## Division III
### Section A

# COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Context</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Street</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freestanding</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping Center</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Center</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Baltimore County has three major business zones (BL, BM, BR) and numerous overlay districts which are used within the URDL. Two of the districts, CT and CCC, confer additional density onto the underlying zone. The majority of the commercial zones, and therefore, the majority of the commercial development, is located along the County’s radial corridors. These commercial corridors have developed dramatically over the past 40-50 years. Unfortunately, aesthetic quality has not kept pace with the quantity of development. Adoption of the commercial development design guidelines will assist the county in obtaining high quality, aesthetically pleasing development.

The purpose of this section is to provide general guidelines that will be used by the County to evaluate project design as required by the development process. These guidelines are advisory and should be used by the County, builder/developer, and residents.

This section has been divided into four major development types which include Main Street, Freestanding (single or multiple use), Shopping Center, and Power Center (wholesale-retail). Each type of development has been divided into the following elements:

- Site Planning
- Landscaping
- Open Space
- Circulation and Parking
- Signage and Lighting
- Building Features

Each of the elements has a series of objectives with examples of how these objectives might be achieved. The site context issues should also be used in project evaluation. Projects are evaluated on a case by case basis studying surrounding land use and zoning, topography and environmental constraints.
SITE CONTEXT

Evaluate surrounding development to determine appropriate building form, orientation and setbacks.

Prior to the submission of a site design, the surrounding neighborhood context should be evaluated to ascertain the appropriate building form, orientation, and setbacks. The primary purpose of this evaluation is to achieve a built project that blends into the surrounding development. For example, if surrounding buildings are located close to the road, then the proposed buildings should be located in a similar manner.

As another example, where strips of formerly residential buildings are being converted to office and retail uses, the residential character and scale of the architecture should be retained to protect the integrity of the neighborhood. As existing buildings are modified or expanded, the use of varying architectural forms and detailing should reflect those found in the community.

The development context affects the site design proposal; the context must be considered to obtain a cohesive commercial development. In certain cases the site context will not dictate a consistent or cohesive building orientation. Site context should be also interpreted to express ideas of the place or region, including its history, culture, weather, ecology or other factors.

Existing

Proposed

An example of adaptive reuse -- two existing residences where remodeled, and linked with an addition, to become a compatible, leasable commercial building.
Site Context

Existing

Proposed

In this example, two small residences were razed to make room for a larger commercial building. The new building incorporates materials and detailing commonly used in the buildings of the community.

Existing

Proposed

Additions to converted residential buildings should repeat its architectural features to create a larger structure of unified, compatible design.
To the extent feasible or practical, share points of egress and ingress and locate utilities underground.

Two urban features which have a significant impact upon the visual quality of development along the roadways of commercial corridors are curb cuts and utility poles. Consolidating curb cuts reduces congestion on the corridors and eliminates conflicting traffic movements. Requiring all utility lines be located underground through the development process may not always be physically possible and the cost to undertake this type of effort is beyond the financial means of the County. However, each development is encouraged to share access and place utilities underground whenever possible.

Appropriately screen and buffer commercial development from residentially zoned properties.

Adequate protection of adjoining residencies is critical to maintaining stable and economically healthy residential communities.

*Shared access reduces traffic congestion by consolidating ingress/egress points and allowing vehicular movement between properties without using the street.*
Main Street

MAIN STREET CONCEPT

“Main Streets” have long been an integral part of Baltimore County’s urbanized areas, including York Road through Towson, Harford Road through Parkville, and Reistertown Road through Pikesville. While each has its own character, they also have many commonalities. As a rule, Main Streets consist of gateways and a core, are commercial in nature, but contain mixed retail, office, and residential uses.

Over the decades, buildings located along such streets have undergone numerous renovations and distinct architectural features are now often hidden behind facades that are of questionable aesthetic quality.

It is the purpose of these guidelines to provide direction where the future improvement (development or redevelopment) of Main Streets is concerned and to stimulate creativity.

CIRCULATION AND PARKING

Reinforce existing parking patterns.

- Retain curbside parking where appropriate.
- Consolidate rear yard parking lots and reduce the number of access drives. Clearly designate all off-site parking areas.

SITE PLANNING

Continue the existing building edge.

- Continue the existing building edge, i.e., build new structures to the sidewalk with zero setback from the property line. Large setbacks with front yard parking are not recommended.

- Incorporate elements of existing buildings into the architectural design of new structures, but do not duplicate existing forms. Construction of standardized “franchise” type structures is strongly discouraged.
LANDSCAPING AND OPEN SPACE

Use Main Street elements to reinforce existing character.

- Create a sense of entry to the Main Street. Identify entry points by utilizing such elements as street trees, curbed or boxed planters, lighting fixtures or combinations thereof.

- Building height should relate proportionally to street width. Where appropriate, design narrow streets with wide sidewalks, or establish islands that protrude into the street at regular intervals. Furnish such islands with street trees, boxed planters or architectural light fixtures. Landscaped central median strips also effect a visual reduction of street scale.

Building located in a similar matter to existing building. Parking is located in the rear; buffering and screening of adjoining residences is provided.
Main Street

Provide non-vehicular access.

- Establish bicycle lanes where sufficient space is available. Provide bicycle racks.

- Create a pedestrian-friendly environment. Uniform paving texture is encouraged. Identify pedestrian crosswalks clearly. Develop a system of small civic spaces that provides seating in sun and shade, as well as vandal-proof trash receptacles. Accent the walks and civic spaces with landscaping providing seasonal interest and color.

- Encourage restaurants and cafes to provide outdoor seating. Utilize awnings to protect pedestrians from inclement weather and to reinforce continuity of the built edge.

SIGNAGE AND LIGHTING

Signage should be an integral part of the building design.

- Signage should reinforce the Main Street character. Signs should be subordinate to the building and should not exceed the width of the storefront. Signs should be hung within building height. Large roof structures with perpendicular signage are not recommended.

- Utilization of durable materials, subdued colors and professionally executed graphic design is encouraged. Signs should be compatible with those of adjacent buildings in style, size, color, shape and graphic design. A proposed sign should not dominate other signs.

Light fixtures should be consistent throughout the area.

- Light fixtures should be compatible with building design and should be consistent throughout the Main Street core. They should be located in a manner that contributes to the pedestrian environment.

- Lighting should be appropriate for its location. Cut-off lighting should be provided adjacent to residences, pedestrian scale lighting should be provided along the street, site lighting should be provided along the sides and rear of buildings.

BUILDING FEATURES

Reinforce distinct architectural features.

- Utilization of natural materials, such as stone, masonry, and beveled wood siding are recommended. Facade treatments with synthetic, flimsy or highly reflective materials such as vinyl, formstone, T-111 or mirror glass are strongly discouraged.

- Incorporate subtle but distinct color schemes that create a sense of continuity and reinforce a common theme. Bright colors are appropriate as accents or trims, but are not recommended for large surface areas of buildings.
- Screen roof-mounted mechanical equipment from pedestrian view.

- Utilize roof forms to provide visual interest. Pitched roofs constructed of metal (with standing seams) or wood shakes or shingles are recommended. Exaggerated cornices, parapets or other projecting features should be considered for flat roofed buildings. Screen all mechanical equipment on roof tops.

- Retain the proportion of existing buildings, i.e., create clear separation between the first floor (storefront) and upper floor. Residential structures converted to commercial uses should select storefront and window types that are compatible with upper facade.

- Building walls facing adjoining properties should incorporate details such as windows, doors, color, texture, or landscaping to provide visual interest.

*Building facades repeat architectural theme of surrounding residences. The building facade is designed with a two-story residential appearance. The chimneys, shutters, double-hung windows, and fascia board all contribute to this character.*
FREESTANDING CONCEPT

Freestanding commercial buildings can be generally placed into two categories. The first category includes uses which have distinct operational demands generated by hours of operation, high parking requirements, or larger trip generation. Such uses include restaurants, banks and auto repair establishments. The second category includes commercial buildings which have multiple tenants but no major anchor store. Mixed office, retail, and residential uses are encouraged within these areas.

SITE PLANNING

Locate buildings and site elements to enhance surrounding uses.

- Buildings should be oriented towards the street, either parallel or perpendicular, except where deviation would create more functional and useful open space.
- Buildings should form a uniform edge or setback along the street.
- Cluster freestanding structures to provide form and enhance the visual quality of the site development.
- Minimize front setbacks.

OPEN SPACE

Provide open space to accommodate landscaping and create useable areas for employees and patrons.

- Small spaces designed for use by occupants or clients should be provided.

- Design open space to:
  1) Screen or buffer adjoining residences;
  2) Break up large parking lots (greater than 15 spaces);
  3) Provide green space around buildings and adjoining commercial uses;
  4) Allow some secure, on-site areas for sitting.

LANDSCAPING

Landscaping should be used for screening, shading, and enhancing site design.

- Landscaping should be provided to address:
  1) Continuous streetscape;
  2) Screening/buffering of adjoining residences;
  3) Perimeter landscaping between adjoining uses;
  4) Landscaping of building edges.

- When planting diamonds are provided within parking areas, they should be provided at more frequent intervals than what is required for planting islands, e.g., 1 per 6-8 spaces.

CIRCULATION AND PARKING

Provide safe and convenient parking.

- Circulation and parking areas should include landscaped peninsulas and/or islands.
Freestanding

- Minimize the number of ingress/egress points.
- Share pedestrian and vehicular access to adjoining non-residential properties.
- Locate parking bays along the sides and rear of the lot; minimize parking areas along the front.
- Provide safe and convenient pedestrian access.
- Sidewalks/paths should be provided to adjoining residential communities.
- Provide sidewalks within the street right-of-way.
- Sidewalk or path connections to adjoining uses should be considered at the building faces.
- Secondary vehicular access to side streets is encouraged.

**LIGHTING AND SIGNAGE**

Lighting and signage should complement the building architecture and be appropriate for its purpose.

- Lighting should be designed to meet the specific needs of the site elements and integrated with the building design. Tall light standards which illuminate the entire site are discouraged because they lack scale.
- Lighting standards adjacent to residential areas should not exceed 18 feet in height and should be designed to prevent spillover of light onto the adjoining residences.
Freestanding

- Signage should be integrated with the building design.
- Freestanding identification signs should not exceed the height of the building.
- All signage should be graphically and color coordinated.
- Roofs should be an integral part of the building design and conform to a specified roof type.
- Building materials and colors should be based on their visual impact as well as their compatibility with the neighborhood.

BUILDING FEATURES

Incorporate representative architectural/site characteristics.

- The proposed use should incorporate attractive representative characteristics of surrounding areas. Transitional treatment may include matching cornice lines, continuing a colonnade, or using similar materials and building proportions. Consistency of scale, volume and details is more important than materials or colors.
- The proposed design should respect existing historic structures or districts in the immediate area. A vernacular style is preferred over “franchise” type structures.
- Nonresidential buildings sharing street frontage with residentially developed properties should maintain the basic design elements characteristic of the residential uses.
- Blank walls facing streets should be avoided.
- Exterior building elevations should be consistent on all sides in regard to roof style, materials, form and detailing.
Freestanding

Buildings should be oriented on the street, with parking to the sides and rear.

Efficient site design uses existing topography to provide at-grade access to multiple levels.

The building facade is designed with a balcony, columns, and an arcade to provide interest and scale.
Shopping Center

SHOPPING CENTER CONCEPT

Excluding major regional shopping malls, Baltimore County’s shopping centers have developed as linear strip centers along commercial corridors. These centers are characterized by large setbacks, acres of parking in the front, and high-mast, automobile-oriented signage. There is little streetwall remaining along these portions of the corridor. The corridors themselves are wide, carrying high traffic volumes at fast speeds. Pedestrian traffic is rare.

The design goals for these centers include developing a sense of street edge, respecting the character of adjacent residential areas, creating a visually attractive commercial environment and providing safe circulation for pedestrians.

SITE PLANNING

Develop a sense of street edge.

- If located at the intersection of two arterial streets, the site development should incorporate a special feature or focal point at the corner of the site.

- If not at an intersection, a special feature should be considered in conjunction with a transit stop or at the primary access point to the site.

- Large sites should allow for smaller out-parcel development of pad sites close to the street, particularly at corners.

- New development should provide parking areas that are beside and behind, as well as in front of buildings. This would allow the placement of buildings closer to the street and expanses of parking to be broken up.

Provide pedestrian accessibility.

- Buildings should be located to facilitate safe and comfortable pedestrian movement between them. If the adjacent site is developed, locate the building to facilitate pedestrian and vehicular connections to the developed sites.

Protect adjacent residential areas by appropriate placement of commercial buildings.

- Buildings should be arranged to reduce the effects of noise, odors, trash, light spillage, and circulation on the adjoining residences.

LANDSCAPING AND OPEN SPACE

Create an attractively landscaped right-of-way and maintain sense of streetwall.

- Following existing grades changes between different sections of a parking lot is an excellent way to break the uniformity and expanse. Avoid level grading of the entire lot. Use of retaining walls which allow the maintenance of existing slope areas is preferred over graded artificial slopes.

- Landscaped islands in the parking lot with curb cuts and shade trees are required by zoning and will help break the parking lot into more attractive, smaller scale areas as well as provide shade and areas for snow removal.
This shopping center is set back from the street to provide parking for patrons, however, extensive landscaping, an entry kiosk, and a pad site are used to strengthen the street edge.
• Coordinate placement of landscaping, benches, telephones, and lighting with the location of out-parcel development to improve the streetscape.

• Combine seating areas with seasonal color planting areas, and sculpture or water features to serve as a focal point.

• Landscape areas should be provided to integrate pad sites with surrounding land uses.

Provide buffers and screens for adjacent streets and residential areas.

• Plant evergreen trees where topography lessens the screening effect of a fence or wall.

• Screening should be an extension of the development’s architectural treatment and consistent in color and design. Walls should be constructed of quality materials consistent with the building facade material.

• Screen service facilities from the remainder of the project, adjacent land uses and roads.

• Dumpsters should be clustered and screened on all sides, especially when they are visible from neighboring properties or streets.

• Utility metering should be located within a designated service area and screened from the project and adjacent land uses.

CIRCULATION AND PARKING

Promote pedestrian accessibility.

• On the sides of the building which provide public access into the building, walkways should be wide enough to allow for sidewalk seating area as well as pedestrian travel. Weather protection should be provided at the entrance area and, if appropriate, along the entire building walkway.

• Internal walkway surfaces should be designed to be visually attractive and enhance pedestrian comfort and safety. They should be distinguishable from driving surfaces through the use of contrasting materials such as pavers, bricks or scored concrete.

• A pedestrian network should be provided within the parking lot to transit stops, to out-parcel development and to neighboring developments to increase accessibility from surrounding uses.

• Sidewalks along the front of commercial developments should be connected to the sidewalk along the street. At a minimum, walkways should connect focal points of pedestrian activity such as transit stops and street crossings to the major building entry points. The sidewalk system should be developed to avoid making customers walk across a sea of asphalt.

• Walkways should be provided along the full length of the building on any side which provides building access to the public or where public parking is available.
Minimize vehicular conflicts.

- Where feasible and desirable, consolidate curb cuts with a principal curb cut located at a mid-block location.

- No more than one curb cut per side street for secondary entrances should be provided.

- The driveway should be at least 200 feet from the intersection of major thoroughfares (arterials) unless a one-way traffic flow is used.

- Locate service facilities in a central area to be used by several retail establishments, separate from the main circulation and parking functions.

The signs for individual stores are located within the same area of the building. This band allows for variation but maintains building uniformity.
LIGHTING

Create a safe environment, reduce glare and spillage of light to adjoining properties and streets and provide attractive site elements.

- All lighting fixtures should incorporate cut-off shields to prevent the spillover of light to adjoining properties.
- Place utility poles evenly and plumb.
- Consider special lighting to emphasize landscape such as uplighting or special lights in trees.
- Light fixtures should be consistent with building designs of a uniform design throughout the development.
- Provide special lighting for pedestrians or for ambience as needed, on poles not to exceed 18 feet.

SIGNAGE

Create a consistent line of vision through the placement and orientation of signage.

- Development projects should include a plan that specifies location, size, materials and lighting for all shopping center and individual signs.
- Signage should be consistent in size, location, material, and graphic design throughout the project.

Shopping center with landscaping along the drop-off lane and an arcade along the shops.
Outdoor advertising (billboard) is inappropriate in shopping center parking lots.

One freestanding sign should be used to identify the shopping center, rather than several signs.

Develop a sense of street edge.

- Signs should be placed at the property line to promote a streetwall appearance.

Signage should be integrated with the building design.

- Signage should incorporate the architectural elements of the commercial development to bring identity of the building to the streetwall.

BUILDING FEATURES

Develop a sense of street edge.

- Encourage vertical elements higher than the typical one-story building through mixed uses on the site such as a second floor for offices or residences. This gives the building a stronger presence on the street and adds variety to the architecture.

- Main entrances to parking lots should provide architectural elements such as a gateway, arch or tower to create identity and sense of streetwall.

- Storefronts along walkways are encouraged.

Respect the character of the adjacent area in the design of buildings.

- Buildings within a multi-building complex should exhibit a unity of design through the use of similar elements such as rooflines, materials, window arrangement, sign location and details which respect neighboring residential areas.

- Roof lines, overhangs, and the front fascia should be extended to the rear of the building.

- Rear and side facades should be of finished quality and of the same color and materials as the front of the building.

Promote visual interest.

- New or remodeled buildings should incorporate bold architectural forms such as offsets, exaggerated parapets, and highly articulated entrances. Interesting materials, colors and details are strongly encouraged.

- Long, flat faces are strongly discouraged. Buildings over 100 feet in length should incorporate recesses/off-sets, angular forms or other features to provide a visually interesting shape. A single uninterrupted length of facade should not exceed 100 feet.

- Large expanses of flat monotonous material should be minimized through the use of bands of accent color, recessed or protruding belt courses, wide reveals or combinations thereof.
Shopping Center

- Colors are encouraged for trim as accents, but are discouraged for the main portions of the buildings.

- Mechanical equipment, if located on the building, shall be located within the roof form of the building or enclosed within a screening structure, the design of which is consistent with the design of the building.

Amenity areas are incorporated into site design. Long building facades are divided into visually scalable sections with a variety of architectural details and roof forms.
POWER CENTER CONCEPT

A Power Center is a destination, single-story shopping area, that is automobile oriented with no interior mall space and is often occupied by discount retailers (wholesale with membership and subject to sales tax). Generally, the largest user has a floor area over 100,000 square feet, but there may be two users with 40,000 to 80,000 square feet, and there may be additional strip retail uses and pad sites. Developers generally provide more than 5 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of building area. These centers can be characterized as large buildings with large amounts of parking.

SITE PLANNING

Site elements should develop a sense of street edge.

- Locate or center the largest user on the site to provide a focal point for design.

- Group buildings together to form a unified complex. Buildings may be organized to form a campus-like setting that are surrounded by attractively landscaped parking areas.

- If located at the intersection of two arterial streets, the site development should incorporate a special feature or focal point at the corner of the site.

- Locate pad sites close to the street to provide a sense of street edge.

- The furthest parking lot space should generally not be more than 300 feet from the building facade and no more that 500 feet from a building entrance.

- Design the site circulation system as a hierarchical system. The entry should feed a collector road which feeds the parking areas. The entry design should include a landscaped median to separate incoming and outgoing traffic and provide visual relief from the width of the paving.

- Design all sidewalks as a continuous circulation system and connect the sidewalks with the pedestrian ways in the vicinity.

- Screen mechanical and utility equipment, trash dumpsters and other similar items from view.

LANDSCAPING

Landscaping should be used to provide visual orientation, define circulation, and shade parking lots.

- Provide landscaping between the building facade and sidewalk where possible. Landscaping along the building will provide additional visual interest.

- Plant the strip between the major road and the site development with materials that continue the overall streetscape design.

- Locate street trees and other landscape features along the sidewalk system.

- If planting islands are staggered within the parking lots, then only one island break for every 14 parking spaces will be required. Islands should have a minimum of two trees.
The building complex is organized with the largest tenant at the center of the site. Anchor tenants and pad sites are located close to the right-of-way to provide a street edge. Service, loading and storage are at the rears of the buildings and screened by extensive landscaping. The parking lots are lined with trees to identify the main vehicular routes. A single identification kiosk is located at the main entry close to the major arterial.
• If tree-lined medians (minimum width of 9 feet) are used to separate parking aisles or the internal collector street, then island breaks will not be required.

OPEN SPACE

Provide open space for employees and patrons.

• Provide an outdoor, landscaped area for employees to take a break, eat lunch, wait for a ride, or meet someone.

• In projects where undeveloped land remains, use these areas as passive open space and provide pedestrian access.

CIRCULATION AND PARKING

Circulation patterns and parking should reinforce safe and efficient pedestrian and vehicular movement.

• Design an internal collector street which fronts a majority of the building entrances. This concept will have buildings on one side of the street and parking areas on the other.

• Use landscaped islands and medians to help separate and define the roadway network.

• Provide sidewalks along the parking lot side of the collector street. The extensive use of sidewalks is not required, but should be adequate to ensure a safe pedestrian environment.

• Provide sidewalks and curbs along the entire length of the front building facade. Include sidewalks along the sides of the building when facing a parking lot.

SIGNAGE AND LIGHTING

Signage should provide visual relief from the building facade(s).

• Signs should be wall-mounted and not extend above the building facade(s).

• The building signs should have a consistent color pallet (three colors or fewer, including background) and lettering style.

• One freestanding project identification sign that identifies the development may be up to 25 feet in height; if the development is on more than one major arterial or boulevard, then the other freestanding signs may not exceed 8 feet in height.

• The design of a freestanding sign may be kiosk-like to become part of the overall streetscape and use similar architectural elements included on the main building design.

• Architecturally compatible, low-level light fixtures are preferred. Lighting adjacent to residential areas should not exceed 18 feet in height.
BUILDING FEATURES

Large buildings should incorporate architectural elements that visually segment the structures.

- Buildings should be architecturally related with design and materials.

- Provide windows along the sidewalk edge to aid visual interest, give scale and provide a sense of “window shopping” and information about what is sold in the centers.

- A consistent, uniform architectural theme is desired for the development. Centers are often designed as a tall, one-story box. Provide some scale relief by offsetting the building entry or providing a canopy above the sidewalk.

- Avoid designing long unadorned facades. Provide repetition of shapes or forms along the building facade.

- Building heights may be varied to avoid long monotonous facades.

- The rear facades and loading areas should not be visible from the major street. Loading and service areas should be completely screened with the use of landscaping, decorative fencing or walls.

- Avoid large, flat roofs without using accents in the parapet line. Height differentiation provides visual relief of otherwise straight boxes.