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Mixed Use Development Guidelines

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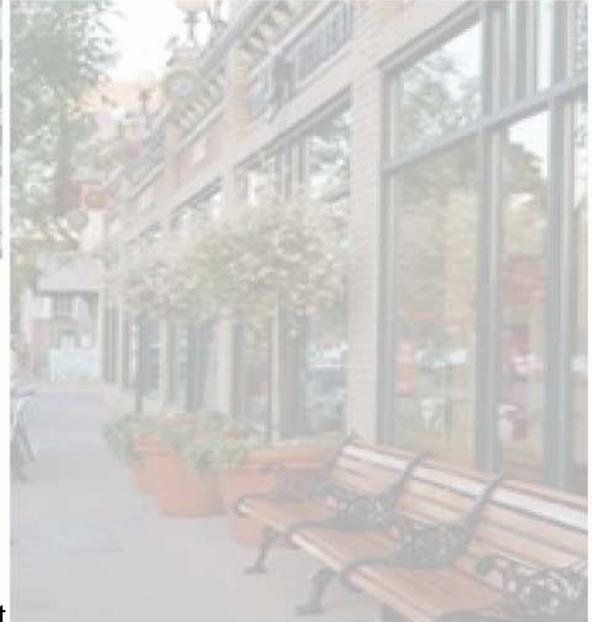
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Mixed Use Development

"Mixed use" is a type of land development that suits the great truism that 'what's old becomes new again.' Prior to the early part of the 20th Century, the development of land in almost any urban area was 'mixed,' with homes, shops, and workplaces blended either within the same building or juxtaposed to each other. The denseness of the development and the mixture of uses resulted in an environment where walking was the primary mode of transportation for those who lived, visited, and worked in these cities. In the early 20th Century, with the introduction of new modes of transportation and new legal frameworks for regulating land use and land development, the pattern of land use in cities changed and mixed use became an infrequent form of development in all but the largest cities in the United States. In its place came a pattern that we are familiar with today, exemplified by the segregation of uses and a heavy dependence on the automobile as the means of moving from one place to another.

Toward the end of the 20th Century, and particularly as we entered the 21st Century, we came to the realization that our dependence on the segregated form of land use as the primary method of development may not be the best method for all circumstances. New forms of land use and development have evolved, some of which have been stimulated by various schools of thought regarding urban and regional planning including "Neo-Traditional Development," "New Urbanism," and "Smart Growth." No matter what the name, each school of thought on how we should use and develop our land utilizes the concept of mixing uses and at higher densities. The use of mixed use development is particularly advocated in situations where land available for development is scarce (for whatever reason) and there is a desire to maintain growth within a pre-defined area rather than allowing growth to continually spread outward beyond the existing area of development, which is a known outcome of the use-segregated, low-density pattern used during most of the 20th Century.

In sum, the idea at the heart of this document when it comes to mixed use is the transformation of the pattern of development in certain areas of Virginia Beach where advocated by the Comprehensive Plan from a "suburban" one to an "urban" one. Many people believe that the term 'urban' refers only to high-rise construction or big buildings close together as evidenced most often by such places as New York, London, or Paris. In its truest sense, "urban" most

The vision that many people have when they think of "urban." This is not the type of 'urban' referred to by these guidelines.

accurately describes those parts of our built environment that are discernibly different from their suburban and rural counterparts. It connotes denser arrangements of buildings characterized by overlapping patterns of use and activities, and clearly defined, humanely-scaled external spaces, where citizens can conduct their business and meet and mingle freely with others.

These factors create a system of relationships that is larger and more comprehensive than the design of individual buildings, and which requires special consideration for best results. The organization of these various factors, including building design, landscape, open space and transportation is referred to as "urban design," and these guidelines provide clear examples of the practices that are necessary for the creation of successful, memorable places within the City of Virginia Beach.

Urban design is intended to bring order, clarity and a pleasing harmony to the urban places within the city. Urban design creates the "character" of a place. This character is primarily formed by the arrangement and details of the elements that defines it – the walls of buildings that enclose a plaza, for example; or the storefronts along the commercial street; or the dwellings that line a residential avenue. These guidelines provide guidance on the appropriate urban design for mixed-use environments in the City of Virginia Beach.

The latest Comprehensive Plan for the City of Virginia Beach notes that the city has reached the point in its history where mixed-use development must play a critical role in the future growth of the city in order to maintain its overall health:

> In envisioning the redeveloped city of the future, it is apparent that in the Strategic Growth Areas where high intensity uses critical to our future tax and employment base must go, there frequently exist today lesser intensity uses that do not fully utilize their locational advantage, and so a transition must take place. Often these current uses were well located with respect to the market forces at play when they were instituted, but since then circumstances have changed. Eventually, market forces will cause these uses to relocate to more appropriate sites, often at great profit to the landowner, but this process is often more gradual than is compatible with this plan or are of the type that fail to achieve true potential of a site. The uses involved are often service-related and low intensity commercial uses that are essential elements of a livable community, and so their retention in the community is vital. If the strategic growth areas identified in the plan are to serve their intended purpose, then a transition from less intense to more intense land use must occur and the plan must identify suitable sites and areas to which the owners and operators of these uses can willingly and easily relocate. The identification of such available alternative sites will speed the transition process (p. 52).

To accomplish this transition from 'less intense to more intense land use' within the Strategic Growth Areas identified by the Comprehensive Plan, the Plan suggests several steps as part of an overall strategy, one of which notes that we must

> develop mixed use as a principal tool for redevelopment and as a preferred land use pattern in the strategic growth areas, and develop necessary zoning and other regulatory tools to encourage it, (p. 52).

This document is provided as part of the foundation of the implementation of this recommendation. A component of a coordinated approach involving detailed area plans, zoning and development ordinance revisions, and design guidance, the content of this document will evolve over time as specific plans are developed for each Strategic Growth Area where mixed use development is recommended. The content of this document heavily borrows from one of the City's first official guides for mixed-use development, the Laskin Road Gateway Design Guidelines, which encourages such development within the Laskin Road Gateway Overlay District between Beach Garden Park and Pacific Avenue on Laskin Road. This document has been created to accompany the creation and use of the B-4C Central Business Mixed Use District. It is hoped that the document and its future amendment for other Strategic Growth Areas will give property owners and developers direction in the creation of unique and instrumental places that will transform the City of Virginia Beach as it enters its next phase of growth. In particular, the document should be used as part of the process of evaluating the appropriateness of a request for a mixed-use zoning category as specified by the City Zoning Ordinance, such as the B-4C. The guidance provided in the following pages is not overly detailed, as it is intended to give an overall framework regarding the fundamentals of mixed-use development while providing designers and developers an appropriate level of flexibility, encouraging creativity in responding to the opportunities presented by each site.

Questions regarding the guidance within this document or the development ordinances, plans, and policies for Strategic Growth Areas should be directed to the Department of Planning of the City of Virginia Beach at 757-427-4621.
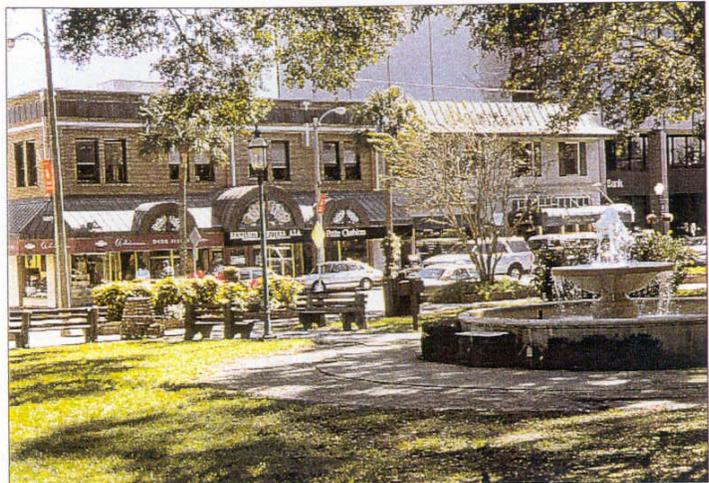
This scene is a good example of the mixed-use 'urban' development that should result from the use of the principles in these guidelines.
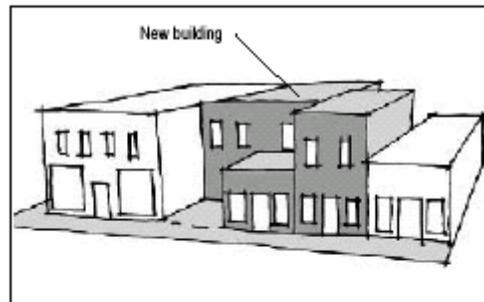
2 Site Design

Probably the most important aspect of mixed-use development is the way that the project is integrated physically and functionally as to encourage pedestrian activity and walking as the primary means of moving through and around the project.

Design Goal: Provide interest at the street level to encourage walking and to enhance the pedestrian experience.

Align a building's front at the sidewalk (right-of-way) edge

- ❑ A minimum of 75% of the building front (and side, if on a corner) should have a zero foot setback.
- ❑ Primary building facades should be parallel to the sidewalk (right-of-way), except where it is desired to maintain a highly desirable vista.
- ❑ Where portions of a building are set back from the sidewalk (right-of-way), such areas should be treated as courtyards (see Outdoor Spaces section later in this document).

Develop the ground floor level of a building to encourage pedestrian activity

- ❑ The linear frontage of a commercial or mixed-use building should include pedestrian-oriented elements, such as:
    - o Transparent display windows
    - o Outdoor dining areas (cafés)
    - o Public art or other public amenities such as fountains, benches, etc.
- ❑ Blank walls or vacant lot appearance is not appropriate.

Locate on-site parking to minimize visibility from the sidewalk.

- ❑ Parking should not be located so that it interrupts the storefront continuity along the sidewalk.
- ❑ Place on-site parking behind the buildings, either at-grade or within a parking structure.

A building with a courtyard in front is appropriate, if 75% of the building wall is maintained.

Inappropriate: Align at least 75% the building front at the sidewalk edge. This building, set back from the sidewalk, erodes the visual continuity essential to a strong retail district.

- Parking should be accessed from the rear of parcels if possible. If not possible, the entrance to parking from the street should be 'hidden' designing it as part of the rhythm of the storefronts but not in such a way that it is a hazard for pedestrians. When necessary, such driveways should be minimized in width and provide for good visibility of pedestrians from vehicles using the driveway. A change in material for the sidewalk should be utilized to indicate to or 'warn' pedestrians where the access to the parking is located.
- The entrance to parking facilities should be located on a secondary street and not on an arterial roadway.

Locate mechanical equipment and service areas out of public view.

3 Building Mass and Design

Design Goal: **New buildings and additions should be delineated both vertically and horizontally to reflect a human scale.**

The height of buildings should provide for a human scale to the overall streetscape while respecting surrounding development in the area. In no case should the height of a building exceed that specified by the City Zoning Ordinance.

- ❏ The portion of buildings along the street should not exceed a maximum height of five to six stories. Increased height beyond that should be achieved on the by setting back the upper floors from the initial five or six stories, thus reducing the impact of the overall mass.

Buildings should be divided into "modules" that provide visual interest and serve to create a traditional "Main Street."

- ❏ Create modules of 25 to 50 foot wide as traditionally found in Main Street environments.
- ❏ A clear visual division between upper and lower floors should be incorporated through a change in materials, colors, and use of canopies and awnings.

Note the use of 25 to 50 foot modules in this building as a means of providing visual interest

Facades of buildings that face the street should incorporate human-scale detailing through the use of reveals, belt courses, cornices, expression of structural or architectural bays, recessed windows or doors, material or material module changes, color and/or texture differences, or strongly expressed mullions.

Each building housing a principal nonresidential use should incorporate at least two (2) of the following additional features on all building facades facing a public street, public plaza, or public open space:

- ❑ *Arcades;*
- ❑ *Arbors;*
- ❑ *Contrasting building materials or textures;*
- ❑ *Incorporation of street furniture at the ground floor;*
- ❑ *Incorporation of outdoor eating or seating areas at the ground floor;*
- ❑ *Variations in rooflines along a single block face;*
- ❑ *Transparent windows that allow views into and out of the building; black, mirrored, or other opaque surfaces should never be used.*

4 Form and Roofline

Design Goal: Simple rectangular forms with horizontal roof forms should predominate on commercial and mixed-use structures. Use of pitched rooflines on residential structures is appropriate.

Simple rectangular volumes are preferred.

- ❑ New buildings and additions should be designed with simple rectangular volumes, accented by other shapes as details.
- ❑ Cylindrical, pyramidal, and other elaborate forms as the main building are not appropriate.

Horizontal roof forms should predominate and be screened by extensions of the building wall planes.

The primary form of this building is rectangular, but it is accented with a variety of other geometric forms

- ❑ Parapet walls should be used for screening flat roofs and should be detailed with such features as cornice to define the building roofline.
- ❑ Sloping roof forms may be considered as accents.

For primarily residential structures, horizontal roof forms or sloped roof forms are appropriate.

- ❑ Sloped roof forms may be considered as a means of screening a flat roof on a residential structure.

Design Goal: **Clearly identify the primary entrance to a building and orient it to the street.**

Orient the primary entrances to the sidewalk and the primary pedestrian ways.

- ❑ Primary entrances to ground floor spaces and upper levels should be oriented to the sidewalk and primary pedestrian ways.
- ❑ If a courtyard is part of the overall design, an entrance may be located on it as well.
- ❑ Buildings located at the intersection of roadways should be designed with angled entrances at the corner.

Clearly identify the primary entrance

- ❑ Use an awning, change in roofline, or other architectural feature to define the entrance.
- ❑ A sign mounted at the entry may also be used.
- ❑ Special paving treatments may be used to define the entry.

Note the change in material, color, and form used at the corner of this building, clearly designating the entrance

Recessed entries should be used in storefront construction.

- ❑ Storefront entries should be recessed to emphasize the entrance, increase window display area, and provide a sheltered transition to the interior of the store.
- ❑ Building entrances should provide shade from the sun and weather protection for pedestrians. This may involve overhangs that are at least 48 inches deep, arcades, roofs, porches, alcoves, porticos, awnings, or any combination of these features.
- ❑ Storefront entries should be centered on the façade and be highly 'transparent.' Solid doors are discouraged.

This building makes good use of recessed areas as a means of clearly identifying the entrance

6 Architectural Features

Design Goal: **Architectural features should be used to provide weather protection and highlight building features and entries.**

Buildings should be designed to incorporate awnings.

- ❑ Storefront window openings should be designed to accommodate awnings above the windows.
- ❑ The awning should fit the shape of the opening of the building.
- ❑ Awnings should be mounted to highlight moldings that may be found above the storefront or to fit within a sign panel that may be part of the façade design.
- ❑ While fabric (canvas or other high quality fabric) awnings are preferred, fixed metal canopies are also acceptable. Vinyl awnings are inappropriate.

A fixed canopy may be used where enhanced weather protection is desired.

- ❑ Permanent structures may be used on building facades with harsh sun exposure and where outdoor dining is planned.
- ❑ They must be incorporated into the overall design of the building and be appropriate in mass and scale with the structure.

These features must be designed to not obstruct storefront visibility and pedestrian access.
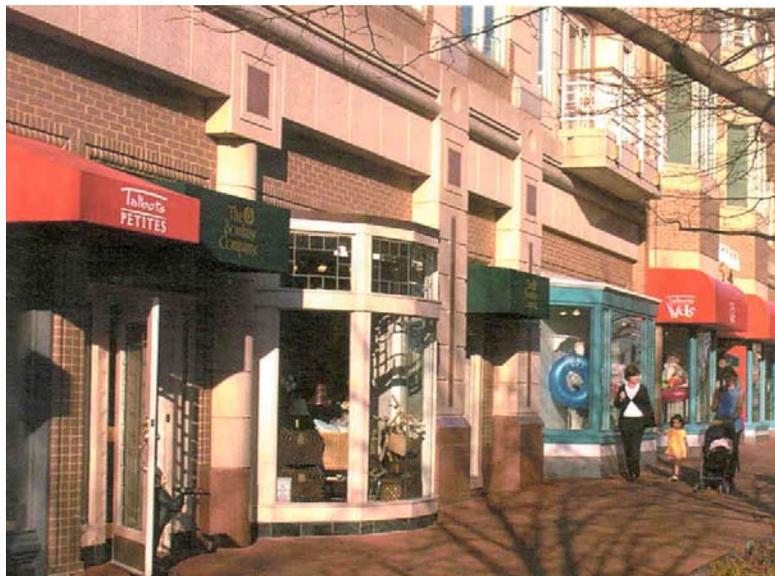
Good use of awnings. Note how the awnings 'fit' into the brick molding along the storefront.

Design Goal: **Building materials and colors should exhibit quality and help establish a human scale while providing visual interest.**

While some diversity in exterior building materials and color is a part of the tradition of urban form, the range should be limited in order to promote a sense of visual continuity for the area.

- Use the highest quality materials on exposed exterior surfaces, such as brick, pre-cast, tile and stucco.
- Innovative materials are encouraged provided they appear similar in quality, texture, finish and dimension to those surrounding area.
- Stucco and synthetic stuccos should be detailed to create a composition of smaller wall surfaces and establish a sense of human scale.

Simple material finishes are encouraged.

- Matte finishes are preferred. Polished stone or ceramic tile, for example should be avoided or limited to accent elements.
- Reflective or mirror glass is discouraged.
- Building colors should evoke a sense of richness and liveliness to complement and support the overall character of a mixed use area.

The buildings along this street reveal a good mix of quality materials and colors, providing both human scale and visual interest

8 Signage and Lighting

Design Goal: **Design buildings with careful consideration for the incorporation of signage and lighting.**

New buildings and additions should be designed to allow for signs appropriate in scale and location to the use and the surrounding area.

Signs shall comply with the City Zoning Ordinance.

Exterior building lighting should be used to accentuate the building design and the overall ambiance of the area.

- ❑ Highlight architectural details and features with lighting integrated into the building design.
- ❑ Façade lighting should provide for a sense of vibrancy and safety without resulting in excessive light and glare.
- ❑ The innovative use of lighting is encouraged.
- ❑ Energy conservation and efficiency should also be considered.

This building makes lighting an architectural feature by integrating the fixtures into the pilasters, illuminating the detail above and providing safety to those below

This sign is both visible to passing vehicles while being scaled and designed for pedestrians

Outdoor Spaces and Amenities

Design Goal: **Design outdoor spaces and amenities to enliven the sidewalk level and provide for private open space for shoppers, employees, and residents.**

A variety of outdoor spaces may be considered:

- ❑ A courtyard at sidewalk level, set in line with the building front.
- ❑ An interior courtyard with a major entrance clearly visible from the street.
- ❑ Upper-level decks, balconies, and rooftop gardens are encouraged as private open space. Such structures should be located so as to avoid encroachment into the public right-of-way.

Courtyards are encouraged as places for outdoor commercial activities.

- ❑ No more than 25% of a new commercial storefront building should be set back for a courtyard.
- ❑ Consider environmental conditions such as sun, shade and prevailing winds when positioning courtyards and outdoor seating areas.
- ❑ Trees, trellises or similar shade elements to be designed into a courtyard are encouraged.

Upper story decks, balconies or rooftop gardens should be incorporated for residential uses.

- ❑ Balconies on the front façade should be located and designed to minimize potential conflicts with pedestrian traffic on sidewalks below. Such structures should also be located so as to avoid encroachment into the public right-of-way.
- ❑ Balconies should be appropriately scaled and incorporated into the overall design of the building.
- ❑ Projecting balconies should not obscure visibility of signs or storefronts.
- ❑ Consider environmental conditions such as sun, shade, and prevailing winds when designing decks, balconies or rooftop garden spaces.

Pedestrian amenities such as patios and plazas, landscaped mini-parks, squares or greens should be provided as amenities and may include seating, lighting, special paving, planting, food and flower

vendors and artwork.

❑ Patios, plazas, mini-parks, squares and greens should be proportionate in size to the development. Small-scale amenities are appropriate for small developments, and large-scale amenities are appropriate for large developments.

❑ In order to serve as a focal point, a feature should be visible and easily recognizable as an area that encourages outdoor assembly. It may be framed by a view corridor, be placed on a high point, or be visually related to a multi-use trial or other walkway.

An example of large-scale amenities appropriate to large-scale development