



04

COMMERCIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

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04 COMMERCIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

PURPOSE AND APPLICABILITY

The following design guidelines are intended to inform the scale, character and features of commercial projects in Santa Cruz County. Commercial land uses include consumer-focused retail, service, entertainment and visitor-accommodation uses as well as worker-focused office and laboratory uses. The Commercial Design Guidelines can be applied to new whole-site developments, infill development on existing properties, and redesign or repurposing of existing buildings for new commercial uses.

The guidelines provide ideas and best practices for well-designed projects, and should be used in conjunction with the County's General Plan, County Code, and Design Criteria for streets and frontages. In cases where design guidelines

are related to quantitative requirements, links to relevant standards are provided.

Specific development standards and appropriate design guidelines for commercial projects may depend on the street type, zone district, and General Plan land use designation of the parcel where the project is located.

Commercial projects should follow both Chapter 2: Overarching Design Guidelines and the guidelines provided in this chapter.

Commercial projects with residential components should follow Chapter 5: Mixed-Use Guidelines. Commercial projects in the Workplace Flex (C3) zone district should follow Chapter 6: Workplace Flex Guidelines.

COMMERCIAL DESIGN GOALS

- 1 Provide for a range of commercial development from small scale infill development on existing underutilized land to larger new commercial development.
- 2 Encourage a well-defined public realm through careful placement and design of buildings, streets and pedestrian areas so that commercial areas become destinations for residents and visitors.
- 3 Create active and attractive edge conditions along primary frontages of new and existing development to foster visually-engaging, functional and comfortable streetscape environments.
- 4 Ensure that commercial projects are designed and operated to be compatible with adjacent uses and neighborhoods and the surrounding natural environment.
- 5 Minimize impacts on residential areas by providing context sensitive site layout, landscaping, signage, building design and size, and on-site parking, loading, and circulation.
- 6 Accommodate parking that is adequate (but not excessive), contributes to a pedestrian-friendly, bicycle friendly, and transit-supportive environment, and supports a "park once" environment.

A. SITE PLANNING



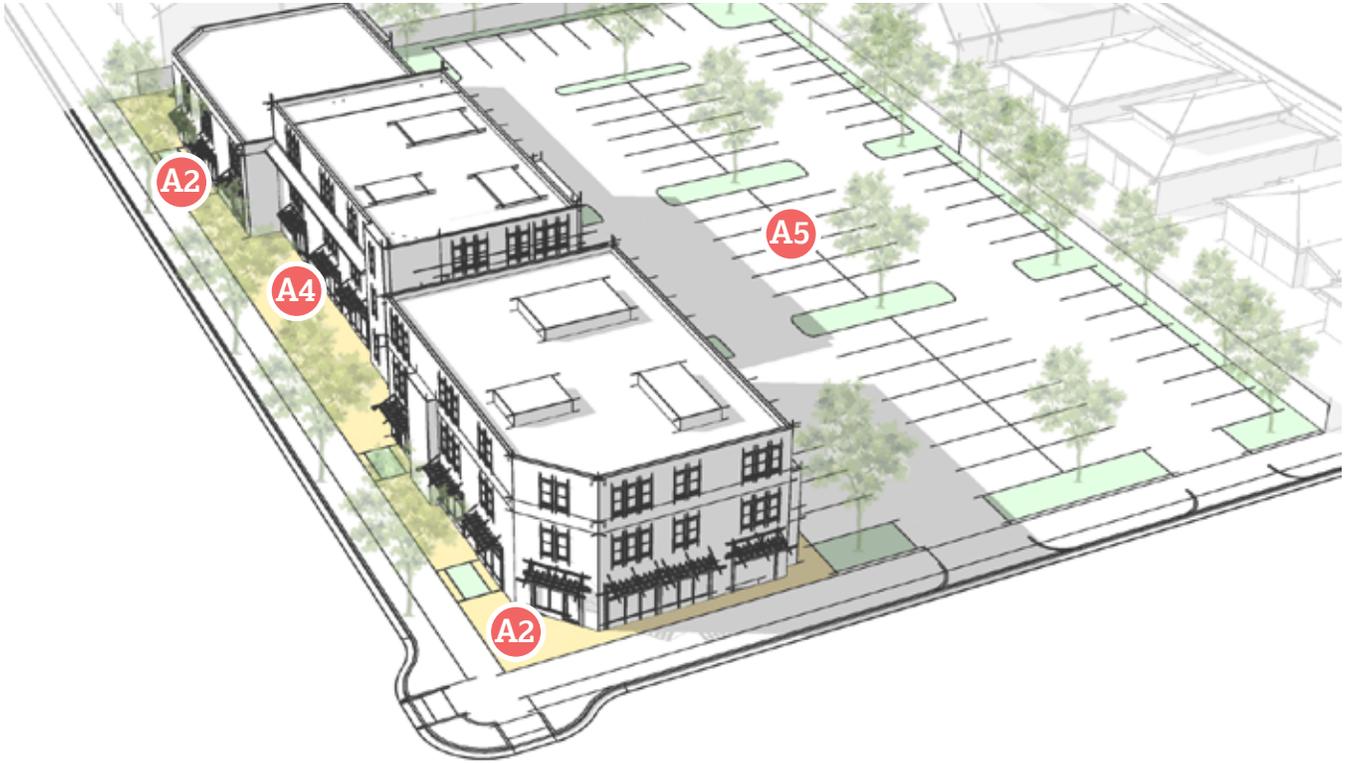
A1. Building Orientation. Place buildings parallel to streets to maximize site efficiency, improve pedestrian flow and wayfinding, and create a linear urban edge along commercial corridors.

Orient buildings and open spaces with high pedestrian traffic such as shops, cafes, and plazas to face the street and engage the sidewalk, in order to create a more active and enjoyable pedestrian environment.

A2. Entrances. Locate primary entrances along streetscape frontages to develop direct access points and foster connection with the immediate pedestrian environment. Locate secondary entrances to access parking lots and rear or side building faces.

A3. Open Spaces. Locate public open spaces and plazas facing Main Streets and Active Connectors in order to create social gathering spaces that are welcoming and visible.

A. SITE PLANNING



A4. Setbacks. Site buildings close to the required street-facing setback(s) along Main Streets and Active Connectors, unless a greater distance is being used to enhance the public realm with large activity zone uses such as outdoor dining and plazas. Allow expanded landscape buffers or other similar features on Multimodal Corridors that require mitigation from noise and emission.

See SCCC 13.10.333 for commercial setback requirements.

A5. On-Site Parking. Ensure parking is clustered toward the rear of a site (opposite street frontages), allowing the building to activate street frontages. Provide shared driveways and coordinated parking opportunities with adjoining properties. Building frontages should not face parking areas when the option to front the street is available.

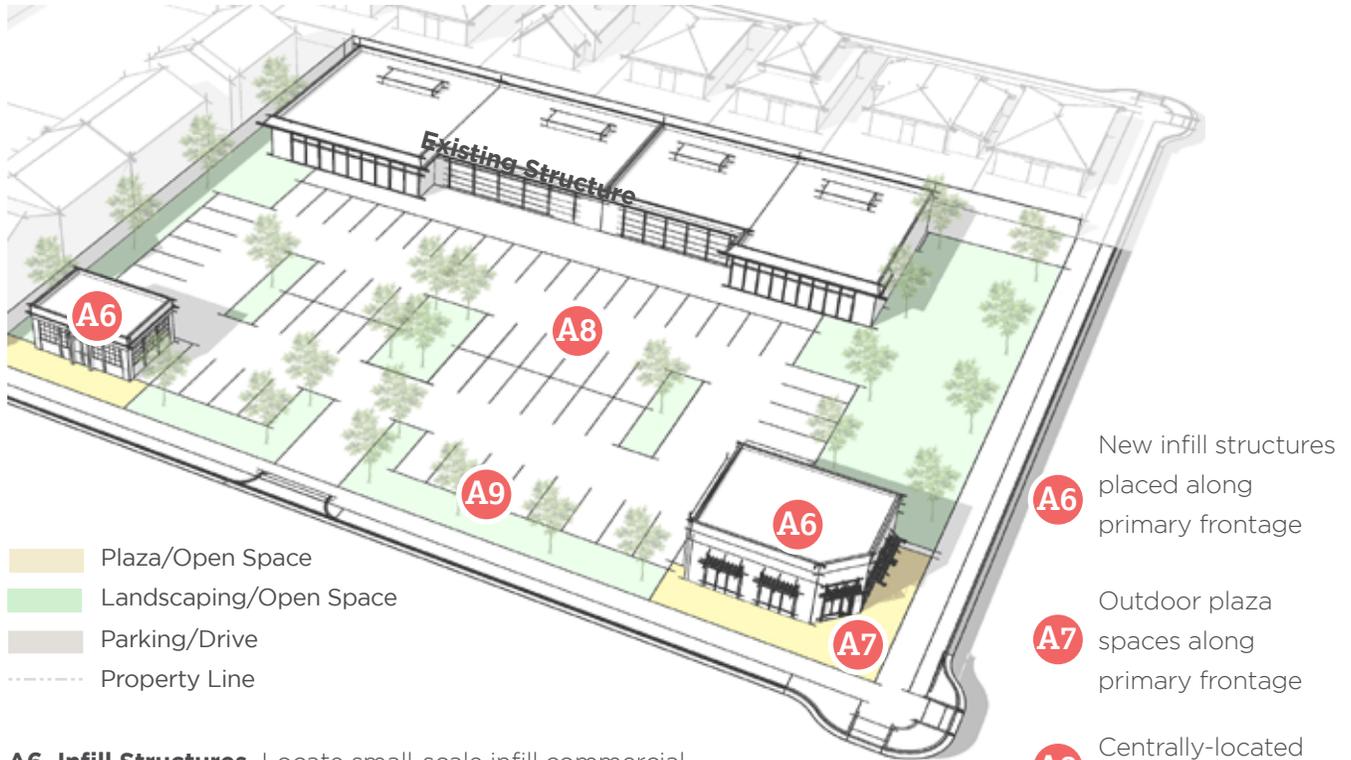
See SCCC 13.16 and County Design Criteria for parking design requirements.

A2 Entrances oriented toward frontages and corners

A4 Building setback to allow space for plaza

A5 Rear-located parking

A. SITE PLANNING - INFILL



A6. Infill Structures. Locate small-scale infill commercial development within existing parking lots facing public streets such as Main Streets and Active Connectors. Prioritize infill development in strategic locations such as street intersections and parcel edges.

A7. Infill Open Space. Add common public spaces to create active areas that front the immediate streetscape and support the infill commercial development.

A8. Infill Parking. Site infill commercial development to create consolidated, centrally-located parking.

A9. Infill Frontage Enhancement. Install a landscape buffer along the primary frontage to create an attractive edge condition that screens areas of exposed parking lot and provides a pedestrian-friendly experience, especially along Main Streets.

See SCCC 13.11.070(B)(3) for infill design strategies, SCCC 13.11.070(D) for commercial infill landscaping, and SCCC 13.16 and County Design Criteria for parking design requirements.



A. SITE PLANNING - BUILDING PROGRAM



A10. Ground Floor Uses. Where possible, encourage ground floor spaces fronting public streets to be primarily occupied by retail, restaurant, personal services, cultural destinations, and other similar public oriented businesses. Place the most active functions, such as restaurants, office lobbies and common customer areas, along public streets with gracious sidewalks and landscaping. Front internally-facing buildings with similar ground floor uses toward a common space with pedestrian orientation. These uses can be accompanied by parklets to further extend activities into the public realm.

See SCCC 13.10.335(C) for ground floor commercial use requirements.



A11. Ground-Floor Height. Consider providing ground floor minimum floor-to-floor height of 15 feet to best support retail and office uses.

A12. Small Scale Retail. Encourage temporary and permanent small scale retail opportunities in front of ground floor office spaces that require privacy from pedestrian traffic.



B. BUILDING DESIGN



B1. Articulated Frontages. Consider including articulated frontages for commercial buildings and projects, with alternating setbacks, building planes, and varied colors and materials to create more pedestrian interest.

B2. Street Activation. Design commercial buildings to directly engage the street by using first floor overhangs, tree canopies, seating areas, extended outdoor dining, and well-defined entrances. Encourage active frontages along streets and alleys by incorporating features such as window glazing, outdoor seating, and landscaping. Also include functional art such as decorative bike racks, fences, and murals. These areas should enhance the experience for pedestrians and bicyclists while encouraging people to linger and visit local businesses.

- B1** Articulated frontages
- B2** Floor overhangs, awnings, tree canopy to activate street
- B3** Ground-floor building transparency to create visual interest for pedestrians



B. BUILDING DESIGN



B3. Ground-Floor Building Transparency.

Make internal building activities visible from public streets and internal pathways, unless there are privacy or security concerns. prevent transparency. Encourage ground-floor, street-facing building walls of non-residential uses to provide transparent windows or doors with views into the building for at least 60 percent of the building frontage, in order to create visual interest and to help stores showcase their merchandise or services.



B4. Building Mass. Design multi-story commercial buildings along corridors, in commercial centers, and for specific uses such as medical centers. Incorporate single-floor building volumes and horizontally-oriented building elements in areas where low-lying buildings are cherished aspects of community character.



B5. Multiple Buildings. Develop larger sites with multiple buildings or building forms that include a variety in designs and functions. The individual buildings should include variation and articulation in their setbacks, stepbacks and heights in order to break up the bulkiness of the development.

B. BUILDING DESIGN

B6. Pedestrian Scale. Step-back upper floors from the street to avoid a “canyon effect.” and preserve a human or pedestrian scale along the street edge.

Use porches, arcades, or balconies to counteract the vertical emphasis of taller buildings.

Additionally, use a variety of materials and/or colors to de-emphasize the size and bulk of upper floors.

B7. Interesting Facades. Include façade elements and materials that make larger buildings more visually interesting and less bulky, particularly along streets and pedestrian pathways.

B8. Entrances. Use features such as overhangs, business signs, and/or recesses to create an architectural focal point and draw attention to stores and restaurant entrances.



B. BUILDING DESIGN



B9. Adaptive Reuse. Retain the original character and unique features of historically designated buildings that are retrofitted or reused for a new purpose, to maintain the cultural history of individual neighborhoods. This should be accomplished in accordance with local historic preservation regulations.

Additionally, require historical buildings to maintain important façade or architectural features during retrofits and expansion projects.

See SCCC 16.42 for historic preservation requirements.

B10. Signage. Provide clear and architecturally consistent business identification signage. In shopping centers and in buildings with multiple businesses, adopt a cohesive signage program for all businesses.

See SCCC 13.10.581 for signage requirements.

B11. Blank Walls. Minimize the use of blank walls, particularly at the ground-floor level. Where necessary, blank walls should be textured or layered with different materials or should incorporate art enhancements where appropriate.

C. OPEN SPACE



C1. Location. Locate outdoor gathering spaces so they are visible from public streets or trail networks, accessible from the building/street, and connected to other pedestrian facilities.



C2. Landscaping. Encourage publicly-accessible plazas and open spaces to include a combination of landscaped and hardscaped elements. Ensure that high-quality paving materials, such as stone, concrete, tile, pavers, or brick are used for hardscaped elements.



C3. Paving. Coordinate paving, planting, and other landscape materials with the design of the building and site.



C4. Public Art Integration. Ensure that art, sculpture, and interactive installations are meaningfully integrated into the open space design.

C. OPEN SPACE



C5. Amenities. Provide benches, tables, and shade in plazas and other outdoor areas. These features should be made from high-quality, durable materials consistent with the architectural theme of the building and surrounding neighborhood.



C6. Parking Space Conversion. Along Main Streets, Active Connectors, and on internal parking lots, consider allowing conversion of parking spaces into outdoor dining and other commercial use, where adequate parking exists and other requirements such as ADA access can be met.



C7. Outdoor Retail. Design open spaces to host outdoor retail environments that support indoor uses such as restaurants, cafes, artist studios, etc.



C8. Events. Program publicly accessible open spaces with a wide variety of temporary and frequent events such as farmers markets, wine tasting, etc.

D. ACCESS, CIRCULATION AND PARKING

D1. Sidewalk Connections. Provide on-site pathways for pedestrians and bicyclists, separated from vehicular traffic, that connect building entries to adjacent public sidewalks.

See County Design Criteria and SCCC 13.16 for pedestrian and bicycle pathway requirements.



D2. Walkway Design and Materials. Include elements such as contextually-appropriate paving materials, trellis structures, landscaping, pedestrian-scaled lighting, seating and trash receptacles along sidewalks and pedestrian pathways.

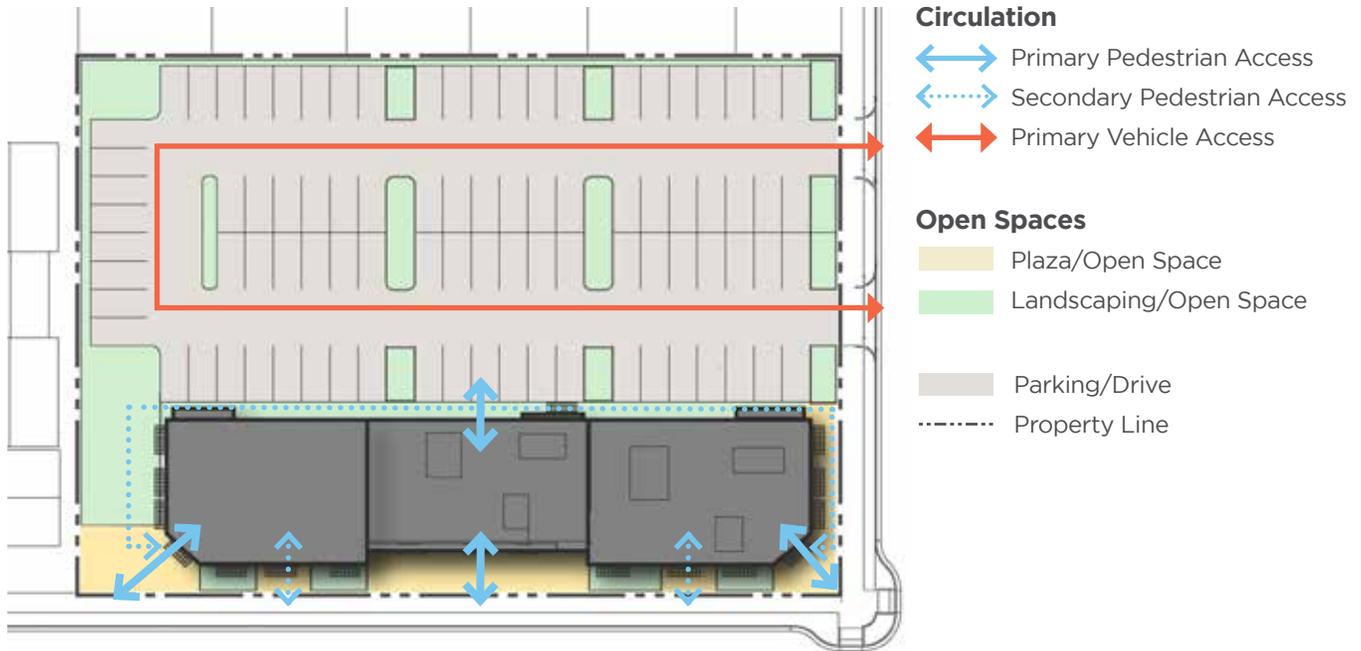


D3. Drive-Through Design. Where drive-throughs are allowed, design drive-through facilities to mitigate problems such as pollution, congestion, noise and appearance. Buffer drive throughs from residential uses and provide adequate room to accommodate queuing vehicles on site.

See SCCC 13.16.091 for drive-through facility design requirements.



D. ACCESS, CIRCULATION AND PARKING



D4. Parking Location. Provide vehicle drop-off areas and limited short term, retail-friendly teaser parking along sidewalks. The remainder of the parking should be behind the building or in underground or structured parking, in order to maintain an attractive and pedestrian-oriented frontage to major streets.

D5. Parking Size. Encourage large outdoor surface parking lots to be broken up by landscaping and stormwater planters.

D6. Shared Parking. Maximize opportunities for shared and stacked parking to reduce parcel footprint devoted to parking. Include interior vehicle connections between properties.

D7. Bicycle Parking. Provide convenient and secure bicycle parking adjacent to building entrances. The design and materials should be coordinated with the site and building design. Whenever possible, bicycle parking areas should be covered and located in areas which are clearly visible to site users.

See SCCC 13.16 and County Design Criteria for vehicular and bicycle parking requirements.



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