

## **Commercial Design Guidelines**

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# Commercial Design Guidelines

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## A. INTRODUCTION:

**Purpose:** The purpose of this document is to:

- Communicate with the development community in advance, the design expectations for commercial projects to facilitate the review process that results in quality development.
- Assure the fair and consistent application of design objectives.
- Protect investment in the community by encouraging consistently high quality development.
- Foster a sense of community and encourage pride of ownership.
- Insure safe, functional and attractive development.
- Encourage projects appropriate to the context of this southwest environment.
- Promote the development of a livable community designed for people.
- Insure an accessible and safe community.
- Reduce the “heat island” effect, by increasing shaded areas and designing hard surface areas such as parking fields to mitigate warming effects.
- Encourage project identity and visual interest through elements such as distinctive structures,

water features, landscape features, plazas, art, etc.

- Encourage environmentally sensitive site and building design to reduce negative impacts and conserve energy.

**Applicability:** To achieve these Purposes, the Guidelines apply to all new commercial and office developments and their substantial alterations that require approval by the Design Review Board or planning staff. They are also intended for use by staff when Maricopa County requests input on commercial proposals within unincorporated parts of Gilbert's planning area. The guidelines do not apply to industrial sites.

These guidelines should be used by developers when designing projects, referenced by the Design Review Board when reviewing projects and by the Town Council when hearing appeals of Design Review Board decisions. These guidelines are also applicable for staff review.

**Use of Guidelines:** The provisions set forth in this document identify the minimum level of design quality for commercial development. However, flexibility is encouraged to achieve excellent designs. To that end, the use of the words shall and must have been purposely avoided within the specific guidelines. Each application for commercial development, however,

should demonstrate to what extent it incorporates these guidelines.

Applications that do not meet specific guidelines applicable to that project will need to be justified as to how the proposed design will improve the project by better meeting the intent of the General Plan, LDC and these Guidelines. The determination as to whether a project provides an improved design will be made through the design review findings required by the Land Development Code as determined by the Design Review Board.

#### **Relationship between the General Plan, Land Development Code and Commercial Design Guidelines:**

**Guidelines:** The approval process for commercial development is guided by the General Plan, the Land Development Code and the Commercial Design Guidelines.

**General Plan:** An umbrella document that sets the development vision of the community. It provides policy direction for land use, vehicular and bicycle circulation, water and environmental issues, open space and recreation, community growth, housing, and cost of development.

**Land Development Code:** An ordinance that implements the General Plan by establishing land use and development requirements in zoning districts. The *Land Development Code* (LDC) provides specific minimum development criteria.

**Commercial Design Guidelines:** Establishes Town of Gilbert minimum principles for designing quality commercial development. Certain items apply to site planning and others to building aesthetics.

**Organization:** The guidelines are divided into three sections: Site Planning, Building Design and Environmental Sensitivity. Within each section are a number of design principles and measures that address the different elements of site and building design and environmental sensitivity.



*Large scale retail use with pedestrian amenities*

## **B. SITE PLANNING**

Planning for development on a site encompasses items such as its relationship to surrounding uses, building orientation on the site, pedestrian and vehicular circulation, efficiency of parking areas, screening of loading and utility areas, and the design of landscaping, signage and lighting.

### **1. Contextual Relationship to Residential:**

- a. Commercial developments adjacent to existing and future residential developments should be of an appropriate scale, set back and building height. Multi-story commercial buildings should incorporate lower scale, single-story elements and/or greater setbacks adjacent to existing and future single-family development.
- b. Orient support uses such as trash enclosures, compactors, truck loading areas and outdoor storage away from residential uses to the extent practical.
- c. Locate drive-through lanes away from adjoining single-family and multi-family developments. Locate speakers and menu boards so that noise is not directed toward residential uses and incorporate a screen wall and landscaping to mitigate noise.

- d. If an existing masonry wall separates a residential development from a proposed commercial development, plant large evergreen trees in an expanded landscape planting area to buffer the residential use.

### **2. Building Orientation:**

- a. Locate pad buildings closer to arterial intersections to provide a strong visual and pedestrian relationship to the street while taking in to account the queuing requirements of the ULDC and in section B.4.f. of these Guidelines. When practical, locate some parking and service functions behind the building.
- b. Orient gas canopies, drive-through lanes, service functions and accessory structures away from the intersection of arterial roadways.
- c. Develop distinctive architectural forms or landscape, art, or historical features at the terminus of major project entrances.
- d. Frame major project entries with structures, oversized landscaping or distinctive entry features.
- e. In large multi-building projects, organize the site layout to provide functional pedestrian spaces, plazas and amenities between or in front of buildings.
- f. Provide weather and sun protection, such as overhangs, awnings, canopies, etc. to mitigate climatic and solar conditions.

### 3. Pedestrian Amenities and Hardscape:

- a. Design convenient pedestrian and bicycle access to all adjacent streets.
- b. Pedestrian focal points should have enhanced pedestrian paving such as decorative scored concrete, stained concrete, exposed aggregate, integral colored or textured concrete.
- c. Design sites to minimize pedestrian and vehicular conflicts. Where pedestrian circulation paths cross vehicular routes, provide a change in paving materials, textures or colors to emphasize the conflict point, use decorative bollards, to increase visibility, improve safety and enhance aesthetic appeal.
- d. For commercial developments over 5 acres, provide direct pedestrian and bike paths onsite to match those in approved or built adjacent developments.
- e. Accessible parking spaces should be convenient to building entries.
- f. For commercial development over 10 acres, design pedestrian amenities to allow for use and enjoyment of outdoor areas as a development focal point or centralized amenity. These should include a mix of pedestrian scaled lighting, tables, drinking fountains, benches, seating walls, shade trees, raised landscape planters, berms, clock towers, water features, specimen trees, potted plants, information kiosks, botanical exhibits or art features.
- g. Within commercial shopping centers over 10 acres, provide convenient pedestrian access to transit stops and outlying parking areas.
- h. Design sites to accommodate bus stops in the development of shopping centers on arterial streets where future transit service is planned.
- i. Provide convenient bicycle parking in locations that do not interfere with pedestrian circulation. Disperse bicycle parking facilities throughout larger sites and locate them in convenient and visible areas.
- j. Provide for a continuation of pedestrian access when commercial developments are located adjacent to existing or planned open space.
- k. Allow for outdoor dining and/or other amenities to enliven plazas and open space areas. Outdoor dining and pedestrian amenities should be separated or screened from residential areas and from vehicular traffic.



*Pedestrian area with decorative paving, seating, pedestrian scaled lighting, potted plants and landscape planters*

- l. Use functional colonnades in shopping centers to provide sheltered areas for outside dining or other activities in designated areas.
- m. Design pedestrian areas to incorporate a mix of structures such as colonnades, canopies, or trellis structures in combination with canopy shade trees.
- n. On west and south exposures, design plazas, patios and pedestrian areas with architectural and landscape shade elements.

#### 4. Vehicular Circulation and Parking:

- a. Provide special paving treatments at site entrances.
- b. To promote safe pedestrian access, provide sidewalks and not head-in parking spaces directly in front of large individual retail tenants over 30,000 square feet (with the possible exception of accessible spaces).
- c. Strive to minimize driveway cuts on arterial streets by providing vehicular cross-access easements and shared access driveways between adjacent commercial projects.
- d. Provide an unobstructed pedestrian walkway shaded with trees through large parking areas in projects over 10 acres.
- e. Traffic calming devices are encouraged in the interior of a site to enhance safety.
- f. High volume drive-through uses should incorporate adequate stacking for the intended uses.
- g. For parking and utility screen walls, use the design pattern of the principal building's architectural theme. Articulate walls by using decorative columns and diversity in texture, material and alignment. Provide the decorative finish on both sides if visible to the general public.



*Unfavorable: Use material for shopping cart corrals and locate adjacent to landscape islands and integrate materials and colors from the building design theme,*



*Favorable: Place shopping cart corrals adjacent to landscape island with decorative finished materials*

- h. Provide long-term storage of shopping carts either within the tenant space or adjacent to it, behind a decorative screening wall exceeding the height of the carts. Shopping cart storage may not encroach into accessible pathways.
- i. For establishments that use parking lot shopping cart corrals, design corrals built with durable decorative materials complimenting the building design.
- j. Use canopy trees in parking lots to break up the scale of large parking lots and provide additional shading.
- k. In commercial developments larger than 15 acres, use an outer drive aisle to move vehicular traffic away from the aisle or aisles in front of store areas.



## 5. Loading Areas and Accessory Equipment:

- a. Design trash enclosures with decorative masonry walls and sight-tight gates to match design features of the commercial development.
- b. To the extent possible, locate trash facilities, service and loading areas away from single-family residential uses, project entrances and major circulation aisles.
- c. Locate parking lot and drive aisle light poles in landscaped areas. Demonstrate the avoidance of a conflict between lighting and landscaping. Paint concrete light pole bases to match the primary color of the building or finish the bases to match parking screen walls.
- d. Recess service electrical system (S.E.S.) panels into the building elevation and screen with doors, screen with landscaping or a solid wall (with landscaping) built of similar building materials and colors of the main development and equal to or exceeding the height of the S.E.S. panel.
- e. Strive to locate ground-mounted utility cabinets where they do not conflict with prominent site views and can be screened from major streets and public areas. Paint cabinets and screen walls to match the principal structure. Where space allows, provide landscaping in front of screening walls.
- f. Ensure that ground-mounted utility equipment and cabinets are level and at the grade of the surrounding area.

- g. On final site plans identify the location of all proposed outdoor display and sales areas, including propane sales, vending machines, amusements and seasonal sales. Their location should not displace required parking and pedestrian or landscaping areas.
- h. Finish or paint all exterior metal to match approved project colors.

## 6. Signage:

- a. Locate freestanding signs on low planter walls or design monument signs to incorporate distinctive elements of the architectural style or theme of the development
- b. Design directional signs with similar design elements as the project freestanding signs.
- c. Design and locate signage to be visible from both pedestrian and vehicular areas.
- d. Provide building signage that is proportional to the scale of the tenant façade. All building and freestanding signs should be designed to further the design theme of the building and be consistent with any sign package.
- e. Illuminate letters, not sign backgrounds for freestanding signs.
- f. Paint sign backgrounds and sign cabinets to complement building colors.
- g. The use of reverse pan channel (halo) copy and pan channel copy is encouraged for building signage.



*Freestanding sign with poor design  
and poor quality materials*

- h. Generally, freestanding signage should use light copy with dark background.
- i. Prominent color bands, painted accents, and striped awnings should complement and not dominate the architectural theme of the building.

## 7. Landscaping and Grading:

- a. Design the project landscape theme to complement and enhance project architecture.

- b. Incorporate street frontage landscaping consistent with the adopted streetscape districts and General Plan Character Areas.
- c. Design arterial street intersection frontage with substantial hardscape features, creative grading design, fountains, seasonal color, art and/or vertical landscape focal points. Incorporate “Welcome to Gilbert” features at designated entrances to the Town. (This does not count against project signage.)
- d. For projects over 15 acres, provide a raised landscaped median at major entrances from arterial streets to separate ingress lanes from egress lanes.
- e. For projects over 10 acres, create prominent focal points. Architectural structures, art, historical and/or landscape features should be located at the terminus of major project entry drives.
- f. For projects over 10 acres, incorporate prominent entry features, vertical landscape forms and/or seasonal color at both vehicular and pedestrian project entrances.
- g. Incorporate canopy shade trees, landscape features and seating or other pedestrian amenities near colonnades, storefronts and pedestrian routes.
- h. Provide significant foundation and/or accent plantings, including trees, around buildings to accentuate or screen building features.

- i. Provide low-profile accent plantings at the base of monument signs.
- j. Use lush but low water consumption ground cover in areas near pedestrian amenities and prominent entrance features.



*Focal entrance to Gilbert with vertical landscape forms and water features*

- k. In highly visible areas, use taller and larger caliper trees.
- l. Use predominately deciduous trees to shade western, southern and southwestern exposures in the summer.
- m. For the overall site, use a mixture of deciduous and evergreen trees.

- n. If retaining walls in retention basins are necessary, they should be terraced and landscaped to reduce their visual scale.
- o. Design retention basins that are visible from public streets and common open spaces to avoid a "bathtub" or linear channel appearance. Highly visible retention basins should be contoured using berms and curvilinear design.



*Boulevard landscape project entrance with landscaped median*

- p. Screen restaurant menu boards from adjacent public rights-of-way and off-site uses.
- q. Coordinate landscaping plans with above and below ground utility location needs.

- r. Screen the paved area of high activity automotive uses, such as service stations and convenience stores, from streets and major public use areas by a 3-foot wall or a dense vegetative buffer.

## 8. Lighting:

- a. Provide pedestrian scale lighting fixtures in areas designed for pedestrian activity such as plazas, courtyards, pathways and seating areas but excluding parking only areas. Select lighting fixtures that complement the general architectural style of the development.
- b. Highlighting of unique or special features of the site, such as architectural features, specimen trees and artwork with accent lighting should be considered.
- c. Use decorative wall-mounted sconces or light fixtures when building lighting is proposed on elevations away from residential uses.

## C. BUILDING DESIGN:

### 1. Massing:

The visual impact of a building depends not only on its size, but also on the relationship between its length, width and height. Also, such features as prominent entries, windows, color and materials are factors in the visual impression of a building.

- a. Building mass should be broken into smaller elements, consistent with the proportions of the architectural style selected and surrounding uses.
- b. In large multi-building projects, vary the size, massing and height of the buildings in relation to each other.
- c. Reduction of building mass may be achieved by using a combination of the following techniques:
  - Variation in the rooflines and form.
  - Ground level arcades and covered areas.
  - Protected and recessed entries.
  - Vertical elements on or in front of expansive blank walls.
  - Pronounced wall plane offsets and projections.
  - Use of focal points and vertical accents.
  - Inclusion of windows on elevations facing streets and pedestrian areas.
  - Retaining a clear distinction between roof, body and base of a building.

### 2. Design:

Articulate facades to provide a visual effect that is consistent with the community's character and scale.

- a. All facades, including back and side elevations of a building generally visible from public view or adjacent to residential areas, should be architecturally treated and relate to but not overwhelm the neighborhood. All elevations generally visible from public view should reflect the overall design, colors and textures used on the front façade.
- b. Design multi-building projects to include consistent design elements throughout the project.
- c. Building elevations should incorporate architectural features and patterns that include a pedestrian scale.
- d. Internalize or underground any vacuum tubes.
- e. Utilize architectural features, screen walls, landscaping and canopies to integrate drive-throughs into the overall building design.
- f. Fully screen roof mounted mechanical equipment.
- g. Internalize roof drain elements within the building or architectural features such as columns (except at-grade discharge).
- h. For all buildings at least two of these elements should repeat horizontally. Buildings with facades greater than 100 feet in length should include several of the elements listed below, repeated at appropriate intervals, either horizontally or vertically:
  - Color change. Recognizable, but not strongly contrasting.
  - Texture change.
  - Material change.
  - Architectural variety and interest through a change in plane such as offsets, reveals, archways or projecting ribs.
  - Wall plane projections or recesses.
- i. Wall elevations should terminate at a logical point such as a column or tower element.
- j. Service and exit doors should be integrated into the architecture of publicly visible elevations.
- k. Variations in rooflines or parapets should be used to reduce the scale of commercial buildings. Roof size, shape, material, color and slope should be coordinated with the scale and theme of the building.
  - Parapets for concealing flat roofs should feature three dimensional cornice treatments when at the ends or corners of buildings. Where not used in conjunction with other roof elements, parapets should vary in height and have a finished depth at building corners. The size of all roof elements should be appropriate to the size and scale of roofing materials used.
  - Buildings with sloping roofs should include multiple planes.
- l. Solid and soft or open areas of the façade, such as windows, entryways, arbors, porches, and arcades should be arranged to create a relationship that complements the architectural style of the structure.

- m. Predominant exterior building materials should be of high quality and durable. These include, but are not limited to:
- Brick.
  - Stone, natural or faux.
  - Integral color, sand blasted or stained textured masonry.
  - Split-face or scored concrete masonry units.
  - Textured tilt-up concrete panels.
  - Stucco/EFIS.
  - Metal roofs.
  - Concrete and clay tile roofs.
  - Clear and tinted glass.
  - Architectural metal.
- n. Predominant exterior building materials should not include the following:
- Un-textured tilt-up concrete panels.
  - Pre-fabricated steel panels.
  - Corrugated metal.
  - Asphalt shingle roofs, except for period architecture.
  - Highly reflective glass.
  - Wood.
- o. Predominant facade colors should possess low reflectivity characteristics, and respect the diversity of color in the southwest. The use of bright color schemes should be justified by the overall design, and may not be appropriate in many contexts.
- p. Building trim and accent areas may feature different building materials and different colors than the building field color, including use of primary colors, if compatible with the architectural design.
- q. Buildings should have clearly defined customer entrance(s) incorporating elements such as:
- Canopies or porticos.
  - Overhangs.
  - Recesses/projections.
  - Arcades.
  - Raised corniced parapets over the door.
  - Peaked roof forms.
  - Arches.
  - Entrance framed by outdoor pedestrian features or enhanced landscaping.
  - Architectural details such as tile work and moldings integrated into the building structure to frame the entryway.
  - Integral planters or wing walls that incorporate landscaped areas and/or sitting areas.
  - Enhanced pedestrian surfaces.

### 3. Freestanding Accessory Structures:

Enclosed service/refuse areas and covered parking should be designed to be an integral part of the building architecture. The forms, colors, textures and materials used on the main building should be applied to all sides of these structures generally visible to the public.

- Use energy efficient lighting.
- **Mitigate urban heat island effects.**
- Reference national programs for environmentally sensitive development methods such as Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED), Int'l. Energy Conservation Code (IECC) and Energy Star Labeled Buildings.

### D. ENVIRONMENTAL SENSITIVITY:

While not specifically guideline items, the following measures that promote environmental sensitivity are offered for consideration by the development community:

- Orient and design new structures and additions for minimum solar gain, reflectivity and glare.
- Shelter entries and windows and use architectural shading devices and landscaping to minimize cooling losses.
- Use energy efficient materials in doors and windows.