

Town of Acton

Design Review Guidelines

for Commercial Development



Draft Document - July 2006 - Scope



- Cost +/-
- Req'd / Recommended?
- Timing
- From us?

~ Collaborated
developer

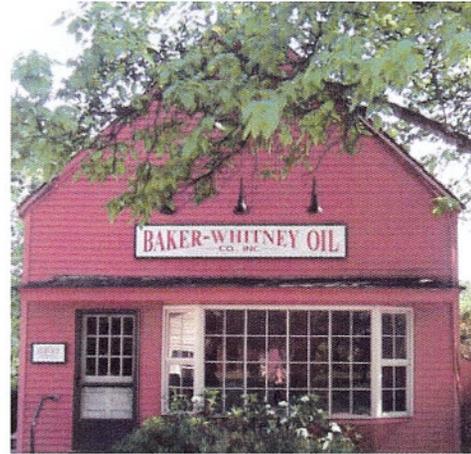
now something fits
in to what is
around it.

PURPOSE

The purpose of these guidelines are to:

- Streamline the approval process for commercial development
- Promote attractive development of commercial areas
- Preserve and enhance the New England character of the Town's commercial centers and thoroughfares
- Unify commercial properties both visually and physically with surrounding land uses
- Facilitate a more healthful and walk-able suburban atmosphere that integrates pedestrian needs with those of drivers
- Protect property values by enhancing the Town's appearance.

Acton has a character defined by its 19th century village centers and rural New England roots. Successful future development should respect this special past by contextual sensitive building design with appropriate materials, scale, massing and site planning. Acton has three historic village centers, as well as rural and commercial areas that each have a unique visual context. The following guidelines outline site and building components for successful development in these different areas.



DESIGN GUIDELINES

Building Placement on Site

New structures should present their main entrance and storefront to the public street and be located no further from the front lot line than adjacent structures on either side of the proposed location. The desire is to create a unified and consistent alignment of building facades that define and address the street. Locating the building closer to the street will preserve more open space and also permit more space behind it for parking and service access.



Building Massing/Scale

With the objective of maintaining a small town character buildings should appear to be modest in scale relating to the scale of the immediate context if appropriate. Massing for large structures should be articulated in such a way as to reduce the apparent scale of the building by introduction of small scaled architectural features, creation of an irregular footprint and breaking the roofscape with dormers, gables or changes in roof direction. Avoid long expanses of repetitive architectural elements, and flat unarticulated wall surfaces.



Parking

Where possible locate parking behind the structure to allow the building it serves to be in closer proximity to the street. This is important for encouraging greater density along the street and for making for a more appealing pedestrian environment. In all cases screen parking with a landscape buffer to minimize its visual impact.



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Sidewalks

Well designed walkways are critical to creating a pedestrian friendly experience. Where building setbacks permit, separate sidewalks from the street with a landscaped buffer. Buildings entrances, parking areas, and important public spaces should be directly served by sidewalks. Refer to Acton's Sidewalk Design Guidelines.



Signage

Building signage should be appropriately scaled to the building or surface onto which it is placed, should not obscure important architectural features and be readable for both pedestrians and drivers approaching the site. Acton has comprehensive signage regulations within its Zoning Bylaws that provide further detailed requirements.



Storefronts

Well designed storefronts add vitality to the streetscape encouraging business as well as pedestrian traffic. Retail storefronts should make generous use of glass, face the street or sidewalk and not be obstructed by piers or other features that block view of the display windows. Carefully designed awnings coupled with appropriately scaled signage and lighting will further enhance the storefront's appearance. To the extent possible, storefronts should be continuous, uninterrupted and lengthened to maximize its frontage on the public way.



Lighting

Acton has adopted a lighting bylaw that encourages energy conservation and eliminates extraneous light that can spill offsite or cause glare. Select pedestrian-scaled light fixtures appropriate to building type and location. Avoid the use of floodlighting, wall packs and tall light posts intended for lighting large areas. Area lighting may be accomplished instead with a denser placement of shorter pole-mounted fixtures.



Windows and Doors

With the exception of retail storefronts, modestly scaled vertically proportioned windows articulated with muntins are most appropriate to the the local building vernacular. Building facades should have an abundance of windows and doors that use clear nonreflective glass. Windows on higher floors should align vertically with windows below if possible.



Landscaping

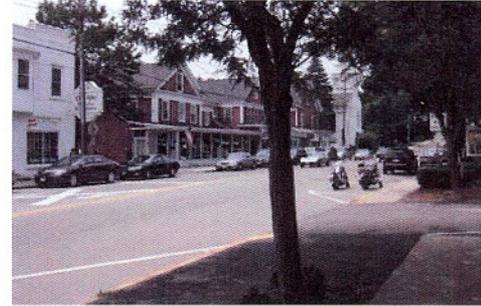
Thoughtfully designed landscaping appropriate to the context of a small New England town should include the careful use of stone walls, wood fencing, paving materials and plantings. These features can tie a structure to its landscape, define spaces and make for a pleasant pedestrian experience. Preserve mature plantings where possible and minimize modifications to the natural topography of the site.

Plantings

Indigenous planting appropriate to the context should be used and placed in a manner that appears natural and integrated into the landscape. Planting should be grouped to include a variety of types and scale from trees, shrubs, perennials and ground cover. Planting should be used to define spaces, shade pedestrian spaces, soften buildings and to create buffers between public spaces and roads, parking areas and mechanical equipment.

Public Spaces

Development should strive to create appealing public spaces and provide pedestrian access and connections to existing public amenities via sidewalks, covered walkways, and lawns. Provide public amenities that invite public use such as benches, water features, and shaded gathering spaces. Buildings should recognize the importance of their visual impact on the public way onto which they front. In order to strengthen the definition of the public spaces buildings should maximize their frontage on the street and public spaces that they abut.



Materials

There is a strong preference for authentic natural materials such as wood, brick, and stone for the exterior of structures and landscape features. Construct windows, storefronts and public doorways of wood where possible. Synthetic materials should be as close in appearance and detail to the natural material it simulates as possible.



Roofs

It is characteristic of traditional New England architecture and smaller scaled structures that roofs be sloped and articulated with dormers, chimneys, gables, cupolas, etc. Larger structures likewise can benefit from a similar treatment that will break-up the massing into appropriately scaled elements. Avoid large flat roofed areas or conceal them behind parapets or sections of sloped roof.



Mechanical Equipment

Conceal utilities and mechanical equipment from public view. If possible utilities should be placed below grade, ventilation equipment enclosed with the building or concealed by parapets, and service areas and dumpsters enclosed and located away from public view.



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