18. Form & Character Development Permit Areas

18.1. Overview

18.1.1. AREAS
Lands designated as Downtown Smithers, Mixed Residential and Highway 16 Commercial and identified on Schedule: C.

18.1.2. PURPOSE
The Form and Character Development Permit Area (DPA) regulates the form and character of commercial and multi-family residential development in Smithers. Objectives are to:

1. Ensure that the commercial core remains the focal point of the community;
2. Contribute to the existing character and identity of Smithers;
3. Ensure new developments fit appropriately into the context of existing neighbourhoods.

18.1.3. EXEMPTIONS
A Development Permit is not required for the construction, addition, or alteration of a building, provided the following:

1. The total value of the proposed construction is less than $75,000 as long as it adheres to the design guidelines. Only one of these exemptions will be granted to one property in a two-year period.

2. Single-family dwellings, duplexes, and semi-detached dwellings. Any additional dwellings (detached or attached) do not qualify for this exemption.

3. Construction that amounts to less than 20% increase in total floor area or a maximum of 28m² (300ft²) of new floor area provided.
that the appearance of the building from the street on which the development fronts are not altered, and required parking and landscaping are provided.

18.1.4. SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Every submission shall include:

- A completed Development Permit Application and applicable fees;
- Building elevation drawings, illustrating all sides of the building(s);
- A site plan showing buildings and structures, unenclosed storage areas; garbage areas, parking, loading, landscaping, and access;
- Drawings showing proposed signage details;
- Exterior building colour samples.

18.1.5. JUSTIFICATION

Smithers’ architectural history extends back to its roots as a farming, resource, and railway town. This is evident in several buildings of historical significance that exist today, including the Railway Station and Central Park building.

The importance of Main Street, and the immediately adjacent streets that make up downtown Smithers as the commercial center and focus of the Smithers’ community was first acknowledged in the early 1970’s with the establishment of the Alpine Theme. These design guidelines were in recognition of the mountain and winter sports heritage that is unique to Smithers. The definition of the alpine design theme included extended rooflines, shuttered windows, balconies, pictured exterior walls, and wooden signs.

Since then, considerable energy and money has been invested in the reconstruction of portions of the downtown, including the rebuilding and paving of streets, brick pavers, angle parking, street furniture, lighting and landscaping. A “Downtown Revitalization Area” was declared by the Provincial Government in 1981 resulting in an improved physical environment and the unique downtown that is evident today.

Initiatives to improve the downtown continue to take place. Downtown merchants and property owners have contributed enormously to the continued

“Identity is the extent to which a person can recognize or recall a place for being distinctive from other places as having a vivid and unique, or at least a particular character of its own.” (Lynch, The Image of the City, 1960)
development of the Downtown by creating a cohesive town core in accordance with the alpine theme.

In 2008, a Downtown Charrette that occurred as part of the Official Community Plan process explored options for reinforcing the downtown’s role as the commercial, arts, and cultural heart of the community. The Charrette developed a range of urban design and policy strategies to build on the existing downtown form and character. Participants expressed a desire for a more contemporary interpretation and expression of the Alpine Theme broadened to include the rich cultural heritage, including First Nations history, as well as the natural and resource history of Bulkley Valley that have shaped the community.

The implementation of the Development Permit Areas ensures a continuity of work already completed as well as incorporates the vision that resulted from the OCP process.

18.2. General Guidelines

The following guidelines apply to all the Form and Character DPA’s, both designated by land use and as shown on Schedule C. In this section, both general and specific guidelines are given for downtown commercial, Highway 16, and multi-family residential developments.

18.2.1. BASIC DESIGN APPROACH - SMITHERS ALPINE THEME

Developments shall be in accordance with the “Architectural Design Guidelines Alpine Theme” prepared for the Town of Smithers in 1997. These design guidelines have been applied successfully to the majority of new and renovated buildings in the downtown, resulting in the unique building character and streetscape. Although not required, elements of the design guidelines have also been successfully incorporated into development in other areas of Town.

The guidelines presented below are intended to supplement the existing Alpine Theme to encourage a broader, more contemporary interpretation of the alpine theme.

18.2.2. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

All design proposals should consider the design and construction requirements posed by the area’s climate.
**Wind** - Hanging signs, parapet extensions, awnings and canopies should be constructed with sufficient bracing to withstand strong winds such as might be typical of the area.

**Rain** - Architectural elements exposed to precipitation, such as roofs, cornices, edges, canopies and decorative detailing, should be properly designed and flashed to protect the building structure and carry water away from pedestrian pathways or human-use areas.

**Snow** - Any building structure upon which snow accumulates (canopies, awnings, roof forms) should be constructed in a manner conducive to spontaneous snow dump of accumulated loads into non-pedestrian areas. Snow must either be positively shed or positively retained. Shedding snow must be deflected from pedestrian areas by dormers, hipped roofs, canopies, or other means. All steps and wheelchair ramps must be covered or otherwise protected from ice and snow build-up.

**Ice** - Repeated heating and cooling of snow loads can give rise to ice accumulations. Building design should therefore consider heat loss factors as a method of controlling ice build-up. Proper flashing should be accorded to areas subject to ice accumulation. Walkways, entries, and other human use areas should be designed with the aim of minimum potential ice build-up and efficient removal of accumulations that do occur.

### 18.2.3. SITE DESIGN

Locate and design site servicing and utilities, parking and access, to maximize pedestrian safety and enhance existing properties. Guidelines include:

1. **Overall Layout.** Where feasible, “Back of house” activities should be located in the back of buildings. “Back of house” activities include but are not limited to the following:
   - Off-street surface parking, access and loading areas;
   - Enclosed and unenclosed storage areas;
   - Vents, meters and transformers.
   - When it is unavoidable to locate driveways, garages and garage entrances in the fronts of buildings, they should be located so that they are visually less dominant, by, for example, recessing them behind the main building line.

Climate sensitive design can be used to mitigate the effects of rain, snow, ice, splash and wind.

Maximizing natural ventilation and day light access
2. **Access.** Overall site design must include provisions that address the needs of walkers, transit patrons, cyclists, and people with various mobility needs. For example, provide safe and convenient walkways between the public street system and building entrance. Shared access is encouraged.

3. **Buffers.** Screen parking areas from sidewalks and other active open spaces using materials that provide a visual buffer while still allowing clear visibility into the parking areas to promote personal safety. Screening examples include landscaping, a trellis, or grillwork with climbing vines.

### 18.2.4. BUILDING ORIENTATION & FORM

New development should ensure a good fit within existing or new neighbourhoods through architectural features and building proportions. Guidelines include:

a. **Entrances.** Entrances should be reinforced architecturally to provide building identity and address. Commercial entries tend to be public, and residential entries tend to be private, and should therefore be designed accordingly. Where possible, locate entrances with access from public streets and sidewalks. Ground floor entries should be weather protected to provide comfort for pedestrians. Examples include awnings, covered entrances, or recessed entrances.

b. **Orientation.** New projects should ensure that their siting, form, and scale does not block significant views and solar access from existing or anticipated development, and that shadowing impacts on adjacent buildings and useable open spaces are minimized.

c. **Scale.** Building design elements, details, and materials should create a proportional and pedestrian scale building form. Where new development is taller than existing adjacent development, buildings and groups of buildings should transition in scale from larger to smaller developments.
18.2.5. LANDSCAPING

Landscaping materials help integrate new projects into the surrounding landscape while adding greenery to the town. Guidelines include:

a. **Add greenery.** Soften the appearance of buildings using plants, shrubs and trees. Where necessary use hard landscaping treatments such as terraced retaining walls and planters. Some strategies include:
   - Planter guards or low planter walls as part of the building design;
   - Landscape open areas created by building articulation;
   - Incorporate gardens in the site design;
   - Emphasize entries with special planting in conjunction with decorative paving and/or lighting.

b. **Retention.** Minimize the removal of existing significant trees and other vegetation. Where tree or vegetation removal is necessary, they should be replaced with new trees and vegetation.

c. **Native Landscaping.** Incorporate native landscape materials and the use of plants resistant to Smithers cold winters.

d. **Parking Areas.** Parking lots should be landscaped for comfort and visual interest. Rain gardens, bio-swales, and permeable materials are encouraged to absorb storm water at its source;

e. **Functionality.** Landscaping and building design should ensure penetration of sunlight in winter, and shading of afternoon sun in summer. Evergreens and conifers are encouraged to provide year round screening for blank walls.

18.2.6. BUILDING MATERIALS

New buildings should incorporate substantial and natural building materials into their facade to avoid a ‘thin veneer’ look and feel. Guidelines include:

a. Incorporate robust, natural materials that are local to Smithers. Examples include:
   - Masonry;
b. **Architectural Styles.** Reflect the cultural history of Smithers, including First Nations, through tasteful building styles and materials that are reflective of the local history.

18.2.7. **SIGNAGE**

Regulation of sign size and type is necessary to set upper limits on business sign competition and to prevent an escalation in sign size, animation and flash at the expense of pedestrian scale, architectural character and streetscape. Guidelines include:

1. **Branding.** New developments should be creative in incorporating the intent of these guidelines into corporate logos, brands and identities as expressed in the design and materials of signage.

2. **Scale & Presence.** Commercial buildings should provide signage that identifies the business and is appropriately scaled. When new signage is applied to an existing building, it should provide the appearance that the signage was part of the original building design. Signage should be in proportion to the look of the entire building.

18.2.8. **LIGHTING**

Lighting has a powerful effect on the overall ambience, safety and security of a building. Guidelines include:

a. **Location.** Directed lighting should be provided on the face of commercial buildings and at main entries to multi-family buildings.

b. **Safety.** Paths and entry areas should be sufficiently lit to ensure pedestrian
comfort and security.

- **Illumination levels.** Illumination levels should be appropriate for the function it serves while at the same time preventing light pollution. Encouraged lighting examples include downcast gooseneck lights, pot lighting, LED lighting of storefronts.

18.3. **Specific Guidelines: Downtown Commercial**

Downtown Smithers is the social, economic, and historic heart of the community, playing a significant role in the community’s overall character and identity. Specific objectives of the Downtown Commercial area are to:

- Build on the existing pedestrian scale of development;
- Reinforce Main Street as the heart of the community;
- Sensitively incorporate residential uses into the downtown;
- Preserve/restore views to the mountains and of prominent buildings.

**GUIDELINES:**

- **Definition and Continuity.** Site buildings to frame and define public streets and open spaces. Locate buildings at the sidewalk edge more or less continuously along a street using a common set back or ‘build to’ line.

- **Vitality and Texture.** Commercial and mixed use buildings in the downtown should be oriented and designed to maximize street vitality and enhance pedestrian amenity by encouraging shops with street level entrances and transparent shop fronts where visible from the street.

- **Mitigate blank walls.** Expansive blank walls (i.e. over 5 metres in length) fronting public streets should be avoided. When blank walls are unavoidable, they should be mitigated by:
  - Installing vertical trellis in front of the wall with climbing vines or plant materials.
  - Setting the wall back slightly to provide room for a landscaped or raised planter bed in front of the wall, including plant materials that could grow to obscure or screen the walls surface.
d. **Sensitively integrate large retailers.** Large scale commercial developments are encouraged to locate within the downtown provided they sensitively integrate into the existing streetscape and established urban fabric by:

- Incorporating small shops into facades fronting public streets and open spaces;
- Incorporating frequent entrances and display windows to be consistent with the existing building and façade rhythm in the downtown;
- Locating off-street surface parking to the side or rear of the building.

### 18.4. Specific Guidelines: Highway 16 Commercial

Highway 16 is a key transportation corridor through the community and gateway into the downtown. A standard of design is important for this area as it provides the initial impression presented to travelers as they pass through Smithers as well as a local transportation network.

The character of development within the Highway 16 corridor should reflect certain elements of the Alpine Theme; yet acknowledge that larger scale commercial buildings should realistically interpret the Alpine Theme more broadly. Specific objectives of the Highway 16 commercial corridor are to:

- Ensure that the form and character create a pleasant and welcoming experience for both visitors and community members;
- Reinforce the relationship of Hwy. 16 as a gateway to downtown Smithers;
- Encourage designs that respect and respond positively to the surrounding natural and built environment.
GUIDELINES:

a. **Attention to Materials.** Incorporate natural materials including heavy timbers and stone.

b. **Site Layout & Building Orientation.** Orient buildings to front onto Highway 16 and the adjacent frontage street with parking located to the rear or side of the building. Large format buildings should try to create internal ‘pedestrian streets’ that connect to the surrounding external streets.

c. **Mitigate Blank Walls.** Large format buildings that front onto and have their main entrance accessible from the off-street parking lot (i.e. buildings that present the side of their building to the adjacent frontage street) should be designed in a manner that breaks up the appearance of expansive blank walls.

18.5. **Specific Guidelines: Multi Family Residential**

Multi-family residential buildings such as town houses, apartments and multiple detached dwellings play a key role in the community in terms of size, scale and design as well as being focal points of activity generation. Specific objectives of Multi Family Residential areas are to:

- Ensure the form and character of development in these areas contributes positively to the neighbourhood context and community as a whole.
- Encourage building designs that promote privacy, safety and accessibility.

GUIDELINES:

a. **Connections.** Site residential projects to maximize opportunities to create open spaces and networks including play areas for children according to the following guidelines:

- Encourage green spaces and common areas as defining elements of the project. Examples include common garden areas, play spaces, courtyards, gathering places, and walkways.
- Encourage direct access to a private outdoor space, patio or balcony, or upper level terrace for each dwelling unit.

**NOT THIS**

Off-street parking should not be located between the front of a building and the public sidewalk
- Provide natural surveillance for children’s play areas by orienting units with views onto these spaces.

b. **Cluster Units.** Larger residential developments should be separated into smaller groups or clusters to maintain a residential scale and image. Dwelling units in smaller groups facilitate residential interaction and neighbor surveillance.

c. **Scale and massing.** The scale and massing of buildings should be broken up to reduce the visual impact of buildings and to create variation and visual interest.

d. **Maintain a ground orientation.** Where possible, provide for direct access from the fronting street to individual ground floor units.

e. **Facade.** Minor visual breaks in the façade should be used to further break up building mass, to accentuate individual entrances and units, and to create variation and enhance visual interest from public and private open spaces.

f. **Special considerations for detached dwellings (i.e. carriage houses or cluster development):**
   - Respect the privacy of adjacent properties through appropriate placement of windows, location of decks and other features that may infringe upon the privacy of a neighbouring resident.
   - Encourage large windows and decks to face the lane or shared rear yard.
   - Use building materials that reflect the character of the principal dwelling and be built using similar architectural features.