



Town of Athol Downtown Design Guidelines

Downtown Vitality Committee
February 13, 2024

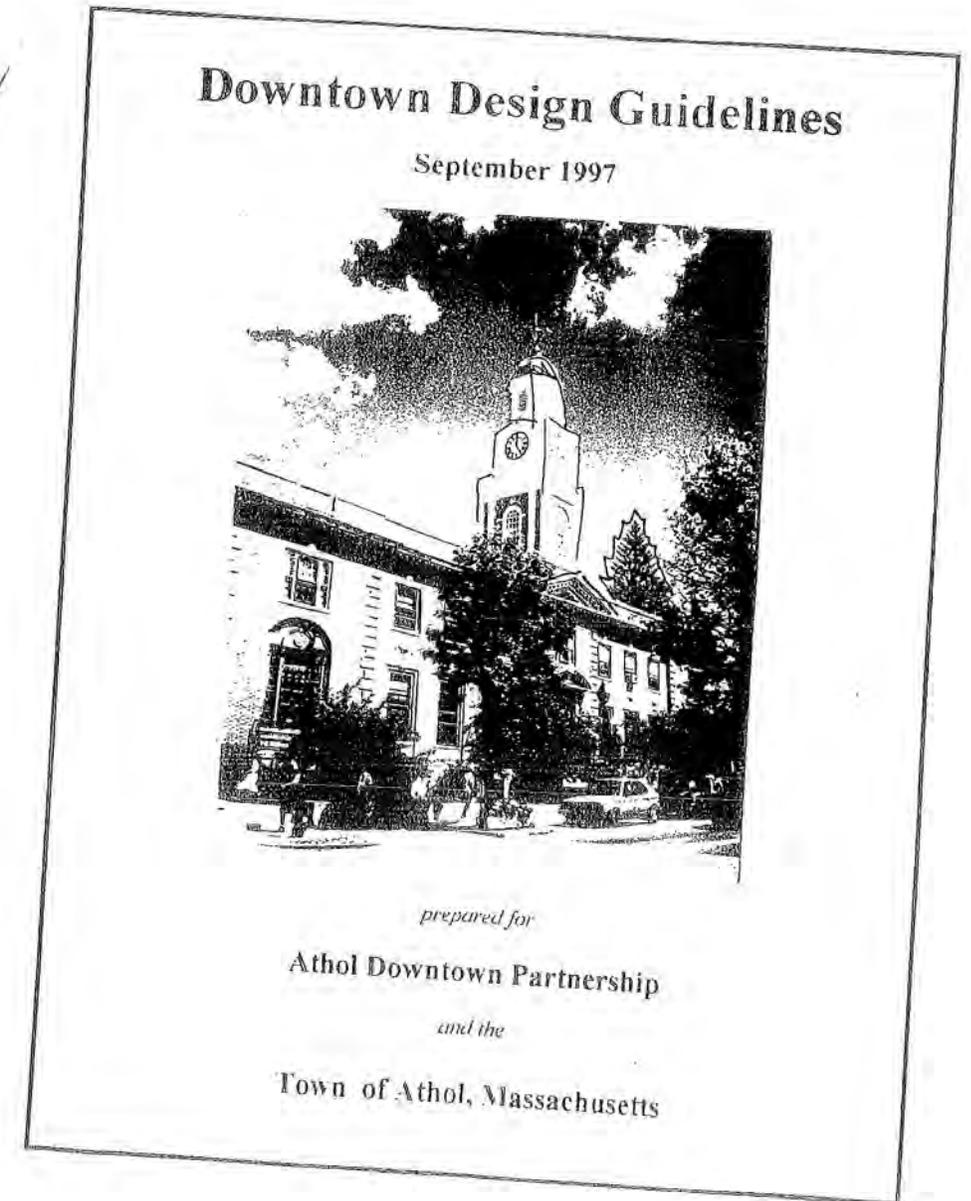


Timeline



Existing Guidelines: Review

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Images
- ▶ Signs
- ▶ Entrances and Doorways
- ▶ Color
- ▶ Awnings & Canopies
- ▶ Maintenance & Structure
- ▶ Wood Restoration
- ▶ Building Equipment & Hardware
- ▶ ADA Standards
- ▶ Site Improvement
- ▶ Standards for Rehabilitation
- ▶ Example
- ▶ Glossary



Existing Guidelines: Review

- ▶ *Identify the components that need to be brought up to current standards. This will include the current design review process.*
- ▶ Introduction (update)
- ▶ Images(update, add)
- ▶ Signs (update, add)
- ▶ Entrances and Doorways
- ▶ Awnings & Canopies
- ▶ Color (update)
- ▶ Maintenance & Structure (reorganize)
- ▶ Wood Restoration (reorganize)
- ▶ Building Equipment & Hardware (reorganize)
- ▶ ADA Standards (update)
- ▶ Site Improvement (reorganize based on topic, jurisdiction)
- ▶ Standards for Rehabilitation (update)
- ▶ Example (discuss!)
- ▶ Glossary (keep and add)

Missing?

- ▶ Sustainability
- ▶ Infill Development
- ▶ Effective storefront design
- ▶ Effective storefront display
- ▶ Public Realm
- ▶ Town Infrastructure
- ▶ ??

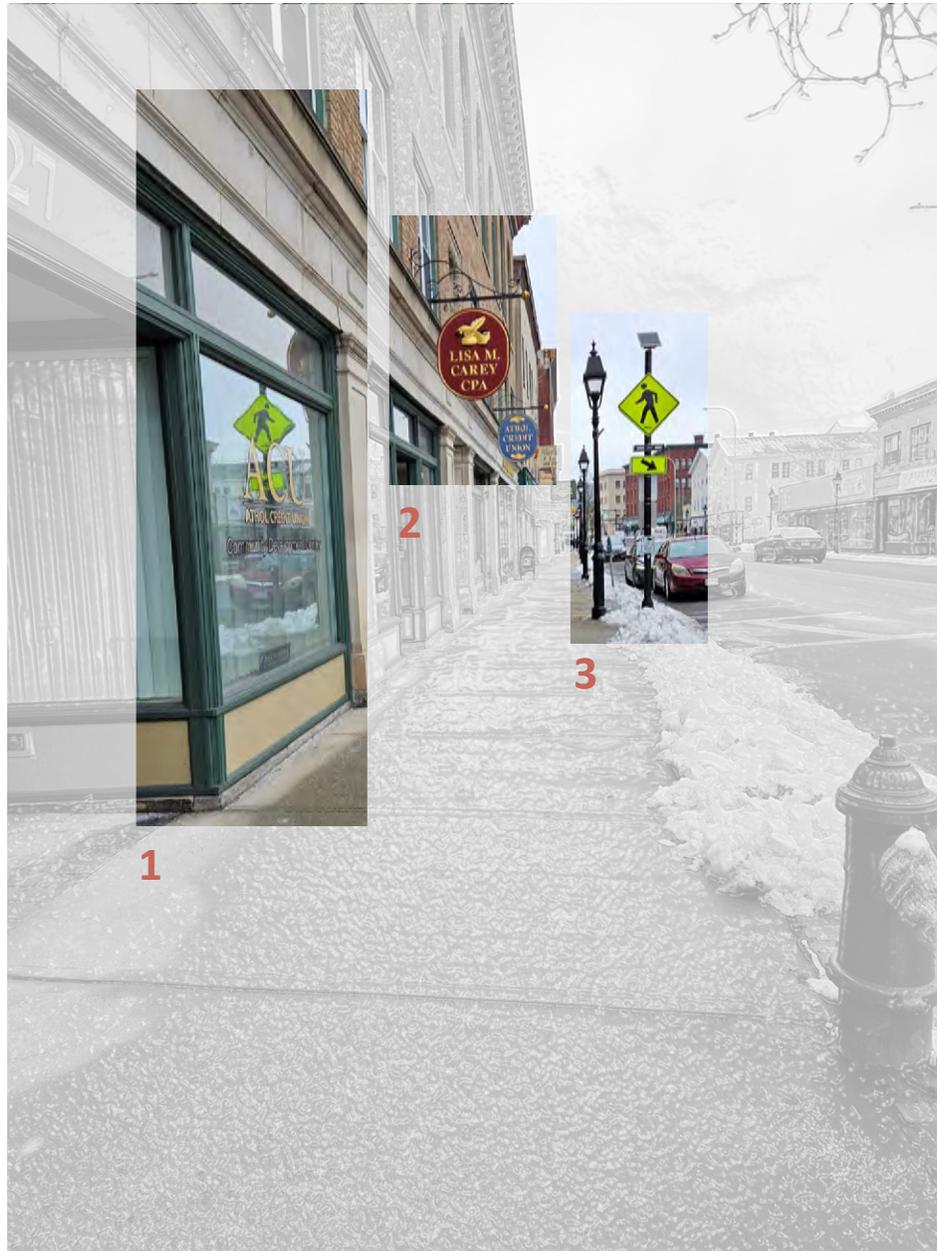
Existing Conditions



1 3-part storefront with sign band



2 Projecting signs



1

2

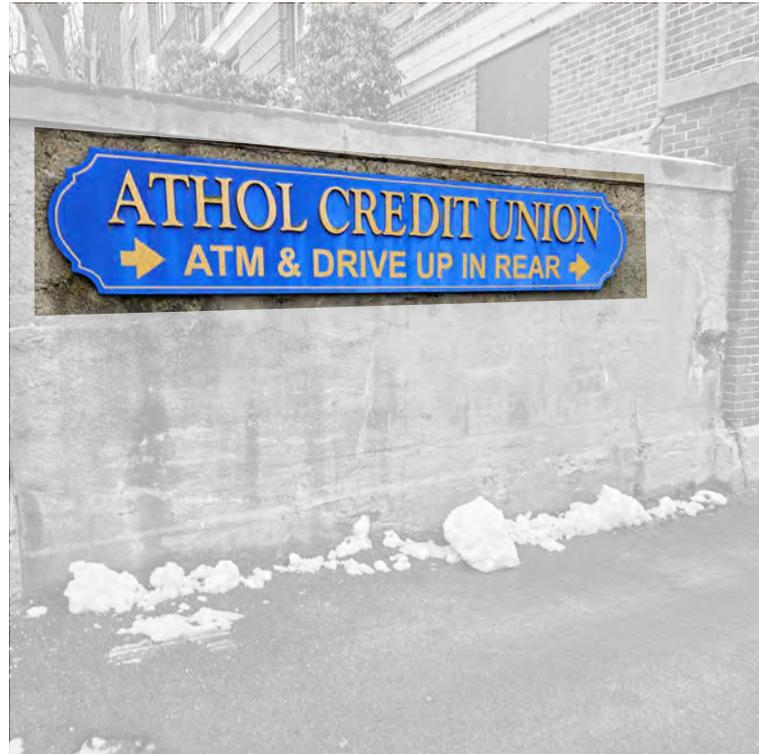
3



3 Town lighting and crosswalk infrastructure

Existing Conditions

Signage for rear businesses

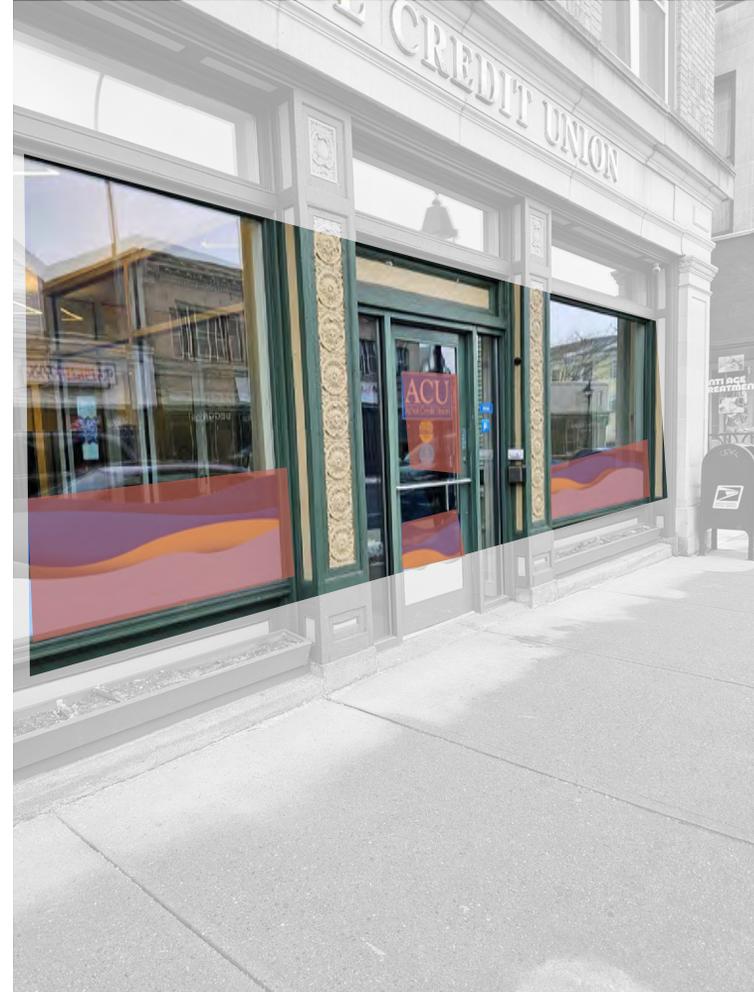


Existing Conditions

Percent of window coverage



Areas in red are obscured – what is the right percentage?



2/13/2024

Existing Conditions

Use of Sign Band



1 Temporary sign, placement not within the sign band

2 Proportion relative to sign band?

3 Proportion relative to sign band?



Existing Conditions

Storefronts



Recessed entry



Flat entry; flat window under overhang



Flat entry; protruding window; use of awnings

Existing Conditions

Window display



Existing Conditions

Town street furniture and materials



1 Concrete, brick, standard tree-grate



2 Bin, streetlight base, bench



Precedents: Use of Photos; Encourage/Discourage

3. Buildings

Massing and character

The design of the building form and architectural features should be respectful to the surrounding residential context, to reduce the impression of large scale structures, and to reinforce the sense of a modest pedestrian-oriented village.

Principles

- All aspects of a building design should reinforce the sense of community and strengthen the perception of Nobscot as a village center with an identity and sense of place
- Large buildings should be divided and defined as smaller and distinct parts that are part of an overall composition
- Building massing and character should be designed to promote interest and a sense of vitality and activity in the center
- Building massing and character should develop a traditional approach to the building form that enhances the sense of place of the Nobscot village center
- Building massing, orientation and design should define a clear relationship to its surroundings to respond to adjacent structures, frame street frontages, define open spaces, and shape community amenities



Design of the building massing to frame street frontages and small plazas while reinforcing a modest pedestrian scale.



Building massing with a retail base that is differentiated from a residential top integrated into a complementary design.



Variation in building massing, height, roof form, balconies and materials reduces the visual impact of a larger building.

Framingham Nobscot Village Design Guidelines

City of Framingham (Nobscot Village)

Storefronts

- Retail storefronts can contribute to the vitality of the streetscape. Storefronts should face the street and make generous use of clear, non-mirrored, non-opaque glass. Store interiors and goods should be visible from the sidewalk and should not be obstructed by landscaping or architectural features.
- Awnings, appropriately scaled signage, and lighting are encouraged to enhance the storefront's appearance.

ENCOURAGED



Inviting storefronts

DISCOURAGED



Uninviting storefronts



Town of Northborough

Precedents: Guidelines for Sustainability

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

ELEMENTS

- 1** **LOCALLY SOURCED MATERIALS**
Materials that are produced locally help support the local economy, have a smaller carbon footprint due to reduced transportation needs and, in the case of natural materials, have a visual harmony with their location.
- 2** **HIGH-PERFORMANCE BUILDING SKIN**
Low emissivity windows, high R-value spray insulation, reduced thermal bridging, adequate depth exterior walls, solar shading, and sustainable cladding all contribute to a high-performance building envelope.
- 3** **LATENT ENERGY (SOLAR / GEOTHERMAL)**
The energy naturally existing within a site is its latent energy. In the northeast, this is most often in the form of solar energy coming from the sun, and geothermal energy in the form the stable temperature of the ground despite seasonal temperature swings.
- 4** **GREEN ROOFS**
Green roofs reduce storm water runoff by absorbing and then slowly releasing rainwater. They protect the underlying roof, reduce solar gain during the summer months, and provide habitat for wildlife. If located on a lower roof of the building, they can also be a visual amenity to higher floors or adjacent developments.

- 5** **STREET TREES**
Street trees reduce solar gain, provide shade for pedestrians, filter the air and convert CO2 to oxygen, provide habitat for birds, and protect pedestrians. Design must allow for proposed trees to grow to their mature size. Planning documents should specify measures to ensure that there is sufficient space for water penetration and root growth and that the location is appropriate to the mature size of the proposed tree.
- 6** **PERMEABLE PAVING**
Permeable paving comes in many forms, materials, and colors. Fundamentally they share the capacity to allow rain water to filter through them and leach back into the ground. This reduces the load on storm sewers during storms, and allows for ground water recharging.
- 7** **RAIN GARDENS / BIOSWALES**
Rain gardens provide holding space for storm water during large rain events, averting flooding and run off in adjacent spaces such as sidewalks and roadways. When filled with water-tolerant grasses and plants, they provide a visual amenity and additional capacity during storm events.

Town of Watertown, Gamble Associates

Precedents: Use of Historic Images

1	2	5	6
3	4	7	8
9	10		

1 First Church in Sterling
 2 Conant Free Public Library and First Church in Sterling
 3 50 Main Street: 1883 Sterling High School; now Sterling Light Dept.
 4 33 Main Street, Sterling Town Hall, Mitchell Store, lost building
 5 Trolley on Main Street
 6 11 Main Street
 7 Mitchell-Sawyer store (photo dated 1911)
 8 14 Main Street: Mitchell house
 9 27 Main Street: Helen Fitch house (razed 1953)
 10 240 Worcester Road: Sterling Inn

All images courtesy of David Gibbs and the Sterling Historical Society.

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June 2021 Town Center Design Guidelines, Town of Sterling 15

Town of Sterling

Precedents: Review Process and Standards for the Town

Next Steps

The Town should consider the following next steps for these design guidelines:

- Review and approve the guidelines. This should be done by the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals. The Select Board may also wish to review and endorse these guidelines.
- Integrate the design guidelines into the Town's review process for projects within the Town Center District submitted to the either the Planning Board or the Zoning Board of Appeals.
- Consider introducing guidelines for the treatment of public ways within the Town Center as defined by the maps on page 5. These guidelines are described below.

Initial Adoption

Because these guidelines are not mandatory, they do not require Town Meeting approval. The Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Appeals may choose to adopt them as part of their review process for site plan review and/or special permit. The guidelines would be used to discuss and evaluate applications for rehabilitation, additions, or new buildings and provide a framework for discussions between the boards and the applicants and a basis for comments by abutters and members of the public.

Future Expansion

The scope of this project was to develop advisory guidelines only. However, as the Town boards and residents become more familiar with the use of design guidelines, they may find it appropriate to make some or all of these a mandatory component of the review process. These guidelines could be upgraded to development standards and added directly to the Town's Protective By-laws or kept as a separate document and referred to by reference in the Protective By-laws. Mandatory standards will need to be more explicit about the requirements applicants must meet. More precise language will make it clearer as to when an applicant has met the standard.

The guidelines could be expanded to other zoning districts, including the Commercial District. The boundary shown on page 5 could also be extended to incorporate contributing buildings such as the Conant Free Public Library, First Church in Sterling, and the Mitchell House.

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Public Rights-of-Way

Although the focus of these design guidelines are on private properties that come before the Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Appeals for review, the Town of Sterling could – and should – also take action to reinforce the historic character and pedestrian friendliness of the Town Center. The Town has already begun improvements to the sidewalks to address accessibility. The Town is working with MassDOT and the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission on a Complete Streets Program. The Town should leverage future Chapter 90 funds and grant programs to consider a policy that addresses the full right-of-way and includes the following:

- Consistent and coordinated street furniture, including historic lighting and coordinated benches, trash and recycling receptacles, tree grates, and other physical components of the streetscape. Such consistency would reinforce the identity of the Town Center.
- Consistent sidewalk materials, including a main surface, such as concrete, with a contrasting trim and granite edging. If trim is used, the sidewalk should be widened enough to accommodate pedestrians with stroller or wheelchair users without use of the trim as a travel surface. Adding contrasting trim, such as brick, stone, or concrete pavers, may require that the sidewalks be widened.
- Street trees to shade the pavement, reduce the heat island effect, and provide better air quality. Street trees should be installed with a grate to protect the tree and an appropriate depth and width for the tree to flourish. Again, the sidewalk may need to be widened to accommodate multiple users and the infrastructure for the tree to survive.
- Continue to install crosswalks with connecting ramps. Crosswalks should always have a ramp to allow safe transition from the level of the sidewalk to the level of the street for users of all ages and abilities. The surface of the ramp should differ from the surface of both the sidewalk and the street. Crosswalks should be placed with appropriate regularity to that people can safely cross the street to access activity on both sides. A differentiation of color and/or material within the crosswalk will provide better visibility for both pedestrians and drivers.
- Consider burying the utility lines the next time the road is reconstructed. In addition to improving the look of the Town Center, buried power lines are more appropriate for a region with significant power losses due to winter storms.



Example of crosswalk with ramp; color and material differentiation for both



Same image; note historic lighting with cross arms for future banner



Sidewalk with contrasting trim and granite curb.

June 2021 Town Center Design Guidelines, Town of Sterling 27

Town of Sterling

Community Outreach

- ▶ Public workshop
 - ▶ Meeting date?
 - ▶ Location
 - ▶ Format
- ▶ Focus groups
 - ▶ Discuss options and design review process
 - ▶ Same day?
 - ▶ Who should be invited?



