



# URBAN DESIGN





## 10. Urban Design

### A. Introduction

Sidney's built environment plays an important role in defining its image, which in turn shapes the perceptions of those who live and work in the City, or are visiting. According to the "Retail Market and Recruitment Strategy", quality of life is the number one factor in retaining property values. This argument supports the need for a long term plan and for the built environments in a community, and to protect and preserve their character and aesthetic values. The components of the built environment addressed in the Urban Design Plan include the following:

- Major Land Uses
- Corridors and Gateways
- Activity Centers and Landmarks
- Edges and Views
- City Beautification
- Historic Resources
- Traditional Development Pattern

### B. Planning Issues

The following planning issues were identified relative to urban design:

#### 1. Corridors

Sidney contains a number of high profile natural and built corridors, most notably I-75 and the Great Miami River as well as SR 47, SR 29 and CR 25A. People traveling along transportation corridors are exposed to the City and gain a sense of its appeal based on their observations of the built environment. Transportation corridor improvements should focus on strengthening the link between downtown and I-75 and enhancing SR 47.

#### 2. Gateways

There are four exits from I-75 into Sidney, which serve as the City's front door. Exit 92 at SR 47 is heavily developed with commercial and industrial land uses. The remaining interstate exits are primarily undeveloped. These particular gateways need to be enhanced and linked to the primary corridors, which move people into and out of the City.

#### 3. Activity Centers

Several activity areas in the City attract local people, such as Tawawa Park, Custenborder Park and the Sports Complex, Deam Park and the YMCA facility. Other activity centers serve as regional draws, such as the downtown or Shelby County Fairgrounds. These centers experience high volumes of activity, and it is important for the City to continue extending support to these areas, and focus on physical improvements that will enhance these centers.



*Existing entry signage as viewed from Fair Road.*



## C. Existing Conditions

### 1. Findings

The feeling of entering a city may occur long before one sees the building shapes of the central business district. A variety of elements help identify and achieve a sense of place for a community. A sense of place results from the combination of urban design elements including gateways, corridors, nodes, districts, edges and landmarks. Identifying what is unique about Sidney, from extraordinary land marks places and events to ordinary elements that define the Community. These elements range in scale and are not exclusive or independent of each other. It is the relationship between the elements that help bring definition and identity to Sidney. Analyzing Sidney's built environment, according to urban design components, reveals opportunities and constraints for enhancing community image.

### 2. Place Making

The adage says, "A picture is worth 1,000 words." This particularly rings true with a City's visual identity. Sidney's identity needs to be strengthened and enhanced to promote the positive characteristics of the community. Strengthening the City's identity is one step toward improving the community's appearance and overall quality of life. One of the most effective ways to improve a communities' identity, or image, is to build upon what makes the community, or region, unique. For example, by incorporating the characteristics of Sidney's older residential areas into the design of new residential development the neighborhood appeal is enhanced by the diversity and style of buildings. This also can include a variety of housing types and densities, porches, girded street patterns, alleys, wide tree lawns, and detached or side loaded garages. What is special about the community will be incorporated throughout the city, and will help set it apart from other surrounding communities.



*An existing view of South Main Street illustrates wide streets, tree canopy, and off street parking that is found in traditional neighborhoods.*

Improvements to commercial development and the transportation corridor may be abstracted from the urban design components. Some of these may include a modified grid street pattern integrated into commercial development, on street parking, and vernacular architecture (with unique characteristics such as arches, and stone, brick or wood materials). For instance, the major roadway corridors may continue the newly constructed downtown streetscape by extending lighting, signage, landscape treatments and pavement texture. By borrowing from these traditional existing elements the identity of Sidney will be enhance.



*The existing Route 47 Corridor would benefit from extending the urban design elements of Downtown.*

### 3. Major Land Uses

Major land use concentrations in Sidney serve as community building blocks, and provide a strong direction for future land use recommendations. They clearly help define the current physical character of the City, by indicating major residential areas, commercial nodes and industrial concentrations. (This depiction is general in scope, and a detailed land use survey is outlined in the Land Use Chapter).

Low density residential is the predominant land use in the City. Rural residential/agriculture land uses are located to the north, east and south of the City. A considerable number of "satellite" low-density areas are located outside of the sewer service limits. Major open space includes Tawawa Park, Moose Golf Course, Shelby County fairgrounds and the Great Miami River corridor.



Urban Design Features





Commercial development is concentrated around the Central Business District, northwest corner of I-75 and SR 47 and the frontage along CR 25A south of Russell Road. The industrial land uses are concentrated along the I-75 corridor south of SR 47, and along Vandemark Road. In addition, industrial uses are located along the west side of SR 29 north of Russell Road.

#### **4. Transportation Corridors**

Transportation corridors provide a means for people and goods to travel to, and through, a community. They define the ways in which a community functions, and the visual impression a community leaves with travelers and visitors. The major corridors in Sidney include I-75, SR 29, SR 47, CSX and Conrail railroads.

#### **5. Natural Corridors**

Natural corridors serve a variety of functions as open space elements, wildlife corridors and in the case of streams, as conduits for stormwater. Natural corridors likewise help to define a community's overall character, as well as smaller portions or neighborhoods (as boundaries). The major natural corridors include the Great Miami River and several related tributaries including Brush, East Turtle, Mill, Tawawa and Plum creeks.

#### **6. Gateways**

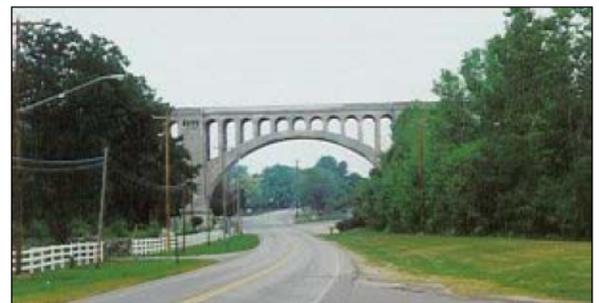
Gateways are key points at which travelers enter a community. They serve as "front doors" and provide travelers the very first image of a community. They serve an important function in that regard, leaving a lasting impression that can boost a community's appeal or harm it. Major gateways are located at the four interchanges along I-75. Minor gateways are CR 25A at the southern city line, SR 47 just east of Kuther Road, SR 29 (northwest and east) at the Clinton Township boundary, SR 47 south of Tawawa Creek and CR 25A south of Hoewisher Road.

#### **7. Activity Centers**

Activity centers are locations that are defined by a great deal of human activity whether it be recreation, shopping, health care or other activities in which people exchange communication, goods and services, etc. Activity centers are important in that they serve as major points of communal exchange and they are foundations for a community's quality of life. The major activity centers include Tawawa Park, Shelby County Fairground area (encompassing Emerson Elementary School, Sidney High School, Sidney Middle School, and County Fairgrounds), Wilson Memorial Hospital, Central Business District (including County Court House, Municipal Building, etc.), Deam Park/YMCA, Custenborder Park and the SR 47 commercial corridor.

#### **8. Landmarks**

Landmarks are considered a site-specific reference point for a community and often promote an image reflecting the surrounding community. They can be physical structures ranging in scale from a sign to a building, or the landmark is in the natural landscape. A landmark creates a specific identity for a community because it serves as a reference from different locations in the city. Sidney's landmarks include Conrail Railroad Bridge (across the Great Miami River), Courthouse Square, grain silo adjacent to the corporation line on Vandemark Road and City water tanks west of I-75 and along Fourth Avenue.



*The Big Four Railroad Bridge serves as one of Sidney's landmarks.*

#### **9. Edges**

Edges define the boundaries of specific areas and can include large woodlands, significant sloped areas and physical elements, such as elevated highways. Two primary edges in Sidney are the existing sewer service boundaries, and the three-mile platting area boundary.



**10. Views**

At different points around the City, views provide images of Sidney. Overall, the scale of Sidney is small, defined by small residential lots, and the traditional courthouse square area. Other views in Sidney are the many corridors creating visual paths of open space.

**11. Development Pattern**

Sidney's original development pattern and architecture evolved mostly out of necessity. Streets were laid out perpendicular to the river to accommodate bridge crossings, and development densities were based on limited mobility. Building materials were taken from nearby woodlands and quarries, and the buildings themselves are located close to the street. The courthouse is located in the center of town, borrowing from a courthouse square design unique to the Midwest, demonstrating the importance of Sidney being the county seat. The adjacent residential neighborhoods became an extension of this pattern, creating a very pedestrian oriented, compact environment. This is demonstrated by the integration of residential units in close proximity to work and shopping.



*The above diagram from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation illustrates how typical suburban type development is laid out.*

Today, Sidney's development pattern, like most communities, is more a result of convenience than necessity. Streets are curvilinear; local streets are designed to discourage through traffic while other streets area designed primarily to carry traffic swiftly and efficiently through the community. Buildings are setback from the street to be buffered from the busy traffic. Side and rear yards are extensive to afford privacy. Parking lots and garages are located in the spacious front yards and have become the most prominent feature on the block. The resulting low density, and separation of uses, further increases the dependence on autos to travel, taking away from the existing compact pedestrian oriented design.

**D. Urban Design Plan**

**1. Introduction**

The Urban Design Plan concentrates strategies in areas having high visibility and volumes of citizen interaction. The underlying theme of the plan is broad based physical improvements -- strengthening the physical appearance of the City, and creating a positive community identity.

**2. Policies**

The following summarizes the mission statement and objectives that serve as the policy foundation for the Urban Design Plan:

**a) Mission Statement**

The urban design mission is to beautify the City, preserve historic structures and modify the pattern of development.

**b) Objectives**

The following are the objectives for Urban Design:

**Objective 1 - Beautification of the City**

The City has several high profile urban design components such as corridors and gateways, that are strategic points for establishing the City's image. City beautification means enhancing these points with landscaping and other materials to increase the aesthetic perception and appeal of Sidney to residents, businesses and visitors. Community investments in public improvements and incentives promote a strong quality of life.



*Similar to the suburban type development, this above diagram from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation illustrates more traditional type development.*



### **Objective 2 - Preservation of Historic Resources**

Historic resources are an asset to Sidney also, particularly the Courthouse Square and older neighborhoods adjacent to downtown. These resources are unique to the City and are attractive to visitors. Furthermore, such resources create a strong identity, function as a source of historic continuity and contribute to the City's uniqueness

### **Objective 3 - Traditional Development Pattern**

Encouraging future development to follow a more traditional neighborhood development pattern is a better utilization of land, and places homes, shops, and employment in close proximity to one another, reduces the number of trips people make, which in turn reduces traffic congestion.

## **3. Standards**

Specific standards for urban design are developed on an ad hoc basis in different communities. Such standards are unique and applicable to each community, based on its existing physical structure, and the visual perceptions of community residents and officials. Sidney should develop urban design standards unique to the City, with adequate community input. The following are the recommended standards for Urban Design:

### **a) Gateways**

Standards for improving gateways to reinforce a positive image for the City include the following:

- 1) Consistent, attractive and welcoming signage identifying the City.
- 2) Significant landscape improvements.
- 3) Removal or screening of inappropriate physical activities, such as screening of outdoor storage of materials and equipment.

### **b) Corridors**

Standards that extend a positive image from gateways along corridors include the following:

- 1) Consolidated public signs and overhead utilities in the right-of-way.
- 2) Comprehensive street tree plantings and well-maintained tree lawns.
- 3) Updated signage regulations to reduce visual clutter and provide for a cohesive signage environment.

### **c) Activity Centers**

Standards that support activity centers include the following:

- 1) Public actions should not result in negative impacts to an activity center.
- 2) Activity centers should continue to be well integrated into the City.
- 3) Reinforce activity centers by encouraging complementary development.

### **d) Districts**

Standards that protect districts include the following:

- 1) Encourage appropriate identification signage at the entrance to districts, such as subdivision neighborhood signs, with appropriately scaled landscaping.
- 2) Discourage uses that are inappropriate for a given district, such as residential development in an industrial area.

### **e) Edges**

Standards that reinforce edges include the following:

- 1) Reinforce natural edges through tree plantings, especially on public land.
- 2) Discourage development of severely sloped areas along the Great Miami River.
- 3) Prohibit development in a floodplain.
- 4) Encourage effective screening and buffering between conflicting land uses.

### **f) Landmarks**

Standards that support and/or protect existing landmarks (including historic resources) include the following:

- 1) Discourage demolition of or inappropriate renovation to existing landmarks.
- 2) Discourage inappropriate uses or activities adjacent to landmarks (or within close proximity).
- 3) Encourage development that is sensitive to and reinforces the architectural character of Courthouse Square.



- 4) Nominate local buildings and districts to the National Register of Historic Places

**E. Development Pattern**

Standards that encourage a more traditional neighborhood development pattern are the following:

- 1) Incorporate traditional neighborhood design standards into development regulations for new developments.
- 2) Promote infill development within existing residential neighborhoods that is compatible with the existing architectural character.
- 3) Identify existing commercial areas with redevelopment potential and encourage a mix of uses at increased densities with strong pedestrian links to adjacent neighborhoods.

**4. Urban Design Plan**

**a) Introduction**

The Urban Design Plan identifies appropriate actions to implement the standards, previously noted, and respond to the policies underlying the plan. The public has noted that Sidney should improve its physical image to help improve the overall quality of life, and to make the community more attractive to new businesses and residents.

**b) City Beautification**

The City has several high profile urban design components, such as corridors and gateways, which are strategic points for improving Sidney's image. Existing gateway areas do not promote community identity or convey a sense of place. Likewise, existing corridors do not promote visual linkage into the community, or convey a strong community image. It is important to note community beautification goes hand in hand with community growth. Under the proposed Land Use Plan, the majority of Sidney's growth will be to the north and northeast. For example, corridor development and gateway identity in these growth areas must be linked, and promote, the identity of Sidney. The same holds true for growth on the west side of I-75, and this area must contribute aesthetically to the City. Strengthening these types of urban design components will allow Sidney to maintain a holistic City image committed to community development, beautification and environmental preservation, rather than a fragmented image of the "City and the suburbs."

**1) Public Improvements**

Public improvements are an important part of maintaining a positive appearance and identity for Sidney, as well as promoting a strong quality of life. Funding is crucial to city beautification. The City's capital improvement's program should be revised to reflect the priorities for city beautification. Ultimately, public improvements made in highly visible areas will encourage economic development, and attract new residents.

The following public improvements should be considered:

- i. Continue plans to improve the downtown streetscape throughout other visible corridors.
- ii. Design and install landscaping at all interstate gateways, beginning at SR 47.
- iii. Establish corridor design standards for landscaping, street trees and infrastructure (sidewalks, light and traffic poles, etc.) and implement in major corridors. Coordinate with bike path master plan.
- iv. Consolidate public signage and utilities in all rights-of-way.



*In the above picture, Route 62 in Gahanna, Ohio is similar to Route 47. Shown in the below picture are improvements that were made to the corridor to improve the City's gateway.*





- v. Continue street tree program.
- vi. Consider unique street name signage for historic districts.
- vii. Undertake reforestation/ forestation programs along natural edges on public property.
- viii. Maintain public landmarks.

## 2) Private Improvements

Private improvements are equally important as public improvements. Well landscaped and maintained properties such as the Stolle Corporation facilities at I-75 and SR 47, serve as an example that should be replicated throughout the City's business and industrial districts. The creation of a city beautification program should be explored to provide incentives for improvements and maintenance undertaken by private property owners.

One desirable aspect of Sidney is the older neighborhoods around the downtown. These areas are desirable because of their unique architecture and historic neighborhood environment. However some of the residences are aging, and are in disrepair. Sidney can improve upon the existing neighborhoods around the Downtown through infill development, where new homes are built with similar materials as existing buildings, and the architecture corresponds in an unobtrusive way.

Another important aspect of the Urban Design Plan is to improve older sections of the City, especially the residential areas surrounding the downtown, and borrow traditional neighborhood elements from these areas to spread throughout newer developments. The traditional elements of revitalized older neighborhoods such as the grid street pattern, brick or wood frame homes with detached garages, alley ways, prominent parks, and the convenience of the centralized locations are attractive options for a growing portion of the population that desire more urban development as opposed to suburban expansion. This is an attractive option for homeowners, and continuing some of these elements throughout the city helps enhance the urban design recognition.



*Areas like Norfolk, Virginia have encouraged more traditional type development in newer housing projects.*

The following private improvements should be considered:

- i. Continue facade rehabilitation programs downtown.
- ii. Encourage landscaping and screening on existing development, especially at gateways, within corridors and adjacent to landmarks.
- iii. Strengthen landscaping and signage standards in the Zoning Code.
- iv. Promote tree planting/reforestation programs along natural edges.
- v. Encourage maintenance of privately owned landmarks.

## c) Historic Preservation

Historic preservation is an important tool in protecting the historic resources of Sidney. The City should develop programs concentrating on preserving its historic resources. Different programs should create incentives to maintain historic structures, and the City should develop a historic resource commission to provide the City with a role in historic preservation. This portion of the Urban Design Plan is interrelated with the Downtown Plan.

## d) Traditional Development Pattern

Following a more traditional development pattern for future development, and encouraging infill development within existing neighborhoods, will set Sidney apart from other growing communities in the region. They will also make attractive places to live for relocating families, and encourage existing residents to stay by offering a variety of housing choices.



## E. Implementation

### 1. Introduction

The following strategies focus on key implementation steps to beautify the City and preservation of its historic resources.

### 2. Strategies

#### Objective 1 - Beautification of the City

##### Strategies

##### 1a1) Continuing the annual award for commercial beautification

Commercial areas have a strong impact on Sidney's image, and many people from other communities shop at the City's commercial areas. In order to enhance the perception of Sidney to visitors, the Sidney-Shelby County Chamber of Commerce and Sidney Visitors Bureau should continue its commercial beautification award program.

*Responsible Party:* Sidney-Shelby County Chamber of Commerce and Sidney Visitors Bureau (Lead)  
*Timeframe:* Ongoing  
*Estimated Cost:* In-House Staff Time

##### 1a2) Establishing an annual award for single-family residential beautification.

The City should establish an annual award program to recognize individuals who beautify their single family residential property. The program could be based upon the Chamber's successful commercial beautification award program.

*Responsible Party:* Community Services Director (Lead)  
*Timeframe:* Short Term  
*Estimated Cost:* In-House Staff Time

##### 1b) Strengthening urban design components of the City's zoning code.

The City's zoning code is an important way to enhance the built environment, especially as new development is constructed or properties are redeveloped. Several aspects of the zoning code affect the built environment, including greater flexibility for required setbacks and side yards, building height and roof slopes, signage, landscaping, parking, etc. The code should be reviewed in line with this Plan and updated where necessary.

*Responsible Party:* Community Services Director (Lead)  
*Timeframe:* Short Term  
*Estimated Cost:* In-House Staff Time

##### 1c) Requiring the landscaping of new industry, businesses and off-street parking areas along major arterials and I-75.

Landscaping and buffering are important components of urban design. The City should develop zoning code amendments that create buffering and screening requirements for industrial and commercial areas and a landscaping ordinance that stipulates requirements for new and substantially expanded commercial and industrial facilities.

*Responsible Party:* Community Services Director (Lead) and  
*Timeframe:* Ongoing  
*Estimated Cost:* In-House Staff Time



**1d) Establishing design standards for public spaces.**

The City should establish coordinated design standards for all public spaces, especially gateways, corridors, districts, activity centers, edges and landmarks. These standards would address public infrastructure, landscaping, signage, etc., including appropriate plant material, planting standards, poles, traffic fixtures, benches, trash receptacles, etc. All City departments in undertaking their regular duties and in bidding capital improvements would follow these standards. A design professional should be retained to assist in developing the standards and preparing a handbook with typical drawings.

*Responsible Party:* City Manager (Lead) and Community Services Director  
*Timeframe:* Mid Term  
*Estimated Cost:* \$25,000 - \$35,000 for Professional Services

**1e) Linking the downtown and I-75 through beautification of the major roadway corridors, i.e. SR 47, 25A, SR 29, and Fair Road.**

The I-75 corridor is important to Sidney due to the high visibility it presents in the community. This area, and others, should focus on establishing aesthetic connections to the downtown and major to attract tourists visiting commercial areas at interstate exits. With SR 47 as an example, the City could implement a public improvement program for creating a visual link between downtown and I-75, using streetscape elements and the railroad bridge on SR 47 as a starting point. Also included could be improvements or replacement of the existing steel guardrails and enhancement of signage along the corridor. The currently abandoned CSX rail bridge has been earmarked to be removed in 2010, with financial and project management support from ODOT. This project is planned so as to improve the aesthetics of the view of the downtown landscape when driving into town from West SR 47.

*Responsible Party:* Public Works Director (Lead)  
*Timeframe:* Ongoing  
*Estimated Cost:* To Be Determined on a Project Specific Basis

**1f) Adopting and enforcing residential maintenance standards.**

Please see the Community Facilities and Services Plan, Objective 1f3.

**1g) Expanding the City's urban forestry program.**

Please see the Community Facilities and Services Plan, Objective 1f1.

**Objective 2 - Historic Resources**

**Strategies**

**2a) Adopting an incentive package to encourage historic rehabilitation, adaptive reuse in targeted neighborhoods and the downtown.**

Please see the Downtown Plan, Objective 3, and Strategy D.

**Objective 3 – Traditional Development Pattern**

**Strategies**

**3a) Adopt design standards for residential neighborhoods**

Making residential neighborhoods distinguishable from more typical suburban development found in surrounding cities would be to Sidney's advantage creating a unique residential market. This is done through adding design standards to the City's subdivision regulations and zoning code that encourage traditional neighborhood elements into new residential growth.

*Responsible Party:* Community Services Director  
*Timeframe:* Immediate  
*Estimated Cost:* In House Staff Time

**3b) Adopt design standards for commercial corridors**

Adopting commercial corridor design standards would be beneficial to Sidney in many ways. Adopting such standards will help visually link the different areas of Sidney. Public improvements can be made along the corridors by replacing the lighting, similar to what is found in and around the downtown square, and control the curb cuts along the corridors (*see Chapter 9 Objective 5 Access Management*) making it visibly more consistent, and allow for better pedestrian access. In the private realm, changes can be made to how buildings are sited (i.e. parking in the rear, more pedestrian friendly), signage, architecture and landscaping. By enacting such standards, a visible consistency will be created throughout the community.

*Responsible Party:* Community Services Director

*Timeframe:* Immediate

*Estimated Cost:* In House Staff Time

**3c) Adopt standards for key gateways**

Gateways are entry points into a Community, and are intended to make a visual statement about the type of City visitors are approaching. This is important to Sidney because if the gateway does not leave a favorable impression, one's view on the entire City may be tainted. It is recommended that the City devote efforts to improving the major gateways into the City at SR 47 from the east and west, SR 29, CR 25A, and Fair Road.

*Responsible Party:* Community Services Director

*Timeframe:* Immediate

*Estimated Cost:* In House Staff Time

**3d) Adopt standards that incorporate native landscaping**

Native landscaping is the natural environmental features such as rivers, streams and woodlands. It is recommended that the City of Sidney adopt standards that incorporate these natural features into new development, in ways that allow for the features to stand out and become a part of the development, as opposed to features like woodlands being removed completely for bluegrass lawns. Whenever possible the City should allow the natural environment prevail, creating and preserving open space, and constricted habitats. This approach will also reduce the amount of money the City spends on otherwise maintaining these areas.

*Responsible Party:* Community Services Director

*Timeframe:* Immediate

*Estimated Cost:* In House Staff Time