



Downtown Development Review Overlay

Downtown Character & Goals

LOUISVILLE'S DOWNTOWN

The area of Louisville known as “Downtown” is described by the community in several key documents and in very specific terms after extensive study. The goals and aspirations for Downtown are clearly defined therein and subsequent regulations and review processes have been established to assist the community to achieve these goals for Downtown.

Goals- Cornerstone 2020

As the guiding document for strategic planning of land use and development in Louisville adopted in June 2000 by the Louisville and Jefferson County Planning Commission, the “*Cornerstone 2020 Comprehensive Plan*” describes Downtown thus:

“...The Downtown (area) is comprised of predominantly office, civic, medical, high density residential and cultural land uses. It has a grid pattern of streets designed to accommodate a large volume of vehicular traffic and public transportation. There are provisions for on-street and long-term parking of vehicles and for substantial pedestrian and non-vehicular movement within the district. Buildings are generally the greatest in volume and height in the metropolitan area, and there is public open space including plazas and squares. The Downtown Form should give identity to the whole community and should provide for a mixture of high density and intensity uses. Unlike the other community forms, the Downtown is already a geographically defined area that is described by the Louisville Codified Ordinance and in the Louisville Downtown Development Plan. The Downtown Development Plan also recognizes that the downtown consists of ... subdistricts and describes those subdistricts. The Downtown Development Plan and its successors are to be used as official planning evidence guiding land use decisions in the Downtown.”

Cornerstone 2020 further establishes 4 primary goals for the Downtown area:

1. Support development and redevelopment in the downtown district, establishing it as the heart of the city and the economic center of the region.
2. Create a downtown with a compact, walk-able core and a lively and active pedestrian environment that fosters and increases the number of people walking on primary downtown sidewalks and ensures a more humane downtown environment.
3. Develop downtown as a unique and active destination with a variety of land uses that attract and accommodate visitors, businesses, shoppers, and residents.
4. Development in downtown should respect the unique character of each downtown zone and should be based on design standards developed for those zones in the *Downtown Development Plan*.

Each of these goals is then supported by specific objectives.

Goals- The 2002 Downtown Development Plan

Spurred by the effective guidance and leadership provided by the 1990 *Downtown Development Plan*, the community updated the Plan in 2002 with the mission to “develop an updated blueprint for the continued growth of downtown Louisville as it moves into the twenty-first century, to create the type of unique downtown environment that can take advantage of markets that now exist, and to use the new Plan as a guide for its activities during the upcoming decade.” A vast number of meetings with downtown stakeholders, district groups, and neighborhood associations were held to seek out their input, as well as a number of forums and design-oriented conferences that were conducted in partnership and with the active participation of the public.

As a result of these meetings, forums, and design sessions the Plan defines 9 Principles to guide the review of all proposed actions in Downtown:

1. Continue to reinforce Downtown as the unique cultural, business, entertainment, retail, and civic center of the region.
2. Create a 24-hour Downtown with a focus on residential development integrated with a mix of commercial, civic, cultural, and entertainment attractions.
3. Transform Downtown from a “collection of destinations” into one unique “Destination.”
4. Create active, vibrant, safe, and livable public spaces supported by the design of buildings, streets, and open spaces.
5. Create an interconnected network of streets, transit, and public open spaces.
6. Enhance Downtown’s attractiveness as a place for investment.
7. Build on existing strengths with new initiatives and development
8. Integrate Downtown seamlessly with its adjacent neighborhoods, the City, and the region.
9. Forge Public/Private Partnerships to coordinate high priority initiatives and oversee Plan implementation.

Each of these principles is then supported by specific objectives.

Process- The Louisville Metro Land Development Code

The Land Development Code for Metro Louisville contains the land use and zoning regulations for the entire Metro area. As stated in its introduction, “Specifically this Code provides regulations to implement applicable goals, objectives, guidelines, and policies of the adopted Comprehensive Plan (Cornerstone 2020).” The regulation is administered by the Louisville and Jefferson County Planning Commission.

The Louisville Land Development Code is also a form based code regulating the physical form of development, as well as its zoning, based on its location within a designated form district defined by its pattern of physical development. The regulations addressing the Downtown Form District provide specific use and dimensional requirements for new development in the Downtown area. The Code addresses basic elements of site layout and building design, streetscape, open space, parking, signage, and public art that are appropriate for an urban downtown setting.

Process- The Downtown Development Review Overlay

The Downtown Development Review Overlay was originally established by the City of Louisville Board of Aldermen in 1992 as a recommendation of the 1990 Downtown Plan. According to the Board, and again by Metro Council in 2007, the Overlay’s specific task is to preserve, conserve and protect the “historical, cultural, architectural, aesthetic or other distinctive areas” of Downtown by reviewing proposed developments in accordance with established principles and guidelines addressing elements such as “building setbacks along streets, open space, off-street parking, landscaping, paving, lighting and streetscape furnishings, fences and walls, signage and public amenities and, in addition, elements of urban design such as building and street wall character, and building mass and form.”

In order to preserve the character of Downtown Louisville it is important to define this character in very real terms and develop principles and guidelines that expand on the existing strengths of the area and guide new development in a clear and positive fashion.

The principles and guidelines of the Downtown Development Review Overlay coordinate with and expand upon the requirements of the Land Development Code as necessary to achieve the objectives of these facets of urban design.

The design review process provides a forum for citizens and developers to work toward achieving a better urban environment through attention to fundamental urban design principles. Design Review is intended to assist new development to contribute positively to Louisville’s downtown. Design guidelines offer a flexible tool which will allow new development to respond better to the distinctive characteristics of its surroundings.

Character- The Downtown Area and its Components

The Downtown Area, as with other successful metropolitan and urban areas, is composed of several key components that each serve a function but must work together successfully including: areas with specific and unique characteristics; boundaries, connections, and relationships of these areas; key streets and intersections; and the subsequent overall character of Downtown.

Areas of Distinct Character

All successfully urban areas in Downtown have much in common with respect to successful urban design and building characteristics. These common threads provide for continuity within Downtown as a single destination and then allow the individual districts to successfully focus on their unique characteristics.

Many buildings are constructed up to the front and side property lines to establish a continuous street wall or building frontage along the sidewalk. Individual or connecting buildings along a blockface form a continuous building frontage or street wall and are characterized by an overall mass that is divided into distinct segments or storefronts to create an attractive sidewalk and streetscape environment. Buildings that have a well defined storefront with an entrance form the sidewalk, windows for the display of retail goods or services, signage that is designed- proportioned and appropriately located, and other pedestrian oriented amenities create an attractive and animated sidewalk environment.

Heights of buildings range considerably from single story structures to high rise buildings of well over 200 feet in elevation. This variation in building height and mass provides opportunities for sun light and fresh air to reach the sidewalks and open spaces. Successful high rise buildings have upper stories that are set back from a well defined base composed of one or more lower stories which provide continuity with the scale of adjoining or nearby low rise buildings. Interspersed with contemporary low and high rise buildings are Local Landmark, National Register, and other significant architectural and historic resources. The structures exhibit a broad vocabulary of building materials, ranging from masonry (such as brick and stone) wood, and ornamental metals to contemporary exposed steel and concrete with glass curtain wall designs. Quality building materials, a high degree of surface finish, and attention to detail tend to exemplify the best structures.

Public and private open spaces that successfully create safe, vital, and attractive environments are appropriately located, sized, and designed to incorporate pedestrian amenities such as shade trees, landscaping, adequate seating, fountains, lighting, public art and visual and pedestrian access to sidewalks and building entrances.

Curb cuts and vehicular entrances to parking facilities are located, sized and designed to reduce interruptions in the contiguous building frontage along a blockface and provide for safe and efficient vehicular and pedestrian traffic flow, establish well designed and balanced streetscapes. Surface parking lots are present in all districts and have a particularly negative impact on the quality of the streetscape and district when not screened properly.

Core Downtown

The Core Downtown area contains a number of key activity centers including entertainment and retail venues such as 4th Street Live, the proposed City Centre project, The Palace Theatre, Louisville Gardens, and other, smaller venues and restaurants particularly along 4th Street. Guests to the city will find some of the largest hotels in the area including the Marriot and Hyatt on Jefferson Street serving the Convention Center as well as the historic Seelbach and Brown hotels along 4th Street. Anchoring the southern portion of the district along Broadway are media outlets including the Courier Journal, housing developments such as the Crescent Center and St. Francis, and smaller educational institutions such as the St. Francis High School, the Brown School, and Jefferson Community College. Buildings in the district range from single story structures to highrises well over 200' in elevation.

There is a concentration of public and private parking garages and lots, particularly parking lots along 5th Street, 3rd Street and 2nd Street.

West Main Street Preservation District

Properties fronting on Main Street between I-64/ 9th Street and the Kentucky Center for the Arts and Humana Building and south of the existing flood wall to Pike Alley are designated part of the West Main Street Local Landmark District. The buildings on Main Street are constructed primarily of cast iron, masonry, and stone materials. The buildings are vertical in form with narrow street frontages. The upper story facades have a large percentage of area constructed as windows. The West Main District has attracted a number of cultural arts institutions and museums that thrive in communal fashion. The historic buildings in the area have also attracted significant 1st floor retail uses with urban, loft residential opportunities in the spacious upper floors of the historic buildings. The West Main District also contains the judicial and civic center of the community including the historic City Hall complex. Nearby are the towers of the financial district and the large-scale amenities such as the Convention Center, the Kentucky Center for the Arts, the Galt House complex, and the Arena. The northern area facing the river has been developed as public plazas and cultural institutions such as the Ali Center which utilize their lower levels as parking garages to serve visitors and rise out of the flood plan by necessity. Buildings in the district range from single story structures to highrises well over 200' in elevation with a more common range of 3 to 5 stories in the historic district.

East Main/ Market

The East Main/Market area has attracted a number of smaller cultural arts galleries, shops, loft housing, and restaurants that thrive in communal, neighborhood fashion. The many historic buildings in the area have attracted significant 1st floor retail uses with urban, loft residential opportunities in the spacious upper floors of the historic buildings. To the south are a number of larger scale hotels lining Jefferson Street. Nearby are future development sites of the Medical Center. The northern area facing the river has been developed in conjunction with the redevelopment of the Waterfront as residential and public park space including Louisville's Great Lawn. Buildings in the district range from single story structures to highrises well over 100' in elevation with a more common range of 3 to 5 stories in the historic district.

The three blocks east of Floyd Street between Main and Market Streets are listed as part of the Phoenix Hill National Register District. The three blocks bounded by 2nd, Main, Floyd, and Market Streets contain buildings of historic and architectural merit that are

similar in character to buildings within the Phoenix Hill National Register District. Significant rehabilitation and improvement efforts have been completed and other opportunities exist. This area is also adjacent to the Phoenix Hill, Butchertown, and Irish Hill neighborhoods.

Medical Center

The majority of the Medical Center lies to the south and east of the Overlay but as one of Louisville's primary generators of activity, employment, research, and health service the Medical Center is a major component of downtown. The Medical Center draws a large population of residents from the city and the state seeking health services as well as a significant number of students and medical professionals associated with the University of Louisville and other hospital facilities. Adjacent districts strive to serve these populations with services from housing to restaurants to retail. This area is adjacent to the Phoenix Hill, and Sobro neighborhoods.

South Broadway (SoBro)

The Sobro area is south of the current Overlay border of Broadway and York Streets. Recently the subject of intense community interest and study, the area is poised for significant re-development as a residentially scaled urban neighborhood capitalizing on significant historic resources and building stock and providing neighborhood level services and business development. Its proximity and productive partnership with downtown is seen as a key component of its success.

West Downtown

In contrast to other areas buildings in West Downtown are generally set back from the street in a campus like fashion reflecting the influence of Urban Renewal efforts in the 1960's and 1970's. Individual buildings are primarily separated from one another and the open spaces that surround them are continuous and usually landscaped. This open space pattern is created through building setback from the right of ways. The concentration of primarily single use buildings and related facilities in conjunction with public and private open spaces create a pedestrian environment that is of a more suburban character.

Existing private open spaces, other than the major public spaces at Jefferson Square and Martin Luther King Park, are formed by front, street side, side, and rear yards that are landscaped with shade trees and by off street parking lots.

While these extended setbacks and landscaped areas attempted to provide for some relief of the dense, urban conditions found elsewhere in downtown the community now recognizes that the area's development in such an open and distant "auto centric" fashion is not conducive to an active and vibrant public space. In fact, the area has become somewhat isolated from the rest of the urban core and will benefit by being developed hence in a more urban form. Such development will improve the pedestrian qualities of the district and encourage activity. Over time the set back areas may be developed as public amenities such as small pocket parks or outdoor dining.

The area is adjacent to the Russell neighborhood, a National Register District.

Boundaries, Connections, and Relationships

The downtown and the Overlay are essentially contained within a geographic area defined by 9th Street/Roy Wilkins Parkway to the west, the Ohio River to the north, Interstate I-65 to the east, and Broadway to the south. The district areas can further be defined by their edges or “spines” such as Main, Jefferson, 2nd, and 4th Streets. Their defining characteristics can be further described by significant activities and community roles, their built form, and in some instances their historic character.

These boundaries and characteristics are useful in quantifying the physical form and activity of the districts. They provide guidance to planning and evaluating future development that will be successful in retaining the positive characteristics of the districts and the downtown as a whole.

Of equal, if not greater importance, is maintaining the connections- physical and experiential- among the districts and with neighborhoods adjacent to the downtown. This connectivity is the key to developing downtown as a single Destination in lieu of multiple and competing destinations.

Streets and Intersections

The streets in downtown Louisville are not only infrastructure to move goods and services but also serve as the pedestrian, vehicular, and transit connectors of the districts of downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods. The high quality of the design of downtown streets, intersections, and public space environments is the key to the success of providing a downtown that is “walk-able”- a lively, active, and humane environment. A downtown that is a single Destination invites pedestrians and human scaled activity throughout the unique downtown districts and into adjacent neighborhoods in a friendly and inviting manner.

Louisville’s Downtown has been historically defined and organized principally by Main and 4th Streets. *Main and Market Streets* retain much of their historic character and structures. In fact portions of both West and East Main and Market Streets are within districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places! *West Main Street* and its environs are additionally designated as a local preservation district. At their intersection with 4th Street, Main and Market Streets have developed into a much larger scale of activity and built form. *4th Street* has seen many changes but remains a street with a primarily pedestrian focus. It is only two lanes wide through most of downtown and is a key pedestrian thoroughfare from the river to Broadway and beyond into the Old Louisville neighborhood and the University of Louisville. Both *2nd and 3rd Streets* are important corridors connecting downtown with southern Indiana, the waterfront, interstate highways, the SoBro (South of Broadway) area, and the Old Louisville and Limerick historic neighborhoods. *9th Street, or Roy Wilkins Avenue*, currently provides an auto-centric western edge to downtown and key connection to the interstate system. It is envisioned to be a more pedestrian friendly boulevard to be enhanced for better cross access into the neighborhoods west of downtown. *Jefferson and Liberty Streets* are important corridors connecting downtown with neighborhoods east and west of downtown as well as traversing the community’s civic and governmental functions and the Convention Center area. To the north *River Road* is set at an elevation relative to the Ohio River and serves as a scenic corridor as well as local access to the north-south streets of downtown. Above River Road is Interstate I-64 which provides motorists with views of the river as well as downtown with access at 3rd and

9th Streets. To the south *Broadway* is a wide street that serves not only as an important vehicular, pedestrian, transit, and visual connection to the east and west Broadway business and neighborhood districts but also provides a connection to the city's major open spaces and Olmsted park and parkway system. Where these key streets intersect there are unique and significant opportunities for making meaningful public spaces and emphasizing points of connection among the districts and adjacent neighborhoods.

Conclusion

The aforementioned documents *developed by the community* clearly define the physical configuration of Downtown and its many unique qualities, the goals for its future development, and principles to guide that development. Another document, the *Land Development Code*, also specifically regulates the allowed uses and general dimensional parameters for new development in the Downtown area as well as the rest of broader Louisville Metro area. It is the unique role of the Downtown Development Review Overlay to combine these written and accepted goals and aspirations into a methodology for detailed review of the physical development of Downtown Louisville recognizing the special characteristics of its districts, streets, and adjacent neighborhoods. As a community driven process the Overlay ensures public participation in this review and accountability to the citizens of Louisville.