

River Approach Character Area

Encompassing the Service, Commercial, Industrial Zone District and a portion of the Neighborhood Commercial Zone District

Design Objectives and Guidelines

Location

The River Approach Character Area consists of two parts of the Service/Commercial/Industrial Zone District and one part of the Neighborhood Commercial Zone District, which is situated toward the river to the north of the central commercial zones of the city. The area runs north from the Commercial Core and is defined by Rio Grande Place to the east and the north. At the western end of Rio Grande Place the area extends to the west side of Mill Street, along each side of Puppy Smith Street. Between there is an area centered upon Galena Plaza. This area is a central consideration of the *Draft Civic Center Master Plan*, establishing objectives for future development criteria.

Existing Character

Street Pattern

These areas are at the edge of the city center, where the land slopes away toward the Roaring Fork River and here the topography has prompted a departure from the street grid. The street grid rapidly gives way to a more 'organic', curving pattern.

Pedestrian ways are somewhat fragmented. Some properties have sidewalks along the street edge, while others do not. In addition to sidewalks, key pedestrian trails along the river and connecting the river to the downtown area exist, but are not directly accessible from many developments in the River Approach area.



The Service/Commercial/Industrial Zone District lies in two parts along the northern edge of the Commercial Core Historic District.



Pedestrian ways are somewhat fragmented. Some properties have sidewalks along the street edge, while others do not.





Several existing buildings are relatively low in scale and lot coverage. As redevelopment occurs, a greater intensity of site utilization is anticipated.



The falling terrain towards the river provides challenges as well as opportunities for development.



Street edges should invite pedestrian activity and take advantage of the river as a key natural resource.

Building Character

Several existing buildings are relatively low in scale and lot coverage. As redevelopment occurs, a greater intensity of site utilization is anticipated. The form of new development should respond to this setting, which is more natural and open in character. The characteristics of the setting and terrain, including areas of public open space and parking introduce both constraint and opportunity in design terms. New development should integrate with the natural features established by the river and Rio Grande Park.

A major part of the area to the east has been recently and successfully rebuilt as the Obermeyer Place mixed use development. It exhibits a use of masonry and architectural detail that helps to convey a sense of scale and visual interest. Street edges are visually interesting and open spaces are inviting.

The falling terrain toward the river enhances the importance of this area, both as the introduction to the downtown as one approaches from the north and the to immediate commercial center itself and areas of public open space that flank it.



Design Objectives

These are the key design objectives for the River Approach. The City must find that any new work will help to meet them.

Future use of the less developed area is likely to be for a mix of uses catering to the service sector of the city. The character area presents issues of public access and where appropriate the extension of the circulation pattern of streets and walkways to ensure adequate access to public trails and open land. This has been successfully designed in Obermeyer Place and remains a primary objective for the rest of the area.

The integration of new development into an open and natural landscape also requires consideration of development scale and visibility. Internal circulation patterns are important, linked to street facing development and well designed internal, structured or buffered internal parking arrangement.

Where development abuts a street it should address the street and provide architectural interest and a human scale. The intent is to provide compatible transitions to the natural edges along the more urban streets.

Topography and a more natural setting strongly influence the form and location of development here. As a result, a building should respect the natural contours, features and scenic vistas that exist.

Buildings should work with the slope of the site and the roofscape should be modulated. Providing landscaping and tree planting to ensure a continuation of the softer impression of the natural setting is also important.

Building scale should achieve similar principles of height variation and building modulation, linked with connections through a site to adjacent areas of open space and public trails.

In sum, the following objectives apply:

1. Establish an attractive gateway to the city center, as one approaches downtown from the north.

The River Approach area should have an identity which is distinct from the Commercial Core. This should draw upon its industrial heritage (albeit in contemporary ways), and also reflect its location near and public access to the river. It should not simply repeat the design traditions of downtown.

2. Establish street edges that invite pedestrian activity and promote an urban/ industrial character along established street edges.

In general, street edges should be more "urban" with storefronts abutting sidewalk edges. This should result in a well defined street wall; this in turn should be punctuated with spaces between buildings that lead to walkways and activities within a site and along the river banks.

3. Highlight natural resources along edges of developed areas.

Buildings and outdoor use areas should orient to the river and public parks. In essence, developments should be "double-fronted," looking both to the river and to the street.

4. Provide an interconnected system of sidewalks and internal walkways that facilitate pedestrian circulation.

Walkway and river access should frame the edges of properties and also provide internal connections within a parcel. Connections among properties, in addition to those provided by external sidewalks, are also encouraged.

Recognize the nature of service/commercial activity through the design of safe and efficient vehicle delivery routes, while providing a system of walkways that safely facilitate pedestrian circulation to and through the site.



Conceptual Review Design Guidelines

The following design guidelines shall apply at the conceptual review stage.



The network of streets and pedestrian passageways should be a key feature of the River Approach area.



Provide pedestrian connections through properties that link to public sidewalks and trails.

Street & Alley System

An integrated circulation network of streets, alleys and courts should be established here to maximize public access. Wherever possible, pedestrian routes should be enhanced. The creation of additional public walkways to internal and other public spaces should be encouraged.

3.1 Provide pedestrian connections through properties that link to public sidewalks and trails.

- Also provide connections to outdoor use areas.

3.2 Define street edges with public sidewalks.

- These should be of sufficient width to invite their use.
- Street trees should be provided where space permits.

3.3 Minimize crossing conflicts for pedestrians.

- Locate driveways and curb cuts to avoid crossing conflicts.



Parking

The character of Aspen is one which is most appreciated on foot and the human scale walkable concentration of streets and spaces lies at the heart of the attraction of the city. The visual impact of parking should be minimized. Whenever possible parking should be placed underground or in a structure where the scale and setting of the site affords this opportunity. Where a parking structure is proposed, it should be within a 'wrap' of commercial and/or residential accommodation. Surface parking shall be placed away from the street, within the site, and effectively buffered and subdivided with landscaping.

3.4 Minimize the visual impacts of parking.

- Parking shall be placed underground wherever possible.
- Where surface parking is permitted, it shall be located to the interior of the property.
- Surface parking shall be externally buffered with landscaping, and internally planted and landscaped to soften design of parking areas and provide solar shade.

3.5 Structured parking access should not have a negative impact on the character of the street. The access shall be:

- Located on a secondary internal street where feasible
- Designed with the same attention to detail and materials as the primary building façade.
- Integrated into the building design
- Where redevelopment occurs, alley parking access should be created.

3.6 Minimize the visual impacts of surface parking.

- On small lots where limited surface parking in front of the building might be considered, it should be designed and screened to minimize the visual impacts.



Parking should be designed to minimize visual impacts.



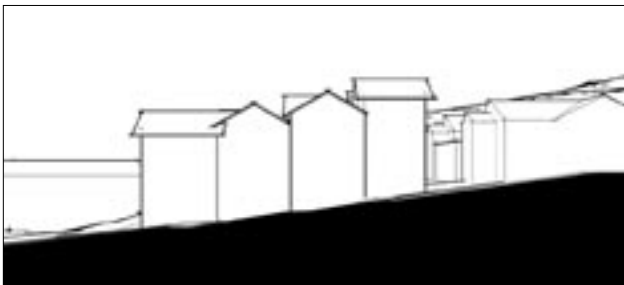
Surface parking should be designed and screened to minimize visual impacts.



A riverside setting is a significant public amenity.



Variation in natural topography exists within the River Approach Area and new development should be designed to integrate with the natural landscape.



Design a building to integrate with and blend into the natural landscape.

Topography

A substantial part of the River Approach is relatively flat, but there are some steep slopes. Variation in the natural topography should be reflected in any new development. A building should express the change in elevation of the site through stepped and articulated building forms where necessary. Excavation of natural terrain should be minimized. Natural features help integrate the building and site and should be retained.

Development that reflects the contours of the site and meander of the river is appropriate here. That is, buildings need not be arranged in a grid but instead follow natural topography.

3.7 A building on a sloping site shall be designed to reduce its perceived mass and scale and reflect the natural slope of the site. This shall be achieved in one or more of the following ways:

- Step sections of the street façade(s) in relation to the street slope.
- Vary the height of the building modules to convey a human scale.
- Vary the plane and height of the street façade to express the slope of the site when present and continue the varied form in the roof profile(s).
- Use the roof form and profile to reduce the perceived scale of the street façade(s) and roof.
- Include a range of materials to express the modulation of the façade.

3.8 Design a building to integrate with and blend into the natural landscape. This shall be achieved in one or more of the these ways:

- Face the building(s) toward the open landscape as well as the primary street.
- Create public access through and adjacent to the site.
- Reduce the height and scale of individual building modules.
- Reduce the building footprint and/or use smaller buildings adjacent to the open area.



Public Amenity Space

Providing usable open space has been a long-standing priority and characteristic of the city. It is also an objective in the River Approach area. The Planning and Zoning Commission and/or the Historic Preservation Commission will decide whether, where and in what form Public Amenity Space will be required.

Opportunities exist within sites approaching the river to create public amenity space, and to ensure adequate connections through the site(s) to link with street pattern or public trail beyond.

Location of Public Amenity Space

Public amenity space is a requirement in the River Approach Area. This should take the form of:

- Public walkways through the site
- Internal areas of open space within the site
- River and trail overlooks
- Public access to space adjacent to the river

Public Walkway Amenity Space

Within a city highly regarded for its pedestrian character and 'walkability,' enhancing the opportunities presented by public circulation patterns has distinct advantages and is encouraged. Public access to river frontage is also an objective.

The existing sites within the River Approach Area tend to be larger and the street network less complete. Walkways to link with the street network, internal open space and external open land or public trail system and river edge may be required. Such links may be within or towards the boundaries of the site, depending upon particular site constraints and development design.

3.9 Walkway links should be a minimum of 8 ft. wide.



Public links through a site should enhance the circulation in and through the development and provide access to natural features and public spaces that abut the property.



Access to public trails should be provided.



Orient plazas and other amenity spaces to views of open space, the river and other landmarks when feasible.



Building placement should incorporate both natural features and pedestrian access in and around the development.



Setbacks and links in this area should enhance public access, provide space for a sidewalk and additional landscaped area.

Building Placement

Within this area there is great latitude in building placement of buildings. Generally they should face and define both the primary street frontages, secondary street frontage, and/or internal spaces.

The river setting is less urban in character and prompts consideration of how buildings should integrate more effectively with increasingly natural and open background or foreground. Reducing the scale of larger development through the creation of a series of building modules or separate buildings is important when adjacent to the river. The use of setbacks, open space and the landscaping of the street frontage integrate the building with the landscape.

Setbacks

3.10 Varied setbacks are appropriate.

- Aligning a building at the sidewalk edge is preferred, but some variation is appropriate where this provides enhanced outdoor spaces and pedestrian circulation routes.

3.11 Use varied setbacks to reduce building scale, enhance public access and accommodate landscaping. All of the following should be considered:

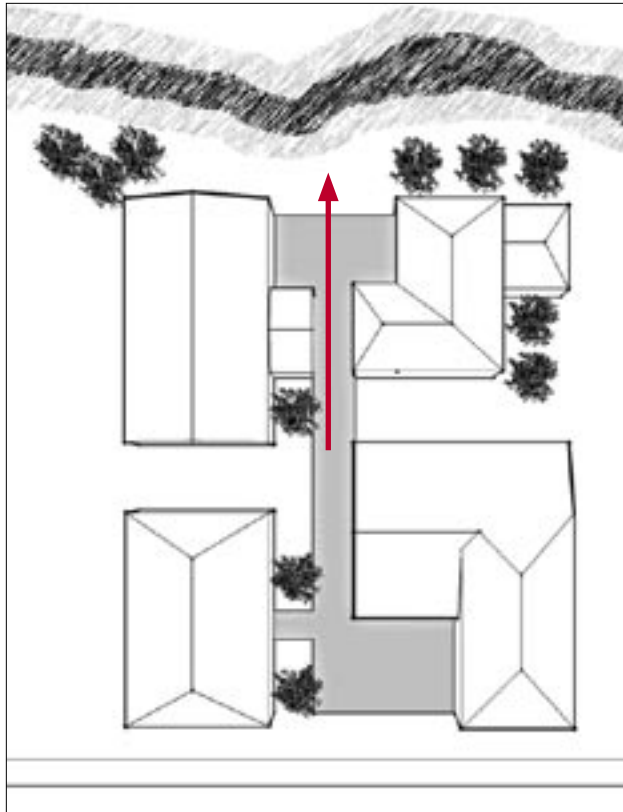
- Front setbacks should provide for additional or widened sidewalk and landscaping of the front yard space.
- Sidesetbacks should provide the opportunity to create or reinforce public walkways or through courts to adjacent streets and public trails.
- Setbacks adjacent to a public street should accommodate the planting of street trees.



Orientation

3.12 Buildings should orient to street edges, internal open spaces and the river edge.

- A building occupying a corner site should face both streets.
- The building should be "double fronted."



Orient a building toward the street as well as internal open spaces. Provide a pedestrian link to natural features and amenity space within or adjacent to the development.



Orient building spaces to views, open space, and the river as well as the street.



Orienting uses to overlook parklands and the river edge is encouraged, where other environmental conditions permit.



The character of the River Approach is strongly influenced by natural setting and site topography.





Provide variation in building height and roof profile



Buildings should break up the mass and orient toward the primary street and any adjacent natural features.

Building Height, Mass & Scale

The character of the River Approach is strongly influenced by natural setting and site topography, creating a prominent situation for any development site or building. Consequently, building height, mass and scale should be modulated and articulated to vary the building profiles and street presence, and to create a diverse street wall and varied roof profiles.

Height Variation

Building height and height variation are key characteristics in any development in this area. Variation helps to reduce the perceived mass of a structure as well as maintain the character and scale of the area.

3.13 Provide variation in building height and roof profile through one or more of the following:

- Vary the heights for different sections of the development
- Vary the setbacks, and wall planes of different building "modules."



Final Review Design Guidelines

The following design guidelines shall apply at the final review stage.

Building Design & Articulation

On elevated sites and in areas forming the interface between the city and open landscape, the design and modulation of a larger building becomes a central consideration in the successful integration of the building and setting. Dividing a building into "modules" is therefore encouraged. However, this should not be interpreted as a series of "false fronts" of different imitated styles.

3.14 To reduce the perceived mass of a building, the design should respect the natural setting and reflect the human scale and character of the city. This shall be achieved through all of the following:

- The massing of building forms
- The articulation of the façade(s) through a varied roof profile
- The use of a variation in architectural materials, and detailing

The distinction between the first floor and the upper floors of the building also plays a key role in creating a sense of human scale and is therefore an important consideration. The design of a new building should respect the stature of the first floor, and its visual role as the tallest floor of the building.

3.15 A new building should be designed to maintain the stature of traditional street level retail frontage and other stories.

- This should be a minimum of 11 ft. in floor to floor height on the first floor.
- The minimum required first floor height must be maintained for at least the first 50 foot depth of the lot, and may only be dropped to a lower height beyond that point for areas that are devoted to storage, circulation, offices, restaurant kitchens, alley commercial spaces, or similar secondary uses.



Positioning portions of a building front to reflect the curvilinear layout of some streets is appropriate.



Industrial openings are appropriate in the River Approach Character Area.



Providing architectural details that add interest and a sense of scale is appropriate.





A higher percentage of transparency at the street level is appropriate in the River Approach Area.



Variation in roof profile can be achieved through setting back the top floor from the front facade and reflecting the traditional lot width in the roof plane.

3.16 Any new building shall be designed to maintain a minimum of 9 feet from floor to ceiling on all floors.

3.17 The retail entrance should be at the sidewalk level.

- All entrances shall be ADA compliant.
- On sloping sites the retail frontage should be as close to a level entrance as possible.

3.18 Incorporate an airlock entry into the plan for all new structures.

- An airlock entry that projects forward of the primary façade at the sidewalk edge is inappropriate.
- Adding temporary entries during the winter season detracts from the character of the historic district.
- Using a temporary vinyl or fabric "airlock" to provide protection from winter weather is not permitted.

Roofscape

A building's roofscape should be regarded as an architectural 'elevation', given its visibility from nearby buildings and mountain slopes. Specific attention should be paid to creating a varied and interesting roofscape. The form seen from above should reinforce the rhythm and scale of the street façade.

On a sloping site a building should be designed using a series of roof profiles which reflect variation in the natural topography of the setting.

3.19 Variation in roof profile should be reflected in both the width and the depth of the roofscape of the building(s). This should be achieved through the following:

- A set back of the top floor from the front façade
- Reflect the traditional lot width in the roof plane



3.20 The roovescape should be designed with the same design attention as the secondary elevations of the building.

- Group and screen mechanical units from view.
- Locate mechanical equipment to the rear of the roof area.
- Position, articulate and design rooftop enclosures or structures to reflect the modulation and character of the building.
- Use materials which complement the design of the building façades.
- Design roof garden areas to be unobtrusive from the street.
- Use 'green roof' design best practice, where feasible.

Architectural Materials

Building materials that are of high quality and convey a human scale are appropriate in the River Approach. New, creative applications that draw upon the traditional Aspen palette including industrial ones, are encouraged.

Recent development, for example, Obermeyer Place has, in certain cases, interpreted this range and quality successfully in both contemporary and more traditional form. The prominence of the area accentuates the importance of this. The role played by the palette of materials and their detailing in establishing the current character of the River Approach should be reflected in new development.

3.21 High quality, durable materials should be employed.

- The palette of materials proposed for all development should be specified and approved as part of the general and detailed development approvals process, including samples of materials as required.



A range of materials is appropriate in the River Approach Area. Among them are those that reflect an industrial heritage as seen in this public link through the site.



Creative interpretations of materials associated with the industrial heritage of the River Approach Character Area are appropriate.



Building materials that draw upon the area's industrial heritage are appropriate.



Landscaping should create a buffer between the street and sidewalk.

3.22 Building materials should have these features:

- Convey the quality and range of materials seen historically
- Reduce the perceived scale of the building and enhance visual interest of the facade.
- Convey human scale

Paving & Landscaping

Landscaping has been traditionally associated with the creation of a welcoming and attractive character in city development, and should continue to do so in a manner which enhances both building setting and street scene. Development in this area should include landscaping in the form of paving and both tree and shrub planting, as enhancement to the streetscape and to integrate buildings with their setting.

3.23 Landscaping and paving should have the following characteristics:

- Enhance the street scene
- Integrate the development with its setting
- Reflect the quality of the architectural materials

3.24 Landscaping should create a buffer between the street and sidewalk.

- Sidewalks should be detached from the street edge to allow for a landscaped buffer.

