



# VIBRANT

## BLOCKS FOR BUSINESS

A Main Street Design Guide for More Beautiful Commercial Districts

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### PLAN REVIEW

April, 2022

# Our Team

## > CITY OF DETROIT

### Planning and Development Department

In coordination with:  
BSEED  
General Services Department

## > CONSULTANT TEAM

### Interface Studio

Lead, planning and urban  
design

### Sidewalk Detroit

Community Engagement

### Smithgroup

Architecture & technical  
support

# Why are we here tonight?

This is a presentation of the draft Vibrant Blocks for Business: Commercial Design Guidelines for the City of Detroit.

## AGENDA

- 30 minute presentation about the project, our process, and what's included in the guidelines
- General Q + A
- How to provide your feedback on the draft!

As a courtesy, **please remain muted during the presentation**. During the Q+A **you may use the “raise hand” button** at the bottom of your screen. The moderator will unmute you when ready.

# What are we trying to achieve in Detroit?

more just  
more beautiful  
more vibrant  
main streets +  
commercial  
districts

A commercial main street or district that's designed well can:

- **support local businesses** and incubate new ones
- stimulate hyper-local economies and **keep money in the community**
- provide **access to needed jobs, goods and services**
- **encourage walking** and alternative transportation
- be the **center of cultural and social activity**

# What do the Design Guidelines do?

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## The Design Guidelines:

- Create clear, easy to use guidance for the **design of future development or rehabs** on commercial corridors
- Illustrate design elements of **different types of development** but not specific locations
- **Supplement the Zoning Ordinance**

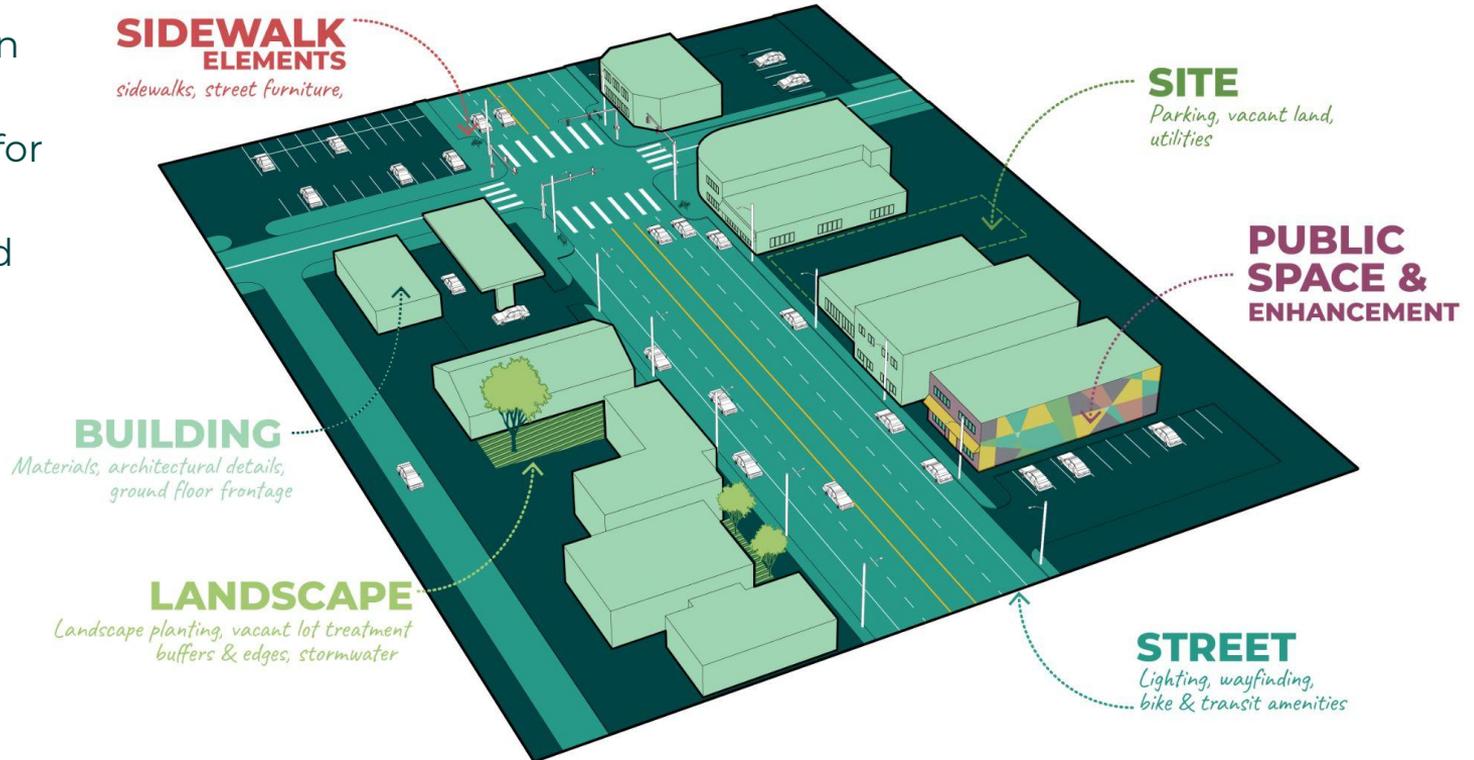
*Zone Detroit is set to be released soon. This guidance document will work to complement that work and will be referenced in the new code, similar to the way TMSO reference design guidelines now*

## The Design Guidelines **don't**:

- Make planning or design recommendations for **geographically specific commercial corridors**
- Define design elements that are **specific to character or vibe of the area** or neighborhood
- **Recommend any zoning changes** to the code, specific properties or commercial districts

# What design guidance is included?

The final document is an **easy to use design guide** for small scale developers and businesses.

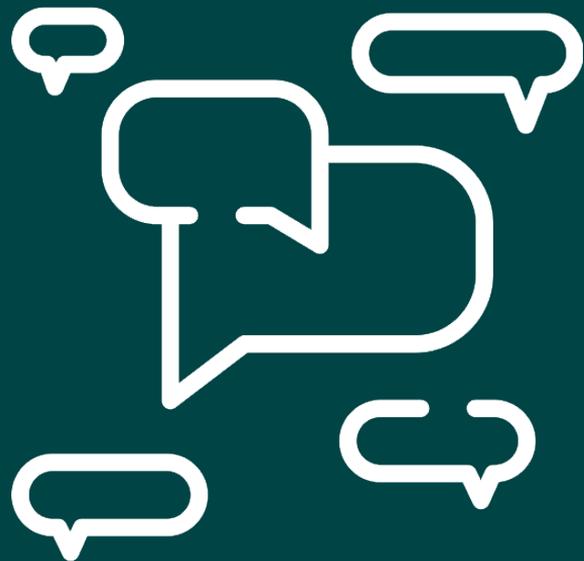


# When should you use this guide?

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This guide should be referenced while **building new development on a commercial street**, but also any major renovation or updates, including:

- When you're making changes to your building or site
- When you're updating your facade
- When you are looking to build a new structure
- When you're adding outdoor dining
- When you're redoing your parking lot
- At conceptual review meetings



# **Our Process**

# Our Process



If you are one of the **700+ residents**, community organizations, property owners or small businesses engaged over the last year or so we want to thank you!

# What we heard, THE GUIDELINES NEED TO:

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## WHAT WE HEARD:

- Commercial streets need to be Clean and Safe, and that **even the healthiest corridors are in need of care.**

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- **Frame the importance of first impressions** to create a great customer experience

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- **Provide more clarity, support and space for innovation:** allow for expression + character and to respond to different communities

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- **Community members are very passionate about seeing corridors thrive** across all areas of design

## HOW VBB RESPONDS:

- The document seeks to provide clarity where possible on **who is responsible for what** when it comes to litter, broken sidewalks, etc.

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- Much of the focus of the document is on the **exterior of the building and site design**, and how it relates to the surrounding community.

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- Guidance was **designed to be flexible and diagrammatic**, so designs can be tailored to individual communities.

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- Chapter 5 **Checklists** ensure any design or property meets the VBB goals.



**How to use this  
guide, and  
what's in it!**

**one**

**what makes a vibrant commercial street or district?**

**two**

**development resource guide**

**three**

**building blocks for vibrant blocks: property type**

**four**

**building blocks for vibrant blocks: elements**

**five**

**vibrant blocks checklist**

# What makes a great commercial main street or district?





This document aims to work together to create commercial districts that are:

- SAFE & COMFORTABLE**
- CLEAN & MAINTAINED**
- GREEN & RESILIENT**
- WALKABLE & HUMAN-SCALE**
- UNIQUE & AUTHENTIC**
- LIVELY & ACTIVATED**
- INCLUSIVE & DIVERSE**



## Bringing it all together

more just  
more beautiful  
more vibrant  
main streets +  
commercial  
districts

# Development resource guide



# KEY RESOURCES

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*Start here!*



## **DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE CENTER**

The DRC can answer your development questions and provide you with resources & direction to accomplish your projects.

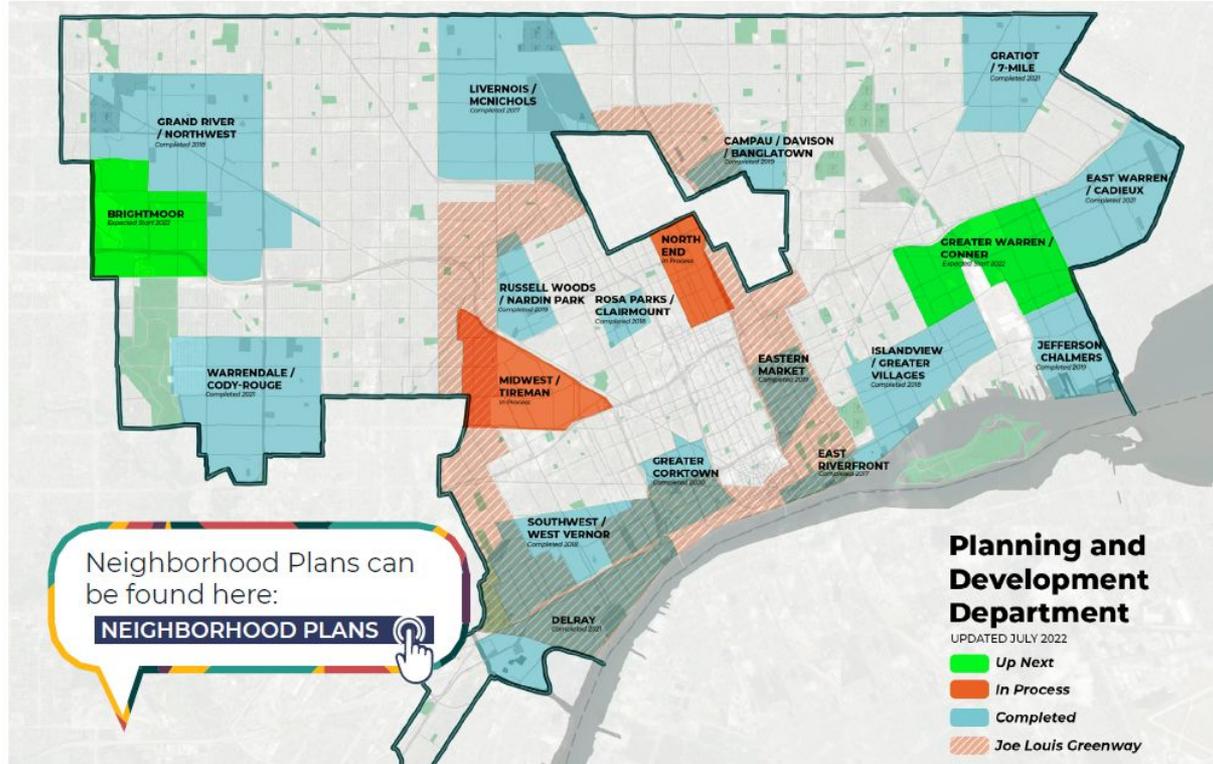


## **"OPEN FOR BUSINESS" GUIDE**

Provides a step-by-step overview of the development process as well as relevant contact information.

# DO YOUR RESEARCH!

1. Consider contacting your District Business Liaison
2. Consider talking to your DON representative
3. Explore the permitting portal
4. Check your Neighborhood Framework Plan
5. Identify who owns the commercial street fronting your business location



## Projects that may require PDD Design Review:

ZONING REVIEW	HISTORIC REVIEW	LAND SALES	PUBLIC INCENTIVES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public Center Adjacent (PCA)</li> <li>Planned Development (PD)</li> <li>Traditional Main Street Overlay (TMSO)</li> <li>Rezoning/ Master Plan Amendments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The property is located within a Historic District</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA)</li> <li>Detroit Building Authority (DBA)</li> <li>Community Outreach Ordinance (COO)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PA 198 District</li> <li>Brownfield TIF</li> <li>Community Benefits Ordinance (CBO) - Tier 1 OR Tier 2)</li> </ul>

### Did you know?

Proposals for development should follow basic urban design principles and established neighborhood development strategies as described by the PDD Guiding Principles

The City of Detroit is committed to advancing equity, sustainability, resilience, and healthy living for those who live, work and play within and around project areas. Proposals for development should follow basic urban design principles and established neighborhood development strategies as described by the PDD Guiding Principles below. During Design Review, the Planning and Development Department will evaluate all new residential, commercial, and mixed-use projects against these principles and provide feedback on each.



#### HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The intent of development is to preserve existing structures and complement the urban fabric through a thoughtful and intentional approach to design.



#### ACTIVATE THE PUBLIC REALM

All projects shall build upon the walkable environment, providing a transparent and interactive building frontage and ground level meant to intrigue pedestrians through design and active uses.



#### MAINTAIN/INTEGRATE THE STREET GRID

Many city blocks have been combined into superblocks or developments built facing inward. The goal is for new development to be directly integrated into the existing street grid – not to



#### APPROPRIATE DENSITY

Any new building shall be appropriate in scale with surroundings.



#### BUILDING FORM AND MATERIAL

The sites shall incorporate sound urban design and established development principles. The built environment shall provide interesting building typologies of varied architectural styles and complement, not mimic, the nature of the existing urban fabric.



#### PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE

Where appropriate, alleyways will serve as the main point of automotive ingress and egress. Car accidents, public right of way will be minimized or obsolete in order to provide a safe, walkable, pedestrian oriented street design.



#### PARKING AND ACCESS

All on-site parking shall be appropriately landscaped or be screened from view, preferably developing parking lot edges of the site with new construction in order to shield the parking from view.



#### SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

All developments should strive to embrace sustainable practices that create healthier living environments while aiming to minimize the negative impacts of the built environment and achieving long-term energy and resource efficiency as well as universal design.



#### STREET FRONTAGE

All new construction shall be designed along the front lot line of the property adjacent to the public right of way. Parking shall not be provided between the building frontage and the street edge.



#### BUFFERING & SCREENING

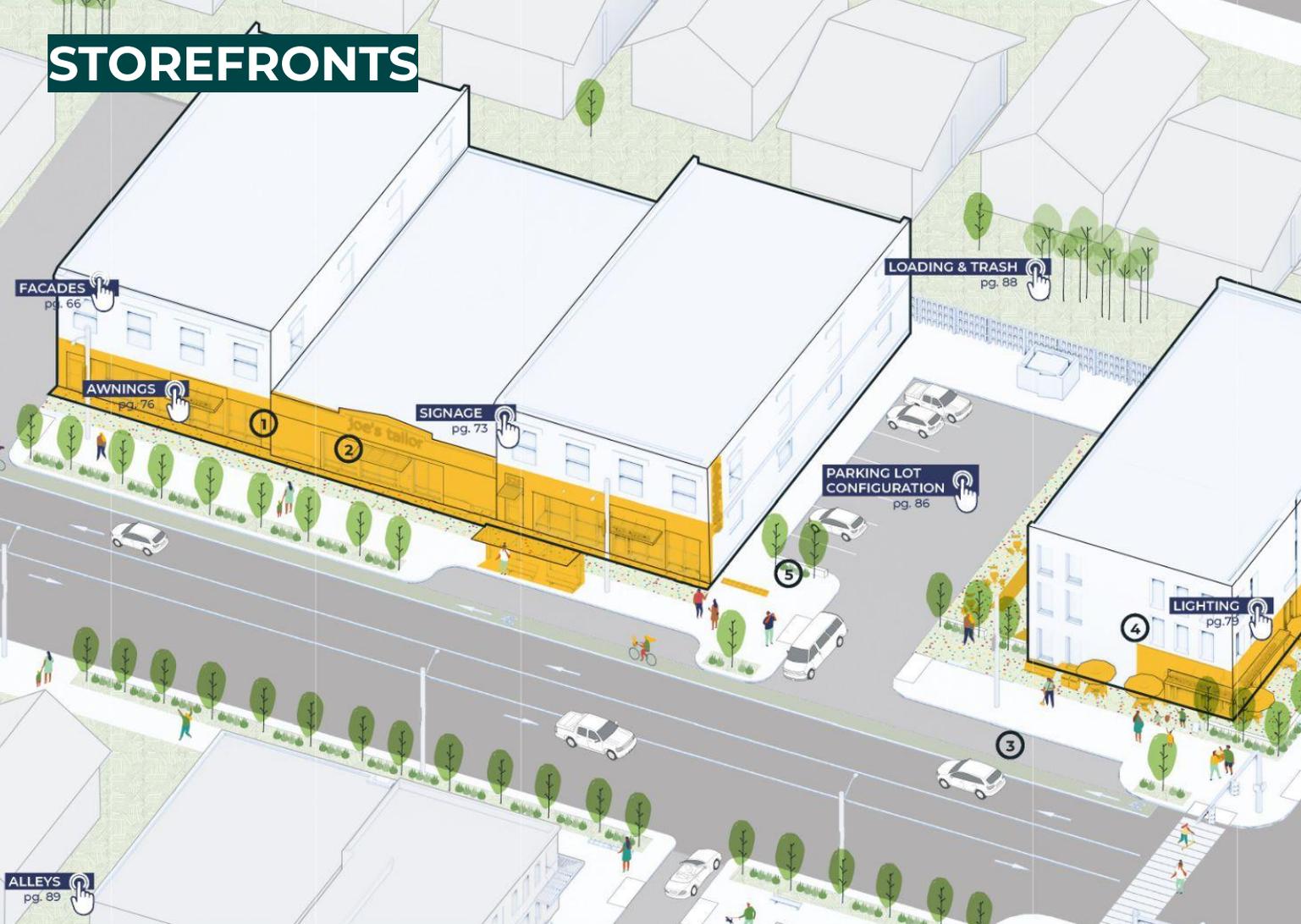
Expand the use of green belts and natural buffer zones to protect residential areas from commercial and industrial areas which are environmentally detrimental to nearby residential neighborhoods. Minimize and screen outdoor storage and work areas.



# Building blocks for vibrant blocks: property type

three

# STOREFRONTS



## DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

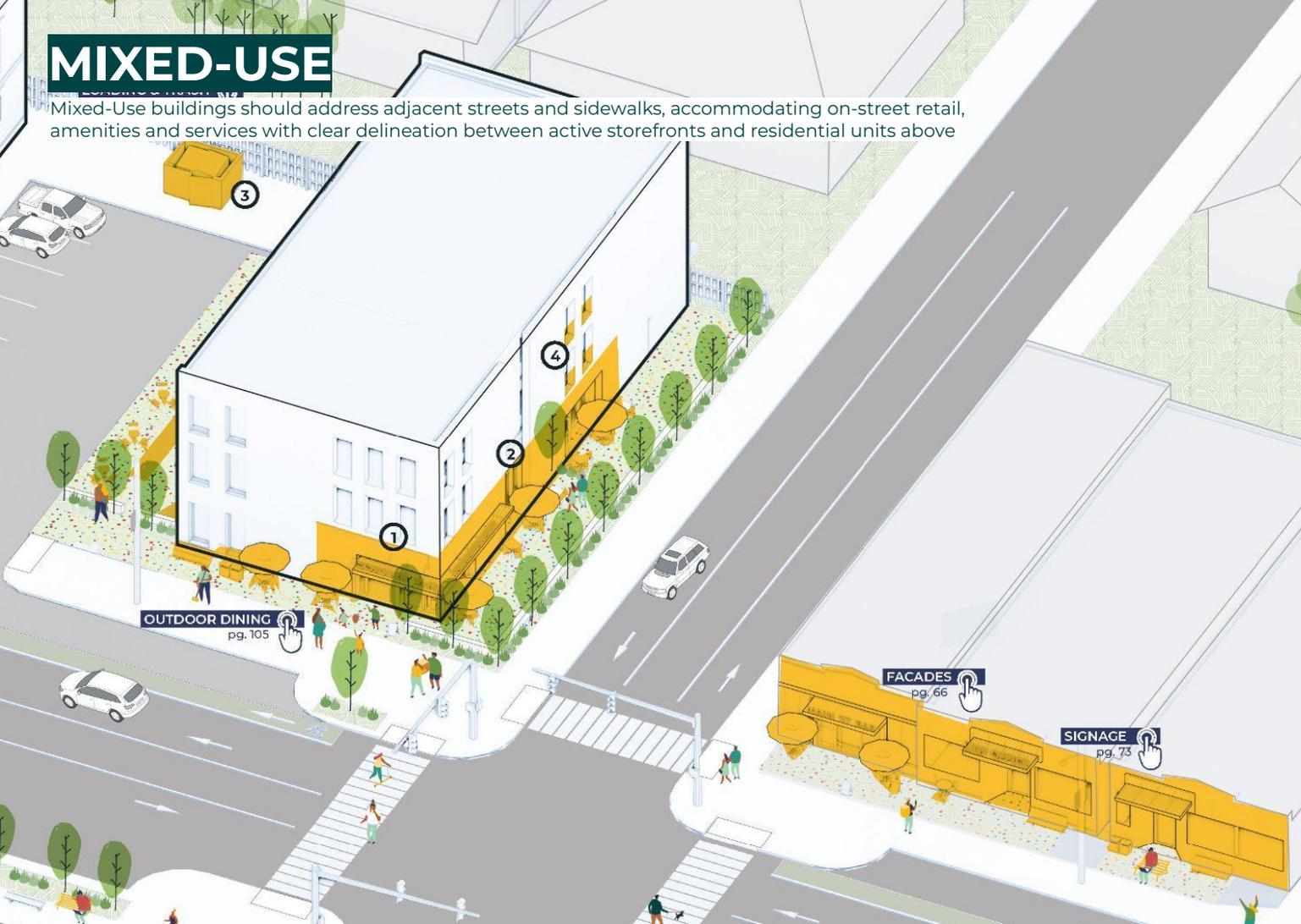
- 1 Orient your building and entryways to the sidewalk
- 2 Incorporate visual interest at the ground level including frequent windows, awnings, indentations, outdoor dining, etc.
- 3 Incorporate loading zones for both deliveries and customer pick up/drop off
- 4 For projects located at intersections, continue the design treatments around the corner
- 5 Screen parking and loading areas

## AVOID

- Placing your parking lot in front of your building
- Residential lobby entrances that are on the sides of buildings or difficult to find
- Creating excessive parking spaces or multiple curb cuts

# MIXED-USE

Mixed-Use buildings should address adjacent streets and sidewalks, accommodating on-street retail, amenities and services with clear delineation between active storefronts and residential units above



## DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

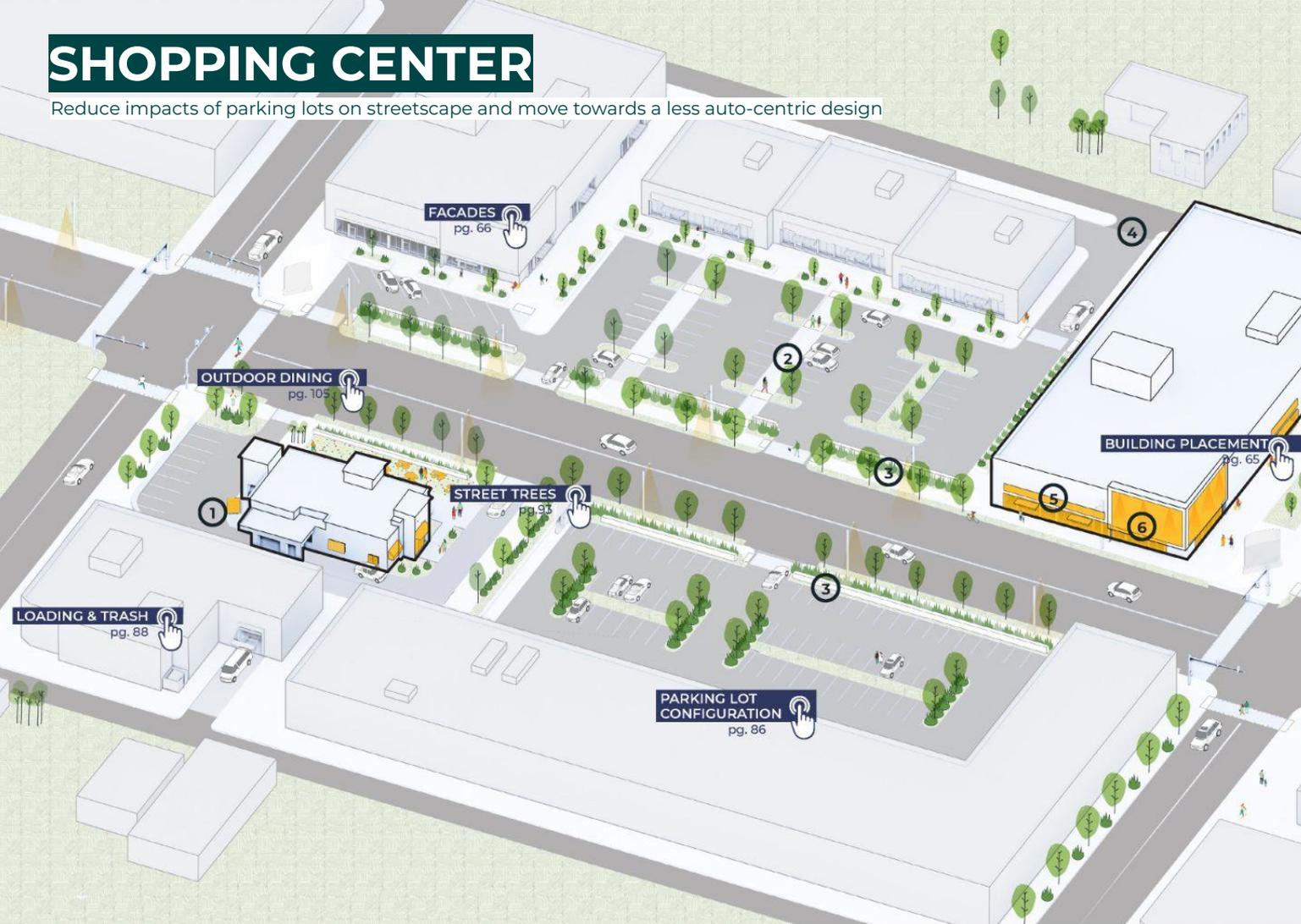
- 1 Offer engaging ground floor storefronts and uses, with visible and identifiable multifamily or office windows and balconies above
- 2 Clearly identify and distinguish multifamily residential entries with well-lit access and entry vestibules visible from the street
- 3 Place support service, trash and resident loading access at the rear of the property with easy access, out of sight of pedestrians, customers and residents
- 4 Consider discrete residential balconies and rooftop access, while also minimizing on-street sight lines into residential units

## AVOID

- Building and program placement that conflicts with common service and maintenance access points
- On-site parking between the building and street

# SHOPPING CENTER

Reduce impacts of parking lots on streetscape and move towards a less auto-centric design



## DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

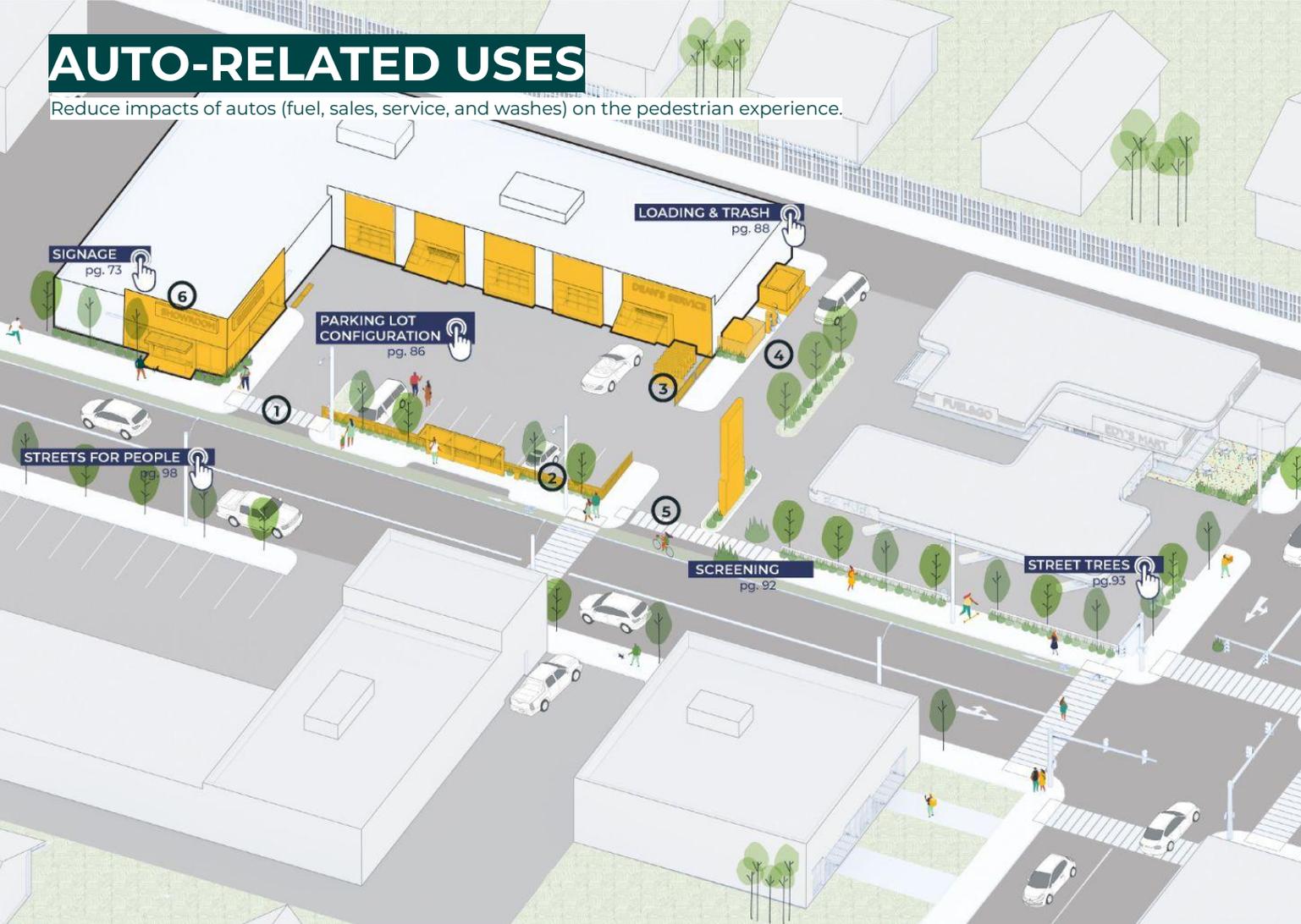
- 1 Locate drive-thru windows and loading bays for deliveries at the rear of buildings
- 2 Prioritize pedestrian amenities and walkways throughout the site should be prioritized in the siteplan
- 3 Screen parking areas, add landscaping, street furniture, and human scale architectural details, and align curb cuts with parking aisles
- 4 Provide secondary entrances off alleys when appropriate
- 5 Place new buildings along the street to reduce conflict points with vehicles and pedestrians
- 6 Emphasize building entrances and keep windows clear to show activity inside

## AVOID

- Placing your parking lot in front of your building for new buildings
- Creating excessive parking spaces or multiple curb cuts
- Parking lots that do not have pedestrian circulation or screening
- Locating blank facades along the street or in highly visible locations

# AUTO-RELATED USES

Reduce impacts of autos (fuel, sales, service, and washes) on the pedestrian experience.



## DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

- 1 Limit the number of driveways as much as possible. Maximum curb cut width should not exceed 24 feet.
- 2 Screen parking areas, add landscaping, street furniture, and human scale architectural details, and align curb cuts with parking aisles.
- 3 Screen storage areas, including storage of materials, tires and cars
- 4 Utilize alleys and side streets for circulation if possible
- 5 Simplify auto access, consolidate driveway entrances where possible
- 6 Emphasize building entrances and keep windows clear to show activity inside. Place new buildings at the street.

## AVOID

- Placing your parking lot in front of your building for new buildings
- Creating excessive parking spaces or multiple curb cuts
- Parking lots that do not have pedestrian circulation or screening

# RESIDENTIAL

Effectively integrate residential uses into vibrant commercial corridors.

**PARKING LOT CONFIGURATION**  
pg. 86

**STREET TREES**  
pg. 93

**EVENTS + PROGRAMMING**  
pg. 109

**ALLEYS**  
pg. 89

**FENCING & SCREENING**  
pg. 92

## DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

- 1 Residential entrances should front the street to promote a sense of community, safety, and encourage eyes on the street
- 2 Open spaces should be incorporated in residential blocks with pedestrian access to provide recreation amenities
- 3 Place parking in the rear and locate garages and storage in the rear yard via alley access
- 4 Activate front entrances with landscaping, pathways, and human scale design.
- 5 Keep in mind privacy, noise, light, and traffic impacts on existing neighborhoods

## AVOID

- Placing your parking lot or garages in front of your building

# INDUSTRIAL

Industrial facilities should be clean and secure, supporting ease of access for employees and suppliers while maintaining appealing, well-maintained street-facing facades.

FACADE DESIGN  
pg. 67

PARKING LOT  
SCREENING  
pg. 86

BIKE RACKS  
pg. 92

STORMWATER  
MANAGEMENT  
pg. 95

LOADING & TRUCK  
pg. 98

## Did you know?

The City of Detroit provides more detailed design guidelines specifically for industrial properties. Click the link below to review them.

[INDUSTRIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES](#)

## DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

- 1 Orient loading and service docks away from adjacent streets, sidewalks and open spaces, while providing sufficient space for truck loading and access
- 2 Maintain a consistent street frontage facing sidewalks with façade storefronts where feasible, as well as visible entries for access
- 3 Ensure rooftop mechanical systems are screened or remain below the line of sight from adjacent sidewalks
- 4 Reduce or isolate any mechanical system noise or noxious fumes
- 5 Maintain discrete locations for dumpsters and other frequent services

## AVOID

- On-street or curbside loading
- Street facing parking lots
- Fully opaque facades
- Overly bright on-street security lighting and signage

# Building blocks for vibrant blocks: elements

The word "four" is rendered in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. Each letter is filled with a different color and features a diagonal split. The 'f' is purple and yellow. The 'o' is yellow and purple. The 'u' is yellow and purple. The 'r' is purple and red. The letters are set against a white background.

# Building Blocks Components

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## BUILDING

- Building Placement
- Facade Design
- Exterior Materials
- Signs
- Awnings & Canopies
- Security Doors & Grills
- Vacant Building

## LIGHTING

- Lighting

## SITE

- Parking Location & Layout
- Parking Lot Screening + Buffers
- Loading & Trash
- Alleys
- Accessibility

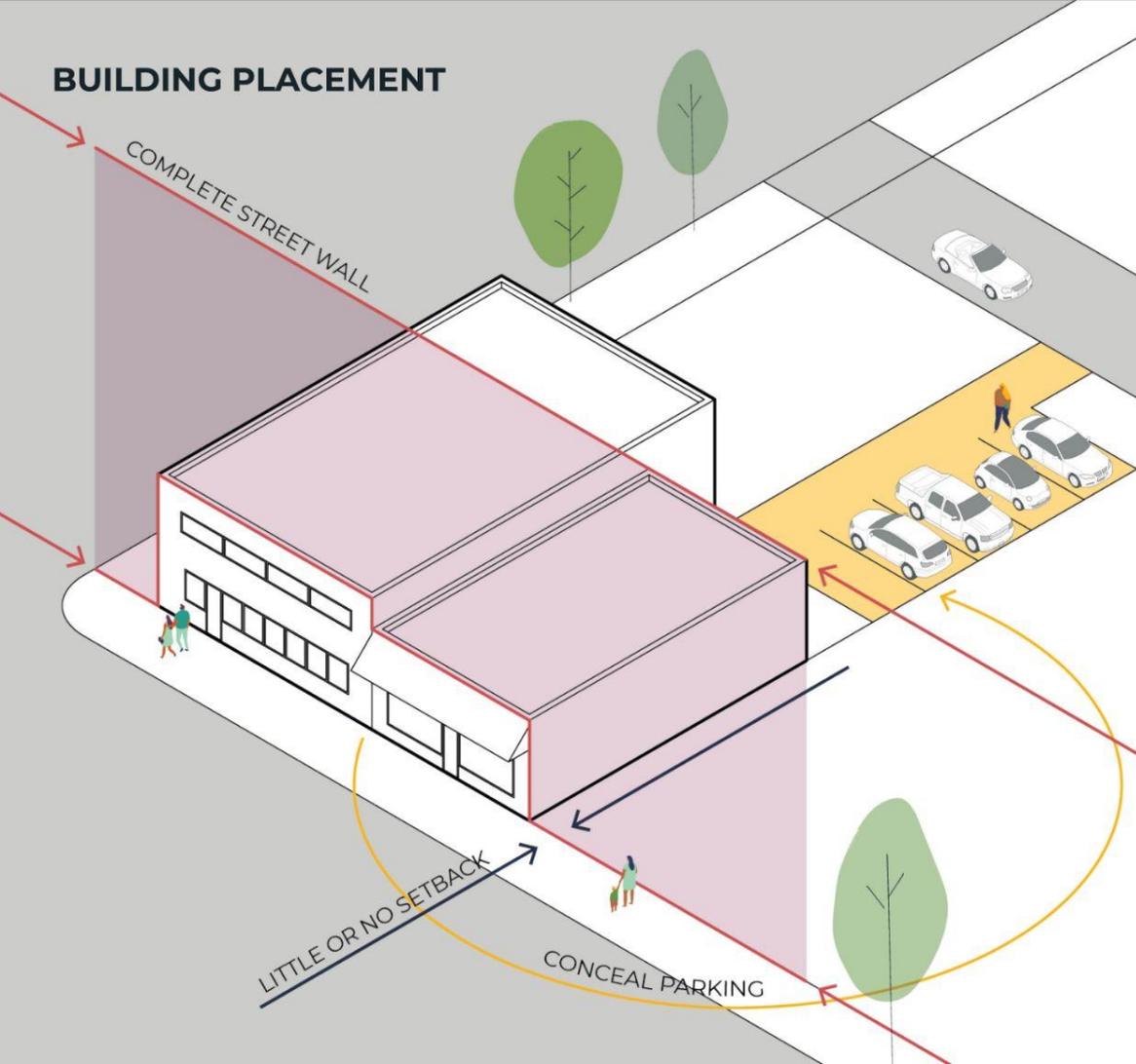
## LANDSCAPE

- Fencing
- Street trees
- Landscaping
- Vacant Lots

## STREETS, SIDEWALKS & PUBLIC SPACES

- Streets for People
- Sidewalks
- Street Furniture
- Outdoor Dining
- Bike + Transit Amenities
- Public Art + Murals
- Events + Programming

## BUILDING PLACEMENT



## VIBRANT BLOCKS HAVE BUILDINGS THAT...

- Create a feel of a continuous, active edge along the whole block
- Position the front door facing the street with little to no setback to reinforce the street wall
- Use setbacks, sideyards, and gaps to enhance the block by designing plazas, landscaping, or outdoor dining areas and plazas
- Prioritize pedestrian access to the commercial corridor frontage, sidewalk, and building entry

## REQUIREMENTS

- Primary entrance must face the street
- Building needs to be accessible by pedestrian pathways from the sidewalk and parking lot.
- No greater than a 10-foot setback in TMSO districts

## AVOID

- Buildings set too far back from the property line without activation of the setback

## FAÇADE DESIGN



*Elements to consider to enhance your building's facade...*



**1 WELCOMING STOREFRONTS**

The use of windows, lighting, and architectural details clearly define entrances and make a welcoming space.



**2 GROUND FLOOR DETAILS**

Design focuses on the experience at the pedestrian level. Human scale façade details can help bring a larger building down to earth.



**3 ORDERLY WINDOWS & OPENINGS**

Create a sense of order and unity in your building's openings. Consistent scaling of windows and patterns should be compatible with neighboring buildings.



**4 ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS**

Maintaining and creating buildings with details such as cornices, parapets, grouped bays make an appealing design.



**5 MECHANICAL SCREENING**

Extend facade material beyond the building structure + add elements to hide mechanical equipment from view.



**6 INTEGRATED GREENERY**

Adding living walls and integrated planters can soften the edges and add visual interest to your building.

# EXTERIOR MATERIALS

## VIBRANT BLOCKS HAVE MATERIALS THAT ARE...

- Detailed **consistently on all sides** of a structure that are visible from streets or an adjacent residential district
- **Complementary to one another** in terms of color, texture, scale, and orientation. Variation in materials should be intentional as a part of the building and facade design
- **Harmonious** in hue, texture, tone, and intensity **with the adjacent buildings and surrounding area.**
- **Preserved when a building is renovated.**

## REQUIREMENTS

- Build with high-quality materials
- Additional requirements apply if the property is in a Traditional Main Street Overlay (TMSO) area.

## AVOID

- Large scale exterior concrete panels and exterior concrete masonry units (CMU) or “cinder block”
- Sandblasting or pressure washing without consulting a professional. These methods may damage a building in irreversible and expensive ways
- Painting natural materials such as stone or brick
- The use of dark and highly reflective materials

## PRIMARY MATERIALS

This document encourages the use of durable and easy to maintain materials that hold up well over time as the primary material for a building.



BRICK MASONRY



STONE MASONRY

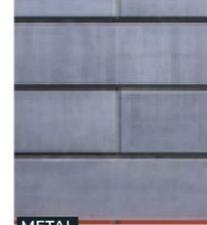


## SECONDARY MATERIALS

support the use of a building's primary materials. This may include using them on side or rear facades or to emphasize key facade design elements.



SIDING



METAL



## SPECIAL USE OR LIMITED USE MATERIALS

Limited Use materials should be used sparingly on a building's exterior or facade.



STUCCO



SPLIT-FACED BLOCK



# SIGNS

## VIBRANT BLOCKS HAVE SIGNAGE THAT...

- Complements and enhances the character of the corridor
- Is visible and legible to passersby on foot, bike, or in vehicles
- Is inviting and unique
- Is designed to celebrate the business

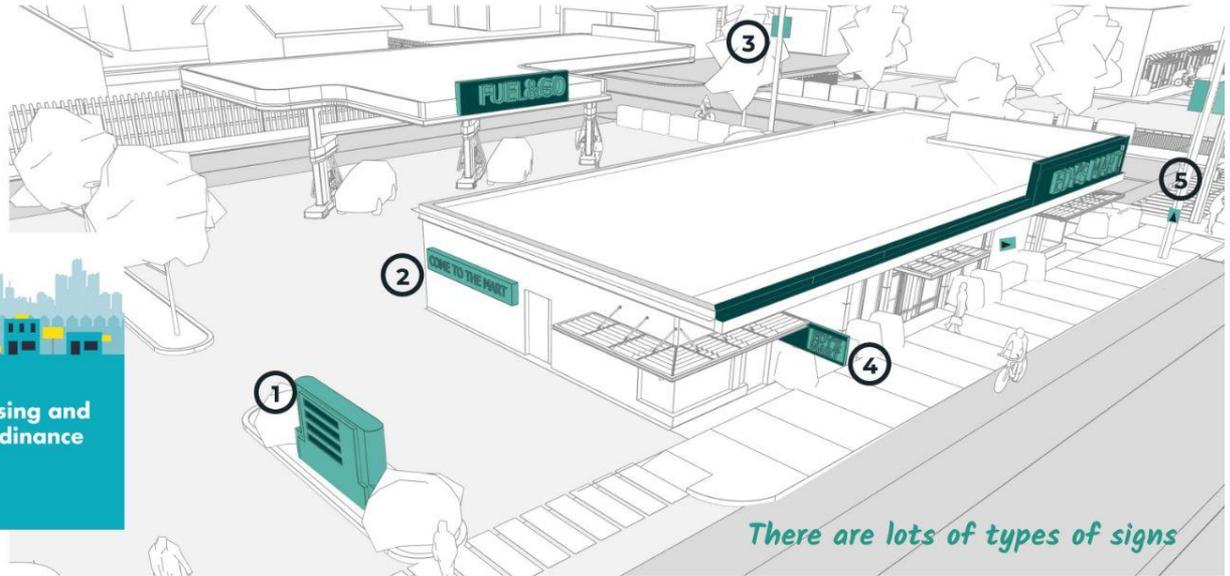
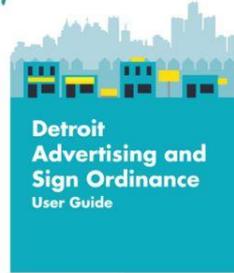
*Make sure your sign is permit compliant!*

## REQUIREMENTS

- Sign size and placement in compliance with regulations
- Licensed & permitted installation

## AVOID

- Obstructing windows, architectural details, or pedestrian movement
- Signs that move or flash, except in designated districts
- Exceeding sign size outlined in code
- Filling windows with signage
- Excessive numbers of signs



*There are lots of types of signs*



MONUMENT SIGNS



WALL SIGNS



POLE SIGNS



PROJECTING SIGNS



WAYFINDING SIGNAGE

# PARKING LOCATION + LAYOUT

## VIBRANT BLOCKS HAVE PARKING THAT IS...

- Located to the rear of the building and well-screened
- Minimized to efficiently serve the site and shared among multiple buildings wherever possible
- Well-organized with safe, connected pedestrian pathways
- Enhanced with landscaping, stormwater infrastructure, and/or public art

## REQUIREMENTS

- Ensure parking stall and circulation layout and striping are in compliance with code
- Keep lot and surrounding sidewalks free from dirt, ice, litter, sleet, and snow
- Enclose lot with 3-foot barrier along all street or alley frontages
- Provide a smooth and durable surface with proper drainage
- Provide appropriate lighting
- Create one common entrance and one common exit
- Minimize instances where vehicles cross pedestrian pathways
- Conform to accessible parking regulations
- Conform to any additional standards specific to zoning district

## AVOID

- Expanses of parking lot lining the street
- Parking lots without screening or enclosures
- Trash or weeds accumulating in pavement or along curbs and sidewalks
- Parking lot surfaces that are not ADA compliant
- Inadequate lighting
- Multiple entrance and exit driveways



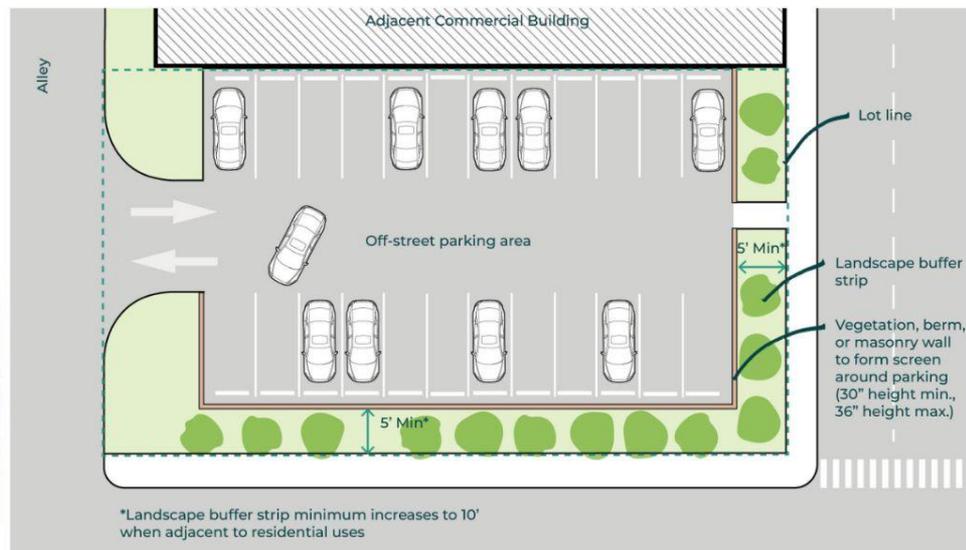
SCREENING & LANDSCAPING



ACTIVATE EDGES



MINIMIZE DISRUPTION OF SIDEWALKS





## Vibrant sidewalks might look like these...



### What's my responsibility to keep clean and repair?

Property owners are responsible to clean and maintain safe passage for pedestrian along the sidewalk segment, curbs, and parking lanes in front of their property.



## Some areas in need of repair...



BROKEN, OBSTRUCTED SIDEWALKS



OVERGROWTH OF GRASS OR MISSING CURBS

## HOW TO... Repair or replace a portion of sidewalk in front of your business

- In some cases, **the City will include sidewalk repair or replacement as part of a major streetscape project.** To find out if a project is planned for your corridor, visit DPW's project information site.
- If a sidewalk is significantly damaged, broken or deteriorated, and no City improvement project is planned for that location, **it is the responsibility of the property owner to repair the issue.**
- The city will make **exceptions if the sidewalk has been uplifted by root growth** from trees located between the sidewalk and the street under the "Tree Guarantee Policy"-- use City's Sidewalk Damage Map.
- To repair a sidewalk, you can hire a contractor or elect to do the work yourself. In either case, **make sure the necessary permits are obtained.**

# LANDSCAPING

## VIBRANT BLOCKS MIGHT HAVE/USE...

- Plantings and planters that provide that beautify the street throughout the year within Amenity Zone of a sidewalk, in curb extensions or raised medians.
- Native Plants that require less maintenance or irrigation than traditional plantings.
- Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) to capture stormwater that may fall during a heavy rain or snow melt

## REQUIREMENTS

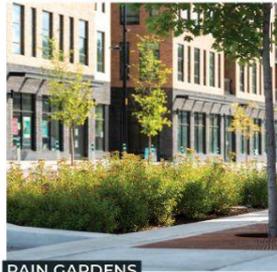
- Select plant species based on benefits for native wildlife and pollinators, regional hardiness (USDA Zone 6a and 6b), soil conditions and drainage, progeny, tolerance of urban conditions, seasonal color, biodiversity, and root structure
- Select plants that are tolerant of short periods of inundation and long dry periods, as well as salt-tolerant if capturing runoff from streets or sidewalks
- Use low-growing plants (under 30") where sight distance must be preserved (e.g. crosswalk locations and locations where personal safety is a concern)
- Understand and plan for maintenance and snow removal when considering plantings in any part of a sidewalk

## AVOID

- Plantings that require a lot of water if you do not have a plan for irrigation



TREE TRENCHES

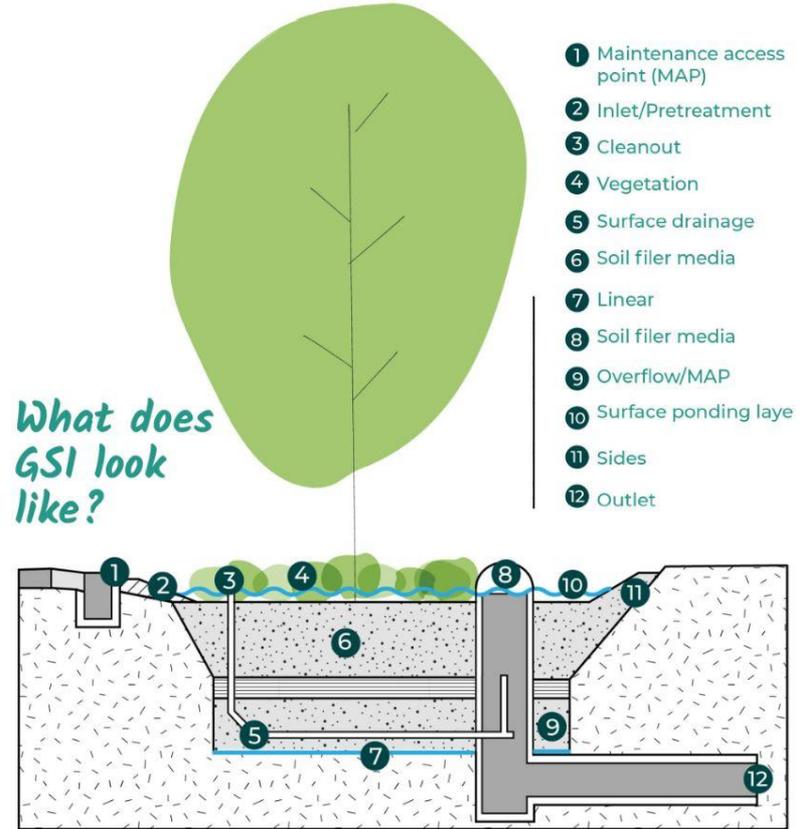


RAIN GARDENS



STORMWATER PLANTERS

What does GSI look like?

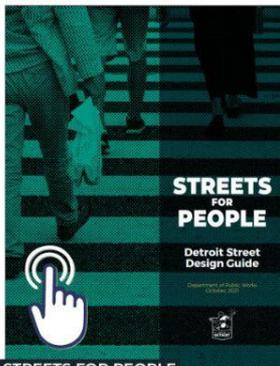


## STREETS FOR PEOPLE

The City of Detroit created the **Streets For People: Detroit Street Design Guide** to support decision-making for street planning, design, and engineering. *Streets For People* provides guidance for commercial streets based on street typology, and includes best practices from everything from sidewalk design to street furniture.

Designing streets that prioritize people walking, biking and taking transit requires that attention and resources be devoted to sidewalk space, bike facilities, and accommodations for transit users. More flexibility can also be built into the curbside zone so it serves multiple users.

### KEY RESOURCE:



### STREETS FOR PEOPLE

The City of Detroit now has a Streets for People Plan to make it easier and safer for all Detroiters to be mobile throughout the city. The transportation plan prioritizes improving safety for all Detroiters, especially our most vulnerable residents, and identifies clear implementation and design strategies for street improvements.

## HOW TO...

### *Slow down traffic through design!*

Detroit's streets are often wide, and many of the participants in this study asked for resources to calm traffic. Traditional traffic calming measures on commercial streets can be challenging due to varying street ownership. Reach out to your District Manager to see if the Department of Public Works can provide traffic calming measures.

There are also ways to slow down traffic through design tactics. By creating a more pedestrian and bike friendly environment, you can help to reduce the number of cars on the road. Planting street trees, providing bike parking stalls on your sidewalk, and minimizing your parking footprint can all help to create a safer, slower street for all.



# Vibrant blocks checklist



# PROPERTY OWNERS

Use this checklist to ensure your plan for development is achieving the goals set forth in this document.



## SAFE & COMFORTABLE

- Property is well-lit
- Vacant lots are secured

Buildings are easy for people to see into and out of, creating transparency between the street and the building's ground floor

- Security grates, if used, are mostly transparent
- Cameras, if used, are clearly marked
- Bulletproof glass, if used, is inconspicuous
- Fencing does not contain razor wire



## CLEAN & MAINTAINED

- Parking lots and sidewalks are free of weeds and overgrowth
- Exterior building materials are well-maintained, and free of graffiti and unnecessary excess signage
- Trash bins are regularly emptied
- Vacant buildings are secured and upkept



## WALKABLE & HUMAN-SCALE

- Pedestrian-friendly amenities are located on the property
- The front door looks welcoming
- The building frontage has appropriate signage
- Walkways are free of obstructions



## LIVELY & ACTIVATED

- Space outside the business is maintained and includes seating, planters and/or other amenities for customers
- Outdoor dining opportunities are provided in appropriate places



## GREEN & RESILIENT

- Rain gardens and rain barrels are installed
- Green roofs and porous pavement are included
- Green buffers are used instead of fencing where possible



## UNIQUE & AUTHENTIC

- The building façade is attractive and unique
- The signage helps illustrate what is sold inside
- Cultural heritage is uplifted through public art and building design
- Temporary signage is tasteful and uncluttered
- Chain signage is appropriately scaled and does not dominate the corridor



## INCLUSIVE & DIVERSE

- Access and circulation requirements are met, with an aspiration towards Universal Design

**THANK YOU!**

**Please provide your  
feedback on the draft!**

**Follow the link in the chat, or visit:**

**[detroitmi.gov/vibrantblocks](https://detroitmi.gov/vibrantblocks)**

# Questions?



**Use the raised hand function if you'd like to speak**

**Please keep your questions or comments to 1 minute.**



You can also submit your question or comment directly to Russell Baltimore via email: [baltimorer@detroitmi.gov](mailto:baltimorer@detroitmi.gov) or fill out our feedback form



## How to Contact Us

By phone: (313) 628-0257

City of Detroit contact: Russell Baltimore [baltimorer@detroitmi.gov](mailto:baltimorer@detroitmi.gov)



## Where to find the draft document:

[detroitmi.gov/vibrantblocks](https://detroitmi.gov/vibrantblocks)