

**CENTRAL SQUARE DESIGN GUIDELINES:
SUMMARY OF URBAN DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS**

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1. Purpose

The Central Square Design Guidelines build on the foundation of the *1989 Central Square Development Guidelines*. These guidelines have been developed by the Central Square Advisory Committee 2011/2012 as part of the City of Cambridge's comprehensive Kendall Square to Central Square (K2C2) planning study to develop a vision for Central Square, Kendall Square, and the Osborn Triangle area connecting the two squares.

The Central Square Design Guidelines have been compiled to assist residents, property owners, developers, businesses, the City and other stakeholders in reviewing proposed development projects within the Central Square Overlay District. These guidelines in conjunction with the *Central Square Plan, 2012*, will establish the criteria by which development consultation review and review of applications for special permits and variances will be conducted. The Plan includes a broader treatment of development goals, public realm goals and other issues that also have relevance for new private development. Thus, the Plan should be consulted to understand more fully, the planning and urban design context for these guidelines.

2. Background

Central Square, one of Cambridge's oldest commercial areas, is located at the junction of four economically and socially diverse Cambridge neighborhoods: Area 4; Mid-Cambridge, Cambridgeport, and Riverside. It contains a varied mix of retail, eating, and drinking, cultural, office and residential uses. The Square's concentration of commercial activity is located between two major institutional nodes. One of these nodes includes City Hall, the YWCA, the YMCA, the U.S. Post Office, the Division of Employment Security and various religious organizations and is the western boundary. The eastern boundary and second institutional node is defined by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

The Square's business activities are concentrated along Massachusetts Avenue from Inman Street (west) to Main Street (east), and between Bishop Allen Drive (north) to Green Street (south). Beyond these boundaries exists a scattering of commercial uses and a rich fabric of residential structures.

Central Square is centrally located in Cambridge between Harvard University and MIT and lies along the City's main thoroughfare, Massachusetts Avenue. As such, it is distinguished by its high degree of accessibility via multiple transportation options. It lies within an extensive network of good walking streets, with broad sidewalks along the core stretches of Mass Ave. Public transportation is provided by numerous bus routes and the MBTA Red Line subway. Two Hubway bike share stations, numerous bike parking racks, and marked bike lanes encourage cycling. The Square is also within minutes' driving time of both the Mass Pike and Interstate 93.

3. Development Vision and Goals

Central Square is Cambridge's downtown and a center for nearby neighborhoods; a vibrant cultural district; a sustainable environment that invites people from all walks of life to shop, live, enjoy entertainment and the arts, and find community together; and more. There are four primary objectives that Central Square Advisory Committee recommends:

- a. Enrich the Square's public realm as place that invites community interaction at many levels.
- b. Celebrate and maintain the mix of old, new, venerable and funky enterprises activating Central Square's Cultural District.
- c. Support community diversity through more varied housing choices.
- d. Enrich neighborhood walkability and livability with safe, green streets and improved access choices.

These guidelines are written to promote to the extent possible through physical design the attainment of the committee's goals and objectives.

4. Design Principles and Guidelines

a. Streets and Sidewalks

Goal: Establish Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street as great public spaces.

Measures:

- a. Require active ground floor uses in new and substantially renovated buildings (either retail or designed to accommodate retail in the future).
- b. Priority areas for developing/adapting building to include active ground floor uses include:
 - East side of Sidney Street at Lafayette Square (e.g. through replacement of the existing frame residential buildings). Retain historically/culturally significant structures.
 - City Parking lot edges, and other large parking lot frontage along streets/sidewalks.

Goal: Enhance the street network to make walking more convenient, safe, and fun.

Measures:

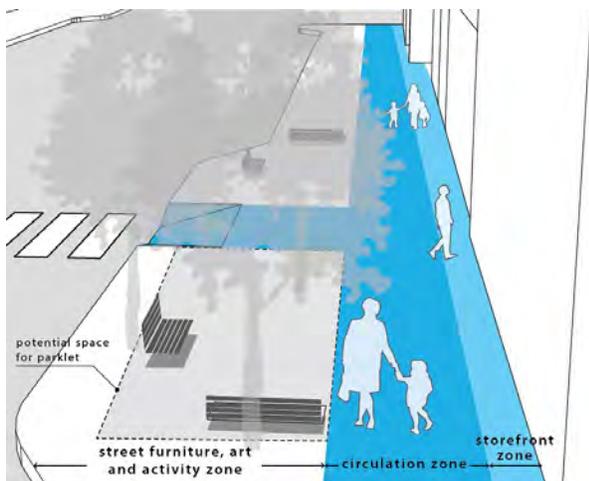
- a. Improve pedestrian street lighting with a plan that addresses safety, identity and convenient access. Consider opportunities for building-mounted lighting to supplement street lighting.
- b. Encourage transparent retail storefronts.
- c. At nonresidential uses, a setback of up to 10 feet may be provided to accommodate outdoor dining or other active programming.
- d. Encourage compact front gardens along residential building frontage on streets other than Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street to introduce attractive plantings, express the square's diversity, and help balance the goals of active street edges and residential privacy. These gardens should be 5 to 10 feet deep from sidewalk to principal facade line.
 - Incorporate stoops or other entrances to ground level units wherever possible.
 - Semi-private outdoor seating/patio areas may be permitted.
 - Providing accessible routes to ground floor housing is strongly encouraged, by using a ramp and continuous plinth where the ground floor is raised above sidewalk elevation.
 - Utilize fences, plantings and/or other elements to provide appropriate privacy to ground floors located at sidewalk level.
 - Fences between garden and sidewalk areas should not be excessively tall and should incorporate significant visual transparency.

Along Mass Ave and Main Street

Sidewalks of Mass Ave and Main Street could be defined into three zones:

1. circulation zone in the middle,
2. street furniture zone that abuts road, and;
3. storefront zone right adjacent to the buildings.

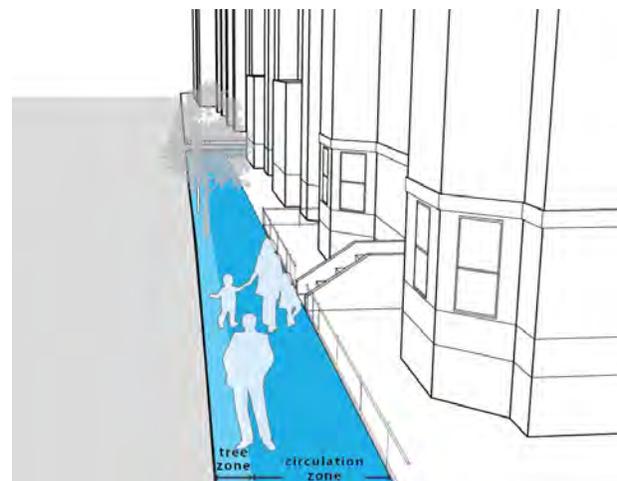
Continue to encourage active use of street furniture zone outside of the 8'-12' wide circulation zone. In addition to outdoor dining, consider parklets, public art/play installations, and designated locations for performance. Encourage participation by businesses and organizations in helping conceive and manage these active areas.



Good example of active sidewalk usage along Mass Ave. (Tavern in the Square, Central Square)

Along Secondary Streets

Side streets generally lack the sidewalk width to support active uses possible along Mass Ave, but should be enlivened by active ground floor building uses and, where possible, compact setbacks of 5 to 10 feet at new development to accommodate front gardens and/or outdoor dining.

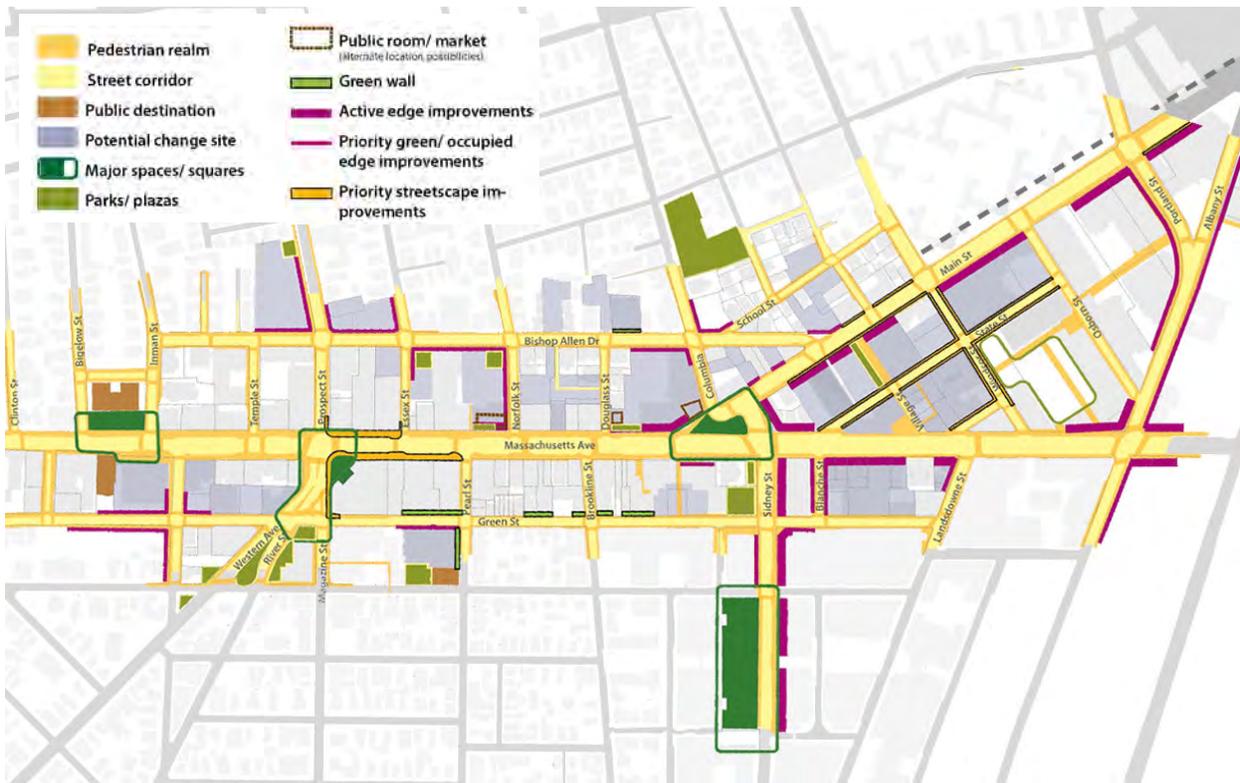


Good example of sidewalk along secondary streets with stoops and planters that gives residential character. (303 Third st, Kendall Square)

b. Integrating Buildings with Public Places

An important aspect of reviewing new development is the relation between each project and the open spaces near by. The following map shows the range of open spaces that currently exist in Central Square.

Goal: As the design of existing public spaces is revisited and as part of the redevelopment of adjacent properties, seek to improve the attractiveness and functionality of the open space at all levels.



As the design of Carl Barron Plaza is revisited, a key aspect for improvement is the ground floor of the adjacent building. Active ground floor uses would do much to make the plaza more successful.



Redevelopment on the former Quest Diagnostics properties should be carefully reviewed to ensure that the successful aspects of Lafayette Square are respected and enhanced.

Goal: Create new outdoor and/or indoor gathering spaces.

Measures:

- a. Encourage establishment of a Public Room, cultural center and/or public market of 5,000 sf or more floor area in association with property redevelopment or adaptive reuse. Prime locations to consider include redevelopment sites of one acre or more.
 - The Public Room and/or market should be located in a highly visible and accessible area with excellent walking connections to Mass Ave, transit and parking.
 - The space should have an overtly public character, provided through a broad, clear entrance, generous ceiling height or similar measures.
 - Significant daylight should be provided using windows, skylights and/or clerestories.
 - An entity should be designated with responsibility for programming and maintenance of the facility.
- b. In conjunction with active uses of private development, encourage installation of publicly accessible spaces such as plazas, play areas, pedestrian connectors, and parklets either on site or on underutilized sidewalk areas to be activated by adjacent active uses



c. Active Ground Floor

Goal: Expand the apparent public realm by expanding the publicly accessible private spaces along sidewalk, in association with creation of housing, retail, cultural and/or office space.

Measures:

- a. Transparent materials and interior lighting should be used to maximize visibility of street level uses.
- b. Active ground level spaces should have strong, interactive connections with adjacent public sidewalk/plaza space using strategies such as extensive transparent glazing, interactive media or public art, large operable doors and windows, and/or associated outdoor seating.
- c. Blank walls exceeding 10 feet in length should be avoided.

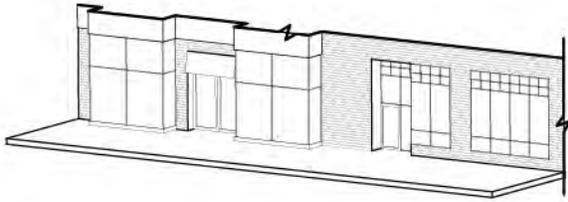
Goal: Storefronts should be oriented to the pedestrian and provide visual interest both day and night along Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street. Pedestrians should be encouraged to window shop by the provisions of varied and interesting display areas. Every effort should be made to facilitate access into the store and to create an individual building or store identity.

Measures:

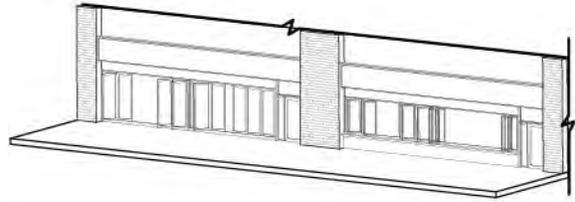
- a. large window areas for display or for looking into a store with lighting to facilitate night viewing
- b. awnings and/or canopies
- c. signage which is attractively integrated into the window area, awnings, canopies, and architecture of the building
- d. creative signage, awnings, and graphics to create a visually interesting, creative and engaging streetscape
- e. street grade entrances which continue strong linear edge along Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street
- f. window boxes
- g. restoration of details in historically contributing or significant buildings
- h. encourage chamfered ground floor entrances wherever possible in corners

The Following elements are discouraged for stores and storefronts design:

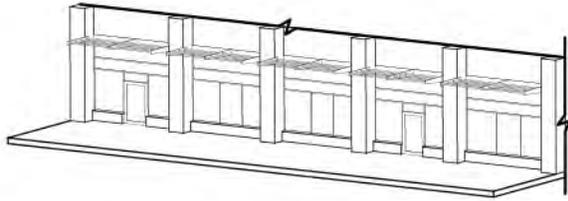
- a. small window areas that do not promote or encourage viewing into the store
- b. overpowering signage that obscure architectural details of historically interesting buildings
- c. alcoves or recesses in the building wall that encourage loitering
- d. loading docks along Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street
- e. parking entrances and exits along Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street
- f. below or above grade store entrances
- g. non-retail uses on Massachusetts Avenue



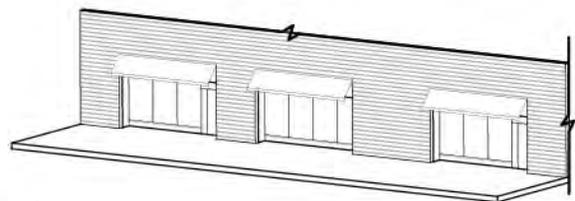
Display Window



Operable Window



Canopy



Awnings



Examples of existing well-designed storefronts in Central Square

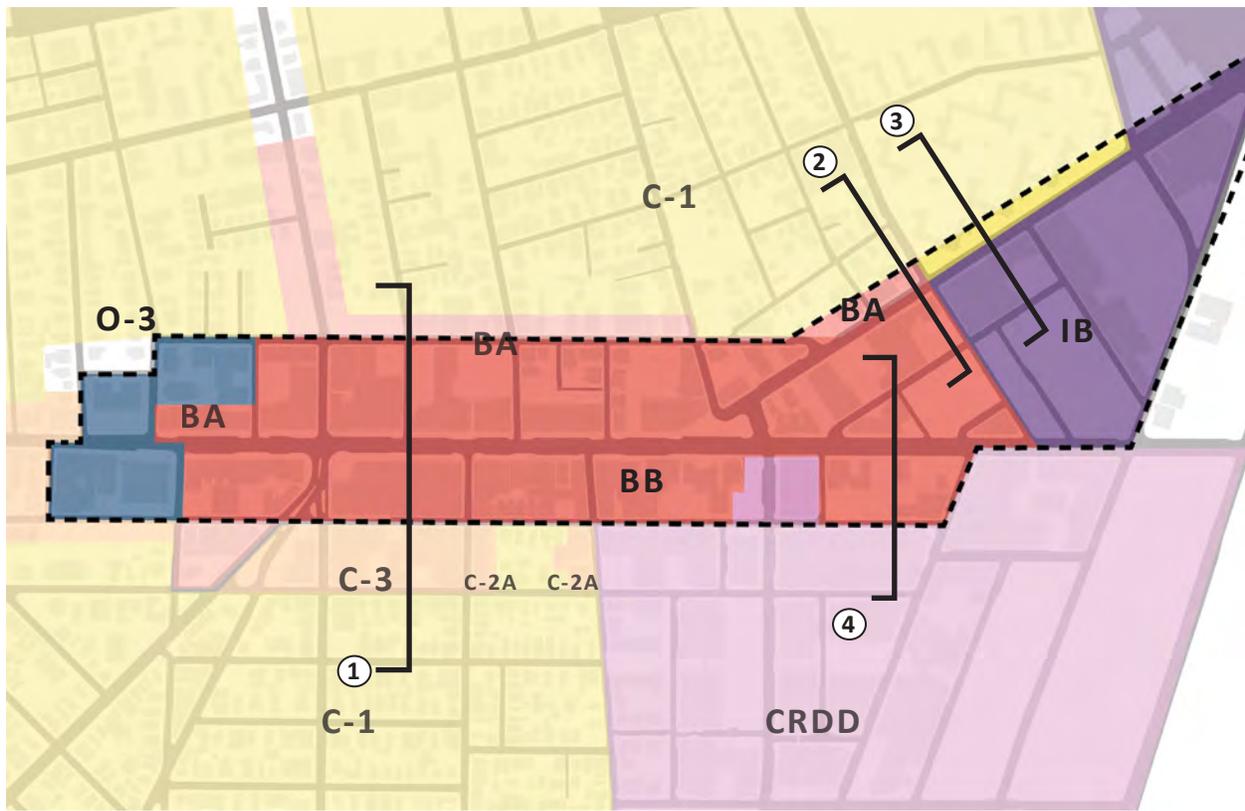
d. Built Form

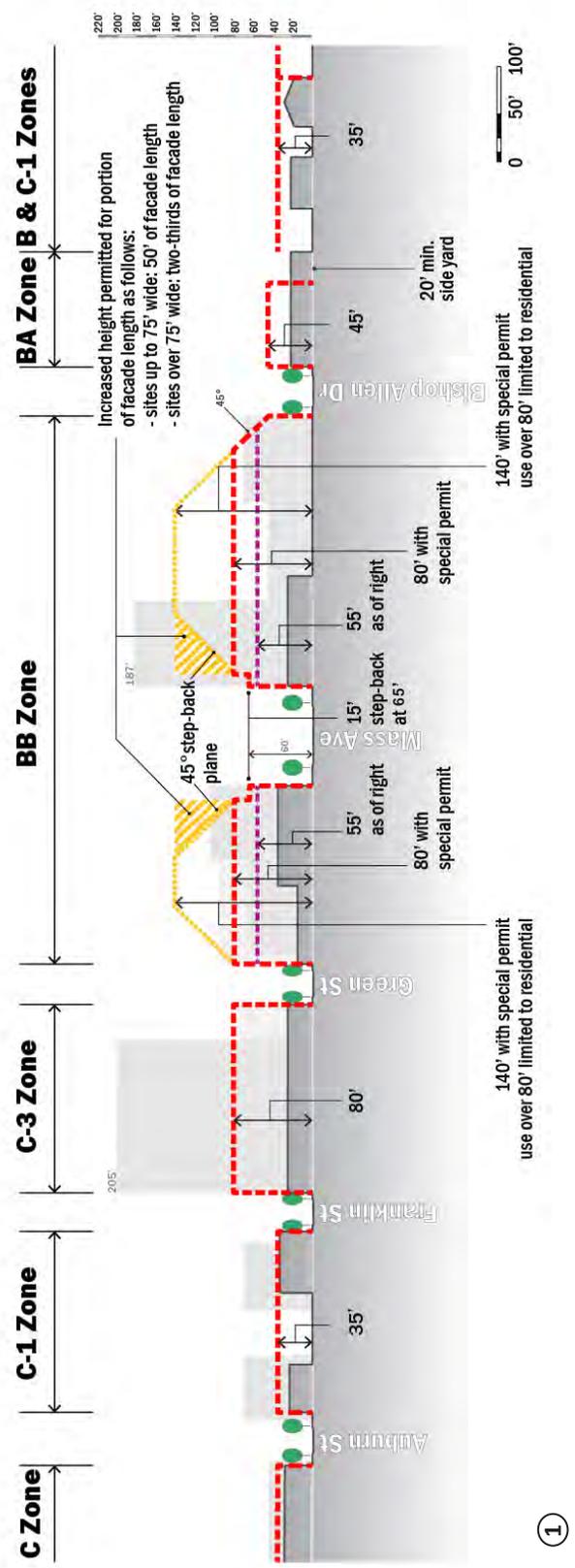
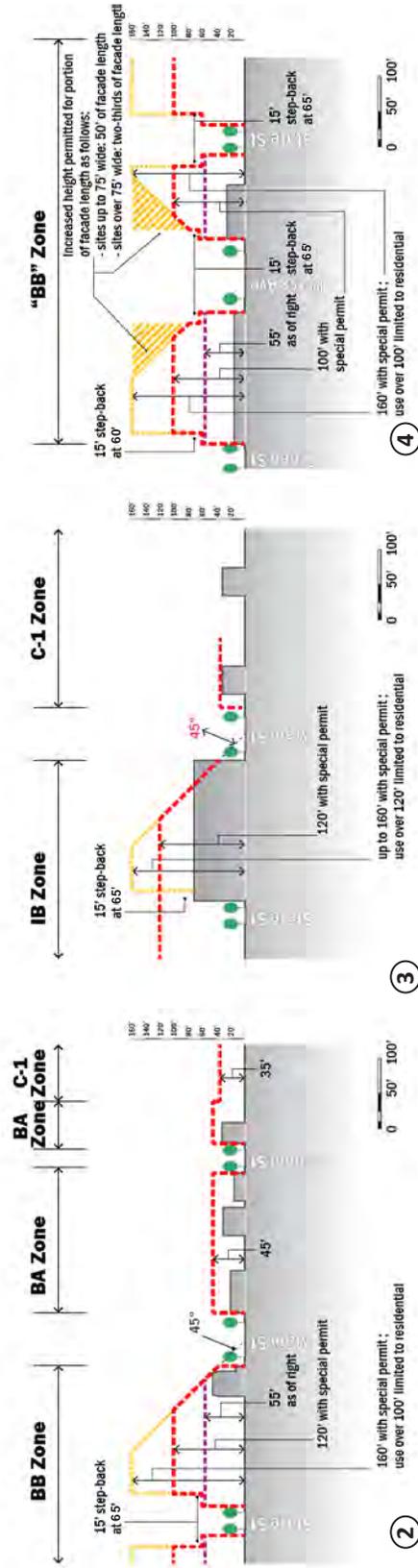
– Height

Goal: Height of buildings should be consistent within height range of the overall context of the surrounding properties. Variation of height within this range is encouraged; while buildings are encouraged to align facade elements with tops of adjacent buildings, overall building height is not necessarily intended to be uniform from one building to another.

Measures:

- Allow the greatest height and bulk of the building on Massachusetts Avenue with a diminution in height and bulk as the project approaches the lower residential uses in abutting areas (see **streetwalls and setbacks**).
- Consider opportunities to maintain and enhance views to significant historic structures when composing building height and bulk.
- In street wall situations it is desirable to relate architectural elements of new construction to the significant architectural elements including cornice heights on adjacent buildings.
- The combined length of any two adjacent facades should not exceed 220’.





– **Massing**

Goal: Continuation of a strong linear retail frontage is critical to preserving the strength and historic character of the commercial district. Building fronts should maintain a strong linear edge along Massachusetts Avenue. Adjacent structures should build to a common party wall, although occasional setbacks of up to 15 feet to accommodate outdoor dining or retail sales, integrated with ground floor design and programming, are encouraged. Alleyways between buildings are not encouraged except at identified locations where public pedestrian passages are desirable.

Limit shadow impacts of new development on portions of neighborhoods outside the study area and public parks within approximately 1-2 blocks or 500 feet of development site. Shadow impacts should not substantially reduce the appeal of public spaces, nor direct sun access to neighborhood housing, during spring and fall. Limit shadow impacts to no more than 2 hours per day between March 1 and October 31.

– Streetwalls and Bulk Control

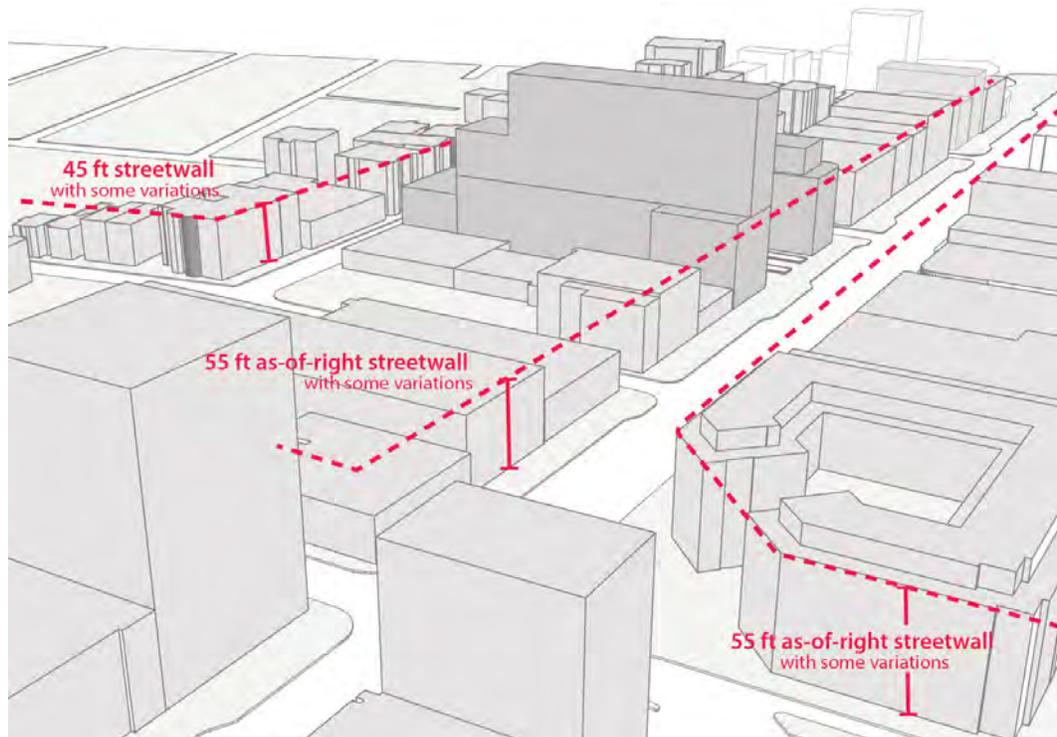
Goal: Building facades along Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street should both reinforce the traditional 55 foot height range of many traditional buildings, and introduce variation in height, including volumes that exceed the 55-60 foot range. Added height is especially encouraged where it can help buildings serve as attractive landmarks.

Measures:

- Streetwall height should step down progressively from the Massachusetts Avenue/Main Street toward neighborhood context.
- A maximum streetwall height of 45 feet should be maintained along streets perpendicular to Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street within 100 feet of adjacent neighborhood zoning districts.
- Taller volumes are permitted if set back from this streetwall at least 15 feet and within the height overlay limits.

– Scale

Goal: The heavy pedestrian activity in the Square must be recognized in renovations and new construction projects. Treatment of the ground floor plane should relate to the human dimension and be rich in detail to enhance the pedestrian experience.



– *Building Facade*

Renovations: Contributing and historically significant buildings should be maintained and renovated whenever possible to maintain Central Square’s cultural heritage and promote environmental sustainability (see section **5. Appendix**). Materials should be consistent with the materials used when the structure was originally built. Original details should be preserved and restored whenever possible. Additions, including new upper floors, are acceptable if architecturally distinguished from the existing structure and otherwise consistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation & Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings.

New Construction: The intent of design guidelines for facades is to emphasize how important the design is both for the building itself and for the street as a whole, and to require that designers and their clients produce high quality design. No one has a single, formulaic answer for what high quality design is—good design needs to have its own integrity, and should also be “of its place,” in some sense. To be “of its place,” design should respond to orientation with regards environment, place, and site, while providing context by acknowledging the importance of building profile, edges and corners. As architectural design has evolved over the last few decades, some architects bring edgy, modernist sensibilities to their work, while others wish to be more reflective of historical precedents. The goal of these guidelines is to encourage new projects in Central Square to be conceived with enduring and durable qualities, such that, many years from their conception, they are seen as strong contributors to the liveliness of the Square, and to its role as presenting a diverse set of architectural statements over a century or more.

The ground level of buildings should be especially carefully designed to engage the interest of pedestrians. Pedestrian level treatments should either be rich in detail and help to reinforce human scale through the use of architectural elements such as trim, sills, lintels, awnings and canopies or, in more modern fashion, should be inviting and interesting through dramatic treatment of space, lighting, and signage. Additionally, strategies that provide a framework for variation in the design of the ground floor, so that the architecture of the building does not dominate the architecture of the street, allow for future flexibility as conditions change. In any case, windows should be expansive and illuminated from within to create interesting display or viewing areas for retail space. Finally, encouraging the expansion of the definition of ground floor articulation to the lowest 2 levels can further enhance the pedestrian experience and differentiate between what is city and what is street.

The following examples of buildings in Central Square and elsewhere have been annotated to show that buildings of many eras and styles can contribute to a richly varied architectural experience. The key to success in façade design is that the architects strive to make their architectural expression strong and to have been conceived with an awareness of context.

4. Design Principles and Guidelines

bay window provides scale transition from the overall building to more human-scaled elements, plus attractive effects of form and shadow



contrasting copper, brick and glass materials contributes scale and rhythm to the facade

the entablature, "the crown" of the building elaborates building facade

"punched" operable windows epitomize the older architecture in the Square



ground floor canopy (or awning) provides shade and distinguishes storefront areas from facade above



opportunity to see interior activity creates visual interest

curtain wall detailing breaks down the facade into human scale

human scale pedestrian level design

articulation of window and cornice detailing makes building facade interesting



stone and brick materials provides a sense of durability and stability



the depth of the facade on the left allows richer expression of the architecture

monolithic facade should be avoided



sensitive use of new materials and colors complement existing buildings



recessed arcade type of ground floor frontage should be carefully designed, so as to not create a dark, unappealing ground floor.

e. Parking and Service Areas

Goal: Off-street parking and service areas should be screened from the public realm wherever possible, to enable more attractive and active settings to adjoin sidewalks and other public places.

Measures:

- a. Off-street parking should be located below grade wherever possible. It is acceptable to locate public parking at grade level if it is surrounded by active uses and surmounted by additional building floors.
- b. Where existing surface parking is expected to remain for a significant period of time, improve edges along sidewalks with plantings and/or public art.
- c. Locate service areas on alleys or side streets, never along Mass Ave or Main Street. Loading docks should be faced with a garage door that typically remains closed except when vehicles are entering or leaving, and that is designed to complement the architecture of the building.

5. Appendix

