

City of Port Washington Code Rewrite

November, 2025

Subject: Downtown Design Overlay District

Purpose: Discuss elements for inclusion in the City of Port Washington’s Zoning Code Rewrite related to form-based design requirements for the Downtown.

Extents:

The City of Port Washington’s Downtown Design Overlay District requirements should apply to the following extents: [See image]

Requirements apply to the following sub areas based on the Downtown Plan Urban Design Framework. Some requirements may be divided between these sub areas, but no differences in requirements are proposed at this time: [See image]

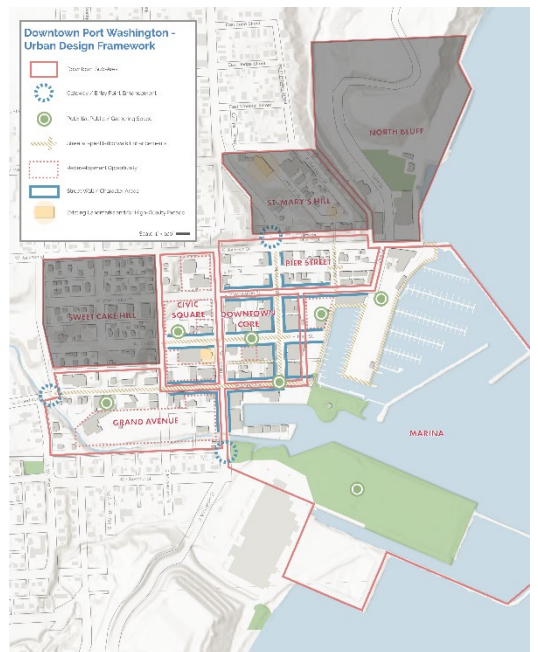
- Civic Square
- Downtown Core
- Grand Avenue
- Pier Street
- Marina

Regulating Plan:

The Downtown Design Overlay District should function as a “regulating plan” to provide the overall vision for development in the downtown boundary.

Because form-based requirement involve detailed review of design and architectural elements, it may sometimes be necessary to make exceptions and special considerations for designs that contribute positively to the overall character and intent of the Urban Design Framework but deviate from a specific requirement. In these cases, discretion should be granted to the body reviewing new developments for consistency with the regulating plan to allow these deviations. Exceptions and deviations from the requirements of the form-based code shall be based on one or more on the following criteria:

- The proposed deviation is necessary to achieve other listed requirements of the regulating plan;
- The proposed deviation is acceptable in favor of going above and beyond other basic requirements of the form-based code;
- The City Plan Commission or Plan Director shall take into consideration whether the proposed deviation is necessary to preserve local history and urban fabric unique to and characteristic of the City of Port Washington or that the deviation produces unique architectural value that is not anticipated by the form-based code but nevertheless achieves the overall vision for the regulating plan.



Form Based Elements:

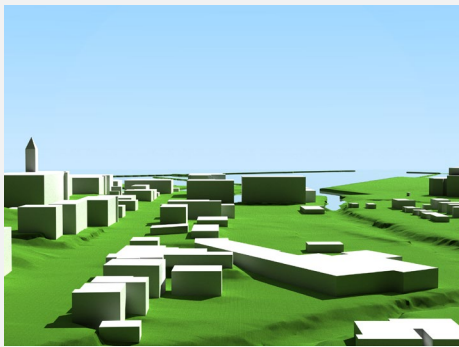
Building Heights

Building height limits are necessary to protect certain view sheds in the City of Port Washington. Protected view sheds generally consist of the following elements:

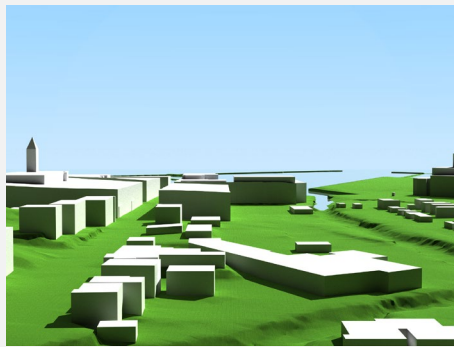
- The viewshed is publicly accessible and frames a unique element of the downtown such as the waterfront or a historic building;
- The viewshed can be protected while still accommodating reasonable development on property within the downtown;

The following viewsheds are defined for the purposes of informing building height regulations. While the viewsheds themselves do not directly regulate the building heights, they are provided for context of building height regulations:

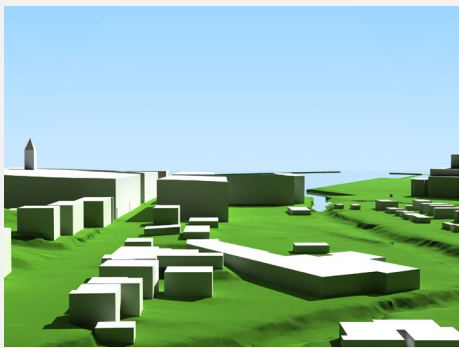
Grand Avenue looking east:



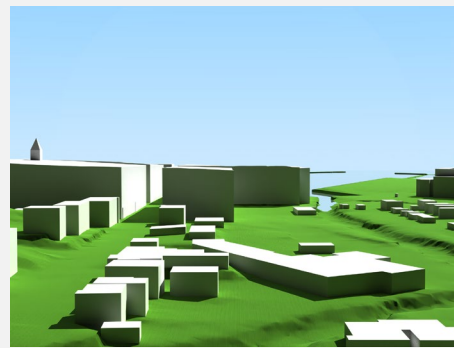
Grand Avenue Corridor today



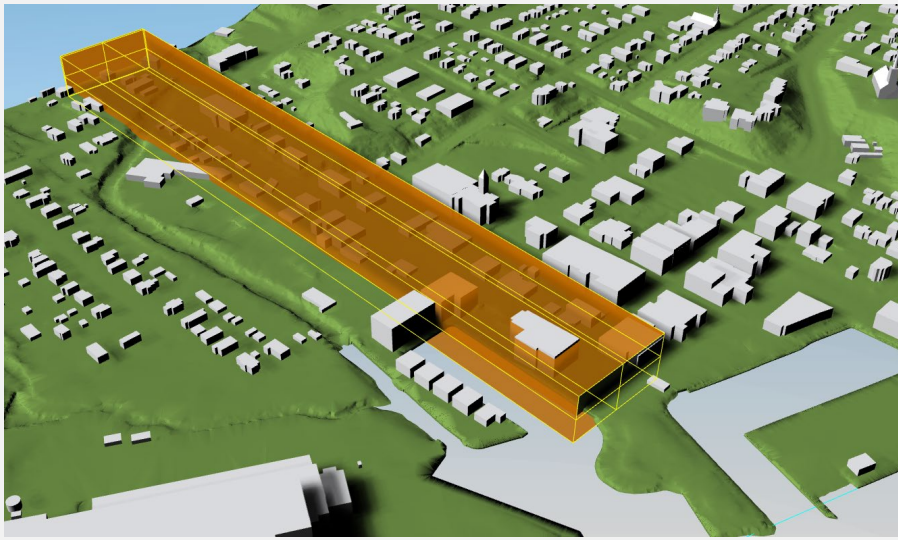
Grand Avenue with 53-ft buildings



Grand Avenue with 68-ft buildings



Grand Avenue with 93-ft buildings



Recommended 53-ft limits to Grand Avenue buildings, birds eye view looking northwest

The renderings above demonstrate the impacts of various building heights if implemented along Grand Avenue, as viewed from the vantage point of Grand Avenue and Spring Street, an elevated point along a key entry to Downtown.

- **Today:** The approach eastbound into Downtown today along Grand Avenue reveals much of the waterfront horizon, marina, and downtown buildings. Preserving as much of this as feasible while still accommodating new development is desirable.



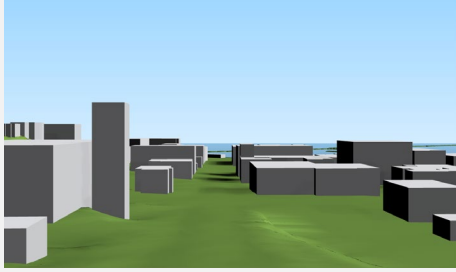
Existing view at Grand Avenue and Spring Street, street view looking east.

- **53-ft buildings:** 53-foot buildings along Grand Avenue have minimal impact to the viewshed looking east. This image shows an extreme scenario with 100% lot coverage and zero setbacks. Up to 53-ft development along Grand Avenue could be allowed. It is worth noting that the existing Harborview Hotel somewhat exceeds what is considered acceptable in this viewshed. 5 feet lower than this limit, 48 feet, should not be exceeded along the frontage of Grand Avenue, with even shorter limits approaching the lakefront.
- **68-ft buildings:** 68-foot buildings have negative impacts on the viewshed looking east. In a scenario with 100% lot coverage, 68-foot buildings would eliminate much of the view downtown. 68-foot development should be completely prohibited within this viewshed to protect this view. 58-63 feet should be explored as a maximum building height for elements set back from Grand Avenue at least 60 feet, on the south side of the street only where they do not impact the viewshed.
- **93-ft buildings:** 93-foot buildings along Grand Avenue have an impermissible negative impact, demonstrating that the key height range to regulate is between 48-63 feet. 93-foot buildings should be completely prohibited to protect this view.

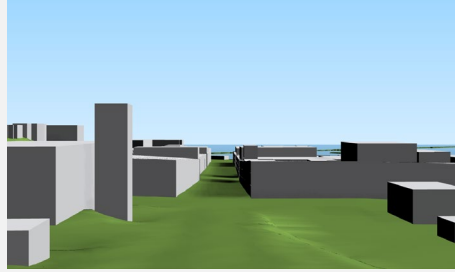
Recommendation: Along the Grand Avenue corridor west of Franklin Street, 43-foot buildings should be allowed without restrictions. Building elements may be accommodated over 43 feet - up to 53 feet on the north side of the street and up to 58 or 61 feet on the south side of the street - but must be stepped back from the street frontage and build-to-zone. Steppbacks should be implemented to ensure that building heights extending beyond this have minimal viewshed impacts.

- 48-building height: no setback from build-to-zone
- 48-58-ft building height (north): 8-ft stepback from build-to-zone
- 48-61-ft building height (south): 60-ft stepback from build-to-zone.
- >58-ft building height (north); >61-ft building height (south): not permitted.

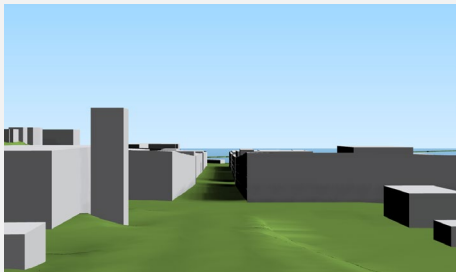
Washington Street looking east:



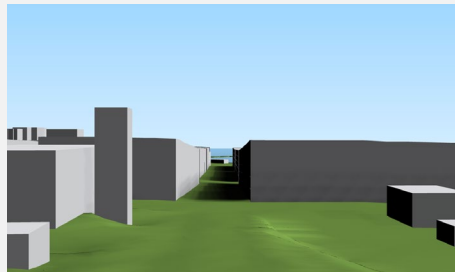
Washington Street Corridor today



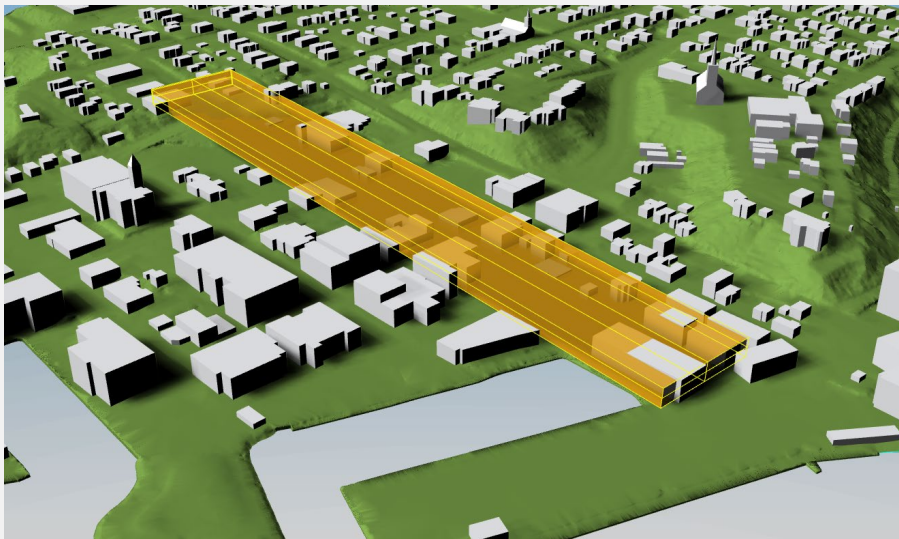
Washington Street with 33-ft buildings



Washington Street with 43-ft buildings



Washington Street with 53-ft buildings



Recommended 43-ft limits to Washington Street south side buildings, birds eye view looking northwest

The renderings above demonstrate the impacts of various building heights if implemented along Washington Street, as viewed from the vantage point of Washington Street and Milwaukee Street, an elevated viewpoint in the northwest of downtown where downtown mixed buildings transition to urban residential land uses.

- **Today:** The view eastbound toward the lakefront along Washington Street reveals much of the waterfront horizon, marina, and downtown buildings. Preserving as much of this as feasible while still accommodating new development is desirable. The significant slope down from this location to the foot of Harborview County Park measures about 30 ft. Beyond this slope, there is a gentle slope down to the waterfront. The view is much more open on the south side of Washington Street compared to the north side.



Existing view at Washington Street and Milwaukee Street, view looking east.

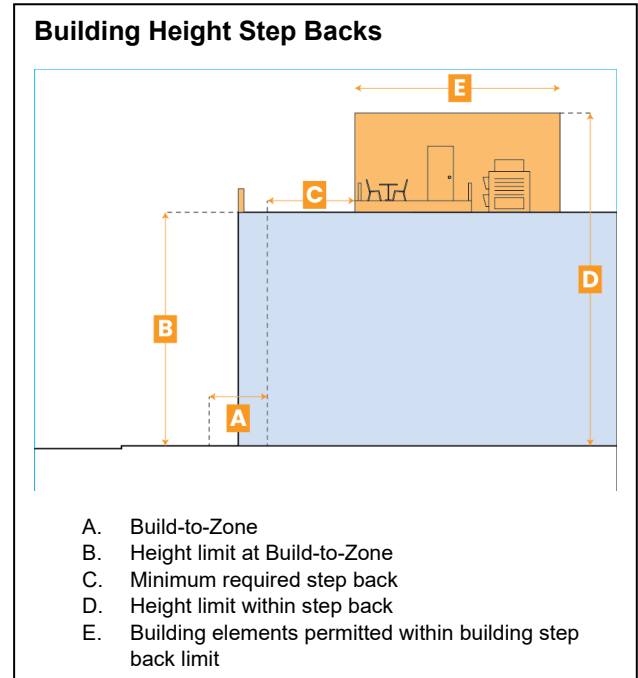
- **33-ft buildings:** 33-foot buildings along Washington Street have minimal impact to the viewshed looking east. This image shows an extreme scenario with 100% lot coverage and zero setbacks. 33-ft development along Washington Street may be allowed without restrictions. Limits on the hillside should be based on the lowest point. This would prevent any buildings from exceeding ground level at Harborview Park if limited to 33 ft.
- **43-ft buildings:** 43-foot buildings begin to impact the viewshed looking east, but minimally. In a scenario with 100% lot coverage, 43-foot buildings would eliminate about half of the existing views. 43-foot development should be carefully regulated to avoid negative impacts.
- **53-ft buildings:** 53-foot buildings along Washington Street block the viewshed without a setback, demonstrating that the key height range to regulate is between 33-48 feet along the street frontage. Anything above 48 feet should be stepped back.

Recommendation: Along the Washington Street corridor, 33-foot buildings should be allowed without restrictions. Building elements may be accommodated over 33 feet - up to 48 feet - but should not take up more than a portion of the lot. Stepbacks should be implemented to ensure that building heights extending beyond this have minimal viewshed impacts.

- 33-ft building height: no setback from build-to-zone
- 33 to 48-ft building height: 8-ft setback from build-to-zone
- 48-53-ft: not permitted: 8-ft setback from build-to-zone, not to exceed 50% lot coverage

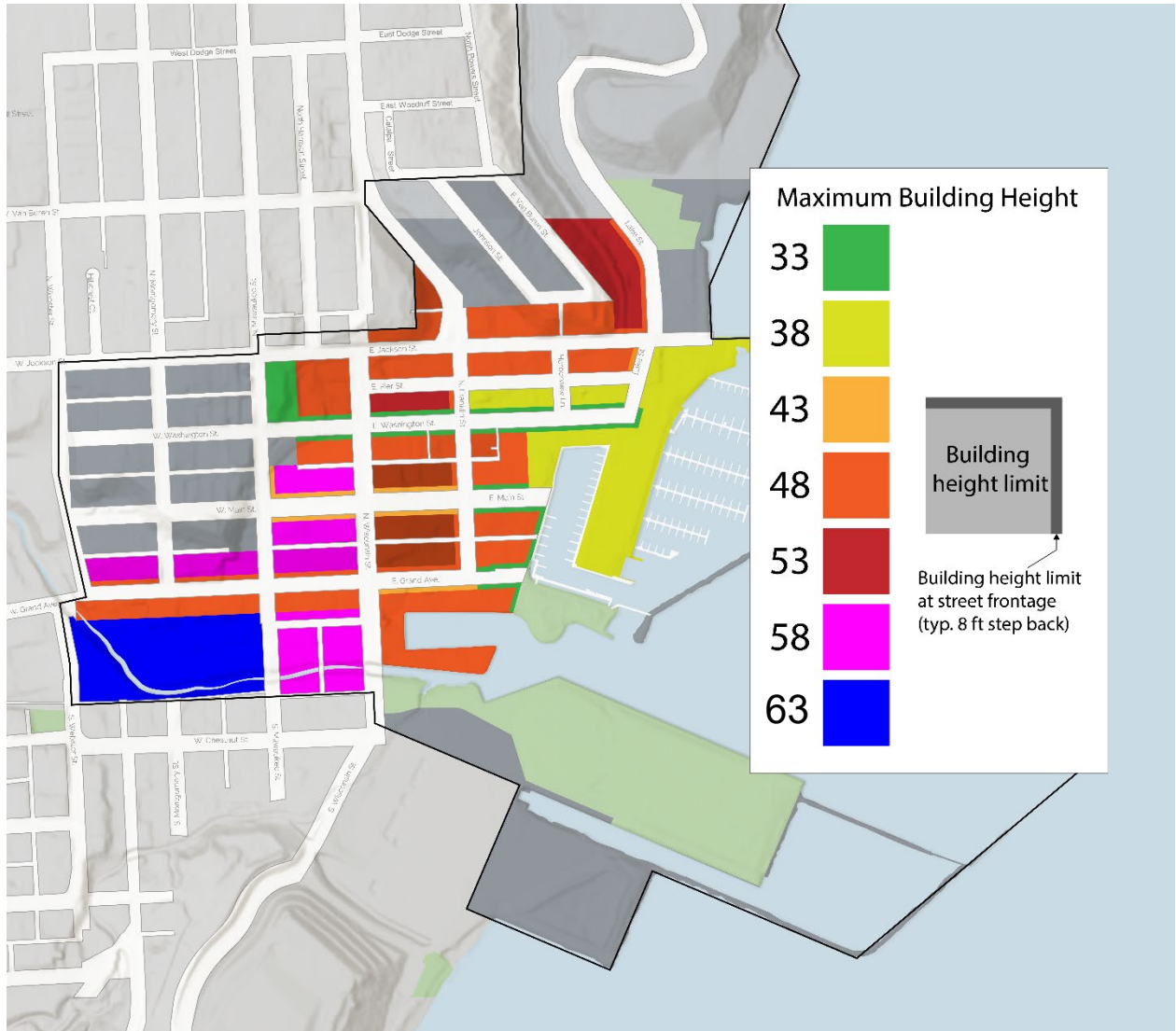
Building Height Step Backs:

Building heights are limited to the height as recommended in the Downtown Heights Map. Within the build-to-zone, building heights are limited to the height as represented by the color along the street frontage. Height at the build-to-zone is measured to the base of roof eaves, parapet walls, or similar elements. Behind the build-to-zone is a building step back of 8 feet. Additional building elements are permitted within the step back limit including rooftop decks, penthouses, and mechanical equipment not to exceed the height as shown on the block interior on the Downtown Heights Map.



INTERNAL WORKING

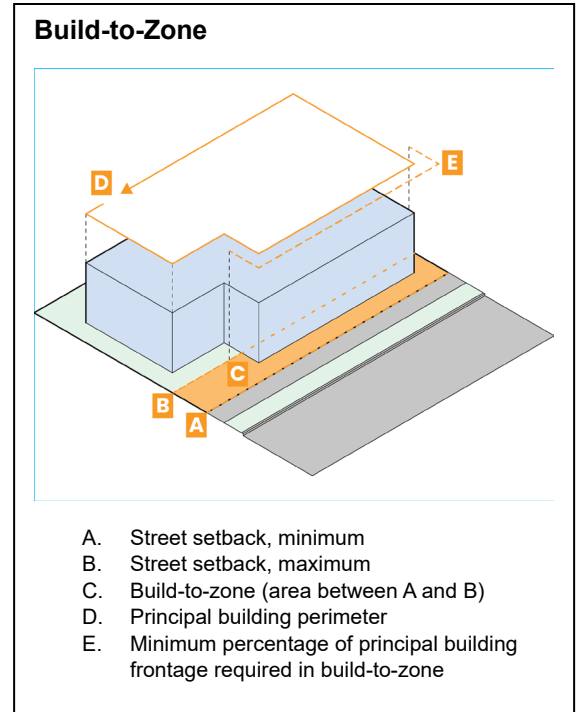
Draft Recommended Heights Map:



Build-to-Zone

Similar to a traditional setback, a build-to-zone defines a minimum and maximum building setback from the street. Build-to-zones help define a street wall along a corridor to ensure consistent urban form.

Generally, a build-to-zone should be about 0-10 ft deep to allow for flexibility in site planning. 50-100% of the building frontage should be within this zone. Potential exceptions may be added for street furnishings, outdoor seating, public spaces, and other non-building improvements that contribute positively to the public way and character of the street.



Architectural Design

Building Materials

Building materials should harmonize with the surrounding environment but still allow for modern construction practices. Desirable features of building materials include durability, texture, color, and visual diversity. Higher quality materials should be required along the street level and street facing facades, while lesser quality materials are allowable on upper stories and on rear facing facades.

Required materials for public-facing facades:

- Brick
- Stone
- Decorative concrete masonry units
- Metal panel systems
- Materials with comparable appearance and durability as the above listed materials
- Other creatively used, high quality and durable building materials

Prohibited materials as primary material for public-facing facades:

- EIFS (Exterior Insulation Finishing System)
- Vinyl or aluminum siding
- Corrugated metal

Decorative materials permitted as a portion of public-facing facades:

- Decorative finished block systems
- Aluminum composite materials
- Glass/glazing
- Precast concrete
- Decorative concrete block
- Decorative façade panels
- Finished wood

Façade Composition

Facades fronting Street Wall/Character Areas as designated in the Downtown Plan Urban Design Framework must consist of the following elements:

Zone 1 Façade Base: The base anchors the building to the ground and is the interface between the building and people. The base of the building includes any exposed basement, all of which should avoid spandrel glass and other non-transparent windows.

Zone 2 Façade Middle: The middle of a building abstractly communicates the building's function or use. The transition between the middle and the base or the middle and the top of a building is often articulated by the use of contrasting materials, or ornamental elements.

Zone 3 Façade Top: The top terminates the building against the sky and provides opportunity to create an interesting silhouette and, in conjunction with surrounding buildings, an interesting skyline.

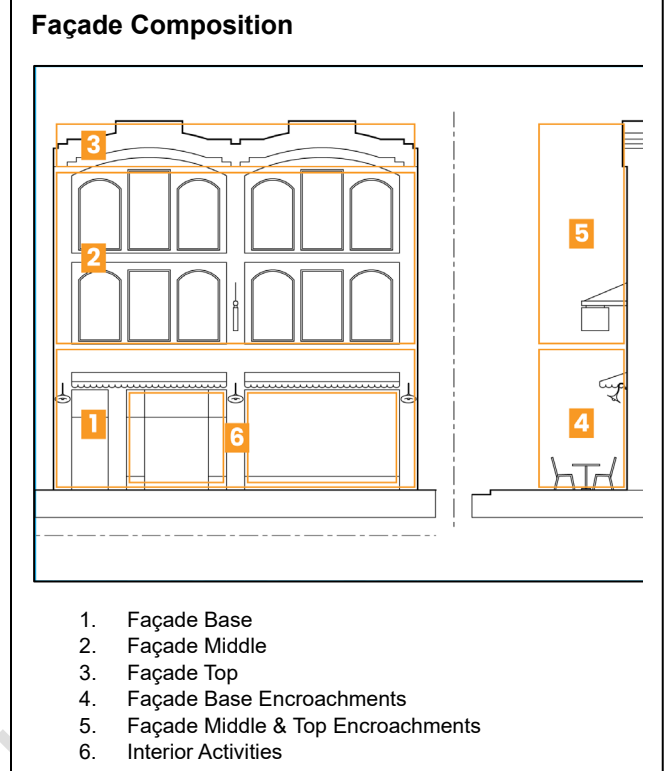
Zone 4 Façade Base Encroachments: Base encroachments include any element at the base of a building that extend beyond the property line. Elements in this zone may include architectural features, signage, awnings, lighting, and other adornments.

Zone 5 Façade Middle & Top Encroachments: Middle encroachments include any element about the base of the building that extend beyond the property line. Elements in this zone may include architectural features, bay windows, signage, balconies, awnings, and other embellishments.

Zone 6 Interior Activities: Interior activities include uses that occur on the private side of a building's façade on the ground floor. This zone is important to ensure a certain amount of activity on the ground floor to enliven the street.

Building facades should create a general harmony among buildings. They should be composed with the following details:

1. Buildings should have a visually distinguishable base, middle and top.
2. Rooftop landscaping and vegetation and/or occupiable rooftop areas are encouraged due to the high visibility of rooftops from nearby properties.
3. Buildings should demonstrate a rhythm in the façade – typically organized according to the structural frame of the building.
4. Building windows and entries should generally be designed with vertical proportions and should avoid continuous horizontal elements such as ribbon windows and continuous awnings overhangs. Curtain wall facades are prohibited in order to maintain the character of downtown.
5. Windows and entries should be designed with elements that increase the sense of depth in the façade via change in material, color, and/or horizontal articulation and recesses measuring at least 4 inches.
6. Facades should have expressive elements that add interest, but are not repeated such as unique awnings, canopies, parapets, balconies, terraces, light fixtures, banners, etc.
7. Special attention should be paid to overall building height and massing in relation to adjoining buildings in order to maintain a scale and character compatible within downtown subareas.
8. Buildings built on abutting lots should have moderate visual diversity in terms of materials and façade compositions in order to create a significant, visual distinction in materials, style, and aesthetic character. The massing, however, should be harmonious with adjacent buildings.



Street Wall/Character Areas

Street walls/character areas are public streets that function as important corridors where buildings shall have minimal setbacks and include active ground level uses producing a vibrant street life. The following streets are designated as street wall/character areas:

Franklin Street: Jackson Street to Grand Avenue

Main Street: Milwaukee Street to the waterfront

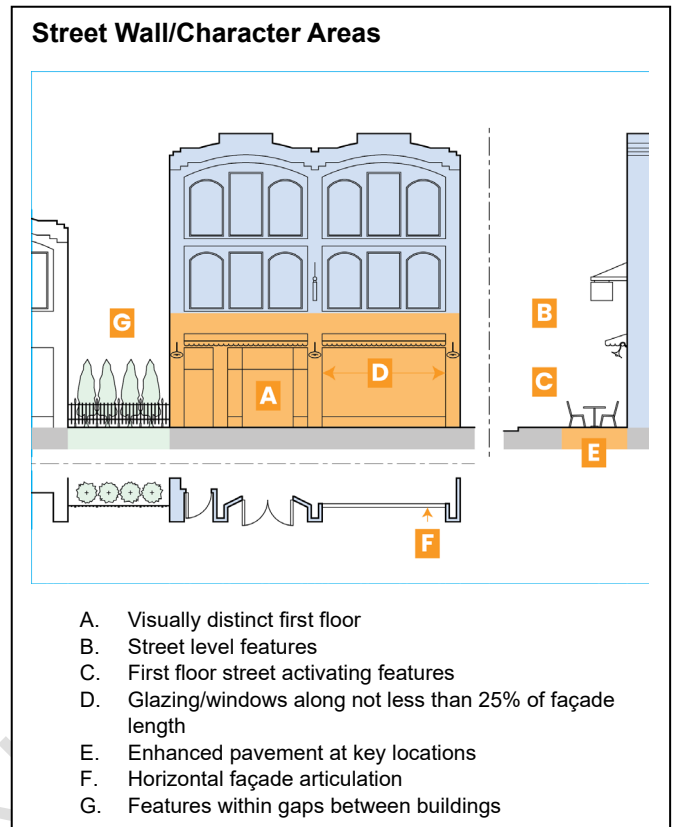
Grand Avenue: Webster Street to the waterfront

Washington Street: Milwaukee Street to the waterfront

Wisconsin Street: Grand Avenue to the bridge over the Sauk Creek

The following standards shall be applied to development fronting a street wall/character area:

- The first floor façade shall be visually distinct from upper façade zones but integrated with the overall architectural character of the building.
- The street level of the building shall have not less than three (3) visually diverse and expressive features such as:
 - A. Hoods
 - B. Canopies
 - C. Awnings (including marquees; awnings may not be plastic or fiberglass)
 - D. Projecting signs
 - E. Planters
 - F. Seating walls
 - G. Bay windows
 - H. Railings
 - I. Pedestrian-scale (12-15') street lighting
 - J. Recessed entries
 - K. Transom windows
- The first floor shall incorporate street activating features including not less than two (2) of the following elements:
 - A. Outdoor cafes
 - B. Outdoor seating
 - C. Plazas
 - D. Porches
 - E. Decks
 - F. Niches
 - G. Pedestrian-oriented signage
 - H. Decorative lighting
- Glazing/windows shall be included along not less than 25% of the total façade length.
- Enhanced pavement materials should be used at key locations such as crosswalks, sitting areas, and entries; these materials include but are not limited to pavers and/or textured concrete. Parking areas shall include substantial decorative fencing/garden walls and ornamental/shade trees.



- Facades shall be articulated horizontally, or with material changes, to prevent the creation of spans greater than eight (80) feet in width. Acceptable forms of façade articulation include the following:
 - A. Recesses or protrusions at least 2 feet in depth
 - B. Changes in material type
 - C. Interruption with a visually prominent pedestrian entry that is emphasized through the use of architectural details or special materials.
- Gaps between buildings along the street wall/character area's build-to-zone exceeding twelve (12) feet in length shall be filled with alternative features that create a strong continuous visual pattern such as ornamental walls or fences not exceeding four (4) feet combined with tree rows, landscaping, or hedges.

Parking and Loading/Service

All parking areas shall be designed to be safe and visually pleasing public experiences rather than unwanted and undesirable places.

- Parking Location:** Surface parking shall be located under, behind, and/or on the side of buildings and not at the intersection of two streets, between a street and a public place, or between the building and the street.
- Parking Buffer:** Surface parking along street edges shall be bordered by not less than six (6) feet of space incorporating decorative fencing/walls and ornamental/shade trees. Surface parking shall never abut a sidewalk.
- Parking Design:** Surface parking shall be designed as an integrated vehicular/pedestrian space providing not less than two (2) of the following aesthetic features similar to courtyards, plazas, or garden areas:
 - Decorative paving
 - Landscaping
 - Pedestrian pathways
 - Sculptural elements
 - Wayfinding signage
 - Stormwater features
- Loading:** Service and loading areas shall be designed with the same or harmonious architectural treatments as the principal building façade. Service and loading areas shall be screened only when visually appealing construction of certain elements is not possible.
- Parking Structure Design:** Parking structures shall continue the principal façade materials and details. Parking structures shall be open in design and partially below grade when feasible to reduce overall building height. Active ground-level uses shall be integrated with a parking structure to the extent feasible. Uninterrupted spans of parking structure walls exceeding 120 feet shall not be permitted.

