

**ARCHITECTURAL GUIDELINES FOR COMMERCIAL
PROPERTIES IN THE NORTH BIRMINGHAM COMMERCIAL
REVITALIZATION AREA**

ARTICLE I. Definitions

For the purpose of these guidelines, certain terms and words are hereby defines.

- (a) “Commercial Rehabilitation Area” That portion of an Urban Renewal Area so designated in a council adopted Neighborhood Revitalization and Improvement Plan in which certain improvements are mandatory and which is included within the rebate area herein defined. (See map)
- (b) “Neighborhood Revitalization and Improvement Plan” An Urban Renewal Plan so entitled and adopted by the Birmingham City Council subsequent to January 31, 1978.
- (c) “Design Review Committee” A committee appointed by the City Council to review and approve the private physical development of Commercial Rehabilitation Areas according to the provisions of the Ordinance and other duties as assigned by the City Council (Section 60-5, Article IV of Ordinance 79-56).
- (d) “Commercial Rehabilitation Incentive Program” A program of financial incentives (rebates) adopted by the City Council to encourage the rehabilitation of commercial structures in Commercial Rehabilitation Areas.
- (e) “Rebate Area” That portion of an Urban Renewal Area so designated in the council adopted Neighborhood Revitalization and Improvement Plan in which certain improvements are voluntary and if in compliance with these guidelines are eligible for rebate. (See map)
- (f) “Shopping Street” A street on which predominantly retail businesses front, which emphasizes pedestrian rather than vehicular accessibility.
- (g) “Public Improvement Area” An area in which the city has undertaken extensive physical improvements to public facilities.
- (h) “Public Right-of-way” or “Public Way” Any street, alley or other public way which has been dedicated to the public use.

Architectural Guidelines for Commercial Properties in the North Birmingham commercial Revitalization Area

Article II. Rehabilitation of Existing Commercial Properties

The following standards shall be applied to all existing commercial (non-residential) structures whether occupied or vacant in the commercial rehabilitation area and not scheduled for demolition.

1. Building Fronts, Sides and Rears Abutting Streets or Public Areas

a. All structural and decorative elements of building fronts, sides and rears abutting and/or visible from streets or public improvement areas shall be repaired or replaced to match as closely as possible the original materials and construction of that building. Rotten, deteriorated or weakened portions shall be removed, repaired and replaced to 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 match 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. 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 material.

(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. Window panes 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 that it/they will 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 Paragraph 5, "Signs"

c. Show Windows:

(1) A show window shall include the building face, 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 grills, etc., shall be compatible and harmonious with the scale and character of the structure. All show window elements must be located within 14 feet of grade unless original show window elements exceeded 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 as authorized by the Design Review Committee, and in accordance with Paragraph 5, "Signs."
- (4) Show windows with trim, mullions or muntins not consistent or compatible with overall façade design, shall be replaced, or painted.
- (5) Glass in show windows shall be transparent; clear, bronze or gray tinted. Translucent, opaque, reflective or colored glass, other than gray or bronze tinted, shall not be permitted except with prior approval by the Design Review committee.

d. Awnings:

- (1) If compatible and harmonious with the scale and character of the structure, and adjoining structure, soft, flameproof awnings are permitted over the first floor 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.
 - (3) Rigid or fixed awnings or canopies are not permitted unless an integral part of the structure, 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 structure subject to restrictions outlined above and with prior approval by the design Review committee.
- e. Solid or permanently closed or covered storefronts shall not be permitted, unless treated as an integral part of building façade using wall materials 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.

f. Exterior Walls

(1) All exterior fronts, 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 mixed 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 and corrugated metal, they shall be painted a color approved by the Design Review Committee; if original and other than corrugated metal, they shall be repaired as necessary according to the minimum standards set forth in these architectural guidelines; if not original and metal siding, wood or porcelain panels, and in need of significant repair, 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.

(3) Existing miscellaneous elements on the building fronts, such as empty electrical conduit, unused sign brackets, etc., shall be removed and 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 and securely installed. Gutters and downspouts that require painting shall be painted to harmonize with the other building front elements.

g. Buildings Visible from Public Ways

If, due to the removal of adjacent existing buildings, a building is exposed to view from a public way, the face of the building so exposed shall be improved as necessary to avoid visually detracting from the area.

h. Mechanical and Electrical Equipment on Exterior Walls

(1) Individual room air-conditioning units shall not be installed in front of side wall windows, if they will be 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 the exterior face of the building wall more than 6 inches and are painted or otherwise made as unobtrusive as possible and do not unnecessarily detract from the building character and appearance.
- (3) 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, provided where visible from streets or public improvements the necessary items are painted or otherwise made as unobtrusive as possible and do not unnecessarily detract from the building character and appearance.

2. Roofs

- (a) Chimneys, elevator penthouses or any other auxiliary structure on the roofs shall be repaired and cleaned as required for rear and side walls.
- (b) Any mechanical equipment placed on a roof shall be so located as to be hidden from view from the shopping streets, and to 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 such a manner as to minimize its visibility.
- (c) Roofs shall be cleaned and kept free of trash, debris or any other element which is not a permanent part of the building.

3. Auxiliary Structures

Structures at the rears of buildings attached or unattached to the principal commercial structure which are structurally deficient shall be properly repaired or demolished.

4. Rear and Side Yards and Parking Areas

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. A sign not exceeding six (6) square feet may be used to identify and control parking and loading.

5. Signs

- (a) No signs other than those identifying the property where they are installed or identifying the use conducted therein shall be permitted. 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.
- (b) 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.
- (c) Flat signs shall be placed parallel to the building face and shall not project more than 12" from the surface of the building and shall not exceed in area two times the width in feet of the frontage of the building. In the case of corner properties, each façade is to be calculated separately as to size allowed for each. 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, the use of boxed signs is prohibited. Lettering applied to ground floor show windows or entrance doors shall not exceed four (4) inches in height, and the text limited to identification of the primary business therein. Signs identifying the business occupant shall be permitted at rear entrance doors but shall not exceed six (6) square feet in size except where authorized by the Design Review Committee.
- (d) Projecting signs shall not be permitted on any portion of any building. However, a new marquee with a sign or a sign that is part of an original marquee may be permitted if in keeping with the building type or use with prior approval of the Design Review Committee.
- (e) Painted signs on building surfaces or on framed backings or use of separate cutout letters shall be permitted in accordance with the above limits for flat signs.
- (f) Non-illuminated secondary sign shall be permitted for the identification of commercial tenants occupying the upper floors of a building. Such signs shall not exceed two (2) square feet in area and shall not project more than two (2) inches beyond the surface of the building nor shall they be placed higher than approximately fourteen (14) feet above grade level.
- (g) Roof top signs, signs on or above the parapet of a building, billboards, or outdoor advertising signs painted or mounted on structures other than billboards, except as otherwise herein provided, shall not be permitted.
- (h) Painted or sewn signs on awnings or free standing canopies are permitted.

- (i) Flashing, moving or portable signs shall not be permitted, except with the approval of the Design Review Committee.
- (j) All signs not conforming to these requirements shall be removed within two (2) years from the project initiation date except billboards larger than sixty square feet, which shall be removed within three (3) years. No lease for such billboards expiring after the project initiation date of enactment of Chapter 60 of the City Code shall be renewed.
- (k) Permanent window signs in upper floor windows for authorized identification of upper floor tenants shall not exceed 20% of the total window size or more than a total of 2 square feet per occupant.

6. Vacant Lots

When a vacant lot exists 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 off trash and debris.

7. Other

All other repairs to a building, as determined during the initial inspection as necessary to safeguard the health and safety of possible building occupants, shall be made in accordance with applicable sections of the City Building Code.

Article III. New Development of Properties

The following standards shall be applied to all new structures or additions to existing structures in a Commercial Rehabilitation Area.

1. Design Standards

a. Building design:

- (1) Each building unit, (whether existing or proposed) shall be an integral element of the overall site design and the Neighborhood Revitalization and Improvement Plan and shall reflect and complement the character of the surrounding area.

(2) Proposed commercial buildings shall be located so as to be compatible with surrounding residential areas and organized in a manner to coordinate customer and employee physical requirements. Building facades shall be complementary to those adjacent in terms of amenity and appearance.

b. Parking design

(1) Off-street parking areas shall be designed with careful regard to orderly arrangement, landscaping and ease of access as an integral part of the total site design. Off-street parking areas, except at entrance ways, shall be separated from streets by appropriate landscaping or structure.

(2) 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 intersection to avoid congestion and interference with traffic.

c. Loading and service area design:

Loading and service space shall be provided in convenient off-street facilities to serve business uses in the proposed development to the maximum extent possible.

d. Street, pedestrian walkways and open space design:

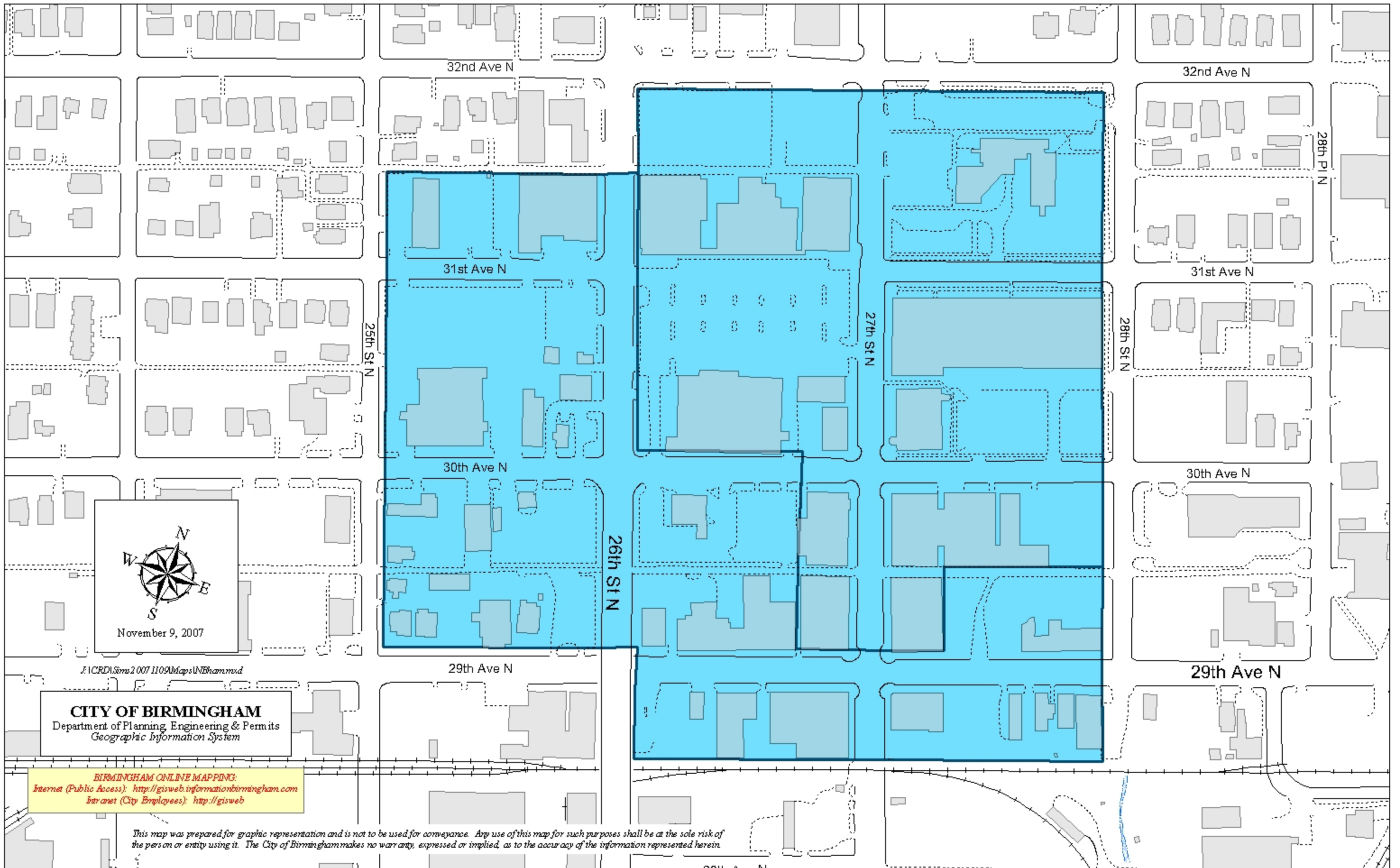
Proposed development shall consider the provision of appropriate open space in combination with the proper siting of buildings. Streets, pedestrian walkways and open spaces including street furniture and signs shall be designed as an integral part of the overall design, properly related to adjacent existing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

e. Landscape design:

A coordinated landscape program for the proposed development shall be incorporated for the entire proposed site including landscape treatment for open space, streets and parking areas. Landscaping shall include trees, shrubbery and planting in combination with related paving and surface treatments.

f. Signs:

All signs for new structures and additions to existing structures shall conform to the requirements set forth in Article I paragraph 5, "Signs".



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CITY OF BIRMINGHAM
Department of Planning, Engineering & Permits
Geographic Information System

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