

Subject: make TC-1 more flexible but not more suburban

From: Kirk Westphal
Sent: Tuesday, April 23, 2024 12:36 PM
To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>
Cc: Disch, Lisa <LDisch@a2gov.org>
Subject: make TC-1 more flexible but not more suburban

Greetings ORC:

Thank you for thinking through some of the potential improvements to TC-1 in the light of the draft petition at State and Eisenhower.

I think TC-1 is an excellent zone overall. I think it guides form and density in a way that can allow the evolution of new residential and local- and regional-serving commercial areas in a walkable, urban fashion. (I'm chomping at the bit for it to be applied to Washtenaw!)

Some reactions to the staff memo follow.

Agreement

- There are good reasons to provide more flexibility in the allowable block and building length.
- Parking structures should be allowed at-grade on non-corridor-facing streets.

Disagreement

- Please do not weaken the streetwall requirement. Allowing more empty space on block faces runs counter to the urban, walkable “downtown-like streetscapes” intent of TC-1.

In my view, the current allowance of plazas in downtown should not be a rationale for allowing plazas in TC-1, but rather a reason to eliminate this from our downtown zoning. Where are the attractive plazas or recessed first floors downtown? The majority of them — typically adjacent to 1970-80s-era buildings — are dead zones that detract from the pedestrian experience because we do not have any design standards for them. As we re-learn periodically, making urban “open space” an attraction rather than a repellent is notoriously difficult to achieve. Our best-loved blocks don’t have gaps and dead zones. I ask that you not expand this error to TC-1.

Further, the proposal exposes a flaw that I didn’t anticipate: weak corners. My understanding of TC-1’s treatment of corners (i.e., within 100’ needs to be nonresidential on the ground floor) was that it was meant to make sure that at least our major intersections had a strong identity and were reserved for some kind of commercial presence at street level. It frankly never occurred to me that a developer would want to avoid an opportunity to use a significant corner for retail or office. I think it would be a mistake to allow petitioners to leave a major corner empty and call it a “park.” (Can anyone think of successful parks overlooking acres of asphalt?)

- Instead of accommodating the request for **more** gaps on a block face, I request that you take this opportunity to require the opposite:
 - 1) the first 100' of corners must be occupied by a building
 - 2) the first floor is *required* to have commercial space, and preferably active uses (retail/restaurant, not office or financial)*. I've been informed that the code currently effectively says, "There may not be residential units on the street level within 100'," which in my opinion was not the intent of regulating the ground floor.
- Please do not allow driveways or any empty spaces to be exempted from the frontage requirements.

The current 70-75% frontage requirement is appropriate because it mandates a street presence regardless of number and width of driveways and other interruptions to the building fabric — which is the determining factor of a walkable, urban environment. Changing this to focus on the percentage of buildings that are "excluded from the maximum setback" I believe confuses the issue. If these exceptions are expanded, it's likely that close to half of a block face could have no buildings!

Small suggestion

- I'd recommend changing the wording to identify major intersections without using the word "signalized" because some intersections may become roundabouts. Perhaps intersections where the combined ROW measurements are >X?)

Question

- I cannot identify the section this clause refers to: "Buildings that are not townhouses or apartment buildings must meet the design requirements provided in Section 5.17.6.C.2." There are design requirements for "mixed-use" buildings (the definition of which is also unclear to me) for TC-1, and stoops are required for townhouse buildings, but are there design requirements for non-townhouse residential buildings? Could they have a solid wall facing the corridor? If so, can this be remedied?

*I believe it is not appropriate to mandate retail uses in the vast majority of cases, but I feel strongly that 1) the core shopping blocks of our downtown districts and 2) the major corners of TC-1 are the critical exceptions.

Thank you for reading, and I'm happy to answer questions.

Regards,
Kirk Westphal
734-660-9955

TABLE 5.16-2: TRANSIT CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT USE SPECIFIC STANDARDS

		LOT WIDTH UP TO 250 FT.	LOT WIDTH 250 FT. AND MORE
BUILDINGS	MIXED USE BUILDING	<p>1-First story must be minimum of 15 ft. in height.</p> <p>2-Minimum 60% of the first floor facing any sidewalk between 2 and 9 ft in height must be clear windows and doors that allow views of interior space or product display areas. The bottom of any window or product display area used to satisfy the transparency standard must not be more than 3 ft above the adjacent sidewalk.</p> <p>3-Buildings at the front setback must have a functional entrance door facing the transit corridor. Entrances at corners are acceptable.</p>	<p>1-First story must be minimum of 15 ft. in height.</p> <p>2-Maximum 360 ft. diagonal.</p> <p>3-Minimum 60% of the first floor facing any sidewalk between 2 and 9 ft in height must be clear windows and doors that allow views of interior space or product display areas. The bottom of any window or product display area used to satisfy the transparency standard must not be more than 3 ft above the adjacent sidewalk.</p> <p>4-Buildings at the front setback must have a functional entrance door facing the transit corridor. Entrances at corners are acceptable.</p> <p>5-Buildings more than 750 feet from the transit corridor may be 1 story.</p>
	TOWNHOUSE/ APARTMENT BUILDING	<p>1-Street-facing door and stoops required for Townhouses.</p> <p>2-Apartment Buildings must have a functional entrance door facing the transit corridor. Entrances at the corner of the Building are acceptable.</p> <p>3-Garage doors may not face any street.</p>	<p>1-Street facing door and stoop required for Townhouses.</p> <p>2-Apartment Buildings must have a functional entrance door facing the transit corridor. Entrances at the corner of the Building are acceptable.</p> <p>3-Garage doors may not face any street.</p> <p>4-Maximum 360 ft. diagonal.</p>
BUILDING FRONTAGE	MIXED USE BUILDING	Minimum frontage equal to Lot Width less 30 feet or 45 feet when adjacent to residential zoning	Minimum 75% frontage
	TOWNHOUSE/ APARTMENT BUILDING	Minimum frontage equal to Lot Width less 30 feet or 45 feet when adjacent to residential zoning	Minimum 70% frontage
SITE	ALL BUILDINGS	<p>1-Buildings must have a public or private sidewalk adjacent to all sides with main entrances.</p> <p>2-When the site is more than 62,500 sq. ft., the site must be designed as blocks 250 feet on each side or as near as practical given the site shape, with sidewalks, plazas, or drives separating the blocks.</p>	<p>1-Buildings must have a public or private sidewalk adjacent to all sides with main entrances.</p> <p>2-When the site is more than 62,500 sq. ft., the site must be designed as blocks 250 feet on each side or as near as practical given the site shape, with sidewalks, plazas, or drives separating the blocks.</p>
	MIXED USE BUILDINGS	The portion of the first story within 100 feet of an intersection of public rights-of-way must be occupied by nonresidential use.	The portion of the first story within 100 feet of an intersection of public rights-of-way must be occupied by nonresidential use.