

SECTION 3

Central Core Design Guidelines



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Chapter 1: Introduction



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1. Introduction

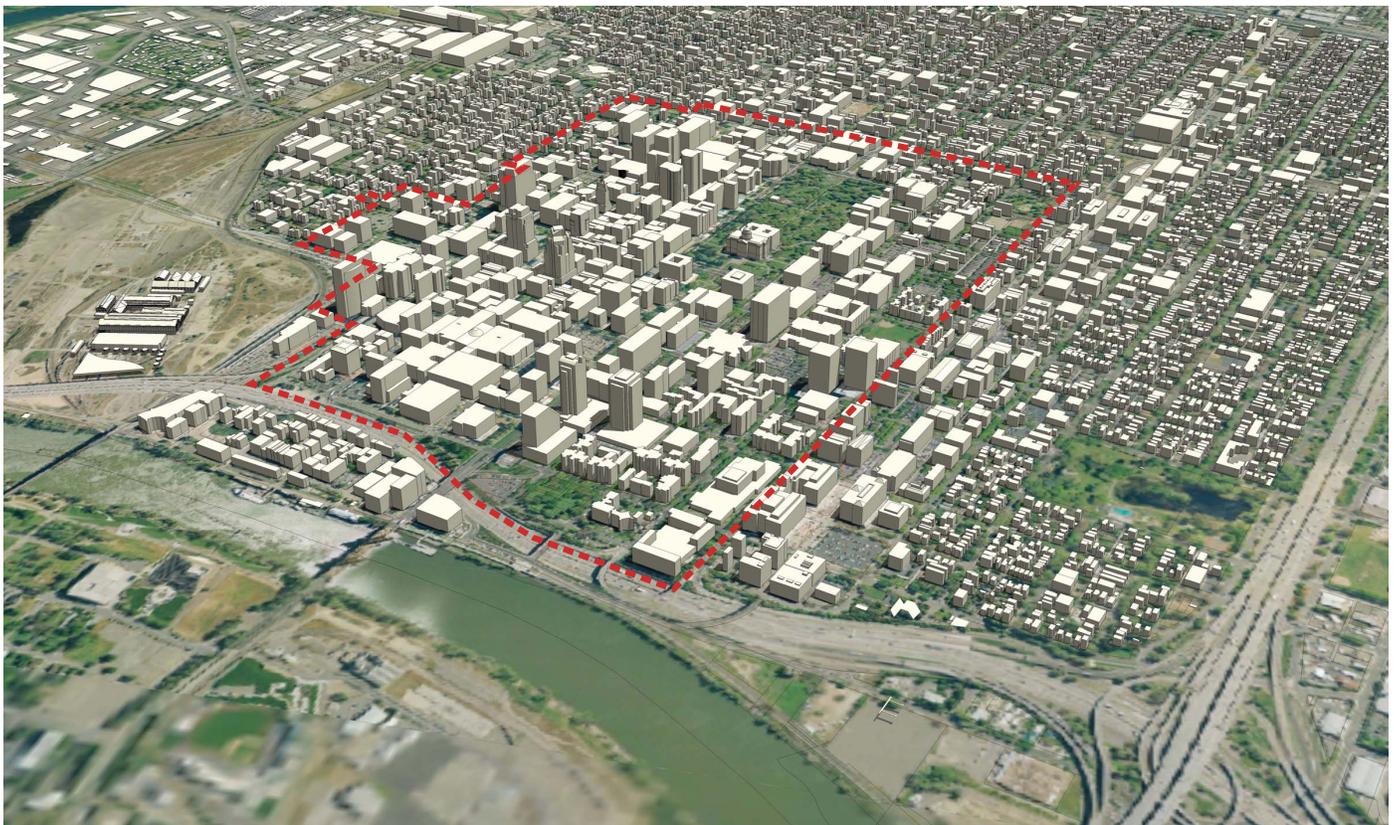
The Central Core, which includes the CBD, the neighborhood immediately south of the Capitol and Capitol Mall, and a portion of Alkali Flat and Mansion Flats to the north, represents most of the historic core of Sacramento's downtown. Even as the urbanization of the Central City expands northward and becomes more diverse, the Central Core will continue to have a unique position and function as the economic, governmental, and cultural hub of both the City and the region.

This Central Core Design Guidelines document represents a comprehensive revision and update of the 1987 *Sacramento CBD Urban Design Plan and Guidelines*. The urban design direction established in the 1987 Plan and its vision of the CBD as a viable living, working, shopping and cultural environment with a full range of day and night time activities served as the starting point for the development of these Guidelines. That said, much has changed since 1987, and new urban design guidelines were needed to address the new context, especially the new interest in developing housing in the Core.

A substantial amount of new development occurred in the CBD that was guided by the 1987 Plan, particularly in the area around Cesar Chavez Plaza, where the addition of numerous office buildings, a few hotels, and the renovation of the Plaza significantly enhanced the character and vitality of the Central Core. Altogether, more than a dozen mid- and high-rise buildings were constructed in the Central Core between 1987 and 2008. In addition, light rail service, which began in 1987, has continued to expand its service to and influence on the Central Core and the broader Central City area.

In addition to the office and commercial development envisioned by the 1987 Plan, the early 2000's saw a previously unknown demand for high density urban housing in the Central Core—a use and building type for which no planning had previously been done. The integration of residential uses downtown raised a series of urban design issues that needed to be addressed in the guidelines, including: compatible integration of residential and non-residential uses; creation of 'complete' neighborhoods that

Sacramento Central City, 2007



An aerial view of the general height and massing of buildings in the Central City.

provide the full range of amenities and services needed to serve a residential population; and design of ‘complete’ streets that provide safe, attractive, and comfortable movement for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit users of all ages and abilities.

Finally, climate change and sustainability, topics which were not in the forefront in 1987, have become critical issues that cities must now address. This has created additional impetus to promote mixed use development in the Central Core as a means of creating more energy efficient and less polluting patterns of growth that result in fewer vehicle trips, greater transit usage, more walking and biking, more energy- and resource-efficient buildings and infrastructure.

This is the context for the Central Core Urban Design Guidelines.

A. The Intent

The Central Core District Design Guidelines sets forth a long-term vision for the physical form and character of Sacramento’s downtown and a comprehensive set of design guidelines for developing downtown Sacramento to its fullest potential. The objective of the Guidelines is to direct future growth in a manner that builds upon the existing context including the Core District’s market strengths, cultural and social amenities, historical assets, and plan direction, while also acknowledging District’s potential for dynamic and transformative growth and maturation as an urban center.

The intent is to insure that all development in the Central Core contributes to making downtown Sacramento a unique and special place, and furthers Sacramento’s aspiration to be “America’s Most Livable City.” The Guidelines seek to capitalize on the recent development momentum and ensure that proposed higher density development also provides the qualities and amenities that will create an attractive, livable downtown with a lively mix of uses, walkable streets, convenient transit, distinctive neighborhoods, and access to its riverfront.

Finally, these Guidelines are only a means to an end—a tool to assist the City in achieving its long-range vision. The vision itself will only be brought to life through the persistence and cooperative efforts of all those who participate in the creative process of building Sacramento’s future.

B. Relationship to Central City Urban Design Guidelines

This document—the Central Core Design Guidelines—is one component of the larger Central City Urban Design Guidelines, which consists of a compilation of area-specific guidelines that have been prepared for each of the principal districts in the Central City. In addition to the area-specific guidelines, Section 2 of the Central City guidelines document describes the context that informs the guidelines for all of the Central City districts, articulates a broad vision for the built character of the Central City, and sets forth a framework of urban design concepts that is intended to inform all decisions relating to the physical form and design of the Central City. As such, the concepts set forth in Section 2—Central City Framework—are directly applicable to the Central Core and should be referred to by anyone who is involved in interpreting or implementing the design guidelines in the Central Core whether for private development or public projects.

Guidelines Document Content and Organization

The Central Core Design Guidelines is organized in four chapters:

1. **Introduction:** describes the context, intent, and structure of the Guidelines document, and the relationship to other documents for design review in the district.
2. **Urban Design Framework:** articulates the overall vision for the physical form and character of the Central Core District and describes the underlying context that informs this vision.
3. **Public Realm Design Guidelines:** addresses the design of key components such as streets, sidewalks, and parks that comprise the public realm. The Public Realm guidelines provide some guidance for private development, but their primary focus is to provide direction to City departments and decision-makers who are responsible for the design, implementation and maintenance of improvements within the City’s parks and public rights-of-way.
4. **Private Realm Design Guidelines:** addresses the design of key components that comprise the private realm, including the placement of buildings, the design

of buildings, and the treatment of off-street parking. The Private Realm guidelines provide direction to developers, property owners, City staff, the Design Commission, the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Commission, the Planning Commission, the Preservation Commission and the City Council. Used in concert with the City of Sacramento Zoning and Preservation Ordinance and applicable building codes, this document will provide City staff, decision-makers, and private interests a common basis for the evaluation of design and development issues during the design review and approval process for individual private development proposals.

Guidelines Sphere and Authority

The Central Core Design Guidelines are applicable to the area that is generally bounded by Interstate 5 on the west, Q Street on the south, 17th Street on the east; and a combination of G Street, F Street, and the Railyards on the north (see figure).

The guidelines in this document are intended to provide direction rather than prescriptive requirements. The Design Commission shall have the authority to waive individual guidelines for specific projects where it is found that such waiver will better achieve the design policy objectives than strict application of the guidelines.

The Central Core District



This Guidelines document incorporates both mandates and recommendations. Where the word “shall” or “must” is used it is intended to be a mandate; and where the word “should” or “encouraged” is used, it is intended to be a recommended guideline. The mandates are treated as standards with little room for variation whereas the recommendations are subject to some interpretation and have room for minor variances.

Relevant Planning Documents

The Central Core Design Guidelines have been informed by a number of City planning documents that also have jurisdiction over and/or provide guidance related to specific areas of interest. These documents typically address their area of interest in greater depth and provide more detailed analysis and policy direction. As such, they are important references that should be consulted when applying these guidelines. These documents include:

- Preservation Standards
- Pedestrian Master Plan
- Central City Parking Master Plan
- Parks Master Plan
- Urban Forest Best Management Practices
- Central City Neighborhood Design Guidelines
 - Midtown
 - Alhambra
 - CADA R Street Urban Design Guidelines
- Railyards Design Guidelines
- River District Design Guidelines
- Sacramento Riverfront Master Plan

It is important to note that the Central City Neighborhood Design Guidelines is the governing design guidelines reference where the Central Core Design Guidelines are silent. This includes the residential neighborhoods north of the CBD and in the southeast corner neighborhood of Fremont Park.

Applicability of Preservation Standards/Plans and Central Core Design Guidelines

For properties listed in the Sacramento Register of Historic Resources, either as individual Landmarks, or as properties within Historic Districts, projects on those parcels will be reviewed in accordance with adopted historic preservation standards, including the “*Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*”. The City of Sacramento has also adopted two documents—“*Listed Structures Plan (Residential and Non-Residential)*” and “*Preservation Area Plan*”—which are being updated as part of the proposed “*Preservation Development Standards*” document (Note: as of 2001 “*Listed Structures*” are now referred to as “*Landmarks*” and “*Preservation Areas*” are referred to as “*Historic Districts*”). Additionally, in the Rail-yards, design guidelines have been developed specifically for the Central Shops Historic District, to be used in addition to the *Secretary of the Interior’s Rehabilitation Standards*, and for the Transition Area around the Central Shops Historic District.

When a proposed project includes some element where the historic standards/plans may be silent, these Central City Urban Design Guidelines will govern, along with the City Code, as they may relate to that element. When there may be a conflict between the historic standards/plans and the Central Core Design Guidelines, the historic standards/plans will govern.

Design review of proposed projects involving historic properties, whether Landmarks or Historic Districts, are conducted by the Preservation Commission, Preservation Director, or Preservation Staff, per Chapter 17.134 of the City Code, as opposed to the Design Commission, Design Director, or Design Review Staff. In addition, preservation development project review requires certain additional reviews, such as review of proposed window and door repairs/replacements and proposed fencing, even if Building Permits are not required.