



City of South Milwaukee

COMMERCIAL FAÇADE DESIGN GUIDELINES

The provisions of this document shall apply to all exterior commercial renovations in the Downtown District, along North Chicago Avenue and South Chicago Avenue commercial corridors (commercial corridors) as well as commercial properties within C-1, C-2 and C-3 commercial zoning districts. The degree to which each standard applies to a façade improvement project shall be evaluated on a case-by-case basis in an effort to achieve an overall design that meets the purpose and intent of these guidelines. These design guidelines supplement existing ordinances and shall also apply to façade improvements using a Facade Grant.

These guidelines will provide criteria by which the Plan Commission and Staff evaluate commercial façade and exterior improvements for consistency with implementation policies of the City's Comprehensive + Downtown Plan and the Downtown Strategic Plan.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Façade composition drives the safety, convenience, and comfort of sidewalks by establishing where people enter and leave buildings, how people in the buildings can see out onto the public spaces, and how pedestrians “read” the buildings. The general composition of traditional downtown buildings and most urban architectural styles includes a base, middle and top.

The facade is the entire exposed exterior surface of a building that fronts a public street and contains the building's principal entrance. Façade and related exterior improvements should have a visual and harmonious relationship with the surrounding buildings or structures.

Exterior alterations, new additions, or related improvements shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.

Non-traditional commercial building improvements are encouraged to enhance human scale elements with windows, distinguished entries, recesses or projections to add visual interest. If the surrounding district is not pedestrian-friendly, then the project should prioritize improvements designed to appeal to pedestrians to begin to transform the area, enhancing existing façade details or adding compatible elements.

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES & MATERIALS

Architectural features or detailing that makes traditional architecture and most other architectural building styles unique include cornices, frieze boards, bulkheads, lintels, and overhangs.

Building façade and exterior improvements shall utilize high-quality materials. Materials not permitted on facades include blackout glass, vinyl siding, and plywood. Faux materials are discouraged. EIFS, stucco, and glass block is prohibited on first floor and on streetside facades.

Traditional Downtown Storefront Architectural Elements



The base anchors the building to the ground and contains prominent transparent windows. The middle abstractly communicates the building's function or use and often has contrasting materials or elements from the bottom. The top terminates the building against the sky and provides an opportunity to create an interesting silhouette.

STOREFRONTS

Storefronts are the most prominent component of downtown commercial building façades as well as other urban commercial nodes. When alterations are made to the first-floor levels of buildings that currently have more closed up or opaque storefronts, the storefront shall be restored to its original condition of a more open facade. Opaque or permanently enclosed storefronts are prohibited, as are window treatments, which 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 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.

Contemporary design for alterations to existing properties is acceptable if such alterations do not destroy significant historical, architectural, and cultural materials of the building and if such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the property and adjacent buildings.

Display windows should be lit at night to provide ambient street illumination, thereby contributing to a lively and safe pedestrian environment.

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 used to do so. Sandblasting and other abrasive cleaning methods are prohibited because of the damage it can do to the masonry. Defective mortar should be repainted by duplicating the original mortar in color, style, texture, and strength. Deteriorated masonry should be replaced with new masonry that duplicates the old masonry materials as closely as possible.

WINDOWS

Non-traditional building styles may contain no or minimal fenestration. Increasing building fenestration is encouraged to add to the visual impact on the public realm, using materials compatible with the original architectural style.

Traditional Architecture: Upper story windows above traditional storefronts 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 necessary, the replacement window should duplicate the appearance and design of the original sash to the greatest extent possible. Modern style window units such as a 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 & ORNAMENTATION

All structural and decorative elements of 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.

AWNINGS & ENTRANCE CANOPIES

If storefront awnings are to be used, they should be of a traditional tent style and not conceal decorative features of a facade. 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. Awnings with soffit panels should not be used to allow the structure on the underside of the awning to be exposed. 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 sized to complement the proportions of the façade. Fixed, metal, asphalt shingle, or mansard type canopies should not be used on traditional styled buildings.

EXTERIOR LIGHTING

Lighting should contribute to the character of the site, providing pedestrian scale interest and security throughout the site and does not disturb adjacent developments and residences and the night sky.

All lighting should be shielded from the sky and adjacent properties and structures, either through exterior shields or through optics within the fixture.

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.

Accent lighting is encouraged but should be combined with functional lighting to highlight special focal points such as building/site entrances, public art and special landscape features.

Lighting design should comply with the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America's Recommended Practices and Design Guidelines.

SECURITY GATES & 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.

OTHER EXTERIOR ELEMENTS

Existing exterior fire escapes, ladders, standpipes, vents, etc. should be painted to blend with the wall on which it is mounted.

All mechanical equipment located on or near the roof shall be contained within opaque parapet walls or placed behind or within roof forms.

Street level mechanicals units shall be located to the rear or side of the building or within the building or parking structure.

SIGNAGE

All signs must be compliant with the South Milwaukee Sign Code. Signs should be made of high-quality materials. Signs attached to the façade shall fit within the existing features of the façade and should not cover architectural elements. Sign color, shape, materials, and sizes should reinforce the overall composition of the façade.

New signage in the Downtown District should be traditional in character to complement the architecture of many of the older buildings. New signage in the other commercial corridors shall be of a compatible scale to the building and surrounding properties and provide visual appeal.

Sign Boards

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 called the sign band and are externally lit.

Internally Illuminated Signs

Modern, internally lit box signs are not permitted when using the Facade Grant Program and are not allowed in the Downtown District. These signs are discouraged in other commercial corridors.

Awning Signs

Awning signs may have lettering on the edge flap or "skirting" of the awning that remains visible when the awning is either retracted or open. Lettering on the main part of the awning is generally not permitted.

Display Window Lettering

Lettering that is painted on or etched into the interior side of display windows and glazed entry doors is encouraged. These signs in traditional storefronts 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 a building wall and are supported by metal brackets. These signs should project no more than four 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 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 backlighting or illuminated from the glow of interior store lights. These signs can be made today by leaded glass crafts workers and can be made as easy to remove panels that can be changed when tenants change.

Freestanding Signs

Monument signs are discouraged in the Downtown District. Pylon/pole signs are not allowed in the Downtown District. Pylon signs are discouraged in other commercial corridors.

LANDSCAPING & FENCING

Landscaping is encouraged around building perimeters, outdoor spaces and surface parking lots. Permanent planters or retaining walls should be built of a material that complements the building architecture and adjacent properties.

Fencing is encouraged for screening of parking lots and for pedestrian circulation and shall not exceed four feet in height. The use of chain link fencing, barbed wire or similar materials is not allowed.

Exterior Building Paint Palette

These are recommended paint colors to choose from when repainting a Downtown Main Street building facade. These colors are historically and contextually appropriate for the Downtown District and region.



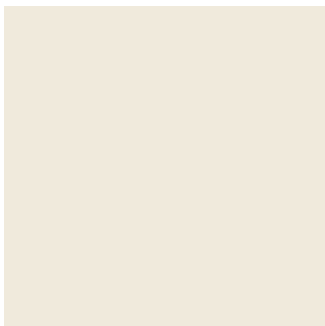
Bunglehouse Blue
SW 0048



Black Magic
SW 6991



Lanyard
SW 7680



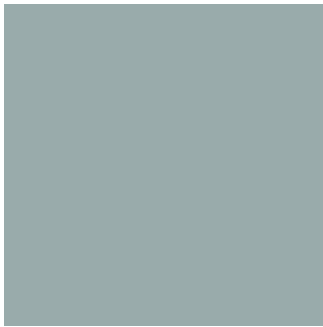
Dover White
SW 6385



Cajun Red
SW 0008



Urbane Bronze
SW 7048



Dutch Tile Blue
SW 0031



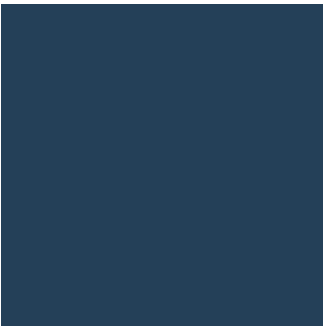
Gallery Green
SW 0015



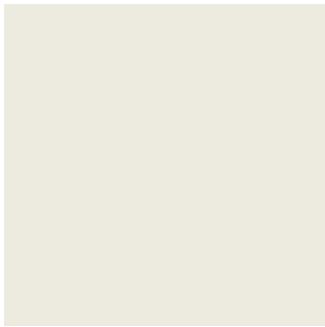
Cut the Mustard
SW 6384



Light French Gray
SW 0055



Salty Dog
SW 9177



Alabaster
SW 7008



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South Milwaukee

Commercial Façade Design Guidelines Form

PROJECT ADDRESS	
Contact Name	Contact Phone
Business/Organization/Affiliation to Property	Contact Email
Project Description	
Materials Using	
OFFICE USE ONLY BELOW THIS LINE	
Date Received:	Staff Determination:
APPROVED	DECLINED
DATE:	
If Declined, may appeal Process to Plan Commission.	
APPEAL	YES NO Plan Commission Meeting:

DESIGN GUIDELINES		
Y	N	NA
		Project restores original façade and keeps historic materials
		Improvements compatible with the existing building
		Improvements complement character of surrounding area
		Materials are of higher quality and permitted (Not allowed: blackout glass, vinyl siding, plywood. Not allowed first floor: EIFS, stucco, glass block. Faux materials discouraged)
		Windows restored to original condition or replaced with compatible style and quality
		Awnings do not conceal decorative façade features & meet guidelines and code
		Exterior lighting is shielded, does not create a nuisance & contributes to building character
		Sign meets sign code requirements. Internally lit box signs are prohibited
		Sign fits within the existing features of the façade and does not cover architectural elements
		Sign type is allowed at location. NOTE:
		Other:
NOTES:		