

Storefront Guidelines

Storefronts, which appear at eye level to pedestrians and motorists, are the most visible element of commercial buildings. Due to their prominence in commercial downtown architecture and their importance to the shopping experience, the significance of Main Street storefronts cannot be over-emphasized. This guide to storefront rehabilitation is based on a number of principles: respect for the architectural and historical heritage of the building and recognition of how a storefront functions as a modern merchandising tool. Upgraded storefronts can contribute much to Greene County's comprehensive Main Street revitalization efforts.

History

A storefront is more likely to have undergone renovations than an upper façade because successive merchants often want to update their storefronts. Such changes bring mixed results.



In many instances the changes actually detract from the selling experience. In other cases, the changes involve quality workmanship and design. Even though the storefront may be of a different era than the upper façade, a later renovation may be well worth preserving. Most often, an "ordinary" storefront with good merchandising features (i.e., large display windows) may require little more than a new paint scheme, cleaning or a new, improved sign. Most principles of good storefront design apply to either "attached" or "free-standing" buildings. The list of DO'S and DONT's illustrated and explained within will be helpful in guiding your rehabilitation efforts.

Before you decide to embark on what could be an unnecessary and costly renovation, evaluate the "style" of your storefront. Seek technical assistance from MSRP and local historic preservation and Main Street organizations. Generally speaking, the styles of storefronts break own into the following periods of time:

Pre-1900

Although finding storefronts in their original condition can be difficult, there are numerous outstanding examples that appear in Greene County. These architectural gems should be preserved at all costs as they add richness to the history and character of the region. Pictured is one such example from Coxsackie, featuring large display windows (to allow as much natural light to enter the store and to afford greater visibility to the merchandise); and a mid-cornice with decorative brackets.



1900-1940

Deeply recessed doorways that allowed more area for window display are exciting features of this time. Although rare, such as this beautiful example in Catskill, they offer a glimpse of expert workmanship, materials and design that were perfectly suited to quality merchandising.



1940- Present

Distinctive storefronts like this classic from the 1950's are difficult to find, but add a distinctive layer of history to the evolving story of Main Street.



Do's & Dont's

Piers

DON'T cover the piers, columns or lower portion of your building. These areas are usually built of the same material found on the upper façade and provide an integral function to the overall building design by linking the upper façade to the storefront. Covering these areas not only hides the original material but separates the building into unrelated areas that compete, rather than compliment each other. Painting the lower portion of the storefront a different color than the façade above can also further this separation.

DO take advantage of the entire building façade. If piers have been covered, carefully remove the covering material. This will expose sections of the original façade and visually pull the upper and lower part of the building together, while providing a frame for the storefront. If painted a color different from the area above, simply paint the lower area the same color. Whether it be an "attached" or "free-standing" structure, the idea is to visually join the lower and upper parts of the buildings so they "read" as one.

Awnings

DON'T install awnings that appear as minor appendages to the building and incorporate dimensions that make them appear tacked on. Try to avoid the use of "quarter-round" or "waterfall" style awnings or those made of hard materials such as sheet metal or aluminum with vinyl coverings, as these styles and materials give a rigid appearance that is less appealing for the shopper.

DO provide awnings that comfortably into the building façade and are correctly proportioned to shade the window and protect the shopper. Generally speaking the awning should be of the "drop" type; extend approximately five feet over the sidewalk have a 45 degree drop; have a valance that is at least 12" in height and measures no less than 7'-0" from the sidewalk. It is recommended that soft, more natural materials, such as canvas be used, as it lends a softer, more welcoming appearance.



Bulkhead

DON'T build the bulkhead or lower window panel too high. This cuts down in the window size and creates a barrier between customer and merchandise.

DO keep the lower window panel between six and eighteen inches in height. This dimension has proven to be ideal as it creates a proper base for displaying merchandise.



Display Windows

DON'T obliterate or reduce the size of the display window. Filling in the space of the storefront detracts from the inviting appearance you want to encourage for Main Street.



DO see the display window as a natural and money saving feature. If energy conservation is a concern, double glazing is available. If the storefront is no longer used for a business and the demand is for residential use, keeping the display window intact provides ample light for the apartment, saves construction costs, and preserves the open and expansive look of the streetscape while also allowing an easy conversion back to commercial should market conditions change.

Window Display

DON'T overlook the value of good window display. Every business, whether it be retail or service oriented has something colorful or interesting to present.

DO see window display as having a positive impact, not only on your business, but as an extension of your storefront as well. Even if your business is service-oriented, you can still keep the window colorful and inviting.

Display Window Glass

DON'T use tinted glass. Although helpful in shielding the interior from direct sunlight, it can greatly reduce the visibility of what is displayed. Using tinted glass is like putting up a brick wall.

DO ensure that display windows are of clear glass. Shoppers should get a clear, unobstructed view of the merchandise displayed.

Maintenance

DON'T neglect regular maintenance. Unwashed windows, peeling paint, torn awnings, broken or missing tiles, etc., not only present a poor image to the shopper but can lead to costly repairs that can affect other parts of your storefront.

DO build a policy of good maintenance habits to protect or enhance your investment or business. Keeping a storefront clean and in good repair is the best and easiest of all rehabilitation practices.



Signage

A sign's appearance can do much to help or hurt any business. Because of its importance in helping to attract customers, the choice and placement of any sign deserves consideration and care. The following Do's and Dont's illustrate how a little extra effort can make a big difference.

Location

DON'T place the sign in areas that were never meant to be covered. Take special care to not cover any architectural details such as a window transom, ornate brackets, brickwork, etc.

DO locate the sign in a logical location. On most buildings, particularly older ones, the natural location for signage lies in the areas between the display window and the storefront mid-cornice or between the mid-cornice and the sill of the second floor window.



Size & Scale

DON'T make a sign any larger than it has to be. Although one cannot deny that a large sign is more likely to be noticed, "bigger is better" does not always follow. Overly large signs often cheapen the image of the business, diminish the impact of the storefront and display window, overwhelm and compete with neighboring businesses and contribute to the visual pollution of the street.

DO provide signs and letters that are in proportion to the building, sidewalk and pedestrian. Remember, the scale and pace of Main Street is quite different (and more welcoming to the shopper) than that of a car-oriented shopping strip.

Background

DON'T use a light background with dark letters. This approach gives more prominence to the background instead of the message.

DO keep the background dark (darker colors recede) and the lettering light. This will not only make your message stand out better but will result in a sign that looks less like an ordinary box.



Legibility

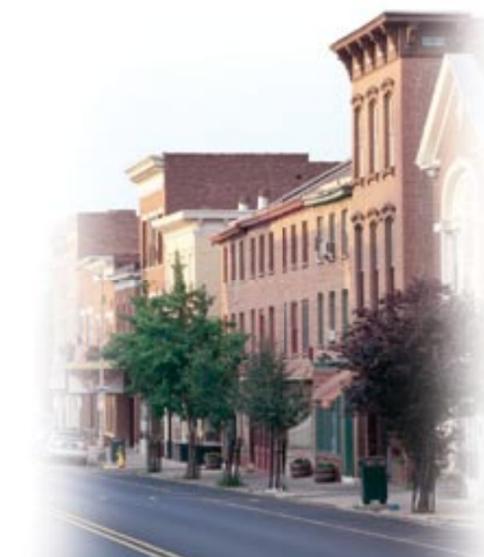
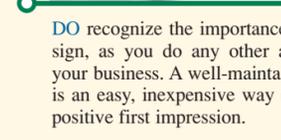
DON'T make the letters or design of the sign so fancy that they become illegible. Ornate lettering styles are best suited for printed material rather than commercial signs. Do not attempt to put too much information on the sign as the inclusion of many items only makes the sign more difficult to read.

DO keep the signs simple and direct. The name of the business by itself, is far more effective in commanding the attention of your potential customer. Additional information, such as various items sold within, can be placed in other areas, such as on the valence of an awning, or within the display window.

Maintenance

DON'T forget about checking the condition of your sign. A faded sign, or one that is missing a letter or two, conveys a poor image to your customer and adds to the visual uncaring appearance of Main Street. For property owners seeking a tenant, abandoned signs (pictured), paper signs taped to windows, etc., lessen the chance for attracting the quality tenant you desire.

DO recognize the importance of your sign, as you do any other aspect of your business. A well-maintained sign is an easy, inexpensive way to give a positive first impression.



Building Façade, Storefront & Sign Guidelines

Greene County is rich in history, which is reflected by superb examples of significant architecture, including numerous fine older commercial buildings found on many of the diverse Main Streets in the County. The potential of these buildings in adding to the economic vitality of its villages and hamlets has been recognized as important by the County.

To encourage the revitalization and re-development of these traditional commercial districts, the Greene County Legislature has created the Main Street Revitalization Program (MSRP) to financially assist merchants and property owners in their plans to physically upgrade their properties or businesses. The program is administered by the Greene County Department of Planning and Economic Development. The purpose of the MSRP is to provide the necessary resources to help Greene County's businesses and municipalities with their individual Main Street Revitalization efforts. Resources available include the MSRP Small Cities Program, including professional architectural services provided by the County and the provision of technical assistance from the MSRP staff.

An improved façade and storefront not only adds to the building's real estate value, but also attracts more customers to Main Street as it becomes a retail and visitor destination.

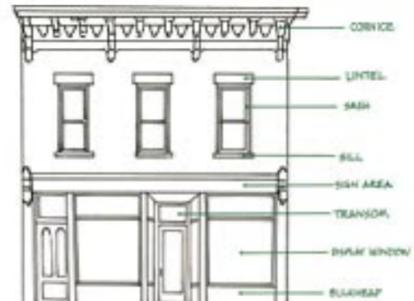
This publication is designed to assist in building rehabilitation efforts, whether you are an owner who desires to maintain or improve the condition of your property, or a new or established merchant. Following the recommendations carefully provides important technical design assistance by illustrating how to get the job done correctly, while offering helpful hints on ways to save money.

Façade Guidelines

In evaluating what improvements can be made to your building, a good first step is to become familiar with the type of structure with which you are dealing. Commercial buildings fall into two categories; those that are "attached" to other structures and those that are "free-standing." In either case, see the structure as a whole, that is, understand that the building was designed to be "read" as an assemblage of parts, with a roof cornice, upper windows, architectural details, sign area, and a storefront with display area. Becoming familiar with the names of the architectural elements will help you deal more effectively with rehabilitation professionals and contractors.

Building Types

Attached



Earlier building façades were often covered over to make them look more "modern or up-to-date." The installation of a shed roof (as pictured in this example), or the use of other "thematic" cover-up additions can be expensive and unnecessary. It pays to know the original design. If possible, look under the cover-up material - you might be pleasantly surprised at what you discover. Research the appearance of the original design, as early photos can often be found at the Historical Society, local newspaper office or by finding vintage post cards. Knowing and respecting original conditions can lead to a more authentic and cost-effective rehabilitation approach.



In the early part of the 20th century (ca. 1900-1930), design of commercial façades became simpler in design. The use of masonry was still prevalent but the use of architectural details became more restrained.



Appearances of more contemporary commercial buildings include a vast array of styles and materials. When left in their original condition, buildings dating from the 1940's - 1960's can add diversity to downtown.



Building Types

Free-Standing

Over the years on many of the Main Streets in Greene County, individual private dwellings were converted to commercial uses. These "free-standing" structures often retain the basic appearance of residential homes, but have altered various parts of the building to suit the commercial nature of the business within. As with "attached" masonry structures, it is worthwhile to understand the history along with the architectural terminology of your structure.



If no major alternations have taken place try to compliment the commercial nature of the building with appropriately placed signs and features (such as landscaping) that add to the character of the building.



As with attached buildings, free-standing buildings evolved over the decades. The 1920's brought many changes, including the addition of new storefronts over the original façade. Note the pediment of the original house above the second floor.



When thinking of renovating a structure like the one pictured, try to relate the top and bottom of the building (at least through color) and retain the large display windows for good shopper viewing.



Maintenance

Roof

DON'T allow any part of the roof, parapet, cornice, gutter or windows to deteriorate. Deterioration can lead to leaks and water seepage, which cause damage that could become very costly to repair - particularly to the building's interior.

DO check the roof and cornice every six months for minor openings, cracks or missing parts. Repair immediately.

Windows

DON'T reduce the size of the original window opening for the sake of energy conservation. Altering the size of windows can harm the visual proportions and harmony of the façade and reduce the amount of natural light, which is a big plus (aesthetically and functionally) for upper floor spaces. If your windows need replacement and your building is an historic structure, do not use vinyl windows as their installation will limit certain funding sources that might be available to you.



DO provide storm windows (either inside or out) that fit or come close to the original window opening. Heat saving can also be achieved through the use of interior treatments such as drapery. Installing canvas awnings (as pictured) can also help keep spaces cool in summer. If any

of the upper floors are vacant, place curtains or shades behind the windows to make them appear as if the space were occupied. The uses of exterior awnings or interior shades are not only functional but can provide a decorative touch to the façade.

Masonry

DON'T allow joints between bricks to disintegrate. This can permit water to seep into open spaces where freezing can cause cracking of bricks and weakening of the wall.

DO re-point brick joints where necessary. If the structure is older, be sure to use a mortar that is consistent in lime content, color and texture to the existing mortar.



Clutter

DON'T allow loose wires, unused sign brackets, abandoned signs, exhaust vents, torn pennants, etc. to mar the façade.

DO remove these distractions that indicate an owner's uncaring attitude. When taken together these distractions add to the visual clutter of Main Street.



Painting

No single item can have as dramatic an effect as the re-painting of a building façade. Because painting a large mass has a tremendous impact, careful planning is required.

It is important to ensure that proper attention is given to preparing the surface for painting, whether you use a contractor or do-it-yourself. Although proper preparation may add to the cost of the job, it is well worth the investment. A newly painted façade can deteriorate quickly if the surface has not been properly prepared. Thoroughly scrape all loose paint and apply a primer coat or two good coats of paint. Latex paint with a flat finish is recommended for masonry surfaces, while oil base or latex paints with a matte or semi-gloss finish are recommended for wood structures.

Choose a color that is subdued. As part of a color scheme, a number of villages have assembled a color chart or "palette" which recommends a range of appropriate colors. Do your part in trying to have your building become part of the overall program. When dealing with large surfaces, bright colors can become garish and overpower the design integrity of the building. Since it is impossible to determine the exact color from a small paint chip, paint a small test patch on the building. Paint colors should be complimentary to the colors they are placed against, as well as to the individual building design. Try not to use more than three colors: a body color for the walls, a contrasting color (for trim, cornices, windows, and perhaps an accent color for special features, such as the entrance door. Look to join the colors of the upper façade into the storefront, thereby unifying the overall design of the building and giving the ground floor tenant more visibility.

Vinyl Siding

Although many property owners are attracted to the idea of installing vinyl or synthetic siding as a way to "improve" the image of their building or to save on painting costs, there are numerous, important disadvantages that should be considered.

It should be understood that the average guarantee of vinyl siding is twenty years. Over time siding will fade, become dull and dingy and have to be painted if it is to appear as originally intended. The costs involved in installing siding are equal to two quality paint jobs, thereby negating any cost savings. The notion that using siding will increase the value of one's property is also false, as installation invariably means removing or covering over many of the building's architectural details. In the process, the three-dimensional quality of the building façade is destroyed, resulting in a flat, monotonous appearance, thereby actually reducing the value of one's building.

In addition, there are other disadvantages of using siding. It hides physical deterioration, rot and insect attack may proceed undetected, it acts as a vapor barrier thereby trapping excess moisture that can eventually damage wood, and it has been shown that it does not have insulation value. If your building has its original wood siding in place and it was covered with vinyl siding for the reasons listed above, to remove the siding and restore the original wood siding. Further information about this important subject can be found by contacting the offices of MSRP.

Before & After

There is no clearer way to see the result of building improvement practices than to compare pictures of what the property looked like "before" and how it appeared "after"

rehabilitation. The following case studies illustrate the results of some of the work that has recently been completed in Greene County.



Removal of the vinyl siding has provided functional and aesthetic advantages to this façade. The original siding has more depth of detail and gives more impact to the architectural quality of the building. The roof top domers were also replaced with more appropriately designed domers that significantly increase the buildings stature and financial value.



Refurbished windows, replacement of doors, a restored mid-cornice, power-washed facade and new painting has transformed this important building into a shining example for the community to admire.

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Cost-effective improvements such as refurbished windows and front doors along with a new paint job and exposure of the wooden siding have made a big difference to this building.



A restored front porch, along with new railings, give this building its unique character and has ensured the security of these important architectural elements. Repainting the façade using a softer color palette has joined the parts of the building together more in harmony than the harsh colors it was painted before.

