3.3 Retail Centers & Commercial Districts

I. GOALS

A. To encourage “superior design” in retail centers and new buildings in our commercial districts.

B. To ensure that retail centers of all types and commercial districts integrate with their neighborhood while protecting the neighborhood from negative environmental impacts such as noise, traffic and overspill of lighting.

C. To ensure that when residences are incorporated within commercial districts or developments, they are compatible in terms of addressing pedestrian and vehicular circulation, noise odors, parking, site lighting, and other design issues.

D. To encourage retail centers to take advantage of existing site features.

E. To promote buildings that are of an original design, specific for the site, and not repeated as a template or prototype.

F. To provide vehicular as well as a direct and safe pedestrian and bicycle access and within retail centers and to neighboring uses.

G. To provide site entries that are clear and understandable to customers and employees, minimizing confusion and facilitating easy and unobstructed, pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular access.

*Figure 3.3.1* Take advantage of existing site features such as mature trees by incorporating them into the site plan.

*Figure 3.3.2* Seat walls within retail centers create attractive and informal areas for pedestrians.
H. To create pleasing pedestrian environments in and around retail centers that encourage walking to and within the center.

I. To promote public art in retail centers.

J. To promote energy efficient design.

K. To encourage retail and commercial centers which are safe, and contribute to a safer surrounding area and support Police and Fire Department efforts to promote public safety.

Figures 3.3.3a and 3.3.3b Public art creates vibrancy such as in the plaza tiles in front of Whole Foods at the Coddington Mall and the abstract sculpture adjacent this mixed use center.
II. SITE DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

A. EXISTING CONDITIONS/ SITE CONSTRAINTS

1. Incorporate existing natural features such as trees, topography, creeks, and riparian vegetation into the site plan. These and similar natural elements should be considered when developing a site plan. Every effort shall be made to preserve dominant elements such as significant trees, for example. When trees must be removed mitigation will be required. See the Appendix for Chapter 17-24 of the City code which governs tree removal and replacement issues.

2. Integrate new development carefully into existing neighborhoods and future planned neighborhoods.

3. Mitigate noise through early site planning and placement of buildings and sound barriers as needed, particularly when adjacent to residential neighborhoods. Refer to Chapter 17-16 –Noise Chapter of the City Code for noise limits.

4. Mitigate the noise of: refrigeration equipment, delivery trucks and trash compactors, trash dumpster and handling, store public address system, and other noise producing equipment or activities when they interface with residential uses.

Figure 3.3.4 An example of incorporating riparian vegetation and a swale into a site plan along Range Avenue.

Figure 3.3.5 Preserved oak trees are a dominant feature in the design of the Fountaingrove Village retail center at Stagecoach Road.

Figure 3.3.6 This new plaza and kiosk at Stony Point and Sebastopol Roads integrates well with the existing restaurant use next door.
B. NEIGHBORHOOD AND STREET PATTERN

1. When retail centers are located adjacent to a residential neighborhood, consider providing both retail stores and other facilities, such as: neighborhood serving services, offices, residential units, and possibly municipal facilities. *This type of project will better integrate with a residential area, will tend to serve as a focal point for the neighborhood and provide more ‘around the clock’ activity, enhancing safety.*

2. When retail centers are located adjacent to public spaces, such as parks, orient the development to the public space. *Orienting the back of a retail development with a wall along public spaces is discouraged.*

3. A commercial center should be easily accessible to residents and employees in the area. Pedestrian access should be as direct as possible and should be located and designed to provide a pleasing and safe pedestrian environment, and should be designed to avoid negative impacts to residents and businesses.

4. Provide attractive and inviting pedestrian scale features, spaces and amenities. Configure entrances and parking lots to be functional and inviting with walkways, conveniently tied to logical destinations. Consider bus stops and drop-off /pick-up points as integral parts of the configuration.

Anchor pedestrian walkways with special design features such as arcades, porticos, pedestrian light fixtures, bollards, decorative paving, planters, water features, public art, and other architectural elements that define circulation corridors and outdoor spaces. Examples of outdoor spaces are plazas, patios, courtyards, and window shopping areas. These features and spaces are to enhance the building and the center as integral parts of the community.
5. Provide continuous internal pedestrian walkways from the public sidewalk or right-of-way to the customer entrances of all buildings on the site. Also provide pedestrian sidewalks between customer entrances within the project and provide direct connections between stores and focal points such as transit stops and street crossings. Locate walkways to promote walking between stores rather than driving.

Generally, internal sidewalks are to be a minimum of eight (8) feet in width, and landscaped with trees, shrubs and ground cover and shall include benches and other pedestrian amenities.

Walking is a social activity and walkways need to be wide enough to accommodate people walking together. Sidewalks also need to be wide enough to allow pedestrians to pass each other without being forced into a street or driveway. Narrower walkways may be considered for short distances or portions of the project where minimal pedestrian activity expected.

6. Walkways that cross streets, internal driveways, and parking areas, shall be constructed of an alternate material to emphasize the location of the walkway.

7. Building materials adjacent to pedestrian walkways are to be pedestrian friendly, authentic, rich in detail with visual interest, and durable.

8. Embellish the entrances to the buildings at the ground level by creating a minimum zone that is paved with brick, granite, and concrete with exposed aggregate or precast pavers, or approved alternative.

9. Provide barriers to protect the pedestrian from moving vehicles between walkways, driveways and streets. Examples of barriers include planters, bollards and half walls.

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*Figure 3.3.9* Internal sidewalks should be a minimum eight (8) feet wide and landscaped with trees.

*Figure 3.3.10* Entries at the ground level should be embellished with attractive materials and details.

*Figure 3.3.11* Use landscaped barriers to protect pedestrians from vehicular traffic.
10. When neighborhood and community retail centers are located adjacent to residential neighborhoods, provide direct vehicular connections to the neighborhood. Avoid circulation that would encourage shortcuts through parking lots. Retail centers and stores which included a regional draw should be designed to discourage short cutting through residential neighborhoods. Direct vehicular access permits residents access from local streets without forcing traffic on to Transitional or Regional Streets.

11. When retail centers are adjacent to residential neighborhoods, locate service entries to minimize service vehicle traffic through the residential neighborhood.

12. When residential units are included in the retail center, consider placing the units to act as a buffer between the retail activity and the surrounding existing and future residences. *Generally residences facing residences will be more compatible than retail buildings or parking lots facing residences.*

13. In a development with a large off-street parking area, clearly demarcate entrance to the parking area. Where there is a high traffic density, provide sufficient number of entrances and exits to avoid traffic bottlenecks, but at the same time do not provide an excessive number of entrances which may have a negative impact on pedestrians and bicycle traffic.
14. Enhance the public streetscape by creating retail centers that fit into their context. Create an inviting pedestrian experience along the sidewalk facing shop entrances towards the street.

Shop entrances should be located as near to the street as possible to reinforce the pedestrian experience, reinforce the streetscape, and screen large parking areas. All shop entrances approved with the project are to remain open to the public during business hours and are not to be blocked off.

Along major arterials it may be appropriate, depending on the context, to set the building back behind no more than two rows of parking. The larger setback allows for more useable pedestrian amenities such as plazas and outdoor dining areas that are buffered from the negative impacts of a major street.

Locating the back of buildings to a street does not enhance the streetscape or pedestrian experience and should be avoided.
Section 3.3 – Retail Centers & Commercial Districts

C. GENERAL SITE CONSIDERATIONS

While retail centers and commercial centers may primarily be served by automobiles, pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders must be considered.

1. Cluster buildings to create a pedestrian friendly urban village and consider including retail spaces which include a variety of stores sizes. The presence of small retail stores gives a center a “friendlier” and diversified appearance by creating variety, breaking up large expanses, and expanding the range of the site’s activities.

2. Provide sidewalks and planter areas to serve as buffers between pedestrian and vehicles. Provide trees for shade as well as lower plantings to soften roadways and parking lots.

3. Where transit stops exist or are proposed next to a retail center, provide a direct walkway from the transit stop to all of the uses within the center. Transit riders should not have to walk through landscaping, and between parked vehicles, to get to and from shops.

4. Provide a shaded area in which customers can sit while waiting to be picked up, or rest while shopping. Design this area to be consistent with the rest of the center or district.

5. Provide at least one pedestrian path that bisects the parking lot in community and regional shopping centers. Include a strong vertical element to identify the location of the path.

Figure 3.3.16 Clustering of small shop fronts create “friendliness” and variety within a larger retail center such as at the Safeway center on Mendocino Avenue.

Figure 3.3.17 A sidewalk with trees provides attractive separation between cars and pedestrians.

Figure 3.3.18 Provide shaded areas for waiting or resting that are designed consistent with the center.
6. Provide convenient bicycle parking to support those who bike to work as well as customers that bike to shop. Consider providing bike lockers for employees.

7. Safety is a major concern in the design of the retail center parking lots. To that end, provide the following:

   a. Vehicular entries and exits that provide safe passage to and from the street. Provide adequate sight lines and stacking distances.

   b. In larger centers (Community and Regional Shopping Centers) do not locate parking spaces directly in front of the anchor stores.

   c. Do not locate parking spaces along the driveway entrances and exits to parking lots for a minimum of 15 from back of sidewalk or 25 feet from back of curb if there is no sidewalk planned.

8. When adjacent parcels are developed with retail business, consider consolidated entries to serve the vehicular and pedestrian traffic for both parcels.

9. Design major internal driveways to appear more as streets rather than driveways within a parking lot, with major internal driveways to include sidewalks and street trees with large canopies.

10. Distribute parking areas to shorten the distance between buildings and to shorten the distance to the public sidewalks, and to reduce the scale of the paved surface area.
11. Large retail stores are to include multiple customer entrances. Multiple store entrances reduce walking distance from cars, and facilitate pedestrian and bicycle access from public sidewalks and streets.

When more than one entrance is not possible, the project should include additional pedestrian enhancements to provide clear and direct pedestrian access from adjacent parking areas, shops, and streets to the nearest portion of the building, and a covered walkway such as an arcade should be provided to direct customers along the building to the entrance.

12. If a state mandated recycling center is required, or to be part of a retail center, incorporate its design in the early stages so that issues such as circulation, screening, the use of materials consistent with other structures in the center, and so on, can be provided for.

As is also the case with other facilities, it is undesirable simply to attempt to add it later in some leftover space.

13. Refer to Section 4.2 for Off-Street Parking guidelines.
D. MIXED USES

1. Housing may be included in the development. The General Plan allows residential use within Commercial Designations, and may be required. Office or institutional uses may also be included as allowed by the General Plan. The General Plan does require residential uses to be incorporated into the overall design of designated Community Shopping Centers.

2. When residential uses are combined with commercial uses care should be taken to ensure adjacent uses will be compatible.

   For example, apartments over professional offices or low volume retail generally are compatible mixed uses because the relatively low activity levels of the commercial uses will generally not have an adverse impact on apartment dwellers. Apartments over a high volume commercial use, like a fast food restaurant, generally is not a compatible mixed use because the customer traffic, noise, and odors over extended periods of the day and night may interfere with the peaceful occupancy of the residences.

3. Consider the principle of “like to like” in the design of mixed use projects.

   When mixed use developments feature uses in separate buildings (horizontal mixed use vs. vertical mixed use) the backs of the buildings are often a good location to make a transition from one use to another. By locating commercial across the street from commercial, and residential across from residential, conflicts associated with mixed uses do not occur along the street. Conflicts associated with different uses, such as differing schedules, noises, odors, and so on, are less problematic when they occur along a secondary alley access.
4. Noise generating equipment, such as air conditioners, exhaust fans, refrigeration, should be located and, if appropriate, housed in such a way to reduce the level of the noise reaching residents and others nearby. Be aware that the Zoning Code and State Law mandate maximum allowable noise levels for residences. A Noise study may be required as part of a project review. Consult with the Department of Community Development staff regarding project specific requirements.

5. When combining residential with commercial uses, take advantage of shared parking, as permitted by the City’s Zoning Code. In some high density mixed use projects, it may be appropriate to request a reduction in the number of required covered parking spaces.

E. LANDSCAPING

1. “Orchard Parking” is the City’s preference for large parking lots. Refer to Section 4.2.

2. Provide a five foot wide planter planted with ground cover and street trees along a typical frontage street. When on-street parking is provided along the frontage street, a contiguous sidewalk with tree wells should be used. See Sections 1.2 & 1.3 for additional information on streets and sidewalk configuration.

3. Design on-site street furniture, accessories, and lighting to be consistent in its design.

4. In addition to planting materials, provide public art in retail centers consistent with the City’s Public Art in Private Development Ordinance.

5. Refer to Section 4.1-Landscaping, for general Information.

6. Wall design at perimeter of projects should compliment the architecture of the building.
F. LIGHTING

1. Provide a uniform lighting level which assures safety and security at night.

2. Provide light standards or poles that are no taller than 16 feet in parking lot.

3. Care should be taken in the placement of special use areas, such as ATM’s, vending areas, etc., to ensure that higher lighting levels there do not adversely impact adjacent neighbors.

4. Light spill-over onto neighboring properties should be insignificant. To ensure this, provide light fixtures with shielded light sources and cutoff optics.

5. Illuminate pedestrian pathways with a light source that is closer to the ground than parking lot lighting. This light source should not exceed 12 feet in height. Coordinate the placement of light fixtures with tree placement to provide a regular spacing of light standards for uniform lighting and to minimize tree foliage blocking light from reaching the pedestrian path.

6. Use of subtle illumination to enhance the architectural form of a building is encouraged. However, illuminating a building as a form of advertising is discouraged, especially with overly bright lighting. As well as being an inappropriate form of advertising, excessively bright lights are hazardous to nighttime drivers.

Figure 3.3.27 Light standards should not exceed 12 feet in height along pedestrian paths and not exceed 16 feet in parking lots.

Figure 3.3.28 Subtle illumination such as used in this example, can effectively enhance the architectural form of a building and is encouraged.
III. BUILDING DESIGN GUIDELINES

Retail Centers and buildings in commercial districts should exhibit “superior design” in terms of high quality building materials, well planned and proportioned structures, generous pedestrian amenities and sensitivity to the surrounding neighborhood.

A. GENERAL

1. Design buildings specifically for the sites they are intended to occupy. Designs should be unique to Santa Rosa. Reuse of stock plans is discouraged in Santa Rosa. Repetitive building designs used in other communities or other locations within Santa Rosa should not be used.

2. Design buildings to fit into the character and context of the surrounding area in terms of scale, style, use of materials, form, and so on. Buildings should not be stylized or ornamental in a garish and conspicuous manner. This is particularly important in historical districts.

3. Discreet use of color and corporate features that are compatible with the surrounding neighborhood within the specific site is acceptable.

4. Design buildings to provide visual interest and articulate facades to reduce the massive scale and uniform impersonal appearance of large buildings. Interest can be created and scale reduced by including “human scale” elements which give one a sense of his or her relationship to a structure, details such as: balconies, awnings, canopies, recessed entries, arcades, wall insets, and reveals.

5. For facades greater than 50 feet in length incorporate significant wall plane projections or recesses to reduce the massive and uniform look typical of these types of projects.

Figure 3.3.29 Stock designs used repeatedly are discouraged in Santa Rosa.

Figure 3.3.30 The anchor retail building at Fountaingrove Village offers visual interest, articulation, color and texture, and at a human scale.

Figure 3.3.31 Break up facades of 50 feet or more with significant wall plan projections and/or recesses.
6. Buildings are to include active and open facades that interest those walking by and create an active pedestrian oriented streetscape at the public street and within the project. Ground level facades that face public streets and internal streets and driveways shall include arcades, display windows, entry areas, awnings, or other such features along the façade with no less than 60% transparency at the entry elevation of the ground floor. Transparent windows shall remain unobstructed.

7. Divide buildings into increments with columns or the like, to create a rhythm that breaks up the wall plane.

8. Incorporate special treatment which emphasizes the corner of buildings that occupy the corner of public streets and corners of private streets and driveways that occur within the project.

9. Design main entries to be prominent and easy to identify and that are distinguishable from the storefront.

10. Clearly identify entries to upper office, retail or residential floors.

11. Include features that articulate upper floor wall plane, such as windows, balconies, and awnings.

12. When parapets are used on flat roofs, the parapet is not to be used simply to increase the overall height and bulk of the building, or create artificial “sign” panels.
13. Use variations in roof lines to add interest to, and reduce the massive scale of large buildings. Roof lines are to complement the character of adjoining buildings and neighborhoods.

14. Each phase of a phased development should attain a visual completeness. Temporary barriers/walls should be painted and trimmed to integrate with the permanent construction.

15. Develop a sense of architectural continuity, but all elevations need not be identical.

16. Design buildings in commercial centers to exhibit a consistent concept. Freestanding buildings should be architecturally compatible with other buildings in the center. 
   This does not mean all buildings should be detailed in an identical manner, or that only one architectural style is used. However, the buildings need to be compatible.

17. Buildings are to be designed to minimize energy consumption through the use of skylights, window shading, landscaping and other technologies and comply with applicable City of Santa Rosa energy/green building requirements.
B. COLOR & MATERIALS

1. Use high quality, durable and low maintenance materials. This is particularly true of the first story, where heavy commercial use can damage materials and finishes. Preferred materials include: split faced concrete block, brick, metal siding with quality factory finishes (such as 40 yr. Kynar paint), powder coated aluminum storefront, or stucco. Residential quality materials such as plywood or composite panel siding and composite siding that require field painting need regular maintenance due to heavy commercial use and do not stand up well to the sun in our climate. When neglected, these materials become shabby.

2. Select building colors to establish continuity and compatibility with the neighborhood. Colors should enhance the visual character of the environment of the proposed building(s). Building colors should not compete for attention. Building colors should not become “signing” of the building or site. Integral coloring (where the color is mixed into the material vs. applied as paint) of concrete, stucco, and similar materials is encouraged. Use color to articulate and reduce the scale of large buildings.

3. Use complimentary buildings materials, colors, and textures within a retail center. Individual storefronts may vary to reflect the character of individual businesses or to develop variety, while respecting the concept of the center.
4. The use of highly reflective materials is discouraged. These materials may be considered as secondary or accent materials but their use is discouraged as primary or base finish material of a building.

C. ENTRIES / DOORS / WINDOWS

1. Use building entries to protect patrons from the elements and create a “sense of entry” or focal point for the building.

2. Utilize doors and windows in an organized pattern to articulate wall surfaces.

D. ACCESSORY ELEMENTS, LOADING AREAS, OUTDOOR STORAGE, FENCING & ROOFTOPS

1. Areas for outdoor storage, truck parking, trash collection or compaction, and loading, shall be screened from customers, abutting streets, and adjacent uses.

2. Areas for outdoor storage, trash collection or compaction, and loading are not to be located within 20 feet of any public street, public sidewalk, or internal pedestrian way.

3. Incorporate loading docks, truck parking, outdoor storage, utility meters, backflow devices, HVAC equipment, trash collection, trash compaction, and other service functions into the overall design of the building and the landscaping so that the visual and acoustic impacts of these functions are fully contained and out of view from adjacent properties and public streets. Furthermore, avoid attracting attention to these functions by the use of screening materials that are different from or inferior to the principal materials of the building and landscape.
4. Non-enclosed areas for the storage and sale of seasonal inventory are to be permanently defined and screened with walls and/or fences. Materials, colors, the design of screening walls, and/or fences or the cover thereof shall be compatible to the predominant materials and colors of the building.

5. Provide shopping cart corrals to organize carts in the parking areas. Incorporate vending machines, automatic teller machines, and other equipment into the design of the center.

6. Screen roof top equipment from visibility. The point of view for determining visibility shall be 5 feet above grade at a distance of 200 feet. If the roof structure does not provide this screening include an equipment screen in the design. When the roof top is visible from adjacent buildings, screen equipment to at least the height of the equipment.

7. Integrate or hide attached structures and equipment such as solar collector panels, antennas, large satellite dishes, and so on, into the structure or screen from view.

8. Screen all exterior trash, recycling, and storage utility boxes, wood service poles, electric and gas meters, fire sprinkler valves and backflow preventers and transformers, etc. from view wherever possible. Where screening is not possible, design the landscape to mitigate the visual impact.

9. Design fencing, soundwalls, trash and recycling enclosures, shopping cart corrals adjacent to the building, service areas, and similar accessory site elements to be compatible with the architecture of main buildings and include appropriate landscaping.

10. The preferred location for utility equipment, such as transformers, splice boxes, etc. is in underground vaults. If placed aboveground, large equipment shall be screened from view and should not to be placed in prominent and highly visible locations.
E. REDEVELOPMENT AND REMODEL OF EXISTING CENTERS

In order to respond to changes in retailing trends and to ensure the viability of existing retail centers; redevelopment, remodel and the transformation of existing retail centers is expected. In some cases, portions of, or an entire retail center may be demolished and redeveloped. In other cases, no demolition is proposed and the entire proposal consists of façade and/or parking lot upgrades. Typically, design guidelines are written to apply to new construction and it is often unclear to what extent redevelopment and remodels are expected to comply with design guidelines. In addition, redevelopment and remodel projects often are proposed in a piecemeal fashion, as it is not unusual for a retail center to be located on multiple properties with multiple property owners.

In general, it is the community’s desire for older suburban-type centers to be redeveloped to comply with current goals and policies calling for more urban-type centers geared to pedestrians, bicyclists, and those using public transit. However, this desire, often conflicts with the desire of the developer to minimize costs by using as much of the existing infrastructure as possible. Often it is not practical to redevelop a retail center all at once, as multiple property owners may not work together to achieve a united goal.

The purpose of this section is to acknowledge that redevelopment projects and remodels are reviewed case-by-case to determine to what extent the proposal is to comply with these Design Guidelines, and that it may not be practical for a partial redevelopment or remodel to comply with these guidelines to the same extent that a new project would need to comply.

It is the applicant’s responsibility to demonstrate that the redevelopment/remodel has been designed in compliance with these guidelines to the maximum extent feasible and practical based upon the overall scope of the proposal and the project’s location and relationship to adjacent properties.

Figure 3.3.43 The St. Francis Center at Calistoga Road is an excellent example of a shopping center remodel. The remodel took into account pedestrian access, shading, and façade coordination across the center.

Figure 3.3.44 Whole Foods Market at the Coddington Mall successfully integrated into the rest of the existing center by creating a vibrant pedestrian connection rich with landscaping, colors and textures.