

Design Guidelines

Southborough

Downtown District



September 20, 2021

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DESIGN GUIDELINES: PURPOSE

The overall goal and purpose of Southborough's Downtown District Design Guidelines is to support the revitalization of the Downtown through the design of attractive buildings and public spaces that will enhance, protect and promote the Downtown District's historic small town Main Street identity and character, create a sense of place through preservation and desirable development, bring people to the district, and generate an active and vibrant pedestrian environment. These guidelines are intended to assist property owners, proponents, architects, and landscape architects with project planning by providing the guidance on the Town's expectations for the design of development, redevelopment and rehabilitation projects in the Downtown District and will provide the Planning Board with criteria for the review and evaluation of projects proposed in the Downtown District during the site plan review and special permit process. These guidelines are intended to supplement the Town of Southborough's zoning regulations for the Downtown District Section 174-8.12, Site Plan Approval Section 174-10, and Downtown District plan approval Section 174-10.2 and articulate the following design objectives:

1. Strengthen the character of Downtown Southborough as the focal point of a prosperous rural New England community and as a destination for shopping and services
2. Encourage village-style streetscapes
3. Encourage a vibrant environment to live, work and play, and create pedestrian and bicycle-friendly spaces where the community can gather
4. Preserve existing historic structures whenever possible and to restore and retain original architectural features of historic buildings (See Appendix A for a list of historic structures in the Downtown District)
5. Renovation, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse are generally preferred to the demolition of old historic buildings.

The Planning Board is authorized to promulgate these design guidelines to carry forth the purpose and intent of the associated Bylaw provisions.

This workbook is not intended to substitute for the requirements of the established Zoning Bylaw. **In the case of any actual or perceived conflict between the contents of these guidelines and the Southborough Zoning Bylaw, the Bylaw is the binding regulation.**

These guidelines have been compiled as a joint effort with representatives of the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board, the Economic Development Committee, and the Historical Commission; with the intention that they be periodically updated to reflect technological or other advancements in best practices.

DESIGN GUIDELINES: MAP



Downtown District Boundary excluding all split lots and railroad parcel Assessor Map 55 Lot 92
(PB recommended 09.20.21, BOS approved 09.21.21)

Note: Images from Southborough GIS Mapping 2021

DESIGN GUIDELINES: PROCESS/SUBMITTAL MATERIALS

The proponent must submit the proposed project for design review as part of the site plan approval process and the special permit with site plan approval (Section 174-10.2 Downtown District plan approval) process, as applicable. Submittal requirements for projects in the Downtown District shall be in accordance with Southborough Zoning Bylaw Site Plan Approval Section 174-10 and Section 174-10.2 if a special permit is required with site plan approval. In addition, submittals must also include floor plans and architectural elevations of all proposed buildings and a schedule of all exterior materials and colors.

SOUTHBOROUGH HISTORIC PROPERTIES



There are some extraordinary buildings within the Downtown District with outstanding design qualities that make them representative of their time and period style of architecture. It is to these buildings that we can refer as models and fine examples of good design, from which we can derive lessons and inspiration.

Given the historic nature of Southborough's downtown, existing structures of historical or architectural value should be preserved wherever possible. Alterations to the street facades of historical structures should be minimized and incorporate measures to protect and preserve the historic character of the structure. Proponents should refer to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings and should adhere to these guidelines as closely as possible in projects involving historic buildings.

The architectural character of new buildings should respect the character of nearby, existing historical buildings in the National Register Southborough Center Historic District, and utilize traditional facing materials, paint colors, window, and door designs to harmonize with adjacent buildings.

OVERALL GOALS AND ORGANIZATION

These design guidelines are intended to provide for a coherent and attractive business and civic environment in Southborough's Downtown District. They are intended to apply to those portions of buildings that can be seen from public vantage points and apply to the interior of buildings only to the degree that this influences the appearance from the streets or sidewalks. Overall goals include the following:

- Restore and protect the historic character – Southborough has multiple buildings that have historic merit, and represent the architecture of past eras and the historic culture of the town. These guidelines seek to preserve characteristics that are genuine and remain, and to restore historic characteristics once associated with existing buildings where they can be reasonably and practically restored.
- Enhance Downtown Southborough as a commercial area - Downtown Southborough contains multiple service and retail businesses. As such, the guidelines promote a consistently high quality that will be attractive to visitors and patrons of the area.
- Reinforce Downtown as a civic place - Downtown Southborough serves its residents as a civic center, and contains public uses in addition to the businesses and residences. As such, the downtown center should have an attractive appearance and display the unique qualities of its past and present.

These guidelines are organized into subsections that address design elements and components within the Downtown District. The information within each subsection contains specific intentions and directions for new designs or renovations, along with pictures illustrating desired outcomes.

I. Building Placement & Orientation

Guidelines

- The principal entrance(s) to the building should be clearly articulated using architectural detailing and shall be on the front façade, which shall face the street according to Section 174-8.12 G (1).
- For residential buildings in the Downtown District, the front entrance should be defined by at least one of the following: a porch of at least 6 feet in width and depth, pent roof, roof overhang, hooded front door, or similar architectural elements.
- The maximum distance between street-level entrances in a single building shall be 35 feet unless waived by the Planning Board in compliance with Section 174-8.12 G (2)
- To create a unified and defined street and facilitate public pedestrian access, a consistent alignment of buildings is encouraged. The front building line must be within the minimum and maximum front setbacks established in the Zoning Bylaw Section 174-8.12 F (3) (a) and (4) and should be sensitive to the placement of adjacent buildings.

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II. Building Massing

Guidelines

- Articulation of massing and the ground level of a building along its primary street frontage should visually anchor the building and provide human-scaled elements that improve the pedestrian environment.
- Building massing should be consistent with the surrounding environment and within the floor area ratio (FAR) and height requirements of Section 174-8.12 F (5) and (8) of the Zoning Bylaw.
- Domestic scale should be produced through massing devices such as breaks in wall and roof planes and through design of architectural features. Upper stories may be set back, treated with a different material, or incorporated into the roofline, to diminish building mass or to make a building more compatible with the design of adjacent buildings.
- There should be some element of consistency with any buildings on abutting premises facing the same street, such as consistency in eave height, wall materials or window proportions.
- The building façade should clearly define commercial ground-floor spaces, where they exist, and differentiate through articulation the ground floor from residential or office spaces on the stories above.

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III. Setbacks & Green Space

Aesthetically pleasing landscaping with visual interest such as mixed flowers and plantings are encouraged. Maintenance of landscaping should be ongoing to create a consistent curb appeal. Existing zoning in the Town Bylaws regulate setbacks and landscaped green space as referenced below.

Guidelines

- Landscaping is required per Sections 174-8.12 F (6) and 174-13
- Minimum front, side, and rear yard setbacks are established in Sections 174-8.12 F (3) and (4)
- A minimum of 20 percent of the site must be left as landscaped green space
- Abundant, well chosen, and well-maintained planting and landscaping should become a notable theme to be reinforced throughout. In the Downtown District, outdoor gathering places close to open spaces, shops, and residences should provide benches, and plantings that reflect the natural surroundings
- Landscaped open space should be designed to be visually and physically accessible to the extent feasible and should enhance the visual impact of the project and adjacent properties. At least 50 percent of the minimum landscaped green space shall be contiguous and located between the front building line and front lot line 174-8.12 F (6)
- The use of native species of trees, shrubs, vines, groundcovers, and perennials is encouraged in order to make gardens compatible with the existing wildlife habitat and its regional context.

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IV. Exterior Materials

Use of materials traditionally found and historically utilized in Southborough is encouraged in the district. This includes an emphasis on wood, masonry, brick, stone accents, and wood clapboard finishes for renovation or new construction. Exterior materials should be consistent with the historic style used to compose the façade.

Guidelines

- Consistent use of a dominant building material for the façade is encouraged, rather than multiple materials, such as brick and clapboard combinations.
- Imitation materials, such as vinyl siding, plastic tile roofing, or brick veneer are discouraged.
- Durable, eco-friendly materials should be used whenever possible.
- Materials used to patch or repair existing façades should match original materials. If metal is used, it should be appropriate to the building, and convey a sense of quality.
- Plywood or other wood panel sheathing materials should be avoided unless incorporated as a panel within a frame, durable for exterior use.
- Minor decorative elements, such as façade ornaments, or small accents can be of any rigid, durable material in harmony with the façade.
- Downspouts and gutters should be of a material and color compatible with the building walls. If the building is historic, the style of downspouts and gutters should conform with the original character of the façade.
- Flashing materials should not be conspicuous. In the case of historic structures, traditional flashing materials such as copper may be appropriate and are encouraged.
- Repointing of brick or other masonry façades should employ grout materials and tooling that are appropriate to the architectural style of the building.
- The colors of exterior materials should complement the surrounding area. Bright colors should be avoided.

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V. Façade Design/Entrances

Building and façade designs should be harmonious with the immediate neighbors and historic site organization within the Downtown District, with primary orientation towards the street, and doors and storefronts facing the sidewalk. Façades and visible roofs should strive to be visually interesting and attractive along areas that will be seen by the public. Façade improvements, in general, should respect a building's original style where the building is historic, or where the original building design is of high quality and distinctive character.

Previous renovations that have taken place over the course of time are sometimes evidence of the history of a building and its environment. If these alterations have acquired their own significance, they should be respected. A unified architectural style should be determined for each project and used consistently for all elements of the building wall and roof. Building doors and windows should be consistent in proportion, size and configuration with the architectural styles that are determined to be appropriate for the building.

However, in the case of a use that is housed in multiple buildings, the underlying integrity of each building should be preserved to the extent that historic qualities remain.

Where rear parking is provided, the provision of secondary rear entrances and pleasing rear facades is strongly encouraged. The design of the rear entrances and facades should be appropriately detailed to provide an attractive appearance but should not be overly embellished to compete with the main storefront.

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

Guidelines

- Distinguishing original qualities and features of a façade should be preserved; elements that make a building special should be identified and preserved to the extent commercially reasonable.
- Façade design should take into account the locations and proportions of the façade elements and signage bands of adjacent buildings.
- Façade colors should be complementary to the natural materials used on a building and to the buildings adjacent to it.
- The palette of colors used on a building should be in accord with the materials of the building façade.
- Generally muted tones and colors are appropriate for most façade materials except for trim and special storefront elements and signage.
- The use of historic colors in the renovation or replacement of historic elements is highly encouraged. Lists of historic color suppliers are available at local historical organizations and the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.
- Blank walls without any visual content or interest should be avoided along pedestrian sidewalks and parking areas, and on front façades in general.
- Individual buildings and their storefronts should appear distinct, even when a single use spans multiple storefronts.
- Historic roof forms should be retained or restored. Additions should have roof forms that are compatible with the forms of the building to which they are attached.

VI. Storefront Design

Storefronts refer to those portions of the façade that directly relate to the street and the commerce inside. Most commercial façades consist of an architectural framework designed intentionally for one or more storefronts to occur. The expression of the storefronts should respect the framework and not expand beyond it. Storefronts should be consistent in style with the building architecture, provide clarity and interest to the façade, provide for a high level of transparency, and be harmonious with other adjacent storefronts. It is also important that the distinction between the storefront and the rest of the façade is maintained. Storefront display windows that display products or services, signs with the name of the organization, local business logos, hours, public service messages or displays, or views to an activity in which people are involved frequently during hours of operation are encouraged (but must comply with bylaw Section 174-11, Signs).

Guidelines

- Primary entrances should be largely transparent, as was traditionally the case with storefront design. This will promote a sense of welcome and safe access.
- Where a storefront does not serve a retail use and transparency is not practical, window treatments should be employed to create an attractive appearance.
- A horizontal band or frieze that serves as a signage band should be incorporated at the top of storefronts.
- A base panel and sill course design is traditional for most, although not all, storefront styles. Where it is appropriate for the existing or proposed architectural style, a base panel and sill course should be provided.
- The base panels and sill course should continue across the entire width of the storefront bay and terminate at doors or the vertical elements framing the bay.
- The base panel and sill course should be 24" or lower, measured above the sidewalk. Incorporating a glazed transom above the door is encouraged when storefront heights are sufficient to allow for it. This could be used to display the building address.
- Storefront window transoms should be consistent with door transoms.
- Transparent storefronts are not necessary for some businesses, such as professional offices. Nevertheless, it is recommended to maintain substantial storefront glazing and provide attractive window treatments rather than opaque panels in order to avoid blank façades along the sidewalk.
- Items should not be placed in storefront windows that block views to internal activity, such as the backs of display cases, unless they are part of a display to the outside sidewalk or street.
- Storefront lighting should be confined to highlighting signage and the window display itself. Lighting that attracts attention to itself should be avoided. (Must comply with bylaw Section 174-12.1 Outdoor Illumination.)
- The use of seasonal planters and window boxes to adorn storefronts and entrances is highly encouraged.

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VII. Pedestrian & Cycle Access

Projects should be designed to provide efficient and safe pedestrian circulation within the site. Pedestrian connections are encouraged between focal points of pedestrian activities such as sidewalks, parking areas, public spaces, and building entrances. Where possible, pedestrian linkages should be made to adjacent properties. Pedestrian walkways should be integrated into internal landscaping wherever possible.

In locations not currently served by a public sidewalk, projects should provide a sidewalk that is in compliance with federal, state and local (ADA regulations, AAB requirements) or other accessibility documents, as applicable, located between the principal entrance facing the street and the road right-of-way.

Parking areas should include a bike rack to allow for safe and secure storage of bicycles.

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VIII. Doors & Windows

Architectural detail should be incorporated into the ground-floor facade to create an easily identifiable and welcoming entrance. As one of the most important parts of the facade, the main entrance should be clearly 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. Windows and glass portions of front doors should be clear, non-mirrored, non-opaque glass.

Windows should respect spacing and size patterns appropriate to the architectural style that is chosen for either renovation or new construction. In general, multiple smaller window openings are preferred for upper stories of buildings. Lower story windows should be appropriate to the uses behind them, but transparency and indication of activity are important.

Fenestration (the arrangement of windows on a wall) should be architecturally related to the style, materials, colors, and details of the building. Windows and door openings should be proportioned so that verticals dominate horizontals. To the extent possible, upper-story windows should be double-hung type and vertically-aligned with the location of the windows and doors on the ground level, including storefront or display windows. Upper stories should incorporate window patterns and designs that are compatible with and complimentary to existing upper-story window patterns in the district.

First-floor window and display design should create a feeling of transparency on the ground floor of the building. This contributes to a sense of safety and is welcoming to pedestrians. The viewing zone of the first-floor facade should be made up of approximately 75% transparent non-reflective glass. Window displays are encouraged, but visibility into the building from the sidewalk should be maintained.

With the exception of retail storefronts, modestly scaled, vertically proportioned windows articulated with muntins (dividers of panes of glass) are most appropriate to the local building vernacular. Shutters are also an appropriate element to include on windows.

Guidelines

- Street numbers should be located near the front entrance and be of adequate size and distinctive color to be visible to the passing motorist.
- The street number should not be located so that it is obscured when the front door is open.
- Any special loading and service entrances should be screened from streets, other public ways, and adjacent properties, and their visual impact minimized.
- Unused entrances should be transformed into other architectural elements appropriate to the architectural style of the building, such as a store window.
- Entrances should meet the requirements of the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (AAB) regulations.
- Historic door material and hardware should be restored or repaired where possible. Repair should match existing size, species, profile and configuration.
- Divided lite doors or side lites should be employed only if appropriate for the style of the building façade.

- Whenever possible, the original window patterns of a building should be restored or retained; avoid blocking, reducing, or changing any original and appropriate pattern of windows when renovating older buildings.
- An individual, "punched" window expression rather than continuous horizontal or vertical "strip" windows is encouraged whenever possible and appropriate to the building style.
- Larger scale windows should be used at the ground level.
- Transparent glazing should be used, and reflective or dark tinted glass avoided.
- Opaque panels, such as painted metal or spandrel glass, should not be used to replace vision glazing in windows.
- Where ceilings need to be lowered below the window head, a ceiling soffit should be provided between the lower ceiling and the window head that allows the vision glass to be full height.
- Shutters should be employed only if they are consistent with the architectural style of the façade. Shutters should not be employed with casement-style windows, bay windows, or broad picture or display windows.
- Repairing existing historic windows with in-kind materials is preferable to replacement. When existing historic windows are irreparable, replacement windows should replicate existing historic window details.

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IX. Signage

Signage must comply with Section 174-11 of the Southborough bylaws. In general, the number of signs on a façade should be kept to the minimum necessary to effectively communicate the messages being conveyed.

Guidelines

- Signage should employ colors and type face that complement the primary architectural style of the building.
- All signs should be of durable materials compatible with the materials of the building served.
- Plastic in general is not recommended for use in a historic center.
- In a multiple storefront building, the signage should be of a size, location, material and color that relates harmoniously between bays.
- Freestanding signs should generally be limited to buildings that have a significant setback or are otherwise not visible from the street or sidewalk, or where other signage is not appropriate to the architecture.

X. Awnings

Awnings, canopies and marquees with a traditional design and appearance are encouraged as façade elements, especially when they serve to protect pedestrians from the sun and rain, provide a secondary location for signage, or add color and interest to building storefronts and façades. Awnings should reflect the overall façade organization and storefront locations of a building. Traditional and simple shapes are encouraged, rather than unusual profiles.

Guidelines

- Awnings on a multiple storefront building should be consistent in character, but need not be identical. Awnings should be located within the building elements framing storefront openings.
- Awnings of a round or bullnose shape should be avoided unless used for a single door or window opening that is not part of a framed storefront.
- The rigid framework for awnings, canopies or marquees should be no lower than 8 feet above the sidewalk under it. Suspended fabric panels of awnings should be no lower than 7 feet above the sidewalk
- Awnings made of soft fabrics such as canvas are encouraged, unless replicating prior historical features.
- Backlit awnings should not be used.

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(photos to be added)

XI. Lighting

Lighting must be appropriate to the building's architectural style. Building lighting must comply with Section 174-12.1 Outdoor Illumination of the Southborough bylaws and the associated Rules and Regulations adopted by the Planning Board.

Guidelines

- Historically appropriate lighting should be applied to match the building type and style.
- Building lighting should provide an even illumination level while operating. Flashing, pulsating or similar dynamic lighting is prohibited.

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XII. Utilities & Mechanical Equipment

Components of building mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems should be concealed from view wherever possible. Exposed storage areas, machinery, garbage dumpsters, service areas, truck loading areas, and utility buildings should be screened from the view of abutting properties and streets using plantings, fences, and other approved methods.

Guidelines

- Rooftop mechanical equipment should be completely screened by the building parapet
- Air conditioning units should not be placed into windows or any other openings visible from the street.
- Mechanical equipment units located in non-window openings are appropriate if they are screened with a grille within the storefront or façade or building wall.
- Screening of utility feeds and metering devices from public view is encouraged when appropriate.
- Electric, telephone, cable television, fire alarm and other conduits and wiring shall be installed underground in accordance with the requirements of the source company or authority, unless waived due to soil conditions or other reasons, in compliance with Town Code Section 244-18.

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XIII. Parking

It is important to create an inviting pedestrian environment, while offering convenient parking, accessible to all individuals.

- Parking should be placed on the rear side of the building and should not be located closer to the front lot line than the principal structure.
- When an existing building with an existing front parking lot is significantly renovated, proponents should explore opportunities for mitigating the impact of the parking on the streetscape, including adding landscaping or architectural design elements, or, if feasible, moving the placement of the building to allow for rear parking.
- Parking facilities with more than five (5) parking spaces should be bordered on three sides with a landscaped buffer incorporating natural vegetation where possible. (Must comply with bylaw Section 174-13, Landscaping.)
- All commercial parking areas including more than five (5) parking spaces should also include bicycle parking facilities.

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XIV. Appendix A – Historic Structures in the Downtown District

(TO BE ADDED IF AVAILABLE)