

CITY OF ASPEN, COLORADO

Commercial, Lodging and Historic District Design Objectives and Guidelines



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Prepared by:

Winter and Company
1265 Yellow Pine Avenue
Boulder, CO 80304

Phone: (303) 440-8445

Fax: (303) 443-0725

www.winterandcompany.net

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Document Organization

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Organization of the Document

This document contains urban design guidelines for the commercial and lodging areas of Aspen, as well as guidelines for historic preservation. The information is presented in a series of sections and subordinate chapters that address the different design contexts to be encountered:

Introduction

The introduction presents an overview of the design traditions of Aspen, the varying contexts of the commercial areas and the organization of the document. This section will be used for any proposed improvement within a commercial or lodge zone district.

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Section 1: Design Objectives and Guidelines

Specific urban design guidelines are presented for each of the Character Areas. The guidelines for the Commercial Core and Main Street Historic Districts follow and also form an introduction to Section 2, Historic Preservation Design Guidelines. This section will be used for any proposed improvement within a commercial, lodge or historic district.

Section 2 - Historic Preservation Design Guidelines (An existing document to be revised and incorporated subsequently.)

Introduction to the Preservation Section
Streetscape & Lot Features
Rehabilitation of Historic Structures
Guidelines for New Construction
Painting & Maintenance

Section 2: Preservation Guidelines

This section presents guidelines for treatment of historic properties throughout the city. These may occur as "contributing" buildings within a historic district, or as an individually designated landmark.



Introduction



The core of Aspen reflects more than a century of building that is a response to environmental conditions, economic opportunities and cultural aspirations of its residents. It is a place highly valued by residents and visitors, and it is important that the city maintains its character and sense of history while continuing to evolve.

The City of Aspen, from its establishment as a community in the 1880s, has combined origins in silver mining with the role of world class ski resort. Simultaneously, Aspen has built upon its spectacular natural setting through creativity and excellence in architectural and artistic tradition. The city has played and sustained a unique role in nurturing design quality as well as innovation throughout the 20th century.

The downtown of the city emerged early in the history of the community as a center of commerce, but early precedents for commercial uses were also seen along Main Street, at the base of Aspen Mountain and in scattered sites elsewhere. This is still evident in the Aspen of today.



Many basic elements of the urban form were established when development began with the creation of the early mining settlement. A grid of streets formed the heart of town, while the curving base of the mountains and the meander of the Roaring Fork River created more natural edges. Many early buildings reflected traditional commercial types of the Victorian era, while others used residential forms of the time.

Though the traditional Victorian era commercial block, built to the sidewalk edge with first floor display windows, is the most familiar, commercial development has also appeared in a variety of forms. Early lodging precedents included boarding houses and hotels. Later, early resort era buildings introduced chalet themes and modernist expressions. Still other design ideas were brought forward by a series of improvements in the latter part of the Twentieth Century. This tone of diversity and creativity reflects the influence of the Aspen Design Conference and other programs of the Aspen Institute.



More recent contributions combine with earlier precedents to create the Aspen of today. It is a tapestry of old and new, held together by a sense of continuity in the basic framework features of the downtown. These include similarities of scale, orientation to the street, detailing and materials.

The result is a sense of place that citizens hold in high regard. This is reflected in policies set forth in the *Aspen Area Community Plan*, which notes an intent to preserve the historic resources of the city while also promoting creativity and excellence in new design.

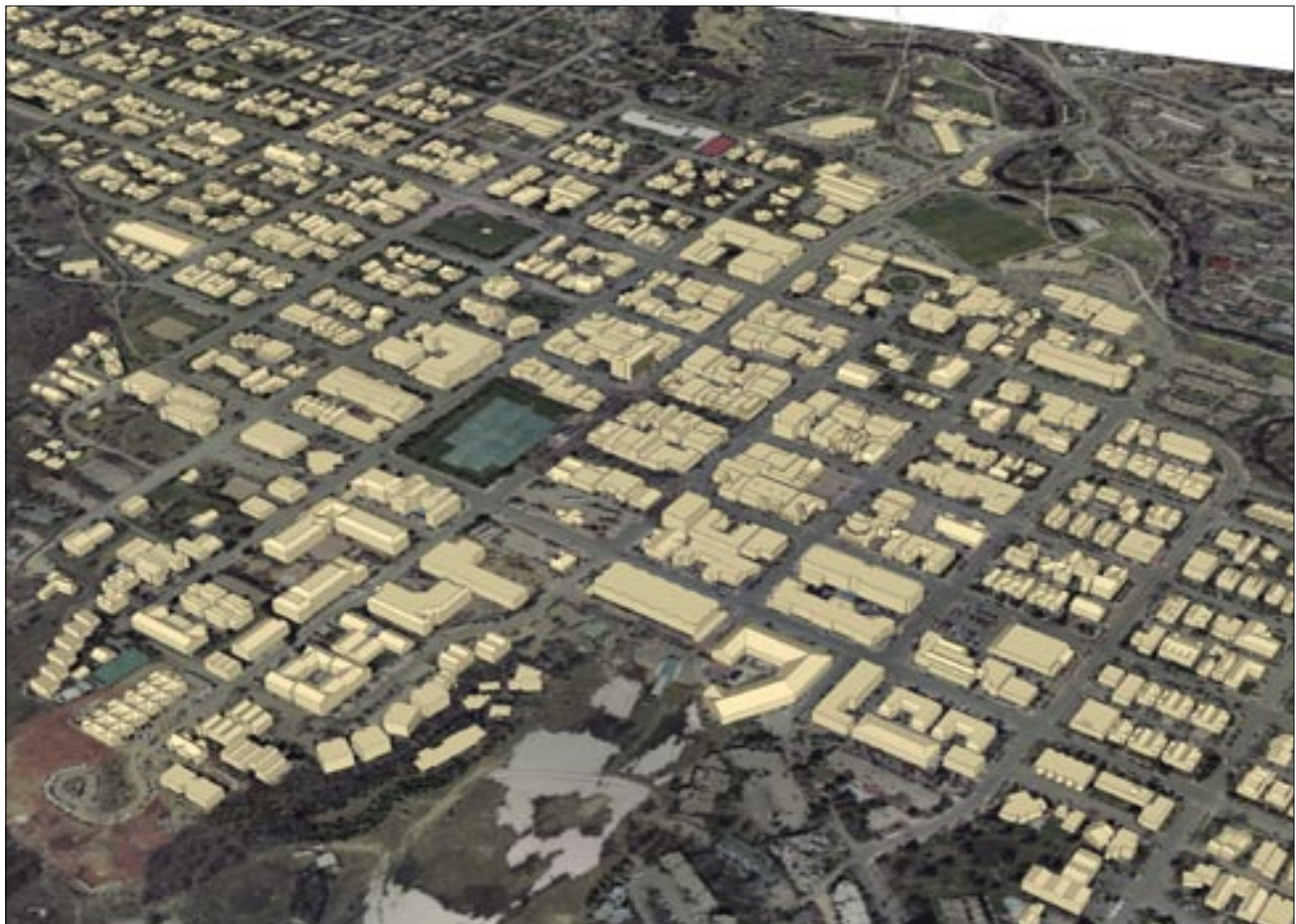
More recently, larger building complexes have appeared. These new projects reflect a combination of market forces, city regulations and incentive programs.

The city has sought to strengthen the appeal of the street for pedestrians, by promoting buildings

and landscapes that are inviting and convey a sense of human scale. Animating the street with year-round activity associated with commercial frontage and gathering places is an underlying premise.

In addition, providing a sense of visual continuity, such that adjoining blocks have a relatedness, is an objective. Another is to emphasize views from key public places to scenic amenities and historic landmarks. In essence, the city seeks to protect its heritage, relate to the natural features of the setting and inspire excellence in redevelopment.

This means respecting context, without literally copying earlier design styles. In order to promote compatibility of property improvements within the established setting, the city has adopted certain development standards and offers a design review process to consider alternative methods of achieving appropriateness.



A three-dimensional model has been created as a design review tool.



Variations in Design Context

This document sets forth design review criteria, standards and guidelines that are to be used in making determinations of appropriateness. They are organized to address the different design contexts that exist in the city. These distinct settings are defined as "Character Areas," within which variations exist among the physical features that define the area. Other places are historic districts. All told, these Character Areas and historic districts include a range of commercial & lodging zone districts. These are:

- Commercial (C1),
- Mixed Use (MU),
- Commercial Lodge (CL),
- Neighborhood Commercial (NC),
- Service/Commercial/Industrial (SCI),
- Lodge (L),
- Lodge Overlay (LO)
- Lodge Preservation Overlay (LP)
- Commercial Core Historic District (CC)
- Main Street Historic District. (MU)

Some of the Character Areas are coterminous with zone district boundaries, but in other cases, they depart from those lines, in order to reflect differences in built form and character. These differences are noted in descriptions of each of

the Character Areas. The design objectives and guidelines in this document are considered within these varying contexts and are crafted for each area. The Character Areas include the following zone districts:

Commercial Character Area (C-1, CL, L, NC)
 Central Mixed Use Character Area (MU)
 River Approach Character Area (SCI, NC)
 Mountain Base Character Area (L, LP)
 Small Lodge Character Area (LO, LP)
 Commercial Core Historic District (CC)
 Main Street Historic District (MU)

Relation to Land Use Code

In addition to the design objectives, standards and guidelines presented here, any improvement within the commercial areas must also comply with the zoning standards set forth in Title 26 of the Land Use Code.

Historic Preservation Guidelines

Historic Preservation Guidelines also exist for portions of the areas addressed in this document. Those criteria apply IN ADDITION to the standards and guidelines set forth here. If a conflict is identified, the Historic Preservation Commission shall determine which takes precedence.

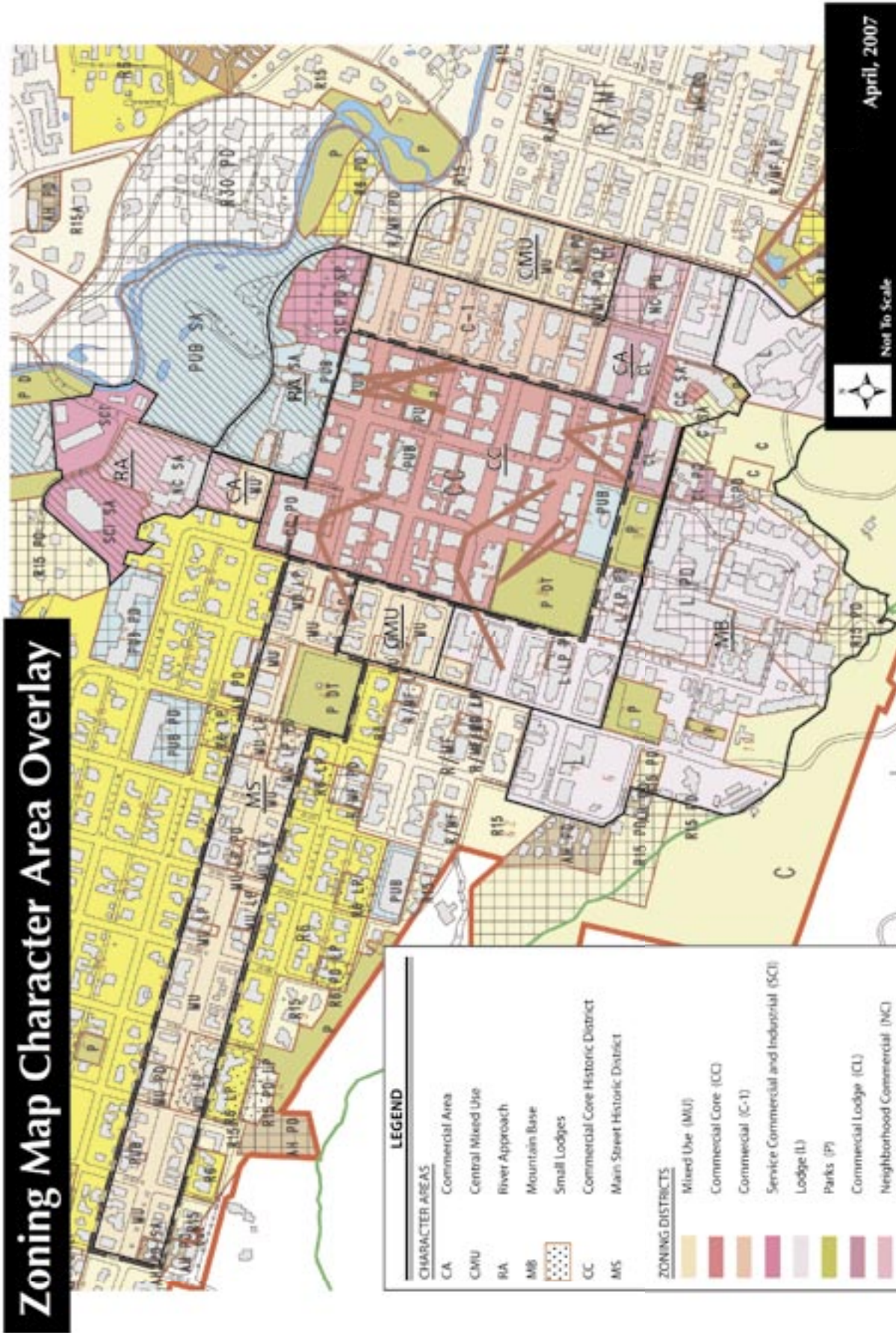


"Protect all buildings and sites of historic significance."

Aspen Area Community Plan









Design Objectives

The design standards and guidelines presented in this document draw upon an understanding of the established features of each character area, and also upon a series of basic design objectives. These focus on respecting context, promoting best practices in urban design and stimulating creativity in design. The primary goal is to ensure that, as the city continues to develop, it occurs in a manner which sustains the highly regarded form, walkability, human scale, visual vitality and character of these areas.

"Decisions regarding scale, massing form, materials, texture and color must be first measured by context. Contextual appropriateness transcends style alone."

Aspen Area Community Plan

All projects should help to achieve the following design objectives:

Objective 1:

Promote an interconnected circulation system that invites pedestrian use. This includes:

A Continuous Street and Alley System

A network of streets, alleys and courts provides the framework for both circulation and architecture within the city, and is essentially the "infrastructure" of the form, function, and identity of Aspen. Within a community noted for its density, walkability and intimate vitality and character, it is essential that this role be retained and, wherever possible, enhanced.

A Respect for Natural Topography

The varied topography of the city core influences the character of development and the manner in which it is perceived. Sloping sites at the base of Aspen Mountain affect the visibility and perception of the scale of development on those sites. On the other hand, lots in the River Approach character area are situated at a lower elevation than adjacent residential areas. In both cases, designs should respond to the natural topography.



Objective 2:

Promote a system of public places that support outdoor activities. This includes:

Public Amenity Spaces

Providing attractive Public Amenity Space is a firm policy for the city. These places should accommodate public gatherings and enhance street vitality. They should provide stimulating accents within the urban street scene. They can provide additional public circulation links, access to further commercial space and frontage, and enhanced opportunities for outdoor dining space.

"Create a more vibrant town with appropriate mixed uses and a variety of building sizes. Allow historic patterns to inform new development."

Aspen Area Community Plan

Compatible Landscape & Paving

Landscaping and paving are essential elements. They help to integrate new development within a well established setting and enhance the character of the site. Design of landscaping and paving should receive strong consideration in all development proposals.

Unobtrusive Off-street Parking

Off-street parking should remain subordinate to the urban scene. It should be treated as a supporting use, rather than a primary one, and visual impacts should be minimized.

"Retain and encourage an eclectic mix of design styles to maintain and enhance the special character of our community."

Aspen Area Community Plan

Objective 3:

Assure that buildings fit together to create a vibrant street edge that reinforces a sense of appropriate scale. This includes:

Context Sensitive Building Placement

The location of a building on the site is important to the character of the street and area. Building placement should be in keeping with the design objectives for the street, as set forth in the character area sections.

Compatible Building Height, Mass and Scale

Overall building height is a key issue, although variation in height is just as important. The perceived three-dimensional mass of a building, with respect to its context, as well as to how it conveys a sense of human scale is also a central issue. Variety in building heights should occur along a street.

Varied Building Design and Articulation

Characteristic scale depends upon variations in design and articulation of facades that convey the traditional city lot width of 30 feet where appropriate. Development should continue to reflect these traditional lot dimensions. Where buildings include several lots, there is a need to articulate the building facade to reflect this apparent scale.

"We wish to encourage creativity and results in design solutions that are fresh and innovative, yet are net additions to the built environment by being contextually appropriate and harmonious without being copies of that which already exists."

Aspen Area Community Plan



An Inviting Street Level Character

At the street level, a building should contribute to a walking environment that is attractive to the public. This may include first floor and storefront window design, landscaping, public art and architectural detailing.

Quality Roofscape Design

Much of the core area is visible from the slopes of the mountains framing the city, and the perceived scale of a building and character of the city is affected by the design of the roof. Rooftop scale, form and design, therefore, are major considerations and a roofscape design should help convey a traditional scale and character of the area.

Compatible Architectural Materials

Traditionally, brick and wood were used for most buildings in commercial areas. These help to convey a sense of scale that is in keeping with the character of the area. While use of these traditional materials should be promoted, other alternative materials may be used when they convey qualities similar to those of traditional ones. What is important is that any material should be durable, compatible with traditional materials and convey a sense of scale.

Applying the Design Objectives & Guidelines

The design objectives and guidelines are criteria that shall be used in determining appropriateness of any improvements proposed in the designated areas. They shall provide the basis for design review by city staff, the Historic Preservation Commission, Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council.

The design objectives and guidelines are used by various city commissions, the City Council and staff in review procedures outlined in the city's development code. In some cases, the Planning and Zoning Commission serves as the lead body that uses the guidelines. In other cases, the Historic Preservation Commission is the lead. Applicants should confer with Planning Department staff to determine the review track that will be used for a particular project.



Format of Guidelines



A typical design guideline is arranged in three parts:

1. Each section within a chapter contains a brief introduction to the principal characteristics and design intent of the area.
2. Every development criterion is introduced by a statement of design objective or intent, setting out the background to the objectives and guidelines.
3. One or more guidelines addressing development form specify particular requirements for that issue within the area. These may be further supplemented with examples or additional detail, presented as a series of "bullets" following each guideline statement.

"We must continue to build on what we have by authentically preserving historic structures and creating thoughtful new buildings that encourage and shape that feeling of historical continuity."

Aspen Area Community Plan



Application of Guidelines

All projects within the designated areas shall comply with the guidelines. The City shall determine when a proposal is in compliance with them.

Although these standards and guidelines are relatively comprehensive, there may be circumstances where alternative ways of meeting the intent of the policy objectives might be identified. In such a case, the city must determine that the intent of the guideline is still met, albeit through an alternative means.

Design Stages

For many projects, design review will be conducted in two steps, first at a "conceptual" stage, and then later at a "final" stage. The conceptual stage typically addresses the basic siting factors of a project, as well as the general massing of a building. The final stage includes consideration of refinements to the articulation of a building, treatment of windows and doors and materials.

In each of the chapters, the guidelines are organized to correspond to the two stages of design review: First, those that are to be used at the Conceptual Review Stage are presented. These are then followed with the Final Review Stage guidelines.

In general, this distinction between conceptual and final phase guidelines shall be used in the review process. However, the reviewing body has the discretion to consider some guidelines from the other phase during the review process if deemed necessary. Therefore, if the review body feels issues typically addressed in the final review stage are pertinent to the conceptual review process, and vice versa, they have the discretion to request additional information prior to approval. For example, the form, location and area of Public Amenity Space will be considered and approved at the Conceptual Review Stage. The success of such space will also be dependent upon more detailed design matters, such as the design and materials of both the building and the design of the space. Although these will normally be approved at the Final Review Stage, they are likely to be a matter for consideration and discussion at the Conceptual review stage.



