

Topic: Tower Separation and Tower Setbacks

July 10, 2017 City Council Study Session

(Excerpted and Updated from April 19, 2017 Commission Study Session)

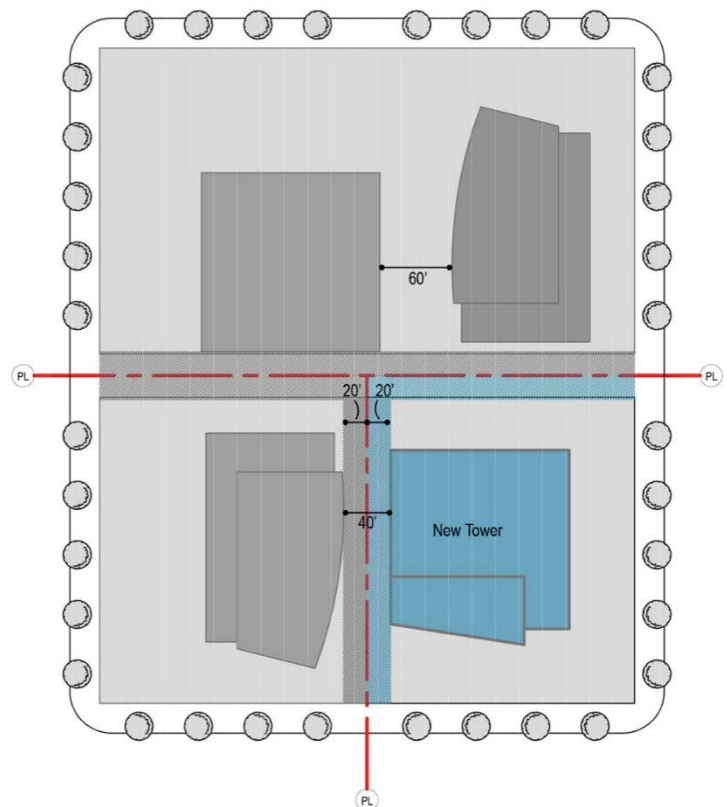
During the June 26, 2017 Council Study Session, tower separation and tower setbacks were identified as one of the topics that warranted further review. Councilmember Wallace noted that information provided to the Planning Commission on topics identified by the Council for further review, would provide a good foundation for its consideration of the Planning Commission recommendation. Materials prepared for the Planning Commission discussion of the tower separation and tower setback topics have been excerpted from the April 19, 2017 Planning Commission packet, and updated to reflect its final recommendation, to support City Council review.

The Planning Commission's discussion of tower separation and tower setbacks pertains to development, and is measured, within a Downtown block or superblock as shown on the graphic below. (The street right-of-way provides separation between blocks.) The relationship of tower spacing to livability in Downtown Bellevue includes having more light and air between buildings, privacy for building residents and workers, and helping to create a more distinctive skyline.

PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDED CODE REFERENCES:

Tower Separation – The tower separation provision for multiple towers is in LUC 20.25A.075.B, and provides that multiple towers in a single project limit must be separated by 60 feet unless a maximum of 10 percent of the façade of one tower intrudes into the tower separation space of the other and the intrusion does not affect the light, air or privacy of either building's users.

Tower Setbacks – In LUC Chart 20.25A.060.A.4, the Planning Commission recommended code provides for a 20-foot setback from the internal property lines that starts at 80 feet high where the building height exceeds 100 feet.



COMPARISON TO OTHER JURISDICTIONS:

Below is a table of tower separation and setbacks from other cities that was presented to the Planning Commission during its review of these topics.

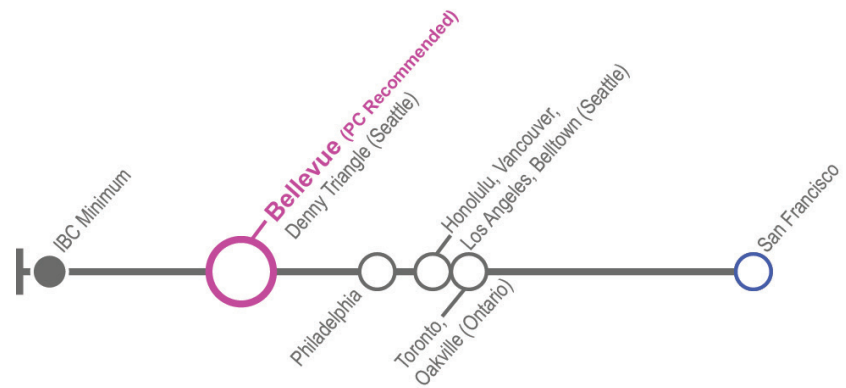
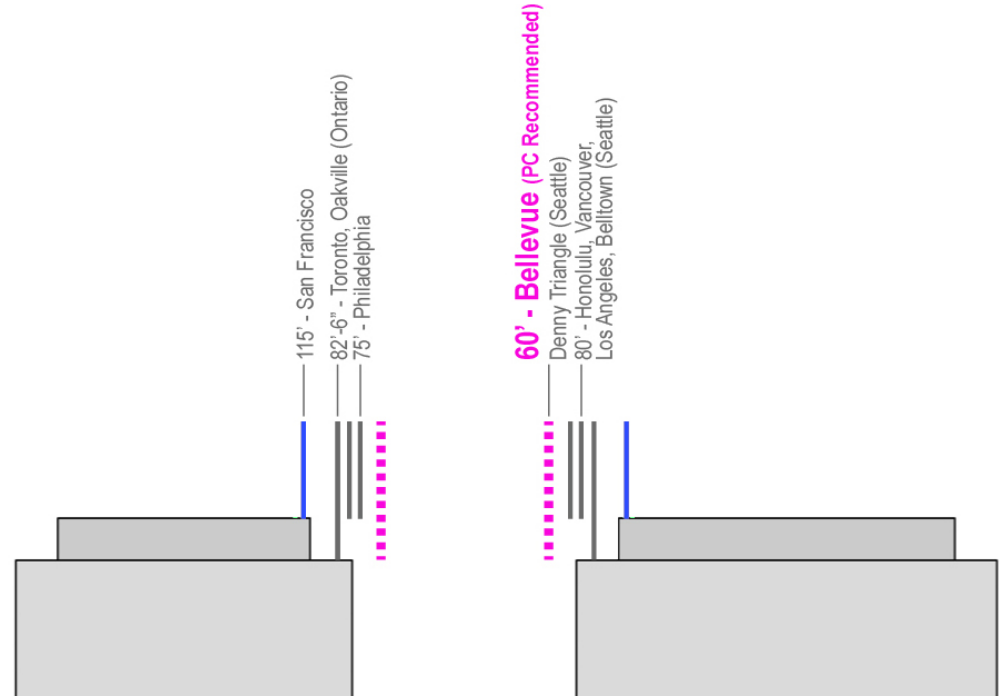
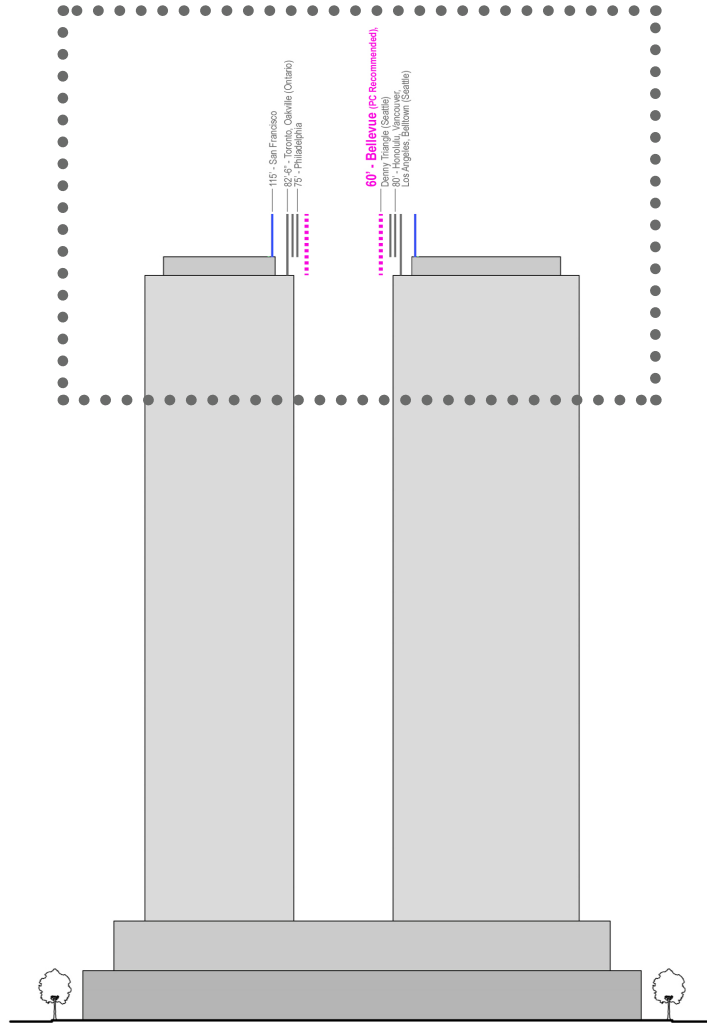
City	Minimum Tower Separation	Beginning Height Where Setback is Applied	Maximum Height	Setback from Interior Property Lines	Other
Planning Commission Recommended Code 5.24.17	60' for multiple towers in same project limit	80' (for buildings over 100' in height)	600'	20'	Departures allowed. Small site exception for tower separation.
San Francisco	115'	85'	550' in most circumstances	--	
Toronto	82' (25 m.)	40'	none	40'	No small site exception
Honolulu TOD Overlay	80'	75' (boulevards) 65' (other streets)	418'	Flexibility granted through design review.	
Vancouver	80'	----	700'	40' or reduced where minimum 80' to existing tower or where a tower would likely be on an adjacent site.	
Philadelphia (Market St.)	75'	60'	1,145'	36.5'	No small site exception
Downtown Los Angeles	80' from existing tower, 40' from shared property line or shared alley center line from a parcel where there could be a tower.	150'	none	40'	Exceptions- Towers are offset, Curved or Angled (average of 80'), or largest windows in primary rooms are not facing one another.

City	Minimum Tower Separation	Beginning Height Where Setback is Applied	Maximum Height	Setback from Interior Property Lines	Other
Seattle	60' (Denny Triangle), 80' (Belltown) Note: Yesler Terrace and Pike Place Market have unique tower spacing reqs.	125' (for buildings over 160' in height)	none	20' for buildings over 45' in height	Can get departure if tower is on the same block and can't meet requirement, but only two per block.

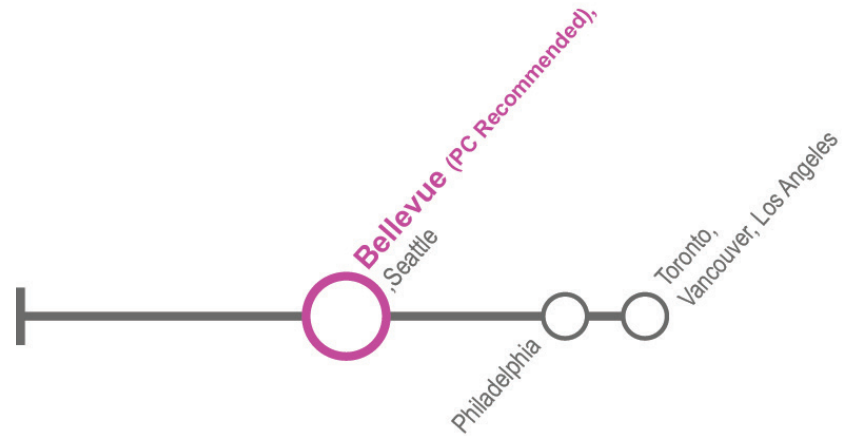
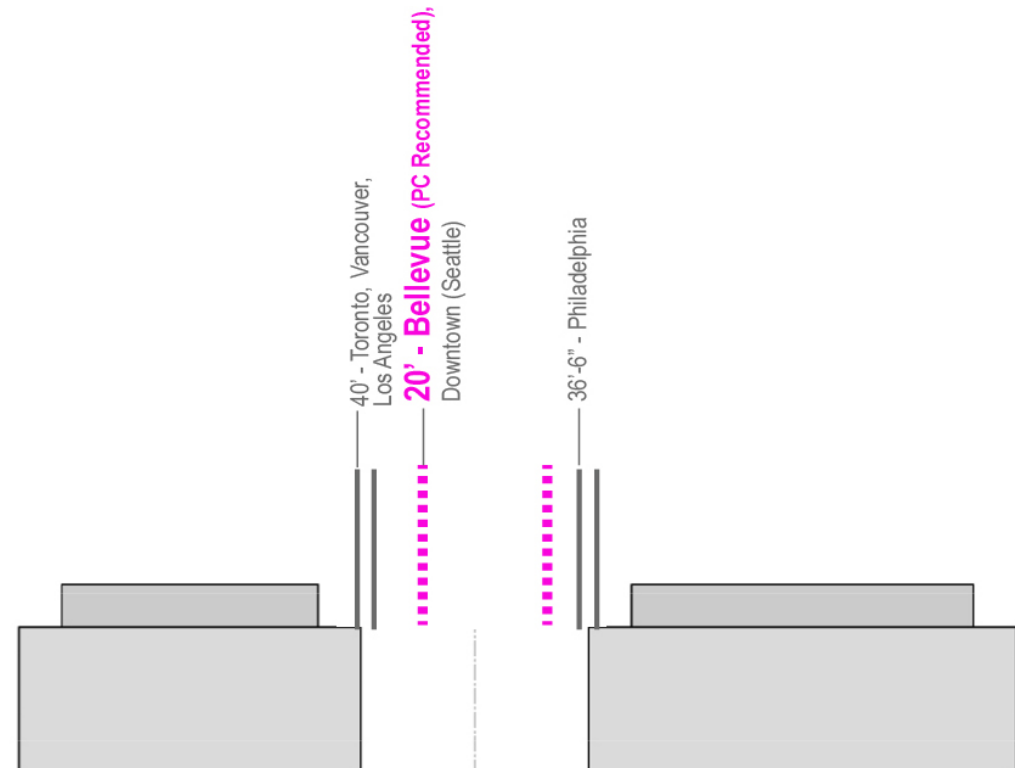
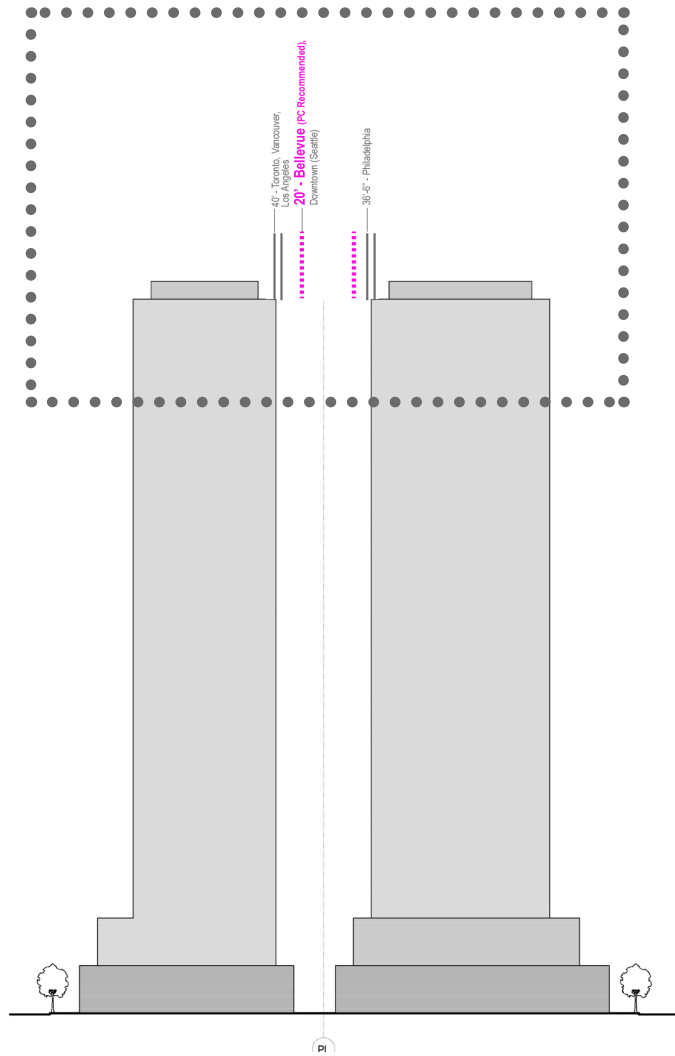
DISCUSSION:

A majority of the cities reviewed for comparative purposes had a tower separation of 80 feet or something near 80 feet. Similarly, most of the tower setbacks from interior property lines were near 40 feet. Tower separation and tower setbacks provide light, air, and privacy to the users of both buildings. The pedestrians on the street below also benefit from the light and air. Tower separation and setbacks also help to create a more distinctive skyline. All of these factors add to livability and were mentioned in both the CAC report and the Council principles as important amenities.

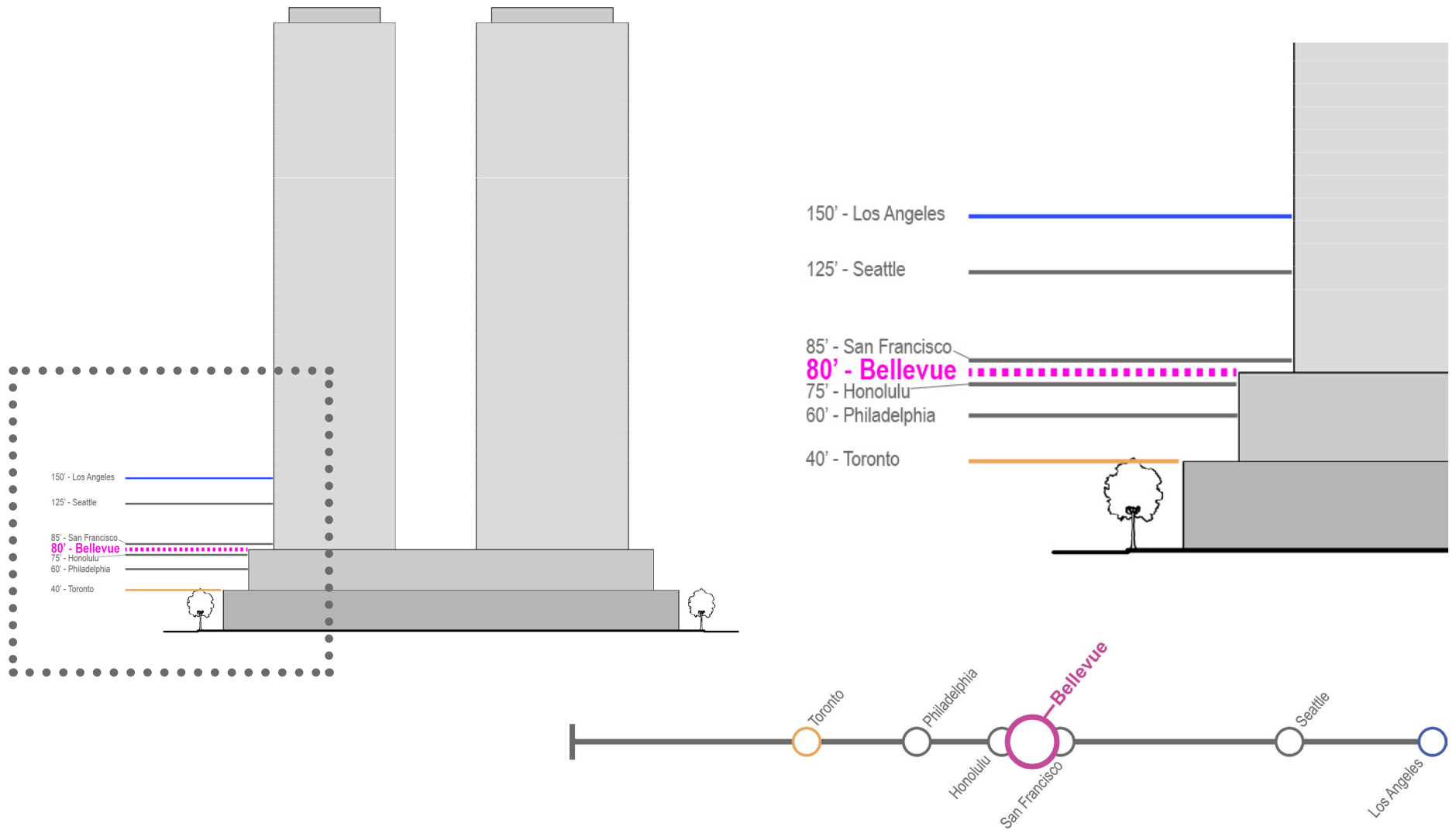
Comparison With Other Jurisdictions: Minimum Tower Separation



Comparison With Other Jurisdictions: Property Line Setback



Comparison With Other Jurisdictions:
Beginning Height Where Setback is Applied



2 - TOWER SPACING

ELEMENTS OF URBAN FORM

Rationale

To preserve and enhance the quality of life for those who live, work, and visit Downtown, providing opportunities for access to sunlight, sky views, and privacy are essential. Tower spacing plays a critical role in preserving and enhancing these elements, in addition to the scale of the pedestrian environment. Towers with inadequate separation can create adverse impacts on the public realm through excessive shade and shadow, obstruction of adequate sky views, and a scale that is detrimental to a pleasurable pedestrian environment. Appropriate tower separation can improve these conditions while also enhancing the quality of the interior environment by providing improved access to daylighting and privacy. Bellevue does not have a precise requirement for tower separation, rather relying on stepback requirements and the International Building Code to establish a minimum 40' separation. Figure 2.1 illustrates comparisons between International Building Code requirements and best practices found in other cities.

The primary objectives of providing appropriate tower separation are:

Sunlight

A rich network of public spaces interconnects the fabric of Downtown, working in support of streetscapes and other public open spaces. Sunlight is an essential element to activating the public realm. When towers are spaced too closely opportunities for sunlight to penetrate to the ground level is significantly diminished.

Scale

When separation is not adequately provided an overwhelming and constrained pedestrian environment can be established. Public spaces such as plazas, parks, through block connections, and streetscapes can appear uninviting, unsafe, and uncomfortable. Appropriate tower separation can establish relief from the overall massing while emphasizing a pedestrian scaled podium.

Privacy

An issue primarily relative to residential developments, appropriate tower spacing can be an integral element to establishing privacy. Appropriate orientation, placement, and spacing can enhance a sense of privacy between residential and office buildings.

Sky Views

Visual access to the sky is important for not only sunlight, but enhancing the feeling of openness and connection to environmental conditions such as weather and sunlight. In a dense urban environment, the clustering of high rise buildings can often create a tight sense of enclosure and intrusion creating an overwhelming and uncomfortable environment. Adequate tower separation enhances opportunities for sky views and creates a feeling of openness that enhances comfort and livability.



Figure 2.1 - Tower Separation Scenarios on a Typical Bellevue Block

Material Previously Reviewed by Planning Commission - February 10, 2016

Design Excellence

Tower separation requirements can enhance the placement of multiple towers on a single site and can create opportunities for abstraction and uniqueness in form. Added visual interest and variation can allow building forms and massings to create fluidity in design, resulting in a more aesthetically pleasing form and skyline as a whole. Towers can become more expressive and offer variation from a more traditional rectilinear form.

Building Performance and Conditions

Adequate tower separation can improve opportunities for daylight internal to buildings. While improving the quality of life of residents and users, daylighting is critical to sustainable building practices. Inadequate tower separation increases the amount of shade and shadow cast upon adjacent buildings, increasing the reliance of artificial lighting. This diminishes the quality of the internal space while reducing building efficiency.

Recommended Requirements

- Tower separation should be a minimum of 80 feet from face of building to face of building above 40 feet in height.
- Departure from the 80 foot separation requirement may be provided for unique & slender forms, spaces not intended for habitation, and fluid forms that demonstrate design excellence.
- Greater separation above the 80 foot minimum would be required for any development pursuing additional height and/or FAR above the existing maximums
- Consideration and coordination should be given to how a proposal relates to the existing and proposed adjacent developments to ensure that the proposal satisfies the separation requirement.
- Where departure of the maximum floor plate is granted, tower separation shall increase by a corresponding percentage. (Ex. Floor plate increase over maximum allowed by 10% = Tower separation increase of 80 feet + 10%)
- Where 80 foot separation is not feasible a site may not be appropriate for multiple towers unless project can demonstrate satisfying the departure requirement for unique & slender forms.
- Sites under 30,000 square feet may be eligible for a departure. See *Small Sites* section.

Precedent

Tower separation has become an important consideration to many urban environments. This separation is to ensure access to light, air, and design excellence within an urban environment. Some examples are as follows:

- **San Francisco**

Minimum Separation: 115'

Beginning Height: 85'

- **Toronto**

Minimum Separation: 82' (25 meters)

Beginning Height: 40'

Exception made for small sites

- **Honolulu (TOD Overlay)**

Minimum Separation: 80'

Beginning Height: Required for all towers below 240' in height

- **Vancouver, BC**

Minimum Separation: 80'

CAC References

Downtown Livability Initiative - Pg. 45

Land Use Code Reference

20.25A.020.A.2

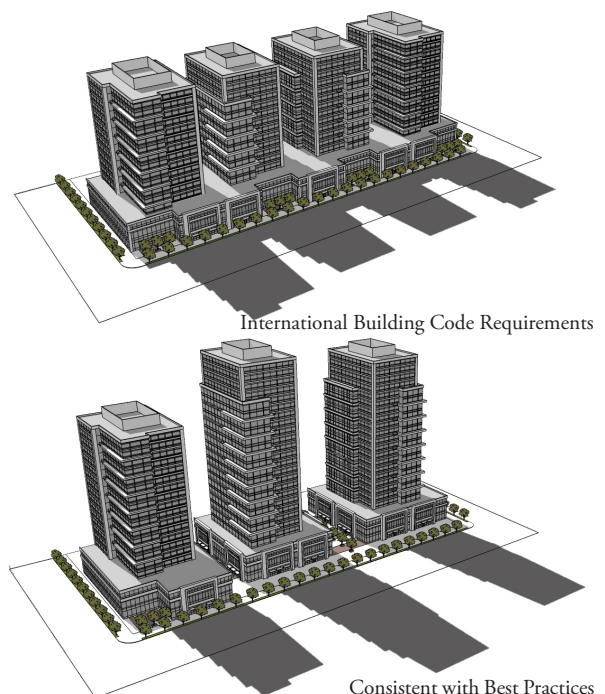


Figure 2.2 - Combined with increased building height, tower separation requirements can reduce the total number of towers per site accommodating the same FAR while, mitigating impacts of shade and shadow on the public realm.

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Cumulative Impact and Impact on Adjacent Sites

The cumulative impact of multiple towers on a single site or city block can enhance the negative impacts of towers. New towers should avoid locating too closely to property or setback lines so to not negatively affect future development opportunities of adjacent parcels. By locating too closely to the property or setback line, adjacent properties may be restricted in their development opportunity.

When planning for a new tower, the applicant shall consider the impact of all towers, existing and proposed, within the immediate area. The sum of all developments may further restrict access to sunlight and sky views. This consideration should inform the placement and form of the tower so to mitigate these impacts when considered within its greater context. Unique forms and placement of towers can serve as adequate mitigation to protect public space and the street level environment.

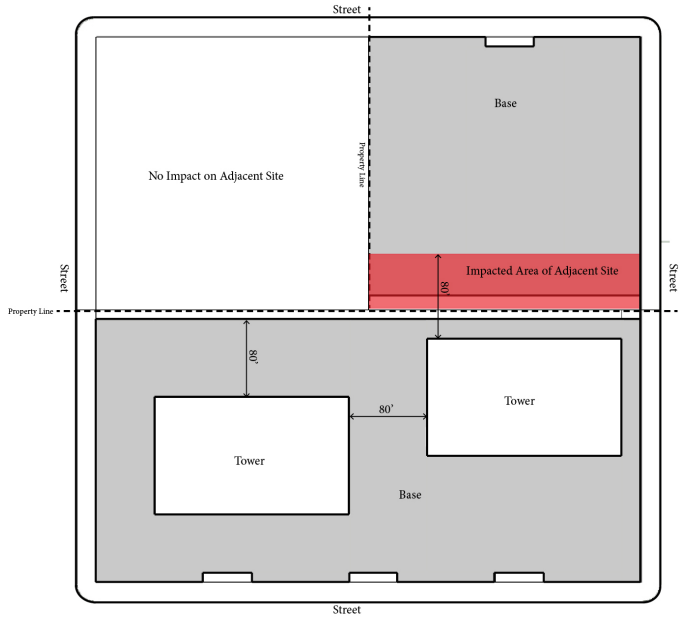


Figure 2.3 - Site to Site Impacts

By providing an adequate setback from the property line a tower can avoid negatively impacting adjacent sites while allowing for adequate separation

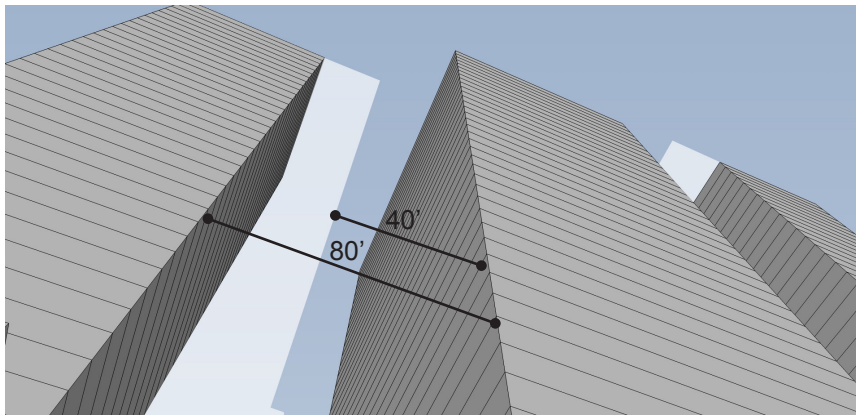


Figure 2.4 - Skyview - Existing Maximum Building Height 450'

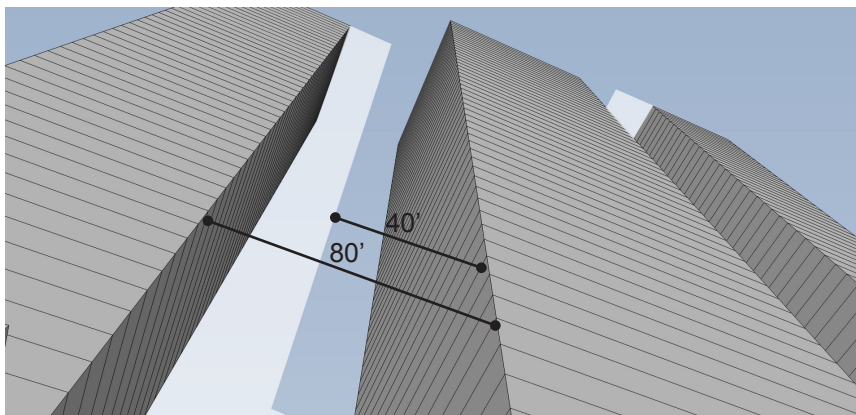


Figure 2.5 - Skyview - Proposed Maximum Building Height 600'

As building height increases, opportunity for light and sky views diminishes. Maintaining a minimum tower separation requirement ensures access to light and sky views that would otherwise be diminished.

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Small Sites

Small sites can be highly beneficial to an urban environment by providing a more granular scale to the pedestrian realm and variation from large towers. However, smaller sites can be disadvantaged by tower separation requirements as neighboring properties could adversely affect their ability to develop within the separation parameters. To maximize development opportunities while still meeting the City's goals for a livable Downtown, accommodations to tower separation requirements are proposed for small sites.

Small sites are those defined by 30,000 square feet or less. Exceptions to tower separation requirements only apply to small sites where a single tower is proposed. Departure from the separation requirements cannot be applied to buildings that span across multiple parcels or sites.

The following setback requirements for small sites are offered to maximize development opportunity and achieve city objectives in preserving sky views and sunlight.

Stepback from street

Tower shall stepback from base a minimum of 15' from the back of *sidewalk*.

Stepback from internal property lines, alleys, and through block connections

Tower shall stepback from base a minimum of 20' from property line or public space.

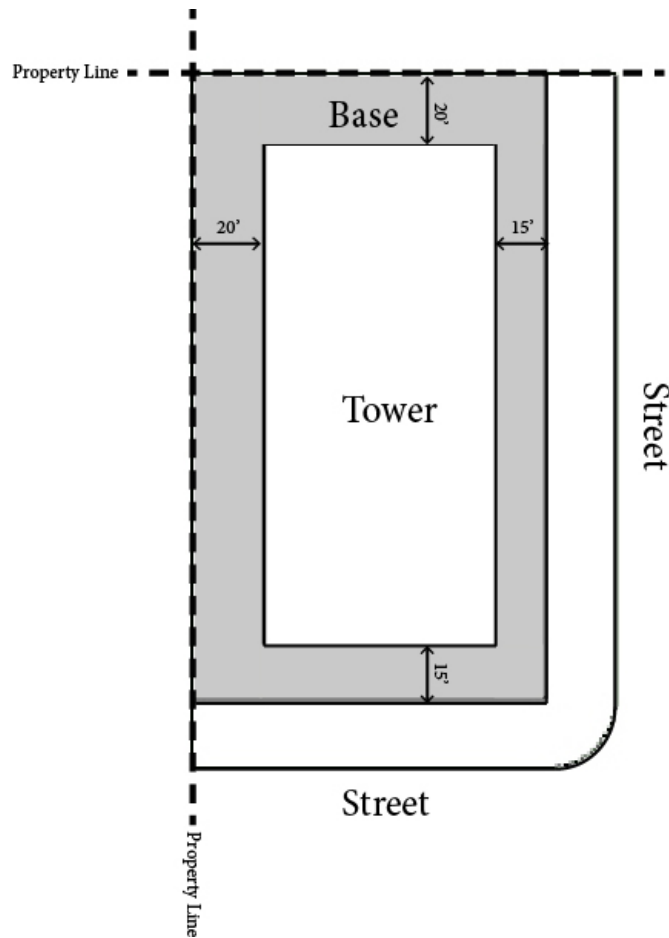


Figure 2.6 - Small Site Departure