

CITY OF BATAVIA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: URBAN DESIGN ELEMENT

Urban design is concerned with the creation and maintenance of a built urban environment that is visually pleasing, a nice place to live and work, and in harmony with the natural environment of the Fox River valley. It goes beyond safety and function, the use of land, and the economics of the urban environment to address subtle, yet important, issues that make the difference between a great place and “just somewhere.” The Urban Design element is an essential part of the community effort to foster an outstanding quality of life for its residents, businesses and visitors.

Background

Batavia has long prided itself in being a special place. The community’s exceptionally long and successful history of volunteerism, much of it revolving around public places, art, environmental concern and quality of life, is a primary source of this pride. The historic character of much of the community is integral to its image. These concerns are the central focus of the Urban Design element.

Issues

There are a number of urban design issue areas the community has identified as being important to the creation of a high quality environment. These issue areas have been analyzed and discussed, which led to the drafting of goals and policies to direct future City actions relating to urban design. Urban design improvements, such as City entry features and streetscape improvements are identified on Map UD A. The following issues were identified during the development of the Urban Design element:

1. Landscaping. As the community continues to develop and redevelop, and vacant land is converted to urban use, the result can sometimes be stark and unattractive. Landscaping reduces the amount of solar heat absorbed by a development, allows stormwater to filter into the ground, and improves its aesthetics. Both public and private property benefit from an active street tree planting and maintenance program.
2. Design Review. The City has adopted development guidelines and standards that clarify the community’s design objectives. These guidelines and standards address all industrial and commercial buildings and sites, as well as institutional and multi-family residential developments. Employing the guidelines and standards results in improved quality of new developments.
3. Downtown Character. Downtown is the place that makes Batavia different from other communities. Redevelopment of the downtown is one of the City’s highest priorities. The character of the downtown has been eroded by demolition of historic structures and the construction of suburban-style developments. The challenge is to redevelop the downtown in a manner that is economically viable

- and recreates the pedestrian-friendly character of the historic downtown. The Fox River has often been ignored by developments that adjoin it, but that is beginning to change. Many of the design recommendations from the 2002 Downtown Batavia Master Plan are carried forward in this Comprehensive Plan. The Master Plan's emphasis on creating downtown "streetwalls" and placing parking behind and alongside buildings may conflict with retailers' desires. In addition to the appearance of properties in the downtown, the appearance of downtown streets should set a standard of high quality for investment in private properties.
4. Building Height and Scale. The scale of development in Batavia varies from small-scale older neighborhoods to very large industrial buildings on the east side of town. The Randall Road commercial corridor has a mixture of small-, medium-, and large-scale developments. The community desires a transition in scale between different uses, and a continuity of scale within neighborhoods. Taller buildings represent importance and should be located only in specified areas, with emphasis on the downtown.
 5. Public Art. Art displays the soul of the community, and Batavia has a strong commitment to expanding public access to the arts. Inclusion of art as a part of community design goals can benefit commerce as well as the livability of the City. The downtown is home to numerous businesses that are engaged in visual and performing arts.
 6. Community Spaces. Places where people can gather for active and passive purposes are essential for good quality of life. Plazas, gardens, parks, courtyards and similar spaces provide relief from urban development, allow people to enjoy music, relaxation, festivals, and similar community events. Public streets are an important element in the visual quality of the City and, if well designed, serve to connect and unify the community. Perhaps the most important community spaces in Batavia are the Fox River and downtown streets and plazas.
 7. Lighting. The character of the community at night is strongly influenced by street and parking lot lights, building illumination and lighted signs. Lighting is also important to insure safety for people, property and vehicles. Balancing needs of light levels for public safety, and effective and attractive commercial messaging with limiting glare and light trespass represent significant design challenges.
 8. Signage. Balancing the two major goals of signs – identification and advertising – is crucial. A quality visual environment attempts to meet both objectives, without creating a garish, unpleasant and visually cluttered community.

Goals and Policies

Goal 1. Improve the quality of the built environment

Policies

- a. Through design review, implement established design criteria for all new and remodeled commercial, industrial, institutional and multi-family projects, including changes to parking lots

- b. Encourage high quality building materials and extensive landscaping in public and private projects
- c. Continue the commitment to quality design in City construction projects, and work with other public entities to reinforce that objective in their projects
- d. Require all sides of a building or project to be of a consistent design quality when it will be visible from public streets, residential uses or areas accessible to the public
- e. Insure that mechanical and electrical equipment is screened from public view
- f. Reduce the scale of large retaining walls by terracing and landscaping
- g. Construct landscaped stormwater detention basins with natural contours and gradual side slopes

Goal 2. Integrate the preservation of natural and historic features into new developments

Policies

- a. Retain and reuse viable historic buildings and architectural elements as a part of redevelopment projects
- b. Preserve wetlands, significant trees, watercourses and other important environmental features in new development projects when feasible; mitigate landscape removal when preservation is not possible
- c. Preserve natural and historic site features to the maximum extent possible

Goal 3. Use landscaping to soften new development, screen unattractive elements, minimize heat gain, and to provide relief from urbanization

Policies

- a. Incorporate frequent large planters with deciduous trees in parking lots
- b. Screen building- and ground-mounted mechanical and electrical equipment from public view using shrubs, trees, berms and/or screen walls
- c. Screen parking lots from streets using either shrubs, low walls, berms or a combination of materials
- d. Use large setbacks, evergreen trees, fences and shrubs to buffer residential uses from commercial and industrial uses
- e. Landscape projects in a manner that enhances and complements their architecture
- f. Continue an active street tree planting and maintenance program
- g. Landscape projects with a combination of evergreen and deciduous plant material
- h. Use landscaping to establish a sequence of entry to sites and buildings
- i. Include outdoor use spaces in new developments, including seating, tables, paths, vegetation, enhanced pavement, shade and trash receptacles
- j. Screen downtown businesses' existing trash/recycling receptacles from public view

Goal 4. Promote art in public places throughout the community

Policies

- a. Incorporate a requirement for public art into design guidelines for commercial, office and large-scale residential projects
- b. Consider the establishment of a City arts commission to oversee and manage the City's art collection, advise the City Council on acquisitions, and to promote a wide range of performing and visual art exhibits in the community
- c. Require that a percentage of the budget for new major City capital projects be devoted to permanent public art
- d. Collaborate with arts organizations, individual artists, businesses, and other jurisdictions to advance the arts in Batavia

Goal 5. Insure that new development maintains a human scale

Policies

- a. Avoid using larger building masses when smaller, distinct building units and architectural enhancements can better provide a pedestrian focus
- b. Use landscape islands and pedestrian walkways to divide large parking lots into smaller fields, and to make street crossings safer
- c. Avoid blank building walls facing publicly accessible areas
- d. Encourage use of appropriately sized building materials such as brick, stone and block or modulating large expanses of exterior finish insulation systems (EIFS) to create visual interest
- e. Reduce the scale of parking lot lighting, signage and structures in retail and office projects
- f. Provide an inviting, human scale to public spaces by creating intimate seating areas, shade structures, water features, and other similar elements
- g. Provide multiple, convenient pedestrian entrances to public places and encourage the same for retail buildings
- h. De-emphasize or screen utilitarian aspects of projects, including gas pumps, service areas, loading docks and utility areas
- i. Avoid visual clutter in retail development by limiting outdoor merchandise displays
- j. Emphasize human scale entries for all buildings; use entrance canopies and awnings for shelter

Goal 6. Consider lighting as a design element in new public and private development projects

Policies

- a. Protect residential areas and streets from light trespass and glare
- b. Use lighting to accent architecture and improve streetscapes
- c. Provide adequate lighting for safety and security, but avoid over-illumination
- d. Mount pole and building light fixtures as low as possible to achieve adequate lighting

- e. Permit creative and energy-efficient illumination sources that enhance signs and architecture, but which do not become a distraction to motorists
- f. Encourage use of energy-efficient lighting

Goal 7. Make public and private signage an asset to the community

Policies

- a. Insure that signs are legible and in scale with adjacent streets and structures.
- b. Use coordinated signage for shopping centers, office and industrial parks
- c. Avoid sign clutter by careful design and spacing of freestanding and wall signs; encourage building designs that include a sign frieze
- d. Require signs to be built of high quality materials, be well maintained, and to be removed when no longer needed
- e. Allow some changeable-message signs, but carefully regulate the rate of change to avoid appearance of movement
- f. Coordinate the design of freestanding signs with the architecture of the buildings they identify
- g. In the Downtown Historic District and on landmarked properties ensure signage balances respect to the historic character of the buildings and neighborhood with use of modern materials that create interesting or unique designs to facilitate effective communication
- h. Develop wayfinding signs for the downtown

Goal 8. Highlight significant gateways and important places in the City by community signage, public art and windmills

Policies

- a. Install welcome signs at major entry points to the City
- b. Require major commercial projects to acquire, install and maintain an illuminated windmill or significant public art in a prominent location
- c. Incorporate a windmill or significant public art into the site design of major new City buildings
- d. Maintain unique identification signs for the Downtown Historic District and historically significant buildings

Goal 9. Improve the image of the City as viewed from public streets

Policies

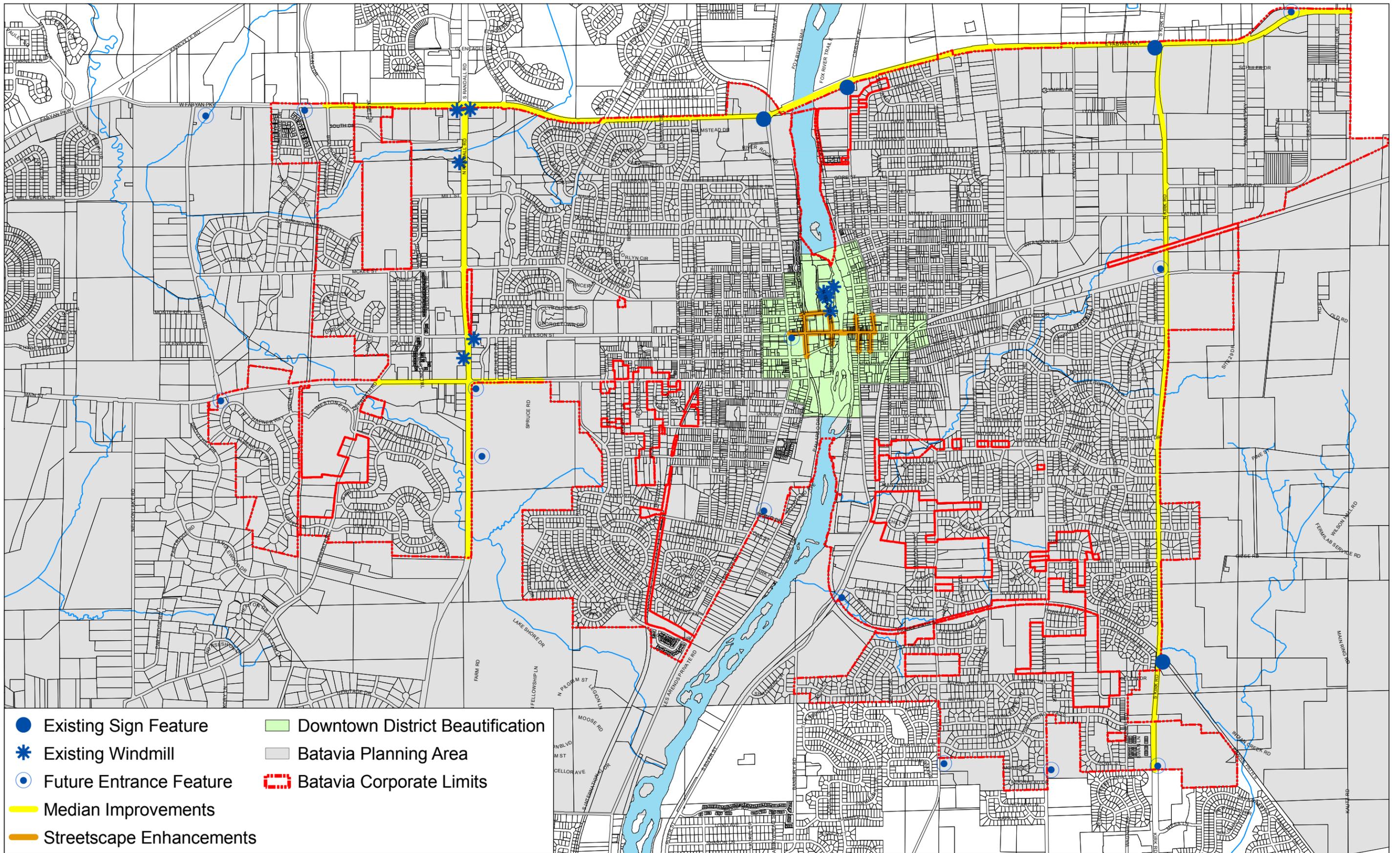
- a. Require design review for all new development in the City except for individual single-family homes
- b. Install landscape buffers or screen fences where loading areas and semi-trailer parking are visible from major streets
- c. In new industrial and commercial projects, orient service and loading areas away from public streets and highly visible areas
- d. Require enclosures with walls and solid gates to complement building architecture for all dumpsters that are visible from public streets or other areas accessible to the public

- e. Continue to limit chain link fencing without overlapping inserts adjacent to public rights-of-way
- f. Allow barbed wire on fencing only in industrial districts when elevated above an easily reachable height
- g. Continue the program for screening public utility sites such as transformer stations, well sites, lift stations and similar facilities
- h. Underground utility lines where possible

Goal 10. Re-establish the urban character and pedestrian-friendly environment of downtown Batavia

Policies

- a. Encourage a diversity of uses, activities and scales of development in downtown
- b. Promote street level activity in the core of the downtown through management of land uses, design of the public domain and movement of pedestrian activity to the street
- c. Make downtown streets interesting, comfortable and lively, with unique lighting, wide sidewalks, seating, upgraded paving materials and convenient public restrooms
- d. Treat pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle access and amenities equally in the downtown
- e. Develop centralized public parking in each quadrant of the downtown; reduce on-site parking requirements
- f. Encourage the location of entertainment, dining, specialty shops and locally owned businesses in downtown
- g. Foster the arts as a major component of downtown activity and interest
- h. Continue the Tax Increment Finance District sponsored financial assistance programs
- i. Use the Fox River, the river trail and unique public spaces as catalysts for new downtown development, activities and uses
- j. Insure that City codes and ordinances respect the historic character of downtown and implement Comprehensive Plan policies
- k. In areas characterized by buildings that hold the street edge, support development that fits this character, including locating parking areas behind, beside or beneath buildings, or in parking structures, where feasible



- Existing Sign Feature
- ✱ Existing Windmill
- Future Entrance Feature
- Median Improvements
- Streetscape Enhancements
- Downtown District Beautification
- Batavia Planning Area
- Batavia Corporate Limits



Map UD A - Urban Design Enhancements

