# 41st Street Commercial Revitalization District Design Guidelines

## 41ST STREET COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES

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## I. Design Guidelines—Basis and Intent

In 1994, the City of Birmingham, in cooperation with the 41<sup>st</sup> Street Business District, Inc. declared 41<sup>st</sup> Street, between Airport Highway and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, to be a Commercial Revitalization District (CRD). The CRD is based on the notion of creating a public/private partnership between the City and property owners along 41<sup>st</sup> Street. In this partnership, the City uses its resources to make street, sidewalks, drainage, lighting, and landscaping improvements, with the understanding that individual property owners will make improvements to their properties. Together, these public and private improvements create a more attractive, better-functioning street which will, in turn, attract more patrons to businesses along the street. The City began the revitalization process by drafting the 41<sup>st</sup> Street Commercial Revitalization Plan.

The adoption of the 41<sup>st</sup> Street Design Guidelines is the final step in the corridor becoming a Commercial Revitalization District. The guidelines that follow are based on the City of Birmingham's Standard Design Guidelines, with specific recommendations by members of the 41<sup>st</sup> Street Business District. The guidelines are based on the idea that the visual character of 41<sup>st</sup> Street—that is, how the corridor looks to passers by—is the primary means of conveying the overall image of the district.

These guidelines apply to the design of buildings, signs, parking lots, streetscapes, and alleys along the entire length of the 41<sup>st</sup> Street Corridor. The guidelines are meant to help property owners make changes to buildings and properties that create a neater, more attractive environment along 41st street. The guidelines acknowledge that the dual commercial and industrial nature of 41<sup>st</sup> Street results in buildings that are of vastly different ages, materials, setbacks, and conditions. The guidelines also recognize that the variety of land uses along 41<sup>st</sup> Street create many different spatial needs with respect to issues such as loading, parking and storage.

These guidelines are intended to be *minimum standards* for property maintenance, renovation, and new construction along the corridor. The language of the guidelines reflects that intention. The word "shall" is used throughout as a means to ensure that these minimum standards are at least consulted when renovation or new construction is being considered. At the same time, the City Design Review Committee fully recognizes that unique physical conditions in any built environment may make it impossible for a property owner to comply fully with guidelines. In such cases, property owners may appeal to the Design Review Committee, whose goal is to find practical, workable design solutions that satisfy both property owners and the intent of the Design Guidelines.

The guidelines are based on the following ideals:

*General.* Improvements and construction should reflect, but not attempt to copy precisely, the original commercial character of 41<sup>st</sup> Street. In implementing recent streetscape improvements along the 41<sup>st</sup> Street corridor, the City of Birmingham selected lighting fixtures, plantings, and street furnishings for use in public areas that reflect and enhance the commercial character of the street. The same care should be taken in the design and construction of private development and renovation.

*Lighting and Utilities*. Lighting has been selected with the original commercial character of the street specifically in mind.

Landscaping and Planting. Trees, hedges and seasonal plantings that are compatible with the commercial nature of 41<sup>st</sup> Street should be included in all public and private parking lots, both along the street edge and in the interior of the lots. Such planting should be urban in character, and have low maintenance requirements. The use of plant materials as visual screening is strongly encouraged.

*Parking Lots.* Access to all off-street parking lots, as well as at the entrances themselves, will be clearly identified along 41<sup>st</sup> Street. Public and private parking lots should be clearly organized and striped to maximize the accessibility of parking spaces. Trees should be used both within and around parking areas to reduce glare during the summer and soften the expanse of asphalt.

*Alleys*. Where trash containers are placed in the alley, they should be of a standard type and kept in confined spaces. Screen walls should be installed when the containers may be seen easily from the streets, a sidewalk, or a parking lot.

*Buildings*. All buildings along 41<sup>st</sup> Street should primarily address the street, although a secondary entrance may address either a rear or side parking area, alley or side street. In the commercial section of the street, between 5<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenues South, there should be very few freestanding buildings. Buildings in these blocks should be built to the property lines on the front and sides, or align with adjacent buildings to create continuity.

*Signs*. Signs along 41<sup>st</sup> Street should be simple and direct. They should be responsive and complementary to the architecture rather than the dominant feature.

*Facades*. All facades of buildings should be designed to help achieve a unifying character rather than "modernized" or made to artificially conform to a particular theme. Materials and colors should be selected from an overall palette compatible with those currently in use on 41<sup>st</sup> Street. Care should be taken that the street level storefront and the upper stories of a villages building reflect the same style.

## Goals for the 41st Street Commercial Revitalization District

Based on the statements above, the following are basic goals for the continued improvement of the 41st Street Corridor:

- Continue to implement the 41<sup>st</sup> Street Commercial Revitalization Plan to create a more attractive, better organized, safer street environment.
- Using physical improvements to buildings and rights-of-way, reinforce the mixed, commercial and industrial use character of 41st Street.
- Capitalize on the notion that 41st Street is a place to find good bargains.
- Enhance appearance and image of safety along 41<sup>st</sup> Street by screening, by removing barbed and razor wire, and installing attractive, secure fencing around salvage yards and industrial properties.
- Capitalize on economic opportunities along 41st Street by infilling vacant properties with commercial uses that draw people and contribute to the historic character of the district.

## II. Design Guidelines for Existing Buildings

## Building Fronts, Sides, and Rears Abutting Public Rights-of-Way

All structural or decorative elements of building fronts, sides, rears abutting and/or visible from streets or public rights-of-way shall be repaired or replaced to match as closely as possible the original materials and construction of that building. Rotten, deteriorated, or weakened elements shall be replaced. Repairs and replacements shall match as closely as possible the original.

#### Windows

Windows not located in the front of buildings shall be kept property repaired, or, with Fire Department approval, may be closed, in which case sills, lintels, and frames must be removed and the opening properly closed to be compatible with the adjacent wall.

All windows must be tight fitting and have sashes of proper size and design to be compatible and harmonious with the scale and character of the structure. Modernizations which reduce or enlarge window openings from the original or significantly enlarge window openings from the original or significantly change original fenestration are not permitted. Sashes with rotten wood and/or deteriorated metal, broken joints, or loose mullions or muntins shall be replaced. All broken and missing window glass shall be replaced with new glass or approved glazing materials.

Window openings in upper floors of the front of the building shall not be boarded up nor shall they be filled in without prior approval by the Design Review Committee. Window panes shall not be painted.

Ceilings, partitions, or other interior elements that terminate inside the window area and are visible through the window from the exterior shall be stopped short of the glass and the exterior edge, or shall be treated in such a manner so as not to be obvious from the exterior. Boxes, crates, or other storage materials shall not be stacked inside windows unless concealed by shutters, blinds, drapes, or other appropriate window covering.

Windows shall not be painted for advertising purposes, but may be painted for authorized identification of the place of business as authorized by the Design Review Committee and in accordance with the *Signs Section* of Part I of this document.

### **Storefronts**

A storefront shall include the building face, show windows, porches, entrance area leading to the door, sidelights, transoms, platform display devices, and include lighting and signage designed to be viewed from the public right-of-way.

Show windows, entrances, signs, lighting, sun protection, porches, security grilles, and other storefront elements shall be compatible and harmonious with the scale and character of the structure. All storefront elements must be located within 14 feet of grade unless original storefront elements exceeded 14 feet.

Show windows shall not be painted for advertising purposes, but may be painted for authorized identification of the place of business in accordance with the *Signs* section of Section II of this document.

Show window trim, mullions, or muntins not consistent or compatible with overall facade design shall be replaced or painted in a manner complementary to other storefront elements.

Glass in show windows and transoms shall be transparent, and may be clear, bronze, or gray tinted. Unless original to the building, translucent, opaque reflective or colored glass, other than gray, bronze, or tinted shall not be permitted.

Solid or permanently closed or covered storefronts shall not be permitted, unless treated as an integral part of the building facade using exterior wall material and window detailing compatible with the upper floors or other building surfaces. All damaged, sagging, or otherwise deteriorated storefronts, shop windows, entrances shall be repaired or replaced.

## **Awnings**

If compatible and harmonious with the scale and character of the structure and adjoining structures, soft, flameproof awnings are permitted over the first floor doors and windows only. Awnings are not permitted on upper floors above windows.

Awnings shall not project more than 7 feet from the building front, shall not be lower than 8 feet above grade, and shall terminate against the building at a height not to exceed 14 feet above pavement, except with prior approval of the Design Review Committee.

Rigid or fixed awnings or canopies are not permitted unless they are an integral part of the structure, constructed of materials similar to, compatible with, and harmonious with the scale and character of the structure and adjacent structures, and kept in good repair. New rigid or fixed awnings or canopies may be added to existing structures subject to restrictions outline above subject to review by the Design Review Committee.

#### **Exterior Walls**

Patched exterior walls shall match existing adjacent surfaces as to materials, texture, color, bond, and jointing. Unpainted masonry walls may be painted where necessary to conceal inappropriate material or patched wall coverings. Other unpainted masonry walls may be painted with the approval of the Design Review Committee. Existing painted masonry walls shall have loose paint removed and shall be painted a single color except for the trim, which may be another color. Samples of all proposed colors shall be submitted for approval to the Design Review Committee with proposed improvement plans.

Applied facing materials shall be treated as follows:

If original, materials shall be painted and/or repaired as necessary according to the minimum standards set forth in these guidelines. If not original and in need of significant repair, or not in harmony with the character of the building, they shall be removed to reveal the original exterior material, which shall be repaired as necessary or removed and replaced by new facing materials according to the minimum standards set forth in these guidelines, and as approved by the Design Review Committee.

Existing miscellaneous elements on the building fronts, such as empty electrical conduits, unused brackets, etc. shall be removed and the building surface repaired or rebuilt as required to match adjacent surfaces.

Sheet metal gutters, downspouts and copings shall be repaired or replaced as necessary and shall be neatly located, securely installed, painted to harmonize with the other building front elements, and maintained in good condition.

#### **Buildings Visible from Public Rights-of-Way**

If a building side or rear is exposed to view from a public way or public parking lot, the face of the building so exposed shall be improved and maintained in a manner consistent with these guidelines as necessary to avoid visually detracting from the area.

#### Mechanical Equipment

Individual room air conditioning units shall not be installed in front or side wall windows, if visible from streets or public improvements.

Through-wall air conditioning units may be installed, subject to prior approval by the Design Review Committee, provided that where they are visible from streets or public improvements,

the units do not project beyond any adjacent exterior face of the building, are properly screened and ventilated, and do not detract from the building character and appearance.

Where through-wall air conditioning units cannot be flush mounted, awnings may be used in order to make the units as unobtrusive as possible. In such a case, they must be compatible with the scale and character of the building and must be approved in advance by the Design Review Committee.

Grilles, louvers, vents, and other mechanical equipment and electrical items may be installed in or on exterior walls, where unavoidable and necessary for the function of the building, subject to prior approval by the Design Review Committee. Where visible from streets or public improvements, the necessary items shall be painted or otherwise made as unobtrusive as possible and shall not detract from the building character and appearance.

#### Roofs

Chimney, elevators, or other auxiliary structures on the roofs shall be repaired and cleaned as required in the section *Buildings Visible from Public Rights of Way*.

Any mechanical equipment placed on a roof shall be made as inconspicuous as possible from public view. Equipment shall be painted in manner to minimize its visibility or shall be screened with suitable elements of a permanent nature or finished so as to harmonize with the rest of the building.

Roofs shall be cleaned and kept free of trash and debris.

## **Auxiliary Structures**

Structurally deficient attached or unattached auxiliary structures which are and located at the rear of a primary building shall be repaired or maintained or may be demolished, subject to approval from the Design Review Committee.

#### **Loading and Service Areas**

Loading berths and service areas shall be screened from public rights-of-way by the use of landscape materials, walls, or fencing.

#### **Parking Areas**

Off-street parking area shall be designed as an integral part of the total site design, with careful regard to orderly arrangement, landscaping, and ease of access. Off-street parking areas, except at entrance ways, shall be separated from street or public rights-of-way by appropriate landscaping or screening.

Parking lots on corners are generally prohibited. The Design Review Committee may consider corner parking provided the applicant can show specific justification and the design of the lot is of superior quality, meeting all requirements established by the Zoning Ordinance, and incorporating maximum screening.

When a side or rear yard exists or is created through demolition, the owner may utilize the space for storage and loading or parking, provided the area is appropriately landscaped and/or screened from all adjacent streets, alleys, and public improvement areas.

Existing front yard parking areas shall be clearly defined as to ingress, egress, and internal circulation and must be appropriately screened by plant materials.

## **Storage Areas**

All outdoor storage shall be visually screened from streets, alleys, and adjacent property. Outdoor storage includes the parking of company-owned operative or non-operative vehicles or equipment, stockpiling or stacking of goods or materials, the placement of storage tanks, incinerators, or dumpsters. No storage shall be permitted between the property line and the building edge.

#### **Refuse Collection Areas**

All outdoor refuse collection areas shall be visually screened from 41<sup>st</sup> Street, alleys, and adjacent properties by a complete opaque screen. No refuse collection areas shall be permitted between 41<sup>st</sup> Street and the building line.

#### **Fences**

Fences must be compatible with the architecture of the building and the streetscape. Galvanized silver chain link fencing is prohibited; however the Design Review Committee may consider chain link fencing which is painted or coated in a dark color such as black or green. Where chain link fences are permitted by the Design Review Committee, they must be screened by plant materials.

Dark colored chain link fencing which provides some screening such as dark chain link fitted with dark opaque slats is an allowable method of screening.

The use of razor wire is strongly discouraged.

The use of barbed wire is strongly discouraged but where a real security need can be demonstrated to the Design Review Committee, up to three strands of barbed wire, attached to poles bent inward toward the property at a 45° to 60° angle may be permitted. The use of plant materials such as thorn or sticker bushes that discourage intruders and provide screening is strongly encouraged in lieu of barbed wire.

#### Signage

Total sign area (whether contained in a single sign or multiple signs) for a non-corner building is two times the *front* linear footage of the building. For example: if a building has a 25' frontage on  $41^{st}$  Street, the total sign area allowed for that building is  $2 \times 25' = 50$  square feet. Corner properties are limited to one sign face per building front. The total sign area allowed for both frontages of a corner property is two times the *shorter* building frontage, e.g. if the corner building is  $20' \times 40'$ , with the 20' side fronting on  $41^{st}$  Street, the total sign area allowed is  $2 \times 20' = 40$  square feet.

Sign content shall be limited to identification of the property or identification of the use conducted therein. Advertising by material or product manufacturers and suppliers other than the primary use of the property shall not be permitted.

All lighting elements such as wires, conduits, junction boxes, transformers, ballasts, switches, and panel boxes shall be concealed from view as much as possible.

Signs and displays for advertising or promotion are not permitted in public rights-of-way unless authorized by the Design Review Committee. In addition, persons desiring to erect any sign in public right-of-way must also secure required permits from the City of Birmingham.

Generally, projecting signs shall not be permitted on any portion of any building. Exceptions may be granted for historic signs or signs of unique graphic design which are less than 12 feet per face, subject to approval from the Design Review Committee.

Painted or sewn signs on awnings, existing marquees, or canopies may be permitted, subject to approval by the Design Review Committee.

Wall signs shall be placed parallel to the building face and shall not project more than 12 inches from the surface of the building. In traditional commercial structures that contain sign bands in the storefront design, signs shall be placed in this area. Wall signs shall be placed with the top of the sign no higher that the bottom of the second story window (where windows exist) or approximately 14 feet above grade, whichever is lower.

Painted signs on framed backings or the use of separate cut-out letters or neon shall be permitted in accordance with the above limits for wall signs.

Lettering applied to ground floor show windows or entrance doors shall not exceed 6 inches in height and the text shall be limited to identification of the primary business therein.

Signs identifying a business occupant shall be permitted on rear entrance doors if they are mounted flush against the building and shall not exceed 6 square feet in size, except where authorized by the Design Review Committee.

Signs in upper floor windows are generally not permitted, except to identify a second floor use separate from the ground floor use. In such cases, signs shall be limited to identification of the place of business. Letters on second floor identity signs shall not exceed 6 inches in height and shall not exceed two lines.

Pole or "lollipop" signs, as defined in the Zoning Ordinance, shall not be permitted except with prior approval of the Design Review Committee.

If other approved methods of identification are not available, monument type signs may be permitted if they are in scale and character with surrounding buildings subject to approval by the Design Review Committee. Monument signs shall not exceed 12 feet in total height and must be 4 feet or less from the bottom edge of sign face to grade. Total sign face area may not exceed 40 square feet. Bases of monument signs must be coordinated with sign faces or must be appropriately landscaped by plant materials which screen support apparatus.

Roof signs or signs above parapets of buildings shall not be permitted.

Off-premise signs, as defined in the Zoning Ordinance, shall not be permitted.

The Design Review Committee may consider the display of corporate logos. The display of more than one corporate logo per building is prohibited. Logos may be pictorial, single letters, or graphic name displays, but shall be limited to the minimum necessary to identify company name. Logo size shall not exceed 9 square feet. Logos must be of exceptional quality and design and must be compatible with the scale and character of the building.

Temporary signs, as defined in the Zoning Ordinance, may be permitted subject to approval by the Design Review Committee. Temporary signs shall not be erected for a period longer than 90 days.

Flashing, moving, or portable signs shall not be permitted except with prior approval by the Design Review Committee.

Signs no longer advertising a bona fide business or product sold from the premises shall be removed by the owner, agent, or person having beneficial use of the property upon which sign is located.

All signs not conforming to these requirements shall be removed within 2 years from the adoption of these guidelines by the 41<sup>st</sup> Street Merchants Association and the Design Review Committee. No lease for off-premise signs expiring after these guidelines have been adopted shall be renewed.

#### **Vacant Lots**

All vacant lots must be properly landscaped and/or screened from adjacent streets, alleys, or public improvement areas. All vacant lots not actively used for storage, parking, or loading must be planted and maintained with grass or other ground cover approved by the Design Review Committee. All vacant lots must be kept free of trash and debris.

#### **Demolition**

No structure shall be demolished without prior approval of the Design Review Committee. In general, no request for a demolition permit will be granted without detailed plans for the proposed use of the site after demolition.

## III. Design Guidelines for Development of New Properties

## **Community Character**

New development shall be designed with a sensitivity to the overall goals of the 41<sup>st</sup> Street Commercial Revitalization District. Specific sites shall be considered in relation their immediate environment (commercial uses, industrial uses, adjacent residential uses) and the placement and context within the 41<sup>st</sup> Street corridor.

#### **Building Design**

Each building unit, existing or proposed, shall be an integral element of an overall site design and shall reflect and complement the character of the 41<sup>st</sup> Street Commercial Revitalization District.

Locations of proposed commercial buildings shall be compatible with any adjacent residential area. Building facades shall be complementary to those adjacent in terms of scale, amenity, and appearance.

Building facades shall be designed to function as an integral part of the 41<sup>st</sup> Street streetscape with attention to visibility, safety, lighting, and incorporation of public amenities. Building design shall address the public right-of-way, and define and complement the streetscape.

Building design shall reflect an overall sensitivity to existing architecture along 41<sup>st</sup> Street with respect to building materials, fenestration, height, scale, color, contrast, roofs, and parapets.

Blank walls in commercial buildings are strongly discouraged along 41 st Street. Developers and designers are strongly encouraged to provide windows along 41 st Street frontage that follow the established rhythm and fenestration pattern along the corridor.

Awnings, canopies, porticos, etc. shall be designed as an integral part of the structure, shall be at least 8 feet above grade, and shall not project more than 7 feet over a public right-of-way. Any awning, canopy, or portico supported by poles, columns, or other vertical support elements, and placed in a public right-of-way requires special approval and permits in addition to Design Review Committee approval.

Building entrances shall provide ease of access, be designed so that pedestrians and patrons have visual access and can easily identify the entrance points, be well-lighted, and act as an integral part of the streetscape.

Building materials shall be of good quality and compatible with the established texture, color, and pattern of materials in that block.

Metal buildings are generally prohibited in commercial structures but may allowed in industrial zones, provided they are of superior quality and design and are compatible with the surrounding area in terms of amenity and appearance.

Corner buildings are important to the 41<sup>st</sup> Street Commercial District and shall be designed so that they are architecturally responsive to the conditions at corners, help define the intersection, and accentuate the building line along the street.

Projects in portions of the district lacking sufficient existing structures to define an architectural style, period, or quality shall be designed with consideration of the goals and objectives of the 41st Street Commercial Revitalization District and overall concepts of the 41st Street Commercial Revitalization Plan, using quality materials and construction.

## Site Planning and Design

Site planning and design shall consider the orderly arrangement of all site elements including: parking, delivery, access, trash storage and collection, landscape treatments, open space, pedestrian walkways, street furniture, auxiliary services (phone, vending machines, newspaper boxes, etc.), signs, building and auxiliary structures, and fencing.

#### **Buildings**

Where adjacent structures exist, buildings shall be located at comparable or compatible setbacks.

Where no adjacent structures exist, buildings generally shall be located at the minimum setback as specified in the Zoning Ordinance in order to define the street/building line.

Generally, buildings shall be situated so that the maximum building frontages define the street or public right-of-way.

#### **Parking**

Parking lots shall be located in rear or side yards in order to minimize their visibility from public rights-of-way. Where parking areas are exposed to public view, they shall be screened with appropriate walls or fencing and/or plant materials.

Parking lots on corners are generally prohibited. The Design Review Committee may consider corner parking provided the applicant can show specific justification and the design of the lot is of superior quality, meeting all requirements established by the Zoning Ordinance, and incorporating maximum screening.

Vehicular access to parking areas shall be direct and not in conflict with general vehicular movement serving the various uses within the development site. Ingress and egress points shall be well distanced from intersections to avoid congestion and interference with traffic. Where feasible, entrances shall be shared with adjacent properties.

Entrances and exits shall be designed so that they are easily identifiable by motorists. Any signage required to direct motorists to entrances shall be simple, clear, and designed to work in harmony with site elements and signs for the project. Any gates, arms, or booths shall be set back from the face of the adjacent buildings. Booths shall be designed as an integral part of the development.

## **Loading and Service Area Design**

Loading and service areas shall not be located on the facade of any building facing any public right-of-way unless the Design Review Committee determines reasonable consideration of site conditions dictate otherwise. Berths visible from any public street shall be screened by a combination of plants, fences and/or walls.

### **Storage Areas**

All outdoor storage shall be visually screened from streets, alleys, and adjacent property. Outdoor storage includes the parking of company-owned operative or non-operative vehicles or equipment, stockpiling or stacking of goods or materials, the placement of storage tanks, incinerators, or dumpsters. Storage areas shall not be permitted between a frontage street and the edge of the building.

Screening fences for storage areas shall be constructed of opaque materials and shall be no less than 7 feet in height

#### **Refuse Collection Areas**

All outdoor refuse collection areas shall be visually screened from access streets, alleys, and adjacent properties by a complete opaque screen. Refuse collection areas shall not be permitted between a frontage street and the edge of the building.

## **Open Space and Landscape Design**

Proposed development shall include the provision of appropriate open space in combination with the siting of buildings. Streets, pedestrian walkways and open spaces, including street furniture and signs, shall be included as an integral part of the overall design and shall be properly related to adjacent existing and proposed buildings.

A coordinated landscape program for the proposed development shall be in incorporated into the site plan for the entire site. Landscape development shall include plantings in combination with related paving surfaces and other amenities deemed necessary to the project.

## Signage

A systematic and coordinated signage plan is required for all new developments. Such plans shall address signs for the entire site, including, but not limited to building identification, business name, tenant signage, parking, loading or service, informational and directional signs.

Total sign area (whether contained in a single sign or multiple signs) for a non-corner building is two times the *front* linear footage of the building. For example: if a building has a 25' frontage on  $41^{st}$  Street, the total sign area allowed for that building is  $2 \times 25' = 50$  square feet. Corner properties are limited to one sign face per building front. The total sign area allowed for both frontages of a corner property is two times the *shorter* building frontage, e.g. if the corner

building is 20' x 40', with the 20' side fronting on  $41^{st}$  Street, the total sign area allowed is 2 x 20'=40 square feet.

Space for signage shall be included in all building and site design.

All signs shall reflect quality workmanship and durable materials.

Special consideration shall be given to the quality and placement of light sources emitting from or directed toward signs.

For specific criteria regarding logos, placement of signs, types of signs permitted, etc., see Section II, Signage.

