

City of Elyria Design Review Guidelines

Buildings are the building blocks of our city. From the humble to the monumental, the simple to the grand, each is a medium through which we convey our culture; each building affects the way we live in our community. Since our buildings tend to outlive us, we want the design of those buildings to satisfy not only the needs of the moment but remain useful and beautiful across generations to come.

The purpose of Design Review is to promote safe, functional and attractive development of business and commercial areas; to unify commercial properties, both visually and physically, with surrounding land uses; to facilitate a more healthful urban atmosphere; to protect and preserve the unique and cultural features within the City; and to protect commercial property values by enhancing the City's appearance.

The Design Review process APPLIES to the following activities:

- All new construction, except for 1, 2 and 3 family dwellings.
- Additions, alterations or renovations to an existing building site or landscape (other than 1, 2 or 3 family building projects), that affect the exterior appearance of a building or site, including but not limited to new or existing signs, color changes, parking area modifications and site lighting alterations.

The Design Review Process DOES NOT APPLY to the following activities:

- Ordinary maintenance or repairs to an existing building or site provided such work involves no change in materials, design, dimensions, texture, color or outer appearance.
- Interior alterations
- 1,2 and 3 family building projects
- Any other exceptions that are provided in the Design Review Guidelines.

Design Review for the City of Elyria shall be administered by the Planning Commission

All information presented in these Design Review Guidelines is believed to be accurate at the time of publication. However, there may be future changes to the applicable laws, regulations or policies that are not reflected in this document. The enabling legislation for Design Review can be found in Chapter 1183 of the Elyria Codified Ordinances. In the event of any doubt or dispute, the provisions of applicable law will control over these Guidelines.

The Planning Commission is authorized to increase or decrease setbacks, height, landscaping, fencing, signs, parking, ingress, egress and lot coverage standards as provided for in Chapter 11 of the Elyria Codified Ordinances, if it can be determined that:

- The modification is needed to achieve the purpose and objectives of Design Review;
- The modification does not adversely impact an adjacent building or property or create an unsafe pedestrian or vehicular situation;
- The modification is necessary to create a more aesthetic or pleasing vista along the public right of way and adjoining properties.

Chapter 1: The Design Review Process

How to Apply for Design Review

Step 1: Obtain a “Design Review Application” from the Planning Commission Secretary, the Building Inspector, the Community Development Director or on the city’s website. These individuals are also available for additional information and assistance.

The application requires background information on the project and asks for a description of how the project addresses each of the design guidelines listed in the Design Guidelines chapter of the Design Review Guidelines.

Plans should be prepared by a professional such as an engineer, builder, surveyor or architect. City Staff (Staff), at their discretion, may accept plans not prepared by a professional for small projects. Staff shall consist of the Building Inspector and the Director of Community Development, or their designee. Plans should be drawn at a scale of not less than 50 feet to the inch.

Step 2: Submit a completed **Design Review Application** to the Planning Commission Secretary to be reviewed by Staff.

The Application shall consist of the following materials, as applicable to the project:

- **Site Plan**
A drawing showing the location, type, size or dimensions of proposed and/or existing structures and site features including: footprint of structures, landscape details, sidewalks, driveways, parking areas, freestanding signs, dumpster location, fencing and lighting locations.
- **Building Elevations**
Drawings showing the front, rear and side elevations of the proposed structure(s), which includes the color and a description of all materials (i.e. Siding, windows, doors, roof, gutters, lighting, trim, and utilities).
- **Lighting Detail**
The applicant shall submit a photograph or diagram of all exterior light fixtures as provided by the manufacturer.
- **Photographs showing the proposed building site and surrounding properties.** In the case of an alteration and/or addition, photos shall depict existing structures and their relationship to adjacent property.

For New Signs or Changes to Existing Signs, the Applicant should also submit:

- A scale drawing of the sign details, including materials, dimensions, color, lighting and lettering style.
- Photographs showing existing sign or proposed sign location.

Step 3: Staff Report

Staff has the authority to approve applications that comply with the Zoning Code and Design Review Guidelines. Any deviation from the Code or Guidelines shall require Planning Commission approval.

The findings of Staff are conveyed in the Staff Report, which will be made available to the applicant from the Planning Commission Secretary within 10 days of the date of submission. Two staff signatures must be on the Staff Report. The project may be approved, approved with modifications or not approved based on compliance with the Design Review Guidelines and applicable codes and ordinances.

Step 4: Submission of Application to Planning Commission.

The applicant may submit the application to Planning Commission when a variance to the Zoning Code is required or when Staff determines to not approve an application.

At least seven (7) days prior to the Planning Commission meeting, submit application to Planning Commission. It is suggested that the Application reflect the comments made in the Staff Report, however the applicant, at their discretion, may submit any variation that he/she deems justifiable.

The Planning Commission has 35 days to respond from date of submission. Failure of the Planning Commission to respond within the 35 days shall be deemed an approval of the plans.

In the event the building project is considered a major traffic generator, as described in Chapter 1113.01 of the Elyria Codified Ordinances, Planning Commission has 60 days to render a decision.

Planning Commission meetings are scheduled at 11:00 am on the first and third Tuesday of each month and are held at Elyria City Hall, City Council Chambers. Due to special circumstances, meeting times and locations may be changed. Submission deadlines for meetings are 10:00 a.m. seven (7) days prior to the respective Planning Commission Meeting. A listing of actual dates and times can be obtained from the Planning Commission Secretary, the Building Inspector and Community Development Director.

Step 5: Planning Commission Review Meeting

The findings of the Planning Commission will be rendered at the appropriate Planning Commission Meeting based on compliance with the Design Review Guidelines and applicable codes and ordinances. Planning Commission may recommend:

- Approval: Construction documents may then be submitted to the Building Department for a building permit, when required.
- Approval with Modifications: Construction documents that reflect modifications may then be submitted to the Building Department for a building permit, when required OR, if the modification(s) are unacceptable by the applicant, the plans may be reviewed by City Council.
- Disapproval: Applicant may restart the application process or applicant may have project reviewed by City Council.

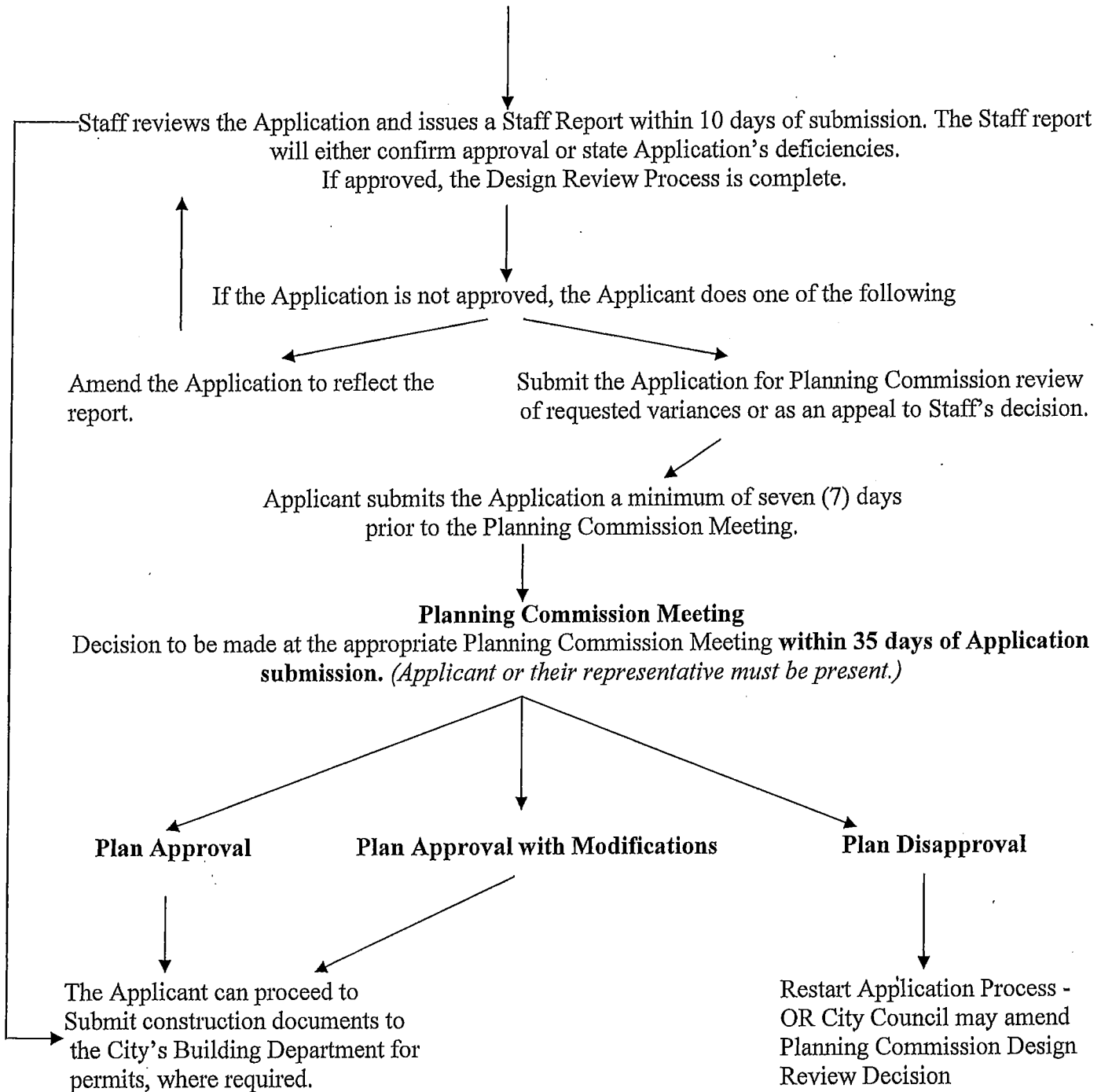
Step 6: City Council Review

Applicant may request review by City Council of plans disapproved or modified, in whole or in part. Any such request shall be in writing and shall describe with reasonable detail the basis of the appeal. The request is to be filed with the Clerk of Council within 30 days of the Planning Commission's decision. A copy of the request shall be served upon the Law Director. Council is required to refer the

request to the appropriate committee for review within 30 days of filing with the Clerk of Council. City Council may sustain or modify, in whole or in part, the decision of the Planning Commission.

DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

Applicant submits the **Design Review Application** to the Planning Commission Secretary.



Frequently Asked Questions

- **What if my project is relatively small?**

Smaller projects, such as signs, awnings, minor storefront remodeling or minor parking lot adjustments will be reviewed by Staff on behalf of the Planning Commission. If the Staff approves or approves with acceptable modifications, the applicant may, when required, apply for a building permit. If Staff does not approve an application, and the applicant chooses not to revise it according to Staff suggestions while wanting to move it forward, the applicant may present the project to the Planning Commission for their consideration.

- **How detailed do applications need to be?**

The scope of your project should determine the detail of your application. Larger construction projects will require professionals to prepare the application to provide sufficient detail and clarity so that Staff and/or Planning Commission are able to analyze the impact of the project and determine its compliance. All applications must be filled out in its entirety.

- **Do I have to provide sample materials?**

Sample materials are not absolutely required, but are often helpful in visualizing the way a project looks. Again, the scope of your project should determine if sample materials would help Staff and/or the Planning Commission in their review.

- **I have a very complex project. Can I meet with city-Staff informally before I prepare a full submission?**

Yes. Staff will meet with applicants on an informal basis prior to the submission of a formal application and will give comments on designs or ideas.

- **Must I be present at the Planning Commission Meeting that my project is being considered?**

The applicant may send a representative to speak on his/her behalf.

- **What level of review goes into my Project?**

The project is reviewed based on design qualities in light of these Design Review Guidelines, the advice of professionals such as Staff, as well as their personal experiences and observations.

In addition, the Design Review Process encourages private development of the highest caliber. Good planning and design do not necessarily mean added cost. In some cases, the suggestions of Staff and/or Planning Commission may result in lower costs for the sponsor and a more valuable project.

- **Are the decisions of Staff binding?**

Yes. Staff will decide whether the project should be approved, approved with modifications or not approved. Modifications and non-approvals by Staff may be reviewed by Planning Commission at the

request of the applicant. The Applicant may also appeal Planning Commission's decision to City Council. Council can modify Planning Commission's decision.

- **If Staff recommends changes, do I have to prepare and present revised drawings showing all of them?**

Not necessarily. Revisions need not always be prepared with the same level of detail as in the initial submission – often, hand-drawn revisions to plans will be sufficient. Where an applicant disagrees with the requested changes, he or she may ask Planning Commission to review Staff's decision. If the applicant accepts the recommended modifications, revised plans incorporating the changes can then be submitted to the Building Department for a building permit.

- **Do these Guidelines ALWAYS apply?**

Essentially, yes. In rare cases, however, the Planning Commission after conferring with Staff, may decide to waive or add certain submittal requirements if it is in the best interest of the Planning Commission's review of the project.

- **Who Makes the Final Decision?**

Final review decisions are made by the Planning Commission, its designee, or by City Council if Planning Commission's decision is challenged by the applicant.

- **How much time will Design Review add to my project?**

Design Review typically adds only a few days to a few weeks to the approval process.

- **Do my plans need to be prepared by a state licensed/registered professional, such as an engineer, surveyor or architect?**

Not necessarily. Projects that involve technical design analysis (ie: new buildings, building additions, major alterations) require the seal of a design professional. When in doubt, contact the Building Inspector.

Chapter 2: Design Guidelines

These Guidelines shall serve as the basis for decisions by the Planning Commission. Construction and alterations to which Design Review applies generally fall within the following general use categories for which the general provisions apply.

USE CATEGORY GENERAL PROVISIONS

Retail, Big Box

Large developments depend on high visibility from major public streets and therefore their design determines much of the character and attractiveness of major streetscapes. The standards for big box development require a basic level of architectural variety, compatibility and pedestrian access. Parking demands are usually very large and therefore particular attention should be placed on landscaping not only at the perimeter but also within the interior of the parking area(s). Consideration should be given to the possible future re-use of the building by multiple tenants when planning loading docks and other physical elements of the building. Sign compatibility is important and special attention should be given

to providing public transit access and community amenities as described in the next section. Roof style and features should be compatible to that of surrounding properties. Where flat roofs are to be used, either cornice treatment or a simulated sloped or hipped roof should be used.

Retail, Strip Center

Strip Centers are smaller commercial developments that typically develop at major street intersections. Normally they are multi-tenant facilities in a linear configuration. The standards for these developments require basic compatibility with its location. Special attention should be given to the style and quality of the arcade walkway, pedestrian access, public transit access, and sign compatibility as well as community amenities as described in the next section. Roof style and features should be compatible to that of surrounding properties. Where flat roofs are to be used, either cornice treatment or a simulated sloped or hipped roof should be used.

Retail, Other

Typically this would include isolated or standalone buildings such as restaurants or other retail uses usually not exceeding two. These businesses can locate in a variety of locations and therefore require special sensitivity to the immediate area. Theme style architecture is discouraged, as it will make subsequent business occupation more difficult. Roof style and features should be compatible to that of surrounding properties. Where flat roofs are to be used, either cornice treatment or a simulated sloped or hipped roof should be used.

Office, Single & Multi-Tenant Buildings

These buildings can locate in a variety of locations and therefore require special sensitivity to the immediate area. In the case of larger multi-tenant buildings, all aspects of site planning, architectural design, signage, landscaping, traffic and community amenities should be considered. Particular attention should be given to its overall context in its neighborhood. Roof style and features should be compatible to that of surrounding properties. Where flat roofs are to be used, either cornice treatment or a simulated sloped or hipped roof should be used.

Industrial

All industrial projects will be reviewed in context of its size and location. Special attention should be given to the façade facing the public right-of-way. Lighting design and placement must be considered as well as placement and design of refuse containment. If in a formal industrial park setting, common features of design, color, setback and landscaping, and the use of mounding, are encouraged.

Institutional, i.e. School, Government, Office Park and Nursing Home facilities

These uses will include but not limited to schools, government buildings, office parks, hospitals and nursing homes. These projects must pay particular attention to design, context to the neighborhood, parking and site planning. Sign compatibility is important and special attention should be given to accommodate pedestrian and public transit access as well as to providing community amenities as described in the next section. Roof style and features should be compatible to that of surrounding properties. Where flat roofs are to be used, either cornice treatment or a simulated sloped or hipped roof should be used.

Guidelines to be used to evaluate design elements of the preceding use categories:

Building Design

Buildings should be designed with enduring characteristics to as to be recognized as being of an appropriate style over time. Special attention should be given to the front façade as viewed from the public right of way. Buildings should have architectural features that include, but are not limited to the following: recesses, projections, wall insets, arcades, window display areas, awnings, balconies, window projections, landscape structures or other features that complement the design of the structure.

Walls greater than 50 feet in horizontal length that can be viewed from public streets should be designed using a combination of architectural features, various building materials and landscaping (abutting the building) for at least 50% of the wall length. Other walls should incorporate architectural features and landscaping for at least 30% of the wall length.

Building Materials

The majority of the building materials shall be brick, stone, glass, decorative concrete block or an alternate material determined by the City Building Official to be of comparable durability. Industrially zoned projects may use other building materials.

Building Colors

The use of high intensity, high reflectance, fluorescent and metallic colors are discouraged except as approved for building trim. Window mullions, window trim, flashing, and other trim elements should be dark colors. (Mill should be avoided.).

Roof Design

Roofs should be designed to reduce the apparent exterior mass of a building, add visual interest and be appropriate to the architectural style of the building. Architectural methods should be used to conceal or accent flat rooftops, except in industrial areas. Variations within one architectural style are encouraged. Sloped roofs, visible rooflines and roofs that project over the exterior wall of a building enough to cast a shadow on the ground are encouraged. This also applies to canopies over fuel dispensers.

Customer Entrances

Clearly defined, highly visible customer entrances using features such as canopies, porticos, arcades, arches, wing walls, and integral planers are encouraged.

Lighting

Light levels shall be sufficient to ensure easy vision and a sense of security within parking areas and shall not shine or glare onto adjacent property or streets. All light fixtures should be designed in such a way that the lens is parallel to the ground and the lens should be flush with the fixture. Building and light pole fixtures shall be permitted to deviate from these requirements in industrial areas with the condition that the fixture is a minimum of 200 feet away from all property lines and light does not migrate onto adjacent properties or streets.

No light fixture should exceed 22 feet in height above grade. All light fixtures and poles should have a dark finish. Decorative or residential style lighting that does not comply with the above standards shall be considered by the project location and the building style.

Community Amenities

Community amenities such as patio/seating areas, water features, art work and pedestrian plazas with park benches or other features located adjacent to the primary entrance to the building(s) are encouraged. Emphasis should be placed on creating points of interest and a place of gathering.

Signage

(Reference Chapters 1173 and 1174 of the Elyria Code of Ordinances for Zoning Regulations)

A comprehensive signage plan should be provided. Wall signs should be designed to integrate into the overall architectural style of the building and consist of individual letters. The reuse of cabinet/box signs on existing buildings is discouraged, while new installations of cabinet/box signs are not permitted, except that cabinet/box signs that do not exceed 30" in any one direction, may be approved by Staff. Cloud/Contour signs may be approved by Staff, if Staff can objectively determine that the sign has the same characteristics of a channel letter sign and, in fact, the sign appears to be a channel letter sign from a distance.

Freestanding signs are encouraged to be of a ground mounted monument style. Sign bases should be constructed of materials compatible with the architecture of a building(s) located on the premises. White, yellow and ivory backgrounds of internally illuminated signs prohibited. Dark backgrounds are recommended. Changeable copy signs, reader boards are discouraged, however they may be acceptable on a limited basis provided they are non-illuminated and contain a dark background with light colored lettering.

Walkways

A continuous pedestrian walkway should be provided from the primary frontage sidewalk to access building entrances. Walkways should incorporate a combination of landscaping, benches, drop-off bays and bicycle facilities. Walkways should provide access from the parking areas to the entrances of the building(s). Walkways should have a minimum width of 5 feet without car overhang or other obstruction(s).

Mechanical Equipment

Mechanical equipment and service areas should be located in recesses in the building footprint or be appropriately screened. The design of the screening should be integrated into the overall building form. Mechanical equipment and service areas should be screened with visual barriers from adjacent property and public right of ways.

Building Location & Orientation

Buildings should have at least one principal entrance oriented toward the primary frontage property line.

Public Transportation Access

Buildings should make provisions to support pedestrian access by way of public transportation services.

Parking

Parking lots shall be concrete and/or asphalt pavement with continuous poured concrete curbing. A detailed parking lot plan is required and must indicate all landscape and planting locations. All planting islands should be of sufficient size to accommodate canopy trees, shrubs, and other plantings. The intent is to break up parking lots with adequate landscaping and green areas. Pervious pavements, rain gardens and bioswales may be approved in an effort to increase water quality and decrease storm water run-off.

Landscaping, Mounding, Fencing and Buffering

Landscaping, mounding or decorative fencing should be installed along all public rights of ways and in other areas as determined by the Planning Commission. However, chain link fencing may be permitted in industrial areas. Screening should be installed in the following locations: Parking Areas, Mechanical equipment, Service areas, Base of buildings(s), and to Buffer adjoining property. Landscaping shall be maintained in an attractive condition.

In those cases where decorative fencing is required it should consist of 42 inch high black wrought iron style fencing. The specific style must be approved.

Trees

In addition to required screening and landscaping, all site plans should include canopy trees (with a minimum two (2) inch caliper, measured six (6) inches above grade) both within the site and along all public rights of ways. All site plans should include a minimum of eleven (11) canopy trees per acre or equivalent, based upon the size of the site. The canopy trees shall be placed no greater than forty (40) feet on center. The type of trees should be selected from a list as approved by the Planning Commission.

Dumpsters and Trash Collection Areas

Any dumpster or trash collection area should be enclosed using the same material and color as that of the main building. The enclosure shall completely conceal the dumpster and all dumpster contents.

Chapter 3: Special Districts

Downtown District (The south boundary is Holly Lane)

This has been approved by City Council and is currently in force. (Special district requirements are in addition to all other requirements.)

Middle Avenue District (Holly Lane to 17th Street.)

(Special district requirements are in addition to all other requirements)

Wherever possible, new structures should contain at least two (2) stories. Combined uses are encouraged with residential or office units on the second floor.

Zero setbacks from the front property line should be required from Holly Lane to 9th Street. From 9th Street to 17th Street the existing residential setbacks should be maintained.

From Holly Lane to 9th Street, buildings are to incorporate the use of historic store front elements. For example, they should include bulkheads, display style windows, and transoms.

Awnings are encouraged.

A public entrance should face Middle Avenue.

Building design should encourage pedestrian access. This area is primarily a residential neighborhood and contains a portion of the West By the River Historic District. All construction within that area shall meet the requirements of that district in addition to the design review process.

Building design should be similar in style and period to nearby properties and may include a cornice.

Cleveland Street District

(Special district requirements are in addition to all other requirements)

This district shall include Cleveland Street from Gulf Road to State Route 57.

Wherever possible, new structures should contain at least two (2) stories. Combined uses are encouraged with residential or office units on the second floor.

Zero setbacks from the property line shall be required.

Buildings are to incorporate the use of historic store front elements. For example, they should include bulkheads, display style windows, and transoms.

Awnings are encouraged.

A public entrance should face Cleveland Street.

Building design should encourage pedestrian access.

Building design should be similar in style and period to nearby properties.

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