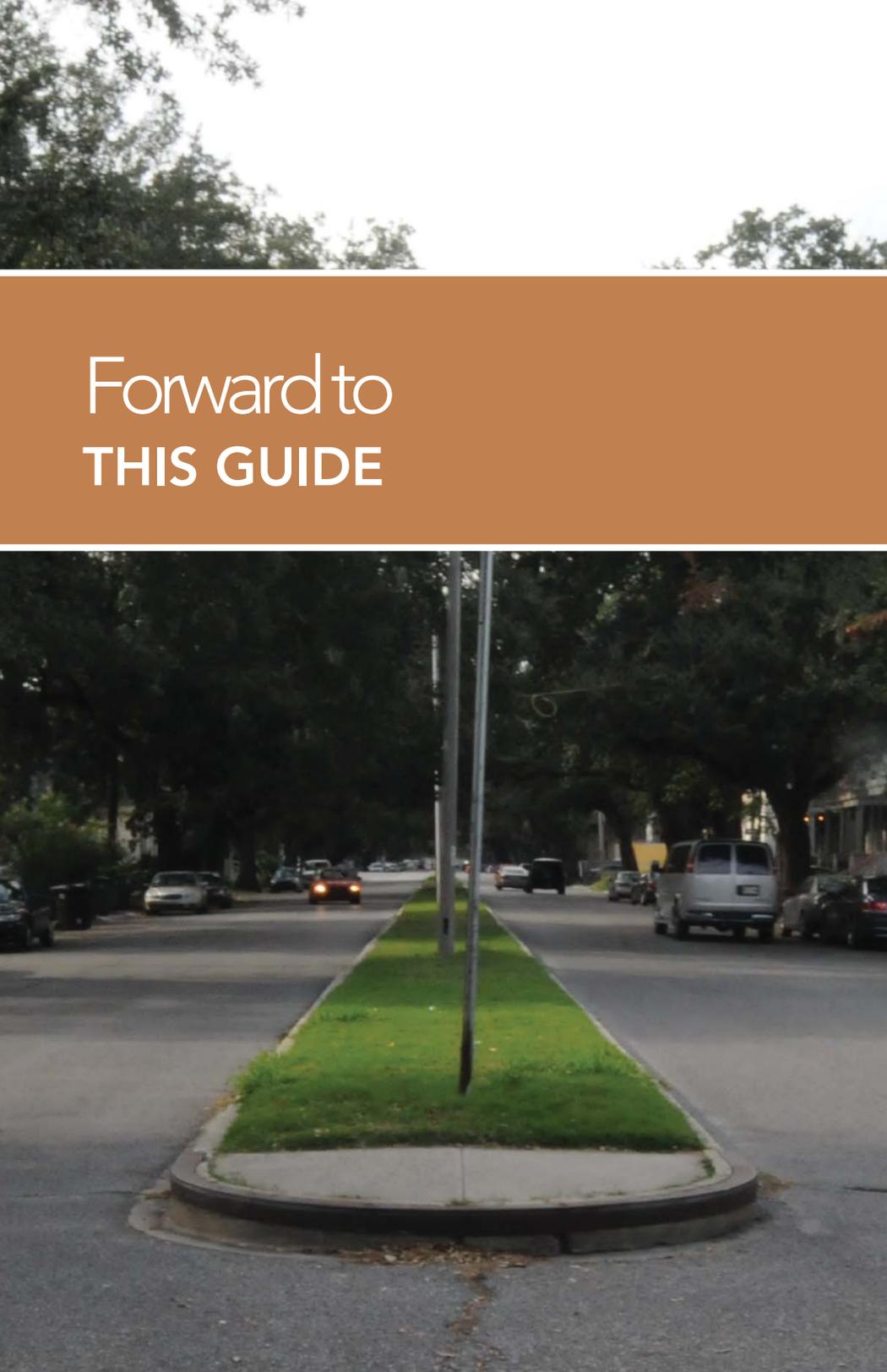


THE
CITIZEN'S
GUIDE TO

URBAN DESIGN



Foundation
for Louisiana



Forward to THIS GUIDE

Foundation for Louisiana is proud to have commissioned and played an active role in the development of the Citizen's Guide to Land Use and Citizen's Guide to Urban Design.

The intent in creating these two resources was to build upon the community organizing, citizen engagement and public partnerships undertaken by the Foundation's predecessor, the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation. This work mobilized residents and neighborhoods in New Orleans to provide substantive input as the city laid out a vision for recovery from hurricane Katrina in the Unified New Orleans Plan, and a vision for the future in the update of the city's master plan.

The release of these guides is timely given a renewed commitment by municipalities throughout Louisiana to create or update master plans and land use regulations in an effort to create more resilient communities. Natural and man-made disasters that have impacted the state over the past six years have highlighted the necessity for communities to be forward thinking about how to grow and function in a manner that limits risks to people and property.

The Foundation believes that residents play a fundamental role in the planning process. We have learned through our work in New Orleans that residents are in need of support and resources to ensure that both their concerns and visions are addressed in plans. The Citizen's Guides are resources that can be used to facilitate and expand dialogue between the public, planners and policymakers on issues impacting the character and future of Louisiana's communities. It is not the intent of the guides to be prescriptive, assigning values of "good" or "bad" to the built environment. Rather the guides provide a common vocabulary to facilitate constructive dialogues in the community planning process.

Foundation for Louisiana is at work for resilient communities. We encourage you to use these guides in your effort to create a more resilient community and a more resilient Louisiana.



Flozell Daniels, Jr.
President & CEO
Foundation for Louisiana

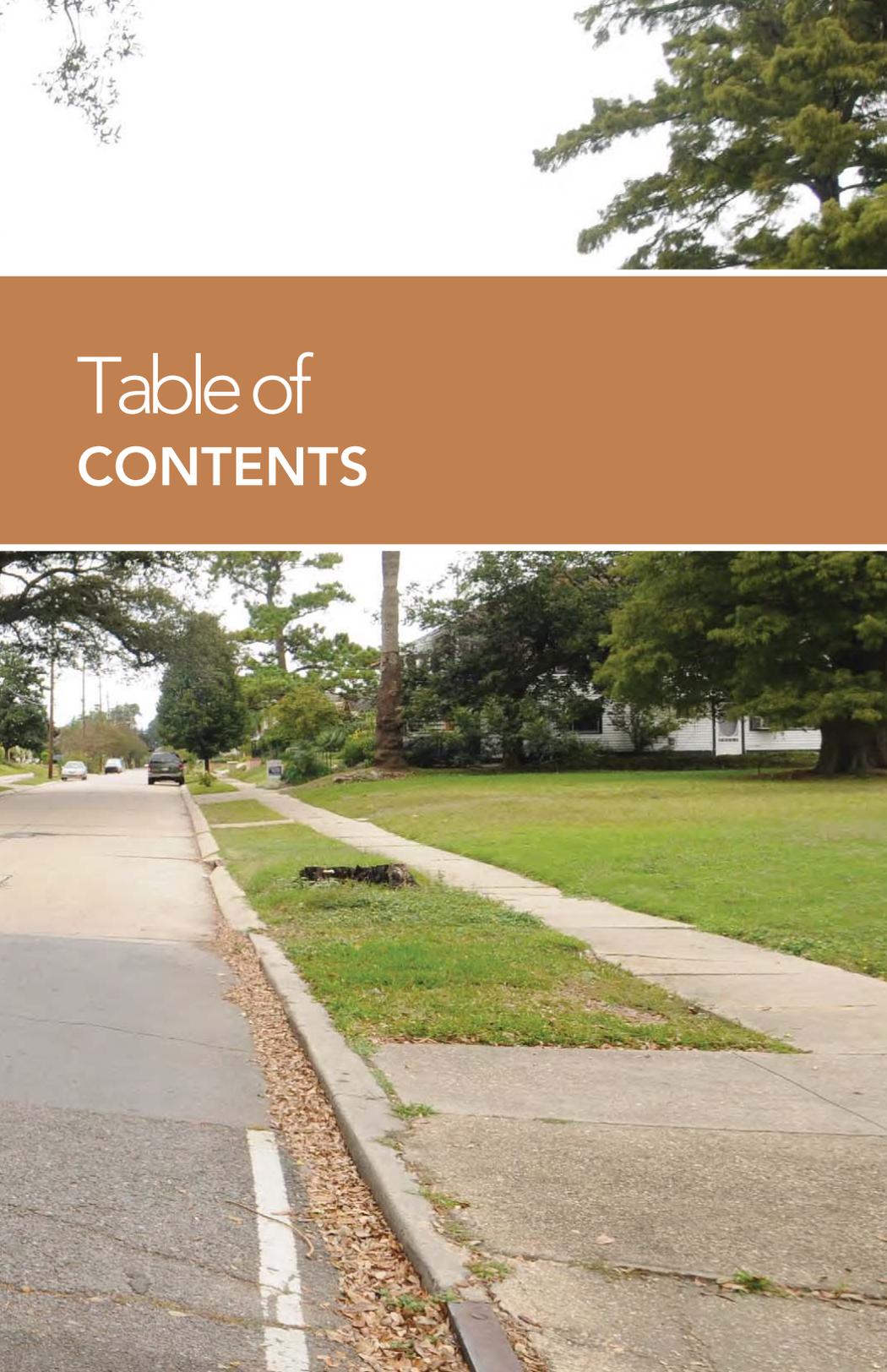


Table of CONTENTS

Introduction

- Forward to This Guide
- Why Urban Design?
- How to Use This Guide

Section 1: How to Read Design Drawings

- 1.1 Concept Diagrams
- 1.2 Precedents
- 1.3 Massing
- 1.4 Plans
- 1.5 Sections
- 1.6 Renderings

Section 2: Elements of Urban Design

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 2.0 Buildings & Open Space | 2.7 Streetscape |
| 2.1 Architecture | 2.8 Transportation |
| 2.2 Set Backs | 2.9 Working at Different Scales |
| 2.3 Formulas | 2.10 Density |
| 2.4 Vernacular | 2.11 Land Use |
| 2.5 Streets & Parking | 2.12 Infrastructure |
| 2.6 Safety | 2.13 Connectivity |

Section 3: Interacting with Designers

- 3.1 The People
- 3.2 The Process

Acknowledgements & Credits

Section 4: Tear-Out Summary



Introduction: WHY URBAN DESIGN?

If architecture is the design of buildings and open space, then urban design is how buildings, open space, streets, and all the other elements of your city are arranged in order to shape local character. The way a place 'feels' - its unique experience and character - comes from decisions made through urban design on a variety of scales, from the individual house to the block, neighborhood, city, and region.

Why do different places feel a certain way? Every neighborhood and street has a certain mix of elements - everything from house colors to the width of streets - that makes the experience of that particular place unlike any other. Design professionals often speak of trying to create a 'sense of place'; it is the right mix of elements that makes an area special. These elements must work in the given context of an area, town, or city.

Good urban design can do many things to improve the quality of life in Louisiana, such as creating safer streets, promoting healthier lifestyles, and nurturing strong community connections. Through urban design, we shape the places we live, work, shop, play, pray, and travel.

Urban design is often described as a process, since it requires many steps and many individuals to design a place. When you participate in this process, you can use your knowledge to help make all the places of Louisiana better.





Introduction: HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



The Citizen's Guide to Urban Design provides an introduction to basic urban design concepts in order to create a common understanding between residents, designers, real estate developers, planners, and government officials. Using a common language, all the stakeholders will be able to communicate more effectively about the issues and plans that shape Louisiana's communities.

For Residents

By better understanding the drawings, terms, and concepts of urban design, you will be better able to see how plans affect your community and to articulate your comments, questions, and concerns. The information in this guide is only valuable if put to use; without knowing about meetings in your area, you will not have a forum in which to discuss the issues that matter most to you. Get involved!

This guide focuses on some of the most common terms and concepts. Your area may have unique characteristics that are not covered in this book.

For Designers and Developers

This guide is intended to give the average person a basic understanding of urban design. Referring to concepts outlined here will lead to a more productive and efficient participation process, one that provides specific and useful feedback.

For Planning Professionals

Ensuring that the citizenry is informed about urban design issues before the start of a major planning process or major project should lead to much smoother implementation. Comments and questions from residents will be more in depth and informed and therefore more representative of the community's true desires. Furthermore, a greater understanding of urban design concepts and practices will help community members move beyond limited knowledge of isolated issues to appreciate the full depth and breadth of the design process.

Introduction: HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



This guide is divided into four main sections:

How to Read Design Drawings

This section teaches you the most common ways designers will display their plans, what each drawing represents, and why a designer used it.

Elements of Urban Design

Become familiar with a collection of elements, the tools of urban design and understand larger concepts about city design.

Interacting with Designers

How to use your knowledge to help transform places in ways that matter to you and your neighbors.

Tear-Out Summary

A summary of this guide on a single illustrated page. Use this page to make hand-outs or as a pocket reference.

At Your Meeting: Important questions will be identified in these boxes. Use these questions to apply the lessons of this guide to your situation.

Another note: This guide refers to designers, architects, and planners interchangeably as potential creators of designs. See sections 3.1 and 3.2 for more information on the roles of people in the design process.



Section 1: HOW TO READ DESIGN DRAWINGS



This section introduces you to the most common drawings used in urban design to represent new buildings, streets, and neighborhoods. When you go to a project review or planning meeting, designers will present drawings like these to explain how a proposed design will impact your community.

There are many kinds of drawings, and each has its own strengths and limitations. By understanding how to read these drawings, you will be able to envision plans, comment on specific elements of a design, and think critically about urban design.



1.1 CONCEPT DIAGRAMS

In order to develop a design, architects and planners will often use diagrams to explain specific ideas or to decide where to put buildings, streets, and other elements. These diagrams are part of a process that moves from initial goals to a final product; along the way, simple drawings help place ideas in physical space.

- Recognize common design diagrams, and understand their goal.
- See a bubble diagram to describe uses.
- Use a movement diagram to show connections.
- Understand how layered diagrams convey information.

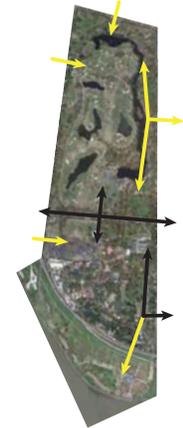
Bubble Diagram

Sketches the general location of buildings or activities.



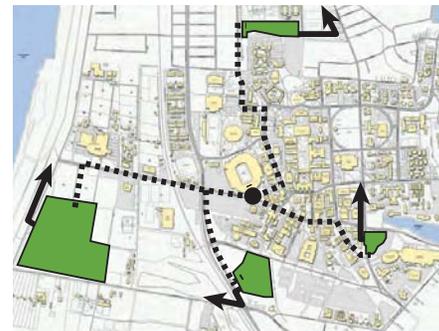
Movement Diagram

Shows how people or traffic move through an area, how they enter or exit.



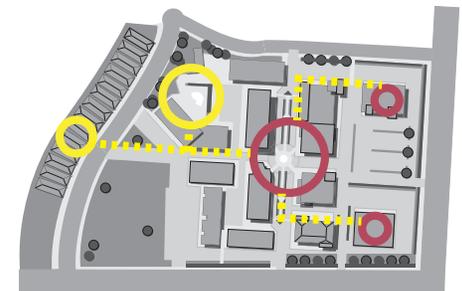
Movement Diagram

Locates paths and connections between places or uses.



Layered Diagram

Uses multiple types of drawings to convey a lot of information quickly.

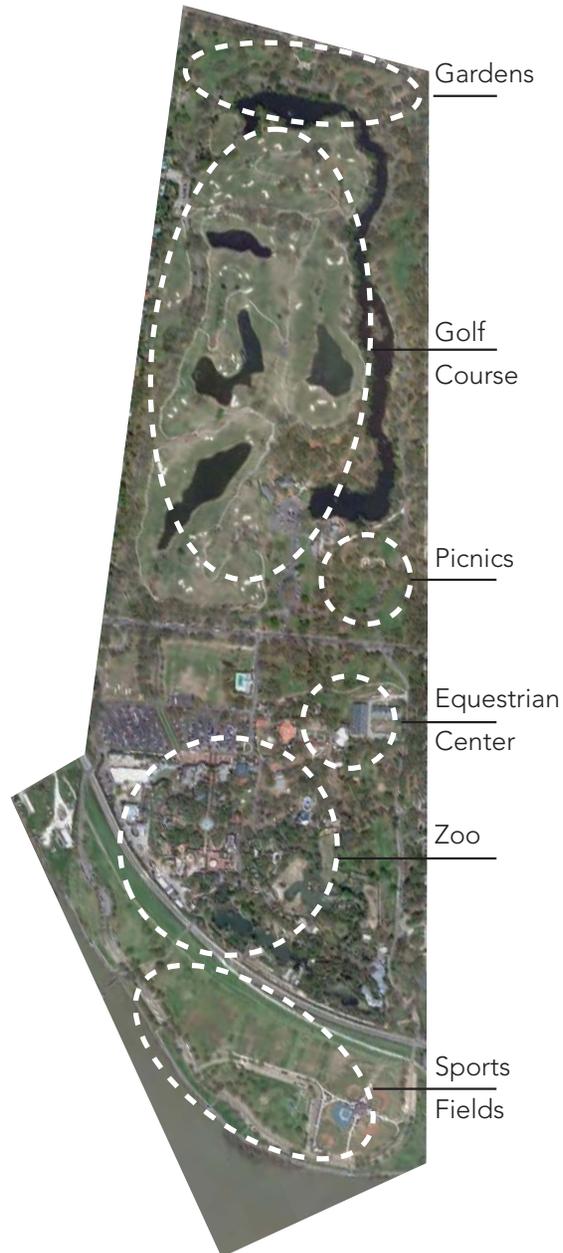


CONCEPT DIAGRAMS

Bubble Diagram

A bubble diagram is a very common drawing in urban planning and is meant as a way to show, in a very general sense, where certain activities or buildings will be located. Here is a bubble diagram of Audubon Park in New Orleans.

The locations of various types of areas are indicated by the “bubbles.” A bubble diagram is merely an approximation of a plan, concept, analysis, or idea. The boundaries of these bubbles do not represent strict borders, but are a sketch. At the beginning of the planning process, a bubble diagram is a way to start to locate specific activities or structures before getting more specific with the design.

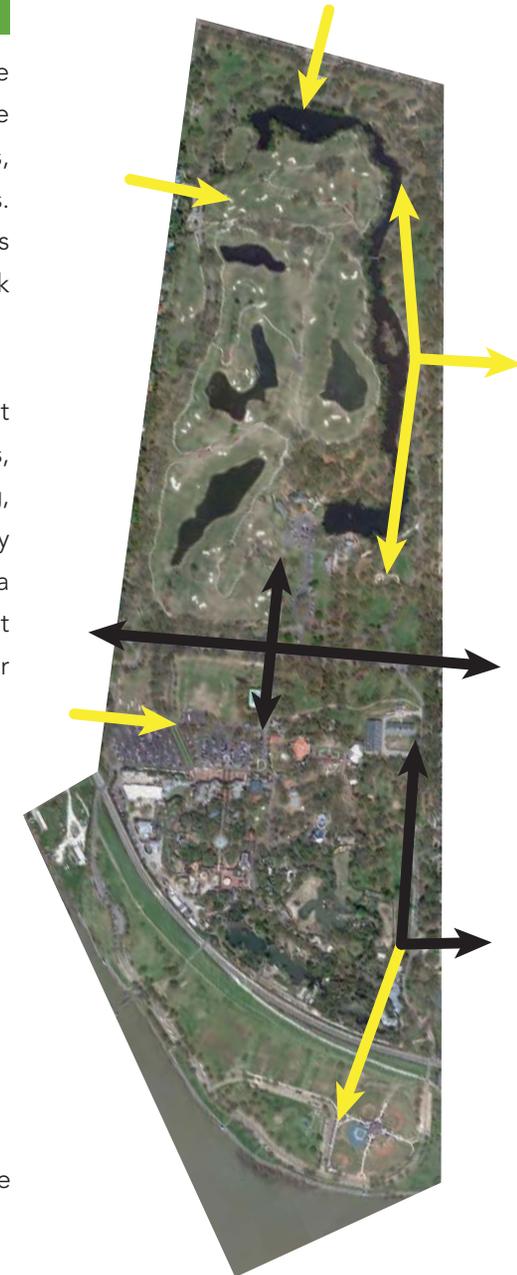


Movement Diagram

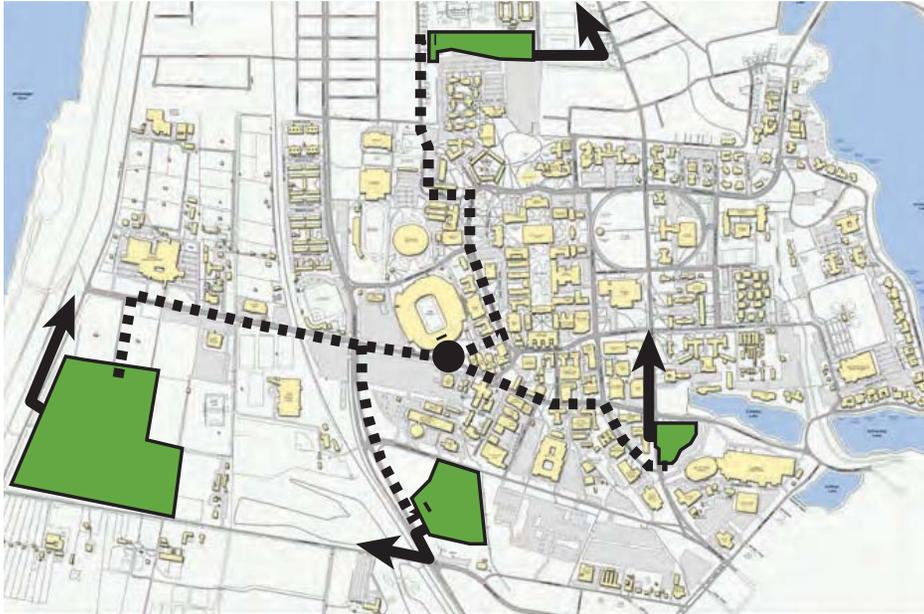
Many drawings will show how people move between spaces. These drawings may also show traffic flows, views, or other kinds of connections. Here is a drawing showing some ways people and cars enter Audubon Park in New Orleans.

A common type of movement diagram shows entrances and exits, whether into a building, neighborhood, or institution. By defining the entrances and exits, a movement diagram can make it easier to understand why buildings or activities are oriented a certain way.

▬ Pedestrian
▬ Automobile



Movement Diagram



Another kind of movement diagram shows the relationship between two areas and the pathways that connect them. In the example above, the dotted lines represent the paths people take between the black dot at the center (Tiger Stadium at LSU in Baton Rouge) and the green areas (free parking lots.) The black arrows show how automobiles exit the parking lots.

A movement diagram, like a bubble diagram, is a way to begin

- Stadium
- Parking Lot
- ⋯ Path
- Car Exit

designing by first locating the areas where people will travel. How people (and traffic) flow will affect the orientation of buildings, parking lots, paths, and parks.

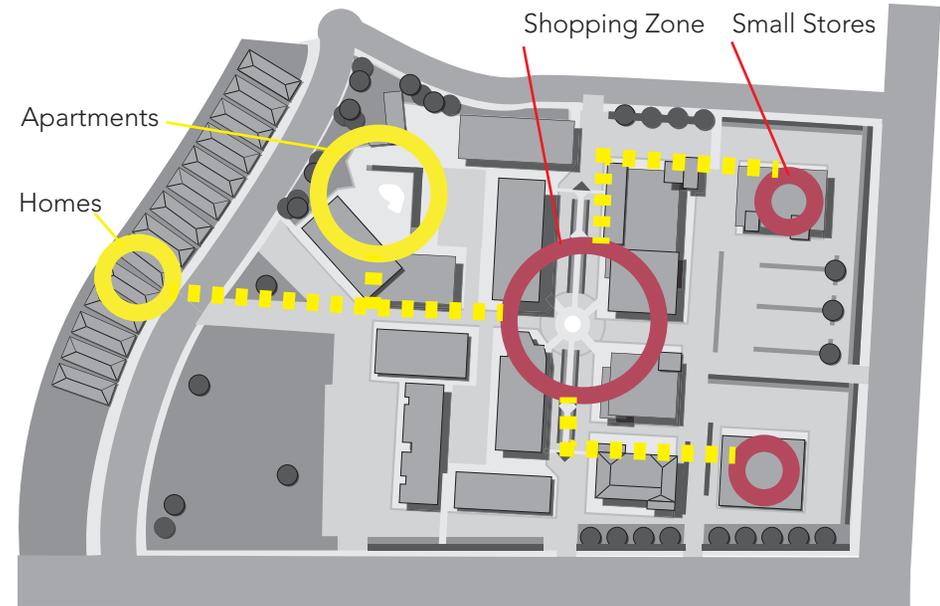
Layered Diagram

By combining different kinds of diagrams, a layered diagram can convey a lot of information about a place at once. In this example, a bubble diagram and a movement diagram have been combined to show how the different design elements work together.

The colored circles represent uses (commercial or residential) and the size of the circle implies the relative importance of each area. The dashed yellow lines are the pedestrian paths that link the various places together.

Even though this diagram only has a few circles and lines, we can learn about the location, type, and possible size of the buildings, as well as the connections between them. While concept diagrams are not designs, they can still tell you much about a place.

- Residential Buildings
- Commercial Buildings
- Pedestrian Connection



PRECEDENTS

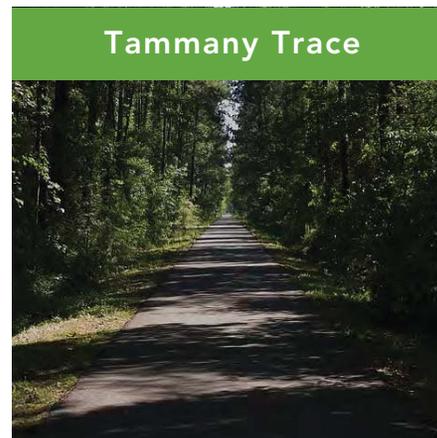
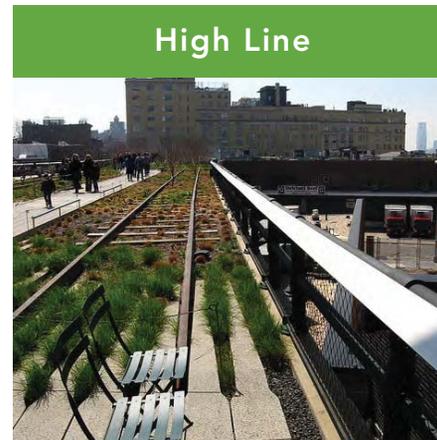
When developing a plan, designers will often seek to emulate previously-completed projects that have been successful; this is called 'using a precedent.' A precedent allows a designer to take the best ideas from other places and adapt them to fit a new location and project.

For example, the design of Lafitte Corridor Park in New Orleans, which changes an abandoned rail line into a bicycle and pedestrian corridor, has several precedents: the Dequindre Cut in Detroit, the High Line in Manhattan, and the Tammany Trace in St. Tammany Parish. All three projects reused an abandoned rail line, so all three precedents have ideas the designers of the Lafitte Corridor can use.

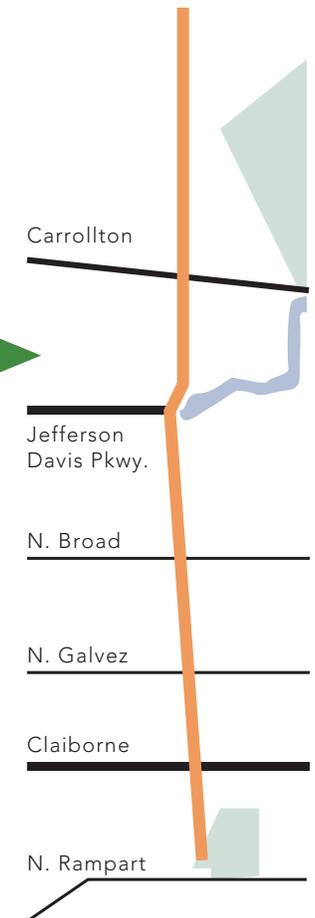
Precedents are sometimes a simple way for designers to show how a place could look or be used. A precedent does not mean that the design will be simply copied in your town, as the design needs to respond to local laws, conditions, and your community input. Of course, a design that works in one place may not work at all in another place. A precedent should be well aligned with your community and its needs and values.

At Your Meeting:

1. What is different about the surrounding context of the precedent and the surrounding context of the project in your city or town?
2. What is appropriate for your community from the precedent? What does not fit?
3. Does the precedent represent the type of project that you would like to see in your community? Why or why not?



Lafitte Corridor Park



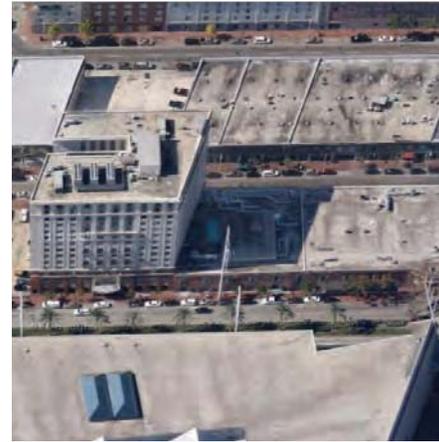
MASSING

Massing is one of the ways planners and architects describe the size of a building and is an important first step in design. The goal of massing and a massing diagram is to outline - in the broadest way possible - the general dimensions of a building: its height, length, width, number of floors, etc.

As these pictures show, massing is not architecture! A massing diagram is just a sketch - many more decisions will shape how a place actually looks. You will see a massing diagram in the early stages of the design process, especially on larger projects. This is the time to look carefully at the size and position of the buildings; by the time a more detailed drawing is done, it may be more difficult to change the fundamental massing of the design.

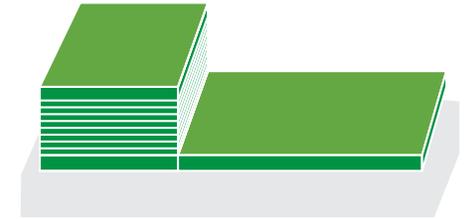
At Your Meeting:

1. What are the sizes of the buildings? How far apart are the buildings? How far are the buildings from the street and sidewalk?
2. Does the diagram show the area around the project? How does the size and positioning compare to nearby buildings?
3. What details will need to be filled in to make the building fit into a neighborhood?



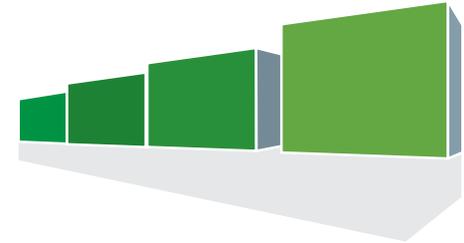
Number of Floors

Simple lines or boxes can show how many floors are in a building.



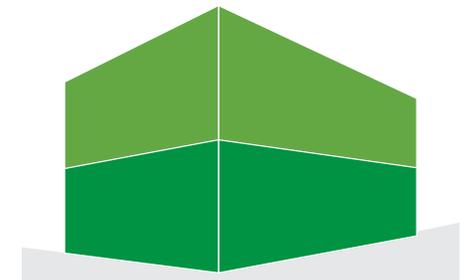
Not Architecture

Massing models can look very different from finished architecture.



Different Colors

Different colors may signify different uses for each floor.



PLANS

A plan is the most important drawing in urban design, where all the ideas come together to show how a place will be arranged and function when completed. A plan will show how buildings, streets, open space, transportation, and other elements of urban design are laid out in a project. The purpose of a plan is to accurately portray a design and to convey enough information that someone - a builder, a city official, a member of the public - can clearly understand the form, scale, and scope of a design.

A plan of a place - such as this mixed-use development - may be easy to read, but without other information it will be difficult to visualize what that place will actually be like. From building heights to architectural styles to lighting, there are many elements that may not be clear in a plan and are extremely important in creating the character of a space.

When looking at a plan, the first thing to do is orient yourself using the north arrow, labels, and scale bar. Next, go through each of the layers described below; think about how each works and how they will all work together.

At Your Meeting:

1. No plan can show everything. What elements are not shown, but are important to a successful design?
2. What is just outside the plan's boundaries? How does the design connect with adjacent property?
3. How does the plan show all the various layers that make a place? Where do you see conflicts or improvements?



- A** Key & Scale
- B** Streets
- C** Open Space
- D** Buildings
- E** Pedestrian System
- F** Entrances & Exits
- G** Parking



A		Building	Water	Parking
		Pedestrian Areas	Street	Landscaping

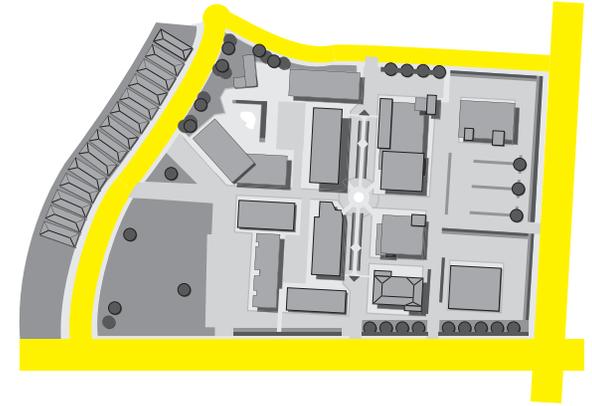
A plan can be made of many different layers. By reading each piece of the drawing, you can understand the type of place a plan is describing or its character.

A Key & Scale

Use the key and scale to orient yourself to the plan. The arrow points north, while the scale will give you an idea of how large any object is.

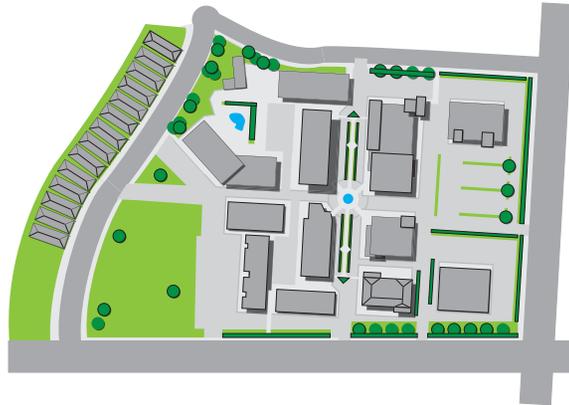
B Streets

Different widths of streets can handle different levels of traffic. Straight roads and curving roads will have varying kinds of characters.



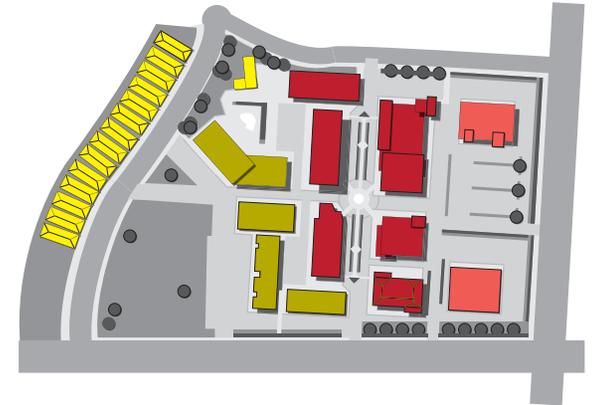
C Open Space

Parks, plantings, lawns and neutral grounds separate areas and may be a resources for recreation. Check to see if open space is placed in a location where it will be used.



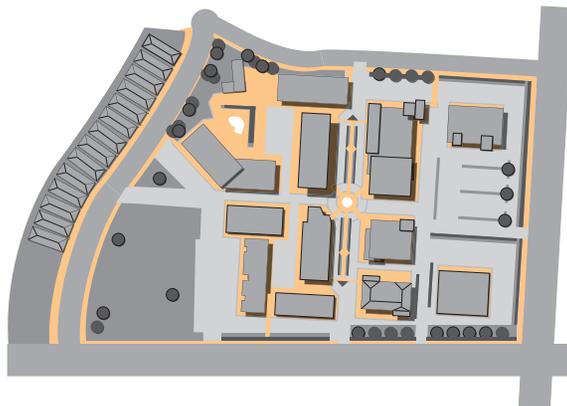
D Buildings

Plans will often use varying colors to show different uses or heights of buildings in a plan. They may also show existing and proposed buildings. Use a plan to see the positions of buildings.



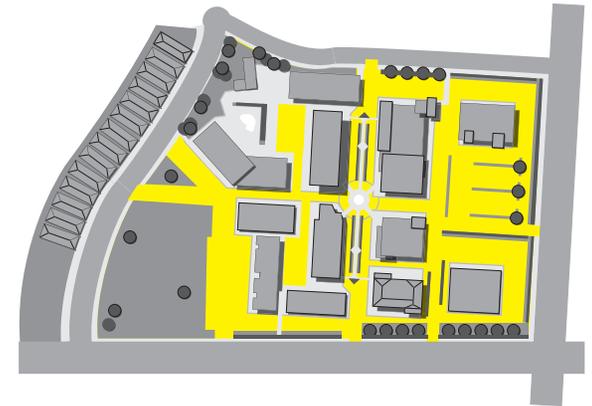
E Pedestrian System

Sidewalks, plazas, and paths help people circulate through the area depicted in a plan. See connections between buildings, parks, and parking.



G Parking

The position of parking is an important part of design. Compare the location of parking to buildings, sidewalks, and streets.



SECTIONS

A section shows how all the elements that create a street design come together. Architects and planners use street sections to show the relationships between buildings, sidewalks, and streets, as well as all the anticipated uses of each. Here is S. Carrollton, New Orleans as a series of photographs and as a section diagram.

Familiarize yourself with this type of drawing. (Later pages will go into details about these elements.) Depending on the type of project, the section may be more focused on the design of the street, as it is here, or it may be focused on a building's size and position relative to the sidewalk or travel lanes.



- A** Building Heights
- B** Set Back
- C** Parking
- D** Traffic Lanes
- E** Neutral Ground
- F** Transit
- G** Bike Lanes
- H** Sidewalks
- I** Plantings
- J** Pipes

At Your Meeting:

1. What is the size of the street? How far apart are the buildings? How far is the building from the street and sidewalk?
2. Does the diagram show the area around the project? Does the section accurately show the street?
3. Does the section show a street appropriate for the area?



RENDERING

Most large projects use a rendering - an artistic sketch or composite photograph - to show the final product as it might look in real life. A rendering can be more relatable than a plan or section, giving a 'you-are-there' view that makes it easy to see how a design would feel when it is built, how it relates to neighboring buildings, and how the new development would change its neighborhood.

At the same time, renderings can be misleading. Renderings are not guarantees that the spaces, buildings, and streets will be used in the manner, and to the degree, portrayed.

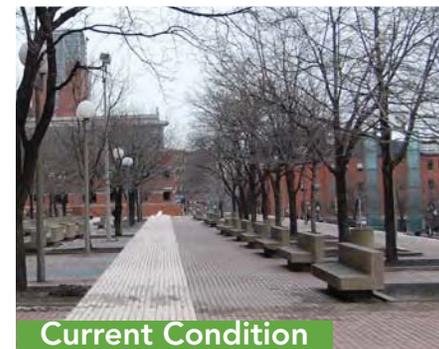
You will usually see renderings at the beginning (as a way to gain support) or at the end (as a way to give a final view before construction) of the design process.

At Your Meeting:

1. Will the site be used as it is depicted in the rendering? What activities are shown, and are other activities allowed?
2. How does the building look? Does it stand out from surrounding buildings, or blend in?
3. Will these designs be easy to maintain?
4. Consider the design in different seasons: will the space function well in local weather conditions throughout the year?
5. How does the design relate to its neighbors?



- A** Atmosphere
The season, time of day, and weather of a rendering.
- B** Massing
The size of a building and its position relative to the surrounding area.
- C** Public Spaces
Outdoor areas open to the public.
- D** Users
The people who will come to this building.
- E** Architecture
The design of the building.
- F** Context
The surrounding area, and the size, type, and use of nearby buildings.



Current Condition



Proposed Redesign

Section 2: ELEMENTS OF URBAN DESIGN

The cities and towns where we live, work, and play are made up of thousands of design elements, from the smallest window to the largest neighborhood. In this section, many of the most common terms and concepts in urban design will be introduced, with examples from across Louisiana.

By knowing these terms, you will be better able to understand architects' and planners' designs for your community, as well as better communicate your vision and desires for your community to designers.





2.0 BUILDINGS & OPEN SPACE

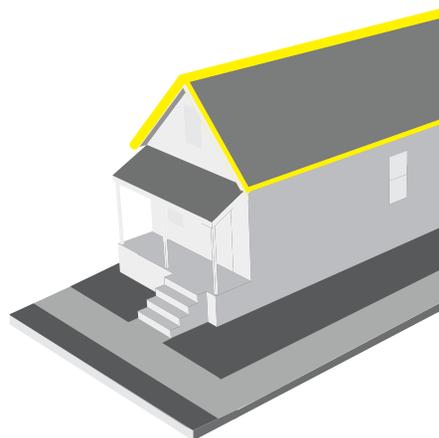
The most basic units of urban design are the arrangement of buildings and structures, the arrangement of open space and the character of buildings and surroundings. The architecture of a building, as well as how it is situated on a lot, helps determine the look and feel of a place.

This section will help you identify important elements of urban design in buildings and open space and learn terms that can be used to describe and critique them.

- Learn how to recognize common architectural features.
- See the relationship between set back, building height, and street width.
- Calculate common formulas.
- Learn about the architectural details unique to Louisiana.

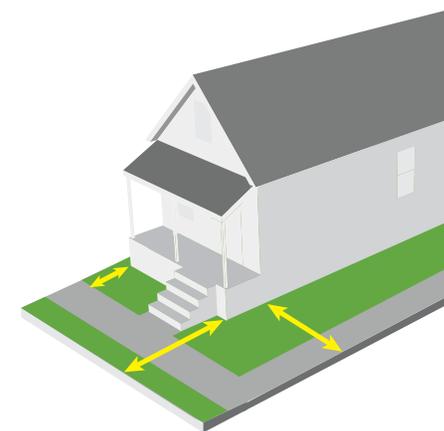
Architecture

The details and features that create the look of a building.



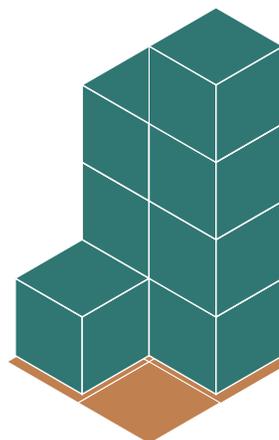
Set Back

The distance between the front of a house and the sidewalk or street.



Formulas

Various ways to calculate a building's size.



Vernacular

Features unique to Louisiana, its history and location.



ARCHITECTURE

The practice of architecture is dedicated to the design and construction of physical structures, particularly buildings. A building's design is made up of many details, and the total effect of all these details is to help create the look and functionality of a place.

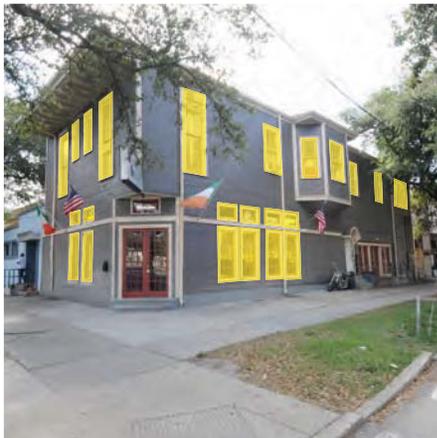
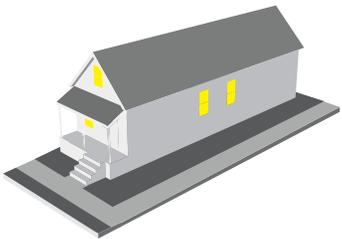
Architects, like many professionals, have their own technical terms that may be unfamiliar to you to describe specific details. Here are some of the common terms; there are many more. Knowing these terms will help you point to specific details to change or keep the same.

At Your Meeting:

1. Which details will make a building look more like the buildings around it? Should a building stand out or blend in?
2. What elements are in your neighborhood? Is there a common architecture or are many buildings different?

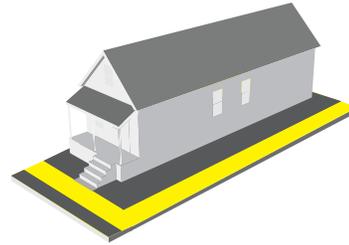
Fenestration

The pattern of windows on a side of a building.



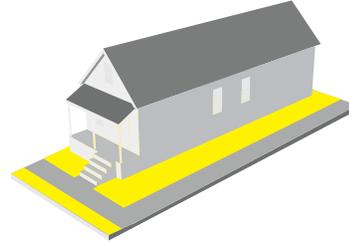
Hardscape

Paved outdoor areas, such as roads, sidewalks, or plazas. Water flows off hardscapes.



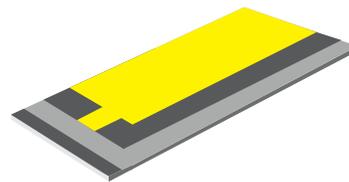
Softscape

Unpaved outdoor areas, such as lawns and planting strips. Water drains down into softscapes.



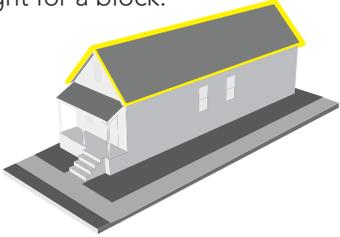
Footprint

The shape of the building on the ground and the amount of ground an object occupies.



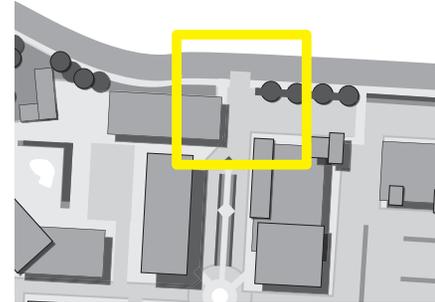
Roof Line

The shape of a building's roof - its height and prominence. Can be used as a way to create a standard height for a block.



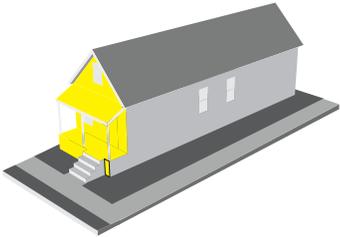
Transition

The area where two uses or scales meet.



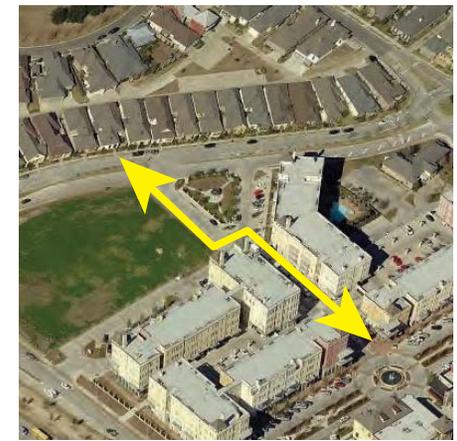
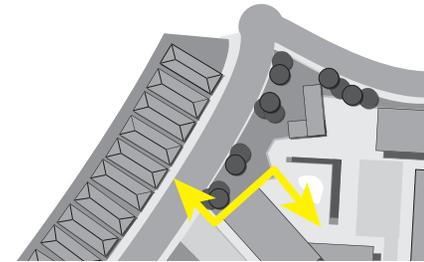
Facade

The front part of the building, the face that usually looks out on the street.



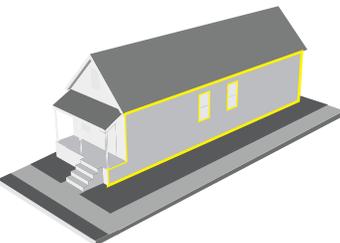
Connectivity

The ability to link a variety of areas or uses together.



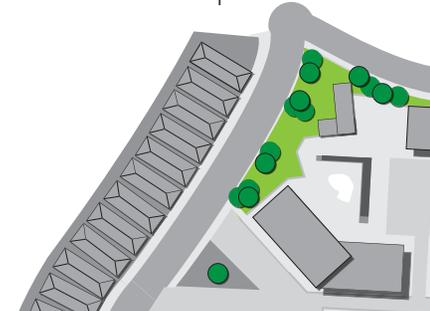
Elevation

Technically a type of drawing; the look of the individual sides of a building, including the facade.



Buffer

An architectural or landscape feature that screens or separates two areas.



SET BACK

A set back is a measurement of the distance from a building to the street or sidewalk. The size of a site's set back determines how far from the street a building must be either according to a design or, in some cities, as part of the zoning code.

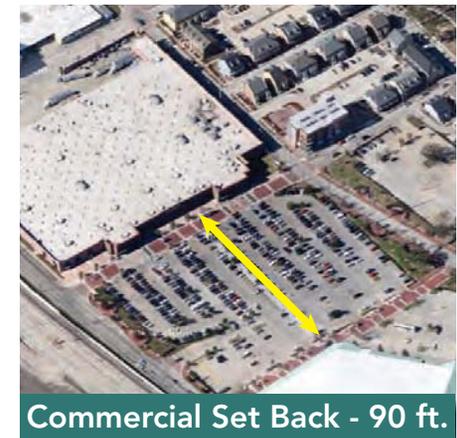
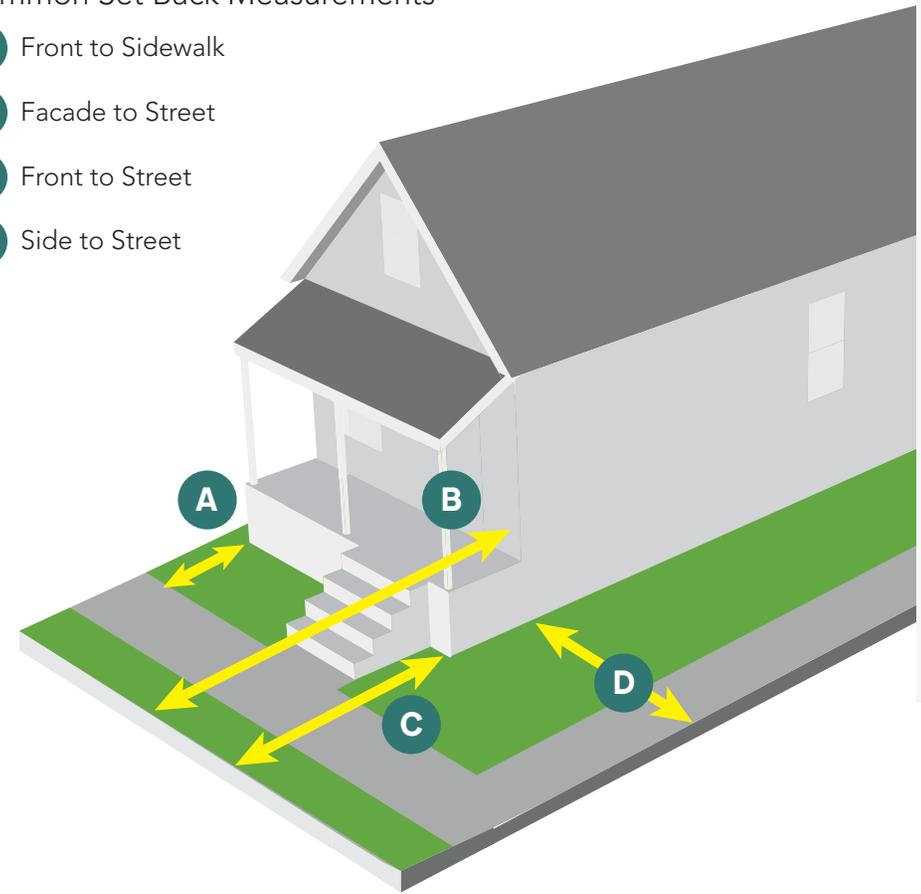
Different set backs will change how a street feels. Small set backs bring a building closer to pedestrians and the sidewalk. Larger set backs have a more open view down the street. Most businesses want to have a small set back so they can be more visible from the street and near pedestrians, though very large stores will often use a deep set back for parking.

Having the same set back for all buildings on a block can make the street seem more unified. On the other hand, a variety of set backs may allow more freedom to choose house designs of various sizes. A set back can also be applied to the sides and rear of a building.

There is no ideal set back; the right set back will depend on the width of the sidewalk and street, the massing of buildings, and the type of neighborhood.

Common Set Back Measurements

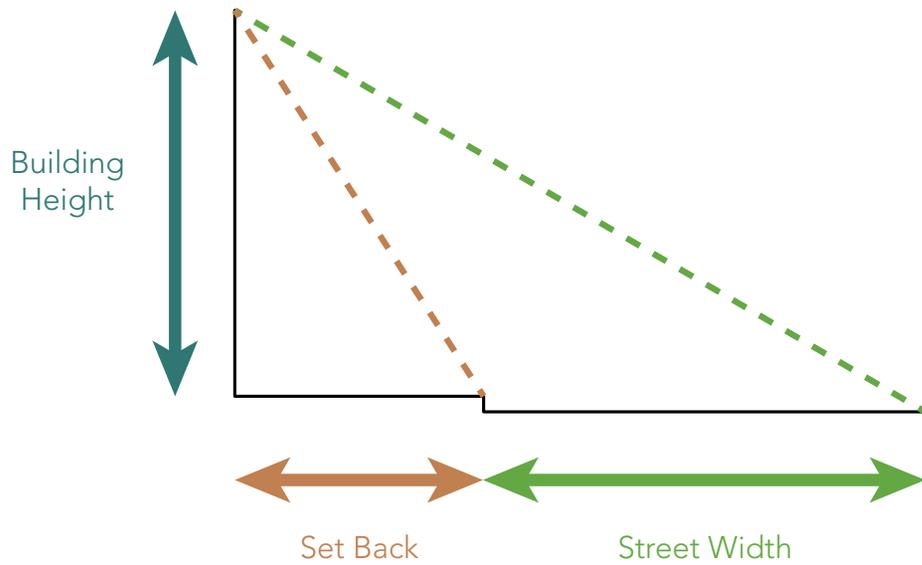
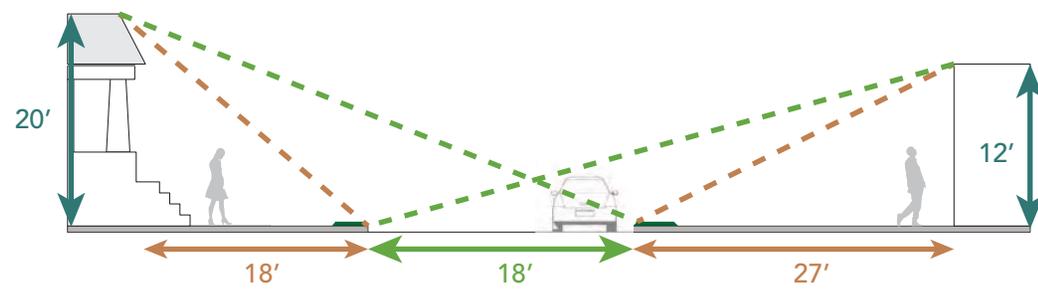
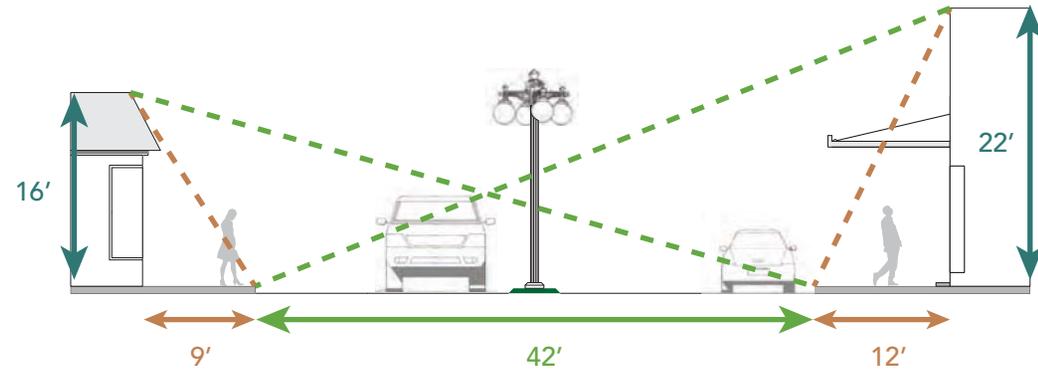
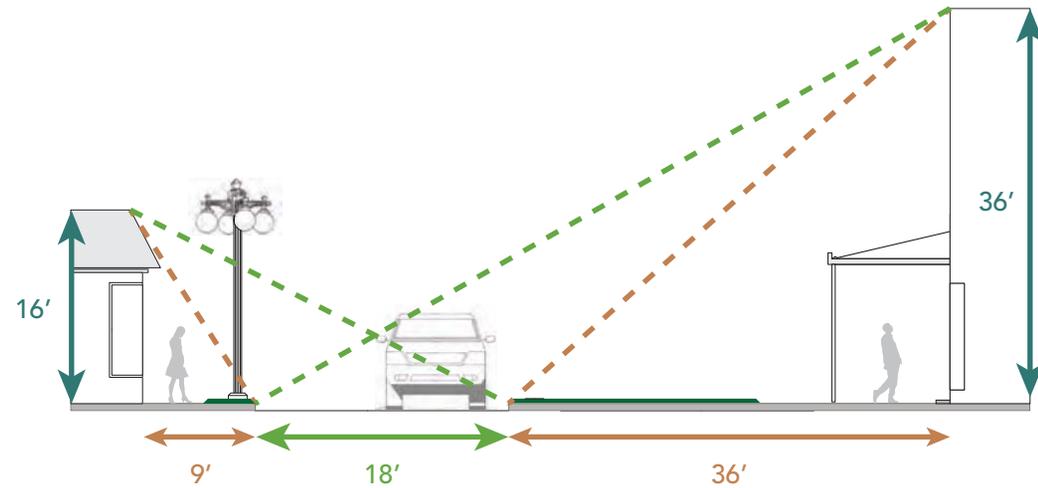
- A** Front to Sidewalk
- B** Facade to Street
- C** Front to Street
- D** Side to Street



Ratios

An easy way to think about the look of an area is by comparing building height, set back, and street width. Ratios of these three simple measurements contribute to the particular feel of a place: building height vs. set back, building height vs. street width, and set back vs. street width.

By changing one, or all of these ratios, you can imagine how the look of a street would be affected. The three sections on the right are of equal width: notice how the different ratios change the way the street feels.



$\frac{\text{Building Height}}{\text{Set Back}}$	$\frac{\text{Building Height}}{\text{Street Width}}$	$\frac{\text{Set Back}}{\text{Street Width}}$	$\frac{\text{Building Height}}{\text{Building Height}}$
--	--	---	---

FORMULAS

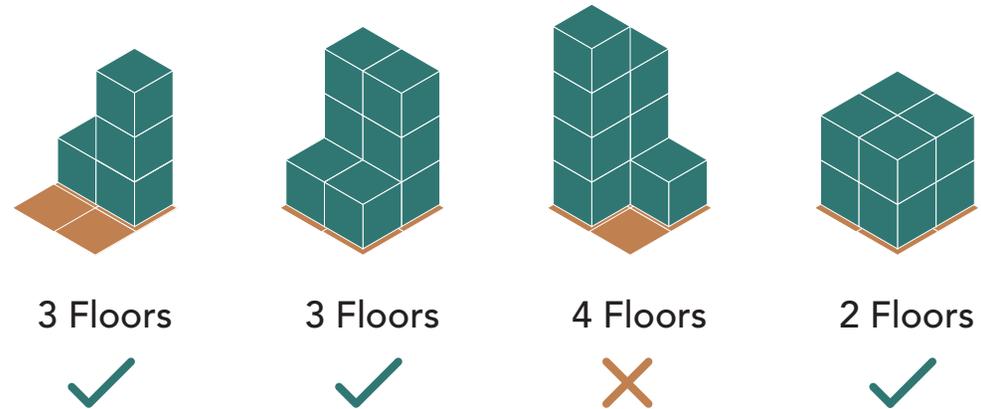
In order to describe the size and position of buildings, planners and designers use a variety of measurements. Because these formulas are often part of zoning, measurements like set back, lot coverage, floor-area ratio, and building height can have tremendous effects on the size, location, and type of building that will be produced. The combination of all these measurement is called the building envelope.

When creating a building, an architect or planner must fit their design within the zoning and thus within certain measurements. Depending on these measurements, some uses may be difficult to develop because the size and shape of a building needed is not allowed.

BUILDING HEIGHT = Roof to Ground or Number of Stories

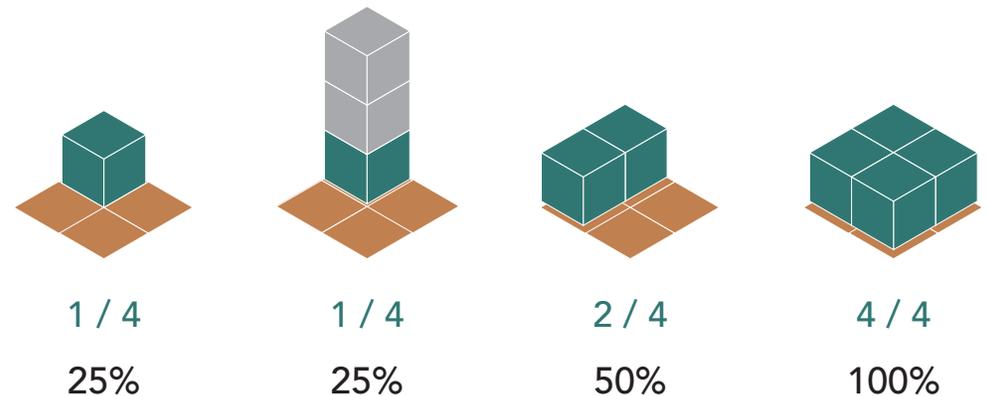
Building height is probably the simplest guideline; some number of floors, or distance from the ground to the roof is set as a maximum, for example a maximum height of 40 feet or 3 stories. This is especially common in historic districts or in areas with scenic views.

If maximum building height is 3 floors, then:



LOT COVERAGE = Ground Story Area / Lot Area

Lot coverage is the amount of the property a building's footprint takes up, usually given as a percentage. The height of the building is irrelevant in calculating lot coverage. In zoning, there may be a relationship between building heights and lot coverage (and set backs); taller buildings often are zoned to sit back farther from the street or cannot cover as much of their lots as shorter buildings can.



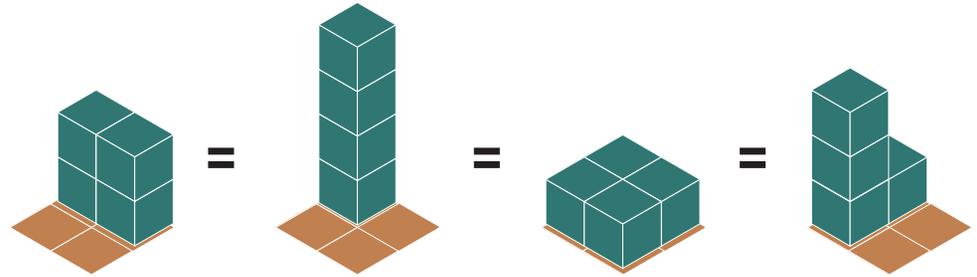
FLOOR-AREA RATIO = Total Building Area / Lot Area

Floor-Area Ratio, or FAR, can be calculated by dividing the total square footage of the building by the area of the building's lot.

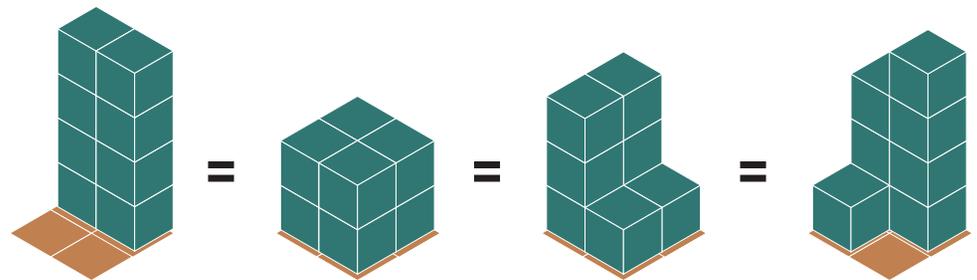
Planners use FAR as a way to measure the size and scale of a building, but because FAR does not consider heights or lot coverage, many different types of buildings can have the same FAR. By combining FAR with lot coverage, set back, and building heights, zoning guidelines can mandate a specific shape, size, and location for a building.

For example, look at the buildings to the right with a FAR of 1. If that is the only guideline, any of these could be allowed. If we set a height limit of two, then only the first and third buildings could be built. If we add a maximum of 50% lot coverage, only the first building works. With just these simple measurements, you can narrow the look of a building by altering the envelope.

FAR 1 = 4 units / 4 units



FAR 2 = 8 units / 4 units



Different sizes, similar FAR

Note the buildings above. A floor-area ratio can be misleading; an FAR by itself does not tell you much about the physical size of a building.



Same lot, different FAR

Note the block below. From the street, these buildings look identical because their heights and set backs are the same, but because of different lot coverages, these buildings have very different FARs.

VERNACULAR

Vernacular design reflects the history, natural geography, and culture of a specific place. In Louisiana, we have strong vernacular design that comes from historic Acadian and Creole styles developed by early settlers. These styles blended North American, European and West Indies influences into architecture uniquely adapted to Louisiana's subtropical climate and geography.

Modern buildings frequently use vernacular style while accommodating different needs, like parking for cars and new building materials. Vernacular design does not have to be complicated; it can just "fit in" with your neighborhood or "look right." These are examples of vernacular elements and design you might see in your community in Louisiana and some of their functional benefits.

At Your Meeting:

1. Does the proposed design fit in with the rest of the existing community vernacular? If not, is there a specific reason why?
2. Are there vernacular elements you would like to see added to the project? What are they?



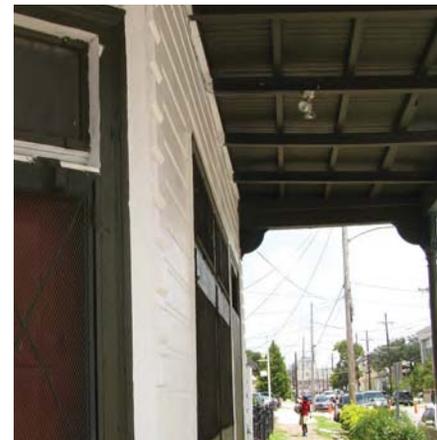
Building Elevation

Buildings are elevated, particularly in coastal parishes, to accommodate high water tables and mitigate flooding risks.



Porches & Stoops

Porches and stoops have an important social function as a place to interact with people on the street. They also provide relief from the heat and protection from rain.



Arcades & Galleries

Arcades and galleries provide shade from the hot Louisiana sun and also provide shelter during rainstorms.



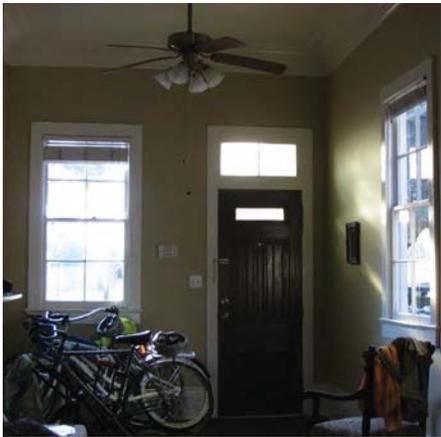
Neutral Grounds

Neutral grounds, a vernacular form of landscaping, provide a place for recreation, help absorb stormwater, and also promote a beautiful street.



Ornamentation

Vernacular ornamentation is closely tied to the era of development, materials, and the type of building.



High Ceilings

High ceilings help keep the interior of buildings cool by providing space for hot air to rise and cool air to circulate.



Windows & Shutters

Tall windows and shutters helped admit light and breezes before air conditioning was invented.



Pitched Roofs

Pitched roofs with overhangs help shade houses and disperse rainwater so it does not undermine the house foundation.



Materials & Colors

Certain materials, like wood or brick, come from resources that were historically available.



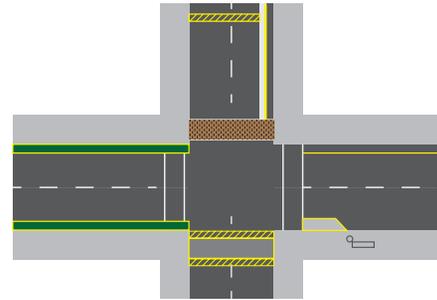
2.5 STREETS & PARKING

Streets connect all the parts of the city together and are used in a number of different ways. They are more than just concrete or asphalt; they are integral to how we live. As a place, a street can be improved through a variety of elements, from better crosswalks to bicycle lanes, many of which will make a street safer and more inviting. Other changes can create or improve opportunities for mass transit, walking, and cycling.

- See streets as a collection of design elements.
- Put safety as a priority in making design decisions.
- Think about the design consequences of forms of transportation.

Safety

Ways to improve safety for people on the street.



Streetscape

Some of the elements that make up a street.



Transportation

Designing to accommodate different ways of getting around town.



SAFETY

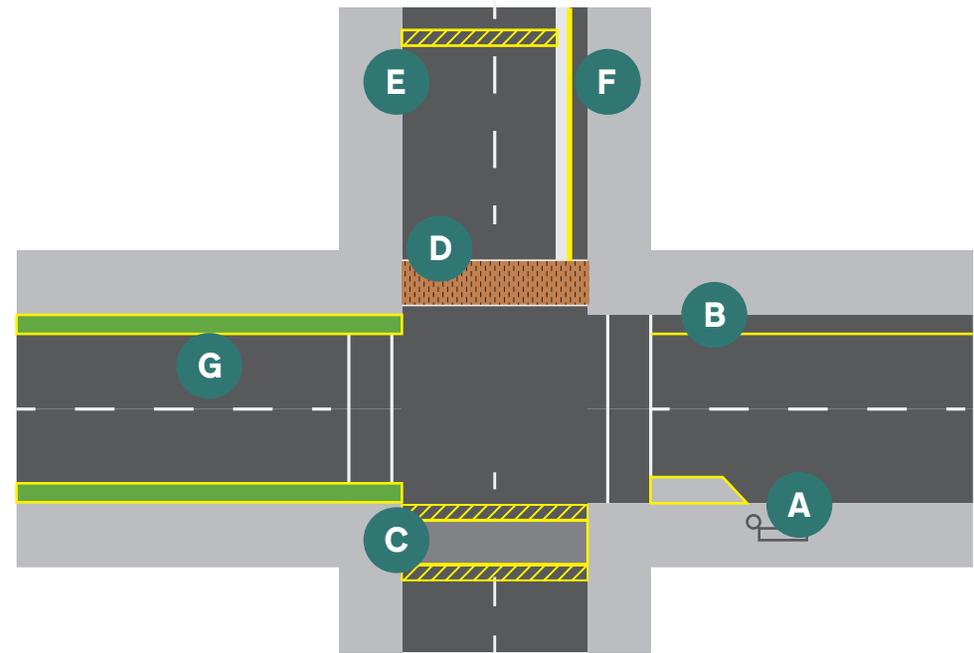
One of the most important goals in any design is to increase the level of safety in a development, neighborhood, or city. While it is impossible to prevent all crime or accidents, there are many design elements that can make an area safer, such as better lighting, building placement that facilitates neighborhood watches, and intersections that slow traffic.

At right are a number of elements that can enhance the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists. Not every street will need these features, but deployed in the right location, they can help improve the experience of walking or riding.

It is important to consider any plan from the perspective of neighborhood safety. Certain arrangements of buildings or uses can lead to an unsafe feeling, such as narrow alleys, poorly-lit parking lots, empty streets, and others. When looking at a plan or design, think about whether an area might feel unsafe and what changes could improve the usability and safety of a design.

At Your Meeting:

1. What types of safety need to be addressed on your street? Which elements are appropriate?
2. How will improved safety measures for pedestrians and bicyclists affect other vehicles?



Traffic Calming

Different features can make streets safer for pedestrians.

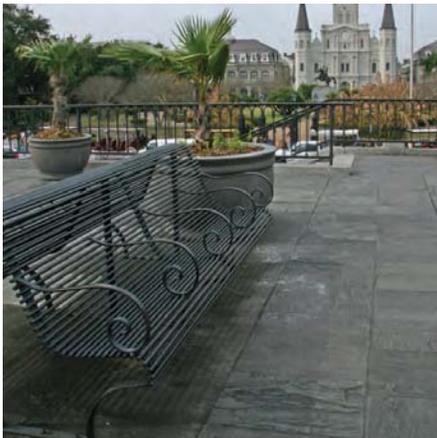
- A** Bus Bulb - An extension of the sidewalk that allows a bus to stay in the travel lane.
- B** Bicycle Lane - A designated area for bicycles; cars may enter lane for turns.
- C** Raised Crosswalk - A 'speed table' forces cars to slow for pedestrians.
- D** Different Crosswalk Material - Changes in paving type signals drivers to slow down. Can be decorative as well.
- E** Speed Hump - A bump that stretches across the roadway.
- F** Separate Cycle Track - A dedicated bicycle lane physically separated from car lanes. Cars may not enter lane.
- G** Street Narrowing - Reducing the width of the street causes cars to slow.

STREETSCAPE

A street is more than just a strip of asphalt; it is the place that connects us with everything else in the city. By changing the elements that make up your street, you can make the street work better, be safer and operate more efficiently. 'Streetscape' is a term architects use to describe all the pieces that come together to form a street, from the gutters to the lampposts. Not every street needs all elements listed: choose the elements that work best for the size and location of your street.

At Your Meeting:

1. Does your street function for a variety of people in cars, on foot, or on bicycles? What would help everyone share the street?
2. What elements are appropriate for your community? Which cannot be put in place?
3. How can related elements (like bicycle lanes and bicycle racks) be linked together to form stronger connections?



Street Furniture

Benches provide places for people to relax, admire views, or utilize parks and paths. Whether they are historic-looking or modern, the design of these items can define the character of a place. Place street furniture to activate open spaces.



Bicycle Racks

Just as automobiles need parking areas, so do bicycles. Racks placed near commercial areas, schools, and parks allow bicyclists to lock their bikes safely, as opposed to locking on fences or posts.



Sidewalks & Curbs

The width and material of the sidewalks can improve the pedestrian experience. Wider sidewalks are appropriate in higher traffic areas, such as commercial streets and near taller buildings.

Smaller curbs, as well as ramps at corners, can make sidewalks easier to navigate for those in wheelchairs and people with strollers.



Lighting

Well-placed lights can make an area safer and more visually appealing. The height of lampposts will depend on the width of the street and the level of use. Decorative lamps can add a historic character to a place.



Signage

The font, color, and placement of signs make navigation and orientation easier. Special designs can identify areas with specific characters, whether it's a historic neighborhood, a main street, or a new development.



Transit Stops

A well-designed bus stop can make using public transit easier and more convenient. Placing a stop next to popular attractions and services creates a hub of activity along a thoroughfare and helps people without cars access the things they need.



Public Art

Public art is a way to show off the values of a neighborhood. Consider using blank wall space for murals and public areas for sculptures or placement of historic markers. Art can be an important element that showcases the unique history and culture of a neighborhood.



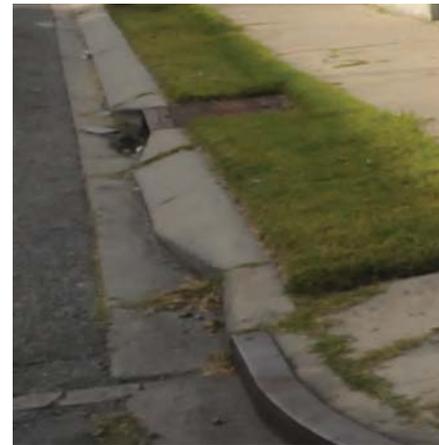
Crosswalks

The texture and design of crosswalks help pedestrians safely and easily cross streets. Textured bumps can indicate crossings while different types of materials can help slow traffic and make a safer street.



Bicycle Lanes

Depending on the width of the street, the volume of traffic, and the street's location, bicycle lanes can help make movement safer and easier for bicyclists. Bike lanes, like roads, should form a network that connects homes, jobs, shops, and schools.



Curbs & Drains

Curbs provide physical separation between the sidewalk and the street, providing a safe space apart from traffic for pedestrians and other sidewalk users. Curbs also help direct stormwater to drains in the street. Curb cuts, or areas with no curb, allow for wheelchair and stroller accessibility at intersections. Larger curb cuts allow for driveways and access to off-street parking for traffic.

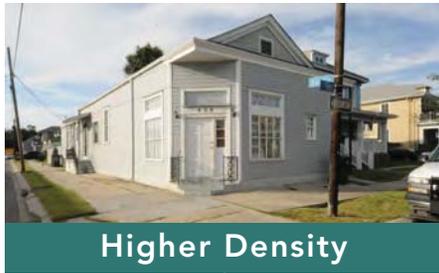
TRANSPORTATION

There are many ways to get around the city - by foot, bicycle, automobile, and mass transit. Each mode of transit has consequences for the designer to consider when making a plan.

In recent years, many cities have tried to encourage development around public transit stops to take advantage of the benefits that come with connections to transportation. Because many more people will take a bus or streetcar, the amount of land needed for automobiles in parking lots and travel lanes can be reduced, leaving more room for new buildings and parks. Public transit encourages people to get out of their cars, allowing for pedestrian-based commercial streets. Also, transit serves many groups that cannot get around by car: students, the elderly, and the handicapped. In general, TOD (transit-oriented development) means higher density and a more urban feel.

Many places, even in large cities, are still designed around the automobile. Because automobiles require spaces of their own - parking lots, driveways, and others - car-based places have a different character. The arrangement of buildings and neighborhoods can be more spread out, which can accommodate larger commercial developments, such as big-box stores, and create a more suburban feel. Because of the lower densities, automobile-oriented destinations may not have enough people around to support a mass transit system or destinations may be too far apart for transit to operate efficiently.

For most cities, there will be some mix of areas that are more transit-oriented and others that are more automobile-oriented. One is not necessarily better than the other, so find the right balance for your community.





2.9 WORKING AT DIFFERENT SCALES

Urban design is more than just benches and bike lanes. Buildings and streets come together to form neighborhoods, cities, even whole regions, and urban design is able to shape these larger scales through the application of density, land use, and connectivity. Infrastructure delivers the services we need to live efficiently. When you participate in the planning process, these are essential elements to consider so that each project works independently and as part of the larger community.

- Learn how to think about density, and compare your project to densities in Louisiana.
- Recognize common land use colors and their meanings.
- Understand how various networks come together to form cities.

Density

A measurement of how much of something is in a given area.



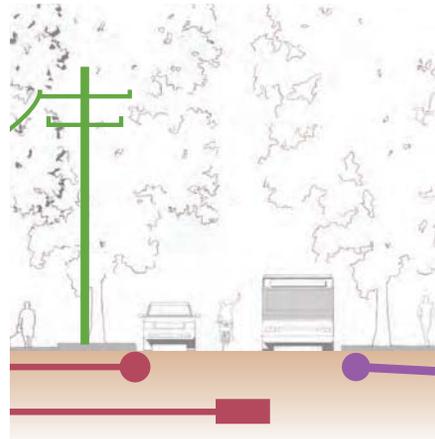
Land Use

The meaning of the colors used to represent land use.



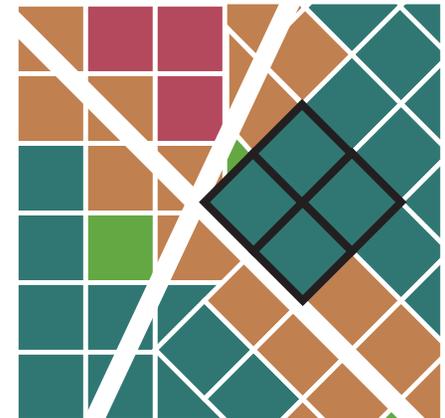
Infrastructure

All the city's systems are plugged into water, air, power, sewers, and the natural environment.



Connectivity

How urban design elements come together to form neighborhoods, cities, and regions.



DENSITY

Density is a measurement of the number of people or dwelling units (houses and apartments) in a given area. Common measurements are people/square mile and dwelling units/acre. (An acre is about the size of a football field.) Though planners and architects often talk of density as a goal, there is no right or wrong density. Instead of focusing on a single number, weigh the benefits and drawbacks of various densities.

In general, higher densities of people will be better able to support local services and businesses, such as mass transit or small retail. Because of this, higher density areas tend to be more walkable. Low density areas offer more spacious views, larger lots, and a more suburban feel, but may be more dependent on cars to get to shops and services. The Citizen's Guide to Land Use discusses the relationship of physical density and use intensity in more detail.

Increasing density does not have to radically change the character of a place. There are many techniques designers can use to blend new projects: buildings can be screened by buffers, set back farther, become multi-use, adopt ingenious forms, or any number of other solutions. From a developer's point of view, there are many reasons to make a project more dense, such as making a project profitable or qualifying for tax credits that help with affordability.

Remember: density is just a measurement. It's more important to find the best design, not just the best density.

At Your Meeting:

1. What is the density of your area? What are the trade-offs of going to a higher or lower density?
2. Higher density does not necessarily mean bigger buildings. What other design elements could help a neighborhood feel lower in density?



Adaptation

Existing building types can be designed to be more dense without seeming larger. An example is the camelback, a shotgun house with a set back second floor. Large single-family homes can also be divided into duplexes.

Reuse

Taking outmoded buildings and reusing them in new ways can change the feel of a place. Here, a former factory in New Orleans has been redeveloped into apartments.

Mixed Use

Changing the zoning of an area to allow for mixed uses can foster a denser, more walkable area. This restaurant has a series of apartments on the second floor.

New Orleans - 2 DU/A



Lacombe - 5 DU/A



Kenner - 10 DU/A



Baton Rouge - 35 DU/A



Lafourche - < 1 DU/A



Baton Rouge - 8 DU/A



New Orleans - 12 DU/A



New Orleans - 50 DU/A



10 du/a

20 du/a

30 du/a

There are as many densities in Louisiana as there are places. Notice how density is just one part of how a place feels: Mid-City Baton Rouge, Kenner, and Bayou St. John in New Orleans are very different places, yet with only a slight difference in density, from 8 to 12 dwelling units per acre (DU/A). Nearly the entire state is under 10 DU/A.

LAND USE

When planners talk about land use, they are trying to describe the expected category of activity that will occur at a given site. Zoning is the way cities regulate land use, by allowing certain activities only in certain areas and by trying to keep incompatible land uses - say, a factory and a school - separate. A land use map tells you what is, or could be built, but only in a general sense. A 'residential' area could look and feel any number of ways; it is up to designers and the community to determine the specifics.

Zoning, which determines which land uses can go where, provides basic constraints on the types of projects that can be built. Separate from the comment process that happens with specific projects, there are larger discussions about the pattern of land use - the master plan and zoning - in your town. Changing zoning at the city level is one way of creating different future arrangements of uses.

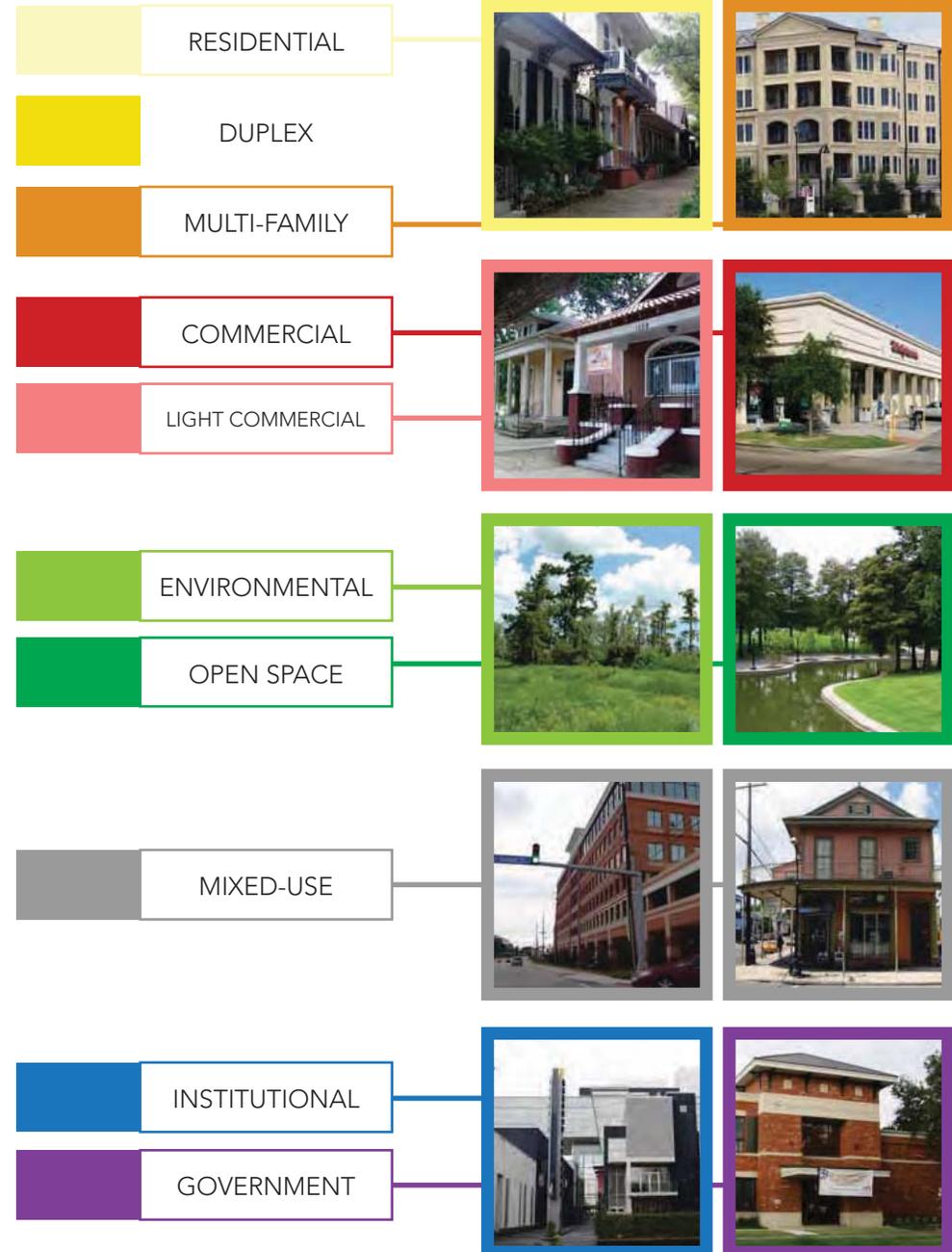
Zoning is also the way a building's envelope is defined, from maximum building heights, lot coverage, and set backs.

Knowing how to read a land use map is key to understanding ways in which local laws and conditions impact community character and development. The colors at right are common to most cities, but not all. Check the map key first for colors and also any patterns - these may signify special districts or designations.

The companion Citizen's Guide to Land Use explains land use in greater detail.

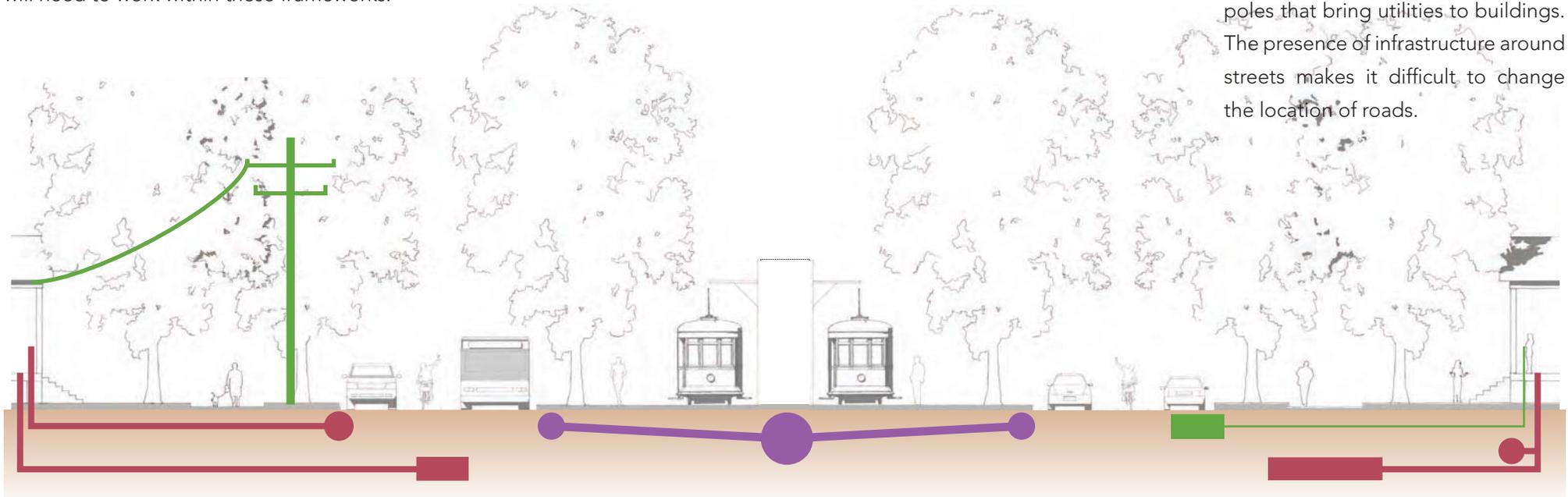
At Your Meeting:

1. How will the proposed land use affect other design elements?
2. How will the proposed land use affect transportation and traffic?



INFRASTRUCTURE

When designers talk about infrastructure, they are referring to the large physical systems that make a city function. There are many kinds: streets, highways, railways, ports, and bridges form a transportation infrastructure; wires, pumps, cables, and pipes connect utilities to our buildings and take away our waste and stormwater; and all of Louisiana is part of large system of soil, air, and water systems. All of these systems are layered across the city and state, so any project will need to work within these frameworks.



Streets

Most elements of infrastructure will be found in, on, or above the streets. When designing a street, planners and architects will have to accommodate the pipes, wires, and poles that bring utilities to buildings. The presence of infrastructure around streets makes it difficult to change the location of roads.

Water / Sewers

Different parts of Louisiana have a variety of water and sewer systems, from wells and septic tanks to reservoirs and sewer systems. Above a certain size, projects must be connected to a sewer system.

Power

Electrical power is distributed through a network of wires, towers, and substations, all of which are difficult to move once built.

Stormwater

How stormwater drains from an area depends on a number of factors: the amount of softscape, the size of gutters and ditches, slope, etc. In some cities, sewage and stormwater go into the same system.

Soil

Knowing the soil helps plan for preventing erosion and subsidence. Also, the type and quality of soil could determine the size of building the land can support.

CONNECTIVITY

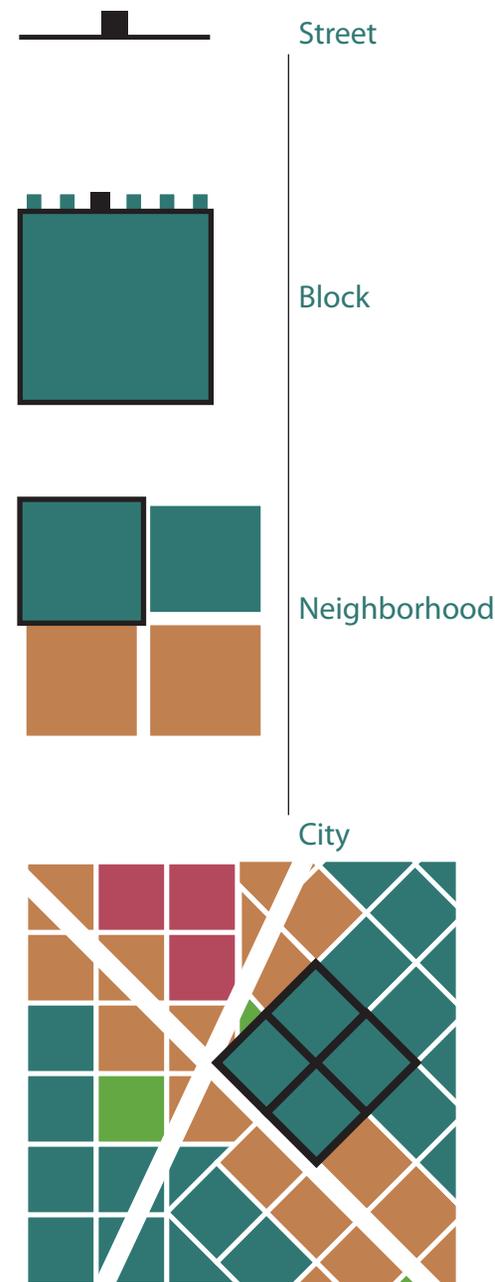
Urban design is not just the look of an individual building, block, or street; part of designing cities and towns is thinking about how small and singular elements come together to form neighborhoods, cities, and even whole regions. When looking at a design for a project, do not just think about the project within its immediate area, but also how it fits into larger networks in your city or region.

For example, redeveloping a waterfront would change the area along the river, but could also affect trucking routes through the city, the placement of terminals, water quality downstream, and so forth. Because developments have the potential to impact so many systems, you may encounter a variety of impact reports that attempt to predict changes and suggest accommodations.

Designers also use connectivity to describe the ways in which all the spaces people live, work, shop, study, pray, and play can fit together on streets that are safe, efficient, and inviting. Designers frequently try to explain connectivity through the movement diagrams introduced in the beginning of this guide, showing how areas link together or are related. In the section on architecture terms, you read about how neighboring properties might promote clear connectivity or buffer their neighbors.

At Your Meeting:

1. How does this project connect to its surroundings? How does it fit into larger networks in your neighborhood, city, or region?
2. What systems should be considered as part of this development? Can it plug into other networks to promote connectivity?
3. What are the obstacles to greater connectivity?



Streets & Block Patterns

Together, all the streets of your town form a network. Within this network, streets are arranged and designed according to a number of factors, including their size, their role, and the importance of their connections. Planners and architects often talk about a street hierarchy - this means that there is a clear difference between major and minor streets. A major street could be wider, or simply have a different use or speed of traffic. A minor street is usually narrower and residential.

The cumulative effect of all the design decisions made regarding buildings - size, set back, massing, streetscape, etc. - is to form the way blocks and neighborhoods look and feel.



Section 3: INTERACTING WITH DESIGNERS

Simply knowing the terms and drawings that designers use is only the beginning in improving the urban design of your community. At some point, you'll need to interact with a designer, developer, or city planner in order to advocate for the changes you want to see.

While the developers, designers, city officials, or planners bring their own expertise to the table, you have your own unique knowledge about the history, character, and feel of a place and - perhaps most importantly - you will be living next to, near, or in the project being considered. Urban design will affect you, so it is important to involve yourself in the decisions being made in your community.

Cities, communities and neighborhoods do not change overnight. Often it takes a series of small changes over an extended period of time to create a noticeable difference. Imagine the place you live twenty years from now. How might it be different? How might it be the same? No matter how it looks, a number of decisions will have to be made for that vision to become a reality. If you don't help make those decisions, who will?

The urban design process is often long and difficult, requiring any design to balance a range of factors, from the quality of the site to the current economy, in order to proceed to completion. But, by using the terms found in this guide, you can help make the designs that best balance everyone's goals; that is, you can transform your community for the better.

THE PEOPLE

No project is the work of a single person; depending on the project and the stage of a design, a number of different people will provide their expertise and knowledge in transforming a development. Every person has a role to play and will come to a project with their own goals, biases, and connections to a place that may augment, conflict with, or enrich a design. Understanding how all the roles - including yours - work together is key to getting your idea heard by the right person at the right time.

Design Team

Architects, urban designers, and landscape architects are in charge of laying out the various elements of a project, producing construction documents, and the actual look of a place. Their work is based on the needs of the developer (their boss) and the input from the community.

Developers

For private projects, and even some public institutions, a developer manages the project, works to finance the deals, and oversees design, the review process, and construction. Their goal is usually, but not always, to make a profit by providing new places.

Development Team

Planners

Urban planners can work for the city or for private firms and perform different roles: research on potential impacts, coordinating the various groups, working with regulatory agencies, meeting with community members, and many more.

Community Groups

Local groups, from PTAs to business associations, can advocate for new elements in designs that help achieve community goals. These organizations can also help gather public opinion and make sure people attend important meetings.

Residents & Neighborhood Associations

Any changes brought by urban design are going to be experienced most immediately by the current residents of the areas in or around a project. It is important that their concerns be articulated to the other people in the design process. Similarly, developers and designers must articulate their vision clearly, to avoid confusion.

Local Community

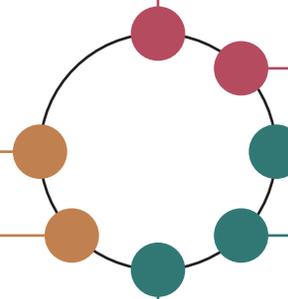
Public Sector

Utility Representative

For some projects, a person with knowledge of a specific infrastructure - power, water, flood control, etc. - will ensure a design operates within these systems efficiently.

Government Officials

Representatives from the city, parish, or state may be involved with a project to make sure the design meets various criteria, from environmental protection to special financing, or fits local zoning.



THE PROCESS

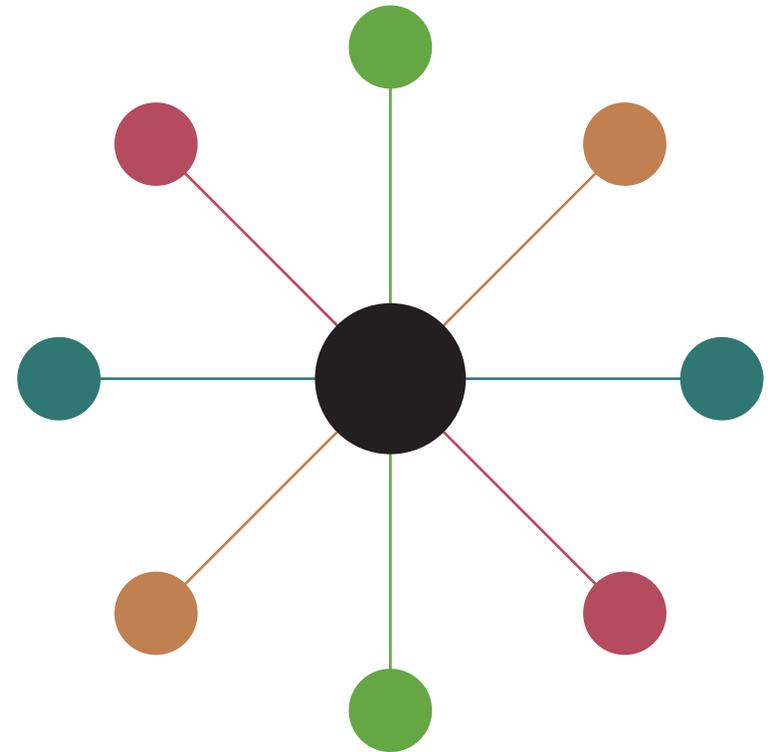
Urban design is a process, one that requires balancing a variety of goals with the physical, legal, economic, and infrastructural frameworks of the site. Because all the elements of a design are connected, the choices we make in the design process affect how all the other pieces work.

Constraints are a constant in design; certain goals just cannot be met because the timing is off, or the finances do not work, or the site is too small, amongst other reasons. Rather than be a frustration, constraints can be a good way to focus on the issues, elements, and places that matter most, or could have the greatest impact. Developers and designers should be up-front about the constraints of the project and be honest about what can or cannot be done.

The urban design process will vary depending on the scale of the project and who is proposing it. In general, you will have fewer opportunities to comment when private developers build within zoning regulations on private property. Alternatively, larger projects, public institutions, and zoning code regulations will often have extensive public meetings and multiple opportunities for participation in design.

This process happens differently across the scales of buildings and block, neighborhood, city, or region. The larger scales of urban design, particularly at the town and city level, are adapted over a long time frame. The processes that shape this scale are likewise large and long-term. You can make your voice heard by participating in your town, city, or region's master plan and zoning process, as well as by electing officials who will oversee the application and enforcement of your area's land use laws.

Use the lessons in this guide, including the elements of urban design, to communicate with designers and practitioners about how to best improve a project that affects you and your community.



At Your Meeting:

Because the urban design process can be complex, it is important to ask the following questions at a meeting in order to focus the conversation.

1. Who is involved in the design and what is their role?
2. What is the purpose of this meeting?
3. Where in the development process is the design?
4. What is the next step?

Acknowledgements AND CREDITS

Foundation for Louisiana would like to acknowledge the Ford Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for their financial support of our civic engagement, neighborhood organizing and community education programs.

The Foundation would also like to recognize the architecture and planning firm Concordia, LLC for drafting the Citizen's Guide to Land Use and the Citizen's Guide to Urban Design. In particular, we would like to thank Philip Denning for his hard work in the development of the final publications, under the leadership of Steven B. Bingler and Bobbie Hill.

Jeffrey Goodman of Social Agency Lab played a vital role in the completion of the Citizen's Guide to Urban Design.

Credits:

All drawings and design by Jeffrey Goodman except:

1.1 - Campus map from LSU's 2003 Master Plan, SmithGroup JJR

1.6 - Renderings courtesy Sulin Carling & Dana Brechwald

Original 3-d house from Google Sketchup

All photography by Kathleen Onufer, Jim Belfon & Concordia, LLC except:

1.5 - Flickr users Healthiermi, Kwong Yee Cheng, & David Schexnaydre

2.6 - Flickr users Faungg

2.11 - Flickr user Walmart Stores

All aerial and satellite photography by Google (with imagery from DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, & USGS) or Microsoft (with imagery by Pictometry.)

Foundation for Louisiana would like to thank its staff: Ethan Ellestad, Tenaj Jones, Jessica Kemp, Bradley O'Neil, Kathleen Onufer, and Eric D. Shaw for their central role in the creation of the guides. They have worked tirelessly to ensure that these publications will be a resource for communities. We also acknowledge Ashley K. Shelton for commissioning a community resource guide on planning for the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation, the Foundation for Louisiana's predecessor.

Finally, residents, community leaders, planners, and architects from throughout the state and nation reviewed these publications. Foundation for Louisiana would like to thank the following individuals for their integral role in the creation of the Citizen's Guide to Land Use and Citizen's Guide to Urban Design:

Ryan Albright, H.M.K. Amen, Demteria Boykins, Sonia Brown, Naydja Bynum, Nathan Cataline, Aron Chang, Joel Devalcourt, Rami Diaz, Lucas Diaz, Benjamin Diggins, Cheryl Diggins, Corrine Ducre, Ed Elam, Chris Fisher, Lois Gould-Ford, Joelle Greenland, Charnelle Hicks, Lael Holton, Lavon Jackson, Steven Kennedy, Alonzo Knox, Seth Knudsen, Eniel Larks, Jeffery Leuenberger, Lenise Lyons, Alexandra Miller, Geoffrey Moen, Fred Neal Jr., Grace Nguyen, Juan Camilo Osario, Thom Pepper, Katherine Prevost, Riana Shaw Robinson, Yolanda Rodriguez, Timolyn Sams, Lakshmi Sridaran, Yvette Thierry, Clair Thomson, Alan Williams, Linda Williams, and Mattie Womble.



CITIZEN'S GUIDE to URBAN DESIGN Summary Sheet

AT THE MEETING

Before anything else:

1. Who is involved in the design and what is their role?
2. What is the purpose of this meeting?
3. Where in the development process is the design?
4. What is the next step?

Establishing this information helps focus the meeting.

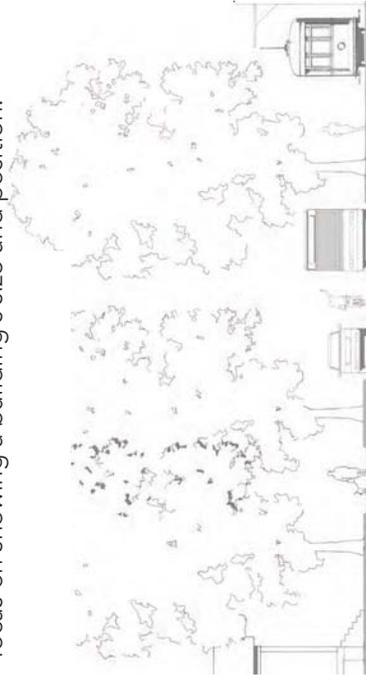
DESIGN DRAWINGS

There are a variety of drawings that designers will make to explain their ideas. To the right is a bubble diagram, which sketches the location of certain uses. Renderings are realistic drawings that show what a project will look like from the street. Massing is a sketch of a building's height, size, and position.



Sections

Architects and planners use street sections to show the relationships between buildings, sidewalks, and streets, as well as all the anticipated uses of each. Depending on the type of project, the section may be more focused on the design of the street, or it may focus on showing a building's size and position.



Plans

A plan will show how buildings, streets, open space, transportation, and other elements of urban design are laid out in a project. The purpose of a plan is to accurately portray a design and convey enough information that someone - a builder, city official, or a member of the public - can clearly understand the form, scale, and scope of a design.

In order to read a plan, think about the various layers that make up a design; some are listed below. The way these layers come together and how the layers connect determine the character of a place.

- A** Key & Scale
- B** Streets
- C** Open Space
- D** Buildings
- E** Pedestrian System
- G** Parking



ELEMENTS OF URBAN DESIGN

The cities where we live, work, and play are made up of thousands of design elements, from the smallest window to the largest highway. These are just some of the many ways to describe a city.

By using the terms and concepts seen here, you can better articulate the elements you would like to see in a design.

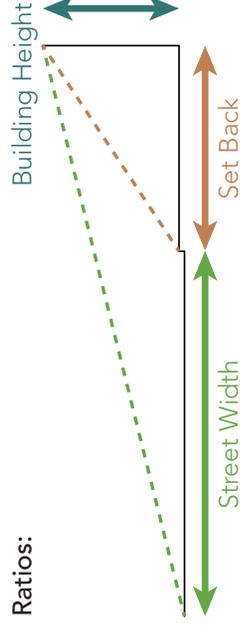
Formulas

Lot Coverage = Ground Story Area / Lot Area

Building Height = Roof to Ground

Floor-Area Ratio = Total Building Area / Lot Area

Ratios:



A Hardscape - Paved outdoor areas.

B Softscape - Unpaved natural areas.

C Roofline - The height and prominence of the roof.

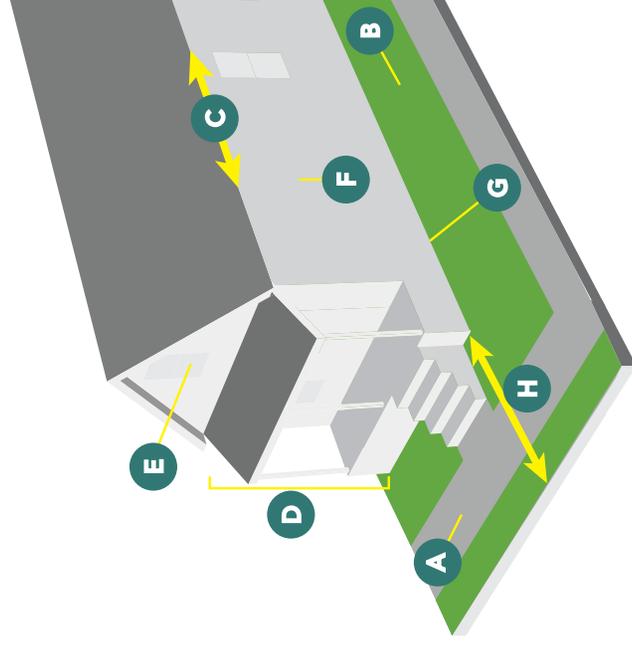
D Facade - The look of the front of the building.

E Fenestration - The location of windows.

F Elevation - The look of the sides of the building.

G Footprint - The amount of land a building occupies.

H Set Back - The distance from a building to the street.



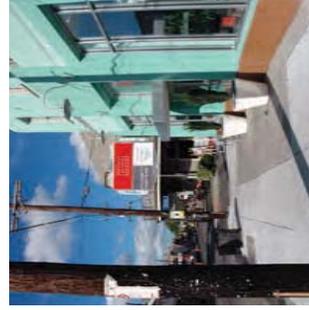
Vernacular

The architectural details that are native to Louisiana, from shotgun houses to arcades to pitched roofs.



Streetscape

All the features that make up a street such as: street furniture, sidewalks, bike lanes, plantings, neutral grounds, signage, art, and gutters.



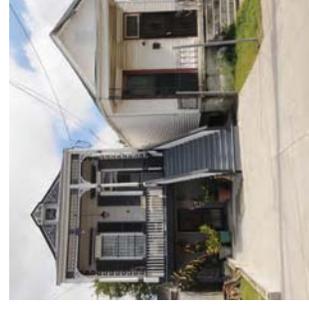
Transportation

The ways people get around lead to different design decisions, including the need for parking, width of streets and sidewalks, and the density.

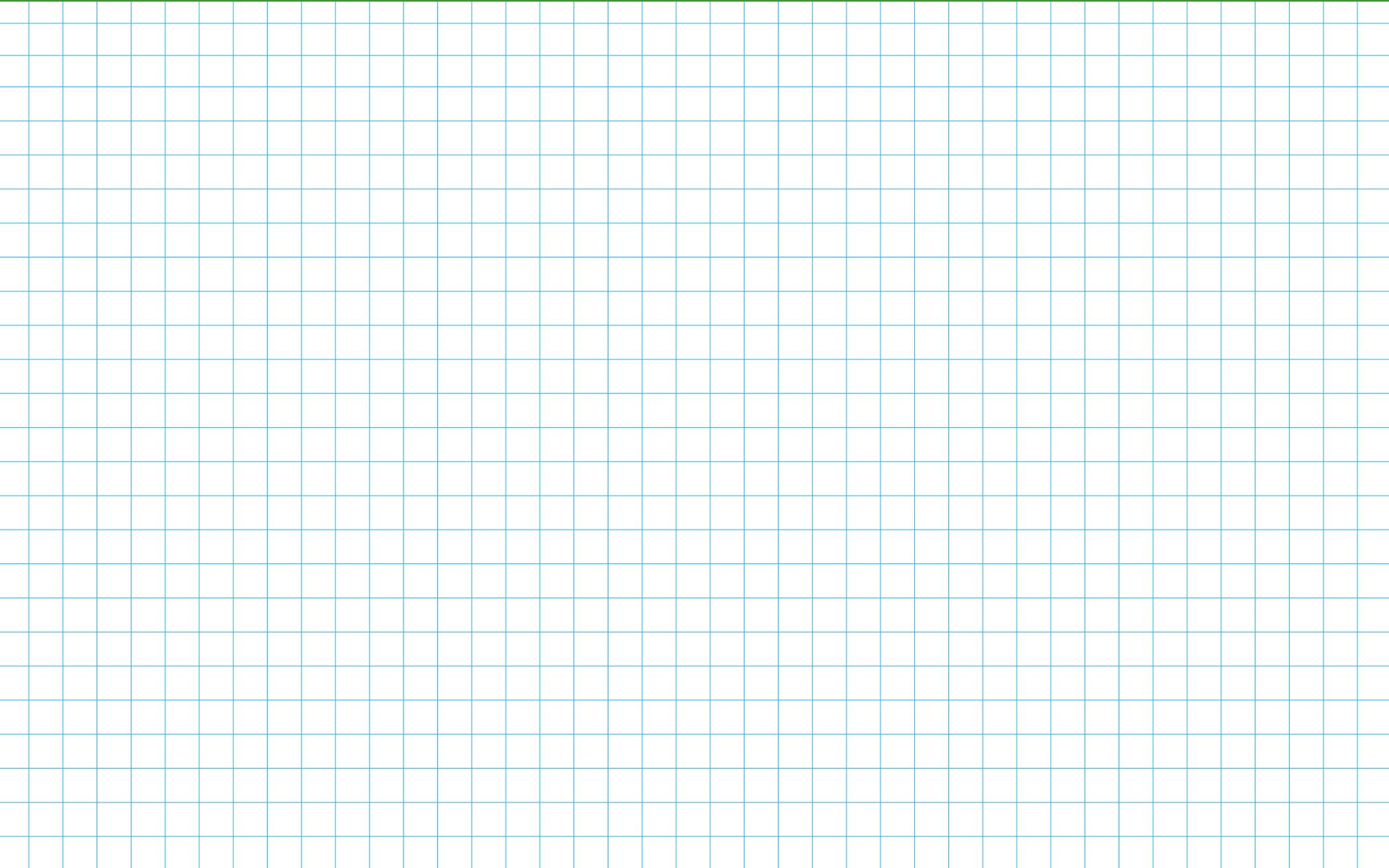


Density

Density is a measurement of how many people are in a given area. Rather than focus on the specific number, find the best design that balances amenities and character.



Notes



The Citizen's Guide to Land Use and the Citizen's Guide to Urban Design
are available at
http://www.foundationforlouisiana.org/news_resources/reports_publications

To offer feedback on the Citizen's Guides, please contact us at
citizensguides@foundationforlouisiana.org

