

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 19th-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

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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.

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.



E. Acton

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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



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