

# Iowa City Downtown District Storefront & Signage Guidelines



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Thomas Connolly  
Will Downing  
Caroline Dyer  
George Etre  
Michelle Galvin  
Ritu Jain  
Karen Kubby  
Chucho Loria  
Marc Moen  
Nate Kaeding  
Grant Nordby  
Joni Schrup  
Brian Vogel  
Brent Westphal  
David Zahradnik

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## Guidelines

This document is the result of a joint initiative by the Iowa City Downtown District (ICDD) and the City of Iowa City. Its intent is to provide a set of design guidelines for Downtown District storefronts and signage that create clear goals and requirements, encourage creativity and support a successful retail environment. The District is already a popular, pedestrian-friendly area with many established retail stores, restaurants and bars. One of the goals is to build on this success by enhancing existing strengths and encouraging the unique character of the District.

This document uses 'retail' to refer to consumer-focused businesses, whether they are selling merchandise or food and drink. Service-type retailers such as cleaners, salons and gyms are also included in this group. Office-type uses are not considered to be retail, although offices located in storefronts on the street should follow the guidelines in order to maintain a consistent retail-appropriate street facade.

The guidelines cover the District's central area bounded by Clinton Street to the west, Iowa Avenue to the north, Burlington to the South and Van Buren to the east; and the North Marketplace area north of Jefferson, roughly between Linn Street and Gilbert. A complete map is shown on the following pages.



*Downtown Iowa City offers a walkable shopping and entertainment district with unique shops, restaurants located in historic buildings and tree-lined streets.*

## District Character

The District is an active, vibrant center for the City and the University. It is a compact, walkable area containing retail, food and beverage, office space, residential, hospitality and key cultural institutions. It includes venues for citywide and community events of all sizes and types. City Plaza (The Ped Mall) is a centerpiece of the community, and is the destination of choice for concerts, public discourse, urban recreation and daily outdoor activity and relaxation. The Ped Mall is a uniquely successful area because of its central location and multiple amenities, and its identity as both a destination and a pedestrian corridor. Maintaining and enhancing these characteristics, including the pedestrian-focused scale of the District, is important to the continued success of the retail environment.

The District draws people from many different places and for different reasons. Providing exciting and varied retail for these different audiences is key to the District's success.

It is useful to draw a distinction between small scale urban pedestrian storefront and signage needs and larger scale suburban vehicle-oriented retail. 'Bigger is better' is not the goal for pedestrian areas, where larger signs can actually be less legible because of closer viewing distances and crowded street facades. Signage that is ideal for long distance viewing across parking lots and boulevards is not appropriate in the District - a finer level of detail and scale is important to create a more comfortable pedestrian environment and to promote exploration and discovery of shopping and dining opportunities.



*In the downtown district, streets are narrower, buildings are close to the street and traffic is slower. This creates an environment that favors the pedestrian and smaller-scale signs.*



*Buildings in a typical suburban setting are set back from the street. Signage must be large and bright to be visible from the roadway.*



## What makes great retail?

There are common elements that contribute to great urban retail environments:

**Clean and Safe Environment** – Clean, well-kept sidewalks, storefronts and stores are a great first impression for shoppers and create a sense of safety by showing that retailers care and are paying attention.

**Critical Mass and Continuity** - When retailers are grouped and not isolated, shoppers can explore without having a particular destination, and discovery is encouraged. Continuous storefronts and signage keep shoppers walking along a street. Gaps in retail such as missing buildings, blank facades, parking garages or non-retail uses discourage pedestrians.

**Clear Brand** – A well-organized and well-designed store or restaurant piques customer interest and provides a quick read of what the store has to offer.

**Quality Signage** – Establishing a clear hierarchy of identity, information and message provides quick and easy communication of the store brand to the customer.

**Exterior Merchandising** – Message boards, well-maintained plantings, product display and seating - all of these can be used in combination to enhance, animate and connect the storefront to the sidewalk and street.

**Lighting** - Storefronts should glow from well-lit merchandise in the first ten feet of the store and from ambient light from the store interior. Illuminated signage should provide a punch.

**Storefront Transparency** – Storefront glass should be maximized with as few mullions as possible to allow views into the store.

**Engaging Window Displays** – Good visual merchandising has great appeal and draws in the customer. Simple displays are often the most effective.

**Street Activity** - Programming daily, weekly and monthly events creates a regular reason for people to come to an area.



*An engaging streetscape with activated storefronts and varied lighting elements creates a vibrant retail environment.*



*A combination of continuous storefronts, consistently located projecting signs and interesting street furnishings makes this retail street compelling to pedestrians.*

The goal of the entire District is to encourage pedestrian-friendly retail and development on all streets. The retail conditions and general environment along each street are different, and are described here in order to help create overall retail goals.

The building frontage on these streets is less dense and retail competes with other uses - residential, academic, parking, civic and services buildings. Many of these buildings can be used as landmarks to help orientation and recognition of access to the core of Downtown, but they do not connect with the street well and many of the retail uses have undesirable storefront and signage conditions. New development and infill retail on Burlington and Gilbert that emphasizes retail at street level and a connection with the sidewalk and pedestrians will be especially important to improve pedestrian-oriented use.

Alleys provide services but also opportunities for public art, less mainstream retail uses and unique discoveries.

The 'Park' retail environment of the Ped Mall is the centerpiece of Downtown and the District - it is part pedestrian corridor, part park and civic gathering space and part shopping, dining and entertainment experience. Retail forms the edges of this unique place and provides a framework for its continued success.





## What makes great retail here?

What's unique about retail in Downtown Iowa City?

**Community.** Iowa City is an active, walkable, progressive, creative and thoughtful community. Learning, research and collaborative thinking are as much a part of daily life as business and retail. Retailers take pride and ownership in their offerings, and local businesses are dominant downtown. A large number of businesses are owned by alumni of the university. The literary history (and present) of the city helps to create an environment that supports a desire for creativity and continuous improvement.

**Small scale.** The small scale and historic character of buildings is both a benefit and a liability. The intimate size of streets, storefronts and stores is comfortable to explore and shop, accessible to local retailers and supports a varied selection of retail and dining establishments. The same intimate size can make some streets seem crowded with storefronts, signs and street furnishings, and Individual building owners have a wide range of resources resulting in maintenance and quality variations from building to building. Because of this small scale, incremental improvements to storefronts and signage can be more manageable than in areas with larger buildings or blocks of property.

Modern infill, renovations and new development are all part of the character of downtown, and contemporary buildings and architectural details that work well with the context, scale and proportion of the District are encouraged and can be appropriate in the overall retail environment.

**The Ped Mall.** Urban renewal in the 60s and 70s created many pedestrian malls, and most of them were failures. Not the case in Iowa City. A highly walkable city, large student population, the central library, a park-like atmosphere and mixed-use development around the Ped Mall has helped to create a combination of urban pedestrian corridor and active urban park

surrounded by a unique shopping, dining and entertainment experience. This mix has enabled the Ped Mall to become the vibrant center of downtown.

**Dual populations and varied audiences.** The university student, staff and hospital populations have a different retail focus than city residents, contributing a different dynamic to downtown. Students make up a large component of the foot traffic throughout the area. This helps to create a sense of activity and energy and also a measure of safety. Parents, alumni, hospital visitors, physicians and visiting academics contribute to a highly dynamic and educated demographic.

**Local area residents, downtown residents and downtown workers.** The different ages and priorities across these categories create a variety of different retail needs and opportunities.

Tourists and sports fans at local games, events and festivals create spikes of demand and street population, although this does not always benefit retailers.

These factors and audiences affect retailer needs and concerns and require a variety of responses, programs and initiatives, but they all primarily depend on the street facing storefront to be the retailer's main communication and invitation to the shopper. Pedestrian-oriented street retail is the most important focus of this guideline. All of the elements described here are designed to encourage, support and sustain an exciting, walkable retail environment downtown. Continuous, high-quality and recognizable storefronts and signage are key to the continuing success of the District.



## What makes great retail here?

### Strengths

- Compact and walkable with lots of foot traffic.
- Many small scale retail-oriented buildings, historic character and continuous retail streets.
- Invested local retailers, both merchandise and dining, provide high-quality options, care about their stores and connect with the community.
- Creative community promotes artistic, literary and thoughtful retail environment.
- Planned streetscape improvements are aligned with the needs of a great retail environment.

### Weaknesses

- Cluttered street facades have too many elements, awnings, canopies and facade additions.
- Inappropriate signage, both sign type and scale, exists throughout the District.
- Negative perceptions of downtown hold back existing retail and new development.
- Several large buildings and empty (parking) sites that interrupt the continuous retail experience and create gaps.
- Retailers are generally individuals or small businesses with limited resources, and procuring design services, custom signage or making significant storefront improvements is difficult.

### Opportunities

- Potential development of several areas and buildings in the District could improve street continuity and fill major gaps in retail.
- Removal of clutter can be a significant improvement to retail visibility.
- Small scale of individual storefronts means there are simple, quick, small-scale ways to start creating improvements.
- Clarifying signage requirements and showing aspirational examples can help retailers and building owners to improve their stores and properties.
- Linking incentives to guidelines and best practices can encourage constant and incremental improvement.

## Guiding Principles

The guidelines consider the most important elements of great retail and the unique characteristics of the District in order to define the following principles that shape this document and support the vision for downtown retail. The principles address the environment of the District as a whole, and the architecture of the buildings and storefronts as individual parts within that environment.

## Promote a Walkable Downtown Retail Environment

**Maximize signage considerations for pedestrian traffic.** Signage sized and created for automobiles is not appropriate in this environment. Materials, detail and scale should be targeted to pedestrian viewing distance and direction. Projecting signs and eye-level window signs are more effective for pedestrian recognition.

**Remove clutter.** Too many added elements confuse shoppers and obscure what is really important: the retailer's identity sign and the storefront with merchandise. Emphasize the architectural features of buildings by removing oversized awnings and canopies, box signs and signs that are not appropriately scaled to the building.

**Create clear, simple signage.** Location and scale are more important than size. When pedestrians know where to look for signs and can clearly distinguish all the parts of a storefront, it creates an understandable hierarchy and enhances visibility of retailers.

**Consider the entire storefront.** All elements, not just signs, contribute to retailer identity and pedestrian recognition. Storefront color, windows, merchandise, plants, sidewalk cafés and displays, street furniture and message signs – all these parts make up the retailer's brand.

**Enhance the park-like environment of the Pedestrian Mall.** The Ped Mall's success is tied to its park-like environment – it is not just a pedestrian 'street' for shopping and dining. Enhance this and promote retail elements that contribute to it.

## Follow the Architecture

**Remove inappropriate architectural elements.**

There are many buildings throughout the District that have had poorly-scaled canopy or portal additions, facade modifications or other inappropriate features added over time. This degrades the historic character of the buildings and contributes to clutter. Whenever possible, these elements should be removed and more appropriate features restored or replaced.

**Create purposeful and consistent lighting.** Illuminate building features, signage, storefront windows and extend 'lights on' hours at retailers even when closed. Customers visiting bars and restaurants will 'window shop' after hours, creating awareness of retail offerings and reinforcing a sense of safety and activity on the streets.

**Design appropriate signage.** Signage size, shape and placement should be proportional to building features and scale. The type of sign should be appropriate to the intended viewing experience – signs perpendicular to the sidewalk are highly visible to pedestrians.

**Take advantage of unique buildings and conditions.** Allow for unique and creative signage opportunities. These opportunities can help to create 'landmarks' to help with wayfinding in the District and enhance the presence of special buildings and places.

**Enhance single buildings with multiple storefronts.** Recommend or incentivize that building owners create a strategy for retailer signage at individual storefronts in a multi-bay building. This can help retailers by avoiding conflicting signs, reducing overall clutter and creating an organized building facade that is more noticeable to shoppers.





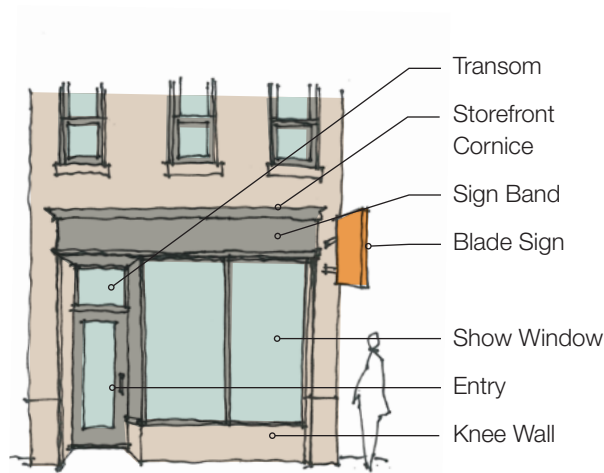
## 2 | Storefronts

The storefront is a combination of building facade elements at the street level - including entry doors, show windows, transom windows, adjacent building columns, sign bands, cornices and structure above the storefront windows and below upper floor windows or features. The traditional storefront was designed to maximize the use of the front of the building as entry, display and identification. Storefronts create a unified pedestrian scale rhythm to the street. Each of the elements has a purpose, and they are intended to work together to present the business to the street in an effective and cohesive manner. The following discussion focuses on traditional storefront types, which make up the majority of the existing storefronts in the District. While many modern buildings do not have this same combination of elements, they can still utilize many of the concepts described here to create compelling storefronts.

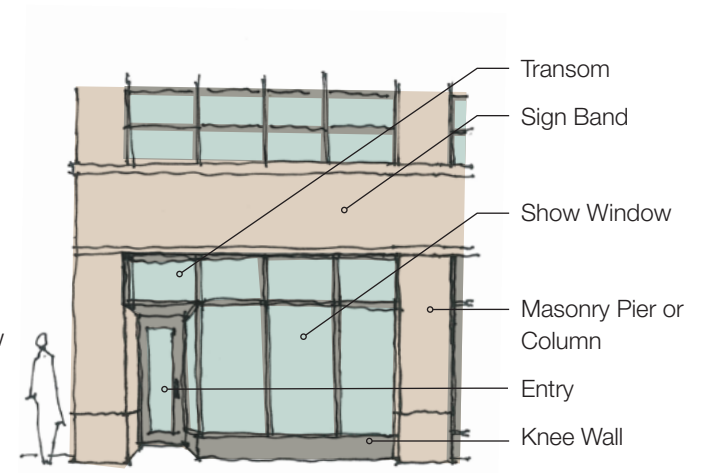
Retailers should think about their storefront in a holistic way. All the individual elements contribute to the identity, visibility and recognition of the retailer. Signage, materials, colors, lighting, merchandise and sidewalk furnishings should be considered parts of this retail identity. Emphasizing one element over another may not be as effective as creating a well-proportioned and coordinated overall appearance. When all these elements are working together in a cohesive composition, shoppers are drawn to the storefront.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

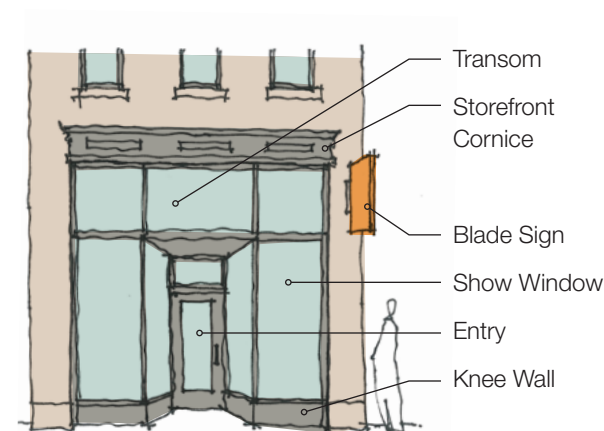
- When renovating, returning a storefront to its original character is ideal. Proportions of doors, windows, mullions and knee walls are most important to fitting in with the facade of a building. Storefronts should fit within the original structural bay openings. Alterations should be compatible in scale, materials and color with existing elements.



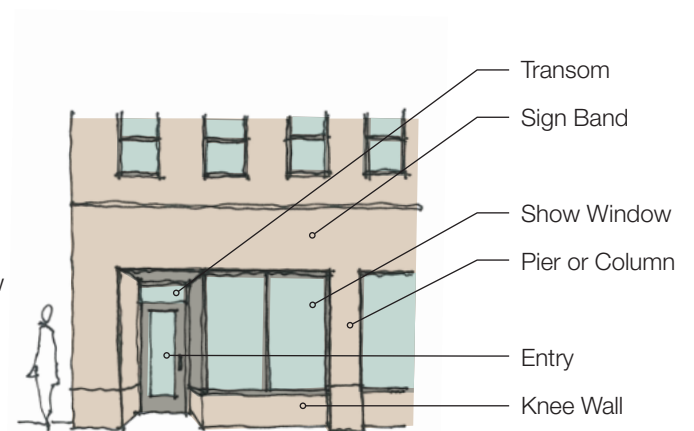
*Traditional storefront with sign band and cornice.*



*Traditional storefront with continuous sign band.*



*Traditional storefront with transom and decorative cornice.*



*Traditional storefront OR altered/modern storefront with continuous sign band.*

### Best Practices - Encouraged (continued)

- Piers, cornices or columns that have been clad or covered should be returned to their original material where possible. Repair damaged areas to match existing adjacent surfaces.
- Maintain the original facade components. Do not remove cornices, columns or other decorative elements. When possible, damaged or missing elements should be replaced with high quality, durable materials. Original doors and windows should be repaired and maintained whenever possible.
- Modern storefronts that are mostly glass can work well for various types of retail, although signage placement can be more challenging for these types of storefronts - it is beneficial if the building designer considers sign needs as a part of the overall design.
- In a building facade with multiple storefronts, maintain consistency from bay to bay. Transom heights and transom bars should be consistent at each bay of the building, or a consistent rhythm should be used across the face of the building. Materials, dimensions and attachments (e.g., awnings) should be consistent.
- Consider adjacent properties when designing storefront elements. Materials, proportions and especially the height of the storefront, upper level windows and cornices are important to maintaining consistent and appropriate sign locations to help pedestrians navigate the retail environment. Minor variations in height and proportion from storefront to storefront create interesting details, but major changes in scale and sign height or size can be visually confusing.



Storefront with transom windows and no sign band.



Storefront with sign band.



Modern storefront with no sign band.



Modern infill in historic, non-traditional storefront with no sign band.



### Best Practices - Avoid

- Storefront setbacks other than recessed doorways are not allowed.
- Do not introduce architectural details not related to the style of the building. This is meant to discourage a mix of styles, detailing or material types that might create a confusing, cluttered or out-of-proportion facade. Introduction of a clean, simple modern storefront into a traditional structure may be the most appropriate in some buildings.
- New signs, awnings or other elements should not obscure or damage original building features.
- Solid panels or elements not associated with the primary retail tenant identity are not allowed in the storefront - ATMs and advertising or tackboard-type message board panels are prohibited.

### Benefits

- **Preserving traditional storefront configurations and developing new buildings using similar design concepts results in storefronts that are flexible for different retail concepts and tenants over time, and creates a visually cohesive retail neighborhood.**
- **Maximizing glass area and uncluttering facades makes the retailer identity and merchandise more visible to shoppers, encouraging them to explore, stay longer and return frequently.**



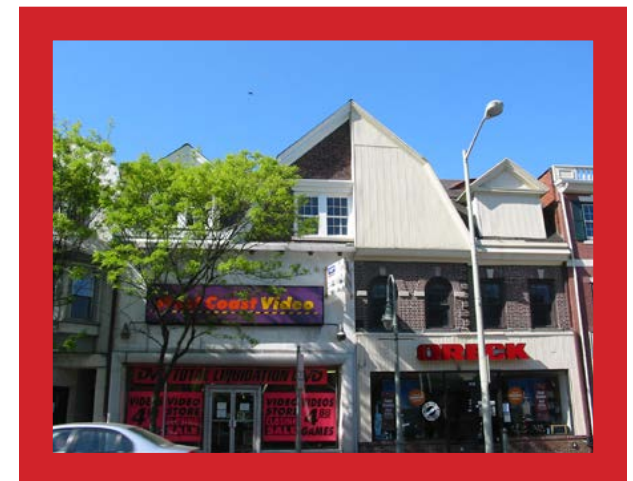
*This former garage has been reused to create a non-traditional storefront.*



*When possible, restore storefronts to original design intent, proportions and detailing.*



*Do not infill storefront with opaque materials.*



*Example of storefront and signage that has significantly modified the building facade and concealed architectural features with inappropriately located signage.*

## Sign Bands

Historically, many buildings were built with a distinct horizontal band located above the storefront and below the second floor window sill, specifically designed and intended for signage. This area, sometimes called a sign band, is often defined by a change in material or plane from the rest of the building face, and may be capped with a cornice element. In some cases the band is created by extending the trim and materials that surround the storefront at street level, giving the entire storefront a different appearance than the upper portions of the building. A sign band may be as simple as a large area of wall above the storefront, without architectural decoration.

When a defined sign band exists, it should be considered as an architectural feature of the building. Sign bands should not be covered by awnings. Sign bands should not be created by covering up other architectural features of a building such as transom windows, cornices or decorative ornament with other materials.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Where sign bands exist, maintain or restore the sign band area using similar materials.
- Proportion is very important when placing a sign in a sign band - the entire area is not meant to be filled with signage or typography, the sign lettering and/or sign panel should have appropriate space in order to be more legible.

### Benefits

- When a sign band exists, it provides the ideal backdrop for a fascia sign.



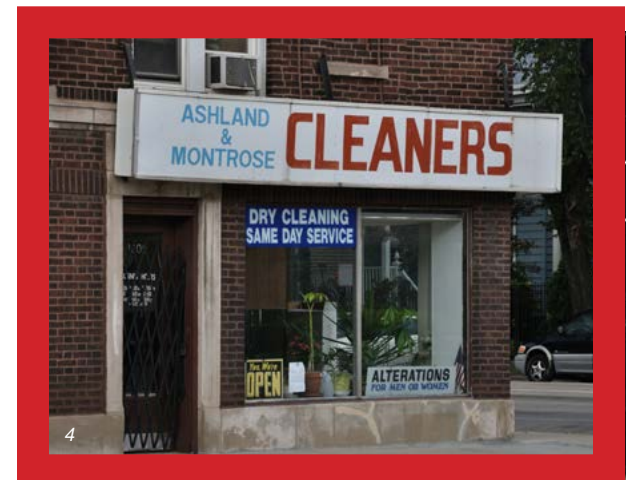
*Keep awnings clear of sign band.*



*A correctly proportioned sign panel can work well within the defined sign band.*



*The sign band can provide the ideal backdrop for simple, non-illuminated letters - resulting in a legible sign.*



*Do not cover over or remove architectural elements.*



### Entries

Storefront entries can be a simple door or a combination of elements (e.g., portals, arches or vestibules), but they should always provide a welcoming experience that invites pedestrians to enter and experience the store and its merchandise. The entry should be a comfortable transition between the sidewalk and the store.

Even the entry door should be thought of as part of the retail brand identity. Creative treatments of color, signage, materials or configuration can emphasize the store identity and engage the shopper.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Entries should be recessed to serve as shelter to protect customers from the weather and prevent doors from swinging into the sidewalk.
- Conflicts between pedestrians and non-recessed doors can be reduced by placing flowerpots or a bench adjacent to the entry to create a buffer zone.
- Doors should reflect the storefront's overall character and should always be commercial grade.
- Transparency is important: doors should be mostly glass, with wood or metal frames as appropriate for the building and storefront materials. Solid doors may be appropriate in some cases, if the materials are appropriate to the store brand.
- Avoid enclosing or replacing old entrances with solid materials. If the door is no longer in use, secure it and leave for future use.
- Hours of operation, store name and address may be applied to the glass of the door, in vinyl or painted lettering. It is important that these messages are clearly shown on or near the door for shopper recognition. Addresses may also be used above the door on transoms or transom bars.



*Doors should reflect the overall character of the building.*



*An open door is a welcoming touch that offers comfort to new customers.*



*A transparent entry can help showcase merchandise.*

### Entries

#### Best Practices - Encouraged (continued)

- An open door is a great way to create a more welcoming environment.
- Entries must comply with all code and accessibility requirements.

#### Best Practices - Avoid

- Loading and service doors should not be shared with or located on the same side of the building as the main customer entrance.
- Do not clutter doors with signage, advertising or window treatments. Customers should have clear views into the store as well as comfortable, safe entry and exit.

#### Benefits

- Clearly marked, compelling entries will encourage shoppers to enter a store or restaurant.

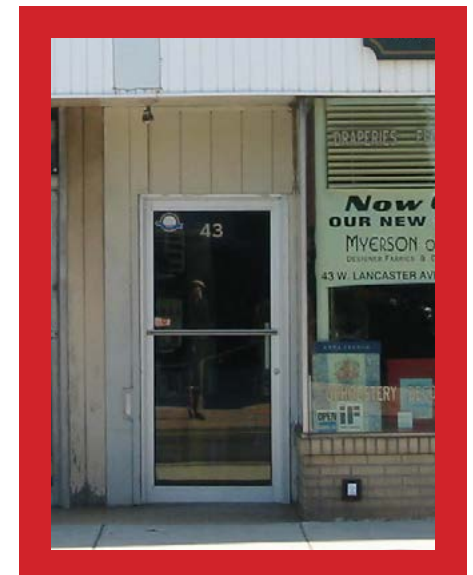


*Adding features next to entries with non-recessed or slightly recessed doors helps prevent doors from swinging into passing pedestrians.*



*While transparency is important for entry doors, solid doors when paired with a highly transparent storefront can create a welcoming feeling of hospitality.*

*Entries that are cluttered, opaque and dark are not welcoming.*





## Windows

Storefront windows consist of show or display windows that extend from the knee wall of the storefront to the height of the transom bar or to the structural opening of the storefront if no transom windows exist. Inviting and energetic storefront windows help to establish the character of the neighborhood and attract the interest of shoppers. Large, clear glass windows create a sense of engagement between pedestrians and the store. Preserving the original design of storefront windows is important to the overall character of the building.

These windows are the primary way a retailer conveys what they are offering. Storefront display windows should be clear and individual glass lites should be as large as possible. Windows should extend the entire width of the storefront bay wherever possible (with the exception of the entry door).

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Knee walls at the bottom of display windows should be approximately 8 to 18 inches high, and generally no higher than 24 inches. Modern buildings may have even lower curbs, or full height glass. Knee walls and curbs should be constructed of durable materials. Historically, many display windows had extended platforms inside the store, level with the knee wall to provide an area for merchandise display. If used, these platforms should be constructed of hard materials such as wood or tile.
- Retain transom windows even when hidden by awnings, as they are visible when customers approach or when awnings are rolled up or removed, and let light into the store.
- Mullion spacing should be as far apart as possible, to create the largest expanse of glass. Closely spaced mullions, punched windows, horizontal grids or divided lite windows are generally not ideal for retail, however mullion spacing should work with building elements and proportions.



*Operable windows create the feel of outdoor seating and a closer connection to pedestrians on the sidewalk.*



*Knee walls provide a stage for merchandising.*



*Keep transom windows uncovered to provide maximum benefits of natural daylight. Window coverings should be minimal and decorative to screen sunlight if necessary.*



*Windows that are inactive due to interior uses can be converted to display to promote the business and keep sidewalks bright.*

## Windows

### Best Practices - Encouraged (continued)

- Storefront window glass should be as clear as possible. Tinting, darkened glass or similar treatments prevent shoppers from seeing into the store and should be avoided. Low-E glazing with a high visible light transmittance (85% is high) may be acceptable if required by energy codes.
- Design and materials of window and door frames should match.
- Retain the original pattern of transom windows and avoid obstructing the transom glass with non-transparent materials.
- Interior ceilings lower than the storefront window or transom window head height should transition up to the head height with a soffit, no less than 3 feet from the storefront (ideally 4 or 5 feet) in order to preserve the full window height and bring light inside.

### Best Practices - Avoid

- Office-type window treatments (e.g., shades or blinds) are not allowed in retail storefront windows. Decorative window treatments may be allowed, particularly in restaurants to provide guests protection from the sun. These treatments should be in keeping with the retailer's brand, and should only be deployed during the times they are necessary.
- Do not infill storefronts with solid materials. Remove existing solid infilled storefronts and replace with glass windows.

### Benefits

- A large, well-merchandise, interesting window that allows views into the store is the best way to connect with shoppers on the street.
- Continuous glass storefronts along a street allow clear sightlines both into and out of stores to the sidewalk, which helps create a sense of safety for pedestrians and retailers.



Use consistent materials for doors, door frames and window mullions for an integrated look.



Smaller lites of glass are not usually ideal, but thin mullions, a large overall window area and interesting window graphics make this an attractive storefront.



Dark tinted glass creates an uninviting storefront.



Don't cover over transom windows with solid materials.



### Merchandising

The merchandising of a storefront is as important as any other component. Not only does it engage and invite the customer into the store, but it can create an enlivened streetscape that enhances the experience of the entire District. Merchandising inside the store is important as well, but this guideline will focus on the main display visible in the storefront windows from the sidewalk.

The storefront display should reflect the core brand of the store, and capture shoppers' attention with creative use of a combination of merchandise, graphics and other materials.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- The first 4 or 5 feet into the store from the storefront window should be considered the merchandising zone. Ideally this area should have a window platform for displaying merchandise and adjustable lighting.
- The ceiling of the merchandise area should maintain the original height at the transom and be made of plaster or drywall; dropped ceilings should not be used in this area and transitions to a lower ceiling height beyond this zone should be unobtrusive.
- Storefront displays should be creative, colorful and composed to tell the retailer's story in a compelling way. Simple and bold can be more effective in attracting pedestrian attention. Displays should be kept clean and changed regularly to maintain customer interest.
- Seasonal and holiday decorations made with real materials accentuate merchandise in a storefront display. Generic mass-market decorations should be avoided.



*Simple placement of merchandise can be very effective.*



*Carefully considered placement of window graphics provides visibility of merchandise and to the inside of the store.*



*Unique displays and layered decorative elements draw the customer's eye into the space.*



*Beautiful packaging presented in an artful way is an attractive and colorful solution.*



### Merchandising

#### Best Practices - Encouraged (continued)

- Storefront displays should be constructed of high-quality, durable and interesting materials and should be changed or updated frequently.
- Art objects or installations and unique furniture or display pieces can provide an interesting backdrop for merchandise.
- Use professionally designed graphics in the merchandise zone. Handmade signage or graphics should be artistic, creative and carefully crafted.

#### Best Practices - Avoid

- Backs of display cases, shelving, desks or equipment should not face the display windows. Merchandise for sale, such as stacked clothing or boxed products, should generally not be on display in the storefront window.
- Solid walls or built structures behind the storefront that block visibility into the store should be avoided. Barriers that prevent views into the store make a storefront less inviting to passersby.

#### Benefits

- Interesting and exciting merchandise displays pull people into a store.
- Great displays and merchandise can animate the streetscape and promote pedestrian activity even when stores are closed.



*There are many ways to present merchandise effectively while maintaining good visibility into the store.*



*Creatively staging and lighting merchandise can result in dramatic window displays.*

*Walls or merchandising that create an opaque barrier at the storefront should be avoided.*



## Awnings / Canopies

Awnings and canopies are projections from the storefront that provide shade and protection from the elements and opportunities for branding and signage. Awnings are typically fabric stretched on a metal frame and may be added or removed with changing tenant needs. Canopies are made from rigid materials and are generally permanent architectural fixtures of a building. Canopies are more often found at a main entry door to a building (such as the lobby of a hotel, or entry of a tenant occupying the entire street level) as a unique feature, but some buildings have fixed canopies at each retail bay.

While awnings and canopies provide the benefit of shelter from sun and elements, they can also darken the storefront so that merchandise is less visible from a distance. Businesses on the north side of streets always have shade so awnings and canopies over merchandise windows should be avoided. South, east and west facing businesses have more potential for sun issues throughout the day and may benefit from their use.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Awnings should fit within the structural storefront bay and should not span across bays, so that they do not conceal the shape and architectural features of a building. Within the same building, they should be the same shape and size but can vary color and graphics to identify tenants.
- The base of the awning should align with the bottom of the transom bar and should be a minimum of 8 feet clear from the sidewalk. Awnings should project a minimum of 3 feet from the building face in all cases. Awnings should be proportional to the building and storefront openings.
- Awnings should have an angled, straight shape (unless the openings are other than rectangular) and open ends.



*Awnings should respect the architecture; stay within storefront bays and be proportioned appropriately.*



*When possible, mount awnings within storefront openings.*



*Retractable awnings can be an effective solution for sunlight or weather protection issues.*



*Awnings should not cover building features or ignore architectural proportions.*



### Awnings / Canopies

#### Best Practices - Encouraged (continued)

- Both fixed or retractable awnings are acceptable. Retractable awnings are a preferred means of dealing with sunlight issues at the storefront.
- Awnings constructed of metal should be flat panels and have an angled, straight shape similar to canvas awnings.
- Fabricate awnings and canopies out of durable materials like metal, glass, canvas, wood or solution-dyed acrylic fabric. Avoid vinyl or plastic.
- Flat canopies should be designed to ensure proper drainage and shedding of rain and snow.

#### Best Practices - Avoid

- Awnings are not allowed above street level.
- Solid or enclosed structures with soffits applied to the building face are not allowed. This includes solid structures constructed at the transom window area of storefronts.
- Dome, quarter round and similar shaped vinyl or plastic awnings are not allowed.
- Standing seam, corrugated or other roofing products, especially residential roofing type materials, are not appropriate.
- Internally illuminated or back-lit, awnings are not allowed.

#### Benefits

- Awnings and canopies can offer weather protection and help define an entrance or storefront.
- Awnings and canopies can provide an opportunity for signage.



*A canopy can identify an entry.*



*Canopies can serve to define a storefront and provide a location for signage.*

*A canopy should not cross over multiple storefronts or ignore other building features.*



## 3 | Sidewalks, Lighting & Security

## Landscaping

Plants add color and interest to the storefront and streetscape and can serve to draw the attention of customers. In sidewalk seating situations, they can create a buffer between the pedestrian and the seating areas that make the dining experience more enjoyable.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Plants should be healthy and well trimmed at all times, and dead plants should be removed from displays promptly.
- Planter or flower boxes at second floor windows shall respect the design of the building and not obscure any ornament or conflict with signage.

### Benefits

- Plantings can be an integral part of a retail brand and display, and they lend a sense of freshness and care to a storefront.



*Plants can be used year-round to enliven a storefront.*



*Creativity can be expressed with interesting plants and arrangements.*



*Even minimal planting can soften a storefront and accentuate an entrance.*



*Don't neglect the care and maintenance of plantings.*



## Café Seating

Café seating areas for restaurants and bars are as much a part of the retailer's brand as any other element of the storefront or interior of the establishment. Café seating areas on the public sidewalk must be applied for and leased from the city. Café areas serving alcoholic beverages are subject to specific regulations from the State of Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division (ABD). In addition to the requirements of the lease with the city, and state ABD requirements, café areas in the District shall comply with the requirements on the following pages.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- The area of the café should be clearly defined and furniture, potted plants and dividers should always be orderly and well organized.
- Carefully select furniture, plantings and colorful elements such as umbrellas to align with the establishment's identity. Furniture should be of commercial outdoor quality and should be consistently matched.
- Lighting at sidewalk cafés should be decorative lighting that helps to create an appropriate atmosphere for the café.

### Best Practices - Avoid

- Service equipment or elements, such as carts, racks, tables or similar items should be of quality construction and materials. Back-of-house or kitchen-type equipment should not be used in the café area.
- Café seating area enclosures should not be used as signage or for displaying banners. Limited signage is allowed in these areas and is described in the Portable Signage section of this document.
- Tents or similar temporary enclosures, solid or glass framed enclosures (whether permanent or temporary) are not allowed in the sidewalk café area.



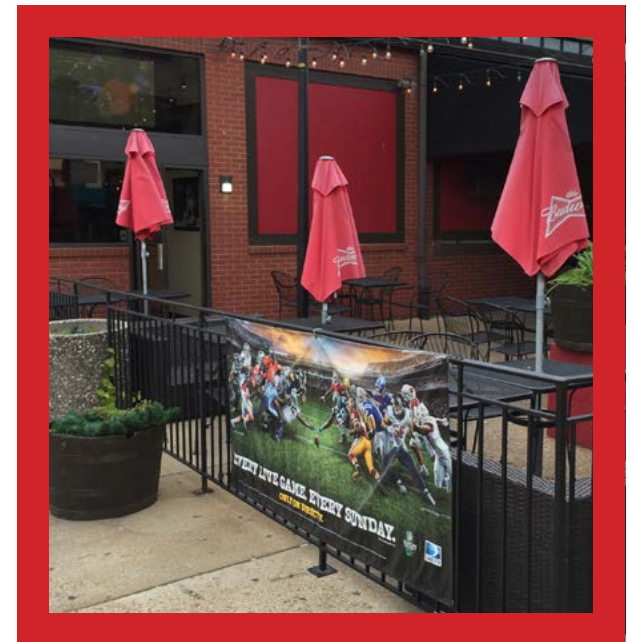
*Planted enclosures provide a physical, visual and psychological buffer between diners and passing cars and pedestrians.*



*Aside from providing shade and weather protection, umbrellas can offer texture, color and softness to the streetscape.*



*In some cases, café seating can be located at the storefront under the shade of awnings. Note the careful arrangement of all the elements.*



*Enclosures should not be used for displaying banners.*

## Café Seating

### Best Practices - Avoid (continued)

- Flood or spot types of lights are not allowed at café areas.

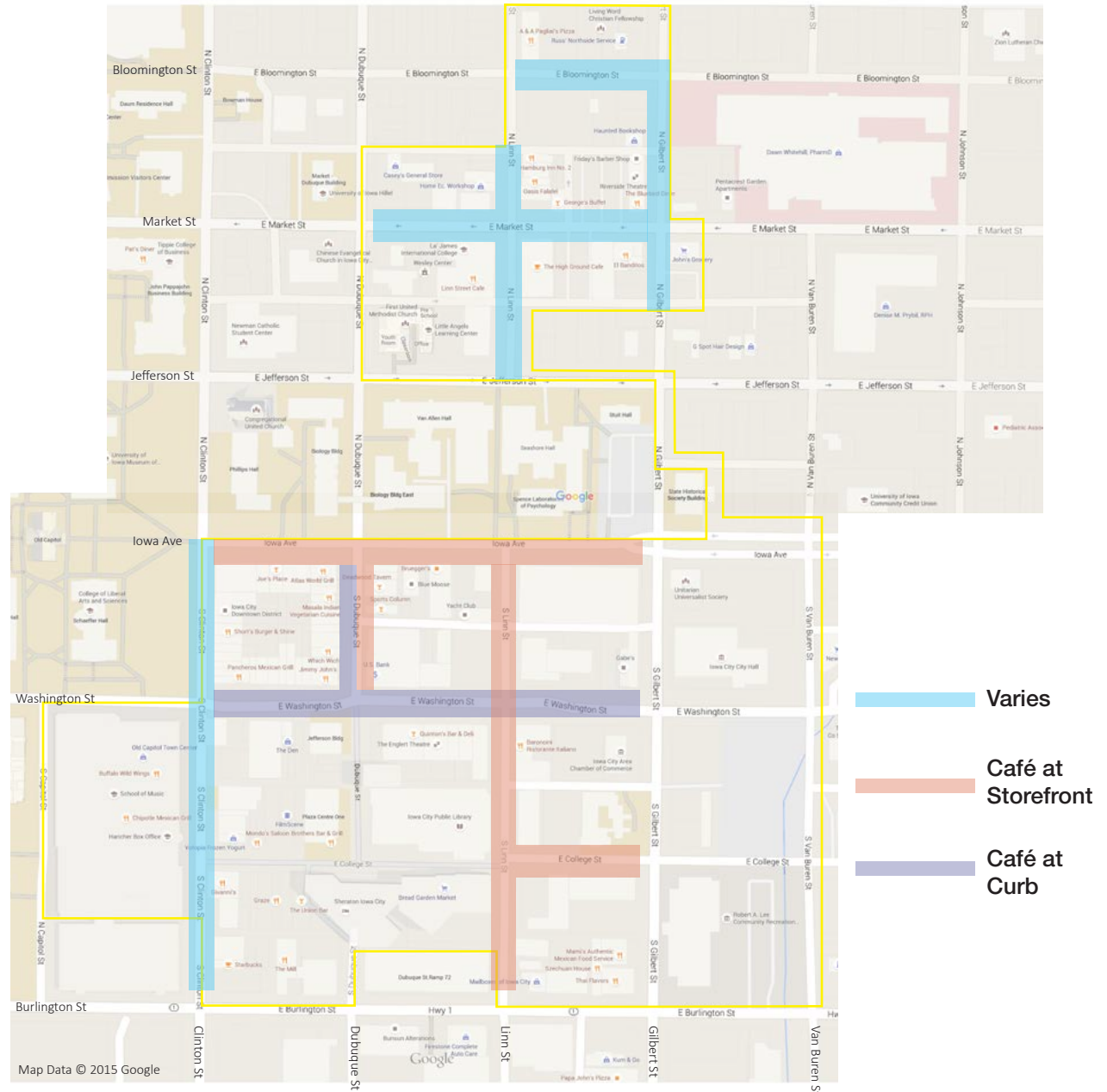
### Benefits

- Café seating along sidewalks can act as a traffic calming device.
- A well-crafted café area creates an inviting streetscape environment and serves as another visual indicator for the retailer.

### Sidewalk Café Locations

Café seating throughout the District should not impede pedestrian traffic or the ability of pedestrians to access other retail establishments or building entries along the street, or push pedestrians too close to the curb to ensure pedestrian safety. Café location in the Ped Mall is defined on a case-by-case basis. Because the downtown streetscape is currently under development and the configuration of sidewalks may change, desirable café locations may change as well. The map shown on this page shows the current desirable placement of seating areas along streets in order to address the following concerns:

- A direct, safe path of travel for pedestrians is desirable along each street.
- Certain streets have a larger number of small storefronts and café spaces at the curb in these areas allow shoppers to more easily access stores and building entries.
- Certain streets have a larger scale and carry more vehicular and pedestrian traffic, making café spaces at the storefront more comfortable for diners and allowing more space for pedestrians.
- Certain streets do not have enough room for cafés on the sidewalk.



*Café Diagram 1: The current desired placement of café seating along streets takes into account the width of the street and sidewalk, and the current placement of cafés. New streetscape configurations may require modifications to the desired placement.*

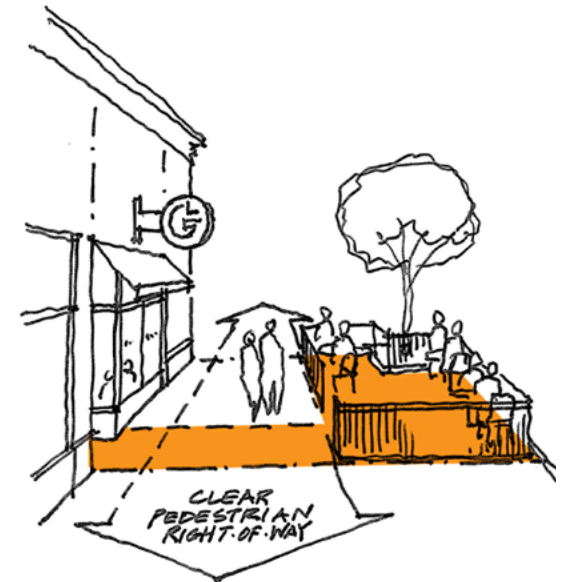
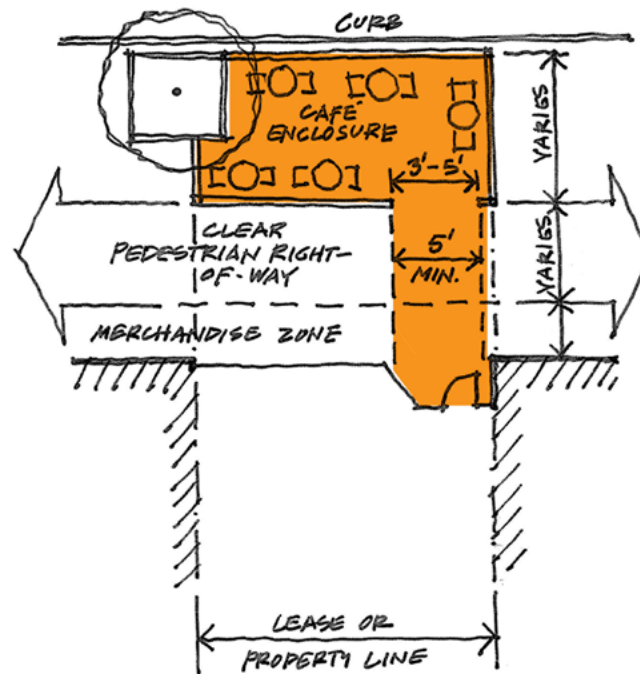


## Café Seating

### Requirements

Café areas in the District shall comply with the following:

- Cafés require an application to the City of Iowa City. Specific proposals are reviewed at the time of application, taking into account site conditions. Additional standards and requirements as described in the City Sidewalk Café Policy will apply. ABD review and approval is required for all sidewalk cafés. The City's application and policy information can be found [here](#).
- Café areas shall be fully enclosed from the public way, with the exception of the entrance to the café area, with a railing, panel, or similar boundary.
- The first 3 feet from the storefront is considered the exterior merchandise zone, for Portable Signs, planters and other elements as described in the Merchandise section.
- Café areas shall either be directly adjacent to or in front of the licensed establishment, and require a written lease agreement with the City. The lease requires that the pedestrian right-of-way between the entrance of the establishment and the entrance of the café enclosure be kept clear. The extent of the sidewalk area along the street to be leased may vary but in no case shall it exceed the width of the licensed establishment's storefront, defined by the lease or property lines. The desired dimension of the clear right-of-way is 8 feet. The exact dimension may vary with individual street location and existing sidewalk but in no case shall it be less than 6 feet.



Café Diagram 1: The leased area is shown shaded orange, including the required pathway between entry door and café entrance. The lease requires the pedestrian right-of-way to be kept clear (exact dimension may depend on individual street, and the dimension of the existing sidewalk).

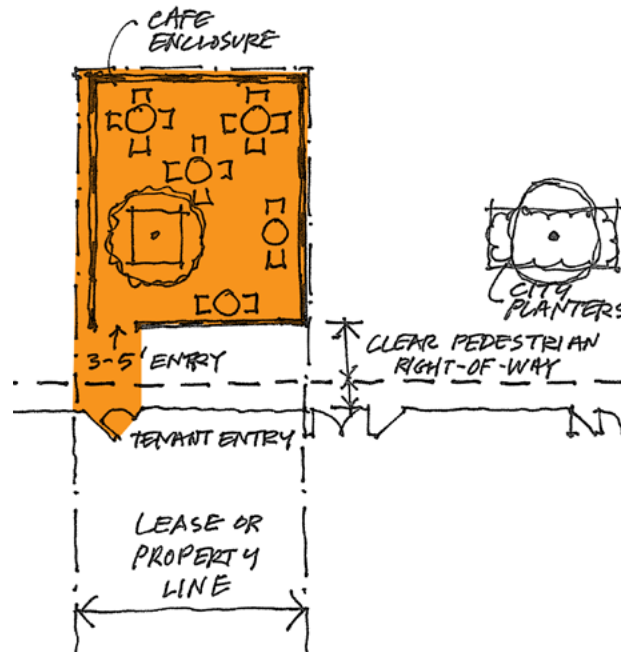


## Café Seating

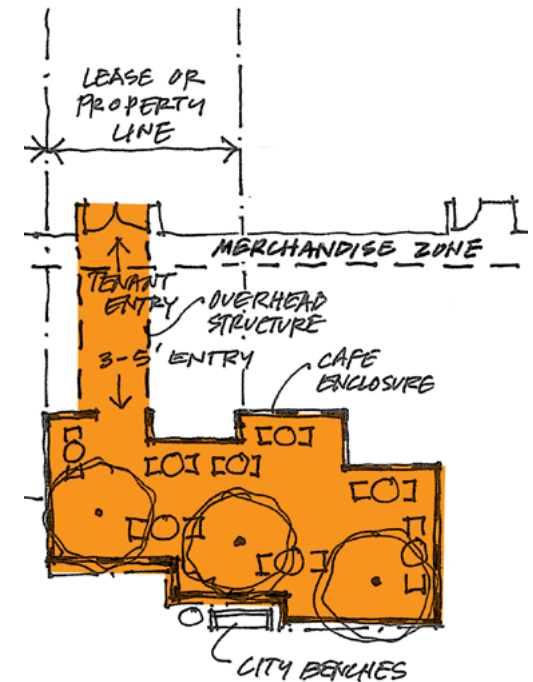
### City Plaza (Ped Mall) Café Seating

Café areas in the Ped Mall shall comply with all the Café Seating Requirements above, and with the following:

- Café location in the Ped Mall will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
- Ped Mall cafés with an overhead connection may be allowed to extend past the width of the tenant's storefront in some cases. Written approval from adjacent tenant(s) and building owner(s) as well as City approval is required.
- The leased area for sidewalk cafés in the Ped Mall may be limited by the City in order to preserve pedestrian rights-of-way in between cafés, and preserve the designated Fire/Emergency access lane in the Ped Mall, or preserve City streetscape elements such as benches, trees or other fixed features.
- The City may, at its discretion, allow café seating areas to include portions of City curbed planters or landscape elements, such as trees and plants.



Café Diagram 2: Ped Mall café concept. City streetscape elements, such as trees, benches or planters may be included within Ped Mall café areas but are still City property and may not be removed or modified.



Café Diagram 3: Ped Mall café concept. Ped Mall cafés that extend beyond the lease or property line may be allowed in certain cases and with certain enclosure conditions.

## Merchandising

Merchandise adjacent to or in front of the display window can be an important visual part of the storefront. The closer shoppers get to merchandise, the more likely they are to pause and explore.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Merchandise on the sidewalk is permitted within the first 3 feet of the storefront, as long as it does not block the minimum path of travel. Take care not to obscure the display window itself. Separate permits may be required for more extensive 'sidewalk sale' events.
- Carefully select merchandise to entice shoppers and encourage exploration into the store. Items on the sidewalk should be a prelude to the retailer's more comprehensive selection.

### Best Practices - Avoid

- Do not clutter the sidewalk with clearance or packaged merchandise, or use normal store fixtures outdoors. The sidewalk should be treated like the display window: unique, creative and eye-catching displays are important.

## Benefits

- Placing merchandise on the sidewalk animates the streetscape, conveys a feeling of safety and draws customers.



*Good sidewalk merchandising is as effective as a sign for communicating the offerings of the business.*



*Even minimal merchandising can be effective.*



*Merchandise should not block pedestrian movement along the sidewalk.*



Good lighting enhances the business and the District by providing a sense of welcome, comfort and activity while also promoting and showcasing good architecture, well-designed storefronts, café seating and merchandise. A variety of lighting methods should be considered for overall illumination, highlighting building features and signage, and featuring merchandise.

#### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Light sources should be shielded to avoid direct glare for both pedestrians and building occupants. The lighting effect on signs and building features should be most visible, not the light fixture itself.
- LED lighting is becoming more popular and accessible (both price and variety of fixtures) and is an energy efficient choice, but care should be taken to use appropriate fixtures and lamp sources. The LED color temperature should be matched to the retail or restaurant environment. Warmer color LEDs (3000-3500K is warm) are recommended for store lighting. Internally illuminated signs and lettering should use cooler LEDs (5100-7000K is cool) in most cases to give a whiter, cleaner appearance to backlit lettering and provide the most legibility.
- High color rendering metal halide or fluorescent lamps (85 CRI is high) with a color temperature of matched to the interior environment of the store are also recommended light sources.
- Surface-mounted flood or spotlights on buildings should be located in a manner that is as unobtrusive as possible. Lamp-holder type fixtures without shields are not allowed. Care should be taken to eliminate light directed up to the sky.
- Lighting for signage should be placed above the sign and evenly spaced along the storefront. LEDs for signage should be selected to provide the best color rendering on the building materials and for sign legibility.
- Lighting for Upper Level Signage is allowed. See Signage section for allowable signage above the street level.



*Decorative lighting creates a festive environment.*



*Lighting should create a feeling of activity but not be overpowering.*



*Gooseneck light fixtures can simultaneously provide lighting for signage, the storefront and pedestrians.*



## Best Practices - Encouraged (continued)

- Gooseneck or stemmed flood or spotlight fixtures are appropriate for lighting signage. The style of these fixtures (modern or traditional) should be compatible with the building style. However, it is acceptable to use small, simple, modern fixtures in most cases.
- Fixtures of a decorative nature should be appropriate to the architecture, coordinated with the facade and mounted as appropriate to the features of the building, at piers or over the storefront bay as illumination for signs. Small fixtures are encouraged.
- Building lighting should be consistent in placement and design; develop a lighting strategy that enhances the building and the storefronts.
- Storefront merchandise and display windows should be lighted from the inside, with lighting directed on the display. Windows and storefronts should be lighted until 11pm or midnight to maintain pedestrian interest.

## Best Practices - Avoid

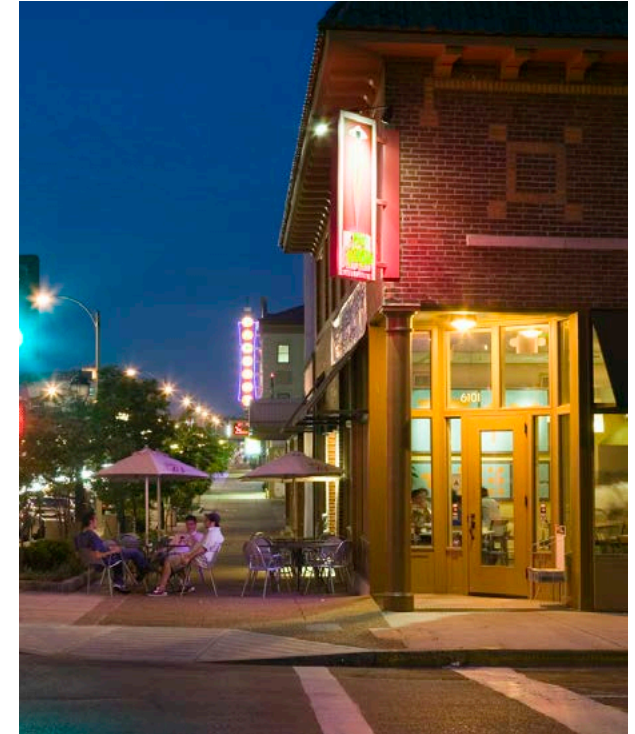
- Surface-mounted conduit should be avoided.
- Signage or other retail lighting is not allowed above the street level with residential use.

## Benefits

- Using accent lighting at the building, illuminated storefronts and clearly illuminated signage makes for a visually balanced storefront at night. Leaving out one of these elements can create too much contrast and make the storefront difficult to recognize.
- Exterior lighting that is matched in color temperature and level with the storefront interior visually enhances the store interior and merchandise.
- A well-lit retail street encourages shoppers to stay later into the evening because they perceive the environment to be safer and more active.



*Transom windows not only allow light to flow in during the day, but help create a brighter, more dramatic storefront.*



*Illuminated storefronts and signs help to create a comfortable, safe streetscape.*



*A dark storefront discourages window shopping and creates gaps in the pedestrian experience.*

There are multiple factors that help create the perception of safety, many of which are described previously in this document. Well-maintained, brightly lit, open and active storefronts create both the perception of safety and the reality of an environment that is less conducive to negative behavior - this can reduce the need for aesthetically undesirable physical security features. In fact, the presence of windows with bars, grates or shutters sends the message that there is a problem.

Pedestrians feel safer when there is more visibility, both on the street and between the sidewalk and store interiors, and more people on the streets increases the feeling of safety. Large expanses of glass contribute to this “eyes on the street” situation, and this helps foster a self-monitoring environment.

## Best Practices - Encouraged

- Storefront windows should be kept illuminated even after the store closes, ideally until 11pm or midnight.
- Security measures such as cameras, alarm contacts and similar should be discrete.

## Best Practices - Avoid

- Fixed security bars, solid or linked rolling security shutters and sliding expandable security gates are not appropriate.

## Benefits

- Good street illumination, transparent and lighted storefronts and continuous retail along the street help create a perception of comfort and safety with shoppers, and are a deterrent to would-be violators.



*Bright, transparent storefronts provide visibility and store lights brighten sidewalks.*



*Café seating and streetscape amenities are a reassuring sign of pedestrian activity.*



*Bars and grates create an unwelcoming feel and convey the impression of high crime.*





Well-designed signs help create successful storefronts. Comprised of letterforms and graphic elements, a sign conveys the personality of the business and creates a sense of excitement and vibrancy on the street.

Signage should be designed by a design professional and fabricated by a sign company that understands various methods and materials that are appropriate to the District. The size of the sign should be appropriate for the storefront, building and neighboring buildings as well as the pedestrian experience. If signs are too large and bright, they may reduce visibility of the merchandise and affect the dining experience of neighboring sidewalk cafés.

Pedestrian visibility, both from adjacent sidewalks and from across the street, is the primary consideration for the type of signage used as well as its size and location. Signs should not be scaled for vehicular visibility since the characteristics of the streetscape, narrow viewing angles and trees minimize the benefits of larger signs. Using a variety of well-designed and appropriately scaled sign types is the best approach.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Use of projecting signs increases pedestrian visibility and creates a unique feel for the District.
- Use quality, durable materials.
- Plan lighting placement to best accentuate the signage.
- Scale signs to fit the building and avoid obscuring architectural features.
- Exposed neon is appropriate if used in a limited and tasteful manner.
- Dimensional letterforms add more interest to signage than flat vinyl or painted signs.



*Non-illuminated, pin-mounted letters can be highly effective.*



*A three-dimensional element can make your storefront more distinctive.*



*Hand-painted signage can feel both nostalgic and refined.*



*Halo-lit letters are an elegant way to illuminate a sign.*



*Restore old signs when possible.*



*Exposed neon is an appropriate method if used in a limited and tasteful manner.*

**Best Practices - Encouraged (continued)**

- Consider restoring historic signs.
- Consider 3-dimensional elements to make signs more interesting.

**Best Practices - Avoid**

- Internally illuminated, plastic-faced letterforms or 'cloud' type backlit acrylic signs are not allowed. Instead use individual open-face, neon channel letters, halo-illuminated letters or push-through letters.
- Back-lit, acrylic faced cabinet signs, where the entire face is illuminated, are prohibited except in the case of historic theater marquees.

**Benefits**

- Creative, well-designed signage draws attention, adds a layer of detail and interest to the storefront and creates a lasting impression with the customer.
- Smaller, pedestrian-friendly, unique signs can be less expensive than traditional, vehicular-oriented signs.



*Artistic elements add charm and elegance to a sign.*



*Sometimes a very simple design solution can be very effective.*



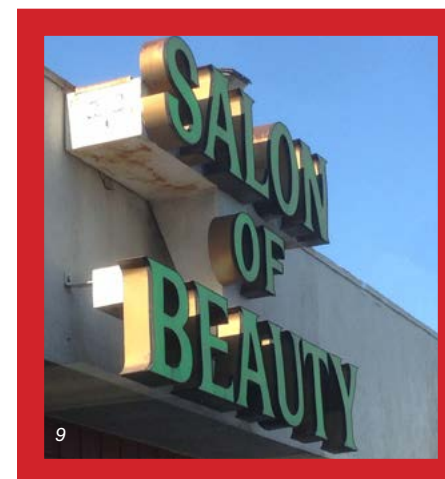
*Blade signs offer great visibility for pedestrians and offer an opportunity for creative solutions.*



*Use creative shapes to make signs more appealing.*



*Back-lit, acrylic-faced cabinet signs, where the entire face is illuminated, are prohibited.*



*Internally illuminated, plastic-faced letterforms are not allowed.*



## Fascia Signs

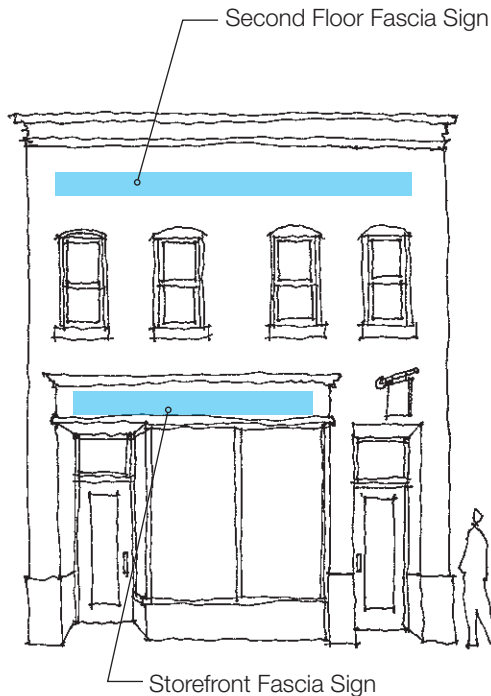
The facade of the building is typically the location for the primary store identification. For first floor tenants, when sufficient room exists, the Storefront Fascia Sign is located over the storefront or entry. Sometimes this area is a defined sign band, but often it is not.

In some cases, second floor retail tenants are allowed a Second Floor Fascia Sign that may be located above the windows of the second floor. Second Floor Fascia Signs are allowed under the following conditions:

- When a second floor tenant has a dedicated entry door from the street, on the same face of the building where the sign is located.
- When an entire building contains multiple tenants that are accessed through a common lobby from the street. In this case, a comprehensive sign plan showing proposed exterior sign locations must be proposed by the building owner and approved by the City. Sign sizes and placement should follow these Guidelines.
- Office tenants are not allowed to have a Second Floor Fascia Sign.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Placement of signs on the facade should take into consideration the architectural features and proportions of the building.
- The allowable sign area is 1.5 times the length in feet of the street facing facade but should be no longer than 90% of the length of the facade or sign band.
- On larger buildings, placing the sign over the entrance helps customers understand where to go.
- When a sign band exists, fit signs within the original space of the sign band as defined by the architectural features. Avoid extending beyond the band area.



*When a sign band exists, it can provide the best location for signage.*



*Storefront Fascia Signs and Second Floor Fascia Signs can be arranged to allow for visibility and consideration for the building design.*



## Fascia Signs

### Best Practices - Encouraged (continued)

- If no clear sign band exists, signs should be located in relationship to the building facade storefront features: either centered over the entrance, centered in the facade, or centered on the main display window, and at similar height as adjacent businesses. Typically this is below the second floor windows and above the storefront.
- Individual letter signs look best on a sign band when the sign band is smaller in proportion to the storefront, or the sign band has details like panels or interesting materials.
- Flat panel signs with lettering on them can be used on sign bands, if the panel shape is proportional to the sign band area, related to the shape of the band, and placed so that it doesn't 'float' in too much space because it's too small, or get crowded because it's too big.

### Benefits

- In most cases, the Fascia Sign is the primary sign for a tenant. A well-placed and correctly proportioned sign defines the storefront and catches pedestrian attention.
- A well-placed and correctly proportioned Second Floor Fascia Sign provides identification for a tenant that has no storefront display.



When no defined sign band exists, signage should be sized to work with the proportions of the building and other storefront elements.



Individual letters that are proportional to building details can be an elegant fascia sign solution.



Simple, pin-mounted letters can be very effective.



A correctly proportioned sign panel can work well within the defined sign band.



Fascia Signs should be designed to work with the space allowed, and should not ignore obvious architectural constraints.

## Projecting Signs

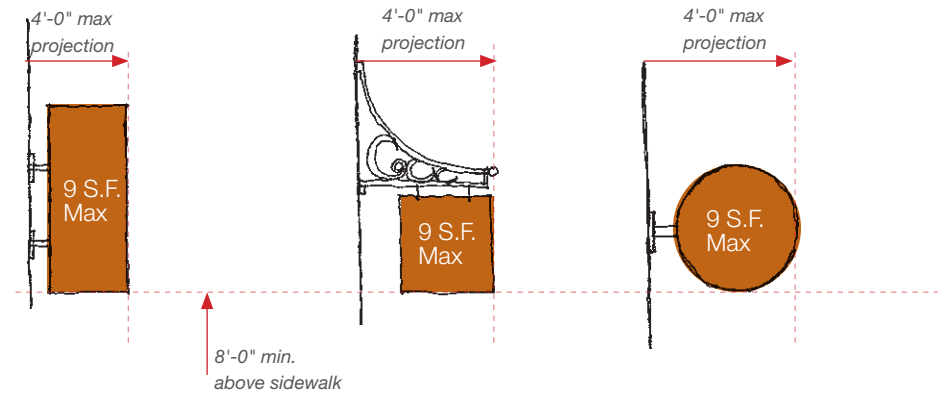
Projecting Signs project out from the face of the building over the sidewalk, are two-sided and contain the business name and/or logo.

In some cases a three-dimensional object or shape related to the business may be used. These signs may or may not incorporate the business name or logo. Because it is not possible to define all the allowable or prohibited designs, Projecting Signs of this nature are subject to design review.

There are three types of Projecting Signs allowed in the District:

- **Storefront Projecting Signs** are located below the second floor window sill.
- **Upper Level Projecting Signs** are located above the second floor window sill and below the bottom of cornice or roof line if no cornice exists. For any allowable Upper Level Projecting Sign, the tenant must obtain permission from the building owner. Upper Level Projecting Signs are only permitted when any of the following conditions exist:
  - The retail tenant occupies the entire building, and the building frontage is greater than 60 feet.
  - The tenant is a hotel, theater or bowling alley as permitted by the sign code.
- **Banner Projecting Signs** are located above the second floor window sill and below the bottom of cornice or roof line if no cornice exists. Banner Projecting Signs are only permitted when any of the following conditions existing:
  - The retail tenants are located in a large, multi-tenant building where access to individual tenants is through a common lobby from the street, and tenants do not have individual exterior storefronts.
  - The retail tenant occupies a large, multi-story building with more than 200 feet of street frontage.

### Storefront Projecting Signs



### Upper Level Projecting Signs and Banners





## Storefront Projecting Signs

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Use high quality, durable, rigid materials that will not bow or bend.
- Lightweight, swinging-type signs are an inexpensive but highly visible way to identify your storefront.
- Use clear, memorable imagery and interesting shapes.
- The bracket or support structure is part of the visual presentation and should be simple and clean, or thoughtfully incorporated into the design of the sign.
- The bottom of the sign shall be no lower than 8 feet above the sidewalk, and the top shall be no higher than the bottom of the second floor window sill.
- Consider adjacent projections (Projecting Sign, awnings, canopies) when determining the location of the sign. Do not obstruct pedestrian view of adjacent tenant Projecting Signs.
- Locate signs no closer than 1 foot from the adjacent lease or property line and no closer than 12 feet from any adjacent tenant Storefront Projecting Sign.
- The maximum size is 9 sq. ft. per side, messages are only allowed on two sides, and the maximum projection is 4 feet from the face of the building.

### Best Practices - Avoid

- Internally illuminated, plastic-faced letters and cabinet signs are not allowed.

### Benefits

- Projecting signs are highly visible to pedestrians walking along the sidewalk and provide an excellent opportunity for creative expression of retail brand identity.
- Simple, inexpensive signs can be very effective.



Decorative brackets add interest and enhance the design.



A three-dimensional object creates an eye-catching sign.



Small light fixtures can be used to illuminate the sign effectively.



Storefront Projecting Signs are highly visible for pedestrians.



Creative, artistic elements grab pedestrian attention.



Storefront Projecting Signs should not be oversized or require excessive structures or guy wires for support. Internally illuminated, plastic-faced sign cabinets are not allowed.



## Upper Level Projecting Signs

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- The sign should be located on the building in a location that relates to the building design, takes into consideration features of the building and is proportional to building size. Most signs will look better when mounted away from the building.
- Maximum sizes are related to the size of the building:
  - 2 story: 30 sq. ft. per side with a maximum 4 foot projection from the face of the building.
  - 3 story: 80 sq. ft. per side with a maximum 5 foot projection from the face of the building.
  - 4 story and taller: 150 sq. ft. per side with a maximum 6 foot projection from the face of the building.
- Messages are restricted to the two sides of the sign perpendicular to the building face. The length and orientation of the message should be appropriate to the shape of the sign.
- Locate signs no closer than 5 feet from adjacent buildings and no closer than 15 feet from adjacent tenant Storefront Projecting Signs.
- The sign shall not extend above the bottom of the cornice at top of the building and not below the bottom of the second floor window sill.

### Best Practices - Avoid

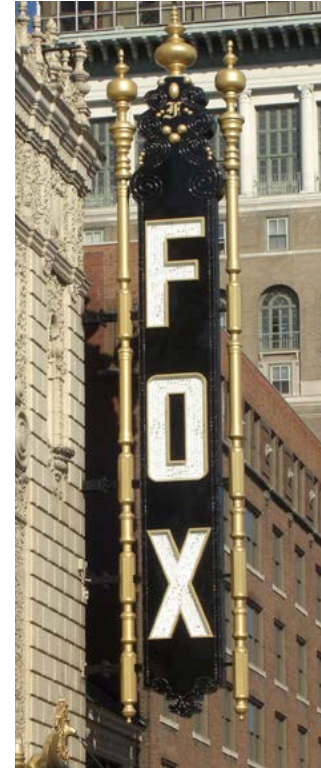
- Internally illuminated, plastic-faced letters and cabinet signs are not allowed.
- Do not use excessive, visible bracing that is not part of the sign design.

### Benefits

- Upper Level Projecting Signs can create a highly visible expression for larger tenants.



Locate sign on building in a manner that relates to the architecture.



The design of the sign can borrow design elements from the building.



Lengthy messages are not appropriate for vertical projecting signs.



Buildings located on a corner provide an opportunity for a corner-mounted projecting sign.



Internally illuminated, plastic-faced sign cabinets are not allowed. Signs should be mounted away from the building.



## Banner Projecting Signs

While temporary banner signs are not allowed, fixed projecting banners that are part of a coordinated signage program can be used, like a Projecting Sign to enliven a blank facade and provide visibility for tenants.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Banners must be mounted with permanent brackets at both top and bottom.
- Banners must be mounted perpendicular to the face of the building and should be done in multiples.
- The size of the banners should conform to the Upper Level Projecting Sign requirements. The banner size should be in proportion to and reflect the scale of the building facade and surrounding architectural elements.
- Messages on banners should be kept short, and graphics should be bold and clear.
- Banners are subject to design review.

### Benefits

- **Banners can soften the impact of a large blank facade and enliven the streetscape.**
- **Banners can allow for street identification of interior retail tenants.**



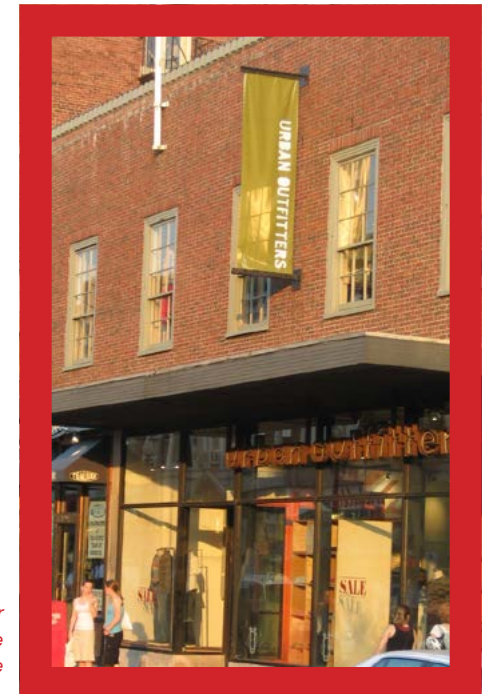
*Banners can enliven a large blank facade and help identify tenants located inside a retail center.*



*Banners can create a celebratory mood.*



*Banners can help provide identity for a large single tenant building.*



*A single banner should not be used as the primary sign.*



## Awning Signs / Canopy Signs

Awning Signs are graphics applied to the surfaces of the awning. Canopy Signs are fabricated sign elements that are supported on or by the canopy structure.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- An Awning Sign or Canopy Sign can serve effectively as the primary identification of a retailer if no suitable location for a fascia sign exists.
- Awning graphics should be painted, embroidered or silk-screened. Locate typography on the valance (front edge) and graphics on the sloped top. Graphics should be limited to retailer logo, name and descriptions of goods/services. Phone numbers, addresses and advertising statements are not allowed.
- Awning graphics should not cover more than 25% of the awning surface.
- Canopy Signs may be located on the canopy face, mounted upright along the canopy edge or suspended from underneath. Location should be based on the canopy features, height, width and adjacent building features.
- The bottom edge of a Canopy Sign suspended below a canopy shall be no lower than 8 feet from the sidewalk, and Canopy Signs located on the canopy face or above shall not project below the lowest edge of the canopy.
- Canopy signs should be no more that 90% of the canopy length and no more that 24 inches in height and should not be lower than 8 feet from the sidewalk.
- Consider concealed lighting in the canopy to illuminate signage.

### Benefits

- Graphics applied to awnings are an inexpensive way to create highly visible signage.
- A canopy offers a highly visible location for signage and a convenient location for lighting.



Placing signage on the valance of a retractable awning allows for visibility when the awning is closed.



Awning signage and Storefront Projecting Signs can work well together.



The face of a canopy provides a great background for signage.



Letters placed on top of a canopy can be elegant and highly legible.



Signage can be suspended below a canopy.



Excessive and small typography on an awning is illegible and unappealing.



## Window Signage

From a pedestrian standpoint, the storefront windows are the most important visual focal point and warrant considerable attention to be successful. Often, the display windows are the only significant location or area available for signage. It is important to remember that the windows serve several purposes - store identity, visibility, lighting and merchandising - and it is important to balance these to obtain the highest impact.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Window Signage is allowed only in first floor windows.
- Graphics and signage should not impair the visibility of the storefront merchandise area. Any solid graphic or signage applied to either the outside or inside of the glass or within 1 foot of the inside of the glass should not obscure more than 20% of the glass storefront in total. Individual graphic elements, logos and letters without background may cover a significant portion of the glass area as long as it is not solid and does not obscure visibility into the store. No single panel of glass should be completely covered.
- Helpful information such as address, store hours and description of goods and services is best located on entry doors or side-lite windows, not the main display window(s).
- Signs placed in windows should be located to enhance the overall look of the display area.
- Store identity signage on main display windows is especially encouraged on the Ped Mall - the tree canopy in this area lowers the visibility of the upper building facade or sign band area from certain distances.
- Signage in transom windows offers good visibility for pedestrians, as long as this signage does not completely cover the glass area.



Window signage at the transom can be a good solution for providing store identification closer to pedestrian eye level.



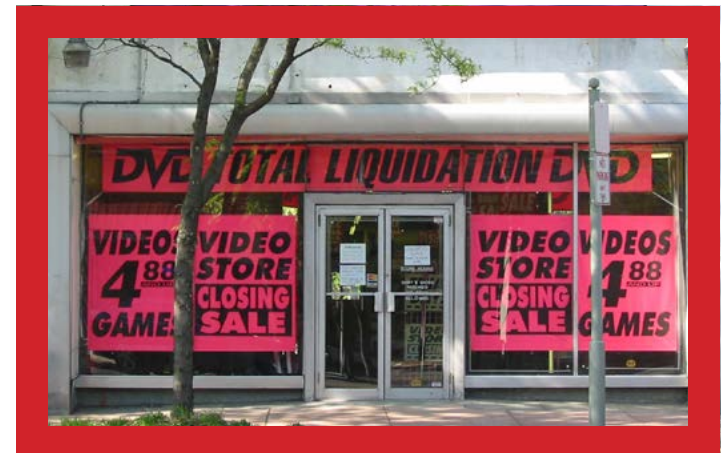
Window graphics should be individual letters so as not to block merchandising area and views into the store.



An example of a beautifully composed window, with merchandise and window graphics complementing each other.



Simple vinyl signage applied to glass can serve as a tenant's primary signage..



Use of opaque materials limits visibility and light transmission into store.

## Window Signage

### Best Practices - Encouraged (continued)

- Placing a menu in the window entices customers to stop and offers an invitation to enter. Menus should be placed close to the entry door, at or slightly below eye level.
- The quantity of temporary signs should be limited in number and size so as not to obscure visibility into the store. Temporary signs should not be placed at eye level.
- Simple, non-illuminated 'open' signs are preferred to bright neon or LED signs. Consider a handmade sign, located at or near the entry door.

### Best Practices - Avoid

- Paper handbills and notices that are not related to the business of the retailer should not be placed in store windows.
- Flashing or 'chase' light signs are prohibited.

### Benefits

- Graphics applied to the glass are a highly visible, inexpensive method of displaying the store identity and giving helpful secondary information.
- Uncluttered storefront windows make the inside of the store or restaurant visible and draw pedestrian attention to the merchandise or activity within.



Entry doors are the perfect location for reinforcing the identity and displaying store hours.



Handmade signs are a good alternative that allows for creative expression.



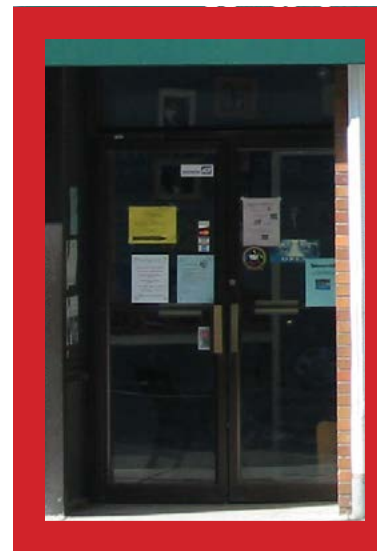
Signage that does not block views into the store can be placed in windows.



A simple, elegant solution for displaying additional information.



Consider an enclosure dedicated for the display of a menu.



Temporary handbills and other opaque displays should be limited in number and size to keep entries open and inviting.



Don't cover windows with large solid materials or cover mullions with graphics. Too many signs make it difficult to see inside.



## Wall Murals

A wall mural is an image that covers a large portion of a building and is applied directly to the wall surface with paint or vinyl. Any wall mural that contains a commercial message will be considered a sign or advertisement and subject to applicable codes.

Wall murals are allowed on a secondary facade, or a side of the building facing parking lots, vacant lots or alleys and not on the formal or main storefront facade of the building.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Wall murals used as a sign for a business, with commercial messages such as retailer names or logos, are only allowed in alleys. For any wall mural that has a commercial message, the guidelines for a Fascia Sign apply to the size of the message.
- A wall mural can use color, imagery and typography to create an artful expression.
- All wall murals are subject to design review.

### Best Practices - Avoid

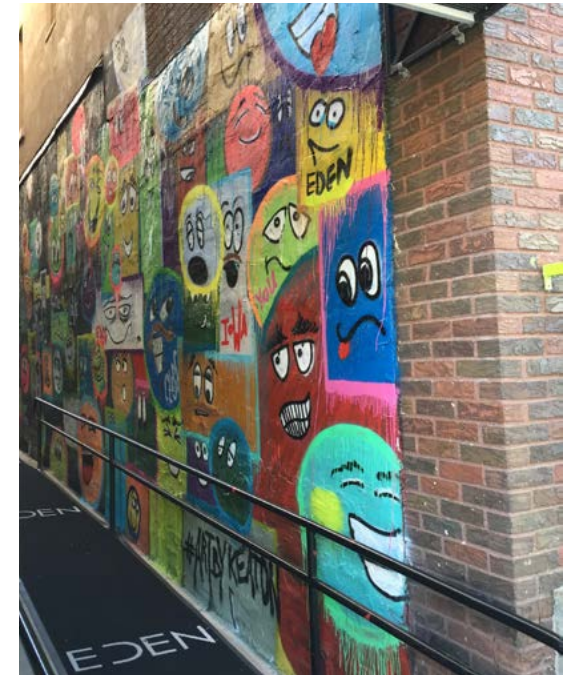
- Wall murals should not cover architectural features or details.
- Wall murals that contain product or corporate advertising messages are prohibited.

### Benefits

- Murals can be a creative and artistic way to add interest to an otherwise blank wall, and can convey a sense of history or artistic quality.



*A painted art piece celebrating the history of the city creates an engaging facade facing a parking lot.*



*An alley entrance to a nightclub becomes welcoming with the addition of an artistic wall mural.*



*Painted signs or wall murals are not appropriate on the street facade and should not cover architectural features.*

## Portable Signs

Portable signs are a way for businesses to offer more detailed information about their products or services and special events or sales, and when designed and executed creatively can add visual interest to the sidewalk. Sandwich boards, moveable signs and signs attached to or associated with the enclosure of a sidewalk café are all considered Portable Signs.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Portable Signs should be located on the café enclosure or on the sidewalk in the first 3 feet from the face of the storefront and should not block the pedestrian right-of-way.
- The design of freestanding Portable Signs should be stable and able to withstand normal wind conditions. Use durable materials like wood or metal that weather well and have a pleasing appearance, as opposed to plastic.
- For sandwich boards, creative handwritten messages, in chalk, for instance, convey a sense of quality, personal touch and authenticity. Frequently changing messages and artwork maintains pedestrian interest.

### Best Practices - Avoid

- Signs on café enclosures should be integrated or permanently fixed to the structure. Banners or temporary placards are not allowed.
- Corporate logos or product advertising are not allowed on Portable Signs.
- Generic plastic and weighted-base sign boards, such as those filled with water or sand, are not allowed.

### Benefits

- **Creative Portable Signs** are a more personal invitation to shoppers to come in to the store or restaurant, and provide a level of detail about the store offerings not available with other signage.



*A freestanding sign can be a creative solution for an 'open' sign.*



*Handwritten sandwich boards offer another opportunity for artistic expression.*



*Integral signage on café seating enclosures creates a refined, branded look and good pedestrian visibility.*



*Sidewalk enclosures should not be used for advertising or excessive messaging. Restrict message to business name.*



*Cheap plastic sandwich boards are not allowed.*





## Non-Traditional Storefronts

There are buildings within the District that do not have the traditional characteristics of a retail storefront: there are building facades without a typical open bay and storefront, but contain just punched openings or no openings at all along the street; there are facades with unique window styles that are not adaptable to the standard storefront recommendations found in this document; there are unique building facades that cannot be reasonably altered because of historic or structural concerns.

Turning these buildings into compelling retail requires creativity and unique solutions. Forcing standard retail guidelines and typical features onto non-traditional facades can create odd conditions and is not desirable, but there are some strategies that contribute to a vibrant retail environment that should be constant.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Use unique building features to create interest on the street.
- Use the best sign types for the particular building. Just because a sign type is allowed by code doesn't mean it is the best choice. The most effective and recognizable sign, even if it is smaller or is usually a secondary sign type, can sometimes be the best.
- Storefronts on the street should always be occupied by active pedestrian uses: retail, dining, galleries or services are appropriate.

### Best Practices - Avoid

- Signage and added elements such as awnings and canopies should not be placed on building facades that don't have the proper configuration or proportions for those elements.
- Avoid office and non-retail uses in storefronts. In the event that office or other professional uses are on the street, their storefronts should comply with these retail guidelines in order to keep a continuous interesting street facade.



*New retail in an old manufacturing building uses the proportions of the existing architecture to inform the renovated storefront design.*



*A modern storefront and materials provide an interesting counterpoint to historic architecture.*



*A creative storefront added to an old auto garage building is a play on garage door proportions.*



*A window added to the secondary facade of a building uses paint to create a visually cohesive storefront.*



## Non-Traditional Storefronts

### Best Practices - Avoid (continued)

- Signs are most effective when shoppers know where to look for them - avoid signs located too high or in tight spaces on buildings that don't have traditional sign areas.

### New Construction

New development and construction of retail properties should conform to the zoning and form-based codes in place in Iowa City, as well as the guidelines in this document. The recommendations and encouraged best practices in the Guidelines are applicable to modern retail facades as well as traditional configurations. The items described below are key design issues that are vitally important to retail.

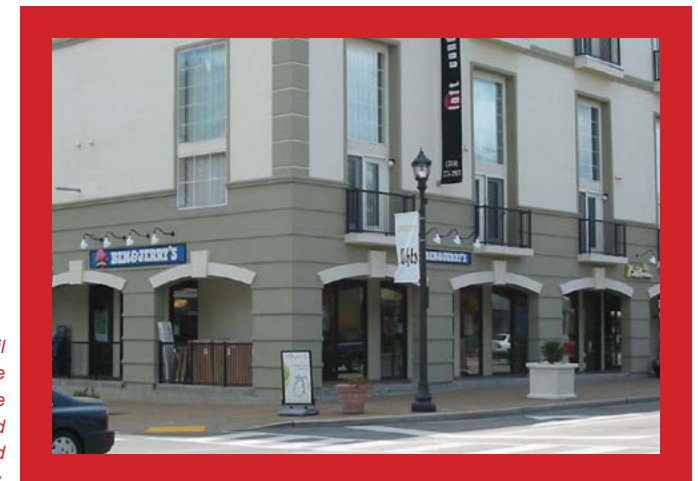
New development should address the needs of retail uses along the street facade. Planning facade areas and building details to accommodate retailer signage is critical to both retailer success and good building design. Treating signage as an afterthought to the overall design of the building often results in poor signage that detracts from the aesthetics of the building and makes the spaces more difficult to lease to desirable tenants. It is in the best interest of the developer and architect to plan ahead for these needs. This does not mean adding traditional features to an otherwise modern building, but it does require the designer to think about signage needs and create the opportunity for creative, effective signs in the context of their building design.



*Projecting signs are the only way to put signage on this ornate historic building - but they are highly effective.*



*Canopy signs are a highly visible way to provide signage for clean modern storefronts. Canopies help to call attention to the entry doors.*



*Street level retail arcades can be confusing because storefronts and entries are concealed from view.*

## New Construction

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Develop defined storefronts or window areas that enable retailers to create their own identity within the storefront. Whenever possible, designers should incorporate planning for sign placement in the overall design of the building.
- Street frontage should be mostly glass in order to maintain a visually interesting street facade for pedestrians. For larger retailers occupying extensive frontage, display windows with frequently changing merchandise should be used rather than window film or other coverings.
- Entry doors should be clearly apparent - use of canopies, eyebrows or other distinguishing elements in modern curtainwall buildings helps shoppers orient themselves on the street.

### Best Practices - Avoid

- Blank street walls without glass or signage should be avoided. Shoppers lose interest and feel uneasy when confronted with extensive blank facades.
- Avoid continuous, undifferentiated large storefronts without signage opportunities or clear entry doors.
- Non-pedestrian oriented signs, such as signs placed too high on the building facade or large signs more appropriate for automobile visibility are not appropriate in the District.



*These modern storefronts are mostly glass with no sign band, but consistent placement of projecting signs that work with the detail of the building creates a recognizable and effective sign program for pedestrians.*



*The interior spandrel panel behind this all-glass storefront provides a perfect sign band for the retailer.*



*Use of an eyebrow canopy above the doors in this curtainwall building creates a clearly identifiable entrance.*



*All glass storefronts can be challenging for signage, but this building has a generous solid wall above that allows signage above the entry door, and window signage can be used as a pattern across the storefront.*





The following examples are meant to describe how the recommended best practices could be used to transform storefronts, in variety of different ways and with different amounts of effort and cost.

### Improper sign and door placement

The existing canopy sign is above an ATM in the storefront, mini-blinds block views into the windows, and the entry door and address are in the adjacent storefront.

- Preserve the canopy feature and provide a more legible sign.
- Remove the ATM and renovate the storefront to place the entry door in the center below the canopy.
- Clean up the remainder of the storefront windows and provide simple window signage that is visible to pedestrians.

### Before



### After



### Solid materials infilling storefront

The storefront windows and transom have been covered up, and the proportion of the storefront is too short for the scale of the building.

- Remove stucco infill and replace with new storefront and transom windows, proportional to the building's architectural features.
- Create storefront entry doors centered on the storefront.
- Install a new projecting sign in a location consistent with the architectural features of the building.





**Before****After****Solid materials infilling storefront**

The storefront has been infilled and replaced with a punched window and residential-type door, and additional signage obscures most of the remaining glass.

- Remove brick infill and replace with a more appropriate glass storefront.
- Install new signage on sign band.

**Solid infill at storefront and metal roofing**

The storefront has been infilled or covered up and replaced with a punched window and residential-type door. Metal roofing has been inappropriately used to create a permanent awning.

- Remove stucco infill and metal roofing and replace with glass storefront.
- Install creative graphic window signage.
- Install new projecting sign.



**Before****After****Covered transoms and too much signage**

The transoms have been covered for signage, creating a darker store and detracting from the proportions of the building. The transom signs and window signs obscure too much of the storefront.

- Remove signage panel from transom area and replace with or restore glass transom windows.
- Remove clutter from windows to allow better visibility into store.
- Legible window signage and a projecting sign are more visible to pedestrians than the larger transom signs.

**Inappropriate sign placement**

Sometimes a bigger sign is the answer. This sign is out of proportion to the storefront and the sign band, and makes the overall composition seem out of balance.

- Use a projecting sign to capture pedestrian attention from the sidewalk and signal the entry.
- Create a fascia sign that is proportional to the overall storefront.





**Before****After****Inappropriate sign placement**

These two signs serve the same purpose, and neither provides visibility from down the sidewalk. The larger sign is out of proportion to the building decoration.

- Eliminate the larger fascia sign and replace with a projecting sign.

**Inappropriate sign placement and clutter**

There is so much wrong here, but the remedies are actually very simple. The entire storefront is too cluttered, covered with signage, mini-blinds and an air conditioner. The main signage is not proportional and has too much information. The barber pole is obsolete.

- Remove the obsolete sign. Remove the main sign panel and replace with an individual letter fascia sign.
- Remove AC, mini-blinds and clutter from window and door, and use simple window graphics to reinforce the store identity.







The Ped Mall is a unique asset for the District and the city as a whole. In this busy urban pedestrian corridor, retail exists alongside recreation, leisure, scholarly study, political discourse and revelry. This lush, park-like setting requires special retail considerations in addition to the overall recommendations of the Guidelines.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

- Storefront Projecting Signs that are highly visible to pedestrians walking along the edges of the Ped Mall are one of the most effective ways to use signage in this area.
- The tree canopy in the Ped Mall creates a slightly lower visibility level than that of a typical retail street. Signage on the storefront glass is more visible from across the 'street' than signage located above the storefront or in a sign band.
- Portable Signs, plantings, merchandise and furnishings on the sidewalk are even more important here to attract the attention of pedestrians.

### Best Practices - Avoid

- Larger signs that are higher on the building, while not prohibited in the Ped Mall (unless prohibited by the sign code or elsewhere in the Guidelines) are not as effective in this area because of the tree canopy.
- Large expanses of blank wall or darkened storefronts should be avoided. Safety in this all-pedestrian area, especially with the many trees and planter walls, is very keyed to lighted windows and the perception of 'eyes on the street' created by continuous illuminated storefronts.



*The tree canopy in the Ped Mall contributes to the character of the place, but it lowers the visibility of the upper facade of buildings, making window signage and projecting signage close to the storefront more effective.*



*Signage at eye level in the display window will be more visible across the Ped Mall.*



*Projecting Storefront Signs are highly visible to pedestrians.*



*Portable sandwich boards are especially effective on the Ped Mall.*

The alleys in the District have potential not only as interesting and culturally/artistically relevant pedestrian options, but as locations for more intimate, creative and eclectic retail. There will always be room in any downtown for the off-the-beaten-path, 'in the know', hidden destination. Creativity thrives on the side street and in the less mainstream area. Alleys provide opportunities for public art, less expensive real estate and edgier offerings.

The signage, lighting and storefront requirements in alleys are different by necessity – alleys are places of infrastructure, utility and practicality. Large expanses of glass are vulnerable to vandals, or simply stray debris from a garbage truck; large building signs would face blank walls, rather than shoppers on the other side of the street; and part of the attraction of the alley store is the mystique of what's behind that solid door.

Some alley retail has been created by using the back room or area of street-facing retail - allowing the alley retail to be accessed both from the back of the larger store and from the alley door. This can be advantageous for both retailers, allowing sub-leases for spaces that are too large and greater safety for smaller alley businesses.

### Best Practices - Encouraged

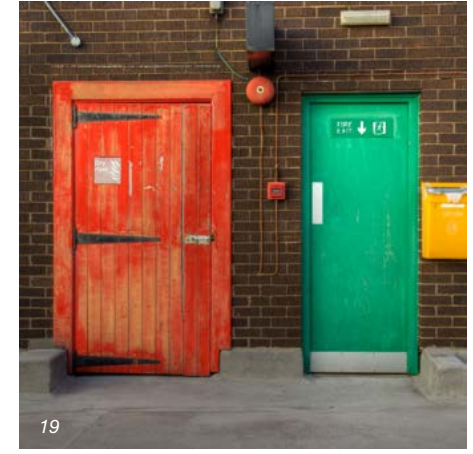
- Wall murals, painted signs and artistic elements can enliven alley environments.
- Creative and craft-oriented retail, start-up businesses and highly-focused specialty shops may be appropriate in alleys.

### Best Practices - Avoid

- Materials and elements that are not durable enough for the abusive alley environment.
- Signs that project into the vehicular pathway of the alley.



18 Wall murals and other creative installations can serve to provide visibility for businesses and enliven the alley environment.



19 Since glass storefronts don't exist in alleys, doors can be painted bright colors to draw attention.



20 Color and creative graphics can offset the oftentimes bleak quality of an alley.



21 Adding plant material creates a more friendly environment.





All photos provided by Kiku Obata & Company except as identified below.

1. Mid-West Living Magazine  
<http://www.midwestliving.com/travel/iowa/20-top-things-to-do-iowa/?page=16>
2. Linn Street, Iowa City  
Michael Stenerson  
Courtesy Iowa City Downtown District
3. Manorcore  
<http://www.manorcore.com/>
4. Ashland & Montrose Cleaners  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/vxla/4806483168/vxla>  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/vxla/>
5. IMG\_8057  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/roberttbell/5965480877/>  
Robert Bell  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/roberttbell/>
6. Constant Craving  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/rutlo/3106414663/>  
iMatthew Rutledge  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/rutlo/>
7. Cast Iron Storefront In Cairo, IL  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/pasa/7300011184/>  
Paul Sableman  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/pasa/>
8. P2086855  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/fontshop/4555354543/>  
fontshop  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/fontshop/>
9. Great Moments in Store Naming salon of ugly  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/cogdog/18793047696/>  
Alan Levine  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/cogdog/>
10. Retail California Pizza Kitchen  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/86530412@N02/8404052136>  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/86530412@N02/>
11. P1040895  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/accordionguy/2609751291/>  
Joey DeVillia  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/accordionguy/>
12. P2086919  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/fontshop/4555369047/>  
Fontshop  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/fontshop/>
13. Signs  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/aloha75/7281614816/>  
Sam Howzit  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/aloha75/>
14. Banner Day  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/hankzby/7093975859/>  
Henry Zbyszynski  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/hankzby/>
15. Café Sacher  
[https://www.flickr.com/photos/shisho\\_1975/9443798874/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/shisho_1975/9443798874/)  
Shinji W  
[https://www.flickr.com/people/shisho\\_1975/](https://www.flickr.com/people/shisho_1975/)
16. Plaza Cleaners. Typewriters Sales & Service.  
Ravenswood  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/vxla/4805857125/>  
vxla  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/vxla/>
17. Sidewalk café  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/walkingsf/18817092262/>  
Eric Fischer  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/walkingsf/>
18. Pitonul SRL  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/brinzei/6796261917/>  
Paul Chiorean  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/brinzei/>
19. The Doors  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/djsosumi/3745652273/>  
Paul Nuttall  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/djsosumi/>
20. Shoe string  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/52544814@N00/21607035742/in/photolist-yVkGX1-akPX9Y>  
Keppet  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/52544814@N00/>
21. vines in the alley  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/15977536@N06/5069987246/in/photolist-8J21zd>  
lcethim  
<https://www.flickr.com/people/15977536@N06/>
22. The Globe sign for TQ3081  
<http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/4498466>



### Merchandising

VMSD (Visual Merchandising Store Design) is a retail industry publication that acts as a resource for retailers and design professionals. They regularly publish competition winning designs and information on merchandising trends.

<http://www.vmsd.com/projects/window-displays>

### Storefronts

The National Park Service and the Trust for Historic Preservation have many resources available related to storefronts, and state historic agencies can be a good reference as well.

#### Identifying architectural character

<http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/17-architectural-character.htm>

<https://www.illinois.gov/ihpa/Preserve/mid-century/Documents/modern-storefront-glossary.pdf>

#### Preserving historic storefronts and details

<http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/11-storefronts.htm>

[http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/standguide/preserve/preserve\\_storefronts.htm](http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/standguide/preserve/preserve_storefronts.htm)

<http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/rehab/store01.htm>

### City of Iowa City

#### Sidewalk Cafés

<https://icgov.org/city-government/departments-and-divisions/public-works/administration>