X. Aesthetics

1. The ODOT will provide options to the adjacent receptors, property owners, and local political authorities via public meetings conducted by the appropriate ODOT personnel. Aesthetic options and material types shall be presented. All structural noise barriers shall be textured on both the highway and receptor side and have top coping or sill treatment. Aesthetic options for noise barriers must adhere to the latest version of ODOT’s Aesthetic Design Guidelines.

2. Landscaping will be considered for all noise barrier projects. Funding (i.e. federal, state, local, enhancement, etc.) will be determined after completion of the public involvement process. The landscaping design plan for all noise barrier projects shall be designed by ODOT or an approved ODOT design consultant.

For Federal-aid projects, landscaping and other visual enhancements can be provided to improve the aesthetic appearance of noise barriers (including berms and barrier/berm combinations). Such enhancements can also be provided on any Federal-aid project as part of a context sensitive approach, even if noise barriers are not constructed. Landscaping and other aesthetic treatments are eligible for Federal-aid participation to the same extent other eligible project costs are.

If ODOT decides to design and construct a vegetative screening for aesthetic purposes, then the adjacent property owners must be informed that this screening is not meant for noise abatement and will provide little to no noise reduction. Vegetative screenings are an enhancement for the adjacent properties and should only block the line of sight of the majority of the traffic. See Appendix D for a sample drawing of a vegetative screening. The view of the top of tractor-trailer should not be taken into consideration in the design of a vegetative screening. ODOT-OES should be contacted and utilized in regard to the use, design, and aesthetics of any screening activities such as walls or vegetative screens. A vegetative screening can be kept in a project manager’s toolbox for use in ROW negotiation with adjacent land owners. Spending for vegetation in lieu of a noise barrier is limited to not more than $125 per lineal foot.

3. The Ohio Revised Code (ORC) Section 5517.05 requires ODOT to present design options available for the proposed noise barrier at each public information meeting including, when physically feasible to construct, at least one design consisting of natural barriers such as trees, shrubs, mounds or other similar elements should be
presented. The adjacent property owners must be informed that trees and shrubs are not meant for noise abatement and will provide little to no noise reduction. Should earthen mounds in lieu of structural barriers be presented, the abatement potential of said mounds shall also be addressed. Should any of the above alternative measures be compatible with the design goals of a given project and are found to be feasible and reasonable, the measures can be presented to the public.

4. Transparent noise barriers will only be considered when the affected land use is one that could be considered unique or has a special interest by the community. Examples of such uses could be a community's central business districts, historic properties or other areas that are considered to be special or unique to the community and that a visual connection to/from the transportation facility is required to maintain that use. In these cases, the barriers must qualify for federal funding, must not pose a sound reflective impact to areas opposite the facility and be approved by both the Administrator of ODOT's Office of Environmental Services and by the ODOT Deputy Director of the Division of Planning. Once approved, the use of transparent noise barriers will be included in the cost of the project and funded by the project.

5. When noise abatement requirements dictate the erection of noise barriers, the design and construction of such noise barriers shall be in accordance with the Department's established Aesthetic Design Guidelines. These guidelines set forth the ODOT’s goals and expectations that highway improvements and their appurtenances be visually compatible with their surroundings and aesthetically pleasing in general, and in arriving at such designs, consideration has been given to the preferences of the affected community as well as to the overall appearance of the extended highway corridor. Toward this end, noise barrier surfaces that are visible from either the roadway or the community side shall be designed to include a uniform, aesthetic textured appearance.

6. Proposed icons, logos and/or lettering on noise walls will be considered on a case by case basis. The design must be reviewed and approved by both the Administrator of ODOT's Office of Environmental Services and by the ODOT Deputy Director of the Division of Planning. Once approved, the icons/logo/lettering on the noise wall will be included in the cost of the project and funded by the project. The number of different icons and frequency of each icon shall be reviewed and approved by ODOT. Large noise wall projects should have no more than 4 different icons allowed.