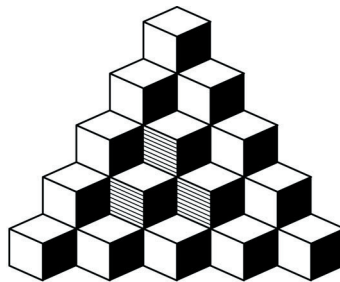


# Design Guidelines

Schenectady Facade Improvement Grant Program



**DOWNTOWN SCHENECTADY  
IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION**  

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**BUILDING OUR FUTURE BLOCK BY BLOCK**



JUNE 2002

## Introduction

Utilizing \$250,000 in funding from the Schenectady Metroplex Development Authority, the Downtown Schenectady Improvement Corporation has established a façade grant program for commercial properties within the boundaries of the Downtown Special Assessment District. The program will encourage owner investment to improve the exteriors of buildings within Downtown Schenectady. In addition to leveraging more than \$250,000 in private investment, the program will also increase property values and make the area more attractive to outside investors.

One of the common elements among northeastern cities experiencing successful revitalization of their downtown districts (Saratoga NY, Northampton MA, Corning NY, Burlington VT, etc.) is the presence of laws or regulations that govern the exterior alternations to buildings. Over time, those laws and regulations facilitate the creation of a downtown that is attractive and inviting, with urban retail districts that are vibrant destinations.

In order to ensure this program furthers the overall redevelopment of downtown Schenectady, detailed design guidelines have been established that will apply to any property owner receiving grant funds.

## Applicability

The following guidelines shall apply to all projects undertaken with funding from the Downtown Schenectady Façade Improvement Program administered by the Downtown Schenectady Improvement Corporation. The Downtown Schenectady Improvement Corporation may amend these guidelines at any time. Interpretation of these guidelines rests solely with the Downtown Schenectady Improvement Corporation.

## Adherence and Conformity with Applicable City Regulations

These guidelines have been developed in accordance with the Architectural and Site Design Guidelines of the Downtown Schenectady Master Plan and the regulations of the relevant zoning districts. All existing local and state laws will still apply to work undertaken as part of the program. Within historic districts, all historic district regulations shall apply.

These guidelines are meant to supplement and enhance existing laws, and in many cases, will be more restrictive than existing law. Although these guidelines have not been formally adopted by the City, compliance is a requirement for participation in this program. Final interpretation and applicability of these guidelines rests first with the façade committee of the Downtown Schenectady Improvement Corporation, and then with the Board of Directors.

## Standards from the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

The following Standards from the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation shall apply:

- The distinguishing original qualities of character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.
- All buildings, structures, and sites shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create an earlier appearance shall be discouraged.
- Changes that may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of a building, structure, or site and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance shall be recognized and respected.
- Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship which characterize a building,

structure, or site shall be treated with sensitivity. Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced, wherever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture, and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of features, substantiated by historic, physical, or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings or structures.

- The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken with the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that will damage the historic building materials shall not be undertaken.
- Every reasonable effort shall be made to protect and preserve archaeological resources affected by, or adjacent to any project.
- Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural or cultural material, and character of the property, neighborhood or environment.
- Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to structures shall be done in such a manner that if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure would be unimpaired.

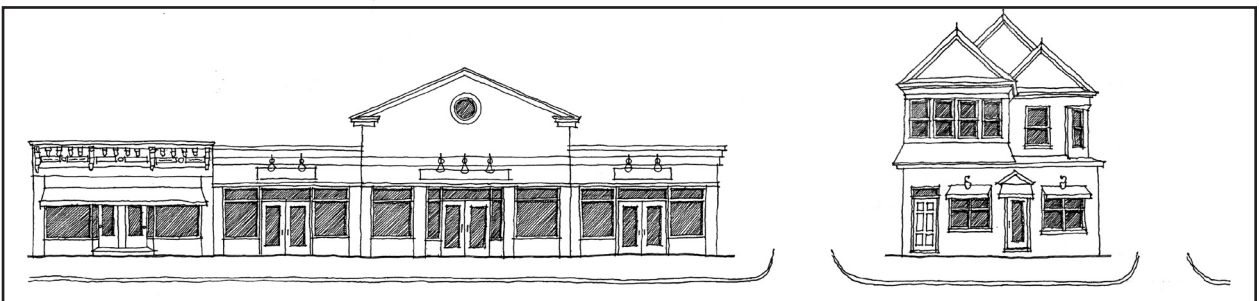


**In addition to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, the following design guidelines shall apply for the Schenectady Façade Improvement Program:**

### **Building Facades**

Building façades have great potential to enhance the overall character of the downtown. The care in their design, detailing and maintenance can enhance the community image of the city. Facades also provide an image for the businesses they house, and can provide a sense of care and community pride for their inhabitants

- The building should respect historic rhythms and should complement the historic nature of the district, and work to enhance the overall character of the downtown in quality materials, building details and craftsmanship.
- Building façades shall express the traditional lot widths of the Downtown District in the building structure even when several traditional lots have been assembled into a single property.
- Building facades should be articulated with architectural features such as piers and columns, recessed and projecting bays, and three-dimensional elements of architectural details, signs, and awnings to complement the scale and articulation of the traditional urban buildings of the downtown. Large expanses of unarticulated blank wall should be avoided.



- Window and cornice alignments and placement should relate to those of significant adjacent buildings and the traditional urban fabric downtown, as should window size and spacing.

## Storefronts

Storefronts present an excellent opportunity to create a positive image for a business and to enhance the district character. Quality storefront design, restoration and renovation will go a long way towards insuring Schenectady's renaissance.

- Storefronts should reflect the significant storefront rhythms and proportions found throughout the historic buildings of downtown Schenectady.
- A storefront shall be designed to fit inside its original opening and not extend beyond it. Storefront detailing, signage, awnings should not project over or across adjacent buildings.
- Building detailing and architectural elements and features, such as signs, lighting, and awnings should enhance the individual character of the building, and should complement the colors and features of significant adjacent buildings.
- The façade at street level, the storefront, should be differentiated from the upper floors to create a visual base for the building and a pedestrian friendly scale. This can be achieved by architectural treatment and materials selection
- Sixty to seventy-five (60-75) percent of the storefront or other retail street level façade shall be transparent through the use of glass windows and doors. The intent is to maximize the transparency of the storefront in order to enhance the pedestrian nature of the street.
- New storefronts and alterations shall be compatible with the character of other significant facades in the district in terms of colors, quality and type of materials, details and door locations, and should complement or enhance the overall design of the the applicant's building facade.
- Attractive storefront displays are an important feature of the downtown pedestrian experience. Quality materials and craftsmanship to create attractive storefront display areas within four feet behind the storefront glass for changeable displays may be applicable for grant funding. This can include enhancing the permanent display floor, casework, shelving, display platforms, background, and interior storefront lighting. (See lighting). The changeable displays themselves are not eligible for funding.

## Windows and Doors

Windows and doors should be of a quality and composition to enhance the overall façade while serving the practical purposes of protecting the building's interior from the elements and providing daylight, air, passage and security.

- A high percentage of glass in the entrance doors is frequently recommended depending on the overall façade design.
- Original window and door arrangements shall be maintained. Window replacements shall match, to the greatest extent practical, original window size, style and configuration.
- For upper story windows, necessary repair or replacement work shall match the original window in material and style, sash configurations, and size.  
(Wood windows and doors are preferred, but high quality clad is acceptable.)
- Only clear colorless glass (no tinted glass) shall be used for display windows. Translucent or colored glass may be used for design details.
- For storefronts at the sidewalk level, storefront windowsills shall be located at a maximum of thirty (30) inches above the finished grade at the building line. 18" to 24" is preferred.
- Plexiglas is prohibited.
- Spandrel glass panels are prohibited.
- Windows and doors shall not be blocked or boarded.

## Historic Details and Building Materials

- Uncover, retain and restore original building elements that still exist. These include cornices, window trim, entryways and paving, doors, transoms and display windows, hardware glazing, frames and other historic materials.
- If unable to rehabilitate original materials and/or details, replacement materials and design shall match or exceed the quality of the original.
- Remove building alterations that are neither consistent with the original design nor significant in their own right.
- Historic building materials and details shall not be covered over.
- Façade improvements shall be composed of materials that complement adjacent significant facades and shall be equal to or exceed the quality of appearance of traditional materials.

## Building Stabilization

Because the building façade is a potential public asset general building façade stabilization to preserve the architectural integrity and longevity of the building is covered by this grant program. All work shall be as per state building code requirements, per the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and per good trade practices for good quality construction and rehabilitation. Work shall include but not be limited to:

- Masonry repair and repointing which shall follow the Historic Preservations Briefs.
- Cornice flashing and repair.
- Window flashing and repair.
- Building detail repair including wood and metals.

## Painting

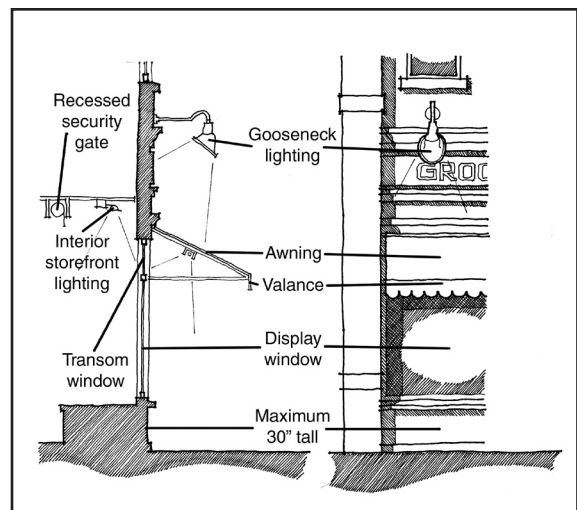
Paint colors should be chosen to enhance the overall character and composition of the building and to improve the appearance of the district.

- Colors can be used to articulate the building details.
- The quality of preparation for painting as well as the quality of the paint can go a long way toward extending the life of the paint job. Use paint manufacturer's top quality line.
- Harsh or glaring colors should be avoided.
- Generally colors should be comparable with an historic color palette. Most manufacturers have literature that illustrates historic color palettes.
- A simple color scheme of up to three colors is generally suited to a quality storefront.
- Consideration should be given to colors on adjacent buildings to create harmony and/or contrast in the district, and not colors that will be discordant.

## Building Lighting

Lighting presents an underutilized opportunity to enhance a façade and the district. The lighting fixtures chosen can add to the character of the storefront, improve the business image, and enliven the street. The fixtures chosen and their illumination qualities shall complement the architectural character of the building.

- Lighting of storefronts and of storefront displays shall be encouraged to illuminate storefronts until midnight to enhance the overall appearance of the district in the evening.
- Building lighting shall be used to illuminate main signs, storefront displays, and the building's architectural features.



- Lighting shall not call attention to itself or cause light spillage to pedestrians, adjacent buildings or to the sky.
- Industrial lighting is prohibited.
- Building lighting when combined with existing street lighting shall be a maximum of five (5) foot candles measured at a point approximately five (5) feet out from the center of the building's main street façade.
- Low pressure sodium shall not be used; metal halide, incandescent, or halogen, quartz and fluorescent in light qualities to mimic incandescent or metal halide light quality, and neon are applicable for funding under this program. Typical metal halide lamp color temperature should be 3200 degrees K, CRI 70.

## Awnings and Canopies

For the purposes of these guidelines, the definition of an awning is a protective sloped projection over the door, window or storefront of a building, generally supported by a frame attached to the building. A canopy is a horizontal ornamental and protective flat projection from a building façade, generally cantilevered out from a building that may be supported by cables from the building wall above.

Awnings and canopies can best enhance their facades when placed within and in relation to the structural frame of the storefront, window or doorway. Generally, this means within the frame formed by the storefront cornice or sign panel above and by vertical piers or columns on either side. Alternatively, they may be mounted between the transom and the display windows to allow light into the business.

Awnings and canopies can be used to reinforce the design characteristics of the building's architecture, and also serve practical functions. Their use to shelter pedestrians from sun, and to keep merchandise in display windows from fading and prevent other damage caused by heat and sunlight makes them most appropriate for south facing facades. They can also be useful to shelter pedestrians from rain.

- Awnings and canopies shall be designed with pedestrian comfort, solar and rain protection, as well as good building aesthetics in mind.
- Awnings and canopies shall be installed in designs, proportions and colors that are harmonious with the architecture of the building and the character of the district.
- The frame of the awning or canopy shall be a minimum of eight (8) feet (6) inches above the pavement. The bottom of an awning or canopy valance shall be a minimum of eight (8) feet above the pavement.
- Valances shall extend a maximum of twelve (12) inches.
- Generally, awnings or canopies supported by poles attached to the sidewalk are not allowed.
- Canopies shall have thin visual profiles so as to obscure as little of the building and storefront as possible.
- Color and style of any awnings for upper story windows shall coordinate with any street level awnings.
- Generally, sloping open-sided shed style awnings with free valance are the type of awning preferred.
- Well-designed canopies of glass and steel are permitted to enhance a building entrance.
- Backlit awnings shall be prohibited but down-lighting shall be permitted to illuminate the sidewalk and storefront.
- Good quality cotton or acrylic awning canvas, such as Sunbrella fabric is acceptable. Other materials are subject to approval.
- Materials such as vinyl, plastic, aluminum and fiberglass are prohibited for awnings since they generally detract from the character of the commercial district.
- Awnings may not project across multiple buildings, but should enhance the individual nature of their building.

## Security Devices

- Roll-down and collapsible security gates and grates are not eligible for grant funding.
- Decorative ironwork is eligible for funding.

## Air Conditioners and Other Appurtenances

- Air conditioners shall not project beyond the building face.
- Satellite dishes and cable wiring shall not be visible from across the street of the principle building façade.

## Façade Maintenance

It is the responsibility of the building and business owners to maintain their buildings in good repair. Cracked windows, peeling paint, and burnt out lamps all diminish the professional image and pedestrian nature of the district. Well maintained buildings show pride and care in the district and will enhance its economic viability and quality of life.

## Signs

Signs present a real opportunity to bring out the character of the business. Signs should be selected that are consistent and harmonious with the architectural style of the property and should enhance the character of the surrounding district.



Sign designs must be included along with the building permit application to relay the overall building design, and sign design approval must be obtained from the zoning officer.

## General Guidelines

- All signs shall be of professional quality.
- The sign design should be clear and easy to read, and reflect a positive image of the business it represents.
- Sign design and colors should be considered within an overall design for the building and storefront. Light colored letters on a dark background are easier to read.
- Sign copy shall be limited to the name, address, function, and logo of the establishment.
- Signage should be part of an orderly, attractive and uncluttered design of the storefront.
- Signs shall only refer to the establishments located within the buildings where the signs are located, and not off-premise businesses.

## Sign Types

### Awning and Canopy Signs

Awning and canopy signs are visual messages incorporated into the valance of an awning, or affixed to a canopy.

- Signs on awnings shall be restricted to the valance.
- A maximum of eight (8) inch letters shall be provided on the valance of an awning, or twelve (12) inch letters on a structural canopy.
- Awnings may incorporate attractive professionally created logos on the sloped portion of the awning, or valance, which may not exceed 15% of the sloped area.
- Signage shall hang no lower than eight (8) feet above grade.
- Generally, quality metal letters are appropriate for structural canopies.

### Banner Signs

Banner signs are visual messages displayed on heavyweight canvas fabric that is mounted to a building by a frame at one or more edges. Professionally designed banner signs for businesses can be an attractive element for the storefront and the district, and are applicable for this program. Temporary and vinyl banner signs are not applicable for this funding program.

- Banner signs shall follow guidelines for projecting signs, and also require a revocable permit from the City

of Schenectady Engineering Department, as well as insurance naming city as additional insured.

- Banner signs shall be constructed of heavyweight cotton or acrylic fabric, such as Sunbrella or approved equal.
- Banner signs shall hang no lower than (8) feet above the grade.

### Freestanding Signs

Freestanding signs are not attached to or part of any building but separate and permanently affixed in or upon the ground. Included are pole signs, pylon signs, and monument signs. Freestanding signs are generally considered inappropriate for the Downtown Business Improvement District, and are not applicable for grant funding.

### Portable Signs

Portable signs are not structurally attached to the ground, a building, a structure, or another sign. Portable signs include sidewalk signs, A-frame signs, menu and sandwich board signs.

- Portable signs shall not exceed (10) square feet per sign face, and shall neither exceed (4) feet in height nor exceed 30" in width.
- Portable signs shall not impede pedestrian or vehicular traffic, and must be placed in the immediate vicinity of the advertised establishment.
- Portable signs shall not be permanently affixed to anything and shall be removed when the premises advertised is closed.
- One portable sign is permitted per business establishment.
- The sign may not include any moving parts.
- All exposed surfaces, including edges of sign shall be sanded, painted and finished smooth enough to run fine fabrics across without snagging.
- Signs placed on Jay Street and Stratton Plaza are subject to review by the Signage and Sidewalk Merchandise Review Committee.
- Portable signs require insurance naming City as additional insured.

### Projecting Signs

Projecting signs extend horizontally more than nine (9) inches from the face of a building. Projecting signs should be used to complement or replace the principal wall sign and are especially suitable for displaying symbols and logos.

- On multistory buildings, projecting signs shall be located above storefront display windows and below second story windowsills. On one-story buildings, projecting signs shall be located above storefront display windows and below the roofline.
- A projecting sign shall be mounted with its lowest point a minimum of eight (8) feet above the sidewalk and shall extend from the building face a maximum of five (5) feet or one-third (1/3) the width of the sidewalk, whichever is less.
- The size and location of a projecting sign shall complement neighboring signs and the building to which it is attached, but may not be any larger than 12 square feet.
- Projecting signs also require a revocable permit from the City of Schenectady Engineering Department, and insurance naming City as additional insured.

### Wall Signs

Wall signs are painted on or attached to the outside of wall of a building with the face of the sign in the plane parallel to such wall, and extending a maximum of nine (9) inches from the face of such wall.

- Wall signs shall be located within a traditional sign band location.

- For buildings without a sign band, wall signs shall be located above the top of first floor openings and below second floor windowsills or below the roofline on an one-story building.
- A wall sign shall not extend beyond the building for which it is designed.
- A wall sign may extend the width of the storefront but shall be a maximum of two (2) feet, six (6) inches high.
- Wall signs shall be coordinated with the architectural features of the building, and shall not to obscure architectural detail.
- Lettering on wall signs shall be a maximum of eighteen (18) inches high and occupy about sixty-five (65) percent of the sign.

### Window Signs

Window signs painted or affixed on glass windows may be eligible for grant funding. Window signs placed within the storefront window display are not.

- Window signs should complement the window display.
- Window signs shall not occupy more than twenty (20) percent of the window surface.
- Window signs should not obscure the display area. Text is often best if horizontally aligned within twelve (12) inches of base of storefront window, and logos with or without text may be best centrally designed within storefront windows, or door.
- Window signs affixed to the glass may only include name of establishment, a very brief description of service offered, a logo, and/or building address number.
- The color of the letters should contrast with the display background.
- Typically, vinyl computer cut letters and logos of professional quality affixed to glass are preferred.
- Window signs within storefront displays, if used at all, should only briefly provide more detailed or changeable information about the business such as the phone number, hours of operation, or services offered.

### Sign Lighting

Lighting for signage presents an opportunity to enhance the district in evening hours, and attractive light fixtures can enhance the overall appearance of the building.

- Lights shall be chosen to be integral to and to enhance the character of the building.
- Individual lighting fixtures shall be positioned to provide even lighting.
- Internally-illuminated box signs shall be prohibited.
- Awnings shall not be fully illuminated to avoid overemphasizing the storefront at the expense of the rest of the building's facade.
- When exposed lamps are used to illuminate signs, they shall be equipped with gooseneck reflectors, or other devices arranged so as to concentrate the illumination upon the area of the sign and prevent glare. Special attention shall be given to illumination so as into avoid glare to pedestrians, motor vehicles, or adjacent properties.
- Each outside lighting installation and each illuminated sign shall be controlled by a 24 hour timer by Intermatic or equivalent.

### Sign Maintenance

- Signs shall be maintained regularly. Broken, faded, worn signs and empty supports suggest vacant or inactive businesses.
- Unused sign elements such as boxes and supports shall be removed.
- Signs shall be mounted so as to cause as little damage to the building as possible.