



# **BELMONT, MA FORM-BASED CODE USERS GUIDE**

**DRAFT SEPTEMBER 2025**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## A. WHAT IS A FORM-BASED CODE

Form-Based Codes (FBCs) are a modern approach to zoning that focus on the physical design and character of buildings and public spaces, rather than just how buildings are used. This approach is especially well-suited to establishing and enhancing walkable places like Belmont Center, where the goal is to preserve and enhance a traditional New England main street feel while encouraging thoughtful growth and reinvestment.

A form-based code regulates the built environment by prioritizing the form, scale, and relationship of buildings to streets and public spaces, rather than just separating land uses. While traditional zoning often labels areas by use— like “commercial” or “residential”—form-based codes emphasize character, using terms like “neighborhood main street” or “traditional village center.”

This method supports:

- Predictable development outcomes that reinforce the unique identity of Belmont Center.
- A high-quality public realm that prioritizes walkability, mixed-use development, and human-scaled architecture.
- A flexible range of compatible uses that allow for local businesses, residential options, and civic spaces to coexist within a coherent physical framework.

Form-based codes are adopted into local law as binding regulations, not merely guidelines, and they are designed to support Belmont’s planning goals by ensuring new development contributes positively to the town’s established character. Please see this site for more information: <https://formbasedcodes.org/definition/> on Form-Based Codes.

## B. INCREASING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Belmont Center Form-Based Code Overlay represents a critical step toward advancing the Town of Belmont’s goals for economic vitality, community character, and smart growth. The Town seeks to increase the share of commercial properties to 10% of its total tax base, reducing the burden on residential taxpayers while enhancing options for shopping, dining, and services. This vision is best achieved through the thoughtful redevelopment of existing commercial areas, with a focus on creating a vibrant, walkable, and economically resilient district.

This planning effort builds upon the foundation laid by the 2008 Vision for Belmont Center Plan, which first articulated the community’s aspirations for a more active and pedestrian-friendly center. This Form-Based Code Overlay offers the regulatory tools needed to implement that vision—focusing not just on land use but on the physical form and quality of the built environment. By establishing clear guidelines for building scale, placement, and design, the

code aims to foster a cohesive, mixed-use district that respects Belmont’s historic charm while supporting future growth.

A robust public engagement process helped shape this code. A workshop held in January 2025 at Belmont Town Hall invited residents, business owners, and property stakeholders to participate in discussions about building heights, neighborhood character, views, and walkability. Insights from these conversations informed key components of the overlay, including street activation, scale transitions, and improved pedestrian access between Leonard Street and the Claflin Street parking area.

Leonard Street, Belmont’s traditional “Main Street,” is central to this effort, but the plan extends beyond a single corridor. By including Claflin Street and Concord Avenue, the overlay adds commercial frontage and creates opportunities for a more dynamic, multi-street district. The Special Requirements Plan, for example, introduces a mid-block pedestrian connection to enhance access from Claflin Street parking to Leonard Street.

Ultimately, this Form-Based Code Overlay is designed to reflect Belmont’s community values while unlocking the potential for high-quality development. It supports a broader vision of inclusive economic development, diverse housing options, and a public realm that prioritizes people over cars— ensuring Belmont Center remains both distinctive and forward-looking.

## **C. BUILDING ON PREVIOUS WORK**

The Form-Based Code Overlay for Belmont Center builds on more than a decade of community-driven planning and analysis. This initiative synthesizes the findings and goals of three foundational planning documents that collectively provide a comprehensive vision for the area’s future development.

### **1. Planning Vision for Belmont Center – Belmont Center Planning Group (BCPG)**

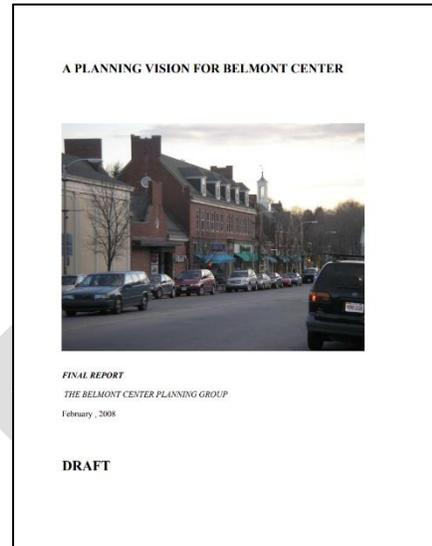
Developed through extensive engagement with residents, town committees, and stakeholders, this document outlines strategic objectives for Belmont Center’s long-term growth. Recognizing that large-scale redevelopment may not be feasible in the short term, it emphasizes the importance of targeted zoning changes to guide and manage future opportunities. Key goals include:

- Preserving and enhancing the historic character of Belmont Center
- Encouraging a diverse mix of businesses and uses to support daytime and evening activity
- Providing adequate and accessible parking for local businesses
- Enhancing the pedestrian environment for safety and accessibility
- Promoting civic life through public spaces and community-oriented events

- Protecting the character of surrounding residential neighborhoods

## 2. A Vision for Belmont: Mapping a Sustainable Future

This plan outlines physical improvements to Belmont Center’s public infrastructure. Recommendations include redesigning Leonard Street, Concord Avenue, and Claflin Street to improve walkability and traffic flow. Proposed interventions involve one-way traffic conversions, widened sidewalks, reverse-angle parking, and improved pedestrian access to the Claflin Street parking lot. The plan also promotes shared parking strategies and aims to maximize customer convenience through better curb access and front-door availability.



## 3. Belmont Center Parking Plan

This study provides a detailed assessment of current parking conditions in Belmont Center and proposes data-driven strategies for improvement. While the area benefits from ample parking and strong transit connections to Boston and Cambridge, inefficiencies exist due to outdated signage and permit systems. The plan identifies high demand on Leonard Street and underused parking on side streets. Key recommendations include revising parking permits, improving signage, encouraging walking and biking, and optimizing lot usage through better connectivity and management.

Together, these documents laid the groundwork for the Form- Based Code Overlay by establishing clear priorities and actionable strategies. This current effort integrates their findings into a cohesive regulatory framework that enables Belmont to move from planning to implementation.

## D. THE PUBLIC PROCESS

A transparent and inclusive public process was central to the development of the Form-Based Code Overlay for Belmont Center. This approach ensured that the updated zoning reflects the community’s priorities, values, and aspirations.

The process began with a public survey that was distributed online to gather input from Belmont residents, business owners, employees, and frequent visitors. The survey explored key issues facing Belmont Center, including current challenges, the desired scale of change, and levels of support for a range of potential improvements. These included expanded retail and dining options, longer store hours, public spaces, enhanced services, entertainment venues, playgrounds, meeting areas, structured parking, and rooftop dining.

The survey received more than 500 responses, the majority from Belmont residents or individuals with a direct connection to the town center. Several themes emerged from the results:

- Top goals included increasing local tax revenue, supporting small businesses, and revitalizing existing properties to enhance their taxable value.
- Key challenges identified were the limited variety and quality of shops and services, traffic congestion, and the lack of housing options in the center.
- Community sentiment indicated broad support for moderate to significant changes in Belmont Center, especially for initiatives that would increase vibrancy, walkability, and economic diversity.

These survey results informed the structure and focus of the Design Charette that was held on January 22–23, 2025, at Belmont Town Hall. This event was by invitation but was inclusive and participants included neighborhood residents, key public officials and staff, board and commission members, and citizens who participated in the public survey. The two-day event featured several interactive components:

1. **Visual Image Survey:** Participants placed red or green dots on images of streetscapes, building facades, and urban forms to express preferences. This helped clarify which architectural styles, building types, and streetscape elements were favored.
2. **Live Polling:** Attendees shared real-time feedback on building heights, frontage types, and character-defining features. Descriptors of Leonard Street today included “potential,” “underdeveloped,” and “quaint,” while future aspirations included “thriving,” “welcoming,” and “vibrant.” There was strong preference for two- to three-story brick buildings with active ground-floor commercial use, and general opposition to one-story or overly modern high-density development.
3. **Table Exercises:** Small group discussions were conducted around base maps of the study area. Participants were asked to identify what should be preserved or improved, how to address parking and housing needs, and how to enhance public spaces. Many groups proposed converting Leonard Street to one-way traffic to improve flow, adding crosswalks, creating mid-block pedestrian connections, increasing building heights on Concord Avenue, and expanding commercial uses along Claflin Street.



The ideas and feedback collected during the survey and workshop were instrumental in shaping the development standards, design guidelines, and spatial strategies embedded in the new Form-Based Code Overlay. This participatory approach ensured that the resulting regulations are both responsive and rooted in the lived experiences of the Belmont community.

## **Public Process**

### *Planning Board*

The majority of the public process occurred at the Planning Board who held over 10 meetings where the Center zoning was a discussion item and many of these sessions included public input. The Planning Board also opened the Public Hearing for the zoning in April 2025 and conducted 13 sessions before closing the Public Hearing and voting on the By-Law.

### *Public Forum*

The consultant for the project, Able-City East, hosted a public forum in September 2025 that was well attended and provided an update to the draft By-Law and answered a number of public questions.

### *Listening Sessions*

The Planning Board and Select Board also hosted three public meetings/listening sessions on the zoning where attendance ranged from 40 to 75 citizens.

### *Town Meeting Presentations and Updates*

Elizabeth Dionne, serving at the Chair of the Select Board, made a presentation at Annual Town Meeting 2025 to provide a summary of the project and noted the progress made up to that point. A presentation was also made at the October 2025 Special Town Meeting providing another update and status.

### *News Flash and Other Online Resources*

The Planning Board website hosted a “News Flash” for the Center zoning and this subscriber list included over 118 residents. The Planning Board also hosted a comment form that as of the end of October 2025, had received 20 individual comments and questions.

The project had a dedicated website with a significant amount of project information including presentations, draft By-Laws, impact analyses information, and many other resources. Included was a comprehensive Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) that provided answers to a range of actual or anticipated questions about the zoning.

### *Media Coverage*

The Belmont Voice published at least five separate articles on the Center zoning project and the coverage was in-depth and comprehensive. Additionally, the Belmont Media Center hosted the Director of Planning and Building and Chair of the Planning Board for an episode on the Center as part of their Belmont Journal program.

### *Boards and Committees*

Planning Board members and staff attended a number of meetings of other boards and committees in Town to discuss the Center zoning including the Warrant Committee, School Committee, Economic Development Committee, Transportation Advisory Committee, and the Select Board held a number of public discussions on the topic.

## **E. THE OVERLAY ZONING BY-LAW**

To bring Belmont Center’s community-driven vision to life, existing zoning regulations must evolve to support a more walkable, vibrant, and economically diverse downtown. The current zoning, while flexible in some respects, relies heavily on the issuance of Special Permits from the Belmont Zoning Board of Appeals. These permits allow for increases in building height and floor area ratio (FAR), but are reviewed on a case-by-case basis using a variety of subjective criteria, such as compatibility with nearby structures, potential shadow impacts, fire safety, traffic effects, and public benefit. This process lacks predictability and clarity developers and property owners need to invest confidently in the area.

To address these challenges, the Town of Belmont, in collaboration with the consultant team from Able City East, developed this Form-Based Code (FBC) specifically for the Belmont Center area. Unlike traditional zoning, which focuses on land use, a form-based code prioritizes the physical character of the built environment—how buildings relate to streets, sidewalks, and each other. This approach ensures that new development supports the creation of a walkable, visually cohesive, and mixed-use district that enhances both community life and economic performance.

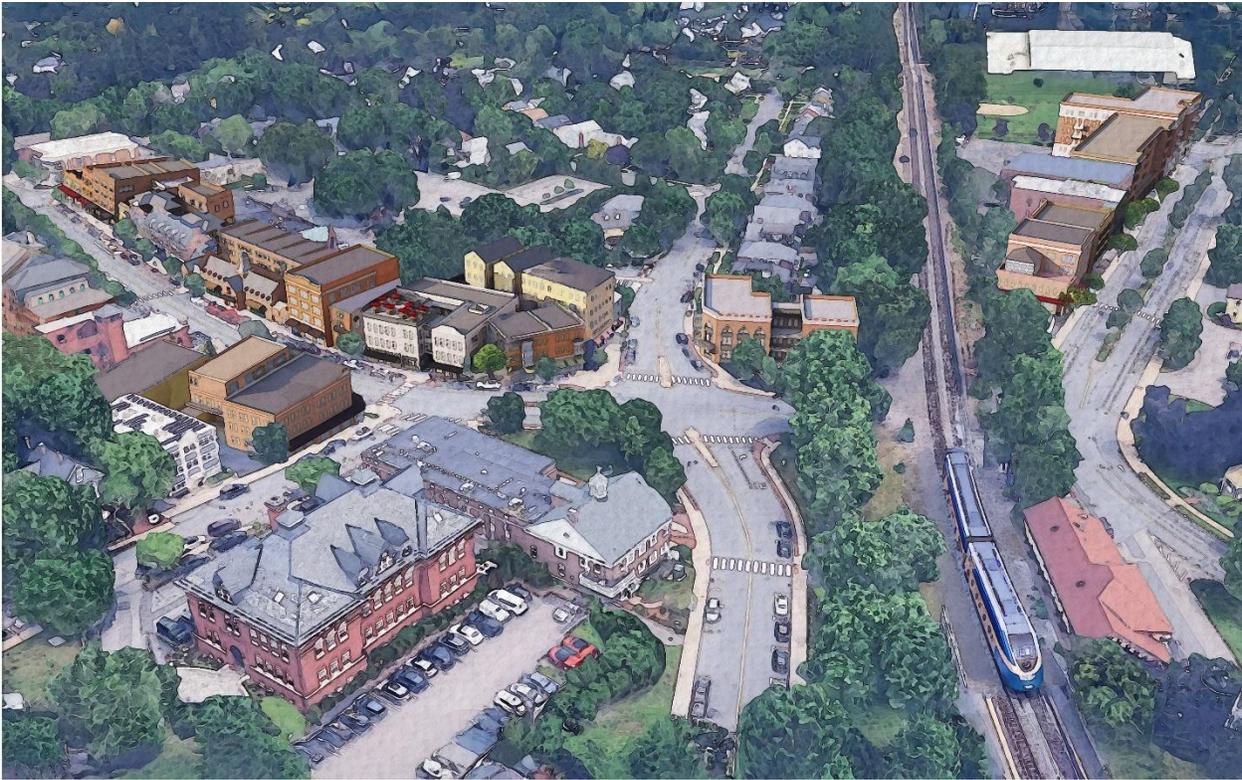


Figure 1 - Example Rendering of the Center

**F. THE ROLE OF OVERLAY DISTRICTS**

This overlay will complement existing zoning by providing a clearer, more predictable regulatory framework that focuses on building form, frontage types, and public realm design. Key benefits include:

- Encouraging Expanded Commercial Development: Requires that new multi-story buildings include commercial spaces beyond just the ground floor, while also promoting the use of rooftops for commercial or public purposes during suitable seasons.
- Preserving Architectural Character: Ensuring that new development respects Belmont’s historical context while accommodating thoughtful growth.
- Improving Clarity and Accessibility: Using visual tools such as diagrams, street sections, and illustrations to make the zoning code more user-friendly for residents, property owners, and developers.
- Allowing Types of Housing Missing from Belmont: Allowing more diverse and smaller housing options within the center of Belmont to help address local affordability and availability challenges while supporting an active and vibrant town center.

Form-Based Codes emphasize placemaking. By regulating the relationship between buildings and the public realm, they create more attractive, functional, and human-scaled environments. In Belmont Center, this means fostering a district where pedestrians feel welcome, businesses can thrive, and architectural integrity is preserved.

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## 2. HOW TO USE THIS FORM-BASED CODE OVERLAY

### HOW TO USE THIS FORM BASED OVERLAY

This Form-Based Code is structured to guide development and redevelopment within designated overlay districts through a clear, predictable framework rooted in physical form, public realm, and community priorities. The following steps will help users navigate and apply the code effectively:

#### A. Determine If the Overlay Code Applies

Start by confirming whether the property in question lies within a designated Form-Based Overlay District. Refer to §10.3 B., Establishment of Overlay Districts, and consult the Regulating Plan (§10.3 A.) to identify district boundaries and applicable transect zones (FB1–FB5).

#### B. Understand the Vision

Before proceeding, review this document and §10.2, Purpose and Intent, to understand the broader goals of the code, including economic development, public involvement, and the intended transformation of Belmont Center and surrounding areas. This context supports informed application of the standards.

#### C. Locate the Transect Zone

Using the Regulating Plan, identify the specific Form-Based Transect Zone that applies to a specific property:

- FB1 Edge
- FB2 General
- FB3 Center
- FB4 Core

Each zone includes a distinct set of regulations tailored to its urban character and development intensity. See §10.3 for detailed standards.

#### D. Check Permitted Uses

Review §10.4, Permitted Uses to confirm whether your intended use is allowed within the identified zone. This section outlines both listed uses and the process for considering uses not explicitly listed.

#### E. Review Development Standards

Once the transect and use are confirmed, refer to §10.5, General Standards for guidance on:

- Building and site design
- Parking requirements
- Lighting and landscaping
- Stormwater management

- Incentives for public benefits

These standards ensure that private development contributes to a cohesive and high-quality public realm.

#### **F. Understand Streets and Civic Space Requirements**

Review §10.6 to understand the role of streets and civic spaces in shaping the district. These public elements are key to achieving the code's placemaking objectives.

#### **G. Follow the Administrative Process**

If your project is eligible and aligned with the code, consult §10.7, Administration for direction regarding the procedures required to opt into the overlay, submit applications, attend pre-application meetings, and navigate the review and approval process. There you will be referred to the appropriate sections of the Zoning By-Laws and other documents including:

1. Section 7.3 for Design and Site Plan Review application requirements
2. Section 7.4 for Special Permit application requirements
3. Planning Board Rules and Regulations for Design and Site Plan Review procedures and submittal requirements.

#### **H. Refer to Definitions**

Use §10.8, Definitions to clarify key terms and ensure correct interpretation of the code language. Other relevant definitions can be found in Section 1.4 of the Zoning By-Laws.

## Quick Code Guide: Building Scale Projects

Step	Instructions.	Code Section(s)
	Determine if the Overlay By-Law Applies using Establishment of Districts and Regulating Plan	Sec. 10.3 – 1. Sec. 10.3 – 2.
	Develop an understanding of the vision of the Form-Based Code in this Framework & Overview	Sec. 10.1
	Using the Regulating Plan (Section 10.3 1.), identify specific Form-Based Transect Zone that applies to the property	Sec. 10.3 – 1..
	Check Permitted Uses to confirm intended use(s) are allowed.	Sec. 10.4
	Review and comply with Development Standards specific to Zone, Building Type, Frontage Type, and Generally	Sec. 10.3 – 1. Sec. 10.3 – 2.
	Understand and comply with Streets and Civic Spaces Requirements.	Sec. 10.6.
	If project is eligible and aligned with Code, follow the Administrative process for Threshold type.	Sec. 10.7
	Use Definitions to clarify key terms and ensure correct interpretation of Code language.	Sec. 10.8

# 3. BELMONT CENTER & GATEWAY DESIGN GUIDELINES

## ENHANCING AND SUSTAINING THE CHARACTER OF BELMONT CENTER

Belmont Center is a vibrant and historic heart of the Town of Belmont—home to cherished architecture, walkable streets, local businesses, and a strong sense of community. As we look to the future, thoughtful urban design plays a vital role in preserving what makes Belmont Center special while guiding improvements that support livability, resilience, and shared prosperity.

These Design Guidelines are applicable to both the Belmont Center Overlay District (BCOD) and the Center Gateway Overlay District (CGOD). This primer provides a foundation for understanding how urban design informs decisions in already developed areas like Belmont Center and how these design guidelines can help sustain and enhance its character over time. Overall, users and evaluators should focus on three primary goals and nine specific objectives:

CONTEXT	Build on context by enhancing the distinctive physical, natural, historic and cultural qualities of the location while accommodating growth and change	01	Build on the character, local identity, and aspiration of the place
		02	Create positive relationships with surroundings
		03	Integrate and enhance on-site features and opportunities to contribute to a location's uniqueness
PUBLIC REALM	Contribute to a public realm that encourages social interaction and fosters inclusivity	04	Design the sidewalk level of buildings to be active and human-scaled
		05	Provide opportunities to pause, site, and interact
		06	Integrate and minimize the impact of parking and necessary building services
QUALITY & RESILIENCE	Promote quality and long-term resilience in the face of changing demographics, climate and economy	07	Support the comfort, safety, and dignity of residents, workers, and visitors through thoughtful site and building design
		08	Design for quality, using enduring materials and strategies with a coherent approach
		09	Design for resilience, health, and stewardship of the environment. Ensuring adaptability to climate change and the evolving needs of the town

### WHAT IS URBAN DESIGN IN A MATURE AREA CONTEXT?

Urban design in already developed areas focuses on reinforcement, repair, and refinement—not reinvention. It involves shaping how buildings and public spaces evolve, ensuring changes respect the existing fabric while supporting community needs. Key urban design concepts relevant to Belmont Center include:

- **Contextual Fit:** Ensuring new development or improvements harmonize with existing architecture, scale, and patterns of use.
- **Public Realm Stewardship:** Maintaining and enhancing streetscapes, sidewalks, plazas, and green spaces that serve as social and civic gathering places.

- **Connectivity and Access:** Supporting walkability, multimodal access, and smooth integration with the MBTA station and surrounding neighborhoods.
- **Sense of Place:** Preserving Belmont Center’s identity through careful attention to materials, signage, facades, and streetscape details.
- **Adaptability:** Allowing for incremental change that accommodates evolving retail, residential, and civic uses while respecting the area’s heritage.

## WHY URBAN DESIGN MATTERS IN BELMONT CENTER

Belmont Center thrives because of its unique blend of historic charm, pedestrian-oriented scale, and community-centered spaces. Thoughtful urban design helps:

- **Protect Character:** Ensure that future changes reinforce Belmont Center’s established identity.
- **Support Local Economy:** Create inviting spaces that attract foot traffic and support small businesses.
- **Enhance Public Life:** Provide welcoming, functional places for people to gather, rest, and enjoy.
- **Promote Sustainability:** Encourage development patterns that support walking, biking, and transit use.
- **Balance Tradition and Change:** Guide improvements that are responsive to community needs while respecting the Center’s historic integrity.

## PURPOSE OF THESE DESIGN GUIDELINES

These design guidelines offer a framework to help property owners, designers, business owners, and public officials make informed, context-sensitive decisions. They are rooted in the principles of Form-Based Code, which emphasize the form and function of buildings and streetscapes, rather than just the separation of uses. In Belmont Center, these guidelines are intended to:

- Reinforce the pedestrian-friendly character of the district;
- Encourage high-quality materials and details that reflect local identity;
- Guide compatible infill and renovations;
- Maintain a vibrant, inclusive public realm.

This primer aims to equip all stakeholders with a shared understanding of the design values that support a thriving Belmont Center—so that as we evolve, we do so with intention, care, and respect for what makes this place truly unique.

## SUMMARY OF TRANSECT ZONES

## Form Based Zone 1



FB1

### Examples of Building Types in FB1 District



*2.5 story mixed-use building*



*Live/Work units have ground story storefronts with residential above*



Commercial offices and services



A corner store and ground story Commercial Uses



Attached townhouses



Commercial and office complex

**Form Based Zone 2**



**FB2**

**Examples of Building Types in FB2 District**



*3.0 story mixed-use building*



*3.5 story traditional mixed retail and office*



*Tudor mixed-use Building in small town*



*Neo-traditional mixed-use corner building*



*3.0 story town center streetwall*



*4.0 story commercial and office building*

**Form Based Zone 3**



**FB3**

## Examples of Building Types in FB3 District



*3.0 story mixed-use building*



*Neo-traditional mixed use with rooftop restaurant*



Commercial offices and services



A mid-block arcade provides access to rear parking area



Neo-traditional mixed-use building



Commercial and office mixed-use

**Form Based Zone 4**



**FB4**

**Examples of Building Types in FB4 District**



*4 story mixed-use building*



*Office and retail in traditional building*



*Mixed-use traditional Building Street wall*



*A corner store and ground story Commercial Uses*



*4.5 story mixed-use building*



*Commercial and office traditional building*

**Center Gateway Overlay District**



**CGOD** Examples of Building Types in CGOD



*Neo-traditional mixed-use building*



*Mixed-use corner building*



*Neo-traditional mixed-use building.*



*Two floors of retail/service uses with upper floor offices*



*Mixed-use commercial and residential in modern design*



*Parking deck with liner Building in front.*

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## ◆ 1.0 GENERAL GUIDELINES

### A. PURPOSE AND INTENT

Building design in the Belmont Center area shall help reinforce the goal of creating a pedestrian oriented and active commercial district. Buildings shall be context sensitive and respond to the vernacular architecture in the region. Each building shall be designed relative to the specific features of its site.

### B. ALL SITES

#### (1) Mixed Use Structures

Most new structures in the Belmont Center area which make use of the Overlay option are expected to be mixed-use buildings (see Figure 1) with a combination of commercial, retail, office, and residential.

- Ⓐ Restaurant
- Ⓑ Retail
- Ⓒ Office
- Ⓓ Residential
- Ⓔ Architectural Element

#### (2) Franchise Styles

While franchise businesses are allowed on a limited basis in the Belmont Center area, franchise-specific design is not encouraged. Franchise business' buildings shall adhere to the design standards outlined in this document.

#### (3) Freestanding Accessory Structures

Non habitable structures accessory to primary buildings shall be considered architectural elements and shall be held to the same design standards as the site's primary buildings. The following list contains examples of these freestanding accessory structures:

- Freestanding ATMS
- Canopies over gas pumps
- Garages
- Storage units
- Recycling sheds
- Cart corrals
- Large signs
- Seasonal sales elements
- Utility buildings



Figure 2 - Mixed-Use



## ◆ 1.1 MATERIALS

### A. PURPOSE AND INTENT

The goal of this document is to encourage cohesive building design throughout the Belmont Center area. This building design shall bolster the identity of the Belmont Center area and create a sense of cohesion through the use of common, complementary, materials.



When materials are combined on a building façade horizontally, Heavier Materials shall occur below lighter materials. Heavier Materials are more substantial or dense, often used to convey a sense of solidity and permanence. These materials can include stone, brick, concrete, or metal panels. These materials are to be used at lower levels or at key structural points to provide a grounded and robust aesthetic.

- (1) Cohesive Material Application: Buildings shall present a coherent and restrained material palette. Material and color changes shall serve a clear architectural purpose, such as highlighting an entry, anchoring a base, or reinforcing structural rhythm—not simply to add visual variety.
- (2) Façades with excessive material or color variation are discouraged. No more than three primary materials shall be visible on any single building façade, excluding trim or accent materials.

- (3) Material changes shall wrap around corners, where visible from public streets or pedestrian paths, to avoid a false-front appearance.
- (4) Changes from one material or color to another along the horizontal direction shall occur at Inside Corner Transitions which are design treatments where two walls meet at an interior corner of a building.
- (5) Changes in material or color along the vertical direction shall occur at a hard-edge Bump-Out Transition which gives materials a surface to terminate into.
- (6) Predominant exterior building materials shall be high quality materials, including, but not limited to, brick, sandstone or other stone, glass, stucco and/or masonry. Exterior building materials shall not include smooth-faced concrete block, tilt-up concrete panels or prefabricated steel panels, unless the visible finish is brick, stucco, slate shingles, or stone.
- (7) The Use of day-glow or fluorescent colors are prohibited. Earth-tone colors are appropriate.
- (8) Building trim and accent areas may feature any color(s) not specifically excluded in this section provided said color is limited to ten (10%) percent of the affected Facade segment, with a maximum trim height of 24 inches total for its shortest distance. Neon tubing shall not be an acceptable feature for building trim or accent areas.
- (9) Entrances to a building shall be articulated with Storefronts or other architectural forms which create a distinct entrance.
- (10) Awnings, arcades and canopies shall be designed to shelter pedestrians from the elements, create a transition of scale from the street to the building entry, reduce heat against the Storefront glass, and provide a distinctive image and identity for businesses in the building. Lighting shall not be directly attached to a canopy or awning.

## **B. ALL SITES**

### **① Facade Materials**

Brick, clapboard, and shingles shall be used on the Belmont Center area buildings as primary materials. Other more contemporary materials, like fiber cement or vinyl siding, are acceptable as well if the overall aesthetic aligns with the rest of the Belmont Center area. Large blank facades and highly reflective plastic or unfinished metal materials are not acceptable.

## ② Material Colors

Facade colors shall be subdued and relate to the local vernacular. Colorful facades are appropriate at low saturation and low intensity. High gloss, or reflective chrome, metallic, and fluorescent colors should not be used at the Belmont Center area.

## ③ Trim

Trim colors shall always complement the primary facade color. Intensely colored or metallic trims are appropriate as accents only. Highly reflective or chrome trims are not permitted. Simple and minimalistic approaches are encouraged.

## ④ Tripartite Facade Articulation

Buildings of three stories or more shall use changes in material to delineate the base, middle, or top of the building. These material changes help create a pedestrian scale and reduce the building's mass. Natural materials should be used at the base level, close to pedestrian spaces, to create a more tactile experience.



Figure 3 - Materials



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## ◆ 1.2 ROOF FORM

### A. PURPOSE AND INTENT

Building roof forms shall be designed with practicality and functionality in mind with careful consideration for Massachusetts’s unique climate and winter weather patterns, including snow loading and shedding. Secondly, roof pitch and orientation shall seek to take advantage of solar gain and opportunities for roof-mounted solar where possible.

Tertiary consideration should be given to orientation of ridge and gable ends as they present to the street or public space. Building roof lines modify the form of buildings, create visual interest, break up building mass, emphasize primary facades and entrances, and provide respite for people. Simple and pragmatic approaches are highly preferred over unnecessarily complicated designs.

### B. ALL SITES

#### ❶ Pitched Roofs

The use of pitched roofs at the Belmont Center area is highly encouraged. The aesthetic is part of the greater design vernacular of Massachusetts. With regard to practicality, pitched roofs are encouraged because they create shadow patterns for interest and shade, and allow for snow to easily shed off of the roof.

#### ❷ Parapets

Parapets are encouraged to be used at the Belmont Center area. They can and should be used to help conceal rooftop mechanical units and other equipment.

#### ❸ Preferred Materials and Colors

Pitched roofs shall be made with composite asphalt shingles, treated cedar shingles and shakes, or standing seam, non-glare metal. Roofing shall be a solid complementary color or black, gray, white, or earth tone. Colorful patterns are not acceptable. All roof materials shall be matte finish. Reflective and high gloss materials are prohibited.

#### ④ Roof Mounted Elements

Equipment mounted on top of roofs shall be screened from view from the ground or from other buildings, or located behind buildings with other utility equipment, where it would also need to be screened. Rooftop screening shall be cohesive with other building design elements so that it blends in to the rest of the architecture.

#### ⑤ Dormers

Dormers shall be used as additional roof forms that help break up building mass. Dormers shall not occupy more than half of the width or depth of the roof.



Figure 4 - Roof Form



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## ◆ 1.3 AWNINGS AND CANOPIES

### A. PURPOSE AND INTENT

Awnings can help highlight primary entrances, provide shelter and shade for people, and produce shadow patterns that create visual interest. Awnings and canopies shall complement their building's design by using complementary materials and colors. They shall not be used as exclusively advertising features. Awnings can also be included for environmental reasons. They can provide shade for passive cooling in the summer and also serve as mounts for solar panels.

### B. ALL SITES

#### Ⓐ Location

Where awnings are used, they shall be integrated into the building's architecture and facade. The use of retractable awnings is not encouraged. Awnings shall be located directly over windows or doors to provide protection from the elements for pedestrians.

#### Ⓑ Materials and Graphics

Awnings should be constructed of durable, high-quality materials that resist fading and weathering. Fabric awnings are preferred over vinyl, as they provide a softer appearance and higher design quality. The color palette should coordinate with the building facade and adjacent storefronts, avoiding overly bright or fluorescent tones. Any graphics or signage applied to awnings should be limited to business identification, kept to a modest scale, and integrated into the overall design rather than dominating it. Lighting beneath or above awnings should be subtle and avoid glare onto the street or neighboring properties.

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## ◆ 1.4 FACADE

### A. PURPOSE AND INTENT

One of the goals of the Belmont Center area is to focus on pedestrian orientation. New and redeveloped buildings shall reinforce this goal and the goal of quality architecture. All building facades shall be attractive and consistent in design across all facades to the street, internal driveways, parking areas, and surrounding neighborhoods. Special attention shall be given to facades with entrances to ensure ease of pedestrian access from the street on which the facade fronts.

### B. ALL SITES

## ① Site Elements

All site elements, including furnishing, lighting, signage, and landscape and screening planting, in addition to other exterior elements, shall complement building facades and highlight pedestrian spaces. Complementary materials and colors shall be used in site elements to match building facades. In addition, all exterior elements shall be coordinated with building and site plans to avoid functional conflicts, maintain visibility, and avoid safety hazards.



## ② Primary Facades

Primary facades are building facades that face a street or public space and include a main entrance to the building. There can be more than one main building entrance, and consequently there can be more than one primary facade. Building entrances on primary facades shall be visible from the street on which the primary facade is oriented, and provide unobstructed spaces adjacent to entrances for pedestrians. Highly visible customer entrances on primary facades shall include three or more of the following design components:

- Canopies or porticoes

- Overhanging roof lines that can provide shelter for people
- Recesses or projections
- Raised corniced parapets over the door
- Peaked roof forms
- Outdoor seating or dining areas
- Display windows that are visible from the street
- Architectural details that are integrated into the design of the building
- Planted beds and/or raised planters
- Sense of rhythm and scale



### ③ Secondary Facades

Secondary facades are any building facades that do not face a public space or street and do not include a main building entrance. Secondary facade design does not need to match primary facade design, but should be complementary to the primary façade and be sensitive to abutters. Building utilities not located on roofs shall be located along secondary facades and screened accordingly from public view. Private entrances, such

as maintenance or secondary residential tenant entrances, shall be located along the secondary facade.

**4** Entrances

Main building entrances shall be located along primary facades. If a common building entrance is needed for more than one building tenant, that entrance should also be located along a building's primary facade. Additional private entrances at secondary facades are permitted. The Planning Board may waive these requirements if the building is part of a common development scheme approved by the Planning Board in which the building relates to the overall development and public and private streets in a manner that is consistent with these standards.

**5** Detailing

Increased detail at the pedestrian level shall provide a sense of human scale. Detailing may include elements such as change in materials, trim, and accessory elements such as awnings, lighting fixtures, benches, or signage.

**6** Wall Treatments

Increased detail at the pedestrian level shall provide a sense of human scale. Detailing may include elements such as change in materials, trim, and accessory elements such as awnings, lighting fixtures, benches, or signage.



Figure 5 - Facade



### 7 Utilities

All utility equipment, such as vents, downspouts, flashing, electrical conduits, meters, HVAC equipment, vending machines, and service connections, shall be treated as integral elements of the building's architecture, starting in the conceptual building phase. Exterior utility equipment, like meters and HVAC equipment shall be located to the rear of the building and screened appropriately as stated in other standards. When functional elements need to be part of the building facade they shall be incorporated into the building's architecture accordingly, with matching colors, materials, and detailing. Building elevations presented for Planning Board review shall show the location and treatment of all functional elements, including vending machines.

### 8 Fenestration

Windows shall generally be vertical in orientation across all facades. A minimum of approximately 35% of the primary facade of the first level of commercial retail establishments shall have fenestration. All other commercial primary facades shall have a minimum of approximately 30% transparent fenestration. A minimum of approximately 15% of secondary facades shall have transparent fenestration.

Fenestration shall create a sense of rhythm and cadence, and a sense of scale and continuity, as well as activate buildings on the street level. Blank walls are not permitted on any facades.



Figure 6 - Facade Transparency



Figure 7 - Fenestration



## ◆ 1.5 ADDITIONS AND SECONDARY VOLUMES

### A. PURPOSE AND INTENT

Any work done to existing buildings and sites in the Belmont Center area will be held to the same standards as new buildings and sites. This includes substantial building rehabilitation and additions, which can provide opportunities to update buildings and add a feeling of cohesion to the built environment at in the Belmont Center area.

### B. ALL SITES

#### (1) Volume And Massing

Any work completed on existing structures in the Belmont Center area shall be consistent with the architectural standards outlined for the Belmont Center area in this document.

#### (2) Materials

Materials used in alterations or additions shall complement the materials used on the original structure and consistent with these design standards.

#### (3) Preservation

When building rehabilitation is required, every effort shall be made to preserve any distinct architectural features or examples of skilled craftsmanship present on existing buildings.

#### (4) Pedestrian Scale

New additions and building alterations create the opportunity to add pedestrian scale features and fenestration like entryways, windows, lighting, etc. to buildings that emphasize the pedestrian centric goals in the Belmont Center area.

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## ◆ 1.6 BUILDING MOUNTED SIGNAGE

### A. PURPOSE AND INTENT

Properties in the Belmont Center area shall be identified with signs that are legible, attractive, and simple. Signage shall also adhere to Belmont's sign standards found in the Town's Zoning Ordinance. Awnings shall not extend into public Right of Way unless specially permitted by the Planning Board. Designers shall refer to Section 5.2 of the Zoning By-Laws for sign requirements.



**B. ALL SITES**

**1 Design**

Building signage shall complement the architectural features of the building on which they are attached through shape and material choices. These signs shall only contain essential information to keep the design clutter free and legible.

**2 Mounting**

Signs mounted on facades shall be fully integrated into the architecture and not added to the fascia as an afterthought, or mounted as an arbitrary architectural detail. Signs shall be mounted on vertical surfaces, like the building facade, and not project above the facade or trim.

**3 Hardware**

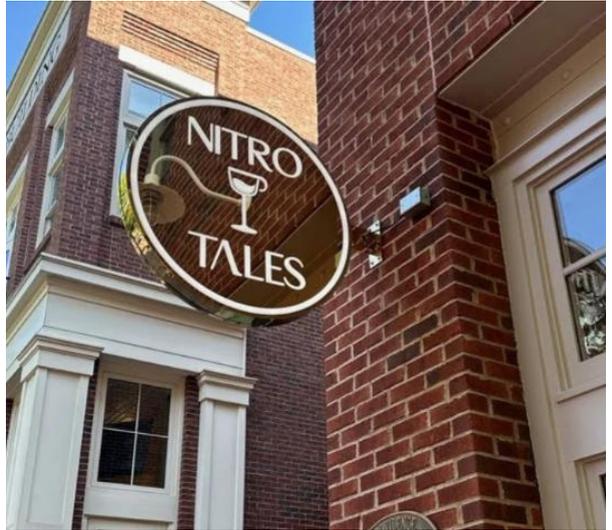
Signs shall be mounted in such a way that their hardware is hidden from view, unless that hardware is part of the sign aesthetic or an integral part of the sign system. Sign mounting hardware shall be stainless or galvanized steel, and painted with rust inhibiting paint, to prevent streaking or discoloration of the building facade.

**4 Signage Within Fenestration**

Advertisements within windows are discouraged and shall only occupy no greater than 25% window glazing.



Figure 8 - Signage and Lighting



## ◆ 1.7 LIGHTING

### A. PURPOSE AND INTENT

Outdoor lighting is an important aspect of building design in that it creates safe pedestrian spaces. It can also be used to emphasize entrances, facade features, and signage. Lighting fixtures shall be integrated with the building design in terms of materials and colors.

### B. ALL SITES

#### Ⓐ Design and Utility

Where projecting light fixtures are used, they shall be simple, unobtrusive, and utilize materials consistent with the building's design. All electrical boxes, conduits, and other necessary utilities shall be concealed.

#### Ⓑ Entrances

Lighting entrances and other pedestrian spaces at night is important for safety. All building entrances shall be well lit for easy identification at night.

#### Ⓒ Signage

In most cases lighting will be needed to illuminate signs, whether the sign itself is illuminated internally or projecting lighting is used. Internally lit individual letters or logos are preferred over entire panels that are internally lit. Designers shall refer to Section 5.2 of the Zoning By-Laws for sign requirements.

#### Ⓓ Pedestrian Spaces

Pedestrian spaces adjacent to buildings shall also be well lit, whether through the use of projecting lighting mounted to the building facade or through the use of standalone bollards or street lamps. Lighting shall aid in pedestrian safety.

#### Ⓔ Dark Sky Compliance

All lighting shall be compliant with Dark Sky standards. Lighting shall be down-directed, shielded, and a color temperature maximum of 3000 Kelvin. Lighting shall be directed away from glass and reflective surfaces to minimize glare.

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## ◆ 1.8 MID-BLOCK ARCADE

## A. PURPOSE AND INTENT

Through-block arcades provide mid-block pedestrian connections on long blocks, enhancing walkability and permeability of the street network. Properly designed, they offer active, safe, and engaging passageways that supplement the public realm. When lined with micro-retail, food, or service uses, arcades create vibrant, small-scale commercial opportunities and foster street-level vitality similar to The Alley in Montgomery, Alabama or the historic Colonial Arcade in Cleveland, Ohio. Other notable arcades include:

1. **Dayton Arcade**; Dayton, OH (ULI Americas Awards for Excellence Winner)
2. **King Street Arcade**; Madison, WI
3. **The Arcade**; Providence, RI
4. **The Arcade**; Nashville, TN
5. **The Arcade Cleveland**; Cleveland, OH
6. **Broadway-Spring Arcade**; Los Angeles, CA



Inspiration for an arcade design can be taken from these outstanding examples.



## B. LOCATION AND ACCESS

1. Arcades should be located to connect parallel streets, parking facilities, or civic destinations where blocks exceed 400 feet in length.
2. Entrances must be clearly visible from the sidewalk and designed as welcoming portals, with generous glazing, signage, and lighting.
3. Minimum clear width should be 15–20 feet to allow comfortable pedestrian movement and retail frontage.

### C. DESIGN CHARACTER

1. Arcades should be treated as extensions of the public realm, incorporating durable paving, weather protection, active façades, and architectural detailing consistent with adjacent buildings.
2. Transparency is essential: storefronts, windows, and display areas should face into the arcade, avoiding blank walls.
3. Roof or ceiling treatments may include skylights, clerestories, or decorative lighting to create visual interest and natural light penetration.

### D. MICRO-RETAIL STOREFRONTS

1. Where feasible, arcades should be lined with micro-retail bays ranging from 150 to 500 square feet to accommodate start-up businesses, artisans, and service providers.
2. Storefronts should be modular and flexible, with glass doors or roll-up windows that maximize permeability and display opportunities.
3. Shared amenities (storage, restrooms, loading areas) should be provided at the rear or in common service corridors to support small tenants.



Figure 5-6 – Micro Storefront Within 2-Story Arcade



Figure 5-7 – Arcade Micro Storefront

### E. PEDESTRIAN COMFORT AND SAFETY

1. Arcades must include adequate lighting, visibility, and sightlines for safety and security.
2. Hours of public access should generally mirror surrounding streets, with transparent gates or doors allowed for nighttime security.
3. Weather protection, seating, and wayfinding signage are encouraged to promote usability throughout the year.

### F. INTEGRATION WITH SURROUNDINGS

1. The design of entrances should complement adjacent building architecture while clearly signaling a public passage.

2. Where arcades connect to plazas, alleys, or shared courts, the transition should be seamless and include landscaping, bicycle parking, and public art opportunities.



## ◆ 1.8 PORTE COCHÈRE

### A. PURPOSE AND INTENT

A porte cochère provides a covered vehicular passage through or alongside a building, enabling short-term drop-off and pick-up while maintaining architectural continuity along the street frontage. Properly designed, it supports convenient access for residents, guests, and deliveries without disrupting pedestrian flow or diminishing the quality of the public realm.

In mixed-use or multi-unit developments, a porte cochère can reduce curb cuts and improve internal circulation by consolidating access points, while contributing architectural interest through its massing, detailing, and lighting. Historic and contemporary precedents include:

1. The Broadmoor Hotel; Colorado Springs, CO
2. The Charles Hotel; Cambridge, MA
3. One Dalton; Boston, MA
4. The Fairmont Olympic; Seattle, WA

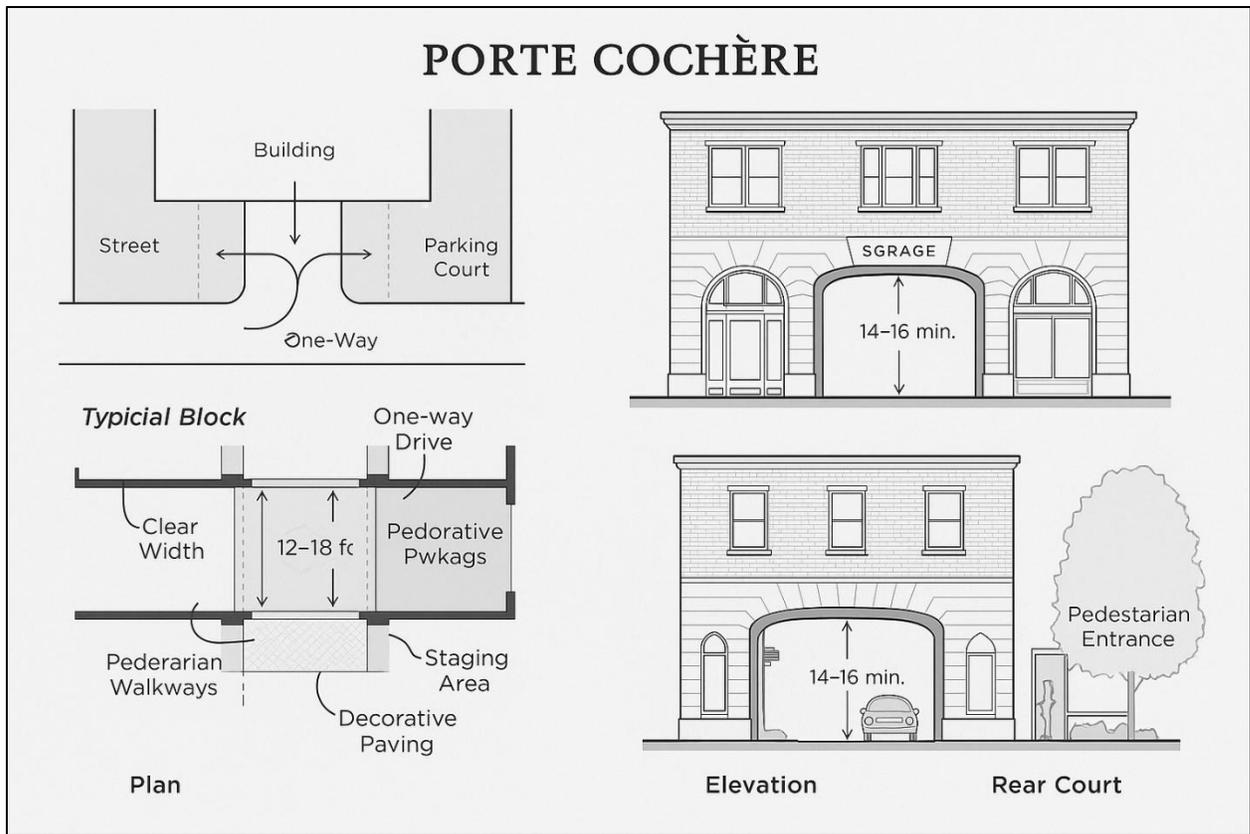
## 5. The Peabody Hotel; Memphis, TN

Design inspiration may be drawn from these examples, emphasizing integration with the building's overall character.



### B. LOCATION AND ACCESS

1. A porte cochère may be located mid-block or at secondary street frontages to reduce curb cuts and preserve continuous pedestrian zones along primary façades.
2. Entrances should be clearly visible from the public way, with sufficient turning radii and vertical clearance (typically 14–16 feet) to accommodate passenger vehicles, small delivery vans, and emergency access.
3. Pedestrian routes must remain uninterrupted: covered walkways, crosswalks, or raised tables should be used where sidewalks cross the drive lane.
4. Where feasible, porte cochères should connect to internal parking courts, garages, or service areas to minimize visual clutter on the street.



### C. DESIGN CHARACTER

1. A porte cochère should appear as an integral part of the building mass, not an appended carport. The roof or overhead volume may align with primary floor plates, using materials and detailing consistent with the façade.
2. Architectural elements such as piers, arches, or cornices should define the opening and create a sense of enclosure and arrival.
3. Lighting should be warm, evenly distributed, and designed to highlight architectural features while ensuring nighttime safety.
4. Ceiling finishes should be treated as visible façades, with quality materials, soffit detailing, and concealed utilities.

### D. FUNCTIONAL STANDARDS

1. Typical clear width: 12–18 feet (one-way passage); dual lanes require 22–24 feet.
2. Vertical clearance: 14–16 feet minimum.
3. Drive surfaces should use decorative, durable paving materials (e.g., brick, pavers, or scored concrete) to visually differentiate from public streets.

4. Provide short-term waiting or staging areas outside the travel lane to avoid backing or idling conflicts.
5. Drainage must be managed to prevent ponding at entrances.

#### **E. PEDESTRIAN AND PUBLIC REALM INTEGRATION**

1. Pedestrian entrances should be visible and proximate to drop-off areas, with direct, covered access to building lobbies or retail frontages.
2. Weather protection (canopies, overhangs) should extend to sidewalk connections.
3. Designs should preserve clear sightlines to storefronts and avoid creating blank or inactive walls.
4. Landscaping, planters, or low seating walls may define the edge of the porte cochère and enhance its public-facing quality.

#### **F. CONTEXTUAL AND URBAN DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS**

1. The porte cochère should reinforce the block's architectural rhythm and scale, aligning cornice lines, window patterns, and materials with adjacent structures.
2. Where located mid-block, it may serve dual functions as a shared one-way drive or service access for adjoining parcels, reducing redundant curb cuts.
3. Designs should ensure visibility, natural surveillance, and a sense of openness, particularly where the passage extends through the building to rear courts or parking.
4. Public art, lighting installations, or subtle signage can help identify the passage as a civic feature, not merely a utilitarian drive.

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### **◆ 1.10 ARCHITECTURAL STYLES**

#### **Architectural Styles: Context and Creativity**

##### **A. Purpose**

The purpose of this section is to provide guidance on architectural styles in Belmont's centers and neighborhoods. The goal is *not* to prescribe a single style or limit creativity, but to ensure that new development respects the established character of the community while allowing for innovation and contemporary expression.

##### **B. General Principles**

- (1) Respect Context

- New construction should be compatible with the scale, massing, roof forms, and rhythm of surrounding buildings.
- Compatibility does not require replication. A building may be contemporary in design if it acknowledges the proportions, materials, and overall urban form that define its setting.
- Use materials that respond to or complement those found on nearby significant buildings. The use of identical materials is not required, but consider tones, textures, and patterns that respond to what exists and help transition from old to new.
- Use materials that complement the overall architectural expression. Use reveals, trim, and thoughtful detailing to resolve material transitions, such as between floors or at corners.

## (2) Historic Sensitivity

- a. Belmont’s architectural heritage includes Colonial, Federal, Victorian, Tudor, and early 20th-century commercial and civic buildings.
- b. When designing in or near historic areas, new projects should recognize these traditions in massing, window patterns, materials, and site organization.
- c. Direct imitation is not required; respectful reinterpretation is encouraged.
- d. When using historic roof forms, study the contextual examples of those forms and their details. Contemporary interpretations of historic forms are encouraged, but should be derived from and relate to historic details.

## (3) Encourage Creativity

- a. **Foster Architectural Creativity:** Encourage designers to propose novel and inspiring interpretations of traditional building forms, balancing originality with sensitivity to context.
- b. Allow contemporary design solutions that complement the scale, rhythm, and proportions of existing Belmont Center buildings without resorting to mimicry.
- c. **Material Exploration:** Support the creative use of new and sustainable materials when they harmonize with the district’s established palette of brick, stone, and traditional cladding.



- d. Designers are encouraged to explore contemporary methods that complement, rather than overwhelm, traditional forms.
- e. **Human-Centered Inspiration:** Prioritize designs that inspire through their public realm contributions—active storefronts, pedestrian amenities, transparent façades, and engaging ground-floor details.
- f. Contrasts between old and new should be deliberate, clear, and refined, avoiding pastiche or superficial imitation.
- g. **Innovation in Sustainability:** Inspire designers to integrate creative green building strategies—energy efficiency, green roofs, passive design—while maintaining contextual appropriateness.
- h. **Celebrate Craft and Detail:** Reward projects that demonstrate creative attention to façade detail, storefront design, signage, and lighting that elevate the visual identity of Belmont Center.
- i. **Public Realm Contributions:** Encourage imaginative approaches to plazas, alleys, pedestrian passages, and outdoor seating areas that make Belmont Center more welcoming and vibrant.



#### (4) Materials and Craft

- a. Durable, authentic materials (brick, stone, wood, high-quality composites) are strongly encouraged.
- b. Finishes should avoid excessive reflectivity, artificial appearance, or poor weathering characteristics.

#### (5) Details and Transitions

- a. Attention to detail at the pedestrian scale is essential: entrances, storefronts, windows, and signage should contribute to a welcoming public realm.
- b. Where historic façades are retained, transitions between old and new should be handled with care, clearly expressing differences in time while maintaining overall coherence.

#### (6) Illustrative Examples

- a. Positive examples include: a modern brick building with large glass storefronts that aligns with the cornice height of adjacent historic blocks; or a contemporary addition set back slightly from a preserved historic façade.
- b. Less desirable are designs that either ignore context entirely (overscaled, monolithic forms) or mimic it without authenticity (stylistic “copy-and-paste” historicism).

## ◆ 1.11 SUMMARY

The design of new buildings and improvements within Belmont Center should celebrate both continuity and creativity. Successful architecture will harmonize with the Center's historic scale, rhythm, and materials while embracing thoughtful, contemporary design that supports walkability and community life. Each project should contribute to a cohesive streetscape, a welcoming public realm, and an enduring architectural identity rooted in Belmont's traditions.

Ultimately, design excellence in Belmont Center is measured not by adherence to a single style but by the ability to create enduring, contextually sensitive places that enrich everyday experience. Buildings should demonstrate craftsmanship, authenticity, and environmental responsibility—advancing the town's vision of a vibrant, inclusive, and timeless center.

DRAFT