

Commercial Façade Design Guidelines

The Commercial Façade Design Guidelines outline the standards that should be followed when renovating buildings using a City Façade Grant (Program). These guidelines take into consideration a building's neighborhood context and historic character in determining an appropriate design solution to the renovation.



The Façade

The façade is the entire exposed exterior surface of a building that fronts a public street and contains the building's principal entrance. Any elevation not containing the main entrance but fronting a public street exposed to public view will be considered a secondary elevation. Secondary elevations may also be eligible for façade grants.

Storefronts

It is the intent of these guidelines that most buildings should have a storefront-type glazing facing the street. When alterations are made to the first floor levels of buildings that currently have more closed up or opaque storefronts, the Program



will usually require that the storefront be restored to its original condition of a more open façade. Opaque or permanently enclosed storefronts are prohibited, as are window treatments that significantly decrease the amount of original window area. All damaged or otherwise deteriorated elements of storefronts, display windows, entrances, upper facades or signs should be repaired or replaced to match or be compatible with the original materials and design of the building.

Buildings that are an integral element of the traditional streetscape should reflect and complement the character of the surrounding area to the greatest extent possible.

If an existing storefront is to be replaced, the new storefront should be traditional in character and include an appropriately designed bulkhead panel, large glass display windows, a glazed transom surmounted by a storefront cornice and a traditional glazed storefront door. This new storefront should fill the full height of the original masonry opening.

Masonry

Unpainted brick, stone or terra cotta should not be painted or covered by another cladding material. Previously painted masonry, however, may be painted. If it is necessary to remove paint or clean unpainted masonry, the gentlest method should be employed. Sandblasting and other abrasive cleaning methods are prohibited because of the damage it can do to the masonry.

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(Masonry, continued)

Defective mortar should be repointed by duplicating the original mortar in color, style, texture and strength. Deteriorated masonry should be replaced with new masonry that duplicates the old masonry material as closely as possible.



Upper Story Windows

Upper story windows that are visible from the public right-of-way should be restored to their original condition. Creating additional openings, enlarging or reducing window opening sizes and filling openings with materials such as glass block, should be avoided.

If the replacement of a window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design of the original sash to the extent possible. Modern style window units such as horizontal sliding sash or single panes of fixed glass in place of an original double hung sash, as well as the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building should be avoided.



Trim and Ornamentation

All structural and decorative elements of eligible facades should be repaired or replaced to match or be compatible with the original materials and design of the building to the greatest extent possible. This includes, but is not limited to, window caps, carved stonework, ornamental plaques and cornices.



Awning and Entrance Canopies

If storefront awnings are to be used, they should be of a traditional tent style. Internally illuminated, half round hoop and truncated wedge shaped awnings will generally not be approved. Awnings should be made of canvas or neoprene impregnated fabric instead of shiny vinyl. In general, awnings with soffit panels should not be used. Custom awnings may be approved if sensitively designed to enhance a new storefront design.



Entrance canopies extending out to the curb may be permitted if they are traditional in design, fabric covered and sized to complement the proportions of the storefront. Fixed, metal, asphalt shingle or mansard type canopies should not be used.

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Signage

New signage should be traditional in character to complement the architecture of many of the older buildings in Racine's neighborhoods. There are many types of traditional signs that are appropriate for use on older storefronts.

Signboards

A flat signboard with hand painted or raised lettering is the most appropriate type of sign for older commercial buildings. These signs should be placed in the narrow band above the storefront call the "sign zone" and be externally lit. Internally lit box signs are generally not permitted when using the Program.



Awning Signs

Awning signs have lettering on the edge flap or "skirting" of the awning. Lettering on the main part of the awning is generally not permitted.

Display Window Lettering

Another common type of storefront signage is lettering that is painted on or etched into the interior side of display windows and glazed entry doors. These signs should consist of only lettering and/or a logo, should not cover more than 1/5 of the area of the glass panel and should not obscure the display area.

Hanging Signs

Hanging signs are signs that project from the building's wall and are supported by metal brackets. These signs can come in all shapes and sizes and are sometimes made in the likeness of objects or symbols associated with a particular type of business. These signs should project no more than 4 feet from the face of the building and should not obscure the signage of other nearby businesses. The signs and brackets should be designed to complement the architecture of the building and mounted in the mortar joints of masonry buildings. All projecting signs should be hung within the base zone of the building or parallel to the second story windows and be externally lit. Internally lit and moving projecting signs are generally not permitted.

Transom Signs

A transom sign is made of leaded glass letters that are built into the transom above the storefront display window or door. These can be illuminated at night with back-lighting or illuminated from the glow of interior store lights. These signs can be made today by leaded glass craft workers and can be made "as easy to remove" panels that can be changed with tenants change.

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Neon Signs

Neon signs first became popular in the late 1920's and 30's and are seeing a renaissance in popularity today. There are many neon sign artists who can design new signage that will complement an older storefront. Exterior neon signs are most appropriate for post 1920's commercial buildings, while neon signs that are mounted within a display window can be successfully adapted for use on all types of commercial structures.

Yard and Sidewalk Signs

When appropriate, permanent yard signs as well as portable sidewalk signs ("sandwich boards") displayed during business hours can be used.

No matter which type of sign is chosen, they should include only the formal name of the business, the nature of the business and the address. There should be no advertising of brand names, credit card, service club affiliations, etc. This information detracts from the readability of the primary message of the sign. Large advertising signs on upper facades, roof top signs, billboards and other outdoor signs painted or mounted on structure are not eligible.

Security Gates and Bars

The installation of either interior or exterior, permanent or retractable security gates or bars is prohibited. They are out of character with the architecture, create an impression that the area is unsafe and ultimately hurt business. Less obtrusive security devices, alarm systems or unbreakable glazing material are preferred alternative security measures.

Exterior Lighting

Spot or flood lighting to highlight the architectural detailing of a building should be inconspicuous and blend with the wall on which it is mounted. No lights should move, flash or make noise.



Other Exterior Elements

Existing exterior elements such as fire escapes, ladders, standpipes, vents, etc. should be painted to blend with the wall on which they are mounted.

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Landscaping and Fencing

In some projects, landscaping and fencing will be considered. Simply installing fencing around a parking lot or a portion of the parking lot will generally not qualify for a façade grant. If fencing is part of a larger renovation project, it will be considered only if the fence has architectural character such as wrought iron with masonry piers. Common fences such as stockade, bound-on board, picket and chain link would not be eligible. Planters or retaining walls should be built of material, which complements the materials of the adjacent buildings. Generally, brick or other suitable masonry units would be considered while certain types of interlocking concrete block and landscaping timbers would not be eligible.



TERMS USED TO DESCRIBE STOREFRONT FEATURES

1. UPPER CORNICE
2. BRACKET
3. CORBELLED BRICK DECORATION
4. WINDOW HOOD MOLDING
5. DOUBLE HUNG WINDOW UNIT
6. STOREFRONT CORNICE
7. SIGN ZONE
8. TRANSOM WINDOW
9. DISPLAY WINDOW
10. MASONRY PIER
11. DOUBLE LEAF ENTRY DOOR
12. DOOR TO UPPER FLOOR
13. BULKHEAD
14. ENTRY RECESS



Source: Paul Jakobovich, et al; Good for Business; City of Milwaukee Department of City Development; 1995