



Village of La Grange

**BNSF Railroad Corridor Subarea Plan
URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES**

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**Village OF
La Grange**



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INTRODUCTION

Urban design is a critical element of the BNSF Railroad Corridor. Community preferences on urban design will have strong influence on the level of pedestrian orientation in the Corridor and the degree to which Village objectives for transit supportive land use can be realized. Together with land use regulations such as the Village's zoning code, urban design decisions affect the perceived quality and character of the Corridor.

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND DESIGN ISSUES

The Village of La Grange and its business partners have successfully sustained the Downtown with a balance between older structures and newer styles of development. La Grange has undertaken a streetscape improvement program which reinforces the charm and ambience of the Downtown. Aesthetic improvements, combined with the bulk regulations of the Village's zoning code, have created a Downtown area that is highly pedestrian oriented and "walkable".

During the comprehensive planning process, the Village solicited input regarding key planning issues and opportunities confronting the BNSF Railroad Corridor. Issues include the following:

- A lack of pedestrian continuity between the Downtown and West End Business District.
- A lack of adequate wayfinding and entry signage.
- Many outdated building facades.
- Poorly marked/designed walks across the BNSF Railroad Corridor right-of-way.
- The scale of some of the Corridor's newer structures.
- A need for additional open space within the Corridor, of various scales.

Opportunities related to urban design that were identified include the following:

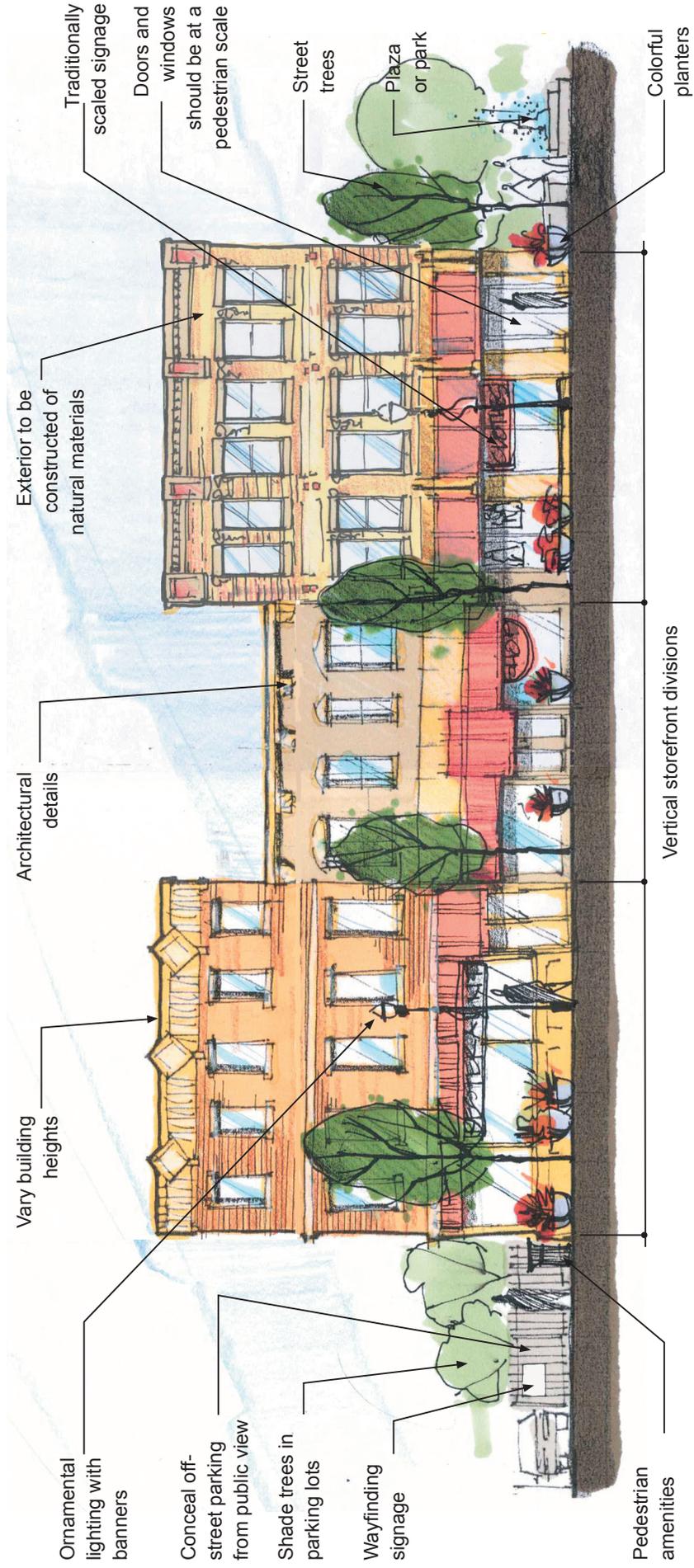
- An established visual identity (streetscape) to expand, and to enhance with additional amenities.
- A Design Review Overlay District mechanism for design review is already in place.
- Several attractive buildings and facades.

URBAN DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The following principles should guide design decisions with regard to both public and private improvements within the Corridor to facilitate a consistent visual image and pedestrian-friendly character. An illustration of several of these principles relating to building facades is shown in Figure 1, Facade Design Principles.

At the end of this document you will find a checklist to be used as a reference when designing new or remodeling existing buildings to comply with these principles.

FIGURE 1. BNSF RAILROAD CORRIDOR FACADE DESIGN PRINCIPLES



ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN - COMMERCIAL

1. Buildings should not exceed five stories in height within the Corridor, and should be sensitively designed to be compatible with their surroundings regardless of height.
2. The overall mass and bulk of buildings should be broken down with vertical “storefront” divisions and/or changes in exterior materials, to remain compatible in scale with older structures.
3. Rooflines should be varied for visual interest - parapet wall construction is most appropriate for commercial and mixed-use structures.
4. Architectural details - such as facade accents, balconies and awnings - can also serve to break down the scale of larger buildings and provide visual interest.
5. Masonry, stone and other natural exterior materials are most appropriate within the context of the Corridor.
6. Commercial storefronts should be located along the “street wall” and have large windows for merchandise display, encouraging a window shopping and strolling atmosphere.
7. Small scaled and non-illuminated signage is most appropriate within the Corridor; large and garish “box” signs or signs with moving parts are not in keeping with the character of the area.
8. Off-street parking spaces for commercial developments should be screened from view along public rights-of-way.



ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN - MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

1. Buildings should not exceed five stories in height within the Corridor, and should be sensitively designed to be compatible with their surroundings regardless of height.
2. Rooflines should be varied for visual interest - sloping roofs and gable elements are most appropriate for multi-family residential structures.
3. Architectural details - such as facade accents, balconies and entry porches can also serve to break down the scale of larger buildings and provide visual interest.
4. Masonry, stone and other natural exterior materials are most appropriate within the context of the Corridor.
5. Townhouse units should address the street by providing individual entrances for each unit.
6. Outdoor off-street parking spaces and garage entrances for multi-family residential developments should be concealed from view along public rights-of-way.

OPEN SPACES AND STREETScape

1. Provide generous sidewalks that allow for a “walking zone” adjacent to storefronts and an “amenity” zone at the curb to accommodate planters, street trees and benches. Ideally, sidewalks should be at least fifteen feet in width.
2. Integrate plazas, rest areas and open spaces of varying scales in the Corridor to provide rest and relaxation opportunities for shoppers and other visitors. Spaces should be strategically positioned and of high quality design.
3. Larger open spaces should incorporate lawn areas, defined walking paths, shade trees and focal points such as water features or public art displays.
4. Provide ornamental lighting sufficient to ensure secure walking conditions after dark, especially at off-street pedways and pedestrian crossing areas.
5. Street trees should be provided throughout the Corridor, in either grates or planted parkways, as appropriate.
6. Benches, water fountains, trash receptacles and other pedestrian amenities should be visually coordinated.
7. Color should be introduced through the use of plantings in low planters/planting beds, storefront awnings and pole-mounted banners.



PARKING LOTS AND STRUCTURES

1. Lots and structures should be buffered from their surroundings with perimeter fencing and plantings, where visible from public rights-of-way.
2. To the extent feasible, parking lots should be visually concealed behind or beside buildings, but be easy to find and access.
3. Clear signage and adequate lighting for wayfinding and security should be provided at all parking areas.
4. Parking lots should incorporate shade trees within planted islands for visual relief and user comfort.
5. Parking structures should be open in design, partially below grade if feasible to minimize overall height, and treated on the exterior with high quality materials and vines to blend in visually with their surroundings.

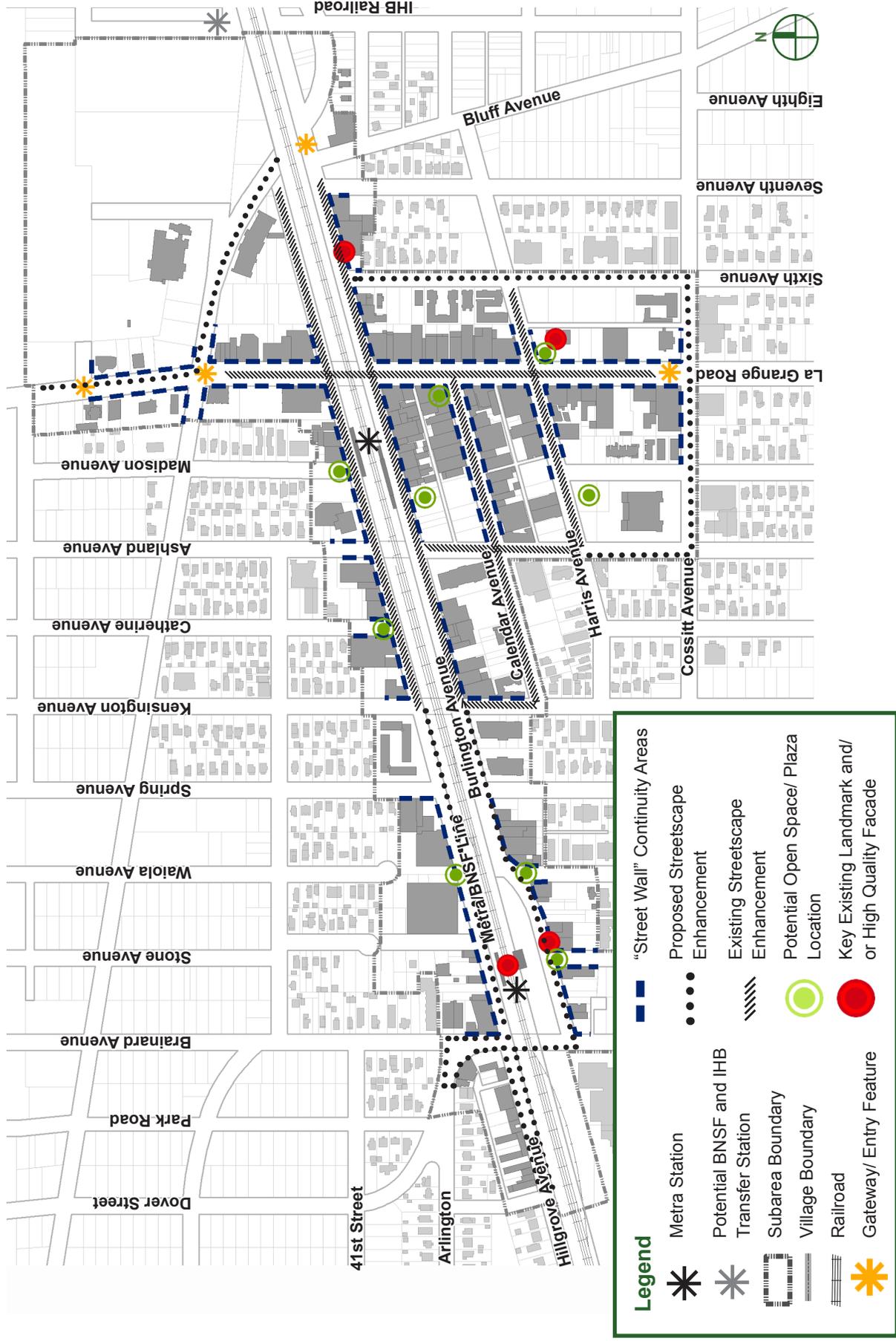
URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Key to maintaining pedestrian continuity, and supporting the Village's TOD development efforts, is the continuation of the pedestrian-oriented "street wall" where buildings are developed up to the front lot line. Continuing to maintain and develop attractive storefronts is critical to sustaining the pedestrian character of the Corridor. Locations where it will be important to develop or maintain the Corridor's "street wall" character are illustrated in Figure 2, BNSF Railroad Corridor Urban Design Framework. Listed below are other potential aesthetic improvements within the BNSF Railroad Corridor.

1. Expand the established streetscape palette into all areas of the Corridor, as indicated in the Urban Design Framework. Consider the addition of benches and other additional amenities in areas that are already improved, where space permits.
2. Establish gateway treatments, as indicated in Figure 2, to announce arrival into the Corridor at key locations and aid in orientation, in conjunction with the wayfinding signage system.
3. Parking lots and structures should be sensitively designed and well buffered from their surrounding through the use of careful siting, landscaped and fenced setbacks, and high quality materials.
4. Community input in the first phase of the planning process indicated that public art could be an important component of the Corridor. The market analysis indicated that there is a potential for arts and cultural facility development in the downtown. A high quality public art program could support this initiative. If and when it is pursued, the community will need to define a public arts program in more detail.
5. New private developments should adhere to the Urban Design Principles outlined here with regard to architectural design and site improvements, to provide a consistent and transit-supportive built environment throughout the Corridor.



FIGURE 2. BNSF RAILROAD CORRIDOR URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK



DESIGN GUIDELINES CHECKLIST

Buildings in the BNSF Railroad Corridor should reflect the context of the surrounding area as well as the principles and policies established in the Urban Design Guidelines. The checklist below should be referenced when designing a new building or renovating an existing building. Please indicate all the characteristics that have been incorporated into the design of the project.

Height

- Building height is less than 5 stories
- Height compatible with adjacent buildings

Facade Design

- Overall mass and bulk broken into vertical divisions
- Rooflines varied for visual interest
- Facade accents, balconies and other elements provide visual interest
- Storefronts are located along the “street wall” (if applicable)
- Large windows for merchandise display (if applicable)
- Townhouse entrances visible and accessible from street (if applicable)

Building Materials

Appropriate materials include, but are not limited to

- Masonry
- Stone
- Other natural materials

Signage

- Small scale (if applicable)
- Non-illuminated
- Signs with dimension or depth
- Individual letters preferred to “box” signs
- No moving parts

Streetscape

- Sidewalks provided with width of at least 15 feet at storefronts
- Pedestrian “walking zone” of approx. 10 feet adjacent to storefronts
- “Amenity” zone provided at the curb for planters, street trees and benches
- Ornamental lighting located at off-street pedways and pedestrian crossing areas
- Street trees in either grates or planted parkways
- Benches, trash receptacles and other pedestrian amenities visually coordinated.
- Plantings in low planters/planting beds

Parking Facilities

- Off-street parking spaces and garage entrances concealed from view along street(s)
- Perimeter fencing and plantings to provide buffer
- Parking areas visually concealed behind or beside buildings
- Easy to find and accessible
- Clear signage and adequate lighting for wayfinding and security
- Shade trees within planted islands

Parking Structures

- Open in design
- Partially below grade if feasible to minimize overall height
- High quality exterior materials and landscape to blend in visually with surroundings