

City of Takoma Park

Office of the Mayor

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7500 Maple Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912

The Honorable Bruce R. Williams
Mayor

May 5, 2011

Françoise Carrier
Planning Board Chair
Planning Board
M-NCPPC
8787 Georgia Ave.
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Re: Transmittal of Community Recommendations for the Urban Design Guidelines for the Takoma/Langley Crossroads Sector Plan.

Dear Ms. Carrier, *Francoise*

In support of the upcoming Sector Plan and working with the Planning Board staff, the City has, with the support and approval of the Planning staff, held a successful series of meetings to discuss potential urban design guidelines for infill and greyfield development within the Takoma Langley Crossroads area.

The following overall goals were identified by the community as being of great importance when reviewing future development projects in the Takoma Langley Crossroads and are reflected in the recommended Urban Design Guidelines:

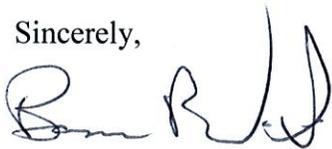
- The protection and improvement of the aesthetic and physical quality of life of residents in adjoining single and multi-family blocks; and
- the creation of a substantially higher quality of public and private infrastructure than currently exists (specifically redevelopment and development which is pedestrian oriented, aesthetically pleasing, and supports comfortable usage of alternative modes of transportation).

Additionally, the City strongly encourages the adoption of baseline expectations by the Planning Board rather than the use of illustrations or general design concepts. The use of specific language and detailed streetscape direction will allow developers and the community to clearly determine if a site or building design meets the guidelines.

Our specific recommendations for inclusion in the pending Urban Design Guidelines for the Takoma/Langley Crossroads Sector Plan are attached. They are intended to further our community's interest in neighborhood compatibility, sustainability, improved environmental performance, a unified streetscape, and higher quality development that supports a diversity of businesses and residents.

These guidelines have been embraced by the community and are viewed as a means of providing a high degree of predictability and certainty to both future developers and area residents while improving the overall development process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce R. Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bruce" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Williams".

Bruce R. Williams
Mayor

/enclosures/

SITE DESIGN

General

Intent: *Improve environmental performance and sustainability of the site; further relationship-building and economic activity; and enable residents, employees and visitors to conveniently and safely walk, bike and use transit to access residences, community centers, employment, goods and services.*

1. Organize building mass, building orientation and outdoor spaces to provide efficient pedestrian access from streets and adjoining residential neighborhoods.
2. Incorporate adequate space for operational recycling and landscape/building maintenance; design for the collection and storage of waste and recyclables and provide access for collection vehicles with the least impact on pedestrian/bicycle circulation and public view sheds.
3. Where appropriate, incorporate open space areas that serve multiple functions such as filtering stormwater, creating vistas, providing air and light to buildings, furnishing the district with active and passive recreation areas, and providing value for adjoining uses.
4. Orient building, window placement, and outdoor spaces to maximize access to light, air flows, and interesting views.
5. Consider placing renewable energy sources onsite.

Intent: *Enhance the visual and aesthetic experience of living in adjoining neighborhoods and entering the commercial district.*

1. Pay exceptional design attention to focal points (corners and view termini found at local and major street intersections).

Neighborhood Compatibility

Intent: *Uses in transition areas are to be compatible with a low-traffic-volume single- and multi-family community.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. Limit uses within buildings that face a street of properties zoned for single-family or multi-family to residential or office uses.
2. Do not provide a drive-through or outdoor automobile service facility on portions of sites within 200 feet of a single-family or multi-family zoned property.

Setbacks and Build-to Lines

Intent: *Protect and enhance the visual interest and aesthetic experience of living in the New Hampshire Gardens neighborhood.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. Setback buildings confronting the primary face of single-family residential structure 25 feet from the property line or public improvement easement edge whichever is furthest from the street curb.

2. Setback buildings confronting a secondary face of a single-family residential structure 10 feet from the right-of-way or public improvement easement line whichever is closest.
3. Buildings shall be setback 25 feet from all single-family zoned property lot lines.¹
4. Place buildings located on retail-oriented-streets, avenues or boulevards at or within five feet of the edge of the right-of-way or public-improvement-easement, whichever is furthest from the curb.
5. Driveways, parking, and accessory buildings may not be located in the front setback.²

The Community supports when feasible or appropriate:

6. Entrance features that are not enclosed such as stoops, porticos or porches may be located within the front setback.
7. Design porches and balconies with a minimum depth of 7 feet.

Circulation and Access

Intent: *Create a high quality pedestrian and bicycle friendly environment that encourages alternative modes of transportation and reduces dependence upon cars.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. Divide large properties into walkable blocks generally between 250 and 500 feet in length.
2. For residential and office uses confronting the primary face of single-family residential structures, design parking access to be from a rear alley or street internal to the site.
3. Continue pedestrian and bicycle pathway pattern and design across driveway entrances.
4. Use sidewalks a minimum of five feet in width to connect to dwelling entrances, parking, public space, auxiliary buildings, and recycling and waste disposal facilities.
 - a. On primarily commercial properties provide such access with sidewalks a minimum of six feet in width.
5. Provide pedestrian and bicycle linkages across large commercial properties from residential neighborhoods.

The Community supports when feasible or appropriate:

6. On sites greater than four acres in size, construct private alleys off of main highways for access to the rear of buildings, loading, parking, dumpsters, and service entrances.
7. Circular, U-shaped and other driveway or pull-in features are strongly discouraged.
8. Share access to parking and loading on adjacent properties.

Intent: *Protect residential neighborhoods from negative impacts of commercial activity.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. Locate drive-thru services behind buildings.
2. Do not locate drive-thru services or their access drive aisles in buildings or on land adjacent to single-family or multi-family residentially zoned properties.

¹ CR ZTA Standard

² CR ZTA Standard

Intent: *Provide a quality and comfortable microclimates using solar orientation and prevailing winds.*

1. Orient new streets on the diagonal to the compass (SW to NE and NW to SE) where feasible.

Screening and Buffering

Intent: *Create an appealing shopping, working and living atmosphere, reduce negative visual and noise impacts of new uses and buildings while preserving “eyes on the street” principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. Screen parking adjacent to public or private street sidewalks with opaque walls or evergreen plantings a maximum of 4 feet in height.
2. Screen parking adjacent to single-family houses with opaque walls of 6 feet in height on the single-family house property side.
3. Barbed wire, vinyl cladding, unclad cinder block, and razor wire are inappropriate materials for walls, fences, or screening.
4. Limit the use of chain link fencing material to enclosures for recreational courts (e.g. basketball).
5. Screen dumpsters, recycling areas, HVAC units and utilities.
 - a. Dumpsters, trash and building recycling containers should be located on the side of or behind a building and not in front of a building or adjacent to a rear public entrance.
 - b. Locate HVAC units on the side, behind, or on top of a building behind a parapet wall or other façade or roof treatment; do not locate these features adjacent to a public entrance.
 - c. Do use eco-materials for screening that are recycled and/or composed of renewable resources where feasible and that visually complement the main structure.

The Community supports when feasible or appropriate:

6. Screen multi-story parking garages adjacent single-family or multi-family residential with vines or a green (living) wall
7. Line parking garages adjacent to a public right-of-way or a private street with retail micro-retail units, vines, or a green (living) wall.
8. Consolidate dumpsters on adjacent properties whenever possible.

ARCHITECTURE

Height

Intent: *Protect and enhance the visual and aesthetic experience of living in the New Hampshire Gardens neighborhood with compatible development.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. Restrict new development and addition height to 60 feet on the 7401 and 7333 New Hampshire Avenue properties.
2. Restrict building height to 40 feet for the first 50 feet of the lots depth on portions of sites that confront the primary face of single-family residential buildings.
3. Restrict building height to 35 feet for the first 40 feet of the lot's depth on portions of sites facing Kennewick Avenue.
4. On properties sharing a lot line with a single-family home, do not build higher than 35 feet in height measured from an average elevation of the adjacent rear yard(s) of the adjoining single-family home(s) property line(s). This height restriction shall be applied within the first 75 feet in lot depth from the shared lot line. The subsequent 50 feet in lot depth may include an additional story.

Massing and Building Articulation

Intent: *Create quality public and quasi-public spaces framed by buildings that enhance the visual interest and aesthetic experience of the Crossroads community.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. With the exception of structures serving primarily an institutional function, articulate large buildings (that exceed 60 feet in street frontage, that are primarily horizontal in composition, that exceed a 1:1 ratio) so as to read as multiple buildings through a combination the following:
 - a. Massing changes: change both the facade set back a minimum of five feet and height a minimum of one foot.
 - b. Material changes: divide the building into vertical bays that use varied materials and colors.
 - c. Vocabulary changes: including varying the details such as columns, window frames, types of windows, or height and shapes of windows and doors, the cornice, roofline, or pediment, the relationship of solids to voids, the relationship of projections to recesses, and the vertical and horizontal bands, so that the building and its bays are understood as several different buildings.
2. Design buildings to serve a primarily institutional function shall be of exceptional design and quality.
3. At the ground floor pedestrian level introduce design, detail and material complexity in the sign band, entrance, and window frame.

The Community supports when feasible or appropriate:

4. Use building materials to the extent feasible that are recycled, eco-friendly and that provide aesthetic value exceeding the quality of the surrounding housing and commercial building stock.
5. Provide the highest quality design and materials at focal points created by street intersections, adjoining prominent open spaces, and facing public streets.

Lighting

Intent: *Promote community comfort, safety and sociability while reducing environmental impact.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. Locate and shield fixtures with a 70% cut-off and so that light does not spill from a parking lot onto an adjacent residential property.

2. Illuminate entrances with direct shielded light.

The Community supports when feasible or appropriate:

3. Daylighting, such as through building orientation, shallow floor plates, light shelves, courtyards and atria, is encouraged.

Openings

Intent: *Promote community comfort, safety and sociability and create a high quality environment with eye level appeal.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. Locate the primary entrance to commercial and residential units on a public or private street, pedestrian mews or a plaza and not a parking lot or drive aisle.
2. Highlight main entrances with three or more design elements such as an address, awnings, a portico, architectural recesses, windows (transom and sidelights), plantings, and architectural details.
3. Design buildings with a minimum of 20% fenestration on all stories, including those facing the rear, alley, driveways, parking lots or other open areas.
4. Face retail storefronts with a minimum of 70% clear glass.
5. Provide multifamily buildings with a transparent lobby and entrance windows.
6. Design windows facing single-family residential structures to be primarily vertical in character; solid glass curtain walls and horizontal glass banding are inappropriate.
7. Design security grills to complement architectural style of building not to detract from it; vertical bars are discouraged.
8. Large retail stores greater than 60,000 square feet with long stretches of unrelieved wall space along streetscapes are inappropriate: wrap walls facing the street with micro-retail spaces, divide the store across two stories or locate the main sales floor on a story other than the ground level.³

The Community supports when feasible or appropriate:

9. Orient corner building entrances to the corner unless the adjoining street is dissimilar in character.
10. Ground level housing and commercial units should each have an entrance onto public sidewalks when they are adjacent.
11. Avoid covered arcades in close proximity to heavily trafficked roadways.

PUBLIC AND QUASI-PUBLIC SPACE

Streetscape

³ This size retail space is a limited use adjacent to or confronting single family residential in the CR ZTA: **59-C-15.512. Restrictions and requirements of limited uses.**

Limited uses must meet the site plan findings required under 59-D-3 and comply with the design recommendations of the applicable sector or master plan, and associated design guidelines, to ensure compatible relationships between such uses and proximate residential housing through mitigating factors including, but not limited to, increased setbacks, sound and visual barriers, decreased structural heights, or diminished site lighting.

Intent: *Provide a quality, ADA-compliant pedestrian environment for walking, shopping, and socializing. Build a unique “feel” through streetscaping to distinguish the Crossroads from other regional shopping districts.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. Bury or relocate overhead wires to the rear of the building or alleys, they may not be located within the streetscape for streets or avenues.
2. Locate Public Utility Easements within the right-of-way or Public Improvement Easement.
3. Provide retail streets, avenues and boulevards (public or private) with a streetscape located between the build-to-line (the edge of the public right-of-way or public improvement easement furthest from the curb) and the curb. This streetscape will generally be 15 feet in width with the exception of University Boulevard which shall be 25 feet in width.
 - a. Paving materials and pattern shall be consistent with a design selected for and associated with each avenue and boulevard. [to be determined]
 - i. A patterned “shy zone” shall be installed within the first two feet of the build-to-line.
 - ii. A minimum seven-foot wide pedestrian “clear zone” shall be maintained between the “shy zone” and the “street furniture zone” and which shall be smooth with no grooves or bevels (non-vibration causing) for ADA compliance.
 - iii. A “street furniture/landscape zone” which may be patterned and shall occupy the area between the “clear zone” and the street curb or cycle track.
 - b. On University Boulevard a cycle track of minimum 8 feet in width with a two foot green buffer (total a minimum of 10 feet wide) is to be located between the boulevard curb and the street trees.
4. Provide non-retail-oriented streets and avenues with a streetscape that includes:
 - a. A sidewalk of 8 feet in width at the edge of the right-of-way or public-improvement-easement, whichever is furthest from the curb.
 - b. A landscape strip between the sidewalk and the curb:
 - i. Place stepping stones or other non-continuous pavers at regular intervals to connect the sidewalk to any on-street parking if present.
 - ii. Where appropriate, use the infiltration features within the landscape strip for the development stormwater mitigation.

Parks and Plazas

Intent: *Create social outdoor rooms through a series of inviting and comfortable greens, plaza, and pocket parks connected by leafy corridors and pathways.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. Animate public space with adjacent activating uses such as retail or restaurants.
2. Preferred open space locations include at focal points created by street intersections.
3. Out of the way locations are inappropriate for open space unless it is a maintained playing court (such as soccer, basketball, or tennis) which is clearly open to the public.

The Community supports when feasible or appropriate:

4. Parks and open space should be at grade with adjacent sidewalks and shall be no more than three steps above or below grade on at least one street.

5. Include artwork as an integrated design element on the walls, floors and ceilings of outdoor space.
6. Promote participatory artwork that moves or responds to the viewer, or create mystery or whimsy.
7. Fountains are strongly encouraged, especially in hardscaped areas.
8. Consider incorporating elements that are climbable and which also function as seating such as rocks, seating walls, steps, and public art.
9. Playground features are appropriate for open space close to areas planned for restaurant uses.

Yards, Patios and Courtyards

The Community strongly supports:

1. Residential or office terraces, courtyards, and gardens adjacent to a street sidewalk shall not be enclosed by a wall or include a gate that exceeds three-and-a-half feet in height.
2. Plant residential yards, grounds, and open space with a variety of shrubs, ground cover and trees.

The Community supports when feasible or appropriate:

3. Residential units are encouraged to incorporate usable, semi-private outdoor space that has a visual connection with the street, such as porches, stoops, balconies, and terraces.
4. Design courtyards with a central feature such as a fountain.
5. Ground level or rooftop community gardens are strongly encouraged.
6. Trellises are encouraged on upper story outdoor spaces.
7. Consider placing basketball and other sport playing facilities on rooftops.
8. Where feasible, include facilities for residential composting.

Lighting

Intent: *Use site furniture to create a unique visual identity for the crossroads and create a comfortable and safe evening environment.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. Within the streetscape, locate pedestrian-oriented lights every 70-100 feet in the street furniture zone or landscape strip and along public and quasi-public walkways.
 - a. Luminaires shall be located no more than 10 feet in height on non-retail streets and no lower than 12 feet on retail streets.
 - b. Poles [to be determined].
 - c. Design shall be consistent across the Crossroads shopping district and as specified in these documents.
 - d. All light specifications, location, designs and installations shall be approved by the Takoma Park Director of Public Works.
 - e. If street directed lighting is required by the Director of Public Works or the State Highway Administration it shall be located on the same or same style pole.
 - f. Where a building is directly adjacent to a public walkway, wall mounted lighting consistent in style and quality with the streetscape lighting may be substituted for streetlights.
2. Meet dark sky standards on all fixtures.
3. Use luminaires with minimum color rendering index of 75.

4. Light areas to achieve an even distribution across the sidewalk to 6 feet in height and not create dark shadows or glare.

The Community supports when feasible or appropriate:

5. LED is preferred.

Streetscape and Site Furnishings

Intent: *Use furniture to create a unique visual identity for the crossroads and create inviting and comfortable streets that support diverse community members.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. Benches shall be durable, easily maintainable, and comfortable.
 - a. Benches within public streetscapes shall be approved by the Director of Public Works.
 - i. Along business streets, the Urbanscape “Dewart” bench is preferred.
 - ii. Within park-like and leafy residential areas, the Urbanscape “Beverly Shores” is preferred.
 - b. Within retail-oriented streets benches shall be placed in the street furniture zone at a minimum of 1 per 100 linear feet.
 - c. Install a minimum of one bench per 1500 square feet of open space.
 - d. Cluster benches with other amenities such as waste receptacles, flower pots, landscaping, etc.
 - e. Distribute benches so that there is a selection in the shade and in sun throughout the day.
 - f. Offset benches 24 inches from the pedestrian flow of traffic.
 - g. Do pave areas adjacent to at least half of all benches provided to allow for wheelchairs.
 - h. Do not place most benches at more than a 90 degree angle towards each other.
2. The appropriate location for bicycle racks is in the streetscape furniture zone.
 - a. Hoop racks are an acceptable style, coordination with the street furniture is encouraged.
 - b. Bicycle racks within the streetscape shall be approved by the Director of Public Works.
 - c. Place bicycle racks near entrances to retail, office buildings, residential structures and bus stops.
3. Place trash and recycling cans in pairs at corners and bus stops at the minimum rate of one set per two hundred linear feet of public or private sidewalk.
 - a. Trash and recycling cans to be placed in the right-of-way shall be approved by the Director of Public Works.
 - b. Trash and recycling cans on private property should conform to the style and must meet or exceed the quality established within the public right-of-way.
 - c. Include instructions in English, Spanish, Amharic, and French at a minimum on recycling cans.

The Community supports when feasible or appropriate:

4. High quality, movable furniture is encouraged where there is a management entity responsible for daily care and maintenance.

Street Trees

Intent:

Create an inviting shopping environment of dappled shade, improve quality of life, provide traffic calming, reduce the heat island effect and stormwater run off, and sequester carbons.

The Community strongly supports:

1. Large shade trees are appropriate street trees.
 - a. Preferred street tree characteristics include a dappled and not overly heavy shade; ability to be limbed at full growth to 12 feet in height, and upward growing branches.
 - b. Trees in public right-of-ways and public improvement easements shall be approved by the City of Takoma Park Arborist and each street shall have a consistent species or cultivar.
 - c. Define retail streets, avenues and boulevards (public or private) with trees planted 20-25 feet on center as feasible.
 - d. Define all other streets with tall shade trees planted 20-35 feet on center.
 - e. Fastigate trees may not be used as street trees.

The Community supports when feasible or appropriate:

2. Where a streetscape irrigation system is not installed, install hose bibs on the outside of new buildings in locations appropriate for watering street trees and landscaping.

LANDSCAPING AND HARDSCAPE

Intent: *Improve public safety and comfort, soften environment.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. Limit the use of shrubs taller than three feet to areas where they screen parking; use shrubs taller than four feet to screen walls.
2. Asphalt is an inappropriate material for sidewalks.
3. Use seating, walls, and other elements to discourage pedestrian traffic within gardens and critical tree root zones.
4. Use high quality paving for pedestrian areas.
 - a. Federal law requires that all paving materials and design be ADA compliant.
 - b. Brick pavers may only be composed of clay.
5. Continue pedestrian and bicycle pathway pattern and design across driveway entrances.

Intent: *Improve permeability, reduce negative environmental impacts, reduce carbon footprint.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. Grass lawns/turf is to be avoided except for shared use areas such as in a park or playing field.
2. Plant slopes with groundcover.
3. Select plants that have low water and pesticide needs, and generate minimum plant trimmings.
4. Emphasize plant diversity.
5. Design landscapes to collect and absorb rainwater runoff (stormwater).

The Community supports when feasible or appropriate:

6. Irrigation should be drip or seep. Avoid spray type irrigation.
7. Consider catchments to recycle rainwater for landscape irrigation where feasible.

8. Include designated infrastructure with appropriate screening for onsite collection and composting of yard waste.
9. Use heat retaining pavements in courtyards and plazas.

Trees

Intent: *Improve the ability of trees to survive the urban environment and grow large enough to improve quality of life and the environment.*

The Community strongly supports:

1. Provide a minimum 25% tree coverage at ten years of growth for the gross lot area.
 - a. Trees planted within the streetscape directly adjacent to the property may be used to meet this guideline.
 - b. With the exception of parking lot landscaping requirements and with the approval of the City Arborist offsite street trees planted within the commercial district may be substituted for onsite trees.
2. Provide tall shade trees with a minimum of 1500 cubic feet of soil.
3. Provide ornamental trees with a minimum of 900 cubic feet of soil.
4. Soil must have 20% organic material.
5. Infill the tree area with loose soil, not compacted, with the exception of the base for the tree root ball.
6. Under paving, Silva Cell or other City Arborist approved structure may protect soil from compaction.
7. Soil at a depth greater than three feet below the top of the tree box may not be included in the volume calculation.

The Community supports when feasible or appropriate:

8. Use species native to Maryland wherever possible.
9. Plant trees along pathways on either side where feasible to create an allée.
10. Where appropriate, plant trees on the west and south sides of buildings to reduce heat loads.
11. Up to 40% of the volume may be overlapped and shared by a maximum of one additional tree on either side.