



June 25, 2008

Dear Honorable Mayor, City Councilpersons, City General Managers and Staff, and Members of the Design Community,

In Fall 2007, the Cultural Affairs Commission convened a series of open-ended meetings with key stakeholders and members of the Commission Design Advisory Panel (CDAP), a group of appointed experts in architecture, urban planning, and public art. In these meetings, we began a discussion on how to create the necessary conditions for consistent and long-term excellence in public architecture, public art, urban design that best reflects Los Angeles' international stature as a vibrant and creative cultural center. As a result of these meetings, a Steering Committee was appointed to develop and formally propose design principles, guidelines and policy recommendations on how to achieve this objective. Building on the feedback received from the initial series of discussion forums, the Steering Committee has worked together consistently and thoughtfully over the last six months to develop these proposals, and we now seek to distribute these proposals to the rest of the City family and the broader design community in an effort to solicit input and to create a productive discussion around shared goals.

Please find enclosed a set of Project Design and Review Guidelines which proposes new standards and seeks to reinvent the way that the Cultural Affairs Commission is involved in design review, and city planning and development. A key theme in these documents is an emphasis on each City Departments' role as developer, custodian and champion of the public realm. We believe that each Department's design review process can be implemented in a manner that ensures that each public building and public art project not only facilitates that Department's unique and important program, but that they also are thoughtfully designed in a way which facilitates interaction of users, residents and pedestrians alike, with sensitivity to local and regional context. The Commission hopes to encourage all City Departments to view their projects as a building block in the development of a public infrastructure of streets, plazas, parks and civic buildings which showcase the culture of our City. We hope that you join us in raising the bar, and moving forward together to develop this vision for Los Angeles.

Al Nodal

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President
Cultural Affairs Commission



Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Commission [CAC]

PUBLIC ART, ARCHITECTURE, LANDSCAPE & URBAN DESIGN
REVIEW GUIDELINES

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July 11, 2008



PUBLIC ART, ARCHITECTURE, LANDSCAPE & URBAN DESIGN
REVIEW GUIDELINES

I. Introduction

Every property in the city, both public and private, depends upon the public realm both as a necessity for access and as the setting for value and meaning. Thus everyone has a stake in the well-being of the public realm - of the streets, parks and open space, and all public buildings.

“Access” is an inclusive term as it applies to pedestrians first of all, and then to all other means of movement. Whether we come by car or bus or from any other point of origination, we intend a place of destination, and we arrive on foot. Moreover, the path of movement must not only facilitate access but also assist way-finding. It is the distinct quality of sidewalks that helps people know where they are, feel safe, and have the opportunity to fully engage the choices and enjoyment of urban life. When people move in cars or buses they also want to know where they are, and how to arrive. Thus the distinct qualities of streets are also essential for a sense of place. Additionally, the provisions for parking are in fact the provisions for arrival and the transition to walking. All residents, visitors and property owners have a stake in the quality of these arrangements.

The space of the public realm is formed by decisions about the balanced allocation of the right-of-way for pedestrian and vehicular experience. The space itself is given distinction by its street furnishings of trees and lights and awnings and benches and signs, and is most clearly formed by its flanking buildings. Every façade serves not only as the face of a building, but especially as the inside wall of the street space. How these “street walls” come together to form the public realm is an obvious matter of public concern.

And every new project remodels its place in the city. Informed and consistent design review on behalf of the public affected by such remodeling is essential to enable the development of a great city. Design review is a public process which affords opportunities to enhance the quality of life in Los Angeles.



II. Design and Review Guidelines

The Los Angeles Administrative Code [Section 22.106] sets forth the jurisdiction of the Board of Cultural Affairs Commissioners to review projects in two categories: municipal projects [buildings, art & infrastructure] and private projects impacting public land or ROW. Following adoption of the Arts Development Fee [Admin. Code Sec. 22.118], resulting private Public Art Projects also became subject to CAC review.

The proposal to develop, distribute and apply a consistent set of design and review guidelines for all three of CAC's jurisdictional areas is to suggest a holistic approach to individual project review, and to broadly interpret the Administrative Code as authorizing the CAC to not merely review projects but to champion design excellence in and of the public realm.

Although projects submitted for review may strictly fall only within one of the following four categories of Public Art, Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Urban Design, it is important to note that all the guidelines are mutually supportive and should be considered together in the design and development of any one addition to the public realm.

Project applicants, Cultural Affairs Commission staff and the Cultural Affairs Commission will utilize the following guidelines to both articulate and review the design intent of projects. When presenting a project, the affirmative or divergent response to each design objective should be addressed in the Statement of Intent provided by the applicant prior to the presentation.



A. URBAN DESIGN

The Los Angeles Administrative Code [Section 22.106] sets forth the jurisdiction of the Board of Cultural Affairs Commissioners to review projects in two categories: municipal projects [buildings, art & infrastructure] and private projects impacting public land or ROW. Following adoption of the Arts Development Fee [Admin. Code Sec. 22.118], resulting private Public Art Projects also became subject to CAC review.

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1. Critical Assessment of Place

Require essential documentation and critical assessment of the context in which the project is situated. Such assessments should include recognition of elements of community value and design quality, elements that deserve new attention and enhancement, elements that are currently detrimental to the character and quality of experience, and missing programmatic dimensions of use and space.

2. Incremental Development of a Vibrant and Hospitable Public Realm

Encourage open and consequential design augmenting or transforming existing place qualities to ensure that the aggregate of individual projects results in a meaningful urban form and a vital and supportive pedestrian environment.



3. Pedestrian Primacy

Maintain the primacy of the street as the pedestrian organizer of the public realm. Provide a comfortable sense of enclosure for pedestrians at sidewalk level with strong building edges; clearly define public open spaces distinct from the street envelope. Support selective implementation of landscaped medians, to facilitate pedestrian crossing of wide streets, and crosswalks w/ curb extensions. Encourage mid-block passages through large scale projects to expand the pedestrian circulation matrix and encourage daytime accessibility to usable private open space from public sidewalks. Require sidewalk widths that accommodate more than two pedestrians walking abreast.

4. Street Envelope

Ensure that the design of each new building contributes to the evolution of a well defined and well proportioned street envelope and to the creation of an active, visually engaging and safe streetscape, both during the day and at night. Buildings set back from the public sidewalk will be evaluated in relation to the prevailing street wall and street width and the civic significance of the project and its positioning. Design should focus on the relationship between sidewalks and building edges, the interaction between pedestrians and the first two stories of adjacent building facades; consider visual facade permeability, night time illumination of ground floor interiors, restricted garage entrance points, and placement of interior building functions to active sidewalk traffic.

5. Building Massing & Site Disposition

Articulate the disposition and massing of building components to respond to environmental objectives at both the pedestrian and city form scale relative to preservation of views, access to sunlight and minimizing of wind turbulence, prolonged shadows and glare. Encourage building massing at the sidewalk edge to contribute to the incremental development of optimum street envelopes, at a minimum street width to building height ratio of 2:1.

6. City Lighting and Streetscape Amenities

Encourage creative lighting solutions which separately address roadway and sidewalk illumination, spillover interior lighting, and decorative facade and landscape lighting which will highlight special buildings and activity centers and facilitate safe, extended use of the public realm. Encourage development of enhanced curbside parkways, shade trees and mini plazas to incrementally expand streetscape amenities.



7. New Media

Encourage media-activated districts rather than stand alone buildings. To enhance how districts come to life at night, new media can make a vibrant and even poetic contribution, but must also attend to limiting night-time light pollution, assuring proper life-time management and maintenance, and off-setting energy consumption. Large scale media installations should enhance public life and transcend proprietary self-promotion.

8. Mandatory Preliminary Early Review

Schedule projects located in “contextually sensitive” districts [historic, cultural, environmental, view corridor preservation, scale or land use transitional zones, etc] for CAC’s Preliminary Early Review to ensure timely input by staff and CDAP relative to mandatory design objectives.



B. LANDSCAPE

The contemporary city occupies an ecological setting that is continually transformed by population growth, the complexity of culture, traditions, global influences, and both physical and digital technology. Landscape urbanism refers to the foundation infrastructure of the city, including not only the land and all natural systems, but also the built systems that provide access throughout a region for movement, water, power, and waste disposal – indeed for all of the fundamental needs of healthful inhabitation.

All new projects of every scale rely upon this infrastructure, and to various degrees repair and enhance, or damage and diminish this basis for the city's existence. Design guidelines are required to systematically review the means by which projects are beneficial and reverse existing trends that have endangered urban health. Such guidelines attend to the largest systems and projects as well as to very local places and projects.

1. Natural Systems

Require new public works projects and other larger scale private sector projects to sustain irrigation and storm water, and ground water management solutions and to enhance the significance of water in a semi-arid region; to enhance the continuities of open space, of plant communities, of bird flight paths, of solar modulation and of wind flows essential to air quality and moderation of summer temperatures, and to emphasize use of California relevant plant communities.

2. Urban Plant Ecology

Encourage the use of plants suitable to semi-arid climates and to local soil conditions; support existing healthy plant communities. Assure sufficient plant material for oxygen regeneration and for wildlife health. Planting should reinforce or otherwise enhance the distinction of local places and the comfort of outdoor space. Require shade trees to moderate micro climates, and meet most stringent shading requirements for all surface parking lots. Require shade street trees to be included in all projects, with sustainable state of the art planting and soil design. Discourage use of Monocots (Palm trees) unless historically appropriate to site. Encourage minimum one-to-one replacement of each tree lost to construction.

3. Open Space Networks and Corridors

Reinforce the continuities of open space along the boulevards, avenues, and streets of the city, and along the river, arroyos, and canyons. Respect the contribution of public parks to strengthening open space systems. Recognize the dependence of all natural systems on these networks by maintaining or restoring sufficient unpaved surface, permeable paving, planting continuities, and appropriate space for movement and access of all compatible life forms.



4. Variety of Gathering Spaces

Encourage the design of open spaces that extend the variety of social interaction opportunities and of personal contacts with nature. Such gathering spaces include sidewalks wide enough for stopping, talking, and sitting; mid-block passageways, and alleys that enhance accessibility and “hanging-out;” small plazas, courts, and pocket parks; and larger parks and recreation areas that serve community interests. Design these spaces to express green park-like attributes rather than plaza-like attributes where appropriate.

5. Site Boundaries

Extend arbitrary site “boundaries” for Public Work or other City building projects located in City parkland to allow for meaningful augmentation and restoration of aging or sparse tree community.

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C. ARCHITECTURE

Consider Architecture that nurtures Los Angeles' Public Realm and Sense of Place

Architecturally, Los Angeles' public realm is shaped by a rich confluence of building traditions, innovations – particularly in domestic architecture - and varied environments. From organic beachside urbanism to bungalow and tract-house sub-urbanism, from a downtown of pedestrian-oriented streets, blocks and distinct districts defined by tall buildings hard-up against sidewalks to low-scale neighborhood main streets, from a sea-level port to hillsides and mountains dotted with homes, from suburbs and boulevards representing the forms and ideals of each 20th Century decade, and now towards the sustainable ideals of the 21st Century, Los Angeles contexts are as diverse as its populations.

Civic architecture and architecture forming the public realm of this city should acknowledge and nurture explicit understandings of the specific qualities and potentials of each unique Los Angeles place. While no one style or approach or material palette adequately represents an ideal architecture for Los Angeles, each act of architecture can establish a positive relationship to its civic surrounds by carefully considering and building upon local building scales, adjacent and desired patterns of open space to built space, environmental adjustments related to Los Angeles' varied temperate climates, building orientation that enhances public realm activity, and use of materials, details and craftsmanship that grows out of careful observation of existing conditions as well participation in a tradition of innovation that has long shaped Los Angeles' built-form design.

Each work of architecture becomes an opportunity to relate to and improve a specific place within Los Angeles. Each design team, when building in and for the public realm, should describe how the architecture of a specific building contributes to the making of that specific Los Angeles place and addresses the following design principles.

1. Encourage Evocative Design

Architectural and open space design should be both evocative and contextual, and innovative and sensitive to the specificity of the environmental, cultural and historical circumstances of each local Los Angeles place.

2. Ensure Public Realm Improvement and Activity

Each building design team should consider programming, site planning, space planning and building design options that improve and activate surrounding sidewalks and public spaces designed for pedestrians, building visitors and occupants.



3. Design Buildings with Ample Open Space and Landscape

The inclusion of regionally appropriate landscaping should be an integral part of exterior as well as interior building design as well as the use of shade trees to moderate the effects of local microclimates.

4. Establish Pedestrian-friendly Site Circulation

Each project should anticipate public accessibility for pedestrians as well as vehicles and minimize conflicts between pedestrian and vehicular circulation, especially at the interface of building lobbies and garage driveways with public sidewalks. Where feasible, provide public passageways to facilitate mid block circulation options for pedestrians.

5. Enhance Defensible Perimeters

Each building design should explore creative means to secure defensible project perimeters alternative to fences and blank walls. Strategies may include but are not limited to orientation of buildings windows that overlook sidewalks and open spaces, landscape hedges and setbacks, allowances for the planting of climbing vines, water features that separate building perimeters from property lines and other inviting elements that enhance building relationships to immediate surrounds.

6. Provide Facade Interest

Buildings should be designed to be experienced from all public viewpoints with special attention paid to facade modulation and material, finish and detailing choices that provide visual interest within the pedestrian's immediate field of vision. In particular, facades at ground level and in proximity to public spaces and sidewalks should incorporate carefully considered architectural components that enliven the sensations and textures of pedestrian experience.

7. Consider Public Lighting Opportunities

Provide exterior as well as interior lighting of architectural and landscape components that enhances user experience and wayfinding while ensuring security at building perimeters, surrounding open spaces and sidewalks.



8. Promote Sustainability

Apply sustainability principles to all aspects of site and building design per Executive Directive No. 10, "Sustainable Practices in the City of Los Angeles", dated July 18, 2007 and per LA Municipal Code 16.10-16.11, "Los Angeles City Green Building Program."

9. Integrate the Public Art Component Early

For both municipal and private projects, select and involve the Public Art Program artist during the earliest phases of project development, well in advance of any preliminary design review submittals to the Cultural Affairs Commission.

10. Incorporate High Quality Signage, Wayfinding and Graphic Components

Signage, wayfinding and graphic elements, including electronic and digital media, are an integral part of architectural experience and should be well related in terms of scale and detailing to a building's program, use, design intent and architectural components. These elements should also be designed in relation to the character and context of adjacent environments and respectful of existing community contexts, both during the day and night, as well as views to and from the building as well as to and from natural settings. To ensure high quality signage, graphic and wayfinding elements, these components should be considered during the conceptual design phase.

II. Encourage and Provide Preliminary Early Review

Projects design teams are encouraged to consult and establish a design review program with Cultural Affairs Commission staff at the earliest concept phase of a project and well in advance of any preliminary design review submittals to the Cultural Affairs Commission. Projects located in contextually sensitive districts will be scheduled for mandatory "Preliminary Early Review". DCA staff will formulate and communicate in a timely manner "Preliminary Early Review" procedures, design guidance and recommendations relative to project design objectives and the intent.



D. PUBLIC ART

Los Angeles' expansive and inventive dynamism is the perfect environment for public art that can inspire and engage its audience. Whether occurring as an isolated moment in any of the unique extended low-density communities that are an intrinsic feature of Los Angeles or clustered in its more urbanized areas, public art has the capacity and the responsibility to add a layer of pleasure, wonderment, intellectual adventure and provocative curiosity to our shared public spaces.

For the better part of the twentieth century, artists of all disciplines found the universe of Los Angeles to be unprecedented in its opportunities and freedom. Now, as we define the twenty-first century, it is imperative that the vision of artists be welcomed into the formation of the public realm.

When artists become more prevalent as participants in the construction of the public domain they will often become part of design teams that include architects, landscape architects and engineers. The open-ended discourse of studio practice can find a parallel opportunity in the built forms, open spaces and virtual realities of our cities, thereby creating complex and rewarding experiences and multiple meanings for diverse audiences within the context of the shared public realm.

Public art is singularly well suited to counter the tendency of Los Angeles to be experienced as a series of private spaces and moments connected most frequently by automobile travel. Public art establishes visual and social identity that can be shared by residents and visitors alike, bringing unique and revealing qualities to particular locations and at the same time create a sense of connectivity through the regular placement of art throughout the city.

With its astonishing reservoir of artists and arts organizations, Los Angeles is well poised to redefine its public spaces and dynamic networks as opportunities for artistic and cultural expression. Permanent public artworks can redefine the visual map used to navigate the far-flung neighborhoods of Los Angeles by inserting unique and memorable forms into the city's fabric. Temporary, unpredictable and ever-changing public art can add vitality and adventure for residents and visitors alike and reinforce the idea that Los Angeles is a dynamic, evolving, open-minded and generous city.

Taken in tandem with the city's remarkably diverse and rich array of cultural institutions, public art can assist Los Angeles to become an international center for the arts; one in which residents take pride and visitors are anxious to experience.



1. Artist-Focused, Expansive Selection Process

Develop artist selection processes that are committed to finding artists whose practice demonstrates a capacity for elevating the standards for public art and advancing aesthetic and civic purpose.

2. Distinguish Public Artist Selection from Traditional Design Procurement

Create a selection process which acknowledges how public art is different from other design procurement processes. The selection process should initiate an open-ended, creative process by a selected artist, rather than simply selecting an artist based on a specified proposal at the outset.

3. Art Panel Qualifications

Require that the art panel consist of a majority of members who are art professionals, with at least one member who has public art experience. Panelists who have no prior experience or knowledge of public art will participate in a briefing session that will provide a basic overview of the field.

4. Develop and Expand the Public Artist Pool

Establish artist-development and training as an intrinsic component of the public art program to encourage art students and working artists to see public art as an attractive, meaningful and manageable forum for their creative talents. Work with local institutions such as art colleges and university art departments, museums, and non-profit art centers and the informal network of artists, curators, and grass-roots organizations in this program.

5. Early Artist Selection

Maximize design cost benefits as well as the artist's important role in shaping the public sphere by integrating the artist selection process earlier in the Conceptual Architectural Design phase, while program and site design decisions are still fluid.

6. Art & Architecture Process Integration

Facilitate and empower the selected artist's creative process throughout the project by initiating congruent design development time lines for art and architecture which foster the greatest cooperation possible between artists and other design team members. Ensure that the artist is given the option to be fully integrated into the project design team.



7. Artist Independence

Encourage and respect artists' visions as they develop in the course of a project both in relationship to each artist's own concerns and vocabulary as well as to the full complex set of issues that define each project's context, including architectural, urban design, and community context. Autonomous objects, integrated art and design, and the full nuanced spectrum between the two must be available for the artist to determine as the most appropriate and potent approach for each project.

8. Art Maintenance

Mandate annual maintenance plans and set-asides for all public art installations and ensure that resources are available to support, clean and renew public artworks over their life span.

9. Temporary Public Art Projects

Expand temporary public art project opportunities. Convene a workgroup with key public art stakeholders and interested parties to develop a plan on how the Department of Cultural Affairs can play a role in supporting and/or developing temporary public art projects. Develop a list of necessary steps needed to create the conditions, resources, and infrastructure to support and empower artists to propose and develop temporary art projects in the city.

10. Media and advanced technologies

Encourage the use and exploration of advanced technologies in public art, recognizing the need to distinguish commercial content and intent from the more idiosyncratic and personalized discourse of art. Understand the challenges of maintaining new technologies and consider future maintenance budget needs from project inception. Recognize shorter lifetime expectations for such technologies measured against more tested materials.

11. Multiple Sites and Portable Art

Utilize the Public Art Annual Plan process to establish opportunities for multiple site public art projects which can use similar or identical public artworks at several locations to help bind a community together with a regional or neighborhood identity.



12. Articulation of Artistic Intent:

While fostering the broadest possible range of artistic forms of expression, require Public Art presenters to articulate their choices in the Statement of Intent, utilizing the following discussion guidelines:

- a.* How have the concerns and vocabulary of your own practice influenced your project?
- b.* To what contextual factors does your project respond? (i.e. the architectural plan, the site's specific physical or ecological conditions, the adjacent urban environment, or the community's social and/or historical context)?
- c.* How does your project respond to these factors? (i.e. are you subverting and disrupting the context, are you celebrating and memorializing these contextual factors or are you working in another realm entirely?)
- d.* What formal/conceptual strategies are you employing in your response to these factors and how do these strategies effectuate your intended response?
- e.* Who is the intended audience for your project? How do you envision your audience will interact with your project?
- f.* How does your project challenge the audience? What sort of experiential and/or cognitive opportunities does your project instigate for the audience?
- g.* Does your project add to the idea of civic engagement, or participation in the public sphere? If so, how?
- h.* How did your early (or late) involvement in the host project's design process influence the choices described above?