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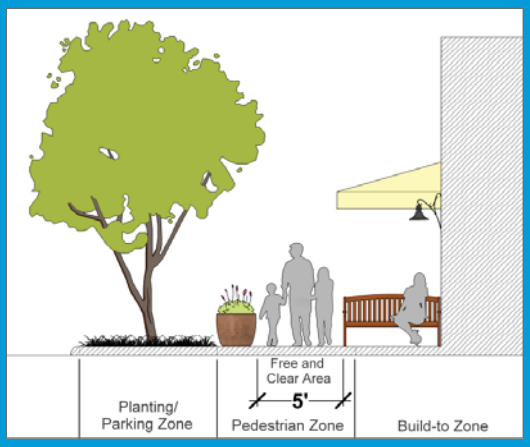
Zoning reFORMs for a New Chapter of City Building



Commercial Design Standards Handbook

Planning Department

July 2014

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Introduction

Background

Many communities have realized that the creation and enhancement of special "places" throughout a City, through careful design and arrangement of new and old buildings and spaces, can be an important economic development tool. Offering more options to live and work and shop and recreate is important to attracting and retaining the kinds of businesses and workers which are fueling this century's post-industrial economy.

The Comprehensive Plan recognizes that the creation and enhancement of these kinds of places requires guidance through the adoption of new design standards. The plan recommends more attention to the design of new and redeveloping commercial and mixed use projects. Thus, the Commercial Design Standards are established to encourage developments that are attractive, pedestrian-oriented, and enhance nearby neighborhoods.

The Commercial Design Standards are described in Chapter 3.77 of the City of Lincoln Design Standards. The standards apply to two categories of commercial and mixed use property: Corridors and Centers.

Corridors consist of linear commercial and mixed use areas within neighborhoods and along arterial streets with typically shorter blocks interconnected to local street networks. Corridors are generally located in the area of the city developed prior to 1950. Development is integrated with and easily accessible from abutting residential neighborhoods. Small-scale Corridor development is, by tradition and design, pedestrian friendly with one to three story buildings oriented to the street and built up to the property line. Larger-scale Corridor development has historically been automobile-dependent and often lacks a uniform character with variation in setbacks, building size and vehicular access, circulation, and parking.

Centers consist of commercial or mixed use development that is largely planned as one cohesive area, but may include adjacent commercial land and multiple land owners. Centers are generally located in areas of the city developed since 1950. Centers typically abut one or more arterials and are generally 5 to 100 acres in size. Centers are composed of a series of development “blocks” defined by perimeter streets and internal roadways. Internal roadways provide links to abutting streets along the perimeter of the site. Buildings are generally accessed via internal roadways. Defining features of well-designed Centers include human-scale building features, enhanced streetscapes, pedestrian amenities such as plazas, on-street parking, and clustering of buildings to promote walkability.

Who Should Use This Guide

This handbook is intended to serve as a guide for developers, architects, engineers, other design professionals, concerned citizens, city staff, and the general public regarding the founding principles and intent of the Commercial Design Standards for Lincoln. This illustrated handbook will also be used as a guide for review and interpretation by the Planning Director and Appeals Board.

Illustrated Reference Sections

In the following section each Urban Design provision has been illustrated with examples organized into two categories: appropriate (☑) or inappropriate (☒). In general terms the “appropriate” illustrations fulfill the intentions of the standards or are close in character while the “inappropriate” illustrations do not. Not all “appropriate” photographs in this handbook depict the exact metric of the standards; they are intended to clarify the intent of the provisions.

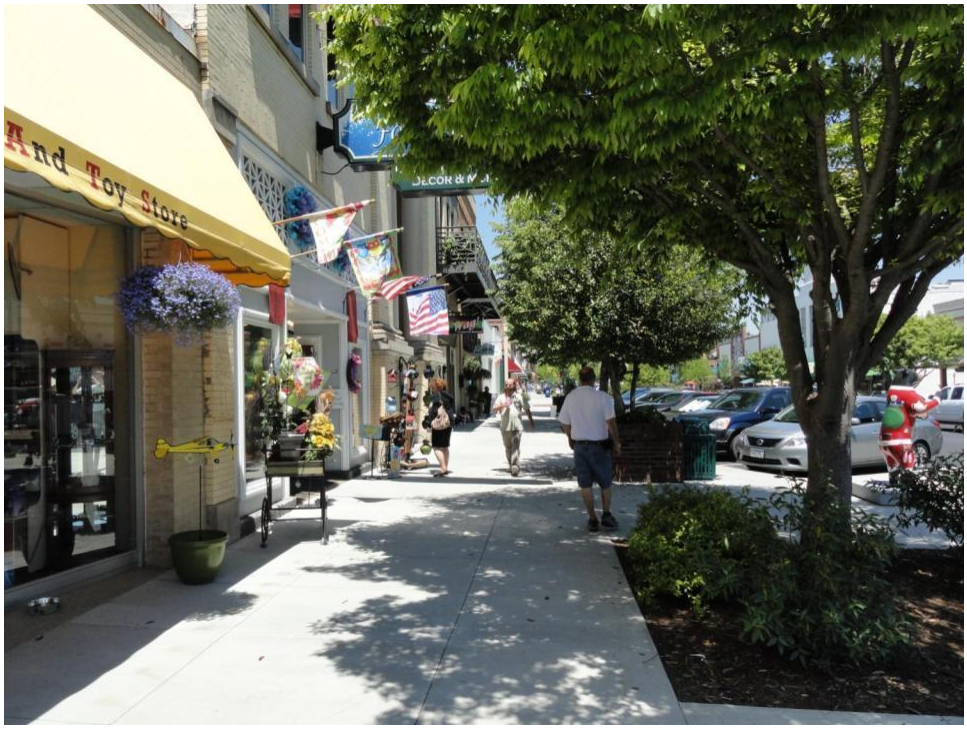
Streetscape

(Section 5)

The area along a public or private street or drive between the curb and the development is referred to as the streetscape. Streetscapes define how a city presents itself to the public, directly impacting the sense of place and walkability of a community and communicating even to casual passersby strong messages about the quality of a commercial area. The Comprehensive Plan recognizes that "good urban design includes an attractive streetscape". Streets should be treated as public places, rather than just as conduits to move through as quickly as possible.

The lack of streetscape makes it uncomfortable for a pedestrian to walk along this commercial street. There is little refuge from moving vehicles.

This local example in College View enhances the public realm along the busy corridor and allows pedestrians to walk comfortably along the street.



When buildings and trees line the street, they can give pedestrians a pleasant feeling of enclosure and increase their level of comfort. The pedestrian's sense of prospect and refuge in enhanced by this streetscape environment.

Further, streetscapes and streetscape zones should align with those of surrounding development in order to create a unified streetscape which enhances the City's pedestrian circulation system and provides clarity to drivers by establishing a recognizable pattern along the street.

✓	✗

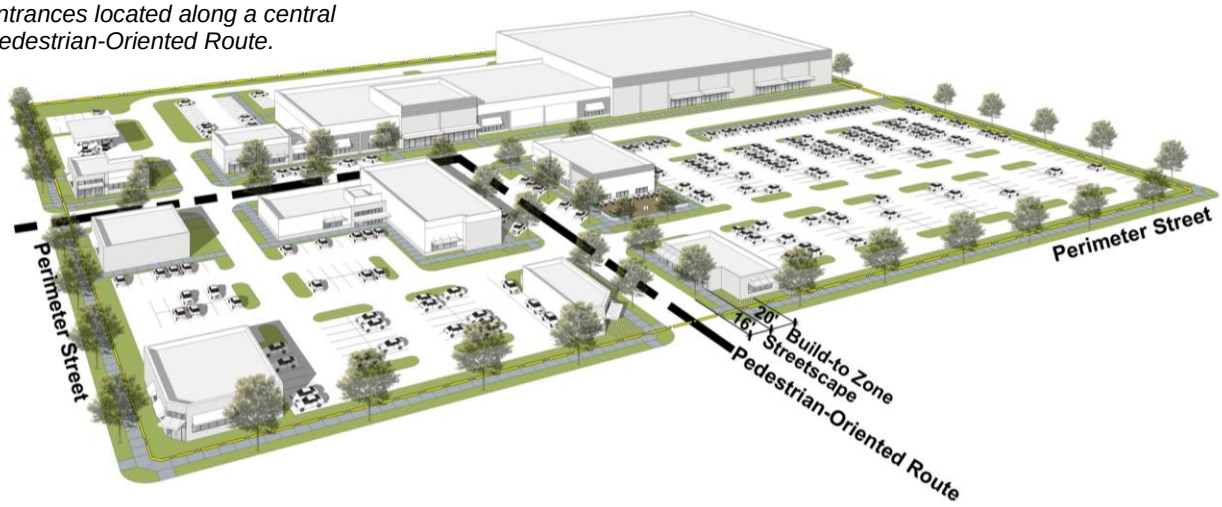
Site Development for Centers

(Section 6.2)

Local examples of center sites are located in newer parts of the City and are generally developed as one cohesive area with multiple buildings, big box retail, and an internal circulation system.

The design standards strive to enhance Centers by providing a pedestrian-oriented route, pedestrian-friendly building arrangement, open space amenities, and defined streetscapes. Center standards are applied to Use Permits for land zoned B-2, B-5, and H-4 and PUDs with Center characteristics. Center standards encourage buildings to face "inward" toward the designated pedestrian-oriented route, creating a sense of place.

Following the Commercial Design Standards, a typical center site has an inward orientation with buildings and entrances located along a central Pedestrian-Oriented Route.



Site Development

(Section 6)

In addition to the enhancement of streetscapes, building placement and design also make Corridors and Centers more pedestrian-friendly by creating a sense of enclosure to the space between buildings along a street. The way the site is organized has a large influence on the sense of place and walkability of a development. Site development considers a project's organization and its relationship to adjacent development. Sound site design principles can maximize a development's benefit to its surroundings with properly sited buildings, well-designed parking areas, and adequate pedestrian connections and access.

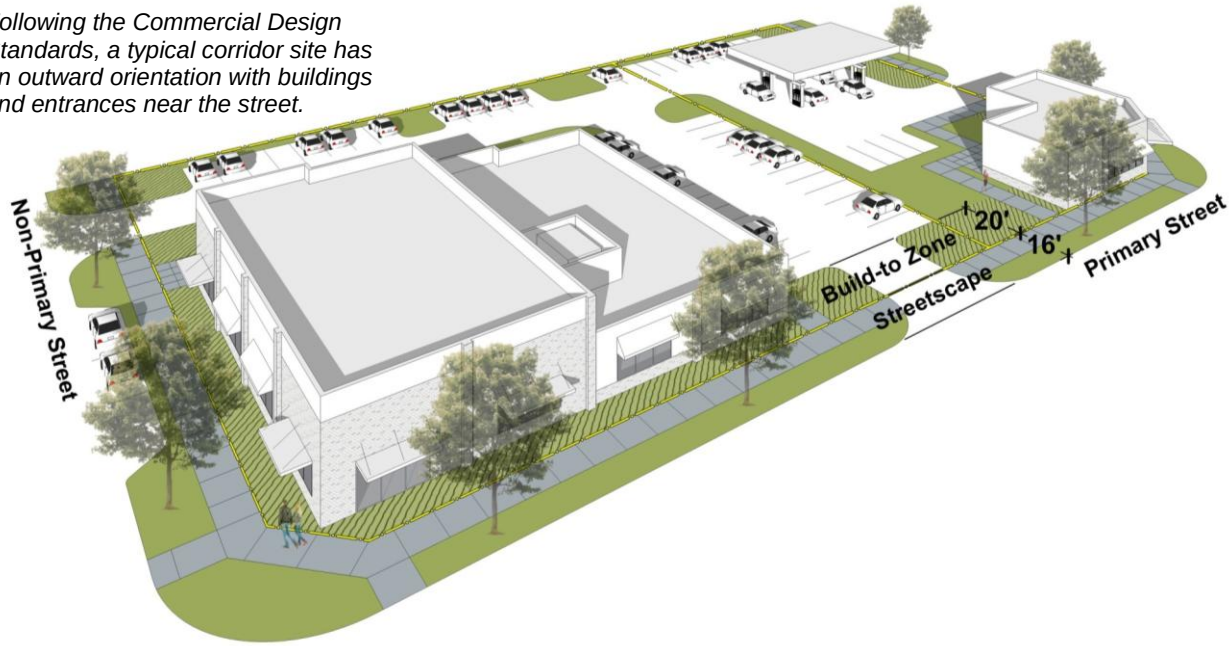
Site Development for Corridors

(Section 6.1)

Local examples of corridor sites are located in older parts of the City and are generally smaller, single use sites.

The design standards strive to revive, repair, and enhance Corridor areas by creating attractive, pedestrian-oriented streetscapes, and by reinforcing the continuation of historical building patterns in B-1, B-3, and H-2 zoning districts and PUDs with Corridor characteristics. Corridor standards encourage buildings to face "outward" toward the street, creating a more inviting place.

Following the Commercial Design Standards, a typical corridor site has an outward orientation with buildings and entrances near the street.



Pedestrian-Oriented Route

(Section 6.2.a)

The pedestrian-oriented route is the primary internal route for pedestrian circulation in Centers. It is the primary focus for concentration of floor area, building orientation, streetscapes, and pedestrian amenities within a Center's site. The pedestrian-oriented route also provides a connection to pedestrian circulation outside the site, enhancing the walkability of surrounding residential neighborhoods. In order to create a dense, Main Street type environment, most of the Center's floor area is required to locate along the pedestrian-oriented route.

Conventional shopping centers are designed with isolated buildings on individual sites that are surrounded by parking. Pedestrian circulation is not considered in this type of development.

When the site is organized with a Pedestrian-Oriented Route, walkable streets create a "place" where pedestrians can visit multiple businesses without relying on their car.

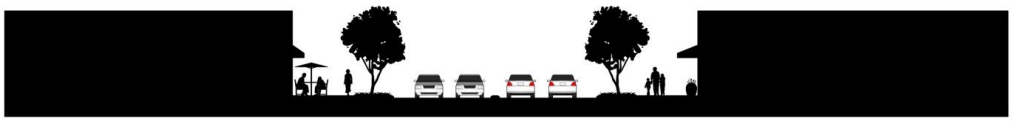
The "main street" at Village Pointe in Omaha is like a pedestrian-oriented route. Buildings in the center are placed along both sides of the street and entrances are oriented to this primary pedestrian route. There is also a streetscape with on-street parking, street trees, and pedestrian amenities.

✓	✗

Build-to Zone, Net Frontage Length & Orientation

(Section 6.1.a-6.1.c and 6.2.b-6.2.d)

The street is often described by urban designers as a large outdoor room. The walls of this room are defined by the street façades of its buildings, which create a "street wall". How buildings are placed and oriented has a great impact on the street's overall appearance and on the strength of the street wall.



Pedestrian-Oriented Development

Auto-Oriented Development

The profile of development influences the perceived walkability of a street. When a continuous street wall is formed, pedestrian activity is encouraged.

Build-to zones are an important component of urban design because they establish and help maintain a street wall. When street facades are built within the build-to zone, they define an enclosed visual space for pedestrians and expand the view down the street.

Ensuring that a property's frontage consists of continuous building facade promotes walkability by adding visual interest to the streetscape. Large breaks in a street wall make for an uncomfortable pedestrian environment.

Orienting entrance façades to the primary street or pedestrian-oriented route encourages activity and creates a lively atmosphere. Buildings that are oriented away from the street send the message that pedestrians approaching from the sidewalks are unwelcome and are very discouraging to pedestrians, who may perceive them to be unsafe. In Centers, orientation to the pedestrian-oriented route encourages walkability throughout the development.

Placing the building up to the street defines a street wall and creates a more pleasant place for pedestrians to walk.

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S 48th St	QuickTEQ Computers & Repair the uppercut TICKET FOR CASH
	CVS pharmacy OPEN 24 HOURS Cover Girl
CHIPOTLE	

Additional Pedestrian Considerations & Vehicular Access, Circulation, and Parking

(Section 6.1.d-6.1.e and 6.2.f-6.2.g)

Although the role of vehicles in everyday life and the need to provide adequate circulation and convenient parking for drivers is recognized, a key objective in creating walkable communities is to reduce car-dependency. Placing parking and drive-through lanes between the curb and the street facade takes away from the unity of the street wall, creating a detached relationship between the building and the street and discouraging pedestrian circulation.

Also, parking areas that are arranged to the rear and side of buildings provide safe, convenient, and efficient access, result in shortened distances to other buildings and public sidewalks, reduce the overall scale of the paved surfaces within the development, and improve the visual character from the street.

Buildings that are surrounded by parking and drive-through lanes are isolated from pedestrians, making an unappealing connection to the public sidewalk. When parking and drive-through circulation are located to the rear or side of buildings, the pedestrian access and , thus, walkability is greatly increased.

✓	✗
	Hardee's
GetGo	

Pedestrian Amenities

(Section 6.2.e)

Pedestrian amenities are public gathering spaces within a Center development. Amenities offer convenient and inviting features and help to make a common open space feel comfortable and usable.

At South Pointe, the pedestrian amenity is a public gathering space for performances and other events. The landscaping and furniture allow shoppers to relax and take a break while enjoying the comfortable atmosphere.

This local pedestrian amenity provides a pleasant outdoor dining space.

Building Design

(Section 7)

The building design standards address the physical characteristics of development and apply to both Corridors and Centers. The standards create more aesthetically-pleasing buildings, especially along pedestrian travelled ways and help to avoid blank walls, windowless facades, cheap materials, and monotony. Attention to detail and design contributes not only to the long-term value of a project, but also to surrounding neighborhoods and the entire community.

The standards rank the entrance façade as a primary façade because the principal entrance is a primary destination within the development. The street façade is also important to consider because it has the greatest impact on the street wall and pedestrian movement within the streetscape. Therefore, entrance façades and street façades are required to be built to a higher standard than other building facades because they have a stronger relationship to the pedestrian.

The Building Design Standards are based on the best local examples. The intent of these standards is to raise the bar towards good building design and provide options for meeting the standards.

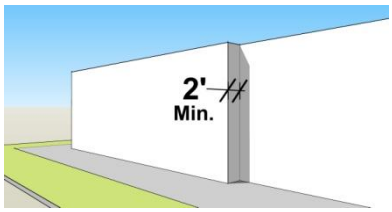
Articulation

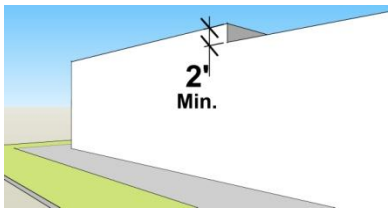
(Section 7.1)

Breaking up long, blank, monotonous facades into smaller divisions reduces the apparent building scale and improves the aesthetics of a building façade. Articulation minimizes the appearance of bulk as viewed from the street, pedestrian walkways or adjacent properties and thus creates human scale. Articulation is most important for large retail buildings in Corridors and Centers because of the overall mass and length of these building types.

The articulation standard is performance-based where a variety of options are provided that meet the overall intent. Where only two of the elements listed in the standard may be needed to meet the intent of articulation, a combination of repeating elements will add visual interest to the street wall and enhance the overall design of the façade.

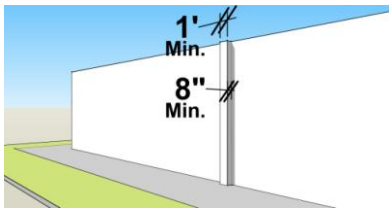
Building elements that contribute to articulation include: changes in wall or roof plane;

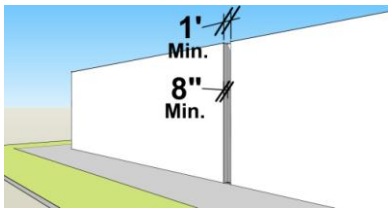




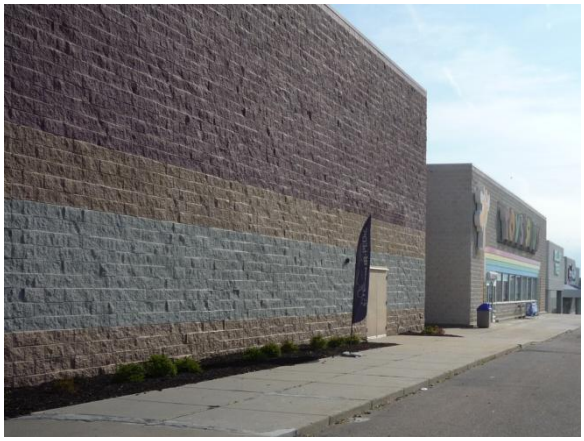
changes of color, texture, or material;

columns, ribs, pilasters, or reveals;





window or door openings and; balconies, awnings, or canopies.

✓	✗
	CVS/pharmacy PHOTO CENTER
Serendipitous UNLIMITED	

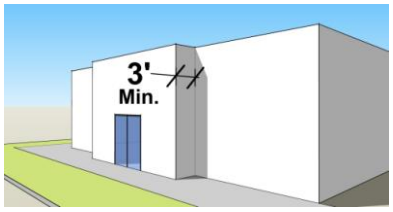
Entrance design

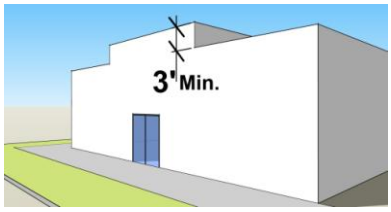
(Section 7.2)

Prominent entrances are incorporated as a means of wayfinding for pedestrians, to break up long, blank facades, and to provide human scale. This standard is only for Centers where wayfinding is the more important because development is made up of multiple buildings and multiple entrances. The listed building elements can define the entrance and make it stand out from the rest of the building façade:

Building elements that contribute to entrance design include: architectural detailing;

recesses or projections from the building façade; parapet walls or raised roof;

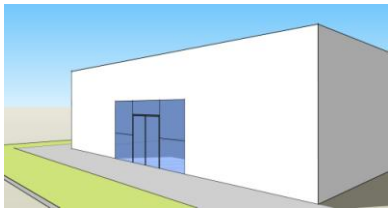




pilasters projecting from the buidling façade; arcades, colonnades, and galleries;

awnings and canopies; integral planters or wing walls;

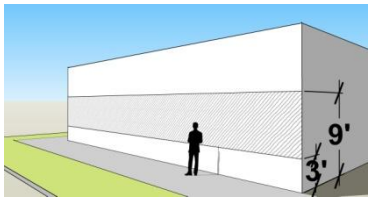
and display windows surrounding the entrance.



✓	✗
	THE STILL
PHARMACY	
INDIAN CUISINE	

Transparency
(Section 7.3)

This standard is intended to maintain human scale and interest along building facades by providing an unobstructed visual connection from the outside to the inside of the building. Transparency also puts eyes on the street which is generally desired as a component of safety.



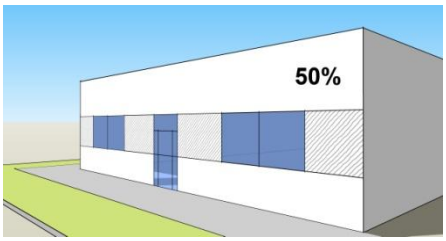
The transparent zone is between 3 and 9 feet above grade.

Without design standards, chain retailers like CVS prefer to have their windows placed above interior shelves. This puts the windows above a pedestrians eye level, disconnecting them from what's going on inside.

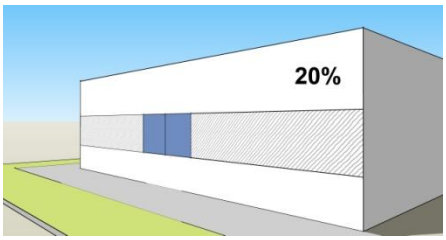
When required by design standards, these chain retailers will place windows within the transparent zone to create a visual connection between the inside and the outside of the building and to add interest along the street.

The percentage of transparency required within that zone is different depending on circumstance. Street and entrance facades are considered the most pedestrian-oriented and therefore require a higher percentage of transparency. Arterial facades have a lesser requirement because they are generally further from the streetscape, or pedestrian zone.

Street and entrance façades have a transparency requirement of 50%.



Arterial façades have a transparency requirement of 20%.

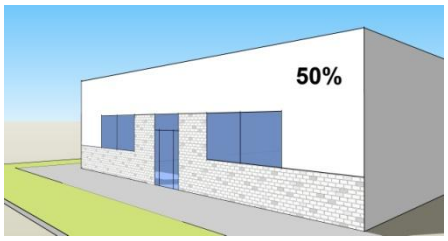


✓	✗
APPAREL BERNINA SEWING STUDIO	
MERCANTILE CENTER	NATURAL GROCERS

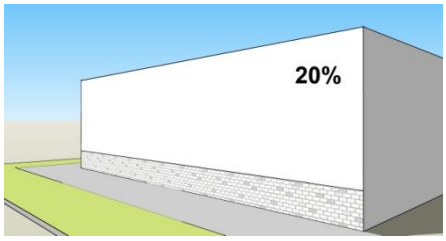
Materials
(Section 7.4)

Exterior building materials comprise a significant part on the visual impact of a building or development. Quality environments are created with variation and compatibility of building materials. The standards classify materials by their visual weight. Heavy materials are required in order to add durability and permanence to buildings and to add visual interest to the building facade.

The materials requirement is a percentage which is different depending on circumstance and, because transparency is an important part of pedestrian comfort and safety, glass is counted towards the materials requirement as well. Street, entrance, and arterial facades are considered the most pedestrian-oriented as well as the most visible from the street. Therefore, a higher materials requirement is placed on these facades. All other facades have a lesser requirement because they are generally further from the streetscape, or pedestrian zone.

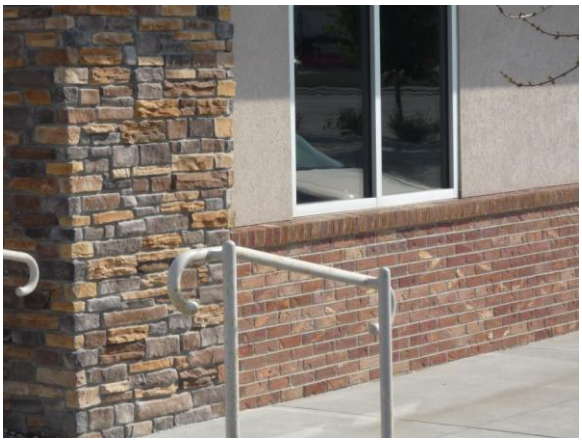


Street, entrance, and arterial materials requirement of 50%.



All other building façades have a materials requirement of 20%.

Buildings constructed of heavy materials are perceived as more durable and permanent structures which add to the visual interest of the street.

✓	✗
STAPLES Windows	AUTOPARTS
	

Parking Structures
(Section 7.5)

Parking structure design should be compatible in materials and scale to the surrounding context. Designing and articulating the exposed portions of parking structures suggests the appearance of a habitable building which is more compatible to surrounding development. Also, when a parking structure is adjacent to a streetscape, first floor parking should be screened in order to enhance walkability.

✓	✗

Equipment Screening
(Section 7.6)

Utility and service areas can be visually obtrusive. The visual impact of these areas should be minimized, especially views of such areas from streets and pedestrian walkways. Thus, equipment should not be located in front of street or entrance facades and should be screened with landscaping, walls, or fences.

✓	✗