

# Facade Improvement Guidelines



for Knoxville's Early Commercial Districts

*The East Tennessee Community Design Center and  
The Knoxville-Knox County Metropolitan Planning Commission  
Spring 2006*

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*These guidelines were created by the East Tennessee Community Design Center and the Metropolitan Planning Commission in cooperation with the City's Community Development Division. The provisions were developed in response to recommendations by the Empowerment Zone's Infill Task Force and Partnership for Neighborhood Improvement. The publication was originally drafted to address the facade improvement program in the Broadway-Central Avenue area. It has been revised and edited to apply to similar areas in the City, where late 19th Century and early 20th Century development took place.*

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# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
Reference Materials .....	9
Existing Conditions and Recommendations.....	11
Guidelines for Specific Features .....	12
Ground-floor windows .....	12
Upper-story Windows .....	12
Doors .....	13
Transoms .....	14
Facade Materials, Rooflines, and Cornices .....	14
Signs.....	15
Awnings .....	16
Painting and Brick Cleaning.....	16



# Introduction

**Goals:** These guidelines were created to enhance the economic vitality of selected commercial areas through attractive, consistent design. By following these guidelines, one project will complement another, resulting in small but attractive neighborhood business districts over time. In turn, the appearance of Knoxville’s historic buildings will be improved.

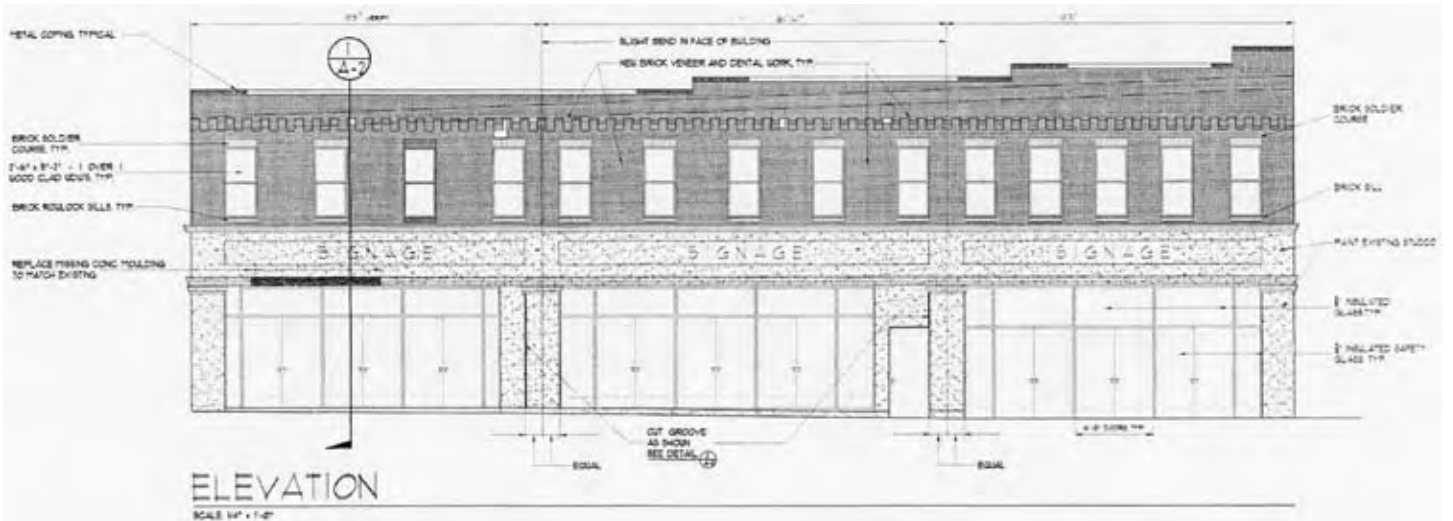
Most of these areas are in the “Heart of Knoxville” neighborhoods, such as Old North, Oakwood-Lincoln Park

and Park City. In some cases, such as the Broadway-Central Avenue, Five Points and Burlington areas, funding has been established for facade improvements.

These guidelines provide direction for two types of projects:

- renovation of commercial architecture in older Knoxville communities, and
- design of new infill development in those commercial areas.

*This building at the Broadway-Central intersection is a candidate for facade restoration.*



*This is the approved plan for its rehabilitation.*

**Historical Background:** The face and extent of Knoxville's commercial development began to change as streetcar lines were created in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While residents continued to shop downtown for major needs like furniture and clothing, day-to-day services such as grocery stores and bakeries were being created in the expanding suburbs. The onset of this development preceded the automobile age. Consequently, the need for a parking lot was yet to be conceived. The new enterprises were constructed as "slot commercial buildings," typically wall-to-wall with their storefronts extended to the sidewalk. Trolleys ran on the adjacent street, easily in view of owners and customers through the expansive display windows.



*An example of a historical storefront from the area is the John Housley Cigar Company building which was located at 733-735 Central Avenue in 1939 (photo courtesy of the McClung Collection).*

Occasionally, individual buildings were created in neighborhoods. "Mom and Pop" grocery stores, such as those in Oakwood-Lincoln Park and Fort Sanders, are examples.



*A good example of a rehabilitated store in Lincoln Park*

The architectural styles that were in vogue during the era of the street car system (1890-1940) are represented in these small commercial areas. Occasionally, some of the Victorian-era styles can be found, but single versions of the "commercial style" are typical, featuring recessed entries, large plate glass windows and transoms at the ground level. One and two-story buildings are typical.

Other places that have these architectural characteristics include "Happy Hollow" and a small part of the Oakwood area along Central Avenue, portions of Cumberland Avenue and the Hotel Avenue vicinity in Fountain City. If funding becomes available for slot commercial building renovation or infill development in such areas, these guidelines would be applicable.



*The Flatiron Building (left) and Haupt's Drug Store (right), which still framed both sides of Broadway, are two excellent examples of the Commercial and Gothic Revival architectural styles (photos courtesy of the McClung Collection).*

**Process:** The City's Facade Review Committee, which is under the direction of the Community Development Department, has been established to review projects in the areas for which funding is provided. The committee can approve, reject or ask that modifications be made to proposed designs. The committee will make every effort to work with an applicant to create an appropriate design that meets the following guidelines.

### General Information

For those property owners who wish to take advantage of this program, the following points should be considered:

- For the purpose of the program, the facade is defined as the primary public or street side of the building in its entirety from the sidewalk or grade level to the uppermost portion of the roofline. Corner buildings are considered to have two facades. Facades may be composed of multiple storefronts, which should be recognized in any redesign.
- Specific building improvements should be compatible with the original character of the structure.
- The design of new construction or non-historic building renovation should be compatible with neighboring historic or architecturally significant structures.

### Rules

- Participants should refer to current zoning requirements regarding yard, building setback and related provisions in developing their project. Other considerations including the supplemental regulations covering signs, awnings and similar features.

Zoning changes or variances may be warranted to achieve appropriate setbacks.

### Eligibility

Examples of **eligible** work include:

- Removing inappropriate additions and layers of inappropriate materials, such as imitation brick and stone, metal and vinyl siding, and other coverings.
- Replacing or repairing storefronts, doors, windows, parapets, and cornices.
- Adding lighting and awnings
- Masonry cleaning and re-pointing
- Painting
- Installing or improving signage
- Procuring architectural design services

Examples of **ineligible** work include:

- Historically inaccurate, ground floor windows that do not allow or encourage viewing into the business.
- Overpowering signs and billboards.
- Building entrances that do not relate strongly to the sidewalk.
- Interior improvements or roof repair, not visible from the street.
- Removal of architecturally important features
- Installation of plastic or vinyl awnings or canopies
- Installation roll-down security gates
- Sidewalk repair
- Repetition of the same design for buildings that are in a row
- Interior repairs or construction
- Landscaping or parking lots



*These examples of facade rehabilitation represent very positive improvements in Happy Hollow along North Central Street.*



### Broadway-Central Facade Program Boundary



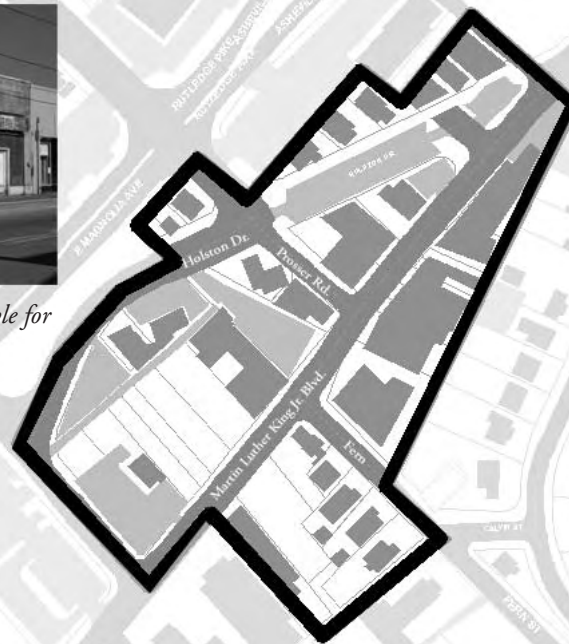
*Examples of buildings that are eligible for the facade program.*



### Burlington Facade Program Boundary



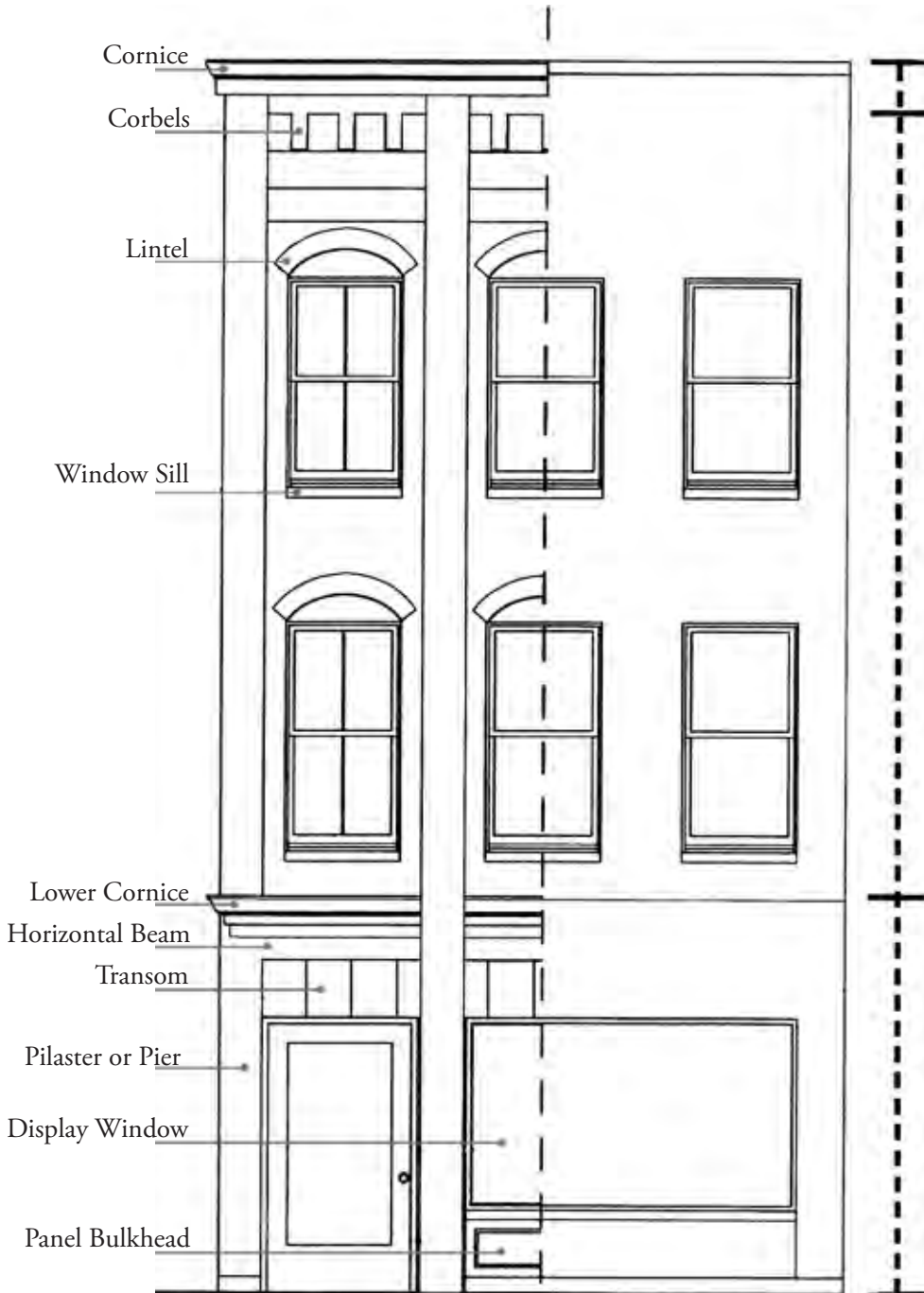
*Examples of buildings that are eligible for the facade program.*



# Reference Materials

## Facade Elements

Although this illustration is of a Victorian building, most of the facade elements are typical of commercial buildings in trolley suburbs.



### Cornice

The traditional building cornice decorates the top of the building and may be made of metal, brick, wood or other materials. Some cornices project from the building while an ornamental band delineates others. The top of the wall may have a patterned brick band or a coping of brick concrete or metal, severed to visually cap the building, completing its appearance.

### Upper Facade

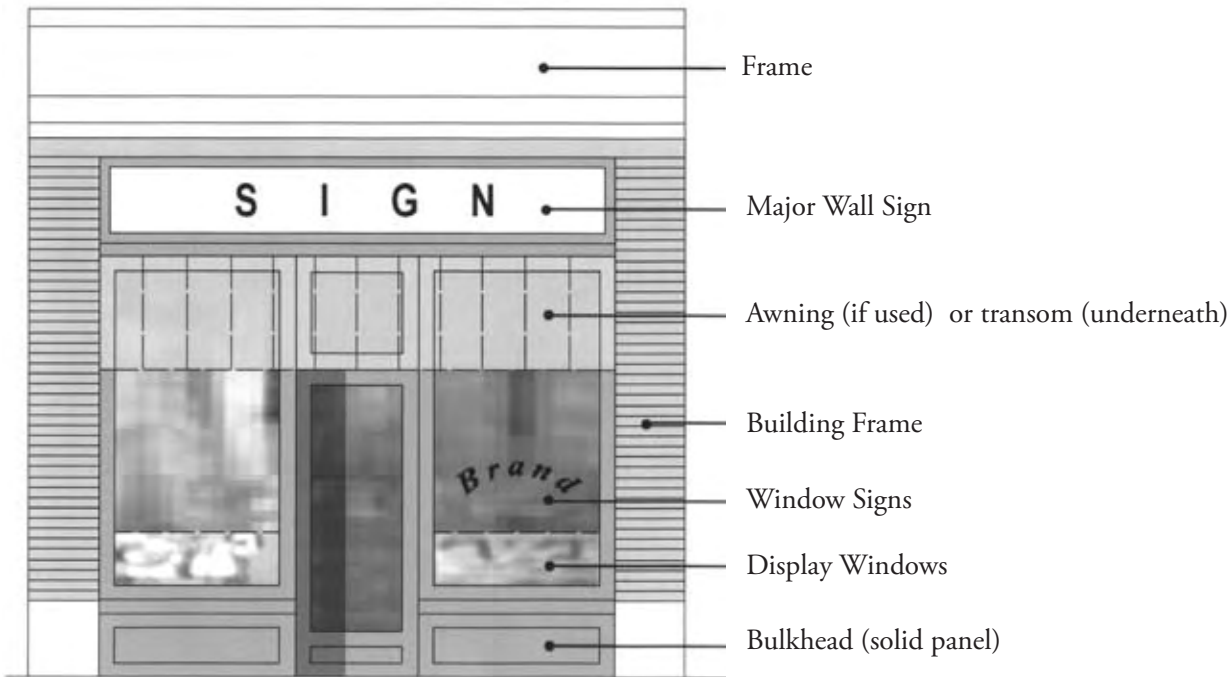
Upper facade is characterized by regularly spaced window openings that repeat on each floor. The size, type and decoration of these windows may vary, but they are usually the same in each floor. Other facade details may also be present on the upper level facades such as corbelling, brick banding, or decorative panels.

### Storefront

The first floor of a traditional storefront is composed of large display windows and framed by vertical structural piers and a horizontal supporting beam, leaving a void where the storefront elements fit. The storefront elements consist of an entrance (often recessed), display windows, a bulkhead, transom windows over the storefront and a cornice which covers the horizontal supporting beam. The first floor may also contain an entrance to the upper floors.

### Important parts of an individual storefront

These parts did not vary much on the buildings of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



### The following elements are encouraged in the context of a comprehensive facade renovation:

- Window replacement and window framing visible from the street
- Restoration of historic architectural details and removal of elements which cover such details
- Cleaning, repainting or re-siding of buildings where restoration of brick or stone is inappropriate
- Signs which are attractively integrated into the architecture of the building including the window area, doorway and awning or canopy
- Infill construction compatible with, but not duplicating, the historic architecture of the area
- New storefront construction within an existing building
- Awnings or canopies (cloth or fabric), where these can be both functional and visually appealing



# Existing Conditions and Recommendations

Over time various changes have been made to the buildings in the areas where these facade guidelines are proposed. Most of the changes cover or detract from the original architecture. Present conditions and solutions include the following:

## Storefronts

The storefront is the most important architectural feature of historic commercial buildings. The sensitive rehabilitation of storefronts can result not only in increased business for the owner, but can also provide evidence that revitalization efforts are succeeding.

Basic storefront design principles are:

- Windows should be a historically integral part of the building's overall design.
- Materials that cover the original facade should be removed.
- Bulkheads, the sign board, door and window frames are the only features that should be solids in the facade. Windows and doors should be transparent.
- A durable base or bulkhead should be constructed below windows at the grade line.
- Recessed doors are appropriate in most rehabilitation work.



*The original features of the ground floor were removed.*



*An example of an appropriate rehabilitation.*

# Guidelines for Specific Features

## Ground-floor windows

*Existing Condition:*



- The windows are not designed in character with the historical architecture or the structure.

*Recommended Solutions:*



- Create bulkheads, display windows and transoms.
- Make sure that the display windows are of an appropriate scale to the original windows and that the glass is transparent; lighting should be used to allow night viewing into and out of the business.
- Remove silver-toned aluminum inserts and use traditional materials such as wood.

## Upper-story windows

*Existing Condition:*



- The original windows have been covered.

*Recommended Solutions:*



- Remove non-historic material and add 100 percent transparent glass windows and framing that complements the original design.

## Doors

### *Existing Conditions:*



- The door openings have been filled or the original doors were replaced with ones which have no transparency. There are no doors that face the sidewalk.

### *Recommended Solutions:*



- Replace door with one that includes transparent sections and is historically appropriate.
- Add new door that is oriented towards the sidewalk.

### *Recommended Solutions:*



- Another solution is to install a contemporary door that complements the original architecture.

### *Recommended Solutions:*



- Use a door from the historic period.

## Transoms

*Existing Condition:*



- The original transom panes were covered or removed.



*Recommended Solutions:*

- Restore the transom (above) or
- Add awnings (below)



## Facade Materials, Rooflines and Cornices

*Existing Condition:*



- The original material was covered or removed.

*Recommended Solution:*



- Remove the metal or other siding, and if the roofline was altered, restore the cornice.

## Signs

A balance should be struck between the need to call attention to individual businesses and the need for a positive image of the entire district. Signs can complement or detract from the character of the building depending on their design, placement, quantity, size, materials, color, and condition.

### *Acceptable designs include:*

- Signs that do not obstruct significant architectural details
- Flat wall signs for commercial buildings that can be located above the storefront, generally on flat unadorned surfaces of the facade (see page 10)
- Locations within the frieze of a cornice, on a previously covered transom or on the pier that frames display windows
- Projecting signs (shingle signs)
- A limited number of signs to encourage compatibility with other buildings and discourage visual cluster
- One wall sign per facade (although smaller projecting signs, window signs and canopy lettered signs are encouraged)
- Traditional sign materials such as wood, raised individual (metal or painted wood letters) or lettering within glass windows. (Avoid the use of foam molded letters. Some plastic individual letters may be appropriate if they have non-glossy finish and do not appear as having a shiny plastic appearance.)
- Wall signs that are not painted directly on the surface of masonry walls (if the wall has not been previously painted)
- Colors that complement the materials and color schemes of the building, including accent and trim colors
- Lighting that highlights the sign with a shielded incandescent light source. (More specifically, illumination should be external to the sign; for example, an incandescent light in a “goose neck” mount. Internally lit plastic molded signs are not appropriate.



*An example of one means of incandescent illumination.*

- Sign size that is in direct correlation to the scale of the building and surrounding buildings
- Signs that are oriented to a pedestrian scale



*These projecting signs have a pedestrian scale.*

For a building with multiple tenants, a master sign plan should be submitted for the building. This should include an illustration of all the signs on the building, including their dimensions, materials and lighting.



## Awnings and Canopies

Awnings can contribute to the overall image of the area by providing continuity for an entire block, helping to highlight specific buildings and covering any unattractively modeled transom areas above storefronts. Awnings should be designed as an integral part of the overall building storefront with materials and color that are compatible with the building and adjacent buildings.



*An example of historical awnings from the area is found by looking at Swan Brothers City Bakery which was located at 341-343 Broad Street, in 1891 (photo courtesy of the McClung Collection).*

### *Acceptable designs include:*

- Standard sloped fabric awnings: whether fixed or retractable, sloped awnings are the traditional awning types and are appropriate for most buildings.
- Boxed or curved fabric awnings may be used on non-historic or new buildings.
- Awnings and canopies should fit the storefront design and not obscure important elements such as transoms or decorative glass.

### *Other awning and canopy design principles are outlined below.*

- Plastic or metal awnings are inappropriate for any building within the program areas.
- An awning should be placed carefully on the storefront so that it does not obscure original architectural elements and does not damage materials.
- Awnings and canopies can be used to cover vents, air conditioning units, or other unsightly physical

features around openings. They should be sized appropriately in relation to such features.

- Colors should be coordinated with the overall building scheme. Solid colors, wide stripes, and narrow stripes may be appropriate, but not overly bright or complex patterns. Do not use shiny plastic-like fabrics.
- As appropriate, the front panel or valance of an awning may be used for a sign. Letters can be sewn, screened, applied or painted on the awning fabric; avoid hand-painted or individually made fabric letters that are not professionally applied.

## Painting and Brick Cleaning

### *Acceptable methods and principles follow:*

- Building colors will be left to the discretion of the building owner and designer, although color schemes will be reviewed by the Facade Review Committee in the context of the entire project.
- Color schemes should be harmonious with the building character, adjacent buildings and surrounding community. Proposed facade improvements should not include brilliant colors, create harsh contrasts, or detract from the exterior design of the building.
- In all cases, surface cleaning should be undertaken with the gentlest means available. Sandblasting and water-blasting in particular, but also other cleaning methods, damage historic buildings and should not be undertaken without thorough testing prior to use on a building. Sandblasting and water-blasting are not recommended on brick, stone or wood. In all instances, it should be ascertained that a building exterior is really in need of cleaning prior to undertaking.
- Older masonry buildings are often painted to mask problem areas, such as mismatched masonry, or to solve a water absorption problem. Unless it is necessary to complete masonry repairs, it is recommended that brick buildings that have historically been painted should be re-painted in the future, particularly with a color that is compatible with the setting. If paint removal is attempted, a test patch should be used to determine if there will be a negative chemical reaction.