



Town of New Canaan Village District Design Guidelines



EFFECTIVE JUNE 30TH 2010

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OVERVIEW

These design guidelines strive to maintain and enhance New Canaan's small town way of life, rural character, historic value and scenic charm. They strive to create a sustainable environment, by utilizing energy conscious design and conservation, while encouraging the use of forms and materials that are human in scale, historic in feel and allow expression of New Canaan's sense of community and distinctive style. The design guidelines are intended to be a guide to help navigate through the review process.

Purpose and Authority for Design Review

As noted in the 2003 Plan of Conversation and Development, New Canaan's history and evolution have resulted in a central business district surrounded by residential zones of decreasing density. This compact Town Center distinguishes New Canaan from surrounding towns, and is consistently identified as substantially contributing to community character. Each of the retail and business zones, comprising the Town Center, is designated in the Zoning Regulations as a Village District. Accordingly, Design Review is authorized for the retail and business zones in Article 4 of the Zoning Regulations. The Commission views the Town Center as a comprehensive Village District. These design guidelines for the Village District expand and amplify those set forth in section 6.12 of the Zoning Regulations.

Design Review provides a framework for citizens, developers and interested persons to work toward achieving a better-built environment through attention given to fundamental design principles. Design Review is intended to affect how new development can contribute positively to New Canaan's historic Village District setting. Design guidelines offer a flexible tool, an alternative to prescriptive zoning requirements, and will allow new development to respond better to the distinctive character of its surroundings.

Design Review has four principal objectives:

1. To encourage site planning and architectural design that will maintain and enhance the character of the New Canaan Village District and ensure that new development sensitively fits into the village;
2. To provide guidance and flexibility in the application of development standards;
3. To improve communication and participation among developers, neighbors and the town early in the design and siting of new or reconstructed commercial or mixed-use development.
4. To identify items that impact the quality of life and livability of the Village District.

Design Review is one of the components of the permit application, along with environmental review, building department review, variances, etc. Unlike some other components, projects subject to Design Review are brought before the Planning & Zoning Commission for consideration only after staff and the Design Review Subcommittee have conducted a Preliminary Administrative Design Review. The Planning & Zoning Commission makes the final decision on Design Review.

Context and Design Issues

The New Canaan Village District design guidelines are based on the character of the Village District as known to its residents and businesses. The guidelines help to reinforce existing character and protect the qualities that the Town of New Canaan values most in the face of change.

The overriding objective of the design guidelines is to ensure that new development fits in well with its surroundings and is in keeping with the village feel of downtown New Canaan. The following design guidelines share this objective, and with an emphasis on design conditions and priorities supported by the community, aim to guide the design of new development in a manner that strengthens the village's mixed-use character. The community has clearly stated its desire to maintain the small town atmosphere and the qualities that have historically characterized the Village District. However, it was also recognized that new development provides the opportunity for a broader mix of businesses and services, residential units and employment and an expanded tax-base. New development also provides the opportunity to create an energy efficient and a responsible community built environment.

In addition, New Canaan has a noted history of architectural innovation and style. Notably, the infusion of modern architecture within the fabric of many of New Canaan's neighborhoods has added to the rich fabric of the community and should not be discouraged.

OVERALL GOALS OF THE DESIGN GUIDELINES FALL INTO FIVE CATEGORIES:

1.0 ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

Elements and materials that respect and strengthen the Village District are encouraged in new building design. The quality of New Canaan's built environment can be characterized as a mix of buildings that are architecturally interesting, interspersed with others having an indistinct style or character, and therefore a selective approach to contextual design is warranted. New development should respond to New Canaan's context by providing enough visual linkages between the existing stock of historic buildings and the proposed structure. The goal is to create a cohesive overall impact that utilize basic features such as window proportions, entryway placements, decorative elements and materials. For example, many of the area's most successful buildings exhibit human scale window proportions and bold cornices. Repeating such elements in new development would continue an appropriate pattern.



Drawing from traditional forms and materials, this commercial building fits well on the street. The building height is reduced by the use of a lowered story and material change in the corner of the building. Attention to design detail gives the building human scale and visual interest.



The use of color reinforces the historical character of this commercial building and the use of traditional New England building elements; cornice, columns and capital and the oculus window set in the pediment reflect the Downtown Village District building character.



New development and adaptive reuse of structures can complement the design character of New Canaan's historic structures. The design of this building is based on traditional forms and materials and with the introduction of expressive brick detailing at window openings and the introduction of large glass areas help to enhance the character of this contemporary building.



The painted white window frames on red brick are a good example of New England historical character. The proportion of the window mullions reflects the office use on the 2nd floor and wider spacing on the ground floor works well for pedestrians and retail display. The height of the building and the balustrade capping the roof create character and give this building historic reference.



This building has a close relationship with the pedestrian environment and is a good example of a corner building. The geometry change at the intersection of 2 streets forms a good transition to the next street. The height of the building is diminished by the introduction of the wood colonnade. The use of color breaks up the red brick while creating interest and defining the lower portion of the building. This also allows for a consistent location for building signage.

2.0 HEIGHT, BULK AND SCALE COMPATIBILITY

New Canaan’s small town “feel” is expressed in the existing architecture. One way to preserve and continue the small town quality in new development is through the siting, massing and design of new buildings. New development in the Village District must be consistent with the height, bulk and scale of the other structures in the Village District.





The height of this building has been diminished by the introduction of the entrance canopy overhang and the introduction of painted wood siding and richly detailed red brick. The strong cornice and repetitive dormers help to reduce the horizontal and vertical size of the building. The appearance of a very long front elevation is diminished by the changing of the roof slope and turning the building 90 degrees at the corners. Also the introductions of landscape features help reduce the appearance of a very large building.

3.0 SITE PLANNING FOR A HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

In general, the placement of new development should be aesthetically pleasing and fit in contextually with the historic buildings in and near the Village District. Particular consideration should be given to the impacts any new development or redevelopment might have if adjacent to or in close proximity to the Historic District. New development, or renovation and additions, should reflect these principles by enhancing Village District streetscapes, and should screen parking, utilities and other commercial necessities from the street.



This commercial building fits in well with the residential character of the Village District. The adaptive reuse of this structure into a commercial office building retains the residential character by the introduction of a wooden fence, and the decorative landscape further reinforces such character.

4.0 SITE PLANNING FOR A PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT

A pedestrian oriented streetscape is a very important characteristic to be achieved in any new development in New Canaan's Village District. New in-fill development within the Village District should set the precedent in establishing desirable siting and design characteristics, such as:

- Creating continuous pedestrian interest and activity;
- Exterior lighting should be shielded and there should be minimal interior lighting when the place of business is not operating.
- Including street trees, benches, planters and plantings; and
- Providing small seating areas or other areas for human interaction.

Active and potential pedestrian circulation corridors should be sought. There are many current pedestrian circulation routes that involve access to town property by traversing private properties. If redevelopment is proposed for any of these private properties, these circulation patterns should be preserved through easement or other permissible means. In addition, if there are properties that are proposed to be redeveloped that do not contain pedestrian corridors, but could potentially serve as a link to other pedestrian routes, easements or other means should be sought to obtain these routes.

5.0 ENVIRONMENTAL / SUSTAINABLE DESIGN STANDARDS

Traditional and past development and construction practices have contributed to light, air, noise and water pollution, solid waste generation, deforestation and other negative consequences. The New Canaan Planning & Zoning Commission finds that sustainable site planning pertaining to the control of stormwater and pollutants, as well as building measures applied to the design, construction, preservation, rehabilitation, restoration and maintenance of buildings, would achieve the following goals:

- Encourage resource conservation;
- Reduce the waste generated by construction projects;
- Increase energy efficiency;
- Decrease the amount of stormwater exiting the site;
- Lessen the pollutant load in untreated stormwater entering the towns treatment system and ultimately the natural waterways;
- Diminish the amount of flooding; and
- Promote the health and productivity of residents, workers, and visitors to the Town.

5.1 BUILDING DESIGN

The New Canaan Planning & Zoning Commission recognizes that sustainable building design shall complement existing policies related to development and natural resource conservation and desires to model environmentally sensitive building design. Whenever possible, historically and/or architecturally significant structure or features should be reused and incorporated into any development or redevelopment proposal.

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEEDTM) as defined by the US Green Building Council, Green Building Rating System and Certification is a nationally recognized standard for excellence in design and has multiple levels of certification. Design and construction decisions made by the Town in the construction and remodeling of Town buildings can result in significant cost savings to the Town over the life of the buildings and benefit the environment. The following guidelines are recommended for Town of New Canaan major renovations and new construction projects located in the Village District.

"Town of New Canaan Village District Design Standards," are to encourage environmentally sensitive design and construction practices based on the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEEDTM) certification process.

The Commission recommends that all new Town buildings over 5,000 square feet in size be designed, contracted and built to achieve, at a minimum, the LEEDTM Silver certification level. A building shall be deemed to be covered by this section if it is owned by the Town or, if owned by another entity, at least fifty percent (50%) of the capital dollars in connection with the building project have been provided by the Town.

No building permit for any building, which seeks to obtain LEED™ Silver certification, shall be issued until an architect or designer has certified that the LEED™ standards are being addressed in the plans or specifications. The certification shall be submitted to the Building Department and P&Z for verification.

All private development of new construction and major renovation is encouraged to follow the LEED™ building rating system and other sustainable design strategies that foster good design and environmental stewardship.

5.2 SITE DESIGN

The New Canaan Planning and Zoning Commission recognizes that sustainable site design and implementation practices will aide in the protection of the towns natural resources, specifically water bodies. In addition, sustainable site design will reduce the amount of flooding by retaining the water that falls on the site, as opposed to piping it to the towns storm drain system.

All private and town properties proposed for redevelopment within any of the village districts should employ Low Impact Development (LID) practices. Some examples of LID include, but are not limited to:

- Decreased and disconnected impervious surfaces to slow the rate of flow of runoff and reduce the volume of surface water exiting the site;
- Increased vegetation, specifically the installation of native plant species;
- Permeable pavement or porous concrete instead of asphalt;
- Rain gardens and underground detention to store and slowly release surface water runoff; and/or
- Bioswales and flow-through vegetated systems to remove sediments and pollutants.

All private development of new construction and major renovation are encouraged to follow any applicable guidelines in the USGBC LEED™ ND regulations, the Center for Land Use Education & research (CLEAR) guidance document, “Developing a Sustainable Community” as well as the U.S. EPA Low Impact Development (LID) guidance documents and fact sheets.

6.0 NEW CANAAN VILLAGE DISTRICT ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

The overriding objective of these design guidelines is to ensure that new or substantially renovated commercial or mixed-use development fits well with its surroundings. Development *must* be contextually sensitive to the history, community and environment that constitute the Village District. These guidelines are intended to provide guidance and direction so that new construction and renovation of existing structures can meet that requirement. Whenever possible, historically and/or architecturally significant structure or features should be reused and incorporated into any development or redevelopment proposal.

6.1 ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

The physical appearance of new development in the Village District is an important aspect that will shape the character of the village. The overall design, details and materials will be key components in determining context sensitivity.

6.1.1 Façade Articulation

To make new development compatible with the surrounding architectural context, facade articulation and architectural embellishment are important considerations in commercial and mixed-use buildings. Any large buildings should have facade articulation that reflects a group of small buildings and reinforces the architectural rhythm established in the Village District core.



To the eye this building is broken into smaller proportions by the change in how the exterior façade steps back and by the introduction of a roof overhang terminating with an arched entry way.



This use of strong horizontal bands of wood painted white with classical detailing is successful in integrating different building into a cohesive whole. The introduction of a pediment and change in roof line while stepping the building back breaks up the linear mass of the buildings while successfully connecting the buildings.

6.1.2 Architectural Concept and Consistency

The use and repetition of architectural features and building materials, textures and colors can help create unity in a structure. Consider how the following can contribute to a building that exhibits a cohesive architectural concept:

- Facade modulation and articulation (e.g., recesses and protrusions);
- Windows and doorway (fenestration) patterns;
- Trim and moldings;
- Grilles and railings;
- Roof lines;
- Lighting and signage;
- Color.



This building successfully integrates several design elements by the use of color, materials, classical detailing and the introduction of landscaping that continues the same design principals including color, texture and density.



This building successfully integrates itself with a sloping site while reducing the visual impact of the building. The stonewall and landscaping help reduce the height of the building. The building responds to intersecting streets that are of different levels.



This red brick building contains white-framed windows with classical detailing highlighting the red brick facade. The building is symmetrical with a centralized and recessed entry and equally spaced windows that are accented with black shutters. A cupola completing the use of classical materials, colors and proportions, caps the building.

6.1.3 Architectural Cues

New or substantially reconstructed mixed-use and commercial development should respond to several architectural features common in New Canaan's historic buildings to preserve and enhance pedestrian orientation and maintain an acceptable level of consistency with the existing architecture. To create cohesiveness in the Village District, identifiable and exemplary architectural patterns should be reinforced. New elements can be introduced, provided they are accompanied by strong design linkages. Whenever possible, historically and/or architecturally significant structure or features should be reused and incorporated into any development or redevelopment proposal.

Preferred elements can be found in the examples of commercial and mixed-use buildings included on these pages, and specific elements from historic buildings in the center of New Canaan.



This building is a strong example of New England architecture by the use of materials that frame the building and help break up a long façade and create a more vertical building. The introduction of white painted clapboard and the strong window mullions painted with a light blue reinforce traditional New England building character.



The exterior of this building is clad with cedar shingles that dominate the façade and by the introduction of contrasting white color creates a strong material composition.

6.1.4 Building Materials

Building materials shall be treated as significant design elements that define the appearance of the structure and strengthen the sense of identity of the New Canaan Village District. The use of materials that give the appearance of New England architecture is strongly encouraged. Whenever possible, historically and/or architecturally significant structure or features should be reused and incorporated into any development or redevelopment proposal.

- **Materials Encouraged.** Traditional, high-quality building materials common to New England (e.g., brick, stone, clapboard, shingles or other similar products) shall be used as the primary siding material. Contemporary materials that have the same visual characteristics (e.g., cement plank clapboards or vinyl siding) are acceptable if attention is paid to detailing (e.g., corners, trim at openings, changes in material). Environmentally sound materials as identified by the USGBC LEED Accreditation Design Checklist shall be considered in the selection of all materials.
- **Materials Discouraged.** Highly reflective or processed materials (e.g., metal or plastic panels, brushed aluminum, bronzed glass, concrete block, untreated plywood, dryvit, etc.) and multicolored brick (incorporating occasional white bricks in a random pattern) shall not be used on the primary or front-facing facade.

6.2 HEIGHT, BULK AND SCALE

The scale of existing development on contiguous and nearby properties must be considered for new development in the Village District. A transition in height, bulk and scale, in terms of relationship to surrounding buildings and within the proposed structure itself, must be considered. Particular consideration should be given to the impacts any new development or redevelopment might have if adjacent to or in close proximity to the Historic District.

- A. Applicant must analyze the site in relationship to its surroundings. This should include:
 - Patterns of urban form in existing built environment, such as setbacks and massing compositions;
 - Size of Code-allowable building envelope and footprint in relation to existing built environment.
- B. New buildings should use architectural methods including modulation, color, texture, entries, materials and detailing to break up the façade, particularly important for long buildings, into sections and character consistent with traditional, historic multi-bay commercial buildings and existing historic buildings in the Village District.
- C. The arrangement of architectural elements, materials and colors should aid in mitigating height, bulk and scale impacts of Village District development, particularly at the upper levels. For development greater than 1-1/2 stories in height, a strong horizontal treatment (e.g. cornice line or frieze) should occur at the first story. Consider a change of materials, as well as a progressively lighter color application to reduce the appearance of upper levels from the street and adjacent properties. The use of architectural style, details (e.g: rooflines, cornice lines, fenestration patterns), and materials found in less intensive surrounding buildings should be considered.

6.3 BUILDING AND SITE PLANNING

6.3.1 Signage

Business signs should add interest to the Village District as well as inform. They must also conform to Section 6.3 of New Canaan Zoning Regulations. In case of a conflict, the zoning regulations will govern.

They can unify the overall architectural concept of the building, or provide unique identity for a commercial space within a larger mixed-use structure. Design signage should be appropriate for the scale, character and use of the project and surrounding area. Signs should be oriented and scaled for both pedestrians on sidewalks and slow moving vehicles. Materials should be wood or composite and should be painted or sealed. Only direct lighting is permitted, backlit signs are not permitted.

6.3.1.1 *Signage Goals*

Signs play a central role in providing information, wayfinding, and setting the tone for New Canaan's commercial districts. They inform motorists and pedestrians, while having a direct effect on the overall appearance and character of the town. Proper signage goals are:

- To provide basic, legible information about commercial establishments with attractive, legible signage.
- To encourage forethought in the design, size, placement, and graphic format of all signage used in the commercial areas of New Canaan.
- To create distinctive commercial corridors and nodes, where signage is compatible with quality architecture and site design.
- To protect the investment of commercial interests throughout New Canaan establishing a quality benchmark for future signage, in keeping with the design standards.

6.3.1.2 *Signage Plan*

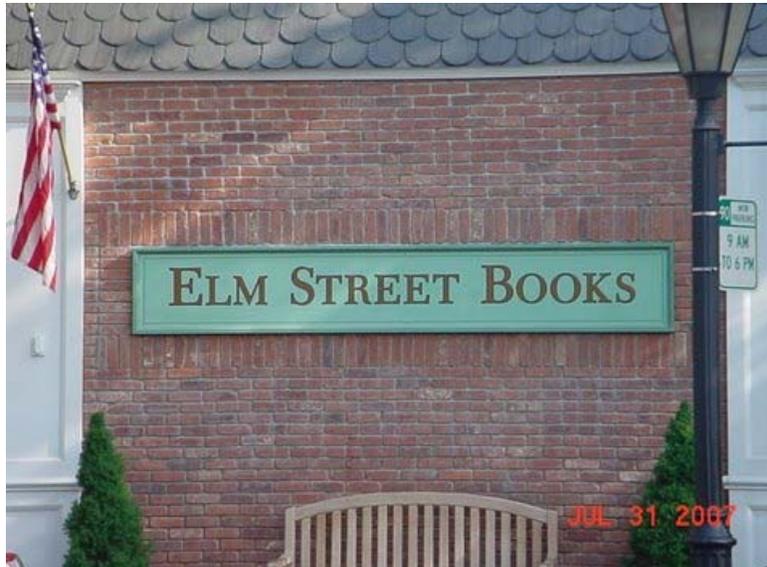
A Signage Plan shall be submitted as part of the Site Plan application. It shall be developed by design professionals experienced in commercial signage or environmental graphics. The applicant shall expect to resubmit the plan to the planning staff if the building's tenant is unknown at the time of application.

6.3.1.3 Compatibility

Signs shall be designed to achieve a high level of visual compatibility with the building(s) and its surroundings through the use of similar detailing, form, color, lighting, and materials.

6.3.1.4 Design

The shape of the sign shall complement the architectural features on the building. Simple geometric shapes are preferred for all signage. Signs shall be trimmed and detailed to complement the building design features. In addition, all new signs shall achieve a level of visual compatibility with existing signs that comply with these design guidelines.



6.3.1.5 Lettering Size

Size of lettering shall be as stated in 6.3 D of the Zoning Regulations.



6.3.1.6 Location

Signs shall be mounted in locations that do not block motorists' line of sight or create a hazard for pedestrians or bicyclists. Roof mounted signs that project above the roofline are prohibited.









6.3.1.7 Advertising Features

Objects other than signs designed primarily to attract public attention are prohibited in the commercial district because they distract motorists and contribute to visual clutter. Examples of prohibited advertising features include greater-than-life size models of food or other products, replicas of spokespeople associated with commercial products, rows of flags or banners, and internally-lit bands of color.

Primary signage may not include logos.

No A-frame or easel type signage is allowed.

Excessive interior lighting when the business is not operating is strongly discouraged. Immediate window display and necessary security lighting are preferred.

6.3.2 Pedestrian Environment

The rear portion of a new building should not turn its back to the parking area, but rather embrace it as a part of a potentially active and vibrant environment.

The side of a structure facing a parking area should be compatible with the rest of the building and the surrounding streetscape. Where appropriate, consider the following treatments:

- Integrating the parking area with the building's overall design;
- Treating the parking area as an extension of the building;
- Screening the view of dumpsters, utilities and other service related features from the parking area.

6.3.3 Amenities

Areas created for pedestrian interaction, benches, terraces, or even performance areas, all contribute to the character of a Village District. Streetscape amenities mark the entry and serve as way finding devices in announcing to visitors their arrival in the Village District. Consider incorporating the following treatments to accomplish this goal:

- Pedestrian scale sidewalk lighting or droplights on the facade;
- Accent pavers at storefront entrances;
- Performance or gathering areas;
- Areas for merchandise display.

6.4 GENERAL LANDSCAPE PRINCIPLES

6.4.1 Objectives

Landscaping shall be used to complement the architecture, enhance human scale, reinforce circulation paths, highlight entrances, provide shade, and add seasonal interest. New Canaan's commercial districts shall be unified by a rich variety of street trees, flowering shrubs, and masses of color.

6.4.2 Selection

The use of plant materials and landscape elements that require a low degree of maintenance is strongly encouraged. To the extent possible all plantings shall be native and resistant to insect infestation, drought, disease, roadside salt, and auto emissions, and hardy to New Canaan winters. Special consideration shall be given to planting materials and strategies as outlined in the USGBC LEED guidelines for sustainable sites, heat island effect and water efficiency.

6.4.3 Integration

Plantings shall be massed to soften edges, corners, and pavement areas, and to integrate the building into the landscape.

6.4.4 Existing Trees/ Plants

Wherever practical, existing or unique trees or other significant plantings shall be preserved, provided the species are not considered invasive. The landscape plan shall illustrate which vegetation will be preserved and what protection measures will be taken during construction. Transplanting and reusing trees and other plantings are strongly encouraged.

6.4.5 Buffers & Screening

Plant materials and other landscape elements shall be used to create suitable buffers between residential and commercial properties. The design of buffers shall consider the appearance from both commercial and residential viewpoints. Evergreen plantings are particularly effective for year-round buffering.

6.4.6 Screening

Parking lots shall be separated from the street by plantings, earth berms, walls, and/or other landscape elements to minimize the view of vehicles, while still allowing the public to see the building.

6.4.7 Variety in Planting

The use of native flowering shrubs, evergreen shrubs, perennials, annuals, vines, ornamental grasses, and other plant material is highly recommended, in addition to street trees, evergreen trees, and ornamental trees.

6.4.8 Foundation & Wall Plantings

Planting beds are recommended along exposed building edges, foundations and uninterrupted walls. Plantings shall provide either a formal pattern or a naturalistic blend of heights, colors, and textures for visual relief.

6.4.9 Accent Plantings

The installation of special planting beds is to be encouraged in appropriate areas for visual accents in the landscape. These can include daylily beds, butterfly gardens, bog gardens, fragrant gardens, shade gardens, yellow foliage gardens, early blooming gardens, texture gardens, etc.

In the Village District wherever feasible, shade trees, shrubs and other plantings should be encouraged. The trees selected must be listed on the Recommended Street Trees for Connecticut as compiled by the University of Connecticut Plant Science Department.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Amenity: Aesthetic or other features of a development that increase its marketability or usability to the public.

Articulation: The manner in which portions of a building form are expressed (materials, color, texture, pattern, modulation, etc.) and come together to define the structure.

Cornice: A molded or projecting horizontal feature that crowns a façade.

Design Guidelines: Statement of preferred design practices or aesthetics that are used to guide development projects in a particular Town, community, or neighborhood.

Façade: Any vertical, exterior face or wall of a building, often distinguished from other faces by architectural details

Fenestration: The arrangement and design of windows and doors on a building's façade.

Frieze: The area of a façade dividing upper stories from the ground level story; generally one to two feet high and continuing the width of the building; may contain ornamentation.

Gable: The upper, triangular portion of a façade, usually flanked by sloping roofs.

Modulation: A stepping back or projecting forward of sections of a structure's façade within specified intervals of building width and depth, as a means of breaking up a structure's apparent bulk.

Pedestrian Scale: Used to describe the quality of a building or streetscape that includes structural or architectural components of size and proportions that relate to the human form and/or that suggest through their structural or architectural components the human functions that are intended to be accommodated.

Streetscape: The visual and functional character of an entire street including: buildings, paving material, plantings and street amenities such as lamps and benches. Also, the environment created for human activity and interaction.