

**DESIGN STANDARDS FOR THE CITY OF NORTH ADAMS
CHAPTER 40R SMART GROWTH OVERLAY DISTRICT**

I. Introduction

The Design Standards contained hereinafter are adopted pursuant to the authority of MGL c.40R, “Smart Growth Zoning,” and Regulations (760 CMR 59.00), as well as Section 9.4 of the City of North Adams Zoning Ordinance (the “District Ordinance”). Said design standard are intended to complement the District Ordinance, and provide a clear regulatory framework for site and building design requirements within the City’s Smart Growth Overlay District (“SGOD”)

This document is organized by subject headings based on the areas of regulation. Included herein are both non-binding Guiding Principle and binding Standards for Compliance. The Guiding Principles identify the City’s goals and vision for the District, and its three Sub-districts, and are intended to steer the planning and design of projects to be located therein. The Standards for Compliance include specific design requirements that shall be applied to developments within the District that are subject to Plan Review under the District Ordinance.

II. Purpose and Applicability

These Design Standards supplement Section 9.4 of the North Adams Zoning Ordinance and are set forth to ensure that renovation and construction within the District and its Sub-districts will preserve and complement the architectural qualities, historic character, and pedestrian ways found therein while promoting infill development and substantial redevelopment of historically significant and underutilized properties.

This document is intended for use by Plan Approval Authority (the “PAA), which is the City of North Adams Planning Board, in its review and consideration of proposed development projects within the District. Upon finding consistency among a development project, the District Ordinance, and the Standards for Compliance herein contained, the PAA shall approve the development.

This document shall take effect upon adoption by a majority of the North Adams Planning Board and approval by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (the “Department”). These Design Standards, as authorized by MGL c.40R, may be amended from time to time with the approval of the Department pursuant to the District Ordinance.

In the case of inconsistency between the District Ordinance and the Design Standards contained hereinafter, the District Ordinance shall govern. In the case of inconsistency between these Design Standards and applicable state and/or federal laws, rules and regulations, including, but not limited to, state building codes or fire safety codes, the applicable state and/or federal laws, rules, and regulations shall govern.

III. Guiding Principles

A. General

The C.40R Smart Growth Overlay District in the City of North Adams will, under the Guiding Principles set forth herein, become a vibrant, mixed use area that promotes new residential and commercial development in harmony with the existing character of its three Sub-districts. The following Guiding Principles are intended to steer the direction by which development occurs within the District and serve as the basis for the Design Standards for Compliance contained hereinafter. Development projects will be evaluated against the Guiding Principles, as well as relevant Design Standards.

1. PROMOTE compact, mixed use development in pedestrian-oriented form:

The District is intended to: Encourage compact development that conserves land, preserves historic and natural resources, and integrates different uses; promote adaptive reuse of existing and underutilized sites and structures, as well as infill development on vacant lots; and establish pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly districts and neighborhoods wherein residential, commercial, civic, cultural, educational, and recreation are integrated.

2. ENHANCE connectivity and accessibility:

The District is intended to: Establish a multimodal circulation network in which all users of the transportation system may conveniently walk, bike, drive, or ride public transportation to destinations within and beyond the District; ensure accessibility for all transportation system users regardless of age or ability; and increase access to recreational amenities and open space.

3. CREATE distinctive neighborhoods that provide diverse housing options:

The District is intended to: Create mixed use, mixed-income neighborhoods that comprise a multitude of housing options ranging from single-family homes to townhouses, apartments, and condominiums within multifamily structures; support neighborhood businesses; and provide housing options affordable to various household types and income levels.

4. IMPROVE the design of public space and the built environment:

The District intended to: Encourage private development to be harmonious and respectful of the public space so that streets, sidewalks, green spaces, and all other public spaces and ways remain or become comfortable, inviting, and aesthetically attractive.

5. ENCOURAGE creative design consistent with neighborhood character:

The District is intended to: promote creativity in architectural and landscape design while maintaining the distinct neighborhood and historic character present within each Sub-district.

B. Sub-districts

The North Adams Smart Growth Overlay District is divided into two distinct Sub-districts. Each Sub-district has its own distinct history and character and therefore its own vision for development. The Sub-districts—the Mill and Downtown Districts—are located in the downtown area and the gateway thereto. Each Sub-district is intended to encourage adaptive reuse of existing underutilized properties and infill development on vacant lots inline with the Guiding Principles set forth hereinbefore.

Mill District

Located along and around the Union Street corridor, the Mill District serves as the eastern gateway to the downtown area. The Mill District contains several properties of historical significance, including Notre Dame School and Cathedral, the Hoosac Mill, Wall Streeter Mill, the Windsor Mill, the Barber Tannery, and the St. Francis Rectory. The Mill District also contains several smaller residential areas on Willow Dell and Miner Street, as well as commercial uses on Canal Street and toward the intersection with Eagle Street. Development projects within the Mill District should leverage underutilized historic properties and natural resources such as the Hoosic River and open space to create a vibrant mix of residential, commercial, and recreational uses that improve the desirability of the downtown's eastern gateway.

Mill District Vision Statement: A district in which existing historical and natural resources are leveraged to create a distinct, vibrant neighborhood in which residential, locally-owned and operated commercial, and recreational uses coexist. New residential and mixed-use developments within historic structures enhance the look and feel of the area to create a highly desirable and inclusive neighborhood.

Downtown District

The Downtown District is situated in the heart of the downtown. Included within the District are Main Street, historic Eagle Street, and Steeple City Plaza. The Downtown District is primarily commercial. The north side of Main Street comprises a series of old New England block-style downtown buildings, some of which are occupied at the ground and second floor level while others are contain up to six vacant floors. The south side of Main Street—Steeple City Plaza—is primarily single-story, strip mall-style construction with large parking lots. Also, located in the District is historic Eagle Street—a small mixed-use street with restaurants, art galleries, retail shops, residences, and a few vacant buildings. Development in the Downtown District should focus on rehabilitating existing vacant buildings for mixed-use purposes and the creation of a multimodal circulation system that enhances pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

Downtown District Vision Statement:

A vibrant downtown neighborhood that mixes residential and commercial uses wherein increased residential development supports local businesses; and a vital, multimodal streetscape serve to attract and retain a diverse array of residents from all age and income levels. The Downtown District will be enhanced by residential and mixed-use development in existing vacant and under-utilized buildings.

IV. Design Standards for Compliance

A. Scale, Proportion, and Exterior Appearance of Buildings

- 1. Relationship of Buildings to Site:** The construction, rehabilitation or renovation of buildings should be designed in such a way that permits, to the maximum extent feasible, passive solar energy and natural into structures and onto sidewalks and other public ways and spaced. Site design and location should preserve, enhance, and/or create pedestrian areas that are protected from adverse and dangerous conditions, including, but not limited to, high winds, shadows, emissions, and vehicular traffic.
- 2. Setbacks:**
 - a.** Generally, setbacks for new buildings in the District and its Sub-districts should consistent with setbacks of neighboring buildings. The PAA, at its discretion, may approve setbacks that differ from those of neighboring buildings Front setbacks may, with approval from the PAA, be used for well-landscaped public spaces. Where differing setbacks are approved, design elements including walls, fencing, or landscaping of a minimum height of three feet may be used to reinforce the street line with approval from the PAA or may be required thereby.
 - b.** Buildings on corner lots shall be oriented to the corner and visible from both public street fronts. Buildings on corner lots may incorporate residential entries and special landscaping by setting the structure back from the property line.
 - c.** Developments in predominantly commercial and mixed-use areas should visually reinforce street-level storefronts by placing horizontal or vertical elements in a line that corresponds with the setbacks and façade elements of adjacent building façades. Such elements may include, but are not limited to, columns, windows, planters, benches, awnings, and cornices.
 - d.** Alternative paving materials such as brick or brick pavers should be used to differentiate setback areas from sidewalks and to visually reinforce street lines.
- 3. Proportion:** Generally, the roof lines or tops of structures should be clearly distinguished from the façade walls thereof via horizontal divisions, varying materials, and/or traditional roof lines.

4. **Roof Forms:** Generally, the forms of roofs within the District, its Sub-districts, the blocks and individual buildings therein, should vary by incorporating design elements including, but not limited to any of the following: parapets, decorative cornice treatments, belt courses, and bay windows.
5. **Mechanical Equipment:** Any mechanical equipment attached to or placed upon the roof of a building shall be screened from view of streets or integrated into the overall design of the building so as to be rendered inconspicuous by use of materials, placements, roof shape or form, or other means determined to be acceptable by the PAA.
6. **New Buildings:** All new buildings shall contain two or more stories and shall be designed to create and maintain a visual distinction between upper and lower floors. All new buildings to be located within the Downtown subdistrict shall be designed and constructed in a manner consonant with the surrounding mill buildings. All new buildings to be located within the Downtown subdistrict shall be designed and constructed in a manner consonant with the architecture of buildings located on the north side of Main Street between Holden and Eagle Streets.
 - a. **Ground Floor:** Transparent, open façades (e.g.: windows covering between 50-80% of the ground floor façade area beginning at 24"-30" inches above the sidewalk) for street-level commercial uses are strongly encouraged.
 - b. **Middle Floors:** Architectural features may include: belt courses or horizontal bands distinguishing individual floors; change in materials and colors and/or textures that enhance specific forms of the building; a pattern of windows; and/or bay windows to give scale to the structure.
 - c. **Vertical Division:** For buildings that are designed to distinguish between ground and upper-floors using horizontal elements, said elements should be consistent across the façade. The scale of larger multi-story buildings should be modulated by cornices, string cornices, step backs or other similar features.
 - d. **Horizontal Division:** Major horizontal elements of new buildings should align and be consistent with those of adjacent buildings. Additionally, buildings greater than forty feet (40') in width shall be divided into a series of smaller bays. No uninterrupted length of any façade shall be permitted to exceed forty (40) horizontal feet or 40% of the façade's total length, whichever is less, without incorporating one or more of the following design elements: color, material, or texture change; and one or more of the following: architectural projections or recesses, trellises, balconies, or windows.

7. Renovation

- a. Historical Commission:** Developers proposing to renovate existing buildings are encouraged to meet with the North Adams Historical Commission before submitting plans to the PAA to better understand the historical significance of the building.
 - b. Scale and Proportion:** All renovations shall, to the maximum extent feasible, maintain the scale and proportion of the original building elements, including roof shape and height, structural framework, cornice, sign band, window size and symmetry, and decorative elements. The PAA may allow alterations to the aforesaid design elements if such alterations create benefits to either future occupants or the public.
 - c. Original Façade Elements:** The covering or removal of original façade elements as part of a renovation of an existing building is strongly discouraged and may be prohibited by the PAA.
- 8. Locational Context:** New buildings should utilize a contextual approach to design that is sensitive to and corresponds with the design elements of surrounding buildings of local and historical significance. Such design elements may include, without limitation:
 - a.** Distinctive entrances and windows;
 - b.** Decorative façade elements that create human-scale and pedestrian interest;
 - c.** Large storefront windows;
 - d.** Canopies, variable parapets, and cornices;
 - e.** Entry treatments that are arched or framed in a manner that protects people from the elements;
 - f.** Pedestrian-oriented features, including: non-reflective storefront windows and transoms; awnings; first-floor detailing; and roofline detailing.
- 9. Entryways:** Buildings, new or renovated, should include protected pedestrian entryways for upper story residential and commercial uses. Where possible, entryways should provide recessed doorways in order to provide a welcoming space that is protected from the elements and to add design features to the façade. Adequate nighttime entryway lighting shall be provided.
- 10. Frontage:** All walls of buildings with street frontage shall include windows, doors, or other indicators of human occupancy, such as balconies or porches.
- 11. Side and Rear Walls:** The design of all exterior walls of buildings visible from public ways shall be consistent with the design of the façade of the same building. Such walls may include fewer architectural details and design elements than the façade.
- 12. Materials:**

- a. Materials of new and renovated buildings visible from public ways should be consistent with those of existing buildings within the District, unless such materials of existing buildings include vinyl siding. Materials such as brick, stone, wood shingles, and clapboard are preferred and strongly encouraged. Other materials may be used in ways that are compatible with the appearance of surrounding buildings. Materials with pattern and texture are encouraged.
- b. Finish materials that are prone or susceptible to fading, discoloration or staining are strongly discouraged. The use of applied foam ornamentation and Exterior Insulation and Finish System) is prohibited on ground level locations. Vinyl and aluminum siding, siding with narrow trim, and pressure treated porches and balconies are strongly discouraged.
- c. Where more than one material is used, heavier materials (e.g.: stone, brick, etc.) should be located below lighter materials (e.g.: wood, fiber cement board, siding, etc.). The change in material should occur along a horizontal line, preferably at floor levels.

13. Windows:

- a. **Ground Floor:** Windows should be located and designed to maximize transparency of commercial façades and attract pedestrian interest.
- b. **Indoor-Outdoor Interaction:** Large windows in commercial, ground floor storefronts that open to facilitate indoor-outdoor interaction with the street and/or sidewalk are encouraged.
- c. **Other:** Transom or clerestory windows above entrance, display windows, projected bay windows are also encouraged. In buildings where large areas of glass are to be installed, multiple paned windows should be used.

B. Placement, Alignment, Width and Grade of Streets and Sidewalks

1. **Emergency Access:** Ease of access, travel, and on-site movement for fire and police equipment, as well as other emergency services, shall be assured at all times and in all locations for safety of the public. Developers are encouraged to meet with the North Adams Departments of Public Safety and Public Services to ensure adequate emergency access is provided.
2. **Multimodal Ways:** Any proposed development that requires the creation of new public and/or private circulation systems shall ensure public safety by separating pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle traffic. The PAA may permit the creation of a woonerf if satisfied that the design elements assure public safety.
3. **Accessibility:** All new sidewalks within shall be designed and constructed in accordance with applicable laws, rules, regulations, and standards, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (AAB).

4. **Delineation:** Clear distinction between areas for pedestrian traffic and areas for vehicular traffic, except in the case of woonerf approved by the PAA, will be provided.
5. **Materials:** Sidewalks shall be surfaced with concrete, brick, or stone using a minimum unobstructed width of five feet (5'). All other sidewalk materials are prohibited. Where sidewalks are non-existent or do not meet the minimum width requirement due to existing conditions (i.e.: existing lack of setback), the proposed development should include a plan for pedestrian walks which may include a combination of sidewalks, path, and passthrough alleys or a woonerf.
6. **Sidewalk Improvements:** Where existing sidewalks within rights-of-way abutting the proposed development are cracked, broken, or uneven, developers are strongly encouraged to proposed improvements to said sidewalk. Where development is proposed adjacent to sidewalks that not designed, constructed, or maintained in accordance with applicable laws, rules, regulations, and standard, including, without limitation, ADA and AAB, improvement of such sidewalks may be required as a condition of Plan Approval, provided that said condition is not unduly restrictive.
7. **Public Seating:** Benches should be provided near retail entrances Sheltered benches should be provided at bus stops.
8. **Pedestrian Circulation:** Pedestrian access shall connect to all building entrances with further connections to local pedestrian arteries. Sidewalk, crosswalks or walkways shall be provided to allow access to adjacent properties and among buildings within a development. All development and redevelopment should allow for possible future pedestrian and bicyclist connections with adjoining properties where appropriate.
9. **Mixed-use Areas:** Mixed-use developments should preserve and enhance the pedestrian environment by providing continuous sidewalks that are unencumbered by parked vehicles and are minimally broken by vehicular access within blocks.
10. **Curbing:** Curbing shall be granite and designed to limit off-pavement vehicle access.
11. **Topographic Alteration:** Alteration of the topography shall be limited as nearly as possible to only that which is necessary for the provision of access.
12. **Traffic Management Plan:** Any development proposed within the District or its Sub-districts may require a Traffic Management Plan. Developers shall meet with the North Adams Traffic Commission and the Department of Public Services to discuss and determine the need for a Traffic Management Plan. Such a determination shall be based upon the anticipated generation of traffic, impact of increased traffic on nearby intersections, and the vehicular Level of Service of nearby streets and intersections. Where required, a Traffic Management Plan shall include the following:

- a. A plan showing the proposed parking, loading, and traffic circulation within the site; its access and egress points; and other features related to traffic generated by the proposed use.
- b. A traffic study, prepared by a qualified traffic engineer, detailing the expected traffic impacts. Said traffic study must substantially conform to the Institute of Transportation Engineers' "Traffic Access and Impact Studies for Site Development: A Recommended Practice," latest edition. The PAA must approve the geographic scope and content of the study. Additionally, the developer may be required to submit a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) plan tailored to the specific uses and the geographic location of the site.
- c. Proposed mitigation measures, if any, such as left turn lanes, roadway widening, signage, and signalization of intersections.

C. Type and Location of Infrastructure

1. **Utilities:** To the maximum extent feasible, all new utilities shall be located underground.
2. **Parking:** Parking areas shall be graded, surfaced with asphalt, concrete or other suitable non-erosive material, and drained in a manner deemed adequate by the North Adams Department of Public Services to prevent nuisance caused by standing water, erosion or excessive water flow across abutting streets or ways, within the proposed parking area, to abutting properties, and to wetland resource areas. Natural drainage courses shall be utilized insofar as possible and LID techniques are strongly encouraged.
3. **Detention and Filtration:** All detention and filtration system shall be designed to conform with the Stormwater Management Policy of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Additionally, all detention and filtration systems shall be located on-site and should have curvilinear sides, so as to appear as part of the natural landscape. Manmade embankments shall have maximum side slopes of three feet (3') horizontal and one foot (1') vertical.
4. **Surface Run-off:** Surface run-off shall be minimized. LID techniques such as bioretention cells, drainage swales, and porous paving materials are encouraged where soil and topography allow and the protection of the site and adjacent properties from erosion as a result thereof is assured.

D. Location of Building and Garage Entrances

1. **Access Points:** Points of access should be consolidated wherever possible; multiple curb cuts are strongly discouraged.
2. **Sight Lines:** Acceptable sight distance shall be provided and maintained at all access and egress locations.
3. **Parking:** To the maximum extent feasible, parking and vehicular access shall be located away from the corners.

- 4. Entrances:** Building entrances shall be designed to provide direct access to sidewalks to emphasize pedestrian ingress and egress as opposed to accommodating vehicle. Entries for residential uses on the street rather than from the rear are encouraged. Doorways to upper floors shall be visibly separated from street-level shop entries. Pedestrian entrances shall be sufficiently lighted and entry areas should be protected from the weather.

E. Off-street Parking

- 1. Sidewalks:** Continuous sidewalks that are unencumbered by parked vehicles and within minimal curb cuts for vehicular access within a block shall be provided as a means of preserving and enhancing the pedestrian environment.
- 2. Parking Areas:** Surface parking areas should not be designed to front on a public street. Surface parking shall be screened from view from public rights-of-way. Screening may be transparent cast iron or brick fencing or plantings and shall be at least three feet (3') in height.
- 3. Landscaping:** Large parking areas shall include landscaped islands to divide to the area. Landscaping within the interior of parking lots is required and should incorporate existing trees, berms, and other land forms where possible. The following minimum landscape coverage is required:
 - a.** Parking lots containing fewer than 100 spaces shall have a minimum of five percent (5%) of the interior lot area landscaped.
 - b.** Parking lots with more than 100 spaces shall have at least seven percent (7%) of the interior lot area landscaped.
- 4. Parking Blocks:** Parking lots containing more than 100 spaces shall be divided into blocks containing no more than fifty (50) spaces per block. Blocks shall be separated from one another by a landscaped area at least eight feet (8') in width.
- 5. Entrances:** Entrances to structured parking shall be located on side streets or alleys wherever feasible. Blank walls on parking structures are prohibited and shall be screened. Screening may include public art, vegetation or buildings containing other uses, such as residential or commercial.
- 6. Setbacks:** Parking areas shall be setback from structures, property lines, and public ways by a minimum of ten feet (10').

F. Location and Design of On-site Open Spaces

- 1. Quasi-public:** Privately-owned open space that is accessible to the public should be incorporated within site design for new developments, especially on corner landscape treatments and courtyard entries.
- 2. Visibility:** Wherever possible, open space within developments should be visible from public rights-of-way.
- 3. Trees:** Mature trees in open space areas within developments shall be kept and incorporated into the landscape.

4. **Streetside Gardens:** Wherever possible, streetside gardens between buildings and public rights-of way are encouraged,
5. **Operation and Maintenance Plan:** Open space areas within developments shall be maintained to the highest standards. An Operation and Maintenance Plan for open space areas may be required prior to Plan Approval. If required, the Operation and Maintenance Plan shall remain on file with the PAA and may be an ongoing requirement.

G. Landscaping

1. **Landscaping Plan:** A landscaping plan shall be submitted with any plan for approval.
2. **Plantings:** Plantings shall be of native species and provide seasonal foliage, bloom, and fragrance. Sustainable landscape materials requiring minimal irrigation or fertilizer should be used. Plantings shall be selected with consideration of site conditions and the local climate and preference shall be given to plantings that are drought- and disease-resistant. All plants shall be A-grade or No. 1 Grade, free of defects, and of normal health, height, leaf density, and spread as defined by the American Standard for Nursery Stock, ASNI Z60.1 (latest edition available), or the American Association of Nurserymen. Plants shall have full, even, well-developed branching and a dense fibrous, and vigorous root system. Plant species should be chosen considering the following:
 - a. **Salt-tolerance:** In areas where salt is likely to be used, trees and plantings that are observed to have salt-tolerance should be chosen.
 - b. **Planters:** The ultimate maturity of plantings should be considered in determining the size of planters or plant beds.
 - c. **Tree Crowns:** The mature shape of tree crowns should be considered when selecting trees for planting on public rights-of-way with buildings located adjacent to the property line to prevent branches from growing into buildings and requiring excessive pruning.
 - d. **Street Trees:** The shape and density of the canopy should be considered when selecting trees for planting along streets. Smaller, more ornamental trees or trees with higher or lighter canopies should be chosen for commercial streets.
3. **Existing Vegetation:** Effort shall be made to preserve existing vegetation.
4. **Existing Trees:** Where feasible, existing mature trees shall be preserved. The location and design of buildings should not cause avoidable removal or damage to any tree exceeding twelve inches (12") in trunk diameter.
5. **Site Plans:** Site Plans submitted to the PAA shall identify existing trees on the site to be preserved. Trees shall be tagged in the field within the project review process and appropriately designated on project plans.

6. **Street Trees:** Street trees that provide summer shade and winter light with tree grates or in planter strips shall be provided.
7. **Screening:** Paved areas shall be screened by hedges where practical.
8. **Islands:** All islands and landscaped areas should be a minimum of 100 square feet to support healthy plant growth.

H. Lighting

1. **Orientation:** All lighting shall be oriented downward and conform to “Dark Skies” guidelines, as stated by the International Dark Sky Association (IDA).
2. **Scaling:** In pedestrian areas, to the extent feasible, lights should be affixed to twelve to fifteen feet (12’-15’) high poles or bollards. In parking areas, light fixtures may be a maximum of twenty-five feet (25’).
3. **Pedestrian Lighting:** Installation of pedestrian light fixtures as part of a development’s sidewalk improvements is required as necessary to ensure safety after dark.
4. **Light Pollution:** Lights and light fixtures that produce glare and/or light pollution are prohibited.
5. **Energy Efficiency:** Energy efficient lighting that uses timers or motion sensors is strongly encouraged.
6. **Lighting Plan:** A lighting plan is required as a part of the Plan Approval process.

I. Buffering in Relation to Adjacent Properties

1. **Noise Levels:** Noise levels emanating from normal operations and uses, excluding motor vehicles, shall at no time exceed 10 d.b.a. above ambient noise levels at the property line.
2. **Service Elements:** Trash dumpsters, utility/service areas, loading docks mechanical equipment, and the like shall be consolidated away from the street front wherever possible and screened from view.
3. **Services:** Appropriate provision shall be made for waste disposal, water supply, refuse removal, drainage, dust and erosion control, and other utilities and their appurtenances, in accordance with local and state regulation.