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# **Design Standards and Guidelines for Large Retail Establishments**

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**DESIGN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES  
FOR LARGE RETAIL ESTABLISHMENTS**

City of Fort Collins  
Community Planning and Environmental Services

*Adopted by the Council of the City of Fort Collins  
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## INTRODUCTION

The City of Fort Collins adopted a moratorium on large retail developments to study the community impacts of the "superstore" phenomenon in more detail and to provide the community with clear and enforceable policies to mitigate those impacts. The moratorium provided the opportunity to review existing retail developments with community-wide or regional impacts and to set standards for future developments to ensure that future development fits with the expectations and meets the needs of the community.

These standards and guidelines are a response to dissatisfaction with corporate chain marketing strategy dictating design that is indifferent to local identity and interests. The main goal is to encourage development that contributes to Fort Collins as a unique place by reflecting its physical character and adding to it in appropriate ways.

Large retail developments depend on high visibility from major public streets. In turn, their design determines much of the character and attractiveness of major streetscapes in the city. The marketing interests of many corporations, even with strong image-making design by professional designers, can be potentially detrimental to community aspirations and sense of place when they result in massive individual developments that do not contribute to or integrate with the city in a positive way.

Fort Collins already has a development review system that promotes solutions to these general issues. The purpose of these standards and guidelines is to augment those existing criteria with more specific interpretations that apply to the design of large retail store developments.

These standards and guidelines require a basic level of architectural variety, compatible scale, pedestrian and bicycle access, and mitigation of negative impacts. The standards are by no means intended to limit creativity; it is the City's hope that they will serve as a useful tool for design professionals engaged in site specific design in context. They are placed within the framework of the Land Development Guidance System which provides for variance from the requirements if the proposal is equal to or better than the City requirements.

## **PROCEDURE**

The following standards and guidelines are intended to be used as a design aid by developers proposing large retail developments in community regional shopping centers or as uses-by-right; and as an evaluation tool by the City staff and the Planning and Zoning Board in their review processes. These standards and guidelines apply to all projects which are processed according to the criteria for Community Regional Shopping Centers in the LAND DEVELOPMENT GUIDANCE SYSTEM as Planned Unit Developments and to all projects for retail establishments of more than 25,000 square feet as uses-by-right. "Standards" denoted by (+) are mandatory. "Guidelines" denoted by (o) are not mandatory, but are provided in order to educate planners, design consultants, developers and City staff about the design objectives. These standards and guidelines are to be used in conjunction with the All Development Criteria of the L.D.G.S.

The Planning and Zoning Board is empowered to grant variances to the mandatory (+) standards under the following circumstances:

1. The strict application of the standard would result in peculiar and exceptional practical difficulties or exceptional and undue hardship upon the owner of the affected property; or
2. The alternative site planning and building design approach meets the design objectives as stated in the standard, equally well or better than would compliance with the standard; and
3. In either of the foregoing circumstances, the variance may be granted without substantial detriment to the public good.

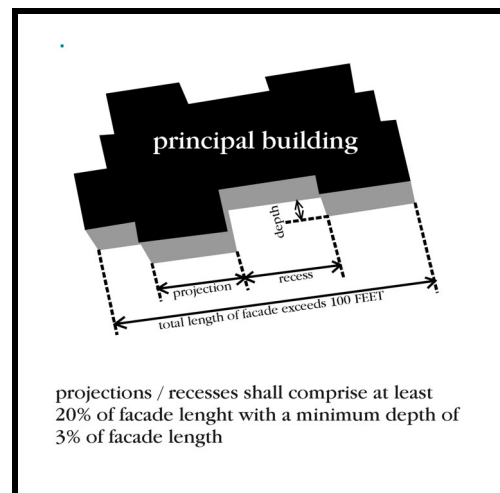
# ARTICLE I. AESTHETIC CHARACTER

## 1. Facades and Exterior Walls

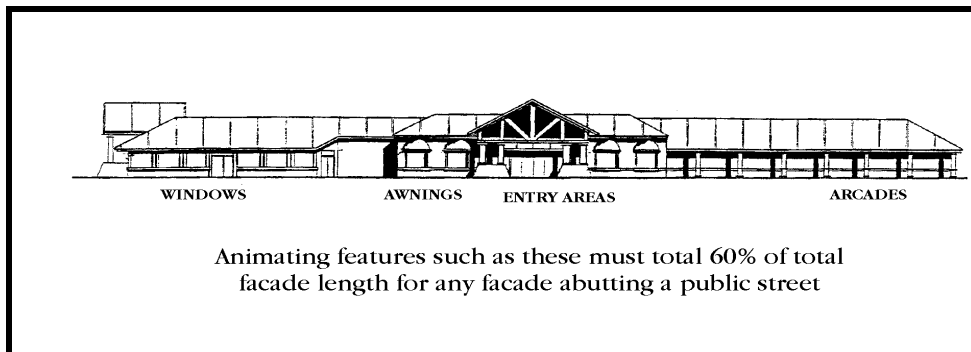
**GUIDELINE:** Facades should be articulated to reduce the massive scale and the uniform, impersonal appearances of large retail buildings and provide visual interest that will be consistent with the community's identity, character and scale. The intent is to encourage a more human scale that Fort Collins residents will be able to identify with their community. (o)

**STANDARD:** (+)

- a. Facades greater than 100 feet in length, measured horizontally, shall incorporate wall plane projections or recesses having a depth of at least 3% of the length of the facade and extending at least 20 percent of the length of the facade. No uninterrupted length of any facade shall exceed 100 horizontal feet.



- b. Ground floor facades that face public streets shall have arcades, display windows, entry areas, awnings, or other such features along no less than 60 percent of their horizontal length.



## 2. Smaller Retail Stores

**GUIDELINE:** The presence of smaller retail stores gives a center a "friendlier" appearance by creating variety, breaking up large expanses, and expanding the range of the site's activities. Windows and window displays of such stores should be used to contribute to the visual interest of exterior facades. The standards presented in this section are directed toward those situations where additional, smaller stores, with separate, exterior customer entrances are located in principal buildings. (o)

**STANDARD:** (+)

Where principal buildings contain additional, separately owned stores which occupy less than twenty five thousand (25,000) square feet of gross floor area, with separate, exterior customer entrances:

- a. The street level facade of such stores shall be transparent between the height of three feet and eight feet above the walkway grade for no less than 60 percent of the horizontal length of the building facade of such additional stores.
- b. Windows shall be recessed and should include visually prominent sills, shutters, or other such forms of framing.

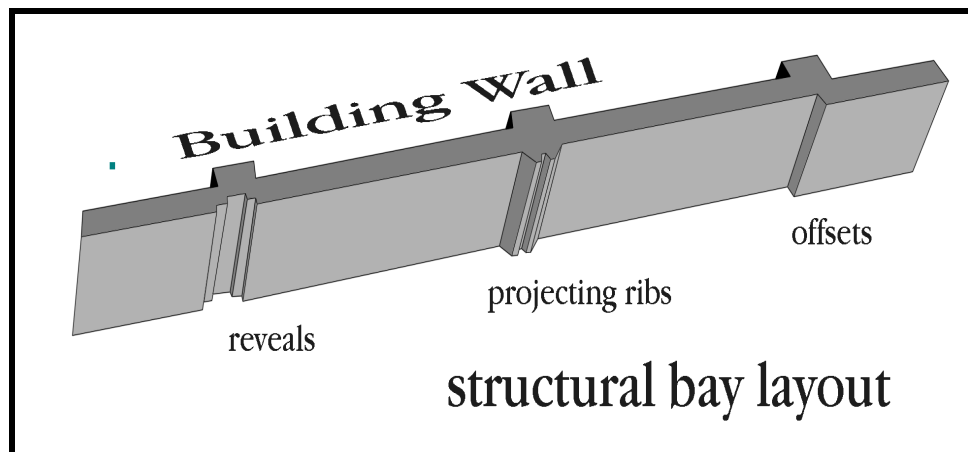
### 3. Detail Features

**GUIDELINE:** Buildings should have architectural features and patterns that provide visual interest, at the scale of the pedestrian, reduce massive aesthetic effects, and recognize local character. The elements in the following standard should be integral parts of the building fabric, and not superficially applied trim or graphics, or paint. (o)

**STANDARD:** (+)

Building facades must include a repeating pattern that shall include no less than three of the elements listed below. At least one of these elements shall repeat horizontally. All elements shall repeat at intervals of no more than thirty (30) feet, either horizontally or vertically.

- Color change.
- Texture change.
- Material module change.
- Expression of architectural or structural bay through a change in plane no less than 12 inches in width, such as an offset, reveal, or projecting rib.



Expression of Architectural or Structural Bay.

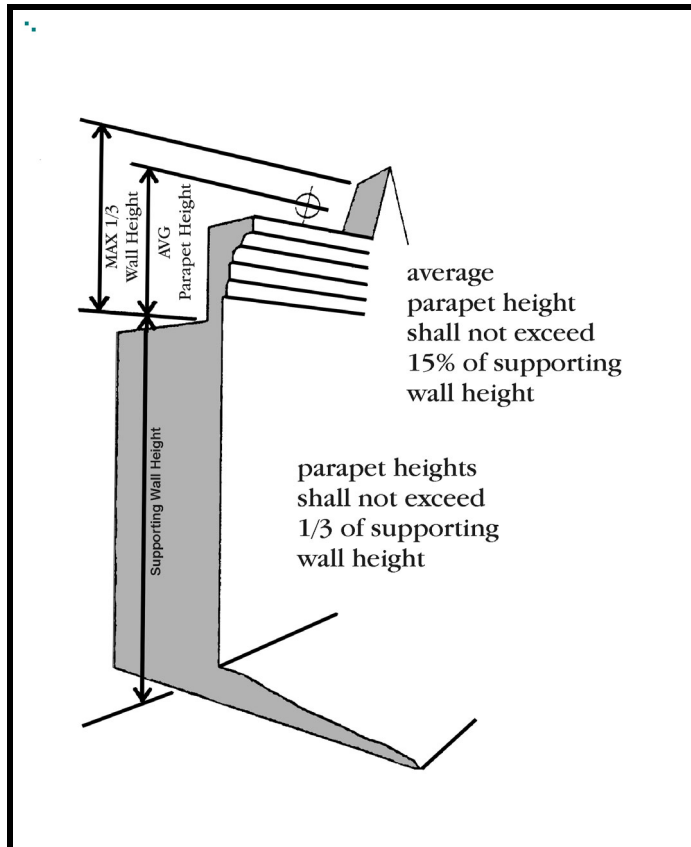
## 4. Roofs

**GUIDELINE:** Variations in roof lines should be used to add interest to, and reduce the massive scale of, large buildings. Roof features should complement the character of adjoining neighborhoods. (o)

**STANDARD:** (+)

Roofs shall have no less than two of the following features:

- a. Parapets concealing flat roofs and rooftop equipment such as HVAC units from public view. The average height of such parapets shall not exceed 15% of the height of the supporting wall and such parapets shall not at any point exceed one-third of the height of the supporting wall. Such parapets shall feature three dimensional cornice treatment.



Parapet Standards.

- b. Overhanging eaves, extending no less than 3 feet past the supporting walls.
- c. Sloping roofs that do not exceed the average height of the supporting walls, with an average slope greater than or equal to 1 foot of vertical rise for every 3 feet of horizontal run and less than or equal to 1 foot of vertical rise for every 1 foot of horizontal run.
- d. Three or more roof slope planes.

## 5. Materials and Colors

**GUIDELINE:** Exterior building materials and colors comprise a significant part of the visual impact of a building. Therefore, they should be aesthetically pleasing and compatible with materials and colors used in adjoining neighborhoods. (o)

**STANDARD:** (+)

- a. Predominant exterior building materials shall be high quality materials . These include, without limitation:
  - brick
  - wood
  - sandstone
  - other native stone
  - tinted, textured, concrete masonry units
- b. Facade colors shall be low reflectance, subtle, neutral or earth tone colors. The use of high intensity colors, metallic colors, black or fluorescent colors is prohibited.
- c. Building trim and accent areas may feature brighter colors, including primary colors, but neon tubing shall not be an acceptable feature for building trim or accent areas.
- d. Predominant exterior building materials should not include the following:
  - smooth-faced concrete block
  - tilt-up concrete panels
  - pre-fabricated steel panels

## 6. Entryways

**GUIDELINES:** Entryway design elements and variations should give orientation and aesthetically pleasing character to the building. The standards identify desirable entryway design features. (o)

**STANDARD:** (+)

Each principal building on a site shall have clearly defined, highly visible customer entrances featuring no less than three of the following:

- a. canopies or porticos
- b. overhangs
- c. recesses/projections
- d. arcades
- e. raised corniced parapets over the door
- f. peaked roof forms
- g. arches
- h. outdoor patios
- i. display windows
- j. architectural details such as tile work and moldings which are integrated into the building structure and design
- k. integral planters or wing walls that incorporate landscaped areas and/or places for sitting

Where additional stores will be located in the principal building, each such store shall have at least one exterior customer entrance, which shall conform to the above requirements.



## **7. Back and Side Facades**

**GUIDELINE:** All facades of a building which are visible from adjoining properties and/or public streets should contribute to the pleasing scale features of the building and encourage community integration by featuring characteristics similar to the front facade. (o)

**STANDARD:** (+)

All building facades which are visible from adjoining properties and/or public streets shall comply with the requirements of Article I.1. of these Design Standards and Guidelines.



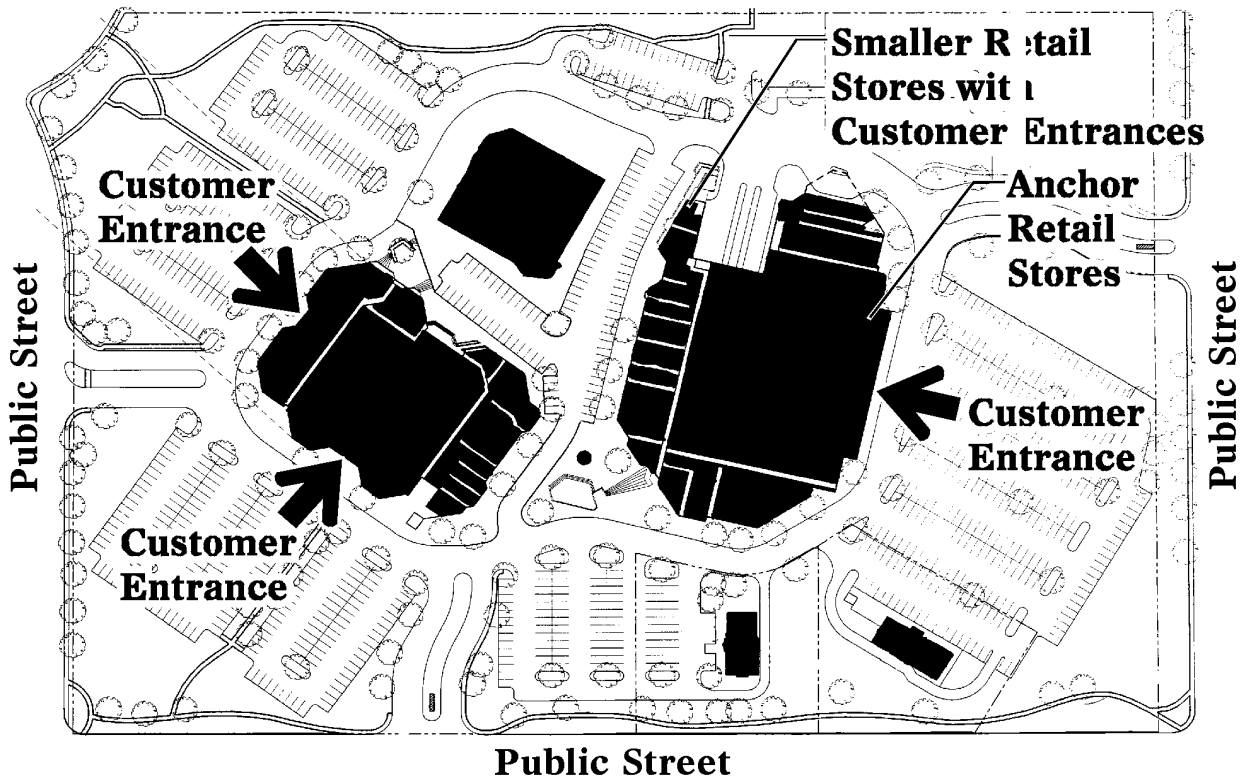
## ARTICLE II. SITE DESIGN AND RELATIONSHIP TO SURROUNDING COMMUNITY

### 1. Entrances

**GUIDELINE:** Large retail buildings should feature multiple entrances. Multiple building entrances reduce walking distances from cars, facilitate pedestrian and bicycle access from public sidewalks, and provide convenience where certain entrances offer access to individual stores, or identified departments of a store. Multiple entrances also mitigate the effect of the unbroken walls and neglected areas that often characterize building facades that face bordering land uses. (o)

**STANDARD:** (+)

At least two (2) sides of a large retail establishment shall feature customer entrances. The two (2) required sides shall be those planned to have the highest level of public pedestrian activity, and one (1) of the sides shall be that which most directly faces a street with pedestrian access. The other of the two (2) sides may face a second street with pedestrian access, and/or a main parking lot area. All entrances shall be architecturally prominent and clearly visible from the abutting public street. Movie theaters are exempt from this requirement.



## 2. Parking Lot Orientation

**GUIDELINE:** Parking areas should provide safe, convenient, and efficient access. They should be distributed around large buildings in order to shorten the distance to other buildings and public sidewalks and to reduce the overall scale of the paved surface. If buildings are located closer to streets, the scale of the complex is reduced, pedestrian traffic is encouraged, and architectural details take on added importance. (o)

**STANDARD: (+)**

Parking lot location. No more than fifty (50) percent of the off-street parking area for the lot, tract or area of land devoted to the large retail establishment shall be located between the front facade of the large retail establishment and the abutting streets (the "Front Parking Area").

The Front Parking Area shall be determined by drawing a line from the front corners of the building to the nearest property corners. If any such line, when connected to the plane of the front facade of the building, creates an angle that is greater than one hundred eighty (180) degrees, then the line shall be adjusted to create an angle of one hundred eighty (180) degrees when connected to the plane of the front facade of the building. If any such line, when connected to the plane of the front facade of the building, creates an angle that is less than ninety (90) degrees, then the line shall be adjusted to create an angle of ninety (90) degrees when connected to the plane of the front facade of the building. Parking spaces in the Front Parking Area shall be counted to include all parking spaces within the boundaries of the Front Parking Area, including (i) all partial parking spaces if the part inside the Front Parking Area boundary lines constitutes more than one-half ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ) of said parking space, and (ii) all parking spaces associated with any pad sites located within the Front Parking Area boundaries.

### **3. Back Sides**

**GUIDELINE:** The rear or sides of buildings often present an unattractive view of blank walls, loading areas, storage areas, HVAC units, garbage receptacles, and other such features. Architectural and landscaping features should mitigate these impacts. (o)

**STANDARD:** (+)

The minimum setback for any building facade shall be thirty five (35) feet from the nearest property line. Where the facade faces adjacent residential uses, an earthen berm, no less than 6 feet in height, containing at a minimum evergreen trees planted at intervals of 20 feet on center, or in clusters or clumps shall be provided.

#### 4. Outdoor Storage, Trash Collection, and Loading Areas

**GUIDELINE:** Loading areas and outdoor storage areas exert visual and noise impacts on surrounding neighborhoods. These areas, when visible from adjoining properties and/or public streets, should be screened, recessed or enclosed. While screens and recesses can effectively mitigate these impacts, the selection of inappropriate screening materials can exacerbate the problem. Appropriate locations for loading and outdoor storage areas include areas between buildings, where more than one building is located on a site and such buildings are not more than 40 feet apart, or on those sides of buildings that do not have customer entrances. (o)

**STANDARD:** (+)

- a. Areas for outdoor storage, truck parking, trash collection or compaction, loading, or other such uses shall not be visible from abutting streets.
- b. No areas for outdoor storage, trash collection or compaction, loading, or other such uses shall be located within 20 feet of any public street, public sidewalk, or internal pedestrian way.
- c. Loading docks, truck parking, outdoor storage, utility meters, HVAC equipment, trash collection, trash compaction, and other service functions shall be incorporated into the overall design of the building and the landscaping so that the visual and acoustic impacts of these functions are fully contained and out of view from adjacent properties and public streets, and no attention is attracted to the functions by the use of screening materials that are different from or inferior to the principal materials of the building and landscape.
- d. Non-enclosed areas for the storage and sale of seasonal inventory shall be permanently defined and screened with walls and/or fences. Materials, colors, and design of screening walls and/or fences and the cover shall conform to those used as predominant materials and colors on the building. If such areas are to be covered, then the covering shall conform to those used as predominant materials and colors on the building.

## 5. Pedestrian Flows

**GUIDELINE:** Pedestrian accessibility opens auto-oriented developments to the neighborhood, reducing traffic impacts and enabling the development to project a friendlier, more inviting image. This section sets forth standards for public sidewalks and internal pedestrian circulation systems that can provide user-friendly pedestrian access as well as pedestrian safety, shelter, and convenience within the center grounds. (o)

**STANDARD:** (+)

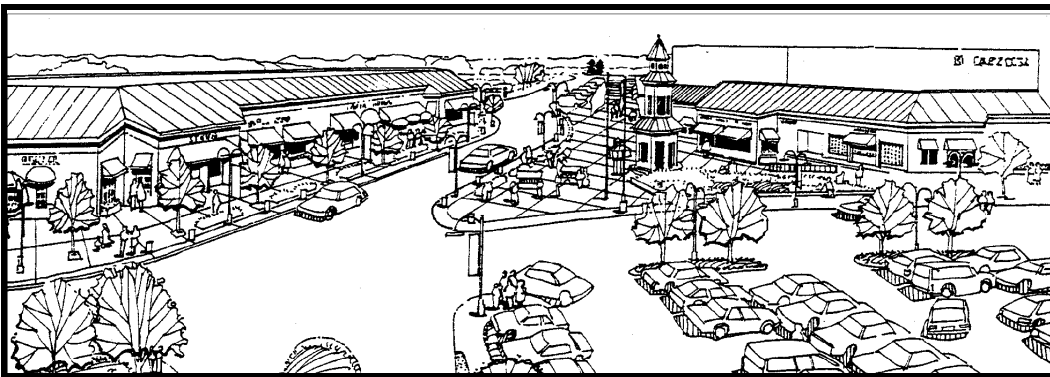
- a. Sidewalks at least 8 feet in width shall be provided along all sides of the lot that abut a public street.
- b. Continuous internal pedestrian walkways, no less than 8 feet in width, shall be provided from the public sidewalk or right-of-way to the principal customer entrance of all principal buildings on the site. At a minimum, walkways shall connect focal points of pedestrian activity such as, but not limited to, transit stops, street crossings, building and store entry points, and shall feature adjoining landscaped areas that include trees, shrubs, benches, flower beds, ground covers, or other such materials for no less than 50 percent of their length.
- c. Sidewalks, no less than 8 feet in width, shall be provided along the full length of the building along any facade featuring a customer entrance, and along any facade abutting public parking areas. Such sidewalks shall be located at least six (6) feet from the facade of the building to provide planting beds for foundation landscaping, except where features such as arcades or entryways are part of the facade.
- d. Internal pedestrian walkways provided in conformance with Part (b.) above shall provide weather protection features such as awnings or arcades within 30 feet of all customer entrances.
- e. All internal pedestrian walkways shall be distinguished from driving surfaces through the use of durable, low maintenance surface materials such as pavers, bricks, or scored concrete to enhance pedestrian safety and comfort, as well as the attractiveness of the walkways.

## 6. Central Features and Community Spaces

**GUIDELINE:** Buildings should offer attractive and inviting pedestrian scale features, spaces, and amenities. Entrances and parking lots should be configured to be functional and inviting with walkways conveniently tied to logical destinations. Bus stops and drop-off/pick-up points should be considered as integral parts of the configuration. Pedestrian ways should be anchored by special design features such as towers, arcades, porticos, pedestrian light fixtures, bollards, planter walls, and other architectural elements that define circulation ways and outdoor spaces. Examples of outdoor spaces are plazas, patios, courtyards, and window shopping areas. The features and spaces should enhance the building and the center as integral parts of the community fabric. (o)

**STANDARD:** (+)

Each retail establishment subject to these standards shall contribute to the establishment or enhancement of community and public spaces by providing at least two of the following: patio/seating area, pedestrian plaza with benches, transportation center, window shopping walkway, outdoor playground area, kiosk area, water feature, clock tower, or other such deliberately shaped area and/or a focal feature or amenity that, in the judgement of the Planning and Zoning Board, adequately enhances such community and public spaces. Any such areas shall have direct access to the public sidewalk network and such features shall not be constructed of materials that are inferior to the principal materials of the building and landscape. (+)



Example of a center with numerous special features and community spaces.



## **7. Delivery/Loading Operations**

**GUIDELINE:** Delivery and loading operations should not disturb adjoining neighborhoods, or other uses. (o)

**STANDARD:** (+)

No delivery, loading, trash removal or compaction, or other such operations shall be permitted between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. unless the applicant submits evidence that sound barriers between all areas for such operations effectively reduce noise emissions to a level of 45 db, as measured at the lot line of any adjoining property.

