CITY DESIGN BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

The University of Alabama
Center for Economic Development
BRANDING

STEP 1: IDENTIFYING YOUR BRAND
A brand is not what you want to say you are, it is what people think of you. Creating a brand is creating an emotional connection to your town.

Ways to develop your brand:
• Evaluate where your town is now, and where you want to be
• Consult citizens of where they want to go as a community
• Take inventory of the most popular aspects of your town, and capitalize on these and their already existing brands

STEP 2: LOGO OR SEAL
If your town does not already have a logo or seal- create one. Many municipalities already have seals, but they are not used for marketing purposes. If you have a seal- incorporate it into your logo. If you want to stay away from this look, and create a logo separate from the seal, use your assets as a basis for the logo. (i.e. have a river or lake? Use blues to symbolize water)

Examples:

Tuscaloosa, Alabama logo:

Huntsville, Alabama logo:

Tuscaloosa, Alabama seal:

Monroeville, Alabama seal:
STEP 3: COLOR PALETTES

The color palette of your town is important. This can be used when talking with property owners about designing the look of their business or building. Having an established color palette will create a cohesive look to your downtown.
Examples of cities with nice color palettes:

STEP 4: TAGLINE
A tagline gives your community a voice—this is what your town would say if it was to introduce itself to visitors. A tagline can be catchy, old fashioned, short, funny, etc. as long as it creates an emotional connection with your visitors, while simultaneously creating an identity for the existing residents.
Examples of taglines:

**Tuscaloosa, Alabama:** Together we can build a bridge to the future
**Madison, Alabama:** Where progress meets preservation
LIGHTING
Streetlights within cities provide a multitude of purposes, from increasing visibility to decreasing crime and theft. Well-lit alleyways, parks, and sidewalks. Existing streetlights can be converted to LED for efficiency, while new streetlight systems can focus on creating networked systems under a central control. Aside from functionality, lighting can also serve to boost the aesthetic of your city by modernizing it, or sticking with a traditional theme. Streetlights are one of the many ways that cities can embrace technology and operate more efficiently, ensure public safety, and improve quality of life.

LED Powered Streetlights

Different styles of lamp posts/lighting sources for your city enhances the design and provides variety.
LANDSCAPING
Approximately 80% of the US population lives in cities, disconnecting individuals from natural areas such as forests. Thus, urban trees and landscaping are crucial in providing shade, removing air pollutants, and reducing storm water runoff, as well as creating recreational and aesthetic benefits. Choosing the right tree species, planting properly, and continually improving site conditions can create beautiful city scenery. Aside from trees, maintaining greenery like grass and shrubs can literally bring your city to life as residents will feel happier, and guests will feel more welcome in the natural environment.

SEATING
Although a small touch, seating in cities often acts as a way for the community to serve visitors and residents. Part of a design movement called “tactical urbanism,” installing seating aims to make city living more comfortable and enjoyable. Seats make public space more vibrant, bringing in people, which in turn improves businesses. Seating can even be a subtle form of art, as local artists can design their take on city seating that serves a purpose and is visually appealing.
RECYCLING/WASTE MANAGEMENT
Having easily accessible and readily available waste options for your citizens and pedestrians walking around your city is important. Trash collection and recycling bins do not have to be an eye sore, but they do prevent one. Not only do they make your city appear nicer but they reduce littering which creates a bad look. Not having trash scattered around creates the idea that your city is clean and healthy.

WALKABILITY
Making cities walkable ensures compliance with the ADA and encourages economic growth as people spend more money when cities are less vehicle-oriented. A city’s walkability is dynamic and improvement comes with people-oriented planning. Walkable cities tend to be the healthiest and happiest, creating a great vibe for newcomers and tourists.
BANNERS/SIGNAGE
Signs and Banners serve as markers gaining attention, directing people, or advertising specific events/companies. In towns and cities, they help to increase customer traffic or deliver a message. Banners are used to promote your seal and branding, while also highlighting specific areas or districts within the city. Signs can also be useful for aesthetic welcomes and land markers. They do not need to be a typical welcome sign- but maybe painted on a bridge, or building coming into your town.

Example wayfinding:

Example banners:

Example signs:
Morristown, Tennessee
Huntsville, Alabama
GREEN SPACE
The benefits of parks and trails are broad and pervasive. Parks and trails build strong communities, attract economic development and protect the natural environment. They can serve to bring together a community and provide green space vital to a good wellbeing. Green spaces can also encourage better personal health among residents, creating an overall healthier community. Aside from looking nice and inviting, green spaces provide the community with a public sphere to be utilized for a variety of purposes.

STOREFRONTS
Storefronts say a lot about your town and your businesses, as it is the first impression a customer or resident receives. Storefronts with vivid colors that follow a general palette are visually appealing and give towns and cities a fresh look. Nice storefronts can liven up a downtown area and persuade shoppers. Maintaining nice looking fronts cleans up your city; alongside this, the upkeep of empty storefronts encourages businesses to move in, as the space looks appealing and like their business would do well there.

Example Storefronts: