Town of Bennington, Vermont
Planned Commercial District

Design Standards

Bennington Vermont
Planned Commercial District
Design Standards

Prepared For:
Town of Bennington
Planning Commission
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Related Documents:

Design Standards Example Photos (Separate Document)

Sign Ordinance

Additional information and related documents may be obtained by contacting the Bennington Town Offices at:

Town of Bennington
P.O. Box 469
Bennington, Vt. 05201
(802)-442-1037

PURPOSE, SCOPE & AUTHORITY

PURPOSE

The Planned Commercial District of Bennington is expected to experience significant growth in the coming years, as it encompasses the only intersection with the new highway that is commercially zoned as well as having major intersections with Route 7 and 7A. It is the role of the Planning Commission to ensure that future development such as this is in keeping with the vision of the Town Plan and in the best long term interest of the residents.

In 2004, the Town of Bennington created the Planned Commercial (PC) district as a Design Review District which could be influenced by the recommendations of these design standards.

Design standards such as these are intended to document a community's design objectives with the use of illustrations and other examples so that developers and consultants can visualize how their projects work towards the goals of the Town Plan. They are intended to assist property owners, developers and town review boards with the preliminary planning, design and evaluation of proposals and approval of projects. By incorporating the standards in the early phases of design, time consuming and costly changes can often be avoided. In addition, they are intended to reduce or eliminate the more common architectural characteristics of sprawl development, and work towards a common vision for Bennington's future.

The goal of this document is to ensure that, over time, the standards will improve the character and natural beauty of the community making it an even more attractive and prosperous place.

SCOPE

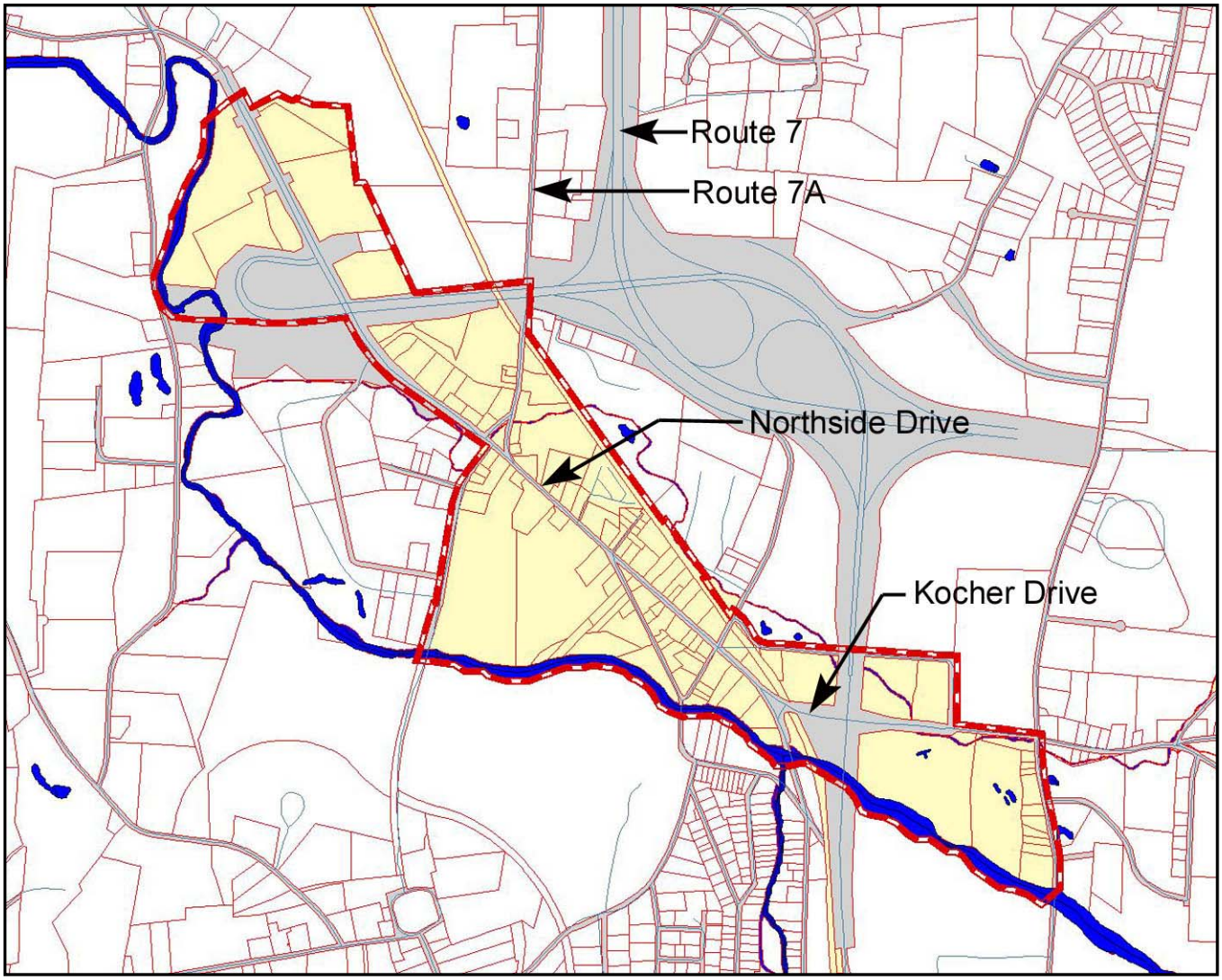
This manual provides design standards for all new construction and exterior alterations of properties within Bennington's Planned Commercial District. The boundaries of the Planned Commercial District (also referred to as the PC District) have been illustrated on page 5 of this manual for easy reference, however it is recommended that you check with the latest zoning maps on file at the Town Offices to verify what properties are covered.

AUTHORITY

For all projects involving new construction or substantial renovation of a building or buildings containing 5000 gross sq. ft. or more of floor area, the Development Review Board reserves the right to retain a licensed architect, at the applicant's expense, to review the application and provide a report regarding whether or not the application complies with these design standards.

This document is intended to act in conjunction with the Town of Bennington Land Use & Development Regulations. In the event of a conflict or discrepancy between the two documents, the most restrictive standard shall apply.

DISTRICT BOUNDARIES MAP



The Planned Commercial District Design Guidelines cover the areas highlighted in the above image at the time of publication. Refer to the zoning maps on file at the Town Planning Office for any updates or changes to the district since that time.

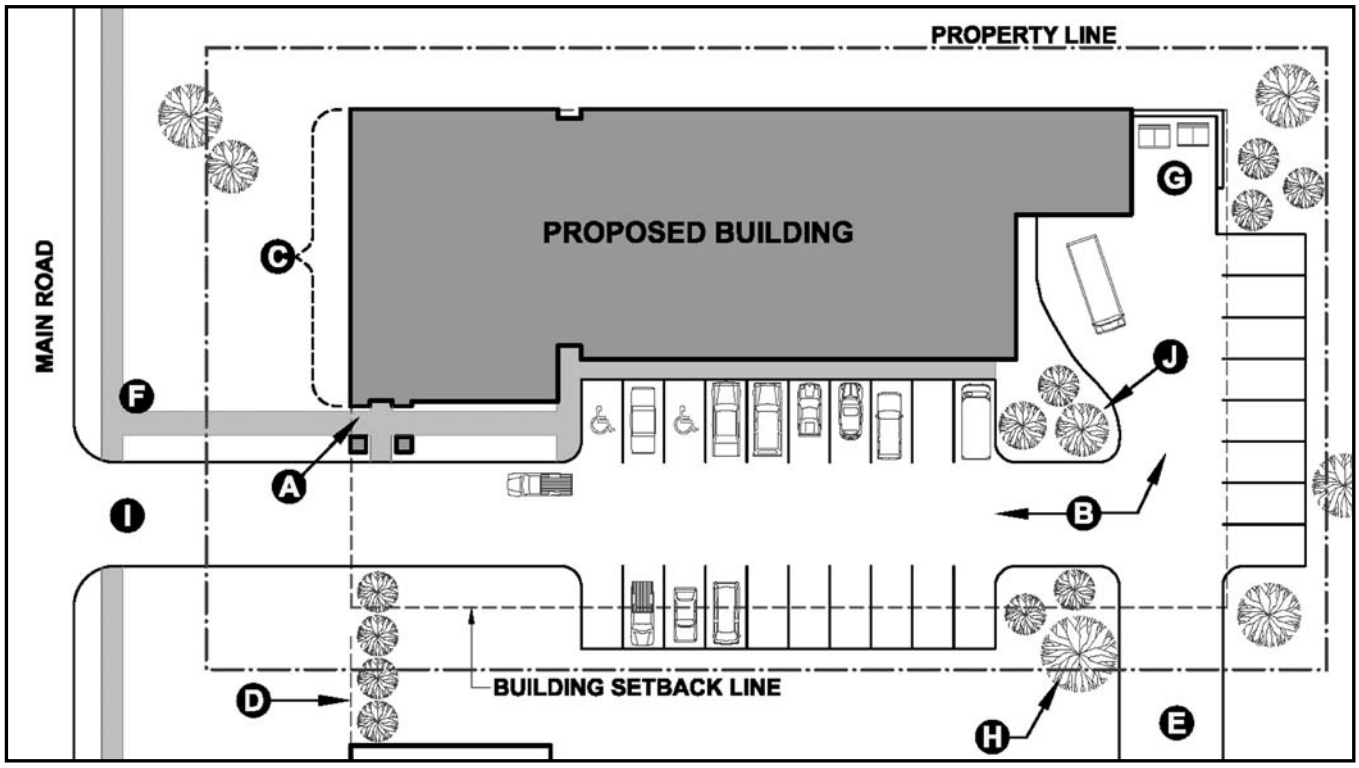


Figure 1: Sample Site Layout. The building is brought forward as close to the street as possible, with parking and other services tucked around the side and back. This helps to define the identity of the street and gives the business maximum public exposure.

1.1 The primary building entry should always be placed at the front of the building (facing the front lot line) and be clearly identifiable from the street. **(A)** In this example, an entry vestibule is created which faces the front, side and rear parking area simultaneously.

1.2 Parking should be placed at the side or rear of the lot and screened from view whenever possible. Break the parking areas up into groups of no more than 20 spaces per area (35 for large development projects) separated by landscaping areas. **(B)**

1.3 Place as much of the building width at the front of the lot as possible to maximize front façade exposure to the public. **(C)** The front façade should be kept parallel to the street.

1.4 To reinforce the "street-edge", align with neighboring buildings which are also close to the front setback line. Landscaping can also be used to reinforce this line. **(D)**

1.5 Whenever possible, attempt to link with adjacent parking lots or provide shared parking areas which can serve neighboring buildings simultaneously. **(E)** This provides a secondary means of access to the site and can ease congestion on the main road.

1.6 Provide sidewalks for the full width of the property with a direct link to the primary building entry. **(F)**

1.7 Loading docks, service areas and trash facilities should be located at the rear of the building and not visible from the street. Fences, walls or landscaping can be used to shield them from view. **(G)**

1.8 Incorporate any existing, older trees into new site plan development whenever possible to reduce waste and salvage good shade trees. **(H)**

1.9 Minimize the amount of curb-cuts by having a single driveway in and out of the property from the main road whenever possible. Secondary access points from side roads are encouraged on larger projects when warranted. Curb cuts should only be as wide as necessary to accommodate needed lanes. Curb radiuses should be kept to a minimum. **(I)**

1.10 The parking lot areas should be designed in regular, rectangular shapes. Irregular wedge shaped parking areas created by following angled property lines are discouraged. Only create as much paved area as absolutely necessary.

1.11 Landscaped islands and other green space should be consolidated into useful areas, and not just narrow strips of grass or plantings.**(J)**

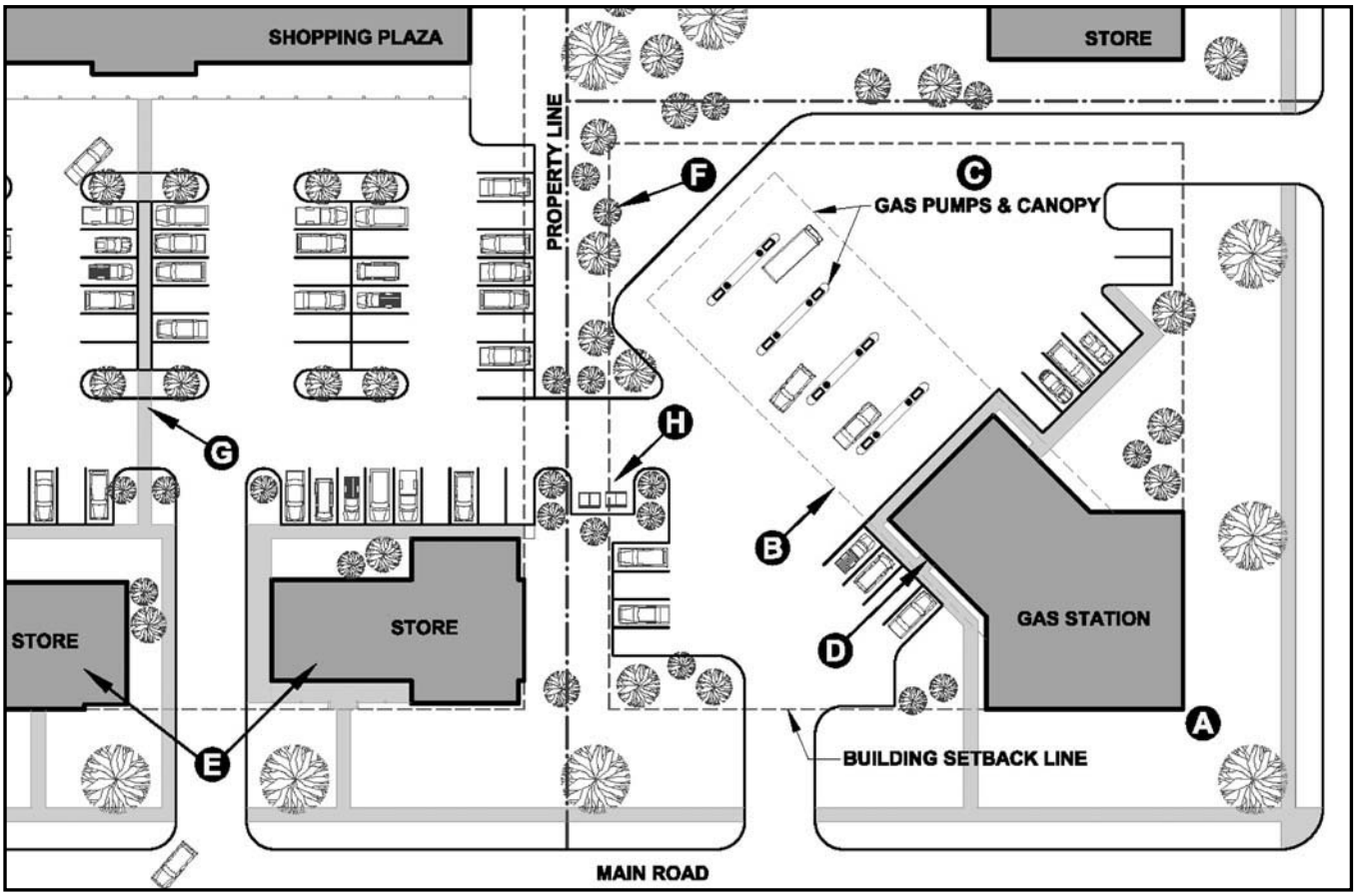


Figure 2: Redefining The Edges. Corner lots are especially important in defining the street. Special attention should be paid to bringing the building mass all the way out to meet the corner. Large shopping plazas should also attempt to infill the front of their lots with new commercial space to take advantage of the road frontage.

1.12 Corner lots should try to place as much building mass near the intersection as possible to help anchor the lot and take advantage of the high visibility. **(A)**

1.13 Gas station canopies should be designed as an integral part of the station architecture whenever possible. This can allow for a visual or even physical connection which provides shelter between the vehicle and the building. **(B)** See Appendix 'A' for examples.

1.14 Alternative gas station layouts include placing the pumps near the rear of the lot while having the convenience store out in front near the street. **(C)** This helps to highlight the building, shield the utilitarian pump canopy and pulls the curb-cuts away from the intersection, creating easier access.

1.15 When it is not feasible to place the building entry directly on the front façade, attempts should be made to ensure that it is still readily visible and faces the main road or internal street. **(D)**

1.16 Older shopping plazas set back far from the street can benefit from developing the land at the front of their lot. This helps to define the street character and allows for more "one-stop" shopping and shared parking opportunities. **(E)**

1.17 Provide trees and other landscape screening to shield large parking areas from adjacent lots. **(F)**

1.18 Large parking lots are encouraged to provide landscaped islands and walkways which help to break up the visual expanse of blacktop and encourage safe pedestrian travel areas. **(G)**

1.19 Some developments may benefit from having a shared access to a common dumpster location which both neighboring properties can use. **(H)**

1.20 All public access ways on the site should comply with the *Americans With Disabilities Act*. Visit their Web page www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm for more information.

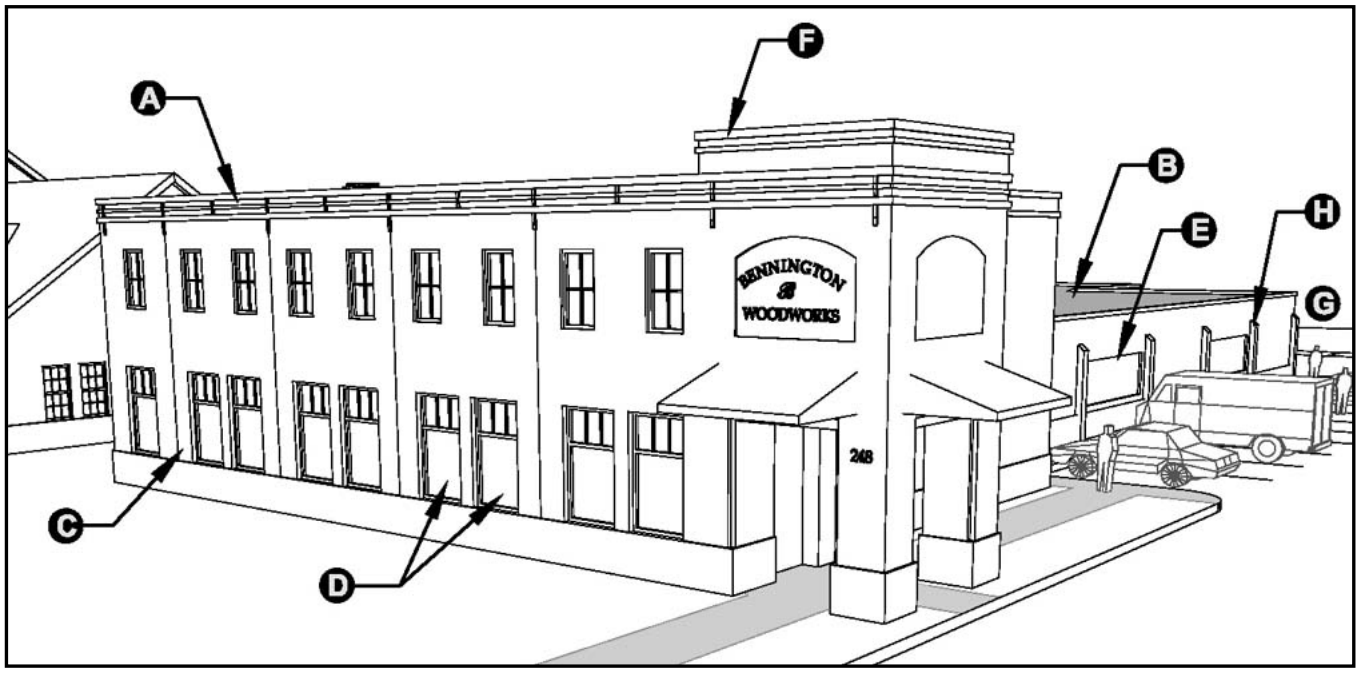


Figure 3: Breaking Up The Masses Helps Reduce The Scale. Dividing the building volume up into a variety of shapes helps to reduce the perceived scale of the architecture and allows placement of the more important volumes up near the front of the site.

2.1 Place a majority of the building mass close to the road to help define the street edge. In this example, the two-story mass is placed at the front of the lot, and likely contains the most public functions including reception, offices, showroom, retail space, etc. **(A)**

2.2 Less public areas such as warehouses, storage and manufacturing spaces can be shielded from view in the rear. This often allows for warehouse/utilitarian style construction to be hidden behind the smaller scale public spaces that are in front. **(B)**

2.3 The building mass near the front of the site should be articulated with design features which give it a more pedestrian scale appearance. Natural, smaller scale materials should be used near the front of the site and pedestrian areas whenever possible **(C)**

2.4 Large scale features such as long, uninterrupted picture windows are not encouraged near the front of the site. They should instead be separated into smaller groups to help reduce their scale, and give them a more vertical orientation. **(D)** The scale of these large windows can be further divided with the use of mullions and muntins.

2.5 Larger scale design features such as garage doors or long horizontal windows should be reserved for the rear of the facility whenever possible and out of sight from the street. **(E)**

2.6 Different massing at the entry to the building helps to further define a reduced scale appearance and improves visibility from many directions. **(F)**

2.7 In this example, the utility area in the rear is only one story, **(G)** but this could instead be a two or three story area which is still shielded from view behind the front portion of the building.

2.8 Large areas of blank wall should be avoided, or should be reserved for the side or rear of the facility whenever possible. If they cannot be avoided, design accents such as pilasters or other façade articulations can help to reduce the overall scale appearance. **(H)**

2.9 Special design elements which help to articulate the façade help to further reduce the overall building scale. Articulations of the facade or breaks in the roofline help to define different masses and reduce the scale. **See Also 'Fenestration'.**

2.10 The use of covered porches and similar recessed front entry areas is encouraged to help create a more human scale appearance to the building. These also help to draw attention to the point of entry and provide shelter from the rain and snow. Porch areas should not be used for outdoor merchandise display.

2.11 In lieu of a formal porch entry, a small canopy or awning over the main entry also helps to provide a pedestrian scale appearance.

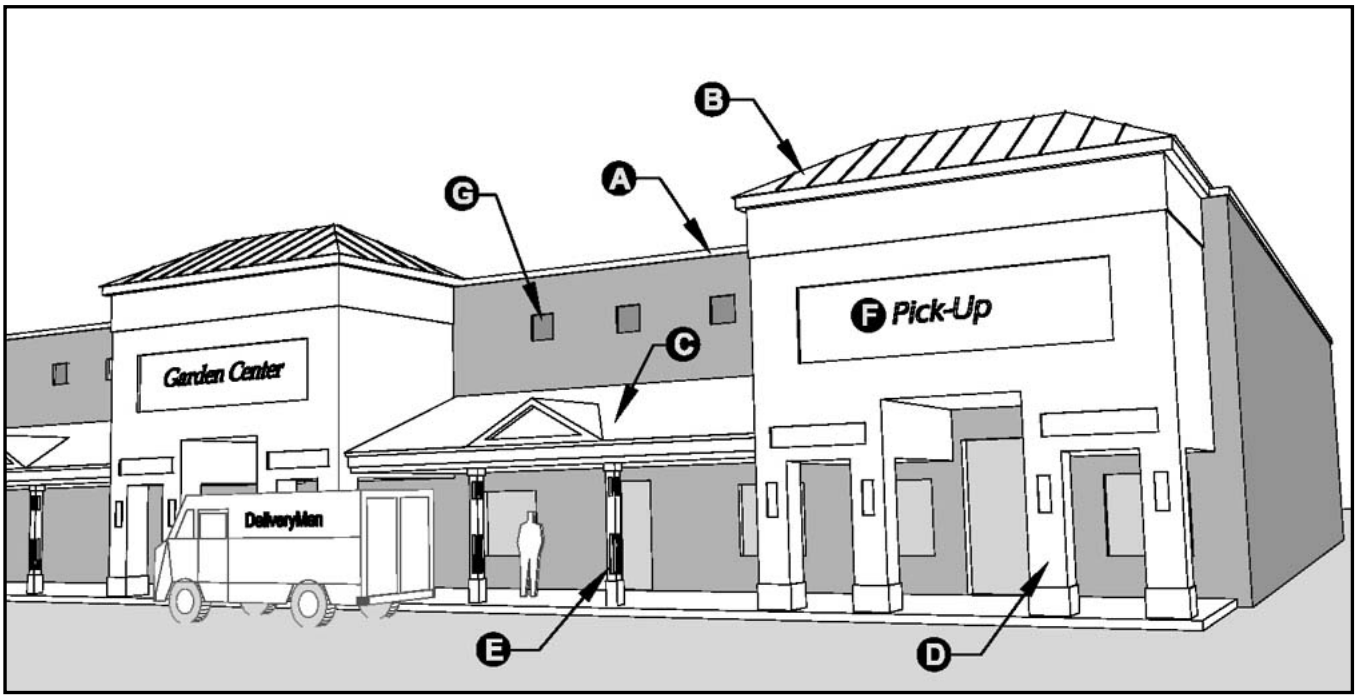


Figure 4: Alternate Design For Big-Box Retail. By articulating the façade of a typical Big Box retail store with different massing elements, you can help to give a smaller scale appearance to an otherwise featureless mass.

2.12 The typical Big-box retail structure can be seen here as a relatively featureless mass shaded in grey. **(A)** These structures usually have blank walls on most of the facades, and are articulated only at the point of entry.

2.13 Large retail structures are encouraged to articulate their primary façade(s) with various design features to help reduce the overall scale of the building with the use of roofline articulation or mass divisions. **(B)** These can be used to highlight entry points, exits, specialty areas (such as a garden/landscaping center or auto service) customer pick-up zones or separate places of business.

2.14 In between the main massing elements, a secondary level of scale reduction can be achieved with a smaller porch design. **(C)** In addition to creating a more interesting façade, this provides pedestrian shelter and helps to tie the façade together. In the case of multiple tenant plazas, these porch areas act as the front facades and entry points to smaller businesses

2.15 The relative massing of the façade can be slowly broken down into progressively smaller elements. For example, the larger storefront elements **(B)** are supported on large piers. **(D)** These entrance elements frame smaller porches in between, which are supported on even smaller columns. **(E)** These smaller columns are scaled to the pedestrian, and use the smallest materials.

2.16 The front façade or entry areas may be designed to accommodate façade lettering where appropriate. **(F)**

2.17 The main façade **(A)** can be further enhanced with occasional variations in materials, such as the use of colored or textured masonry units in special areas to create localized patterns. **(G)** The use of banding designs (continuous horizontal stripes) across large areas of façade is not recommended.

2.18 Smaller scale materials should be used on these front façade massing elements whenever possible.

2.19 The size, scale, motif and use of materials for the front façade design should be kept consistent across the façade in order to tie the entire composition together. The use of a variety of design styles across the façade is not recommended.

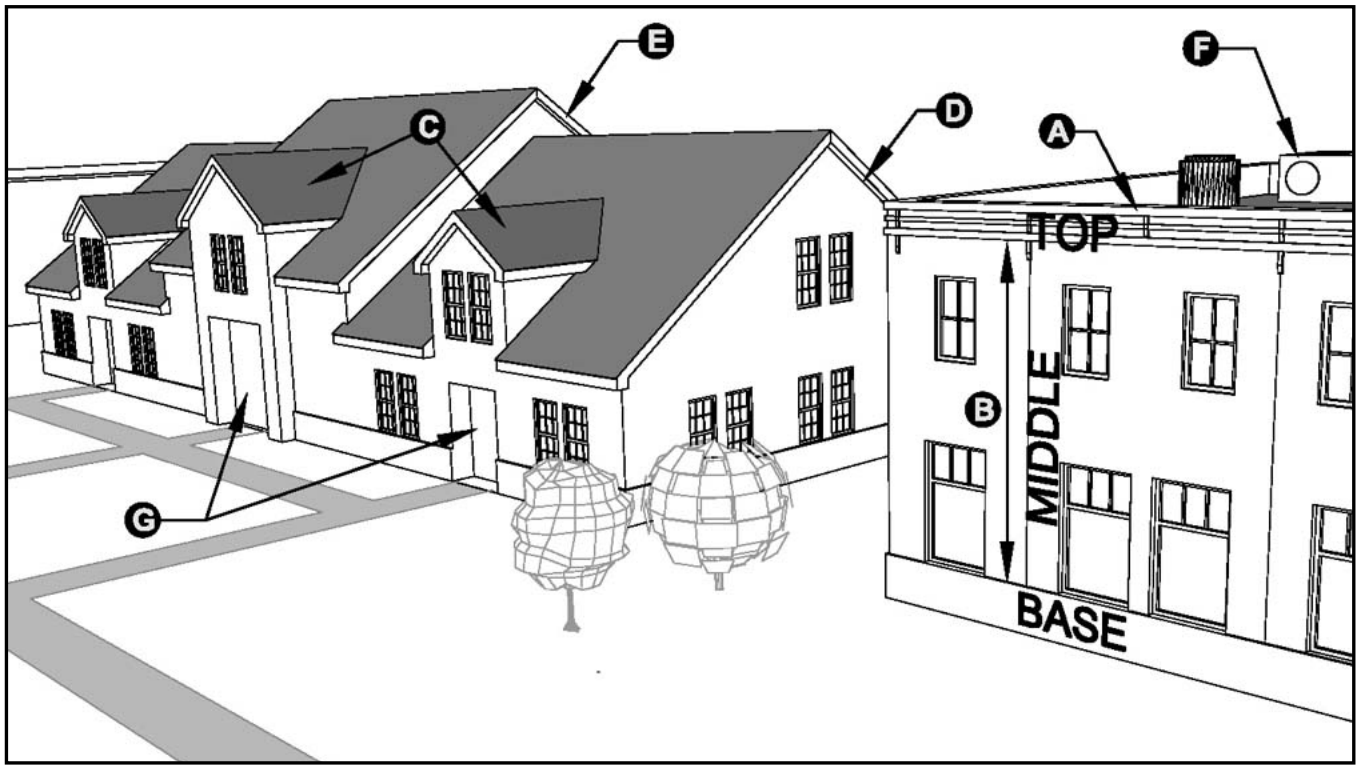


Figure 5: Different Roof Configurations. A well designed building roof provides screening, reduces the building scale, diverts the fall of rainwater, highlights important areas and creates a graceful "cap" to the structure, among other things.

3.1 The tallest façade of the building should face the street, stepping down in back if necessary.

3.2 The roof of the building should be in keeping with the scale of the structure itself. Overly large, bold or "inflated" roof and fascia designs are discouraged.

3.3 Flat roof structures should be capped by an articulated parapet design which acts as a structural expression of the building façade and its materials. **(A)** Fake roof fronts, built-out roof frames and similar applied designs are discouraged.

3.4 Subtle variations which help to differentiate the 'base', 'middle' and 'top' of the structure are encouraged. **(B)**

3.5 Sloped roof structures are encouraged to maintain a pitch between 6:12 minimum and 12:12 maximum slope on all primary roof areas. (Not including dormers, entry canopies or similar elements.) Mansard and shed roof designs are discouraged.

3.6 Buildings with sloped roofs are encouraged to employ the use of dormers and gables along the front to help maintain a prominent façade when feasible. **(C)** These also help to divert rainwater and snow away from doorways.

3.7 Buildings with sloped roofs are encouraged to provide roof overhangs between 6" and 18" deep. **(D)**

3.8 Subtle breaks and fluctuations in the roofline are encouraged to highlight important areas of the building (such as the entry) and break up longer runs of façade/roof area. **(E)**

3.9 Air handling units, condensers, satellite dishes and other equipment placed on the roof should not be visible from the street, and instead should be screened by building elements so they are shielded from sight. **(F)** In addition, roof mounted equipment shall be visually minimized with painted colors and finish complementary to the overall building design.

3.10 The roof of a structure should be designed so as to divert the fall of rain and snow away from pedestrian areas such as walkways and doors. The use of canopies, awnings or similar protective designs are also encouraged at entry locations. **(G)**

3.11 Although the town wishes to encourage two and three story development along the street, there may be some instances where a taller structure could obstruct a natural or historic vista such as a public view of the Bennington Monument. In these cases a more sensitive design approach may be required.

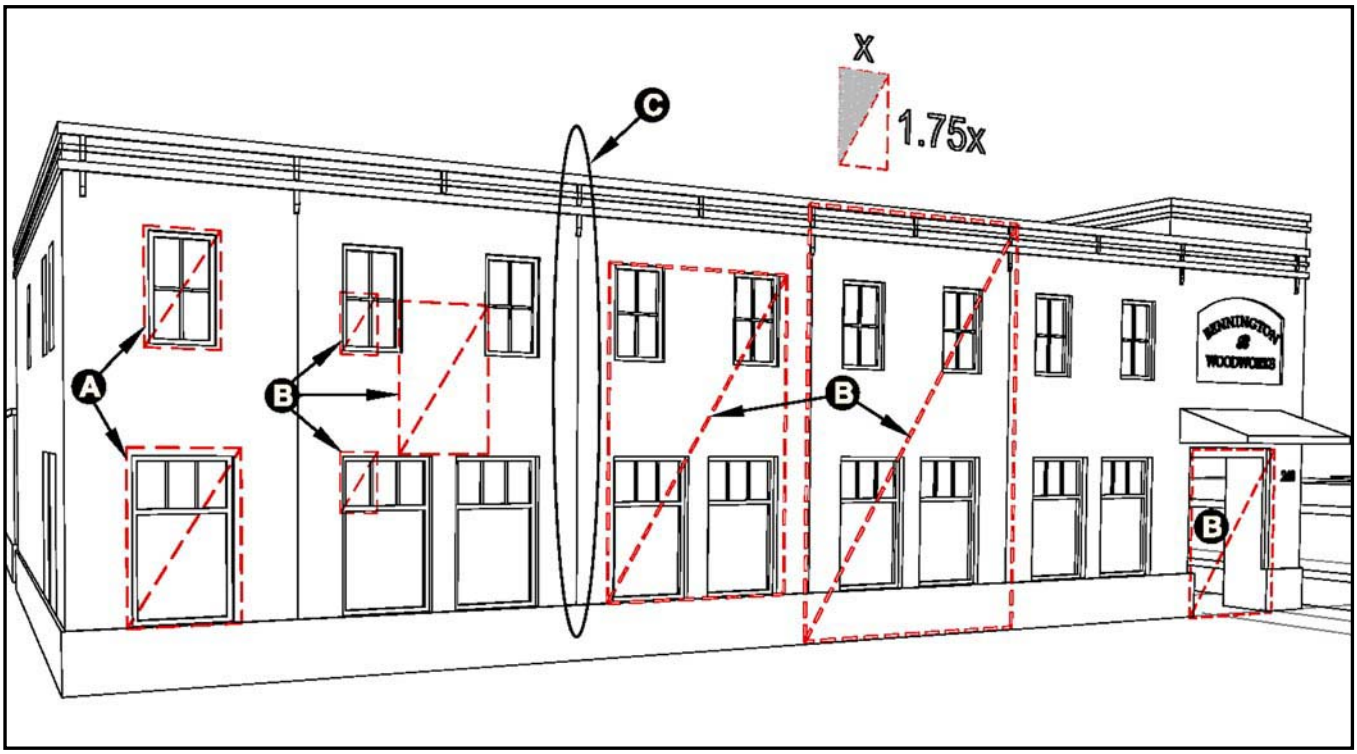


Figure 6: A Consistent Proportioning System. Many of the façade characteristics of this building are determined by the same width to height proportioning ratio (1:1.75). This can help to visually balance and tie the building together.

4.1 The proportions of design elements such as windows, columns or bay spacing should be kept as consistent as possible on the façade. In this example, the windows on the second floor have the same width to height ratio as the windows on the first floor. **(A)**

4.2 Proportioning systems also can be very effective in guiding other design characteristics of the façade. Here, the same width to height ratio of the windows was used to determine the proportions of many other features. **(B)**

4.3 The use of vertically proportioned elements (elements which are generally taller then they are wide) is encouraged to help give the building a taller, lighter and more stately appearance. Strong horizontal influences such as large fascias or banding designs are discouraged, or should be adequately balanced with vertical elements. **(C)**

4.4 The proportion of structural elements such as posts or columns should be appropriate to the weight they appear to be carrying. Columns which support larger masses, such as upper floors, generally have a low width to height ratio (For example 1:5). **(D)** Columns supporting lighter elements such as a porch roof generally have larger ratio (For example 1:15). **(E)** These relative proportions help balance a façade visually.

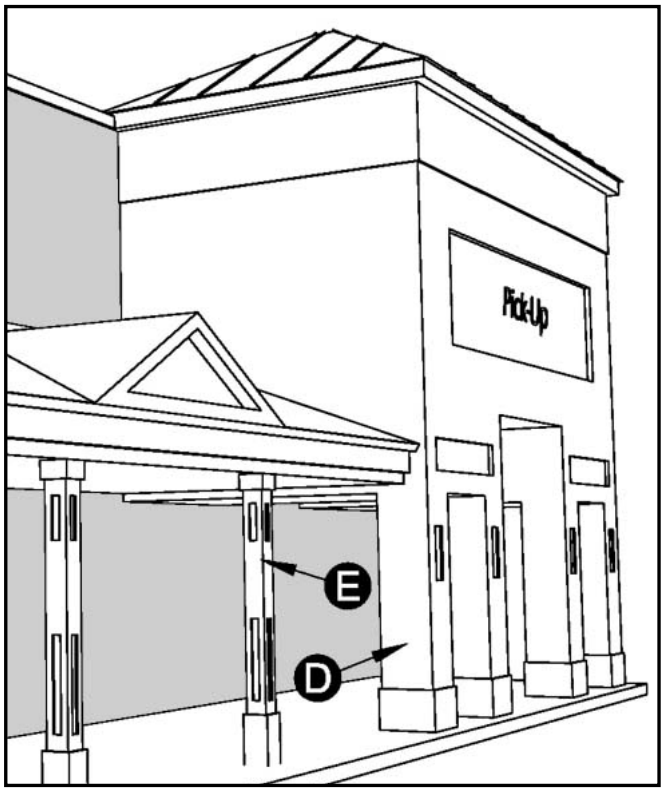


Figure 7: Relative Column Proportions. The thickness of the column or pier should reflect the amount of weight it appears to be carrying.

Figure 8: Fenestration Is A Measure Of The 3-Dimensional Depth Of A Façade Created By Fluctuations Or Openings In A Wall. Recesses such as archways or deep windows are two examples of fenestration. They help to give a façade a more 3-dimensional appearance by casting shadows and creating a visual contrast.

5.1 Articulations in the plane of the façade are encouraged to create an interesting design, reinforce rhythms and cast shadows. **(A)** Very flat façade designs are discouraged.

5.2 Typically, the most fenestration is found at the first floor level near pedestrian areas. Here, the use of larger openings and increased depth is encouraged. **(B)** This creates a more open and inviting area.

5.3 In a building of two or more stories, the upper floors typically would have decreasing levels of fenestration. Here, smaller openings and less depth is usually found compared to the first floor. **(C)**

5.4 Openings in masonry buildings should express a structural lintel or arch to express how it is carrying the weight above. **(D)** Likewise, door and window frames can also use a wider trim at the head than is used on the sides to achieve the same visual effect.

5.5 The primary entry to a building is the best place to be creative with the use of depth in a façade. The added depth and articulation help to draw attention to the entry and highlight it as an important place. **(E)**

5.6 The use of façade articulation such as expressing the structural bays of the building with pilasters or other detailing can be useful in animating an otherwise blank area of wall. **(F)**

5.7 In non pedestrian areas, such as the side or rear of the building, an increased level of fenestration is not as important, and can be scaled down if desired. **(G)**

5.8 The use of porches, colonnades, canopies or awnings is a great way to introduce shadows on a façade, and are encouraged. **(H)**

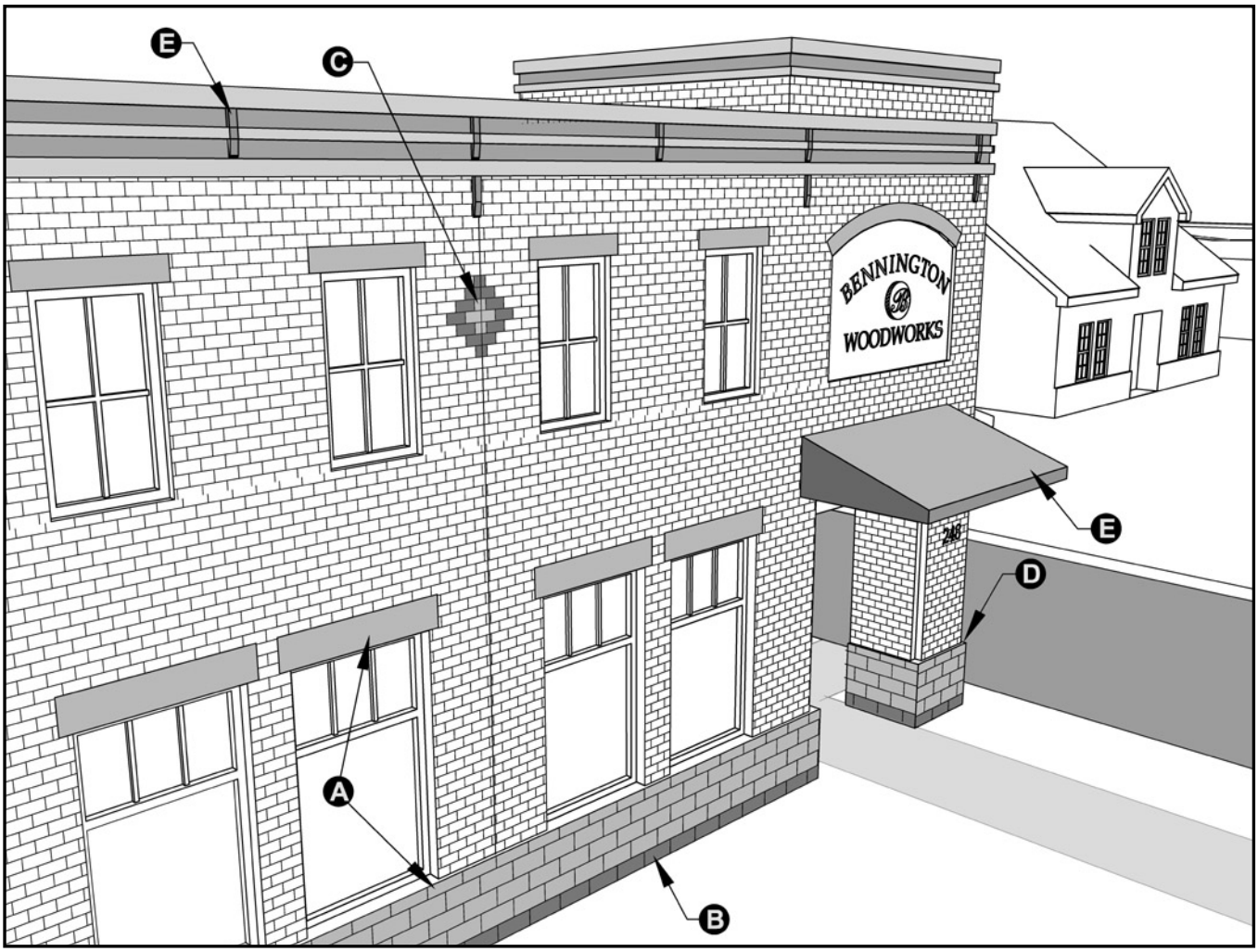


Figure 9: Smaller Scale Materials. The use of smaller building materials is recommended to help give the structure a more pedestrian scale.

6.1 Smaller scale, natural materials are encouraged whenever possible, especially on the front façade and near pedestrian areas.

6.2 When using more then one material on a façade, it is recommended to have one as the dominant theme with the others acting only to compliment or accentuate the design. In this example, the main brick façade is accented with the use of a special concrete block at the base, with matching concrete lintels. **(A)&(B)** This helps to tie the design together and provides a visual base for the building to rest on.

6.3 Special patterns included in the façade or roofing material every now and then can help to create a more lively and interesting design, and are encouraged. **(C)**

6.4 When making a transition from one material to the next, it is recommended that the change occur at a hard edge or "bump-out" in the façade. This helps to create a surface for the first material to terminate into before the second one begins. **(D)**

6.5 When using multiple colors on the exterior of the building only one color should be used as the main theme, with the other colors used more sparingly to create accents. **(E)**

6.6 The main color theme should typically be of a natural, muted shade. Brighter, more vibrant colors such as red or yellow should generally be reserved for minor accents and highlights only, and should be used sparingly.

6.7 The use of contrast between primary and accent materials or colors can help enrich a façade design.

Table 1: Recommended Materials Chart. The following chart is intended as a general guide to the materials most and least preferred for use within the Planned Commercial District. It is not intended to be comprehensive. Actual exterior materials and colors should be approved by the Town. Materials listed in the 'Not Recommended' column, or materials not specifically listed in this chart, may be permitted, but are subject to review and approval by the Review Board to ensure appropriateness.

ELEMENT	RECOMMENDED	NOT RECOMMENDED
Façade	Common Red Brick	Multi-colored Brick
	Bare (consistent tone)	Imitation Brick Siding
	Painted (approved color)	
	Special Masonry Units	Plain (bare) Concrete Masonry Units
	Textured Concrete Block	Metal Siding
	Colored Concrete Block	Exterior Insulation Finish Systems
	Split-faced Block	
	Natural Stone / Imitation Stone	
	Wood Clapboard	Asphalt Siding
	Wood Shingle	
Trim	Wood (Painted or Stained)	Bare Wood
	Finished Grade	Lumber Grade
	Aluminum	
Windows	Anodized Aluminum Frame	
	Approved Color	
	Wood Frame	
	Painted or Stained Approved Color	
	Vinyl Clad	
	Expressed Lintels (over openings)	Steel Plate or Angle
	Brick	
	Limestone	
	Colored Concrete	
	Clear, Etched or Frosted Glass	Mirrored Glass
	Stained Glass	
Roof	Natural Slate	
	Standing Seam Metal	
	Small Seam Width, Approved Color	
	Asphalt Shingles	
	Parapet Caps / Chimney Caps	
	Stone, Pre-Cast Concrete or Limestone	
Other	Canvas Awnings	Plastic Awnings
	3 color maximum, approved colors	
	Walkway Pavers/sidewalk	Asphalt walkways
	Stamped or Poured Concrete	
	Brick or Colored Paving Stone	