DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR MULTIFAMILY HOUSING

DECEMBER 2025

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Prepared by the City of Cambridge Community Development Department 2025

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1. INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of people in Cambridge live in multifamily housing. A “multifamily” building is a building that contains three or more dwelling units, meaning a space intended for living—in other words, it has space for sleeping, a kitchen, and a bathroom. Multifamily buildings take many different forms in Cambridge—they can be triple-deckers or fourplexes or be larger apartment or condominium communities. Multifamily housing is a core feature of a dynamic urban community. It has been a component of Cambridge's housing stock since the mid-19th century and will be increasingly important as Cambridge grows in the 21st century.

These multifamily design guidelines are meant to help designers and developers of multifamily buildings across the City of Cambridge. Design guidelines are not zoning requirements; they are voluntary in nature. However, these guidelines provide best practices for building functional, attractive, and high-quality buildings that contribute positively to existing neighborhoods. After all, buildings on a street form blocks and blocks form neighborhoods, and neighborhoods (and squares and corridors) together make Cambridge feel like Cambridge.

The City’s Community Planning & Design staff are available to address your questions. We encourage project proponents to meet and discuss a new multifamily development before formally applying for a permit.

How to Use this Document

This document is divided into four separate chapters. It starts with high-level design issues, and gradually zooms in to finer-grained details of multifamily buildings:

- **Site Design** – Site layout, open space, large site development, circulation, parking, lighting, and public art.
- **Building Design** – Context, massing, facades, tall buildings, and historical buildings.
- **Sustainabilit**y – Green building and resiliency.
- **Principles in Practice** – Illustrating how the preceding chapters work together and apply to different types of buildings in different parts of Cambridge.

Each section consists of key elements of that topic area, with individual bits of design advice that are most important for creating buildings that contribute to the lives of their residents and to the quality of life in Cambridge as a whole. No building can meet every guideline, and that's okay. Which guidelines are most important will vary depending on the project, its location and context. However, developers and designers should strive to achieve most of these guidelines where possible and appropriate. Buildings have a responsibility to contribute positively to the places where they are built. When that happens – we are all better served.

Some Housekeeping

These guidelines were originally created as the “Affordable Housing Overlay Guidelines” when the City first adopted its Affordable Housing Overlay zoning in 2020. Reflecting on the original purpose of these guidelines, it became clear that the goal of good multifamily design is not limited to affordable housing: the design guidance that applies to affordable housing should apply to all multifamily development. In early 2025, the City updated its Zoning Ordinance to permit multifamily buildings everywhere in the city. Thus, this document has evolved to generally apply to all multifamily development, whether or not it occurs under the Affordable Housing Overlay in Section 11.200 of the Zoning.

At the same time that these guidelines were being developed the City also completed the "Citywide Design Guidelines", which cover the full range of project types. The shared goal of both sets of guidelines is to help new projects contribute to a beautiful, harmonious, welcoming, and sustainable Cambridge. The purpose of the Multifamily Design Guidelines is to provide a convenient and focused discussion of the issues specifically pertinent to the design of multifamily residential projects.

This document is meant to be used wherever design guidelines for affordable housing or other types of multifamily housing are applicable.

1.1 PRINCIPLES OF GOOD MULTIFAMILY DESIGN

Being a good building means being a good neighbor. Here are overarching principles every development should follow, regardless of its size or location:

- **Context** – In neighborhoods with a clear, established architecture, new buildings should reflect and respond to common design elements. In more diverse areas, more individuality may be appropriate.
- **Enhance the City** – New buildings should be pleasant, safe, and interesting to walk by and interact with. They should contribute to the beauty of Cambridge's streets, parks, squares, and historic fabric.
- **Neighborly Massing** – Building massing and layout should be sensitive to the privacy of neighbors and their solar access where possible.
- **Appealing Facades** – Harmonize with neighboring buildings and offer visual interest to the public realm.
- **Ground to Sky** – Pay special attention to the design of ground floors and to how passersby will experience the building. Design the tops and roofs of buildings to make the skyline interesting to see from up close and far away.
- **Common Spaces** – Provide shared spaces (indoors or outdoors) so that neighbors can get to know one another.
- **Harmonize with History** – Respect and respond to nearby historical buildings.
- **Sustainability and Climate Resiliency** – Make new buildings energy efficient and safe from extreme climate conditions such as flooding and extreme heat. Use sustainably sourced and healthy construction materials.
- **Site and Landscape Design** – Contribute to the beauty of the public realm and to resident's privacy, enhance sustainability and resiliency, and minimize detrimental impacts on neighbors and the public.
- **Safety** – Design for pedestrian and bicycle safety.

1.2 UNDERSTANDING NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

Design should begin with reviewing existing city plans for the area—including citywide plans—as well as an analysis of the site and its context. The analysis should address:

- The project's consistency with Cambridge's relevant planning documents.
- The characteristics of the public realm: the form and character of adjoining and nearby streets, squares, parks, and other open spaces.
- Surrounding land uses and building types, including parks, retail, community services, and other amenities.
- The pattern of the neighborhood's urban blocks.
- Building siting and the relationships of buildings to the public realm.
- Building height, massing, and scale.
- Architectural details.
- Colors and textures of building materials.
- Distances to nearby public parks and their features.
- The vehicular, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian circulation network.
- Vehicular and bicycle parking.
- Aspects of architectural and landscape design that contribute to neighborhood character.

2. SITE DESIGN

Good site design means fitting into the existing neighborhood context, creating outdoor spaces for the benefit of residents, and contributing to the quality of the street for passers-by. Projects do this by sensitively locating buildings on their sites, and by the design and programming of their open spaces.

2.1 SITE LAYOUTS: RESPONSE TO CONTEXT

OBJECTIVES

Harmonize with the neighborhood context, including the surrounding urban patterns of streets and blocks, building setbacks, travel paths, and open spaces.

In existing neighborhoods with established patterns of development, responsive and context-sensitive site design will help enhance the character of the built environment.

In evolving areas of the city, new developments should help achieve the city's goals for urban character.

GUIDELINES

a. In existing well-developed areas, where urban patterns are relatively uniform and stable, site buildings and design landscapes for compatibility with existing urban patterns of building siting and street character.
- Front yard setbacks should generally align with those of the neighboring buildings.
- Reference the prevailing pattern of building orientations, and the location of entrances as much as possible.
- Exceptions may be desirable where they reinforce the larger pattern of the city's civic structure, for example, where a residential street meets a retail corridor street that has a zero setback, the corner lot may appropriately have a zero setback on both streets.

b. In areas where the patterns of development are diverse, locate buildings in relation to neighbors with the aim of creating a coherent streetscape while meeting other citywide objectives articulated in these guidelines.

c. In evolving areas of the city, locate new buildings and site elements to support the planned streets and patterns of development.

d. On streets primarily consisting of residential buildings, the streetwall facades of multifamily buildings should generally align with the front facades of their neighbors.

e. In high-density areas, such as commercial corridors, multifamily buildings should frame streets and squares with streetwall facades aligned on the sidewalk.
- Site new buildings to maintain the continuity of existing retail frontage while allowing for comfortable sidewalk width and creating opportunities for activation such as outdoor seating.
- Side setbacks visible from the street should generally be avoided: streetwall facades should meet abutting buildings at a party wall condition.

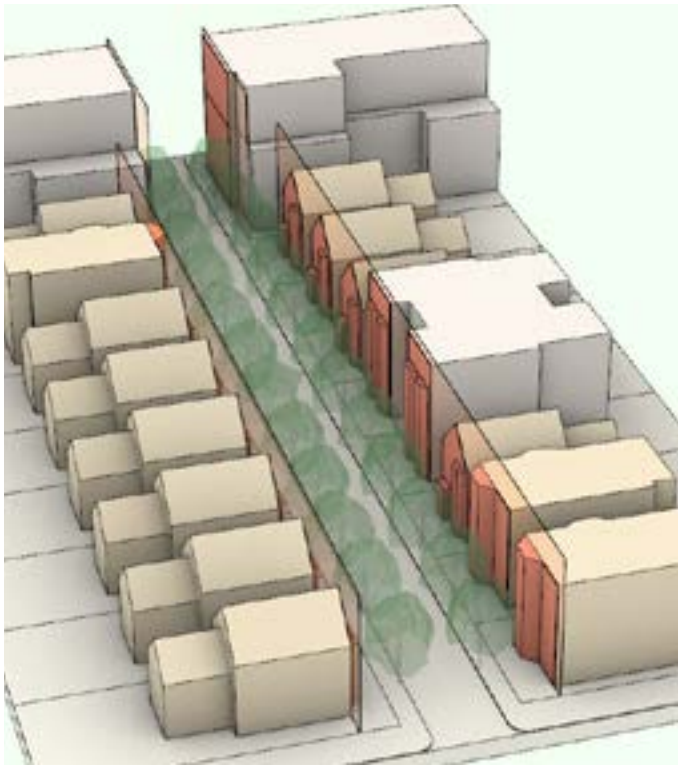
f. Locate open space in relation to adjacent yards and residential units that would benefit from natural light and views.

g. Where feasible, place buildings and design landscapes to minimize impacts on nearby existing buildings, respect the privacy of neighbors, maintain solar access, and to take advantage of views from the site.

h. In siting new buildings, consider views to nearby landmark buildings, public open spaces, public art, or other features of significant visual interest, and views from significant locations in the city.

i. Locate and design parking, trash storage, transformers, and mechanical equipment and its screening to minimize impacts on adjoining residences and on the public realm.

On retail corridors, locate the streetwall zone of the building facade at the back of the sidewalk.



On residential streets, provide a front yard setback compatible with that of neighboring buildings. Where a residential street meets a retail corridor with a zero setback, however, the corner lot may appropriately have a zero setback on both streets.

The buildings of Central Square vary widely in their styles, heights, materials, and dates. But by the alignment of their front facades they frame the street as a legible public room at the urban scale.

At its corner facing the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Arlington Street, this mixed-use building has a zero setback and ground floor retail uses. Its wings facing Arlington Street are set back to relate to the street's typical residential setbacks. Entry forecourts between the wings open onto the tree-lined street, connecting semi-public space within the site to the public realm.

2.2 OPEN SPACE AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN

OBJECTIVES

Provide opportunities for residents to enjoy nature, interact with each other, recreate, relax, and play.

Contribute to the City's beauty.

Enrich the pedestrian experience of passersby by contributing to the quality and coherence of the public realm.

Contribute to the privacy of residents.

Respond to the natural characteristics of the site, including tree cover, topography, hydrology, and sea level rise and storm surge levels (SLR/SS).

Minimize the "Urban Heat Island" (UHI) effect—the tendency for urban areas to be hotter in summer due to paving, and lack of vegetation.

Minimize the impacts of on-site parking, building services, and utilities on neighbors and on the public realm.

Provide open spaces with amenities to serve the diverse needs of residents.

GUIDELINES

a. Provide gathering places, green spaces, and other types of outdoor spaces as appropriate to the site, context, and building form: yards, entry forecourts, interior courtyards, play areas, decks, patios, open lawns, porches, loggias, balconies, roof terraces, and upper-level decks.

b. Support play and recreation. Where possible, integrate playful design elements and features throughout the site. See the Cambridge's "Play in the Public Realm" and "Healthy Parks and Playgrounds" for additional recommendations.

c. Maximize vegetation—particularly canopy trees—to shade and enrich streets and other public open spaces.

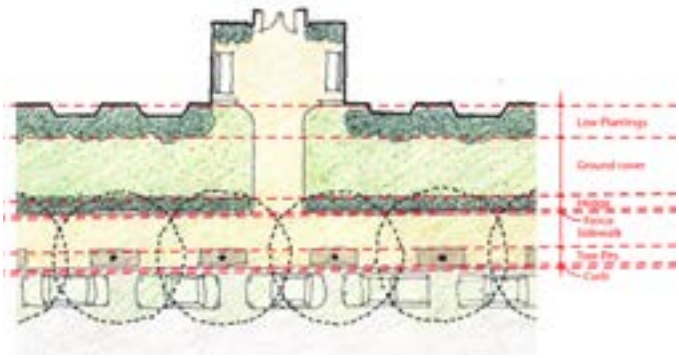
d. Minimize paved surfaces. Use permeable surfaces wherever possible for pedestrian pathways, parking areas, and other outdoor spaces.

e. Consider summer shading and winter solar access in the design of all communal open spaces.

Landscape design should provide shade, permeable surfaces, and offer the beauty of vegetation.

f. Design front yards to define the public street and sidewalk and to enhance the privacy of building interiors.

g. Consider organizing front yard landscape elements—low walls, low planting or hedges, fences, trees, ground cover, foundation plantings, etc.—as a series of landscape zones parallel to the sidewalk, so as to frame the street as a legible space and to delineate thresholds of privacy as one moves from the sidewalk to the building entrance.



The frontage of a residential building on a residential street, arranged as a series of parallel zones that frame the street and delineate thresholds of privacy.

Front yards should enrich the public realm with plantings and other landscape features. Parallel zones of canopy trees, hedges, fences, sitewalls, ground cover, and architectural features such as front steps and stoops frame the street.

h. When possible, improve adjoining public sidewalks, and plant curbside street trees.

i. Consider locations for seating at building entrances, front yards, sidewalks, courtyards, and along paths.

j. Where front yards are elevated above sidewalk level, utilize features such as low walls, curbs, hedges, steps, and ramps to negotiate the grade change. Provide accessible routes as appropriate. Unplanted or grass berms that slope up directly from sidewalk level are discouraged.

Curbside street trees shade pedestrians and separate them from parked cars and the vehicular roadway.

When sites have elevated front yards, low site walls celebrate the grade change and frame the sidewalk.

On residential streets, even narrow zones of front yard plantings can enrich the pedestrian experience.

Benches located directly next to the sidewalk can be a welcome public amenity.

k. Consider providing landscaped forecourts and inner courtyards, especially in dense residential neighborhoods and on corridors, to help foster a sense of community, to create transitional space between the public street and the building lobby, to provide light and air to unit interiors, and to enrich the site with plantings.

l. In residential contexts, consider providing side and rear setbacks for the portions of multifamily buildings that are more than 40 feet from the front facade to minimize impacts on adjacent buildings and their rear and side yards.

m. Consider the location, dimension, and orientation of open spaces to best promote healthy trees and other vegetation.

n. Select species for plantings and ground cover that are appropriate for urban conditions.

Courtyards are places of connection. They are venues for public events, casual meeting and relaxation, and play. As shared open spaces, they contribute to the identity of the project and help reinforce residents' sense of place.

o. Prioritize new large canopy shade trees over new small ornamental trees.

p. Follow the recommendations of the Department of Public Works and the City's Urban Forest Master Plan for species, planting standards, and care.

q. Minimize the urban heat island effect by preserving existing mature canopy trees wherever possible and by planting new ones to shade buildings, open spaces, and paved surfaces.

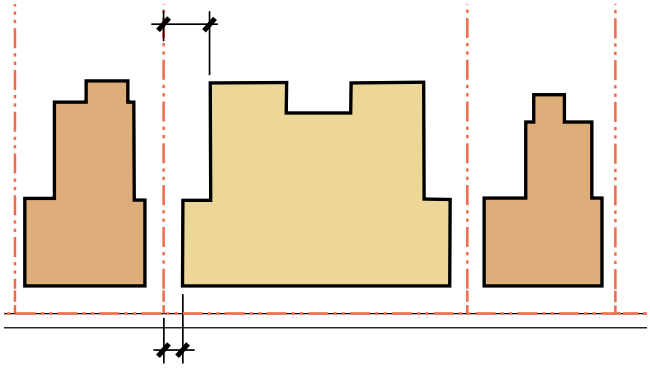
r. Use landscaping to screen surface parking and vehicular driveways from residential units and open spaces on and adjoining the site.

s. Screen loading and trash areas, meters, mechanical units, electrical transformers and switchgear, and utility equipment with plantings, fences, site walls, or other landscape elements.

Forecourts should celebrate building entrances. Where possible, provide amenities, including shade and places to sit.

Where possible, provide interior courtyards as semi-public/semi-private common spaces for residents.

Forecourts and courtyards in block interiors should be integral components of the pattern of neighborhood streets and other open spaces, yet have their own distinct character and form.



Where possible in residential neighborhoods, minimize impacts on neighbors with wider side yard setbacks at the rear portions of new multifamily buildings.

2.3 MULTIFAMILY HOUSING PROJECTS ON LARGE SITES

OBJECTIVES:

Developments consisting of multiple buildings and/or blocks should be integrated into the existing street and block network.

They should strive to be compatible with the scale of existing buildings and public spaces in their neighborhoods.

GUIDELINES

a. Take advantage of opportunities to design internal streets, paths, and broader open spaces to connect with the surrounding urban pattern.

b. Where appropriate to site and context, consider creating through-block pedestrian and/or vehicular connections.

c. Where possible, divide large multifamily projects into separate buildings to enhance their compatibility with the typical scale of Cambridge's residential neighborhoods.

d. Take advantage of opportunities to provide public parks and community spaces to serve the needs of the surrounding neighborhood.

e. Improve the streetscapes of bordering streets with new trees and other plantings, pavement, and street furniture, etc.

f. For large buildings, provide multiple street entrances wherever possible.

Large multifamily project divided into a group of separate buildings organized around a shared courtyard, each addressing the adjoining public street.

Large multifamily project organized by its internal street system and connected to a neighboring residential complex. Courtyards, both fully enclosed and partially open, provide spaces for play and connection.

Multifamily housing project on a large site, integrated into the civic structure of its neighborhood. The buildings are arranged to continue the pattern of the context's urban blocks; the courtyard engages the neighborhood streets.

Street trees offer shade, beauty, and spatial definition to the sidewalk and street. Multiple building entrances enrich the sidewalk with visual interest and activation.

An internal pedestrian walk, activated by building entrances, organizes the layout of this multifamily housing project and connects it to the public street and park.

2.4 CIRCULATION

OBJECTIVE

Promote active transportation by prioritizing pedestrian-friendly and bike- and micromobility-accessible site design.

GUIDELINES

a. Create direct, functional, and beautiful paths for pedestrians and bicycles from the public sidewalk to building entrances. Pedestrian access to the building and site should be clearly articulated and accessible to people of all levels of ability, and should take precedence over other mobility modes.

b. Design and lay out path systems to provide intuitively clear routes for pedestrian and bicycle movement.

c. Provide adequate signage to additionally clarify wayfinding and use of paths.

d. Where possible, locate building entrances on public streets, or in forecourts directly visible from public streets. Secondarily, locate building entrances on interior courtyards or pedestrian streets.

e. On corner lots with non-residential street-level uses such as retail, consider locating the entrances to these uses at or near building corners.

f. Establish pedestrian path widths and select their materials based their use and location on the site.

g. In areas where flood risk is high, consider secondary elevated sidewalks that are raised above street level.

h. Minimize the number and widths of curb cuts and driveways.

i. Where possible, adjoining projects should share driveways to minimize the amount of paving and the number of curb cuts.

j. Where possible, locate curb cuts on secondary streets rather than on primary streets.

Celebrate building entrances.

Prioritize the pedestrian experience.

2.5 PARKING

OBJECTIVE

Minimize the impact of parking and driveways on residents, neighbors, and the general public.

GUIDELINES

a. Arrange driveways and parking to avoid conflicts with pedestrian and bicycle movement.

b. Minimize the site area dedicated to driveways and parking and avoid locating them close to neighboring properties.

c. Use green walls, hedges, art work, metal stencils, fences, louvers, sun shading elements, or other means to visually screen driveways and parked cars.

d. Provide canopy trees to shade surface parking lots where possible. Otherwise, consider shading structures or photovoltaic arrays.

e. Utilize permeable pavement where possible.

f. Consider light colored, solar-reflectant, or high SRI pavers or pavement.

g. Provide curb-side or off-street active curb spaces for short-term service needs, like pick-up/drop-off and loading and delivery.

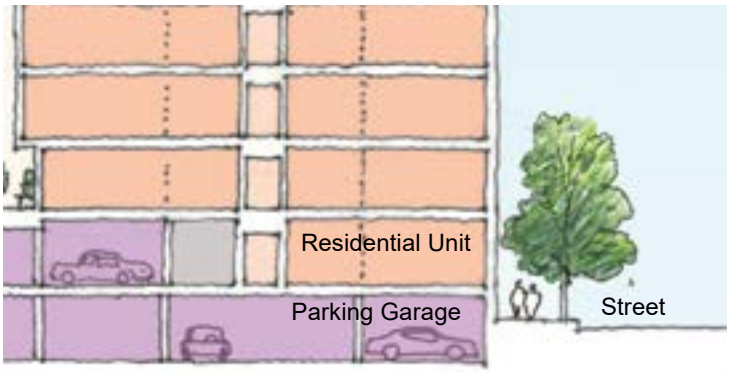
h. Locate bicycle parking in accordance with the City's *Bicycle Parking Guide*.

i. Screen under-building parking and long-term bicycle storage from the public realm with residential units, common areas, retail, other ground floor uses, or visually appealing opaque walls.

j. Avoid loading and servicing areas that exceed two bays or 30 feet wide.

See 3.7 Parking, Utilities, and Service Elements for guidance on architectural design

Shade parking areas and driveways and screen them from view.



Minimize the impact of under-building parking on the public realm as much as possible by screening it from public view.

2.6 UTILITIES AND SERVICES

OBJECTIVE

Minimize the visual, acoustical, and environmental impacts of essential utilities and services on residents, neighbors, and the public.

GUIDELINES

a. Locate utility functions such as gas, electric, and water meters, transformers, switchgear, and fire safety equipment where they will be least visible from the street. Where possible, conceal them within the building or in side or rear yard setbacks. To minimize their impacts, they should be planned for early in the design process

b. Locate mechanical elements such as HVAC units, condensing units, ventilation outlets, mechanical exhausts, louvers, and similar elements to minimize their visibility from the public realm and from neighboring sites and buildings. Screen them with plantings, fences or other materials that complement the site design and the building's architecture.

c. Avoid locating air conditioning condensing units on the ground. They should be located on roofs wherever possible.

d. Locate roof-mounted air conditioning equipment, and mechanical penthouses away from roof edges and/or provide parapets with adequate height or screenwalls to screen them from adjacent properties and public areas.

e. Minimize the noise impact of rooftop mechanical equipment with sound damping materials and screens and proper acoustic and sound isolation methods.

f. Screen trash and recycling areas with landscaping and/or fencing and ensure that noise and odor-generating functions are fully enclosed.

See also 3.7 Parking, Utilities, and Service Elements for architectural design guidance

To minimize their impacts on residents and the general public, utilities and service functions should be located sensitively. Screening should be designed as an integral element of the landscape design.

2.7 OUTDOOR LIGHTING

OBJECTIVE

Provide lighting for safety and functionality while minimizing energy use, light pollution, glare, and other negative impacts on neighbors, wildlife, the public realm, and the larger environment.

GUIDELINES

a. Use lighting only for safety and functional purposes such as providing wayfinding along access/egress routes, allowing open spaces to be usable in the evening, illuminating signage, or subtly accentuating key architectural elements such as building entrances.

b. Avoid excessive contrast in lighting levels.

c. Provide lighting that is fully shielded, down-lit, dark sky compliant, has a warm color temperature, and is at or below typical neighborhood light intensity. Consider locating lighting at appropriate heights (e.g.: at foot level on paths or moderate height poles for parking lots).

d. Carefully consider lighting for pedestrian safety and aesthetic quality, including at first floors (lighting of stoops, entrances, and glazed retail spaces), covered parking areas with open sides, and in highly glazed interior spaces such as stairways.

e. Select lighting fixtures that minimize energy consumption.

f. Employ timers, automatic dimming, or other mechanisms to avoid excessive lighting.

g. Consider using solar powered lighting.

h. Shield lighting to prevent glare and minimize light trespass.

Design and locate lighting for functionality, safety, and aesthetics.

2.8 PUBLIC ART

OBJECTIVE

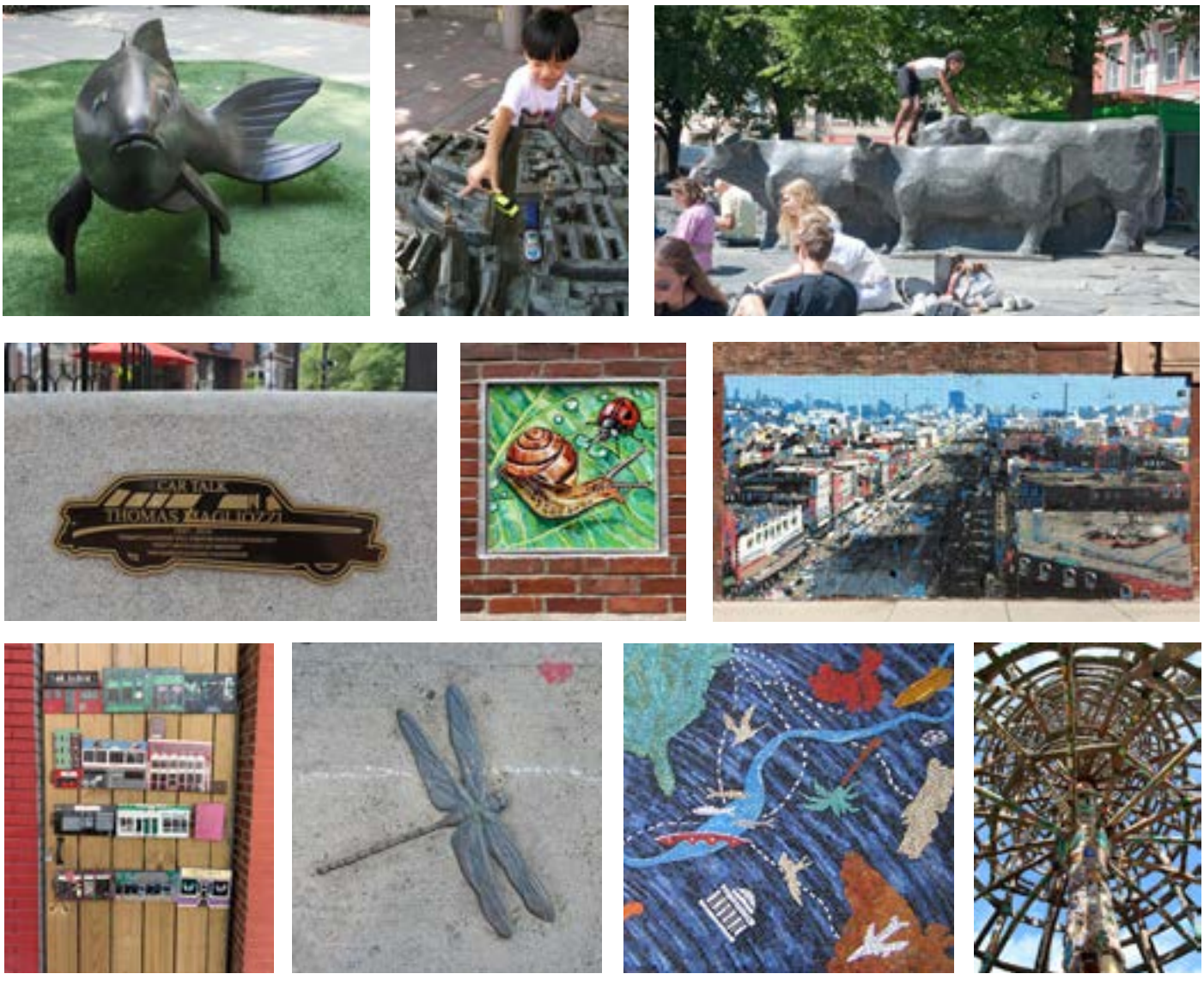
Enrich the visual environment and strengthen the sense of place by incorporating art.

GUIDELINES

a. Consider incorporating public art as an integral component of the development's architectural and landscape design.

b. Where possible, integrate arts-related uses such as artists' galleries, arts displays, or artist's studios on the ground level of multifamily residential developments that are located on business and commercial streets.

c. Commemorate Cambridge History



Public art can create a unique sense of place.

3. BUILDING DESIGN

Multifamily projects should strive for design excellence regardless of their location, size, and type of housing they provide. They should frame the public realm, provide visual interest, relate to the human scale, enhance walkability, and be sensitive to their contexts.

In established areas, residential projects should relate to the architectural character and development patterns of nearby buildings by taking cues from their colors, materials, and details. In evolving residential and commercial districts, multifamily buildings should anticipate planned conditions and set a high standard for future development.

Particular care should be taken in the design of buildings that are more than twice as tall as the surrounding context. A building's perceived size is not only a matter of height and width—it is also a matter of scale, shape, facades, materials, and the design of windows, entrances, and details. Appropriate and sensitive strategies of massing and facade design can significantly improve the fit of tall buildings with smaller scaled neighbors.

3.1 MASSING: DEFINE AND ARTICULATE THE PUBLIC REALM

OBJECTIVES

Serve residents' needs, offer a sense of belonging to a meaningful place, and foster connections with the Cambridge community.

Define, clarify, and articulate the Cambridge's public realm by capitalizing on opportunities to:

- Enhance the beauty and walkability of the city.
- Frame streets and squares as legible volumetric spaces.
- Engage significant visual axes and views.
- Emphasize significant corners of blocks and important intersections.

Reinforce the existing or planned pattern of streets and blocks:

- In established neighborhoods, relate to the existing pattern of streets and other open spaces, and emphasize compatibility with existing buildings.
- In evolving areas, configure new developments to help realize the City's vision for urban form.
- On primary mixed-use streets, prioritize the continuity of the streetwall from one building to the next.
- On smaller scaled residential streets, while less rigorous continuity of the streetwall may be appropriate, buildings should still work with their neighbors to frame the street as shared space.

Minimize detrimental impacts on neighbors and on the public realm.

GUIDELINES

a. Frame adjoining public spaces, including streets and sidewalks, with the building's mass and its front facade.

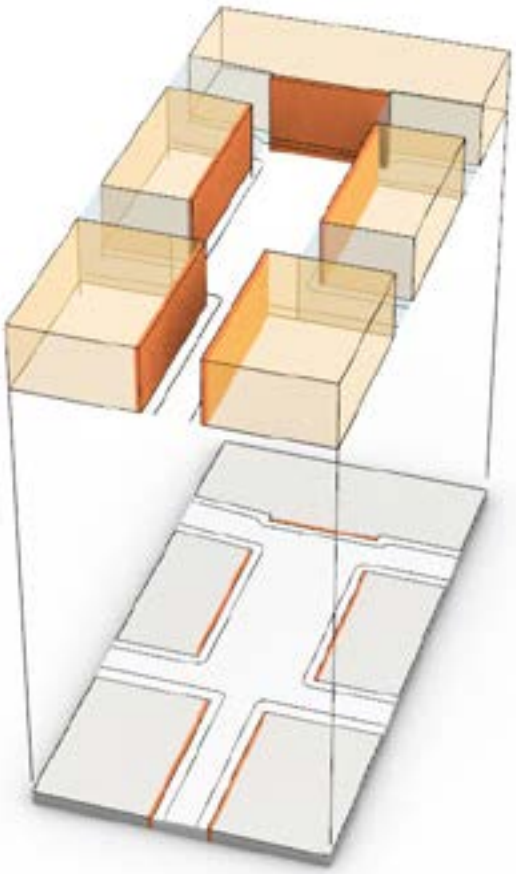
b. Arrange building mass to define the outer perimeters of blocks and, where possible, to preserve open space in the block interior.

c. In denser and larger scaled areas, such as retail corridors:

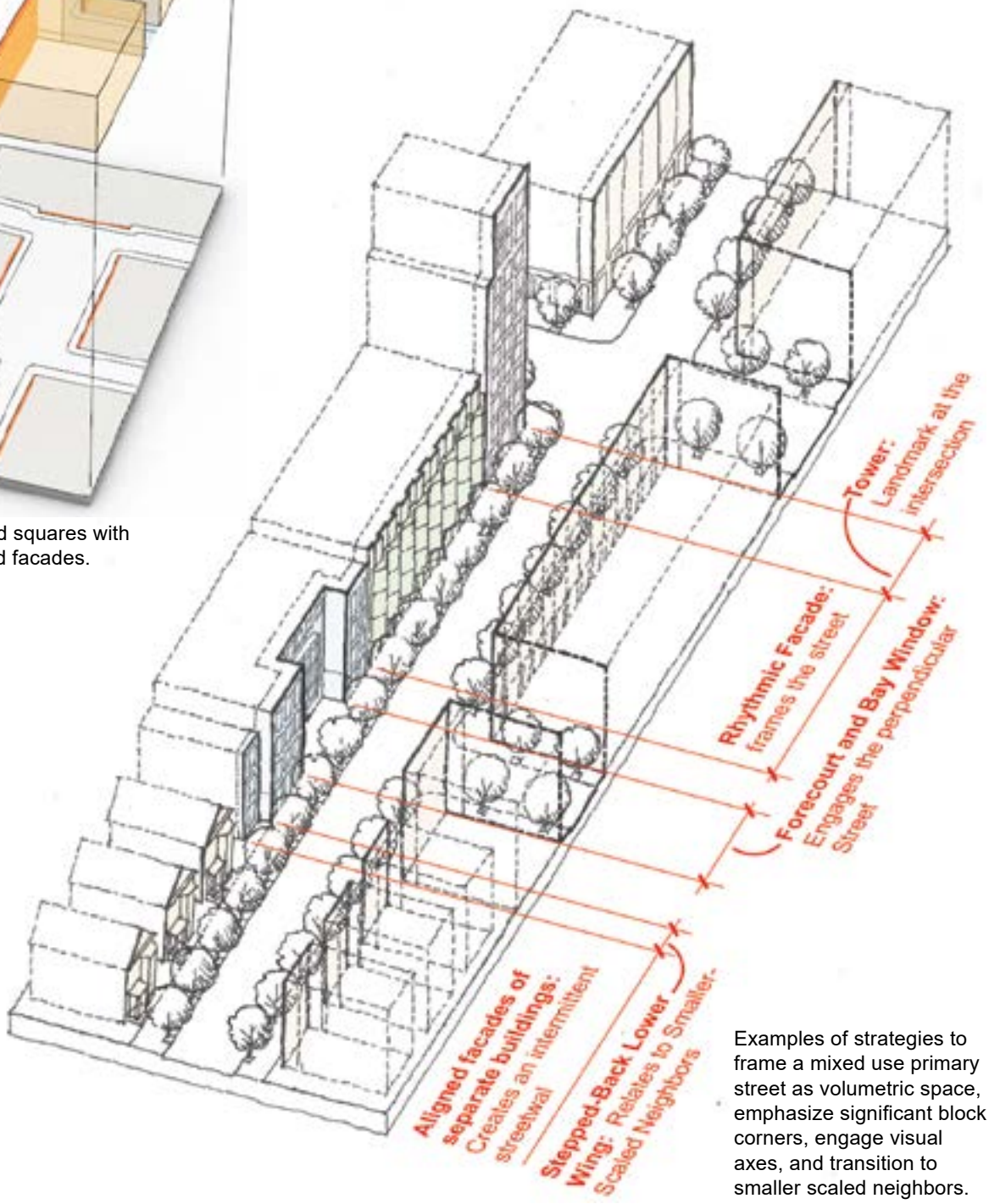
- Provide continuous streetwall facades along the edge of the sidewalk or the predominant plane of adjoining buildings.
- Buildings should generally align their streetwall facades parallel to the back-of-sidewalk or the build-to-line.
- Where existing sidewalks are too narrow for the anticipated pedestrian volumes, consider setting the building slightly back from the property line to enhance the pedestrian experience.
- Wherever possible, the pedestrian frontage zones and streetwall zones of new buildings should meet those of their neighbors in a party wall condition.
- Respond to significant features of the public realm, such as important intersections, cross streets or other significant visual axes, or public squares. Consider emphasizing these locations and urban spaces with greater height and assertive mass.

d. In lower scaled residential areas:

- Align the streetwall facades of multifamily buildings with those of their neighbors.
- Consider modulating the heights and articulating the massings of large buildings to create a sense of scale compatible with smaller existing neighboring buildings.
- More irregular massing strategies than on primary corridors may be appropriate.
- Consider providing courtyard spaces at building fronts or sides to reflect the character of nearby existing development, to divide long frontages into smaller scaled facades, and to enhance building entrances.



Frame streets and squares with building mass and facades.



Examples of strategies to frame a mixed use primary street as volumetric space, emphasize significant block corners, engage visual axes, and transition to smaller scaled neighbors.

3.2 MASSING: RESPOND TO NEIGHBORING BUILDINGS

OBJECTIVE

Minimize the impacts of bulk on neighbors.

Preserve open space on block interiors for solar access, ventilation, and vegetation.

Enrich residents' experience by creating a unique inner world inside the block, more intimate in scale than the fully public streets outside the block, by breaking down building massing on block interiors.

GUIDELINES

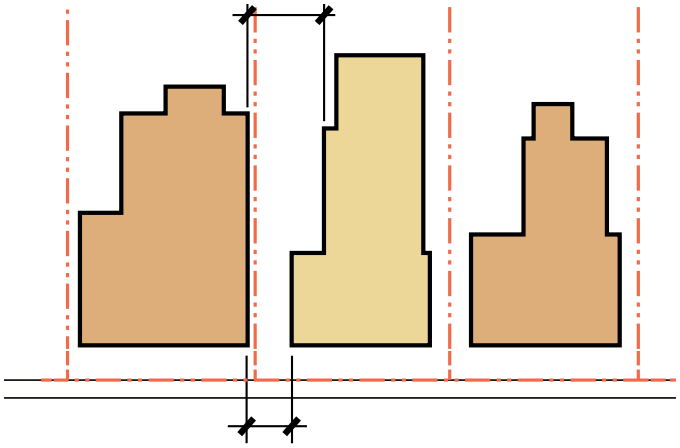
a. Make an effort to relate the height, massing, scale, and form of new buildings to those of existing adjacent buildings.

b. Where an existing neighboring residential building is located very close to the side or rear lot line, consider providing a wider area of open space on the interior of the block to maintain light, air, and privacy for both buildings.

c. Where new buildings are constructed in rear yards of existing buildings, consider adjustments to massing, building siting, and other articulations to reduce the visual bulk of upper floors.

d. Reduce the visual bulk of taller buildings by stepping back top floors, or by using mansard, gambrel, hipped, or gable roof profiles.

e. Consider adjusting building massing to maximize access to sunlight, air, and sky views from neighboring buildings and sites, and to maintain privacy.



Respond to the form of neighboring buildings, defer to the privacy of their interior spaces, and minimize impacts on their open spaces.

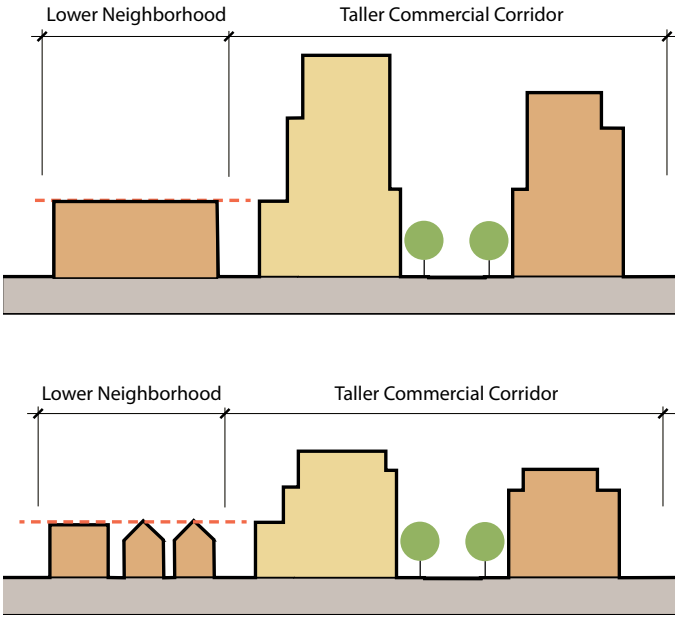
Consider reducing the mass of top floors to increase compatibility with smaller scaled neighbors or existing buildings on the site, especially in smaller scaled residential neighborhoods.

f. When a site along a commercial corridor abuts a lower-scaled residential district, consider concentrating the project's taller elements near the taller context and closer to the corridor street.

g. Incorporate stepbacks to relate to the heights of adjoining buildings and the scale of the street; and to provide a transition between the height of taller buildings and lower surrounding buildings.

h. Especially where multifamily buildings are both tall and broad, consider mitigating their bulk by breaking up their facades into smaller elements by means such as changes in plane, materials, or fenestration patterns.

i. To minimize the building's sense of bulk and shadow impacts on neighbors, avoid cantilevers on towers and locate slab volumes sensitively relative to the context.



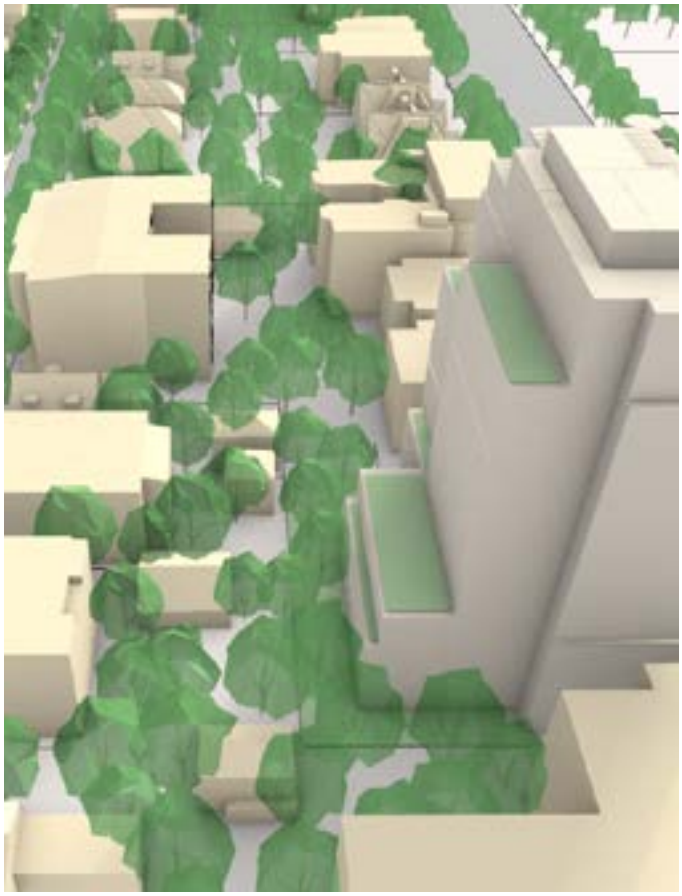
Adjust the massing of tall buildings to relate to lower neighbors and districts.

Articulate the massing of large buildings—both their overall massing and the three-dimensional form of facades—to engage adjoining spaces and relate to the scale of nearby buildings.

j. Where feasible, provide stepbacks and/or setbacks on the rear facades of towers facing the interior of the block, and on their side facades facing adjoining buildings.

k. Consider smaller scaled massing articulations and more varied facades on block interiors than on block perimeters.

Freely composed rear elevations express individuality and the adaptability of built fabric, and respond to the semi-private scale of block interiors.



Stepping the massing of a tall building away from its side and rear property lines helps to reduce its impact on the neighboring buildings of its block by minimizing shading, respecting their privacy, and preserving open space in the block interior.

Smaller scaled massing articulations and varied facade treatments on block interiors emphasize the relative privacy and more intimate scale of the interior space.

3.3 ENGAGE THE VARIED SCALES OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

OBJECTIVES

Engage the public realm at the scale of the pedestrian, the street, the block, the district, and the city:

- Activate streets with ground level uses and facade details that enrich the pedestrian's visual experience.
- Define the volume of the street as a legible public space.
- Respond to distant views.

GUIDELINES

a. Organize building massing and facades into horizontal zones: Base, Middle and Top, (or Pedestrian Zone, Streetwall, Tower, and Top).

b. Use building massing; articulation; changes in facade plane, color, materials; the design, organization, and proportions of fenestration; and architectural details to differentiate the zones as appropriate to the context.*

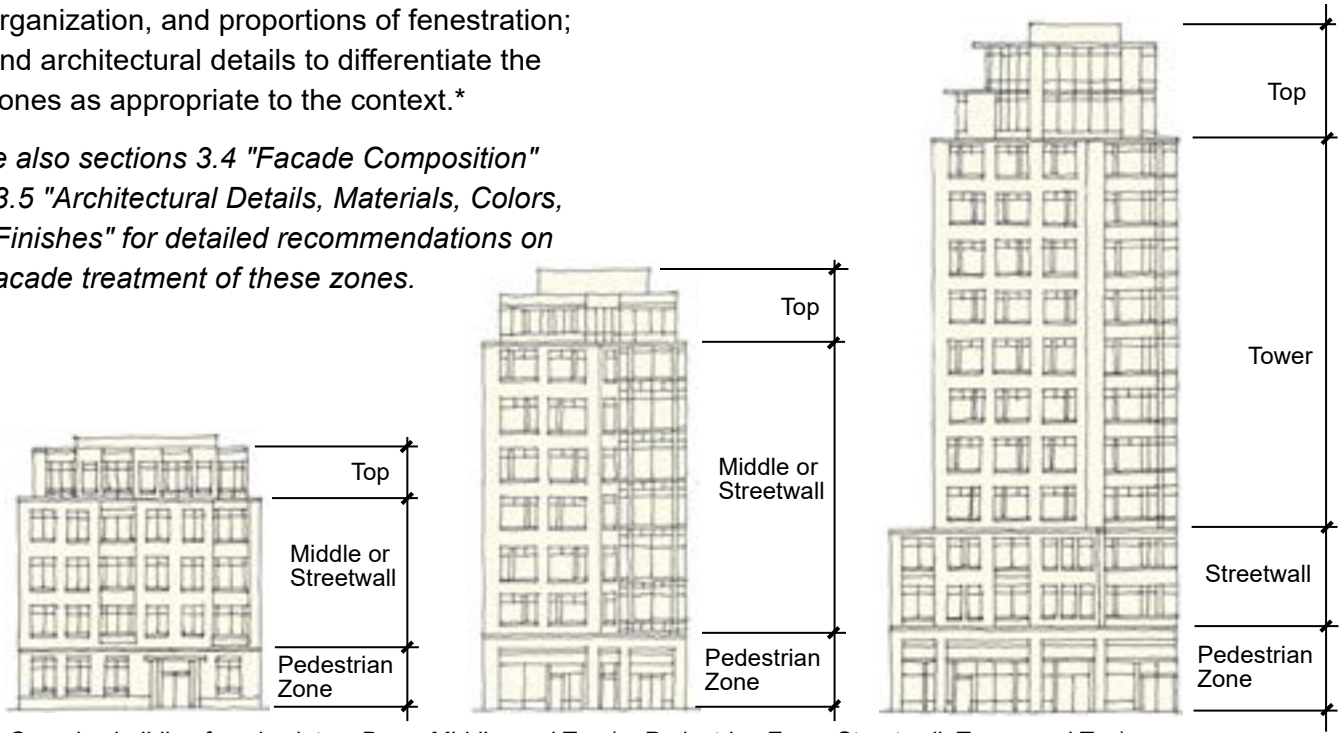
** See also sections 3.4 "Facade Composition" and 3.5 "Architectural Details, Materials, Colors, and Finishes" for detailed recommendations on the facade treatment of these zones.*

The Pedestrian Zone: The ground story, and occasionally second story, of a building facade fronting a street or other open space, often including active uses oriented to engage the public realm.

The Streetwall Zone: The portion of a building facade fronting a street or open space that extends from the Pedestrian Zone to a height typically equal to the facade-to-facade width of the adjacent street.

Tower Zone: The portion of a tall building that extends from the Streetwall Zone to the Top Zone. Not all buildings will have a tower zone.

Top Zone: The uppermost portion of a building. Depending on building height and design, this may include cornices, roofs, mechanical penthouses or enclosures, and potentially one or more residential floors and/or common spaces.



Organize building facades into a Base, Middle, and Top (or Pedestrian Zone, Streetwall, Tower, and Top).

3.3.1 THE BASE OR "PEDESTRIAN ZONE"

OBJECTIVES

Contribute to the walkability, beauty, visual interest, and liveliness of Cambridge's streets and other open spaces.

Create a safe, vibrant, visually rewarding, and welcoming pedestrian realm.

Enrich the pedestrian experience and reinforce the pedestrian scale.

GUIDELINES

a. Provide well proportioned and detailed architectural features including windows, doors, shading elements, cladding, materials, and textures to create visual interest at the pedestrian zone, and to distinguish it from the upper floor facades. (See 3.5 "Architectural Details, Materials, Colors, and Finishes")

b. Provide shelter and shade at building entrances. Enhance entrances with features such as stoops, porches, recesses, canopies, awnings, low walls, arcades, landscaping, and seating areas.

c. Where appropriate to the context, incorporate ground-level retail spaces, lobbies, and common areas to enliven the urban environment.

d. Where possible in buildings on residential streets with ground floor units, provide individual entrances directly from the sidewalk to those units.

- Maintain privacy for first floor residential units by raising them above sidewalk level and/or by front yard plantings and other landscape features.

On residential streets, separate stoops for individual first floor residential units, front yard landscaping, and views into common spaces enhance the pedestrian scale of the street.

e. On retail or commercial streets, ground floor uses should engage the public realm.
   - Incorporate active ground floor uses where possible.
   - Where ground floors include retail, lobby, or community spaces, maximize views into the building interior from public streets by using clear (preferably low iron) glass in windows and storefronts.
   - Provide sufficient ceiling heights (an 18 foot floor-to-floor dimension is recommended). In cases where ground floor active uses are not feasible, design facades to accommodate future active uses.

f. In buildings on retail and commercial streets, clearly differentiate ground floor facades from those of upper floors.
   - Ways to achieve this include a high percentage of glazing, architecturally emphasized building entrances, distinct materials and colors, a higher level of detail, shelter for the public from the elements, recessed entrances to ground floor uses, large operable windows, awnings or canopies, and variation in mullion patterns.

On retail streets, glazed pedestrian-level facades and unique mullion patterns and materials provide visual interest.

Awnings or canopies emphasize pedestrian scale and protect pedestrians from the elements.

g. Two-story-tall pedestrian zones may be appropriate for mid-rise and high-rise buildings located on wide streets.

h. In flood-prone areas, resilient design strategies such as raised first floors, waterproof materials, and flood-proof barriers should be incorporated.

i. Where first floors are elevated above sidewalk level, access is preferably provided through lobbies located at sidewalk level with interior stairs, ramps, or elevators up to the elevated first floor level, or through exterior steps and ramps within or leading to an elevated forecourt that gives access to an elevated lobby and other first-floor spaces.* For buildings with small front setbacks, exterior ramps and steps should be located *behind* the plane of the streetwall facade, not between the streetwall and the sidewalk.

A two-story-tall pedestrian zone, compatible in scale with a wide street.

** See also Chapter 4 "Sustainability & Resilience".*

Landscaped steps and a ramp, located behind the plane of the streetwall and ascending to an elevated forecourt at the level of the building's first floor.

3.3.2 THE MIDDLE OR "STREETWALL ZONE"

OBJECTIVES

Frame the public realm.

Relate to the scale of smaller neighboring buildings and to Cambridge's architectural heritage.

On tall buildings, the streetwall facade should mediate between the pedestrian and tower zones.

GUIDELINES

a. The streetwall zone generally corresponds to the pedestrian's cone of vision.
- In Cambridge, the top of the streetwall zone generally ranges from approximately 30 feet to 60 feet above sidewalk level.

b. In new buildings in well-developed areas of the city, streetwall zone height depends on the character and width of the street (generally equal to or somewhat less than the street's facade-to-facade width), and on the heights and designs of nearby existing buildings. In areas of the city that are in transition, its height should act as a precedent for the anticipated future character of the street.
- On a wide street or broad open space, taller streetwalls are generally appropriate.
- On narrower streets, lower streetwalls are generally appropriate.
- Taller streetwalls may be appropriate on corridor streets and in squares.

c. The streetwall should be generally continuous and parallel to the street it faces. Curved or angled shapes in plan that are at odds with the configuration of the street should generally be avoided.

The articulation of the streetwall by bay windows and other changes in plane and by changes in color and textures strengthens the building's relationship to its neighbors.

d. Complement the facades of nearby buildings, with attention to detail, proportion, and fenestration patterns.*

e. The streetwall facade should have a primary plane to which recessed and projecting elements like bay windows, balconies, deeply set windows, exterior trim, cornices and string courses are added.

f. Consider providing elements that give a vertical grain to streetwall facades such as vertically proportioned windows and multi-floor tall bay windows.

** See also sections 3.4 "Facade Composition" and 3.5 "Architectural Details, Materials, Color, and Finishes"*

Enrich facades with bay windows, changes in plane, and varied materials.

Enrich the facade with the color and scale of cladding materials and with unique details.

3.3.3 THE "TOWER ZONE"

OBJECTIVES

Reduce large buildings' sense of bulk, especially that of mid-rise buildings in lower scaled contexts and of high-rise buildings.

Define space at a larger scale than the streetwall.

Create landmarks at significant locations in the public realm.

Minimize visual and microclimate (e.g.. sun, wind) impacts on the public realm and neighbors.

Minimize impacts on the night sky.

GUIDELINES

a. Tower facades and massing should generally emphasize slender vertical proportions, with vertically repetitive facade designs. Cantilevers larger than balconies should generally be avoided.

b. Consider providing different facade designs on towers' different sides in response to views from the building, solar orientation, and distant views of the building as an urban landmark.

Detail, articulated massing, and three dimensional relief in the design of towers enrich the public realm. Vertically grained facades help mitigate a sense of bulk.

c. Consider breaking up the massing and facades of large buildings into smaller elements, and arranging them to respond to view axes along streets or paths, to mark significant intersections, to frame large open spaces, and to relate to smaller neighboring buildings.

d. Develop the patterns created by the locations of window openings, the depth of fenestration relative to the wall surface, mullion patterns, operable vs. inoperable windows, spandrel panels, infill panels, trim, balconies, and other details and three-dimensional elements, and the colors and textures of materials to create visually rich facades.

By asymmetrically combining a vertical tower element and a lower streetwall element, and by the use of different colors and materials for different portions of its massing, the building responds to the intersection, frames the street, and reduces the sense of bulkiness that its height and breadth might otherwise have produced.

e. Follow dark-sky and bird-safe principles in facade design and specifications. Avoid up-lighting. Avoid exterior lighting above the third floor level.

The vertical grain of the tower's facade breaks up the building's bulk and provides visual variety when seen obliquely.

3.3.4 THE "BUILDING TOP" AND ROOFSCAPE

OBJECTIVES

Contribute to the building's expressive identity as seen from a distance. Add visual interest to the city's roofscape.

Mitigate the scale of large buildings.

Minimize excessive shading of neighboring buildings and open spaces.

GUIDELINES

a. Give special consideration to the design of top floor facades, particularly in residential neighborhoods, where existing buildings often have intricate massing, roof lines, or parapet walls.

b. Distinct building tops may range from simple cornices, to occupiable volumes distinguished by string courses or changes in material, to stepped-back top floors, to repetitive or irregular groups of smaller elements.






Stepbacks, dormers, terraces, balconies, sloped roofs, and irregular massings can provide visual interest and programmatic amenity at building tops, as well as reduce the building's perceived bulk.

c. Consider use of stepped-back top floors to help reduce the building's perceived bulk and height and its potential shading of neighboring buildings and open spaces.

d. Mansard roofs should slope inward from the plane of the wall below, not overhang beyond it.

e. Multi-floor tops, irregular massing, and distinctive forms and roof shapes can contribute to the building's identity and visual interest.

f. Consider providing rooftop terraces and gardens to add visual interest to the tops of buildings and provide outdoor spaces for residents.

g. Consider light colored roofs, vegetated roofs, "blue" roofs, and "purple" roofs to reduce the urban heat island effect and to reduce storm-water runoff.*

h. Consider photovoltaic arrays, or bio-solar systems, or make provisions for their installation in the future.

i. Mechanical equipment should be visually screened when it is visible from the ground, and acoustically screened as appropriate to the context.

j. Mechanical screening should be compatible in appearance with the facades below.

** See also Chapter 4 "Sustainability & Resilience".*

Distinct building tops break down the scale of tall buildings, contribute visual interest to the public realm, and reinforce the building's identity.

Rooftop and upper floor terraces can be gathering places and provide opportunities for gardening.

3.3.5 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE FACADE ZONES

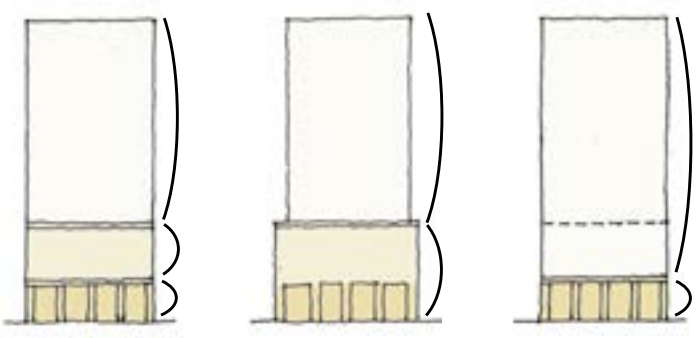
OBJECTIVES

In well-developed neighborhoods and streets, respond to the scale of the existing buildings.

In neighborhoods and streets that are in transition, create precedents for the anticipated scale of their future buildings and the character of their public realms.

GUIDELINES

a. For tall buildings in relatively low contexts, a wide variety of strategies may be appropriate to distinguish the streetwall zone from the tower zone, depending on program and context.
- Different materials and colors.
- Different window-to-wall ratios.
- Different proportions of windows and other facade elements.
- Different mullion patterns in windows.
- String courses or projecting cornices that divide the two zones.
- Stepping all or portions of the tower's front facade back from the plane of the streetwall facade to emphasize horizontal continuity between the streetwalls of the existing buildings and the new building.
- Expressing either the streetwall or tower as composed of smaller elements.



For tall buildings, a variety of relationships between the facade zones may be appropriate, depending on the design of neighboring buildings and the character of the street.

Setback towers create upper level roof terraces. Distinct streetwall zones relate to lower scaled neighbors.

b. In areas consisting of primarily tall buildings and without a consistent streetwall height, a distinct streetwall zone may be unnecessary.

c. In locations where vertical emphasis would enhance a unique sense of place, consider continuing a portion of the tower facade to grade either in the plane of the streetwall or set back.

In some contexts, a distinction between the facade's streetwall and tower zones may be unnecessary. In these examples, the facade's vertical proportions reduces the building's sense of bulk.

The continuation of a portion of the tower facade through the streetwall zone creates a welcome point of vertical emphasis in the streetscape.

The streetwall zone of tall buildings expressed as a group of discrete volumes that relate in height and width to the dimensions of smaller nearby buildings.

d. For low-rise and mid-rise buildings with first floor active uses, transparent ground floors, the character of shopfront fenestration systems, and contrasting first floor materials create strong distinctions between the pedestrian zone and the street wall zone.

e. For low-rise and mid-rise buildings without active uses on their first floors, relatively subtle distinctions between the pedestrian zone and the streetwall zone may be appropriate.

- Strategies include changes in materials, string courses or other types of trim, distinct window arrangements, and porches and other ways of celebrating building entrances.

Distinctions between the first floor pedestrian zone and the upper floor streetwall zone in low rise buildings, created by differences in materials, string courses, porches, and fenestration.

3.4 FACADE COMPOSITION

OBJECTIVES

Improve how new buildings fit in with neighbors.

Contribute to the beauty of the public realm.

Enrich the pedestrian experience.

GUIDELINES

a. Amongst the design tools to enrich facades and relate them to those of neighboring buildings, designers should consider:

- Window-to-wall ratios.
- The articulation of long facades.
- The use of rhythmic facades.
- The use of proportional systems to organize windows and other features.
- The celebration of building entrances.
- The use of vertically grained facades.
- Asymmetrical compositions in response to context.
- Distinctions between front and side facades.
- The celebration of significant building corners.

The civic-scaled order of the facade gives it an appropriate urban presence for a primary street. The domestically scaled variety enriches the public realm.

Its rich streetwall facade and varied ground floor retail shopfronts give this mixed-use building an appealing street presence. The vertical interaction between the pedimented residential entrances and the blank wall above them gives the entrances visual prominence and breaks up the length of the facade.

Human scaled and proportioned windows, recessed and projecting facade elements, a low base that relates to the height of the front yard plantings, and a welcoming entrance give this large building a residential scale.

3.4.1 WINDOWS

OBJECTIVES

Create a pedestrian-friendly appearance by providing transparency to active ground floor uses.

Create a sense of connection between residential units and the outdoors.

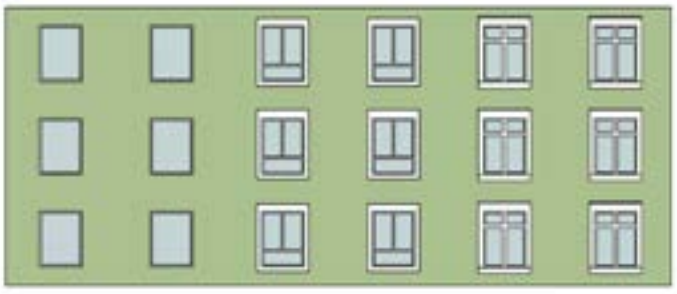
Attempt to maintain the privacy of residents and neighbors.

Achieve requisite building energy performance.

GUIDELINES

a. Windows should be designed and arranged to create a well-composed facade, provide the greatest benefit for the building's residents, and minimize impact on neighbors.

b. In facades with low window-to-wall ratios, use strategies such as grouped windows, spandrel or other types of blank panels, expressed window heads, jambs, sills; and other types of trim to expand the presence of the windows on the facade.



In this example, all the window openings have the same dimensions, but those in the leftmost bays seem undersized. As a result of their detail and trim, the center and right hand windows appear large enough to achieve a harmonious relationship with the solid wall surface around them.

When window-to-wall ratios are low, consider grouping windows and other elements to create larger facade figures.

Example of the window-to-wall ratio of a residential building with non-residential uses in the first floor.

Example of the window-to-wall ratio of a residential building with first-floor dwelling units.

3.4.2 LONG FACADES

OBJECTIVE

Enhance the compatibility of large multifamily buildings with smaller scaled neighbors.

GUIDELINES

a. Where new buildings present long facades to streets framed by smaller scaled existing buildings, provide variety and create a sense of intermediate scale by incorporating features such as changes in color or material, recesses, projections, balconies, bay windows, porticoes, columns, pilasters, piers, or expressed structural bays.

b. Front facades of buildings in residential neighborhoods with frontages longer than 150 feet should generally be divided by forecourts or vertical recesses or projections.

A stepped-back top floor, changes in facade plane, varied facade treatments, a recessed entry forecourt, and bay windows help the long street-facing facade of the new building relate to the smaller scale and varied facade designs of its existing neighbors.

The vertically aligned balconies and recessed vertical notches divide this long facade into smaller scaled components.

The forecourt, bay windows and other changes in plane, and different materials and colors help mitigate the length of this building's facade.

3.4.3 RHYTHMIC FACADES

OBJECTIVES

Create visual harmony and a sense of order and predictability to the streetscape.

Help break down larger buildings into smaller, more relatable segments.

GUIDELINES

a. Consider treating broad streetwall and tower facades as a series of detailed repetitive bays comprised of piers, pilasters, windows or groups of windows, projecting features, bay windows, balconies, or other such elements.







Facades composed of rhythmic bays: framing and enriching the spaces of the public realm while responding to both civic scale and the scale of the individual.

3.4.4 PROPORTIONAL SYSTEMS AND REGULATING LINES

OBJECTIVE

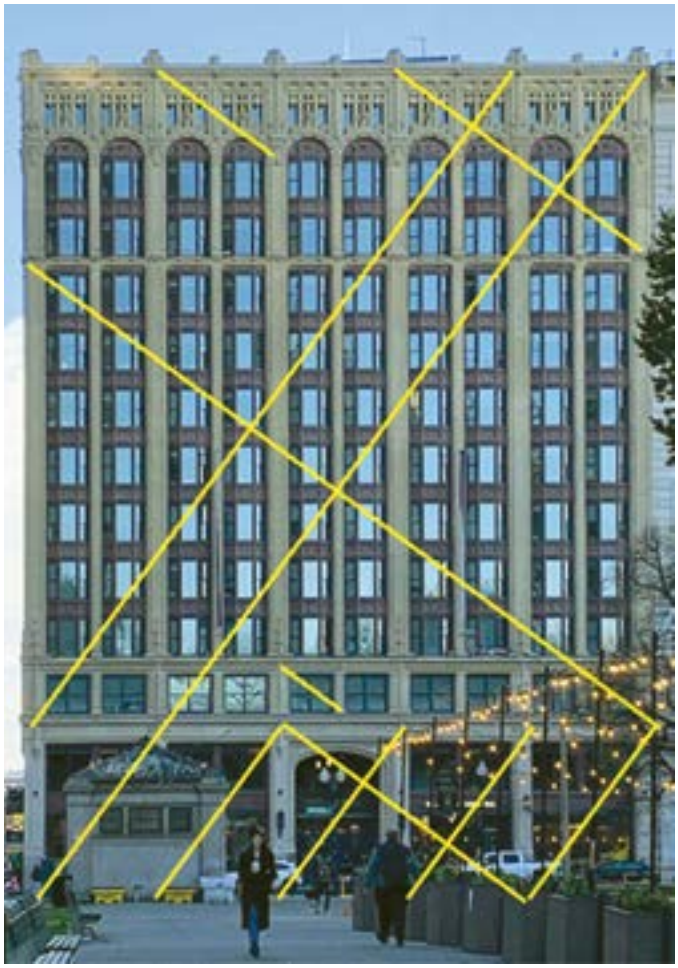
Celebrate the public realm with facades of beauty and organizational harmony.

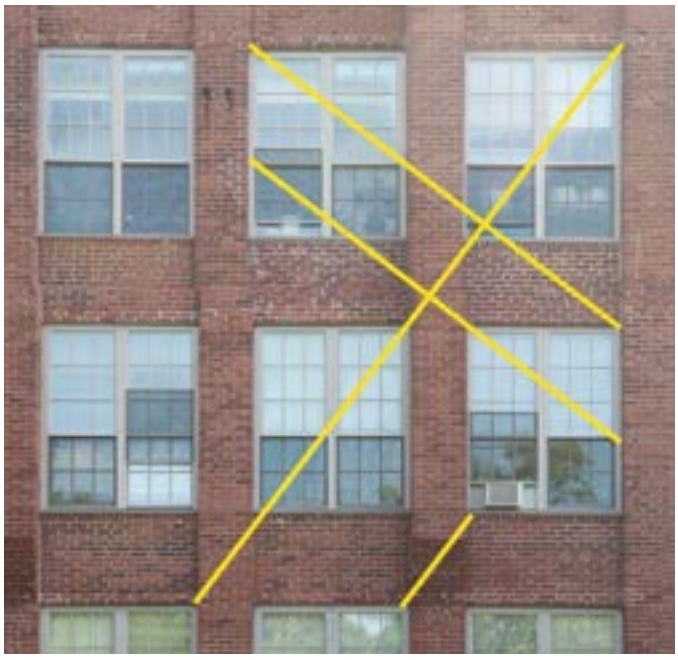
GUIDELINES

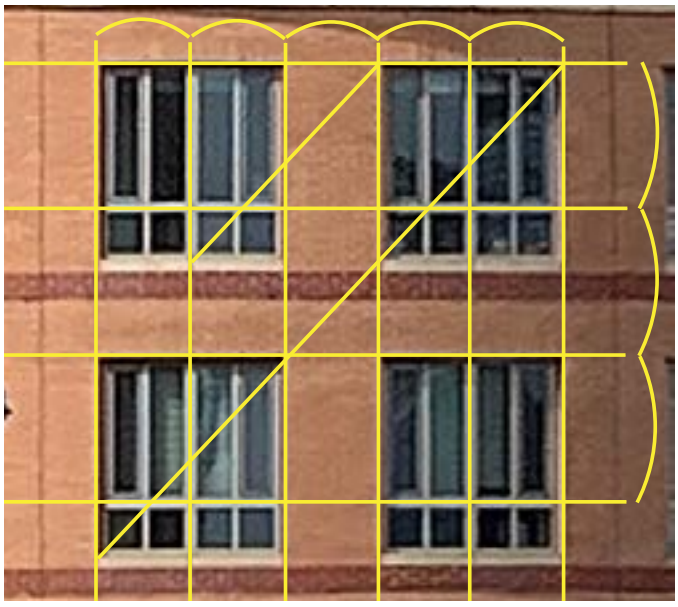
a. Consider the use of proportional systems and regulating lines to guide facade composition.

b. Use consistent proportions to knit elements such as expressed structural bays, windows and their subdivisions, horizontal and vertical facade zones, and projections and recesses together into a harmonious whole.

c. Consider the use of regulating lines to align facade elements and to establish rhythms in facade composition.







The use of consistent proportions and a network of regulating lines to locate and dimension structural bays, window and door openings, pier widths, spandrel heights, and mullion patterns can contribute to harmoniously designed facades.

3.4.5 RESIDENTIAL ENTRANCES

OBJECTIVES

Contribute to the building's identity.

Create a welcoming presence on the street.

Foster a sense of community for the building's residents.

GUIDELINES

a. When possible, provide individual entrances to ground level units.

b. Emphasize entrances with canopies, stoops, materials, and unique details.

c. Where possible, provide gathering places and places to sit.

Residential entrances should contribute to the building's sense of identity and, where possible, provide a space for meeting and interaction between residents.

3.4.6 BUILDING FRONTS VS. SIDES

OBJECTIVES

Create coherent urban blocks by reinforcing the distinctions between the block's outer perimeter—its face to the public realm—and its more private interior spaces.

At the corners of blocks, reinforce the distinct character of each adjacent street or open space.

GUIDELINES

a. For buildings on corner lots:
- Consider employing distinct facade and massing strategies on building fronts that face the adjoining streets.
- If possible, provide building entrances on both streets.

b. For buildings whose sides face adjacent buildings, consider different treatments for their front and side elevations. Possibilities include the use of contrasting materials or colors; the presence vs. absence of projecting bay windows; different types of trim and details; and different window to wall ratios, and types, sizes, and proportions of fenestration.

On corner sites, distinct treatments of front and side facades reinforce the different characters of the adjoining primary and secondary streets.

Employing distinct treatments on street-facing facades emphasizes the civic significance of the public street in contrast to private spaces in the block's interior.

3.4.7 SIGNIFICANT CORNERS

OBJECTIVE

Celebrate significant intersections as memorable nodes in Cambridge's pattern of streets and other open spaces.

GUIDELINES

a. Consider unique massing and facade strategies at corners of blocks.

b. Where possible, provide corner entrances to ground floor retail spaces.

Unique architectural forms at the corners of blocks in response to significant intersections and squares.

3.5 FACADES: ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS, MATERIALS, COLOR, AND FINISHES

OBJECTIVES

Create an engaging, coherent, lively, and visually rich public realm.

Complement neighborhood character.

Convey a sense of quality and of investment in the future of Cambridge.

Enhance building energy performance.

GUIDELINES

a. Add interesting details to the building facade and entrances, including bay windows, balconies, sun shades, terraces, and dormers.

b. Include design details such as lintels, sills, and other window trim, railings, string courses, cornices, and rake and eave details.

c. Visually enrich glazed areas with carefully considered mullion and muntin patterns and profiles, operable windows, window trim, and sun-shading devices.

d. Preferably design bay windows with windows on the sides as well as front facing.

e. Emphasize building entrances, corners, step-backs, top floors, and roofscapes with a focus on their design and details.

f. Scale, materials, and level of detail should be compatible with the context.

g. Window-to-wall ratios and the proportions and rhythms of doors and windows should preferably relate to those of the neighbors on the street.

h. Use materials that are warm, inviting, and compatible in color, finish, and texture with surrounding buildings and the neighborhood context.

Facade elements such as trellises, stoops, bay windows, and dormers, as well as the details of trim and cornices, can relate new buildings with their existing contexts.

i. Use high-quality and durable construction materials with proven records of long life-cycles and low environmental impacts.
   - Natural and durable materials such as brick, concrete masonry, and stone are preferred.
   - Other optional materials include pre-manufactured panels of cementitious, concrete, metal, or composite materials.

j. Avoid low-quality materials, such as:
   - Thin cementitious panels, especially large panels and large areas of them.
   - Exterior insulation and finish systems (EIFS).

k. Avoid:
   - Mirrored materials.
   - Colored glazing.

l. Light colors are encouraged to minimize heat absorption and the consequent heat load on building systems, and to minimize the urban heat island effect.

m. Vision glass should be clear, with high transparency and low reflectivity. Low iron glass is preferred for ground floor retail and common spaces.

n. For residential units, strive for divided light or multiple pane windows. In general, avoid large single-light windows.

o. In general, avoid horizontal strip windows.

p. Take measures to minimize bird collisions with glazing. Consider a wide range of high- and low-tech solutions as appropriate to the specific installation, such as:
   - Bird-safe materials.
   - Glass coatings visible to birds, but not to human vision.
   - Frit patterns.
   - Limiting the size of glazing units.
   - Shading devices, screens, and recessed balconies.

q. Panelized cladding systems should be constructed of durable and dimensionally stable materials, and assembled with elegant details. Joints should be precise and consistent and arranged in a pattern that complements the layout of openings and enriches the pattern of the facade. Large panels are discouraged.

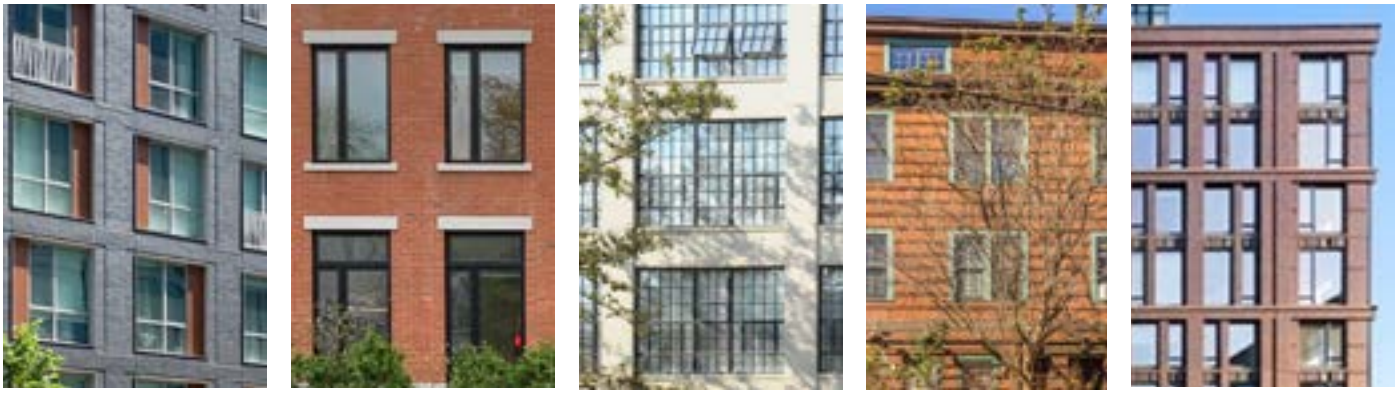
r. Consider vegetated facade systems.

s. Cornices should generally be crisp and slim. Avoid excessively large or boxy profiles.

t. Consider providing either full depth or "juliette" balconies.




A building's windows; their construction details; subdividing mullions; framing elements at their heads, jambs, sills, and spandrel panels; and other associated trim and framing elements organize the facade and offer visual interest to the public.



A wide variety of fenestration types and cladding materials can organize and enliven the facade.

Where possible, provide balconies, both as amenities for residents and to enliven the facade.

Facades with low window-to-wall ratios depend on framing elements, trim, subtle three dimensional relief, shading elements, and the details and textures of cladding materials for visual interest.

Cornices should be crisp and slim.

Panelized cladding systems should be elegantly detailed and proportioned.








A wide variety of materials and details are compatible with Cambridge's existing buildings. The scale of joint patterns, textures, the proportions of elements, construction details, and colors should all contribute to the harmony of a new building with its context.




Sunshades can provide detail and shadow, in addition to preventing excessive solar gain.

3.6 HISTORICAL BUILDINGS

OBJECTIVE

Respond to Cambridge's architectural heritage and character by sensitively adapting and adding to existing historical buildings that are parts of new multifamily projects.

GUIDELINES

a. Use best practices in restoration and maintaining significant historic structures. Consultation with the Cambridge Historical Commission is required for developments in Historic and Neighborhood Conservation Districts and is recommended elsewhere.

b. In renovating an existing architecturally or historically significant building, or where original materials or components need to be replaced, match architectural features and materials. New additions may use substitute materials compatible with the architecture and historic character of the building and district.

c. Where new units are proposed on an existing lot shared with a historic structure, the new building should distinguish itself as new construction but may relate in its materials, scale, proportions, form, or architectural articulation.

Additions to historical buildings that are distinct from the original structure yet also compatible with it.

3.7 PARKING, UTILITIES, AND SERVICE ELEMENTS

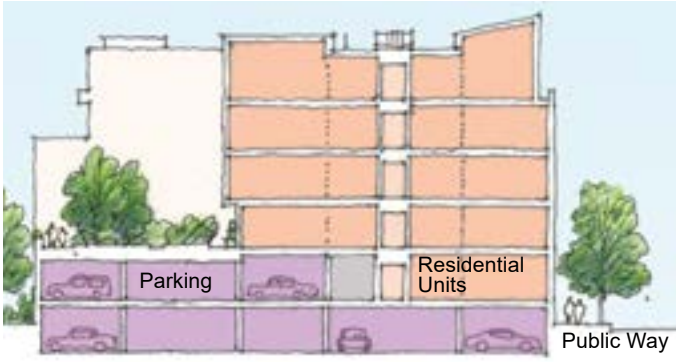
OBJECTIVE

Minimize the impact of parking, service elements, and utilities on the public realm and on the experience of residents.

GUIDELINES

a. Wherever possible, wrap structured parking with residential units or active uses on street facades.

b. Where parking spaces are immediately behind the ground floor street facade or facing neighbors, screen the parking with architectural elements that provide depth and visual interest, such as decorative louvers, green walls, artwork, or grilles. Avoid wire mesh screening.



Separate ground level parking and service spaces from the public realm and screen it from residential units

c. Consider providing landscaped terraces to cover structured parking.

d. Design parking entries, loading bays, trash/recycling storage areas, and servicing entrances as integral components of building facades.

- Use architectural doors, or louvers that complement the building's facade design.
- Loading dock doors should remain closed when vehicles are not actively entering or exiting.

e. Avoid blank walls on ground floor facades. Where spaces such as utility rooms, fire control centers, etc., require windowless walls, other means of creating visual interest should be provided, such as changes in plane, materials, surface textures, details, and plantings.

f. Organize through-wall vents, rooftop overflow scuppers, fire department connections and signage, meters, service doors, and other functional features as intentional elements of the facade's composition.

Provide visually appealing treatments of blank walls, and of doorways and ventilation for utility spaces.

Through-wall vents located in coordination with window openings.

3.8 BUILDING INTERIORS

OBJECTIVE

Multifamily projects should serve the needs of their residents while contributing to the character of the neighborhood.

GUIDELINES

a. Provide a mix of unit types and sizes that will support and contribute to the diversity of housing in the neighborhood. The inclusion of a significant number of units that are suitable for families with children is preferred except in special cases where housing will serve populations with different housing needs, such as housing for seniors.

b. Consider one or more of the following strategies to make interior living spaces more useful and comfortable:

- Include adequate interior living space, common storage, and access to natural light and air.
- Size bedrooms to accommodate standard bedroom furniture and provide access to natural light.
- Provide ample counter space and storage in kitchens.
- Provide access to laundry facilities in residential units or elsewhere in the development.

Provide flexible common spaces, suitable for large gatherings, and smaller more intimate ones.

c. In larger projects, provide interior common spaces for shared amenities, services and facilities such as storage, recreation and gathering space, or in larger buildings areas that can serve residents in the event of extreme weather or power outages. Consider providing amenities that serve the broader community.

d. Consider providing common spaces at ground level and visually connecting them to outdoor spaces on building frontages or block interiors.

e. Consider providing common spaces at upper levels, taking advantage of rooftop terraces for views.

f. Use operable windows for residential units and common spaces to provide passive ventilation and improve indoor air quality.

g. Provide convenient long-term bicycle parking.

Connect common spaces to the outdoors.

4. SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT DESIGN

Follow the City's overall sustainable development practices in the design of multifamily residential projects. Maximize energy efficiency and performance to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and be resilient to the effects of climate change.

The City has taken significant steps to address the energy and fossil-fuel impacts from development and redevelopment. For example, the City's Fossil Fuel Free Ordinance adopted in 2024 requires new buildings and major renovation projects to be fossil fuel free. These guidelines supplement the City's zoning and sustainability requirements and align with broader city planning and policies, such as the "Net Zero Action Plan" and the "Resilient Cambridge: Climate Change Preparedness and Resilience Plan."

4.1 SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

OBJECTIVE

Maximize energy efficiency and minimize health impacts on residents and the public*

GUIDELINES

a. Employ renewable and low-carbon energy features where feasible, such as solar photovoltaic systems, solar heating systems, or geothermal heating and cooling systems.

b. Consider operational and embodied energy in material selection.

c. Select and design building systems and equipment within units to facilitate future conversion to all-renewable energy systems.

d. Consider embodied carbon in the selection of construction materials. Where possible, use and integrate recycled content materials without compromising durability and material quality.

e. Select materials with products certified to be non-toxic, that are low in volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions, that are recycled and/or renewable. Consider product life-cycles.

f. On large projects, consider providing "shelter-in-place" facilities that are passively protected from flooding and extreme heat and are suitable as shelter during emergencies. Consider providing emergency medical and other supplies, back-up electric power for critical loads, and back-up communications capacity.

** For additional information related to sustainable building and design standards, visit the Office of Sustainability and Zoning & Development websites.*

Provide photovoltaic systems, or allow for their future installation.

4.2 HEAT MITIGATION

OBJECTIVES

Protect residents from excessive heat, both inside residential buildings and on their sites.*

Help reduce the urban heat island effect on the city, including buildings and the public realm.

GUIDELINES

a. Preferably shade open spaces and buildings with trees. Where trees are not feasible, consider the use of shading devices such as canopies, awnings, or pergolas to shade exterior paved areas and/or to reduce solar heat gain on building facades.

b. In site design, building orientation, and facade design, minimize the demand for heating and cooling by considering the effects of solar gain on different sides of the building. Design interior spaces for passive heating, cooling, and ventilation.

c. Provide operable windows, including operable upper sashes or transoms.

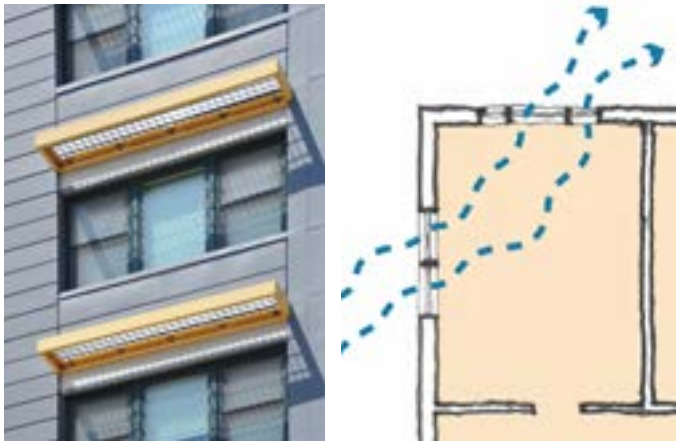
d. Incorporate sun shading devices or shutters with positive ventilation, solar screens, canopies, porches, or brise-soleils to shade strongly sunlit facades.

e. On roofs, exterior walls, and paved surfaces, use materials with high solar reflectivity to minimize heat absorption and localized heat island effect. As an alternative, employ vegetated coverings such as green roofs or green walls.

f. Incorporate strategies to capture, reuse, and filter water on-site through natural features like green roofs and bioswales or mechanical methods like capture tanks.

g. Use vegetation and solar reflective materials to reduce heat absorption. Consider co-benefits of rooftop heat mitigation strategies, such as solar green roofs.

** For additional information related to sustainable building and design standards, visit the Office of Sustainability and Zoning & Development websites.*



Consider sunshading for windows and allow cross-ventilation.

Provide vegetative shading.

Take advantage of rooftops to address stormwater and provide on-site energy sources.

4.3 FLOOD RESILIENCE

OBJECTIVE

Protect residents and building systems from flooding.*

GUIDELINES

a. Use the City's most up-to-date projections for anticipated future flood elevations, including the City's Floodviewer information and dashboard. Seek guidance from the City of Cambridge Department of Public Works (DPW) regarding peak stormwater runoff and on measures to build and protect to the 2070 10% flood level and recover from the 2070 1% flood level.

b. Where front yards are elevated above sidewalk level, use features such as low walls, curbs, hedges, steps, ramps, to create the grade change and provide accessible routes.

c. Avoid locating sensitive uses such as critical building functions, emergency equipment, or residential bedrooms in areas that are at risk of future flooding.

** For additional information related to sustainable building and design standards, visit the Office of Sustainability and Zoning & Development websites.*

Elevate residential spaces and spaces for critical building systems above the anticipated flood level.

d. In buildings with elevated ground floors, consider strategies to provide ready public access to lobbies and other active or community uses on ground floors, such as:

Internal circulation

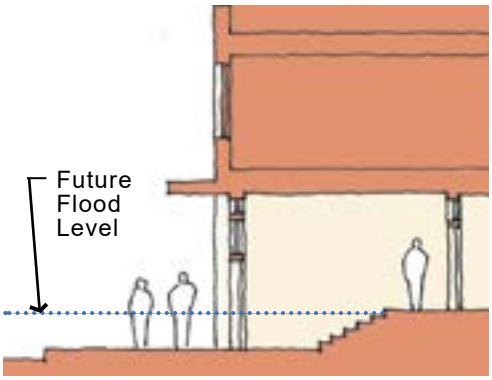
- Locate lobbies and other entrance spaces at sidewalk level. A sidewalk level entry leading to a lobby with internal steps and ramps provides the strongest visual connection between the public realm and the building interior.
- Use steps and ramps or elevators inside lobbies to provide access up to ground floor level and to general building circulation.
- Construct street level lobbies and other spaces with flood-tolerant materials and/or flood-proof exterior walls, and design such spaces to be protected by passive flood barriers.

Elevated sidewalks

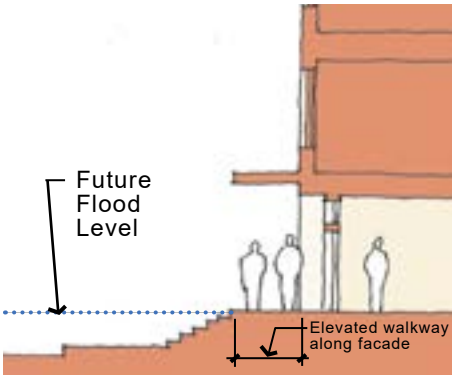
- Provide a secondary elevated sidewalk along the front of the building at first floor level, giving access to multiple unit front doors and accessed from the street level sidewalk by ramps and steps.

Elevated forecourts

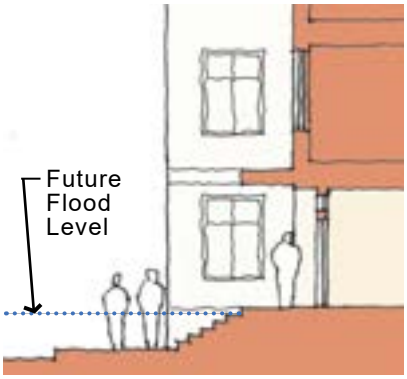
- Use exterior ramps and steps to provide access from sidewalk level up to a forecourt at the same level as the building's elevated ground floor.
- Design ramps and steps as integral parts of the forecourt's landscape and architecture.



First floor elevated above flood level with steps and ramp inside the building's lobby.



Lobby and first floor elevated above flood level with continuous exterior walkway that is accessed by steps and ramps from the sidewalk.



Lobby and first floor elevated above flood level with exterior steps and ramp in the building's forecourt.

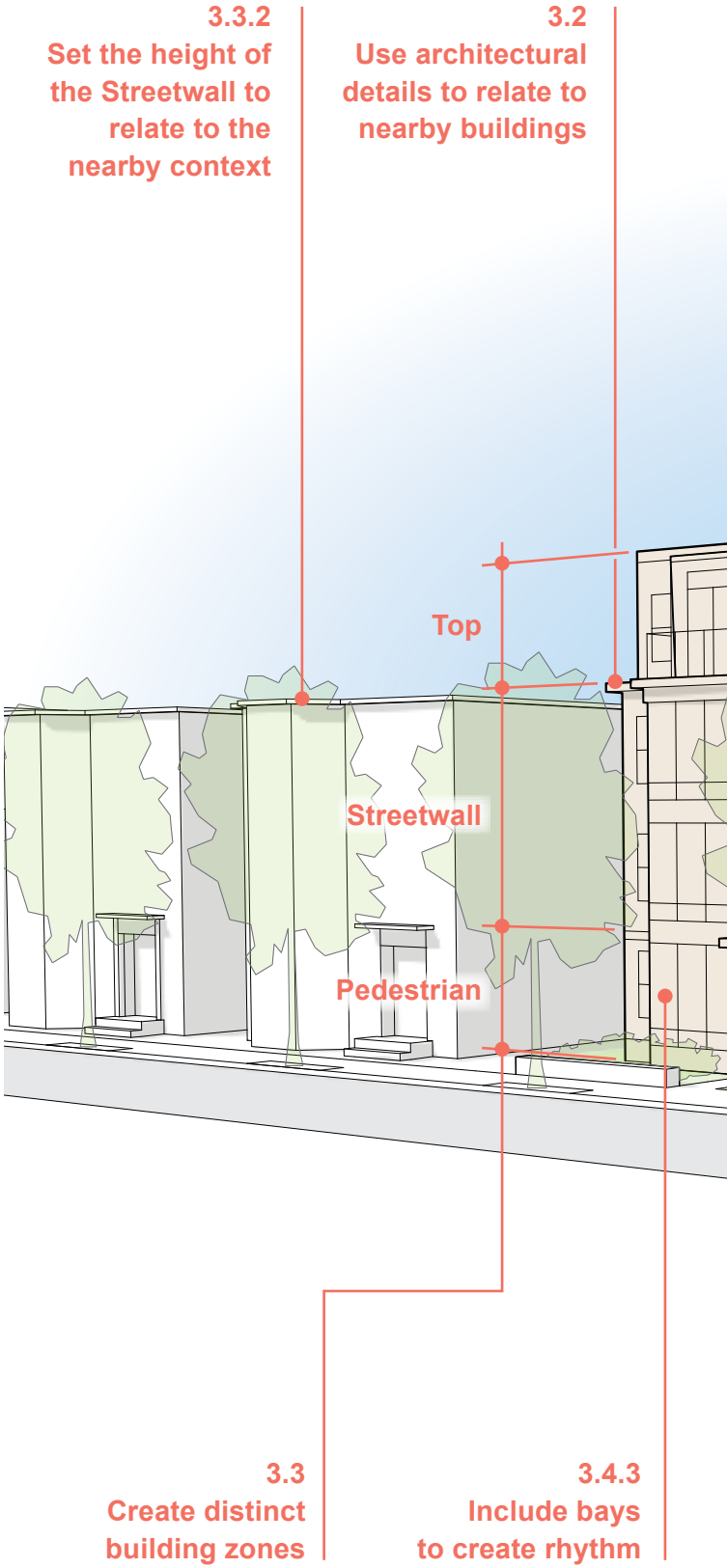
5. PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

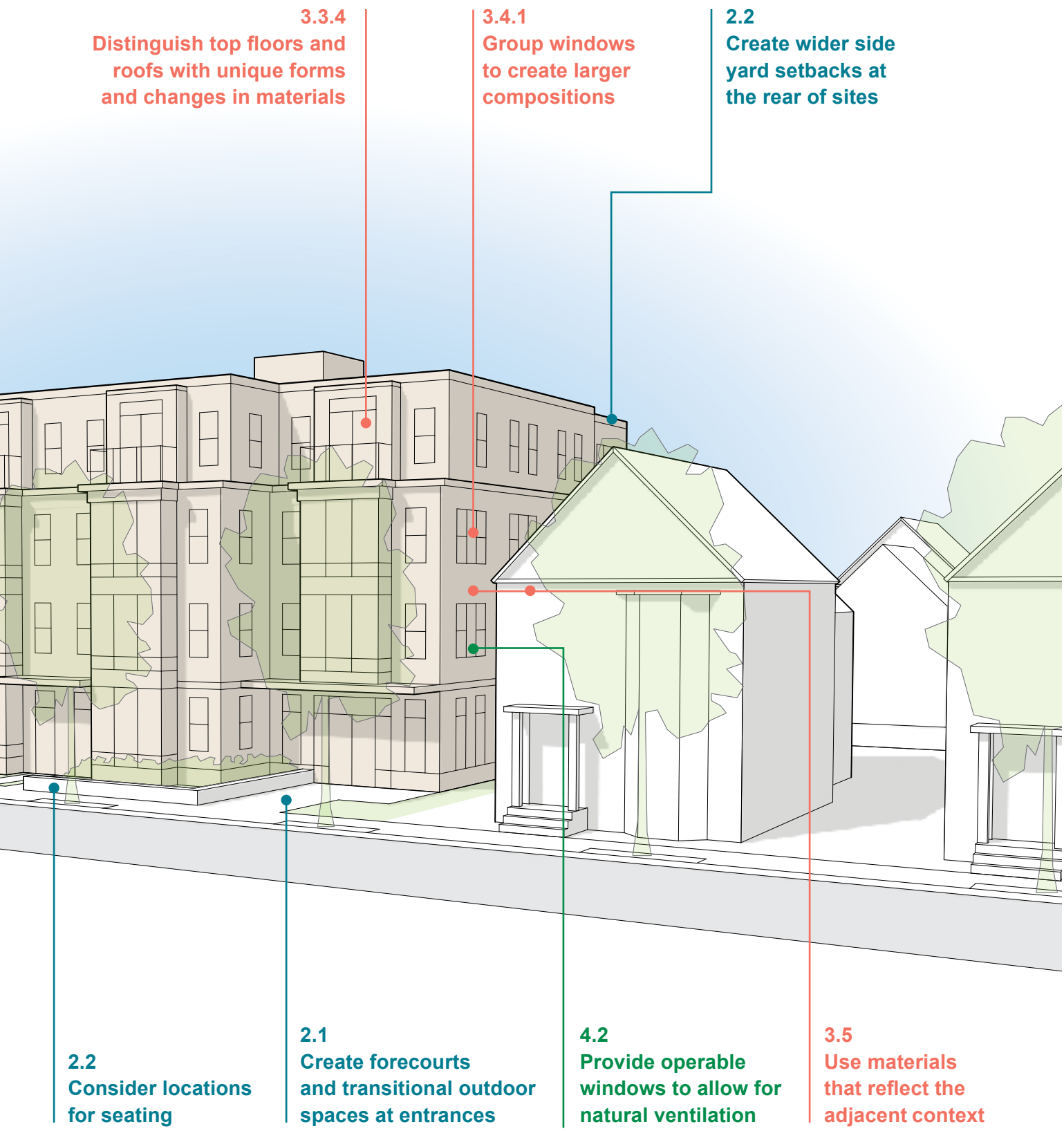
The guidelines and strategies in the previous chapters are intended to ensure that new housing complements and enriches Cambridge's existing neighborhoods. Some of these principles are universal and should be applied to all types of housing in all locations; others are more relevant to specific scales, locations, or contexts. The following chapter provides examples of how the design guidance found in this document can be employed to address different building scales in varied locations. They offer visual illustrations of how proposed developments can best integrate themselves into their surrounding contexts.

Each example has been chosen to represent conditions commonly found throughout Cambridge; however, they aren't intended to depict specific places. They are also not meant to preference a particular style or design language, but rather to depict one possible successful outcome.

5.1 EXAMPLE: 4-STORY BUILDING IN A RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD

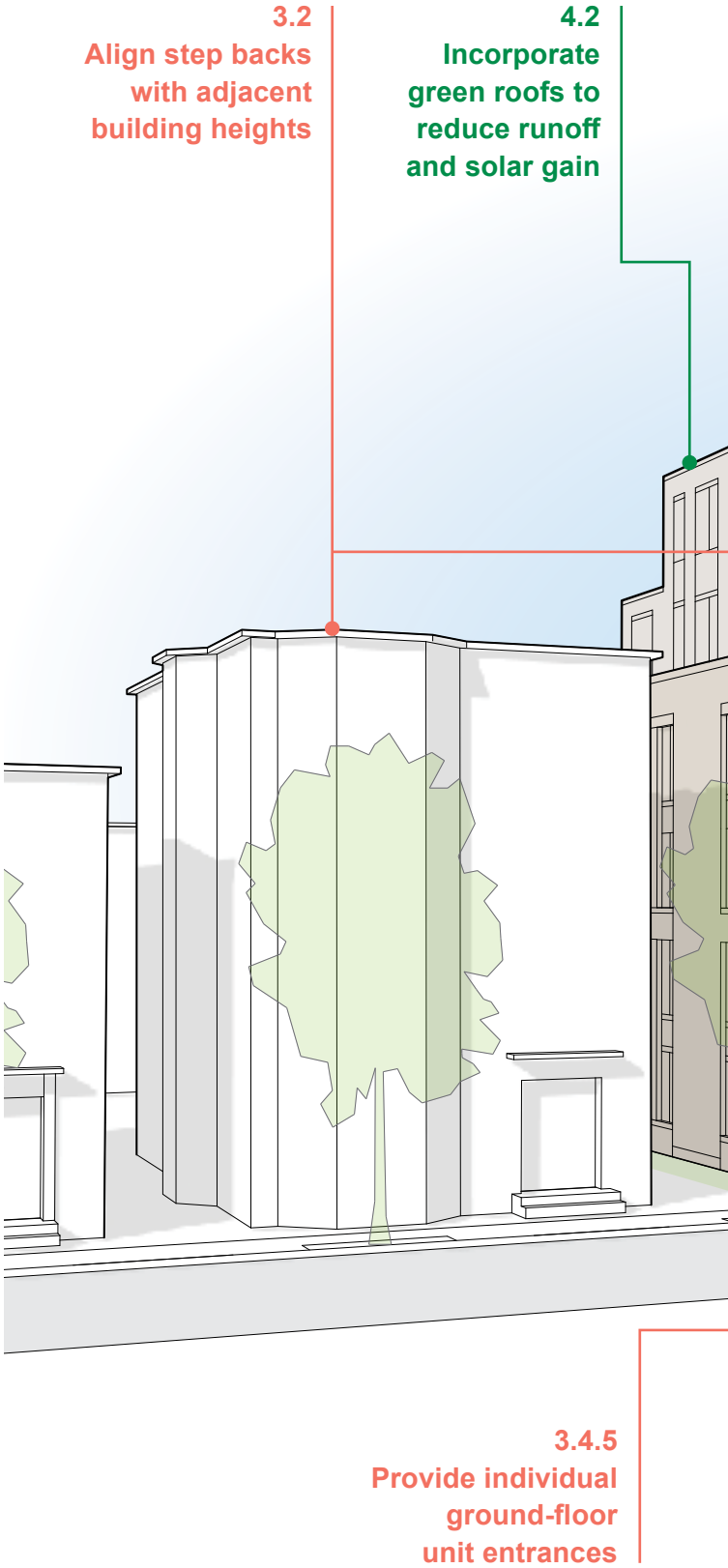
Four-story multifamily buildings are now permitted in all residential districts throughout Cambridge. Since buildings of this height and scale are commonly found throughout the City, new development should take cues from Cambridge's rich existing context regarding massing, materials, and architectural elements. Ground level units should ideally have their own entrances to activate the street.

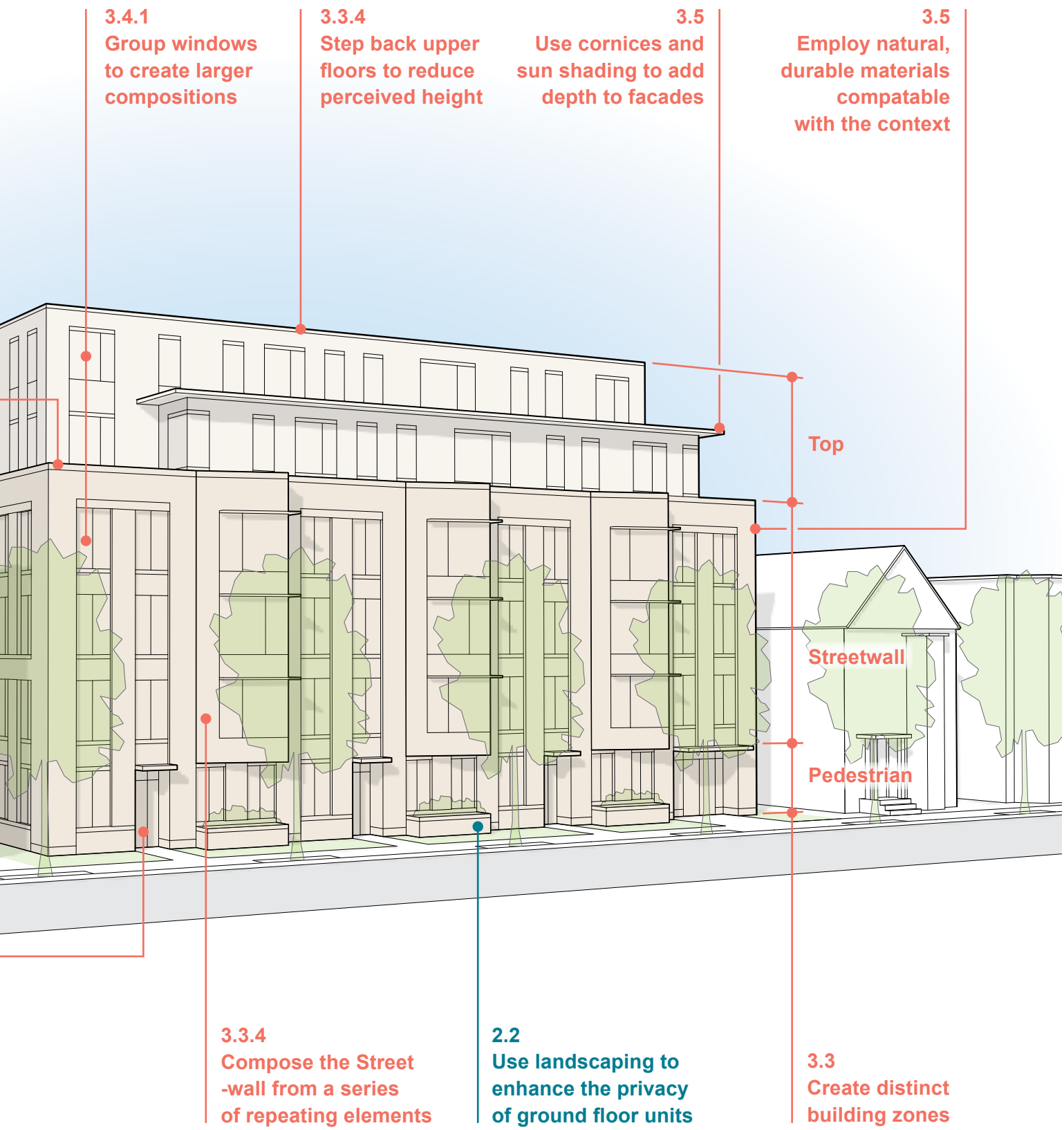



3.3.4
Distinguish top floors and roofs with unique forms and changes in materials
3.4.1
Group windows to create larger compositions
2.2
Create wider side yard setbacks at the rear of sites
2.2
Consider locations for seating
2.1
Create forecourts and transitional outdoor spaces at entrances
4.2
Provide operable windows to allow for natural ventilation
3.5
Use materials that reflect the adjacent context

5.2 EXAMPLE: 6-STORY BUILDING IN A RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD

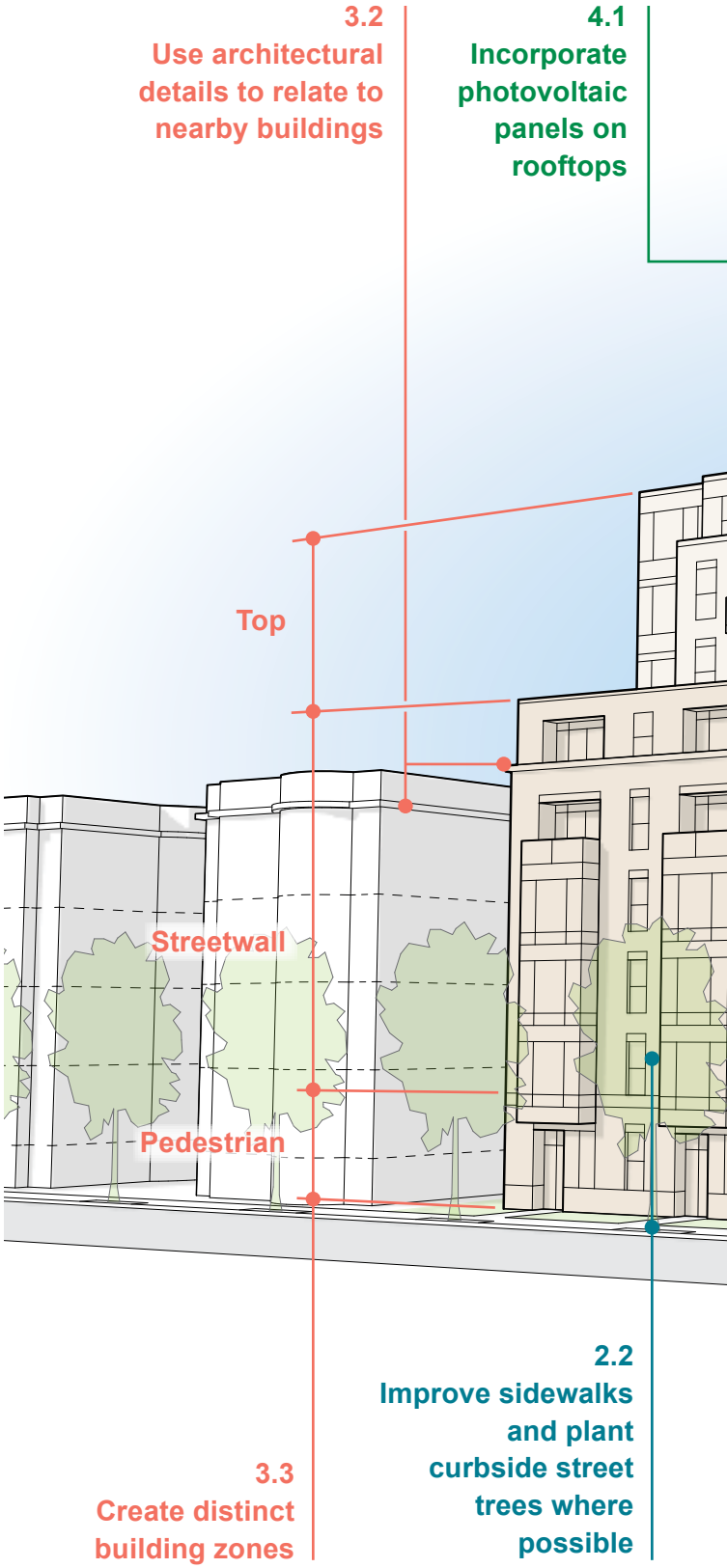
Six-story multifamily buildings are often taller than the surrounding residential fabric, though examples of 5 and 6 story brick apartment buildings can be found in most neighborhoods throughout Cambridge. New development should seek to respond to the existing forms, heights, and rhythms of the context. Upper level stepbacks and material changes can add visual interest and help reduce the perceived height of new buildings.

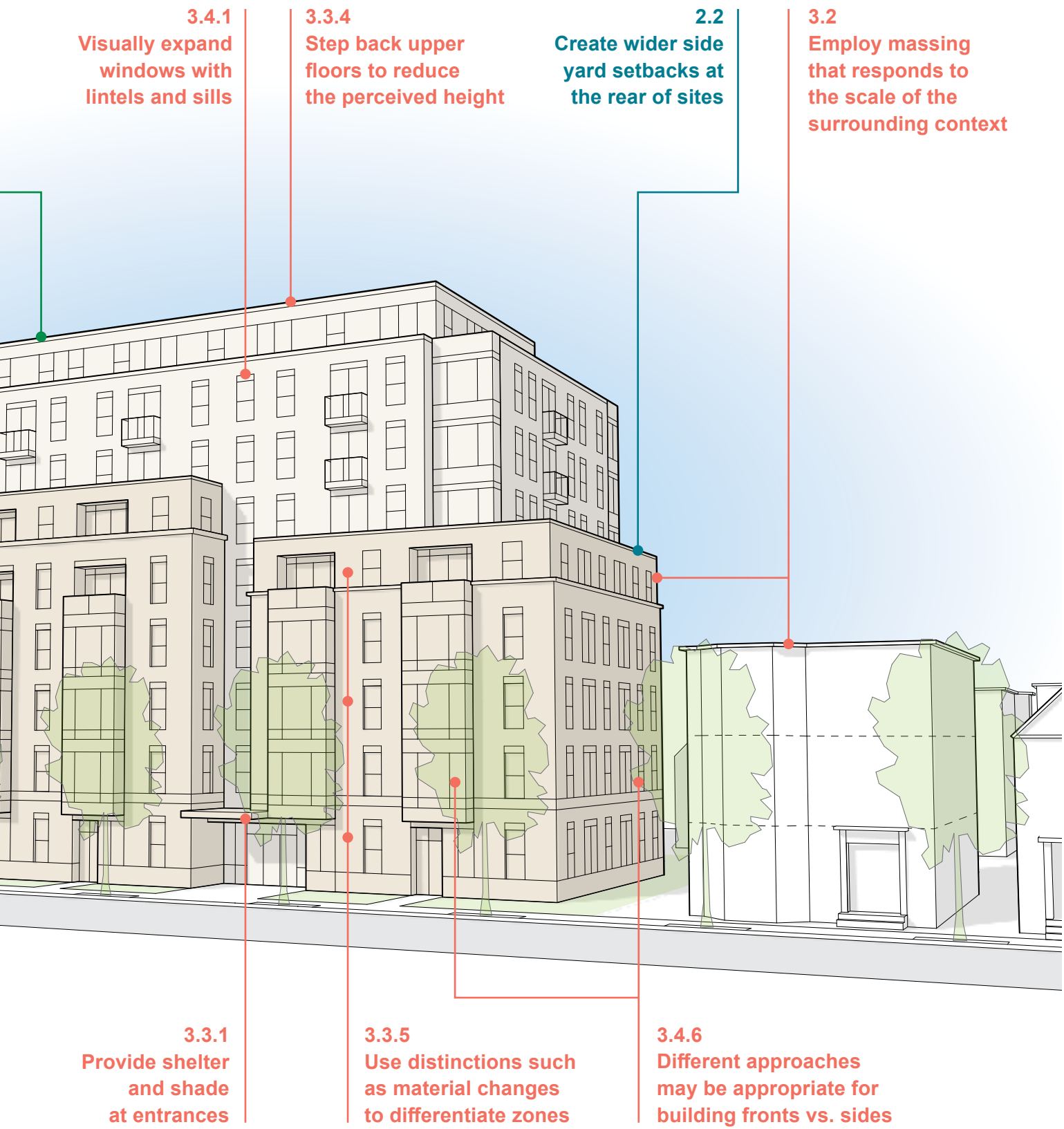



3.4.1
Group windows to create larger compositions
3.3.4
Step back upper floors to reduce perceived height
3.5
Use cornices and sun shading to add depth to facades
3.5
Employ natural, durable materials compatable with the context
Top
Streetwall
Pedestrian
3.3.4
Compose the Street -wall from a series of repeating elements
2.2
Use landscaping to enhance the privacy of ground floor units
3.3
Create distinct building zones

5.3 EXAMPLE: 9-STORY BUILDING IN A RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD

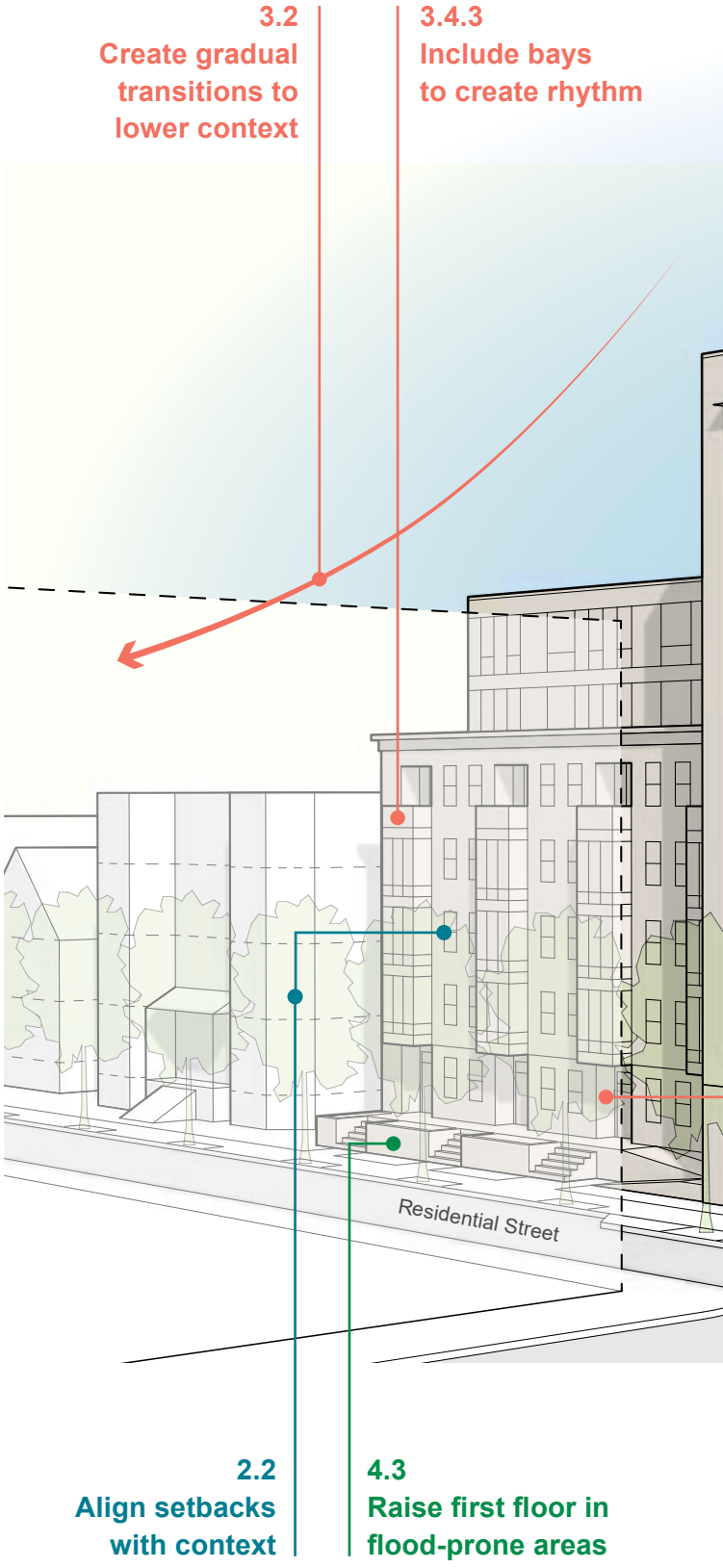
For nine-story multifamily buildings within existing residential neighborhoods, the primary goal is to use massing, facade composition, and material strategies to reduce the perceived height of the new development in relation to its neighbors. Strongly stepping back the upper portion of the building at a height similar to the adjacent context will help it visually recede. The highest level of facade articulation and detail should be concentrated in the Pedestrian and Streetwall Zones to draw focus to these lower sections.

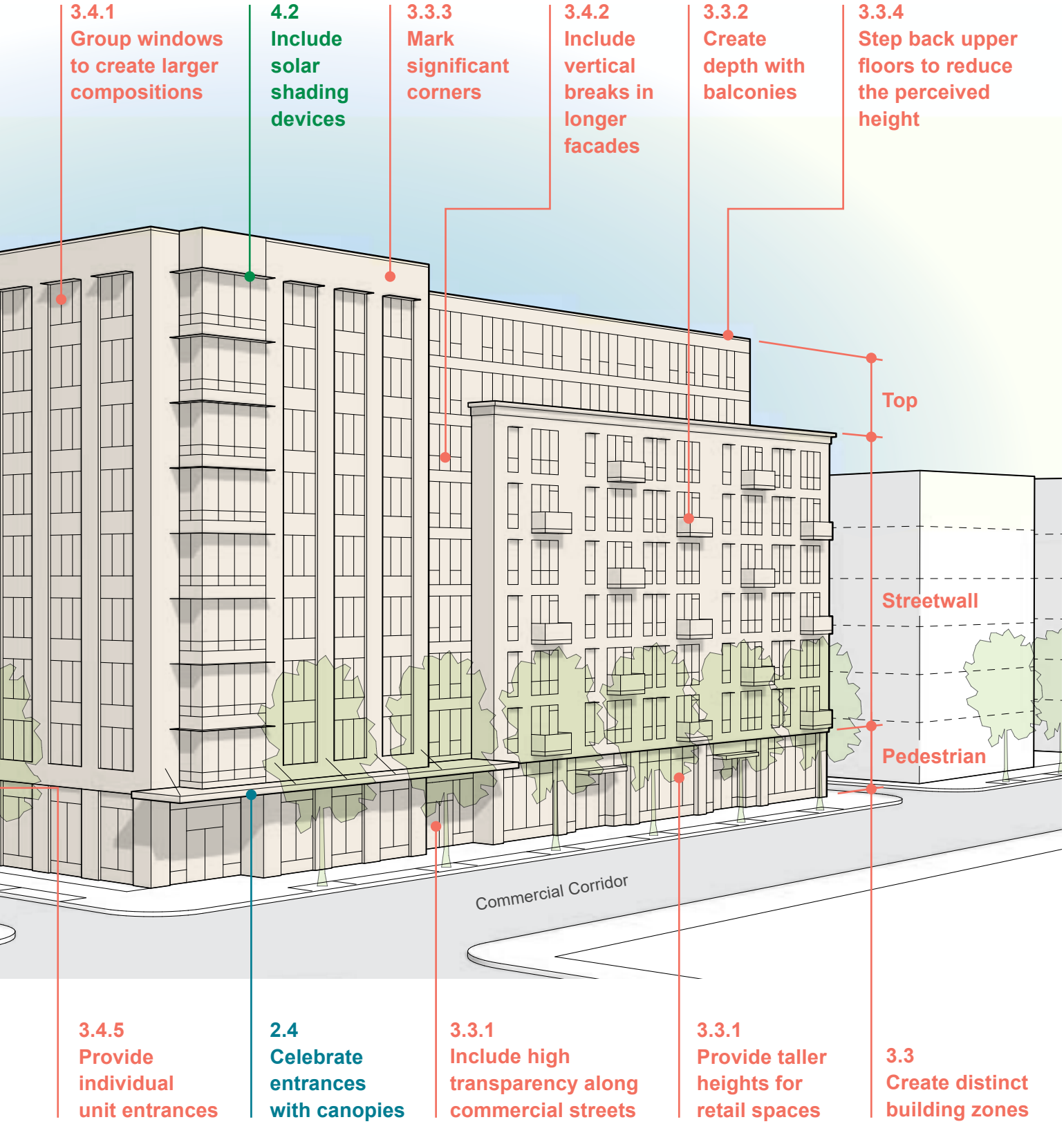



3.4.1
Visually expand windows with lintels and sills
3.3.4
Step back upper floors to reduce the perceived height
2.2
Create wider side yard setbacks at the rear of sites
3.2
Employ massing that responds to the scale of the surrounding context
3.3.1
Provide shelter and shade at entrances
3.3.5
Use distinctions such as material changes to differentiate zones
3.4.6
Different approaches may be appropriate for building fronts vs. sides

5.4 EXAMPLE: 9-STORY BUILDING ON A RETAIL CORRIDOR

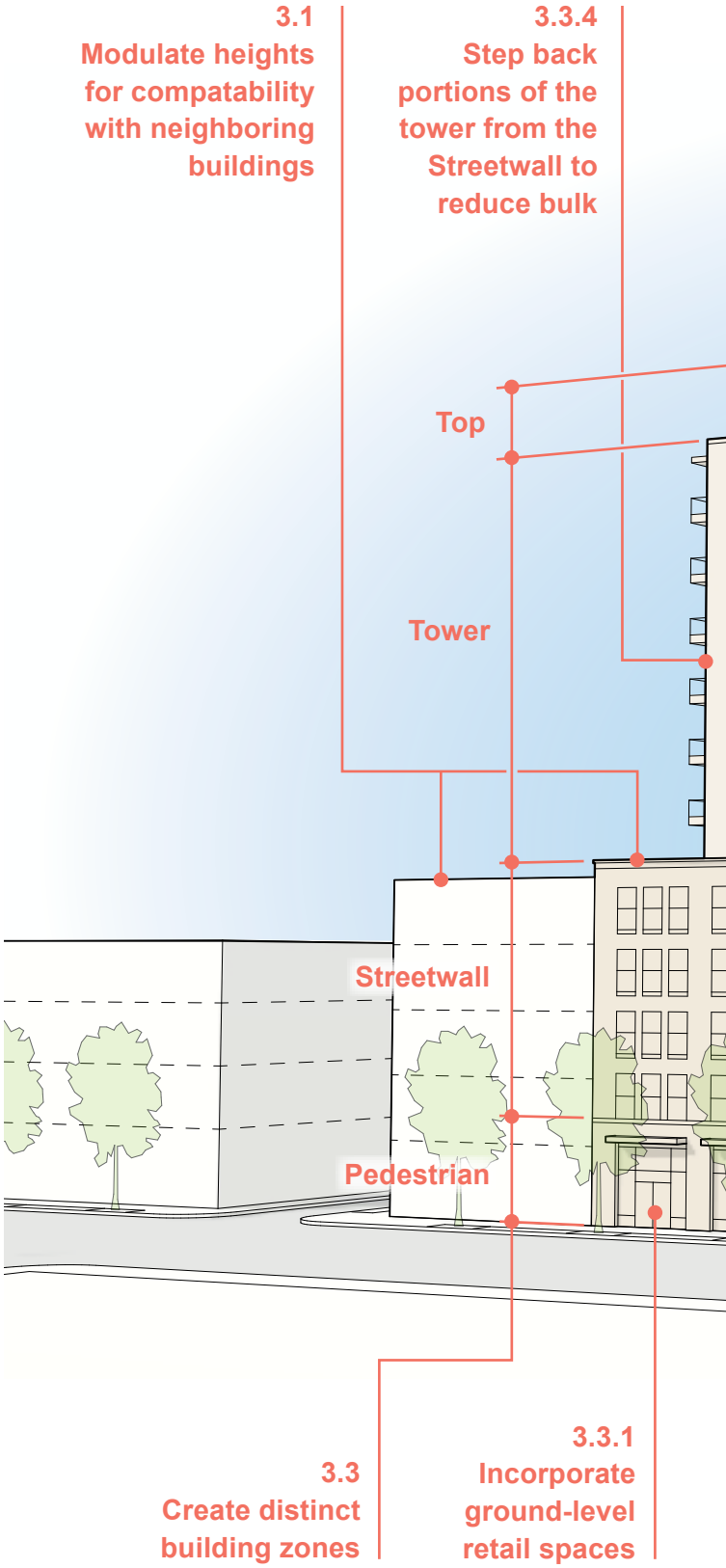
New development in these locations will often need to bridge scales between shorter neighborhood districts and taller commercial corridors. Distinct approaches should be applied to the "front" and "sides" of the building based on their unique context- a taller, more urban expression is appropriate along the corridor and a more fine-grained and intimate scale integrates into the neighborhood. Moments of height are reserved for significant corners or intersections.

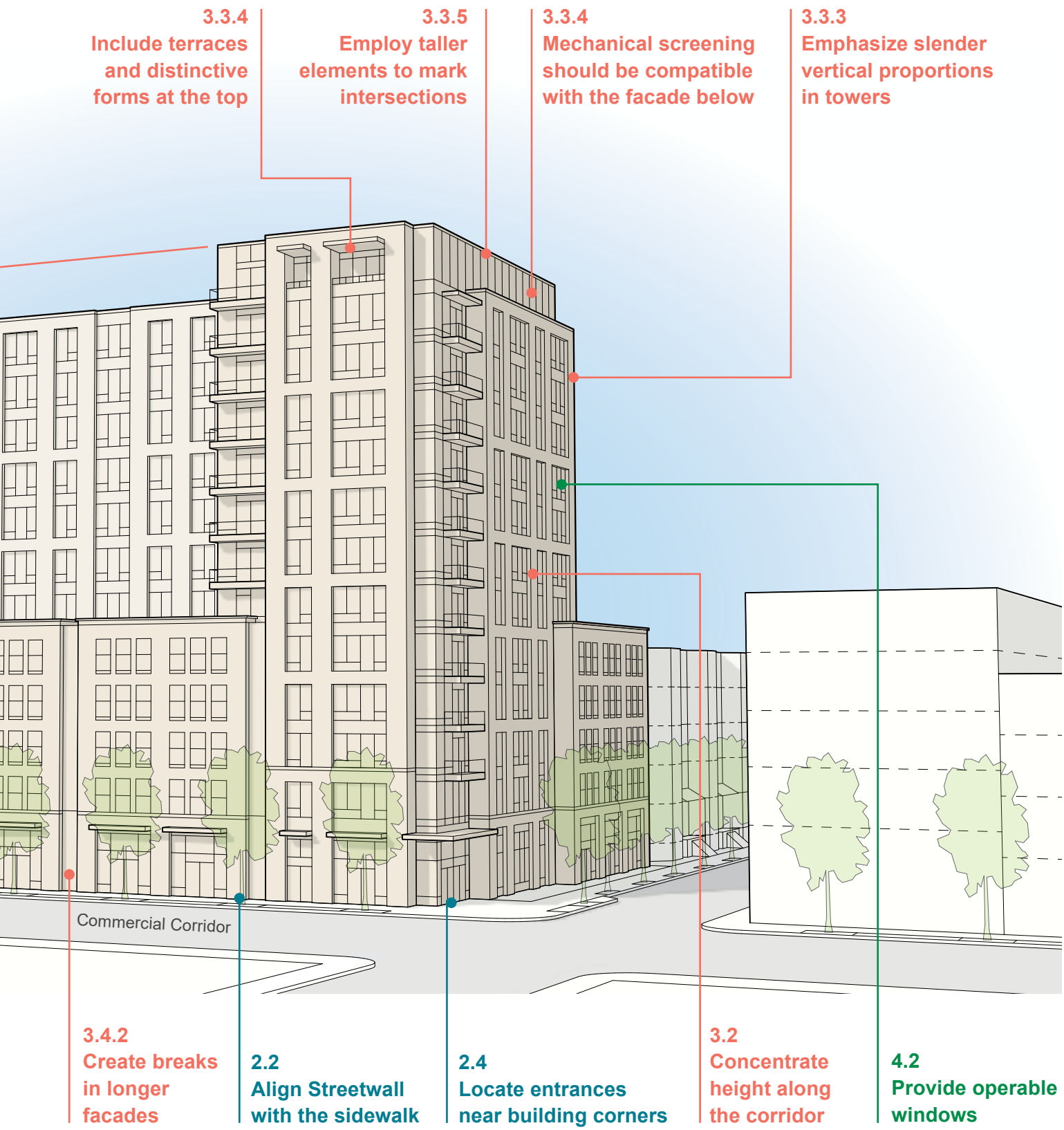



3.4.1
Group windows to create larger compositions
4.2
Include solar shading devices
3.3.3
Mark significant corners
3.4.2
Include vertical breaks in longer facades
3.3.2
Create depth with balconies
3.3.4
Step back upper floors to reduce the perceived height
Top
Streetwall
Pedestrian
Commercial Corridor
3.4.5
Provide individual unit entrances
2.4
Celebrate entrances with canopies
3.3.1
Include high transparency along commercial streets
3.3.1
Provide taller heights for retail spaces
3.3
Create distinct building zones

5.5 EXAMPLE: 12 TO 15 STORY BUILDING ON A RETAIL CORRIDOR

New developments twelve stories and taller will typically include a "Tower" zone that is distinct from the Streetwall zone below. This division should generally occur around the average streetwall height of the context, and is often achieved through upper-level step backs and changes in material or architectural detailing. Portions of the tower may come to the ground to mark important nodes or intersections. Towers should emphasize slender, vertical proportions. The top is an opportunity for distinctive forms that emphasize the tower's individuality and mark significant places in Cambridge's urban form.




3.3.4
Include terraces and distinctive forms at the top
3.3.5
Employ taller elements to mark intersections
3.3.4
Mechanical screening should be compatible with the facade below
3.3.3
Emphasize slender vertical proportions in towers
Commercial Corridor
3.4.2
Create breaks in longer facades
2.2
Align Streetwall with the sidewalk
2.4
Locate entrances near building corners
3.2
Concentrate height along the corridor
4.2
Provide operable windows

6. GLOSSARY

Active Use: Building program that animates streets and open spaces by encouraging actual or visual engagement between tenants and the public. Active uses include residential lobbies, restaurants, cafes, retail, services for the public (e.g. fitness centers, cafeterias, daycares, etc.), community spaces, art exhibition spaces/display windows, creative workspaces, cultural venues, and city services.

Affordable Housing Overlay: A set of modified development standards set forth in Section 11.207.3 of the Zoning Ordinance intended to allow incremental increases in density, limited increases in height, and relaxation of certain other zoning limitations for residential developments in which all units are made permanently affordable to households earning up to 100% of area median income.

Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) Dwelling Unit: A dwelling unit within an AHO Project for which occupancy is restricted to an AHO Eligible Household and whose rent or initial sale price is established by the provisions of Section 11.207.3 of the Zoning Ordinance.

Architectural Details: Small-scale elements (both decorative and technical) of a building's facade and massing that provide visual interest and articulate the facade's composition; elements that express style and character.

Awning: A projecting element made of canvas or a similar material stretched on a frame and used to keep sun or rain off a storefront, window, or doorway.

Bay window: Window or a window wall that projects beyond the typical plane of the building elevation.

Block: Group of adjacent buildings, bounded by public streets or other open spaces.

Build-to Line: A line, typically parallel to the lot line, where the facade of a building is required to be located.

Civic Structure: The connective pattern of public spaces, including streets, parks, and squares, significant landmark buildings, and the pattern of commercial and residential blocks that organizes a city's public realm.

Canopy: A roofed shelter projecting over a sidewalk, driveway, entry, window, or similar area that may be supported by a building, or columns, poles, or braces.

Circulation: The interconnected system of streets, driveways, sidewalks, paths, bicycle lanes, squares, forecourts, courtyards, building entrances, lobbies, interior corridors, and stairs that facilitates movement. Circulation connects the varied elements of a city, organizes movement on individual sites, leads to building entrances, and connects interior spaces.

Cladding: The exterior material layer of a building envelope which forms a veneer covering the underlying structure, such as brick, stone, metal, glass, concrete, wood, terracotta, or other composite systems made of such materials.

Context: The area around a project. Its neighborhood or district, including its buildings, landmarks, streets, parks, squares, and other open spaces, and natural features.

Contextual: Building that is harmonious with and respectful of the character of its context by virtue of its siting, building type, scale, materials, or colors.

Cool Roof: A cool roof is designed to reflect more sunlight than a conventional roof, absorbing less solar energy and thereby reducing heat transfer to the building.

Commercial Corridor: A large, mixed-use street of citywide importance. In Cambridge, these include Massachusetts Ave, Cambridge Street, and Main Street.

Cornice: A molded and projecting horizontal feature that crowns a facade or a portion of a facade.

Facade: The face of a building towards a street or other open space. The primary or “front” face of a building is particularly important as it addresses the public realm and contributes to its character.

Fenestration: A building's windows and doors.

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Frontage: The property line or part of a site facing a street or public open space. If the lot abuts more than one street, all street-facing sides are considered frontages.

Glass, Mirrored: Glass that blocks visibility from outside by reflecting light.

Glass, Opaque: Glass that is not transparent, typically achieved through films, etching, or backing panels.

Glass, Vision: Clear or tinted glass that is visually transparent from both the exterior and interior.

Glazing: The portions of the building envelope that let in light, including windows, plastic panels, clerestories, skylights, doors with glass, and glass block walls.

Green Wall: A vertical system designed to support the growth of living plants, often incorporating a growth medium and an irrigation system.

Green Roof: A roof that is partially or completely covered with vegetation and a growing medium, planted over a waterproof membrane. It may also include components such as a root barrier, drainage, and irrigation systems.

Landscape: Open space designed to enhance the functional, social, and ecological qualities of a site. Landscape includes soft landscape (organic elements such as soil, groundcover, shrubs, trees), hard landscape (pathways, broader paved areas, decking), and features (furnishings, lighting, and recreation and play equipment).

Lot: A parcel of land in identical ownership throughout, bounded by other lots or by streets, which is designated to be used, developed or built upon as a unit.

Low-Rise Building: A building with three or fewer stories.

Massing: The three-dimensional form of a building's volume including its height and major articulations.

Mechanical Equipment: Includes, but is not limited to, exhaust fans and ducts, air conditioning equipment, elevator bulkheads, heat exchangers, and transformers.

Microclimate: The local climate of a relatively small area, influenced by site characteristics such as the color and reflectivity of surfaces, vegetation, shade, solar orientation, wind, and topography.

Mid-Rise Building: A building that has four to nine stories.

Mixed-Use: Development that includes more than one use—such as residential, commercial, industrial, or public and semi-public uses—within the same building, project, or site.

Open Space: All unbuilt areas, whether publicly or privately owned. Cambridge's Zoning Ordinance defines different categories of open space in Section 2.000.

Pedestrian Zone: The ground story, and occasionally second story, of a building facade fronting a street or open space, often including active uses oriented to engage the public realm.

Percent Transparency: The ratio of transparent window and door glazing to the total facade area. Also called the "Window-to-Wall Ratio".

Penthouse: An enclosed, unoccupied rooftop structure that houses mechanical, electrical, plumbing equipment, elevator machinery, roof access, and building systems.

Privately Owned Public Space (POPS): Open space that is owned, provided, and managed by a private entity, and accessible to the public, through an agreement between the City and private property owner that was developed during the City's project review process.

Public Art: A work of art created for or placed in the public realm for enjoyment by all. At its best, public art is responsive to its site or social and physical context. Public art can be ephemeral, temporary, or permanent, and it can be the creation of one person or many. It embraces a wide range of forms, sizes, and scales, including but not limited to murals, sculptures, memorials, monuments, integrated architectural or landscape features, functional elements (such as street furniture and lighting), community art, digital / time based media, performances, and festivals.

Public Realm: All spaces that are physically and/or visually accessible to the public, regardless of ownership. These spaces can include, but are not limited to, privately and publicly owned open spaces, parks, plazas, squares, streets, sidewalks, paths, building ground floors, and facades.

Publicly Accessible: Areas that are fully open to public access and meet applicable universal accessibility requirements.

Right-of-Way: Transportation corridors that comprise the majority of the public realm and are typically owned by a government entity. They facilitate movement and connections, and include streets, sidewalks, and paths.

Scale: The perceived sense of a building's size relative to the human body, to the street or other open spaces that it faces, and to nearby buildings.

Setback: The minimum distance which a building, portion of a building, or other structure must be set back from a property line, street, or designated natural feature.

Spandrel: The area in a multistory building's facade between the sill of a window on one level and the head of the window below.

Step-back: A setback occurring at an upper level of a building that results in the facade above being located further back from the plane of the facade below.

Streetwall Zone: The portion of a building facade fronting a street or open space that extends from the Pedestrian Zone to a height typically equal to the facade to facade width of the street.

Street, Residential: A street that is primarily or entirely lined by residential buildings.

Street, Retail: A street that is primarily or entirely lined by ground floor retail spaces.

String Course: A thin horizontal band on a facade, distinct from the wall above and below it. It may either project from the typical plane of the wall, or be flush but in a contrasting material.

Tall Building: A building that has ten or more stories.

Tower Zone: The portion of a tall building that extends from the Streetwall Zone to the Top Zone. Not all buildings will have a tower zone.

Top Zone: The uppermost portion of a building. Depending on building height, this may include cornices, roofs, mechanical penthouses or enclosures, and potentially one or more residential floors and/or common spaces.

Transparency: The ability to see through a surface, typically achieved by employing materials such as glass that allow the transmission of light.

Urban Heat Island (UHI): The increased temperature in urban settings caused by the replacement of natural land cover with surfaces that absorb and retain heat.

Yard: An open unoccupied space on the same lot with a building, open and unobstructed from the ground to the sky. Front, rear, and side yards are distinguished based on which property line they are adjacent to and are defined in Section 2.000 of the Zoning Ordinance.

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