



Delaware County 2035 | Activity Corridors

Design Guidelines

Activity Corridors Design Guidelines

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Table of Contents

Section 1: Introduction

Introduction, Background, and How to Use This Guide	2
Community Framework Map	3

Section 2: Design Elements

Streetscape

Mixed Uses	5
Complete Streets	7
Auto-Oriented Uses	9
Street Trees.....	11
Exterior Lighting.....	13
Shopping Center Design.....	15
Access Management.....	17

Building Façade

Historic Buildings.....	19
Architectural Pattern and Treatment.....	21
Building Height.....	23
Building Signage.....	25
Building Orientation and Entrance	27
Screening.....	29

Placemaking

Outdoor Dining.....	31
Pop-Up Spaces	33
Gateways.....	35

Section 3: Conclusion

Conclusion	38
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Section 1:

INTRODUCTION



Introduction

Activity Corridors are linear-shaped places that flank major transportation corridors or highway interchanges with intense development. They typically contain a variety of retail, office, and service oriented uses, such as restaurants, and vary in width, density, and design depending on the local context and underlying character. While many Corridors are auto-centric, they have the potential to become more walkable, connect to surrounding neighborhoods, and include more attractive streetscapes. The Activity Corridors Model Design Guidelines serves as a guide for local communities to incorporate design elements and features into a contemporary zoning ordinance and understand the implications of various options within the zoning ordinance text.

Background

Though it is easy to think of Activity Corridors as the way to travel through a community, they contain the largest concentration of commercial uses and as such, drive the economy of a community. They often serve as a gateway, and for many people driving, an Activity Corridor is their only interaction with a community; it defines the community in their minds. As a result, the design and function of Activity Corridors play a vital role in the success of a community.

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. Increasing walkability and developing complete streets will help to make communities more attractive to potential renters and buyers. At the same time, an increase in online shopping (e-commerce) has significantly changed shopping habits – perhaps most greatly affecting big-box commercial stores. Following best practices and playing into market trends can help to ensure these corridors continue to drive the economy of a community.

Different Activity Corridors have unique sets of conditions that will impact the use of these Design Guidelines. Some Activity Corridors are located in areas that are largely built-out (Mature Neighborhoods) while others are still experiencing tremendous growth (Growing Suburbs). Some corridors are thriving, with new businesses moving in and diverse mix of uses while, others have experienced significant tenancy loss. This guide will help areas seeking new vitality and those looking to maintain or grow current conditions.

How to Use This Guide

The Design Elements presented in Section 2 are organized into three categories: Streetscapes, Building Façade, and Placemaking. Within these categories, each element has a brief definition as well as policy considerations and visual examples. The Design Elements provide a suggested structure for Design Guidelines that may be adopted by any municipality in the County that contains an Activity Corridor as described in Delaware County 2035, or as defined by the township or borough. The design guidelines may be adopted in their entirety as part of a new Activity Corridor zoning district, or selectively incorporated into the existing municipal zoning district(s) of an Activity Corridor.

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 broad areas with similar development patterns and characteristics. The four types of Character Areas are: Mature Neighborhoods, Growing Suburbs, Greenways, and Open Space. Most communities have a spectrum including all four Character Areas and any individual locations 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. For the purposes of Delaware County's Design Guidelines, Activity Corridors are distinguished from the other Central Places (Urbanized Centers, Town Centers, and Neighborhood Centers).

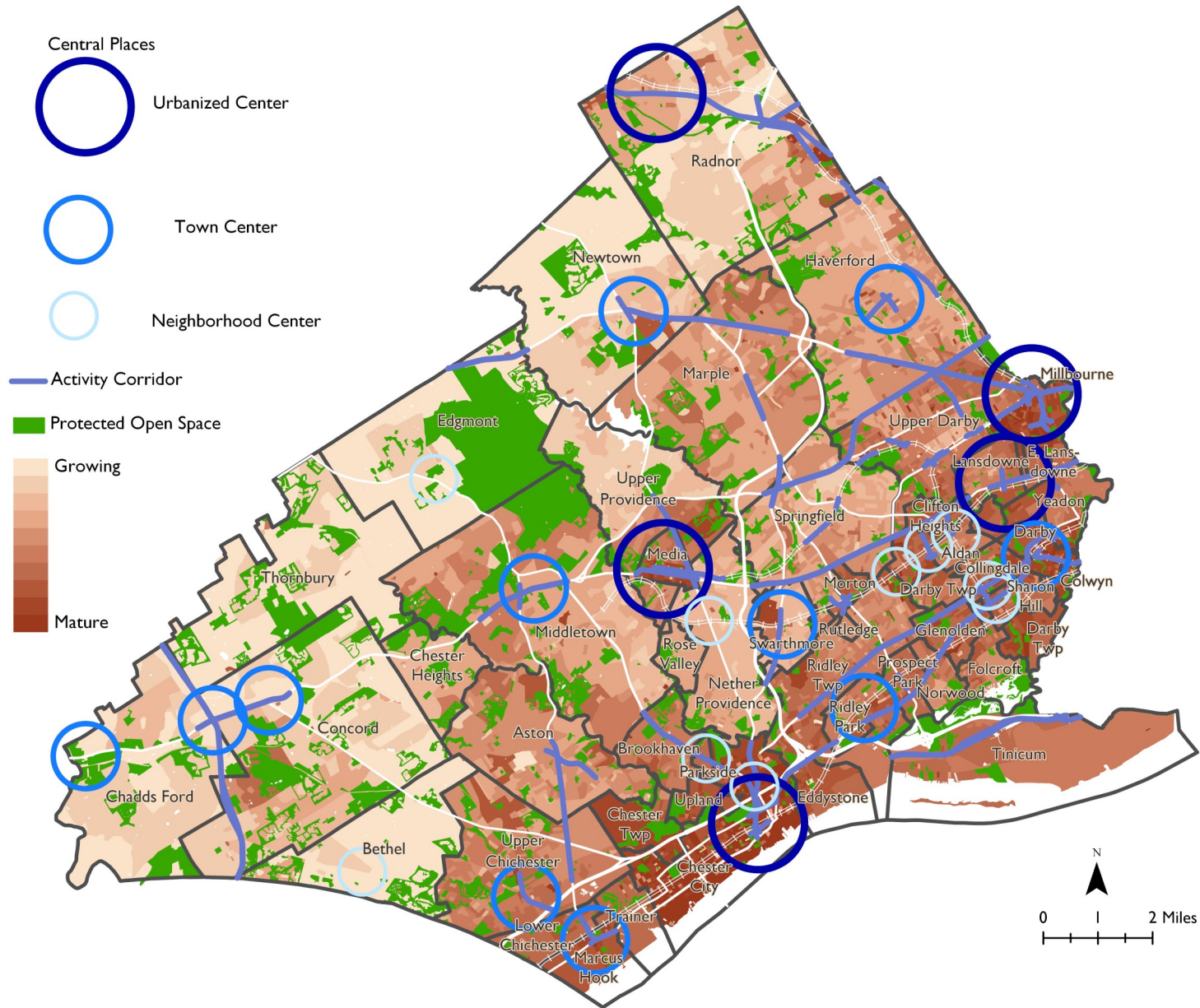
Activity Corridors vary in width, density, and design greatly depending on the local context and underlying Character Area. As such, this document offers different options to be considered based on the local context.

Activity Corridors in Mature Neighborhoods are largely built-out with relatively small lots along the corridor. There are sidewalks along the corridor which often build on existing transit access, but a significant number of curb-cuts and surface parking lots can disrupt the pedestrian experience. These corridors are often surrounded by (and well-connected to) dense residential neighborhoods or more traditional downtowns. Most buildings are older structures, many of which have a second story with offices or apartments located above commercial spaces.

Activity Corridors in Growing Suburbs are generally surrounded by large lots, with single-use structures on individual lots. Most buildings are set back relatively far from the street and contain large surface parking lots. Many corridors in Growing Suburbs exhibit contemporary access management, including shared driveways and connections between parking lots. The sidewalk network is incomplete, with significant gaps along corridors and limited connections to surrounding residential communities.

It is important to note that any specific Activity Corridor – much like the surrounding communities themselves – will likely contain some characteristics from both Mature Neighborhoods and Growing Suburbs. As such, this document references “**Activity Corridors in Transition Areas**” – that is to say the communities that are somewhere between Mature Neighborhoods and Growing Suburbs.

Delaware County Community Framework

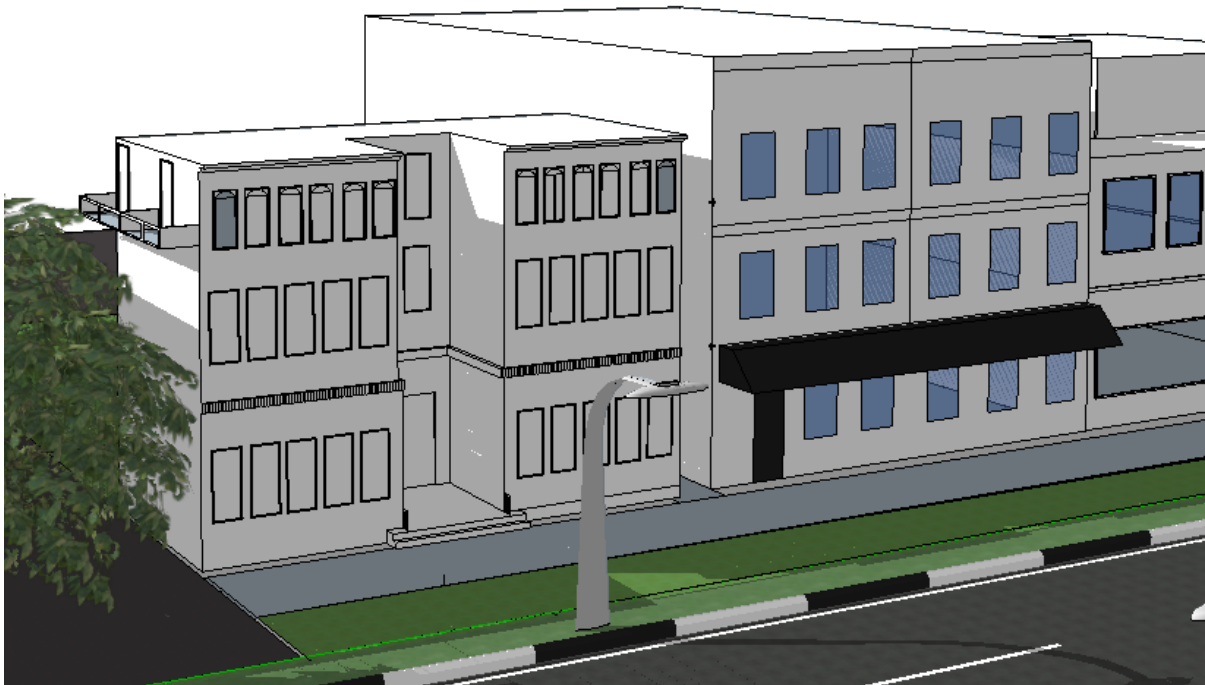


Section 2:

DESIGN ELEMENTS



I Streetscape



MIXED USES

Mixed uses are comprised of diverse use types located within the same district, street, or building. Mixed uses support daily shopping and service needs, provide employment, residential-living opportunities, and recreational and community facilities.

Mixed uses along a corridor encourage ongoing activity throughout the day. Retail stores, commercial services, and offices typically attract users during the day. Residences, stores, dining, entertainment, and cultural uses retain activity during evenings and weekends.

Mixed uses are integral to establishing and maintaining a dynamic Activity Corridor and its economic success.

Benefits

- **Walkable communities**
- **Economic factors**

Considerations

- **Land & infrastructure availability**

Related Features

- **Sidewalks**
- **Lighting**
- **Pop-up spaces**

a Mixed Uses



Lansdowne Borough



Swarthmore Borough



Upper Darby Township



Media Borough

I Streetscape



COMPLETE STREETS

Complete streets planning is inclusive of all modes of transportation: automobiles, pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit. It seeks to safely separate each transportation type while maintaining the viability of each.

Not all activity corridors can immediately support a complete streets model, but new construction should seek to be inclusive through traffic calming, bike lane requirements, sidewalk requirements, and transit shelters.

Cars should not be the only mode of transport considered when expanding development along an activity corridor, and care should be taken to connect to existing transit corridors.

Benefits

- **Increased pedestrian traffic**
- **Safety**
- **Health**

Considerations

- **Maintenance**

Related Features

- **Street Trees**
- **Access Management**
- **Auto-Oriented Uses**

b Complete Streets



Springfield Township



Media Borough



Marcus Hook Borough



Concord Township

I Streetscape



AUTO-ORIENTED USES

Auto-oriented uses are those that focus around the car and provide little to no pedestrian use. Common examples include car washes, gas stations, and drive-through facilities.

While auto-oriented uses are appropriate along most Activity Corridors, they should be designed in manner that is in keeping with the existing or desired character of the corridor and maintain safe and comfortable pedestrian access. Access driveways should be limited, and parking should be generally located to the rear or side of the site.

Additionally, gas pumps and drive-through facilities should be located along the rear or side of the building so that they are not the main features. To help mitigate the impact of auto-oriented uses rear parking and screening can be required.

Benefits

- **Convenient access for drivers**

Considerations

- **Pedestrian safety**

Related Features

- **Access Management**

C Auto-Oriented Uses



Clifton Heights Borough



Media Borough



Media Borough



Radnor Township

I Streetscape



STREET TREES

Trees planted along the sidewalk and other public spaces serve a number of useful functions. They can improve air quality, mitigate some of the negative impacts of automobiles, provide shade, screen sun glare, reduce reflective heat, and aid stormwater drainage.

Street trees also provide a scenic amenity, visually connecting the street, building frontage, and sidewalk by providing a unifying element to the corridor.

Municipalities should coordinate street tree planting with utility companies to ensure that there are no conflicts with above and below ground wires. Care should be taken to maintain street trees by pruning lower branches so that signage is not blocked and remains visible to pedestrians and people in passing vehicles.

Benefits

- **Improved quality of life**

Considerations

- **Maintenance and tree selection**

Related Features

- **Sidewalks**
- **Lighting**
- **Complete Streets**

e Street Trees



Radnor Township



Haverford Township



Chester City



Radnor Township

I Streetscape



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 the sidewalk 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 an Activity Corridor.

Benefits

- Safety
- Aesthetics

Considerations

- Cost
- Consistency

Related Features

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

f Exterior Lighting



Upper Darby Township



Prospect Park Borough

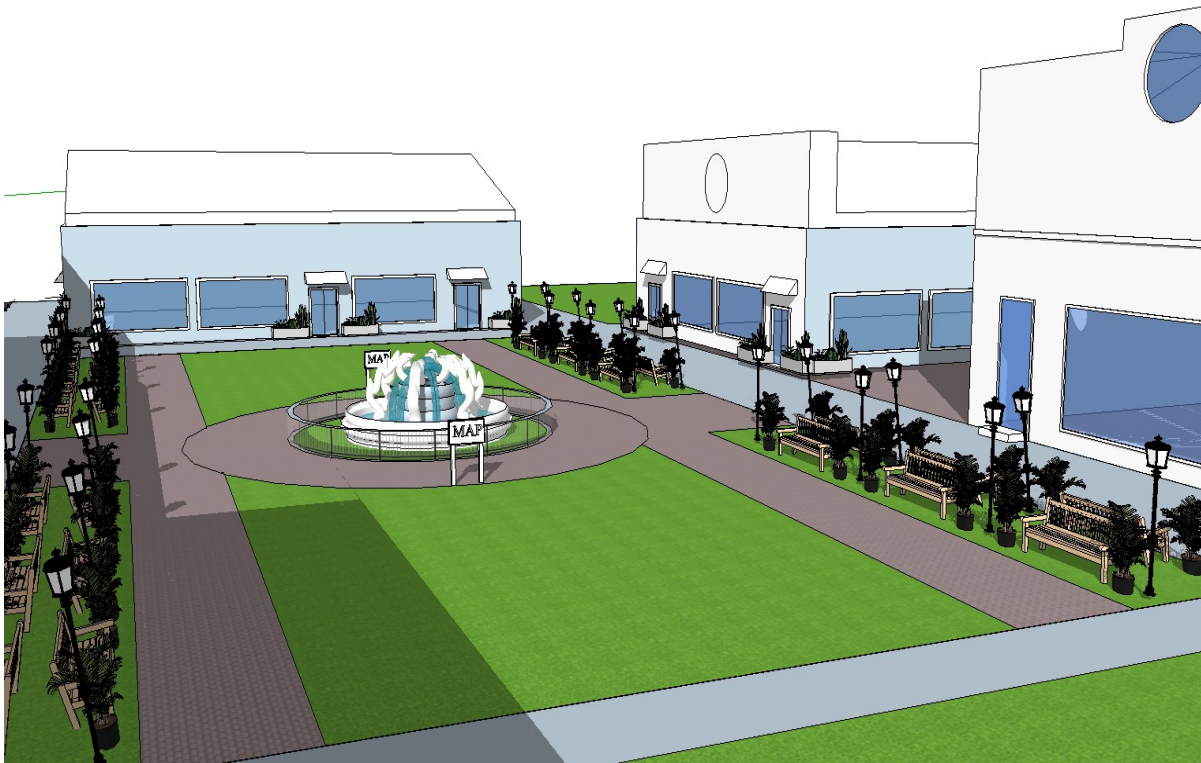


Haverford Township



Springfield Township

I Streetscape



SHOPPING CENTER DESIGN

Shopping centers are a common and important use along Activity Corridors. When designed appropriately with local context, they can contribute to the desired character of a corridor.

As with all buildings, shopping centers should be oriented towards pedestrians. The front of the stores should be treated similarly to a streetscape in a downtown, with sidewalk, benches, planters, and pedestrian lighting. In order to ensure a more traditional environment along the storefronts, the front façade should have a variation in depth every 50 feet or less.

Longer shopping strips should also mirror a more traditional design by allowing for breaks in continuous storefronts. For shopping centers with a structure that is longer than 500 feet, there should be a pedestrian connection between the parking in the rear of the building and frontage every 300 feet or less.

Benefits

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

Considerations

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

Related Features

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

d Shopping Center Design



Chadds Ford Township



Concord Township



Concord Township



Upper Darby Township

I Streetscape



ACCESS MANAGEMENT

Access management refers to the control of vehicular access points, such as driveways and intersections, to and from properties along a roadway. Proper access management allows traffic to flow more smoothly and safely along the road, but also limits curb cuts and allows for a more continuous and safe pedestrian environment.

To help reduce the need for multiple driveways on a block, surface parking lots can share entrance driveways and be connected through internal driveway systems. In some instances, shared parking agreements between adjoining developments may be most appropriate. Shared parking allows people to use parking spaces from adjoining properties and is particularly useful when neighboring properties have differing peak hours, such as a bank and a restaurant. It allows the size of parking lots to be reduced while still providing the appropriate number of parking spaces.

Benefits

- Improved access
- Multimodal connections

Considerations

- Bus stops

Related Features

- Traffic Calming
- Sidewalks

d Access Management



Concord Township



Aston Township



Radnor Township



Springfield Township

2 Building Façade



HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Historic buildings are structures officially designated as having intrinsic historic or architectural significance. Historic buildings may have local, regional, or national significance and can be protected from demolition or unregulated alteration.

Historic structures are an important element of community character because they offer tangible connections to the past, and provide unique architectural and design qualities that contribute to the visual character and distinctiveness of corridors.

It is important to retrofit or expand older buildings in order to preserve historic character. When an historic building cannot feasibly be used, the preservation of the façade or portions of the interior can retain important features of the structure.

Benefits

- **Scale**
- **History**

Considerations

- **Maintenance**
- **Renovation costs**

Related Features

- **Setbacks**
- **Placemaking**

a Historic Buildings



Chester City



Upper Darby Township



Upper Darby Township



Lansdowne Borough

2 Building Façade



ARCHITECTURAL PATTERN AND TREATMENT

Architectural pattern addresses building massing, or three-dimensional size and shape, as well as horizontal architectural features such as the location 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.

A compatible building size, location, and placement of ground floor windows and doors can foster pedestrian activity. In order to maintain visual interest, blank or solid walls should be avoided, particularly along the frontage of a building. The transparency created by windows connects activity inside to pedestrians outside and may draw them into businesses while contributing an interesting and inviting streetscape.

Building frontages exceeding a specified length should contain articulation or other architectural treatments at intervals to reduce the monotony of extended, flat walls.

Benefits

- **Aesthetic**

Considerations

- **Cost of construction**

Related Features

- **Historic Architecture**
- **Walkability**

b Architectural Patterns



Radnor Township



Concord Township



Chester City



Radnor Township

2 Building Façade



BUILDING HEIGHT

Building height, along with a building's relationship to the street, sets much of the tone for an Activity Corridor.

Specifying building height maximums and minimums can ensure new development is compatible with the existing or desired scale and character of a corridor. While it is common for zoning ordinances to regulate height, it is also important to design with a minimum height in mind as buildings that too-short can negatively impact the character of a street.

Setback requirements for upper stories can mitigate the bulk of taller buildings contributing to an open and inviting streetscape. Upper story setbacks may also be appropriate when a corridor abuts residential uses; added building height may be allowed on the frontage facing the main thoroughfare if the upper levels are set back from the side(s) abutting residential neighborhoods.

Benefits

- **Economic vitality**

Considerations

- **Regulations for use**

Related Features

- **Walkability**
- **Placemaking**

C Building Height



Concord Township



Swarthmore Borough



Haverford Township



Upper Darby Township

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.

The size, material, location and frequency of signage should be considered with an emphasis on simplicity and coherency of features while allowing for some variety and creativity. Planners should also consider implementing interpretive signage to help guide users.

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 a community and planners. Backlit or “box style” signs are often restricted due to their aggressive appearance which 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



Radnor Township



Lansdowne Borough



Media Borough



Radnor Township

2 Building Façade



BUILDING ORIENTATION AND ENTRANCES

Building orientation is the direction of the principal façade and entrance(s) of a building, and its location relative to the street and sidewalk.

Buildings in Activity Corridors 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 façades and encourage pedestrian activity along the corridor.

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 Orientation and Entrance



Springfield Township



Upper Darby Township

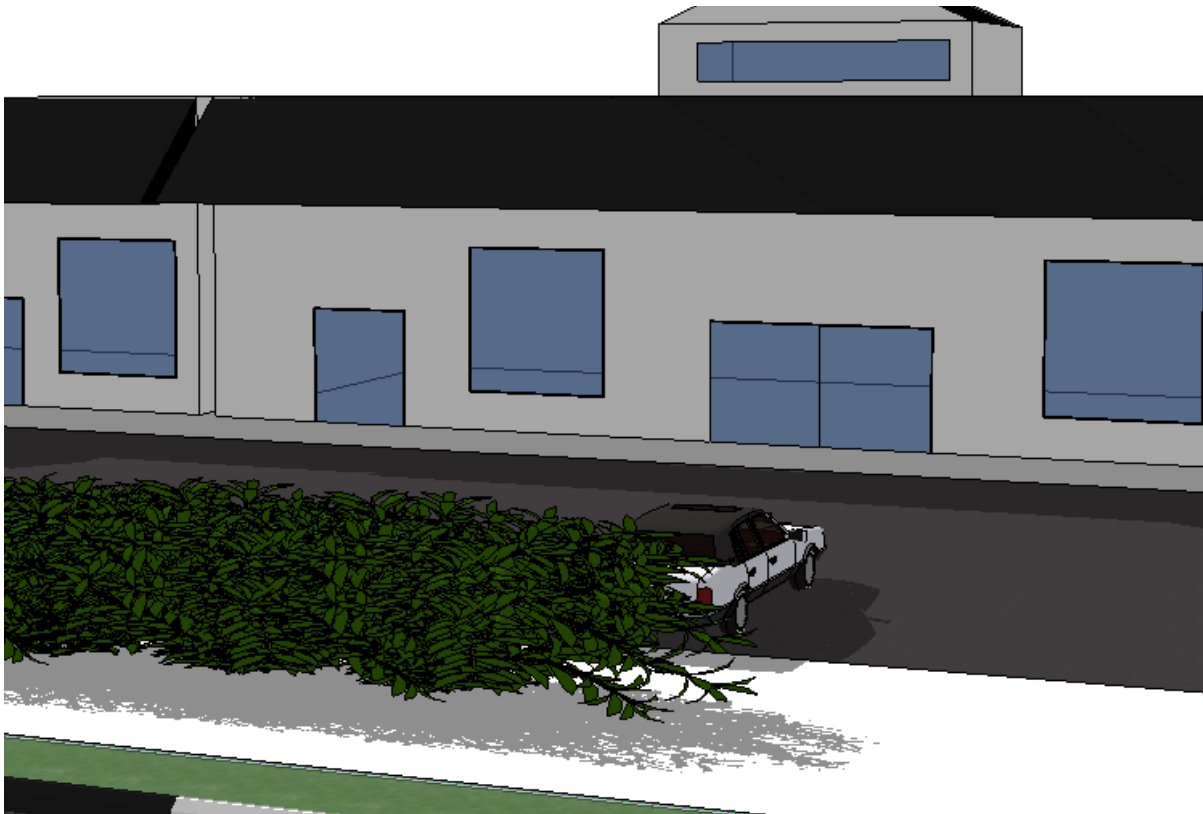


Upper Darby Township



Concord Township

2 Building Facade



SCREENING

Screening can help to shield unsightly areas on site, such as refuse areas, and/or provide a buffer between adjacent uses. Screening refuse areas shields views and access to trash and other byproducts of commercial uses. It reduces their visual impact and improves the appearance of the Activity Corridor.

In many Growing Suburbs, it is common practice to require a buffer between adjacent uses. This may include an earthen berm with plantings, evergreen trees, or a solid fence.

This may not be possible in Mature Neighborhoods because buildings and uses are generally denser. As such, screening may be accomplished with decorative fencing or building extensions.

It is also important that landscaping be included within and along parking lots to shield automobile headlight glare from the street and neighboring uses as well as to provide a visual break from large parking areas.

Benefits

- **Aesthetics**

Considerations

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

Related Features

- **Walkability**
- **Building Façade**

e Screening



Radnor Township



Springfield Township

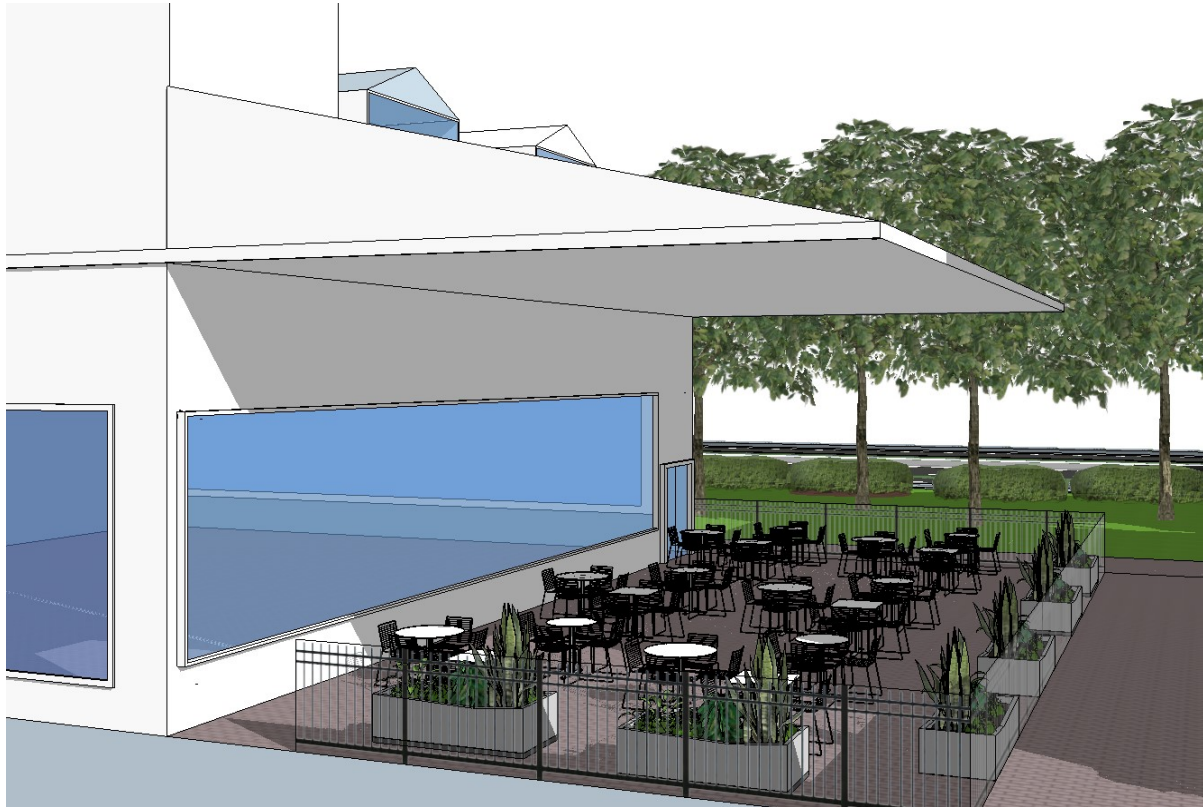


Springfield Township



Concord Township

3 Placemaking



OUTDOOR DINING

Outdoor dining in seasonal weather is an appealing amenity that can attract diners to sit-down restaurants and other food and beverage establishments. It also connects customers to the exterior spaces of buildings, stimulating an active and interesting streetscape.

Outdoor dining in front of or alongside restaurants places diners within the visual frame of the sidewalk. Social interaction is facilitated and personal safety may be enhanced by allowing diners to utilize the sidewalk as a public space. Outdoor dining should be regulated to ensure a safe, clear path to and from building entrances for pedestrians (ideally two pedestrians to pass at once) and emergency responders.

For buildings on Activity Corridors that are set back from the sidewalk, outdoor dining spaces can be located between the storefront and parking or on the side of the building. Additional screening, such as landscape planters may be necessary to create a comfortable environment for people.

Benefits

- **Aesthetics**

Considerations

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

Related Features

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

a Outdoor Dining



Media Borough



Haverford Township



Radnor Township



Concord Township

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), or even in vacant stores. Pop-up spaces are an excellent way to encourage off-hour visitors to areas along activity corridors and 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 can be good spaces for pop-ups because they provide flexible open space. Providing space for pop-ups encourages visitors who, once there, may 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



Lansdowne Borough



Springfield Township

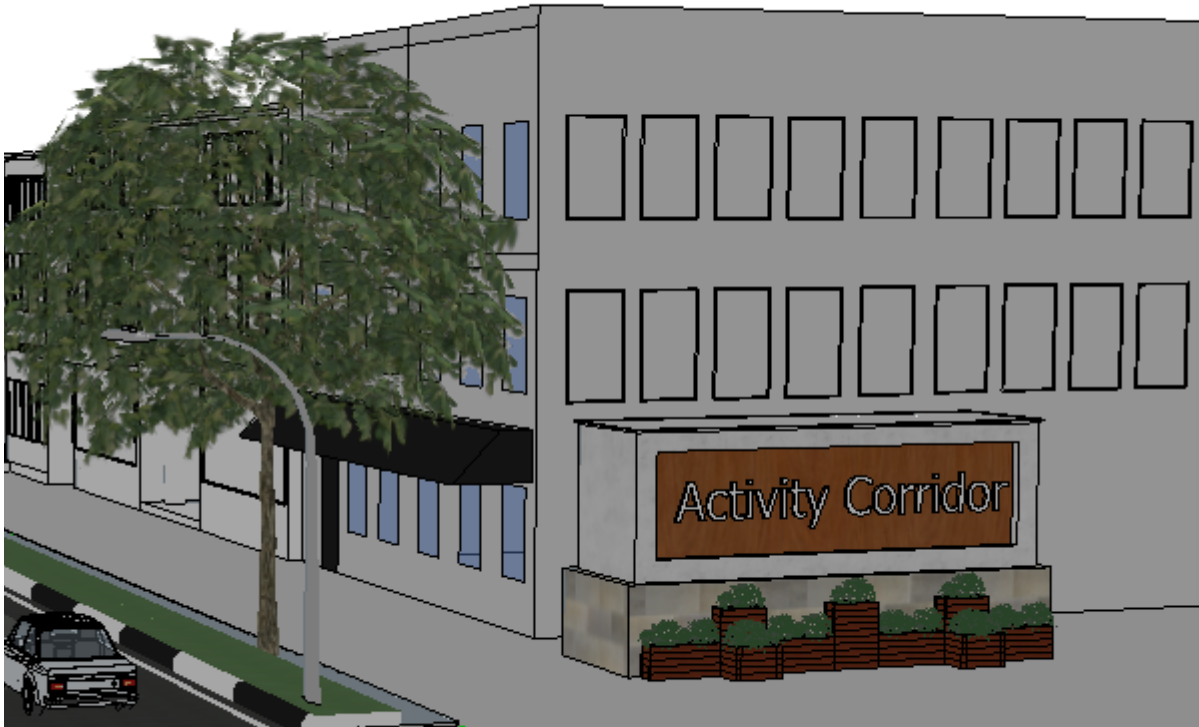


Media Borough



Lansdowne Borough

3 Placemaking



GATEWAYS

Gateways provide space to welcome visitors to an area and let travelers know that they are entering a distinct district or town. They 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 see an the identification of a new place.

Gateways provide an opportunity for traffic calming and vegetation. Gateways should alert people to the offerings of an activity corridor and encourage them to take in the variety an area has to offer. 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 a local theme that can be highlighted (arts activities, shopping areas, etc.).

Benefits

- **Sense of place**
- **Announcements**
- **Safety**

Considerations

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

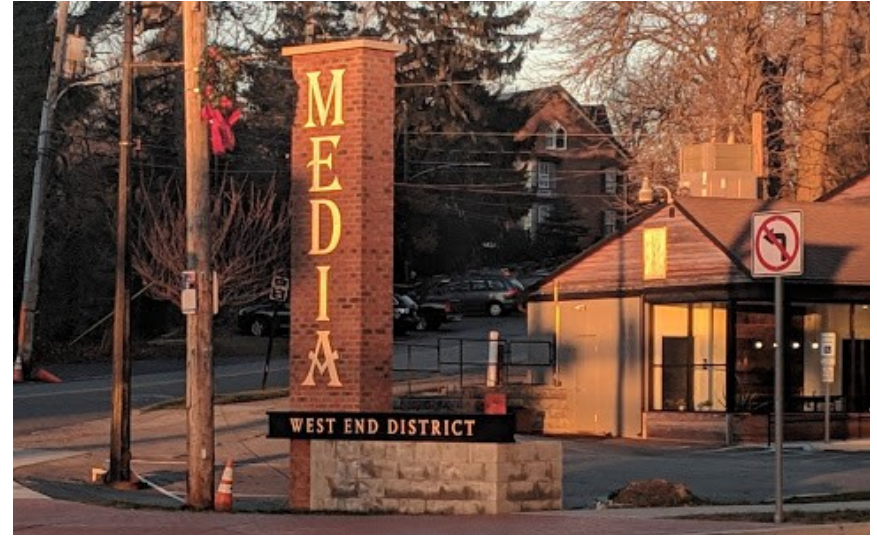
Related Features

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

c Gateways



Haverford Township



Media Borough



Concord Township



Lansdowne Borough

Section 3:

CONCLUSION



Conclusion

Many high-traffic roads and thoroughfares across the region, referred to as “Activity Corridors” in Delaware County 2035, have experienced continuous vibrancy and economic development. As development is concentrated along these Activity Corridors, it is important for local communities to have zoning laws that support appropriate projects and enhance people’s desired experiences. The Design Guidelines for Activity Corridors serve as a visual guide for local communities to implement into the zoning ordinance.

The provisions contained in the Design Guidelines are intended to promote growth and development that will maintain and enhance Activity Corridors or support their revitalization, while building towards the community vision. The provisions in Section 2 address the design features that comprise the principal elements of ideal Activity Corridors, including mixed uses, quality shopping center design, appropriate setbacks, screening, parking, and building orientation, among others. Communities can utilize these concepts to maintain and enhance the unique development and design character of the wide variety of Activity Corridors in the County while supporting local economic development.

Design Guidelines for Activity Corridors should be used to guide Countywide corridor projects and priorities. The visual aids and guidelines listed throughout the publication provide a path to meet the overarching goals of innovate, diversify, and adapt in the county’s comprehensive plan, **Delaware County 2035**. The guide is intended to serve as a resource for local governments. Municipalities should reference this guide and incorporate the recommended design elements and features where appropriate, into their zoning, development review, and studies and plans for Activity Corridors.

