



PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

TO: City Council
FROM: Abby Gillfillan, AICP, Planning Manager
THROUGH: Shannon Mattingly, AICP, Director of Planning and Development Services
DATE: August 9, 2019
RE: Downtown and Historic Architectural Standards and Guidelines

The San Marcos Development Code regulates the design of buildings within the Downtown Historic District and within the Downtown as a whole utilizing different standards and processes. It is important to note that generally subjective design based decisions are made by boards and commissions and objective standards can be reviewed for compliance administratively. The memo below includes information about when and how the different sets of standards and guidelines were approved, the applicability of the different regulations, the process for enforcing architectural standards, and the process for enforcing design guidelines.

DOWNTOWN PROPERTIES ZONED CD-5D

LOCATION:

Properties zoned CD-5D (Character District - 5 Downtown) are indicated on the adjacent map in gray. The boundary was first developed as part of the 2008 Downtown Master Plan and the zoning was established in 2011 with the adoption of the Downtown SmartCode.

DOWNTOWN ARCHITECTURAL STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES:

In 2012 the City contracted with Nore Winters to develop architectural standards. As presented in 2012, the purpose of the design standards was "to enhance the effectiveness of the SmartCode in downtown by adding context-sensitive design standards, supplementing with design guidelines for special cases, and revising the signage standards for the downtown area."

The following standards were approved in 2012:

- Expression Tools
- Upper Floor Window Design
- Varied Upper-Floor Massing
- Step-Downs in Height

In addition to these standards which are code requirements, a set of downtown design guidelines were adopted to be used in special cases as identified below:

- As advisory information for those who wish to better understand the intent of the design standards,
- As part of design review when an administrative approval process is specifically allowed by the code,
- As part of design review for the alternative compliance process approved by the Planning Commission.



ADOPTION OF CODE SMTX - APRIL 2018

The standards and guidelines adopted in 2012 with the design assistance of Nore Winters were carried over into the new San Marcos Development Code in 2018. In many cases the 2012 standards were expanded upon and made applicable to other zoning districts where larger buildings may also be built. In addition to the 2012 standards being carried over Code SMTX introduced new architectural standards to specifically address the massing of buildings adjacent to residential areas and sensitive sites.

Please see the attached code comparison table which includes links and notes to show where and how both the old and new standards and guidelines were carried over from the SmartCode into the current San Marcos Development Code.

APPROVAL PROCESS FOR PROJECTS NOT LOCATED IN A HISTORIC DISTRICT

STEP 1: PRE-DEVELOPMENT MEETING

Applicant is advised of the standards and guidelines for development in the downtown.

STEP 2: APPLICATION SUBMITTED

All applications for projects in the Downtown Area are flagged for special review.

STEP 3: PLAN REVIEW

A multi-disciplinary team reviews downtown projects for compliance with the architectural standards and streetscape requirements.

STEP 4: ALTERNATIVE COMPLIANCE OR ADMINISTRATIVE ADJUSTMENT

If the applicant is requesting an alternative way to meet the design requirements the request is reviewed against the design guidelines. A few select and specifically identified adjustments to the code may be approved administratively but most are approved by the Planning and Zoning Commission as an Alternative Compliance. Complete waivers to the standards are considered a Variance and are approved by the Zoning Board of Adjustments.

STEP 5: STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff reviews a request for alternative compliance against the design guidelines and makes a recommendation

STEP 6: FINAL DETERMINATION

The Planning and Zoning Commission considers the request for alternative compliance utilizing the design guidelines as criteria. The Planning and Zoning Commission may approve, approve with conditions, or deny a request for alternative compliance.

STEP 7: PERMIT IS ISSUED

DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

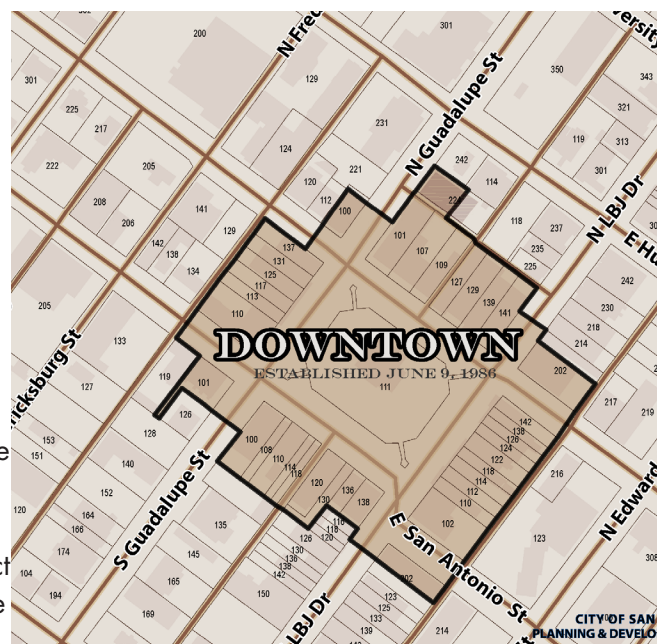
LOCATION

The Downtown Historic District generally consists of all properties located adjacent to the Courthouse Square. The District was established in June 1986 and is a zoning overlay district. Properties within this district are subject to all architectural and design requirements of the San Marcos Development Code identified above in addition to the San Marcos Historic District standards and guidelines.

DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

Review standards and criteria within Historic Districts have not changed significantly since the Districts were established and the guidelines were developed.

All modifications to existing buildings visible from the street including any new buildings or structures within a Historic District are required to receive a Certificate of Appropriateness from the



Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) prior to a construction permit being issued. A Certificate of Appropriateness is reviewed against:

- [The Construction and Repair Standards of the San Marcos Development Code](#)

In addition to the Construction and Repair Standards the Historic Preservation Commission may use as general guidelines the [Historic District Guidelines located in Appendix C of the San Marcos Design Manual](#) and the current Standards for Historic Preservation Projects issued by the United States Secretary of the Interior.

APPROVAL PROCESS FOR PROJECTS LOCATED IN A HISTORIC DISTRICT

STEP 1: PRE-DEVELOPMENT MEETING

Applicant is advised of the standards and guidelines for development in the downtown. In addition, the applicant is referred to the Historic Preservation Officer to discuss the design and architectural requirements in the Downtown Historic District.

STEP 2: APPLICATION SUBMITTED

All applications for projects in the Downtown Area are flagged for special review. In addition, all projects located within Historic Districts are flagged for review by the City's Historic Preservation Officer.

STEP 3: PLAN REVIEW

A multi-disciplinary team reviews downtown projects for compliance with the architectural standards and streetscape requirements this team includes the Historic Preservation Officer when a site is located within or adjacent to a Historic District.

STEP 4: CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

All construction projects with the Downtown Historic District where improvements are visible from the street require a Certificate of Appropriateness issued by the Historic Preservation Commission.

STEP 5: STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The City's Historic Preservation Officer reviews a request for certificate of appropriateness against the Construction and Repair Standards, the historic design guidelines and the Secretary of the Interior Standards and makes a recommendation

STEP 6: FINAL DETERMINATION

The Historic Preservation Commission may approve, approve with conditions, or deny a certificate of appropriateness based on the criteria.

STEP 7: PERMIT IS ISSUED

Design Standards	Smart Code Citation	Code SMTX Citation	Notes	Illustration
Contextual Height Step Down	6.2	Sec 4.4.4.1	With Code SMTX the new Neighborhood Transitions standards expanded where the contextual height step down applies to also include properties containing National Registered Historic Landmarks in addition to Local Landmarks. The old code only recognizes local landmarks and single family zoned properties. In addition, a map was included in the code to specifically identify those properties where the step down is applicable since that was not as clear in the old code and had been challenged.	<p>FIGURE 4.23 CONTEXTUAL HEIGHT STEP DOWN MAP</p>
Expression Requirements	6.3	Sec 4.3.5.4 Sec. 4.3.5.9	Expression Tools under the old code only applied to large buildings in the downtown. With Code SMTX these tools are required at greater intervals in the downtown. (every 25' instead of 60') In addition the use of the tools were expanded to other districts and building types to a lesser degree. Additional Building Elements and Tools were also added with Code SMTX that did not exist in the old code.	
Upper Floor Window Design Requirements	6.4	N/A	This item was discussed with the Think Tank and was not included in Code SMTX because there were so many design options that the result of the standard did not create a higher quality window design. The decision was made to trade out upper floor window design with the expanded articulation and building expression tools referenced above.	
Varied Upper Floor Massing Requirement	6.5	Sec. 4.3.4.6	No Changes to these standards	

