



**PROPOSED AGENDA
OAK ISLAND PLANNING BOARD
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2025 – 9:00 AM
COUNCIL CHAMBERS -- OAK ISLAND TOWN HALL**

CALL TO ORDER

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ADJUSTMENT/APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

[Approval of the Minutes](#)
[11.20.25 Planning Board Minutes](#)

PUBLIC COMMENT

I. OLD BUSINESS

II. NEW BUSINESS

- II.1 [Proposed Text Amendment\(s\) to the Unified Development Ordinance - Section\(s\) 5.3., 8.1.1.6., 10.19.6., and 10.26.](#)
[Section 5.3 - Expedited Review Reference \(Plan Review Process\) - Incentive Reference](#)
[Section 8.1.1.6 Zoning Dimensional Requirements - Incentive Reference - Text Amendment](#)
[Sec. 10.19.6 - Urban Form Development Standards & Incentives](#)
[Sec 10.26 - District Signs - Incentive Reference](#)
[Economic Development Incentives in North Carolina](#)
[Setting the standard for main street transformation CNU.pdf](#)
[Seven habits of highly walkable communities - Planning.pdf](#)
[Walkable City Rules - Never Allow Front Parking.pdf](#)

III. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

IV. STAFF REPORTS

V. ADJOURN

**PLANNING BOARD
AGENDA ITEM MEMO**

SUBJECT: Approval of the Minutes
DATE: December 12, 2025
DEPARTMENT: Administration

Subject Summary: Approval is recommended for the Minutes of the following meeting:

November 20, 2025

Attachments:

[11.20.25 Planning Board Minutes](#)

Financial Impact Statement: N/A

Legal Review: N/A

MINUTES
PLANNING BOARD
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2025 – 9:00 AM
COUNCIL CHAMBERS – OAK ISLAND TOWN HALL

Present: Chairman David Bradley, Vice Chairman Durrall Gilbert, Board members David Purser, Gene Brooks, and Barbara Textoris, Development Services Director Matt Kirkland, Planning Manager Taylor Davis, and Deputy Town Clerk, Erin Baker.

Chairman Bradley called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Vice Chairman Gilbert noted that in the minutes from the previous meeting, on page 8, there was no record of a motion that was approved regarding trees located on front side and back property lines counting towards DBH (Diameter at Breast Height) requirements.

Mr. Purser motioned to approve the minutes as amended with the addition regarding trees on front, side, and back set backs counting toward DBH requirements. Mr. Brooks seconded the motion and passed unanimously.

Chairman Bradley motioned to excuse Board member Mark Spicer. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Gilbert, and it passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Joe Yeager, Chairman of the Business Advisory Board, spoke about food truck regulations on Oak Island. He explained that the current ordinance is restrictive, particularly regarding parking requirements and permitting. Mr. Yeager cited his own experience with Grape and Ale, where he had to stop having food trucks due to parking restrictions and the requirement to obtain a permit each time a different food truck visited his property.

Mr. Yeager suggested several changes:

- Allow food trucks more mobility around the island
- Implement a streamlined permitting process where food truck operators obtain a single permit with the Town rather than requiring business owners to get permits for each visit
- Provide more flexibility with right-of-way parking to accommodate food trucks
- Prioritize Oak Island-based food truck businesses before allowing those from other counties

Vice-Chairman Gilbert made a motion to close Public Comment. The motion was seconded by Gene Brooks and passed unanimously.

I. OLD BUSINESS

I.1 Review of and Proposed Text Amendment(s) to Supplemental Regulations Section(s)

SECTION 7.2.3. ACCESSORY BUILDINGS/STRUCTURES

Ms. Davis explained that this amendment would add structures to the prohibition against placement of accessory buildings within utility easements and would add recorded access easements to prohibited areas for accessory structure placement. She noted that fences can obstruct access to utility easements during emergencies, and that the Town should not approve obstructions within access easements that could prevent legal or emergency access to properties.

Mr. Brooks motioned to open the item for discussion and Vice Chairman Gilbert seconded.

Board members discussed at length the implications of prohibiting fences in utility easements, particularly the impact on homeowners who would lose use of portions of their property. Mr. Gilbert and Mr. Brooks expressed concern about property owners losing 10 feet of usable space at the rear of their properties, especially for pool owners who need to fence their entire yard. Ms. Davis clarified that the change would only apply to recorded utility easements that can be verified.

The Board also discussed the need to address fire hydrant clearance after the Fire Marshal raised concerns about fences being too close to hydrants. The current fire code requires 36 inches of clearance around hydrants.

After extensive discussion, the Board agreed to amend the proposal to:

- Allow fences in utility easements but with property owners accepting liability for any damage or removal by utility entities
- Prohibit accessory buildings and structures (including fences) within 36 inches of fire hydrants
- Clarify language regarding recorded access easements

Vice Chairman Gilbert motioned to approve the amended language for Section 7.2.3, which would allow fences in utility easements, prohibit structures within 36 inches of fire hydrants, and clarify language regarding recorded access easements. The amendment shall read: “Accessory buildings, structures and uses, except fences, shall not encroach into any utility or recorded access easement. In the event of removal or damage by a utility entity, the owner is responsible for any repair or replacement. No accessory building or structure shall be erected within 36 inches of a fire hydrant.” The motion was seconded by Mr. Brooks, and it passed unanimously.

SECTION 7.12.2 TEMPORARY STORAGE FACILITY

Ms. Davis presented changes to remove the 30-day grace period for temporary storage facilities before permits are required. She explained that the current gap is difficult for code enforcement to track and creates confusion for applicants. She noted ongoing issues with unpermitted storage containers remaining on properties indefinitely.

Board members discussed whether requiring permits from day one would be overly burdensome for residents who only need storage containers briefly when moving. Vice Chairman Gilbert suggested allowing a free 30-day permit, with fees only applying to extended periods beyond 30 days.

Ms. Davis and Mr. Kirkland confirmed that the Development Services Department could implement such a system through their permitting software, which would allow them to schedule follow-up inspections at the 30-day mark.

Vice Chairman Gilbert motioned to approve the staff recommendation to remove the 30-day gap before permits are required, with a recommendation to Town Council that the first 30 days be at no cost, and fees would apply for extensions beyond 30 days. The motion was seconded by Mr. Brooks, and passed unanimously.

SECTION 7.43 FOOD TRUCKS

Ms. Davis explained that the amendments aimed to improve readability by breaking-up dense paragraphs, reordering regulations, and addressing several issues including:

- Removing the cap on food truck permits (currently 30)
- Eliminating redundancy in the permitting process
- Setting a uniform expiration date of Dec. 31 for all food truck permits
- Requiring trash receptacles within 10 feet of truck, specifying the number of receptacles, and requiring receptacles to be emptied nightly
- Allowing seating (up to 15 seats per truck proposed)
- Adding prohibitions on temporary utility connections and drive-through operations
- Adding enforcement and permit revocation provisions

Ms. Davis presented research supporting food truck-friendly policies, noting that studies show food trucks promote restaurant growth, attract foot traffic to commercial areas, allow businesses to test new markets, and can lead to revitalization of underdeveloped areas. She also noted that between 2020-

2024, Oak Island had more than 1,200 new homes constructed, indicating population growth that would benefit from more food service options.

The Board engaged in detailed discussion about several provisions, particularly focusing on:

- The 50-foot separation requirement from restaurants (viewed as outdated and unnecessarily restrictive)
- Parking requirements (determined these should be at the business owner's discretion)
- Seating allowances (increased from proposed 15 to 16 seats to accommodate four picnic tables)
- Minimum distance from fire hydrants and utilities (reduced from 15 feet to 3 feet)
- Add a reference to 7.43.9.2 in the Code Enforcement section that the food truck vendor will be given notice and a right-to-cure before a permit revocation
- Fine amounts for unpermitted food trucks (increased from \$150 to \$250)

Mr. Gilbert recused himself from voting on this section due to owning property where food trucks operate.

Mr. Brooks motioned to approve the staff recommendations for Section 7.43 with the following amendments: deletion of part of a sentence “except those related to spacing from a competing business” in 7.43.2.1; deletion of section 7.43.2.2; reduce 15 feet to 3 feet required distance from hydrants/utilities in section 7.43.2.3 and deletion of section 7.43.2.4.; increase allowed seating to 16 seats in section 7.43.3.7; removal of section 7.43.4.1 and removal of everything after the first sentence in section 7.43.4.2; increase fine for unpermitted trucks to \$250 in section 7.43.10.4; and addition of language referencing the violation notice procedure in section 7.43.9.2. The motion was seconded by Chairman Bradley and passed unanimously (with Gilbert recused).

SECTION 7.46.3 SEXUALLY ORIENTED BUSINESSES

Ms. Davis noted that Town Council had requested the Planning Board review and affirm the hours of operation for sexually oriented businesses. She explained that the board had previously recommended hours of 9 a.m. to 10 p.m., but Town Council amended this to 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Mr. Brooks motioned to open the item for discussion and Vice Chairman Gilbert seconded.

Mr. Kirkland provided context from the Town attorney's review, explaining that while the Town cannot prohibit these businesses entirely (per state law), they could impose reasonable restrictions. The attorney had noted that other municipalities typically allow some evening hours for these businesses.

After brief discussion, the Board agreed to maintain the 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. hours previously approved by Town Council, noting that other restrictions in the ordinance would make it extremely difficult for such businesses to locate in Oak Island anyway. Mr. Kirkland and Ms. Davis confirmed that Town Council would be made aware of the Planning Board's discussion and recommendation.

The Board took a brief recess at 10:47 a.m.

II. NEW BUSINESS

II.1 Proposal to Amend the Date and Time for the Monthly Planning Board Meeting

Ms. Davis presented two options for changing the Planning Board's regular meeting date:

- The last Tuesday of each month
- The first Tuesday of each month

She noted potential conflicts with holidays for the last Tuesday option in May, November, and December.

After discussion, the Board agreed to adopt the last Tuesday of each month at 6:00 p.m., with adjustments for those months with holiday conflicts. For May, November, and December 2026, meetings would be held on the Tuesday of the week prior to the holiday weeks.

Vice Chairman Gilbert motioned to change the Planning Board's regular meeting time to 6:00 p.m. on the last Tuesday of each month, with the May, November, and December 2026 meetings moved to May 19, November 17, and December 22 respectively. The motion was seconded by Mr. Brooks and passed unanimously.

III. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

Mr. Brooks expressed appreciation to staff for presenting the Board's recommendations to Town Council and to Chairman Bradley and Vice Chairman Gilbert for clarifying the Board's positions during the Council meeting. He noted that Town Council had approved many of the Planning Board's recommended changes to Chapter 32, with some amendments, and felt the collaborative process had worked well.

Vice-Chairman Gilbert echoed these sentiments and suggested that the Board should review the recently approved changes in a year to assess their effectiveness and identify any needed adjustments. He emphasized the importance of allowing the ordinances to stabilize while remaining open to future refinements.

Chairman Bradley requested that staff provide documentation and data on how the tree ordinance is working when the review time comes, to help the Board make informed decisions.

IV. STAFF REPORTS

Matt Kirkland reported that:

- Planner I Justice Herman passed the Certified Zoning official course
- The Town is preparing to launch the Resilient Coastal Communities Program grants
- Planning Board items from November and December meetings will go to the January Town Council meetings for public hearings due to the Council transition and holiday schedule

Ms. Davis reported that work continues on code repair issues, with parking being a priority area. She noted that some businesses are voluntarily placing parking in the rear or side of properties in alignment with the Comprehensive Plan and Streetscape Master Plan, though it isn't yet required by ordinance.

V. ADJOURN

A motion to adjourn was made by Vice Chairman Gilbert and seconded by Mr. Purser. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 11:02 a.m.

David Bradley, Chairman

Attested: _____

Erin Baker
Deputy Town Clerk

**PLANNING BOARD
AGENDA ITEM MEMO**

SUBJECT: Proposed Text Amendment(s) to the Unified Development Ordinance - Section(s) 5.3., 8.1.1.6., 10.19.6., and 10.26.
DATE: December 12, 2025
DEPARTMENT: Development Services

Subject Summary: BACKGROUND

At the July 17, 2025, meeting the Planning Board heard a presentation on the Town's initiative for suggested improvements to the Unified Development Ordinance referred to as commercial code repair. Since that time, Staff has developed a proposed adoption strategy and schedule which was presented to the Board at the September 18, 2025, meeting along with a brief introduction to upcoming text amendments. Having completed the main items from group one of the adoption strategy, we are now progressing to group two, which includes several proposed corrections to the performance standards of Article 10 for off-street parking requirements. Items from group two will be proposed over the next few Planning Board meetings and will focus on rear parking and eliminating the minimum parking requirement.

SUMMARY

This selection of amendments from group two aims to incentivize specific urban form development standards as they relate to off-street parking for commercial properties. Mainly, that parking be established or relocated to the rear of the property, behind the building, such that visibility of the parking area from the street is reduced. The amendments also incentivize the relocation of driveways off Oak Island Dr. to the side streets in effort to reduce traffic conflicts and congestion along one of Oak Island's busiest roads.

Recent amendments to Chapter 160D Local Planning and Development Regulation of state statute limit the Town's authority to mandate new development standards for commercially zoned property when the new development standard would create a non-conformity on an existing commercial property e.g. a municipality mandates rear parking but there are existing commercial properties with front parking. The parcels with front parking would thus be non-conforming to the ordinance, and as such, the amendment would be considered a prohibited down-zoning.

§160D-601 - Down-Zoning.

No amendment to zoning regulations or a zoning map that down-zones property shall be initiated, enacted, or enforced without the written consent of all property owners whose property is the subject of the down-zoning amendment. For purposes of this section, "down-zoning" means a zoning ordinance that affects an area of land in one of the following ways:

- (1) By decreasing the development density of the land to be less dense than was allowed under its previous usage.
- (2) By reducing the permitted uses of the land that are specified in a zoning ordinance or land development regulation to fewer uses than were allowed under its previous usage.
- (3) By creating any type of nonconformity on land not in a residential zoning district, including a**

nonconforming use, nonconforming lot, nonconforming structure, nonconforming improvement, or nonconforming site element.

To avoid down-zoning implications, rather than requiring specific design standards, the Town looks to offer development incentives for voluntary compliance. To be clear, these are not financial incentives but rather additional allowances and exceptions to our existing ordinances applied to the project site.

Proposed new section 10.19.6.1. establishes the applicable zoning districts and requires total compliance to the recommended urban form development standards to qualify for the applicable incentives.

Proposed new section 10.19.6.1.1. prescribes two site design standards the applicant must voluntarily comply with to receive the applicable incentives. The first, prescribes the location of off-street parking on the site and the second limits driveways off Oak Island Drive.

Proposed new section 10.19.6.1.2. outlines the offered incentives for voluntary compliance to the recommended urban form development standards. If an applicant locates their parking in the rear the site qualifies for a reduced front setback to five (5) feet from the property line, expedited application and site plan review and an increased wall signage allowance. Likewise, if the site foregoes a driveway access off Oak Island Drive by utilizing a side street or lateral access connection from an adjacent commercial property the parcel becomes priority for planned improvements by the Town such as the installation of sidewalks, on-street parking, or street trees.

COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN CONSISTENCY

The proposed amendments were found to be consistent with the 2025 Comprehensive CAMA Land Use Plan. The amendments support Objective 1.1 to Strategically Update the Town's Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to Enhance Community Health and Function when the amendments to Article 10 may serve to reduce traffic conflicts along Oak Island Drive and promote a healthier walkable community. The amendments also improve the functionality of the ordinance and the Town's administrative processes. Objective 1.2 Promote Actions and Development that Forward the Vision and Character of Oak Island are supported when development and re-development which adheres to the Town's vision for the future of Oak Island is facilitated by changes to the ordinance.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

Also included in the packet is an explanation of the legal parameters municipalities must work within when offering tax incentives for development. While tax credits or other financial incentives may be perceived to be the most effective in facilitating a desired change, municipalities are limited in their scope of authority when offering such an incentive and risk exceeding their legal bounds thus exposing the Town to possible liability that should be avoided.

Additionally, a few supporting articles have been included that address rear parking and other urban form practices which facilitate place making and walkable communities.

Attachments:

- [Section 5.3 - Expedited Review Reference \(Plan Review Process\) - Incentive Reference](#)
- [Section 8.1.1.6 Zoning Dimensional Requirements - Incentive Reference - Text Amendment](#)
- [Sec. 10.19.6 - Urban Form Development Standards & Incentives](#)
- [Sec 10.26 - District Signs - Incentive Reference](#)
- [Economic Development Incentives in North Carolina](#)
- [Setting the standard for main street transformation CNU.pdf](#)

[Seven habits of highly walkable communities - Planning.pdf](#)
[Walkable City Rules - Never Allow Front Parking.pdf](#)

Suggested Motion: Motion to approve the text amendments to Section(s) 5.3., 8.1.1.6., 10.19.6., and 10.26.

Financial Impact Statement: N/A

Legal Review: N/A

**SECTION 5.3 ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVAL—MAJOR/MINOR SITE PLAN, MINOR SUBDIVISION,
OR MAJOR SUBDIVISION PRELIMINARY/FINAL PLAT.**

5.3.1. As applicable, expedited review of submitted plans containing the recommended urban form development standards of 10.19.6.1.1., refer to 10.19.6.1.2.(2)

SECTION 8.1 DIMENSIONAL REQUIREMENTS TABLE.

8.1.1. Dimensional Table Notes.

8.1.1.6. Setback Exceptions.

8.1.1.6.5. Reduced front setback per 10.19.6.1.2.a.(1) for compliance to recommended urban form development standards in the CL-D, CB, CR, and O&I districts per 10.19.6.1.1.

SECTION 10.19 OFF-STREET PARKING REQUIREMENTS.

10.19.6.1. Urban Form Incentives in the CL-D, CB, CR, and O&I Districts

The Town of Oak Island encourages rear parking and looks to reduce the number of driveway accesses on Oak Island Drive in the CL-D, CB, CR, and O&I districts. To further the goals of the Streetscape Master Plan and objectives of the Comprehensive CAMA Land Use Plan the Town offers incentives as set forth in 10.19.6.1.2. for those who voluntarily comply with the recommended urban form development standards as listed in 10.19.6.1.1. Each of the recommended urban form development standards must be satisfied to qualify for the applicable incentives.

10.19.6.1.1. Recommended Urban Form Development Standards

- a) Parking shall be located to the rear of the building (between required rear yard and building) and is encouraged to be designed in such a manner to reduce visibility of the parking area from the street.
 - 1. In the case of corner lots with frontage on Oak Island Drive and when the required front yard and front facade face the side street, parking shall be located nearest to the property line furthest from Oak Island Drive and behind or to the side of the building such that visibility of the parking area from the Oak Island Drive is reduced.
- b) Driveways where safely feasible and in accordance with the NCDOT roadway design manual shall be limited to side streets with no direct access to Oak Island Drive. Interior parcels without frontage along a side street are encouraged to establish lateral access through adjacent properties.

10.19.6.1.2. Incentives for Recommended Urban Form Development Standards

- a) Incentives for voluntary compliance to 10.19.6.1.1.a. or 10.19.6.1.1.a.i. include:
 - 1. **Reduced Front Setback:** The setback for qualifying parcels shall be five (5) feet from the front property line. In the case of corner lots on Oak Island Drive where the front yard is adjacent to a side street, the side yard adjacent to Oak Island Drive qualifies for reduction rather than the front setback.
 - 2. **Expedited Application and Site Plan Review:** Qualifying projects may be subject to an expedited 30-day plan review. The Town shall have thirty (30) business days to complete the site plan review for zoning compliance, with the days being counted when the current submission/resubmission is in possession of the Planning Department. All Technical Review Committee comments must be satisfied before site plan approval regardless of the thirty (30) day period and additional review by the Technical Review Committee may be required, as needed.
 - 3. **Increased Wall Signage Allowance:** The maximum area for wall signs on the facade facing Oak Island Drive may be increased to 2 square feet for each linear foot of wall frontage.
- b) Incentives for voluntary compliance to 10.19.6.1.1.b.
 - 1. When the subject parcel is adjacent to town owned property, such as right-of-way, and is within an area identified for improvements in a town published plan such as the Streetscape Master Plan, the area immediately adjacent to the subject parcel may be prioritized by the Town for installation of the planned improvements such as sidewalks, street trees, street parking, pedestrian infrastructure or the like.

SECTION 10.26 DISTRICT SIGNS.

10.26.2. Business District Signs When Site Plan is Not Required (O-I, CB, CR, and C-LD).

10.26.2.1. Increased wall signage allowance in the CB, CR, C-LD, and O&I, refer to 10.19.6.1.1.a. and 10.19.6.1.2.(3)

10.26.4. Commercial Major Site Plans and Developments (O-I, CB, CR, and C-LD)

10.26.4.1. Increased wall signage allowance in the CB, CR, C-LD, and O&I, refer to 10.19.6.1.1.a. and 10.19.6.1.2.(3)

Economic Development Incentives in North Carolina

North Carolina law provides specific and limited authority for how local governments may support private development using public funds or tax-based incentives. While economic development incentives are permitted in certain circumstances, they are not a general-purpose tool and must be carefully structured to comply with constitutional and statutory requirements.

Legal Parameters for Incentive Use

1. Direct financial incentives are limited to certain types of projects

North Carolina courts have upheld local economic development incentives primarily in cases involving:

- Significant job creation or retention
- Substantial new taxable investment
- Projects competing across state or regional boundaries

As a result, direct cash incentives or tax-based reimbursements are generally associated with large employment-driven projects (often referred to as “Maready-style” projects).

Projects such as small retail, restaurants, and typical mixed-use developments do not usually meet these criteria and therefore present significant legal risk if supported with direct financial incentives.

2. Incentives must be tied to true competition and a “but-for” finding

For a local government to provide a direct incentive, the governing board must be able to find that:

- The project is genuinely mobile, with other jurisdictions competing for it; and
- But for the incentive, the project would likely locate elsewhere.

Many locally serving projects are not structured this way, which limits the ability of local governments to lawfully offer direct incentives in those cases.

3. Public benefit must clearly outweigh private benefit

Under the North Carolina Constitution, public funds must be used primarily for a public purpose. Courts have consistently looked for:

- A clear, measurable public return (jobs, tax base, economic diversification); and
- Safeguards ensuring the public benefit outweighs the private gain.

While goals such as revitalization, placemaking, and small business support are important planning objectives, they do not, on their own, provide sufficient legal justification for direct financial incentives.

4. Performance-based structure and safeguards are essential

When incentives are used, they must be:

- Earned through actual performance
- Paid as reimbursements after agreed-upon benchmarks are met
- Documented through written agreements with enforcement provisions

Up-front grants or open-ended assistance are not consistent with how economic development incentives have been upheld in North Carolina.

Lawful Tools Commonly Used to Support Development

Even where direct incentives are not appropriate, local governments have a variety of lawful, effective tools to support retail and mixed-use development, including:

- ✓ Public infrastructure investments
- ✓ Zoning and development standards that provide predictability and flexibility
- ✓ Area-wide improvements and capital projects
- ✓ Public-private partnerships with clear public benefit
- ✓ Grants or agreements tied to public improvements or services

These approaches can meaningfully support development while remaining within established legal parameters.

Key Takeaway

Economic development incentives in North Carolina are narrowly tailored and project specific. While direct financial incentives are appropriate in limited, job focused situations, retail and mixed-use projects are typically better supported through planning, infrastructure, and policy tools rather than tax or cash incentives.

This framework helps ensure that local governments support growth while remaining consistent with constitutional and statutory requirements.

PSQ (/publicsquare)



DESIGN (/PUBLICSQUARE/CATEGORY/DESIGN)

Setting the standard for main street transformation

Lancaster BLVD in Lancaster, California, changed the way we think about creating “sense of place” in a busy downtown thoroughfare. Moule & Polyzoides won a 2021 CNU Charter Award in the Neighborhood, District, and Corridor category.

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE (/node/538) APR. 26, 2021



(<http://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=https%3A//www.cnu.org/node/8312&title=Setting%20the%20standard%20for%20main%20street%20transformation>)



(<http://twitter.com/intent/tweet?status=Setting%20the%20standard%20for%20main%20street%20transformation%2Bhttps%3A//www.cnu.org/node/8312>)



(<http://www.linkedin.com/shareArticle?mini=1&url=https%3A//www.cnu.org/node/8312&title=Setting%20the%20standard%20for%20main%20street%20transformation&source=>



(mailto:?subject=Check%20out%20Setting%20the%20standard%20for%20main%20street%20transformation&body=https%3A//www.cnu.org/public-square/2021/04/26/setting-standard-main-street-transformation)

“Lancaster BLVD changed the way we think about boulevards,” notes Andrew Von Maur, professor of architecture at Andrews University and a 2021 Charter Awards juror. “It also changed the way we think about parking.”

This strikingly original street redesign had an enormous economic impact on Lancaster, a suburban city in the desert of southern California. A street that previously held minimal attraction to pedestrians, and had little sense of place, suddenly became the social, cultural, and economic heart of the city. Lancaster BLVD testifies to the power of street design to forge a community identity, and put a city on the map.

CNU 29. Design *for* Change

May 19–21, 2021

REGISTER TODAY

(<https://www.cnu.org/cnu29/register>)

The project, completed in 2010, sets the gold standard for main street renovation in America, and does so with a fiscally lean design. The rapid construction schedule—eight months—and the relatively low price tag of \$11.5 million, were driven by a design decision to leave the curb locations and the intersection dimensions intact.

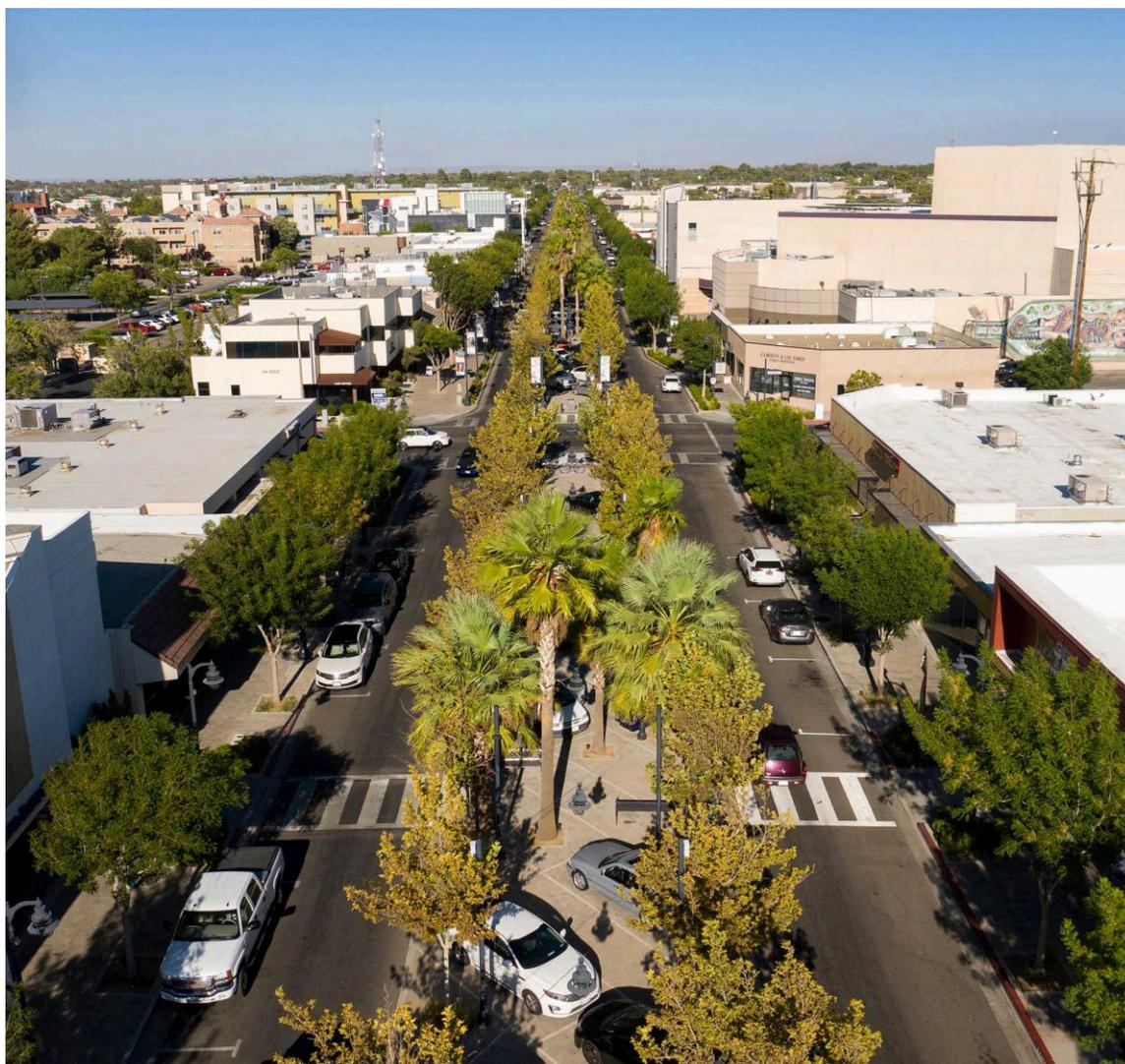


Sequential construction process from pre-existing conditions to new streetscape

The former five-travel-lane thoroughfare is redesigned as an extended city park. A 30-foot-wide shaded central “ramblas” was added, a multi-functional public space, inspired by Barcelona’s famous thoroughfare. The ramblas accommodates a range of public events, including a farmer’s market, street fairs, and a parade seating. When not in use, the central space provides everyday diagonal parking.

That Lancaster Boulevard had not already won a Charter Award came as a surprise to the jury, so well-regarded is this project.

“The results have been nothing short of astonishing,” says Amara Holstein on *Build a Better Burb*. “Completed in 2010, the nine-block stretch ... has completely rejuvenated downtown. People flood in for events, from farmers’ markets to holiday fests, or to go to 50 new shops, restaurants, and businesses that have since opened, along with a new park and museum. Cars don’t drive faster than 10 to 15 mph, and injury-related traffic collisions are down. Overall, the project has been estimated to have generated \$273 million in economic output.”

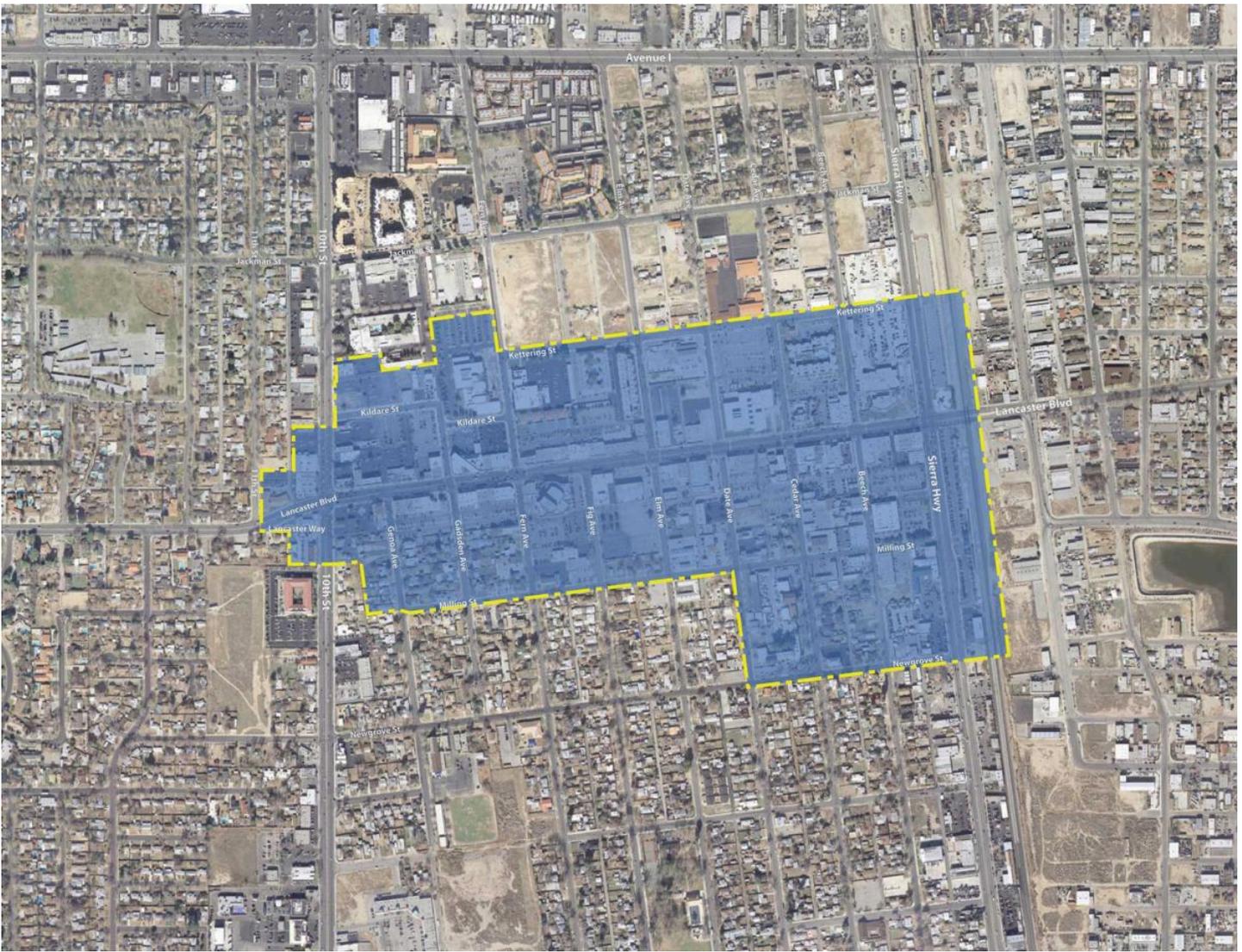


Aerial view to east

Lancaster BLVD amounts to far more than a street redesign, as the impact has reverberated throughout the corridor. More than 800 permanent jobs were created, in addition to 1,100 temporary construction jobs during the Great Recession. Just over 800 housing units have been built or rehabilitated; more 116,000 square feet of commercial space has been constructed or renovated. Tax revenue from downtown is up 96 percent compared to the same period in 2007, the year before revitalization efforts began.

Lancaster began as a small railroad town with a tiny grid of streets in the late 1800s, and it still only had a few thousand inhabitants by the middle of the 20th Century, when the aerospace industry brought substantial suburban housing and commercial development.

Over the many decades, “it lost much of its native character as its main street and environs adapted both to the automobile and to Lancaster’s nascent role as regional center,” according to the design team. “It ultimately suffered from high-speed traffic, poor pedestrian experience, excessive parking, and reduced retail activity.”



Since its founding in the late 19th Century, Lancaster became a sprawling suburb, losing much of its traditional downtown character. Lancaster Boulevard, the City's main street, suffered from high-speed traffic, poor pedestrian facilities, excessive parking and reduced retail activity. After initiating change with the completion of the Downtown Specific Plan in 2008, the City retained Moule & Polyzoides to redesign the Boulevard's streetscape.

The transformation began with a 2008 Downtown Specific Plan that sought to reverse the negative impact of suburban planning on downtown. The city quickly acted on recommendations, using redevelopment funds (a system that was disbanded in 2012). The Streetscape Plan is composed of eight primary design elements: Rambla (Median Parking); Gateways and Gateway Buildings; Mid-Block Crossings; Alleys & Paseos; Roundabouts and Intersections; Arcade and Façade Improvements; Plaza; Block Transformation & Infill Projects; Street Walls; and Parking.

“The project created a plan for the boulevard that went from concept to implementation within a year, demonstrating that effective outreach, intelligent design, and seamless communication among all stakeholders can make such project not only visionary, but also efficient and expedient,” notes the design team.

Downtown Boulevard Transformation

- **Moule & Polyzoides, Architects and Urbanists:** Principal firm, lead architect, and urban designer
- **City of Lancaster:** Client
- **Fong Hart + Schneider Partners:** Landscape designer
- **Swift and Associates:** Parking and transportation consultant

- **Urban Advantage:**Photo-transformation artist

2021 Charter Awards Jury

- **Goeff Dyer** (chair), Master Planning and Urban Design Strategic Lead, B&A Planning Group
- **Amy Stelly**, Artist, designer, urban planner with Claiborne Avenue Alliance
- **Marques King**, Economic Development and Design Manager with Jefferson East, Inc.
- **Alli Thurmond Quinlan**, principal, Flintlock Architecture & Landscape
- **Andrew von Maur**, Professor of Architecture at Andrews University

🔗 [CHARTER AWARDS 2021 \(/PUBLICSQUARE/502\)](#)



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Seven habits of highly walkable communities

Questions about this information? [Contact us](#). December 22, 2015

Updated from an original article written by Glenn Pape.

A seven step approach to creating more walkable communities.

Creating places with good walkability and pedestrian friendliness is difficult but not complicated. If a community is looking to focus on improved walkability in their community there are seven main areas or steps to focus on to create a better walking environment.

The first step is creating a fine-grained pedestrian network or circulation pattern. Dense and interconnected pedestrian routes are the foundation of a walkable community. This is most often done with short block lengths or mid-block crossings and cut through alleys. Ideally, a comfortable walkable environment has an intersection or route choice every 200 to 300 feet. This provides pedestrians with efficient access but also creates visual interest or walk appeal as new buildings and intersections come into view. This visual stimulation serves to draw pedestrians along an interesting route.

The second step is to orient buildings to the street. A building should front and frame the street. If a building turns its back to the street it creates a void that pedestrians tend to avoid. The same can be said with a residential garage facing the street. It removes the visual interaction between the public space of the sidewalk and the semi-private space of the building front. These edges created by buildings help to create the public room for pedestrians and reinforce circulation routes. Driveways, loading docks, and service access should be at the rear of buildings or limited in size to minimize the impacts on pedestrian space.

The third step is to organize land uses to support activity. Uses need to be geared toward pedestrian interaction. In commercial areas, retail appropriate uses need to be on the first floor with office or residential above. Land uses with a lot of people coming and going tend to attract additional pedestrian activity and when properly designed and sited can help anchor a retail street. Larger uses such as theatres or parking decks can be located behind a façade of liner buildings with the access point being a point of high pedestrian activity.

The fourth step is to place parking behind or below buildings. Nothing disrupts pedestrian flow like a parking lot. But parking is essential for successful commercial places. Accommodating parking is a key driver in site planning and financing of new development. The concept is to place surface parking in the center of the block behind structures in low to medium demand areas and to site well-designed parking structures in high demand areas. Well-designed structures can serve multiple buildings and draw people onto the street. Remember once a driver has parked that person becomes a pedestrian, so parking needs to be designed to enliven and support surrounding spaces.

Create a human-scale with design details is the fifth step. Large blank walls provide little interest to pedestrians. Human scale is created through two concepts - narrow lots allowing for numerous ever-changing storefronts and the detailing of the storefronts through unique façade design. By placing a new storefront every 18-24 feet, pedestrians are drawn through the environment by the new destinations. Human scale details for each individual storefront includes such things as awnings and signage, lighting and the design of windows. These small-scale details cause pedestrians to interact visually with their environment. Even large buildings can be designed with these types of details to create visual interest and human scale detail.

The sixth step is to provide continuous access. Sidewalks should provide a comfortable welcoming environment that provides access to the structures adjacent. Street crossings should be frequent and well-marked. Sidewalks should connect commercial areas to surrounding neighborhoods and transit stops. The continuity of pedestrian access to destinations such as recreational amenities and major employers or commercial uses is essential for walkability.

Step seven is to complete the street. Streets need to be designed for more than just private and commercial vehicles. Streets need to include all modes of transportation including pedestrians, bicyclists, wheelchair users, and transit. It also needs to accommodate users of all ages and ability. To accomplish this, design principles that manage traffic such as bike lanes, narrow travel lanes and on street parking should be used to create a complete street and make it a safe and welcoming place for all users.

These seven concepts are the basic building blocks of creating a walkable community. Not every concept applies everywhere in a community, but application of these concepts in the correct context will result in a more walkable environment.

For more information on walkability in your community, contact a [Michigan State University Extension Land Use educator](#).

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Never Allow Front Parking

Embrace the sidewalk with building fronts.

ONE OF THE EARLIEST BOOKS to come out of the New Urbanist movement was *City Comforts*, by David Sucher. It begins with three crucial rules for creating community. Rule #1: “Build to the sidewalk.”²⁴² While it takes more than three rules to make great places—how does 101 sound?—it is hard to imagine a better place to start. Because when it comes to destroying walkability, the front parking lot is probably the most common and the most impactful error that cities make.

Front parking lots do five bad things simultaneously.

Case in point, Over-the-Rhine in Cincinnati: 1,200 feet of continuous revitalization along Vine Street after a two-way reversion in 1999 (see Rule 38), stopped in its tracks after three full blocks by a Kroger Deli parking lot. Shoppers and diners stroll north from downtown, hit this beauty—with a mere fifteen spots—and turn on their heels. As of this writing, the buildings to the north, 100 feet from bustling vitality, are still boarded up.

Similar mistakes can be found along more North American main streets than it is possible to count. Some time around 1960, the suburban auto-age Quickie Mart was allowed to invade the downtown, and things went south from there. The ugly, plastic, fluorescent-glowing storefront added insult to injury, but the real culprit was the parking in front.

Front parking lots do five bad things simultaneously. They push buildings back from the street, destroying its spatial definition. They put store windows out of view, making the walk less interesting. They create curb cuts across the sidewalk, undermining its comfort and safety (see Rule 81). They allow patrons to park directly in front of businesses, depopulating sidewalks of strolling shoppers. And they send a not-so-subtle message that the store is meant to serve motorists—who could be from anywhere—rather than locals.

Most cities’ planning departments understand that front parking is a blight, but that does not mean it is not allowed. A common struggle is with Walgreens or Rite Aid, whose standard store plans presume front parking, typically right at the corner, where spatial definition is most needed. Happily, these merchants have shown a willing-



The parking lot that stalled redevelopment on Vine Street in Over-the-Rhine.

ness to be flexible—in those cities that insist. The proper solution involves a parking lot that is one bay wide (double head-in in 60 feet) that wraps around the back two sides of a building that sits on the corner.

This result still places gaps in the streetscape while introducing two curb cuts, but it is vastly superior to the alternative. If the curb cuts are paved to match the sidewalk, and the parking lot edged by decorative walls, the impact is limited.

Cities that wish to ensure a positive outcome must be specific in their codes. All good new urban development ordinances outlaw front parking lots. Most also stipulate

that stores may have secondary doors facing their rear parking, as long as they have front doors on the sidewalk. But very few remember to require that the front doors be kept open during store hours. This was the problem in Birmingham, MI, which over a decade transformed its downtown from auto-oriented to “walker’s paradise” following a DPZ plan. One glitch was a large jeweler who followed the plan to a T but kept their sidewalk doors locked.

Shifting back to urban, walkable development patterns from conventional suburban models has been a struggle, especially in suburbia. The first step has always been—and remains—reorienting buildings to the street.

RULE 84: Do not allow front parking lots, and require businesses with rear or side parking lots to place their primary entrance at front.