Commercial Design Guidelines
Westlake, Ohio
dover village
commercial design guidelines

City of Westlake
Planning Department
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Westlake, Ohio 44145
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prepared by
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introduction

The Dover Village area is Westlake’s first commercial center. The area initially developed around the intersection of Dover Center Road and Center Ridge Road in the 1840s with a significant boost in the 1940s and 1950s. Very little remains from the first one hundred years however. Some of the buildings in the area today reflect an architectural aesthetic typical of this era the 1940s and 1950s, with simple, streamlined façades in blonde or red brick, strong sign graphics, and a pedestrian-oriented scale. The Commercial Design Guidelines promote this mid-century theme as a way to celebrate Westlake’s original city center as a special district. The Guidelines are not attempting to preserve a “historic district,” since many of the buildings in this area are clearly of a more recent vintage. Instead, the Guidelines acknowledge a unique chapter in the City’s history and capitalize on the appeal of the remaining mid-twentieth-century buildings to define a distinctive sense of place.

The Guidelines promote the retention of existing 1940s and 1950s era buildings in the district, and the incorporation of architectural details and signage styles characteristic of this period for new construction. The goal, however, is not to impose a uniform character on the district, but to allow for variations that occur as the area developed, and continues to develop, incrementally over time. Businesses in this district tend to be smaller, locally-owned operations with separate and unique storefronts. The Guidelines aim to preserve and promote the differentiation of individual businesses, while providing the means for them to combine as a vital, appealing local retail district.
The Dover Village Commercial Design Guidelines are intended to supplement the design review guidelines found in Chapter 1237 of the Westlake Codified Ordinances and signage regulations found in Chapter 1223, and provide more specific guidance based on the unique attributes of the Dover Village area. In the event there is a conflict between the Chapter 1237 general guidelines and the Dover Village Commercial Guidelines, the guidelines adopted for Dover Village would take precedence within the Dover Village Design Review District, as shown at left.

The Guidelines are organized by building type, although there is some overlap and many of the recommendations apply to all properties within the district. To use the Guidelines, consult the section that corresponds to a specific building type, then review the last sections of the Guidelines which address signage, streetscape improvements, and exterior colors, and are generally applicable throughout the district.

The Dover Village Design Review District is considered an overlay zoning district and is indicated in blue on the adjacent map. Financial assistance is available for some properties in the district to implement ideas from the Guidelines. Part of the district is a Cuyahoga County-designated Investment Target Area (ITA). The ITA boundaries are indicated by the red dashed line on the adjacent map. Property owners and business owners within the ITA are eligible for small grants ($2,000) and low interest loans (up to $75,000 for up to 12 years). Funds may be used to renovate the exterior and interior of commercial and retail buildings. All County-subsidized improvements must be consistent with the Guidelines.

A portion of the district also falls within Westlake’s Enterprise Zone. In addition, Westlake’s Community Improvement Corporation may initiate programs to provide revolving loans or other means of financial or technical assistance. For information on either of these programs contact the City of Westlake Planning and Economic Development Department.
review process

Exterior alterations to buildings and signage in the Dover Village Design Review District are subject to review by the Westlake Planning Commission (PC). The PC generally meets on the 1st and 3rd Monday evenings of the month. New buildings, square footage additions and substantial site improvements require Planning Commission and Council approval like all development plans under Section 1220 of Westlake's Codified Ordinances. The design review process can be initiated by the applicant before or in conjunction with any required development plan review.

Design review and approval by the PC must occur before building permits are issued. The PC will use the following design guidelines when reviewing proposed projects in the district.

For more information on the design review and permitting process, or about financial assistance for property improvements, please contact:

Planning and Economic Development Department  
(440) 871-3300, Ext. 4305  
• for design review and economic development questions and zoning requirements

Building Department (440) 617-4105  
• for permitting procedures  
• building permit forms are available on the City’s website at:  
   http://www.cityofwestlake.org/building/forms/bldgPermit.pdf

Cuyahoga County Department of Development (216) 443-7273  
• For more information on grants and low-interest loans to help finance property improvements.
The category of “retail storefronts” includes buildings that are sited at or near the front sidewalk, with parking to the rear or to the side.

1. Building details, particularly on the front façade, should be designed for maximum visual interest.
2. Artificial cladding materials, such as obviously faux stone and synthetic stucco (i.e. Dryvit) are discouraged.
3. Horizontal trim and curved sign bands are encouraged to suggest the streamlined look of 1940s and 1950s-era commercial buildings.
4. Storefront windows provide an opportunity to display merchandise and provide “eyes on the street.” Clear glass should be retained in existing storefront windows, and existing windows should not be reduced in size or eliminated on street-facing façades.
5. Sign bands should be established on primary façades to establish a clear location for signage.
6. Projecting signage may be appropriate, particularly on corner buildings, to reinforce the architectural character of the district.
7. Unique “feature” signs are encouraged to add distinction to businesses in the area.
8. Awnings are encouraged to provide protection from the weather for pedestrians, and to add color to the district.
9. Main entries should be clearly defined, and emphasized with architectural detailing, awnings, lighting, and/or signage.

Feature signs may include three-dimensional signage to provide a unique and recognizable identity for a business.

Canopies and awnings add visual interest to a storefront and call attention to the entrance; projecting signs and a clearly defined sign band reinforce business identity.
10. Decorative paving is encouraged for sidewalks and other paved areas on private property.

11. Outdoor dining is encouraged for restaurants, coffee shops, and other food-related businesses. Outdoor dining may encroach into the public right-of-way, subject to the City’s approval, as long as an unobstructed six-foot sidewalk is maintained for pedestrian passage and it otherwise complies with Chapter 707, Outdoor Dining, of the Westlake Codified Ordinances.

12. The width of driveway curb cuts should not exceed 30 feet. This width is adequate for delivery truck access; wider curb cuts undermine the pedestrian character of the district. Curb cuts should be clearly defined with landscaping or decorative paving.

13. Landscaping is encouraged for surface parking lots. The amount of a parking lot’s landscaped area will vary with the size of the lot, but the following guidelines apply:

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14. Landscaping should be concentrated at parking lot edges to soften the appearance of parking from the street and to provide definition to curb cuts; landscaped islands within a parking lot are also encouraged.

15. Trash dumpsters must be in enclosures as specified in Section 1216.03(j) of the Westlake Codified Ordinances. Loading areas, and mechanical equipment should be located to the rear of buildings, with fencing and landscaping to screen these areas from public view.

Keeping curbcuts to a maximum width of 30 feet helps make the district pedestrian-friendly; outdoor dining and parking lot landscaping also enhance the character of the district.

Horizontal trim recalls the architectural styles of the 1940s and 1950s; providing a roof element over the front door makes the entrance more prominent.

Sidewalk café configuration, with six foot unobstructed pedestrian right-of-way.
Freestanding retail buildings differ from retail storefronts in that they have deeper setbacks from the street and typically have parking in the front setback. This category also includes retail franchises and gas stations.

1. Standardized corporate prototype buildings are discouraged; buildings should be designed to respond to the context of the Westlake community and the Dover Village District.

2. Buildings should be designed with details and materials to evoke the streamlined look of 1940s and 1950s.

3. Blonde or red brick are the preferred exterior cladding materials. Artificial cladding materials, such as obviously faux stone and synthetic stucco (i.e. Dryvit) are discouraged.

4. Clear glass storefront windows enhance the pedestrian appeal of the district and provides night-time illumination for the district; storefronts should be at least 50% clear glass.

5. Sign bands should be used on primary façades to establish a clear location for signage.

6. Monument signs are preferable to pole signs, and should have a landscaped base. Existing pole signs are considered non-conforming.

7. Canvas or metal awnings are encouraged to provide protection from the weather for pedestrians, and to add color to the district.

8. Main entries should be clearly defined, and emphasized with architectural detailing, awnings, lighting, and/or signage.

9. Outdoor dining is encouraged for restaurants, coffee shops, and other similar businesses, and it is permitted visible from the public right-of-way as long as it complies with other provisions of Chapter 707, Outdoor Dining, of the Westlake Codified Ordinances.
10. A 20-foot setback is typically required for new buildings and building additions. If the setback is not used for parking or driveways, outdoor dining, landscaping, outdoor seating, sidewalks, and decorative paving may occur in this area.

11. Parking in front of a building (particularly for the handicapped) should be set back at least 10 feet from the property line. Parking should be well-screened from the street with landscaping, decorative fencing, walls or other treatments.

12. Gas station service buildings should be located at or near the street edge, with gas pumps located to the side or behind.

13. The width of driveway curb cuts should not exceed 30 feet. This width is adequate for delivery truck access; wider curb cuts undermine the pedestrian character of the district. Curbcuts should be clearly defined with landscaping or decorative paving.

14. Landscaping is encouraged for surface parking lots, particularly along the public right-of-way. The amount of a parking lot’s landscaped area will vary with the size of the lot, but the following guidelines apply:

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15. Landscaping should be concentrated at parking lot edges to soften the appearance of parking from the street and to provide definition to curb cuts; landscaped islands within parking lots are also encouraged.

16. Trash dumpsters, loading areas, and mechanical equipment should be located to the rear of buildings, with fencing and landscaping to screen these areas from public view.
Retail strips include groups of individual storefronts that are immediately adjacent, and sometimes connected, to each other. Unlike shopping centers (discussed on page 11) retail strips typically have multiple owners. In the Dover Village District, the retail strips contain many of the 1940s and 1950s era buildings that give the area its distinctive character.

1. Individual businesses within a retail strip should each have a distinctive identity, but there should be a degree of coordination and consistency for the collection of businesses as a whole.

2. Variations in roof forms can reinforce the distinct identities of individual businesses and provide architectural interest within a retail strip.

3. Façade enhancements, particularly the use of trim details that emphasize a horizontal, streamlined appearance for a retail strip, are consistent with the 1940s and 1950s architectural character of the district.

4. The retention of original cladding materials, such as brick façades and stone trim, is encouraged; the application of artificial materials, such as obviously faux stone, synthetic stucco (i.e. Dryvit) or vinyl siding is discouraged.

5. Eliminating or reducing the size of street-facing windows is discouraged, as is filling these windows with opaque materials such as wood panels or spandrel glass. Clear glass storefront windows enhance the pedestrian appeal of the district and provides night-time illumination for the district; street-facing façades should be at least 50% clear glass.

6. Canvas or metal awnings are encouraged; it is not necessary for adjacent businesses to have matching awnings, but a coordinated scheme for all awnings within a retail strip is encouraged.

7. Businesses within a retail strip are not required to have matching signs, but some degree of continuity, in terms of color palette, sign type, sign placement, and method of illumination is encouraged.
Business owners are encouraged to collaborate on a signage plan that addresses the entire retail strip in which they are located.

8. Where space permits, outdoor dining is encouraged for restaurants, coffee shops, and other similar businesses. It is permitted to be visible from the public right-of-way as long as it otherwise complies with Section 707, Outdoor Dining of the Westlake Codified Ordinances.

9. Outdoor dining can be accommodated along the side or rear elevations of retail strips, provided that there is enough space to allow pedestrian passage and that an adequate buffer between outdoor dining and loading/service areas.

10. Retail strips are typically setback from the right-of-way and separated from the sidewalk by a parking lot. Where space permits, landscaping for the edge of parking lots is encouraged; decorative fence treatments at the sidewalk edge are also appropriate to screen parking and enhance the pedestrian quality of the district.

11. A 20-foot setback is typically required for new buildings and building additions. If the setback is not used for parking or driveways, outdoor dining, landscaping, outdoor seating, sidewalks, and decorative paving may occur in this area.

12. Pole signs are discouraged; distinctive wall signs and feature signs are more appropriate for the district.

13. Trash dumpsters, loading areas, and mechanical equipment should be located to the rear of retail strips, with fencing and landscaping to screen these areas from public view in enclosures as required by Section 1216.03(j).

14. Painting rear façades a uniform, neutral color that complements the front and side building elevations, helps to provide a clean and cohesive appearance for properties within a retail strip.

15. Exterior fire escapes, standpipes, vents, etc. should be well maintained and painted to blend with the color of the building.
Rear façades should be maintained to the same level as front façades; strategic use of landscaping or decorative fencing can help to screen service areas, trash dumpsters, and mechanical equipment.

Side elevations can provide opportunities for outdoor dining, tucked away from parking and the traffic of major streets.
Shopping centers include a collection of businesses located within a single complex, usually with a single owner.

1. New shopping centers should be sited to provide storefront visibility and maximum street presence for all tenants.

2. When a new shopping center is sited, parking should be distributed between two areas—a small parking area in front of the shopping center and a larger parking area behind.

3. Buildings should also be oriented in relation to grading, natural features, and adjacent properties; any new construction should minimize changes to natural grade, and the removal or destruction of trees or other natural features.

4. Existing shopping centers, particularly those with a more inward orientation, should increase the visibility of individual tenants as much as possible by providing signage and architectural embellishment on street-facing façades.

5. Variations in roof heights are encouraged to enhance the distinctiveness of individual businesses and provide some variety to the skyline.

6. All observable sides of a shopping center should be designed for architectural interest.

7. Canvas or metal awnings are encouraged for individual businesses, but awning material and color should be used consistently throughout a shopping center.

8. Individual tenants are encouraged to have unique storefronts and signage, but unique features should be part of a coordinated design for the entire shopping center.

9. Outdoor dining is encouraged for restaurants, coffee shops, and other food-related businesses. It is permitted to be visible from the public right-of-way but otherwise must comply with Chapter 707, Outdoor Dining, of the Westlake Codified Ordinances.
10. A 20-foot setback is typically required for new buildings and building additions. If the setback is not used for parking or driveways, outdoor dining, landscaping, outdoor seating, sidewalks, and decorative paving may occur in this area.

11. Benches, planters, fountains, bike racks, decorative paving, and public art are encouraged for shopping center properties.

12. Parking lots should have landscaping at the sidewalk edge and landscaped islands within the parking lot. Larger lots should have a greater percentage of landscaping, based on the following guidelines:

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Emphasis on street-facing façades gives greater visibility for individual businesses and helps to establish an identity for a shopping center.

Clear, well-designed signage and increased emphasis on street-facing façades will help to address this challenge.

Lack of visibility from the street can be a challenge for retailers in some of the area’s existing shopping centers.
13. Mechanical equipment on the ground and waste receptacles must be screened with a fence or plant material as approved by the Planning Commission, or housed in a structure that is in harmony with the surroundings. Trash dumpsters must be stored in masonry enclosures as described in Section 1216.03(j) of the Westlake Codified Ordinances.

14. Mechanical equipment attached to the side or roof of a building, including heating vents, should be kept as low as possible and screened. Color should be compatible with the background.

15. Accessory loading areas should be located in unobtrusive areas and be screened or blocked from public view.

16. Shopping center signage may be uniform for each tenant, or individual businesses within the center may have more flexibility in establishing their own sign identity. In the latter case, a coordinated sign plan must be developed by the shopping center owner and approved by the City.

17. Directory signs listing individual tenants are appropriate, but the design of these signs should incorporate materials and architectural details from shopping center buildings.

18. Directory signs should be designed for maximum legibility by pedestrians and motorists, and must be sited in a way that does not obscure views for drivers entering or exiting the shopping center. A minimum setback of ten feet from the right-of-way is required for monument signs.
Offices and other commercial buildings contribute to the character of the district.

1. Main building entries should be clearly defined; canopies or awnings, and lighting may be used to enhance an entry.

2. Buildings may be identified through wall signage or a monument sign; sign graphics that evoke the architectural styles of the 1940s and 1950s are encouraged.

3. A 20-foot setback is typically required for new buildings and building additions. If the setback is not used for parking or driveways, outdoor dining, landscaping, outdoor seating, sidewalks, and decorative paving may occur in this area.

4. Landscaping should be concentrated at parking lot edges to soften the appearance of parking from the street and to define the ends of curb cuts; landscaped islands within parking lots are also encouraged.

5. Larger parking lots should have a greater percentage of landscaping, with guidelines as follows:

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6. The width of driveway curb cuts should not exceed 30 feet.

7. Trash dumpsters must be placed within masonry enclosures as specified in Section 1216.03(j). Loading areas and mechanical equipment

Awnings help to dress up a building façade; landscaping softens the appearance of parking lots.

The Lifetime building on Westwood Road is a good example of the mid-century architecture that gives the district its defining character.
The Dover Village district includes a mix of property types and uses, including housing. Residential properties within the district can be enhanced through the use of gateway treatments near entries (see Section 1223.08(a), part of Westlake’s Sign Code).

1. Where single-family housing areas intersect with the commercial corridor, brick or stone piers can be used to signal a change to a residential use and to define the entry to a residential area.

2. Apartment and condominium complexes, and other types of multi-family development in the district, should have clear and well-lit entries. Landscaping, decorative lighting, and gateway elements near property entries help to identify these residential properties.
Sign standards vary with different building types, so please refer to the previous sections for more specific information, but the following guidelines apply to all signage in the Dover Village district:

1. Signs should be designed to evoke the graphic and architectural identity of the 1940s and 1950s. Historically authentic reproductions of signs from this era are not required, but sign graphics with a "retro" quality are encouraged.

2. Using colors from the Dover Village palette (page 21) is encouraged for signage in the district.

3. Painted sign panels with overhead, gooseneck light fixtures are appropriate in this district, as are signs that use exposed neon tubing to spell out the name of a business.

4. Feature signs are encouraged for retail businesses in the district. These multi-sided or three-dimensional signs help to establish a unique identity for a business and are usually designed to depict or symbolize some aspect of the business they are identifying.

5. Temporary window signs are discouraged, as they tend to make a storefront appear cluttered, but permanent window signs can be designed to supplement the main signage, adding color and excitement to building façades at the pedestrian level.

6. Durable materials, such as brick, stone, and metal, are preferable for monument signs; monument signs should have landscaping at the base.
Section 1223.10 of the City’s Zoning Code provides additional standards for sign design:

(a) The lettering should be large enough to be easily read but not out of scale with the building, site or streetscape, permitted letter sizes range from four inches to forty-eight inches where appropriate.

(b) The number of items (letters, symbols, shapes) should be consistent with the amount of information which can be comprehended by the viewer, avoid visual clutter and improve legibility.

(c) All wall or fascia signs of buildings on the same lot shall have consistency in size, design, and color, with the style of sign generally consistent throughout the building or group of buildings. Consistency of design includes uniformity of colors or harmonious use of a limited range of compatible colors. (See the Dover Village palette on page 21).

(d) The sign should complement the building and adjacent buildings by being designed and placed to enhance the architecture. The sign shall reflect the primary purpose of identifying the name and type of establishment.

(e) A sign should be constructed with a minimum of different types of elements and materials so as to provide a consistent overall appearance.

(f) Instructional signs shall contain the minimum information and the minimum area necessary to convey the message and instruct the viewer in the safe and efficient use of the facility.

(g) No part of a sign shall project above the parapet line, unless the sign is designed to complement the mid-century architectural character of a building in the district.

(h) Signs in commercial and industrial districts may be internally or externally illuminated provided that light sources to illuminate such signs shall be shielded from all adjacent residential buildings and streets, and shall not be of such brightness so as to cause glare hazardous to pedestrians or motorists, or as to cause reasonable objection from adjacent residential districts.
(i) Identification signs in residential districts shall be illuminated by external means only. Internally illuminated signs shall not be permitted in residential districts.

(j) The source of light shall not be visible from the street and external light sources shall not shine on adjoining properties. No flashing, revolving or intermittent illumination shall be employed.

(k) No flashing or moving parts shall be permitted for any sign or advertising display within the City.

(l) All signs shall be designed, constructed, and erected in a professional and workmanlike manner, in conformance with all applicable building codes, and with materials which are durable for the intended life of the sign.

(m) Signs shall have no secondary or other signage added to the sign face or sign structure, except as recommended by Planning Commission.

(n) For any sign which projects over a public right-of-way, the sign owner shall obtain and maintain in force liability insurance for such sign in such form and in such amount as the Law Director may reasonably determine. Proof of such insurance shall be required prior to obtaining a permit.

(o) Freestanding signs shall be designed and located so as not to obstruct a driver’s visibility entering or exiting a lot or to be a safety hazard to pedestrians or vehicles, and shall maintain a clear line of sight at an intersection.

(p) All sign structures larger than twenty-four square feet or any electrified sign must carry the name and address of the owner, advertising agency, the erector, or agent who is responsible for the maintenance or removal of the sign. All freestanding permanent business and industrial signs must include the street address number at the sign location as part of the business identification.
paving, lighting, and street furniture

Benches, trash receptacles, and other street furniture were not commonly found in 1940s- and 1950s-era streetscapes. These features were not widely used in commercial areas until the 1970s. A well-designed streetscape, though not historically accurate for the mid-century period of Dover Village, would nonetheless increase the appeal of the district and promote pedestrian activity. Property owners are encouraged to incorporate paving, lighting, benches, and trash receptacles into renovation plans and new construction, keeping in mind that any modifications to the public right-of-way will require the approval of the City.

1. Decorative paving materials add a welcome spot of color to the district. Color recommendations for paving materials can be found in the Dover Village palette on page 21. Bold geometric patterns have the most impact.

2. Pedestrian-scaled light fixtures will add a warm glow to the district at night and are appropriate along the sidewalk and within parking lots. Round fixtures with simple, streamlined poles evoke the architectural era of the district.

3. Benches and trash receptacles were not commonly found in mid-century commercial streetscapes, but these elements are welcome in the district today. Timeless, elegantly designed benches and trash receptacles, that do not recall any specific time period, will provide for pedestrian comfort without detracting from the character of the area. Color recommendations for paving materials can be found in the Dover Village palette on page 21.

4. Bus benches were very common in the 1940s and 1950s, so as an alternative to the previous guideline, decoratively painted bus benches could be incorporated into the Dover Village streetscape as a public art opportunity.

Decorative paving can be used to establish a strong color palette for the district.

Bench can reinforce the name of the district, or provide an opportunity for public art.
Entry signage should reinforce the mid-century character of the district.

5. Gateway elements are appropriate at entry points to the district. Signage, lighting, and landscaping at entry points will reinforce the district’s identity.

6. The Dover Village District does not have a continuous tree lawn along the right-of-way, but small breaks of greenery between the street and the sidewalk are encouraged to soften the appearance of the area.

Main gateways to the Dover Village District at the intersections of Center Ridge and Dover Center Roads, and Center Ridge and Canterbury Roads; secondary gateway at the intersection of Center Ridge and Westwood Roads.
The Dover Village area originally developed in the 1940s and 1950s. Several buildings from this era still remain, and their architectural features set the tone for the character of the district. In an effort to recall the look of the 1940s and 1950s, property owners and businesses are encouraged to use colors from the Dover Village architectural palette when designing signs, banners, awnings, fixtures, street furniture, and other architectural features.

The war years of the early 1940s were a time when dark, drab colors, such as brown and olive green were prevalent; patriotic reds and blues were also popular. In the late 1940s, these colors began to give way to softer, lighter hues. At the end of World War II and throughout the 1950s, colors were brighter and more youthful, and color in commercial architecture was often used to make a strong design statement. Blond or red brick were common building material for commercial architecture in this period, and contrasting colors were often used for signage, awnings, and trim. Although the colors in the Dover Village palette are not a perfectly accurate representation of historic building colors, business owners who incorporate the palette into their property improvements and signage will help to establish an attractive, cohesive atmosphere for the commercial district that evokes the history of the area.

1. The Dover Village palette includes dark, earth-based tones and lighter pastel colors.

2. Red or blonde brick are encouraged as the exterior cladding materials for buildings in the Dover Village District; building base colors should be limited to a relatively small number of choices that are in keeping with the overall character of the district.

3. Trim colors should be selected from the broader Dover Village accent palette to coordinate with a building’s roofing and siding materials.

4. Primary colors (red, yellow, blue) and stark black and white combinations are discouraged for signage in the district, in favor of the more subtle colors in the Dover Village palette.
bibliography


credits

Page 1: Historic photograph from *A History and Civics of Dover Village* by R.S. Hudsell and Hazel Rutherford

Page 11: *Monument sign*: Lemon Creek Village in the City of Walnut, California

Page 16: Examples of mid-century signage from [http://www.roadsidenut.com](http://www.roadsidenut.com)

Page 17: *Gooseneck light fixture*: SPJ Lighting, Inc.

Page 18: Historic photograph from *You've Come a Long Way, Westlake... (...and You've Got a Long Way to Go)* by William M. Robishaw

Page 19: *Light Fixture*: Hanover Lantern, Inc. ; *Paving*: Wassau Tile, Type 3 Fabritex paving, installed on Martin Luther King Boulevard in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; *Bench*: Barco Products Pattern Collection; *Trash receptacle*: Victor Stanley T-Series

Page 21: *Architectural Forum*, April 1946