



WINCHESTER HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

Historic preservation has played a major part in the economic revitalization of many of Virginia's older downtowns, including Winchester. Appropriately rehabilitated façades located within the downtown historic district create a natural setting for commercial activities. Customers and visitors expect an attractive and well-maintained central business district. Each building improvement helps generate the next project.

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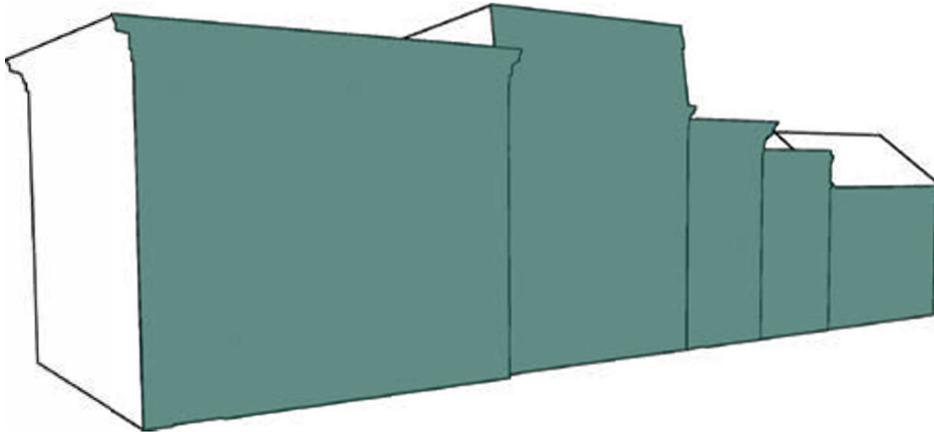
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These guidelines reflect the pragmatic approach that historic downtowns continue to evolve and adapt with each new generation. Physical changes to historic assets are managed in a careful way, but no attempt is made to stop change. Over time the framework of historic preservation and economic development can work together to keep downtown viable and help it to continue to play its role as the historic heart of the community.

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FAÇADES

Traditionally, most commercial buildings in downtown Winchester contain ground floor retail businesses that require display windows, and upper-story space for housing, storage, or offices. As a result, the primary elevations - or façades - of historic commercial buildings have a predictable appearance. Generally, commercial buildings average two to four stories, and nearly all have flat or shed roofs. Traditional commercial buildings have three distinct parts that give the façade an overall unified appearance: storefront, upper floor(s) and cornice.



The design character of the downtown area is defined by the street wall created by the buildings.



The design character of the downtown area is defined by the cornice which is the decorative cap at the top of the building.

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The design character of the downtown area is defined by patterns of windows that create a rhythm of openings along the street wall.



The design character of the downtown area is defined by storefronts, windows, and entrances that create the transparent openings at the street level.

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THREE AREAS OF A FAÇADE

1 CORNICE

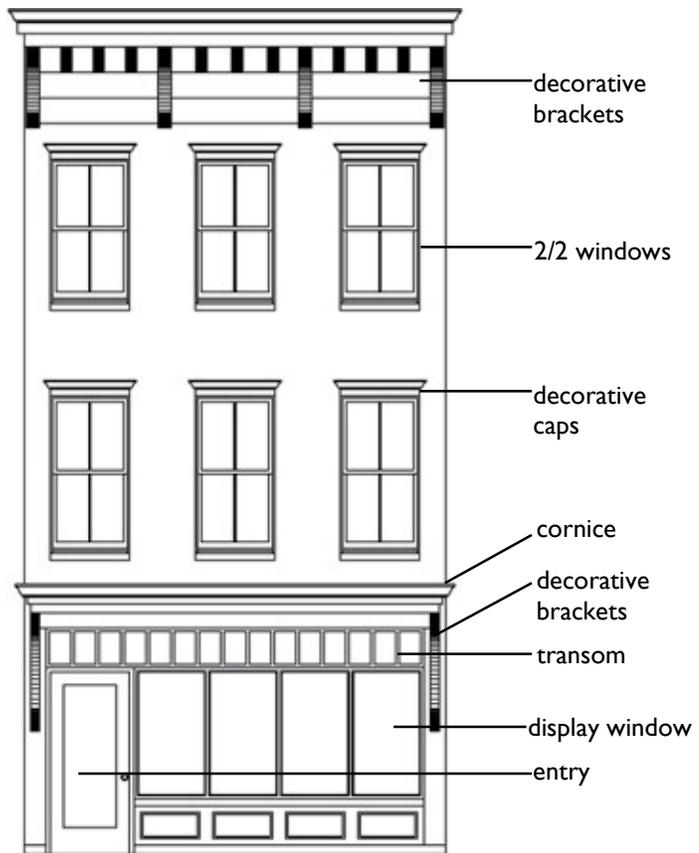
The cornice decorates the top of the building and may be made of metal, masonry, or wood. Some decorative cornices project from the building, while an ornamental band delineates others. The top of the wall may have a patterned brick band or may have a coping of brick, concrete, or metal.

2 UPPER FLOOR

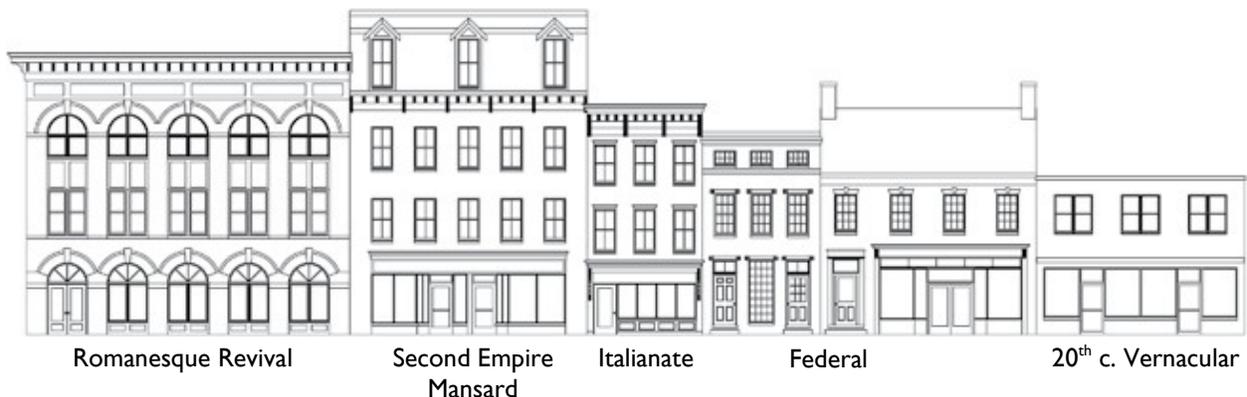
Upper floors are characterized by smaller window openings that repeat on each floor. These windows may vary in size, type, and decoration but usually are the same for each floor. Other façade details may be present on the upper-level façades such as brick banding, corbelling, or decorative panels.

3 STOREFRONT

The first-floor storefront is transparent and is framed by vertical structural piers and a horizontal supporting beam, leaving a void where the storefront elements fit. The storefront elements consist of an entrance (often recessed), display windows, a bulkhead under the display windows, transom windows over the storefront, and a cornice which covers the horizontal beam. The first floor also may contain an entrance to the upper floors. Later buildings may lack several elements of traditional storefronts such as transom windows, or decorative details.



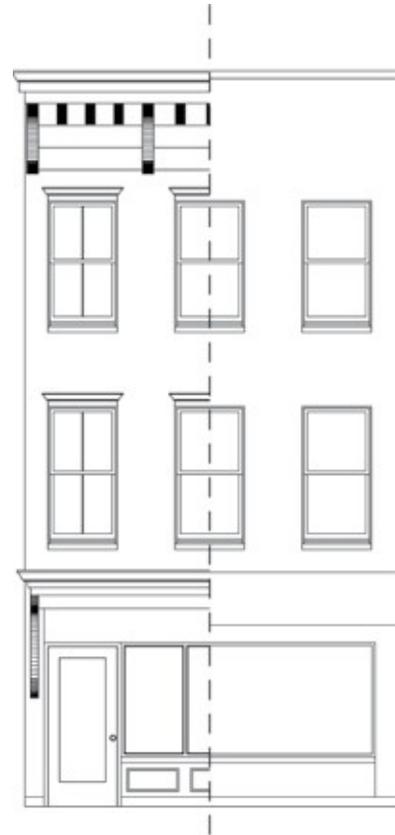
COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURAL STYLES



PLANNING A FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT

Over time commercial buildings are altered or remodeled to reflect current fashions or to eliminate maintenance problems. Often these improvements are misguided and result in a disjointed and unappealing appearance. Other improvements that use good materials and sensitive design may be as attractive as the original building and these changes should be saved. The following guidelines will help to determine what is worth saving and what should be rebuilt.

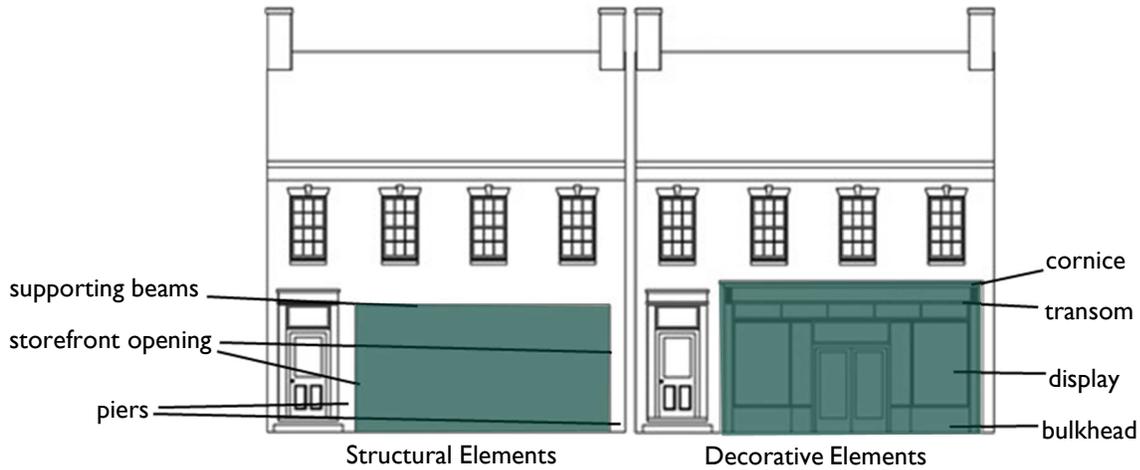
- 1 Conduct pictorial research to determine the design of the original building or early changes.
- 2 Conduct exploratory demolition to determine what remains and its condition. (This work would require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the BAR.)
- 3 Remove any inappropriate materials, signs, or canopies covering the façade.
- 4 Retain all elements, materials, and features that are original to the building, or are sensitive remodelings, and repair as necessary.
- 5 Restore as many original elements as possible, particularly the materials, windows, decorative details, and cornice.
- 6 When designing new elements, conform to the configuration and materials of traditional storefront design. Reconstruct missing original elements (such as cornices, windows and storefronts) if documentation is available, or design new elements that respect the character, materials, and design of the building.
- 7 Avoid using materials that are incompatible with the building or district, including aluminum-frame windows and doors, aluminum panels or display framing, enameled panels, textured wood siding, unpainted wood, artificial siding, and wood shingles. False historical appearances such as “Colonial,” “Olde English,” or other theme designs should not be used.
- 8 Avoid using inappropriate elements such as mansard roofs, metal awnings, coach lanterns, small-paned windows, plastic shutters, inoperable shutters, or shutters on windows where they never previously existed.
- 9 Maintain paint on wood surfaces and use appropriate paint placement to enhance the inherent design of the building. See *Brochure 3: Residential Rehabilitation* (page 16) for further information about painting.



The original character of a historic commercial building is often lost when features and elements are covered up or removed from a façade.

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ELEMENTS OF A STOREFRONT



STOREFRONT EXISTING CONDITIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

What happens when...

...the cornice is missing but the transom window is intact?

Rebuild the cornice

or

Create a sign board that becomes the cornice line.

...the original transom is missing but the cornice is intact?

Restore the transom

or

Add an awning

or...



Make the transom a sign board.

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...the historic storefront was replaced with a brushed aluminum

Rebuild the original storefront based on historic documentation

or

Install a new storefront that respects historic character

or...



Paint the aluminum storefront and add a new wood door with side stiles and rails.



...the piers have been covered with a newer material?

If the material is integral to the storefront and it is historically significant, retain the material

or...



Remove the material and restore the brick if the material has no historic significance.

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WOOD WINDOWS

Windows add light to the interior of a building, provide ventilation, and allow a visual link to the outside. Because of the wide variety of architectural styles and periods of construction within the district, there is a corresponding variation of styles, types, and sizes of windows. They also play a major part in defining a building's particular style, and therefore, they should be retained instead of replaced. In that regard, the following website contains a wealth of details about historic windows and their replacement, as well as other valuable information on historic houses.

<http://www.oldhouseguy.com/windows/>

- 1** Retain original windows if possible. Ensure that all hardware is in good operating condition. Ensure that caulk and glazing putty are intact and that water drains off the sills.
- 2** Repair original windows by patching, splicing, consolidating or otherwise reinforcing. Wood that appears to be in bad condition because of peeling paint or separated joints often can be repaired.
- 3** Uncover and repair covered-up windows and reinstall windows with their original dimensions where they have been blocked in. If the window is no longer needed, the glass should be retained and the back side frosted, screened, or shuttered so that it appears, from the outside, to be in use.
- 4** Replace windows only when they are missing or beyond repair. Reconstruction should be based on physical evidence or old photographs.
- 5** Do not use materials or finishes that radically change the sash, depth of reveal, muntin configuration, the reflective quality or color of the glazing, or the appearance of the frame.
- 6** Use true divided lights to replace similar examples and do not use false muntins in the replacement.
- 7** Do not change the number, location, size, or glazing pattern of windows on primary elevations by cutting new openings, blocking in windows, or installing replacement sash that does not fit the window opening.
- 8** Improve thermal efficiency with weather stripping, storm windows (preferably interior), caulking, interior shades, and if appropriate for the building, blinds and awnings.
- 9** If using awnings, ensure that they align with the opening being covered. Use colors that relate to the colors of the building.
- 10** Use shutters only on windows that show evidence of their use in the past. They should be wood (rather than metal or vinyl) and should be mounted on hinges. Shutter should be sized to cover the window opening when closed. Avoid shutters on composite or bay windows.
- 11** Vinyl, aluminum-clad, vinyl clad, and wood composite windows, with or without removable muntins or muntins sandwiched between the glass, are generally not considered appropriate or compatible within the Primary and Secondary downtown assessment districts as defined in City Code. However, they may be considered appropriate on post-1947 buildings, on a case-by-case basis.

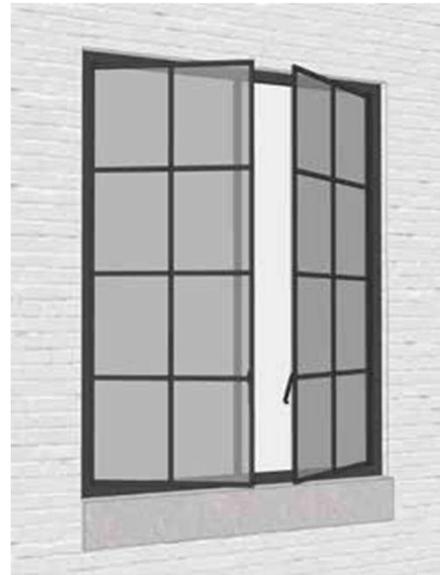
NOTE: Consult Preservation Brief #9, 13, & 33. (Publications available at <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/preservation-briefs.htm>.)

METAL WINDOWS

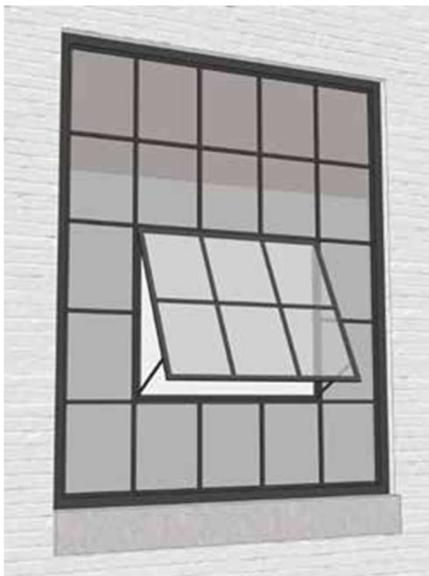
Early twentieth century commercial and industrial buildings frequently used a new type of window that used a metal- frame. There were several types of metal frame windows, including casement, pivot, and hopper windows; all named for how they open. Often these windows were organized in larger banks of openings to create greater light and ventilation into a building. These windows are considered a character-defining feature of the historic building and should be restored as a part of a rehabilitation project.

- 1 Retain metal windows if they are a character-defining feature of the building.
- 2 Maintain by removing any surface rust, priming and painting.
- 3 Caulk the masonry surrounds with a high-quality elastomeric caulk.
- 4 Repair metal windows in place or remove for more extensive work.
- 5 Replace metal windows with new examples that replicate the existing as close as possible in material, size, frame design, pane configuration, etc.

NOTE: For further information, see Preservation Brief 13: The Repair and Thermal Upgrading of Historic Steel Windows.



Metal Casement Window



Metal Hopper/Awning Window



Metal Pivot Window

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REARS OF BUILDINGS

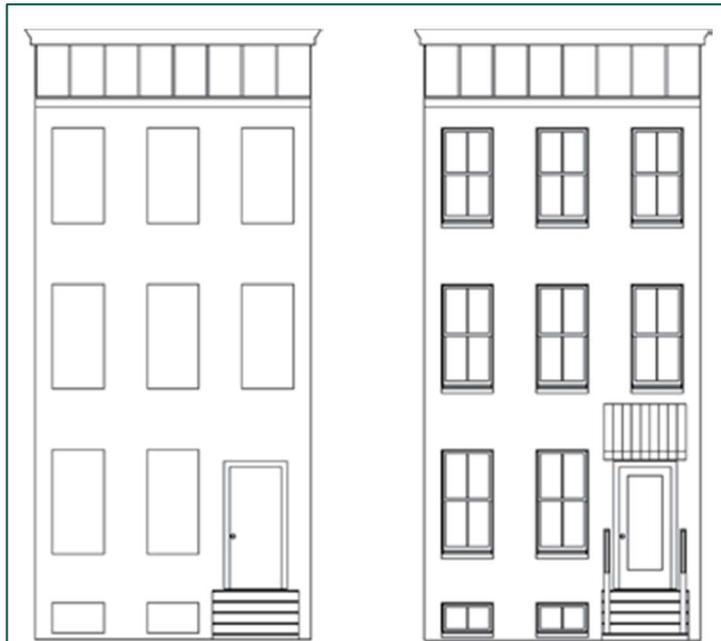
The area behind commercial buildings is often forgotten and neglected. This area may be a utilitarian space for deliveries and storage of discarded goods. However, in some cases the rear of the building may provide the opportunity for a secondary entrance, particularly if oriented to a public alley such as Indian Alley. The appearance of the back area then becomes important to the commercial district and to the individual business. Customers may be provided with direct access from any parking area behind the building. In these cases, the back entrance becomes a secondary entrance to the store and is the first contact the customer makes with the business.



Some buildings have existing rear entries that could be utilized by customers.

SITE BEHIND BUILDING

- Keep entrance uncluttered and free from unsightly items such as trash or recycling materials not in containers.
- Leave enough space in front of the rear entry for pedestrians to comfortably enter the building and meet all handicap (ADA) requirements.
- Consolidate and screen mechanical and utility equipment in one location as much as possible.
- Consider adding planters or a small planting area to enhance and highlight the rear entrance and create an adequate maintenance schedule for them.



A neglected and boarded up rear façade can be opened up and enhanced to provide an attractive second entry to an existing business, or a primary entry to a new tenant within the building.

REAR BUILDING FAÇADE GUIDELINES

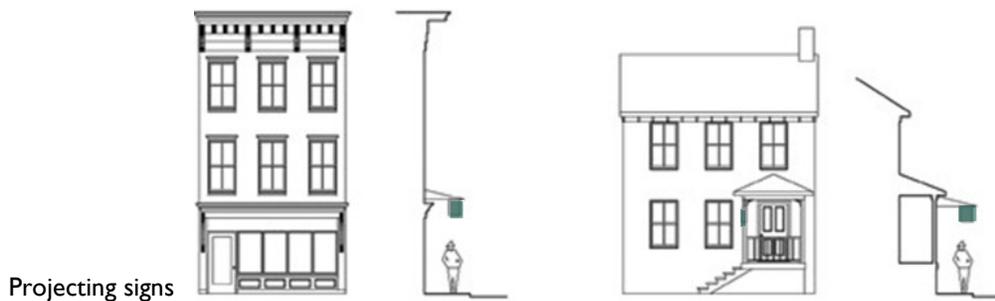
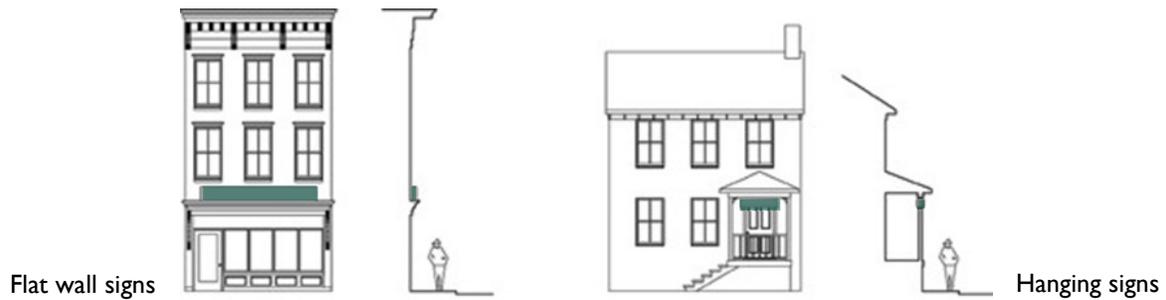
- 1** Retain any historic door, or select a new door, that maintains the character of the building and creates an inviting entrance. Note building and ADA codes when, and if, changing dimensions or design of the entrance.
- 2** Maintain the original windows and window openings when possible. Windows define the character and scale of the original façade, and should not be altered
- 3** Repair existing windows when possible and avoid replacement. If they are replaced, ensure that the design of the new window matches the historic window and has true divided lights instead of the clip-in muntin bar type.
- 4** If installation of storm windows is necessary, see windows section of *Brochure 3: Residential Rehabilitation* (page 5) regarding proper procedures.
- 5** Remove any blocked-in windows and restore windows and frames if missing.
- 6** If security bars need to be installed over windows, choose a type appropriate for the window size, building style and required level of security. Avoid using chain link fencing for a security cover over windows.
- 7** If the rear window openings need to be covered on the interior for merchandise display or other business requirements, consider building an interior screen and maintain the character of the original window's appearance from the exterior.
- 8** Install adequate lighting for customer and store security. Ensure that the design of the lighting relates to the historic character of the building.
- 9** Consider installing signs and awnings that are appropriate for the scale and style of the building.
- 10** Install adequate security, including alarm systems and hardware for doors and windows. Design and select systems and hardware to minimize impact on historic fabric of the building.
- 11** Ensure that any fire escapes meet safety regulations and that no site elements inhibit proper egress.
- 12** Ensure that any rear porches are well maintained and, if used as upper floor entrance(s), are well lit and meet building codes while retaining their historic character.

COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

SIGNS

Signs are a vital part of the downtown scene. A balance should be struck between the need to call attention to individual businesses and the need for a positive image of the entire district. Signs can complement or detract from the character of a building, depending on their design, placement, quantity, size, shape, materials, color and condition. Historically significant signs should be retained, if possible, on buildings, even if the business is no longer in existence.

SIGN TYPES



SIGN PLACEMENT

- 1** Place signs so that they do not obstruct architectural elements and details that define the design of the building. Respect signs of adjacent businesses.
- 2** Flat wall signs for commercial buildings can be located above the storefront, within the frieze of the cornice, on covered transoms, on the pier that frames display windows, or generally on flat, unadorned surfaces of the façade, or in areas clearly suitable as sign locations.
- 3** For residential type buildings used for commercial purposes, a flat sign attached to the wall at the first floor, or between porch columns, is appropriate.
- 4** Projecting signs for commercial buildings should be at least 10 feet above the sidewalk, and project no more than 3 feet from the surface of the building. They should not be placed above the cornice line of the first-floor level unless they have a clearance of less than ten feet.
- 5** For residential type buildings used for commercial purposes, small projecting signs attached to the wall at the first floor or porch column are appropriate and should not be located higher than the top of the porch.
- 6** Freestanding signs, in general, are not an appropriate sign type in a traditional downtown except for use in the front yard of a residence that has been converted to commercial or office use. In this case, freestanding signs should be no higher than 15 feet.
- 7** Window signs (interior and exterior) should be approximately 5.5 feet above the sidewalk at the center point for good pedestrian visibility. Optional locations could include 18 inches from the top or bottom of the display window glass.
- 8** Window signs are also appropriate on the glazing of doors and on upper floor windows for separate building tenants.
- 9** Awning and canopy signs should be placed on the valance area only. The minimum space between the edge of the letter and the top and bottom of the valance should be 1.5 inches.
- 10** Vertically oriented signage may be appropriate, if architectural elements of the building are not obscured.

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Projecting signs help identify a business to approaching pedestrians.

QUANTITY OF PERMANENT SIGNS

- 1 The number of signs used should be limited to encourage compatibility with the building and discourage visual clutter.
- 2 In commercial areas, signs should be limited to two total and a different type for each sign. A building should have only one wall sign per street frontage. Smaller directory signs may be used near the entryway or inside a common lobby area.
- 3 If customer access is provided at the rear of the building, property owners should consider reserving some of the building mounted sign allocation for identification of the business at that entry.

Size

- 1 All signage on a commercial building should not exceed the allowable size specified by the underlying zoning district.
- 2 Horizontal or flat wall signs should not exceed 24 inches in height (or width for vertical signs) and should not extend more than 6 inches from the surface of the building.
- 3 Height of signage (or width, if vertically oriented) should not fill more than 75 percent of architecturally defined area (frieze or cornice, transom, etc.).
- 4 Flat wall signs must have a minimum depth of 0.75 inches, or have raised features (such as lettering or artwork) that are 0.75 inches in height or depth.
- 5 Projecting signs should be a maximum of 6 square feet per face, and have a minimum thickness of 3/8 inch.
- 6 Average height of letters and symbols (average width, if sign is vertically oriented) should be no more than 18 inches on wall-mounted and painted signs, and 9 inches on awning, canopy for a shoe store. Such shapes should not obscure signs, and window signs.
- 7 Window signs should obscure no more than 20 percent of the window glass.

Execution

Sign professionals who are skilled at lettering and surface preparation should execute signs.

Design

It is important that signs be readable while conveying an image appropriate for the business or the building in a historic setting. Often, sign painters or graphic designers can assist with sign design.

Shape

Shape of signs for commercial buildings should conform to the area where the sign is to be located unless a sign is to take on the shape of the product or service provided, such as a shoe for a shoe store. Such shapes should not obscure architectural elements of the building.

Materials

Wall signs should not be painted directly on the surface of masonry walls if the wall has not been previously painted. Window signs should be painted or have decal flat letters and should not be three-dimensional.

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Color

Use colors that complement the materials and color scheme of the building, including accent and trim colors. Three colors are recommended, although more colors can be appropriate in exceptional and tastefully executed designs.

Illumination

Generally, signs should be directly lit with a shielded light source. New internally illuminated signs are prohibited by Historic Winchester (HW) zoning district ordinance.

Buildings with Multiple Tenants

A master sign plan should be submitted for the building. Upper-floor tenants should be represented at each primary entrance by a flat, wall-mounted directory sign.

Banners

Banners are temporary as indicated by the city zoning ordinance.



The owner of this coffee shop uses shapes of a grinder and mug to create a clever and attractive projecting sign.

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Murals

Artists are encouraged to creatively express themselves and collaborate with property owners in the Historic Winchester District to create murals to enhance community placemaking and promote patronage to local businesses. The vibrancy of public art can reinvigorate spaces and the perception of public safety. When mindfully implemented, murals can convey a city's history, culture, and the lives of its residents, but careful consideration is needed to avoid compromising the historic district's character. Both the Board of Architectural Review and an applicant proposing a mural in the historic district should consider four primary factors on the compatibility of the proposal with the historic district's character: location, scale, historic context, and the First Amendment.

FACTORS OF COMPATIBILITY

- **Location:** Where will the mural be located? On which elevation? On which story(ies)? Is the structure's use commercial / industrial / intuitional / mixed-use or residential? What architectural features, such as openings, are present? What other buildings are nearby and are they significant?
- **Historic Context:** What year was the building constructed? If it is a contributing structure, under what National Register criteria is it eligible? How would the mural impact one's ability to interpret the historic character of the space? What historic resources/materials are present on the elevation on which the mural is proposed, and will they be significantly impacted or obstructed by the mural?
- **Scale:** The size of the mural/square footage/massing. The size of the mural compared to the size of adjacent and adjoining buildings. Focus on human-scale.
- **First Amendment:** Does the mural include commercial or non-commercial speech? Does the artwork contain obscenity or intellectual property (IP)? If it contains IP, does the property owner or business owner hold the rights to the imagery or have permission from whomever does?

- 1 Applicants shall submit a mural application for conceptual review to the BAR. Applicants seeking to remove a mural shall also submit a COA application.
- 2 Wall murals should not be discouraged but should be carefully reviewed for compatibility with the district character.
- 3 Applicants should not paint unpainted masonry, but painting a mural on an appropriate, previously painted, elevation shall be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- 4 Applicants may consider alternative methods of mural application such as applying a mural to a removable material rather than directly on a building wall. On unadorned, un-painted, masonry walls, alternative methods provide opportunities for creative expression and shall be considered on a case-by-case basis.
 - The BAR will review the proposed application method to ensure its appropriateness.
- 5 Murals should be in scale with the district and surrounding buildings.

- 6 Murals on the primary elevation of contributing structures are discouraged and are generally inappropriate; proposals on the primary elevation of a contributing structure not exceeding 20% of a wall's area, excluding openings, shall be considered on a case-by-case basis. The following exceptions to the maximum allowable percentage shall be considered on a case-by-case basis:
 - Murals proposed on the primary elevation of non-contributing structures.
 - Murals proposed on the primary elevation of new construction.
 - Murals proposed on elevations facing a public alley and those on a corner side elevation that would otherwise be considered a primary elevation.
 - Murals containing commercial messaging i.e. a storefront sign.
- 7 Always use paint and installation materials that are reversible and appropriate for historic structures; do not use neon or fluorescent paints.
 - Paint shall be intended for exterior use and of sufficient quality which will not deteriorate or compromise the integrity of the material to which it is applied.
 - The property owner is responsible for the upkeep of the mural should the paint begin to peel, or other damage impact its appearance or materials.
- 8 Mural art that constitutes a sign shall conform to the sign regulations in the zoning ordinance. Murals considered signage include those that display, allude to, or refer to commercial messaging.
- 9 Murals should consider the project's relationship to character-defining elevations and should not be applied over any architectural elements, such as, but not limited to, the exterior glass and frames of windows and doors, or above the roof line, or cornice if one exists.
 - Murals are not recommended on elevations with significant architectural details and materials and should not obscure or distort the historic features of a building.
- 10 Murals may only be painted on, or otherwise attached to, commercial, industrial, institutional, or mixed-use structures. Murals are not permitted on solely residential structures except purpose-built multi-family structures which shall be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Murals on accessory structures shall be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

References:

City of Bardstown, KY, Bardstown Historic Design Review Manual (2018).

City of Charlottesville, VA, and Frazier Associates, Charlottesville Architectural Design Control Districts Design Guidelines (2012).

City of Richmond, VA, Department of Planning and Development Review, Old and Historic Districts of Richmond, Virginia Handbook and Design Review Guidelines (2017).

Frankfort, KY, Board of Commissioners. City Ordinance Chapter 101. Frankfort, Kentucky, 2019.

Virginia DHCD. "Mural Tech Sheet." (2023).

NOTE:

The BAR maintains a content-neutral standard for application review; this means the BAR does not approve or deny mural applications based on individual board members' subjective artistic interpretation, but rather the application's adherence to the guidelines.

Contact city staff if you have questions on how zoning determines commercial messaging.

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AWNINGS & CANOPIES

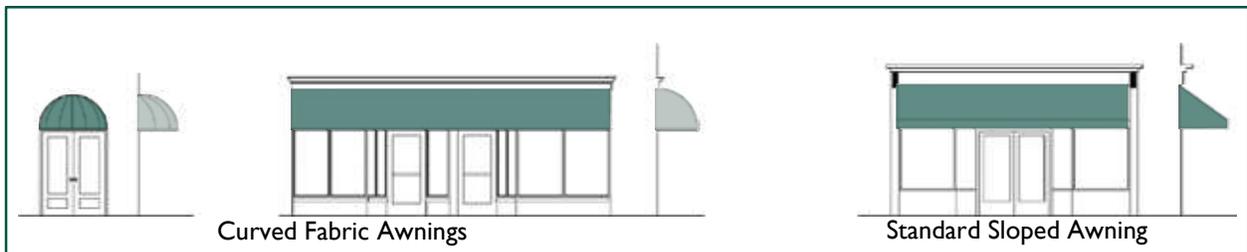
Awnings can contribute to the overall image of downtown by providing visual continuity for an entire block, helping to highlight specific buildings, and covering any unattractively remodeled transom areas above storefronts. They also protect pedestrians from the weather, shield window displays from sunlight and conserve energy.

AWNING AND CANOPY TYPES

- **Standard Sloped Fabric Awnings:** Whether fixed or retractable, sloped awnings are the traditional awning type and are appropriate for most historic buildings, both residential and commercial.
- **Boxed or Curved Fabric Awnings:** A more current design treatment, this type of awning may be used on non-historic or new commercial buildings.
- **Canopies and Marquees:** Appropriate on some commercial buildings, canopies and marquees must fit the storefront design and not obscure important elements such as transoms or decorative glass.
- **Aluminum or Plastic Awnings:** These awnings are inappropriate for any building within the historic district.



This curved fabric awning is also used as a location for the primary sign of the business.



AWNING DESIGN AND PLACEMENT

- 1 Place awnings carefully within the storefront, porch, door, or window openings so they do not obscure elements and do not damage materials.
- 2 Choose designs that do not interfere with existing signs, distinctive architectural features of the building, or with street trees or other elements along the street.
- 3 Choose an awning shape that fits the opening in which it is installed.

- 4 Make sure the bottom of the awning valance is at least 7 feet high.
- 5 Avoid using metal or plastic awnings.

AWNING FABRIC AND COLOR

- 1 Coordinate colors with the overall building color scheme. Solid colors, wide stripes, and narrow stripes may be appropriate, but not overly bright or complex patterns.
- 2 Avoid using shiny plastic-like fabrics.

SIGNS ON AWNINGS

- 1 As appropriate, use the front panel or valance of an awning for a sign. Letters can be sewn, screened, applied or painted on the awning fabric; avoid hand-painted or individually made fabric letters that are not professionally applied.
- 2 See the sign section for size and placement requirements for awning signs.

Reference:

“Keeping Up Appearances: Storefront Guidelines,” 1983, National Main Street Center publication by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

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