

A classic old street with low ADT. The pavement width is overly wide because there is little need for parallel parking on both sides.

Streetscape Elements

There are many elements of streets and streetscapes which must be combined to create a positive, human scale environment, a streetscape with charm and character.

They include the following features:

1. the proportions and dimensions of the streetscape, the relationship of building height to street width
2. buildings which define a built-to-line
3. the semi-public space, the front yard, porch, and entrance
4. the delineation of the pedestrian realm including sidewalk widths, fences and edges, and parkway
5. the parkway width including spacing and type of street trees, and of street lights
6. the street furniture including street signs, benches, light fixtures, etc.
7. screening of parking lots
8. curbs
9. a low travel speed (10 to 30 mph)
10. the location and placement of the garage
11. parallel parking

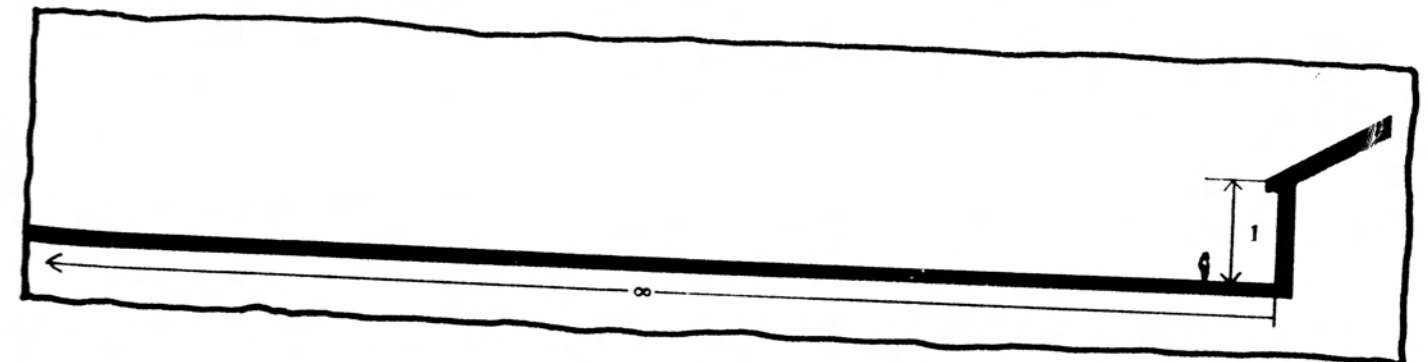
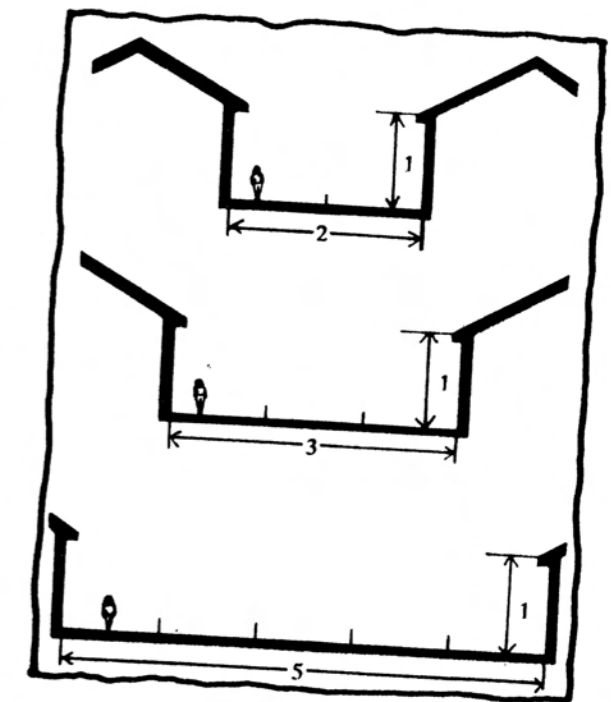
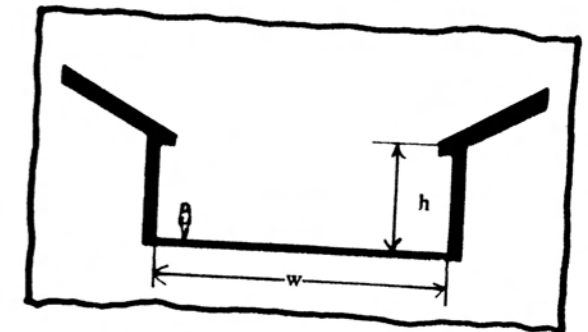
In addition to these design features, the street includes a right-of-way, the wire-utility easements, curbs or swales, sewer and water pipe locations, turning radii, sight triangles, as well as specific engineering and construction material specifications. The correct combination of these features with the appropriate pavement widths and visual termination can create a valuable and positive sense of place.

1. The Proportions of the Streetscape

The proportions and length of the street are critical to the image of place. The spatial enclosure is a major determinate of whether a person feels comfortable in the space and whether it can be defined as a positive place.

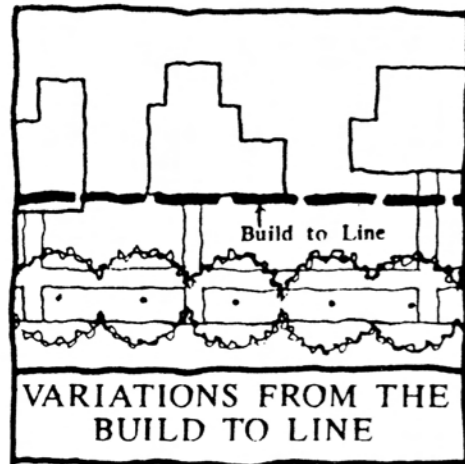
The relationship of building height to street width defines the proportion of the street space. The extent to which the street can define space is determined by the relationship of wall height (h) (generally defined as to the cornice or overhang line) to the width (w) between the walls (generally defined as the primary facade surface). It includes the pavement width plus the building setback. This proportion defines two surfaces of this spatial enclosure. We view this relationship in terms of a ratio.

There are certain ratios in which people feel more comfortable. This has come from analysis of VPS™ results and measurements taken from models after completion of workshops and case studies. A ratios from 1:1 to 1:2 (building wall height: street width) is considered ideal and most often used. Those streets falling between 1:4 and 3:1 are acceptable although wonderful small pedestrian passages have measured at 4:1. Beyond 1:5 the space will not be well defined - there is little sense of enclosure. Where this occurs, large street trees are critical to reconstruct and correct the proportions. Street trees can enhance any streetscape, but they are particularly critical when the proportion of the street exceeds 1:4. Trees and understory plantings, as well as topographic walls and hillsides, can modify the proportional relationship creating extremely positive urban and rural streets. Above 4:1 the street begins to resemble a canyon; it is dark with little sunlight. The proportion of 1: infinity is very important; this proportion defines the long view. Places where buildings are built on one side of a street with a long view of a water area or open field on the other are considered very positive.





A new street in Harbor Town illustrates the strict use of the Build-to line. The facades help define the public space across the street.



The picket fence defines the front yard as a semi-public space seen from the sidewalk and a semi-private as seen from the house.

2. Setback, Build-to Line

The structures that line the street will also determine how well the streetscape is defined. Height, width, and massing of the structures plays a role in defining the spatial qualities of the streetscape, as do the building setbacks. Streets should have a build-to line. This is a line which determines where the majority of the primary facades should be located. A variation of this would allow a more flexible front yard setback. Front yard setbacks should vary according to uses, street types, and the speed of traffic. However, they should be set at a depth which creates a positive proportion. The setbacks of the primary facades should remain fairly uniform along each street except for retail and civic uses. In a retail or commercial setting, the building should normally be placed against the edge of the sidewalk, as these uses depend upon direct pedestrian access. In other words, a 12-14 foot setback from the curb is appropriate. Civic uses such as a church or community building can be set further back than the build-to line.

Residential uses at the street level should have a build-to-line that makes a small front yard possible. Some buildings should be allowed to deviate 10 to 25% from this standard by being in front of or behind the build-to line. As an example, if the build-to line is established as ten feet on a certain type of street, the front facade could be on this line or between 1 foot and 2 feet 6 inches in front or in back of this line. Porches can intrude into this setback line. Setbacks in residential areas vary from 10 to 35 feet, depending on the street type and passing traffic. The placement of structures in a hamlet, village, or town must attempt to create a sense of visual continuity and enclosure.

3. Front Yard and Entrances
The Front Yard

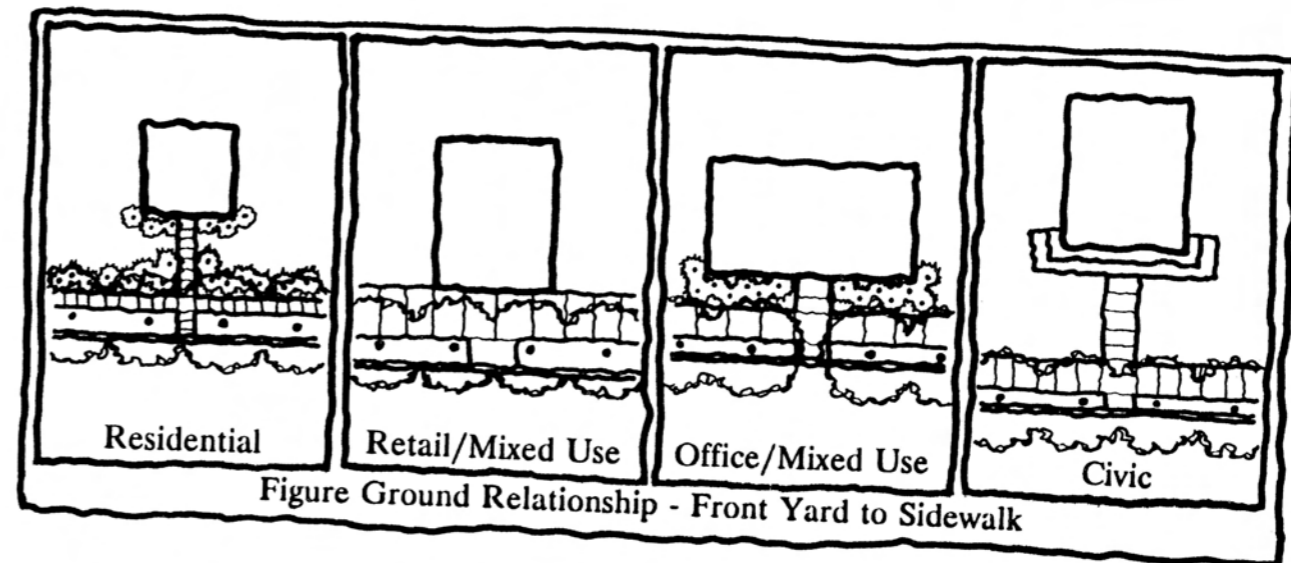
The front yard is the area between the house and the public sidewalk. The more defined it is, the more it becomes classified as semi-public, which means that this area is partially enclosed to form a space. The enclosure is typically a low fence, hedge, or wall three to four feet tall. The front porch may form one edge of this enclosed space. The enclosure of the front yard, complete with entrance gateway, gives guests and strangers the feeling of entering into the private domain of the house. Porches, stairs, and stoops elevated above the front yard and sidewalk reinforce the sense of the semi-public space. There is evidence that the

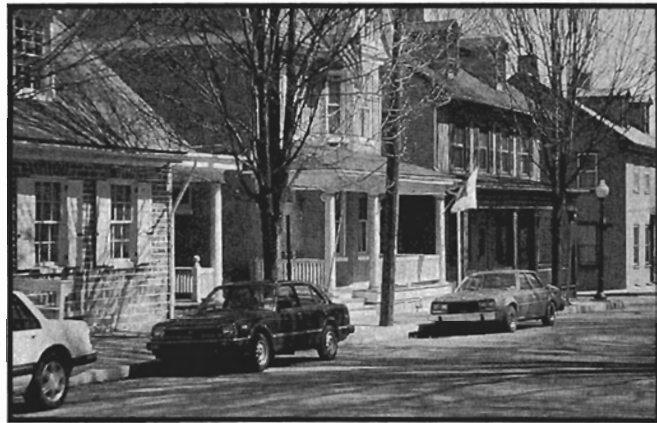
provision of this semi-public space as part of the front yard is a deterrent to crime and provides a greater sense of security for residents. Porches, stairs, and stoops can intrude into the front yard. Some porches can consume the entire front yard with the railings acting as the semi-public edge. Yard edges are an important part of the streetscape. The most highly rated typically contain a low picket-type fence, low hedges, a low masonry wall, or some combination of these elements. Entrances are articulated by decorative posts and sometimes a gate. Fences range from three to four feet high. Chain link fences should only be allowed if combined with a hedge.

In commercial and mixed-use areas with retail facilities on the ground floor the front yard should consist of wider sidewalks, creating opportunities for sidewalk cafes or some other use (fruit stand, sidewalk displays, etc.) Mixed-use buildings with offices on the ground floor should be set slightly further back, with the opportunity for a small semi-public space or a planting area; these uses do not have display windows, typically. Civic uses can and should have larger front yards.



Commercial Main Street in Clinton, NJ.





Well defined entrances.



A well defined pedestrian realm.



Sidewalk enhanced with plants and flowers.

Entrances

Entrances to buildings should be clearly defined. The level of the entrance above the sidewalk creates a relationship between the structure and the street. On residential buildings, the entrances should be elevated at least 18 inches above the sidewalk. As residential buildings are located nearer to the sidewalk, the ground floor elevation must be increased so that a person standing on the ground floor can see over the top of the pedestrian while the pedestrian cannot see directly into the unit. In commercial or mixed-use areas, the front entrance is usually flush with the sidewalk. Multi-family units require handicapped access.

4. The Pedestrian Realm

The elements which define the pedestrian realm include sidewalk widths, fences, hedges, building edges, parkways, street trees, street lights, and parked cars.

Sidewalks

According to Jane Jacobs, "Lowly, unpurposeful and random as they may appear, sidewalk contacts are the small change from which a city's wealth of public life may grow."

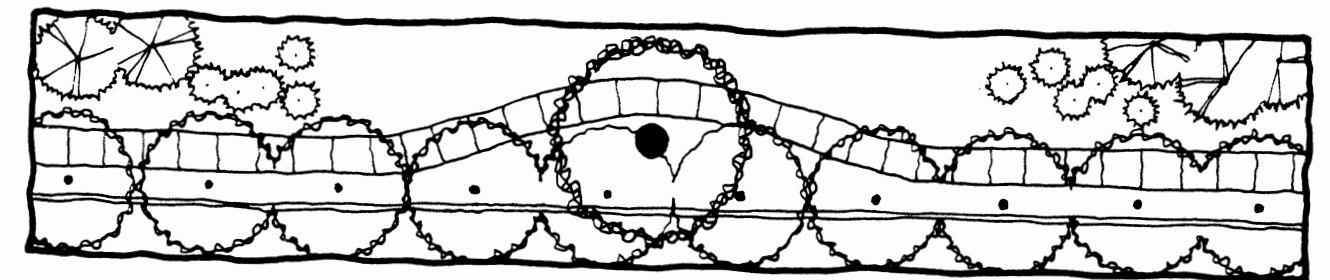
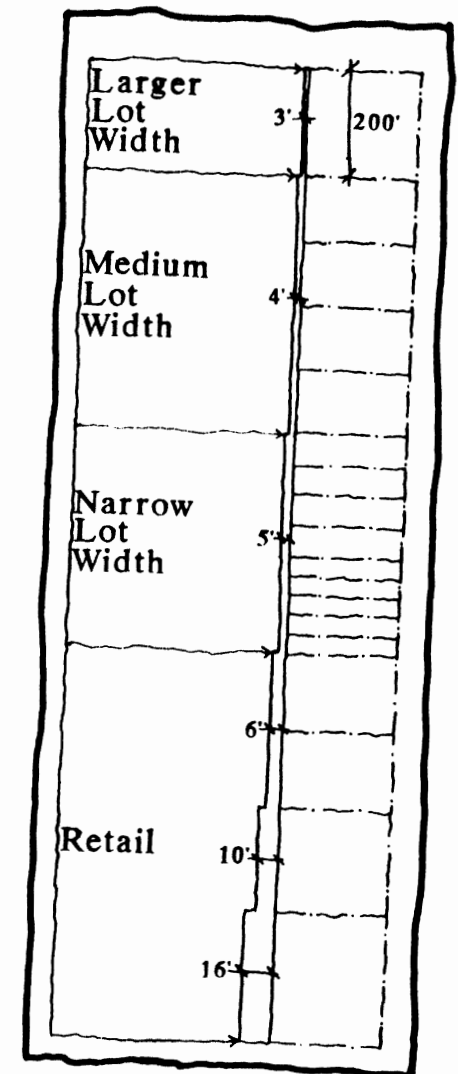
Throughout the community, the sidewalk is a critical element that allows and encourages free pedestrian movement. Sidewalks should connect the front and side doors of all units to the core retail area, civic and social buildings, and major recreational facilities. The sidewalk should be considered as a separate network, paralleling the roadways but also diverging between buildings to provide access to areas like parking lots or interior shopping courts. Sidewalks should be continuous. The width of the sidewalk should change from the edge of the community to the center or core depending on utilization. The sidewalk should be allowed to wander around large trees and outcroppings without being overly rigid in its placement.

Generally the sidewalk should start on the periphery of the hamlet or village where the lot widths begin to narrow; less than 200 feet is the general rule. In these locations the sidewalk can be narrow, but not less than three feet. As the potential intensity of pedestrians increases, the sidewalk must be widened. A four foot sidewalk is the most comfortable for two people to walk side by side or to pass a person pushing a baby carriage or one in a wheel chair.

Sidewalk widths must become broader in the commercial core. The sidewalk should extend from the edge of the building to the edge of the pavement. A minimum width of eight feet is required although ten to sixteen is more adequate since sidewalks in the commercial core may contain trees, lights, outside displays, awnings, and auto overhangs.

To the extent possible the sidewalk should be textured, scored, inlaid, stamped, or constructed of material that will produce textural variety in the ground form. Brushed concrete and blacktop must be avoided unless used for a bicycle path. Concrete can be scored into small rectangles, stamped to look like brick or slate or inlaid with brick as edges or dividers. Alternative, sidewalks can be constructed from brick or pavers, or created from small gravel edged in wood or metal. Gravel can be used for park walkways and for those near the periphery of the community. No sidewalks are appropriate on narrow roads of ten to eighteen feet in width, with slow speeds and an ADT of less than 250. Sidewalks should be placed to accommodate changes in topography, or the presence of large trees.

Chart of sidewalks width relative to lot widths.



Curve sidewalks to preserve large trees.