OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE
New development comes with the obligation to implement sustainable design and construction practices that incorporate technological innovation and green building practices. It should strive to address the highest sustainable and ecological principles using advanced green technologies and materials, and promoting high performance building. New buildings should be constructed with local, low-embodied energy materials and constructed with the highest standards for environmental sustainability.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION
Urban regeneration means more than simply building anew; historic preservation is an effective economic development strategy. The reuse and reapplication of existing buildings should be encouraged in addition to new development as they provide a direct connection to Watertown’s past. Existing buildings that have retained cultural significance can form the basis for economic development and growth.

WATERTOWN’S COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

Watertown is defined by its relationship to the Charles River, as well as by its squares and the commercial corridor that links them. Together, these stitch together the various residential neighborhoods which make up the majority of the Town.

The Design Guidelines focus on these links and nodes, outlining best practices to guide sustainable future growth. By strengthening the character of these major corridors, greater connectivity and a richer “sense of place” can be achieved.
Building massing has to do with the overall proportions of a structure, including the dimensions of the building footprint and its relationship to the context where it resides. As Waterston’s density increases and properties become smaller in scale, figuring out how to manage massing becomes increasingly important.

Larger building masses are most appropriate for Waterston Square, the historic commercial core of the town. Smaller building masses and massing is required in this area. The overall proportions of a building are affected by its size, scale, proportion, and the materials used. A building’s mass should taper more seamlessly with the character of established neighborhoods.

**ENCOURAGE:**
- Breaking a building mass into smaller forms
- Variation in building mass for large projects

**DISCUSSION:**
- Large building masses with little variation in height
- Building elements that follow a specific pattern
- Building elements that are too large

**BUILDING MASSING**

Building height constitutes just one aspect of a building’s design, but it is undoubtedly the most conspicuous. Historical building heights in Waterston vary with greater height generally reserved for civic buildings, institutions, churches, and other similar buildings. The vast majority of the buildings, however, are just one or two stories along the primary commercial area. Heights of one or two stories are used in a variety of areas including the individual facades to floor dimensions, the type of construction, the contours of a site, the use and scale of the surrounding.

**ENCOURAGE:**
- Variations in building heights
- Upper-story backset from the street edge
- Corner buildings with corner setbacks

**DISCUSSION:**
- The “canyon effect” created by a series of buildings close to one another
- Large-scale height differences between new buildings and existing neighborhoods

**BUILDING HEIGHT**

The sun is always a primary consideration and its location on the site can be varied. When parking is located in front of buildings, it often requires multiple cuts (or setbacks) for the property it serves. A result, the inclusion of green space, roof gardens, and setbacks beneath buildings. Surface parking lots located in front of commercial establishments facilitate access for patrons but do little to improve the character of the street or public space.

**ENCOURAGE:**
- A reduction of parking requirements requesting zoning
- More underground and on-builidng parking
- Less backland surface lots with visual landscape buffers

**DISCUSSION:**
- Surface parking in front of buildings
- Projects which preference cars over pedestrians and bicycles
- Parking garages that contain large blank walls

**SUSTAINABLE DESIGN**

A sustainable building treads lightly on the earth.green Architecture

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**ENCOURAGE:**
- Roofline designs that enhance the character of a building
- Sidewalks that provide a buffer between the street and the building
- The use of high quality materials that are locally sourced

**DISCUSSION:**
- The use of high quality materials that are locally sourced
- Green materials with low embodied energy and are recyclable
- Sustainable building products that reduce raw material use should be chosen
- Low-embodied energy building products should be specified to improve air quality.

**ENCOURAGE:**
- The use of high quality materials that are locally sourced
- Green materials with low embodied energy and are recyclable
- Sustainable building products that reduce raw material use should be chosen
- Low-embodied energy building products should be specified to improve air quality.

**DISCUSSION:**
- Flat repetitive facades that lack texture and detail
- Use of existing, local, or other indigenous materials
- Use of historical facades that maintain their original character

**MATERIAL SELECTION**

There is a direct connection between material choice and environmental responsibility. Buildings account for half of the world’s greenhouse gases and consume 50% of its raw materials.* Moreover, building materials should be selected with respect to their performance and sustainable qualities rather than just trends or aesthetics. With this in mind, materials should be selected with respect to their sustainability, recyclability, use of recycled materials, and their environmental impact. In other words, projects should be built with sustainable and environmentally friendly building materials.

**ENCOURAGE:**
- Materials that are locally sourced
- Materials with low embodied energy
- Materials that reduce raw material use
- Low-embodied energy building products should be specified to improve air quality.

**DISCUSSION:**
- Flat repetitive facades that lack texture and detail
- Use of existing, local, or other indigenous materials
- Use of historical facades that maintain their original character

**SIGNAGE**

Commercial establishments need to advertise; however, advertising signs should be effective and appropriate to Waterston’s historic design without contributing to visual clutter. A balance needs to be achieved between signs that work with existing streetscapes and signs that detract from the ambiance and aesthetic of the streets.

**ENCOURAGE:**
- Stand-alone signs that are not designed for a pedestrian environment
- Neon and fluorescent or beacon signs
- Colored signs that complement the materials and color schemes of the building

**DISCUSSION:**
- Stand-alone signs that are not designed for a pedestrian environment
- Neon and fluorescent or beacon signs
- Colored signs that complement the materials and color schemes of the building

**FACADE TREATMENT**

The facade is the primary external or public surface of the building and is entirely different from the sidewalks or green space to the immediate parts of the environment. Corner buildings have two primary facades. The character of any building is affected by the proportion and nature of openings, the composition of the fenestration, the size and pattern of the exterior walls, the massing of the building, the proportions of the building, and the materials used. Quality materials will add a level of sophistication to a large and otherwise minimally detailed facade, whereas inexpensive materials make a same-sized building look cheap. A building’s elevation or facade says a lot about the quality and character of a building.

**ENCOURAGE:**
- Quality materials and natural materials
- Green materials with low embodied energy
- Buildings with natural materials

**DISCUSSION:**
- Cheap exterior building finishes
- Materials that don’t complement
- Poorly designed facades

**PUBLIC REALM INTERFACE**

The relationship of the building to the street (the form of its setbacks or build to line) plays a key role in the ability of a development to enhance or detract from the experience of a public space. Conservation commissions are most successful when the street edge is defined with active ground floor uses with a high degree of transparency. A robust public realm interface is essential for a successfully community. How a building relates to the public realm makes a difference in the quality of the design and the degree to which the buildings contributes to public life.

While the massing of a building and its height, scale, profile and orientation have a significant impact on one’s impressions of a place, the reason in which it meets the ground is the most critical. Entrance ways and green spaces in front of the building can be easily accessible, and it should aid in pedestrian comfort, safety, and convenience.

**ENCOURAGE:**
- Presence of planters that draw us to traffic and enhance pedestrian interest
- Appropriately scaled sidewalks for the density of development and street type
- Garden benches and visual landscape buffers
- The incorporation of bike paths and lane divider in plantings strips
- Adjacent outdoor space around buildings that is publicly accessible
- Public art opportunities

**DISCUSSION:**
- Residual, privately owned public spaces that lack connectivity
- While building elements along commercial corridors
- Projects that preference cars over the sustainable as walking or biking
- Pedestrian elements such as in a single property

**PARKING + ACCESS**

Parking is always a primary consideration and its location on the site can be varied. When parking is located in front of buildings, it often requires multiple cuts (or setbacks) for the property it serves. As a result, the inclusion of green space, roof gardens, and setbacks beneath buildings. Surface parking lots located in front of commercial establishments facilitate access for patrons but do little to improve the character of the street or public space.

**ENCOURAGE:**
- Shared parking opportunities where space and use do not conflict
- Opportunities for shared parking must be pursued in a variety of development patterns whenever possible and should impact the character of the street or public space

**DISCUSSION:**
- Surface parking in front of buildings
- Projects which preference cars over pedestrians and bicycles
- Parking garages that contain large blank walls

**BUILDING SETBACKS**

The dimension from a building to the street edge has everything to do with how a space feels. In urban areas with a high degree of commercial activity, it is important to maintain a continuous street wall with minimal setbacks or building setbacks. Setbacks do not need to be as large as park strips, parks, plazas, seating areas or landscape zones. What constitutes an appropriate building setback varies with the program of the building, the number and type of uses on the property, the street edge, and the overall appearance of the neighborhood. A taller building will appear less tall when set back from the street edge. When projects are developed as a result of a building setback, the relationship of the building facade to the public right of way can have a greater impact than any other design. Conversely, when the same building is relative to the amount of an appropriate building setback is the relative urban context.

**ENCOURAGE:**
- A reduction of setbacks along cornors
- More underground and on-builidng parking

**DISCUSSION:**
- Building setbacks on upper floors above three or four stories
- Areas for active programming in setbacks for shops and cafes
- Appropriately scaled sidewalks
- Wide planting areas for large shade trees and rain gardens

**BUILDING HEIGHT**

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**ENCOURAGE:**
- Variations in building heights
- Upper-story backset from the street edge
- Corner buildings with corner setbacks

**DISCUSSION:**
- The “canyon effect” created by a series of buildings close to one another
- Signage that compliments the buildings

**SIGNAGE**

Commercial establishments need to advertise; however, advertising signs should be effective and appropriate to Waterston’s historic design without contributing to visual clutter. A balance needs to be achieved between signs that work with existing streetscapes and signs that detract from the ambiance and aesthetic of the streets.

**ENCOURAGE:**
- Attractive signs that are proportional to the building where they are located
- Traditional signs such as a worn wooden lettering
- Neatly designed signs that complement a facade of mature size
- More decorative or handcrafted signs that are understated and not overwhelming
- Signs that are placed above the storefront (floor or tenant)
- Signs that complement the materials and color schemes of the building

**DISCUSSION:**
- Stand-alone signs that are not designed as an integral part of the building
- Large signs on street level
- Street furniture or bulletin signs
- Inappropriate signage existing in the business district

**GREEN BUILDING DESIGN**

A green building is one that is energy-efficient and promotes human health and environmental sustainability.* A green building is one that is energy-efficient and promotes human health and environmental sustainability.*}

* Green Architecture, Design Alternatives (2010)