



# Design Review Guidelines for The Marlborough Village District

Referenced in the Marlborough Zoning Ordinance (MZO)

Section 650-33 Special Provisions  
Applicable to the Marlborough Village District (MV)



Main Street, Marlborough, Massachusetts. City Hall is at the left. Photo: Paul Dell'Aquila, MAPC

These Design Guidelines supplement MZO Section 650-33 D. Design Standards

December 4, 2014

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## I. Introduction and Purpose of the Design Guidelines

The City of Marlborough completed a planning and rezoning process for the Downtown in 2014. Residents, business owners, the City Council, Planning Board and the Economic Development Corporation reviewed recommendations for uses, dimensions, parking requirements and project review with the goal of revitalizing the Downtown. It was acknowledged that the existing Downtown has many attributes, including an attractive streetscape and ample parking. However, existing regulations would preclude mixed use development and there were no guidelines to ensure that new construction would be compatible with the existing historic fabric. The result of the planning process was the development of new zoning regulations Section 650-33, Special Provisions Applicable to the Marlborough Village district (MV), augmented by these Design Guidelines.

### Purpose of the Design Guidelines

Architecture and site design have enormous potential to enhance the quality of life in a community. Well-designed buildings in well-planned commercial centers achieve a distinct “sense of place” bringing people together to shop, work, live and play. By contrast, bad architecture in a poorly planned place can depress economic vitality. **Section 650-33 D “Design Standards for the Village District”** of the Zoning Ordinance requires building and site design to “enhance the visual character of Marlborough’s historic downtown and respect and reflect the traditional 19th century heritage of the area.” The goal of these Guidelines is to maintain the design quality of Marlborough’s historic city center, helping to attract customers to the area and encourage economic revitalization.

These Guidelines are intended to assist property owners, developers, architects, reviewers and members of the public. The Guidelines do not describe the rules, such as the building setbacks and heights that are specified in the Marlborough Zoning Ordinance. Rather, they suggest the elements of site and building design that developers and business owners should consider for compatible design of new buildings and extensive alterations in the Downtown. The Guidelines include illustrations of these elements and photos.

### Purposes of the Village District Zoning

- ❖ Preserve and enhance the character of Marlborough’s Downtown.
- ❖ Promote attractive development of the Downtown.
- ❖ Streamline the approval process for development.
- ❖ Relate commercial and mixed use properties both visually and physically to surrounding land uses.
- ❖ Facilitate a more walkable and healthier Downtown that integrates the needs of pedestrians with those of drivers.
- ❖ Protect property values by enhancing the Downtown’s appearance.

## Results of the Design Preference Survey

A design preference survey is a research and visioning technique to gauge residents' and business owners' impressions of the present community image and to build consensus for its future character. As part of the April 3, 2014 Community Forum, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) conducted a design preference survey. A summary of the results is below, and was used to develop the key elements for the Design Guidelines.

### Marlborough Residents and Business Owners Prefer:

**Building bulk & height:** Moderate-scale structures, similar to the existing five to six story structures. For larger scale buildings, articulated facades to lessen impression of massing.

New buildings on Main Street may be different from those on Granger Boulevard. Granger Boulevard may have larger and more architecturally varied buildings, while still “fitting in” with Downtown Marlborough.

**Design features** that add visual interest and reduce appearance of bulk and mass.

**Roof form:** Flat roofs.

**Building style:** City-block style. Details such as corbelled brick.

**Exterior materials:** Brick; or stone, adequate first floor windows to enable visibility of shop spaces.

**Parking** at rear of building, if not off-site.

**Pedestrian amenities:** Sidewalks/pathways, outdoor seating, and appropriate landscaping. Structures located in such a way as to maximize ease of pedestrian access.

### Marlborough Village District Key Elements

- ❖ Buildings in scale with their surroundings.
- ❖ An orientation toward the street, with maximum frontage on the street.
- ❖ Close proximity to the street.
- ❖ Parking behind the buildings.
- ❖ A place for pedestrian amenities such as plazas and benches.
- ❖ Big windows on the ground floor, with no blank walls.
- ❖ Use of brick or stone.
- ❖ Camouflaged storage spots, and mechanical equipment.

## II. Design Guidelines

Most buildings in the Downtown can help to create a livelier, more engaging experience for visitors, shoppers and residents. The new zoning regulations encourage a mix of uses, which is defined as a combination of residential/business uses on the same lot. Also allowed are more types of retail stores and services and restaurants. Flexible building setbacks and reduced parking requirements incentivize development and redevelopment in the Downtown. In exchange for streamlined project review (most uses are now allowed As of Right, without a Special Permit), the Design Standards in the Marlborough Village District (MZO Section 650-33 D) must be met as part of Site Plan Review. The Design Standards are intended to promote quality development emphasizing the city's sense of history and desire for contextual, pedestrian-scaled projects. These Design Guidelines are intended to provide more detailed information on how a project can meet the Design Standards.

Marlborough Village Zoning  Design Standards  Design Guidelines

### Organization of the Guidelines and How They Are Utilized

The Design Guidelines mirror the organization of the Design Standards in the Marlborough District Village Zoning, addressing the following topics:

- Building Scale
- Roof Form
- External Materials and Appearance, including Acceptable Masonry Construction
- Landscaping and Sidewalk Amenities
- Service Areas, Utilities and Equipment
- Vehicle and Pedestrian Features
- Parking and Bicycle Parking
- Sustainable Building Design
- Historic District and Other Historic or Landmark Structures.

For each topic, the exact language from the Zoning Ordinance is provided in the shaded, outlined box. This is the Design Standard. Then, more details (“guidance”) is provided on that topic, followed by a picture or illustration. A **Glossary of Terms** is also included.

Each Downtown project will be required to address these topics, as applicable, as part of the Site Plan Review detailed in Marlborough Ordinance (MO) Section 270-2 and Marlborough Zoning Ordinance (MZO) Section 650-33B Site Plan Review. The Site Plan Review process is principally an administrative review conducted by various department heads and officials, further streamlining project review. The City may utilize the services of an urban designer or architect in order to assist with the review of the Design Standards during Site Plan Review<sup>1</sup>. The City Council will conduct Site Plan Review for proposed hotel uses and for all projects 10,000 square feet or more in the Downtown.

Marlborough has designated the Building Commissioner as the contact person for initial questions about the Zoning Ordinance and these Guidelines.

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<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to the adoption of Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 44, Section 53G “Employment of Outside Consultants”

## General Design Concepts

Each property is different. Whether the project is an addition to an existing structure, or a new building, what might be appropriate for one property may not necessarily be appropriate at another, so no specific design solution is mandated.

### Existing Buildings

The goal for renovating existing buildings is to retain the original façade elements, including the original **size** of the windows if these are candidates for replacement. Additions should be “sympathetic” to the original style of construction. The goal is compatibility, not a “carbon copy”.

If the original façade has been obscured, the focus should be on removing inappropriate materials and other façade elements, such as signage, and restoring the original architectural character. Old photographs from the Marlborough Historical Society can provide guidance to inform and inspire these improvements.

### New Buildings

Many new buildings will mix retail uses with housing or offices or other uses above. These mixed use buildings will enliven the Downtown. Every new building can help make the center more pedestrian-friendly by incorporating handsome storefronts and signage, views of ground-floor activity, display windows, and flower boxes to create an interesting experience for pedestrians.

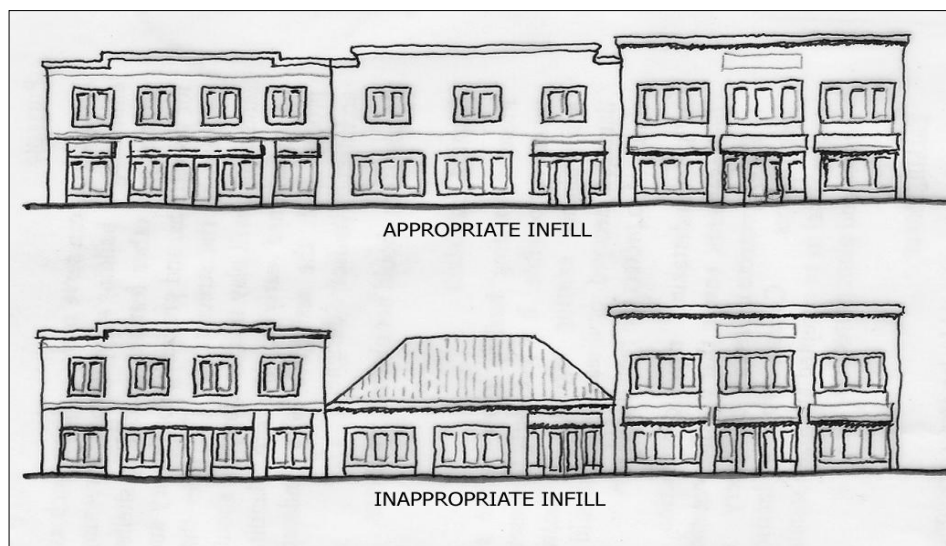
## Design Principles

These following general design principles should be considered for all development projects in the Downtown. These principles apply to both contemporary and more traditional design styles.

### Context

This term refers to site design, new construction or a rehabilitation/addition that is sensitive to the character of the surrounding area. The goal is a building or alteration that “fits in” with its location.

Context includes building form, massing, and scale; rhythm of windows and doors; materials; colors; fenestration; signs; lighting; landscaping and open spaces.



Examples of a building design that is in character with the surrounding context (top), and a building design that does not maintain continuity in the massing, height, or architectural style.

## Massing and Bulk

Massing, also referred to as architectural form, is the overall shape of a building defined by exterior walls, roof shapes, and any significant architectural appendages such as porches, projecting bays, towers, and cupolas. Methods of describing a building's massing include large or small, simple or complex. A building that is large and simple is typically referred to as "bulky".

Buildings adjacent to streets and public spaces should reduce building mass and bulk through variation in planes and wall surfaces (articulation), fenestration (windows), height variation, and differences in materials or colors in order to be more pedestrian scaled.

## Scale

Scale in architecture is a measure of the relative size of a building or building component in relation to a known unit of measure or customary size for such a component. Familiar building elements such as bricks, doors and windows, provide points of reference to judge the scale of a building. If the size or shape of a familiar building component diverges from the expected, it may be said to be "out of scale".

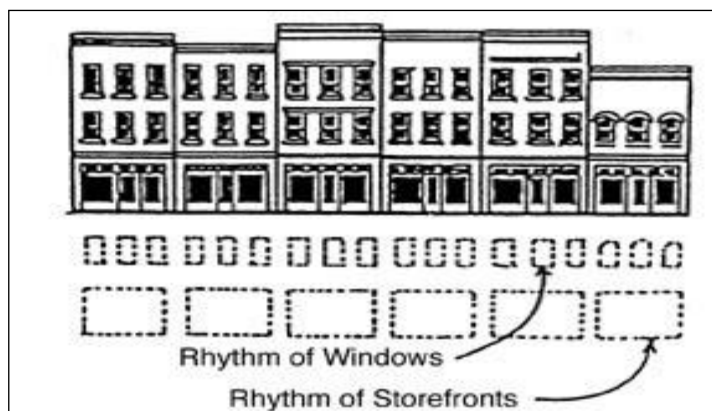
The perceived scale of any proposed building is a function of:

- the overall size of the proposed building relative to existing building sizes
- the visual relationship of the new building's facade elements relative to the visual relationship of building facade elements in surrounding, existing buildings.

The principle of scale applies both to individual buildings and to streetscapes. At the streetscape level, there is usually an identifiable building scale that is typical to that area, based on overall building forms and heights.

## Rhythm

Almost every building includes some elements that are repeated, such as windows, columns, or arches. Rhythm in architecture refers to the pattern and spacing of these repeating façade elements. The concept of rhythm can be applied to the facades of individual buildings, or to entire streetscapes. At the streetscape level, rhythm applies to the relationships of the façade elements, but also roofs, the overall form of the buildings, and to the building siting. The spaces between buildings and the set-back distances from the street boundary also create a rhythm.

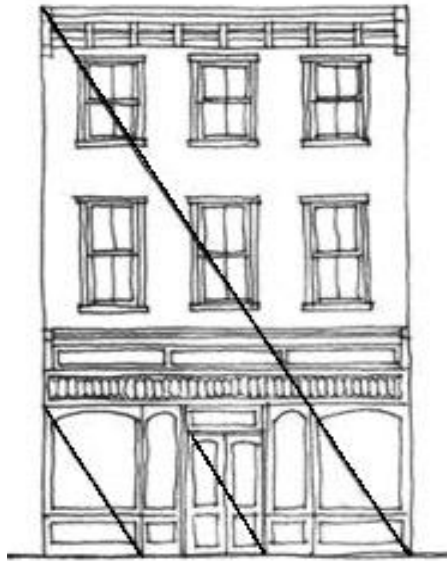


Examples of façades that effectively maintain the rhythm of windows and storefronts.

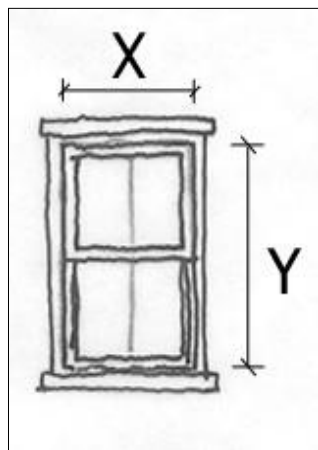


## Proportion

Proportion is similar to scale in that it is a relative term. Proportion in architecture relates to the dimensions of the various building elements as well as the overall building facades. Architectural harmony is achieved in a building facade when the facade elements are proportional to each other and to the overall facade. One of the oldest systems of determining “ideal” proportion is the Golden Section, which is a rectangle with a width to length ratio of about 5:8, is formed when the diagonal of a square is dropped as an arc. This proportion is frequently still used today in western art and architecture.



Proportion in architecture relates to the dimensions of the various building elements as well as the overall building facades.



Another example of the importance of proportion is determining the size of windows. Replacing windows in historic structures may require a custom fabrication. Otherwise, modern stock sizes will look too small, and will require inserts to fill the window opening. The window and the building facade will look “out of proportion”.

All windows should be proportioned such that the height (Y) of individual windows should be 1.5 to 1.9 times their width (X).





In the above example, the façade heights and proportions are similar to each other, allowing for individual expression but creating a harmonious streetscape. The windows and doors share similar proportions, sizes, locations and number. Note the varied, but compatible storefronts.

## Specific Guidelines

### Building Scale

**Zoning Text, Section 650-33 D (2) (a):** New Buildings and/or substantial alterations shall be pedestrian-oriented and shall reflect the community preference for moderate-scale structures that are in harmony with the existing historic brick structures. Building design shall incorporate features to add visual interest while reducing the appearance of bulk or mass. Such features include varied facades, rooflines, roof heights, materials, and architectural details.

Buildings shall relate to the pedestrian scale by:

- Including appropriate architectural details to add visual interest along the ground floor of all facades that face streets, squares, pedestrian pathways, parking lots, or other significant pedestrian spaces.
- Articulating the base, middle, and top of the facade by cornices, string cornices, step-backs or other similar features.
- Continuous lengths of flat, blank walls adjacent to streets, pedestrian pathways, or open spaces are discouraged. Continuous blank walls in excess of 50% of the wall frontage are not allowed. If windows cannot be installed, the façade should include different materials or a design element to vary the frontage.

“A moderate scale structure” in Marlborough is 3 to 5 stories, of approximately 40 ft – 55 ft.

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.

The massing of commercial buildings should be deemphasized by the use of projecting and recessed sections to reduce their apparent overall bulk.

Reduce the apparent scale of the building by introducing small-scaled architectural features like openings, sills, pilasters, columns, and other features to establish a human scale at the street level.



The Marlborough Savings Bank building is nicely articulated to reduce the massing. String cornices and different treatment of upper stories lessen the apparent size. Note the awnings on the first floor windows.



Two examples of “moderate scale” structures in Marlborough.







The above example could be appropriate for Granger Boulevard. Note the first floor commercial frontage, with different materials above to provide horizontal breaks in the massing, and landscaping that emphasizes the front entrance and outdoor seating.

## Roof Form

**Zoning Text, Section 650-33 D (2) (b):** Mechanical equipment located on roofs shall be screened, organized and designed as a component of the roof design, and not appear to be a leftover or add-on element.

Adverse impacts on abutters from vents, HVAC, etc. are to be minimized.



(Photo credit: Paul Dell-Aquila, MAPC )

This is an example of rooftop mechanicals “designed as a component of the roof design”.

## Entrances

**Zoning Text, Section 650-33 D (2) (c):** For visibility and accessibility, all primary commercial building entrances shall be visible from the right-of-way and the sidewalk, and shall have an entrance directly accessible from the sidewalk.

Doors shall not extend beyond the exterior facade into pedestrian pathways.

Architectural detail should be incorporated into the ground-floor façade to create an easily identifiable and welcoming entrance. As one of the most important parts of the facade, the main entrance should be easily 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.

Where a new building is to be located on a *corner*, each side visible from a street should be considered a primary storefront façade and incorporate these fenestration patterns, unless doing so would unduly obtrude into a primarily residential street.



This is a good example of a corner building with first floor retail, and identifiable entrances on both street frontages.





An example of a corner building with active retail on both street frontages.



While too tall to meet the Marlborough height limits, this shows a very successful addition on top of an existing structure. The articulated front helps to break the massing of the apartments above the first floor retail. Compatible materials are used.



## External Materials and Appearance

**Zoning Text, Section 650.33 D (2) (d):** Predominant wall materials shall be red brick, stone, or pre-cast concrete panels; Wood siding may be used where the structures are adjacent to residential districts where the intent is to blend the structure more into the existing neighborhood. If painted, or coated, a non-metallic finish is to be used. Cladding materials should be consistent on all facades with the exception of special design elements such as turrets. Materials designed to “imitate” brick are not permitted.

### Acceptable Masonry Construction

Acceptable masonry construction will be of standard fired clay brick units bonded together with mortar. Acceptable applications include building components such as walls, stairs, columns, arches, planter beds etc.

Utilize bricks which are sound, hard, well burnt with uniform color shape and size.

The bricks should be compact, homogeneous, and free from holes, cracks, flaws, air-bubbles, spawls and stone lumps.

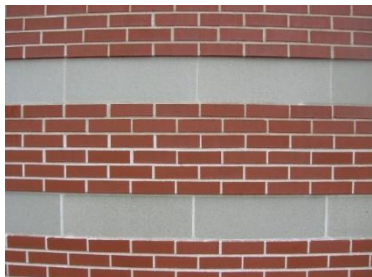
Frogged bricks shall be laid with the frogs pointing upwards.

Mortar specifications shall comply with relative American Society of Testing Materials (ASTM) standards.

The properties of masonry units should comply with the requirements of relevant ASTM Standards. Masonry units are classified into the following types: solid, hollow unit, cellular, perforated and frogged.

Except for minor trim, the building shall avoid the appearance of reflective materials such as porcelain enamel or sheet metal. Window panes shall be non-reflective.

Ground floor commercial building facades facing streets, squares, or other significant pedestrian spaces shall contain transparent windows encompassing a minimum of 35% of the facade surface.



Marlborough residents strongly prefer authentic natural materials such as brick and stone for the exterior of structures and land- scape features. Construct windows, storefronts and public doorways of wood where possible. Any synthetic materials should be as close in appearance and detail to the natural material it simulates.

Vinyl siding is discouraged as it is environmentally damaging during its manufacturing and disposal stages, and is not prevalent in the Downtown.

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.

## Awnings

**Zoning Text, Section 650-33 D (2) (e):** Awnings and canopies shall be compatible with the architectural style of the building. Colors and patterns used for awnings and canopies shall be subdued and compatible with existing awnings on adjacent buildings, if any.

**Awnings** that are functional for shade and shelter are encouraged. These awnings should be made of canvas or a canvas-like material, should fit the shape and scale of the window or door 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 facade 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.



## Landscaping and Sidewalk Amenities

**Zoning Text Section 650.33 D (2) (h):** To the maximum extent possible, projects shall provide pedestrian-friendly amenities, such as outdoor seating, patios, porches or courtyards. Window boxes are encouraged. Large windows that open up to provide the experience of “open air dining” are encouraged. Site landscaping shall be maximized. Links/sidewalks designed to connect Granger Boulevard parking areas with adjacent developments are encouraged to further the goal of providing safe pedestrian access to businesses within downtown Marlborough

Thoughtfully designed landscaping appropriate to the context of the building and the surrounding streetscape is highly desirable. These features can define spaces and make for pleasant pedestrian experiences. See a perfect example, below.







Who wouldn't enjoy walking down a landscaped passageway, or next to a window box and sidewalk planter with lovely flowers? Even a few flowers in a tree pit enhance the pedestrian experience in a downtown.

## Service Areas, Utilities and Equipment

**Zoning Text Section 650.33 D (2) (i):** Service and loading areas and mechanical equipment and utilities shall be unobtrusive or sufficiently screened so that they are not visible from streets or primary public open spaces and shall incorporate effective techniques for noise buffering from adjacent uses.



This photo shows a site that would not meet the Marlborough Design Review Standards relative to mechanical screening, or screening of a service area (dumpster).



## Vehicle and Pedestrian Features

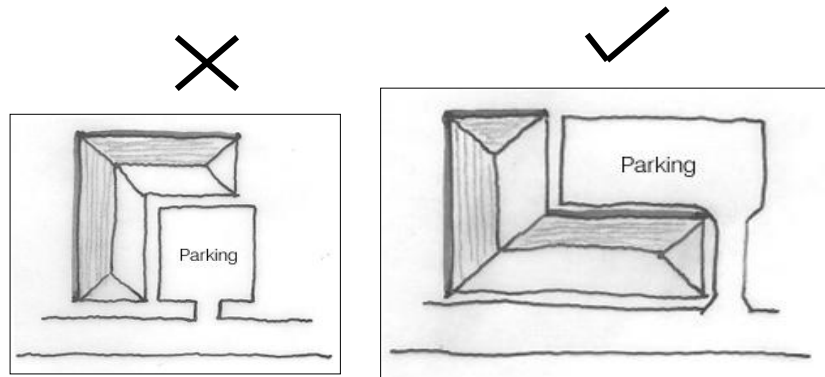
**Zoning Text Section 650.33 D (2) (j):** Vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle features shall be designed to promote connectivity. Curb cuts shall be minimized.



A landscaped passageway with signage for bicycle rentals

## Parking

**Zoning Text:** To maintain a pedestrian-friendly environment, motor vehicle parking spaces shall be located behind or beside buildings wherever possible. Parking located directly between the building and the street alignment shall be discouraged.



Parking should be treated as a secondary function of the building(s) with which it is associated. Parking should be located behind a building, underground, in a parking structure, or to the side.

## Bicycle Parking

**Zoning Text:** Bicycle parking shall be provided for all new development, and shall be located as close as possible to the building entrance(s). Any property required to have bicycle parking may establish a shared bicycle parking facility with any other property owner within the same block.

Examples of bicycle parking:



[http://www.creativepipe.com/inverted\\_u\\_racks\\_models\\_su\\_and\\_wu.htm](http://www.creativepipe.com/inverted_u_racks_models_su_and_wu.htm)





<http://www.sunshineu-lok.com/bicycle-racks-simple-lok.php>



<http://www.m-bike.org/blog/tags/bike-racks/>



<http://www.sportworks.com/product/heavy-duty-inverted-u-rack>

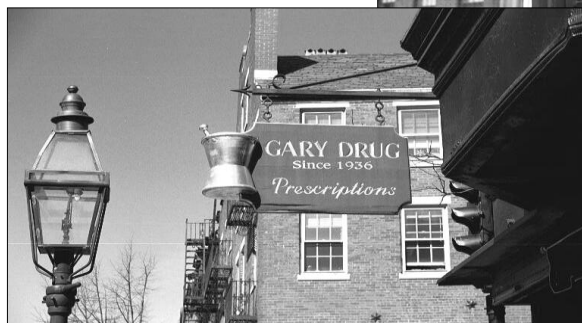
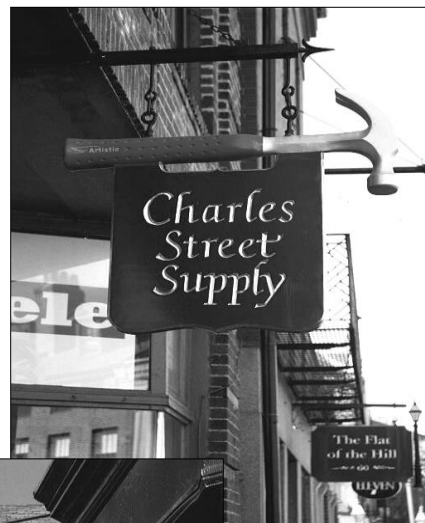
## Signage

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. Marlborough has signage regulations (see Section 526 “Sign By-law”), which provide further detailed requirements.



Examples of projecting or “blade” signs



Examples of projecting signs that use effective shapes or symbols to improve legibility and individuality.





While inexpensive, and allowing for variable messages, the sign board on the left does not enhance the streetscape, and may not be approved. Is the one on the right more appropriate? Why?

Within the Marlborough Village district, "A Frame" signs are limited to valet parking signs that must also receive a license from the City Council.



Perhaps a touch of whimsy is what makes these signs attractive.

**Photo Credits:** from the Report: Norwood Downtown Sign Initiative, prepared for the Town of Norwood and Downtown Initiative Program of Massachusetts by The Cecil Group.

## Glossary of Terms

**Arcade:** A range of arches supported on piers or columns attached to or detached from the wall.

**Awning:** A roof-like cover extending over or in front of a storefront (as over the deck or in front of a door and/or window) as a shelter.

**Bay:** A main division of a structure. A regularly repeated unit on a building elevation defined by columns, pilasters, or other vertical elements, or defined by a given number of windows or openings.

**Bay window:** A window or series of windows forming a bay in a room and projecting outward from the wall.

**Blank Wall:** An exterior building wall with no openings and generally constructed of a single material, uniform texture, and on a single plane.

**Brackets:** Ornamental pieces placed under eaves, cornices, window sills, etc., which appear to provide structural support.

**Bulkhead:** A vertical partition separating compartments.

**Canopy:** An ornamental projection, over a door, window, niche, etc.

**Clerestory:** An outside wall of a room or building that rises above an adjoining roof and contains windows.

**Column:** A supporting post-often round in shape-found on storefronts, porches, and balconies; may be fluted or smooth.

**Corner block:** A square, relatively flat block of wood, often decoratively carved, placed at the upper corners on each side of the wood framing around a door.

**Cornice:** The projecting uppermost portion of a wall, sometimes treated in a decorative manner with brackets.

**Cupola:** A small roof tower, usually rising from the roof ridge.

**Dormer:** A window set vertically in a structure projecting from a sloping roof.

**Eave:** The part of the roof which extends beyond the side wall.

**Façade:** The face of a building, especially the principal face.

**Fascia:** Any relatively broad, flat, horizontal surface, as the outer edge of a cornice, a string-course, etc.

**Fenestration:** The arrangement of windows and other openings in a wall.

**Frieze:** The portion of the façade found just below the point where the wall surface meets the building's cornice or roof overhang.

**Front Lot-Line:** On a regular lot, the front lot line is the shared line between the lot and a sidewalk/public right-of-way.

**Gambrel:** A roof having two slopes on each side of the peak, the lower slope usually steeper than the upper one.

**Gable:** The vertical triangular wall between the sloping ends of gable roof.

**Gable Roof:** A roof that consists of two sloping planes that meet at the ridge or peak. The planes are supported at their ends by triangular, upward extensions of walls known as gables.

**Hipped Roof:** A roof with four sloped sides.

**Mansard Roof:** A roof that has two slopes on all four sides.

**Massing of the Building(s):** The combined effect of the arrangement, volume and shape of a building or group of buildings. Also called bulk.

**Muntin (or Window Bar) –** A short bar used to separate glass in a sash into multiple lights. Also called a windowpane divider or a grille (“true divided light”)

**Parapet:** The portion of an exterior wall that rises entirely above the roof, usually in the form of a low retaining wall; the parapet may be shaped or stepped.

**Pediment:** A low triangular gable above a cornice, topped by raking cornices and ornamented.

**Pilaster:** A column partially embedded in a wall, usually non-structural and often decorated to resemble a classical column.

**Public Right-of-Way:** Includes the street, curb and sidewalk area in front of private property at the front lot line.

**Quoin:** Corner treatment for exterior walls, either in masonry or frame buildings.

**Roof:** Flat or Pitched. Pitched roofs can be: Hip, Mansard, Gambrel, Gable, and more.

**Sash:** (Window Sash) Framework of stiles and rails in which the lights of a window are set.



## Acknowledgements

Mr. T. Bryan Mulligan, AIA

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