



Design Guidelines

FOR MIXED-USE DISTRICTS

AMHERST TOWN ORDINANCE, CHAPTER 203, SECTION 5A



November 2019

CONTENTS

ABOUT THE GUIDELINES

A - SITE DESIGN

- A-1. Pedestrian Access and Connectivity. 4
- A-2. Outdoor Amenity Space 5
- A-3. Bicycle Amenities 6
- A-4. Public Art. 7
- A-5. Site Landscaping 8
- A-6. Sustainable Features 9
- A-7. Residential Transitions 10

B - BUILDING DESIGN

- B-1. Facade11
- B-2. Entryways12
- B-3. Windows13
- B-4. Roofs and Architectural Details14
- B-5. Street Level Interest.15
- B-6. Sustainable Building Features16
- B-7. Building Materials17

C - PUBLIC REALM

- C-1. Open Space18
- C-2. Sidewalks.19
- C-3. Curb Zone 20

ABOUT THE GUIDELINES

This document is created as a companion to the Amherst Zoning Ordinance (specifically to Chapter 203., Section 5A, Mixed Use Districts). The following design guidelines are meant to aid in the review of development projects located within Mixed Use zoning districts. All of the recommendations included in the guidelines apply only to projects in Mixed Use Districts.

These guidelines aim to ensure that new development fits the desired aesthetic of the various parts of the Town, while complementing the existing developed context or creating a new sense of place and satisfying zoning requirements. These guidelines are not mandatory requirements, but are recommendations and ideas meant to be considered and implemented on a project-by-project basis. As such, discretion and interpretation are required to determine when a project is consistent with the guidelines. The Town's appointed Design Advisory Board will offer a recommendation based on the application of these guidelines to all projects in the Mixed Use Districts subject to Planning Board or Planning Director review as provided in the Zoning Ordinance.

For the required zoning regulations in the Mixed Use Districts, please see Chapter 203, Section 5A of the Town of Amherst Code (Zoning Ordinance).

ORGANIZATION OF THE GUIDELINES:

This document is organized into three parts: Site Design, Building Design and Public Realm. Each part contains a series of design topics. Each topic has an intent statement and specific design recommendations, presented in the following manner:

A-1. EXAMPLE DESIGN TOPIC

Intent statement detailing the desired design objective related to the topic.

a. Example design recommendation.

1. Specifics or details related to the design recommendation.

Links to the Zoning Ordinance appear as shown below:

Additional Considerations

A - SITE DESIGN

A-1. PEDESTRIAN ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY

Pedestrian access and connectivity within a site should enhance walkability throughout the site and to adjacent sites, promote safety and provide clear connections to the public realm.

a. Establish a continuous internal walkway system throughout the site.

1. Ensure all internal walkways are an adequate width for the anticipated level of activity to allow safe pedestrian access
2. Integrate the internal walkway system with the public pedestrian circulation system
3. Use landscaping, paving materials and distinct lighting that complement the surrounding architectural styles to accentuate a site's internal circulation system
4. Direct the internal walkway system through a plaza, courtyard or other amenity, where applicable
5. Create a safe environment through visibility from adjacent areas, uniformity of outdoor lighting, and appropriate selection of vegetation.
6. Use consistent wayfinding signs to convey directions.



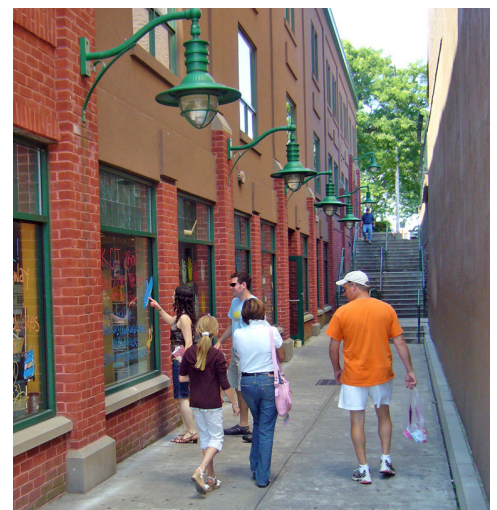
Pedestrian paths should make up a continuous network throughout a site and can be highlighted with paving materials and color.

b. Provide a physical pedestrian connection between the site and nearby public space. Appropriate options include, but are not limited to:

1. A door that opens directly to a public space
2. A walkway that connects a building directly to a public space
3. A plaza, outdoor seating area or patio that connects a building to a public space

c. Provide public pedestrian access through a block. Methods include:

1. A path or walkway connecting two streets through a block
2. A narrow shared walkway through a block that accommodates pedestrians and cyclists
3. A pedestrian walkway integrated with an open space or adjacent retail amenity



Illuminated mid-block walkways for pedestrians can improve site connectivity and can be activated with display windows, pedestrian-scaled lighting, street furniture, or other amenities.

Additional Considerations

See Zoning Ordinance Sec. 5A-7-6 for regulations regarding pedestrian access.

A-2. OUTDOOR AMENITY SPACE

Although opportunities will vary by site, projects should incorporate amenity space, where required, into the design. Courtyards, plazas, playgrounds, outdoor dining areas and other amenity spaces provide opportunities to gather and engage in activities for both the general public and residents of the development. When located adjacent to the public realm, these features activate and enhance the pedestrian experience.

a. Locate and program an amenity space to receive regular use.

1. Frame an amenity space with development that promotes pedestrian activity
2. Program an amenity space with site features or activities that will invite its use
3. Program an amenity space to support adjacent interior uses when possible
4. Break down larger spaces into smaller parts to encourage different uses or activities, including young children, teens, the elderly and pets
5. Use building edges, landscaping or other site elements to define the edges of an amenity space, while complying with A-2.c below
6. Provide open and easy visual and physical access into the space
7. Amenity space designed to be occupied through all months of the year is encouraged
8. Locate an amenity space to maximize sun exposure in winter months, where possible

b. Place amenity space so that it is connected to the public realm.

1. Location adjacent to public or private streets is preferred
2. If a street-adjacent location is infeasible, connection via high-quality pedestrian access is acceptable

c. Designs should not appear to privatize the space.

1. Barriers such as walls, fences and gates should be avoided, where possible.



A single amenity space can provide many functions including seating, activity and gathering space, and art exhibition space.



Playground elements can be incorporated into amenity spaces at a variety of scales.

Additional Considerations

See design standards for outdoor amenity spaces in the Zoning Ordinance Sec. 5A-7-1.

A-3. BICYCLE AMENITIES

Providing bicycle amenities such as parking facilities and repair stations, promotes the use of active transportation methods, which helps improve the safety, health and experience of community residents and visitors.

- a. **Provide connections to existing or planned bike paths.**
- b. **Incorporate bicycle amenities into site designs.**
 1. Locate bicycle parking facilities in highly visible and accessible locations
 2. Bicycle parking facilities should:
 - a) Minimize the potential for theft
 - b) Fit the visual and architectural style of the project and surrounding area
 3. Other bicycle amenities to be considered include:
 - a) Covered or sheltered bicycle parking facilities
 - b) Repair stand/air pump stations
 - c) Lockers or other restricted storage area
 - d) Water filling stations
 - e) Access to nearby publicly-available restrooms



Bicycle parking facilities can be simple or can be incorporated with other design elements such as landscaping, street furniture, or public art installations.



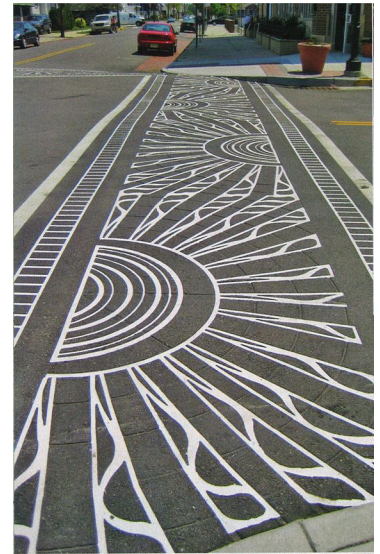
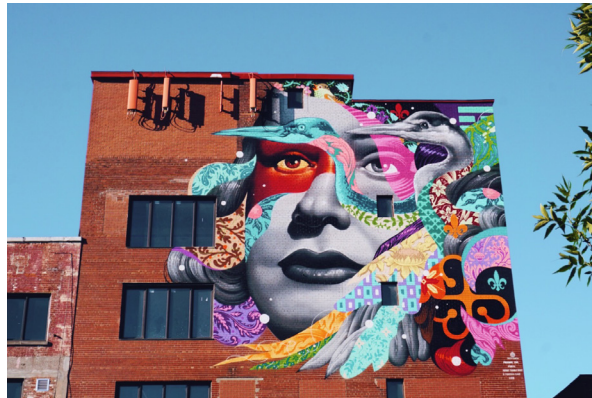
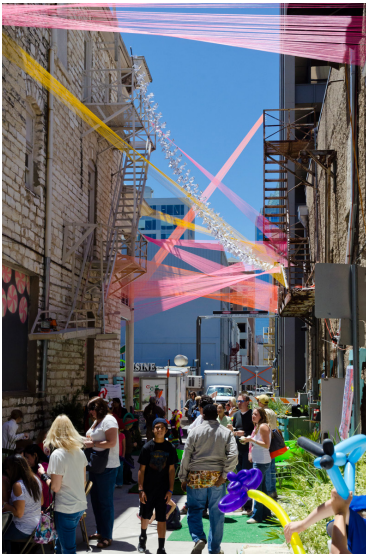
Create connections to existing or planned bike paths whenever possible.

A-4. PUBLIC ART

Public art includes decorative and functional features that are accessible or visible to the public. These may include sculptures, landscape elements, murals, or street furniture (benches, bike racks, or other functional features with an original design). Public art enhances the pedestrian experience and should be integrated into a project as a design amenity.

d. Encourage the inclusion of public art in a project. Consider public art that:

1. Is durable and accessible to the public
2. Relates to functional site features such as gates, entries, sitting areas and walkways
3. Reflects the cultural values and heritage of the community
4. Activates outdoor amenity space
5. Creates visual interest on blank walls
6. Engages local artists and arts organizations in the design or production processes



Public art can come in almost any form and can be functional, experiential or simply visual.

A-5. SITE LANDSCAPING

Landscaping can enhance a project by providing visual interest, tying together key site features, providing shade, screening areas from public view and providing buffers between properties. It can also help soften the urban environment and visually enhance the public realm. The guidelines in this section go beyond the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance. In addition to the requirements of Chapter 203-7-2, landscaping should:

- a. **Preserve existing viable, healthy and attractive trees.**
- b. **Be incorporated into the project's stormwater management system through the use of Low-Impact Development and other green infrastructure approaches.**
- c. **Use a coordinated landscape plant and materials palette to establish a sense of continuity within the project.**
- d. **Choose appropriate tree and plant species.**
 1. Use tree and plant species that will thrive in Amherst and in the conditions of the specific site
 2. Use native plant species whenever possible
 3. Avoid the use of invasive species and species susceptible to pests
 4. Use native low-water species



Choose plant species that can thrive in the site's conditions and use the selected plants throughout the site.



Landscaping in parking areas can help create clear and safe pedestrian paths, while improving the area's visual aesthetic and stormwater management capabilities.

Additional Considerations

For landscaping requirements in transition areas (including buffers and screening) see Zoning Ordinance, Secs. 5A-5 and 7-2.

A-6. SUSTAINABLE FEATURES

Each site design should create opportunities to contribute to a sustainable future for Amherst. Incorporate sustainable features that help reduce energy and water consumption, improve stormwater management, and create an overall healthy environment.

a. Integrate Low-Impact Development (LID) features throughout the site to minimize impacts to the municipal stormwater system and area watersheds.

1. Include a stormwater management feature, such as a bioretention area or rain garden, as a site amenity
2. Use permeable surfaces and paving systems that allow water infiltration
3. Collect and reuse rainwater for irrigation in ways that do not allow open water insect breeding
4. Incorporate LID features in parking lot designs, using one or more of the following:
 - a) Permeable pavement for parking spaces (but not drive aisles)
 - b) Planted areas to slow runoff and filter water
 - c) Installing landscaped islands below the level of the parking lot surface to allow for runoff capture
 - d) Other features that store, slow or filter surface water runoff



Rain gardens and other planted bioretention features can help store and filter stormwater runoff.

b. Use landscaping to reduce heating and cooling needs.

1. Use deciduous shade trees and other plants that create shade in warm months and allow sun exposure in cooler months

c. Include materials and natural features that conserve and promote wildlife habitat and local biodiversity.

d. Reuse site and construction materials.



Permeable paving materials and landscaped bioretention areas can help improve stormwater management in parking areas.

A-7. RESIDENTIAL TRANSITIONS

Residential transitions, where required in Sec. 5A-5., should focus on minimizing the impact of new development and site activity on adjacent protected districts.

- a. **Take into consideration the project's building and site elements that are located near the residential transition.**
 1. Design the transition to minimize headlight or other glare, and screen unsightly elements of the project
 2. Consider what the effectiveness of the proposed vegetation in all seasons of the year
 3. Take into account sightlines from adjacent residential development and vehicular movements in locating walls, fences and vegetation
- b. **Use wall and fence materials that can be maintained to last as long as the principal building.**
- c. **Use colors that match or complement the principal building or are subdued and blend in with the natural environment.**



Additional Considerations

For transition requirements (including buffers and screening), see Zoning Ordinance, Secs. 5A-5 and 7-2-4.

B – BUILDING DESIGN

B-1. FACADE

The facade of a building should be appropriate to the style and character of surrounding buildings, the site, and the general character of the surrounding community .

- a. **Design the building to incorporate a “base, middle and cap” to divide the facade into separate components, that produce well-defined ground or lower floors and a distinctive “cap” element framing the middle floors, especially on taller buildings.**
- b. **On larger building frontages, implement a variety of facade treatments to provide visual distinction, variety, and the appearance of multiple structures to break up the facades.**
 - 1. In Infill Districts, each facade section should reflect the scale of the surrounding context
 - 2. In Retrofit Districts, each facade section of large buildings should break up the impression of a single building
- c. **Arrange elements on the facade (such as windows, doors, canopies, balconies, and similar elements) to create a generally consistent rhythm and overall visual interest.**



Facades should include “base, middle and cap” components .



Use different materials and elements to break up larger buildings into smaller facades.

Additional Considerations

See detailed frontage requirements in the Zoning Ordinance Ch. 203, Section 5

B-2. ENTRYWAYS

Entryways should be well-identified and provide a welcoming experience for those utilizing them, while contributing to the overall style and character of the building.

- a. **Doors and entryways should be of a style, scale, and coverage appropriate to the overall architectural style of the building.**
 1. In Infill Districts, entryway style and scale should complement adjacent building entries, sites and the character of the surrounding buildings
- b. **The primary entrance of a building should be clearly identifiable.**
 1. Use architectural elements to highlight an entrance, such as:
 - a) Canopy
 - b) Portico
 - c) Stoop
 - d) Building recess
 - e) Awning
 - f) Moldings
- c. **Incorporate accessibility into primary entrances without the need for switchbacks or railings.**
- d. **Commercial buildings should have a transparent primary entrance.**



Recessed entries with architectural moldings and other details provide strong visual cues for the location of the main pedestrian entrance on this facade.



Design the primary entrance to be clearly identifiable using architectural details like awnings or canopies.

Additional Considerations

See frontage requirements in the Zoning Ordinance Ch. 203, Section 5A for standard measurements for entrances.

B-3. WINDOWS

Window design and arrangement should express a human scale. Where compatibility with adjacent building character is important, use windows to create visual continuity with the existing character and provide visual interest.

- d. **Windows should be of a scale and proportion appropriate to the overall architectural style of the building and in character with the window sizes of adjacent buildings and sites.**

- b. **Locate windows to create visual continuity.**
 1. Approaches that produce visual continuity include, but are not limited to:
 - a) Consistent horizontal spacing between windows on a floor
 - b) Vertically aligned windows on upper and lower floors
 - c) A common head height for windows on a single floor
 2. Ground floor windows should relate to the human scale - the bottom of a window should begin at a height less than 30" above finished grade

- c. **Window openings should be trimmed with an appropriate material.**
 1. Appropriate materials include:
 - a) Brick
 - b) Stone
 - c) Wood
 - d) Metal
 - e) Cementitious board
 - f) Other similar materials recommended by the Design Advisory Board



Windows should create a sense of rhythm and continuity, even across multiple facades.



Window trimming in appropriate material, (in addition to other architectural details) helps define the character of a building.

Additional Considerations

See the Zoning Ordinance Ch. 203, Section 5A for full window sizing and transparency requirements.

B-4. ROOFS AND ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

These crucial components of a building's facade and massing should complement and enhance the overall building composition. The use of these details should be kept consistent with buildings of a similar architectural style, but should also help create a unique identity for the structure. An appropriate amount of architectural detail should be used.

- d. **Architectural details such as overhangs, cornices, eaves and parapets, should complement the architectural style of the building and its surrounding context.**
 1. A building's architectural details should complement those of adjacent buildings
- b. **Rooflines should be in character with the overall architectural style of the building.**
 1. Design of a roofline should be compatible in massing and form to adjacent buildings
- c. **Cornices should be used to differentiate and enhance the vertical composition of the facade.**
- d. **Building stories, cornice lines and other horizontal elements should be generally consistent with adjacent buildings to help provide a rhythm to the streetscape.**
- e. **Varying the building placement (setback from the street) on a large building helps break up the block and reduce the impact of long buildings on the streetscape.**
- f. **Architectural lighting may be used to enhance specific elements of the building.**
 1. All lighting should be restricted to the specific building face or element being lit
 2. No light fixtures should point upwards into the sky



Architectural details can help express a building's unique character while still fitting in to its surroundings.



Cornice lines, window size, window spacing, and other details help create a continuous aesthetic across facades.

Additional Considerations

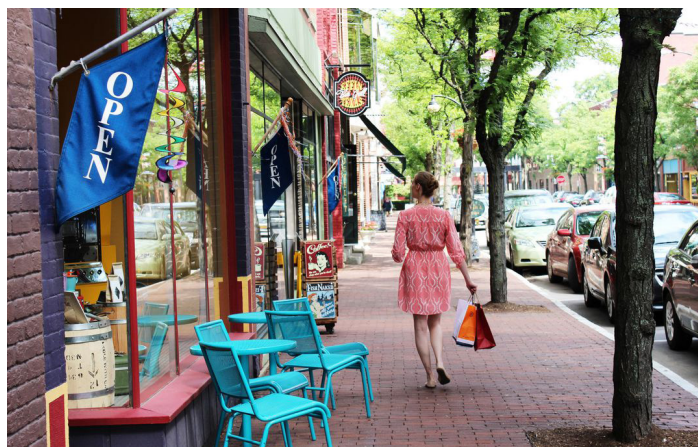
See lighting requirements in the Zoning Ordinance Ch. 203, Sec. 7-3 and setbacks in Sec. 5A-1 and 5A-3.

B-5. STREET LEVEL INTEREST

The character of a building's ground floor strongly impacts the pedestrian experience. The ground floor of a building should be designed to generate activity, animate the sidewalk and help establish a visual physical connection between the inside of the building and the adjacent outdoor area.

a. Design a building to provide interest at the street level adjacent to the public realm.

1. Methods for all buildings should include:
 - a) Entries and windows
 - b) Architectural details
 - c) Landscaping
 - d) Public art
2. Methods for commercial buildings should include:
 - a) Storefronts
 - b) Display windows or cases
 - c) Outdoor dining and gathering areas



Elements such as display windows, landscaping and more help create a more interesting pedestrian experience.

b. Incorporate landscaping along the ground floor of the building.

1. The guidelines in this section go beyond the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance. In addition to the requirements of Chapter 203-7-2, consider additional landscaping along the ground floor:
 - a) Use landscaping to highlight a building entryway, walkway or other feature
 - b) Place durable and permanent planters in shallow front yards or other instances where more intensive landscaping cannot be placed given the site constraints. Design and material selection for planters should complement the architectural style of the building
 - c) Plant-covered trellises offer the opportunity to create shade and a sense of human scale and enclosure
 - d) Green walls ("living walls") are a unique landscaping option that can improve air quality and reduce a building's heating and cooling costs



Green or "living" walls can be a unique architectural feature that provide environmental, aesthetic and social benefits.

B-6. SUSTAINABLE BUILDING FEATURES

Buildings should incorporate sustainable features that help reduce energy consumption, reduce water use, and contribute to a more sustainable environment.

- a. **Designs should seek to reduce water use and reuse water within the building by:**
 1. Collecting and reusing graywater and rainwater for non-potable uses such as irrigation.
 2. Using rain barrels, cisterns or other water retention systems
 3. Providing high-efficiency fixtures and appliances in buildings

- b. **Designs should seek to reduce energy use and generate energy on-site by:**
 1. Generating energy on-site by incorporating sustainable energy options or sources into the building design
 2. Incorporating “passive design” strategies that make use of naturally available energy, such as:
 - a) Orienting and “daylighting” the building to make use of natural sun exposure
 - b) Installing high performance windows
 - c) Installing high performance insulation
 - d) Providing natural ventilation
 - e) Incorporating thermal massing to help heat and cool the building
 3. Providing high-efficiency fixtures and appliances in buildings



Green roofs help keep buildings and cities cool while providing excellent space for renewable energy production equipment and outdoor amenity space.



“Daylighting” a building can help make the most use of its natural sun exposure.



Water recycling systems like cisterns can be exposed (like these) or hidden within the building or site.

Additional Considerations

See solar energy requirements in the Zoning Ordinance Ch. 203, Sec. 6-10.

B-7. BUILDING MATERIALS

Building materials should evoke the character, style and purpose of the structure. Each building facade should use high-quality, durable materials that contribute to the visual continuity of the building's character. They should be consistent with those used traditionally in the surrounding area; however, new and innovative materials may also be appropriate, especially in Retrofit Districts.

d. Use high quality, durable building materials.

1. Choose materials that are proven to be durable in the local climate, such as masonry, stone, metal, wood and brick
2. Choose materials that are likely to maintain an intended finish over time or acquire a patina, when that is a desired outcome
3. Incorporate building materials at the ground level that will withstand on-going contact with the public and the elements, sustaining impacts and corrosion without compromising the appearance

b. Use responsibly-sourced and long-lasting building materials.

1. Use recycled, local and sustainably sourced materials when possible
2. Avoid materials treated with detrimental chemicals (for a list of detrimental chemicals to avoid, see the [International Living Future Institute's "Red List"](#))
3. Use low maintenance and long-lasting materials that will extend the building's life cycle

c. Any side or rear wall facing a street, residential district or public area must consist of the same finish materials as the primary facade.

d. Decorative masonry materials (such as split face and textured finish blocks) are discouraged but may be considered an acceptable facade material at the discretion of the Planning Board.

e. Exterior finishing materials for renovations, additions and rehabilitations should be consistent with those being retained on the existing structures.

f. Exterior Insulation Finish Systems (EIFS) should not be utilized as a primary building material, but may be utilized, at the discretion of the Planning Board, as a decorative or complementary material on upper stories only.

Additional Considerations

See the Zoning Ordinance Sec. 5A-7-15 for a full list of approved and prohibited materials.

C – PUBLIC REALM

C-1. OPEN SPACE

Open space is a public outdoor area provided for social and recreational use. Examples of open space include parks, parklets, greenways, trails, playgrounds, gardens and more. Open space is required in the Retrofit Districts.

- a. **Open spaces should ideally be centrally located.**
- b. **Open spaces should contribute to an existing or planned open space or greenway network when possible.**
- c. **Open spaces should be easily accessible by everyone.**
- d. **Open spaces should be designed to be proportionate in scale to their surrounding context.**
- e. **Existing natural features and systems should be used or highlighted in the design of an open space.**
- f. **Open spaces should be programmed in ways that allow for a variety of uses.**
 - 1. Define larger open spaces with smaller spaces to encourage different activities and uses
 - 2. Some spaces may be definitively programmed for specific uses, but most should allow for flexibility of uses
- g. **Incorporate pedestrian and bicycle amenities such as seating, trash receptacles, drinking fountains, bicycle parking, and pedestrian-scaled lighting**



Open spaces should be proportionate to their surroundings.



Connect open spaces to an existing open space network if possible.



Create flexible open spaces that can be used for many different activities.

Additional Considerations

See design standards for open spaces in the Zoning Ordinance Ch. 203, Sec. 5A-7-2.

C-2. SIDEWALKS

Design sidewalks to enhance the pedestrian experience. A well-designed sidewalk increases walkability and safety, and helps to connect ground floor activities to the public realm.

- a. **Coordinate building elements such as furnishings, overhangs, lighting and signs to create an engaging sidewalk space.**
 1. In all cases, ADA access must be maintained.
 2. Elements that extend into or above the right-of-way may require additional approval from the Town or other agencies such as the State Department of Transportation or Erie County Public Works.
- b. **Sidewalk elements should be scaled according to their context, including the intensity of activity, building heights and noise levels.**
- c. **Locate exterior uses and amenities to support and connect to interior activities.**
 1. Street furniture and other amenities associated with an adjacent business is encouraged, but must not interfere with pedestrian movement on the sidewalk, including ADA compliance.
- d. **Use surface materials that complement the architecture and character of the area.**
 1. Continue the use of the chosen material across intersections to provide visual continuity and improve pedestrian safety.
 2. The Town and other regulating agencies with jurisdiction may require approval of any non-standard materials.



Include pedestrian-level amenities like seating and landscaping without interfering with pedestrian movement through the site.



Coordinated scales of architectural details and signs help create an engaging sidewalk space and contribute to neighborhood identity.

Additional Considerations

See streetscape design standards in the Zoning Ordinance Ch. 203, Sec. 5A-7-9.

C-3. CURB ZONE

The curb zone is the area between the back-of-curb and the sidewalk where landscaping and streetscape amenities should be placed so that they contribute to the pedestrian experience.

- a. **Streetscape amenities may be placed in the curb zone with approval of the Town or other regulating agency with jurisdiction.**
 1. Amenities may include:
 - a) Seating and other street furniture
 - b) Pedestrian-scaled lighting
 - c) Trash and recycling receptacles
 - d) Landscape planters
 - e) Bicycle parking, bicycle repair stations and bike-share stations
 - f) Drinking fountains
 - g) Public art
- b. **Trees and other landscaping should be planted within the curb zone, subject to approval of the Town and other regulating agencies with jurisdiction.**
 1. Allow sufficient spacing for tree canopies to grow and develop without conflict with other trees or buildings.
 2. Align and space trees to create a direct and continuous path of travel.
 3. Consider planting locations carefully to ensure visibility for signs on adjacent buildings
 4. Select tree and plant species that will thrive in Amherst under the site's conditions.
 5. Consider using the curb zone as also an opportunity to provide for green infrastructure and additional landscaping.



Landscaping elements and pedestrian amenities create a buffer between the street and the sidewalk.

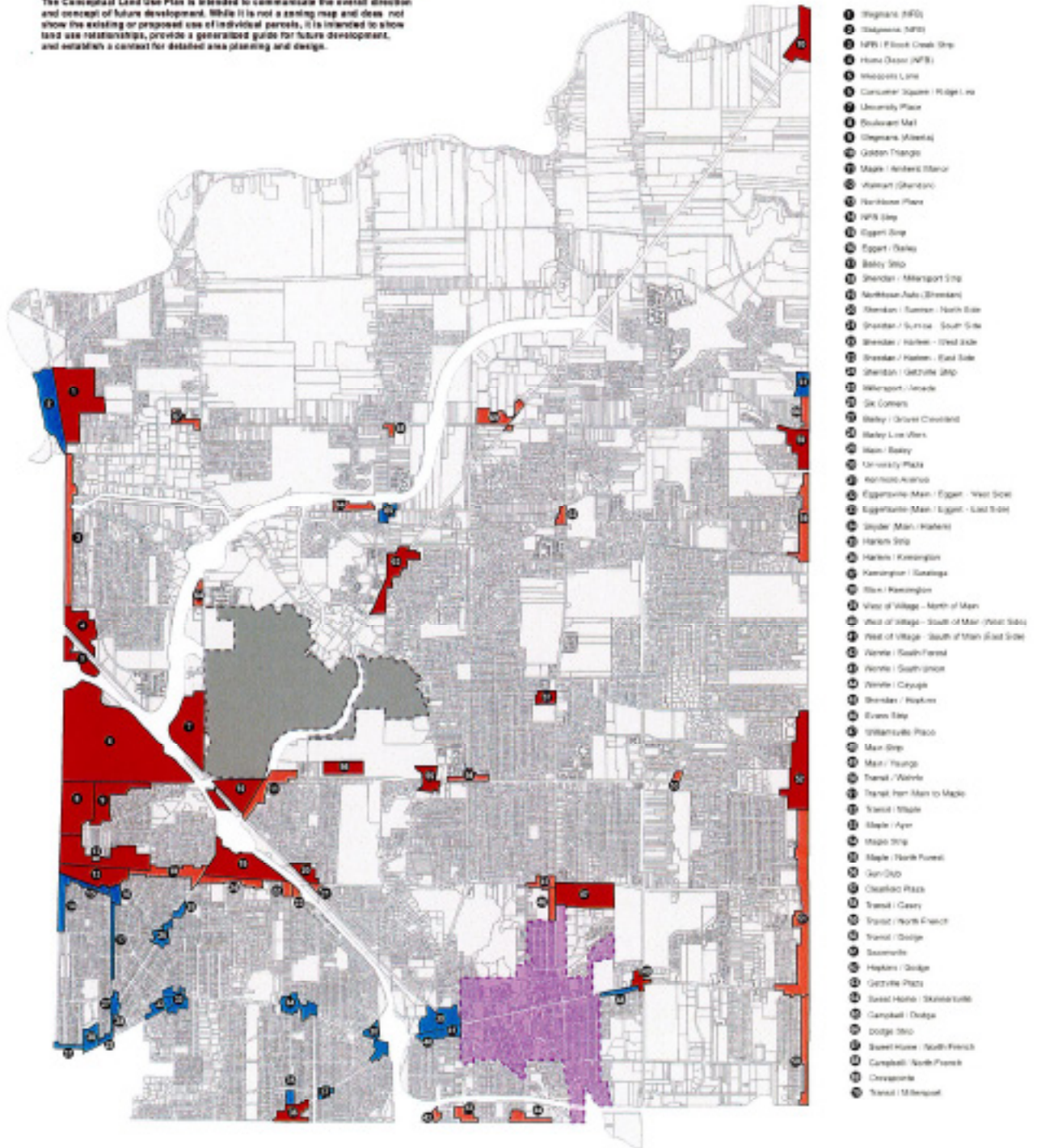


This curb zone incorporates seating, pedestrian-level lighting, shading trees and stormwater retention landscaping.

Town of Amherst Bicentennial Comprehensive Plan 2018

The Conceptual Land Use Plan is intended to communicate the overall direction and concept of future development. While it is not a zoning map and does not show the existing or proposed use of individual parcels, it is intended to show land use relationships, provide a general guide for future development, and establish a context for detailed area planning and design.

FIGURE 6A



Commercial and Mixed-Use Designations

- Suburban Center
- Suburban Corridor
- Traditional Areas
- Village of Williamsville
- University at Buffalo

SOURCE NOTES

Original Source Data Provided by the Town of Amherst Information Technology Department, GIS Corporation and Nathan Roberts & Todd, LLC

Map Compiled by the Town of Amherst Planning Department

Date: September 2019

FIGURE 6-A



