



Request	Adopt Official Guidelines
Project Name	Downtown Code Design Guidelines
Council District	19 – Kupin
Requested by	Metro Nashville Planning Department
Staff Reviewer	Nora Yoo, Jared Islas, and Yuqing Wang
Staff Recommendation	<i>Approve</i>

Applicant Request

Adopt the ‘Downtown Code Design Guidelines’ as official guidelines for use by the Downtown Code Design Review Committee and Staff in their evaluation of projects to be reviewed by the Committee.

Background

The Downtown Code (DTC) is a form-based zoning code that applies to much of the Downtown Nashville Community Plan area. Since its adoption in 2010, the DTC has shaped the growth and development in Downtown Nashville. The DTC has been amended from time to time over the ensuing decade, as downtown neighborhoods have continued to grow and evolve.

The Downtown Code Design Review Committee (DRC) is made up of design professionals with experience in architecture, landscape architecture, planning, or urban design. The DRC's current responsibilities include reviewing and approving Concept Plans, Major Modifications, and revisions to previously approved plans. Additionally, the DRC makes recommendations to the Planning Commission regarding Overall Height Modifications.

In late 2021, Metro Council amended the DTC to require the DRC review and approve a Concept Plan prior to the approval of a Final Site Plan. This came after several projects that were technically compliant were not reaching the community’s expectations of thoughtful design. Since then, the DRC has reviewed dozens of Concept Plans. Following the implementation of this procedural change, several members of the DRC expressed interest in creating formalized design guidance to aid in their review of various types of applications, including Concept Plans.

In late 2023, the Metro Planning Commission (MPC) adopted ‘Rules & Procedures’ for the DRC to follow that includes the following language, providing a route for official design guidelines to be adopted by the committee.

G. BASIS FOR COMMITTEE DECISIONS;

The Committee shall use criteria established within the Downtown Code as well as architecture, landscape architecture, engineering, and planning best practices for reviewing items. The Committee may also use other sources of information, such as studies, plans, reports, and official guidelines to evaluate items.

Following over a year of preliminary work, Planning Staff shared a draft version of the Downtown Code Design Guidelines (“Guidelines”) with the DRC at their March 7, 2024, meeting.



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Purpose

Primarily, the Guidelines serve as a tool for the DRC and Planning Staff in their evaluation of DTC development proposals. This document coalesces the expectations of Metro Planning and of the DRC for what applicants should consider as they develop projects in Downtown Nashville and establishes design guidance that supplements the existing requirements of the DTC.

Additionally, the Guidelines provide property owners, developers, and designers with predictable and implementable guidance based on planning and design best practices; encourage and emphasize best-in-class site and architectural design; and articulate the overarching goals that help create a Downtown Nashville that works for everyone.

Document Structure

The Guidelines document is organized around four Goals – each of which is critical to the success of a development proposal in Downtown Nashville. These include Future-Focused Ecological Design, Human-Oriented Design, Contextual and Connected Design, and High-Caliber Architectural Design. Each goal includes several guidelines that offer key directives on how to achieve that Goal. A selection of possible strategies – actions to implement the guideline – are provided in association with each guideline. Applicants are encouraged to develop and propose additional or alternative strategies that suit the needs of specific projects. The egalitarian structure of the strategies content is deliberate, allowing applicants room to determine and define how their specific projects achieve the four Goals.

GOAL 1	GOAL 2	GOAL 3	GOAL 4
Future-Focused Ecological Design	Human-Oriented Design	Contextual and Connected Design	High-Caliber Architectural Design
<p>Guideline 01 Bolster natural features and ecosystem services.</p> <p>Guideline 02 Incorporate and maintain sustainable site and building design technologies, materials, and systems.</p>	<p>Guideline 03 Create an active and dynamic streetscape and public realm.</p> <p>Guideline 04 Minimize the impacts of parking and building services.</p> <p>Guideline 05 Provide safe, inclusive, and accessible experiences.</p>	<p>Guideline 06 Recognize and enhance the site context.</p> <p>Guideline 07 Prioritize multimodal transportation.</p>	<p>Guideline 08 Demonstrate a clear and coherent organizing design concept in the project massing and site layout.</p> <p>Guideline 09 Support the design intent through considered architectural expression at different scales.</p>

Application and Use

Applicants seeking approval for development within the DTC zoning district should use this document for design guidance. As part of the Concept Plan application, applicants are asked to submit a narrative expressing how the project addresses the four Goals. This narrative may be supported by additional materials provided by the applicant, such as design drawings, diagrams, and



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3D views. Alignment with the Guidelines document, and the commitments made as part of Concept Plan approval, will be verified at each subsequent step in the development review process.

In the past, the level of design scrutiny has been higher for more prominent sites or for developments asking for increased entitlements (through the Bonus Height Program or an Overall Height Modification). However, the Guidelines strive to reflect the goals of an evolving downtown – one that values high-quality urban design and architecture for all projects – no matter the proposed use, scale, location, budget, or path to entitlements. Design teams are encouraged to be creative, resourceful, and thoughtful in their approach to fulfilling the four Goals.

The Guidelines and DTC Zoning

The Guidelines document is design-based guidance for the DTC zoning district. This content has been formulated to support, and work in tandem with, the DTC's existing zoning requirements. While the DTC remains the sole regulatory tool, the Guidelines establish design-based support for applicants to use through the development review process.

As an example, the DTC includes a list of recommended exterior materials. The Guidelines document supports and further illustrates how material selection can be determined through the lens of the four Goals noted above (considering: material specification by considering sustainability and sourcing distance, the scale of elements in the pedestrian realm, how materials fit contextually into a given neighborhood, and how they can contribute to a thoughtful architectural expression).

Stakeholder Engagement

The first draft of the Guidelines document was posted online directly following an informational presentation at the DRC's March 7, 2024, meeting. Over the following two months, Planning Staff sought feedback from stakeholders through a variety of methods, including meetings and email exchanges with interested parties, as well as an online survey and an in-person public open house.

In the latest revision of the document, Planning Staff made efforts to address questions and incorporate feedback by improving the clarity and specificity for each guideline and their corresponding strategies.

Meetings and Emails

Planning Staff received robust and thorough feedback through 1-on-1 and group meetings and email exchanges with stakeholders. Staff held approximately 10 meetings with over 45 people (property owners/developers, designers, and other agencies, including NDOT) to discuss the Guidelines. These meetings included a ULI Nashville roundtable on April 22, 2024, and a feedback session with the DRC at their May 2, 2024, meeting. Staff also made themselves available to questions and comments via email and phone during the public comment period.

Online Survey

An online survey, posted on the project webpage, was open from March 8, 2024, to May 8, 2024. The survey respondents were primarily members of the development community, in addition to a number of downtown residents, workers, and visitors. Generally, respondents provided favorable reviews of the draft content. Respondents were asked to evaluate and identify how satisfied they were with each guideline as written in the first draft of the Guidelines document. The results ranged



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between 59% and 82% satisfaction for each guideline. The survey also gave respondents the opportunity to provide open-ended comments or questions on the draft Guidelines. These comments focused on the following themes: application and use of the Guidelines; the Guidelines’ role as supplemental design guidance to regulatory zoning; building materials; and vehicular parking.

Public Open House

On Monday, April 29, 2024, the Planning Department held a public open house to invite in-person questions and comments on the proposed Guidelines document. Similar to the online survey, the primary attendees were members of the development community. Questions and discussion from attendees focused on the application and use of the Guidelines and strategies on building systems and materials, site access, and developments contributing to the needs and desires of the community.

Revisions and Final Draft

After the end of stakeholder engagement, Planning Staff compiled and reviewed comments on the posted draft of the Guidelines document. The following is a summary of changes that were made as presented in the attached Final Draft.

Section and Page in Final Draft	Changes from Posted Draft
Background and Purpose (pg. 4)	Combined “Background” and “Purpose” content into one page for clarity and made minor text edits.
Application and Use (pg. 6)	Simplified content through major text edits for clarity. Added a subsection about the Guidelines’ relationship to zoning. Added supplementary graphics. Brought “Application and Use” and “Document Structure” content together on one spread due to their interrelatedness.
Document Structure (pg. 7)	Simplified content through minor text edits. Added supplementary graphics. Brought “Document Structure” and “Application and Use” content together on one spread due to their interrelatedness.
Guideline 01 – Bolster Natural Features and Ecosystem Services. (pg. 10-11)	Added/edited strategies related to suspended pavements, maintenance, and blue roofs. Replaced image 01A (previously a rendering) with a photo of Cumberland Park and its relationship to the Cumberland River. Replaced image 01B with an infographic explaining the benefits of green roofs.
Guideline 02 – Incorporate and Maintain Sustainable Site and Building Design Technologies, Materials, and Systems. (pg. 12-13 and throughout)	Changed to “Incorporate <i>and maintain</i> sustainable site and building design technologies, materials, and systems.”
Guideline 02 – Incorporate and Maintain Sustainable Site and Building Design Technologies, Materials, and Systems. (pg. 12-13)	Added/edited strategies related to recycled or renewable building materials and EV chargers.
Human-Oriented Design (pg. 14-15 and throughout)	Reordered the three guidelines under “Human-Oriented Design” so that the “Create an Active and Dynamic Streetscape and Public Realm” guideline comes first in the series.
Guideline 03 – Create an Active and Dynamic Streetscape and Public Realm. (pg. 16-17)	Added/edited strategies related to finished floor elevations across topographical changes, plantings in the streetscape, and Privately-Owned Public Spaces (POPS). Relocated a strategy on public art and other



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	streetscape elements from the “Recognize and Enhance the Given Site Context” guideline to this spread. Replaced images 03B and 03C (previously renderings) with photos of exceptional spaces in the public realm.
Guideline 04 – Minimize the Impacts of Parking and Building Services. (pg. 18-19)	Edited strategies to include reasoning behind encouraging less parking and underground parking, where parking is provided. Added strategies on shared parking agreements and building services such as waste management services, deliveries, and loading. Replaced images 04A and 04b (previously renderings) with photos. Removed image 04E.
Guideline 05 – Provide Safe, Inclusive, and Accessible Experiences. (pg. 20-21)	Added/edited strategies to highlight safety for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders, PROWAG guidelines, and encourage high levels of site porosity. Replaced image 05D (previously a rendering) with a photo.
Guideline 06 – Recognize and Enhance the Site Context. (pg. 24-25)	Changed a strategy subheading to “Place and Community Identity” and edited the strategy to include additional details. Relocated a strategy on public art and other streetscape elements from this spread to the “Create and Active and Dynamic Streetscape and Public Realm” guideline. Replaced image 06B. Edited a strategy related to site layouts’ responses to parks, greenways, and open spaces.
Guideline 07 – Prioritize Multimodal Transportation. (pg. 26-27)	Added/edited strategies to reference Transportation Demand Management (TDM), micromobility devices and corrals, bike share, pedestrian desire paths, and transit stop connections. Simplified the strategy subheadings. Replaced image 07B with a higher resolution version of the same image. Replaced image 07D (previously a rendering) with a photo of a bike share station.
Guideline 08 – Demonstrate a Clear and Coherent Organizing Design Concept in the Project Massing and Site Layout. (pg. 30-31)	Edited strategies to include reference to avoiding long, uninterrupted building lengths and to carefully shape building footprints on all frontages. Replaced image 08E with a photo of Parke West in Midtown Nashville.
Glossary (pg. 34-36)	Added definitions for ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act, Blue Roofs, Micromobility, POPS – Privately-Owned Public Space, PROWAG – Public Rights-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines; Structured Pavement, and TDM – Transportation Demand Management.
Additional Resources (pg. 37)	
Image Credits (pg. 38-39)	Updated to reflect image changes throughout.
Acknowledgements (pg. 40)	Updated.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval.