

COMMERCIAL FACADES DESIGN GUIDE



Quick Design Tips for Commercial Facades Projects

Note: These tips are adapted from the [Downtown Design Guide](#).

GENERAL

- **Maintain authenticity:** Base any restoration efforts on documentation or physical evidence.
- **Avoid False History:** Do not add features or ornamentation that never existed on the building.
- **Respect Historic Scale:** Storefronts should maintain traditional proportions, including two side piers and a lintel or cornice band. Avoid enlarging, reducing, or infilling the storefront with inappropriate materials.
- **Align New Features:** Ensure new elements align with existing architectural details. E.g. Edge of new transom aligns with edge of storefront glass.
- **Simplicity in Design:** Use simple, straightforward designs that complement classical proportions. Avoid unnecessary ornamentation unless historically accurate. E.g. Do not add patterns to new cement board paneling and trim if that area was originally another material, such as transom glass.

MATERIALS

- **Appropriate Material Use:** Design for appropriate treatment of existing/historic materials and appropriate selection of new.
- **Avoid Inappropriate Materials:** Refrain from using materials like Exterior Insulation Finishing Systems (EIFS), Vinyl Siding, Standing Seam Metal Roofing and Siding, Residential type wood siding, shingles, or shakes.
- **Masonry Treatment:** For proper cleaning and repointing of brick and masonry, refer to *Preservation [Briefs 1](#) and [2](#)* from the National Park Service.

TRANSOMS

- **New Transom Windows:** Ensure new transom windows follow traditional proportions. Transoms over storefront glass should not be bisected with brick, unless the brick is a pier that goes from the ground through the transom.
- **Infilled Transoms:** If transoms cannot be restored, ensure sign panels fit the original transom space. Awnings may also be used to conceal infilled or missing transoms.

WINDOWS

- **Storefront Windows:** Use large, single, fixed windows without muntins for display windows.
- **Upper Story & Side Facade Windows:** Replace windows with historically accurate types and configurations. Retain original window sizes and ensure replacements fit the full opening.
- **Window Alterations:** Avoid infilling or blocking part of a window opening with masonry or plywood. Do not enlarge openings.

DOORS

- **Commercial Doors:** Use predominantly glass doors for commercial spaces to maintain transparency and visibility.
- **Secondary Entrances:** Differentiate secondary entrances from primary ones. Half glass doors are appropriate for doors to upper stories.

AWNINGS

- **Proportionate Awning Design:** Awning shapes should correspond with the building's openings. Use sloped, rectangular awnings for rectangular openings and rounded awnings for arched windows.
- **Scale Consideration:** Ensure awnings do not obscure too much of the storefront or extend excessively over the sidewalk. Awning widths should allow proper anchoring while maintaining visibility of columns. Leave at least 8 feet of clearance from the sidewalk.
- **Multiple Awnings:** Use individual awnings for each storefront to break up large facades. Avoid extending a single awning across multiple storefronts.

LIGHTING

Effective Lighting: Gooseneck lights are ideal for highlighting signage and adding architectural interest. Focus lighting on signage areas or over doors to enhance visibility and impact.