



TOWN OF
SOUTH HADLEY
MASSACHUSETTS



BUSINESS A-1 ZONING DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENTS

MAY 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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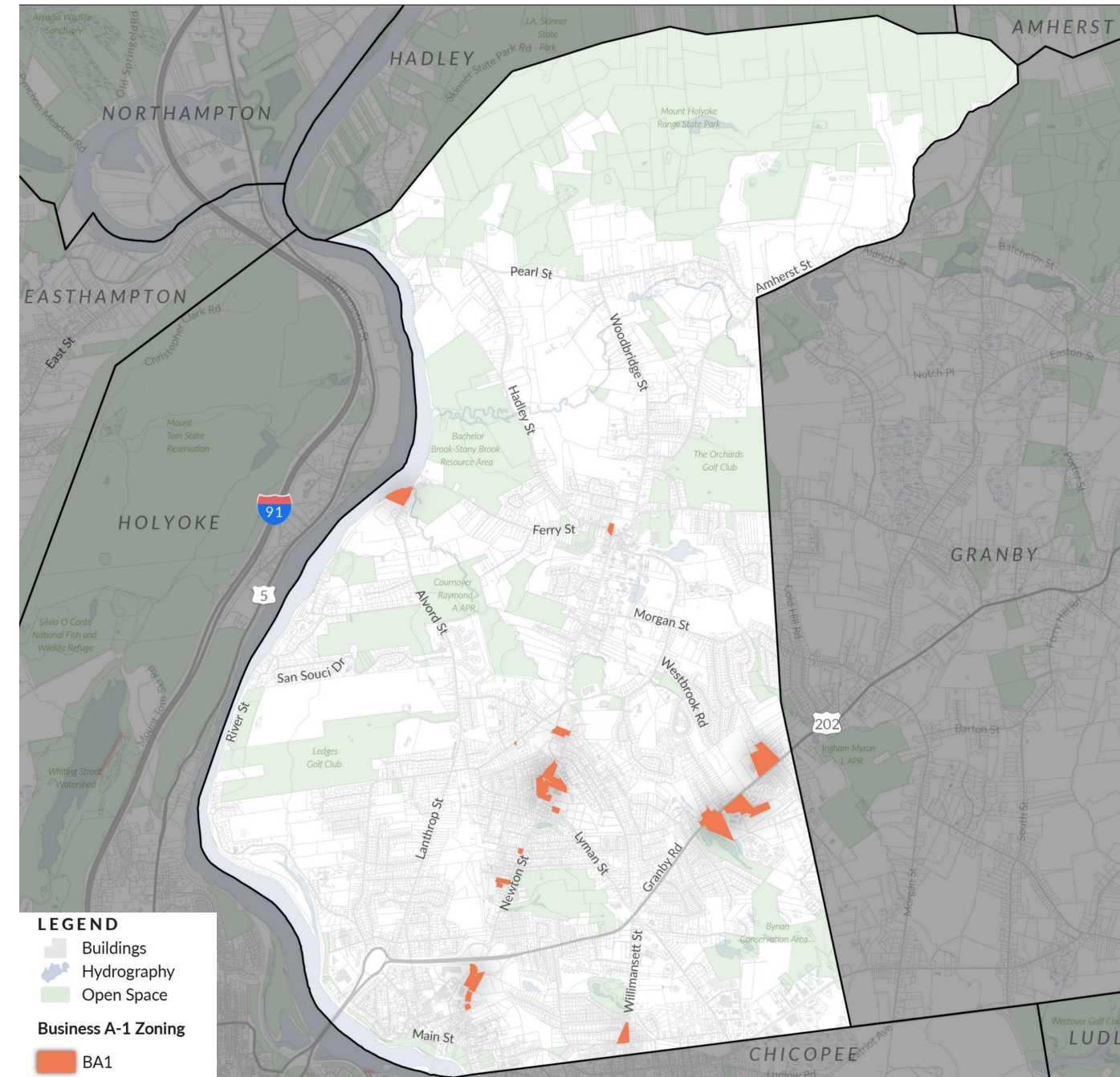


INTRODUCTION

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 zoning district encourages a mix of commercial activities serving 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.



Town of South Hadley – Extent, BUS A-1 Parcels
Image Credit: Innes Associates

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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.

** Substantial renovations will be as defined by the Stretch Energy Code codified as 780 CMR Appendix 115.AA.*

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CONTEXT

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

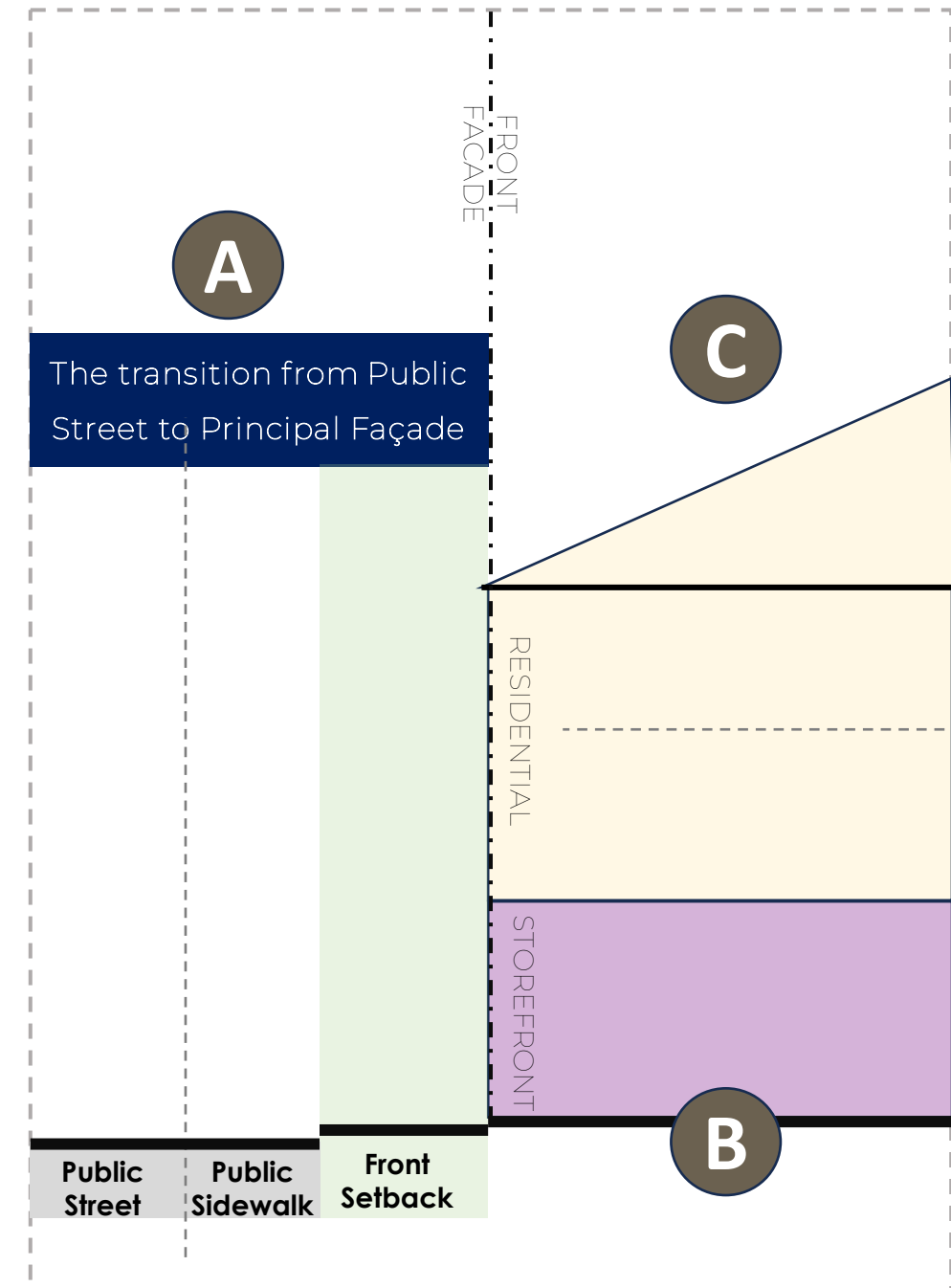
These guidelines are intended to help shape a district that offers useful services while minimizing disruptions to traffic flow, streetscape character, and quality of life in adjacent residential areas. They also seek to create public spaces and storefronts that feel welcoming to pedestrians, contribute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

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MIXED USE DEVELOPMENTS

Guidelines for mixed-use developments focus on the physical elements that shape how a place functions and feels, from the public street to the principal façade. The façade includes the commercial first-floor (which may include a storefront) and the residences on the upper floors or to the rear of the building. These elements are organized into three interconnected categories:

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



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MIXED USE DEVELOPMENTS



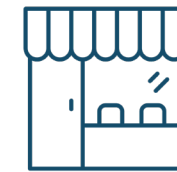
A. What is a Transition Zone?

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 the development program 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.

A. Transition Zone

Use of Front Yard

ENCOURAGE

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

DISCOURAGE

- Tall fences, walls, parked cars, or dense plantings that block views from the street.
- Parking, dumpsters, or large utility boxes directly in the front yard.
- Unconnected areas of grass 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.



Parked cars block the public sidewalk.

A. Transition Zone

Tree Canopy

ENCOURAGE

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

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



DISCOURAGE

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

Crucial signs blocked by overgrown and poorly maintained foliage.



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



A. Transition Zone

Connections

ENCOURAGE

- Design wide, well-marked sidewalks that connect buildings, transit, and public spaces.
- Add routes that are continuous, accessible, and free from obstruction.
- Install clear signage, lighting, and crosswalks to guide pedestrians safely.
- Add walkways that connect building entrances to bike paths and nearby neighborhoods.
- Prioritize 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.
- Materials that are slippery, uneven, or difficult for strollers and wheelchairs.
- Driveways or loading zones that disrupt pedestrian and bicycle routes.
- Walkways blocked by poles, signs, or street furniture.

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



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.

B. Site Design

Circulation and Access

ENCOURAGE

- Place driveway entrances on side streets or alleys to reduce traffic conflicts.
- Limit the number of curb cuts to a single access point wherever possible to enhance pedestrian safety, ensure a continuous sidewalk experience, streamline traffic circulation, reduce traffic backups, minimize excessive pavement, and support a more cohesive streetscape.
- Extend the sidewalk across the driveway using the same material and grade.
- Locate parking areas behind or beside buildings, not in front.
- Share driveways and parking lots between uses to reduce pavement and improve efficiency.
- Place mixed-use buildings close to the street, using the minimum setback where feasible to enhance walkability and prevent undefined or inactive front spaces.

DISCOURAGE

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

Businesses with alley or side parking show how moving driveways/ circulation off the primary street makes pedestrians safer and more welcoming.



Yellow arrows indicate entrances to back alleys for parking.



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

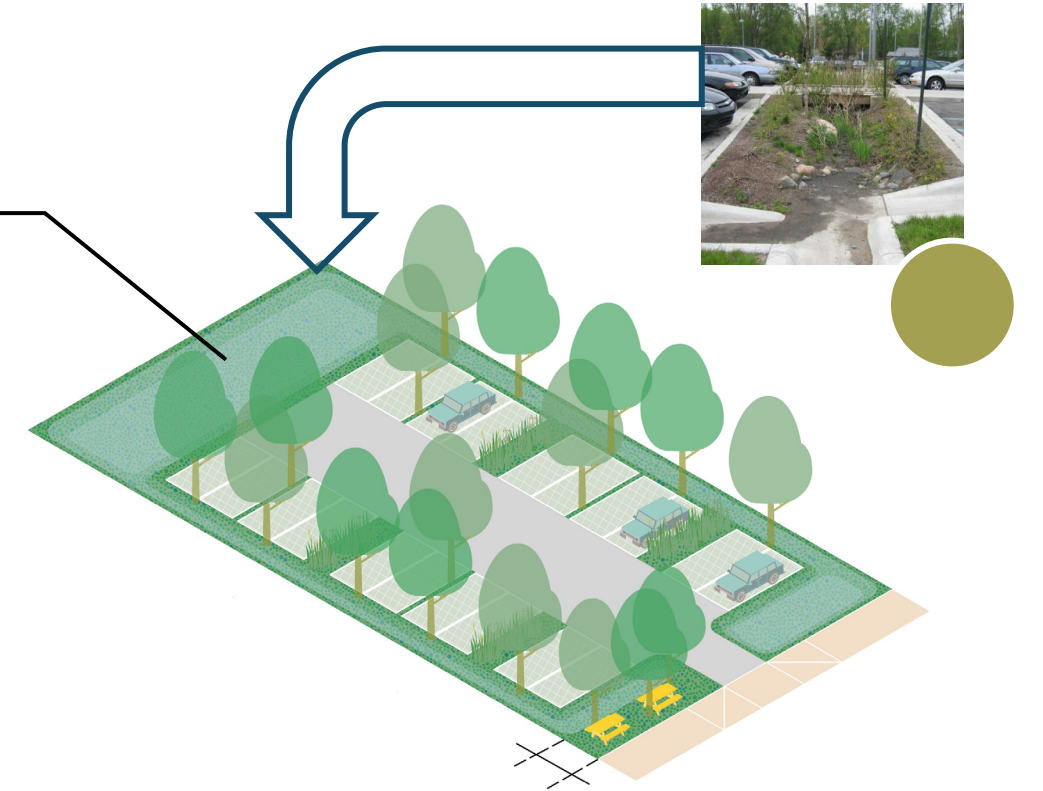
B. Site Design

Stormwater Management

ENCOURAGE

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

Plan for incorporating green infrastructure.



DISCOURAGE

- Direct stormwater run-off into the street without treatment.
- Large areas of impervious pavement without any stormwater capture, treatment and infiltration.
- Neglecting drainage in areas prone to pooling or erosion.

Discourage large swaths of impervious surfaces.



B. Site Design

Trash Management

ENCOURAGE

- Screen trash bins with fencing, walls, or landscaping with materials and designs that complement the building design.
- Locate bins away from public entrances and sidewalks.
- Create separate areas for recycling and composting where possible.
- Combine trash cans for multiple tenants to help minimize visual and functional disruption.
- Cover and secure enclosures to control odor, pest issues, and wind-blown dispersal of trash.

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.

B. Site Design

Mechanicals

ENCOURAGE

- Place mechanical equipment in less visible locations like rooftops and rear yards. Add screening or set roof mechanicals back so they are not visible from the street.
- Screen ground-mounted equipment with walls, fencing, or plantings.
- Use 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.

Screened rooftop mechanicals not visible from the street.



Screening is incorporated into the design of the façade.



Exposed mechanicals clutter the façade and do not address noise from operations.



B. Site Design

Lighting

ENCOURAGE

- Use pedestrian-scale lighting along walkways and entrances.
- Add warm, low-glare fixtures that match the district's character.
- Light key areas for safety, like alleys, sidewalks, and parking, with the minimum amount of light required.
- Coordinate lighting with public realm elements to create cohesive zones.
- Use motion sensors and timers to conserve energy and Dark Sky-approved fixtures to reduce light pollution.

DISCOURAGE

- Harsh, overly bright, or mismatched lighting types.
- Light-spill or glare 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.



B. Site Design

Signage

ENCOURAGE

- Use signs that are scaled to pedestrians and complement the building design.
- Select materials and fonts that are clear, durable, and appropriate to the district.
- Integrate signs into storefronts or awnings without covering key features.
- Compliance with Zoning Bylaw 255-85 is required.

DISCOURAGE

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

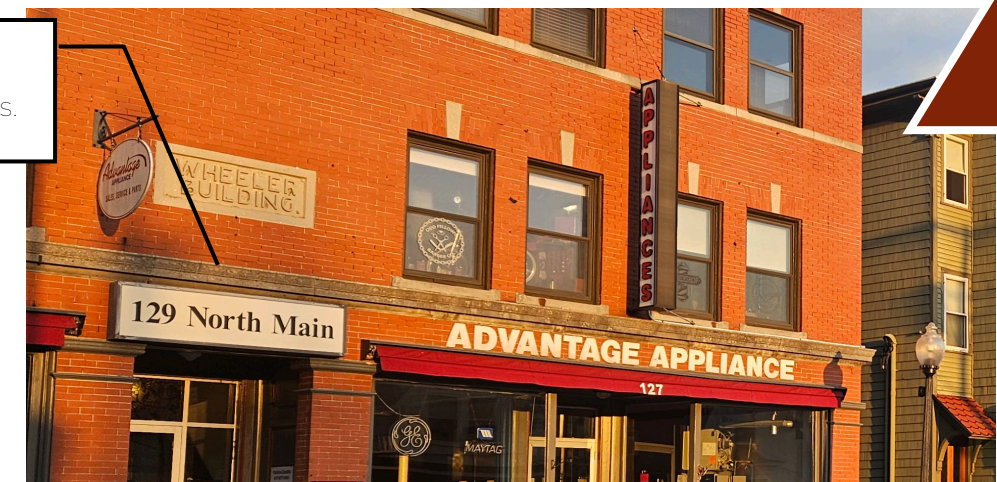
Well-lit signs are incorporated into the building design.



Signs that complement the building and are pedestrian-scaled.



Mismatched signs and styles create visual chaos.



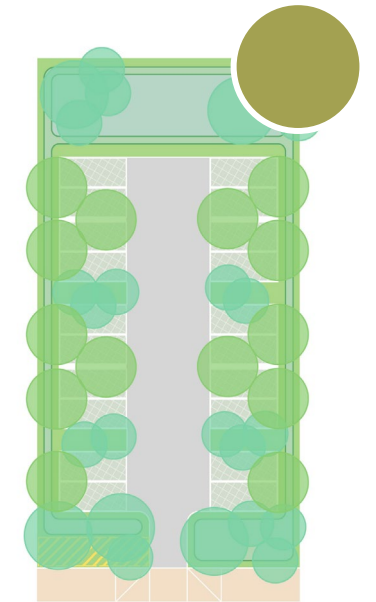
B. Site Design

Buffers

● ENCOURAGE

- Use landscaping, fencing, or changes in grade to create buffers between uses.
- Add vegetated buffers around parking lots and loading areas.
- Buffers that are consistent with nearby development.
- Use native or adapted, non-invasive species.

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



▲ DISCOURAGE

- Blank walls, large paved areas, or exposed service zones facing neighbors.
- Using only tall fences without greenery or design considerations.
- Placing uses with different noise levels adjacent to each other without visual and noise screening.
- Installation of plants on the Massachusetts Prohibited Plant List.

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



C. Building Design

Building Massing: Scale

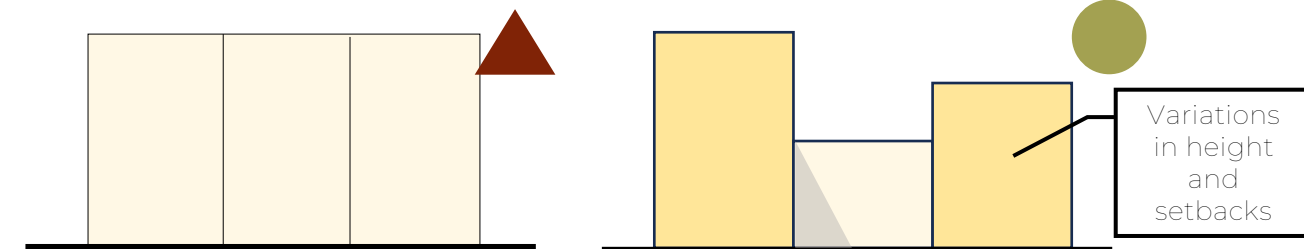
ENCOURAGE

- Design buildings to be compatible with the general height and bulk of neighboring structures.
- Step down the height and massing near residential edges or pedestrian spaces.
- Break large buildings into smaller, human-scaled components, using façade articulation (either setting back or bringing forward the façade from the main plane).
- Use materials and detailing, such as cornices and sign bands, to reduce visual bulk.

DISCOURAGE

- Oversize buildings that dominate 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.

Buildings step down near the sit-down area.



Variations in height and setbacks

Oversized building with no break in massing overpowers the sidewalk.



C. Building Design

Building Massing: Vertical and Horizontal Elements

ENCOURAGE

- Use vertical elements like pilasters or window bays to divide large facades.
- Place awnings above windows or entrances (and between architectural elements such as pilasters) to highlight storefronts and provide shelter.
- Use a clearly defined base, middle, and top to organize the building visually.
- Use a similar three-part scheme for ground-floor storefront or lobby entrances.
- Design sign bands to be consistent in height and placement across multiple storefronts.
- Add 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 otherwise oversized relative to the façade.

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.

C. Building Design

Building Massing: Roof Elements

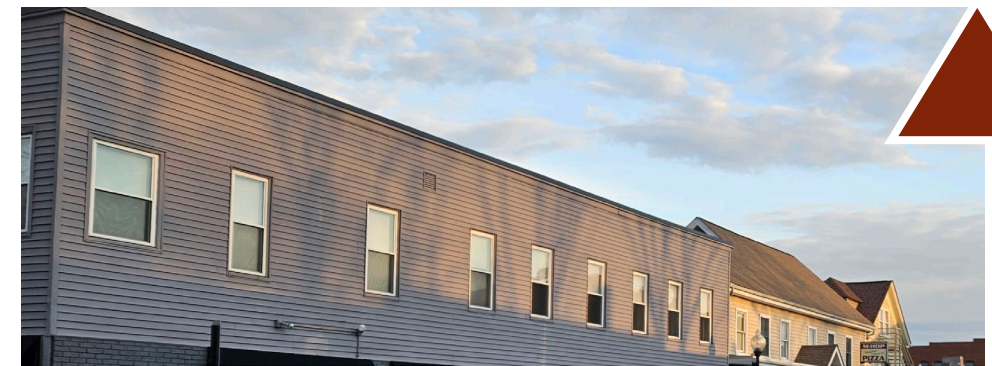
ENCOURAGE

- Design roofs that reflect the character of the district, such as pitched, gabled, or shaped parapets.
- Use rooflines to define building mass and add visual interest.
- Incorporate elements like dormers, cornices, or eaves when appropriate to soften transitions.
- Screen rooftop mechanicals so they are not visible from the street or public way.
- Install solar panels or green roof systems as amenities and sustainability for businesses and residents.

DISCOURAGE

- Flat roofs with no detailing or architectural treatment.
- 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.

C. Building Design

Building Massing: Pedestrian Pass-throughs

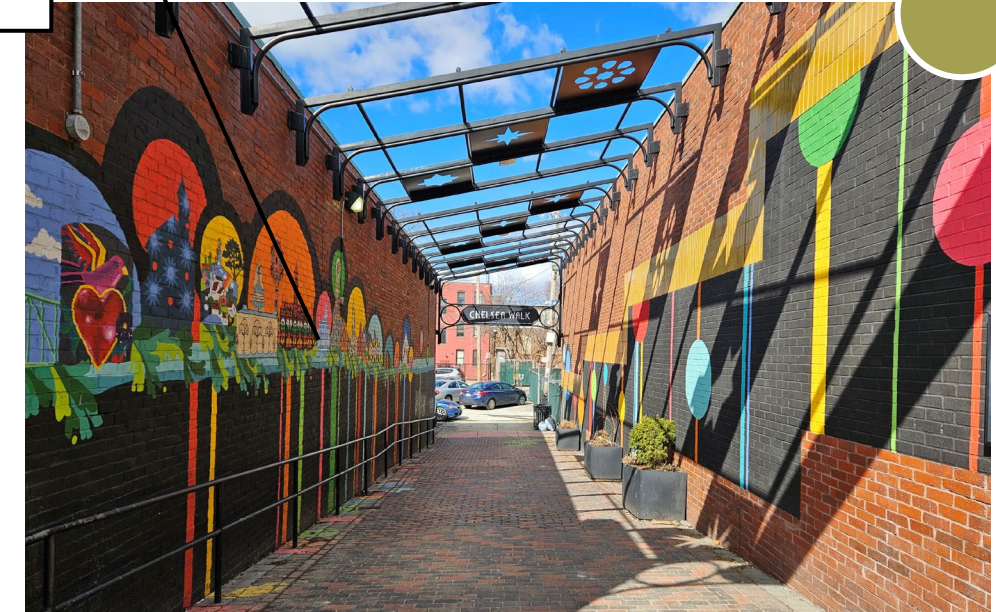
ENCOURAGE

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

DISCOURAGE

- Service entries and loading access that open into the pedestrian pass-through.
- Dead-end corridors or uninviting cut-throughs with low visibility.
- Inconsistent paving materials between pass-through and other connections.

Pedestrian pass-through is enhanced with murals and pavilions, creating a vibrant space for pedestrians..



A dead-end service alley opens onto the main street, causing confusion about the appropriate use of the space.



C. Building Design

Façade Treatments

● ENCOURAGE

- Use different materials to distinguish the commercial base from the residential upper stories.
- Use windows and architectural details on the upper-level facades to reflect the residential use.
- Create highly transparent and inviting ground floor facades and storefronts.

Different materials for commercial 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.



C. Building Design

Windows and Doors

ENCOURAGE

- Place doors and windows where they support visibility and activate the street.
- Use clear transparent glass on ground-floor commercial spaces.
- Align windows and doors with the building structure and proportions.
- Separate the main entrance to residential use from commercial entries for privacy.

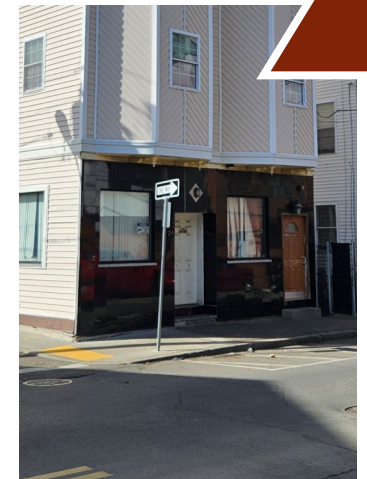
Clear transparent glass on the ground floor commercial enhances pedestrian experiences, contributing to an active, inviting streetscape.



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.



SOURCES

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