

DESIGN & BUILT FORM FRAMEWORK

Overview

A primary objective of HRMbyDesign is to encourage architectural excellence in building and public space design, through the use of new built form and design guidelines. Built form refers to the shape a building takes in terms of its height and massing. In the past, most development agreements for new and remodelled buildings in downtown Halifax limited maximum height but little consideration was given to the shape or design of a building. The new process will address both components.



Appropriate building form on Barrington Street at Prince Street

Built Form Framework

The Built Form Framework contained in the Downtown Halifax Land Use By-law will influence the shape of new buildings through pre-established maximum building heights, streetwall heights, upper storey setbacks, sideyard setbacks, and maximum tower widths and tower separation distances for taller buildings.

Maximum Building Heights

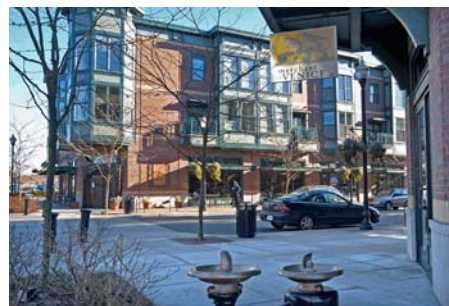
The appropriate height and mass of buildings varies throughout the Downtown Plan area. Maximum building heights and streetwall heights were identified through an analysis of the existing character of each of the nine proposed precincts. For example:

- Maximum streetwall heights generally reflect the 1:1 ratio of street width to streetwall height, in a range of 15 - 21.5 metres (50'-60').

- Building heights step down towards areas surrounding the Citadel, toward the water's edge on the waterfront, next to heritage buildings, and they are reduced in heritage conservation districts.
- Tall buildings are directed to areas where tall buildings already exist.
- Maximum building heights are framed as "pre-bonus" and "post-bonus" heights, enabling the bonus zoning program (see below).

Bonus Zoning Program

The bonus zoning program provides applicants for development with an opportunity to achieve additional height above that of the pre-bonus maximum in exchange for a negotiated public benefit to HRM. For example, a developer in a 21.5 m height precinct could potentially achieve 30% more height (up to a post-bonus maximum of 27.5 m) by providing the municipality with one or more public benefits described in the Plan, to be negotiated by the Development Officer with input from the Design Review Committee. Although it is expected that design excellence will be achieved in all new development, the provision of exceptional sustainable building design or, publicly accessible open space are two design related public benefits that may be provided.



Massing Rules

In order to maintain a positive pedestrian experience at the street level, and to reduce the impact of wind and shadow on the street while encouraging sunlight penetration, setback and stepback rules have been incorporated into the Land Use By-law. The rules are designed for three main building types: low-rise, mid-rise and high-rise.

	Low-rise (<18.5 m)	Mid-rise (18.5 - 33.5 m)	High-rise (33.5 m +)
Sideyard Stepback at-grade	N/A	The lesser of 10% of lot width or 5.5 m, for the mid-rise portion of the building except on central blocks.	11.5 m from interior lot lines on the high-rise portion of the building.
Upper Storey Stepback from Streetwall	N/A	3 m stepback above the streetwall height.	An additional 1.5m on the portion of the building above 33.5 m.
Separation Distance	N/A	N/A	23 m between high-rise portions of adjacent buildings or 17 m when in same ownership and at least one tower is commercial use.
Maximum Tower Dimension	N/A	N/A	Maximum tower width of 38 m by a maximum depth of 27.5 m for central blocks, or 38 m by 38 m for non-central blocks.

Building Design

The Design Manual attached to the Land Use By-law is the primary reference to be used in the design review process for new development. It includes general design guidelines, heritage design guidelines, sustainable building design guidelines and special guidelines for development on the waterfront.

General Design Guidelines

The general design guidelines provide guidance for how the building will interface with the sidewalk and pedestrians at street level through the appropriate design of:

- pedestrian-oriented commercial uses;
- pedestrian-scaled streetwall height;
- articulation of the base, middle and top of the building, including the roof lines and rooftop;
- upper storey stepbacks;
- impact of important civic or corner sites;
- protection of prominent sites at the end of important

views;

- parking, services, utilities; and
- criteria for the variance of the built form rules.

Sustainable Building Design Guidelines

The sustainability design guidelines provide a guide for development applicants that participate in the bonus zoning program to achieve exemplary sustainable building design as a public benefit. The guidelines demonstrate how to design, construct, and operate buildings and landscapes in an environmentally responsible manner.

Heritage Design Guidelines

The heritage design guidelines command respectful development that is abutting or integrated with heritage buildings, infill and additions to existing heritage buildings and areas, and provides guidelines for facade alterations and signage on heritage buildings in heritage conservation districts.

Public Open Space Design

The Public Realm Handbook is an internal document that will inform the Transportation & Streetscape Design Functional Plan to be conducted following adoption of this Plan, and will lay out the public realm framework for downtown Halifax. This may include amendments to the existing Municipal Service Systems Design Guidelines, or “HRM Red Book.” The Public Realm Handbook contains guidelines for the design and siting of:

- Streetscapes
- Open Spaces & Connections
- Gateways, Views and Landmarks
- Public Art
- Potential Civic & Cultural Sites
- Transit Infrastructure
- Public Facilities

For more information:

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