

TRN-XX.XX – Sidewalk Corridor Widths within Historic Resource Overlay Zones

Rule Adopted by Bureau of Transportation (Pursuant to PCC 3.12.010).

I. Exceptions to Portland Pedestrian Design Guide, Table B-3 Sidewalk Corridor Widths

1. For Civic and Neighborhood Main Streets (as identified in the Portland Transportation System Plan) located within a Historic Resource Overlay Zone, sidewalk corridors may be a minimum of 12 feet wide (in accordance with sidewalk corridor requirements for “Neighborhood Corridors”) rather than 15 feet wide as prescribed by table B-3 to assist in the preservation of Historic building façade lines.
2. Sidewalks narrower than 12 feet may be approved along Civic and Neighborhood Main Streets located within a Historic Resource Overlay Zone through a Public Works Alternative Review process, with confirmation from the Director of Bureau of Development Services that preservation or restoration of a Historic building façade line is significant to the historic character of the block.
3. Where a sidewalk corridor less than 12 feet is approved along a Main Street within a Historic Resource Overlay Zone, all sidewalk level right-of-way encroachments and street activation activities approved and permitted by PBOT must occur fully outside of the Pedestrian Through Zone (e.g., within the curb/parking zone). This does not apply to elements such as canopies, awnings or balconies that are located above the pedestrian level and are governed by the Window Projections Into Public Right-of-Way Code Guide.
4. Civic and Neighborhood Main Streets located within Design Overlays are subject to the provisions of the Pedestrian Design Guide Table B-3 sidewalk corridor width requirements.

II. Background

The Portland Pedestrian Design Guide serves as the City’s primary guidance on how sidewalks should be built throughout Portland to ensure they are context-appropriate and accessible to people of all ages and abilities. It establishes the City’s sidewalk design criteria, including requirements for minimum sidewalk widths, street tree space requirements, street corners, and crossings, among others.

Table B-3 of the Pedestrian Design Guide sets the minimum required widths for sidewalk corridors overall and for each zone of the sidewalk corridor, based upon the roadway’s Street Design Classification. Section B.1.3.4 provides certain limited exceptions to the sidewalk widths prescribed in Table B-3, including for Main Streets within Historic Resource Overlay Zones.

Within Historic Resource Overlay Zones, there are sometimes instances in which the requirement to construct a wider sidewalk with development may conflict with established building façade lines that contribute to the coherency of a Historic/Conservation District. A historic or conservation district is not merely a collection of individually significant historic resources, rather the district is the resource. It is notable for its coherency and integrity, and that has been determined worthy of preservation. To respect and complement the district, new development should seek to blend in with the existing fabric.

PBOT briefed both the Design Commission and Historic Landmarks Commission on the updated Pedestrian Design Guide twice in 2021, at which time both commissions concurred that their primary concern is protecting the consistent street walls on the linear commercial corridors (“Main Streets”) within Historic and Conservation Districts. Both commissions expressed that a consistent street wall on these linear commercial corridors within Historic Resource Overlay Zones is its primary character-defining element and that new development should not introduce a staggered street wall in this context.

This Administrative Rule was developed in collaboration with Bureau of Development Services staff and Design and Historic Landmarks commissioners appointed to a joint subcommittee to work with PBOT to develop an approach to sidewalk setback requirements within Historic Resource Overlay Zones in October 2021.

III. Reference

Portland City Code Chapter 17.28: Sidewalks, Curbs and Driveways.

Portland City Code Chapter 17.88.020: For Buildings and Planning Actions.