



COMMERCIAL AND MIXED-USE
ILLUSTRATED DESIGN GUIDELINES

DISTRICT OF OAK BAY

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Illustration credit Calum Srigley, Modus Associate.

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to support the interpretation of the Commercial and Mixed Use Development Permit Area Guidelines. It is for general informational purposes only and does not replace Oak Bay bylaws, policies and processes.

Oak Bay residents care deeply about the form and character of development in the community. Throughout the process to update the Official Community Plan (2025), there was fairly universal interest in guiding new development to fit with the local context and character of Oak Bay.

Commercial and Mixed-Use projects should also be shaped to increase the vitality of Oak Bay's village areas. This will bring more residents to commercial areas and provide opportunities to enhance the public realm.

The intent of these guidelines is to set sufficient limits to exclude new projects that are obviously out of character with Oak Bay (e.g., large grey concrete walls with no windows or detailing), and to be flexible enough to allow creative designs that borrow enough characteristics of established neighbourhoods to blend with the diversity that already exists. The guidelines will enable successful projects that encompass innovation, environmental practices, and features that meet the needs of existing and future residents.



2 COMMERCIAL AND MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT PERMIT AREA GUIDELINES

Oak Bay is a cherished community characterized by historic and character homes and buildings, tree lined streets, lush west coast vegetation, and iconic views of the Salish Sea. As newcomers continue to be drawn to the community and new development occurs it is important to preserve the elements of Oak Bay that make it so special.

Objectives

The objectives of the Commercial and Mixed-use Development Permit Area are to promote developments and redevelopments that accomplish the following:

1. Support a sustainable and compact community
2. Respect and enliven the character and streetscape of commercial areas and contribute to the neighbourhood sense of place
3. Provide housing diversity to meet the changing needs of residents
4. Provide landscapes that include vegetation and rainwater management
5. Support safe pedestrian access and accessibility
6. Consider the impacts of new construction on adjacent residents

Site Planning

Context, Scale and Massing

1. Design and build new development to contribute to the cohesion, visual identity and the quality of the streetscape by incorporating building elements that are complementary, such as street walls, façade rhythm, and horizontal cornice lines.
2. Add interest to the streetscape through variations in building height, rooflines and massing for larger buildings.
3. Contribute visual interest to both streetscapes if the building is located on a corner site such as by wrapping storefronts around the corner.
4. Locate and design the building massing to provide a transition between the form, character and scale of the surrounding neighbourhood and the character of commercial areas or arterial and collector roads that are close to or adjacent to the property being developed.
5. For buildings over three storeys, use setbacks and/or terracing above the third level to reduce massing impacts on the street, to allow sunlight penetration, and to retain an appropriate village-like scale for Oak Bay's commercial areas. Articulation may be considered in lieu of setbacks through the use of balconies, trellises and architectural features.



6. Encourage locating utility infrastructure (such as electrical meters, HVAC units etc.) on the side or rear facade of buildings locations where feasible and that are screened to minimize visual impact from the street and neighbouring properties.
7. Locate garbage and recycling rooms in underground or covered parking areas where feasible.
8. Encourage community connection with the street through the use of balconies, patios, and work-live units (where permitted).

Adjacent Properties and Buildings

9. Respect the privacy of adjacent residential properties by limiting overlook.
10. Limit shadowing of public outdoor use areas and adjacent residential properties.
11. Consider prominent views of nearby or distant landscape features from public spaces.

Pedestrian Comfort, Safety and Visual Interest

12. Provide weather protection such as awnings and canopies in front of stores and at primary building entries.
13. Provide outdoor spaces that are accessible to the public and complementary to the uses of the building, e.g., outdoor eating areas, plazas, courtyards. Encourage the inclusion of public art in these outdoor spaces.
14. Apply Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles to building and site design, balancing these with objectives related to landscaping.
15. Finish building elevations on flanking streets to the same standard as the street façade and provide visual interest.
16. Locate commercial uses at street level with a maximum amount of glazing on the façade at this level and with well-defined entries oriented towards the dominant street.



17. Address potential conflicts between commercial and residential uses through design features such as physical separation of uses, noise and visual barriers, and mechanical systems to address air quality.
18. Minimize the visual, noise and traffic impacts of commercial activity on the surrounding neighbourhood.

Sustainable Design

19. Use sustainable building practices and technologies such as water and energy conservation, waste reduction, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, solar panels, bird-friendly glazing, geothermal energy and other emerging systems.
20. Follow passive solar siting principles to reduce the energy needed for lighting and heating, e.g., penetration of sunlight and natural light into interior spaces.
21. Incorporate planted roofs and roof-top gardens on buildings for use by residents and patrons.
22. Provide charging stations for electric vehicles and secured storage for bicycles.
23. Screen roof-top mechanical and ground-level equipment from views in a manner that is consistent with the architectural design of the building, and so as not to cause visual, noise or vibration impacts on project residents or adjacent residential lots.



Landscape Guidelines

1. Design the site layout and building locations to retain and conserve as much natural vegetation, rock outcrops, existing hydrology, and unique site features as possible, including Garry oaks, other large trees, and significant vegetation.
2. Respect the existing topography, minimizing the need for cut and fill, major blasting, or tall retaining walls.
3. Use low impact development practices such as the following:
 - o include generous landscaped areas on site with absorbent soils and minimize the amount of impervious surfaces to increase the natural infiltration (absorption) of rainwater and to provide a more natural or landscaped character
 - o reduce the amount of impervious paving and use permeable materials where possible, e.g., permeable pavers, permeable asphalt or concrete, decks, reinforced grass
4. Make sites accessible to people of all abilities through the use of universal design principles.
5. Consider energy efficiency and conservation in landscape design, e.g., provide shade in summer, moderate wind, while allowing sunlight and daylight into buildings.
6. Incorporate outdoor amenities such as benches, courtyards, food gardens, dog relief areas, and recreation facilities to provide opportunities for residents to socialize and to contribute to a sense of community.
7. Consider landscape screening of surface parking areas and service areas where necessary to reduce impacts on neighbouring residences and the public realm.



8. Locate refuse and recycling container areas where they are accessible to residents and to container pick-up trucks, screened with an appropriate durable enclosure, and provide landscaping around the perimeter of the enclosure where possible. Avoid direct exposure of refuse and recycling areas to public streets.
9. Select light fixtures based on dark sky principles, e.g., shielded to direct light downward only.
10. Avoid flashing lights, neon signs and similar bright lights.

Access, Circulation and Parking Area Guidelines

1. Design any internal road and parking system for efficient circulation of all types of vehicles, with a layout that discourages speeding, and provide safe pedestrian routes from parking lots to building entrances.
2. Include internal landscaping within large areas of surface parking in order to “break-up” the hard surface area.
3. Locate parking to the rear or side yard, underground or under the building where possible.
4. Locate access points and route driveways to minimize impacts on pedestrian streets and existing trees.
5. Underground garage entries should be located on rear or side façades of buildings. If this is not possible, they should be recessed behind the front building face and incorporate architectural detailing to avoid a streetscape that is auto-centric. Garage doors visible from the street should include glazing, design features, and materials/colours to soften the impact.
6. Consider the use of laneways for access where they exist.



Additional Guidelines for Specialized Commercial Areas

In addition to applicable Guidelines set out in section 8.3.3.6 and 8.3.3.7, in the case of land shown as “Specialized Commercial DPA” on Schedule B: Land Use Framework Map, the following guidelines are applicable:

1. Design the site’s vehicular circulation and parking to be efficient for all types of vehicles, with a layout that discourages speeding, providing safe pedestrian routes from parking lots to building entrances.
2. Locate buildings/impermeable areas and design the landscape to retain, and if possible, to increase, the tree canopy on the site.
3. Design the front yard landscape to include a significant proportion of vegetation and design fences to allow views into the property.
4. Locate and design directional signs and any similar features to be low profile, ground-oriented and externally lit with low intensity fixtures accentuated by landscaping.



