



Downtown Development Review Overlay

Principles and Guidelines

OBJECTIVE

(With references to the Ordinance, LMCO 162.01- Downtown Overlay)

The Downtown Development Review Overlay was established by the City of Louisville Board of Aldermen in 1992 as a recommendation of the 1990 Downtown Plan. According to the Board, and again Metro Council in 2007, the Overlay's specific task is to preserve, conserve and protect the "historical, cultural, architectural, aesthetic or other distinctive areas" of Downtown by reviewing proposed developments in accordance with established principles and guidelines addressing elements such as "building setbacks along streets, open space, off-street parking, landscaping, paving, lighting and streetscape furnishings, fences and walls, signage and public amenities and, in addition, elements of urban design such as building and street wall character, and building mass and form."

The guidelines are not intended to discourage development or to dictate architectural design or style, but to encourage such development that contributes to the overall design quality of the Downtown and each district.

They are intended to promote compatibility of new development with existing land use and design features, to enhance the Downtown's visual quality, to preserve the Downtown's commercial character with a pedestrian friendly environment and to strengthen the economic vitality of Downtown by encouraging new investment and further business, residential, and commercial development in appropriate locations in Downtown.

All development proposals within the Overlay shall comply with applicable guidelines however a proposal that does not conform to one or more specific guidelines may be approved by the Committee or its staff if they determine that the proposal is in conformance with the intent of the guidelines as a whole.

The principles and guidelines of the Downtown Development Review Overlay expand upon the requirements of the Land Development Code as necessary to achieve the objectives of these facets of urban design in recognition of a project's specific location.

Principle 1- Site Planning

Objective

Each downtown site lies within a specific neighborhood, adjacent to specific traffic corridors and intersections, and: may be adjacent to areas of different intensity of development; may be near public open spaces; may be near historic and/or significant structures; and may contain historic and/or significant structures. These basic issues should be evaluated for the project site and considered at the earliest stages of concept development.

Design Guidelines

1. Building placement and orientation. It is intended that Downtown develop as an urban environment with a consistent, animated streetwall which defines a physical area that is friendly, active, and safe for the public. Generally speaking new construction should build to the front property line and extend the width of the property. Corner properties should be built to both frontages. Properties with 3 or more frontages should give consideration to the relative character of the frontages and focus development accordingly- primary consideration should be given to orientation toward major thoroughfares.
2. Public space. Setbacks from the property line may be considered provided the setback area is developed as a Public Open Space and amenity or as a location for exterior activity related to ground floor usage of the buildings, such as outdoor dining or retail. Consideration should be given for providing Public Open Space on sites that align with other significant urban elements such as open spaces or vistas, significant neighboring structures or public institutions, axis or terminus of the street grid.
3. Preservation of Existing Structures. Existing structures that are identified locally or nationally as having significant historic character should be retained and incorporated into new development. Modifications to these structures shall be in accordance with the latest edition of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. No application to demolish these structures shall be approved unless the applicant is able to demonstrate that: a) rehabilitation of the structure or its replacement will have a greater positive impact on the economic vitality of the district than preserving the existing structure and that the construction of the new structure would not be possible or economically feasible without the demolition of the existing structure; or b) that the applicant cannot obtain a reasonable economic return from the property or structure unless the existing structure is demolished. Development within the West Main Street local preservation district shall be reviewed by the Historic Landmarks and Preservation Districts Commission.
4. Site Access. Careful consideration should be given to vehicular site access, on-site circulation, parking, and sufficient access for storage and collection of waste and recycled materials to minimize impacts to the street wall, pedestrian environment, and the streetscape. Consideration should also be given for other types of access such as pedestrian, public transit, and bicycle.

Principle 2- Building Massing

Objective

Develop an architectural concept and compose the major building elements and massing to reinforce desirable urban features in the surrounding area and district. Compose the massing of the building to create transition to the height, bulk, and scale of development in nearby less intensive zones.

Design Guidelines

1. Arrange the mass of the building in response to the following as applicable:
 - a. Distinct and noteworthy characteristics of the district/neighborhood
 - b. Adjacent landmark or noteworthy building
 - c. Major public entity or institution nearby
 - d. Neighboring buildings that have employed distinctive and effective massing compositions.
 - e. Public views and vistas
 - f. Potentially negative micro-climate issues such as extensive shadows and urban wind effect.
2. Compose the massing of the building to relate strongly to nearby buildings and create a transition to the height, bulk, and scale of development in nearby less-intensive zones. Buildings on zone edges should be developed in a manner that creates a step in perceived height, bulk, and scale between the development potential of the adjacent zones. Factors to consider in analyzing potential height, bulk, and scale impacts include:
 - a. Distance from a less intensive district edge
 - b. Differences in development standards between abutting neighborhoods
 - c. Type and amount of separation between districts, i.e. property line, alley or, street.
3. Design a well proportioned and unified building. Compose the massing and organize the interior and exterior spaces to create a well-proportioned building that exhibits a coherent architectural concept. Design the architectural elements and finish details to create a unified building, so that all components appear integral to the whole.
4. The building composition should include a well-defined base at the pedestrian level that fits well into its context. As a general minimum the base should be 2 to 3 stories.
5. To allow adequate light and air to reach the street level, high-rise buildings (over 14 stories) should generally:
 - a. Be located about 100 feet from other high-rise buildings within the same block.
 - b. Have upper stories which are progressively narrower; the higher the story, the narrower.
6. Rooftops should not look cluttered from any pedestrian vantage point. All mechanical or utility equipment should be well-integrated into the overall design.

Principle 3- Building to Context

Objective

A certain amount of architectural diversity is expected in any downtown. However, buildings should be “good neighbors” by relating well to the common patterns of windows, entrances, cornice lines and column spacings around them and reinforcing the overall character of their immediate surroundings. Develop an architectural concept and compose the major building elements to reinforce desirable urban features in the surrounding context and district.

Design Guidelines

The exterior of any new construction or alteration should be designed and detailed to fit in with its architectural surroundings. Exteriors should:

1. Be compatible with the general character of nearby buildings in terms of façade organization, materials, finishes, scale of detail, and respecting established horizontal and vertical elements and spacing in the nearby context such as cornice lines and pier/column spacing.
2. Reinforce the character of nearby buildings having historic or architectural significance by developing designs that respect established cornice lines, horizontal and vertical façade organization, and massing of historic buildings in the context.
3. Follow the rehabilitation standards in the latest edition of the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation whenever historic or architecturally significant structures are to be altered, expanded, or when new construction is to occur adjacent to such structures.

Reference: SOI Standards for Rehabilitation

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive material, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary or physical evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic material, features, size, scale, and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environments would be unimpaired.

Principle 4- Building to Pedestrian

Objective

People should have strong visual connections to buildings as a strong building-to-pedestrian relationship helps make downtown feel more inviting and active 24 hours a day. Therefore develop the street level of the building's exterior to create safe, inviting, and active environments and spaces to engage pedestrians. These environments are defined by the uses that occur within them, physical space for them to occur, and articulation of the physical surroundings.

Design Guidelines

1. Where sidewalk width is limited consider setting portions of the building back slightly to create spaces conducive to pedestrian-oriented activities.
2. Articulate the building façade to provide an engaging pedestrian experience with design elements such as open shop-fronts or arcades, multiple entries, merchandising and display windows, street front open space with artwork or furniture, awnings, signage, and light fixtures. In some instances raised landscaped beds may be appropriate. As a general rule 50 percent of the wall surface at the sidewalk level should be transparent, utilizing glazing that is not highly tinted or reflective.
3. Utilize building materials characteristic of the area having texture, color, pattern, and a higher quality of detailing.
4. Variations on the façade plane such as inset entries, building piers, and other details can assist in providing relief to long expanses of building wall.
5. Building entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street. Principle building entrances should face the street. Entrances should be inviting and easily accessible. They should have a high level of articulation and be well-lit. Canopies or awnings provide protection from the weather.
6. Changes in sidewalk material aid in defining exterior spaces and entryways.
7. Develop alley facing facades at least one bay into the alley to eliminate harsh contrasts in the street wall. Provide adequate lighting at alleys to enhance visibility and safety. Design alley access points for vehicles with appropriate lighting and signage for quick orientation by motorists and safety for pedestrians.
8. Exterior lighting should be designed to be visually integrated into the exterior design of the building. Lighting should be designed to provide illumination that creates a greater sense of activity, security and interest to the pedestrian.

Principle 5- Parking, Vehicular Use and Access

Objective

Parking garages, surface parking, and vehicular use areas should have the same qualities and characteristics as any other downtown developments. They should relate strongly to their context, reinforce the urban streetwall, and be designed to promote comfort and safety for pedestrians.

Design Guidelines

- 1) **Parking Garages.** A parking garage visible from the street should be integrated into its surroundings and provide active and inviting street level appearance. The garage should:
 - a. Follow all Principles and Guidelines for building and site design.
 - b. Minimize the use of ramped floors visible from the street.
 - c. Openings and entrances should be in scale with people. Parking garage entries shall be minimized in size but fully articulated as an opening in the structure. Pedestrian entrances should also be fully articulated.
 - d. Screen parked cars from pedestrian view.

- 2) **Surface Parking Lots and Vehicle Use areas.** Generally speaking, development of downtown sites solely as surface parking lots or vehicle use areas is discouraged due to their negative impact on the street wall, streetscape, and pedestrian-friendly character of downtown. Specifically, demolition of buildings for development of new surface parking lots is discouraged. Surface parking and vehicle use areas elsewhere, when deemed appropriate, should adhere to the following:
 - a. Surface parking and vehicle use areas should not create gaps along the street and sidewalk. They should be fully screened from pedestrian view through a combination of solid building-like elements such as colonnades, decorative fencing, and dense decorative landscaping intended to continue the street wall. Dense landscaping intended for screening should be 3' high at time of planting and maintained to properly screen vehicular uses yet be low enough to maintain visibility and safety. The screening may also be an opportunity for Public Art.
 - b. Provide adequate interior landscaping, especially shade trees.
 - c. When associated with a principal structure on the same site, surface parking, loading, and waste/recycling storage and collection areas shall be located fully behind the principal structure on the site.

- 3) **Vehicular access and design.**
 - a. Curb cuts and vehicular access shall be designed in conformance with the Access Management Standards and Design manual within the Land Development Code and appropriate Metro agencies.
 - b. Vehicular access should be designed to minimize conflicts between cars and pedestrians.
 - c. Access from the alley shall be utilized to the fullest extent possible. Where the alley is unimproved or of insufficient width or length for the new development it shall be improved as part of the project for viable use.

- d. Existing curb cuts that are not proposed to be re-used should be removed and replaced with walk and curb compatible with the current standard design for that location.
- e. Existing curb cuts to be re-used should be minimized in width and number to the fullest extent possible.
- f. Driveways should be located to be shared with adjacent properties whenever possible.
- g. Driveways and vehicular entrances should not occur in dominant locations on the site.
- h. Provide adequate directional information for motorists.

Principle 6- Open Space

Objective

New public open space, exterior and interior, should be located and designed to relate strongly to pedestrians and its built context. Design public open spaces to promote a visually pleasing, safe, and active environment for workers, residents, and visitors. Views and solar access from the principal area of the open space should be especially emphasized.

Design Guidelines

1. Generally open spaces should be oriented to receive maximum sunlight and taking advantage of views to the surrounding context.
2. To maximize the impact of the open space without degrading the streetwall character of downtown exterior open spaces should:
 - a. Be located 100 feet away from other open spaces and intersections
 - b. Be no wider or deeper than 100 feet
3. To create the best environment for public enjoyment new open spaces should:
 - a. Create a comfortable and inviting place to rest
 - b. Provide clear visual and physical access from the public way
 - c. Provide plenty of seating (about 1 linear foot for every 30 square feet of paved open space)
 - d. Provide sufficient lighting for safe evening use
 - e. Utilize fountains or other water features
 - f. Use plant materials that are colorful, appropriately sized, and attractive year round
 - g. Incorporate public art in accordance with Principle 9.

Principle 7- Street and Sidewalk Character

Objective

Downtown streets and sidewalks should be safe and attractive for both cars and pedestrians. Getting from one place to another should be a pleasant, comfortable, and rewarding downtown experience.

Design Guidelines

1. Developments involving new construction and or modifications to existing curb and sidewalk along the frontage(s) of the site should include improvements to the streetscape including sidewalk and curb in accordance with the current standards for that street and the Street and Road Side Design Standards of the Land Development Code.
2. Street furnishings. Street furnishings including but not limited to benches, news racks, bicycle racks, and trash containers shall conform to the standards established by the Downtown Streetscape Manual.
3. Lighting- Street lighting for public streets shall conform to the standards established by the Downtown Streetscape Manual. On-site lighting should also be compatible with street lighting standards.
4. For the sake of visual continuity trees shall be planted in the right-of-way every 25' to 35' along the curb line in order to create a continuous canopy. Tree species and caliper and planting area shall conform to the standards established by the Downtown Streetscape Manual. A mix of ornamental and shade trees should be planted outside the right-of-way for both shade and visual variety.
5. Pedways. The pedestrian environment is substantially impacted by the actual number of pedestrians engaging in activity on the street level. Generally speaking, the more pedestrians engaging in activity at street level the more the streetscape environment feels active, inviting and safe. Overhead pedestrian walkways (pedways) have real potential to negatively impact the street level environment by removing pedestrians from it. Overhead pedestrian structures therefore are generally discouraged. When a pedway is deemed to be appropriate, it should:
 - a. Be designed to be architecturally compatible with the design of the structures at each end.
 - b. Have articulated street level access or clear direction to access points for pedestrians.
 - c. Provide entry points within each building that are comparable to street level entrances like lobbies that are attractive and have clear directions to internal circulation elements and other internal uses.
 - d. Give consideration for views underneath including material finish and lighting.
 - e. Not have permanent signage.

Note:

1. These guidelines are in addition to the streetscape guidelines of the Department of Public Works and Assets, the Metro Arborist, and the Land Development Code.
2. Project features developed as public amenities should also be designed in conformance with Metro Louisville Complete Streets Manual, October 2007, which promotes the design of transportation corridors that are safe and convenient for pedestrians, cyclists, motorists and bus riders of all ages and abilities.

Principle 8- Signage

Objective

Design signage appropriate for the scale and character of the project and the immediate context. Signs should be oriented to pedestrians and/or persons in vehicles on streets in the immediate vicinity.

Design Guidelines

1. Signage should add visual interest at street level without being overwhelming.
2. Signage should be organized to increase legibility and communication while reducing visual clutter.
3. Signage should be designed and attached to the building in a way that is complementary to the style of the building and its unique design features.
4. Back-lit or internally illuminated signage should have opaque, non-illuminated face panels. Only the individual letters and/or logos should be illuminated.
5. Changing image (such as LED scrolling type signage) and video display signage is very dynamic and should be carefully designed to minimize impacts to adjacent residential uses.
6. Rooftop signage is not allowed. Signage attached to the upper portions of a building may be considered provided it is complementary to the style of the building.
7. Freestanding signage should be limited to portable sidewalk signage or monument style directory signage associated with a public plaza in front of a building. The public plaza shall fully conform to Principle 6- Open Space. Free standing pole-mounted signage is not allowed.
8. Existing signage that does not conform to the current codes is encouraged to be removed or modified to conform to current requirements of the Land Development Code. Non-conforming signage that has been abandoned for a period exceeding 1 year shall be removed. Existing signage that is historic or possesses a character unique to downtown may be considered to remain.
9. Outdoor advertising signs (billboards) are discouraged, but where permitted by zoning regulations should:
 - a. Block no views or vistas nor create a cluttered appearance.
 - b. Be integrated into the design of a building or project.
 - c. Relate strongly to the character of the district.
10. Signage proposals for entertainment attractions within the Downtown Entertainment District and not otherwise permitted by the Land Development Code may be approved by the Committee. Review of such signage shall follow the review procedures outlined for waivers of the Land Development Code listed in Chapter 11 of the Code. Applicant shall adequately demonstrate to the Committee that:
 - a. The waiver will not adversely impact adjacent property owners; and
 - b. The waiver will not violate the Comprehensive Plan; and
 - c. The extent of the waiver of the regulation is the minimum necessary to afford relief to the applicant; and
 - d. Either:

1. The applicant has incorporated other design measures that exceed the minimums of the district and compensate for non-compliance with the requirements to be waived (net beneficial effect); or
2. The strict application of the provisions of the regulation would deprive the applicant of the reasonable use of the land or would create an unnecessary hardship on the applicant.

Principle 9- Public Art

Objective

Public Art is the continuously growing record of the community's identity, creativity, values, and its highest aspirations. Physically, Public Art is an element or installation of art- temporary or permanent- placed on public or private property including building exteriors and outdoor public areas for enjoyment by all. Incorporation of public art elements in downtown development is highly encouraged.

Design Guidelines

1. Public Art should be available for the enjoyment and enrichment of all the people within the community. Inclusion of a meaningful allowance for the commissioning of public art in the planning and construction for all significant building projects is encouraged.
2. The public art planning and selection process should begin at the onset of individual projects. It should be designed, executed to integrate the artwork with the overall project and aesthetically enhance the urban environment.
3. Public Art proposals should conform to the design guidelines and master plan established by the Mayor's Committee for Public Art (MCOPA). The MCOPA guidelines and master plan recognize Public Art's potential to:
 - a. Demonstrate Louisville's values of community and creativity
 - b. Stimulate economic growth and investment
 - c. Encourage public education by improving cultural literacy
 - d. Contribute to Louisville's identity
 - e. Bridge cultural and social barriers
 - f. Provide community cohesion
 - g. Energize public spaces in the urban environment
 - h. Enhance new and existing development
 - i. Provide local opportunities for talented regional, national, and international artists
 - j. Contribute to Louisville as a tourist destination
 - k. Leave a legacy for the future