

Portland Main Street Design Objectives, Guidelines, and Standards

Introduction:

Portland's forward-looking vitality is grounded in its rich sense of history. Our community, located in south-central Lower Michigan, is mindful of its rural heritage. Located along Kent and Bridge Streets and Grand River Avenue near the confluence of the Grand and Looking Glass Rivers, the Downtown Business District has nearly 50 businesses and buildings, and was named to the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district.

It is the direct experience of many communities that economic vitality is tied to the aesthetic quality of individual businesses, as well as the district as a whole. Thoughtful design and improvements of individual businesses and surrounding commercial areas often lead to greater sales for an enterprise, and contributes to the overall image of the town as a whole for its customers, visitors and residents.

The Portland Main Street Program encourages property owners, merchants and residents to protect and promote the district's unique character, identity and history. In establishing these guidelines, we hope to achieve several important objectives, including:

Preservation and enhancement of historic buildings, architectural features and streetscape

Enhancement of the commercial health of Portland by presenting a pleasant experience for shoppers, visitors and residents

Promote collaboration between the private and public sectors through availability and promotion of grants, tax credits and other resources

Stricter standards may apply if city, state or federal money is used in the project.

Objectives used in this document are the goals of the program. Guidelines are direction for the designs encouraged. Standards are detail requirements when DDA money is used for the project. Grant agreements and applicable ordinances will supersede the requirements of this document.

Overall Goals

The goal of the Portland Main Street Façade Improvement Program and Design Guidelines is to revitalize the Downtown Business District, not to make it into something different. In providing for the judicious application of these Design Standards, the Program hopes to

- ✓ make the District's buildings better versions of themselves, not to imitate any other community, design scheme or commercial district.
- ✓ encourage renovations and improvements which create an attractive image for individual businesses, while respecting the original design parameters of its façade, and how it fits in the District.
- ✓ encourage affordable solutions, so that business and property owners benefit, rather than suffer, economically by the process.

It is the intention of these Design Standards to provide that:

- ✓ a building's unique and distinguishing elements be identified and preserved when possible
- ✓ if a building has historic or aesthetic value, improvements be designed to reveal the building's original style, form and materials, wherever possible
- ✓ in instances where changes to an original building have provided their own historic significance and contribute positively to the building and the district, they should be identified and preserved. However, when they are not of significance, they should be removed.
- ✓ the colors of historic buildings, including their awnings, treatments, lighting and signs should be chosen with their historic character in mind
- ✓ contextually appropriate, traditional and high-quality materials be used to maintain historic integrity, and will be factors in the consideration of all designs
- ✓ where original building elements were removed or substantially altered over time, contemporary treatments, methods or materials are suitable; contemporary treatments or materials should not be of poor or temporary nature, or
- ✓ individuality within a unified appearance is encouraged for single businesses or buildings with multiple storefronts. If a single business occupies more than one building, individual buildings should retain their individual character within a standardized or unified appearance

The Portland Main Street Façade Improvement Program, including elements of lighting, awnings and signs, will use the following Design Standards to meet these goals and objectives. Application of these standards to individual projects will be a major factor in deciding the extent, if any, of grants, credits and other resources.

Awnings:



Objective: To enhance the historic character of the area, while providing sun protection for display windows, shelter for pedestrians, and a sign panel for businesses.

Guideline: Retractable or operable awnings are encouraged. Long expanses of awning should be broken into segments that reflect the door or window openings beneath them.



Standard: Awnings cannot extend across multiple storefronts and/or multiple buildings. Awnings must be constructed of durable, protective, and water repellent material; however, plastic or fiberglass awnings are not allowed. Backlighting or illuminating awnings is not allowed. Awnings must project a minimum of 36" from the building.

Signs



Objective: Signs should be architecturally compatible with the style, composition, materials, colors and details of the building and with other signs on nearby buildings, while providing for adequate identification of the business.

Guideline: Symbolic and historic three-dimensional signs such as barber shop poles and appropriately-sized projecting signs are encouraged, as permitted in the sign ordinance. Signage should have the capability of being lit in the evening, although the source of light must be hidden or shielded from the direct view of motorists or pedestrians per the lighting standard.



Signs constructed of natural materials such as metal or wood are preferred. Permanently painted window signage is encouraged if compatible with the architecture of the building.

Neon signs are permitted on the exterior of the building and in display windows, if not covering more than one-third of the window surface area.



Standard: Internally illuminated signs (not including neon or barber-pole types) are prohibited except for theater signage. The combination of neon signage, permanently painted signage and temporary signage cannot exceed a total of two-thirds of the window surface area.

Projecting signs must comply with the sign ordinance, and should not extend above the first story. Signs cannot block or obliterate design details, windows or cornices of the building upon which they are placed.

Roofs & Cornices

Objective: Rooflines should mimic the separate yet complementary rhythm of buildings in the district.

Guideline: Flat roofs (slightly sloped to drain) are preferred with cornices that articulate the rhythm of the buildings. Cornices should be embellished with detailing and stepped or sloped to achieve a visually interesting yet harmonious sequence along the building façade.

Standard: Sloped roofs are not allowed unless the roof form is concealed by a parapet or false front. Exceptions may be granted if the sloped roof is used on top of a multi-story building to help reduce the overall height of the façade and define the residential character of the upper floors.

Utility & Mechanicals Screening

Objective: Utility areas and mechanical equipment should be designed so that they do not detract from the aesthetic appeal of the district.



Standard: The screening of exterior trash and storage areas, service yards, loading areas, transformers and mechanicals units must use the same materials, color and/or style as the primary building in order to be architecturally compatible with the building it is adjacent to.

If the utility area is separate from the building it serves, it should be consistent with the district's streetscape theme. All roof equipment must be screened from public view if visible from the street.



All exterior trash and storage areas, service yards, loading areas and mechanicals units must be screened from view. Camouflaging air conditioning units is an acceptable screening method.

Façade Width

Objective: To break up the monotonous appearance of long facades.

Standard: A building more than 45 feet in width should be divided into increments of no more than 45 feet through articulation of the façade. This can be achieved through combinations of the following techniques:

- ✓ Divisions or breaks in materials
- ✓ Window bays
- ✓ Separate entrances and entry treatments
- ✓ Variation in roof lines

Fenestrations (Windows & Doors)



Objective: To encourage large, open views into the commercial space enhancing the pedestrian experience by providing a visual connection to the use inside the building. On upper levels, windows should provide privacy while aesthetically and functionally serving the building.

Guideline: The restoration or renovation of a storefront should attempt to return the façade to its original character. Preserve original materials or details and the shape and size of original window openings. Replace missing original elements such as windows and transom windows.



On upper floors, the windows should be vertically oriented. Arched tops, columns framing the windows and decorative lintels are encouraged.



Standard: The areas of buildings that were historically transparent should be made so in rehabilitation. For new buildings, a minimum of 30% of the ground level façade and sides of buildings adjacent to public right of ways should be transparent (windows and doors), and a minimum of 15% of the building's rear façade facing a public right of way, parking area or open space should be transparent. Reflective or glass tinted more than 40% is not allowed.

Materials & Detailing

Objective: Rehabilitation or redevelopment projects should be constructed to be long lasting and use materials and detailing that apply the Interior Secretary's Standards to maintain the distinct character and harmony of the district.



Guideline:

Tile, stone, glass block, copper flashing, metal and wood should be considered for accent materials. Preferred is a high level of design and architectural detail. At rear entrances the primary materials should be used in a way that highlights the entrance. The

following materials are strongly discouraged on the façades or sides of buildings adjacent to public right of ways: Concrete block or brick larger than 4" in height, 12" in length
Aluminum, vinyl or fiberglass siding or roofing materials.



Infill construction should reflect some of the detailing of surrounding buildings in window shape, cornice lines and brick work.

Building renovation and alterations should restore architectural details of cornices, brickwork, transom, display windows and bulkheads.

Standard: As provided in the zoning ordinance:

- ✓ "1. Buildings shall utilize high quality architecture and landscaping that creates an integrated, pedestrian-oriented environment. At least thirty percent (30%) of first floor office and commercial development shall be clear glass.
- ✓ "2. In the Central Business District, primary building materials shall comprise a minimum of fifty percent (50%) of the remainder of buildings including masonry material, such as brick, stone or split face block.
- ✓ "3. Metal paneling and plain concrete masonry units (cement board) are prohibited in the Central Business District.
- ✓ "4. Metal paneling and plain concrete masonry units (cement board) shall constitute no more than fifty percent (50%) of the facades of buildings located outside of the Central Business District."



Materials that attempt to mimic traditional materials are allowed. An example would be fiberglass panels that are molded to look like brick. Painting previously unpainted brick is not allowed.



Color

Objective: To encourage a varied but complimentary use of color.

Guideline: The color of buildings should complement the adjacent buildings' colors and this historic character if the individual building and the district. The accent colors should complement the primary color.

Franchise Architecture

Objective: To maintain the unique character of Portland's downtown, buildings should not be branded using an architectural style of a company.



Standard: Franchise architecture (building design that is trademarked or identified with a particular chain or corporation and is generic in nature) is strongly discouraged.

Franchises or national chains must follow these standards to create a unique building that is compatible with the district.



Streetscape



Objective: The streetscape should be uniform so that it acts to provide continuity throughout the downtown.

Guideline: When making improvements to private property, including the addition of benches, trash receptacles, fencing, bike racks, or trash enclosures, owners should match the City's styles for these elements so the installations can complement each other.



Standard: When a redevelopment project disturbs existing streetscape elements those items must be replaced with approved City streetscape elements.

Lighting



Objective: Lighting in the downtown should serve to illuminate façades, entrances and signage and provide an adequate level of personal safety while enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the buildings.

Guideline: Avoid colored lighting schemes in order to achieve continuity in building lighting within the downtown.

Standard: Building and signage lighting must be directed at the building or sign illuminated, with the light source(s) shielded or hidden from direct pedestrian and motorist view, e.g., shaded gooseneck or directed lamps.

Landscaping

Objective: Landscaping treatments should be used to enhance the pedestrian experience, complement architectural features and/or screen utility areas.

Guideline: The use of flower boxes, planters and hanging flower baskets is encouraged.

