



OWNERS GUIDE TO BUILDING FAÇADES



ABOUT THE SOLUTION CENTER

The Main Street Solution Center is a free access portal to resources for communities and organizations working to revitalize and strengthen their local economies. The Solution Center's curated resources are designed to help guide and inspire local leaders and advocates as they navigate the complexities of downtown and neighborhood business district revitalization and economic growth.

ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

This Main Street Solution Center publication was underwritten by Michigan Main Street and Main Street Iowa. Their generous support demonstrates a shared vision and ongoing commitment to freely share knowledge, experience, tools, and best practices to fuel revitalization and economic growth in their own communities, and in locales spanning the nation.



ABOUT THE CREATORS

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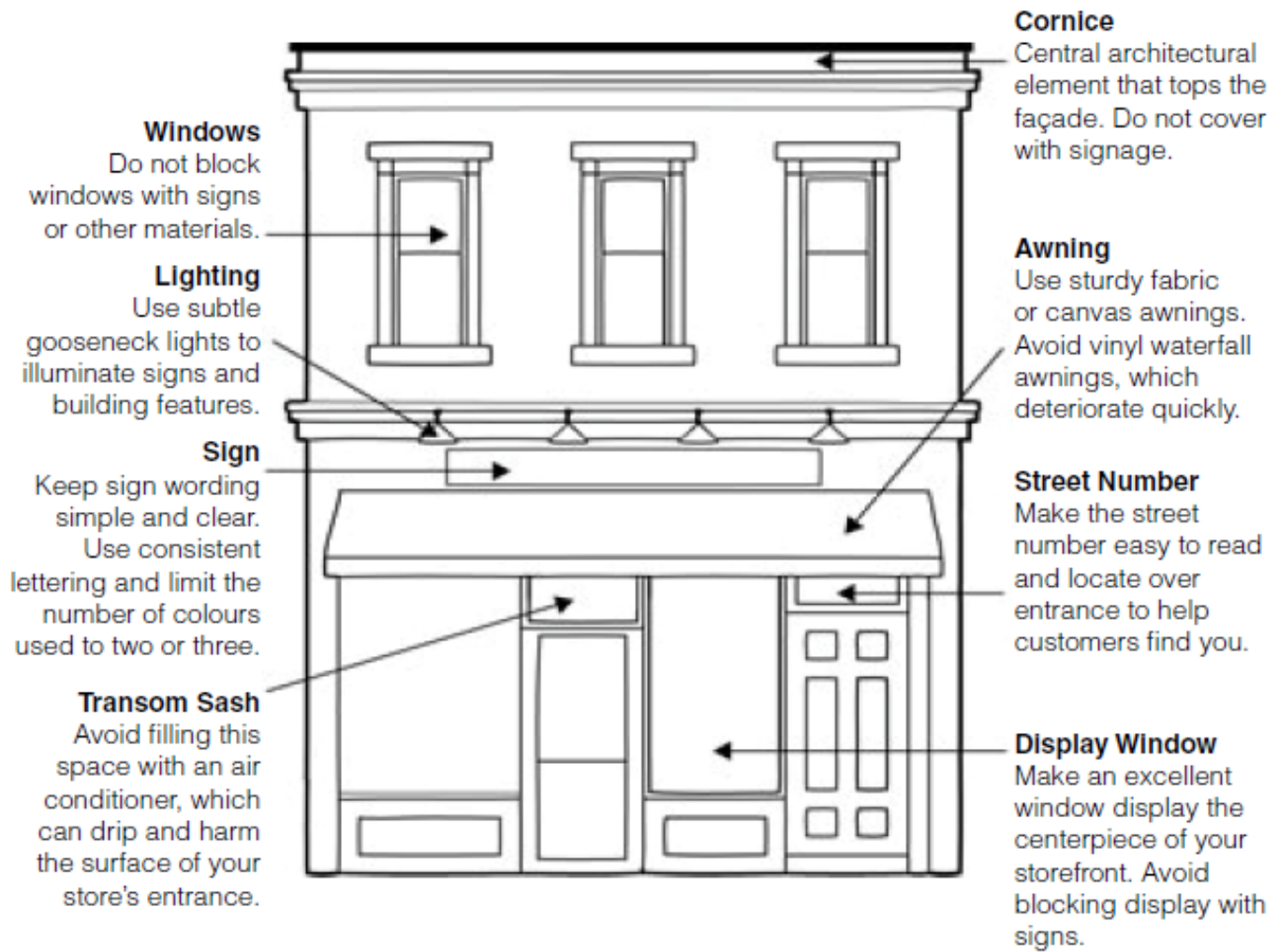
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THE OWNERS GUIDE TO BUILDING FAÇADES

A historic building façade is the exterior front or face of a building that has architectural, cultural, or historical significance. These façades are often characteristic of a particular period, style, or method of construction, serving as a physical reminder of a community's past. Historic façades may feature unique architectural elements such as ornate detailing, traditional signage, original windows and doors, and distinctive materials like brick, stone, or wood. They contribute to the identity and character of historic districts and are valued for their aesthetic appeal and their role in preserving the architectural heritage of an area.

Preserving historic building façades is crucial for maintaining the historical integrity and visual

landscape of urban and rural environments. This preservation helps to sustain the historical narrative of a place, fostering a sense of continuity and connection to the past. It involves careful maintenance, restoration, and sometimes rehabilitation to ensure that the original appearance and structure are retained as much as possible. Preservation efforts are guided by principles that seek to protect the historical value and architectural integrity of these façades while allowing for adaptive reuse and modernization that meet current needs and standards. Through these efforts, historic building façades remain vibrant components of their communities, attracting visitors, enhancing local economies, and enriching the cultural fabric of the area.



THE OWNERS GUIDE TO BUILDING FAÇADES

District property and business owners need to be well-informed about various aspects of their building façades to ensure they contribute positively to the aesthetic, historical, and economic vitality of the area. Here are key points property and business owners should know about the façades of their buildings:

1. Local Regulations and Guidelines

Historic Preservation: Understand if your building is within a historic district or if it's a designated historic structure, which may restrict alterations.

Zoning and Codes: Be aware of local zoning laws, building codes, and any specific façade improvement guidelines that must be followed.

2. Maintenance and Repair

Regular Maintenance: Regular upkeep is essential to prevent deterioration, including cleaning, painting, and repairs.

Structural Integrity: The structural integrity of the façade should be periodically assessed, especially for older buildings, to ensure safety and prevent costly damages.

3. Aesthetic and Design Standards

Community Character: The façade should complement the overall character and aesthetic of the downtown area, aligning with any thematic or design standards set by local authorities or downtown associations.

Signage and Branding: Signage should be appropriate in scale, design, and placement to not only promote the business but also maintain the visual harmony of the streetscape.

4. Energy Efficiency and Sustainability

Upgrades: Consider energy-efficient upgrades, such as better insulation, windows, and doors, which can reduce operational costs and contribute to sustainability goals.

Lighting: Exterior lighting should enhance the façade's features while being mindful of energy consumption and light pollution.

5. Accessibility

Ensure that entrances and any outdoor spaces comply with accessibility standards, providing equal access to all individuals, including those with disabilities.

6. Financial Incentives

Grants and Loans: Some municipalities, downtown and district associations, or historic preservation organizations offer grants, loans, or tax incentives for façade improvements.

Cost-Benefit Analysis: Understand the potential return on investment for façade improvements, including increased property value, customer attraction, and energy savings.

7. Approval Process

Permitting: Familiarize yourself with the process for obtaining necessary permits for façade alterations or improvements.

Community Involvement: Engaging with the community or neighborhood associations early in the planning process can facilitate support and a smoother approval processes.

8. Long-term Planning

Future-proofing: Consider future needs and trends in your façade design to ensure it remains functional and appealing over time.

Preservation vs. Modernization: Striking the right balance between preserving historic elements and incorporating modern amenities and styles is crucial for maintaining the building's character while meeting current needs.

By understanding and addressing these key aspects, property and business owners can ensure their building façades not only comply with local regulations but also contribute positively to the economic and aesthetic vitality of the downtown area.

Visit the [National Park Service website to review the Secretary of Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Preservation Briefs as well as other preservation tools and resources.](#)



EXAMPLE | SAULT STE. MARIE DOWNTOWN COMMERCIAL FAÇADES URBAN DESIGN GUIDE

The following images capture just some of the key aspects detailed and illustrated in the Sault Ste. Marie (ON) Downtown Commercial Façades Urban Design Guide.

[View or download the full document here.](#)

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DOORS AND GROUND FLOOR WINDOWS

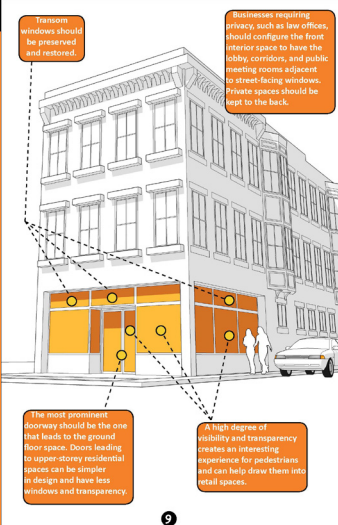
Storefront entrances and windows should be visually appealing to promote local businesses to passing pedestrians, and to contribute to making the sidewalk a more welcoming public space.

Encouraged:

- Windows and doors that are made of transparent glass and kept unobstructed to provide visibility into the store.
- Folding and sliding doors that can open business activity onto the street and activate the public realm.
- Window frames that are painted with complimentary colours to the rest of the facade to add interest and variety.
- Preservation and restoration of original patterns and openings of doors and windows. New installations of windows, including transom windows, should be compatible with the building's overall appearance.
- Perforated and retractable shades for street-facing windows, rather than styles that would substantially inhibit visibility to and from the street.

Discouraged:

- Obstructing window views with signs, product shelving, and other obstacles.
- Non-transparent decals covering the full extent of windows.
- Replacing or altering original windows or its openings with different styles or materials.
- Window replacements that do not fit the entire window opening or the use of filler material to compensate for size differences.
- Plexiglass as a glass substitute.



Transom windows should be preserved and restored.

Businesses requiring privacy, such as law offices, should configure the front exterior space to have the lobby, corridors, and public meeting rooms adjacent to street-facing windows. Private spaces should be kept to the back.

The most prominent doorway should be the one that leads to the ground floor space. Doors leading to upper-storey residential spaces can be simpler in design and have less windows and transparency.

A high degree of visibility and transparency creates an interesting experience for pedestrians and can help draw them into retail spaces.

SIGNAGE

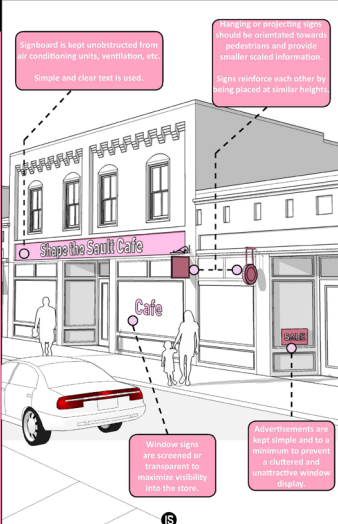
An attractive facade is an effective form of store identity and advertising. Signage is an important element in this, as it makes a strong first impression and can be a creative demonstration of a business' character. Signage that is excessive in scale, inappropriately placed or not maintained, are common issues that should be avoided, as its improper use can negatively impact commercial areas.

Encouraged:

- Stand alone lettering, affixed directly onto signboard.
- Simple and short wording, with up to seven words.
- Blade or projecting signs that are pedestrian scaled are preferred.
- No more than one main sign with a maximum of two other smaller signs. The smaller signs should be pedestrian scaled and at eye level.
- Main signs should be flat and located on the signboard.
- Store name and logo should be restricted to two or three areas: the signboard, display window, entrance door, awning, hanging or projected sign.
- Lettering style that is legible from a distance, reflects the business's image and historic period of the storefront.
- Signs and signboards should be aligned with the same features on neighbouring buildings to maintain the existing pattern of horizontal and vertical facade features.

Discouraged:

- Signage that is overly large, inappropriately located, or that overpowers and obstructs a significant portion of the facade or obscures important architectural detail.
- Backlit illumination. Signage should be illuminated from above.
- Not investing in durable, quality, or compatible material to the building facade, and neglecting the maintenance of signs, especially historic ones.
- Tarp signs.



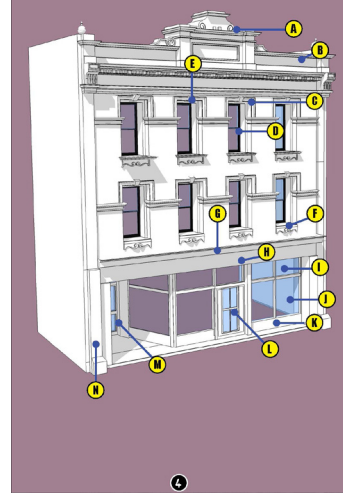
Signboard is kept unobstructed from air conditioning units, ventilators, etc. Simple and clear text is used.

Hanging or projecting signs should be orientated towards pedestrians and provide smaller scaled information. Signs reinforce each other by being placed at similar heights.

Window signs are screened or transparent to maximize visibility into the store.

Advertisements are kept simple and to a minimum to prevent a cluttered and unattractive window display.

FACADE ELEMENTS



- A Pinnacle
- B Cornice
- C Window lintel
- D Window muntin and mullion
- E Keystone
- F Window sill
- G Lower/storefront cornice
- H Signboard
- I Transom window
- J Storefront window
- K Base panel
- L Storefront door
- M Secondary door
- N Pier or pilaster

AWNINGS AND CANOPIES

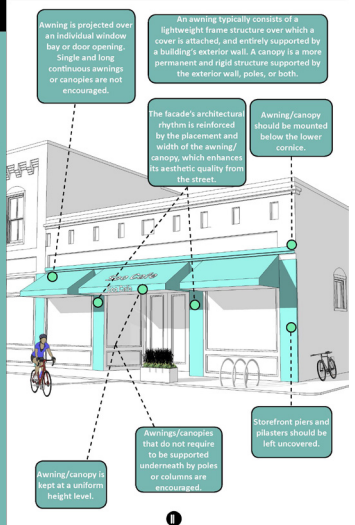
Awnings and canopies are ground floor based elements that shelter building entrances from rain and reduce heat and glare from the sun. They provide space for signage and decoration that can welcome customers and enhance the pedestrian realm, as well as bolster business identity. Awnings and canopies must conform to the Ontario Building Code and City by-laws.

Encouraged:

- Awning/canopy width dimensions that match window and door openings, and are in proportion to the building facade.
- Matte finish canvas and cloth material that is waterproof, fade and tear resistant, and that can withstand rain and snow.
- Where appropriate, retractable awnings can be used to accommodate different weather conditions.
- Colours that are compatible to the rest of the building's facade.
- Illumination to add comfort for pedestrians and enhance the public realm.
- Graphics and text kept to a minimum.

Discouraged:

- Materials that are transparent, reflective, sensitive to wind and snow (i.e., vinyl and plastics) should be avoided.
- Styles or placements that obstruct important building elements, or are located above the ground floor.
- Outdated designs such as fluted, curved, bulbous, or rounded canopies.
- Backlit canopies. They should be lit from above.



An awning is projected over an individual window bay or door opening. Single and long continuous awnings or canopies are not encouraged.

An awning typically consists of a lightweight frame structure over which a cover is attached, and entirely supported by a building's exterior wall. A canopy is a more permanent and rigid structure supported by the exterior wall, poles, or both.

The facade's architectural rhythm is reinforced by the placement and width of the awning/canopy, which enhances its aesthetic quality from the street.

Awning/canopy should be mounted below the lower cornice.

Awning/canopy is kept at a uniform height level.

Awnings/canopies that do not require to be supported underneath by poles or columns are encouraged.

Storefront piers and pilasters should be left uncovered.

UPPER STOREY WINDOWS

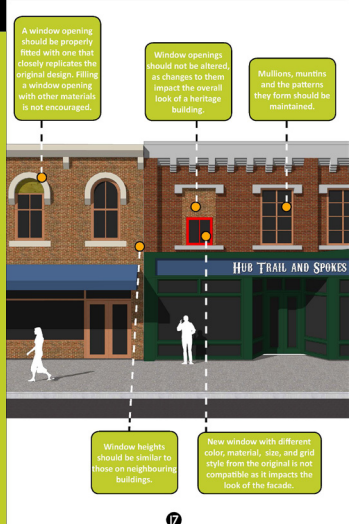
Windows do more than just let light and air inside. They play a significant role in the overall design and appearance of the buildings they serve, especially when they are the most dominant visual element of an otherwise plain building. Historic windows often exhibit a high degree of craftsmanship and design that reflect the era in which they were built. Poorly designed windows can dramatically alter the appearance of a building and compromise historic character. Windows above the first storey of a building are considered upper-storey windows.

Encouraged:

- Retention, preservation, and maintenance of the location, form, and materials of historic windows.
- When repair is not possible or practical, replacement may be an option given that it is as close as possible or compatible with the colour, material, texture, dimensions, and design of the original window.
- Inappropriate additions or alterations to the original historic windows should be reversed to reflect the original appearance.
- New windows should be aligned with those of neighbouring buildings for consistency amongst horizontal features.

Discouraged:

- Covering, enclosing, reducing, expanding, or concealing an original window opening.
- White vinyl window casings, mullions, and muntins.



A window opening should be properly fitted with one that closely replicates the original design. Filling a window opening with other materials is not encouraged.

Window openings should not be altered, as changes to them impact the overall look of a heritage building.

Mullions, muntins and the patterns they form should be maintained.

Window heights should be similar to those on neighbouring buildings.

New window with different color, material, size, and grid style from the original is not compatible as it impacts the look of the facade.

