

City of Ridgefield

14 Essential Guidelines for Downtown Ridgefield



Urbsworks, Inc. Architecture and Urban Design

Marcy McInelly, AIA | Project Manager, Primary Author
Joseph Readdy, NCARB, AIA | Guideline Assistance, Editing
Ryan Sullivan | Graphic Design Assistance, Production

October 22, 2004

Introduction	01
Guideline Districts	05
Chapter 1 Urban Form	07
1.1 Street to Building Relationship	09
1.2 The Importance of Corners	11
1.3 Ridgefield’s Alleys	13
1.4 The Facade as Wall, Streets as Rooms	15
Chapter 2 Building Form	17
2.1 The Pedestrian Level	19
2.2 Building Programmability & Adaptability	21
2.3 Building Orientation	23
2.4 Background Buildings & “Civic” Buildings	25
2.5 The Base, Body & Cornice	27
Chapter 3 Material, Detail & Color	29
3.1 Ridgefield’s Buildings at Night	31
3.2 The Color of Downtown Ridgefield	33
3.3 Building Materials	35
3.4 The Doors and Windows of Ridgefield	37
3.5 The Storefronts of Ridgefield	39
Design Review Process	41

Table of Contents

Background

INTRODUCTION

Residents, business owners and visitors describe the friendly and inviting small town atmosphere, the walkable main streets and animated storefronts as some of Ridgefield’s greatest assets. This guideline document defines, describes and illustrates the 14 essential characteristics that contribute to the physical form of Ridgefield. These essential design guidelines are intended to ensure that new development builds upon these strengths by preserving, strengthening and adding to them.

This document is divided into three primary sections: “Introduction,” “Downtown Design Guidelines,” and “The Design Process.” The “Introduction” describes the planning background that led to the publication of these guidelines, and describes Ridgefield’s voluntary, incentive-based system of design review. The section called “Design Districts” places the Downtown District in context, as the first of three districts that are intended to receive design attention.

Most of the users of this document will refer to the second chapter, which lists the 14 design guidelines under the headings “Urban Form,” “Building Form,” and “Material, Detailing and Color.” In this section, each guideline is introduced with information explaining why the guideline is important, illustrations of the urban design concept and how the concept is manifested in Ridgefield. The guidelines themselves are relatively short—generally one to three sentences. In some cases the guidelines are accompanied by a list of material or treatments that fall into three categories: “encouraged,” “allowed,” and “requires further review.” A “Purpose Statement” precedes each guideline.

The third and final section, “The Design Process” is a flowchart that illustrates the review process.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

If you are an applicant, planning improvements to your building or planning a new development.

You will want to be familiar with Chapter 2, “Downtown Design Guidelines.” Your application for design review will need to make clear to City review staff and officials how your proposal responds to each guideline. Other helpful sections for applicants include 1.4, “Ridgefield’s Approach to Design Regulations,” and Chapter 3 “The Design Review Process.”

If you are a neighbor, reviewing a development proposal.

You will want to be familiar with Chapter 2, “Downtown Design Guidelines.” You may find the sections which precede each Design Guideline—“Why is this Important,” and “Purpose Statements” very helpful in understanding the intent behind each of the design guidelines. Other helpful sections for affected neighbors include Chapter 1.3, “Existing Zoning and Standards,” and Chapter 1.4, “Ridgefield’s Approach to Design Regulations.”

If you are a review official.

Since it is your job to review projects and judge the degree to which they meet the Design Guidelines, you will want to be very familiar with the Design Guidelines, both the intent behind them as well as the guidelines themselves. It is your role to provide design guidance to applicants, and encourage voluntary compliance. In cases where the guideline is not clear to the applicant or there is more than one way to meet it, the Purpose Statement can be helpful.

If you are considering moving to Ridgefield to live or work.

The document will provide a good picture of Ridgefield’s personality, its urban form and the regulatory environment it seeks to promote.

There is a very distinct, recognizable character to Ridgefield. How would you describe it?

Ridgefield style is “early to mid-century small town.”
Peggy Quall, Design Committee

“The space between freeway and Ridgefield Downtown, helps give downtown its character.”
Workshop participant

“It’s at the end of the road and hard to get to.”
Workshop participant

“It’s quaint and friendly. You can’t help but slow down.”
Workshop participant

“It’s at the end of the road—a destination. You have to want to come to Ridgefield.”
Workshop participant

“The natural beauty of the vista of the estuary.”
Workshop participant

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

In August 2004, the City of Ridgefield contracted with Urbsworks, Inc, Architecture and Urban Design, a Portland-based firm, to work with a citizen’s task force to provide design guidelines for an Incentive Based Downtown Design Guideline Program. This was the second phase of a downtown planning project; the first phase consisted of Downtown Planning Guidelines (published in 2002). The Design Committee is comprised of nine members, including planning commissioners, developers, citizens, and small business owners.

Between August and October 2004, Urbsworks conducted two workshops with the Design Committee and two workshops with the general public of Ridgefield. In addition, Urbsworks conducted an inventory and evaluation of Ridgefield’s urban form and building design. This document is the result of the workshops, the inventory and evaluation.

The project funds were been made available through The Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development with matching funds from the City of Ridgefield.

DOWNTOWN, THE HEART OF RIDGEFIELD

[Excerpted from Downtown Ridgefield Planning Guidelines—2002]

Downtown Ridgefield has always been the traditional heart of the community. Downtown is the social, commercial, governmental crossroads of old Ridgefield. Ridgefield has abundant resources to draw upon, including its small town character and charm, and the natural surroundings, such as the rolling hills, the Lake River waterfront, the National Wildlife Refuge, attraction to artisans, rich Native American archaeological history, and its association with the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Ridgefield stands poised for dramatic growth. Every segment of the community is preparing for such growth. The Port of Ridgefield has completed a master-planning program at the Lake River waterfront. The Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge is planning for the expansion of its interpretive and visitor facilities

in anticipation of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial. The plans include a new interpretive center at the refuge and a downtown information kiosk to inform Lewis and Clark visitors.

In Ridgefield, all roads lead to and from downtown whether one is traveling to the Wildlife Refuge, the Port, City government buildings, residential areas, or out to the I-5 Junction.

An end product of this planning effort is to create a destination area for downtown Ridgefield that provides quality merchandise, service, and activities with an ambience that is unique to Ridgefield.

The goal for this document is a Design Guideline Handbook for the downtown commercial core of the City that represents the unique ambience of Ridgefield.

“With everything poised to happen, how can Ridgefield preserve its sense of place? How can it protect and enhance its village-like atmosphere that everyone enjoys so much?”

Downtown Ridgefield Planning Guidelines—2002

Observations on Ridgefield’s Opportunities & Constraints

[Excerpted from Urbsworks’ memo dated 27 August 2004—Summary of Site Visit & Design Committee One]

Ridgefield’s intact urban environment, its grid of streets, pedestrian-oriented, walkable environment and its many good buildings give Ridgefield a head start compared with many western American towns at the turn of the century. Ridgefield does not have to contend with too much through traffic, truck traffic, vacant lots or urban blight. Fran Kemper’s comment that “***What’s most important is the façade***” supports this observation.

There is a very distinct, recognizable character to Ridgefield—as Peggy Quall observed, “***early to mid-century small town.***” At the same time, while there is a very distinct character in Ridgefield,

it consists of equal parts intangible elements and tangible physical elements. Brent Grening’s comment “***how does it all work together?***” sums up this concept.

Design regulations cannot protect the intangibles, but the exercise that the Design Committee has committed to in developing Design Guidelines can also be used to help identify those intangibles and set up programs to cultivate and protect them. As Brent said, “***We need to teach ourselves how to have that conversation with the people who come to Ridgefield.***”

Design guidelines are inherently more difficult to administer. However, if they are well-written, designed and illustrated, they can encourage good design. Ridgefield’s decision to go this route, combined with Ridgefield’s “human capital” and the Design Committee’s conviction to make regulatory environment “***simple and friendly here for developers,***” in Chad Session’s words, make it more possible that Ridgefield can make design guidelines work for them.

Overly prescriptive design guidelines that specify trim, finish material, or require imitation of historic elements may not produce long-lasting buildings that weather well. At the same time, high quality materials and good detailing are very important. Ridgefield’s Design Guidelines must help applicants understand this. Understanding the forms of Ridgefield that makes up its good bones is critical also, possibly more critical than identifying one period style that all new buildings must imitate. At Urbsworks, we think that the goal is to have buildings “emulate,” not imitate Ridgefield’s older structures. In Brent’s words, the guidelines should “***allow innovation, and not have regulations require a staid or contrived response... a totally managed environment—that’s not Ridgefield.***”

As Cyrus observed, Ridgefield has good bones, “***but the bones don’t have much flesh on them, and there is not much to work with.***” Some historic research is important to understanding how Ridgefield has evolved and to use that research to inform

the Design Guidelines. We would like to use this to help identify future programs that can help to celebrate Ridgefield’s 100th anniversary and “*build a walk through history here in Ridgefield,*” as Kevin Snyder suggested.

Ridgefield’s Approach to Design Regulations

Earlier in 2004, the Design Committee recommended that new design guidelines developed for the City of Ridgefield Downtown District be incentive-based, not required.

Several goals were established for this project

- Use the process of developing design regulations to define the character and personality of Ridgefield.

- Use the design guidelines to present the personality of Ridgefield as positive and welcoming.
- Illustrate Ridgefield’s patterns clearly, and describe how to use them to guide future developments.
- The ultimate goal is to have future development strengthen, extend and preserve Ridgefield patterns.

This approach was reinforced at meetings and workshops conducted during the course of this project. When asked at the first Design Committee Workshop, what characterizes a simple and friendly regulatory environment? members responded with

- Design Guidelines can be used to help identify the character of Ridgefield and set up programs to cultivate and protect it. “We need to teach ourselves how to have that conversation

- with the people who come to Ridgefield.” Brent Grening, Design Committee
- We want it to be “simple and friendly here for developers.” Chad Sessions, Design Committee
- The guidelines should “allow innovation, and not have regulations require a staid or contrived response... a totally managed environment—that’s not Ridgefield.” Brent Grening, Design Committee

In addition, at the Public Workshops, business owners and residents said

- I would like the regulation to be helpful. It should be welcoming, not a bunch of do’s and don’ts.
- The tone should be: Here’s who we are, how can we help you fit in?
- The guidelines should provide a road map: how to get from A to B, how to get through the maze.
- A dilemma is, how to be inviting while prohibiting certain things, or setting minimums.
- If it’s well illustrated, people will be drawn to it.

Possible incentives that have been discussed include

- A reduction of City fees: impact, hook-up and business fees
- 1st Independent Bank loan package
- Low interest loan pools: Urban Development Action grant (DAG) pay backs, industrial revenue bonds (IRBs), and revenue from special downtown taxing districts.
- Incentive grant programs: CDBGs, fund raising, state local and private
- Tax incentives—TRA 196, ERTA 1981
- Public improvements: sidewalks, streetlights, plantings
- Property Tax incentives
- TIF projects
- Business Improvement District
- Historic Easement
- Partner relationships: Parks Board, Business Association, Planning Commission
- Free design Assistance

What are the most important things in Ridgefield to regulate?

“What’s most important is the façade”
Fran Kemper, Design Committee

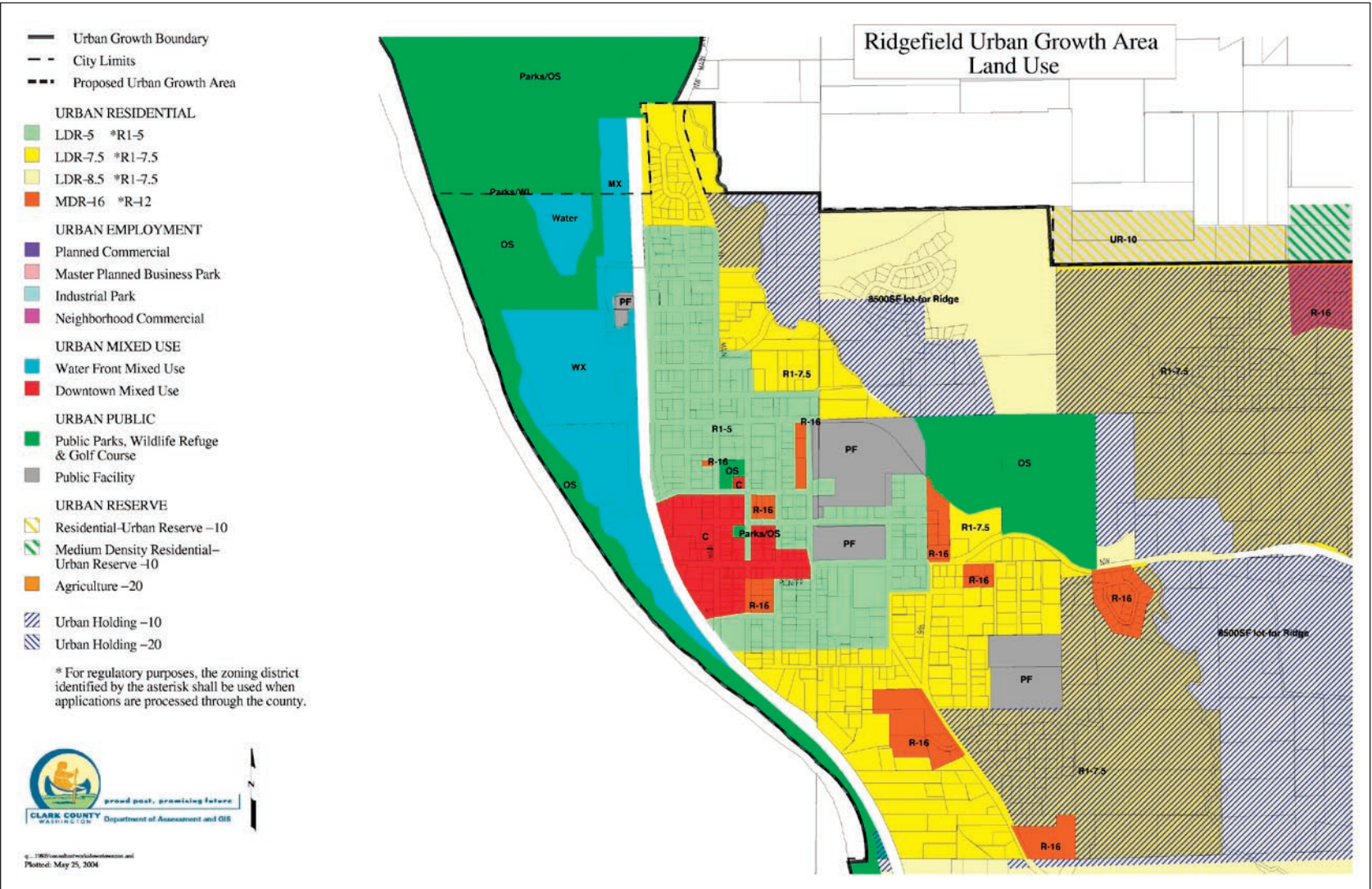
“How does it all work together?”
Brent Grening, Design Committee

What characterizes a simple and friendly regulatory environment?

Design Guidelines can be used to help identify the character of Ridgefield and set up programs to cultivate and protect it. “We need to teach ourselves how to have that conversation with the people who come to Ridgefield.”
Brent Grening, Design Committee

We want it to be “simple and friendly here for developers.”
Chad Sessions, Design Committee

The guidelines should “allow innovation, and not have regulations require a staid or contrived response... a totally managed environment—that’s not Ridgefield.”
Brent Grening, Design Committee



Map showing City of Ridgefield Zoning. Downtown Ridgefield Design Guideline Study Area is zoned *Downtown Mixed Use*.

- Main Street Program

Existing Zoning & Standards

Old Town Ridgefield that is the focus of this study is zoned

Downtown Mixed Use (DMU). The zoning for the area specifies

- Land uses—permitted, conditional and specifically prohibited
- Lot requirements, such as setbacks and minimum lot width and depth
- Landscaping screening and buffering standards

In addition, Section 18.500.050, defines review standards that are handled by the Planning Director, including Subsection 2, regarding the location of buildings in relationship to streets, and Subsection 3, regarding the percent of wall area facing a street that is required to have windows.

These design guidelines will be administered by the Planning director and reviewed by the Design Committee, according to the Incentive-based Voluntary Design Guidelines Program.

If there is a conflict between the Design Guidelines and the Chapter 18.230—Zoning and Standards, Chapter 18.230—Zoning and Standards shall govern.

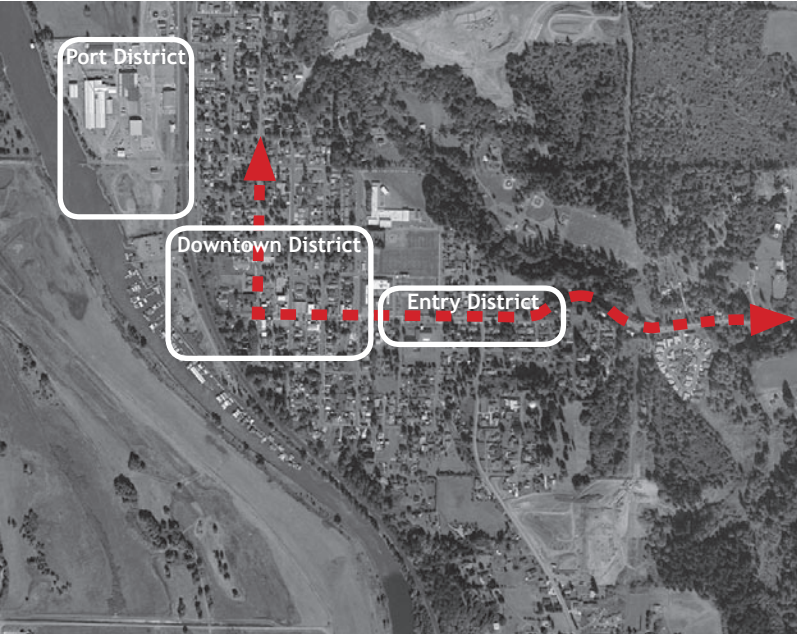
If there is a conflict between the Design Guidelines and the Building Code provisions administered by the building department, the Building Code provisions shall govern.

History of Ridgefield in Pictures

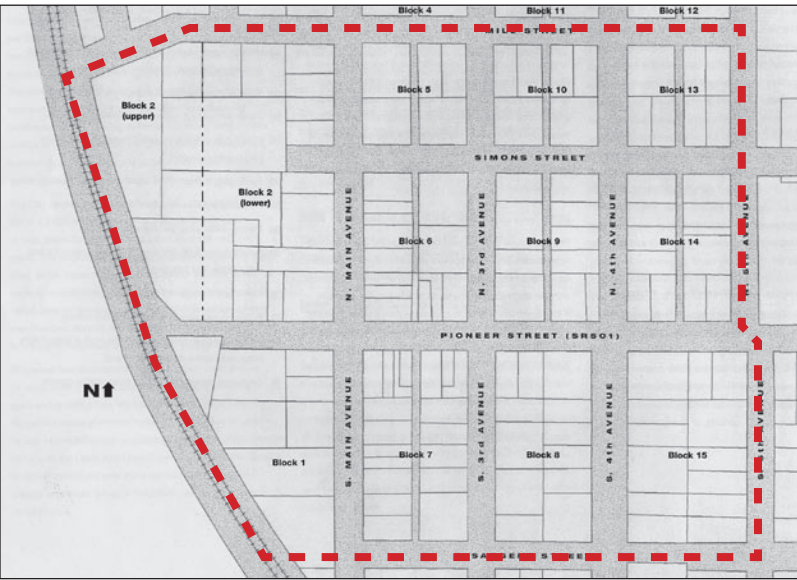
Courtesy of Ridgefield Public Library.

The Downtown District

The Downtown District has been defined as the area bounded by 5th Avenue on the east, Sargent Street on the south, Lake River Street on the west and Mill Street on the north. It is this district that is the focus of the 14 Essential Design Guidelines for Downtown Ridgefield. However, as part of the Urban Form and Building Form evaluation, Urbsworks identified two additional “districts” that support and help define the Downtown Commercial district.



Three design districts



Downtown District Study area

The Entry District

The Entry District, defined as the length of Pioneer Street from the red barn at the bend in the road (Pioneer and Old Pioneer Way) to the edge of the Downtown District is the area that leads into the downtown, helping to create the “sense of arrival” that many participants in the Public Workshops described as one of Ridgefield’s most unique features. In order to preserve and enrich this important feature, Urbsworks recommends that the City of Ridgefield undertake a similar design and planning exercise for this District as it has undertaken for the Downtown District. There has been desire voiced at the Workshops that Pioneer Street



Red barn in the bend of the road marks the eastern end of the proposed entry district. Above, residential structures, some converted to office uses.

Entry District accommodate live /work uses in the future. Some participants talked about Portland’s NW 23rd Street as a model. Up to the 1980’s NW 23rd was a predominantly residential street. Over the years it has transitioned into an interesting and vibrant commercial/ office and residential district. Many of the original residential building which lined NW 23rd have been rehabilitated and adapted to a mix of compatible uses—typically retail or restaurant at the ground level, office and/ or residential above.

The Port District

The Port District, identified roughly on the diagram at the left, represents another important opportunity for the Downtown District. In 2003, the Port of Ridgefield completed a master-planning program for their district at the Lake River waterfront. During the course of this project, the Port was represented by Brent A. Grening, a member of the City of Ridgefield Design Committee. During the Design Workshops, a commitment was expressed that development in the Port District would support the Downtown District and vice versa.

Planning and Design of the Port District and the Entry District

Recommended future actions and options include:

- Use the 14 Essential Design Guidelines for Downtown Ridgefield as interim guidelines for new development.
- Develop a new set for each district using this document as a framework to address district personality. For example, for each district address the features that fit into the three primary categories identified in this document: Urban Form, Building Form and Materials and Detailing.
- Identify and illustrate those elements that differentiate the district and unify the district..
- Develop design guidelines that preserve, extend and/or strengthen the patter.

Guideline Districts

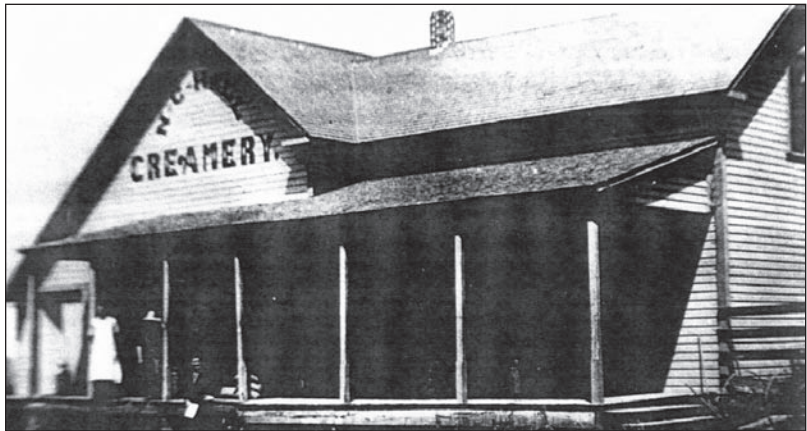
History of Ridgefield in Pictures

Courtesy of Ridgefield Public Library.

How can Ridgefield recover, uncover and celebrate its history?

As Ridgefield prepares to celebrate its 100th anniversary, we should ask the question, how do we “build a walk through history here in Ridgefield?”

Kevin Snyder, Planning Director



Creamery—SW corner of Mill and Main. Operated into the 1920's.



Ridgefield Mercantile—SW corner of Pioneer and Main. Fred Herbert moved from here to the NW corner in 1928.



Historical storefront.



Hardware Store—NE corner of Pioneer and Main.



Railroad Station—the railroad arrived in 1908 and a station was opened.



1953



Pioneer and Main.



Pioneer Avenue—1915.



1937

Chapter 1

Urban Form

Urban Form

1.1 STREET TO BUILDING RELATIONSHIP

1.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF CORNERS

1.3 RIDGEFIELD’S ALLEYS

1.4 THE FACADE AS WALL, STREETS AS ROOMS

Urban form is one of the often overlooked physical features that creates a sense of place. Ridgefield is fortunate to have good urban form, and a strong sense of place. In Ridgefield, the historic main street buildings are still mostly intact. They face the street with welcoming facades, rather than being removed from the street behind rows of parked cars. And unlike many other small towns in the western US, the main street does not double as a state highway, carrying large volumes of cars to somewhere else—“through” the town, rather than “to” it.

These and other things contribute to the sense of arrival that many participants in the Design Workshops commented on, when asked the question: “what specific elements give Ridgefield its character?” Many visitors, residents and customers arrive in Ridgefield after traveling down Pioneer Street, past forested areas and open country, then to the red barn at the bend in the road, then through a segment of Pioneer that is defined by residential structures facing the street but set back about twenty feet. Finally, at the intersection of 3rd Avenue and Pioneer, the buildings form a dramatic enclosure to the street and this pattern is continued for 1-1/2 blocks.

The strength of this pattern is what led Urbsworks to declare that one of the most important aspects of Ridgefield to be preserved is its urban form. Many people assume that the most important features contributing to Ridgefield’s character are the materials, detailing and color of the buildings. While these are important (and thoroughly addressed in Chapters 3), no amount of paint, expensive material and fancy decoration can make up for bad urban form. If you have good urban form, everything else falls into place. That is why it is important to place this chapter first.



The design of the space between buildings is as important as the design of the buildings themselves. They are the public rooms of Ridgefield.



After travelling through the countryside and the “entry district,” one arrives at the intersection of 3rd Avenue and Pioneer, where the buildings form a dramatic enclosure to the street and this pattern is continued for 1-1/2 blocks.

Street to Building Relationship

Why This Is Important

“Height-to-width ratio,” meaning “building height to street width relationship” is a formula that has been used by city designers to create pleasing public spaces since the Renaissance.

One of the most important elements of Ridgefield’s good urban form is the spatial enclosure created by street width to building enclosure, especially on the 1-1/2 block segment of Pioneer between 3rd Avenue and Main Avenue. This issue should be considered when establishing an appropriate minimum and maximum building height.

As a general rule, a ratio of 1 : 3 is an effective minimum to create spatial enclosure. How does Ridgefield measure up?

At 3rd and Pioneer, at City Hall, the ratio is 1 : 2.3 (building height : street width)

At Main Avenue Pioneer, at the Hardware store, the ratio is 1 : 1.75 (building height : street width)

According to the formula, Ridgefield, with a street width of approximately 60 feet, should strive for a minimum building height of 20.’



Even when the building is a single story, its perceived height can be increased through a façade treatment such as the “false front.”

Purpose Statement

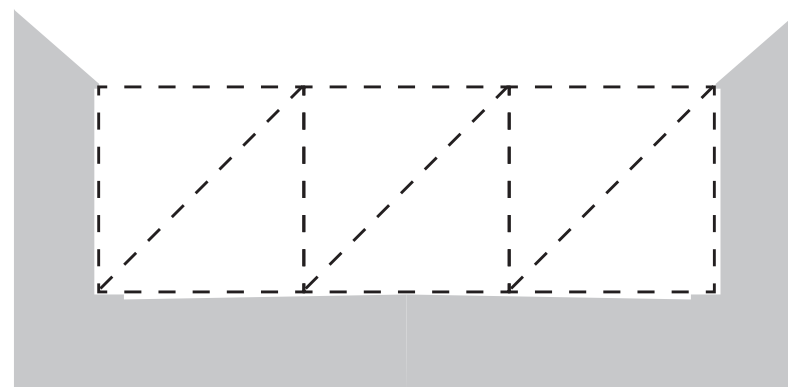
Along Pioneer Street, between Main Avenue and 4th Avenue, Ridgefield currently has a building height-to-width ratio that

- establishes a strong sense of urban enclosure; and
- by contrasting with the character of surrounding residential neighborhoods, with their patterns of lower scale buildings set back from the street, creates a sense of arrival.

Guidelines

In order to preserve, extend and/or strengthen this pattern, consider the following guidelines:

- 1) Consider requiring all new buildings within the study area to meet a minimum height of 20 feet and maximum setback of 0.'
- 2) Even when the building is a single story, this guideline can be met through a façade treatment such as the "false front."
- 3) Consider allowing flexibility on the maximum height of buildings within the study area. Consider requiring new buildings to demonstrate the height-to-width ratio that would result.
- 4) Consider allowing mixed use buildings that accommodate one or more floors of residential and/or office to build up to the highest acceptable height.



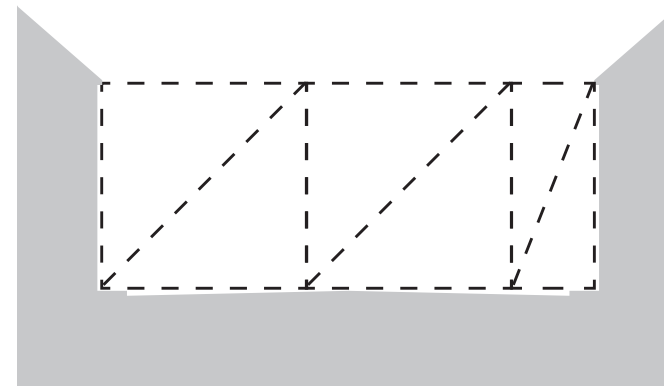
Ratio 1:3—Effective Minimum Ratio for Spatial Enclosure



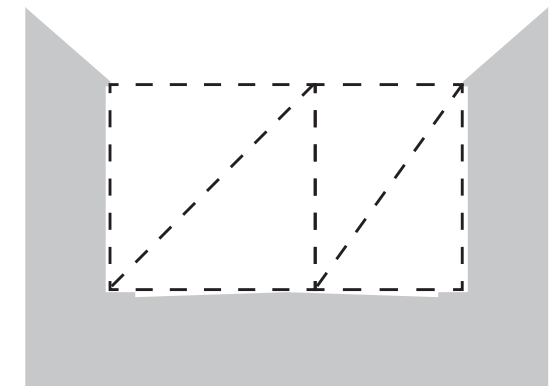
Ratio 1:2.3—City Hall



Ratio 1:1.75—Hardware Store



Ratio 1:2.3—City Hall



Ratio 1:1.75—Hardware Store

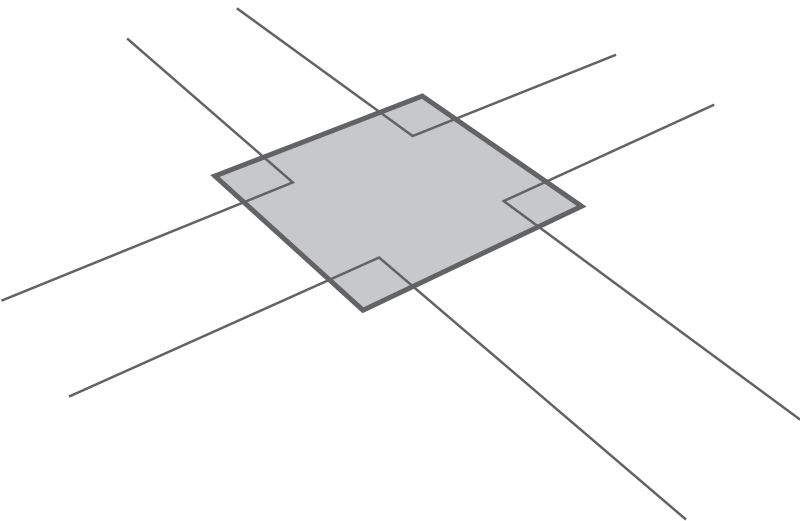
“The height-to-width ratio of the space generates spatial enclosure, which is related to the physiology of the human eye. If the width of the public space is such that the cone of vision encompasses less street wall than sky opening, the degree of spatial enclosure is slight. The ratio of 1 increment of height to 6 of width is the absolute minimum, with 1 to 3 being an effective minimum if spatial enclosure is to result. As a general rule, the tighter the ratio, the stronger the sense of place and, often, the higher the real estate value.”

Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk et al, Architectural Graphic Standards, Ninth Edition

The Importance of Corners

Why This Is Important

In downtown areas such as the Ridgefield Study Area, corner buildings are more important than in-line buildings. Corner buildings must face two streets, not just one. Corner buildings mark the extent of the block, so it's important that they meet the minimum height (at least), and have a physical prominence. In many towns and cities, the most valuable real estate is the corner sites. In real estate and retail parlance, four corners at an important intersection is the "100% intersection." Ridgefield's 100% intersection is probably the intersection of Pioneer Street and Main Avenue. The Hardware store takes advantage of the prominent site. The other three corners—two vacant and one with a one story building—present an opportunity for future development to finish the intersection urban form.



In many towns and cities, the most valuable real estate is the corner sites. In real estate and retail parlance, four corners at an important intersection is the "100% intersection."



Corner buildings have a responsibility to mark intersections, and to strengthen and mark the extent of the block. When the corners of blocks are marked well, lots in between can be lower height buildings or even vacant and not erode the urban form as much as a vacant corner.

Purpose Statement

Along Pioneer Street, between Main Avenue and 4th Avenue, Ridgefield has prominent corner buildings at some corners.

These buildings should be used as an example to guide future development at the remaining corners, to

- mark the blocks and intersections; and
- establish importance of the intersection of Main Avenue and Pioneer

Guidelines

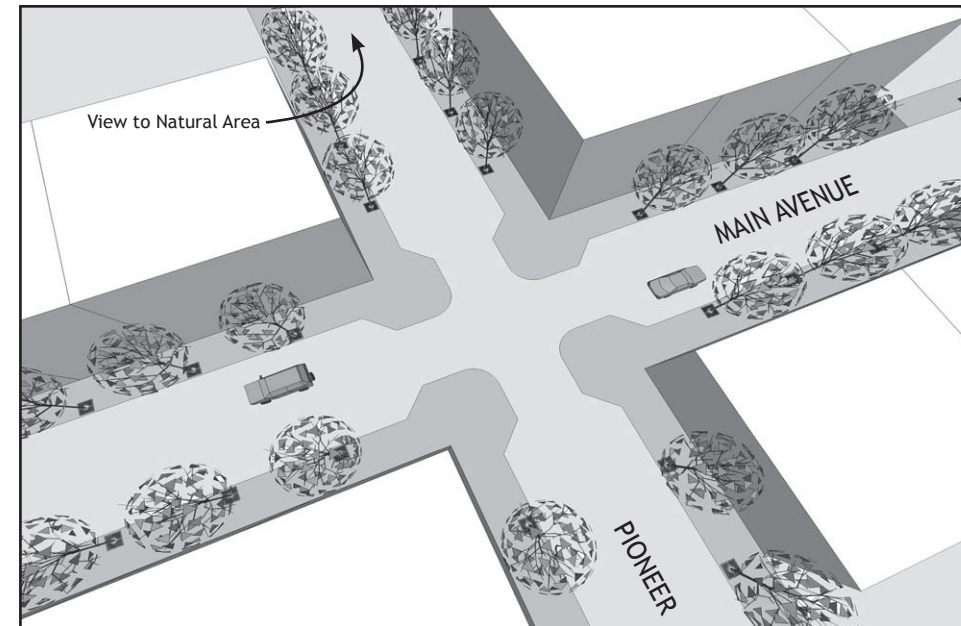
In order to preserve, extend and/or strengthen this pattern, consider the following guidelines:

1) Consider requiring all new corner buildings within the study area to meet a maximum setback of 0' and a minimum height of 30 feet or at least two levels.

2) Encourage new buildings to respond to other corner buildings by facing the corners with windows or entries, accentuated building forms or chamfered corners.



Corner buildings can define intersections as special places. Here two examples of buildings that face the corner with special treatment. On the left, a chamfered corner, windows and a balcony; on the right, accentuated building forms and an inset entry.



Ridgefield's 100% intersection.



The City Hall at the corner of Pioneer and 3rd Avenue. Above, facing 3rd Avenue.



Above, facing Pioneer.



The hardware store at the corner of Pioneer and Main Avenue is a marker. It is finished with main street facade treatment on two sides, not just one.

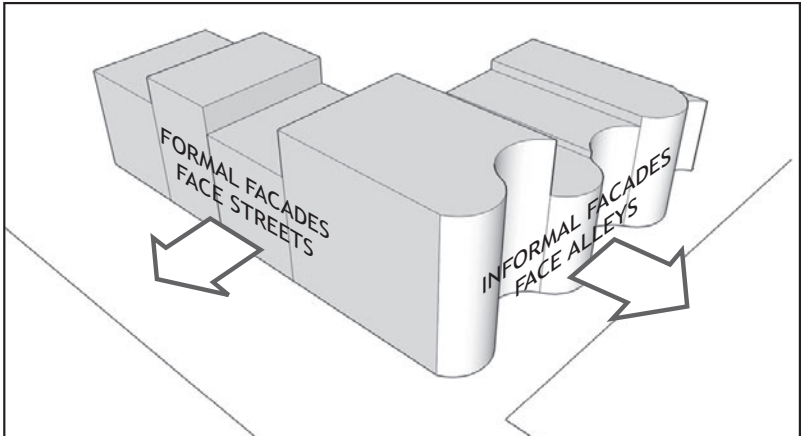


Ridgefield's Alleys

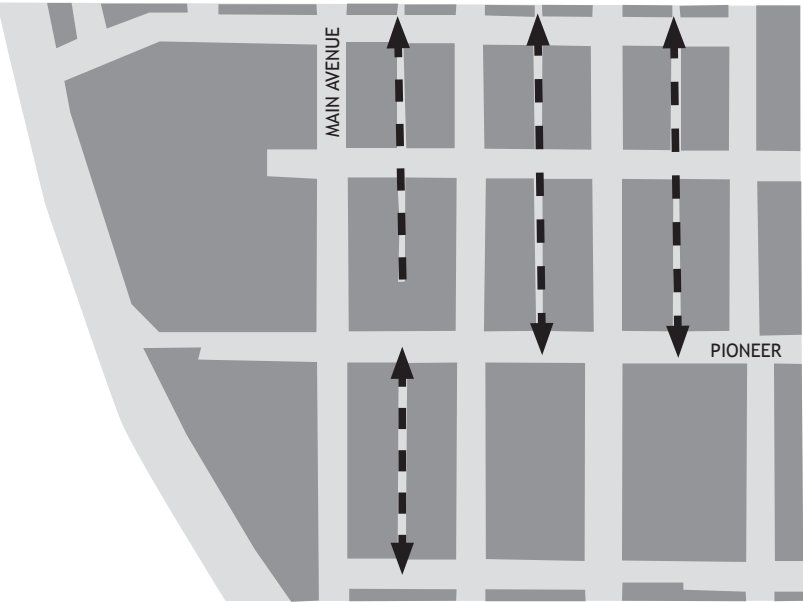
Why This Is Important

Alleys are very important for locating service-related functions, such as garbage pick up and loading docks away from the main street. Ridgefield is fortunate to have an extensive, well-maintained alley system within the study area. Many other cities struggle without them or have not maintained theirs.

Because the alleys are more utilitarian than the main street, they can be very interesting places, more casual in character, as well as offering a secondary path-way system through the downtown. In addition they can offer downtown locations for small or startup businesses at a lower cost.



Because the alleys are more utilitarian than the main street, they can be very interesting places, more casual in character



The north-south alley system through Ridgefield offers a secondary path-way system through the downtown.

Purpose Statement

Ridgefield has an intact, well maintained alley system that runs north-south through most blocks within the study area. These alleys provide

- an important location for the service functions of buildings; and
- an interesting secondary pathway system that is different in character from the main streets—less formal and more casual.

Guidelines

In order to preserve, extend and/or strengthen this pattern, consider the following guidelines:

1) Encourage strong differentiation of Ridgefield's alleys from its main streets, both in building form as well as materials and colors. On the main streets, materials and colors are limited to a more restrained palette (see Chapter 3). Encourage a more expansive palette to be used on the alley-facing sides of buildings. Similarly, where facades facing the main street are encouraged to enclose the street through strict geometric form, encourage facades facing the alley to be more expressive and experimental in form.



Encourage a more expansive palette of colors to be used on the alley-facing sides of buildings.



Why This Is Important

“What are the most important things in Ridgefield to regulate?”

Question posed at the Design Workshops

“What’s most important is the façade.”

Fran Kemper, Ridgefield Design Committee

The Façade as a Wall; Streets as Rooms

It’s true that in Ridgefield, with its good urban form, the façade is a focus. However, before any discussion of the materials and detailing of the facades themselves (addressed in Chapters 3) it helps to understand the façade’s role in defining Urban Form. Looking at Urban Form forces a shift in emphasis from the individual buildings to the ensemble of buildings, their unifying elements and their collective role in defining space. This is a way of seeing the street not as a corridor or a left over space, but rather as a lively, vital place of its own.

At this level, think about Ridgefield’s ensembles of buildings and how they form the walls of Ridgefield’s grand public rooms—the street spaces. In Ridgefield the rooms have an additional role: they focus the view towards the natural area—the rolling hills, the Lake River waterfront, and the National Wildlife Refuge.



Purpose Statement

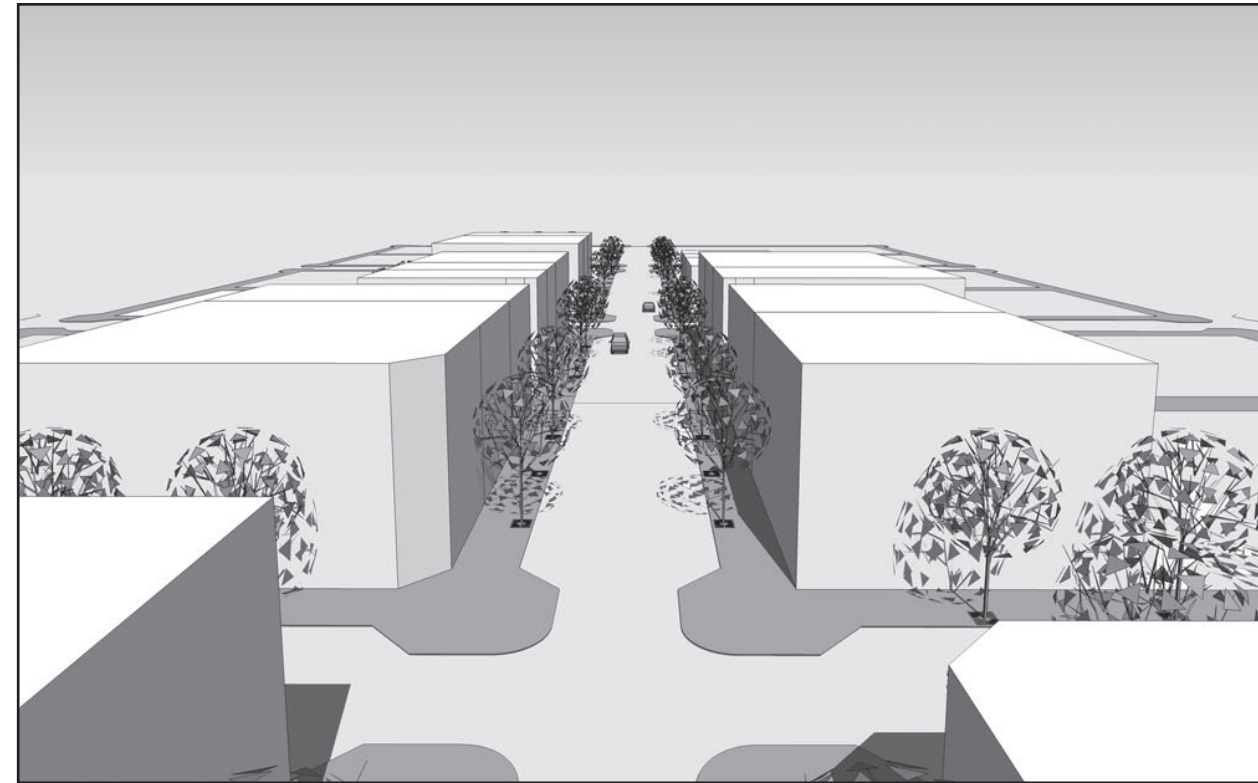
Along Pioneer Street, building ensembles form a cohesive wall that

- encloses the street, and
- focuses the view toward the river and natural area.

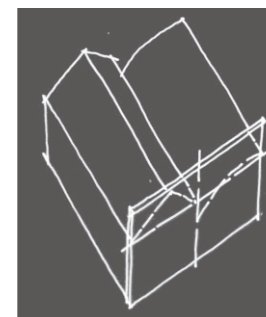
Guidelines

In order to preserve, extend and/or strengthen this pattern, consider the following guidelines:

- 1) Before examining the materials and detailing of a new building façade or a facade improvement, consider its role in enclosing the street and focusing the view.
- 2) Consider the façade as part of an ensemble of buildings with both unifying elements such as the “base, body, and cornice,” (see Chapter 2), and differentiating elements such as color, materials and architectural style (see Chapter 3).



In Ridgefield the rooms have an additional role: they focus the view towards the natural area—the rolling hills, the Lake River waterfront, and the National Wildlife Refuge.



The false front.



Even smaller one-story buildings play an important role in the building ensemble. Here, two Ridgefield buildings put on an impressive front.



Chapter 2

Building Form

Building Form

- 2.1 THE PEDESTRIAN LEVEL
- 2.2 BUILDING PROGRAMMABILITY & ADAPTABILITY
- 2.3 BUILDING ORIENTATION
- 2.4 BACKGROUND BUILDINGS & CIVIC BUILDINGS
- 2.5 THE BASE, BODY & CORNICE

What is building form? Why is it important?

Often, building form—that is, a building’s bulk, height and massing, and its ability to adapt to changing uses over time—can be more important than the materials and detail of the building. Each building has several roles to play: first, as a member of an ensemble of buildings that together create urban enclosure, mark corners, create pleasing and inviting street walls and frame views.

Another role buildings play is housing and marking important civic functions, such as City Hall, Police Station and Post Office.

Buildings also provide the well-designed rooms where people live and work. Since buildings last a long time, these rooms should be designed to accommodate different uses over time, to bring diverse uses to an area and respond to changing market and real estate demands.

The Pedestrian Level

Why This Is Important

For Ridgefield —the economically viable, pedestrian friendly village- a street level that is animated and inviting is of primary importance. The pedestrian level is usually the first experience visitors have. In fact, people often don't notice the upper levels of the buildings unless they live or work in the building.

Retail and inviting storefronts with merchandise spilling out on to the sidewalk support healthy commercial activity. More passive uses at the ground level, such as professional offices, should also have inviting architectural treatment at the pedestrian level. The pedestrian level of buildings include the side walk zone. Good sidewalks have three distinct zones:

- The building frontage, for display of merchandise, for stopping and viewing and window shopping, and for outside café tables
- The through pedestrian zone
- The plant strip/buffer zone, for street furniture such as benches, garbage receptacles, newspaper stands, kiosks and street trees



Cafe seating in the building frontage zone.

Purpose Statement

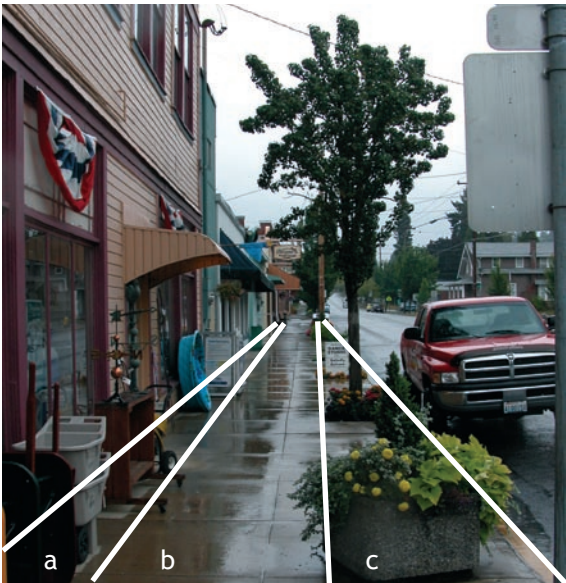
Within the Ridgefield study area, especially along Pioneer Street, the street level of buildings create an animated, inviting pedestrian friendly environment through

- storefront windows
- merchandise displays at the frontage zone of the sidewalk

Guidelines

In order to preserve, extend and/or strengthen this pattern, consider the following guidelines:

- 1) The Downtown Mixed Use zone (18.500.050) standard requires “At least twenty percent of the wall area facing the street to have windows.” Consider requiring all buildings within the study area to exceed the minimum standard for windows facing the street at the pedestrian level.
- 2) Consider requiring new buildings within the study area to be designed to accommodate future retail, even if the near term planned use is more passive, such as professional offices.
- 3) Encourage awnings and storefront design that allows for merchandise displays or café seating in the frontage zone.

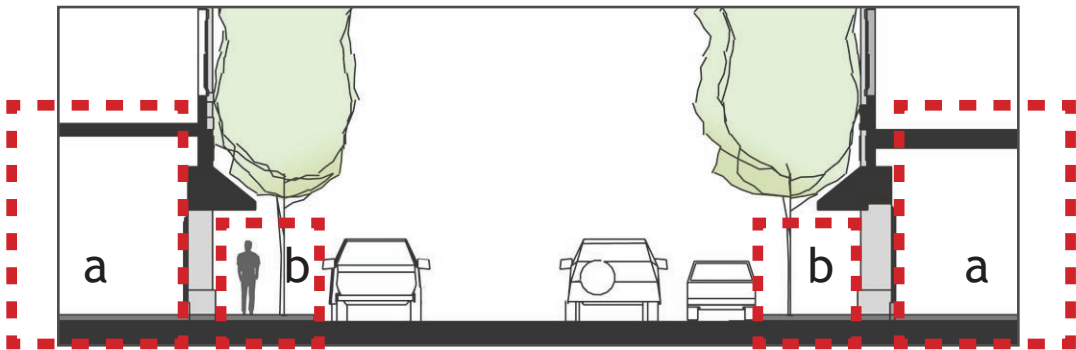


- a. frontage zone: canopy & merchandise display.
b. through pedestrian zone.
c. street furniture and street tree zone.

Merchandise display in the frontage zone on Pioneer Street.



The Downtown Mixed Use zone (18.500.050) standard requires “At least twenty percent of the wall area facing the street to have windows.” Consider requiring all buildings within the study area to exceed the minimum standard for windows facing the street at the pedestrian level.



- a. Consider requiring new buildings within the study area to be designed to accommodate future retail, even if the near term planned use is more passive, such as professional offices.
- b. Encourage awnings and storefront design that allows for merchandise displays or café seating in the frontage zone.



In front of the cafe, seating in the frontage zone.

Why This Is Important

Reuse and rehabilitate existing buildings whenever possible.
Require new buildings to be constructed of high quality materials and built to last.

Rooms within should lend themselves to changing uses over time.
Main street buildings should be able to accommodate retail at the ground floor, even if the current market doesn’t support commercial uses.

Building Programmability & Adaptability



Rooms over the Hardware Store. Rooms within downtown buildings should lend themselves to changing uses over time.

Purpose Statement

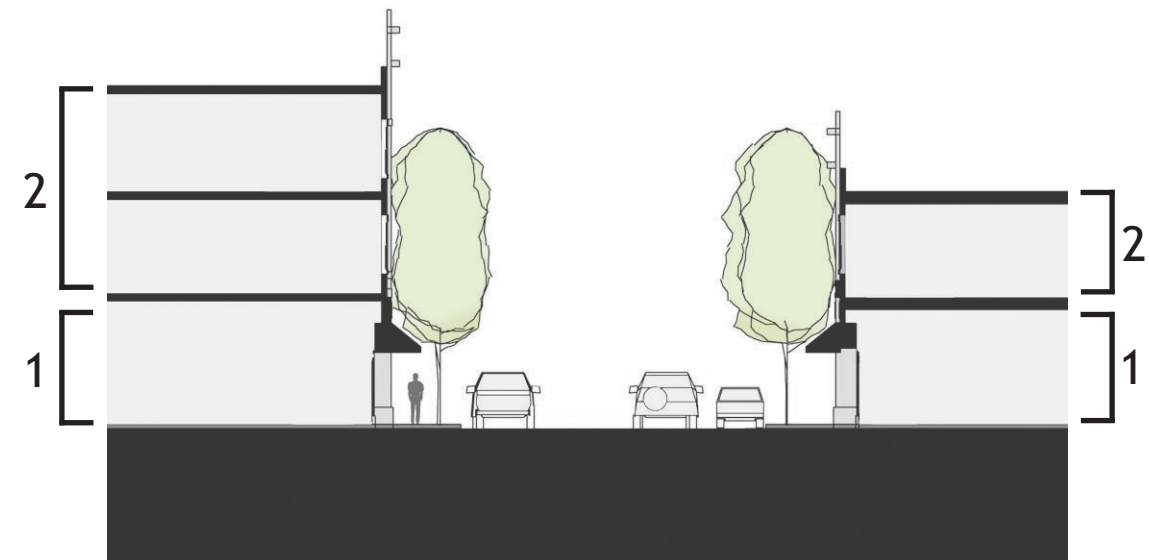
Within the Ridgefield study area, buildings have accommodated changing uses over time, such as the

- City Hall—first constructed to house a bank, now houses the City administrative offices and Council chambers
- Liberty Theater—first constructed as a theater, now serves as a coffee shop and music/meeting hall

Guidelines

In order to preserve, extend and/or strengthen this pattern, consider the following guidelines:

- 1) Consider requiring new or rehabilitated buildings to build a floor to ceiling height of at least 15 feet, and be fire rated construction to accommodate future or immediate retail or restaurant.
- 2) Consider requiring the upper levels of the building to be designed to accommodate housing or office.



1) Consider requiring new or rehabilitated buildings to build a floor to ceiling height of at least 15 feet, and be fire rated construction to accommodate future or immediate retail or restaurant.

2) Consider requiring the upper levels of the building to be designed to accommodate housing or office.

Building Orientation

Why This Is Important

Typically, buildings in Downtown Ridgefield have two orientations, to the main street and to the alley. Corner buildings have two street faces.

Ridgefield’s street facing facades typically sit immediately at the back of the sidewalk (have a zero foot setback), and have inviting storefronts at the pedestrian level. Where buildings have more than one level, they have large windows facing the street on upper levels. This pattern contributes to the visual connection between the inside and outside of buildings, and fosters safety and security in the public street spaces. Urban designers refer to this as “eyes on the street.”

Similar physical and visual connection should be fostered on alley facing buildings to foster a safe and secure environment there as well.



The City Hall at the corner of Pioneer and 3rd Avenue, facing 3rd Avenue.



...and facing Pioneer.



The hardware store at the corner of Pioneer and Main Avenue is a marker. It is finished with main street facade treatment on two sides, not just one.



Purpose Statement

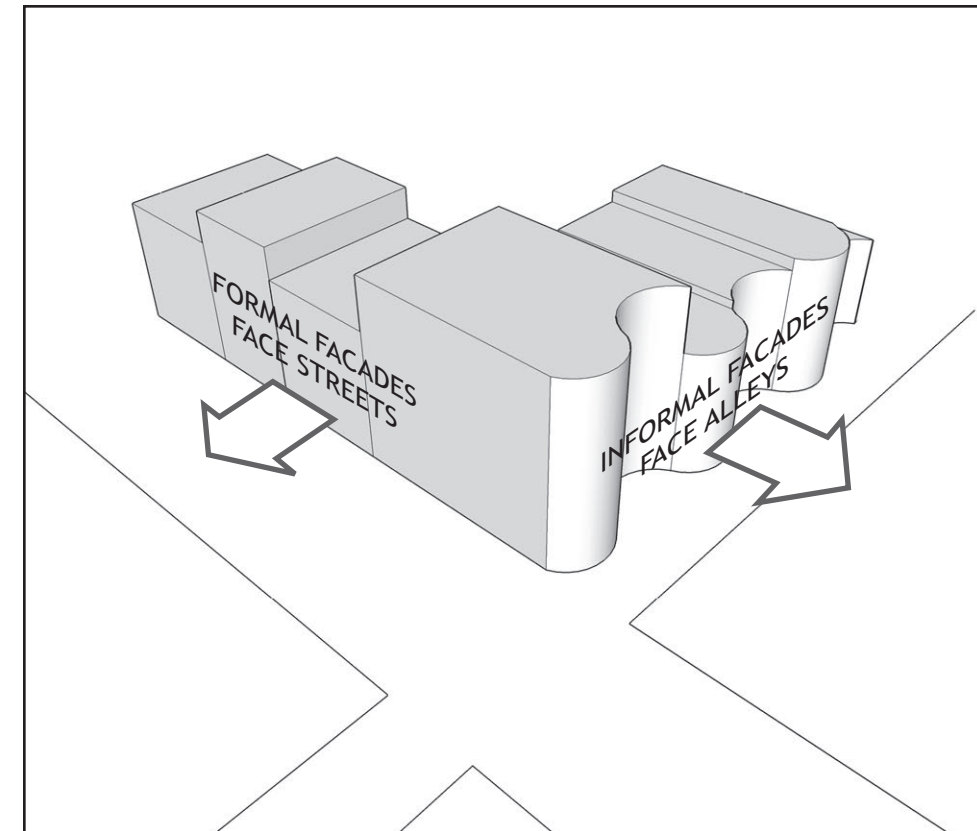
Within the Ridgefield study area, especially along Pioneer Street, the orientation of buildings fosters a safe, inviting and attractive environment at the street level through

- visual and physical connections between the inside and outside of buildings.

Guidelines

In order to preserve, extend and/or strengthen this pattern, consider the following guidelines:

- 1) The Downtown Mixed Use zone (18.500.050) standard requires “At least twenty percent of the wall area facing the street to have windows.” Consider requiring all buildings within the study area to exceed the minimum standard for windows facing the street at upper levels.
- 2) Consider requiring alley facing facades to place windows facing the alley at alley level and/or upper levels of buildings.



Typically, buildings in Downtown Ridgefield have two orientations, to the main street and to the alley.



Eyes on the street and alley.

Background Buildings & “Civic” Buildings

Why This Is Important

Ridgefield has a good balance of background buildings and “civic” buildings. The City Hall building and the Police Station building have extra ornamentation and more impressive architecture, befitting their civic function. Traditionally, financial institutions and government buildings have more monumental architecture, which explains the City Hall building’s style, as it accommodated a bank before was adapted to house City administrative functions and Council Chambers.

Background building—sometimes referred to as “filler” buildings or “fabric” buildings—fill the spaces in between and house offices, stores and living units. Together these two types of buildings form the important ensembles that create urban enclosure and street walls.

On the main street, maintaining a balance between the two is important. Important sites warrant more monumental architecture, and possibly important civic functions as well.



Extra ornamentations and more monumental architecture at the Police Station and the Hardware store.

Purpose Statement

Within the Ridgefield study area, a pleasing balance between background buildings and monumental civic buildings is maintained through

- Ornamented architecture that is limited to important civic buildings or important markers, such as the Hardware store, the Police Station and City hall.

Guidelines

In order to preserve, extend and/or strengthen this pattern, consider the following guidelines:

1) Important sites warrant more monumental architecture.

Consider the developing goals for future architecture on undeveloped sites—should the site accommodate a background building or a monument building? Two especially important sites are the vacant lots directly across Main Avenue from the Hardware store and the grocery store.

2) When evaluating new buildings or remodels that propose significant changes to the style of the building, consider the role of the building within the ensemble of buildings that form the block front. Is it a background building or a monument building?



City Hall



Background building: Grocery Store on southeast corner of Pioneer and Main Street.



Background building: Offices on Pioneer Street.



Hardware Store marking northeast corner of Pioneer and Main Street.

The Base, Body & Cornice

Why This Is Important

These define the lines and bands of materials that separate the storefront level from the middle, or “body” of the building and the top, or cornice level. When carried across buildings, these bands provide unifying effect, even while individual buildings are very different in material, size and design. These lines help bond an ensemble of buildings, and reinforce the street enclosure and the “façade as wall” concept.

The base of the building can include façade elements that also support the pedestrian activity and storefronts at the street level, including masonry-belt courses, canopies, awnings, signs and storefront transom windows.



A very fancy cornice on an early 20th century building.

Purpose Statement

Within the Ridgefield study area, buildings express the base, body and cornice level of buildings through façade elements such as

- Base elements: storefront transom windows, signs, canopies and awnings
- Body elements: bands of masonry or wood marking demarcating window courses or groups of windows
- Cornice elements: simple masonry bands, wood overhangs with brackets and stone and wood cornices.

Guidelines

In order to preserve, extend and/or strengthen this pattern, consider the following guidelines:

- 1) Consider requiring new buildings and remodels to design buildings with a base, body and cornice.
- 2) Consider requiring new buildings to demonstrate the relationship between its proposed façade elements and those of the existing adjacent buildings.



The Hardware store demarcates base and body through simple wood trim bands. The top cornice is formed from a wood trim band, a plain entablature, and a wooden bracketed overhang.

2 Story Building



3 Story Building



How the base, body and cornice system works on buildings of different heights. Above, a 2 story building; below, a 3 story building.

Materials, Detailing and Color

- 3.1 RIDGEFIELD’S BUILDINGS AT NIGHT
- 3.2 THE COLOR OF DOWNTOWN RIDGEFIELD
- 3.3 BUILDING MATERIALS
- 3.4 THE DOORS AND WINDOWS OF RIDGEFIELD
- 3.5 THE STOREFRONTS OF RIDGEFIELD

**Chapter 3
Materials,
Detailing &
Color**

Ridgefield’s Buildings at Night

Why This Is Important

The experience of Ridgefield at night is very different from the daytime experience. The City has not yet installed street lighting in the downtown district. The pleasing character of Ridgefield at night is the result of those lights mounted on the building façades that cast a soft light onto the sidewalk and focus attention on building entrances and architectural details. The light from within building storefront windows also contributes to the general illumination, as well as adding animation, interest, and vitality to the streetscape at night.

This is the combination of lighting sources and techniques that can be used to create an ambiance, atmosphere, and magical character, while at the same time ensuring security. A combination of storefront lighting and building mounted lighting that is both functional and architecturally compatible is strongly encouraged for all new projects. When the City is able to complete its program of street lighting, that program will reinforce and complement those projects completed using these design guidelines. Rather than eliminating the need for careful consideration of building illumination, a program of street lighting will supplement the contribution made by individual building projects to the unique character of Ridgefield.



Ridgefield City Hall at night.

Purpose Statement

The character of Ridgefield is extended into the evening and nighttime by the contribution of building-integrated lighting and storefront lighting. At night, the daytime views of the hills and river are lost. Instead, the character of Ridgefield is about the soft glow of lighting cast onto the sidewalks and the inviting sparkle of storefront lighting.

Guidelines

In order to preserve, extend and/or strengthen this essential pattern, consider the following guidelines:

- 1) Choose lighting fixtures that complement the design of the project, are appropriate to the character, style, and scale of the project and reinforce the character of Ridgefield;
- 2) Choose lighting fixtures that perform an aesthetic function, such as those on the City Hall;
- 3) Choose lighting fixtures that perform an architectural function, such as hidden lighting for signs and other architectural details;
- 4) Carefully consider the design of storefronts and entrances with consideration to the issue of illumination;
- 5) Carefully consider the purpose of each light fixture, and its placement and aim so as to maximize its utility and minimize negative impacts, such as glare or unnecessary illumination of the sky.
- 6) Consider of all light fixtures to minimize unnecessary illumination of the sky;
- 7) Consider whether to continue a “theme” light fixture -such as those on City Hall- that would extend a design theme within the downtown against creating an element unique to the project;

- 8) Consider maintenance and operational requirements for re-lamping all light fixtures (a burnt out light fixture is worse than no light fixture);



City Hall lights during the day.



The light from within the building storefront windows also contributes to the general illumination, as well as adding animation, interest, and vitality to the streetscape at night.



Carefully consider the design of storefronts and entrances with consideration to the issue of illumination.

The Color of Downtown Ridgefield

Why This Is Important

The color of downtown Ridgefield should reflect its natural environment: earth tones from the hills and plants and the colors of the sky and clouds -especially as they are reflected in the water of Lake River. Colors are inherent in the materials used to construct projects as well as the colors applied to the project as finishes. Materials intended for use in the project, such as brick or stone, have their own unique colors. Materials are discussed in section 2.3.3 of the Design Guidelines. The inherent color of these natural materials should also reflect the natural environment of Ridgefield. For example, brick is available in colors ranging from black, to red, to buff, to brown. Only some of the colors of brick will be appropriate for projects in Ridgefield.

The colors for all streets within the design district should be selected from this palette of natural color. Brilliant, full-saturated colors should be carefully considered and used only as accents within a larger color palette. A wider range of colors can be considered for the alleys.

As part of its incentive-based design guideline program, the City has offered to institute a design assistance program to help applicants prepare a color palette that reflects the goals of Ridgefield.



City Hall brick.



Hardware store wood trim.

Purpose Statement

In order to enhance the unique character of Ridgefield and strengthen its connection to its natural setting, all projects should consider the contribution that color can make. Colors matching those of the surrounding landscape, vegetation, and sky should be the primary source of color palettes for all projects. Therefore consider the following guidelines when designing your project.

Guidelines

Appropriate use of color represents an opportunity to reinforce and enhance downtown Ridgefield.

- 1) Consider the finish materials for the project first when developing a palette of colors;
- 2) Consider the colors of Ridgefield that reflect its natural environment first when developing a color palette;
- 3) Consider resources such as Benjamin Moore or Miller Paint for historically appropriate colors;
- 4) Consider resources such as the design assistant program when developing a color palette;
- 5) Consider maintenance and repair when developing a color palette.



Main street palette shared reflect Ridgefield's natural environment.



Brilliant, full-saturated colors should be carefully considered and used only as accents within a larger color palette. A wider range of colors can be considered for the alleys.



Allow more expressive color.



Why This Is Important

We should have a few minimums, on materials and style. Don't build warehouse-type buildings with corrugated metal for example. "This is Ridgefield's 'main street'—industrial materials are not appropriate." Workshop participant

Building Materials

Unlike pure, abstract color as considered in Guideline 2.3.2, building materials provide a deeper, richer character by virtue of their inherent textures. Brick is available in many colors, but it is also available in many textures. Beyond that the visual effect of a brick wall is a function of the scale of the brick, its individual texture, the mortar joint detail, and the pattern of the bricks in place. There are four primary materials that are historically appropriate for Ridgefield: stone, brick, stucco, and wood. The City Hall uses both stone and brick to establish its presence and significance on Pioneer Street. The Hardware Store is constructed and detailed using wood, Both of these buildings are appropriate for Ridgefield. Each should be considered as examples from which to learn when designing a new project for downtown.

Since not every building in downtown has to be a “monument,” other materials -like stucco- are also appropriate.

Beyond the discussion of the four primary materials for new buildings in downtown Ridgefield, there are supporting materials that should be considered when designing a new project: glass and fabric.

The importance of the pedestrian level experience of each new project has been discussed in Section 2.2.1. The primary contributor to the quality of the pedestrian experience is

appropriately scaled and proportioned expanses of clear glazing. Tinted or opaque glass is strongly discouraged.

Awnings which extend from the storefront over the sidewalk represent a gracious way to define space, protect pedestrians from the elements, “frame” the storefront windows, and advertise ones business. Appropriate materials for awnings are glass in metal frames and fabric. Metal or vinyl awnings are strongly discouraged.

Purpose Statement

The history of Ridgefield provides us with the appropriate patterns for future downtown development. Buildings like the Hardware Store and City Hall represent how corner buildings on significant sites could be designed. Other buildings, like the Liberty Theater or Lily Wiggans, provide positive examples of how other buildings constructed within the fabric of significant sites can make significant contributions to the character of Ridgefield.

Guidelines

In order to preserve, extend and/or strengthen this pattern, it’s important to consider the location of the project, the historic context for the project, and the scale of the project. Therefore consider the following guidelines:

- 1) Consider the location of the project -corner, mid-block, or alley- when selecting primary materials for the project;
- 2) Consider selecting the primary materials for all projects from the four primary materials used historically in Ridgefield; stone, brick, stucco, and wood;
- 3) Consider the historic patterns for architectural detailing or combining these primary materials;
- 4) Use appropriate material selections to reinforce the hierarchy and character of the building form. For example, use stone as a

base, with brick or stucco as the body, and brick, stucco, or wood as a cornice;

- 5) Use the best material that meets the budget for the project in the simplest way possible, for example use stucco rather than “thin” brick;



Consider selecting the primary materials for all projects from the four primary materials used historically in Ridgefield; stone, brick, stucco, and wood.

Why This Is Important

The experience of every visitor to Ridgefield can be positively reinforced with careful consideration to the doors and windows of each new project. This is level of scale where the details are most closely observed and directly experienced.

Modern technologies and materials have made it possible to construct doors and windows that are much more efficient and more waterproof than they once were. On the other hand, they often look “modern” and they can negatively impact the character of buildings intended to blend into historic surroundings. Often these doors and windows appear too “flat” and do not have the same character of older buildings constructed with thicker materials. The visual result is that new buildings that have not been carefully detailed can appear flat, or “fake” when adjacent to buildings that are truly historic or built with respect to historic patterns for thick walls. This difference is most readily apparent when viewed in conditions with strong natural light and deep shadows. The modern building’s lack of depth is obvious when compared with the animation provided by light and shadow of the historic building.

Windows. The Hardware Store represents the oldest original pattern of fenestration in Ridgefield. The windows there are extremely simple in design. The major element of each storefront window is a pair of transparent panes of glass separated by a simple vertical mullion and surmounted by clerestory windows. The clerestory windows have a relatively simple pattern of subdivisions with stained glass. The design guidelines recommend that windows should be no more extravagantly detailed than these.

Doors. The doors of Ridgefield are a place where expressions of individuality are most appropriate. In almost all cases, however, a major element of the door should be glass. This pattern is reflected in virtually all of the doors of downtown Ridgefield.

The Doors & Windows of Ridgefield

Purpose Statement

The historic pattern of downtown Ridgefield is one where most buildings were constructed with thick walls where the windows and doors were set back from the building face. These doors and windows were simply constructed with minimal extraneous detailing. In order to preserve, extend and/or strengthen this pattern, it's important to carefully observe the actual pattern of historic doors and windows rather than substitute "flourishes" that represent modern interpretation of historic themes.

Guidelines

In order to preserve, extend and/or strengthen this pattern, consider the following guidelines:

- 1) Consider replicating the scale, proportion, and position of the historic pattern of doors and windows when designing new projects. Use window and door placement to reinforce the "thickness" of building walls -and by extension the solidity and permanence of the building;
- 2) Consider the hierarchy of the existing historic windows in Ridgefield, such as those of the Hardware Store, that are extremely simple in form but enhanced by clerestory windows with true divided lights.
- 3) Consider using doors and windows that match historic patterns for construction and detailing rather than those that "look" historic. For example, use windows with true divided lights rather than solid panes of glazing with applied trims which attempt to mimic the effect of divided lights.
- 4) Consider the opportunities for design expression when selecting doors for new projects. Reflect on the designs already in place in downtown buildings;
- 5) Consider reserving the "fanciest" details for the smallest elements, such as door hardware, hinges, locks, and handles.



Consider

window and door placement to reinforce the "thickness" of building walls -and by extension the solidity and permanence of the building.



Consider the hierarchy of the existing historic windows in Ridgefield, such as those of the Hardware Store, that are extremely simple in form but enhanced by clerestory windows with true divided lights.

Why This Is Important

The storefront level of downtown Ridgefield is where motorists and pedestrians confirm their initial impressions about the character of the city. All of the elements of urban form, street enclosure, the pedestrian realm, street furniture, etc. help define the scale and form of Ridgefield.

The Storefronts of Ridgefield



Cafe



Hardware store



Lily Wiggans

Purpose Statement

What truly reinforces the character of Ridgefield is the pattern of storefront development. The storefronts animate the public realm. They provide a lens that looks both in both directions, projecting the personality of the individual business outward while offering an invitation to enter. The adaptability of buildings over time indicates that all new projects in the Downtown Ridgefield District (as defined by the study area) should feature storefront design.

Guidelines

In order to preserve, extend and/or strengthen this pattern, consider the following guidelines:

- 1) Because the storefront is an important component of the character of Ridgefield, consider requiring that every application demonstrate how the proposal contributes to the storefront level of Ridgefield.
- 2) Consider creating a storefront pattern of development for all ground floor street-fronting projects.



The storefronts animate the public realm.



The storefronts provide a lens that looks in both directions, projecting the personality of the individual business outward while offering an invitation to enter.



Because the storefront is an important component of the character of Ridgefield, consider requiring that every application demonstrate how the proposal contributes to the storefront level of Ridgefield.

The Design Review Process

Steps in the Voluntary Incentive-based Downtown Design Guideline Review Process

