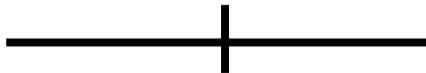


# 35<sup>th</sup> *Street*

## 35th Street Commercial Façade Improvements Design Guidelines



## Introduction

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. Improving the appearance and functionality of buildings supports local businesses and can have a significant impact on the attractiveness, security, and marketability of the commercial corridor.

At the request of merchants and property owners located on the 35th Street Commercial corridor, the City of Norfolk has drafted a recommended set of design guidelines for making exterior modifications and exterior improvements to commercial buildings in the district.

The 35th Street Commercial Corridor is located within the Park Place National Register Historic District and has many buildings that contribute to the unique character of the district. The focus of these guidelines will be on how storefront improvements - such as signs, awnings, and security grilles - can be consistent with the architectural features that establish and sustain the aesthetic, historical, and architectural value and significance of the district.

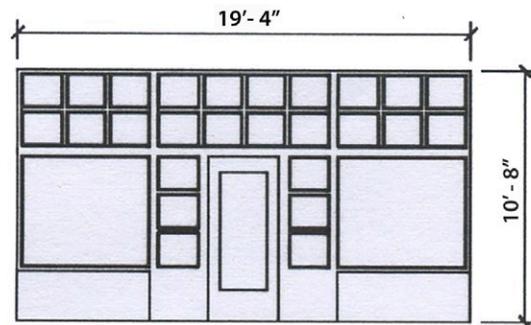


## What are design guidelines and who are they for?

Design guidelines are intended to assist property owners and businesses with planning and approving exterior improvements to buildings along the 35th Street Commercial Corridor while achieving the following goals:

- Promote and preserve the history and architectural character of buildings and the corridor.
- Enhance the quality of the pedestrian experience.
- Enhance the economic investment for businesses and property owners.
- Promote design standards such as pedestrian-friendly streets, appropriate infill, and overall attractiveness of the corridor.
- Highlight the individual characteristics of buildings while contributing to the overall identity and cohesiveness of the corridor.

The guidelines are intended to be flexible, encouraging creative building designs while attracting pedestrian visits and preserving distinctive materials and architectural features inherent in the corridor's character and style.



## Applicability

The proposed design guidelines will assist in the design and review of modifications and improvements to existing storefronts located on the 35th Street Commercial Corridor and included in the boundaries of the Commercial Corridors Revitalization Program.

The guidelines will provide property and business owners:

- Information about the character of the corridor.
- Guidance for façade improvements or other exterior alterations.
- Guidance for appropriate infill development.

Generally, the use of the guidelines is voluntary. However, final guidelines will be used by the Aesthetic Improvement Grant Review Committee to review projects receiving grant money from the City of Norfolk.

All improvements must meet the requirements of all zoning, historic preservation, building construction and maintenance codes administered by the Department of Planning and Community Development. When in conflict, applicable city codes and ordinances will override interpretations of the design guidelines.



## Elements of a Commercial Façade

Use the architectural features of the entire building to provide guidelines for the design of the storefront. For example, the existing architectural elements around the shop windows and the cornices should be maintained and - wherever possible - historical features should be preserved and restored. The storefront design should be compatible with these features.

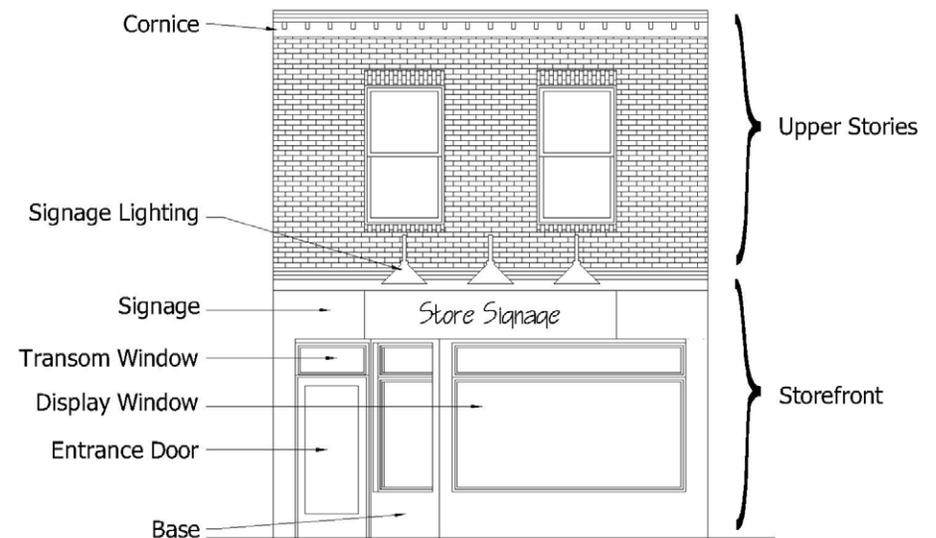
Examples of significant architectural features include cornices, brackets, railings, columns, and shutters. Thoughtful design should reflect these individual building characteristics while contributing to the overall identity and cohesiveness of the corridor.

## Materials

Choice of materials is very important in renovating a commercial building. Materials that were historically used and that blend with the buildings along the corridor are best. Examples of materials you need to preserve include wood, iron, cast iron, and tile.

### Recommended:

- Retaining existing historic materials (such as siding) as well as decorative metal or masonry elements.
- Using quality, natural materials (such as brick) for siding.
- Using quality wood construction for storefronts.



### Not recommended:

- Covering original or historic materials with new materials.
- Using vinyl or other synthetic materials for siding and trim.
- Replacing original or historic materials, unless the condition of the historic materials is so deteriorated that replacement is necessary. In cases where replacement is warranted, it should be with new elements that match/mimic the original historic materials.



## Upper Façade and Cornice

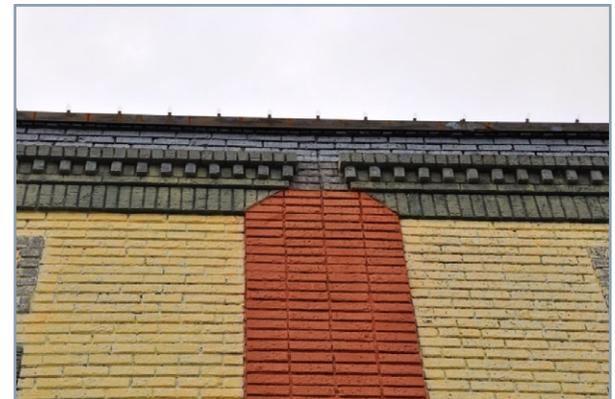
Historic cornices, window surrounds, windows and other decorative elements found in upper stories of a storefront should be retained and repaired, whenever possible. In cases where replacement is warranted, it should be with new elements that closely match/mimic the materials and design of the historic features.

### Recommended:

- Preserve historic upper-story windows. Replace with same/similar materials and design if originals cannot be retained.
- Re-opening boarded up windows.
- Preserving and repairing historic cornices; replace with same/similar materials and design if original cannot be retained.
- Removing non-historic materials, such as vinyl or any other false veneer, if possible.
- Using upper stories for additional merchandise display.

### Not Recommended:

- Enclosing original window openings, or portions thereof.
- Placing window air-conditioning units on front elevations.
- Removing existing historic materials or features from the building or covering original features with non-historic materials.
- Adding details that create a false historical appearance.
- Avoid creating false historical appearances or themes that include inappropriate elements such as mansard roofs, metal awnings, coach lanterns, small paned windows, plastic shutters, or shutters on windows where they never previously existed.



## Storefronts: Doors

As with windows, the objective of store doors is to allow pedestrians and other passersby to see inside the store.

### Recommended:

- Preserve historic doors or replace with same/similar materials and design if originals cannot be retained.
- Re-open boarded up door openings.
- Entry doors with lots of glass so shopper can see items inside. New door should be compatible in size, scale, material and shape with the overall storefront.
- Accessibility improvements should be made according to current applicable regulations.
- Where existing, maintain glass transoms over entry doors. Repair as necessary with glazing to match entry door.

### Not Recommended:

- Enclosing original door openings, or portions thereof.
- Using doors that are opaque or have no glass.
- Pulling the entrance back from or pushing it forward from the building façade if it was not originally configured that way.
- Using residential doors.



An opaque door makes the space feel unsafe and unwelcoming



## Storefronts: Windows and Displays

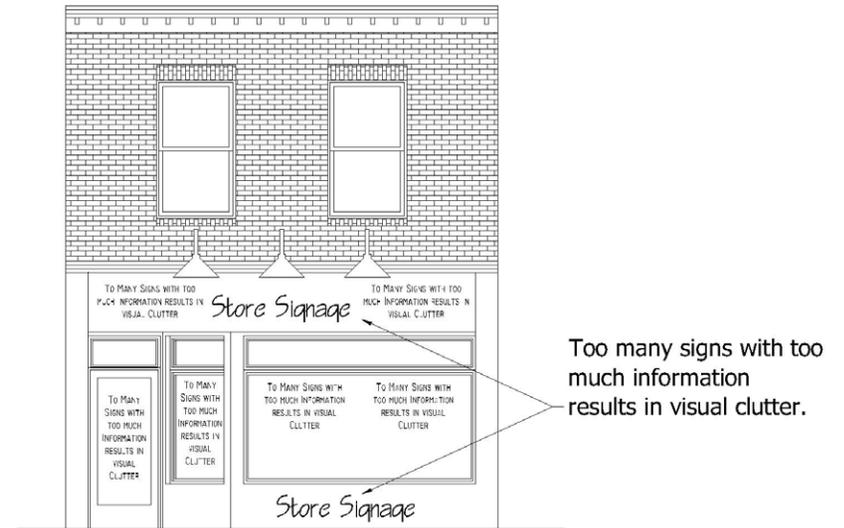
Storefront windows and display windows should be transparent to encourage pedestrians to see inside the businesses. The use of large windows provides the maximum amount of visibility.

### Recommended:

- Preserve historic windows, or replace with same/similar materials and design if originals cannot be retained.
- Where replacement is warranted, it should be with new elements that match/mimic the materials and design of the historic features closely.
- Re-open boarded up storefront windows.
- Use clear glass for easy viewing into store.
- Use storefront and display windows to showcase merchandise.
- Total area of ground floor façade shall be 50% open.

### Not Recommended:

- Enclosing original windows or display openings, or portions thereof.
- Using windows with opaque or highly tinted glass.
- Mirrored, highly reflective glass. Used only as an architectural or decorative accent.
- Using ground floor display windows for storage behind paper signage or cluttering display with too much merchandise so that it prevents pedestrians from viewing inside the store.
- Keeping display windows empty.



## Storefronts: Security Grilles

Opaque, solid roll-down security gates make the commercial corridor feel unsafe and do not allow shoppers to see merchandise. Security measures should be installed and utilized in a visually pleasing way that does not detract from the architecture of the building.

### Recommended:

- If security grilles are necessary, consider grilles mounted on the interior of the storefront so that the grille rolls down on the inside of the display window or door to minimize visual impact on the pedestrian streetscape.
- If exterior security grilles are necessary, use open grilles that allow light to come in, displays to be seen at night, and visual inspection from the front.
- Use grilles on the sides and rear of a building rather than the front façade or storefront windows.
- Explore various types of transparent security grilles to find the one that best fits the look of the storefront and compliments the building façade.
- Rails and grille housing must be incorporated into the storefront design.
- Color of grilles should match windows and be electronically operated.



### Not Recommended:

- Doors that are visible during the day.
- Using opaque or solid security gates or doors.
- Using roll-up doors.



## L ighting

Lighting can highlight signage or various architectural elements of a building, as well as create a lively and secure environment along the corridor. Appropriate illumination (foot candle) standards for the building and signage lighting may be developed.

### Recommended:

- Using lighting to accentuate signage, displays, store entrances, and architectural details.
- Using exterior lighting fixtures that compliment the architecture and time period of the building.
- Keeping storefronts, displays and even upper level windows lit after business hours helps provide safety and interest at night.
- Keeping building signage lighting separate from window display lighting.

### Not Recommended:

- Using flashing, changing, neon or pulsating lights that will detract from the building and store merchandise on display.
- Using spotlights or floodlights that are overly bright for surrounding areas.
- Having inadequate lighting to illuminate entrances and displays at night.



\* Encroachment permit may be needed.



## Signage

Signage is very important along a commercial corridor. It serves to communicate the name of businesses and provides visual interest to pedestrians and motorists. With signs, the owner can advertise, identify and promote the business' image.

### Recommended:

- Keeping signage similar in scale with others on the street and of a scale that is geared to pedestrians as well as vehicles.
- Using historic or existing sign panels or areas designated or logical for signage.
- Using simple messages, logos and business names that are easily legible.
- Mounting signage no more than one story above the sidewalk level.
- Lettering on windows itself, rather than paper signs inside display windows.
- Providing appropriate illumination for signage.
- Consulting a sign company, due to the vast array of options for letters and font sizes a sign company be consulted.

### Not Recommended:

- Covering or obscuring architectural features of the building, or mounting signs so that they harm or interfere with the building's integrity.
- Using flashing, changing, neon or pulsating signs that will detract from the building and store merchandise on display.
- Using too many signs that create visual clutter.
- Using freestanding signs, except for one A-frame sign with permission from the Planning Department.
- Using internally-lit box signs.

\* Encroachment permits may be needed.



## Awnings

Awnings can add color and interest to storefronts, clearly identify the location of the entrance, provide shade or shelter for customers, provide another location for business signage and act as a transition between the storefront and the upper façade. In addition, they can hide security grilles and keep out unwanted sunlight.

### Recommended:

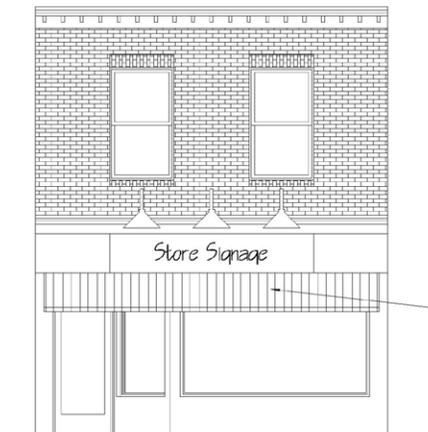
- Make awning sizes appropriate for their location on a particular building and ensure that they work with the architectural features.
- Use fabric awnings made of weather resistant materials.
- Consider using awning as location for signage, particularly if there is not a readily apparent location for it on the building that works with its architectural features.
- Use awnings of simple shapes that are not too large for their location.
- Use simple messages, logos and business names that are easily legible if signage is on awning.
- Coordinate the choice of colors as part of the overall color scheme.



### Not Recommended:

- Covering or obscuring architectural features of the building, or mounting awnings so that they harm or interfere with the building's integrity.
- Using plastic, vinyl or metal awnings.
- Using continual awnings, rather than breaking them up over appropriate sections of a building (recommend photo/drawing).
- Backlighting awning designs.

\* Encroachment permit may be needed.



Aluminum Awning are harsh and unwelcoming. They are less flexible than fabric awnings and more subject to wind damage.



## Colors

Color can be used to highlight architectural features, enliven the streetscape and provide cohesion among buildings. It also conveys an identity and personality of the store within.

### Recommended:

- Considering store colors within the context or theme of the entire corridor.
- Using color to complement or highlight architecture of the building.
- Maintaining paint on wooden surfaces.

### Not Recommended:

- Using multiple colors which may create a confusing or cluttered appearance.
- Painting previously unpainted brick, unless it is needed to conceal repair patches or poor mortar re-pointing.



## Landscaping

Attractive landscaping in planters, tree pits and window boxes can enhance the appearance of individual businesses and the overall corridor.

### Recommended:

- Keeping planters, tree pits and boxes pruned, watered and in good condition.
- Placing planters by store entrances.
- Using planters and boxes that are stable and will not tip or blow over.

### Not Recommended:

- Using species which will be too large and dominate the sidewalk or block signage or building features.
- Using species which do not grow well or survive in the climate.



## **SUPPORTING RESOURCES**

### *Façade and Aesthetic Improvement Grants*

The City of Norfolk offers matching grants up to \$25,000 to assist business and property owners with façade improvements to commercially zoned and used properties. To obtain an application and more information, contact the Department of Planning and Community Development at 757-664-4752.

### *Rehabilitation Tax Credits*

Contributing buildings in the Park Place National Register District may qualify for tax credits through the Commonwealth of Virginia and the National Park Service, which may provide up to 45% of the cost of rehabilitation. This program is implemented through the Virginia Department of Historic Resources at 804-367-2323.

### *Historic District Compliance*

For information on the applicability and compliance to the requirements of the historic district designation, you may contact the Historic Preservation Manager. Offices are located at City Hall, 5th floor, or you may call 757-664-4752.

### *Building Permits*

Building permits may be obtained at the City's Bureau of Building Construction Safety located at 400 Granby Street. For more information call 757-664-6565.

### *Encroachment Permits*

Improvements involving encroachments into the public with-a-way will need to be approved by the Department of Planning and Community Development (Zoning Administrator). Offices are located in City Hall, 5th Floor. For more information call 757-664-4752.

