

## 109 Main Street: *Gradually Transforming a Commercial Corridor*

by Randall Arendt

*Location:* 109 Main Street (US Rt., 202 and Maine Rt. 25), Gorham, ME

*Developer:* Great Falls Construction Company, Gorham, Maine

*Architect:* Evan Carroll, Bild Architecture, Portland, Maine

*Date:* 2015

This project is notable because it replaced an unattractive single-story building with a well-designed two-story structure and strengthened the physical character of this Main Street commercial corridor (US Rt. 202 and Maine Rt. 25) with its relatively close proximity to the street. The center of this Maine town of about 17,300 is in transition, with newer commercial buildings located closer to Main Street and served by rear parking, but where many older developments continue to present large open parking to the street.

This project continues a town-led trend toward siting new buildings closer to Main Street and locating parking to the rear, as exemplified by Key Bank, Norway Savings Bank and the Gorham Savings Bank. These developments stand in sharp contrast to the RiteAid pharmacy constructed two decades ago, in 1998, which typified commercial design at that time, with considerable street frontage dominated by asphalt (parking and driveways).

Located at a major intersection on a previously underutilized one-acre site in front of a large parking lot serving a supermarket behind it, 109 Main helps to establish a more village-like character on this property, similar to those presented by the new banks. Even many of the details are very authentic, such as brick foundations, three-inch exposure clapboards, and copper flashing. Situating the parking to the rear and sides helps to mitigate the visual impact of the necessary asphalt as seen from Main Street, and is a design feature required in the Urban Commercial District. Gorham takes the building/street relationship seriously, and rejected requests (from prior applicants) to locate the driveway between the new building and Main Street.

The architecture of this design-build project blends many traditional New England stylistic elements, from clapboards and wood shingle siding to dormers and gables (which successfully disguise the mostly flat roof). Containing about 11,000 square feet of floorspace, the ground floor is divided into four rental areas ranging from approximately 1,300 to 1,500 square feet for restaurant and retail uses, with roughly

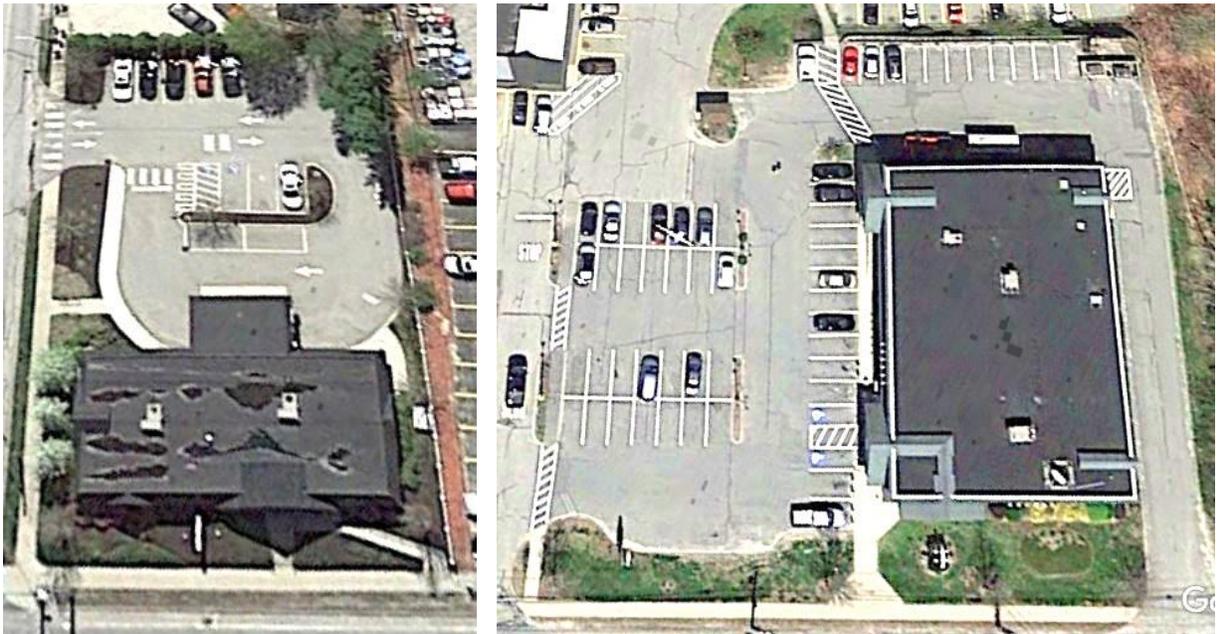


**Figure 1:** The new building at 109 Main Street adds height and regional architectural character to this highly visible site.

5,000 square feet above. Tenants include a Subway sandwich shop, an Aroma Joe's coffee/donut shop, and a nail salon. The upper level, not yet occupied, has been designed for either office or residential use. (It had originally been planned to remain vacant or used for storage until the ground-floor tenants established themselves and the developer could assess the parking situation.) Although all shops in the new building have entrances at both front and back, the rear doors closest to the parking lot are the most commonly used. However, access to the front doors is provided by a sidewalk required by the town.



**Figure 2:** The rear of the building, facing south (left above) is virtually identical to the front (facing Main Street) and is where most customers access the shops. The drive-through area on the western side (above right) maintains a visibility easement from Main Street required by the supermarket located behind the property.



**Figure 3:** The importance of requiring the long axis of new buildings to be parallel to the street is illustrated above. The new Rite Air pharmacy (above right) could easily have been required to do so and to buffer its parking from the street, as did Norway Savings Bank (above left). National chains often respond only to strong, clear language in local codes, and frequently

pay only lip service to municipal requests that buildings screen rear parking. Side parking, as at Rite Aid, typically open the street to large expanses of asphalt, thwarting the creating of any town-like physical character to the streetscape.



**Figure 4:** Two other new banks along the Main Street highway corridor stretch across the majority of their frontages, minimizing the visual impact of their parking lots. Gorham Savings bank on left, Key Bank on right).