

III. Commercial Development Within The Urban-Rural Demarcation Line

D. Office

III. COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE URBAN-RURAL DEMARCATION LINE

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INTRODUCTION

The majority of non-residential zones within Baltimore County allow for the construction of new office buildings. The RO, O-1, O-2, O-3, and OT are specifically designated for office use. In addition, the industrial zones (ML, MLR, MR, MH, SE) and business zones (BL, BM, or BR) also allow for the construction of new office buildings.

The purpose of this section is to provide general guidelines that will be used by the County to evaluate the project design as required by the development review process. These guidelines were established to review office, self-storage and flex warehouse type uses.

Office design projects in the RO, O-1, O-2, O-3, and OT are subject to compatibility as per Section 32-4-402(d) of the Baltimore County Code.

Definition

Design compatibility is a similar relationship between the surrounding neighborhood's dominant design elements – site, landscape, and architectural features – and a proposed office development.

Intent

Development proposals will be evaluated according to each objective. However, variations from the objectives may be considered when compensated by design improvements which contribute to and benefit the overall environment. The example are illustrative and not regulatory. Creative design solutions and alternatives are encouraged.

Objectives (Sec. 32-4-402.(d))

- 1. Context:** "The arrangement and orientation of the proposed buildings and site improvements are patterned in a similar manner to those in the neighborhood."
- 2. Building Placement:** "The building and parking lot layouts reinforce existing building and streetscape patterns and assure that the placement of buildings and parking lots have no adverse impact on the neighborhood."
- 3. Site Circulation:** "The proposed streets are connected with the existing neighborhood road network wherever possible and the proposed sidewalks are located to support the functional patterns of the neighborhood."

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4. Open Space: “The open spaces of the proposed development reinforce the open space patterns of the neighborhood in form and siting and complement existing open space systems.”

5. Site Feature: “Locally significant features of the site such as distinctive buildings or vistas are integrated into the site design.”

6. Landscaping: “The proposed landscape design complements the neighborhood’s landscape patterns and reinforces its functional qualities.”

7. Accessory Structures: “The exterior signs, site lighting and accessory structures support a uniform architectural theme and present a harmonious visual relationship with the surrounding neighborhood.”

8. Building Detail: “The scale, proportions, massing, and detailing of the proposed buildings are in proportion to those existing in the neighborhood.”

NOTE: Objectives 7 and 8 are more challenging considerations and more difficult to succinctly illustrate. Scale, proportion and massing are key to proposing an acceptable solution. There is an understanding that the floor plate area and the floor to floor dimensions for

commercial office development differs from typical single family detached construction. If such a site is adjacent to a residential neighborhood then the main concern is with the reduction of apparent size and bulk. The accessory features of the site should be designed to blend in with the overall design theme.

a. SITE PLANNING

1. Locate the buildings, parking facilities, and accessory structures to utilize the existing topography and slopes.

- (a) The site plan design should take advantage of views, natural site drainage, preserve striking land forms and water features, and incorporate existing vegetation to the fullest extent possible.
- (b) The placements of buildings on a site should conform to the undisturbed land form. Use the existing vegetation on site to enhance the building locations or parking areas.
- (c) Organize buildings around natural or man made open space features.

2. Accessory structures, service areas and mechanical equipment should be designed as integral components of the site.



- (a) Screen and fence trash dumpsters, sheds and mechanical equipment with materials and design features that are the same as or complementary to the building. Landscape treatment at these locations should act as a visual buffer.
- (b) Dumpsters should be located in areas that are functional, but not visually imposing from streets or residential areas.

3. The location of buildings should reinforce the street as a center of activity.

- (a) Locate the longest side of a building parallel to the public right-of-way. The front yard setback should not substantially (+5%) deviate from adjacent structures unless such structures do not conform to the overall area character.
- (b) The building orientation and design should reflect and contribute to the neighborhood character.

4. Provide and incorporate pedestrian and bicycle access into the site and building design.

- (a) Landscaped, tree-lined walkways should be used as connections between buildings, buildings to streets, or buildings to parking areas.
- (b) Incorporate recessed sitting areas into the walk or pathway system
- (c) Incorporate bicycle facilities into the site and building design.

b. CIRCULATION AND PARKING

1. Circulation and parking should reinforce safe and efficient pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular movement.

- (a) The main entrance serves as the dominant ingress and egress point into a development.
- (b) Curb cuts should be consolidated to the extent feasible or practical.
- (c) Access points into a development site should be located to minimize the impact on adjoining residential communities.
- (d) The vehicular access points should facilitate traffic movement through the site.

2. Transit should be an integral part of project circulation.

- (a) The provision of bus shelters, or signs and pathways should be incorporated into the development.

3. The landscaping and paving dimensions within the street rights-of-way provide a sense of identity and orientation.

- (a) The streetscape design and features should reflect those of the surrounding community. For example, boulevards should contain tall compact trees, commercial corridors should have tall canopy trees, and urban areas should have appropriate sidewalk furniture and tree placements.

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- (b) Street widths should be designed to reflect existing patterns and hierarchy.

4. 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.

c. LANDSCAPING AND OPEN SPACE

LANDSCAPING

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

1. Landscaping should create and define street image, entranceways, screen storage and loading areas, provide buffers adjacent to residential uses, shade parking lots and integrate the building design with the site design.

- (a) Street trees, streetscape furnishings, and details should be used for continuity between project sites and for pedestrian access along streets.
- (b) Plantings at points of entry define and accent building and site access (pedestrian as well as vehicular).
- (c) Use vegetation to provide a natural screen and buffer commercial office use from residential neighborhoods.
- (d) Plant shade trees along walkways through parking lots to visually interrupt the parking bays. Shade trees will also reduce heat and glare and help to define traffic patterns and movements.

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2. Enhance environmental protection.

- (a) Incorporate permeable paving materials to infiltrate and manage stormwater onsite, such as reinforced grass/gravel pavement systems, porous asphalt and concrete, and permeable interlocking concrete pavers.

OPEN SPACE

2. Design the open space network and amenities as an integral part of the overall site plan to take advantage of landscaping features and undevelopable areas.

- (a) Provide small areas for active or passive use by employees such as picnic tables, benches, and other areas for sitting, eating, or meeting.
- (b) Provide access to the open space network. Take advantage of the space between buildings to include a courtyard or site feature.
- (c) Use undevelopable areas as open space features or as buffers between uses.

d. ARCHITECTURE/BUILDING FEATURES

1. Encourage architectural style of the building or buildings to be highly articulate and the design should complement existing residential uses and/or adjacent buildings.

- (a) **Proportion:** Buildings designed to express the base, shaft and crown provide a sense of proportion and appear visually interesting.
- (b) **Mass:** Vary and articulate building elements to visually and dimensionally interrupt the bulk of the building. Two ways to do this include highlighting entranceways and establishing focal points. The bulk and general massing of a building should not significantly exceed the horizontal and vertical dimensions and volume of adjacent buildings in the surrounding area.
- (c) **Scale:** Buildings should relate to surrounding development by designing tapering heights and setbacks, repeating established patterns and modules and siting the building with similar setbacks.

2. Encourage intriguing design character through the creative use of materials and design details. Building elements create focal points and establish hierarchy.

- (a) **Pattern:** Vary the window and wall relationship to reflect existing patterns prevalent within the community.
- (b) **Detail:** The architectural character and stylistic features should be derived from examples of surrounding development and regional patterns. The building entrance, base and window pattern are opportunities for special detail and accent.

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- (c) **Roof:** The roof treatment is an integral part of the building design and the design should incorporate the style and pitch of roofs found in the surrounding community. Screen rooftop mechanical equipment or locate the equipment so that it is not visible.

- (b) Illuminated signs will be allowed. External lighting should only be applied to the sign face.
- (c) The design and materials of a sign should complement and be similar to those used for the building.

3. Sustainability.

- (a) Buildings should be designed to achieve green building standards equivalent to the silver standard of either the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) or the National Green Building Standards (NGBS).
- (b) Incorporate solar panels, water recycle systems or other systems in architectural design to mitigate energy and water consumption and optimize energy use.

e. SIGNAGE AND LIGHTING

SIGNAGE

1. Signage serves as a focal point for information to identify the location and nature of a business.

- (a) Signage design should improve the visual continuity of the area; it should not serve as a distraction.

LIGHTING

1. Lighting fixtures should be designed to provide continuity within the project as well as with the surrounding community.

- (a) Lighting standards adjacent to residential areas should not exceed 18 feet in height and should be designed to prevent spillover of light onto the adjoining residences.
- (b) The footcandles produced should be appropriate for the use proposed. The illumination of the building and site features (parking lots, walkways or entrances, etc.) should not exceed the needed level and appropriately sized for its purpose.
- (c) Use sustainable light and energy practices:
 1. Solar powered lighting is encouraged.
 2. Incorporate energy-efficient lighting options, such as LED (Light Emitting Diode), sodium vapor, metal halide, T fluorescent, and compact fluorescent.