

DESIGN GUIDELINES

These guidelines are not intended as a prescription that will guarantee the good design of residential and commercial neighborhoods. The nature of every site is different and only a comprehensive assessment of opportunities and constraints and an integrated response to context can insure the best and most appropriate design solutions. More detailed design guidelines, such as those illustrated to the right, are required to define appropriate and inappropriate details, dimensions, and materials.

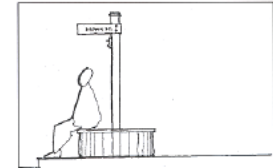
Never-the-less, there are design and planning principles that have structured the historic growth of Wakefield as well as many other American towns, and that are generally considered to result in attractive neighborhoods with a strong sense of community.

Some of these principles are articulated on the pages that follow.

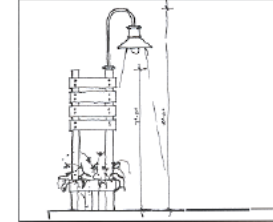
STREET SIGNAGE

Guideline

- * Signage should be uniform and clear.
- * Signage can be incorporated with the street lighting.
- * Notice boards should be incorporated into the overall signage of the village in order to alleviate telephone pole postings.
- * A distinction should be made between municipal and private enterprise signs.
- * The marine quality of the village should be emphasized in the design of simple wood constructions as bases for directional signs, street lighting and notice boards.



Simple wood construction can be used for street signage.



Street lighting can be incorporated with the signage and decorative banners can be placed above the notice board below.

AWNINGS AND OVERHANGS

Guideline

- * Porches, awnings, arcades and overhangs are encouraged to provide a convenient covered sidewalk zone for pedestrians.
- * Awnings are retractable fabric covered frames and may extend up to 6 ft. over the sidewalk with a minimum of 9 ft. clear underneath them.
- * Overhangs may be like awnings but are of fixed construction, generally with a metal standing seam or corrugated surface. They may also be roofed to match the building's principal roof.

Discussion

- * On mixed-use streets awnings and overhangs offer weather protection and an intimate scale for pedestrian activity.



Awnings are encouraged to provide a covered sidewalk zone for pedestrians.



Awnings over individual windows add interest to the streetscape.



Consistent building set-backs help define the character of a neighborhood.

DIMENSIONAL REQUIREMENTS THAT BALANCE CONSISTENCY AND VARIETY

Setbacks and minimum lot requirements are important in determining the character of a residential community, and should be keyed to a comprehensive understanding of the neighborhood. Too often dimensional requirements are excessive, and create relatively useless left over space between buildings. Clustering can make better use of open space, using smaller dimensions in creative ways.

Reductions in dimensional requirements can be keyed to public benefits: affordability, open space, the preservation of existing neighborhood character. Minimizing side yard setbacks on one side, reduced front yard setbacks in some neighborhoods, and requirements that recognize unique site features can lead to a more unified streetscape that still maintains a sense of variety.

In downtown areas setbacks can be reduced even further to produce the kind of street life associated with urban areas.

In some areas housing can be pushed right up to the street.



ALIGNMENT OF BUILDINGS TO REINFORCE THE PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC SPACE

In older, traditional communities houses with front porches line public streets. Consistent setbacks of 30' or less help define streets as outdoor rooms with a perceptible shape and character. The houses relate to one another and focus on the street as a community space. Orientation to a shared open space can help unify the streetscape and give a sense of character.

More recent developments, often on hills or large amorphous lots, scatter houses in seemingly arbitrary locations and orientations, leaving the remaining space feeling left over and poorly defined.



Aligning house fronts gives character to the street.

Varied building types can still create a neighborhood if they have a consistent relationship to the street.





Building around existing trees adds value to new housing.

PRESERVATION OF SITE FEATURES

The unique natural and man-made character of a site should be recognized in new development. Wooded hillsides, wetlands, rock outcroppings, large trees, and distant vistas should be elements around which a site's design is organized.

It is beneficial to make unique natural features part of the public domain. A walking trail along wetlands, a vista kept open off a public street, a rock outcropping marking the entry to a development, or a hilltop that is part of an open space network create value for private property owners while contributing to shared Town goals. Roads sculpted to fit the landscape and houses located so that significant cutting and filling are not required should be part of the planning process. Old houses can often be maintained with new development around them, creating continuity between past and future.

Wetlands can give character to adjacent development, as at Colonial Point.



PUBLIC SPACES

The small town character that attracts people to places like Wakefield comes from its public spaces, many in the older parts of town. New developments can build on these precedents.

Streets can be more than vehicular access ways. Cul-de-sacs can be more than circles of asphalt. Even parking lots can be more than paved wastelands. Both individual property owners and the community at large benefit when attention is paid to creating public spaces.

Streets lined by trees, fences, porches and houses take on a public quality that creates a sense of community. A shared green space can form a focus for a group of houses and then connect them to adjacent neighborhoods. A loop around a central green to provide an emergency vehicle turnaround may utilize less paving than a cul-de-sac. Shorter driveways are possible if front yards are reduced. Land can then be reserved for community space or for recreation. Such places can link together to form a green space network throughout the town.



Narrow spaces, if well designed, can create an animated streetscape.

Trees help turn streets into gracious public spaces.





Retaining walls suggest the shape of the natural landscape while defining the street and sidewalk.

STREETSCAPE - PUBLIC

The street should be considered as a public outdoor room, with a character that adds to the value of adjoining properties. Streets should have appropriate dimensions that encourage pedestrian movement, and sidewalks along at least one side to connect houses and neighborhoods to each other. Street trees should be planted along the street to screen houses from traffic and make walking more pleasant.

Planting strips characterize older neighborhoods in Wakefield and should be required in newer developments. Stone pylons and retaining walls along the sidewalk, used to define neighborhoods in the Town's West Side, are local landmarks that could be repeated in other locations.

Street trees screen houses from the street while making attractive places for walking.



STREETSCAPE - PRIVATE

Front yards, fences, hedges, and low walls both connect and separate houses from the street, making both public and private areas more usable.

Ideally, a series of zones define increasingly private areas as one approaches the fronts of houses. Sidewalk, gate, yard, steps, porch, bay, door, and windows demarcate transitions from public, to semi-public, to semi-private, to private areas, creating a rich environment. These zones can continue in the rear, with porches, decks, yards, fences, and alleys again connecting families to the community.

In general, these zones should parallel the street. Retaining walls are necessary when sites are regraded and can raise yards above the street and define the sidewalk below. Planting can create a screen lining the sidewalk that continues from one house to the next. Yards should not be designed autonomously, but as part of a larger streetscape and neighborhood.



Private landscape contributes to the larger community nearby.





Winding streets make sense on hillside sites if they follow natural contours.

STREET LAYOUT

New suburban streets too often try to emulate the picturesque curves of rural roads. In reality, they usually fail to capture the charm of the countryside or the neighborhood character of a town.

For most locations in Wakefield, a grid of streets is likely to be more appropriate for new development than the arbitrary winding of a cul-de-sac. A grid allows multiple entry and exit points connecting a new development to the surrounding community. Streets can be narrower and shorter, avoiding rush hour choke points and encouraging pedestrian traffic. Curves can be located where they make sense in relation to the natural landscape, avoiding a contrived or arbitrary quality.

In general, residential streets should be as narrow as possible while still accommodating traffic and emergency vehicles. Narrow driving lanes and on-street parking slow traffic and improve safety. On-street parking can be provided in widened areas off the street while maintaining narrower, pedestrian oriented dimensions elsewhere.

Straight streets on flat sites tie houses to the neighborhood and beyond.



DRIVEWAYS AND PARKING

Driveways and parking are a necessary part of residential design, but they should not denigrate the neighborhood character. Thoughtful accommodation of automobiles allows asphalt and curb cuts to be minimized, creating a better walking environment.

Garages beneath, to the side, or behind single family houses allow friendly porches, entries, and windows rather than blank garage doors to define the streetscape. Two garage bays (on the side or back) can be reached by a ten-foot wide curb cut, allowing more green space along the street. Two or more houses can share driveways, leaving more yard space for each house.

Parking can also be in the rear, accessed from an alley or a loop road that circles behind a group of houses. This strategy is especially effective for a row of townhouses or a multi-family grouping, allowing planting rather than asphalt to face the street in front.

On-street parking can also reduce the amount of paving required. Periodic increases in the width of a street can accommodate parking without creating an overly wide street in relation to the anticipated traffic. Landscaping is important, especially where driveways and parking areas abut the street or residences.

Strategies that treat parking areas as carefully developed and landscaped courtyards used for parking rather than barren seas of asphalt should be encouraged.



Garages tucked behind houses allow porches rather than blank facades to address the street.

Parking and garages slipped under and behind multi-family housing prevent paving and garage doors from overwhelming the site.

