Goals for Laconia Design Guidelines

March 27, 2011

This outline sets down the underlying principles that will form the basis for better design in Laconia. Without a clear consensus on what we are all trying to accomplish, regulation would be a hit or miss proposition. At the same time we wish to make sure that those guiding goals really are the ones important to the community.

The outline is broken down by village, and then in turn by the type of frontage found on a given property in question. Accompanying diagrams will show which conditions apply to which areas of the city. Each positive aspect is followed by specific action items that will help promote a healthy design. In this way we hope to build a "streetscape" that achieves the public character the citizens of Laconia are seeking. Both public and private initiatives are included.

I DOWNTOWN LACONIA

A. FRONTAGE STREETS – These are the primary commercial streets in the downtown area. The edge of parcels along this type of frontage are what we think of as the "face" of downtown and have a big impact on the way we see the city.

1. <u>"Hold the Front"</u> Reinforce the street frontage by making sure each property strengthens the pattern rather than breaking it or weakening it.

***a. Make 2-sided streets*:** Fronts should face each other across the street; not front to back.

b. Place main entries along the front: The front is stronger when primary building entrances are clustered there.

c. Design a formal front that addresses the street: The front should look like the front. Traditional patterns can reinforce this.

d. Match adjacent setbacks: Keep the pattern of street frontage.

e. Mind your manners: No "back of house" uses, such as dumpsters or deliveries, in front area.

2. **<u>"Provide for Pedestrians"</u>** A good walking environment enlivens the downtown. Public and private design will provide a safe and pleasant path to encourage foot traffic.

a. Maintain safe walking surface: clearly separate people and cars; minimize curb cuts and cross traffic.

b. Offer shelter: Provide awnings, cover and wind screening.

c. Create a secure path: Provide a night lighting environment that is friendly, welcoming and safe.

e. Encourage strolling: Street furniture and plantings used to create a desirable place to linger.

f. Talk to the walkers: Use small scaled pedestrian signage vs. driver-sized highway signs to identify the area as pedestrian friendly.

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3. <u>"Strengthen the Community Character"</u> Laconia already has a strong physical character that can be supported by reinforcing patterns of use, materials, shapes and sizes.

a. Use traditional building arrangements: Use patterns, such as housing over shops, help the downtown make sense and be less confusing. A visitor should always know where to go and what is public and private.

b. Use familiar quality materials: brick, stone, glass, wood will make new developments fit in and enhance the existing street frontage.

c. Match common scale and building massing:

i. 20' to 30' widths of wall before coming to a break or corner are typical.

ii. respond to adjacent cornice/roofline by blending with average frontage height.

iii. respond to a street corner with a special feature such as a bay or entry that acknowledges this important crossroads location.

iv. window and opening sizes, types & proportions: on upper floors windows are usually taller than the are wide and are separated from each other in the wall.

d. Favor familiar forms and elements:

i. downtown buildings have vertical proportions of 19th and early 20th cent.

ii. trim and detailing around openings, corners and edges is generous with shaped profiles often from classical building tradition.

iii. flat roof or horizontal cornice is usual for commercial frontage as opposed to pitched roofs.

iv. sloped roof exceptions can occur where there is space to safely shed snow and rain away from pedestrians and neighbors.

4. <u>"Preserve Our History"</u> Newness for its own sake will eventually cover up the history of downtown. Re-use of whole buildings or even of significant parts help preserve and retell the story of where the city has come from and helps to support a sense of its special place.

a. Uncover and re-use where possible: buildings or elements, especially those that tell a story about past activities in the lives of the residents. Doors, windows, columns, even painted wall signs help us imagine what was.

b. Provide historic information: public display, signs and pictures help others appreciate the significance of your piece of Laconia.

B. SERVICE STREETS – What every downtown needs in order to function. Well set up and controlled service streets behind, free up the front sidewalk to be more of a people place. While less attractive functions are accommodated here, this side of the property also needs to be kept up to protect the downtown character. Clean, well lit, functional design with a minimum of clutter is the goal.

1. <u>Make a "Back-of-the-House"</u> Provide needed services off identified service streets.

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a. Move on-site parking to the side or rear: This is important to preserve the street front pedestrian character, and also to avoid putting cars between the public and potential display windows.

b. Provide a parking/staff entry: The best solution is to route visitors and staff to the main door to help make the front more lively. Where that is impractical, a secondary entrance should be created that is also presentable.

c. Deliveries in the rear: A loading dock or door can be well designed too. It can be attractive in its own right or downplayed to be barely noticeable. The waiting vehicle should not obstruct regular use by others.

d. Trash: Dumpsters need to be screened and enclosed in the downtown area.

e. Locating utilities / mechanical equipment: Needed equipment, such as large kitchen exhausts, pad mounted transformers, condensers or cooling towers should be located on the rear of the building or roof-mounted out of sight.

f. Not across from frontage: Avoid locating the service side of your building across from a neighbor's frontage or on a major thoroughfare. When a service element is unavoidable, camouflage and screening are important.

2. <u>"Keep it Pedestrian Friendly"</u> Though this is primarily a utilitarian frontage to the property, some basic consideration of the public is still important.

a. Maintain safe walking edge: Even more attention must be paid to keeping vehicles and pedestrians separate when there is cross traffic, backing and maneuvering going on in vicinity to the public walkway.

b. Provide pedestrian screening: for cars / dumpsters / utilities

i. fences / walls low, at the site boundary define the public zone and conceal some of the clutter. Care should be taken not to create blind spots or a penitentiary appearance.

ii. plantings can both conceal the negative and enhance the street.

c. Lighting for safety:

i. appropriate levels to avoid "dark alley" feel

ii. prevent spill-over to neighbors with cut-off fixtures

d. Curb cuts: A more lenient policy in this area is appropriate; smoothly functioning services at the back will help keep vehicles away from the front.

C. RIVERFRONT EDGES – For Laconia to continue to expand use and enjoyment of the riverfront, it falls to the abutting properties to treat this edge as an important and visible resource. As the river becomes more of a place people want to be, more access to it also important. Regulation should also reward collaboration between riverfront owners to create riverside pathways.

1. <u>"Keep It Clean"</u> With expanded use of the waterfront, its quality must be protected, both visually and materially.

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a. No parking surfaces within 50' of the water's edge: Impervious surfaces direct run-off into the waterway. Parking cars is a low grade use of this prime resource.

b. Plant a buffer: A planted buffer at the river edge acts both as a visual enhancement and a filter to intercept run-off.

c. Put our best foot forward: Appropriate uses that are presentable from the river help change the overall character. A simple as a lawn or as involved as a shelter or landing, the uses along the river edge should enhance enjoyment of the waterway.

d. Reference Shoreland Protection regulations

2. "Make it a City Feature" The river can become a second Main Street and a major draw to the downtown.

a. Provide public access points to river: More places to view the river will integrate it more into the city. Regulation should reward abutters who share with the public.

b. Provide walking edge along river: In the same way, even more consideration should be offered to landowners who offer the river edge as a walkway for the public.

c. Landscape features to take advantage: Develop the riverfront in a "park-like" manner.

i. resting places; benches, "docks", shelters
ii. lawns and decorative planting
iii. pavers, walkways and bike paths

d. Buildings should respond to river: A building that faces on to the river will now be viewed from that side and contribute to the character—design of this side should not be an afterthought.

i. take advantage of the location – the building should not be blank or turn its back on the river. Bay windows, deck and balconies can express a presentable face to river.
iii. special consideration to restoring mills and other traditional water's edge construction from Laconia's history.

e. Public/private boundaries: With the public access to the river it will still be important to protect the privacy of the private landowner. These measures should be effective *and* attractive.

i. "friendly" fences and walls
ii. terracing and level changes
iii. hedges and landscape
iv. gates and access
v. low key lighting
vi. hours of operation – consider when the area needs to be secured from access.

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II LAKEPORT

A. COMMERCIAL EDGES -- While Lakeport is more of a homogenized neighborhood with residential, institutional and commercial uses intertwined, there are still concentrations of like properties that could be enhanced and supported. The commercial areas could benefit from a more cohesive identity that attracted visitors as a destination. Infill development, as illustrated in the Masterplan, should be encouraged.

1. "Clarify the Boundaries" The area around the intersection of Elm St. and Union Ave. is clearly the center of commercial activity, and a pattern of development is already present with some notable gaps and exceptions. Special conditions for commercial frontage in this area will help identify this core area.

a. Create a consistent look: Storefront entries, windows, awnings and signage will reinforce the image of the commercial street frontage.

b. Municipal signage: To announce a special area. This could include banners and welcome signs for land and water approaches.

b. Provide on-street parking: This pattern is appropriate to the neighborhood and takes pressure off landowners to pave their lots for customers. The convenience welcomes impromptu visits.

c. Connect to boat traffic: To make Lakeport's downtown a boaters' destination.

d. Support good sidewalks and clear crosswalks: This announces that the area is a place to get out and walk.

e. Street planting & furniture: a municipal facelift that helps encourage visits and identifies the commercial core.

2. "Support the Lakeport Character"

a. Wood framed residential forms: This is the norm in the area, with existing exceptions mostly for public buildings, such as the fire station.

i. gable roofs
ii. porches and other traditional features
iii. respond to corner lots
iv. residential scale features and proportions

b. Promote Pedestrian Use:

i. pedestrian – scaled signage makes it less of a strip development.
ii. front accessible entrances create life on the streetfront
iii. traffic calming; busy through traffic detracts from the walkable atmosphere. These features of roadway design slow things down.
iii. displays to street where appropriate—show windows support walking and indicate a safe and friendly area.
iv. recurring edge details: fences, planting, special paving
v. two-sided street where possible; the southwesterly side of Elm St. is an opportunity to strengthen the feeling of a downtown center by creating facing commercial frontage on both sides of the street.

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vi. Infill for continuous frontage. For example, the fire station stands out due to its prominent location and larger setbacks.

B. RESIDENTIAL STREETS – The surrounding residential areas have a familiar assortment of common construction types. Still the encouragement of the best of the Lakeport character will help the village hold together, visually.

1. <u>"Use familiar forms and materials"</u> Traditional construction materials and details support the neighborhood character.

a. Wood framed construction: Sets the tone for the neighborhood.

b. Use gable or sloping roofs:

c. 12' – 24' width of wall planes: Creates the fine scale of a residential area.

d. Employ traditional features: 19th and 20th century lakefront communities in NH used recurring building elements.

i. dormers
ii. porches
iii. bays
iv. vertical double-hung windows
v. clapboards and shingles
vi. decorative trim

2. <u>"Create a sympathetic site layout"</u>

a. Put parking to the side or rear: to preserve the street frontage of lawns and porches, etc.

b. Observe and respond to adjacent landscape: By demonstrating due consideration of the positive patterns already established on the street, the property developer can make a stronger case.

c. Provide a "Front Yard" public face:

i. main entry
ii. front yard landscape
iii. boundary fence feature

C. WORKING MARINA -- this is an important part of what makes Lakeport what it is, and the development guidelines should recognize this fact.

1. <u>"Make boating a point of pride"</u> – Make activities visible and understandable to help tell the story of Lakeport.

a. Open view to dock operations: In season the comings and goings enliven the community.

b. Provide safe public assess for casual visitors

c. Improve boat storage exteriors: – material and finishes reflective of Lakeport character.

d. ***Off season – view doors to stored boats:*** More secure and more interesting with fewer blank walls.

e. Defined and control trailered boat parking:—not willy-nilly. This can frustrate both pedestrians and motorists. Well conceived lots could be a point of interest.

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2. "Generate activity" – Encourage commercial and recreational activities involving the waterfront.

a. Support small craft access: canoes and kayaks with access to Lake Opechee.

b. Overview uses; cafes and restaurants that can see and contributre to the life of the waterfront.

D. WATERFRONT SITES RESIDENTIAL / COMMERCIAL As with the Downtown waterfront, there are a few conservative principles needed to protect the local character.

1. "Keep It Clean" With expanded use of the waterfront, its quality must be protected, both visually and materially.

a. No parking surfaces within 50' of the water's edge: Impervious surfaces direct run-off into the waterway. Parking cars is a low grade use of this prime resource.

b. Plant a buffer: A planted buffer at the river edge acts both as a visual enhancement and a filter to intercept run-off.

c. Put our best foot forward: Appropriate uses that are presentable from the river help change the overall character. A simple as a lawn or as involved as a shelter or landing, the uses along the river edge should enhance enjoyment of the waterway.

d. Reference Shoreland Protection regulations 1.

2. "The Lakes Front Yard"

a. Use building forms that take advantage of lake frontage

i. features that take advantage of the views (e.g. bay windows)

ii. avoid garages and utilitarian structures turning their backs on the water.

b. Decks and porches

c. Boat slips

i. form and materials

ii. access to street

iii. this is a rental business for residents—state and local regulation

III WEIRS BEACH

A. WEIRS BEACH LAKEFRONT At Weirs Beach its all about the lakefront and land development in relation to it. The front of the Weirs Beach commercial district is divided into two distinct zones, roughly corresponding to the railroad station location. Each has its own concerns for future development.

1. "Lake Street Promenade" This is a one-sided boulevard, typical of 19th century waterfront resorts accessed by train. While still alive and lively in the current times, this area has a stronger sense of the history of its major development just after the Civil War with the establishment of the veteran's homes.

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a. Infill to respect historic veterans' homes: Should further developmentl occur along this part of Lake St. it should strengthen the pattern established by the Victorian structures present.
b. Up to the RR station
c. Use wood framed construction
d. Pitched roofs
e. Consider views to the lake: Porches, dormers, decks, bays etc.
f. Consider views from the lake: Landscape frontage and building massing should fit in with the lakefront "row" of significant buildings.
g. Additions to historic buildings: follow the Sec. of the Interior's Standard
h. Add historic information: Signage for visitors.

2. "Resort Zone" North of the RR Station there are still fine old buildings worthy of preservation. However, fun has been the operational principle here for a long time and should be recognized.

a. Can be less formal: Non-traditional, even fanciful shapes and styles
b. Use flat or pitched roofs
c. Colors and materials can be fun and creative: But still durable and maintainable.
d. Beyond the RR station
e. Service access from inland: Back of house access from the rear.
f. Edge to support pedestrian foot traffic: As on Main St., clear separation of vehicles and pedestrians with minimal interaction will create a strolling-friendly environment.

i. pedestrian – scaled signage makes it less of a strip development.
ii. front accessible entrances create life on the streetfront
iii. traffic calming; busy through traffic detracts from the walkable atmosphere. These features of roadway design slow things down.
iii. displays to street where appropriate—show windows support walking and indicate a safe and friendly area.
iv. outdoor activities such as café tables

d. Destination hotel: City support for such a development and its associated benefits.

B. SEASONAL VACANT LOTS – All around Weirs Beach there are empty lots that are rarely used but get intense commercial use during Motorcycle Week. The income from this festival is a disincentive to develop the lots, but their off-season appearance is a drag on the local vitality. Several steps can reduce the impact of the empty lots and could increase the likelihood additional event uses at other times of year. Additional efforts are recommended to increase the number and type of yearly events.

1. "On major frontage" (Route 3) these areas are quite prominent and require more attention. Because the wide expanses are not particularly pedestrian friendly when empty, the view from the car should get a lot of consideration. Paved areas and unimproved dirt lots are more of a concern that grassed lots.

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a. Screen empty expanses: Boundary screening or fencing, even if partial height, would focus attention on the sidewalk/foreground area. Pedestrian walkways for the vendor tent set-up could be behind the low fence or wall with occasional openings to help control pedestrian street crossing.

b. Provide street trees to upgrade these edges

c. Provide alternates to asphalt: some portion of "grass-crete" could reduce the bleakness of the large empty lots and has an environmental benefit.

d. Build permanent market shelters: A permanent framework is often used to support intermittent market use. Vendors provide display and rain/sun cover. This also helps "tell the story" of life at Weirs Beach.

e. Landscape and streetscape elements

2. "Off-street lots" Where more concealed from public view, seasonal lots have less immediate impact on the character of Weirs Beach other than lost revenue and activity.

3. "Native American History" Steps to encourage appreciation of this significant site will add to the attraction.

a. Further interpretive signage: Illustrations of the ancient life of the Weirs; branding, logos, signage themes.

b. Special Events: Commemorative events or festivals; fishing tie-in.

c. Archaeological investigation: Support study of known native American sites.

C. Residential Streets – the cottage neighborhoods associated with the beach are outside of the scope of these proposed guidelines.

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