

## CHAPTER 6 - COMMERCIAL BUILDING DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

### A. Background

The historic commercial buildings in the historic district are concentrated primarily within the Historic Urban Core and Historic Entry Corridors found along Main Street and East and West Washington Streets.

#### A.1 Historic Urban Core

As described in Chapter 1, the Historic Urban Core is an area where historic commercial mercantile buildings, historic residences and institutional buildings are sited close to the sidewalk to form a strong urban street edge. Although the area contains a variety of historic buildings from different periods, these buildings work together to form a classic downtown street character.

Maintaining the urban character of the Historic Urban Core can be achieved through the implementation of the following goals:

- Preservation of the established urban character
- Preservation of the mixture of historic building types
- Rehabilitation of historic building facades
- Strengthening of the street edges
- Installation of enhancements to the pedestrian environment
- Adherence to design standards for new construction which respects the historic urban character of the area



North Main Street circa 1930

#### A.2 Historic Entry Corridors

As described in Chapter 1, Historic Entry Corridors are areas that were originally residential regions along the main thoroughfares which have transitioned into a mixture of residential and commercial uses. The area contains a variety of historical residential and commercial building styles. They are typically separated from each other by side-yards and feature front yards that are setback from the sidewalks. Over time, greater change has occurred to the buildings and street character in these areas than in the Historic Urban Core. Consequently, there is a greater need for coherent and cohesive improvements to building facades and street-scapes elements to strengthen the area's historic character.

The preservation of the Historic Entry Corridors' character shall be achieved through the impaction of the following goals:

- Rehabilitation of historic building facades
- Adherence to design standards for new construction which respects the historic urban character of the area



North Main Street

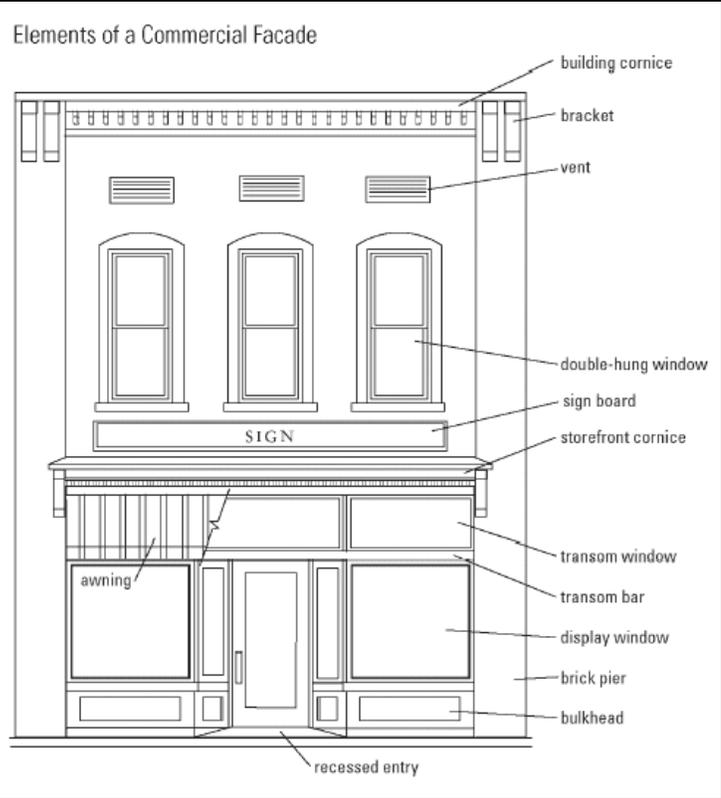
- Strengthening of the street edges
- Installation of enhancements to the pedestrian environment
- Reuse of abandoned or under-utilized buildings

B. Rehabilitation of Historic Building Facades

Many historic buildings within the commercial sub-areas are deteriorated or have been altered to cover-up their original character-defining features. The mercantile building facades along Washington Street within the Historic Urban Core are the most challenging in this regard. Here the facades have been obstructed by modernizations or the application of new signage. It is possible that the original facades may still exist under one or more layers of alterations. Therefore, the careful removal of the alterations and the restoration of the original details could restore the building's original character. Subsequently, the building would not only be an attractive location for business, its restoration could serve to spur economic development/ redevelopment within the area. The following illustrates several of the important elements associated with restoring a building's facade in the Historic Urban Core sub-area. Through communication and education, the owners of historic mercantile buildings should be encouraged to rehabilitate and restore their buildings' original façade design.



East Washington Street



Similarly, the rehabilitation of buildings within the Historic Entry Corridors can also serve to invigorate economic redevelopment and the subsequent preservation of the historic character of these entrances to the downtown area. The architectural design elements illustrated above also apply to building rehabilitation in the Historic Entry Corridors.

Examples of commercial rehabilitation projects in the Historic Urban Core and Entry Corridors can be found on the following page.

## C. Mercantile Buildings in the Commercial Area

### C.1 General

There are numerous historic mercantile buildings in the Historic Conservation Overlay District. Typically, they are:

- Designed with an open first story featuring large store front windows and display cases with an entrance to the retail space.
- The second story typically has smaller double hung windows with some decorative trim.
- The top of the building is usually finished with a detailed parapet and cornice.
- The buildings are built right next to each other from one corner of the block to the next corner without open side yards.



North Main Street

Taken together, their design forms a uniform two-story edge to the street that will allow greater pedestrian interaction.

### C.2 Guidelines for Mercantile Buildings

The following guidelines are important to the preservation and rehabilitation of historic mercantile buildings:

- Preserve Historic Building Facades

Where the building's original facade has not been altered, preserve the original façade design and details in order to maintain its historic character. The preservation of facades includes the performance of regular and preventative maintenance to avoid future deterioration.

- Rehabilitate Historic Building Facades

In the case of the alteration or deterioration of an historic building's façade, rehabilitation of the original façade elements is necessary to restore the historic urban character of the Downtown area. Rehabilitation may require the careful removal of alterations and additions which have covered over the façade's character-defining architectural elements. Where necessary, new construction may be required to restore missing, heavily damaged, or altered elements.

- Preserve/Rehabilitate Display Windows

Preserve and rehabilitate historic mercantile display windows at the street level to not only restore the building's original appearance, but also to encourage street-level retail uses and foster a pedestrian-friendly environment.

BEFORE	AFTER
<b>155-157 East Washington</b>	
	
<b>127 East Washington</b>	
	
<b>133 - 137 West Washington</b>	
	
<b>165-175 North Main Street</b>	
	

- Preserve and Rehabilitate Windows and Doors

Preserve and rehabilitate original window/door openings, window sashes, window/door muntin patterns and window/door trim to maintain and strengthen not only the building's historic character but also that of the surrounding area as well. Where original windows and doors must be replaced due to deterioration or damage, match their original sizes, patterns and design.

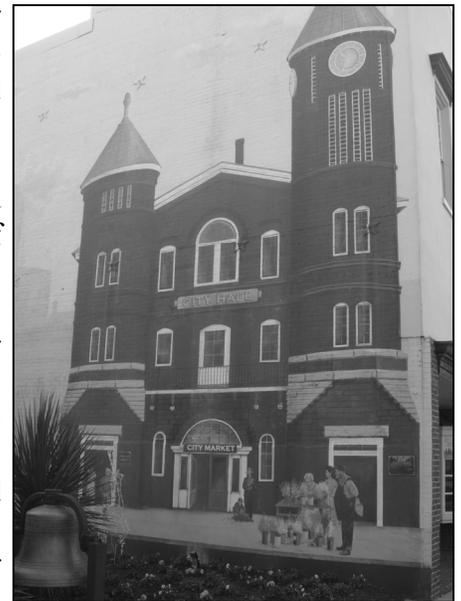
- Preserve and Rehabilitate Façade Materials

Preserve and rehabilitate the original historic façade materials. This would include carefully cleaning the historic brick, stone, and tile where needed and repointing or repairing damaged areas. In addition, woodwork should be carefully cleaned, prepared and painted.

- Murals

In recognition of the importance of preserving the overall character of the Historic Conservation Overlay District, there are certain contributing factors which need to be considered prior to the approval of the installation of a mural on a mercantile building. Murals shall:

- ◇ Be allowed on the side or rear portions of a mercantile building and may be used to enhance the historical significance of the community
- ◇ Be associated with an historic figure, event, or place
- ◇ Provide significant evidence of the history of the building or the development of the historic district
- ◇ Be an integral part of the building's design or physical fabric
- ◇ Be recognized as a local landmark that is considered as a popular focal point in the community
- ◇ Not compromise public safety or distract from the character of the Historic Conservation Overlay District



North Main Street

#### D. Residential Buildings in the Commercial Area

##### D.1 General

Many of the historic residences along Main Street and Washington Street have been converted to commercial uses over the years. Such conversion places new demands on these buildings requiring special care and considerations if their historic features are to be retained.

##### D.2 Guidelines for Residential Buildings

The following guidelines are important to the preservation and rehabilitation of historic residential buildings which are in a commercial use:

- Preserve the Residential Character

Through careful preservation and rehabilitation efforts, the conversion of an historic residential property to commercial uses shall not alter its historic residential appearance and character. Likewise, additions and alterations should adhere to the residential guidelines found in Chapter 5.



West Washington Street

- Preserve the Residential Setting

Residential properties should retain their original landscape setting as viewed from the street or public way. Parking lots shall be located to the rear of the property and screened from public view by picket fences, low screen walls, hedges or other materials suitable to an historic structure. Driveways should be made of exposed aggregate concrete, brick or concrete pavers, gravel, plain concrete, concrete runners, or decorative asphalt; non-decorative asphalt “black-top” paving shall not be used. Driveway treatments must also be designed to appear residential in character.

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- Preserve Residential Features

Where residential buildings are converted to commercial uses, residential features, such as front entrances, porches, porte cocheres, and architectural embellishments shall be retained and preserved so as to maintain the overall residential character of the structure.

## E. Signage Design

### E.1 Background

The design of commercial signage within the Historic Conservation Overlay District is important in order to achieve an appropriate scale, location, appearance and color scheme, which does not detract from the district's appearance and character while allowing for business's identification. Signs should be fabricated from traditional materials such as wood and metal with painted finishes. Plastic and foam sign-boards are not to be used. Lettering shall be historic in appearance such as paint applied, vinyl appliqué, or applied in three-dimensional relief.

### E.2 Guidelines for Signage

The following design guidelines are important for ensuring that signage does not detract from the historic characteristics of the Historic Conservation Overlay District:

- General

Several forms of signage are permissible within the district. If the structure was originally a mercantile building, the signage should follow historic signage forms such as a building mounted sign above display windows or window signs. Signage should be designed with traditional serif typeface, colors, and appearance and style which are appropriate to the historic building and the Historic Conservation Overlay District. If the building is classified as an institutional use, then the signage could be building-



mounted (e.g. letters mounted directly to the building. The Historic Landmarks Commission may consider proposed signage which exceeds the Guidelines on a case-by-case basis. In no case, however, shall the signage exceed the underlying requirements of the applicable zoning district.

- **Lighting**

Lighting of signage must be indirect. Signs which are internally illuminated are prohibited. Lighting of signage must be concealed and directed in such a way as to not allow light to be visible directly from the street, sidewalk, or other public way. Neon signs are allowed for window signage only when mounted on the interior side of the glass.

- **Colors**

Signage colors shall be consistent in the Historic Conservation Overlay District's overall character. The colors must blend with and complement the overall color schemes of the adjacent street. The use of bright and obtrusive colors such as neon and day-glo colors are prohibited.

- **Wall-Mounted Signage**

When attached to a facade, a wall-mounted sign can consist of either attached or mounted simple letters or signboard. Within the Historic Urban Core wall-mounted signage should serve as the primary form of signage on mercantile buildings.



The size of a wall-mounted sign is based on one square foot of sign area for every two feet of length of the primary façade, Sign letters can not exceed 18 inches in height or 45 square feet in area. A wall

sign should be attached to the building's primary façade above the first story display windows, typically above the awning but below the second floor windows. If the building is an institutional use then it is customary to attach the signage by individual letters in the frieze of the cornice. A wall-mounted sign is permissible in lieu of an awning sign.

Wall-mounted signs for residential and religious buildings should be limited to a maximum of 12 square feet in size and should be mounted above or adjacent to the main entrance.

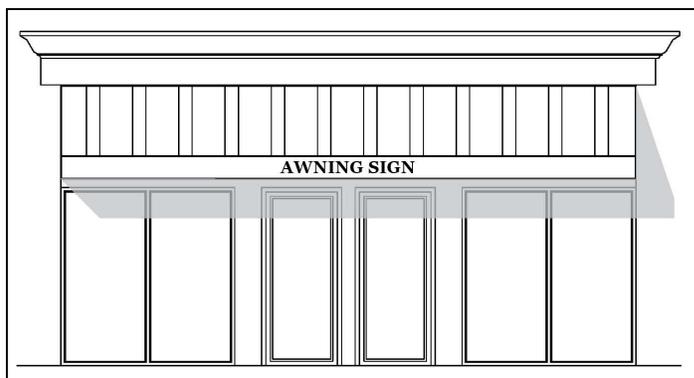
- Free-standing signs

Free-standing signs are permitted where a front yard setback permits the location of such a sign in accordance with the applicable Unified Development Ordinance standards. The design of any freestanding sign shall be guided by the following illustrations. The sign area shall not exceed 12 square feet. Internal illumination is prohibited. Exterior illumination shall be designed to prevent light to shine into a public street or public way.



- Awning signs

Awning signs are allowed on mercantile buildings in lieu of a wall-mounted sign where awnings cover the first floor storefront display window. They are typically painted or sewn into the fabric awning. The size guidelines are the same as wall mounted signs, with the exception that letters can be as high as 24 inches to compensate for the angle of the awning. Awning signs may be illuminated from the exterior side only; illumination methods which will cause the awning to glow from within are prohibited.



- Under-canopy signs

Under-canopy signs are permissible under entrance canopies, awnings, and front porches of commercial and residential buildings. They should be mounted directly over the entrance area, made of a rigid sign board, and hung such that the lowest point is at least 7-1/2 feet above the sidewalk. The size of an under-canopy sign is governed by the Unified Development Ordinance.

- Window signs

Window signs are encouraged on storefront display windows where muntin patterns would not interfere with the text. It is recommended that window signs be restricted to first floor display windows and be constructed of letters fixed to either the inside or outside of the glass. The size of a window sign is governed by the



Unified Development Ordinance. However, in no case shall window signs exceed 10% of the total area of the window in which they are displayed.

- Projecting Signs

Projecting signs, which are attached to the primary façade of a commercial building, are a permitted form of complimentary signage. Projecting signs shall be hung or supported from a metal bracket which attaches to the primary façade of the building, perpendicular to the sidewalk, and installed such that the lowest point is at least 7-1/2 feet above the sidewalk. Projecting signs are to be limited in area to four square feet. Internal illumination is prohibited. Exterior illumination, if provided, shall not shine into the street or public way.

- Mural Signs

Mural signs are permissible on the side or rear portion of a mercantile building within the Historic Conservation Overlay District. Such signs shall be treated as wall signs and comply with the wall signage requirements of Section 31-714 of the Unified Development Ordinance.

## F. ADA Access Ramps and Lifts

### F.1 Background

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that all commercial entities, which are places of public accommodation, be accessible to disabled users or that alternative accommodations are provided. To achieve ADA compliance for many older historic buildings which were not built with at-grade entrances the addition of access ramps and lifts is a necessity. If designed carefully and sensitively, access ramps and lifts can usually be added to historic buildings without substantially altering their historical appearance.



The building code controls the design of ramped access. Included within the design standards is the design of emergency exiting and general safety. Applicants are encouraged to consult with an architect and the Suffolk Building Official to determine how best to design ramps which will provide wheel-chair access.

### F.2 Guidelines for ADA Access

- Non-Ramped Solutions for Minor Height Differences

Minor differences in height can often be solved with simple sloped paving solutions. A sloped transition between the two levels which does not exceed a 1:20 slope (height:length) does not require handrails or landings at each end. Usually this can be accomplished without creating a need for screen walls to conceal the slope.

- Minor Ramps

The building code permits a ramp slope of 1:8 for height differences up to 3 inches (e.g. a ramp of 24 inches in length will be adequate for a 3 inch height difference). If the height difference is between 3 inches and 6 inches, then a slope of 1:10 is the steepest slope permitted. Ramps, even short ones, require handrails on each side of the ramp and landings at each end. In addition they require slip resistant paving. When short ramps are involved, the handrail can be a simple wrought-iron design without pickets.

- Full Ramps

- ◇ Ramps which rise over 6 inches are required to have a slope no greater than 1:12. Handrails are required on each side and a landing is required on each end and at changes in direction of the ramp.
- ◇ Ramps which rise less than 15 inches in height are required to have handrails without guardrails. Landings are required at each end and at changes in direction of the ramp. Ramps should be hidden with landscaping or a low screen wall or fence. Rails may be simple wrought iron to minimize their appearance or hidden with a wall or fence.
- ◇ Ramps which rise more than 15 inches in height above the ground, are required to have guard rail pickets or slats which will prevent people from falling through the rail. Ramps should be hidden with landscaping or a low screen wall or fence.

- Elevators and Chairlifts

Elevators and chairlifts are alternate ways of providing access in accordance with the ADA Accessibility Guidelines. Elevator additions are considered as building additions and require full consideration of the Guidelines for new construction. Chairlifts are required to be hidden with landscaping or a low screen wall or fence.