

# DESIGN GUIDELINES

## Coolidge Corner Interim Planning Overlay District

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**The Brookline Planning Board**  
Town of Brookline, MA

January 12, 2006

## **Acknowledgements**

The following guidelines were adopted by the Brookline Planning Board on January 12, 2006. These guidelines were prepared by the Brookline Department of Planning and Community Development.

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## **Design Guidelines for Coolidge Corner Interim Planning Overlay District**

### **Introduction**

The establishment of the Coolidge Corner Interim Planning Overlay District (CCIPOD) is a direct outcome of recommendations made by the Brookline Comprehensive Plan adopted in January 2005 to develop a “District Plan” for Coolidge Corner. A key component of the CCIPOD is the establishment of interim design guidelines that would apply to all applications for special permits in the district area. These interim guidelines will ensure that the area is not subject to inappropriate development during the preparation of the Coolidge Corner District Plan.

All special permit applications should conform to the interim design guidelines in addition to any conditions outlined in Section 9.05 or elsewhere in the Zoning By-Law. These interim design guidelines must include, but need not be limited to, the following general items:

- 1. Relationship of proposed developments to the existing neighborhood**
- 2. Relationship of proposed developments to the street edge**
- 3. Materials, massing and scale of proposed developments**

These guidelines will be used by the Planning Board during the design review process and will be a useful tool for property owners and developers interested in understanding key design issues in the Coolidge Corner district Area.

## Design Guidelines for Coolidge Corner Interim Planning Overlay District

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## 1.1 Mechanical Equipment, trash storage, and service entrances

**Purpose:** Minimize the visual impact of mechanical equipment and trash storage, particularly within the public realm; encourage storefronts to include adequate service access.

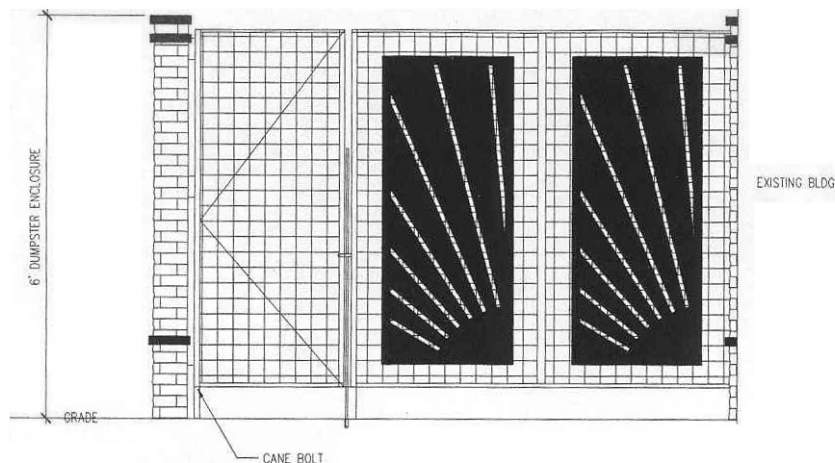
**Guideline:** Mechanical equipment should be located within the building envelope, on rooftops with appropriate screening, or below ground. Mechanical and electrical equipment includes, but is not limited to, generators, air compressors, HVAC equipment, solar panels, utility boxes or meters, and satellite dishes.

Trash storage should be located within the building footprint or should be properly screened from public view. Additionally, commercial buildings should provide reasonable access for deliveries and maintenance (preferably at the rear of buildings) that does not impede public streets or sidewalks.



**Beacon Street, Coolidge Corner**

*Example of a commercial building with all mechanical equipment located on the roof*

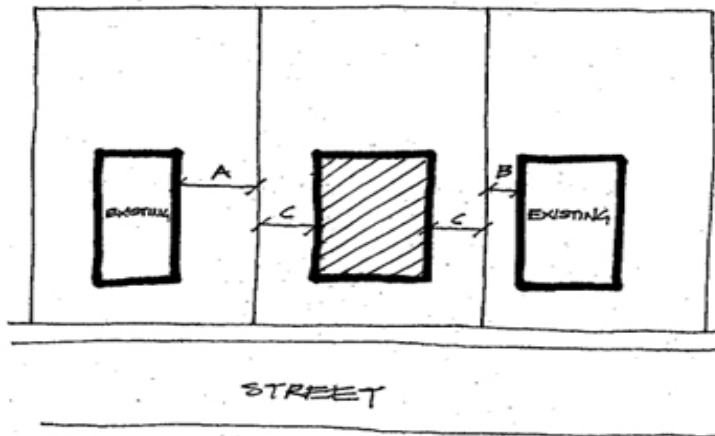


*Example of a decorative fence proposed for a trash enclosure in Coolidge Corner*

## 1.2 Side yard setback averaging

**Purpose:** Encourage side yard setbacks for new construction that are consistent with established side yard setbacks.

**Guideline:** New buildings should match the average side yard setback of adjoining properties and those of the immediate neighborhood, especially when these setbacks are greater than those required by the Zoning By-Law. However, the side yard setback shall not be less than what is required under Section 5.01 of the Zoning By-law.



C = AVERAGE OF  
A AND B  
(BUT NOT LESS  
THAN THE MINIMUM  
SIDE YARD SPECIFIED  
IN SECTION 5.01)

### 1.3 Residential window coverage requirements

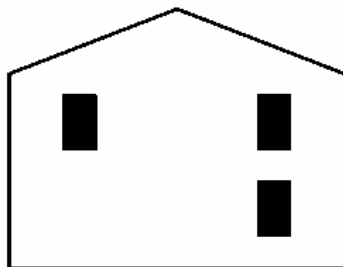
**Purpose:** Discourage blank walls facing public streets; encourage fenestration patterns that are consistent with existing development

**Guideline:** At least 15 percent of the area of each façade that faces a street lot line should be windows or main entrance doors. Windows used to meet this standard should allow views from the building to the street.



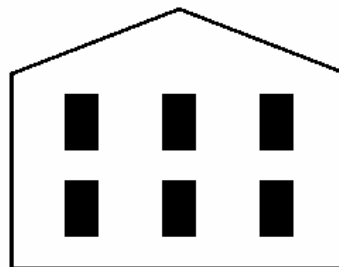
***Beacon Street, Brookline***

*The primarily blank wall (less than 5% window coverage) facing Beacon Street is incongruous with the surrounding neighborhood.*



8% window coverage

*Discouraged*



15% window coverage

*Preferred*

Source: Infill Design Code Amendments, City of Portland, OR

### 1.4 Maximum ground level frontage requirement

**Purpose:** Allow more diversity within commercial areas by minimizing the ground level frontage for larger businesses; encourage use of existing upper floors.

**Guideline:** A single business should not occupy more than 50 feet of continuous ground level frontage along public streets.



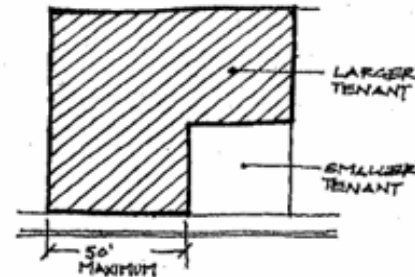
**CVS in Porter Square, Cambridge**

*Small retail spaces line the ground floor frontage of CVS to provide an active street edge rather than a blank wall.*



**Barnes and Noble, Coolidge Corner**

*By utilizing the second floor, this large tenant only occupies a small ground level frontage along Harvard Street, permitting a greater diversity of retail.*



*Diagram illustrating how a larger tenant can accommodate additional square footage while complying with the 50 foot frontage requirement*



## **1.5 Ground level uses in commercial districts**

**Purpose:** Encourage active retail ground-level uses in commercial districts to promote a pedestrian-friendly streetscape.

**Guideline:** Active commercial retail frontages should be encouraged in commercial districts, particularly in areas with a high concentration of retail activity. Parking, storage, large lobbies, or other uses that do not reinforce an active retail environment are discouraged.



*Under the current zoning requirements, this type of “non residential” would be permissible in Coolidge Corner.*

## 1.6 Front yard fencing guidelines

**Purpose:** Encourage pedestrian level fencing heights along public streets to foster neighborhood interaction.

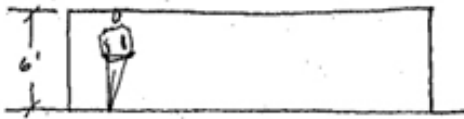
**Guideline:** Fences within front yard setbacks in M Districts should not exceed 4'-0" in height.



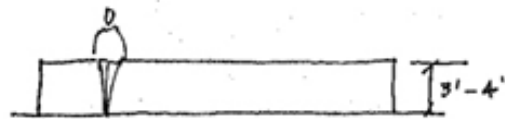
*Centre Street, Brookline*  
Example of 6' high fence in an M District



*Thayer Street, Brookline*  
Example of a 3' high fence



*Discouraged*



*Preferred*

## **1.7 Porches and semi-public spaces**

**Purpose:** Encourage front porches and semi-public spaces within the front yard setback. Semi-public spaces consist of areas along public ways that offer a transition from public to private space. These spaces offer opportunities for neighborhood interaction.

**Guideline:** Front porches, stoops, balconies, and related semi-public space should be encouraged along public ways. Usable spaces with a depth of 8 feet or more are encouraged.



***Centre Street, Brookline***

*Example of a traditional Brookline residence with a significant semi-public space*

## 2.1 Parking frontage requirement

**Purpose:** Minimize the visual impact of parking areas in residential districts, (particularly garage bays and blank walls that may dominate the streetscape); encourage pedestrian friendly streetscapes with active living spaces facing the street

**Guideline:** No more than 40% of a ground level building frontage facing a street should be occupied by parking facilities or non-livable space, including garages and utility or storage space.



**Thayer Street**

Nearly 100% of the ground level frontage of this “by-right” structure is devoted to parking



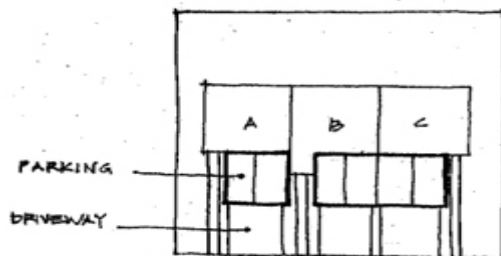
**Centre Street, Brookline**

Approximately 90% of the ground level frontage of this building is devoted to parking use.



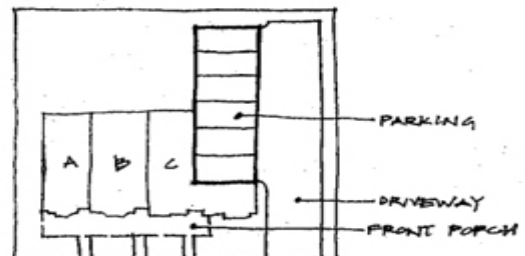
**Francis Street, Brookline**

0% of the ground level street frontage of this building is devoted to parking use.



*Discouraged*

*Discouraged*



*Preferred*

*Preferred*

## 2.2 Design of parking structures

**Purpose:** Minimize the visual impact of parking structures by restricting the visual impact of parking on public ways.

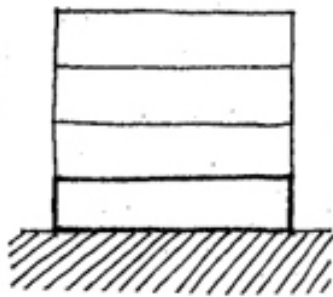
**Guideline:** All parking structures for residential and commercial uses facing a public way should be (1) underground or substantially underground (no more than 5' above grade); (2) located more than 10 feet above grade; or (3) on the first level but shielded from public view. For all parking structures, specific landscaping or architectural treatment should be utilized.



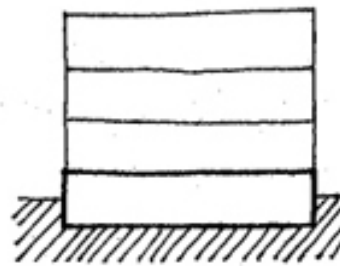
**Harvard Street, Brookline**  
*None of the parking for this office building is concealed from public view and the building has no relationship to the ground plane*



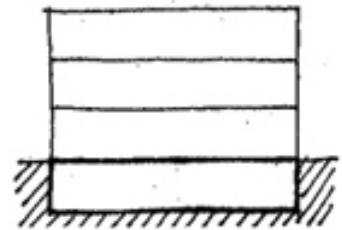
**Francis Street, Brookline**  
*All parking is located along the side and rear of these buildings, allowing porches and "active" spaces along the street.*



*Discouraged*



*Acceptable with proper landscaping and building edge treatment*



*Preferred*

### 2.3 Building entrance location

**Purpose:** Encourage visible, pedestrian-oriented building entrances that maximize safety, pedestrian activity and sociability

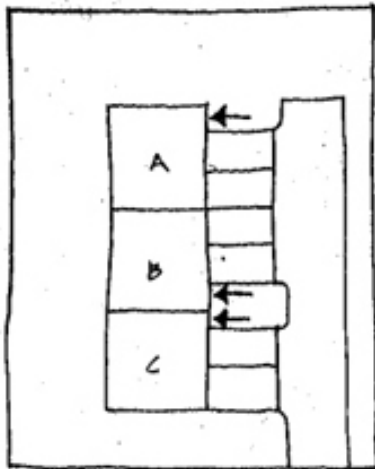
**Guideline:** All main building entrances should be parallel to a street frontage and located along the primary building façade. Additionally, buildings with multiple street frontages should be encouraged to utilize corner entrances.



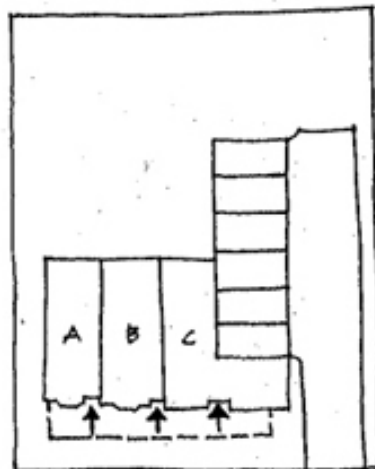
*Portland, Oregon*  
Example of a residential building  
w/ no entrance or windows facing  
the street



*Cambridge, MA*  
Example of residential development  
w/ multiple entrances facing the street



*Discouraged*



*Preferred*

## 2.4 Spacing of residential and commercial entrances

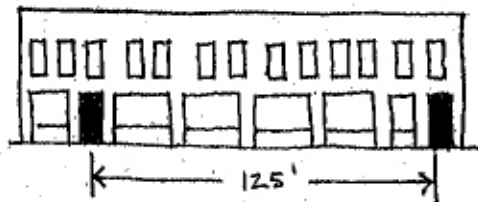
**Purpose:** Encourage active streetscapes with multiple entrances; discourage long stretches of “dead” space along the street.

**Guideline:** Where residential buildings face a public street, entrances should generally be spaced no more than 75 feet apart. Where commercial storefronts face the street, doors should generally be spaced no more than 50 feet apart.

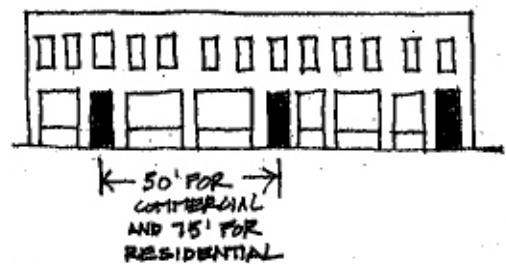


### *Harvard Street, Coolidge Corner*

*CVS Pharmacy in Coolidge Corner has two entrances along Harvard Street that are spaced approximately 70 feet apart. An additional entrance was required by the Planning Board when the storefront was expanded.*



*Discouraged*



*Preferred*

## 2.5 Minimum glazing requirements for ground level commercial uses

**Purpose:** Ensure that ground floor facades in commercial districts have a high level of transparency necessary for a vibrant, successful retail environment.

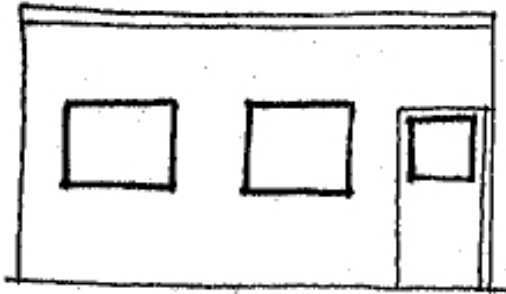
**Guideline:** Ground floor facades should have at least 75% transparent surface (particularly between 2' and 10' above grade) to permit a clear view from the sidewalk into the interior space of the building.



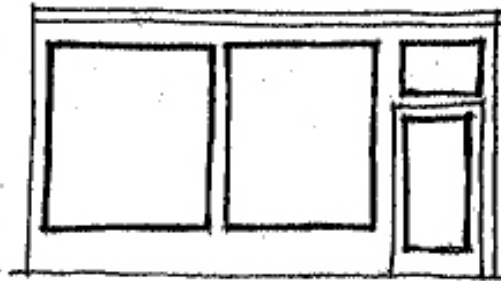
*Cambridge, MA*  
*Storefront w/ less than 75% glazing*



*Brookline Village*  
*Storefront w/ more than 75% glazing*



*Discouraged*



*Preferred*



## 2.6 Transparency requirements

**Purpose:** Maintain visibility into commercial buildings; discourage inappropriate shelving or interior modifications that impede visibility.

**Guideline:** No more than 30% of glazed areas within buildings located in commercial districts should be concealed. This includes any signage, wall partitions, shelving or other opaque surfaces that reduce window transparency.



*Beacon Street, Brookline*  
Window coverage exceeding 30%



*Harvard Street, Brookline*  
Extensive transparency allows clear sightlines into this storefront.



*Discouraged*



*Preferred*

## 2.7 Knee-wall height requirements

**Purpose:** Encourage storefront designs that maximize visibility into the building.

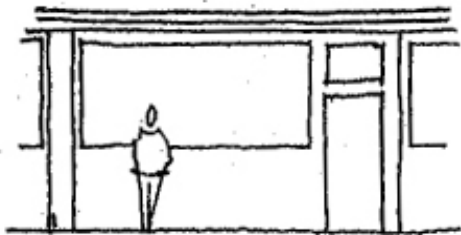
**Guideline:** Storefront knee-walls should not exceed 3' in height. No shelving, displays, or partitions exceeding 3' in height should be placed within 5' of storefront windows.



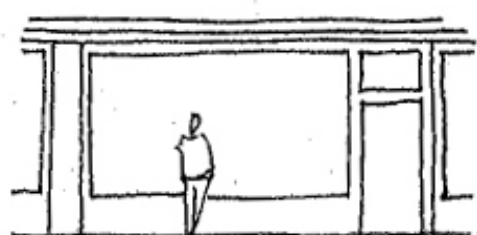
*Cambridge, MA  
Excessively high windows prevent  
visibility into this storefront*



*273 Harvard Street, Brookline  
Example of an 18" high knee wall permitting  
excellent storefront visibility*



*Discouraged*



*Preferred*

## **2.8 Street Tree Requirements**

**Purpose:** Trees are a significant environmental and social resource in the Town of Brookline. New developments should respect existing street trees and promote new plantings that shape and define our streets and public ways.

**Guideline:** All mature street trees should be preserved. New street trees should be formally planted along public ways and should form a barrier between the pedestrian and the street. Spacing of trees should not exceed 25'. The minimum size for new street trees should be at least 3" to 4" in caliper. Tree lawns shall be encouraged to provide greater root expansion and a green barrier between the pedestrian and the street. Where tree lawns are not feasible, the minimum tree well size should be 6' x 6' (8' x 8' or greater is preferred). In cases where street trees are not feasible due to space limitations, vertical plantings such as climbing vines should be considered.



*Typical tree-lined street in Brookline*

### **3.1 Building heights in residential districts**

**Purpose:** Encourage building heights for new residential structures that are consistent with established building heights in the immediate neighborhood.

**Guideline:** For residential districts, the overall height of new structures should relate to that of adjacent conforming structures and those of the immediate neighborhood. Avoid new construction that varies greatly in height from other buildings in the area. To the extent possible, relate individual floor-to-floor heights to those of neighboring buildings. In particular, consider how the first floor level relates to the street and whether this is consistent with first floors of neighboring buildings. Exceptions are permitted if accessibility issues make consistency with this guideline difficult.

### **3.2 Building width**

**Purpose:** Encourage building widths for new residential structures that are consistent with established building widths in the immediate neighborhood.

**Guideline:** For both residential and commercial districts, the general width of new structures should relate to that of adjacent structures and those of the immediate neighborhood. Larger buildings that are located adjacent to smaller structures should be broken down into smaller bays. Avoid new construction that consists of continuous horizontal walls, particularly in existing neighborhoods with a pattern of narrow building widths.



***Aspinwall Avenue***

*This multi-family structure mirrors the existing building width in the surrounding neighborhood.*

### 3.3 Building elements

**Purpose:** Encourage building proportions that are compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.

**Guideline:** The proportions and relationships between doors, windows and other building elements should relate to a human scale and should be compatible with the scale, rhythm, and character of the surrounding area.



**Beacon Street, Brookline**  
*This landmark building in Coolidge Corner includes a variety of elements (dormer windows, awnings, architectural detail) that relate to the size of the human body.*



**St. Paul Street, Brookline**  
*A lack of human-scaled design elements results in a design that overwhelms the pedestrian.*

### 3.4 Variation in building massing

**Purpose:** Provide variation in building massing by encouraging bays, porches and projections that meet specific criteria.

**Guideline:** In M Districts, porches, bays and other projections should be encouraged. These projections should relate to the scale and character of adjacent buildings and the immediate neighborhood and should reduce the overall mass and bulk of the building.



***Centre Street, Brookline***

*This new building includes little variation in building massing and has a “box-like” appearance.*



***Cypress Street, Brookline***

*This new infill project includes a projecting circular bay, porches, and private balconies that reduce the scale of the building.*

### **3.5 Dormer window guidelines**

**Purpose:** Encourage dormer windows that minimize building bulk and preserve the character of the neighborhood.

**Guideline:** Dormer windows should adhere to the following criteria:

- should be set back from the main wall of a building
- should include a reasonable setback from the roof at the gable ends
- should not rise above the ridge line of the building's main roof



### **3.6 Quality of materials**

**Purpose:** Encourage durable, high quality building materials that are compatible with the surrounding area.

**Guideline:** Building materials should draw upon the neighborhood pattern of finish materials that include brick, stone, shingles and clapboard, finished cement, and the incorporation of a variety of contrasting textures.



***Park Street, Brookline***

*This multi-family building includes a combination of high quality materials such as brick, cast stone, wrought iron, and wood.*

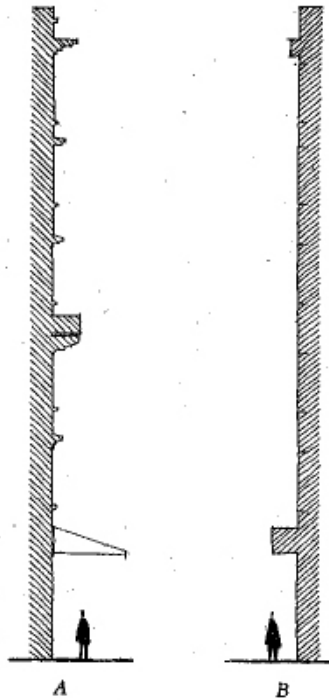
### 3.7 Surface articulation

**Purpose:** Encourage richness in building surface design to ensure that new buildings and additions contribute to the public realm.

**Guideline:** The facades of buildings should be designed to include surface variation that maximizes the interplay of light and shadow.



*These photos illustrate extensive surface variation, providing a sense of quality and permanence.*



*Building wall sections of two buildings on Via Cola di Rienzo, Rome; the more complex facade, A, offers more surfaces, more opportunities for shadow and light changes than does facade B*

**Source:** *Great Streets*, Allan Jacobs