



DESIGN GUIDELINES

Town of Hamilton, MA
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I. PURPOSE

The goal of these guidelines is to improve the design quality in Hamilton's business district, helping to attract customers to the area and encourage economic revitalization.

Architecture and planning can either enhance or undermine the quality of life. Well-designed buildings in well-planned communities can bring people together and make life better. Alternatively, bad architecture in a poorly planned place can separate people and make life less attractive.

This guide does not dictate rules, such as a building's setbacks or heights, which are found in the local bylaws. Instead, it suggests the elements of what the town of Hamilton considers to be beautiful and functional design for the commercial area; and it illustrates these elements with images from the town and surrounding areas. The intent is to inspire and guide the design of future buildings in Hamilton.

The goals of these guidelines are:

1. Preserve and enhance the New England character of Hamilton's commercial centers and thoroughfares.
 2. Promote attractive development of commercial areas.
 3. Streamline the approval process for commercial development.
 4. Relate commercial properties both visually and physically to surrounding land uses.
 5. Facilitate a more walkable and healthier suburban atmosphere that integrates the needs of pedestrians with those of drivers.
 6. Protect property values by enhancing the town's appearance.
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II. ELEMENTS

The top ten elements for successful, pedestrian-friendly commercial buildings in Hamilton are:

1. A modest building scale.
 2. An orientation toward the street with maximum frontage on the street.
 3. Close proximity to the street.
 4. Parking behind the buildings.
 5. A place for pedestrian amenities such as plazas and benches.
 6. Big windows on the ground floor with no blank walls.
 7. Articulated roof-scape.
 8. Use of natural materials such as wood, brick or stone.
 9. Camouflaged large parking areas, storage areas and mechanical equipment.
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III. DESIGN GUIDELINES

Design, Massing, Scale and Proportions

- ≈ Building design should incorporate features that add *visual interest* to the building while reducing the appearance of bulk or mass. Buildings should avoid long, monotonous, uninterrupted walls or roofs on their visible facades. They also should avoid long expanses of repetitive architectural elements. Whether symmetrical or asymmetrical, the buildings' facades should be *balanced in their composition*.
- ≈ With the objective of maintaining a small-town character, buildings should appear to be *modest in scale*, relating to the scale of the immediate surroundings. The massing of larger commercial buildings should be deemphasized by the use of projecting and recessed sections to reduce their apparent overall bulk. New buildings should not exceed the average height of existing buildings on abutting properties and the general area; however, greater distances between buildings may allow for larger distances in height.
- ≈ Reduce the apparent scale of the building by introducing small-scale *architectural features*; creating an irregular, albeit balanced, footprint and breaking the roof-scape with dormers, gables or changes in roof direction (see **Roof Types** below). Use architectural elements like openings, sills, shutters, chimneys, columns, and other features to establish human scale at the street level (see **Architectural Style and Detail** below).



- **Figure 1:** Example of active retail block that is visually interesting, balanced, modest in scale and with many architectural elements



- **Figure 2:** Example of active retail block that is visually interesting, balanced, modest in scale and with many architectural elements



- **Figure 3:** Example of visual interest while reducing the appearance of bulk with extended gable additions.



- **Figure 4:** Example of existing building designs along Willow Street abutting single family residential.



- **Figure 5:** Example of existing building designs.



● **Figure 6:** Example of existing building design with towers, gable ends and hip roof.



● **Figure 7:** Example of inappropriate design with scale and proportions of trim, roof line, entry door and building height to width.



● **Figure 8:** Example of inappropriate design with scale and proportions of trim, roof line, entry door and building height to width.

Architectural Style and Detail

- ≈ Buildings may be either traditional in their architectural character or a contemporary expression of traditional styles and forms.
- ≈ Buildings should articulate the line between the ground and upper levels with a cornice, canopy, balcony, arcade or other architectural features. The cornice and/or parapet is an area where architectural detail and materials are important, as they can add distinctiveness and visual emphasis to a building, but they should be consistent with the body of the design in scale and detail.
- ≈ The use of special architectural elements such as, but not limited to, towers and turrets, muntins and window shutters, chimneys and dormers, is encouraged at major street corners to accent structures and provide visual interest.



Figure 13: Visually appealing facade in Greek Revival architectural style



- Figure 9: Example of active retail block that is visually interesting, balanced, modest in scale and with many architectural elements



- **Figure 10:** Example of building design using trim boards, roof dormers, large expanses of glass on the pedestrian level, interesting roof line and a contemporary expression.



- **Figure 11:** Example of inappropriate architectural style with the combination of masonry and clapboard.



- **Figure 12:** Example of a business use in a residential style building.



- **Figure 13:** Example of building design using trim boards, roof dormers, large expanses of glass on the pedestrian level, interesting roof line and a contemporary expression.

Roof Types

- ≈ It is characteristic of traditional New England architecture that smaller-scaled structures have roofs that are *sloped* and *articulated* with dormers, chimneys, gables, cupolas, fascias, or other elements.
- ≈ Larger structures likewise can benefit from similar treatment that breaks up the massing into appropriately scaled elements.
- ≈ Avoid large flat-roofed areas, or conceal them behind parapets or sections of sloped roof. Flat parapet facades are not a preferred roof type.



Materials and Colors

- ≈ The Town strongly prefers authentic natural materials such as *wood, brick, and stone* for the exterior of structures and landscape features. Construct window frames, storefronts and public doorways of wood or aluminum where possible. Synthetic materials should be as close in appearance and detail to the natural material it simulates. Vinyl siding and fiber cement panels are discouraged.
- ≈ All sides of the building should use materials consistent with those on the front if visible from public streets or neighboring properties, and should be carefully designed with similar detailing, comparable quality, and compatible materials.



Storefronts

≈ Well-designed storefronts add vitality to the streetscape, encouraging pedestrian as well as vehicular 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.

Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19: Blank walls along pedestrian walkways are not a preferred storefront or business front.



Windows

- ≈ Fenestration (the arrangement of windows on a wall) should be architecturally related to the style, materials, colors, and details of the building. Windows and door openings should be proportioned so that verticals dominate horizontals. To the extent possible, upper-story windows should be double-hung type and vertically-aligned with the location of the windows and doors on the ground level, including storefront or display windows.
- ≈ Upper stories should incorporate window patterns and designs that are compatible with and complimentary to existing upper-story window patterns on the same block.
- ≈ First-floor window and display design should create a feeling of *transparency* on the ground floor of the building. This contributes to a sense of safety and is welcoming to pedestrians. The viewing zone of the first floor facade should be made up of approximately 75% transparent non-reflective glass. Window displays are encouraged, but visibility into the building from the sidewalk should be maintained.
- ≈ With the exception of retail storefronts, modestly scaled, vertically proportioned windows articulated with *muntings* (dividers of panes of glass) are most appropriate to the local building vernacular. *Shutters* are also an appropriate element to include on windows.



Figure 16: Vertically-aligned windows and entrances



Figure 18: Window with muntins



Figure 17: Window with shutters

Entrances

- ≈ Architectural detail should be incorporated into the ground-floor facade to create an easily identifiable and welcoming entrance. As one of the most important parts of the facade, the main entrance should be clearly identifiable. Doors and entryways should follow a traditional storefront design (usually recessed) and should be compatible with the architectural style of the structure. The entrances should also address the primary street or pedestrian pathway.
- ≈ When rear parking is provided, the provision of secondary *rear entrances* and pleasing rear facades is strongly encouraged. The design of the rear entrances and facades should be appropriately detailed to provide an attractive appearance, but should not be overly embellished to compete with the main storefront.
- ≈ Where a new building is to be located on a *corner*, each side visible from a street should be considered a primary storefront facade and incorporate these fenestration patterns, unless doing so would unduly obtrude into a primarily residential street.



Figure 19: Greek Revival entrance



Figure 20: Victorian Entrance



Figure 21: Corner building with attractive entrances and windows facing both streets

Awnings

- ≈ Awnings that are functional for shade and shelter are encouraged. These awnings should be made of canvass or a canvass-like material; should fit the shape and scale of the window or door that they are sheltering; and should be designed to be compatible with and complimentary to building signage and design. Awnings should break at the vertical divisions of the structure (i.e., the break between the display windows and the entrance).
- ≈ The color and pattern of awnings affect the entire building and therefore should be carefully chosen. A facade with minimal architectural detailing can be enhanced with bright colors and patterns, while a more decorated façade may be complemented with a plain, subtle shade. The shape of awnings should be designed to fit the building's architecture and relate to other awnings that exist along the street.



Other Elements that Add to New England Heritage

Shade Trees

The aesthetics and functions of shade trees are very important to Hamilton residents. Shade trees are large deciduous trees with spreading canopies, with the most popular being oaks, maples, ashes, elms, and lindens. In addition to aesthetic qualities and commercial appeal of these trees, they also have more practical benefits such as reducing heating and cooling costs, reducing heat reflected from paved areas, attracting and sustaining wildlife, converting carbon dioxide to oxygen, helping prevent soil erosion, increasing property value and much more. Therefore, preservation and protection of old shade trees as well as planting new ones is strongly encouraged.



Plantings/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, stone walls and other historic features where possible and minimize modifications to the natural topography of the site.



Lighting

The exterior lighting scheme is important to the success of a storefront design. Lighting that highlights the sign and display area is often more effective than general lighting of the entire store. When a larger building has a number of storefronts, exterior lighting should be coordinated. Energy efficient lighting is also encouraged. Hamilton encourages energy conservation through the use of energy-efficient bulbs and the elimination of 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.



Signage

In buildings with multiple storefronts, a coordinated approach to signage throughout the building is particularly important. Use signs of similar size, proportion, and materials on each store. Varying the color of individual signs can add variety. Signage should be appropriately scaled to the building or surface onto which it is placed, should not obscure important architectural features, and should be readable by both pedestrians and drivers approaching the site.

