



Terre Haute Vigo County *Comprehensive Plan*

HNTB

Appendix G: Physical Appearance

APPENDIX G: Policy Development, Physical Appearance

The number one issue identified by the planning team and the public in is related to the physical appearance of the community. These concerns relate primarily to the cleanliness, visual clutter, and lack of attractiveness in Vigo County and Terre Haute. A focus on urban design strategies, in addition to general community clean-up and maintenance programs, is aimed to change this image.

General clean up and maintenance programs address more immediate concerns in the community such as littering and street sweeping. These programs are important to improving the self-image and sense of public responsibility of the community. They are programs that generally need to be maintained over time to ensure their effectiveness, even as the City and County engage in the larger scale appearance projects related to urban design.

Urban design includes a range of options, not all communities embrace all urban design elements, and the extent to which a community chooses to implement urban design also varies from element to element, from community to community. The level of implementation is based on the political will to embrace a strategy, the funding resources available and willingness to commit financial resources, and the local attitude toward improving the visual character of the community.

A few neighborhoods in Terre Haute have recognized the importance of urban design in their planning efforts. There is a 7th Avenue streetscape plan that has been developed for that downtown corridor. Additionally, the 13th Street Corridor neighborhood revitalization strategy has designed gateways, key pedestrian/vehicle intersections, signage and lighting, and other streetscape elements.

What is Urban Design?

Urban design is the art of making places for people. It is how a place is put together, how it looks, feels, and functions. Urban design, when successfully integrated within a community, can help create lively places with distinctive character; streets and public spaces that are safe, accessible, pleasant to use and human in scale; places that inspire us because of the imagination and sensitivity of their designers.

"As long as people have built cities, we have tried to define the qualities that would make for the most ideal urban environment. In the first Century B.C., the Roman architect Vitruvius declared that great buildings required three virtues: Commodity, Firmness and Delight, or as we might say today, they must be functional, well-built, and attractive." Tyler Gibbs, Denver Director of Urban Design

Very much the same thing can be said about our cities today. They must function to serve our needs; they must be built to provide us lasting value, and they should be beautiful in a way that generates attraction and reflects pride.

Cities reflect urban design qualities by the way they are perceived and experienced. Where positive urban design outcomes have occurred, citizens continually value the result, sometimes not exactly knowing why they like an area or why it holds attraction. Communities utilize urban design to generate this attraction by implementing urban design practices as a “place-making” tool. It is when those aware of its role as a “place-making” tool begin to utilize it as such that urban design can successfully take root within a community. Where given priority status in a community, urban design becomes one of the single-most important elements in establishing a “sense of place.” When common community components such as landmarks, open spaces, greenways, gateways, or historic districts are considered as part of a larger urban design framework, the result is functional, valued, and attractive places that reflect the ideals of a community.

Urban design addresses many of the physical and spatial relationships that make up a place. For this reason, good urban design is often mistaken as the “icing on the cake.” In reality there are many complex relationships that have to be considered in the development of a well-designed place, including land use compatibility, building context, pedestrian orientation and scale, and the list goes on. But urban design is not solely dependent on these physical and spatial relationships it often reflects design themes and community characteristics. These character-defining elements include local architectural styles, local values, historic themes, natural heritage and community branding. Though less tangible than physical design elements, these themes and community characteristics can play a vital role in a community’s urban design identity.

Physical form and character are the direct result of recognizing the need for establishing a sense-of-place within a community. Urban design is more than just what we see as the final visible result of a place that has successfully engaged people. It involves deliberate actions to create a physical environment that meets social, economic, functional, environmental and aesthetic objectives. Some examples of these include development efforts and regulations that influence the urban design of a community such as Master Plans, Overlay Districts, Zoning Patterns, Ordinances, and Design Guidelines. Development efforts and planning regulations related to urban design are the forces that drive the final outcome of a healthy community.

Creating an urban design framework plan for a community is no simple task. It involves much collaboration between designers, policy makers, and the public to integrate aesthetic components into the overall framework of a community. The process begins with action steps and policies which when implemented are manifest in the design of a community’s physical elements, its physical organization, and its design themes.

Community Clean-up and Maintenance

The short-term appearance concerns of the public are related to the overall cleanliness of the community, street cleaning, and leaf removal services. Other appearance concerns are less direct, but are related to dilapidated, vacant, and abandoned buildings, which are directly addressed in the neighborhood development and redevelopment key concept.

There are ranges of programs that can be implemented to address these concerns. Several frequently adopted programs include:

- Neighborhood clean-up days sponsored by neighborhood associations (dumpsters, trash bags, and/or refreshments provided)
- City or town-wide clean-up days (similar to above but larger in scale), with dumpster provision included in waste management contract
- Hazardous material recycling/drop-off days (well publicized)
- Well publicized drop off locations for hazardous materials
- Regular tire recycling collection days (well publicized) or locations
- Well publicized locations for drop off of large items (such as appliances)
- On demand large-item pick up service
- Regularly scheduled large-item pick up service
- Street sweeping program that cleans event locations and routes following major events such as parades or street fairs
- Street sweeping program that addresses collectors and arterials on a regular basis
- Street sweeping program that ensures all public streets (including local) streets are addressed on a scheduled basis
- Leaf pick up program that ensures all neighborhoods have leaf pick up a minimum of twice each fall

These street sweeping and leaf collection programs should be integrated into the overall budget for the street department of each municipality and the county. Clean-up days with dumpster provision can be funded with private donations, through waste management contract provisions, or as a part of the general fund.

Large item disposal, hazardous material recycling/disposal, and tire recycling programs should be coordinated through the Solid Waste Management District.

Urban Design Framework

There is a spectrum of urban design components that make up the common denominators for a sophisticated, healthy community. Communities that give special attention to urban design are more likely

to maintain unique, attractive, and “people-friendly” environments that enhance their residents’ quality of life.

Good urban design reflects in the overall health of a community- by the way people value their cities and civic places. For the purpose of this plan, ten urban design elements have been defined as the most critical for maintaining a healthy and vibrant community in Terre Haute and Vigo County. These are:

- landmarks,
- pedestrian orientation and scale,
- building context,
- land use edges,
- open/public space,
- strong linkages, gateways,
- defined districts and neighborhoods,
- parking,
- and signage/ wayfinding.

Together, these elements make up the Vigo County-Terre Haute Urban Design Framework. These ten elements of the Urban Design Framework are described in the following sections:

Landmarks

Giving special consideration to developing places of meaning, high exposure, or symbolic importance in unique ways creates landmarks. Some examples of landmarks include structural elements, monuments, prominent public spaces, and even gathering areas.

Currently there are few landmarks throughout the County or City. The most notable local landmark in the region is the County Courthouse in Downtown Terre Haute. The French Neo-Baroque Style courthouse has long been a celebrated focal element throughout the County since it was completed in 1884. This building’s elaborate stone decoration, ornate columns, and oversized keystones; all constructed of Indiana limestone provide a focal element that exudes the rich heritage of the region. Although well cared for by its citizenry, the building itself has sat still amidst the changes that have occurred throughout the years, mostly resulting from the automobile-driven growth that has occurred around it. The courthouse deserves to be even more celebrated as the County’s most prominent landmark. It is possible to imbibe a new life into this historic landmark by treating the areas that surround it. This includes



Vigo County Courthouse



Enhanced sidewalk crossing

revitalizing views, plazas, open spaces, landscaping, sidewalks and pedestrian connections, lighting treatments, etc.

A range of options related to landmarks include:

- Maintaining the existing landmarks
- Preservation, rehabilitation, or renovation of existing landmarks
- Requiring architectural review for changes to public buildings and construction of new buildings of public prominence.
- Commissioning new landmark structures and features

Pedestrian Scale and Orientation

To create a high-level pedestrian friendly community, all spaces should be organized with the pedestrian experience as a main priority. This includes the integration of walks, pedestrian lighting, landscaping, enhanced signage, and crosswalks.

Terre Haute has many opportunities to improve its sense of pedestrian orientation and scale. In past years, high-level pedestrian networks of sidewalks supported by landscaping, street trees and ornamental lighting have become few and far between throughout both the City and County. However, some areas have made significant efforts to provide such an environment. One of the most notable examples in Terre Haute is the Indiana State University Campus. A comfortable pedestrian experience has been a priority at the University, and it is evident by the connectivity and sense of scale throughout the campus. This experience should be established as the norm rather than the exception in Vigo County by prioritizing pedestrian amenities throughout neighborhoods and downtown streets alike.

In addition to traditional sidewalks, Terre Haute currently has 5.8 miles of National Road Heritage Trail that follows the former Vandalia Railroad. When the phases are completed, Terre Haute will have a trail running through and one circling the City. This path system will link a number of places including the ISU campus, the Wabash River, North High School, Ohio Boulevard, Deming Park, and Dobbs Park. Once completed, this trail will establish highly networked pedestrian connections for both recreation and as an alternative form of transportation within the local community and beyond.

A range of options related to pedestrian orientation for walkways would be:

- Repair and replacement of broken or missing parts of existing sidewalks
- Completing the sidewalk network and requiring all new development to have sidewalk
- Development of a local trail system
- Development of a trail system that provides internal and external connections
- The level of street amenities such as lighting, signage, and street furniture also presents a range of options. Lighting

- options range from streetlights, to themed lighting, to pedestrian scale lighting options. Banners or wayfinding signage can enhance the pedestrian experience, as can street furniture such as trash receptacles, benches, and planters.

Building Context

To achieve a sense of overall harmony in the built environment, building context should be given special consideration. This can be accomplished by taking measures to preserve the character-defining qualities and attributes of a community or district and by ensuring that buildings are properly sited, and of the appropriate scale, bulk, and architectural character for the surrounding context.

Building context is one of the single-most important elements that can affect a community's overall image. Once a building is placed out of context or built out of scale, there is not that much that can be done to correct the visual implications.

Within the City of Terre Haute, building context has often been overlooked. This is especially true in the City's historic districts. Examples abound throughout the City, pointing to the fact that there is a need to ensure that new development is compatible with the old. Rezoning should not be passed in historic residential areas unless their occurrence is considered not to impact the framework of the existing neighborhood.

A range of options related to managing building context would be:

- Zoning standards for front and side setbacks, height restrictions, and bulk requirements
- Separate standards regarding setbacks, height, and bulk in addition to site plan review for special corridors or districts
- Architectural standards and architectural review for special corridors or districts

Land Use Edges

The treatment of land use edges is an important consideration when addressing adjacent non-compatible uses. Community image is strongly linked to the image along these land use edges. Therefore, it is important to create visual and functional relationships between non-compatible land uses and along corridors.

Sometimes edge treatments take the form of encouraging infill development in pockets of transitional areas where none has occurred. In other instances, corridors serve as the edge between two non-compatible uses such as business and residential districts. In these cases, opportunities should be explored to enhance these corridors with aesthetic treatments and landscape buffers. Planning for setbacks and screening can establish harmonious relationships, even between some of the most non-compatible uses.



Parking buffer

Land use edges have not been given high consideration in Terre Haute in past years. This is evident by a lack of buffering between non-compatible uses. Much of this is due to the fact that Terre Haute's Zoning Ordinance does not require buffering with high concentrations of plant materials.

A range of options regarding treatment of land use edges would include:

- Requiring buffering (distance or fencing) between incompatible land uses
- Landscaping requirements for buffer yards that require a significant amount of plant cover
- Flexible standards depending on the incompatible uses that are adjacent to one another

Public Open Space

The intent of developing parks as a priority urban design element is to transform existing parks, greenways, plazas and public gathering spaces and build new ones to form a community-wide integrated recreation system. The community should make it their objective to establish an integrated recreation system including plazas, neighborhood parks, community parks, and playgrounds that together form an overall open space system that is linked together by greenways.

Vigo County and Terre Haute have succeeded in implementing a number of parks and trails projects throughout the community. The result is a system of parks and recreational facilities with a high level of service that are well utilized and prided by the community including: plazas, neighborhood parks, community parks, and trails.

Terre Haute is home to 23 city parks of various sizes, from small block parks to neighborhood parks to community parks. In addition, the park system includes two municipal golf courses and three municipal swimming pools. One of the most exciting additions to the Terre Haute park system is the National Road Heritage Trail, representing the first of several greenway corridor trails that will ultimately comprise a corridor network for the City of Terre Haute, Vigo County, and west Central Indiana. The 5.8 miles that comprise the first phase of the trail have fast become a popular and much utilized area, for walkers, runners and skateboarders. When complete, this trail system will provide a network that will help to link together the open space system throughout the City of Terre Haute and beyond.

The Vigo County Parks Department also manages a variety of parks, nature preserves and amenities. These include Fowler Park and Wilderness Area, Prairie Creek Park, Hawthorn Park and JI Case Wetland Wildlife Refuge, Flesher Memorial State nature Preserve, Markle Mill Park, and some small neighborhood parks. These parks are a host to a variety of events. The community's strong legacy of providing exemplary park facilities should continue as they explore new means for providing recreational opportunities for their residents.



Festival public open space

A range of public and open space options would include:

- A park board and staff to manage public open spaces
- Adoption of a five year parks and recreation plan
- Planning and development of a trail system that connects parks and public spaces
- Well integrated network of trails, parks, and public spaces
- Strong Linkages

The establishment of strong linkages – both physical and visual- contributes to a strong sense of connectivity through a community. To create a strongly linked community, it is important to link people and destinations within a network of pedestrian and vehicular corridors, viewsheds, and open spaces.

Although pedestrian linkages have not been a top priority of the County or City in the recent past, the community is currently making great strides to launch the establishment of interconnected pedestrian corridors with the first completed 5.8 mile segment of the National Road Heritage Trail. This trail, along with the Fairbanks Park River walk, will establish a 7.25 mile greenway corridor, running parallel to U.S. 40, from eastern Vigo County, through the City of Terre Haute's central core, ending at the Wabash river.

The Terre Haute Department of Engineering, in partnership with the Department of Parks and Recreation, is also developing plans for a new urban boulevard and integrated bicycle/pedestrian trail. The trail is an expansion of the City's growing National Road Heritage Trail network. The Ohio Boulevard-Deming Park Pathway will utilize context sensitive design solutions to develop thematic design elements such as signature gateways and trailheads at various nodes including the National Road Heritage Trail and Deming Park. These nodes are important because they will establish a highly visible sense of a continuous linear park connecting eastside neighborhoods to open space resources. This project is the first of its kind in Terre Haute in many years. The project is a prime example of the integration of vehicular and pedestrian corridors into a cohesive plan that connects people and places- and its applications should be continued elsewhere as a means for establishing strong linkages throughout Vigo County and Terre Haute.

The Terre Haute / Vigo County Trails and Greenways Committee is currently involved in the development of a trails master plan. This plan includes an extensive system of trails, primarily in Terre Haute, that when implemented will help to form a community-wide integrated trail system.



Gateway sign



Streetscape enhancements

A range of options for strong linkages includes:

- An efficient roadway system with sidewalks that are internal to neighborhoods
- A roadway and sidewalk system with trails providing connections between pedestrian nodes
- A roadway, sidewalk, and trail system that includes public transit connections
- "Complete streets" that serve vehicles, bikes, pedestrians, and public transit

Gateways

A gateway is a landmark, streetscape or other area that a visitor or resident first sees when entering the city, a neighborhood, a cultural district, downtown or other destination. With gateways, the goal is to create entryways to the community, its districts, neighborhoods, and attractions that achieve a sense of arrival, contribute to a strong sense of community identity, and provide unique visual experiences.

In cities across the country, gateways take on a variety of forms. Historically, gateways that are most prominent within the community have been in the form of structural elements or objects that designate entry to a city or one of its districts, such as signs, sculptures, passageways, or architectural embellishments. Gateways may also be integrated into the way a city is built. Places such as corridors and even interchanges can be built to create unique celebratory gateways. A growing number of cities are working with landscape architects, architects, engineers, and artists to create visually rich gateways throughout the US and the State of Indiana. Some of these gateway applications include pedestrian and vehicular bridges, corridors, entries to the districts, and downtown gateways. All of these forms of gateways help make cities more interesting and unique places to live, work, and visit.

Terre Haute does not currently have a strong established network of gateways. There are few unique gateways in the City, one of which is the Gateway structure located at Ohio Boulevard and 25th Street. This gateway is a unique icon within the community that is rich in history and creates a sense of grand entry. There is a need to revive this value that was at one time placed on creating gateways in Terre Haute. This task has been accomplished by the Universities, which have made significant efforts to establish special gateways to their campuses.

The range of options for gateway signage is quite wide, some of the options include:

- "Street sign" style markers for districts and places of significance
- Requiring subdivision entrance signs, and encouraging neighborhoods to erect district signs
- Developing community gateway signs



St. Mary of the Woods gateway

- Developing a community gateway theme and carrying it throughout key corridors and districts

Defined Districts and Neighborhoods

Districts are an important component of the Urban Design Framework. Districts- characterized by special physical attributes, historical presence, or unique activities should be celebrated and given special definition within a community. Defined districts can enliven a City by helping to celebrate the unique characteristics of its individual areas.

Districts can have many positive impacts on a community, including an improved quality of life for residents in addition to bolstering the impacts of cultural tourism. Several distinct pockets of cultural opportunity already are already thriving in places throughout the City and County. These include the university districts: St. Mary of the Woods, Indiana State University, and Rose Hulman. They include the Downtown business district in addition to historic neighborhoods such as Farrington's Grove and Collett Park. Although well known to local residents, the districts of Terre Haute have not been clearly defined or celebrated by the community. The City has the opportunity to tap into these districts and to celebrate their unique individual qualities.

Defining districts and neighborhoods can be expressed in a number of ways:

- Neighborhood or district gateway signage
- Developing a neighborhood or district theme
- Developing specific design standards for each neighborhood or district
- Developing architectural standards for each district or neighborhood based on its unique identity or character

Parking

Parking lots should be given special consideration as not just a place to park. Rather, parking lots are places where people walk to and from destinations, and drive to and from. Lots should provide sufficient, accessible, and attractive parking conditions for those who use them.

Time spent in parking lots can be made much more pleasurable by the implementation of urban design standards. Parking should be screened along street frontage and softened with landscaping. When possible, parking lots should be considered for use as multi-purpose spaces such as markets, etc. In addition, shared parking should be encouraged between adjacent or vertically mixed uses whose peak demand is offset. These measures can help to limit the potential negative impacts that can be caused by too many parking lots.

Parking lots in Terre Haute has typically been developed without considerable efforts to visually soften or screen them. This has resulted in numerous open lots, and sometimes eyesores, along streets and



Wayfinding signage

corridors. This is partly the result of a lack of regulations related to parking in the Zoning Ordinance.

The City has recognized a growing need for parking. The new downtown-parking garage will help to provide for this growing need in a clean, compact, and reasonably affordable garage situated next door to the Terre Haute City Center.

A range of downtown parking options would include:

- Specialized parking lots for each structure
- Designated public parking areas
- Public parking garages
- Integration of public parking lots and garages with transit system
- Design standards for parking garages

Signage and Wayfinding

Signage often conveys the first impression of a community. Well-designed city signage systems consolidate various modes of information into common formats organizing district signage, directional information, and themes into a unified system that communicates a positive image of a place.

- Wayfinding can be applied to many situations, and is especially helpful when navigating a city. By enabling people to “find” their way through cities, wayfinding programs can aid in the use of public and private facilities, and help to provide access to goods and services for pedestrians and drivers. Because of their graphic nature, wayfinding signs can be utilized as more than just a means for displaying information; they are also a means of conveying themes and celebrating the identity of a community.

Private sign structures are regulated under the current Zoning Ordinance. These regulations are customized to individual district designations. Unfortunately, much of the problem with sign clutter in the City has occurred prior to the induction of these regulations. However, much can be done to improve the visual impacts of signage on the public side. Currently, the City and County have no unified signage system in place. A unified system of street signs, wayfinding signs, district signage, etc., would provide a common recognizable format of signage that could help to communicate a unique city identity.

A range of options for signage and wayfinding would include:

- Unified unique street sign system
- Directional signs to key locations
- Maps for pedestrian use
- Themed system integrating maps and directional signs

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