

Commercial Development: Site Planning

The Green Valley Institute exists to help the communities and citizens of The Last Green Valley, also known as the Quinebaug-Shetucket National Heritage Corridor, sustain their environment and quality of life while growing their economics.

We are a non-regulatory organization dedicated to:

- Improving the knowledge base from which land use and natural resource decisions are made,
- Building local capacity to protect and manage natural resources as our region grows.

The GVI was created through a formal partnership of the Quinebaug-Shetucket National Heritage Corridor and the University of Connecticut's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Massachusetts' Cooperative Extension System and other partners.



Regulations and design standards for commercial development can enhance town character, create a sense of place and encourage economic development. This fact sheet is the second in a series on this topic. Other fact sheets in the series are an overview of commercial development, and individual fact sheets with suggested regulation standards for architecture, signage, lighting and landscaping. **Site Planning** defines the placement and relationship of elements such as access ways, parking, buildings, walkways and surroundings.

Overall Objectives for Site Planning

Proposed development should respect the uniqueness of each property, reinforce the town's character and sense of place and create an attractive, functional and safe environment that is beneficial both to the business and the community.



The development should incorporate safe connections to and from the street for vehicles as well as pedestrians, and encourage connections to abutting commercial development.

Abutting residential properties should be respected through sensitive site planning, buffering, and architectural designs.

Vehicular Circulation Standards

Minimize the number of access points, known as curb cuts, onto town and state roads for increased vehicular and pedestrian safety.

Combine entrances to other commercial properties whenever possible.

Separate vehicles from pedestrian areas to the greatest extent possible.

Use traffic calming techniques such as speed tables, raised crosswalks, curvilinear road alignment, on-street parking, street-side plantings, neck-downs and curbed islands.

Provide connections between parking lots and driveways on abutting commercial properties where feasible. Anticipate possible future connections to undeveloped properties and incorporate the opportunity for future connection into site plan.

Separate access drives to drive-throughs from pedestrian circulation to minimize conflicts. Use techniques to increase motorist awareness of pedestrians, such as lighting, raised crosswalks, changes in paving, signage or other devices.

Separate service drives from internal walkways, parking areas or other pedestrian areas by landscaped islands, grade changes or other devices.

Define circulation pattern with directional arrows, crosswalks,

and other ground markings using pavement paint or other suitable material to ensure safe circulation.

Parking Standards

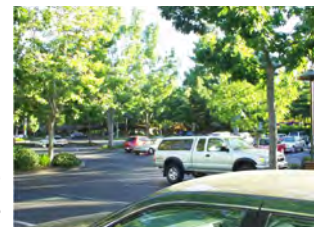
Locate the majority of the parking area at the rear or sides of the buildings whenever possible. If it is unavoidable that parking must be adjacent to a residential zone, screen with evergreen trees, earth berms, fences or shrubs.

Separate the pedestrian area near the building entry from the access and service drives.

Coordinate the parking with building entrances, lighting and landscaping.

Separate the paved surfaces of parking areas from all buildings by a minimum of an 8' wide landscaped area for every 10' in vertical building wall surface.

Reduce the visible scale of parking areas with landscaped islands and other appropriate features. Small parking areas (up to 39 spaces) should have 10% of the parking lot area as interior landscaped islands; larger areas, and those exposed to public view, should have 15% of the lot area landscaped.



Configure lot layout to facilitate safe vehicular movement throughout; provide sufficient turn-around for single entry lots.

Encourage shared parking, particularly where abutting land uses have differing hours of peak usage.

Provide for snow storage in the design of all parking areas to avoid conflicts with landscaping, visibility, drainage or pedestrian safety.



Break up the scale of large parking areas by incorporating out-parcels for smaller commercial buildings that share the parking area.

Pedestrian Circulation Standards

Locate walkways where motorists can anticipate pedestrians and react accordingly. Design walkways to give the pedestrian a full view of oncoming vehicles, with minimal interference from trees, shrubs and parked cars. Avoid walkways that cross drive-through lanes, access and service drives and other high-traffic routes.

Size the walkway width a minimum of five feet wide to allow two people to pass comfortably; additional width may be necessary in certain areas such as those with heavy pedestrian traffic or where cars overhang the walkway.

Align walkways within parking lots with the main entry or focal point on the building, whenever possible, to assist in wayfinding.



Landscape areas adjacent to walkways with trees, shrubs, benches, flower beds, ground covers, or other such material.

Delineate walkways that cross vehicular paths by a change in pavement texture, pattern or color to maximize pedestrian safety. Select the material for crosswalks to be highly durable and low maintenance, and to allow safe bicycle movement across the surface. Consider raised crosswalks at key locations as a traffic calming device and to make crosswalks more visible.

Provide continuous internal walkways/sidewalks to each customer entrance.

Avoid the sheet flow of stormwater across walkways; size the stormwater system to limit ponding and icing during winter for uninterrupted use of the walkway.

Design all walkways to facilitate maintenance by the property owner by coordinating the location of walkways with utilities, plantings, drainage and other site elements that could affect long-term maintenance.



Design building entrances to provide outdoor spaces for seating, displays and aesthetic enhancement to create a pedestrian friendly space.

Service Area Standards

Locate all facilities for service at the side or rear of the principal building; service areas include waste collection and storage facilities, loading and unloading areas, loading docks, storage facilities, dumpsters, recycling areas, fueling areas and vehicle service and maintenance areas. Avoid locations that face public roadways or abutting residential properties. Design building so overhead doors or other vehicle entrances or exits are not located on any façade that faces a public street or residential neighborhood.

Size the service area to fit the specific needs of the building's intended use; the smallest size to meet the building's future needs is encouraged.

Screen service areas to minimize visibility from public and private streets, main entrances, abutting neighborhoods, public open spaces and walkways.

Use architectural elements such as walls or fences for screening, enhance screening with evergreen trees, shrubs and earth berms.

Select building materials for screening that complement the design of the main structure by repetition of materials, detailing, scale and color. Use black coated chain link fencing, landscaped to screen from view, if required for safety.



Standards for Buffers and Screening

Select the proper type of buffer based on a thorough understanding of site conditions, distances to property lines, intensity of the proposed use and the degree of concern expressed by abutting landowners.

Design buffers and screening as an integral part of the site plan and coordinate with other elements used on the site. Use stone walls, plantings, fencing, walls, earth berms, and other screening elements that are similar in form, scale and appearance to other elements on the site.

Maintain buffers in a condition that assures their continued effectiveness.



Stormwater System Standards

Design the stormwater system as an integral and attractive component of the landscape; use an open stormwater system (as shown here) whenever possible.

Multiple-Building Development Standards

Design the entire site with a master plan that shows the general location of future buildings, parking lots, vehicular and pedestrian circulation, common open spaces, utilities, service areas, stormwater systems and other components of site development.

Coordinate the signage, lighting, site amenities, landscaping and architecture to unify the development.

Orient all buildings to create usable, safe and attractive pedestrian spaces, preserve significant site features and minimize the appearance of parking areas.

Incorporate outdoor use areas such as greens, plazas and courtyards, that are separated from vehicular traffic with landscaping, grade changes or other site feature, and part of an interconnected pedestrian circulation plan.

Additional Information:

Green Valley Institute: www.GreenValleyInstitute.org

Scarborough, ME Design Guidelines: www.scarborough.me.us/planning/pb/spguidelines.pdf



A publication of the Green Valley Institute.
Please contact us at 860-774-9600 to schedule a workshop on this topic.