



**DOWNTOWN  
MEMPHIS  
COMMISSION**

# **Public Review Draft 10.14.2024**

**DOWNTOWN MEMPHIS  
DESIGN GUIDELINES**

PREPARED 2022-2024



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS LIST

These design guidelines were developed during 2022-24. We would like to thank and recognize the following for their involvement and input on this process.

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TBA

## Stakeholders:

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# INTRODUCTION

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These design guidelines establish a common language, dialogue, and direction for incorporating sound urban design principles for development projects incentivized by the Downtown Memphis Commission (DMC). These projects typically occur within the Central Business Improvement District (CBID) Boundary and the Parkways Boundary (see on next page).

The purpose of these guidelines is to facilitate the development of a built environment that is more vibrant and inviting for people living, working, shopping, and visiting Downtown Memphis. This improved environment largely hinges on the experience of pedestrians and how buildings appear and interface with the street. Streets, buildings, and publicly accessible spaces that provide a quality experience for pedestrians are also almost always pleasant for bicyclists and drivers. Quality design and development that strengthens neighborhoods and creates inviting streetscapes are conducive and supportive for residents, businesses, and visitors.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

These guidelines are organized by a series of principles and guiding objectives that outline how to develop projects in alignment with these principles. These guidelines focus on site planning and layout, building features and details, and remaining sensitive to a project’s surroundings.

There is a diversity of projects that are incentivized by the DMC and these guidelines recognize that not every directive of these guidelines will apply to each project. Applicants are encouraged to work with DMC staff to evaluate how to incorporate these best practices into their specific project.





Mississippi River

Mud Island

Thomas St./Rt. 51

40

69

North Parkway

PARKWAYS BOUNDARY

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CBID BOUNDARY

Downtown Memphis

Medical District

Midtown

Overton Park

E Parkway N

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Liberty Bowl

South Memphis

South Parkway E



# GUIDELINES OVERVIEW

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The guidelines are organized by three principles. **Placing Pedestrians First** highlights the overall emphasis on developing a high-quality pedestrian experience in Downtown. **Creating Places of Lasting Value** focuses on appropriate building design elements and materials. **Being Authentic to Memphis** provides guidance on being sensitive to and recognizing the surrounding context and character of each development project.



# 01 Place Pedestrians First

1A Design the Site to the Human Scale

1B Create an Engaging Street Experience

1C Appropriately Accommodate Vehicles

# 02 Create Places of Lasting Value

2A Design Attractive Buildings

2B Use Materials of Lasting Quality

# 03 Be Authentic to Memphis

3A Densify with Context

3B Appropriately Treat Historic Buildings & Sites



## PRINCIPLE 01

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# Place Pedestrians First

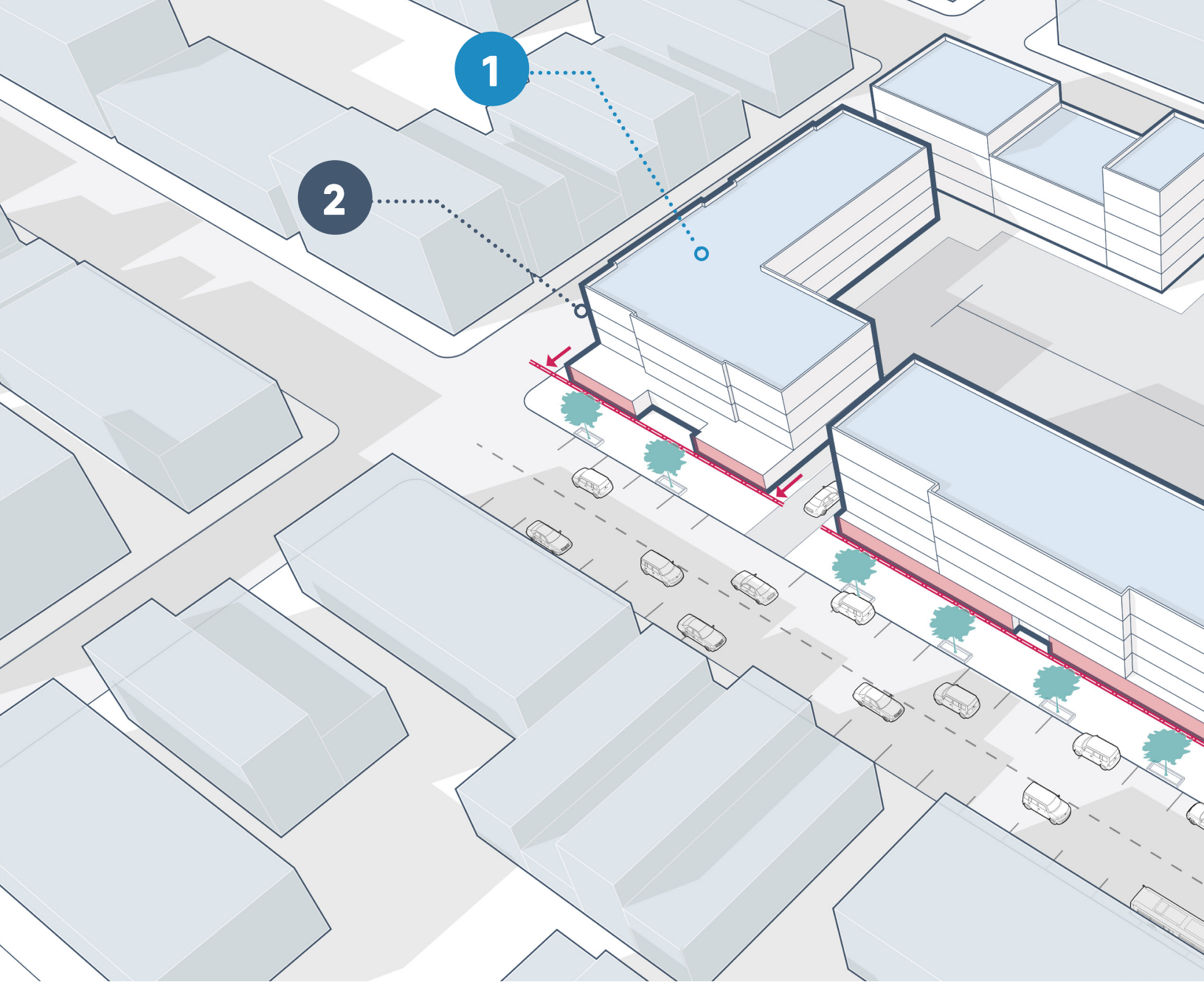
This principle focuses on prioritizing the pedestrian street experience. It includes three major goals: **Design the Site to Human Scale**, **Create an Engaging Street Experience**, and **Appropriately Accommodate Vehicles**. Each goal contains a series of guiding objectives to consider when planning a development. Together these objectives and the direction they provide will shape the development's layout within the context of the block, how vehicles and other users are accommodated, and what features to include at the street level and along the streetscape to create a high-quality, comfortable and enjoyable pedestrian experience.











## 1-A DESIGN THE SITE TO THE HUMAN SCALE

Development plans should be cognizant of their place within the block. In doing so, they should include building features and design spaces that contribute to a comfortable and engaging experience for pedestrians.

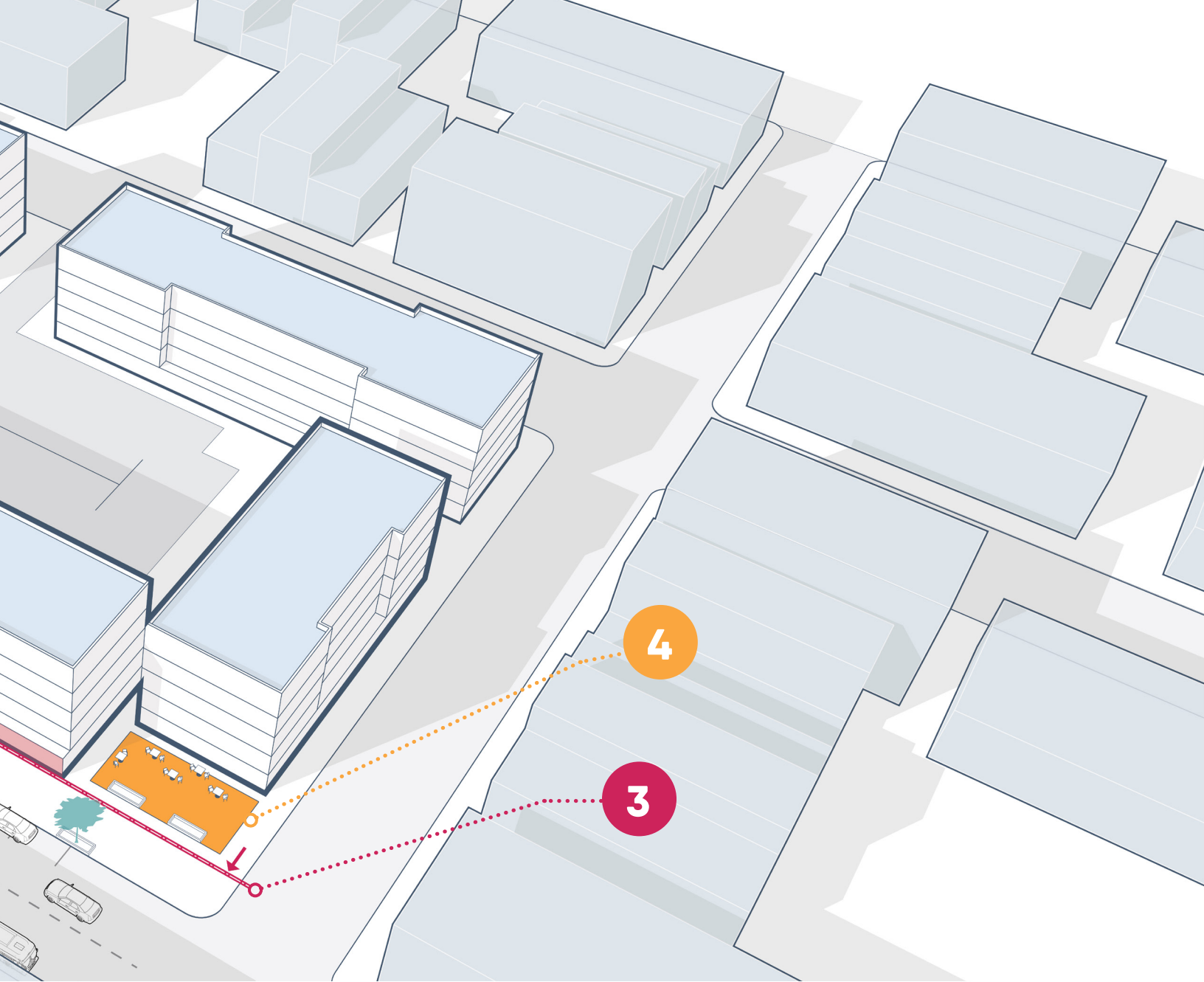
### 01 BLOCK PATTERN

Downtown's historic pattern of short blocks increases pedestrian connectivity and keeps development at a human scale.

### 02 BUILDING MASSING

The three-dimensional form of a building (massing) should be carefully designed to create visual interest.





### 03 **BUILDING LINES/SETBACKS**

Downtown buildings should address the street to create a sense of comfort and enclosure for pedestrians.

### 04 **PLAZAS & OPEN SPACE**

Well-planned open spaces in dense Downtown neighborhoods help to build a more interesting and active environment for pedestrians.

# 1-A DESIGN THE SITE TO THE HUMAN SCALE

## 01 BLOCK PATTERN

Downtown's historic pattern of short blocks increases pedestrian connectivity and keeps development at a human scale.

- a. Blocks should be maintained at the traditional scale in Memphis (generally 340-foot square), otherwise public ways should be provided through them at this scale.
- b. Superblocks should be avoided unless the block backs up to a continuous barrier (not including rivers and parks).
- c. Maintain existing public alleys in large development projects whenever possible.
- d. Minimize the location, size, and number of curb cuts and locate vehicular parking access to minimize impacts on pedestrian circulation.

## 02 BUILDING MASSING

The three-dimensional form of a building (massing) should be carefully designed to create visual interest.

- a. Use vertical and horizontal articulation to break up long building frontages into more human-scaled units.
- b. Where appropriate, step back portions of a building to create public plazas and courtyards that add visual interest and encourage pedestrian activity.
- c. Place buildings at corners to hold and activate them. Corner frontage may be chamfered or set back to better address the corner.

## 03 BUILDING LINES/SETBACKS

Downtown buildings should address the street to create a sense of comfort and enclosure for pedestrians.

- a. In most Downtown contexts, the majority of a building's primary facade should be pulled up to the edge of the sidewalk to create a consistent "street wall" while leaving comfortable space for pedestrians and amenities.
- b. Building setbacks should generally continue the existing setback pattern established by adjacent buildings.
- c. In commercial corridors that currently exhibit larger setbacks to accommodate parking between buildings and sidewalks, new development should be pulled up to the sidewalk to help transition the area to a more walkable environment.

## 04 PLAZAS & OPEN SPACE

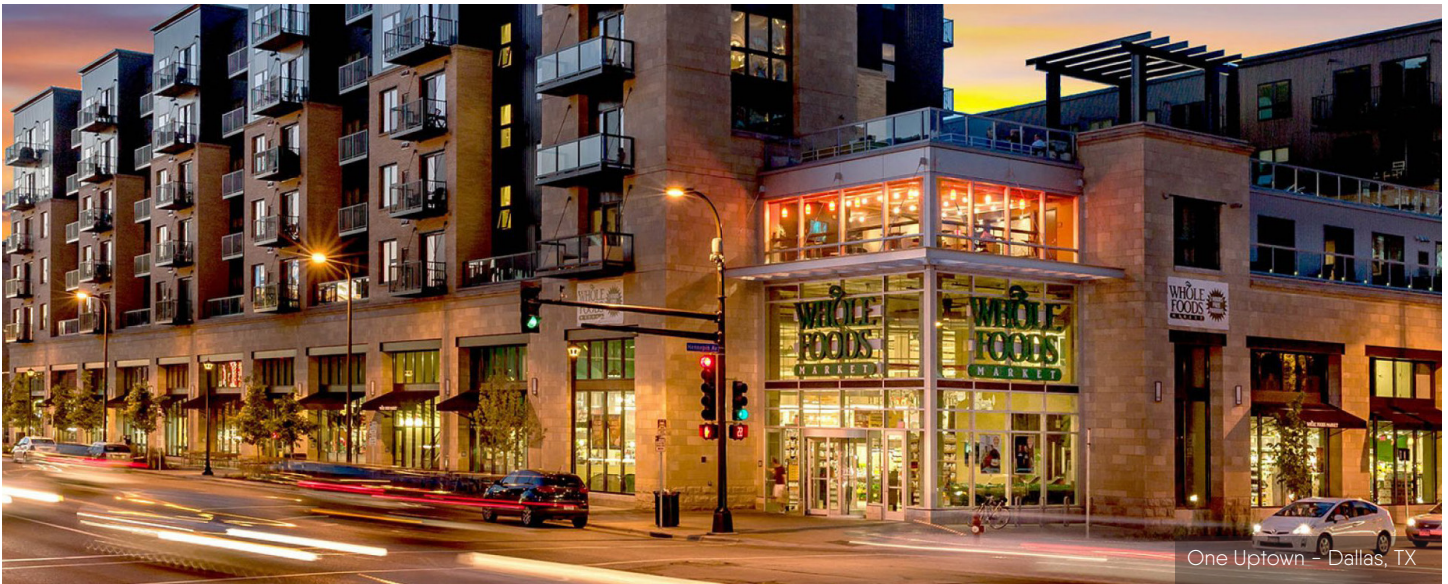
Well-planned open spaces in dense Downtown neighborhoods help to build a more interesting and active environment for pedestrians.

- a. Publicly accessible plazas and other open spaces can be used to interrupt longer lengths of building faces and provide amenity space.
- b. Open spaces should connect to the public street and interact with active uses on the ground floor of the building whenever possible.
- c. Plazas should be designed for use and activation – creating empty space for its own sake is discouraged.



The Citizen Apartments – Memphis, TN

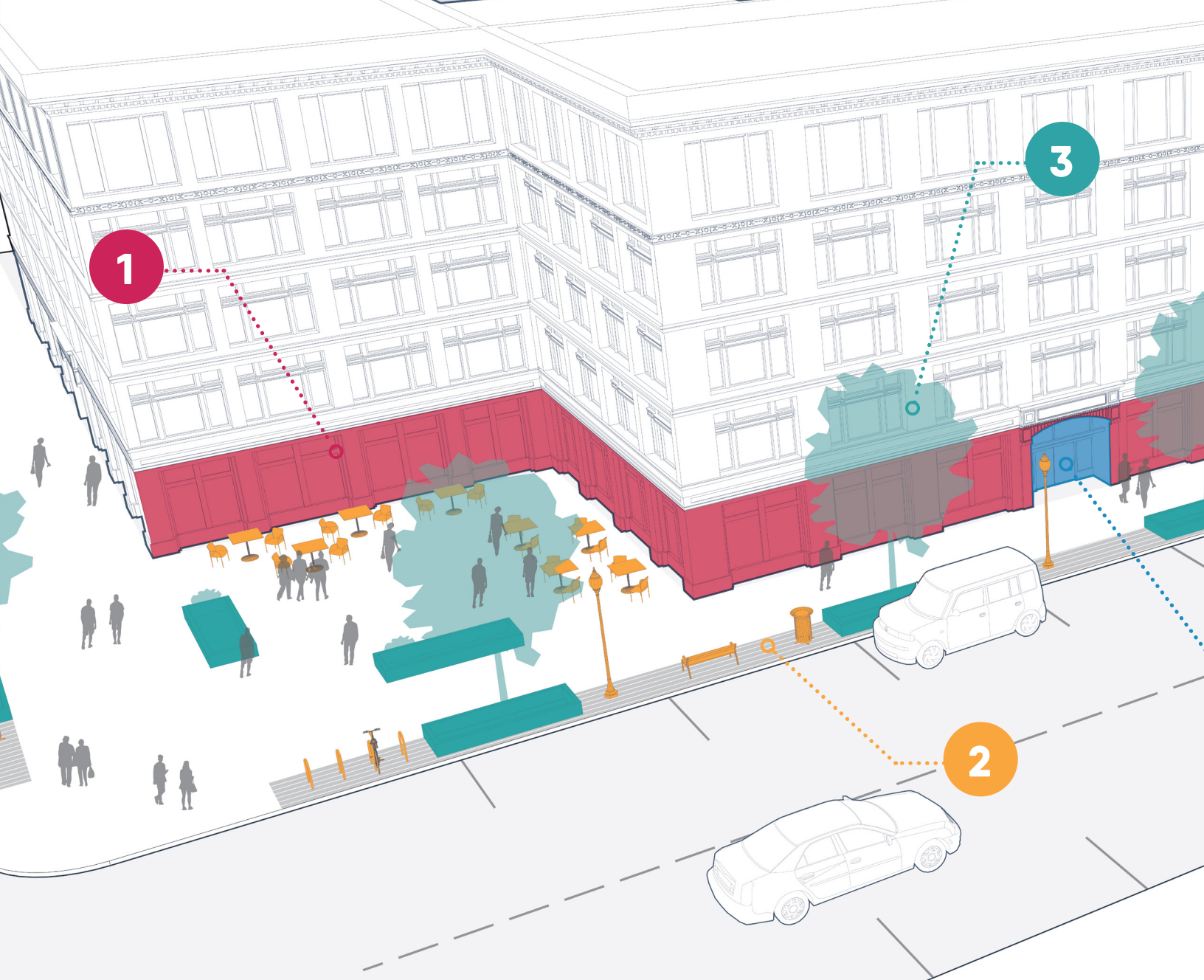
Creating a street wall with activated ground floors that follows the street alignment.



One Uptown – Dallas, TX

The building's general form and shape changes throughout but the ground floor remains transparent and enjoyable.





## 1-B CREATE AN ENGAGING STREET EXPERIENCE

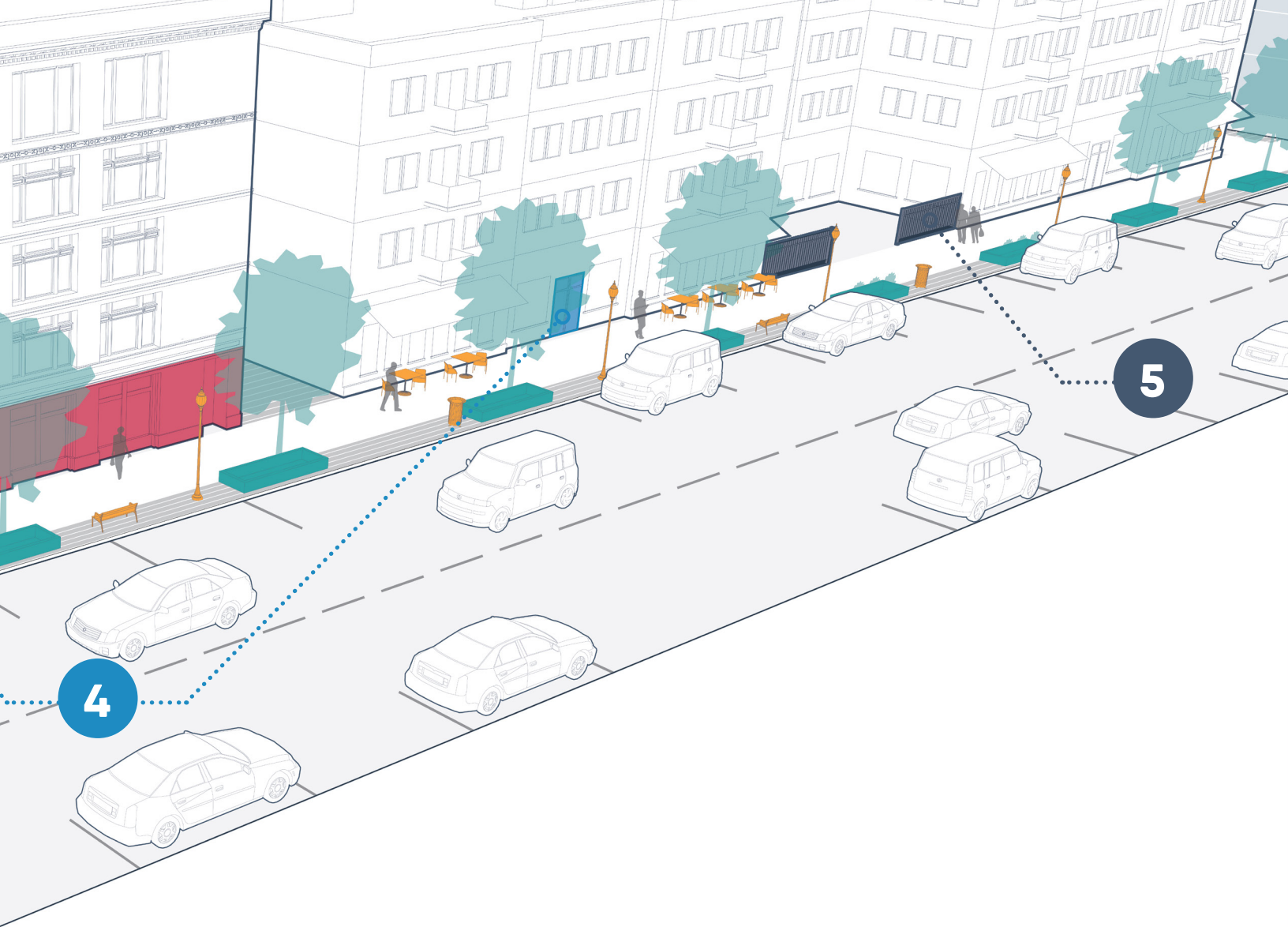
Buildings and sites should be designed to provide visual interest to pedestrians. A large expanse of blank wall is almost always inappropriate on any street-oriented building facade. For most commercial buildings, storefront systems and windows that allow for transparency and views into the interior space from the public sidewalk are a vital ingredient for buildings that create an engaging street experience. Additional enhancements such as landscaping and street furniture can further improve the pedestrian experience.

### 01 **ACTIVATED GROUND FLOOR**

Creating lively and active ground floor spaces along primary pedestrian streets is one of the most effective ways to create a safe and livable place.

### 02 **STREET FURNITURE & OUTDOOR ACTIVATION**

Outdoor seating and other well-planned furnishings invite people to linger and enjoy the public realm, and help connect interior and exterior spaces.



### 03 **LANDSCAPING**

Appropriate landscaping can reduce heat and provide shade, soften the hard edges of buildings, and help create calming and beautiful spaces.

### 04 **BUILDING ENTRY**

Clearly defined pedestrian entrances are a key ingredient to creating legible buildings that activate the public realm.

### 05 **WALLS & FENCES**

Walls and fences should be used sparingly when necessary for screening or defining spaces.

# 1-B CREATE AN ENGAGING STREET EXPERIENCE

The key to prioritizing pedestrians is incorporating elements and features in the public realm that create a more pleasurable visual and spatial environment. These features offer opportunities for activity and interaction with people and uses along the street.

## 01 ACTIVATED GROUND FLOOR

Creating lively and active ground floor spaces along primary pedestrian streets is one of the most effective ways to create a safe and livable place.

- a. Ground floors should be designed to maximize the level of transparency into the building as seen from the public sidewalk using glass storefronts, windows, and doors. While the appropriate percentage of transparency will vary by location and building type, 60% or greater transparency is the goal for most Downtown Memphis buildings.
- b. Whenever possible, primary ground floor frontage should incorporate leasable retail spaces, amenity spaces, or other active uses.
- c. Parking frontage along primary streets should be minimized, and both surface lots and structured parking should be screened by other uses to the greatest extent possible

## 02 STREET FURNITURE & OUTDOOR ACTIVATION

Outdoor seating and other well-planned furnishings invite people to linger and enjoy the public realm and help connect interior and exterior spaces.

- a. When possible, developments should find ways to incorporate outdoor seating areas that facilitate year-round outdoor activation
- b. Bicycle facilities, street furniture, and amenities should be located near active pedestrian areas such as entries and plazas.
- c. The design and color of outdoor furnishings should be coordinated and complementary, and the furniture should be high quality and durable.

## 03 LANDSCAPING

Appropriate landscaping can reduce heat and provide shade, soften the hard edges of buildings, and help create calming and beautiful spaces.

- a. Landscaping should be incorporated into the design of projects when possible to provide shade, beautify public spaces and create a more inviting public realm.
- b. Plant materials that are indigenous or well-acclimated and non-invasive should be used whenever possible.
- c. When an established landscape palette is established within a neighborhood or corridor, new landscaping should strive to be compatible with the plant selections and design already established on nearby properties.
- d. The mature size of plant material should be carefully considered such that it does not overgrow and cause conflict with buildings or users.



## 04 **BUILDING ENTRY**

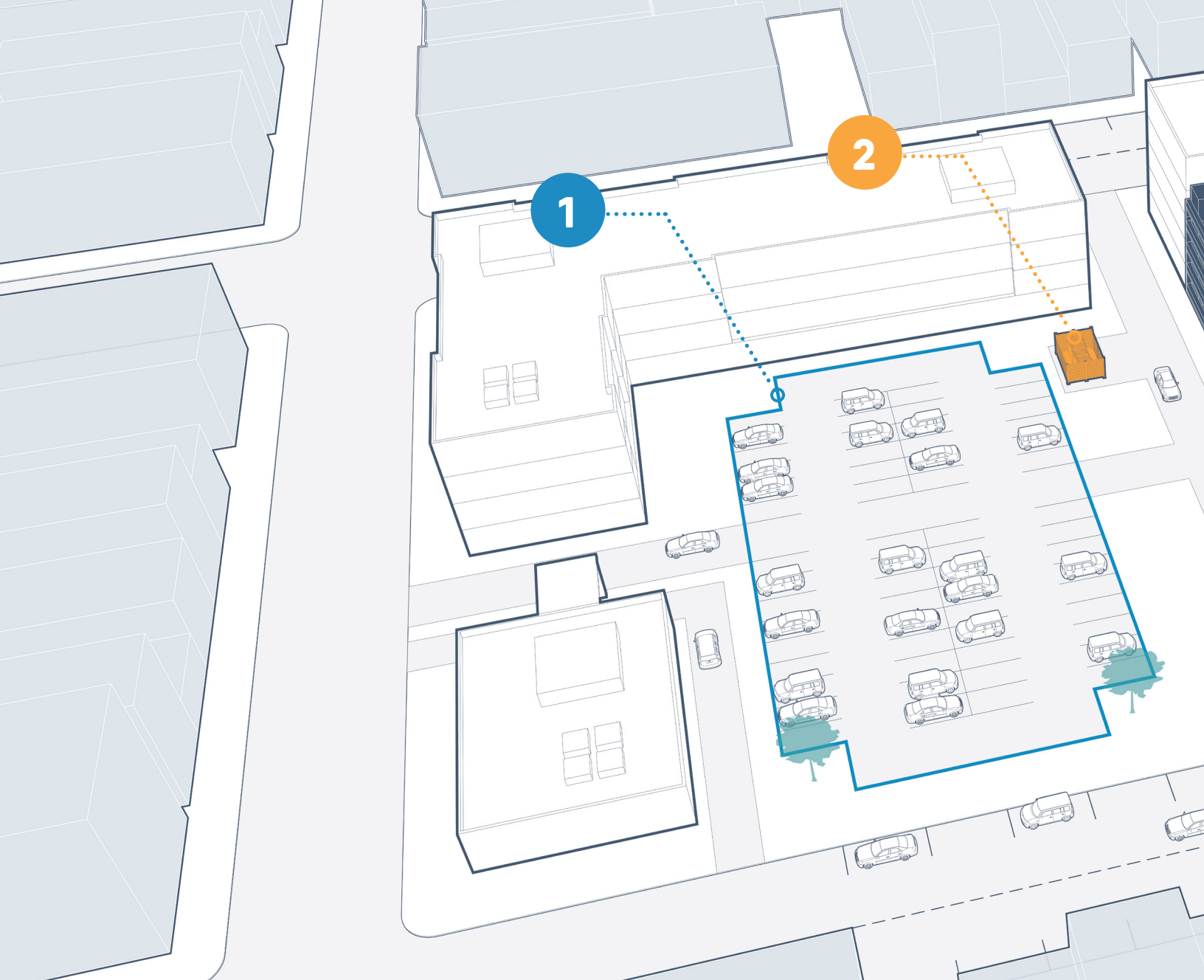
Clearly defined pedestrian entrances are a key ingredient to creating legible buildings that activate the public realm.

- a. Buildings should provide significant, operable entries / exits that face the public street.
- b. Building entries should be clearly defined and highlighted using materiality, archway, columns, a recessed entry, canopy, awning, porch, stoop, or other features.

## 05 **WALLS & FENCES**

Walls and fences should be used sparingly when necessary for screening or defining spaces.

- a. Long stretches of opaque walls or fences are generally inappropriate on primary pedestrian streets.
- b. Except when necessary for screening, fences and walls Downtown should be six feet in height or less.
- c. Fences and walls should be set back from the sidewalk edge, with a landscaped buffer when possible.
- d. Walls and fences should be of high-quality materials that fit with the character of the primary structure and its surroundings
- e. Vinyl, chain link, razor wire, and opaque privacy fences are inappropriate in most Downtown contexts.

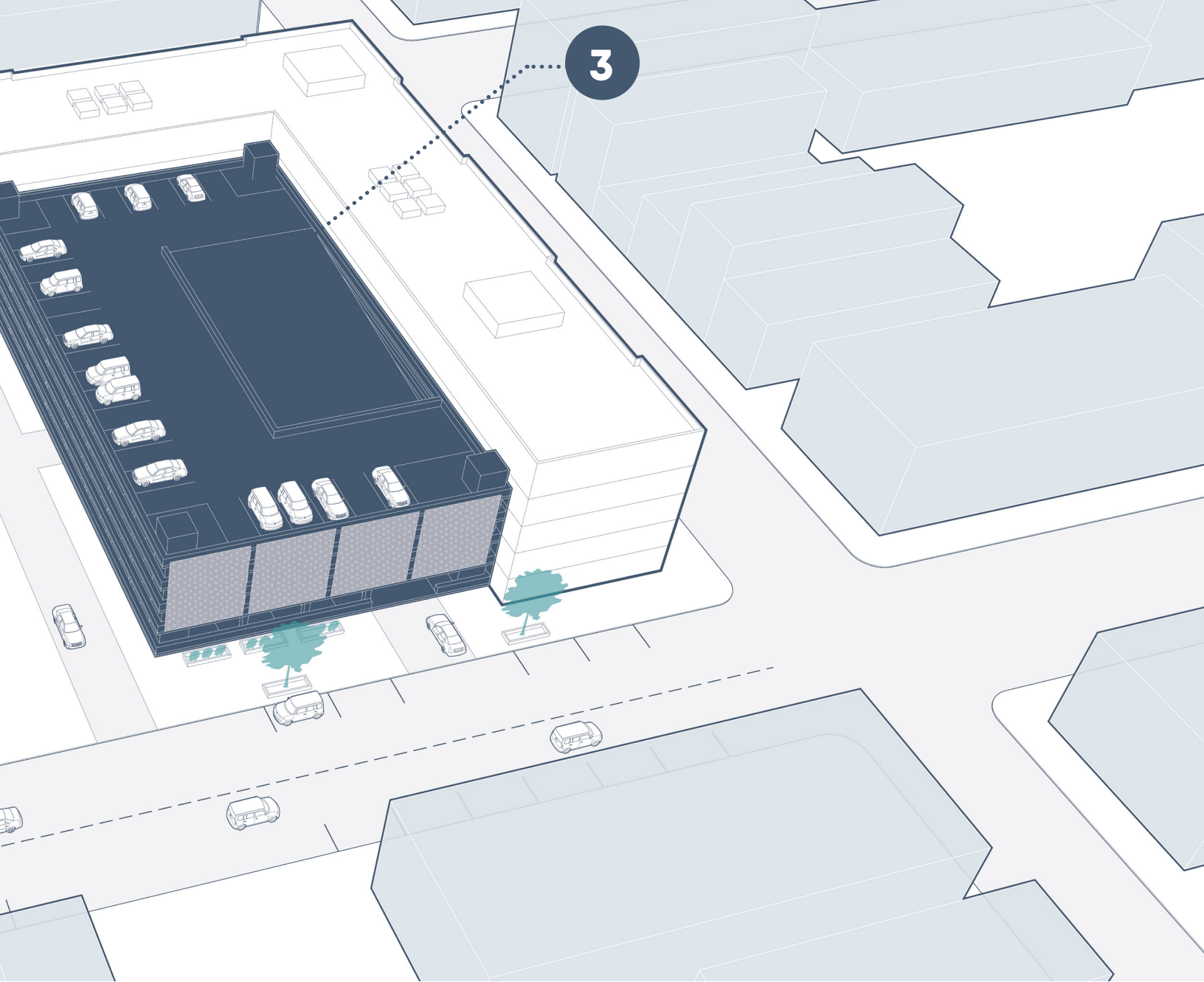


## 1-C APPROPRIATELY ACCOMMODATE VEHICLES & SERVICE AREAS

There is an important balance between automobiles and other modes of transportation when it comes to successful urban areas. While vehicles and vehicular access are critical, urban places should not be designed to feature the automobile – but rather the pedestrian. As a result, careful thought must be given to how vehicles interact with the built environment without dominating it or degrading the pedestrian experience. Access to sites and blocks should be consolidated. Parking areas and facilities should be screened and placed in less intrusive locations. When done well, an appropriate balance can be reached.

### 01 SURFACE PARKING

Surface parking lots should be carefully placed to minimize their visibility and impact on the public realm.



## 02 **UTILITY SERVICE AREAS**

Service areas should be positioned to reduce visibility and minimize conflict with pedestrian traffic.

## 03 **PARKING GARAGES**

Well-designed parking garages are typically the best way to provide parking for Downtown developments.



# 1-C APPROPRIATELY ACCOMMODATE VEHICLES

Automobiles are a necessary part of urban life. They provide direct transportation to destinations and provide services for utilities. However, giving priority to vehicles within the streetscape and block design will inhibit the pedestrian experience. Access to sites and blocks should be consolidated and located in the least obtrusive place where it can meet the necessary functional requirements. Parking areas and facilities should be screened and attempt to contribute to the pedestrian experience the best they can.

## 01 SURFACE PARKING

Surface parking lots should be carefully placed to minimize their visibility and impact on the public realm.

- a. Surface parking should be consolidated and placed to the rear of the site or center of the block.
- b. The number of curb cuts should be minimized and alley access encouraged.
- c. Provide a visual buffer in cases where a surface parking lot must abut a public sidewalk. This could include screening devices such as a high-quality fence or landscaping.
- d. Encourage landscaping within parking lots to break up the lots and provide shade.

## 02 SERVICE AREAS

Service areas should be positioned to reduce visibility and minimize conflict with pedestrian traffic.

- a. Utilities and mechanical units, whether ground- or roof- mounted, should be completely screened by landscaping, fencing, or architectural features, and placed to the rear of buildings if possible.
- b. Dumpsters should be consolidated and placed behind buildings or screened along alleys and service drives.
- c. Screening should be made of high-quality materials that complement the building and minimize visual impact.
- d. Loading docks and delivery areas should be screened from the public right-of-way and not conflict with pedestrian zones.
- e. Use low-profile or screened mechanical units on rooftops.
- f. Wall-mounted lines, meters, or other equipment should be painted or designed to minimize their prominence from public view.

## 03 PARKING GARAGES

Well-designed parking garages are typically the best way to provide parking for Downtown developments.

- a. Parking garages and structured parking are highly encouraged as a parking solution.
- b. When possible, parking garages should be sited in the center or rear of a block and wrapped with liner buildings.
- c. Parking garages should add to the architectural interest of surrounding building fabric by consolidating garage infrastructure (stairs, pay stations, elevators, etc.) into vertical cores on prominent corners that exit onto major pedestrian streets.
- d. Where garages meet the street, they should be designed to enhance the pedestrian experience by including liner spaces with active uses or displays, or employing other forms of screening to create visual interest.
- e. If the upper floors of a garage are visible from the street, they should incorporate visually-interesting screening or art when possible.



Square Parking Garage Monroe St - Memphis, TN

Parking garages/structures should not front primary streets and should be screened and have clear signage.



Kroger, Union Ave - Memphis, TN

This parking lot is screened with a mix of street trees, lower plantings, and a low brick wall.









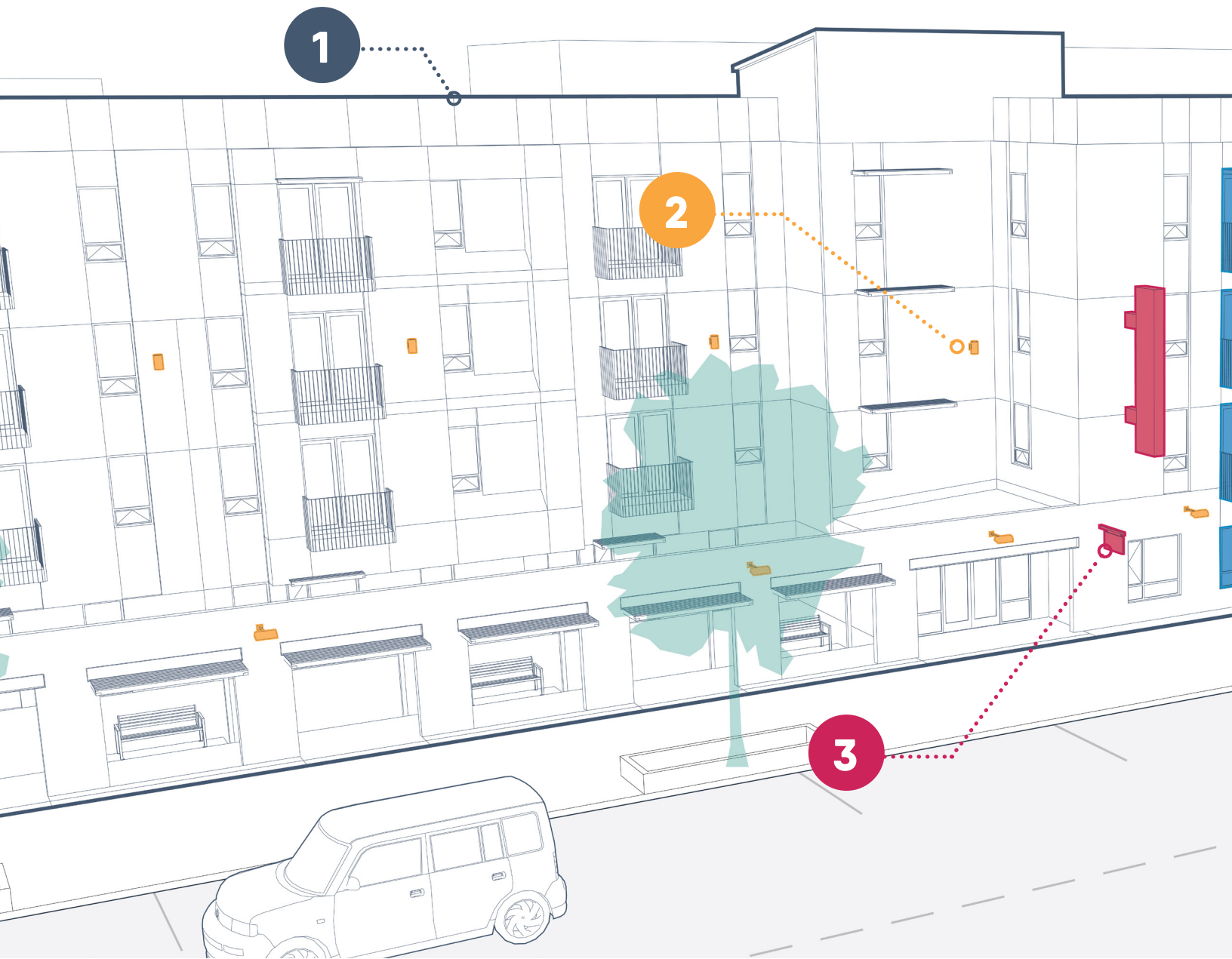
## PRINCIPLE 02

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# Create Places of Lasting Value

This principle focuses on the buildings themselves and how their characteristics can contribute to their active use, aesthetics, and long-term vibrancy of the blocks and districts in which they are located. The first of the three objectives within this principle is to **Design Attractive Buildings** – which focuses on the features of a building’s exterior design that can improve the visual and interactive experience of the building. The second objective is to **Use Materials of Lasting Quality** which provides some guidance and direction on material choices for high-quality building façades. The last objective, **Build Sustainably**, directs us to think about and incorporate more sustainable building and design strategies into the projects.





## 2-A DESIGN ATTRACTIVE BUILDINGS

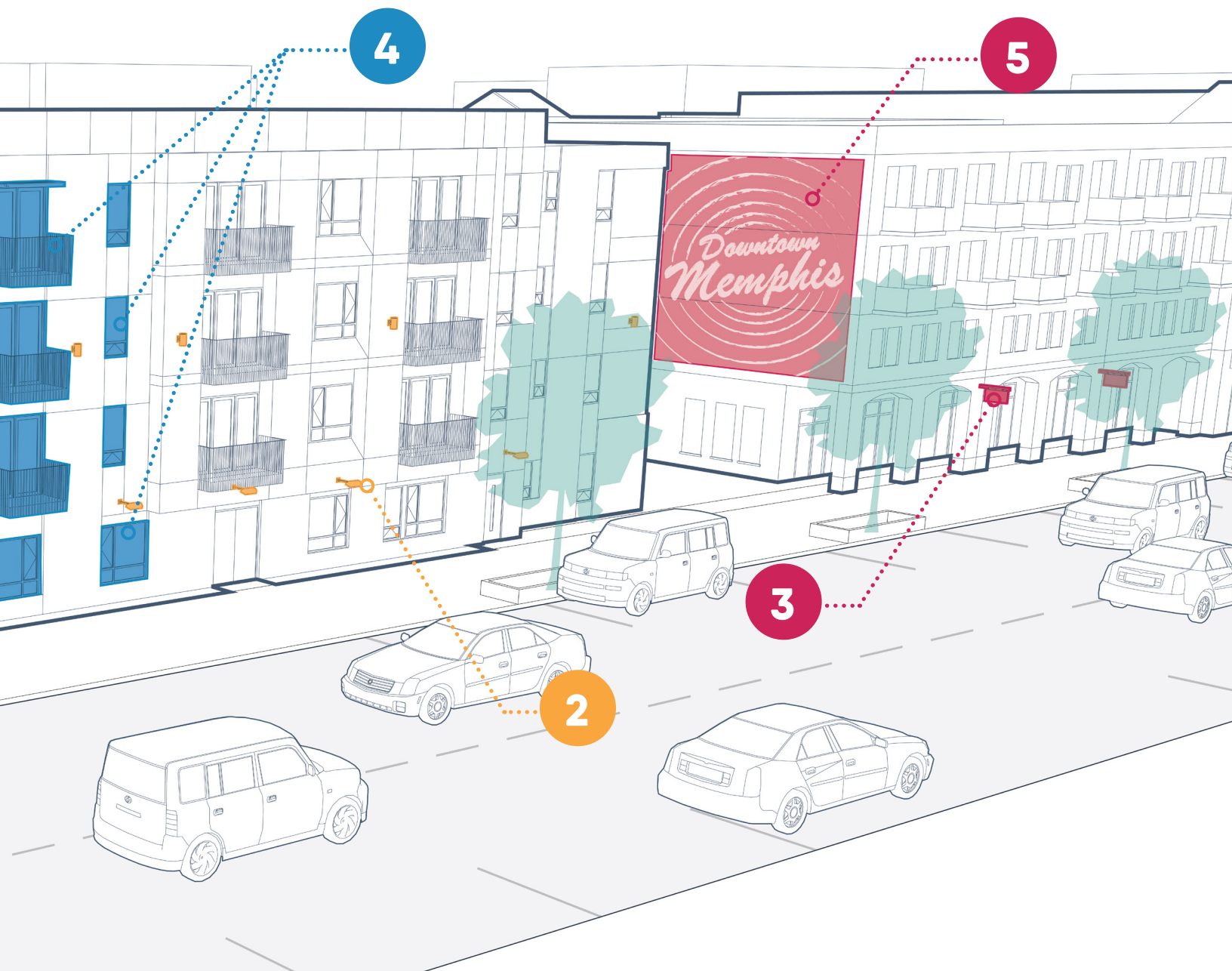
Designing buildings in an attractive style can create an enjoyable experience for pedestrians and a visually interesting streetscape. A variety of elements of the building can impact the visual experience it has. This could include its general form and massing, exterior lighting, signage, windows & balconies, and art & murals.

### 01 EXTERIOR BUILDING FORM

Buildings should create visual interest through their exterior form and avoid creating large stretches of blank walls visible to the public.

### 02 EXTERIOR LIGHTING

Exterior lighting should be used to increase pedestrian safety and enhance the appearance of buildings.



### 03 **SIGNAGE**

Signage should be visually interesting, legible and pedestrian scaled.

### 04 **WINDOWS & BALCONIES**

Windows and balconies should be used to connect interior spaces to the exterior and create visual interest along a facade.

### 05 **ART & MURALS**

Developments should incorporate public art when appropriate to create a more vibrant pedestrian experience.



## 2-A DESIGN ATTRACTIVE BUILDINGS

Architectural designs and how they are received and evaluated is often a subjective experience. This objective describes some of the key elements to keep in mind when designing new buildings or improving existing ones. These elements will assist in creating more visual interest and enhancing the pedestrian experience and interactions with the building.

### 01 EXTERIOR BUILDING FORM

Buildings should create visual interest through their exterior form and avoid creating large stretches of blank walls visible to the public.

- a. Employing vertical and horizontal articulation to break up large building frontages and relate to historic lot patterns.
- b. Use shifts in material and color to create visual interest.
- c. Create a rhythm of horizontal and vertical architectural details like cornices, window moldings, and masonry courses.
- d. Ground level shall, through exterior building forms, create a base, middle and top to convey a sense of human scale along the street wall.
- e. The exterior form of a building (including the roof line and slope) should express a coherent architectural concept, and variation in color, articulation, and materials should not appear arbitrary.
- f. Every side of a building should be thoughtfully designed to avoid monotonous secondary elevations to the greatest extent possible.

### 02 EXTERIOR LIGHTING

Exterior lighting should be used to increase pedestrian safety and enhance the appearance of buildings.

- a. Pedestrian-scaled lighting should be used to increase pedestrian safety and comfort.
- b. Buildings should incorporate architectural lighting that enhances the design of the building when appropriate.
- c. Light fixtures should be selected to reduce light pollution and encouraged to be "DarkSky" approved.

### 03 SIGNAGE

Signage should be visually interesting, legible and pedestrian scaled.

- a. The size, materials, details, illumination, and overall character of the sign should be compatible with the neighborhood in which it is located.
- b. A sign should be compatible with the materials, colors, and details of the building on which it is attached.
- c. Coordinate a building-mounted sign within the facade composition whenever possible. Mount a sign to fit within existing architectural features and not cover architectural features. For historic buildings, do not design or install signage in a way that damages or obscures architectural details or distinctive building elements.
- d. Sign materials should be of proven durability in the Memphis climate and appropriate for a walkable, urban environment. Standard plastic light boxes are generally inappropriate Downtown. Custom formed plastic shapes and sculptural signs may be considered. For plastic signs, a matte finish is preferred.
- e. Preserve a historic sign, including painted wall signs and "ghost signs" where they exist, when feasible.
- f. A sign may be illuminated in a manner appropriate for the building to which it is attached and compatible with the surrounding neighborhood. If internal illumination is used, it should be designed to be subordinate to the overall building composition. Internal illumination of an entire sign panel is discouraged. An external lighting source can be appropriate for a sign, provided that the light source is shielded or otherwise designed to direct the light and minimize glare.

## 04 WINDOWS & BALCONIES

Windows and balconies should be used to connect interior spaces to the exterior and create visual interest along a facade.

- a. Exterior windows are important character defining features for both historic buildings and new construction.
- b. Window glass should be clear and transparent. Reflective, translucent, or tinted glass is generally inappropriate Downtown.
- c. For adaptive reuse and historic preservation projects, preserve the functional and decorative features of a historic window whenever possible. Features important to the character of a window include its frame, sash, muntins, mullions, glazing, sills, heads, jambs, moldings, operation and groupings of windows. Repair frames and sashes rather than replacing them, whenever possible.
- d. For new construction, respect neighboring fenestration patterns in the design of building facades through window type, proportions, scale, and frequency.
- e. In most cases, ground floor windows should be taller than upper floor windows and create a greater level of transparency with ground floor uses.
- f. Consider designing and locating windows to maximize daylighting into interior spaces.
- g. Details such as the size and arrangement of windows, proportion, divided lites, depth of window frame elements, and the ratio of glass to solid wall should be in character with the established patterns in the neighborhood.
- h. Balconies can be a useful strategy to help break up flat upper walls, providing dimensionality and visual interest. Design a balcony to be in character with the building. The balcony should fit within the existing openings when feasible. Use materials, colors, and finishes that are compatible with the overall color scheme of the building. In most cases dark metal matte finishes are appropriate.
- i. A new balcony should be simple in design and should appear mostly transparent. Simple metal work is most appropriate on commercial buildings. Simple wood and metal designs can be appropriate for residential buildings. Heavy timber and plastics are typically inappropriate.

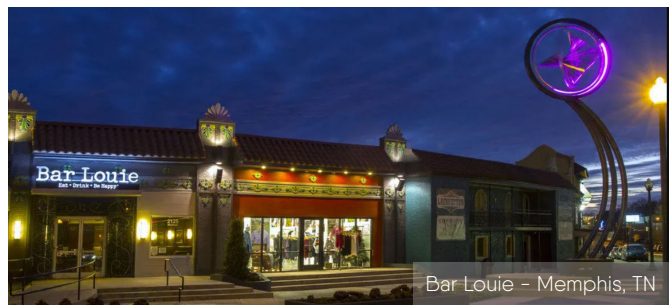
## 05 ART & MURALS

Developments should incorporate public art when appropriate to create a more vibrant pedestrian experience.

- a. Public art is encouraged as a visual tool to enhance the appearance of a building or site and enrich the public realm.
- b. Public art should be complementary to the primary structure on site and the surrounding context.
- c. Design public art that respects neighborhood identity and reinforces the unique character of Downtown Memphis.
- d. A public art piece should be suitable for outdoor display, including its long-term maintenance and conservation requirements.
- e. Avoid locations and public art designs that block windows, impede pedestrian flow or could endanger the safety of adjacent property, pedestrians, or automobile traffic.



The Landing Residences – Memphis, TN



Bar Louie – Memphis, TN

Buildings provides a mix of materials, lighting, features, balconies, public art and windows sizes to create visual and experiential variety.





## 2-B USE MATERIALS OF LASTING QUALITY

Materials that are authentic to Downtown Memphis and durable for the local climate are preferred. Exterior materials for new structures and additions to existing buildings should contribute to the visual continuity of the context and convey high quality in design and detail. In most cases, new buildings should strive to incorporate exterior materials typical within the neighborhood around the site. While the introduction of new materials can be appropriate in some cases, the use of typical exterior materials already found within a block or neighborhood is a useful strategy to help convey a sense of relatedness between new buildings and the existing context.

- Exterior materials should be durable and high-quality.
- Genuine masonry and brick, architectural metals, concrete and glass are preferred. Imitation materials, such as synthetic lap siding, panellized brick or stone veneer and plastic, are generally inappropriate.
- The continued use of traditional materials, such as brick and stone, is highly encouraged in historic commercial districts.
- Materials on the ground floor should be selected to withstand frequent human contact without deterioration.
- The use of synthetic stucco (such as EIFS) is inappropriate for use as a primary building element. Synthetic stucco may be considered for limited use as an accent material on upper floors of a building.
- Composite materials (such as fiber cement boards or panels) may be appropriate, depending on the building location and surrounding neighborhood. Typically, this material is more appropriate in residential areas where traditional lap siding is common. If used in a historic district where brick and masonry are more common, composite materials such as fiber cement boards should be used as a secondary element and not constitute a majority of the wall coverage area.



## MATERIAL PALETTE EXAMPLES AROUND MEMPHIS



Arrive Hotel - Memphis, TN



Historic Wonder Bread Factory - Memphis, TN



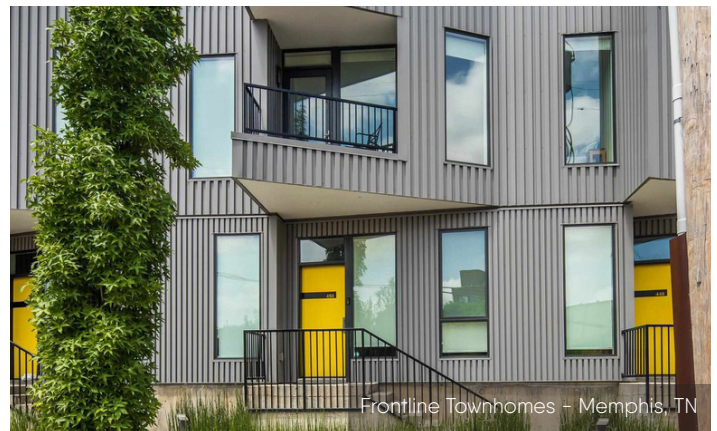
The Landing Residences - Memphis, TN



Barboro Flats - Memphis, TN



Barware - Memphis, TN



Frontline Townhomes - Memphis, TN



Crow Residence/Crazy Gander Coffee - Memphis, TN



Wisecore Brewing Co. - Memphis, TN





The Baltimore Convention Center - Baltimore, MD

## 2-C BUILD SUSTAINABLY

As new development occurs within Downtown Memphis, it needs to be sensitive to the unique attributes of the local climate and the reality of environmental impacts on buildings and inhabitable spaces. Emissions from energy use in buildings and associated infrastructure make up the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the Memphis area. This objective encourages projects to incorporate more sustainable practices into their plans through reusing existing structures, considering local climate, using sustainable materials, considering the lifespan of the building, and pursuing energy efficient metrics and transportation methods. New and emerging strategies and technologies will reshape sustainable development practices in coming years and should also be explored in the development of a project in line with the spirit of this objective.

These actions will improve our air and water quality, lead to better health outcomes for our residents, and encourage the growth of new green businesses and jobs. Most important, these actions focus on creating a more equitable city. Climate change most impacts vulnerable populations, and it is necessary to prioritize programs and investments that will reduce disparities and increase opportunities for these communities.

## 01 REUSE OLD BUILDINGS

The greenest building is one that already exists – whenever possible prioritize the reuse of existing buildings on a development site.

- a. The demolition of an existing structure should be avoided whenever possible in favor of adaptive reuse and rehabilitation.
- b. If an entire structure is unable to be reused, consider incorporating a character-defining portion of the original structure into the new building.

## 02 DESIGN FOR THE MEMPHIS CLIMATE

Buildings should be designed to deal with the challenges of heat in Memphis.

- a. Developments should incorporate features that provide shade for pedestrians, including awnings, canopies, and trees.
- b. Incorporate design features that allow for natural ventilation, including operable windows.

## 03 USE SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS

Building materials are a major source of a project's overall carbon footprint and should be selected with sustainability in mind.

- a. Sustainable materials, including recycled and locally sourced materials, are encouraged.
- b. Select durable, low-maintenance materials that minimize the need for replacement.
- c. Salvage materials whenever possible if demolition of an existing building is necessary.

## 04 DESIGN FOR ADAPTATION

Buildings should be designed for flexibility of use over a long lifespan.

- a. Design buildings with flexible spaces that can adapt to a number of different uses over time.
- b. When feasible, design buildings with redundancy in structural strength to accommodate future expansion.
- c. Consider designing parking structures with flat floors, high floor-to-floor heights, and other features that could allow for conversion to other uses in the future.

## 05 PURSUE BEST PRACTICES

Buildings and sites should be designed in alignment with leading industry best practices as applicable to the project.

- a. Achieving green certifications like LEED, Net Zero, and ENERGY STAR is highly encouraged.
- b. Sites should be designed to utilize green infrastructure for controlling and cleaning stormwater where feasible. Collection and reuse of stormwater or grey water is encouraged.
- c. Buildings should be designed to minimize their carbon emissions from energy use to the greatest extent possible.

## 06 ENCOURAGE SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION

Downtown development should be designed to encourage biking, transit use, and accommodate electric vehicles.

- a. Provide bike parking near key access points on site, including entrances and public spaces.
- b. Provide adequate electrical vehicle charging infrastructure in parking garages.
- c. Consider the location of nearby public transit stops when locating entrances and public space amenities.



## PRINCIPLE 03

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# Be Authentic to Memphis

This principle speaks to being conscious and respectful of the immediate and nearby context of their project. This includes any historic or otherwise significant architecture, places, public spaces, uses, or districts. These single instances or patterns that may occur in the context of a project should be acknowledged or incorporated where appropriate. The first objective for this principle is to **Densify within Context**, which is to be aware of the surrounding building and block densities and to not disrupt the existing rhythms of the area's built form. The second objective is to **Appropriately Treat Historic Buildings & Sites**, which will cover the DMC's preferred guidance and instruction on working with historic buildings and sites. The third and final objective of this principle is to **Reflect Memphis History & Character**. This goal provides recommendations and directions on celebrating local landmarks, people, history and culture in the visual elements and experiences we are creating with our projects.





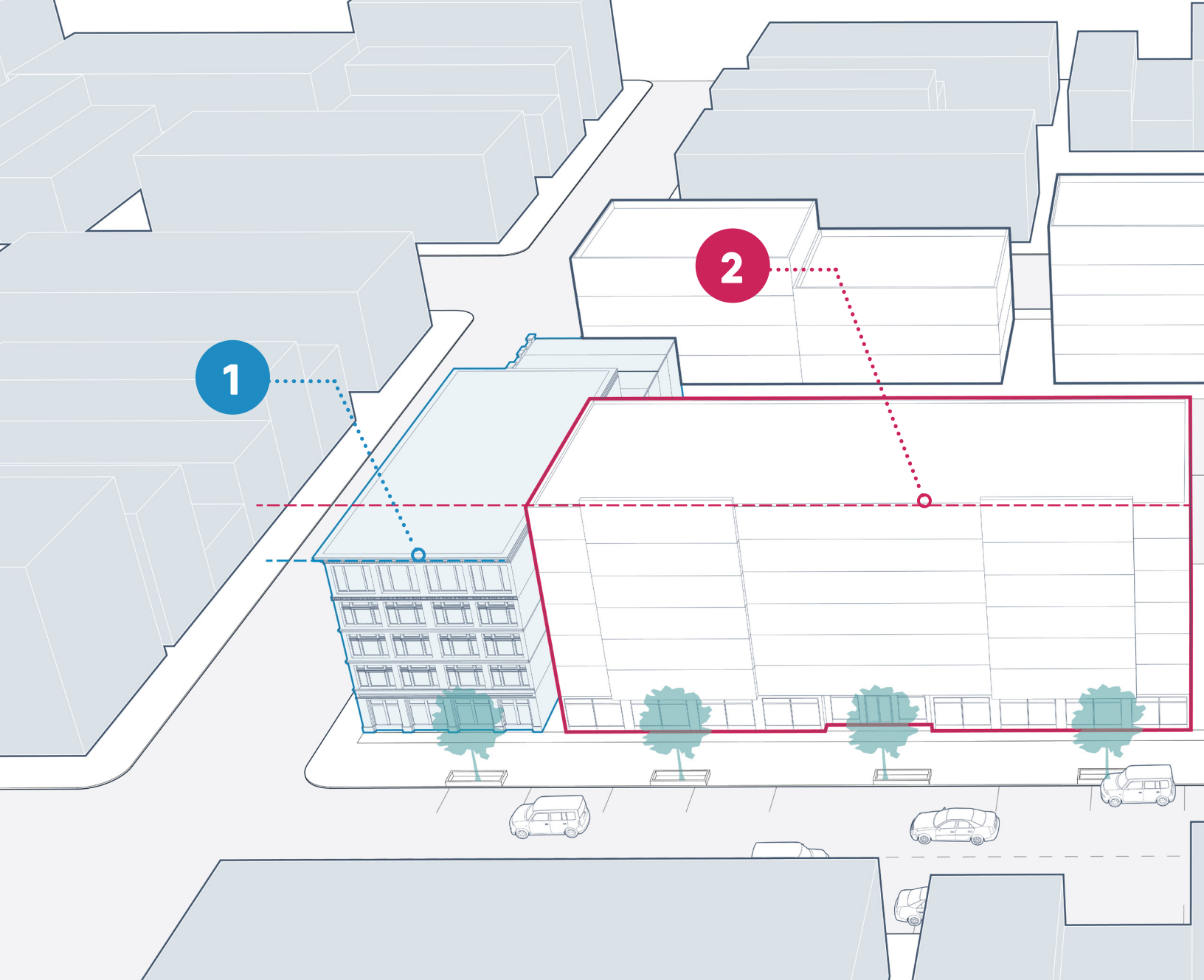


**MACHINERY SALES CO.**  
NEW & USED METAL WORKING MACHINERY

LATHES - BRAKES  
MILLING MACHINES  
GRINDERS - SHEARS  
DRILL PRESSES  
BANDS

South Main St. - Memphis, TN



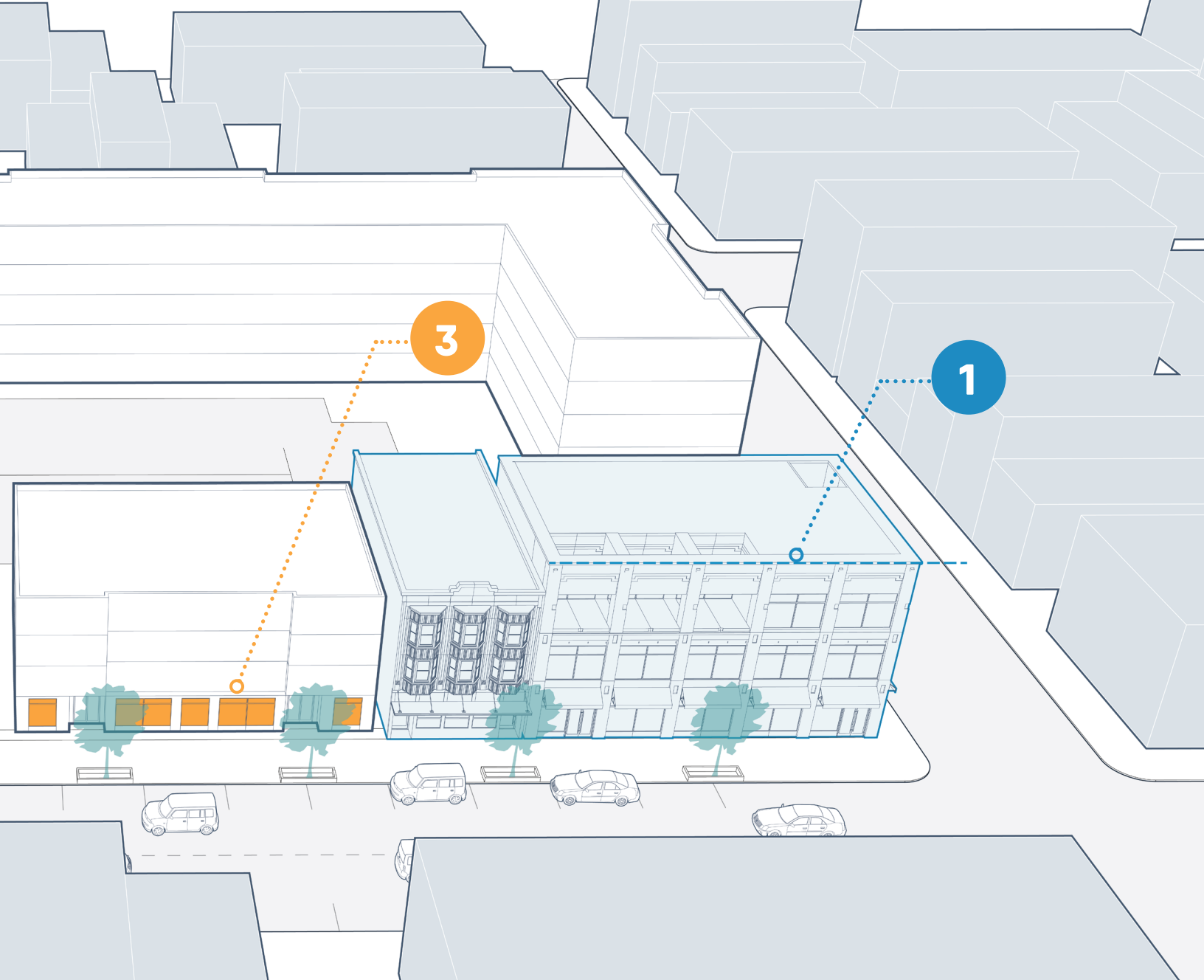


## 3-A DENSIFY WITHIN CONTEXT

Being aware of the contextual density of a project will help inform an appropriate scale for new buildings. Density does not have to be limited to that of adjacent buildings but should feel like an organic growth and reduction from adjacent and surrounding buildings and uses.

### 01 RELATE TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

New buildings should relate to their neighborhood context while remaining fresh and innovative.



## 02 INCREASE DENSITY RESPECTFULLY

When a new development is more dense than its surroundings, incorporate design features that ease the transition.

## 03 CONTINUE HISTORIC PATTERNS ON THE GROUND FLOOR

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### 01 RELATE TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

New buildings should relate to their neighborhood context while remaining fresh and innovative.

- a. New developments should imitate adjacent buildings and be contextual and harmonious with other buildings in the neighborhood by referencing materials, colors and other building features that are prevalent in the area.
- b. New developments should feel “natural” in its context, with a sense of scale and height that generally fits within the range of buildings in the surrounding area.

### 02 INCREASING DENSITY RESPECTFULLY

When new development is more dense than its surroundings, incorporate design features that ease the transition.

- a. If a building is higher than neighboring buildings, floors above the height of adjacent buildings can be stepped back from the street to reduce their visual impact.
- b. Consider stepping down the height of a new development where it borders existing buildings of significantly lower height.

### 03 CONTINUE HISTORIC PATTERNS ON THE GROUND FLOOR

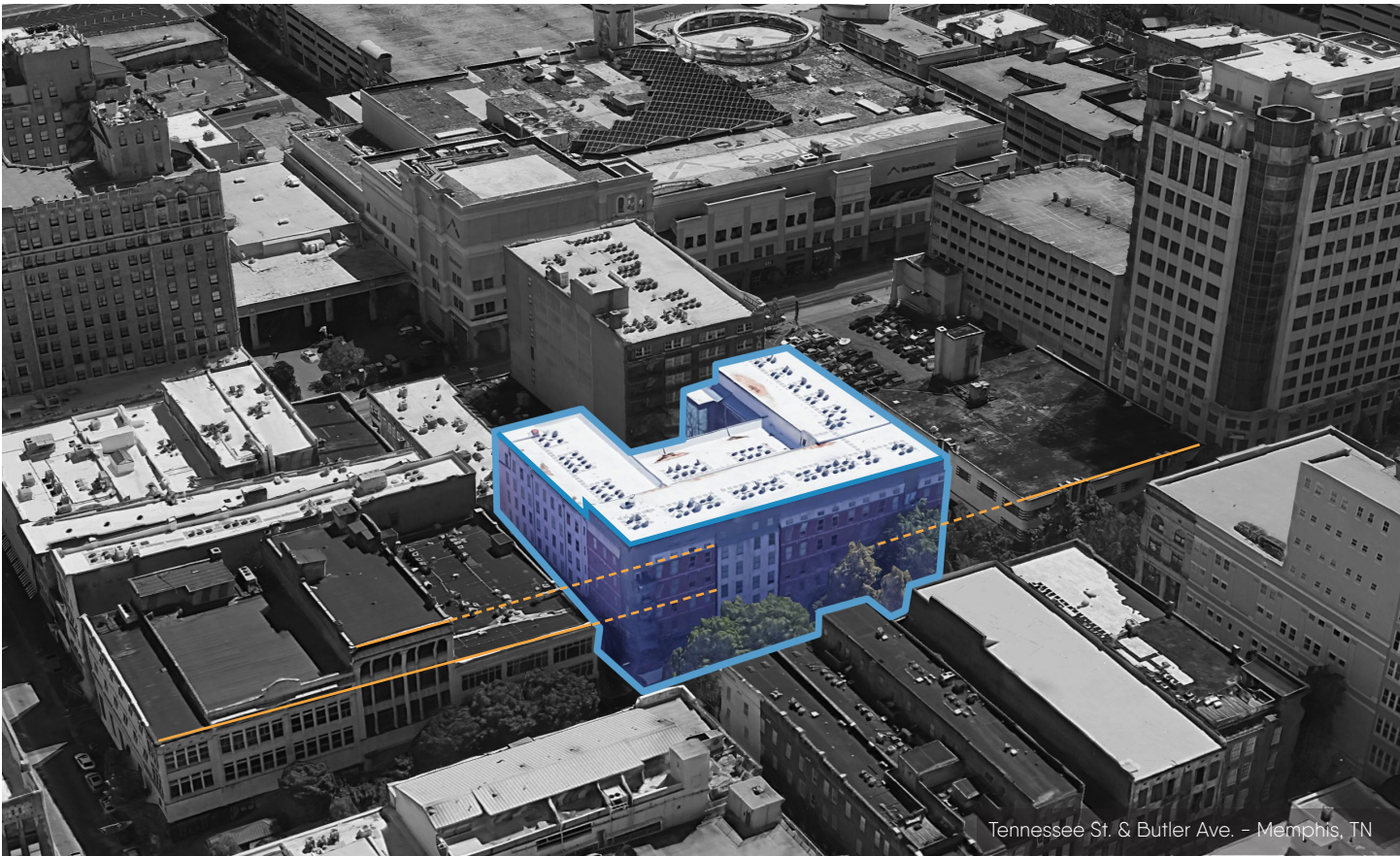
New development should continue the historic rhythm of ground floor frontage established by adjacent buildings to create a consistent pedestrian experience.

- a. Whenever possible, match the height of adjacent ground floors, and continue existing horizontal lines established by neighboring buildings to establish a better sense of relatedness between old and new development.
- b. Use articulation to break the ground floor of a new building up into visually distinct units with a width similar to adjacent storefronts.
- c. The design of the streetscape should offer clear connections to adjacent streetscapes, but existing context should not limit the streetscape in providing enhanced pedestrian experiences as recommended by these guidelines.

## Density Studies

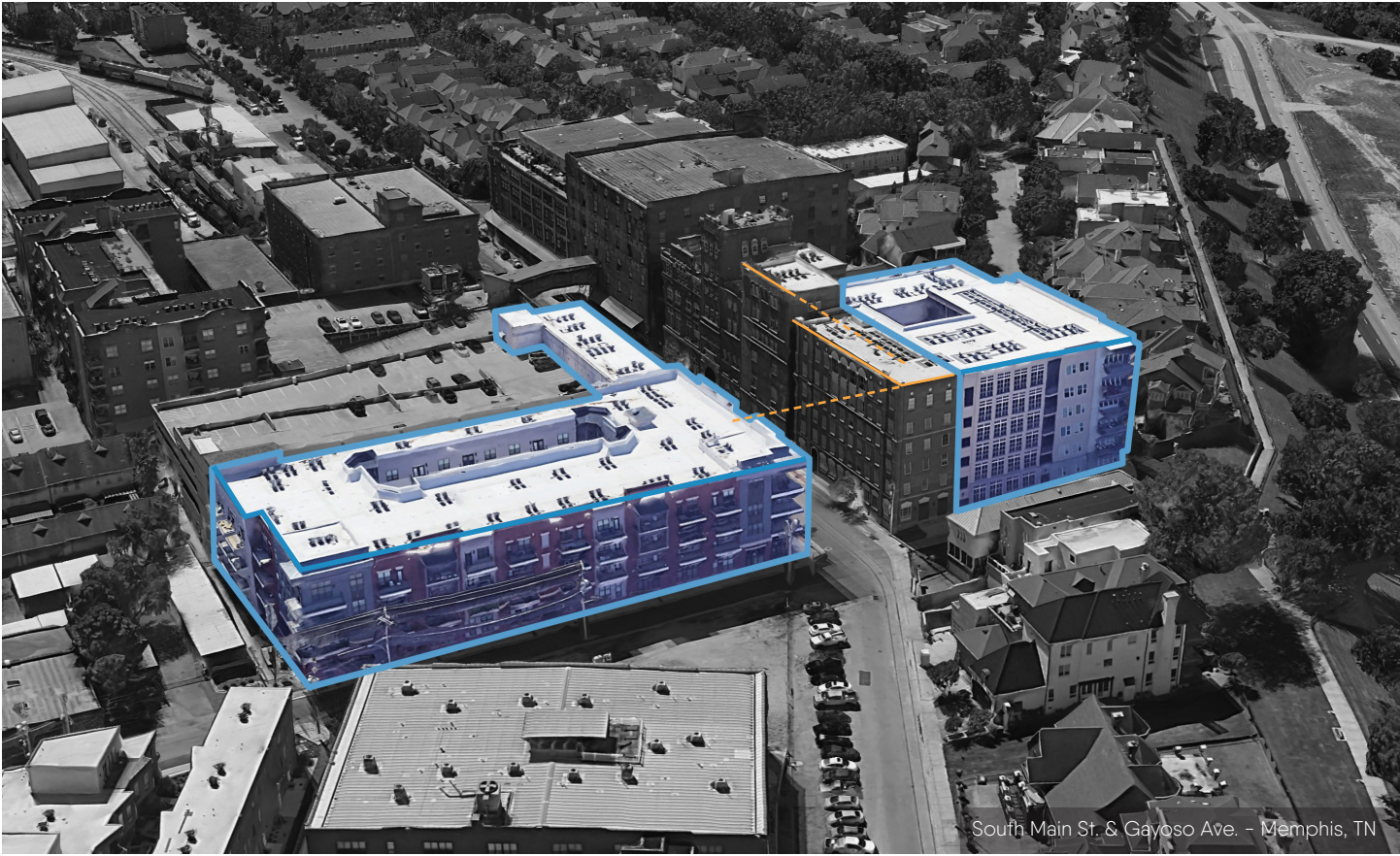
On the following page, there are two examples from Memphis showcasing how new developments have approached density relative to their contexts. The top example shows how a new development may be taller and denser than the properties adjacent to it, but still be appropriate in its broader context and relation to Downtown.

In the lower diagram, new development matches or is at lower height or density than the prominent historic structures nearby. This allows the prominent historic structures to still define the character and experience of the block.



Tennessee St. & Butler Ave. - Memphis, TN

This is an example of increasing density in Downtown Memphis.



South Main St. & Gayoso Ave. - Memphis, TN

This is an example of matching density in Downtown Memphis.





### 3-B APPROPRIATELY TREAT HISTORIC BUILDINGS & SITES

Historic Buildings and sites should be celebrated through respectful planning and design as development continues in Downtown Memphis. Historic buildings and sites, such as these, contribute to the fabric, character, and story of the neighborhoods and districts they are a part of. Key guidelines to consider when working with historic buildings and sites include architectural era or style-defining features, materials, finishes, building components, site use and other considerations.

#### 01 MAINTAIN CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES

The architectural features that define the overall character of an existing building should be maintained to the greatest extent feasible.

- a. Character-defining features of historic buildings should be preserved whenever possible. Examples of character-defining features include:
  - i. Architectural features like cornices, columns, and ornamentation.
  - ii. Historic components like windows, doors, and storefronts.
  - iii. The overall composition of the building's facade, including the placement and number of windows in a building wall.
- b. If repair is necessary, choose the method that involves the least intervention.

## 02 REPLACE FEATURES SENSITIVELY IF NECESSARY

If preservation isn't possible, building elements should be replaced sensitively with the goal of maintaining the building's character.

- a. Historic building elements should be replaced in-kind if preservation isn't possible.
- b. When preserving, repairing, or replacing building components (windows, doors, etc.) consider the shape, ratio materials, decorative features, functionality texture and scale of the components.
- c. If a historic building's exterior has already been significantly altered, and there is evidence documenting its original appearance, reconstructing the facade using matching elements is highly encouraged.
- d. If reconstruction of a historic facade is not possible, or if there is no evidence of the original appearance, a contemporary facade compatible with the building's character can be considered.

## 03 RESTORE HISTORIC MATERIALS

Historic primary building materials contribute to the character of existing buildings and should be restored rather than replaced if possible.

- a. Whenever feasible, existing materials and finishes should be preserved and restored.
- b. If historic materials or features have previously been covered, uncovering and restoring these materials is highly encouraged.
- c. Do not cover original building materials with new materials.
- d. Clean existing materials with the gentlest means possible and avoid harsh methods like sandblasting.
- e. Do not paint historic masonry that is currently unpainted.
- f. If replacing a historic material is necessary, try to match the composition, scale, and finish of the original material.
- g. Only replace the amount of exterior material needed.

## 04 BUILD COMPATIBLE ADDITIONS

Additions to existing buildings should be distinct from the original structure while remaining visually subordinate.

- a. Additions to existing buildings should appear subordinate to the main structure. For example, an addition to the top of a building should be stepped back from the primary facade to minimize its visual impact.
- b. Additions should not obscure character-defining features of the original structure.
- c. Additions should be compatible with the existing structure, but remain visually distinct, to differentiate the historic and new portions of the structure.

## 05 FOLLOW BEST PRACTICES FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

- a. Refer to the Secretary of the Interior's standards for the treatment of historic properties, linked below, for more comprehensive guidelines for renovating historic structures.  
[Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties](#)



# DESIGN GUIDELINE CHECKLIST

Below, we have provided a summary of the key prompts and ideas described in these guidelines. This simple checklist can be an effective tool to use in evaluating development projects and plans to ensure it aligns with the spirit of these guidelines. Note, this is not an official tool for evaluating projects or designs.

## 01 PLACE PEDESTRIANS FIRST (PG. 8)

- Does this project contribute to a more vibrant and exciting pedestrian experience?
- Does the project propose an active and interesting ground floor experience?
- Does the layout of the structures in the project follow along the street and block edges?
- Do the building's massing and setbacks create visual intrigue and create a harmony with surrounding sites?
- Is there a clear sidewalk zone with amenity features?
- Are entrances and access points clearly defined and focused on the pedestrian?
- Are cars utilizing shared locations in the rear of properties? Are they accessed through shared points of entrance and egress?
- Are parking areas or structures screened in some manner?

## 02 CREATE PLACES OF LASTING VALUE (PG. 23)

- Does the form of the building create some degree of visual intrigue?
- Do the building and site provide sufficient pedestrian and architectural lighting?
- What, in this project's design, is something to celebrate and be proud of?
- Is the signage visually clear and effective at sharing information without being distracting?
- Are there any opportunities for public art that can celebrate the history and culture of Memphis?
- Will the materials contribute positively to the project's longevity and the visual cohesion of the surrounding area?
- Does the building's and site's design incorporate sustainable construction techniques and methods?
- Is the project setting a good example for future development or redevelopment in the surrounding area?

## 03 BE AUTHENTIC TO MEMPHIS (PG.32)

- Is the density and height of the project within a reasonable change from the adjacent buildings and surrounding sites?
- Will the project feel out of place on its block?
- How does the project handle historic building features and elements (if applicable)?
- What reasons are being argued for not restoring or preserving architectural features or building materials (if applicable)?
- Does this project celebrate Memphis or local history or culture?
- Does it feel unique to its neighborhood, or city?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



These guidelines serve as a starting point and provide general direction on design for future investment and development in the Downtown area. Each project will be unique and face its own challenges with how to incorporate the thinking in these design guidelines. Developers should work with DMC staff to understand and clarify these guidelines and how they could be applied to their unique project. DMC contact information can be found below.

Additionally, it is important to recognize other relevant planning efforts that work in tandem with this set of guidelines. The first is the Memphis 3.0 Comprehensive Plan. This plan establishes a city-wide vision for the continued growth and enhancement of the city and has been influential in informing the principles established in these guidelines. The plan can be found here: [www.memphis3point0.com](http://www.memphis3point0.com). For questions about the plan and what it could be mean for your project, contact the Memphis and Shelby County Division of Planning and Development here ([www.develop901.com](http://www.develop901.com)) or at their Downtown office (information below).

The Division of Planning and Development has also been working on their own set of Urban Design Guidelines for projects throughout the City and County. These Urban Design Guidelines provide more specific detailed direction for development and are more closely tied to the zoning review and amendment process. The guiding principles for the Urban Design Guidelines and this Downtown Memphis Design Guidelines document are very similar and should not conflict when applying to a given project.

### Contact Information:

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