LEARN ABOUT ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

City of San Marcos Downtown Architectural Standards

Are there currently downtown design standards and guidelines in San Marcos? Yes, the City adopted standards and guidelines in 2012. Both standards and guidelines are utilized when reviewing new development in the downtown area. Standards are found in the San Marcos Deveopment Code, and guidelines are found in the San Marcos Design Manual.

What is the difference between standards and guidelines? Standards and guidelines work together to influence certain parts of a building. Standards include a "shall" or a "must" statement. For example, "a front porch must be at least 6 feet deep". Alternatively, guidelines typically include a "should" statement that helps provide intent or guidance to a standard. For example, "An awning or canopy should be in character with the building and streetscape."

Why are we updating these standards and guidelines? In January 2020, the San Marcos City Council provided direction to update these standards in order to include new standards to address design issues, create new graphics to illustrate the difference between standards and guidelines, and to tailor those standards and guidelines to different parts of downtown.

What types of topics are being addressed in the update? Several topics are being addressed, including:

- Massing of larger buildings to promote compatability with the traditional scale of downtown
- Articulation of facades
- Building materials
- Street level design that promotes a sense of place and activate the public realm; and
- Transitions from higher density zones to abutting sensitive edges

I'm not familiar with design terminology, what do all of those terms mean? We've included a helpful guide on the next few pages to define some design elements.

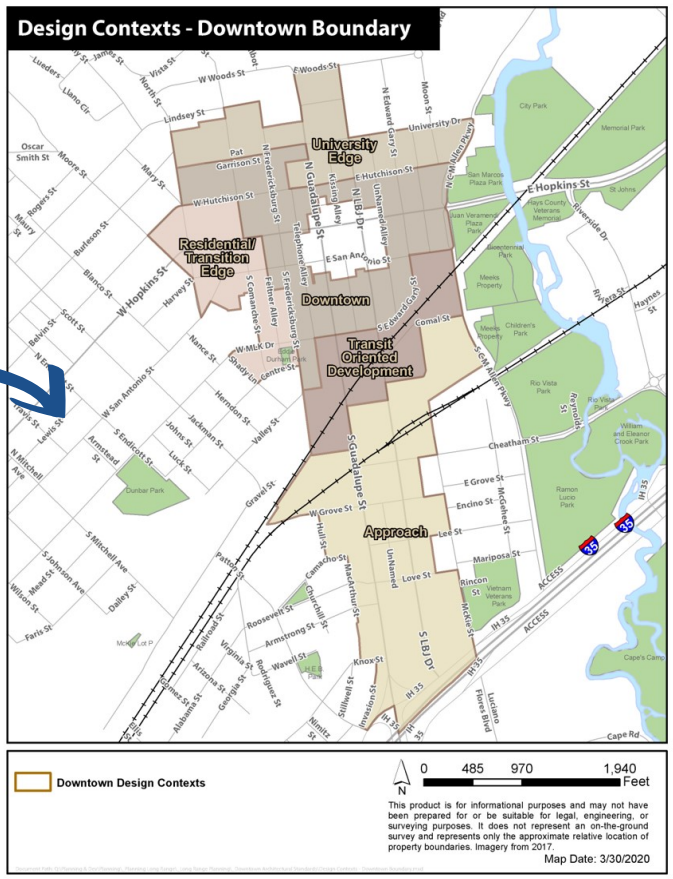
Where do these standards apply?

THE DOWNTOWN

While there are various architectural standards that apply to commercial or multifamily projects within the San Marcos City Limits. This project is looking specifically at updating standards and guidelines that are within the Downtown as shown in the downtown boundary in the map to the right.

WHAT ARE DESIGN CONTEXTS?

Design contexts are smaller geographic areas in the downtown that have unique attributes. For example, building design standards in the University Edge may need to look very different than standards in a "Residential Transition Edge".

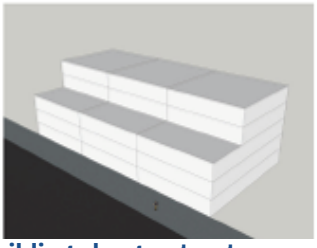


Architectural Terms Explained

MASSING

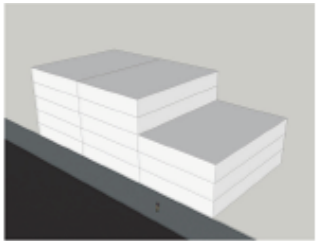
Building massing refers to the shape, volume, or "chunk" of a building. Building massing techniques can be used to reduce the overall appearance of building while also helping to create a more interesting building form or shape. To "step down" a mass of a building means to potentially remove chunks of the building to help create a smooth transition between the building and the pedestrian, street, or other sensitive feature. Stepdowns can occur at various angles on a building:

FRONT



Reduces the mass of a building along a street

SIDE

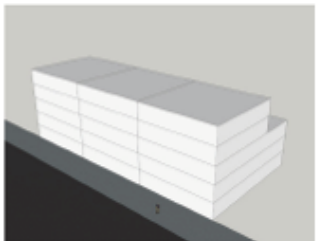


Reduces mass providing transition to a smaller building

MIDDLE

Reduces the central mass by expressing different "chunks"

REAR

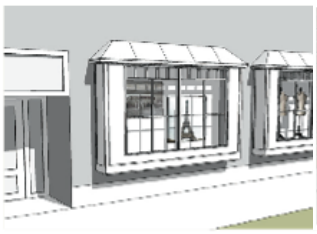


Creates a transition between the rear and a sensitive area (outdoor area or amenity space)

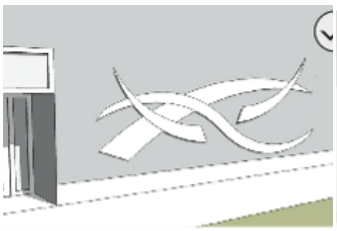
STREET LEVEL DESIGN

Street level design refers to the various elements that are viewed by a pedestrian walking along a building. Street level design elements can make the pedestrian experience more enjoyable and can help ensure larger buildings relate appropriately to the sidewalk and the street.

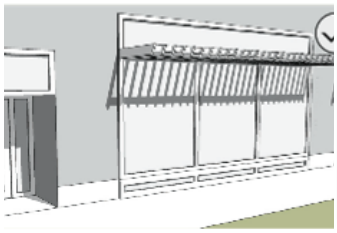
SHOPFRONT WINDOWS / DISPLAYS



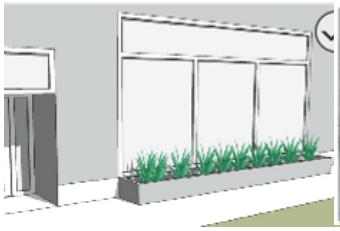
WALL ART



CANOPIES / AWNINGS (SHADE)



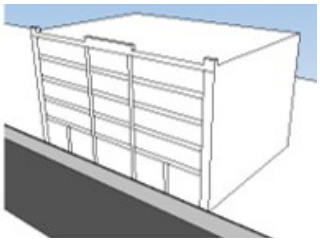
PLANTERS / LANDSCAPING



ARTICULATION

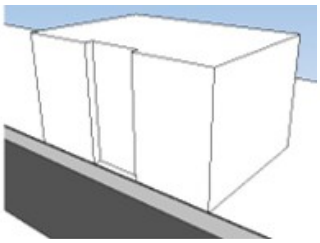
Building articulation refers to various detailed elements of a building. They are smaller than massing elements and focus on creating visual interest in a building through different vertical or horizontal details that articulate or provide a building uniqueness. Here are few examples of articulation styles:

ACCENT LINES



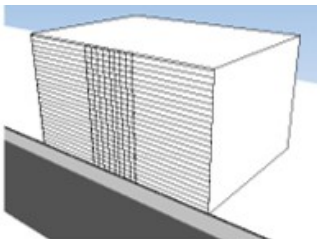

Vertical or horizontal lines on a building that projects slightly from the building wall (moldings, sills, cornices, canopies)

MINOR WALL OFFSETS



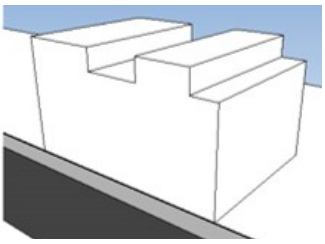

A wall offset occurs when a building includes a notch or indent in the building wall for the full height of the building.

MATERIAL/COLOR CHANGES



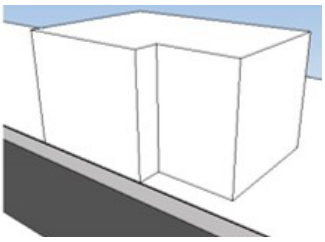

Material and color changes (every 15-30') can provide visual variety to a blank wall. Changes typically follow a pattern.

HEIGHT VARIATION




Changes in vertical height of building that are more than 2 stories tall.

INCREASED SETBACKS




A setback occurs when a building is pushed back slightly from the front property line for a portion of the building. This creates additional pedestrian space.

BASE, MIDDLE, CAP


This is a technique in which the ground floor, middle, and cap (or top) of a building are accented into three distinctive areas.

TRANSITIONS

A transition refers to when a building includes elements that soften the building as it moves closer to a sensitive edge. A sensitive edge could be a park, a smaller residential structure, or a historic district or site. Elements that would soften the building may be a reduction in height, or enhanced massing, articulation, or street level design.