



1

INTRODUCTION

- 1A **Structure of these Guidelines**
- 1B **Using these Guidelines**
- 1C **Coordination with Outside Agencies**
- 1D **Key Priorities and Values**
- 1E **By-right and Small Scale Development**

INTRODUCTION

The practice of urban design addresses the physical features that define the character of streets, public spaces, neighborhoods and communities. Urban design is used to align the desired scale and character of development with the social, economic and aesthetic values of a community.

Fairfax County is committed to achieving a high standard of urban design and architectural quality in its Commercial Revitalization Districts (CRDs) and Commercial Revitalization Areas (CRAs). CRDs and CRAs may be coincident in geography with the county's "Mixed-use Centers," as designated in the Comprehensive Plan. Mixed-use Centers are the portions of the County in which the Concept for Future Development and other county land use policies generally call for future growth to be concentrated. These include the Tysons Urban Center and the various suburban centers, Community Business Centers (CBCs), and Transit Station Areas (TSAs). Urban Design Guidelines for these areas are a means to provide best practices and detailed design suggestions for new development, redevelopment and capital projects to ensure that they integrate compatibly with their surroundings, function well, are aesthetically pleasing, support community vitality, and improve the overall livability of an area.

Purpose of these Guidelines

The *Urban Design Guidelines for Fairfax County Commercial Revitalization Districts and Areas* (Guidelines) are intended to guide the appearance, arrangement and function of the built environment in the CRDs and CRAs, with a particular emphasis on public spaces and streets. The Guidelines serve as a companion document to the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan (Plan) by elaborating upon the Plan's more general recommendations related to urban design, public spaces and streetscapes. The Guidelines further articulate the intent, objectives and performance recommendations contained in the Plan by conveying design ideas in greater detail, especially with regard to

street and streetscape design, building form and design, and site features, including interim development conditions.

As stated in the County's Strategic Plan for Economic Development, flexibility and agility in zoning and development review is necessary to respond to evolving development trends and technologies. The content in this document are designed to be applied as guidelines rather than as regulatory (mandatory) "one size fits all" requirements. The Guidelines are meant to offer design guidance only and there is flexibility in how or whether a design element or recommendation can be realized.

The Guidelines are intended to:

- provide a common language with which to discuss how to create developments that contribute to an attractive, vibrant and livable area;
- offer clarity on important aspects to consider in the design of developments;
- help facilitate the dialogue that occurs among stakeholders in the development review process;
- provide solutions that balance the desire for a high quality environment with the need for developments to be feasible;
- foster desirable and compatible development that responds to the surrounding context; and,
- encourage the design of communities of the highest quality, where each building and public space contributes positively to the overall character of the area.

1A

STRUCTURE OF THESE GUIDELINES

The Urban Design Guidelines for the County's CRDs and CRAs are comprised of two documents:

- **Volume I: Urban Design Guidelines for Fairfax County Commercial Revitalization Districts and Areas** describes urban design principles and best practices that are applicable generally to all CRDs and CRAs.
- **Volume II: District Design Guidelines** contains urban design guidelines for the various CRDs and CRAs that are tailored specifically to the individual area.

Thus, the Guidelines applicable to each CRD or CRA include not only the common design language articulated in Volume I, but also the distinct, district-specific guidelines included in Volume II.

In Volume I, Chapter 1 includes the purpose and use of the document. Chapters 2 through 6 contain urban design principles and strategies addressing specific topics including street and streetscape design (Chapter 2), open space design (Chapter 3), building design (Chapter 4), parking and access (Chapter 5), and additional placemaking elements, such as public signage, public art and water features (Chapter 6). Chapter 7 provides guidance on interim development conditions. An accompanying Appendix contains additional details, a toolbox of sustainable design

strategies, and reference materials. Chapters 2 through 6 are organized in the following manner:

- **Intent:** An introduction to each chapter describes the overarching purpose and intent of the chapter.
- **Topical Sections:** Each chapter is divided into sections that address a specific subject matter.
- **Design Principles:** The topical sections include design principles defining the goals and general urban design conditions necessary to achieve desired outcomes.
- **Design Strategies:** Each topical section also provides specific design strategies which, in some instances, include suggested materials and dimensional requirements for implementing the design principles.

Within the topical sections, local and national references are offered for additional information. Additional specifications—a tree plant list and planting details—are included in the Appendix, along with a toolbox of sustainable design strategies. References are hyperlinked within each section. The complete listing of all references and their web addresses is located in the Appendix.

1B USING THESE GUIDELINES

The Guidelines apply to development proposals for all properties located within the boundaries of the CRDs and CRAs. They are intended to be used by citizens, developers, land owners, designers, Fairfax County staff, the Fairfax County Planning Commission, and the Board of Supervisors when either proposing, designing or reviewing development proposals in CRDs and CRAs.

The two volumes of the Guidelines should be used together to inform strategic design decisions in planning for redevelopment, land use, transportation, and infrastructure. There may be instances where guidance provided in Volume II of the Guidelines may elaborate upon or contradict material provided in Volume I. In such instances, the guidance in Volume II supersedes the guidance in Volume I.

The Guidelines are not a substitute for the codes and ordinance provisions associated with the development review process. The Guidelines are meant to offer design guidance only. There is flexibility in how a design element may be realized, provided the design intent can be achieved. As such, the Guidelines are not prescriptive; architectural style, specific street furnishings, plant species, or exact paver types are not dictated. Rather, the Guidelines present a palette of design options that provide flexibility and allow for innovation. Designers and property owners are encouraged to use the Guidelines as a frame of reference when making specific design decisions as long as the selections meet the intent laid out in the Guidelines.

FLEXIBILITY

There will be instances where the urban design and streetscape recommendations outlined in the Plan and these Guidelines cannot be accommodated in the manner envisioned, even with reasonable adjustment and flexibility. Where pre-existing site constraints are present, or where infill or expansion of buildings or other existing features limits the ability of a development to satisfy the urban design recommendations, or when modifications to the streetscape guidance are necessary to conform to applicable County and/or Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) requirements and guidelines, variations may be permitted on a case-by-case basis using the following criteria:

- The inability to conform to the recommendations is demonstrated through written and/or graphic evidence; and,
- Deviations are as minimal as possible; and,
- Modifications still meet the intent of the Plan and the Guidelines.

FUTURE MODIFICATIONS

Finally, as CRDs and CRAs, and their surrounding neighborhoods, develop and evolve, the Guidelines may need to be amended to respond to those changing conditions. In addition, new technologies, maintenance challenges, and innovations may provide opportunities for different design strategies, new products, materials, etc., which should be reflected in updated versions of these Guidelines.



Chapel Hill, NC



Boston, MA

TOP LEFT

The Guidelines encourage the use of durable, renewable materials in public spaces such as this LEED-ND project
Image Credit: Peyton Chung

TOP RIGHT

Integration of quality public spaces into a development is key to its contribution towards a livable community
Image Credit: Reed Hilderbrand



Liverpool, England

BOTTOM

The Guidelines provide recommendations to improve the public realm, including streetscape areas such as this example from England
Image Credit: ADP Architecture

1C

COORDINATION WITH OUTSIDE AGENCIES

The potential exists for conflicts to occur between utilities and pedestrian features, particularly in the streetscape. To avoid such conflicts, utility easements, utility boxes, and access to equipment require special consideration in the design process. Dominion Energy, Washington Gas, Fairfax Water, communications providers, and other utility companies should be consulted early in the design process. On-going planning and coordination among project designers, the County and the various utility providers is essential to ensure that utilities and utility equipment are located appropriately.

In addition to Fairfax County, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and the various utility companies are involved in decisions affecting the installation of roads, utilities and streetscape features, particularly those in the public right-of-way.

Coordination with VDOT is critical for projects that include the installation of improvements within its right-of-way. VDOT requires a permit for any installation proposed within its right-of-way, including planting beds, paving and street furniture. During project design, all proposed improvements should be reviewed with VDOT staff. VDOT's [Northern Virginia Planting Guidelines](#), [Road Design Manual](#), and [Road and Bridge Specifications](#) should be consulted and can be found on VDOT's website.

VDOT classifies most streetscapes within its right-of-way as either standard or non-standard. Standard streetscapes include certain street trees, grass and concrete sidewalks. Non-standard streetscapes are those that deviate from the standard by incorporating additional components or unique materials, such as pavers. VDOT requires that all non-standard streetscapes be maintained by the property owner and, in some instances, a maintenance bond will be required to ensure that these components will be maintained over the long term.

RIGHT

The development process requires early and ongoing coordination with Fairfax County, VDOT, and a range of utility providers, including Fairfax Water, Washington Gas, and Dominion Energy



1D KEY VALUES AND PRIORITIES

These Guidelines advance four key values that reflect County priorities: social equity; sustainability; maintenance and durability; and smart city infrastructure. These provide an underlying framework that is reflected in the design principles and strategies articulated in the remainder of this document.



SOCIAL EQUITY

Design decisions affecting the built and natural environment should take into account social equity and environment sustainability. Efforts should include creating green spaces, supporting a high quality of life, and promoting employment opportunities, housing, amenities and services for all people. CRDs, CRAs and other mixed-use activity centers are uniquely positioned to support diverse lifestyles and provide opportunities for growth and mobility because of their higher level of transit accessibility, access to jobs and services, range of housing types and prices, and recreational opportunities.

In 2017, the [One Fairfax Policy](#) was adopted jointly by the Board of Supervisors, the School Board, and the Park Authority. This policy established the framework that is used to consider equity in decision-making in both the County government and the school system. These Guidelines incorporate the principles of One Fairfax, particularly as they relate to improvements to multimodal connectivity and parks and open spaces. Development proposals should embrace the One Fairfax policy by contributing to the creation of sustainable and equitable places.



TOP LEFT

Sustainable practices, such as ensuring that new trees are planted with sufficient root space to promote sustained long term growth, are a key aspect of these Guidelines
Image Credit: Silva Cell

BOTTOM LEFT

Stakeholders participating in development of design concepts for the vision for a community
Image Credit: Fairfax County

BOTTOM RIGHT

One Fairfax is a policy established to consider equity as part of the County's decision-making process
Image Credit: Fairfax County

SUSTAINABILITY

Fairfax County is committed to achieving a sustainable community. In 2017, the Board of Supervisors updated its environmental vision document entitled [Sustainable Initiatives](#), which includes, “an overarching vision to attain a quality environment that provides for a high quality of life and is sustainable for future generations. These aspects of a quality environment are essential for everyone living and working in Fairfax County. No matter what income, age, gender, ethnicity, or address, everyone has a need and right to breathe clean air, to drink clean water, and to live and work in a quality environment.”

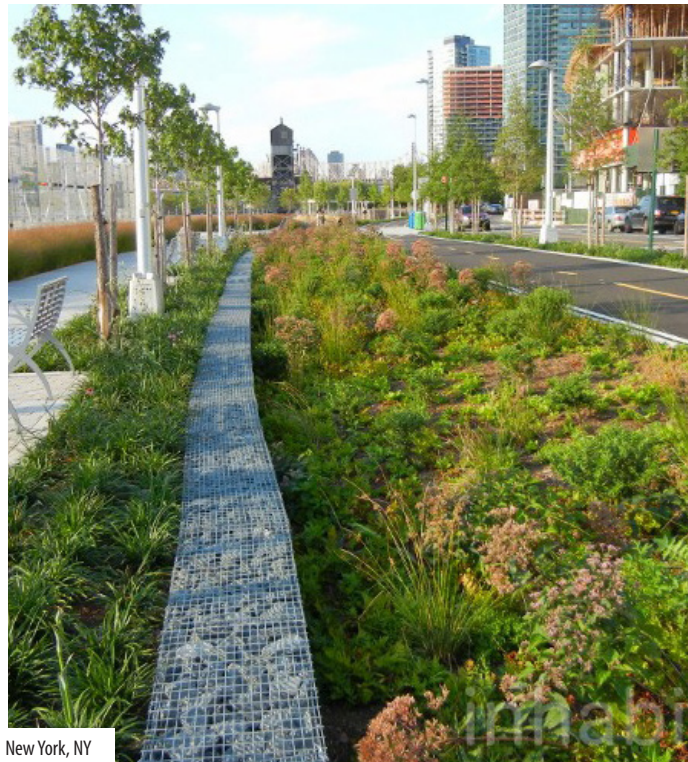
New developments should contribute to this County vision. This can take many forms, such as creating a walkable and

bikeable environment; supporting transit services; achieving a compact development; increasing green space and tree canopy; integrating energy efficiency measures and energy production; conserving water and other resources; reducing and recycling waste; and, integrating existing architecturally and culturally significant themes and buildings into new development.

There are many resources that elaborate on the County's sustainability goals and that provide specific guidance for achieving the desired outcomes. These include: the [Environment Section of the Policy Plan](#) of the Comprehensive Plan, the Heritage Resources Section of the [Policy Plan](#), and the Fairfax County [Annual Report of the Environmental Quality Advisory Council](#), among others.

LEFT

Streetscape with low-maintenance plantings that also function as bioretention facility, capturing runoff from the adjacent non-porous surfaces while reducing urban heat island effect and increasing native pollinators
Image Credit: Yuka Yoneda, Inhabitat



New York, NY

RIGHT

Obtaining LEED certification is one way to demonstrate a project's commitment to sustainability
Image Credit: City of Sandy Springs, GA



Sandy Springs, GA

MAINTENANCE AND DURABILITY

An urban environment that is low-maintenance and consists of durable materials that weather and age well over time is important in achieving a sustainable and adaptable public realm. The use of high quality and wear-resistant materials for streetscape surfaces should be a priority for all projects. Public spaces require adaptable designs that can accommodate changing demands, as the use of these spaces may evolve over time.

The long-term maintenance of sidewalks, trees, landscaping, paving, furnishings, lighting, park facilities, and other components of the public realm is a chief consideration of these Guidelines. Specifications were selected based in part on the anticipated level of durability and maintenance.



San Francisco, CA

SMART CITY

Smart City technologies utilize electronic data collection to supply information which is used to manage assets and resources efficiently. These technologies improve sustainability, encourage economic development, and enhance quality of life factors for people living and working in such areas. Collected data can be used to monitor and manage transportation systems; power and water supply; waste management; law enforcement; and, systems as diverse as schools, hospitals, and other community services. Examples of this technology that relate to these Guidelines include, but are not limited to, the incorporation of broadband services into benches, programmable street lighting, smart trash bins that monitor capacity, and transit facilities that provide real-time information for passengers. Smart City features are rapidly evolving; developments should incorporate these evolving technologies where feasible.



Minneapolis, MN

LEFT

Scored, poured-in-place concrete sidewalks provide a consistent, durable, and low-maintenance surface most suitable for persons with disabilities and strollers
Image Credit: Prado Group

RIGHT

Bus stop with real-time information - an example of smart city technology
Image Credit: NACTO

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BY-RIGHT AND SMALL-SCALE DEVELOPMENT

By-right development projects are those that can be built without going through the rezoning, special exception, special permit, or variance process including public hearings, because the proposed development conforms to the property's zoning regulations. While it is anticipated that the primary users of these Guidelines will be those who are pursuing zoning applications, applicants seeking to do by-right development projects should also consult these Guidelines and implement their recommendations to the extent feasible. Feasibility is dependent on site-specific factors such as size of the proposed development, the scale of the site, and the proposed uses.

Small-scale and infill development generally refers to single sites that are less than one acre in size and are planned for a single use. These sites may have difficulty achieving some of the recommendations in the Guidelines because they may be unable to provide, for example, structured parking, or be mixed-use, or may have other constraints that limit design opportunities. In these instances, projects should adhere to the Guidelines to the extent feasible (*See Graphic 1: Small Scale Development*).

All by-right, small-scale, or infill development projects should address the following:

1. Developments should incorporate components of the Comprehensive Plan's ultimate condition wherever feasible and should facilitate, and not preclude, long-term planning objectives such as transportation improvements, utility undergrounding, and future parks, among other public facilities.
2. All projects should provide for multimodal connectivity where feasible to ensure that pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular facilities are consistent and continuous across the site and to between adjacent properties. For example, incorporating a bicycle lane within the right-of-way of a site may be necessary to provide a continuous facility along a corridor.
3. Sidewalks and associated landscaping should be provided, as they are essential to achieving a consistent, safe, and walkable environment for pedestrians, and for placemaking.
4. New buildings should adhere to build-to lines (theoretical lines on the ground, typically located at the edge of the Building Zone, to which building frontages should align), as depicted in the street cross-sections in Volume II: District Design Guidelines.
5. When surface parking is unavoidable, design opportunities should be employed to creatively integrate parking and vehicle circulation into the site so it is less obtrusive to the visual appearance of the area and so that it provides safe and comfortable pedestrian access to the building and along the street frontage. For example, locating the parking on the side or rear of the site and placing the building at the front edge of the Building Zone is essential to transforming revitalization districts and areas to a more urban form.

GRAPHIC 1: SMALL SCALE DEVELOPMENT

