

Chatham County Design Guidelines

For

Commercial, Industrial and Conditional Use Projects

*as prepared by the Design Guidelines Subcommittees of the
Chatham County Planning Board and the
Chatham County Appearance Commission*

Adopted August 3, 1999 by the Chatham County Planning Board

Introduction

A project proposal shall include the information listed in the Chatham County Submission Requirements, available in the Planning Office.

Preliminary design must incorporate an evaluation of the existing natural characteristics of the site such as topography and vegetation, historic structures, and meaningful vistas.

Designs shall consider future development of adjacent and nearby sites, roads, and public amenities.

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1.0 Screening of Storage Areas

This section addresses the outdoor storage, utility, and equipment areas often associated with commercial uses. Requirements herein do not apply to mercantile locations where commodities for sale are displayed on the sales site.

Preliminary site design for any project should include providing for adequate outdoor storage needs. These areas include space where materials are temporarily stored, waste and recycling is handled and stored, mechanical/electrical equipment is located or loading and vehicular work yards are located.

Whenever possible storage areas should be concealed by site or building design. Where such is not possible, screening should be provided as follows.

Type of Item to be Screened

Ground-mounted electrical transformer

Waste and recycling outdoor containers, stored construction materials, utility supplies, etc.

(does not apply to temporary storage of six months or less)

Repair work, dismantling or servicing of vehicles

Satellite dish antennas that are 25" in diameter or greater

Screening Requirements

Border plantings on the two most visible sides of the equipment at least as high as the equipment, such as evergreen shrubbery planted to achieve an approximate 80% visual obstruction

A 95% solid treated wood fence at least 1' higher than the object to be screened and coming within 12" of the ground, with border plantings of evergreen shrubs that constitute an approximate 30% screen on the two most visible sides of the fence, OR, An approximate 95% dense planting of evergreen shrubs and/or small trees that reaches the screen density within 24 months of installation and is maintained in perpetuity or until a fence is erected.

Conceal area using 8' high, 100% opaque fence, with evergreen border plantings that conceal 35% of the fence or equivalent screening

A 70% visual barrier that is the height of the dish or greater when viewed from the public right-of-way or adjacent residential usages.

Storage areas that are deemed hazards to the public or stored items that could be windblown or require security shall be further enclosed on all sides by wall or fence with border plantings and shall include an operable gate. Gates shall not swing into any public way.

Project landscaping shall be established prior to the facility earning a certificate of occupancy. It is the owner's responsibility to maintain the landscape plantings in good health and to replace any failed plants promptly.

2.0 Exterior Lighting

Exterior lighting shall be architecturally integrated with the building's style, materials, and colors in the selection and design of light poles, brackets, and fixtures.

Spillover

All exterior lighting used on commercial projects shall be designed to protect adjacent residential properties against spillover of light. Exterior lighting may be designed with shielding to reduce spillover and should be planned to direct light away from or not be located next to adjacent properties. Where intense project lighting requirements could impact adjacent properties, thick evergreen vegetative buffers, walls, or fences may be required to protect adjacent property.

Timing

Timing devices shall be employed to shut off luminaries or reduce light levels when full lighting is not required, such as after regular business hours. Special attention shall be paid to protecting residential properties from off-site illumination after 9:00 PM.

For instance, an automobile sales area that requires the use of lighting to illuminate displayed vehicles shall employ the use of low-level security lighting after regular business hours instead of burning full illumination.

Pole heights

Non-cutoff-type shielded lights (non-directional floodlights) shall not be installed higher than 20' above grade.

Shielded cutoff-type light fixtures may be installed as high as 35' above grade. 35' shall be the maximum

installed height of outside luminaries. Lower intensity, lower pole height parking and landscape lighting is encouraged.

Where adjacent land is used for residential purposes outdoor lighting shall be planned such that the maximum illumination level at property lines does not exceed 0.3-foot candles (fc). (Minimal illumination levels routinely used in parking area design are: 0.5 to 1.0 fc for vehicular traffic areas and 0.2 to 2.0 fc for pedestrian use areas. For example, 0.3 fc is dimmer than light from a clear full moon and represents the threshold of legibility for standard size newsprint)

All parking area light fixtures shall have shields designed to project all lighting downward and to minimize the amount of night-sky illumination. Where up lights illuminate buildings or signs, the fixture shall include a lens or louver designed to prohibit unnecessary light from being projected toward the sky or onto adjacent property.

The use of site and parking lot lighting provided by a utility company does not relieve the owner or developer from conforming to lighting design standards.

Plan Submission

Applicant shall submit a lighting site plan indicating illumination intensities on the project site as well as indicating where any light will be incident upon adjacent properties and the intensity thereof.

3.0 On-Site Signs

The existing provisions of the Chatham County Zoning Ordinance applicable to signs and the Chatham County Off-Site Signage Ordinance requirements apply where applicable in Chatham County.

The sign design shall demonstrate the following criteria:

- 3.1 Signs should be architecturally compatible with the style, composition, materials, colors, and details of the building as well as with other signs used on the building or in its vicinity, i.e. within that development project.
- 3.2 Signs should fit within the existing facade features, should be confined to signage areas, and should not interfere with door and window openings, conceal architectural details, or obscure the composition of the facade.
- 3.3 Whenever possible, signs located on buildings should be placed at the same height, in order to create

a unified signage band. The size, color, lighting design and style of all signs present in commercial projects (like shopping centers) shall be consistent throughout the entire project. This includes out-parcels, signs attached to buildings and signs at the entrance(s) to the center.

- 3.4 Sign colors should be compatible with the colors of the building facade.
- 3.5 Illuminated signs may be either spotlighted or back lighted with a diffused light source. Spotighting shall require complete shielding of all light sources; light shall be contained within the sign frame and shall not significantly spill over to other portions of the building or site. (see also, Lighting section) Neon signs shall employ low intensity colors. Flashing signs are prohibited.

4.0 Parking Lots

The Chatham County Zoning Ordinance entitled "Parking Lot Improvement, Design and Location Requirements" Section 12.2 sets forth minimum requirements for design and buffering. The following guidelines supplement those requirements. A parking plan showing compliance with these standards should be shown on the development plan submitted to the Planning Board.

- 4.1 Parking lots, wherever possible, shall be located to the side and rear of structures and away from streets and highways, thereby using buildings as a visual barrier for the parking. Otherwise, adequate screening should be provided for aesthetic purposes and to prevent the glare of auto lights upon adjacent properties.
- 4.2 Wherever possible, for purposes of traffic safety, entrances and exits shall be restricted to side streets rather than access on arterial or collector roads. Access points shall be located as far as possible from street intersections.
- 4.3 Parking spaces should not directly abut structures, leaving at least ten feet for sidewalks, landscaping, and plantings. A raised concrete walkway or landscaped strip is preferred to allow better pedestrian access and improved appearance.
- 4.4 For appearance's sake, buildings or landscape features, instead of parking areas should occupy the corner of roadway intersection sites.
- 4.5 Pedestrian safety is a paramount consideration in the design of parking lots. Parking areas should be designed so that pedestrians walk parallel to cars moving in the parking access lanes and crosswalks designated by signage painted pavement, and sometimes speed humps.
- 4.6 The minimum dimensions for parking spaces shall be 9 ft. by 18 ft. The width of bi-directional traffic

aisles shall be at least 22 ft. For angle parking, the width of the aisles shall be between 10 ft. and 18 ft., depending upon the angle. All other details of lot design shall be consistent with generally accepted design principles and as set forth in Section 12.2 of the Zoning Ordinance.

- 4.7 Landscaping and trees in parking lots improve the site's appearance as well as provide shade. Landscaped islands of at least 8 ft. in width shall be located across the end of parking aisles and at intervals of every 5 to 10 parking spaces. The density of 10 parking spaces between landscaped islands is more dense than that specified in the Zoning Ordinance; this design change is suggested for conditional use permit applications where more flexibility is given to the Planning Board in design conditions. Also, designs should seek to incorporate a center path bordered by trees (like the parking lot at RDU airport) that would provide a safe, direct, center path to the primary entrance of the principal store in the shopping center. This design would provide improved safety, and provide a logical path for return of shoppers with carts full of purchases.
- 4.8 Trees shall be planted between every other row of cars and around perimeter of lot. There shall be a minimum of one large tree (ultimately 35 ft. high at maturity) and 4 shrubs per 2000 sq.ft. of parking surface.
- 4.9 Notwithstanding the 5ft.wide x 4ft. high, 50 percent opaque buffer required by Ordinance for lots parking 10 cars or more, buffers between parking lots and residential uses shall be a minimum of 15 ft. wide x 6ft. high and 80 percent opaque within 2 years of planting.

5.0 Screening of Loading Areas

The Chatham County zoning ordinance provides for loading and delivery areas for all buildings used for trade, or industry. A minimum dimension for loading spaces and a quantity requirement for providing spaces based on building area is included. Such spaces shall have access to a public service alley, private driveway, or, if necessary, a public street.

Whenever possible, all loading areas shall be located between the building and the rear lot line of the property, and/or shall be screened from the view of the street and adjacent properties. Developments that use loading areas extensively are encouraged to recess this functional area of the building into the mass of the building or creatively blend it into the landscape using building offsets, screen walls, berms, and other design techniques.

The following is a list of screening requirements is intended to protect the public and adjacent properties from views to loading areas.

Type of Item to be Screened	Screening Requirements
Delivery door or overhead door without exterior dock and steps	None
Overhead delivery doors with loading docks and steps	6’ high screening device of solid structure (wall, fence, etc.) with low border plantings at corners or 25’ on center areas of border plantings OR An approximate 95% dense planting of evergreen shrubs and/or small trees that reaches effective density within 24 months and is maintained in perpetuity or until a landscaped fence is erected.
Loading dock areas that are also used to store recycling waste containers or outdoor stored materials for any period of time	A 95% solid wooden fence or wall at least 1’ higher than the tallest storage or equipment article. Fence shall extend to within 12” of the ground and have border plantings of evergreen shrubs that constitute an approximate 30% screen on the two most visible sides of the loading area OR An approximate 95% dense planting of evergreen shrubs and/or small trees that reaches effective density within 24 months of installation and is maintained in perpetuity or until a landscaped fence is erected.

Screening structures and landscaping may include breaks in the visual barrier for vehicular and pedestrian

egress. There, openings in the screening shall be limited to a minimum practical width and located so as to obscure line of sight from the public way.

6.0 Landscaping, Buffering, and Screening

Attractive landscaping of a project is an essential component of overall visual appeal. It affords an opportunity to soften the impact of new development. Therefore, it is important that the landscape plan demonstrate clearly thought-out goals. There are many possible approaches to achieving the degree of screening necessary for the various conditional use districts. A clearly stated rationale should accompany the landscaping plan that explains how the plan both serves the needs of the project and fits in with the rural Chatham County setting. For example, some factors that may be addressed are as follows:

- site conditions such as the amount of sun or shade, slope, and wet or dry areas
- representative native species of both canopy and under story trees to provide continuity with wooded areas nearby
- plants that provide screening in cold seasons
- cost and maintenance considerations
- growth rates
- flowering species that can benefit both passersby and beneficial insects.

Landscaping plants shall be selected that are, for the most part, a naturally occurring species and arrangement for the area. The use of non-naturally occurring and rare plantings is not discouraged for "specimen" and "contrast" plantings.

- 6.1** A landscaping plan must be submitted with every conditional use permit application. Landscaping refers to topography, trees, shrubs, grass, and vegetation. The landscaping plan shall indicate where existing trees and vegetation are preserved.
- 6.2** A buffer is a strip of land with the screening required thereon. Screening may include landscaping, walls, fences, hedges, berms, and existing vegetation.
- 6.3** Street trees shall be required along streets at intervals of 40 ft. Each tree shall be of at least 2-1/2 inch caliper when installed and be a height of 30 ft. at maturity.
- 6.4** Chain link fences are to be discouraged unless screened by vegetation.
- 6.5** Plantings adjacent to building walls should be included along sides of buildings where devoid of architectural interest.
- 6.6** The buffer width, height, and appropriate screening for commercial uses adjacent to other

commercial uses, adjacent to residential/rural use, or to land zoned as such shall be in accordance with Table 6-A.

Table 6-A
Landscape Buffering Requirements
Feet of Width and Screen Type

Screen A: Opaque-- 8 ft. high opaque and intermittent visual obstruction to 20 ft. high

Screen B: Semi-opaque--3 ft. high opaque and intermittent visual obstruction to 20 ft. high

Screen C: Broken screen--intermittent visual obstruction to height of 20 ft.

(Opaque is defined as dense, year round foliage that obscures the identity of objects)

Proposed land use class	For adjacent property development					Land use across an adjacent street				
	B-1	O&I	Ind-L	Ind-H	R-A	B-1	O-I	Ind -L	Ind -H	R-A
B-1: Commercial - width - type	10 ft. B	15 ft. B	15 ft. A	15 ft. A	15 ft. A	10 ft. C	15 ft. C	10 ft. C	10 ft. C	15 ft. B
O&I: Office & Institutional	15 ft. B	10 ft. B	15 ft. A	15 ft. A	15 ft. A	15 ft. C	10 ft. C	10 ft. C	10 ft. C	15 ft. B
Ind-L: Light Industrial	40 ft. B	40 ft. B	10 ft. C	10 ft. C	40 ft. A	10 ft. C	15 ft. C	10 ft. C	10 ft. C	40 ft. A
Ind-H: Heavy Industrial	50ft. A	60ft. A	20ft. C	none	80 ft. A	20ft. C	30ft. C	10ft. C	10ft. C	50ft. A

R-A: Residential and
 Agricultural None required

Buffering requirements to protect usages across adjacent streets shall employ the densest buffer when a combination of land uses exists.

B-1 to R-A buffers may not match the zoning ordinance requirements (see page 52). As this is an extension of the zoning ordinance with regards to the buffer for parking lots.