

## INTRODUCTION

What are design guidelines and who should use them?

Design Guidelines address aesthetic issues that business and property owners face in planning commercial and retail improvements. In general, they are intended to provide ideas, stimulate thinking, and promote good design among the many participants in neighborhood commercial corridor revitalization. They address the physical aspects of supporting a healthy commercial area through building design and building maintenance.

By establishing these guidelines, the City encourages several important public and private objectives. Design Guidelines:

- Improve the quality of physical alterations to commercial corridors.
- Enhance the quality of the pedestrian experience along a commercial corridor by providing a pleasant shopping/dining experience.
- Enhance economic investment for businesses and property owners.
- Protect and conserve neighborhood architectural character.
- Promote community awareness of the physical environment.
- Encourage flexible and individual creativity rather than anonymous uniformity.

Why good design makes commercial corridors stronger

The physical design of a neighborhood commercial district contributes greatly to the overall image of the community: Each district has unique architectural and cultural qualities that attract residents, customers, and visitors. The distinctive – and often very different -- characteristics of buildings of varying ages are assets that make commercial corridors such interesting and satisfying places.

On a commercial corridor, facades built in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century may exist alongside those built in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. Often, commercial structures started as residences and were later converted to shops. In addition to changes in use, building features may have been changed from one period to another, simply to keep up with architectural fashion. Some of these fashions may seem dated now, but if the result shows quality craftsmanship and is pleasing in proportions, composition, and details, then the façade is a valuable visual resource for the corridor. Thoughtful design improvements reinforce the positive identity of a community's retail core and create a "sense of place" that is distinct to the neighborhood.

# DESIGN GUIDELINES

## WHERE TO BEGIN....

**Step 1: Evaluate your building's appearance.** It is important to take a good look at a building before proposing alterations to its exterior. It is recommended that you locate historic photographs of the building to formulate an understanding of the original construction. Consider the windows, doors, and detailing. Note the entire façade, including the upper stories as well as the street level. A successful improvement strategy is one that treats the building as a whole and does not neglect the upper floors. Remember that the street level should be viewed as just a part of an entire building. The goal is to have visually distinct facades that relate to neighboring buildings, while contributing to a sense of cohesiveness in the commercial corridor without strict uniformity. The street should “read” as a corridor with a distinct identity, although composed of dozens of different building styles and uses.

**Step 2: Evaluate your building's surroundings.** A high level of upkeep always strengthens the image of a commercial corridor. Sidewalk maintenance is the responsibility of the property owner whose property is immediately adjacent. The sidewalk should be kept free of debris and washed regularly. Trash generated by the building should be kept in enclosed areas at the rear of the building and must be easily serviced by trash collection trucks.

**Step 3: Make needed repairs: Establish a maintenance schedule.** Preserve the value of façade improvements by repairing any damage before façade work begins. In order to prevent major building repair in the future, a regular maintenance schedule should be established for façade cleaning and repair. The following are recommended preventive maintenance steps:

- Checking roof to ensure that it is watertight
- Checking drainage systems (gutters, downspouts, etc.)
- Scraping chipped and peeling paint and repainting
- Repointing and patching deteriorated masonry or stonework joints
- Replacing deteriorated building surfaces
- Repairing and painting window frames and sills
- Repairing cracked sidewalks and broken curbs as damage occurs

# ELIGIBLE LOCATIONS

The following map shows the areas of the City of Erie where property owners are eligible for façade grants from the Erie Downtown Partnership and where these Design Guidelines will be enforced.

Boundaries of the Erie Downtown Partnership are:

*Beginning at a point in at the intersection of the center line of Sassafras Street and the waters edge, moving southward to the intersection of the Railroad Viaduct, thence easterly along the Railroad corridor to the intersection of the center line of Holland Street; thence northerly along said centerline to the intersection of the waters edge; thence westerly along the waters edge to the point of beginning.*



## FRONT FAÇADE

**Objective:** Use significant or historic architectural features of the entire building to provide guidelines for the design of the building; incorporate upper floors in façade improvement plans.

### Recommended

- Maintain significant or historic architectural elements around the windows.
- Preserve and restore historical features. Repair upper facade with material that is the same as, or complements, the existing construction.
- Use lighting to accentuate the architectural features of the building.
- Respect the entire commercial corridor by assessing the context of your building in the surrounding streetscape. Ask, “How does my particular building fit into the neighborhood?”
- In older buildings, consider installing a storm window on the inside of the original window so it will not be seen.
- Murals should incorporate wall openings into the mural design. Murals are recommended only for non-principal facades (such as side and rear facades).

### Not Recommended

- Covering any part of the building façade with aluminum, stucco, false-brick veneer, or any other material that will obscure openings or detailing.
- Filling in windows or doors with any material unless repairing undesirable prior renovations.
- Creating windowless blank walls or destroying original architectural detail.
- Removing existing quality materials and details from a building.
- Using materials or adding details that simulate a history other than that of the original building.

## **DOORS**

**Objective: Make entrances obvious and welcoming.**

### **Recommended**

- Use doors that contain a lot of glass so the shopper/customer can see the interior
- Choose a door that is compatible in scale, material, and shape with the overall façade.
- Consider the entrance experience: Door(s), vestibule, sidelights, lighting, transom, etc.

### **Not Recommended**

- Using doors that are opaque or that include no glass. Doors that are more suited to residential use should be avoided for commercial entrances.
- Pulling back the street level structure from the sidewalk with the exception of an entrance vestibule. This takes away precious retail space and creates unusable outdoor space that often collects trash and provides space for loitering
- Storing merchandise behind one door of a double door entrance.
- Closing a part of an entrance or making the entrance door smaller than the original door.

## **ENTRANCES: ACCESSIBILITY**

**Objective: Incorporate accessibility as an overall part of the entrance sequence.**

### **Recommended**

- Implement improvements according to the ADA Standards for Accessible Design.
- Work with adjacent stores to coordinate shared ramps, stairs, lifts, or elevators.

### **Not Recommended**

- Use of slippery materials on walking surfaces.
- Making entrances complicated or difficult to get through by crowding them with merchandise.

## **WINDOWS: MATERIALS, SIZES, MAINTENANCE**

**Objective: Attract attention to the products or services within.**

### **Recommended**

- Use large windows to provide the maximum amount of visibility.
- Use clear glass.
- Clean glass regularly.

### **Not Recommended**

- Use of tinted, opaque, fritted, or smoked glass
- Covering the windows with too much signage or attaching paper signs on windows.
- Reducing window size to an area smaller than its original.
- Boarding up or closing upper-story windows in any fashion.
- Use of ground floor or upper floor window space for storage.

## **WINDOWS: DISPLAY**

**Objective: Stimulate interest in new products or services**

### **Recommended**

- Use windows to display merchandise by using the full extent of the glass.
- Make the display exciting, fun, and original.
- Change the display often to keep the passerby interested and to continually draw in the potential customer.
- Display small merchandise at the front of the window or at eye level.
- Use upper floor windows for displays.

### **Not Recommended**

- Cluttering window displays with too much merchandise or disorganized displays that prevent customers and pedestrians from seeing inside.
- Use of window display space for storage.
- Keeping display windows empty.



## **GENERAL LIGHTING**

**Objective: Make the street feel lively, inviting, and secure.**

### **Recommended**

- Use lighting to draw attention to window displays, signs, store information, and a building's architectural details.
- Use exterior fixtures that complement the entire façade.
- Keep window displays well lit, even after business hours.
- Direct lighting onto the display itself.
- When possible, light second and third floor windows, even after business hours.
- Use a timer to turn lighting fixtures on at dusk and off at dawn.

### **Not Recommended**

- Use of flashing, pulsating, or moving lights
- Use of lighting that is overly bright for the surroundings or that produces glare onto sidewalks or adjacent properties.
- Framing the display window with neon tubing.
- Use of lighting fixtures that clash with the architectural style and character of the façade.

## SIGNAGE

**Objective: Communicate the name of a store and add visual interest to the streetscape experience.**

### RECOMMENDED

- Signage that is consistent in scale with other signs in the corridor, and that complements a building's architecture.
- Pedestrian-scaled signs.
- Type fonts and colors that are legible.
- Distinctive lettering styles that represent the business.
- Artwork, icons, logos, and simple messages.
- Lettering on the window glass itself, either by adhesive letters, painting, or etching professionally produced or completed by an artist or sign company.
- Professionally fabricated signage in metal, plastic, glass, or some combination of these materials, as well as in stone or wood. Signage should be located, scaled, and sized appropriately for the façade.
- Incorporating illumination of a sign at night as an integral part of the sign's design.
- Signs should be mounted no more than one story above the sidewalk level.
- Where historically appropriate, signs painted on non-principal facades.

### NOT RECOMMENDED

- Using many signs that are confusing to read (use one or two signs).
- Covering building elements such as windows and cornices with signs.
- Using long, complicated messages.
- Attaching paper signs to the windows.

## **AWNINGS**

**Objective: Add an exterior building element that serves a practical purpose and enhances a storefront's appearance, if appropriate for your building.**

### **RECOMMENDED**

- Assess your building for the appropriateness of an awning.
- Size of the awning must be scaled to the size of the building and its context in the commercial corridor.
- Use awnings that have a simple shape: A straight, sloped awning with a free valance is preferred to unusual shapes.
- Use fabric (real or synthetic) made of weather resistant material.
- Consider using retractable awnings because they are more flexible in changing weather.
- Use awnings to create pleasant shaded spaces in front of a building.
- Use awnings to cool interiors and save energy.
- Use awnings to mask security grilles.
- Use awnings as signs. Awning signage should be on the valance, which is easy (and economical) to change.
- Use larger awnings for shading the interior or to provide a covered place for outdoor merchandise display and sales on the sidewalk.

### **NOT RECOMMENDED**

- Use of back-lit or internally-lit awnings.
- Use of aluminum, vinyl, or other plastic materials.
- Covering architectural details with continuous awnings or oversized awnings.
- Use of canopies (that extend to the curb and have vertical supports).

## **SECURITY GRILLES**

**Objective: Provide overnight building security in a visually pleasing way.**

### **RECOMMENDED**

- Use open grilles that allow lighted window displays to be seen at night.
- Keep security grilles clean and well maintained.
- Conceal grille box or housing unit under awnings and signs.
- Install security grilles inside of the display glass and make sure they can be completely concealed during regular business hours.
- Explore various types of transparent security grilles and find the one that best fits the look of your building.

### **NOT RECOMMENDED**

- Use of opaque, solid security gates.

## **BUILDING COLOR**

**Objective: Convey the identity and character of a building.**

### **RECOMMENDED**

- Color should be considered in the context of the entire commercial corridor.
- When choosing color for your building façade, consider how sunlight strikes your building. This will determine how the color really appears to the eye.
- Color should be used to bring together the elements of the entire façade, from the cornice to the entrance door.
- Color should complement, respond to, and enhance the architectural character and detailing of a building.
- The research of historic paint palettes can be easily researched through commercial paint retailers. When choosing paint colors refer to these period specific groupings first.

### **NOT RECOMMENDED**

- Using more than three (3) colors, because it will make your façade seem less coherent and less composed.
- Painting arbitrary decorative lines, bands, or graphics directly on the façade if not related to the building's character or detailing.

## **LANDSCAPING/PLANTING**

**Objective: Strengthen the appeal of your business and character of the commercial corridor.**

### **RECOMMENDED**

- Use landscaping to create shaded areas and reduce wind speed on commercial corridors. Coordinate your selections with other businesses on the street.
- Plant trees to reduce pollution and noise.
- Plant trees that have high, sparse, canopies that will not cover building or street level signage.
- Use plants and trees that are native to the area and easily maintained.
- Use flower boxes at windows and plant containers at entrances.
- Use plant containers that are sturdy and stable so they cannot be easily tipped or blown over.
- Keep plant containers free of litter and other debris.
- Keep plants suitably watered and pruned.

### **NOT RECOMMENDED**

- Use of exotic landscaping that will not survive the climate conditions.
- Breaking the continuity of the sidewalk by placing plant containers in high pedestrian traffic areas of a sidewalk.

## **The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation**

The Standards (Department of Interior regulations, 36 CFR 67) pertain to historic buildings of all materials, construction types, sizes, and occupancy and encompass the exterior and the interior, related landscape features and the building's site and environment as well as attached, adjacent, or related new construction. The Standards are to be applied to specific rehabilitation projects in a reasonable manner, taking into consideration economic and technical feasibility.

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.

8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.

9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.



## **PREVAILING WAGE THRESHOLDS**

Please be advised that if the overall cost of the project meets or exceeds \$25,000 then the property owner will be required to abide by all regulations as they relate to Davis Bacon Prevailing Wages.

## **APPROVALS AND USEFUL RESOURCES**

Reviewing this guide is only the first step in making façade improvement in Erie. Depending on the work you want to do, other City approvals may be needed. Contact the City of Erie Code Enforcement Office at 870-1313 for guidance through the process, or explore on your own at [www.erie.pa.us](http://www.erie.pa.us). The following Departments or Agencies may have information useful to you:

- **The City of Erie Zoning Office**
- **The Erie County Historical Society**
- **The Erie Redevelopment Authority**