Design Standards
Neighborhood Commercial District

City of Atlanta
Bureau of Planning
Department of Planning, Development and Neighborhood Conservation
Introduction:

The Neighborhood Commercial (NC) District is a proposed new zoning district. The purpose of the district is to revitalize and protect neighborhood commercial districts at a scale and character which is in keeping with the surrounding neighborhoods, provide neighborhood oriented shops and services, and emphasize pedestrian convenience.

Current regulations have supported the proliferation of automobile-oriented strip shopping centers and chain store development. Huge parking lots and blank walls have replaced pedestrian scale streets. This type of development has destroyed the neighborhood character and uses within our traditional neighborhood centers.

A Neighborhood Commercial District ranges in size from 1 shop to several blocks and will provide close-at-hand goods and services to nearby residences. The new NC District regulations will support the rebuilding of our traditional neighborhood commercial districts by establishing pedestrian-friendly design standards. These standards include minimum sidewalks that have street trees, shop fronts that are adjacent to the sidewalk and parking that is to the rear or side of buildings.

The district will also enable established neighborhoods to retain their own unique character by allowing them to tailor the ordinance to meet their particular needs. Elements of the ordinance such as sidewalk widths and permitted uses may be adjusted by individual neighborhoods to retain their character.

The first step is officially creating the district through City Council adoption of the NC District ordinance. No property will be rezoned as part of this action. The second step is for the City to work with businesses and property owners who may wish to rezone their neighborhood commercial area to NC, and then ask City Council to rezone those particular properties. Establishing the NC District is an important action, which will support the revitalization of our neighborhoods.

The following is a summary of the NC District regulations, which includes the goals of the regulations and an illustrated summary of the design standards. For more details, see the complete NC ordinance.
BEFORE and AFTER COMMERCIAL STREETS

BEFORE
TYPICAL EXISTING SECTION

AFTER
TYPICAL PROPOSED SECTION
BEFORE and AFTER COMMERCIAL STREETS

BEFORE
TYPICAL EXISTING ELEVATION

AFTER
TYPICAL PROPOSED ELEVATION
BEFORE and AFTER COMMERCIAL STREETSCAPES

BEFORE
EXISTING TYPICAL STREETSCAPE

Above is a typical example of a commercial strip in the City, characterized by forty (40) feet or greater front yard building setbacks, parking in front of buildings, unsightly overhead utilities, lack of spatial definition and little pedestrian infrastructure. It is designed exclusively for the automobile, which discourages alternative modes of transportation.

AFTER
PROPOSED TYPICAL STREETSCAPE

The proposed NC District envisions a streetscape with buildings moved closer to the street and parking located in the rear. Lined with attractive storefront windows and primary entrances that face onto ample sidewalks, a commercial strip becomes transformed into a neighborhood center which encourages pedestrian activity while still accommodating the automobile.
Goals (Section 16-32.002)

1. Protect existing neighborhood-oriented commercial areas from uses and building forms which are incompatible with the scale, character and needs of the adjacent neighborhoods;

2. Preserve and restore existing, traditional and pedestrian scale buildings in established, historic neighborhood commercial districts;

3. Create new commercial nodes, in areas so indicated in the Comprehensive Development Plan, which are pedestrian-oriented and provide uses which primarily serve adjacent neighborhoods;

4. Promote a balance of retail, service, office, dining and residential uses which serve the adjacent neighborhoods;

5. Place reasonable controls on the development of larger scale highway-oriented retail, service, office and dining uses which are intended to serve larger areas of the City than a single neighborhood or a small group of neighborhoods;

6. Alleviate development pressure on existing neighborhoods by placing reasonable controls on development and expansion of strip commercial areas within neighborhoods;

7. Facilitate safe, attractive and convenient pedestrian circulation and minimize conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles;

8. Encourage pedestrian flow through the design of mixed use buildings with ground level retail uses, which open directly onto sidewalks adjacent to public streets;

9. Improve pedestrian access within the district and to and from the surrounding neighborhoods;

10. Establish building facade lines and front yard requirements which reserve the space between buildings and the street for pedestrian functions;

11. Encourage the rehabilitation or development of neighborhood commercial areas to include proportionately significant residential uses;

12. Minimize the use of adjacent neighborhood streets for commercial area parking by establishing adequate parking requirements and encouraging shared parking arrangements;

13. Promote a nodal form of neighborhood commercial development which is of such a size that all uses within the district are within a convenient walking distance of one another; and

14. Include all parcels within a neighborhood commercial area as part of the Neighborhood Commercial district.
TRANSITIONAL YARDS (Section 16-32.009)
Commercial lots adjacent to residentially zoned properties shall have the following requirements:
- 20 feet wide landscape buffers or 10 feet wide alleys in the side and rear yards
- Buffers shall not be used for the purpose of parking, loading, servicing or any other activity
- Permanent opaque walls or screening 6 feet in height

ZERO-LOT-LINES (Section 16-32.009)
New development shall have:
- Zero-lot-lines, or
- Set back a minimum of 5 feet from the side lot line, except as required for a transitional yard (Section 16-32.008)
MAXIMUM PERMITTED BULK LIMITATIONS

MAXIMUM FAR FOR RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL

BULK LIMITATIONS (Section 16-32.0011)

*Refer to Site Limitations (Section 16-32.012) for additional requirements.

**Non-residential FAR is calculated with the net lot area.
*Residential FAR is calculated with the gross lot area.

Bulk limitation is computed by the Floor Area Ratio (FAR).

The FAR* = area of building divided by the area of the property.

- The maximum FAR for commercial uses = 1.50
- The maximum FAR for residential uses = 1.49
- The total maximum FAR for commercial and residential uses combined = 2.99
- Non-heated/cooled areas, such as parking decks, are not included in FAR calculations

**Bulk limitation is computed by the Floor Area Ratio (FAR).

The FAR* = area of building divided by the area of the property.

- The maximum FAR for commercial uses = 1.5
- The maximum FAR for residential uses = 1.5
- The total maximum FAR for commercial and residential uses combined = 3.0
- Non-heated/cooled areas, such as parking decks, are not included in FAR calculations

*Non-residential FAR is calculated with the net lot area.
*Residential FAR is calculated with the gross lot area.
MINIMUM BUILDING FACADE HEIGHTS (Section 16-32.012)

- Minimum 18 feet high

FLOOR DELINEATION (Section 16-32.015)

- Delineate floors from third story above sidewalk level and lower with architectural detailing such as belt courses or cornice lines

MAXIMUM BUILDING HEIGHTS (Section 16-32.012)

- 35 feet within 150 feet from single-family residential
- 52 feet between 150 and 300 feet from single-family residential

TRANSITIONAL HEIGHT PLANES (Section 16-32.012)

- No structure shall protrude through a transitional height plane beginning 35 feet above the buildable area boundary nearest to the common residential district boundary and extending inward over the commercial district at an angle of 45 degrees
SIDEWALK and SUPPLEMENTAL SIDEWALK

BUILDING FACADE LINE (Section 16-32.015)
- Not less than 20 feet and not more than 30 feet from the street curb on arterial streets.
- Not less than 15 feet and not more than 30 feet from the street curb on all other streets.

SIDEWALK (Section 16-32.013)
- Located along all public streets
- Minimum of 15 feet in width
- A clear zone with a minimum width of 10 feet
- A street furniture zone located adjacent to the curb as described below.

STREET FURNITURE ZONE (Section 16-32.013)
- Located adjacent to the curb
- Minimum width of 5 feet
- Intended for placement of trees, street furniture, utility poles, waste receptacles, fire hydrants, traffic signs, newspaper vending boxes, sandwich advertising boards, bus shelters, bicycle racks, public information kiosks and similar elements as approved by the City

SUPPLEMENTAL SIDEWALK (Section 16-32.014)
- Located between the sidewalk and the building façade
- Maximum width of 15 feet
- Hardscape and used for public plazas or terraces with a maximum finished floor height of 24 inches, accessory outdoor dining or other similar types of uses
- Raised terraces shall be surrounded by safety fencing with a maximum height of 42 inches
- Accessory outdoor dining may be separated from the sidewalk only with movable planters or fencing which shall have a maximum height of 36 inches
CLEAR ZONE (Section 16-32.013)
- Unobstructed by any permanent or nonpermanent element for a minimum width of 10 feet and a minimum height of 8 feet

AWNINGS and CANOPIES (Section 16-32.013)
- Shall encroach a maximum of 5 feet over the public sidewalk

BUILDING ENCROACHMENT (Section 16-32.014)
- Balconies shall encroach into the supplemental sidewalk a maximum of 5 feet
**TREE PLACEMENT** (Section 16-32.013)
- Planted a minimum of 25 feet and a maximum of 40 feet on center within the street furniture zone
- Minimum planting area of 25 square feet which shall be planted with evergreen ground cover such as mondo, liriope spicata or ivy
- All plantings, planting replacement and planting removal shall be approved by the City Arborist

**SIGHT TRIANGLE** (Section 16-32.013)
- Nothing shall be erected, placed, planted or allowed to grow in such a manner as to impede visibility between the heights of two-and one half feet above the grade of the adjoining sidewalk or right-of-way and eight feet within visibility triangles.

Sight triangle = area bounded by the first 20 feet along intersecting edges of where the right-of-way is and a line connecting the ends of such 20 feet lines.

**SIDEWALK TAPERING** (Section 16-32.013)
- Taper a commercial area sidewalk into adjacent residential areas
INFILL DEVELOPMENT BUILDING FACE LINES
(Section 16-32.015)
For blocks with buildings built before 1950, one of the following shall apply:
• New development building facade lines shall match average existing building facade lines, or
• New development building facade lines shall match that of the nearest adjacent building facade line built before 1950 and that is closest to a 15 feet building facade line.

BUILDING NUMBERING (Section 16-32.015)
• Located above the primary building entrance
• Clearly visible from the sidewalk
• Minimum of 6 inch height
STREETFRONT WINDOWS (Section 16-32.015)
All street-fronting ground level developments, with the exception of churches and fire stations, shall have windows that meet the following requirements:
- Must be of clear, unpainted or similarly treated glass to allow views of store interior or display windows
- Cover 75% of street frontage
- Raised a maximum of 3 feet above the sidewalk with a minimum height of 10 feet above the sidewalk
- Maximum façade length without windows of 10 feet
- In areas with buildings built before 1950, storefront windows will match those of the older buildings

PRIMARY PEDESTRIAN ENTRANCES (Section 16-32.015)
- Face and be visible from the street
- Be directly accessible from the public sidewalk adjacent to such street
- Open directly onto the adjacent public sidewalk, or an outdoor dining area or plaza adjacent to the public sidewalk
- Remain unlocked during normal business hours

DUMPSTERS and LOADING AREAS (Section 16-32.018)
- Screened so as not to be visible from any public plaza, outdoor dining area, public right-of-way, or residential area
- May be enclosed with opaque fences or walls 6 feet in height
PARKING DECK FACADES
(Section 16-32.020)
• Shall conceal automobiles from visibility
• Shall have the appearance of a horizontal storied building

PARKING DECKS (Section 16-32.020)
• Above ground parking structures shall provide continuous street-fronting ground level commercial, office or residential uses, except at ingress and egress points into structure

DRIVEWAYS (Section 16-32.020)
• A common or joint driveway may be required by the Commissioner of Public Works, when adjacent lots have direct vehicular access to a street.
• Connect the public sidewalk to the surface parking area. See Landscaped Buffer (Section 16-32.018) for additional requirements.
CURB CUTS (Section 16-32.020)
Unless otherwise permitted by the Commissioner of Public Works, curb cuts shall be:
- 24 feet wide for two-way entrances
- 12 feet wide for one-way entrances
- One curb cut is permitted for each development with the exception of properties with more than one front yard which may have 2 curb cuts

GASOLINE SERVICE STATIONS (Section 16-32.015)
- Gasoline fuel dispenser structures, canopy, or associated service area shall not be located between a building and the street
- A maximum of 4 fuel dispenser structures with a maximum of 8 fueling position spaces
- No car washes permitted
- No automobile maintenance garages permitted
PARKING SECURITY (Section 16-32.017)
Parking facilities shall have the following lighting requirements:
- Evenly lit and equal to a minimum of 0.2 footcandle of light
- Light spillage onto adjacent residential properties shall be reduced with a maximum 90° cutoff luminaire

PARKING MAINTENANCE (Section 16-32.021)
Parking facilities shall have the following requirements:
- Maintained in clean, safe, sanitary and attractive condition
- Clearly defined spaces and driving lanes
- Not operated when any damage impairs the drivability of the parking lot

LANDSCAPED BUFFER (Section 16-32.022)
- A continuous landscape buffer area between the parking area and the street, excluding driveways
- A minimum width of 5 feet
- Trees planted a maximum of 42.5 feet on center
- Planted with evergreen ground cover or with shrubs to be maintained at a minimum mature height of 24 inches and a maximum height of 30 inches
- Areas with less than 34 feet street frontage shall have at least one tree planted in the landscape buffer
BICYCLE PARKING (Section 16-32.024)

- One bicycle/moped parking space for every 20 automobile parking spaces
- No fewer than 3 and no more than 50 bicycle/moped parking spaces
- Located within the street furniture zone a maximum distance of one hundred (100) feet of the building entrance, or shall be located at least as close as the closest automobile space, except for handicapped parking spaces
- A metal anchor will secure the frame in conjunction with a user-supplied lock.

*Refer to section 16-28.014-6 for complete requirements*