

# Fort Collins Design Manual

**Examples and  
Explanations of  
Fort Collins' Land  
Use Code Standards**



Fort Collins  
**CITY PLAN**  
*Changes & Choices*

# Community Design Solutions

Examples and Explanations  
of Fort Collins' Land Use Code Standards

Edition 1

May 2000

Community Planning & Environmental Services

Advance Planning Department



# This Manual

This manual consists of an Introduction followed by direct annotation of Articles 3 and 4 of the Fort Collins Land Use Code.

The Introduction summarizes a whole approach to designing development based on the Land Use Code. The two Articles contain Fort Collins' planning and design standards in their sectioned, legal outline format.

The complete outlines of Articles 3 and 4 are included in this manual. Within the outlines, only selected standards are presented and explained. The selected standards are marked with this reference box:

## ***Examples & Explanations***

- N.A. indicates a standard or a section with No Annotation at this time.
- Anything written in this Times Roman type is actual Land Use Code text.
- Anything written in this type is an explanation only. These explanations may not be used in official hearings to approve or deny any development plan.

We intend this manual to provide a forum for common understanding of the standards and the reasons behind them. It is an open invitation: we welcome suggestions, comments, questions, and concerns on these matters, and expect to update and change the manual as appropriate. To share your thoughts, start by contacting the Advance Planning Department, phone (970) 221-6376; or e-mail [aplanning@ci.fort-collins.co.us](mailto:aplanning@ci.fort-collins.co.us).

This manual is not a regulatory document. It is not to be used by the Decision Maker as a basis for approval or denial of a development plan.

## **Combining These Community Design Solutions with Other Public Requirements**

These example solutions focus on design decisions about a development site. For the most part, they skip past the crucial considerations which determine the suitability and limitations of a piece of land for development in the first place — such as geology, hydrology, ecology, and the availability of streets, utilities, and a system to handle storm water flow. These considerations should be assessed before designing a site plan.

Also, certain technical engineering standards for streets and utilities are included in the Land Use Code by reference only, and so they are not explained in this document. These can typically be met without compromising the Land Use Code's approach to development. They mostly involve details of construction and operation of transportation and utility infrastructure.

## **Non-applicability to Industrial Facilities**

Some aspects of the pedestrian-oriented development approach described in this booklet do not necessarily apply to industrial facilities. The Introduction is based on standards for commercial, residential, and mixed-use developments.

## **The Land Use Code**

The Land Use Code is Chapter 29 of the Municipal Code of the City of Fort Collins, containing local regulations for land use and land development.

## **City Plan**

City Plan is Fort Collins' Comprehensive Plan containing the Vision, Goals, and Principles and Policies upon which the Land Use Code is based.

## **Special Thanks & Acknowledgement**

Anton Nelessen of ANA Associates, Inc., and Dan Burden of Walkable Communities, Inc., deserve recognition for sharing a number of pertinent photographs. Also, each of their firms has a highly visual, descriptive approach to planning which has significantly influenced this manual.

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## **Annotated Article 3 — General Development Standards**

## **Annotated Article 4 — Zone District Standards**

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# INTRODUCTION



*A disconnected development whose plan emphasizes just one consideration: vehicle access to a parking lot. Even this one consideration exhibits a need for more thoughtful planning and design. This is the front. The back and sides consist of blank walls, more asphalt, and chain link fencing, offering no positive relationship to the surrounding neighborhood.*

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## Arranging Parts

Fort Collins Land Use Code standards deal with the basic physical fabric of the city.

The fabric is composed of a collection of parts — some privately owned, starting with buildings and parking lots; and some publicly owned, starting with streets, parks, drainageways, and natural areas.

This book shows solutions to some basic local standards for how to arrange the parts in real estate developments.

Goals for the functioning, health, and appearance of Fort Collins depend on arranging the parts of new developments more along the lines of a traditional, walkable town. This means confronting and balancing the tendency for disconnected developments dominated by traffic, parking lots, and garages.

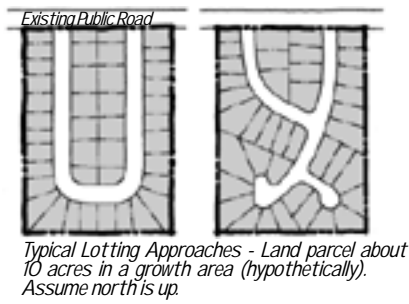
The most pervasive design question faced by the Code is probably this: how can vehicle access be provided with the least effect on the pedestrian environment and visual quality?



*Streets, sidewalks, building placement, and functional landscaping form a walkable pattern of city blocks and comfortable street fronts. This allows access for all, on foot or on wheels. This looks like the most positive way to deal with traffic, air pollution, loss of local identity, and most other “growth” issues. It takes thoughtful design to avoid leaving out key parts, and integrate vehicular functions so they won’t overwhelm the place. The standards affect design and operations both for real estate developers and for City Departments.*

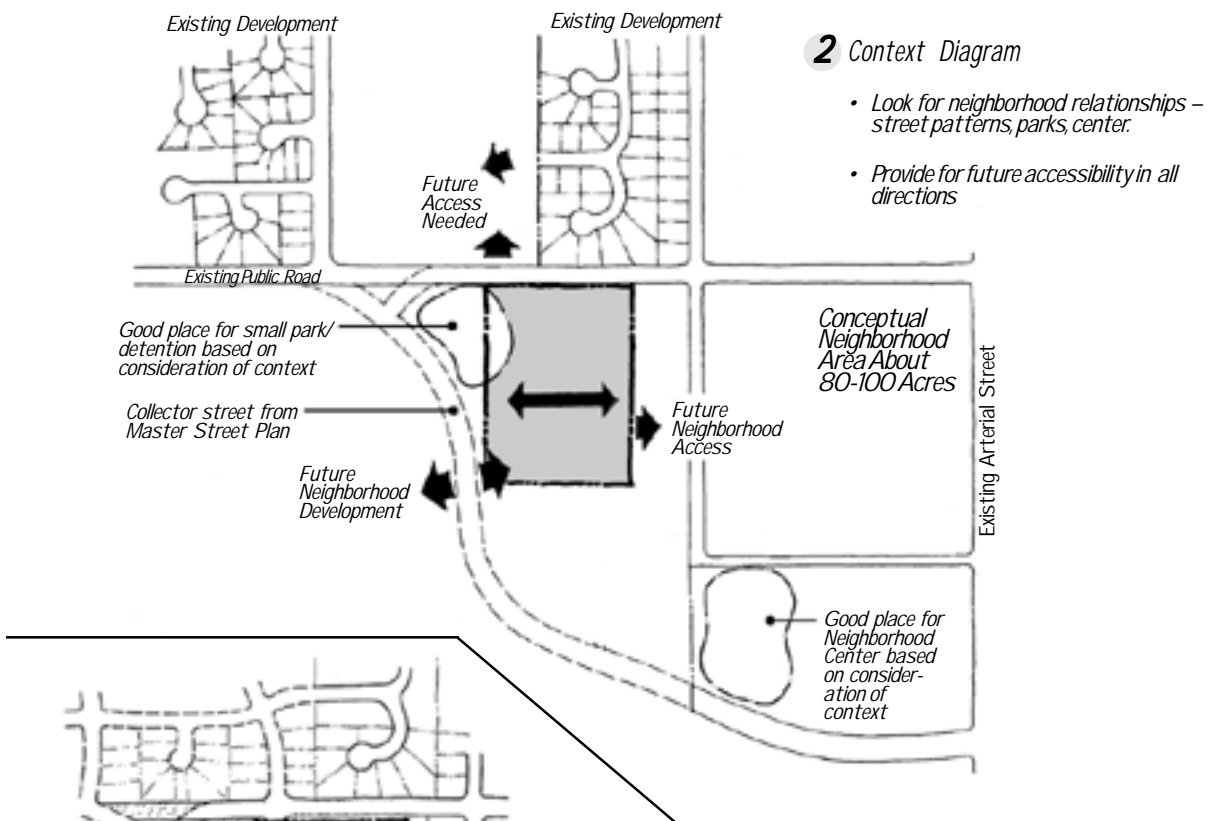


## Example Context Diagram For a Residential Development Subdividing a Piece of Land vs. Building Up a Neighborhood or District



### 1 Subdividing an Individual Parcel in Isolation

- Minimum access as required for emergencies.
- No neighborhood interconnections; street pattern forms barriers in the larger neighborhood.
- Solar orientation of lots is not addressed.
- This approach is expedient; little is thought or design work required.



### 2 Context Diagram

- Look for neighborhood relationships – street patterns, parks, center.
- Provide for future accessibility in all directions



### 3 Response to Context Diagram

- Coordinate with neighbors if possible.
- Provide connections in all needed directions
- Address solar orientation
- Provide a mix of housing types.
- Form an integral part of a functional neighborhood and district consistent with City Plan
- This approach is more difficult; more work required than #1 above.

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## A Town-Like Pattern

Show individual developments in context. Streets and connections laid out by developers of adjacent properties will be integral parts of neighborhoods and districts built up over time.


Project plans must include at least a diagram showing the proposed development in the context of the relevant neighborhood or district surroundings. This should include both sides of adjacent streets, whole intersections, and conditions across all edges. Look at the zoning and the *City Plan Principles and Policies* behind it.

Then, especially on parcels with a dimension over 500 feet or so, look for ways to form a simple, connected pattern of streets and blocks. Look for existing streets that can be extended, and provide street stubs that can be extended by future development. These streets will have trees, comfortable sidewalks and crosswalks, and special features to calm traffic if needed.

This pattern then lends itself to building fronts facing the streets and street corners.

In some cases, off-street paths and trails for bicyclists and pedestrians need to be extended or provided in addition to streets.

It will take effort by developers and the City to tie parts together – housing and other land uses; streets, sidewalks, and buildings; individual styles and an underlying community fabric; developments and open lands.



*Sequence showing evolution of an example plan for a piece of land, considering the context. The tendency is to only consider (1), dividing the land into lots and put the traffic on the existing road. The Code requires attention to (2), contributing to a larger neighborhood or district. The result is (3), a different plan than (1), meeting multiple needs. The Code emphasizes accessibility and mixing to avoid overloading one single street, multiply choices, and allow some everyday trips to be shorter and more direct.*



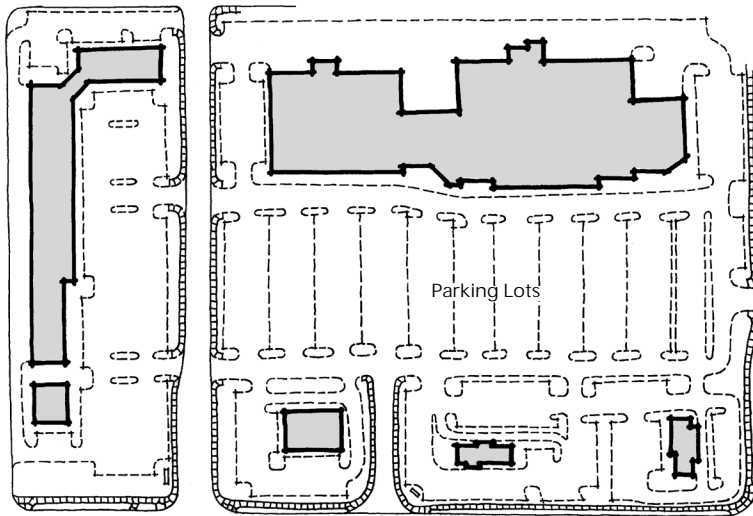
a.



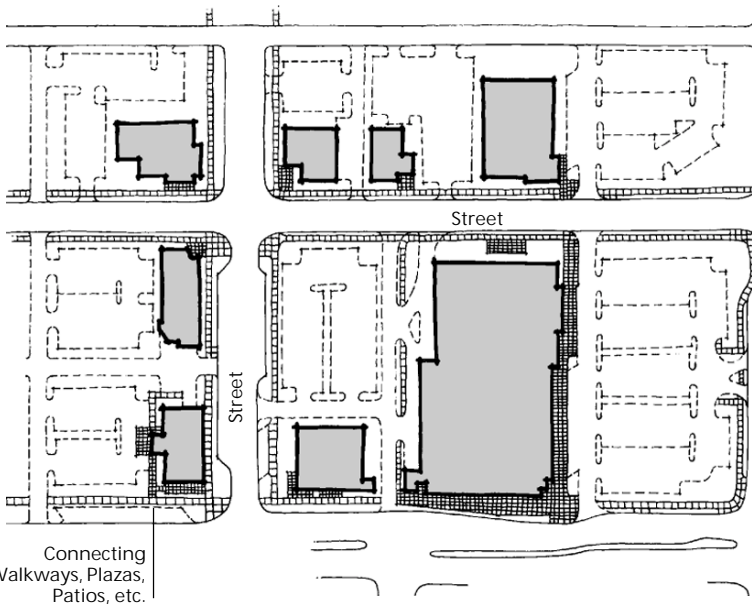
b.

# A Whole Approach

Specialists can easily design each of the parts — the driveway access, the parking lot, the sign, and building, for example — to serve technical and consumer marketing purposes in an individual development. The hard part is to make the multitude of real estate developments fit in and fit together over time into a whole greater than the sum of the parts — a livable city.



*Without local standards, development formulas commonly result in buildings as isolated "islands" engulfed by parking lots and drive-thrus, with no connecting walkways to or between buildings.*



*Plans for real neighborhoods and districts are more complex, broken down into blocks with building faces along connecting walkways and plazas, patios, etc. The result is a richer environment. To meet the standards, plans should look more like this.*

*a. Street edge along a commercial development with no connecting walkways. Everyone is required to walk across parking lots and drive-thrus to get to and from all buildings. The buildings are separated from each other and from streets by the maximum possible distances. Sidewalk segments and landscaping are relegated to leftover spots. The Land Use Code requires a more balanced approach with equal design consideration for the pedestrian.*

*b. Street edge, downtown Fort Collins commercial development. Ideally, styles and details will vary with buildings and tenants. But the aim is for each building to take its place along a landscaped walkway, close to neighboring buildings, as an integral part of a walkable district or neighborhood.*

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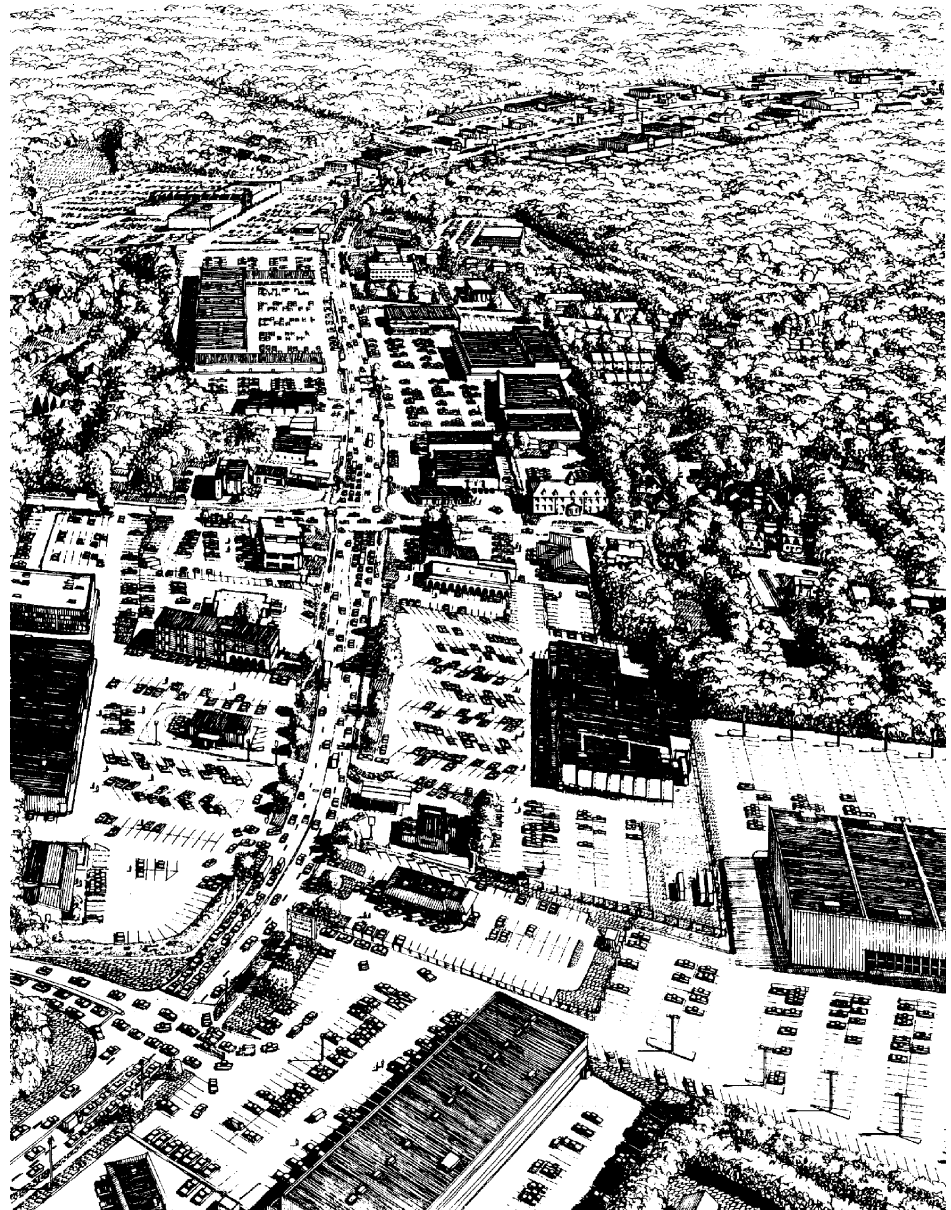
## Focus on streets

This is an overriding theme in the City's system.

Focus first on the thoughtful layout of an interconnected street network with walkable blocks.

Second, on the street itself as a positive public space with trees, sidewalks, transit stops, bikelanes, crosswalks, and other features.

And third, on the street front created by interesting building faces and entrances brought together along streets. Big, roaring arterials may pose exceptions.



*Comparison of formless  
sprawl arranged entirely  
around vehicle access to  
parking lots (left),*

*and*

*compact community development  
designed around people,  
community identity, and rural  
land conservation (right).*

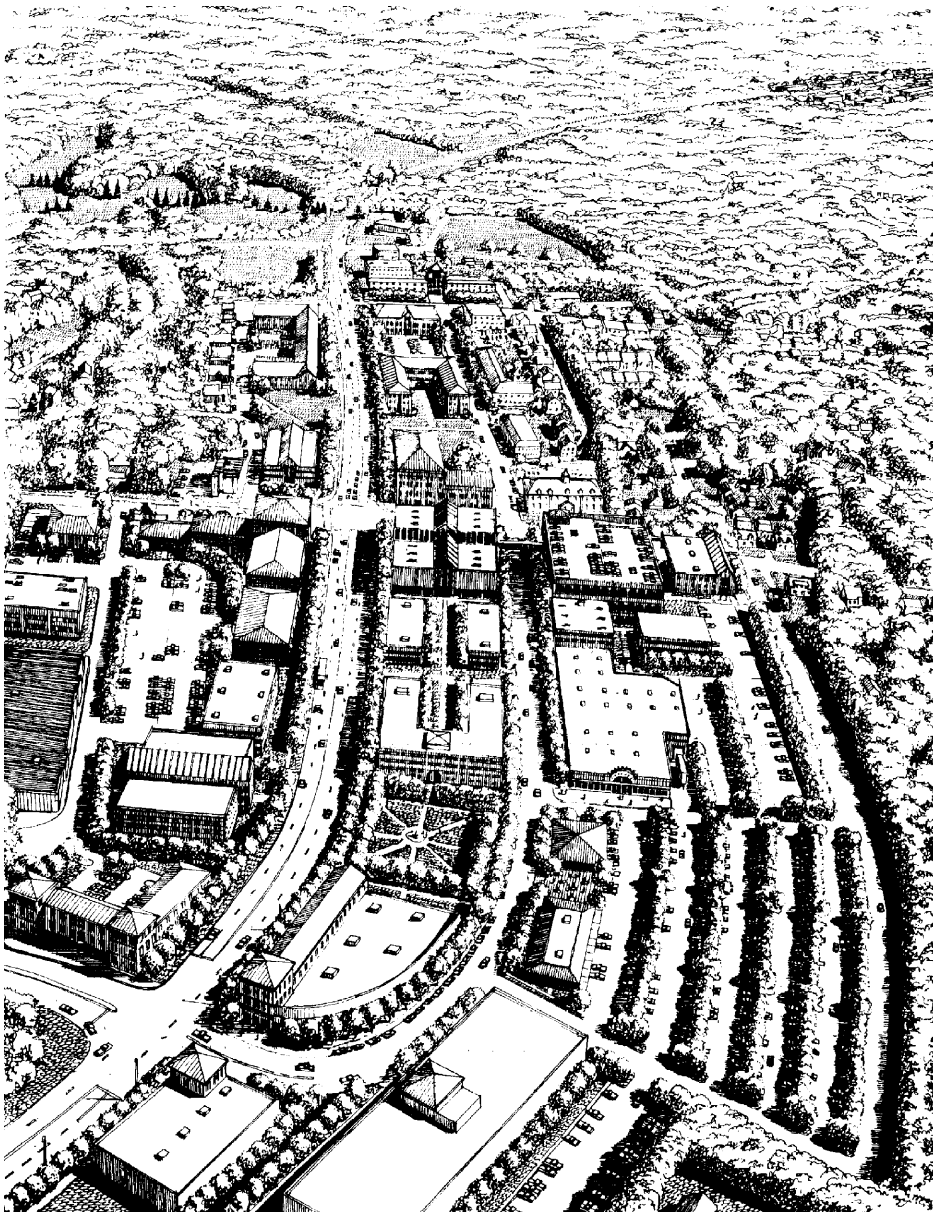
## Focus on Streets

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These three things all go together in walkable cities. There is not a new idea here — this is the way towns and cities have traditionally been built.

Streets are the city's most important public spaces. They determine what kind of place Fort Collins will be, under what conditions its residents encounter each other in public, and what image the city will project to visitors. They are the basis of accessibility for pedestrians as well as for vehicles.

A street is not an object that's easy to recognize and deal with, like an individual building in its own parking lot. A street is formed by many individual buildings, all part of the shared space. By focusing on a shared street instead of just a parking lot or private drive, we have to be more pluralistic — to accommodate different points of view.



Courtesy of Dodson Associates. Landscape Architects and Planners



Courtesy of Looney Ricks Kiss, Architects and Planners

*A plan for new development with a focus on shared streets and a sense of community. Access is direct and convenient, walking is pleasurable, and transit becomes more feasible in cities that evolve along these lines.*

## A Paragraph From City Plan:\*

“New streets will make development an integrated extension of the community. The street pattern will be simple, interconnected, and direct, avoiding circuitous routes. Multiple routes should be provided between key destinations. Streets should be located to consider physical features, and to create views and prominent locations for civic landmarks such as parks, plazas, and schools.” — City Plan Principles and Policies, Policy CAD 1.3

In addition to standards for private development, the City itself has a critical role in responding to traffic pressures so that streets remain attractive public spaces which justify the orientation of building faces onto them. This has long been an intractable problem for cities. It will undoubtedly require constant attention in Fort Collins’ future.



*A comfortable street linking a neighborhood, a commercial district, and ultimately, the rest of the city. Elements are short blocks, fronting buildings, detached sidewalks, street-side parking, medians, landscaping, and low traffic speeds. A busy urban junction can be comfortable, interesting, and accessible by many modes of travel when streets accommodate multiple needs.*

\* City Plan is Fort Collins’ Comprehensive Plan upon which the Land Use Code is based.



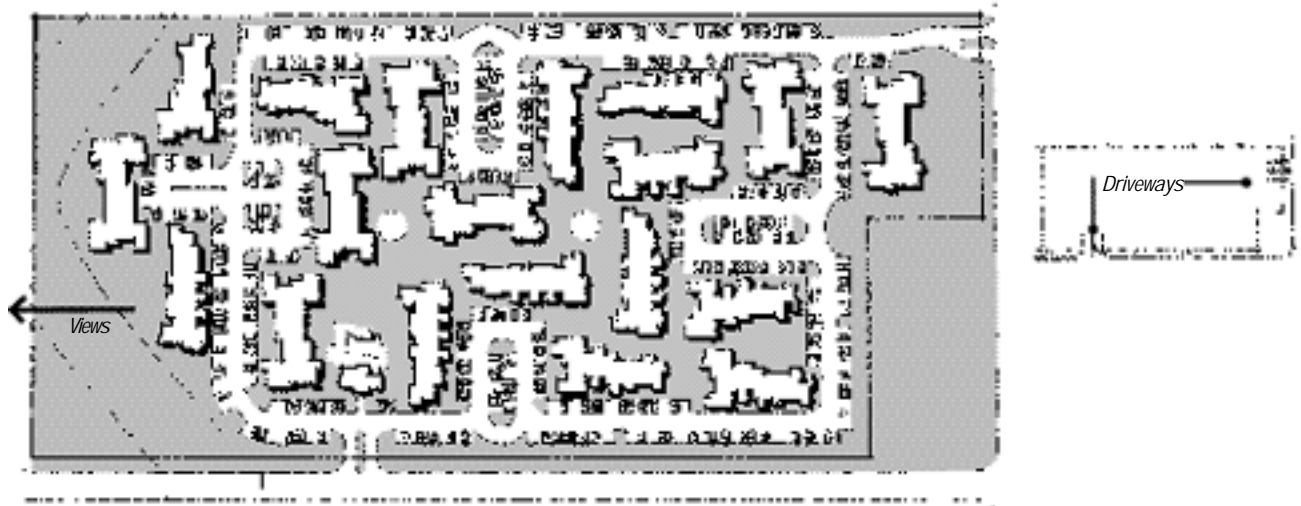


*Street view of dwellings facing parking lots. The closest front door is behind the trash dumpster.*



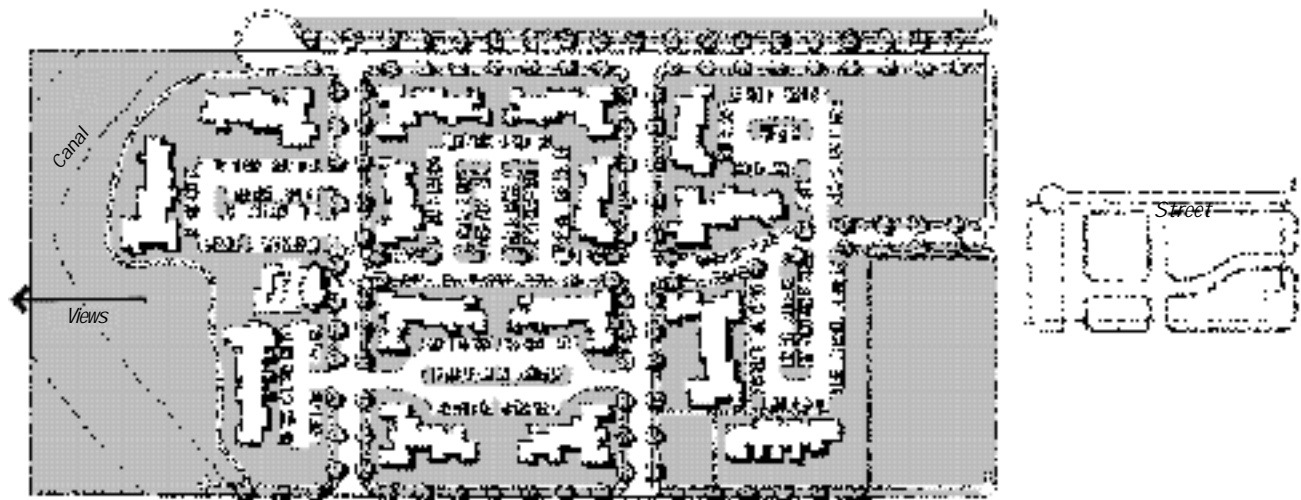
*Street view of dwellings arranged in the traditional manner of homes on a local street.*

## Buildings With Only Parking Lot Access



*The basic connections and relationships between parts often get shortchanged in developments where large or winding parking lots take the place of local streets. This form of development has little relationship to the community besides a traffic inlet/outlet onto an existing street. And that is the key issue—the form of development created by the basic arrangement. Requiring upgrades to buildings or landscaping can't make up for the negative effects of arranging everything around vehicle access to a parking lot.*

## Buildings Facing Streets



*Street connections and relationships are what makes a city. Standards call for mingling different building uses and ways of movement along city streets. Over and over again, these solutions emphasize a positive urban relationship of buildings facing onto landscaped sidewalks. This form of development has a complete, integral relationship to the larger community.*

*Parking lots are convenient and workable, but not at the expense of other important considerations.*

Build to a Sidewalk



a.



b.



c.



d.



e.



f.



g.

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One other overriding theme naturally follows the focus on streets:

## Build to a Sidewalk

This simple line paraphrases what may be the most important design standard in the Code. It shows how simple a balanced approach to urbanization can be. It refers to a street sidewalk or other connecting walkway that directly connects to the street and neighboring buildings. The corollaries are that a street network is provided; and that any parking lots are behind, beside, or below the building.

The following passage from *City Comforts* by David Sucher makes the point.

**“ There are many details to observe in cities and in these pictures but the reader might focus on and consider, above all, *the placement of the building in relation to the sidewalk*. Simple as it may be, this relationship of the building to the sidewalk is one of the key architectural decisions in city planning for cohesive neighborhoods. This relationship is significant in residential areas but is of supreme importance in commercial areas. Indeed, it is the position of the building with respect to the sidewalk which makes a city. “**



a.-d. **“This”**: *Four examples showing buildings for different land uses placed along sidewalks. In b., a connecting walkway leads through a courtyard.*

e.-g. **“Not This”**: *Three examples showing buildings with no relationship to sidewalks.*



*As a timeless site planning solution, it's hard to beat a nice street corner building for blending different objectives — visibility, pedestrian access, and orienting people to their location in the community. It puts the owner's and the city's best face forward. At top, a new mixed use bank building with offices and dwelling units. Above, a new dwelling.*

## Build to a Sidewalk



*Despite the benefits of creating street corners and then anchoring them with buildings, these contributions to the city fabric are frequently omitted from real estate developments. Both buildings above are located at significant arterial corners and both show the arrangement at the respective corners.*

*The upper example fits the Land Use Code approach; the lower one would not meet several standards related to buildings, sidewalks, and the relationship between them.*

# Emphasize Building Interactions

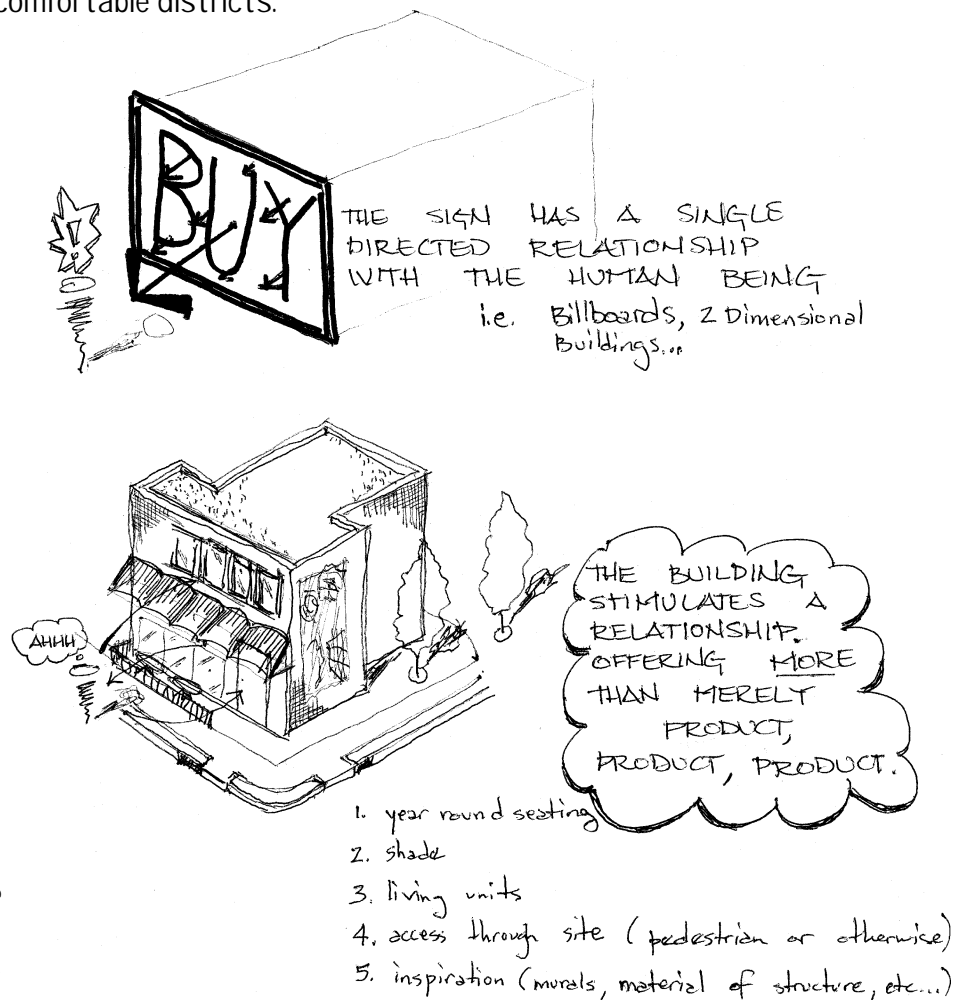
Fort Collins standards for buildings deal with the public role buildings play in shaping the streets, including sidewalks and other adjoining spaces.

Previous pages explain that buildings will be placed to anchor the sidewalk and street system. Entrances should then be clearly defined and directly connected to the street.

Building materials, architectural details, textures, and color ranges must be designed for visual interest and human scale. Standards call for entrances, windows, projections, recesses, details, textures, compatible color shades, and shaped rooflines or cornices.

Look at the surrounding neighborhood or district and reinforce any positive characteristics. Compatibility does not mean uniformity, but the context should not be neglected.

In short, a building needs to be designed as part of a public place to be inhabited by people. Generic corporate prototypes and parking-lot or garage-based formulas may need to be modified to fit local standards for distinctive, comfortable districts.



*This cartoon doodle given to the Planning Department during a study of retail development captures a lot of the discussion about local standards.*

MORE RESPONSIVE ; LESS RIGID

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## A Balance of Priorities

The public interests of the community, and the private interests in a given real estate development, often have different priorities in arranging a site plan. Below is a simplified comparison of competing approaches that get blended and balanced. Ideally, a simple and memorable system of streets and outdoor spaces is first formed in conjunction with schematic architecture. Then driveways, parking lots and corporate themes can be fitted into the resulting fabric.

### “This”

Pedestrian-oriented arrangement based on community design  
(Fits with the Land Use Code):

- 1) First, explore and create a sequence of landscaped streets, blocks, and comfortable connecting walkways to structure building sites.
- 2) Place buildings close together with interesting building faces and outdoor spaces lining and anchoring the streets and corners.
- 3) Place parking lots and other vehicle use areas where they won't interrupt the connecting walkways or dominate the street scene.

*Balances priority among a broad range of long- and short-term needs; includes all important parts; is more complex, requires more design work and coordination, therefore is initially more costly with few costs deferred, displaced, or unmet.*

*Results in more efficient use of land, energy, time, and all other resources by connections, mixing, compactness, and less car-dependence.*

### “Not This”

Vehicle-oriented arrangement with little or no community design  
(Does Not Fit with the Land Use Code):

- 1) First, assign a predetermined number of predesigned floor plans to a parcel. Locate commercial buildings for visibility of sign-like facades across parking lots to motorists on public streets.
- 2) Locate driveways for car traffic, then maximize parking spaces on the site and in front of the door.
- 3) If commercial, pave generous areas for delivery and service trucks to sides and rear.
- 4) Put signs, landscaping, or sidewalk segments in any leftover spots.

*Places priority on a narrow range of short-term considerations; leaves out important parts; is easier with less design work and coordination needed, therefore is initially less costly with more costs deferred, displaced, or unmet.*

*Results in less efficient use of land, energy, time, and all other resources by segregation of uses and exclusive car-dependence.*



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## 4 Key Standards Create a Shift

A handful of basic standards shift development away from impersonal patterns where parking lots, garages, and all that goes with them, take the place of inviting streets and sidewalks.

The Code's legal outline format may make your eyes glaze over at first. And, as always, details will still get complicated in some specific developments. But the **essence** is fairly simple.

The shift is toward a city laid out as a fabric of walkable districts. Districts will be connected by multiple choices of enjoyable routes and modes of travel — based on walking as the universal mode used by virtually everyone to varying degrees.

These key standards require attention to basic relationships and considerations that might otherwise be neglected:

- Orientation to a Connecting Walkway, 3.5.2 (B)(2) for multi-unit dwellings and 3.5.3 (B)(1) for commercial buildings;
- Street Pattern and Connectivity, 3.6.3 (D) and (E);
- Neighborhoods with housing variety, parks, and neighborhood centers, 4.4 (D)(1), (2), (3), and (7); and
- Recessed Garage Doors to emphasize the faces of homes, 3.5.2 (E).

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## Creativity

Under the Land Use Code, there will be creative alternatives to the standards for particular situations. But they should be just that — truly creative solutions that respond to the unique circumstances and still make progress toward the purposes behind the standards.