

BARDSTOWN ROAD - BAXTER AVENUE

DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS



A GUIDE FOR

DEVELOPERS, BUSINESS OWNERS & CITIZENS



City of Louisville

Jerry E. Abramson, Mayor



January 1992

Fellow Citizen:

It's a pleasure for me to present this "user's guide" to the Bardstown Road Overlay District. This is part of our effort to be helpful to property owners, business people, neighbors and anyone else interested in the design review process we've adopted for this lively and exciting, three -and-one-quarter-mile commercial corridor.

First, relax. The business people who have been through the review process will tell you we're doing everything possible to protect the special character of Bardstown Road without smothering anyone's rights or creativity. I can guarantee that anyone affected by the design review process will be treated with respect and sensitivity.

Second, virtually everyone agrees that Bardstown Road has something worth protecting: The feeling you get from a place that relates well to people and from surroundings that welcome you, make you feel comfortable, and make you want to slow down and spend some time with others. It's a vibrant, visually appealing, sometimes slightly offbeat place that helps make Louisville interesting and livable.

I'm convinced good, thoughtful design is part of the reason Bardstown Road works. Please help us enhance the distinctive feeling along the corridor. Let us know what you think and how we can best maintain one of community's most important assets.

Sincerely,

Jerry E. Abramson

Mayor

City of Louisville



FACTS & MYTHS

Let's be real clear about one thing: the Bardstown Road Overlay District *does not* require review of routine maintenance and cosmetic changes — such as painting — or any other work that doesn't significantly alter the appearance of the property. *Period.*

That means that most upkeep and repairs are done just the way you've always handled them. Here's a list of things exempt from any kind of design review:

- ✓ Any routine maintenance — including painting, repairs and the like.
- ✓ Any repair work needed to bring a building into compliance with building codes.
- ✓ Demolition of garages and similar structures.
- ✓ Removal of existing signs.
- ✓ Installing temporary signs (for up to two months while permanent signs are being designed and approved).
- ✓ Adding to any residential building, so long as the addition doesn't add living units or increase the total floor area by more than 20 percent.





THE BARDSTOWN ROAD OVERLAY DISTRICT

WHAT IS THE BARDSTOWN ROAD OVERLAY DISTRICT?

The Bardstown Road Overlay District (or BROD, for short) was created in January 1990 to help enhance the appearance and economic vitality of one of the community's most successful and appealing neighborhood commercial areas — the stretch of Baxter Avenue and Bardstown Road running through the Highlands.

BROD is administered by the city's Department of Inspections, Permits and Licenses (phone 625-3361) with input from a citizen-review panel.

Because of the district's historic value, the city's Landmarks Division (phone 625-3501) helps with the architectural review process.

HOW DOES BROD WORK?

The city law creating BROD set up an assortment of architectural and design guidelines and, in certain cases, a citizen-review

The guidelines aren't hard and fast rules. They guide.

process to help apply them.

The guidelines aren't hard and fast rules. They *guide*, trying to preserve the charm and vitality of the corridor and keep it from becoming just another suburban-style commercial strip. Bottom line: Reduce clutter and increase shop-window appeal.

The design-review process balances three objectives:

- 1) *Fairness.* Everything possible is done to be even-handed and avoid needless delays to applicants.
- 2) *Continuity.* Proposals are weighed by how much they "fit into" their surroundings, understanding that the corridor is very diverse.
- 3) *Economic vitality.* Bardstown Road is different. It's fun. Maybe even occasionally offbeat. And it's successful. Making room for everybody's interests is an important part of making the process work.





WHAT KIND OF WORK IS REVIEWED BY BROD?

Simply put, there are three kinds of developments subject to design review:

- 1) Any construction or exterior changes. Demolition of a non-historic building is an exception. Additions to

"... We're doing everything possible to protect the special character of Bardstown Road ... without smothering anyone's rights or creativity."

Mayor Jerry Abramson

residential buildings are also exempt from design review, provided the addition doesn't add to the number of living units or increase the total floor area by more than 20 percent.

- 2) Any new business sign or outdoor advertising sign.
- 3) Demolition of an historic structure.

Sometimes that review is done with input from a citizen-review committee, but it's often done on an "expedited" basis as a part of the city's normal construction and sign permit-review process.

WHAT'S "EXPEDITED REVIEW?"

The law says there should be a faster kind of review for changes dealing with signs and enlarging commercial buildings.

"Expedited review" is for any proposal that just consists of:

- ✓ A new business sign.
- ✓ Changing the structural part of an existing sign.
- ✓ Adding to any commercial building, if the addition isn't visible from the corridor and if it doesn't add more than 10 percent to the building's total floor area.





There are guidelines that apply even to “expedited review” proposals. But the review is typically done at the same time the sign or building permit request is being handled.

Remember: The simple fact is routine repair and maintenance — including painting — is *not* subject to any design review even if it needs a building permit.

WHAT ARE THE GUIDELINES TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH?

In broad terms, the guidelines look at:

- 1) *Major work like new buildings, additions, or significant remodelings.* In nearly every situation, the process tries to preserve the strong visual relationship between the buildings along the corridor.
- 2) *Changes to or affecting older and historic buildings.* Part of the special character and attractiveness of the corridor comes from the hundreds of historic buildings lining Bardstown Road. Every reasonable effort is being made to see that this source of pride and vitality is enhanced.
- 3) *Materials.* Once again, continuity is the yardstick. Since brick and wood are the predominant materials along the corridor, use of brick or wood — or any other “traditional” material — is encouraged.
- 4) *Landscaping.* Bardstown Road is an attractive place to walk and drive. Well-maintained trees, shrubs and other landscaping makes the corridor more livable and easier to live with.
- 5) *Parking.* Whenever possible, small, under-used lots should be made more efficient and accessible. The results are less pavement, more room for trees and people, and fewer buildings demolished. Generally speaking, new parking should go behind buildings.
- 6) *Signs.* Does a sign help a business do business without taking anything away from



the attractiveness of the corridor? That's the balance the design review process is after.

ARE ECONOMICS A FACTOR?

Yes, definitely. In the specific case of proposed demolitions of historic structures, the law says that no one can be denied a reasonable return on their property whether it's commercial or residential.

Keep in mind, however, that the properties along the corridor already have zoning restrictions on how they can be used or developed aside from any design review that might apply.

WHO DECIDES?

Through an expedited review, the city's top permit

official can generally decide design-review requests as part of the city's usual permit process.

For any changes that can't be expedited by this official, there's a citizen-review panel. The review panel is an eight-person advisory group selected mainly (three out

The guidelines want to encourage "people activity." They're trying to keep the corridor diverse and inviting.

of the eight) from people who own, operate or manage a building in the corridor.

The rest of the panel consists

of two architects or other type of design professional, a staff member or commissioner of the Louisville Landmarks Commission, a staff member or commissioner of the city-county Planning Commission, and a representative from one of the neighborhood associations along the corridor.

IS THERE AN APPEAL PROCESS?

Yes. If your application is turned down, you can appeal to the city's Board of Zoning Adjustment (phone 625-6230).

DOES THE REVIEW COST ANYTHING?

No more than the usual permit fee.





HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

The city's top permit official can decide certain proposals on the spot, provided there's adequate information for a decision. That's "expedited review."

For any proposal that gets reviewed by the citizen-advisory group, add eight days, when a meeting is held to talk things over with the applicant. Provided the committee members have enough information to make a decision, the group can make a recommendation then and there. To make it official, give them another three days to pass along their decision.

The permit official needs some time — up to three days — to consider the committee's recommendation and decide whether to accept or

reject its advice.

Generally, the more complicated the proposal, the longer the review. Remember, however, no one wants to make any proposal more complicated than it has to be.

Don't be afraid to talk about your ideas. Start the process early.

DO YOU NEED AN ARCHITECT OR DRAWINGS?

If your project had a professional designer already involved, it's probably wise to get them involved in the review process. The drawings required for a

building permit should be enough.

But if you have a relatively simple project to review, no one is going to ask you to hire an architect or prepare anything more than what it takes to clearly describe and illustrate what you propose doing. Just keep in mind that *the more the committee can understand about your project, the easier it becomes to make a recommendation.*

ANY SUGGESTIONS?

The more dialogue, the better. Get some early feedback on your ideas.



SIGN GUIDELINES

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Mayor Jerry Abramson

In a survey, "more attractive signage" was high on a list of things Bardstown Road shoppers said they'd like to see improved. "More attractive signage" is pretty wide open to definition, but the BROD guidelines have some general and specific "do's and don'ts:"

- ✓ Cutting down on visual clutter is a major objective. The best way to do this is to attach a sign to the building, provided the building on the property can be easily seen from the street.
- ✓ If the building sits back on the lot and an attached sign would be



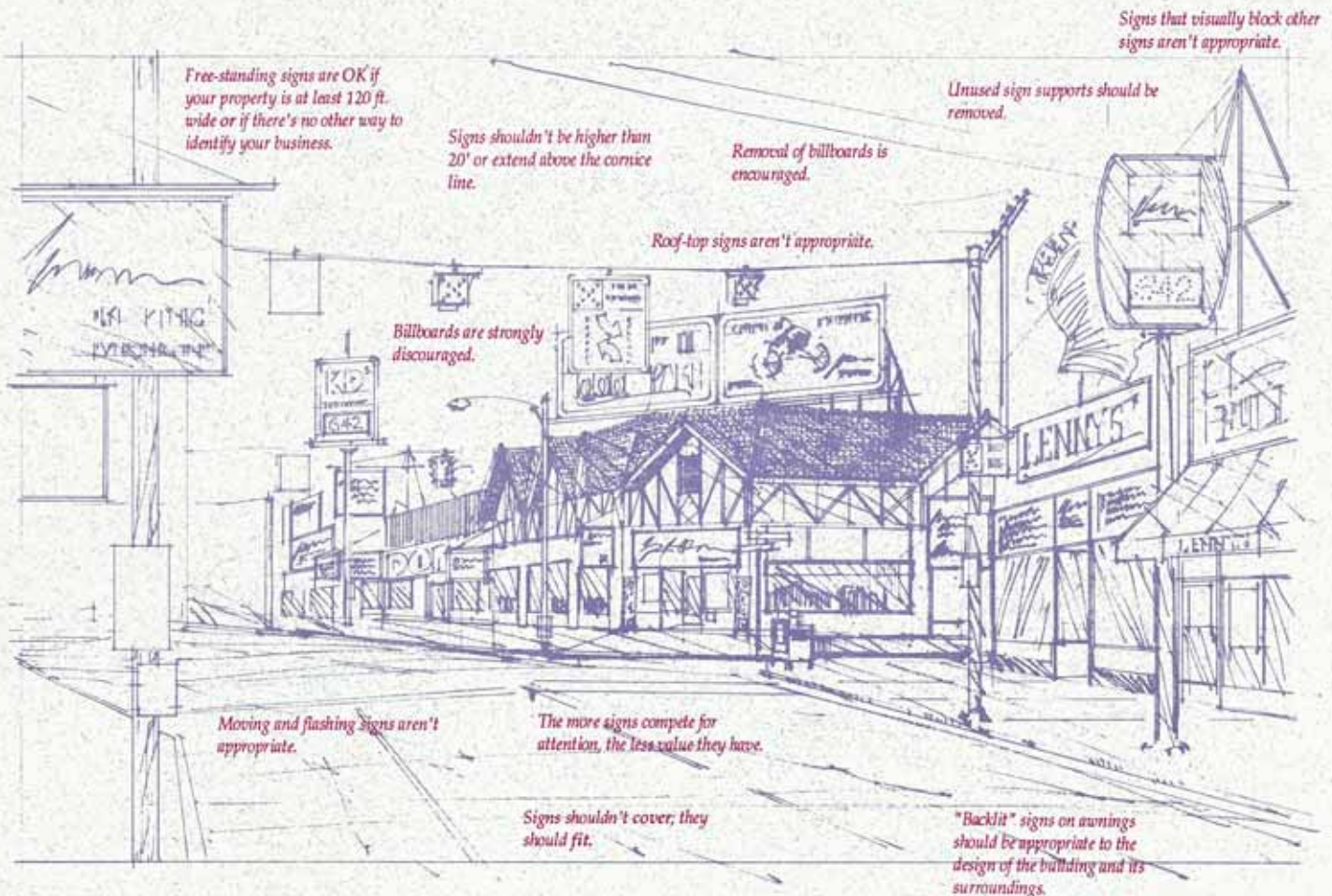


hard to see, the next best alternative is a "monument sign." This is typically a low sign that sits on a base and might be landscaped. Free-standing signs — particularly tall ones — are discouraged because they add to the clutter that makes the corridor look too much

like a badly planned strip shopping center.

- ✓ Signs that move or have gaudy illumination aren't appropriate.

Bottom line: Does a sign help a business do business without taking anything away from the attractiveness of the building or the corridor?





GUIDELINES FOR ADDITIONS & NEW CONSTRUCTION

It's tough to make hard-and-fast rules about a place as architecturally diverse as the Baxter-Bardstown corridor: *One-story buildings. Two-story buildings. Two-story buildings with one-story additions. One-story buildings with two-story additions. Close to the street. Pulled back from the street.*

But somehow the differences are subtle enough that things hold together and make a cohesive impression. That's why it's so important to plan additions, new construction, and major remodelings carefully, especially when historic structures are involved.

Generally speaking, there are four thoughts to keep in mind:

1) **Placement.** Look around your site and get a sense of what will "fit in." Try to maintain the prevailing setback. Also keep an eye on things like sideyards and the shapes of the buildings around you. . .their position on the lot.

Cars are a fact of life. But they

shouldn't come between your building and the people on the corridor. Keep parking lots to the rear of the site if at all possible.

2) **Details, especially windows.**

The corridor is mostly an older neighborhood shopping district, and its buildings tend to reflect that in their design, particularly with

"Now this building looks like it 'belongs' on Bardstown Road."

John Miller
site planner for Applebee's
2225 Taylorsville Road

their ample display windows. Some even have porches. Avoid blank walls and too-boxy designs.

3) **Roofing and height.** Try to be consistent. If the storefront additions around you have flat roofs, for example, don't design a high-pitched one that sticks out.

The same generally holds true for the height of new buildings and additions. Look for compatibility. Keep taller sections to the rear of the site. Remember, however, not to intrude on the residential neighborhoods that border the corridor.

4) **Orientation.** The corridor is "urban." Its buildings aren't just close to one another and close to the street. They relate to people who walk and drive along the corridor.

If possible, plan the front of the building to face the street. Try to keep the main entrance and important "people" activity on the corridor.

Storefront additions are OK if there's a strong pattern of similar additions. Roof shapes should be similar to nearby buildings. Display windows add visual interest to additions. Keep height and set back consistent with nearby buildings.



Traditional materials – brick and wood siding – can help a new building complement its surroundings.



Try to be compatible with surrounding buildings when it comes to the height of a new building.

A sign should be incorporated into the design of the building.



Display windows are encouraged.

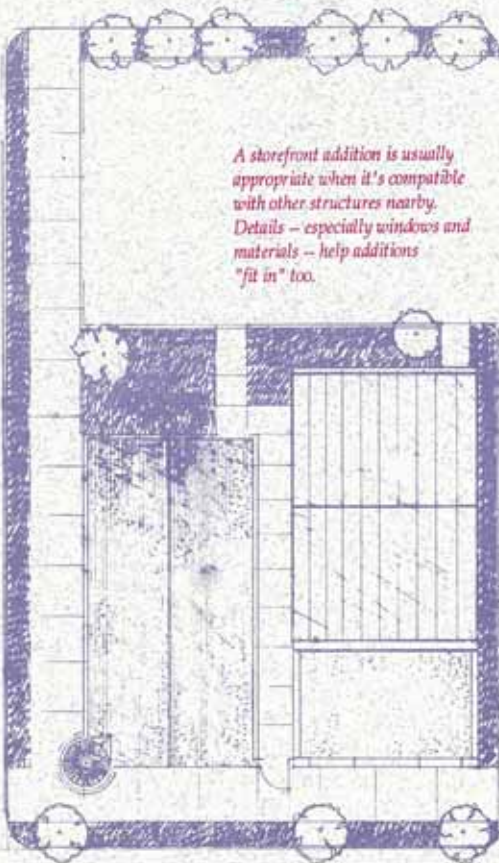


Original storefronts can be a "pattern" for new designs.

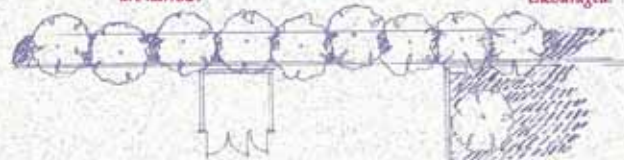
Storefronts should invite pedestrian activity. Appealing windows, well-placed signs and traditional materials are good guidelines to consider.

A new building can look out-of-place if it's wide and its neighbors are narrow.

Historic buildings contribute a lot to the character of the corridor. Their preservation – and careful remodeling – is strongly encouraged.



A storefront addition is usually appropriate when it's compatible with other structures nearby. Details – especially windows and materials – help additions "fit in" too.



Combining parking lots is encouraged. This can mean less pavement, more room for trees and people, and fewer buildings demolished.



In much of the corridor, buildings have little or no setback at all. New buildings should recognize that.



The setback of new buildings should respect the prevailing setback of surrounding buildings.

Whenever feasible, bury utility lines or move service away from the street.





GUIDELINES FOR MATERIALS

Most of the buildings along the Baxter-Bardstown corridor date from the late-1800s through WWII — just about the same time the Highlands became a popular place to live.

That was an era of substantial brick and wood frame construction, and the predominant materials in the corridor reflect that tradition.

When building or remodeling, choose a material consistent with that tradition. Begin by looking at the buildings around you and see if they suggest a direction. Chances are, there will be two major options:

- ✓ **Brick.** There's a lot of smooth, red brick along the corridor. Pay attention to little things too, like the color of the mortar.
- ✓ **Wood.** Horizontal lapped siding, "clapboard," is encouraged.

If those don't tickle your fancy, select something compatible. Aluminum and vinyl siding might be OK, but generally not for covering up historic buildings. Stone and stucco are two other workable alternatives.

Ask for advice before replacing materials. The Landmarks Division can help with questions about what to do with old siding, windows, roofs and trim.

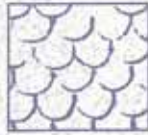
Don't cover or remove decorative trim. It's what helps make the corridor different — and attractive.

Windows with panes can help make a storefront look more interesting... and inviting.

Shop windows are meant to be inviting. Canvas awnings, wood trim and low-key signs help make store fronts more appealing to pedestrians.

Historic materials need special attention. Brick and stone — if cleaned at all — should be cleaned using the gentlest means possible. Don't sandblast!





Store-front additions are a Bardstown Rd.-Baxter Ave. tradition. The best ones respect the height, setback and materials of nearby buildings.



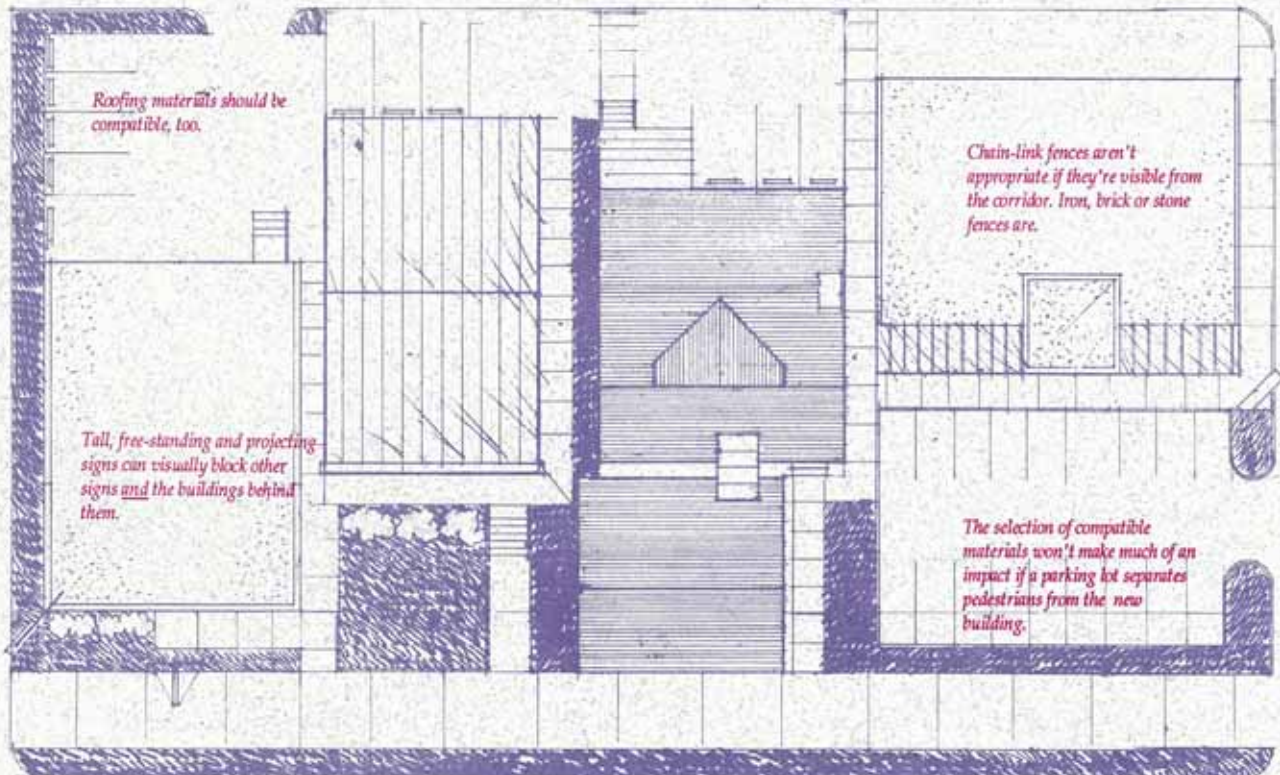
Compatible materials help keep the special character of the corridor intact. Select new materials by looking around for something familiar.

The choice of windows can make a big difference. Compare buildings with small windows, big windows, and no windows at all. Which ones invite pedestrian activity?

Carous awnings are more inviting than metal, particularly if there isn't any glaring "back lighting."

Radical departures from nearby buildings aren't appropriate. Metal or vinyl aren't traditional materials on the corridor.

Brick and horizontal wood siding are encouraged. Stucco or other compatible materials are also acceptable.





GUIDELINES FOR LANDSCAPE & PARKING

Trees and other plantings can have a big impact on making places more livable... and more inviting to shoppers. That's why the guidelines for the design review process want to encourage the "greening" of the Baxter-Bardstown corridor.

Proposals will be judged for their emphasis on new street trees, planter boxes or other landscaping. If possible, utility lines should be buried. New fences and screening walls should use materials that match or complement the main structure; chain link

should be avoided.

New parking should be planned behind buildings. Compatibility is important, so be aware of adjacent residential neighborhoods when you're planning lighting, plantings, and buffering.

Whenever possible, merge parking areas to increase efficiencies. Combining small parking lots into bigger ones not only improves appearances, it might also increase the number of available spaces.

"The project turned out better because of the design review process."

John Miller
Miller/Wihry Inc.
site planner for Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar
2225 Taylorsville Road



Landscaping along the street should be submitted along with your plans for new and substantially remodeled structures.

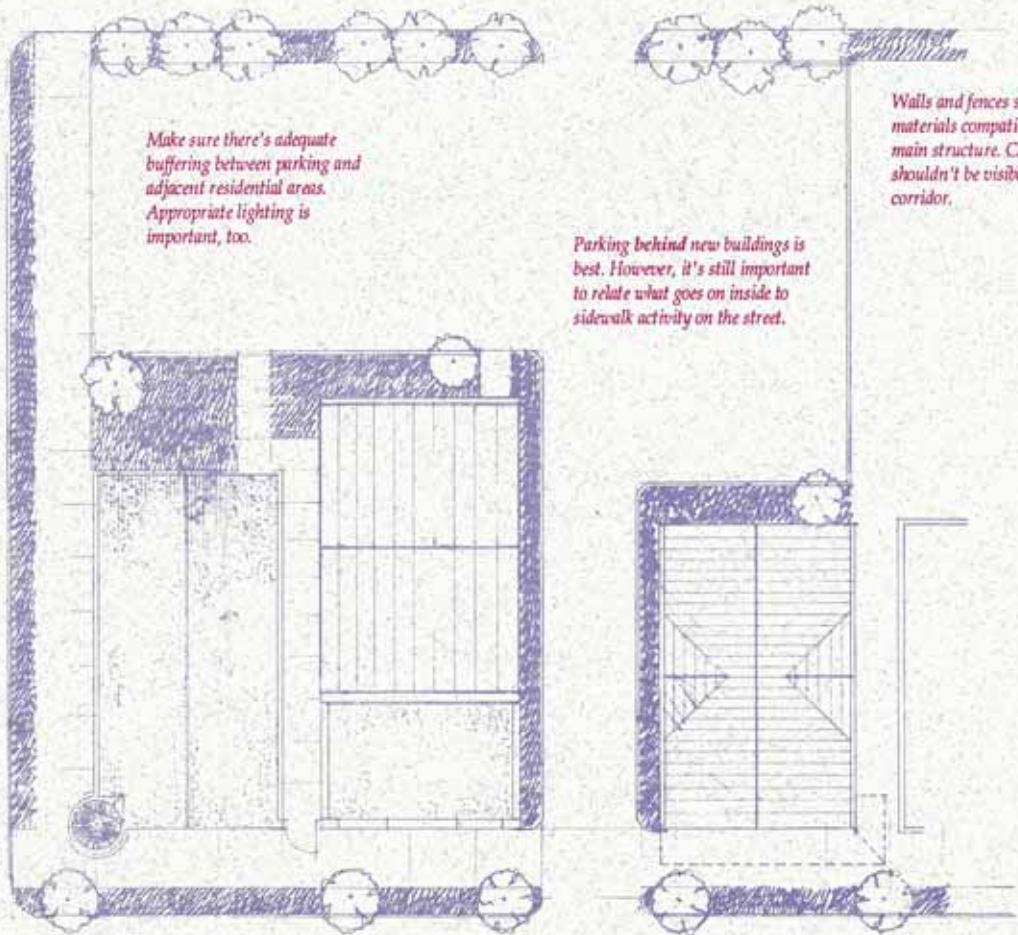
Trees and other plant material should be selected for reasonable ease of maintenance.

Street trees and planter boxes are encouraged because they help make shopping more attractive.





Underground utility lines or service from the alley, where feasible, is encouraged.



Make sure there's adequate buffering between parking and adjacent residential areas. Appropriate lighting is important, too.

Parking behind new buildings is best. However, it's still important to relate what goes on inside to sidewalk activity on the street.

Walls and fences should use materials compatible with the main structure. Chain link shouldn't be visible from the corridor.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The best source of detailed answers about the Bardstown Road design review process — and the place to start an application — is the city's Department of Inspections, Permits and Licenses. Get in touch with it by calling or writing:

Mr. Bill Schreck
609 West Jefferson Street
Louisville, Kentucky 40202
625-3361

The overlay district is mostly in a part of Louisville represented on the Board of Aldermen by the Third Ward Alderman, Dr. Tom Owen. Contact Alderman Owen by calling or writing:

Alderman Tom Owen
601 West Jefferson Street
Louisville, Kentucky 40202
625-3796

The Department of Community Services has an "action line" for general information about the city's programs and to direct questions to the appropriate agency:

CityCALL
625-3333

The Landmarks Division provides architectural staff for the design-review process. Call or write:

Landmarks Division
609 West Jefferson Street
Louisville, Kentucky 40202
625-3501

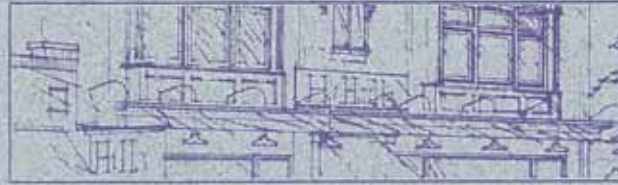
For questions about other zoning and land-use regulations, you can contact:

Louisville-Jefferson County Planning Commission
900 Fiscal Court Building
Louisville, Kentucky 40202-3396
625-6230

"The design panel worked with me . . . and for me."

George Gates, owner
Gates Chevron
1546 Bardstown Road





"The process works."

George Gates, owner
Gates Chevron
1546 Bardstown Road

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City of Louisville

Department of Inspections, Permits and Licenses

625-3361