

Downtown Design Guidelines

City of Los Altos



Adopted
December 8, 2009

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

1



INTRODUCTION

Los Altos is blessed with a downtown of unique personality and vitality with a wide variety of shops, restaurants, offices, and services focused primarily on serving the local community. Constructed over a period of many decades, the development patterns are supportive of a strong pedestrian environment, and its structures offer a rich palette of the community's history.

Residents and visitors alike appreciate the special *Village Character* of Downtown Los Altos, but the identification of those features that are most responsible for the establishment of that highly prized character has often been elusive, and difficult to convey to property owners wishing to make changes to existing structures or build new ones. The intent of these design guidelines is to better describe the nature and elements of that *Village Character* by pointing out special features of existing downtown development and by examples from other communities with a similar village scale and character.

The design guidelines that follow provide practical and time-tested methods for preserving and enhancing the special qualities of the Downtown Los Altos village scale and character while offering ample opportunity for increased economic vitality. They supplement and reinforce the *Los Altos Downtown Design Plan*, and are intended to assist applicants in visualizing appropriate designs and in understanding community expectations, while providing fairness and consistency in the City's downtown development review and approval process.

COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS

The community wishes to support and enhance the unique character of Downtown Los Altos. Property owners and developers will be expected to fit their projects into that existing fabric with sensitivity to their surroundings, and a recognition that the sum of the whole is more important than any single building or use. Buildings should be seen as unique, identifiable, and distinct from other buildings, but this distinction should be subtle, not dramatic.

A high quality of traditional architectural and landscape design is expected with abundant detail carried out in a manner that is authentic to the architectural style selected by the applicant.

Applicants are not required to meet all guidelines, but should be in substantial conformance with the design guidelines and the Required Findings set forth in the sidebar on page 11.

INTENT

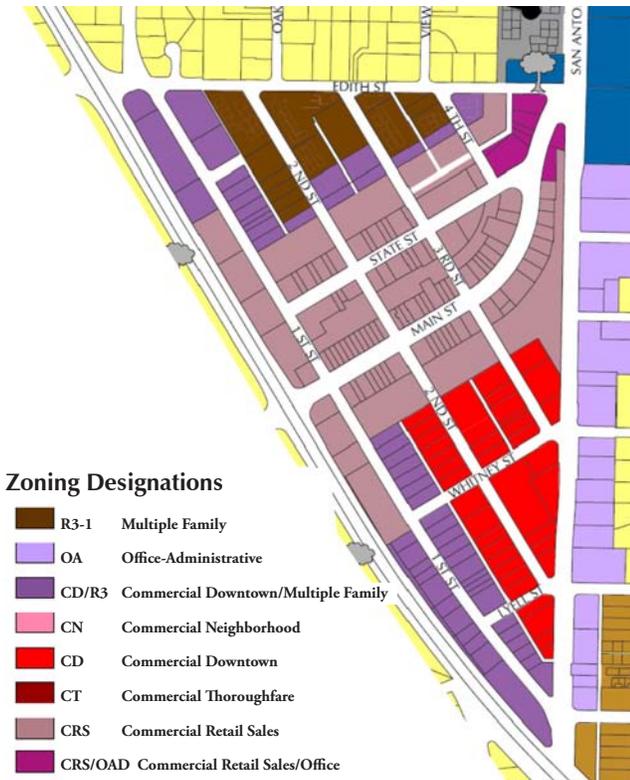
These guidelines are intended to accomplish the following:

- Support and enhance the unique Los Altos Downtown Village Character.
- Maintain and enhance an attractive Downtown pedestrian environment.
- Provide a mix of uses to meet the needs of community residents and visitors.
- Encourage increased Downtown vitality with additional retail shops, restaurants, offices and residents.
- Encourage creative design and architectural diversity.
- Encourage appropriate historic preservation.
- Encourage sustainable design and development.
- Establish a strong sense of entry at Downtown gateways.
- Provide adequate, attractive and convenient public parking.
- Encourage the maintenance and upgrading of uses, properties and signage.
- Encourage signage appropriate to the Downtown Village scale and Character.
- Implement the Los Altos Downtown Design Plan.

The city will consider development incentives for projects that implement or preserve elements of the Downtown Design Plan (e.g., paseos and courtyards) on a case-by-case basis.

For City staff assistance in the development review process, please contact the City's Planning Department at (650) 947-2750

1



Downtown Zoning

APPLICABILITY

These design guidelines apply to all design review applications for new construction, additions, exterior facade changes, landscaping and signage.

The guidelines are in addition to and subordinate to the zoning regulations. The five downtown zoning districts covered by these design guidelines are shown on the map to the left. Full Zoning Code information for the downtown area can be found on the City’s web site at:

www.losaltos.ca.gov

GUIDELINES ORGANIZATION

These guidelines are focused on the commercial areas contained within the triangle bounded by Foothill Expressway, San Antonio Road, and West Edith Avenue.

The guidelines are divided into three sections to reflect the major use areas of Downtown Los Altos. Note that some districts may contain more than one zoning category.

The guidelines set forth in the Downtown Core District establish the level of community expectations relative to architectural form, village character elements, and design quality and details for the whole of the downtown area. They should be reviewed by applicants for projects in all zones.

Downtown Core District

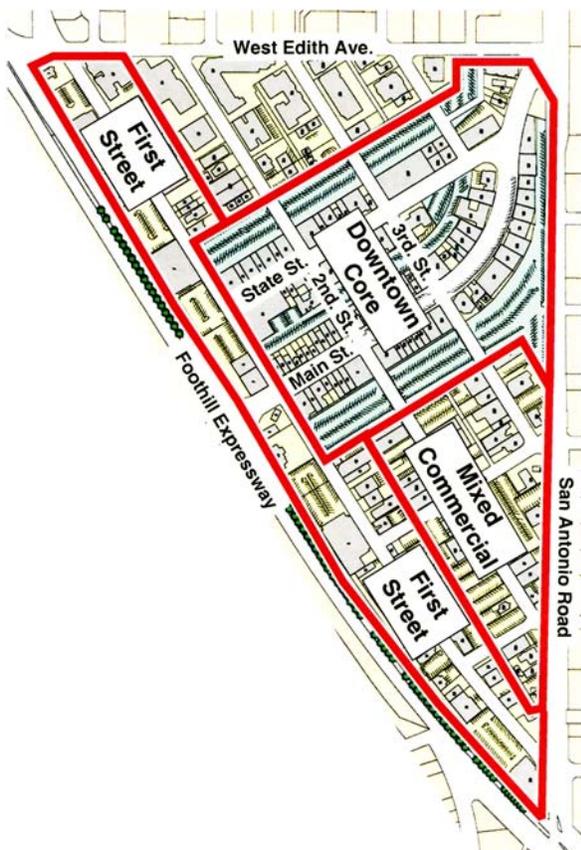
This district is the primary pedestrian retail area of downtown focused on Main Street and State Street. Its structures are closely related one to the next with a great deal of retail continuity, and a small scale village character. Most of the Downtown Core District is within the Downtown Parking District.

Mixed Commercial District

Located adjacent to San Antonio Road, this district, while still heavily pedestrian oriented, has a looser physical texture, somewhat larger scale buildings, and more stand alone structures. Supplemental design guidelines are provided to recognize the district’s different physical conditions and uses. The intent is to accommodate larger uses while maintaining a scale and character that is supportive of downtown’s village character.

First Street District

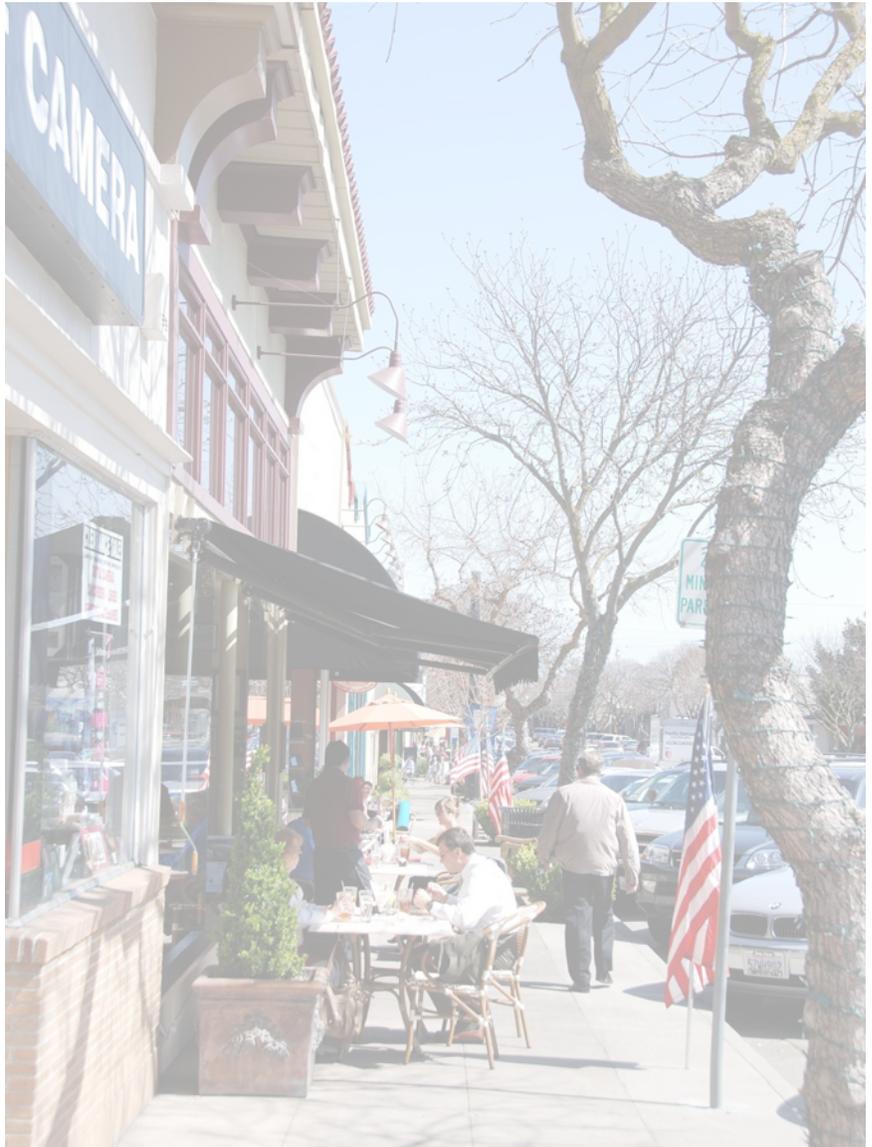
This area fronting on First Street contains a wide variety of uses, and is more strongly vehicle-oriented than the retail core area. The intent is to accommodate a wide mix of uses in a manner sensitive to the village character of downtown.



Downtown Design Guidelines Districts

DOWNTOWN VILLAGE CHARACTER

2



DOWNTOWN VILLAGE CHARACTER

Downtown Los Altos has grown and changed over a span of decades through incremental changes and the efforts of many property and business owners. The area serves as the heart of the community through a mix of retail, office, residential, institutional, civic and service uses as well as social gathering spaces. Today, it is a closely knit series of subdistricts with slightly differing use emphases and design characteristics, held together by an overall village scale and character. That unique scale and character has been nurtured over the years, and has become even more of a community asset as many other downtowns in the Bay Area have grown ever larger and lost much of their earlier charm.

Village Character is often hard to define, and harder to preserve as retailing and office development trends in downtown areas have tended to favor national retail chains and prototypical designs. Yet, there are communities determined to preserve the uniqueness of their village scale and character downtowns. In the development of these design guidelines, existing features of Downtown Los Altos have been used as models, and lessons learned from other downtowns have been integrated as examples of effective ways to preserve and enhance village scale and character.

Some of the major features of village character are listed in the sidebar to the right, and illustrated by the annotated photographs of Downtown Los Altos below and on the following pages.



Individual tenant identities with wide diversity in parapet shapes, building heights and awnings

VILLAGE CHARACTER FEATURES

- Traditional Village and Main Street architectural styles.
- Wide diversity of building forms.
- Larger buildings broken up into smaller segments.
- Courtyards and paseos with secondary uses.
- Mixture of continuous storefronts and stand alone buildings.
- Varied building top profiles and details.
- Wide variety of interesting architectural and storefront detail.
- Diverse mix of pedestrian scaled storefronts and signage.
- Individual store personalities.
- Variety of storefront profiles with entry vestibules, facade recesses and landscaping.
- Landscaping integrated with the storefronts
- Limited blank walls.
- Wide variety of natural building materials.
- Abundant landscaping and pedestrian amenities.
- Wide variety of pedestrian paving.
- Preserved historic resources.
- Pleasant and interesting parking-to-shopping paths.
- Second floors strongly related to the street front.
- Attractive parking areas.
- Residential units included in the downtown mix of uses.
- Public social gathering places.
- Integrated art and whimsical details.
- Use of natural materials.
- Subtle lighting.

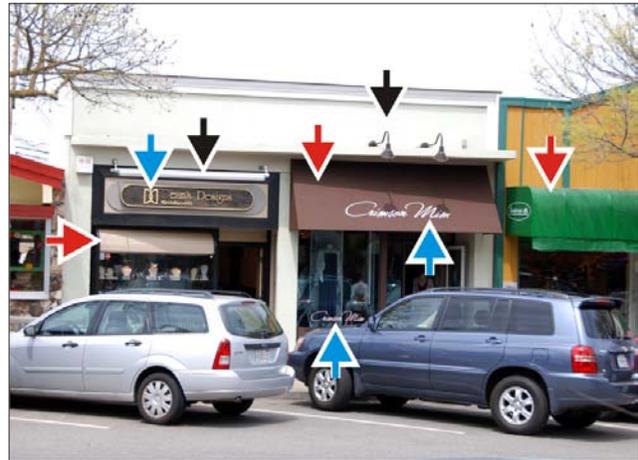
VILLAGE CHARACTER

2



Landscaping and amenity buffers between pedestrians and parked cars

VILLAGE CHARACTER FEATURES



Great diversity in awnings, signage and sign lighting



Facade setbacks and outside seating

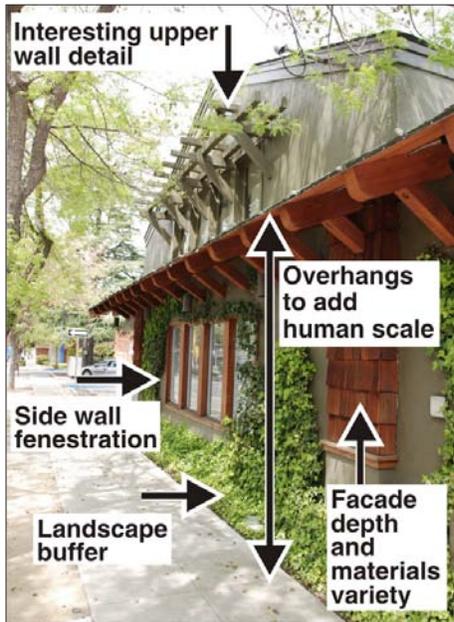


Visually interesting entries with natural materials

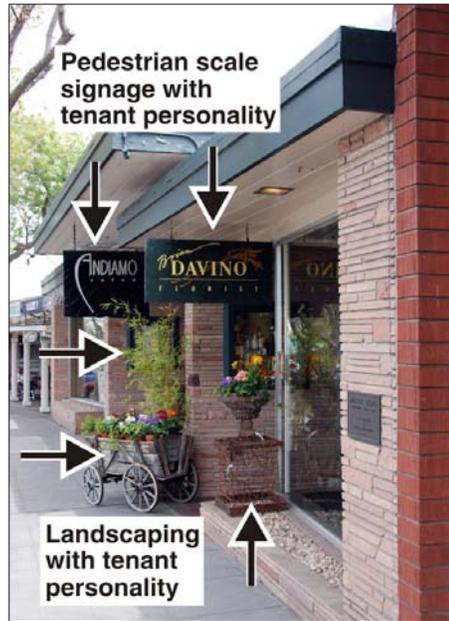


Variety of building forms

VILLAGE CHARACTER FEATURES



Side wall breakup and visual interest



Pedestrian scale signage and landscaping with personality



Public social spaces



Strong presence of second floor uses on the street



Intimate courtyards and paseos



Residential units included in the downtown mix of uses

VILLAGE CHARACTER

2



Small offices with personality and human scale

VILLAGE CHARACTER FEATURES



Larger offices with interesting human scale details and sensitive materials selection



Entry vestibules and friendly entry doors



Reminders of the downtown's architectural history



Large offices broken up into village scale buildings



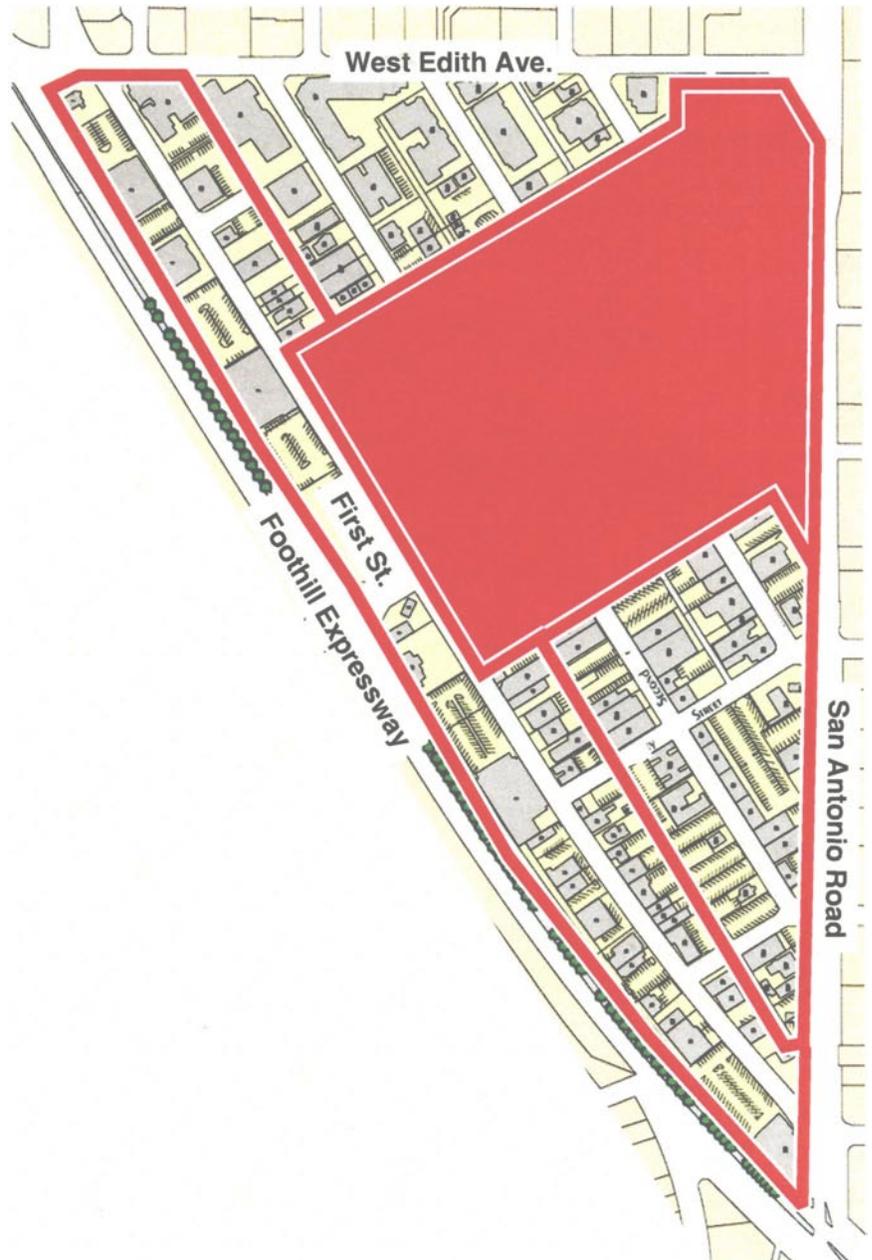
Pedestrian oriented and scaled signage

Pedestrian scaled awnings

Pedestrian scaled storefronts

**DOWNTOWN CORE
DISTRICT**

3



DOWNTOWN CORE DISTRICT

The Downtown Core District is the very heart of the downtown. It contains a wide diversity of retail and other uses, all contained within a strongly pedestrian-oriented environment. The size of the area makes parking once and visiting multiple stores relatively easy. And, street frontages are visually interesting. Individual buildings and shops have unique personalities, and a great deal of attention has been given to landscaping within both the public and private realms.

The goal of these design guidelines is to retain and enhance the uniqueness of the district, and to integrate changes to individual parcels into the fabric of the area – including parcels and buildings, which by historic standards, may be somewhat larger than the current pattern.

3.1 PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT

The compactness of the Downtown Core is such that it lends itself well to parking once, and walking to multiple destinations. For that to be successful, the pedestrian experience at every point from getting out of one's car to moving throughout the downtown must be a pleasant one with clarity of organization and delight to the eye and senses.

The creation of a successful pedestrian environment is a joint public-private effort. The guidelines below address the major contributors to the creation of a village scale and character.

3.1.1 Provide uses and activities to enhance and complement the Downtown environment

Uses and activities do not normally fall within the purview of design guidelines. However, they are often critical to the success of individual projects and the downtown as a whole. The following are guidelines for the early planning stages of projects within the Downtown Core District.

a) Explore opportunities for office and residential uses on the second floor.

Second floor office and residential uses provide valuable support for downtown ground floor uses as well as a greater sense of place for the downtown. In addition, they have the potential for extending the hours of downtown utilization beyond normal retailing hours.



Carmel

REQUIRED FINDINGS

For any commercial project in the city to receive design review approval, the Planning Commission must be able to make the following findings:

1. The proposal meets the goals, policies and objectives of the General Plan and any specific plan, design guidelines, and ordinance design criteria adopted for the specific district or area.
2. The proposal has architectural integrity, and has an appropriate relationship with other structures in the immediate area in terms of height, bulk and design.
3. Building mass is articulated to relate to the human scale, both horizontally and vertically. Building elevations have variation and depth, and avoid large blank wall surfaces. Residential or mixed-use residential projects incorporate elements that signal habitation, such as identifiable entrances, stairs, porches, bays and balconies.
4. Exterior materials and finishes convey quality, integrity, permanence and durability, and materials are used effectively to define building elements such as base, body, parapets, bays, arcades and structural elements.
5. Landscaping is generous and inviting, and landscape and hardscape features are designed to complement the building and parking areas and to be integrated with the building architecture and the surrounding streetscape. Landscaping includes substantial street canopy, either in the public right-of-way or within the project frontage.
6. Signage is designed to complement the building architecture in terms of style, materials, colors and proportions.
7. Mechanical equipment is screened from public view, and the screening is designed to be consistent with the building architecture in form, material, and detailing.
8. Service, trash and utility areas are screened from public view, or are enclosed in structures that are consistent with the building architecture in materials and detailing.

DOWNTOWN CORE DISTRICT

3

Santa Barbara



Courtyards and paseos can increase downtown vitality and economic success through development intensity and tenant variety.

Santa Barbara



Valencia



Clusters of varied dining opportunities can create a distinctive sense of place and an enhanced street environment after normal working hours.

Valencia



Outdoor dining is strongly encouraged.

b) Explore opportunities for additional tenants through the use of courtyards and paseos.

Current uses are largely contained within one-story structures, often containing only a single tenant. Opportunities for additional retail, service commercial and office tenants, in courtyards or along paseos, abound. They can be especially useful for deep parcels where primary tenants do not need the full depth of the lot. Their use could enhance individual property utilization while supplying additional foot traffic to support other downtown uses. Existing paseos and courtyards should be preserved. Arbors and trellises are encouraged in paseos and courtyards (see example below).

Irvine



Guidelines for Courtyards:

- Enclose on at least two sides by buildings.
- Remain open to the sky.
(Arbors and trellises are allowed.)
- Minimum width: 20 feet.
- Minimum area: 400 square feet.

Guidelines for Paseos:

- Minimum width: 10 feet for through-block paseos.
4 feet for entries to courtyards or individual single businesses.
- Courtyards along the paseo are encouraged.

c) Explore opportunities for active evening uses.

Consider nearby uses when planning for property design changes. There may be opportunities for adding to an existing cluster of after-hours uses with outdoor dining or complementary uses (e.g., bookstore for browsing near restaurants or coffee houses).

3.1.2 Design landscaping and open space to enhance the Downtown Village Character

Downtown open spaces and landscaping are as much responsible for the area's uniqueness as are the buildings. They provide the framework to unify an otherwise potentially chaotic collection of eclectic building designs into a strong sense of place. Some of the main features of Downtown's open space and landscape system include:

- Continuous pedestrian links between uses and between parking and storefront clusters

- Separations between pedestrians and automobiles
- Quiet and intimate open spaces off of main walkway areas
- Varied paving colors and textures
- Multiple and varied pedestrian amenities
- Sheltering Chinese Pistache trees along pedestrian paths
- Individualized landscaping at storefronts and shop entries
- Landscaping with seasonal blooms
- An overall sense of informality and variety

a) **Design storefronts and building walls along pedestrian frontages to accommodate special paving and landscaping.**



Carmel

Use abundant landscaping to emphasize storefront entries.



Los Altos

Use landscaping to soften side walls along pedestrian walks.

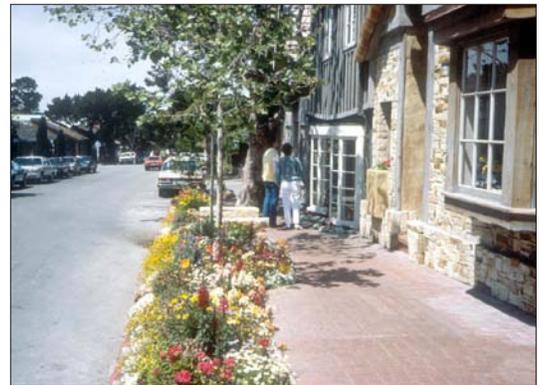


Carmel

Use special textured paving in open space areas to separate them from high traffic sidewalks and to provide a human scale.

b) **Utilize textured paving in all paving areas adjacent to the public sidewalks.**

Brick pavers and other modular units are ideal in providing a color and scale change to open space areas that are linked to or adjacent to sidewalk areas. They complement the smaller scale size of the areas, and assist in reinforcing the village scale of the downtown. One example is shown in the photograph to the upper right. Exposed aggregate concrete with brick or wood dividers, or permeable paving, are other acceptable alternatives. Avoid plain or colored concrete paving with scored joints. While less expensive than hand-placed pavers, it lacks the necessary visual quality to enhance the village character.



Carmel

c) **Enhance tree wells with landscaping.**

Planting strips and pockets are effective in adding visual interest to sidewalks and open spaces, and serve well in separating pedestrians from adjacent traffic and parked cars. They also provide infiltration areas for stormwater runoff. Flowering plants or ones with distinctive forms and colors, as shown in the examples to the right, are especially appropriate.



Los Altos

Landscaped tree wells and planter strips are the desired approach to separating pedestrians and cars.

DOWNTOWN CORE DISTRICT

3



Carmel

Courtyard and paseo treatment should be equal in quality and detail to the primary street frontages.



Santa Barbara



Santa Barbara

Incorporate fountains and other forms of public art into courtyards, paseos and other open spaces.

d) Design courtyards and paseos to invite pedestrian use and enhance adjacent uses.

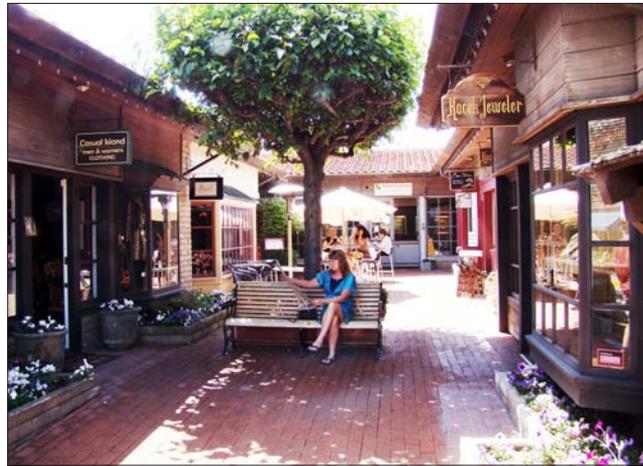
Landscaping, pedestrian amenities, storefront treatments and signage in courtyards and paseos should be equal in quality and detail to the primary street frontages. One example is shown to the left.

e) Seek opportunities to incorporate fountains and public art into open spaces.

Fountains and other forms of public art add uniqueness to the downtown pedestrian environment, increase the attractiveness of the area to a wide range of tenants, and encourage longer shopping stays.

f) Provide abundant pedestrian amenities.

Benches and other places to sit, shade from the sun, and other amenities also encourage shoppers to linger and extend their time downtown. These amenities should be supportive of the desired village character and scale. Selection of natural materials, like wood, and high quality metal of a traditional design, rather than concrete, are most likely to be successful. Planter edges can also serve to provide convenient seating near shop fronts.



Carmel

g) Integrate pedestrian scale lighting into the landscape of open spaces.



Pasadena

3.1.3 Design pedestrian and vehicle crossing points with attention to pedestrian safety

Ingress and egress points for parking lots and parking structures as well as pedestrian crosswalks are potential areas of pedestrian and vehicular movement conflicts.

a) Provide visual clues to alert drivers that pedestrians have the right of way.

- Provide special paving textures and/or colors for pedestrian crossings at intersections and parking areas.
- Provide special signage where driver visibility of crossing pedestrians might be limited.

b) Avoid landscaping and other obstructions that could limit views of traffic and pedestrians at crossing points.

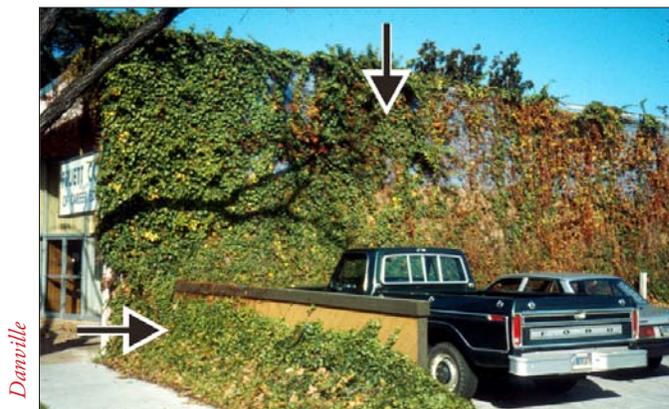
- Keep landscaping below driver eye height.
- Avoid trees and signs that might block drivers' views of pedestrians about to cross their path.

3.1.4 Locate and design trash enclosures and private parking areas to be inconspicuous and enhance the visual environment

Adequate parking and trash disposal areas are essential to the success of the downtown. However, accommodating them must be accomplished in a manner that is inconspicuous and enhances the area's village scale and character.

a) Improve existing private parking lots when conversion to usable commercial space is not possible.

- Provide low walls and landscaping for parking spaces adjacent to streets and pedestrian ways.
- Soften walls with vine and/or tree landscaping. Two examples are shown below.



Use low walls to screen the view of cars from adjacent sidewalks and landscaping to soften blank walls.



Use trees and architectural features to buffer walls at parking and service areas.

DOWNTOWN CORE DISTRICT

3

Pleasanton



b) Integrate trash enclosures into the building.

- Provide interior trash rooms whenever possible.
- Where trash enclosures are adjacent to buildings, match the trash enclosure building materials, details and colors to those of the building (See examples on page 36).
- Where integration into the building is not possible, provide upgraded trash enclosures with finished and durable materials as well as buffering landscaping. Avoid exposed concrete block unless enhanced split face block textures and colors are utilized, block joints are visually minimized with colored mortar, and extensive vine landscaping is provided to soften the walls' appearance. Three examples are shown below and to the left.

Mountain View



Valencia



3.2 ARCHITECTURE

Downtown Los Altos contains an eclectic mix of architectural styles and forms, indicative of its growth over many decades. While there are individual buildings of architectural merit, the character of downtown owes more to the wide stylistic variety, small scale, and visual richness of its structures than to their architectural distinction. In the future, the emphasis will be on combining individual architectural excellence with building forms and details that reinforce the small scale village character of the Downtown Core District. A diversity of design styles will be encouraged and expected.

Over time, the downtown retail core has evolved as an area with substantial pedestrian/retail continuity and an emphasis upon an expression of the unique personalities of its individual businesses. The following design guidelines are intended to reinforce that existing framework, scale and character.

3.2.1 Continue the pattern and scale established by existing buildings

- a) **Maintain and reinforce the underlying downtown 25-foot module along all street frontages. Some techniques for this emphasis include the following:**



Los Altos

Changing roof parapet height and/or shape.



Carmel

Utilizing different building heights, architectural styles, and forms.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

These guidelines are not intended to establish or dictate a specific style beyond the desire to maintain Downtown Los Altos' small town character and attention to human scale and detail. In general, diverse and traditional architectural styles that have stood the test of time are preferred.

Designs merely repeated from other cities or without thought to the special qualities of Los Altos are strongly discouraged, and unlikely to be accepted.

CORPORATE ARCHITECTURE

The City will work with applicants to adapt critical functional features of prototype plans to their Los Altos sites, but will not accept standard plans, building forms, elevations, materials, or colors that do not relate to the site, adjacent development, or Los Altos' community character.

Applicants are encouraged to meet early in the process with the City's Planning Services Department staff to discuss their plans and building prototypes.

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

The City of Los Altos supports sustainable design in the construction of new facilities and the remodeling of existing buildings. Applicants are expected to utilize creativity in adapting sustainable design elements to the unique qualities of Downtown Los Altos' visual environment. City staff will work closely with applicants to achieve this goal.

Special attention will be expected of all applicants in the following areas:

- Use of energy efficient HVAC systems
- Use of solar energy
- Reduction of energy demands through simple techniques such as operable windows and sun control methods
- Minimization of storm water runoff
- Use of recycled materials
- Maximization of insulation and energy efficient lighting

3

Laguna Beach



Utilizing different awning forms and/or materials, as shown above and below, matching the predominant building module.

Corte Madera



Santa Barbara



Defining storefronts with projecting piers and emphasizing tenants' unique store personalities.

Santa Barbara



Changing storefront type and details.

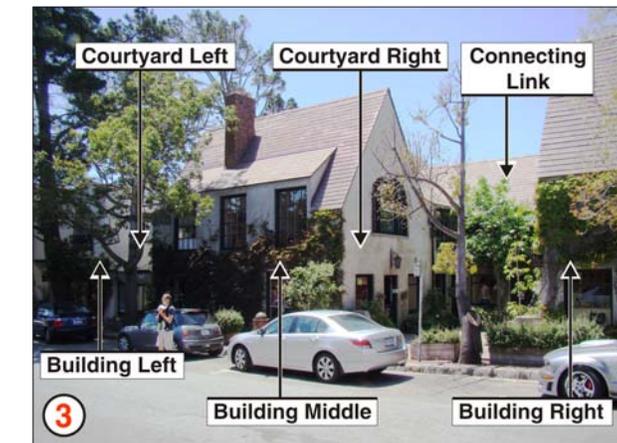
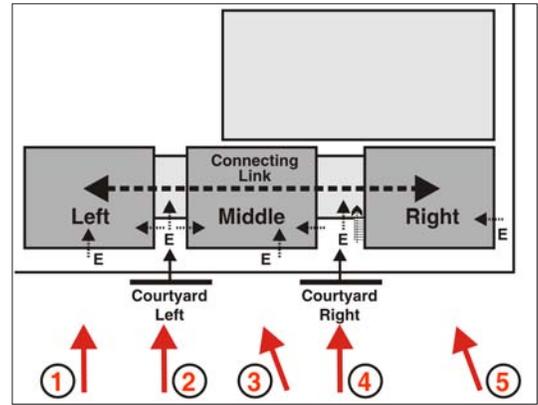
Santa Barbara



Reinforcing the module with second floor projections and details.

b) Break larger buildings up into smaller components.

- Divide longer facades into individual smaller segments with individual design forms and architectural styles. One option is shown on this page. Development incentives may be available.
- Provide recessed courtyard entries between individualized building segments. These courtyards should be at least 20 feet wide and 20 feet deep with substantial landscaping and pedestrian amenities. These are excellent locations for entries to shops and/or to second floor uses. The example of a larger structure in Carmel which utilized these techniques is shown in the diagram and photos on this page. See also the photo example from Los Gatos at the bottom of page 31.



Left courtyard features shop entries, display windows, special paving and landscaping.



Right courtyard features shop entries, stairs to second floor uses, special paving and landscaping.

Differing architectural forms and styles separated by courtyards assist in fitting this large building complex into a village scale.

DOWNTOWN CORE DISTRICT

3

Los Gatos



Front facades are predominantly display windows and entries.

Los Gatos



Sidewall display window provides a transition between the primary and secondary frontages.

Los Gatos



Sidewall piers relate the sidewall facade to the shop fronts, and landscaping softens the wall.

Beverly Hills



These contemporary facades fit into this streetscape due to their small scale, and the use of high quality materials and crisp detailing.

c) Create continuous building frontages.

- Avoid blank walls along sidewalks and paseos. Display windows and entries should occupy at least 60% of the wall areas on primary frontages. Walls along side streets and paseos may have a lesser amount of glazing, but should have display windows – especially near the primary facade. Other non-glazed wall areas should be enhanced with wall plane changes, landscaping (e.g., landscaped trellises and lattices), and/or special architectural detailing (see example to the left).
- Minimize pedestrian/vehicle conflicts by locating any driveway or loading areas away from main pedestrian routes.

3.2.2 Design for diversity with sensitivity to adjacent development

a) Select traditional architectural styles.

- Traditional architectural styles have been developed over an extended period of time, and generally fit comfortably with other traditional styles in a downtown commercial environment. Within the traditional styles of building form and facade organization, however, design creativity is encouraged to adapt the style to current needs and a fresh look. Examples of traditional commercial styles may be found in the resources identified in the sidebar on page 27. Adaptations of traditional residential styles may also be appropriate to the village character of Downtown Los Altos.
- The depth and authenticity of detailing found in traditional architectural styles will best harmonize well with current buildings in Downtown Los Altos. However, well designed modern facade designs may be acceptable, depending on location, materials, and the quality of the details. They will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Examples are shown below and to the bottom left.

Pasadena



The warmth of the materials and the variety of smaller scale detailing help this modern facade to fit into a streetscape of diverse architecture.

b) Relate the facade designs to adjacent structures.

- Respect the scale of adjacent buildings.
- Relate the placement of defining elements and details to those on adjacent structures. One example from Downtown Los Altos is shown below.



Matching parapet and window heights help relate these adjacent buildings.

c) Design with architectural integrity and continuity.

- Exterior details should be authentic to the style. Sources of assistance in understanding traditional architectural design principles and details may be found in the reference sources noted in the sidebar to the right.
- Design buildings as whole units. The design of upper floors and ground level walls, piers and other supporting elements should be designed as a unified whole.
- Preserve historically significant structures, whenever possible. Refer to Appendix B for a list of downtown historic resources.
- Preserve worthy elements of the existing buildings. Recycle and reuse distinctive design elements.
- Where buildings were once architecturally distinctive but have been altered over time, restore the lost integrity of form and details, if possible.



The upper and lower facades of this building work as one unified structure.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLES AND DETAILS RESOURCES

- **The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture**
Richard Longstreth
Rowman Atimira 2000
- **Traditional Construction Patterns: Design & Detail Rules of Thumb**
Stephen A. Mouzon
McGraw-Hill 2004

DOWNTOWN CORE DISTRICT

3

Beverly Hills



Avoid tall entries like the one above in favor of pedestrian scaled entries like the one shown below.

Los Gatos



Carmel



Permanent brick planters.



Carmel

Operable windows are encouraged for restaurants, cafes and coffee shops.

San Anselmo



Planters and climbing vines.

Carmel

3.2.3 Design to enhance Downtown’s Village Character and pedestrian scale

a) Vary storefront treatments.

A strong feature of Downtown Los Altos’ village character is the variety and individuality of the storefronts.

- Provide significant variations between adjacent storefronts occupied by different businesses, including those within the same building structure. These variations should include display windows, entry doors, awnings and signage. For frontages over twenty-five feet in width with the same tenant, variations should also be provided to avoid long facades of the same storefront design.
- Size store entries to the human figure and normal entry door heights. Avoid over scaled, tall entries such as the one to the above left.
- A wide variety of storefront treatments is desirable. Some may have bulkheads below display windows while others may have larger areas of glass extending to the floor.
- Outdoor dining and operable windows are strongly encouraged for restaurants and cafes. Two examples of operable windows are shown below to the left.

b) Design storefronts to allow landscaping and special paving.

- Landscaping may occur in a variety of forms as shown in the examples below and on the following page. Flowers are strongly encouraged to add color and interest.
- See also Guidelines 3.1.2 a) on page 19.

Victoria, BC



Built-in planters and hanging pots.

Pasadena



Trellises and lattices with climbing vines.

Los Gatos



Recessed window boxes.

Carmel



Window box planters, paving pockets and climbing vines.

Los Gatos



Mixed treatment in larger setbacks.

Pasadena



Landscaped setbacks and potted plants.

Los Gatos



Planter pots.

Carmel



Wall-mounted pots.

DOWNTOWN CORE DISTRICT

3

Carmel



Vestibules need not be rectangular in shape.

Santa Barbara



Vestibules with more facets can be used to increase the exposure of goods in storefront windows.

Carmel



A simple, narrow vestibule with a well detailed door may work best for narrow store frontages.

c) Provide entry vestibules.

Vestibules emphasize shop entries, and allow ingress and egress to businesses without impeding pedestrian movement on adjacent sidewalks. They also allow for increasing display window exposure.

- Vestibules may have a wide variety of shapes, from simple rectangular indentations to larger and more complex shapes. Some examples are shown in photos to the left.
- Use special paving materials and colors to clearly define the vestibule areas and separate them from the adjacent public sidewalk.
- The use of wood doors with glazing and raised panel details, rather than metal and glass doors, is strongly encouraged to add warmth to the shop entries.
- Dutch doors and doors with divided light windows are encouraged to link the shop interior to passing pedestrian traffic and add visual interest to the entry.

Los Altos



A wood door and brick paving contribute to this inviting shop entry.

Oakland



Dutch doors offer an inviting, friendly entry to passing shoppers.

d) Utilize awnings and canopies at windows and entries.

- A variety of awning types is encouraged. They may be traditional, as shown to the right, or unique (see the wood shutter awnings below). They should also be distinct to the store's tenant. For multiple tenant buildings, avoid making all of the awnings the same.
- Keep the mounting height at a human scale - with the valence height not more than 8 feet above the sidewalk level.



San Jose



Beverly Hills

e) Provide cornices and building tops consistent with the architectural style.

- Avoid unfinished wall tops in favor of projecting cornice features or roof overhangs. Examples are shown below and to the right.



Los Gatos



Los Gatos



Santa Barbara

Designing larger buildings to resemble a collection of smaller individual buildings, as shown to the left, is preferred in the Downtown Core. Larger structures with varied store fronts, as shown above, may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

DOWNTOWN CORE DISTRICT

3



Carmel

Architectural features and shop entries are encouraged on corner parcels.



Carmel

f) Provide special features for buildings located at street corners (See examples to the left).

g) Emphasize entries and display windows.

- Make shop entries as open and inviting as possible.
- Consider landscaping and special paving to add visual interest.
- Keep all window glazing transparent. Avoid tinted glass in favor of awnings and other shading devices for sun control.

h) Utilize natural materials.

Wood, stone, and brick can provide warmth at storefronts, and enhance the feeling of village scale and character.

- Wood doors and window frames are strongly encouraged.
- Avoid synthetic stone.
- Tile is discouraged except for bulkheads below display windows and for decorative accents. One good example is shown below.



Ojai



Santa Barbara

Landscaping and open doors can add great appeal to both individual shops and the street as a whole



Carmel

Providing large display windows and inviting entries enliven the street frontage, and encourage shoppers to enter the store.

i) **Enhance the pedestrian experience with interesting architectural details.**

- Consider bay window displays where walls might otherwise be blank, as shown in the example below.



Carmel

- Architectural details should be high quality and appropriate to the architectural style.
- Individual trim elements should be scaled to be or resemble proportions that could be handled and installed by hand. Elements on any portion of the structure should not be inflated in size to respond strictly to building scale, but should also have a relationship with human scale.

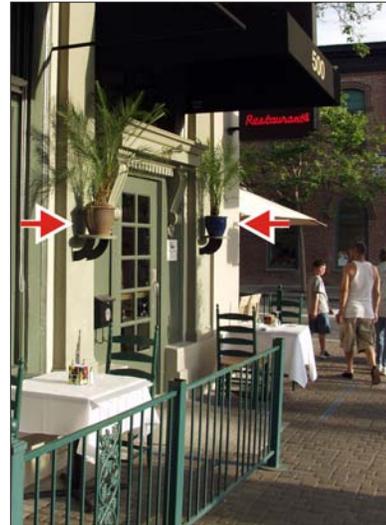
j) **Provide special storefront and facade lighting.**

Nighttime lighting of the building and display windows can add greatly to the downtown's sense of vitality and safety, and can encourage window shopping by those who may be dining in downtown restaurants.

- Lighting should be subtle.
- The use of decorative lighting, concealed fixtures, or pin lights are all possibilities.
- Decorative lighting fixtures should be appropriate to the architectural style of the building and storefront.



Santa Barbara



Pleasanton

Small details like these pots on shelves at the restaurant entry can add greatly to the village scale and character.



Pasadena

True or simulated divided light windows, decorative lights, and landscaping can add special visual interest to a storefront.



Carmel

These small decorative wall-mounted fixtures and the concealed lighting of the display window provide subtle lighting for the building, merchandise and signage.

3



Carmel

Tile stairs and business directory sign



Pasadena

Awnings and window boxes at the second level help relate those uses to the street level

3.2.4 Design second floor facades to complement the streetscape and Village Character

a) Provide second floor entries that are equal in quality and detail to storefront entries.

Some techniques to accomplish this emphasis include:

See example to the left and below.

- Special awning or roof element.
- Wrought iron gate.
- Decorative tile stair treads and risers.
- Special lights.
- Decorative street address numbers or tiles.
- Plaque signs for upper floor business tenants.



Carmel

Second floor entry awning

b) Relate second floor uses to the pedestrian environment on the street level.

Some methods of achieving this include the following:

See examples on this and the following page,

- Second floor overhangs
- Bay windows
- Decks
- Balconies
- Planters.



Carmel

Projecting bay windows



Carmel

Second floor overhang and wrought iron gate at second floor entry



Carmel

Upper floor deck



St. Helena

Small balcony with landscaping



Montecito

Wide balcony

- c) **Utilize operable windows in traditional styles.**
- Recess windows at least 3 inches from the face of the wall.
 - Use vertical proportions for individual windows.
 - Separate individual or groups of windows by solid wall masses, and treat windows as punched openings.
 - Avoid ribbon windows and curtain wall treatments.



Carmel

Colorful flower pots

DOWNTOWN CORE DISTRICT

3

Los Altos



Building facades facing parking lots may be treated the same as street-facing facades, as above, or may be treated in a more simple manner, as below.

Los Altos



3.2.5 Design compatible parking plaza oriented entries and facades

Facades facing parking lots may be treated similarly to street-facing facades if they serve as a second entry, or they may be treated more simply, but will be expected to receive consistent design attention and landscaping. Two current examples in the Downtown Core District are shown below.

3.2.6 Integrate utilities and building services into the overall building design

a) Integrate mechanical and trash rooms into the building whenever possible.

- Where not feasible, use screen walls to match the design, materials and finish of those of the main building (See examples below).

b) Add trellises, lattices, and landscaping to screen and soften exterior mechanical equipment and trash enclosures.

Two examples are shown below.



Ojai



Los Gatos

c) Rooftop mechanical equipment shall be concealed from public view (street or adjacent buildings).

- Existing rooftop mechanical equipment shall be concealed or relocated out of view whenever a roof is replaced and when equipment is upgraded or replaced to any extent that requires a building permit.
- Locate on a portion of the rooftop that is not visible to the public or locate behind roof forms, parapets or screens that are compatible with the architectural character of the structure.

3.2.7 Design larger structures to be sensitive to the unique scale and character of Downtown Los Altos

a) Adapt corporate prototype designs to relate both in form and scale to the adjacent downtown fabric.

- An Apple store prototype example in Walnut Creek and its modification for Downtown Los Gatos, shown to the right, illustrates one way in which a corporate prototype design can be modified to fit into a small scale downtown environment.
- The GAP store in Los Gatos, shown below, has been designed to appear as two structures to better fit into the existing downtown fabric.



Walnut Creek

This store in Walnut Creek illustrates the standard Apple prototype.



Los Gatos



Los Gatos

The standard Apple prototype was modified in the Town of Los Gatos to better fit with the existing downtown scale and character.

b) Avoid architectural styles and monumental building elements that do not relate to the small human scale of Downtown Los Altos.

- The structures shown below and to the right are well designed, but would be out of place in Downtown Los Altos. These are all examples of what should not be done.



Walnut Creek

Exaggerated door height
 Normal door height
 Human height

Don't use exaggerated tall doors



Walnut Creek

Tall and bulky column bases

Don't use over-size building elements



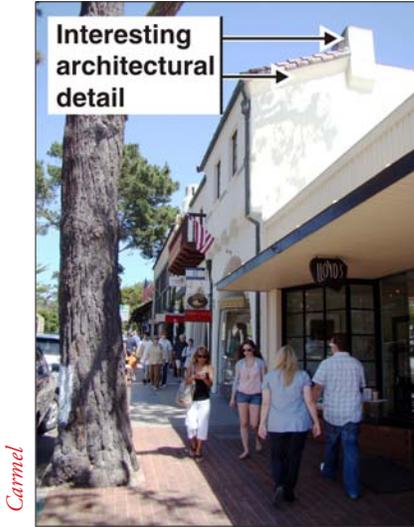
Walnut Creek

Tall and wide arches

Human height

Don't use large arches

3



Carmel



Telluride



Telluride

c) Provide special design treatment for visible sidewalls of structures that are taller than their immediate neighbors.

- Sidewall windows are encouraged where codes allow and adequate fire protection can be provided.
- Employ design techniques to relate the visible sidewalls to front facades. Some common techniques include the following:
 - * Repeating front facade finished materials, decorative details and mouldings.
 - * Carrying front facade cornices and wall top projections around all sides of the upper floor.
 - * Providing varied parapet heights to avoid a box-like appearance.
 - * Utilizing gable and hip roofs to vary the height and appearance of side walls.
 - * Treating side walls with inset panels.
 - * Integrating interesting architectural details.
 - * Stepping back the front facade of upper floors to vary the side wall profile.



Valencia



Walnut Creek

3.2.8 Design and detail parking structures to complement Downtown’s Village Scale and Character

- a) Locate vehicular entries to allow ingress and egress from streets other than Main Street and State Street.
- b) Place as much of the parking below grade as possible.
- c) Provide commercial uses on ground floors facing pedestrian-oriented streets and walkways.
- d) Provide a minimum 5-foot wide landscape strip to accommodate low shrubs, flowering plants, and vertical trees along all edges that do not have active commercial frontages.
- e) Integrate extensive landscaping into the parking structure edges and entries.
- f) Integrate pedestrian entries with adjacent commercial uses.
- g) Provide secondary ground floor pedestrian entries when the structure is adjacent to commercial core service alleys containing rear shop entries or paseo entries.
- h) Design parking structures to be visually compatible with other Downtown Core District commercial buildings.

Some techniques include:

- Breaking up the building mass and height to match the predominant 25-foot wide module of the core area.
- Designing the structure as a downtown building, rather than as a parking structure.



Walnut Creek

Ground floor commercial uses in the parking structure example shown above assist in maintaining retail and pedestrian continuity.



Walnut Creek

This parking structure has been designed with pilasters, and with varied facade depths, and details to relate to the module and style of nearby retail shops.



Walnut Creek

Minimize parking garage entries, and integrate parking structures with adjacent commercial uses, as shown above.

DOWNTOWN CORE DISTRICT

3



Sacramento

Facade materials and opening proportions help relate this parking structure to its surrounding neighbors.



San Mateo

Ground level commercial uses and upper floor set-backs are techniques that relate parking structures to adjacent smaller scale development.

- Utilizing finished exterior wall materials (e.g., brick and/or stucco), and decorative trim elements.
- Providing natural light and ventilation with openings that are similar to the proportions of commercial building windows.
- Screening cars from street view.
- Visually screening interior light fixtures from street and adjacent buildings view.
- Incorporating medallions and/or decorative lighting fixtures into exterior ground floor facades.

- i) **Step back street-facing facades, if feasible, where they are adjacent to lower buildings (See example to the left).**
- j) **Design facades facing the service drives for Downtown Core District commercial buildings as visually attractive neighbors that will be compatible with those adjacent secondary entries and outdoor use spaces. Two multi-use service alley examples are shown below.**
- k) **Special attention should be given to landscaping, window fenestration, lighting, variations in alley paving materials and textures, and other elements that add human scale and visual interest.**



Pasadena



Pasadena

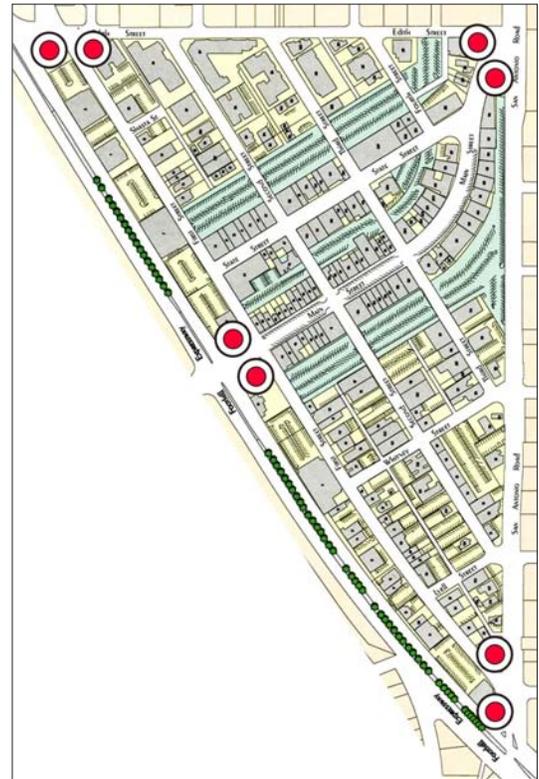
3.2.9 Reinforce a sense of entry at Downtown Gateways

a) Provide special design treatments on sites that mark entries to the Downtown Core District.

- Sites for special treatment are identified on the adjacent map.
- Relate the improvements to any special public entry improvements at these entry intersections. Broader concepts for these intersections are outlined in the *Los Altos Downtown Design Plan*.

b) Select design treatments that are appropriate for the site, the architectural style of the structure, and the uses accommodated. Some elements that may be considered include:

- Tower elements
- Sloped roof structures
- Special uses with outdoor plazas
- Fountains
- Special landscape features
- Special lighting
- Increased architectural details
- City identity signing



Downtown Gateways

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3.3 SIGNAGE

Signage is critical to the economic viability of individual businesses as well as to the downtown as a whole. This importance must be balanced with the goals of providing a strong sense of community, and using the design of signage to reinforce the village character and ambiance of Downtown Los Altos.

Applicants should refer to Chapter 11.04 Signs of the Los Altos Zoning Ordinance which contains relevant definitions and the basic standards which will be applied to commercial signage. The guidelines in this chapter supplement the Sign Ordinance, and are intended to provide more detail in regard to good signage design principles and community expectations that signage will be consistent with downtown's village scale and character.

The sign examples shown may not be appropriate for all locations. Each sign will be reviewed in the context of the proposed project architecture and site.

3.3.1 Select signs appropriate to the pedestrian scale environment of the Downtown Core District

a) **Select and scale signs that are oriented to pedestrians rather than to passing motorists. Sign types that are most likely to be successful and approved are the following:**

- Wall Signs
- Awning Signs
- Window Signs
- Projecting Signs
- Hanging Signs
- Plaque Signs

GOOD SIGN DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Design easily readable signs.

- Avoid excessive wording and advertising messages. Signs are most effective when their messages can be grasped quickly. Too many words or images compete for attention and reduce the readability of the sign.
- Use no more than two letter font types per sign. The primary purpose of a sign is to quickly convey information to passing pedestrians and motorists. More than two letter styles make readability more difficult. A simple logo with an additional type style may be considered.
- Keep the size of letters and graphics in proportion to overall sign area. Text and graphics are difficult to read if they crowd the borders of the sign. Smaller letters with space around them will have more impact than larger letters with limited space around them. Generally limit the width and height of lettering and graphics to 85% of the overall sign width and height. A good rule of thumb is to limit the amount of sign information to no more than 50 to 55% of the overall sign area.

Use high quality materials

- Appropriate materials include finished wood, metal and, for projecting banner signs, woven fabric. Plastic sign materials and signs painted directly onto building surfaces are strongly discouraged.
- The sign materials and design should be related to those of the building on which it is mounted, and all sign edges should be cleanly finished.

Use simple sign shapes

- Geometrical shapes such as rectangles, squares, circles, ovals and triangles are visually stable shapes which help focus attention on the sign message. These should be used in almost all cases. Combinations of geometric shapes will also generally produce a good sign shape.



3.3.2 WALL SIGNS

Wall signs are panels or individual letters mounted on and parallel to a building wall or a roof fascia.

- a) **Limit sign information.**
 - Generally, limit sign information to the business name. Graphic logos, date of building construction, address, and other elements may be allowed at the discretion of the City.
- b) **Place signs within a clean *Signable Area*.**
 - The *Signable Area* should:
 - 1) Be relatively flat.
 - 2) Not contain doors or windows.
 - 3) Not include projecting molding or trim.
 - 4) Be in reasonable proportion to the overall facade.
 - 5) Generally not exceed 15% of the building facade.
 - If a building does not have a good location for a wall sign, use other allowed types such as awning, window, or projecting signs.
- c) **Use sign materials which project slightly from the face of the building.**
 - Signs painted directly onto wall surfaces are strongly discouraged since a change in tenant could require a major facade repainting.
 - Use either individually applied letters to the face of the wall, or apply sign letters to a board or panel mounted on the wall face. Sign copy and graphics applied to a board or panel may consist of any of the following:
 - * Individual letters and graphics of wood, metal or similar materials
 - * Individual letters and graphics carved into the surface of a wood panel
 - * Letters and graphics painted directly onto the surface of the panel
- d) **Night lighting is encouraged.**
 - Direct exterior illumination with well designed and shielded spotlights is the preferred lighting method.
 - Interior illuminated individual letters are strongly discouraged.
 - Interior illuminated *can signs* which include multiple letters on a translucent background within a single sign enclosure are not allowed.
 - Neon signs are discouraged, but may be allowed and evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- e) **Conceal all sign and sign lighting raceways and other connections.**

f) **Maximum letter height.**

Sign height and width should be appropriate to the building on which it is placed and the distance of the sign from fronting streets. Generally, wall sign letter heights should not exceed 12 inches in height except along San Antonio Road where 18 inch high letters may be considered.

g) **Relate sign colors to building colors.**

- Select wall sign colors to complement the building and storefront colors. For colors other than black, select from color ranges which are analogous and complementary to storefront and/or building colors.
- Corporate branding colors will be considered, but will not be automatically approved if they are considered out of place with the building or the surrounding environment. A change of color or the use of toned down colors in the same hue family may be required in place of brighter standard corporate colors.



Santa Rosa

3.3.3 AWNING SIGNS

Awning signs consist of letters and graphics applied directly to the face or valence of awnings. Awning signs are often used effectively in combination with window signs.

a) **Place signs for easy visibility.**

- Apply signs to awning front valences (i.e., the flat vertical surface of awnings) or to sloped awning faces with a slope of at least 2 to 1.

b) **Limit the signage information on awnings.**

- Since awning signs will often be viewed from passing vehicles, the amount of information which can be effectively conveyed is limited. Keeping sign text short will allow viewers to better comprehend and remember the message.
- Generally, limit awning signs to the business name, business logo, services or type of business (e.g., French Cuisine), and/or the business address number.
- Limit the size of logos or text placed on awning sloped faces to a maximum of 15% of the sloped surface areas.
- Limit sign width on awning valences to a maximum of 85% of the awning width. Limit the letter height to a maximum of 85% of the valence height.



Healdsburg

c) **Avoid interior illuminated awnings.**

Backlit awnings that make the entire awning a large sign are not allowed. Signage on the awning's sloped face may be illuminated by shielded and attractive directional spot lights.



Pasadena

DOWNTOWN CORE DISTRICT

3



Burlingame



Los Gatos

3.3.4 WINDOW SIGNS

Window signs are primarily oriented to passing pedestrians, and are generally applied to the inside of display windows.

- a) **Limit the amount of signage used.**
Window signs should be limited to a maximum of 25% of any individual window, and an aggregate area of no more than 10% of all ground floor windows on any building face.
- b) **Limit the size of lettering.**
The maximum height of letters should be 10 inches.
- c) **Consider the use of logos and creative sign type.**
Graphic logos and images along with special text formats can add personality and interest to window signs.
- d) **Use high quality materials and application methods.**
Limit window sign materials to the following:
 - Paint or vinyl film applied directly to the face of the window.
 - Wood or metal panels with applied lettering.



Oakland



Los Gatos



Mill Valley



San Francisco

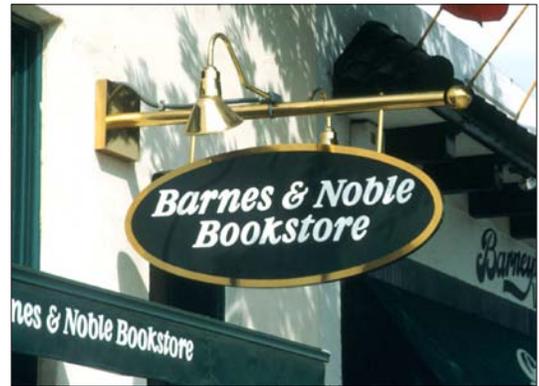
3.3.5 PROJECTING SIGNS

Projecting signs are relatively flat, two-sided solid panels attached to brackets which are mounted on and perpendicular to the face of buildings and storefronts. In addition to text, they may include graphic images that express the unique personality of an individual business.

- a) **Use high quality materials.**
Use wood, metal or non-glossy fabrics. Avoid plastics.
- b) **Limit the number and size of projecting signs.**
 - Use no more than one projecting sign per business frontage.
 - Limit the size of any projecting sign to five square feet.
 - Project signs no more than 36 inches from the building face, and provide at least 6 inches between the inside edge of the sign and the building.
- c) **Relate the design of projecting signs and supports to the character of the building.**
 - Simple round or square horizontal supports with capped ends, painted black or white, are generally acceptable.
 - More decorative approaches may be desirable when appropriate to the sign and/or architectural character of the building.
- d) **Position projecting signs to complement the building's architectural details.**
Locate solid panel signs below the first floor ceiling line, or no more than 14 feet above the sidewalk, whichever is less. Provide at least 8 feet from the bottom of projecting signs to the ground in pedestrian areas.
- e) **Provide sign lighting only with shielded spotlights.**
 - Utilize high quality fixtures such as cylinder spots or decorative fixtures. Avoid exposed standard spot and flood light bulbs.
 - Design light supports to complement the design of the sign and building facade.



Pleasant Hill



Oakland



Santa Barbara



San Francisco

Blade signs are a smaller form of projecting sign.



Los Gatos

DOWNTOWN CORE DISTRICT

3

Laguna Beach



Laguna Beach



Mountain View



Carmel



Oakland



3.3.6 HANGING SIGNS

Hanging signs are relatively flat panels, generally two-sided, which are similar to projecting signs, but are smaller and suspended below awnings, bay windows, balconies, and similar projections. They are intended primarily for business identification to pedestrians passing on the sidewalk.

- a) **Use high quality materials.**
Use wood or metal and avoid shiny plastic or fabric. Finish all exposed edges. Suspend signs with metal rods, small scale chain, cable, or hooks.
- b) **Limit the number and size of hanging signs.**
Use no more than one hanging sign per business. Limit the maximum sign size to 3 square feet. Mount signs to provide a minimum of 8 feet clearance between the sign and the sidewalk.
- c) **Orient hanging signs to pedestrian traffic.**
Mount signs under awnings, bay windows or other projections with their orientation perpendicular to the building face so that they will be visible to pedestrians passing on the sidewalk. If hanging signs for multiple businesses are placed along a building frontage, they should all be mounted with their bottom edge the same distance above the sidewalk.

3.3.7 PLAQUE SIGNS

Plaque signs are pedestrian-oriented flat panels mounted to wall surfaces near business entries, upper floor entries, and courtyards. They include signs that identify a specific business, directory signs for multiple businesses, and menu display boxes for restaurants.

- a) **Limit the location and size of plaque signs.**
Locate signs only on wall surfaces adjacent to tenant entries or entry passageways to off-street courtyards. Plaque signs may identify a single business or multiple businesses occupying an upper floor or courtyard.



Santa Barbara



Los Gatos



Santa Barbara

- b) **Use plaque signs for the display of restaurant menus.**

A restaurant district is enhanced when a variety of restaurants share the area and customers are able to walk from one to the next to compare menus and prices. Attractive menu boxes with lighting assist in this process. Menu signs or boxes should have internal indirect lighting (e.g., bulbs located in the frame to cast direct light over the menu surface) or direct lighting using decorative fixtures.



Sausalito



Santa Fe



San Francisco

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**MIXED COMMERCIAL
DISTRICT**

4



MIXED COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

Owners of properties and businesses in this district should review the guidelines for the Downtown Core District. While projects in this district may be somewhat larger and less retail-oriented than those in the downtown core, they are still very much a part of the downtown village, and the village character and scale emphasis underlying those guidelines will be expected of new buildings and changes to existing properties in this district. The intent of these guidelines and the zoning standards established for this district are summarized in the sidebar to the right.

The primary differences between development in this district and the downtown core include:

- A wider range of uses is allowed.
- Required parking must be provided on-site rather than in common parking district lots or structures.
- Setbacks are required along all street fronts, and in many cases at the rear of parcels.
- A 50-foot building module applies, rather than the 25-foot module in the downtown core.
- Three-story buildings are allowed up to forty-five feet in height.*

** Pending a Zoning Code change approval by the City Council to increase the height limit in this zone from its current maximum of forty feet.*

INTENT

- A. Promote the implementation of the Los Altos Downtown Design Plan.
- B. Support and enhance the downtown Los Altos village atmosphere.
- C. Allow latitude for creative design and architectural variety.
- D. Respect the scale and character of the area immediately surrounding the existing downtown pedestrian district.
- E. Provide pedestrian amenities such as paseos, outdoor public spaces and outdoor seating.
- F. Establish a sense of entry into the downtown.
- G. Encourage historic preservation for those buildings listed on the city's historic resources inventory.
- H. Encourage the upgrading of building exteriors, signs, passageways and rear entries.
- I. Provide for a full range of retail, office, and service uses appropriate to downtown.
- J. Improve the visual appeal and pedestrian orientation of the downtown.
- K. Encourage the use of solar, photo voltaic, and other energy conserving devices.

MIXED COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

4



Los Altos

This low wall separates the parking lot from the sidewalk/driveway at this Los Altos office building.



Palo Alto

A low box hedge is used here to buffer the pedestrian from the adjacent parking lot.



Palo Alto

Special paving and landscaping give this parking lot a village character.

4.1 PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT

A strong pedestrian orientation is expected. In addition to the guidelines below, the Downtown Core District Pedestrian Environment guidelines on pages 17-22 will also apply to this district.

4.1.1 Minimize the impact of parking on pedestrian circulation and the pedestrian environment

- a) Underground parking is strongly encouraged.
- b) Locate parking at the rear of parcels.
- c) Limit the exposure of surface parking lots along street frontages as much as possible.
- d) Provide access to parking from passages and less traveled pedestrian routes whenever possible.
- e) Limit the width of parking access drives as much as possible.
- f) Limit access and parking lot paving to those areas that are functionally required, and provide landscaping in all other areas.
- g) Where parking lots must abut a public street or a pedestrian walkway, provide a minimum landscaped setback of 5 feet, and provide low walls or box hedges to screen parked cars from direct view. Two examples of screening are shown to the left.
- h) Special textured paving that is porous and minimizes water run-off in surface parking lots is strongly encouraged. Examples are shown to the left and below.



Palo Alto

Another example of porous paving

4.2 ARCHITECTURE

The Mixed Commercial District includes office and service uses as well as retail uses. And, since many of the parcels are larger than those in the Downtown Core District, buildings are also often larger. The architecture guidelines below are intended to recognize these differences while maintaining a scale and character that is compatible with that of the downtown core.

4.2.1 Mixed use buildings are encouraged

a) Buildings not planning for a mixed use at the current time still must allow for future mixed use by:

- Providing a minimum ground floor ceiling height of 12 feet.
- Locating the ground floor no more than 12 inches above the sidewalk level.
- Designing the ground floor facade with a minimum of 60 percent transparent glazing.

b) Ground floor retail uses should generally follow the relevant storefront design guidelines for the Downtown Core District. If in doubt, applicant should consult with city planning staff.

4.2.2 Break long facades into smaller modules

a) Buildings that are longer than 75 feet in length must be broken up into segments that are no longer than 50 feet.

b) The development of smaller building segments may be accomplished in several different ways. They include combinations of the following techniques:

- Separate structures surrounding a courtyard.
- Indented courtyards (See Guideline 3.2.1.b).
- A change in horizontal or vertical plane.
- A projection or recess.
- Varying cornice or roof lines.
- Distinctive entries.

4.2.3 Provide primary building entries on the street frontage

a) Building entries may also be provided from the parking lot, but this should not be designed as the only or the major entry.



Los Altos



Danville

The photos above show two examples of breaking larger buildings into smaller segments that are compatible with the Los Altos downtown village scale and character.

MIXED COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

4

BUILDING HEIGHT VARIATION EXAMPLES

4.2.4 A variation in building heights is encouraged

- a) Variations may be provided by different heights for major building elements or by lowering segments of the facade such as exterior stairs (See photos to the left).

4.2.5 Sloped roof forms are encouraged

- a) Flat roofs may be considered on First Street parcels where they would be more compatible to adjacent development.
- b) Upper floors embedded in the sloped roof form may be needed to conform to the height limits for the district.

One example is shown below.

Los Gatos



Santa Monica



Exterior stairs to upper floor uses are one way to provide variation in building height.

Pasadena



4.2.6 Design buildings to screen surface parking lots whenever possible

- a) Provide as much building frontage along the streets as possible.
- b) Second floor space is encouraged along street frontages with parking lot entries. See the example below.

Cupertino



Projecting ground floor arcades are another way to provide variation in building height.

Santa Monica



4.2.7 Provide design consistency

- a) The architectural style and details should continue around all sides of the structure.

4.2.8 Emphasize individual windows or small window groups on upper levels

- a) Use vertical window proportions.
- b) Avoid horizontal ribbon windows.
- c) Recess window a minimum of 3 inches from the face of all exterior walls.



Sunnyvale

Avoid continuous ribbon windows like those above in favor of individual windows with substantial jambs separating them, as shown below.

4.2.9 Upper floor balconies and decks are encouraged



Los Gatos

Another example of second floor balcony and deck space providing facade depth and visual interest.



Los Altos

See the guidelines and examples on pages 34-35.

4.2.10 Include substantial architectural detail

- a) Detail elements should be consistent with the architectural style of the building.
- b) Detail elements, similar to those in the Downtown Core, may include:
 - Roof cornices and overhangs
 - Wall mouldings
 - Trellises and lattices with landscaping
 - Decorative lights
 - Awnings
 - Balconies

See examples to the right.



Los Gatos



Pasadena

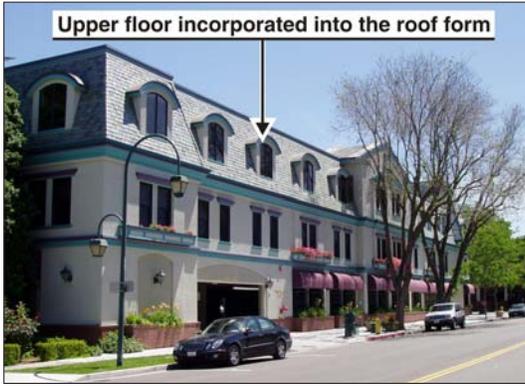
MIXED COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

4

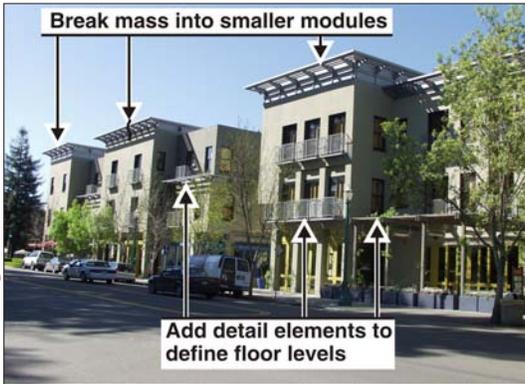
4.2.11 Design taller buildings to relate to smaller nearby buildings in the downtown

Some techniques are shown in the examples on this page.

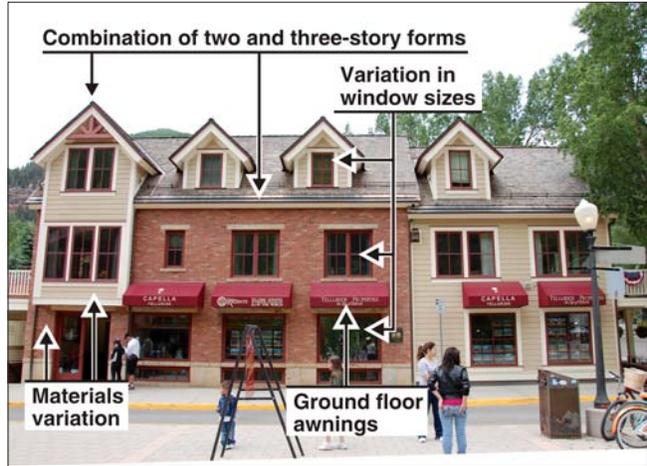
Danville



Healdsburg



Telluride



Santa Barbara



Birkdale Village



Telluride



4.3 LANDSCAPE

Extensive landscaping is expected in the Mixed Commercial District because of the increased setback requirements, substantial surface parking, and the increased size of the buildings.

4.3.1 Provide a landscaping buffer between parking lots and building facades

- a) Include shrub and tree landscaping to give tenants a sense of separation between themselves and the parking lot.
- b) When parking is tucked under the building, landscaped planters, with trees, should be provided to break up the parking lot paving at the building. One example is shown below to the right.

4.3.2 Provide special landscaping and paving at building entries

See pages 28 and 29.

4.3.3 Provide on-site amenities for tenants and pedestrians

- a) Locate amenities adjacent to sidewalks, building entries, paseos, and courtyards. Amenities may include:
 - Benches
 - Fountains
 - Planted areas
 - Rain gardens and other rainwater infiltration features
 - Special decorative paving
 - Potted flowers and plants
 - Public art
 - Waste receptacles



Danville

Landscaping to separate buildings from parking lots is expected. The type and height of landscaping will be dependant on the size, height, and form of the building.



Laguna Beach

Example of landscaped planters at tuck-under parking.



Los Altos

Los Altos example of landscaping used to enhance an office building's setting.

4

GROUND SIGN EXAMPLES



Los Altos



Sonoma



Sonoma

4.4 SIGNAGE

The Downtown Core District signage guidelines apply to all signs in the Mixed Commercial District. Ground signs and free-standing signs may also be allowed at the discretion of the city.

4.4.1 GROUND SIGNS

a) Location limitations.

Ground signs may be considered on a case-by-case basis mainly along San Antonio Road in recognition of its greater vehicle orientation, width, and traffic speeds.

They may also be considered along other streets where wide landscaped setbacks are provided, as in the downtown Los Altos example to the upper left.

b) Limit the information on each sign.

• Ground signs should generally be limited to the following information:

- 1) Project or primary business identification name and/or logo
- 2) Address number

• Multi-tenant ground signs are strongly discouraged. However, the display of multiple tenants may be considered for small ground signs so long as the sign and background color is common throughout, and the type style and logo colors of each tenant are the same.

• The inclusion of services and products offered should not be included on ground signs.

c) Locate signs for easy visibility from passing vehicles.

- Locate signs within 10 feet of the front property line.
- Avoid blocking any vehicular or pedestrian sight lines which might result in safety problems.

d) Signs including bases should fit within a rectangle no larger than 5 feet high and 5 feet wide.

e) Lighting.

• Lighting for ground signs must be by direct spotlight illumination from fixtures mounted either at the top of the sign or on the ground below the sign. Fixtures must be shielded to avoid direct view of the bulbs. Interior illuminated ground signs are not allowed.

f) Materials.

• All ground signs, including price signs for service stations, shall be constructed of matte finish nonreflective materials.

4.4.2 FREESTANDING SIGNS

- a) Limit freestanding signs to single tenants.
- b) Signs including bases, vertical supports, and crossbars should fit within a rectangle no larger than 6 feet high and 3 feet wide.
- c) All sign materials should be matte finish.
- d) Letters and logos may be applied or painted onto the sign.
- e) Signs may be externally lit with shielded spot lights.

FREESTANDING SIGN EXAMPLES



Laguna Beach



Benicia

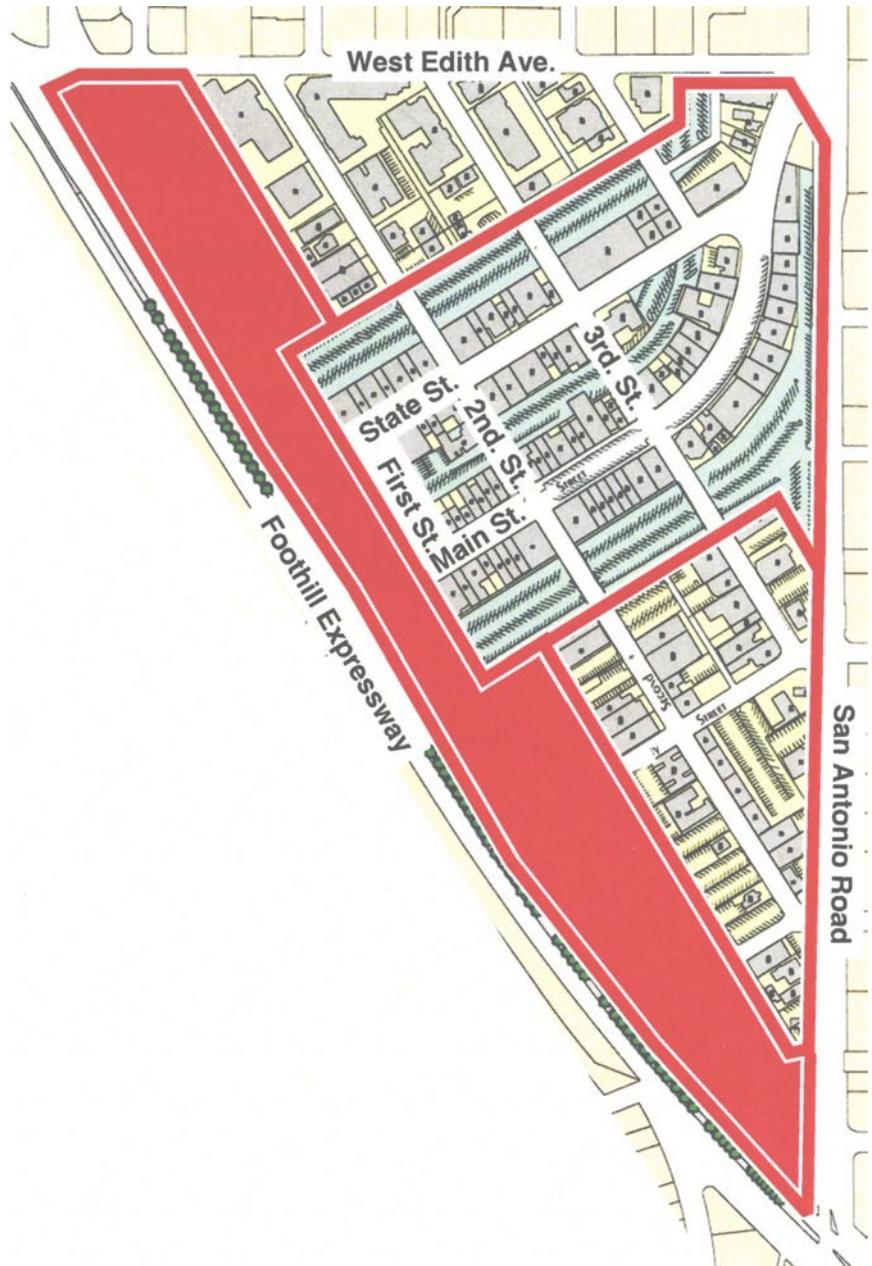


Sonoma

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**FIRST STREET
DISTRICT**

5



FIRST STREET DISTRICT

Owners of properties and businesses in this district should review the guidelines for the Downtown Core District. While projects in this district may be somewhat larger and less retail-oriented than those in the downtown core, they are still very much a part of the downtown village, and the village character and scale emphasis underlying those guidelines will be expected of new buildings and changes to existing properties in this district. The intent of these guidelines and the zoning standards established for this district are summarized in the sidebar to the right.

The primary differences between development in this district and the downtown core include:

- A wider range of uses is allowed.
- Required parking must be provided on-site rather than in common parking district lots or structures.
- Setbacks are required along all street fronts, and in many cases at the rear of parcels.
- A 50-foot building module applies, rather than the 25-foot module in the downtown core, except for lots located within the CRS Zoning District.*

** Pending a Zoning Code change approval by the City Council to extend the CRS zoning into the First Street District..*

INTENT

- A. Promote the implementation of the Los Altos Downtown Design Plan.
- B. Support and enhance the downtown Los Altos village atmosphere.
- C. Allow latitude for creative design and architectural variety.
- D. Respect the scale and character of the area immediately surrounding the existing downtown pedestrian district.
- E. Establish a sense of entry into the downtown.
- F. Encourage historic preservation for those buildings listed on the city's historic resources inventory.
- G. Encourage the upgrading of building exteriors, signs, and parking lots.
- H. Provide for a full range of retail, office, and service uses appropriate to downtown.
- I. Develop a landscaped strip along the back of properties that abut Foothill Expressway between West Edith Avenue and San Antonio Road.
- J. Improve the visual appeal and pedestrian orientation of the downtown.
- K. Encourage the use of solar, photo voltaic, and other energy conserving devices.

Applicants should carefully review the Los Altos Zoning Ordinance provisions appropriate to their properties. Parcels covered by the design guidelines for the First Street District are located within three zoning districts with slightly different limitations and requirements.

5



Santa Rosa

A visual and physical separation between street front sidewalks and adjacent parking lots is expected.

5.1 PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT

The First Street District is spread along First Street which is more vehicle-oriented than the remainder of Downtown Los Altos, and has more surface parking with limited landscaping than most other areas. Nevertheless, this district is very much a part of the downtown village. These guidelines are intended to allow larger buildings and on-site parking while doing so in a manner that reinforces Downtown Los Altos' village scale and character.

5.1.1 Minimize the visual impact of parking

- a) **Underground or screened roof parking is encouraged on larger parcels.**
- b) **Provide a landscape buffer between street front sidewalks and any adjacent parking lot. Per the zoning code, the minimum width of this buffer must be 5 feet, unless less is allowed by a variance. When lesser widths are allowed for existing parking lot improvements, some buffering is still required. One approach to adding visual buffering by a low wall is shown below.**



Benicia

5.1.2 Provide pedestrian linkages between street front sidewalks and building entries

- a) **Building entries facing First Street are strongly encouraged. For larger buildings where entries are set back on a facade facing a parking lot, provide a strong sidewalk connection with landscaping on both sides from the street front to the entry.**



Danville

Separate parking lots from pedestrian areas at buildings by landscaping (above) or by pedestrian arcades (below).

5.1.3 Provide landscape buffers between parking lots and pedestrian areas at buildings

- a) **Building fronts are expected to be as active and attractive as those in the Downtown Core District, and to be buffered from parked cars. Landscaping and, where appropriate, trees should be used to buffer pedestrian areas. Alternatively, arcades and planters at the building may be used for this purpose. Examples of these two approaches are shown to the left.**



Los Gatos

5.1.4 Provide special paving for parking lots immediately accessible from the street

a) Parking areas which are adjacent to street front sidewalks and with perpendicular parking spaces directly accessible from the street drive lane are strongly discouraged. For existing parking areas like this that are being upgraded, provide a distinction on the paving color and texture between the parking surface and the adjacent sidewalk and street paving.

5.1.5 Provide pedestrian walkways through large parking lots

a) Dedicated walks through parking lots will improve pedestrian safety and enhance the shopping and business patronage experience. Walkways should be reinforced with edge landscaping and with textured and/or permeable paving where they cross parking drive aisles. One example is shown in the upper right of this page.



Sunnyvale

Example of a well designed pedestrian walkway through a parking lot. Note: The building entry in the background would be out of scale for downtown Los Altos.

5.1.6 Provide pedestrian amenities.

Amenities may include:

- Benches
- Fountains
- Planted areas
- Rain gardens and other rainwater infiltration features
- Special decorative paving
- Potted flowers and plants
- Public art
- Waste receptacles



Sunnyvale

Provide pedestrian amenities.

5.1.7 Integrate ground floor residential uses with the streetscape

a) Set structures back a minimum of 10 feet from the street property line. Stairs and entry porches may encroach into this setback up to the property line.

B) Soft landscaping is required for a minimum of 60% of the front setback area.

See examples below and to the right.



Mountain View



Mountain View

Provide ground floor residential setback landscaping.

FIRST STREET DISTRICT

5



Justin

This shopping complex has a village scale and character by virtue of treating adjacent uses as individual buildings.



Los Gatos

The scale, details and natural materials used for this tower create an attractive focal point for the building without losing human scale.

5.2 ARCHITECTURE

Building uses and sizes will vary more in the First Street District than elsewhere in the downtown. The goal of these guidelines is to accommodate this wide diversity of size and use while maintaining a village scale and character that is complementary to the downtown core. The photographs shown on this and the following page are examples of more vehicle-oriented buildings that include forms and details that are sensitive to village scale and character.

5.2.1 Design to a village scale and character

- a) Avoid large box-like structures.
- b) Break larger buildings into smaller scale elements.
- c) Provide special design articulation and detail for building facades located adjacent to street frontages.
- d) Keep focal point elements small in scale.
- e) Utilize materials that are common in the downtown core.
- f) Avoid designs that appear to seek to be prominently seen from Foothill Expressway and/or San Antonio Road in favor of designs that focus on First Street, and are a part of the village environment.
- g) Provide substantial small scale details.
- h) Integrate landscaping into building facades in a manner similar to the Downtown Core District (See pages 28-29).

Examples of larger parcel buildings that are designed to be consistent with a village character are shown on this and the adjacent page.



Mill Valley

Traditional building forms, architectural details, and integrated landscaping assist in relating the parking lot frontage to an overall village scale and character.

5.2.2 Design structures to be compatible with adjacent existing buildings

- a) Buildings adjacent to the Downtown Core District should be designed in form, material, and details similar to those nearby along Main and State Streets.
- b) Projects adjacent to existing residential neighborhoods should draw upon residential forms and details to create a smaller grain design fabric that is compatible with the residential buildings.

Examples are shown below and to the right.



Ojai



Danville



Danville



Mill Valley



Santa Rosa

Landscaping between facing parking rows is desirable to break up large expanses of paving.

5.3 LANDSCAPE

Substantial landscaping is expected in the First Street District to ensure that the area becomes a visual part of the larger downtown village.

5.3.1 Provide substantial landscaping adjacent to residential neighborhoods

5.3.2 Landscape Foothill Expressway edges with shrubbery and trees

5.3.3 Add substantial landscaping in all parking lots

- a) Provide landscaping equal to or greater than the requirements set forth in the Los Altos Zoning Code.
- b) Tree landscaping should be provided to create an orchard canopy effect in surface parking lots with more than one drive aisle. Utilize landscape fingers placed parallel to the parking spaces to break up expanses of parking lot paving. Space the islands with intervals not exceeding 6 parking spaces in length.
- c) Utilize hedges, trees, and other landscaping between facing parking spaces as shown in the example to the left.

5.3.4 Add street trees along all parcel street frontages

5.4 SIGNAGE

The Downtown Core District signage guidelines apply to all signs in the First Street District. Ground signs and freestanding signs may also be allowed at the discretion of the city (See the guidelines on pages 60-61 for these two sign types).



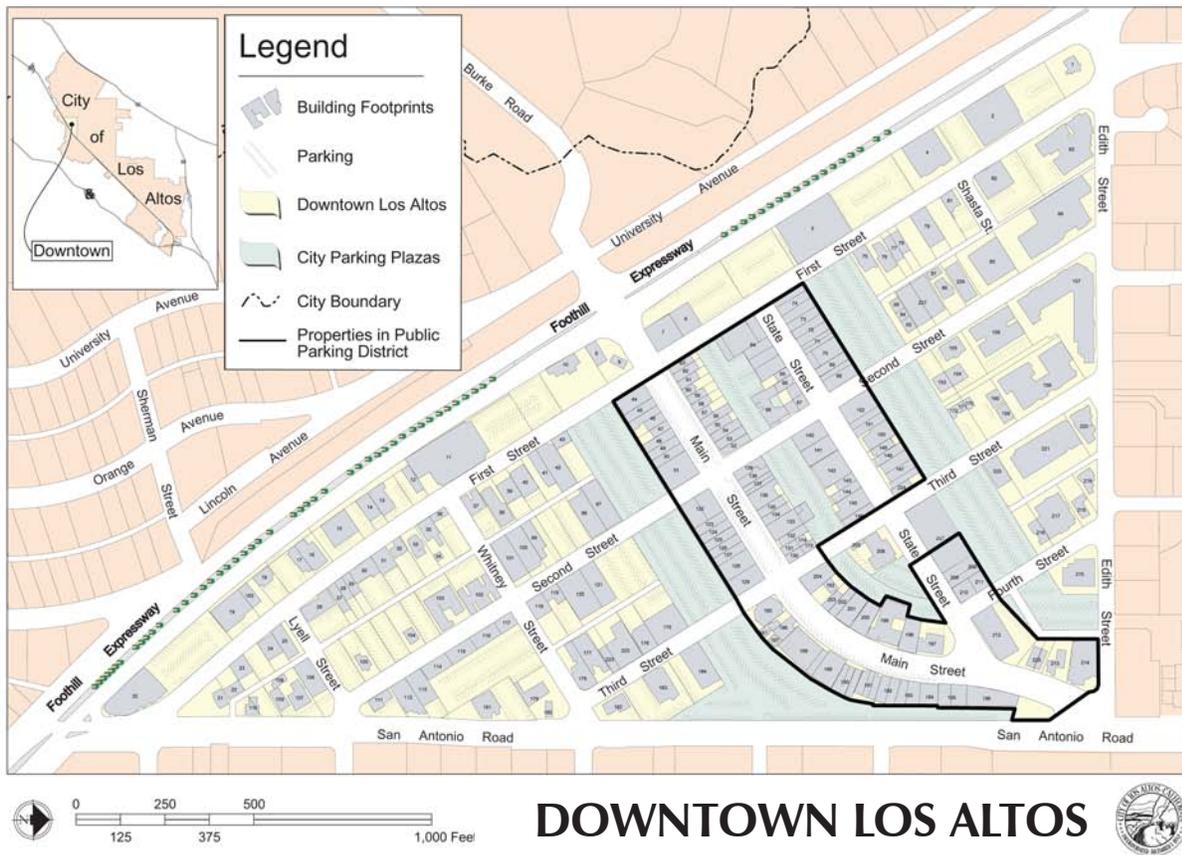
APPENDICES



DOWNTOWN PARKING DISTRICT

In conjunction with downtown property owners in 1956 the City of Los Altos formed a public parking assessment district. As a result this district formed the 10 public parking plazas in the downtown core area. A majority of the properties in the downtown core are within the public parking district as shown on the map below. These properties in the public parking district are subject to unique parking regulations that exempt the properties from providing on-site parking for gross square footage that does not exceed 100 percent of their lot area.

Properties in Public Parking District



DOWNTOWN HISTORIC RESOURCES

Downtown Los Altos has nine properties listed in the City’s Historic Resources Inventory, including five buildings that are designated as landmarks. The most prominent historic building downtown is the old Southern Pacific Railroad Station at 288 First Street, which was designated as a landmark in 1984 and may be eligible for listing on the State and National Historic Registers. All nine properties and their historic ranking is listed below. More detailed historic evaluations for each property are available in the City’s Historic Resources Inventory.

Address	Historic Ranking
288 First Street	Landmark
300 Main Street	Landmark
301 Main Street	Historically Significant
316 Main Street	Landmark
350 Main Street	Historically Important
368 Main Street	Historically Significant
388-398 Main Street	Landmark
395-399 Main Street	Landmark
188 Second Street	Historically Significant