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# PRINCIPLES FOR DESIGNING MIXED-USE URBAN BUILDINGS IN SALT LAKE CITY

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# Adopting Principles That Can Improve Our City

In a city that constantly talks about walkability and alternative forms of transit, it is imperative that we understand how to create interesting and lively urban environments that encourage and support pedestrian activity.



# Mixed-Use Urban Buildings in Salt Lake City

Salt Lake has many great buildings from which to draw inspiration. These buildings share a set of characteristics that contribute to the creation of great urban environments where residents enjoy dining, shopping, and just strolling down sidewalks.

The design of buildings can greatly influence how pedestrians behave in the city and can contribute or detract from the pedestrian experience.



# Mixed-Use Urban Buildings in Salt Lake City

Understanding the characteristics that enhance the walking experience can assist us in creating great urban spaces.

The following characteristics are presented as a set of guiding principles to assist in the design process and establish a set of standards for assessing new design proposals.



# Proportion of Base to Overall Height of Building

One of the first principles that greatly impacts the urban environment is large, clear, ground floor windows.

Generally areas where we see the greatest pedestrian activity are bordered by buildings where the proportion of the ground floor to the overall building is almost one-and-a-half to two times the height of the upper floors.



# Proportion of Base to Overall Height of Building

Most historic buildings in Salt Lake with more than 2-3 stories have a ground floor level that is almost double or triple the height of ground floor found in most new construction.

Allowances for this added height on the ground level should be considered in building heights restrictions by the city so as to encourage this type of design.



# Proportion of Base to Overall Height of Building

Here we see an example of a new building where the proportion of the ground floor is too low for the overall height of the building.

This principle is closely tied to another problem often found in new construction which has to do with the fact that there is no hierarchy to the various levels of the building.

All levels of the building appear to be almost the same height.





These differences are most apparent when viewed in a side by side comparison where the proportions of the ground floor, compared to human scale, are clearly visible. On the left, the ground floor picture windows of the historic building are over twice the height of the pedestrians. The strong horizontal cornice clearly defines the ground level. Notice the clarity of the glass providing a clear view into the building and the attention to detail on the window frames. On the right, the windows are blacked out and the window frames are poorly detailed, lacking even the most basic attempt to resolve the alignment between the doors and windows.





Another side by side comparison illustrates the clear difference in the character of the two pedestrian environments. The image on the left illustrates how a few simple principles of good urban design contribute to the creation of an interesting and dynamic urban environment compared to the space on the right.

# Windows

A key principle of brick and mortar retail is that people:

1. Buy what they can see.
2. Enter spaces they can see into. For this reason windows should be large, transparent, and as close to the pedestrian path as possible. The lighting is also critical to insure that you can see into the space when it is bright outside.

For this reason retailers often change their lighting throughout the day. It is actually brighter during the day to minimize reflections on the glass.



# Windows

New projects throughout the city are using “store front” type windows that are common to suburban strip malls, and which have no place in urban pedestrian environments.

Secondly, the wrong type of glass is being specified which is often tinted or glazed in such a way as to make it even more difficult to see into the interior of spaces or the window displays.

These photos are just two examples of the type of poor frame details and opaque glass that is occurring all over the city.



# Windows

Where these windows are being used in an attempt to “disguise” parking levels the treatment is not working. The buildings are presenting lifeless, boring elevations to the sidewalks.

It is essential that liner spaces be used to screen the parking from the sidewalk and present occupied spaces to the public realm.

In predominately retail and commercial areas these should be commercial spaces. In predominately residential areas these can be entry lobbies. But all spaces should adhere to the principles of taller ground floors and transparent glass mentioned previously.



# Windows

Another principle illustrated in this photo is the idea of mass and ground floor detail. The area around the windows should be designed in such a way as to convey the sense that the structure can actually support the large opening of the window. These windows, deeply set within the thick columns, provide this sense of stability to the building. The change in wall plane further adds visual interest to the pedestrian experience.



# Setbacks

Pedestrians tend to prefer well defined spaces. Buildings provide the street “walls” that define the public realm. For this reason it is generally better to place buildings close to the sidewalk, especially retail and commercial spaces.

Properly designed ground level windows and well detailed buildings provide a constantly changing visual experience for pedestrians.



# Setbacks

The Bride's Shop's window are correctly located right out on the sidewalk.



# Glass Transparency and Lighting

The glass is transparent and free of clutter.

The display is beautifully and correctly lit to emphasize the dresses.

Signage compliments the display rather than blocking the merchandise.

Properly lit windows add to the character of the pedestrian experience at all times of the day and have the added benefit of providing a greater sense of safety at night.





# Setbacks

These shops sit back from, and at an elevated perspective to, the sidewalk. These are less than ideal conditions.

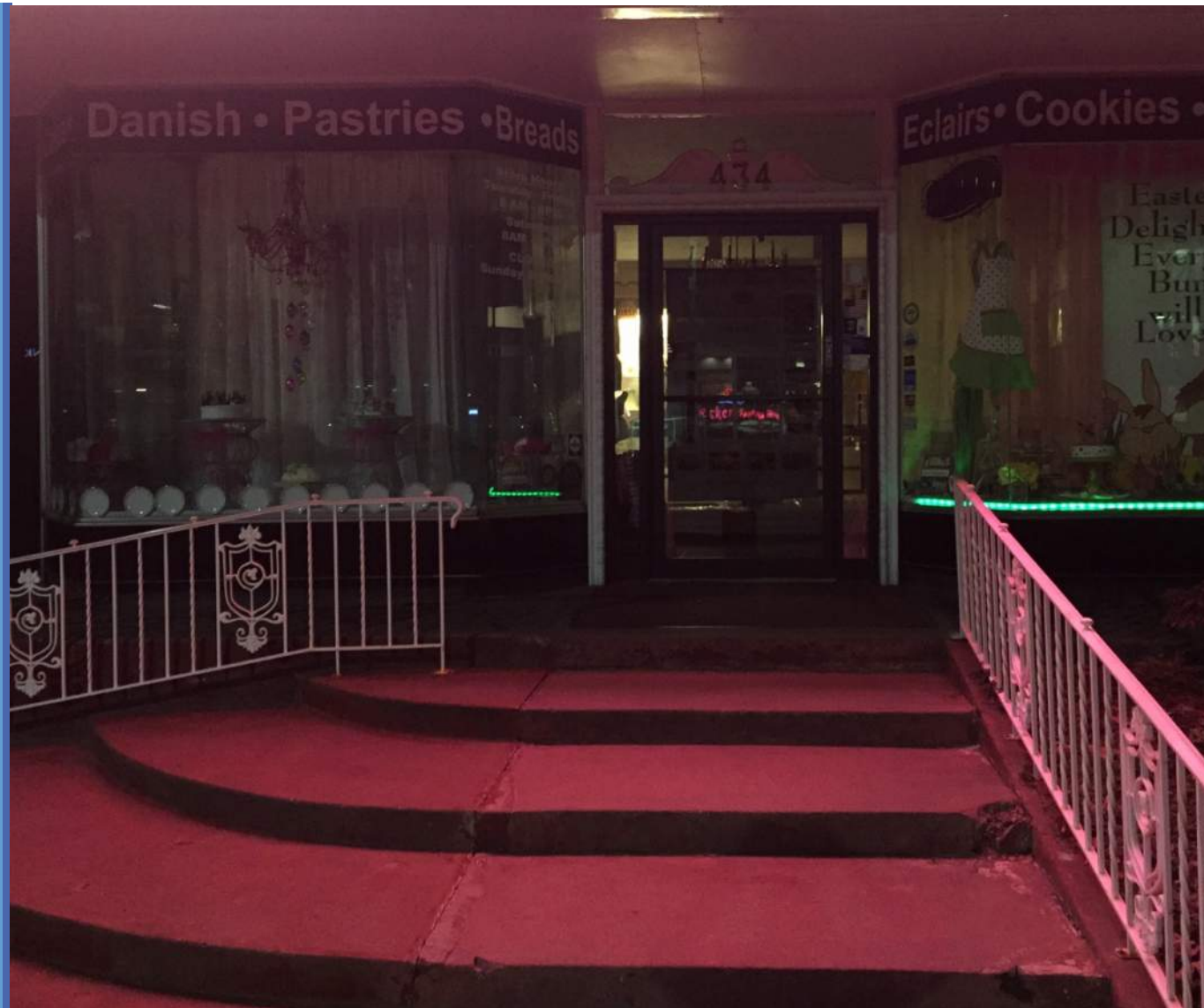
The problems are not insurmountable, but the shop owners need to approach their displays slightly differently to account for the larger setback.



# Glass Transparency and Lighting

The Pastry Shop is an icon of South Temple. Its long term success in the area should be celebrated. While the shop is not open in the evening, and therefore they are not trying to draw people in at night, the lack of lighting diminishes its potential as a landmark and fails to create the kind of night-time atmosphere that could enhance the neighborhood and the pedestrian experience. The setback conditions and poor lighting makes it challenging to see the displays from the sidewalk.

A few minor changes to address these conditions could make a significant difference in the quality of the pedestrian environment throughout the day and into the evening.



# The Lotus

This building illustrates a number of issues that should be discouraged.

The lower level is too short and it has the wrong type of windows. The windows are also poorly detailed for a pedestrian area.



# The Lotus

It is essential that we carefully analyze all details of new buildings being constructed in the city.

We must pay particular attention to the details at the ground level which will either enhance or detract from the pedestrian experience.



# The Lotus

These details often go unnoticed by those who only use their automobiles. But if these types of detailing mistakes become too prevalent in an urban area they have a devastating affect on the pedestrian environment and can eventually lead to a subconscious choice by individuals to not walk in an area.





Above is a comparison of two buildings that actually sit side by side on South Temple. These photos were taken from the same location but in opposite directions. The images illustrate the importance of a building's materiality and details, particularly in historic urban environments where people experience the buildings up close at the ground level.



Closer attention to a buildings details and the materials used must be paid particularly at the ground level. It is critical to remember that unlike automobile environments the smallest details really matter in pedestrian areas. For this reason, a building in urban areas must have a refinement of details at the ground level.



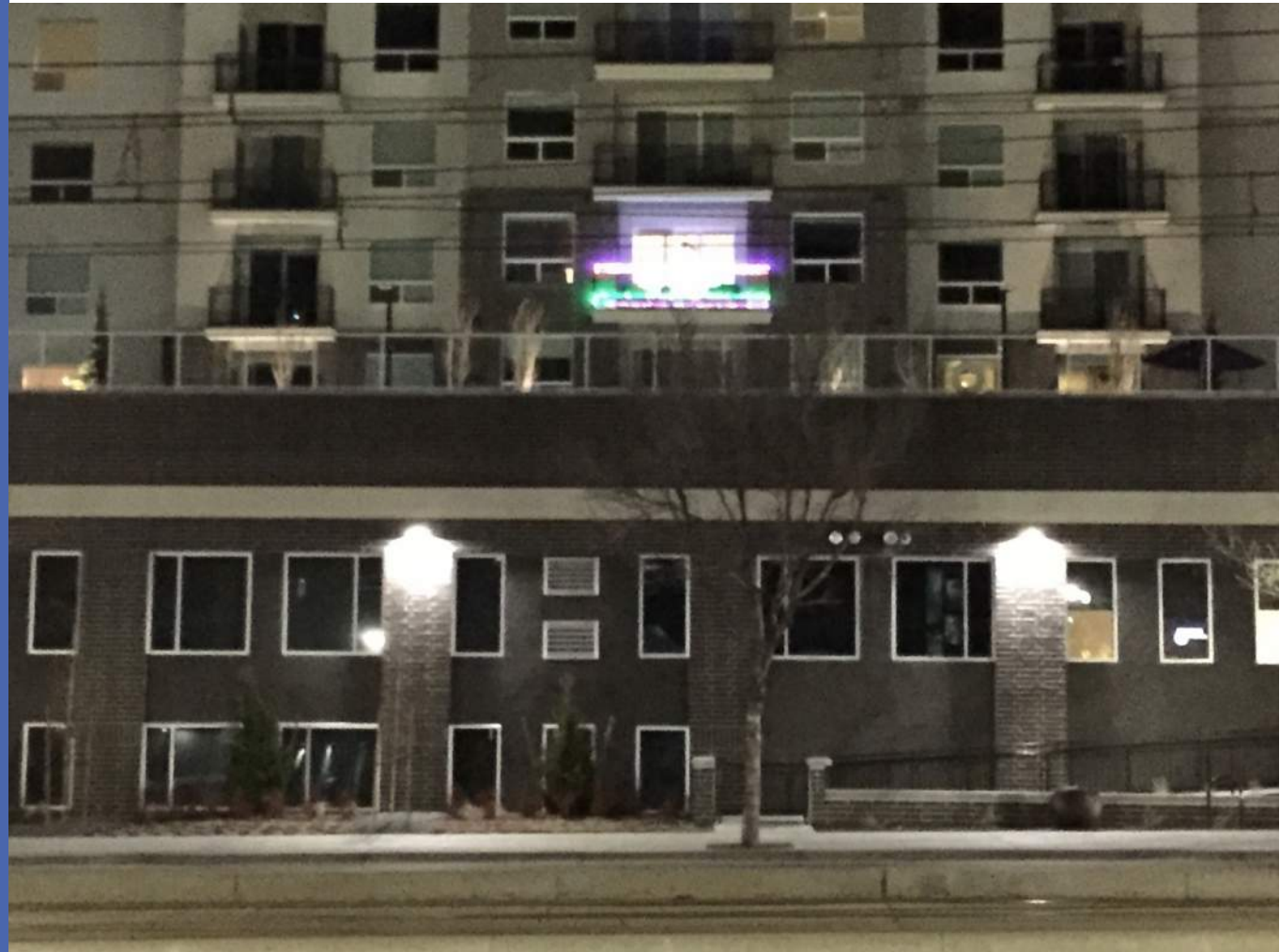
Images like these show utilities and backexit doors located on the principle street elevation of buildings throughout the city. This lack of attention to detail says to the pedestrian and the public in general that the building has turned its back to the public realm.



# Environmental Psychology

It is important that one experiences walking past these buildings at various times of the day to understand the full impact of certain design decisions.

Environmental psychology is a key aspect of creating great urban pedestrian environments.



# Adopting Principles That Can Improve Our City

It is essential that we understand how design and planning decisions impact the pedestrian experience and begin to adopt ordinances and codes that will result in the creation of the types of environments we desire.





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