

Torrington Design Review Guidelines

Downtown Historic Area

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TORRINGTON DESIGN REVIEW GUIDELINES

DOWNTOWN HISTORIC AREA



Guidelines for Rehabilitating Existing Storefronts

Downtown Torrington has a unique architectural history and is filled with buildings with historic character and distinctive style. Property owners are encouraged to restore their buildings in a historically sensitive and appropriate manner. New construction should be architecturally compatible with local historic buildings. Additions to Downtown Torrington buildings should relate closely to the existing building, while maintaining the visual prominence of historic buildings. Most of the historical buildings in Downtown Torrington were built during the Industrial Era 1860-1920.

Art Deco buildings appeared in Torrington in the 1930's with the construction of the Allen Building and Warner Brothers Art Deco Movie Theater. The concept of restoration is simple and straightforward. Use materials that need little or no maintenance and which will equal the natural beauty and characteristics of the original structure. Replace and/or repair the original facades to help recreate Torrington's Industrial Era shopping district or the Art Deco building designs.





Allen Building



Warner Theater

To obtain information on historic buildings, property owners are encouraged to look for old photographs, contact the Torrington Historical Society architectural archives, ask neighbors or look for old materials stored in the basement or attic for help in determining the historic elements of the building. You can also consult the Torrington Historic Resource Survey, 1983, Volumes 1 and 2, on file in the City Clerks office.

Later storefronts often hide rather than remove original elements and details. By carefully removing select non-historic materials, the historic character may be revealed. Historic elements revealed should be retained and incorporated into restored storefronts. The Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* provides good guidance in proper restoration and renovation of historic buildings.



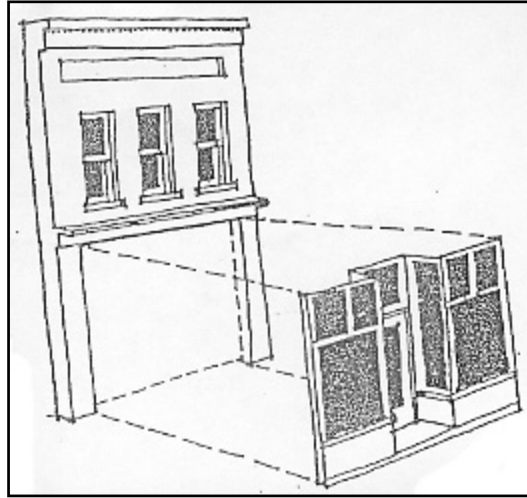
The following guidelines are recommended:

- Maintain the commercial character of existing storefronts. Avoid adding elements that appear residential in character. The traditional Torrington storefront was composed almost entirely of windows, providing maximum light and display.
- Maintain the open character of the storefront by using comparatively large amounts of glass. This large glass area creates a visual openness that is part of the overall proportional system of the façade and is as valid today as it was in the past. Generally there should be more glass and less wall at the storefront level, balanced by more wall and less glass on the upper façade. Don't add solid materials to display window openings. Do not block up windows from either the inside or outside in order to install new windows or display something inside. Do not use clouded or "frosted" glass in display windows. If a smaller window area is desired for a new use, the historical windows should be retained. Install interior blinds, shutters or curtains.



- Use materials that were historically used in Torrington. Vinyl and aluminum siding, artificial masonry and mirrored or tinted glass are not appropriate for high visibility buildings. A mansard roof with wood shingles, rough textured wood siding and gravel aggregate materials are not appropriate.

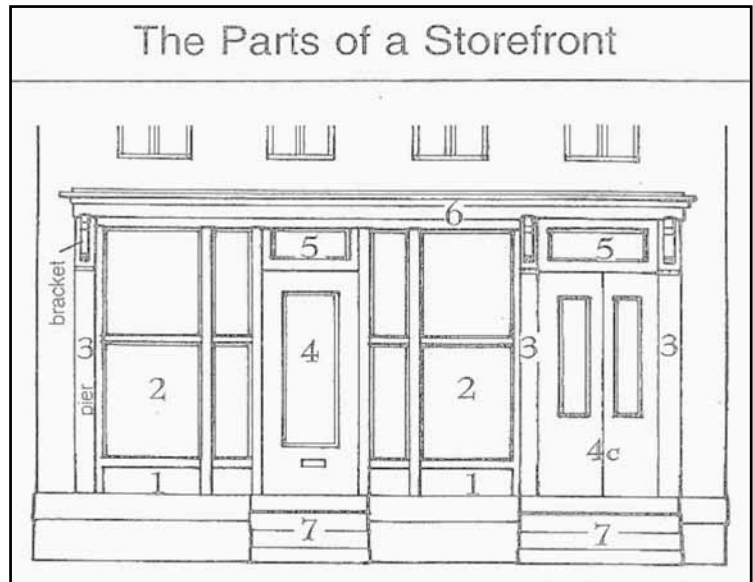
- Historically, storefronts were set into the façade, not applied to it. This character should be maintained. A general rule for remodeling is that the storefront should be designed to fit inside the original opening and not extend beyond it. Maintain the location of the historic storefront entrance. If the entrance was always at the center of the building, avoid moving it to the side.



- Avoid placing air conditioners in storefront and transom windows.

Parts of a Storefront

1. **Bulkheads (or kickplates).** Bulkheads provide a base for the glass of the display windows. They are typically of frame construction, and sometimes have raised panels.
2. **Display windows.** Extensive window displays were considered advertisements in themselves and visibility of merchandise was a priority for most shop owners. Large display windows typically flank the entrance to a storefront.



3. **Structural supports.** Constructed of wood, masonry, or cast iron, these supports are necessary to carry the weight of the structure above and to allow the use of large display windows. These supports are typically located on both sides of the windows and entrance doors.
4. **Entrance.** Storefront entrances are either set flush with the windows and wall, or are recessed to provide more display area. Sometimes a secondary entrance that leads to the upper stories is incorporated into the storefront design (4c.) Remaining historic wooden doors are important and should be retained.
5. **Transoms.** Transoms are windows located above the entrance and the display windows. They are often of multi-pane design, or fitted with stained, leaded, or textured glass. Sometimes they incorporate lettering or ornamental designs.
6. **Storefront Cornice.** A cornice (a simple or elaborate series of moldings) usually caps the storefront composition. It may include brackets, panels, and other ornamental details.
7. **Other Elements.** Storefronts also typically include signs and awnings, and may incorporate steps and ramps into their designs. Building numbers and lighting are also included.

Guidelines for Upper Stories and Cornices of Commercial Buildings

Upper story windows give an appearance of vitality and use even if the upper floors are vacant. They create a repeated pattern that helps tie together the facades.

- Maintain the rhythm created by upper story windows. Avoid filling in window openings, adding new openings, or otherwise altering their shape or size.
- Closed window openings should be reopened and treated as original.
- Place air conditioning units on walls that are not visible from the street. No new openings should be made in the front wall to accommodate air conditioners, mechanical devices, satellite dishes and vents. Also avoid these in 2nd floor windows and walls visible from the street.
- Retain and maintain all window moldings and trim, and other elements of the midsection of commercial buildings.
- If a historic cornice must be removed because it is too severely deteriorated, replace it with a new cornice. The new cornice may be a simplified design, but it should convey the same character as the historic cornice.



Painting.

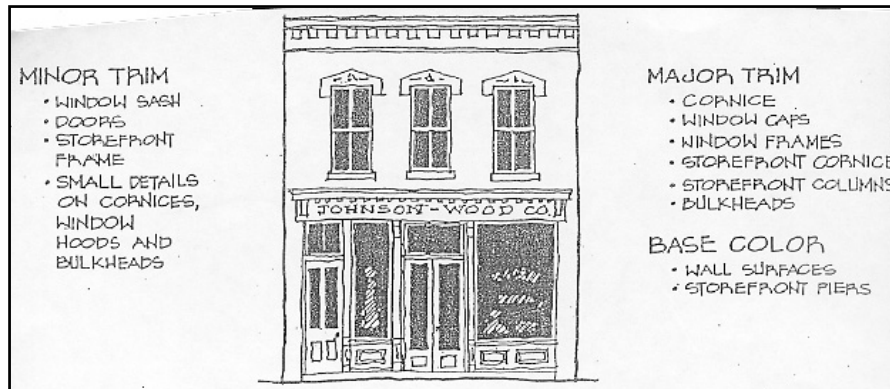
Choosing the right combination of colors can unify the building elements within the façade as well as relate the building on the street.

- Three colors are sufficient to highlight any façade. Do not paint the entire building one color. The base color appears on the upper wall and piers flanking the storefront. Often this color will be natural brick or stone requiring no paint. The major trim color defines the decorative elements of the building, tying together the upper façade trim and the storefront. The trim color should complement the base color. Major trim elements include the building cornice, storefront cornice, window frames, sills and hoods and storefront frame, columns and bulkheads (including aluminum framing.)



- The minor trim color should enhance the color scheme established by the base and major trim. Often a darker shade of the major trim can be used to highlight the window sashes, doors and selective cornice and bulkhead details.

Do not paint masonry. Brick, concrete and stone have a natural beauty, which should be seen.



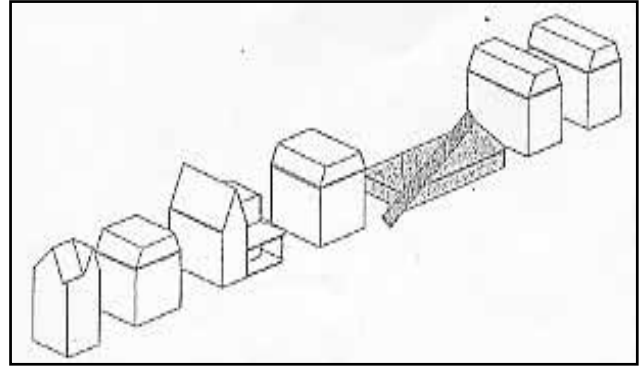
Guidelines for New Construction

When designing a new storefront the emphasis should be on transparency. New construction should be compatible with local historic buildings, a reproduction is undesirable. The basic storefront design should include large display windows with thin framing, a recessed entrance, cornice or a horizontal sign panel at the top of the storefront to separate it from the upper façade and low bulkheads at the base to protect windows and define the entrance.

- **Appearance.** New construction in the Torrington Downtown area should relate closely to the buildings in the immediate neighborhood. They should not duplicate the design of nearby historic buildings. The colors chosen for an infill façade should relate to the building's neighbors.



- **Size, Scale and Proportion.** New construction should relate to the dominant proportions, size and scale of nearby buildings downtown. The average height and width of the surrounding buildings determines a general set of proportions for an infill structure or the bays of a larger structure. Long low buildings are inappropriate amid taller structures. New buildings should not visually overpower surrounding buildings.



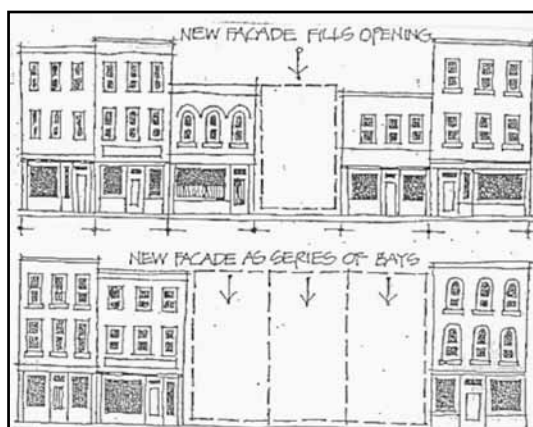
- **Shape and Massing.** New construction should incorporate massing, building shapes, and roof shapes that are present in surrounding buildings.



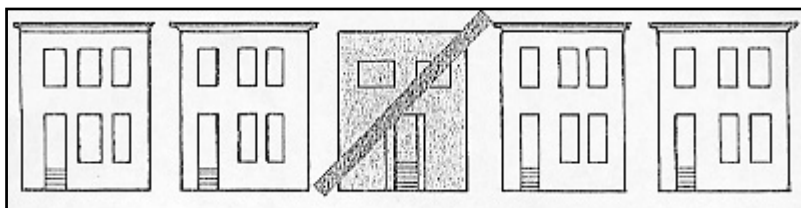
- **Materials.** Building materials should be compatible with those of surrounding buildings. Traditional materials that are common in the Torrington Downtown area such as brick, concrete, stone and wood, are preferred. An infill façade should be comprised of materials similar to the adjacent facades. The new building should not stand out against the others.



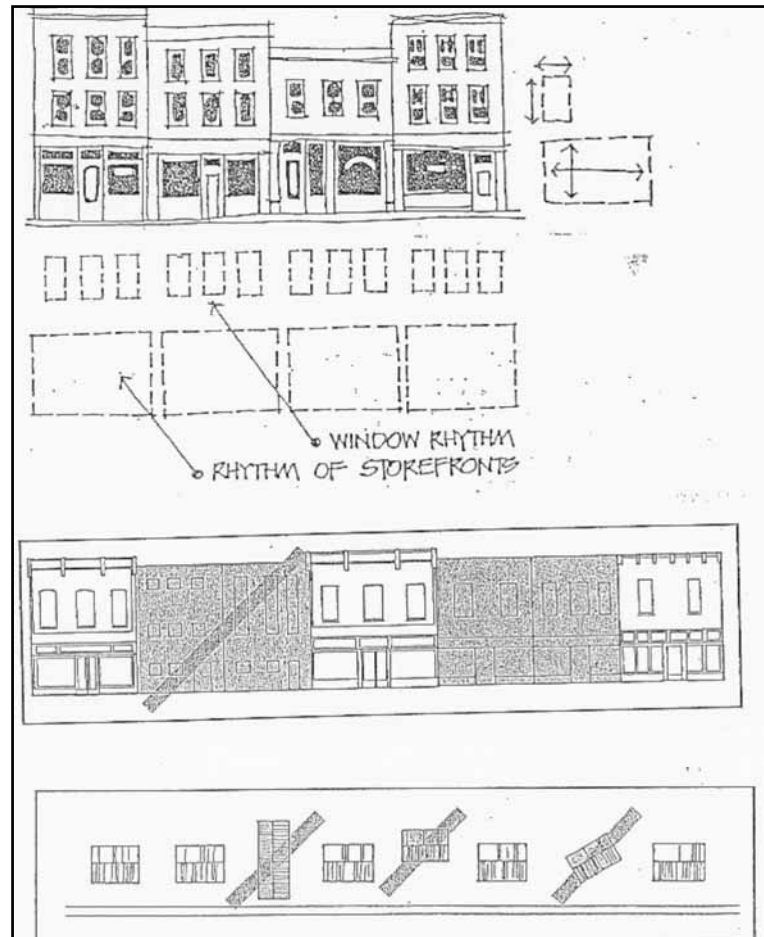
- Patterns and Rhythm.** The rhythm of facades along the street and components thereof should be maintained. The infill building should fill the entire space and reflect the characteristic rhythms of facades along the street. If the site is large, the mass of the façade can be broken into a number of smaller bays to reflect rhythms of the surrounding buildings.



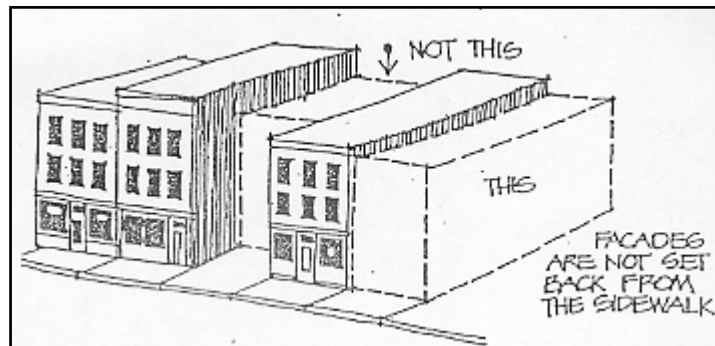
- Cornice and Floor-to-Floor Heights.** New construction should continue the floor-to-floor and cornice heights of historic buildings in the district, or should incorporate detailing suggesting those heights.



- **Windows and Doors.** New construction should use window and door openings of design and size typical of those of historic buildings in the immediate neighborhood.



- **Detailing.** Infill architecture should reflect some of the detailing of surrounding buildings in window shapes, cornice lines and brickwork.
- **Orientation and Location.** Principle facades of new construction should face the same direction as the rest of the buildings on the street. The prevailing setback line at the street should be preserved. The new façade should be flush to its neighbors.



Additions

Additions to Downtown Torrington buildings should relate appropriately to the existing buildings, while maintaining the visual prominence of the historic buildings.



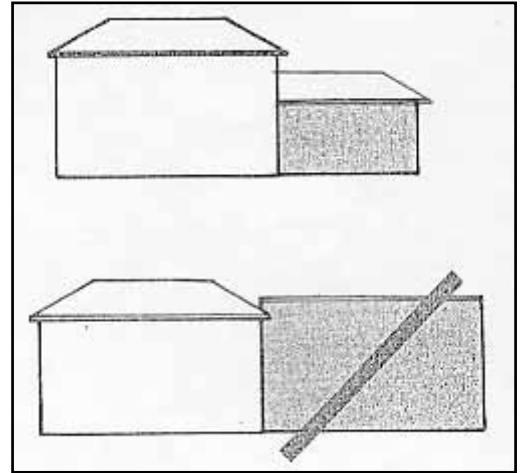
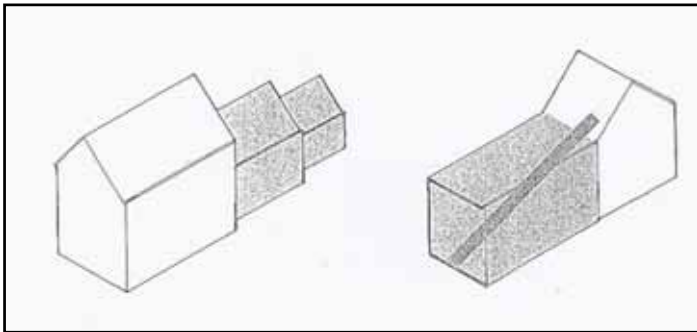
Guidelines

When attempting to replicate the appearance of an historic building, size and scale are critical features that must be closely adhered to. Otherwise:

- Design additions so that it is clear what is historic and what is not. Contemporary designs for additions are not discouraged when compatible with the character of the building.
- Additions to non-historic buildings should not clash with or visually overwhelm nearby historic structures.
- Additions should be constructed so that their removal will not harm the historic form or integrity of the building.
- Build additions so that walls of historic buildings that face the street are not hidden, damaged or destroyed.

Size, Scale, and Proportion. The height and width of an addition should not exceed that of the historic building.

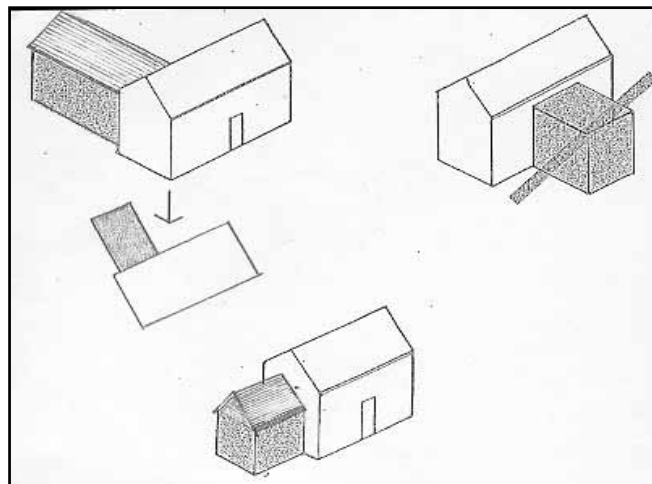
Shape and Massing. Additions should incorporate massing techniques used by the historic building. Using dominant roof shape and pitch of the historic building will increase compatibility. When adding stories to a building, set them back from the front wall to differentiate them and make them less conspicuous from the street.



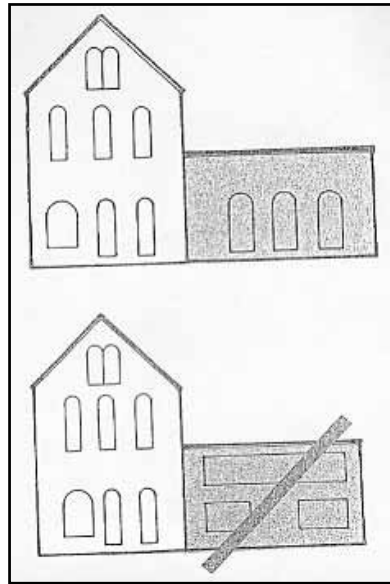
Materials. Building materials should be compatible with those of the historic building. Traditional materials are preferred. Avoid using materials or details that draw attention away from the historic building. Construct additions to minimize the loss of historic material.

Location. Additions should maintain the proportions and profile of the original building. Place additions so that they are inconspicuous to the public eye. Use rear or side walls whenever possible.

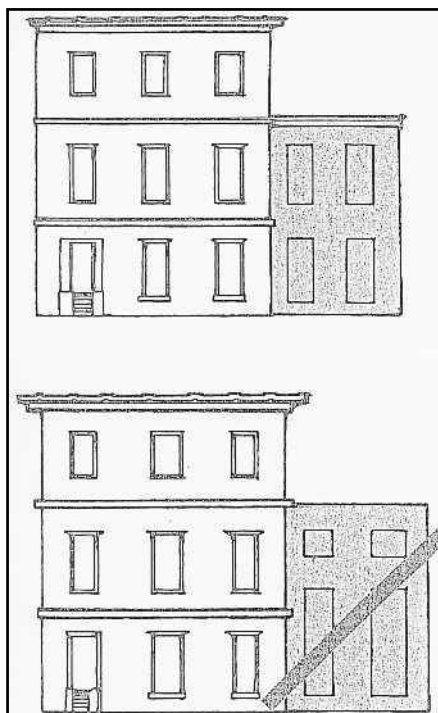
- Set additions back from the front wall of the existing building.
- Construct additions so that important details of the historic building are not hidden, damaged or destroyed.



Windows and Doors. Windows and doors in an addition to an historic building should relate in size, shape, scale and proportion to original openings in the existing building.



Floor-to-Floor Heights. Additions should conform to the floor-to-floor heights of the historic building or should incorporate detailing that suggests consistent floor-to-floor heights.



Signage



Principles of Sign Design

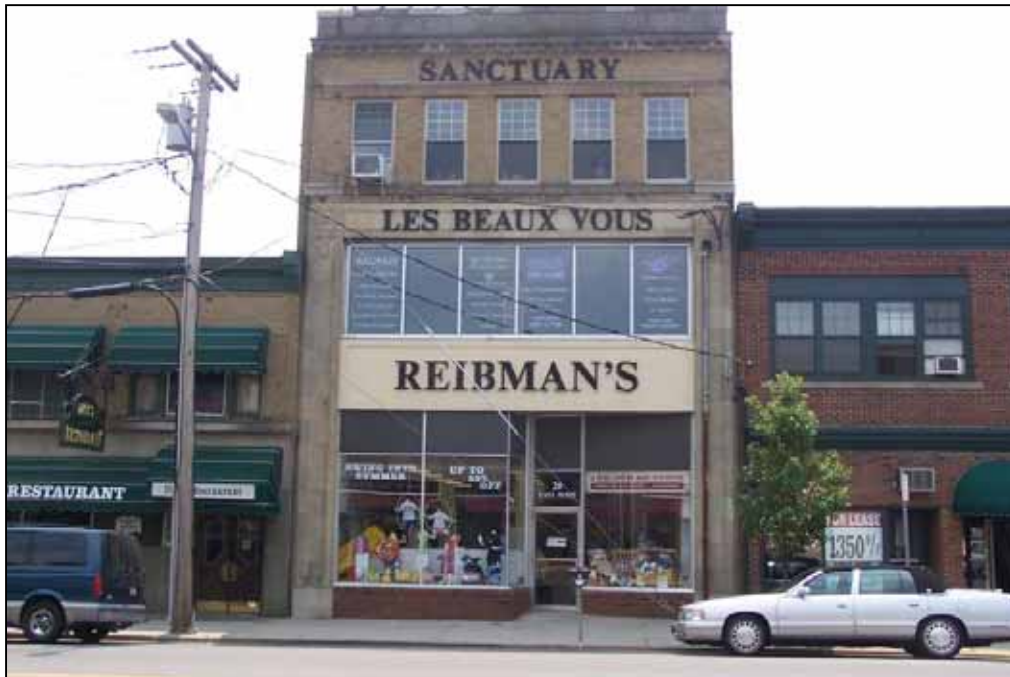
The effectiveness of a sign is determined by a number of factors, including size, placement, content, legibility, letter size and color contrast. The location selected for a sign influences its size, colors and methods of illumination. Because each building is different in design, each sign must be considered individually. The design of a building façade will usually present obvious clues for the best location of a sign. Flat, continuous surfaces, unbroken by either decorative detailing or openings such as windows and doors, are logical places to consider installing a wall mounted sign. Covering up such details and openings merely undermines the attractive features that give architectural style its character. If no suitable flat surface is available in the General Business Zone, a projecting sign may be appropriate. Hand-painted signs are preferred that are not internally lit. Almost every building has one or more logical locations where a sign can be placed for good visibility without obscuring the architectural design of the building. Signs should be coordinated with the landscaping. These locations include the area between the storefront windows and overhanging cornice, the area immediately above the cornice, the surface of the piers that frame the storefront and the display and transom windows. In some cases placing the sign higher on the façade may be appropriate but, in general, placing it below the second story windows will ensure that it can be easily read by pedestrians and motorists.



Content and Legibility

The fewer the words used to communicate a message, the more effective. Signs with too much information can be confusing. Keep the message clear and direct so that the name is easy to read. Secondary information can be placed on signs on doors, awning valances, bulkheads and inside display windows. Proper proportioning of a sign and lettering can add distinction to a building of modest design. If too numerous or too large, signs hung at right angles can easily overwhelm the proportions of a building, obscure its details and create a cluttered appearance along the street.





When a business expands into one or more adjoining buildings, the owner will often hang a sign that spans them all. Such an oversized sign visually cuts buildings in half and diminishes the distinctive architectural features that differentiate them. One solution is to install two smaller signs that expose the buildings piers, restoring proper verticality and scale to both facades.

When a large building contains more than one storefront and each houses a different business, the signs should relate well to each other in terms of height, proportion, color and background value. Maintaining uniformity among these characteristics reinforces the buildings façade composition while still retaining each business's identity.



A good sign should communicate its message quickly and easily. The clearer the typestyle the more readily it will be understood. Ornate lettering should be avoided. The size and proportion of lettering affect the quality of the sign. A sign's colors, and, in particular, the contrast between the letters and background, influence legibility. A sign with a dark background will have the strongest visual impact because dark colors have a tendency to recede while lighter or brighter colors stand out. Using dark or muted colors for the background of a sign also helps it fit more naturally into the architectural design of most older buildings, especially when the sign's colors complement the colors of the building's materials. If the sign's background lacks color, as with those painted on glass or Plexiglas, then light colors should be used. Franchise sign's fit into the district when they respect the scale of the street and neighboring signs.



Lighting

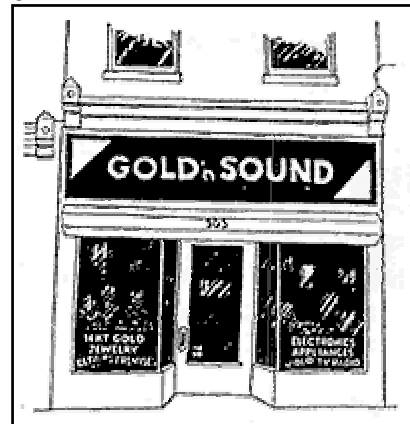
The appearance of a well-designed sign can be enhanced or marred by the way in which it is lighted. At night, illuminated signs and storefronts display windows provide a pleasing ambient light to the sidewalks and streets of the General Business Zone, making them appear more lively, inviting and safe to pedestrians and passing motorists. While it is important to provide an appropriate level of illumination for a sign, it is equally important to select a fixture that will shield the light source from the viewers eyes. The size of the fixture, type of bulb and light level must be carefully scaled to serve the ambience of the General Business Zone. Incandescent bulbs provide a warm, bright light that renders objects in their true colors. More intense forms of light, such as sodium vapor, mercury vapor or other metal halide light sources are not well suited for illuminating signs. Their overly bright light can actually render signs illegible as well as distort the color of both the building and the sign. Internally lit signs can be effective when properly designed. Unfortunately, in their most common form, the commercially produced plastic signage, dark letters applied to a white background, making a glaring white box with a difficult to read message. Reversing the contrast between background and lettering can make the sign more legible.



Signage & Awnings

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Main Street Guidelines, Signs for Main Street," is an excellent resource for designing good signs. Also the following guidelines are recommended when designing signs and awnings for downtown businesses:

- Signage should provide information simply and legibly. Studies show that seven words are the most passersby can effectively read.
- All signs should be made of durable materials.
- Primary signage should be limited to advertising the name of a business and its main goods and services. In general, primary signage should not advertise national brand names or logos.



- Permanently applied or painted window lettering may also be an effective way to advertise a business name, type of business, and/or primary goods and services.
- Window signage should be limited to covering no more than 15 percent of available window space.
- In general, the number of signs per storefront should be kept to a minimum. Limit signage to the number necessary to effectively communicate the business message. Too many signs in one storefront can detract from the overall appearance.
- Signs should be of a size, location and design that do not obscure a building's important architectural details.



- Signage can employ colors and typefaces that are designed to complement the unique character of a storefront, or they can be used creatively to add visual interest without altering a building's primary architectural style. Harmony in color and style is always encouraged.
- Flat wall signs installed above storefronts should form a clearly articulated sign band and be integrated into the overall facade design. Other locations and types of signs could be appropriate depending on the building design and the business owner's interests.
- Temporary signs, such as banners and paper signs in windows, should be removed in a timely manner. The use of temporary signs that outlast the advertised sale or promotion is discouraged.



Awnings, Canopies and Marquees

- Awnings, canopies and marquees provide a secondary location for signage. They add color and interest to building storefronts and facades and can be used to emphasize display windows and entrances. They also serve to protect pedestrians and display windows from the sun and rain.
- Awnings, canopies and marquees consistent with local character and building type are encouraged.
- Awnings should reflect the overall facade organization of a building. Awnings should be located within the building elements that frame storefronts.
- Important architectural details should not be concealed by awnings, canopies or marquees.
- Awnings on a multiple-storefront building should be consistent in character, scale, and location, but need not be identical.
- Awning shapes should relate to the shape of the facade's architectural elements. The use of traditionally shaped awnings is encouraged, when appropriate. Creative or unusually-shaped awnings should be designed with considerable care.
- Canvas and fire-resistant acrylic are preferred awning materials. The use of vinyl or plastic as awning materials is discouraged.

