

## URBAN DESIGN AND URBAN DESIGN OVERLAY DISTRICTS

Urban Design Districts provide guidelines for development activity in clearly defined special design areas and can strengthen the physical and economic character of each neighborhood by mitigating or avoiding functional and architectural incompatibility of buildings or services. These design districts include Growth Centers, major transportation corridors, historic districts and other unique community areas as identified in the Horizon Plan.

Much of the momentum for establishing and incorporating urban design must come from local, neighborhood initiative and become self sustaining through a shared understanding of the economic and social importance of a community's appearance. The Planning Commission can assist community associations in their development of a strategic urban design plan for revitalizing and protecting the quality of life in our communities.

Urban design elements to be considered may include:

- transportation design
- landscaping
- building articulation and orientation
- service areas
- parking areas
- lighting
- building materials
- signage

### Urban Design District

Urban Design Districts include design guidelines and also regulate permitted land uses in the district. This type of design district can be utilized when properties are in transition, usually from a residential use to an office or neighborhood commercial use. Urban Design Districts do not automatically rezone parcels in the district when the design district is approved. Each property owner must apply to the Planning Commission to rezone their property to Urban Design District.

Urban Design Districts regulate use as well as operating rules for the specific uses, such as operating hours. This type of design district tends to utilize more stringent design regulations, including building materials and setbacks. A goal of Urban Design Districts is to minimize impacts on neighboring properties and establish a high level of design quality.



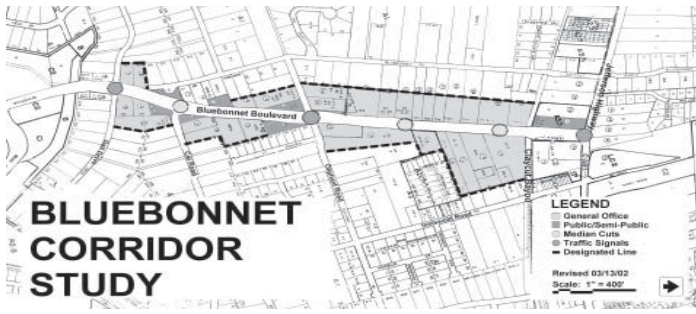
**Above: Urban Design Districts promote pedestrian friendly design and walkable commercial areas.**

### Urban Design Overlay District

Urban Design Overlay Districts do not change the underlying zoning category, i.e. all permitted uses remain the same, but rather impose additional requirements relating to concerns such as greenspace, landscape, and architectural features.

Urban Design Overlay District guidelines are a voluntary supplement to general zoning regulations, designed to provide a framework for the protection and enhancement of the aesthetic, economic and environmental quality by addressing development issues as related to neighborhood character and economic diversity.

This type of design district is utilized in areas with a mixture of uses and zonings. Urban Design Overlay Districts can bring uniformity and cohesion to areas with a mixture of residential, office and commercial uses. Existing mixed use areas benefit from the design standard guidelines provided by an Urban Design Overlay District.



**Above: The Bluebonnet Corridor was the first Urban Design District established in East Baton Rouge Parish. The design guidelines in this area focus on compatibility of office uses with adjacent residential properties.**

### **Baton Rouge Urban Design Districts**

The Bluebonnet Boulevard Corridor Study began in response to concerns regarding the future land use of the newly constructed Bluebonnet Boulevard extension. The result, after months of public input and the creation of design guidelines, is Baton Rouge's first Urban Design District. The City of Baton Rouge-Parish of East Baton Rouge's comprehensive plan, the Horizon Plan includes a set of Action Items related to urban design in Baton Rouge. Action Item LU4.A in the Land Use Element of the Horizon Plan encourages the "establishment of procedures for designation of urban design districts or corridors including participation by affected property owners within the identified areas".

Bluebonnet Boulevard is a major corridor in Baton Rouge. When plans were made to extend the road, it was apparent that the extension would have to cut through a residential area. In order to address the needs of the community, the Planning Commission worked to form a Committee comprised of property owners, developers and representatives from neighborhood associations.

After months of public input and committee meetings, design guidelines were created to address the following seven elements: Setbacks; Landscaping and Buffers; Building Height and Size; Parking; Building Materials; Lighting; and Signage. The Bluebonnet Boulevard UDD was broken down into subareas and guidelines were catered to fit each subarea, depending on lot size and proximity to homes. Greenspace and preservation of selected trees were incorporated into the design guidelines. In addition to landscaping the medians, the City-Parish Department of Public Works landscaped several city-owned lots in Urban Design District 1.

The procedure by which Urban Design District 1 was established is an excellent example of public participation in the local planning process. The planning process was lengthy, however, directly working with the community and taking into consideration the needs of all residents has resulted in a set of guidelines which incorporate transportation planning and land use planning while retaining the characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood.

The Growth Center Community Planning Process also educates the public on the benefits of Urban Design Overlay Districts. Growth Centers include mixed use areas identified by the Horizon Plan for their potential to establish design districts.

Since the first Urban Design District was established in Baton Rouge, 11 other design districts have been established. The Planning Commission continues to coordinate with communities in Baton Rouge regarding Urban Design Districts.

**Below: Urban Design Districts provide for predictability in design and avoid inappropriate development. Urban Design Districts raise the design standard in East Baton Rouge Parish for commercial and office developments.**



**For more information contact:**

**City-Parish Planning Commission  
1755 Florida Street, Third Floor  
P.O. Box 1471**

**Baton Rouge, LA 70821**

**Telephone: (225) 389-3144 Fax: (225) 389-5342**

**Office Hours: 8 a.m.—5 p.m. M-F**

**Email: [planning@brgov.com](mailto:planning@brgov.com)**

**Web page: <http://www.brgov.com/dept/planning>**