WHAT WE HEARD

Form and Character Development Permit Guidelines

Engagement Summary Report – December 2024



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Introduction

The City of Nanaimo is updating the Form and Character Development Permit Guidelines that inform new commercial, industrial, multi-family, and mixed-use developments in the City of Nanaimo.

Design Guidelines establish the benchmarks for ensuring high quality design that meets City Plan goals. The guideline will address site layouts, building and landscape design, lighting, energy efficiency, sense of place, and more. The design guidelines provide an opportunity to support the City Plan's five main goals of a Green, Connected, Healthy, Prosperous, and Empowered Nanaimo as experienced in the built form.

The Form and Character Design Guidelines are part of Development Permit Area 8 (DPA 8), and will be applicable to all new multi-family, commercial, industrial, and mixed-use developments in the City of Nanaimo. This project will consolidate and update the current design guidelines to implement City Plan goals and policies.

The guidelines are meant to give clear and concise direction on how new development can be approved by Development Permit where they substantially comply with the guidelines. It is important that the guidelines allow for flexibility and creative solutions in the design process while still reinforcing the vision for the City.



Engagement Program

BOP Architects, Elkplan Design, Focal Engineering, and Perry and Associates were retained as the consultant team to assist with developing the guidelines. This team delivered Phase 1 of the engagement program that ran from June 18th to July 21st, 2024. The purpose of the Phase 1 engagement was to discover what is important to the community members in the built environment, and what they would like to see in design for future developments. This informed the first draft of the Development Permit Design Guidelines released in November 2024, which led to the need of a Phase 2 engagement program. Phase 2 was led by the City of Nanaimo team and ran from November 18th to December 13th, 2024.

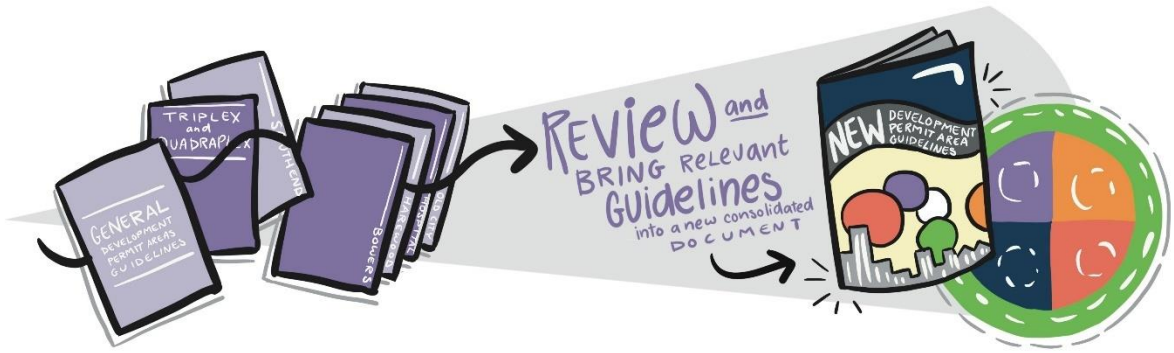
The purpose of the Phase 2 engagement program was to have community members provide feedback on the draft design guidelines document. It was designed to provide opportunities for public and stakeholder community members to have a say in the development of the Draft Form and Character Guidelines, via an online survey. Directed emails were sent out, an in-person Design Advisory Panel meeting was held, and a comment form was provided on the City of Nanaimo's Get Involved webpage for all community members to access. The engagement questions focused on discovering what community members liked, and what could be improved in the Draft Form and Character Guidelines document. Stakeholder groups that were targeted for engagement included:

1. Design Advisory Panel
2. Neighbourhood Associations
3. Development Community
4. Advisory Committee for Accessibility and Inclusion
5. Public

Input received from Phase 2 of the engagement program is summarized in this report, which provides an analysis of common themes and emerging ideas that will help continue to shape the next draft of the Form and Character Development Permit Guidelines.

Participation

The online Get Involved page generated feedback including 34 comment form submissions, input from Neighbourhood Associations, Developer Community, and the public. In addition, the City received emails with feedback from the Neighbourhood Associations, and two emails from the Development Community. A Design Advisory Panel meeting was held on November 28th, 2024, and they also provided feedback.



Summary of Findings & Discussion

The following sections include summaries of what we heard from each group, including the Design Advisory Panel, Neighbourhood Associations, Development Community, and the public. The City did not receive input back from the Advisory Committee for Accessibility and Inclusion for the Phase 2 engagement program. The report concludes with a general summary of emerging themes that have been identified through the Phase 2 engagement program.

Design Advisory Panel – November 28th, 2024

Attendance:

5 Panel members

Format:

The City of Nanaimo project team was invited to the November 28th, 2024, Design Advisory Panel meeting to discuss the Draft Form and Character Development Permit Guidelines. The City of Nanaimo team prepared specific questions which allowed for a guided discussion where Panel members considered what they liked and what could be improved in the Draft Guidelines.

Findings:

Document Usability – Panel members expressed that the document is easily usable and contains accessible language for all. They expressed that the way the document is divided up and categorized is well done. In addition, the figures that are provided throughout the document are useful and compliment the written guidelines for better understanding. It was noted that the section on the Waterfront Guidelines was the least clear and that it needed more work for better understanding. Lastly, it was suggested that the document incorporate more illustrations.

Public Art – Panel members noted the lack of clarity in the expectations for public art. It was questioned what the City means by public art (i.e. does an artist have to be involved? What qualifies as art? Who is responsible for maintaining public art?). It was discussed that the term "public art" is broad, but that the broadness can be helpful for the document as it leaves public art open for flexibility. It was also mentioned that public art supports artists and breaks up monotony, and that the City has Culture staff who can support developers in this area.

Landscaping – Panel members discussed conflicting language in some of the landscaping guidelines. For example, words such as "coniferous" and "evergreen" were used interchangeably in some of guidelines, and it was noted that it is important to clarify which one is meant in each guideline. In addition, some guidelines encourage fruit bearing plants, and some do not, and it was recommended that this contradiction be addressed, or specify where the City would like to see fruit bearing plants.

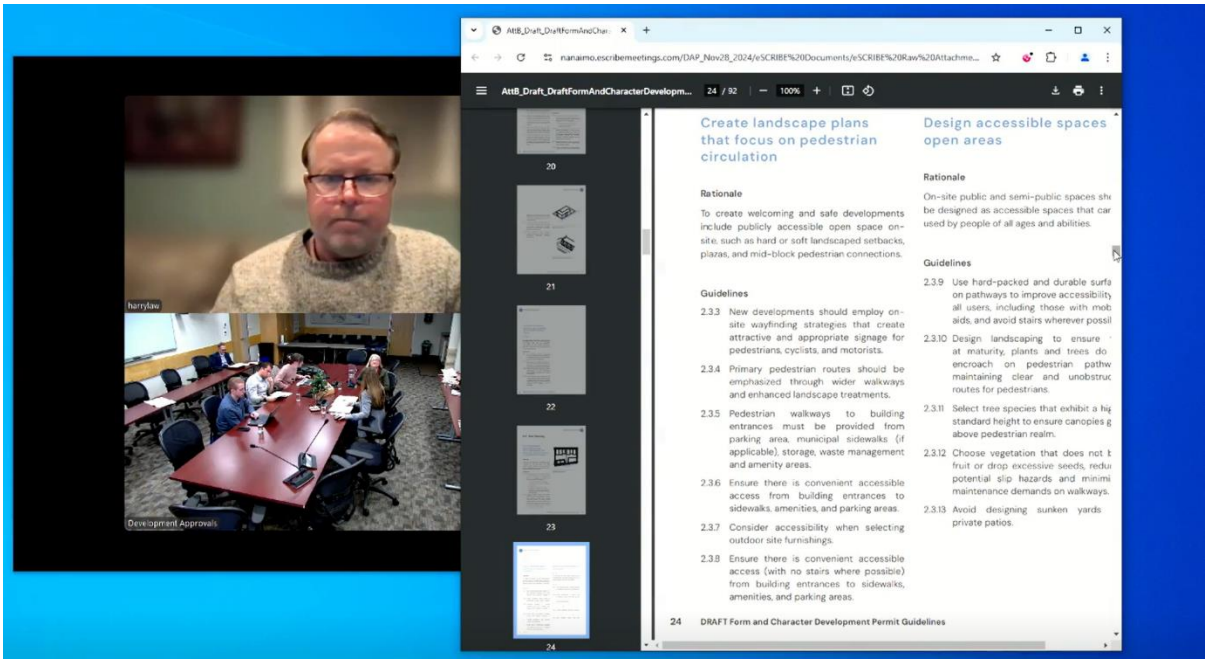
Panel members noted that some language was not clearly explained in some of the guidelines. For example, the statement "design landscape features that users can interact with" needs to be further explained as the intention is not clear. In addition, the statement "explore inspirational landscaping" is not clear, and needs to be further explained to understand the intention of the guideline. Lastly, one of the guidelines suggested using

plantings to mitigate acoustic conflicts, however, plantings do not have an impact on mitigating noise, as they are typically only good for visual screening. The panel recommends the guideline suggest a more solid mass for noise mitigation.

Siting, Buildings, & Materials – The Panel noted that there are inconsistencies in in the guidelines regarding paint on retaining walls. One guideline encourages paint on retaining walls and one guideline does not. The Panel suggests not using paint on retaining walls as it can create maintenance issues. A better option would be for the developer to create patterns in the concrete through sandblasting and the like. In addition, the Panel recommended not using pressure treated wood for posts, especially in natural areas where there is potential for leaking chemicals. It would be better if it was specified where the pressure treated wood should be or make the guideline less specific to pressure treated wood.

The Panel recommended guidelines for adequately sized, weather protected balconies. They discussed how balconies should be covered from the weather, otherwise it can only be used for a few months out of the year. It was also questioned whether apartments buildings should be built where every unit has a balcony. The Panel suggested potentially a Juliet balcony would suffice for some buildings as long as there are adequate shared amenity spaces. Units with no balconies may be able to help with housing affordability too.

Lastly, the Panel discussed the importance of encouraging infill developments that are sensitive to the local neighbourhood they are being built in. It was noted that infill projects need to fit in with the surrounding area, and that this point needs to be strengthened in the document, specifically in the Neighbourhood and Suburban Neighbourhood sections.



Neighbourhood Associations – Input from November to December 2024

Response:

2 Neighbourhood Associations (NA)

Format:

Neighbourhood Associations (NA's) were directly emailed from City of Nanaimo staff to provide input on the Draft Form and Character Guidelines via email or the Get Involved webpage.

Findings:

Document Usability – One NA expressed that the language, such as guidelines that are "encouraged", are too soft. The NA recommends that stronger language be used such as "required" or "enforced", especially for the heritage design guidelines for the Old City neighborhood.

CPTED – One NA suggested that the Draft Form and Character Guidelines need more CPTED guidelines. This includes avoiding landscaping that creates blind spots for hiding places, incorporating nighttime lighting in open spaces, and requiring gated entrances in underground and undercover parking areas. Another NA noted that they were supportive of the guidelines that encourage design for natural surveillance to deter crime, as this is a priority for their association. They also expressed that benches and tables as passive safety measures do contribute to more frequent use, but do not feel safe to use outside of typical business hours as more transient users tend to take over the space.

Heritage – One NA noted that the Draft Guidelines only provide specific principles for protection of heritage in the Old City neighbourhood and suggest that other neighbourhoods are worthy of heritage protection guidelines as well. The NA suggests that the construction of infill housing in historic neighbourhoods is an effective way to ensure that the vibrancy and unique architectural character of a neighbourhood is maintained over time and that there should be guidelines that speak to this. They recommended a number of the Old City neighbourhood section guidelines should also be included in the Neighbourhood and Suburban Neighbourhood sections.

Protection of Views – One NA noted that there are no guidelines in the document that protect existing views in neighbourhoods, and that the promotion of rooftop decks and the encouragement of maximizing views of the water in new builds can hinder views for existing residents. It is recommended that new construction should ensure that significant views are not spoiled or altered for residents and visitors.

The Waterfront – One NA recommended clarity on whether the developer should emphasize the water side or Stewart Avenue side of waterfront properties from a public access perspective. In addition, the NA suggests that commercial activity should be

promoted on both sides of the properties. It was also mentioned that waterfront developers should be responsible for adding to a continuous, uninterrupted public waterfront walkway, and that the building scale on the waterfront from BC Ferries to Pearson Bridge should not exceed four storeys. Lastly, the NA noted that the Waterfront section was not clear and is in need of some clarity with wording.

Development Community – Input from November to December 2024

Response:

2 Developer Groups

Format:

The Development Community was directly emailed from City of Nanaimo staff to provide input on the Draft Form and Character Guidelines via email or the Get Involved webpage.

Findings:

Industrial Development – One developer expressed concern for the applicability of the General Guidelines to industrial development. It was noted that industrial land use is not conducive to a high level of pedestrian permeability and an active, interesting streetscape. Many of the activities that take place on industrial lands are not those with a high level of interface with the public due to safety concerns and the limited nature of commercial interactions.

The developer recommends better clarity in the General Guidelines which apply to industrial development, as they suggest most of them are not suitable for industrial developments. For example, the developer noted several guidelines that are not appropriate for industrial buildings including thermal bridging, limited building articulation, limited ability for using a variety of materials, limited landscaping in comparison for a high pedestrian area such as an Urban Centre, the inability to have public outdoor amenity areas, especially on larger, private industrial properties, and that wood fencing is not secure enough for industrial uses. Lastly, the developer noted that parking is much different in industrial areas, as parking needs to be allowed in front of or beside the buildings depending on size and use, and that breaking up the parking lot and creating attractive parking areas is not practical.

Document Usability – One developer expressed concern with the lack of generality in the document. It was noted that the criteria are too specific, which can create roadblocks and challenges for planners working through development projects. There needs to be more generality and flexibility as all project sites are different and will entail creativity. Specifically, it was pointed out the Climate Adaptation section is too specific as not all climate efficient elements will be applicable. There needs to be room for unique solutions for unique buildings and sites in terms of environmental technology.

It was expressed that some of the language is too strong. Words such as “use” and “implement” are too strong as some of the guidelines that use this language will not be applicable to every project. Lastly, one developer recommended that certain sections of the General Design Guidelines apply more to specific Land Use Designations, such as the Street Interface and Connectivity guidelines.

Siting – One developer mentioned that given the current social context of Nanaimo, inviting public into the private realm of a site on all land use types is problematic, therefore, guidelines that encourage this should not be applicable across all sites and land uses.

Get Involved Nanaimo Website Comment Form – Input from Nov 20th – Dec 13th, 2024

Responses:

34

Format:

The Form and Character Development Permit Guidelines project was added to the Nanaimo Get Involved website, to feature project information, and an online survey with three questions to provide comments. The following section is organized according to the questions asked in the comment form.

Findings:

Question 1: What do you like about the Draft Form and Character Development Permit Guidelines?

Document Usability – Some respondents noted that the document is easy to read, well presented, and have sensible guidelines. It was also expressed that the document is well organized, provides guideline flexibility, and includes many different types of guidelines.

Environmental Protection – Some respondents expressed that they support the guidelines that encourage the retention of trees and natural habitat, as they need protection and stewardship. In addition, guidelines that promote increased massing for multi-family buildings, with less focus on architectural design in favour of energy efficient designs, was valued by some respondents. Some noted they appreciated the support for native plants in landscaping as this is important for biodiversity in urban environments. It was also stated that the low impact strategies to reduce landscape disturbances and integrate natural features is appreciated. Lastly, some respondents expressed they were pleased with the encouragement of tree canopies and that they support the guidelines that encourage reduced surface runoff.

Character – Some respondents expressed that they supported the idea that new developments should complement the residential character of the neighbourhood in which they are being built in, and that existing neighbourhood patterns should be respected and continued. In addition, some respondents noted that they agree with the guidelines that encourage balanced transitions between new developments and old ones. Some respondents also supported the encouragement of public art, as this can make a positive impact on an areas sense of place. Lastly, some respondents appreciated the inclusion of guidelines that protect the character of the Old City neighbourhood as they feel the character is slowly disappearing.

Green & Public Spaces – Some respondents noted that they support the guidelines that speak to better public access to the waterfront, as there is currently a lack of accessibility to our waterfront in comparison to nearby communities. It was noted by some respondents that they were in favour of guidelines that encouraged green spaces and permeability.

Weather Protection – Some respondents supported the emphasis on protecting multi-family buildings from the weather, including the encouragement to increase roof overhangs for shading and rain collection, as well as the encouragement to increase use of vertical screens, durable siding, roof materials, and increased insulations in exterior walls.

Question 2: What improvements would you suggest for the Draft Form and Character Development Permit Guidelines?

Document Usability – Some respondents mentioned the need for images in the document. Words alone do not showcase the guidelines enough; therefore, visuals are needed. It was also expressed that the document is quite lengthy for a lay person to review, and that it is not easily understandable for residents. Lastly, some respondents noted that the General Guidelines section is too broad, as many of them do not apply to all land uses (i.e. roof top patios for an industrial building is not realistic).

Accessibility & Affordability – Some respondents mentioned their concern for the lack of guidelines that consider mobility users, such as wheelchairs users. For example, the porch design for townhouses as shown in the illustrations are not age or mobility friendly. In addition, apartment buildings with 22 plus storeys do not have requirements for multi-elevator installations, which is problematic for paramedics to reach distressed patients, as elevator times can be too long and become a risk. Some respondents also mentioned that there should be guidelines that require more details for sight impaired design features such as raised gardens, as well as space designed for autistic community members (i.e. guidelines for quiet, lower lit spaces). Lastly, some respondents were concerned that the guidelines did not address housing affordability.

Siting, Buildings & Materials – Some respondents expressed that there should be guidelines that discourage the development of multi-family buildings on slopes, as this destroys the privacy of those living below the slope. In addition, it was mentioned that upper-level setbacks of buildings shouldn't be encouraged to be too large, unless it improves the quality of life of residents in the building. In addition, respondents discussed that requiring denser housing to conform to older and smaller buildings hampers the creation of new and modern designs, and that the focus should be made on allowing developers to implement new designs rather than trying to accommodate old buildings.

Community Spaces & Amenities – Respondents mentioned that multi-family buildings should also be discouraged from being developed where there are no amenities within 2

kilometers, for example, in the Hammond Bay area. Some respondents expressed the concern for guidelines encouraging excessive parking. It is a worry that community space would be sacrificed to accommodate too much parking. In addition, it was discussed that shared space should be encouraged over private spaces because shared land spaces can have greater variety of uses compared to isolated private spaces.

Environmental Protection – Many respondents expressed that there should be guidelines that discourage multi-family and townhouse development near parks and lakes, as this will not protect existing resources, does not preserve nature, and threatens watersheds.

Landscaping – Some respondents recommended that there should be guidelines that reference key indigenous plants, for example, malus fusca, and should have signs so that the public can be educated on the importance of these plantings. In addition, it was mentioned that there should be an increase in the percentage of native plants required, specifically in section 2.5, and that it would be nice if the guidelines could be written to strengthen tree retention.

Question 3: Is there any other feedback you would like to provide about the Draft Form and Character Development Permit Guidelines?

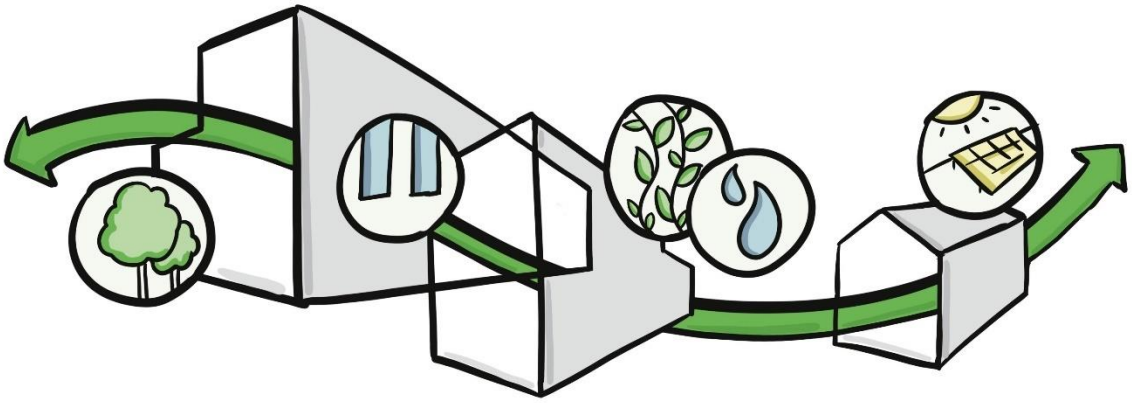
Active Transportation & Access – Some respondents mentioned that there should be guidelines requiring physical separation between roads, bike lanes, and walkways, as this is critical for safety and overall quality of the walking and riding experience. In this case, it was discussed that wide sidewalks should be encouraged where possible. It was also noted that there is limited public access to the waterfront, and that this should be a main objective for the Waterfront section of the document. Lastly, it was expressed that there are guidelines missing that address the outward look of the buildings, such as increasing access to grocery stores and other services, timely public transit availability, and access for vehicle and emergency personnel.

Character – Respondents expressed that there should be guidelines that encourage creative outdoor signage for businesses, in particular in the downtown area. This adds vibrancy, uniqueness, and fun to an area. It was also noted that developments should be designed to match the character of the neighbourhood in which they are being developed in.

Amenities & Green Space – Some respondents mentioned that the guidelines should encourage socially positive enhancements, such as meeting areas and space for gatherings. In addition, it was mentioned that multi-family developments should have a range of amenities, for example, clubhouses, pools, kids play areas, and green spaces (i.e. examples in Vancouver).

Buildings – Some respondents expressed that the requirement for balconies should be eliminated, as energy and carbon codes and good building envelopes require simple massing. Requiring balconies also increases cost and complexity for developers. It was also mentioned that mixed use buildings should be encouraged where possible, with commercial use on the ground level and residential on the above levels as this will also increase walkability in the city.

Environmental Protection – Many respondents expressed the concern for locating high density development near parks and lakes, as this will infringe on park use, increase traffic, and will not protect the unique environment the city has. It was recommended to add specific guidelines related to parkland to ensure adjacent developments provide a balanced transition and a minimized impact.



Summary

This section looks at commonalities between different audiences, as well as areas of divergence that were identified through the engagement result analysis. The following topics were common across all groups that were engaged in this process.

Document Usability – There were mixed reviews on the document usability. Some respondents said the document is easy to read, well presented, and organized, while others identified the need for clarity in certain sections (General Design Guidelines & Waterfront sections) as well as simpler language. It was also mentioned that the figures provided in the document are useful, but more imagery is needed to illustrate the guidelines. Lastly, it was expressed that some of the guidelines are too general, and some are too specific, depending on the section in which they are located in the document.

Siting, Buildings & Materials – Across the groups engaged, there were a number of different comments regarding siting, buildings, and materials, including the preference for no paint on retaining walls, infill that is suitable for each unique neighbourhood, discouraging things like rooftop patios and chopped up parking lots in industrial areas, and the discouragement of upper-level building setbacks. There were also multiple comments about the requirement of balconies for multi-family buildings, specifically pertaining to the fact that energy and carbon codes require simple massing. Balconies hinder simple massing and also decrease residential affordability. Lastly, there is concern for guidelines encouraging inviting the public realm into the private realm given the current social context of Nanaimo.

Landscaping, Weather, & Environmental Protection – There were different views about landscaping, and weather and environmental protection across engagement groups. Some mentioned that there is more clarity needed, such as where the city would like to see fruit bearing plants and where they would not. Many supported the guidelines regarding tree retention and tree canopies, protection of the natural habitat, and native plants, however, there were also comments that there are not enough. For example, many respondents want to see guidelines that discourage multi-family and townhouse development near parks and lakes.

Character, Heritage, & Public Art – Some respondents agree with the guidelines that encourage public art, and some think they are too broad and need further explanation. In addition, respondents were happy with the heritage guidelines for the Old City Neighbourhood but wish to have these guidelines within the broader Neighbourhood and Suburban Neighbourhood sections, so they can be applied to other neighbourhoods too. Lastly, most respondents support the guidelines that encourage infill development mimicking the character of the neighbourhood in which they are being built.

Amenities & Community Spaces – Few respondents were pleased with the guidelines regarding public spaces, for example, some mentioned the need for more guidelines

encouraging gathering areas, and some were concerned with the guidelines that encourage large parking lots out of fear that it would take away from potential community space. Lastly, some were hopeful for more guidelines that encourage better and more frequent public accesses to the waterfront.

Accessibility & Safety – Some respondent groups mentioned the need for guidelines regarding CPTED and accessibility. For example, there is a lack of guidelines for nighttime lighting, mobility uses in and outside of buildings, and sight impaired design.

All feedback provided during the November and December 2024 phase two engagement process will be considered for the next draft of the Form and Character Development Permit Guidelines, which is expected to be released in Spring 2025. In addition, feedback from staff from various City departments will inform the Spring 2025 draft.

