INTRODUCTION

Community institutions are an important part of the character and vitality of neighborhoods in Forsyth County. Institutional uses include schools, churches, and government offices as well as services, community organizations and nonprofit agencies.

Many institutional uses are surrounded by single-family residential neighborhoods. As these facilities grow, existing single-family structures are sometimes demolished to make room for building expansions. Unfortunately, new construction or additions to institutional uses can sometimes have a negative effect on adjacent single-family homes because institutional uses typically have larger building footprints and bulkier massing. The design techniques found in this document can help institutions grow appropriately within their neighborhoods by improving the relationship development projects have with nearby single-family homes.

Compatible design: Design compatibility is not about simply replicating existing scale or reproducing the architectural styles of nearby buildings. Rather, the focus of compatibility is highlighting how institutional development can be designed to respond to fundamental neighborhood patterns. This context-sensitive approach allows change to be accommodated while preserving cherished aspects of neighborhood character. The patterns found in a neighborhood are defined by recurring characteristics such as the green street edges of front yards and street trees, and by the frontage patterns, forms, and orientation of buildings. These patterns vary by neighborhood, street, and block, leading to different elements of compatibility depending on location.

The continuation of existing patterns can accommodate a diversity of architectural styles, while providing an underlying sense of cohesion and “place” that helps define the character of neighborhoods. Compatibility focuses on elements including building and parking location, building height and scale, orientation, facade articulation, architectural and landscaping elements, building materials, and roof lines.

The example above shows a large institutional use with architectural and landscape elements that allow it to fit within an established neighborhood. The example to the right is not as successful and looks disconnected from the surrounding neighborhood because it does not follow existing patterns already present on the street.
Corner sites typically are highly visible from two or more streets as well as from long distances. Because of their higher visibility, corner buildings can serve as gateways or focal points through careful architectural detailing. Depending on their location and design intent, corner buildings may incorporate extra space for pedestrians and a generous entry, or can be located directly next to the corner to provide a strong urban block edge.

This corner building enhances the streetscape with its unique entrance and outdoor space with benches for pedestrian comfort.

In an urban setting it is preferable to locate buildings closer to the street corner to create a more vibrant pedestrian environment. Avoid locating surface parking lots at corner locations where they will be the dominant feature.

A corner building placed at an intersection with minimal setbacks helps define the corner and creates a strong urban edge.

In suburban settings, street setbacks can be increased and landscaping may be used to anchor the building to the corner.
Landmarks and focal points can be created by placing “signature” buildings at high visibility locations, such as at key intersections or main development entrances.

- Public entrances clearly defined and facing the street. A unique rounded entryway feature is an integral part of the building design.
- Special pavement treatment at the street corner for greater emphasis.
- Marked crosswalks give pedestrians the ability to safely cross at the intersection.

A building which is attractively designed to anchor the street corner.

A police headquarters building designed to highlight the public entrance.

The corner of this building is marked with an architectural element which serves as a focal point for adjoining streets.

An educational building designed to create a visually strong and attractive landmark for the campus.
DESIGN TECHNIQUES FOR MID-BLOCK SITES

For mid-block sites it is important to look to the uses and scales of adjacent buildings for design inspiration for new buildings. If a strong street edge is already present in the block, the new building should be designed to respond to the established streetscape. If, on the other hand, the adjacent properties are undeveloped or underdeveloped, more design flexibility exists. In either case, site layout considerations such as setbacks, building orientation, and parking location are important in creating a good pedestrian environment.

Buildings located close to the sidewalk to follow existing patterns in the neighborhood.

Parking located behind the buildings with a landscaped common area separating new buildings and residential development.

Facades are designed with articulation to provide visual variety.

Provide a pedestrian connection between the front door and the sidewalk.

In urban settings it is preferable to locate buildings closer to the sidewalk, emulate nearby front yard setbacks, and locate parking to the rear or side of buildings.

This town hall building design fits well in an established neighborhood and includes a wrap-around front porch, varying roof heights and wall planes, minimal setbacks, and traditional building materials.

This fire station located at the edge of a neighborhood replicates existing elements found in nearby single-family homes. Articulated facade elements include gable roofs, a variety of materials and planes, residentially-scaled doors and windows, and recessed garage bays for fire trucks.
Following one or more of the design techniques below can minimize the impact of taller buildings on neighboring homes:

- Increase building setbacks
- Step back upper floors
- Hide the top story inside a pitched roof
- Include dormer windows for pitched roofs
- Use landscaping and trees as a visual buffer between new and existing development

Examples of good transitions between adjacent uses.

The mass and scale of this institutional use blends in with adjoining single-family homes.

Shared parking is encouraged among compatible uses that are located adjacent to one another. Shared parking reduces the amount of surface parking that is required for each separate use.

This fire station within the boundaries of a National Register Historic District was designed to fit in a single-family neighborhood context.
DESIGN TECHNIQUES FOR LARGE DEVELOPMENT SITES

Large developments have a greater potential to impact adjacent residential areas because of their size. For that reason it is important that the context of the site is taken into consideration. By understanding the context, designers can determine which of the predominant features of the area are positive and incorporate these elements into the character of the new development.

- This project minimizes the impact of a long facade by breaking up the project into two buildings and using facade articulation.
- Incorporate plazas or open space with seating areas in larger developments.
- Use hedge planting or low walls to screen parking areas from adjacent streets.
- Establish clear pedestrian paths from parking areas to building entrances.

Larger developments adjacent to single-family homes need to be designed with broken wall planes, architectural elements that create the feeling of a residential scale, increased front setbacks, and appropriate landscaping to fit in with surrounding development.

An interior courtyard and lower buildings are used to frame a taller structure which is set back from the road.
DESIGN TECHNIQUES FOR LARGE DEVELOPMENT SITES

Two site layouts along the same road show different design approaches for locating buildings and parking areas.

This building is set back a large distance from the road and a large parking lot dominates the site adjacent to the street.

A landscaped entry makes this building feel like it is located in a park-like setting.

An attractive building design has less impact when too much parking exists between the building and the street.

This building and site design is organized to facilitate side and rear yard parking rather than parking between the building and the street.
The same square footage can be accommodated by two different site layouts. The image above shows a monolithic building with parking to the front. The drawing below shows a building broken down into three smaller components with pedestrian features between the buildings and parking to the rear of the site.

A new building’s height should be compatible with adjacent structures and, when necessary, incorporate sensitive transitions in height between low-rises and taller structures. Setbacks and variable roof lines can divide a building’s mass into sections that complement the scale and massing of neighboring structures.

The mass of a building can be broken up by recessing and projecting elements to avoid flat monotonous facades. Upper levels can also be set back to achieve an appropriate height-to-width ratio for the street.
DESIGN TECHNIQUES FOR LARGE DEVELOPMENT SITES

Pedestrian access within the parking area can be clearly delineated through the use of special pavers/scored surfaces, raised pedestrian areas, and covered entryways or other similar treatments.

Perpendicular parking facing residential units should include screening to prevent car headlights from shining into windows.

Break up parking areas and disperse them throughout the site to avoid the visual impact of large parking areas along a street frontage.

Incorporate innovative stormwater management practices, such as permeable pavers, in parking areas.
Design projects to be pedestrian-friendly. As appropriate, incorporate outdoor pedestrian gathering places into the project.

Locate common open space in a central location and provide seating areas and tables. Design common open space for people to interact, host guests, and relax.
Rooftop mechanical equipment and off-street parking should be screened to be out of view from public streets. The example above uses decorative metal panels to screen rooftop equipment. The example below uses a low brick wall to screen a parking area.

Street furniture including benches, trash receptacles, bike racks, fountains, signage, sculptures, etc. can be designed to give the project a unique feel and look.
DESIGN TECHNIQUES FOR BUILDING ADDITIONS

The impact of building additions on the existing character of surrounding properties should be minimized. For additions facing the street, building character and identity needs to be established at the street level, which requires the most design attention. Common design elements such as landscaping features, street furniture, or building materials can be used throughout a project to create visual unity.

A one story building addition faces the street to better integrate the project with single-family residences across the street.

By constructing a building addition to the rear of existing homes, the streetscape remains unchanged while allowing a bigger building footprint.

A bigger building is created by connecting existing smaller structures.

Parking remains to the rear of the properties.

The appearance of the streetscape remains largely unchanged.

Addition’s mass is broken-up and building height is stepped back to fit in with context.

No new driveway cuts along residential street.

Street trees help define the street edge and soften the impact of new buildings.

Parking addition located next to existing lot.

No parking spaces facing single-family residences.
Large building additions work better when located to the rear of the existing structure and away from single-family homes.

The mass and location of this building addition are incompatible with the scale of surrounding single-family homes.