

Gateway Overlay District

As a general concept, an *overlay district* is a special zone covering an area within which some special type of resource or attribute exists. As its name implies, the district overlays the existing land use regulations covering the subject area, and supplements these existing regulations. The appeal of the overlay concept lies in the community's being able to achieve the goal of protecting certain attributes of an area through a relatively simple legislative process. That is, the overlay district can be appended to the existing land use, site plan and other applicable regulations rather than requiring an extensive rewrite of these existing regulations.

The McKownville neighborhood is proximate to three municipal borders and has numerous high-speed roads approaching or running through it. It would seem prudent for the Town to explore the potential for creation of a *gateway overlay district* to selected corridors and major crossroads. The primary areas to which it would apply would arguably Western Avenue near the bottom of Fuller Road Alternate, at the City line and near Johnston Road.

While the Town's desires specific to the identified gateways should ultimately determine the contents of the gateway district article, an examination of the potential McKownville gateway areas suggests that the following design elements and restrictions could be among the main features of such a district's regulations:

- For nonresidential developments *site design with parking behind buildings*, to facilitate walking to and from establishments and to establish a "close in," neighborhood-oriented feel to the streetscape (potentially serving a traffic calming function).
- Also for nonresidential developments, *screening of loading areas or their placement behind buildings*.
- Encouragement of *shared accesses* to Western Avenue.
- *Underground connections* to all utility lines and infrastructure.
- *Landscaping* of areas between buildings and roadways, with this landscaping set back from the roadway to facilitate sidewalk installation and protect lines of sight between through streets, driveways and side streets.
- *Greater than normal setback requirements for gas pumps* at service stations (to enhance internal site circulation, in turn improving the safety of the roadway in front of the station by reducing impedances related to driveway movements).
- Along a similar line to the previous point, *increased minimum lot depth requirements* to ensure adequate space for internal circulation, landscaping and other aspects of the site.
- *Design or architectural styles* more in keeping with the character of the neighborhood being entered at the gateway point.

While some of these elements are clearly subject to local discretion regarding acceptability (what constitutes an architectural style in keeping with the neighborhood, for example), the comment is that the gateway overlay district can provide the Town with a tool for ensuring that visual transitions are logical and positive and that site-level activity on the parcels in these areas takes place in a manner compatible with the adjacent setting.