

Rutland Downtown Redevelopment Area
Redevelopment Plan
Architectural and Design Guidelines
Historical Context and Design Principles

NOVEMBER 3, 1993

CONTENTS

Statement of Purpose	1
Historical Context	2
III. General Design Principles	3
IV. Design Objectives	3
V. Design Prohibitions	4
VI. Review Process	4

I. Statement of Purpose

The Redevelopment Plan stipulates that all proposed plans for the Redevelopment Area be reviewed by the Architectural Review Committee prior to permitting and construction. These guidelines define the context in which proposed designs will be reviewed. Architectural planning and design issues of importance to the City are outlined in this document and should be discussed with the Zoning Administrator in a pre-design conference before any design work is undertaken.

Designs will be reviewed against the criteria set down in the following sections. The overall intention of architectural review is to assure that individual buildings contribute to forming a coherent environment in the downtown that is consistent with the best qualities of existing buildings. However, designers are urged to interpret the design guidelines in contemporary ways rather than slavishly imitating existing buildings. Judgements of the adequacy of proposed designs inevitably involve subjectivity and tradeoffs in view of financial necessities. The intentions of the Redevelopment Plan and the specific context of the proposed structure will be important in judging the acceptability of a proposal.

II. Historical Context

Phase I Context

From the 19th century through the 1950's the bulk of the Redevelopment Area (Parcels A, B, C and D) was a large railroad yard, complete with passenger and freight terminals, switching yards and repair facilities. The remaining parcels were primarily industrial and commercial sites. Downtown Rutland thus has always been oriented toward an open, expansive space at its center. Although surrounded by rail yards, the train station was well kept and attractively landscaped. Rutland was a city where railroads and industry were part of the daily fabric of life, so provisions were made for the human as well as industrial needs.

Redevelopment of the Area is not intended to create a tightly structured street grid, as exists in the downtown east of the Area. Instead, the Plan seeks to re-establish a public park in the center of town and encourage buildings that are properly viewed across open space.

Indeed, the facades of the 100 block of Merchants Row, generally regarded as the architectural signature of downtown, was designed to be viewed across such an open space and would be diminished if overshadowed by new structures immediately across the street.

Phase II Context

Rutland's central business district grew in response to the location of the railroad tracks. Today, with the tracks largely gone, downtown is left with two distinct areas: a traditional street grid lined with well-preserved late 19th century commercial buildings (Phase II Redevelopment Area) and an open area with few pre-existing land use constraints (Phase I Redevelopment Area). Consequently, site plan requirements for Phase I and Phase II differ significantly. With the possible exception of Parcel E, all parcels in Phase II should be redeveloped in a manner consistent with the traditional street grid already in place.

Common to Both

Downtown Rutland's distinctive building stock is based on well built, practical commercial structures - functional and without pretense. In many regards they define Rutland itself. New structures should be designed to complement the spatial openness of downtown and maintain the tone of a practical, working city.

Downtown Rutland is an established National Historic Preservation District. The stock of late 19th and early 20th century commercial buildings is Rutland's major architectural asset. All designs will, first and foremost, be reviewed for their contribution to the enhancement of this established architectural mix.

IV. General Design Principles

"Imitation" historic designs are discouraged. New structures should present a pleasing visual effect viewed side by side with existing buildings but are not required to attempt wholesale mimicry of those buildings.

This juxtaposition defines the central design context in which plans will be reviewed: the design's ability to serve current commercial needs in a manner that complements the existing building stock.

Two categories of site frontage are used to determine treatments for facades and landscaping: A) Public Access areas, such as major streets and major pedestrian approaches to buildings, and B) Service Access, which includes loading and general service areas for buildings. The specific classification of frontage within the parcels will be set at the pre-design review session, as frontage requirements will change depending on the division of parcels.

In general, Public Access frontage will be seen and used by the general public, and must be designed to a higher level of architectural detail than the Service Access frontage, which is out of the flow of public traffic and thus more hidden from public view.

All proposed redevelopment projects must demonstrate that the needs for employees, customer or resident parking are accommodated on the redevelopment site or provided in a dedicated off-site parking area. Aside from customer parking at curbside metered spaces, parking for redevelopment projects will not be permitted to spill over onto surrounding streets. Parking requirements will be determined according to the specific nature of the site using ratios set forth in the Urban Land Institute 1983 report entitled "Shared Parking". Alternate solutions such as satellite parking and public transit will also be taken into consideration in setting parking requirements.

V. Design Objectives

The primary function of a commercial building is to provide a good environment for commerce. Designs must provide effective commercial spaces that encourage customer traffic and public interaction.

The street level presentation of buildings is extremely important. Buildings must relate constructively with public spaces such as streets and parks. From any vantage point around the building a pedestrian or passing motorist must be able to clearly understand the function of that building and see an easy, attractive path to gain access to the building.

Building designs are expected to emphasize the visual and commercial effect of their primary orientation but should also present well structured solutions for the aesthetics of secondary approaches. Placement of primary and secondary orientations are critical to the success of the design. All four building elevations will be reviewed with consideration to this issue.

Buildings will be sited and massed so that they do not overpower existing buildings or create extreme shadows on major public areas. All plans for the Phase I Area will be reviewed for their relationship to the facades of the east side of Merchants Row, acknowledged here as the architectural centerpiece of downtown Rutland.

Building materials will be reviewed for their contribution to a pleasing look for the overall Area. The existing buildings contain a variety of materials and colors, so other than to state a preference for brick, the guidelines do not specify certain required materials.

Recessed windows and punched windows are desirable for buildings on Phase I Parcels B and D and elsewhere in the historic district, as they complement the windows of the existing buildings in the historic district along Merchants Row and Evelyn Street.

Parking areas must be reasonably landscaped. While it is essential that large parking areas be included to insure the commercial viability of the Area, these parking fields must be visually compatible with surrounding buildings and public spaces.

All building designs will strive to preserve the quality of public open spaces. Siting of buildings in relation to angles of sunlight is of prime importance. Public spaces must be provided with adequate exposure to natural light.

Any land not covered by buildings or pavement shall be suitably landscaped and maintained. All landscaped areas shall be maintained in good condition to prevent presence of dead shrubs and trees, unmowed grass areas and overgrown or unkempt planters.

Extended, windowless walls on a Public Access frontage must incorporate design elements to break the visual expanse of the blank wall. When feasible, this same objective may be attained through landscape design.

VI. Design Prohibitions

Mirrored or heavily tinted glass is prohibited at street level.

Landscaping treatments that block store windows or inhibit the normal flow of pedestrian traffic are prohibited.

VII. Review Process

All proposals and plans must be submitted to the Zoning Administrator. They will be reviewed by an Architectural Review Committee made up of the Zoning Administrator, two representatives from RRA, and two representatives from the Planning Commission. The Committee will report its findings to the zoning administrator, who will then convey a final ruling to the applicant.

There are three levels of review for all proposed renovation and new construction projects:

Pre-design conference: Project developers and their architects must meet with the design review committee prior to the start of any project design work in order to review these guidelines and discuss the implications of these stated policies for the proposed project. The pre-design conference may be conducted by the zoning administrator.

Schematic design: The schematic design for the project, complete with site plans and elevations must be reviewed and approved. These plans must indicate the building's relationship with all surrounding properties and the treatment of landscaping and parking areas. At this stage, a preliminary review will also be conducted to determine compliance with City codes. Applicants will be informed in writing within 30 days whether the design has been approved, conditionally approved with specific required changes or disapproved. If disapproved, specific reasons will be provided to the applicant in writing. Applicants who believe that approval has been unreasonably withheld may appeal the decision to the Planning Commission, which may form a special review committee to hear the appeal.

Final project approval: Final construction documents for the project, and samples of major exterior materials and colors, must be approved prior to permits being issued. As in 2, above, applicants 1) will be informed in writing within 30 days whether the design has been approved, conditionally approved or disapproved, and 2) shall have the right to appeal the decision.

For some smaller projects it may be possible to combine the concept review and the final project review.

All inquiries concerning these guidelines should be addressed to:

RUTLAND CITY ZONING ADMINISTRATOR
City Hall
1 Strongs Avenue
Rutland, Vermont 05701
Phone: (802) 773-1800