

City of Minneapolis CPED Planning Division 505 4th Avenue S, #320 Minneapolis, MN 55415 612-673-3000

CHAPTER 550, ARTICLE V, SITE PLAN REVIEW STANDARDS

ARTICLE I. GENERAL PROVISIONS

550.500. Purpose. Site plan review standards are established to promote development that is compatible with nearby properties, development patterns, natural features and plans adopted by the city council, to minimize pedestrian and vehicular conflict, to reinforce public spaces, to promote public safety, and to visually enhance development. The regulations recognize the unique character of land and development throughout the city and the need for flexibility in site plan review.

550.510. Buildings and uses subject to site plan review.

- (a) In general. Table 550-1, Buildings and Uses Subject to Site Plan Review, lists all buildings and uses subject to site plan review. The site plan review requirements of this article shall apply to the establishment or expansion of any building, principal use or freestanding accessory parking garage listed on the table, except as otherwise provided by this section. Site plan review shall not be required where the property has received site plan approval and is in full compliance with such approval, and the establishment or expansion of the use does not alter the approved site plan. Any person with a legal or equitable interest in a property may choose to voluntarily file an application for site plan review for any building or use not listed in Table 550-1, Buildings and Uses Subject to Site Plan Review. Voluntary applications shall be subject to administrative site plan review.
- (b) Downtown districts. Any building containing fifty thousand (50,000) square feet or more of gross floor area located in the downtown districts shall be exempt from the general landscaping and screening requirements. The parking and loading landscaping and screening requirements shall apply.

Table 550-1 Buildings and Uses Subject to Site Plan Review

Any new principal nonresidential or mixed-use building.

The site plan review application may be reviewed administratively if both of the following apply:

- (1) The project or proposal does not include any other land use application requiring a public hearing.
- (2) The building contains less than twenty thousand (20,000) square feet of gross floor area.

Any addition to a nonresidential or mixed-use building that would increase its gross floor area by two thousand five hundred (2,500) square feet or more.

The site plan review application may be reviewed administratively if each of the following apply:

- (1) The project or proposal does not include any other land use application requiring a public hearing.
- (2) The building addition contains less than twenty thousand (20,000) square feet of gross floor area.¹

Any building or use containing four (4) or more new or additional dwelling units or rooming units.² The site plan review application may be reviewed administratively if both of the following apply:

- (1) The project or proposal does not include any other land use application requiring a public hearing.
- (2) The proposal includes fewer than twenty (20) new or additional dwelling units or rooming units.

Any use that includes the intensification, expansion or reconstruction of a legal nonconforming drive-through facility.

Freestanding accessory parking garages containing thirty (30) or more new or additional parking spaces³

Principal parking facilities containing ten (10) or more new or additional parking spaces⁴

Public services and utilities uses.

Table 550-1, continued

Recycling facility.

Transportation, vehicle services, and parking uses, except as otherwise required for principal parking facilities above.

Any new single-, two-, or three-family dwellings

The site plan review application shall be reviewed administratively and shall be subject to the standards of section 550.790, Site plan review for Single-, Two-, and Three-family Dwellings.

¹ Additions that total two thousand five hundred (2,500) square feet or more in any three (3) year period shall be subject to site plan review.

² Additions that total four (4) or more dwelling or rooming units in any three (3) year period shall be subject to site plan review and additions that total twenty (20) or more dwelling or rooming units in any three (3) year period shall require a public hearing and shall not be eligible for administrative review.

³ Additions that total thirty (30) or more parking spaces in any three (3) year period shall be subject to site plan review.

⁴ Additions that total ten (10) or more parking spaces in any three (3) year period shall be subject to site plan review.

550.530. Alternative compliance. The city planning commission or zoning administrator may approve alternatives to any site plan review requirement upon finding any of the following and as required elsewhere in this article:

- (1) The alternative meets the intent of this article and the site plan includes amenities or improvements that address any adverse effects of the alternative. Site amenities may include but are not limited to additional open space, additional landscaping and screening, green roof, decorative pavers, ornamental metal fencing, architectural enhancements, transit facilities, bicycle facilities, preservation of natural features, restoration of previously damaged natural environment, rehabilitation of existing structures that have been locally designated or have been determined to be eligible to be locally designated as historic structures, and design which is similar in form, scale and materials to existing structures on the site and to surrounding development.
- (2) Strict adherence to the requirements is impractical because of site location or conditions and the proposed alternative meets the intent of this article.
- (3) The proposed alternative is consistent with applicable development plans or development objectives adopted by the city council and meets the intent of this article.

550.540. Conditions and guarantees for site plan review.

- (a) *In general.* The city planning commission or zoning administrator may impose such conditions on any proposed site plan and require such guarantees as it deems reasonable and necessary to protect the public interest and to ensure compliance with the standards and purposes of this zoning ordinance and the applicable policies of the comprehensive plan.
- (b) Performance bond or letter of credit. The city planning commission or zoning administrator may require a performance bond or letter of credit to be supplied by the applicant guaranteeing completion of required site improvements as a condition of site plan approval. The amount of such bond shall be set at one hundred twenty-five (125) percent of the estimated cost of the improvements.
- (c) Inclusionary housing. Approval of a site plan review application for any building or use subject to the inclusionary housing requirements of Article VI, Inclusionary Housing in this chapter, shall be conditioned upon compliance with the inclusionary housing requirements specified in the city's Unified Housing Policy in effect on the date a complete site plan review application is submitted.

550.550. Changes in approved site plan.

- (a) *Minor changes.* The zoning administrator may authorize minor changes to an approved site plan upon determining each of the following:
 - (1) The proposed changes would not represent a substantial redesign of the project and are consistent with the intent of this article and the findings made by the city planning commission or zoning administrator in connection with the approval of the site plan.

- (2) The proposed changes would not create the need for additional alternative compliance or land use applications not previously considered and approved by the city planning commission or zoning administrator.
- (3) Where the proposed changes would result in additional building bulk, the increase would not exceed ten (10) percent of the gross floor area of the approved increase, or an additional two thousand five hundred (2,500) square feet, whichever is less. A proposed reduction of floor area compared to the approved site plan may also be considered a substantial change based on criteria (1) and (2) above.
- (4) Compared to the approved plan, the changes would not increase the proposed building height greater than five (5) feet or five (5) percent, whichever is less.
- (5) Additional building bulk or height shall not be considered a minor change if the approved building bulk or height was authorized through a variance or conditional use permit to exceed maximum floor area or height limitations.
- (b) Other changes. Changes to the site plan or components of the site plan other than minor changes shall require amendment to the site plan. The requirements for application and approval of a site plan amendment shall be the same as the requirements for original application and approval. However, an amendment to an approved site plan filed within two (2) years of approval shall be subject to a reduced application fee as authorized by Chapter 525, Administration and Procedures.

550.560. Building placement.

- (a) In general. The placement of buildings shall reinforce the street wall, maximize natural surveillance and visibility, and facilitate pedestrian access and circulation. The first floor of buildings shall be located not more than fifteen (15) feet from the front lot line, except where a greater yard is required by this zoning ordinance. In the case of a corner lot, the building wall abutting each street shall be located not more than fifteen (15) from the lot line, except where a greater yard is required by this zoning ordinance. The area between the building and the lot line shall include amenities such as landscaping, tables and seating, but shall not include vehicle parking.
- (b) *Exceptions.* The city planning commission or zoning administrator may approve alternatives to these requirements, subject to section 550.530, provided that where applicable, any adverse effects shall be mitigated by a decorative fence, masonry wall, or planted materials that reinforce the street wall.

550.570. Building walls.

- (a) In larger buildings, architectural elements, including recesses or projections, windows and entries, shall be emphasized to divide the building into smaller identifiable sections. Blank, uninterrupted walls that do not include windows, entries, recesses or projections, or other architectural elements, shall not exceed twentyfive (25) feet in length.
- (b) Generally, buildings with a simple palette of high-quality materials are preferred. Buildings shall not include more than three (3) exterior materials on each elevation. This excludes windows, doors, and foundation materials.
- (c) The appearance and materials of the rear and side walls shall be similar to and compatible with the front of the building. Generally, the primary exterior material(s) incorporated on the front of the building must be incorporated on all sides.
- (d) Material changes should occur at architectural intersections such as recesses, setbacks, or massing changes. Material changes should be articulated through transitional detailing such as substantial trim, coursing, or reveal.
- (e) Following approval of a site plan review application, modification to exterior building materials may be considered a minor change under section 550.550 of this ordinance where the zoning administrator finds that the change will not result in lower-quality, less durable materials.

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550.580. Entrances. Buildings shall be oriented so that at least one (1) principal entrance faces the public street rather than the interior of the site. In the case of a corner lot, the principal entrance shall face the front lot line. Principal entrances shall be clearly defined and emphasized through the use of architectural features or other details that express the importance of the entrance. Multiple entrances are encouraged.

550.590. Windows.

- (a) In general. Minimum window area at the first floor or ground level shall be measured between two (2) and ten (10) feet above the adjacent grade. Minimum window area on walls above the first floor shall be measured between the upper surface of a floor and the upper surface of the floor above, except that window area on the topmost story shall be measured on that portion of a building included between the upper surface of the topmost floor and the ceiling. Windows are required on any portion of wall that extends more than six (6) feet above the adjacent grade.
- (b) Residential uses. Twenty (20) percent of the walls on the first floor and ten (10) percent of the walls on each floor above the first that face a public street, public sidewalk, or public pathway, shall be windows. Ten (10) percent of the walls on each floor facing an on-site parking lot shall be windows, provided the parking lot is not located between the building and a public street, public sidewalk or public pathway.
- (c) Nonresidential uses. Thirty (30) percent of the walls on the first floor and ten (10) percent of the walls on each floor above the first that face a public street, public sidewalk, or public pathway, shall be windows. The required window area shall increase to forty (40) percent on the first-floor wall facing a public street designated as a goods and services corridor. Ten (10) percent of the walls on each floor facing an on-site parking lot shall be windows, provided the parking lot is not located between the building and a public street, public sidewalk, or public pathway. Required windows shall be as follows:
 - (1) Windows shall be vertical in proportion.
 - (2) Windows shall be distributed in a more or less even manner.
 - (3) The bottom of any window used to satisfy the ground floor window requirement may not be more than four (4) feet above the adjacent grade.
 - (4) First floor or ground floor windows shall have clear or lightly tinted glass with a visible light transmittance ratio of six-tenths (0.6) or higher.
 - (5) First floor or ground floor windows shall allow views into and out of the building at eye level. Shelving, mechanical equipment or other similar fixtures shall not block views into and out of the building in the area between four (4) and seven (7) feet above the adjacent grade. However, window area in excess of the minimum required area shall not be required to allow views into and out of the building.
 - (6) In multiple tenant buildings, each individual ground level tenant space that faces a public street, public sidewalk, or public pathway, shall comply with the minimum window requirements of this section.

550.600. Ground floor active functions. Except for production and processing uses in production districts, the first floor or ground level of buildings shall be designed to accommodate active functions by ensuring that parking, loading, storage, or mechanical equipment rooms are limited to no more than thirty (30) percent of the linear building frontage along each wall facing a public street, public sidewalk, or public pathway.

550.610. Roof lines. The form and pitch of roof lines shall be similar to surrounding buildings.

550.620. Parking garages.

- (a) *Design.* In addition to compliance with the other standards of this article, parking garages shall comply with the following:
 - (1) In the downtown districts, requirements for active uses between the ground floor of principal and accessory parking garages and any public sidewalk, as required by Chapter 530, Zoning Districts,

shall apply. In all other districts, parking garages shall comply with provisions of this article requiring active functions on the ground floor.

- (2) Above the ground floor, in any structure that includes a principal or accessory parking garage, parking and loading shall be limited to no more than thirty (30) percent of the linear frontage of each floor facing a public street, public sidewalk, or public pathway.
- (3) Vehicles and internal garage lighting shall be screened as viewed from the public right-of-way and nearby properties.
- (4) Where two (2) or more levels of parking are provided above ground, the top level of parking garages shall be enclosed or screened as viewed from above.
- (5) All garage elevations shall use exterior materials to cover and diminish the visibility of any sloping floor.
- (6) Design features that facilitate future conversion of parking garages to other uses, including flat floors, are encouraged.
- (b) *Floor area in downtown districts.* The combined, above-grade floor area of principal and accessory parking garages in the downtown districts shall not exceed the gross floor area of all other uses located on the same zoning lot.

550.630. Alternatives to building design standards. The city planning commission or zoning administrator may approve alternatives to the building design requirements, subject to section 550.530, provided that the security of the surrounding area is considered and that any adverse effects are mitigated through the use of wall enhancements or architectural features, including display windows, that create visual interest.

550.640. Pedestrian access. Clear and well-lighted walkways shall connect building entrances to the adjacent public sidewalk and to any parking facilities located on the site. Such walkways shall be a minimum of four (4) feet in width.

550.650. Transit access. Where transit shelters are provided, such shelters shall be well lighted and weather protected, and shall be placed in locations that promote security through natural surveillance and visibility.

550.660. Vehicular access.

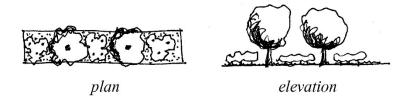
- (a) *In general.* Vehicular access and circulation shall be designed to minimize conflicts with pedestrian traffic and with surrounding residential uses. Curb cuts for vehicles shall be consolidated wherever possible.
- (b) *Vehicular alley access on corner lots.* On a corner lot, curb cuts are prohibited along a goods and services corridor. Where a zoning lot is adjacent to two (2) goods and services corridors, a curb cut may be allowed.
- (c) Vehicular alley access.
 - (1) *In general.* Vehicular alley access shall be prohibited for the following uses when located on a block containing any urban neighborhood or residential mixed-use zoning to minimize impact upon residential properties:
 - a. Transportation, vehicle services, and parking uses.
 - b. Any use with a drive-through facility.
 - c. Any nonresidential use over four thousand (4,000) square feet.
 - (2) Exceptions. The city planning commission or zoning administrator may approve exceptions to allow alley access where strict adherence is impractical because of site location or conditions and the exception meets the intent of this section. The city planning commission or zoning administrator shall accept input from the fire, police, and public works departments and shall consider, but not be limited to, the following factors when determining whether to approve an exception:
 - a. The number of residential uses on the block and their use of the alley.

- b. The number of commercial uses on the block and their use of the alley.
- c. The location of the site on the block and its proximity to the end of the block.
- d. Other access to/from the site.
- e. The nature of the use and the number of vehicle trips the site is expected to generate.
- f. Public safety and crime prevention.
- g. The hours and days of operation of the use.
- h. Alley design and traffic safety impacts.
- (d) *Service access.* Access for service vehicles shall be provided which does not conflict with pedestrian traffic. Where practical, truck loading areas shall be located away from urban neighborhood or residential mixed-use districts.
- (e) *Reduction of impervious surface.* To the extent possible, site plans shall minimize the use of impervious surfaces. The use of interlocking pavers capable of carrying a wheel load of four thousand (4,000) pounds is encouraged for areas that serve low impact parking needs such as remote parking lots, parking facilities for periodic uses and parking in natural amenity areas.

550.670. Residential developments without off-street parking or loading. Where a newly constructed development with four (4) or more residential units provides zero (0) off-street parking or loading spaces, at least one (1) temporary drop-off and pick-space shall be provided and shall be clearly labeled as such. An accessible route shall be provided between the drop-off and pick-up space and the building. This provision shall not mandate a vehicle curb cut to a street where a curb cut wouldn't otherwise be provided.

550.680. General landscaping and screening.

- (a) Required landscaping. Overall composition and location of landscaped areas shall complement the scale of the development and its surroundings. In general, larger, well-placed contiguous planting areas shall be preferred to smaller, disconnected areas. Not less than twenty (20) percent of the site not occupied by buildings including all required landscaped yards shall be landscaped as follows (for purposes of this provision, a canopy or service area canopy shall not be considered a building):
 - (1) Not less than one (1) canopy tree for each five hundred (500) square feet, or fraction thereof.
 - (2) Not less than one (1) shrub for each one hundred (100) square feet, or fraction thereof.
 - (3) The remainder of the landscaped area shall be covered with turf grass, native grasses or other perennial flowering plants, vines, shrubs or trees.



General Landscaping: Plan/Elevation

- (b) Required screening. Where screening is required by this zoning ordinance, such screening shall be six (6) feet in height, unless otherwise specified, except in required front yards where such screening shall be three (3) feet in height. Required screening shall be at least ninety-five (95) percent opaque throughout the year, unless otherwise specified. All screening shall be subject to the regulations of Article X, Fences in this chapter. Required screening shall be satisfied by one (1) or a combination of the following:
 - (1) A decorative fence.



Required Screening: Decorative fence

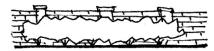
(2) A masonry wall.

Required Screening: Masonry wall

(3) A hedge.

Required Screening: Hedge

- (c) *Required landscaped yard and screening.* Where both a landscaped yard and screening is required by this zoning ordinance, such required landscaped yard shall be satisfied by one (1) of the following:
 - (1) Along a rear or interior side lot line, locate the required landscaped yard inside or outside the required screen.



Required Landscaped Yard and Screening: Yard outside the required screen

(2) Along a public street, public sidewalk or public pathway, locate the required landscaped yard outside the required screen unless such screen is highly decorative and is less than sixty (60) percent opaque, such as a wrought iron fence.



Required Landscaped Yard and Screening: Yard inside or outside the required screen

550.690. Parking and loading landscaping and screening.

- (a) In general. Parking and loading facilities, and all other areas upon which motor vehicles may be located, including but not limited to drive-through facilities, pump island service areas and stacking spaces, shall comply with the standards of this chapter and the applicable regulations of this zoning ordinance. Where this section requires a landscaped yard, such yard shall remain unobstructed from the ground level to the sky, except that fencing shall be allowed.
- (b) Parking and loading fronting along a public street, public sidewalk or public pathway. Parking and loading facilities, and all other areas upon which motor vehicles may be located fronting along a public street, public sidewalk or public pathway shall comply with the following standards:
 - A landscaped yard at least seven (7) feet wide shall be provided along the public street, sidewalk or pathway, except where a greater yard is required. If a parking facility contains over one hundred (100) parking spaces, the minimum required landscaped yard shall be increased to nine (9) feet in width.
 - (2) Screening consisting of either a masonry wall, fence, berm or hedge or combination thereof that forms a screen three (3) feet in height and not less than sixty (60) percent opaque shall be provided, except that where areas are devoted principally to the parking or loading of trucks or commercial

vehicles of more than fifteen thousand (15,000) pounds screening six (6) feet in height and not less than sixty (60) percent opaque shall be required.

- (3) Not less than one (1) tree shall be provided for each twenty-five (25) linear feet or fraction thereof of parking or loading area lot frontage.
- (c) Parking and loading abutting or across an alley from an urban neighborhood or residential mixed-use district, or any permitted or conditional residential use. Parking and loading facilities and all other areas upon which motor vehicles may be located that abut or are across an alley from an urban neighborhood or residential mixed-use district or a permitted or conditional residential use shall comply with the following standards:
 - (1) A landscaped yard at least seven (7) feet wide shall be provided along the property line or alley, except where a greater yard is required. If a parking facility contains over one hundred (100) parking spaces, the minimum required landscaped yard shall be increased to nine (9) feet in width.
 - (2) Screening at least ninety-five (95) percent opaque shall be provided as specified in section 550.680(b).
- (d) *Interior landscaping of parking lots.* The corners of parking lots where rows of parking spaces leave areas unavailable for parking or vehicular circulation shall be landscaped as specified for a required landscaped yard. Such spaces may include architectural features such as benches, kiosks or bicycle parking.
- (e) Distance to trees. In parking lots of ten (10) spaces or more, no parking space shall be located more than fifty (50) feet from the center of an on-site deciduous tree. Tree islands located within the interior of a parking lot shall have a minimum width of seven (7) feet in any direction.

550.700. Landscaping of other areas. All other areas not governed by sections 550.680 and 550.690 and not occupied by buildings, parking and loading facilities or driveways, shall be covered with turf grass, native grasses or other perennial flowering plants, vines, shrubs, trees or edible landscaping. Wood mulch, other organic mulches and landscape rock may be used in planting beds and in maintenance strips adjacent to a building, but are not a suitable alternative to plant cover. Areas wider than two (2) feet with wood mulch, other organic mulches or landscape rock shall contain plantings spaced not less than two (2) feet apart or as specified per the planting instructions. Landscape rock that is easily disturbed shall be at least five (5) feet or more from a public sidewalk or a shared property line.

550.710. Ecological function. In its review of landscaped areas, the city planning commission shall include consideration of the following:

- (1) Interception and filtration of precipitation and stormwater through maximizing multiple-layered vegetative cover.
- (2) Reduction of reflectance and urban heat island effects through increasing canopy cover.
- (3) Conservation of energy through strategic shading and the use of windbreaks.
- (4) Selection and placement of plant materials to limit required maintenance of landscaped areas.
- (5) Preservation or restoration of natural amenities.

550.720. Plant material standards. Landscape species shall be indigenous or proven adaptable to the climate, but shall not be invasive on native species. Plant materials shall comply with the following standards:

- (1) All required trees shall be a minimum of two and one-half (2.5) inches caliper in size, except cluster or multiple trunk specimens, which shall be a minimum of one (1) inch caliper in size.
- (2) All required shrubs shall be a minimum of one (1) gallon container size.
- (3) All landscape materials shall be tolerant of specific site conditions, including but not limited to heat, cold, drought and salt.
- (4) Landscape materials that are used for screening shall be of a size that allows growth to the desired height and opacity within two (2) years.

550.730. Installation and maintenance of materials. Installation and maintenance of all landscape materials shall comply with the following standards:

- (1) Areas to be landscaped shall be prepared and improved as specified by current Minnesota Department of Transportation standards for soil preparation and drainage.
- (2) All landscape materials shall be installed to current industry standards.
- (3) Maintenance and replacement of landscape materials shall be the responsibility of the applicant or property owner including the maintenance of any trees planted in the public right-of-way. An adequate water supply shall be indicated in the site plan. Landscape maintenance should incorporate environmentally sound management practices, including the following:
 - a. The use of water and energy efficient systems such as drip irrigation.
 - b. Pruning primarily for plant health and replacing dead materials annually.
 - c. Anticipating and allowing plant community succession.

550.740. Alternatives to landscaping and screening requirements. The city planning commission may approve the substitution or reduction of landscaped plant materials, landscaped area or other landscaping or screening standards, subject to section 550.530, provided one (1) or more of the following exists:

- (1) The proposal will allow a site plan of exceptional design that includes amenities such as public seating, an outdoor plaza or transit shelter that will enhance the area or that is more consistent with the design of the site or the surrounding area.
- (2) The proposal will allow a site plan that is more consistent with the character of the area.
- (3) Existing plant materials, walls, fences or the topography of the site and its surroundings make the required landscaping or screening less necessary.
- (4) The required landscaping or screening will hinder truck access and service necessary to the operation of the use.
- (5) The required landscaping and screening may obstruct views of traffic or reduce natural surveillance of the site.

550.750. Concrete curbs and wheel stops. All parking lots and driveways shall be designed with wheel stops or discontinuous curbing to provide on-site retention and filtration of stormwater. Where on-site retention and filtration is not practical, the parking lot shall be defined by six (6) inch by six (6) inch continuous concrete curb.

550.760. Site context.

- (a) *In general.* To the extent practical, site plans shall minimize the blocking of views of important elements of the city such as parks and greenways, significant buildings and water bodies.
- (b) *Shadowing.* To the extent practical, buildings shall be located and arranged to minimize shadowing on public spaces and adjacent properties. A shadow analysis may be required that demonstrates the impact that the proposed building would have on shadowing of public spaces and adjacent properties.
- (c) *Wind*. To the extent practical, buildings shall be designed to minimize the generation of wind currents at ground level.

550.770. Crime prevention through environmental design. Site plans shall employ best practices to increase natural surveillance and visibility, to control and guide movement on the site, and to distinguish between public and non-public spaces. Site plans shall include the following crime prevention design elements:

- (1) *Natural surveillance and visibility*. Design the site, landscaping, and buildings to promote natural observation and maximize the opportunities for people to observe adjacent spaces and public sidewalks.
- (2) *Lighting levels.* Provide lighting on site, at all building entrances, and along walkways that maintains a minimum acceptable level of security while not creating glare or excessive lighting of the site.

- (3) *Territorial reinforcement and space delineation*. Locate landscaping, sidewalks, lighting, fencing and building features to clearly guide pedestrian movement on or through the site and to control and restrict people to appropriate locations.
- (4) Natural access control. Locate entrances, exits, signs, fencing, landscaping, and lighting to distinguish between public and private areas, control access, and to guide people coming to and going from the site.

550.780. Historic preservation. To the extent practical, site plans shall include the rehabilitation and integration of locally designated historic structures or structures that have been determined to be eligible to be locally designated as historic structures. Where rehabilitation is not feasible, the development shall include the reuse of significant features of historic buildings.