

Community Assistantship Program

Milaca Downtown Revitalization

Prepared in partnership with
City of Milaca

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Milaca Downtown Revitalization

Summer 2008

The main goal of this project was to provide the City of Milaca with visions of what their downtown area could look like as they seek to revitalize and reenergize the core of the city. The subsequent drawings, maps, and boards are meant to begin a broader dialog within the community. One that will help form a stronger idea of what can be done in designing the spaces that will form the identity and sense of place within Milaca.

Board 1: Downtown Milaca

The map shows an idea of how the central business core and focus of downtown revitalization efforts in Milaca might be defined spatially. This helps determine where streetscape changes are made and how the city identifies its commercial and community identity. Access routes to downtown along Central Avenue and Second Street are emphasized to show how residents and visitors will enter the city and where signage and other key information could be located. A Pedestrian Promenade that connects the civic buildings and parks to downtown is highlighted in orange and forms a strong pedestrian connection between the many commercial and active use areas of Milaca.

Two reverse figure grounds compare the pattern of open space within the downtown area. The figure ground on the left represents the current distribution of open space with well fronted streets and few large openings. The figure on the right represents downtown after buildings scheduled for removal are taken down. It is important to consider how these larger open spaces will alter perceptions of the vitality of downtown. Redeveloping commercial lands and providing programming for other open spaces is key to building a viable downtown.

Board 2: Downtown Streetscape

The downtown streetscape helps build the identity of Milaca through a consistent use of materials and unified design elements like pedestrian scale lighting and paving patterns. Bump-outs provide safe street crossings and reinforce the pedestrian nature of downtown while giving space for sidewalk cafes and other street furniture. Increasing sidewalk widths along First Street by changing to a parallel parking pattern will allow for the addition of street trees and ease pedestrian movement. Street trees lining the sidewalks provide shade and make the pedestrian experience more enjoyable.

An urban plaza located on Second Street, north of the grocery, allows for light auto traffic associated with the bank drive through while providing outdoor space for community events. The design of this space should raise the street level to that of the sidewalk to create a unified pedestrian area.

Possible configurations of new buildings including an expanded grocery store footprint, redevelopment of the creamery building site, and new buildings along Second Street

where Alfred Olson's stood are shown. These new buildings should continue to address the pedestrian zone to bring active use to downtown sidewalks.

The two perspective drawings provide experiential views of First Street and Main Street and how they could look with the additional streetscape elements.

Board 3: Parks

Trimble and Recreation Parks are extensions of the downtown area and can play a vital role in drawing people into downtown Milaca. These drawings envision Trimble Park as a Town Square and host to a wide range of community activities throughout the year including farmer's markets, art fairs, evening picnics and music, and movies in the park.

The sketches illustrate the addition of a bandstand to the park as a focus of community events. Sidewalks and parking allow easy access to the park and provide spaces for art fair and market stands to be set up during community events. Playgrounds are grouped together and a large open green is created for active use.

To foster a better connection to Recreation Park the sidewalk from downtown is extended and highlighted with signage guiding residents and visitors to the sports fields and river. Creating a tree lined pathway extends the notion of the park connection and pedestrian scale lighting and benches through Trimble Park provide gathering spaces for those using the parks.

Board 4: Pedestrian Promenade

The Promenade is a pedestrian connection that links the parks, civic buildings, and downtown commercial core of Milaca through a centralized walkway. This connection utilizes the existing alleyway that runs through downtown from the public library to Main Street with a connection to an urban plaza on Second Street north of the grocery. Windows and shop access along the Promenade are encouraged to give visual connection between the indoor and outdoor environment and increase safety through additional eyes on the street.

At Main Street the walkway travels along downtown sidewalks to Trimble Park and then continues to Recreation Park and the Rum River. Informational kiosks and signage can be used to guide visitors to downtown while bump-outs at road crossings and the use of pedestrian scale lighting provide a safe and positive experience. Other amenities include access to public restrooms, benches, tree plantings, and areas for bike parking.

Board 5: Street Design Options

The final board presents various options for the development of the downtown pedestrian zone and streetscape. These examine alternative sidewalk configurations and the corresponding parking pattern that would accommodate each option based on the street

corridor width along Main Street. The location of trees, benches, informational signage and bike parking elements is compared at various sidewalk widths and planting bed locations with an example of how these elements could be combined on corner bump-outs.

Three examples of sidewalk space are illustrated and highlight the human scale experience along Main Street.

-Option one leaves the sidewalk width and street parking pattern the same while adding street trees to the sidewalk zone.

-Option two alters the streetscape pattern increasing the sidewalk width to 14 feet and accommodating street trees, benches, and other site furniture such as newspaper stands and signage. Parking changes from angled drive in to parallel parking bays and a bike lane is added.

-Option three leaves the sidewalk and parking dimensions the same and accommodates street trees in planting beds that extend into one or more of the existing angled parking bays. These would create on-street space for bike, moped, or motorcycle parking.

An example of a street corner bump-out is provided and illustrates how sidewalk cafés could be created in a wider pedestrian zone that also includes street trees, informational signage, bike parking, and other pedestrian amenities.

At the far right of the board are examples of how the street edge around the grocery store might be designed to define the street, pedestrian zone, and parking lot area. Placing a planted buffer between the sidewalk and parking lot can define and soften the transition between the two areas. Street trees planted within the sidewalk or in the buffer will also help give the space a pedestrian scale and tie it to the rest of downtown.

Milaca Downtown Revitalization Summer 2008

Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats

Strengths:

Centrally located compact downtown
Historic buildings (can provide a guide for future development)
Safe streets for pedestrian movement
Proximity of downtown and residential areas
Community and regional connectivity
Range and mix of business, non-profit, office, services, community space, and industry
Grocery store staying in downtown and expanding
Existing businesses able to draw people into downtown
Large yearly events attract residents and visitors to Milaca and downtown
Adequate parking
Parks, Rum River, and recreational opportunities
County Seat of Mille Lacs County
Community atmosphere-people watch out for each other
Partnerships with the Healthy Communities Initiative and community involvement
Established momentum in building a stronger downtown area

Weaknesses:

Downtown hasn't found an identity
No indication of downtown's location from highways
Lack of signage, information nodes, and visitor information center
Missing downtown businesses-daily necessities, coffee, bakery, café
Little connection between businesses like the theater and restaurants
Short business hours due to demand limit times that people use downtown
Lack of design guidelines/material consideration and consistency have led to tin siding
High volume of impervious surfaces
Lack of greenery in downtown
Similar activities and infrastructure provided in all Milaca parks with little differentiation
No programmed regular use of community gathering/event spaces like Trimble Park
Lack of connection between parks and downtown
Wide roads and parking orientation give spatial priority to autos
Lack of shelter or site furniture makes sidewalk less desirable for use and gathering
Missing sidewalks and worn pavement
No identified bike routes or parking
Many downtown buildings have little visual permeability
Exposed service areas, large parking lots and gaps in store frontages give empty feel
Some corners and store fronts have large set backs that mix auto and pedestrian traffic

Few apartment opportunities/demand

Opportunities:

Defining a central downtown area and identity

Enhance streetscape to improve pedestrian experience, connectivity and downtown unity

- Increased safety at crossings through traffic control and pedestrian bump outs
- Widen sidewalks on First and Second Streets SE by altering parking
- Pedestrian scale lighting in downtown
- Site furniture to encourage personal interaction and usage of streetscape
- Bike lanes to encourage alternative means of travel into downtown
- Street trees and paving material selection

Create information nodes, kiosks and community information for residents and visitors

Create unified signage and way finders around town

Encourage building design and material choices that will add character to downtown

Increase visual permeability of business frontages

Open space programming to create wider use of parks and interstitial open space

- Create opportunities for sidewalk cafes and outdoor dining spaces in open lots
- Town square that promotes active use, community space, farm market, art fairs, picnics, music and movies in the park and other opportunities

Create better connections

- Trimble Park and Recreation Park/Rum River
- Parks and Downtown
- Downtown area-Central alleyway and pedestrian friendly sidewalks

Capitalize on proximity to highways 169 and 23

Encourage visitors by informing them of where downtown is and what is there

Visually buffer unsightly, unused, or service and parking areas

Threats:

Large gaps in building frontages, large exposed parking lots, and vacant properties reduce the vitality and sense of identity of downtown

Lack of businesses that provide necessities for Milaca residents

Local shopping dollars going to surrounding communities

Competition with 169/23 corner and business along 23 that may decentralize downtown

Downtown located off of main regional routes

Lack of programming or downtown activity to draw people over a wide range of hours



Downtown Milaca

Creating a Sense of Place

Identify the focus area of Downtown/Central Business District, its points of access, and build the identity of downtown through:

Recognizing linkages between key features

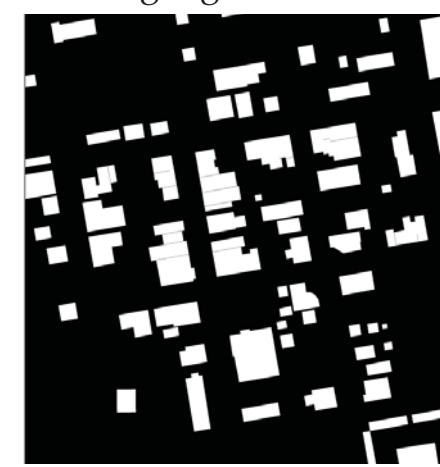
- Civic functions and commercial functions
- Recreational opportunities and the business community
- Opportunities for special events and the core business activity of downtown
- Improvements in the public realm and enhanced opportunities for economic development
- Pedestrian friendly downtown and increased downtown business activity
- Downtown entry points and the broader community

Consistent use of materials

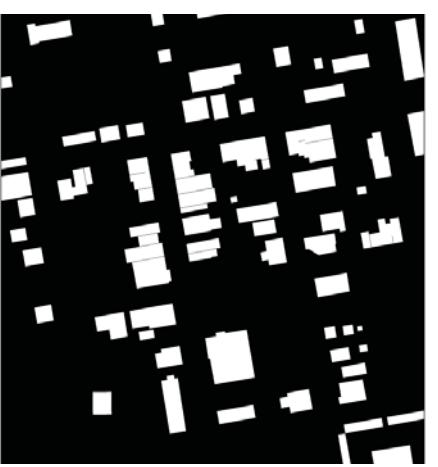
- Paving
- Building materials

Unified design elements

- Benches
- Lighting
- Street trees
- Signage



Reverse figure ground showing the current pattern of open space in downtown.



Reverse figure ground showing the increased amount of open space once buildings planned for removal have been taken down.



Downtown Streetscape

A safe and enjoyable pedestrian environment that encourages people to come downtown

Incorporating pedestrian amenities in the public and private realm:

- Wide pedestrian focused sidewalks
- Street trees
- Benches
- Pedestrian scale lighting
- Encourage sidewalk cafes and outdoor dining opportunities
- Sidewalk bumpouts for increased crosswalk safety
- Public Plaza on Second Street between Main Street and Central Avenue
- Informational signage and kiosks for visitors and the community



View west along First Street from Central Avenue



View north along Main Street from Second Street

Parks

An outdoor extension of downtown Milaca

Trimble Park as Town Square

- Bandshell
- Finish sidewalk improvements around park
- Weekly farmers market
- Summer art fairs
- Summer movie screenings on adjacent buildings
- Shelter near the playground equipment
- Benches and lighting added along sidewalks

Highlight the connection to Recreation Park

- Extend the sidewalk connection
- Signage to lead people to the Park and Rum River

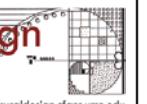
Event parking could be provided east of Main Street during art fairs, farm markets, or community events



View west through Trimble Park to Recreation Park Entrance.



Signs can combine elements of past and present design in Milaca. Here field stone like that on old City Hall is combined with uprights found on the new Library building.



Pedestrian Promenade

Connecting Downtown Milaca



Connections to downtown

- From the Rum River
- From City Hall and the Library

Informational signage and kiosks

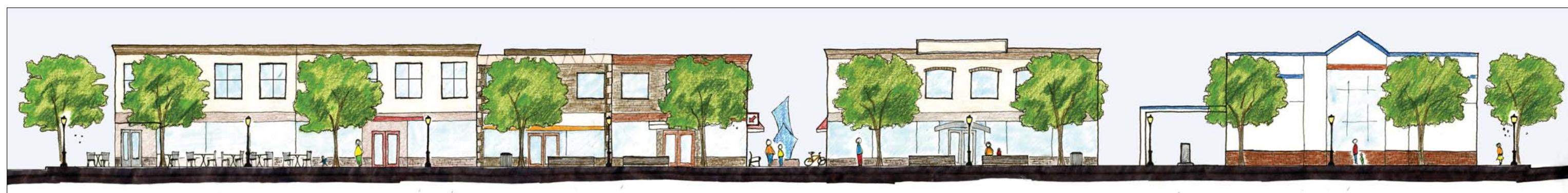
- Guide visitors to the downtown area

Safe and positive pedestrian experience

- Pedestrian-focused pathway linking the public realm with the commercial core

Design Elements:

- Bumpouts at crosswalks for safety
- Benches
- Bike Parking
- Pedestrian scale lighting
- Trees
- Signage and information kiosks
- Connection to the public restrooms

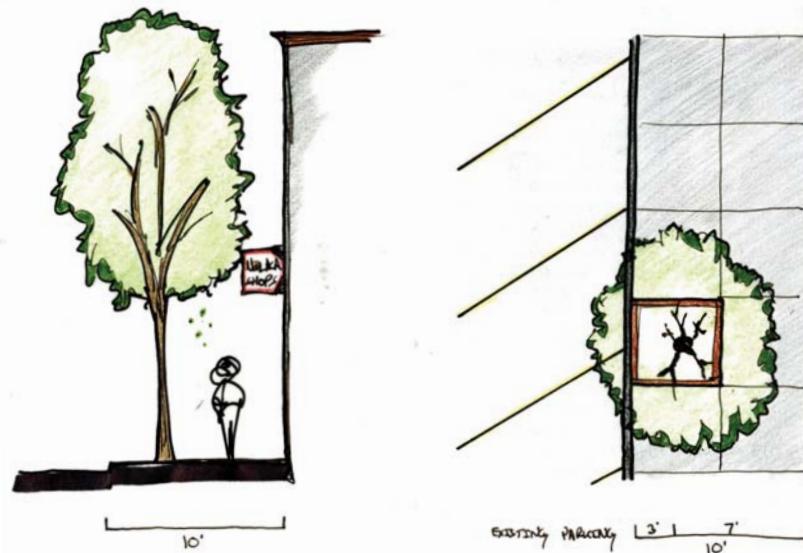


Elevation of Second Street looking north from the Grocery Store

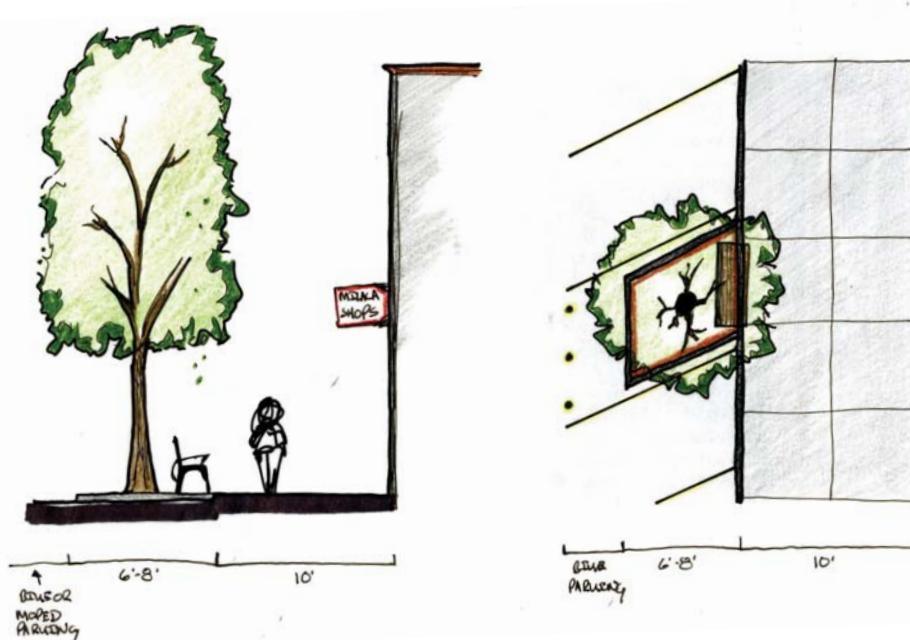


Main Street: Design Options

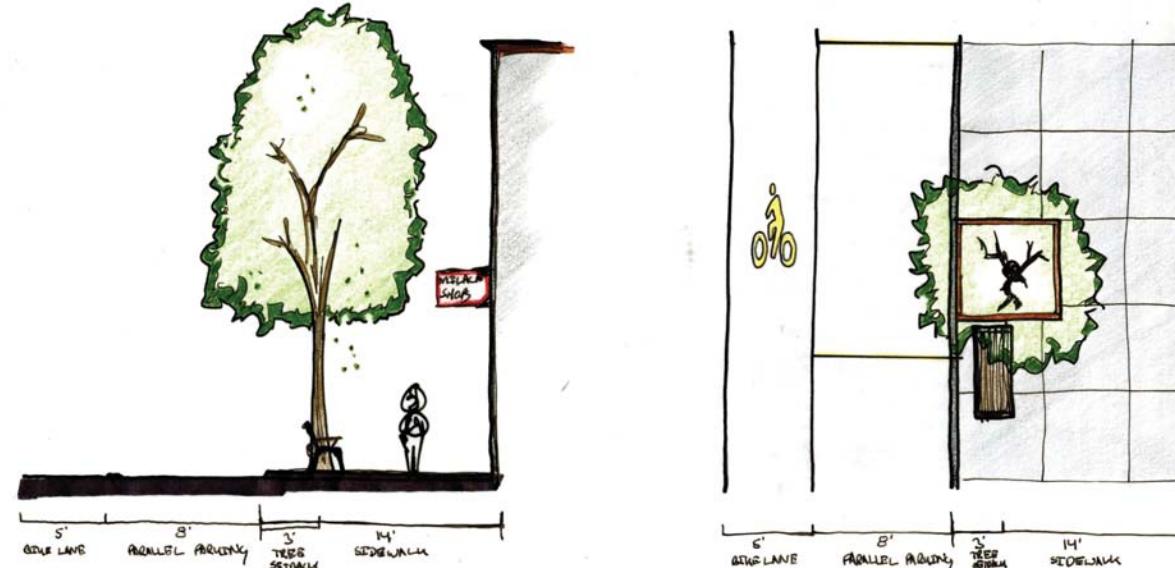
Existing street and sidewalk design with street trees added



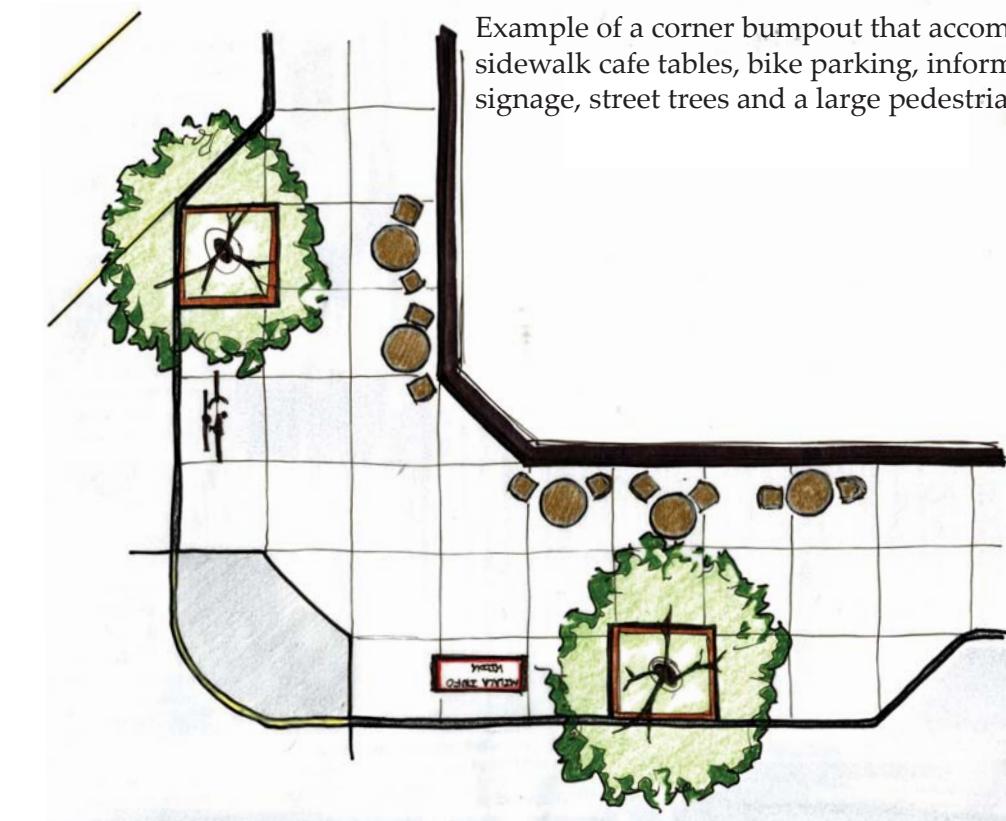
Existing street and sidewalk design with tree planting beds that extend into parking spaces and provide bike and motorcycle parking



Proposed changes to include widen sidewalks, parallel parking, on-street bike lanes, street trees and benches

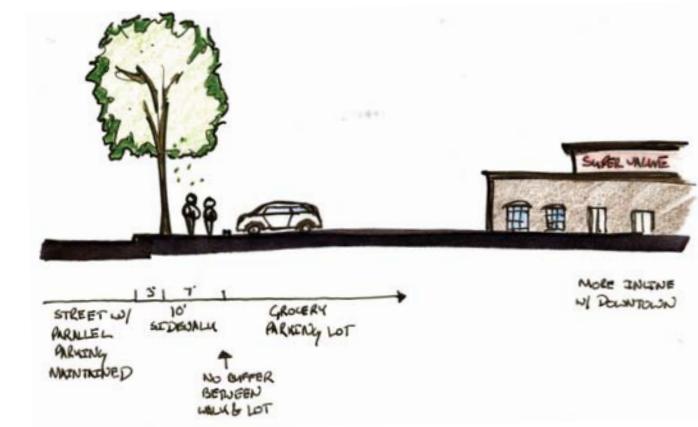


Example of a corner bumpout that accommodates sidewalk cafe tables, bike parking, informational signage, street trees and a large pedestrian area

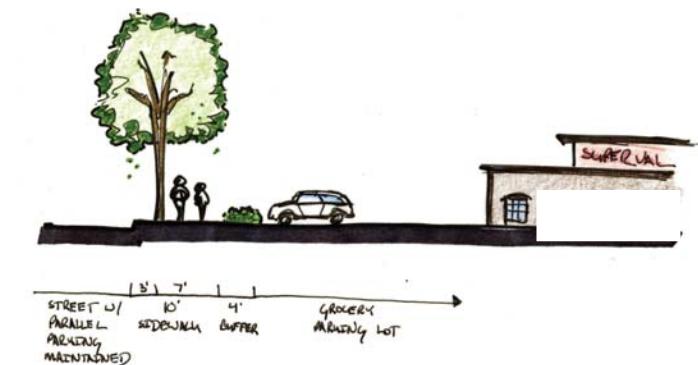


Grocery Street Edge: Design Options

Street trees added along sidewalk edge



Street trees on sidewalk edge with planting buffer between sidewalk and parking lot



Trees and planted buffer between the sidewalk and parking lot

