

## ***THE PUBLIC REALM***

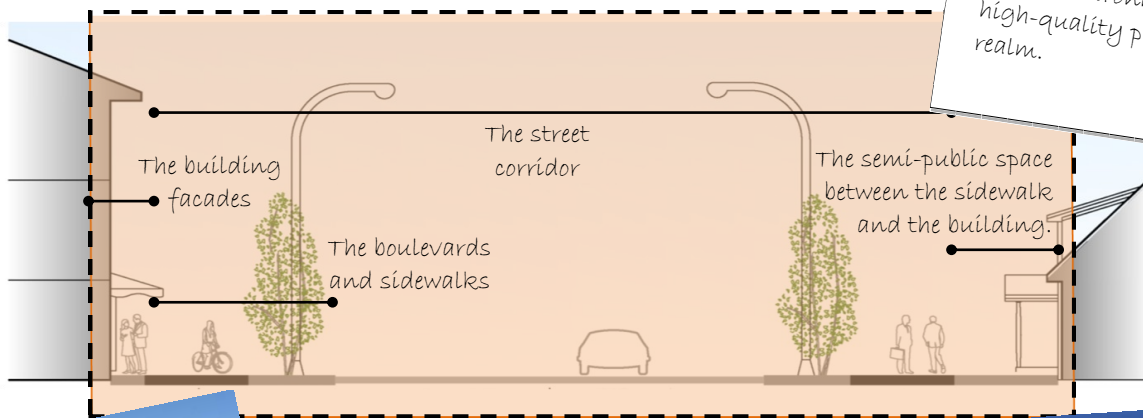
The public realm is a municipality's most defining characteristic. It is defined by the streets, buildings and public spaces and how they effectively work together. This is a key part of what creates the unique identity of a City. When these elements, the infrastructure, effectively work together, the public realm is a well-connected, livable place where people want to be or travel through. When these elements are not well integrated, the resulting public realm is a far less pleasant place to be.

The infrastructure of the public realm establishes the framework or 'skeleton' of the city. A large investment is needed to create this infrastructure and it is the part of the city that lasts the longest. Buildings and activities can change much easier and quicker, but the Public Realm framework remains the same; it is much more costly to make changes to it. It is important to make sure the skeleton is there so the structure that defines the City is clear, and ensures the City is a vibrant, identifiable place regardless of how the buildings and activities within the framework may change over time.

### **WHAT IS THE PUBLIC REALM?**

All the elements of the Public Realm are subject to regulation under form-based zoning to ensure a cohesive, integrated "skeleton". Streets make up about 80-90% of the Public Realm.

*The Smart Growth Community Image Survey (2007) found that what people prefer most in their urban environment is a high-quality public realm.*



Complete streets ensure there is a place for all types of transportation modes in the public realm: vehicles, walking, cycling and transit.



Source: [www.pedbikeimages.org](http://www.pedbikeimages.org)



The facade a building presents to the street contributes to how a street feels for a pedestrian and the nature of the public realm.



**CIVIC SPACES**

Civic spaces are also an important element of the Public Realm. They need to be well-designed for a variety of uses, integrated into the ‘framework’ of the city so that they are accessible, safe and usable. They are the places where people gather, meet, spend time on their own, and where the heart of the community is to be found.



Source: Amazin' Jane on www.flickr.com



Source: Macon on www.flickr.com



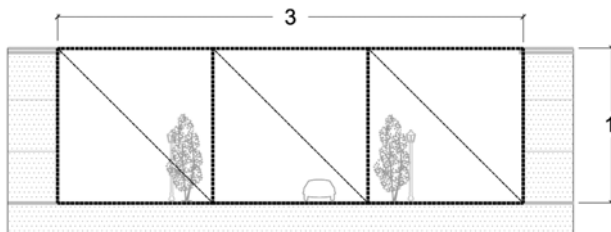
Source: Renny BA on www.flickr.com



Source: www.parktempo.com

**ENCLOSURE**

The Enclosure ratio of a public street is a key element in making a street feel comfortable for pedestrians. When designing street corridors and looking at how buildings can work along them to best define the public realm, this ratio should be considered.

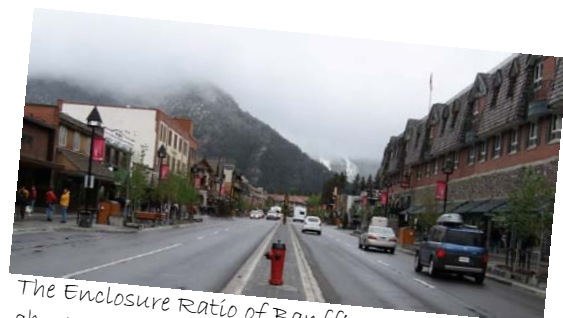


To calculate Enclosure Ratio, the width of the streetscape from the facade of the buildings on each side is compared to the height of the buildings on each side. For the diagram above, the ratio is 3:1.

A ratio of 2:1 or 3:1 is the best ratio to ensure a pedestrian-scale along a street, but still accommodate vehicles. A ratio of 4:1 or higher is designed to be a car-oriented street, and is generally very unfriendly to pedestrians.



The Enclosure Ratio of St. Albert Trail is between 10 :1 and 12:1



The Enclosure Ratio of Banff's Main Street is about 2:1

## **THE PUBLIC REALM AND ZONING**

### *Conventional zoning - what we do now*

The current Land Use Bylaw (LUB) focuses primarily on the use for an individual lot. Street and civic space standards are not included in the LUB.

There are some design guidelines for Downtown and the Business Park with regard to finishes and other facade elements that have begun to help create a better relationship between buildings and the streetscape. The newer Regional Commercial district has taken this further, also including regulations around site design and building placement. But the majority of land use districts focus on the use and the design and creation of the Public Realm is incidental to the development that occurs.

### *Form-based zoning - what we're proposing*

In regulating land use and development, form-based zoning focuses first on the creation of the physical form of the public realm by the placement and design of buildings in relation to the streets in front of them, the buildings around them and other civic spaces. The enclosure ratio is considered when developing street corridor and building height and placement regulations.

The form-based regulations incorporate street corridors, civic spaces and building types. Various regulations such as build-to lines and frontage width requirements help define how buildings relate to the street. These all ensure development is integrated within the context of what is around it to deliberately create a high-quality Public Realm.