City of Greenfield

Design Guidelines for Downtown Greenfield

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[To be recreated once sections are finalized]

Purpose

These Design Guidelines are intended to encourage adaptive reuse and infill development that adds to what we love about Greenfield.

The Guidelines promote high-quality site and building design that is responsive to Greenfield's unique contextual setting, regardless of whether development is privately or publicly funded or located on public or private property. They are intended to assist residents, developers, decision-makers, and City staff by providing a clear and consistent framework for development review.

These Design Guidelines supplement the City of Greenfield Zoning Regulations and do not replace zoning or alter permitted uses.

As currently drafted, these guidelines are intended to apply to the CC zoning district.

Site Design and Landscaping

Site design should integrate development harmoniously with existing natural, historic, and built features while ensuring safe, efficient circulation and high-quality public spaces. Site reviews should evaluate how projects function holistically, balancing environmental protection, pedestrian comfort, and operational needs.

- Site design should prioritize engagement with the public realm, pedestrian comfort and circulation, and usable green space.
- Orient buildings to the street with primary entrances facing sidewalks.
- Clearly define public, semi-public, and private spaces through design, including clear pedestrian travel zones, public amenity or furnishing zones, and a building frontage or private activity zone, where appropriate.
- Loading and service access should be located away from primary pedestrian streets whenever feasible and designed to minimize noise, glare, and visual disruption.
- Integrate rain gardens, bioswales, and green infrastructure where feasible.
- Use native or regionally appropriate plantings adapted to Greenfield's climate and soils that support biodiversity, pollinators, and long-term resilience and do not require extensive watering or maintenance. For tree selection, spacing, and planting guidelines, refer to Tree Guidelines prepared by the Greenfield Tree Committee.

This public space adjacent to an urban building includes a comfortable variety of seating options, plantings, and shade trees.

Architectural Design

Intent: Building massing should reinforce Greenfield's traditional downtown development pattern while allowing for the growth and amenities needed to meet today and tomorrow's needs. New development should be designed to support pedestrian comfort and respect surrounding context. Architectural detailing and facades should contribute to a cohesive downtown character and streetscape while allowing for architectural variety and contemporary expression.

- Façades along primary streets should be designed to reinforce a continuous street wall, with buildings generally aligned to define and frame the public realm.
- Long or wide façades should be divided into smaller components through building entrances, facade bays, or other architectural treatments with functional purpose. Blank walls or façades with minimal articulation should be avoided along public streets, sidewalks, and other pedestrian-oriented areas.
- Architectural details should be used to create depth, shadow, and visual interest in order to reduce perceived bulk and orient the building to the human scale.
- Ground-floor façades should emphasize transparency and visual engagement, supporting active uses and pedestrian safety along public streets.

This streetscape unifies several building styles and vintages with a shared architectural vocabulary, including a continuous sequence of pedestrian-level storefronts, and a regular rhythm of windows and building details across the facades.

Materials and Colors

Building materials and color palettes should reinforce Greenfield's downtown character, support long-term durability, and contribute to a cohesive streetscape. Materials should be authentic, well-detailed, and appropriate to pedestrian-scale environments, enhancing both individual buildings and the overall public realm.

- Use durable, high-quality materials that age well and require minimal long-term maintenance, particularly at ground floors and along public streets where buildings experience the greatest pedestrian interaction.
- Prioritize materials that are traditionally found in downtown Greenfield and similar New England communities, including brick, stone, masonry, wood, and high-quality fiber-cement or equivalent siding.
- Avoid the use of thin veneers, faux materials, or applied ornamentation that lack depth, permanence, or authentic expression of structure and scale. Highly reflective, mirrored, or glossy materials should be avoided where they create glare, visual distraction, or discomfort for pedestrians.
- Use changes in material intentionally to reinforce building articulation, such as distinguishing ground floors from upper stories, highlighting primary entrances, expressing changes in massing, façade bays, or building components.

This building's facade combines several traditional and contemporary materials with articulation that adds depth and visually breaks down the building's massing for a composition that is compatible with its historic neighborhood.

Roof Forms

Roof forms should contribute to the overall massing, proportion, and character of downtown buildings. Roof design should reinforce Greenfield's traditional development patterns, reduce perceived building height, and provide a clear and well-resolved termination to building façades.

- Roof forms should be compatible with the scale and character of surrounding buildings. A variety of roof types may be appropriate downtown, including flat roofs with parapets, pitched roofs, gabled roofs, and mansard forms, provided they are well-proportioned and integrated with the building façade.
- Roofs should be designed to visually terminate buildings, using parapets, cornices, eaves, or roof articulation to avoid abrupt or unresolved rooflines.
- Roof decks, terraces, or green roofs may be appropriate where they are integrated into the overall building design, minimize visual impacts, and do not create adverse effects on adjacent properties or the street.
- Design for snow and ice management, such as to avoid pedestrian hazards around the building.

This block includes a range of different roof forms that are architecturally compatible and support a diverse and visually interesting skyline.

Lighting

Lighting should enhance safety, visibility, and nighttime character while supporting pedestrian comfort and reinforcing Greenfield's downtown scale. Lighting should contribute to a cohesive public realm without creating glare, visual clutter, or spillover onto adjacent properties.

- Use pedestrian-scaled lighting fixtures along sidewalks, plazas, and building entrances; avoid highway- or parking-lot–scale lighting in pedestrian areas.
- Integrate and layer the lighting with building architecture and streetscape elements, including pedestrian-area lighting, entry lighting, and limited accent lighting to highlight architectural features or public spaces.
- Use warm color temperatures appropriate for downtown and residential-adjacent areas to promote comfort and reduce harshness.
- Lighting should be designed to comply with Dark Sky principles by reducing unnecessary illumination, avoiding uplighting, and minimizing impacts on the night sky.

This streetscape design provides a variety of pedestrian-oriented lighting elements that are focused on illuminating and animating the public realm as well as highlighting distinctive architectural features.

Screening

Screening should be used to minimize the visual impact of service functions, utilities, and other necessary but unattractive elements while maintaining a cohesive and pedestrian-friendly downtown environment. Screening should be integrated into overall site and building design rather than applied as a standalone or purely functional element.

- Service areas, including dumpsters, loading zones, utility equipment, and service doors, should be screened from public view along streets, sidewalks, plazas, and other pedestrian-oriented areas. Mechanical equipment, meters, and utility components located at grade or on building façades should be screened or recessed and integrated into the overall design.
- Screening should be architecturally integrated into buildings wherever feasible, using walls, enclosures, or façade extensions that match the building's materials, detailing, and scale.
- Freestanding screening elements, such as fences or walls, should be designed as permanent, durable features, not temporary or utilitarian installations.
- Screening design should be coordinated with lighting, landscaping, and circulation to avoid creating cluttered or visually confusing environments.

This fence screens HVAC equipment with a mix of planting and durable, high-quality materials that are integrated with the building's architecture.

Pedestrian Amenities

Pedestrian amenities should support comfort, accessibility, safety, and social activity while reinforcing Greenfield's downtown character. Amenities should enhance the public realm, encourage walking and lingering, and support active ground-floor uses without obstructing pedestrian movement or creating visual clutter.

- Pedestrian amenities should be planned and coordinated as part of the overall site plan, rather than installed as isolated or piecemeal elements.
- Street trees, planters, canopies, awnings, and shade structures should be used to improve pedestrian comfort, particularly along south- and west-facing sidewalks.
- Bicycle racks, trash and recycling receptacles, benches, planters, lighting, and wayfinding elements should be coordinated in design, scale, and placement to reinforce a cohesive streetscape character. Materials used for pedestrian amenities should be durable, low-maintenance, and appropriate to downtown scale and character.
- Outdoor dining and display areas should be designed to support pedestrian activity without obstructing required pedestrian travel paths or accessibility and should be clearly defined through the use of railings, planters, paving changes, or similar design elements that are compatible with downtown character.

This streetscape combines a variety of sidewalk amenities in a lively outdoor dining and shopping environment while reserving space for continuous pedestrian circulation.

Parking and Circulation

Parking and circulation should support downtown activity while prioritizing pedestrians, reinforcing Greenfield's traditional development pattern, and minimizing visual and physical impacts on the public realm. Parking design should contribute to a safe, walkable environment and support shared, efficient use of limited downtown space.

- Parking should be located behind or beside buildings whenever feasible, and should be designed to minimize visual prominence, using building placement, landscaping, walls, fencing, or changes in grade to screen parked vehicles from public view. Parking areas located between buildings and public streets should be avoided along primary downtown corridors.
- The number and width of curb cuts should be minimized to reduce conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians. Shared parking should be encouraged, including shared access drives and coordinated parking facilities serving multiple uses or properties.
- Clearly defined pedestrian routes should be provided through parking areas, using walkways, paving changes, lighting, striping, or landscaping to guide movement safely and comfortably.
- Landscaping and shade trees should be used to break up large parking areas, reduce heat gain, manage stormwater, and soften visual impacts.
- Parking structures, where proposed, should be architecturally integrated with surrounding buildings, include active ground-floor uses or architectural screening along public streets, and minimize visible garage openings and exposed parking decks.
- Parking design should support flexibility and future adaptation (such as potential later development), recognizing changing transportation patterns, shared parking opportunities, and potential reductions in parking demand over time.

This parking lot prioritizes tree plantings, landscaped areas, and pedestrian paths while efficiently organizing stalls and travel lanes for significant parking capacity.

References and Acknowledgments

These Design Guidelines were informed by a review of peer community design guidelines, planning documents, and best practices from municipalities across Massachusetts. The following plans were consulted to identify common principles related to downtown design, pedestrian-oriented development, building form, and public-realm quality.

The City of Greenfield acknowledges the value of these resources in helping to shape guidance that is appropriate to Greenfield's scale, character, and planning goals. While these documents provide reference points and comparative examples, the Greenfield Design Guidelines are intended to reflect local conditions and priorities and do not replicate or replace the policies or regulations of other communities.

Plans reviewed include:

- Town of Belchertown – Design and Development Guidelines
- Town of Boxborough – Design Guidelines
- Town of Dedham – Downtown and Commercial District Design Guidelines
- Town of Dennis – Dennisport Design Guidelines
- Town of Dedham – East Dedham Design Guidelines
- City of Framingham – Central Business District Design Review Guidelines
- Town of Franklin – Downtown Design Guidelines
- City of Salem – Commercial Design Guidelines
- Town of Seekonk – Design Guidelines
- Town of Spencer – Town Center Design Guidelines
- Town of Winchester – Center Business District Design Guidelines

These documents were used as contextual references to inform best practices related to building massing, façades, architectural details, materials, pedestrian amenities, parking, lighting, screening, roof forms, outdoor dining, and historic preservation.