

Delaware County 2035 | Central Places

Design Guidelines

Central Places Design Guidelines

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Downtown Awakening is a multi-phase program to help municipalities stimulate reinvestment in Delaware County's Central Places. This project is a part of the initial phase of the program to create a series of long-range visions, plans each with a specific and coordinated strategic action plan for implementation. This program is an implementation effort of Delaware County 2035, the County's comprehensive plan.

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Section 1:

INTRODUCTION



Introduction

Many downtowns and main streets across the region, referred to as “Central Places” in Delaware County 2035, have experienced renewed vibrancy and economic development. As people gravitate towards these Central Places, it is important for local communities to support appropriate projects and enhance people’s desired experiences. The Central Places Design Guidelines serves as a resource of best practices for local communities for design features of particular importance to Central Places. It includes an overview of each feature, potential benefits, and important considerations along with photographs of examples from across the region.

Background

The idea of “downtown” brings to mind images of bustling shops, outdoor seating, and community events for many people. Downtowns are often walkable destinations integrated with surrounding neighborhoods and can be found throughout Delaware County. Streets typically have improved pedestrian amenities, such as wider sidewalks, benches, and enhanced crosswalks. Mixed land uses, with a range of building sizes and density, lend a unique character and identity to these areas. Apartments or offices can often be found above street level retail in buildings along primary streets. Surrounding streets are typically comprised of multi-unit dwellings and single-family homes.

Real estate trends in recent years show an increased desire for housing that is located within walking distance to shopping, dining, and other cultural attractions. Further, many homebuyers emphasize proximity to transit when selecting a home to purchase or rent. As such, increasing walkability and developing complete streets will help to make communities more attractive to potential renters and buyers.

Different Central Places have unique sets of conditions that will impact the use of these design guidelines. Some Central Places are fortunate to attract ongoing development and have high commercial occupancy rates and a diverse mix of consumers and markets. Others may have experienced commercial tenancy loss and a decline in the residential population. Some Central Places are in the process of revitalization, attracting new development and redeveloping older buildings, transit facilities, and infrastructure while others have not started this process. The Design Guidelines, along with the Central Places Model Zoning Ordinance, may provide a foundation for improvement. This guide will help areas seeking new vitality and those looking to maintain or grow current conditions.

Community Framework

Delaware County 2035, the County's comprehensive plan, organizes the diverse place types of the County into **Character Areas** and **Central Places**. The County has four Character Area types, which are large tracts with similar development patterns and characteristics. The four types of Character Areas are: Mature Neighborhoods, Growing Suburbs, Greenways, and Open Space. Most communities comprise a range of all four Character Areas and any individual location will include characteristics of multiple Character Areas.

There are also four types of Central Places; all are community focal points that reinforce or establish a sense of place and character. The four types of Central Places are: Urbanized Centers, Town Centers, Neighborhood Centers, and Activity Corridors. Examples, but not an exhaustive list, of Character Areas are highlighted in the map to the right.

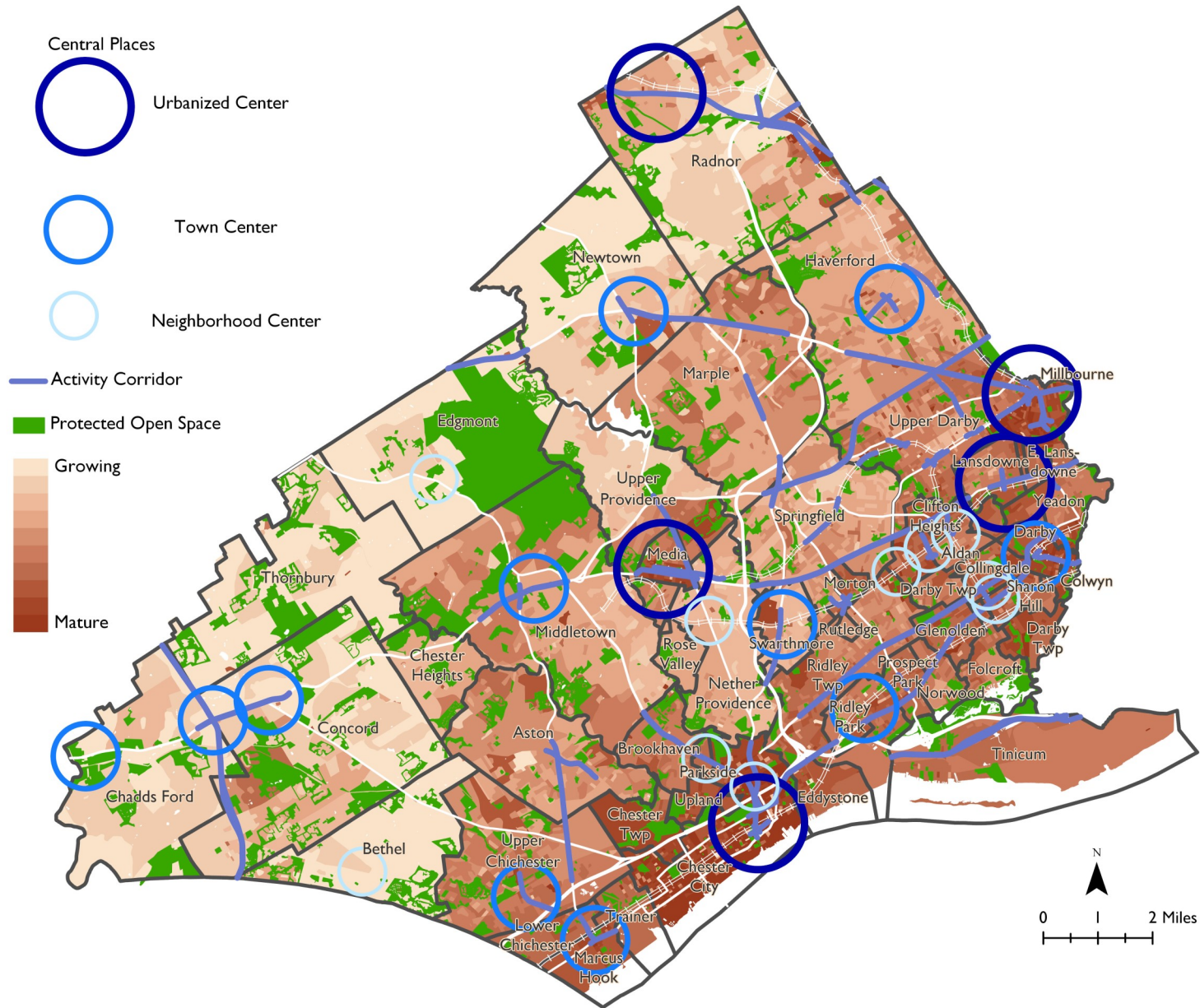
Use of the Design Guidelines

Central Places Design Guidelines acts as a reference for different streetscape elements in downtowns. These guidelines are intended to represent best practices for Central Places and foster a distinctive sense of place. This includes pedestrian-oriented features and access to all of the amenities provided in Central Places.

In conjunction with the Central Places Model Zoning Ordinance publication, this document serves as a guide to those implementing new design features into their communities' Central Places. While the following elements can be used individually, it is recommended that they are implemented together. Developers, architects and the public can use this document to envision and plan for design features that, when administered together, will make a Central Place unique, accessible, and a successful economic center.

In Central Places, it is important to design with the pedestrian and the pedestrian scale in mind. Central Places serve residents in a variety of ways and are most successful when they are walkable. Therefore, pedestrians should be prioritized through use of design features including proper sidewalks, building scale, frontage, landscaping, and a de-prioritization of vehicular traffic. Traffic and parking will still exist in Central Places, but traffic-calming measures should be implemented to prioritize pedestrians. Parking may also be relocated to sites near the edge of downtown so that visitors can leave their cars nearby and participate as pedestrians.

Delaware County Community Framework



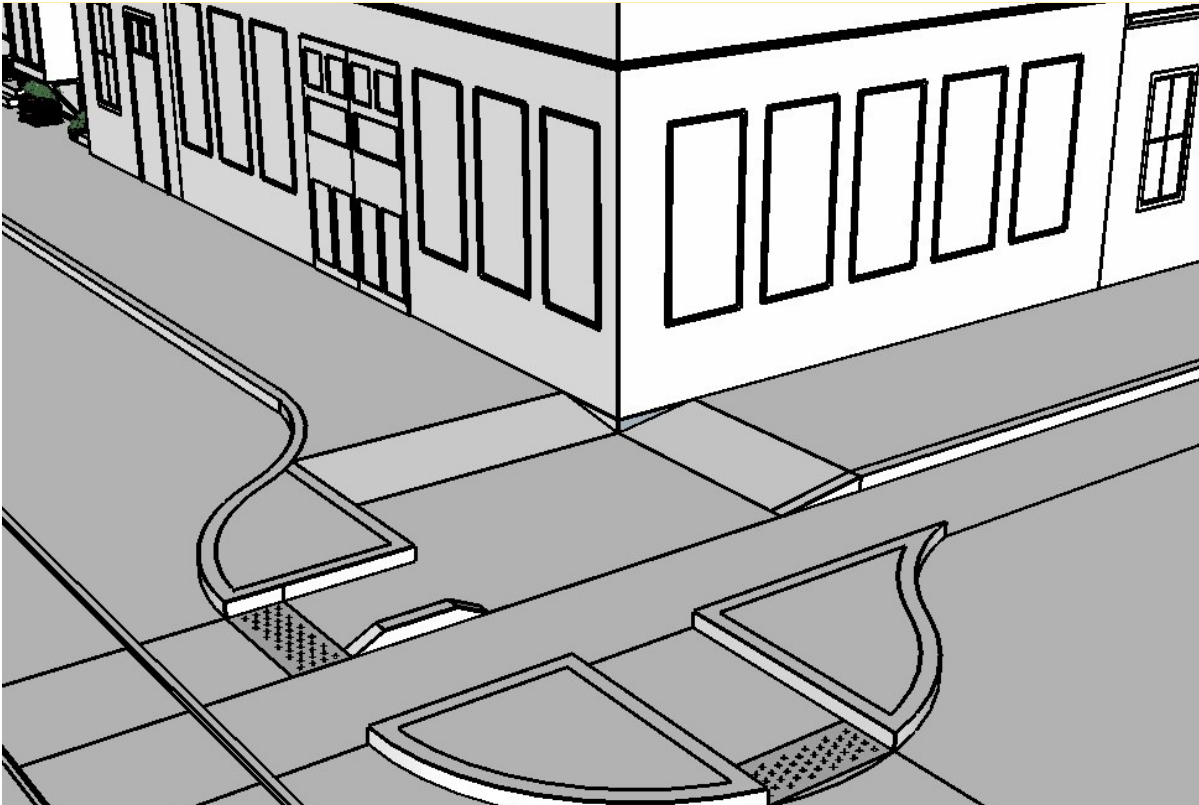
Section 2:

DESIGN ELEMENTS

Complete Streets



I Complete Streets



Traffic Calming

Traffic Calming is a transportation planning tool used to address high traffic volumes and speeding; reduce collision frequency and severity; reduce cut-through traffic; and increase access for all modes of transportation through a variety of engineering methods.

Successful Central Places create pedestrian friendly environments by keeping vehicular speeds at a minimum increasing safety for all users. Traffic calming elements in Central Places should be varied and can allow for additional greenery or green stormwater infrastructure.

Benefits

- Increased safety
- Increased multimodal access

Considerations

- Congestion

Related Features

- Sidewalks
- Bicycles
- Transit - Buses
- Transit - Rail

a Traffic Calming



Springfield



Bryn Mawr

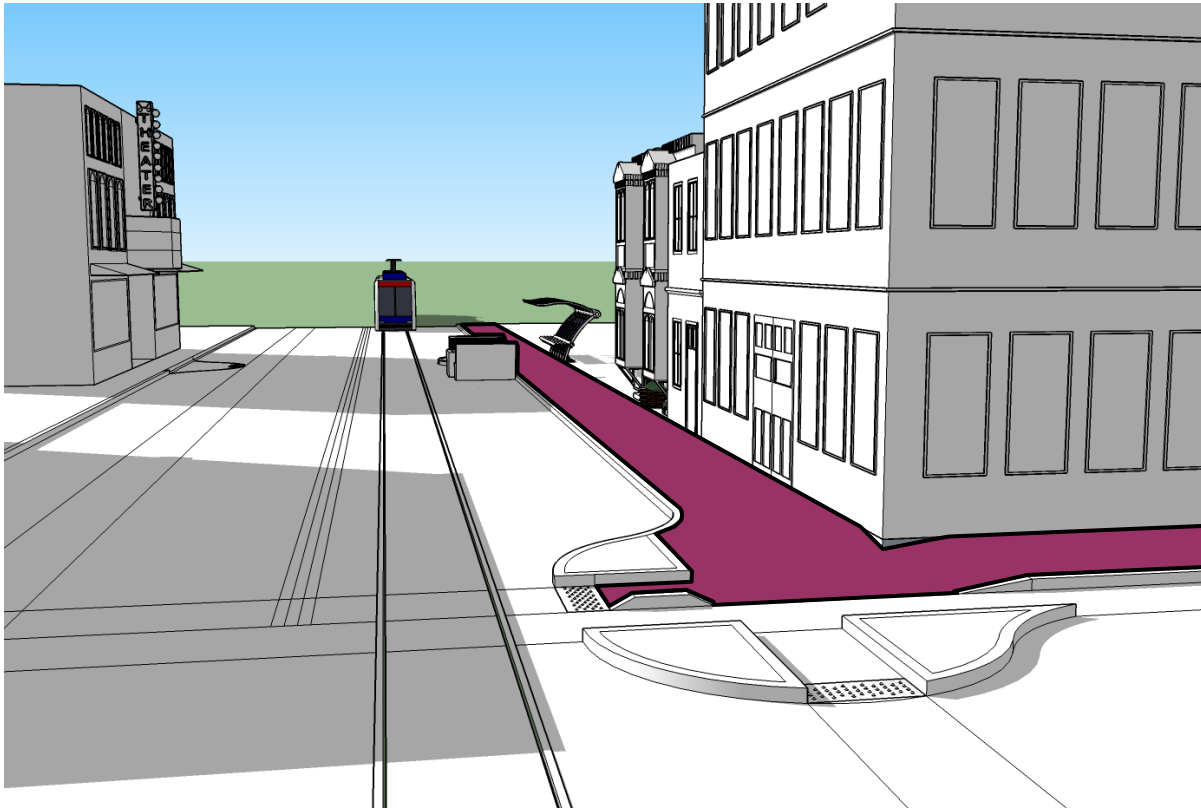


Marcus Hook



Bryn Mawr

I Complete Streets



Sidewalks

Sidewalks are where people experience Central Places, taking in all that the downtown has to offer. Sidewalks should provide adequate space for a variety of uses, including a frontage zone with space for outdoor dining and street furniture, pedestrian traffic and a transitional space for street trees, road signs or parking meters. Sidewalks should be well maintained with ample area for these features, and provide a welcoming space where people can experience central places.

Frontage zones should encourage the flow of foot traffic while allowing space for diners to enjoy the street. Restaurants with outdoor dining are at a premium in the warmer months. Pedestrian zones fall in the middle of the sidewalk and allow for pedestrians to navigate sidewalks unimpeded. Transition zones provide space for parking infrastructure, signage and street trees and other greenery. Transition Zones also provide space for street trees, which help to protect the pedestrian zone and provide added shade keeping the streetscape more comfortable.

Benefits

- Increased pedestrian traffic
- Safety
- Health

Considerations

- Maintenance

Related Features

- Greenery and Landscaping
- Pop up spaces

b Sidewalks



Prospect Park



Media

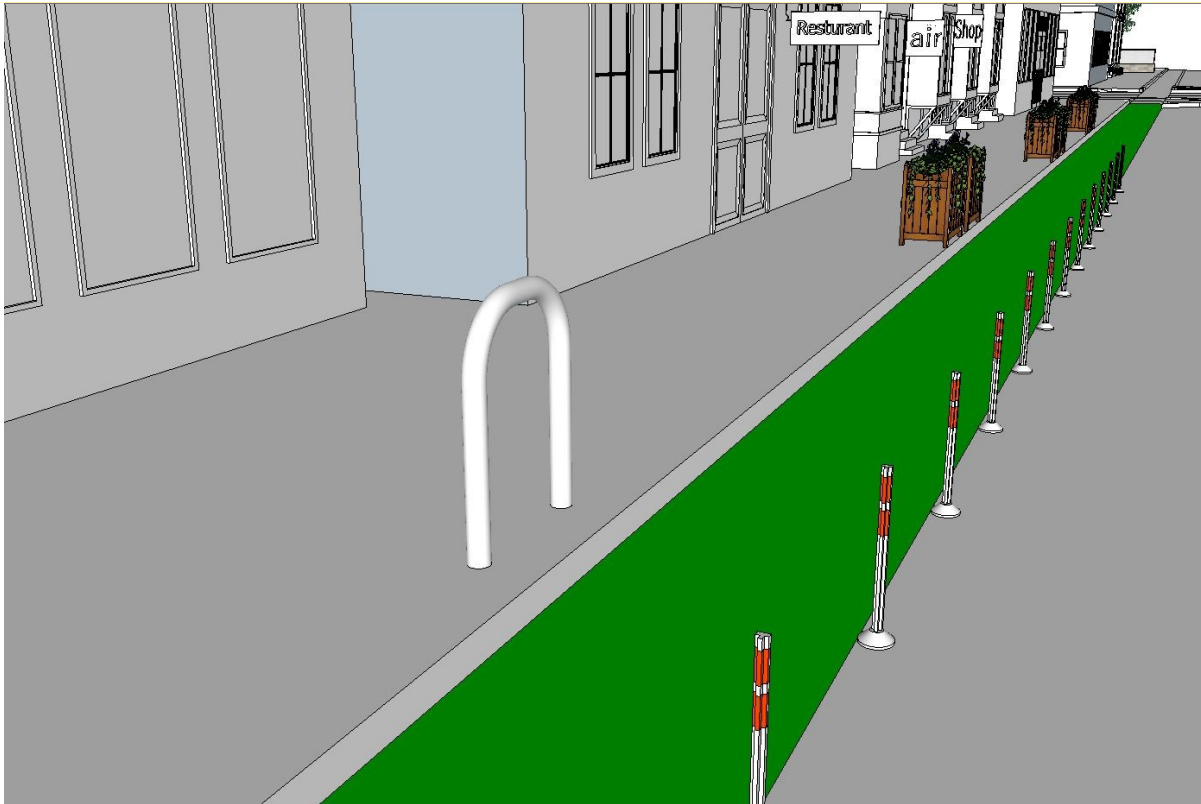


Marcus Hook



Pennsylvania

I Complete Streets



Bicycle Accommodations

Bicycle accommodations provide a designated space for cyclists to ride, with bike lanes or cycle tracks (protected lanes). Protected bike lanes offer better safety with physical barriers, while unprotected lanes raise awareness to other users that cyclists should be expected.

Bike lanes provide space for more multimodal traffic in Central Places. Bike parking should be centralized around transit stops and key destinations. Sheltered bike parking keeps bikes out of the weather and protected, while cyclists enjoy the shops and dining in Central Places. Bike shares provide mobility for a minimal fee, and can fit into a small footprint in central places, like a sidewalk, plaza, or an extra parking space.

Benefits

- **Traffic calming**
- **Safety**
- **Health**

Considerations

- **Bike Parking**
- **Maintenance**

Related Features

- **Transit—Buses**
- **Transit—Rail**

C Bicycle Accommodations



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Springfield



Wayne



Secane station

I Complete Streets



Transit - Buses

Buses service on streets in Central Places, provides alternative access to the downtown. Designated bus lanes provide space for busses to navigate streets more effectively with less competition for street space. Bus lanes enhance transit availability along the route by enabling more reliable and frequent service, increasing access to Central Places.

Providing shelter for transit users increases ridership and activity in Central Places. Shelters allow riders to utilize service, even in bad weather. Bus shelters can also provide space for public art, and are a place to post information for riders.

Benefits

- Improved access
- Multimodal connections

Considerations

- Bus stops

Related Features

- Transit—Rail
- Traffic Calming
- Sidewalks

d Transit - Buses



Springfield



69th St Station

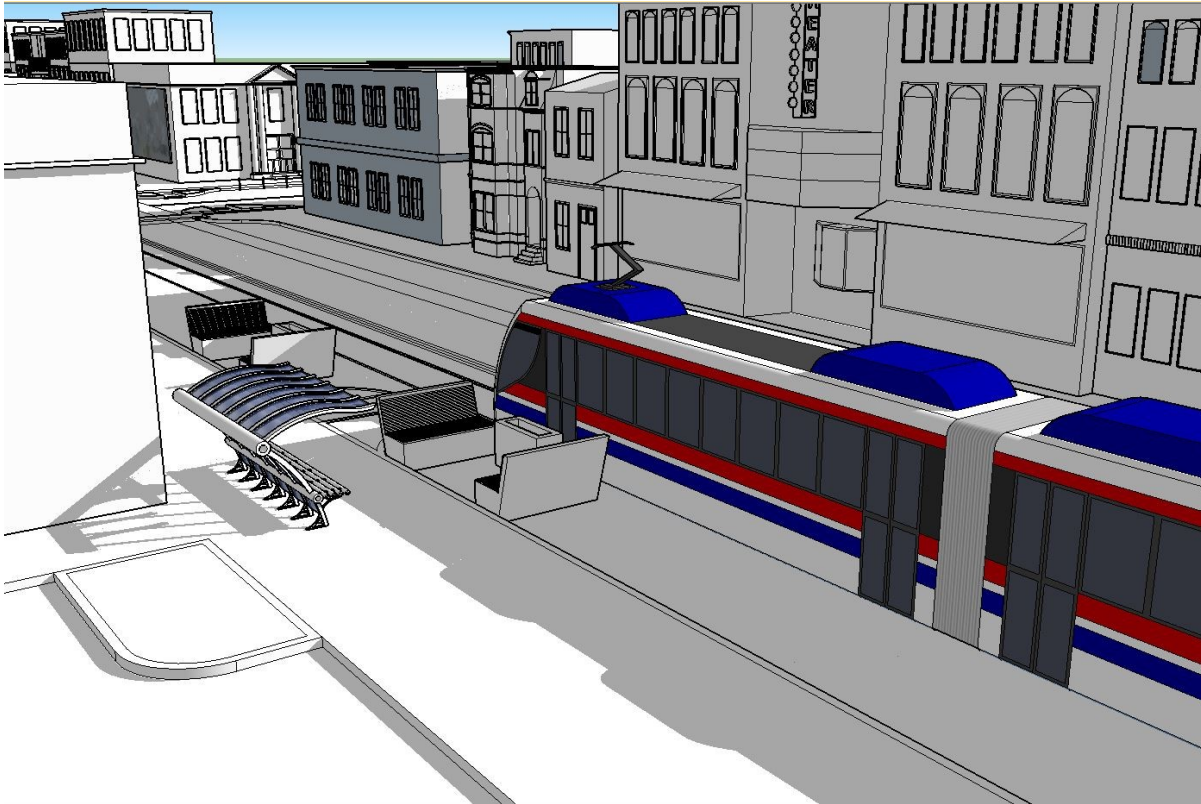


Springfield



69th St station

I Complete Streets



Transit - Rail

Central Places often have transit accessibility, such as trolleys or trains. Train stations provide a gateway to a community and create a first impression for visitors. These spaces should connect to the sidewalk and bike networks of downtown, allowing users to transition easily between modes. Stations should be connected to the pedestrian and bike networks and allow space for riders to wait comfortably for their train or trolley to arrive. Adequate bike parking should be provided at stations to allow visitors transportation options in Central Places.

Benefits

- Improved access

Considerations

- Multimodal accommodations
- Connections to a sidewalk network

Related Features

- Sidewalks
- Transit—Buses

e Transit - Rail



Darby



Wayne



Chester



Villanova

I Complete Streets



Exterior Lighting

Exterior lighting illuminates buildings and signs helping to provide nighttime site visibility and sign legibility. Exterior lighting should be designed to enhance a site, highlighting a building's architecture and entrances, and providing safety and security for pedestrians. Particular care should be given to lighting along pedestrian paths from sidewalks along the street to the main entrance of the building.

All exterior lighting should be designed to prevent glare onto adjacent properties. The lighting fixtures themselves are important design features and should be selected to fit appropriately with the existing or desired character of a Central Place. Consider the practice of "Dark Skies" lighting to provide light where needed while eliminating excess light—this typically involves the use of light caps and coverings.

Benefits

- **Safety**
- **Aesthetics**

Considerations

- **Cost**
- **Consistency**

Related Features

- **Walkability**
- **Building Façade**
- **Architectural Treatments and Patterns**
- **Historic Buildings**

f Exterior Lighting



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Marcus Hook



Media



Springfield

Section 2:

DESIGN ELEMENTS

Building Façade



2 Building Façade



Historic Buildings

Historic buildings are often officially designated due to their historic, stylistic, structural or architectural significance, and they might be examples of building techniques that are no longer in use and add to a community's character. Historic buildings may have local, regional, or national significance and can be protected from demolition or unregulated alteration.

Historic buildings not officially designated that still possess an architectural quality or visual appeal are unique and add value to the community. If structurally intact, they may not yet have gone through the designation process.

Some Central Places are endowed with historical buildings that were constructed in a time when architecture was more ornate and detailed. These details lend important character to Central Places and should be preserved and enhanced. Infill architecture should respect nearby historic buildings. Historic buildings were often built at a more pedestrian friendly scale and orientation, making it more pleasant to walk near their facades.

Benefits

- Scale
- History

Considerations

- Maintenance
- Renovation costs

Related Features

- Setbacks
- Placemaking

a Historic Buildings



Upper Darby



Upper Darby



Chester



Lansdowne

2 Building Façade



Architectural Treatments and Patterns

Architectural patterns address building massing, or three-dimensional size and shape. They also address horizontal architectural features such as the relationship and proportion of entrances and windows, and the relative alignment of top, middle and base floors. The use of compatible building materials and roof styles is also part of architectural pattern.

Whenever possible, the architectural elements of a building including material, window size and pattern, floor height/building height, and setback should respect the character of existing buildings in the Central Place. Details like cornices, archways, columns, dentil, and other molding are prevalent in historical architecture and provide visual elements that should be protected for the richness and variety they add.

In order to maintain visual interest, blank or solid walls should be avoided, particularly along the frontage of a building. A minimum percentage of the area of building frontage should contain windows, and this minimum is higher in Central Places to increase pedestrian interest. The transparency created connects the activity inside of a building to pedestrians. This helps draw pedestrians into businesses and creates an interesting and inviting streetscape.

Benefits

- **Aesthetic**

Considerations

- **Cost of construction**

Related Features

- **Historic Architecture, Walkability**

b Architectural Patterns



Wayne



Wayne



Springfield



Wayne

2 Building Façade



Windows

Windows and window treatments include the portions of the building that allow in natural light for function, and also those that shops and storefronts use to feature goods or communicate their use to the public.

Successful Central Places showcase their many visual elements to increase the aesthetic appeal and vitality of a given streetscape. Pedestrians like to look into display windows, which can be decorated to draw people in while enhancing the general aesthetic of an area. Awnings on storefronts, cafes and restaurants serve three purposes: to protect pedestrians, to announce the brand of a storefront, and to visually unite individual shops with the whole of the Central Place.

It is suggested that designers guide the general aesthetic of a Central Place so that various elements of storefronts fit into a pattern. Building frontages exceeding a specified length should contain articulation or other architectural treatments at intervals to reduce the monotony of extended, flat walls.

Benefits

- Economic vitality
- Pedestrian presence

Considerations

- Regulations for use

Related Features

- Walkability
- Placemaking

c Windows



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2 Building Façade



Building Signage

Signs are visual displays that identify and advertise businesses and other uses and communicate public information. Signage is pervasive and can be found on most buildings and sidewalks and along roads.

Signage should be consistent throughout the Central Place. Signs do not need to be identical, but planners should implement parameters and encourage all business to create signage that fits within the parameters of signage guidelines. Size, material, location and frequency of signage should be considered with an emphasis on simplicity and coherency of features to maintain a certain character but encourage variety and creativity. Planners should also consider implementing interpretive signage to highlight an area's history.

It is *not* recommended that all signage be identical, but the best parameters are those that do not allow for egregious or “distasteful” signs. This is subjective and must be determined by community and planners. Backlit or “box style” signs are often restricted due to their aggressive appearance that often negatively impacts its surroundings. Excessive signage is also discouraged to reduce visual clutter.

Benefits

- **Common aesthetic, vibrancy**

Considerations

- **Regulation, cost, design parameters**

Related Features

- **Historical architecture, window treatments and patterns**

d Building Signage



Marcus Hook



Lansdowne

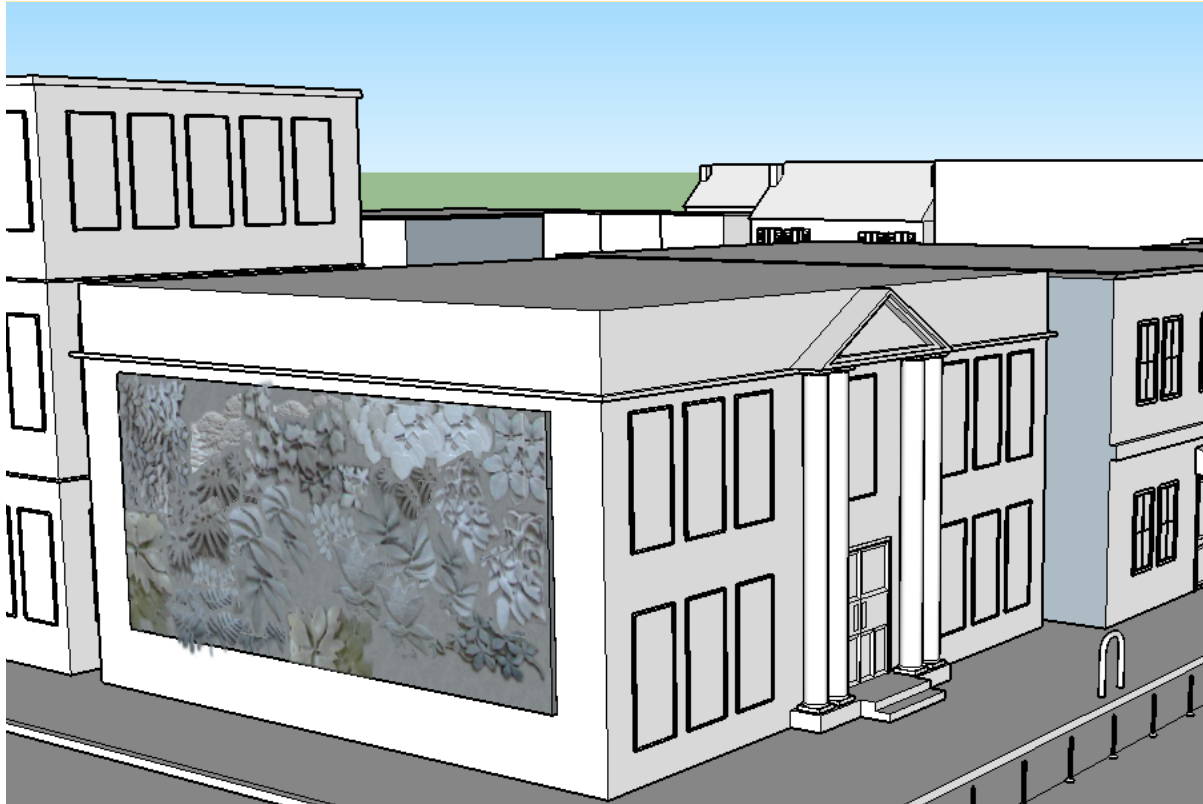


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2 Building Façade



Building Envelope

Building envelope is the exterior surface area of a building. Since scale is an important consideration for Central Places, 2-4 stories is a good height for buildings abutting a sidewalk so they do not block the sun from reaching the street. Building height should continue the 2-4 story pattern and create a consistent streetscape over one story.

Buildings in Central Places should generally be oriented towards pedestrians along the length of the main thoroughfare. Entrances should be visible and accessible from the sidewalk along the street in order to create a dynamic pattern of facades and encourage pedestrian activity along the sidewalks. When parking is located in the rear or on the side of a building, pedestrian access through the parking lot to the main entrance and/or a secondary building entrance should be installed.

Benefits

- Safety
- Aesthetics

Considerations

- Cost,
- Consistency

Related Features

- Walkability
- Building façade treatment

e Building Envelope



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Haverford

2 Building Façade



Building Setback

Building setback is a building's distance from the sidewalk and frontage is the area of the building envelope that stretches along the road.

In Central Places, building setback should be minimal. For shops and public buildings along high pedestrian traffic streets, buildings can directly abut the sidewalk. Municipal buildings may be surrounded by a public green space or historic grouping of buildings where the open space is used for outdoor public activities, like cafes or pocket parks with seating.

If more than 2-4 stories are required, consider a setback to avoid closing in the street. Taller buildings may be appropriate for some Central Places, depending on street width and character. Frontage may vary, but pedestrians should take priority; parking should be located on the side or rear of buildings, so as not to interrupt the connection between the building façade and the sidewalk.

Benefits

- Natural light
- Aesthetics

Considerations

- Cost
- Consistency

Related Features

- Walkability
- Building Façade

e Building Setback



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Media

Section 2:

DESIGN ELEMENTS

Placemaking



3 Placemaking



Greenery and Landscaping

Greenery and landscaping involves a mix of vegetation (trees and plants) and built elements (planter boxes, hanging baskets, water and garden features). Street trees provide a sense of place, soften the streetscape and provide shade for pedestrians and adjacent businesses. Street trees and rain gardens provide an opportunity to introduce greenery and capture stormwater runoff. This dual benefit allows for unique features which can create a sense of place for Central Places.

Planters incorporate greenery where trees or other permanent features cannot be incorporated into the streetscape, and can be moved as needed or for special events. Improved streetscapes are often referred to as “beautification” projects, but the term barely encompasses the benefits: they set the experience for visitors and send a message to current and potential investors that the community cares about its Central Places.

Benefits

- **Runoff reduction**
- **Aesthetics**

Considerations

- **Native or seasonal plantings**
- **Maintenance**

Related Features

- **Sidewalks, Gateways, Pop-up spaces**

a Greenery and Landscaping



Springfield



Wayne

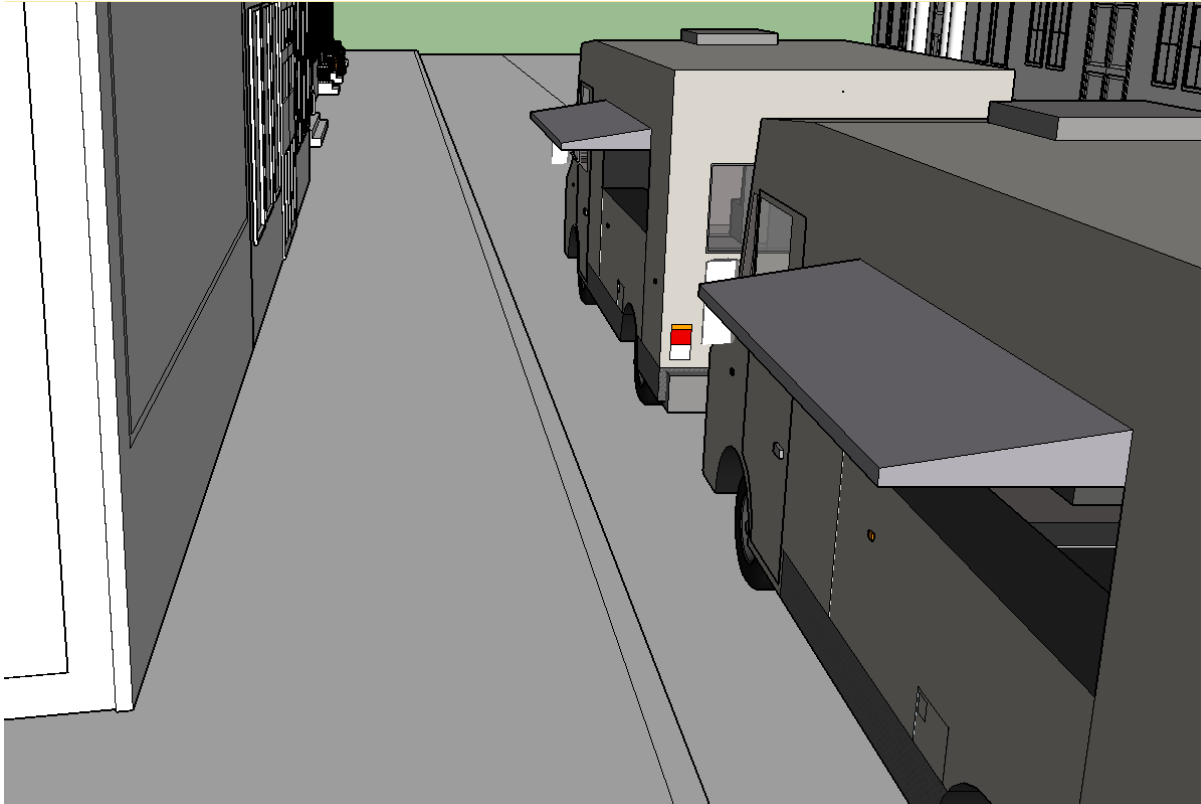


Wayne



Secane

3 Placemaking



Pop-up Spaces

Pop-ups are temporary installments in public spaces that include food trucks, farmers' markets, street festivals, parades, art walks, murals and other non-permanent elements that draw the public to a space.

Pop-ups can be located on-street (via street closures or in parking areas), in parking areas or in parklets (tiny parks). Pop-up spaces are an excellent way to engage visitors of Central Places. Pop-ups may be seasonal or ongoing.

Pop-ups can also be used to test the potential for new uses in a space: anything from benches to bikeways, crosswalks, landscaping or street closures.

Surface parking lots are great spaces for pop-ups because they provide flexible open space, typically in central locations. Providing space for pop-ups encourages visitors who, once in a Central Place, will likely patronize other shops and restaurants and contribute to the economic vitality of the area.

Benefits

- Increased foot traffic
- Economic benefit

Considerations

- Planning and clean up

Related Features

- Sidewalks
- Greenery and landscaping

b Pop-Up Spaces



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Delaware County

3 Placemaking



Gateways

Gateways provide space to welcome visitors to a town and let travelers know that they are entering a distinct district. These often take the form of signage but can also include traffic calming elements, planters, greenery and unique lighting or public art. Gateways are often located on major roadways, but train stations, bus stops, and trolley stops are all spaces where visitors can be welcomed into Central Places.

Gateways provide an opportunity for traffic calming and vegetation. Gateways should welcome people to enjoy Central Places and encourage them to take in all the area has by slowing the flow of traffic. Additionally, gateways are excellent locations for interpretive signage, which can be in the form of a map that displays historic locations or events, prominent street trees, or some theme that can be highlighted (arts activities, shopping areas, etc.).

Benefits

- **Sense of place**
- **Traffic calming**
- **Safety**

Considerations

- **Cost**
- **Maintenance**

Related Features

- **Placemaking**
- **Greenery and Landscaping**

C Gateways



Media



Media

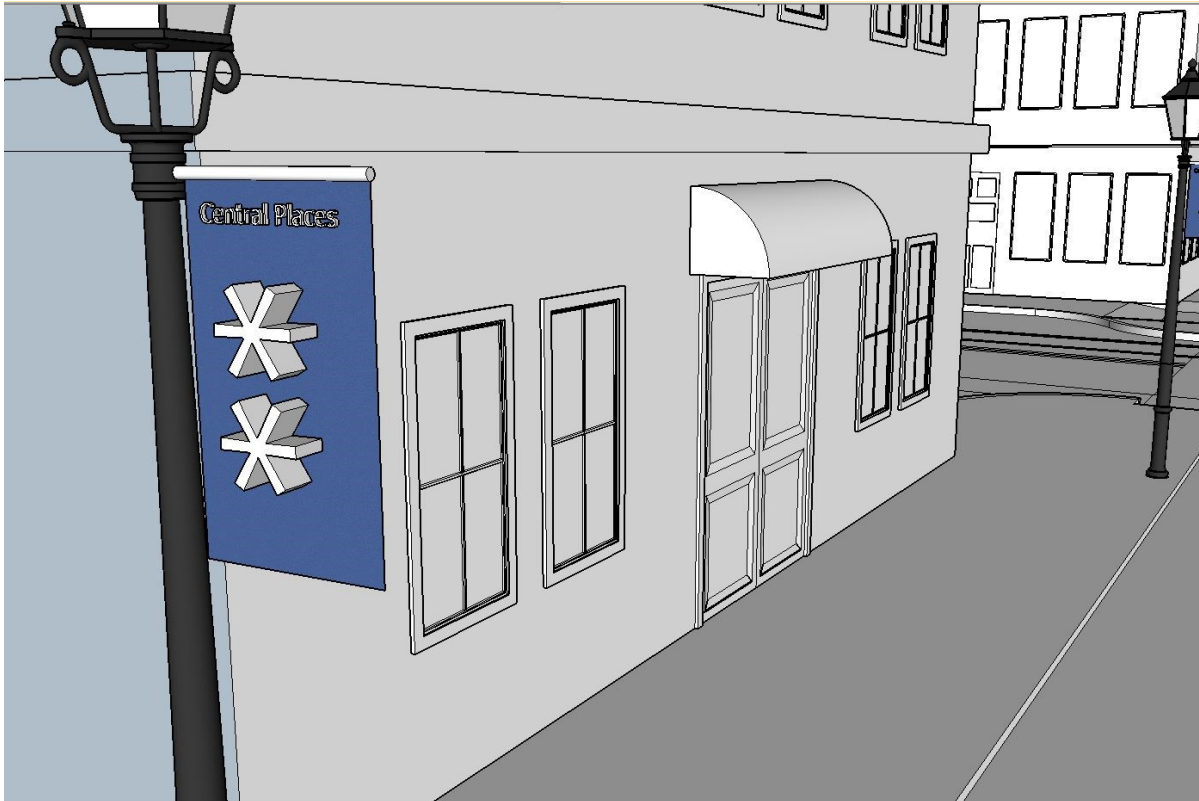


Swarthmore



Bryn Mawr

3 Placemaking



Decorative and Seasonal Signage

Signage can create a brand for Central Places by using banners or decorations. Throughout the year Central Places can utilize seasonal signs or branding to create a sense of place, adding a unique character to the streetscape.

Signs can be unique, coordinated, or a combination, but should fit an agreed-upon design aesthetic.

Seasonal signage can also be in the form of banners or light fixtures with seasonal variations. Consider artist-designed utility pole banners announcing a town feature or reusable holiday decorations around lampposts.

Benefits

- **Sense of place**
- **Advertisement**

Considerations

- **Cost**
- **Restrictive ordinances**

Related Features

- **Pop-up spaces**
- **Gateways**

d Decorative and Seasonal Signage



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Prospect Park



Haverford