



PRIVATELY OWNED PUBLIC SPACE



Public Plaza 2007 Text Amendment - **Approved!**

On October 17, 2007, the the City Council adopted a zoning text amendment related to design and operational standards for Privately Owned Public Plazas, as modified by the City Planning Commission. The new provisions update design regulations for privately owned public plazas and thereby facilitate the design and construction of high quality public spaces on privately owned sites that will, in turn, provide valuable amenities to residential neighborhoods and commercial districts.

The new provision includes:

1. **Replace the existing residential plaza definitions and urban plaza standards** with a single plaza type called the public plaza.
2. **Revise and update the design standards** for public plazas, while ensuring that substantial architectural flexibility remains for unique and exciting open space design.
3. **Streamline and consolidate** provisions related to open air cafes and kiosks within plazas, nighttime closing of plazas, and the process for modification of plaza design guidelines.

The new text is limited to design and operational standards and makes no changes that relate to bulk, permitted floor area, the amount of floor area generated through the provision of bonus plazas or to locations where the plaza bonus is available.

Why is This Text Amendment Needed?

The first zoning regulations permitting floor area bonuses in exchange for the construction of privately owned public plazas were adopted in 1961 and, since that time, over 250 such spaces have been created in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. While each of these spaces provides much-needed public open space in the dense commercial and residential districts of New York City, many of these plazas are unsatisfactory in their configuration, accessibility, amenities, or other design features. These deficiencies are at least partially attributable to the lack of specific design guidelines or outdated criteria.

The Department of City Planning has detailed records of all bonus plazas created under the various zoning provisions and has visited plazas to document their successes and shortcomings. This ongoing analysis of bonus plazas has revealed that, while the introduction of residential and urban plaza standards and gradual refinement of these guidelines has improved the quality of plazas, there are still numerous instances of plazas that lack basic amenities and thereby inhibit public use and enjoyment. For example, it is not unusual to find plazas that provide limited seating options, deliberately inhibit seating with spikes, and have obstructions that block visibility within the plaza area. These types of deficiencies are often attributable to outdated and inconsistent standards in the existing zoning text.

What Do the Design Changes Entail?

The proposed design standards for public plazas are largely based on the existing urban plaza design standards. The previous urban plaza standards from Section 37-04 have been replaced by a new Section 37-70 (Public Plazas). The urban plaza text has been amended to implement new and enhanced design standards for public plazas. The updated design standards govern the following aspects of plaza design:

- Size
- Configuration
- Dimensions
- Location on a zoning lot
- Orientation
- Visibility into and within the plaza
- Elevation changes
- Circulation and access
- Permitted obstructions
- Seating
- Planting and trees
- Lighting
- Litter receptacles
- Bike parking
- Public space signage
- Uses fronting on the plaza

What Do the Operational Changes Entail?

Additional changes were adopted regarding the operation of public plazas, including the design of barriers and gates associated with nighttime closing of public plazas and open air cafés and kiosks within public plazas.

Public Review

On June 4, 2007, the City Planning Commission referred, for a 45 day period, the proposed text amendment (N 070497 ZRY) to affected Community Boards and Borough Presidents for review and comment. On September 19, 2007 the City Planning Commission adopted the text amendment with modifications.  Read the [CPC report](#). On October 17, 2007, the City Council adopted the text amendment, as modified by the City Planning Commission. Zoning text changes are now in effect. View the  [adopted zoning text amendment](#).

For more information about the proposal, contact the Manhattan Office of the Department of City Planning at (212) 720-3480.

Related Notes

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