

SECTION 6

River District Design Guidelines



City of Sacramento
Urban Design Group



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Note: Chapters 3 & 4 were adapted, in part, from the Central Core Guidelines, Section 1 of the Central City Urban Design Guidelines produced by WRT Solomon-ETC, Inc.

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Chapter 1: Introduction



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1. Introduction

The vision for the River District is to transform a light industrial and warehouse area into an urban community of diverse uses exhibiting an eclectic architectural character that celebrates its unique place in the city at the confluence of the American and Sacramento Rivers.

The River District Design Guidelines provide urban design and architectural guidelines for the River District Design Review District. They supersede the design guidelines of the 1994 Richards Boulevard Area Plan (RBAP).

These guidelines have been developed in coordination with the River District Specific Plan (2010) and as a part of the newly compiled Central City Urban Design Guidelines (2009). The River District Design Guidelines relate to two significant sets of architectural guidelines - the newly established Central Core Design Guidelines (2009) and the Railyards Design Guidelines (2007), that along with the Central City Neighborhood Design Guidelines, cover 90 percent of the Central City.

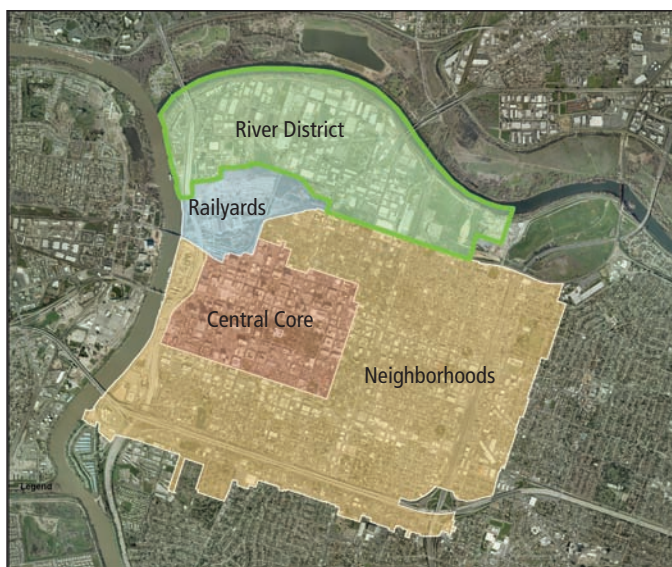


Figure 1.1 River District Design Review District shown in green with areas of other Central City design review districts.

The Central City Urban Design Guidelines consist of the following sections:

Section 1 – Introduction

Section 2 – Central City Framework

Section 3 – Central Core Design Guidelines

Section 4 – Central City Neighborhood Design Guidelines

Section 5 – Railyards Design Guidelines

Section 6 – River District Design Guidelines

Guiding Principles of River District Specific Plan (RDSP)

- The River District's unique character and design will provide a sense of place.
- The River District will be comprised of distinct neighborhoods with unique personalities.
- The River District's desirable location will support its diverse and robust economy.
- The River District will maximize connectivity – north/south and east/west – and support all transportation modes.
- The River District will be a model for sustainable development.
- The River District Specific Plan will support strategies to improve safety and social conditions.
- The scenic environment and livability of the River District will be enhanced through the development of public parks, open space, trails and outstanding community facilities and amenities.



Figure 1.2 Working session of public workshops held in February and March of 2008.



Figure 1.3 The 2008 Visioning Public Workshops were well attended and urban design concepts were presented with early Guiding Principals.



Figure 1.4 Walkability expert Dan Burden spent two days with staff surveying and advising staff and stakeholders on pedestrian-friendly street design.

Background

In February, 2008, two workshops were held to gather public input on Urban Design and Land Use, Circulation and Infrastructure within the District. The Project Team brought walkability expert Dan Burden to the River District to work with staff over a two-day period to advise on principles for walkable streets and complete neighborhoods. The culmination of this work was presented to the public in March 2008 with a statement of principles and concepts. This formed the basis of the urban design element of the River District Specific Plan and has been refined into this document.

Discussion of Principles

The major urban design concepts continued to be refined until the street grid and land use assumptions were finalized in late 2009. An area of over 1,100 acres including long established businesses and business districts, the River District Design Review Area embraces the diverse character and carries forward the notion that distinctive areas could evolve into unique sub-districts or neighborhoods within the District (See Sidebar previous page).

The Intention of this Document

This document is written to inspire great design within a vision framework for creating an exciting and eclectic district of neighborhoods and vibrant streets. It sets forth the major urban design concepts for the district and the vision for each of seven character-defined areas. Chapter 2, Framework, seeks to establish a vision for creating one of the most unique and energetic areas of the city. Attention to detail and vision at the outset of the redevelopment effort is of paramount importance to the future investment and expectations for the quality of life that can unfold as the district transforms. Good design through

recognition of context, thoughtful site planning, careful articulation of mass and form, and care in the detailing of systems and finishes will protect careful, well informed investment.

For the public realm, quality standards of streetscape design, parks and open space, landscape and quality transit facilities are investments in public dollars which will contribute to the value of private investments. The synergy between the private realm and public realm are essential in creating a great place to live, work, play, and invest.

Urban Character

The existing urban character of the area is mixed with many post WWII warehouse buildings, framed with expansive wood trusses, and earlier 20th century masonry structures along with many recent tilt-up concrete structures.

The eclectic, unplanned nature in the district has an uniqueness in contrast to other areas of the Central City. There are several buildings that qualify as historic and many others that while not historic, hold great opportunity for reuse creating unique Sacramento places.

The opportunity exists to create diverse, family-friendly districts with high design standards that builds on the qualities of the existing district, such as:

- Its location at the confluence of two major northern California rivers,
- Easy access to two Interstate highways
- Two light rail lines connecting the district to the region and key transit hubs (i.e. Sacramento Valley Intermodal Facility and Sacramento International Airport),
- An existing public school,
- Desirable employment locations, and
- Two Rivers Trail and other cultural amenities.

How to Use these Guidelines

The River District Design Guidelines (RDDG) govern the design and planning of both the Public Realm and the Private Realm of the River District Design Review District, which includes the 2010 River District Specific Plan area. The organization of the Guidelines follows that of the Central Core and the Railyards Design Guidelines.

The urban design concepts and goals are covered in Chapter 2, Urban Design Framework, of these guidelines. Chapter 3 provides design guidelines for the Public Realm and Chapter 4 is specific to the Private Realm. Together these guidelines are intended to provide design criteria to city staff, property owners, design professionals, commissioners, council members, and the general public. They set-forth a framework of design intentions, recommendations and design standards for the various areas of the River District in coordination with the Policies and Goals of the Specific Plan. Specific policies include:

- High priority for pedestrian, bike and transit mobility in balance with the vehicular demands passing through the district,
- Land use classifications that will allow and encourage a diverse mixture of uses,
- Place-making concepts that will guide the development of a distinctive district,
- Parks and open space priorities which are linked and sequenced through the district
- Streetscape design that emphasizes pedestrian and bicycle mobility with comfort and safety

Governing Design Guideline Documents

The River District Design Guidelines have been developed in coordination with the 2010 River District Specific Plan process.

Township 9, a Planned Unit Development (PUD) in the cen-

ter of the RDSP is governed by Design Guidelines adopted for this area on September 7, 2007 and any further amendments approved since the original approval. The Township 9 PUD Design Guidelines reference the Central City Design Guidelines of which this document is a part. Therefore, where the Township 9 Guidelines are silent, this document shall preside. Other existing PUDs in the District such as Continental Plaza and others shall preside. Future PUDs shall be established within the framework of this document.

The River District Design Review District boundary. These guidelines therefore contain general “best-practice” guidance for the entire area, and also extend particular design guidance for areas contained in the RDSP.

Any amendments to these guidelines shall be made with the recommendation of the Design Commission and be adopted by resolution of the City Council as a subset of the Central City Urban Design Guidelines.

Chapter 4 - The Private Realm

The River District Design Guidelines provide policy guidance to the Design Commission, Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Commission, Planning Commission, Preservation Commission, and the City Council. Used in concert with the City of Sacramento Zoning and Preservation Ordinances and applicable building codes, this document will provide City staff and private interests a common basis for the evaluation of design and development issues during the design review and approval process.

These guidelines are to be used to give direction rather than prescriptive requirements. The Design and Preservation Commissions shall have the authority to waive individual guidelines for specific projects where it is found that such waiver will better achieve the design policy objectives than strict application of the guidelines.

These Guidelines incorporate both mandates and recommendations. Where the word “shall” or “must” is

used it is intended to be a mandate; and where the word “should” or “encouraged” is used, it is intended to be a recommended guideline. The mandates are treated as standards with little room for variation whereas the recommendations are subject to some interpretation and have room for minor variances.

Some key building components referred to repeatedly in this section are identified and pictured at the beginning of *Part D - Massing & Building Configuration*.

Review of Alternative Designs

The River District Design Guidelines are intended to be a framework and basis for the review of projects in a fair, consistent, transparent, and seamless fashion by the City of Sacramento. Although not all Design Principles will be met on any given project, staff will review projects for overall compliance to ensure project meet the intent of the design criteria set forth in this document.

As such, alternative designs that can be demonstrated to achieve key design principles in some form will also be considered by City Staff. The Preferred Design will always be the recommended approach for proposed projects; however, when an Alternate Design can be proven to be appropriate, staff will be flexible and use reasonable judgment when reviewing projects.

Alternative Designs can be proven to be appropriate when the proposed design provides equal or greater amenities and benefits to compensate for areas of the project design not in compliance. Alternative Design projects should always strive to uphold the Urban Design Policies set forth in this document related to context, architectural character, project scale, pedestrian experience, exterior material quality, integration of building services, and sustainable design.

River District Design Review District Authority

The Design Commission and Preservation Commission have review and approval authority for deviation from required height, yard, and step back standards.

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