

1/23/12 (6)

**Christine Joyce**

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**From:** ann sussman [annsmail4@gmail.com]  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 19, 2012 9:28 AM  
**To:** Christine Joyce  
**Cc:** Design Review Board  
**Subject:** re: DRB materials for BoS 1/23 meeting  
**Attachments:** 11-11-2DRBCharge.pdf; ATT00001.htm; 11-11.16 Acton Design Guidelines 2.pdf; ATT00002.htm; 11-1-11DRB.pdf; ATT00003.htm

Hi Christine,

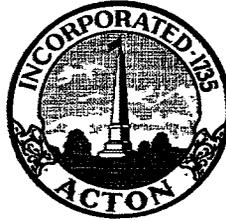
Here are DRB materials for BoS meeting on Monday the 23rd. They are:

- Revised DRB Charge
- Updated Design Review Guidelines for the Town of Acton
- Why DRB? Comments from Acton developers, citizens, and others who have appeared before the board.

Thanks for all your help keeping us on track and organized.

best,

Ann  
978 790 7776



## DESIGN REVIEW BOARD CHARGE

February 26, 2007  
November 2011, revised

### Purpose

The mission of the Design Review Board (DRB) is to promote attractive development in Acton that furthers the goals and objectives identified in the Town Master Plan and other comprehensive planning reports, and enhances the overall quality of life for Acton residents. The DRB serves the Board of Selectmen in an advisory capacity regarding proposed commercial development and may, at the request of other Town Boards, provide design guidance on certain non-commercial development within the jurisdiction of the other Town Boards.

# DRAFT

### Projects for Which Design Review Is Available

The DRB may provide design guidance as follows:

- (1) At the request of the Board of Selectmen as to a proposed commercial development or municipal project;
- (2) At the request of another Town Board as to a proposed non-commercial development that is within the jurisdiction of the Board requesting such guidance; no proposed residential development encompassing fewer than four residential units shall be subject to DRB review.

The DRB's provision of design guidance will require and be consistent with Design Review Guidelines.

### Design Review Guidelines

The DRB publishes Design Review Guidelines, subject to the Board of Selectmen's approval, that are the basis for its review of proposed development projects. The Design Review Guidelines, in turn, draw upon and reflect the goals and objectives in the Town Master Plan and other comprehensive planning reports.

The DRB's Design Review Guidelines are posted on the Town website ([www.acton-ma.gov](http://www.acton-ma.gov)). The DRB shall develop guidelines for municipal projects and residential developments of four or more units, pursuant to broad-based public outreach, via surveys or other appropriate methods, to identify the preferences of Acton residents with respect to such non-commercial projects. These guidelines are subject to periodic review.

The DRB aims to work with project Applicants to achieve results beneficial to both Applicant and Town. The Guidelines do not rigidly prescribe certain styles of architecture or other design details, but suggest ways for development to be contextually sensitive, respecting the Town's unique past and historic building traditions while at the same time being open to all styles of design and architecture. The DRB shall make copies of the Design Review Guidelines available to Town departments and Boards for distribution to Applicants and potential Applicants.

## **Membership**

The DRB shall have eight members, consisting of five voting Members, two Associate Members and one Alternate Member, all appointed by the Board of Selectmen. Members shall serve staggered three-year terms; Associate Members and the Alternate Member shall serve one-year terms. The DRB members shall include

- Two Planning Board members, one of whom will serve as the Alternate
- A local businessperson/commercial property owner
- Five Acton residents representing diverse professional backgrounds or general interests in the following areas:

Architecture or Planning  
Real Estate Development  
Landscape Architecture and Design  
Interior Design  
Graphic Design  
Civil Engineering  
Land Use Law  
Building/Construction

The DRB shall elect annually a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and Clerk.

## **Meetings**

The DRB shall meet on a regular basis twice a month. All DRB meetings shall be open to the public.

## **Project Review Procedure**

Upon referral to the DRB of a development proposal, the DRB shall invite the Applicant to appear before the DRB at a regularly scheduled DRB meeting convenient for the Applicant, to present drawings and renderings of the project as well as photographs showing the existing conditions and context. While, the Board of Selectmen and other Boards encourage developers to meet with the DRB because it may lead to expedited official reviews, this process is voluntary. The DRB encourages Applicants who are willing to meet with the DRB to do so as early as possible in the development process.

During an Applicant presentation, DRB members shall make suggestions regarding the design of the project with reference to the Design Review Guidelines and, if appropriate, the Town of Acton Master Plan and other comprehensive planning reports. If the Applicant agrees, the DRB may schedule additional review meetings. The DRB shall communicate regularly with the referring Board throughout the review process, and conclude its review in accordance with any deadline that the referring Board may set for the DRB's review.

Upon completion of its review of a project proposal, the DRB shall prepare an advisory opinion, summarizing its review of and comments about the project, and forward the advisory opinion to the referring Board, the Applicant, and the Town website manager for posting on the Town website.

## **Administrative Provisions**

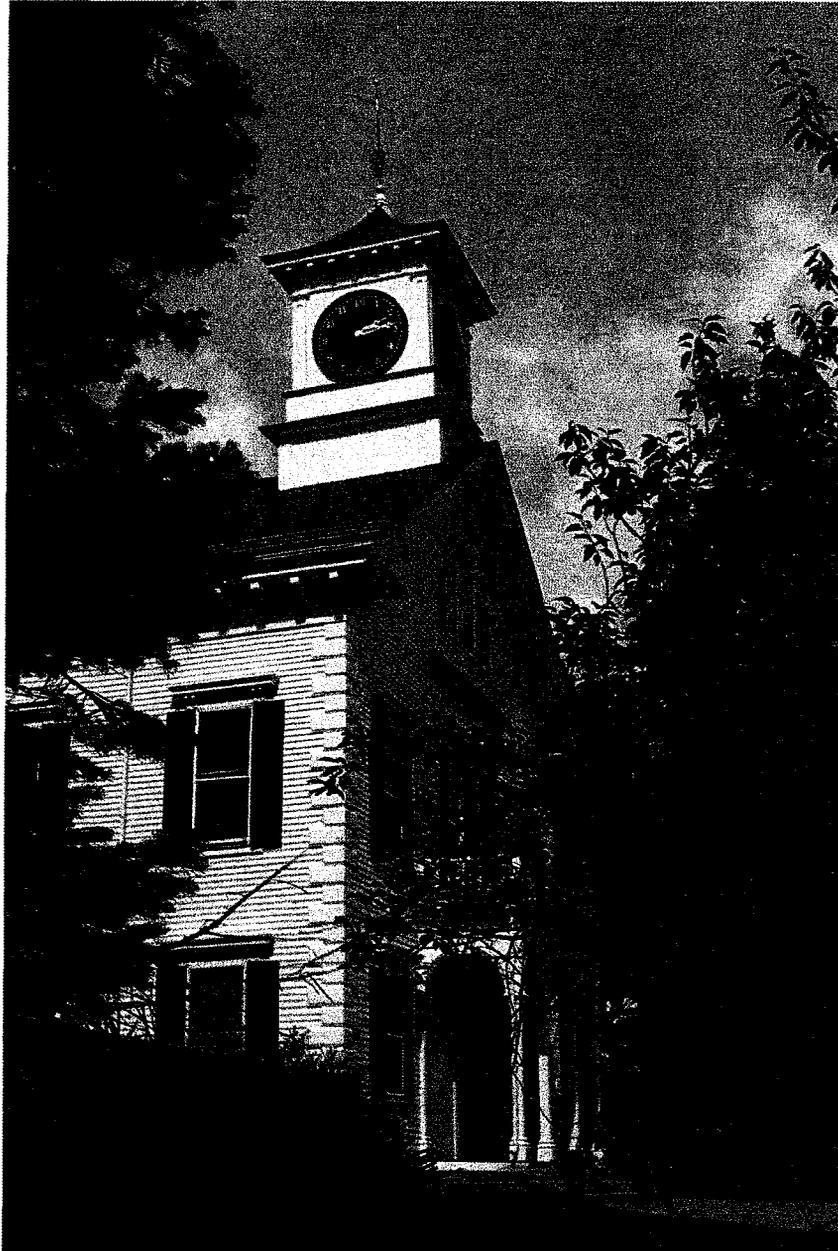
Advisory opinions of the DRB shall be consistent with the intent and purpose of the Design Review Guidelines and Town of Acton Master Plan and other comprehensive planning reports. The DRB may periodically revise and amend the Design Review Guidelines, subject to Board of Selectmen approval.

The DRB shall comply with all applicable Town bylaws and State laws, including the requirements of the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, . .

The DRB Chair shall keep the assigned Board of Selectmen Liaison apprised of the DRB's activities.

# Town of Acton, MA

## DESIGN REVIEW GUIDELINES



February 2007, Rev. November 2011



# TOWN OF ACTON — DESIGN REVIEW GUIDELINES

## PURPOSE

These guidelines seek to:

- Promote attractive and appropriately scaled development;
- Preserve the existing New England character of the Town;
- Facilitate a circulation system that integrates multiple forms of transportation-vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians;
- Protect and increase property values by improving the Town's overall appearance;
- Adhere to the objectives of the Town and individual Village Master Plans;



Acton Center

Acton's character is defined by its three 19<sup>th</sup>-century village centers and its rural New England roots. Successful future development should respect this special past by implementing contextually-sensitive site planning principles combined with building designs promoting appropriate scale, massing and materials.

The intent of the Design Review Board is not to prescribe styles of architecture. Applicants are expected to be creative with styles and materials and it is anticipated that new construction will blend with existing scales and styles. Design Review Board meetings are an opportunity to generate new ideas and concepts. The Board strives to work with an applicant to achieve results beneficial to both the Applicant and the Town.

## DESIGN GUIDELINES

### Site History and Context

Study the project's context and placement within the adjacent neighborhood or Village at project inception.

### Sustainable Principles

In keeping with Acton's designation as a 'Green Community', developers are encouraged to promote sustainable principles specified in LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), the Massachusetts Stretch Code, Energy Star and other programs.

### Building Placement on Site

Building placement on the site is critical to successful development. In general, new structures should strive to:

- Present their main entrance(s) to the street;
- Be located no further from the front lot line than adjacent structures, creating a consistent alignment of building facades defining the street.

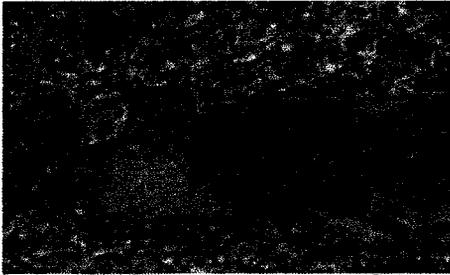
In addition, site plans should:

- Permit space for parking and service access at the rear;
- Promote safe vehicular and pedestrian access;
- Always avoid removal of mature trees.

### Public Spaces

Development should strive to create appealing public spaces by:

- Providing pedestrian access and connections to existing public sidewalks;
- Providing benches, water features, and shaded gathering spaces.



S. Acton



W. Acton

# TOWN OF ACTON — DESIGN REVIEW GUIDELINES

## Parking

Strive to minimize parking area and/or share parking spaces with adjacent properties. See Acton Zoning Bylaws. In addition:

- Where possible, locate parking behind the structure to allow the building to be in closer to the street;
- In all cases, screen parking from street with landscape buffers;
- Include planters islands in parking for trees and shade.

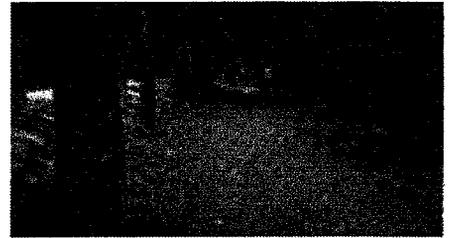


W. Acton

## Sidewalks

Well-designed walkways attract pedestrians. They should:

- Connect to building entrances, parking areas and key public spaces;
- Where setbacks permit, be separate from the street with a green buffer;
- Use attractive paving materials such as pavers instead of asphalt or concrete. (See Sidewalk Design Guidelines)



N. Acton

## Landscape Design

Thoughtfully designed landscapes tie a structure to its surroundings, enhance the pedestrian experience and make a place memorable. They should:

- Preserve mature plantings, stone walls and other historic features;
- Minimize modifications to the natural topography.



S. Acton

## Plantings

Use indigenous and sustainable plantings wherever possible, try to:

- Avoid State listed invasive plant materials;
- Avoid using plants and trees that attract deer;
- Make plantings define spaces, shade pedestrian spaces, soften buildings and buffer mechanical, electrical and other equipment.

## Lighting

Select pedestrian-scaled light fixtures appropriate to building type and location that:

- Avoid the use of floodlighting, wall packs and tall light posts;
- Follow Acton's lighting bylaw encouraging energy conservation and eliminating light spill offsite.
- Refer to the lighting section of Acton's Zoning Bylaws.

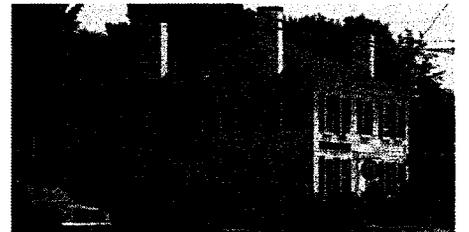


N Acton

## Building Massing and Scale

As feasible, maintain small-town character with buildings that appear modest in scale. To reduce the apparent size of a building:

- Introduce small-scaled architectural features; create an irregular footprint; break the roofscape;
- Avoid long expanses of repetitive architectural elements and flat unarticulated wall surfaces.



E. Acton

## Existing Structures

Preserve existing buildings and structures of historic value; if renovated, do so in a manner that respects the character of the original. Historic structures contribute to the Town's character and should be preserved in their original location if possible. Collaborate with Acton's Historic Commission, Historic District Commission, etc.

## TOWN OF ACTON — DESIGN REVIEW GUIDELINES

### Roofs

For projects keeping with New England tradition, slope roofs and articulate with dormers, chimneys, gables, cupolas, etc. Larger structures can benefit from a similar treatment that breaks up the massing into smaller-scaled elements. Avoid large, flat roofs or conceal them behind parapets or sections of sloped roof.

### Windows and Doors

With the exception of retail storefronts, modestly scaled vertically proportioned windows are most appropriate, in addition:

- Building facades should have an abundance of windows and doors that use clear, non-reflective glass;
- Windows on higher floors should align vertically with windows below if possible;
- Entrances should be prominent, protected from the weather and face the street.

### Storefronts

Well designed storefronts add vitality to the streetscape promoting business as well as pedestrian traffic. Retail should:

- Make generous use of glass, face the street or sidewalk and not be obstructed by columns or features that block the view of display windows;
- Consider carefully-designed awnings with appropriately scaled signage and lighting and, as possible, create continuous frontage on the street.

### Materials

Use natural materials such as wood, brick and stone for the exterior of structures and landscape features, as feasible. Construct windows, storefronts and public doorways of wood where possible. Synthetic materials should be as close in appearance and detail to the natural material simulated and should be in locations not visible from the public way.

### Mechanical, Electrical and Telecommunications Equipment

- Conceal utilities and mechanical, electrical and telecommunications equipment from public view;
- If possible, place utilities below grade; conceal ventilation equipment within the building envelope with parapets;
- Screen service areas and dumpsters with fencing and landscaping, locating them away from public view.

### Signage

Scale signage to the building or surface onto which it is placed; do not obscure important architectural features. Make signs readable for both approaching pedestrians and drivers. In the Town's historic districts, signage approval is required by the Historic District Commission. Refer to Acton's signage regulations in the Zoning Bylaws.



E. Acton



W. Concord



W. Acton



W. Acton

For further information contact:

The Design Review Board  
[drb@acton-ma.gov](mailto:drb@acton-ma.gov)

Town Hall  
472 Main Street  
Acton, MA 01720

## Why DRB in ACTON

October 2011

"The old Meineke muffler building in Kelley's Corner - which was expanded in the 90s - is a shining example of what not to do. It's what happens in a town when there is no design review."

"I'd love to work with the Design Review Board and others on improving pedestrian connections from the school complex to Kelley's Corner. There's a lot of low-hanging fruit that the town can benefit from like creating stamped sidewalks...and other visual cues for motorists and pedestrians and all those school kids in the area that clearly delineate the area as a pedestrian zone."

-Chris Starr, Acton resident, developer, + Kelley's Corner Building Owner. Mr Starr owns the former Meineke Bldg

"I found (appearing before the DRB) reasonable and helpful and not a huge obstacle or adversarial and there were some architects who gave me some good advice."

- Steve Steinberg, Acton Developer & Building Owner. Mr. Steinberg has appeared before the DRB for both commercial and 40b residential projects.

We live on the corner of Arlington and Spruce. As you know, there is construction underway there. Am happy to say, thanks to the review board, we have had more input on the design and fit of the new buildings. So much of what has been built in Acton over the past ten years has not been aesthetically appealing and has been built with apparent disregard for the surrounding community. The Design Review Board helps mitigate the differences from the builders desires and the neighborhoods needs.

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PHONE: 978-263-7925

"I think the Design Review Board helped with the plantings for my last project (for the Prescott Barn)"

- Leo Bertolami, Acton Developer, Building Owner

I definitely support the Design Review Board reviewing mixed use and 40B projects and think people with expertise in development should be involved. The BoS have a lot to do as it is. I see it as helpful having others do in-depth review and make recommendations before final decisions are made.

Dr. Pamela Cochrane, Acton resident

As a resident of Acton and practicing architect for over thirty years, I strongly support the Design Review Board's proposal to provide voluntary, non-binding design review to a broader scope of commercial and residential projects in Acton.

It is my belief that this voluntary design review will provide valuable professional feedback that will help strengthen the design and planning characteristics of future proposals with respect to Acton's architectural past, but with an eye for moving forward. In 2010, the additional attention in reviewing the design, scale and planning aspects of the Marsh View/93 Central Street proposal before the ZBA, helped clarify what the real visual impacts to the local neighborhood context and natural environment would be. Similar design review processes have been very successful in other of our surrounding towns.

Ken Guditz  
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Acton, MA 01720

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I am sure in cases where the developer has a poor design, we would be happy to send them to DRB especially if there is any concern about the design from the neighborhood. I attend all the ZBA hearings on 40B's, design is not normally the issue, density is. Our goal is for developers to do LIP 40B's and if we begin to load it up with layers of approval, they will just file using MassHousing and bypass us altogether. I would say it would be helpful to have DRB available but not be expected for every project.

- Nancy Tavernier, Acton resident, Acton Community Housing Corporation, Chair

For the 21 years that I have lived in Acton, I have been wishing there was a process within which Acton citizens could voice their desires for more accessible designs in private development.

- Acton resident + Committee member

"I absolutely think there should be design review. I think that's why Concord stays the way it does. They have ways to assess new buildings before they're built. Development should be sensitive to the setting."

- Acton home owner & resident since 1968

For residential developments, the DRB could certainly help developers build both aesthetically appealing and environmentally friendly neighborhoods, by being an information clearinghouse as well as regulator. I would love to see design guidelines that limit curb cuts and parking lots like the Subway's on Great Road, where there is one huge stretch of pavement - leading to confusion as to entrance and exit.

- Carol Holley, Acton resident + Committee member

"The restoration of the Windsor Building (historic West Acton fire station) is a better project because of input from both the DRB + HDC. It's good to have some people you can bounce ideas off of. However, I definitely think it should be clear that the DRB doesn't have regulatory authority."

-Dean Charter, Director, Town of Acton Municipal Properties, + Acton resident

Clearly my husband and I feel design review is an essential part of the process of building. Our town is losing value as we continue to fill in every nook and cranny and build block style homes that come right up to the sidewalk...

Thoughtful and well planned design enhances not only the character of a single development, but contributes to the quality of life and the character of a town... The value of a town both aesthetically and in terms of property value is determined not only on schools or per capita income, but also on how it feels to drive through that town. Is it appealing, does it draw you in and make you want to stop or look around?

I hope that the Design Review Board will become an essential part of our town's growth and development. High taxes are difficult, but worth it if the town incorporates services like design review and more thoughtful planning.

- Acton homeowner + long-time resident

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