



Chapter 7: Streetscape & Design Elements

OVERVIEW

During the public input phase of *The Dixie Fix*, the area of streetscape generated much interest. While safety and traffic flow are primary objectives of the study, the aesthetics along the corridor should not be ignored when implementing improvements or when redevelopment occurs. In fact, what one sees plays an important role in safety and in moving traffic. The current visual clutter created by overhead utilities and confusing signage (both private and public) make it difficult to find your desired destination and visually distract the driver pulling attention away from the primary task of driving.



Community are urged to consider aesthetics when development regulations are revised and as property along Dixie Highway develops or redevelops. While it is understood that physical improvements to the roadway and access itself should take priority and that funding just for those improvements will be challenging; aesthetics should not be overlooked. Funds are available for streetscaping and much can be done through the development/redevelopment process when appropriate regulations are in place. Many communities find that insisting on high quality development/redevelopment creates a more pleasing setting and a more successful and sustainable business climate.

STREETSCAPE REGULATION MODELS

Streetscape and design elements are a broad subject. This narrative will provide an overview of two streetscape plans that can be used as the basis for streetscape standards. The first plan considered is known as “*The Dixie*,” a joint streetscape and design effort of the Cities of Elsmere and Erlanger (please refer to <http://www.thedixie.com> for the complete document). The second plan presented for consideration is the *Kentucky Streetscape Design Guidelines for Historic Commercial Districts*.

“*The Dixie*”

“*The Dixie*” is a good local model to consider for the entire corridor. This design guideline program uses the following overall goal; “to improve the economic viability of this portion of the Dixie Corridor while enhancing the visual quality of life on and near The Dixie.” Example streetscaping design goals for the Dixie Highway corridor based on “*The Dixie*” include:

1. Establishing a new image for Dixie Highway
2. Creating a sense of excitement and energy for the area
3. Having a positive effect on businesses (both revenue and property values)
4. Encouraging redevelopment and new development opportunities
5. Promoting a compatible mix of businesses
6. Improving the quality of life for all community members.
7. Preserving the integrity of historic architectural building features.
8. Minimizing alterations and new construction that weaken architectural historic integrity.
9. Encouraging new development that respects and enhances the visual character of the area.
10. Enhancing the retail and service business focus of the area.

Both Elsmere and Erlanger implement and enforce their design guidelines through a zoning overlay district (please refer to <http://ara.nkapc/zoningpdf/elsmere/elsrp.pdf> for Elsmere and http://ara.nkapc/zoning_pdf/erlanger/erlrp.pdf for Erlanger's Renaissance Protection Overlay Zone). The overlay district has specific boundaries, which are part of Elsmere and Erlanger's zoning maps. The guidelines are referenced in the Zoning Ordinance and any new development in the designated area needs to comply with them.

One of the major features of the plan is a breakdown of guidelines into three specific types of design criteria: (A) public, (B) private and (C) historic. The public portion of the plan includes intersections, bus stops, public parking lots and sidewalks. These improvements are funded when public funds become available. The private guidelines are suggested, not mandatory, and are paid by the private property owner. The historic guidelines are used when federal, state and/or local funding is being provided for the rehabilitation or maintenance of historic features.

A. Public Design Guidelines (within the right-of-way)

1. **Screen Walls:** Are used at selective locations to act as gateway features and include a corridor "nameplate." Screen walls are also used to block parking areas from view.
2. **Sidewalks:** "The Dixie" calls for brick sidewalks where redevelopment occurs. Careful consideration should be given to using brick due to safety and maintenance. Embossed concrete might be a more practical and safe choice.
3. **Crosswalk:** Specially colored and stamped crosswalks should be used at intersections.
4. **Pedestrian Lighting:** Calls for a specific type and height of street lighting are recommended.
5. **Landscaping:** The emphasis for landscaping is on minimizing maintenance. No hanging baskets or planters are allowed.

Acceptable trees and shrubs come from an approved list. Many good examples of landscaping exist along the Dixie corridor, such as;

- Little Red School House
 - Richie's Car Wash
 - Fort Mitchell City Building/Fire House
6. **Signage:** The location of signage using the phrase "The Dixie" and the specific font and size are made.
 7. **Street Furniture:** Specific street furniture, benches and trash receptacles are recommended along with where they should be placed.
 8. **Overhead Utilities:** "The Dixie" recommends placing all the overhead utilities on one side of the street on high poles whenever possible.

Overhead utility lines are one of the most dominating visual forces along the corridor. Throughout the entire Dixie Fix study, there was discussion and interest in addressing the unsightliness of overhead wires, the visual distraction they pose to drivers, and the fact that in many instances the poles are only a foot from the curb and roadway. Both options of burial and relocation of utilities to the rear of the property are very high price improvements. However, overwhelming support was voiced for consideration of such improvements, especially if and when situations arise that would entail relocation of utilities due to expanded right-of-way acquisition, sidewalk installation, etc.

In lieu of a coordinated program to consolidate and clean-up the existing overhead utilities, other general options for utilities may exist. Following is a list presented in the *Beechmont Corridor Vision Plan* prepared in 2005 for Anderson Township:

- Introducing a metal surround, collar or banding around the utility poles
- Option to hang selected streetscape elements from existing utility poles such as banners, planters, decorative lighting, etc.

- Replacement of unsightly or damaged utility poles with new ones.

B. Private Design Guidelines (outside the public right-of-way)

1. **Street Furniture:** Specific street furniture, benches and trash receptacles are recommended along with where they should be placed.
2. **Landscaping:** Private businesses are allowed to have planters (terra cotta) in front of their businesses. Screening of private parking areas from Dixie Highway is encouraged. Tree plantings are also encouraged.
3. **Pedestrian Lighting:** Lighting similar to the public type is encouraged.
4. **Awnings:** Are a desired element of all three sectors of “The Dixie.” A number of specific recommendations regarding color, type, and heights are made.
5. **Wall Signs:** One wall sign per business is permitted.



Appropriate signage and strategically placed street furniture creates a welcoming atmosphere and friendly character along the corridor.

6. **Free Standing Signs:** Specifications are given for free standing signs, which, in some cases, differ from the Zoning Ordinance regulations. According to the RP (Renaissance Protection) Overlay Ordinance, the design guidelines prevail over the underlying zone.
7. **Temporary Signs:** Size and duration are listed.
8. **Parking:** The goal of this section is to limit the visual impact of parking lots along the corridor through screening. Rear parking that is linked to adjacent lots is strongly encouraged with a 50% reduction. On-street parking is discouraged. This was echoed by The Dixie Fix Oversight Team and majority of public opinion. Another huge issue for Dixie Highway is the existence of frontage parking that requires drivers to back out into the flow of traffic. The Dixie Fix’s site specific access management recommendations have worked to address these particular locations.
9. **Buildings:** Reuse of existing building stock is encouraged. A list of suggested materials and colors for new construction is made as well as a height limitation of 2 ½ stories. This was well supported by responses from the Visual Preference Survey. The age of buildings along Dixie span from the 1800s to present day, creating a wide variety of building sizes, materials, set-backs, etc. New construction that blends with the existing is most preferred.

C. Historic Design Guidelines

These criteria are followed only if federal, state or local funding is used. The design guidelines are quite lengthy and are similar to those used by the Secretary of the Interior for Historic Buildings on the National Register.

Kentucky Streetscape Design Guidelines for Historic Commercial Districts

The second plan used as a reference for developing streetscape and design regulations for Dixie Highway may be the *Kentucky Streetscape Design Guidelines for Historic Commercial Districts*, which was published by the Kentucky Heritage Council in 2002. The guiding principles of Kentucky Streetscape Design Guidelines can be summarized as follows:

1. Design for People
 - Look for opportunities to enhance or create gathering places
 - Provide alternative transportation modes
 - Improvements and new development need to avoid all types of congestion and look for ways to improve safety
2. Correct Infrastructure Pathologies
 - Drainage
 - Utility Lines and facilities
 - Pedestrian Routes
 - Parking
 - Service Areas
3. Maintain or Improve Mass and Space Relationships
 - Where appropriate, seek to fill “gaps” in building “mass,” avoid excessive parking in the front of buildings
 - Maintain average building set backs
4. Enhance Pedestrian Experience
 - Screen parking lots
 - Remove visual “clutter” and obstacles
 - Plan improvements and redevelopment with pedestrian routes in mind
5. Coordinate Public and Private Improvements
 - Monitor public and private improvements and look for ways to incorporate streetscape improvements when

- feasible (improve sidewalks, signage for example)
- Look to create limited design coordination between the public and private elements

6. Enhance Individuality
 - Maintain historic fabric (where appropriate)
 - Use high quality contemporary design for new projects

Both “The Dixie” Design Guidelines and the *Kentucky Streetscape Design Guidelines* have qualities and features that could be utilized in other areas of the Dixie corridor. The *Kentucky Streetscape Guidelines* have very solid overall goals while “The Dixie” Design Guidelines are an existing program that has been implemented. It is also worthwhile to keep the overall project goals of improving the economic viability,

while enhancing the visual quality of life on and near the Dixie corridor in mind as determining the choice of streetscape plan.

ADDRESSING VISUAL CLUTTER THROUGH WAYFINDING

Building upon the potential for local communities along Dixie to adopt streetscape design regulations, it may serve very beneficial to conduct



Identifying and preserving historic districts can enliven suburban centers and maintain the social fabric of the corridor.

a wayfinding study and create a plan for the entire corridor.

The term “wayfinding” was first used in 1960 by architect Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City*, where he referred to maps, street numbers, directional signs and other elements as “way-finding” devices. Even though signage plays an important role in wayfinding, the process does not rely exclusively on signs.

Visitors to Dixie Highway are not always familiar with the corridor and need to know where they actually are and the location of their destination in order to travel safely and efficiently. An organized wayfinding system could have a positive effect on increasing safety and travel time, as well as the overall attractiveness of Dixie Highway as a travel destination.

Effective physical wayfinding clues allow people to quickly grasp the environment whether they are traveling by vehicle, foot, bicycle or bus. Wayfinding can take many different forms such as signs, color coding, maps, banners, brochures and even websites. Wayfinding tools provide orientation, direction, identification and regulatory information to the Dixie traveler. To achieve effective communication, wayfinding tools should:

- Clearly identify arrival points.
- Use easily understood “plain” language.
- Code areas by using color and memorable graphics.
- Size messages and signs appropriately for viewing distances.
- Select letterforms and color combinations that comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Accessibility Guidelines
- Use established pictographs with words to facilitate comprehension of written messages.
- Establish consistency in sign placements and graphics layouts.
- Provide convenient parking and accessible walkways located adjacent to building entries.
- Provide standardized “you are here” maps for pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders.

- Use consistent lighting, roadway and sidewalk materials along the corridor
- Situate memorable landmarks along the corridor and at key decision points such as major intersections.
- Distinguish local communities with signs, plantings, etc.

A future wayfinding study for Dixie Highway should include all stakeholders and be multi-modal in its approach. The study should inventory and analyze existing conditions including:

- Interstate signage
- City street signage
- Street infrastructure
- Bike/Pedestrian routes
- Community/neighborhood identity
- TANK transit

It should be noted that a sign inventory was conducted during the Dixie Highway Corridor Study (June 2005) and could provide a starting point for collecting wayfinding data.

A potential Dixie Highway wayfinding plan should make formal recommendations in regards to the design, materials, and location of wayfinding elements. Estimated costs and a phasing strategy for implementation would enable funding applications to closely follow conclusion of a wayfinding study.

(Sources: John Muhlhausen's April 4, 2006 article [Wayfinding Is Not Signage at www.SignWeb.com](http://www.SignWeb.com) and the [Draft Uptown Schematic Design Final Report, July 21, 2005](#)).

