

**STANDARD DESIGN  
GUIDELINES**

## **Article I. Rehabilitation of Existing Commercial Properties**

### **A. Building Fronts, Sides and Rears Abutting Streets or Public Areas**

All structural and decorative elements of building fronts, sides and rears abutting and/or visible from streets or public improvements 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.

### **B. Windows**

- (1) Windows not in the front of buildings shall be kept properly repaired or, with Fire Department approval, may be closed, in which case, sills, lintels and frame must be removed and the opening properly closed to be compatible with the adjacent wall.
- (2) 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 change the 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.
- (3) Window openings in upper floors of the front of the building shall not be boarded up and shall not be filled without prior approval by the Design Review Committee. Windowpanes shall not be painted.
- (4) If ceilings, partitions or other interior elements terminate inside the Window area, and are visible through the window from the exterior, they shall be stopped short of the glass and the exterior edge or face shall be treated in such a manner so as not be obvious from the exterior. Boxes, crates, etc. shall not be stacked inside windows unless concealed by shutters, blinds, drapes or other appropriate window covering.
- (5) 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 Section K, "Signs."

### **C. Store Fronts**

- (1) A store front shall include the building face, show windows, porches and entrance area leading to the door, sidelights, transoms, display platform devices, including lighting and signage designed to be viewed from the public right-of-way.
- (2) Show windows, entrances, signs, lighting, sun protection, porches, security grilles, etc., shall be compatible and harmonious with the scale and character of the structure. All store front elements must be located within fourteen (14) feet of grade unless original store front elements exceeded fourteen (14) feet in which case, subject to review and

approval by the Design Review Committee, they may remain at the original height.

- (3) Show windows shall not be painted for advertising purposes, but may be painted for authorized identification of the place of business if approved by the Design Review Committee, and in accordance with Section K, "Signs."
- (4) 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 store front elements.
- (5) Glass in show windows and transoms shall be transparent, clear, bronze or gray tinted. Translucent, opaque, reflective or colored glass, other than gray or bronze tinted, unless original, shall not be permitted except with prior approval by the Design Review Committee.
- (6) Solid or permanently closed or covered storefronts shall not be permitted, unless treated as an integral part of the building facade using wall material and window detailing compatible with the upper floors, or other building surfaces. All damaged, sagging or otherwise deteriorated storefronts, show windows or entrances shall be repaired or replaced.

D. Awnings

- (1) 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 and on upper floors above windows only.
- (2) Awnings shall not project more than seven (7) feet from the building front, shall not be lower than eight (8) feet above grade and shall terminate against the building at a height not to exceed approximately fourteen (14) feet above the pavement, except with prior approval of the Design Review Committee.
- (3) Rigid or fixed awnings or canopies are not permitted unless an integral part of the structure, in good condition, of similar materials, compatible with, and harmonious with the scale and character of the structure and adjacent structures. New rigid or fixed awnings or canopies may be added to existing structures subject to restrictions outlined above and with prior approval by the Design Review Committee.

E. Exterior Walls

- (1) All exterior front, side or rear walls which have not been wholly or partially resurfaced or built over shall be repaired and/or improved in an acceptable manner. Unpainted masonry walls may be painted where necessary to conceal misused material or patched wall coverings. Other unpainted masonry walls may be painted only with the approval of the Design Review Committee. Existing painted masonry walls shall have loose material removed and be painted a single color except for 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. Patched walls shall match the existing adjacent surfaces as to materials, texture, color, bond and jointing.

- (2) Applied facing materials shall be treated as follows:

If original they shall be painted and/or repaired as necessary according to the minimum standards set forth in these architectural guidelines. If not original and in need of significant repair, or not in harmony with, the character of the building, they are to 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 architectural guidelines, as approved by the Design Review Committee.

- (3) 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.
- (4) Sheet metal gutters, downspouts and copings shall be repaired or replaced as necessary and shall be neatly located, securely installed, and painted to harmonize with the other building front elements.

F. Buildings Visible from Public Ways

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 in a manner consistent with these architectural guidelines as necessary to avoid visually detracting from the area.

G. Mechanical and Electrical Equipment on Exterior Walls

- (1) Individual room air-conditioning units shall not be installed in front or side wall windows, if visible from streets or public improvements, without prior approval by the Design Review Committee.
- (2) Through wall air-conditioning units may be installed, subject to prior approval by the Design Review Committee, provided where visible from streets or public improvements the units do not project beyond any adjacent exterior face of the building and are properly screened and ventilated and do not detract from the building character and appearance.
- (3) 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.
- (4) Grilles, louvers, vents and other mechanical 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.

H. Roofs

- (1) Chimneys, elevator penthouses or any other auxiliary structure on the roofs shall be

repaired and cleaned as required in Section F, "Buildings Visible from Public Ways."

- (2). Any mechanical equipment placed on a roof shall be concealed from public view and be as inconspicuous as possible from other viewpoints. Equipment shall be screened with suitable elements of a permanent nature or finished so as to harmonize with the rest of the building. Where such screening is unfeasible, equipment shall be painted in a manner as to minimize its visibility.
- (3) Roofs shall be cleaned and kept free of trash, and debris. Other elements which are not a permanent part of the building are not permitted.

I. Auxiliary Structures

Attached or unattached structures at the rear of buildings which are structurally deficient shall be properly repaired or may be demolished upon approval of the Design Review Committee.

J. Rear and Side Yards and Parking Areas

- (1) When a rear or side 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. An appropriate sign not exceeding six (6) square feet may be used to identify and control parking and loading, subject to Design Review Committee approval.
- (2) Off-street parking areas 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 streets or public rights-of-way by appropriate landscaping or screening.
- (3) Existing front yard parking areas shall be clearly defined as to ingress, egress and internal circulation and must be appropriately screened by plant materials and/or structure.
- (4) Fences must be compatible with the architecture of the building and the streetscape. Galvanized chain link fencing (silver) is prohibited, however, the Committee may consider, given specific justification, chain, link which is painted or coated in a dark color.

K. Signs

- (1) Signs shall be limited to those identifying the property or identifying 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.
- (2) Signs and displays for advertising or promotion are not permitted in public rights-of-way unless specifically authorized in writing by the Design Review Committee, in addition to securing the necessary permits from the City.

- (3) 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 square feet per face and only with prior Design Review Committee approval.
- (4) Painted or sewn signs on awnings, existing marquees or canopies maybe permitted, subject to Design Review Committee approval.
- (5) Flat signs shall be placed parallel to the building face and shall not project more than twelve (12) inches from the surface of the building and shall not exceed in area two times the width in feet of the frontage of the building. Flat signs shall be placed no higher than the bottom of the second story window where windows exist or approximately fourteen (14) feet above grade level, whichever is lower.
- (6) In the case of corner properties one flat sign per side is permitted. The area of each sign shall not exceed two times the lesser frontage width in feet. The depth and height limitations shall apply as in paragraph "5" above.
- (7) Painted signs on framed backings or use of separate cut out letters or neon shall be permitted in accordance with the above limits for flat signs.
- (8) Lettering applied to ground floor show windows or entrance doors shall not exceed six (6) inches in height, and the text shall be limited to identification of the primary business therein.
- (9) Signs identifying the business occupant shall be permitted at rear entrance doors if they are mounted flush against the building and do not exceed six (6) square feet in size, except where authorized by the Design Review Committee.
- (10) Signs in upper floor windows are generally not permitted.
- (11) Pole or "lollipop" signs shall not be permitted except with prior approval of the Design Review Committee.
- (12) If approved methods of identification are not available, monument type signs may be permitted if they are in scale and character with surrounding buildings and only with prior approval of the Design Review Committee. Monument signs shall not exceed twelve (12) feet in total height and must be four (4) feet or less from the bottom edge of the sign face to grade. The area of the sign face shall not exceed forty (40) square feet. Monument signs must be appropriately landscaped by structure and/or plant materials, which effectively screen support apparatus.
- (13) Roof top signs, signs on or above the parapet of a building, billboards, or outdoor advertising signs painted or mounted on billboards or other structures, except as otherwise herein provided, shall not be permitted.
- (14) The Design Review Committee may consider the placement of corporate logos on the

parapet or top face of buildings that exceed ten (10) stories in height and serve to house major corporate tenants which occupy a minimum of 30% of the total building space. Logos which are not purely pictorial or single letters but are graphic name displays shall be limited to the identifying name. The logo size shall not exceed in square feet the number of linear feet of the width of the building face to which it is applied. The display of more than one corporation's logo is prohibited. Corporate logos must be of exceptional quality and design and be compatible with the scale and character of the building. Billboards, sign boards, box signs and logos painted directly on the face of the building are prohibited.

- (15) Temporary signs, such as lease or rental signs, with prior Design Review Committee approval, may be permitted but shall not be posted for a period that exceeds ninety (90) days. Flashing, moving or portable signs shall not be permitted except with the approval of the Design Review Committee.
- (16) All signs not conforming to these requirements shall be removed within two (2) years from the project initiation date. No lease for billboards expiring after the project area has been established shall be renewed.

L. Vacant Lots

When a vacant lot exists, whether temporary or permanent, or is created through demolition, the owner must properly landscape and/or screen the property from adjacent streets, alleys and public improvement areas; cover all areas not actively used for storage, parking or loading with grass or other ground cover approved for the property by the Design Review Committee; and maintain said ground cover and keep all the property free of trash and debris.

M. Demolition

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

N. Other

All other building repairs identified during the initial inspection which are necessary to safeguard the health and safety of building occupants shall be made in accordance with applicable sections of the City Building Code.

## **Article II. New Development of Properties**

The following standards shall be applied to all new structures or additions to existing structures.

### **A. Community Character**

- (1) New developments shall be designed with a sensitivity to the overall goals and objectives of the community. Specific sites shall be considered in relation to their immediate environment (retail node, pedestrian spine, office park etc.) and the placement and context within the larger project or redevelopment area and the land-use or urban design plans prepared for the area.

### **B. Building Design**

- (1) Each building unit, (whether existing or proposed) shall be an integral element of an overall site design and shall reflect and complement the character of the surrounding area or plans prepared therefore.
- (2) Locations of proposed commercial buildings shall be compatible with any adjacent residential areas. Building facades shall be complementary to those adjacent in terms of scale, amenity and appearance.
- (3) Building facades shall be designed to function as an integral part of the streetscape with attention to visibility, safety, lighting and incorporation of public amenities.
- (4) Building design shall reflect an overall sensitivity to existing architecture of quality with regard to building materials, fenestration, height, scale, color, contrast, roofs and parapets.
- (5) Building design shall address the public right-of-way, and define and complement the streetscape.
- (6) Generally, blank walls are discouraged. Developers and designers are encouraged to provide windows in high activity areas or to provide architectural relief elements in wall design at the ground level.
- (7) 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, which is supported by poles, columns, or other vertical support elements placed in a public right-of-way requires special approval and permits in addition to Design Review Committee approval.
- (8) Building entrances shall provide ease of access, be designed so that pedestrians/patrons have visual access and can easily identify the entrance points, be well lighted, and act as an integral part of the streetscape.
- (9) Building materials shall be of good quality. Trendy materials of questionable longevity shall be avoided. Metal buildings are generally prohibited; however, the Design Review



Committee may consider developments which incorporate such structures provided they are of superior quality and design and are compatible with the surrounding area in terms of amenity and appearance.

- (10) Corner buildings shall be designed so that they are architecturally responsive to the corner condition and help to define the intersection and accentuate the building line along the street.
- (11) Projects in redevelopment areas which lack sufficient existing structures to define architectural style, period or quality shall be designed with consideration of the goals and objectives of the Community and overall concepts of the redevelopment or urban design plan, using quality materials and construction.

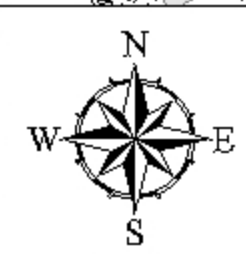
C. Site Planning and Design

- (1) Site Planning 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, news etc.), signs, building and auxiliary structures, and fencing.
- (2) Buildings:
  - (a) Where adjacent structures exist buildings shall be located at comparable or compatible setbacks.
  - (b) Where no adjacent structures exist buildings generally shall be located at the minimum setback in order to define the street/building line.
  - (c) Generally, buildings shall be located so that maximum building Montages define the street or public right-of-way.
- (3) Parking:
  - (a) Parking lots on corners are generally prohibited. The Design Review Committee may consider such lots provided the applicant provides specific justification and the design is of superior quality incorporating screening.
  - (b) Parking lots shall be located in rear or side yards in order to minimize their view from public rights-of-way. Where parking areas are exposed to public view, they shall be screened with appropriate structure and/or plant materials.
  - (c) Vehicular access to parking areas shall be direct and not in conflict with general vehicular movement serving the various uses within the 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.

- (d) 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 setback from the face of the adjacent buildings. Booths shall be designed as an integral part of the development.
- (4) Loading and Service Area Design
  - (a) Loading and service space shall be unobtrusively provided off-street to serve business uses in the proposed development.
- (5) Open Space and Landscape Design
  - (a) Proposed development shall consider the provision of appropriate open space in combination with the proper siting of buildings. Streets, pedestrian walkways and open spaces, including street furniture and signs, shall be designed as an integral part of the overall design, and shall be properly related to adjacent existing and proposed buildings.
  - (b) A coordinated landscape program for the proposed development shall be incorporated for the entire proposed site. Landscape development shall include plantings in combination with related paving and surface treatments and other amenities deemed necessary to the project.

D. Signs

- (1) A systematic and coordinated sign package is required for all new developments. Sign packages for new developments 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.
- (2) Consideration shall be given to the provision of sign space in the building and site design.
- (3) All signs shall reflect quality workmanship and materials.
- (4) Special consideration shall be given to the quality and placement of light sources emitting from or directed toward signs.
- (5) SEE - I, Section K, "Signs" for specific criteria regarding size, placement, and types of signs allowed.

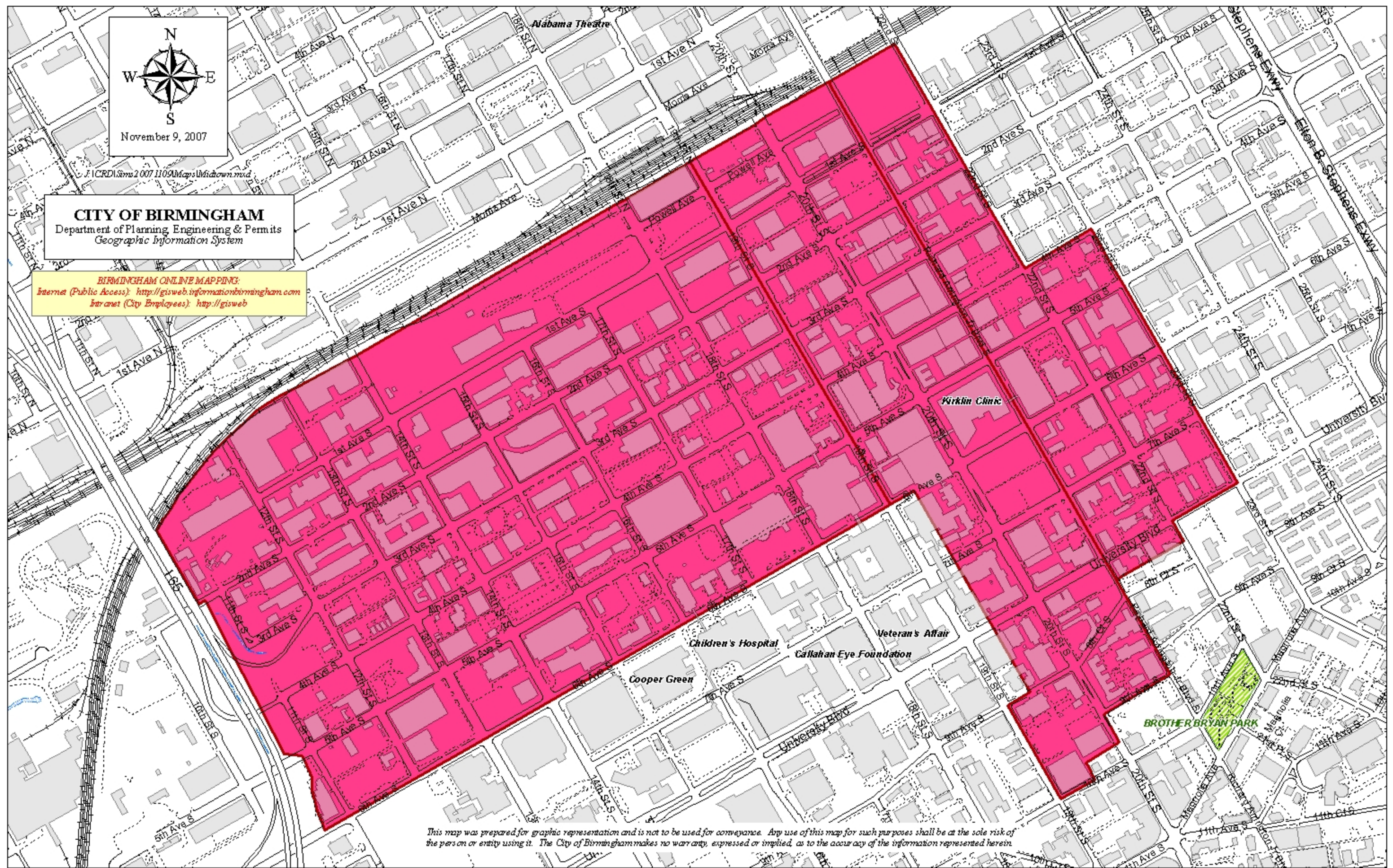


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### CITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Department of Planning Engineering & Permits  
Geographic Information System

**BIRMINGHAM ONLINE MAPPING:**  
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**Midtown Commercial Revitalization District**