

ORDINANCE NO. 2023-091

AN ORDINANCE ADOPTING CHANGES TO THE DESIGN GUIDELINES AND PART ELEVEN - PLANNING AND ZONING CODE, AND DECLARING AN EMERGENCY.

WHEREAS, the City of Kent has previously adopted design guidelines for all new construction, structural or cosmetic modifications to a building's exterior, and all permanent signs not in the public right-of-way that are located within the "Downtown / West River Overlay District"; and

WHEREAS, the changes to the design guidelines address the numerous comments received from the public and members of various boards and committees throughout the three (3) phases of the update to the design guidelines process; and

WHEREAS, the new design guidelines will be used to encourage and promote the design of buildings through recommendations to building owners and tenants of commercial spaces located in the "Downtown / West River Overlay District".

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED by the Council of the City of Kent, Portage County, Ohio:

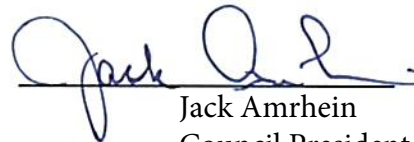
SECTION 1. That the proposed City of Kent Design Guidelines, revised on October 15, 2023, a copy of which is attached hereto as Exhibit "A", and made a part hereof, is hereby adopted as supplemental recommendations only to the "PART ELEVEN – PLANNING AND ZONING CODE.

SECTION 2. That all existing ordinances which are in conflict with the provisions of this ordinance are hereby REPEALED. Specifically, Appendix A and Appendix B of PART ELEVEN – PLANNING AND ZONING CODE and any reference thereto in the Kent Codified Ordinances are REPEALED.

SECTION 3. That it is found and determined that all formal actions of this Council concerning and relating to the adoption of this Ordinance were adopted in an open meeting of this Council and that all deliberations of this Council, and of any of its committees that resulted in such formal action, were in meetings open to the public in compliance with all legal requirements of Section 121.22 of the Ohio Revised Code.

SECTION 4. That this Ordinance is hereby declared to be an emergency measure necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, safety and welfare of the residents of this City, for which reason and other reasons manifest to this Council, this Ordinance is hereby declared to be an emergency measure and shall take effect and be in force immediately after passage.

PASSED: December 20, 2023
Date


Jack Amrhein

Council President Pro Tem

EFFECTIVE: December 20, 2023
Date

ATTEST: Amy Wilkens
Amy Wilkens, CMC
Clerk of Council

I, AMY WILKENS, CLERK OF COUNCIL FOR THE CITY OF KENT, COUNTY OF PORTAGE, AND STATE OF OHIO, AND IN WHOSE CUSTODY THE ORIGINAL FILES AND RECORDS OF SAID COUNCIL ARE REQUIRED TO BE KEPT BY THE LAWS OF THE STATE OF OHIO, HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE FOREGOING IS A TRUE AND EXACT COPY OF ORDINANCE No. 1023-091, ADOPTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF KENT ON December 20, 2023.

(SEAL)

Amy Wilkens
AMY WILKENS, CMC
CLERK OF COUNCIL



City of Kent, OH

DRAFT Design Guidelines

Revised 10/15/2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Glossary of Terms	3-4
Introduction.....	5-7
1.0 Site Design	8-9
2.0 Building Design	10-19
3.0 Signs.....	20-23



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The terms included here are terms that are referenced in these Design Guidelines. For terms that are not included here, refer to the City of Kent's Planning and Zoning Code, Chapter 2—Definitions.

1. **Activate or Activation.** The portion of a building or site designated for use by activities that engage with the pedestrian and the public realm that it abuts.
2. **Articulation.** See Façade Articulation.
3. **Building Massing.** The overall configuration of the major three-dimensional volumes, modules, or elements of an individual building and its facade. Such volumes, modules, or elements are generally defined by significant and recognizable changes in height, setback, or facade plane.
4. **Context/Contextual.** A building or design element that responds to social, cultural, and architectural stimuli as well as other elements in the built environment that may influence a site, structure, or building.
5. **Design Guidelines.** A set of design parameters for developments and building alterations that require design review. The guidelines, as design guidance, are adopted public statements of intent and are used to evaluate the acceptability of a project's design. Design guidelines help ensure that the design review process will result in advice and recommendations, which stay focused on Kent's set of aesthetic expectations for the projects being reviewed. Compliance with the guidelines is not mandatory.
6. **Façade.** The exterior face or wall surface of a building. While often associated with the front (or face) of a building, façades are typically those portions of a building's exterior that can be viewed from a public way or street.
7. **Façade Articulation.** Design elements that add texture, interest, depth and rhythm to the facade of a building, including horizontal and vertical projections, cornices, balcony rows, design patterns, awnings and canopies, as well as horizontal and vertical changes in material, color and/or finish.
8. **Human Scale.** The perception of a building and its parts based on proportions, scaling elements, and context-sensitive solutions that allow a human to reasonably interpret the design as relatable to the size of a person.
9. **Lintel.** A beam or other support at the top of a door or window. Most lintels are decorative and also provides structural support.
10. **Local Historic Property.** Any building, structure, site, or object which has special character or special archaeological, historic or aesthetic value as part of the development, heritage, archaeological or cultural characteristics of Kent, the State of Ohio or the United States and which has been designated as such pursuant to the provisions of Kent Codified Ordinance (KCO) Chapter 1393. (See Section 1393.06).

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

11. **Massing.** See Building Massing.
12. **Materiality.** The use of various materials or substances on a façade, balcony, window, or roof.
13. **Pedestrian Realm.** The portion of a public or private right-of-way dedicated to uses other than vehicle movement or parking. The pedestrian realm includes sidewalks, civic spaces, planting areas and other streetscape elements.
14. **Primary Street Façade.** A primary building façade is one that abuts and is visible from a primary street.
15. **Public Realm.** Areas within the right-of-way (including streets and sidewalks), parks, publicly owned open space, and publicly-accessible areas on private property, including off-street pedestrian connections. The public realm is that space occupied both in physical and visual terms by the public. It is created by such elements as the parts of the building that are visible from the street, the front yard, the sidewalk, street trees, lighting, and the street itself.
16. **Sign Band.** A horizontal band extending the full width of the building facade and located between the highest first floor windows and the cornice, or if there is more than one story, the highest first floor windows and the bottom of the second floor windows.
17. **Street Level.** The first story or level in a building or structure. Street level will generally be considered to be the story or level of a building or structure that interfaces directly with the public realm, including street level building frontages abutting streets, open spaces and off-street pedestrian connections, such as walkways and paths.
18. **Street Wall.** The vertical plane parallel to the street in which the front building facades of the majority of the buildings along a street are located.
19. **Texture.** The visual and tactile expressions of materials used in a building that is produced by how the given material is produced and how it is employed. See Materiality.
20. **Upper Stories.** The upper portion of a building that is above the street level façade.
21. **Visible Façade.** Any façade, which is not categorized as a primary street façade, but which is visible, in full or part, from the public realm.

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

The City of Kent Downtown/West River Overlay District (Overlay District) includes the majority of the Commercial-Downtown (C-D) Zoning District, and some commercial properties located in the Commercial High Density Multifamily-Residential (C-R), High Density Multifamily-Commercial (R-C), and Multifamily Residential (R-4) Zoning Districts located to the east and west of downtown, including along East Main Street, Gougler Avenue and North Mantua Street.

The primary area included in the Overlay District is the downtown Central Business District, which is a mixed-use pedestrian focused area. Its special character is defined by the quality of the “public realm” and its unique built environment that was a focal point of the downtown redevelopment that took place between 2010-2015. This document aims to encourage the level of design quality generated by new development, renovations to existing structures, including buildings designated as a local historic property, as defined in KCO Chapter 1393, and other physical improvements, are complementary and reflective of the unique nature of this area.

PURPOSE

The purpose of these Design Guidelines is to provide a comprehensive document articulating the level of design quality expected of public and private improvements within the Overlay District.

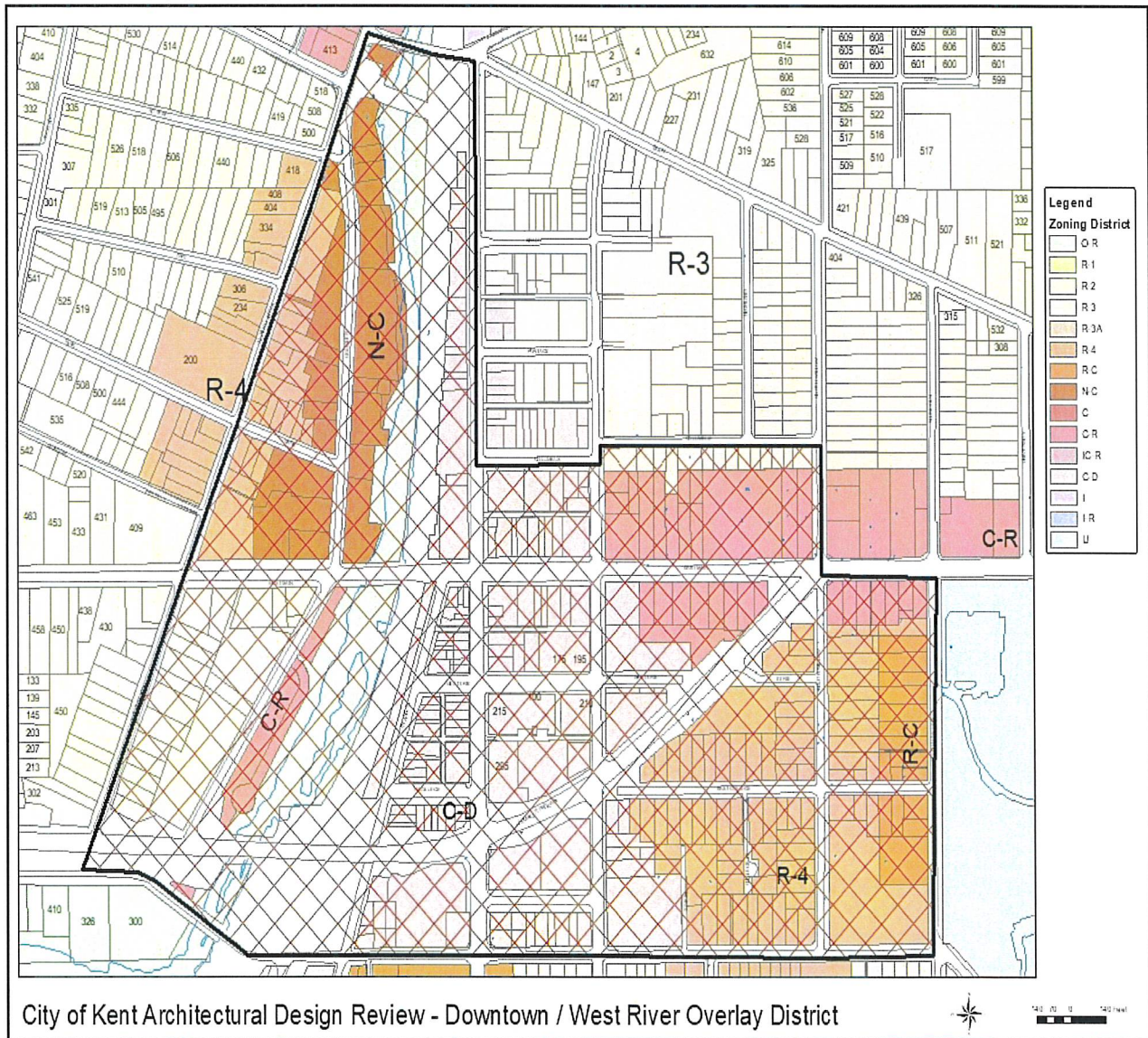
This document serves as the basis for evaluating commercial projects, including new construction, renovations to existing facades and signage within the Overlay District. The Design Guidelines will assist property owners with understanding the context of the built environment and design approach that applies within the Overlay District and helps owners when they are faced with decisions about alterations and new construction.

APPLICABILITY

The Design Guidelines are applicable to all new construction, exterior renovations, signage, and improvements of public and private commercial structures and buildings in the Overlay District (see Figure 1). In accordance with Section 1111.04(B)(4) of the City of Kent Zoning Code, the Design Guidelines do not apply to the new construction or renovation of owner-occupied residential properties. When applicable, this document also serves as the basis for the relevant findings of the Architectural Review Board (ARB).

INTRODUCTION

Figure 1. Downtown / West River Overlay



INTRODUCTION

GOALS

The success of downtown Kent is its focus on the pedestrian environment, retail vitality, indoor and outdoor experiences, and placemaking. To build on downtown Kent's successes and to support the purpose of the Design Guidelines, the following goals have been established for these Design Guidelines:

- Achieve good design to support ongoing economic vitality and sustain property values.
- Ensure that downtown Kent's unique visual identity is sustained to enhance downtown Kent's sense of place.
- Facilitate connectivity with Kent State University.
- Assist small business owners, commercial tenants, and developers operating within the Overlay District, with design guidance.
- Promote complementary design activities that can promote balance to the diversity of styles, character, and age of buildings.
- Acknowledge the presence and value of structures designated as a local historic property through the processes delineated in KCO Chapter 1393, and encourage owners of such properties to consider style and existing design elements when planning for exterior renovations.
- Educate the public about various aspects of good design.
- Make Kent a destination place for residents, visitors, and new businesses.



1. BUILDING PLACEMENT

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



- The “public realm” is the space that physically and visually is occupied by the public and includes areas of a building that are visible at the street level, sidewalks/walking paths, exterior lighting, both on private buildings and in the public right-of-way, street trees, landscaped spaces and the road itself, including on-street parking and crosswalks.
- The character of the “public realm” influences the design by taking into consideration the site and the character of the surroundings and takes precedence over individual structures or buildings. How buildings relate to the surrounding streets public spaces and amenities, as well as other buildings profoundly influences the pedestrian experience in the “public realm.”
- The pattern of buildings abutting the street and the sidewalk creates a well-defined edge, also known as a “street wall,” that frames streets and open spaces. The street wall provides a sense of spatial definition or enclosure for the pedestrian that creates a coherent pedestrian environment that reinforces and creates a sense of place while also making for a pleasant, comfortable, and safe pedestrian environment.
- Buildings should reflect architectural quality through design and the selection of materials/finishes that are based on the character of the surroundings, and not solely on the building itself.

1. BUILDING PLACEMENT

Intent Statements

- To orient primary building façades towards the street and the public realm
- To ensure engagement between building uses and the public realm
- To encourage additional open spaces for pedestrian & outdoor activities, such as outdoor dining
- To use the location of buildings to define & contain the street space to support pedestrian activity
- To use street corners to create a distinctive, attractive, & memorable sense of place



DESIGN GUIDELINES

- Locate public areas such as lobbies, retail and dining along building walls that abuts the street or pedestrian walk areas so that they are visible & accessible.
- At the intersection of two streets, the front facades on both streets should be sited to clearly define the corner & enhance a sense of street enclosure.
- To enhance the special nature of downtown streets with an appropriately composed & cohesive architectural presence that expresses the character of the area.

2. BUILDING DESIGN

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



- All sides of the building should be given design consideration, including the roof.
- Buildings that express the uses inside to the viewer outside are more comprehensible. Similarly, buildings that acknowledge the activity outside them are more integrated into the public realm.
- Buildings with durable and low-maintenance materials withstand the test of time.
- Creativity and design expression that is reflective of the services or products of the occupying business or tenant are encouraged.
- Architectural design is complex and should not promote a single style or be limited to specific features or details.
- Local historic properties, as defined by KCO Chapter 1393, are focal points of the downtown and add character and variety and their character and features should be respected when considering alterations.
- The character of a building's broader surroundings is important and needs as much consideration as the building itself.

2. BUILDING DESIGN

Intent Statements

- To encourage buildings that are complementary with their surroundings
- To ensure building massing supports a comfortable street level & pedestrian experience
- To create buildings that frame & define public streets, alleys, & urban, open spaces
- To design buildings that transition to adjacent areas by utilizing styles that are complementary
- Architectural variety in building design can occur, while still maintaining a sense of cohesion with its surroundings through the use of lighting and streetscape



DESIGN GUIDELINES

- Ground floor heights should provide a welcoming scale of 14 feet or greater.
- Use of structural bays, expressed columns, and window elements should be utilized to promote a pedestrian scale.
- Building massing should delineate & communicate the base, middle, & top of the building.
- Building massing should emphasize key building features such as primary entries.
- Building massing should promote a sense of human scale at the street level by distinguishing this level from the remainder of the building's stories.

2. BUILDING DESIGN



DESIGN GUIDELINES

- Contemporary architecture is encouraged when the design also incorporates some elements of traditional form and massing visible in other existing buildings in the surrounding area.
- Adaptive reuse involving the renovation of existing structures for a new use or purpose is strongly encouraged.
- A building's mass, scale, form, height, and floor-to-floor horizontal alignment can vary, but should not be in stark contrast to its surroundings. Consideration should be given to the surrounding context within approximately one block of the proposed development on both sides of the street.
- Street wall height may vary throughout the street and within each block to support architectural variety, but the height of the street wall should aim to align the established height along the majority of the block frontage.

2. BUILDING DESIGN

Intent Statements

- To further refine building form, massing and proportions through the use of facade details and design elements
- To promote well-detailed facade designs with texture and depth that provide a sense of human scale and generate visual interest
- To minimize blank or long expanses of wall at the street level and on the upper floors of buildings



DESIGN GUIDELINES

- Variation in the arrangement & placement of windows, doors, materials & design patterns should be used to emphasize building features, such as entries, corners, & changes in interior use.
- Design elements and features used on the street level facade should coordinate with upper floor design elements to result in a cohesive building design.
- Locate publicly accessible commercial/office spaces, not private spaces, along the street level to facilitate a safer & more vibrant environment for pedestrians.

2. BUILDING DESIGN

Intent Statements

- To encourage the use of well-detailed exterior materials that generate a visual sense of texture and depth
- To give consideration to how the changes in exterior building materials can enhance the visual aspects of the building
- To promote the use of a variety of high-quality durable exterior materials, including but not limited to, brick and Hardie board
- To utilize finishes, materials, and colors that are complementary of existing buildings and create a sense of visual balance



DESIGN GUIDELINES

- All visible facades of a building should be treated equally in terms of materials, color, & design details.
- Synthetic materials, including but not limited to artificial stone, slag brick, and resin should be used in ways that avoid excessive imitation or false replication of natural materials.
- Excessive uniformity is discouraged, but variations in materials should be balanced to create a unified sense of whole in an area.
- Building facades should incorporate materials that are appropriate to individual massing components & create connectivity to the public realm.

2. BUILDING DESIGN



Design Guidelines

- Bolder, brighter colors, including corporate branding colors, may be applied to areas or elements of the building where they are ancillary to the main features of the building or storefront space and are applied in ways that do not dominate the overall color palette.
- Bolder, brighter colors can be balanced by integrating natural materials and textures into the overall façade design.
- Consideration should be given to the colors of a building's body, trim & accents & details to be highlighted, when considering building colors.
- Use of materials that gracefully weather, or develop a patina, depicting the passage of time can add unique coloring & design elements that complement more contemporary design details.
- When considering dominant color choices for a façade, attention needs given to the façade's positioning on the street and how various colors reflect or absorb sunlight throughout various points of the day.

2. BUILDING DESIGN

Intent Statements

- To provide a minimum level of transparency on all facades
- To ensure that building activities are visible from the public realm and vice versa
- To ensure that building facades do not cause glare or negative effects for pedestrians or drivers
- To facilitate transparency at the street level, providing interest & activity along the sidewalk & at night, providing a secondary, more intimate, source of lighting



DESIGN GUIDELINES

- Maximize the transparency of the street level façade to allow views of the use & activity within the building.
- Use of retractable or full-length windows that open are encouraged to activate the public realm.
- Large expanses of glass should be subdivided into smaller units.
- Windows should generally utilize traditional proportions & be taller than they are wide.
- Upper floor windows should generally include a defined lintel & sill.
- Use of bay windows at the street level should be discouraged .

2. BUILDING DESIGN

Intent Statements

- To emphasize the importance of pedestrian entries as a defining feature of street level design
- To ensure that pedestrian entrances are located to generate activity & vibrancy at street level
- To promote effective movement to & from a building that is signaled by the architecture to welcome & link pedestrian movement to the broader public realm at the street level
- To ensure buildings interact seamlessly with adjoining sidewalks, streets & open spaces



DESIGN GUIDELINES

- Position entrances at active locations that enable & promote pedestrian walkability & connectivity.
- Entrances should be designed to pronounce their purpose and location through the use of recessed or projected features that add variation to the horizontal plane of the street level façade.
- Adequately recess or cover entrances to provide shelter from the elements.
- Entrances should be easily identifiable and create a transitional space between the building and the street level.

2. BUILDING DESIGN



DESIGN GUIDELINES

- Larger buildings should provide multiple entrances along frontages greater than 100 feet in length.
- Mixed use buildings with shared entrances to upper story uses should use architectural elements, furnishings, and/or landscaping to clearly articulate and differentiate them from street level commercial/retail entrances.
- At the intersection of two streets, the building corner should be defined by incorporating a prominent architectural feature and/or differentiation in design from the facades on both streets that makeup the corner.
- Building located on corners need to take into consideration buildings on opposite corners.

2. BUILDING DESIGN

Intent Statements

- To add visual interest to the pedestrian environment at the street level
- To provide shade and protection from the elements for pedestrians
- To create interesting rhythms and patterns along the building facade
- To ensure that awnings are made of durable and quality materials
- To enhance storefront design & attractiveness



DESIGN GUIDELINES

- Care should be taken when placing awnings to preserve views down the street.
- Awnings should be consistent with, & relate to, the facade design of the building.
- The design of awnings from one building & block to the next should be diverse, but remain compatible with the overall street context of the area.
- Awnings should be designed as individual components & not be continuous along the buildings street level.
- The color of awnings should complement the building façade.
- Awnings should not obscure architectural building features.
- Awnings should be made of durable materials designed for exterior use.

3. SIGNS

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



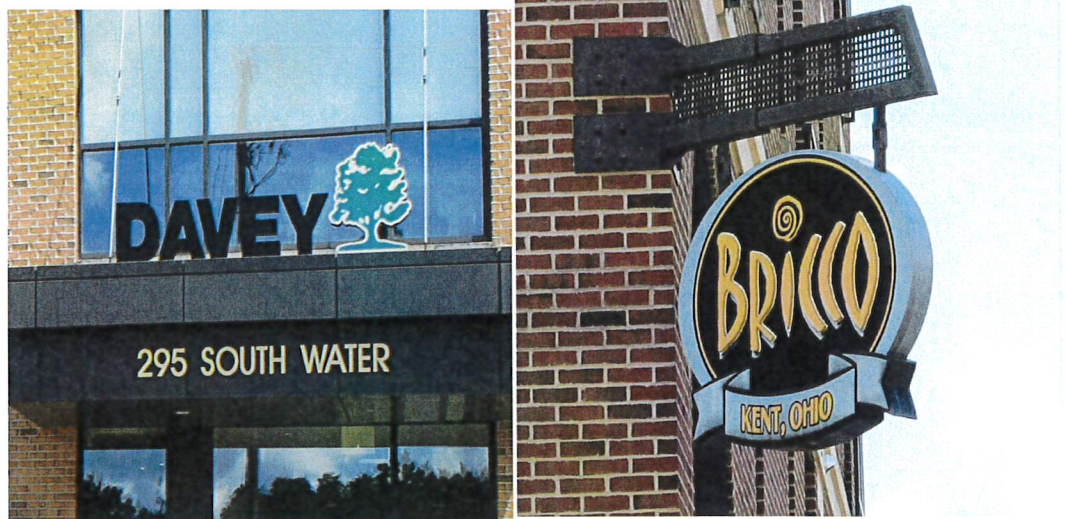
- Signs and their placement in commercial areas, promotes business activity by creating visual interest through variations in shape, font, colors, and enhances the pedestrian experience along the streetscape.
- Good sign design ensures that a business's advertising needs are met, while also enhancing a building's architecture and site location.
- The size, shape and proportions of any sign should be compatible with the size and scale of its surroundings and should not compete with or obscure other design features of the building, site, or streetscape.

The guidelines for signs addresses sign composition and character only. All signs must be reviewed by the Community Development Department to ensure compliance with all applicable sign regulations as specified in the City of Kent Planning and Zoning Code.

3. SIGNS

Intent Statements

- To encourage signs that complement a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented street frontage
- To promote creative and iconographic sign design at prominent locations
- To encourage signs that fit the character of the Kent community and that do not detract from or overpower the features of a building's façade
- To encourage sign design that is expressive of individual commercial proprietors and businesses



DESIGN GUIDELINES

- Use of materials that exhibit craftsmanship & which contribute to individual business identity should be used.
- Use of dimensional letter forms (min. of 1/2" deep) on wall and blade signs are preferred to flat, vinyl, or painted acrylic.
- Fasteners & other sign attachment devices should be integrated into the façade design & not cause unnecessary damage.
- Window signs should not block views into an establishment and allow pedestrians to see through them.

3. SIGNS

Intent Statements

- To provide adequate lighting of signs for legibility and orientation
- To encourage lighting that enhances the character of the pedestrian experience at the street level
- To ensure that sign lighting is coordinated with building facade design and lighting
- To ensure that sign lighting does not adversely affect the Public Realm or adjacent properties



DESIGN GUIDELINES

- Illumination external to the sign surface with lighting directed at the sign is desirable for street level businesses.
- Backlit signs, in certain circumstances, may be acceptable, but illumination should be muted and not stark.
- Power sources, raceways, and conduit should be concealed.
- Internally lit exterior signs are strongly discouraged.
- Neon signs can be displayed in a window, but mounting a neon sign externally on a building is strongly discouraged.

3. SIGNS



DESIGN GUIDELINES

- Sign lighting should be consistent with the overall building lighting.
- Sign lighting should provide support to nighttime pedestrian activity.
- Halo illumination should be considered for signs that will be displayed on taller buildings, structures with larger massing, or signs that will be displayed above the street level.
- External illumination of signs is preferred for smaller storefronts on the street level.
- Scale the brightness and visual impact of sign illumination to the surrounding area's level of activity while ensuring that the light level from the sign does not overpower other signs on the street or the façade.