

Section 10

URBAN DESIGN & COMMUNITY IMAGE

City of Lancaster Comprehensive Plan

URBAN DESIGN & COMMUNITY IMAGE

INTRODUCTION

Urban design is much more than mere beautification of a city. It is a complex process of ordering a community's natural and man-made features to establish a distinct visual image and identity – *a sense of place* – for the community. Urban design principles strive to improve the quality of life, or *livability*, within a city by enhancing the man-made environment and by creating new opportunities for social interaction among residents. Good urban design practices also help to create a legible development pattern, which makes the community understandable to residents and visitors alike. They often deal with the sensory response of people to the community's physical environment: its visual appearance, its aesthetic quality, and its spatial character. Good urban design practices can be used to bolster people's sense of well being and civic pride, their awareness of different places within a city, and their behavior toward one another. In short, the careful application of urban design principles in city planning may help to protect the quality of the environment (both natural and man-made), and the corresponding quality of life enjoyed by residents and visitors, as a city or town changes over time. The creative application of specific urban design improvements should result in a more aesthetically and functionally stable community that is a happier and healthier place to live, not only in the physical sense, but in the psychological and emotional sense, as well.

The Urban Design & Community Image element of the Comprehensive Plan provides a foundation for the creative application of good urban design principles and practices in Lancaster. It integrates urban design considerations into Lancaster's growth and development processes to create an attractive and recognizable physical environment that complements the functional organization of the City, and to reinforce a sense of *community* among the people who live here.

COMMUNITY IMAGE

Many factors contribute to the *image* of a city. The overall impression that a community imparts to residents and visitors is a good indication of the image of a city. A city's image is solely the perception of its physical appearance that can be encouraged or promoted to enhance the overall impression of the City through an array of urban design strategies. This element of the Comprehensive Plan is intended to identify those aspects of the urban fabric that could be enhanced or improved to increase the community's pride and commitment in working toward quality physical growth and development. The

character of Lancaster that people perceive as they travel through the City is one of the most important issues regarding *urban design*, as it is used within the context of this Plan.

Several major aspects of the City's physical design that can enhance the image the public has of Lancaster, and that can contribute toward making Lancaster a better place to live and work have been identified as follows:

- ♦ Community focal point(s) and/or landmark(s);
- ♦ Gateway treatments at selected points along major arterials;
- ♦ Methods of creating better residential neighborhoods, and of protecting and enhancing existing neighborhoods;
- ♦ Street scene and parking area treatment along major thoroughfares and travel corridors (e.g., screening, landscaping, etc.);
- ♦ Site design criteria for new development;
- ♦ Signage, street lighting, and other streetscape amenities; and
- ♦ Methods of maintaining and enhancing the downtown area (specifically the Historic Town Square).

The physical design goals referenced within the Goals & Objectives component of the Comprehensive Plan identify the need to improve the physical quality and appearance of Lancaster. By considering the design of the City as a whole and that of specific sites or locations, enhancement of the overall image of the City can be achieved. This element of the Plan serves as a guide for achieving such community design goals and objectives. The following discussion and recommendations address the physical components responsible for making positive changes in the appearance of the community, and for improving the community's image and overall quality of life.

URBAN DESIGN CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

LACK OF COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Cities often lack visual individuality especially those in large urbanized areas similar to the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex; it is often difficult for cities to distinguish their physical appearance from another. Large, central cities generally have the advantage of distinctive skylines as identifying element. However, smaller cities must endeavor to create their own identity, or *signature*, in other ways that are both conducive and responsive to their individual size, scale and character. A recognizable

image/identity is not only important to the inhabitants of a particular community, it is also important to those who live within surrounding areas and to visitors. It helps to provide orientation – a point (or place) of reference for people moving into, within, and out from a community. The City of Lancaster should consider adopting a theme that could assist in developing and establishing the City's image. A signature phrase or slogan would be a good way in which to promote the community's theme and image.

The *sameness* that is often inherent to communities within a particular geographic area makes it appear that each one is just like its neighbors. For example, the visual appearance of Lancaster to a traveler along Beltline Road may be the same, or very similar, to the appearance of Beltline Road in some other community. Due to the fact that developers and their architects often adhere to popular design trends of a particular time period, rapid development tends to result in homogeneity of style – it all looks similar. This lack of design variety, especially along major travel corridors, can create anonymity within a region – one community looks just like its neighbor, and it is difficult for people to know when they have left one city and entered another. Of course, many communities have taken steps to beautify and individualize their physical appearance, thereby creating their own image/identity to set them apart from their neighboring cities. Therein lies the challenge for Lancaster.

URBAN DESIGN ELEMENTS

An effective solution to the challenge of this *lack of identity* lies in the application of appropriate urban design elements that help create a City's image/identity. These elements are as follows:

- ♦ Community focal points/landmarks;
- ♦ Gateway or entryway treatments;
- ♦ Travel corridor treatments;
- ♦ Neighborhood enhancements;
- ♦ Enhancement of nonresidential developments; and
- ♦ Enhancement of the Historic Town Square into a unique downtown area.

Community Focal Points/Landmarks

Many communities lack identifiable landmarks and focal points of activity, which creates orientation problems for residents and visitors. Prominent landmarks tend to enhance guidance and way-finding, which entails knowing where one is at any given time, and knowing how to reach any other place within the community. Landmarks (also referred to as focal points) are highly visible elements, or areas, that are readily recognizable by residents and visitors as important places, such as a downtown area, major shopping centers, entertainment or employment centers, water towers, etc. They are also very useful in

helping people find their way around within a community or a special area. Landmarks can be any easily seen element within a city. Lancaster has several features that are locally and regionally identifiable landmarks. The Lancaster Airport acts as an entryway to the City from the southeastern direction. The Historic Town Square, Midway Park Medical Center, Cedar Valley Junior College and Ten-Mile Creek Preserve are other notable features that would qualify as landmarks for Lancaster.

Gateway and Entryway Treatments

Gateways, also known as entryways or portals, can provide a strong sense of arrival to, as well as a sense of departure from, the community. They are the first thing visitors see when they come into a community, and the last impression visitors have when leaving, and they can provide a strong indication of a community's image if they are well designed and prominent.



Illustration 10-1
Example of a Landscaped Gateway

One of the major urban design issues facing Lancaster is the visual continuity, or sameness, along its major thoroughfares and highways. Currently, there is little to distinguish Lancaster from other communities along any of the major access corridors into the City. Properly developed, the establishment of distinctive gateways into the City could add greatly to Lancaster's sense of identity, and could create a definite sense of *arrival*. The design of gateways, or entry points, into Lancaster should be guided by several factors. One of the most obvious factors is the number of people using a particular entry point. Out of all the roads that lead into Lancaster, three of the roadway facilities entering the City, Interstate Highway 35, Pleasant Run Road and State Highway 342, are more heavily used. Therefore, distinctive gateways and signage along these roadways would go a long way toward creating a unique image for Lancaster.

An entry feature for Lancaster along one of these roads leading into the City could be as simple as a carefully designed landscape feature (**Illustration 10-1**), which may include a special type of signage or other identifier (**Illustration 10-2**) that signifies arrival into the community. It is suggested that a water feature be incorporated in to an entry feature, if possible. Many cities throughout Texas have successfully utilized this technique, but the degree of success or effectiveness has greatly depended upon the design quality of the entry feature, as well as upon how strategically it is located and how visible it is from the road. Priority for funding entry features, both in terms of total dollars spent per entry and in terms of the timing of expenditures,



Illustration 10-2
Example of an Entryway Treatment

should be directly related to the number of people using a particular entry point. Often, donations can be solicited from civic groups to assist in the funding of specific gateways and/or their maintenance (e.g., an *adopt-a-gateway* program).

Another important factor in the design of entry points is to develop an entry that provides a sense of identity for the community, while at the same time projecting a desirable image for the City. This can be accomplished through careful use of signage (**Illustration 10-3**), landscaping, and other design elements such as lighting, fencing, paving patterns, art/sculptural elements, and a variety of earth forms. Consideration should be given to establishing a uniform design concept for all gateway treatment area. Hierarchical distinction between major and minor gateways can be achieved through design modification for each type of entry feature.



Illustration 10-3
Example of Streetscape Elements
Along Freeways

Design of entry features should take into consideration the setting in which each feature will be placed, as well as the traffic speed with which it will be viewed. Although any entry feature might ideally be placed at the corner of a roadway intersection which is at, or near, the true City limits, the design of the feature might conflict either visually or aesthetically with an adjacent retail use at the intersection. In such a situation, it may be prudent to move the entry feature further into the City to provide a better setting and better visibility, such as placing it upon the thoroughfare median if there is one. The traffic speed at which an entry feature is viewed must also be taken into account, and the size, boldness and scale of the feature should be designed accordingly.



Illustration 10-4
Example of Streetscape Elements
Along Residential Streets

One of the areas within Lancaster that is well suited for an entry feature is Pleasant Run Road as it enters the City from the west. Many visitors travel this route when going into the City from Interstate Highway 35. Entry features could be installed in conjunction with a new development in this area. For example, if an entry feature and (possibly in components with a retail center) was constructed on Pleasant Run Road at Interstate Highway 35, it could provide an attractive first impression for visitors entering from the west, as well as to those passing on the highway.



Illustration 10-5
Example of Streetscape Elements
Along a Major Thoroughfare

Travel Corridor Streetscape Treatments

The term *streetscape* has been developed in recent years to describe the visual image that is projected by a city street and by various elements within and surrounding the street right-of-way. Overhead power lines, traffic signals, signs, light fixtures, plant materials, and street paving are some of the most noticeable physical elements that are found within a typical streetscape. The visual appearance of adjacent developments and their physical form also influence one's perception of a streetscape and the overall community.

The streetscape characteristics within Lancaster are now generally evolving from a small city to a growing and dynamic suburban community (see **Illustrations 10-4, 10-5 and 10-6**). Steps should be taken now, as new development occurs, to improve and upgrade the image of the City as seen from the major roadways within Lancaster. The process of planning to incorporate streetscape elements along major thoroughfares within Lancaster can be developed through the joint efforts of public and private groups. The 1986 Comprehensive Plan identified a travel corridor area along Pleasant Run Road between Houston School Road and Blue Grove Road. It is recommended that this Pleasant Run Corridor be extended from Interstate Highway 35 to the eastern City limits. Streetscape elements along this corridor should be developed in accordance with the concepts and elements of urban design described within this Comprehensive Plan, and the land uses encouraged along this corridor should be in accordance specifically within (**Plate 7-1**) the Future Land Use Plan element.

Lancaster should adopt landscape requirements within the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances to incorporate objectives that are envisioned to create a quality streetscape, to generate a positive community image, and to enhance property values within the community. Generally, the concepts utilize accent-planting techniques to provide variety and color, while requiring street trees to establish a sense of cohesiveness throughout the City. Landscaping and related features add to the attractiveness of any development site, but are particularly effective on retail and multi-family sites. It is therefore suggested that the City continue to pursue reasonable and practical landscape requirements for retail uses, offices and apartment complexes, as well as along the edges of residential subdivisions.

It is recommended that the City include a comprehensive screening program with alternative design choices for major thoroughfares as part of the subdivision approval process. Three options would provide enough choices as well as flexibility and variety along thoroughfares. If possible, brick screening walls should be on private property. Any of the following options could be appropriate:

- ♦ A brick masonry wall with selected over-story trees; wood fences should not be permitted;
- ♦ A solid living screen based upon approved plant materials; and,

- ♦ A combination of a brick masonry wall and *wrought iron* (steel or aluminum, solid stock preferred for longevity) fence sections (at least 60 percent of the surface should be brick masonry) combined with evergreen shrubs and selected over-story trees.

To be successful with a thoroughfare-screening program as suggested above, two major actions must be accomplished. First, an approved plant material list as well as approved construction standards for screening walls must be amended into the Subdivision Ordinance. Second, some entity must be responsible for maintenance and repairs to screening walls. Without both of these actions, the long-term results of any screening or landscaping endeavors would be less than desirable. Cities are allowed to create public improvement districts (PIDs), which have special funding and taxing authority. PIDs can be created for a variety of reasons, including funding and maintaining streetscape/landscaped areas. When landscaped areas are created, one of the following entities must be responsible for long-term maintenance: 1) the City; 2) a separate taxing authority (e.g., PID); 3) a property owners' association; or 4) volunteers/individual homeowners.

The City's Subdivision Ordinance includes a recommended list of appropriate plant materials for landscaping within Lancaster, especially in public areas and along thoroughfares. These materials should also be used for the landscaping of private properties, as well, because they represent low maintenance species that are generally adapted to the local climate. Also identified on the plant list are species, which are drought resistant or are native to the area. Since water conservation in general is becoming more of a statewide issue, the use of xeriscape techniques will be beneficial for a long period of time after these drought resistant plant materials are installed.

Neighborhood Enhancements

The design and character of residential neighborhoods is also an important component of the City's overall urban design portfolio. As more property is developed into residential subdivisions, such design factors as entry features into subdivisions, screening, lighting and landscaping, as well as the design layout of the subdivision itself, will be critical to the perception of Lancaster's residential neighborhoods. While the City clearly must provide developers with options appropriate to the marketing of their subdivisions, the City may also wish to maintain some continuity between different residential subdivisions along a major thoroughfare. Older residential neighborhoods may need gradual improvements in such necessities as street maintenance and code enforcement, but newer residential subdivisions offer the potential of embracing and including positive design elements that will add value, both aesthetic and monetary, to the homes constructed within them.

One of the factors that will determine the ultimate efficiency of Lancaster’s thoroughfare system is the manner in which properties adjacent to major thoroughfares are developed and used. By regulating points of access into adjacent properties, and by providing for wider spacing of intersecting streets (**Illustration 10-7**), it becomes possible to maximize the traffic capacity and the efficiency of each thoroughfare. Another important consideration will be the manner in which public and private landscape improvements occur within, and adjacent to, thoroughfare rights-of-way. By coordinating and guiding both of these factors, the City can create a safe and efficient thoroughfare system that projects a positive image for the community and for adjacent residential subdivisions. A detailed description of desirable neighborhood designs and their applicability in Lancaster is discussed in the Neighborhood Design section of the Comprehensive Plan.



Illustration 10-6
Example of Residential Properties Adjacent to Major Streets

Platting Adjacent to Creek and Drainage Areas

Creeks and drainageways offer great recreational and scenic opportunities within Lancaster. Since much of the remaining vacant land will likely be developed as residential, it is probable that at least a portion of this development will occur adjacent to creeks or drainage areas. In order to protect the integrity of the storm drainage system and to reduce the potential for flooding, the City must adopt a comprehensive policy for designing residential developments adjacent to these creeks and drainage areas. Where the floodplain is reclaimed, the City should encourage non-detrimental, non-intensive land uses, such as parks and open space.

The City must restrict the platting of residential and commercial lots within the flood ways of creeks and drainage areas, which have the potential for carrying significant volumes of storm water runoff. **Illustration 10-8** shows two recommended platting alternatives where residential lots are placed adjacent to creeks or drainage areas. The City can preserve the carrying capacity of these drainageways by designating them as public or private open spaces or as floodway management areas, or by incorporating them into the City's park system. Platting

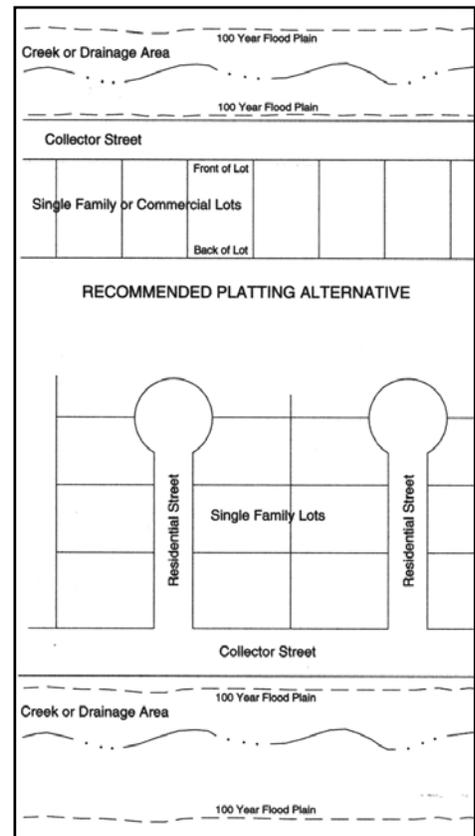


Illustration 10-7
Recommended Platting Arrangements Adjacent to Floodways and Creeks

collector streets along creeks allow continuous access and visibility of the creek for scenic and aesthetic enjoyment opportunities. This concept also helps to slow storm water runoff before it enters the drainageway or creek. One accepted method of drainageway protection is designating those areas as floodway management areas (FMAs). Cities are already using this technique, and it is suitable for implementation in Lancaster, as well. Under this designation, the drainage areas would be dedicated to the City and maintained in a natural condition. That is, little maintenance would be provided except for trash or debris removal. Mowing and other levels of maintenance normally performed in City parks would not occur within these areas.

Lancaster must restrict the platting of residential and nonresidential lots within the floodplain of its significant drainage areas, and the City should prevent development and reclamation within the flood fringe area (100-year flood plain). An additional 100 feet of setback for development beyond the FEMA designated floodplain is recommended. Building sites 200 feet for the above setback should be at least two feet above the floodplain elevation. The City should encourage retention/detention ponds to be used as flood control methods. When possible, these retention/detention ponds should be incorporated into the site as an amenity, along with landscaping elements. As the vacant areas within Lancaster continue to urbanize, the potential for flooding will increase due to higher storm water runoff volumes from impermeable surfaces. Protection of the flood plain areas and preservation of critical drainageways can help to reduce capital expenditures that may be needed in the future to correct problems caused by urban flooding.

Entryway Features for Residential Subdivisions

All residential subdivisions in excess of twenty platted lots should provide a landscaped entryway feature at all access points from thoroughfares that are greater than sixty feet in right-of-way width. The entryway features should be on private property but could be placed within the right-of-way, and would have to observe sight/visibility requirements.

Design Requirements: The entryway feature should include living landscaped materials from an approved plant list. The design of the entryway feature should also include lighting features, an automatic irrigation system, and subdivision identification (i.e., signage).



Illustration 10-8
Example of a Residential
Neighborhood Entryway Feature



Illustration 10-9
Example of a Residential Neighborhood
Entryway Feature Subdivision

The design of the entryway feature should be in accordance with design policies as provided by the City. The design of the entryway feature should be reflected on the engineering plans submitted with the final plat. A standard right-of-way use agreement should be developed in most cases.

The maintenance of the entryway feature should be the responsibility of the developer for a period of two years, or until building permits have been issued for at least seventy-five percent of the lots within the subdivision, whichever is later. After such time, a homeowners' association or other approved entity should maintain the entryway.

Enhancement of Nonresidential Developments

An important aspect of creating more attractive nonresidential treatments is through specific site design items, which can be addressed by the private sector during site development. Often, much of what creates a better view from the street is simply better site design. Site design review can be incorporated into the City's normal project review of site plans. The following sections discuss examples of site design elements or construction material usage that could enhance nonresidential developments, especially along major thoroughfares. These examples should be evaluated to make certain they are included in either the Zoning or Subdivision Ordinance.



Illustration 10-10
Example of Landscaping in a
Nonresidential Development

Landscaping For Nonresidential Developments

Purpose:

- ♦ Enhance the view and image of the community from major thoroughfares;
- ♦ Contribute to the overall quality and visual appearance of individual developments;
- ♦ Reduce glare from paved surfaces, and break up large expanses of paving;
- ♦ Replenish oxygen supply and provide natural air conditioning; and
- ♦ Provide visual relief and open space within urbanized developments.



Illustration 10-11
Example of a Monolithic Curb
Protecting a Landscaped Area

Guidelines for Consideration:

- ♦ Require a minimum ten-foot (10') landscaped edge (i.e., interior parkway) adjacent to any street right-of-way, and a minimum of 15 percent of the front yard to be landscaped area. Reduce the landscaped edge requirement to five feet (5') for secondary frontages to the rear or side. In addition, a ten-foot (10') landscaped edge should be provided adjacent to a street with a smaller right-of-way width if a residential use exists or is planned adjacent to the nonresidential use. The landscaped edge can include street right-of-way. The right-of-way should be sodded and/or seeded with grass or planted in low height groundcover. Require one large tree (3" minimum caliper) per 40 feet of street frontage.
- ♦ All landscaped areas should be protected by a raised, monolithic curb and should remain free of trash, litter and car bumper overhangs. Landscaped areas containing trees and shrubs should be no less than five feet (5') wide. Landscaped areas within parking lots should generally be at least one parking space in size, with no landscaped area less than fifty (50) square feet in area. Within parking lots, landscaped areas should be located to define parking areas and to assist in clarifying appropriate circulation patterns. Landscaped islands should be located at the terminus of all parking rows, as well as interspersed along lengthy parking rows, and should contain at least one shade tree (3" minimum caliper). Total landscaped area within a parking lot shall equal at least sixteen (16) square feet per parking space.
- ♦ Require one (1) shade tree (3" minimum caliper) per twelve (12) parking spaces within parking lots that contain twenty (20) or more parking spaces. Allow 25 percent of the required trees to be planted within the landscaped edge.
- ♦ Provide a bonus for the protection and preservation of existing trees. Developments that preserve and protect existing trees should be given additional credit toward the total number of trees required.
- ♦ Provide a listing of appropriate plant materials for use within required landscaped areas. Use of plants not specified should be subject to approval by the City. Recommended plants should be drought resistant, if possible, and xeriscape techniques should be encouraged.

Implementation:

- ♦ Review the existing Zoning Ordinance to ensure that the guidelines suggested above are included. The City should also establish procedures for requiring maintenance of landscaped areas once they are installed.

Screening of Solid Waste Containers

Purpose:

- ♦ Improve the appearance of the community from public streets and neighboring properties; and
- ♦ Prevent public access to solid waste containers (e.g., dumpsters).

Guidelines for Consideration:

- ♦ Require a six-foot minimum screen around any commercial or industrial solid waste container that is visible from an existing or proposed public roadway (see **Illustration 10-13**). Required screening shall be a solid brick or wooden wall (or a living screen) on three sides of the enclosure with a securable, metal gate to control access to the receptacle. These gates should be optional but should be of steel tube frame construction, with evenly spaced pickets to permit air circulation while providing sufficient screening. Other types of masonry construction, including concrete poured in place, concrete panels and stucco, may be allowed for the enclosure with specific City approval. Chain link fencing (with or without slats) should not be allowed for screening solid waste containers. Access (i.e., approach) areas to the enclosure should face the interior of the site, and should not be directly visible from a public street. All approach areas should have adequate vertical and horizontal maneuvering areas, and should be paved with concrete to withstand the heavy weights of trucks servicing the containers.
- ♦ Solid waste containers should not be placed in front of buildings;
- ♦ Solid waste containers should not be placed within required parking spaces, and they should allow proper access and vehicular circulation by service trucks;
- ♦ Solid waste containers should be located away from residential buildings; and
- ♦ Where possible, screening should match the predominant exterior finish material(s) used for the primary structure on the lot.

Implementation:

- ♦ Review the existing Zoning Ordinance to ensure that the guidelines suggested above are included.



Illustration 10-12
Example of Solid Waste Container
Screening

Nonresidential Buffers and Screening

Purpose:

- ◆ To ensure that nonresidential areas do not have a negative impact upon adjacent residential areas/uses; and
- ◆ To ensure high quality interface and compatibility between uses.



Illustration 10-13

Example of a Wide Setback with Landscaping

Guidelines for Consideration:

- ◆ Require additional setbacks, buffer yards (as required in the Landscape Ordinance), and landscape treatments when industrial uses face or are adjacent to residential areas (**Illustration 10-14**).
- ◆ Require architectural elevations and develop standards for quality treatment of all sides of nonresidential buildings that are adjacent to residential areas.
- ◆ Require masonry screening walls and landscaping, if necessary.
- ◆ Require that issues of air, noise, and light be addressed in the planning phases of development. Studies should be conducted by the development applicant to ensure that remedies are effective.

Implementation:

- ◆ Review existing ordinances to ensure that the guidelines suggested above are included.

Screening and Location of Outside Storage/Loading Areas and Utility Equipment

Purpose:

- ◆ Improve appearance of the community from public streets and neighboring properties; and
- ◆ Prevent public access to storage areas.

Guidelines for Consideration:

- ◆ Loading docks, service doors, and outside storage areas should not face onto or be visible from a major or minor thoroughfare, wherever possible.



Illustration 10-14

Example of Outside Storage Screening

- ◆ When loading docks and/or outside storage areas are located within a side yard, they should be screened from adjacent properties and public rights-of-way by using either brick/masonry walls and/or earthen berms. An appropriate combination of trees and shrubs from the approved plant list may also be used to meet this screening requirement with specific City approval (**Illustration 10-15**).
- ◆ Pad-mounted utility equipment and air conditioning units should be screened from view from public rights-of-way without altering the safe and efficient use of the equipment.
- ◆ Encourage relocation and/or underground placement of existing and future electrical feeder lines and other utility lines (e.g., telephone).

Implementation:

- ◆ Review guidelines regarding screening and placement of loading docks, and ensure that they are addressed within the Zoning Ordinance.

Signage

Purpose:

- ◆ Ensure that signage identifies business, residential and public uses without creating confusion, unsightliness or visual obscurity of adjacent properties.
- ◆ Provide a more unified organized streetscape through more consistent signage.
- ◆ Reduce visual clutter and improve visual character along roadways.
- ◆ Encourage shared signage.

Guidelines for Ground Signs:

- ◆ Make all signs more visible and effective by eliminating the redundancy, clutter and chaotic effect that an overabundance of signs have on the visual environment.
- ◆ Preserve and enhance the community's image by reducing the number of signs along major corridors (**Illustration 10-16**), and by strengthening limitations on signage along major travel corridors (e.g., height, size, spacing, number, etc.).



Illustration 10-15
Example of Unified Ground
Signage



Illustration 10-16
Example of Monument-Style
Signage



Illustration 10-17
Example of Freestanding Signs

- ◆ Encourage monument-style signage (**Illustration 10-17**) along all major thoroughfares, except within certain designated areas (e.g., where sight visibility is limited such as along Interstate Highway 20). The maximum allowable height, including the base, for a monument sign should be about six feet (6') or eight feet (8'). The overall surface area of the sign, including the base, should be no more than about eighty (80) square feet per side. This restriction would not apply to temporary real estate, development, or construction signage.
- ◆ Freestanding *pole signs* (**Illustration 10-18**) should still be permitted, but monument signage is encouraged and preferred within areas not adjacent to Interstate Highway 20 or Interstate Highway 35. As used within these guidelines, a monument sign refers to a sign with a continuous base, which is approximately the same width as the actual sign face, with the signage generally attached directly to the base. If preferred, the signage could be attached to the base by short, one to two foot poles as long as the overall height of the sign and base does not exceed eight feet (8').
- ◆ Through the design review process, ensure that signage is compatible with corresponding buildings and the general surroundings. Signage should not interfere with sight visibility when entering or leaving the site.

Implementation:

- ◆ The City's sign regulations should be reviewed with the intent of achieving a balanced system of street graphics that provides pleasing and effective visual communication.

Trees & Open Space Preservation

The City presently does not have a tree or open space preservation ordinance¹⁰⁻¹ and since Lancaster's open space and trees represent valuable local resources, and it is therefore recommended that large, high-quality trees, as well as appropriate open space, be preserved and protected.

Implementation:

- ◆ Develop an ordinance requiring the protection of certain trees (of specific types and sizes) within residential and non-residential areas.
- ◆ Revise Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances to require mandatory open space in both residential and nonresidential developments.

¹⁰⁻¹ As of March 20, 2001.

Access, Driveways and Median Openings

Purpose:

- ♦ Improve traffic flow along major and minor thoroughfares; and
- ♦ Reduce required pavement surface area, thus reducing storm water run-off and providing opportunities for landscaped enhancement.

Guidelines for Consideration:

- ♦ Require mutual access easements between businesses along all major traffic arteries to promote lateral (*cross*) access between properties and to minimize driveway openings.
- ♦ Promote shared driveway openings and limit driveway openings to one per property on parcels with less than 300' of frontage. On larger parcels, permit no more than one driveway opening per 300 linear feet of frontage along a thoroughfare.
- ♦ Require landscaped medians or entry signs to be maintained by homeowners' associations or other such entities.
- ♦ Require site visibility easements to ensure proper visibility at corners and at driveways.

Implementation:

- ♦ The City of Lancaster's Construction Standards should be reviewed, and if necessary, design and construction standards for driveway opening widths, radii and spacing should be incorporated.

Enhancement of the Historic Town Square Into A Unique Downtown Area

One of the most significant urban design opportunities within Lancaster is the downtown area known as the *Historic Town Square*. As in many cities, the City's downtown shopping area has not been able to compete with more modern and efficient outlying shopping centers and with *big box* retailers. The Historic Town Square area of Lancaster has not only experienced the impact associated with this trend, but has also survived the impact of the 1994 tornado. In spite of the destruction caused by the tornado, the downtown's unique heritage and its central location make it attractive in terms of revitalization and reinvestment opportunities within the area. However, the City should still provide a framework for reinvestment. Ultimately, it will be up to private investors to transform the Historic Town Square from an idealistic concept into an economic reality. However, before private investment can have a chance, in addition, the City should initiate ideas for the overall design of the area, and should develop more detailed strategies and actions in order for private investment to become interested and for the project to be a success in the long-term.

The November 1995 Rural/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) study report proposed a design concept that begins to establish several design principles, or ideas, that the citizens of Lancaster foresee for the Historic Town Square. The report recommended that the Square be strengthened as a civic gathering place and cultural center, and the overall concept proposed encouraging specialty retail, artists' communities, food and entertainment in combination with new elderly, infill housing to redefine Lancaster's Historic Town Square as a viable asset of the community. These recommendations remain viable, and should still be considered appropriate for the Square area.

Therefore, based on the R/UDAT study, as well as on citizen input during the comprehensive planning process, the Historic Town Square plan should:

- ♦ Establish a *people* place, with a small-town atmosphere for the citizens of Lancaster;
- ♦ Create a community focal point;
- ♦ Create a retail shopping area that is oriented to the pedestrian, yet accommodates the automobile;
- ♦ Establish a list of desired uses for the area; and
- ♦ Establish a streetscape concept and plan.



Illustration 10-18
Example of a Town Square

This Historic Town Square concept illustrates several basic design components that could be used to initiate more detailed plans in the future. It is recommended that the City take a proactive role in revitalizing the area by making a commitment to *seed* the project with capital improvements (e.g., streetscape amenities, etc.), and to *set the stage* for private reinvestment within the area. After initial improvements are completed, later phases of the streetscape project can be programmed for funding and implementation. Occasionally, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) monies can be used for such projects.

The City should also consider creating a tax increment financing (TIF) district or a public improvements district (PID) to help finance improvements within the Historic Town Square area. Several cities throughout Texas have successfully created TIF and PID districts for downtown areas that were in need of economic revitalization.

The original downtown area of Lancaster should be revitalized for the overall purpose of providing a unique place for citizens to visit and enjoy. If this revitalization project is undertaken only to improve or benefit retail businesses within the Historic Town Square area as the primary objective, then it probably will not be as successful as envisioned. The objective of economic return is only one of the ingredients that will be necessary to truly transform the Historic Town Square into an attractive *people* place. The City of Lancaster must believe that the character and heritage of the area are as important as its economic potential. If the citizens of the community also embrace this philosophy, then the public economic investment will benefit the retail businesses within the Historic Town Square as well as the City as a whole.

At this time, the City should take several specific actions to initiate the Historic Town Square revitalization program:

- ♦ Approve an overall framework plan (i.e., concept) for the area;
- ♦ Commit funding for the development of a detailed plan that would establish a basic theme and streetscape plan, as well as a phased construction funding program;
- ♦ Create a special zoning district designed specifically for the Historic Town Square area;
- ♦ Use the Historic Preservation Overlay District, Section 29 of the Lancaster Zoning Ordinance, as a model for the proposed Historic Town Square District;
- ♦ Establish a boundary for the proposed Historic Town Square District; and,
- ♦ Review parking requirements for alternative locations within this District.