

## **1.1 PURPOSE OF THE OTN-PRGS URBAN DESIGN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES**

The purpose of the Old Town North Potomac River Generating Station (OTN-PRGS) Urban Design Standards and Guidelines is to promote high-quality architectural and urban design applicable within the CDD Concept Plan boundaries, and to encourage a cohesive and attractive environment for the people who live, work, shop, recreate and visit Old Town North.

The OTN-PRGS Design Standards and Guidelines are intended to provide requirements and guidance in written and graphic form for projects in the CDD Concept plan area to implement the vision of the Old Town North Small Area Plan (OTN SAP).

## **1.2 BACKGROUND - URBAN DESIGN IN OLD TOWN NORTH**

The Old Town North Small Area Plan, adopted in 1992, (1992 OTN SAP) recommended the establishment of urban design guidelines and a review process for newly constructed and redeveloped properties. The 1992 OTN SAP stated that the design guidelines, once established, should be refined as needed over time to ensure that the critical design objectives for the neighborhood continue to be addressed. Subsequent to adoption of the 1992 OTN SAP, the Old Town North Urban Design Guidelines were adopted in 1994 and a review process for new development was established. In 2017, the Old Town North Small Area Plan and Design Guidelines were updated and approved by City Council after a robust engagement process with the community.

This adopted OTN Design Standards and Guidelines (2017) ensures that new development occurring over the next 20 years aligns with the updated Plan goals and objectives in a manner that strengthens compatibility between uses and enhances the vision for Old Town North, its overall sense of place, and its quality of life for all. At the time of adoption, it was contemplated that with the redevelopment of the PRGS site, design standards would be created to guide the redevelopment of the former power plant site.

## **1.3 USE OF OLD TOWN NORTH-PRGS DESIGN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES**

The OTN-PRGS Design Standards and Guidelines is an addendum to the Old Town North Urban Design Standards & Guidelines and supplement the Old Town North Small Area Plan (OTN SAP) and all applicable City codes, ordinances, and existing City plans and policies such as the Complete Streets Design Guidelines, Green Building Policy, Landscape Guidelines, etc.

The OTN-PRGS Design Standards and Guidelines described herein are applicable to new development within the Potomac River Generating Station (PRGS) site that require a Development Site Plan (DSP) or Development Special Use Permit (DSUP).

### **OTN SAP:**

The stated vision and recommendations that inform the Standards and Guidelines.

Note: The Design Standards and Guidelines acknowledge that each site/building will need to be evaluated on its context and that modifications may be necessary to achieve the intent of this document. Any modification to the Standards contained herein will be evaluated and determined through the development review process.

### **STANDARD:**

A defined criteria based on the outlined OTN SAP vision and recommendations for which development projects are required to comply and necessitate a higher level of review.

### **GUIDELINE:**

A defined criteria based on the outlined OTN SAP vision and recommendations for which development projects are encouraged to incorporate to the extent possible.

The OTN-PRGS Design Standards and Guidelines are intended to be utilized by development, design professionals, for redevelopment proposals within the PRGS CDD Concept Plan area. Others such as the community, City staff, the Urban Design Advisory Committee, the Planning Commission, and the City Council will also utilize these Design Standards and Guidelines as they assess proposals within the CDD Concept Plan area.

## **1.4 REVIEW RESPONSIBILITY**

The Urban Design Advisory Committee (UDAC) has been established as an advisory group to City staff. It has urban design advisory review responsibility for the portion of Old Town North not within the OHAD boundaries. While the OTN Design Standards and Guidelines for buildings are not applicable to the OHAD, the Design Standards and Guidelines for the streetscape and public realm will apply to the entire plan area.

### **A. Urban Design Advisory Committee**

The OTN-PRGS Design Standards and Guidelines are intended to facilitate the Urban Design Advisory Committee's (UDAC) review of properties which fall within the Potomac River Generating Station (PRGS) CDD Concept Plan boundary. UDAC is advisory to City staff to ensure compliance with the Design Standards and Guidelines. For DSPs and DSUPs, UDAC will provide a written recommendation to the Director of the Planning Department. The Department of Planning and Zoning, the Planning Commission and the City Council will give consideration to the recommendations of UDAC on urban design aspects of public and private development applications.

## CHAPTER 2: SITE DESIGN

The character of the urban environment is influenced by site design that is principally established by the quality of buildings and their relationship to the surrounding public spaces and streets. To ensure compatibility between different building scales and uses, height transitions and variations are required. The Site Design Standards and Guidelines also address building placement, orientation, parking, and the location of services and utilities.

### 2.1 Building Orientation, Frontage and Setbacks (Streetwall)

Building orientation, frontage and setbacks are important components of a building's design and contribute to the public realm and distinctive character of a building. The pattern of buildings facing the street creates a well-defined edge, also known as a "streetwall", that frames the streets and open spaces. A building frontage is the extent to which the building's streetwall responds to the street facing property line and corresponding setbacks.

The streetwall provides a sense of spatial definition that creates a coherent urban environment and reinforces a sense of place while also making for a pleasant, comfortable and safe pedestrian environment. The design, location and quality of the building adjacent to the street – the streetwall – is the portion which is experienced the most by pedestrians and should be the area of the building façade which is given the most attention and the highest quality design and materials.

While maintaining a continual streetwall is important, it is also important to avoid a monolithic façade without relief. Therefore, some of the frontages may have building breaks, front yards, setbacks, and courtyards to create a variety of landscaping and building forms that provide visual interest to pedestrians and motorists, while also maintaining the cohesiveness of the block and street form.

#### Orientation, Frontage and Setback Standards:

1. Buildings shall generally be sited parallel to the street, irregular spacing between buildings shall be avoided or minimized at the setback line, except in cases where variation is needed for gateway elements as required, or to maximize water views or open spaces at the ground level. In general, buildings shall include as much frontage as possible.

#### Guidelines:

1. The streetwall height should generally be a minimum of 20 feet as shown in Figure 2.01 and Figure 2.03a.
2. 20-25% of the total street frontage for residential, office, and hotel buildings should be setback 2-10 feet from the property line, excluding courtyards (as shown in Figure 2.02a).
3. Where courtyards are provided, total building setbacks including the courtyard should not exceed 35% of the total street frontage (as shown in Figure 2.02b). The depth of the courtyard shall be determined as part of the development review process.
4. Where ground floor retail, art and/or cultural spaces are located, building setbacks should be a maximum of 15% of the total street frontage.
5. Architectural elements and entrances should be used to provide visual interest, enliven the streetscape for the pedestrian, and promote streetscape activity.
6. Building setbacks above the streetwall (as depicted in Figure 2.03b) are encouraged where retail and/or art uses are provided on the ground floor.

## 2.2 Building Heights - Transitions

### Transition Standards:

1. Building height transitions shall be required at the locations shown on Figure 2.04 and shall utilize approaches such as building setbacks, stepbacks, building shoulders, landscape buffers and/or courtyards, but not limited to those depicted in Figure 2.0X.
2. Transitions may be required at other locations for the redevelopment sites if deemed necessary as part of the development review process.
3. The type and configuration of the required building transition will be determined as part of the development review process based on the context of each site.

## 2.3 Building Heights – Variety

### Height Variety Standards:

1. Each multi-family building shall provide a minimum of ~~15%~~ 25% of the building footprint below the maximum height established in the CDD below the rooftop penthouse level (Figure 2.06). The specific allocation of the variation shall be determined as part of the development review process.
2. Office and hotel buildings shall provide a variety of height which shall be determined through the development review process.

## 2.4 Gateway Elements – Vistas

Gateway elements are distinctive architectural elements and/ or special building forms used to draw attention or reinforce points of interest that mark the location of “entries” and “places” within the plan area. These elements will be of the highest level of design excellence incorporating special building forms and/or the innovative use of materials. Additionally, a fundamental component of the OTN SAP is that the east-west streets will maintain the view-shed to the Potomac River. Gateway elements should not obstruct views to the waterfront and the protected viewshed of the Washington Monument from Slaters Lane.

### Standards:

1. Views to the Potomac River shall be maintained. Incorporate public vistas through the configuration of the buildings and the design of open space in the locations generally depicted in Figure 2.07.
2. Gateway elements shall be provided for new buildings at visually prominent locations within the plan area as shown in Figure 2.07.

### Guidelines:

1. Gateway buildings should exhibit the highest level of architectural design and detail and utilize high-quality materials.
2. Gateway buildings should provide special elements at street terminations to frame views. This may include public art, special landscaping and/or building forms.
3. Gateway elements should be proportioned to the size and scale of the building.

4. Excluding the buildings on Washington Street, required gateway element(s) should provide distinctive three-dimensional forms, unique shapes and materials to reinforce the significance of each location.

## 2.5 Parking and Service Areas

Appropriate parking location and design will support the creation of active, walkable, and transit-oriented development.

### Standards:

1. Parking for each building (excluding townhouses and stacked townhouses) shall be located entirely below grade or entirely screened with an active use. The screening of the parking with active uses shall be provided for each level of the entire perimeter of each street, park, and/or open space frontage.
2. Surface parking lots are prohibited except for non-construction uses necessary to support temporary uses. Parking for temporary uses may be permitted with a special use permit.
3. Loading service docks should not be accessed from the Retail Corridors (North Saint Asaph and Montgomery Streets) and should be located on secondary streets where feasible.
4. Bicycle racks shall be provided from the City of Alexandria's pre-approved types.

### Guidelines:

1. Parking garage entrances should be minimized. Garage entrances should be located on secondary streets yet be adequately visible and accessible to the public if public parking is provided.
2. Loading dock and garage access should be combined where possible but sized to not dominate the building or block frontage. The doors should also be designed to provide architectural interest for the pedestrian and be complementary to the overall building design.
3. Where alleys are provided, they should be designed to minimize visibility into the alley and the garage doors from the public right-of-way.
4. Curb cuts for parking access and alleys should be minimized for the demonstrable needs of new development.
5. Service areas should be out of view or screened from the public right-of-way by adequate landscape or architectural elements.
6. Bicycle parking should be provided in a safe, accessible and convenient location, within 100 feet of the building entrance.

## 2.6 Utilities

Utilities are an important aspect of modern infrastructure but must be sited as discreetly as possible to minimize their impact on the public realm.

### Standards:

1. No transformers are allowed in the public right-of-way.
2. Transformers shall not be concealed from the public right-of-way or areas with public access easements. To the greatest extent feasible, transformers are to be located underground and coordinated with the parking garage.

**Guidelines:**

1. Utility locations should be selected to avoid conflict with street trees.
2. New construction should provide pad mounted, indoor, or underground transformers within the building footprint; otherwise, transformers should be located adjacent to an alley or at the rear of the property where feasible.

**CHAPTER 3: BUILDING DESIGN**

The following building design standards and guidelines are intended to create distinctive architecture and to complement a high-quality public realm. High quality building design will contribute to the unique character of Old Town North and promote a sense of community and livability.

**3.1 Massing and Form (Building Character)**

The intent of this provision is to ensure a variety in building massing for residential and commercial uses and to provide variation in building footprint to create more urban, pedestrian-scaled buildings. In addition to height variation and transitions defined in Chapter 2, a building’s massing can be articulated horizontally in plan such as, but not limited to, projections and recesses.

**Standards:**

1. Building design and construction materials, as defined herein, will be of high quality and will contribute to the unique character of Old Town North and promote a sense of community and livability.

**Guidelines:**

1. Where changes in the wall planes and architectural elements are provided or required, they should comply with Figure 3.01 Massing elements such as projections and/or recesses are provided to avoid flat building façades.

**3.2 Building Types**

**I. Multi-Family Buildings**

**Multi-Family Standards**

**A. Building Character and Materials Standards:**

1. Unless required for the function of the building, blank walls in excess of 30 feet in length or height are prohibited.
2. Where ground floor commercial, retail, and/or arts and cultural uses are not provided, and where stoops are provided, they shall be designed in a way that does not obstruct the sidewalk and public-right-of-way.
3. Building materials for each façade should consist of the following:
  - Natural or engineered stone, metal, porcelain tile, terra cotta, brick, wood, concrete, photo-voltaic panels, glass or materials of equal quality, performance, and longevity.

- Fiber cement board and/or siding and/or panels (or comparable) shall be limited to a maximum of 20% of the materials used on the building façade visible from a street or park/open space.
  - Mirrored reflective, frosted reflective or darkly tinted glass is prohibited.
4. Prohibited materials include synthetic stucco, and vinyl siding.
  5. Sides and rears of buildings that are visible from an adjoining street and/or park shall be designed in a compatible manner utilizing a similar architectural treatment as the primary façade.
  6. Blank facades for newly constructed buildings shall be prohibited for any street and/or along active frontages. Where nonactive frontages occur, incorporate differentiated materials, landscaping, lighting, and/or art (for example, a mural) to make them active.

#### **B. Building Massing Standards:**

7. Building designs shall incorporate modulation and articulation such as massing reveals, changes of textures, materials, and/or colors, or shifts of the façade plane in order to create a pedestrian scaled façade.

#### **Multi-Family Guidelines:**

1. Reasonable building breaks should be provided for larger multi-family buildings to avoid long, monolithic façades.
  - Where retail/commercial use is provided or required on the ground floor a building break should occur above the first floor retail-commercial use.
  - There may be a connector between the building break.
  - As part of the development review process, a building break may not be required if a level of architectural variation is provided comparable to the building break required above. In addition, if a building break is not required, the façade variation shall include variation in color and materials
2. Buildings should generally provide a vertical fenestration pattern. Variation may be allowed if approved through the development special use permit process.
3. The solid to void ratio (or wall to window) should consist of a minimum of 30% void for each building facade on a primary street which shall exclude ground floor commercial-retail areas where provided. A higher percentage should be provided where feasible.
4. Windows should be used as an element that helps to articulate the building's character, and designed to reveal the thickness/depth of the wall.
5. Windows should be well-proportioned and operable, if feasible.
6. Windows should be grouped to establish rhythms across the façade and hierarchies at important places on the façade.
7. Window and door placement should provide a high degree of transparency at the lower levels of the building to maximize visibility of active uses and provide a human-scaled architectural pattern. A rhythm of individual windows and exterior openings within building façades should be established to provide a greater variety of scale through material variation, detail and surface relief.
8. Buildings should be architecturally differentiated through the use of color and materials within each block.
9. HVAC, mechanical, and telecommunications equipment should be integrated into the overall building design and should not be visible from an adjoining street and/or park. Wall units or vents should recessed within a balcony or integrated with the design of the building.

## **II. Office and Hotel Buildings**

## Office and Hotel Standards

### A. Building Character and Materials Standards:

1. Building materials for each façade shall consist of the following:
  - Natural or engineered stone, metal, porcelain tile, terra cotta, brick, wood, concrete, photo-voltaic panels, glass or materials of equal quality, performance, and longevity
2. Prohibited materials include synthetic stucco and vinyl siding.
3. Sides and rears of buildings that are visible from an adjoining street and/or park shall be designed in a compatible manner utilizing a similar architectural treatment as the primary façade. Blank walls shall be prohibited for any frontage.

### Office and Hotel Guidelines

1. Window and door placement should provide a high degree of transparency at the lower levels of the building to maximize visibility of active uses and provide a human-scaled architectural pattern. A rhythm of individual windows and exterior openings within building façades should be established to provide a greater variety of scale through material variation, detail and surface relief.
2. Buildings should generally provide a vertical fenestration pattern. Variation may be allowed if approved through the development special use permit process.
3. The solid to void (or wall to window) ratio should consist of a minimum of 30% void for hotel buildings and 35% void for office buildings and may include spandrels. Mirrored reflective, frosted reflective or darkly tinted glass is prohibited. A higher percentage is encouraged where feasible.
4. Windows should be used as an element that helps to articulate the character of a façade, and designed to reveal the thickness/depth of the façade wall.
5. Windows should be well-proportioned and operable, if feasible.
6. Windows should be grouped to establish rhythms across the façade and hierarchies at important places on the façade.
7. Buildings should be architecturally differentiated through the use of color and materials.



### III. Ground Floor Uses

#### A. Retail

The City's successful retail streets and storefronts reflect a fine-grain pattern of multiple shops and businesses. Within a given block, the variety of retail offerings, visibility of window displays and multiple entrances provide the pedestrian with a significant level of visual interest. The successful performance of the retail areas will be directly related to the successful design and construction of their retail storefronts. It is the intent of the retail storefronts that all retail tenants will have the opportunity to design and install their own storefronts. Storefronts should be "individual" expressions of a tenant's identity and, therefore, unique from adjacent storefronts. Storefront signage is addressed in Chapter 4, Section 4.7.

#### Retail Use and Retail Storefront Standards:

1. The minimum depth for retail spaces shall generally be 35 feet, with 50 feet preferable, for the entire length of the building frontage along all streets, open spaces, courtyards, and park frontages. The floor to floor height shall be a minimum of 15 feet, with 18 feet preferable.
2. The design of the retail storefronts shall be designed to include "high quality materials, such as stone, metal, glass, wood, concrete, terra cotta, and tile and be administratively approved through the creation of retail storefront requirements that reflect the design intent herein.
3. For ground floor retail, generally provide transparent windows for a minimum of 70% of the retail area. Flexibility may be considered based on creativity and the overall compatibility and character of the storefront design, meets the intent of the Design Standards and Guidelines, and is approved by the Director of Planning and Zoning.
4. The materials for the retail storefront shall consist of stone, metal, glass and/or wood. Construction detail and finish shall be of high craftsmanship. Durable materials such as these are especially critical at the street level where pedestrian contact will be considerable. Storefronts shall be predominantly glass to provide views into the store. Translucent composite materials may be acceptable and reviewed as part of the development review process.

#### Retail Use and Retail Storefront Guidelines

1. Corner retail storefronts are encouraged to extend at least 35 feet along the side street and/or park-open space, and should also be expressed in the architecture.
2. To establish pedestrian-scaled design on the ground floors of larger buildings, window groupings, material changes, or columns on the principal façade should be used to accentuate individual storefronts and denote a smaller increment of building bays.
3. The retail storefronts should be designed to create a comfortable yet highly animated pedestrian environment by utilizing a rhythm of multiple retail entrances. Blank walls, where no glazing or architectural articulation is provided, are prohibited.
4. The design of retail should take into account:
  - how the storefront fits into the architecture of the building;
  - the relationship to varying grades along the storefronts, and the flexibility to adjust store entries;
  - visibility of storefronts (including clear glass);
  - sidewalk spaces for outdoor retail displays or dining; sign and logo requirements; and
  - the design, materials and colors of awnings or canopies to protect pedestrians and windows.

## **B. Arts and Cultural Flexible Ground Floor Spaces**

The goal of flexible ground floor spaces is to enable arts and cultural uses as defined in the OTN SAP within the plan area that diversify the City's economy, complement and enhance the neighborhoods, and provide locations for existing and new small businesses and emerging industries.

These uses typically require taller ceiling heights, and deeper bays than typical retail, and work is often showcased with large windows or garage bays at street level. Flexibility in space and design is a key element for these uses.

### **Arts and Cultural Use Standards:**

1. The arts and cultural uses shall be subject to all applicable requirements of the Zoning Ordinance and associated policies and regulations.
2. The floor to ceiling height shall be a minimum of 15 feet, with 18 feet preferable. The minimum depth of each space shall be a minimum of 20 feet, or greater where feasible.

### **Arts and Cultural Use Guidelines:**

1. Each ground floor arts and cultural use should provide a minimum of 40% transparency (garage doors, doors and windows) at the street level.
2. A garage door or comparable sized opening should be provided for each space or approximately every 20-30 feet. Garage and/or roll up doors should be glass and metal.
3. Flexibility may be granted for exhaust, fans, and vents on primary building façades that support the building function/use. Final location and treatment will be determined as part of the development review process.
4. Adequate loading, access, refuse collection, and noise attenuation should be addressed during the development review process.

## **IV. Residential Uses at Grade**

### **Standards:**

1. Residential buildings shall provide a front setback of 2-10 feet from the required sidewalk to provide space for landscaping, streetscape, and similar elements, unless art and/or live/work-spaces are provided.
2. Ground floor levels for all residential units shall be elevated a minimum of 12 inches and maximum of 4 feet above the adjoining sidewalk. 2-3 feet is desired. Where at-grade accessible units are needed or required, alternatives will be considered as part of the development review process.

### **Guidelines:**

1. For multi-family buildings, where ground floor commercial space is not provided, building design should reinforce the pedestrian environment through active amenity areas at the ground plane with individual and functional entries are encouraged.

### 3.3 Building Entries

Building entries enhance the scale, activity and function of each building. This is achieved through building entries at frequent intervals for the street and park frontages. Building entries should also reinforce pedestrian activity and circulation along the street. The building entries are required to be distinctive features and be an integral part of the design of the building, with a size and scale appropriate to the scale of the building. The entries should be easy to locate from the street for pedestrians and motorists.

#### Standards:

1. The primary pedestrian entrance shall front along an activated street frontage.
2. Enhanced level of architectural design and treatment are required, and, where appropriate, landscape treatment shall emphasize the primary entrance as focal point.
3. For primary retail frontages, the width of residential and/or office lobbies shall be the minimum necessary.

#### Guidelines:

1. Building entrances should be given prominence on the street frontage. The size and scale of the entrance should be appropriate for the scale of the building and may include a change in material, wall plane, and/or color.
2. Awnings or canopies are encouraged for building entrances or first floor retail uses. These add color and vibrancy to the streetscape and protection from the weather for the pedestrian. Awnings and signage should be in compliance with the City's sign regulations under the Zoning Ordinance or as part of a Coordinated Sign Plan.
3. Residential and commercial entrances in mixed-use buildings should be architecturally differentiated.
4. Entries should provide protection from the elements, with canopies, recesses, or roof overhangs.

### 3.4 Building Roofs

The Design Standards and Guidelines for building roofs ensure a consistent and appropriate urban character, and that rooftop open space is provided to achieve the environmental goals of the OTN SAP and CDD. Building rooftop design should be aesthetically pleasing, integrated into the overall building design and function to conceal rooftop equipment from view of pedestrians from the adjoining streets and open spaces.

#### Standards:

1. Penthouse and rooftop amenity spaces shall be designed to be architecturally and materially compatible with the overall building design.

**Guidelines:**

1. Buildings with flat roofs should have green rooftops that may be utilized as high quality outdoor open spaces for the building's users and as an extension of the building's common areas.
2. The design of rooftop gardens should be integrated within the overall architecture of the building.
3. Parapets on flat roofs should be minimum of 2 feet in height above the roof, or as needed to conceal mechanical equipment.
4. Rooftop equipment (including elevator equipment, HVAC equipment, etc.) should be concealed in penthouse structures and/or designed as an integral part of the building and/or adequately screened parapet. Mechanical penthouses and roof top equipment should be designed as an extension of the building, employing building materials and design treatments consistent with the exterior of the building when visible from a public street or open space.
5. Where visible from the street, roof penetrations such as vents, attic ventilators, flues, etc. should be placed to limit their visibility from the street. The material and color should match the color of the roof, except those made of metal, which may be left natural.
6. Sloped roofs should be metal, slate, tile, or other comparable high-quality material.

**3.5 Walls, Fences, and Railings**

Walls, fences, and railings provide transitions between the private and public realm and contribute to the spatial definition of streets and privacy of yards and courtyards. The Standards require high quality materials and height limits for fences and walls.

**Standards:**

1. The height, length, and visual impact of walls and fences shall be pedestrian scale and in no case shall they exceed 3.0 feet in height in the front or side yards. In the rear yards, 6 feet privacy fences may be provided, if approved as part of the development review process. Additional screening may be permitted if located adjacent to industrial uses.
2. Materials for walls, garden screen walls, and/or retaining walls should be constructed of brick, stone, metal, architectural precast or other highly finished appropriate material.
3. Materials for fences shall be decorative metal or wood. Railing shall be metal to match the architectural character of the building.

**Guidelines:**

1. Green walls and living walls are strongly encouraged.
2. No walls, fences, or railings should be constructed in the right-of-way.
3. The size and species selection of landscape materials in green walls or hedges should be carefully considered. Landscape elements which are likely to impede pedestrian travel or use of sidewalks should not be installed.

## 4.7 Signage

The intent of the signage Design Standards and Guidelines is to encourage creativity, uniqueness, and high-quality graphics, while being compatible with the adjoining residential neighborhoods.

### Standards:

1. In addition to complying with the Sign Regulations in the Zoning Ordinance Article IX, signs in Old Town North shall adhere to the following:
2. Free standing signs are prohibited.
3. Retail shall provide projecting signs at the pedestrian level of the building.

### Guidelines:

1. Signs should not obscure other building elements such as windows, cornices or decorative details, but should relate in placement and size to these elements.