

# Town of Whitsett, NC

## Commercial Architectural Ordinance

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## **I. Commercial Architectural Character**

### **11.1 General Intent / Introduction**

As authorized under NCGS 160A-381, the purpose of these architectural and site design regulations is to supplement existing development criteria with specific criteria that apply to the design of all new construction, redevelopment and renovation of commercial buildings and projects. The goal is to create and maintain a positive community image and identity by providing for architectural and site design treatments which will:

1. Promote sustainable commercial development and redevelopment.
2. Enhance the visual appearance and character of the community.
3. Increase the safety and convenience of commercial and mixed use projects in Whitsett.
4. Enhance the quality of life in Whitsett.

The character of the Town of Whitsett shall be positively conveyed through the appropriate use of massing, form, and materials in new commercial structures. In this chapter, general requirements for all development are presented.

New commercial development shall be sensitive and complementary to the heritage of the Town of Whitsett, yet be balanced with present objectives to encourage development diversity and establish a vibrant commercial area.

The architectural requirements are designed to promote development that is compatible and complementary to the rural flavor of Whitsett.

Rhythms and proportions of existing buildings shall be identified and incorporated into new construction. These include such things as window to wall or solid-void ratio, bay division, proportion of openings, entrance and porch projections, and site coverage.

Exterior surfaces shall be compatible with those of existing structures or the collective character of Whitsett in regard to scale, type, size, finish, texture, and color. Finishes shall complement the existing scheme of Whitsett's rural setting.

Design and architectural expression that follows the basic principles of the ordinance is appropriate. The ordinance is not meant to preclude making exception in the case of innovative and nationally recognized certification or rating systems (including Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System™) design.



**Fig. 1** Massing of a building can be broken up by the variation of depth, texture, and color.



**Fig. 2** Pitched roofs and rural architectural features are preferred design characteristics that are consistent with the historic character of Whitsett.

**WATERSHED AREAS NOTE:** The Town of Whitsett is in the Watershed area for Lake McIntosh and Lake Jordan; and all developments in the town are subject to their watershed rules and regulations as well as the Town of Whitsett Architectural Ordinance.

## 11.2 Applicability

Provisions of this ordinance are applicable in the following zoning districts:

- Office (Limited Office LO),
- Commercial & Industrial business (Highway Business HB, Neighborhood Business NB),
- public or industrial (PI)

as defined in Whitsett Town Development Ordinance Article IV Zoning.

Compliance with the standards set forth in this article shall be demonstrated by submittal of architectural drawings in accordance with this ordinance, a site development plan or site improvement plan.

Deviations from these ordinance regulations may be authorized when:

1. The Planning Board, Town Council, or Enforcement Committee determines specific regulations or requirements are in conflict with the town's life/safety code.
2. Obtaining nationally recognized certification, or rating system certification for commercial projects requires deviation from the town's building ordinance (including the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System™). Proof of the required deviation shall be demonstrated to the planning board prior to allowing any departure from these regulations.
3. Where the applicant demonstrates alternative materials, design elements, or site layout will achieve equal or better performance to the satisfaction of the planning board.
4. The Planning Board determines that costs associated with rigid compliance will be cost prohibitive on the owner and render the project unachievable. A creative and innovative solution shall be demonstrated to the planning board prior to allowing any departure from the regulations for cost prohibitive cases.

## 11.3 Applications and Permits

Any person submitting a site plan and color rendering, or applying for a building permit, shall, as a part of said application, submit a plan that shows proposed work will comply with this Ordinance. The plan shall be submitted to the Whitsett Town Administrator/Planning Board.

The above required plans and descriptions shall be sufficiently complete to enable the Town Administrator/Planning Board to readily determine whether compliance with the requirements of

this Article will be secured. If such plans and descriptions cannot enable the ready determination, the applicant shall submit evidence of compliance.

The owner of a lot requesting improvements shall first obtain, from the Whitsett town administrator, a Development Clearance Certificate, followed by application for a building permit from the Guilford County Planning Department. The town administrator will determine if the request must be approved by the Whitsett planning board. Guilford County will review the construction plan submitted for conformance with the regulations contained in the Town of Whitsett Architectural ordinance.

#### 11.4 Structures Existing on Effective Date

A. **Structures Existing on Effective Date:** Structures built prior to the effective date of this Article are exempt from the provisions of this Article; provided, however, that no change in use, replacement, and structural alteration of the structure shall be made unless it thereafter conforms to the provisions of this Article. Architecture that would be prohibited by this Section but was in existence on 06/10/2008, and was constructed in accordance with the applicable laws and ordinances in effect on the date of construction, but by reason of its design, or construction is not in conformance with the requirements of this Section, are exempt from the provisions of this Article, and may remain in place and be maintained indefinitely, subject to compliance with the following:

- i. Normal maintenance of such structure shall be allowed, including nonstructural repairs and incidental alterations which do not increase the degree or extent of the nonconformity.
- ii. No structural alteration, enlargement or extension of the building shall be allowed.
- iii. No relocation of the structure upon the premises shall be allowed unless to correct a location violation.
- iv. If damage to the structure from any cause is less than fifty(50%) percent of either the original or replacement value, whichever is less, the structure may be rebuilt or repaired to its original condition in its original location and may continue to be utilized.

B. **Lapse of Pre-existing Structure Rights:** Pre-existing structure rights shall lapse automatically and the nonconforming structure shall be brought into compliance with this Section or removed if one of the following occurs:

1. If such structure is damaged from any cause to an extent of fifty (50%) or more of either the original or replacement value, whichever is less;
  2. If there is a significant exterior remodel in the structure to an extent of fifty (50%) or more of either the original or replacement value, whichever is less.
- C. **Map Amendment or Text Amendment:** Any structure that is made nonconforming by reason of zoning map amendment or any subsequent amendment to the text of this Section, shall be removed or brought into compliance as provided in Section 11.5 (A) (Structures Existing on the Effective Date).

## 11.5 General Requirements

### 11.5.1 Massing and Orientation

- Utilizing appropriate massing and orientation can allow new development to complement the heritage of Whitsett. New structures shall use massing and orientation similar to that of Whitsett's existing rural structures. Building placement and orientation shall also reinforce the connection to primary and secondary streets, contributing in a positive manner to the streetscape of the commercial area.



**Fig. 3** Even very large buildings can be broken up into smaller sections and shall not have large blank walls.

- Small, individual developments are preferred. Several small developments contribute a greater degree of diversity than a few large developments.
- Where large buildings are unavoidable, they shall be located at the rear of a development parcel or staggered with adjacent developments, with smaller individual developments along the street to preserve a consistent streetfront.
- Breaking up large buildings with multiple bays is required, and each façade shall provide a meaningful purpose such as individual entrances to the larger building. On large buildings the façade shall be broken up every 30' to 40' with color, change of building materials, depth, height, or other architectural characteristics. On smaller buildings, the break in façade shall be every 15' to 25'. Appropriate detailing, scale, and proportion area elements can be addressed through facade design.
- Orient buildings to the main street, either parallel to the street or at a maximum angle of 45 degrees. If a building is on a corner lot, it may have a corner orientation. This is not to preclude entrances or façade detailing to other orientations, such as a side parking lot.



**Fig. 4** Artistic design & architectural features can decrease the impact of ‘big-box’ size and massing.

- The perceived width of buildings shall be consistent with smaller developments. Divide wider buildings into modules to convey a sense of more traditional construction, yet remain true to the interior layout/programming of the building. This is especially recommended for a series of adjacent businesses built in one development.
- Use courts and atria to help vary the mass of buildings with large floor plates and introduce natural light to the interior.
- Provide for depth and variation in a façade through the use of different colors, materials, and other details.
- Do not use flat looking walls/facades and large, boxy buildings. Break up the flat front effect by introducing projecting elements such as wings, porticos, bay windows, awnings, recessed balconies and/or alcoves. Staggered bays will also contribute to a greater definition of a façade. Specific requirements for different building forms are given in the recommended building forms section of this chapter.



*Fig. 5* Color changes & variation in material and depth are good tools to break up the massing of a building.

- Give the greatest consideration in terms of design emphasis and detailing to the street facing façade (or façades if a corner site). Clusters of buildings in a single planned development may utilize common or compatible building forms and/or architectural styles, with a secondary emphasis on the internal relationships of buildings around a shared parking facility, interior court, landscaped yard, or plaza.
- Buildings on corner sites shall orient to both streets. These buildings are encouraged to have an entrance situated at or near the corner.
- Use sculpture, fountains, monuments, and landscape to enhance the three-dimensional quality of outdoor spaces.

### 11.5.2 Height

Building heights shall comply with the limits as established in the city code for the underlying zone. Building heights of one or two stories are considered desirable and appropriate to the scale of The Town of Whitsett.

### 11.5.3 Mixed Use Housing (Future Use)

Since Whitsett desires to create an attractive & vibrant shopping district along Highway 70, maintaining commercial uses on the ground floor is essential. The second floor of commercial buildings can be used for office space, retail and in some cases housing (if specific amenities are provided). Second story housing may be feasible along Highway 70 if additional public pedestrian amenities are provided such as open space, pocket parks, plazas, sitting areas, extra landscaping, fountains, etc. A starting recommendation is that for every two square feet of amenities that provide a public benefit, one square foot of livable housing may be added on the upper floor. This housing must be utilized as part of a mixed use development, therefore street level commercial elements are required to be part of the project.

The Planning Board & Town Council must change zoning rules to allow any mixed use developments.



**Fig. 6** Mixed used developments can be architecturally pleasing, satisfy housing needs, and also create vibrant shopping districts.

### 11.5.4 Exterior Walls and Surfaces: Building Materials

- Materials for exterior walls and surfaces shall be selected based on durability, appearance, timelessness as well as compatibility with those used for the existing structures found in Whitsett.



**Fig. 7** Emphasis on the detailing of the street-facing façade creates a pleasing experience for the pedestrian as well as the overall character of a commercial district.

- Notable rural buildings in Whitsett (such as Brightwood Storage Units and façade of Hardwoods Unlimited) are constructed of brick. To complement and be compatible with the character of Whitsett, masonry building materials, such as brick, stone, and colored decorative concrete block, are highly preferred for use as the primary building material (85% or greater) of commercial development. Windows/doors can also be used to count toward the 85% of the recommended building materials. Many varieties and colors of brick or stone are available and acceptable for use. Other materials may be considered for use as a primary building material, based on review by the Town.
- Secondary building materials shall include brick, stone, colored decorative concrete block, stucco, wood/cement fiber siding & timbers. These materials are highly desirable over metals, plastics, vinyl, and faux siding materials including synthetic stucco-type materials.



**Fig 8** Wainscotting is encouraged to break up the façade and inhibit a color or material from dominating the building façade.

- Scale, texture, detailing, and windows/doors shall be greatest at the ground floor, where the level of visibility and adjacency to pedestrian activity is greatest.
- Use materials in a manner that is consistent and visually true to the nature of the building material. (See Appendix A for additional materials requirements.)
- Use primary building materials for facades that front onto public ways. Secondary building materials may be used as accents on these facades or on less visible facades.
- Use natural building breaks (such as inside corners) for changes in materials, rather than abrupt changes or changes at outside corners to avoid the appliqué look of a material.
- Do not use synthetic materials. (i.e. vinyl, metal siding)
- Innovative use of other materials may be considered.
- Consider durability and life cycle in the selection of materials.



**Fig. 9** Secondary building materials are encouraged as accents to a primary building design.

### 11.5.5 Texture, Colors, Finishes

- Design elements such as color and materials shall reinforce the scale and character of the Commercial District and the heritage of Whitsett. Do not use large areas of the same color and/or materials with no relief. Conversely, do not use too many materials and/or colors, which may create busy or incongruous facades. Use materials that have a modular pattern closest to pedestrian ways to add scale, texture and visual interest.
- Earth tones are generally preferred over harsh or loud colors, except where more vibrant colors are used to create a special effect that is harmonious with the adjacent context. A color palette of earth tones has been provided in the appendix for use as a reference guide to color selections in developments.
- The use of color schemes shall be compatible with the surrounding areas.
- Simplicity is encouraged regarding color. Excessive amounts of different colors shall not be used. Brighter colors are recommended for use as accents only.
- The texture and finish of a structure shall convey a modern, yet timeless, building.
- Vary colors and materials to break up the monotony in larger developments.



**Fig. 10** Individual businesses can share a larger building but stand out by changing the color or material of the facade.

#### 11.5.6 Windows and Doors

- Windows and doors make important contributions to the appearance of any building and shall be of a similar design and style to the general character of Whitsett's rural setting.
- Facades that front on to public ways shall contain functional windows and doors, with a balance of solids and voids.
- Windows at the ground level shall generally be of clear glass, and placed at a height that relates visual connection of indoor and outdoor environments.
- Do not use blank facades with no windows/doors.
- Do not use the use of dark-tinted or reflective glass windows. Where possible, awnings, balconies, eaves, arbors, landscaping, and other shading devices are effective, and can be far more visually interesting.

- Materials for framing windows shall be compatible to the primary exterior material. Materials that do not match are discouraged.
- Consider the use of canopies or awnings on windows that directly abut pedestrian walkways to provide protection from the elements.
- Sun and glare can be controlled with awnings, canopies, balconies, trellises, foliage, and other shading devices that also protect pedestrians from inclement weather.
- The ground floor of the primary façade shall contain windows/doors that are architecturally compatible with the façade of the building.



*Fig. 11* Arches, sills, trim, muntins, and other architectural features can enhance windows.

### 11.5.7 Architectural Styles: Exterior Trim and Decorative Detailing

While building form is the primary identifying characteristic of a structure, architectural style, represented by the use of exterior trim and detailing, is a secondary characteristic. Different architectural styles can be used on the same basic building form.





**Fig. 12** Covered entrances or porches create a more attractive façade.

- Use details and features that work well with the chosen primary and secondary building materials.
- Design details to be visually true and consistent with their materials of construction.
- The use of details can break up uninspiring solid surfaces and helps to avoid the box-like appearance often seen in new construction.
- Trim and details shall be simple in material and design. A classic, timeless style shall be used.
- Materials for trim and details shall be compatible with the primary exterior material. Detailing shall be authentic with the characteristics and capabilities of the materials.
- Excessive ornamentation is not recommended.
- The use of details such as timbers, stones, and beams shall be considered.
- Do not use pasted on details that do not reflect internal pattern of building or are not proper use of materials. Do not use façade appliques as a method to modulate the façade. Exterior materials, massing, modulation, etc., shall relate to the indoor function and use of the structure.



**Fig. 13** Variation in rooflines, slope, and plane are very desirable for providing character to a commercial structure.

### 11.5.8 Roofing

Roofing is a significant design feature. The form, height, color, pattern, materials, configuration and massing of the roof contribute to the success of a structure. Roof mass and form shall be consistent with the scale and proportions of the building as well as the architectural character (see Fig 13 above). Use roof materials and patterns that are appropriate to the overall character and form of the building.

- No more than two roof types in a single structure i.e. a primary and secondary roof type.
- Roof materials visible from the street (i.e. sloped roofs), shall be harmonious in texture, color, and material with other building materials.

### 11.5.9 Mechanical and Service Areas

Mechanical, electrical, and communications equipment such as heating and cooling units, transformers, control boxes, and antennas shall not be located on primary facades.

- Rooftop mechanical units are desirable where possible, and shall be screened from view with integrated architectural elements (walls, parapets, etc.).
- Meters, stacks, and service pipes shall be located conveniently for service and use, but not on primary façades.
- Loading docks shall be located near parking facilities, in alley ways or on side streets, and designed or screened in a way that minimizes their visual impact.

### 11.5.10 Access Management Recommendations (Entrance/Exits):

NOTE: All developments in the town of Whitsett are subject to the North Carolina DOT (Department of Transportation) regulations as well as the town of Whitsett ordinance. The DOT regulates and issues the permits for Access Management (Entrance/Exits).

New non-residential developments located adjacent to each other shall be required to provide cross access so that parking lots and driveways are connected.

- Encouraging cross-access between adjacent developments reduces the number of vehicles that are required to re-enter the major roadway. Keeping the additional turning traffic off the major roadway improves its efficient and safe operation.

Minimum lot frontages shall be required for non-residential developments.

- The access management standards recommended in Table 1 of this report include a 400-foot spacing between non-residential driveways. In order to enforce this spacing, adjacent commercial properties would need to have well over 200 feet of frontage. Encouraging minimum frontage will keep driveways from being spaced too closely.

Larger developments such as shopping centers shall be required to provide access to outparcels.

- Providing cross-access to outparcels encourages internal traffic circulation and keeps unnecessary turning traffic off major roadways.

Implement right turn deceleration lanes for developments generating significant peak hour traffic as determined through the site access/traffic impact study process.

- Right turn deceleration lanes minimize the effect of slowing traffic that is exiting the traffic stream on the major roadway. This improves safety and keeps the major roadway operating at speeds that are more desirable. Where deemed necessary, deceleration lanes shall be constructed within the property of the proposed development.

Right-in/Right-out only driveways shall be encouraged as secondary access for non-residential developments.

- When a development requests more than one driveway, the feasibility of a right-in/right-out driveway as a secondary access needs to be evaluated and encouraged.

For developments that have frontage on both a major road (major or minor thoroughfare) and a side street (local or collector), primary access via the side street shall be encouraged.

- Restricting major road access to service entrances or right-in/right-out driveways where side street access is available reduces the impact of turning vehicles on the major road. It may also eliminate the cost for a developer associated with constructing a deceleration lane on the major road.

## 11.6 Compliance With the Ordinance

- A) **Unsafe Structures:** Any structure which is unsafe or insecure, or is a menace to the public shall be removed after due notice by the Enforcement Officer has been given.

- B) **Deteriorated or Abandoned Structure:** Any structure which has been abandoned or which has not been properly maintained, shall be removed after due notice by the Enforcement Officer has been given.
  
- C) **Structures Erected Without Permit:** Any structure which has been erected in violation of the NC Building Code or in violation of this Ordinance shall be removed or brought into compliance after due notice by the Enforcement Officer has been given.

### **11.7 Enforcement**

See Article IX of the Whitsett Development Ordinance.

## II. Appendices

### I. Building Materials Reference List

The use of details and features that work well with the chosen primary and secondary building materials are most effective. Design buildings such that details are visually true and consistent with their materials of construction. Provided are requirements for:

- A. Brick
- B. Timbers
- C. Stone
- D. Stucco
- E. Siding/Cement fiber panels
- F. Concrete Block Masonry-split faced or decorative.
- G. Concrete Tilt Up Building
- H. Wood / cement fiber siding

#### *A. Brick*

Brick is a modular material and shall be used in a manner that achieves a sense of permanence and quality.

- Dimensions of facades and openings shall course out with brick modules where possible, to avoid small, cut pieces of brick.
- Trim with appropriate water table detail.
- Brick shall appear self-supporting and three-dimensional. Do not use wide spans (over 10') at openings.
- Use some form of header or lintel at all openings. These shall be deeper for wider spans.
- Use inset windows, brick jamb returns, and projecting sills at windows. Recess windows.
- Do not use pieces of wall that are less than one brick wide between openings, or less than two bricks wide at a corner.



**Fig 1.** Brick is a classic and timeless building material.

- Use the range of decorative patterns brick offers. Use combinations of soldiers, headers, stringers, etc. to form patterns that create cornices, wall caps, water tables, and other details. Use patterns in a manner consistent with the material.

### *B. Timbers*

Wood beams or exposed logs can be used to add to the architectural appeal of the building. This type of treatment is often seen in Craftsman style construction.

- Used as decoration over porches and windows and other overhangs.

### *C. Stone*

Stone is a substantial material rooted in the land. Stone and stone panels must be used in a manner that appears self-supporting and three-dimensional in order to feel genuine.

- Do not use wide spans (over 10') at openings.
- Do not use narrow pieces of stone wall less than 1' wide between openings, and less than 2' wide at corners.
- Take care in the detailing and construction to create a believable corner.
- Keep mortar joints consistent in width to match apparent breaks between stones with breaks in modules.
- Show some form of header or lintel at all openings. Wider spans shall utilize deeper headers and lintels.
- Use inset windows, stone jamb returns, and projecting sill at windows.

#### *D. Stucco*

Stucco is traditionally a rough ‘plaster type’ finish coat over masonry walls. Use in a simple manner over large planar wall surfaces.

- Stucco turns corners without need of trim, so keep clean lines at the corners.
- Emphasize the material with broad overhangs, deep recesses at openings, and delicate details such as thin metal rails.
- Do not use narrow pieces of wall at corners or between windows.
- Create points of emphasis to provide contrast to stucco walls. Use slight changes in plane, changes in texture (walls vs. trim), or inset panels of contrasting finish and color (ceramic tile).
- Use appropriate scoring joints to create smaller panels that allow for natural expansion and contraction without unnecessary cracking. Joints shall tie in with natural breaks or openings where cracks might naturally develop.

#### *E. Wood Siding / Cement Fiber Panels*

Siding is traditionally a lightweight material over a frame structure. If using a cement-based product, choose those with a genuine appearance and use an authentic manner when detailing.

- Do not use vinyl, plywood, or pressboard siding.
- Critical details, both visually and functionally, are joint sealings at corners, soffits, openings, and between siding pieces.
- Combinations of trim, fascia, subfascia, soffits, eaves and rakes protect the vulnerable joints in a building that is sided. Work to create a functional, unified, and harmonious family of these details.
- Ensure that the scale of details is appropriate to the function.
- Apply details consistently on all sides of the building.
- Stagger vertical joints in horizontal pieces of siding.
- Do not use small sections of siding between openings and at corners.
- Use a base to protect sided walls from the elements. Masonry bases are preferred.
- Provide an attractive and functional transition to the base.

#### *F. Decorative Concrete Block Masonry*

A modular material used in a similar manner to brick or cut stone. Many different textures and sizes are available.

- Dimensions of facades and openings shall course out with the block modules where possible, to avoid small cut pieces of block.
- Use a stain or color finish for visible areas.
- Consider the use of patterns to enhance the building; create cornices, wall caps, water tables, and other details using patterns.
- Accent with detail blocks of different texture/finish.
- Use inset windows.
- Do not use pieces of wall that are less than one block wide between openings, or are less than two blocks wide at corners.
- Large sections of smooth faced, plain block in highly visible areas is not permitted.

#### *G. Concrete tilt up buildings*

A Tilt-up is a building constructed of concrete panels, commonly used for commercial or industrial facilities, such as; office buildings, warehouses, retail centers, manufacturing facilities, etc. Large concrete panels are typically poured on site and raised by a crane in place to form the exterior walls of the building.

- It is strongly recommended that stamped, stained, or textured panels be used to add character and appeal to the building. Plain, blank panels over large expanses of wall will not be permitted.
- Wainscot is also recommended to break of the façade.
- Use change of color or change of material to break up large walls of cement.
- Plain cement panels without decorative features are not permitted.
- Windows can also be used to add character and break up the wall area.

### III. Glossary of Architectural terms

Readers of this document may find several descriptive architectural terms with which they are not familiar. This glossary of terms is provided to give simple definitions of words used throughout this text.

**ARCH** -A structural element designed to support the weight above an opening. A true arch consists of wedge-shaped stones or bricks that make a curved bridge spanning an opening.

**BAY WINDOW** -A window that projects from the outer wall, extending the floor space and creating an alcove in the interior space.

**CORNICE** -The projecting member at the top of a wall or roof trim.

**COLUMN** -A vertical round shaft that supports, or appears to support, a load.

**EAVE** -The edge of a roof that projects over the outside wall.

**FACADE** -The front or principal face of building; any side of a building that faces street or other open space.

**FRAME** -The part of an encasement of an opening supporting a door or window. Also, a method of building construction employing a skeletal system of several repetitive structural components, as in wood-frame or steel-frame, or the work of constructing such a system.

**LINTEL** -A supporting beam placed over a door, window or other opening; usually visible and of a contrasting material from the wall surface.

**MUNTIN** -A small piece of wood or metal in a window sash holding in place and separating one piece of glass from another.

**PARAPET** -A low wall at the edge of a roof, porch, or terrace.

**PITCH** -The degree of slope or inclination, as in the steepness of a roof.

**PLASTER** -A wall finish material, usually made of lime gypsum or cement, sand and water, applied in a plastic state with or without a heavy texture, to exterior or interior surfaces.

**SASH** -The movable frame holding glass in a window opening.

**STUCCO** -Plaster for exterior walls.

**SURROUND** -Ornamental trim or casing surrounding a door or window opening.

**WAINSCOT** – Wood, stone, brick or stucco paneling or some other decorative material that is applied to the lower section of a wall and may extend around the entire facade.

**IV. Color Palette**

