

City of Minneapolis  
**Great Streets**

# FAÇADE DESIGN GUIDE



**A** **welcoming**, eye-catching storefront sends a positive message to potential customers and draws them into your business to spend their money. This guide provides some suggestions and ideas for storefront improvements that will help your building to market your business.

This design guide provides ideas to stimulate thinking. It is not a substitute for a professional designer. The guide is a companion piece to the City of Minneapolis Great Streets Façade Improvement Program. As such, it focuses on basic façade elements that are eligible for funding through the program.

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WELCOME

# THINKING OF IMPROVING YOUR STOREFRONT?

## Evaluate the building's appearance and surroundings

What is unique about your building and the nearby businesses that you can enhance?

How can you emphasize what you like best about the building and area?

How can you enhance what your business has to offer?



## 2 Check on and perform physical maintenance

The payoff for even the simplest repairs should not be underestimated. It is important to **preserve the value of a building** by repairing any damage when it occurs and by keeping a regular maintenance schedule. If repairs or maintenance are needed, they should be accomplished before or simultaneously with other façade improvements.

It is the responsibility of the building and business owners to maintain their buildings in good repair. Cracked windows, peeling paint, and burned-out lights all diminish the professional image and pedestrian appeal of a business district. Well-maintained buildings express pride and care and enhance a district’s economic viability.

## 3 Look to preserving historic architectural style and features

When planning a storefront remodeling project, keep in mind the history of your building and that of neighboring buildings. Storefronts are often modified over time to reflect different architectural styles or accommodate new uses. Be cautious about altering the original character of an historic building or removing unique features that make your building stand out.

Owners of potentially historically significant structures should seek professional design assistance to maintain the historic integrity of the building when undertaking any projects beyond minor repair.

Check the City of Minneapolis website at [www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/hpc/landmarks](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/hpc/landmarks) to see if your building is a locally designated historic landmark or within an historic district.

## 4 Contact City offices to determine permitting needs

Keep in mind that City of Minneapolis permits are required for most construction projects. City regulations **require** some of the ideas listed as encouraged in this guide and **prohibit** some of the discouraged elements. City regulations are different for historic properties and change from one zoning district to another.

While the City can issue many permits in a few days or weeks, there are some circumstances where it can take longer to obtain permits. Be sure to check on which permits you will need early in the process. It is vital that business and building owners work with City Zoning staff on designs and obtain all necessary permits **before** beginning work. Call 311 if you have questions regarding permitting processes. All contractors who work in the City must be licensed and insured.

**S** **Storefronts** help define the character of a commercial area. The design and use of the storefront are critical to a business' advertising and merchandising.

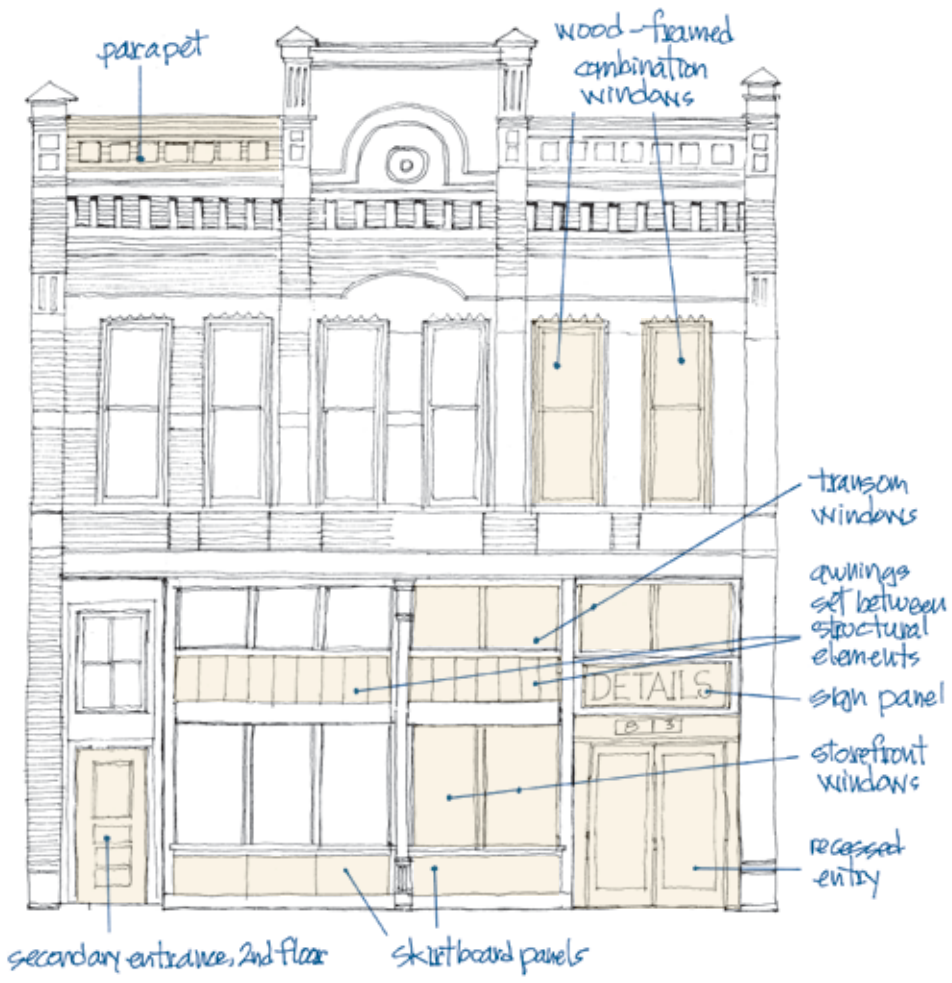
The building conveys a great deal of information about your business. It is very important to address each element as part of a larger, integrated façade. Consider how best to welcome customers with a façade that establishes a visual connection between your business and the street. Façade improvements should make it easier to identify an individual business from the larger picture of the street.

Carefully planning an integrated project provides a strong business image and can be cost effective at the same time.



**FAÇADE ELEMENT TERMS**

- Façade or storefront:** Typically, the front of a building, facing a public street or road
- Cornice:** Ornamental trim at the meeting of the roof and wall, defining the top of the building
- Sign panel:** Horizontal area above the first floor storefront windows and below the second floor windows where a sign is placed
- Transom window:** Windows above storefront windows, they can be operable or fixed
- Storefront window:** Large, eye-level windows providing views between the street and the business interior and showcasing goods
- Skirtboard panels:** Area that supports storefront windows
- Awning:** Protective sloped projection over a door, window, or storefront
- Upper floor windows:** Windows on stories above the first floor
- Recessed entrance:** Allows for protection from the elements and protects pedestrians on the sidewalk from out-swinging doors
- Parapet:** A low wall along the edge of a roof or balcony



19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY STORE FRONT

**A**rchitectural style, character, and details make a statement about your building and your business. Distinctive architectural details such as a classic stone or metal cornice or pilaster, or a modern hint at these elements define the top and edge of the building and provide visual interest. Architectural details add to the character and distinctiveness of a building and indicate to customers that you value your building and their experience.

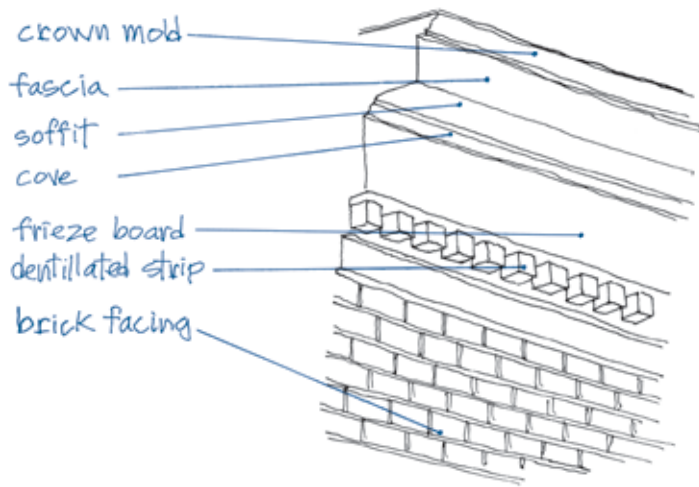


**BEFORE**  
The aluminum siding on the sporting goods store conceals the unique architectural details and cornice of the building. This is discouraged.

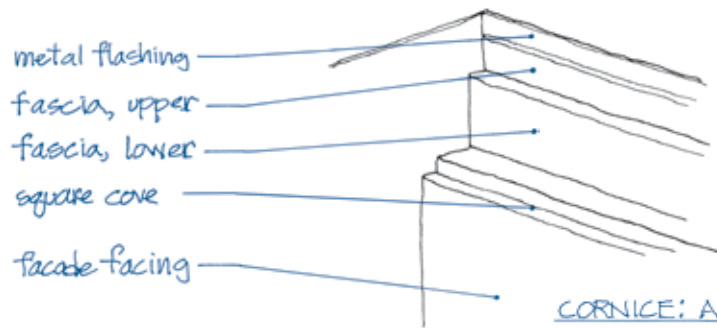
**AFTER**  
Restoring the original storefront facade opens up a business to the street and pedestrians.



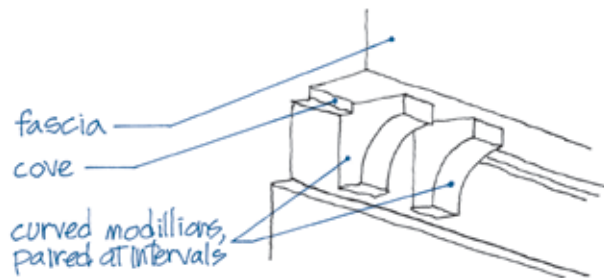
NEWLY RECONSTRUCTED STOREFRONTS



CORNICE: TRADITIONAL STYLE



CORNICE: ADAPTIVE MODERN



MODILLION DETAIL

## ENCOURAGED

- Replacing missing, deteriorated, or damaged architectural details, when possible, with one that closely matches the original in appearance and materials
- Preserving historic details and materials
- Defining building edges and main entrances with architectural details that are sensitive to the building scale, historic character, and customer experience
- Changes over time are evidence of the history and development of a building, they may have acquired significance in their own right, to be recognized and respected
- Defining the edges of the building
- Check with **City of Minneapolis Planning and Zoning (call 311)** before removing decorative details from a building

## DISCOURAGED

- Covering, obscuring, or removing cornices, trim, or other architectural details
- Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create a false historic appearance



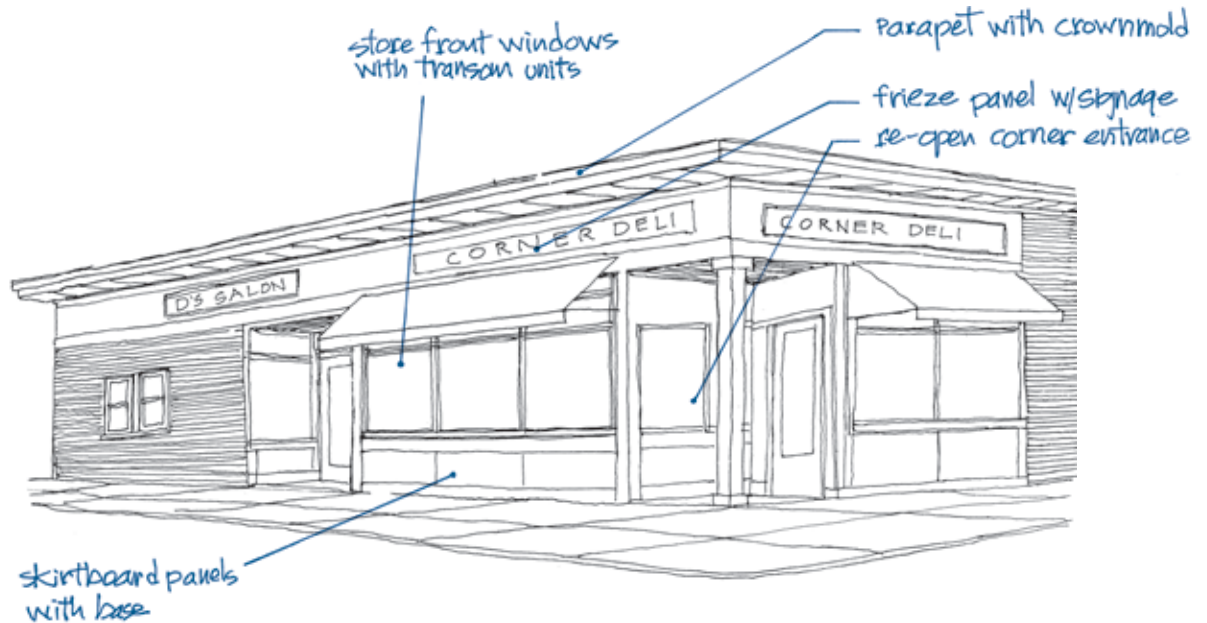
**D**urable materials such as brick, stucco, and stone are often the exterior walls of commercial buildings and imply longevity and stability. Residential buildings are often covered with clapboard, wood, or aluminum or vinyl siding. These materials can seem out of place on a commercial building.

For brick and stone repair, use a mortar similar in color and texture to the original and one designed for the building and environmental conditions. The wrong mortar could expand or contract too severely, cracking the brick or stone.

Before repainting, all peeling or loose paint must be completely removed and all exposed areas primed. It is also important to hire a professional to conduct lead testing and abate all lead-based paint.



**BEFORE**  
On this commercial building, several things are discouraged: the sign band is covered, the original building material and window sizes are covered with siding, and the recessed doorway is enclosed with plywood.



CORNER ONE-STORY STOREFRONT: AFTER

**AFTER**  
Installing signs in the sign band, uncovering the original windows and siding, and restoring the recessed doorway indicate to customers that the building houses a business.



**BEFORE**

Covering brick with another material, like the yellow boards in this photograph, is discouraged.

**ENCOURAGED**

- Repairing damaged exterior materials with similar materials
- Using durable materials such as brick and stone
- Adding a fresh coat of paint
- Painting architectural elements and window frames a different, yet complementary color to make the building more visually appealing and emphasize unique features
- Murals can serve as a destination point or assist in defining the location
- Consulting an architect before covering a façade with new materials
- Using low-maintenance materials
- Maintaining brick and stone façades with timely tuck pointing (replacing deteriorated mortar)

**DISCOURAGED**

- Painting brick or stone that is not painted
- Sandblasting brick, which removes a protective exterior
- Covering brick or stone with vinyl, aluminum, or wood siding



**AFTER**

Removing materials that cover brick and display windows restores the street's rhythm and clearly identifies building entrances.

**T**ransparent storefronts assure both natural surveillance of the street and sidewalk and create an inviting pedestrian experience. Large spans of solid wall area reduce the opportunity to display goods and services to passing customers, are uninviting for pedestrians, and provide a tempting surface for graffiti.

Storefront windows are very important for most retail and service businesses. Transforming storefront windows to make them appealing to customers is a cost effective way to promote products and services. Storefront windows may not seem necessary for some businesses, such as some professional offices. However, there are many benefits for such businesses to maintain large storefront windows along the street for natural interior lighting and to maintain a visual connection between the business and sidewalk.

Doors should draw shoppers to the business entrance, provide views into the business from the street, and open and close smoothly.



#### BEFORE

Covering windows with large signs essentially turns a store's back onto the street and potential customers.



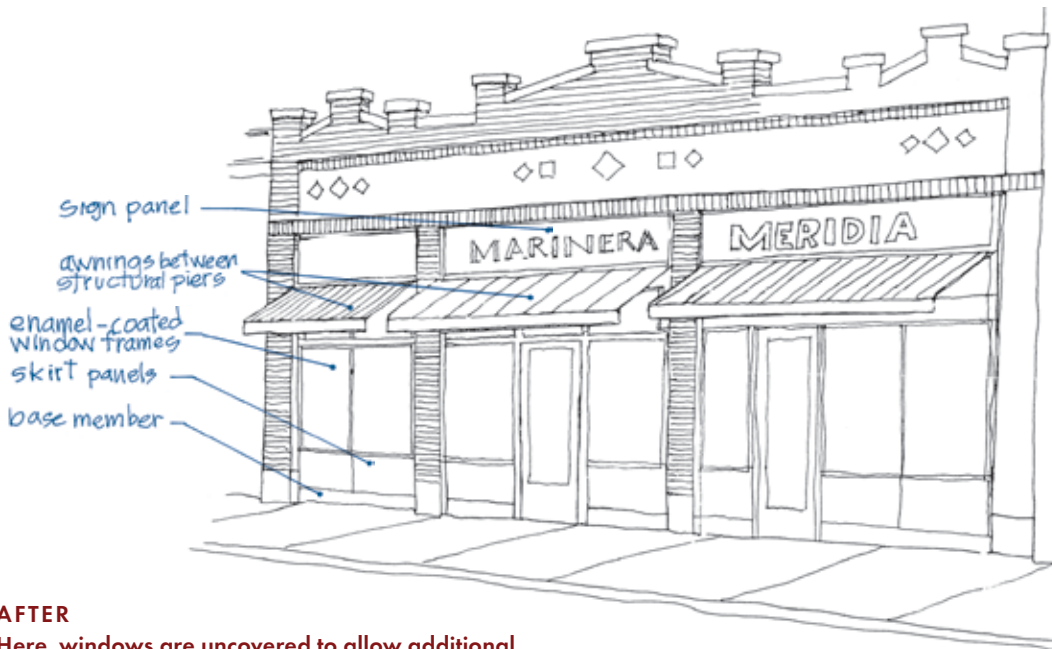
2 STORY COMMERCIAL BUILDING  
WITH 1 STORY ATTACHED STOREFRONTS

#### AFTER

In this sketch, the windows and doors are free of clutter and obstructions, allowing clear views between the business and the street. The white residential-style door is replaced with a door consistent with the building style.



**BEFORE**  
Covering windows and skirtboard panels with boards or other materials is discouraged.



**AFTER**  
Here, windows are uncovered to allow additional views into the building and skirtboard panels are restored to coordinate with the windows they support.

1920s-30s STOREFRONT

**ENCOURAGED**

- Windows and doors made of clear glass to allow views into and out of the business
- Wide folding or sliding doors that open the business activity directly onto the sidewalk
- Painting window frames a complementary color to add visual variety and interest
- Removing boards or other obstacles from upper floor windows
- Using lighting to discourage loitering in recessed doorways during off hours
- Using window coverings such as shades or curtains to mask unused upper floor space as an alternative to covering windows
- Reusing original windows whenever possible

**DISCOURAGED**

- Reducing existing window size to accept standard residential window sizes
- Replacing windows with wall surface, wood, metal, or other materials
- Blocking windows or unused doors with storage shelves, product storage, or signage
- Doors with a residential appearance
- Plexiglas instead of glass

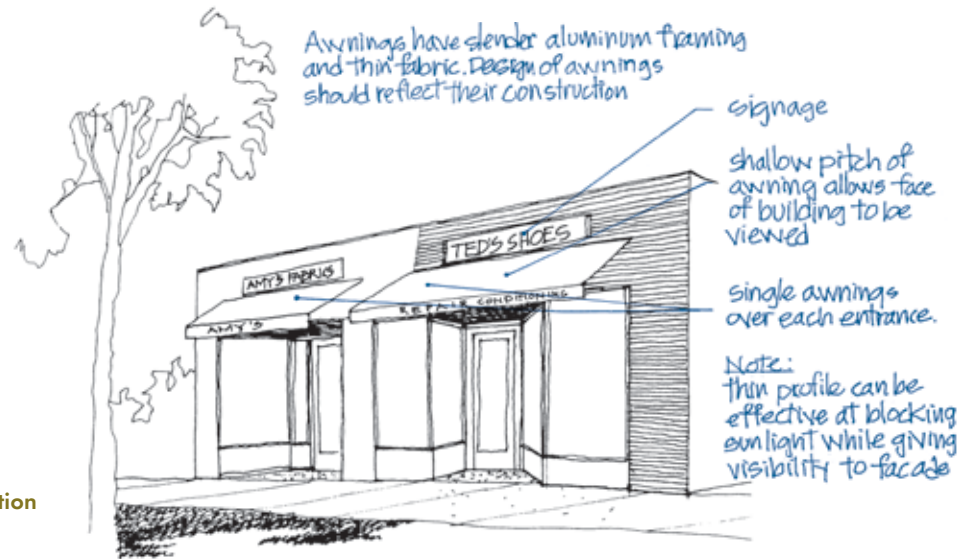
**C**anopies, or awnings, are roof-like structures above a window or door, projecting over the sidewalk. They are typically made of canvas or metal and can shelter customers, merchandise, and storefront windows from direct sunlight. Awnings also provide space for signage and decoration, to enhance the pedestrian experience and welcome customers.

Awnings visually mark door and window locations. They help visually define the width of an individual store and can contribute to business identity. On a single building with multiple storefronts, individual awnings should be located at each storefront opening and be consistent in size, profile, and location to distinguish each business and reveal building details. Multiple awnings on a single building do not need to be identical.

**AFTER**  
 Correctly sized awnings draw attention to a store's windows and entrance, rather than the awning itself.



**BEFORE**  
 This large metal awning overwhelms the small building.

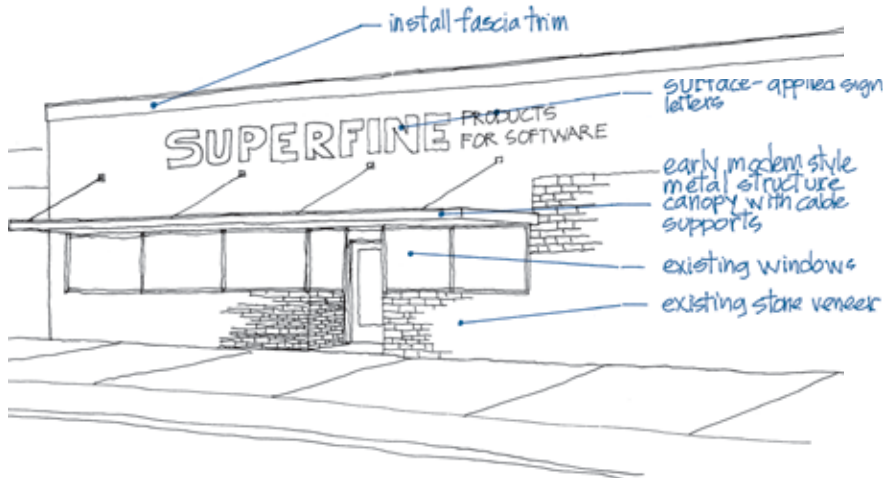


AWNING STUDY - AFTER



**BEFORE**

The aluminum awning on this building is too small for the size of the building and obscures the upper portion of the windows.



POST-WWII STOREFRONT

**AFTER**

A canopy is more consistent with this building's horizontal style and emphasizes the window band as a principal element of the façade.

**ENCOURAGED**

- Attaching awnings to the building at or below the lower edge of the sign band
- Awnings with dimensions that match the window and door openings
- Awnings made of canvas and waterproof cloth designed to resist fading and tearing
- Colors that coordinate with the building and area
- Retractable awnings that allow flexibility to respond to changing weather
- Using awnings to cool interiors and save energy
- Awnings that are in proportion to the building
- Under-awning lights designed to illuminate the sidewalk and storefront
- Awnings with thin profiles that do not obscure the building and storefront

**DISCOURAGED**

- Reflective or glossy finishes that obscure a reader's view
- Rigid materials such as aluminum, vinyl or plastics that are sensitive to weather conditions, especially wind
- Obscuring architectural details of the façade
- Using a continuous awning across two buildings to join them as one business
- Backlighting awnings

**Y**our storefront signage tremendously affects your business. Signs make a strong first impression and can be a creative demonstration of a business' character. Signs should clearly communicate the name and identity of your business. Four to seven words are the most passersby can effectively read. Well-designed signs market a business through quick impact.

There are many different kinds of signs which can be effective if appropriate to the site and well designed.

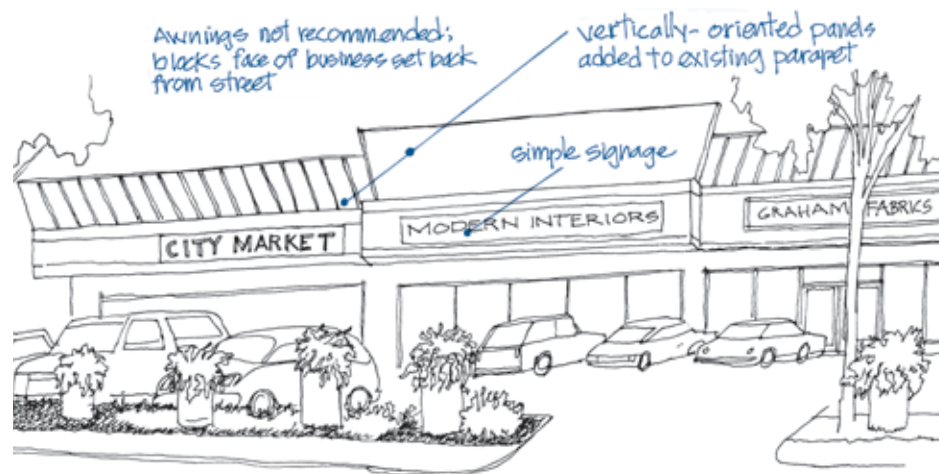
**Projecting/hanging signs** are double-sided and project from a building over the sidewalk. Pedestrians on the sidewalk see them best.

**Window signs** are graphics and/or lettering applied directly to the storefront windows and best seen at pedestrian level.

**Wall signs** are attached to the primary façade and best viewed looking straight at the building from across the street. Wall signs are usually located in the **sign band**, the portion of the façade that is just above the storefront on the first floor and below the second floor windows. The **sign band** provides space for building signage in a consistent place from storefront to storefront. Even if your building does not have a traditional sign band marked by architectural details, you can achieve a similar look by placing a wall sign in the area where a sign band would be located.



**BEFORE**  
Signs are well-located, but are backlit and overwhelm this low building.



**AFTER**  
Simple, clear sign text in the sign band is encouraged.

1960'S ERA STRIP SHOPPING CENTER



PROJECTING SIGN

## ENCOURAGED

- Solid, brightly-colored signs that contrast with the building's wall colors
- Type fonts and colors that are legible from a distance
- Collaborating with artists to design a unique sign that represents your business
- Mounting signs no more than one story above the sidewalk
- Graphic or three-dimensional, fixed signs that include an icon of the business
- Using neon to indicate a business name or trade, but not to advertise specific products
- Contrasting letter and background colors to increase readability
- Posting the property address number on the building to help customers and delivery services locate your store
- Using durable materials
- Displaying the business name or logo on a window sign that does not obscure views
- Lights mounted to illuminate a sign
- Hiring professionals for sign design, construction, and installation

- Relighting historic neon signs and maintaining other historic signs

## DISCOURAGED

- Blocking storefront windows with too many signs
- Overwhelming the building with a sign that is too large
- Long, complicated messages
- Small, difficult-to-read lettering
- Covering architectural details with signage
- Signage mounted on top of the building
- Internally-illuminated or backlit plastic signs
- Using banners as permanent signage
- Neglecting maintenance on old signs

**All signs require permits obtained by a licensed sign contractor in the City of Minneapolis.** A list of licensed sign contractors is available at [www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/mdr/docs/signcontractors.pdf](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/mdr/docs/signcontractors.pdf)



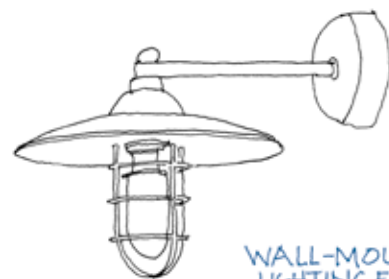
**E**ffective lighting systems provide needed visibility for your storefront, drawing attention to key functional or aesthetic elements such as doorways, windows, signage, sidewalks, or architectural details. Strategic lighting can also deter criminals and increase the perception of safety for passing customers.

There are several different kinds of lighting: entrance way lighting, sign lighting, merchandise storefront lighting, energy-saving night lighting, decorative detail lighting, and general area lighting. Each lighting type performs a different job and should attract attention to what it illuminates, not to the light fixture or bulb.

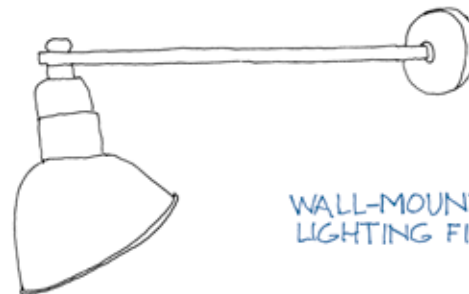
#### BRIGHTER IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER

Security lighting can be at a relatively low level. Glare is light that beams directly from a bulb into your eye. It hampers the vision of pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers. If lights are overly bright, they actually make it easier for a criminal to hide in the deep shadows produced by objects in the harsh light. Make sure lights point downward or toward the building or sign and not into the sky.

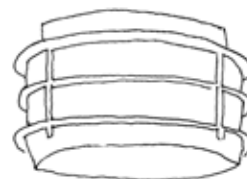
Darkness can be better than lighting if no one is around to witness and report crimes or if lighting helps criminals to see what they are doing. Consider using motion-detector lights or timers when lights are not needed late at night. If an area is usually dark, people will more likely notice if it is suddenly lit up. **Do not light back doors that cannot be seen by others.**



WALL-MOUNTED  
LIGHTING FIXTURE

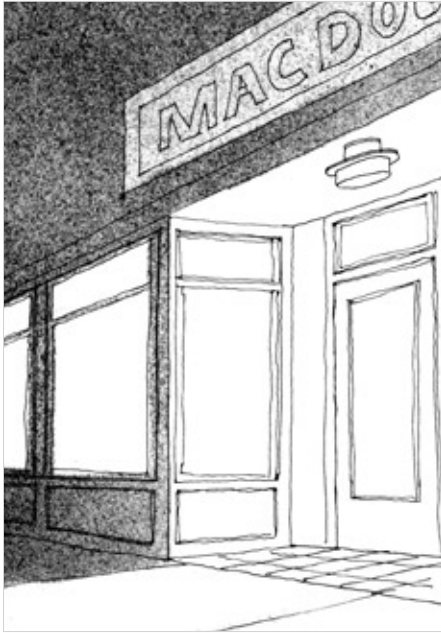


WALL-MOUNTED  
LIGHTING FIXTURE



CEILING-MOUNTED  
LIGHTING FIXTURE

These styles of lighting fixtures are encouraged.



Lighting recessed doorways is encouraged.



Backlighting awnings is discouraged.

**ENCOURAGED**

- Downward-directed lighting at all building entrances and along walkways to maintain security while not casting excessive glare
- Light fixtures that complement the entire façade
- Casting light only where needed
- Hiding or shielding security lighting, such as floodlights
- Lighting signs from above, rather than behind
- Lighting recessed doorways
- Hiring professionals for lighting design, construction, and installation
- Energy saving light bulbs

**DISCOURAGED**

- Lights directed toward streets, sidewalks, or adjacent properties
- Lights that are too bright
- Backlighting awnings

If you want help translating this information, call 612-673-3737.

**ATENCIÓN.** Si desea recibir asistencia gratuita para traducir esta información, llama al 612-673-2700. **OGOW.** Haddii aad dooneyso in lagaa kaalmeeyo tarjamadda macluumaadkani oo lacag la' aan wac 612-673-3500. **CEEB TOOM.** Yog koj xav tau kev pab txhais cov xov no rau koj dawb, hu 612-673-2800.



**City of Minneapolis**  
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& Economic Development – CPED*

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