South Riverside Drive: Gateway Corridor Project

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South Riverside Drive

Gateway Corridor Project

A proposal by John Maxwell and John Adam
for the City of Iowa City Department of Planning and Community Development

Field Problems in Planning, 102:210
Graduate Program in Urban and Regional Planning
The University of Iowa

May 2002

Property of Urban and Regional Planning
University of Iowa
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Prepared for the Department of Planning and Community Development, City of Iowa City

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May 2002
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Executive Summary

For several years the critics of post-war urban form have railed against strip development. According to James Howard Kunstler, “It is in absolutely all its details a perfect piece of junk. It is the anti-place” (1996, 93).

When the Iowa City Department of Planning and Community Development asked us to come up with ideas about what could be done to improve the appearance of South Riverside Drive, they were responding to the same impulse that has driven other cities in America to rethink how strip development happens and to take a new look at their aging commercial strips.

From annexation in the 1920s through today the character of South Riverside Drive changed from being mostly residential to being a mix of homes and businesses to being virtually all commercial. The self-regulatory practice that once existed in the area has long since disappeared as absentee ownership replaced the local presence. This has resulted in deterioration of building appearance and cleanliness, both of which contribute to people's distaste for it. Consequently, our first task was to identify the existing conditions: what makes South Riverside Drive the place it is? Four interrelated factors sum this up:

- It is a commercial corridor serving a variety of community-wide needs.
- The commercial uses are predominantly auto service, food service, financial, medical and insurance service, and a few retail uses.
- It is an economically healthy commercial area.
- South Riverside Drive is a major traffic conduit between southwest Iowa City and the east side of the Iowa River.

The corridor lacks aesthetic appeal and is “placeless” in people's minds. Furthermore, because its location is important as an entryway and because of the inter-urban competitive nature of business activity, any attention paid to beautifying the corridor would sustain and might even enhance commercial activity, as other communities across the United States have found.

Asked by the City to assess a level of desire by the business community to participate in improvements, we designed a survey instrument to gauge that interest and at the same time garner the opinion of patrons and neighbors on aesthetic issues. Indeed, the administration of this survey has piqued interest among business owners and residents and spurred us on to consider a relatively comprehensive set of recommendations.

The survey results confirmed the City’s thoughts regarding South Riverside, with 60 percent of all respondents stating that the street is unattractive and a poor reflection on the city. Lack of landscaping was
decried the most, followed by the physical appearance of buildings, streetlighting and an inadequate system of sidewalks. From this, we were able to establish priorities for remediation of the situation.

We also ascertained that 55 percent of business and property owners were keen to participate in some association to oversee aesthetic change. They also were most inclined to favor a grant program incentive scheme to assist them in making needed changes to their properties, but also found the idea of tax-increment financing quite appealing.

Since landscaping and the appearance of buildings were of highest priority for change among respondents, our recommendations focused on these two areas along with site layout. Site layout emerged as important as seven percent of respondents perceived the area as being cluttered and confusing. This factor, tied to the emphasis placed in the planning literature on the importance of order and coherence to the viewer for appreciation of an aesthetically pleasing environment, directed our focus toward spatial order.

The results also alerted us to some responsibilities, direct and indirect, that fall to the City if aesthetic changes are to be achieved in the corridor.

The conception of Riverside Drive as a “Gateway” district into Iowa City led to a recommendation to create a Gateway District Overlay zoning designation, which contains guidelines regulating building design and materials, lot layouts and minimum landscaping standards.

Securing the attention and support of the business community is an obvious essential to achieving remediation, and so we outlined a Facade and Landscaping Improvement Program (FLIP), the purpose of which is to spur immediate aesthetic improvements.

To round out our suggestions and include recognition of the City’s role in beginning the revitalization process, recommendations for public amenities were also included in the report. Amenities do provide a focal point to which a traveler can connect and ascribe meaning, and they do contribute to the shape and historic meaning of locales, thereby assisting in the creation of a ‘sense of place’.

We recognize that the task of transforming the character of South Riverside Drive is one that no single entity can achieve on its own. We also believe that the City can take heart from knowing that 81 percent of cities across the country are working with their business communities to create places that are appreciated by residents and visitors, alike. Thus, its responsibility in this case is no different. Efforts to dispel scepticism, build consensus, and improve the streetscape and landscaping are all areas of direct responsibility to the City. In addition, we are confident that through the development of an improvement program and by setting standards for design, the City can indirectly influence this important process of transformation.
Map of South Riverside Drive indicating extent of study area

Legend
- streets & roadways
- study area
- rivers & streams
Introduction

South Riverside Drive from Myrtle Avenue to the intersection of Highways 1 and 6 is an auto-oriented commercial district that doubles as a point-of-entry for Iowa City. As such it shapes travelers’ perceptions of the town. Results from our survey of patrons and nearby residents indicated that those perceptions are not positive, but rather negative to the point of extreme distaste. People perceive a lack of landscaping, poor building design, and a general deficiency in care and upkeep of properties.

The City also acknowledges this fact and further recognizes that the area lacks a “sense of place,” though heartened by the relatively stable economic vibrancy of the area. In addition, authorities are conscious that the competitive nature of inter-urban business activity demands that commercial areas become and remain attractive places since “beauty” plays a significant role in the marketing of places, just as it does in the case of goods and services. All across the United States, city governments and planners are taking the lead in effecting aesthetic changes to commercial centers, and strips in particular, and they have received consistent support from the courts in their efforts.

This report provides the City of Iowa City with a plan to improve the appearance of South Riverside Drive through improvements in landscaping and building facades. These recommendations address the long-term redevelopment of the corridor and short-term improvements and modifications. To put it another way, we offer proactive solutions to achieve immediate and lasting effects and regulatory solutions to guide the shape of future redevelopment.
Existing Conditions

South Riverside Drive is a four-lane arterial street on the west side of Iowa City with a north-south orientation that roughly parallels the Iowa River. It begins at the southern corporate boundary and was once the entry point of US Highway 218 into Iowa City. At the south end of the study area (see figure 1) State Highway 1 West and US Highway 6 East join and share Riverside until Highway 1 splits off to the east at the Burlington Street bridge. In this stretch Riverside passes by the west campus of the University of Iowa. North of Iowa Avenue, Riverside and Highway 6 part company as Riverside makes an eastward jog and the highway arcs westward toward Coralville. North of the Cedar Rapids & Iowa City (CRANDIC) Railroad overpass it enters the university’s arts campus, which contains the Museum of Art, Mabie Theater and Hancher Auditorium. Riverside Drive ends at a T-intersection with Park Road on the southern edge of City Park.

For most of its southern route Riverside crosses relatively flat land, some of which is in the combined flood plain of the Iowa River and Willow Creek. As it approaches Burlington Street, steep hills and rocky bluffs rise up on its west side. Until it reaches the arts campus it is tightly bound by the hills and the river. With only two buildings having access to it in this portion, it makes an ideal traffic conduit between Iowa City and the City of Coralville to the northwest.

The focus of this study is the commercial-use portion of South Riverside, an approximately 2100-foot stretch from Myrtle Avenue at the north end southward to the convergence of
Highway 1 West and Highway 6 East. The Iowa Interstate Railroad crosses over the street on a trestle approximately 275 feet south of Myrtle. West Benton Street intersects Riverside about 700 feet further south. Included in the area of study are Sturgis Corner Drive and Orchard Street. The Sturgis Corner subdivision is a trapezoidal portion of land situated between Riverside Drive and the Iowa River. Occupying the former site of the City's landfill, this subdivision was platted in 1978 and is now entirely built out. Orchard Street formed the backbone of Cartwright's Addition (platted between 1910 and 1920, around the time the area was annexed to the City). Today it is the division between the commercial uses on Riverside and residential uses to the west. There are currently four businesses on Orchard. Benton Street contains three businesses between Orchard and the Iowa River. Altogether there are fifty commercial uses within this area and two apartments (both accessory to So-Fro Fabrics, 1029). The entire study area is zoned CC-2, Community Commercial, the intent of which is "to provide areas for those sales and service functions and businesses whose operations are typically characterized by outdoor display, storage and/or sale of merchandise, by repair of motor vehicles, by outdoor commercial amusement and recreational activities or by activities or operations conducted in buildings or structures not completely enclosed" (Iowa City Zoning Code, 14-6E-4).

Most of the businesses are in some way auto-oriented—filling stations, auto repair services, car dealerships and a car rental establishment. The next largest group of commercial uses is restaurants. Most of these are of the fast-food variety, which tend to generate a lot of entering and exiting traffic during rush hours and dinnertimes. The rest of the businesses are a mix of retail and service uses (see figure 7 following).

**figure 6.** Sinclair gas station, 731 S. Riverside.
Figure 7. Map of existing uses in the study area. Table 1 following identifies businesses and their types.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>business</th>
<th>lot no.</th>
<th>address</th>
<th>type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly's Auto Center</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>auto service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kum &amp; Go</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungry Hobo / The Wedge</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy Queen</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claim to Frame</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domino's</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valvoline Quick Lube</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>auto service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Muffler &amp; Brake</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>auto service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartwig Dodge</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>auto service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linder Tire Service</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>auto service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Muffler Inc.</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>auto service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breugger's Bagel Bakery</td>
<td>715</td>
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<td>food</td>
</tr>
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<td>Sinclair Marketing</td>
<td>731</td>
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<td>auto service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc's (Amoco) Riverside Standard</td>
<td>801</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonalds</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowerama of America</td>
<td>817</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payless Shoe Source</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground Round</td>
<td>830</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy's</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zio Johno's Spaghetti House</td>
<td>953</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuffy Auto Service</td>
<td>909</td>
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<td>auto service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Reilly's Auto Parts</td>
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<td>auto service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tobacco Outlet</td>
<td>923</td>
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<tr>
<td>Panchero's Mexican Grill</td>
<td>965</td>
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<td>food</td>
</tr>
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<td>Business Name</td>
<td>ZIP</td>
<td>Street Address</td>
<td>Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mister Money USA of Iowa City</td>
<td>1025</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>financial service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo-Ann Fabrics &amp; Crafts</td>
<td>1029</td>
<td>Riverside Drive</td>
<td>retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duds'n'Suds</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sturgis Corner Drive</td>
<td>service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Inn</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sturgis Corner Drive</td>
<td>food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spray &amp; Shine Car Wash</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sturgis Corner Drive</td>
<td>auto service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midas Auto Service Experts</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sturgis Corner Drive</td>
<td>auto service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Ranchero Mexican Restaurant</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Sturgis Corner Drive</td>
<td>food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly Services</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Sturgis Corner Drive</td>
<td>auto service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi Valley Regional Blood Center</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Sturgis Corner Drive</td>
<td>medical service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvan Learning Center</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Sturgis Corner Drive</td>
<td>service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance Associates of Iowa City</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Sturgis Corner Drive</td>
<td>financial service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa City Family Chiropractic</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Sturgis Corner Drive</td>
<td>medical service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westaff</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Sturgis Corner Drive</td>
<td>service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coldwell Banker</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Sturgis Corner Drive</td>
<td>financial service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check n'Go</td>
<td>94</td>
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<td>financial service</td>
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<td>Professional Foot &amp; Ankle Care</td>
<td>98</td>
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<td>medical service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mumm's</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>West Benton Street</td>
<td>food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartwig Motors</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>West Benton Street</td>
<td>auto service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twin Image Salon Spa</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>West Benton Street</td>
<td>service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned Parenthood</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>Orchard Street</td>
<td>medical service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Touch of Mink</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>Orchard Street</td>
<td>service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven's Radiator King</td>
<td>1010</td>
<td>Orchard Street</td>
<td>auto service</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A Brief History

Though not part of the original town plat of 1839, Riverside Drive has been a part of Iowa City for nearly a century. The City Directory of 1920 listed eleven households on the street (figure 8), all of them south of the CRI&P Railroad overpass. That number had grown to twenty-two by 1930 and Riverside Drive's first Standard Oil filling station appeared at 708 South Riverside, the present address of Professional Muffler.

As early as 1935 the number of businesses was beginning to catch up to the number of houses. Twenty-two households and six businesses lay between Myrtle Avenue and Highway One, including a restaurant at 513, three filling stations, two trucking firms and Riverside Grocery at 710, owned and operated by George F Morrow until the mid 1960s (figures 9, 10 and 11 show the changes from 1899 to 1939 along South Riverside).

An A&W Root Beer stand at 1000 South Riverside, the corridor’s first fast-food joint, opened in 1949, as did the long-lived Big Ten Inn Restaurant. The number of houses had not declined much by this point. There were still nineteen of them, and many merchants lived on site, so while there were eleven commercial uses by this date, residential uses were still in the majority.

In 1952 Benner’s Grocery at 1029 joined the mix. Not only did its large building house the grocery, but for many years also contained a barbershop in the rear and two apartments above that; Jo-Ann Fabrics currently occupies the building.

In 1959 the first McDonald’s Hamburgers at 817 opened on Riverside, the same year the number of businesses finally outnumbered households (18 to 12; the year before the ratio had been 14 to 15). Riverside’s role as an auto-
service, auto-oriented commercial corridor was clearly evident by the mix of businesses at the time: five service stations, four auto dealerships, two truck and farm sales & service operations, two groceries, and three restaurants, two of which were of the fast-food variety. The paving of Riverside Drive in the late ‘50s probably spurred the increase in commercial uses.

The land between Riverside and the Iowa River and south of Benton remained relatively undeveloped at this time, probably owing to the fact that this area had once served as a municipal landfill.

Within a decade all the private homes had disappeared, leaving the two apartments above Benner’s and the house at 620 split into four units. The widening of Riverside Drive from two lanes to four circa 1962-63 contributed to the decline in residential uses and was itself motivated by the increase in commercial uses, as well as the rapid residential development west of the corridor. Riverside Drive became less an entryway on the edge of Iowa City and more an interior conduit of traffic from district to district. Its few remaining neighborhood-serving businesses closed their doors in this decade (Riverside Grocery, 1961; Brenner’s, 1968) to be replaced by the community-serving, auto-oriented uses that typify the corridor today. In 1970 there were no less than fourteen auto-related businesses (including filling stations, body shops and car dealerships) between Myrtle Avenue and the highway intersection.

In the decades of this changeover, the City practiced no formal design controls except for the usual bulk, height, setback and parking regulations contained in the zoning ordinance. As a result, building design and materials, landscaping and signage

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**Figure 9.** 1899 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. On the left is “River Road,” what we know today as Riverside Drive.
were dictated by individual taste, corporate image, or the limitations of property owners' pocketbooks. One restaurant, Lassie's Red Barn at 713, even had an eight-foot tall white chicken out front. The chicken was also a perennially favorite target for theft during fraternity rush week activities. Despite such oddities, some self-regulation existed, but those days disappeared along with the strong local presence.

One local business owner remembers that even at this time there was still a feeling of neighborliness despite the loss of residential uses. When his father ran the business, he recalls, managers and owners along South Riverside used to sit down to lunch together and shoot the breeze. Naturally, the talk tended toward business issues along the Riverside Drive corridor, including aesthetic matters. Because so many of the businesses were locally run—and up to the 1970s some still lived on-premises—they concerned themselves more with how things looked. As the community of local owners dwindled, so did the self-management of the area's appearance. Unless a sense of community revives along South Riverside Drive, the chances of achieving a true sense of place are slim. Under these circumstances, the City has a role to play in regulating appearance.

*figure 10. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1920. Riverside is mislabeled as "Templin Drive," which actually terminates some distance north.*
figure 11. 1939 Sanborn Map detail. Note the former orientation of Benton Street on the east side of Riverside, between the present-day locations of Linder Tire and Professional Muffler.

The Rise and Fall of Different Uses on South Riverside Drive, 1930-2002

- Residential uses
- Commercial uses
Roadmap to the Report

The report is divided into two parts each containing a number of sections.

Section One examines the critical issues facing South Riverside Drive and our definition of the “problem” as we interpret it.

Section Two details the methodology and findings from a survey conducted to assess opinions from property owners, patrons and nearby residents on the state of conditions in the Riverside corridor, and to elicit ideas of what they would rather see in the way of landscaping and building design. The property owners received additional questions designed to assess willingness to take part in an improvement loan program and interest in forming a business association.

Section Three in Part II contains information on other cities’ approaches to developing guidelines addressing Architectural Standards, Site Layout Standards, Landscaping Standards and Sign Standards. These guidelines form part of a recommended new zoning designation, Gateway District Overlay, which should have broad applicability—with minor modifications particular to type of roadway—to any commercial strip serving as an entry corridor to Iowa City. These include Highway 6 East, Highway 1 West, Riveside Drive further south of the project area, and the North Dodge corridor from the intersection with Governor Street to the Interstate 80 overpass. We believe the advantage of incorporating design guidelines in the Zoning ordinance rather than in the Building & Housing ordinance is that it focuses immediate attention on the rezoned area and holds it up for public scrutiny.

Section Four outlines our proposal that the City of Iowa City establish a Facade and Landscaping Improvement Loan Program. This would be offered part and parcel with City expenditures on improvements in the public right-
of-way. The loan program could consist of a low-interest forgivable loan to property owners for the purpose of bringing properties better into compliance with the overlay design guidelines without having to wait for complete parcel redevelopment.

Section Five consists of a set of recommended civic improvements in the public right-of-way, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, such as installing bollards along the sidewalks, paying for the burial of overhead utility lines, upgrading light posts along the corridor, installation of a public clock and construction of an entryway arch.

We end the report with a summarization of findings and recommendations and suggested directions for further research.
Part 1
Identification and Research

Introduction

This part of the report contains two sections that set the stage for the recommendations that follow in Part II.

Section 1 defines the "problem" of South Riverside Drive, as it was presented to us by the City and as we determined from surveys and planning literature research.

Section 2 lays out and discusses the findings of the survey we conducted in the South Riverside Drive corridor and the adjoining neighborhood.
Section 1: Critical Issues on South Riverside Drive

Defining the Problem

The Iowa City Department of Planning and Community Development provided the initial definition of the problem when they asked us to develop a plan to improve the appearance of the South Riverside Drive commercial corridor. Subsequent meetings with Planning staff revealed a dissatisfaction with the quality of landscaping and building design. Traffic- and access-related issues are the subject of a concurrent study by another Field Problems group and therefore play a minor role in this report.

South Riverside Drive from Myrtle Avenue to the intersection of Highways 1 West and 6 East is zoned Community Commercial, CC-2, meaning that it contains uses serving the entire Iowa City-Coralville area rather than a specific set of neighborhoods. The problem, however, is not with the types of businesses. The corridor bears the...
marks of being economically vibrant: every commercial space is occupied and there is only one undeveloped lot (620). The goal of this study is not to change the commercial character of South Riverside Drive. Given that the corridor appears economically healthy, that people regularly use the services available, the visual clutter typical of strip development does not seem to be much of a problem in the case of South Riverside.

Yet communities across the United States annually spend large sums of federal, state and local funding on beautifying commercial corridors. Often these expenditures are made with the goal of stimulating economic activity in depressed areas, but in some cases it is to improve and sustain activity by enhancing visual appeal. The Coralville Town Center Plan and the Iowa Avenue Streetscape Project are two local examples of such spending.

Design charrette participants in the Coralville plan came to the following conclusion regarding the 5th Avenue-12th Street area: "[They] agreed the area lacks a clear, consistent, and attractive visual identity. The absence of consistent building and parking setbacks, attractive and uniform signage, architectural treatments, and streetscaping results in a cluttered visual and physical development pattern. This lack of unity and harmony creates a less than desirable 'sense of place' and community image" (Coralville
The Iowa Avenue plan had similar goals: "Establish an appropriate image for the corridor, emphasizing the connections of students and citizens to the City's history, its environment, and the University" and "Create a 'sense of arrival' to downtown Iowa City and the heart of the University" (Iowa Avenue Streetscape Plan, p. 2).

Respondents to the survey we conducted during the months of February, March and April 2002 voiced similar views regarding South Riverside Drive. As an entryway to Iowa City, South Riverside failed to give visitors a favorable first impression of the town. For residents it represented an absence of civic pride on the part of property owners and the City. Common responses were that it looked "junky" and "run down," "like an industrial area." When asked what streets in the Iowa City-Coralville area would serve as good models for the improvement of South Riverside Drive, a majority of respondents named the Coralville Strip, the Coralville Town Center (5th Avenue and 12th Street), and Iowa Avenue. When prompted, people acknowledged—in our survey experience—that these streetscape improvements were worth the investment.

Our efforts in defining the "problem" of South Riverside Drive revealed these elements:

The corridor lacks visual coherence and is generally regarded as unsightly.

This lack of coherence, combined with unsightliness, seriously diminishes the corridor's "sense of place."
This same combination signifies an absence of community pride and involvement.

Economic vitality, while not presently suffering, may be enhanced by visual improvements and the addition of amenities.

Past revitalization efforts in Iowa City have focused on connections and references to antecedents in the area—take Iowa Avenue and the near Northside, for example. In the case of South Riverside there are no historic “anchors” to latch renewal efforts onto. Hartwig Motors and Dairy Queen are the two oldest businesses in the study area; all other connections with the past are gone. The objective with South Riverside Drive is to forge a new identity as an urban commercial destination and as the southern entryway to Iowa City. To accomplish this, both public and private players must invest their energies.

figure 15. Most businesses have parking in the front of the building. Pedestrian connections are non-existent in these situations and the street lacks a definite edge.
Section 2: Findings of Survey

Introduction

During the months of February, March and April 2002, we conducted a survey of business and property owners along South Riverside Drive, patrons of businesses, and residents within two blocks of Riverside to assess opinions about the conditions of the general appearance of the study area. Specific questions were asked about the condition of landscaping and buildings. Business and property owners were asked to indicate interest in various types of loan or improvement district programs in addition to the appearance-related questions. The methodology and the survey tool are included in Appendices A and B, respectively. One item of note is that although the response rate among patrons and residents was relatively high, only 20 percent of business and property owners responded. This, we believe, was due to primarily three reasons: 1) whereas all patrons and residents were interviewed face-to-face, such contact was made with only a few owners; 2) the time for follow up was very limited; and 3) some level of scepticism about the City’s sincerity and motive in seeking aesthetic changes to the Corridor seemed to exist among owners, judging from the nature of the few contacts made. Notwithstanding, we do not think that the efficacy of the survey was undermined by the low owner-response since we observed a correlation between the responses of patrons and residents, and those of the owners that did respond.

Results

About 60 percent of all respondents found the South Riverside Drive Commercial Corridor unattractive and a poor reflection on Iowa City. Some went even further to describe it as “disorganized,” “filthy” and having a “run-down” appearance. As expected, business and property owners were not keen to express their opinions as to what parts of South Riverside Drive looked worst or best to them. Nevertheless, the majority of all respondents expressed pleasure with how the section of highway between Burlington St. and Myrtle Avenue looked, particularly the greenscaped west side beneath the bluffs.

Even though a significant proportion of respondents found nothing attractive to comment about within the study area—Myrtle Avenue to Highway 1—some still thought that a few business premises, such as Hartwig Motors, Breugger’s Bagel Bakery and the corner by The Village Inn were quite attractive. Mention was also made of greened areas, such as The Ned Ashton Park, and the view of the Iowa River.

On the other hand, 17 percent of respondents thought that the facades, texture, and the general cleanliness of buildings and their surroundings were visually distasteful (Chart 1). Significant criticism was also heaped on the railway bridge and its environs, and the condition of the sidewalks, while the river and its banks were considered rather unsightly.
Professional Muffler was most often identified as needing urgent attention, even though other old buildings were mentioned. Notwithstanding, the paucity of landscaping was decried the most and was highlighted by 21 percent of respondents as the area needing most attention. After landscaping, the physical appearance of buildings was singled out next as the change most needed to improve the appearance of South Riverside Drive along with an improvement in street lighting and sidewalks, and a change in the quality (too big) and distribution (too many) of commercial signage (Chart 2). Respondents also expressed the desire for parking to be made less visible, for benches to be placed, and for the creation of pockets of open space for informal recreation and congregation.

The survey prompted respondents to identify buildings in the Iowa City-Coralville area the designs of which they would like to see repeated or modeled on South Riverside. There were many suggestions for architectural design of buildings and facades. Among the buildings referred to were several university buildings, the buildings in the business areas of 12th Avenue and 5th Street in Coralville, Breugger’s Bagel Bakeries in Iowa City, Mondo’s on Clinton Street, and The Tower Place Parking Facility on Iowa Avenue. About 38 percent of respondents identified architectural style and finish as important factors influencing their recommendations, while 9 percent cited a clean and fresh appearance. The issue of identifying an appealing streetscape, worthy of emulation, generated many suggestions. Iowa Avenue was most highly recommended for its attractiveness and level of accommodation for pedestrian traffic, with the business area of 12th Avenue and 5th Street in Coralville, Mormon Trek Boulevard near Benton Street (Walden Square), Dubuque Street between Market Street and the Ped Mall, and Linn Street between Market and Jefferson Streets (in that order of preference).

Business Response

Fifty-five percent of business and property owners were keen to participate in an association to oversee aesthetic change in the Corridor (Chart 3). Owners were most inclined to favor a Grant Program incentive scheme to assist them in making the needed changes to their properties, but financial aid in the form of Tax Increment Financing was also found quite appealing. An even weaker level of interest was expressed in a low or zero-interest loan program, but it appears that owners were sceptical about the Business Improvement District strategy. It may be that they are least knowledgeable and/or experienced with using this type of incentive, even though it offers a measure of financial control that the others do not.

As to the targets of incentive programs, 22 percent of business and property owners thought that landscaping should be the priority, while 17 percent identified burying the utility lines as important. In each case, 11 percent of the owners indicated that building facades and street lighting should be targeted for attention, followed by sidewalks and public art, each with 8-percent support (Chart 4).

Other Findings

As indicated in the insert below, respondents wished to see some land-use adjustments that would make the Corridor a more desirable place to do business. They desired a change
in the current trend towards an increasing restaurant orientation, and expressed their wish for more neighborhood type businesses, such as a grocery store and coffee shop. Others focused on the danger to pedestrians posed by the many entrances/exits to business premises, and recommended that adjacent businesses share one entrance. One respondent desired to see a small landscaped boulevard, but was unsure as to how such could be fitted given the limited space in the Corridor.

Pedestrian and vehicular traffic concerns were also voiced. Residents of Myrtle Avenue were concerned about their safety when crossing South Riverside Drive from the vicinity of Myrtle to use the bicycle trail or patronize Dairy Queen, and cited the need for a pedestrian crossing. These residents also felt somewhat isolated because of the inadequate sidewalk network between Myrtle and the rest of the Corridor. Motorists also expressed their concern about the difficulty and associated risk involved in entering and exiting some business premises.

Two other concerns were also mentioned that relate to the appearance of the area, though from a different perspective. One is related to the current practice of ‘nesting’ under the Benton Bridge by homeless people, which respondents believe will intensify with all the attendant ills of unsightliness and unsanitary conditions. The other is born of an apprehension about what will happen to landscape improvements, particularly those initiated by the City.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Matters of Desire &amp; Concern as Expressed by Respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desires:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grocery store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coffee shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small landscaped boulevard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attract businesses other than restaurants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shared vehicular entrances to businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concerns:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maintenance of any landscaping improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absence of sidewalks isolates people on Myrtle Ave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>need pedestrian crossing near Myrtle Ave. junction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>too difficult to enter &amp; exit some business properties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>removal of homeless from beneath Benton Bridge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is our view that these wishes and concerns are part of the popular expressions for a more fulfilling and pleasurable experience in the Corridor and so should not be taken lightly by the City.
Discussion of Results

The results clearly indicate that business and property owners along with patrons and neighboring residents desire to see aesthetic change in the Corridor. One factor cited by a prominent business owner explaining the lethargy—when it comes to effecting this change—is that current City guidelines force building frontages to be set back considerably from the road if substantial renovation is intended, and so presents itself as a constraint to making properties more attractive for business. Another factor mentioned is that neighborliness among business owners in the area has eroded since the late 1960s. This occurred as business owners acquired more investments elsewhere, thereby reducing their presence in the area. Absentee ownership was further exacerbated by changes in business ownership as some businesses closed and non-resident owners made investments in the area. One very important benefit of neighborliness, however, was discussion between owners over lunch about general matters, including issues of aesthetics. It is hoped that future attempts at beautifying South Riverside Drive would inspire some degree of neighborliness among resident business managers and owners that would preserve and enhance what is achieved.

The lamentation over the inadequacy of good landscaping and business owners’ keenness to target incentive programs to this area makes it the number one priority. Improving the facades, texture of finish and design of buildings is perceived as very important in any future plans for aesthetic change for the area as well. The results show that Iowa City and Coralville both have building and streetscape features that can be used as examples. The views expressed by owners, patrons and residents are indeed useful for consensual agreement as to the priorities for aesthetic change in South Riverside Drive. Landscaping and the appearance of buildings hold the highest priority, but street lighting, sidewalks and parking lots were identified as the next three important areas demanding attention. The support given by the business sector to the burying of overhead utility lines and public art suggests that this party seeks holistic improvements. Moreover, there is a desire among owners to participate in the process of transforming the appearance of the Corridor even though there is presently some scepticism about the City’s motive in seeking change.

Influence on Direction of Study

The results of the survey assisted in setting priorities for the research. It became clear that the main focus of any aesthetic recommendations should be directed towards landscaping and building appearance. The 7 percent of respondents that perceived the area as cluttered and confusing reminded us of the emphasis placed in the literature on the importance of order and coherence to the viewer if s/he is to be able to appreciate an aesthetically pleasing environment. Consequently, we focused somewhat on site layout as well, but not at the expense of other areas of importance, such as public amenities.

The results also alerted us to some responsibilities that fall to the City if there are going to be aesthetic changes to South Riverside Drive. We concluded that some
responsibilities were direct and others indirect. Among the direct responsibilities is taking the initiative in areas of landscaping, streetscape improvements, burying utility cables and provision of public art. Two other key tasks are overcoming the scepticism felt by some business and property owners, and building consensus among them. On the other hand, setting standards, and development of an improvement plan that includes appropriate incentives would fall under the indirect responsibilities of the City. With these factors in mind, we now turn to making our recommendations.
Chart 1. Most Offensive Aspects of South Riverside Drive as per All Respondents

- Landscaping - need trees & flowering plants
- Railway bridge & its environs
- Parking lot surfaces - too much visible
- Professional Muffler building
- Utility lines
- Buildings
- Sidewalks
- The river & its banks
- Street lighting
- Streetscape

South Riverside Drive Gateway Corridor Plan
Chart 2.

Indicator of Priorities of All Respondents
for Aesthetic Improvements to SRD
excluding Landscaping

- buildings - improve façades, texture & environs
- improve sidewalks
- put in benches
- improve signs
- improve streetscape
- clean & beautify river & its banks
- improve lighting - use shades deflecting light downward
- hide parking behind buildings
- small open spaces
- bury utility lines
- put in lighted bench (gazebo) areas overlooking river
- allow buildings with varying heights
Chart 3. Business & Property Owner's Interest in a Business Association

Percent

- interested
- very interested
- not interested (at this time)
- no response
Part II

Recommendations

Introduction

Public improvements to landscaping and streetscape definition, while important, succeed best in conjunction with a reciprocal effort by the business community to enhance and maintain the appearance of South Riverside Drive. Because the City of Iowa City currently has building design, lot layout, landscaping, or building material oversight only in special circumstances—such as in planned unit developments, historic preservation overlay zones, or in developments exceeding a certain size trigger—development in all other instances proceeds without the opportunity for input from the City Planning Department, despite the fact that such development impacts everyone in the community.

In commercial zones that serve the Iowa City-Coralville area the need for publicly mandated design standards is predicated on the fact that these areas are the face of the community that residents and visitors see the most of; consequently, they play a large role in shaping peoples' perceptions of community character. From this we draw two guiding principles:

A collective effort at achieving a visually appealing and stimulating environment encourages a positive perception.

The collective result of individual neglect and lack of municipal controls produces a negative perception.
The solution is a two-pronged approach that includes short-term and long-term elements intended to achieve improvements and demonstrate a cooperative effort between citizens and government.

This part of the report contains three sections: the long-term element in the form of Design Guidelines (Section 3) for the proposed Gateway District Overlay zone; the short-term element in the form of a Facade and Landscaping Improvement Program (Section 4); and a description of Public Amenities (Section 5) the City should provide as a demonstration of commitment and as a contribution to the effort to establish South Riverside Drive's identity as a commercial destination.
Section 3:  
Design Guidelines  

Architectural Standards  

The purpose of architectural standards is to provide design regulations for commercial structures located in designated gateway corridor districts. The guidelines are intended to ensure that new buildings and additions to existing buildings will make a positive contribution to the visual appearance of the corridors. A definitive function of these guidelines is to encourage commercial structures to support and relate to the street and to some extent pedestrian linkages, rather than to parking areas.

We do not spell out specific guidelines in this section—these should result from committee discussions involving the City and impacted business and property owners. We do, however, suggest areas of concentration based on the results of the survey we conducted and design guidelines for Gateway corridors adopted by other municipalities, in particular, the Montrose, California Regional Gateway Corridors Plan.

As stated in the introduction to this study, we propose that the City of Iowa City develop a new zoning designation—Gateway District Overlay—that has broad applicability to commercial zones in other entryway corridors, such as North Dubuque between Bloomington and Jefferson, Highway 6 East, Highway 1 West, North Dodge between Interstate 80 and Prairie du Chien, and South Gilbert from Southgate Avenue to the Iowa Interstate Railroad overpass. Appropriate adjustments to design specifications would be necessary for corridors zoned CH-1, Highway Commercial.
Facades

Buildings should have architectural features and patterns that provide interest by balancing the stimulating complexity of quality materials and architectural features with the coherence of regular patterns of, for example, windows, bays, columns (both free-standing and imbedded), cornices, base materials that "anchor" the building, well-defined entryways, changes in material, variations in building plane, and so forth.

Fenestration

For facades fronting primary streets it may be desirable to require fenestration so as to avoid a bunker-like appearance. Community Commercial zones are not like the Central Business District in that there is not a lot of walk-by traffic passing close to each storefront, but windows can be used to establish a rhythm and relieve the appearance of bulk or facelessness.

Window element design guidelines from other municipalities have addressed the following:

No window should terminate where the wall joins the soffit. A minimum clearance should separate the top of the window casing and the point where the wall joins the soffit.

On buildings where the primary facade material is wood or cementitious board siding, windows should be surrounded by painted trim of a set minimum width, and the trim should increase in width for every unit increase in diagonal measurement of window (measured from lower left corner of interior frame to upper right corner of interior frame) beginning at a unit measure, such as two or three feet (see figure 16).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagonal window size (ft.)</th>
<th>Trim width (inches)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
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</table>

*figure 16.*
On buildings where windows are framed by masonry units the sill and lintel should be adorned by roll-lock courses, soldier courses, or solid stone or cementitious materials with the appearance of stone, especially if such material is of the same material as or in a style complimentary to the anchoring base (see above section on Facades).

Example of a roll-lock course

Example of a soldier course
Rooflines

Some Gateway Corridor guidelines mandated variations in rooflines to add variety and interest to structures, or to diminish bulk. They incorporated some of the following features:

Roof parapets are used to conceal rooftop equipment. Parapets are portions of walls that extend above the roofline. The maximum height of parapet shouldn’t exceed some proportion of the height of the supporting wall (Bruegger’s Bagel’s parapet is one-third of the overall height). Such parapets should include a three-dimensional cornice treatment.

Overhanging eaves, extending a minimum distance out from the supporting walls, are used to:

- provide shelter from weather,
- reduce solar gain in buildings, and
- to create a shadow line.

For buildings exceeding a certain square footage, the roof area should consist of a minimum number of roof slope planes to minimize the appearance of bulk (see figure 17).

Clerestory windows or dormers are encouraged to minimize the appearance of large roof expanses (see figure 18). Domed skylights or other windows that emit light upward should be prohibited so close to an airport’s flight zone.
Other Structural Design Elements

Entryways

Entryway design elements and variations give orientation and aesthetically pleasing character to buildings. Entryways include any portion of the building that is adjacent to a pedestrian walk. Each building should have clearly defined, highly visible customer entrances that may include one or some combination of the following elements:

- Canopies or porticos
- Overhangs
- Recesses and/or recessions
- Arcades
- Raised, corniced parapets over the door
- Peaked roof forms
- Arches
- Display windows
- Architectural details, such as trim or patterns in cladding materials
- Integral planters or wing walls

Materials

Survey respondents mentioned that many of the buildings look “cheap” and “shoddy.” Building materials and colors constitute a significant part of the visual impact of a building. Cheap materials and garish colors are
more appropriate to summer carnivals. For buildings with a permanent presence in the community the materials should reflect that sense of permanence by being sturdy and attractive.

Gateway Overlay design guidelines usually include a list of acceptable or required facade materials. Almost every set of design guidelines we reviewed listed the following:

- Brick
- Wood (finished and painted)
- Limestone, sandstone or other native stone
- Tinted, textured concrete masonry units
- Stucco
- Cementitious materials with the appearance of wood or stone, such as cement board.

Predominant building materials should not include:

- Smooth-faced concrete units
- Tilt-up concrete panels
- Prefabricated metal panels.
A Final Thought on Architectural Standards

The City should consult with the business community and residents to decide on what elements an appearance code should focus on. Appearance codes are usually designed by an individual or group of individuals who have been authorized by a governmental authority. For this reason, they are maligned as exclusionary, unilateral mandates providing guidelines that are too narrowly focused and prescriptive (Hinshaw 4).

Some contend that this method can be made more flexible by embracing the views and aspirations of the wider public through aesthetic programming. Their argument is as follows: Because there are long-term variations in preferences, aesthetic programming may be incorporated into appearance codes. Aesthetic programming facilitates a desired future change in design by allowing for the input of the affected public through either their evaluation and choice of a design(s) from a pre-selected set of images or from a set of images generated through design competitions. Another method is to have the affected public identify areas or images in their city that they like and dislike the most and to give the reasons behind their assessments (see responses to questions 5 and 7 in the “Results of Survey” section). In this way, flexibility may be worked into whichever method is used.

The goal of aesthetic programming is not to specify one solution, but to provide guidelines within which the designer functions to fashion new properties or redesign old ones (Nasar (1997) 180-181). This consumer-oriented approach involves people in decisions that affect them and makes appearance codes more flexible.
Illustrations of design elements in action should be included to quickly compare and contrast preferred designs with non-preferred designs.

**Good**

- Well-defined base
- Windows at least every six feet
- Sufficient eaves overhang
- Window trim materials—sills and lintels
- Well-defined entryway

**Bad**

- Insufficient eaves overhang
- No window details—just blank holes in the wall
Design Guidelines

Site Layout Standards

The purpose of this section is to set standards for the orientation of primary structures on commercial lots in the Gateway District Overlay Zone. While acknowledging that Gateway Districts are characterized by primarily auto-oriented uses, survey results, a review of planning literature and a collation of gateway corridor guidelines from other municipalities indicate a preference for three factors above all:

Buildings should be near the street, both to enhance the pedestrian realm and to define a more or less uniform street edge.

Parking should be located to the rear and/or sides of buildings in order to enhance the pedestrian realm, to define a uniform street edge, and to reduce visual clutter.

The openings into auto-service garages should not be directly visible from the street. One survey respondent said it looked “junky,” another said it made Riverside Drive look like an old industrial zone. Again, the purpose is to reduce visual clutter along the street edge and to enhance the experience for pedestrian users of the Gateway District.

A set of basic lot layout diagrams and descriptive text follows. These incorporate our interpretation of survey responses and ideas from selected layout standards found in other cities’ codes.
Dimensional Requirements

For non auto-oriented retail and non drive-through restaurant lots (see figure 21):

Build-to lines are used to site primary structures on all lots fronting primary and intersecting secondary streets.

In this example the build-to line for lots fronting primary streets is twenty (20) feet from the roadway right-of-way.

In figure 23 the build-to line for lots fronting intersecting secondary streets is ten (10) feet from the roadway right-of-way.

NOTE: The specific dimensions named in these examples (ten feet, twenty feet, etc.) are used only as starting points for discussion if the joint public-private process of adopting guidelines takes place. Twenty feet happens to be the front setback line for most properties and zones in Iowa City currently.
For auto-oriented use lots (see figure 22)

Build-to lines are used to site primary structures on all lots fronting primary and intersecting secondary streets.

The build-to lines for lots fronting primary streets vary according to orientation of structure on the lot:

When the structure is centrally located (more or less equidistant from side lot lines), the build-to line is no greater than thirty-five feet from the right-of-way.

When the structure is located nearly adjacent to either side lot line, the build-to line is no greater than twenty (20) feet from the right-of-way.

When the lot has two or more access points from one or more streets, the build-to line is no greater than twenty (20) feet from the right-of-way.

The build-to line for lots fronting intersecting secondary streets is ten (10) feet from the roadway right-of-way.
Side setback and set-to lines are determined by the location of structures and parking on adjacent lots.

The minimum distance between two structures on adjacent lots is no less than ten (10) feet.

Side setbacks—structure adjacent
- Minimum: 5 feet
- Maximum: 15 feet

Side setback—parking adjacent
- Minimum: 5 feet
- Maximum: 10 feet

The rationale behind variable setback/set-to lines for side yards is to accommodate parking on one side for new development.
Parking

One thing survey respondents consistently stated when asked to identify the worst aspects of Riverside Drive was the presence of parked cars in front of almost every building. With the exception of Hartwig Motors (629), Linder Tire Service (632), Professional Muffler (708) and Ground Round (830), every business along Riverside Drive has all of its customer parking out front. Except for Ground Round, all these buildings predate the widening of Riverside Drive to four lanes.

The following are recommended starting points for discussion when guidelines are developed:

Parking should be located to the side and rear of buildings. It may be located in the front of buildings by variance.

Parking located adjacent to either a side or front lot line should be no closer than twenty (20) feet to the right-of-way.

Parking areas located along or adjacent to the front lot line should be screened from view of the adjacent roadway.

Plant materials and fencing may be used in combination to provide successful screening. Any such screening would comply with whatever landscaping guidelines are adopted for Gateway District Overlay zones.

Exception to these parking requirements may be made for businesses displaying vehicles for sale or extended lease, not for short-term rental.
Access

Traffic is not the focus of this report, but issues of access are part of any ordinance dealing with site layout design. Based on the City’s desire to consolidate driveways along Riverside, as noted in the Comprehensive Plan, Southwest District section, and the redevelopment agreement reached on the Saltzman Subdivision in the summer of 2001. The following list of suggestions is based on our interpretation of the City’s mandates:

No lot should have more than one point of vehicular access (or curb cut) per street frontage, except in cases where frontage exceeds five hundred (500) feet along any one street.

Access points on adjacent lots should be separated by a minimum distance, except in situations where this is physically impossible due to length of lot frontage or to side set-back requirements.

Two or more adjacent lots are encouraged to share points of access under direction of a shared-access agreement. Currently Tobacco Outlet, Zio Johnno’s, Panchero’s, and Mister Money make use of one access point. Exceptions to this may include businesses such as fast food drive-through restaurants or gas stations with rapid, high-volume turnover at different periods of the day. Access should be from secondary (backage) streets where possible, such as Orchard Street that runs parallel to Riverside Drive. A fifteen-foot wide alley connects Riverside to Orchard and serves Tuffy’s and O’Reilly’s. This allows patrons more than one ingress/egress option and helps distribute the traffic over a greater number of streets.

*figure 26. locations of current curb cuts along Riverside Drive.*
Future redevelopment of the area may allow the placement of a roadway easement connecting the east end of Douglass Street to the west end of Sturgis Corner Drive across the block bracketed by Riverside and Orchard. It would be approximately five hundred feet from the Riverside/Highways 1 and 6 intersection. The advantage of such a roadway would be the restored use of the north-south alley to allow rear access to lots fronting both Riverside and Orchard. The resulting intersection may need to be signalized.

Figure 27. Location of possible roadway between Orchard and Riverside Drive.
Design Guidelines

Landscape Standards

Several survey respondents named the lack of greenery along Riverside Drive as one of its worst aspects. A subsequent survey question asked what the respondent thought of the landscaping along Riverside, to which well over half replied “What landscaping?”

The purpose of this section in a set of design guidelines would be to establish an aesthetically pleasing environment for Gateway District Overlay zones in landscaping and site design. These guidelines apply to new development, but if these recommendations are adopted into the City Ordinance it is incumbent on the City to provide landscaping improvements of its own (see later section on Public Amenities) or to persuade property owners to bring existing development into compliance with these standards. A small number of possible incentive programs designed to bring existing development in line are covered in a later section.

Landscaping may be the easiest and fastest fix to the aesthetic problems facing South Riverside Drive. As noted above, survey respondents cited it without specific prompting as a problem. Low-growing bushes and grasses help mask parking lots and soften the appearance of the commercial corridor by interrupting swaths of concrete and asphalt. Trees with broad canopies shade parking lots and buildings, reducing solar gain and establishing patterns of light and dark (sun dappling) that also relieves the monotony of a uniformly lit place.

*figure 28.* Durable and hearty native species, such as the obviously healthy oak pictured here, requiring little irrigation or pesticide treatment, are preferred in Gateway Districts.
Landscape Requirements

Estimating landscape requirements for an entire zone rather than on a site-by-site basis can be a tricky proposition, but if, as in many sign ordinances, the amount required is a function of each lot’s dimensional characteristics, there should be no significant burden on property owners or developers. Well tended landscaping demonstrates pride in one’s business and in the community (note figures 29 and 30).

Perimeter

Landscaping should cover a minimum percentage of the primary and secondary roadway frontages, excluding driveways.

Masonry walls up to two to four feet in height—measured from the average height of the roadway adjoining the lot—should be permitted if they are compatible with or complimentary to the architecture and materials of the primary structure.

Hurricane and chain-link fences are not adequate for either landscaping or screening and should be prohibited along any street frontage in a Gateway District.

Use of native and/or drought-tolerant species of plants and trees reduces irrigation and maintenance needs.

Landscape plantings should not block the views of neighboring businesses and signage as seen from automobiles on the public street.

Existing trees should be preserved wherever possible.
Parking Areas

Parking areas located in the front of the primary use on a lot that exceed a minimum number of parking spaces should include landscaped islands distributed across the parking area, covering a minimum percent of the area, including parking spaces and aisles. Landscaped islands should be required at the end of each row of spaces.

As an incentive to developers, parking areas on the sides of buildings should have reduced landscaping requirements. These areas consisting of a minimum number of spaces should include landscaped islands distributed across the parking area, covering a minimum percent of the area. Landscaped islands should be required at the ends of each row of spaces.

As a further incentive, parking areas located to the rear of buildings would not have landscape requirements, except that parking areas greater than 10,000 square feet should have at minimum one (1) shade tree per 2,500 square feet in order to reduce solar gain (conversion of sunlight to heat energy) and thus mitigate microclimatic effects.

A minimum percent of the landscaped area should be shade trees. Durable ground cover, rather than sod grass or landscape rocks, is encouraged within parking islands.

The use of water-permeable surfacing materials is encouraged in order to reduce the overall quantity of storm water runoff.
Service, Storage and Loading Areas

These guidelines are similar to many of those spelled out in other cities’ ordinances and to Iowa City’s design guidelines for infill housing in the Central Planning District.

All such areas within view of public streets and neighboring properties should be screened, recessed, or enclosed.

Outdoor vending machines should be screened from view of public streets and neighboring properties.

A combination of plant material, wall and/or fence may be used to screen views. Fences may not be of the chain link or hurricane variety.

Utility meters, structures and other appurtenances, as well as HVAC equipment and transformers, should be screened from view of public streets and neighboring properties.
Landscaping—City Responsibilities

It would be ideal for the City to create a strong street edge through the planting of a formal row of trees on both sides of the South Riverside Gateway Corridor. However, there does not appear to be sufficient right-of-way between sidewalk and curb along any portion between Myrtle Avenue and Highway 1 & 6 intersection in which to plant trees. One alternative for defining and formalizing the edge of the street may be through the use of bollards that may also be used to illuminate the sidewalk. To be effective the City must first undertake to accomplish the following tasks:

Overhead utilities should be buried. This is easier said than done and would potentially be very expensive. The City could pool funding from its own coffers and perhaps enact a special assessment of the Riverside Drive properties.

Structural elements, such as sidewalks, street signs and landscaping should be regularized along South Riverside Drive.

Streetlights should be standardized along the corridor (see section on Public Amenities).

figure 32. The ideal tree-defined street edge.

figure 33. This street edge is defined by bollards and posts. A strong line is established by simple elements set in series.
Design Guidelines

Sign Standards

Iowa City's current sign regulations contained in the Zoning Chapter are similar to those found in example Gateway Corridor design guidelines. Some of them allow sign heights and surface areas in excess of those contained in the Iowa City regulations. The one specific recommendation we can make is to encourage the use of combined signs. A few survey respondents said there are too many signs on Riverside.

Lighting Standards

Poles and fixtures should be finished to blend with other materials consistent with the architecture guidelines. Maximum height requirements can be discussed if there is a perceived need to do so.

Only down-directed, full cut-off fixtures should be used. This restricts light trespass onto adjacent properties and into the sky.

Site lighting should be directed downward onto vegetation or prominent site features.

Externally lit signage should be encouraged, provided the light source is shielded from view of cars and passersby.
Conclusion

We would like to stress again that the example guidelines contained in this study are based on what we learned from the survey and what other municipalities have done to improve the appearances of their entry corridors. Final guidelines should follow from a series of workshops involving affected and potentially affected parties. Because order, complexity, coherence and meaning are the key elements of a pleasant aesthetic experience and the creation of a “sense of place,” local government has to coordinate efforts to achieve the desired outcome. Design controls, such as appearance codes and design review processes, are intended “to control individual acts for the good of the community.” In fact, U.S. courts consider that aesthetics alone is “an adequate basis for public controls” (Nasar, 1994, 378). Nasar goes on to argue that though differences in tastes may “preclude the development of such guidelines,” there is sufficient evidence to suggest that “commonalities in architectural preferences” do exist. This is so because certain kinds of visual features stimulate a response in people, generally (378). Thus, the role of planners and others in the preparation of appearance codes should not be discounted as futile and impossible. As long as the design guidelines are tailored to the sensibilities of the specified public, they should find acceptance by the majority. In an effort to achieve the objective, specific information with respect to physical attributes, meanings and preferences must be assembled first. Such information would inform the choice of relevant styles and physical characteristics that are meaningful to the affected public (Nasar, 1997, 187).
Section 4: Facade and Landscaping Improvement Program

Purpose

The purpose of the design guidelines attached to the concept of a Gateway District Overlay zone is to achieve improvements in aesthetics as Gateway-designated areas redevelop. The timeframe for redevelopment could stretch into decades, which makes it essential to spur more immediate change.

It is unrealistic to expect property owners to undertake improvements simply because an overlay zone is established, which is why it is incumbent upon the City to lead the way by investing in the Riverside Corridor and by providing incentives for property owners to do the same.

An incentive program can take a number of shapes but it has to have three basic elements at its heart: design assistance, a program of improvement loans or grants, and an area to target. South Riverside Drive, from Myrtle Avenue at the north end to Highways 1 and 6 at the south end is the target area.

There are twenty-five businesses fronting this corridor and four fronting on intersecting Benton Street between the Iowa River to the east and Orchard Street to the west. Five businesses front onto Orchard and should be included as eligible properties in an improvement assistance program since they face a residential area.

Many of the cities whose improvement programs we researched (Lincoln, Nebraska; Columbus, Ohio; Stockton, California; Lima, Ohio; Evanston, Illinois) used Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) money to fund either low-interest loan or grant programs. A discussion with Iowa City Housing Planner Steve Long indicated that the City would likely be disinclined to direct any CDBG funds toward a program of this type, especially since the area in question is not financially distressed and does not serve a predominantly low-income clientele.

Iowa City has a few options in this case:

Earmark capital improvement funds for the South Riverside Gateway District, allocating some portion of that for a low-interest loan program;

Establish a loan program out of the general fund;

Establish a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district in which property taxes on the added
value of improvements are earmarked for physical improvements within the district; or

Persuade business and property owners to participate in a business association and establish a self-regulated Business Improvement District (BID) in which improvement and maintenance funds are collected by the City through a special real estate assessment and dispersed on a regular basis.

One may note that the options above increase in complexity from simple loan programs to programs demanding successively greater levels of personal investment on the part of the business community. For any improvements to “take hold” and be self-perpetuating, the involvement of the businesspeople in the area is essential. Their involvement will have the advantage of creating a feeling of commitment to the corridor, motivating proprietors and managers to take greater care in its appearance and to begin promoting it as a destination in itself rather than simply a conduit for traffic.

A Facade and Landscaping Improvement Program should define a clear set of goals: economic goals to entice the business community and aesthetic goals to persuade citizens that it is worth directing some of their tax dollars into the district. The Lincoln, Nebraska program contained a set of Program Goals applicable to South Riverside:

- Improve and enhance the visual quality of buildings and landscaping.
- Increase or maintain the district’s role as a major commercial activity center in the Iowa City area.
- Provide for the creation or expansion of retailing and other commercial activities.
- Increase the market value and demand for commercial properties in the South Riverside Gateway District, resulting in economic growth and an increased property tax base.

The loan program should direct itself toward specific types of improvements; specifically, those that can enhance aesthetic qualities without the need to redevelop properties.

The following lists are recommended target areas for a facade and landscaping improvement program.

**Facades**

- Entranceways
- Window replacement or enhancement
- Facade material replacement or enhancement, including the addition of architectural details
- Canopy/awning replacement
- Facade painting
Masonry cleaning and repair

Landscaping

Addition of landscaped islands and planting strips in parking areas fronting South Riverside, Orchard or Benton between Orchard and the Iowa River.

Sidewalk/pedestrian access improvements

Light fixtures replacement or improvements

Ineligible Improvements

The following items are ineligible because they are taken to be a matter of course in maintaining compliance with the building safety code or in the regular operational improvements made to any business:

Signage

Major structural improvements

Interior remodeling

Roof repair

Based on survey responses and extrapolations from specifically named properties, a table of notably deficient

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>place</th>
<th>address</th>
<th>type of improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly's Auto Center</td>
<td>510 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kum &amp; Go</td>
<td>513 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungry Hobo/Wedge</td>
<td>517 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy Queen</td>
<td>526 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claim to Frame</td>
<td>527 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domino's</td>
<td>529 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valvoline Quick Lube</td>
<td>600 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Muffler &amp; Brake</td>
<td>606 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartwig Dodge</td>
<td>629 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linder Tire Service</td>
<td>632 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Muffler</td>
<td>708 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breugger's Bagel Bakery</td>
<td>715 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinclair</td>
<td>731 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc's Amoco</td>
<td>801 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonalds</td>
<td>804 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowerama</td>
<td>817 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payless Shoe Source</td>
<td>820 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground Round</td>
<td>830 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuffy Auto Service</td>
<td>909 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Reilly's Auto Parts</td>
<td>915 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco Outlet</td>
<td>923 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zio Johno's Spaghetti House</td>
<td>953 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panchero's</td>
<td>965 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mister Money</td>
<td>1025 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JoAnne Fabrics &amp; Crafts</td>
<td>1029 Riverside Drive</td>
<td>(\times)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
target properties was compiled (table 2), but a more comprehensive and detailed list may be necessary for use in implementing a loan fund and as a guide for staff providing design assistance.

Eligibility

Only property owners are eligible applicants. Tenants who wish to make improvements must enter into a separate agreement with owners to apply for a loan. The property owner must sign the loan application and only that person may enter into a loan agreement with the City.

Only those applicants who can provide matching funds and can prove capability and commitment to provide matching funds are eligible.

Application Process

Consideration for financial assistance will only happen if an application is submitted along with the following materials:

A design plan of sufficient graphic and/or textual detail to demonstrate program compliance.

Contractor bids or quotes for all proposed work.

Demonstration of financial capability.

Legal description of the property and legal name of property owner to be used to secure the loan.

Following this a loan committee will review the application and accept or reject it according to a set of evaluation criteria, which may include the following:

A comprehensive project that addresses all aspects of the design guidelines.

Significant improvement to the appearance of the building and surrounding area.

The level of investment being made.

Improvement of safe structures in sound condition.

Collective participation of adjacent property owners/tenants in improving several facades or landscaped areas.

Willingness to hire disadvantaged, minority- and female-owned businesses.

The committee may remand any applications deficient in design quality to the staff member assigned to
provide architectural design assistance, although all applicants should be strongly urged to take advantage of this service before applying so as to avoid preparing complete sets of drawings that may be rejected.

The loan committee ought to include a planning staff member, the economic development coordinator, the representative of a local business association and perhaps a resident from the vicinity of South Riverside Drive. The committee should meet on a regular basis during the lifetime of the program.

Facade and Landscaping Design Assistance

This part of the loan program is designed to encourage applicants to make use of professional designers or architects by offering reimbursement of design fees up to 10 percent of the total project costs. A separate application for this assistance should be filed within the six months prior to submitting a Facade and Landscaping Improvement Loan application.

In this program, the City reimburses the applicant for design fees as a means of encouraging the use of professional designers or architects.

Borrowers would not be reimbursed for design costs until facade or landscaping improvements are at least 50 percent complete. Applicants who do not receive a loan are not eligible for design cost reimbursement.

Limited design assistance should be available in the form of a qualified planning staff member who is available to advise applicants on the elements of design they should be concentrating on and to suggest design details. If staff involvement exceeds a predetermined number of hours (perhaps one workday total), the applicant should be assessed an administrative fee at least equal to the hourly wage (salary / 360 days / 8 hours) for each hour beyond the limit.

Maintenance

If the applicant receives funds from the City for improvements, he or she is also agreeing to maintain the improvements in good repair for a period equal to the repayment period. Under the “good neighbor agreement” provision of Chapter 15A of the Iowa Code, when assistance is provided on a competitive basis, anyone willing to enter into the agreement receives extra consideration. “A good neighbor agreement is an enforceable contract between the business and a community group or coalition of community groups which requires the business to adhere to negotiated environmental, economic, labor,
or other social and community standards” (Iowa Code 15A.4).

Repayment

Loan repayment should begin no sooner that 12 months from the initial loan agreement or 60 days after the last loan disbursement, whichever comes first. The loan term should be determined by the size and scope of the project and the borrower's ability to generate cash flow for repayment.

Loan Forgiveness

Some percentage of the loan amount should be forgiven if the borrower maintains the improvements in a satisfactory manner and is timely with repayments. Higher forgiveness percentages may be offered in exchange for an agreement on the part of the borrower to maintain the improvements in good condition for a period beyond the amortization of the loan, although that may pose some enforcement problems.
Section 5: Public Amenities

"Design schemes for city entry points constitute just one of an array of techniques used...to encourage visual continuity in...entryways" (Bishop 14). Public art is an element used to achieve coherence in appearance and to convey particular significance to a particular location or area. It provides a focal point to which the traveler can connect and ascribe meaning.

Planners and others involved in urban development have used municipal art as an important and even essential aspect since the 1890s (Hodder 438). Public art was given federal support as early as the 1930s during the New Deal era, and, in particular, through the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project. The subsequent creation of conventions, art councils, agencies, and programs has carved out a place for public art in American culture. In fact, a requirement that “one percent of...capital investment be spent on art became a feature of many cities' programs” (Blair et al. 222).

During the 1980s and 1990s, the interest in public art was further invigorated as the industrial structure of the economy at the local, state and national levels gave way to a more service-oriented form in which tourism development has assumed importance. As a result, public art has shifted upwards in significance from a merely desirable amenity to an essential one. In essence, displays of public art contribute to the shape and historic meaning of places and so assist in the creation of a sense of place.

The Gateway Arch

The train trestle passing over Riverside Drive just north of Hartwig Motors has been in a state of deterioration for a long time. The paint is rusted away in large patches and the tops of the concrete supports are crumbling. Kevin Hartwig told us that years ago he
offered to buy the paint if the Cedar Rapids and Iowa City Railway Company would do the restoration work. They turned him down. One thing that can immediately improve the appearance of South Riverside Drive would be a simple layer of paint on this bridge. A sign welcoming travelers to Iowa City could also be added. A more expensive, but potentially more impressive and memorable, would be the construction of a gateway arch.

Arches have served both civic and spiritual roles throughout their history. In either case their role is symbolic.

The purpose of an arch on Riverside Drive would be to let people know than they have arrived in Iowa City. Although the corporate boundary lies much further south on Riverside, the density of development is relatively sparse until one reaches the intersection of highways 1 and 6. As one passes under the train bridge a new vista opens up that takes in the southern edge of the University of Iowa campus and the hill occupied by downtown Iowa City. An archway placed just south of the overpass with a sign welcoming travelers will reinforce the effect of passage, entrance, and arrival.

Figure 36. A possible archway design. We believe the most suitable design is one that is evocative of the practical industrial design of the Iowa Interstate Railroad overpass while being stately and better proportioned. Whatever message is spelled out on the arch should be made of copper so that they develop a patina over time that will contrast nicely with the rust of the overpass.
Public Clock

Nowhere along Riverside Drive can a person without a watch find out what time it is. A public clock (figure 37) would make a useful addition to the corridor. It should be visible from the bus stop in front of McDonalds and to drivers on Riverside and the highway. A four-faced clock on the northwest corner of Riverside and Highways 1 and 6 might be a good location, especially if it combines a sign welcoming travelers to the South Riverside Drive Gateway District.

Streetlights

“Since the business buildings are so diverse in architectural style, the streetscape will need to play a stronger role in creating visual coherence” (Iowa Avenue Streetscape Plan, 1998, 4).

As mentioned in the Design Guidelines section, a row of trees would be a pleasant method of defining the street edge, but the constraint on South Riverside Drive is the narrow right-of-way which may allow for the installation of new streetlights to replace the cobrahead, pole-mounted lights currently in place. To effectively define a street edge, though, the light posts need to be evenly spaced in a regular series; the new light posts along Iowa Avenue are spaced approximately 20-25 feet apart. The density or spacing of streetlights has to conform, however, to existing curb cuts, which in some sections means that the spacing will be intermittent at best.

The authors of the Iowa City Northside Marketplace Plan recommended visually tying the area to the Iowa Avenue streetscape project by utilizing that same streetlight design. With modifications to accommodate necessary highway clearance (figure 38), the same hardware can be used in the Riverside Drive area. This redundancy would allow the City to keep a smaller number of different replacement parts on hand.
Banners

Whether or not the City invests in new light posts to line Riverside, the addition of district-identifying banners on fixtures would be a minor but highly visible demonstration of the City's commitment to improve the appearance of the corridor. A suggested banner design appears on the cover of this report and is replicated here. The blue wave symbolizes the Iowa River. The text of the sign identifies South Riverside Drive.

figure 38. South Riverside Drive streetlight concept.
Bollards

To compensate for a potentially sparse distribution of streetlights, bollards can be employed to fill in the gaps and further define a street edge. In addition, they signal a change from one transport zone to another. That is, they signal to drivers that a pedestrian area exists on the opposite side of the bollards. To pedestrians they may impart a greater feeling of security when they walk along South Riverside because bollards so clearly separate the two modes of transportation. Lighted bollards may also be employed to illuminate walkways for the benefit of pedestrians and to illuminate pedestrians for the benefit of drivers.

*Figure 39.* A few types of street bollards. The style should in some way try to achieve some desired effect. What that may be is a matter for a public-private design charette to decide.
Conclusions

Overview

The challenge of transforming the character of South Riverside Drive may at first appear to be daunting. But we may take courage and assurance from knowing that 81 percent of cities across the USA engage in some form of design guidance in an effort to create livable places that are appreciated by their residents and visitors, alike. Indeed, the efforts represented in this study confirm the City’s thoughts that the area is ripe for change, and so steps should be taken now to build on the interest stirred among owners, patrons and residents by these two researchers over the first quarter of 2002. Failure to do so could result in the growth of apathy among concerned parties, and disillusionment with City authorities.

Our research has revealed that there can be agreement on a set of priorities to achieve aesthetic modifications and, finally, transformation of the Corridor. Examples of preferences in terms of style and finish of buildings and streetscapes were identified, and there is evidence that some business owners are willing to cooperate in the process of change as long as incentives are found agreeable. In other words, a window of opportunity seems to be open.

Our recommendations have been thoughtfully presented with much consideration given to the peculiarities of the study area, even though we believe that they could have broader applicability with minor adjustments. We believe also that they constitute a foundation upon which future efforts can be launched since our goal has been to improve the quality of life experience for those using the Corridor, particularly as it pertains to the visual quality of the built environment.

Moreover, since creating policies and programs, along with building consensus, are all important aspects of effecting physical change within a community, we have identified a role for the City in the process. Besides efforts to dispel scepticism through taking the initiative to make meaningful personal contacts with owners, the City could advance the process through building consensus on the range of construction materials and finishes that would be an asset to the area, and educate owners about a range of reasonable and possible incentives, around which their cooperative efforts could be centered. This leads us to consider the possible direction of future research efforts.

Direction of Future Research

Future research could aid the process of aesthetic change by providing comparative costing of materials for different finishes as well as finding or developing economic incentives that create a win-win situation for owners and the City as a whole. In addition, market
research into the demand for neighborhood-oriented businesses, such as a grocery store, coffee shop, pharmacy, video rental, and household hardware, would be an appropriate precursor to considering stimulating a change in business mix through the establishment of an overlay zone. Since we heard an interest expressed in the erection of accessory apartments above ground-level business operations during our survey, the market research may also be extended to ascertain the level of demand for such housing in the Corridor, bearing in mind that the area is a walkable distance from the University and other downtown businesses. It may also be that the presence of such apartments could act as a catalyst for the establishment of more neighborhood-oriented businesses, which some residents of the neighborhood abutting South Riverside Drive would greatly appreciate.
Appendix A:

Methodology of the Survey

Since the community of businesses, property owners, workers, patrons and nearby residents would be among the persons most affected by any aesthetic changes to the Corridor, we thought it necessary to carry out a survey to ascertain:

a. What they think of its current appearance and if they desired a change;

b. If there are any building designs or streetscapes elsewhere in the city that are preferred;

c. What aspects of change are deemed most needed;

d. What incentives are desired from the city by businesses and property owners in order to secure their support and involvement; and

e. If business and property owners desire to take an active part in planning and overseeing the beautification of the Corridor as part of an association.

We surveyed all the business and property owners without exception, but a sampling process was developed to survey patrons and residents of the adjacent neighborhoods, which included Miller-Orchard and the Myrtle Avenue area. Approximately 310 households were in those neighborhoods and since the location of each household could be directly traced to a particular roadway, we developed a stratified method of random sampling to choose the thirty-one households to be surveyed. This method ensured two things: the random selection of households, and a fair distribution of the households selected as the number of households living on each street was weighted against the overall number.

Sampling patrons of businesses was a bit less straightforward because no finite number of patrons was available. Consequently, the businesses on the Corridor, when in active operation, were used as the choice set from which locations were randomly chosen to conduct surveys. In order to reduce bias as much as possible in the administration of the survey, we obtained a cross-sectional representation of patrons based on three times periods of their use of the businesses’ services: morning (9:00 to noon), afternoon (2:00 to 5:00), and night (8:00 to 11:00). Six surveys were administered in each time period at the randomly chosen locations out of those actively engaged in business during the particular time period. The surveyed patrons were selected on a first-one-willing-to-respond basis. This method of selection was used because of the lack of control the researchers had.
over the population of patrons of the Corridor, and because it was considered that it generated minimal bias in the survey outcome.

**Response to Survey**

Of the 96 persons surveyed (see inserts below), there was a disappointingly low response (20%) from business and property owners. However, the response from patrons and neighborhood residents was 100% and 79%, respectively. This outcome did not hinder these researchers from being able to distinguish the views of owners in the presentation of the findings since their results were reported and used separately at various stages of the analysis. In addition, questions 10 through 15 were particularly targeted to business and property owners. The findings that follow indicate that owners and the other respondents did not differ significantly from each other as to what each group perceived as most in need of improvement.
Appendix B

Example of the Survey Tool

Questionnaire

South Riverside Drive Commercial Corridor

This survey is intended to measure opinion on the appearance of the South Riverside Drive Commercial Corridor. A street's appearance is made up of several elements: landscaping, building design, signs and features such as benches, lighting and utilities. The Coralville Strip may be a useful model to keep in mind.

1. Considering South Riverside Drive as an entryway to Iowa City, how do you think it shapes visitors' first impressions of the town?

2. What parts of South Riverside Drive look best to you?

3. What parts of South Riverside Drive look worst to you?

4. Of these things, which need to be addressed most of all?

5. Are there buildings in Iowa City or surrounding communities whose designs you generally admire and think either suitable for your business or would like to see in the Corridor? Name three (3) if you can.
6. What is it about them you like?

7. What streets in the Iowa City area have an appearance that's appealing to you and you would like to see repeated in South Riverside Drive?

8. What do you think of the landscaping along South Riverside?

9. Outside of landscaping, what changes in the physical environment are most needed to improve the appearance of South Riverside?

Suppose the City of Iowa City was interested in seeing physical changes to the Corridor and decided to offer incentive programs to encourage property and business owners to make landscaping or storefront improvements to properties—please indicate if you would be favorable to the following incentive programs:

10. A low- or zero-interest loan program that requires matching funds from the applicant (please circle one).

   yes
   maybe
   not really
   no

11. A grant program that requires some matching funds from the applicant (please circle one).

   yes
   maybe
   not really
   no

12. A Tax Increment Financing District in which property taxes on the added value of improvements in the designated district are earmarked for physical improvements (please circle one).

   yes
   maybe
   not really
   no
13. A self-regulated **Business Improvement District** in which improvement and maintenance funds are collected by the City through a special real estate assessment and dispersed for you to use where you think it's most needed. This would be part of establishing an identity for the South Riverside commercial district (please circle one).

   yes \hspace{1cm} maybe \hspace{1cm} not really \hspace{1cm} no

14. What do you think would be the best targets of any such incentive program?

   ☐ Landscaping \hspace{1cm} ☐ Building appearance (façade) \hspace{1cm} ☐ Sidewalks
   ☐ Outdoor seating \hspace{1cm} ☐ Trash bins \hspace{1cm} ☐ Public art
   ☐ Street lighting \hspace{1cm} ☐ Burying utility lines \hspace{1cm} ☐ Banners

   Any other things you can think of?

15. What are your thoughts on participating in a business association directed toward maintaining the competitiveness and attractiveness of the South Riverside Commercial Corridor?

Questions or comments? Please contact John Adam or John Maxwell in the Urban Planning Department at (319) 335-0033.

If you have questions about the purpose of this questionnaire, please contact either Dr. Kelly Clifton in the Urban Planning Department at (319) 335-0033 between 9 AM and 5 PM weekdays, or Associate Planner Karen Howard at the Iowa City Department of Planning and Community Development at 356-5230 between 9 AM and 5 PM weekdays.
Appendix C:

Further Findings from a Review of Planning and Development Literature

The literature on environmental aesthetics, particularly as it relates to the environment created by human design, is divided into two areas of study: formal and symbolic aesthetics. Formal aesthetics emphasizes the structure of forms, such as buildings, and symbolic aesthetics focuses on the human responses to the content or meaning of forms (Lang 11). Some primary attributes of formal aesthetics are shape, proportion, rhythm, color, scale, illumination, shadowing, composition, spatial relations, complexity, hierarchy, order, ambiguity, incongruity, surprise and novelty. Philosophers, psychologists, and geographers have made significant contributions to the understanding of aesthetics and its role in human experience, and that their work has served to complement that of architects and planners.

Importance to Human Experience and Response

Human beings have been consistently evaluating their surroundings on the basis of such attributes as pleasing, delightful, beautiful and interesting. Aesthetic factors are also known to influence “judgments of community satisfaction” (Nasar, 1997, 155). Although, it is believed that aesthetics is a qualitative and subjective matter, there is little disagreement that it affects attitudes toward places and how much time is spent in a particular location. An aesthetic experience is described as the interaction between the physical environment and human perception (Isaacs). These experiences vary in degree according to dimensions of unity or coherence, complexity and intensity (Isaacs). It is suggested that people seek an optimal level of stimulation in their environments. However, over-stimulation may lead to coping responses such as “ignoring environmental cues”, while boredom may result from under-stimulation. Thus, a balance between complexity on the one hand and coherence and order on the other is suggested as necessary to achieve an aesthetically pleasing environment. Furthermore, since the aesthetic response is fashioned by culture and experience, it is instructive that aesthetic design be tailored to the sensibilities of those for whom it is primarily designed by keeping it in a familiar (i.e., cultural and historic) context (Isaacs). Elements, therefore, ought to be purposeful, leaning on the side of the popular as opposed to avant-garde or ‘high’ styles. At the same time, an effort ought to be made to reduce “artificial nuisances” such as “traffic, dilapidation, litter, billboards, poles, wires and incompatible land uses” (Nasar, 1994, 397).
Sense of Place

Human beings develop conceptualizations and meanings in relation to their environment, and aesthetic design translates those meanings into a response. The theory can be taken a step further by recognizing that the response either does or does not validate a sense of place to the affected party. This is so because 'place' has been defined as having "three, interlocking components: physical attributes, activities, and conceptualizations or meanings" (Groat & Després 45). In order to fully develop a psychological theory, it is necessary to integrate meanings into a framework of physical attributes and activities. Historically, human beings have assigned particular types of activities to particular types of places, and so, the view is held that personal, social and cultural understanding and values interact with physical attributes of a place to yield a location-specific experience, which may be termed a "sense of place" (Cantor 116-7). As a consequence, it is important to solicit the views of a cross-section of a community of affected persons, and combine such knowledge with an understanding of the cultural and historical significance of the particular location and/or the significance of the particular location in the cultural and historical context of its larger region, such as the city, county, state or nation. We may therefore draw the conclusion that the creation of a sense of place is more than simply making a place or district look more beautiful. A sense of place is a confluence of attractive structures and surroundings, activities and meanings that reflect shared social and cultural values. This is one reason why a community-based approach is advocated to achieve effective and desirable changes to the environment (Maguire et al. 318, 322).

Pedestrian Amenities

It has been argued that "necessary activities will occur regardless of the quality of the environment" but optional activities occur "only when the environmental quality is good, and will continue for longer duration when the quality of the environment is better." Furthermore, one could expect the increase in optional activities to result with an increase of social activities, in which pedestrian activity would be centered (Isaacs). Such a theory has motivated a surge of interest in pedestrian-oriented streetscape designs in urban areas during the last two decades. Such designs have been highly recommended for encouraging "visual continuity in... [civic] entryways" (Bishop 14). The desire to remain in and to return to a place is influenced by the comfort and stimulation experienced there. Studies of shopping areas reveal that the appeal of an area is not only dependent on its general maintenance but the presence of furnishings. They are an important motivator to explore the street environment along with other factors, such as signs, awnings and the presence of people (Zacharias 13). In addition, the "qualities of artificial lighting in pedestrian areas can have a significant effect on the willingness of people to walk in public areas after sunset" because
they greatly influence the viewer’s perception of the friendliness of these areas (11). Moreover, creatively landscaped open spaces, provided with seating and focal points encourage walking, strolling, and scrutinizing, and so encourage visual exploration (Rapoport 89). Notwithstanding, coordination and suitability are two important considerations to bear in mind when deciding which amenities should be provided. Suitability is concerned with the “functional ties among amenities” and its assessment involves evaluating how coordinated or linked the pattern of their use would be. Consequently, the functional and aesthetic characteristics of amenities require contemplation of scale, materials, fixtures, and quantity, in addition to suitability (Shirvani 36).

**Design Review Process**

The proponents of design review argue that it invites a wide range of views as it promotes the creative application of design principles, sets guidelines or principles, and employs a process that seeks consensus and accommodation through collaboration (Hinshaw 4). Though the arguments in favor of design review are plausible and strong, it should also be remembered that the design review process is more costly to the developer, particularly in terms of time, since the process usually involves the convening of more than one public meeting. The lengthy approval process could result in higher development costs (Bishop, p.30). Such could discourage new investment and delay the process of desired change.

Furthermore, the design review process requires specific authority ceded to the local government by the state government. The absence of such enabling authority may draw the judiciary to apply the scope of ‘Dillon’s Rule’ to a local government if there is a challenge, as occurred in *Merriam v. Moody’s Executors*, 25 Iowa 163, 170(1868) (Blaesser 301). However, 78 percent of cities across the USA have established some kind of design review process, with an additional 3 percent engaged in some other form of design guidance (George and Campbell, 1993).

**Aesthetic Legislation Concerns**

Though “there is growing evidence that aesthetic regulations can help a city economically” (Duerksen, p.2), and courts have accorded credence and efficacy in the development of such regulations since the landmark case *Berman v. Parker*, 348 U.S. 26, in 1954, a number of pitfalls in the drafting of legislation has introduced an air of caution. The judiciary has ruled that certain characteristics constitute ‘bad’ legislation and so it is important to avoid them if the legislation is not to be struck down. To avoid such an outcome, cities are directed to follow these recommendations:

1. Guidelines should be clear and sufficiently precise to all parties so that what is being requested is unambiguous and so leads to “fair and consistent decisions” (Blaesser, p.306);
2. Terms used should be “commonly understood”, with words sufficiently technical to be understood by design professionals. To this end, words must have a “settled meaning” based on usage and custom—what the court refers to as ‘common law’ meaning (Anderson v. Issaquah, 851 Wash. Ct. App. 744 P. 2d, 1993);

3. Clear standards should be “articulated” and “published” in advance of their use; it would be unreasonable to expect applicants to pay for repetitive revisions of plans if standards are not succinct and made available to the public (Hinshaw, p.9); in other words, guidelines cannot be arbitrary in their prescriptions; and the possibility for negotiating variances must exist while still maintaining the objective of the regulation;

4. Standards should be supplemented with visual aids in order to reduce uncertainty as to what is required (Erickson 16);

5. There should be a “consistent character within the geographic vicinity of the subject site to make a limitation [in design] reasonable” (Hawkins v. Rockleigh, 55 N.J. Super. 132, 150A. 2d 63, 1959); and

6. Guidelines should be backed with policies that are adopted by the legislature. In fact, the “initial portions of a document containing guidelines should refer to relevant policy provisions” (Hinshaw 21).

Sign Regulations

Our primary source in this area is a Planning Advisory Service Report by Eric Kelly called Sign Regulation for Small and Midsize Communities. Many communities have won challenges to sign ordinances that are based only on an aesthetic desire to reduce visual clutter, but it’s best not to rely too much on that precedent. The material in this PAS Report advises on a number of regulatory topics that, if not handled correctly, can lead to trouble for a municipality. The heights, locations and numbers of signs are individually relatable to the health, safety and general welfare of the community. Colors, materials and lighting are somewhat less so and are often regulated only in exclusive communities that have the political will to regulate in such minute detail. With respect to signs on premises, no attempt should be made to regulate content generally, but reasonable restrictions may be applied with respect to size, shape and location. If content is regulated, the regulation should be administered fairly, otherwise the regulation runs the risk of being struck down (Metromedia v. City of San Diego, 453 U.S. 490, 1981).
Sign size and height should be intimately tied to lot footage, building frontage, building height and speed of the street where the business is located. In New Orleans the sign regulations for gateway corridors limit signs to seventy square feet in area and twenty-five feet in height, or the height of the business, whichever is lower (Duerksen 21). The problem of nonconforming signs left in a rezoned area is often handled by giving the sign owners a grace period roughly equivalent to the amortization or write-off period for sign purchases (usually five years) before they are obliged to bring their signs up to code.

Financial Incentives for Façade and Landscaping Improvements

Different tools for enticing businesses into making improvements include extending low- or zero-interest loans or making grants to qualified businesses. Often these monies are available only in target areas: historic districts, business improvement districts, enterprise zones, and the like. The objective in most of the cities we've investigated is virtually the same as ours in Iowa City: to target a specific area and improve its appearance to benefit both the businesses and the community.

Lincoln, Nebraska offered design assistance loans equal to ten percent of the total cost of the improvements along with a CDBG-funded improvement loan for half of the project costs up to 25,000 dollars. Design assistance is offered to ensure that projects meet the design criteria tied to the improvement program. While the use of CDBG funds is intended primarily for low-income housing and commercial development, there may be some percentage available for non-low-income programs. Columbus' program offered up to $3000 in cash grants provided the applicant provides dollar-for-dollar matching funds. Lima, Ohio's program, while directed at rehabilitation of its historic downtown, provides direction in its additional incentives for going beyond the most minor façade treatments. Each item beyond the essential upgrades is awarded points toward additional funding that does not need to be matched by the applicant.

The utility of these examples to our project is straightforward. They give us a guide as to what kinds of financing sources are available, what forms incentive for businesses can take, and ways to target specific areas.
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South Riverside Drive Gateway Corridor Plan

Appendix C-6