

**TOWN OF READING
DOWNTOWN SMART GROWTH DISTRICT
DESIGN STANDARDS & GUIDELINES**



October 2, 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Purpose
3. Applicability
4. Definitions
5. Application Requirements
6. Guiding Principles
 - 6.1 Support Mixed Use Development
 - 6.2 Reinforce Broader Town Goals to Enliven Downtown
 - 6.3 Balance Unity and Variety and Create Legibility
 - 6.4 Protect and Preserve Critical Historic and Cultural Resources
 - 6.5 Promote Sustainable Development
7. Building Design Standards
 - 7.1 Massing
 - 7.2 Appearance
 - 7.3 Entries
 - 7.4 Fenestration
 - 7.5 Materials
8. Site Design Standards
 - 8.1 Sidewalks
 - 8.2 Driveways and Parking
 - 8.3 Landscaping
 - 8.4 Lighting
 - 8.5 Utility Areas and Utilities
 - 8.6 Drainage and Storm Water Management
9. Signage Design Standards

1. INTRODUCTION

These Design Standards and Guidelines complement the District By-Law and establish the design requirements for development within the Downtown Smart Growth District (DSGD).

2. PURPOSE

The Design Standards and Guidelines include both binding design standards for compliance and non-binding guiding principles. The Design Guidelines shall be used by the CPDC in their review and consideration of development proposals pursuant to the District By-Law.

3. APPLICABILITY

These Design Standards and Guidelines apply to all proposed development within the Downtown Smart Growth District that is subject to Plan Approval under the provisions of Section 4.12 of the Zoning By-Laws.

The CPDC, at its discretion, can approve minor deviations from the Design Standards if, in its opinion, such deviations contribute to the goals articulated in Section 6 more effectively than literal compliance with specific requirements. Applicants should clarify how proposed deviations further the goals of the Town as defined by the Guiding Principles.

These Design Standards do not exempt applicants from obtaining all required permits and complying with all applicable building codes, laws, and regulations in force.

4. DEFINITIONS

Definitions in Section 4.12.2 of the Town of Reading Zoning By-Laws apply to these Design Standards and Guidelines. Where referenced, the Primary Commercial Streets in the DSGD shall be Main Street, Haven Street and High Street.

5. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Application for development within the District shall comply with the application requirements set forth in the District By-Law and shall include all information noted below.

- a. Completed application form
- b. Development narrative including all uses, breakdown of square footage for each use, number of housing units and zoning summary.
- c. Locus map with lot identification

- d. Existing Site plan, including all existing structures, trees, topography, and easements, prepared by a licensed surveyor
- e. Certified list of abutters
- f. Photos of adjacent properties and other properties impacted by the development project
- g. Proposed site plan, indicating project boundaries, building footprints, on-site and remote parking areas (where applicable), and topography
- h. Building plans – all levels including roof
- i. Building elevations – all sides including courtyards and interior lot elevations
- j. Massing perspective sketches or renderings illustrating the key elements of the development proposal within its context
- k. Proposed exterior lighting plan with photometric information
- l. Proposed storm water management plan with rainwater calculations

The documents shall clearly differentiate between existing and proposed work by use of screened lines or color. Changes and revisions to subsequent submittals shall be prominently noted.

6. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

6.1 Support Mixed Use Development

Downtown Reading has historically contained a mix of uses: residential, office, retail, mass-transit, and governmental--that all contribute to the community center character. New mixed-use development should contribute to the overall mix of uses within the district to and support architectural design that marks Reading's identity. New residences, restaurants, and commercial development will bring people to downtown to shop, live, work, and engage in civic and cultural activities. Mix use development will add to the employment, residential, commercial and cultural opportunities and enrich the varied societal life of Downtown Reading. Together they create the livable and vibrant communities that the "Smart Growth" district is intended to promote. In the DSGD the Primary Commercial streets shall be Main, Haven, and High.

6.2 Reinforce Broader Town Goals to Enliven the Downtown

New development and adaptive reuse should enhance the character of downtown Reading and its community amenities, including sidewalks, crosswalks, street trees, lighting, and pedestrian oriented spaces, and it should use these improvements to make connections to open spaces, public buildings and public transportation.

6.3 Balance Unity and Variety and Create Legibility

These design standards are intended to ensure that new buildings are compatible with the existing town center. It is in the Town's interest to promote variety as well. The creative use of forms, materials and unique uses that give vitality to Reading's center is encouraged. Legibility of spaces is especially encouraged – a clear definition of public, semi-public, semi private, and private zones; residential, retail, commercial and public uses; usable open spaces and enclosed building volumes; and vehicular and pedestrian areas.

6.4 Protect and Preserve Historic and Cultural Resources

New development should be compatible with nearby buildings and streetscape patterns. The adaptive reuse of historic buildings is encouraged. New construction should respect the patterns of New England Village construction that have and continue to define the downtown area, including reinforcing the street line by moving the buildings next to the sidewalk in commercial areas, creating an intimately scaled rhythm of façade features.

6.5 Promote Sustainable Development

. Sustainable construction techniques and materials should be incorporated in new construction in the District. Renovation of existing buildings should seek to improve energy efficiency within the building. Water conservation and energy efficiency should be a central goal in the selection of building components and building systems.

7. BUILDING DESIGN STANDARDS

7.1 Massing

7.1.1 Front Façade Setback

A minimum of 60% of front facades at ground level shall be located at the minimum setback line to reinforce the street line. When the space between the façade and setback line is specifically designed for pedestrian uses, such as outdoor dining, the maximum setback shall be permitted. Stepped back portions

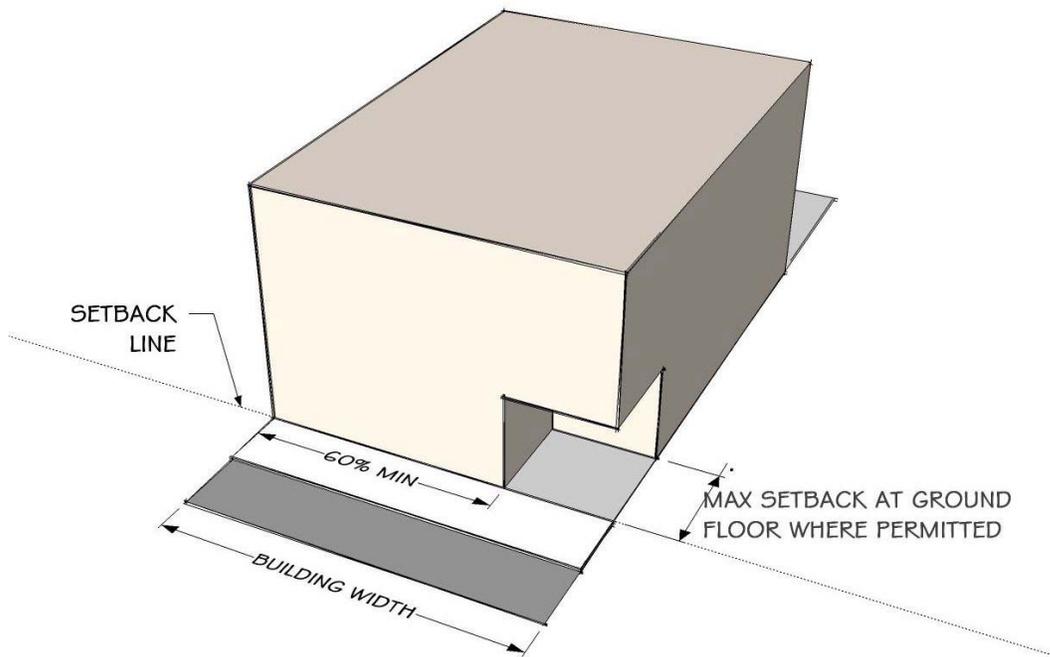


Figure 7.2.1 - Front Façade Setback

of the front façade at ground level are encouraged to articulate entries and provide variety.

7.1.2 Building Step-Back Requirements

The front and rear facades of four story buildings shall step back a minimum of

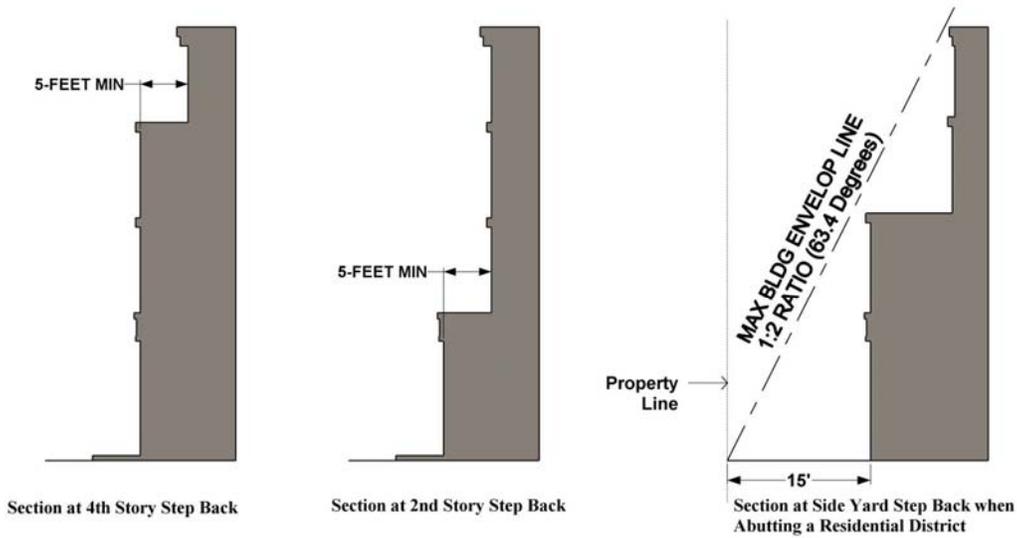


Figure 7.2.2 - Facade Step Back

five (5) feet from the primary building face at either the second or fourth floor levels over 50% of their length, or offer alternative strategies for scaling the building height to the pedestrian must be offered.. Where buildings abut a residential district, the side yard step-back shall be such that the maximum building envelope is bounded by a line projected from the property line at a 1 to 2 ratio (63.4°)

7.1.3 Mixed use buildings shall use proportions – a dominant horizontality for commercial, and a dominant verticality for residential – to give legibility to building uses.

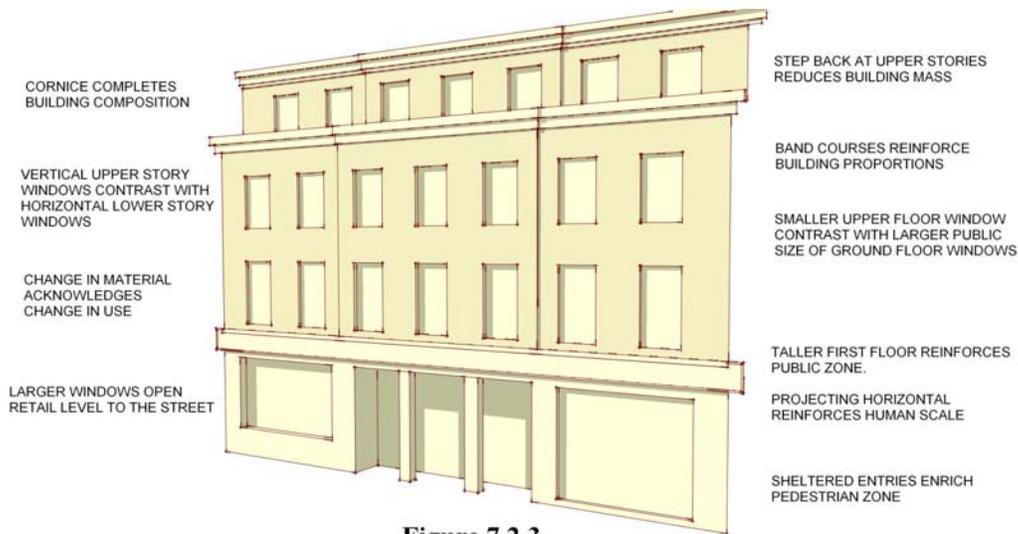


Figure 7.2.3

7.1.4 Special functions with public significance such as theaters, educational uses, and exhibitions spaces, shall be differentiated in form to articulate their role in the downtown environment.

7.2 Appearance

7.2.1 Projecting bays, recesses, and cornices are encouraged at all floor levels to define proportions noted above. Building façades over 40' in length are required to have a change in plane articulated by projecting or recessed bays, balconies, or setbacks.

7.2.2 Horizontal elements such as belt courses, projecting cornices, canopies, and step backs should be combined with vertical elements such as recesses, projecting bays, parapets and vertically aligned windows, to create facades that may evoke but do not imitate the historic buildings of Reading. Projected elements 2 feet and less may be located within the setback areas. Projections into the public right-of-way shall comply with the requirements of the Massachusetts State Building Code 780 CMR.

7.2.3 Façade elements shall continue around to all sides of buildings visible from the street. Elements can be simplified at the rear of buildings to clarify a front/back hierarchy.

7.2.4 Rooftop mechanical equipment shall be set back from building facades so that it is not visible from street views, screened from view behind parapets or enclosed within architectural elements that integrate it into the building design. Screening elements shall incorporate sound control devices or construction that mitigates equipment noise. Roofs shall not be visible from street views, except that mansard roofs may be used at the top floor of three or four story buildings. For any buildings, visible roofs shall not exceed walls in their respective visible

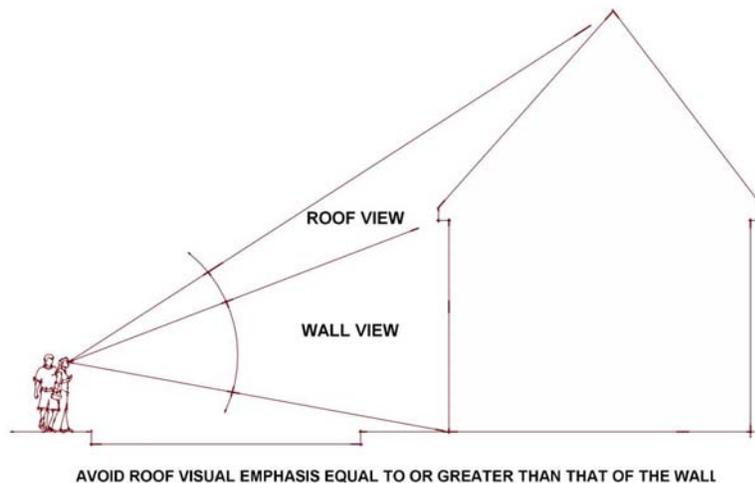


Figure 7.5.2

proportions from street views.

7.2.5 Existing building facades with architectural significance are to be incorporated into new construction wherever feasible. Protected buildings can be changed only with the approval of the Reading Historical Commission.

7.2.6 Franchise Architecture, distinctive building design that is trademarked or identified with a particular chain or corporation and is generic in nature, shall not be allowed in the DSGD: To maintain the unique character of Downtown Reading, buildings shall not be branded using an architectural style of a company. Franchises or national chains may adapt their architectural style to follow these Design Standards and Guidelines, to create a building that is compatible with Downtown Reading.

7.3 Entries

7.3.1 Entries are to be clearly articulated with projecting canopies or recesses for convenience, way-finding, and to activate the street front and pedestrian spaces. Residential and commercial entries shall be separated as required in the District By-Law.



ENTRANCES CLEARLY ARTICULATED AND DIFFERENTIATED

Figure 7.4.1

7.3.2 Retail and commercial entries will face a public sidewalk and are to be primarily transparent to reinforce the public nature of the ground floor uses, and they are to be flanked by primarily transparent façade elements to reinforce this perception.

7.3.3 Lighting and signage shall be integrated into the entry design to reinforce the public nature of the entry.

7.3.4 Entries to upper floor residential and commercial uses are encouraged on commercial streets, but shall not interrupt the perceived continuity of the commercial streetscape.

7.4 Fenestration

7.4.1 Fenestration shall reinforce the dominant horizontality for commercial uses and a dominant verticality for residential uses to give legibility to different uses.



Figure 7.5.1

7.4.2 Ground floor commercial and retail uses shall be a minimum of 60% glass. The view into the first floor commercial or retail windows shall be maintained with a view into the sales floor or seating area. View windows shall not be blocked. Merchandise displays shall not include full-height backdrops that block the view.

Transom windows above view windows and doors are encouraged. Upper floor residential and commercial uses shall have relatively less glass area to emphasize the public nature of the street-front uses. Glass shall be clear, or reflective only to the extent that such reflectivity reduces interior heat. Mirror glass is not permitted. No appliques or other such deliberate screening shall be permitted. Signage on

glass shall be as permitted in Section 9.

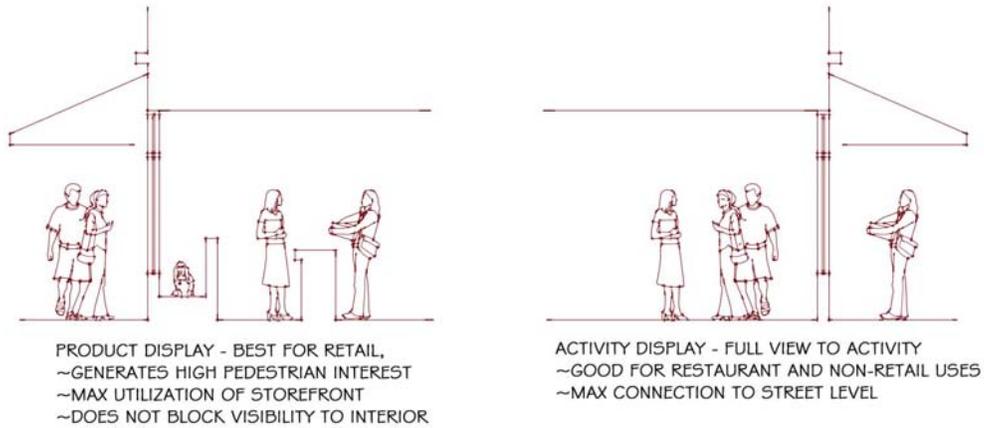


Figure 7.5.2

7.4.3 Protecting ground floor fenestration and defining commercial street fronts with overhanging awnings or canopies is encouraged. Operable windows and doors onto balconies and terraces at upper floor uses are encouraged.



Figure 7.5.3

7.5 Materials

7.5.1 Allowed exterior finishes include, but are not limited to brick, stone, cast stone or other finished masonry, cementitious panels, glass, metal, wood, and cellular PVC trim.

7.5.2 Prohibited materials include vinyl siding and EIFS, although these materials may be used on facades not visible from the primary commercial streets provided such materials are detailed and installed in such a manner as to be consistent with the intent of these Design Standards and Guidelines.

7.5.3 Changes in materials are encouraged to reinforce the massing requirements noted above. When change in material or colors occur, they shall articulate the difference between public and private uses, upper floors and lower floors.

7.5.4 Materials shall continue around to all sides of buildings, which are visible from the street or public parking areas. Elements can be simplified at the rear of buildings to clarify a front/back hierarchy

7.5.5 Blank facades are not permitted. Changes in material, which are accompanied by a change in plane, vertical and / or horizontal elements shall be used to provide a pedestrian scale in areas where windows and doors are not functionally required.

8. SITE DESIGN STANDARDS

8.1 Sidewalks

8.1.1 New sidewalks shall not interrupt the continuity of existing sidewalk materials and dimensions. However, recessed entries and widened sidewalks devoted to outdoor uses, such as dining, can receive special materials and articulation that give spatial definition to these functions.

8.1.2 Amenities that increase the comfort of pedestrian movement along sidewalks such as lighting, projecting canopies, and street trees are required.

8.1.3 Usable open spaces adjoining sidewalks that create activated pedestrian areas for dining, farmers markets, etc. , are encouraged, especially those in the vicinity of public uses such as the commuter rail station.

8.1.4 Improvements to adjacent crosswalks, curbing and sidewalks to accommodate increased pedestrian activity associated with new developments are encouraged.

8.2 Driveways and Parking

8.2.1 Driveways shall not interrupt the continuity of sidewalks and pedestrian spaces. Curb cuts shall be located away from the primary commercial streets whenever possible, preferably on side streets and alleys.

8.2.2 Parking lots shall not face primary commercial streets or be located in front of buildings. Whenever possible, parking areas should be located behind buildings.

8.2.3 Parking lots behind buildings shall be aggregated across property lines wherever possible to maximize the efficiency of the paved space and minimize the number of curb cuts and driveways.

8.2.4 Below grade parking is encouraged, especially where existing changes in grade make on-grade access possible while allowing economical structuring of buildings above. Ramping must be incorporated within the building envelope or below grade.

8.2.5 Parking areas that abut lots in residential districts shall be screened from view by fencing, planting or both and conform to landscaping requirements in paragraph 8.3, following.

8.2.6 Shared parking plans for proposed developments shall be developed in cooperation with the Town of Reading and shall be compatible with the Town's parking policy.

8.2.7 All parking areas and driveways must be designed to maximize pedestrian and vehicular safety. No driveways are to be located within 50' of an intersection.

8.3 Landscaping

8.3.1 Providing street trees that continue the planting plan established by the Town of Reading is encouraged.

8.3.2 Landscaping at retail frontages should be minimal and not interfere with the connection between the sidewalk and interior uses. Landscaping to define commercial entries or outdoor dining areas shall not interfere with the continuity of the sidewalks. Landscaping to define residential entries shall not compete with or overwhelm the continuity of the retail frontages.

8.3.3 Landscaping in parking areas is required – one tree in a minimum 50 square foot planting area for every 5 cars. Landscaping to buffer parking lots from adjoining residential areas is required.

8.3.4 Landscaping that creates usable public open space, or continues existing public open space, is encouraged, providing it does not interrupt the continuity of retail frontages or disengage buildings from the sidewalk in commercial areas.

8.3.5 Wherever possible plantings shall be native species that require minimal irrigation and fertilizer. Planting of invasive species is prohibited.

8.3.6 Healthy existing trees with a minimum 6" caliper and large canopy shall be identified and shall be identified on the Concept Plan if such plan is submitted as specified in 4.12.11.1 of the DSGD ordinance. Proposed development shall preserve four of the identified healthy existing trees per acre or one per lot, whichever is greater.

8.4 Lighting

8.4.1 Façade lighting and architectural lighting shall articulate building uses and entries and reinforce the public nature of the sidewalk and building frontage.

8.4.2 Lighting along street fronts shall reinforce rather than compete with the continuity of the Town's street lighting. If the sidewalk includes street trees, streetlights shall be located between the trees so that the tree canopy does not interfere with illumination coverage.

8.4.3 Lighting in parking areas and at the side and rear of buildings abutting adjoining properties should be designed to cut off light at the property line.

8.4.4 Lighting should contribute to public safety by lighting entries, exits, and adjacent open spaces.

8.4.5 Lighting incorporated into signage, or illuminating signage, must conform with sign requirements of the Zoning Bylaws of the Town of Reading in effect as of March 31, 2009...

8.4.6 All lighting shall be oriented downward and otherwise conform to “dark skies” standards. Uplighting is permitted to light a primary entrance when the light fixture is mounted under an architectural element (e.g. roof, cornice, walkway, entryway or overhanging non-translucent eaves) so that the uplight is captured.

8.4.7 Prohibited lighting includes neon or other edge-glowing sources, mercury vapor, low pressure sodium, high pressure sodium, searchlights, and flashing or changing light sources.

8.5 Utility Areas and Utilities

8.5.1 Loading docks, dumpsters, mechanical equipment and utility meters shall be located at the rear or side of buildings where they are not visible from primary commercial streets and do not interrupt the continuity of the sidewalk and building facades.

8.5.2 When loading docks, dumpsters, and mechanical equipment cannot be located within buildings they shall be screened by elements compatible with the architecture of the building.

8.5.3 Where possible and feasible, shared loading areas, dumpsters, and mechanical equipment shall be incorporated into the design

8.5.4 No above ground electrical lines or utility cables will be permitted.

8.5.5 Burial of overhead utility lines, adjacent to new development will be required.

8.6 Drainage and Storm Water Management

8.6.1 Storm water management systems shall incorporate “Best Management Practices” (BMP) as prescribed by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, in addition to employing Low Impact Development (LID) strategies. BMP/LID means and methods should be carefully integrated within the site design approach with a goal of decentralizing storm water management systems to the greatest extent practical and minimizing environmental impact of new development. The specific goals of the BMP/LID measures should be mitigation of post-development down stream impacts and achieving the highest level of water quality for all storm water runoff.

8.6.2 Systems and the designed approach for storm water management should include elements such as infiltration chambers, landscaped swales, vegetated rain-

gardens, infiltration trenches, dry-wells, permeable pavements and other runoff controlling features that in combination serve to achieve BMP/LID goals.

8.6.3 A Storm water Operations and Maintenance Plan shall be submitted *at the time of application* for all Development Projects to ensure compliance with the District By-Law. The plan shall include a map of the proposed system, specify the parties responsible for the system, a map of the system, easements required, and a schedule for maintenance tasks.

8.6.4 All water from roofs and paved areas shall be retained on site, where possible, and recharged into the ground, or incorporated into a recovery system for use as on-site irrigation, gray water flushing, etc.

8.6.5 Pervious paving is recommended, along with landscaping and pervious landscaped areas.

8.6.6 Sites shall be graded as necessary to prevent ponding of water.

9. SIGNAGE DESIGN STANDARDS

9.1 Exterior Signs

9.1.1 Signage shall be provided to identify residential and non-residential. Signs shall be made of natural materials or have a natural appearance.

9.1.2 A residential-only development or the residential component of a mixed-use development project shall be permitted one sign at each principal entrance to the site. The sign shall identify the name and address of the development and shall not exceed 16 square feet.

9.1.3 Each mixed-use development project in the District may include a primary storefront sign, a storefront cantilevered sign, a display window sign and an awning, or some combination thereof.

9.1.4 Signs on buildings should not obstruct elements such as cornices, arches, lintels, pediments, windows, pilasters, etc.

9.1.5 Signs in the District should be designed primarily to be visible to pedestrians or slow moving vehicular traffic. Wording should be kept to a minimum and the use of logos is encouraged.

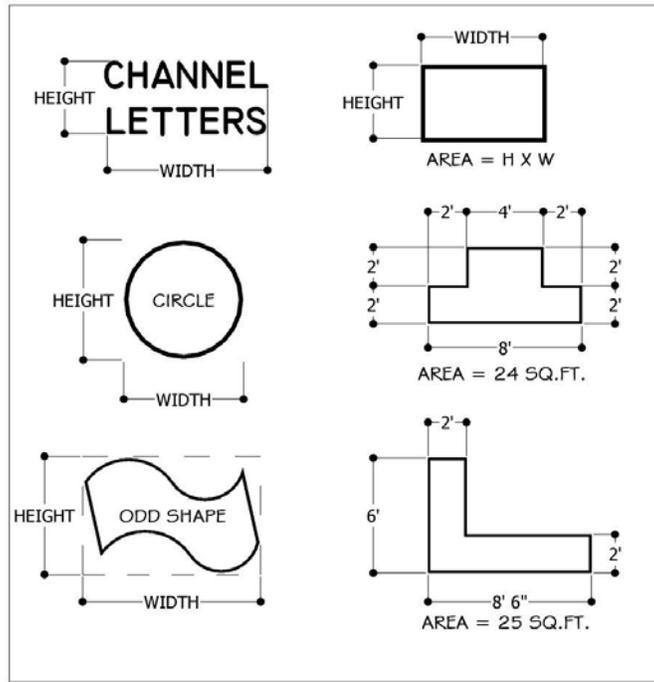
9.1.6 No signmaker labels or other identification (including UL label), are permitted on the exposed surfaces of signs, except as may be required by the building code. If required, such labels or other identification shall be in an inconspicuous location.

9.1.7 Awnings that are used to provide signage should be standardized by height above grade, type, size, materials, colors, illumination and method of installation, across the building façade and within the block to the largest extent practical.

9.2 Primary Storefront Sign

9.2.1 A primary storefront sign shall be located within a sign band beginning approximately 8 to 15 feet above the finish floor level. When a tenant has elevations fronting on different sides of a building, the tenant may have a primary storefront sign on each façade. Wall signs in multi-tenanted buildings shall be placed within the same sign band. The placement of wall signs on individual buildings shall respect the sign band on adjacent buildings.

9.2.2 The total sign area for the primary storefront sign shall not contain more than two square feet of sign area for each linear foot of storefront. Sign area shall be calculated by creating a box around the main body of the primary sign. The storefront leaseline width multiplied by two equals the maximum sign area in



SIGNAGE AREA GUIDE

Figure 9.2.2

square feet, and may not exceed 75 square feet.

9.2.3 Signage above the sills of the second story windows shall be confined to painted or applied letters on the window glass, provided that such signs advertise the organizations therein. Signage is not permitted on continuous, horizontal “curtainwall” type windows in upper stories.

9.3 Storefront Cantilevered Sign

9.3.1 Each tenant will be allowed to construct and install a cantilevered (“blade sign”), installed perpendicular to the building façade, not in excess of eight (8) square feet as measured on one face of the sign. Any such storefront cantilevered sign shall not count toward the total allowable area of signage on a single façade.

9.3.2 One storefront cantilevered sign will be allowed per tenant on each elevation of a building with a customer entrance. The sign shall be attached to the tenant storefront at a minimum 8’ 6” above finish floor level.

9.3.3 Each storefront cantilevered sign may be externally illuminated with two integrated lights (one light on each sign face or panel). The sign may be square,

round, elliptical or other shape. Complex shapes and three-dimensional letters or figures are encouraged. Formed plastic, injection molded plastic, and internally illuminated panels are prohibited.

9.3.4 Signs on the inside or outside surface of display windows may be permitted provided, however, that such signage shall not cover more than ten percent (10%) of the display window area and shall be lighted only by building illumination (white, non-flashing).

9.4 Awnings

9.4.1 Awnings shall be made of fire resistant, water repellent marine fabric (e.g. canvas) or may be constructed of metal or glass. Vinyl or vinyl-coated awning fabric will not be permitted.

9.4.2 Patterns, graphics and stripes are encouraged.

9.4.3 Continuous, uninterrupted awning spans are not permitted. Fixed awnings shall not span numerous bays, windows or store fronts. The awnings should delineate storefronts on a multi-tenant building.

9.4.4 Internally illuminated awnings are not permitted, except that down lighting that is intended to illuminate the sidewalk may be provided under the awning. All lighting under a canopy shall be cutoff or recessed, with no lens dropping below the horizontal plane of the canopy. The light source shall not illuminate or cause the awning to “glow”.

9.5 Prohibited Sign Types

The following sign types are prohibited in the DSGD:

9.5.1 Signs employing luminous plastic letters are prohibited.

9.5.2 Signs or lights that move, change, flash, or make noise are prohibited. Such prohibition shall include commercial balloon devices, high powered search lights and signage expressed or portrayed by emitted light, digital display or liquid crystal display. Where permitted, indicators of time or temperature may move.

9.5.3 Box style cabinet signs or “can” signs are prohibited, whether internally illuminated or not.

9.5.4 Signs utilizing paper, cardboard, Styrofoam, stickers or decals hung around, on or behind storefronts, or applied to or located behind the storefront glazing are prohibited.

9.5.5 Any imitation of official traffic signs or signals, or use of such words as “Stop,” “Look,” “Danger,” “Slow,” “Caution,” or “Warning” is prohibited.

9.5.6 No red or green lights or any lighting effect utilizing such colors may be used on any sign if, in the opinion of the Chief of Police, such light or lighting would create a hazard to the operation of motor vehicles.

9.5.7 Directories shall not be located outside of the buildings.

9.5.8 Roof, pole or pylon signs are prohibited.

9.5.9 Inflatable figures and/or signs are prohibited, whether movable or stationary.
