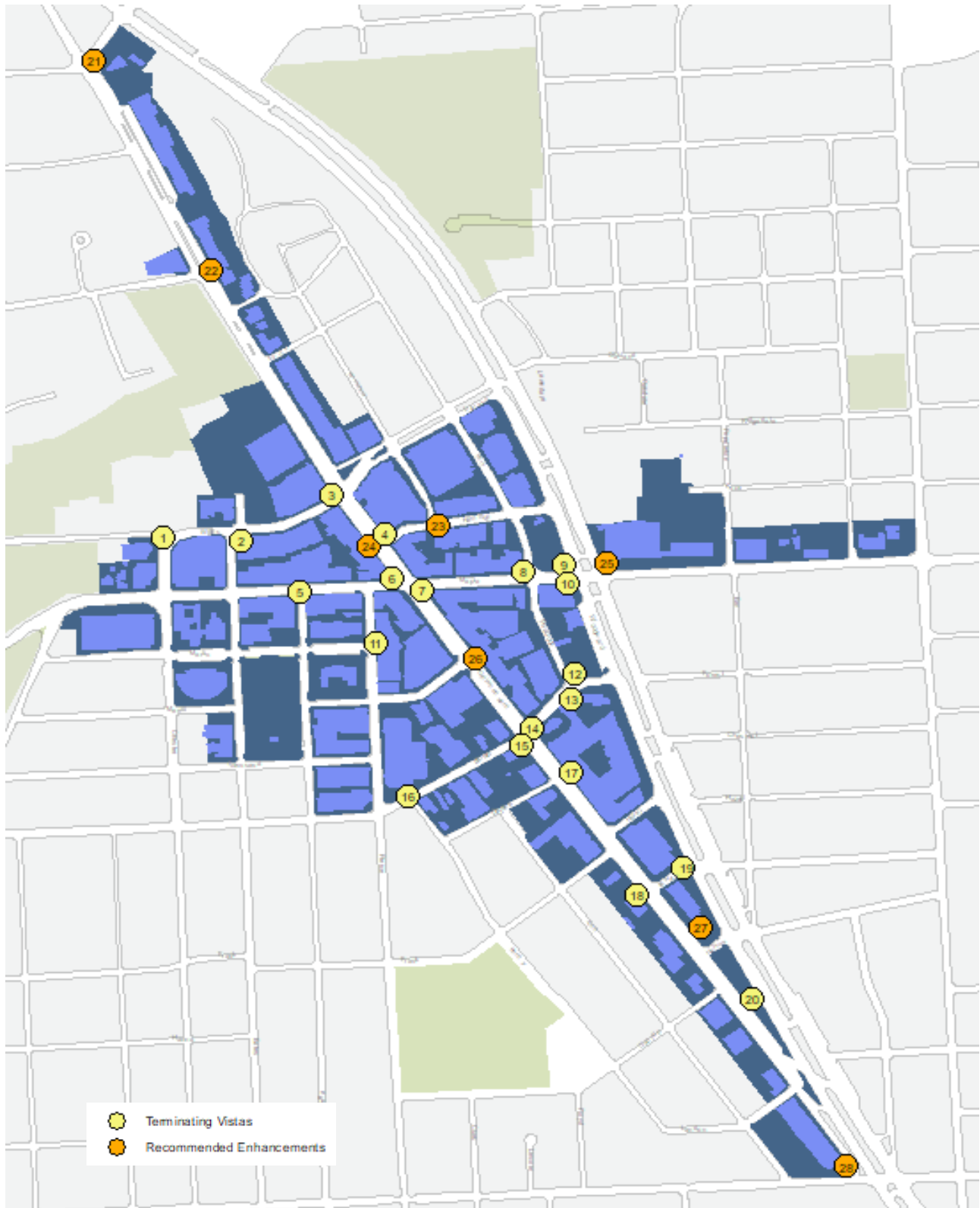


Terminating Vistas in Downtown Birmingham

A Report by the Birmingham Public Arts Board



August 24th, 2020

Report Summary

On May 20th, 2019 The Birmingham Public Arts Board was asked by City Commission to evaluate ways to enhance Terminating Vistas in Birmingham's downtown through the use of Public Art.

The concept of Terminating Vistas having enhanced design features was first introduced to the City in the Downtown Birmingham 2016 Plan and the designated locations were approved as a part of the Downtown Overlay District in 1997.

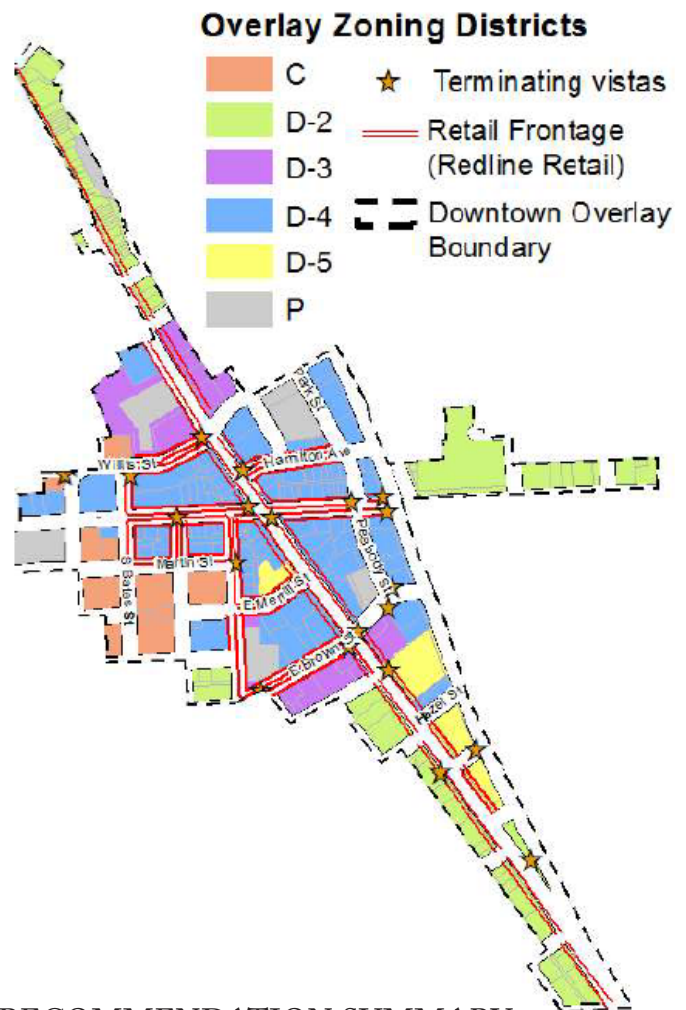
Terminated Vistas are defined in the Zoning Ordinance as “*a building or structure, or a portion thereof, as designated on the Regulating Plan, that terminates a view with architectural features of enhanced character and visibility*” (Section 9.02 Definitions).

Section 3.04(E)(15) of the Downtown Overlay Standards states that “*any building that terminates a view, as designated on the Regulating Plan, shall provide distinct and prominent architectural features of enhanced character and visibility, which reflect the importance of the building’s location and create a positive visual landmark.*”

The Downtown Overlay Zoning Districts Map has designated 20 locations as Terminating Vistas. The Birmingham Public Arts Board used these locations as a guide to evaluate Terminating Vistas and make recommendations relative to ways in which public art may help enhance the City's Terminating Vistas. Recommendations for prominent intersections that could benefit from enhanced design features were also made.

The Public Arts Board evaluated various types of public art that could be placed in Terminating Vistas such as sculptures, furniture, artistic utilities, landscaping and murals. Current City policy affecting the review process and installation process was also considered and recommendations were made regarding City standard furniture, landscaping, utilities and signage policy.

Lastly, the Public Arts Board evaluated City policy impacting the installation process of public art and has provided policy recommendations to assist in the implementation of the public art recommendations.



RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

- 1.) Use public art such as sculptures, artistic furniture, artistic utilities, landscaping and wall art to enhance the City's Terminating Vistas.
- 2.) Revise the sculpture installation process to incentivize sculptures on loan and to make the installation process more efficient for artists and City staff.
- 3.) Revise City policy towards City-standard benches, light poles, landscaping and utility boxes to permit an occasional artistic variation.
- 4.) Amend the sign ordinance and create a new design review policy to allow murals to be placed on the exterior of buildings.
- 5.) Create a public notification process for art in public spaces.

Terminating Vista Locations in Birmingham



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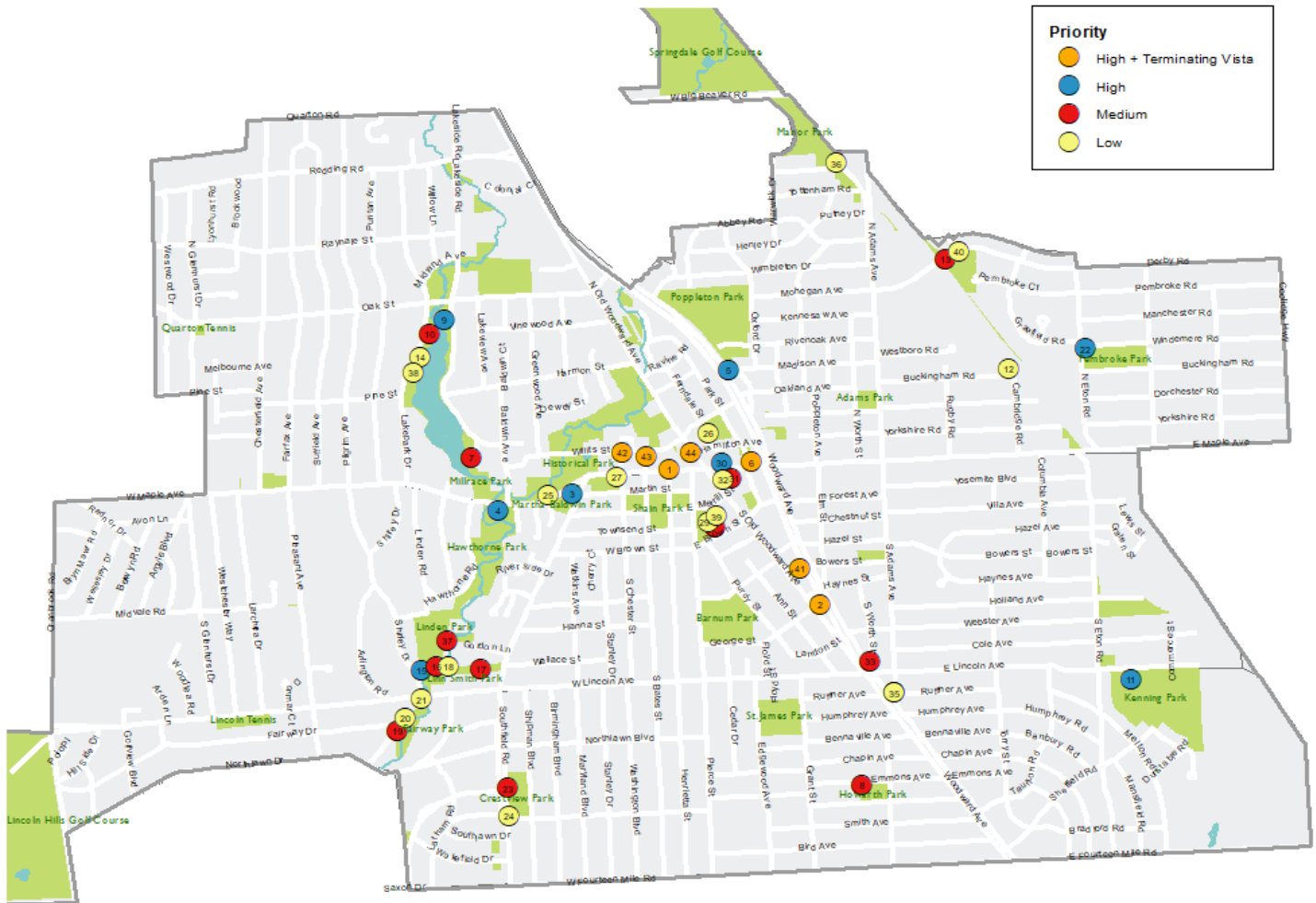


Prioritized Locations for Public Art

The Public Arts Board maintains a map of prioritized locations for public art. It is used as a reference whenever a sculpture for loan or donation is made to the City. Each point is numbered for reference, and the colors indicate areas with higher priority. The priorities are meant to serve as a guideline, though the Public Arts Board has indicated that each sculpture will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis so that it can be contextual with its surroundings.

The Public Arts Board reviewed the various Terminating Vistas and selected seven of the locations to add to their priority map for sculptures. These locations include N. Old Woodward and Hamilton Row, Chester & Willits, Bates & Willits, Maple & Henrietta, Park & Maple, S. Old Woodward & Bowers, and S. Old Woodward & Woodward. The updated Prequalified Public Art Locations Map is pictured below where downtown Terminating Vistas were placed as a high priority.

City of Birmingham Prequalified Public Art Locations



Recommended Locations for Public Space Enhancements

Terminating Vista locations are defined by the Downtown Overlay zoning map, as specified in Section 3.04(E)(15) of the Zoning Ordinance. Upon evaluation, the Public Arts Board finds that there are other intersections throughout downtown Birmingham that merit enhanced architectural and streetscape design features to create a positive visual landmark for that intersection which are included in the orange locations in the adjacent map. If the City wishes to officially deem these locations as Terminating Vistas, the Zoning Ordinance would have to be reviewed by the Planning Board and amended by the City Commission.



Recommended Locations for Public Space Enhancements

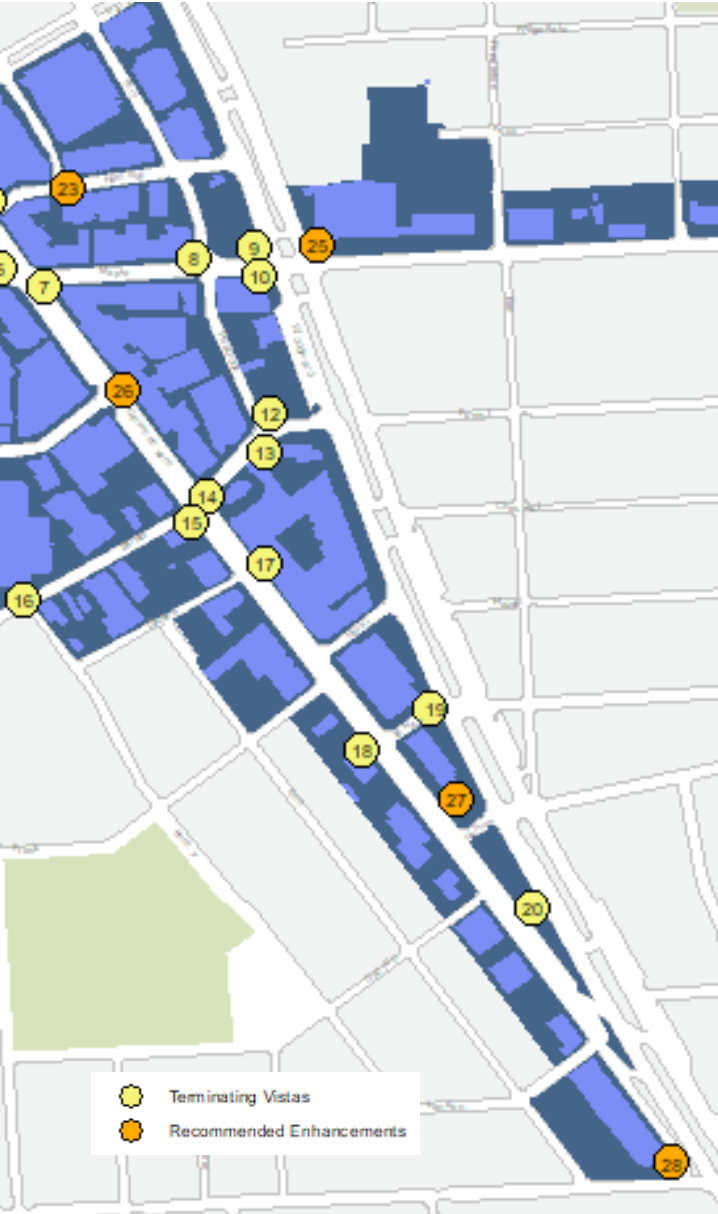
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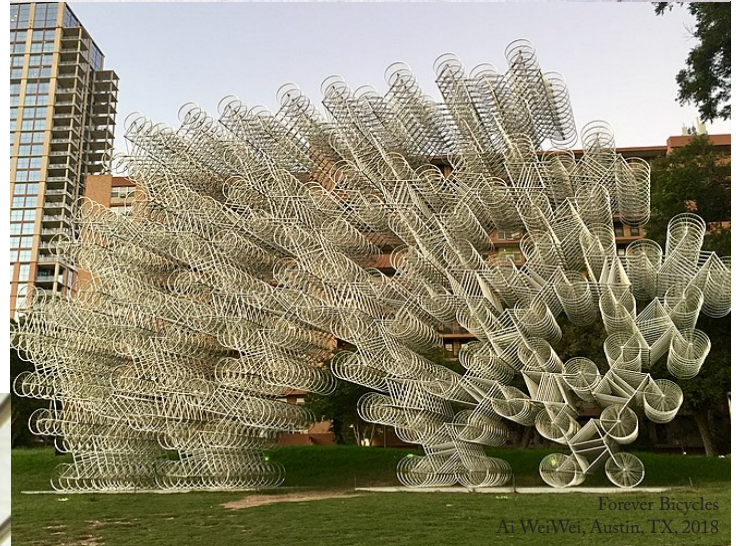
Best Practices in Public Art for Terminating Vistas: Sculptures

Sculptures are one way in which public art can be used to enhance the architectural features of a Terminating Vista. Doing so may effectively draw more attention and bring more prominence to the surrounding buildings. Birmingham currently has fifteen sculptures throughout the City that have either been purchased, donated or placed on loan, though only one is currently in a designated Terminating Vista which is located at the corner of Pierce and Brown Street.

Public sculptures have the ability to compliment the surrounding buildings and invigorate public spaces. The various colors and shapes of sculptures provide the ability for art to interact with the surrounding building and public right-of-way, potentially enhancing the connection between the two. Unique public art may create a stronger sense of place and identity for the building and intersection where it is placed in a Terminating Vista. Such sculptures may capture the eye of a passer-by, bring more attention to the civic environment and contribute to a greater sense of civic vitality.



Tembo, Mother of Elephants
Derrick Hudson, Toronto, ON, 2002



Forever Bicycles
Ai Weiwei, Austin, TX, 2018



I See What You Mean
Lawrence Argent, Denver, 2005



Flamingo
Alexander Calder, Chicago, IL, 1974

Best Practices in Public Art for Terminating Vistas: Artistic Furniture

Artistic furniture is another way public art can be used to enhance the character of a Terminating Vista. Doing so may accent the surrounding buildings while providing a unique public space for socializing or respite.

The City of Birmingham is a walkable city with pedestrian oriented design throughout its downtown and neighborhoods. Unique public furniture may invite a variety of uses that activate a Terminating Vista and promote social interaction. The shape and color of artistic furniture may also have an aesthetic contribution to the right-of-way and surrounding buildings. An artistic bench can be more inviting for a pedestrian to relax and enjoy a section of the City they may have otherwise walked past, and may provide an enhanced civic experience for leisure and appreciation of the surrounding cityscape. Artistic furniture can provide the opportunity to activate Terminating Vistas with people-oriented architectural streetscape design.



The Wave
dSPACE Studio, Chicago, IL, 2014



Circular Bench
Lucile Soufflet, Bruxelles, France 2003



Swirling Bench



Custom Curve Seats
University of Sydney, Australia



Bench of Expectations
Jeppe Hein, Springfield, MA 2018

Best Practices in Public Art for Terminating Vistas: Artistic Utilities

Artistic utilities may also enhance a space and bring more prominence to the surrounding buildings. Many cities, including Birmingham, Michigan have painted electrical boxes with an interesting design to add more character to a utility box placed in the right-of-way. Cities such as Milwaukee, Wisconsin have commissioned artists to paint numerous utility boxes throughout their downtown with a theme to be determined by the artist. There are other examples of cities having sculptors create artistic coverings for electrical boxes that are equipped with hinges and gates for access to interior controls. These coverings provide opportunities for other types of art to be placed on and around them to compliment the surrounding space and improve the aesthetics of public utilities.

Artistic lighting could also be used to enhance the pedestrian experience and illuminate architectural features in a Terminating Vista. Cities such as Portland, Oregon and Seattle, Washington have explored various solar powered lights and sculptures with an artistic design and ambient glow to create unique public spaces. A well placed artistic light can enhance the character of the area and create an interesting talking point while highlighting the surrounding buildings.



Best Practices in Public Art for Terminating Vistas: Wall Art

Outdoor wall art such as murals, mosaics, and ceramic tiling are another example of public art that can enhance a public space and the surrounding architectural features.

Wall art can be temporary or permanent. For local examples, The Park Shelton mural in Detroit, MI has been up since 1978, meanwhile Detroit's Eastern Market cycles through numerous murals every year.

Temporary murals can be done on materials such as plywood or canvas and be applied to the exterior of a building for a length of time and then be removed, thus maintaining the original design and color and the building. Mosaics and ceramic tiles can also be used to provide an interesting texture to the artistic experience.

The various forms of wall art can be especially effective in activating Terminating Vista spaces that have large sections of blank walls.



Tiger
Arlin Graff, Detroit, MI



Park Shelton
John Egner, Detroit, MI, 1974



Aretha
Desiree Kelly, Detroit, MI

Best Practices in Public Art for Terminating Vistas: Landscaping

Integrating artistic landscaping with art and design can be another way to enhance Terminating Vistas. Birmingham has a number of green spaces and planters surrounding buildings at prominent intersections. An example is at Park and Maple where a community garden welcomes people into the downtown. This garden blends well with the Pazzi Building immediate behind it, and provided a natural landscaping to screen the electrical box located within it. Landscaping could be an effective medium to connect buildings, utilities, furniture and sculptures together into one cohesive artistic experience.

As another example, the City of Seattle allows property owners and tenants to garden in the planting strip in front of their property as long as a proper street use permit is obtained. Once obtained, the plantings may include low growing perennials, ornamental grasses, shrubs, herbs, or edible plants. Doing so could encourage more interesting variety in landscape design and create a unique space at prevalent intersections.



Pazzi Community Garden
Park & Maple, Birmingham, MI



Gramercy Park Co-Op
New York City, NY



Personalized Planting Strip
Seattle, WA



18th and F Streets, N.W.,
Washington D.C.

City Policy Related to Public Art in Terminating Vistas

SCULPTURES

Birmingham currently has sculptures on display that were either donated to the City, purchased by the City, or placed on loan to the City for a certain period of time. If the sculpture is donated and placed on public property, the City is responsible for installation and maintenance of the sculpture. If a sculpture is on loan, the loan agreement specifies that the artist is responsible for installation, maintenance and removal.

An issue with the current policy for sculpture installation is that each piece is unique and may require special care for installation. This includes but is not limited to how the sculpture is transported to the installation site, how to safely secure the sculpture to the location, how to create the necessary base and fabricate proper mounts. City staff may not have adequate experience to handle the installation process of various unique sculpture shapes and sizes. Requiring the artist to be responsible for all installation and removal processes may also create issues related to the artist operating machinery on City property.



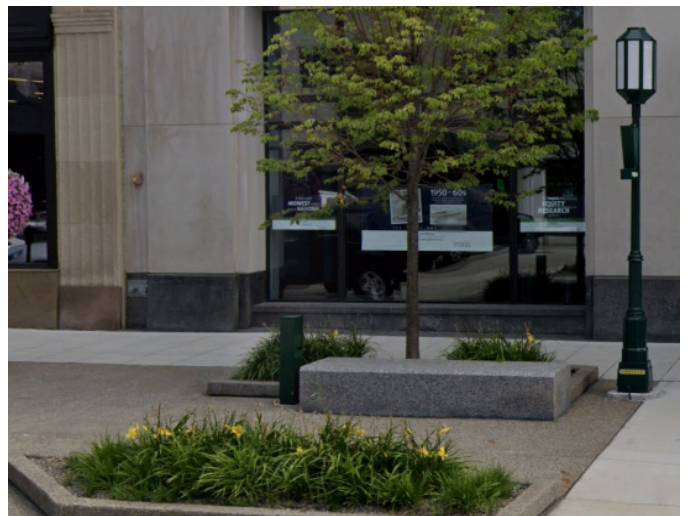
Local art museums such as the Detroit Institute of Arts and Cranbrook Museum have employees who specialize in the installation of sculptures. **The Public Arts Board recommends that the City of Birmingham consult with such specialists for installing sculptures that have been either donated or loaned to the City.** Doing so would enable a more efficient installation process in areas such as Terminating Vistas.



ARTISTIC FURNITURE

Downtown Birmingham has City-standard green metal benches installed along the sidewalks as well as granite benches that were a part of the downtown Old Woodward and Maple Reconstruction projects. This classic design for public furniture fits in with the surrounding streetscape and does not detract from the architectural style of downtown Birmingham.

The Public Arts Board recommends that Birmingham consider allowing more creative and artistic furniture that will contribute a positive design aesthetic to the character of the area. Doing so could enhance the pedestrian space in Terminating Vistas and be used to activate the public space and compliment the surrounding architecture. The City's current approach to streetscape furniture with City-standard benches should remain relatively consistent, but the Public Arts Board recommends that an occasional deviation from City-standard furniture in Terminating Vistas could create a unique pedestrian experience and enhance the character of the area.



City Policy Related to Public Art in Terminating Vistas

PUBLIC UTILITIES

Birmingham's streetscape contains electrical utility boxes and a number of light-poles in the right-of-way in Terminating Vistas. The City-standard light poles and electrical boxes are all painted Birmingham green, with the exception being the recent popcorn box art project at the intersection of Merrill and Old Woodward.

The Public Arts Board has considered a number of different ways to paint and decorate electrical boxes throughout downtown. Various themes were discussed, as well as whether or not the design should be contextual with the surrounding. It was determined that each box should be considered on a case-by-case basis and should not be directly tied to any theme or be required to be related to the surrounding use. **The Public Arts Board recommends the City be open to all types of artistic designs for electrical boxes.**

Sculptural enclosures for such utility boxes have also been considered by the Public Arts Board. **The Public Arts Board recommends that these be considered on a case-by-case situation as well, and not be tied to any theme or surrounding context.** Given the intended function of electrical boxes, any sculpture placed on or around the electrical box should provide easy access to the interior controls and should only be mounted on the ground. **The Public Arts Board does not recommend drilling holes or attaching public art directly to the electrical boxes in order to maintain the integrity of the box.**

The Public Arts Board also recommends that the City consider allowing unique designs in lighting that are in Terminating Vistas. Lighting can be used for either function or form to create a unique aesthetic from the shape of the lantern and the ambient glow of the light. An occasional artistic light pole to replace a city standard lamp in front of a Terminating Vista could enhance the interaction between the streetscape and surrounding buildings. City standard lights should remain relatively consistent, but the Public Arts Board recommends an occasional deviation in this pattern to allow for unique designs.



City Policy Related to Public Art in Terminating Vistas

WALL ART

Artistic paintings such as murals on the front, side or rear of buildings are not currently permitted in Birmingham. Such paintings are considered a sign and section 1.03(D) of the Sign Ordinance states that *“No sign may be painted directly onto any building or surface.”*

The Public Arts Board recommends that the City re-evaluate its policy towards wall art and create a design review process for such art work. There are several Terminating Vistas with large blank walls that the Public Arts Board believes would be ideal for murals, but current policy restricts the building owner from pursuing such design enhancements.

The 2020 Birmingham Plan Draft recommends implementing a mural policy in the Lower Rail District to extend and improve upon the area’s current character, though the Public Arts Board recommends that such a policy be implemented throughout the entire City. A temporary mural program is also recommended where the painting could be placed on some type of material which is then attached to the building.

Murals could be another form of public art used to enhance Terminating Vistas throughout downtown. There are some Terminating Vistas that are more suitable than others and the Public Arts Board recommends that the review process engage the public for input so there is support on a community level.

In order to permit murals and various types of wall art, the Public Arts Board recommends that the City amend the Zoning Ordinance and Sign Ordinance to allow wall art and to define a proper review process by the necessary boards. This would also include creating a public notification process for public art in the municipal code.



City Policy Related to Public Art in Terminating Vistas

LANDSCAPING

The City of Birmingham is an excellent example for maintaining high quality landscaping throughout its streetscape in downtown. Well-maintained flower pots can be found hanging from the lamp posts while an array of plants can be found within the gardens along the sidewalks. The landscaping blends well with the surroundings and provides a complimentary aesthetic to the area.

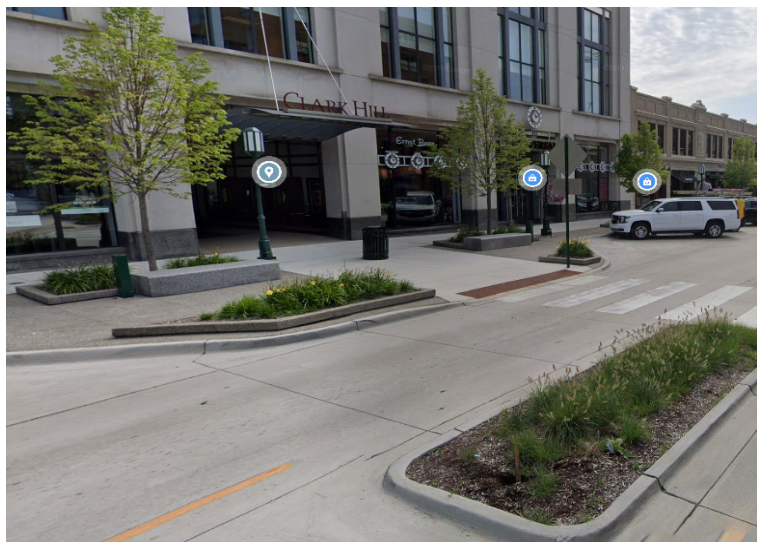
For instances when a public utility is placed within a planter box in a prominent intersection, the Public Arts Board recommends that special consideration for landscaping is made to help screen the utilities from view, especially in cases where no artistic design has been applied to the utility.

When a piece of art is placed within a planter box, the Public Arts Board recommends that special consideration also be made regarding the size and types of plantings surrounding the artwork in order to allow the aesthetics of the art, landscaping and surrounding buildings to work together in a complimentary manner.

The Public Arts Board also recommends the City consider allowing adjacent businesses in downtown design their own planter garden in front of their store. Proper permitting and design process would have to be created and implemented. Doing so could allow some unique designs regarding landscaping and how the plantings interact with the surroundings.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

At the moment, there are no formal requirements for public notification regarding proposals for sculptures, artistic furniture and artistic utilities. The item is posted on the Public Arts Board Agenda and City Commission Agenda, but notifications are not required to be sent to surrounding businesses and residents for public art projects. **In order to promote public input at the Public Arts Board and City Commission, the Public Arts Board recommends establishing a public notification policy for public art projects on City property.**



Recommendation and Implementation Priorities

Recommendation 1: Use public art such as sculptures, artistic furniture, artistic utilities, landscaping and wall art to enhance the City's Terminating Vistas

Implementation: Actively seek artists to provide various forms of artwork. Advertise in the art community for the type of art the City is seeking.

Recommendation 2: Revise the sculpture installation process to incentivize sculptures on loan and to make the installation process more efficient for artists and City staff.

Implementation: Establish an agreement with a professional sculpture installation specialist to consult and assist with sculpture installations in Birmingham. Amend the City's art on loan agreement to require approval of sculpture installation from installation consultant.

Recommendation 3: Revise City policy towards city-standard furniture and utilities to allow for an occasional artistic variation.

Implementation: Amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow an occasional deviation from city-standard benches and light poles where such items may be replaced by an artistically designed light or bench.

Recommendation 4: Create a new policy and review process to allow murals and other various forms of wall art to be placed on the exterior of a building.

Implementation: Amend Zoning Ordinance and Sign Ordinance to allow for placement of temporary and permanent murals and other various forms of wall art. The amendment should include review process by all relevant boards.

Recommendation 5: Establish a public notification policy for art projects on public property.

Implementation: Create a provision in the Public Art Section of the Municipal Code to require public notifications to be sent to residents for public art projects proposed within their area.



Terminating Vista Recommendation and Implementation Framework

Priority	Recommendation	Background	Implementation	Costs	Approval Process
1	Use public art such as sculptures, artistic furniture, artistic utilities, landscaping and wall art to enhance the City's Terminating Vistas.	Public Arts Board is responsible for recruiting and recommending public art in various locations throughout the City.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Public Arts Board creates call for entry to recruit art donations and loans. This includes a request for an artist stipend fund to assist with installation before sending out. Public Arts Board reviews art pieces submitted and selects artwork for recommendation. 	\$2,000 per piece if approved, no more than \$10,000 total per year.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Public Arts Board Parks and Recreation Board (if on greenspace) City Commission
2	Revise the sculpture installation process to incentivize sculptures on loan and to make the installation process more efficient for artists and City staff.	<p>Issues have arisen regarding responsibility for installation and removal.</p> <p>City Employees may not have expertise to install unique pieces of art.</p> <p>Sculpture installation requirements have varied over the years, particularly related to concrete pads.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Public Arts Board recommends revisions to art on loan agreement to allow City to assist with installation and removal to ensure quality control and manage liability. Public Arts Board creates RFQ for sculpture installation specialist to assist with mount fabrication and consult on installation process if necessary. Public Arts Board coordinates with Engineering Department's annual sidewalk program to install concrete base pads. 	<p>Up to \$5,000 for art installation specialist per year.</p> <p>Costs associated with concrete base pad installation (Much more cost efficient to incorporate with Engineering sidewalk program).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Public Arts Board City Commission <p>* Input from Engineering and DPS strongly recommended</p>
3	Revise City policy towards city-standard furniture and utilities to allow for an occasional artistic variation in Terminating Vistas.	City-standard benches and lightpoles are required in the downtown.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Planning Board reviews Terminating Vista report to consider additional Terminating Vista locations as well as possible ordinance changes to permit artistic furniture and utilities. 	No Cost (In house)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Planning Board City Commission
4	Create a new policy and review process to allow murals and other various forms of wall art.	The Sign Ordinance currently prevents wall art.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Design Review Board considers definition for wall art in Sign Ordinance and Zoning Ordinance to help clarify difference between art and commercial signage. Design Review Board considers review process for wall art that possibly includes Public Arts Board. 	No Cost (In house)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Design Review Board Public Arts Board City Commission
5	Establish a public notification policy for art projects on public property.	There is no formal public notification process for art proposals on public property.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Public Arts Board reviews public notification options for public art and makes recommendations for notifications process. 	No Cost (In house)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Public Arts Board City Commission

Terminating Vista Recommendation and Implementation Framework Suggested Timeline Goals

Recommendation Priorities

- 1 Recruit public art
- 2 Revise installation process
- 3 Allow artistic City furniture and utilities
- 4 Permit wall art such as murals
- 5 Establish public notification policy for artwork proposals

Priority	Implementation	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
1	1 - Create Call for Entry to recruit new artwork	Public Arts Board		Parks and Rec	City Commission						
	2 - Application for artwork review and recommendation								Public Arts Board	Parks and Rec	City Commission
2	1 - Consider revisions to Art on Loan Agreement			Public Arts Board			City Commission				
	2 - RFQ for sculpture installation specialist			Public Arts Board		City Commission					
	3 - Coordinate basepads with Engineering's Sidewalk Program								Public Arts Board		
3	1 - Planning Board review Terminating Vista report										TBD - Joint Meeting
4	1 - Design Review Board consider permitting wall art		Design Review Board				Public Arts Board	City Commission			
	2 - Design Review Board consider wall art review process		Design Review Board				Public Arts Board	City Commission			
5	1 - Establish Public Notification Process for Public Art					Public Arts Board			City Commission		

	City Commission
	Public Arts Board
	Planning Board
	Design Review Board
	Parks and Recreation Board