

III. Commercial Development Within The Urban-Rural Demarcation Line

A. Main Street

III. COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE URBAN-RURAL DEMARCATION LINE

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a. MAIN STREET CONCEPT

Economists refer to “Main Streets” as a collection of independent small businesses lined along streets across the US. In Baltimore County, these types of streets have long been an integral part of the urbanized areas. They are: York Road through Towson, Harford Road through Parkville, Eastern Boulevard through Essex, Dundalk Avenue through Dundalk, Frederick Road through Catonsville, Main Street through Reisterstown, and Reisterstown Road through Pikesville. While each has its own character, they also have many commonalities. As a rule, Main Streets consist of gateways and a core, are commercial in nature, but contain mixed retail, office, and residential uses.

With the advent of automobiles, from the 1950s onward, the creation of shopping malls/centers rapidly proliferated throughout the suburban areas. This had severely undermined the liveliness of Main Streets and posed threats to their survival. The impact of the global pandemic, Covid-19, which emerged in 2020, further reveals the dire situation of businesses along Main Streets, and for many, forcing small businesses to be closed permanently. The loss is not just the vibrancy of our communities but also the livability and character of our local neighborhoods.

Over the decades, buildings located along such streets have undergone numerous renovations and distinct architectural features are now often hidden behind facades that are of questionable aesthetic quality. With the increasing awareness of historic preservation, the historic character of main streets is being viewed as an invaluable asset that could be a driving force for tourist development (economic growth) as well as a vital feature for fostering the sense of place, pride, and identity to locals. To further sustain liveliness and growth of these streets, the principles of Smart Growth and Sustainability are being incorporated in design intent and approaches. It is the purpose of these guidelines to provide direction where the future improvement (development or redevelopment) of Main Streets is concerned and to stimulate creativity.

b. SITE PLANNING

1. Continue the existing building edge.

- (a) Continue the existing building edge, i.e., build new structures to the sidewalk with zero setback from the property line. Large setbacks with front yard parking shall be prohibited.
- (b) Incorporate elements of existing buildings into the architectural design of new structures, but do not duplicate existing forms. Construction of standardized “franchise” type structures is strongly discouraged.

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- (c) Multi-story (two/three) mixed-use developments are encouraged, but should not exceed height range of existing buildings.
- (d) Outdoor storage or loading areas should be kept in the rear and screened and rear entrances should be kept clear at all times.

C. LANDSCAPING AND OPEN SPACE

The Baltimore County Landscape Manual ([hyperlink](#)) is to be used in companion with the CMDP Guidelines with the same emphasis and importance.

LANDSCAPING

1. Use Main Street elements to reinforce existing character.

- (a) Create a sense of entry to the Main Street. Identify entry points by utilizing such elements as street trees, curbed or boxed planters, lighting fixtures or combinations thereof.
- (b) Building height should relate proportionally to street width. Where appropriate, design narrow streets with wide sidewalks, or establish islands that protrude into the street at regular intervals. Furnish such islands with street trees, boxed planters or

architectural light fixtures. Landscaped central median strips also effect a visual reduction of street scale.

2. Incorporate sustainable design approaches.

- (a) Provide smaller green infrastructure treatments, such as bioretention planters, stormwater tree wells, or tree trenches.
- (b) When feasible, incorporate green walls or roofs in architectural design to create an attractive look as well as to increase green areas.

OPEN SPACE

1. Provide social gathering space

- (a) Develop a system of small civic spaces that provides seating in sun and shade, as well as vandal proof trash receptacles. Accent the walks and civic spaces with landscaping providing seasonal interest and color.
- (b) Encourage restaurants and cafes to provide outdoor seating. Utilize awnings to protect pedestrians from inclement weather and to reinforce continuity of the built edge.
- (c) If sidewalks are not wide enough, parklets or similar measures should be permitted to increase outdoor seating as a way to enhance vibrancy.

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- (d) Incorporate seating and placemaking elements in the planting or furnishing zones or the bioretention facility wall.
- (e) New developments should fulfill a community function or use within a portion of the site.
- (f) Emphasis should be placed on creating animated spaces that are usable year-round.

- (d) Parking areas should include low walls or landscaping element to buffer parking areas from the street edge.

2. Support alternative transportation.

- (a) All developments should meet Complete Streets requirements: <https://resources.baltimorecountymd.gov/Documents/Planning/cmdp/bcompletestreets.pdf>
- (b) Provisions for transit facilities where feasible shall be included.
- (c) Establish bicycle lanes where sufficient space is available. Provide bicycle racks. (See [BCZR § 409.14. Bicycle parking.](#))
- (d) Baltimore County's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan shall be considered when Main Street development is designed: <https://baltimorecountybikeped.weebly.com/>
- (e) Create a pedestrian-friendly environment through uniform paving texture and identification of pedestrian crosswalks.
- (f) Install electric vehicle charging stations where feasible.

d. CIRCULATION AND PARKING

1. Reinforce existing parking patterns.

- (a) Retain curbside parking where appropriate. Consolidate rear yard parking lots and reduce the number of access drives. Clearly designate all off-site parking areas.
- (b) Where they exist, use alleys for access and parking, but do not locate service areas on the side of buildings facing residential uses. Where loading and service areas are located at curbside, they should be designed to minimize traffic impacts and be clearly designated. Delivery times and access routes should be established during off peak times.
- (c) Planting strips, landscaped traffic islands and/or paving articulation should be used to define vehicle routes and smaller parking courts that provide pedestrian walkways, improve edge conditions and minimize the negative visual impact of surface parking.

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e. ARCHITECTURE/BUILDING FEATURES

1. Reinforce distinct architectural features

- (a) Incorporate subtle but distinct color schemes that create a sense of continuity and reinforce a common theme. Bright colors are appropriate as accents or trims, but are not recommended for large surface areas of buildings. Color schemes for new buildings should relate to schemes found within the existing character of the main street.
- (b) Screen all mechanical equipment on roof tops from pedestrian view.
- (c) Utilize roof forms to provide visual interest. Pitched roofs constructed of metal (with standing seams) or wood shakes or shingles are recommended. Exaggerated cornices, parapets or other projecting features should be considered for flat roofed buildings.
- (d) Retain the proportion of existing buildings, i.e., create clear separation between the first floor (storefront) and upper floor. Residential structures converted to commercial uses should select storefront and window types that are compatible with upper facade.

- (e) Building walls facing adjoining properties should incorporate details such as windows, doors, color, texture, or landscaping to provide visual interest.
- (f) Design chain stores and franchises to fit in the local site context to avoid the corporate design.
- (g) The rear of the building or any exposed sides should be finished in similar materials as the principal street façade where exposed to right-of-way or residential development.

2. Utilize sustainable building design, building materials, and measures.

- (a) Materials used to construct buildings are highly recommended to be locally sourced and/or LEED certified.
- (b) Utilization of natural and durable materials, such as stone, masonry, and cementitious siding are recommended. Facade treatments with synthetic, flimsy or highly reflective materials such as vinyl, formstone, T-111 (wood or wood-based siding products) or mirror glass are strongly discouraged.
- (c) Materials from the existing building that would be demolished to build new one are encouraged to be recycled and incorporated into the new building.
- (d) Incorporate sustainable building materials for building facades that are durable, easily maintained and weather resistant.
- (e) Integrate water recycling systems and solar generators within architectural design.

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3. Enhance the vibrancy and safety of Main Street

- (a) Façades should incorporate articulation features such as projections, recesses, nooks, corners, ledges, and small setbacks along the building length.
- (b) Windows of the retail spaces along streets should allow people outside to see in and vice versa.
- (c) Rooftop seating areas are encouraged.

- (c) Signs should only advertise the businesses within.
- (d) New shop windows shall allow for display of stores' products. Opaque or posterized windows shall not be allowed.
- (e) Secondary signs, such as portable signs (sandwich boards) can add life to the street, but these signs must be located to not interfere with pedestrian travel areas.
- (f) Window signs should be limited to (25%) of the window size and should not block the view of displays in windows.
- (g) New buildings shall incorporate signage to be an integral feature of the building façade, rather than a dominating overlay feature.

f. SIGNAGE AND LIGHTING

SIGNAGE

1. Signage should be an integral part of the building design.

- (a) Signage should reinforce the Main Street character, be subordinate to the building and not exceed the width of the storefront. Signs should be hung within the building height. Large roof structures with perpendicular signage are not recommended.
- (b) Utilization of durable materials, subdued colors and professionally executed graphic design is encouraged. Signs should be compatible with those of adjacent buildings in style, size, color, shape and graphic design. A proposed sign should not dominate other signs.

LIGHTING

1. Light fixtures should be consistent throughout the area

- (a) Light fixtures should be compatible with building design and should be consistent throughout the Main Street core. They should be located in a manner that contributes to the pedestrian environment.

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- (b) Lighting should be appropriate for its location. Cut-off lighting should be provided adjacent to residences, pedestrian scale lighting should be provided along the street.
- (c) Site lighting should be provided along the sides and rear of buildings. Where secondary entrances exist, adequate lighting and visibility should be maintained to ensure pedestrian safety.

- (f) Should be durable and low-maintenance.
- (g) Should not impede pedestrian or vehicular movements.
- (h) Art and murals should not advertise business activity.

2. Use sustainable light and energy practices

- (a) Solar powered lighting is encouraged.
- (b) Incorporate energy-efficient lighting options, such as LED (Light Emitting Diode), sodium vapor, metal halide, T fluorescent, and compact fluorescent.

g. PUBLIC ART

1. Public art should be encouraged for the general public and should be used to enhance the unique culture and history of Main Street. It can be in any media, form, function and meaning.

- (b) Public art should be place-specific.
- (c) Should be located at key destination within the main street with a focus on reflecting the heritage and character of the area.
- (d) Public art is encouraged with private developments
- (e) Should be visibly and physically accessible.

h. MAIN STREET MARYLAND PROGRAM

Main Street Maryland (MSM) is a comprehensive downtown revitalization program created in 1998 by the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (the Department). The mission of the program is to accelerate the economic progress and revitalization of Maryland's traditional main streets and neighborhoods. The primary objective of the Main Street approach is to foster economic development in the State's core communities, preserving local historic and cultural resources while promoting new investment and business development. This approach emphasizes the importance of working simultaneously in the following areas:

- Organization: Building consensus and cooperation among the many groups and individuals who have a role in the revitalization process.
- Economic Vitality: Strengthening the district's existing economic base while finding ways to expand it to meet new opportunities and challenges from outlying development.

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- Promotion: Marketing the traditional commercial district's assets to customers, potential investors, new businesses, local citizens and visitors.
- Design: Enhancing the physical appearance of the commercial district by rehabilitating historic buildings, encouraging supportive new construction, developing sensitive design management systems, and long-term planning.
- Clean, Safe, and Green: Enhancing the perception of a community through the principles of Smart Growth and sustainability.

For access to information on Main Street Maryland, visit the state website at the link below:

<https://dhcd.maryland.gov/communities/pages/programs/mainstreet.aspx>

There are 33 communities in the State but only 2 Maryland Main Streets and 1 Affiliate in Baltimore County. For additional information, visit the link below:

<https://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/departments/planning/communityplanning/mainstreet.html>

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THE ABOVE-DESCRIBED SERVICE OR SUPPLY CONTRACT IS SUBJECT TO THE PROVISIONS OF THE FEDERAL ACQUISITION REGULATION (FAR) AND ANY OTHER APPLICABLE FAR PROVISIONS.

