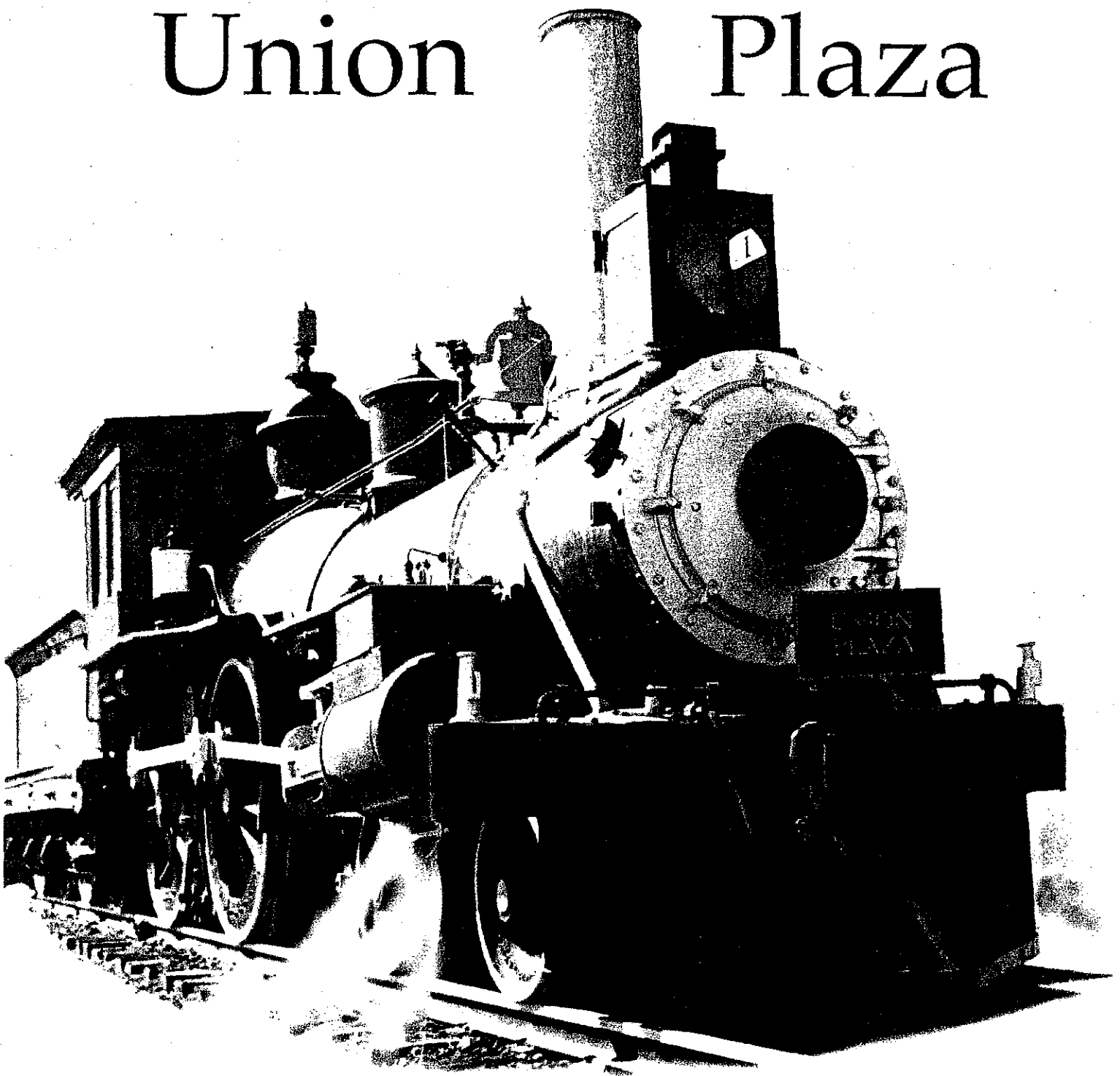


# Union Plaza



## Architectural & Design Guidelines

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The Department of Planning, Research and Development

July City of El Paso, Texas 1996

# UNION PLAZA

ARCHITECTURAL AND DESIGN

The Department of Planning Research and Development

City of El Paso, Texas

City Ordinance 012874 adopted the  
Union Plaza District, August 6, 1996

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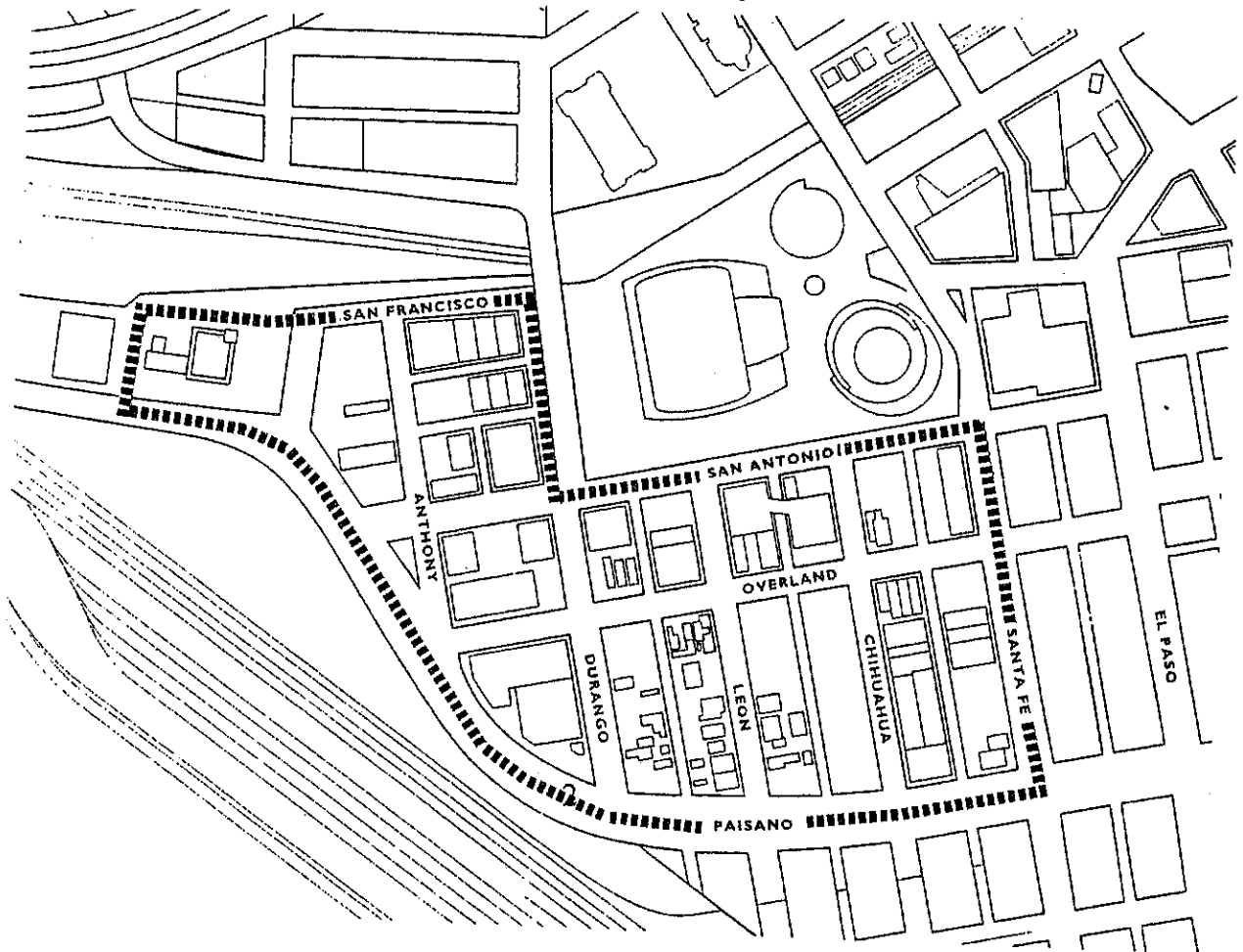
# **INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDELINES**

Purpose  
Unity, Order and Balance

## PURPOSE

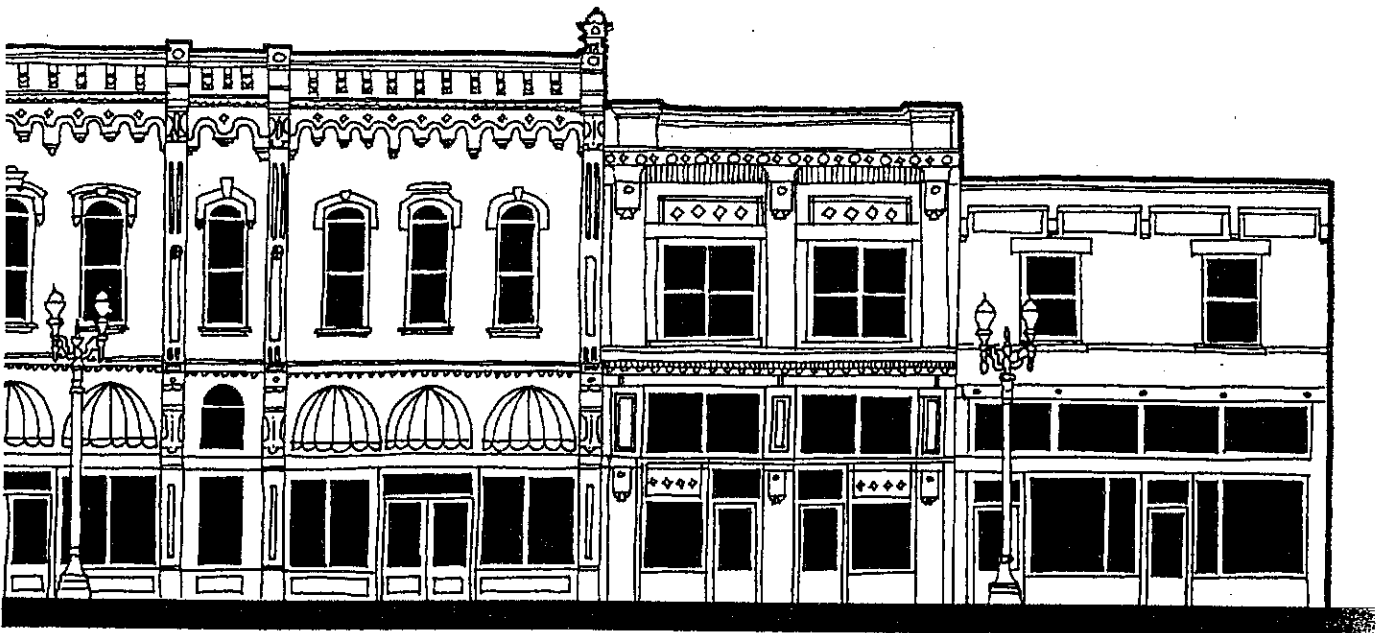
The purpose of these guidelines is to protect business investments in the Union Plaza District from inappropriate design and unsightly construction that could potentially diminish the appeal of the district. Adherence to the guidelines and cooperation among various business owners will enhance Union Plaza and transform the streetscape from an ordinary city block to a coordinated, compatible and truly beautiful international attraction. For the redevelopment of the district, a turn of the century railroad theme from the late 19th and early 20th century has been selected to enhance the public improvements; as well as, provide a focus to the district. All applications for redevelopment of existing buildings or structures or new construction must comply with the Union Plaza Architectural and Design Guidelines.

This part of downtown was developed for the most part, after the completion of the Union Depot in 1906, and thus some of the surviving buildings reflect the character of that time. The surviving buildings of this era in this district are of masonry load bearing construction with simple two part commercial facades or warehouses. There are a few two-story tenements and single family houses from this time period. Many buildings have a classical sense of order but contain few, if any, reference to past periods. Some buildings are extremely plain, bearing certain affinities to their early 19th-century predecessors. Diverse expression in design was achieved by the use of building materials. Brick came in numerous colors and textures, and is the predominate material. Cut stone was used for lintels, arches and copings. Cast-iron can still be seen in columns and beams. Relatively little new constructions has occurred since the closing of the depot in 1974 and the renovated depot is now used by Amtrak and Sun Metro.



## UNITY, ORDER AND BALANCE

Buildings constructed along San Francisco Street and San Antonio Street, between 1900 and 1920, tend to emphasize unity, order and balance. The importance given to these qualities reflects two allied concerns. First, is the premise that the classic tradition provides the basis for good design principles. Second, is the belief that these principles apply not just to individual buildings, but also to groups of buildings as a whole. Based on this premise, commercial buildings should be contributors to a coherent urban landscape. While each facade may possess its own identity and some should stand out as landmarks, most examples should be restrained and relatively unobtrusive. All future renovation, and new infill construction shall use the proportion and scale of the two part commercial store front with large areas of bays and windows. For the sake of design unity and identification, the Union Depot, a local and national landmark, shall be used as a reference for these guidelines.





# **SITE DEVELOPMENT**

Height  
Development Standards  
Pattern and Rhythm

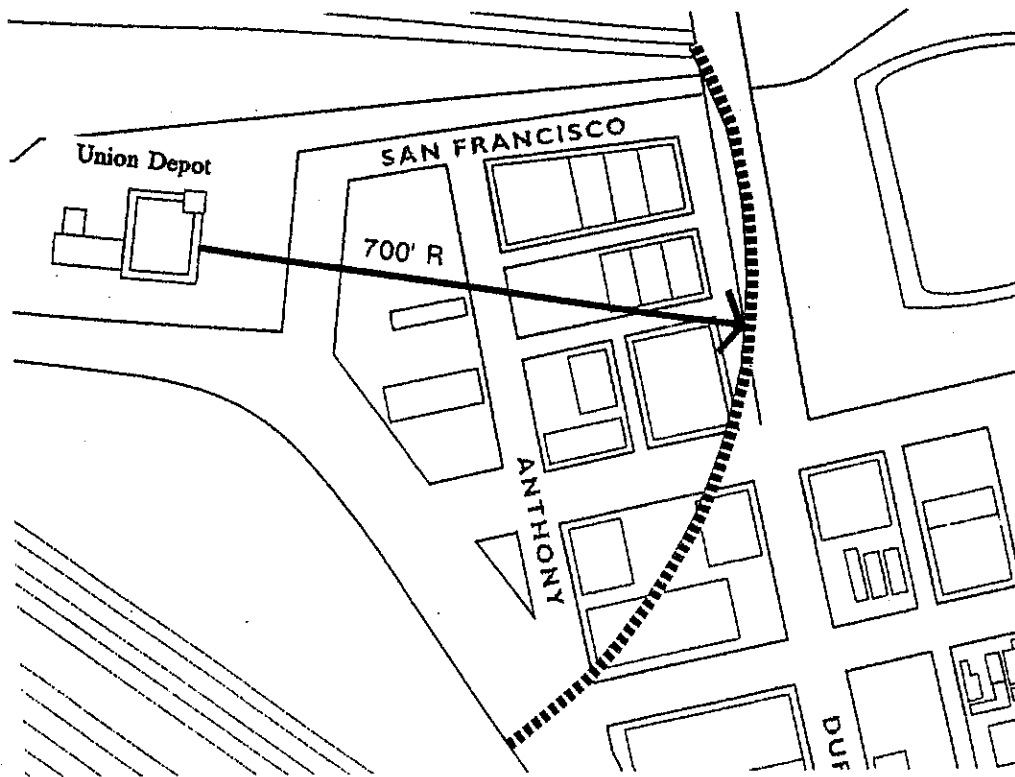
## HEIGHT

- In the District, height limits of buildings or structures within a seven hundred (700) foot radius of any part of the facade of the Union Depot shall not exceed forty (40) feet.
- Height limits of buildings or structures outside the seven hundred (700) foot radius will follow those height limitations as specified in Section 20.53.060B in the Union Plaza Zoning Ordinance.



## DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

- In the case of new construction of a residential/commercial mixed-use project, residential uses shall not occupy the ground floor.
- In a mixed-use development, lot areas must be at least five hundred and fifty (550) square feet per unit, excluding the area devoted to commercial uses.
- For buildings three or more stories in height, a minimum lot area of three hundred (300) square feet per unit is required, excluding the area devoted to commercial uses.
- A minimum site area of nine thousand three hundred and sixty (9,360) square feet with a minimum average width of seventy five (75) feet is required for mixed use projects.
- Due to the nature of existing development in the district, front, side or rear yards, are not required.



## PATTERN AND RHYTHM

The repetition of walls, windows, and doors in the facade of a building establishes a pattern which is sensed by a person observing a building. Architectural elements such as covered entrances, display windows, landscaping projections, and roof lines contribute to the pattern and rhythm of Union Plaza. New construction and additions should maintain and reinforce the existing pattern.



TOO LOW



APPROPRIATE



TOO TALL



## **SITE DETAILS**

Sidewalks and Pedestrian Crossings

Outdoor Cafes

Lighting

Fencing and Walls

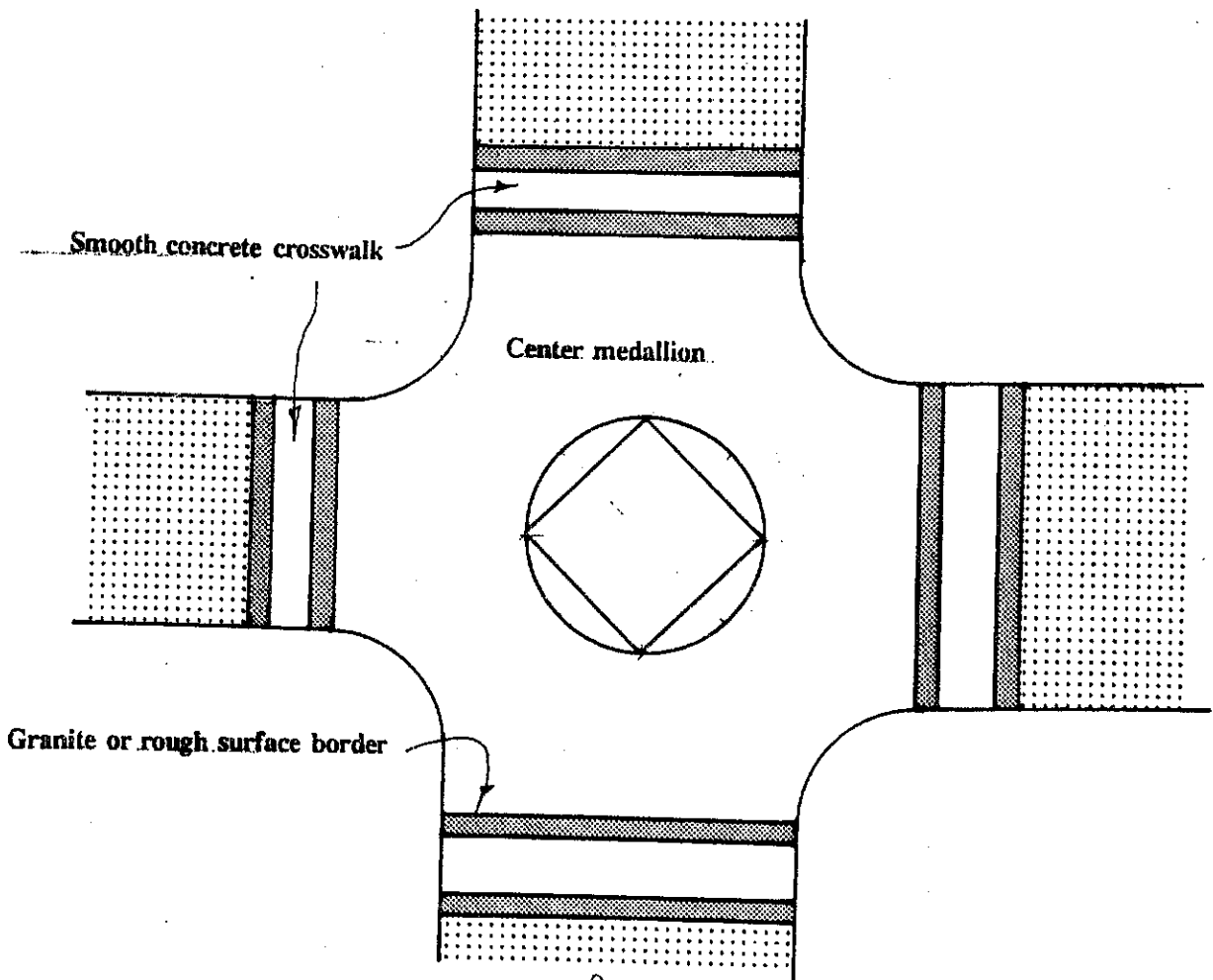
Security

Landscaping

## SIDEWALKS AND PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

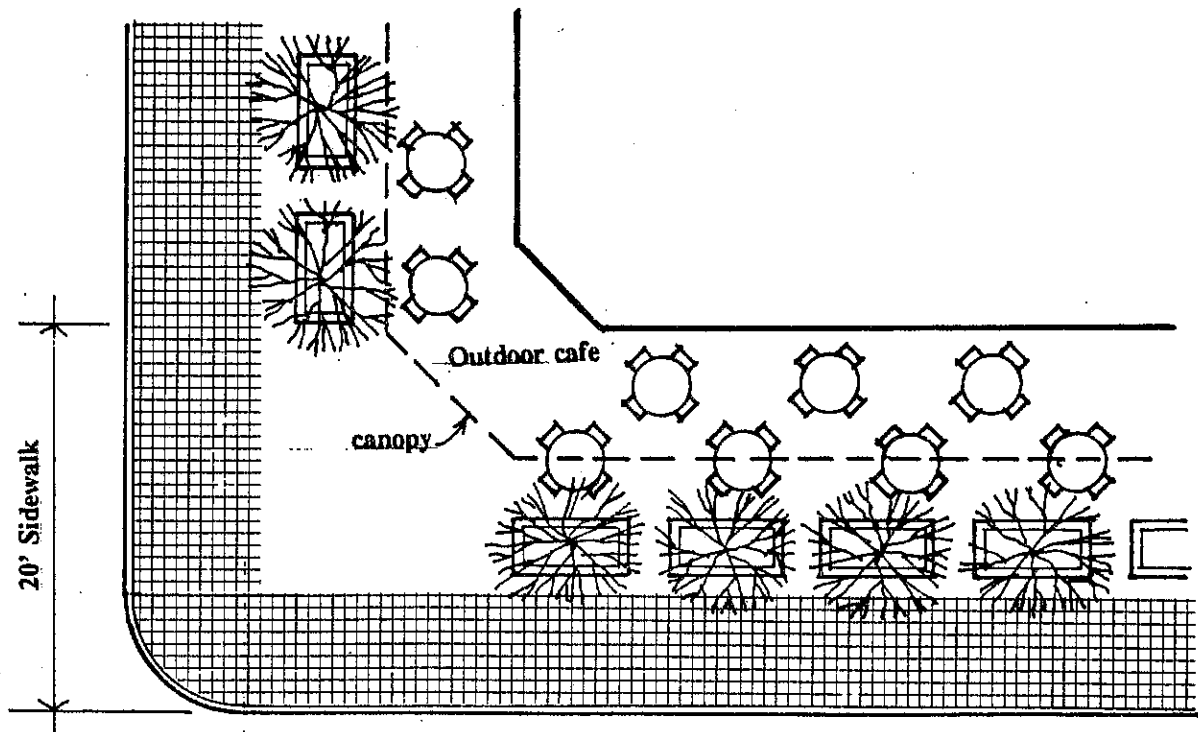
Treatment of sidewalks should consider the needs of pedestrian traffic and aesthetic improvements. The following are recommendations for the district:

- Sidewalks and pedestrian crossings should be enhanced by the use of color and pattern.
- This can be accomplished by the use of pavers, tiles, or by impressing patterns on concrete and other techniques.
- Material in crosswalks should be smooth to allow easy walking and access. Heavy textures and materials should be utilized in the border to separate the crosswalk from the roadway.



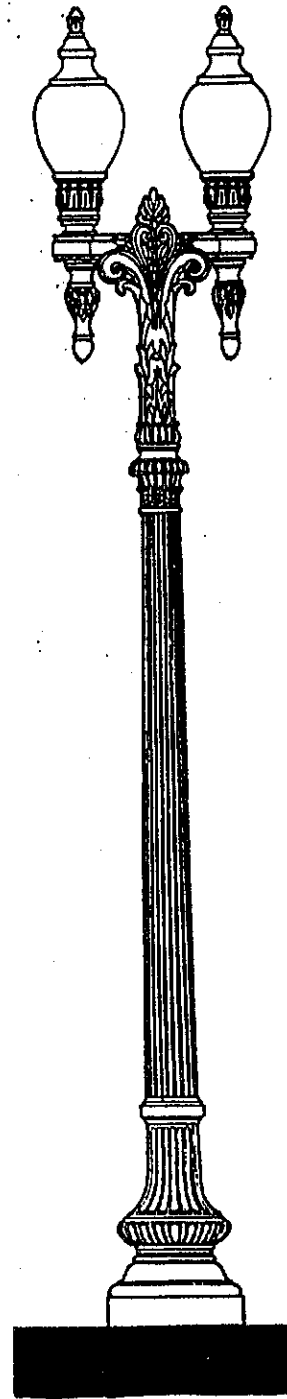
## OUTDOOR CAFES

- The north and east side of the street are the preferred locations for outdoor cafes due to solar orientation.
- If cafes are placed on either the south or west side of the street, it is recommended that awnings, canopies or landscaping be used to provide shade from the sun.
- In the design of outdoor cafes, elements such as landscaping, fencing, solar orientation, and the use of canopies and awnings should be considered carefully.



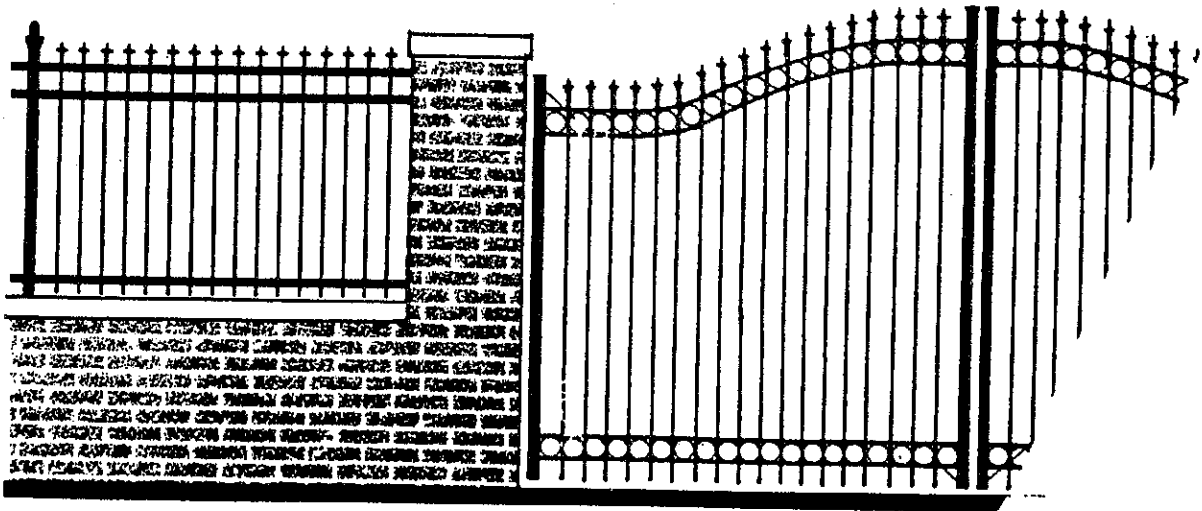
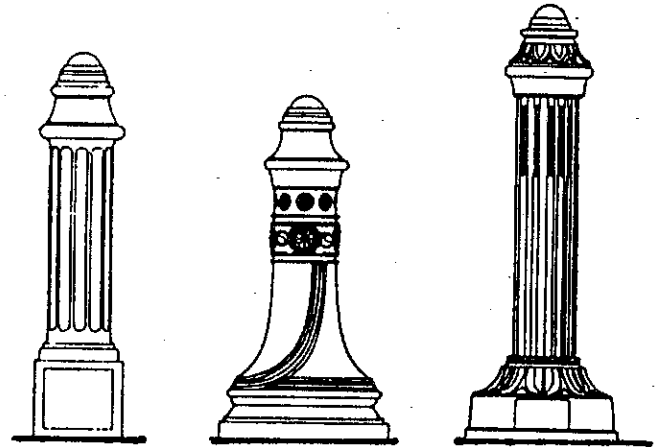
## LIGHTING

- Generally, lighting provides safety and visibility. It also provides safe movement of vehicular and pedestrian traffic, security and crime prevention, and accentuates important landmarks.
- Period light fixtures should be installed on all sidewalks, alleys, open spaces and building facades with the owner's permission, and security lighting in alleys and parking lots. Sconce lighting is permitted.
- Neon lighting and fiber optics may be used on building fronts as logos, accents and signs inside window displays or to highlight architectural features.
- Flashing or intermittent lighting is prohibited in the Union Plaza District.



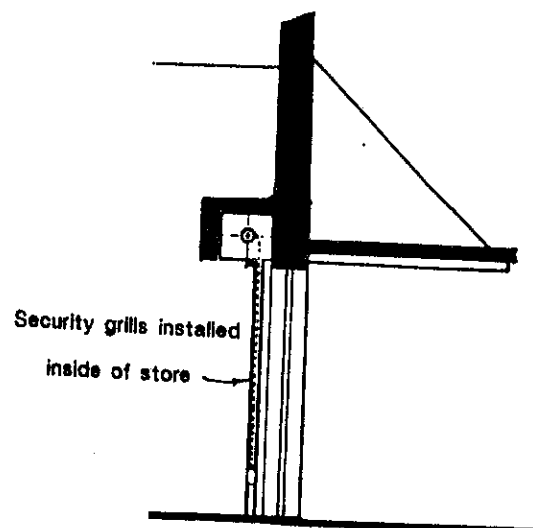
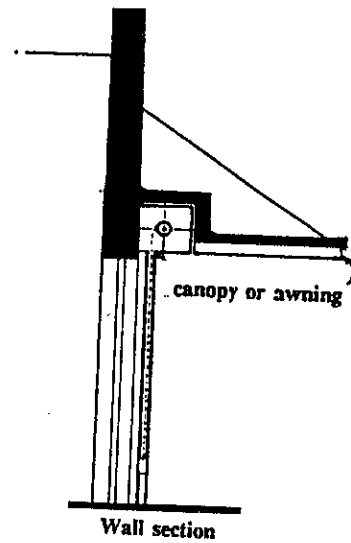
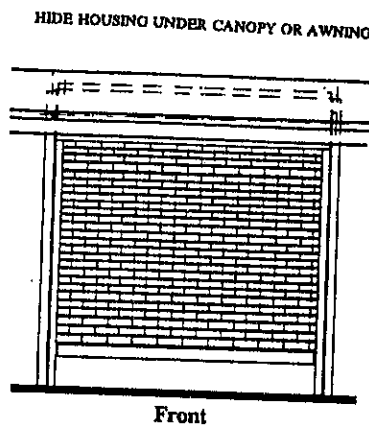
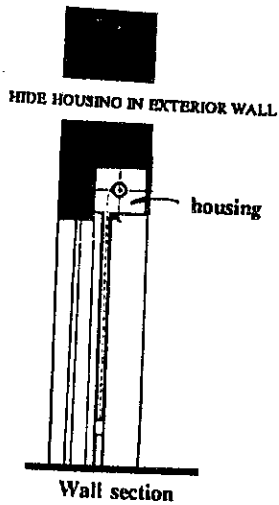
## FENCING AND WALLS

- Brick and wrought iron materials are acceptable for fencing.
- Chain link fencing is incompatible with the Union Plaza District and is not permitted in the district.
- Solid fencing on commercial properties located on any corner lot, shall not exceed three (3) feet in height within twenty (20) feet of a street intersection.
- Loading docks and trash receptacles should be screened.
- Specific design and location regulations for fences and screening walls shall follow the requirements in Section 20.08.300 of the El Paso City Code.
- Iron bollards with chains are acceptable as fencing for parking lots.



## SECURITY

- Metal security grills are permitted.
- Security grills, other than electronic security devices, are limited to roll-up screen/door/grills and shall be incorporated and concealed by a storefront awning or otherwise integrated into the design of the building facades.
- Devices housing mechanisms must not be visible.
- The curtain itself shall be of an open mesh design. Solid curtains are prohibited.





## LANDSCAPING

The regulations of Chapter 20.65 of the El Paso City Code (Landscape Ordinance) are exempt in the district. However, landscaping should utilize drought tolerant plants and shrubs that effectively shade buildings and right-of-ways. Given the lack of building setback and sidewalk widths, creative use of window boxes and planters should be encouraged. Planters should provide an internal irrigation system to promote the long term life of the landscaping. Functional considerations such as solar radiation, water demands, plant selection and maintenance requirements should be given careful attention. Aesthetic principles to be considered are unity, balance and scale. Both aesthetic and functional principles should be analyzed completely when designing a landscape plan for any redevelopment or new construction project.





# **BUILDING DETAILS**

Exterior Finishes

Roofs

Chimneys and Vents

Windows and Doors

Downspouts

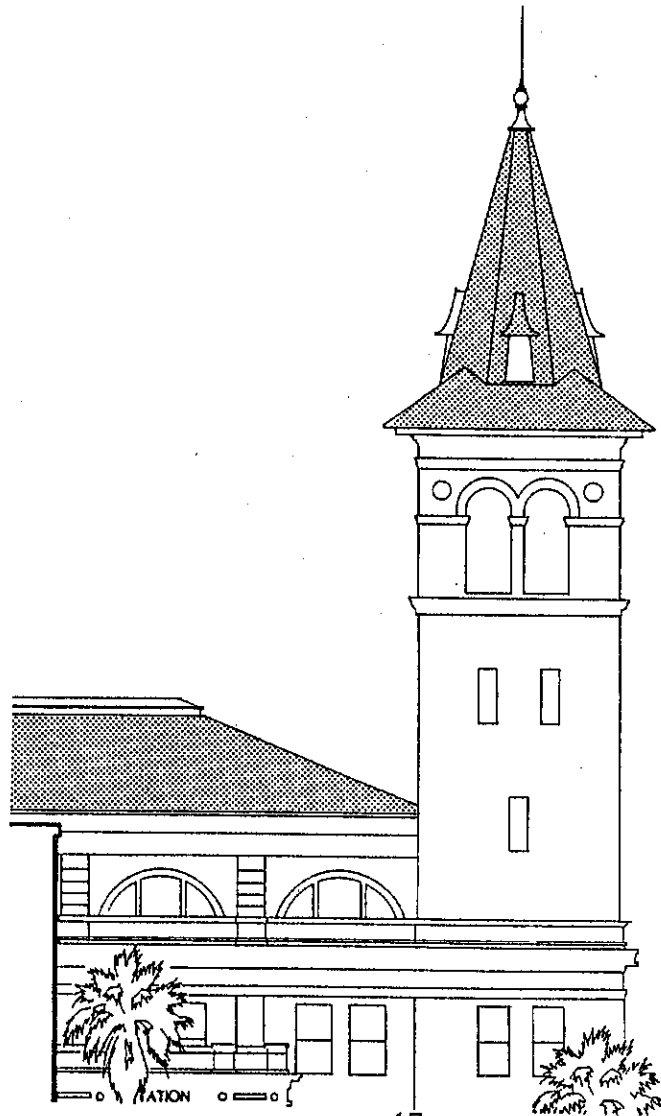
Awnings and Canopies

## EXTERIOR FINISHES

- Recommended materials should consist primarily of brick, or masonry materials that compliment existing structures in the district.
- New materials such as concrete, metals, concrete masonry units, and cementitious coatings may be used provided that the final building facades harmonize with the original structures.
- Brick veneer or other appropriate materials may be used to cover concrete or concrete masonry unit construction. Painted concrete masonry unit or concrete is considered incompatible with existing original development.
- Use of pre-cast and cast-in-place concrete is acceptable.
- New concrete construction must compliment existing buildings in style and detail.
- Existing masonry and mortar should be retained if possible. If masonry must be replaced, old and new materials must match as closely as possible. Original color and texture of masonry should be retained wherever possible. The use of steam cleaning or chemical wash is recommended for existing masonry.
- New construction may duplicate masonry details, such as cornices and pediments found on dominant buildings in the district.
- The use of metals is acceptable. However, polished metal should only be used as a highlight, and not dominate the facade or roof.
- Wood should be used primarily for trim, windows and doors. Original wood material shall be maintained where possible. If wood needs to be replaced, materials shall match existing materials as closely as possible. New wood construction should be compatible with existing materials and construction details of buildings in the district.
- Exposed synthetic materials may be used when the proposed materials match existing materials, original detailing is not altered, window and door trim is properly detailed, and unique finishes are not covered or damaged.
- Colors used for finish should blend with surrounding buildings and the railroad theme. Bright colors should be used only as accent colors.

## ROOFS

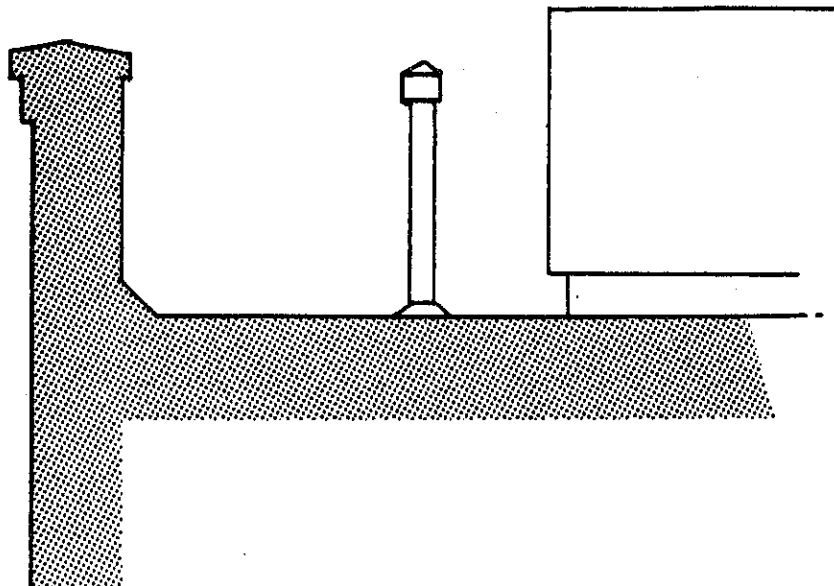
- Structures in El Paso have a variety of roof shapes and styles. Materials used for roofing include copper, anodized aluminum, slate, asphalt shingles, and tile. The Union Plaza area with the exception of the Union Depot, is known for its commercial style flat roofs or built-up asphalt roofs. Mansard roofs are also an acceptable roof style for use in the district. The Union Depot is an excellent example of a hip roof.
- Any *visible* roof structure included as part of new construction must be compatible in the flat roof or built-up asphalt design and style of other buildings and with the Union Depot.
- Factory colored metal roofing is considered acceptable within the Union Plaza Project Area.



## CHIMNEYS AND VENTS

- Chimneys and roofs should not be taken through existing windows or doorways. The preferred manner is to install a vent through a chase in the roof or through the side of a building if possible. Vents should not be installed through the front of the building.
- The existing structures in Union Plaza do not have large, conspicuous, smokestacks, chimneys or roof-mounted vents. Unless these are required for normal operation of a facility by the building or safety codes, they are not recommended as part of a new building design.
- Reasonable attempts should be made to conceal unsightly vents with materials or in the placement of such vent.

### Hide vents and mechanical equipment behind parapets

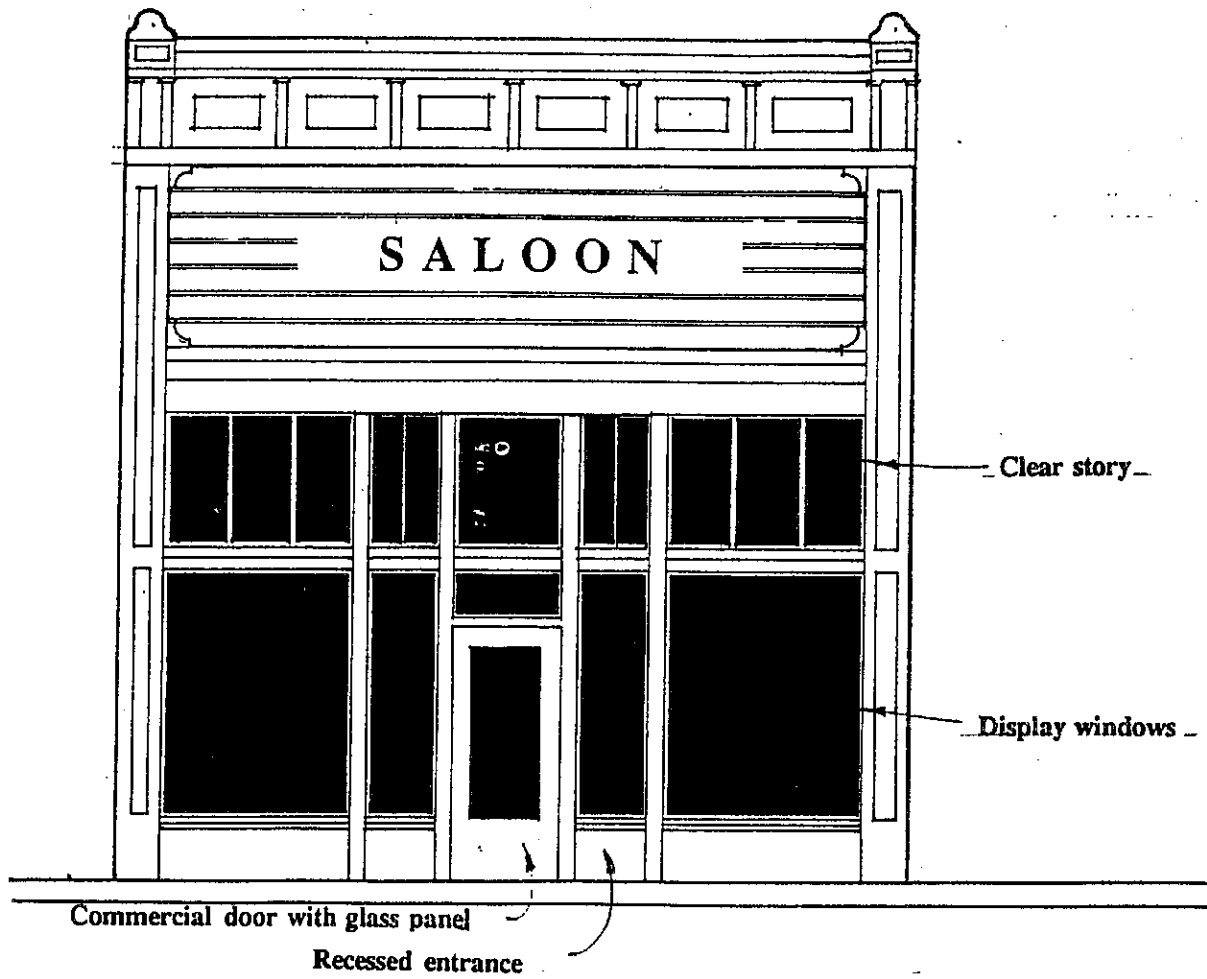


## WINDOWS AND DOORS

- Only nonreflective glazing that is clear, lightly tinted or smoked is permitted.
- Original windows and door should be preserved and maintained provided that they are in good condition. Replacement windows and doors must match the same size and style of the original.
- Architectural detail such as arches, lintels and transoms (even if they are not operable) should be preserved as part of the building elements.
- Awnings, extended roof eaves, and deep-set windows are alternative ways to shade windows without the use of reflective surfaces.
- Shaded entryways and patios to preclude cooled air loss are recommended.
- Doorways are an important feature of any building and should reflect the architecture of the area.



## DOWNSPOUTS



- Anodized aluminum and copper downspouts are acceptable.
- All roof runoff must drain through downspouts.

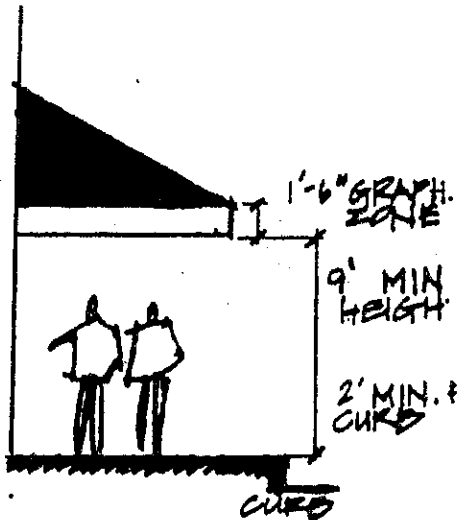
## AWNINGS AND CANOPIES

Awnings and canopies are important fixtures that serve a number of functions; protecting pedestrians from sun and rain and protecting window displays from fading caused by direct sunlight. Also, they allow reflected light to enter the interior without causing additional heating of the structure. Awnings are sloped, while canopies are generally flat. Both project from the building and when properly designed, each can provide additional interest to a structure. In general, awnings will be evaluated on an individual basis in order to determine appropriateness and impact to the structure and its surrounding environment.

The following general guidelines apply.

- Historically, awnings were covered with canvas. Canvas and other synthetics (woven acrylics) should be used on awnings. Shiny fabrics, however, may distract from a building's appearance and should be avoided.
- Prefabricated metal awnings should be avoided unless they embody a design consistent with turn of the century architecture.
- Materials should be compatible with the structure and other elements particular to the district. Plastic awnings and canopies are not be permitted.
- Awnings and canopies should be placed at the top of openings, but they should not cover important architectural details or elements.





- Awnings and canopies should be of an appropriate size and scale in relation to the building's facade. Awnings should not cover more than one third (1/3) of the window opening.
- Fixtures should not extend across the facades of several buildings and should fit their openings.
- Colors on awnings and canopies should be considered carefully. Generally, colors should relate to a structure's overall color scheme.
- Graphics on fabric awning should be placed on the slope or valance. On canopies, signs can be mounted above (along its front edge), or shingle signs can be suspended from the ceiling.
- Awnings and canopies should be used to hide the housing of security mechanisms, when such devices are used.
- A canopy or other sunshade over a walkway is permitted in the front yard or any yard abutting a street. The canopy or sunshade may extend to within three (3) feet of the property line.



# SIGNS

General Information

Illumination and Motion

Color and Design

Freestanding or Monument Signs

Wall Signs Including Canopy and Awning

Shingle Signs

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Signs are any public display boards bearing information or advertising. Chapter 20.66.335 of the El Paso Municipal Code specifically regulates design, color material, height, location and size of signs within the city and in the Union Plaza District. Signs should not hide or cover any significant detailing or architectural features of the building. Signage should not cover windows, doors, or air vents. Signs should be located in close proximity to the activity it is identifying. In most cases, the best location is usually above, on, or near the front door.

- Off-premise signs, roof mounted and billboard signs are not permitted in the District.
- Applicants may install one of the following type of signs:

Freestanding or monument

Wall signs which may include canopies and awnings

- Shingle signs are also permitted in addition to either sign type and will not be counted toward the allowable wall sign area limit.
- Projecting signs may be installed subject to the approval of the Director of Planning, Research and Development.
- Auxiliary signs are permitted to assist in the safe and efficient movement of pedestrian and vehicular traffic.
- Kiosks may be permitted subject to the review of design and placement of the structure by the Director of Planning, Research and Development.
- Banners are prohibited, with the exception that they may be used for a period not exceeding ten (10) days for grand openings, festivals and charitable functions only.

## ILLUMINATION AND MOTION

- Neon and fiber optic materials are permissible as logos, accents and window displays.
- Flashing, backlit, intermittent or moving lights are prohibited.
- Twirling, rotating and revolving signs are prohibited.

## COLOR AND DESIGN

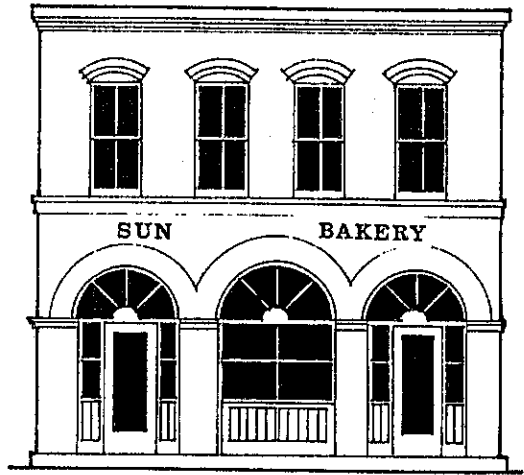
- Colors should compliment the building and the surrounding area; florescent colors are prohibited.
- Designs should be artistic, innovative, yet compatible with the building and the surrounding area.
- Signage shall not exceed ten (10) percent of the total buildable wall area.

## FREESTANDING OR MONUMENT SIGNS

- Freestanding or monument signs are only permitted in four instances; District identification, directory, parking lots or structures, and new construction.
- In the case of parking lots and new construction, two (two) freestanding or monument signs are permitted on each site.
- For District identification or directory purposes, a freestanding or monument sign may be erected at major entry points to the District subject to the approval of the Director.
- Each freestanding or monument sign may not exceed a maximum face area of seventy two (72) square feet. The vertical dimension of the sign face should not exceed eight (8) feet.
- Freestanding or monument signs constructed of plywood are not permitted.
- Materials permitted for the construction of freestanding or monument signs must be of the same or compatible materials of the building for which the sign is intended.
- If a freestanding or monument sign is located on a corner lot, it shall not be located in the area of a triangle formed by intersecting property lines and a diagonal line joining the property lines at points twenty (20) feet from an intersection.



## WALL SIGNS INCLUDING CANOPY AND AWNING



All canopies or awnings installed in the Union Plaza District must also meet the guideline set forth on pages 21 and 22.

- The total area of wall signs may not exceed ten (10) percent of the face area of the elevation of the building on which the signs are to be placed.
- A wall sign shall not project more than eighteen (18) inches, diagonally, from the face of the wall or the surface of a canopy or awning on which the sign is constructed.
- Wall signs should not obscure the building fenestration nor alter the architectural integrity of the building.
- Wall signs shall not extend, vertically or horizontally, beyond the edges of the building or structure on which they are attached.
- Every reasonable attempt must be made to preserve existing historic wall signs. They add to the theme of the district, and shall not be counted toward total sign limitations.

## SHINGLE SIGNS

- One shingle sign per street frontage shall be permitted for business identification purposes only. Shingle signs do not count toward the allowable sign wall area limit.
- Each shingle sign shall not exceed a maximum sign area of six (6) square feet.
- The bottom edge of a shingle sign must not be more than two (2) foot below the bottom edge of any canopy.
- The end of a shingle sign may not extend beyond the edge of any canopy.
- An nine (9) foot clearance must be maintained between the bottom edge of the shingle sign and grade.
- A shingle sign must be placed perpendicular to the front wall of the building.





# **APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS**



## APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Prior to the issuance of any building or related permits for any new construction or renovation of the exterior of existing buildings and structures, drawings and application shall first be reviewed for approval by the Director of Planning, Research and Development or his designee, to ensure that the proposed construction complies with these guidelines. All maps, plans and drawings should be at a scale of not less than twenty (20) feet to the inch unless a modification is authorized by the Director or his designee. Eight (8) copies of the site plan and development plan are required unless additional copies are required by the Director or his designee. Such review by the Director shall be completed within ten (10) business days after the receipt of a complete application.

A detailed site plan including the following:

- Legal description;
- Metes and bounds if portion of lot, block or if property is unplatted;
- Site dimensions;
- Adjacent public right-of-way, public transportation routes and pedestrian systems;
- Utility lines to rights-of-way and easements through the site;
- Description of other site features including drainage, soils or other considerations that may effect the development of the site;
- Location of any special or custom street lighting to be approved by the Department of Traffic and Transportation, if proposed;
- Stamp or seal and signature of a registered professional engineer or architect preparing plans.

A development plan including the following:

- Site layout including the location of proposed buildings, parking, open space and other facilities;
- Location, capacity and design of parking facilities if proposed to include ingress/egress, landscaping, signage and fencing;

- Storm water drainage;
- Description of use of individual building(s) included in the project and maximum floor area devoted to each use;
- Schematic location and design of open space on site, if proposed, including a landscaping plan;
- Sidewalks, to include any existing traffic signals and signage, light poles or other utility apparatus adjacent to the site;
- Schematic buildings elevations and sections, as required to describe the general design of the project and the maximum height of the building including proposed colors;
- Proposed water and sanitary sewer and utility improvements. The application shall include a permit approved by the El Paso Water Utilities;
- Location, size and types of proposed signs, lighting, fencing, landscaping and trash receptacles;
- Design standards applicable to the project;
- Site location map to scale;
- Location and size of loading and unloading berths, if proposed.



# **PROCEDURE**

1. Prior to the issuance of any building or related permits for any new construction or renovation of the exterior of existing buildings and structures, an application containing a site plan and a development plan shall be submitted to the Department of Planning, Research and Development.
2. The application will be reviewed to ensure that the proposed construction complies with the Union Plaza Architectural and Design Guidelines.
3. Upon receipt of an application by the Director or his designee, the applicant will receive a signed and dated checklist verifying completeness of the application. Incomplete applications will not be accepted for review.
4. The Director or his designee, from the date of receipt of a complete application shall have ten (10) working days to review the application. The Director, or his designee may approve, approve with conditions or deny.
5. If the application is denied, the applicant shall have fifteen (15) calendar days to file a written notice of appeal with the Director of the Department of Planning, Research and Development.
6. Upon the filing of an appeal, the Union Plaza Board of Appeals shall take action within forty-five (45) calendar days from the date of receipt of an appeal by the Director. If the Board does not take action within the forty-five (45) day period, an appeal shall be deemed to be approved.
7. A copy of the decision by the Union Plaza Board of Appeals shall be filed in writing and notice sent by mail to the appellant. Every decision of the Board shall be final.