



TOWN OF
SOUTH HADLEY
MASSACHUSETTS



BUS A-1 DESIGN GUIDELINES

MAY 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PLANNING BOARD

Diane Supczak-Mulvaney, Board Chair

Nate Therien, Board Vice-Chair

Brad Hutchison, Board Clerk

Rob Watchilla, Board member

Robert Sklarz, Board Member

John Parenteau, Associate Board Member

TOWN STAFF

Anne Capra, Director of Planning and Conservation

Colleen Canning, Planning/ Conservation Coordinator

CONTENT

- 1** INTRODUCTION.....04
- 2** APPLICABILITY.....05
- 3** CONTEXT.....06
- 4** MIXED USE.....07
 - TRANSITION ZONE.....09
 - SITE DESIGN.....12
 - BUILDING DESIGN.....19

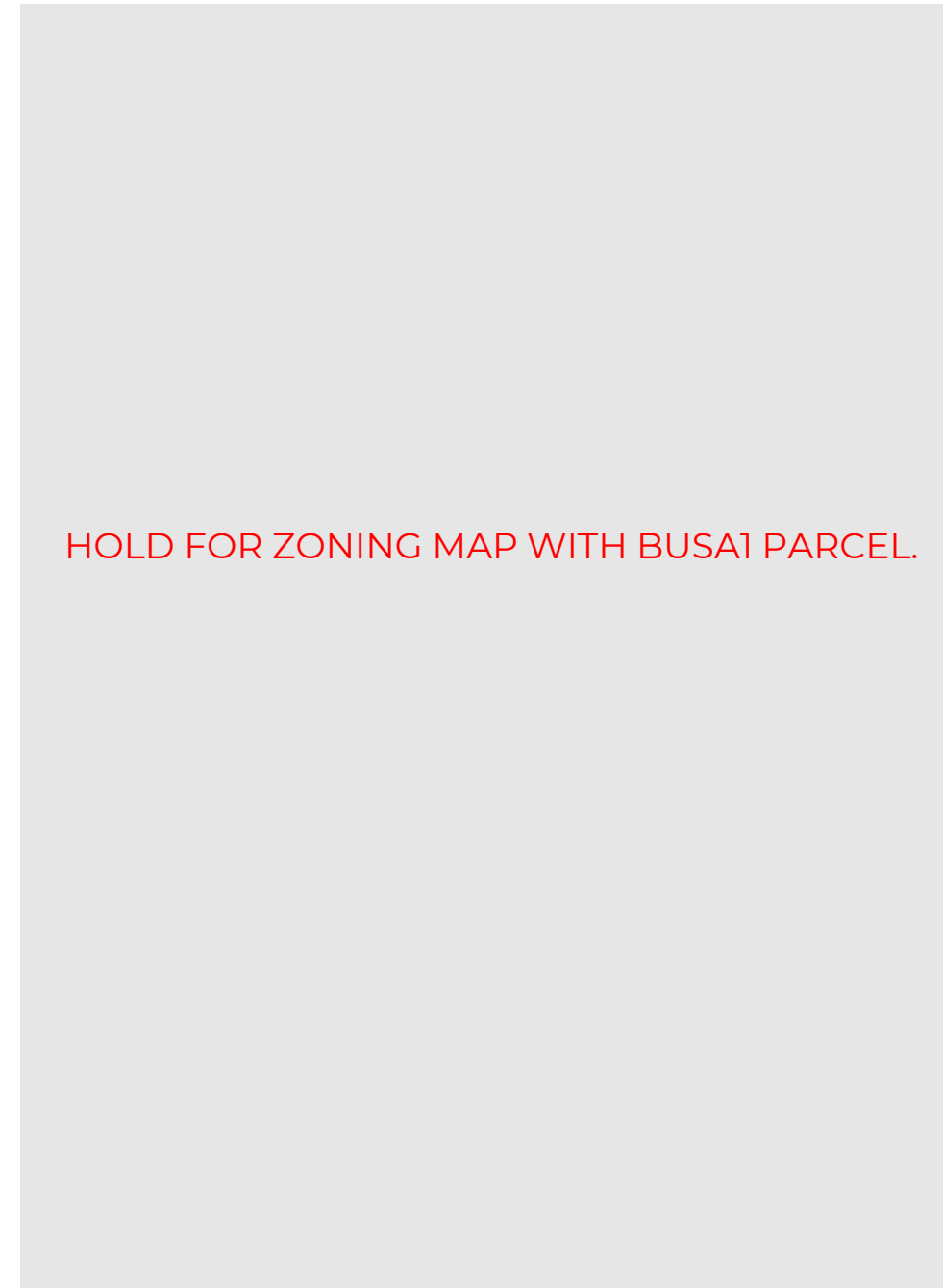
1

INTRODUCTION

The Business A-1 (BUS A-1) District in South Hadley is strategically designated to foster vibrant commercial development that complements the town’s character while minimizing adverse impacts on adjacent residential neighborhoods and local roadways.

This district aims to encourage a mix of commercial activities serving local residents and visitors, promoting economic vitality within a context-sensitive framework.

The design guidelines outlined in this document provide a structured approach to achieving these objectives, ensuring that new developments and redevelopments contribute positively to the district’s functionality and aesthetic appeal.



Source:

2

APPLICABILITY

These design guidelines apply to all new construction, substantial renovations, and redevelopment projects within the BUS A-1 zoning district. They are intended to guide property owners, developers, architects, and planners in aligning their projects with the town's vision for the district. Compliance with these design guidelines is recommended for all applicable projects and will be considered during the town's review and approval processes.

3

CONTEXT

The BUSA-1 Zoning District was created with the following intention,

Business A-1 (General Business). The purpose of this district is to create vibrant commercial areas while minimizing impacts on roads and residential districts.

The purpose of the design guidelines for the BUS A-1 District is to support the development of active, attractive, and economically viable commercial areas that are well integrated with South Hadley's neighborhoods and transportation network.

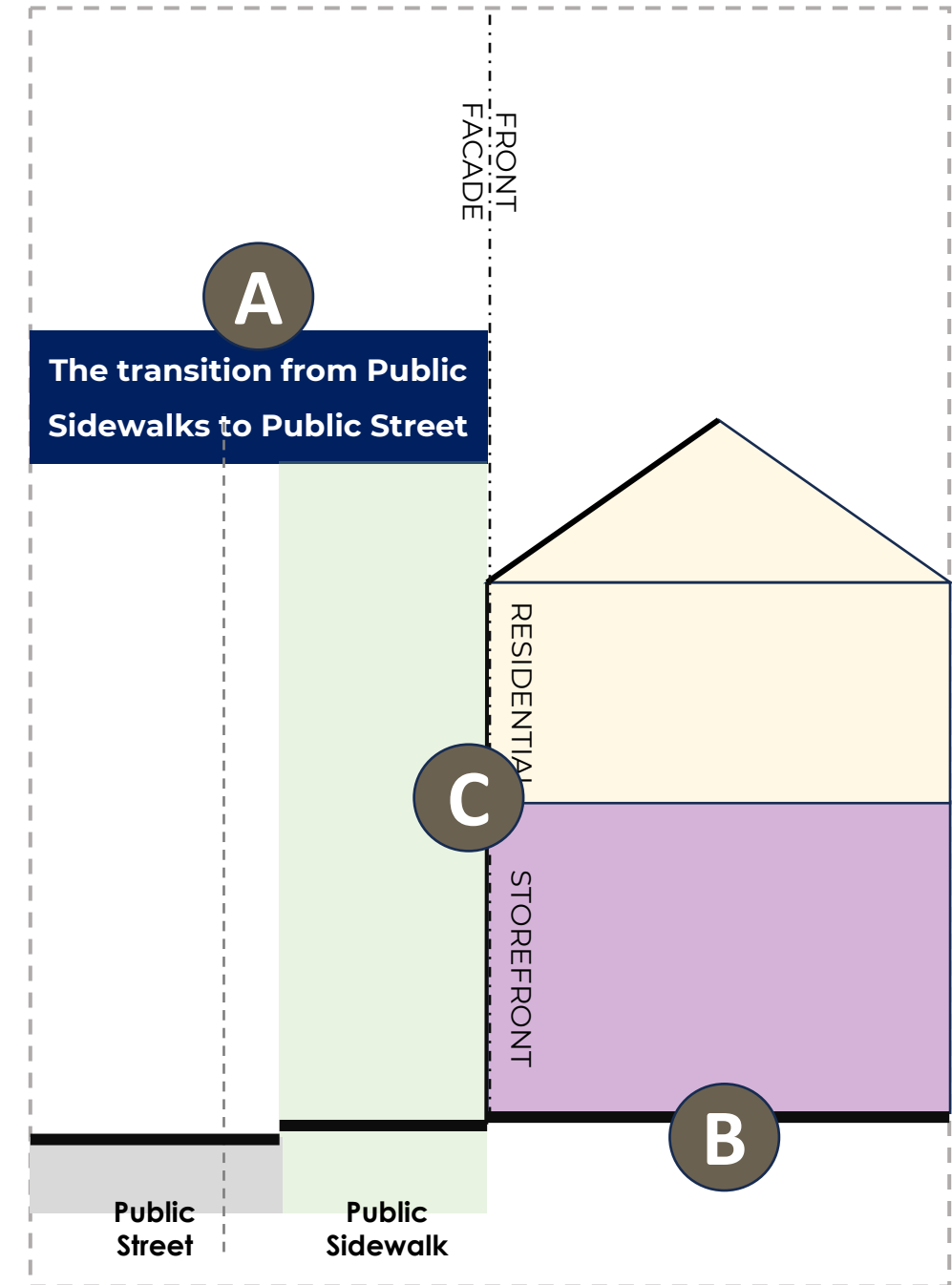
These guidelines are intended to help shape a district that offers useful services while minimizing disruptions to traffic flow, streetscape character, and quality of life in adjacent residential areas. They also seek to create public spaces and storefronts that feel welcoming to pedestrians, contribute to a sense of place, and foster a walkable, small-town atmosphere.

4

MIXED USES

Guidelines for mixed-use areas focus on the physical elements that shape how a place functions and feels – from the public street to the storefront and the residences above or around. These elements are organized into three interconnected categories:

- A. Transition Zone
- B. Site Design
- C. Building Design



4

MIXED USES



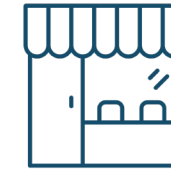
A. What is a Transition Zone?

The transition zone is the area between public streets/ sidewalks and private property, such as the building entrances. This space includes front yards, walkways, porches, fencing, landscaping, and other elements that mediate between public and private life. They serve as the setting for daily activities, interaction, and movement.



B. What is Site Design?

Site design refers to the layout and organization of a development within its parcel. This includes the placement of buildings, driveways, parking areas, lighting, signage, open spaces, and landscaping. Good site design promotes accessibility, safety, and visual coherence while respecting the surrounding context and natural features.



C. What is Building Design?

Building design encompasses the form, scale, massing, style, materials, and detailing of the structures. It addresses how buildings, entrances and storefronts relate to the street, to each other, and to the character of the district.

4

MIXED USES

A. Transition Zone

Use of Front Yard

ENCOURAGE

- Use of landscaping, planters, or seating to make the front yard feel welcoming to pedestrians.
- Design of clear, direct paths from the sidewalk to the building entrance.
- Include elements like low fences, porches, or stoops that mark transition from public to private.
- Keep views into storefronts or ground-floor uses open and inviting.

DISCOURAGE

- Tall fences, walls, or dense plantings that block views from the street.
- Parking, dumpsters or large utility boxes directly in the front yard.
- Unused grass areas that lack purpose or visual interest.
- Clutter, excessive signage, or unrelated elements that disrupt the space.



Planters and seating for a welcoming area.

Change of materials from walkways to places to stay.



Unscreened dumpsters creates an eyesore for pedestrians.

4

MIXED USES

A. Transition Zone

Tree Canopy

ENCOURAGE

- Street trees that provide shade for sidewalks and storefronts.
- Use of native or climate-appropriate species that are easy to maintain.
- Spacing diverse species of trees evenly to create a consistent, vibrant canopy along the street.
- Protect existing healthy trees during construction and site work.

DISCOURAGE

- Removal of mature trees unless absolutely necessary.
- Planting trees that are too small to provide meaningful shade.
- Blocking signs or windows with poorly placed tree plantings.
- Tree species that are invasive or prone to disease.

Trees with higher canopy provide shade to pedestrians but still provide visibility for storefronts.



Main Street, Stockbridge, MA

Crucial signs blocked by overgrown and poorly maintained foliage.



Sidewalks with no shade makes walking on a hot day difficult for pedestrians.

4

MIXED USES

A. Transition Zone

Connections

ENCOURAGE

- Wide, well-marked sidewalks that connect buildings, transit, and public spaces.
- Routes that are continuous, accessible, and free from obstruction.
- Clear signage, lighting, and crosswalks to guide pedestrians safely.
- Walkways to entrances, bike paths, and nearby neighborhoods.
- Shared driveways and rear lot access, including walkways, to serve as informal community connectors and gathering spots.

DISCOURAGE

- Gaps in sidewalks or paths that break the flow of pedestrian movement.
- Use of materials that are slippery, uneven, or difficult for strollers and wheelchairs.
- Placing driveways or loading zones where they disrupt pedestrian and bicycle routes.
- Blocking walkways with poles, signs, or street furniture.

Consistent material. Clearly defined edges and entrances to businesses distinctly identified.



Source: Ayers Associates

Broken sidewalk and unmarked curb cuts make an unsafe intersection between pedestrians and cars.



Overgrown edges narrow the width of the sidewalk, making it difficult for more than one person to walk.

4

MIXED USES

B. Site Design

Circulation and Access

ENCOURAGE

- Placing driveways on side streets or alleys to reduce traffic conflicts.
- Limit the number of curb cuts to make sidewalks safer and more continuous.
- Locating parking areas behind or beside buildings, not in front.
- Sharing driveways and parking lots between uses to reduce pavement and improve efficiency.

An example of an alley access community leads to pedestrian-focused networks in the front.



Source: Housing Design Matters

DISCOURAGE

- Wide or multiple driveways that interrupt pedestrian flow or streetscape.
- Off-street parking lots directly between the building and the street.
- Locating driveways too close to intersections or crosswalks.
- Using large, unshaded surface lots that dominate the site.

Discourage parking lots in the front. Parking lots should be placed behind the buildings.



4

MIXED USES

B. Site Design

Stormwater Management

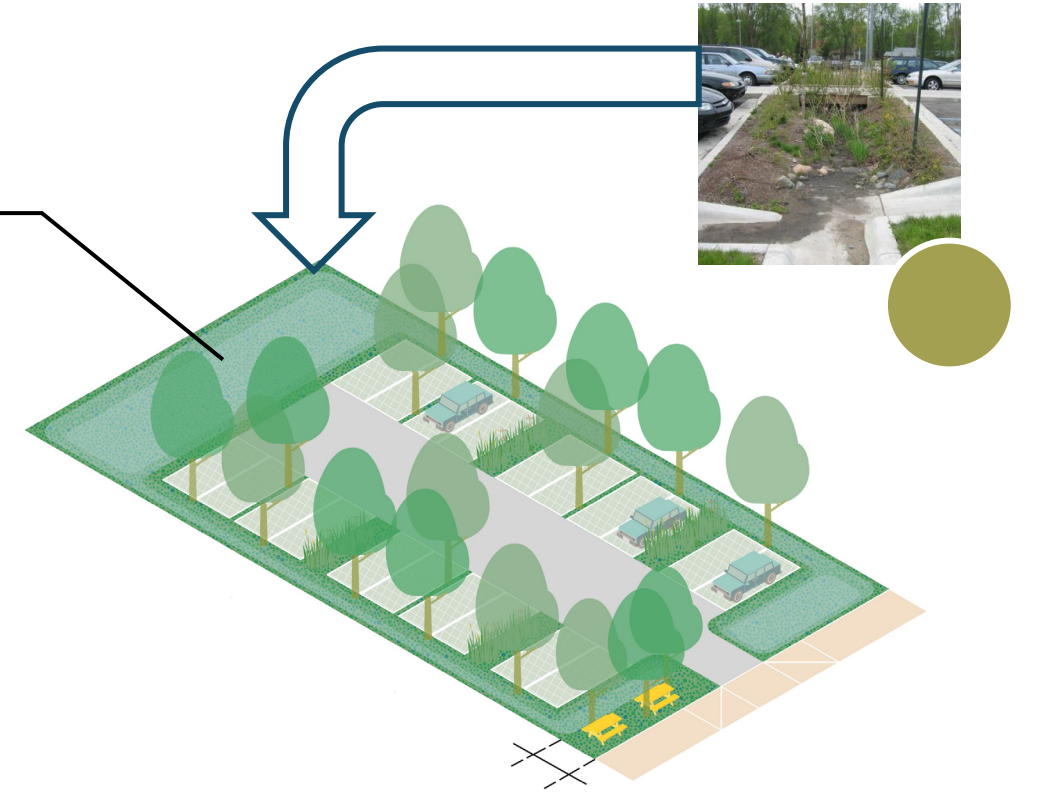
ENCOURAGE

- Use of rain gardens, swales, or permeable paving to reduce runoff.
- Incorporating green infrastructure that manages water close to where it falls.
- Design of drainage systems that also enhance landscaping and public space.
- Green roofs on mixed-use buildings to reduce runoff and insulate structures.

DISCOURAGE

- Directing stormwater into the street without treatment.
- Use of large areas of impervious pavement without any water capture.
- Neglecting drainage in areas prone to pooling or erosion.

Plan for incorporating green infrastructure.



Discourage large swathes of impervious surfaces.



4

MIXED USES

B. Site Design

Trash Management

ENCOURAGE

- Screen trash bins with fencing, walls, or landscaping with materials and designs that complement the building design.
- Locating bins away from public entrances and sidewalks.
- Separate areas for recycling and composting where possible.
- Combining trash cans for multiple tenants to help minimize visual and functional disruption.
- Enclosures to be covered and secured to control odor and pest issues.

DISCOURAGE

- Overflowing or poorly maintained trash cans.
- Blocking walkways or parking areas with waste containers.



Dumpster hidden from pedestrian view by hedges.



Unscreened dumpsters create an eyesore.

4

MIXED USES

B. Site Design

Mechanicals

ENCOURAGE

- Placing mechanical equipment in less visible locations like rooftops and rear yards. Roof mechanicals to be set back so they are not visible from the street.
- Screening ground-mounted equipment with walls, fencing, or planting.
- Use of consistent and compact utility enclosures that blend with the building.

DISCOURAGE

- Placing equipment directly on the front facades or near entrances.
- Noise or exhaust impacts on neighboring properties or public areas.



Source: RoofScreen Products



Source: Instructables

4

MIXED USES

B. Site Design

Lighting

ENCOURAGE

- Use of pedestrian scale lighting along walkways and entrances.
- Warm, low-glare fixtures that match the district's character.
- Lighting key areas for safety – like alleys, sidewalks, and parking – but avoid overlighting.
- Coordination of lighting with public realm elements to create cohesive zones.
- Motion sensors and timers to conserve energy and Dark Sky-approved fixtures reduce light pollution.

DISCOURAGE

- Use of harsh, overly bright, or mismatched lighting types.
- Light spill into neighboring homes or the night sky.
- Tall highway-style lights in walkable mixed-use areas.

Pedestrian Scale Lighting



Downward facing lights illuminate the storefront and reduce light pollution.

Harsh Lighting creates glare for residents.



Source: The Chestnut Hill Local

4

MIXED USES

B. Site Design

Signage

ENCOURAGE

- Use of signs that are scaled to pedestrians and complement the building design.
- Selection of materials and fonts that are clear, durable, and appropriate to the district.
- Integration of signs into storefronts or awnings without covering key features.
- Compliance with § 255-85 Signs regulations is required.

Well-lit signs are incorporated into the building design.



Signs that complement the building and are pedestrian-scaled.



DISCOURAGE

- Large, backlist box signs or those that block windows.
- Use of flashing or overly busy signs that distract from the streetscape.
- Placing too many signs on a single frontage.

Mismatched signs and styles create visual chaos.



4

MIXED USES

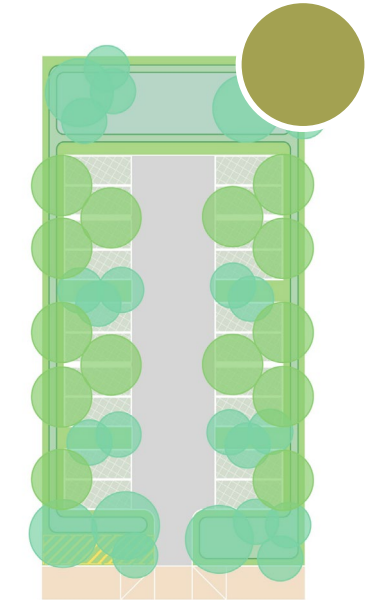
B. Site Design

Buffers

ENCOURAGE

- Use of landscaping, fencing, or changes in grade to buffer between uses.
- Green buffers around parking lots and loading areas.
- Buffers that are consistent with nearby development.

See-through fencing with hedges provides a buffer but allows for a comfortable pedestrian environment.



Source: University of Florida

DISCOURAGE

- Blank walls, large paved areas, or exposed service zones facing neighbors.
- Using only tall fences without greenery or design considerations.
- Placing uses that create noise vs. quiet uses side by side without visual and noise screening.

Long blank fence acts as a blank wall next to the sidewalks.



4

MIXED USES

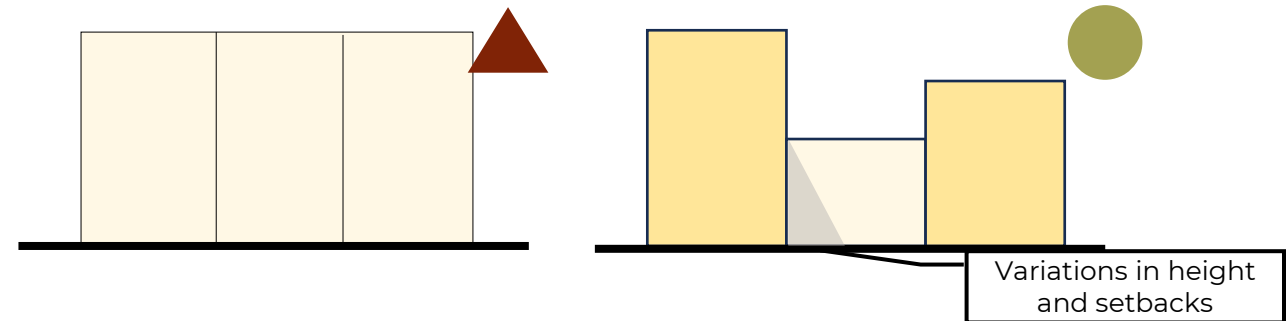
C. Building Design

Building Massing: Scale

ENCOURAGE

- Designing buildings to match the general height and bulk of neighboring structures.
- Stepping down of massing near residential edges or pedestrian spaces.
- Breaking of large buildings into smaller, human-scaled components.
- Use materials and detailing, such as cornices and sign bands, to reduce visual bulk.

Buildings step down near the sit-down area.



DISCOURAGE

- Oversize buildings that overpower the street or surroundings.
- Blank, flat walls with no visual break or articulation.
- One-size-fits-all box forms in areas with diverse building types and styles.

Oversized building with no break in massing overpowers the sidewalk.



4

MIXED USES

C. Building Design

Building Massing: Vertical and Horizontal elements

ENCOURAGE

- Use of vertical elements like pilasters or window bays to divide large facades.
- Placing awnings above windows or entrances to highlight storefronts and provide shelter.
- Use of a clearly defined base, middle, and top to organize the building visually.
- Design of sign bands to be consistent in height and placement across multiple storefronts.
- Strong corner treatments with architectural emphasis to highlight intersections or entries.

DISCOURAGE

- Long flat facades without any breaks or detailing.
- Placing sign bands that cut across architectural details or are oversized.

Window placement breaks the massing of the top floor.

Material changes between the lower and top floors and the difference between the size of windows provide visual relief.



A long façade with repetitive features creates visual exhaustion.

4

MIXED USES

C. Building Design

Building Massing: Roof Elements

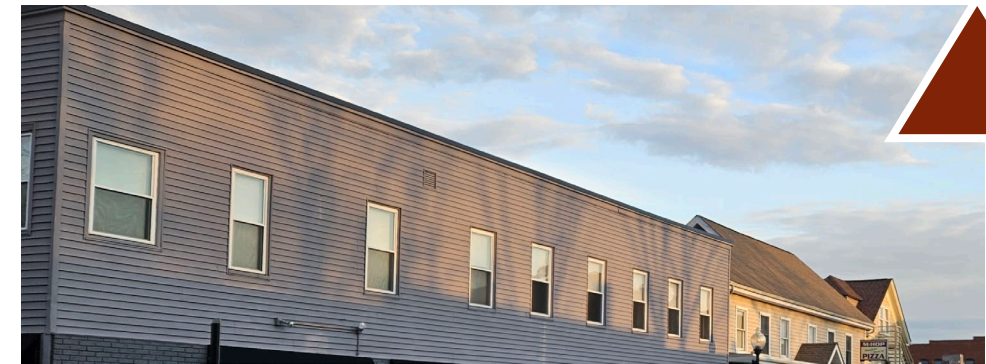
ENCOURAGE

- Roofs that reflect the character of the district such as pitched, gabled or shaped parapets.
- Use of rooflines to define building mass and add visual interest.
- Incorporation of elements like dormers, cornices or eaves when appropriate to soften transitions.
- Screening rooftop mechanicals so they're not visible from the street.
- Solar panels or green roof systems as amenities and sustainability for businesses and residents.

DISCOURAGE

- Flat roofs with no detailing or architectural treatment.
- Tall rooftop equipment without visual screening.
- Treatment of rooftops and rooflines as an afterthought to the overall design.

Variation in pitched roofs and the inclusion of dormers creates interest in the rooflines and fit in with residential neighborhoods.



Flat, unbroken rooflines lack visual interest and make buildings appear monotonous.



4

MIXED USES

C. Building Design

Building Massing: Pedestrian Pass throughs

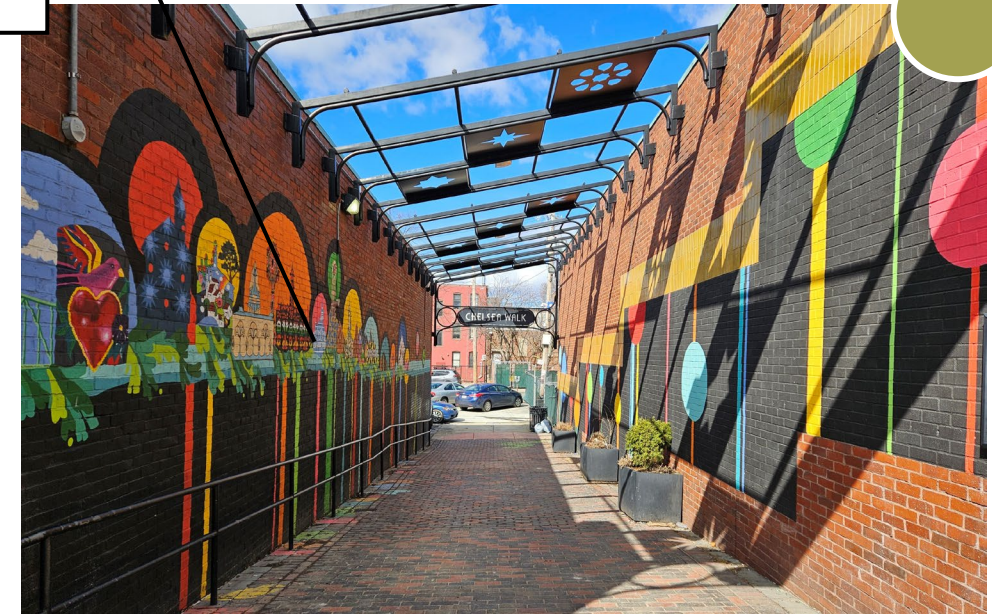
ENCOURAGE

- Mid block connections where lots are long or blocks are deep.
- Murals and public art to enhance the visual appeal and character of the connectors.
- Activations of pass-throughs with storefronts, entryways, and lighting to ensure comfort and visibility.
- Use of pass-throughs as opportunities for pocket plazas or shared outdoor space for residents and patrons.

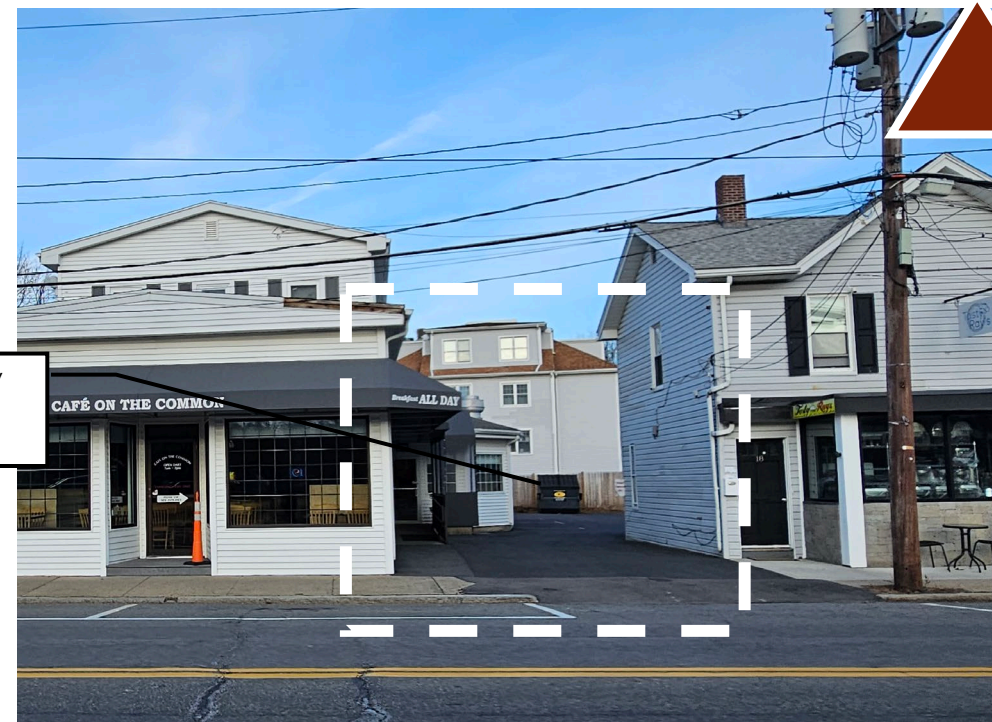
DISCOURAGE

- Service entries and loading access that open into the pedestrian passthrough.
- Dead-end corridors or uninviting cut-throughs with low visibility.
- Inconsistent paving.

Pedestrian pass-through enhanced with murals and pavilions.



A dead-end service alley opens up into the main street.



4

MIXED USES

C. Building Design

Façade Treatments

ENCOURAGE

- Different materials are used to separate the commercial base from the residential upper stories.
- Individual expressions in upper-level facades to reflect diverse residential living.
- Highly transparent and inviting ground floor facades and storefronts.

Different materials for commercials and residential uses.

Highly transparent ground floor storefront.



DISCOURAGE

- Low-quality materials that wear quickly or fade over time.
- Reliance on one material for the entire façade.

Faded and chipped materials can make a building appear poorly maintained and diminish its overall quality.



4

MIXED USES

C. Building Design

Windows and Doors

ENCOURAGE

- Placing doors and windows where they support visibility and activate the street.
- Use of clear transparent glass on ground floor commercial spaces.
- Alignment of windows and doors with the building structure and proportions.
- Main entrances to residential use is separate from commercial entries for privacy.

Clear transparent glass on the ground floor commercial enhances pedestrian experiences, contributing to an active, inviting streetscape.



DISCOURAGE

- Mirrored or blacked-out glass on street-facing windows.
- Mismatched window shapes and inconsistent door styles.

Commercial spaces lacking engaging elements appear inactive and unwelcoming.



