

Upton Center Business District Revitalization

Proposed Design Standards | January 2020



Upton Center Overview

Upton Center Business District (UCBD) is a reinvented Traditional New England Village Center and the heart of community life in the Town. A sense of place is created by the attractive mix of old and new buildings that ring the Common. The largest buildings are the historic civic and religious structures that occupy the most prominent positions aligned with views as people enter the town along key roads. Newer buildings have a cohesive look and feel. They are generally small-scale with traditional New England styling, both in color and architecture.

New buildings provide spaces for the new restaurants, cafes and local-serving businesses that have opened. Above the businesses, apartments with a range of sizes and costs are home to new and long-time residents of Upton.

Drivers slow when they enter UCBD on Route 140 and enjoy seeing the place and people out and about. Visitors to the center often park once and stroll around to visit the Library, or Historical Society Museum, attend an event, buy something to eat, sit on the common or in another small park, or take a longer walk to Heritage Park or Kiwanis Beach. They stroll paths along and across Center Brook, or use sidewalks that are safe, well-connected, and attractive with high quality paving materials, many places to sit, street trees, lush planters, and decorative light fixtures. While in town, residents often run into someone they know. UCBD expresses the community spirit and rural, small town character of Upton.

Design Standards Table of Contents

Project Overview	2
Site Design	3
Utility & Service Areas	3
Driveways & Parking	4
Sidewalks & Pathways	4
Bulk Massing & Scale	5
Styles & Materials	5
Facade Treatment	6
Lighting	7
Gateways, Wayfinding & Branding	8
Open & Recreation Space	8
Landscaping	9
Residential	9





Site Design

- > The UCBD should be recognizable as such, providing a vibrant, active center creating opportunities to live, work, and play.
- > New buildings are to be oriented to maximize view for occupants while minimizing the visual impact of the building on existing viewsheds. New development must line up along the street to reinforce the pedestrian realm, while pushing parking areas behind the new buildings, out of view from the street and passerbys.
- > There is a preference to preserve existing historic (75 years and older) structures.
- > Natural space and pedestrian paths are encouraged to better knit the UCBD together.
- > Where residential neighborhoods abut commercial, office, or mixed-use developments, appropriate transitional features must use and include landscaping, open space or parks, or streets with clearly designed pedestrian features.
- > Any new development within the UCBD should be compatible with the 2019 Vision.



Utility & Service Areas

- > Adequate access for loading on one side of the building is required.
- > Loading docks, dumpsters, mechanical equipment, and utility meters are to be located at the rear or side of buildings where they are not visible from primary commercial streets and do not interrupt the continuity of the sidewalk and building facades.
- > Loading docks, dumpsters, and mechanical equipment are to be screened by elements compatible with the architecture of the building.
- > Where possible and feasible, shared loading areas, dumpsters, and mechanical equipment shall be incorporated into the design.
- > Accessory buildings on-site should be generally diminutive to the principal building on-site. All accessory buildings must be compatible in color, texture, materials, and style with the principal building.
- > Rooftop mechanical units are to be set back from building facades so that it is not visible from street views, screened from view behind parapets, or enclosed within architectural elements that integrate it into the building design. Screening elements should incorporate sound control devices or construction that mitigates equipment noise.
- > Burial of overhead utility lines in any new development is recommended.
- > Any 5G (or similar) implementation should not interrupt the ambiance of the UCBD, traffic flow or street maintenance.
- > Avoid: placement of equipment such as satellite dishes, HVAC, utility meters and other like items in areas visible from the public way; wiring that is stapled to the siding and/or along gutters or downspouts; exposed wiring across building faces or hanging across property lines.

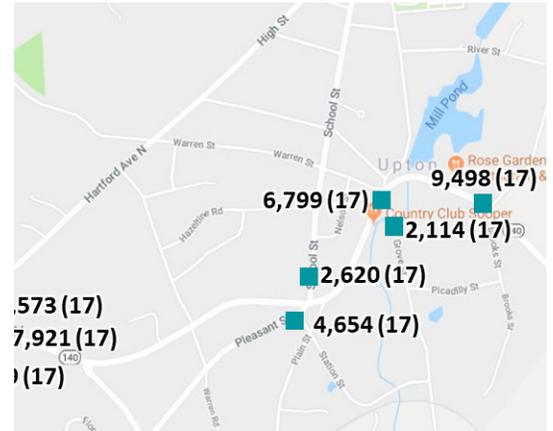


Sample screening enclosure



Driveways & Parking

- > Parking areas shall be located to the rear and/or to the side of the building.
- > Parking lots are to be placed behind or adjacent to buildings to orient entry ways, porches, and windows toward common areas.
- > Parking aisles shall be designed to minimize conflict with pedestrian traffic at sidewalks.
- > Parking is a necessity, but it should not be the dominant feature of mixed-use development. Parking should be, at most, seen as a secondary consideration with the emphasis placed on pedestrian mobility and common spaces.
- > The location of driveway openings in relation to traffic and to adjacent streets shall provide for the convenience and safety of vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site. The number of curb cuts on state and local roads should be minimized.
- > The proposed development shall assure safe interior circulation within its site by separating pedestrian, bikeways, and vehicular traffic.
- > Use a variety of designs materials and alignments to distinguish pedestrian and bicycle paths from vehicular driveways.
- > Podium/tiered/under building parking is encouraged, especially where existing changes in grade make on-grade access possible while allowing economical structuring of the buildings above. Ramping must be incorporated within the building envelope or below-grade.
- > Driveways shall not interrupt the continuity of sidewalks and pedestrian spaces. Curb cuts shall be located away from the primary commercial streets wherever possible, preferably on side streets and alleys.
- > Parking areas shall be screened from view by fencing, planting, or berming and conform to landscaping requirements.
- > Employ curbs, motor vehicle stops, or similar devices.
- > Avoid: Parking that is a dominant feature of the proposed site plan; vehicles from overhanging on or into public rights-of-way or adjacent property; lighting designed and arranged such that light is directed away from public roadways and other adjacent properties, or otherwise improperly shielded from direct glare or hazardous interference.



Upton Traffic Volumes; see Upton Final Report, page 43



Sidewalks & Pathways

- > Connectivity between parking lots, connecting streets, and buildings is desired.
- > Sidewalk materials must be concrete with granite curbing.
- > Amenities that increase comfort of pedestrian movement along sidewalks, such as lighting and street trees are required. Projecting canopies at storefronts are acceptable.
- > Clearly identifiable pedestrian entryways that are separate from vehicular driveway and provided between buildings on the same lot and on adjacent lots.

- > New sidewalks shall not interrupt existing sidewalks materials and dimensions; however recessed entries and widened sidewalks devoted to outdoor uses (such as dining) can receive special materials and articulation that give spatial dimension to these functions.
- > Improvements to adjacent crosswalks, curbing, and sidewalks to accommodate increased pedestrian activity. Usable open spaces adjoining sidewalks that create activated pedestrian areas for dining, playing, gardening, and other passive recreation uses (i.e. bicycle storage facilities, benches).
- > Sidewalk dining is encouraged. (i.e. outdoor space for seating that creates a pedestrian friendly atmosphere).
- > Avoid: Partial or disconnected pathways; pathways that fail to integrate into the existing street networks; poorly lighted sidewalks; an excessive number of curb cuts that impede pedestrian and cyclist safety and create a confusing environment for drivers; overly narrow sidewalks and pathways that discourage walking, cycling and other car-free activities.



Sample sidewalk dining



Bulk Massing & Scale

- > The scale and proportion of surrounding buildings should always be taken into consideration. Redevelopment or repair projects should aim to reflect adjacent buildings in height to maintain scale.
- > Designs shall employ a variety of techniques throughout the UCBD that avoid monotonous building facades and produce a distinct “sense of place.”
- > Avoid: box-like designs which lack building offsets, projections, balconies, and setbacks.



Styles & Materials

- > A sense of architectural coherence shall be maintained by avoiding the combination of various architectural styles in the building design.
- > Do not combine distinctly different elements in the building design, i.e., contrasting materials and colors. This can disrupt the scale and proportion of surrounding buildings and create visual gaps in the streetscape. Overwhelming the building design with excessive detailing (i.e. window trim, molding, cornice, etc.).
- > Building finish materials shall be appropriate to traditional New England architecture and may include, but shall not be limited to: brick or high quality brick-face, wood, stone or high-quality stone-face and composite clapboard siding. Vinyl, unfinished metal or fiberglass as a primary finished surface should not be used.
- > White or neutral color palette, with variety among buildings, is preferred.
- > Historic building forms—consistent with New England village architecture—are preferred.



- > Existing building facades with architectural significance are to be incorporated into new construction whenever feasible.
- > Franchise architecture, distinctive building design that is trademarked or identified with a particular chain or corporation and is generic in nature, is not allowed in the district. Franchises or national chains may adapt their architectural style to follow these Design Standards, to create a building that is compatible with Upton’s local character (outlined in the Upton Center Overview on page 2).

Facade Treatment

- > Street level frontage shall be devoted to entrances, shop windows, or other displays.
- > All buildings shall have principal facade and entry (with operable doors) facing a street or open space. Buildings may have more than one principal facade and/or entry.
- > Facade elements shall continue around to all sides of buildings visible from the street. Elements can be simplified at the rear of buildings to clarify a front/back hierarchy.
- > Blank walls adjacent to streets, alleys, or open spaces shall not be permitted. Where windows are not possible or appropriate to the intended use, vertical articulation in the form of raised or recessed surfaces shall be used to break up blank walls.
- > Larger buildings with multiple non-residential tenants on the first floor shall articulate the facade in a manner that distinguishes the location of these tenants through the use of decorative raised or depressed vertical surfaces, variations in acceptable signage, awnings, marquees, colonnades, or arcades.
- > Special functions with public significance such as theatres, educational uses, and exhibition spaces, shall be differentiated in form to articulate their role in the downtown environment.
- > Projecting bays, recesses, and cornices are encouraged at all floor levels to define the proportions noted above. Undisturbed building facades over 40’ in length are required to have change in plane articulated by projecting or recessed bays, balconies, or setbacks.
- > Horizontal elements such as belt courses, projecting cornices, canopies, and step backs should be combined with vertical elements such as recesses, projecting bays, parapets, and vertically aligned windows, to create facades that may evoke, but do not imitate, the historic buildings of the UCBD. Projected elements two (2) feet and less may be located within the setback areas. Projections into the public right of way shall comply with the requirements of the Massachusetts State Building Code 780 CMR.



Design Preferences; see Upton Final Report, pages 75-80

Roofing

- > Preference for peaked roofs with gables and/or complex peaked roof forms. Flat roofs may be allowed on multi-story buildings as long as the roofline projects outward from the building surface as a decorative cornice or parapet. Rooftop mechanical units are to be set back from building facades so that it is not visible from street views, screened from view behind parapets or enclosed within architectural elements that integrate it into the building design. Screening elements should incorporate sound control devices or construction that mitigates equipment noise.



Entries

- > Entries are to be clearly articulated with projecting canopies or recesses for convenience, way-finding, and to activate the street front and pedestrian spaces.
- > Retail and commercial entries will face a public sidewalk and are to be primarily transparent to reinforce the public nature of the ground floor uses and they are to be flanked by windows and storefronts to reinforce this perception.
- > Lighting and signage shall be integrated into the entry design to reinforce the public nature of the entry.

Windows

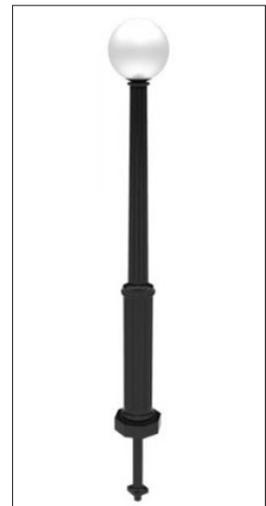
- > Window placement shall reinforce the dominant horizontality for commercial uses and a dominant verticality for residential uses.
- > Transom windows above view windows and doors are encouraged. Upper floor residential and commercial uses shall have relatively less glass area to emphasize the public nature of the street-front uses. Glass shall be clear, or reflective only to the extent that such reflectivity reduces interior heat. Mirror glass is not permitted.
- > Protecting ground floor windows and defining commercial street fronts with overhanging fabric awnings or solid canopies is encouraged. Operable windows and doors onto balconies and terraces at upper floor uses are encouraged.
- > Avoid: using vinyl awnings that also serve as big, illuminated signs.

Lighting

- > Lighting design that is coordinated to illuminate architectural features, entries, sidewalks, parking areas, and signage is preferred.
- > Facade lighting and architectural lighting should articulate building uses and entries and reinforce the public nature of the sidewalk and building frontage.
- > Lighting along street fronts shall reinforce rather than competes with the continuity of the Town’s street lighting. If the sidewalk includes street trees, streetlights shall be located between trees so that the tree canopy does not interfere with illumination coverage.
- > Preference for decorative or historic light fixture poles to illuminate parking lots and pedestrian ways, specifically: single lamp, black pole, New England-style PolySteel post, acorn luminar with diffuser on top, soft light (2700k) LED lightbulbs (see image on right for acorn style top [1] and base style [2]).
- > Wall-mounted decorative lighting fixtures, such as wall sconces, to illuminate building piers or highlight building cornices above is preferred.
- > Lighting in parking areas and at the side and rear of buildings abutting adjoining properties should be designed to cut off light at the property line.



1. Acorn Style Luminar



2. New England-style PolySteel post



- > Lighting should contribute to public safety by lighting entries, exits, parking, pedestrian pathways, and adjacent open spaces.
- > Lighting incorporated into signage, or illuminating signage, must conform with sign requirements of the Zoning Bylaws of the Town of Upton.
- > Parking and pedestrian light fixtures should be compatible with the building lighting to provide for a contiguous appearance of the project.



Gateways, Wayfinding & Branding

- > Gateways should communicate a positive and distinctive identity.
- > Unified gateways and wayfinding should facilitate all modes of travel and communicate direction to key destinations.
- > Text and maps should be clear, concise and accessible.
- > Systems combining multiple elements are encouraged (i.e. directional signs, lightpole banners, maps, etc.)
- > Signage, entries and gateways should be illuminated.
- > Indirect lighting is encouraged for signage.
- > Projected signs shall be minimized, and where they are used, they shall have little or no lettering.
- > Externally illuminated signs are allowed.
- > Encourage connections to adjacent parcels (i.e. pedestrian bridges across Center Brook to the adjacent parking lot/playground area).
- > Avoid: conflicting wayfinding and branding styles; insufficient continuity of wayfinding resources throughout the UCBD; signage that covers or obscures significant architectural details of the building; signs placed after navigational decision points or hidden from key views; pole signs; internally lit signs (i.e. neon) and facade elements; cluttered signage; illegible writing; internally illuminated, rectangular box signs are prohibited; electronic signs; garish colors, lighting or fonts; poor maintenance.



Open & Recreation Space

- > Communal open spaces that maximize sunlight are desired.
- > Playgrounds shall be located along accessible routes.
- > Play structures designed for children shall be at least one third shaded by tree canopies or structures.
- > Shared spaces must be accessible to all residents, provide seating areas and some shade, be appropriately lit, and designed to encourage social activity.
- > Shared spaces that are relatively flat and usable are desired.
- > Vary the shapes and sizes of buildings to create meaningful spaces and visual interest.
- > Group buildings around central open spaces that are easily accessible to all residents.
- > Avoid open spaces around buildings that generally get little use—such spaces are not a replacement for well-designed central open spaces.
- > Design communal open spaces away from busy traffic streets and direct public view.
- > Locate parking lots away from communal open spaces, screen when necessary.
- > Avoid: placement of play facilities so they are oriented away from common space and toward parking lots; common spaces which are likewise oriented toward parking spaces; open space that is oriented so as to discourage shared uses and not well integrated into the overall development.



Landscaping

- > Landscaping shall complement architectural features and, when necessary, screen unattractive aspects (i.e. HVAC systems).
- > Maximize visual impact by using mature trees and other plant types.
- > Use architectural landscape lighting to heighten the effect of street trees and other special landscape features.
- > Use plantings, trees and shrubs to soften hard surfaces of pavement and building façades.
- > Creation of some measure of landscaping in parking areas to help ease the transition between paved surface, common space, and private living space is encouraged.
- > Landscaping at retail frontages should be minimal and not interfere with the connection between the sidewalk and interior uses. Landscaping to define commercial entries or outdoor dining areas shall not interfere with the continuity of the sidewalks. Landscaping to define residential entries shall not compete with or overwhelm the continuity of the retail frontages.
- > Wherever possible, plantings shall be native species that require minimal irrigation and fertilizer. Planting of invasive species is prohibited.
- > Avoid: use of the front lawn or common area for parking purposes; landscaping that creates unusable public open space; landscaping that impedes the flow of pedestrians or impacts the use of designated common space; landscaping that negatively impacts the functioning of stormwater abatement design elements.



Residential

Multi-family Residential

- > Buildings should be oriented to minimize intrusion of privacy of residents in adjacent buildings.
- > Windows should not overlook the living areas of adjacent buildings.
- > Porches are a distinct architectural feature of the UCBD and should be incorporated for residential buildings whenever possible to ensure an attractive front facade.
- > The garage structure shall compromise no more than 30% of the front facade of the primary structure.
- > Front doors should face the street.
- > All stairwells to the units should be enclosed within the exterior walls of the building unless the building is a town-house style development where each unit has a separate private entrance on the ground level.

Single Family Residential

- > Porches are a distinct architectural feature of the district and should be incorporated for residential buildings whenever possible to ensure an attractive front facade.
- > The garage structure shall compromise no more than 30% of the front facade of the primary structure.
- > Primary building entrances should face the street.



Existing Veterans Memorial Playground

Residential Conversions

- > Conversions from single family homes to two family homes shall retain the basic design elements for the building to appear as a single family home. The principle entrance shall be retained on the front facade and a secondary entrance created on one side.
- > All stairways to the second unit should be enclosed within the exterior walls of the building. If this is not possible, they should not be apparent from the street.

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