Outdoor Places
Private Property Design Guidelines
7.10.2023
DENVER
THE MILE HIGH CITY
Rules and Regulations


Outdoor Places Private Property Design Guidelines

Adopted _______________ July 10 __________________________, 2023

Approved for Legality

Kerry Tipper
City Attorney
City and County of Denver

Approved and Adopted

Laura E. Aldrete
Executive Director, Community Planning and Development
City and County of Denver
Patios at Super Star Asian, Machete Tequila + Tacos and Tacos Jalisco
This document provides design guidance, requirements and recommendations for Outdoor Gathering Areas as defined in the Denver Zoning Code. This document is exclusively intended for the review of Outdoor Gathering Areas located on privately owned land. For the purposes of this document, the term "patio" is used interchangeably with Outdoor Gathering Area. These guidelines are intended to facilitate a range of design options for patios on private property and establish guidance for optimizing placemaking and high-quality design. These guidelines are in addition to requirements in the Denver Zoning Code and shall be used concurrently with review of a zoning permit application for an Outdoor Gathering Area. Where design review is required by the zoning code, a patio shall meet all relevant requirements in these guidelines and be consistent with their intent. If design review is not required, these guidelines may be utilized at the discretion of the applicant and compliance is voluntary.

Where more restrictive standards and guidelines are established by other adopted rules and regulations than are established by the provisions of these rules and regulations (the Outdoor Places Private Property Design Guidelines), the more restrictive provisions shall apply.

Overview

**Overarching Design Principles**
- Make Denver more vibrant
- Enhance Denver’s public realm network
- Foster inviting social gathering spaces
- Design in context

**Private Property Patio Types**
- Type 1: Not Visible
- Type 2: Internal
- Type 3: Public Oriented

**Design Guidelines**
- Locating a Patio
- Patio Integration
- Delineating Elements
- Landscape
- Materials
- Integration of Art and Other Features
- Detached Structures Covering a Patio
- Enclosure Elements
- Signage
- Lighting
- Surface Materials within an Off-street Parking Area
Overarching Design Principles

The overarching design principles describe the high-level intent and objectives for Outdoor Gathering Areas on private property. These Principles serve as a basis for the more detailed guidelines that follow.

Make Denver more vibrant
- Facilitate people-oriented outdoor spaces that activate neighborhoods.
- Encourage creative designs and unique outdoor installations.
- Integrate features that add visual interest, such as landscaping, art and lighting.

Enhance Denver’s public realm network
- Contribute to the citywide public realm of streets, parks and plazas by adding spaces for gathering and socializing.
- Maximize the positive contribution of a patio to the public realm through strategic placement and design.
- Prioritize pedestrian experiences, including enhancing physical comfort and creating visually interesting features.

Foster inviting social gathering spaces
- Provide comfortable exterior seating areas and features that maximize user experience.
- Provide protected exterior spaces by mitigating conflicts between patio users and adjacent vehicular, pedestrian and service activities.
- Promote features that increase accessibility for people of all abilities beyond requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Design in context
- Thoughtfully integrate a patio with surrounding streets, buildings and common open space areas.
- Design a patio to complement and remain visually subordinate to the buildings they serve.
- Promote a strong visual and physical connection between a patio and interior building elements.
Business and Economic Benefits of a Well-Designed Patio

Good urban design and placemaking provides tangible economic, social and environmental benefits. Encouraging well-designed private patios as a part of our built environment allows for business flexibility, expansion, and adaptability and helps promote higher business viability, increased visibility and improved pedestrian safety. Maintaining high quality design that contributes to community character can help improve quality of life and create an environment where people want to live, work and invest. The Design Guidelines encourage high quality design that adds value to development.

Patios at Illegal Pete's and Call to Arms Brewery.
Private Property Patio Types

This section outlines three Private Property Patio Types and the unique opportunities for each. Patios on private property contribute to placemaking differently based on numerous factors, including site location, configuration, scale, adjacent elements, and interface with public and semi-public spaces. In some cases, the guidelines in the following sections provide special guidance for specific Private Property Patio Types.

Type 1: Not Visible

The patio at Angelo's Taverna is not visible from the sidewalk or street and therefore has little impact on the public realm.

Type 2: Internal

The patios at the Dairy Block are highly visible from the private alley, which is a key publicly accessible element.

Type 3: Public Oriented

The patio at Honey Hill Cafe is located adjacent to the street and contributes to activation and visual interest along the street.
Type 1: Not Visible

A Type 1 patio is not visible from the street or key publicly accessible elements of private property (internal sidewalks, open space, etc.). These spaces have less external placemaking impact than other Patio Types and are typically oriented toward a single business. They are often located at the rear or internal to an individual business, either within a fenced courtyard or behind a building. Due to their internal private nature, Type 1 patios are not visually impactful on pedestrians on the street or patrons of adjacent businesses.

Type 2: Internal

A Type 2 patio is internal to a site but is highly visible from key publicly accessible elements of private property, like internal sidewalks, parking areas and common open spaces. A Type 2 patio is impactful to the experience of those visiting a property but has less impact on fully public areas like streets or public parks. Examples include a patio within a large shopping center that faces a parking area or a patio along a private paseo between two buildings.

Type 3: Public Oriented

A Type 3 patio is next to and highly visible from a street, park or other fully public space. A Type 3 patio significantly impacts the experience within the public realm. Type 3 patios have the potential to activate and add visual interest to Denver's streets and public spaces. Examples include patios abutting the public right-of-way and patios that are moderately set back from the public right-of-way but are still highly visible and impactful to one's experience in the public realm. A patio that is immediately adjacent, highly visible from, and/or in proximity to a public space presents the greatest opportunity to enhance placemaking to the benefit of all.
Design Guidelines

This section provides design guidelines for Outdoor Gathering Areas on Private Property for a range of topics.

INTENT statements establish the objectives to be achieved for each topic and may also be used to determine the appropriateness of alternatives or innovative approaches that do not meet specific design guidelines. It is expected that a proposed patio will be consistent with all relevant intent statements.

GUIDELINES are design requirements that shall be met when relevant, though some flexibility may be considered if the proposed design is consistent with the intent statements and based on site-specific considerations.

RECOMMENDATIONS provide additional suggestions to achieve the intent statements. Not all topics contain recommendations.

Locating a Patio

INTENT

• Enhance the public realm and/or publicly accessible elements of a private property.
• Maximize placemaking benefits and integration with interior activities.

GUIDELINES

• Locate a patio close to a public way to contribute to visual interest and activation.
  ◦ For a Type 2 Patio, locate a patio near a shared pedestrian path, private drive, a common open space or other similar shared amenity space.
  ◦ For a Type 3 Patio, locate a patio close to the street.
• Locate a patio to maximize placemaking benefits and integration with activities within a building.
  ◦ Locate a patio near an entryway to a building or near windows that provide visual access to interior activities.
  ◦ Where there is an opportunity to activate an area with little activation, such as a blank wall, consider whether adding a patio may strategically activate a currently inactivated location.
Patio Integration

INTENT

- Design a patio to be visually subordinate to an overall site and buildings.
- Place a patio to integrate with site elements.

GUIDELINES

- Place and design a patio and its elements to maintain visibility to architectural features.
- Minimize the use of visually obtrusive elements that overwhelm adjacent buildings.
- Design patio elements at the street level to maintain a single-story scale.
  - Where a detached structure is utilized, maintain a scale that is at or below that of the primary street level story architecture.
- Site a patio such that it fits thoughtfully within its immediate context. For example:
  - Site a patio in an open area adjacent to a pedestrian walkway
  - Utilize ground plane elements, such as paths, landscape areas, or walls, to inform the location of a patio.
Delineating Elements

This section applies to vertical Delineating Elements that may be used to establish the boundaries of a patio.

INTENT

• Maintain clear visibility into a patio.
• Create visual interest.

GUIDELINES

• Scale and design a delineating element to retain views in and out of a patio.
  ◦ Minimize the height of a delineating element.
  ◦ Where a railing is used, maximize the level of transparency.
  ◦ Where opaque planters are used, provide some spacing between each element to avoid creation of a solid wall.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Consider adding visual interest into a Delineating Element. Examples include:
  ◦ Railings that have continuous vertical and horizontal pattern or texture that is visually interesting or artistic in character.
  ◦ Solid walls broken down using vertical or horizontal gaps spaced at regular intervals, material or textural changes, or integration of plants.
  ◦ Creative, sculptural or artistic delineating elements.

↑ Maintain clear visibility into a patio.

↑ Railings should have a continuous vertical and horizontal pattern or texture that is visually interesting or artistic in character.
Landscape

INTENT
- Provide shade.
- Express a human scale.
- Add visual interest.
- Visually soften a patio space.
- Screen utility elements.
- Encourage minimal water usage.

GUIDELINES
- Where possible, utilize existing site landscaping for shade and to add visual interest.
- Add trees or other landscape elements to provide shade.
- Integrate landscape elements into a patio by:
  - Adding landscaping to a Delineating Element
  - Adding freestanding plantings within a patio space
  - Adding landscaping to a building wall that frames a patio space.
- Place landscaping to screen utility boxes and parking areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS
- Use live plant material where possible.
- Group plants that require similar amounts of watering, choose plants that are regionally appropriate, and avoid large amounts of natural turfgrass that requires significant irrigation.
- Use irrigation systems designed for water efficiency, including low precipitation heads, drip systems and other low gallon heads.
**Materials**

**INTENT**
- Ensure patio elements are long-lasting.
- Encourage materials that minimize environmental impacts.

**GUIDELINES**
- Use durable materials that are specifically intended for outdoor use or that are proven durable in Colorado’s climate.
- Use materials that can withstand wind, rain, snow and solar exposure.
  - Utilize non-corroding metals or protective coatings.
  - If wood is used, ensure it is finished.
- Avoid lightweight materials that appear temporary and will deteriorate quickly such as plastic chains, plastic buckets and other similar materials.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**
- Consider using materials that are locally sourced and/or comprised of reclaimed, recycled or renewable materials.

**Integration of Art and Other Features**

**INTENT**
- Add visual interest.
- Encourage creative elements such as art.

**GUIDELINES**
- If art is proposed on a patio, locate the art element or other similar visual or interactive element as a focal point within a patio.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**
- Consider integrating murals, graphics, sculpture or other art elements.
- Consider other visual and audible features like water features, fire elements or other amenity features.
Detached Structures Covering a Patio

This section applies to Detached Accessory Structures, such as pergolas or other shade structures, that cover a patio.

INTENT

- Ensure a coverage structure is visually subordinate to a building.
- Preserve and maintain visibility through the patio space.
- Allow some passage of light from the open sky to the patio space.
- Complement the building architecture.

GUIDELINES

- Limit the amount of impermeable covering to the amount needed to provide shade or other user benefits.
  - If coverings are utilized that are not open to sky, maintain other areas within the patio that are fully open to the sky.
- Where a significant amount of the cover is not open to the sky, place a greater emphasis on using visually permeable railings or consider an open condition without Delineating Elements.
- Use a thin roof structure such that the structure remains visually subordinate to an adjacent building.
  - Limit the scale, width and bulk of a roof covering and its components.
- Utilize a patio coverage structure of materials and architectural style that are compatible with a building's architectural style.
  - For a contemporary building, utilize a contemporary coverage structure with a simple design and limited ornamentation.
  - For a traditional building with more detailing, a coverage structure with more ornamentation may be appropriate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider creative cover patterns and textures that result in visually interesting shading patterns on the surface below.
**Enclosure Elements**

**INTENT**
- Design and locate an enclosure to be visually subordinate to the overall site and buildings.
- Complement the building architecture.
- Provide visibility into and through the enclosure.
- Add visual interest.
- Maintain the outdoor nature of the patio as much as possible.
- Maximize accessibility for all.

**GUIDELINES**
- Locate an enclosure to maintain visibility to windows, entries and other critical architectural features of a building.
- Where possible, locate an enclosure to activate spaces that otherwise lack visual interest, such as in a parking area or a blank wall of a building.
- Design an enclosure to remain visually subordinate to the street level architecture.
  - Limit the height, scale, width and bulk of the enclosure and its components.
- Maintain adequate space for persons to enter and exit the enclosure and the building.
- Maximize transparency on all sides of the enclosure to maintain visibility into and through the structure.
- Use transparent elements that are rigid enough to retain shape and visual permeability.
- Maintain transparent materials to prevent fogging and clouding over time.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**
- Operable elements that allow the enclosure to be opened as weather allows are encouraged.

---

**Additional Design Flexibility for Enclosures on Type 1 Patios**

Flexibility in meeting some of the guidelines for enclosed structures may be appropriate if the structure is less visible from public rights-of-way or public areas of a private site. For example, providing more flexibility for transparency guidelines may be appropriate for an enclosed structure located behind a building and that is not visible from a public way.

**Additional Permitting**

Enclosed accessory structures typically require additional permits from Denver’s Building and/or Fire Departments. The separate building and fire permits process could address a variety of topics including, heating, electrical, utility connections, wind load, carbon monoxide mitigation, fire extinguishers, anchoring, structure materials, snow loads and other similar technical topics.
Temporary tents are not permissible except as part of a special event.

Design an enclosure to remain visually subordinate to the street level architecture.

Maximize transparency on all sides of the enclosure to maintain visibility into and through the structure.
Signage

INTENT
• Integrate a sign with a patio.
• Ensure a sign is visually subordinate to a patio and adjacent buildings.
• Use signage that will stand up to weather impacts and exudes a level of permanence.
• Ensure a sign is easily readable.
• Add visual interest.

GUIDELINES
• Place and size a sign to integrate with architectural patio features.
  ◦ If a sign is attached to a delineating element, place the sign within, and to not obscure, critical architectural features.
  ◦ If a sign is attached to a delineating element, place it in a distinct signage band area integrated with the railing or barrier at the pedestrian or street level.
  ◦ If a sign is attached to a Detached Accessory Structure covering a patio, attach it within the upper supports, vertical columns or other structural features.
• Utilize materials that are durable and that appear intentional and long lasting.
  ◦ Avoid temporary signs that deteriorate easily and are susceptible to wind damage, fading and other deterioration.
• Design text, color, and contrast to ensure the sign is easily readable.

RECOMMENDATIONS
• Consider creative designs that integrate logos, branding, colors and other features that add visual interest.
  ◦ Consider utilizing creative and iconographic signs.
Lighting
This section applies to patios operated at night.

INTENT
- Enhance user safety and visibility.
- Add visual interest.

GUIDELINES
- Place lighting to enhance safety, such as near entries, steps, or pedestrian routes.
- Use string or festoon lighting that is elevated and can be seen from a distance.

RECOMMENDATIONS
- Consider using lighting to highlight architectural elements like railings, detached structures providing a cover, plantings or other patios elements.
  - For example, integrate lighting with a horizontal railing element or place downlights to illuminate special patio areas or features of the coverage structure.

Surface Materials within an Off-street Parking Area

INTENT
- Differentiate a patio in an off-street parking area from remaining vehicular areas.
- Create a visually interesting and comfortable surface that encourages gathering.

GUIDELINES
- Visually define the surface of an outdoor dining area in a parking lot such that it is distinguishable from the surface of remaining vehicular areas.
  - Options for distinguishing a patio's surface include improved surface treatments such as color changes, texture change, perimeter outlines, painting, striping, markings, surface artwork, material changes or other similar visual treatments.
- Avoid significant areas of bare asphalt.