



MIDDLETOWN
Rhode Island

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

TOWN OF MIDDLETOWN

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To: Paul A. Croce, Chairman
Planning Board members

From: Anita Guo, Principal Planner

Date: February 7, 2024

Re: Proposed amendments to the *Middletown Rules and Regulations Regarding the Subdivision and Development of Land*, Article 5, Section 521 regarding commercial development design standards

The subcommittee, established by the Planning Board to review and recommend amendments to the commercial development design standards, met several times over the past few months and has now completed its work. Comments from the Tree Commission and Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) were also considered and incorporated. Please see the attached draft for consideration. Proposed amendments are identified in red and blue type, with new language underlined and language to be removed ~~struck~~.

The proposed amendments are provided for Planning Board review and consideration. The Board must host an advertised public hearing before adopting the amendments. After adoption, the revised regulations will be forwarded to the Town Council for approval.

Please contact me with any questions.

cc. Town Solicitor

Section 521 - Commercial Development

This section describes the general objectives and intent of Commercial Development Design Standards. (CDDS). The provisions in this section are provided for applicant, Technical Review Committee (TRC), and Planning Board guidance. Specific regulations implementing these objectives and their intent are set forth in the following sections (521.1 - 521.4). The purpose of these standards is to establish and maintain a uniform set of standards that promote the use of high quality design, consistent with the traditional architectural styles of Aquidneck Island and New England.

A. Site Design

Buildings and their adjacent spaces, including parking, establish a design landscape rhythm. This rhythm of spaces and buildings should be considered when determining design compatibility, whether between a building or a building and street. Parking should be considered an integral part of site design and should be coordinated with overall site development. Site design shall encourage pedestrian activity, where appropriate, through the placement of buildings close to the street, with off-street parking dispersed into small landscaped lots located to the rear or side of buildings and trees, foliage and grassy areas interspersed among buildings.

B. Building Design and Architecture

In general, buildings shall be designed to include traditional New England architectural elements. This includes, but is not limited to, peaked roof, wood-frame, and other styles consistent with colonial through early twentieth-century period architecture. Facades of a building, particularly the front facade, should consist of or resemble traditional building materials such as clapboard, shingles, brick, or stone. Facades, windows, and doors should be visually proportionate.

C. Landscaping

Landscaping, including plantings, should be designed to define, soften or screen the appearance of the off-road parking areas and structures from the public right of way and abutting properties. The objective of landscaping should be to enhance the design and minimize the encroachment of the proposed use on neighboring land uses. The species and planting techniques for street-side trees and other plantings should be selected to create a unified image for the street, provide an effective canopy, avoid sidewalk damage, and minimize water consumption.

D. Environmental Impacts

Commercial Development shall be designed to control erosion and sedimentation, stormwater runoff, and minimize impacts on surface water and air quality. Erosion and stormwater runoff control shall comply with town regulations, including Town Code

Chapters 151 and 153, as amended. If feasible, efforts should be made to decrease runoff rates and volumes from pre-development conditions.

E. Signage

Signage shall be visually compatible with the scale and character of the surrounding architecture, and should promote traditional architectural elements. The size, location, design, lighting and materials of all exterior signs and outdoor advertising structures shall be compatible with the design of proposed building(s) and structure(s).

Section 521.1 - Site Design

A. General Location and Layout

Buildings should be located so as to create a safe, pleasant walking environment and efficient pedestrian circulation pattern. Building placement, orientation and massing should be planned to promote more active pedestrian-scaled commercial design, with ample opportunities for walking and bicycling, as well as private motor vehicles and to promote the use of public transportation.

B. Off-Street Parking and Circulation

1. ~~1.~~ Location

In all districts, except Light Industrial, parking lots should be located to the rear or side of buildings. If site configuration does not allow for the placement of all required parking spaces to the rear or side, a limited number of parking spaces may be located between the front of the building and the public street. Such lots shall be limited to one row of parking, except that for Large-scale Shopping Centers and other situations where site conditions warrant, the use of two rows of parking may be permitted. In either case, the number of parking spaces in such lots shall not exceed fifty (50) spaces, and additional landscaping and screening elements may be required.

In light industrial districts, parking is permitted between building and front lot line only where the front lot line does not abut a public arterial street.

2. Parking Lot Size

The standards of this section are in addition to the requirements of Article 13 of the Middletown Zoning Ordinance regarding off-street parking and loading. No individual parking lot, located between the building and street, may exceed fifty (50) total parking spaces. For a project requiring more than fifty (50) parking spaces, parking shall be broken up into smaller lots; each accommodating no more than fifty (50) vehicles and directly connected with the other lots. Adjacent parking lots must be buffered from each other with a minimum ten (10) foot landscaped strip, which may also be used as a walkway.

3. Access & Circulation

a) Circulation shall be designed to provide safe and efficient access for pedestrians, automobiles, and emergency vehicles into and throughout the site, including designated pedestrian walkways and crosswalks. Pedestrian access to the site from the public way and neighboring properties shall be provided.

b) A pick-up, drop-off (PUDO) zone and plan are required to demonstrate adequate circulation so the flow of bikes and cars on adjacent streets is not impeded.

4. Ingress & Egress

a) ~~(a)~~ Adequate and safe ingress and egress shall be provided. The number and width of curb cuts shall be minimized.

b) ~~(b)~~ Consolidation of existing curb cuts may be required.

c) ~~(c)~~ Provision for vehicular and pedestrian connections to adjacent developments shall be provided, whenever possible.

d) ~~(d)~~ Site design which requires the use of a public street to maneuver in and out of a parking or loading space located on private property shall not be permitted.

C. Utilities

All utility lines serving the site shall be installed underground. To the maximum extent possible, power lines and utilities in frontage areas shall be installed underground.

D. Exterior Lighting

1. ~~Exterior lighting shall be designed to minimize impact on neighboring properties and night light pollution. Exterior lighting design shall comply with the Zoning Ordinance Article 27B Outdoor Lighting.~~

2. Fixtures illuminating building facades shall be shielded and directed toward the building and all other lighting fixtures shall be shielded and directed to the ground. Building-mounted decorative light fixtures and pole-mounted decorative fixtures, provided that they are less than twelve (12) feet in height, should also be shielded to the extent possible.

E. Infrastructure and Amenities

1. Dumpsters, storage areas, exposed machinery installation including but not limited to HVAC units, service areas, truck loading areas, utility buildings and similar structures shall be designed and screened or located to provide an audio-visual buffer sufficient to minimize their adverse impact on other land uses within the development area and surrounding properties. Dumpsters shall be screened from view in accordance with the Middletown Ordinance Chapter 92A.03 Storage of Trash and Waste.

2. Air conditioning and ventilation units, security devices, and other service equipment shall be screened from view from the public viewway. For all roof mounted equipment, screening shall be accomplished either by equipment being set back from the roof edge ~~for~~

~~roof mounted units or with screening that is incorporated into and consistent with the design of the building. For ground mounted units HVAC units and other equipment, screening shall be accomplished by using landscaping or decorative fencing as screening, or by being screened by landscaping for ground mounted units.~~

3. Litter and Trash Management

- ~~a) — (a)~~ Exterior litter receptacles shall be provided on all commercial, multi-family residential, and mixed-use properties to serve patrons, residents and employees.
- ~~b) — (b)~~ Receptacles shall be appropriately sized and located. The locations and design of receptacles must be identified on site plans.
- ~~c) — (c)~~ Receptacles shall have decorative designs compatible with the overall design theme for the development.
- ~~d) — (d)~~ A waste management and litter control plan shall be provided on the site plans or as a separate document, which shall include specific provisions and actions to prevent accumulation of litter on the subject property and to prevent it from entering abutting properties and streets.

4. Bicycle racks shall be provided in appropriate locations and identified on the site plans. ~~One (1) bike rack space. Minimum bicycle rack space for one bike~~ for each ~~ten five (10)~~ automobile parking spaces or fraction thereof is required, ~~with a minimum of two (2) bike spaces required.~~

5. The location and design of any proposed site amenities, such as benches, bus shelters, playgrounds, etc. must be identified on the site plans. Designs shall be compatible with the overall design theme for the development.

Section 521.2 – Building Design and Architecture

~~A. — A.~~ Façade and Walls

The first impression of a building is that of its front façade, the side of the building facing the most frequently used public away. Accordingly, facades and walls shall incorporate the following features:

- ~~1. — 1.~~ The primary ground floor public entrances must be oriented directly to streets, interior pedestrian plazas, or walkways. If oriented toward parking lots, such lots must contain said pedestrian plazas and walkways.
- 2. The street side façade(s) of a building ~~if visible from the public way~~ shall not consist of an unarticulated blank wall or an unbroken series of garage doors. In no case shall the unbroken plane of a wall exceed forty (40) linear feet without a ~~minimum four (4) feet wide architectural design feature on the building façade break of at least forty-eight (48) inches in plane (Examples: using different building materials/color to create contrast, or changing the siding orientation)~~

3. Except in the GB and LI Zones, commercial garage doors and loading docks shall not be visible from any public way.

4. Loading docks shall not be located on the building façade facing the public way. Commercial garage doors and loading docks shall be screened from public view.

B. Windows & Doors

Windows and doors are encouraged on all building elevations, and should be visually compatible with the architectural style of the building.

~~1. —1.—~~ Windows and glass doors should occupy not less than twenty (20) percent or more than sixty (60) percent of any façade visible from the public way. In LI Zones, windows and glass doors should occupy not less than twenty percent (20%) or more than sixty percent (60%) of any façade that faces a public arterial street.

~~2. —2.—~~ Windows shall be of true divided-light or simulated divided-light design when consistent with the overall building design; except in LI Zones. Double-hung windows are preferred, where consistent with the overall design of the building. Where true windows cannot be utilized, faux windows that simulate true windows are acceptable.

C. Materials

Traditional architecture employs authentic materials on building facades and roofs. Traditional façade materials include wooden clapboards, shingles, patterned shingles, brick, and stone and cast stone, depending on the architectural style and location of the building. Traditional roof materials include cedar shingles and slate. The façade and roof of a building, particularly the front façade, shall be visually compatible with these traditional building materials.

~~1. —1.—~~ Building exteriorsidings, and, roofs, and trim shall be constructed of, or resemble, traditional materials such as wooden clapboards, shingles, patterned shingles, brick, or or stone. Substitute materials may include fiber cement board or composite materials that resemble traditional materials. ~~Standing seam metal roofs and non-flammable or fire-treated siding materials are also acceptable.~~

~~2. —2.—~~ Non-traditional or substitute Synthetic materials ~~or substitutes~~ may only be used subject to ~~Planning Board~~ administrative approval by the Administrative Officer or Planning Board. Samples of all primary materials shall be submitted to the Planning ~~Board Department~~ for approval.

D. Roof Forms and Roof Design

A roof can have a dramatic effect on the appearance of a building. The shape and proportion of the roof shall be visually compatible with the architectural style of the building and shall incorporate the following features:

1. Traditional roof forms such as hip, gambrel, or gable shall be required.

2. The gradient from level of any sloped roof shall be at least 4:12.

~~3.~~ ~~3.~~ Flat roofs may be permitted ~~but shall incorporate~~ decorative details ~~are incorporated~~ into the roof design on all sides of the building and/or the roof is designed to incorporate a sloped design for the portion of the roof visible from the public way, and provided that any mechanical equipment installed on the roof is not visible from the public way and abutting properties.

4. Renovation of existing flat-roof buildings shall incorporate decorative details into the roof design.

E. Architectural Elements

Architectural elements such as arcades, porches, bays, windows, balconies, dormers and cupolas shall be in reasonable proportion to the overall building.

Section 521.3 - Landscaping

The landscape plan shall incorporate the following features:

A. Existing Vegetation

Whenever possible, existing trees and vegetation shall be used to satisfy landscaping requirements. Trees having greater than 18-inch caliper dbh shall be preserved, whenever possible and with consultation with the Tree Warden. If such trees cannot be preserved, each must be replaced with two (2) trees of at least four (4) inch caliper dbh. The Planning Board may seek an advisory opinion from the Tree Commission, regarding the removal of trees.

B. Amount Required

Planted landscaping shall occupy a minimum of twenty-five percent (25%) of the project area.

C. Screening

Screening elements such as plantings, stone walls, berms and/or fences, or a combination of these is required along all property lines.

D. Buffers

Buffers shall be provided as follows:

1. A landscaped buffer of at least ten (10) feet is required along all property lines. This may be reduced if stone walls are used as the screening element.

2. When abutting a residential district or use, the buffer must be at least twenty (20) feet wide and include screening at least six (6) feet in height, measured from finished grade, at time of installation. For large scale shopping centers, the required buffer shall be fifty (50) feet wide.

3. A landscaped buffer of at least ~~ten (10)~~five (5) feet wide shall be provided between buildings and parking lots/driveways. The buffer shall be defined by curbing, ~~and may include sidewalks, but must include a minimum five (5) foot planting strip.~~

E. Plantings

Plantings shall be noninvasive species, and native to Aquidneck Island, if possible. The Planning Board ~~shall~~may seek an advisory opinion from the Tree Commission, regarding the selection of tree species and locations for planting.

F. Trees

1. Street Trees - Deciduous “street trees” shall be planted along the street side property boundary and along any private streets or internal driveways in planter strips or tree wells located between the sidewalk and curb. Trees shall be spaced no further apart than thirty (30) feet on center, and shall be a minimum of four (4) inch caliper dbh at time of planting.

2. Parking Lots - A minimum of one (1) tree shall be provided for every five (5) parking spaces. Trees shall be at least four (4) inches caliper dbh and seven (7) feet tall at time of planting. Each tree must be surrounded by at least 25 square feet of permeable unpaved area.

G. Scenic Views

Scenic views and historically significant landscape features (including, but not limited to, stone walls, picket fences, and large trees) shall be preserved to the maximum extent reasonably possible. This requirement is in addition to the requirements set forth in the Middletown Town Code Chapter 96: Tree Preservation and Protection, and Chapter 97: Stone Walls.

H. Maintenance

Ongoing maintenance of landscaping shall be a continuing requirement of compliance with the Regulations, and failure to maintain landscaping may be cited as a violation. ~~For large projects, or significant landscape features, a~~ maintenance agreement and/or bond may be is-required.

Section 521.4 - Environmental Impacts

A. Construction Site Runoff/Erosion & Sedimentation Control

1. Erosion and sedimentation shall be controlled so that neighboring property and public facilities or services are not adversely affected during and/or after construction.

2. Erosion control shall meet the standards of the Town of Middletown, including Chapter 151 of the Town Code of Ordinances, and the RI Erosion and Sediment Control handbook, as amended.

B. Stormwater Management

- ~~1. 1.~~ Storm-water runoff provisions shall maximize on-site absorption/recharge and minimize runoff and to the extent feasible, should reduce runoff rates and volume from the pre-development conditions.
- ~~2. 2.~~ Direct discharge of untreated storm-water run-off to a wetland or watercourse from impervious surfaces is prohibited.
- ~~3. 3.~~ Storm-water run-off controls shall meet requirements of the Town of Middletown, including Chapter 153 of the Town Code of Ordinances, and the standards of the RI Stormwater Design and Installation Standards Manual.
4. Ongoing inspections and maintenance of the stormwater management system shall be conducted in accordance with the approved operations & maintenance plan. A stormwater facilities maintenance easement, subject to the approval of the Town Solicitor, shall be recorded which will obligate the owner to properly maintain the stormwater system, and provide for, but not obligate the Town to access the easement area to perform necessary maintenance at the owner's expense, should the owner fail to do so.

Section 521.5 - Signage

Signage shall meet the requirements of Article 12 of the Zoning Ordinance. Signs and any exterior illumination must be architecturally compatible with the development. Signage for multi-use projects, including industrial/office parks and shopping centers, shall be of uniform design, with similar scale and fabrication.