

Summary Report: Walkable Places Framework

Objectives

The Walkable Places Plan (WPP) establishes a public process to create context sensitive, pedestrian friendly development rules along designated street segments within the city. These public street corridors are in areas where the goal is to attract higher density commercial, office, and multifamily residential developments and improve the pedestrian experience.

Key Terms:

- **Ground Floor Façade** is the area of the building façade measured between the finished floor height of the ground floor and a vertical height of 8 feet.
- **Pedestrian Realm** is the area that includes hardscape, publicly accessible sidewalks, clear pedestrian spaces, pedestrian amenities, softscape, and utilities along the Walkable Street between the roadway (back of curb, where applicable) and the ground floor façade, as applicable.
- **Street Segment** is the length of a public street between two intersecting streets, or between an intersecting street and the logical termination of the roadway at a well-defined physical barrier
- **Walkable Place Street (WP Street)** is a street segment designated by the WPP where properties along the street may be eligible for WPP. There are two types of Walkable Place Streets: Primary WP Street and Secondary WP Street.
- **Primary WP Street** is a WP Street designated by the WPP where the adjacent properties must meet the applicable WPP Rules.
- **Secondary WP Street** is a WP Street designated on the WPP where adjacent properties may opt-in to the WPP Rules. A Secondary WP Street must either: 1) connect directly to a Primary WP Street, or 2) indirectly connect to a Primary WP Street via one or more other Secondary WP Streets.

About the WPP

The WPP is composed of a map depicting all the designated WP Streets within the city and the corresponding WPP Rules for each specific street segment. There is no limit to the number of street segments included in the WPP or any amendment to the WPP. Designations apply to the entire street segment.

- Key elements of the WPP Rules:
 1. Customizable Standards: Street Width Standards; primary or secondary designation; building setback; unobstructed sidewalk width; Off-Street Parking Standards via Special Parking Area
 2. Non-Customizable Standards: Safety buffer width; softscape maximum; landscape enhancements; fence requirements; auto-use restrictions; and Building/Site Design Standards; off-street parking enhancements in the absence of a Special Parking Area
- The WP Street designation process may be initiated by:

1. City of Houston; or
 2. Property owners representing at least 50% of the linear street frontage along the corresponding street segment¹. A pre-submittal meeting is required with the Planning Director to discuss the proposed applicable street segments and potential WPP Rules.
- The process to review a WP Street designation or an amendment to the WPP is as follows:
 1. Process started by either the City or Property Owners
 2. Planning Director reviews draft WPP Rules and publishes proposal online
 3. Community Meeting(s) to present proposed WPP Rules²
 4. Public Hearing on the WPP Rules at the Planning Commission
 5. Planning Commission review and recommendation
 6. City Council consideration of WPP amendments, if any, recommended by the Planning Commission
 7. If passed by City Council, the corresponding WPP Rules will be effective 30 days after Council action

¹ If the process is initiated by property owners, then property owners representing a majority of the linear frontage of a proposed WP Street may withdraw the street segment from consideration prior at any time prior to City Council consideration.

² A community meeting is not required when property owners representing 100% of the corresponding street segment(s) support the designation and there is no Special Parking Area consideration

When WPP Rules Apply:

The WPP Rules apply for all new development along a Primary WP Street or when opting into the WPP Rules along a Secondary WP Street. When changing an existing development along a Primary WP Street or an opt-in development along a Secondary WP Street, upgrading existing conditions to meet the WPP Rules applies as follows:

Scenario:	Pedestrian Realm Width³	Widen Existing Sidewalk	Building & Site Design	Parking Rules
Parking lot modification/expansion, or driveway modification	X ⁴	X ⁴	X	
Changed use only				X
Interior remodeling w/o changed use				
Interior remodeling w/ changed use				X
Exterior remodeling w/o changed use	X		X ⁵	
Exterior remodeling w/ changed use	X		X ⁵	X
Addition (250 sqft or less) w/in 15' of the minimum pedestrian realm	X		X	X
Addition (250 sqft or more) w/in 15' of the minimum pedestrian realm	X	X ⁶	X	X
Addition (more than 25% of the building sqft) and beyond 15' of the minimum pedestrian realm	X	X ⁶	X	X
Addition (less than 25% of the building sqft) and beyond 15' of the minimum pedestrian realm	X			X

- Requirements of the Historic Preservation Ordinance supersede the WPP Rules, as applicable.
- When a new street tree is required per Chapter 33 along a Primary WP Street or an opt-in development along a Secondary WP Street, then a minimum of 2" caliper street tree is required. The minimum sidewalk and safety buffer width are the required standard for all new development and any new or replacement sidewalks along all designated WP Streets to ensure a safe and continuous pedestrian experience along the WP Street no matter the adjacent development or use of opt-in WPP Rules.

³ Any existing, lawfully permitted physical feature (building, auto-related use, fence, etc.) w/in the pedestrian realm may remain as-built.

⁴ All new parking lots or parking lot expansion are required to meet the WP pedestrian realm width and unobstructed sidewalk width requirements

⁵ Applies when exterior remodeling exceeds more than 50% of the Ground Floor Façade along the WP Street.

⁶ If the existing sidewalk is 6' or wider, then no sidewalk widening is needed. If the existing sidewalk is less than 6' wide, then the segment of sidewalk in front of the new addition must be widened to sidewalk standard established within the WPP Rules.

- A development subject to the WPP Rules may seek a modification to the rules from the Planning Commission using the existing variance process.

The WPP Rules:

Each WP Street may have a unique set of corresponding WPP Rules based on the street segment designation within the WPP. The WPP rules are broken down into four categories: Street Width Standards, Pedestrian Realm Standards, Off-Street Parking Standards, and Building/Site Design Standards.

Street Width Standards

To allow adequate flexibility to account for unique community context and conditions along a WP Street, the right-of-way (ROW) width may be customized using the WPP process to establish an alternative minimum ROW width that is different from the typical standard outlined in Chapter 42, if appropriate justification is provided.

Pedestrian Realm Standards

Pedestrian Realm Elements		Pedestrian Realm Standards
Minimum Width	Option 1: Measured from property line	0', 5', 10', 15', 20'
	Option 2: Measured from back of curb	10', 12', 15', 18', 20'
Minimum unobstructed sidewalk width		6', 8', 10'
Minimum safety buffer width		4 feet ⁷
Maximum softscape		35%
Landscape requirements		Min 2" caliper street trees
Fence requirements		Max. height of 54" within the pedestrian realm. A fence located between the back of curb and the ground floor façade shall be non-opaque, decorative fence ⁸
Uses within the pedestrian realm		No auto-related uses, except: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Driveway(s) perpendicular with the WP Street; or 2. Pedestrian drop-off/loading area beyond minimum pedestrian realm width on a Secondary WP Street where the design is approved by the City Traffic Engineer 3. Upon request by the Planning Director, City Traffic Engineer may approve pedestrian drop-off/loading area beyond minimum pedestrian realm width along a Primary WP Street when unique traffic circulation/conditions make it impractical to have the pedestrian drop-off/loading area along a Secondary WP Street

⁷ Except along an approved on-street cutback parking or loading area where: 1) the cutback parking or loading area design is approved by City Traffic Engineer; and 2) the minimum width of the pedestrian realm next to the cutback or loading area is 10'.

⁸ Requirements for the screening of bulk solid waste containers supersede the WPP Rules, as applicable.

- Other Chapter 42 building line performance standards are not applicable along a WP Street
- Any unobstructed sidewalk must be within the WP Street right-of-way or an approved public pedestrian easement in the Pedestrian Realm along the WP Street, as approved by the Planning Director
- A sidewalk across any driveway along a WP Street must have a clear visual delineation across the driveway

Building/Site Design Standards

Building/ Site Design Elements	Building/ Site Design Standards
Non-single family residential:	
Public entrance to the Pedestrian Realm	Minimum one (1) for each Primary WP Street and opt-in Secondary WP Street
Ground Floor Façade fenestration/ decorative features⁹	Along Primary WP Street: Min 30% fenestration or decorative features, with min 15% fenestration ¹⁰
	Along Secondary WP Street: Min 20% fenestration or decorative features, with min 10% fenestration ¹⁰ for opt-in streets
	Exception: Building fronting three (3) or more WP Streets may have one (1) non-Primary WP Street, as applicable, that is exempt from the fenestration or decorative feature requirement
Minimum unobstructed vertical clearance within the pedestrian realm on private property	Decorative shade structures/ unenclosed balconies: 8 feet
	Other overhang buildable areas: 10 feet
Below grade structures	Allowed up to the property line
Driveway location & dimensions for each property under common ownership or legal interest	<p>Max one 30’ wide two-way driveway or two 15’ wide one-way driveways along the Walkable Place Street for every 300’</p> <p>Exceptions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For properties fronting more than one street, no new driveways are allowed along the Primary WP Street.¹¹ If two or more streets are Primary WP Streets, then the property owner may select one street to meet the driveway standards 2. Properties fronting three (3) or more WP Streets may have one (1) non-Primary WP Street that is exempt from driveway location and dimension requirements

⁹ Decorative Features include: murals, artwork, mosaics, photographs, water features, sculptures, plantings or “living walls” on the building façade. Signs or advertisements as defined by the Sign Code, dominant paint schemes or construction materials, and basic building elements do not qualify. The Planning Director is authorized to promulgate rules and procedures for the efficient administration of this requirement.

¹⁰ If property owners initiate the designation process, they will be allowed to create higher percentage of ground floor façade fenestration/decorative features than the minimum ordinance requirements if they obtain 100% support from all property owners.

¹¹ Exceptions: 1. When there is 1 or more existing driveway(s) along the Primary WP Street, the owner will be allowed to modify or relocate the driveway(s) and keep maximum 1 driveway along the Primary WP Street. 2. When there is no existing driveway along the Primary WP Street and the parcel has its sole frontage along the Primary WP Street, 1 new driveway will be allowed to meet the WP driveway requirements.

Single family residential:	
Front door facing the Walkable Place Street w/ pedestrian access	Required for each dwelling unit that abuts the WP Street
Lot access	If a tract is further subdivided, lot access must be from a shared driveway, Type 2 PAE, alley, or new public street created by the same subdivision plat

- Single family residential Building/ Site Design Standards are the required standard for all new development along a Primary WP Street or Secondary WP Street.

Off-Street Parking standards

Except when City Council approves a Special Parking Area (SPA), development along a Primary WP Street or an opt-in development along a Secondary WP Street, must meet the standard off-street parking rules and the following additional bicycle parking requirements:

- 1 bicycle space for every 5,000 SQFT GFA for uses that require bicycle parking
- 1 bicycle space for every 20 dwelling units for apartments

The Planning Director may streamline the existing review procedures of Chapter 26 for any SPA processed with the public consideration of a related WP Street designation.