Chapter 2: Framework to Central Core Design Guidelines

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

Chapter 2: Framework to Central Core Design Guidelines

Contents

1. Downtown Development 2-1
2. Architectural Response in the Central Core 2-5
3. Climate 2-6
4. Topography 2-6
5. Urban Forest 2-7
6. Street Frontages 2-8
7. Architectural Vocabulary 2-9
8. Materials and Colors. 2-9
9. Tower Massing and Separation 2-10
10. Urban Design Framework Concepts 2-17

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

1. Downtown Development

Sacramento's Central Core has seen dramatic changes to its economic fortunes, housing demand, and commercial position over the last 20 years. The one constant for Sacramento's Central Core throughout the years has been its position as a center for government at the city, county and state levels. When the 1987 Urban Design Plan was prepared, Sacramento's Central Core was primarily an employment center, and one suffering from a declining share in the regional office market and increasing vacancy rates due to competition from suburban office parks. Retail activity was minimal and residential uses were limited to the historic neighborhoods surrounding the Core. As a result, the focus of the 1987 plan was on articulating strategies and guidelines that would catalyze and provide incentives for redevelopment and revitalization, particularly for office development.

621 Capitol Mall

Civic and Office Development

The Central Core experienced a surge in commercial office buildings in the late 1980s and '90s responding to the City's

Sacramento Central Core with Proposed "Pipeline" Projects in 2007 (as of January 2007) shown in pink

reinvestment in the area. Several high-rise office towers were built under the 1987 Plan and Guidelines, including: the 350-foot high Renaissance Tower at 8th and K Streets; the 325-foot high US Bank Plaza at 980 9th Street; and the 400-foot high Wells Fargo Tower on Capitol Mall amongst others. The 1987 CBD Framework Plan identified I Street as the CBD's primary civic corridor reflecting to the numerous City, County, and State buildings that are located along it, and subsequently this civic focus has been further enhanced with the development of several new government office buildings including the U.S. Federal Courthouse between 5th and 6th streets, the California EPA building between 10th and 11th streets, and the new City Hall between 8th and 9th streets. In addition to the government buildings along I Street, the multi-building East Capitol complex was built at 15th Street and Capitol Avenue. The Convention Center replaced an urban block at the eastern edge of the Core, adjacent to the now-thriving Midtown district. Several new hotels were built in the vicinity of the Convention Center and the Capitol, including the Hyatt Regency on L Street and the Sheraton Grand on K Street, and the retail mall on K Street was upgraded in the '90s prior to being acquired by Westfield in 1999. The most recent additions to the inventory of downtown office towers include two 25-story towers on Capitol Mall — the US Bank Building at 621 Capitol Mall and the 500 Capitol Mall building.

By and large, the majority of the downtown development over the past two decades has consisted of large floor plate (e.g. 24,000 sq. ft.) office development in mid- and high-rise buildings, with the tenants being primarily government-dependent or -supportive uses, banks and lending institutions, or insurance companies.

Residential Development

Like many mid-sized cities on the West Coast, Sacramento has over the last few years experienced an increasing demand for inner city residential development. This is consistent with a nationwide trend towards urban living fed by demand from empty nesters, young couples, urban professionals, and gay and lesbian populations—people tired of long commutes and traffic congestion and those looking for the cultural and entertainment amenities associated with urban living.

Historic Southern Pacific Depot, part of the City of Sacramento's planned Intermodal Station

The L Street Lofts in Midtown demonstrate well-designed neighborhood retail integrated into the ground floor.

Initial response to this demand is reflected in the numerous mixed-use loft projects that have been built in the Central Core, such as the Fulcrum Group development at 16th and K Street and the 800 J Street Lofts near Cesar Chavez Plaza. Prior to the collapse in the national housing market and the

recession of 2008, plans had been prepared and approved for several mid- and high-rise residential towers in the Core, an area previously without any significant residential development, let alone in such high density buildings. In January 2007, plans were in process for the 600-foot tall Sacramento Towers on Capitol Mall, the 600-foot tall Aura building also on Capitol Mall, the 400-foot tall Metropolitan building at 10th and J Street, the 700-foot tall Epic building on 12th and I Streets, and the 900-foot tall Grand Metropolitan Tower on 11th and J Streets. While of these five projects, only the Metropolitan appears likely to move forward, the strong interest prior to the recession suggests that it is just a matter of time until such projects are proposed again. Outside of the Central Core, proposed residential development in the Docks Area and Township 9 will further expand and diversify the downtown residential market, with the introduction of mid- and high-rise riverfront housing, as will the proposed high-rise "park block" housing approved in the Railyards.

Retail and Entertainment Development

Complementing this surge in residential development has been an increase in retail, restaurant, and entertainment uses, many as ground floor uses in new mixed use buildings. Consistent with City zoning that requires ground floor retail in certain areas of the Central Core, these uses are generally concentrated along J, K, and L Streets between 3rd and 13th Streets and the numbered cross-streets between L and J Streets. Historic buildings such as the Elks Building at J and 11th Streets and the 926 J Street Building have been renovated and rehabilitated to provide ground floor restaurants and a boutique hotel (926 J Street). In addition, significant new investment and planning has been put into renovating and redeveloping the K Street Mall with a more diverse mix of retail, restaurants, entertainment, and lodging uses.

These additions have enhanced the Central Core's historic role as the regional center for the arts and entertainment, complementing key existing assets such as the Convention Center, Community Theater, Crest Theater, Sacramento Theater Company, Memorial Auditorium, and Plaza Park and contributing to a more vibrant cultural, entertainment, and retail environment that offers a full range of weekday, nighttime and weekend activities as called for in both the 1987 Urban Design Plan and the 1990 Cultural and Entertainment District Master Plan.

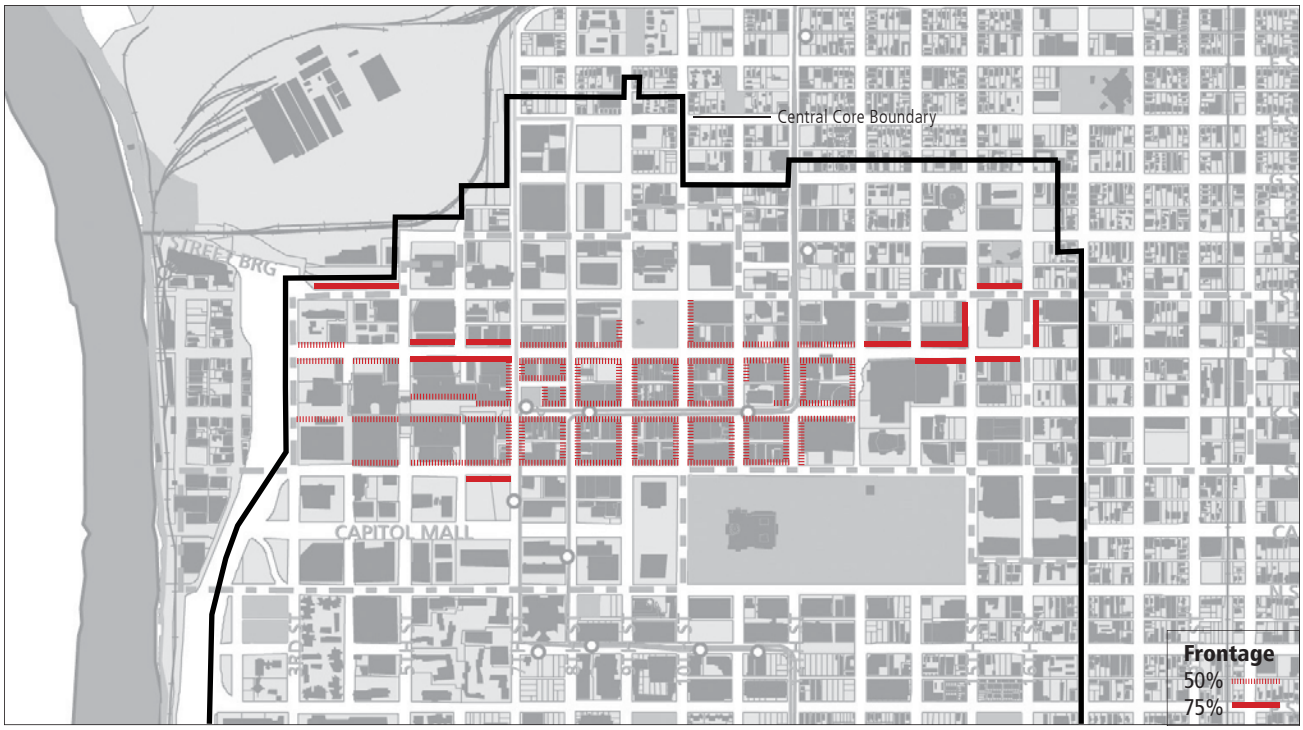
As the Downtown economy continues to become more diverse and dynamic, the 1987 Plan's characterization of J Street as the Downtown's "main street" and K Street as the regional shopping street is probably too limiting. Instead, these corridors have become the heart of a growing retail and entertainment 'district' with breadth and depth—not just linear corridors. Similarly, whereas J and K streets once included the majority of the retail and entertainment activity in the Central City, new areas, such as Midtown and R Street, have emerging retail and entertainment areas, and the eventual redevelopment of the Railyards will add a major new retail district and a cultural district to the Central City mix.

A Mature and Complete Urban Center

Together, the construction of high density residential towers, the introduction of new retail and entertainment uses, and the reinvestment in historic resources are signs of the maturation of downtown Sacramento as an urban center. It also signals a diversification of uses that should add stability to the economic climate in the Central Core that will level off the market swings associated with a single-market employment center.

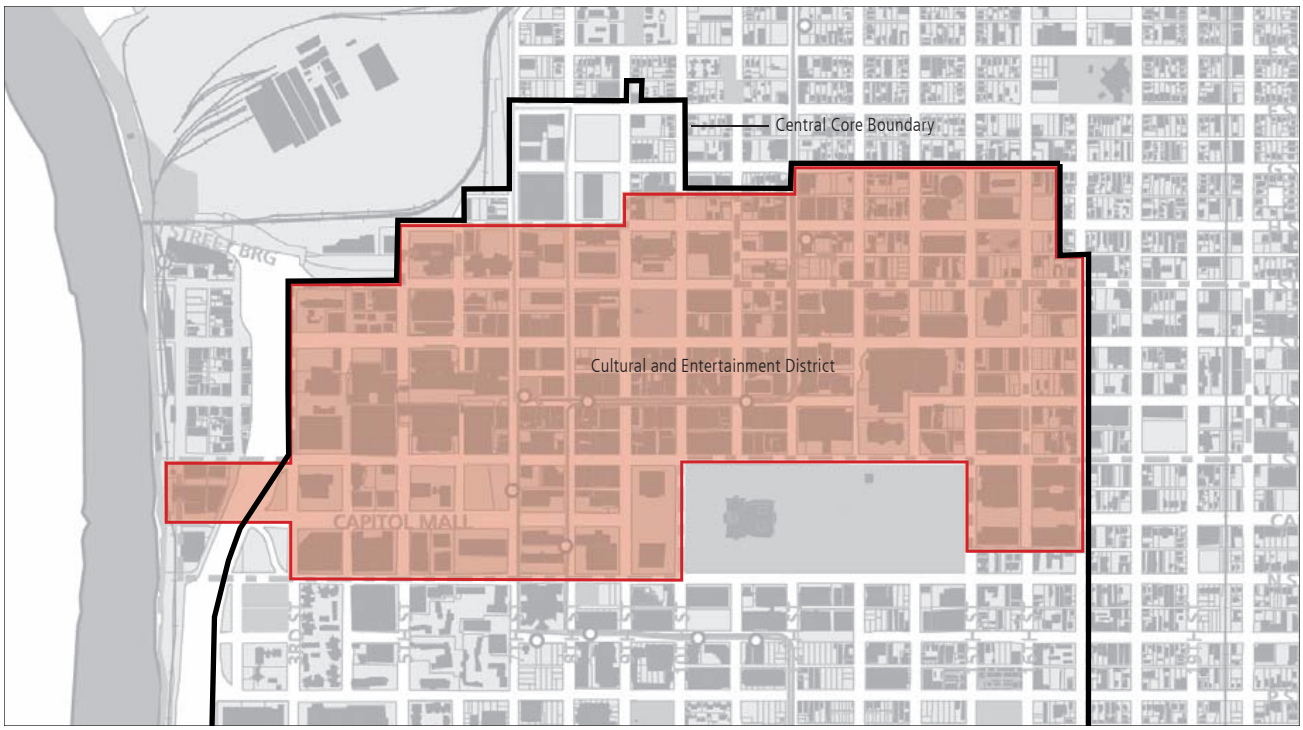
During the surge in applications for downtown residential projects in 2006-7, more than 3,000 dwelling units were proposed to be developed, and studies suggested that there were probably another one to five thousand units that could be accommodated through redevelopment, depending on density. Altogether this level of development could add 10,000 to 20,000 new residents to the Central Core. The introduction of several thousand new residential units will not only alter the physical form and character of the Central Core, it is anticipated to also transform the area's demographics and result in demand for new uses and services oriented to a residential population, including uses such as schools, grocery stores and urban scale parks that are needed to create 'complete' neighborhoods.

Map 1: Required Retail Frontage



Attachment #9 to Chapter 17.96 of the City's Zoning Code

Map 2: Cultural and Entertainment District Boundary Map



Attachment #6 to Chapter 17.96 of the City's Zoning Code

2. Architectural Response in the Central Core

Being "America's most livable city" involves more than making Sacramento a place that is safe, functional, and socially and economically stable. It is also about creating a place that is visually distinctive, appealing, and memorable. Architecture plays a key role in this and in defining the identity of the Central Core. Fortunately, Sacramento has a rich architectural heritage that contributes to the Core's unique identity. This identity is not homogenous in character, but includes an eclectic mix of buildings that changes from street to street and block to block, reflecting the different periods of the City's history.

A distinctive, memorable and sustainable Sacramento will preserve the best of Sacramento's architectural heritage while facilitating creative architecture in the future. The interplay of past, present, and future in the Core District's built environment will contribute to maintaining an identity for Sacramento's downtown that is uniquely 'Sacramentan' and engenders civic pride in those who live here.

The intent of these guidelines is neither to codify the existing architectural vocabulary into a rigid pattern language, nor to stifle the creativity of future designers. The guidelines are intended to avoid generic building design and ensure that the design of new buildings provides a respectful response to surrounding buildings and physical context; demonstrate excellence in design and an understanding of place; and contribute to the Central Core's rich architectural vocabulary. Such consideration on the part of design professionals will ensure that downtown Sacramento continues to evolve through the thoughtful integration of new structures into the existing urban fabric.

Generally, creative re-interpretation of existing patterns and forms is the preferred design strategy, rather than having new buildings emulate existing buildings through false historicism. Employing contrast, rather than re-interpretation of existing forms and patterns, is also an acceptable design strategy. However, to be effective, this approach, by definition, should be employed sparingly. No matter which design strategy is employed, building design always should be guided by the question: "Does the design solution contribute to the Central Core's character and function?" Exceptional design should be embraced and celebrated, but only when it enhances the function or character of its surroundings. For Sacramento to emerge as a great and distinctive city its buildings must demonstrate exceptional design.

Many factors have helped shape Sacramento's architecture. Understanding these influences and the local architectural

Appropriate coloration, massing, scale, and horizontal banding respectfully blends new with old architecture.

Building on left represents traditional historic form with vertical ribbons of punched window groupings, strong base, middle and a distinctive roof top. The street wall is well defined with a hierarchy of horizontal cornicing utilizing local terra cotta exterior details and cladding. High rise tower in center exhibits "contrasting" architectural elements to interject visual tension to skyline. High-rise tower at right side employs creative re-interpretation of "punched" fenestration groupings. The building massing, distinctive roof top element and exterior coloration harmonize with the neighboring historic structures.

responses to them will allow contemporary architects to complement existing historic and vernacular buildings and harmoniously integrate new and old buildings. Key factors that need to be considered in the design of future buildings include: climate, topography, vegetation, street widths, block size, building type, and building materials and color.

3. Climate

Given the extremely hot summers and cold, wet winters typical to Sacramento it is important that buildings not cast perpetual shadows over City streets. While shaded streets are pleasant on a hot summer day, the opposite is true in winter. Any exposure to winter sun is most welcome at street level, particularly if there is also protection from driving rain.

In the 19th Century, columned street verandahs that supported second floor decks over the public walkways were a common feature. The verandahs allowed for solar access and provided rain cover at street level while also providing outdoor space at the second floor level from which to enjoy cooling delta breezes in the evenings. Other than in Old Sacramento, few examples of this vernacular remain in the Central Core. The implications of local climate on the quality of public life are frequently ignored in the design of new buildings, particularly those with long east-west axes that cast perpetual shadows over the streets, open spaces and buildings along their north faces. Taller thinner towers are preferred for Sacramento for a number of reasons, but particularly because they provide better solar access and produce less shading impact on surrounding uses. Although taller slender buildings cast longer shadows, the duration of the shadows on any one location is less because the shadows move more quickly with the passing sun through the course of a day. The taller slender towers also allow for better circulation of cooling Delta breezes of summer and reduce potential for adverse wind tunnel effects.

4. Topography

Sacramento's relatively flat landscape influences architecture and the character of the Central Core in several ways. The level topography has contributed to the creation of a well-defined street wall that has a consistent height along the block face,

Shadow patterns of Central Core Area highrises. Note shadow variance between slender towers and elongated towers to groundplane.

Early Sacramento vernacular style responds well to micro-climate issues.

Federal Courthouse with elongated east-west orientation. Tower casts broad shadows on north side.

with a dominant horizontal cornice line marking the transition from the building base to the floors above. Early mercantile buildings established an average street wall height of 35-40 feet. More contemporary buildings are establishing streetwall heights of 65-80 feet.

The level terrain also provides opportunities for views from taller buildings over the Downtown, the rivers, the City's outlying neighborhoods, and miles beyond to the surrounding valley, distant Sierras, Coastal Range, the Sutter Buttes, and Mount Lassen. Architects should consciously design new structures to take full advantage of existing view corridors while minimizing any obstructions to neighboring views by employing slender tower forms. Finally, the relatively flat landscape means that the City's skyline is highly visible from great distances, and that, unlike hilly cities like San Francisco, the shape of the skyline is dependent solely on the design of its buildings rather than its topography. As a result, designers of taller buildings need to consider the silhouette their buildings will have and their individual and cumulative effects on the City skyline.

A strong horizontal base at pedestrian level with cornices dividing exterior into tripartite sectors. Light filters through the tree canopy onto shaded walls with terra cotta detailing.

5. Urban Forest

As the vision for the Central City's core, its riverfronts, and its redevelopment areas continues to be implemented, it is fully expected to emerge as a celebrated destination, drawing visitors from around the world to visit this beautiful, world class city. One element that is already celebrated is Sacramento's reputation as a metropolis of trees—a "Treeopolis" as it were. A reputation that speaks to the much loved tree canopy that adorns the City streets, and serves as a dynamic symbol of the City's commitment to keeping Sacramento green and sustainable.

The tree canopy in the Central Core plays many roles. Most directly, it creates a beautiful and comfortable setting for public life in the Core. Given Sacramento's climate, the large-canopy, deciduous shade trees that line the Central City's streets provide wonderful summer shade while allowing solar access during the winter. The tree canopies also help to maintain a comforting pedestrian scale to the streetscape, visually and physically linking the pedestrian realms on either side the street. The tree canopy also introduces a natural element that visually softens and

Sacramento's building typologies allow for strongly defined street wall enclosures of consistent base height.

buffers the sharp lines and hardness of the urban setting. In addition, trees help remove pollutants from the air, reduce stormwater runoff and erosion, and increase property values. All told, Sacramento's trees are a distinctive and memorable element of the Central Core, and as such must be highly valued and protected.

The buildings that work best in Sacramento are those that respectfully integrate the City's urban forest. To that end, designers must be intentional in designing to accommodate both existing and future tree canopies and root zones at the earliest stages of conceptual design. Just as the architecture and built environment in the Central Core needs to contribute to the creation of a high quality public realm and a distinctive and recognizable image, so to must the urban forest provide a high quality landscape that embodies the best in thoughtful design, materials and sustainable practices and plays an active role in maintain the health of the community.

Sacramento's wide canopy trees bathe pedestrian areas with welcoming shade during hot summers.

6. Street Frontages

The Central City's grid of streets was originally surveyed for blocks that could be subdivided into parcels with 40-foot wide lot frontages. In the Central Core, this gave rise to building fronts that had a natural 40-foot rhythm. Over the decades, as lots were merged or subdivided, building frontage widths became more varied, including 120 feet, 80 feet, 60 feet, 30 feet, 20 feet, and even down to an

Building façade re-interprets traditional rhythm of street wall by suggesting different building widths and fenestration.

An infill project exemplifying the 40-foot rhythm of Sacramento's historic block platting and subsequent building facades.

exceptional 10 feet wide storefront. The underlying rhythm of building frontages established by the original 40-foot wide parcels is important to the Core's character, in that it maintains a pedestrian-friendly scale to the streetscape and preserves subtle evidence of the Downtown's physical DNA. As such, the 40-foot frontage increment should not be lost. Even for large projects covering entire city blocks or large portions of blocks, building articulation should be incorporated into the design that preserves this pattern.

7. Architectural Vocabulary

The Central Core contains a wonderful variety of architectural styles from the 19th and 20th Centuries. However, even with the diversity of architectural styles, several common elements are evident that should inform future development. Particularly important among this shared architectural vocabulary are the following:

- A vertical emphasis to recessed windows and window groupings with a hierarchy of vertical fenestration patterns;
- Facades that exhibit a very balanced proportion of solid wall surface to exterior window openings;
- Buildings that are expressive of traditional base, middle and top sections with strong horizontal bases, cornice lines and street walls; and
- Decorative building tops, particularly on many older buildings, that add distinctive silhouettes to the Sacramento skyline.

8. Materials and Colors

As the State Capitol, Sacramento has many fine buildings that incorporate a rich array of noble and enduring materials intended to convey the power, stability, and splendor associated with the seat of government of one of the nation's

Traditional architecture unites base, middle, and distinctive top section with vertically oriented punched openings.

Sensitive selection of colors and materials on new tower blends old and new into harmonious whole.

largest and most prosperous states. In addition to granite and marble, the Central Core's historic buildings include a rich tradition of finely detailed terra cotta exteriors. Although there are notable examples of red brick exteriors, such as the Elks Building, the City's finest buildings are generally lighter colored in soft grays and creams which reflect the common use of materials such as granite and limestone in the construction of government and civic buildings. Buildings that substantially vary from this range of colors, such as the Renaissance Tower with its black glazing and dark red cladding, appear distinctly at odds with their surrounding context.

Elks Building — The integration of brick with terra cotta accents highlight the stepped massing and slender tower of this early 20th Century landmark.

9. Tower Massing and Separation

When Sacramento's downtown was young and had few tall buildings their massing and separation were not significant concerns. As the downtown has matured and incorporated more and more mid- and high-rise structures, these have become important issues to address, not only in the Central Core, but also in the Railyards and River District where mid- and high-rise towers are proposed. Densely packed towers can have numerous deleterious effects: decreasing solar access; increasing wind tunnel effects; creating a visually oppressive public realm; and, with the introduction of residential towers, creating privacy conflicts. In recognition of these issues, many cities are adopting the approach pioneered by Vancouver to require slenderer towers with greater separation between them, which is in character with some of Sacramento's most revered towers.

Floorplate Size

Building massing is directly related to the size of a building's floorplate. Under the assumption that most new development would be for office uses, the 1987 guidelines permitted towers with floorplates as large as 24,000 square feet for the lower tower, reducing to 22,000 square feet for the upper tower. The result is buildings that are quite bulky, and when built side by side, are visually quite oppressive.

Given the demand for development of towers in the Central Core and the introduction of more residential uses, the City envisions a building pattern that will protect and enhance

926 J Street — Originally built for office use, was renovated in 2008 as the Citizen Hotel.

views, solar access, air circulation, the quality of the public realm, and the character of the skyline. As a result, the new guidelines mandate a two-tiered approach that requires smaller floorplates for all towers, and smaller floorplates for residential towers than for office towers. This reduction still allows the large floorplates required for office buildings, but reduces the building dimensions enough to produce a slenderer appearing profile, particularly as buildings get taller. The guidelines also encourage even smaller floorplates where possible, not just for aesthetic reasons, but also to facilitate more energy efficient buildings that provide natural light and ventilation to all office space.

The design guidelines call for a much smaller maximum floorplate for residential towers to differentiate them from the bulkier commercial towers, and in order to sculpt the profile of the building to create a distinctive city skyline. For the sake of comparison, other West Coast cities have guidelines to create even more slender residential towers. San Francisco's new Rincon Hill towers are limited to a 10,000 square foot maximum floorplate, while Vancouver restricts the maximum to 7,500 square feet.

Building Stepbacks

The construction of multiple high-rise residential towers in the Central Core creates different challenges from the previous generation of commercial buildings. Whereas commercial buildings can accommodate step-backs of their upper floors within their massing without compromising the integrity of the internal spaces, high-rise residential units are normally stacked one above the other in similar arrangements and require a consistent depth from the Central Core resulting in an un-stepped vertical facade for the majority of the building's height. It is for this reason that the design guidelines do not require residential towers to step-back their floors above the street-wall base height, as is required for office towers (except as required by the Capitol View Protection Act). While the Elks Building has been used as a precedent for stepping back upper floors above the base, a historic precedent for the consistent vertical façades proposed for residential towers is former Cal Western Life building at 926 J Street, built in 1926 (converted in 2008 to the Citizen Hotel) opposite Cesar Chavez Park.

Tower Separation

Historically, Sacramento allowed commercial buildings to be built as close as 10 feet away from each other. However, with the proliferation of towers, greater setbacks are recommended for all the same reasons that smaller floorplates are. Future commercial and residential towers should be required to maintain at least an 80-foot setback, the width of a typical Sacramento downtown street, from adjacent towers in order to ensure protection of views and privacy. In addition to these separation requirements, the guidelines recommend that no more than 4 towers be permitted per block. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate these Tower Separation concepts.

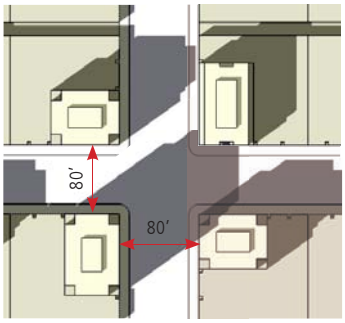


Figure 1: Towers should be spaced at least 80' apart from each other - the equivalence of a street width - and vary considerably in height from those closest to it.

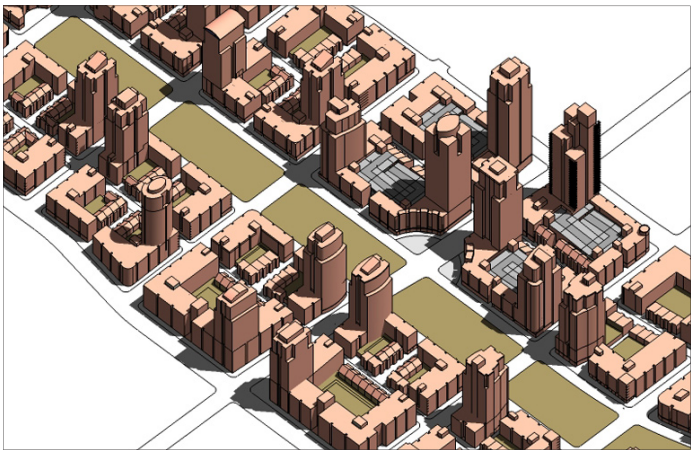


Figure 2: This hypothetical urban design study follows the tower separation guidelines. Towers are always at least 80' apart, and there are never more than the permitted four towers per block.

Height & Massing in the Central Core

Historically, the City also had no height restrictions within the CBD. However, in the early '90s, the State Legislature adopted height restrictions and setback requirements, in the form of "view protection zones," for certain areas of the Central Core located near the Capitol in recognition of its unique value as a cultural and open space resource. The State legislation established a 150-foot height limit in the half block nearest Capitol Park to the north and west, and then increases the height limit in half block increments to a maximum height of 450 feet along 7th and J streets. The one exception is along 11th Street where building heights are restricted to 250 feet between J and K streets, and increase to 350 feet north of K Street (see Figure 3). On the east side of Capitol Park between 15th and 17th streets, the legislation established 80-foot height limits. Beyond the Capitol view protection zones, there are currently no height limits in the surrounding CBD, or in Old Sacramento.

When the City revised its zoning to be consistent with the State-mandated view protection zones, it also established

Figure 5 - 11th Street Corridor Setback Requirements for Capitol View Protection

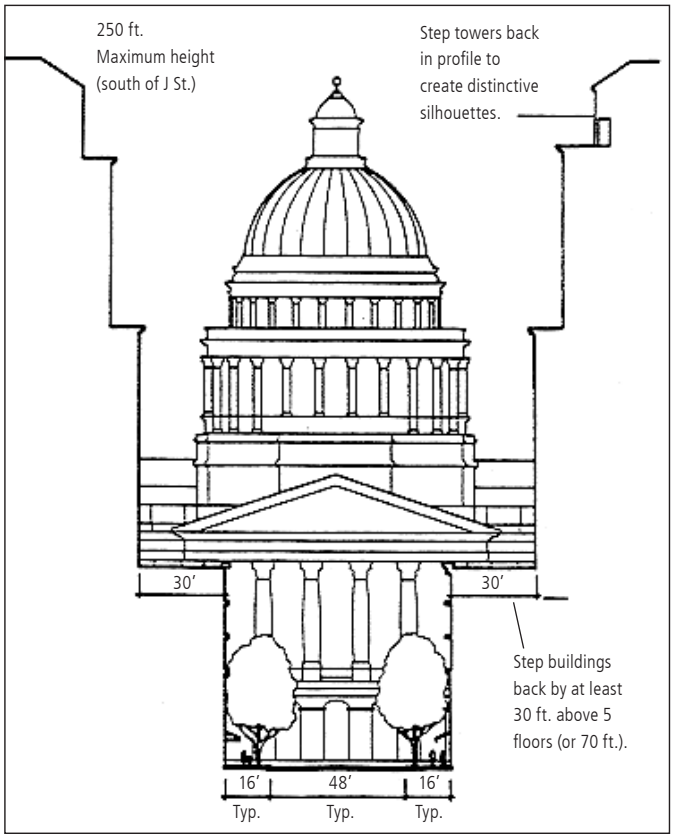


Figure 6 - L Street / 9th Street Park Edge Setback Requirements for Capitol View Protection

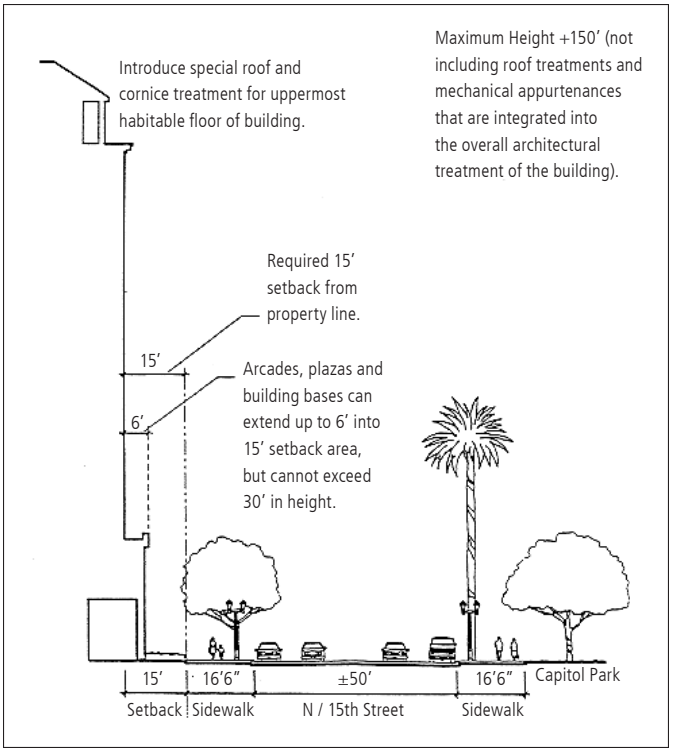


Figure 6 - 15th Street / N Street Park Edge Setback Requirements for Capitol View Protection

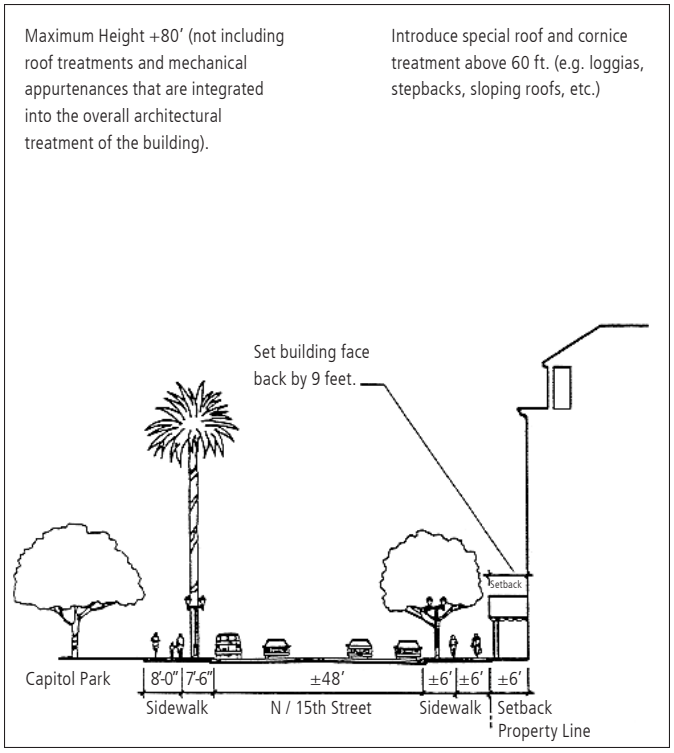


Figure 3 - Height Limits for Capitol View Protection in the C-3 Zone

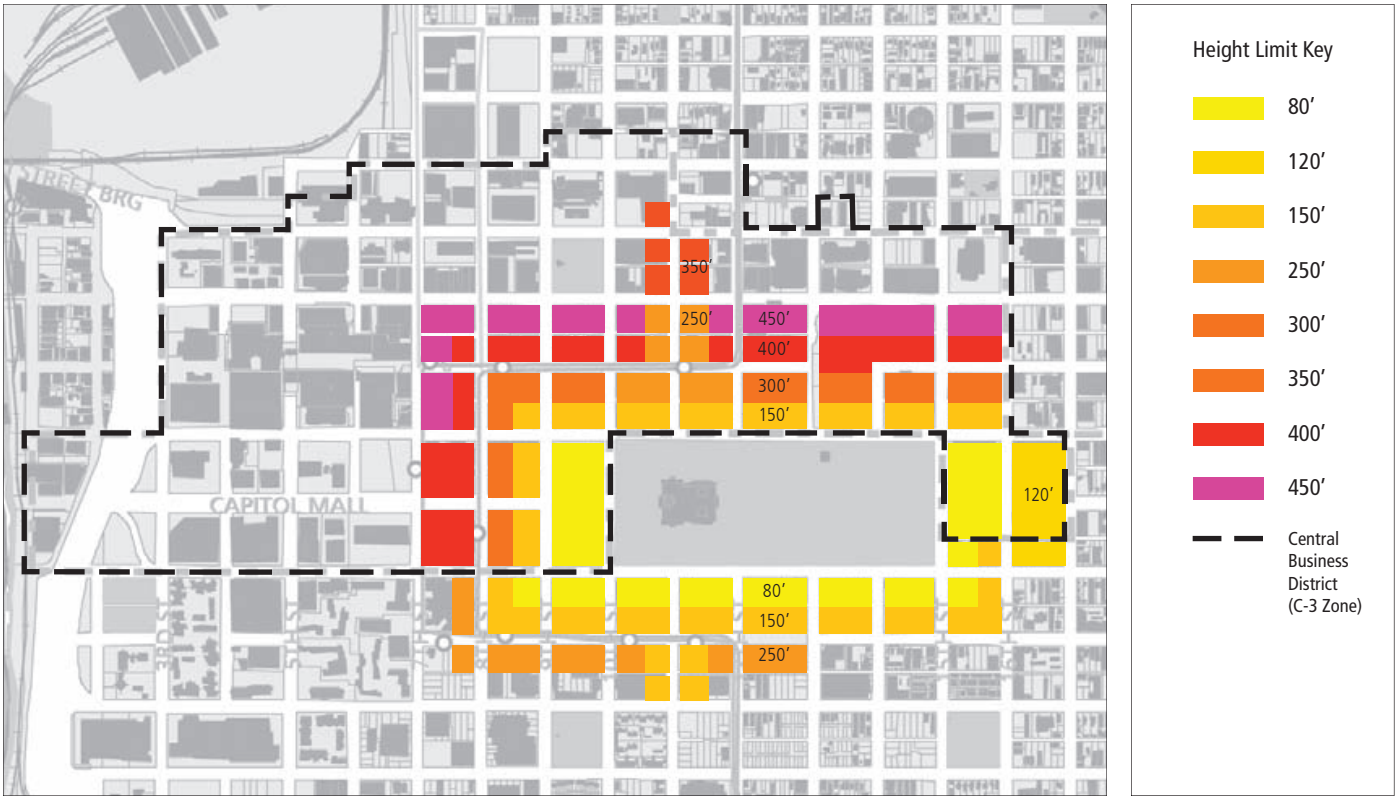
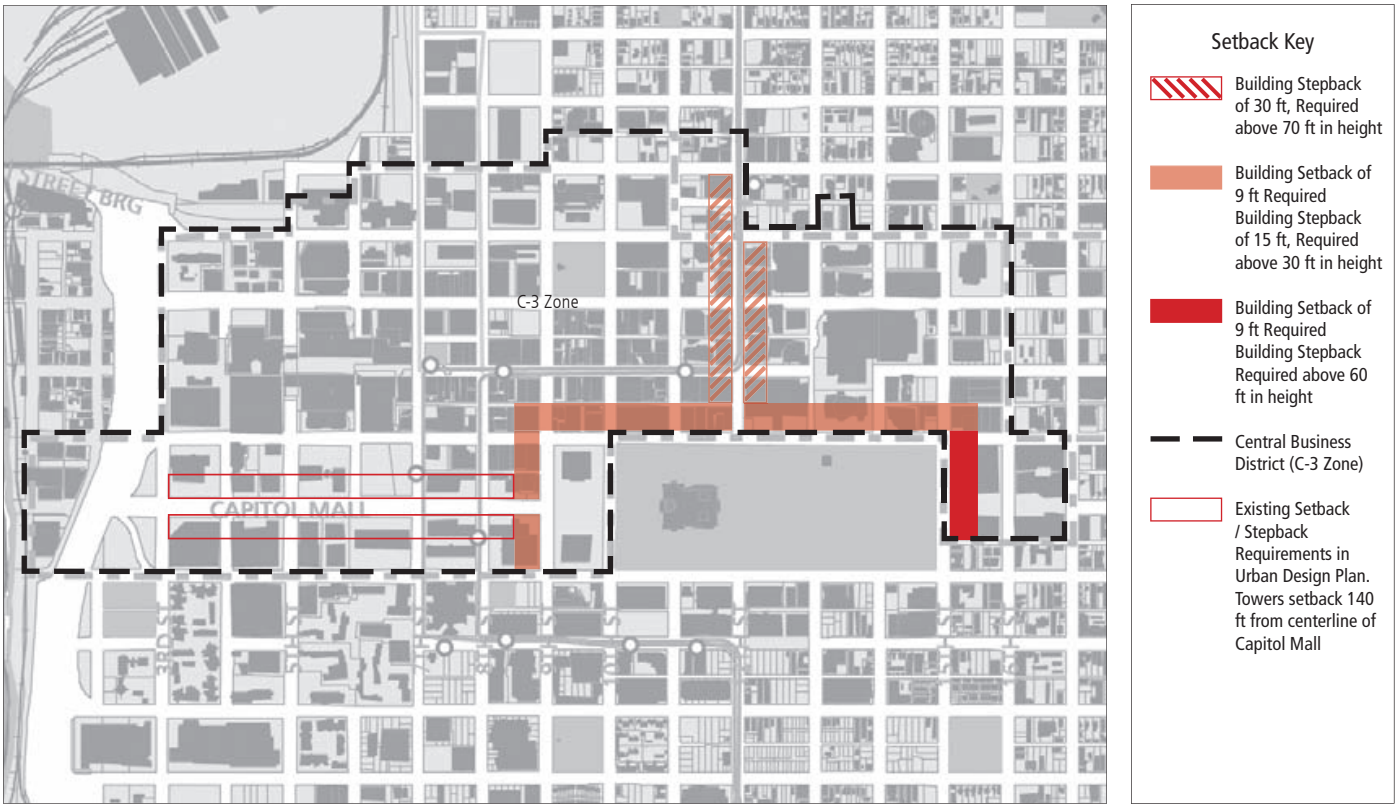


Figure 4 - Overview of Setback Requirements for Capitol View Protection in the C-3 Zone



building setbacks and stepbacks in addition to height limits (see Figure 4). As illustrated in the adjoining figures, 9-foot building setbacks are required along the east side of 15th Street, and 15-foot setbacks from the north and west sides of L and 9th streets respectively. In addition, stepbacks of the upper floors are required above 70 feet along 11th Street, and above 60 feet along 15th Street (see Figures 5, 6 and 7). The figures included here (i.e., Figures 1 through 7) are reproduced from Chapter 17.96 of the City's Zoning Code.

In the Central Core south of N Street, the State subsequently passed legislation to similarly restrict building heights adjacent to the Capitol. However, the City continues to maintain more restrictive zoning (35-45 feet maximum building heights) in this area. As a result, all private projects under the City's jurisdiction are subject to current zoning, while any State or Federal projects, beyond City jurisdiction, would be subject to the State's height zones.

Outside of the Core District building height limits of 60-, 45-, and 35-feet are enforced in the adjoining Alkali Flat, Mansion Flats, Midtown and Capitol Area neighborhoods.

Central Core Height and Massing: Cross Sections through the District

The two north/south cross sections (shown on the following page) are cut across the Central Core facing east towards the Capitol. The third section is cut east/west along I Street facing south.

Section 1 is taken along 9th Street from N Street through Cesar Chavez Park, City Hall to H Street and shows the existing height limits protecting the Capitol Dome including the historic 926 J Street tower and City Hall. The half block north of L Street has a 150-foot height-limit indicated by the recently constructed Marriott Hotel overlooking Capitol Park.

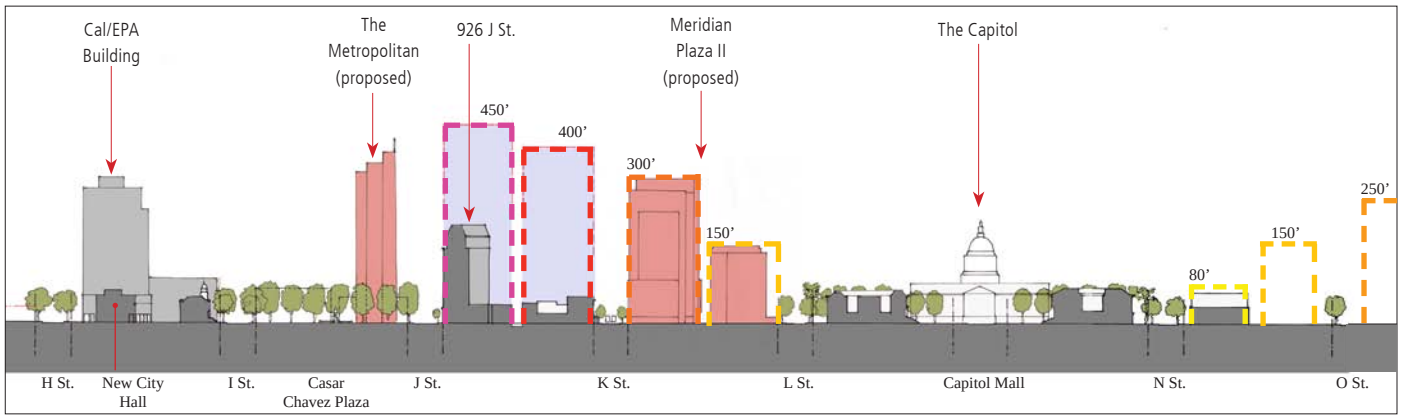
The next half block between the mid-block alley and K Street allows buildings up to 300 feet. North of K Street, 400 feet is permitted up to the mid-block alley and 450 feet in the half block to J Street.

The section shows the proposed 400-foot tall Metropolitan residential high-rise at the corner of J and 10th Streets, overlooking Cesar Chavez Park.

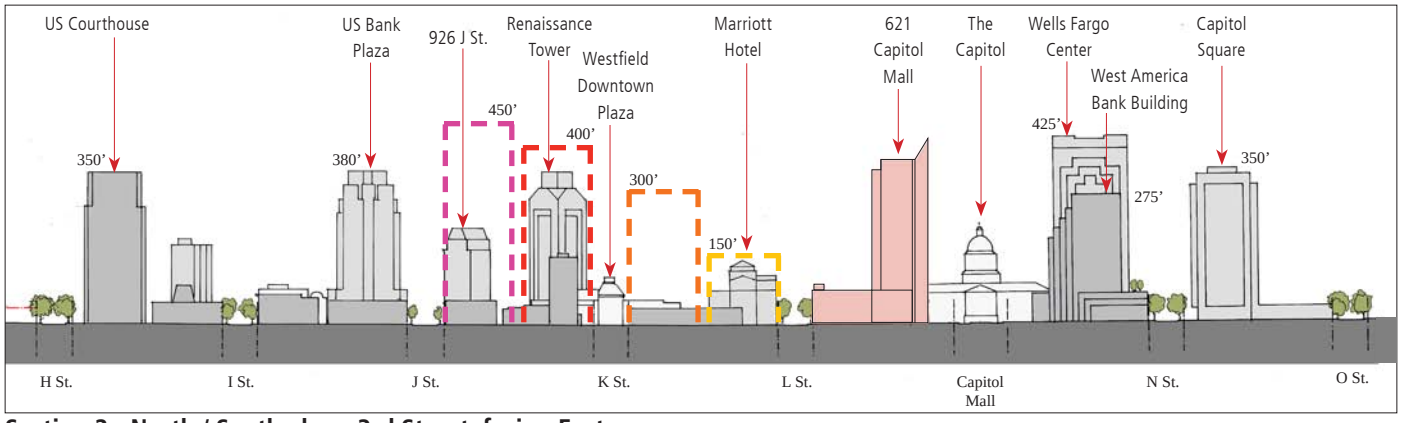
Section 2 is taken along 3rd Street from N to H Streets and shows the existing West America, Wells Fargo, and U.S. Bank towers on Capitol Mall and the Renaissance Tower, US Bank Plaza and Federal Courthouse.

Section 3 is taken along I Street facing south. It shows the protected view corridor towards the Capitol Dome terminating 11th Street as well as historic structures such as the Elks Club and 926 J Street.

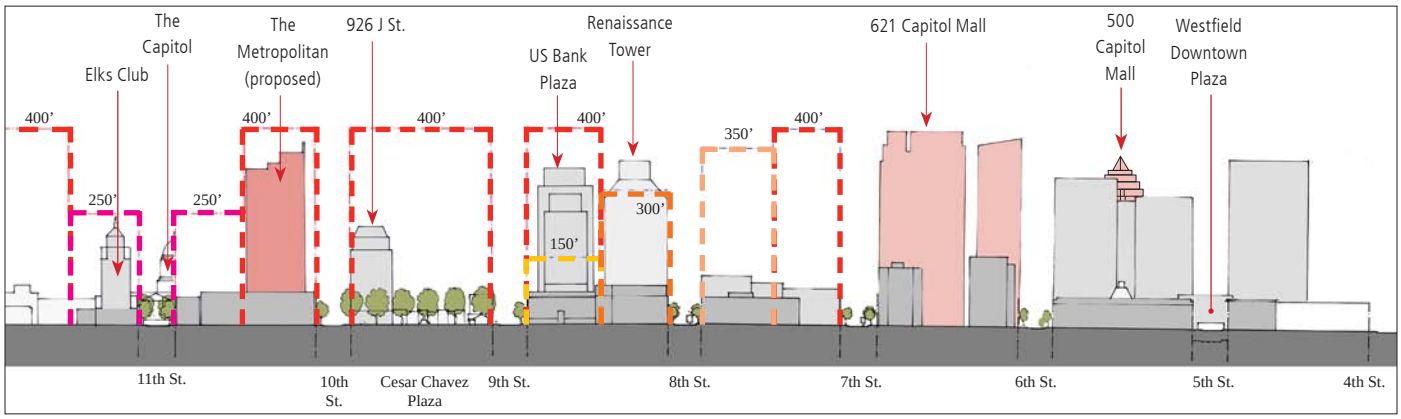
The section shows the proposed Metropolitan tower overlooking Cesar Chavez Park matching the scale and height of the existing US Bank Plaza tower as well as the planned Meridian II development.



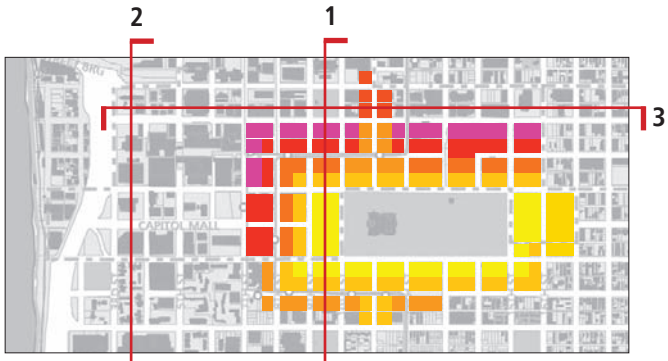
Section 1 - North / South along 9th Street, facing East



Section 2 - North / South along 3rd Street, facing East



Section 3 - East / West along I Street, facing South



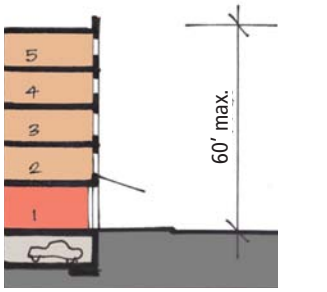
Key Plan

Height Limits and Building Types

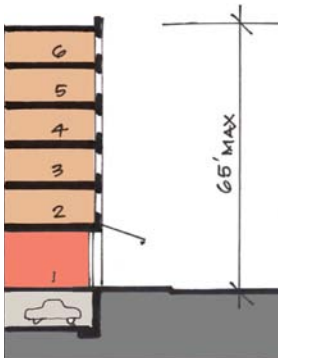
Building height zones should be directly related to building types because building heights directly affect the type of construction required and the cost of construction, which in turn have implications for development feasibility. As a reference, the following describes the relationship between building heights, building codes and construction types:

- **60 feet**, relates to the maximum height permitted in Type V Construction, wood-frame building. These buildings can be a maximum of five-stories tall (e.g., four levels of residential over a one story parking podium).
- **65 feet** relates to the maximum allowed in a Type III Construction, wood-frame or metal stud building.
- **85 feet** is the maximum allowed with a 'Below Life-Safety Limit' building consisting of stacked flats where 75 feet above grade is the height, reached by fire-truck ladder, to the top floor. This building type would need to be a Type I or II Construction in concrete or steel.
- **100 feet** is the approximate maximum allowed for a 'Below Life-Safety Limit' building consisting of stacked lofts where 75' above grade is the height, reached by fire-truck ladder, to the lower level of the top unit. This building type would also need to be a Type I or II Construction in concrete or steel.

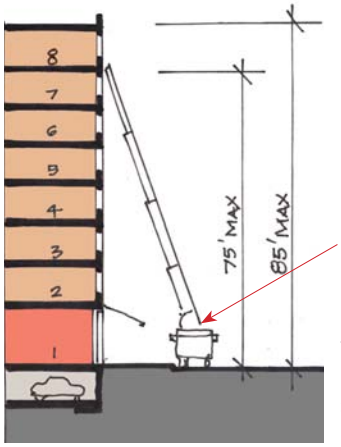
Above the Life-Safety Limit, all buildings require specific fire fighting and rescue features such as ventilated stair vestibules, elevator recall systems and other Building Code requirements.



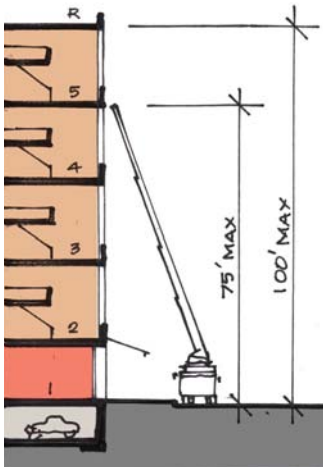
TYPE V
60' max.
wood frame
construction



TYPE III
65' max.
wood frame
construction



TYPE I or II
Below life-saftey
stacked flats 85'
max.



TYPE I or II
Below life-saftey
stacked lofts
100'max.

10. Urban Design Framework Concepts

The following is a summary of the Urban Design Framework Concepts presented in Section 2 – Design Guidelines Framework. Framework concepts outlined below are those that pertain to the development of the private realm in particular.

A. The Central City Skyline

Until the 1990's the Central City skyline was dominated by a handful of landmark buildings, with the 220-foot tall Capitol Dome, the 226-foot tall (18 stories) Elks Club building, the 217-foot tall Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament at 11th and K streets, and the 14-story 926 J Street building being the tallest and most recognizable. Beyond that, the Central City, as seen from the Yolo Causeway or from southbound I-5, had a low profile dominated by its canopy of trees with only the occasional building rising above 50 feet, including a few State office buildings south of Capitol Mall and some of the grain elevators along the railroad tracks.

Today's skyline is one that emerged largely in the 1990's. The construction, in 1989, of the 372-foot, 28-story Renaissance Tower at 8th and K Street kicked off just over a decade of development that would generate 9 of Sacramento's 10 tallest buildings. Collectively these towers substantially exceeded the historic building heights, raising the apex of the skyline by nearly 200 feet (from 226' to 423'), and in the process significantly altered the Central City's historic skyline.

In the early '90s in response to this surge in high rise towers, the State Legislature adopted height limits, in the form of "view protection zones," around the Capitol in recognition of its symbolic importance. The zones establish height limits for the blocks nearest Capitol Park. Beyond the Capitol Area height zone, there currently is no height limit in the surrounding CBD, or in Old Sacramento. Outside of the CBD 'no-limit zone' building height limits of 60-, 45-, and 35-feet are enforced in the adjoining Alkali Flat, Mansion Flats, Midtown and Capitol Area neighborhoods.

The first seven years of the new millennium saw a new surge in development proposals for new, taller buildings, including both high-rise buildings in the CBD and mid-rise buildings in the Midtown area. The recent surge consists of primarily residential and mixed use buildings. As in the '90's development surge, the current development proposals have ratcheted up the average building heights, with several proposals for the CBD exceeding 50 stories and heights ranging from 600 to 900 feet.

B. Central City Gateways

The Central City has several important entry corridors that serve as gateways to the downtown. These gateways are important because they typically shape one's first impression of Sacramento. Historically, these gateways related to available bridge crossings, such as the Tower Bridge, or to key travel routes, such as the Stockton Boulevard (P Street) and Folsom Boulevard (Capitol Avenue) entries from the east and Freeport Boulevard (21st Street) from the south.

The introduction of the freeway system has obscured these historic gateways to freeway interchanges and off-ramps, and in the process has generally degraded the quality of those historic entry corridors. While the historic gateway corridors still exist they now are secondary routes into the downtown whose entry points are marked by the hulking infrastructure of the elevated freeway.

The Central City Urban Design Plan should make a concerted effort to enhance the gateways to the Central City. Landscape, lighting, signage, and public art can be introduced to improve the entry experience for those arriving off the freeway and transitioning to city streets in well established areas. In redevelopment areas such as at Richards Boulevard and North 12th Street, there is much greater opportunity to use built forms and patterns, in addition to these other elements, to enhance and reinforce the entry experience—creating a new gateway to the Central City at the crossing of the American River.

C. Transit Streets and Transit-Oriented Development

The introduction of light rail has added an important framework element around which the Central Core can re-structure. The light rail lines and their station areas provide significant opportunities for locating higher density, transit-oriented development (TOD) that promotes transit use and walkable neighborhoods. To date the light rail system has focused on bringing people into the downtown from

surrounding suburban areas, and the City is only beginning to realize the potential benefit of this resource as a magnet for development. In the historic downtown, 7th, 8th, 12th, K and R streets all offer opportunities for infill and redevelopment that is sensitively inserted into existing neighborhoods, while the zoning along the R Street corridor was amended specifically to allow more height around LRT stations to encourage higher density development.

D. Distinctive Neighborhoods & Districts

The richness and vitality of a city is reflected in the diversity of its neighborhoods. The Central City includes a variety of distinct neighborhoods whose unique character and qualities need to be preserved even as new infill and redevelopment occur. It is critical that as the Central City expands through redevelopment, that it not lose those qualities which make it so attractive—legible, well-structured neighborhoods; distinctive civic buildings; varied architecture; lush tree-lined streets; and attractive residential districts.

The principal strategy for ensuring the quality and distinctiveness of the various neighborhoods and districts is to emphasize quality design of individual buildings and of the public realm. The design of individual buildings and spaces should respond to the physical, historical and cultural context in order to enhance and reinforce the identity of the existing neighborhood. New development should also utilize high quality, durable materials that convey a sense of quality and permanence.

E. Preserving Historic Resources

Sacramento's rich and diverse heritage is reflected in its individually-listed Landmarks and contributing resources in the many Historic Districts throughout the Central City. The preservation of these resources and their character-defining features is an important part of the city's identity and visual vitality. The contribution of individual Landmarks and historic districts throughout the Central Core cannot be overstated. The prevalence of these resources throughout Central Core provides a rich resource base upon which to build. Historic resources add texture and character to the urban fabric that cannot be replicated by new development. While the design of future developments should honestly reflect their contemporary era, they should also take special care to ensure that their orientation, form and massing respects adjacent historic structures, districts or spaces.

F. Parks and Open Space

Increasing the residential population in the Central Core requires a strategy for addressing the increased need for public parks and open space. The high cost and relative scarcity of land in the historic downtown will continue to present a barrier to large-scale development of active parkland in the heart of the Central Core. The City must explore new ways of acquiring and developing open space, connecting urban populations to dispersed open space resources, and leveraging under-utilized public lands. A combination of approaches should be employed to meet the needs of future residents. The Department of Parks and Recreation is leading an effort to develop policies for the creation of small parks and urban plazas (Small Public Places) in higher density areas of the City and in park deficient neighborhoods where there are no large undeveloped parcels. These policies will be included in the update of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2005-2010, and are already reflected in the General Plan 2030.

G. Creating a Complete, Well-served Community

The development of high density residential uses in the Central Core will introduce a new dynamic to the downtown. As a predominantly employment-oriented downtown, these areas currently have few of the facilities or services that will be needed to serve a residential population. A new residential population with a wide range of incomes, ages and household types will need schools, parks, community centers, and fire stations. They will also need retail and services that address their daily needs, such as grocery stores, dry cleaners, etc. While it can be assumed that the marketplace will respond to demand for the latter, the public facilities will require advance planning by the City to ensure adequate facilities and distribution are provided. Consistent with the concept of a walkable downtown, public facilities such as parks, schools, and community centers should be located within walking distance of all Central City residents.

H. Active Streetscapes and Sidewalk Cafes

The 1987 Downtown Plan recognized the importance of maintaining and creating active streetscapes with cafes

and seating. The pedestrian sidewalk experience is to be enhanced by mandating the need for active storefronts on retail and commercial streets, avoidance of blank walls and exposed parking garages. This is especially important in Central Core and other intensive land use areas where large parking garages and service areas frequently compromise the quality and continuity of the pedestrian sidewalk experience. The guidelines mandate that above-grade structured parking garages be screened from the street with liner elements such as residential flats, townhouses, lofts, or retail and commercial space. This guideline shall be a priority for the entire Central City.

Sacramento's climate is ideal for outdoor dining, and sidewalk cafes are an excellent way of activating the streetscape and energizing the retail environment by creating an interface that bridges the public and private realms. Sidewalk cafes, like retail in general, tend to develop a synergy when clustered together. Thus, specific areas have been highlighted for such uses, not to their exclusion elsewhere, but to encourage the creation of dynamic café districts in the downtown. Similarly, guidelines are provided that identify minimum dimensional and performance requirements that ensure that café design is functionally compatible with other public realm needs, such as pedestrian flow requirements.

In addition, the guidelines define the preferred locations for both building entrances and the preference for using the alleys for garage entrances and service areas. On residential streets the guidelines establish the preference for frequent entrances and define the criteria for such elements as stoops, porches, portals and bay windows.

I. The Retail Environment

Retail activity is a critical component of maintaining a vibrant and active Central City. It supports the area's employment and residential function, but it also is the component that makes the Central City an interesting and exciting place to be and a destination for visitors who neither work nor live there. Continuity and diversity are important to the success of the retail environment. Too much dispersion of retail activity or too much duplication in the type of retail will undermine retail viability. It is important therefore to identify priority retail streets and districts, and to require minimum retail frontages to ensure well-defined, identifiable retail zones that establish the retail synergy that energizes the downtown and makes it special.

J. A Well-defined Public Realm

Sacramento's public realm consists of its streets and public places, squares, parks, courts and alleys. These in turn are defined by the buildings that surround them and the "street-walls" that the buildings collectively create. The street-wall is the line of buildings along a street edge that establishes the predominant definition of the public space. Street-wall character is primarily concerned with providing guidance for the how buildings should interface with the sidewalk, and the quality of the enclosure they provide to the street and other public spaces. The placement, scale and design quality of the building's street-wall determines the nature and character of the streetscape and reinforces desired pedestrian or broader public realm objectives. Generally, a consistent street-wall contributes to a clearer public realm identity and a more comfortable pedestrian experience. Two critical issues related to street-wall character are placement and height. The responses to both will vary with the specific neighborhood context. The street-wall is generally located at the edge of the public right-of-way (typically the back edge of the public sidewalk) in higher density commercial zones such as the Central Core and along key urban corridors such as 16th, J, K, and R streets. Buildings tend to be setback a specific distance from the right-of-way in lower density residential districts, such as Alkali Flat or Boulevard Park, in order to enhance privacy or maintain the tree canopy, for example.

The older historic commercial buildings in the Central Core generally maximize utilization of street frontage and site coverage to create well-defined street walls and visually accessible ground floor uses. This is less true along the corridors, where development patterns are more mixed and surface parking lots are more typical. Buildings that do not hold the street wall, in order to accommodate the automobile (parking, driveways, etc.) or in pursuit of architectural distinctiveness, detract from the definition and quality of the public realm. Adhering to guidelines for setbacks and build-to-lines, even as architectural fashions

and technical innovations come and go, will maintain the continuity of the street-wall and ensure the character and stability of the public realm over time.

The height of the street-wall at the setback or build-to-line is also an important element in shaping the character of the public realm. In combination with the width of the public street right-of-way, it is a primary factor in giving scale to the public realm and ensuring a comfortable human-scaled street enclosure. In the more urban areas such as the Central Core, the street-wall height of the major historic buildings is typically 60 feet. This has established the predominant height of buildings subsequently developed and the height above which step-backs or some other architectural treatments are required to preserve a consistent scale. Above the 85-foot height, bulk controls will take affect defining the massing and configuration of towers.

K. Tower Massing and Separation

When Sacramento's downtown was young and had few tall buildings their massing and separation were not significant concerns. As the downtown has matured and incorporated more and more mid- and high-rise structures, these have become important issues to address. Densely packed towers can have numerous deleterious effects: decreasing solar access; increasing wind tunnel effects; creating a visually oppressive public realm; and, with the introduction of residential towers, creating privacy conflicts. In recognition of these issues, many cities are adopting the approach pioneered by Vancouver to require slenderer towers with greater separation between them.

Floor-plate Size

Building massing is directly related to the size of the building's floor-plates. In order to protect views, solar access, air circulation, the quality of the public realm, and the character of the skyline, the new guidelines mandate a two-tiered approach that requires smaller floorplates for all towers, and smaller floor plates for residential towers than for office towers. This reduction still allows the large floor-plates required for such buildings, but reduces the building dimensions enough to produce a slenderer appearing profile, particularly as buildings get taller. The guidelines also encourage even smaller floor-plates where possible, not just for aesthetic reasons, but also to facilitate more energy efficient buildings that provide natural light and ventilation to all office space. See Chapter 4, Section D2 for details of bulk reduction requirements and maximum floorplate sizes.

Building Stepbacks

The construction of multiple high-rise residential towers downtown creates different challenges from the previous generation of commercial buildings. Whereas commercial buildings can accommodate step-backs of their upper floors within their massing without compromising the integrity of the internal spaces, high-rise residential units are normally stacked one above the other in similar arrangements and require a consistent depth from the central core resulting in a vertical facade for the majority of the building's height. It is for this reason that the design guidelines do not require residential towers to step-back their floors above the street-wall base height, as is required for office towers.

Tower Separation

Currently commercial buildings can be built as close as 10 feet away from each other. However, with the proliferation of towers, greater setbacks are recommended for all the same reasons that smaller floor-plates are. Future commercial and residential towers should be required to maintain at least a 80-foot setback from adjacent towers, the width of a typical Sacramento downtown street, in order to ensure protection of views and privacy.