

COMMERCIAL STANDARDS

4

PRESERVING HISTORIC COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

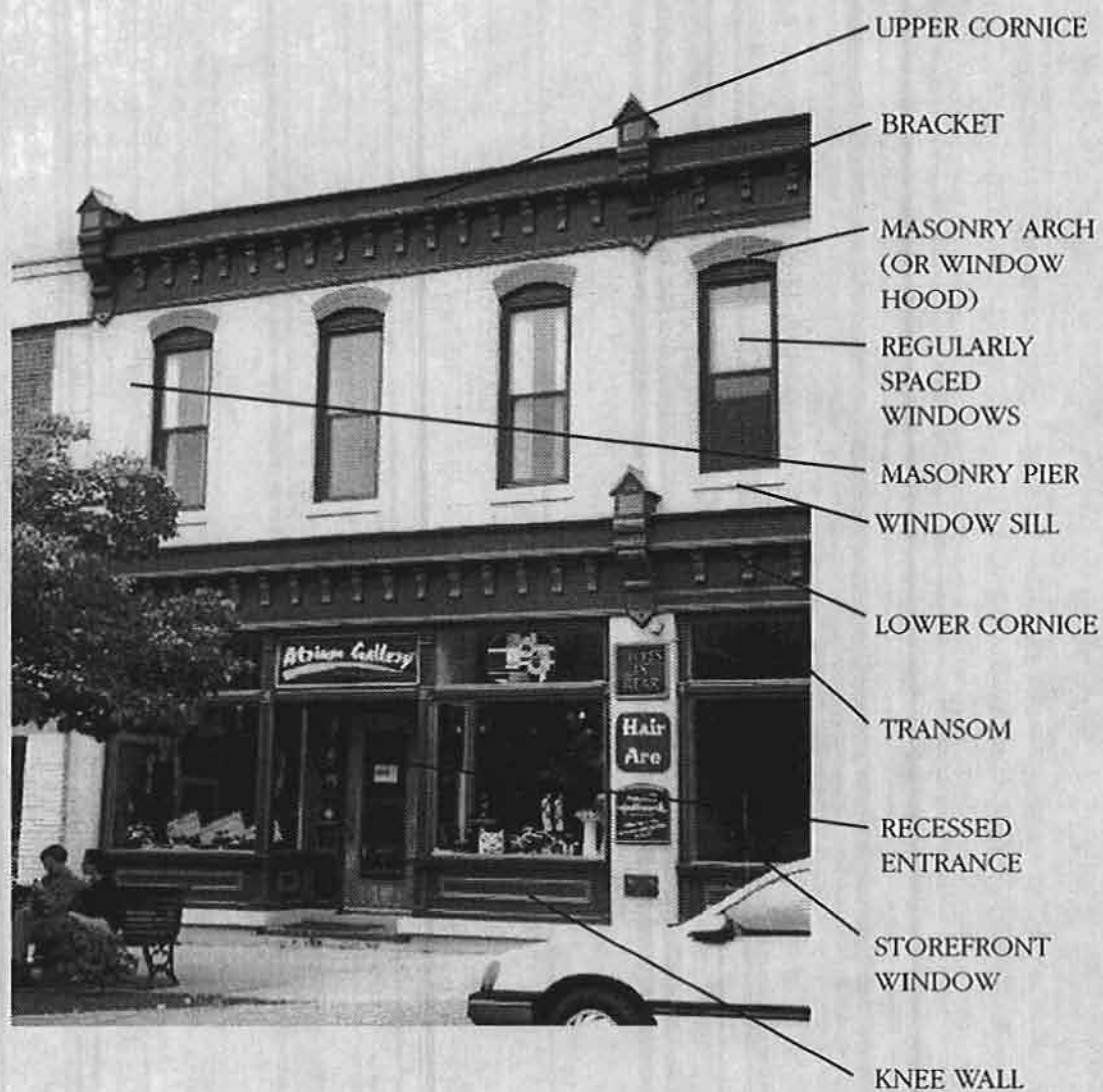
The commercial areas in the Northville Historic District have undergone the most changes. Historic 19th century buildings are clustered in the commercial blocks near Center Street and Main Street. The further one goes from the intersection of Center Street and Main Street the more new (post 1950) construction exists. Residential, industrial, and religious buildings are interspersed with the commercial buildings.

Although perhaps not pristine, Northville's mix of building styles and uses creates a very positive downtown image. Mixed use leads to more social and economic activity. The range of styles is a sign of growth and change over the years, and it provides visual interest. Development is encouraged, but first and foremost, the goal of the Historic District Ordinance is to maintain, preserve and ideally to restore Northville's remaining historic commercial buildings.

The historic core should be strengthened and made more visually coherent so that it remains a traditional "downtown" with pedestrian orientation. In the following section, preservation issues specific to traditional commercial buildings are presented in detail.

The examples and photos included in this section show the range of design approaches and existing conditions within the Historic District. The intention is not to single out, promote, or criticize building owners or properties, but rather to use local and real-life examples to help illustrate the issues where possible.

Glossary



Preserving Storefronts

The ground level of the commercial facade is the storefront. Its purpose is to display merchant wares and to provide a welcoming entry to the customer. Original storefronts were designed with simplicity in mind so that busy design elements would not detract from merchandise. Simple materials like wood and glass were commonly used to harmonize with the upper portion of the building.

The storefront window area is typically composed vertically of three parts: a kick panel (or "kneewall") at the bottom, large display windows between, and transom windows above. Elements of design within the three areas include: the cornice, sign panel, display windows, recessed entry, and canvas awnings.

Many original storefronts have been lost behind later remodeling, which has altered the simple design pattern in fundamental ways such as making the entry door flush, using inappropriate materials or glazing, covering the windows, replacing windows with contemporary or mismatched historic types, or destroying the kneewall.

Storefront Guidelines

- Do not remove or alter existing historic storefront elements.
- If possible, restore the storefront to its original design based on historic descriptions or photographs. For new storefronts, a traditional design that harmonizes with the rest of the building and neighboring structures is also acceptable. (See "New Commercial Construction.")
- Keep existing storefront glazing. If repairs are necessary, replace glazing with clear, untinted glass.
- Do not install window air conditioners or other mechanical devices in the storefront.
- Do not install security grilles over storefront windows.



The historic storefront of this building has been filled in with masonry. Lack of storefront glazing discourages pedestrian involvement.

Preserving the Setback

Storefronts in a commercial district were traditionally built in rows along the sidewalk edge. The effect of this was twofold: pedestrians found it easy to see displays in the store windows and, most importantly, a consistent line of facades was maintained along the length of the street so that the buildings looked like they belonged together. This established an identity for the downtown.

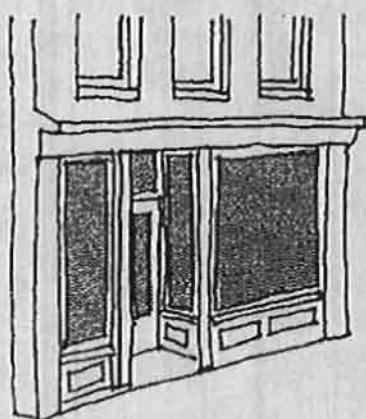
The setback is probably the most important architectural feature to preserve. It is also one of the most important design issues for new construction and additions. (See the following section, "Commercial Additions and New Buildings.")

Setback Preservation Guidelines

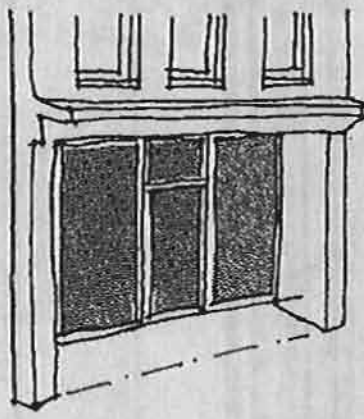
- Do not remove the historic front wall or storefront windows.
- The front wall (both basement and first floor level) should not be moved behind the line of the front facade of the building.
- The knee high wall below the storefront windows contributes to the overall proportions of the building and provides a solid connection between the building and the sidewalk. Historic kneewalls should be preserved. They should not be replaced by glass, open stairwells, or sunken planters.



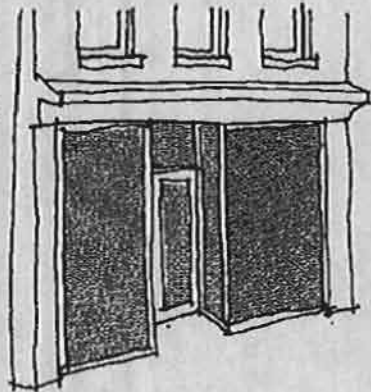
The storefront of this building has been completely removed. The setback of the new storefront is out of alignment. To preserve the historic setback, do not remove the front wall or storefront.



A recessed entry is part of a historic storefront, but the majority of the storefront, especially the kneewall, is located in line with the front wall.



Do not remove the historic storefront. A fully recessed storefront is not appropriate.



Do not remove the historic kneewall. Even if located in line with the front of the building, full height glazing is not appropriate.

Preserving Windows

The goal of the *Standards* is to preserve, maintain, or restore existing historic windows wherever possible. The size and shape of the original openings should be preserved so that the configuration of the facade is not changed. The original materials should be retained, repaired or duplicated. In residential and commercial buildings, window replacement and modifications are most frequently proposed because of maintenance concerns, thermal performance, style, or function. Thermal performance is becoming more of an issue due to Model Energy Code Requirements. Windows are character defining architectural features that will be carefully regulated. There must be a balance of thermal performance and historic appropriateness.

Window openings add variety and texture to exterior walls. The appropriate size of the windows in relationship to the walls gives scale and proportion to the facade. Window spacing and pattern lends rhythm and balance to the facade design. In commercial buildings, windows are the primary feature of the storefront. Inappropriate storefront and upper window treatments can disrupt the visual continuity along the streetfront, limit views, and discourage pedestrian access.

Window details cannot be ignored. Small details are repeated, and add up to a major impact on the building image. Sash width, muntin profiles, size and type of glass, and hardware are all details that matter. Commercial buildings often have two (or more) types of windows. For instance, the storefront windows are large picture windows in narrow wood or metal frames. In contrast, the second floor windows may be tall and narrow wood double hung windows with true divided lights. The different treatments of these windows should not be intermixed.

Commercial buildings are also more likely to have unusual and difficult to replace window designs such as steel casement windows or very large double hung windows. Substitution of these commercial types with residential styled or sized windows is not appropriate. For an illustrated list of window components, see part 5, "Preserving Building Materials."

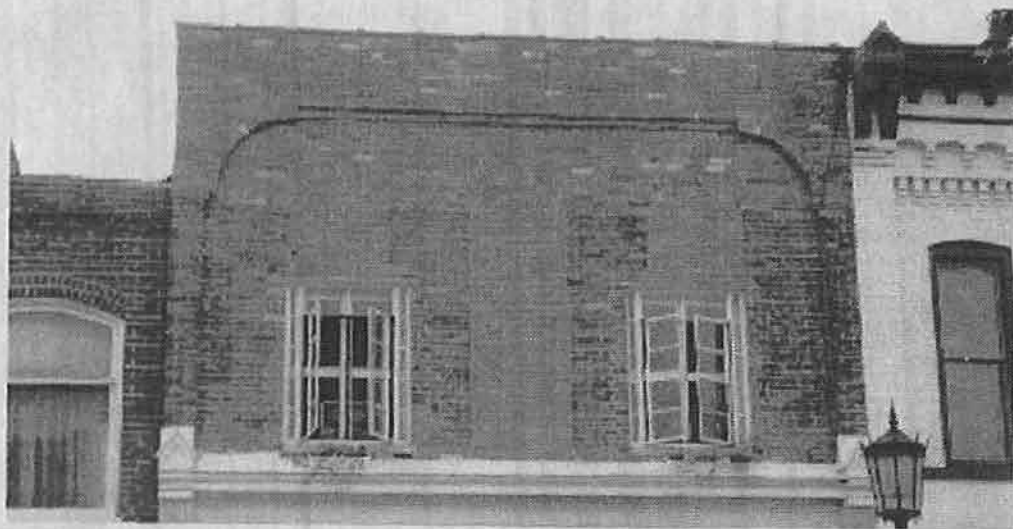
Window Guidelines

- Retain and repair existing window openings including the window sash, glass, lintels, sills, architraves, shutters, hoods, and hardware. Wholesale replacement of existing windows is strongly discouraged and should not be undertaken unless they are deteriorated beyond the point of repair. Refer to "Preserving Building Materials" for more information about preserving and maintaining historic windows.
- If windows are beyond repair, then any replacement window must match the design, size, proportions, and profile of the original windows. Install replacement windows in the same relationship to the exterior wall as the original sash. Some minor variation may be acceptable, upon review by the HDC. Vinyl or aluminum clad replacement windows may be approved if such windows match the size, proportions, and profiles of the historic windows.
- No glass block or tinted, mirrored, opaque, or colored glass is permitted, unless it is the historic glazing type.

- No new window openings into the principal elevations, no enlargement or reduction of original window openings, and no infill of original window openings is permitted.
- Do not install security bars over windows.
- Do not install inappropriate new window features such as aluminum storm and screen windows; insulating glass that requires the removal of original windows; awnings made of plastic or metal stripping; or fake shutters.
- Do not use interior grilles, grilles between layers of insulating glass, or stenciled mullions in lieu of true divided lights or exterior mullions.
- Do not install windows historically used on upper levels at the storefront level. Do not install storefront windows on the upper levels.



The original steel windows have been preserved in the doorway. The upper level windows are inappropriate replacements. The sash do not match the originals in profile or color. Opaque, colored glass should not be used.



The historic window openings have been filled in several times with mismatched masonry. The original arrangement of three tall narrow windows is still visible. The new windows do not match the historic size, material, or rhythm.

Preserving Cornices

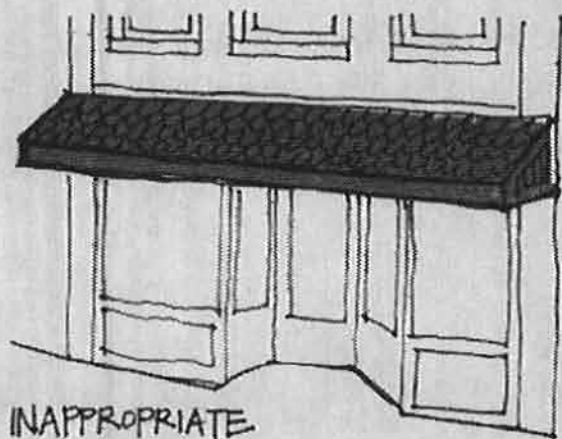
Cornices are projecting, horizontal, decorative bands running the width of the building. Commercial buildings usually had two of them: a large one capping the very top of the facade and a smaller one above the storefront. The upper cornice was larger, more intricate, and projected more than the storefront cornice which was clearly secondary in the overall design. Cornices were constructed of a variety of materials including masonry, metal, wood, and terracotta. Freestanding commercial buildings also had cornices.

Because so much detail is concentrated in the cornices, and because they could be detailed in many architectural styles, cornices are character defining elements which should be preserved. Many cornices have been removed for stylistic preferences and many others were removed because they deteriorated and became real or perceived maintenance problems.

Early to mid 20th century commercial buildings, of which there many in Northville, were also designed with cornices. Often they did not project, and were pared down to a simple limestone cap and a smooth band between the storefront and upper levels. Even so, these cornices articulate the facade, continue horizontal elements on the block, and divide the larger building mass into smaller segments. These cornices should also be preserved.

Cornice Guidelines

- Do not remove or enclose existing historic cornices.
- Reconstruct cornices based on historic photographs, rather than personal preference or availability of "stock" moldings.
- Repair cornices instead of removing them. Cornice deterioration is often linked to roofing problems or parapet wall problems. Coordinate cornice repairs with repair of the roofing, flashing, and mortar joints along parapet walls.
- Do not install an elaborate upper cornice at the storefront cornice level.
- Do not substitute a small roof or permanent awning for the lower cornice.
- Do not add historically styled cornices to a building that never had them.



A traditional lower cornice with canvas awning should not be replaced with a permanent roof structure.



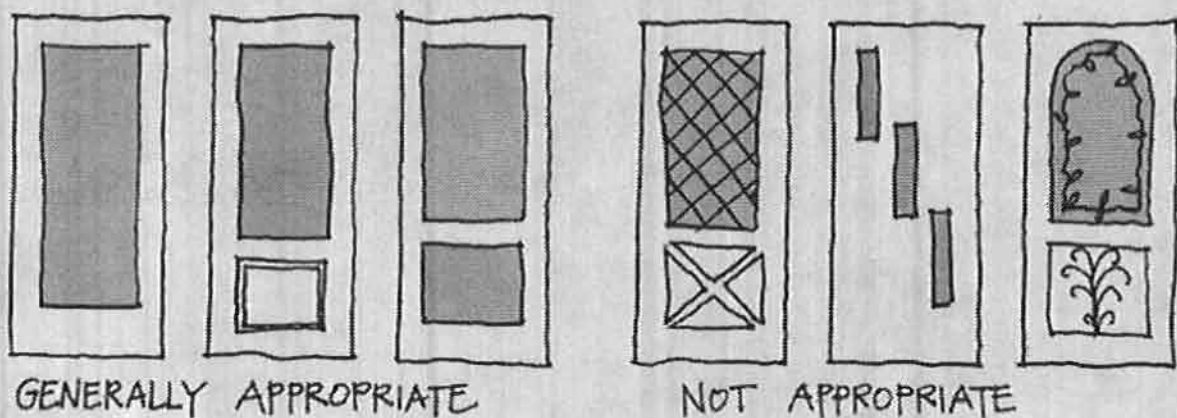
A well preserved upper cornice is a major character defining feature.

Preserving Commercial Doors

The door is an important element that is seen closely by every customer or visitor. The entry is the focal point of a facade and the historic tone of the building is affected by the authenticity of the door. Door choice will be reviewed by the HDC.

There are two distinct types of historic commercial doors. The storefront door was usually a large glass panel, recessed between the display windows. Like the rest of the storefront, the door was usually simple and did not compete with the merchandise in the window. The separate entrance to the upper levels was a wood door flush with the street. Sometimes that door had a glass panel.

It can be very tempting to replace a straightforward historic door with an inappropriate door that has beveled glass, stained glass, or carving because it "seems" more historic. Hollow metal doors and screen doors are other frequently proposed but inappropriate substitutions.



COMMERCIAL DOORS

Commercial Door Guidelines

- Retain original doors and door openings, including doors, casings, pediments, canopies and other door trim.
- Do not remove existing doors and hardware if they can be restored or repaired. If a door must be replaced, replace it with a new door built with the same design and proportions as the original.
- Avoid leaded or stained glass in entry doors unless there is evidence that the original door had it. Smooth glass areas can be used for painted or etched signs.
- No aluminum storm or screen doors are permitted.
- No enlargement of original door openings is allowed unless required by Barrier Free code.
- No infill, reduction, or relocation of original door openings is allowed.

Preserving Ornament

Decorative details like applied wood trim, cornerstones, and window hoods are part of what defines a building's style. They also add texture and human scale to large commercial buildings. Existing historic ornament should be preserved or restored. Addition of new ornament is also regulated. (See "Commercial Additions and New Construction: Details.")

Ornament Guidelines

- Do not remove historic ornament. Preserve and repair existing historic ornament.
- When repairs are not possible, replace with ornaments that match the historic in size, profile, and material.
- Restore ornament based on photographic evidence rather than on individual taste, or what is available "in stock."
- Use actual architectural ornamentation, not symbols of history like flags or eagles. Don't substitute corporate logos for architectural details.
- Do not add ornament that was never a part of the design.
- Do not enclose ornament with aluminum, etc., or coat it with stucco, tar, etc.
- Do not cut into ornament to install awnings, signs, or light fixtures.



Historic ornament (the upper cornice and possibly the window hoods) has been removed. The eagles add some decoration, but are not historically accurate. The original windows have been replaced with windows that are too small for the original opening.



The cornice at left appears to be original. The cornice at right is a reconstruction that seems accurate on the whole. Always base reconstructed ornament on photographic evidence rather than conjecture. For instance, the semicircular elements over the window hoods on the right are questionable.

Preserving Atypical Styles

The Northville Historic District encompasses a wide range of styles, some of which are not popularly considered "historic." If the buildings are over 50 years old, they may be eligible for individual designation. "Future historic" buildings are those which are distinctive or representative buildings from the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's. Even simple 50's Modern buildings are examples of their time, and changes to them now may be regretted later. These atypical styles within the district are protected and will be reviewed by the HDC.

Atypical Styles Guidelines

- Do not turn a Modern building into a historic looking building by adding inappropriate historic details that were never a part of the building.
- Evaluate the key architectural features as if the building were historic. For example, what is the character of the roof, windows, and ornament?
- Retain the original character defining features such as windows, doors, and roof line, even if they are not highly ornamental.



A sensitive re-use for this modern building. The awnings are not historically accurate details but the remainder has been kept largely intact.



Simple modern buildings like this should be preserved and not "historicized" by adding ornament or changing the roofline.

COMMERCIAL ADDITIONS AND NEW CONSTRUCTION

There are several large open lots in the downtown historic district which present opportunities to expand business and commercial development. There are a few possibilities for infill construction (construction between two buildings in a commercial block). Changing or growing businesses may need to add to or modify or expand their existing historic buildings. Business, advertising, and merchandising are not the same today as they were in the 19th century, and competition with malls is keen.

To maintain the identity of downtown Northville, which is an identity that draws people downtown and supports the economy, development is regulated by the combination of the zoning ordinance, the building code and the *Historic District Standards*.

Development Objectives

The Historic District Ordinance does not prohibit additions or new buildings. Much of the downtown is included in the historic district, and consequently new development will have to be carefully monitored in order to retain the historic character, pedestrian scale and identity of downtown.

Variety

A mix of land use is essential to support the historic district and the downtown in general. Shops, business and personal services, restaurants and entertainment are all currently available within the historic district. Although the Historic District Commission encourages varied use and uses that do not adversely affect the historic architecture, land use is regulated by the Zoning Ordinance.

Streetscape Amenities

The streetscape is the overall downtown environment. It is a combination of buildings, planting, paving, benches, planters, lighting, and street signs. Streetscape amenities are provided through the Downtown Development Authority (DDA). The DDA renovated the streetscape in the historic district in the early 1980's. The renovations have been well received.

In the historic district, the amenities should be compatible with the era of surrounding area and not so many as to obscure the buildings or interfere with circulation.

Pedestrian Orientation

The pedestrian scale of Northville's central business district is one of its greatest assets. The ability to walk from business to business is part of what attracts retail, entertainment, and business activity. The activity in turn attracts new residential and commercial development. Pedestrian orientation is defined and reinforced by:

- The scale, height, and detail of older buildings
- The location of building fronts on the property line (setback) which creates a continuous offering of retail windows and doors along the street
- The presence of open spaces for relaxation and public gathering
- Separation of high speed automobile traffic and pedestrian traffic
- Streetscape amenities like benches, planters, and lighting

In the Northville Historic District, the biggest threats to pedestrian orientation are over-scaled new buildings and increasing conflicts between automobile traffic and pedestrian circulation. Implementation of the *Historic District Standards* will reduce the number of over-scaled developments.

Parking

There are three types of parking within the historic district: parking decks, surface lots, and curbside parking. Parking decks are problematic in a historic district. Given the nature of their function, they are not pedestrian oriented structures. Given the nature of the construction they are generally very large and offer few opportunities for using traditional architectural elements. Parking decks can be made less obtrusive by limiting the height and mass as with other new construction in the historic district. Although historic detailing is not appropriate, a mix of traditional materials such as brick and stone, with the contemporary materials like steel and concrete helps to ease the contrast between new and old.

There are many convenient surface lots in the district. When surface lots are located in front of buildings, the pedestrian relationship to the storefront is lost. When surface lots are located at the fringes of the district, the link between the residential areas and commercial areas suffers. The present arrangement that places surface lots behind the wall of commercial buildings is a good one. The lots are convenient to businesses, but are visually "out of the way."

Many curbside parking spots in the historic district were removed to widen the sidewalks, however this type of parking is in keeping with the goals of the Historic District Standards. Curbside parking is a necessity for business and in some ways historically correct. The presence of transportation (horses, carriages, cars) has always been a part of the traditional main street environment.

General Design Issues

The *Standards* are meant to balance the development objectives with preservation of downtown historic character. They do not require using any one style for the construction of an addition or new building. Architectural compatibility is dependent on taking into consideration the physical aspects that influence design: setback, spacing, proportion, mass, height, rhythm, materials, and details will be carefully reviewed. These are the same design qualities that determine residential compatibility, but the application and examples differ in commercial applications.

Setback and Spacing

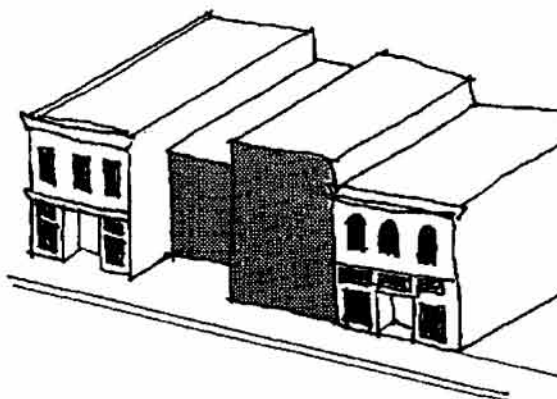
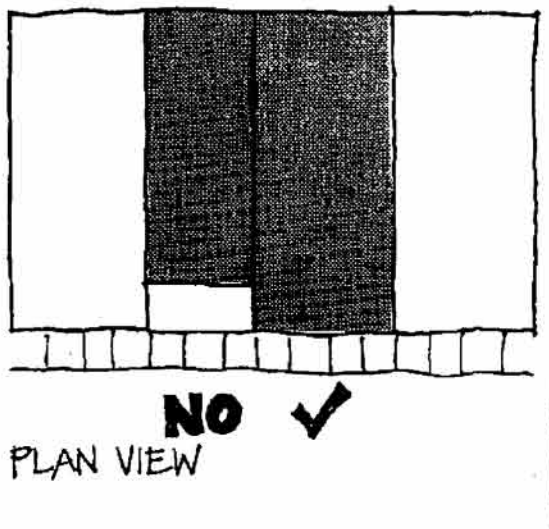
Setbacks are the distance that a building must be located behind the property line. Setbacks are regulated by the Northville Zoning Ordinance. They vary from area to area and are determined by the zoning of the piece of property. The front setback is the distance behind the front (usually street facing) property line. Side and rear setbacks are also regulated.

A consistent setback gives continuity to commercial districts and is a major character defining element of the downtown streetscape. As discussed in the residential standards, residential buildings are generally set back a distance from the street, with spaces in between buildings. In contrast, the character of a traditional commercial area depends on preserving a solid row of buildings along the sidewalk. The typical modern practice of locating parking between the street and the front of the building is not in keeping with a traditional downtown setback.

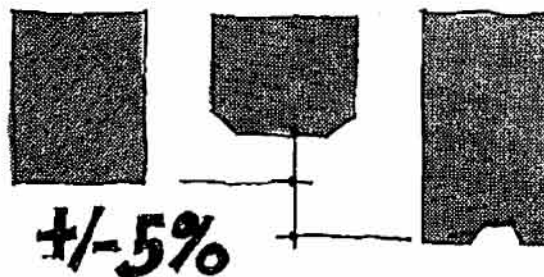
Within the Northville Historic District, the setback approval process may be more strict than the Zoning Ordinance, or it may be less strict. The goal of the HDC review is to preserve the existing rhythm and continuity of the street.

Setback Guidelines

- Maintain the line of storefronts at the sidewalk edge. Locate the front facade of freestanding buildings in the same plane as the facades of adjacent buildings.
- Setbacks may be appropriate and allowable on vehicular streets if diverse siting already exists.
- Access to parking facilities should be from alleys when possible, reserving street frontage for building facades and thereby increasing pedestrian interest.
- Fully recessed commercial facades with no elements at the line of the traditional storefront are not permitted in commercial blocks.
- Recessed entrances have some historical precedent in twentieth century commercial design, and are permitted as long as they are flanked by display windows extending to the storefront.
- Recessed facades used for outdoor dining or for access to the basement are discouraged. In some cases a recessed facade may be permitted if elements such as columns, kneewalls, and soffits are maintained at the line of the traditional storefront and if those elements reflect the traditional relationship between solid and void.
- No additions that project into or above the established historic setback are permitted.



New construction in a commercial block should be in exact alignment with other buildings. Usually this is right at the edge of the sidewalk.



In areas with freestanding buildings that have a greater setback, some variation in the setback (within zoning requirements) is allowed.

Mass

Mass is the overall volume, or bulk, of the building. In order to maintain pedestrian orientation and a sense of scale that is compatible with the existing character of downtown Northville, the apparent bulk of large, new buildings must be reduced. This can be done by breaking the architectural volume into smaller components through variations in building height, roof lines, and detailing.

Mass Guidelines

- Break large forms into smaller, varied masses which are common on most downtown buildings.
- Reinforce the established horizontal lines of facades in the block. Align cornices, upper story windows, and storefront windows. Align storefront heights with others on the block.
- Express the location of each floor with horizontal elements on the facade of the building.
- Repeat the established rhythm of building widths in the block and minimize long expanses of unbroken horizontal building elements.
- Use design elements such as columns and pilasters, or changes in color or material to express this rhythm.
- Maintain traditional established breaks that occur between buildings (such as alleys.)



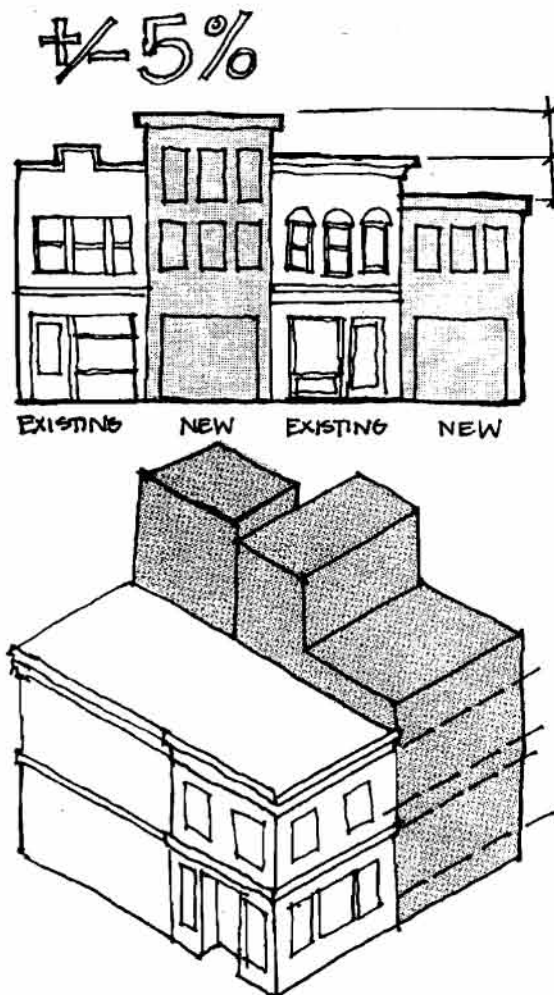
This large building has been divided into smaller masses. The overall effect of the building is still very massive because of the scale, height, and homogeneity of materials in relationship to the neighboring buildings.

Height

Height is the actual dimension from the ground to the top of the building. Historic buildings in Northville are one, two, or three stories. New development of over three stories may be in conflict with the historic character. Actual height and perceived height are sometimes different. A five story building, not generally considered “high rise” may appear much taller if it is adjacent to one story commercial buildings, or worse, when it is adjacent to residential construction. Conversely, a one story infill building can be lost between three story buildings in a solid commercial block.

Height Guidelines

- The proposed roof shape and skyline should relate to the existing adjacent structures.
- The proposed highest height should be within 5% of the average height of the existing structures within a 300 feet radius.
- Retain the horizontal lines of the facades on the block.
- Consider the characteristics of the sun and provide a terraced profile to avoid blocking sun.
- Provide stepped facades to avoid shading sidewalks and public spaces, and to avoid down-draft and wind tunnel effects.
- Taller buildings should be designed to appear to be the same height as their historic neighbors from the pedestrian or street level when viewed. This can sometimes be accomplished by designing incremental transitions in height (steps) between new and existing buildings.
- Buildings that are too short are also not compatible.



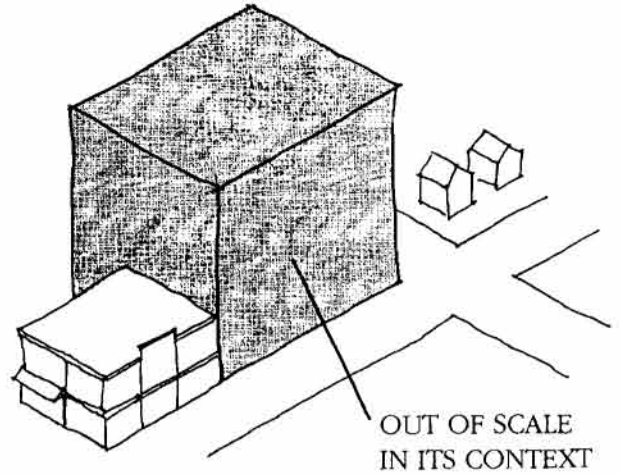
Step new buildings up and back from the streetfront. Continue the dominant horizontal lines (such as the lower cornice, window sills, storefront height, and kneewall) from the adjacent historic buildings.

Scale

Scale is the human perception of the size of an object relative to other objects. Scale varies with function and location. The perception of scale is influenced by height and the proportion of building elements.

Scale Guidelines

- New construction and additions should be compatible with the scale of commercial buildings. Where they are adjacent to residential buildings, the scale should not overwhelm the residential building.
- Residential scale is generally not appropriate within the historic commercial district except where homes have been converted to business use.
- Monumental scale is also not appropriate within the historic district.
- Refer to "Height" and "Proportion" for additional guidelines related to scale.



RESIDENTIAL SCALE



COMMERCIAL SCALE



MONUMENTAL SCALE

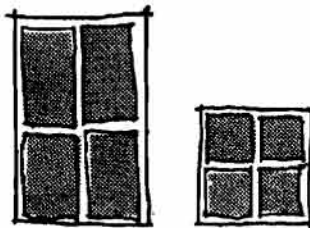
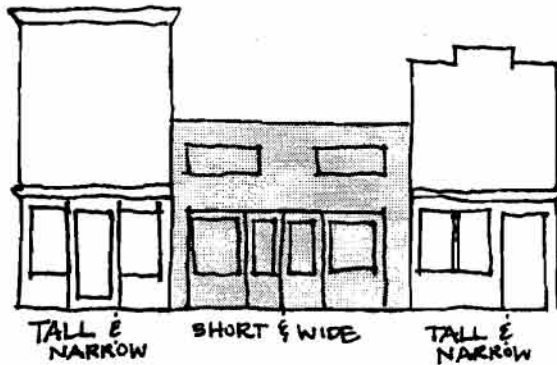
Proportion

Proportion is the relationship between actual dimensions of elements. A design element such as cornice or window may have the same shape as adjacent cornices, but may appear out of proportion because the dimensional relationships are not the same.

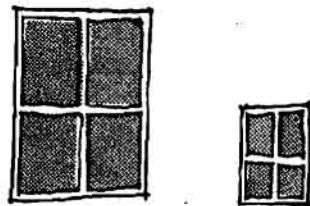
Building materials have physical proportional limits based on their strength. Elements may appear out of proportion if it looks as if the material has been stretched close to, or beyond, its physical limits.

Proportion Guidelines

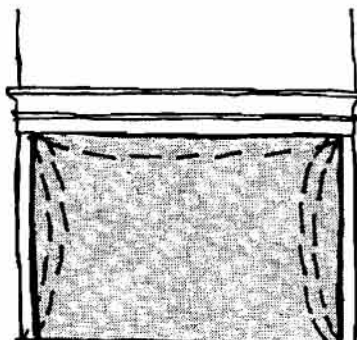
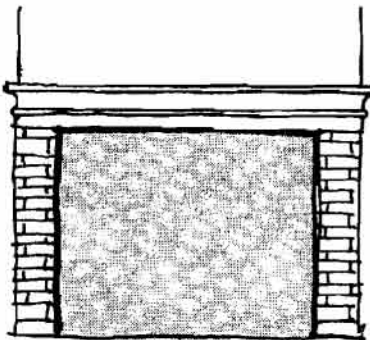
- The relationship of the height to the width of the front facade should be consistent with the pattern established by existing adjacent structures.
- The relationship of the height to the width of windows, doors, and other openings should be consistent with the pattern established by existing adjacent structures.
- The proportion of ornamental elements such as cornices, window hoods, brackets, and pediments should be consistent with historic commercial buildings.
- Materials used in contemporary commercial construction may be capable of more structurally than they are visually. Opening sizes and column heights should be based on adjacent historic examples, not on engineering limits alone.



Different proportion, different size



Different size, same proportion



The masonry pier on the left looks as if it can support the building above. The thin steel columns on the right look like they might bend even though they may be structurally capable of supporting the building.

Hierarchy

Hierarchy is a means of defining the importance of an architectural element by its size, shape, or placement relative to the other forms. Visual hierarchy helps orient the user, whereas lack of hierarchy may confuse the user. This is especially important on commercial buildings, because the user is a customer who needs to find the entrance. In the historic district, a good hierarchical arrangement will put the emphasis on the historic building, rather than on the addition. Additions should be visually subordinate to the historic portions.

Hierarchy Guidelines

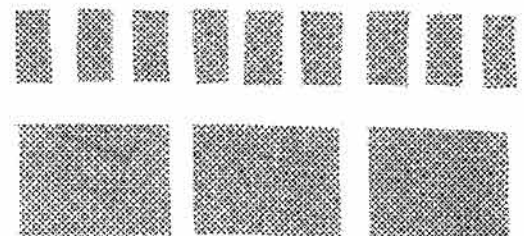
- Locate additions on the rear. (Refer to “Rear Facade Development.”)
- Set rooftop additions back from the facade.
- Apply less ornament to the subordinate addition.
- Do not engulf the historic building with additions.
- No additions that extend into or above the front setback are allowed.

Rhythm

Rhythm and pattern are created by the juxtaposition of repetitive elements in a design. Upper level windows, storefront columns, pilasters, brackets, and gables are some common commercial elements that are rhythmic. Rhythm gives variety to building surfaces and it helps divide walls and masses. This is important on large commercial facades.

Rhythm Guidelines

- The arrangement of solids and voids (walls and openings) and architectural features (ornament, columns, etc.) across the front facade should be consistent with the pattern established by existing adjacent structures.
- Reinforce the established pattern of upper story windows. Use similarly-proportioned windows or consider using other architectural elements (e.g. a change in materials or change in texture) to establish a similar rhythm.



A typical row of historic commercial buildings with the corresponding rhythm and proportion of the second floor windows and storefronts.

Materials

Materials influence the color, durability, pattern, scale, and proportion of a building. Texture is the nature of the surfaces and can be the result of the material selection, tooling, or shadow. Texture adds visual and tactile character.

Materials Guidelines

- The proposed construction materials and their textures should be the same type as those that have already been frequently used in existing adjacent structures (within 100 feet).
- Colors, whether of natural materials such as brick and stone, or applied colors such as paint, should relate to and complement the colors used on existing adjacent historic structures.
- Materials that are common in historic commercial buildings and are generally compatible include, but are not limited to: brick, stone, pressed metal, wood (for ornament) and clear glass.
- Materials that are not common for historic commercial buildings and which may not be compatible include, but are not limited to: exposed concrete block, cast in place concrete, enameled metal panels, split shakes, vertical board and batten siding, imitation stone, imitation stucco, vinyl siding, aluminum siding, or wood siding (except on historic residential buildings). Use of these materials will be reviewed on an individual basis.
- Aluminum and vinyl siding are specifically prohibited within the historic district. Applicants may petition the HDC for an exception.

Ornament

Character defining details of a style are, at minimum, those details listed in the "Architectural Styles" section in part One of the *Standards*. Details on additions and new construction should not be exact replicas of historic details. If details on an addition are imitations, the hierarchy between new building and old building becomes confused and viewers are given a false sense of history. The use of traditional historic commercial elements *in general*, such as upper and lower cornices, bulkheads, and a recessed entrance flanked by storefront windows is permitted and encouraged if the design is in keeping with "General Design Issues" and is not entirely imitative.

Ornament Guidelines

- The proposed details and ornament should be the same type as those that have already been frequently used on existing adjacent structures within a 300 feet radius. Their size shall be in pleasing proportion to the whole.
- Whereas in restoration and preservation new ornaments should match the existing exactly, variations in color, size, profile, and material may be used to differentiate an addition or infill construction from the original.
- Maintain the rhythm, proportion, and alignment of historic ornament while varying the color, size, or profile to differentiate new details from historic details.
- Do not use symbols of history, such as stars or eagles, as replacements for architectural detail.
- Do not add details to the historic building that were never there, even if they do look like other historic ornaments in the area, or if they would make the historic building and the addition "match."
- Do not use corporate logos instead of true architectural detail.
- Do not add or remove details to divide up a single historic building into slices based on tenant occupation. (See "Special Types of New Commercial Construction.")

Special Types of New Commercial Construction

Awnings

Retractable canvas awnings were a traditional feature of historic storefronts. They provided a covered space in front of the store to protect customers from the weather, shaded the interior of the store on hot summer days, and added color and a place to display the company name. Awnings on upper windows were difficult to remove and maintain and were much less common in commercial applications.

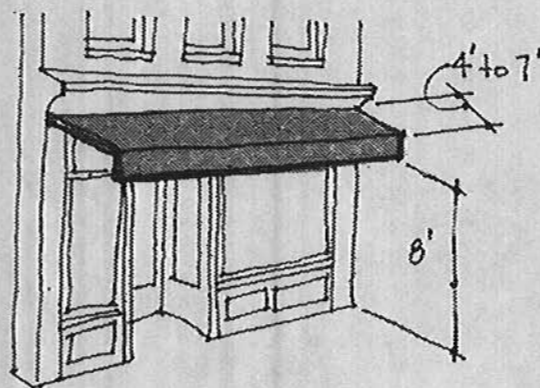
If carefully selected and designed, awnings can be installed in the historic district to perform these same functions. Many types of contemporary awnings are not appropriate and are not allowed within the historic district. Removal of existing non-compliant awnings is encouraged.

Awnings Guidelines

- A standard street-level awning should be mounted so that the valance is about eight feet above the sidewalk and projects out between four and seven feet from the building. A 12-inch valance flap is usually attached at the awning bar and can serve as a sign panel. The awning may be attached either just below the storefront cornice or between the transom and display windows. The awning should fit within the storefront opening.
- Awnings with a business name or logo are considered signs and are also regulated by the Northville Zoning Ordinance.
- No fiberglass, plastic, metal, "bubble" or backlit awnings (glowing awnings with internal light fixtures) are permitted.
- Awnings above the storefront level should be installed only if there is evidence to support they were used historically.



Backlit bubble awnings are not appropriate in the historic district. (No awnings are compatible with the classical style of this building.)



Signs

Signage is an important part of any business whose viability depends in part on projection of an image or identity. Business owners desire prominent signage and a location for distinguishing logos. The Historic District Commission is aware of this need. It is possible, however, to select signs that communicate the merchant's message while at the same time are compatible with the building's character and not in competition with the architecture.

Signs are regulated by the Northville Zoning Ordinance, Article 21. A sign permit must be obtained before installing a new sign (See Part 7, "Review Processes" for sample forms. The HDC will also review new signage to assure that it is compatible. The *Standards* within the historic district may be more strict than those in the zoning ordinance.

Sign Guidelines

- Historic signs add character and are interesting as cultural artifacts. Preservation of these signs is encouraged. (See Preservation Brief #25, *The Preservation of Historic Signs*.)
- Select signs that fit into the façade, rather than those that project from the façade.
- Backlit and internally lit signs and awnings are prohibited by the sign ordinance.
- Awnings that double as signs are discouraged.
- No rooftop signs are permitted.
- Neon and chaser light signs are generally not acceptable; however some of these existing signs may have become historic in their own right, and in that case should be preserved.

Good choices for signs include:

- Signs which are compatible with the character, style and colors of the building. Refer to page 4-21 of these *Standards* for more information regarding materials.
- Small, flat signs hanging perpendicular to the façade wall
- Long flat signs under the lower cornice
- A canvas awning with lettering on its front flap
- Sandwich-style A-frame or T-style signs. Signs in creative shapes that reflect the theme of the business are encouraged.
- Window display
- Painted or etched lettering on windows or doors
- Small (approx. 6" x 18"), unlit projecting signs over doorways

Sidewalk Sign Guidelines

- Signs made of painted wood (MDO board or similar) or metal that presents a finished appearance. Plywood, plastic or vinyl signs are discouraged, except for flush mounted adhesive lettering.
- Menu board signs, with area for writing "specials of the day," with part of the sign area used for permanent lettering identifying the business. All permanent and temporary lettering and artwork should be professionally painted or applied.
- Signs that contain foil, mirrors, or other reflective materials which could create hazards for motorists, bicyclists or pedestrians are not allowed.



The illuminated signs above the awnings are not in keeping with the Historic District Standards. The marquis, with its chaser lights is not strictly in accord with the Standards, and is clearly an addition to the building, but may have acquired local significance. The stenciled sign in the right hand window is an appropriate and sensitive sign.

Combined or Divided Facades

Large commercial buildings were originally designed as a single unified facade for one tenant, but today often contain a number of tenants who wish to differentiate their portion of the building. Sometimes this is accomplished by applying different paint colors, or with signs. More damaging alterations include removal of historic trim (such as the cornice) to replace it with contrasting trim, and cladding portions of the building. In the worst cases, a historic storefront is replaced with several different storefronts or the upper windows are replaced or infilled in a portion of the building. The effect of these changes is that long buildings, originally designed as a single unified facade, have been visually and physically divided into narrow stripes.

Sometimes a single tenant occupies two or more historic storefronts, and wishes to combine these distinct buildings into one larger facade. This can be accomplished subtly with paint color and signage, but these buildings are very vulnerable to large scale modifications such as complete window replacement, trim removal and sometimes complete facade removal and reconstruction. The effect of these changes is that the scale and proportion of the historic buildings has been visually and physically combined into one large mass.

The importance of the cornice, storefront, windows, and setback has already been discussed. These elements provide the horizontal lines and rhythms that “knit” a pedestrian oriented downtown together. Although the desire to assert individual ownership is understood, it cannot be at the expense of a coherent historic commercial district. Long facades shall not be modified in any way that would break the facade into unrelated elements. Small buildings that were not historically combined, shall not be combined into one large facade.

Guidelines

- Differentiate businesses through the use of sensitive and appropriate signage, storefront displays, and color rather than facade alterations.
- Do not apply vertical elements to the facade, such as trim boards or columns, to divide the facade into segments. Do not combine buildings by adding trim that was never there historically.
- Do not remove the historic cornices, or any other historic elements that unify the facade.
- Do not apply cladding (siding, panels, stucco, etc.) to the facade to divide or combine it.
- The goal is continuity. If continuous historic trim exists, it must remain. If such trim has been removed, restoration of these elements is encouraged. New work must *move toward* unification of divided facades.
- Continuity of color is encouraged, but not required.
- More flexibility is permitted at the street level than on upper levels to accommodate multiple businesses.

Rear Facade Development

Because large parking areas are often located behind commercial building blocks, rear facades are seen more often than they were in the past. What were service entrances off of alleys are now treated as second front doors. In downtown Northville, the rear facades and parking lots are becoming a second streetfront as businesses expand and reorient their entrances toward parking.

Rear facades essentially create new public streetscapes where none previously existed, and as such will be reviewed for compatibility like other new commercial construction. New rear facades should be a product of their times. They should not imitate other historic buildings, but should be compatible in material, texture, size, massing, and scale.

Rear Facade Guidelines

- Harmonize the design with the casual atmosphere of the surrounding rear facades, alleys, and parking lots. Scaled down design (instead of grand design) is appropriate.
- Use materials and details in keeping with the commercial setting. Residential materials and details such as cedar shakes, wolmanized lumber decks, and lattice gazebos are not appropriate commercial types.
- Trash cans and dumpsters should be hidden from view.
- Signs and lighting should be modest, secondary to the main signage, and focused on the rear entry door.



These rear facades have inappropriate residential detail and materials.