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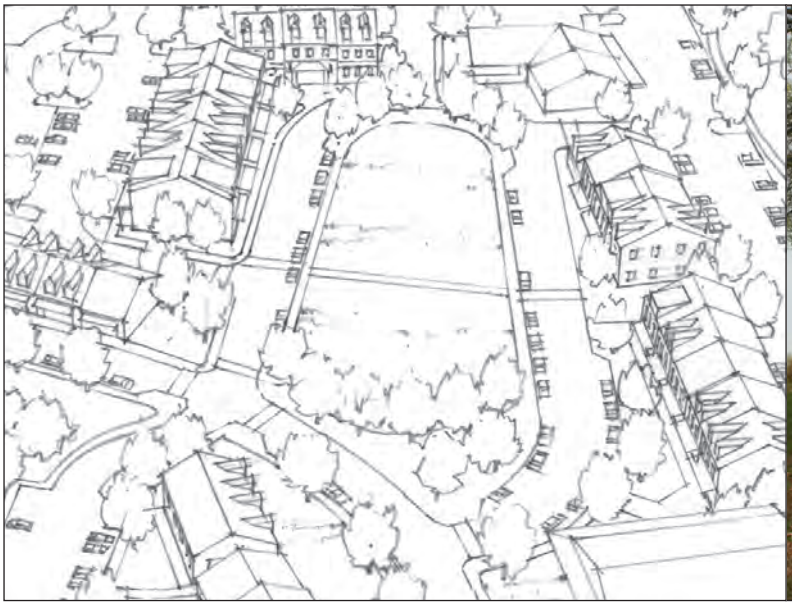

# COMMERCIAL VILLAGE CORE DESIGN GUIDEBOOK

## *for* THE TOWN OF OAK RIDGE

3/7/2022 DRAFT

# Acknowledgments

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# Contents

# INTRODUCTION

# Project Explanation and Goals

Oak Ridge's beautiful setting and vibrant community has been attracting new residents at a growth rate of 1.2% per year. Coupled with this growth is the increasing need for easily accessible goods and services, creating an attractive environment for commercial development.

To address the challenges presented by increasing growth pressures and demands while maintaining Oak Ridge's unique charm, the Town Council adopted a Strategic Plan in 2018 (updated 2021) which specifically addressed the need to prioritize the creation of a "village feel" in the town's commercial core. Specifically:

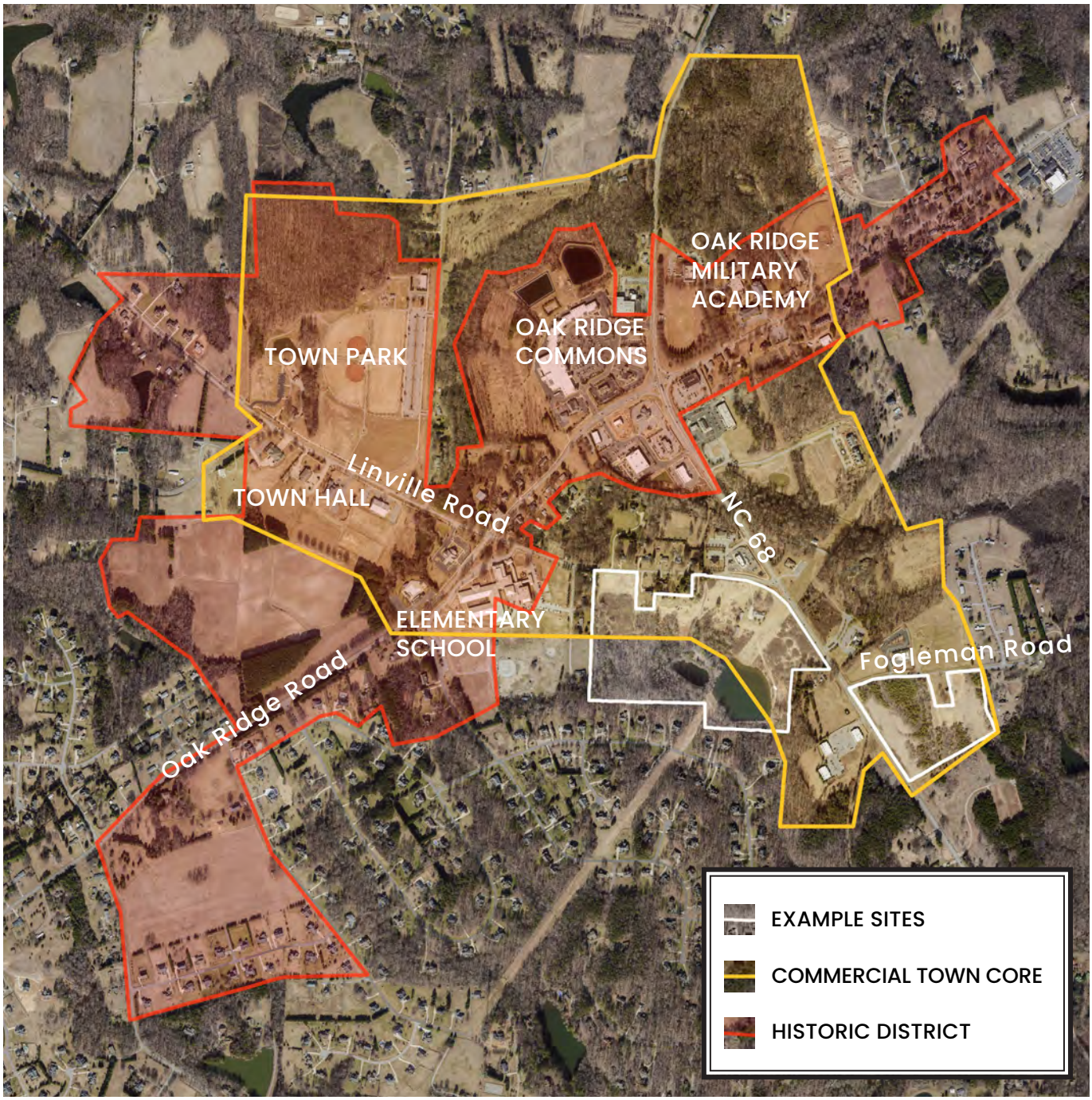
> GOAL 2.2: The Town will promote policies to create an active and healthy "village feel" in the Town Core that prioritizes a unique, walkable, and inviting environment with smaller buildings in close proximity to each other and the street, and incorporates a mix of commercial, residential, and institutional uses, as well as pockets of green space that help create community-oriented gathering places.

With this Strategic Plan directive in mind, the goal of this project has been to help define the characteristics of the "village feel,", and to create a user-friendly, illustrative tool to guide future development within the Town of Oak Ridge's Commercial Core.

The resulting Village Design Guidebook incorporates guidelines for blending new development with the town's historic character, drawn from the Oak Ridge Historic District Design Standards Handbook.

The project process involved collaboration between town officials, citizens, and planning and design professionals. The Town assembled residents for five separate round table discussions: the Historic Preservation Commission, Planning and Zoning Board, developers, and two groups made up of general citizens and other stakeholders.

*Public Workshop for the Commercial Village Core Design Guidebook*




*Town of Oak Ridge*

# Use of the Commercial Village Core Design Guidebook

The Commercial Village Core Design Guidebook is intended to help developers easily understand the Town of Oak Ridge's vision for commercial and mixed-use development within the Town Core, and to serve as a guide for site planning, architecture and landscape architecture during the planning and design process.

The Commercial Village Core Design Guidebook is intended to work in conjunction with existing planning tools. Developers and interested parties should also consult the Town of Oak Ridge Strategic Plan, Town of Oak Ridge Historic District Design Standards Handbook, Town of Oak Ridge Comprehensive Pedestrian Transportation Plan, and The Oak Ridge Streetscape Vision Plan. It should be noted that all relevant provisions of the Oak Ridge Development Ordinance shall apply to all projects, and that several key elements of this Guidebook will be incorporated into the Oak Ridge Development Ordinance. In addition, commercial properties located in the town's Historic District may require a Certificate of Appropriateness, as directed by the Design Standards Handbook.

# Rural Town Context

The variety of architectural styles, materials, and periods of construction exhibits the development and special character of Oak Ridge as a rural village. The intent of these guidelines is to promote new commercial buildings that reinforce and respond to the primary design elements of historic buildings in the area, while reflecting their own time in the town's evolution.

Designs for new commercial buildings should be compatible with the historic architecture in Oak Ridge's Historic District in terms of siting, size, scale, and materials. New buildings designed to respond to the historic setting help to preserve the town's unique charac- ter as a rural village. This handbook is designed to guide the development of new commercial and mixed-use construction while granting flexibility to pursue new interpretations of traditional designs that contribute to the overall variety of development within the town. In this way, new commercial construction can enhance the Oak Ridge community and contribute to its character as a rural village.

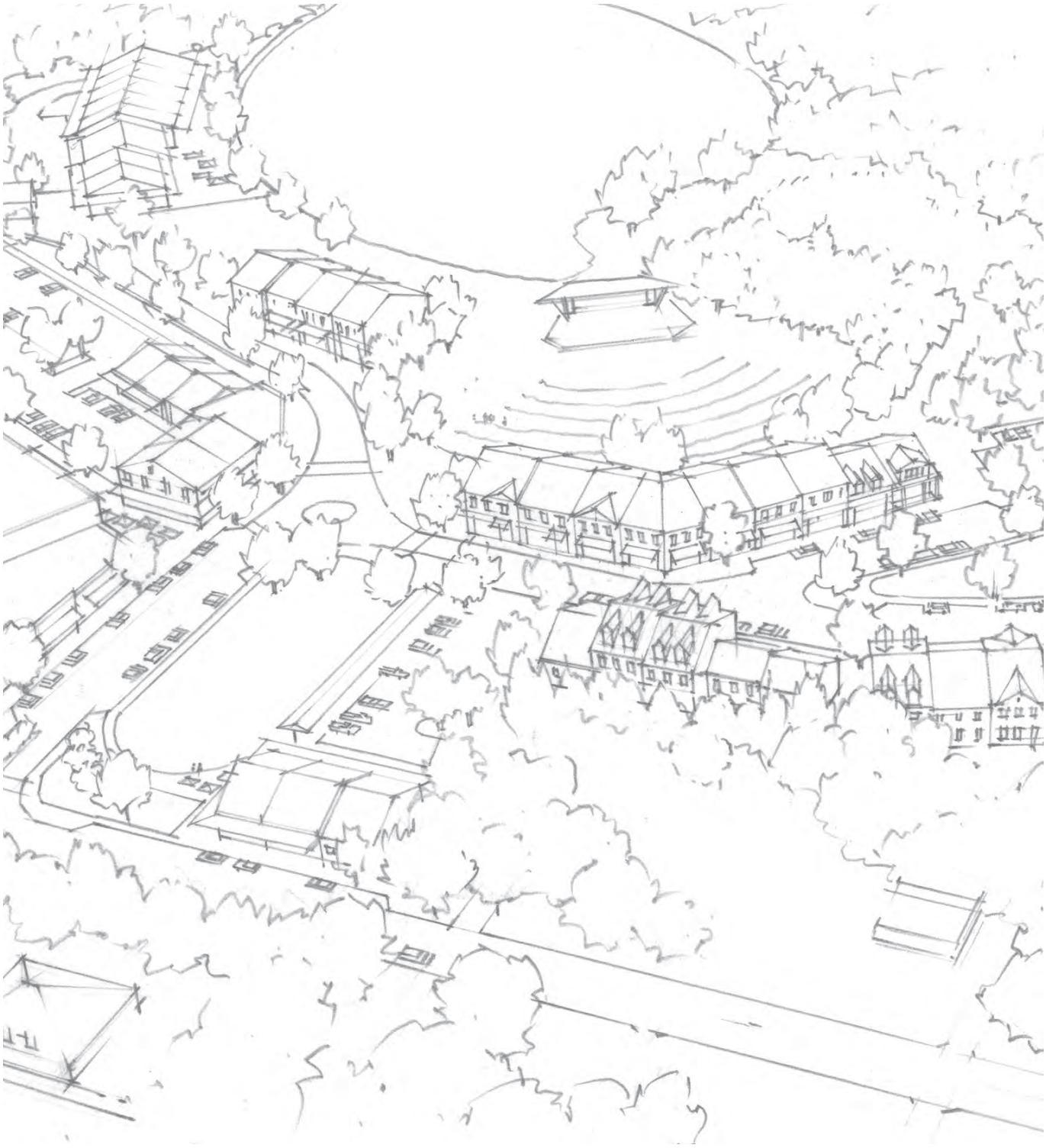
*The Old Mill near Oak Ridge*

*A former residential building being renovated as the town's community center*


*Oak Ridge Military Academy*

*Old commercial building near Oak Ridge*

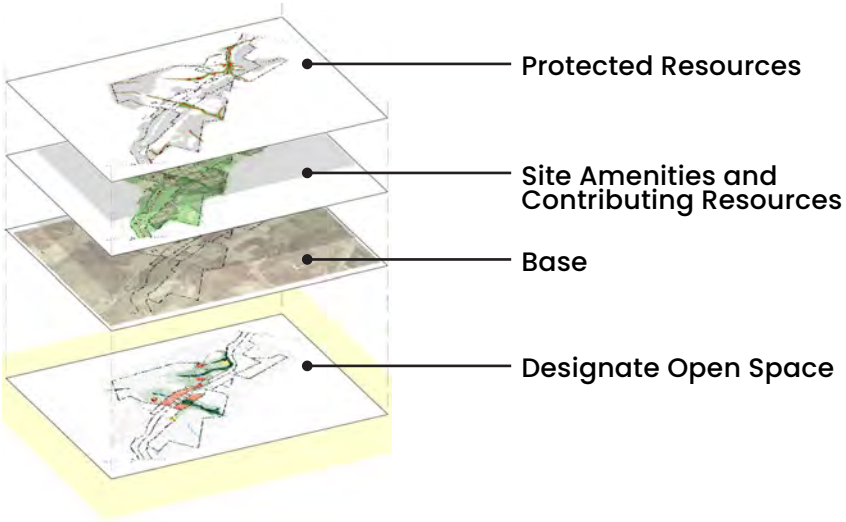
# SITE DEVELOPMENT



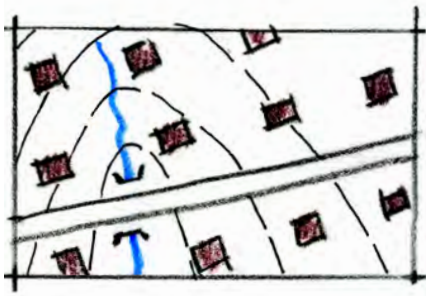
# Site Planning Principles

General Principles of site planning and development should include consideration of all natural features of the site as potential contributors to the design, instead of constraints that must be worked around. Significant natural or historic site features should be preserved, maintained and incorporated as much as possible. Examples of natural features include sunlight exposure, streams and drainage, ponds, topography, scenic vistas, mature trees (over 8 inches in diameter), existing habitat, and cultural or historical resources. First documenting and then using these resources to guide development will help to preserve the underlying character of the region and land, and fit new development into the exceptional cultural landscape of Oak Ridge.

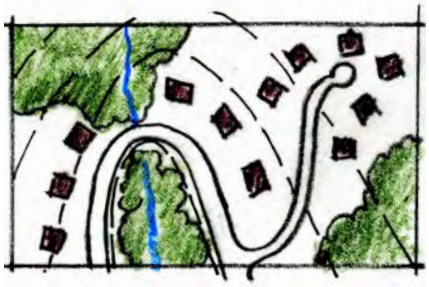
- As part of the site planning process, using a base map provided by the zoning administrator, create existing footprint maps showing existing features. Show all significant natural, cultural, and historic features, as described above, as well as all existing structures, parking, entry points, and roads.
- Create a proposed "footprint" overlay of proposed new buildings, roads and circulation, parking, and other proposed built structures.
- Review features on existing footprint map, including significant natural, cultural, and historic features, as well as proposed footprint overlay map with zoning administrator, who will offer recommendations on preserving, maintaining, or incorporating key existing features.
- Develop plans that are compatible with and do not detract from adjacent property site features.

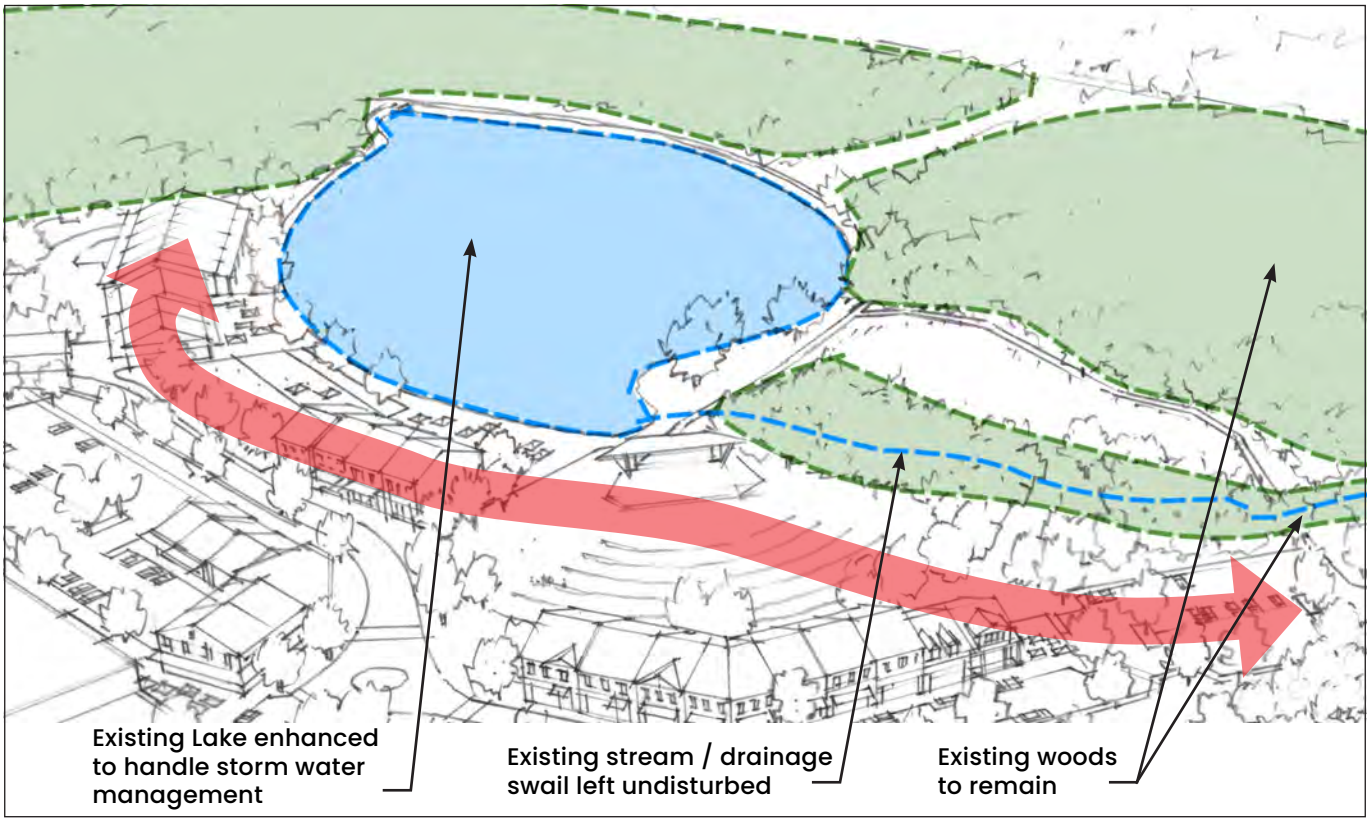



*Site analysis and planning process*



*Successful site planning is illustrated in the sketch below: the development fits the landscape*





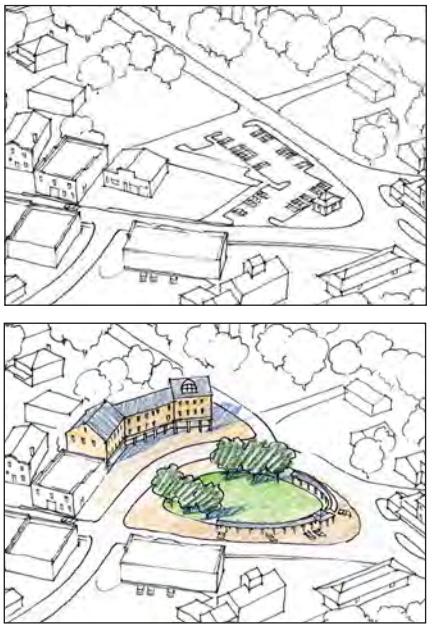

*Above: significant site features are respected*
*Below: site features become celebrated amenities within the new development*

# Building Placement

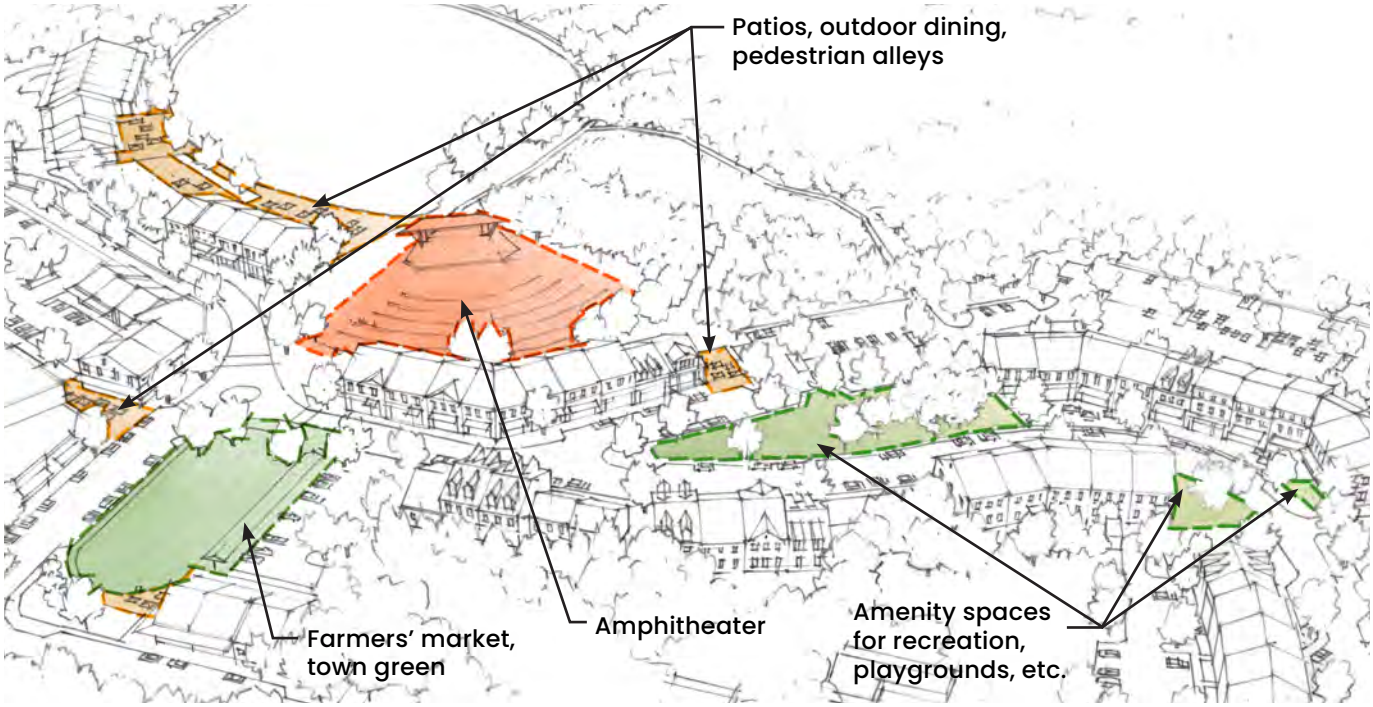
- Use new buildings with distinctive designs to enhance the site and create a strong sense of place. Buildings should be placed in prominent locations and incorporate public spaces. Strategies for achieving these goals might include:
  - » Create well-defined building entrances that welcome visitors/residents and integrate the building into the broader sites.
  - » Use spaces between buildings for pedestrian circulation corridors, with openings for side access.
  - » Arrange buildings to complement existing site resources, such as large trees, open spaces, and other site features.
  - » Integrate indoor and outdoor spaces through well-defined public and private uses.
- Buildings within the same development should generally follow consistent setbacks to reinforce the streetscape and sense of place. Any divergence from this pattern should be used intentionally to accentuate certain buildings or define public spaces.
- Back of house and service areas should be concealed at rear of buildings or within parking areas using landscaped screening elements.

*Pinehurst: the placement of buildings creates interesting pedestrian corridors and spaces*

*Building masses used to create intentional outdoor amenity spaces*



*Before and after sketches: buildings arranged to enhance outdoor placemaking*




# Open Space

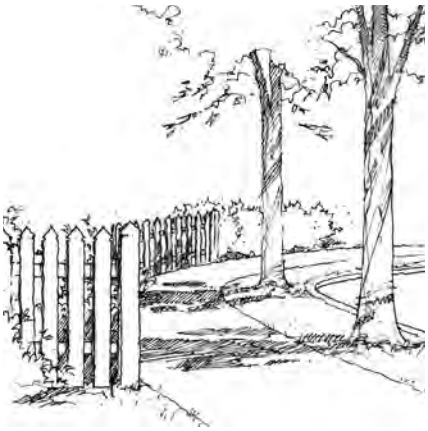
- At the initial meeting with the zoning administrator, learn whether there are any amenities that could benefit businesses or residents in the proposed development. Provide a variety of open spaces that enhance opportunities for the community life of the Town.
- Examples may include, but are not limited to, the following :
  - » Amphitheater or busker's stand
  - » Public art
  - » Farmer's market
  - » Town green or garden areas
  - » Dining patios
  - » Playgrounds
  - » Streetscape should be delineated with paving materials and hardscape elements (lighting, benches, receptacles, bike racks) with enough space to be conducive to flexible usage: dining, informal seating, and street performances.
  - » Preserved open space for habitat, stormwater, or conservation.

*Example of a permanent farmers' market adjacent to a town green*

# Pedestrian Connectivity

A key strategy for increasing the village feeling in new commercial development is to create outdoor environments that are safe, comfortable, and interesting to the pedestrian. Per the Town's Comprehensive Pedestrian Transportation Plan, in order for the town to be fully walkable, all commercial development should provide safe sidewalks and/or trails, as well as connections to adjacent property sidewalks and trails. Sidewalks serving parking areas should be a minimum of 5' wide and adhere to ADA design guidelines for accessibility.

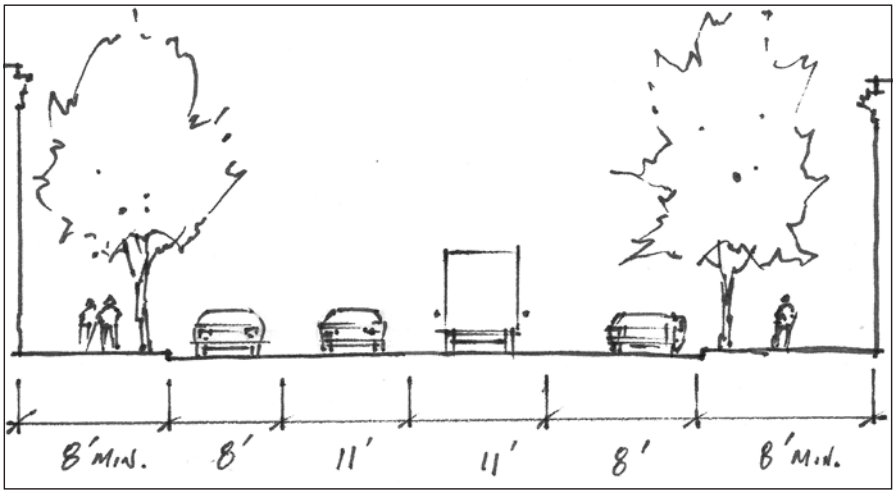
- Location / siting of sidewalks. Sidewalks shall be located throughout the site along connector streets, in front of the front facades of buildings, as required by ordinance. In mixed-use and townhouse areas of the site, sidewalks should be separated from the street by a landscaped verge.
- Provide connections to existing and planned trails.
- Adhere to dimensions, details, construction standards described in the Comprehensive Pedestrian Transportation Plan.
- Design sites with personal safety considerations in mind.



# Roads

The following guidelines apply to roads:

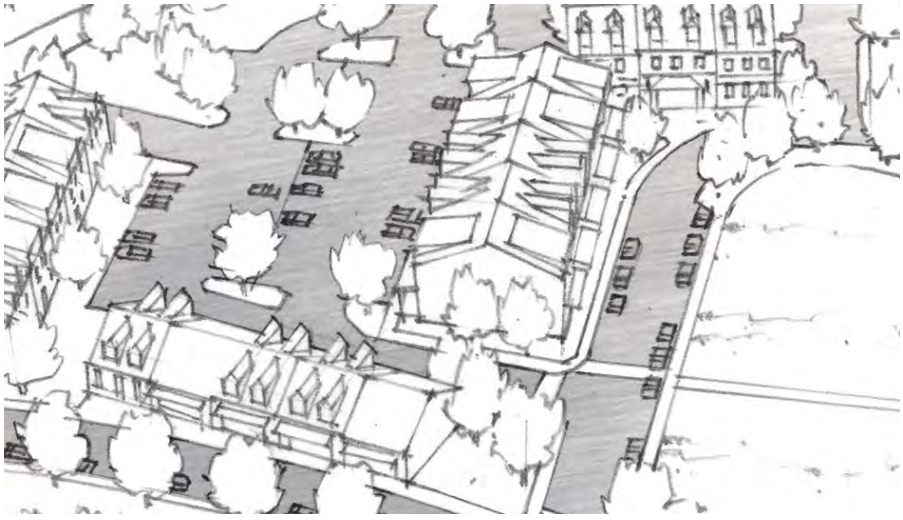
- Entrance / Access Roads. Access roads should be limited and well defined; new commercial development should have a maximum of one exit and one entrance per town street to minimize traffic conflicts. Shared entrances and exits with adjacent properties in order to minimize traffic conflicts is strongly encouraged and should anticipate, to the extent possible, future nearby development.
- Pedestrians. Use pedestrian paths to minimize the need for pedestrians to cross roadways. Where pedestrian traffic is likely to cross roads, provide public walkways for convenient and safe pedestrian access.
- Public roads must meet NCDOT standards. As is the case for public streets, all private streets should provide: two 11ft vehicular lanes, 8ft on-street parking, a 2ft (min.) landscaped verge (may have permeable paving where necessary for access), and an 8ft (min.) sidewalk.
- On-street parking should be maximized in all areas of the development. Parallel parking is preferred, but angled parking can also be implemented.
- Incorporate well-designed traffic calming measures, such as pinch points, bump outs, and medians, to encourage slow, cautious driving. Speed bumps are generally not appropriate.
- For public roads, such as Highway-Arterial-Collector-Local , refer to NCDOT typical road standards.
- When medians are used, they should generally include plantings designed to soften their appearance and enhance the overall landscaping.
- **Drive-throughs.** In general, drive through windows should be avoided, as they can obstruct site access and features, and impede movement on and around the site. If a drive-through window is necessary it should be located so that the anticipated maximum number of vehicles to be stacked can be stored on the subject property without (1) impeding site access and blocking site features; (2) obstructing site traffic, or fire lanes; or (3) stacking out into public roads or other parcels. At the discretion of the zoning administrator, a facilities stacking study may be required to determine anticipated stacking levels at high volume times.



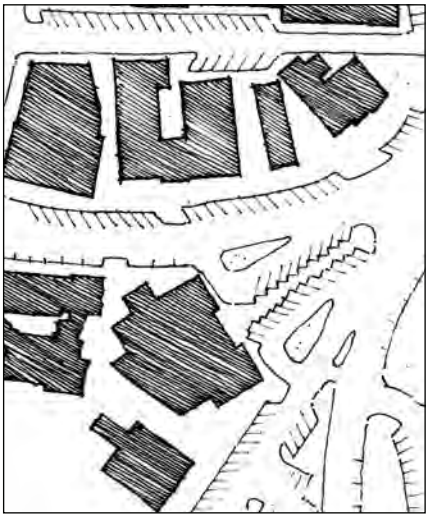
# Parking

- Parking areas should be safe and convenient, functioning well for the vehicle, but geared primarily toward the pedestrian's experience of the site.
- Parking lots should be located to the rear of buildings where the building has a primary face toward the street.
- When parking cannot be accommodated in rear, the side is acceptable.
- When locating parking to the side, keep the front edge of the parking lot further back than the front face of main buildings.
- Rather than large parking expanses, build smaller parking lots that are separated and defined by open space, planting, and/or buildings.
- All parking areas should include a landscaping plan done by a licensed landscape architect. Use mature plantings and trees to screen parking areas; such plantings and trees should also be used in medians within parking areas to soften the visual effects of the parking areas. See Landscape Architecture section for further guidance.

*Above and right: new commercial / residential mixed-use in South Carolina with parallel on-street parking in front, and parking lots behind*



*While providing some guest or customer spaces up front, provide additional parking to the back*



*Pinehurst is an example where parking is convenient but hardly noticed because it is located along streets rather than in large lots*

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# LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

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# Guidelines for Site Landscaping

- Seek assistance from a professional landscape architect.
- As a rule, retain and maintain mature trees (greater than 8" diameter).
- If mature trees must be removed, replace them with similar species.
- Design landscaping to reflect typical community landscape patterns, which are natural, or agrarian-based, rather than stylized.
- Plants should be either native, or historically well-established in Oak Ridge. Hardy, non-invasive species should be used.
- New landscaping should blend with existing landscaping and complement the architecture and site. Plantings should be appropriate to anticipated site uses.

# Types of Trees and Plants

- Native plants are to be used for approximately 75% of each planting design. A mix of different sizes and types (canopy, understory, etc.) of trees and shrubs with different lifespans, as well as evergreen and deciduous verities, and small plantings, should be planted. Trees shall be selected based on specific site conditions such as soil, moisture, exposure, available root area, traffic, and architectural structure, with consideration to flowering time and color, leaf litter, fall color, and full season interest.
- Trees and shrubs should be selected with utmost consideration to habitat and existing site conditions, such as the amount of moisture in the soils. Where possible, wetland species should be used in low areas that collect water, either naturally or through stormwater management design practices, in order to support natural ecosystems.
- Consideration should be given to preserving natural habitats and regional wildlife corridors that connect preserved open spaces across different properties, such as riparian buffers along streams and reservoirs. When possible, corridors should include 150-250' wide sections of continuous preserved woodland or reforested areas.

*Beech tree in a courtyard*

*Existing mature trees should be preserved*

*Existing oak and pine trees near town hall*

*Existing trees at Oak Ridge Military Academy*

*Example of a large oak in an existing commercial village center (Pinehurst)*

**SPECIES OF TREES:**

Possible species of trees to consider include the following:

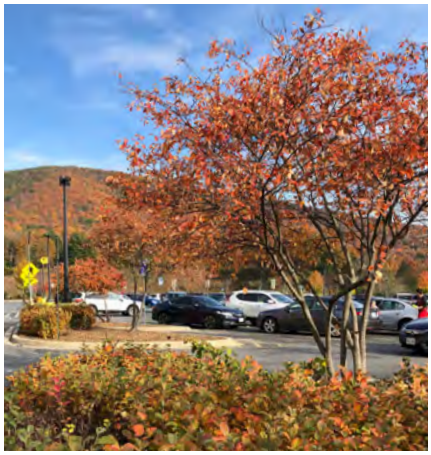
- First on the list of large trees that are suitable for Oak Ridge is of course the stately Oak tree. Many species of oak grow in North Carolina, but for landscape use there are definitive standouts depending on the exact site it is chosen for. White Oak is arguably the most majestic, but needs the most room to spread out. Leaf litter can be tremendous, and this tree will not tolerate soggy soils; it is best used for a large shade tree away from parking lots. Scarlett Oak has terrific fall foliage, but needs similar conditions as the white oak to thrive. Pin Oak has maybe the most iconic silhouette with its drooping form, but also needs room for its bottom branches. The willow oak on the other hand, is a great tree for parking areas since it is very tolerant of urban conditions and has narrow leaves that will not clog storm drains.
- Sycamore is another excellent large tree for parking areas. Its sheer size and virility in almost any condition make it a great choice when a very large tree is desired. It has beautiful bark that can be appreciated up close, and a picturesque loose form that can make a statement in an otherwise mundane parking lot while providing much needed shade and dramatic spatial delineation.
- Honey locust is another tough but beautiful tree, and extremely fast growing. It drops very small leaves after putting on a spectacular yellow display and so is a good choice for public spaces where leaf litter can be a nuisance. The fine texture of its leaves also makes it a nice patio tree.
- Black Gum, Sweetgum, River Birch, Pine, and Holly are good native trees with multiple seasons of interest, and can tolerate a wide variety of soil types.
- Dogwood, Redbud, Serviceberry, Sourwood are good native small flowering trees.
- Native shrubs include: Virginia sweetspire, fothergilla, oakleaf hydrangea, clethra alnifolia, native viburnums. Cherry laurel and crepemyrtle can be used with these for a refined and familiar appeal.
- In garden areas a mix of perennials should be used including Black eyed susans, grasses, wildflowers, evergreen groundcovers, interesting leaf shapes. Contrasting And complementary colors and shapes of flowers and branches should be considered.

*Oak Tree*

*Sweetgum*

*Sycamore*

*Autumn Blaze Red Maple*



*Serviceberry*

*Oak Leaf Hydrangea*

*Virginia Sweetspire*

*Fothergilla*

*Ornamental grasses and wildflowers*

*Astilbe*

*Black-eyed Susans*

# Placement

- As a rule, Landscape features such as allees, vistas, long sight lines, wide open pastoral spaces are to be created when possible using native plant material so as to blend the new development with the existing rural character. Consider specimen trees at the end of long vistas, and clusters of small flowering trees at the edges of open spaces.
- Native shrubs are best used in mass plantings (15-50), grouped close together for dramatic effect especially in fall, when our native plants tend to outshine the commonly planted exotic species. Consider planting masses of shrubs against evergreens to accentuate their color.
- Small trees may be planted 10-35' apart. A key consideration when planting along a road is viewing speed and preserving sight lines. NCDOT sight distance triangles should always be used when planning a design. Generally, avoid trees and use shrubs under 3' at intersections. Instead focus the tree planting along main promenades to create allees and gateways. Roads with a 25 mph speed limit should have more dense, closely spaced composition than those with a 45 mph speed limit, which will need fewer trees to accomplish the same effect.
- Large trees should be planned for long term shade and enjoyment, and with consideration to their mature size and lifespan.
- Hedges and other plantings should be used to screen parking areas, trash receptacles, and mechanical units. They should also be used to buffer and soften walls and building facades.

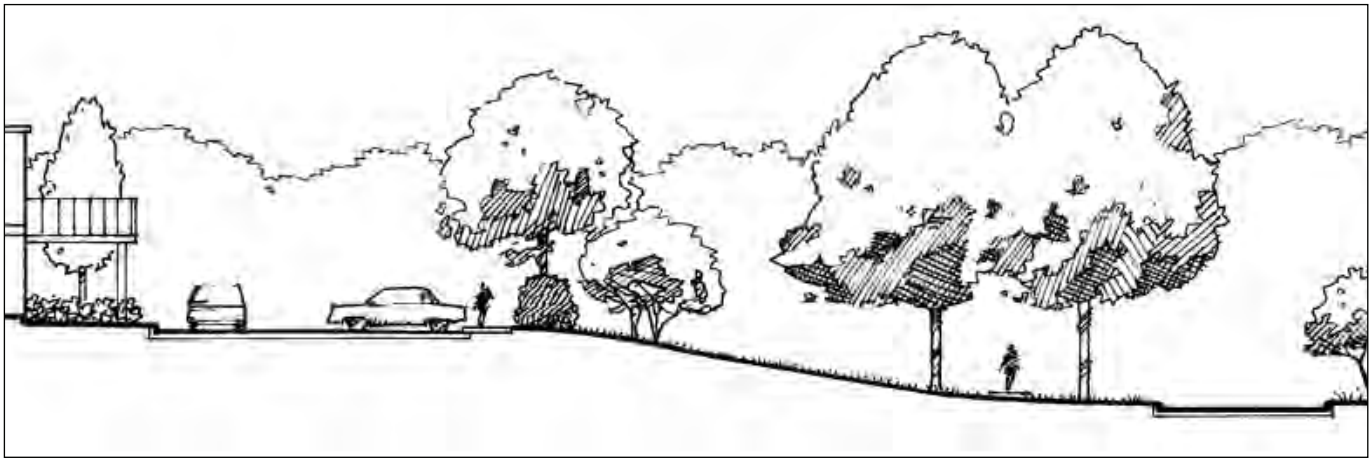
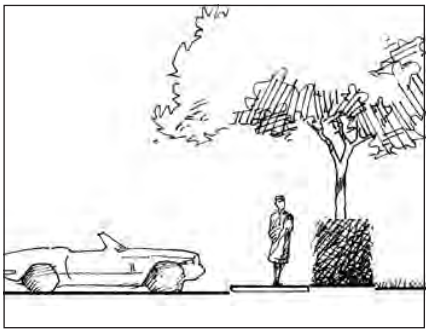


*Image caption*

# Parking Areas & Streetscape

- Streetscapes should be dedicated to the pedestrian experience and enhance the overall sense of place. Generally, parking lots should be sited so as to be screened by the buildings on site, although plantings can also play a role in screening.
- Landscaping, different types of paving materials, and signage can be used to clearly delineate vehicle and pedestrian circulation patterns within parking areas.
- Parking areas should have a planted island every 10-15 spaces.
- In parking lots, locate trees for eventual shade coverage (10 years, 75% coverage). One canopy tree per 6 spaces is required.
- Along roadways, while deferring to NCDOT setbacks, locate trees for shade coverage over the road. .(10 years, 75% coverage). Locate canopy trees generally at 25-40' on center, in verges.
- Use planted medians and verges to effectively minimize negative visual impact of parking. Creatively locate medians to locate large trees and complementary plantings.
- Use hedges to visually minimize impact of parking, as seen from principal public roads.
- Use hedges and shrub masses to screen back-of-house areas. Locate service access for delivery tracks so as to minimize intrusions on nearby properties and on the site as a whole.
- Fast-growing and large trees shall be distributed evenly in new parking areas, for their visual effect, shade, and to help cool the pavement.

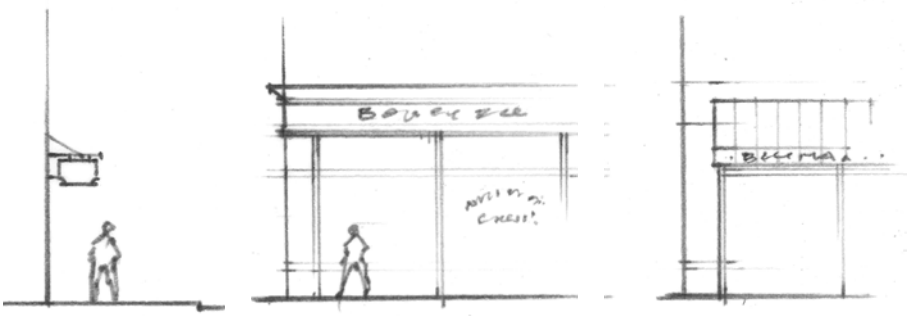


*A hedge of Cherry Laurel screens parking while allowing visibility into the development; large Willow Oaks provide shade*

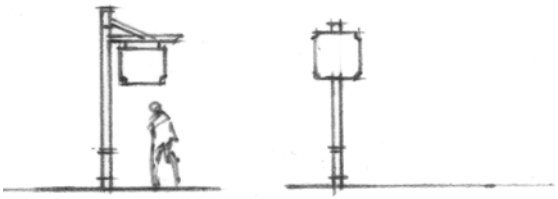
*An alternative verge showing permeable paving and large tress*

# Signage

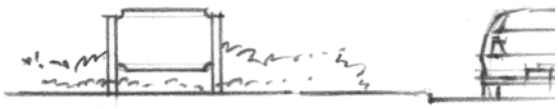
- Keep monument signs to a minimum, installed only at main entry points, and consolidating multiple commercial signs onto the same monument sign.
- Signage should be designed to enhance the site and landscape, using historic building materials common within the nearby Historic District: metal, wood, brick, or stone. Colors should be compatible with those used in the District and in adjacent properties. Bright colors should be avoided in favor of earth tones.
- Building signage should be limited and unobtrusive.
- All signage should be compatible in scale, size, materials, color, and character to the buildings they serve. Sign text should be simple; decoration and ornamentation should be limited.
- Signage should complement the architectural style and not obscure architectural details.
- Avoid back lighting or internal illumination of signs, as well as flashing, rotating, or other attention-drawing signs.



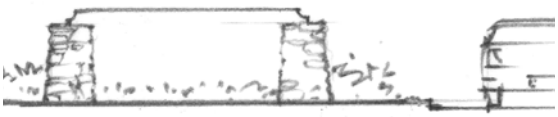
*Signage integrated into the building - modest in size, fitting the architecture*



*Single post sign*



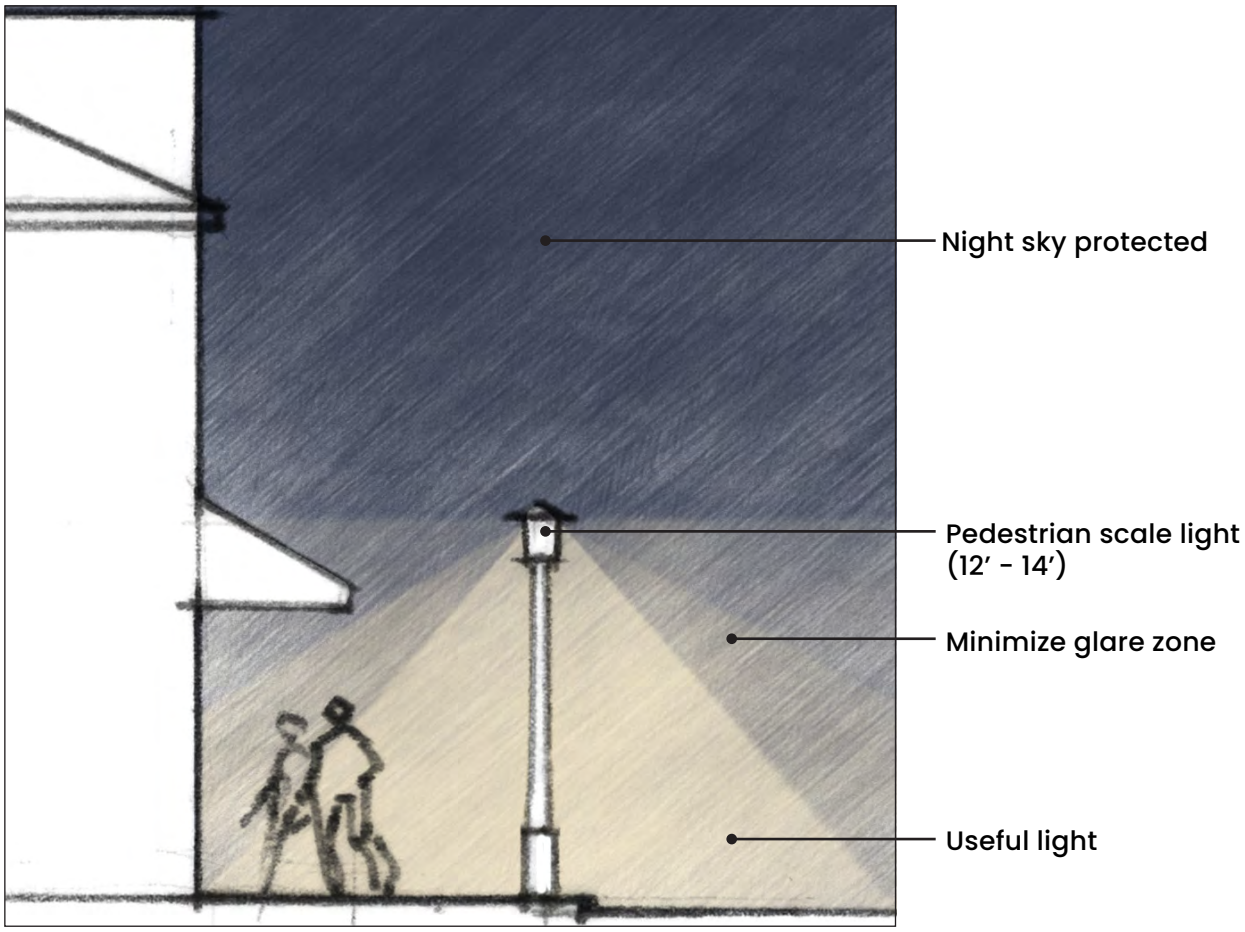
*Double post sign*



*Monument sign - should be used sparingly, only at major entry points*

# Lighting

- Lighting should be designed for the pedestrian scale. Lighting fixtures and poles should be compatible in scale and materials with the building, landscape, and surroundings and should be consistent throughout the site. Undecorative fixtures should be concealed.
- Spotlights, floodlights, and high intensity lighting are generally not appropriate.
- The lowest lighting feasible should be used for each need in order to preserve night sky viewing . Glare should be minimized, and exterior lighting prevented from shining beyond the property on which the fixtures are located.
- Lighting should be designed to preserve night sky viewing; use "dark sky"-friendly fixtures to minimize glare, and reduce light trespass and sky glow.




*Pedestrian-scale lighting protecting night sky*

# ARCHITECTURE

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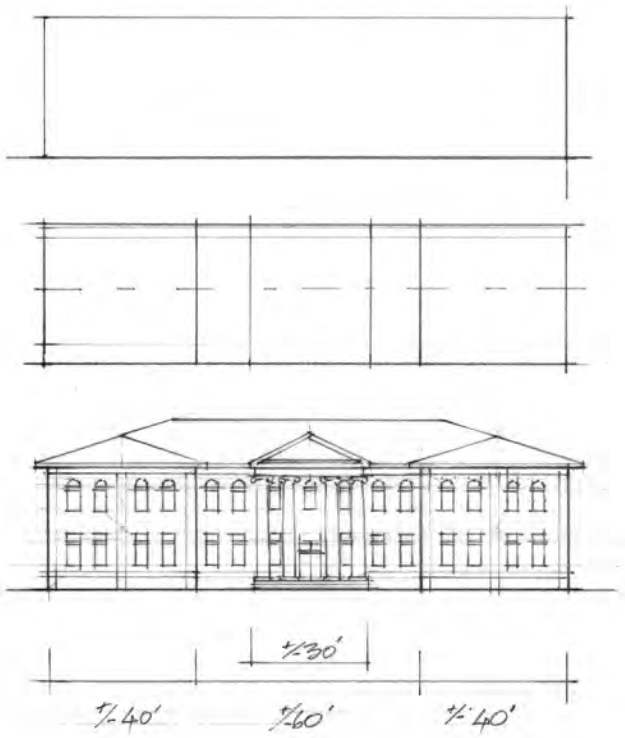
# Height, Scale and Massing

Most historic buildings in Oak Ridge are modest in size, since many are single family houses. The institutional buildings at Oak Ridge Military Academy are a notable exception. However, none of the town's historic buildings exceed two stories. Accordingly, although variations in building size are encouraged for new commercial buildings, it is important that new construction reflect the proportions of Oak Ridge's historic buildings. The massing of larger new construction can be designed to retain the general scale of historic buildings, especially as viewed from the street. Facades should be punctuated horizontally to create a human scale that is compatible with historic structures in the area.

- The height of commercial and mixed-use buildings will vary based on use but should not exceed 2 1/2 stories (or 45 feet).
- Street-facing elevations of new commercial and mixed-use buildings should be broken up into bays of 25 to 45 feet

*An example of a building with a large footprint, but with a facade that is broken up into smaller bays*




Large building facades . . .

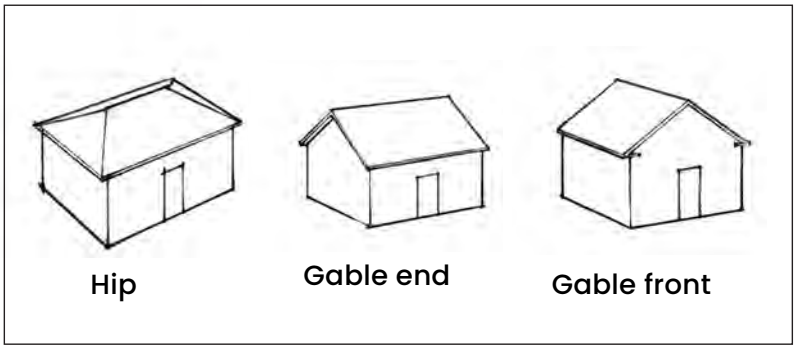
. . . should be punctuated horizontally to relate to surrounding building forms

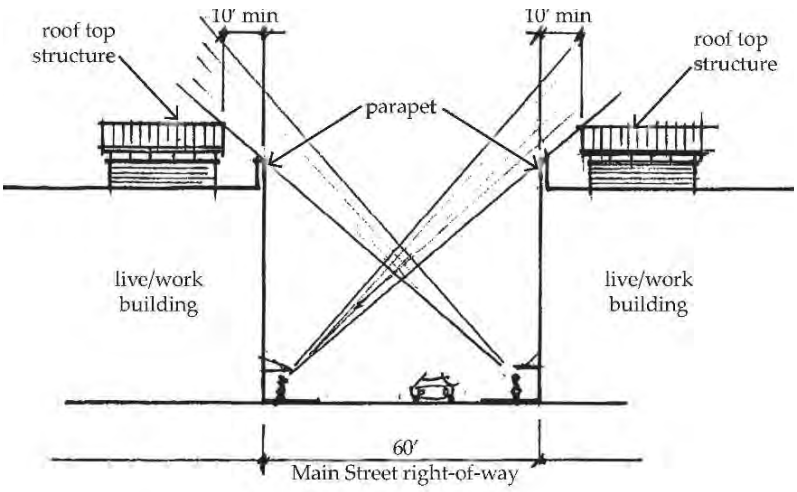
The historic example of Oak Ridge Military Academy

# Roof Form

The roof plays an important role in defining the form of a building. The following guidelines should be followed:

- Incorporate roofing styles typical of historic structures in Oak Ridge, such as gable and hip. Flat roofs may be acceptable for commercial buildings, depending on compensating design elements, such as cornices, parapet wall, or other architectural details. Shed roofs should be reserved for small buildings.
- Alter and break up large roof masses to fit the scale of surrounding rural buildings, by using functioning dormers, chimneys, and other architectural details.
- Roofs should have enough depth to communicate as functional over a building and not simply as a facade element.
- Rooftop mechanical units and equipment should be concealed from the street view.



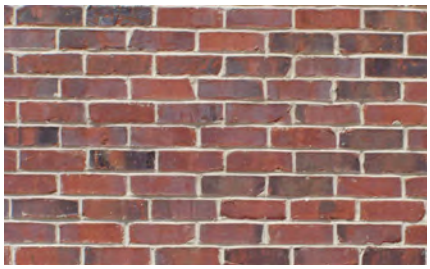



# Materials And Color

Brick has been the main exterior wall material for newer commercial buildings in the historic area (Oak Ridge Commons is a good example). This has been a successful result of the Oak Ridge Historic District Design Standards; however other traditional materials are also encouraged. Although authentic traditional materials are recommended, compatibility of materials in new designs can be accomplished without directly imitating those used in historic buildings, provided they are equivalent in terms of quality and durability. Additionally, the use of energy efficient materials and construction technology in the design and construction of new buildings should be pursued.

The following guidelines should be followed with regard to materials and colors:

- Use traditional and natural building materials that weather naturally, such as brick, stone, wood siding, and wood shingles.
- Use of stone is encouraged but should be real/natural regional stone installed by skilled masons.
- When multiple cladding materials are used on a building: the perceived "heavier" material should be lower. For example: brick above a stone foundation, and wood siding dormers on roof above brick, etc. Vary building materials particularly among clustered buildings to create visual interest and to break up long facades.
- Limit the use of metal to roofing and window frames. Avoid metal (or metallic painted) panels or large expanses of metal.
- Avoid large expanses of glass such as curtain walls, or storefronts without sufficient fenestration. Typically, windows should not occupy more than 40% of the façade of a building, with 10% - 20% preferred. The type and style of windows should complement the building's architectural style.
- Avoid stucco
- Regarding painted materials: soft, earth tones and darker colors should be used. Except for white, bright colors should be avoided.



# Detail and Ornamentation

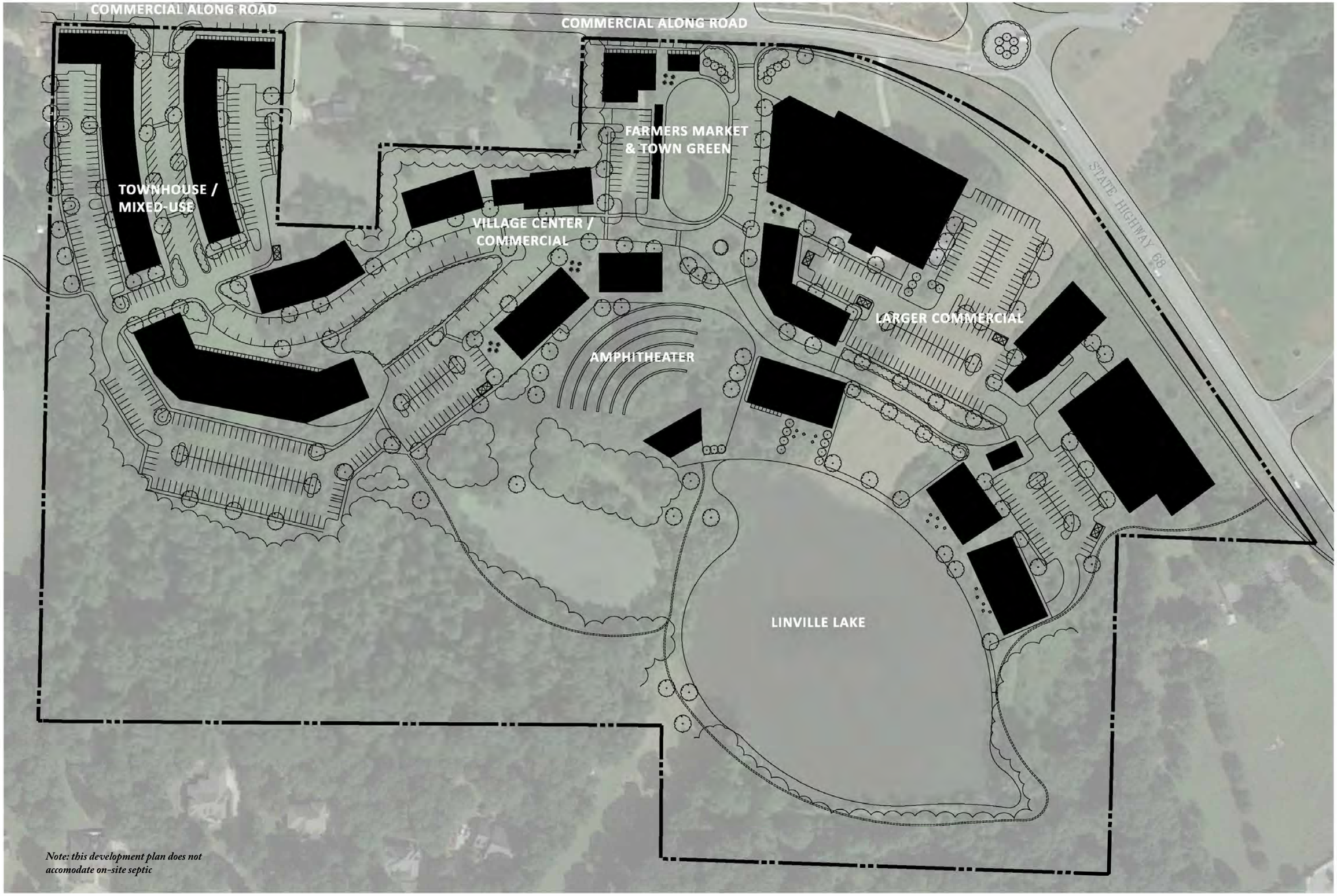
The level of architectural detail and ornamentation in Oak Ridge's historic buildings varies depending on the style and period of a building. Historic buildings feature decoration such as classical columns and entablatures, cornices, corbeled brick chimneys, jigsaw ornament, and window and door trim. Successful new construction does not necessarily try to imitate historic ornament but will rather reinterpret historic decorative features in an original, contemporary manner. Entrances, porches, and other architectural features should be embellished with details that reinforce the architectural style of the overall structure.

# EXAMPLE SITES

# Linville Road Site

This stunning piece of land sits at the intersection of Linville Road and Highway 68, within walking distance to the Oak Ridge Elementary School and Oak Ridge Commons shopping center, two town parks, and the Oak ridge Military Academy. Its proximity to town landmarks and major transportation routes, makes the site ripe for development. With the following example Site Plan, we show one way to maximize development while preserving the small-town village feel and rural landscapes typical of Oak Ridge. In this example, we chose to combine 3 contiguous parcels (11.7 ac, 17.9 ac, 11.5 ac). Over time, the existing residential homes along Linville adjacent to these parcels could also become a mix of commercial, or mixed use. In this way a development can serve as a catalyst, and model, for future nearby property development. It should be noted that this site currently does not have sewer and that unless sewer or off-site septic can be provided, sufficient areas for septic on-site must be included

The design begins with an understanding of the landforms and drainage patterns. The existing series of wetlands and ponds is designated for stormwater mitigation and forested areas nearby are preserved for animal habitat, tree canopy, and recreational trails. With this preserved space as a starting point, a system of contiguous open space is imagined, including an amphitheater and farmers green with traditional farmers market stalls. Connections to existing boundary roads are made, and an interior road system is created. Along these roads are two story mixed use structures, adaptable to a changing market with a growing population of professionals who enjoy living close to amenities. The setbacks to the main streets are approximately 10'- giving enough room for streetscape features such as lights, benches, trash receptacles, planters, signage, and trees. To maximize possible development, these setbacks are consistent and only interrupted when an opportunity to connect to the aforementioned network of green space presents itself. Parallel parking is along both sides of the streets, when possible, and supplemented with larger parking lots located to the rear of the buildings. These large lots allow plenty of parking for tenants, shop owners and service, while keeping the street-front parallel spots open for clients and customers.


COMMERCIAL ALONG ROAD
COMMERCIAL ALONG ROAD
FARMERS MARKET
& TOWN GREEN
TOWNHOUSE /
MIXED-USE
VILLAGE CENTER /
COMMERCIAL
STATE HIGHWAY 68
LARGER COMMERCIAL
AMPHITHEATER
LINVILLE LAKE
Note: this development plan does not
accomodate on-site septic

*Note: this development plan does not accomodate on-site septic*

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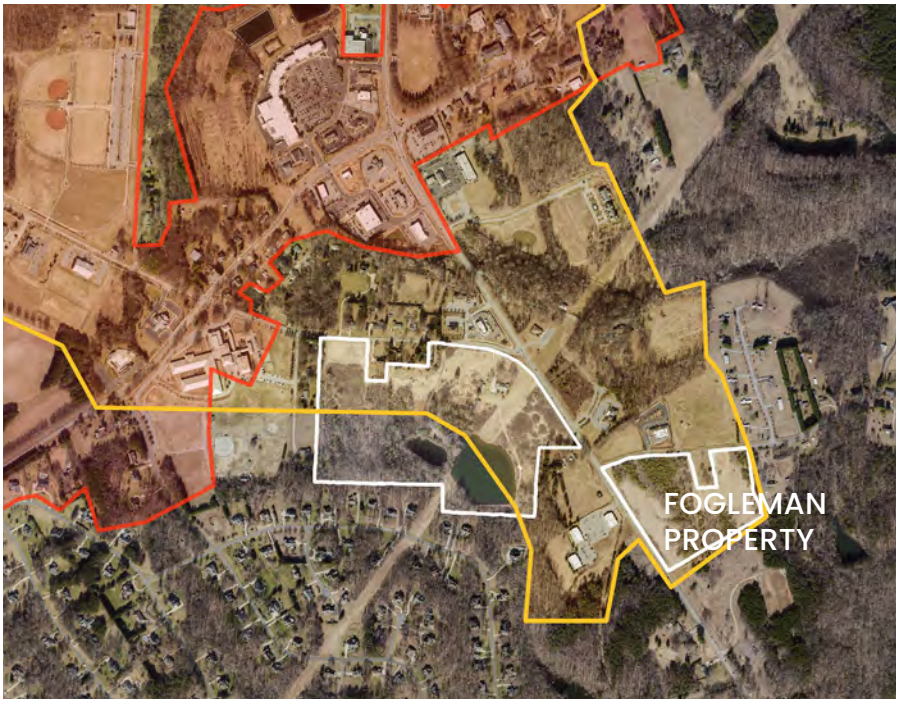
# Fogleman Road Site

This beautiful piece of land sits at the intersection of Fogleman Road and Highway 68, adjacent to the Summit Church at Oak Ridge, and just across highway 68 from the Linville site shown on previous page. The proximity to the Oak Ridge town center and north-south transportation routes makes this site an excellent candidate for development. As a companion to the previous Linville site, we again show a mixed-use development, but this time with a primarily residential theme. The existing residential homes adjacent to these parcels could also later become a mix of commercial, residential, or mixed use.

The design begins by relocating Fogleman Road, which is planned improvement by NCDOT. The lower area of the development is preserved for open space and septic drain fields. As before, a system of contiguous parks is imagined, including two elliptical greens with gazebos flanking each end. Connections to existing boundary roads are made, and an interior road system is created that directly connects to the church site (south) and the bank site (north). Along these roads are 2 story mixed use structures, The setbacks to the main streets are approximately 10'- giving plenty of room for streetscape features. Parallel parking is along both sides of the streets, when possible, and supplemented with larger parking lots that are on the rear of the buildings; hidden from view.

As another option: the septic fields may be relocated to another area and this portion of the property can also be developed in the same fashion.





*Right: alternative plan without septic field*