

CHAPTER 4 – COMMUNITY DESIGN

This element in the town’s plan reflects the emphasis placed on design in Williston’s vision for the future. That vision calls for the use of design review in the historic village and commercial areas, and careful attention to details like landscaping, outdoor lighting, and signs throughout the town. The objectives listed below explain how the town is working to implement this part of its vision.

4.1 – Village Design and Historic Preservation – Maintaining the historic character of Williston Village has long been a town goal. This objective continues design review in the VZD.

4.2 – Commercial Design – This objective provides a foundation for design review in the town’s industrial and commercial zoning districts. It also calls for additional or improved performance standards for industrial and commercial development.

4.3 - Mixed Use Design – As pointed out in Policy 3.1.3, development in the Mixed Use Residential Zoning District is critical to the realization of the town’s vision. This objective calls for the further refinement of the specific design standards for mixed use projects adopted as part of the town’s *Unified Development Bylaw*.

4.4 – Urban Parks - include plazas, greens, and other spaces that provide shoppers and workers an opportunity to enjoy the out-of-doors in commercial areas. They are usually privately-owned and maintained.

4.5 - Neighborhood Parks - are privately-owned parks that provide outdoor recreation in residential neighborhoods. They are usually privately-owned and maintained.

4.6 – Signs and Outdoor Lighting – This objective addresses two elements of design that have a major impact on traffic safety, neighboring properties, the town’s appearance, and the night sky.

4.7 – Urban Forestry – Trees are important assets in any park, neighborhood, or commercial development. These policies provide for their installation and maintenance.

4.8 - Williston-in-Bloom – This volunteer program, with some town support, provides landscaping of public spaces.

4.9 – Gateways to Williston - The Town of will work to enhance its major gateway areas by adopting further design standards and encouraging enhancement projects in its Gateway Zones.

4.1 – Village Design and Historic Preservation - The Town of Williston will continue to use design review to protect the historic character of the Village Zoning District (VZD). The town will also consider ways to protect historic resources outside the VZD.

Williston adopted design review guidelines for the VZD in 1999. These guidelines are available as a separate document: *Williston Village Historic District Design Review Guide*. They have also been incorporated into the town’s bylaws, which require review of all exterior changes in the VZD by the Historic and Architectural Advisory Committee (HAAC). The HAAC reviews applications at its regular meetings, then submits recommendations to the Development Review Board (DRB), which issues Certificates of Appropriateness for changes that comply.

4.1.2 Review the Design Review Guide. Revise as Necessary. The HAAC will review the design review guide, with the goal of using the experience gained in its administration to make it more specific and, thus, more useful.

4.1.3 Maintain the Character of Historic Properties Outside the VZD. Not all historic properties in Williston are in the VZD. The town will continue to consider the presence of historic sites in subdivision and site plan review. The HAAC will be tasked with discussing and preparing recommendations for the designation and protection of historic landmarks outside the VZD.

National and State Registers of Historic Places

Both Vermont and the United States maintain lists of notable historic sites. Information on the State Register may be obtained at <http://www.historicvermont.org/programs/basic.html>. The National Register of Historic Places is maintained by the National Park Service. Check <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/> for information.

4.2 – Commercial Design – The Town of Williston will continue to promote commercial site planning and architectural design that responds to the vision stated in Chapter 2. This will be accomplished via the existing design review process, with some additions and revisions.

Williston's bylaws currently require design review for most commercial and many industrial projects. The areas where design review applies are delineated on Map 6 – Design Review Districts. Design review is conducted by the HAAC. The HAAC's work is based on a list of design guidelines adopted in the town's zoning bylaw. This process has been effective, but should continue to be refined.

4.2.1 Continue to Require Landscaping. The town's design guidelines require that applicants provide appropriate landscaping along property boundaries and streets, within parking lots, and around buildings and signs.

The design guidelines require ample landscaping that functions to buffer adjoining uses and public ways, maintain air quality, shade paved surfaces, and enhance the appearance of the proposed development by screening mechanical equipment, sign bases, dumpsters, and similar features. Landscaping plans are coordinated with erosion control and stormwater management plans, as required by stormwater management and watershed protection regulations.

4.2.2 Encourage Use of Native Plants in Landscaping. Prohibit the Use of Invasive Plants. Williston will continue to promote the use of native species in landscaping for commercial, industrial, and residential premises. It will also call landowners' attention to the Vermont Agency of Agriculture's quarantine of certain invasive exotics, like purple loosestrife, Russian olive, European buckthorn, and Japanese honeysuckle as well as those invasive plant species identified in the bylaw.

4.2.3 Minimize the Surface Area Devoted to Parking. The town will continue to require adequate parking and to encourage shared parking where feasible. For both design and water quality reasons, the town will limit the number of spaces to no more than the number required.

4.2.4 Continue to Minimize the Visual Impact of Parking. Asphalt and automobiles should not dominate Williston streetscapes. The design guidelines will continue to require that parking be placed behind or beside buildings wherever the site permits. Landscaped buffers for parking areas will also be required.

4.2.5 Avoid Dead Walls. Long walls without doors, windows, or other variations kill pedestrian spaces. The design guidelines will continue to require that any wall along which there is a sidewalk or that faces a parking area have functional ground floor windows, which may be used to admit light or for display.

4.2.6 Review and Revise Setbacks for Consistency and Appropriateness. The town's bylaws currently require deep front yard setbacks from major roads in some instances. This makes it difficult to create an urban appearance in the Taft Corners area and requires the frequent use of an exception in the Village Zoning District. Setbacks from major roads will be reviewed and revised to be consistent with the goals of this plan.

4.3 Mixed Use Design. The Town of Williston will continue to apply guidelines for mixed use projects to its commercial design review process.

The HAAC reviews industrial, commercial, and mixed use projects using a set of guidelines that are adopted in the *Unified Development Bylaw*. Some of the considerations in the bylaw include sound-proofing, the separation of commercial and residential entrances, and the need for resident parking. The town will also explore the development of standards to incentivize larger-scale, higher-density projects in the Growth Center.

4.4 - Urban Parks - The Town of Williston will strongly encourage the provision of urban parks in commercial and mixed use developments and seek to enliven existing urban parks.

Urban parks are small, intimate open spaces that allow for casual enjoyment of the out-of-doors by sitting on a park bench during a lunch hour, stretching out on the grass, or enjoying the flowers for a few minutes during an afternoon shopping trip. Urban Parks are usually privately-owned and maintained. Town-owned community and country parks, such as the Rossignol Park and Five Tree Hill Country Park, are described in Chapter 8 - Parks and Recreation.

Urban Parks offer residents, workers, and shoppers opportunities both for movement and peaceful contemplation. Their benefits include stress reduction, an opportunity to connect with the seasons, and sense of vitality in commercial and mixed-use centers. Properly designed urban parks function both as destinations and safe, pleasant pedestrian linkages within a development.

4.4.1 Work with Owners to Enliven Existing Urban Parks. The town will work with owners to encourage ways to enliven existing urban parks. The Town may consider creating a modest, competitive parkland enhancement fund that will encourage further development of existing urban parks that lack pizzazz.

4.4.2 Encourage Provision of Urban Parks in New Developments. The location and design of proposed urban parks must be included in the plans submitted for review by the town. Every situation is different, but some guidelines can be offered.

- Urban parks should be located so as to provide employees, shoppers, and residents with easy pedestrian access to nature in the form of green grass, trees, and flowers. Water features may be appropriate.

- Urban parks should enliven and beautify commercial spaces, especially during the summer. There should be comfortable places to sit. Where possible, sun pockets should be created to lengthen the park's useful season.
- Urban parks should contribute to the public enjoyment of scenic vistas, including views of the Adirondacks or Green Mountains.
- Urban parks may incorporate conservation features, such as streams or wetlands, and the required buffers. They may also incorporate stormwater management features.
- Urban parks should incorporate statuary, murals, or other forms of public art.

4.4.3 Development and Maintenance of Urban Parks. Urban Parks are one of several design options in Williston's bylaw that may be required under the development standards for commercial areas. The maintenance of urban parks is the responsibility of the developer and future owners, including homeowners' associations where residences are included in mixed-use projects. Required maintenance will include mowing and landscape maintenance, litter removal, and the regular upkeep and repair of facilities like benches and tables.

4.5 Neighborhood Parks - The Town of Williston will encourage and, in some cases, require the provision of neighborhood parks in new residential developments. The town will also seek to provide neighborhood parks to existing neighborhoods where they are needed.

A neighborhood park provides a breath of fresh air, a place to pause along a trail and watch the sky change, a place for children to romp that is bigger than the backyard, or a place to shoot a few baskets on Sunday afternoon. A small park near peoples' homes also encourages outdoor socializing, provides a central gathering place for neighborhood activities, and builds a sense of community. Neighborhood Parks are usually privately-owned and maintained. Town-owned community and country parks, such as the Rossignol Park and Five Tree Hill Country Park, are described in Chapter 8 - Parks & Recreation.

Neighborhood parks are intended primarily to serve the residents within the development in which the park is located. These parks are typically created during the design of a new neighborhood. Wherever possible they should be connected to larger open spaces via public paths or trails. It may be appropriate to provide a handful of parking spaces, but automobile access should not be emphasized.

4.5.1 Require Provision of Neighborhood Parks in New Developments Every distinct residential neighborhood should have at least one neighborhood park or reasonable pedestrian access to an existing park. Small subdivisions, in which the provision of a useful park is not feasible, and subdivisions that have good pedestrian access to an existing park may be required to pay a park development fee in-lieu of providing a neighborhood park. This fee will be in addition to the park impact fee, which supports facilities that serve the entire town. The location and design of proposed neighborhood parks must be included in the plans submitted for review by the town. The following guidelines apply.

- Neighborhood parks should be sited on land suitable for development as parkland and reasonably central (preferably within 1,320 feet) of the majority of homes they serve.
- Neighborhood parks may range from a few thousand square feet up to six or seven acres. There is no ideal size. The park should be large enough to complement the neighborhood's character and natural features. Where many children are expected, a larger park with play

structures and an informal, unlighted playing field might be appropriate. In a neighborhood for older folks, a smaller park with a flower garden, sitting benches, game tables, and horseshoe pits might be more useful. Where a subdivision includes a stream corridor, a small neighborhood park might adjoin a much larger, undeveloped open space.

- Neighborhood parks should be connected to the town's system of paths and trails where that is possible. They should always be served by sidewalks or paths connecting them with the homes they serve.
- Neighborhood parks should be developed for recreational activities that are consistent with the neighborhood's character and size, but at a minimum should include turf, shade trees, walks, and basic recreational structures, such as swings or benches. Community gardens may be incorporated into a neighborhood park that serves a higher density development or homes whose yards are not suitable for gardening.

4.5.2 Development and Maintenance of Neighborhood Parks. Neighborhood parks will initially be provided by developers, but in the long run will be privately-owned and managed by neighborhood associations. Developers are responsible, at a minimum, to grade the park and establish vegetation. They may, in their own interest, install facilities ranging from benches to swimming pools or sports courts. Developers may be required to create a park development fund for later use by the homeowners. After the project is complete, further development and maintenance will be the responsibility of the homeowners.

4.5.3 Town Role in Neighborhood Parks. Neighborhood parks are privately owned, and thus routine mowing and landscape maintenance, litter removal, and similar tasks should be the responsibility of the homeowners. Beyond that, the Selectboard may choose to provide limited assistance. Perhaps the best way to do this would be for the Selectboard to make a modest sum available for competitive, matching grants for the enhancement of neighborhood (and, possibly, urban) parks. Grant applications would be reviewed and prioritized by the Parks and Recreation Committee, with final decisions by the Selectboard.

4.6 Signs and Outdoor Lighting – The Town of Williston will continue to require that on-premise signs primarily identify uses. Off-premises advertising will continue to be prohibited. The town will also continue to regulate outdoor lighting to prevent traffic hazards and light trespass, and to protect the night sky.

Quality signs and outdoor lighting make important contributions to the appearance, safety, and market appeal of the developments where they are installed, and to the larger community. Williston's sign and outdoor lighting regulations have been reasonably effective. Some problems have arisen in the administration and enforcement of the sign regulations, however, and these are addressed by the objectives adopted here.

4.6.1 Reorganize and Clarify the Sign Regulations. Although recently rewritten, the town's sign regulations are difficult to use for both staff and applicants. These regulations will be reorganized and clarified.

4.7 Urban Forestry – The Town of Williston will continue to require installation of quality street trees in new developments and take responsibility for those trees when the road they line is accepted for town maintenance. The town will also continue to maintain trees in its parks and on the grounds of municipal buildings.

The trees in Williston's public spaces and along its roads are important community assets. Properly planted and maintained, they provide shade, beauty, and oxygen, and assist in traffic calming, energy conservation, and stormwater management. An inventory of the trees for which the town is responsible – street trees and those in parks and on other town lands – was completed in 2005. It showed that the town currently maintains 1,121 trees. Ninety-five percent of those trees are in good condition. The inventory has pinpointed the location of the five percent that need maintenance or replacement. The principal issue raised by the inventory is the lack of diversity in species being used as street trees. Nearly half are green ash. The town's streetscapes and parks are highly vulnerable to any pest or disease that affects this species or the maples that comprise most of the rest of the trees counted.

4.7.1 Continue to Require and Maintain Street Trees. Require a Greater Diversity of Tree Species. Williston will continue to require the installation of street trees, and upon their acceptance, to maintain them. In 2010 the town updated and adopted the *Public Works Specifications*, which expanded the planting guidelines and defined tree protection strategies. A 2009 bylaw revision required a greater diversity of street tree species.

4.7.2 Maintain the Tree Inventory. The town will update the 2005 tree inventory as trees are accepted, and as public works crews or contractors maintain, remove, and replace trees.

4.7.3 Implement the Urban Forestry Plan. With the adoption of this plan, the Selectboard also adopted Williston's first Community Forestry Plan. A copy of that plan is provided in Appendix C.

4.7.4 Establish a Town Nursery. In order to provide a diverse and affordable supply of trees for the replacement of street and park trees maintained by the town, Williston will consider establishing a nursery on a suitable parcel of town land.

4.8 Williston-in-Bloom – The Town of Williston will continue to support the Williston-in-Bloom program.

Williston-in-Bloom is a local version of the America-in-Bloom program (for information see <http://www.americainbloom.org/what.asp>). It provides volunteer landscaping of public street corners, medians, and other spaces.

4.9 Gateways to Williston – The Town of Williston will work to enhance its major gateway areas.

The town will integrate design elements that reinforce Williston's identity into public and private development projects near particular transitional gateways. These design elements will promote and encourage a distinct and attractive identity in each of our gateways. Any new design elements should also support and coordinate a link to other adjacent and important Williston locations.