

DOZA Design Policy: Standards & Guidelines

A Call to Action for Main Streets



OVERVIEW | Many describe Portland as a city of villages with a distinct main street at the heart of each neighborhood. These areas are important commercial mixed use centers that provide a hub of each neighborhood, often these areas represent what was the original downtown of small towns before annexation to the City. They are the urban fabric that support our 20-minute neighborhoods. Because these areas developed around the advent of the streetcar, they share common building form and design patterns that are diverse, walkable, human-scale, and architecturally, historically and culturally significant. The City is updating its Design Standards, Guidelines and Design Overlay but there's a problem.

Vulnerable Vintage Main Streets | Many Portlanders mistakenly assume our main street areas to be historic districts or conservation districts however with a few exceptions, most are not, making these centers vulnerable to losing their identity and integrity as we grow. Beyond infill development, these small lots on narrow main streets are poorly suited to the development recently seen on Division, Hawthorne, Williams and in Sellwood Moreland, necessitating demolition to achieve economies of scale. This has resulted in a significant degree of incompatible development and a backlash against new density.

To create a better fit with local identity and context, adding main street context standards can help be a bridge that can foster density with greater sensitivity and support in these areas. These could simply add a refinement of standards in the [proposed DOZA Design Policy](#) or add a new main street Plan District for these shared pattern areas of our city we cherish for their beauty, art, architecture, and streetcar-era history.

Economic Vitality & Unique Identity | Main streets visually and functionally define the majority of our City's inner eastside Districts and important centers. Without careful design controls to guide these areas with care and context-sensitivity, these areas with small lots, narrow streets, and concentrations of valued historic buildings can quickly be overshadowed or erased, fragmenting their district identity. We must ensure we are not damaging their economic vitality as well as their contributing draw for regional, national, and international tourism.

Affordability & Sustainability | Our recommendations retain development and densities allowed by code and support more simple and cost efficient design approaches typically found with our foundational architecture across our city.

BENEFITS | Adding missing main street standards:

- **Follows a pattern-based approach that allows for evolution** in style, size and scale with density and sensitivity to local identity.
- **Increases affordability and sustainability** by using simple and cost-efficient common building practices
- **Increases support and more community buy-in to density**
- **Contributes to context sensitivity and harmonious design** and honors the foundational character of our City's iconic architecture
- **Supports human-scale design even in larger, taller buildings**

DOZA City Council Hearing May 12 | Learn more, register now & advocate

Learn: www.pdxmainstreets.org/doza | Contact: ilovepdxmainstreets@gmail.com | Follow: [@ilovepdxmainstreets](https://twitter.com/ilovepdxmainstreets)



Main Street Context & Pattern

From Bill Tripp's illustrations on the Mixed Use Zoning Project



City Council: May 12, 2 pm | New DOZA Proposed Design Standards & Guidelines

Design Policy Misses Big Impacts to East Side Neighborhood Main St. Centers

Most of Portland's iconic vintage streetcar main streets are not designated as historic or conservation districts. Thus, have few tools to guide compatible design. Without care, our vulnerable east side main streets can be easily overwhelmed, losing their identity, and damaging the economic vitality of our small business districts. Many are concerned that instead of evolving, these important places are being erased and replaced nearly overnight (e.g. Division and Vancouver Williams redevelopment without public process, over 5 years). As we grow and add needed housing, we need more nuanced tools for these "Pattern Areas" to help retain their unique and valued identity with flexibility and attention to impacts. Key reference sources: [Vintage Main St. Study](#) & [DOZA Staff Report Future Work pg 51-53](#).

PDX Main Streets | Top 5 DOZA Design Recommendations

1. Add Main Street Design Standards

Many communities have asked for design standards that would help new development fit better with the existing foundational character of our smaller, older narrow vintage main streets. PDX Main Streets is developing a Draft "DOZA Dozen" set of proposed main street standards that reflect the common "patterns" of Portland Streetcar Main Streets. Many of these patterns contribute to greater affordability because they are simple and cost-efficient to build, and support livability, functionality and sustainability. City staff has proposed future "Character Statements" to fill the gap (See [DOZA Staff Report Future Work pg 51-53](#)), but these will only apply to the Guidelines and most projects will follow objective standards.

Recommend one or more of the following suggested approaches:

- Add main street standards to the existing Main Streets "M"-Overlay, and
- Adopt as a distinct Main Street "Plan District" at a minimum for the areas in the Low-Rise Commercial Storefront Analysis (aka Vintage Main St. Study); or
- Integrate into general D-Overlay general design standards (e.g. Main St. Bundle, Affordability); and
- Adopt for specific Main Street areas where there is demonstrated community support (e.g. Hawthorne Blvd, Division Plan District, Sellwood-Moreland Plan District) (NA letters, Biz district letters, adopted PDX Main Street Guidelines, etc)

2. Review is not scaled for impact. New Design Review "Thresholds" need parity w/ Central City (i.e. maximum 45' review trigger, not 65' on narrow undesignated historic main Streets) Recommend 3-4 stories or 40-45'. Proposed 65' is NOT "scaled to impact"

Testify 5/12 in support of Main Streets

Online and/or at the hearing: [Learn more](#)

For more info, visit: www.pdxmainstreets.org/doza | Contact Us: ilovepdxmainstreets@gmail.com

3. Add Demo Review for buildings in the areas of the Vintage Main Street Study

The Low Rise Commercial Storefront Analysis (aka the Vintage Main St Centers Study) identifies vulnerable areas of special character. Add Demo Review for these areas as well as architecturally and culturally important buildings in the inventories already available for Montavilla and for Division, Hawthorne, Sellwood-Moreland by PDX Main St.

4. Require Context Criteria for Permits

To ensure sufficient evaluation of building and site conditions and impacts, Bureau of Development Services should add permit application submittal requirement for the following:

- *Contextual Site Plan* showing proposed footprint of project, adjacent lots with building footprints and windows facing adjacent sites
- *Context Elevations(s)* showing proposed project and adjacent existing development of surrounding block for new commercial, mixed Use, and Institutional buildings.

5. Community Based Planning Policy

There is currently no pathway for community led planning to be recognized according to city staff. When local budgets and staff are limited, and more communities are seeking an equitable voice in shaping their community, the City should not overlook the value-add of community led planning processes. We need to value more than top down approaches. Especially those that are open and accessible, responsive to local goals and inclusive of diverse stakeholders. We need a pathway to ensure work such as the [PDX Main Street Guidelines](#) and other work like Albina Vision, Boise Design Guidelines, Sellwood-Moreland Design Guidelines and others can be recognized and considered if best planning practices are followed and widespread community support can be demonstrated. Everyone deserves a meaningful voice in shaping our City. The time to speak out is now.