

GUIDELINES FOR STORE FACADES AND STOREFRONTS



The John Henry Stevens Store, as it appeared before it was demolished in 1957, displayed two typical turn-of-the-century storefronts with large amounts of glass.

The diverse [store façades*](#) and [storefronts*](#) in Closter's historic downtown contribute to this area's historic "Main Street" character. They provide visual variety and pedestrian scale. Large buildings are divided into smaller segments through the organization of their upper windows and the division of their first stories into several storefronts. The visual openness, due to large glass display windows, of the first-floor storefronts is balanced by more wall and less glass on the upper stories.

Changes have occurred to the facades of many of the commercial buildings in response to various merchandising trends, technology, and tenants. Later storefronts need to be evaluated to determine if they have architectural significance in their own right. Some of the renovations represent interesting examples of the commercial architecture of a later time period. In most cases, the changes affected the storefront while the upper façade remained largely intact. Some remodelings of storefronts are superficial, leaving the structural integrity of the original storefront design intact. In some cases, the original storefronts may still be in place, but covered over. With historically sensitive rehabilitation, the original proportions of storefronts can be returned, enhancing the historic ambience of the downtown and making it a more desirable place to shop and visit.

For Landmarks and all buildings within Landmark Districts, a Certificate of Appropriateness (C/A) is required for any repairs, alterations, and new construction that change the architectural appearance of a store façade and/or a storefront. A C/A is not needed for [in-kind*](#) repairs resulting in no change in appearance or for repainting previously painted exterior features. Refer to the appropriate guidelines for specific exterior architectural features and materials.

GUIDELINES

Identify, retain, and maintain historic features of store facades, including storefronts.

Repair rather than replace deteriorated historic materials. Generally limit repairs to the affected areas and use techniques appropriate to the materials.

Evaluate the changes to any feature of the exterior for its impact on the building, as well as the entire streetscape.

If altered facades and storefronts have acquired significance of their own, retain and maintain them.

If a historic facade or storefront has alterations that do not contribute to its architectural and historic significance, they may be retained, but property owners are encouraged to make alterations that are compatible with the building and district.

When designing a new or renovating an existing storefront, keep the materials simple and unobtrusive and the storefront predominately transparent, continuing the glass-to-wall ratio of other buildings of the streetscape.

Maintain the distinction between individual storefronts, the entire building facade, and adjacent properties.

* Words and phrases followed by * are defined in "Definitions and Abbreviations" in the *Appendix*.



Recommended: Retain, maintain, and repair historic store façade, including significant later modifications. While the greenhouse is a recent addition, to a large degree this commercial building retains the exterior appearance it acquired between 1923-30 when a new front was added to the earlier building.

For Landmarks and Key Contributing and Contributing Buildings in Landmark Districts

RECOMMENDED

- Retain, maintain, and repair historic store façades and storefronts. Replace only the deteriorated sections using the recommendations in these guidelines for the appropriate materials and features. If possible, expose features of the historic store façade that may have been concealed by past modifications. Retain renovations which have historical and architectural significance as part of the building's history and use and contribute a positive visual quality to the building's façade and streetscape.
- When planning the renovation of a store façade and/or storefront, consult old photographs to help determine the historic design and materials and study the building for physical evidence of missing architectural features.
- Review the sources in the *Resources for Storefronts* box at the end of this chapter for information on how to maintain and repair historic storefronts and how to evaluate various options when considering replacements.
- Replacement of a historic feature is allowed only when the original is too deteriorated to be repaired. Then the replacement should match the original in size, design, and, where possible, materials.
- If the storefront and other architectural improvements have previously been replaced, consider replacing incompatible alterations with features that match documented historic ones and/or that are compatible with the building and streetscape. Removing alterations, such as signs or additions that cover or interrupt the horizontal features (frieze, cornice, beltcourse, etc.), will enhance the architecture of the building and the streetscape. However, previously altered features may be retained or replaced with ones of matching design.
- Design a new storefront to fit inside the original opening. Maintain or restore the entrance in its historic location and configuration. If the historic location of the entrance is not known, design and place the new entrance considering the rhythm of solids of the building's overall façade and the rhythm of entrances within the streetscape. Large single-pane display windows are appropriate for most storefronts. Refer to the *Guidelines for New Additions and New Construction* chapter.
- Keep separate buildings visually distinct -- even in cases where several adjacent buildings are occupied by a single tenant or owner.
- If barrier-free access is required for historic doors, try to make the doors compliant through the installation of an automatic opener. If new doors must be installed, they should convey the same visual appearance as the historic doors.
- Conceal mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and telecommunications systems completely from public view. If such equipment cannot be concealed, minimize its visual impact on the building's street façades.
- For awnings, refer to the *Guidelines for Awnings* chapter.
- For signs, refer to the *Guideline for Signs* chapter.



Recommended: Retain, maintain, and repair early storefronts. Use traditional storefronts, such as this one, as design inspiration for new storefronts



Recommended: Retain and maintain historic features of store facades. The store façade in the photograph at the right was erected between 1923-30. It retains its historic integrity and provides considerable visual interest with its curving parapet and traditional storefront with recessed entrance. Unfortunately, the matching adjacent store facade, shown in the 1954 photograph above, was extensively altered in the 1990's.

For Landmarks and Key Contributing and Contributing Buildings in Landmark Districts

NOT RECOMMENDED

- Removing a later storefront that may have acquired historic significance of its own to recreate an earlier storefront.
- Blocking or filling in original storefront openings or replacing window glass with opaque panels, such as metal, wood, or other materials. If street-level glass windows are not appropriate for the business, consider the use of window treatments.
- Changing the size, shape, or placement of historic window or door openings or altering the shape and size of the historic storefront enframing, display windows, doors, transoms, storefront cornice, or base panels.
- Installing architectural features that are stylistically incompatible with, or more decoratively elaborate than, the building. Adding decorative features that create a false historical appearance and diminish the historical integrity of the building.
- Installing metal security screens or bars covering openings unless there is documentary or physical evidence for such features.
- Installing a “theme” storefront such as one reflecting a franchise.



For Non-Contributing Buildings in Landmark Districts

RECOMMENDED

- Design a new store façade to have a distinction between the storefront and the upper section(s) and to have a significant capping feature such as a cornice or parapet. Continue the strongest lines of the adjacent buildings, such as the roofline, parapet line, and lines of the storefront frieze or signboard area. In the design of a new storefront have the traditional three-part horizontal division of base panels, display windows, and transom area within an enframing of piers and storefront frieze or signboard area. For a multi-story building, organize the storefront's features so that they relate to the design of the upper stories. Maintain a pedestrian scale. Refer to the *Guidelines for New Additions and New Construction* chapter.
- For multi-story buildings, make the entrance for street-level users the primary one and design the entrance for upper-story users as a secondary feature.
- Keep separate buildings visually distinct -- even in cases where several adjacent buildings are occupied by a single tenant or owner.
- Conceal mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and telecommunications systems completely from public view. If such equipment cannot be concealed, minimize its visual impact on the building's street facades.
- For awnings, refer to the *Guidelines for Awnings* chapter.
- For signs, refer to the *Guideline for Signs* chapter.

NOT RECOMMENDED

- Installing "theme" storefronts such as one reflecting a franchise.



Recommended: When a historic storefront is missing, install a new storefront, such as this one, that has large display windows and the traditional horizontal division of base panel, display windows, and transom area within an enframing of side piers and upper frieze or signboard area.

RESOURCES FOR STORE FACADES AND STOREFRONTS

Main Street New Jersey, *Design Guidelines*, <http://www.state.nj.us/dca/dcr/msnj/msnjdesign.pdf>

National Park Service, *Preservation Brief 11: Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts*, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief11.htm>

National Park Service, *Preservation Brief 12: The Preservation of Historic Pigmented Structural Class (Vitrolite and Carrara Glass)*, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief12.htm>

National Park Service, *Preservation Tech Notes: Repair and Reproduction of Prismatic Glass Transoms*, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/technotes/PTN44/intro.htm>

New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, *FYI Publication: Storefronts*, <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo/4sustain/storefronts.pdf>