Design Guidelines are implementation documents for city design policies and objectives. They partner with planning code to shape new development. They consist of general principles of design excellence and neighborhood compatibility to improve the way new projects will look and work.
WHY CREATE THEM?

Over 30 sets of design guidelines already exist and are:

- Redundant or inconsistent
- Indirect, vague, or simply outdated
- Lacking relevant examples

Over 30 sets of design guidelines already exist and are:
WHERE WILL THEY APPLY?

**Residential Design Guidelines**
Residential districts: RH, RM, RTO

**Urban Design Guidelines**
Mixed-use, Neighborhood Commercial, and Commercial districts

**All other zones**

RH - Residential, House Character Districts
RM - Residential, Mixed Districts
RTO - Residential Transit-Oriented Districts
Reinforce a set of existing citywide policies, goals, and values

The General Plan
- The Urban Design Element
- The Commerce and Industry Element
- Area Plans

City Policy
- Better Streets
- Transit-First

Existing Design Guidance
- By Use
- By Type
- From Area Plans
- From Neighborhoods
What will the Urban Design Guidelines do?

- Reinforce a set of existing citywide policies, goals, and values
- Promote design excellence and compatibility with context for new projects
What will the Urban Design Guidelines do?

- Reinforce a set of existing citywide policies, goals, and values
- Promote design excellence and compatibility with context for new projects
- Improve the design review process for everyone by creating a common language
WHAT THE URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES NOT DO?

» Change the General Plan
» Change affordable housing requirement
» Add height
» Change parking maximums
» Change allowable uses
» Make everything look the same
» Specify an architectural style
WHO WILL USE THEM?

- The Planning Commission
- Planning Department staff
- Community groups
- The public
- Project sponsors
- Design teams
WHAT DO THE GUIDELINES COVER?

Site Design  Architecture  Public Realm
Be compatible with context

S2  Harmonize Relationships between Buildings, Streets, and Open Spaces
A2  Modulate Buildings Vertically and Horizontally
P2  Locate and Design Open Spaces to Maximize Physical Comfort and Visual Access

Enhance unique neighborhoods

S3  Recognize and Enhance Unique Conditions
A3  Harmonize Building Designs with Neighboring Scale and Materials
P3  Express Neighborhood Character in Open Space Designs
WHY ARE THE GUIDELINES?

**Act as a cohesive system**

- **S1** Recognize and Respond to Urban Patterns
- **A1** Express a Clear Organizing Architectural Idea
- **P1** Design Public Open Spaces to Connect with and Complement the Streetscape

**Fit with the city as a whole**

- **S4** Create, Protect, and Support View Corridors
- **A4** Design Buildings from Multiple Vantage Points
- **A5** Shape the Roofs of Buildings
- **P4** Support Public Transportation and Bicycling
Make great walkable neighborhoods

S5  Create a Defined and Active Streetwall
A6  Render Building Facades with Texture and Depth
A7  Coordinate Building Elements
P5  Design sidewalks to Enhance the Pedestrian Experience

Enhance the urban experience with uses

S6  Organize Uses to Complement the Public Environment
A8  Design Active Building Fronts
P6  Program Public Open Spaces to Encourage Social Activity, Play, and Rest
Support sustainability

S7  Respect and Exhibit Natural Systems and Features
S8  Integrate Common Open Space and Landscape with Architecture
A9  Employ Sustainable Principles and Practices in Building Design
P7  Integrate Sustainable Practices into the Landscape
WHERE ARE WE IN THE PROCESS?

STEP 1  Study Existing Policy
Commission Informational: January 21, 2016
### Example Guideline:

**A2 Modulate Buildings Vertically and Horizontally**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MATRIX</th>
<th>Appendix 1 General Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MATRIX</td>
<td>Appendix 2 Existing Guidelines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Its Existing Policy Origins:

**Urban Design Element**

Human scale can be retained if new buildings, even large ones, avoid the appearance of massiveness by maintaining established building lines.

**Commerce and Industry Element**

“When new buildings are constructed on large lots, the facades should be designed in a series of elements which are compatible with the existing scale of the district.”

**Downtown Plan**

“As a general rule, facades composed of both vertical and horizontal elements fit better with older as well as most new facades.”

**Western SoMa SUD**

“Provide strong, repeating vertical articulation on new buildings to achieve visual harmony and sustain pedestrian interest and activity.”

**Market-Octavia Area Plan**

“Building facades that face the public realm should be articulated with a strong rhythm of regular vertical elements.”
WHERE ARE WE IN THE PROCESS?

STEP 1  Study Existing Policy
Commission Informational: January 21, 2016

STEP 2  Work with Advisory Group
SEPTEMBER 2016 DRAFT
WHO IS IN THE ADVISORY GROUP?

Architects / Designers
David Baker Architects
Fougeron Architecture
Gast Architects
Gehl
Gonzales Architects
Handel Architects
IwamotoScott Architecture
John Schessinger, Architect
Long & Levit
Mark English Architects
Mithun/Solomon
Natoma Architects
Pfau Long
RG Architecture
Schwartz and Architecture
Skidmore Owings Merrill
SITELAB urban studio
Surface Design

Public Agencies
SF Department of Building Inspection
Former SF Planning Department staff
SF Heritage
SF Historic Preservation Commission x 2
SF Office of Community Investment & Infrastructure
SF Planning Commission x 2
SF Environment

Development
Alexandria Real Estate
Build Inc.
Lennar Urban
Prado Group
Strada Investment Group
Trumark Urban

Public Groups / Institutions
AIA Working Group
Duboce Triangle Neighborhood Association
Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association
Livable City
Potrero Boosters
SPUR
TODCO Group

Outside of San Francisco
Ehrenkrantz Eckstut (NYC)
Environmental Simulation Center (NYC)
Former Design Commission Chair x 2 (Portland)
WHERE ARE WE IN THE PROCESS?

STEP 1  Study Existing Policy  
Commission Informational: January 21, 2016

STEP 2  Work with Advisory Group  
SEPTEMBER 2016 DRAFT

STEP 3  Attend Neighborhood Meetings & Host Community Working Sessions  
Commission Informational: October 20, 2016  
MARCH 2017 DRAFT
WHICH GROUPS HAVE STAFF MET WITH?

Neighborhood community meetings:

Barbary Coast Neighborhood Association
Castro Community Benefit District
Dolores Heights Improvement Club
District 3 Meeting
Duboce Triangle Neighborhood Association
Eureka Valley Neighborhood Association
Golden Gate Tenants Association
Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association
Japantown Neighborhood Association
Jordan Park Improvement Association
Liberty Hill Neighborhood Association
Middle Polk Neighborhood Association
Miraloma Park Improvement Club
Ocean Avenue Association
Pacific Avenue Neighborhood Association

Pacific Heights Association of Neighbors
Potrero Boosters
Russian Hill Neighbors
Telegraph Hill Dwellers
Victorian Alliance
Yerba Buena Neighborhood Association
Hosted Evening Workshops:

Workshop #1
November 16, 2016

Workshop #2
December 5, 2016

Workshop #3
January 18, 2017

Workshop #4
February 27, 2017

Q&A Meeting after new draft:
Public Meeting
April 12, 2017
WHERE ARE WE IN THE PROCESS?

STEP 1  Study Existing Policy
Commission Informational: January 21, 2016

STEP 2  Work with Advisory Group
SEPTEMBER 2016 DRAFT

STEP 3  Attend Neighborhood Meetings & Host Community Working Sessions
Commission Informational: October 20, 2016
MARCH 2017 DRAFT

STEP 4  Continued Community Discussions and Draft Refinements
Commission Informational: May 11, 2017
Comments deadline: May 30, 2017
JUNE 2017 DRAFT
What has come from community discussions?

MATRIX  Outreach Consolidation
Not “overarching” guidelines that apply citywide

Applies only in Mixed-Use, Commercial and Neighborhood Commercial areas.

Limited conditions where it would apply with Residential Design Guidelines in R districts.

Guidelines will be applicable in the design review process as part of 304, 309, 312, 314, 329 applications.
Clarification of applicability

Does not supersede or alter the General Plan.

Does not supersede or alter the Urban Design Element.

Does not supersede or alter the Residential Design Guidelines.
Concern about the waiver provision

Waiver provision has been removed

Projects may seek an exception from the Commission through existing application processes: 304, 309, 329. Projects only subject to 312 would need to file a discretionary review to seek such an exception.

Projects may seek an exception only when the proposed design better meets the goals of the respective guideline or where a site condition makes application physically infeasible.
More diverse types of examples

Provided more variety in ages and character of examples

In the September 2016 Draft, approximately 120 images showed:

55% Built in last two decades
45% Built before last two decades
More diverse types of examples

Provided more variety in ages and character of examples

In the March 2017 Draft, approximately 150 images showed:

60% Built before last two decades
40% Built after last two decades
Increase the guidance on sustainability

Added more examples and a new guideline under the Architecture section:

A9
Employ Sustainable Principles and Practices in Building Design
More support for neighborhood commercial districts

Significant increase in NC examples

In the September 2016 Draft, approximately 120 images showed:

- **27%** Downtown Commercial
- **21%** Residential
- **18%** Neighborhood Commercial
- **15%** Public space
- **13%** Mixed Use
- **6%** Not determinate
More support for neighborhood commercial districts

Significant increase in NC examples

In the March 2017 Draft, approximately 150 images showed:

- **33%** Neighborhood Commercial
- **21%** Public space
- **16%** Downtown Commercial
- **11%** Mixed Use
- **10%** Residential
- **9%** Not determinate
More support for neighborhood commercial districts

Many residents expressed that:

NCs feel more like Residential neighborhoods than like Mixed-Use or Downtown areas. Uniqueness of each NC area is fundamental and one set of guidelines would erode specialness. Things are fine in the process now-- it is working-- why add something unnecessary?
More support for neighborhood commercial districts

Many residents expressed that:

They support these as common sense urban design principles.

This would be a good companion or underpinning to neighborhood-specific guidelines.
More support for neighborhood commercial districts
More support for neighborhood commercial districts
More support for neighborhood commercial districts
More support for neighborhood commercial districts
More support for neighborhood commercial districts

PROPOSED HEIGHT  45’

PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL UNITS  90 UNITS
More support for neighborhood commercial districts

- Residential Design Guidelines apply
- Urban Design Guidelines apply

- RH2
- RM4
- NCD
- RH2
In designing a new development or evaluating a development proposal, the following criteria should be considered:

- Overall district scale;
- Individual street character and form;
- Lot development patterns;
- Adjacent property usage, especially buildings of historical, cultural or architectural importance;
- Proposed site development and building design;
- Handicapped access;
- Potential environmental impacts; and
- Feasible mitigation measures.

Site Layout

- The site plan of a new building should reflect the arrangement of most other buildings on its block, whether set back from, or built out to its front property lines.
- In cluster and linear districts with continuous street building walls, front set-backs are discouraged, in order to maintain a continuous block facade line. However, outdoor activities such as sidewalk cafes and walk-up windows may be accommodated by recessing the ground story. In addition, publicly accessible open space may be provided in a front setback if: the retail activity of the street is not adversely affected; there is a shortage of nearby open space to serve district shoppers, workers and residents; the site is appropriate in terms of its topography and sun and wind conditions; and attractive seating and landscaping are provided.
- New development should respect open space corridors in the interior of blocks and not significantly impede access of light and air nor block views of adjacent buildings.
- On irregularly shaped lots, through-lots or those adjacent to fully-built lots, open space located elsewhere than at the rear of a property may improve the access of light and air to residential units.
- Outdoor activities associated with an eating and drinking or entertainment establishment which abut residentially-occupied buildings should be discouraged.

Scale, Height and Bulk

- In most cases, small lots with narrow building fronts should be maintained in districts with this traditional pattern.
- When new buildings are constructed on large lots, the facades should be designed in a series of elements which are compatible with the existing scale of the district.
- The height of a proposed development should relate to the individual neighborhood character and the height and scale of adjacent buildings to avoid an overwhelming or dominating appearance of new structures. On a street of varied building heights, transitions between high and low buildings should be provided. While three-and four-story buildings are appropriate in many locations, two-story buildings are more appropriate in some areas with lower-scale development.
- The height and bulk of new development should be designed to maximize sun access to nearby residential open space, parks, plazas, and major pedestrian corridors.

Frontage

- Facades of new development should be compatible with the proportions and design features of adjacent facades that contribute to the positive visual qualities of the neighborhood commercial district.
- To encourage continuity of “live” retail sales and services, at least one-half of the total width of any new or reconstructed building, parallel to and facing the commercial street, should be devoted to entrances, show windows, or other displays. Where a substantial length of windowless wall is found to be unavoidable, eye-level display, a contrast in wall treatment, offset wall line, outdoor seating and/or landscaping should be used to enhance visual interest and pedestrian vitality.
- Clear, Untinted glass should be used at and near the street level to allow maximum visual interaction between sidewalk areas and the interior of buildings. Mirrored, highly reflective glass or densely-tinted glass should not be used except as an architectural or decorative accent.
- Where unsightly walls of adjacent buildings become exposed by new development, they should be cleaned, painted or screened by appropriate landscaping.
- Walk-up facilities should be recessed and provide adequate queuing space to avoid interruption of the pedestrian flow.
Architectural Design
- The essential character of neighborhood commercial districts should be preserved by discouraging alterations and new development which would be incompatible with buildings which are of fine architectural quality and contribute to the scale and character of the district. The details, material, texture or color of existing architecturally distinctive buildings should be complemented by new development.
- Existing structures in sound or rehabilitable condition and of worthwhile architectural character should be reused where feasible to retain the unique character of a given neighborhood commercial district.
- The design of new buildings, building additions and alterations, and facade renovations should reflect the positive aspects of the existing scale and design features of the area. Building forms should complement and improve the overall neighborhood environment.
- Building design which follows a standardized formula prescribed by a business with multiple locations should be discouraged if such design would be incompatible with the scale and character of the district in which the building is located.

Materials
- The materials, textures and colors of new or remodeled structures should be visually compatible with the predominant materials of nearby structures. In most neighborhood commercial districts, painted wood, masonry and tiles combined with glass panes in show cases, windows and doors are the most traditional and appropriate exterior wall materials.

Details
- Individual buildings in the city's neighborhood commercial districts are rich in architectural detailing, yet vary considerably from building to building, depending upon the age and style of their construction. Vertical lines of columns or piers, and horizontal lines of belt courses or cornices are common to many buildings as are moldings around windows and doors. These elements add richness to a flat facade wall, emphasizing the contrast of shapes and surfaces.
- A new or remodeled building should relate to its surrounding area by displaying compatible proportions, textures, and details. Nearby buildings of architectural distinction can serve as primary references. Existing street rhythms should also be continued on the facade of a new building, linking it to the rest of the district.

Rooftop Mechanical Equipment
- Rooftop mechanical equipment which may be visually obtrusive or create disturbing noises or odors should be located away from areas of residential use and screened and integrated with the design of the building.

Signs
- The character of signs and other features attached to or projecting from buildings is an important part of the visual appeal of a street and the general quality and economic stability of the area. Opportunities exist to relate these signs and projections more effectively to street design and building design. Neighborhood commercial districts are typically mixed-use areas with commercial units on the ground or lower floors and residential uses on upper floors. Sign sizes and design should relate and be compatible with the character and scale of the building as well as the neighborhood commercial district. As much as signs and other advertising devices are essential to a vital commercial district, they should not be allowed to interfere with or diminish the livability of residences within the neighborhood commercial district or in adjacent residential districts. Signs should not be attached to facades at residentially-occupied stories nor should sign illumination shine directly into windows of residential units.

Landscaping and Street Design
- Street trees should be provided in each new development. If a district tree planting program or streetscape plan exists, new development should be landscaped in conformity with such plans. In places where tree planting is not appropriate due to inadequate sidewalk width, interference with utilities, undesirable shading, or other reasons, other means such as window boxes, planter boxes or trellises may be chosen.
- Open uses such as parking lots should be visually screened along the street frontage by low walls, earth berms and/or landscaping. However, the safety of the lots should not be reduced through these measures.
- A landscaped buffer of trees and shrubs should be used along those edges of a parking lot bordering residentially-developed properties.
- In addition to landscaping at the periphery of the parking lot, planting islands between parked vehicles should be located within the lot, whenever feasible. Trees and other plantings provide shade and variety to the visual monotony of parked automobiles, especially when the lot is viewed from adjacent residences.
"New development should respect open space corridors in the interior of blocks and not significantly impede access of light and air nor block views of adjacent buildings."

**Proposed - Urban Design Guidelines**

**HARMONIZE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BUILDINGS, STREETS, AND OPEN SPACES**

A building that relates to city fabric, to its immediate context, and adjacent human activity helps unify neighborhood experience and character. The relationship between areas of low, fine-scaled buildings and areas of high, large-scaled buildings can be more harmonious if the transition in building height and mass between such areas is managed in an intentional and sensitive manner.

- Develop site and building design to establish, respect, or enhance the mid-block open space and minimize their impacts to privacy and access to light. Different configurations for rear yards may be acceptable due site conditions.
- Relate building scale and massing to the size and scale of existing and anticipated buildings.
- Use street widths to help establish the general massing, scale, and proportions of the building.
- Site and sculpt buildings to reinforce built and natural topography.
- Since groups of buildings create their own topography, shape new buildings to respond to, reconcile, or moderate differences between existing ones.
- Modulate building massing vertically and/or horizontally to a scale compatible to its context.
- Mass buildings to minimize shadow impacts on parks and open space.
- Modify tall buildings to minimize wind impacts at the street level.
- Shape the height and bulk of towers with respect to views from important vantage points around the city.
- Place, orient, and shape open space to support adjacent existing open space conditions.
“New development should respect open space corridors in the interior of blocks and not significantly impede access of light and air nor block views of adjacent buildings.”

**Proposed - Urban Design Guidelines**

- Shape new projects to contribute to mid-block open space even when the pattern is broken.
- Locate frontages to reinforce the streetwall.
- By modifying conventional rear yards, corner sites can better support continuous streetwalls and mid-block open space.
- Without reshaping, corner sites can erode the streetwall.
- Reshape corner sites to better contribute to light and air for all.
- Dashed line indicates conventional rear yard.

Building massing should respect larger patterns in the urban fabric.

Infill projects should fit with the adjacent streetwall pattern.

The scale of buildings and public open space, should relate to each other.

Place front and rear facades to support the overall urban design of the block.
“Facades of new development should be compatible with the proportions and design features of adjacent facades that contribute to the positive visual qualities of the neighborhood commercial district.”

**Proposed - Urban Design Guidelines**

**A6 RENDER BUILDING FACADES WITH TEXTURE AND DEPTH**

- Facades composed of long expanses of homogenous surfaces create dull streetscapes that lack scale, visual interest, and character. Facades designed as three-dimensional ensembles create street walls that engage the eye and enhance the experience of the pedestrian. Manipulation of light and shadow render various scales and components of buildings more vividly.

- Avoid large expanses of undifferentiated blank surfaces. Simple changes of color or material in the same plane are rarely sufficient.
- Consider differentiating facade articulation between lower floors and upper floors.
- Evolve the specific character of relief for a building or ensemble from the overall architectural idea.
- Texture buildings by adding deep relief including punched openings in scale with adjacent facade systems.
- Compose window patterns that correspond to programmatic needs.
- Vary the heights and widths of facade features, and articulate forms with materials.
- Respond to the ornamental scale of adjacent buildings. Historic features may be reinterpreted, but should be identifiable as from their own era. Avoid cursory historicism and facade elements that mimic neighbors.
- Consider a rhythm of horizontal and vertical elements, such as bay windows, cornices, belt courses, window moldings, balconies, etc.
- Design curtain walls that modulate the facade and provide scale and three-dimensional texture.
- Consider externalizing structure to help modulate a long or tall facade.

Ornament at the tops of buildings helps to add visual interest and expression.

Form and materials can work together at different scales of detail and variability.

Add smaller, human-scaled features at the ground where they can be easily seen.
"Facades of new development should be compatible with the proportions and design features of adjacent facades that contribute to the positive visual qualities of the neighborhood commercial district."

**Proposed - Urban Design Guidelines**

- Fine-grained architectural detail help to enliven the streetwall.
- Small-scales of ornament bring a human-scale to facades.
- Depth and detail can be invitational.
- Dimensional variation can create texture in facades.
“To encourage continuity of “live” retail sales and services, at least one-half of the total width of any new or reconstructed building, parallel to and facing the commercial street, should be devoted to entrances, show windows, or other displays.”

**Proposed - Urban Design Guidelines**

**A8 DESIGN ACTIVE BUILDING FRONTS**

- Design the base of the building to foster positive activity. Orient and integrate courts, entries, lobbies, large windows and balconies to face streets, public parks, plazas and open spaces to provide more opportunity for safety and interaction.
- Consider how the rhythm of the streetwall and level of detail at the ground floor correspond to walking speed.
- Locate main building entries on the main street. Design entrance lobbies to create a gracious transition between the street and interior – wide, high, and set back enough to clearly signal ‘entrance’. Incorporate overhead projections and landscaping. Building entrances should be more significant than garage entrances.
- Locate mailboxes and other facilities used daily in residential building lobbies to increase their pedestrian activity.
- Provide ground floor residential dwellings with appropriate transition space between street and sidewalk per the Residential Ground Floor Design guidelines. Minimize the height and opacity of front screens, fences, railings and gates. Make defensible and useful space outside individual apartments.
- Avoid or minimize expansive blank and blind walls at the ground floor.
- Match the scale and openness of the ground floor to the scale and role of the street it faces. Provide appropriately frequent storefront entrances.
- Include operable windows and seating to help animate a building.
- Provide upper story balconies where appropriate to allow interface between private and public space.
- Maximize transparency of ground floor commercial facades, but avoid continuous, floor to ceiling glazing. Use or re-interpret traditional storefront elements.
- Develop and express programmatic relationships between inside and outside. Use furniture, displays, signage, and landscaping to help animate the building edge and sidewalk.
- Minimize frontages devoted to utilities, storage, services and parking access, and integrate with the overall articulation and fenestration of the facade. Where possible, locate trash rooms below grade, place transformers in sub-sidewalk vaults or at the interior of the site, and combine loading with vehicular access to minimize curb cuts. Enclose all utility appurtenances.
- Distinguish commercial entrances from residential entrances through integrated signage, changes in materials and colors, or by elevating the residential entry.
- Avoid long frontages without active entries. Widths between entrances should fit a common neighborhood pattern.
“To encourage continuity of “live” retail sales and services, at least one-half of the total width of any new or reconstructed building, parallel to and facing the commercial street, should be devoted to entrances, show windows, or other displays.”

Storefront elements bring human-scaled features to the street.

Balconies can help upper stories connect to the public realm.

Furnishings and openings can connect interior and exterior uses.

Building entrances can activate the public realm.
WHERE THEY WOULD APPLY WITHOUT THE NC DISTRICTS:

**Residential Design Guidelines**
Residential districts: RH, RM, RTO

**Urban Design Guidelines**
Mixed-use, and Commercial districts

**All other zones**

RH—Residential, House Character Districts
RM—Residential, Mixed Districts
RTO—Residential Transit-Oriented Districts
WHERE WILL THEY APPLY?

Residential Design Guidelines
Residential districts: RH, RM, RTO

Urban Design Guidelines
Mixed-use, Neighborhood Commercial, and Commercial districts

All other zones

RH—Residential, House Character Districts
RM—Residential, Mixed Districts
RTO—Residential Transit-Oriented Districts
HOW CAN I BE INVOLVED?

Provide feedback by May 30, 2017 for next draft

Review the draft Urban Design Guidelines and sign up for updates:
http://sf-planning.org/urban-design-guidelines

Questions and comments to:
Anne Brask at anne.brask@sfgov.org

Planning Commission Initiation: July 27, 2017