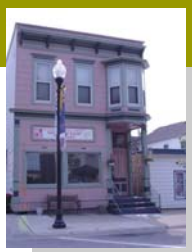
DOWNTOWN DESIGN GUIDELINES

City of McHenry



Your Resource for:

- New Construction
- Façade Renovations
- Design Elements
- Signs and Awnings
- Lighting, Landscaping and Fencing

Date: November 2004

This document was created by the
City of McHenry
Community Development Department.

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Introduction

The City of McHenry is a diverse community that has managed to maintain its small town charm despite being located in one of the fastest growing counties in Illinois. With a variety of housing choices, a wide range of employment opportunities, and unparalleled access to recreational opportunities, McHenry is an attractive community and a pleasant place to live.

A key component of McHenry is its downtown. Stretching from the Fox River, west to Crystal Lake Road, the downtown is considered the economic heart of McHenry. Recognizing its importance, City Leaders have taken steps to maintain and enhance this valuable asset by establishing a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District, adopting a Downtown Plan for redevelopment, and preparing plans for a 0.8 mile Riverwalk through the downtown. The information in this booklet is intended to supplement those actions by providing technical assistance for architects, builders, and home and business owners as they plan alterations to existing structures and new development in the Downtown.

McHenry Area Chamber of Commerce
1257 N. Green Street

History

The traditional commercial storefront is the cornerstone of a City's downtown commercial area. Dating from the 19th and early 20th centuries, these buildings create a strong visual image for the downtown. Unfortunately, the appearance of a building is often regarded as secondary to the daily concerns of running a business. Experience, however, shows that appearance is a factor in a successful downtown. Downtowns underwent significant changes in the 20th Century. Increased reliance on the automobile brought new competition to downtowns in the form of strip centers and shopping malls. Many downtown business owners sought to catch the attention of passing cars by installing shiny new facades and eye-catching signs. The results of these actions were mixed. Too often the very thing that held downtowns together, the visual relationship of the building facades, was destroyed.

The buildings, history and setting make a downtown a unique place. It is therefore desirable to acknowledge these resources and take full advantage of them. These Design Guidelines are intended to help property owners, business operators, architects, designers, developers and contractors do just that.

Design Guidelines

The following pages are guidelines for new construction and for enhancing the appearance of existing buildings in the Downtown Overlay District. These standards will provide the criteria by which the City Council, Planning and Zoning Commission and Staff will evaluate development plans for consistency with the implementation policies of the City's Downtown Plan and the purposes of the Downtown Overlay District. It is important to remember, however, that design improvements alone do not develop economic vitality. Sensible business development, aggressive marketing, and permanent management of the downtown are also necessary.

New Construction

Construction of new buildings on vacant lots in the downtown is encouraged. The design and location of such buildings, however, requires special care. Two types of new construction are discussed: Infill Development, where the new construction "fills-in" gaps in the existing street façade, and Standard Development, where new construction is on parcels located in lesser dense areas of the downtown. This section is intended to provide architects, developers and contractors with the basic design elements applicable to new construction, including scale, proportion, form, and materials. However, other sections of the booklet that address specific items such as doors, windows, awnings, signs, etc., should also be consulted as details of the new building are finalized.

Infill Development

The design of a new infill building, especially the front façade, is critical. The new façade must look appropriate in relation to surrounding buildings, without replicating them. When designing a new infill building, particular attention shall be paid to the following:

- ***Building Design***
  The design of a new infill building should be harmonious with its surroundings. Architectural style is not restricted, however, extremes of style, or attempts to recreate a style indigenous to the downtown are discouraged. Infill buildings located along the route of the proposed Riverwalk should be designed to take advantage of the Riverwalk frontage.

- ***Building Setback***
  A new infill building should maintain the line of existing storefronts at the sidewalk edge. Creating gaps in the streetscape by setting the building too far back from its neighbors, or by placing off-street parking in front of a building should be avoided (*See Figure 1).* If, due to design or construction limitations, a new building cannot be flush with its neighbors, a maximum distance of 5 feet, in front of or behind the existing setbacks of adjacent buildings, may be acceptable.

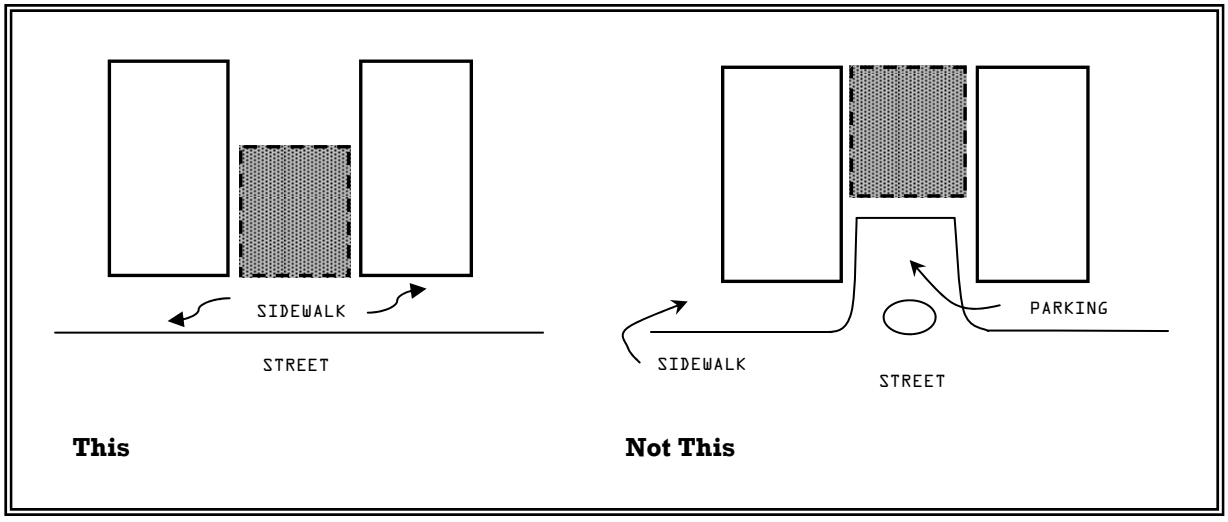

Figure 1, Building Setback

New Construction, cont.

- ***Building Scale and Massing.*** When designing a new infill building, the scale (height and width) and mass of existing buildings along the street should be respected.
  - ◊ The average height and width of nearby buildings can be used to determine a general set of proportions for an infill structure or the bays of a larger structure. The infill building should fill the entire void, or, if the site is large, the mass of the façade can be divided into two or more smaller bays to maintain the established rhythm of the block (*see Figure 2)*.
  - ◊ Buildings should meet the ground with a solid base treatment to create a visual transition from the sidewalk to the building wall. Glass treatments that extend to the ground are not recommended

Figure 2, Facade Proportions

- ***Roof Forms***

The type of roof used for an infill building should be similar to those found on adjacent buildings. In general, flat roofs are preferred over gable, gambrel, hip, or mansard roofs. A parapet shall be used to conceal a flat roof and any roof protrusions, other than the chimney.

- ***Openings***

Doors and windows on an infill building should be similar in size, proportion and alignment based on the architectural style of the building, and to those on adjacent facades. The rhythm of structural mass to voids (doors, windows, etc.) should related to rhythms established on adjacent buildings (*see Figure 3*).

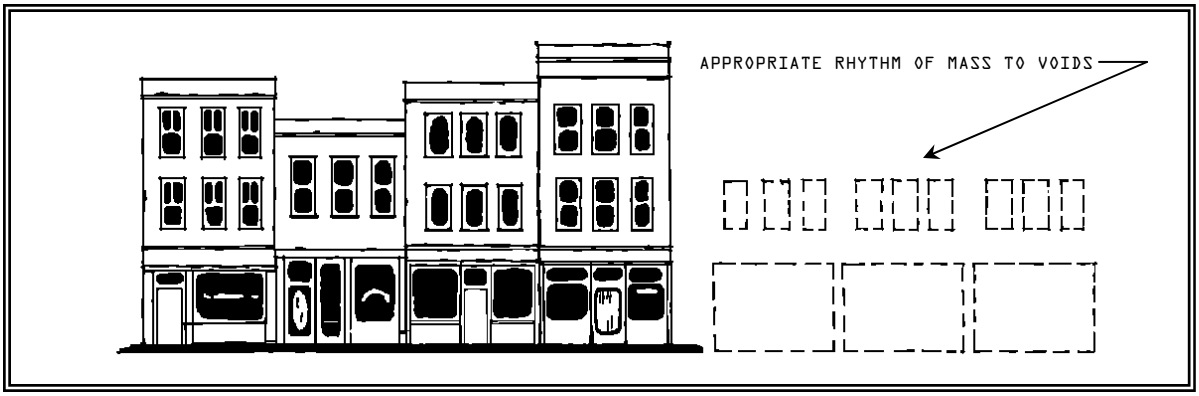

Figure 3, Openings

New Construction, cont.

- ***Detailing***
  Details from adjacent buildings, such as the masonry work, cornice lines, window shapes and bulkheads should be reflected in the architecture of infill buildings.

- ***Building Materials***
  Materials used in the construction of infill buildings should be similar to that used on adjacent buildings. A new building should not stand out from other buildings on the block. Brick and wood are preferred materials. Materials such as aluminum siding, aluminum panels, mirrors or reflective glass, corrugated fiberglass and metal are not considered appropriate. Aluminum, steel, or vinyl cased wood windows may be used, but should have an appropriate finish and color consistent with the overall color scheme.

- ***Miscellaneous***
  - Floor Level. The floor level of an infill building should relate to and be consistent with the floor levels of adjacent structures.
  - Side Elevations. All sides of a building should receive design consideration. Expanses of blank wall should be softened through the use of landscape treatments such as foundation plantings or trellises.
  - Mechanical Equipment. Mechanical equipment or other utility hardware on the roof, ground or building elevation should be located so as not to be visible from any public ways, customer parking areas or neighboring residential or public uses, whenever possible. Otherwise, such equipment shall be screened from view by materials compatible with the building or with landscaping.
  - Utilities. Newly installed utility services and service revisions necessitated by new construction shall be underground.

Standard Development

The design of a new building on a vacant site in a less dense area of the downtown also requires special care to ensure that the integrity and character of the downtown are maintained. Particular attention shall be paid to:

- ***Building/Site Design***
  The same building design guidelines for Infill Development are applicable to Standard Development, Architectural style is not restricted, however, extremes of style, or attempts to recreate a style not indigenous to the downtown are not encouraged. Surrounding areas should be viewed to develop a compatible and harmonious building design. The overall development should reflect the character of the site upon which it is located. Factors to consider include the size of the site, topography, maintenance of existing viewsheds, mature tree stands or other vegetation, and the context of nearby structures.

  With all new development, the pedestrian orientation of the downtown should be considered. Provisions for safe pedestrian movement to, from and within the site should be provided. An attractive streetscape and areas for parking, with ample landscaping are encouraged. New off-street parking should not be prominent when viewed from main streets — it should occur behind, between or within structures. Parking areas should be screened with landscaping, and wrought iron fencing or masonry walls.

  The main entrance(s) to a building should face the primary street, with secondary entrances as needed from off-street parking areas or secondary street facades. Service entrances, waste receptacles, and loading facilities should be located so as not to be visible from public streets and parking areas.

  Monotony of design in multiple building developments should be avoided. Variation of detail, form, and siting should be used to provide visual interest within a development.

New Construction, cont.

- ***Building Setback***
  Maintaining the pedestrian orientation of the downtown is critical. A new building should be constructed as close to the street as possible, to reflect the setback of existing adjacent structures. Parking facilities should be placed behind the building. When on a corner lot, the building should be placed as close to the corner as possible (see Figure 4).

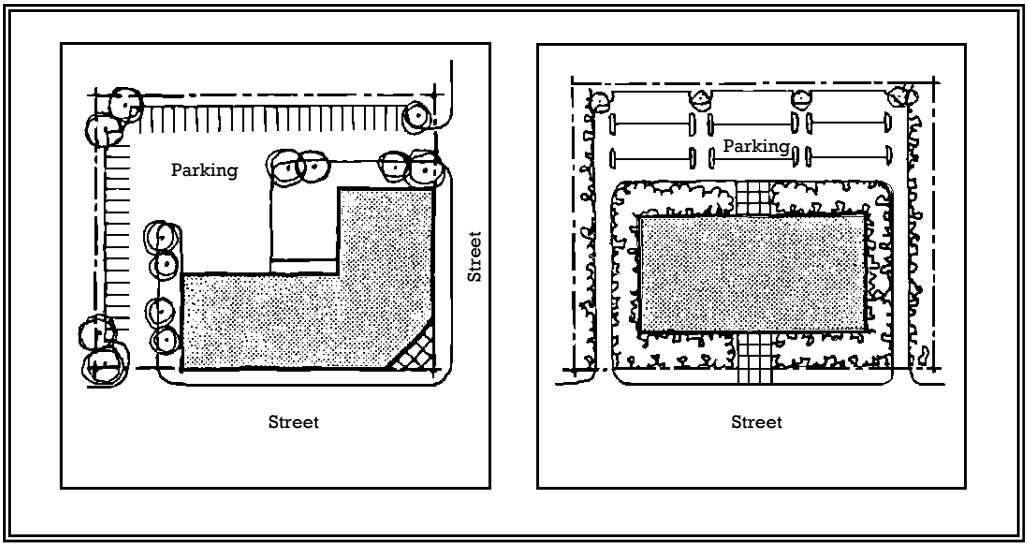

Figure 4, Building Setback

- ***Building Scale and Massing***
  The façade of a new building shall be in scale and harmonious with existing buildings on the same street.

- ***Openings***
  Exterior openings such as doors and windows shall have balanced proportions.

- ***Building Materials***
  Materials used in for new construction should be similar to that used on nearby buildings. A new building should not stand out from other buildings on the block. Materials of a durable quality, such as brick, stone and wood are preferred. There should be definite transitions between changes of material and plane while maintaining an overall simple geometry for the building mass.

- ***Miscellaneous***
  - ◊ Side Elevations. All sides of a building should receive design consideration. Expanses of blank wall should be softened through the use of landscape treatments such as foundation plantings or trellises.
  - ◊ Mechanical Equipment. Mechanical equipment or other utility hardware on the roof, ground or building elevation should be located so as not to be visible from any public ways, customer parking areas or neighboring residential or public uses, whenever possible. Otherwise, such equipment shall be screened from view by materials compatible with the building or with landscaping.
  - ◊ Utilities. Newly installed utility services and service revisions necessitated by new construction shall be underground.

Façade Renovations

The building facades on a street provide the visual image of the downtown. Because they are composed of similar parts, their appearance should be organized and coordinated. Over the years, however, maintaining this appearance has been a challenge. Due to technological developments, changing tenants, and different merchandising trends, a storefront will go through multiple design changes over time. And the upper façade, often viewed as less important, will be ignored or even covered over. Because building appearance is an essential ingredient of a successful downtown, owners are encouraged to restore and maintain their building facades in their original, intended manner.

The façade of the typical downtown building is made up of three parts: the storefront with entrance and display windows, the upper façade, and the cornice that caps the building. Within these three parts are the details that give a façade its character, including the bulkheads, transom, storefront cornice, windows, and window hoods (*See Figure 5).*

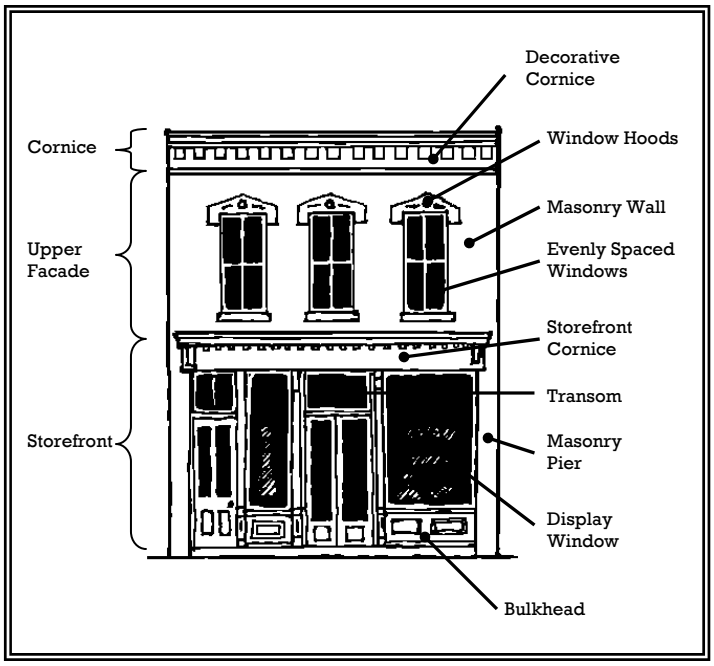

Figure 5, Typical Facade

When planning a façade renovations, consult the following guidelines, as well as the guidelines relating to specific elements found later in this booklet:

- Original features, historic elements, and examples of craftsmanship shall be retained wherever possible. The removal of distinguishing features or significant architectural details should be avoided. Previously made changes that have achieved architectural or design significance should be retained.
- Changes that have no historical basis or seek to create an earlier appearance should be avoided.
- Deteriorated features should be repaired instead of replaced. If replacement is necessary, the new material should match the original as closely as possible. This shall be determined by physical or pictorial evidence, rather than on speculation or the availability of architectural elements from nearby buildings.
- Whenever possible, materials that have been applied to cover over older, traditional façade elements should be removed to expose windows and other architectural details.
- Shutters, if utilized, shall be sized to appear as though they could work. However, shutters were seldom used on 19th and 20th century buildings.
- Storm windows should reflect the appearance and detail of the inner window as closely as possible.
- Sandblasting, high pressure water, and other abrasive cleaning methods should not be used because they damage the structure. Masonry repair such as tuck pointing should use an approved mortar mix and method. Silicone waterproof coating is not an appropriate treatment.
- Signage should fit into the cornice area above storefront transoms. Darker background colors with lighter lettering are recommended, however, strong contrasting colors such as white lettering on a black background, are discouraged. Lettering styles should be simple, not ornate and difficult to read.
- Awnings should be of a proportion and color to compliment the existing colors of the building.
- Accessibility modifications should be made at side or rear entrances to maintain façade integrity.

Rear Entrances

An often over-looked element of a downtown building is its rear entrance. This space is usually thought of and used as a service area, and thus has been poorly maintained and unattractive. With the addition of public parking areas behind stores and the potential Riverwalk, however, the backs of buildings will receive more exposure. A clean, well-maintained rear entrance can be an asset to a downtown building. It can provide direct customer access from rear parking areas and improve circulation between the street and rear parking areas. If properly planned and maintained, a rear entrance will welcome customers, not threaten them.

When considering a rear entrance to your store, you should first ask, would walk-though traffic help or hinder my business? Would it be an added convenience to my customers? If the answer is yes, there are several factors you'll need to consider when planning any changes.

- The rear entry should not compete with the storefront in terms of importance. Remember the rear entrance is the secondary means of access and should be have a more functional appearance. However, be sure to follow the conventions you've established on the street façade side of your building. If you have an already identifiable image, carry it through on the rear façade.
- Consider the neighboring buildings and try to make your rear entrance compatible. You may want to consult neighboring property owners to plan a coordinated approach to rear enhancements.
- The design of the rear door should reflect its change in function. Since it will no longer function as only a service door, it should provide a welcoming, inviting appearance.
- The addition of glass windows on rear façade provides additional merchandise display areas for customers and passers-by.
- On the interior, display and storage areas may need to be rearranged in order to accommodate the change in pedestrian circulation through the store.
- A small sign near the rear door should be included to identify the business.
- An awning can be added for visual identification and customer convenience.
- A wall mounted light fixture near the door can provide adequate exterior lighting.
- Consider adding landscaping at the rear of the building, if possible. Planter boxes with flowers, or potted evergreen or shrubs can add color and better define the rear entrance. Be sure to maintain these properly.
- Don't forget that service functions such as trash collection, loading/unloading, shipping and storage must be accommodated.
- If possible, work with nearby businesses to provide a single, central location for trash collection. Screening dumpsters with a fence or similar structure can help to prevent clutter.
- Remember to clear snow from rear entrances.

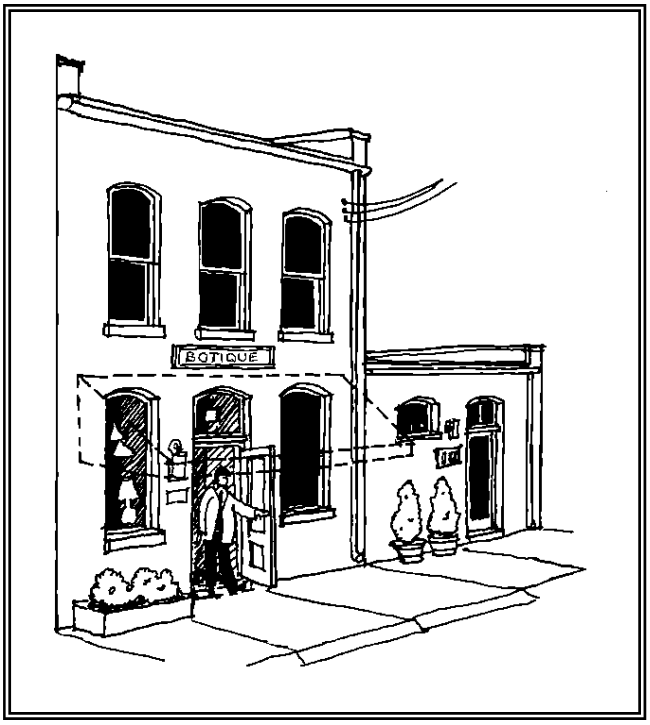

Figure 6, Enhanced Rear Facade

Figure 6 illustrates some of the above-mentioned enhancements that can be made to a rear façade.

Windows

Windows play an important visual role in the downtown. Display windows provide merchants with an area to display their wares. The upper story windows establish the pattern that helps to tie together the facades of a block. Transom windows provide light and ventilation to the inside of the building. Window style and decoration has changed through the years (see Figure 7). However, proper care and maintenance of all storefront windows remain keys to an attractive building.

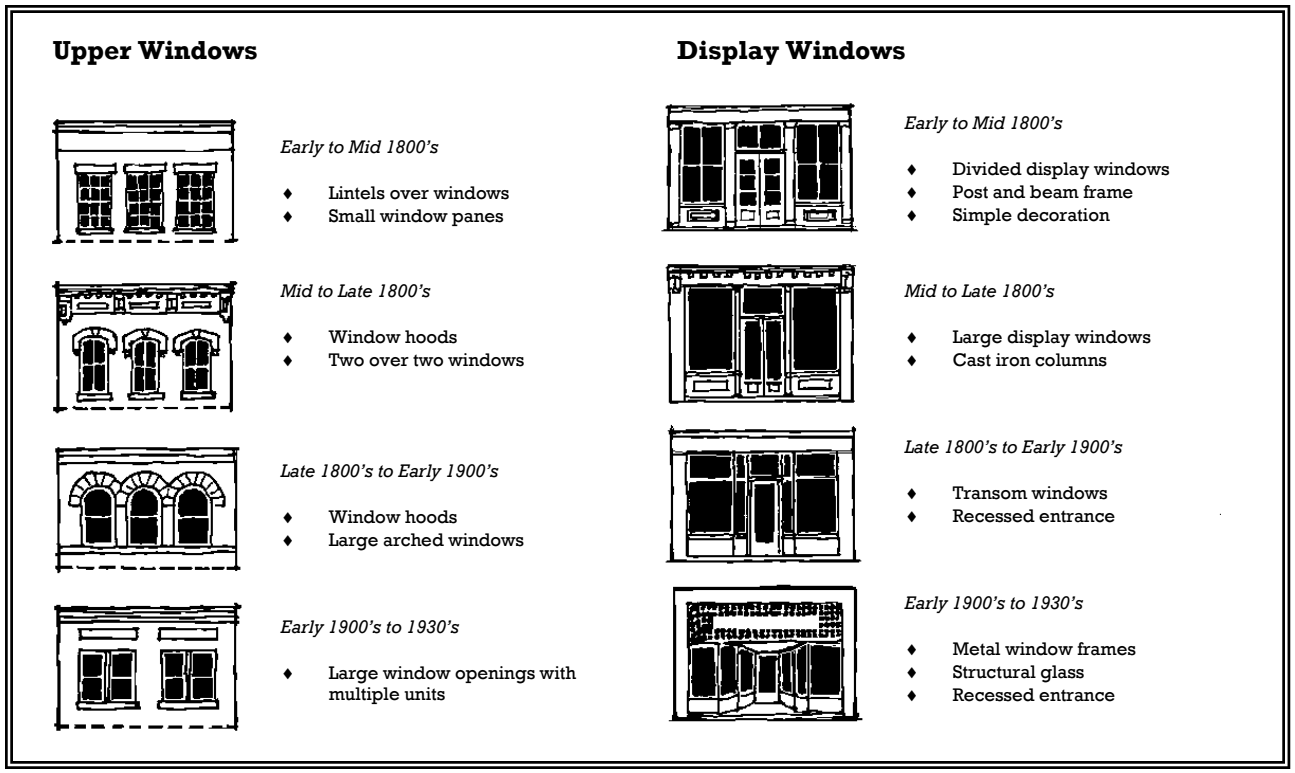

Figure 7, Window Types

- ***Display Windows***. The display window is a crucial element in the success of a downtown business. An attractive, well-planned display can be the difference between someone merely walking by or actually coming in to shop. After setting up your window display, be sure to view the display from outside, to gain the same perspective as customers and passers-by. Also, be careful with all window signage. While a display window can provide space for an attractive painted sign, you should not cover excessive amounts of any window with signage.
- ***Upper Story Windows***. Upper story windows are often neglected, inappropriately replaced, or even boarded up. Not only does this impact the appearance of building, it can change the character of a block. If your building has upper story windows, be sure to set up a regular maintenance schedule. This will help prevent further deterioration.
- **Transom Windows.** Transom windows, located at the top of the storefront opening, are a source of natural light and ventilation. For energy conservation, these windows were often covered or removed. Covering or painting over transom windows upsets the design relationship of the façade and destroys the rhythm of repeating patterns on the street. Uncovering and restoring transom windows is encouraged.

Windows, cont.

Window Repair. The most common window problems involve damaged or deteriorated wood, faulty window operation, and broken glass panes (see Figure 8). Many problems can be easily repaired a minimal cost.

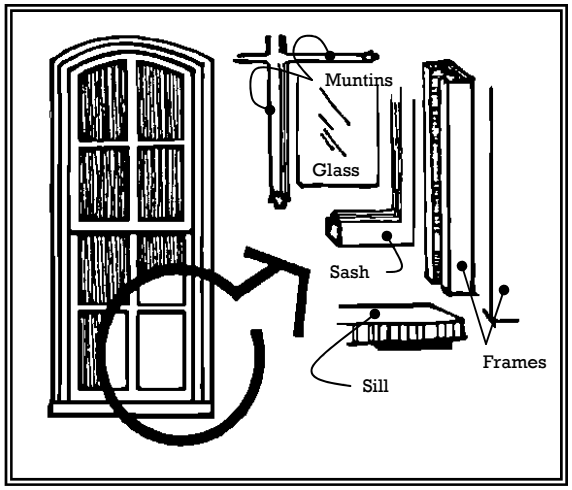

Figure 8, Window Components

- Deteriorated wood is often found on the sill or bottom of the sash. These parts can be replaced without replacing the whole window. Local building supply stores may have pieces that match the original window. Minor repairs can be made by scraping off old paint, filling cracks with putty or caulk, sanding, priming and applying a fresh coat of paint.
- A window that isn't operating like it used to should be addressed. It could be that the window is painted shut. This can be corrected by tapping the sash with a hammer wrapped in cloth. Another problem could be with the window mechanism (sash locks, cords, weights). If this is the case, contact a window dealer who can offer assistance without changing the window.
- Broken glass panes can be easily fixed by removing all old glass and glazing putty, and installing a new pane using the appropriate glazier's points and putty.
- Be sure to check all joints between a window and its masonry opening. If loose or open joints exist, caulk to prevent air and water infiltration.

Window Replacement. Sometimes repairs may be impractical and the only option available is replacement. If you're replacing only one window, find a replacement that matches the existing units. If you cannot find a suitable replacement, consider having one custom made. Wood is the preferred choice, however if you must use aluminum or vinyl, a darker color is preferred. Do not alter the existing window opening to fit the new windows and do not install windows that are not in keeping with the style of your building (see Figure 9).

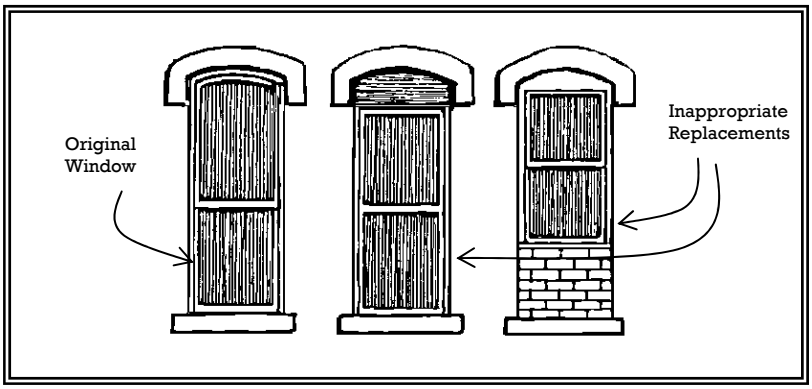

Figure 9, Window Replacements

Storm Windows. Installing storm windows is a great way to cut down on your energy costs. The downside is that they often look inappropriate on an older building façade. If possible, consider installing storm windows on the inside so they will not be seen. If they must be installed on the outside, make sure they are the same shape and have the same overall design features as other outside windows. An anodized or baked-on finish is more desirable than plain aluminum.

Doors

Traditionally, downtown buildings had three doors. On the building front, there was a storefront door, providing access to the business, and a secondary door, providing access to the upper floors (see Figure 10). The rear door was primarily used as a service door.

Figure 10, Front Doors

- ***Storefront Door***. Historically, the entry to a store was more than just a door. The design and appearance reflected its commercial importance. The traditional storefront door was substantial, built of wood with a large glass panel. Despite its stately proportion, the door was inviting to a customer. Although traditional storefront doors are rarely found these days, there are several things that can be done to make a front door the special, inviting element is should be.
  - A front door should be compatible with the rest of the storefront and make a significant statement.
  - To retain a traditional appearance, a wood door with a tall glass panel is most appropriate to maintain the original character. Try and locate a salvaged older door to repair or use a new door of similar design.
  - If a traditional appearance is not desired, the design choice should be based on the overall design of the storefront. Many different wood and metal styles are available. If a glass and aluminum door is chosen, consider using a dark, anodized finish rather than a metallic color.
  - Avoid over-decorating the door. The design should reinforce the character of the building and be inviting for shoppers.

- ***Secondary Door***. A secondary door on the front façade provides access to the upper floors and is usually less elaborate in design. When choosing a secondary door, keep in mind that it should be visually understated, fitting in with the overall façade, but not drawing attention to itself. To maintain a traditional appearance, an old wood panel door is most appropriate.

- ***Rear Doors***. A practical style is recommended for a rear door to reflect the unadorned character of the rear façade. If the back door will be used as a customer entrance, consider the addition of glass to the door to make it more inviting to shoppers and passers-by. A more substantial rear door and entrance is appropriate for businesses along the proposed Riverwalk. It should be substantial enough to attract customers without overwhelming the rear façade. Refer also to the Rear Entrances section of these guidelines

Awnings

Awnings can be both a decorative and functional addition to a storefront. Visually, an awing can add character and interest to a storefront. Practically, an awning provides a sheltered space for customers to view store window displays, and can provide energy saving benefits, especially when used on southern facing windows. When planning an awning for your building, the following should be considered:

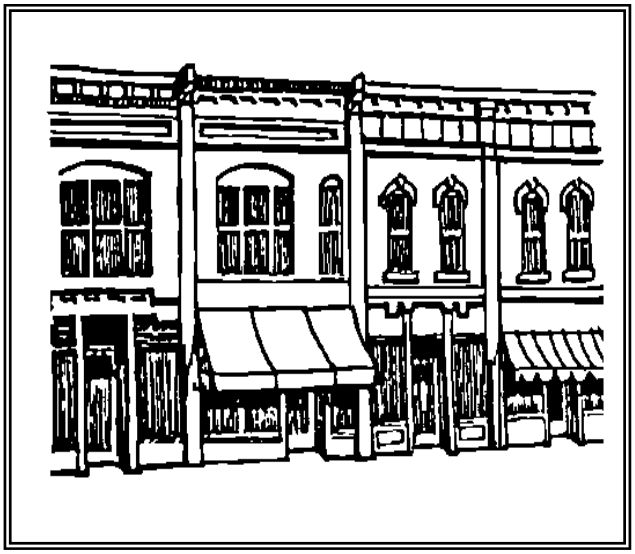

Figure 11, Awning Style

- ***Design***. The design of an awning determines how energy efficient it will be. There are two types of awnings available, operable, and fixed. An operable awning can be opened and closed, allowing sun to shine in on cold days, and providing shade on warm sunny days. A fixed awning is primarily decorative.
- ***Style***. Awnings should be integrated into the design of the building façade, with a simple pitch, and profile that matches the buildings bay structure. Awnings along a street should have a consistent pattern in size and shape, and not conflict with others. Look at your neighbors' buildings and visualize how adding an awning will affect the character of the streetscape (See Figure 11).
- ***Materials.*** Awnings can be constructed from several different materials, including canvas, vinyl, and aluminum. Whichever material is chosen, make sure it is guaranteed weather-resistant. Fading or bleaching from the sun is also an important consideration.

    - ◊ Canvas. Canvas awnings are traditionally popular, but must be weather-treated before installation. Canvas has a lower initial cost, but may require more maintenance than plastic or aluminum
    - ◊ Vinyl (Plastic). Vinyl has a more contemporary effect, but can be attractive if done correctly. Vinyl is more flexible and usually requires less maintenance than fabric.
    - ◊ Aluminum. Aluminum is another choice but is more residential in character and not appropriate in the downtown area.

- ***Mounting.*** Awnings should be mounted so that the valence is approximately 7 feet above the sidewalk. A 12-inch valence flap is usually attached at the awning bar and can serve as a sign panel. Typically, an awning will project between 4 and 7 feet from the building. An awning can be attached above the display windows and below the sign panel or cornice. It can also be mounted between the transom and the display windows, which allows light into the store while shading the merchandise and customers. An awning over upper story windows should not cover the piers or the space between the window sills and the storefront cornice.
- ***Color***. Look at the entire building before deciding on a color for your awning. You'll want a color that enhances the existing features without overwhelming them. For buildings with more detail, a subtle shade should be used. For buildings with minimal architectural detailing, a bright accent color may enhance the façade. Pattern is important, too, depending on the image you would like to project.
- ***Signs***. The valence of an awning has traditionally used for advertising. If you chose to incorporate a sign on an awning, keep the message simple and for identification purposes only.
- ***Illumination***. Internally illuminated or back-lit awnings are not recommended.

Color and Paint

Color

Choosing the right color combination for a building can unify the elements of the façade and relate the building to others on the block. Again, step outside and look at your building as it relates to others. Make sure the colors you use are in character with the rest of the buildings on the block. Generally, no more than 3 colors are sufficient for a building facade. Paint manufacturers have a large selection of historic colors available and can assist with an appropriate color scheme. Stay away from bold colors that attract undo attention to a property.

- Background. Muted or natural tones are appropriate for the Background of the building. The Background consists of the upper wall and the piers on either side of the storefront. This color is often natural brick and requires no painting. In fact, painting of brick surfaces is strongly discouraged.
- Major Trim. The color of Major Trim elements, such as cornices, window frames, sills and hoods, and the storefront frame, bulkhead and columns should complement the background color.
- Secondary Trim. Secondary Trim, such as the window sashes, doors, and certain cornice and bulkhead details, should enhance the color scheme established by the Background and Major Trim. A darker shade of the Major Trim is often used to highlight these features. Caution should be exercised to ensure that the façade is not over-decorated.

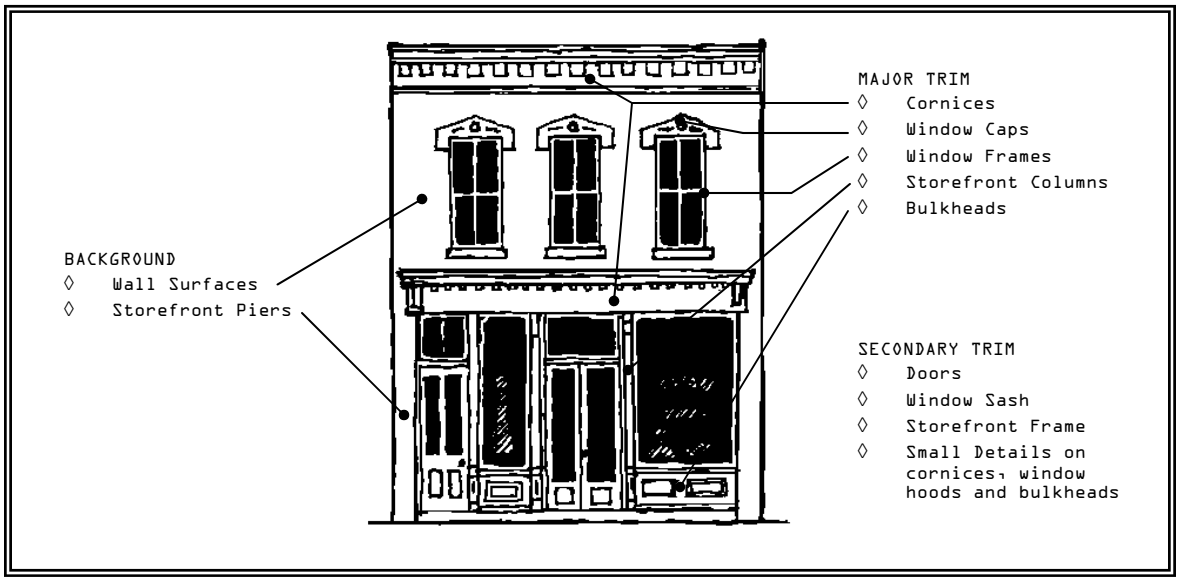

Figure 12, Building Color

Different color schemes were popular at various times. In the mid-1800's, soft, neutral tints were common. Toward the end of the 19th century, darker, richer shades were used. Tastes changed again at the beginning of the 1900's to lighter, calmer colors. If you are thinking about returning your building to its original colors, carefully scrape the paint from a small area. There may be several layers of paint over the original color. Its possible that the original color may have changed over time. For a better idea of the true color, wet the original surface. The base color will appear more accurately when wet.

The sun will play an important role in the colors you select. Before deciding on a color, take a paint chip outside to see how it looks. Do this at various times of the day, and also on both sunny and cloudy days. Sometimes a small paint chip is not enough to get a good idea of how a color will look. In that case, invest in a quart of the color you choose and apply it to a small area on your building. The effect may be surprising.

Color and Paint, cont.

Paint

Painting your building can provide a dramatic improvement in your building's appearance for a relatively low cost. After deciding on the appropriate colors, however, your work has just begun. There are several steps you should follow to ensure your new paint job will be long lasting and successful.

- ***Type of Paint.*** Should you use oil based or latex? Both have their advantages and disadvantages. Oil based paints are generally more durable, and may provide better adherence. Clean up is more difficult. Latex paints are easier to apply and clean up is simple. However, latex paint can be less durable than oil based. Whichever you choose, select a quality paint. Although you'll pay more, a quality paint will last longer than a cheaper paint, will not fade or peel as quickly, and gives better coverage.

  Different materials, stone, brick, wood, block and metal, require different paints and primers. Consult a local paint dealer for assistance in selecting the right type of paint.

  Paint is available in different finishes, including gloss, semi-gloss and flat.

  It is important to note that once you use a certain type of paint for your building, you should continue to use the same type paint. Switching back and forth between oil and latex is difficult.

- ***General Preparation.*** There are many things you can do to prep your building for painting. Check the condition of any wood and replace any boards that are rotted. If you are painting a masonry building, check the condition of the mortar and tuck-point where necessary. Review the condition of your windows. Install new glass in all broken windows. Replace damaged putty with a glazing compound and make sure it goes all around the windows. You'll need to wait 2-3 days for the compound to dry before you can paint.

Figure 13, Surface Preparation

- ***Surface Preparation.*** Prior to painting, all surfaces should be adequately prepared. All loose or peeling paint must be removed. Wire brushes and scrapers are the best tools to use (see Figure 13). If these do not work, consider a blow torch or electric heat gun. Use caution with these last two devices, with only enough heat to soften the paint so it can be easily pushed away. Consider using a primer for the first coat, especially on older buildings. It will help the final coat adhere better.

- ***Scheduling.*** Certain times of the year are better than others for painting. If the weather is favorable, your paint job will go better.

Signs

Signs are a vital part of any downtown. They call attention to your business and help attract shoppers to your store. More importantly, signs help shape the image of the downtown. Flashy, bright colored signs are no doubt attention-getters, but are they appropriate for your business? Or for the downtown? When selecting a new sign for your business, ask the following questions:

- ***What is the Purpose of My Sign?*** Do you merely want to identify the name of your business? Or should you provide information on the products you sell or services you offer? Who are you trying to attract? Take some time to consider what you want your sign to do.
- ***What Type of Message Should I Use?*** Can you convey your message with words? Or will a logo or symbol be more recognizable to potential customers? Possibly, a combination of words and symbols is appropriate.
- ***What Style Sign Should I Use?*** For most downtown businesses, wall, window or canopy signs are the only types of signs that can be used. For new development or redeveloped sites, a freestanding sign is a possibility . If you can use a freestanding sign, consider a monument style sign to maintain the pedestrian scale of the downtown. Taller pole signs are inappropriate and should be avoided.
- ***What Materials Should I Use?*** There are many types of materials that can be used for a sign. Wood, plastic, metal, canvas, stone, brick, paint on glass, and etched or stained glass are some of the materials available. Each have unique qualities that can effectively get across you message and enhance your building façade.
- ***Where Should I Put My Sign?*** When considering sign placement, you need to visualize how your sign will appear in relation to the entire façade. A sign should not dominate the façade; its shape and proportions should fit the building just as a door or window fits. The most common location for a wall sign is just below the lower cornice. This location compliments the architecture of the building and presents a strong image. Other common locations include on the glass display window and on the awning flap (see Figure 14). A good resource to consult is a picture of how your building looked in the past. This may give you ideas about how signs were related to the details of your building. Signs should never project above the cornice line or be mounted on the roof of a building. Never cover up architectural details.

Figure 14, Sign Placement

If you have a rear entrance, a small wall or window sign can help identify your business to customers using rear parking areas. For rear entrances on businesses with frontage on the proposed Riverwalk, a larger sign may be appropriate. If identifying an upper floor business, a small, subdued building mounted plaque sign next to the entrance is appropriate.

A freestanding sign should be located near the entrance to the site. Be careful not to block the view for vehicles or pedestrians exiting the site.

- ***Should I Illuminate My Sign?*** Illuminating a sign may be desirable. Individual back-lit letters and signs illuminated by wall-mounted fixtures are appropriate. Illuminated box signs, exposed neon, flashing signs, moving signs and electronic or fixed letter reader boards are not recommended.

Signs, cont.

The design of your sign requires significant forethought. The color, message, and type of lettering you choose play an important role in expressing the image and personality of your business. As a basic rule of thumb, simple is better than complex when it comes to sign design.

NOTE!
Be sure to consult the City's Sign Regulations before planning your new sign!

- Think about how much your sign will say. Too many words can be hard to absorb, especially in the downtown environment filled with visual images. Keep your message simple and to the point.
- When choosing colors, look at the colors of your building and use them as a guide. A simple color scheme, with no more than three colors, is recommended. Natural, muted tones are better than bold, flashy colors. Adequate visual contrast between the background and wording is recommended.
- The type of lettering on your sign can help to express the personality of your business. There are three common styles of lettering, all with numerous variations. *Serif face* is a historically appropriate style, with variations ranging from simple to fancy. *Sans serif* lettering provides a more contemporary look, with cleaner, bolder lines. *Script* lettering is more decorative and provides a more personal style. To better visualize the various styles, look at other signs in the City. Think about how each style expresses the business or product it advertises. And then, think about the image you would like your sign to project.
- Who you chose to fabricate your sign is an important decision. Simple, well made signs are far more appealing than an elaborately decorated sign that has a sloppy appearance. Select a sign maker only after you've viewed samples of their work.
- Where existing, illuminated box signs can remain. However, all electrical conduit and boxes should be concealed from view, and the box should be maintained as needed to be unobtrusive, coordinating with the surrounding wall color.

Don't overlook the fact that your building presents an image that acts as a sign!
Even the best looking, most well made signs will go unnoticed if your building's appearance is lacking.

Figure 15, Sign Examples

Fencing

Fencing will have limited uses in the downtown. Typically, fences are used for one or more of the following purposes: screening, enclosure, separation and decoration (see Figure 16).

- *Screening*. For example, a fence can be used to block the views of a trash dumpster, or it can be used to block the views of vehicles in a parking lot from an adjacent single-family home. When screening dumpsters or utility boxes, be sure to check with the waste hauler or utility company to make sure they will have access to facilities. Don't provide more screening than necessary. For example, if a dumpster is five (5) feet in height, use no more that a six (6) foot high fence. Also, consider working with your neighbors. One larger trash enclosure is more desirable that several smaller, scattered sites. Wood is an acceptable material for screening purposes and should be solid and either painted or stained. Masonry walls are preferred for this purpose when nearby buildings are masonry.
- *Enclosure*. A fence can provide privacy by enclosing a yard or other private space. Use caution when considering a fence for enclosure purposes. Enclosing an entire yard with solid wood fencing is not considered appropriate in the downtown. If enclosure is absolutely necessary, consider a picket, aluminum or wrought iron fence or a combination masonry wall and fencing.

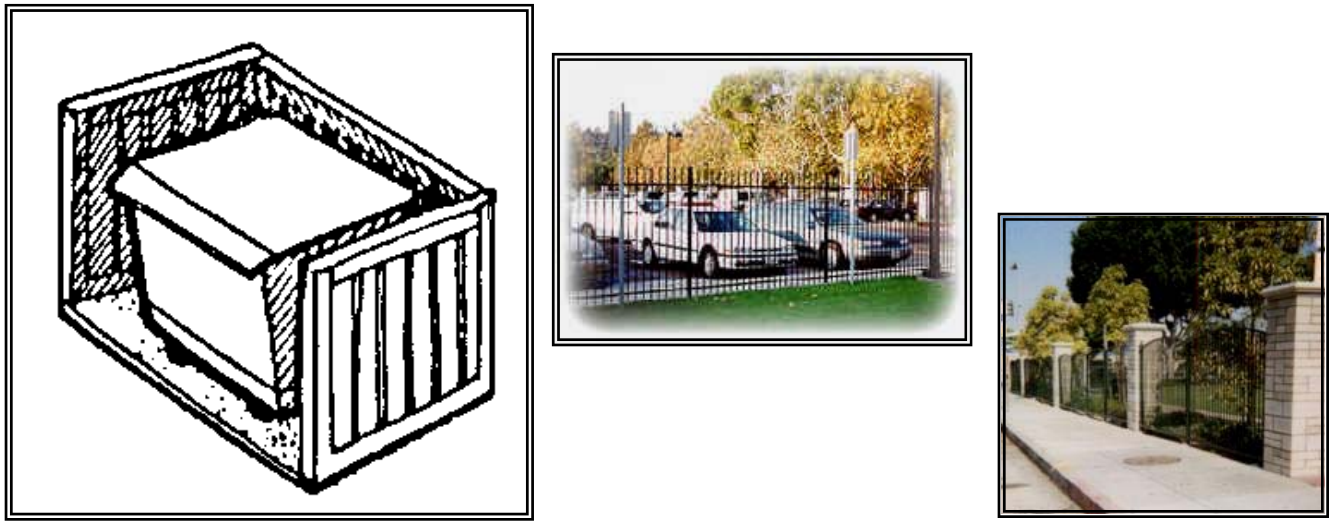

Figure 16, Fencing

- *Separation*. A fence can separate an outdoor eating area from the public sidewalk, or it can separate vehicular areas from pedestrian areas. Low wrought iron fencing and/or masonry walls, in conjunction with landscaping are appropriate.
- *Decoration*. Fencing is often used with landscaping and/or hardscape materials to provide a decorative look to a building site.

When considering a fence for your downtown property, first determine what purpose the fence will serve and then, select the appropriate material. Chain link fencing is not considered appropriate in the downtown .

Lighting

Lighting is an important element when considering visibility in the evening hours. Generally, street lighting installed by the City will provide adequate lighting of the overall building and sidewalk. However, there are times when you may want to provide additional illumination to your site.

Lighting should only be used to illuminate entries, signage, displays, adjacent pedestrian and parking areas, or to highlight significant architectural elements (see Figure 17). Use fixtures with a traditional style, or contemporary fixtures that are appropriately scaled . Ground mounted fixtures should be used to illuminate freestanding signs, landscaping, walkways, parking areas and architectural features. Building mounted fixtures should be used to illuminate entries, wall mounted signs, and walkways adjacent to buildings. Building mounted fixtures should be coordinated in appearance with any freestanding light fixtures. Most manufacturers have coordinating styles and can assist in selecting the right fixtures for your building. Fixture colors should be muted and coordinate with the overall color scheme of the building. Exposed or painted metal finishes are recommended.

Figure 17, Exterior Lighting Examples

To attract attention to your storefront area, there are some traditional methods of lighting you can use:

- Well-lit display windows attract attention to items in your window.
- Residual light washes the sidewalk and attracts pedestrians.
- Light over recessed entry doors can highlight your entrance.
- Lighted signs in the window (neon is acceptable) can highlight products and services.

Bollard lighting is an appropriate choice to illuminate walkways. The lower height is in keeping with the pedestrian scale of the downtown. Another alternative for walkways adjacent to a building is the use of wall mounted fixtures. Parking lot lighting should complement the site by maintaining a similar look to building lighting. Generally the height of parking lot lighting should not exceed 18 feet. Lighting used to highlight architectural features should be ground mounted and concealed where possible to prevent vandalism.

Always use the minimum wattage necessary to meet the purpose of the lighting. Glare and light spread onto adjoining residential properties are prohibited.

The following lighting types are **not** recommended for use in the downtown:

- Visible fluorescent bulbs -
- Exposed neon lighting on the building exterior -
- Flashing lights -
- Colored bulbs, except for temporary seasonal displays -
- Internally illuminated awnings -

Landscaping

The addition of landscaping can help to soften areas in the downtown by adding color and life to an otherwise hard and noisy area. When properly located and maintained, landscape elements can enhance the appearance of a site , supply a place of refuge for the public, and provide energy saving benefits. Landscaping consists of plant material, such as trees, shrubs and flowers, and hardscape items, such as masonry walls, textured concrete, paver bricks, flagstone, limestone, wood, steel, copper and cast or wrought iron. Although it can be a challenge to find adequate area on your site to incorporate landscaping, there are several options available to consider:

- ***Planters/Boxes***. Decorative planters and window boxes can highlight and add color to a storefront or rear entrance. The use of flowering annuals or evergreen shrubs is recommended. Planters should be constructed out of materials consistent with the architectural style of the building. If your planters will be adjacent to public areas, be sure to keep the style consistent with the style of other public amenities. Do not let planters infringe upon pedestrian access to sidewalks and pathways. Artificial plants are not recommended, except for seasonal displays.
- ***Foundation Plantings***. Adding landscaping along the foundation of the building is encouraged. Low growing shrubs, perennials, annuals and groundcover are recommended (see Figure 18). Avoid large expanses of mulch
- ***Wall Expanses***. Large expanses of blank wall can be broken up with foundation plantings, as earlier described, intermediate sized deciduous trees, and man-made elements such as trellises (see Figure 19).

Figure 18, Foundation Plantings

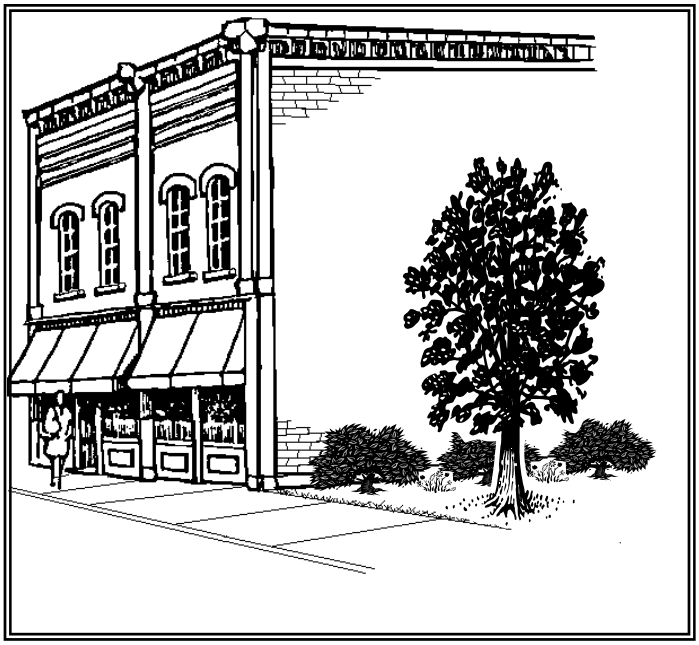

Figure 19, Plantings Used to Break Up Blank Wall

NOTE:
Plants, trees and shrubberies must be regularly maintained! If not, they could become an eyesore.

- ***Decorative Elements***. Decorative elements such as benches, fountains, statuary, brick pavers, stone walls and walkways should be tastefully done and not overdone (see Figure 20). If adjacent to public areas, keep the style consistent with other public amenities. Appropriate materials to consider include, brick, cast or wrought iron, copper, patterned or textured concrete, natural stone or rock, decorative landscape block, steel (anodized, painted or powder coated), and wood. Inappropriate materials are concrete block, galvanized metal, plastic statuary, railroad ties, exposed or unpainted steel, and tires or other rubber material.

Figure 20, Decorative Elements

Maintenance

Regular maintenance is the most efficient and economical way to keep your building looking its best. As a general rule, you should treat any historic detail with care. First and foremost, maintain what you have. If necessary, repair or replace the detail, duplicating or complementing the original. The following tips will assist you in identifying and addressing potential problems.

Masonry

Masonry includes both brick and stone. It can be found on buildings of almost any date. Extreme care is required for any masonry repair to prevent an obvious and unsightly patch.

- **Moisture.** Brick and stone are durable but they can deteriorate over time (see Figure 21). Most often, water infiltration is responsible. Moisture can enter through the top of a wall or where the wall meets the roof. Check your roof, flashing, and wall copings periodically for soundness. Gutters and downspouts should also be inspected periodically for leakage.

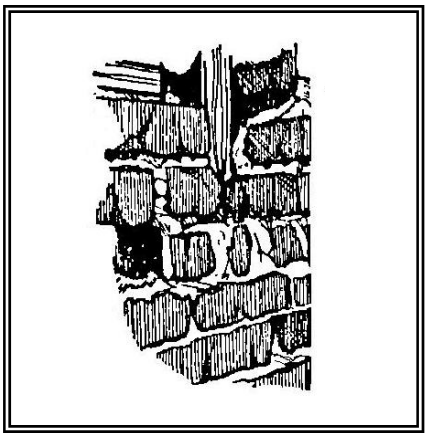

Figure 21, Masonry Damage

- **Tuckpointing**. The mortar used in older masonry buildings gradually erodes as water runs over the wall surface and with freeze/thaw cycles. Joints should be inspected periodically for crumbling or missing mortar. If mortar joints have recessed more than 2", they should be repointed with new mortar to prevent water infiltration and ensure the integrity of the wall. New mortar joints should match the original in style, size, composition, and color. It is especially important to repoint with a mortar of the same hardness as the original. The softer historic mortar compresses as the bricks expand in warm weather and flexes as they contract in cold weather. It is by design, the sacrificial element of the wall and gradual erosion is to be expected. Harder modern mortars with a high content of Portland cement will resist the warm weather expansion of the brick, which can cause cracks in the brick surface. In the cold weather, this same inflexibility may cause cracks to open up as the historic bricks contract.

- **Cleaning**. Masonry cleaning can have a huge impact on the appearance of a building. Most historic masonry buildings have never been cleaned and accumulated dirt can obscure the original masonry color. Masonry should always be cleaned by the gentlest possible method. In many cases low pressure water washing (no more than 250 psi), together with scrubbing with a natural bristle brush may be sufficient. If paint or heavy grime must be removed, a chemical cleaner may be required. There are a variety of chemical cleaners available and a qualified cleaning contractor should be consulted to evaluate your building and recommend a treatment. Whatever treatment is selected, a test patch should first be tried and allowed to weather for a few weeks or months. If the results of the test are satisfactory and no damage is observed, it should be safe to proceed. Remember to protect nearby trees, shrubs, and groundcover when cleaning your building. Chemical cleaners may be hazardous to vegetation.
- **Sandblasting**. Sandblasting is especially harmful to brick surfaces, eroding the hard outer layer to expose a softer, more porous surface that will weather rapidly. You should be aware that sandblasting will disqualify a project from consideration when applying for federal tax credits.
- **Painting**. Exposed masonry should never be painted. A previously painted surface can be restored by a chemical paint remover. Only if chemical paint removal proves impractical should previously painted brick or stone be repainted.

Maintenance, cont.

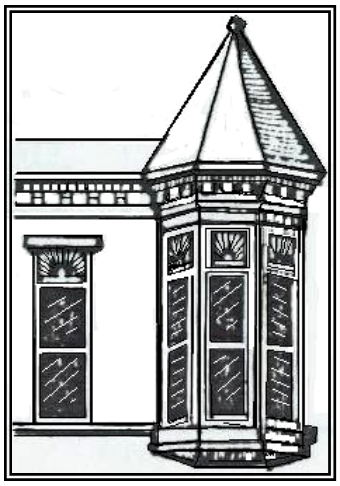

Figure 22, Wood

Wood

Storefronts, cornices brackets and other decorative façade elements were often made of wood (see Figure 22). These original exterior woodwork elements should be retained wherever possible. Regular maintenance will prevent deterioration. Check periodically for soft, rotted areas, splits, and dampness. Damage or decayed sections can usually be repaired by renailing, caulking, and filling. Epoxy pastes and epoxy consolidants can also be very effective in repairing even seriously rotted wood. When painting, use an oil-based primer followed by two coats of oil-based paints.

Severely rotted or missing pieces may be reproduced by a good carpenter or millwork shop. Try to match or at least complement the existing details when replacing woodwork.

Metal

Metal decorative elements (see Figure 23) were often applied to brick and stone facades. Cast iron was used extensively for storefront columns and window lintels. Stamped or pressed metal was most often used to create decorative metal cornices. This kind of architectural ornamentation became quite popular because intricate detail could be reproduced at a reasonable cost.

The signs of metal deterioration are obvious: corrosion, tears, holes and missing pieces. Pressed or stamped metal may be of copper, which requires no surface protection, or of sheet iron, usually coated with zinc or lead to retard rusting. A proper coat of paint is essential to prevent rust and corrosion on such metals. Missing parts can be reproduced in fiberglass or aluminum using existing pieces to make a mold. Be sure to communicate to the person fabricating the replacement part the importance of maintaining the intricate decoration of such pieces.

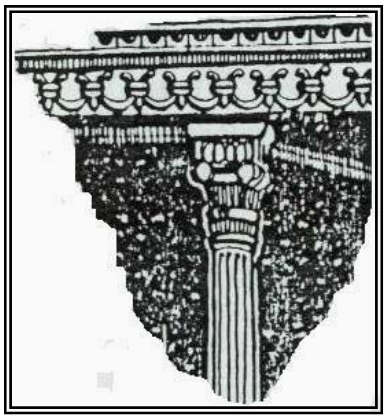

Figure 23, Metal

Decorative Glass

Beveled, stained, leaded and etched glass are all forms of decorative glass. Glass decoration is often covered up. Look for it in transoms or behind plywood window covers (see Figure 21). Sagging means that the glass and frame will need to be reinforced with a brace. Leaded or stained glass can have problems. The metal between the glass pieces, called the "came," could be either zinc or lead. Always use the same metal when making repairs.

Figure 24, Decorative Glass

Resources

There are a multitude of resources available to assist you with the planning of your development or redevelopment project. A few are listed below:

City of McHenry Landmark Commission
Greg Lofgren, Chairman
333 S. Green Street
McHenry, IL 60050
(815) 363-2170 www.ci.mchenry.il.us

McHenry Public Library
809 N. Front Street
McHenry, IL 60050
(815) 385-0036 www.mchenrylibrary.org

McHenry County Historical Society
6422 Main Street
P.O. Box 434
Union, IL 60180
(815) 923-2267 www.mchsonline.org

Illinois Main Street
Office of Lt. Governor Pat Quinn
Thompson Center
100 W. Randolph, Suite 15-200
Chicago, IL 60601
(312) 814-5220 www.state.il.us/ltgov/mainstreet

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency
Preservation Services
#1 Old State Capitol Plaza
Springfield IL 62701-1507
(217) 785-4812 www.state.il.us/hpa

National Trust for Historic Preservation
1785 Massachusetts Ave, NW,
Washington, DC 20036
(202)588-6219 www.nationaltrust.org and www.mainstreet.org

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 809
Old Post Office Building
Washington, DC 20004
(202) 606-8503 www.achp.gov

Websites
www.preservationdirectory.com
www.preserveamerica.gov

After you've planned out the details of your project, you're ready to move to the next step — completing the work. If the work is rather simple, you may choose to do it yourself. For the more complicated tasks, it's best to hire a professional. There are many reputable contractors who can complete the job on time and within budget. Unfortunately, there are others out to make a fast buck, resulting in poor quality, or unfinished work. The following tips will help in selecting a reputable contractor:

- Get more than one estimate and get them in writing.
- Ask the contractor for references and addresses for similar work. Drive by those sites and if possible, contact the property owner to discuss their experience with the contractor.
- Inspect the contract carefully to make sure it includes the contractor's full name, address and phone number, a description of the work to be performed, starting and completion dates, total costs of work to be performed, and a schedule for the down payment, subsequent payments, and final payment.
- Never sign a contract with blank spaces or one you do not fully understand. If you are taking out a loan to finance the project, do not sign the contract until your lender approves your loan.
- Find out if the contractor has a warranty or guarantee on his or her work.
- Make sure the contractor has minimum amounts of insurance for property damage, bodily injury, and improper repair.
- Get lien waivers. This protects you from claims against you or your property in the event you contractor fails to pay his or her suppliers or sub-contractors.
- Don't make final payment until you are satisfied and all subcontractors are paid.

Acknowledgements

These design guidelines have been developed from many sources. Of particular note is the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street program, who's work is a model for all communities looking to maintain and enhance the vitality of their downtown areas. Also, thanks are extended to the many communities who have drafted and implemented their own design guidelines, many of which were refined and used in the preparation of this document.

City of McHenry

DOWNTOWN DESIGN GUIDELINES, CITY OF MCHENRY

City of McHenry
Community Development Department
333 S. Green St.
McHenry, IL 60050
Phone: 815-363-2170
Fax: 815-363-2173
Email: ci.mchenry.il.us