

# Report to Council



**Date:** April 14, 2025  
**To:** Council  
**From:** City Manager  
**Subject:** Building Podium Policies & Regulations  
**Department:** Development Planning

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## Recommendation:

THAT Council receives, for information, the Report from the Development Planning Department, dated April 14, 2025, related to building podium regulations.

## Purpose:

To review the current building podium policies, guidelines, and requirements.

## Background:

### *Previous Council Resolution*

Resolution	Date
THAT Council directs staff to review and report to Council on current building podium policies, guidelines, and requirements as outlined in the 2040 Official Community Plan and Zoning Bylaw No 12375.	January 27, 2025

## Discussion:

Building podiums are a design component of many low-, mid-, and high-rise buildings. A podium serves as the larger base of a narrower structure above it. Typically, podiums are required to accommodate:

- Building entrances/exits;
- Lobbies;
- Parking; and
- Service areas (ex: mechanical rooms, waste & recycling facilities, loading bays etc.).

In addition to these necessary functions, building podiums may include:

- Residential units, retail spaces, or offices (often used to screen parking structures and create active street frontages); and
- Amenity spaces (typically located on top of a podium to provide social and recreational space for residents).

In Kelowna, building podiums are primarily utilized to accommodate the minimum number of off-street parking stalls required by the Zoning Bylaw. Given that portions of the City have a high ground water table, underground parking can be particularly challenging and expensive to construct, leading to the use of above-grade, structured parking within podiums. Building podiums tend to be largest and most prominent in mid-, and high-rise buildings as low-rise buildings do not have to accommodate as much parking.

In particular, the Downtown Urban Centre has accommodated the majority of tower development in Kelowna and the high ground water table has resulted in prominent building podiums. Large building podiums may be less prominent in future mid- and high-rise development in other Urban Centres where the water table is less of a constraint and building heights are lower.

Due to the prevalence of parking podiums in Kelowna, Official Community Plan (OCP) Design Guidelines and Zoning Bylaw regulations have been developed that try and balance functionality and feasibility with aesthetic considerations. The City's guidelines were largely adapted from the City of Toronto's Tall Building Design Guidelines, including emphasis on the pedestrian scale, interaction with at-grade public space, and limiting podium heights with slim tower floor plates above the podium.

#### OCP Design Guidelines

The Design Guidelines within the OCP provide key guidelines that residential and mixed use projects should strive to achieve. Particular emphasis is placed on the activation of public streets adjacent to new developments. With respect to building podiums, guidelines encourage that:

- Primary building facades and entries are oriented to the fronting street, while parking and 'back-of-house' uses (ex: loading, garbage collection, utilities, parking accesses) are away from public view.
- Blank, windowless walls are avoided using design strategies such as articulation, glazing, and various architectural features and details.
- Active frontages are created along the street using ground-oriented residential units or transparent retail frontages.
- Upper storeys of buildings are stepped back (ex: above a podium).
- Off-street parking is accommodated in the following ways, in order of preference: 1) underground, 2) above-grade structured parking, 3) surface parking.
- Parking is screened in the following ways, in order of preference: 1) active retail or residential uses, 2) architectural or landscaped screening elements.
- A minimum podium height of 2 storeys and a maximum podium height of 4 storeys is achieved, while varying the height and form of the podium to the scale of the existing context on adjacent streets.

A full catalogue of Design Guidelines that address the design of building podiums has been attached (Attachment A).

#### Zoning Bylaw Regulations

In alignment with the general direction of the OCP, the Zoning Bylaw provides specific regulations. These include regulations designed to ensure that building podiums are functional and aesthetically acceptable.

Intent	Regulation
Parking is adequate and functional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dimensions of parking spaces</li> <li>• Dimension of drive aisles</li> <li>• Ratio of parking space sizes (regular vs. small)</li> <li>• Number of parking stalls</li> </ul>
Loading spaces are adequate and functional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dimension of loading spaces</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of loading spaces</li> </ul>
Bicycle parking is adequate and functional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of bicycle parking spaces</li> <li>• Location of bicycle parking spaces</li> <li>• Dimensions of bicycle parking spaces</li> </ul>
Streetscape is attractive and has active uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amount of transparent glazing on first floor frontage</li> </ul>
Retail units are functional and can accommodate a variety of businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum depth of a commercial unit fronting a street</li> </ul>
Building podium does not impede sight lines at an intersection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Triangular setback from an intersection for a corner lot</li> </ul>
Building podiums are limited in size to reduce visual impact and maintain pedestrian scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Height of podium</li> <li>• Stepback above podium</li> </ul>
Where possible, parking provided underground is encouraged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Density increase (base FAR) for development where greater than 80% of parking is provided underground.</li> </ul>

### Emerging Trends

There are a number of emerging trends that may affect building podiums:

- Council has been engaged in a series of workshops regarding parking requirements. At the AM Council meeting on February 10, 2025, Council directed staff to proceed with further assessment of and consultation on options to amend parking regulations in the Zoning Bylaw and Payment in Lieu of Parking Bylaw and report back to Council with recommendations. Should the recommendations resulting from this review reduce the required amount of parking, this may have the affect of reducing the necessity of large building podiums and increase the ability of developers to increase active uses in podiums to screen parking.
- Recent Provincial legislation designating Transit Oriented Areas (TOAs) removes the requirement for residential parking within certain areas of the City, leaving individual developers to determine the necessary parking for their project based on market demand. If this change results in less parking being developed as part of projects in the TOAs, this may reduce the necessity of large building podiums.
- OCP Design Guidelines place particular emphasis on the façade of the podium facing the fronting street, however as an interim condition as properties redevelop with towers, the sides of the parking podium are often exposed. While there is no formal Zoning Bylaw regulation or OCP Design Guideline, staff have been working with developers on individual projects to try and ensure that these there is an interim treatment of these facades (ex: murals or patterns) to try and limit the visual impact.
- Staff have received increased interest in new parking solutions including vehicle elevators (as an alternative to parkade ramps) and stacked parking within parkades. Several development applications proposing vehicle elevators have been received and one has been built. To date, these have not been in tower-form buildings. It is difficult to predict whether these parking solutions will become more popular, but if further uptake does occur, they may have impacts on the design of building podiums as they are typically more space efficient than standard parkade layouts.
- As part of Housing Accelerator Fund Initiative #3 – Transit Supportive Corridors, staff are currently reviewing the General Residential & Mixed Use Development Permit Guidelines. While a review of building podium guidelines is not the primary intent of this project, certain guidelines that affect

building podiums are being modified as part of an effort to remove or combine duplicate guidelines, clarify contradicting guidelines, and streamline review.

#### **Conclusion:**

Building podiums are a design feature of high-rise buildings which are predominantly used in Kelowna to accommodate parking due to the high ground water table. OCP Design Guidelines and Zoning Bylaw regulations aim to balance functionality and aesthetics, emphasizing active street frontages and pedestrian interaction. Emerging trends, such as changes in parking requirements and Transit Oriented Areas, may influence the future design of podiums.

#### **Internal Circulation:**

Long Range Planning

Housing Policy & Programs

#### **Considerations applicable to this report:**

##### ***Existing Policy:***

OCP Chapter 18: Form & Character Development Permit Area

#### **Considerations not applicable to this report:**

##### ***Legal/Statutory Authority:***

##### ***Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:***

##### ***Financial/Budgetary Considerations:***

##### ***Consultation and Engagement:***

##### ***Communications Comments:***

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**Reviewed by:** N. Kilmartin, Development Planning Department Manager

**Approved for Inclusion:** R. Smith, Divisional Director, Planning, Climate Action & Development Services

#### **Attachments:**

Attachment A: OCP Design Guidelines Related to Building Podiums