8

Implementation

The key to success of any plan is the implementation component. This vital part of the plan determines whether critical issues conveyed to the city by its public as important elements to improve the condition and quality of life found in the city are to be considered, studied and acted upon.

Dothan's public let their preferences OF PLANS, PROJECTS AND STUDIES be known during the Delphi Technique-patterned citizen survey, several public forums, Planning Commission meetings, City Commission meetings, as well as through letters, and telephone calls to the City. The following is a list of the top preferences identified by the public. Throughout this plan, we have set the stage for planning in Dothan. The preferences on issues raised by the public and those of concern to City leadership were discussed in detail in the previous chapters. In this chapter, the planning implications of each preference are briefly discussed followed by a series of recommendations to implement this Plan. In our review of the concerns expressed during the planning process, there were several items important to staff that are included in the recommendations outlined in this chapter.

LIST OF CONCERNS IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

1. Transportation improvements within the City.
2. Sidewalks, pedestrian ways and bike trails.
3. Communication improvements between the City and the public.
4. Improvements to downtown.
5. More downtown entertainment venues.
6. More open space and parks in which to recreate.
7. Prevent commercial encroachment.
8. Protect the environment.

TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS WITHIN THE CITY

Traffic congestion was the number one concern of the citizens during the preparation of this LRDP. The ability to get around the City in a timely manner, to exit ones subdivision, and to link to other regional highways and routes were expressed to the City staff as becoming more and more difficult. Certain measures to address problems associated with traffic movement on three of our principal arteries are presently ongoing or are close to commencement by the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT).

Improvements and widening to Ross Clark Circle, the City's beltway, is in the planning stages. ALDOT intends to implement access management controls on the segment of The Circle from U.S. 231 North to U.S. 231 South. Part of the project will involve repurposing existing lanes and closing many of the existing median openings along The Circle. Closure of the median openings will promote the function of moving traffic over accessing adjacent properties. The elimination of the many medians will also reduce accidents. Funding for this multi-phase project will be provided by the Federal Highway Administration and the Alabama Department of Transportation.

Improvements and widening to a portion of US 231 North from Ross Clark Circle to north of John D. Odom Road is currently under construction. Widening this segment of the highway and repurposing existing paved areas to create an additional lane each way will improve the traffic flow along this stretch of the busiest roadway in Dothan. Funding for the over $13 million project is provided by the Federal Highway Administration and the Alabama Department of Transportation.

The State is actively looking toward the construction of a **limited access facility** around the west side of town; the I-10 Connector. The State has studied the feasibility of constructing this facility as a toll road but no decision has been made. Ultimately, the road would run from Montgomery, AL. to Panama City, FL. Regardless of whether it is publically or privately financed, a portion of the proposed road lies within the Dothan jurisdiction on the west side of the City. Construction would take much of the through traffic off U.S. 231 North, Ross Clark Circle, and U.S. 231 South providing relief to City residents traveling those roads. Currently, a draft environmental assessment for this project has been completed, but further studies are being conducted. Consultants have been selected to develop design drawings but have not been released to begin work.

As authorized by Title 11, Chapter 52, Article 3, a Minor Arterial and Collector Plan (MACPlan) will be designed and implemented as an extension of this Plan. It will be used to determine what segments of roadways may need additional lane widening based upon the future land use projections developed by this LRDP and where future roads may be needed. Although land use patterns can be difficult to predict, best guesses can be made based upon known patterns, proposed developments and market trends. The MACPlan must be updated as conditions change.

Maneuvering through the urban area inside Ross Clark Circle has never been an issue. That's due to the amount of connectivity between streets and the gridded network of public streets. However, this is not the case in the suburban environments outside Ross Clark Circle where there is a noticeable lack of connection between major streets and between subdivisions. Since connectivity is one of the ingredients necessary to ensure steady and even flow of traffic, measures to improve connectivity should be expanded and new developments should be reviewed carefully to identify opportunities to enhance street connections.

The City of Dothan participated in the development of the 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan conducted by the Southeast Alabama Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Recommendations:

- **1a.** Continue to monitor active transportation improvements projects and steward the development of the I-10 Connector.
- **1b.** Investigate possible sources of funding at State and Federal levels for transportation related improvement projects.
- **1c.** Create and adopt the MACPlan by ordinance. Maintain, update and re-adopt the MACPlan as appropriate.
- **1d.** Promote street connectivity to adjacent undeveloped property.
- **1e.** Encourage car pooling and develop a study to locate possible sites for development of park and ride facilities.
- **1f.** Remain actively involved with the local MPO, ALDOT and the federal government to identify other transportation programs which might benefit the City and the region.
- **1g.** Develop land use patterns compatible with and supports a variety of transportation opportunities.
- **1h.** Focus on the design of internal traffic circulation that moves traffic within the development site efficiently.

1i. Encourage neighborhood street design that facilitates safety, ensures connectivity, deters through traffic and supports viable and sustainable communities.

1j. Implement access management standards in the Subdivision Regulations and development plan review.

1k. Establish limits on the number of dwellings that can be accessed from any one location. Allow additional development with a secondary access.

1l. Use landscaping and street trees to define the edges of development and provide visual clues to motorists that the travel environment has changed.

1m. Develop and adopt a complete streets policy.

SIDEWALKS, PEDESTRIAN WAYS AND BIKE TRAILS

A recent revision to the Dothan subdivision regulations establishes a clear formula for developers of land to determine when and where sidewalks are required in new subdivisions. Section 90-141 addresses in detail the instances when, the location of, and the dimensions for new sidewalks within new residential neighborhoods. The City has recently contracted with a consulting firm to develop a bicycle/pedestrian plan for the City.

The opportunity that is overlooked in many cases involves providing a link between commerical development and adjacent residential areas that would support pedestrian and bicycle trips. Such a link would extend the opportunity for surrounding neighborhood residents to walk or ride to and from the development and their homes rather than having to get into their automobiles for the short drive to the center. Pedestrian links between residential communities, work centers and shopping or entertainment centers is an important component of the multi-modal transportation system of a city.

Recommendations:

2a. Enforce sidewalks requirements established in the subdivision regulations. Revise as appropriate.

2b. Participate fully in the development of the Bike/Ped Plan for the City and implement as funding becomes available.

2c. Encourage pedestrian and bicycle links between shopping and entertainment destinations in the development plan approval process.

2d. Use incentives such as reduced street width or development density to encourage sidewalk design and construction in excess of minimums required.

2e. Promote design and construction of streets and walkways to be safe and pedestrian friendly and incorporate in-line public spaces throughout the network.

2f. Develop streetscape plans and overlay districts for highly visible major roadways in the City that address issues such as safety, trees and landscaping, lighting, pedestrian amenities, sidewalks, crosswalks and medians to enhance the walkability of our City.

COMMUNICATION IMPROVEMENTS BETWEEN THE CITY AND THE PUBLIC

Whether actual or imagined, the public has perceived a lack of communication between the government and its citizens. During the LRDP planning process many opportunities were given the public to participate. The citizen survey resulted in only 5% response and the five public forums held at various locations in the City had very low turnouts even though the time, place and date for each were broadcast through the radio and television media, published on the City's website and within the local newspaper. The forums were held in the evenings, two weeks apart of each other and in each of the City Commission districts as well as two locations in the downtown area. Yet, we continue to hear from some citizens that they were never made aware of the survey or the public forums.

The City Manager holds monthly press meetings wherein he delivers a prepared statement and fields questions from the local media.

The City Commission, Planning Commission, Personnel Board and other committees, commissions and boards hold meetings regularly, all of which are advertised and open to the public.

The City Manager has created a voluntary participation program entitled "Dothan 101" which is held semi-annually over a four week period during the evening. The intent of "Dothan 101" is to inform the public on the day-to-day operation of the City on a department by department basis. The "classes" are kept small so that each citizen can get a close look at how the City operates and can ask questions of the staff during their presentation.

The City Commission meetings are televised on the public access cable channel as a tape-delayed broadcast as are the commission meetings of the County and council meetings for some of the surrounding municipalities.

Recommendations:

3a. Continue the regular press conferences.

3b. Continue with the Dothan 101 program and have the presentations broadcast on the public access channel as a tape-delayed program.

3c. Investigate opportunities to broadcast the Planning Commission, Board of Zoning and Adjustment, and the Historic Preservation Board meetings as tape delayed programming on the public access cable channel.

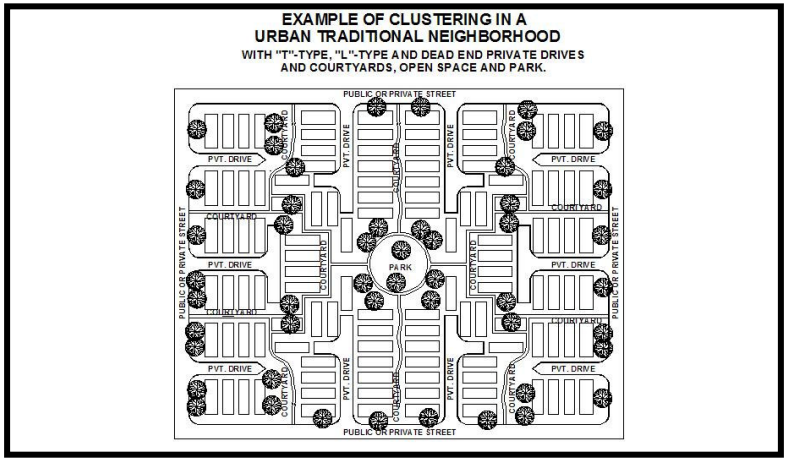
3d. In addition to the tape delayed programming, investigate the practicality to broadcast each meeting "real time" on the official City website.

3e. When entering into the "neighborhood planning" phase of individual neighborhoods within Dothan, it is recommended that a steering committee of citizens who live within the neighborhood being studied be formed to aid in the analysis and development of the plan for their neighborhood. In doing this, the citizens will achieve a sense of community and camaraderie as the process unfolds and culminates.

3f. Investigate implementing an annual citizen survey.

IMPROVEMENTS TO DOWNTOWN

The renovation of the downtown area was one of the most popular comments from our survey and met favorable response from the citizens during our public forums. The downtown as it presently exists does not reflect the vitality of the City where much of the commercial and residential activities have been concentrated along Ross Clark Circle or in the suburban environs beyond The Circle.



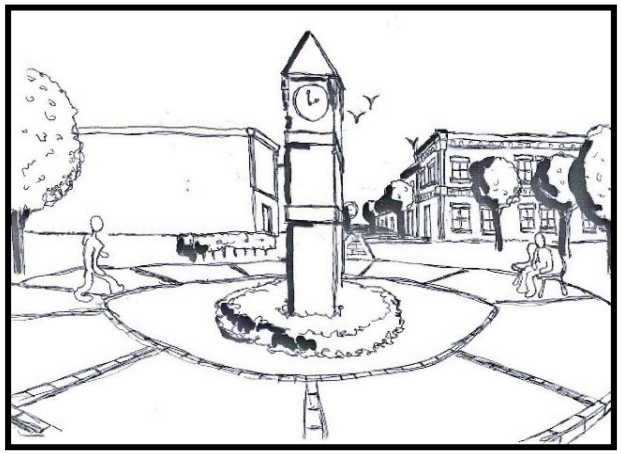
Some comments included the investigation of public/private partnerships by the City for downtown renewal; or the active pursuit of private development companies which specialize in the redevelopment of downtown areas.

DDRA During late 2006 the Downtown Dothan Redevelopment Authority (DDRA) was resurrected to address redevelopment issues. Much of the concentration of their efforts has remained within a small two-city block area of the downtown, but plans are to expand their redevelopment efforts outward as the inner downtown area is completed.

Downtown Overlay District (DOD) In late 2007 and early 2008 the Planning Department created an ordinance and accompanying set of design guidelines for an area of the downtown over which a new overlay district was formed. The new ordinance identified specific districts within the downtown area and allowable land uses within each depending upon the planned character for each. The ordinance also created two new "floating" zones that would encourage out-of-the-box,

creative design when it came to new development downtown. The new zones are the Urban Planned Unit Development (UPUD) and the Urban Traditional Neighborhood Development (UTND). The zones can be applied to as small as a two-acre tract, allowing the development of infill parcels in the downtown. The UPUD can contain mixed uses, while the UTND is restricted exclusively to residential use. Such creative ordinances and design guidelines promote development of quality land use projects.

RSA-Retirement Systems of Alabama (RSA) invests retirement funds in land development ventures throughout the State. They are the managers and owners of several championship golf courses in key areas of Alabama known as part of the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail. Dothan is one of those cities fortunate enough to have one of those courses. The Highlands Golf Course in the Highlands development on the west side of the City is owned and operated by the RSA. However, golf-course developments are usually accompanied by a luxury hotel and convention center such as the one in the illustration.



A Master Plan for downtown was prepared and adopted in 2007. Among other things, it was suggested that the construction of a "town square" would go a long way in the revitalization of the downtown. Similarly, improvements to the existing library and/or some other attraction such as an aquarium, amphitheater, or a natural history museum with planetarium could also be possibilities to attract visitors to the downtown area. These attractions could be publically, privately, or jointly financed and operated and advertised to beach travelers as a temporary diversion.

Recommendations:

- **4a.** Continue working to implement the Downtown Plan.
- **4b.** Continue funding the DDRA.
- **4c.** Actively seek out private land development companies who specialize in downtown redevelopment projects on a large scale for private ventures or public/private partnerships.
- **4d.** Continue seeking RSA investment into downtown.
- **4e.** Improve the infrastructure system within the downtown to include upgrading the water transmission system to a size that could handle increased development density and intensity in the downtown area.
- **4f.** Develop a streetscape plans at a pedestrian scale for other areas of downtown to emphasize a pedestrian friendly environment.

4g. The use of alleys or private drives as outlined within the design guidelines for UTND's and TND's should be considered in high density areas to reduce the need for driveways and garages to face along public streets. They also would offer a location for off-street parking away from the through streets in mixed-use developments.

DOWNTOWN ENTERTAINMENT VENUES

The renovation of the downtown area could pave the way for additional venues held in the downtown. The public suggested that the City sponsor more of these sorts of venues. However, there were many comments from the public that events or venues are learned about only after watching coverage on a local television station of the event once it's occurred rather than before the occurrence, which would have allowed them the time to make plans to attend.
Currently, the volunteer acting troupe known as SEACT periodically develops, sponsors, and produces live plays held at various locations in the downtown. The Dothan Opera House is the location for several plays and musicals throughout the course of the year. The civic center arena is used for many large private productions, civic functions, social functions, and other activities.

The Museum of Arts has the capacity to hold public and private functions, seminars, and meetings and sponsors various civic events at the site throughout the year. The National Peanut Festival completes its annual recognition of the importance of the peanut industry with a parade through the downtown. Various other groups sponsor seasonal art and craft fairs on the streets of the downtown. The City sponsors several seasonal events on the downtown streets as well.

Within our citizen survey we asked the public whether they would be interested in a major sporting venue in Dothan. It was one of 11 "Regional Issues" posed to the public. The response rated a major sporting venue as 10th out of the 11 in ranking of importance to them.

Recommendations:

5a. Continue City-sponsored events in the downtown and establish new ones such as Mardis Gras parades, balls, etc.
5b. Relocate activities to downtown venues such as the "Smokin' in the Wiregrass" bar-b-que cook off held in the spring.
5c. Investigate opportunities for development of "attraction" type uses in the downtown such as an aquarium, a movie theater, or other such activities that would attract visitors to spend time in the downtown.
5d. Advertise any and all events and venues held downtown vigorously BEFORE the event has occurred.

MORE OPEN SPACE AND NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

The planning and construction of Gussie McMillon Park east of the central business district signaled a long-needed investment in the neighborhood by the City. The park was erected on land that was once occupied by East Highlands Elementary School. The school had fallen into decay. A series of public meetings were held at a nearby City-owned community center to introduce the citizens to plans which had been prepared to turn the vacant land into a public park. Construction of the park was funded by CDBG funds, City labor, and volunteer time and effort by local citizens to build a play ground. Similar opportunities exist around Dothan that would fulfill a recreation need for neighborhood oriented activities.

As compared to neighborhood parks that are basically passive park settings, there are several community parks where organized activities are conducted. Responding to a need, a new 87.5 acre community park site was acquired in the southwest area of Dothan. After several studies, this site proved to be suitable to meet future expansion needs.

Recommendations:

- **6a.** Acquire land appropriate for neighborhood park opportunities including in the downtown area.
- **6b.** Consider an amendment to the subdivision regulations which would require land to be set aside for the use of the future residents of the new community.
- **6c.** Increase the amount of open space with an emphasis on creating a greenway network and hike/bike trails.
- **6d.** Encourage land uses that promote an environment where residents can work, live, and play within their neighborhoods.

PREVENT COMMERCIAL ENCROACHMENT

Several instances have occurred recently that has caused some concern that commercial activities are encroaching into residential areas. The planning and construction of the Flying J Truck Stop at the intersection of U.S. 231 South and Ross Clark Circle prompted an outpouring of public concern. The picture on the right explains the use and intensity of the truck stop and its proximity to neighboring single family residences.

The problem in this case was that the current zoning on the property was consistent with its use. But, the zoning ordinance did not elaborate on the size and kind of buffering required, only that a distance of separation was needed. Under the existing zoning ordinance, the City had no choice but to approve the proposed development plan.

In 2007, the Dothan Pavilion was approved and constructed along U.S. 231 North between Murphy Mill Road and Napier Field Road. The large shopping and entertainment center was approved even though it abutted an existing and established single family residential area. In this case, a wide vegetative buffer consisting of mature pines and hardwoods between the incompatible land uses was required as a condition of zoning approval.

In both cases, the lack of well developed and evenly applied buffer standards that could be applied at development plan review caused inconsistent treatment of buffers. As the City revises the zoning code, special attention should be given to how incompatible uses are buffered from one another. In addition to revised buffer standards, the City might consider the application of additional development requirements for properties laying along the image corridors of the City. Properties in an image corridor could be held to a higher standard, thus accentuating community appearance. The Dothan Zoning Ordinance is currently undergoing a major rewrite and if Dothan has learned from passed mistakes, the definition of where, how large, and what composition buffers between incompatible land uses will take should be addressed and included in the new ordinance.

Much of the concern from citizens arises when previously developed single family residential uses along a major arterial or highway is rezoned to something other than what it was originally designated when the neighborhood was first approved. Such changes are usually the result of repeated land use successions causing increased land values. Land economics would push the property with increased land values towards a commercial use where rent is higher. This land use cycle is a common cause of encroaching commercialization.

In some cases, property was rezoned without evidence of a firm development plan. While rezoning shouldn't be subject to a development plan, the developer should be able to give the Planning Commission some idea that the property is not being rezoned for purely speculative reasons.

Recommendations:

7a. Educate the public to understand the forces behind land economics and the inevitable transition before they purchase a home that backs onto an undeveloped tract of land fronting a busy road.

7b. Include as part of rezoning staff reports a review of adjacent properties that may be developed with an incompatible use.

7c. Avoid rezoning approvals where there is no clear understanding of what will be developed on that tract.

7d. Create a "municipal reserve" overlay qualifier that requires greater rear yard setbacks on reserve tracts that abut proposed or existing single family residential lots.

7e. Revise the landscape buffer criteria with regard to landscaping requirements that recognizes the varying intensities of use.

7f. Review height restrictions for non-residential uses that reflect the distance from adjacent residential uses.

7g. Ensure adequate opportunities for new commercial development in appropriate locations in the City.

7h. A variety of regulatory techniques should be developed to promote effective compatibility between adjacent land uses.

7i. Refine landscape requirements so large parking areas include buffering and planting that soften or mitigate intrusive views.

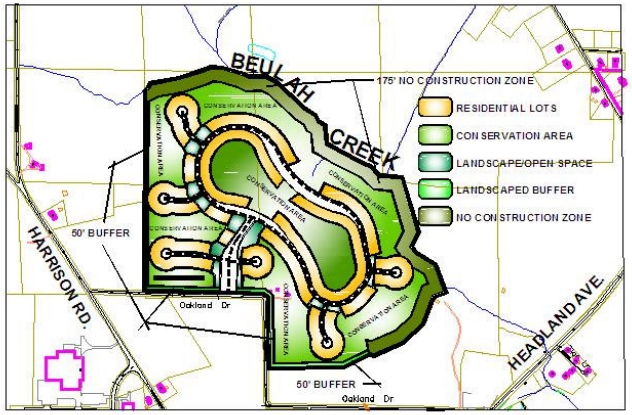
7j. Encourage large commerical uses to locate at major nodes in the transport system.

PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT

Development that uses conservation oriented and eco-friendly practices are becoming increasingly popular in the marketplace. Dothan is blessed with an abundance of open spaces, creeks, rivers, ponds, lakes and other natural areas. The eco-system is biologically diverse and should be respected. Riparian areas, wetlands, prime woodlands, prime pasture land, continuously flowing creeks and rivers, waterways, and gently rolling topography are all characteristic of land in the Dothan area.

Conservation development design standards should be established within the subdivision regulations and as an option in a planned unit development. These standards would be designed to preserve unique features on a site (green infrastructure) by allowing smaller lots (density bonus) in exchange for preserving them. Lots would be clustered along public or private streets leaving a significant portion of the development in conserved open space. This minimizes impermeable surfaces that increase runoff and impact waterways, wetlands, or impact natural vistas. At the same time, the amount of infrastructure required for access would be decreased. The goal is to retain the lot yield that could otherwise be expected but cluster it on the site.

EXAMPLE OF A RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN A CONSERVATION DISTRICT
(SMALLER LOTS IN A LESS-DENSE ENVIRONMENT)



The quality of the air we breathe is often taken for granted in this part of the country, but experience has shown that Dothan will one day be faced with dealing with noncompliance with air pollution standards. As a small urbanized area, Dothan could be faced with having to address ground level ozone and small particulate matter in the air. The sources for these pollutants include a variety of sources ranging from industry to gas combustion engines to the pine forests that surround us. Compliance with State and Federal standards will be mandatory and they will impact economic development practices and the funding of transportation improvements. Dothan leadership should recognize this probable impact on or community. Mitigating measures could include mass transit, car pooling, efforts to increase the use of bicycles and pedestrians facilities, and efforts to address public behavior and attitudes.

To sustain future growth, Dothan needs to develop a source of surface water. Any in depth analysis of this issue is beyond the scope of this Plan. But one thing that should be addressed is the impact on land use that may result. Should a reservoir be pursued, it is vitally important that the land around it is protected from development that might adversely impact water quality.

Recommendations:

8a. Map the location of elements of green infrastructure, protected and endangered species and known cultural resources.
8b. Identify, preserve and protect green infrastructure and habitat in the development review process.
8c. Add conservation development standards to the subdivision regulations to minimize disruption of green infrastructure.
8d. Integrate the constructed environment and the natural environment to protect the native landscape and topographical features inherent in our community.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations in support of Urban Growth Area, Boundary and Annexation Goals

9a. Dothan will give primary consideration for annexing land which has a fiscally positive impact.
9b. Property lying outside the Urban Growth Boundary as designated in this Plan should not be annexed.
9c. The capacity of existing infrastructure and redevelopment of older areas should be promoted to maximize existing taxpayer investments.
9d. Consider initiating a flood hazard ordinance and building inspections program in the three-mile police jurisdiction area to establish a level of protection for its current and future residents.
9e. Ensure that growth occurs in a manner that balances the pace of development with the City's ability to provide critical services such as police and fire protection, utilities, and trash removal as well as capital improvements such as parks, transportation and open space.
9f. Recognize that all land uses are necessary to provide for the balanced and orderly growth and development of the City.

Recommendations in support of Community Appearance Goals and Strategies

9g. Housing of all types and form must be constructed of the highest quality materials and designed to create safe and attractive neighborhoods. Attention must be paid to building massing and form with emphasis on variation to prevent repetition of similar homes or building complexes.

9h. Improve design standards for multi-family housing that will address issues such as architectural design and integrity, building design and massing, spatial relationships, and safety, while creating sustainability and durability.

9i. Improve design standards for various levels of single-family structures that address the specific issues elaborated above.

9j. Develop standards for development quality in the built environment to prevent premature obsolescence.

9k. Enhance and accentuate primary gateways to the City by constructing landscaped medians or points of arrival.

9l. Non-residential uses along image corridors should be clearly recognizable and relate directly to the corridor it fronts.

9m. Use street trees, landscaping and lighting to enhance the appearance of the use or building from the image corridor.

9n. Significant areas of parking in the front should be minimized and placed to the rear of the development.

9o. Where possible, adjacent buildings should relate in size, height and appearance to each other.

9p. Developments should integrate pedestrian and bicycle paths and lanes in image corridors.

9q. Frontage or backage roads should be incorporated into development design in image corridors.

9r. Maintain transitions to residential areas in image corridors; strive to define edges in development patterns.

9s. Sign types and sizes should be appropriate to their context, i.e. height and size should be a function of intensity of use and traffic speed to avoid visual clutter in image corridors.

9t. Land uses along image corridors should be coordinated against a set of design standards.

9u. Strip or leapfrog development along image corridors should be minimized to create a recognizable transition between the “city” and the “country”.