



STAFF REPORT
WEST ALLIS PLAN COMMISSION
Wednesday, September 28, 2022
6:00 PM
City Hall – Room 128

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/user/westalliscitychannel>

5. Resolution to repeal and replace the Planning Department's Site, Landscaping, and Architectural Plan Design Review Guidelines

Overview

Over the past several months, staff drafted an updated version of the City's Design Review Guidelines ("the guidelines"). This included public input from a survey of 480 residents, business owners, and property owners. This update of the guidelines, originally adopted in 1998, modernizes the standards for new development. Clearly defining our community's expectations will lead to improved design that makes our city a better place to be. The updated guidelines will also enhance the design review process by making it clearer and more transparent with a framework for a more consistent and objective design review process. It will also improve communication between staff and applicants, while giving Plan Commission more leverage to require higher quality design features.

Format

The guidelines include an introductory section, which shares background on the guidelines, describes how they will be used, and outlines the structure by clarifying its goals and objectives. **Link to guidelines:** [Draft Guidelines](#)

The "Design Guidelines" section details each guideline with example images, grouped by the objective they are intended to support.

i. Orienting towards the street frontage enables an active streetscape and sense of place.

ii. This unique building responds to the corner lot by filling out the site while increasing massing and incorporating an entrance at the corner.

iii. Retaining historic features like the lights and original sign frame lend a historic feel to this building.

iv. This balcony addition references the historic industrial feel of the building while playing on the complementary colors of a neighboring building.

“ Be open to innovation and creativity. Don't make everything look similar. – West Allis business owner ”

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1a

CONTEXT NEIGHBOR

Contribute to a sense of place and create positive relationships with neighboring properties



BACKGROUND

Development should complement the place it inhabits, enhancing the character of a place rather than diminishing it. New development must respond to its immediate surroundings, including the adjacent sites and those across the street. Design should foster positive relationships between sites with respectful architecture and thoughtful connections.

GUIDELINES

i.

Contribute to a vibrant and fine-grained street wall

Buildings should add to a sense of enclosure around the public realm and augment the form of the street wall by contributing to its rhythm and variety. Smaller lots lead to inherently more walkable, exciting places. Buildings on larger lots should break up building massing, divide into separate and unique destinations at street-level, and use texturing of materials and signage, repetition of multiple doors, decorative windows, and prominent entrances to contribute to a fine-grained environment.

ii.

Scale building mass to content

Increase the height and bulk at prominent corners while stepping down height and mass adjacent to low density residential.

iii.

Reinforce neighboring historic structures

Give deference to landmarks by stepping down towards the landmark height or allowing a wide berth. Reinforce the local context by integrating materials, proportions, and patterns found in the area to new development. Acknowledge local character-defining architectural features and respond to nearby historic, cultural, or civic resources.

iv.

Build and maintain connectivity to neighboring sites

Create visual and physical links to adjacent pedestrian pathways and open spaces. Respect interior connections with neighbors. Setbacks should offer pathways, trails, and open spaces.



i. Building to the lot line comfortably encloses the space around the street. The area is dense and walkable with many destinations in arm's reach. Buildings on small lots with a variety of facade designs and signage add rhythm and interest.



ii. This proposed development concentrates its height and mass next to the main commercial street and corner. It then decreases to 3-stories, then 2-story rowhomes (not pictured) as it moves south towards its residential neighbor.



iii. The lot on the right defers to the historic post office by giving a wide berth with generous side setbacks and by limiting its height. It also uses brick, a defining feature of buildings in the area.



iv. These restaurants visually and physically join their sites by creating a shared outdoor dining space.

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Things on the same block should have a sense of unison to make it seem more welcoming and collective.

— West Allis resident

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3a

QUALITY BUILDING

Design with quality materials and strategies



BACKGROUND

The buildings that are built today should stand the test of time so that future generations will choose to keep and adapt them for their own use. This requires using quality materials that will withstand Wisconsin's varying climate and quality design approaches that produce perpetually desirable forms which defy fluctuations of fads and trends.

GUIDELINES

i.

Use quality building materials such as brick, wood, and decorative concrete

Use sturdy, durable exterior materials that will endure for the long run. Materials with a known history of poor performance are not allowed. Plain walls of concrete block or metal surfaces are not acceptable, except when not visible to the public realm in industrial areas. Painting of masonry materials is discouraged.

ii.

Emphasize the ground floor, particularly entrances

Due to frequency of use, the ground floor and building openings need to resist wear and tear while also providing interest at the human scale. Use tall ground floor heights, high-quality materials, unique details, and craftsmanship to give special attention to these areas.

iii.

Thoughtfully integrate exterior building features into the design

Balconies, awnings, railing, lighting, signage, and stairs can add depth and texture and should be intentionally. Utilities and rooftop mechanical equipment should be hidden from view or integrated into the facade design.

iv.

Use quality design approaches

Apply forms and materials consistently. Create a coherent, textured, organized facade with a balanced proportion of windows and wall area. Use materials to express where uses and activities belong.



i. Using enduring materials like brick masonry, decorative concrete (in this example stylized as wood), and metal features ensures a building will age well and enhances the community's image.



ii. Incorporating detail and craftsmanship at the ground floor and increasing texture and visual interest surrounding the entrance enhances the human-scale experience of the building.



iii. Integrating awnings, stairwells, and other exterior features into the design adds depth and leads to a more coherent and pleasing appearance.



iv. An organized facade, large and proportional windows, and a strong palette of materials and textures forms the basis for a harmonious design that is attractive and functional.

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West Allis needs buildings that will stand the test of time - we have many historic buildings in our city that people enjoy today, new buildings should also be designed with this level of quality so that they will be loved in the future.

— Survey response

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3b QUALITY ENVIRONMENT

Design for resilience and protect natural features



BACKGROUND

The built environment plays a massive role in the health of our natural environment. Additionally, what is built today will have an impact on our environment long into the future. To protect future generations of West Allis, new development must raise the standard to preserve our shared air, water, and climate.

GUIDELINES

i. Design sites to protect and incorporate natural features

Development should protect existing trees, plantings, and soils whenever possible. New development should intentionally design interesting natural features into the site and should strive to use native trees, shrubs, grasses, and flowers.

ii. Design sites to manage and infiltrate stormwater runoff using native landscaping and green infrastructure

Strive to manage water where it falls. Developments can capture, absorb, or store precipitation with native landscaping, trees, bioswales, rain gardens, porous pavements, rain barrels or cisterns, or green roofs. By limiting runoff and lessening the burn on the sewer system, these strategies reduce water pollution and protect Lake Michigan.

iii. Reduce impervious surface with productive, compelling, previous planting and gathering areas

Adding permeable, natural features to formerly impervious lots is encouraged. Large, impervious surfaces should be avoided. Large parking lots are encouraged to include green infrastructure to manage stormwater and should include substantial landscaping, pathways, and gathering places to break up bland, impervious spaces.

iv. Embody sustainability by incorporating renewable energy systems, low-carbon materials, adaptive reuse, and density

Consider environmentally friendly strategies to preserve natural resources and reduce carbon emissions. Adaptive reuse of existing buildings leads to energy savings and avoids harm from demolition pollutants, waste, and emissions. Density greatly reduces energy use per capita and is the foundation for an inherently sustainable community.



i. Strategically placing buildings to preserve existing trees and incorporating green spaces into the site design generates opportunities for respite from the urban environment, sequesters carbon, and respects existing life.



ii. Grading and draining impervious surfaces to bioswales and rain gardens filled with native plantings absorbs stormwater at the source, preventing runoff, pollution, and flooding downstream.



iii. Converting largely unused, impervious parking spaces into a green space with walkways and seating transforms an underwhelming site into an inviting place where people are encouraged to spend time and plants can thrive.



iv. Adapting an underutilized building for reuse reduces waste and pollution associated with demolition and construction and generates opportunities for creative, compelling spaces.

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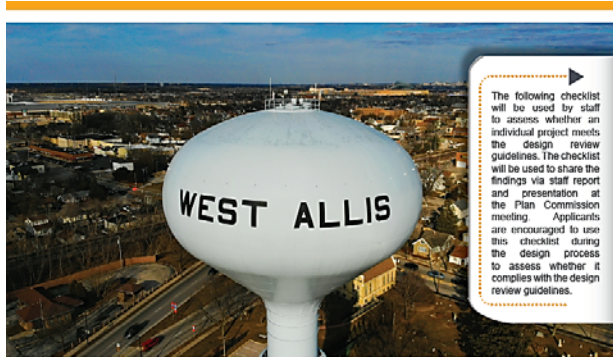
We need more parks, trees, green roofs, and gardens to offset rising temperatures in the city.

— West Allis property owner

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TECHNICAL STANDARDS

ALL USES

1. EIFS and similar products are not allowed on a building material
2. Masonry should not be painted
3. Barbed wire fencing is not allowed

COMMERCIAL USES

1. Chain link fencing is not allowed
2. Vinyl siding is not allowed as a building material
3. In the C-3 and C-4 district, at least 10% of the lot shall be landscaped

RESIDENTIAL USES

1. Chain link fencing is not allowed
2. At least 10% of the lot shall be landscaped

INDUSTRIAL USES

1. Chain link fencing is only allowed in rear or side yards adjacent to industrial properties
2. At least 10% of the lot shall be landscaped

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PLAN COMMISSION CHECKLIST

1.

Goal: Context

Objective	Criteria		Notes
a. Neighbor	i.	☒	
	ii.	☐	
	iii.	☐	
	iv.	☐	
b. Site	i.	☐	
	ii.	☐	
	iii.	☐	
	iv.	☐	

2.

Goal: Public Realm

Objective	Criteria		Notes
a. Active Ground Floor	i.	☒	
	ii.	☐	
	iii.	☐	
	iv.	☐	
b. Build for People	i.	☐	
	ii.	☐	
	iii.	☐	
	iv.	☐	
c. Mitigate Impacts	i.	☐	
	ii.	☐	
	iii.	☐	
	iv.	☐	

3.

Goal: Quality

Objective	Criteria		Notes
a. Building	i.	☒	
	ii.	☐	
	iii.	☐	
	iv.	☐	
b. Environment	i.	☐	
	ii.	☐	
	iii.	☐	
	iv.	☐	

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The “Technical Standards” are a list of specific standards that must be met for different uses.

The final section includes the “Plan Commission Checklist,” which staff will use to share an assessment of how a given project meets the guidelines with the Plan Commission.

Guidelines

Please review the proposed guideline document.

Recommendation: Recommend approval of the resolution to repeal and replace the Planning Department's Site, Landscaping, and Architectural Plan Design Review Guidelines.

A public hearing will be conducted at a future date yet to be determined. Staff would like the opportunity for Plan Commission and Common Council to review the document and ask any questions.