Urban Design
The Legacy of the New York 1916 Zoning Ordinance

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Mithun / Solomon
Equitable Building
New York 1915, that provoked the 1916 Zoning Ordinance
Equitable Building Manhattan
Pre-1916 Zoning Ordinance
1916 New York Zoning Ordinance

SETBACK PRINCIPLE

Typical example in a 1½ times district, for streets 50’ to 100’ wide.

The setback line always runs up from the center of the street through the limiting height at the street line.

HEIGHT LIMITS - 1½ TIMES DISTRICTS

Some principles apply to each of the other districts.

Set backs may be at each story or several stories at once or in the form of a mansard.
Street types

1916 Zoning Ordinance

Streetwall setback heights
1916 New York Zoning Ordinance

1916 Zoning Ordinance
Hugh Ferris drawings illustrating the 1916 Zoning Ordinance
San Remo Towers, Central Park West

1916 Zoning Ordinance

Water Street
Manhattan 1935: Legacy of the 1916 Zoning Ordinance
Manhattan 1935: Legacy of the 1916 Zoning Ordinance
Empire State and Chrysler caught ‘in flagrante!’

Madeleine Vreisendorp, from Delirious New York, by Rem Koolhaas
1961 NYC Zoning Ordinance

Seagram Bldg
Mies Van der Rohe, Philip Johnson

Lever House
SOM
Seagram Building, New York 1961 Zoning

Sixth Avenue towers and plazas
Crown Zellerbach Bldg
1 Bush St, San Francisco
1968
Market Street, San Francisco
1970 era towers
San Francisco Downtown Plan 1985

1. Redirected commercial growth South of Market St around the Transbay Terminal
2. Downzoned areas to protect Chinatown and the Tenderloin Districts
3. Established growth targets per year for commercial development (950k sq ft)
4. Encouraged mixed-use buildings to increase housing in downtown
5. Reinforced Transit First policies, reduced parking ratios
6. Protected over 300 historic buildings and Conservation Districts through the use of Transfer Development Rights
7. Established height limits, bulk controls and tower separation controls to enhance the city skyline
8. Established developer fees to pay for housing, parks, childcare, transit and job training
9. Permitted new types of public open space including Privately Owned Public Open Space (POPOS)
10. Sunlight ordinances to provide year round sunlight to public parks and streets

1985 Downtown Plan
Bulk Controls for Commercial Office and Commercial Office / Mixed-Use Buildings, and Hotels

Tower top:
- Max. floor area: 18,000 sq ft
- Max. plan dimension: 160 ft
- Max. diagonal dimension: 190 ft

Tower shaft:
- Max. floor area: 20,000 sq ft max.
- Max. plan dimension: 160 ft
- Max. diagonal dimension: 200 ft

Bulk Controls begin above 85'

Building base (up to 85' high) - Area not limited by these guidelines*

*Bulk Control, setback, stepback, and allowable area guidelines do not supersede the zoning code or the Capitol View Protection Act, or applicable building and fire codes. See discussions elsewhere.
Case Studies:

Bulk Control Comparisons
Several West Coast cities have strict bulk limits for residential towers in order to create tall, slender buildings. Vancouver's towers typically have very small floor-plates varying from 3,500 to 5,000 sq ft maximum (see image, previous page). San Francisco's Rincon Hill design guidelines permit towers an array of floor plates related to height ranging from 7,500 sq ft for a 300’ high tower to 10,000 sq ft for a 500’ high tower. The current generation of Sacramento's downtown residential towers has a range of much larger floor-plates, generally in the 12,500 sq ft - 15,000 sq ft range.

The three examples on this page compare design parameters for a 300’-high residential tower.

Sacramento
- Max. tower floor plate: 10,000 sq ft (typically 6-8 units per floor)
- Parking store grade
- Building base height: 44’-45’
- Max 4 towers per block

Rincon Hill, San Francisco
- Max. tower floor plate: 10,000 sq ft (typically 6-8 units per floor)
- Max. base building height: 85 ft
- Parking above grade
- Max. 2 towers per block

Vancouver
- Max. tower floor plate: 7,500 sq ft (typically 4 units per floor)
- Max. base building height: 45 ft
- All parking below grade
- 4 story row houses fill remainder of site
- Max. 2 towers per block

Comparison between
Vancouver, Rincon Hill and
Sacramento

Downtown Plan: Bulk Controls
235 Pine Street
SOM Architects

Downtown Plan: Bulk Controls
Downtown Plan: Transfer Development Rights

Hallidie Building to 333 Bush St
Downtown Plan: Protecting View Corridors

California Street View Corridor
650 Mission Street, San Francisco

Downtown Plan: Pocket Parks
101 Second Street Atrium
SOM Architects

Downtown Plan: POPOS
Downtown Plan
Maiden Lane as a pedestrian space
Better Neighborhood 2002
Market/ Octavia
Rezoning Transbay District
San Francisco skyline 2020