



## ▶▶ THE URBAN COMMERCIAL OVERLAY

*Promoting pedestrian-oriented development in the City of Columbus, Ohio*



City of Columbus • Department of Development • Planning Division



In the late 1990's, the city of Columbus began to recognize that existing pedestrian-oriented development patterns were being threatened by suburban-style redevelopment. The Existing Zoning code was partly to blame; its development standards did not accommodate or encourage the unique architectural character typical of older, urban commercial corridors. Therefore, Columbus' Planning Division and the Columbus Neighborhood Design Assistance Center worked collaboratively to develop a new zoning overlay that would impose alternative, urban development standards – the Urban Commercial Overlay (UCO). In February of 1999, Columbus City Council adopted the UCO and established 12 overlay districts. Since then, the UCO has been applied to more than 20 corridors and intersections.

### PURPOSE OF THE UCO

The UCO code regulates development in specifically designated areas in order to protect, re-establish and retain the unique architectural characteristics of older, urban commercial corridors. The provisions of the UCO are intended to encourage pedestrian-oriented design typified by retail display windows, reduced building setbacks, rear parking lots, and ornamental walls and fences. Where applied, the UCO standards generally require full compliance for new construction, partial compliance for exterior building additions and alterations, and minimal or no compliance for routine maintenance or the replacement in-kind of materials.

### OVERLAY DISTRICTS

All of the UCO districts are located within 6 miles of downtown Columbus. Most are linear and confined to the parcels that have frontage along major thoroughfares. The existing inventory of districts includes portions of High Street, Indianola Avenue, West Broad Street, South Front Street, Main Street, Cleveland Avenue, Parsons Avenue, East Long Street, Fourth Street and East Third Avenue. Additional districts have been created in historic neighborhoods such as Italian Village and near the Ohio State University Campus. In total, the city's UCO districts contain more than 14 miles of roadway. New districts are created through the city's rezoning process and typically initiated by the Planning Division.



*Milo's on West Broad St.*

## UCO REQUIREMENTS

### BUILDING SETBACKS:

- « The minimum building setback is zero feet. The maximum setback is ten feet.
- « A 15-foot building setback is permitted for up to 50 percent of a building frontage if a Public-Private Setback Zone is provided.
- « Buildings with multiple frontages (corner lots) must meet the above setback requirements for each frontage.

### DESIGN STANDARDS:

- « At least 60 percent of each primary building frontage, between the height of two feet and ten feet above the nearest sidewalk grade, must be clear/non-tinted window glass permitting a view of the building's interior to a minimum depth of four feet.
- « Ornamental masonry or stone walls may be used for screening, sitting, or used as independent architectural elements. Walls may not exceed a height of four feet.
- « Fences, with or without masonry piers, must be decorative and constructed of ornamental metal tubes or bars. Fences may not exceed a height of four feet.

- « Billboard signs are prohibited.
- « Building frontages that face public streets and exceed a width of 50 feet must include vertical piers or other vertical elements to break the plane of the building frontage. Piers/elements must be spaced at intervals of 15 feet to 35 feet along the frontage.



*UCO district along Third Avenue*

PARKING PROVISIONS:

- « Parking lots must be setback from street right-of-way lines at least five feet.
- « Parking lots must be located at the rear of the principal building. Where access to the rear of the property is not possible, up to 50 percent of the required parking may be located at the side of the principal building.
- « Parking and vehicular circulation are not permitted between a building and a street right-of-way line.
- « The required number of off-street parking spaces may be reduced by up to 50 percent by the Director of the Department of Development in consultation with the Division of Transportation.
- « Parking lots must be screened from adjacent public streets with a four-foot high decorative fence and landscaping or a masonry/stone wall.



*This Donato's Pizza restaurant on North High Street features a zero setback, large windows and a corner entrance.*

## RECENT PROJECTS



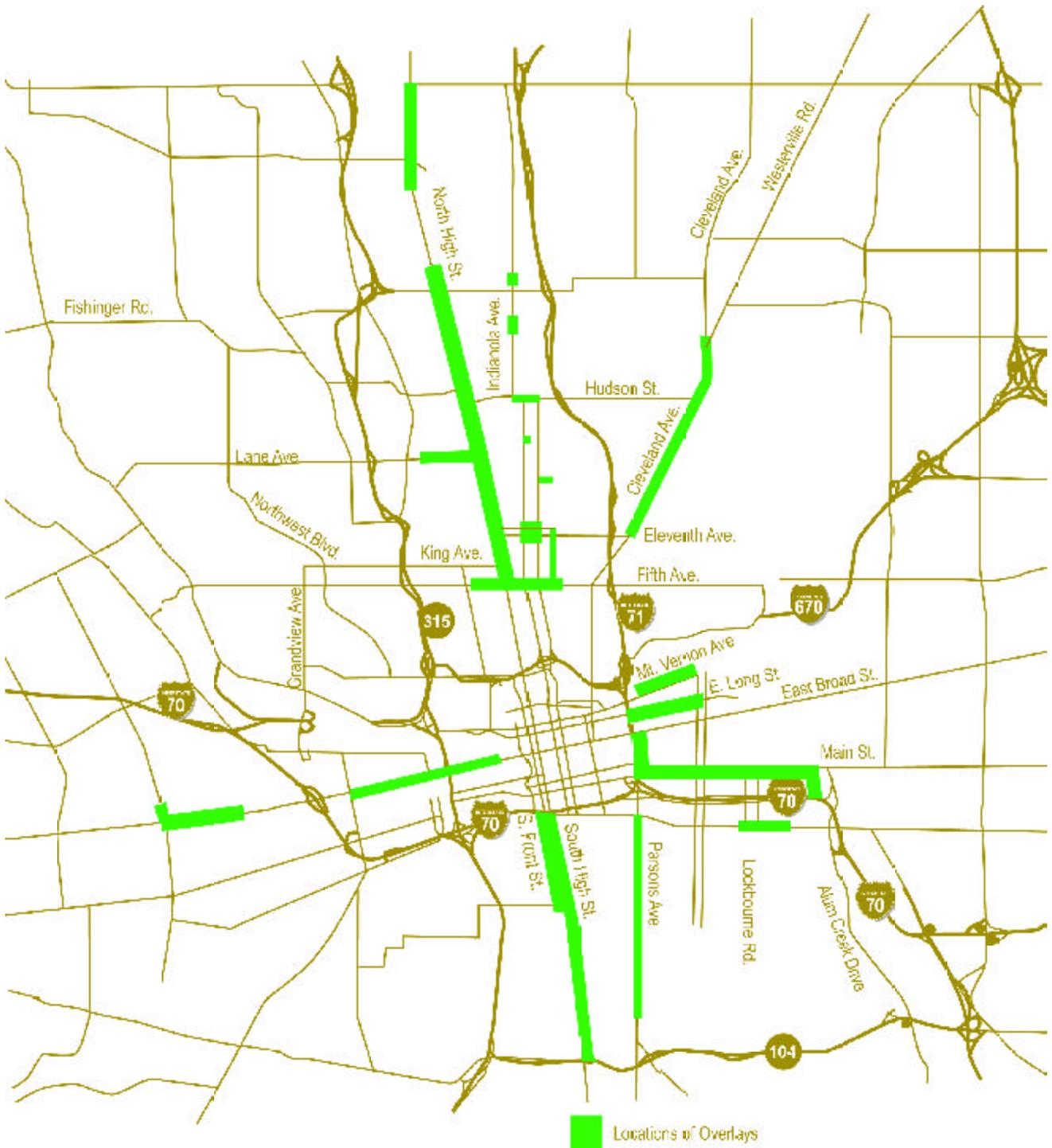
*This Donato's Pizza restaurant on North High Street features a zero setback, large windows and a corner entrance.*



*The Cup O' Joe coffee house on North High Street blends turn-of-the-century proportions with contemporary detailing. Outdoor seating areas and large windows are pedestrian-friendly.*



*Brewers' Yard was completed in the spring of 2002. This mixed-use project incorporates pedestrian-scale site elements and a large off-street parking area situated at the rear of the property.*



# URBAN COMMERCIAL OVERLAY LOCATIONS



*Creative Paint is located off of High Street just south of Morse Road in the Beechwold area. Parking is located at the rear of the store and it has an entrance off the street.*



## URBAN COMMERCIAL OVERLAY ORDINANCE

**BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF COLUMBUS:**

**Section 1.** That the Columbus City Codes, 1959, are hereby supplemented by: the amendment of Sections 3372.601, 3372.603, 3372.605, 3372.607, 3372.609, 3372.611, 3372.613 and 3372.615, reading as follows:

**3372.601 DEFINITIONS:**

**Building Frontage:** “Building frontage” means the side, or facade of a building closest to and most nearly parallel to an abutting street.

**Building Frontage, Primary:** “Primary building frontage” means a building frontage that abuts a street listed in the Columbus Thoroughfare Plan.

**Building Frontage, Secondary:** “Secondary building frontage” means a building frontage that abuts a street not listed in the Columbus Thoroughfare Plan.

**Building Rear:** “Building rear” means the wall or plane opposite the primary building frontage. For a building on a corner lot, the building rear is the wall or plane opposite the wall or plane containing the principal building entrance.

**Drive-Thru:** “Drive-thru” means a building or portion of a building designed for customers to receive goods or services while remaining in a motor vehicle.

**Parking Lot:** “Parking lot” means any off-street public or private area, under or outside of a building or structure, designed and used for the temporary storage of motor vehicles.

**Principal Building:** “Principal building” means a building in which the principal use of the property is conducted. All parcels containing at least one building shall be deemed to have a principal building. A parcel may contain more than one principal building.

**Public-Private Setback Zone:** “Public-private setback zone” means an area between a principal building and a public street right-of-way line utilized for seating, outdoor dining, public art and/or other pedestrian amenities.



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**Reconstruction:** “Reconstruction” means the replacement or rebuilding of a building, premises or structure.

**Setback:** “Setback” means the distance between a building, structure or parking lot and any lot line or street right-of-way line.

### **3372.603      PURPOSE.**

The purpose of the Urban Commercial Overlay (UCO), consisting of Columbus City Code Sections 3372.601 through 3372.699, inclusive, is to regulate development in specifically designated areas in order to protect, re-establish and retain the unique architectural and aesthetic characteristics of older, urban commercial corridors. The provisions of the UCO are intended to encourage pedestrian-oriented development featuring retail display windows, reduced building setbacks, rear parking lots, and other pedestrian-oriented site design elements. Where applied, UCO standards generally require full compliance for new construction, partial compliance for exterior building additions and alterations and minimal or no compliance for routine maintenance and the replacement in-kind of materials.

### **3372.605      DESIGNATED AREAS.**

The standards of the UCO apply to those portions of older, urban commercial corridors determined by City Council to be necessary to retain, develop, and redevelop pedestrian-oriented architecture and urban land use patterns where recent development has displaced, or threatens to displace, the original pedestrian streetscape. The boundaries of designated UCO areas are part of the Official Zoning Map and described in separate sections beginning with C.C. 3372.650.



**3372.607      APPLICABILITY AND EXTENT.**

The standards and requirements of the UCO apply as follows:

**A.** On a commercially-zoned or commercially-used property within a designated UCO area:

- 1.** The placement, construction, or reconstruction of a principal building is subject to all standards and requirements of this Chapter;
- 2.** The expansion of a principal building's gross floor area by up to 50 percent is subject to C.C. 3372.611 and 3372.613 and the expansion of a principal building's gross floor area by more than 50 percent is subject to all standards and requirements of this Chapter;
- 3.** The extension or expansion of a principal building towards a public street is subject to all standards and requirements of this Chapter; and
- 4.** Exterior alteration of a primary building frontage is subject to C.C. 3372.611 and 3372.613. Secondary building frontages and primary building frontages set back from an abutting street a distance of more than 30 feet are exempt from this requirement. For purposes of this requirement, the placement of window shutters, fabric canopies and awnings and/or building-mounted signage is not considered to be exterior alteration.

**B.** The construction or installation of parking lots, fences and other accessory structures on commercially-zoned or commercially-used properties shall comply with C.C. 3372.609 B. and C., 3372.611, 3372.613, and 3372.615.

**C.** The standards and requirements of this Chapter may be waived for buildings officially recognized as historic if they would result in an unacceptable modification of the original, historic appearance of the building as determined by the City of Columbus Historic Resources Commission.

**D.** Residentially-zoned properties and residences are exempt from the standards and requirements of this Chapter, except in architectural review commission districts.

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**E.** In architectural review commission districts, residences, residentially-zoned properties and commercially-zoned or commercially-used properties are subject to C.C. 3372.615 and 3372.609, excepting 3372.609 B, and are not subject to Sections 3372.611 and 3372.613.

**F.** Routine maintenance and in-kind replacement of materials are exempt from the standards and requirements of this Chapter.

The standards contained in the UCO are in addition to the regulations of the underlying zoning districts. Where the provisions of this Chapter conflict with those of the underlying zoning district or other provisions of this Zoning Code, the most restrictive provision applies.

### **3372.609 SETBACK REQUIREMENTS.**

Setback requirements are as follows:

**A.** The minimum building setback is zero (0) feet and the maximum building setback is ten (10) feet, except where a Public-Private Setback Zone is provided. Where a Public-Private Setback Zone is provided, a maximum setback of fifteen (15) feet is permitted for up to 50 percent of the building frontage.

**B.** The minimum setback for parking lots is five (5) feet. Parking lots and accessory buildings shall be located at the rear of the principal building. Where access to the rear of the property is not possible from a public alley or street, up to 50 percent of the parking may be located at the side of the principal building.

**C.** The minimum setback for fences and masonry or stone walls is zero (0) feet.

### **3372.611 DESIGN STANDARDS.**

Design standards are as follows:

**A.** A primary building frontage shall incorporate at least one main entrance door. At a building corner where two primary building frontages meet, one main entrance door may be located so as to meet the requirement for both building frontages.



- B.** A building frontage that exceeds a width of 50 feet shall include vertical piers or other vertical visual elements to break the plane of the building frontage. The vertical piers or vertical elements shall be spaced at intervals of 15 feet to 35 feet along the entire building frontage.
- C.** For each primary building frontage, at least 60 percent of the area between the height of two feet and 10 feet above the nearest sidewalk grade shall be clear/non-tinted window glass permitting a view of the building's interior to a minimum depth of four feet. For a secondary building frontage, the pattern of window glass shall continue from the primary frontage a minimum distance of ten feet.
- D.** All roof-mounted mechanical equipment shall be screened from public view to the height of the equipment. The design, colors and materials used in screening shall be architecturally compatible with the rooftop and the aesthetic character of the building.
- E.** Dumpsters and all ground-mounted mechanical equipment shall be located at the rear of the building and screened from public view to the height of the dumpster/equipment.
- F.** Fences, with or without masonry piers, shall be decorative and constructed of ornamental metal tubes or solid metal bars. Fences may not exceed a height of four feet.
- G.** Masonry or stone walls may be used for screening, sitting, or used as independent architectural elements. Walls may not exceed a height of four feet.
- H.** Parking lots must be screened from all abutting public streets. In architectural review commission districts, required parking lot screening will be the screening approved by the architectural review district commissions. In all other areas, parking lot screening shall consist of either:
1. A four-foot high solid masonry or stone wall; or
  2. A four-foot high decorative metal tube or solid metal bar fence located at the street right-of-way line (property line), with or without masonry pier supports, with a minimum three foot wide landscaped area along the parking lot side of the fence. The landscaped area must be planted with three evergreen shrubs and one deciduous shade tree per 30 feet of frontage. Trees and shrubs must be maintained in good condition; dead material must be replaced within one year.



I. Commercial signage shall comply with C.C. 3375-3383. Billboard signs are not permitted.

**3372.613 DRIVE-THRU USES.**

Drive-thru pickup windows and coverings are prohibited on primary building frontages and shall be attached to the rear or side of the principal building.

**3372.615 PARKING AND CIRCULATION.**

Parking, access and vehicular circulation standards are as follows:

- A.** Parking, stacking and circulation aisles are not permitted between a public street right-of-way line and a principal building.
- B.** Additional curb cuts along streets identified in the Columbus Thoroughfare Plan will not be permitted unless the Division of Transportation staff determines that a new curb cut is the only means available to provide vehicular access to the site and that the new location of the curb cut meets the requirements of the Division of Transportation.
- C.** The required number of off-street parking spaces may be reduced by up to 50 percent by the Chief Zoning Official or designee in consultation with the Division of Transportation staff. Factors to be considered include, but are not limited to: the availability of on-street, public, permit or shared parking; available transit service; pedestrian traffic and accessibility; elimination of arterial curb cuts; hours of operation and existing/proposed land use. The required number of loading spaces may be eliminated at the discretion of the Chief Zoning Official or designee, with due consideration given to: frequency and time of deliveries; size and nature of vehicles accommodated by the loading spaces; the character of the neighborhood; and impact upon adjoining streets or alleys.

**Section 2.** That this ordinance shall take effect and be in force from and after the earliest period allowed by law.