

Downtown Austin Plan (DAP) - Density Bonus Program
Public Plaza Standards

1. Dimensions

- a. To ensure spaces of adequate size are provided to serve the public and accommodate the required amenities, the minimum area for public plazas is 1,200 square feet; and
- b. No dimension of any portion of the plaza shall be less than 15 feet.

2. Configuration

- a. Public plazas should generally be regular in shape (i.e., rectangular, square, etc). However, to allow articulation of building facades facing onto plaza and flexibility in landscape design, the plaza regulations allow for small areas of the plaza to take the form of alcoves or niches adjacent to the main portion of the plaza. If so designed, the main portion of the plaza is termed the “major portion” of the public plaza and must account for at least 75% of the plaza area;
- b. The smaller areas are then considered to be “minor portions” and are limited to no more than 25% of the plaza area;
- c. At least 25% of the plaza shall be open to the sky and such space provides adequate solar access and shade; and
- d. A minimum vertical clear dimension of 30 feet is required for any portion of the plaza that is not open to the sky.

3. Visibility

Visibility into and throughout the public plaza is of paramount importance in promoting a sense of openness and safety. Consequently, public plazas are required to be completely visible when viewed from any adjacent street frontage. Any portion of the plaza not visible from a public Right-of-Way shall not count towards bonus application.

4. Elevation

Plazas with dramatic differences in elevation between sidewalks and plazas lessen their usability, attractiveness, and perception of safety. Public plazas should generally be located at the same level of adjoining sidewalks and streets. Minor changes in elevation, not to exceed 18 inches above or below the level of the adjacent sidewalk, are permitted as recommended by the DAP.

5. Circulation Paths

- a. To ensure sufficient accessibility into and within public plazas, circulation paths are required that are at least 8 feet in width and extend to at least 80% of the depth of the plaza;

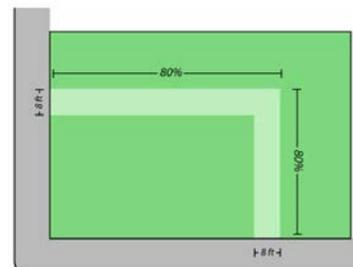


Diagram illustrating minimum circulation path requirements

- b. Circulation paths are required to connect each of the street frontages on which the plaza fronts as well as all plaza and building entrances and major design features of the public plaza, including seating areas and open air cafés; and
- c. Trees planted flush-to-grade, light poles, public space signage, and trash receptacles are permitted within circulation paths.

6. **Prohibitions**

Certain obstructions are generally prohibited from all public plazas due to their detrimental impact on usability and enjoyment of the public space. Garage entrances, driveways, parking spaces, loading berths, exhaust vents, mechanical equipment, and building trash storage facilities are prohibited within all public plazas.

- a. Any such uses located adjacent to a public plaza are required to be screened or concealed from view;
- b. Vents and mechanical equipment are prohibited on any adjacent building walls within 15 feet of the level of the public plaza; and
- c. Air intake vents and intake shafts, such as those to serve underground facilities, are permitted within public plazas if they are incorporated into plaza design features and do not impair visibility within the plaza.

7. **Seating**

Plaza designers should carefully consider the variety, dimensions, location, and configuration of seating with the intent to maximize opportunities for comfortable and convenient seating that emphasizes social interaction. Fifty percent (50%) of seating shall be permanent.

- a. **Variety:** There are six types of seating that may be used to satisfy the seating requirements for public plazas: moveable seating, fixed individual seats, fixed benches, seat walls, planter ledges, and seating steps;
- b. **Location:** To ensure that adequate seating is provided throughout the public plaza, a portion of the required seating in the public plaza must be located within 15 feet of the sidewalk;
- c. **Minimum amount:** The minimum amount of permanent seating required in the sidewalk frontage shall be 25%; and
- d. **Prohibitions:** Deterrents to seating, such as spikes, rails, or deliberately uncomfortable materials or shapes, placed on surfaces that would otherwise be suitable for seating are prohibited within public plazas.

8. **Trees and other Plantings**

Trees and other planted areas are essential components of successful and enjoyable public spaces. A balance must be struck between abundant, lush, and generous planting and the need for adequate openness in the public plaza.

- 1. **Trees:** A minimum of four trees are required within every public plaza. For every 1,000 square feet of plaza, five caliper inches of additional trees are required. The use of caliper inches, rather than an absolute number of additional trees, allows for additional flexibility in planting design. The

requirement can be met by either providing fewer trees with larger diameter trunks or a greater number of smaller, single-stemmed species.

- a. Shade trees shall comply with criteria as specified in the Great Streets Master Plan and coordinated through the Great Streets Coordinator in the Urban Design Division of the Planning and Development Review Department.

2. **Additional plantings:** Public plazas are required, in addition to the tree requirements described above, to provide at least one additional planted amenity within the public plaza area in the form of additional trees or planted area. To encourage greater landscaping variety and to prevent plazas from being excessively hard-surfaced, 20% of the plaza is to be ground-level planting.

9. Sun Control Devices

Sun control devices may be located within a public plaza, provided that all such devices:

- a. Shall be located above the level of the first story ceiling;
- b. Shall be limited to a maximum projection of 2 feet, 6 inches; and
- c. May have solid surfaces that, in aggregate, cover an area no more than 20 percent of the area of the building wall (as viewed in elevation) from which they project.

10. Lighting and Electrical Power

Abundant and well-designed lighting can transform a plaza from a dim, foreboding space into a desirable amenity. All public plazas are required to maintain two horizontal foot candles of illumination across all walkable and seating areas in the plaza and sidewalks adjacent to the public plaza. The minimum hours of illumination are from at least one hour before sunset to one hour after sunrise.

11. Public Space Signage

The provision of clear, visible, and readable signage is essential to identify plazas as public spaces, to provide a list of required amenities provided within the plaza, and to identify hours of access and those responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the plaza space.

1. **Permanent Entrance Plaque:** A maximum of one sign is permitted to be freestanding and must include the public space logo as defined by the Downtown Wayfinding program as well as the words “Open to the public from 6 AM - Midnight”;
2. **Accessory signs:** Signage accessory to a building or tenants of a building associated with a public plaza can add a sense of identity to a plaza, as well as ensuring that the quality and upkeep of the plaza are tied to the identity of the tenant.

- a. One accessory sign not to exceed four square feet located on the building wall is permitted;
- b. The freestanding sign is limited to a maximum width of one-and-a-half feet facing the street and a maximum height of three feet;
- c. The content of the signs would be limited to the building or tenant name and address;
- d. Signs in a public plaza may not be internally illuminated; and
- e. Accessory signage located on permitted canopies or awnings is limited to one foot in height.

12. Operational Standards

- a. Hours of access and nighttime closings:
 - 1. By default, all privately owned public plazas are open to the public at a minimum from 6 AM – Midnight except for temporary closures as described below.
- b. Temporary Closures for Special Events
 - 1. Public plaza temporary closings for special events shall be limited to thirty days per calendar year. Notice shall be given to the Office of Special Events;
 - 2. Signs posting the temporary closure of the public plaza for a special event shall be placed within view of the public right-of-way at least 24 hours prior to the event and include days and times of closures;
 - 3. When temporarily closed for a special event, barriers are permitted to be up to three feet six inches in height, provided that the barriers are fully removed from the plaza area during opening hours and within 24 hours of the conclusion of the special event. If the special event is to take place during the plaza's non-operating hours, the barrier may be up to five feet in height;
 - 4. If the barrier is limited to no more than three feet six inches in height, posts or supports less than six inches in width are permitted to remain within the plaza area during hours of operation; and
 - 5. Cabinets for barrier storage are not permitted within the plaza area.

13. Standards of accessibility for persons with disabilities

To ensure that plazas are accessible and enjoyable for all users regardless of ability, compliance with all applicable building code standards for access for persons with disabilities is required for all publicly-accessible plazas.

14. Uses fronting on public plazas

- a. The vibrancy and vitality of a plaza is directly related to the uses in buildings directly adjacent to the space. Active uses with visual transparency activate and enliven a plaza by providing physical and visual amenities for plaza users.

1. **Retail and services:** At least 60% of a building's frontage on a public plaza must be occupied by retail or service establishments allowed under the applicable underlying zoning district. These uses may include retail and commercial uses such as restaurants, supermarkets and clothing stores. To ensure that valuable retail spaces are provided, each such establishment is required to be at least 24 feet in depth.
 - a. **The following uses are permitted:**
 - i. Commercial Uses: Art Gallery, Art Workshop, Cocktail Lounge, Consumer Convenience Services, Food Sales, General Retail Sales, Hotel-Motel, Liquor Sales, Personal Services, Restaurant, and Theater; and
 - ii. Civic Uses: Cultural Services.
2. **Building entrances:** Some of the most successful and well-maintained spaces are those that have principal building entrances located on or very near to the plaza.
 - a. Principal building entrances are required be located on the plaza itself or within 10 feet of the plaza.

15. Alternative Equivalent Compliance

Alternative Equivalent Compliance may be granted by the Director of Planning upon finding of the following criteria:

- a. The requested modification is in general conformity with the stated purposes of these recommendations;
- b. The requested modification meets all other applicable zoning, building, drainage, water quality, and safety code requirements;
- c. The requested modification will have no significant adverse impact on the health, safety, or general welfare of surrounding property owners or the general public, or such impacts will be substantially mitigated; and
- d. The requested modification is necessary to compensate for some practical difficulty or some unusual aspect of the site of the proposed development not shared by landowners in general.