abstract

This document contains design guidelines that property owners, community members, and planners should use to implement the vision and recommendations of the 2012 approved and adopted Kensington Sector Plan.

Source of Copies
The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
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Online at MontgomeryPlanning.org/community/kensington
introduction

The Kensington Design Guidelines represent the County’s, Town of Kensington’s, and the community’s design aspirations for the future of Kensington. They should be used as a resource by all stakeholders while exploring ways to enhance the quality of urban design in Kensington.

Urban design is concerned with the physical characteristics of an area and these Guidelines consider the design implications of planning decisions in the public realm. An urban design strategy should serve as an integrating tool to coordinate how various development proposals will affect the Town physically, with a principal focus on the public realm: the public faces of buildings; spaces for public use; and the streets, sidewalks, parks, and plazas that provide the outdoor public venue for everyday activities.

Design guidelines assist in implementing recommendations in approved and adopted master plans or sector plans by encouraging better building design in properties being considered for redevelopment, and by promoting the creation of safe pedestrian environments and attractive gathering places defined by buildings.

The guidelines are approved by the Planning Board for use by property owners and Planning Department staff. Their intent is to illustrate how plan recommendations might be met, to inform applicants of design expectations and possible resources to accomplish them, and to provide staff with a framework for project review and a tool for obtaining enhanced design and related amenities. Guidelines do not set architectural styles, are only applicable during discretionary reviews, and will be revised and updated as necessary.

All page references in this document are to the 2012 Kensington Sector Plan.
The Sector Plan’s vision is “To promote a mixed-use Town Center with pedestrian-friendly connections to the vibrant neighborhoods that define Kensington.” The Plan sees the Town Center as “a lively and active place with streets that are welcoming and comfortable for residents, workers, and visitors.” (Plan, page 1)

The Plan goes on to describe this vision in more detail, encouraging connectivity that will “create new pathways for townspeople to move car-free throughout the Town, enjoying a healthier, more sustainable community.” Through design, the Plan encourages “redefining public spaces for people and creating activity along sidewalks through smart design of buildings and the spaces around them.” It also seeks to define “new public spaces that will exemplify the unique scale and character of Kensington.” (Plan, page 1)
The Sector Plan’s recommendations seek to protect the environment by “promoting sustainable infill and reuse, with a goal of creating a neighborhood with the lowest feasible carbon footprint,” and by “implementing effective environmental practices that will inspire current residents and future generations to become stewards of the environment.” (Plan, page 1)

The Plan seeks to create diversity in “an active Town Center with new residential uses,” and to promote “the community’s heritage through its buildings, spaces, and people.” (Plan, page 1)

To fulfill the Plan’s vision, these Guidelines encourage buildings designed with pedestrians in mind and the creation of attractive gathering places.

The Plan also has some specific design goals:

“Enhance Connecticut Avenue and University Boulevard West to provide better safety and function for all modes of transportation.” (Plan, page 24)

“Develop Howard Avenue as a street designed to encourage continuous, active, pedestrian activity on both sides of Connecticut Avenue.” (Plan, page 24)

“Create a mixed residential and commercial thoroughfare with a distinct pedestrian orientation on both sides of Metropolitan Avenue.” (Plan, page 36)
Guidelines format
The guidelines address, and are organized under, the following objectives: Kensington character, pedestrian connections, pedestrian-oriented development, and transitions. Each objective describes a single intent and has the same structural components as follows:

**Objective:** New development should respect the character of existing residential neighborhoods.

**Guideline:** Buildings should step down to transition to existing smaller-scaled buildings.

- Maintain compatible height with adjacent and confronting buildings.

**Example:**

"Existing spatial relationships of the Bakers Union property should be maintained, with taller buildings toward Knowles Avenue and gradually reduced heights to the south of the property." (Plan, page X)

**Existing condition:**

Existing Condition: The Safeway building is compatible in height with the existing structures along Howard Avenue (left) and across Armory Avenue (right)

**Location map:**

10400 Connecticut Avenue “should maintain the current spatial relationship, with taller buildings toward Knowles Avenue and surface parking or residential buildings of up to 45 feet along Warner Street, to the south” (Plan, page X)

**Illustrations and photos:**

Before and after, Warner Street: 10400 Connecticut Avenue has a two-story parking deck (left) along Warner Street across from single-family homes in the historic district. The illustration (right) demonstrates a more desirable transition of scale, height, and residential appearance along Warner Street
Kensington Sector Plan

Design Guidelines

Kensington Character

From its inception in 1873 as a railroad community, Kensington has developed a unique identity in Montgomery County. With turn-of-the-century Victorian era residences, curvilinear streets, and a well-preserved commercial area, the Kensington Historic District was designated in 1986 to preserve that unique identity. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the Kensington Historic District is one of the County's largest with approximately 180 buildings.

Today, Kensington is home to a number of antiques and furnishing stores that attract visitors from throughout metropolitan Washington. Many of these businesses are located along Howard Avenue east of Connecticut Avenue in historic Antique Row. Other antique retailers have located among the warehouses west of Connecticut Avenue on West Howard Avenue.

There are people, things, and places unique to Kensington that promote its identity and image. Railroad community; garden suburb; community founders Brainard Warner, George Knowles, Crosby Noyes; antique dealers; Victorian architecture; and Silver and Rock Creeks are examples of Kensington themes. Development proposals should integrate elements that reinforce the Town’s identity and image.

The Town is rich with a variety of historic architecture. Without dictating architectural style, these guidelines encourage innovative design that is sensitive to the historic architecture, which can be achieved by incorporating characteristics and patterns of the existing architecture into new structures. The goal is not to imitate or duplicate historic buildings, but to enhance the diversity of architecture in Kensington by interpreting existing elements in a new way.
**Objective:** Highlight Kensington

**Guideline:** Manage and protect elements that are important to Kensington’s identity.

- Use unique architectural elements such as construction materials, windows, doors, or façade ornamentation distinctive to Kensington.

- Consider adaptive reuse, rehabilitation, and restoration of buildings that contribute to the area’s character.

- Consider reusing existing structures, materials, and other building components to reduce construction waste. Green deconstruction practices are strongly encouraged.

- Distinguish new development from historic resources to highlight historic resources. Avoid imitating historic designs as it may diminish the singularity of the historic original.

- Incorporate traditional façade elements in new building design.

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An approach to upgrading the light industrial buildings along West Howard Avenue (source: West Howard Avenue Urban Design Study, Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs)

Building reuse at 10412 Montgomery Avenue maintains the original structure’s integrity
**Guideline:** Provide new, predominantly green open spaces to reinforce the garden suburb theme in Kensington’s layout.

- Increase tree canopy cover along streets and within medians, within existing neighborhoods, commercial areas, and on parkland. (Plan, page 17)

- Provide a natural complement to, and respite from, the built environment. Use trees, understory plantings, and ground or hanging planters.

The space between these structures is enhanced by trees and understory planting.

The walk-up ATM along Montgomery Avenue is heavily landscaped.

Using a combination of trees, shrubs, and understory planting, Howard Avenue Park creates a lush garden.
Guideline: Express local history and identity through design elements and public art.

- Incorporate public art in building design and public use spaces with a visible street presence. New projects are strongly encouraged to incorporate the artist into the development team at the conceptual stage.

- Include public art in major public infrastructure projects such as public buildings, bridges, transit systems, railroads, or roadways. The integration of artists, architects, landscape architects, and other designers into the design team for major infrastructure projects is strongly encouraged.

The clock incorporates the ornamental theme of the official Kensington signs

A bus shelter enhanced with public art

A fountain doubles as sculptural art, adding visual interest
Pedestrian Connections

Multiple transportation choices are vital to creating a vibrant Town Center. Successful streets accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, and motor vehicles. Currently, auto travel is the overwhelmingly predominant mode in Kensington. Improvement to the sidewalks, crosswalks, and trails is needed to encourage travel by foot and bicycle. The needs of pedestrians, children, cyclists, and the disabled should be balanced with those of motorists and public transit users. An improved pedestrian network will create a healthy balance of transportation that supports a vibrant Town Center.

“The Sector Plan’s recommendations for better connections in Kensington will give pedestrians priority, especially in the Town Center. Physical and operational improvements can easily accommodate current traffic flows while giving pedestrians the ability to move safely and efficiently through Kensington.”
(Plan, page 7)

Streets within the Plan area’s boundaries are under varying jurisdiction. The Resources section provides a map outlining those jurisdictions. These Guidelines support the existing street standards; a link to the relevant code provisions is included in the Resources section.
**Objective:** Create a high-quality pedestrian network

**Guideline:** Provide direct and safe routes for pedestrian travel.

- Develop defined sidewalk zones: building frontage zone, movement zone, planting/street furniture zone, and curb.

Defined sidewalk zones ensure direct and safe pedestrian travel

Existing condition: Obstructions and the proximity of traffic make this sidewalk along Connecticut Avenue unsafe

Before and after, West Howard Avenue: Clearly defined vehicle and walking zones would create a safer and more pleasant pedestrian environment
• Provide hardscape or landscape treatment on private property between the vehicular zone and the abutting public right-of-way.

With auto-oriented uses such as gas stations and car lots, landscaping can be used to create separation from the public right-of-way.

Before and after, Metropolitan Avenue: Pedestrians along Metropolitan Avenue walk between two vehicular zones. Landscaping and bollards are two ways to buffer pedestrians from traffic and the parking lot.
**Guideline:** Use trees and plants to complement the pedestrian character of the historic district.

- Use trees, understory plantings, and ground or hanging planters.
- Increase tree canopy along streets and within medians, in existing neighborhoods and commercial areas, and on parkland.

Landscaping within the right-of-way provides a soft complement to the sidewalk and building façade, while providing an attractive buffer for pedestrians

Existing Condition: Understory plantings at Howard Park in Kensington provide color and visual interest
**Guideline:** Incorporate amenities and visual interest for pedestrians.

- Locate street-activating uses along the principal streets including retail shops, eating establishments, residential lobbies, and public and institutional uses.

Existing Conditions: The Safeway along Armory Avenue (left) does not create an active street.

Temporary or mobile installations, such as this coffee stand, can create street activation in areas where the buildings do not.
• Maintain a line of building facades and storefronts to define the sidewalk edge. Avoid excessive setbacks, but small setbacks to match existing, adjoining buildings may be appropriate.
• Projections such as awnings and canopies are encouraged. They provide weather protection for pedestrians, create variety, and strengthen the image of individual businesses.
• Reinforce the relationship between the sidewalk and interior activity. Where feasible, provide space to accommodate a transition between street and storefront.
• Avoid creating blank walls on the façades along the CSX rail line, across from Antique Row.

Rear facades of development fronting Metropolitan Avenue are within view from Antique Row.

New development along the north side of the rail line can provide a habitable area that is visible from, and enhances the experience along Antique Row.

Before and after: Along the railroad tracks, building massing and façade articulation can transform a blank façade into a visually interesting façade along the railroad tracks.
**Objective:** Create a variety of public open spaces.

A network of public open spaces should provide comfortable and attractive spaces that offer a range of experiences. Such a system will help create a healthier environment by mitigating the effects of pollution and providing opportunities for recreation, respite, and enjoyment. Public open spaces should incorporate features that engage all age groups from young children to the elderly.

The Sector Plan seeks to create a system of parks and open spaces linked by bikeways and sidewalks to meet the increasing demand for outdoor gathering space. In the Town Center, the location and design of open space should support community interactions and economic vitality.

Some spaces will be privately-owned yet maintained for public enjoyment. For small parcels, public open spaces may be combined to create a larger space.

**Guideline:** Public open space on private property should be accessible from the sidewalk.

- Walls and planting should not block or screen a space from the sidewalk.
- Spaces should be level with the sidewalk, where possible, to prevent elevation changes that can create barriers.
**Guideline:** Locate open space in areas of high visibility.

- Public open space should be in highly visible locations that are animated by adjacent land uses. Their location should provide opportunities for casual monitoring from the perimeter and from abutting developments.
- Public open space is not preferred in areas continuously shaded by surrounding buildings.
- Lighting levels should be adequate for visibility to create a sense of safety.

**Guideline:** Incorporate seating in public open space.

- Incorporate seating in choice locations: near building entrances, in shade, in sun, toward street, near activity and amenity.
- Provide a variety of seating types: single, couple, groups; fixed and moveable.
- Seating should be comfortable.
**Guideline:** Design flexible spaces to accommodate a variety of activities.

- Provide services such as electrical outlets, water supply, and lighting to support gatherings and events.
- Provide amenities appropriate for size and programs such as water features, game tables, play equipment, kiosks, and tables.
- Provide drinking fountains, waste and recycling receptacles, bicycle racks, and information signs as needed.
- Consider interactive public art as an effective tool to activate small spaces.

Before and after, 10401 Connecticut Avenue: The existing plaza does not provide amenities that encourage people to congregate. The plaza could accommodate a variety of activities.
Pedestrian-Oriented Development

The orientation, height, massing, and facade of buildings shape the character of a place. These guidelines encourage building design that fulfills the functional needs of its use while reinforcing pedestrian activity. The goal is to produce private and public development that enhances the public realm and protects the pedestrian environment.

Because of their inherent automobile-orientation, service stations, car lots, and auto repair shops present unique design challenges in creating pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use areas. These guidelines seek to enhance the character and quality of the public realm while balancing the needs of motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

The Sector Plan promotes safe, pedestrian-oriented environments that create an animated community life along the sidewalks (Plan, page 10). The following guidelines illustrate how building design can be street-oriented to enhance the pedestrian environment.
Objective: Enhance the pedestrian experience through careful orientation of buildings.

Guideline: Orient buildings to face the sidewalk.

- Provide the main entrance of buildings directly from the street. Entries can be articulated through the use of building massing, special architectural features, or changes in the roof line.
- Provide an entrance to upper floor uses from the sidewalk.

Windows, doorways, and decoration are façade treatments that enliven the sidewalk.
Guideline: For large development, vary building massing along sidewalk for visual interest.

- For scale and visual interest, break down building mass into a hierarchy of volumes. Avoid creating large, monolithic structures without a transition between ground floor and upper stories.

- Consider a building entry, additional or varied building massing, or distinctive architectural elements at corners.
**Guideline:** Reduce the visual impact of parking structures.

- The use of structured parking (below-grade or above ground) is preferred over surface parking lots.
- Locate parking facilities in the rear or side yard with vehicular access from side streets. Parking structures facing the street should have active ground level uses with pedestrian details.
- Incorporate vegetation through green roofs, rooftop gardens, and green walls.

Punched window openings with planters give this parking garage the illusion of enclosed interior space.

The design of this parking facility is appropriate for an industrial area, like West Howard Avenue.
Guideline: Reduce the visual impact of gas stations.

- Locate gas station retail structures close to the street to help define the street edge. Provide an entrance with transparent windows and doors along the street.

- Avoid a blank wall along active street frontage. If car wash facades line public streets, use clear windows with interior views into the car wash.

- Provide wide, landscaped buffers to separate parking areas, driveways, and stacking lanes from the sidewalk. Trees, shrubs, and low planting walls should be used to screen the visibility of cars.

- Ground mounted monumental signs are preferred over signs on the station’s canopy.

This gas station’s building design and site layout support the pedestrian realm while accommodating vehicular traffic associated with its use.

This gas station provides an entrance from the sidewalk.
Transitions

The existing single-family neighborhoods contribute to Kensington’s overall vitality and residential character. Preserving this residential character is paramount. The Guidelines encourage new development adjacent to existing single-family neighborhoods to be compatible in height, setback, scale, massing, and detailing.

The Plan recommends a cluster of taller buildings along Connecticut Avenue in the Town Center between Plyers Mill Road and Warner Street. The maximum building heights in the proposed CRT Zones are sensitive to the adjacent low-density neighborhoods with lower building heights recommended for properties abutting single-family homes. The Guidelines are intended to ensure that new development is sensitive to existing neighborhoods by stepping down toward existing neighborhoods and that new buildings adjacent to these neighborhoods are compatible in height, scale, and mass.

“Buildings at the edges of the Town Center are recommended for lower height, to ensure gradual transitions of buildings to the adjoining residential neighborhoods.” (Plan, page 21)
**Objective:** New development should respect the character of existing residential neighborhoods.

**Guideline:** Buildings should step down to transition to existing smaller-scaled buildings.

- Maintain compatible height with adjacent and confronting buildings.

“Existing spatial relationships of the Bakers Union property should be maintained, with taller buildings toward Knowles Avenue and gradually reduced heights to the south of the property.” (Plan, page 25)

Existing Condition: The Safeway building is compatible in height with the existing structures along Howard Avenue (left) and across Armory Avenue (right)
10400 Connecticut Avenue should maintain the existing spatial relationships, “with taller buildings toward Knowles Avenue and gradually reduced heights to the south of the property” (Plan, page 25)

Before and after, Warner Street: 10400 Connecticut Avenue has a two-story parking deck (left) along Warner Street across from single-family homes in the historic district. The illustration (right) demonstrates a more desirable transition of scale, height, and residential appearance along Warner Street.
“Building heights on Knowles between Connecticut Avenue and Detrick Avenue should step down from 75 feet at Connecticut Avenue to 60 feet at mid-block and 45 feet at Detrick Avenue” (Plan, page 26)

“Any redevelopment at 10605 Concord Street should focus taller structures along Concord Street, stepping down to a maximum of 45 feet near Nash Place” (Plan, page 29)
“Building heights should step down from 60 feet at Connecticut Avenue to 45 feet at Summit Avenue extended” (Plan, page 30)

“Single-family attached units at a maximum height of 45 feet are appropriate along Plyers Mill Road” (Plan, page 37)
Per the CRT and CRN Zone requirements, “Where a tract of land is adjacent to a lot or parcel in a one-family residential or agricultural zone that is not improved with a commercial, industrial, or utility use, any building: must have a minimum setback of 25 feet or the setback required by the adjacent lot or parcel, whichever is greater; and must not project beyond a 45 degree angular plane projecting over the subject lot or parcel measured from a height of 55 feet in the CR zones, 45 feet in CRT zones or 35 feet in CRN zones at the setback line determined above.” (Sec 59-C-15.72, Setbacks)
Guideline: Open space, landscape buffers, and screened parking lots can provide a transition between different uses and building heights.

Existing Condition: Reinhart Park serves as a buffer between Bakers Union building and structures along Armory Avenue to the east.

Existing Condition: An adequate landscape buffer between commercial parking and houses.
Guideline: New development adjacent to or confronting residential neighborhoods should use façade articulation to create a residential appearance.

- The following elements can achieve residential character through façade articulation:
  - Top: sloped roofs, strong eave lines, cornice elements or parapet treatments, dormers
  - Middle: balconies, railings, punched windows with details such as shutters and headers
  - Base: storefront windows, awnings, arcades, and appropriately scaled signage.

Distinguishing a façade’s top, middle, and ground floor helps create a human-scaled streetscape.
Façade articulation on commercial and mixed-use buildings can create a residential appearance.
**Guideline:** Shadows and lighting glare should be mitigated on neighboring residential buildings.

- Provide trees and hedges to screen and create separation from residential uses.
- Use lighting fixtures with shields or down-directed features.
resources

Street Jurisdictions and Standards

The streets within the Plan area are under varying jurisdictions. Rights-of-way within the Town of Kensington boundaries are under the purview of the Town. Rights-of-way outside the Town boundaries are under the County’s purview. Connecticut Avenue and University Boulevard are under the purview of the State Highway Administration.

Town of Kensington (TOK)
Maryland State Highway Administration (MSHA)
Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT)
The Town of Kensington has a list of approved streetscape furniture for roads under its jurisdiction.

- **Street lighting:** Spring City Washington series in Federal Green or approved other
- **Bike storage:** BK 4 and BKR 5 Victor Stanley in Federal Green or approved other
- **Benches:** C10 Victor Stanley in Federal Green or approved other
- **Waste receptacles:** PRS 36 (24 gallon) Victor Stanley in Federal Green or approved other
The following list is provided as a reference tool, for informational purposes only; it is not intended to be exhaustive.

**Montgomery County**

Montgomery County Zoning Ordinance

Montgomery County Code

Chapter 19 Erosions, Sediment Control and Stormwater Management
Chapter 22A Forest Conservation-Trees
Chapter 24A Historic Preservation Ordinance
Chapter 47 Vendors
Chapter 49 Streets and Roads
Chapter 50 Subdivision

Department of Housing and Community Affairs West Howard Avenue Urban Design Study

Montgomery County Road Code
[http://www6.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/council/pdf/SCANNED_DOCS/20070715_48-06.PDF](http://www6.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/council/pdf/SCANNED_DOCS/20070715_48-06.PDF)

Department of Permitting Services Outdoor Café Seating Guide

Department of Permitting Services Sidewalk Vendor Operation and License
[http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/council/pdf/SCANNED_DOCS/20070227_16-61.pdf](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/council/pdf/SCANNED_DOCS/20070227_16-61.pdf)

Department of Permitting Services Building Construction – Building Codes & Standards

Department of Transportation Pedestrian Safety
Town of Kensington

Forms, Permits & Fees
http://www.tok.md.gov/c/257/permits-regulations

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

M-NCPPC Kensington Sector Plan
http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/community/kensington/index.shtm

M-NCPPC County Bikeways Functional Master Plan
http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/transportation/bikeways/A_A/contents.shtm

M-NCPPC Development Manual
http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/development/development_manual/index.shtm

M-NCPPC Commercial Residential Zone Overview
http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/development/com_res_zones.shtm

M-NCPPC Historic Preservation Office
http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/historic/

M-NCPPC Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan
http://www.montgomeryparks.org/PPSD/ParkPlanning/Projects/pros_2012/pros_2012.shtm
**Others**

Disability Rights Legislation and Accessibility Guidelines and Standards in the United States
http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/sidewalks/contents.htm

Chapter 2: Characteristics of Pedestrians
Chapter 4: Sidewalk Design Guidelines and Existing Practices

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design
http://www.cptedsecurity.com/cpted_design_guidelines.htm

The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties
http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/standguide/

State Highway Access Manual Engineering Access Permits