

Urban design involves the character and definition of those elements that make up the public realm, including the public streetscape, public and private open space, and the buildings that define and address the street. Urban character is defined by the scale and form of the buildings, the pedestrian scale, and the public spaces created by the buildings.

The urban design concept for the *Plan* recognizes the historic and eclectic character of Mt. Vernon Avenue and seeks to protect and enhance its unique character as change takes place. The *Plan* guides future development to maintain a vibrant, low-scale mixed-use neighborhood where Alexandria residents may live, work, shop and play. This chapter provides urban design recommendations for the public streetscape and the private building form to ensure quality design as envisioned by the *Plan*.

The design guidelines outlined in this chapter incorporate the existing Mt. Vernon Avenue Design Guidelines (adopted by Council in 1993). The guidelines herein shall supercede the previously adopted guidelines for this portion of Mt. Vernon Avenue.

6.1 Guiding Principles

Preserve and protect existing residential areas

- Protect nearby residences from impacts associated with commercial activity

Encourage and support a mixed-use development

- Emphasize retail uses on ground floor

Preserve existing historic scale and character

- Allow for appropriate infill development and redevelop incompatible buildings
- Implement standards and guidelines to ensure quality development that reflects the scale of existing historic structures

Celebrate the “Town of Potomac Historic District”

- Protect and enhance the corridor’s visual appearance through streetscape and façade improvements

6.2 Building Form Design Approach

Mt. Vernon Avenue is regarded as one of the region's most unique neighborhoods, due in large part to its small town, Main Street character. The current zoning regulations, however, do not provide a framework to ensure that the form and scale of new or infill development will be compatible with the historic scale and character of the existing buildings along the Avenue. With its emphasis on form, quality, and the relationship of buildings to each other and the street, a more flexible design-oriented zoning approach is appropriate to support and encourage appropriately scaled and designed new construction.

The preparation and application of a building form design approach for a particular neighborhood requires a deep understanding of the existing built environment and the relationships between the adjacent properties, uses and the street. In order to understand the unique built environment in this area, an analysis of properties along the Avenue

was conducted. The analysis found several commonalities among the various sections of the Avenue, including:

- Typical commercial lot sizes are approximately 40-60 feet wide by 110 feet deep;
- Typical residential lot sizes are approximately 24 feet wide by 110 feet deep;
- Sidewalk width varies;
- Typical width of the Avenue from curb-to-curb is 40 feet;
- The street wall (i.e., the location of the face of the building) varies, but is generally located 10-15 feet from the curb; and,
- Buildings are primarily 2- 2 ½ stories in height, with some one- and three-story structures interspersed.

Existing Building Typologies

Mt. Vernon Avenue has a variety of building types (Figures 6.2 – 6.4).

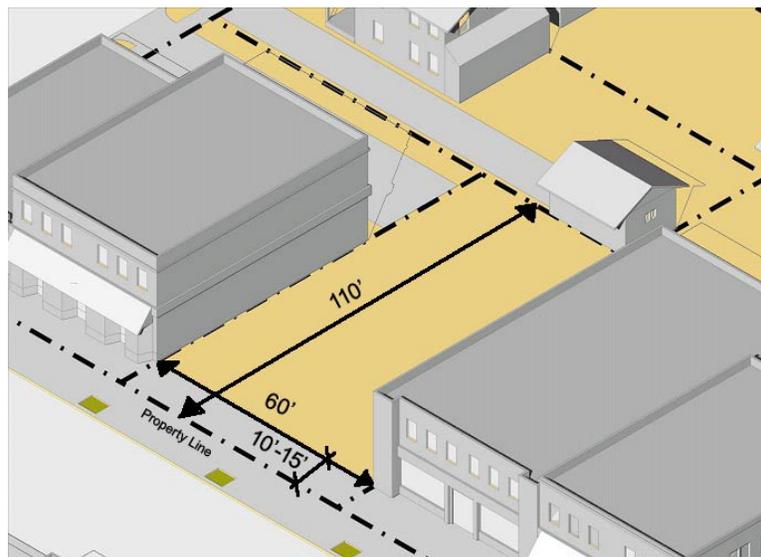


Figure 6.1 Typical infill site

- Retail / Commercial Use
- Flat roofs with parapet
- 60% Glazing / Storefront
- Awnings
- Retail Signage
- Lot Size: ~ 60'x110'
- Lot Coverage: ~ 50% - 60%
- Set Back: ~ 0' - 10'
- Building Height: ~ 12' - 16'

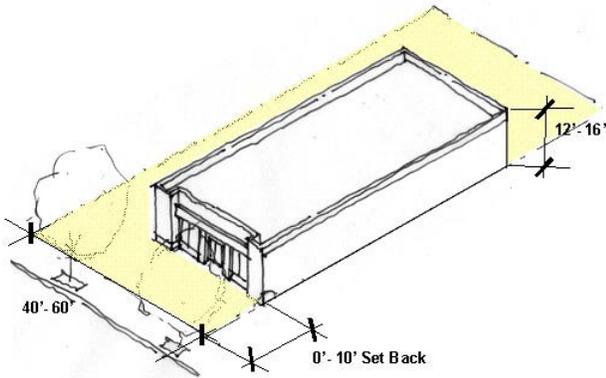


Figure 6.2 Building Typology: One Story Retail / Commercial

- Ground floor retail use
- Flat roofs with parapet
- 75% - 80% glazing/storefront at ground floor
- Vertically proportioned windows at upper floors
- Awnings, overhangs & retail signage
- Entrances, storefronts & architectural features address the corner
- Lot Size: ~ 60'x110'
- Lot Coverage: ~ 60% - 75%
- Set Back: ~ 0' - 5'
- Building Height: ~ 24' - 30'

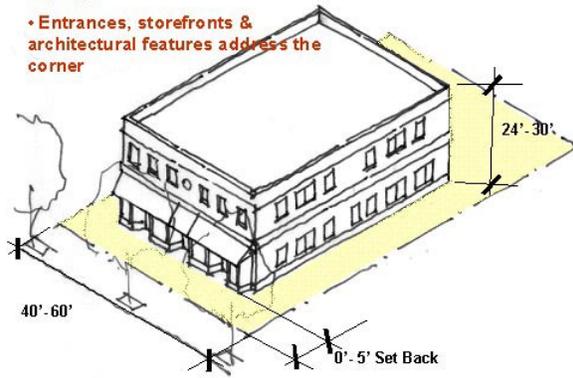


Figure 6.3 Building Typology: Two Story Retail / Commercial

- Flat roofs with parapet
- 75% - 80% Glazing/Storefront at ground floor
- Vertically proportioned windows at upper floors
- Awnings and overhangs
- Retail Signage
- Lot Size: ~ 60'x110'
- Lot Coverage: ~ 75% - 80%
- Set Back: ~ 0' - 5'
- Building Height: ~ 30' - 36'

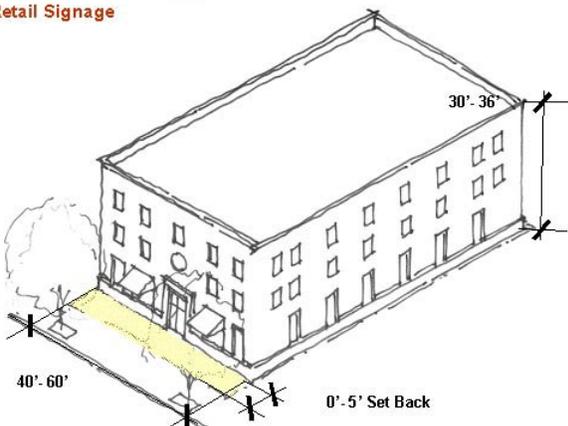


Figure 6.4 Building Typology: Three Story Retail / Commercial

- Commercial Retail - Reuse
- Gabled roof fronts street
- Fenced front yards
- Front porches ~ 8' - 10' deep
- Deep roof overhangs
- Vertical windows
- Lot Size: ~ 24'x110'
- Lot Coverage: ~ 30%
- Set Back ~ 10' - 15'
- Building Height: ~ 18' - 24'

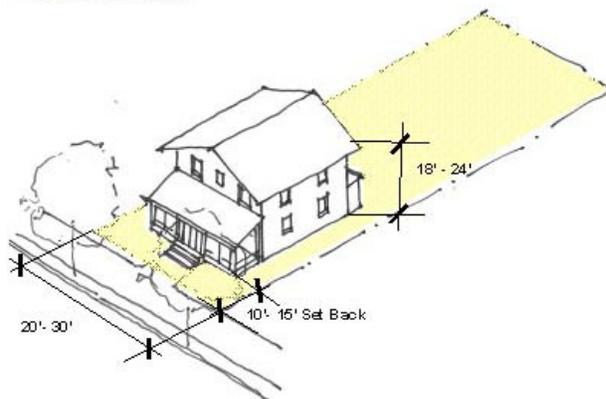


Figure 6.5 Building Typology: Single Family Detached

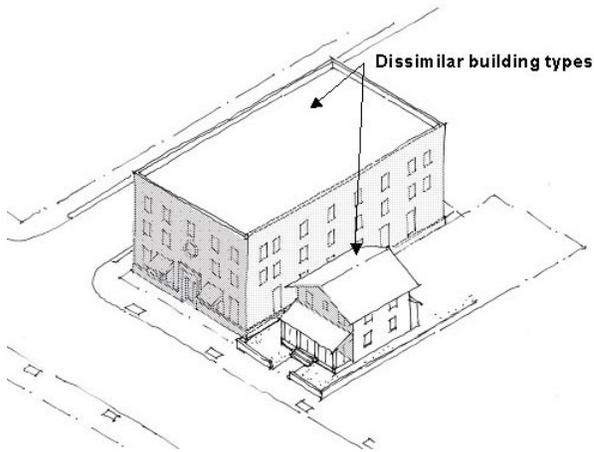


Figure 6.6 Dissimilar building types



Figure 6.7 Discontinuity of pedestrian flow with mid block curb cut

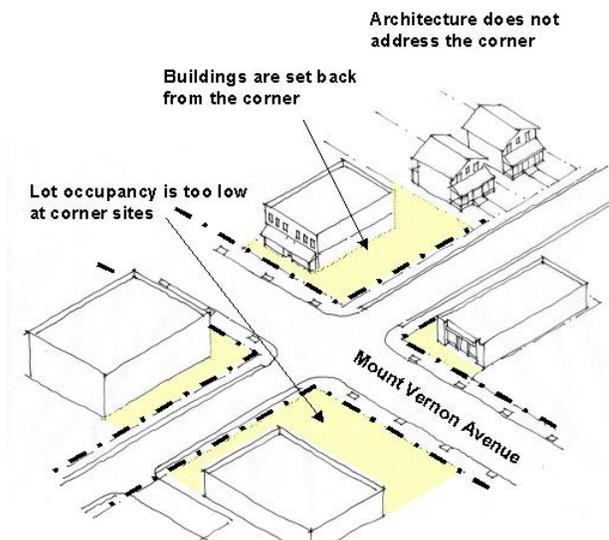


Figure 6.8 Lack of street wall and definitions at corners.

Issues and Challenges

Critical to this analysis was an understanding of the location of the buildings and parking and their relationship to adjacent commercial and residential properties. As part of this analysis, issues and challenges were identified to assist in the development of the design principles that underlie the building form design approach. These issues and challenges include:

- Instances of dissimilar building types that create variety and diversity in some places and discontinuity of the street wall in other places;
- Building scale, setbacks and massing that are out of proportion or lack appropriate transition between building types;
- The presence of historic structures that should be preserved to maintain the history and character of the street;
- Small infill lots with little opportunity for access to rear yards for parking;
- Some building setbacks and surface parking lots compromise the definition of the street wall;
- Retail and commercial service uses abut to residential uses creating undesirable impacts when the screening/buffering is inadequate;
- Vehicle access directly from Mt. Vernon Avenue interrupts the street wall, as well as the continuity of pedestrian flow and retail when located mid-block; and,
- Lack of street wall definition at some corners where the lot occupancy is low, the buildings are set back from the corner or the architecture does not address its corner location

Overall Design Principles

The building form design approach is intended to build on the existing pattern of development along the Avenue while preserving the scale of buildings within the historic district and minimizing impacts on the residences that abut the commercial properties.

Generally, the design principles meet the following objectives:

- New construction should reflect the scale of existing buildings;
- A consistent street wall should be maintained, with some variations to allow for landscaped open space, an opportunity for side windows and for other site use where desired;
- New construction should be two to two and one-half stories, with a setback where a third story is provided;
- New buildings should help define the corners where side streets intersect Mt. Vernon Avenue. Ground level retail storefront windows should extend onto the side streets;
- Appropriate building setbacks and parking lot screening will minimize impacts on adjacent residential properties;
- Ground level retail storefronts should contribute to the vitality of the streetscape and the pedestrian experience;
- Direct driveway access to Mt. Vernon Avenue is not desirable; and,
- Off-street parking lots should be located to the rear of the property, with access provided from rear alleys, when available, side streets or access easements from adjoining properties.



Figure 6.9 Encourage appropriately scaled infill

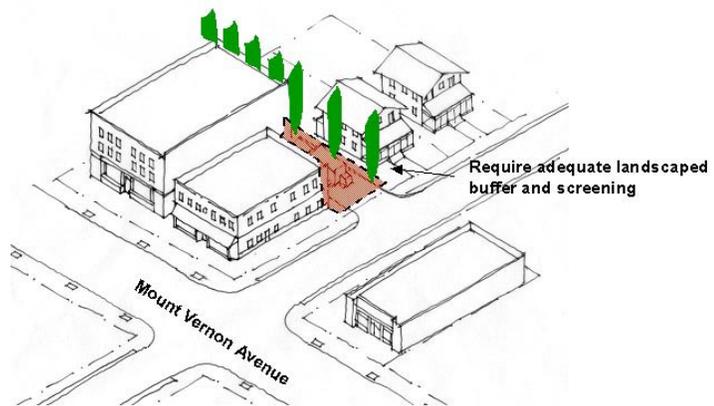


Figure 6.10 Buffer adjoining residences

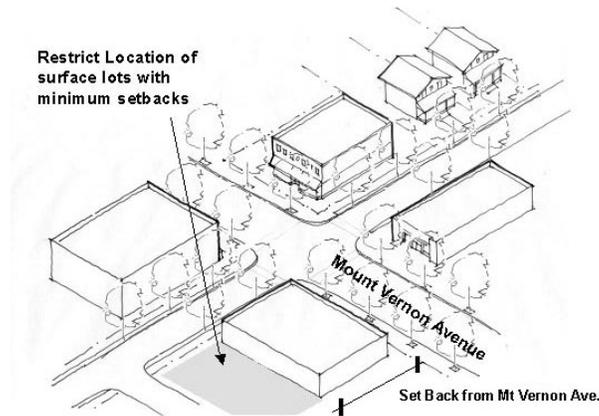


Figure 6.11 Parking in rear

6.3 Specific Building Form Design Guidelines

The guidelines are set forth visually, with graphics depicting the desired form and location of buildings and parking areas, building massing, height and scale, building facades, and screening requirements. A brief discussion of the design intent accompanies each graphic.

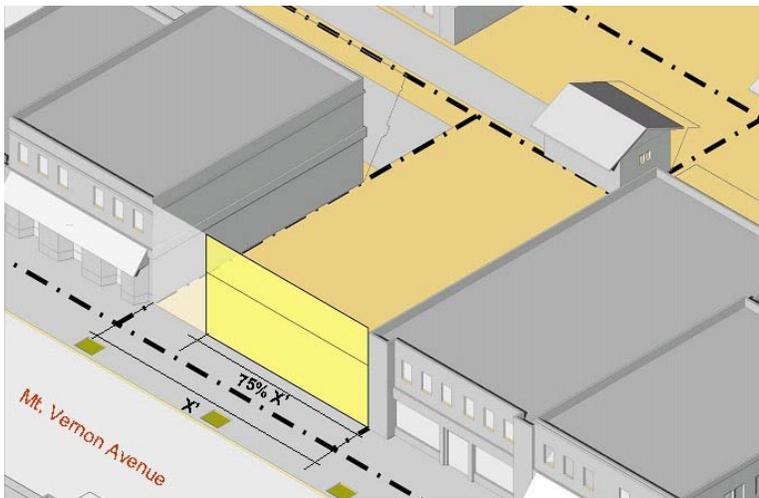


Figure 6.13 Street frontage interior site

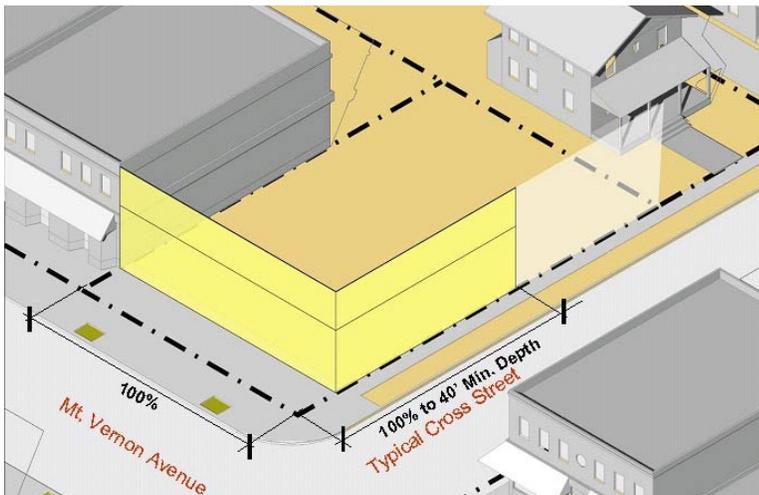


Figure 6.14 Street frontage corner site

Street Wall and Frontage

DESIGN INTENT

New construction will define the street wall with a similar height and scale to existing buildings, while minimizing gaps in the continuity of the urban fabric along the Mt. Vernon Avenue corridor and the commercial transition on the corners of the side streets.

On interior sites

It is desirable to have definition of the full frontage along the street. Buildings should define a minimum of 75% of the street wall for the width of lot. The remaining 25% of lot width may be occupied by landscaping, garden walls or similar defining features. (Figure 6.13)

On corner sites

Buildings are expected to define 100% of the street front along Mt. Vernon Avenue and 100% of the street front to a depth of 40 feet back from the front building wall on the cross street. The primary building entrance should be on Mt. Vernon Avenue or, where appropriate, oriented toward the corner. However, when the corner is used as an entry or architectural focal element, alteration of the street wall at the corner may be appropriate. (Figure 6.14)

DESIGN INTENT

New development will maintain the continuity of the street wall and contribute to the subtle variety and complexity of building facades along Mt. Vernon Avenue.

Building facades must be located within 10 – 15 feet of the front property line and align, where appropriate, with at least one existing neighboring building face to maintain continuity in the street wall. (Figure 6.15)

DESIGN INTENT

Architectural elements are used to provide architectural interest and heighten pedestrian activity at the ground level.

Entry to retail, commercial and institutional buildings should be directly at ground level. The entry to the building should be clearly visible from the street. Prominent, defined entries are encouraged for both architectural interest and as an element of scale and orientation.

Architectural details, such as a change in materials, ornamentation and the use of smaller, human scaled elements will be provided at the pedestrian level. (Figure 6.16)

Building Height and Massing

DESIGN INTENT

New construction will be similar in height and scale to existing buildings along the Mt. Vernon Avenue corridor.

A minimum two-story façade (a minimum of 25 feet in height) is required along Mt. Vernon Avenue. A maximum of three stories, where compatible with existing scale, with a required 10-15-foot setback at the third floor, is permitted along Mt. Vernon Avenue. Where a sloped roof and dormers are proposed, no setback is required at the third floor.



Figure 6.15 Continuity of street wall



Figure 6.16 Architectural detail and interest

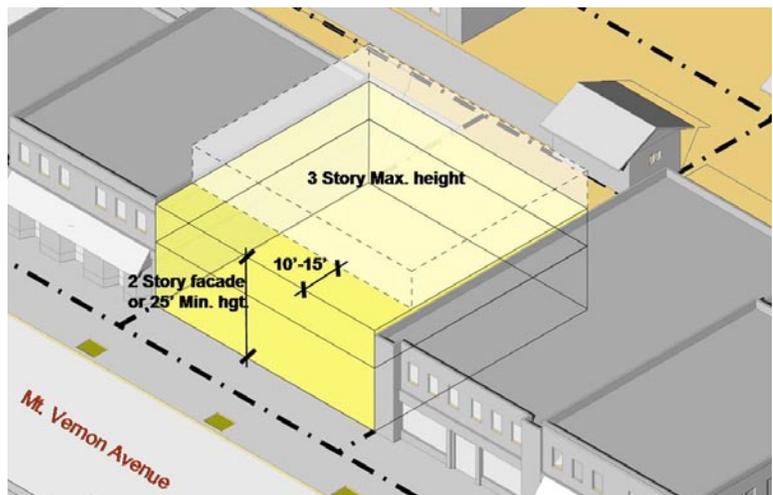


Figure 6.17 Building height and massing

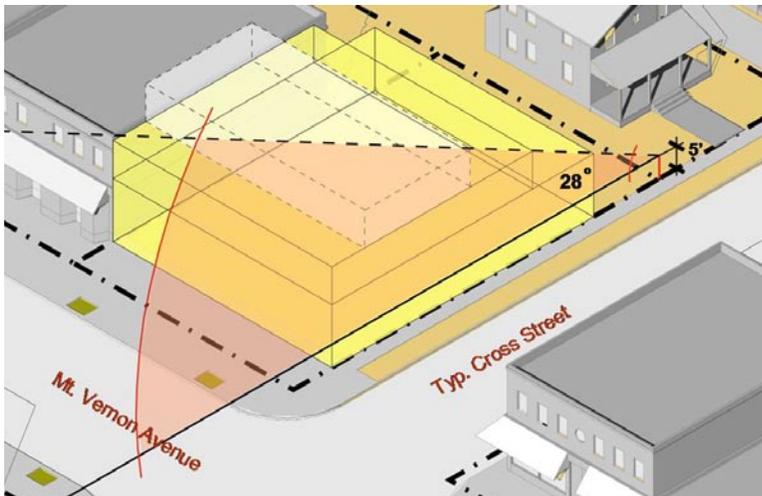


Figure 6.18 28 degree setback angle

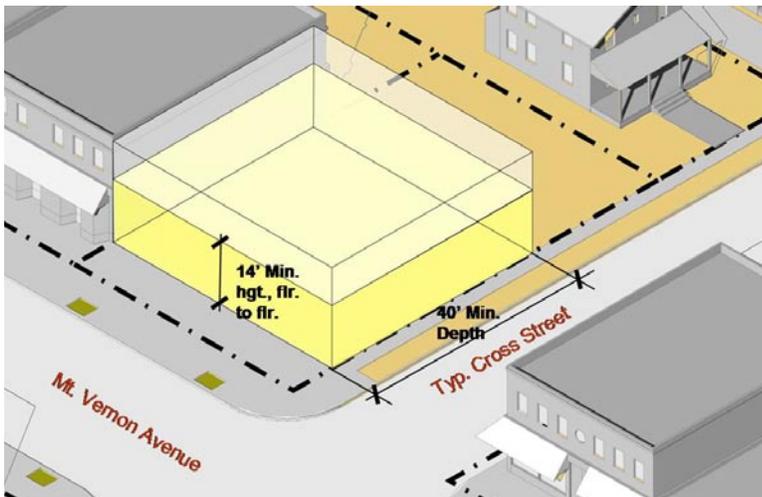


Figure 6.19 Retail floor height and depth



Figure 6.20 Maximum width of continuous facade

DESIGN INTENT

Appropriate massing for new construction provides adequate setbacks for light, air and privacy to neighboring residential uses, while maximizing development opportunity

Building mass and height may not exceed a 28-degree setback angle measured from 5-feet above the ground at the rear property line. (Figure 6.18)

Ground floor retail in newly constructed buildings particularly in the retail focus area should have a minimum 12-13 foot floor-to-floor height and a minimum depth of 40 feet for the width of the building. Larger retail spaces should have higher floor-to-floor heights, such as the 14-foot minimum shown in Figure 6.19.

DESIGN INTENT

Facades on new construction have surface articulation and variation in a scale and complexity similar to existing building facades along Mt. Vernon Avenue.

Building facades may have a maximum width of 60 feet of continuous vertical surface, after which a change in material, plane or vertical articulation is required. Further articulation within the 60-foot width is necessary to break down the building mass into smaller units. Large blank facades are not allowed. (Figure 6.20)

All new development must approximate in street front appearance the existing Mt. Vernon Avenue character of 40-foot to 60-foot wide two story buildings with varying roof heights and setbacks. For new construction that occupies a lot or lots larger than the typical lot of 60 feet by 110 feet, the buildings must be designed to look smaller or have the appearance of separate buildings, with a change in architectural treatment of facades, setbacks, roof lines and styles in order to break up the mass of the buildings. (Figure 6.21)

DESIGN INTENT

Appropriate massing and roof forms enhance the architectural character of the street and add to the continuity and variety of the street wall.

Architectural elements, such as dormers or details at the cornice level help to break down the apparent mass of the building, compensate for changes in height and scale with existing buildings and create interest in the skyline.

A variety of roof forms are encouraged, including flat with a parapet, sloped with ridge parallel to Mt. Vernon Avenue or a combination of sloped, flat, or appropriately designed forms. Roofs are restricted to a maximum height of 40 feet to the top of the parapet for flat roofs and 40 feet to the mid-point of the slope for all sloped roofs. (Figure 6.22)

Buildings are encouraged to include 3rd floor “loft-type” space (such as illustrated in Figure 6.17) that are stepped back from the front building wall at the second story, creating useable outdoor open space on the second story roof. Such buildings may include unique roof designs on the third floor such as angled or curved trusses which create “loft-type” volume spaces. Such roofs shall be no higher than 45 feet at their highest point.

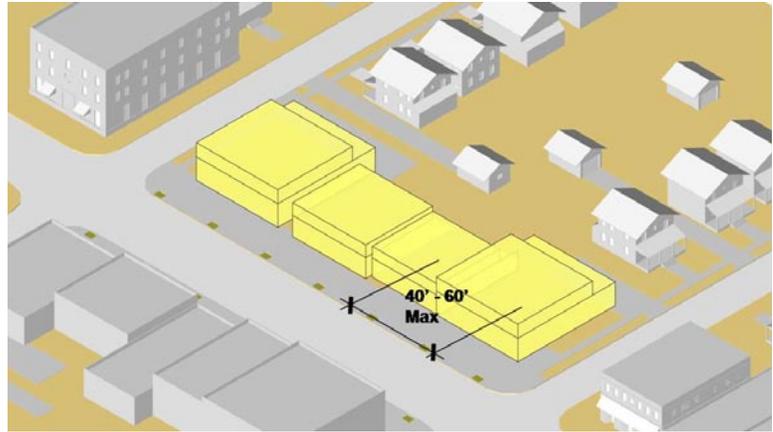


Figure 6.21 Maintain 40–60 foot module

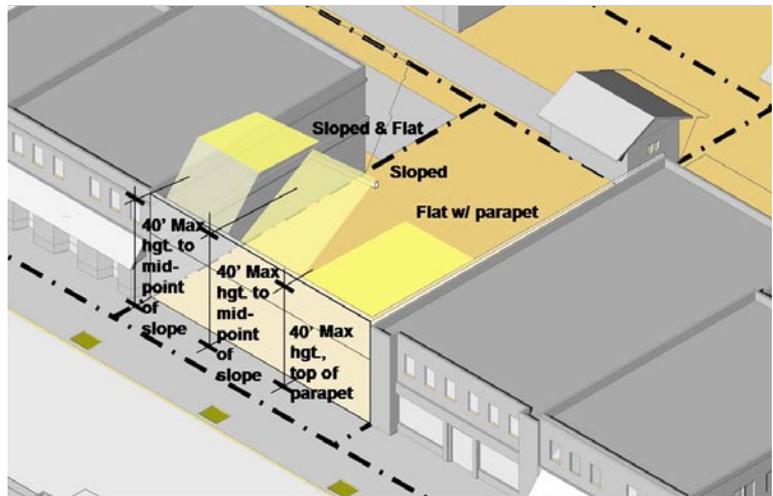


Figure 6.22 Building height

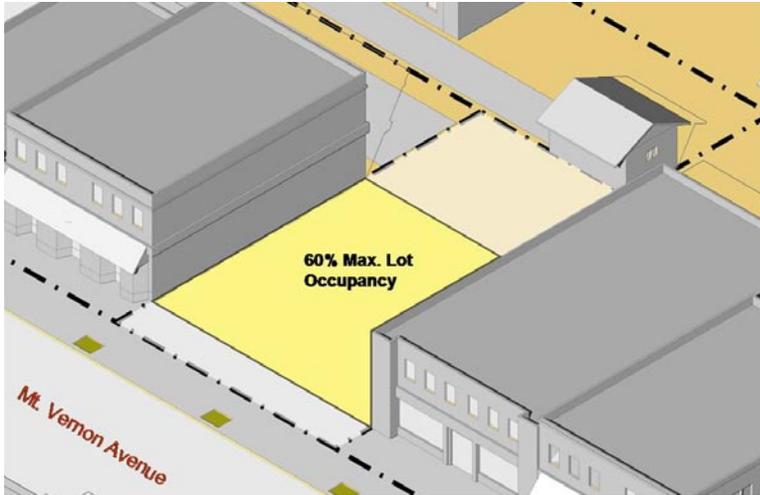


Figure 6.23 Lot occupancy



Figure 6.24 Facade articulation

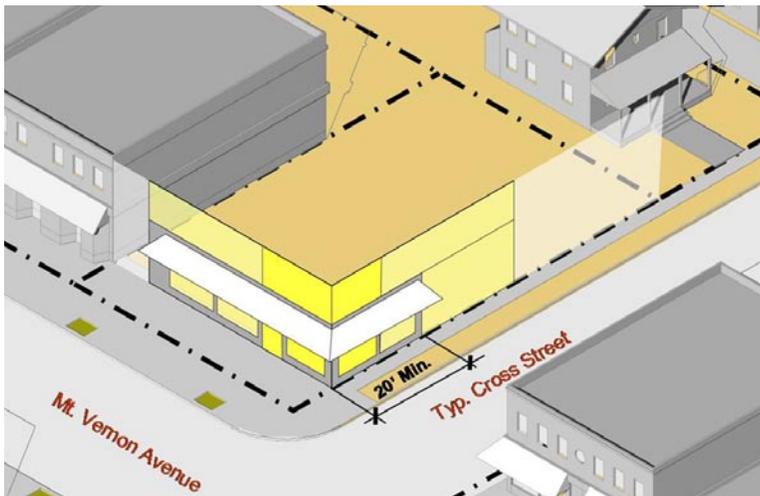


Figure 6.25 Corner articulation

Lot Occupancy

Maximum lot occupancy of 60% is required on Mt. Vernon Avenue to accommodate building placement on the front of the lot and parking/screening on the rear of lots, except on small lots where off-street parking is waived. In such case, consideration may be made to increase the lot occupancy based on the merit of a given proposal. (Figure 6.23)

Facade Articulation

DESIGN INTENT

Diversity of the surface articulation and variation of building facades is accomplished through setbacks and projections while minimizing their intrusion into the building setback or detracting from the continuity of the street wall.

Building façade projections and setbacks may have a maximum depth of 4 feet while maintaining the desired 10-foot setback. Bays or other more subtle means of façade articulation are encouraged. (Figure 6.24)

DESIGN INTENT

Architectural features address the corner and ensure the character and activity of the streetscape extend along the cross streets of Mt. Vernon Avenue.

Ground level retail storefront windows should extend a minimum of 20 feet along cross streets. The building's primary entrance shall be on Mt. Vernon Avenue or on the corner. Architecture is expected to address and articulate the corner of intersecting streets. (Figure 6.25)

DESIGN INTENT

Building façades contribute to the architectural character by creating a high amount of transparency at the ground level and a higher opacity on the upper floors.

For retail/commercial uses the wall/window ratio must be a minimum of 25/75, with 75% glazing on the storefront. For all uses other than retail/commercial, ground and upper floors of building facades must have 30% to 50% glass, as a percentage of the wall surface. Individual “punched” or framed windows shall be provided on the upper levels. (Figure 6.26)

The upper floor windows of new buildings must be vertically proportioned and appropriately scaled to the building façade. The ratio of window height to width should be 1.75/1 or greater. (Figure 6.27)

Parking and Screening

DESIGN INTENT

Gaps in the continuity of the street wall are minimized and the pedestrian experience is strengthened by prohibiting curb cuts along Mt. Vernon Avenue and restricting the width and number of curb cuts along side streets.

On interior sites

Curb cuts along Mt. Vernon Avenue are strongly discouraged. Vehicular access to the property should be provided in the rear from alleys or easement from adjoining property/parking area. Where that is not feasible and the proposed development is well-designed, strong consideration will be given for reasonable waiver to parking requirements. (Figure 6.28)



Figure 6.26 Wall / Window ratio



Figure 6.27 Window proportion

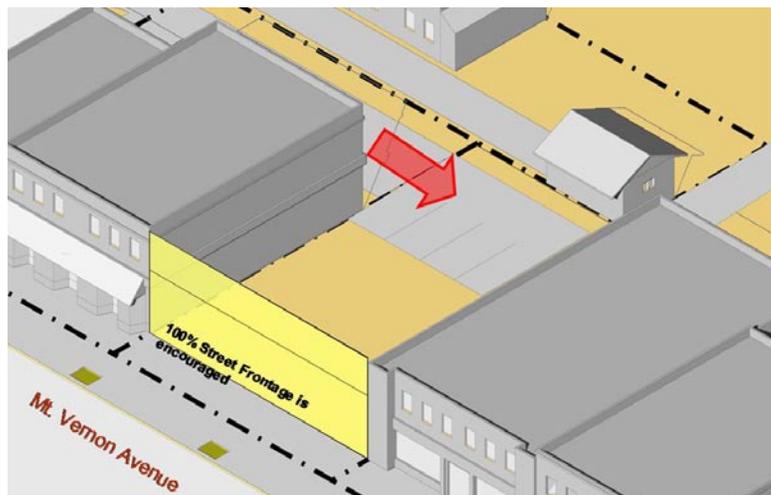


Figure 6.28 Restrict curb cuts on Mt. Vernon Avenue

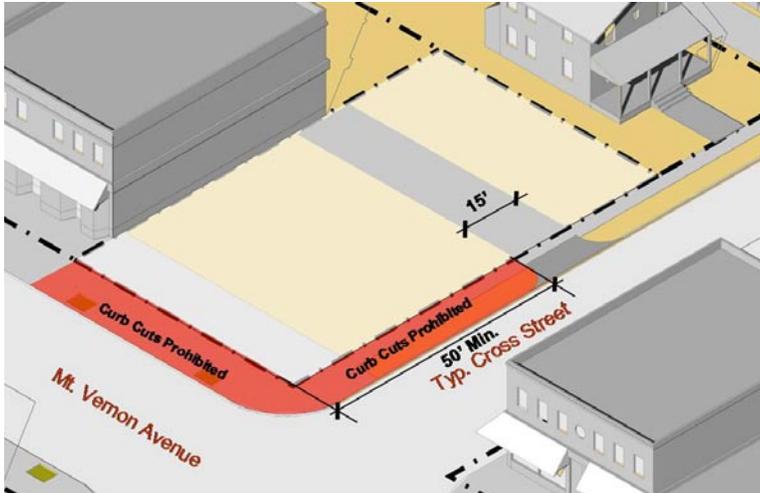


Figure 6.29 Access on corner lots



Figure 6.30 Parking and screening

On corner sites

Curb cuts are prohibited along Mt. Vernon Avenue for corner sites. Rear yard and parking for corner sites must be accessed from cross streets. While 100% street frontage is encouraged, one curb cut with a 15-foot drive lane is permitted along the cross street provided it is set back 50 feet from the property line at Mt. Vernon Avenue. (Figure 6.29)

DESIGN INTENT

The suitable location of surface parking minimizes gaps in the continuity of the street wall and provides appropriate setbacks for screening and landscape buffering to reduce impacts on neighboring residential uses.

Above grade and surface parking lots must be setback a minimum of 40 feet from Mt. Vernon Avenue. An 8 – 10-foot landscaped screening buffer is desired (with a 6-foot minimum depending on the quality of the screening) at the rear of the lot (and on the side street for corner lots) for the entire depth of the parking lot, except where a rear alley intersects perpendicular to the lot. In such instance, a break in the screening buffer is required to accommodate current or future access. Regardless of whether the parking requirement has been waived or reduced, a buffer must be provided as described above to provide screening for adjacent uses.

This design standard does not apply to the Town Square site, as it abuts commercially used property to the rear and the goal in the design of the square is to integrate it into the design of the streetscape, providing the opportunity for both large and small gathering spaces.

6.4 Storefront Guidelines

It is important to maintain consistency in building facades and related treatments throughout the Avenue, particularly with Mt. Vernon Avenue’s mix of architectural styles and colors that have evolved as

the surrounding areas have grown over the last few decades (Figures 6.31 and 6.32 illustrate various configurations of appropriately desired storefronts).

Storefront Design

Storefronts are generally the first point of contact with potential customers and define the character of a neighborhood and retail street. Standardized or generic storefronts are strongly discouraged on Mt. Vernon Avenue. Storefront design should reinforce the “Main Street” quality of the Avenue, with its unique small town character. Storefront design should include as many of the following elements as possible:

- Individual storefront displays should change often to add richness to the Avenue
- The primary pedestrian entrance should directly front along the sidewalk or at the corner
- On corner sites, ground level retail storefront windows should extend a minimum of 20 feet along the side street, and both the architecture of the building and the storefront design should address and articulate the corner at intersections along the Avenue
- Storefronts should have a minimum of 75 percent glass at the ground floor facade
- Creative displays of merchandise and services should be included in storefront windows
- Ground level storefronts are encouraged to have exterior awnings that are coordinated with the storefront design. Along the Avenue, particularly in the historic district, shed or sloped awnings are strongly encouraged and are more appropriate than other awning forms. Awnings shall not overwhelm or obscure the architecture and decorative features of historically contributing buildings. Awnings shall not be backlit.



Figure 6.31 Quality storefront



Figure 6.32 Quality storefront



Figure 6.33 Awnings



Business name on Awning



Variety of sign types

Building Signage

Signage should clearly communicate the business name and should be restricted to the ground level. Facades should be enhanced through awnings, decorative signage, unique window dressings and displays, and detailed trim to add variety to the street wall and distinguish stores from one another. These improvements will enhance the pedestrian experience by offering interesting outposts of stores, eateries and miscellaneous services through a unique visual journey along the Avenue.

Signage should be consistent in scale and language, appropriate to the surrounding context and oriented to the pedestrian. Bright and flashy themed signs should be avoided, as they are not in character with the local neighborhood. Most architectural facades along the Mt. Vernon Avenue are traditional in style; in order to preserve this character, they should not be overwhelmed with signage. Commercial signage on the Avenue should consist of small scale, wall mounted signs located between the first and second floors of a building, glass-applied signage in storefront windows, or those hung from posts perpendicular to the building facade. Internally illuminated box signs should be prohibited and existing signs should be replaced with appropriate signage. Freestanding signs should be prohibited. For buildings with multiple retail units, a coordinated signage approach is desired.

6.5 Pedestrian Environment and Streetscape Recommendations

The *Plan* recommends improvements to lighting, sidewalks, crosswalks, street trees, signage, site amenities, including street furniture and public art to improve and enhance the pedestrian environment.

Sidewalks and Right-of-Way Treatment

Sidewalks are generally adequate and easily navigable by foot, but paving type and texture are inconsistent throughout the Avenue. As the Avenue evolved from residential uses to a combination of uses, sidewalks outside of the improved area have remained narrow and unimproved. This is particularly evident in the treatment of the strip of land between the public right-of-way and private property.

Consistency in sidewalk surfaces would result in an improved appearance and cohesive boundary of the Avenue. The *Plan* recommends using two to three paving types such as concrete, brick pavers, and stone that will not only provide an aesthetic improvement but also distinguish areas of use, such as incorporating one paving type for outdoor dining directly adjacent to a

clearly marked walkway of a contrasting material (Figures 6.34 and 6.35). The use of alternative quality pavement material coordinated with the building façade or retail use is encouraged.

In most locations there is a narrow space (approximately 5-10 feet) between the edge of the public sidewalk and the front of the buildings, called the “public/private zone.” This is private property, but this area plays an important role in complementing the sidewalk. There are several options for the treatment of this area, as follows:

- The area is utilized as part of the outdoor seating for the cafes and restaurants;
- It serves as part of the entrance to retail and service uses – so it should be treated as a continuation of the sidewalk;
- It acts as the foreground to existing residential or office uses on the Avenue. As such, it should be planted and maintained with appropriate foundation plantings, with adequate sidewalk area to serve the use.



Figure 6.34



Figure 6.35 Paving defines retail entrance



Outdoor Dining

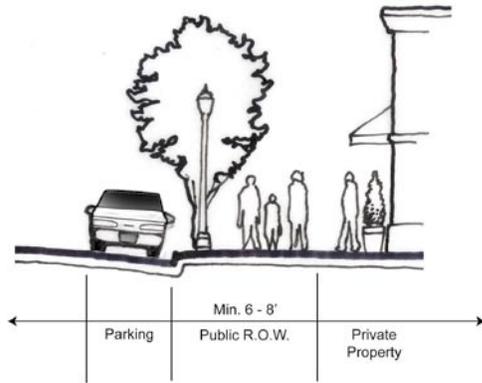


Figure 6.36 Retail, Pave to building foundation

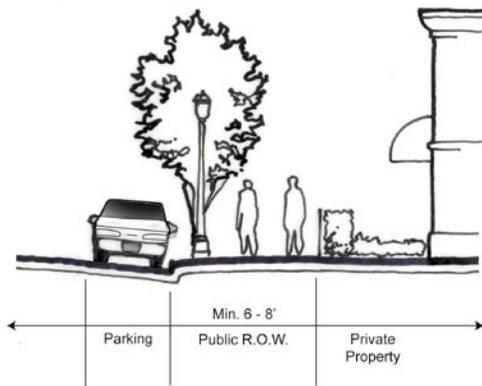


Figure 6.37 Residential Landscaping at entrance

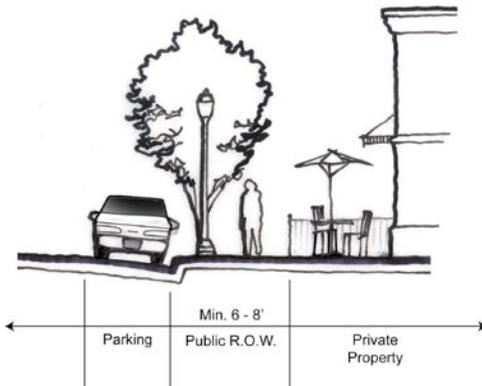


Figure 6.38 Outdoor Dining

The *Plan* recommends that the area located between the city right-of-way and the sidewalk-entry of businesses be paved using the same style of pavement as the existing sidewalk areas – generally brick pavers. Consistency in the treatment of the public/private zone will enhance cohesive identity along Mt. Vernon Avenue. In areas where a residential use is adjacent the right-of-way, ground surfaces is typically planted. For the areas adjacent to commercial and retail uses, the *Plan* recommends that sidewalks be paved to the building foundation. (Figure 6.36 and 6.37). An edge treatment, such as precast white concrete tree planter curb or brick edging for the unidecor pavers, is recommended where the sidewalk meets planting areas or grass.

In order to create activity on the street, outdoor, cafe-style seating should be encouraged and can have areas designated by special paving materials (Figure 6.38). Outdoor seating already occurs in some limited areas of the Avenue, and encouraging additional restaurants and cafes to provide outdoor seating will contribute to the street as a lively public area. Where outdoor dining currently occurs, this space is identified with temporary bollards or planters that identify the edge of the dining area, while others have installed low height metal, or wrought iron fencing. Areas that are used as outdoor dining may be paved in materials that differentiate the areas from pedestrian flow.

The *Plan* recommends that the portions of the Avenue adjacent to parking lots should be treated with a screen or planted buffer. In conjunction with vegetation, low walls can reinforce the delineation and screening of parking areas. (Figures 6.39 and 6.40).

There are several parking lots and service uses within the Historic Core and Monroe Gateway areas that should be screened to the greatest extent possible. This buffer could include a low seat wall that would provide multiple uses, such as screening and an attractive seating space along the Avenue.



Figure 6.39 Parking area without screen

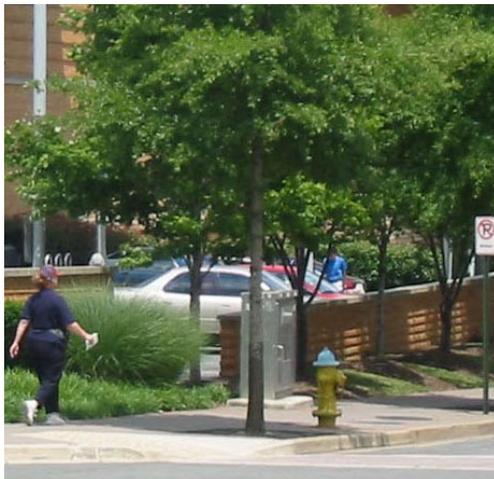


Figure 6.40 Parking area with wall and buffer

Pedestrian Crosswalks

The existing crosswalks on the Avenue vary in design and maintenance, and several crosswalks are currently being upgraded from painted stripes to stamped asphalt, an attractive and cost effective method for highlighting crossing areas that can be easily updated with routine road maintenance.

A series of actions are recommended to improve the existing conditions of many crosswalks to optimize pedestrian safety. Existing crosswalks in poor condition, such as those at the intersections of Nelson and Monroe Avenues, warrant re-stripping at a minimum in the short term. A related issue is the variety in the treatment of crosswalks at other intersections. For example, the crosswalks at the Howell and Mt. Ida Avenue intersections are constructed of brick pavers, while both a painted ladder-style and a stamped asphalt crosswalk are provided at Del Ray and Oxford Avenues. A unique, but consistent crosswalk treatment is recommended to reinforce the character of the Historic Core area.

The *Plan* also recommends a standard treatment for the crosswalks outside the Core area, with special care taken at the two public schools, George Washington Middle School and Mt. Vernon Community School, to upgrade the existing faded and poorly marked crosswalks. These particular crosswalks should be upgraded in the short term with signage, lighting and enhanced treatment to help distinguish these crossings for drivers and to enhance pedestrian safety for children and others crossing the Avenue



Figure 6.42 Crosswalk, alternative materials

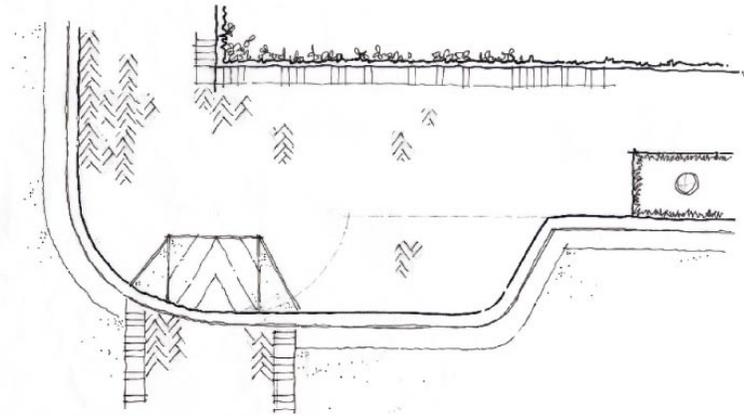


Bulb-outs

Bulb-outs generally serve to slow traffic, shorten road crossing distance and enhance pedestrian safety. The use of paving materials should continue to be integrated in areas where people and vehicles interact, particularly within the Monroe Gateway and the Historic Core.

The City has provided pedestrian bulb-outs at several intersections. These should also be incorporated at other intersections within the Historic Core area. Such improvements strengthen the Avenue as a safe, pedestrian domain.

Larger bulb-outs are recommended for intersections that accumulate greater numbers of pedestrians and can also offer an opportunity for planted areas or wayfinding at key intersections.



*Recommended
Bulb-out design*



Example of Existing Bulb-out

Lighting

A major concern expressed by community members is the lack of pedestrian-scale lighting along the length of Mt. Vernon Avenue. Currently, the street is lit by tall, cobra-head style lights located on one side of the street that illuminate a broad area of the street for vehicular traffic. In many instances, light from these fixtures is directed away from the sidewalk onto the street and may be obscured by the existing tree canopy, with little light filtering down through the trees onto the sidewalk. These conditions create an illusion of a poorly-lit and undesirable space for pedestrians. Installing pedestrian-scale lighting along the entire length of the Avenue, connecting to the Braddock Road Metro Station will help promote street-level activity during the evening hours and encourage pedestrians and others to use the Metro station during non-daylight hours.

In developing the specifications for streetscape lighting, luminaires should not exceed 14 feet in height. This height preserves the scale of the overall community and its adjacency to residential neighborhoods.

Other options to provide additional light on the sidewalk during evening hours are building lighting and lighted storefront windows. Lighting of storefronts should be done in such a manner that provides light on the sidewalk while not negatively impacting adjacent residences.

As an alternative to the expensive installation of new fixtures, the existing cobra-head style light poles could be modified to include an additional light source oriented towards the sidewalk and pedestrians.

The *Plan* recommends that the cost and feasibility of the pedestrian-scale lighting options be considered, and that whichever alternative is selected, a phasing

plan is developed to implement the new lighting over time. In addition, a plan for new bulb-outs should be developed as part of the overall streetscape improvements to coordinate the installation of these improvements.

The *Plan* also encourages building owners and business operators to install lighting that contributes to the illumination of the sidewalk and enhances the pedestrian experience. A high priority should be placed on the provision of effective lighting for pedestrians.

Street Trees

The existing street trees are reasonably mature and generally appropriate for the scale and traffic speed of Mt. Vernon Avenue. However, they are irregular in spacing in some areas and discontinuous in the northern segment of the Avenue.

The *Plan* recommends that trees along the length of the Avenue be replaced over time to ensure consistent streetscape pattern. Deteriorating vegetation easily detracts from the positive elements that the Avenue has to offer.

Newly planted trees should not exceed 30 to 40 feet in spacing so that buildings are not obscured and to ensure the provision of adequate space for both pedestrian movement and lighting (Figures 6.41 and 6.42).

Tree planting will be implemented with the streetscape improvement accompanying the undergrounding from Bellefonte Avenue to Nelson Avenue. A tree planting plan should be developed to infill the remainder of the street.



Figure 6.41 Street Trees



Figure 6.42 Street Trees



Bus Stops lack distinction



Banners and historic markers identify the area.

Public Signage

The signage for both public and private uses is inconsistent throughout the Avenue. Older painted street signs are non-reflective and must be replaced. No signs exist to identify the Town of Potomac Historic District. Bus stop signage is consistent with WMATA signage, but the signs are small and inconspicuous. Bus stops along Mt. Vernon Avenue are generally constructed of asphalt and only marked by Metrobus signage.

Light pole mounted banners are recommended for displaying screen-printed vinyl or fabric signs. Banners can be good theme-oriented displays for neighborhood character that should be considered as one element of a comprehensive package to reinforce and celebrate the identity of the area. Banners should be placed at pedestrian level above head height and could be used to reduce the scale of the cobra head lighting to a more pedestrian scale. The banners should be installed on the sidewalk side of the pole to better orient the banners towards the pedestrian.

Another streetscape improvement should be the incorporation of identity signage at the edge of the Town of Potomac Historic District to coincide with the boundary of the Historic Core (Uhler and Bellefonte Avenues). This signage will provide a special identity feature for this important district and help reinforce the Avenue as a historic main street area. Historic district signage should be incorporated where there is adequate space, such as in planted areas, and where they do not obstruct pedestrian flow.

The Del Ray Citizens Association and Town of Potomac Historical Association have sought to provide interpretative signage in the neighborhood to raise awareness of the Town of Potomac National Historic Register District and

to educate residents and visitors about Del Ray's unique history. A grant has been awarded to the group to design and install signs at several key sites in the community explaining the history of Del Ray and highlighting significant sites. A total of five signs are proposed at the following locations:

- The public parking lot at Mt. Vernon and Oxford Avenues

The sign in this location will describe the evolution of Del Ray/St. Elmo into the Town of Potomac and its annexation by the City of Alexandria. The sign will include photos showing Mt. Vernon Avenue in 1915 and 1929.

- The former Town of Potomac Town Hall, now Fire Station #202, 213 E. Windsor Avenue

A sign will be installed at the Fire Station describing the town fire department, with photos of the fire station at its opening in 1926 and the personnel and equipment of the original fire company.

- The Mt. Vernon Recreation Center, 2701 Commonwealth Avenue

A sign is planned for the area adjacent to the recreation center and will describe the electric railway that ran down present-day Commonwealth Avenue. A map of the route, including stations, and photos will also be included.

- Along Route 1 (Jefferson Davis Highway), exact location to be determined

A sign will be installed along Potomac Yard to describe the former rail yard operations and will feature photos of the old yard.

- Charles Hill Park on Oxford Avenue

This sign will depict the racetrack that was formerly located north of the park.

The *Plan* supports implementation of this interpretative sign program. The program will complement the related *Plan* recommendations that are intended to better identify and celebrate the area's history.

A wayfinding system should be designed to orient pedestrians and vehicles toward parking, historic attractions, the Avenue, public parks, and the Braddock Road Metro Station. These signs should be designed in accordance with the local character.

Drawing on the strengths of the local arts and crafts community, local artists should be invited into the process for designing local signage and wayfinding features. This can provide a unique element to the Avenue, while highlighting the eclectic identity of area residents.

Site Amenities

The community character could be better identified through the integration and improvement of certain amenities. The existing architecture and urban design in the public realm is eclectic and has evolved over time. Elements such as street pole banners, consistent lighting styles and street furniture could help to express the local character. For example, the current street furniture is traditional-style wood and wrought iron benches that are generally in good condition. However, many benches appear weathered from years of exposure and should be updated. Trash receptacles are consistent along parts of the Avenue, but are mixed randomly with aging metal bins that have been painted as part of a local art project. The local touch of art should be supplemented with maintained receptacles.

Site Furniture/Public Art

Benches, bicycle racks and trash receptacles should be in keeping with architectural standards of the Avenue. Given the arts and crafts character of the Del Ray neighborhood, there is an opportunity to capture the creative talent on the Avenue by engaging local artists in the design of benches, sculptures, signs, street lamps, murals and mobile art. Art can often serve as functional material such as a sculpture that operates as a seat, outdoor table for games, etc. The physical integration of art into the public realm can help to express the diverse community character in a unique way, showcasing the eclectic essence of the Avenue and its residents. This is can also work to further the goals of an Arts Promotion Strategy as outlined in Section 3.4.

Utilities and Service

Access to buildings for service such as delivery or trash removal should be from the rear of the site wherever possible. Trash dumpsters should be screened from view by plant materials, fences or walls. Special consideration should be give to the long-term durability of such screening.

New construction should provide space for pad-mounted transformers within the building footprint. If this is not feasible, other alternatives may be explored. In priority order, these alternatives are: 1) transformers are located adjacent to an alley or at the rear of the property; and 2) they are located behind the building line and screened by an opaque wall and evergreen plantings. On larger redevelopment sites, such as the triangle sites, underground placement in a vault is the most desirable location for transformers.





Bus Shelter

Bus Shelters

Currently, there are three bus shelters within the study area. The first shelter is located on the east side of Mt. Vernon Avenue at Oxford Avenue, and the second shelter is located on the west side of Mt. Vernon Avenue adjacent to the Nicholas A. Colasanto Center at Raymond Avenue. Another shelter is located just north of the Commonwealth District area on the west side of Mt. Vernon Avenue at Sanborn Place.

Bus shelters should be located at strategic points to capture the greatest ridership, and conveniently deliver and pick up riders in activity nodes along the Avenue. Activity nodes include spaces along the Avenue where there is an accumulation of pedestrian flow and street-level activity; areas near major destinations or intersections; and areas with connections to other transportation modes including additional bus routes, bicycles trails, or pedestrian routes. Shelters should act as points of information for orientation on the Avenue, local trail connections, and local route and schedule information for all transit serving the vicinity (DASH and Metrobus), as well as Metrorail system-wide maps and taxi service information.

Three existing bus stops on Mt. Vernon Avenue meet WMATA's boarding and alighting standards for bus shelters: on the east side at Hume Avenue and Bellefonte Avenue, and on the west side of the Avenue at Commonwealth and Mt. Vernon Avenues. While the ridership warrants bus shelters in these locations, the existing right-of-way is not sufficiently wide to accommodate a shelter. The *Plan* recommends exploring the possibility of acquiring additional right-of-way or an easement from private property owners to allow the installation of bus shelters.