

DOWNTOWN DESIGN GUIDELINES



- **Design Guidelines for the Downtown Built Environment:**
 - **New Construction**
 - **Building Renovations & Additions**
 - **Open Spaces**
 - **Transportation**



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THE DOWNTOWN IMAGE

The city of Bismarck is continually growing and changing. Because of this economic growth, the built environment needs to adapt and develop to accommodate the growth. With this influx of development comes an opportunity to define and enhance the image of downtown Bismarck. Downtown Bismarck has well-established entertainment and shopping districts. Downtown Bismarck has the opportunity to become a destination that is livable, vibrant, and rich in culture. The goal of these design standards is to guide the quality of new development and preserve the integrity of downtown in order to create that downtown image and achieve these design objectives:

- Create a walkable, human-scaled environment.
- Highlight the attributes that make Bismarck unique and give it a sense of place.
- Connect the built environment with the natural environment through the use of green spaces.
- Design within the context of existing characteristics of each neighborhood.
- Introduce new styles that complement the existing styles to form a balance between old and new.
- Build a flexible environment that can adapt to the changes over time.
- Create an environment that has both uniformity and variety.
- Promote compatibility and continuity of on-going development in downtown Bismarck.
- Encourage property improvements, new development projects and the continued efforts to have a vibrant, lively, and attractive destination as the heart of the community.

These design guidelines will serve as a tool in making decisions about new development. The guidelines are intended to address the built environment, building design, building additions and renovations, open spaces designed for the public and private uses and transportation. The design guidelines are complementary to the previous downtown studies: the 1993 Central Business District Plan; the 1995 Streetscape Guidelines for Downtown Bismarck; and the

2013 Downtown Bismarck Sub Area Plan. The design guidelines can help to create a framework for new development that will in turn become precedents for future development. Although these guidelines do not guarantee good design, they help to guide new development in the direction of good, high-quality design by promoting compatibility and integration of on-going development in downtown Bismarck, reinforcing the desirable environment through context-appropriate designs, acceptable building materials and human-scale design features, a walkable, mixed-use neighborhood and an environment that supports the integration of land uses.

The goal of the design guidelines is to build a recognizable district with an appealing atmosphere and sense of place that is unique to Bismarck, North Dakota. The guidelines promote an appealing district by encouraging sensitive modifications to significant and historic structures and compatible or complementary design that will enhance downtown. The design guidelines establishes an image and identity that will strengthen the presence of downtown Bismarck as a dynamic, vibrant, thriving hub of our community that provides opportunities for businesses, residents and visitors. The image of downtown Bismarck celebrates the historic presence of downtown, the current importance of downtown and the future potential to define downtown as a significant destination point and the heart of Bismarck.

The guidelines are intended to be flexible and to promote innovative design which is complementary to the established character of downtown. The guidelines are meant to encourage and promote unique solutions to design opportunities while establishing the character and vision for the future of downtown Bismarck.

GOOD DESIGN

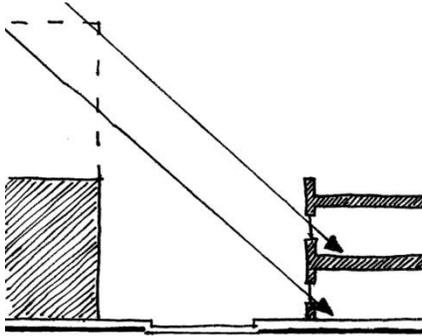
Although what constitutes an excellent design is somewhat subjective, some common attributes can be established. A good design is seamlessly woven into its surrounding context – both the built environment and the natural environment. It not only respects its surroundings, but also enhances them. Another measure of excellent design is its functionality and durability. A building should be built with the future in mind. Certain materials and construction methods should be used to create a building that will withstand the test of time. A design can be measured in what it gives to the community. A good design should not only meet individual needs, but should also meet the needs of the city as a whole.

THE PURPOSE OF THE DESIGN GUIDELINES

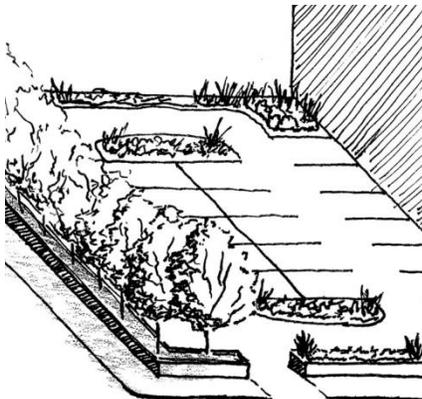
These design guidelines will give clarity to what is valued in a new design. They will raise awareness on what constitutes a good design. During the process of design, creativity and innovation are encouraged. These guidelines will act as a tool to guide that creativity and innovation in a way that upholds the values of the Bismarck community and preserves its identity. They will guide the design in a way that takes into account the larger context. The design guidelines are applicable to all properties located within the DC – Downtown Core and DF – Downtown Fringe zoning districts and are intended to serve as guidance for all new construction projects, building renovation projects, building addition projects and non-historic properties.

SITE AND SURROUNDING CONTEXT

INCORPORATION INTO THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT



A tall building would block the sunlight reaching the nearby building. Work with the conditions of the site to maximize daylight, not just for the individual building, but for nearby buildings as well.



Trees are used to screen the parking lot and to provide shade for the sidewalk.

- 1. Maximize daylight.** Daylighting should be maximized to create livable, inviting interior spaces. Consider how new buildings will affect the daylighting on the adjacent sites. Minimize shading onto these sites.
- 2. Provide shading devices where appropriate.** Take into account the use of the space – both interior spaces and exterior spaces. Outdoor spaces may need a balance of sun and shade depending on the location. Consider how the devices will shade year-round. Ideally they should shade during the summer and allow sunlight in the winter.
- 3. Design with the wind patterns to provide comfortable spaces.** Use the wind to maximize natural ventilation. Consider the wind patterns year-round and design accordingly. Take into account how the form of the building will affect the wind pattern. Use the building form and other elements to block the wind from pedestrian-heavy streets and outdoor spaces wherever possible.
- 4. Design to increase vegetation.** Add vegetation to enhance the sense of place and tie the site into the surrounding natural environment. Consider giving vegetation a dual purpose. For example, trees could screen a parking lot or ramp while providing shade.

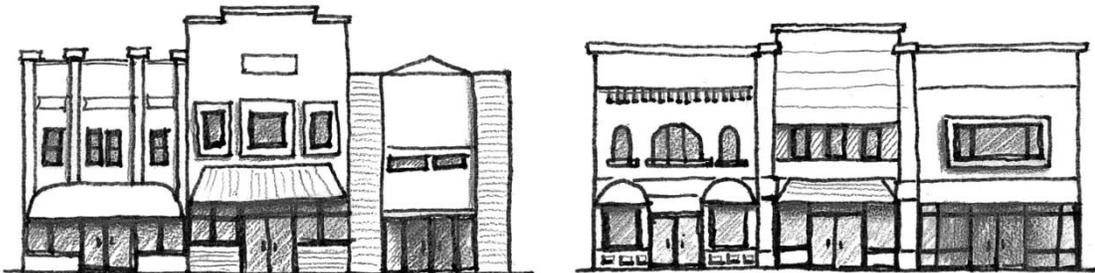
INCORPORATION INTO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

- 5. Draw on the existing site characteristics to further define and enhance the sense of place.** Create rhythm and repetition with architectural elements to give the place a unique identity. Consider how the building ties into the city of Bismarck and how it enhances the uniqueness of Bismarck. Take into account a new building's architectural presence and how it will affect the experience of the place. Some buildings call for a strong visual impact. These buildings will help enhance the image of downtown. Other buildings and structures, such as a parking ramp, should be designed to complement their surroundings and include a variety of uses. Such corresponding design features should promote active uses and visual interest while also providing for key components such as off-street parking facilities to be designed in a manner that is complementary to the other uses in the building.
- 6. Maintain a consistent street edge.** A strong street edge defines an urban space. Align new buildings with the existing buildings to create an edge. When that is not possible, use landscape elements to define the edge.
- 7. New buildings should be compatible and complementary to the older existing buildings.** New buildings do not necessarily need to copy the existing traditional styles, but they should reflect and enhance the overall existing style and character, it should be a balance between new design elements and old architectural features and materials.
- 8. Emphasis should be placed on the pedestrian experience.** Pedestrians should be able to interact with the built environment through visual impact and comfortable experiences at the street level of a building. Street level building facades should create continual visual interest for pedestrians. Attractive, large storefront windows will promote active ground floor use of buildings and spaces. The opportunity to provide sidewalk displays, outdoor seating areas, and special events promotes an experience that is synonymous with a vibrant and thriving downtown atmosphere.

BUILDING DESIGN

MASS, FORM, AND SCALE

- 1. Create a building that complements the existing surroundings in form and scale.** New buildings should be similar in size and form. Provide adequate transition between changes in building scale. Although a new building may be of a different size, the first few stories should visually relate to the surrounding context.
- 2. Align architectural features.** Uniformity is established by the alignment of architectural features, such as windows or molding. Floor-to-floor height should also be similar to further define that uniformity. Variety can be introduced into the uniformity by the way those architectural features are articulated. Variety and uniformity should both be elements in the overall composition of the context in order to make it visually pleasing.



The picture on the right compared to the picture on the left shows how aligning windows, molding, etc. is one way to give order to the overall composition of the block.

FLEXIBILITY

- 3. Create buildings that are adaptable.** Consider the lifespan of the building and plan ahead accordingly. As the economy and the makeup of the city change over time, the buildings will need to adapt to accommodate the current needs of the city. Building designs should promote compatibility with on-going improvements in downtown Bismarck and enhance the image of the area through the promotion of shopping, dining, cultural, and artistic opportunities as a unique experience in the heart of the community.

MATERIAL

4. **Use material that complements the material of the surrounding context.** Although new buildings do not need to have all the same material of the surrounding context, the materials should complement the existing surroundings. They could relate to the existing material in texture, finish, scale, and other design elements or aspects to help tie the building into the composition of the neighborhood. Using local materials could help to further define the sense of place.
5. **Material should be of high-quality and should be long-lasting.** Use materials that are durable and easily maintained. Materials should be able to withstand the different weather conditions throughout the year.

ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

6. **Create distinguishable, easily-identified entrances.** Consider the function of the entrance and design accordingly. Clearly define the main entrance and maximize its visibility. Orient these entrances toward the street rather than towards a parking lot. Although these entrances can introduce a new design style, they should in some way reflect the entrances of the existing buildings in scale and character.
7. **Articulate the building façade to fit within the surrounding context.** Consider the prevailing rhythm and repetition of the existing context. Add variety into the present rhythm and repetition. Creating variety will help prevent a monolithic feel while adding visual interest.
8. **Active edges.** Building frontages should provide direct access and a predominance of glass transparency to allow the physical interaction of people inside and outside the building. This feature also creates a safer pedestrian environment. Active edges must provide a minimum of 70% of the primary building façade as transparent glass along ground floor levels adjacent to rights-of-way.
9. **Color scheme.** Building colors should be simple and complementary to adjoining buildings. Brighter and darker hues should be limited to use as an accent color or to draw attention to building details.

HUMAN CONNECTIVITY



Signage and canopies help make the above area pedestrian friendly.

HUMAN SCALE

- 1. Create buildings that are inviting to humans.** Building articulation should be to a human scale. Break up large masses to make it visually interesting. This can be done through material articulation or by adding architectural features such as canopies or balconies. Adding other human-scaled features such as signage or vegetation can create interest.
- 2. Require ground level retail frontages.** Retail and service uses are encouraged to be concentrated along Main Avenue, Broadway Avenue, and 5th Street. Businesses that engage in the sale of goods or retail merchandise or eating/drinking establishments promote pedestrian activity and an active atmosphere. Entrances to upper floor establishments are also acceptable.



Photo credit: Sam Newberg | Joe-Urban.com

TRANSPORTATION

- 3. Make neighborhoods walkable.** Create neighborhoods that are pedestrian-friendly by incorporating human-scale details. Add elements to protect the pedestrians from the weather, such as adding a canopy or awning. The disruption of pedestrian paths by service alleys should be minimized.
- 4. Add benches and other elements to provide resting areas.** These resting areas could help break up long stretches of a sidewalk while adding visual interest. They should be safe and comfortable. These areas could also provide a place for people to socialize without affecting the flow of the pedestrian traffic.
- 5. Provide bike lanes if possible.** Connect these lanes to the existing network of trails. Consider adding bike racks to encourage the use of bicycles. When bicyclists are anticipated, allow adequate space for both pedestrians and bicyclists to move freely.



Photo credit: William Wieners | Google Plus
The above parking structure is designed to visually fit within its context.



Photo credit: Joe Nickol | Sustainable Cities Collective
This sidewalk has space for outdoor dining that does not disrupt the flow of pedestrians.



Photo credit: Empire Covers

- 6. Design parking spaces that fit into the surrounding context.** Reduce the visual impact of parking lots or parking ramps. Use vegetation or other elements to screen and enliven the space. Design parking ramps to visually fit into its context. Add architectural elements to make it human-scaled and promote first floor retail and commercial uses.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES

- 7. Distinguish between public and private spaces.** Public spaces should be transparent and welcoming at ground level. Private spaces, such as residences, should have a bigger sense of privacy. A clearly defined transition should be apparent between a public sidewalk and existing private residences. Minimize the visibility onto private spaces from adjacent public spaces.
- 8. Design public spaces to encourage street level activity.** Provide adequate spacing for possible outdoor activities, such as outdoor dining or vending. Take into account the flow of pedestrian traffic and design the outdoor space in a way that does not hamper the flow.
- 9. Provide a sense of security in all spaces.** Provide adequate lighting to create safe, comfortable spaces. Maximize visibility onto public spaces to increase security.

OPEN SPACES

- 10. Incorporate open, green spaces into the community.** These green spaces should provide a place for human interaction. Understand the relationship between the open space and the adjacent buildings. The surrounding buildings will interact with this space and will become the “walls” of the space.
- 11. Give outdoor open spaces a purpose and function.** Plan the space to meet the needs of the expected users. Allow for flexibility within the space to accommodate the changing conditions.

12. Connect these green spaces to the surrounding context.

Visually and physically connect these spaces to other public spaces. The paths within these spaces should meet up with existing sidewalks. Visually connecting them with other public spaces could will help to make them inviting.

13. Design these open spaces with the natural environment.

Understand the changing amount of sun and the wind – daily and seasonally – onto the space and design accordingly. Consider how these spaces could be used year-round.