Land Use Code Continued

3.5.3 Mixed-Use, Institutional and Commercial Buildings

(A) ***Purpose.*** These standards are intended to promote the design of an urban environment that is built to human scale to encourage attractive street fronts and other connecting walkways that accommodate pedestrians as the first priority, while also accommodating vehicular movement.

(B) ***Relationship of Buildings to Streets, Walkways and Parking.***

(1) *Orientation to a Connecting Walkway.* At least one (1) main entrance of any commercial or mixed-use building shall face and open directly onto a connecting walkway with pedestrian frontage. See Figure 10.

(2) *Orientation to Build-to Lines for Streetfront Buildings.* Build-to lines based on a consistent relationship of buildings to the street sidewalk shall be established by development projects, in order to form visually continuous, pedestrian-oriented streetfronts with no vehicle use area between building faces and the street.

(a) To establish "build-to" lines, buildings shall be located and designed to align or approximately align with any previously established building/sidewalk relationships that are consistent with this standard.

(b) Buildings shall be located no more than fifteen (15) feet from the right-of-way of an adjoining street if the street is smaller than a full arterial or has on-street parking.

(c) Buildings shall be located at least ten (10) and no more than twenty-five (25) feet behind the street right-of-way of an adjoining street that is larger than a minor arterial that does not have on-street parking.

Examples & Explanations


FROZEN CUSTARD
COMPANY

Building Relationships to Streets

The standards are a simple town building principle: buildings should be placed together along city streets.

A healthy, walkable city springs from streets. The edge is a crucial part of a city street, and building frontage is a crucial part of the edge. The edges largely establish the character of a city.

Courtesy of David Forbes Hibbert, Architect

This memorable large retail building is the result of good urban planning by local civic and business leaders, strategic public investments by the City, skillful negotiating by the Planning Commission, creativity by the architects, and corporate willingness to listen to the wishes of local community residents. (Santa Monica).

The principles are the same in neighborhood districts or larger commercial districts.

Pedestrian streets jump out as the key to channeling "growth" into positive development of a city. People can take pride and a sense of ownership in them.

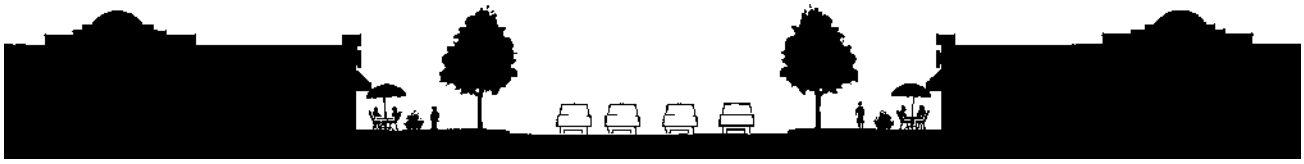
An ample pedestrian and transit friendly realm makes auto and truck traffic behave better, which gets at the very livability of a city.

Above, design mitigation of development arranged around the car, with landscaping, architectural quality, and parking limited to just one row of stalls. But the issue here is the ***form*** *of development created by the basic arrangement. Under the Code, developments will be arranged more like the lower photo, with buildings pulled together up along sidewalks and parking at the sides and rear of buildings.*

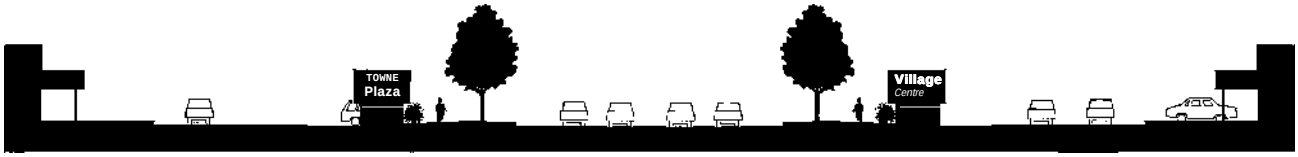
When a building takes its place in the sidewalk network, it adds to a **profile of development** that relates to human dimensions and the experience of a pedestrian. Multiply the effects, and places with comfortable street fronts begin to evolve. These places are then easier to serve, over time, with a balanced transportation system. This largely determines the physical character — the look and feel — of any city.

Buildings set back create voids and a more stark environment.

Profile of Development



Pedestrian-oriented development



Auto-oriented development

The profile of development dictates long term success of a walkable city. The lower profile fails many tests of walkability. Town planning, multi-functional street design, and local pride in buildings are being reaffirmed after a several-decade slump nationwide, and the Code reflects this.

Street edges largely determine whether real estate developments contribute to a community fabric, or merely act as freestanding destinations for car traffic.

But the edges of streets are easy to neglect, and hard to account for in terms of direct costs and benefits. The benefits don't come in a handy form, like the number of dollars on a bottom line or the number of vehicles carried; they come in the form of comfort, enjoyment, friendliness, beauty, inspiration, memory, and a healthy community. Real things, but things that can't be measured and whose costs are hard to divvy up and assign. These standards focus some basic attention on the edges.


Perkins

This Section is integral with Section 3.6.3, Street Pattern and Connectivity, and from the applicable zone districts that call for certain block/street patterns.

It also must be read with City Street Standards and Traffic Engineering criteria, which are not contained in the Land Use Code. The call for pedestrian streets and urban places has implications for City engineers as well as developers. Various interests and technical formulas must be balanced and compromised to achieve multi-functional city streets.

It will take constant collaborative work and attention to make progress toward goals for a walkable city.

Buildings can orient to nice pedestrian areas and handle car traffic and parking. A balanced, multi-dimensional approach to access is evident in the lower example.

This downtown environment is more complex than the one above, meeting a whole range of needs. It takes more consideration to see the essential urban pattern of block, street, tree, sidewalk, window, door, and details; and then translate it onto plans that fit into a local district while accommodating vehicles. It is easier to just pave a driveway and a parking lot around a standardized building.

Key elements in the lower example are short blocks, on-street parking, a complete sidewalk network, a connecting walkway to the building, comfortable outdoor spaces, bike racks, and a supporting alley system behind — all in addition to the parking lot.

The top example typifies a common development approach in which all of these things are missing, with a drive-thru lane added.

The lowest common denominators — 4 walls, a roof, a sign and a parking lot.

A cinema with no direct connections or walking access to and from neighboring stores, restaurants, or dwellings.

A typical example of common prototypes. People walking from nearby housing arrive at this corner where a parking lot access drive meets the street.

Problems with the Standards

What is not so simple for some developers, is the very fact that some common auto-oriented prototypes will not comply with Fort Collins standards. A plan for a building that stands apart, surrounded by parking lots and drive-thrus, will need to be modified to fit into a district or neighborhood.

Designers can readily generate physical solutions for the planning and architecture. The problem is, the results may be seen as contrary to industry formulas that are based solely on traffic access to a parking lot in front of the building, with a big sign to grab the attention of drivers.

Tying into the city sidewalk system might not be important, or even beneficial, to the bottom line in some real estate or business deals. 4 walls, a roof, a sign, and a parking lot, are all that some applicants need to set up shop. Streets, sidewalks, transit stops, outdoor spaces, and even design time, can be seen as extra overhead cost.

General Concern About Vehicle Access

Concerned citizens and developers have stated, somehat rhetorically, that "you can't force people to abandon their cars" to walk, bike, or take transit. (As the rhetoric goes, old people might not want to carry their building supplies home on their bikes in the rain).

Contrary to this concern, the Code is based on an approach to development that still relies on private autos as the primary form of transportation, by far, the same as before the Code. However, it requires us to also pay attention to putting pedestrians and bicyclists on equal footing with cars.

Simply put, the idea is that vehicles can be well accommodated by design that accommodates people as a first order of priority.

The idea is demonstrated on the following pages. In many cases, the same corporate enterprises have developments that would meet the Code, and developments that would not. So essentially, Fort Collins has looked at the true range of possibilities and made pragmatic choices to favor one form of city development over another.

Bank building and its parking lot, accessible only through a larger parking lot, with no streets or walkways linking nearby buildings.

Bank building and a small plaza built to street sidewalks in a walkable, livable district.

Restaurant building with no pedestrian access. It is separated from the street and all other buildings by parking and drive-thru functions.

Restaurant building up along the street with a patio. Parking and drive-thru functions are to the sides and rear.

Examples

Commercial development with little pedestrian relationship between buildings and uses. The building does have a connecting walkway to a side street.

Complete integration and extension of community fabric. This took public investment and collaboration including shared structured parking.

Strip center development where driveways and a parking lot took the place of a street and sidewalks, right across the street from the strip center below.

Strip center built to anchor the street fronts and corners with direct pedestrian access and a thoughtful arrangement all around.

Street front parking lot mitigated by islands for landscaping and a walkway. Multiply the effects, though, and car-dominated strips, instead of walkable districts, emerge.

New (1990's) buildings and streets form a walkable district.

Supermarket site redeveloped to take its place along the street and allow updated development on an outdated site. Fort Collins standards would call for a little more room along the street edge, with a little more landscaping.

Supermarket, Vail. A decent new building, but perhaps the most conspicuous flat, generic development in the valley, with a sole emphasis on traffic access to a parking lot. The lack of any pedestrian access usually represents a general lack of relationship to the locality.

Supermarket, Vail, near the one above, brought to the street in a mixed-use building that includes upstairs apartments affordable to employees. The building takes its place and fits in alongside dwellings. This strategic project took public investment and collaboration. Every development can't be this complete, but it shows the basic orientation to the street along with the other community benefits.

a.

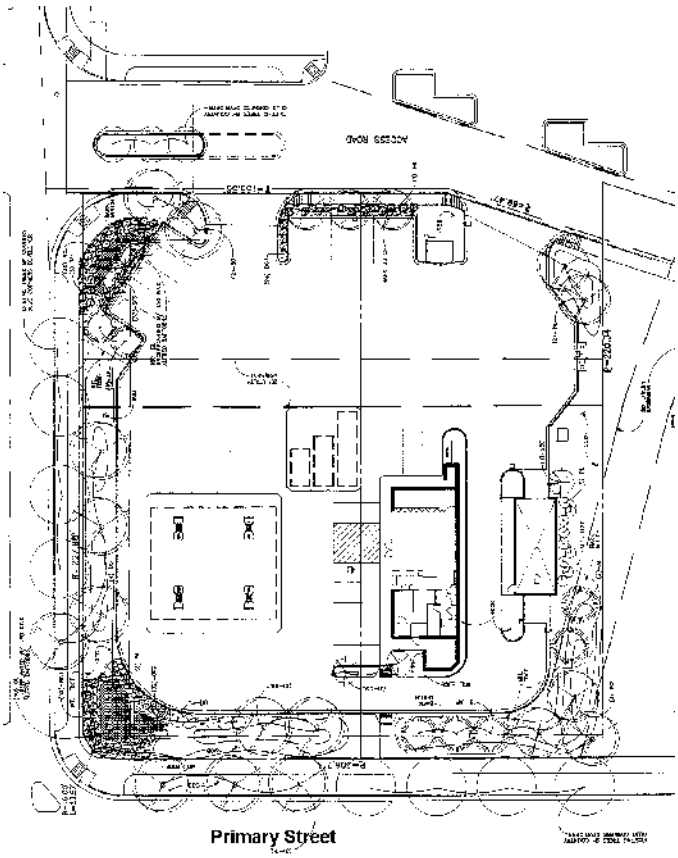
b.

a. Parking is provided near doors AND the building fronts onto the street.

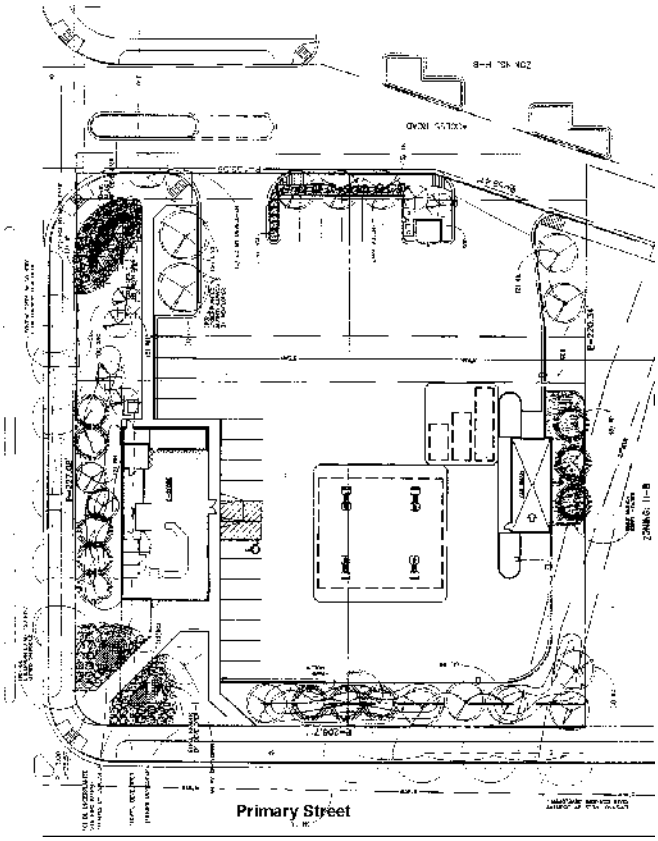
c.

a-d. Buildings tie into the fabric of mixed districts by contributing to street edges. Multiple needs and modes of travel are visibly supported.

d.



A development plan as originally submitted.



Same plan as revised in design review (and built.)

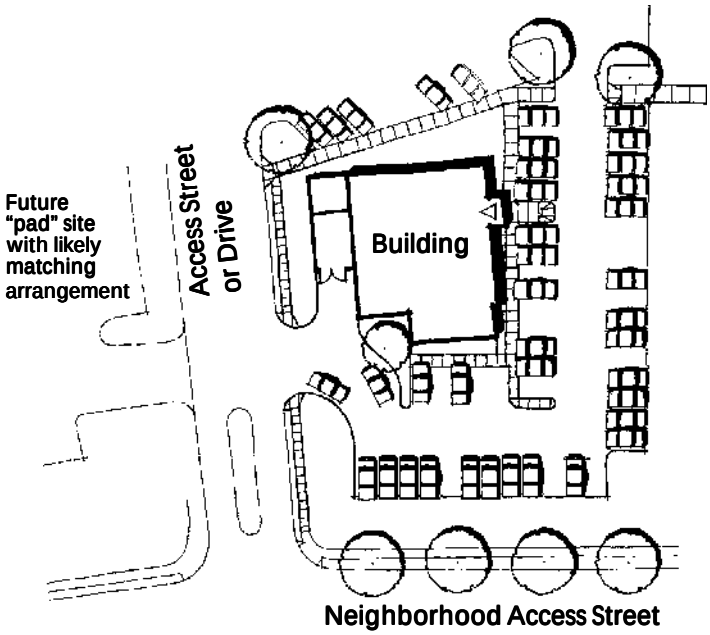
Plans vs. Actual Places.

Part of the trick is to translate good intentions onto technical plans. A plan view drawing that meets the standards can look about the same as one that doesn't. They both will have buildings, parking lots, and maybe even some walkways, all crisply drawn by computer. Plus, technical needs like numbers of parking stalls, building square feet, cubic feet of storm runoff detention, utility lines, pavement thickness, etc., can be fully met on plans that don't otherwise meet local standards. In fact it's easier to engineer these numerical formulas without having to consider the quality of the place.

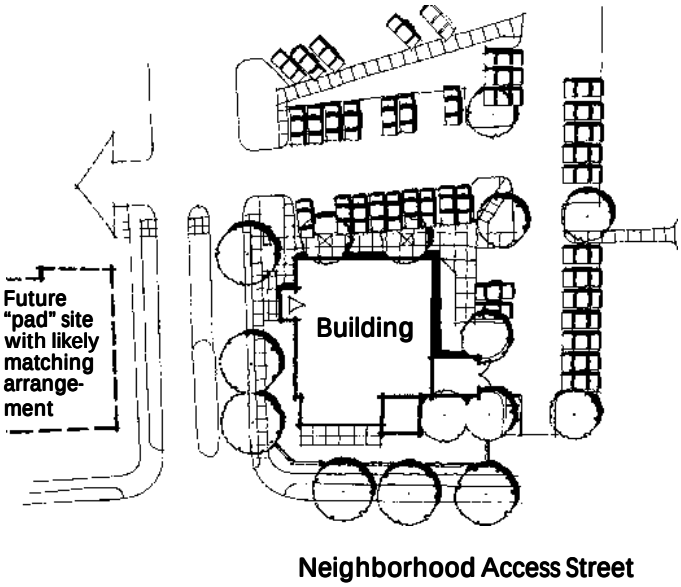
In other words, clear differences that are apparent to a person walking in the city, are not so apparent in the blueprints that determine what gets built. As a result, the urban environment can suffer, even with the best of intentions. The answers simply lie in careful consideration.

The top plan at left does not meet the standards. The street corner would have qas pumps and the building would have no connecting walkway. The bottom plan meets the standard, with a connecting walkway and a building at the street corner.

Following are just a few example plans showing some basic solutions that have general relevance.

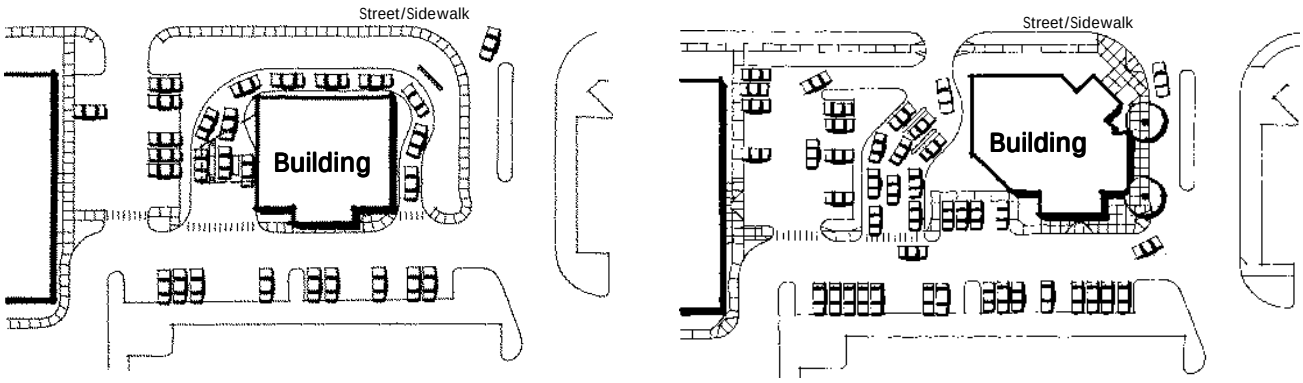


A development plan as originally submitted, engulfed in vehicle access with no connecting walkway

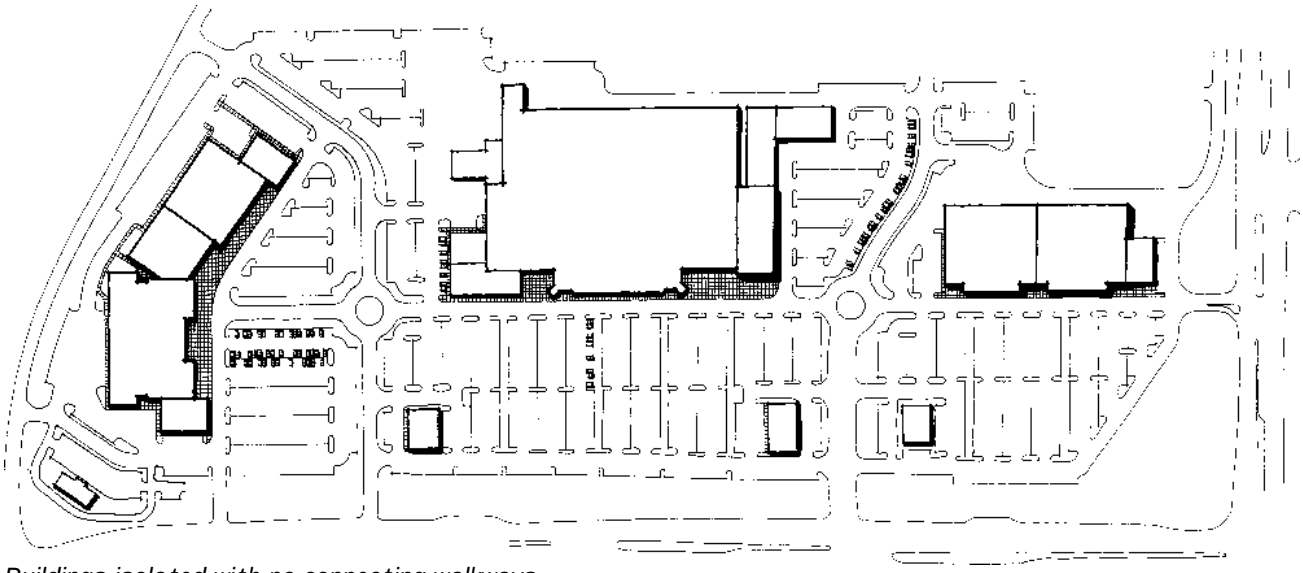


Same plan rearranged to form a comfortable corner for pedestrians

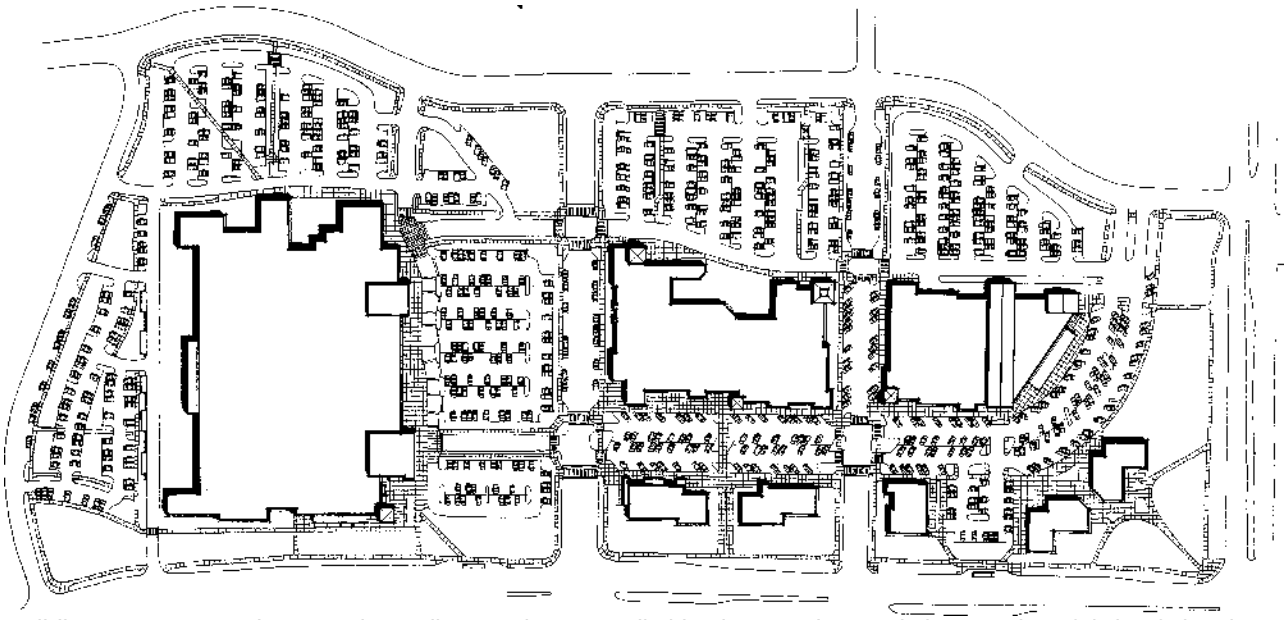
Example Plan View Sketches



"Drive-thrus" tend to tangle circulation in almost any arrangement, but shouldn't isolate a building as on the plan at left above.



Buildings isolated with no connecting walkways.



Buildings, streets, and connecting walkways shape a walkable place, and extend the complete fabric of the city.

Land Use Code Continued

(B) ***Relationship of Buildings to Streets, Walkways and Parking.***

(1) ***Annotated Above (Connecting Walkways)***

(2) ***Annotated Above (Build-to Lines)***

(a) ***Annotated Above (Build-to Lines)***

(b) ***Annotated Above (Build-to Lines)***

(c) ***Annotated Above (Build-to Lines)***

(d) Exceptions to the build-to line standards shall be permitted:

1. in order to form an outdoor space such as a plaza, courtyard, patio or garden between a building and the sidewalk. Such a larger front yard area shall have landscaping, low walls, fencing or railings, a tree canopy, and/or other similar site improvements along the sidewalk designed for pedestrian interest, comfort and visual continuity.

2. if the building is adjacent to a full arterial or major arterial street, and the Director has determined that an alternative to the street sidewalk better serves the purpose of connecting commercial destinations due to one (1) or more of the following constraints:

   a. high volume and/or speed of traffic on the adjacent street(s),

   b. landform,

   c. an established pattern of existing buildings that makes a pedestrian-oriented streetfront infeasible.

   Such an alternative to the street sidewalk must include a connecting walkway(s) and may include internal walkways or other directly connecting outdoor spaces such as plazas, courtyards, squares or gardens.

3. in the case of a large building with employment, vehicle-related or other uses that have little relationship to pedestrians, or that have a need to limit ground floor windows, where the "build-to" line is not feasible for the entire building. The design of such a building shall be permitted to contribute only a portion of a facade to a build-to line by extending at least thirty (30) percent of one (1) side of the building to a build-to line. (See Figure 11.)

4. in the case of Large Retail Establishments, Supermarkets or other anchor-tenant buildings that face internal connecting walkways with pedestrian frontage in a development that includes additional outlying buildings adjacent to the street(s).

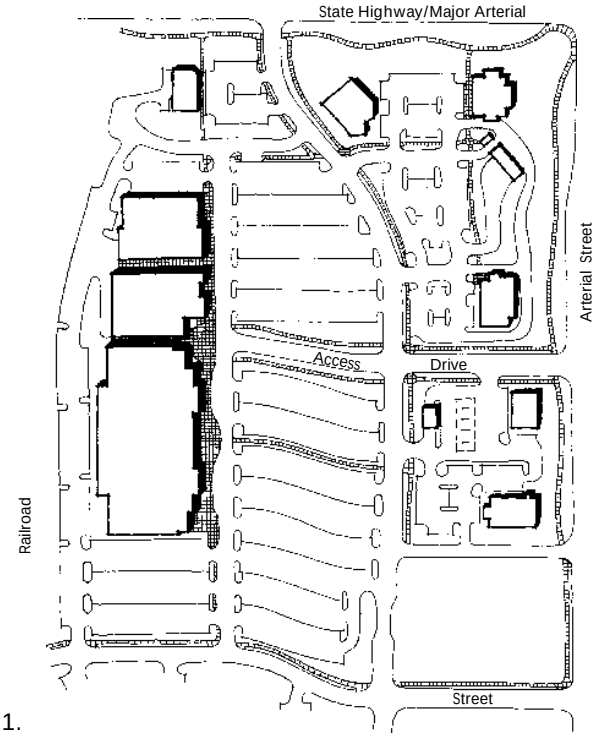
Examples & Explanations

Exceptions to Build-to Lines for Streetfront Buildings

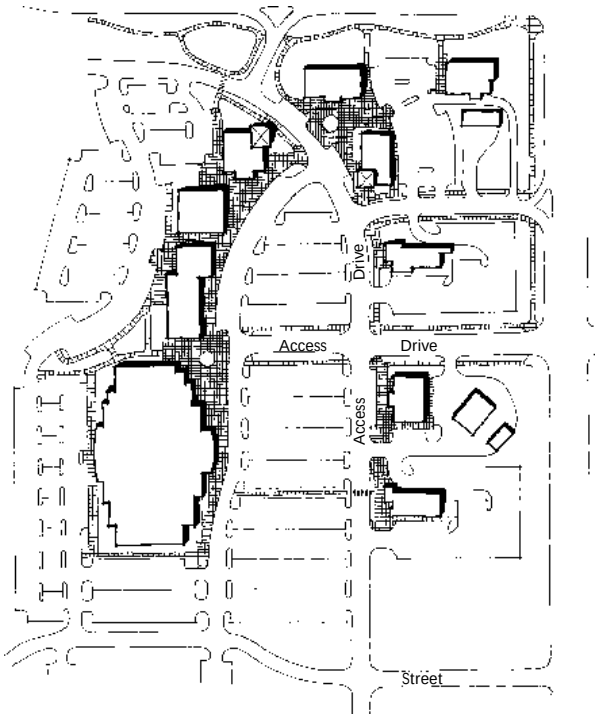
Complications may justify creative alternatives to the basic street front standards in specific development situations. For example, railroads, state highways, big arterials, big canals, and existing development may preclude a complete pattern of streets, making alternative connecting walkways more appropriate. But **if buildings can't be brought together along a street, then bring them together along some other pedestrian frontage** which directly ties to the city network. Again, these building standards are inseparable from street standards in other sections.

Example Planning Exercise

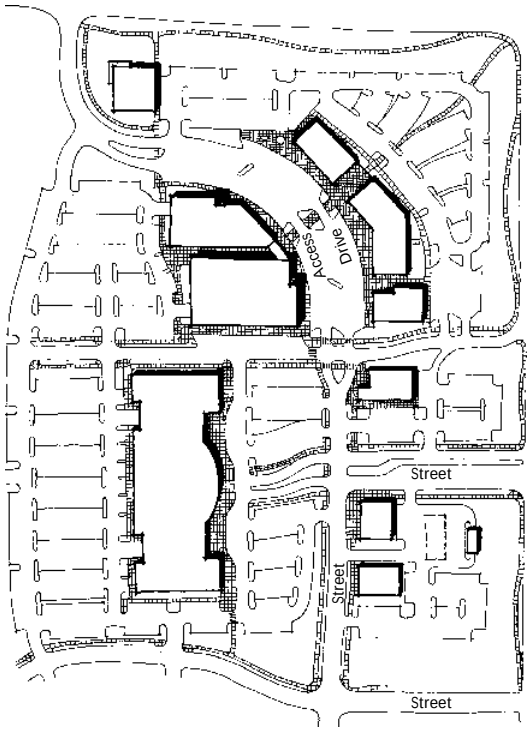
1.



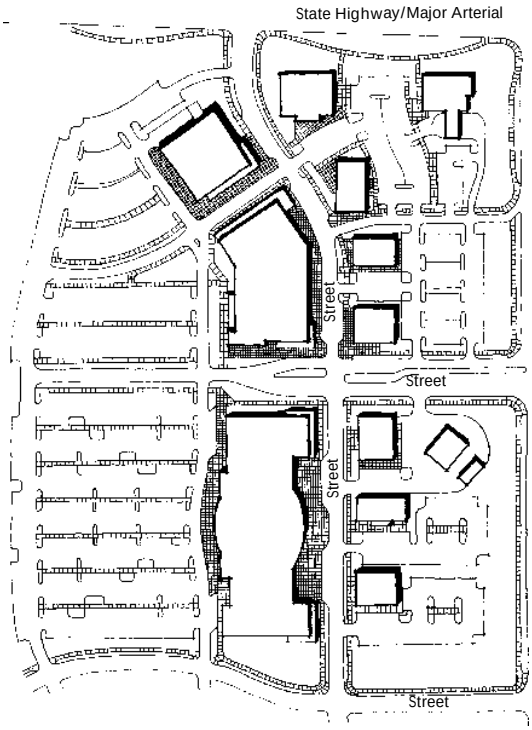
2.



3.



4.



1. *Typical "strip mall" and "pads" with no focus except a huge parking lot. Signalized traffic access is needed; therefore a public street is needed.*

2. *Access drive loop, with some nice walkways and plazas. Signalized traffic access is needed; therefore a public street is needed.*

3. *Street-like drive similar to downtown Fort Collins, and an anchor with parking lots distributed around the building. A real street connects to neighborhoods "below" the development. This street allows a traffic signal at the main access.*

4. *Meets 3.5.3 with buildings facing a pedestrian street.*

Example Planning Exercise.

This sequence of 4 example plans shows a planning exercise for a site where a highway and railroad might prevent the streets the Code calls for. #4 shows a solution that would meet the standards for building orientation. But the top street access to the highway may not be allowed by the State. In that case, #1, 2, and 3 show the evolution of alternative plans to bring buildings together along some **other** pedestrian frontage.

#1 is easiest to develop, but # 2, 3, and 4 do a progressively better job of bringing buildings together in a walkable urban pattern. They are progressively harder because the considerations multiply as buildings coexist along a shared street and other shared spaces. A richer urban environment requires more plurality and cooperation.

Two aspects of this development program make the arterial street sidewalks less appropriate for linking buildings than an on-site walkway network. One is the big, roaring arterials with no chance for on-street parking. The other is the large commercial center with multiple buildings and acres of parking. Internal drives and walkways may continue to provide primary linkages and bring buildings together in developments of this scale.

Besides this example where physical barriers may make true street orientation infeasible, other off-street arrangements may be appropriate for other specific situations, weighed on a case-by-case basis—a pedestrian mall or campus, for example, or other specialized situations.

End Examples and Explanations for 3.5.3 (A) and (B

Two adjacent developments exhibiting massing variation, below, and lack of variation, above.

(C) **Variation in Massing.** A single, large, dominant building mass shall be avoided.

(1) Horizontal masses shall not exceed a height:width ratio of 1:3 without substantial variation in massing that includes a change in height and a projecting or recessed elements.

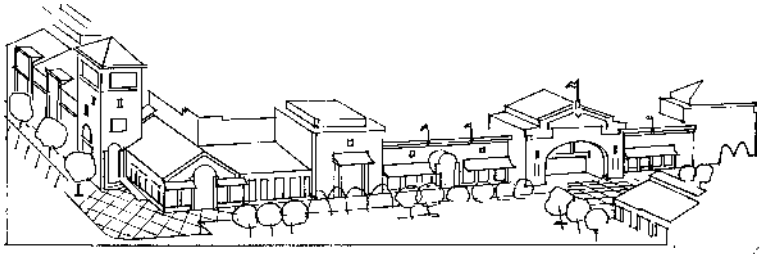
(2) Changes in mass shall be related to entrances, the integral structure and/or the organization of interior spaces and activities and not merely for cosmetic effect. False fronts or parapets create an insubstantial appearance and are prohibited.

Examples & Explanations

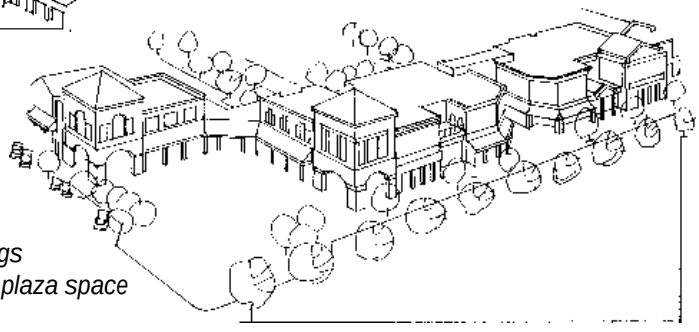
Variation in Massing

This standard requires some variation to be added to an otherwise low, flat, monolithic building. A common aspect of generic auto-oriented development has been featureless buildings unable to work in concert to shape urban spaces. In some developments, the standard may call for a little more height, a little three-dimensional variation, or both.

There is wide flexibility in architectural style based on human scale and contribution to a comfortable district.



Massing variation in an updated hybrid strip mall/street front arrangement



Massing variation in two-story buildings shaping a pedestrian streetfront and plaza space

Projections, recesses, and offsets help distinguish different businesses and activities. Flatness and uniformity smother different social facts and functions of buildings, repelling attention and interaction. Conversely, flatness and uniformity take less work and help lower initial costs, but that approach has impacts on goals for building a compact, walkable, livable city.

Regarding height, the standard does not require upstairs floor space. However, the City generally encourages buildings greater than one story for many reasons. Even an extra half-story, loft, clerestory, or group of real dormers adds interest and life, and shapes space.

New building reviewed under the Land Use Code, The projecting entrance area demonstrates these standards.

Massing variation in a modest neighborhood commercial building. (Caused by the sloping ground in this case).

One long building wall with generous variation. Pedestrian scale massing—and not architectural style—is the point.

Clerestory on car-service use in a livable mixed district.

An extra half story.

Simple 2-story mixed use building.

2 stories including occupied space above drive-thru.

Upper stories add opportunities for interesting roof forms, windows, dormers, balconies, and similar features that go with living or office space. They support the mixing of activity that makes streets and districts livelier. Of course building massing is not an isolated issue—with parking often the major constraint.

Ground floor and upper levels should be designed to reflect the significant differences in function and relationships. The ground floor interacts with pedestrians; the top floor is part of a skyline.

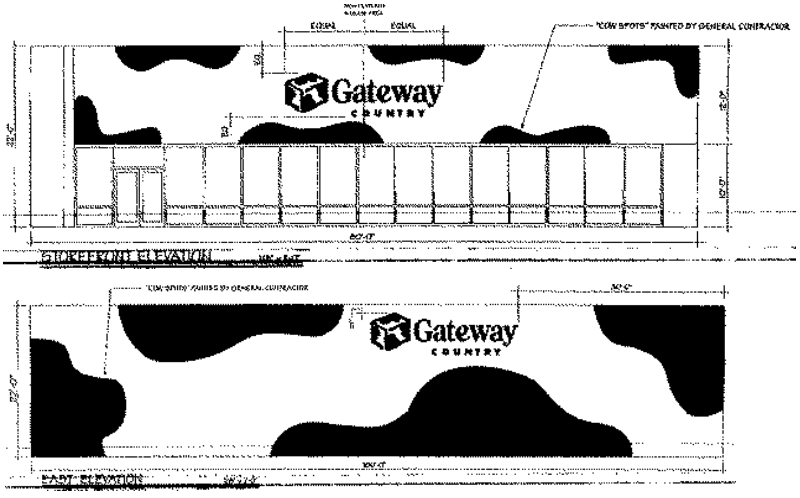
Newer 5-story building continues nearby massing and cornice lines, then slants back.

Stepping back the mass can keep a bulky building from looming over sidewalks and outdoor spaces, and add interest to the skyline. If terracing of the mass is not appropriate for the style, then belt courses and differences in facade treatment can visually break the building down into pleasing proportions.

End Examples and Explanations for 3.5.3 (C)

This convenience store/gas station, placed near the historically significant Harmony School, was designed with special matching masonry to fit in and focus attention on the school.

The smashingly successful result of a long debate in the review process. The corporate developer insisted on razing this building to install a standard prototype called #M-90. The City insisted on saving the historically valuable building, which ironically has spanish-style characteristics. Negotiations finally resulted in this comfortable addition to the city and a peak-performing outlet for the company.



a.-b. Building originally submitted to look like a box painted in black and white cow spots. As built, it reinforces a larger place. For years, corporate users have proposed an assortment of unrelated, attention-grabbing visual statements. And for years, most have been toned down and integrated through local review. Without standards, some buildings would tend to look more like billboards than parts of comfortable places. This is one standard that simply codifies long standing development review practice in Fort Collins.

a.

Land Use Code Continued

(D) ***Character and Image.***

(1) Site-Specific Design. Building design shall contribute to the uniqueness of a zone district, and/or the Fort Collins community with predominant materials, elements, features, color range and activity areas tailored specifically to the site and its context. In the case of a multiple building development, each individual building shall include predominant characteristics shared by all buildings in the development so that the development forms a cohesive place within the zone district or community. A standardized prototype design shall be modified if necessary to meet the provisions of this Land Use Code.

Examples & Explanations

Site Specific Design

The design of an individual building should be treated as no more significant in itself than in relation to its neighboring environment and to Fort Collins as a unique community. Development review in Fort Collins has aimed for this concept for years. The standard essentially sets the stage for discussion and creativity in particular situations.

The examples at left, done prior to the Land Use Code, are especially clear because of historic influences. In general, buildings should be designed to contribute to a larger place with entrance areas, windows, outdoor spaces, and characteristics cited in the standard

b.

End Examples and Explanations for 3.5.3 (D)

(2) ***Facade Treatment.*** — **N.A.**

(3) ***Facades.*** — **N.A.**

(4) ***Entrances.*** — **N.A.**

(5) ***Awnings.*** — **N.A.**

(6) ***Base and Top Treatments.*** — **N.A.**

(7) ***Encroachments.*** — **N.A.**

3.5.4 Large Retail Establishments — N.A.

3.5.5 Convenience Shopping Center — N.A.