

North Highline Design Standards Bulletin

The North Highline Design Standards are regulations set by King County to promote positive, community-oriented development in the North Highline area (see map below). They were approved by the King County Executive and the King County Council in 2023 as [KCC 21A.60](#).

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Where the standards apply

KCC 21A.60.020

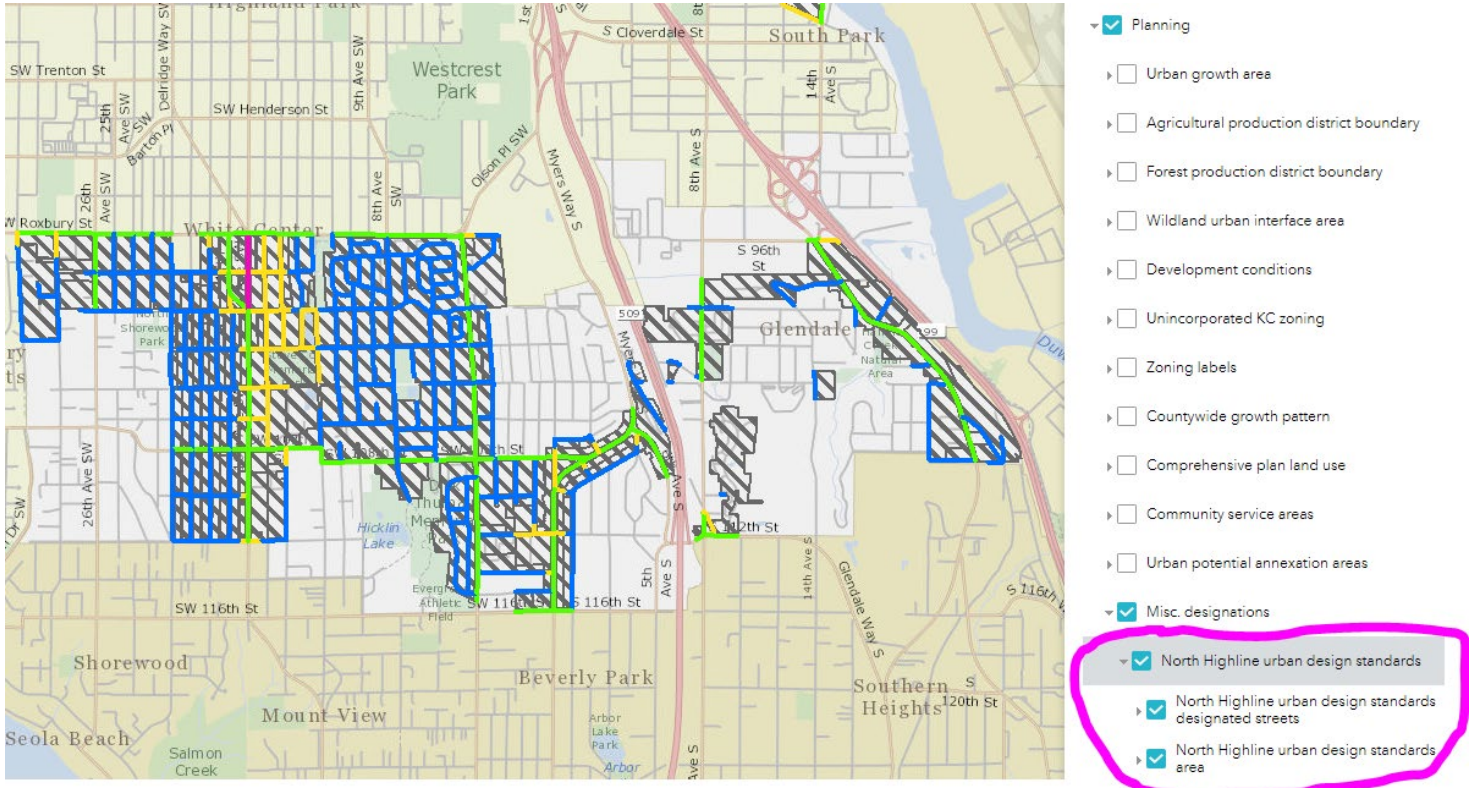
The design standards apply to new or substantial development in the following zones within the North Highline Subarea:

- Commercial Business (CB)
- Neighborhood Business (NB)
- Regional Business (RB)
- Office (O)
- Urban Residential, 12 dwellings/acre (R-12)
- Urban Residential, 18 dwellings/acre (R-18)
- Urban Residential, 24 dwellings/acre (R-24)
- Urban Residential, 48 dwellings/acre (R-48)



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A layer in King County’s iMap (<https://gismaps.kingcounty.gov/iMap/>) shows where the standards apply. Inside the Planning layer group is a subgroup called “Misc. designations,” which contains the “North Highline urban design standards area.”



The standards *do not* apply to:

- Improvements that are below the threshold of a substantial improvement (see [KCC 21A.06.1270](#) for the definition of “substantial improvement”)
- Single family detached dwelling units
- Projects with fewer than six dwelling units
- Building interiors
- Applicants who request and receive a waiver to the standards per KCC 21A.060.100

Process summary

KCC 21.60.030



1. **Pre-application conference** – At least one preapplication conference with King County staff is required, as amended in KCC 20.20.030. Prior to the conference, submit a preapplication meeting packet that includes:
 - Project narrative (KCC 21A.60.030.A.2)
 - Context analysis (KCC 21A.60.030.A.3)
 - Site plan with a list of required content (KCC 21A.60.030.A.4)
 - Building plan that includes architectural intent and building designs (KCC 21A.60.030A.5)
 - Web-based community input survey (KCC 21A.60.030.B.1)

The separate North Highline Design Standards Examples Document contains some templates of these requirements to help guide developers on content and detail.

Recommended design/planning process sequence

Early Design Guidance – After an initial voluntary pre-application meeting between applicant and staff. King County Permitting Division (Permitting) staff will provide an overview of the process and early guidance on the match between the proposal and design standards. Discussion points and early guidance will be documented through a pre-application memorandum to the applicant.

Final Design Guidance – After completing the community engagement process, Permits will schedule a mandatory final pre-application meeting to review community feedback and any updated project designs that reflect community input. Final design guidance will be documented in a final memorandum to the applicant.

2. **Community engagement** – Before filing a building permit application, the builder must solicit feedback through a community meeting and survey by taking the following steps:
 - a. Organize and conduct a community meeting that includes in-person attendance, with at least one person from King County Permits
 - b. Create a web-based community input survey¹ along with the context analysis, site plan, and building plan

¹ See Examples document for an example of a web-based community input survey.

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- c. Mail information about the survey and meeting to residents within 500 feet of the site, and keep the survey open for 21 days²
 - d. Email a notification of the project to interested parties
3. **Building permit application and department review** – After the engagement period has ended, the applicant submits a memorandum explaining how the proposal incorporates community feedback. The memorandum should incorporate details about the engagement, such as a summary of community feedback, copies of comments received from the community, and a summary describing how the project designers incorporated this feedback into their design proposal. The department reviews the project’s alignment with the intent of the North Highline urban design standards of KCC 21A.60.010 and KCC 21A.60.030. King County Road Services may review certain aspects of the proposed development.
 4. **Permit issuance** – If all concerns are addressed and the permit is approved
 5. **Inspections** by King County departments take place throughout the construction process and before issuance of the final Certificate of Occupancy.

Street frontage standards

See KCC 21A.60.040 for example drawings

Street Classifications and Allowed Frontage Types

Each street frontage is classified; primary street frontages will be designated as the portion of the building facing the higher-order street. The street order hierarchy is as follows: 1) Core street, 2) Arterial, 3) Local mixed use, 4) Local residential.

Street classifications for parcels that must comply with these design standards can be found on King County iMap at <https://gismaps.kingcounty.gov/iMap/>.

² The survey period is not required to take place before the community meeting, but for continuity it should be close to the meeting in time. It is recommended, but not required, that the public meeting be at the end of or directly after the 21-day survey period so the survey can be used to advertise the meeting and its findings can be shared at the meeting.

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Street classification	Description	Frontage types allowed
Arterial	Street with a classification of principal, minor, or collector arterial, excluding Core Street as described in subsection A.4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main street • Forecourt • Plaza • Landscape
Local mixed-use	Two-lane, non-arterial streets adjacent to CB, NB, RB, and O zones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main street • Forecourt • Plaza • Porch-Stoop-Terrace • Landscape
Local residential	Non-arterial streets adjacent to R-12, R-18, R-24, and R-48 zones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main street • Forecourt • Plaza • Porch-Stoop-Terrace • Landscape
Core street	Both sides of 16th Avenue SW in the White Center unincorporated activity center from SW Roxbury Street at the north to SW 100th Street at the south	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main street • Plaza

Note: some frontages require awnings that will be within the public right-of-way. This requires a special use permit from King County Road Services. For more information on this process, see Special Use Permits – King County, Washington.

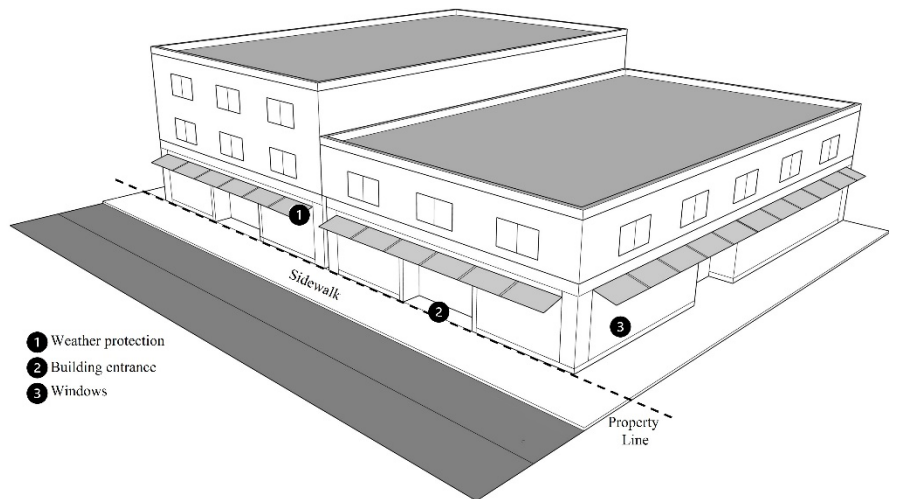
A layer in King County iMap (<https://gismaps.kingcounty.gov/iMap/>) shows the street types for choosing frontages. Within the Planning layer group is a subgroup called “Misc. designations” which contains the “North Highline urban design standards designated streets” layer.

Frontage types

KCC 21A.60.040

Main street building frontage

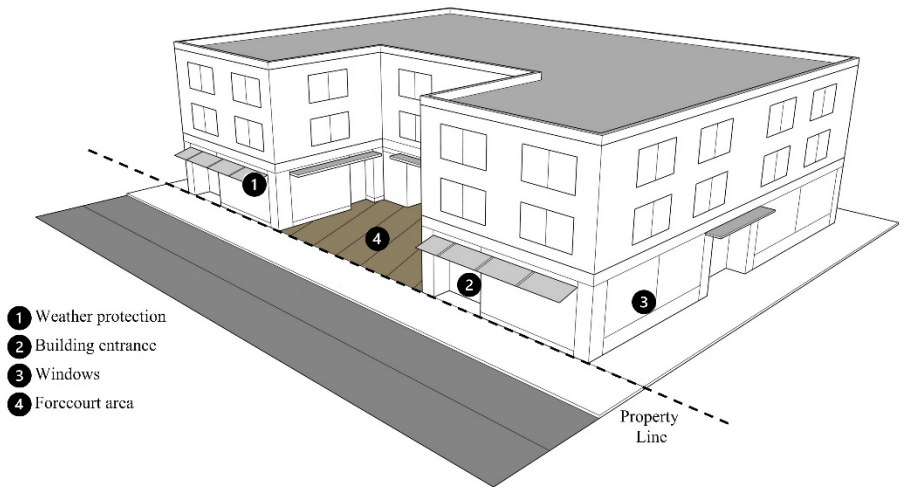
A pedestrian-oriented facade that abuts the sidewalk, has multiple at-grade building entrances for businesses, and includes public features that support sidewalk activity. Main street building frontages have substantial windows/glazing on the ground floor and provide weather protection for pedestrians on the sidewalk.



Allowed street types	Core street, local mixed use.
Setback from property line	0 feet
Weather protection	Weather protection at least 6 feet in depth shall be provided along 75% of the building facade facing a street or pedestrian pathway, including building entrances. Weather protection over the forecourt area is encouraged, but not required.
Building entrances	Entrances shall be provided at sidewalk grade, every 75 feet or less, and have a transparency (glass material) of 40%. Entrances abutting a sidewalk must face the street and be at sidewalk grade.
Windows	70% minimum, or 60% if ground floor windows are operable
Public Amenities Features	At least one every 50 feet (KCC 21A.60.040.C.1.d)
Accessibility	Provide “clear-path” sidewalk accessibility per IBC/ANSI standards.

Forecourt building frontage

A pedestrian-oriented facade centered around a plaza or gathering space that includes a garden, outdoor seating, or other pedestrian amenities. A forecourt is created by recessing a portion of the facade for a portion of the building frontage. A forecourt building frontage is suitable for commercial or residential uses.



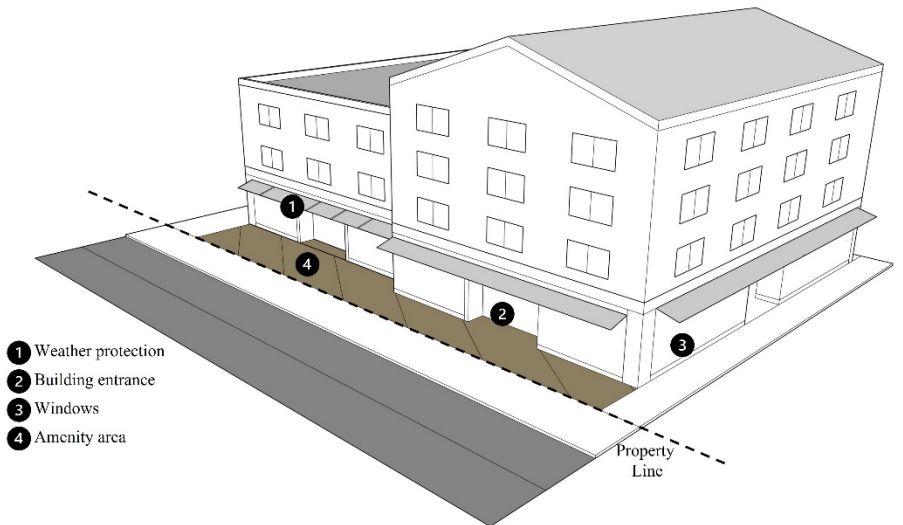
Allowed street types	Arterial, local mixed use, local residential.
Setback from property line	0 feet
Weather Protection	Weather protection at least 6 feet in depth shall be provided along 75% of the building facade facing a street or pedestrian pathway, including building entrances. Weather protection over the forecourt area is encouraged, but not required.
Building entrances	Entrances shall be provided every 75 feet or less, and have a transparency of 40%. Entrances abutting a sidewalk must face the street and be at sidewalk grade.
Windows	60% minimum or 55% if ground floor windows are operable
Forecourt depth from property line	10 feet minimum; 30 feet maximum

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Allowed street types	Arterial, local mixed use, local residential.
Forecourt width	20 feet minimum; 50 feet maximum
Fence	No greater than 3 feet in height; minimum 20% transparent
Public Amenity Features	At least two in the forecourt building frontage (KCC 21A.60.040.C.2.d)
Accessibility	Provide “clear-path” sidewalk accessibility per IBC/ANSI standards

Plaza building frontage

Characterized by public space in the setback area between the building and the property line. The plaza area should support human activity with amenities such as seating, art, and wayfinding. A plaza building frontage is suitable for active ground floor uses such as retail, dining, or civic and cultural uses.

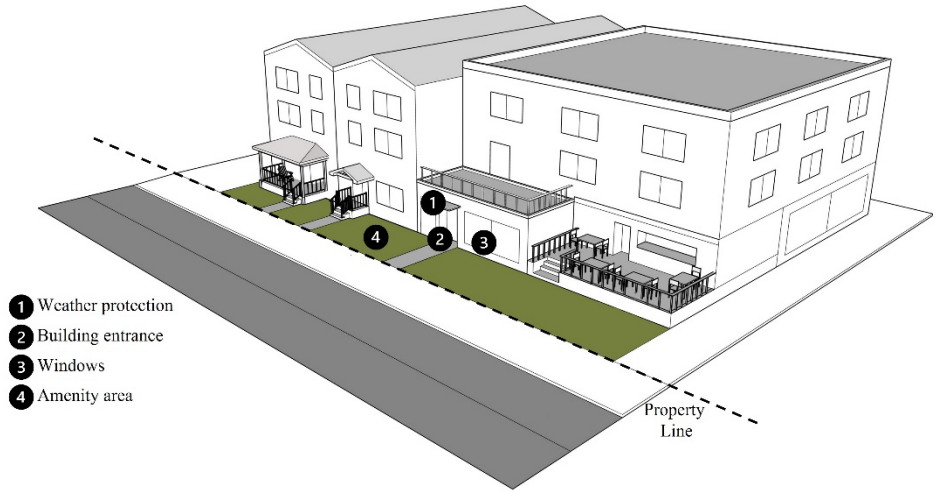


Allowed street types	Arterial, local mixed use, local residential, core street
Setback from property line	5 feet minimum; 25 feet maximum
Weather protection	Weather protection at least 6 feet in depth shall be provided along 75% of the building facade facing a street or pedestrian pathway including building entrances.
Building entrances	Entrances at sidewalk grade, face the street, be provided every 75 feet, or less, and have a transparency of 40%.
Windows	70% minimum or 60% if ground floor windows are operable
Public Amenity Feature	At least one of the following near the sidewalk every fifty feet (KCC 21A.60.040.C.3.d)
Accessibility	Provide “clear-path” sidewalk accessibility per IBC/ANSI standards.

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Porch-stoop-terrace

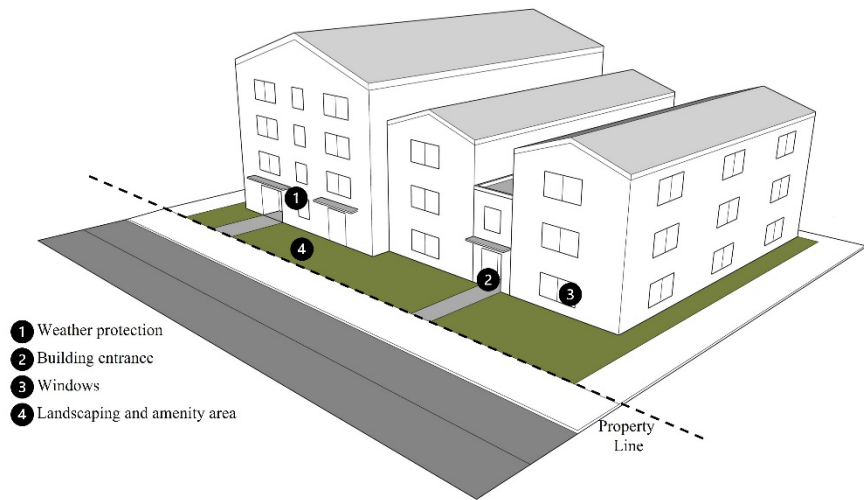
Buildings are set back from the street with a series of individual entrances and semi-private landings such as porches, stoops, or terraces. Entrances may be elevated above grade. Landscaping is provided in the setback area between the building and the sidewalk. A porch-stoop-terrace building frontage is suitable for residential uses, service, or office uses.



Allowed street types	Local mixed use, local residential.
Setback from property line	5 feet minimum; 15 feet maximum.
Weather protection	Building entrances shall be either be covered by an awning or canopy or be covered by being recessed behind the front building facade.
Building entrances	Entrances abutting a sidewalk must face the street and be at sidewalk grade or no more than 5 feet above sidewalk grade; and have a transparency of 20%. Between 25 and 150 square feet of porch area shall be provided per building entrance.
Windows	30% minimum on ground floor.
Fence	No greater than 3 feet in height; minimum 20% transparent.
Public Amenity Feature	At least one of the following near the sidewalk every fifty feet, see KCC 21A.60.040.C.4.d
Accessibility	Provide "clear-path" sidewalk accessibility per IBC/ANSI standards.

Landscaping Building Frontage

Set back from the property line by a wide landscaped strip between the building and the sidewalk. This frontage type is appropriate along streets where the existing streetscape may not be conducive to pedestrian-oriented ground-floor retail or residential uses, such as where there is no on-street parking or where streets are very wide. Ground-floor entries shall still be provided along and connected to the sidewalk.



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Allowed street types	Arterial, local mixed use, local residential.
Setback from property line	10 feet minimum; 20 feet maximum landscaped setback.
Weather protection	Building entrances shall be either be covered by an awning or canopy or be covered by being recessed behind the front building facade.
Building entrances	At least one building entrance shall be directly connected to a public street with a walkway measuring a minimum of 5 feet wide. A minimum transparency of 40% is required for each primary entry.
Windows	Transparent ground floor windows shall be provided along a minimum of 60% of the ground floor and facades facing public streets.
Landscaping	10 feet minimum; 20 feet maximum Type II or Type III landscaping consistent with KCC 21A.16.
Public Amenity Feature	At least one near the sidewalk every fifty feet, see KCC 21A.60.040.C.5.d
Accessibility	Provide “clear-path” sidewalk accessibility per IBC/ANSI standards.

Regulations common to all frontages

Through the public process, community members voiced a desire for a more walkable community. These regulations are intended to improve the pedestrian experience and general accessibility in North Highline while avoiding conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians at property frontages.

- **Alley access required** – Parking shall be accessed from alleys, where an alley exists. If there is no alley, parking entries shall prioritize pedestrians by limiting the maximum width of two-way driveways to twenty feet. The Road Services Division has noted that some alleys are not maintained in this area. A Road Services review engineer should be notified of a proposed development adjacent to an alley when a preapplication conference is scheduled. (KCC 21A.60.050)
- **Mid-block connection on longer blocks** – Developments with more than 200 linear feet on a single street frontage or 200 linear feet of total street frontage on properties that abut two parallel streets shall provide a mid-block connection. The route may be through the building interior if the building is open to the public during business hours. (KCC 21A.60.050)
- **Corner lots** – Developments on corner lots shall either orient a building facade toward the street corner within 15 feet of the property line or provide pedestrian-oriented space at the corner leading directly to a building entrance or entrances. (KCC 21A.60.050)
- **Service areas** – Service areas including loading docks, refuse containers, compactors, and mechanical equipment shall be located and screened to avoid negative visual, auditory, olfactory, or physical impacts on the property and adjacent street frontages. Service areas shall be located within buildings or screened with acceptable materials including brick, concrete block, stone, or wood. Chain-link fencing is not permitted as a screening material. (KCC 21A.60.050)

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- **Windows** – In general, required window areas shall be transparent and allow views from the building to the street. Reflective, dark, tinted, or textured glass is not permitted. See specific requirements associated with the street frontage types in KCC 21A.60.040.
- **Weather protection** – Weather protection may be in the form of awnings, marquees, canopies, or building overhangs.
 - **Required public amenities** – In general, required amenities include features such as seating space, supplemental area lighting, water features, decorative drinking fountains, waste receptacles, artwork, or decorative landmarks, kiosks, raised planters, bike racks, or other things that are acceptable to the director of Permitting. See specific requirements associated with the street frontage type in KCC 21A.60.050.
 - **Lighting** – Lighting is required for building entrances, sidewalks and walkways, and parking areas per KCC 21A.60.070 .
 - **Modulation** – To infuse diversity and visual appeal in building design, building designs are required to incorporate modulation features at intervals of 40 feet, ranging in depth from 3 to 10 feet. Modulation options include alterations in window patterns, vertical columns, roof styles, balconies, colors, building materials, or the integration of vertical elements like vegetated walls or art installations. See KCC 21A.60.070 for more detail.
 - **Stock plans and corporate logos prohibited** – The use of stock building plans, typical corporate or franchise designs, regional prototype alternatives, or other designs that are easily identified with a particular chain or corporation, is prohibited. Signs allowed in accordance with KCC 21A.20 may be permitted to use stock plans, except on core street types subject to KCC 21A.60.090.
 - **Site accessibility** – Site accessibility is required and needs to be integrated into any sidewalk/amenity design, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Buildings in the historic White Center business area/activity center

Specific standards outlined in KCC 21A.60.090 apply to both sides of 16th Avenue SW in the White Center unincorporated activity center, spanning from SW Roxbury Street at the north to SW 100th Street at the south. In general:

- New construction must harmonize with the historic buildings existing in the district
- Signage is subject to special requirements that reflect the diverse nature of local businesses

The North Highline Design Standards Examples Document contains examples of designs to assist with this requirement.

Waivers and modifications

In limited circumstances, the director may waive or modify the application of the design standards at the request of the applicant. See KCC 21A.60.100 for more information.

GreenCenter requirements

KCC 21A.60.060

White Center has one of the lowest percentages of tree canopy cover in King County. These standards do the following to help:

- Improve the appearance of the neighborhood
- Reduce stormwater runoff
- Cool the neighborhood during heat waves
- Provide habitat for birds and insects
- Support local business districts
- Reduce crime

Developments that are subject to the North Highline Design Standards are required to meet a GreenCenter score of 0.3, an equivalent of 30% tree canopy cover on site. The Director of Permitting may allow modifications in the Main Street frontage area per KCC 21A.60.020.

How to calculate your GreenCenter score using the GreenCenter Worksheet and Score Sheet (available on the [How to Submit Permits – Building and Land Use web page](#), under North Highline Urban Design Standards):

1. For each landscape element, multiply the square feet by the multiplier. Use the GreenCenter Worksheet to do this. Your figures will be transferred to the Score Sheet.
2. The totals for each element that make the GreenCenter total will appear at the bottom of the Score Sheet.
3. Divide the GreenCenter total by the parcel size to determine the GreenCenter Score. You will find your score at the top of the Score Sheet page (cell G3).

$$\frac{\text{GreenCenter Total}}{\text{Parcel Size}} = \text{Your GreenCenter Score}$$

Important Notes included in code KCC 21A.60.060

- If different landscape elements cover the same area, such as ground cover under a tree, count the full square footage of each element.
- Plants between the property line and the road can be counted, but only if the Permitting Director or County Road Engineer approves.
- Landscape elements that also meet other rules in KCC Title 21A can be counted.
- For plant walls, count only the space covered by plants. The walls must be strong, have enough space for plants to grow, have watering systems, and have surfaces that plants can stick to.
- For small bushes, plants, ground covers, and grass, count the space on the ground they cover.