

Chapter Five

Urban Design

Purpose

The Urban Design Element identifies design standards for commercial and residential developments which should be implemented to enhance Provo City's appearance. Design standards should promote public health, safety, and general welfare. Neighborhood conservation, maintenance of property values, and an improved city image are common purposes for design standards.

Design standards may regulate landscaping, signage, architecture, scale, setbacks, and the overall character of developments, either citywide or within specific design corridors. Standards protect important views, vistas, and significant architectural and historic resources. They lessen congestion in the streets, improve the overall quality of the built environment, and protect wild, natural beauty.

Architectural design influences the character and value of Provo neighborhoods and business districts. Preserving and enhancing character requires the existence of harmony and compatibility from one building to the next throughout a particular neighborhood or district. Preserving and enhancing major entryways to the city and areas of historical or architectural significance furthers the economic and cultural well-being of the city. However, balance needs to exist between aesthetically pleasing design and burdensome regulations.

Urban Design Influences in Provo

Design Review Process

To facilitate urban design in Provo City, a Design Review Committee (DRC) was established. The committee consists of professionals in various fields of design, architecture, and planning. The DRC addresses general design relationships and site planning principles that are applicable citywide. District guidelines, based on existing design characteristics, as well as needs observed in particular districts, are also addressed in design review.

Urban design principles are difficult to quantify because they are conceptual. Because of the nature of design, decisions of the Design Review Committee may seem more subjective than objective. The design review process seeks to ensure compatibility of structures in districts. Harmony of design is sought to protect visual patterns of the community and to enhance visual relationships and transitions between older and newer buildings. This can be achieved by repeating building lines and surface treatment and by requiring a degree of uniformity in detail, scale, proportion, textures, materials, color, and building form.

Visible Design Influences in Provo

Provo has not developed as a design-oriented community. While areas displaying strong design elements exist, Provo does not have thematic districts. Buildings and developments have improved the appearance of our surroundings through use of architecture, landscaping, parking design, pedestrian appeal and other elements, in combination, to produce an appealing appearance and to improve the way the development fits into the community from a functional standpoint.

These developments and infrastructure improvements have helped to establish a character for localized regions of the city and have, in some cases, influenced the design of new projects occurring on nearby properties. Favorable examples of urban design elements may be seen in the Jamestown office park region along N. University Avenue, the pedestrian-oriented historic downtown Provo region of the Central Business District, the Provo City Old Academy Library, the Shops at Riverwoods and Riverwoods Research and Business Park, and the South University Avenue/East Bay planned commercial and industrial complex.

The Jamestown office complex is an example of sound design concepts that could be emulated citywide. The thematic exterior design enhances visual appeal. Building around existing vegetation adds to the uniqueness of the property. However, parking could have been located behind the buildings, rather than being exposed on University Avenue, or could have been screened better, hiding vehicles while providing a clear view of the buildings. The limited number of signs along University Avenue also enhances the visual appeal. Farther north, the Riverwoods developments have attracted new proposals for residential, commercial and mixed-use development to reflect the high standards established in these companion business park, shopping, and residential communities.

Downtown Provo also uses design elements effectively. The historic Provo LDS Tabernacle, historic Utah County Courthouse, and the north side of the first blocks east and west of University Avenue on Center Street give a sense of the enduring past. Architectural styles are not necessarily the same, but craftsmanship and thoughtful design add interest to the downtown area. Landscaped medians on Center Street provide pedestrian friendly crosswalks. Tree-lined streets help compensate for the lack of greenery due to the absence of front setbacks. Benches encourage people to stop and leisurely enjoy the downtown atmosphere. Recent efforts of the Downtown Alliance have identified this district through the use of thematic street signs emphasizing selected colors and fonts, public information kiosks, street banners, seasonal displays, and planned newsstand kiosks to reduce visual clutter and impedances to pedestrian travel.

The southern entrance to Provo at the University Avenue and I-15 interchange displays effective urban design. On the east side of University Avenue is the commercial area of East Bay. Large buildings are set back a great distance from the street. Meandering sidewalks and landscaped berms along University Avenue add to the atmosphere. Landscaping is found in parking lots, although more could be added. Signs in this area are not overbearing. These elements add to the street appearance.

The East Bay Business Park, which includes corporate and municipal facilities, retail and commercial services, hotels and restaurants, and a golf course incorporating wetlands in a nature-

friendly setting east of S. University Avenue, is working together with the Provo Towne Centre mall on the west side of S. University Avenue to demonstrate favorable economic development impacts to other properties along the S. University Avenue/I-15 corridor. Older businesses built to less desirable design standards are being replaced with new businesses in attractive settings, such as Home Depot and a series of new restaurant sites, as land values increase sufficiently to encourage redevelopment along this corridor. Use of good urban design is successfully attracting new economic development that is vital to the economy of Provo and the quality of life for residents.

The above-mentioned areas have elements of design worth duplicating. Landscaping is a common element that enhances the appearance of any site. The absence of free-standing signs and the use of small-scale signs reduces the amount of visual clutter. Architectural design has improved the appearance of buildings that could otherwise be mundane. Urban design is not limited to exterior design of buildings. It takes into account the appearance of the entire built environment and all aspects of development.

The implementation of urban design requirements will establish citywide design standards to beautify the city as a whole and will help to carry out the values, goals, and objectives of Provo's citizens.

Design Standards

The following categories are to be implemented in some type of policy, regulation, or ordinance to establish urban design criteria within Provo City. Design elements should promote public health, safety, and general welfare while serving the general interest of the public. Policies should be implemented in a timely fashion to encourage the style of development requested by the general citizenry.

Landscaping

Landscaping adds aesthetic qualities to the built environment. Without trees, shrubs, grass, and other greenery, the environment may be dull and unattractive. Landscaping improves the look and feel of the community. It softens hard surfaces, adds color and visual contrast, provides pedestrian appeal and comfort, creates human scale along large-scale building faces, screens parking or mechanical areas, provides transition between uses, and provides shade and cooling in urban areas. To avoid becoming a concrete and asphalt-paved community, the City should require developments to meet landscaping standards.

Signs

Without restrictions, signs can become garish and overbearing. Provo City has a sign ordinance, but further steps need to be taken to improve the appearance of signs throughout the city. Steps need to be taken to improve the desirability of monument signs. Signs should be required to reflect the building's architecture and complement landscaped areas. Billboards should be removed from developed sites.

Construction

Incentives which encourage diversity in appearance (material, height, form) in multi-structure projects need to be provided. While diversity is encouraged, compatibility needs to exist in architecture and themes. Multi-structure projects which could benefit from incentives include commercial, multiple-family, and one-family residential subdivisions. New construction in older, developed areas should be sympathetic to existing form, color, material, style, and scale. Remodels and additions should also be sympathetic to form, color, material, style, and scale of the existing structure. However, there may be a few areas of the city where there are no aesthetic qualities. In these areas, a new design or style may benefit the community and offer diversity in theme, form, color, material, style, and scale.

Design Corridors

Approved by Ordinance

Design corridors preserve the aesthetic integrity of an area by imposing criteria for the appearance and design of buildings within the corridor. In 1997, twelve design corridors were proposed to improve design and beautify the city; the list has since been expanded to fourteen. Map # 5.1 Design Corridors Map shows the current and proposed design corridors for Provo. As Table 5.1 Current Design Corridors indicates, four design corridors have been implemented by ordinance at the time of the 2002-2004 comprehensive update.

TABLE 5.1 CURRENT DESIGN CORRIDORS	
Design Corridor	Location of Design Corridor
North University Avenue	500 North to 960 North
North University Avenue Riverbottoms	2230 North to the mouth of Provo Canyon
West Center Street	Interstate 15 to Utah Lake
South State Street	300 South to Highway 75

Design Corridors

Proposed – Standards to be Developed

Listed below, in Table 5.2 Proposed Design Corridors, are design corridors that still need implementation. Some of the proposed corridors are dilapidated, and there are no aesthetic qualities to maintain. In these corridors, it is hoped that attractive, uniform design will aid redevelopment efforts. Each corridor will be established with design requirements specific to that corridor. Developments in these corridors will be subject to design review. Corridors at City entryways will have logos, landscaping, and welcome signs. Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) rights-of-way also need to be beautified, but are subject to special regulations and approvals through the State of Utah.

TABLE 5.2 PROPOSED DESIGN CORRIDORS

Design Corridor	Approximate Location of Design Corridor
University Parkway	University Avenue to City Boundary
North State Street	1230 North to City Boundary
South University Avenue	600 South to Interstate 15
Downtown University Avenue	500 North to 600 South
500 West	300 South to 1230 North
Center Street	1100 West to 1000 East
4800 North	University Avenue to City Boundary
3700 North	University Avenue to City Boundary
300 South	500 West to 850 East
Columbia Lane	500 West to 1200 West / City Boundary

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