

5.4 Rehabilitation Tips for Existing Buildings

5.4.1 Typical Building Front Features

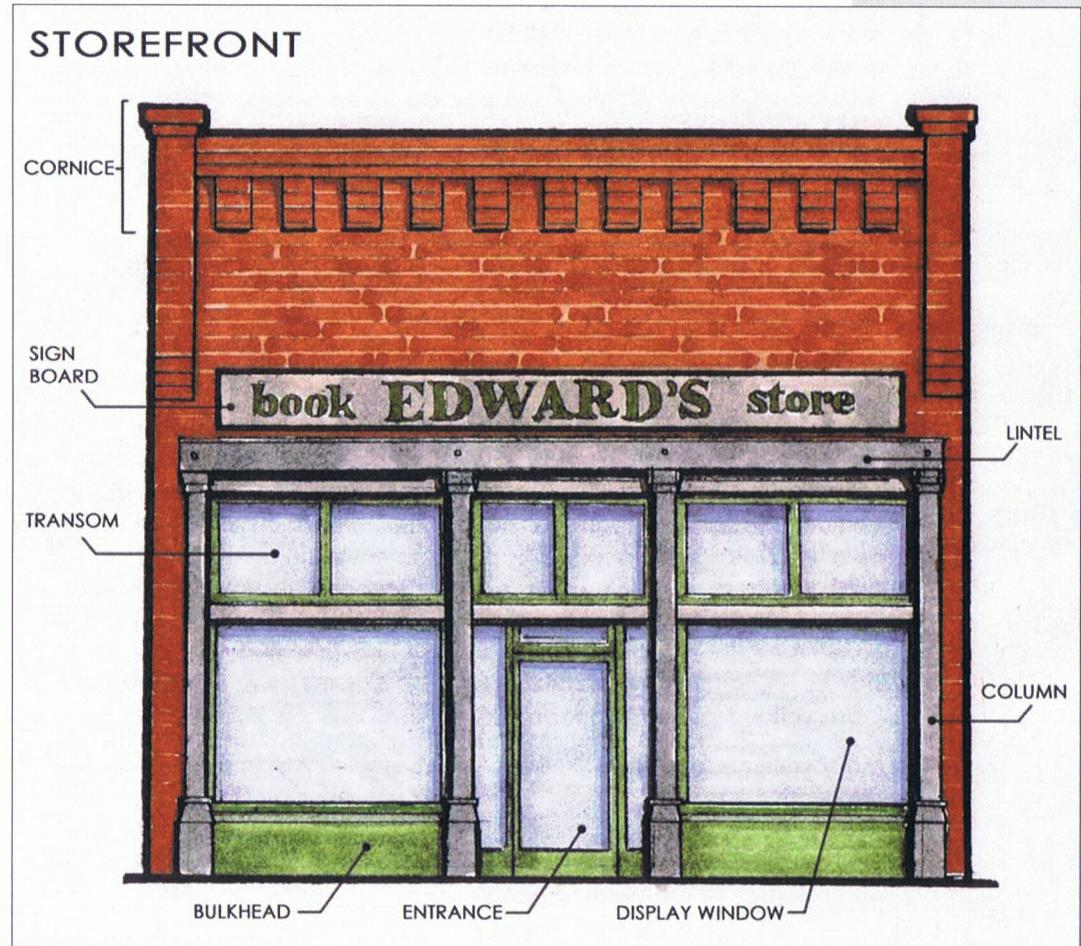
REHAB DESIGN IDEAS

The rehab tips should be useful for most commercial buildings found in Downtown Washington, both those considered "historic" and also those that are not.

WHICH OF THESE TYPICAL BUILDING FEATURES CAN YOU FIND ON YOUR BUILDING?

1. The facade has ornament and detail that provides interest to pedestrians.
2. The first floor level has a large area of display windows which allow pedestrians to see goods and activities inside.
3. The front of the store is aligned at the sidewalk edge, helping to define the pedestrian zone.
4. Signs are sized and positioned to be read at eye level by pedestrians.
5. The second story, if it exists, is more solid than the first, with smaller windows.
6. Brick is the dominant building material, although stone, metal and wood can be found.
7. The main store entrance is recessed in a notch.
8. The top of the building is usually capped with a decorative parapet or cornice.
9. The first floor display windows are usually capped with a belt cornice or molding.

If you develop a rehabilitation scheme that preserves and enhances basic building characteristics, it will usually be the most cost-effective and the most visually pleasing.



5.4.2 Shop Front Openings

- **Maintain the original size and shape of the storefront opening**

Preserve the large panes of glass that were a part of the original storefront opening if possible. These transparent surfaces allow pedestrians to see merchandise and activities inside. If the storefront windows have been reduced in size over the years, consider re-establishing their original dimensions. Be certain that the glass fits within original piers or columns that may exist. These are also essential parts of the design character that add interest and should not be obscured.

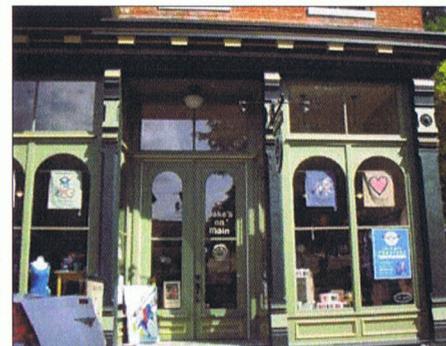
If keeping a large glass area is not feasible for your operation, develop the wall in a manner that will provide interest to pedestrians in some other fashion, such as with a decorative mural, wall sculpture, or display cases. The important principle is to provide surfaces that encourage walking and browsing Downtown. Opaque materials, such as black Plexiglas, are not appropriate in place of display windows, because they do not provide pedestrian interest. Reflective mirror glass is also inappropriate. This hides indoor activities and creates glare on the sidewalk.

5.4.3 Facade Alignment

- **Maintain storefront wall at the sidewalk edge**

Pedestrians Downtown are accustomed to having the inside edge of the sidewalk clearly defined by a wall of storefronts, all presenting interesting activities and merchandise to the street. This characteristic is an essential element of healthy Downtown retailing.

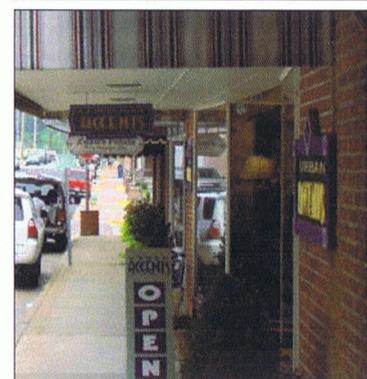
Preserve the glass at the sidewalk line where feasible. This is especially true if the building has historic significance. Most original storefronts were parallel to the sidewalk, but in later years an angled display window was sometimes installed in remodeling. Consider reconstructing the original configuration in these cases. If re-alignment is not feasible, focus on improving the visibility and quality of the entry.



Well designed and coordinated storefront.



Opaque facade and minimal entrance is less inviting for pedestrians.



Recessed entrances align with the sidewalk edge.
(Washington, Missouri)

5.4.4 Entrances

Recessed entries help invite customers inside and they provide temporary shelter in inclement weather.

- **Maintain recessed entries where they exist**

These areas provide protection from the weather, and the repeated rhythm of these shaded areas along the street helps to identify business entrances. Avoid doors that are flush with the sidewalk. If the original recessed entry has been removed, consider establishing a new one. Use doors with large areas of glass where feasible; these will improve the visibility of your business. Consider using an accent color on the door. This will help lead the customers inside. As a way of highlighting the entrance for customers, center your sign over the door.

5.4.5. Kick Plates

A kick plate, or bulkhead, usually supports the floor of a display window. These typically align with the street, adding to the visual continuity of Downtown.

- **Maintain the kick plate that is found below the display window**

If the kick plate is missing, one option is to reconstruct the original using old photographs as a guide. This provides for a decorative color scheme. Coordinate the color scheme of the kick plate with other facade elements. If original design information is not available, another option is to design a new, simplified kick plate. Appropriate materials are painted wood, glazed tile or painted metal.



Recessed entrance with detailed kick plates creates an inviting experience for the customer.
(Washington, Missouri)

5.4.6. Transoms

The upper glass band in traditional storefronts introduced light into the depths of the building, saving on lighting costs.

- **Preserve the transom if it exists**

These bands of glass are found on many buildings and they often align at the same height within a block. Maintaining this line helps reinforce a sense of visual continuity for the street. When transoms are covered and original moldings and window frame proportions are concealed, the impact of the store front is weakened. Use glass in the transom if possible. The purpose is to maintain the alignment of your storefront with others in the block. Glass is preferred because it introduces light into the store interior. As an alternative, use the space as a sign or decorative panel. Keep the background a dark color. Always retain the original shape and proportions of the opening. If the interior ceiling is now lower than this glass line, pull the dropped ceiling back from the window on the inside to maintain its historical dimensions.

Some transoms have hinged panels to allow natural ventilation. Restore these to working order where feasible. Used in combination with ceiling fans to re-circulate air that collects at the top of the room, operable transoms can be very effective in improving comfort levels (especially during "swing seasons" when full air-conditioning is not necessary). In some cases, air conditioning units may have been mounted in place of one of the transom panels, usually just over the entry. These units blast hot air onto approaching customers and raise the temperature of the sidewalk. They also detract from the design character of the building. Relocate these units to the rear, or install roof-top systems where possible.



Building which preserves the transom windows.
(Washington, Missouri)

5.4.7 Upper Windows

Glass areas in upper stories are traditionally much smaller than first floors. This ratio of solid to void is very important.

- **Preserve the size and shape of upper story windows**

Typical upper windows are vertically oriented, and usually several are uniformly spaced along the building front. This rhythm of upper story windows is a very important unifying feature of Downtown because it is repeated on most buildings. Consider re-opening the windows if they are presently blocked. Window manufacturers now offer replacement windows that will fit the original opening; others will provide custom-ordered windows to fit exactly. Do not block down the opening to accommodate a stock window that does not fit the building.

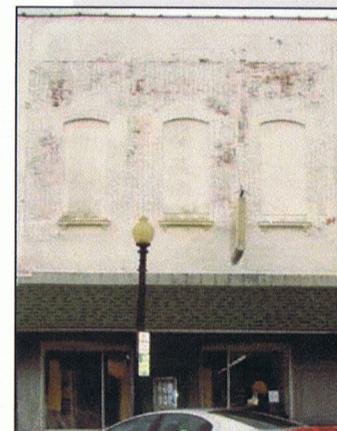
Window shades or curtains, in colors that coordinate with other accent trim, are encouraged. In the process of cleaning up windows, remove old stored items from view; these often detract from the image of Downtown as an active place to do business. If lower ceilings upstairs are necessary, pull the ceiling back from the window to maintain the original height at the window.

If your budget cannot include reopening the windows, consider using shutters to define the original window dimensions. These will still keep birds and weather out, but give a more "occupied" appearance. Shutters were used by early Washington building owners; they also provide a surface for a decorative color that can tie in with an overall color scheme.

Where upper story windows can be maintained, consider using curtains that repeat colors used on first floor awnings or trim. This is especially useful where upper floors are vacant. In this way, the second story can reinforce the color scheme of the business below. Another option is to consider using awnings on upper story windows that match those on the first floor in style and color.



Shutters are encouraged on upper level windows. Shutters should be of proportion and scale, that when closed, completely cover the window.
(Washington, Missouri)



Examples of what not to do with upper floor windows or upper story awnings.

5.4.8 Awnings

- Consider using fabric awnings to provide weather protection and create interest

Awnings are particularly useful on buildings that are quite simple. They provide shade for merchandise, shelter for pedestrians and a colorful accent to the building front that can be changed without great expense.

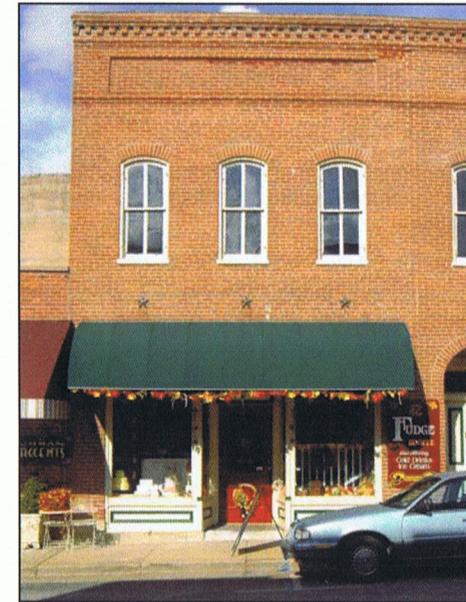
The awning should fit the dimensions of the storefront opening to emphasize these proportions. It should not obscure ornamental details. Mount the top edge to align with the top of the transom, or to align with the framing that separates the transom from the main display window. This will help strengthen the visual continuity of storefronts.

Coordinate the color of the awning with the color scheme for the entire building. Fabric awnings are encouraged. They may be fixed or operable. Fixed awnings will wear longer, but operable ones have the flexibility of being changed with weather and light conditions. Awnings will wear, and should be acknowledged as an operating cost of doing business.

Horizontal metal canopies may be appropriate, where there is historic precedence for their use on similar buildings. Consider painting the edge of the canopy with a color that matches other trim on your building or trimming the edge with fabric. This will help tie it into the overall composition. Metal awnings should be avoided except where they contribute to the historic character of the building.

Rough-sawn wood, plastic, shake or asphalt shingles are not appropriate materials for canopies. Fake mansard roofs are also inappropriate. These do not reflect the character of Downtown, and they do not provide an opportunity to add an accent color to the building.

Installing lighting in awnings so they act as an internally lit sign is inappropriate. These tend to overpower the building front at night, detracting from display windows rather than drawing attention to building interiors.



Fabric awnings create depth, color, and interest for building facades.
(Washington, Missouri)



Wood shingle canopies are inappropriate on Downtown buildings.

5.4.9 Ornamental Details

Decorative features can add distinction image to your business. Customers may recognize your location because of these features.

- **Preserve the original ornament and detail of the facade**

Architectural details add interest to Downtown and are a part of the unique identity of your building. Parapets, cornices and window arches are examples of decorative elements found on many buildings in Downtown Washington. Where portions of these details have been removed, refer to photographic evidence of the earlier condition. Look for details that may have been removed and stored to use as patterns for new designs. Where exact reconstruction of details is not feasible, consider developing a simplified interpretation of the original in which its major form and line is retained.

Ornamental caps or cornices at the top of the facade are especially encouraged, because they give a "finished" look to the building. When these cornices are repeated along the street, they create an important visual line. Consider highlighting details with accent colors or lighting.



Original cornice and detail of the facade have been preserved and maintained.

5.4.10 Facade Materials

- **Avoid concealing original façade materials**

Brick is the historically dominant material Downtown, although there are exceptions. In most cases, exposing the underlying brick material will help to re-establish the character of the building. If the original material has been covered, uncover it if possible.

The original material is often the most durable surface, and if it is masonry, the texture of the wall will contribute to the visual continuity of the block. Metal cladding often is easy to remove, and only small areas of the underlying material will have been damaged. When a building front is entirely covered, it often breaks the rhythm of upper story windows that contribute to the visual continuity of the street. Cover-ups also hide interesting details that can enhance the identity of businesses located in the building.



Avoid concealing original façade materials.

Facade Materials (continued)

If, after removing the covering material, you discover that portions of the original must be replaced, use a material that is similar to the original in color and texture. Highly reflective materials are discouraged because they create glare, increase the temperature of the sidewalk area in summertime and block views of activity inside buildings. This may discourage pedestrian activity Downtown. Rough-sawn wood is also inappropriate. Unpainted wood ages quickly and collects dirt. Wood should always have a weather-protective finish. Paint is preferred in a color that coordinates several trim and ornament features. Covering materials usually weaken the design character of the building and may even obscure deterioration that is occurring to the structure. Working with the original facade materials is usually the most cost-effective approach.

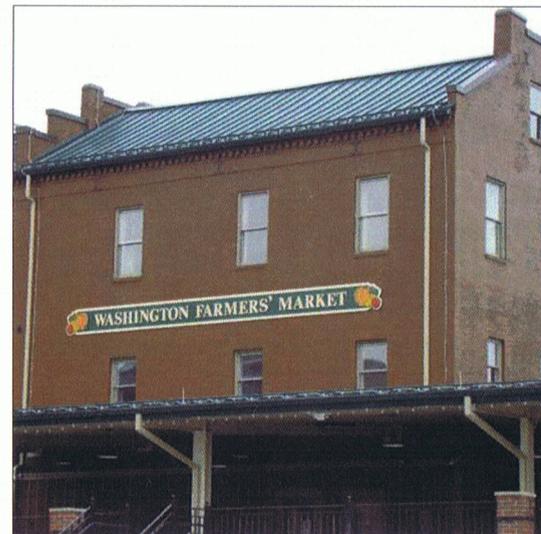
- **Leave brick in its original unpainted state when possible**

This is especially true for historic buildings. Painting of brick is a long-established tradition and a well-painted front can be a very good design solution. If the brick is already painted, avoid paint removal schemes that damage the finish with abrasive methods. Sand blasting, for example, will damage the finish and accelerate erosion.

Consider repainting the brick rather than stripping down to bare brick. This means you will need to repaint periodically, but that is a part of good building maintenance. Repainting may also be necessary if you have to patch holes in the brick wall and are not able to accurately match the original in color and mortar profile. A muted background color will work best, allowing you to use brighter colors for accents. If the building is already sand blasted, you should prepare for the added maintenance that this may cause. The roughened surface will become dirty quickly, and moisture may enter the wall. Water-protective sealants are generally considered to be ineffective in these situations. Painting the brick may provide some relief, but repainting on a regular maintenance schedule may require more effort to prepare a sound substrate (due to the irregular surfaces).



Rehabbed building with proper colors and textures.
(Maplewood, Missouri)



Painted building, using paint colors
compatible with surrounding buildings.
(Washington, Missouri)

5.4.11 Roofs

- **Preserve original roof forms**

Avoid concealing the original roof line. New panels or covering materials that obscure this line are generally discouraged. In the process of removing a metal panel covering, you may discover an interesting parapet design. Fake mansard and shed roofs are inappropriate because they are out of character with the original facade designs.

5.4.12 Plain Front Buildings

Some buildings in the Downtown area do not have historic features or even modern ornamentation. Many were built as simple fronts, others are actually cover-ups on older buildings. If your building seems plain, consider these options:

- **Whenever feasible, uncover original facade materials**

These materials are often more durable and more interesting than later coverings. They may also provide an overall design idea for other building elements. If, however, the building really has no details, it may have been built that way.

- **If uncovering is not feasible, develop a new design that will reinforce general characteristics of other buildings on the block**

Develop a new design, using the traditional storefront elements described on page 46, or develop a simple design using three basic elements: a unified paint scheme, an awning and a sign.

- **Emphasize horizontal features that can align with other buildings**

Consider highlighting a simple cornice, a band of color, a sign or panel, or an awning edge that can line up with similar elements on the street.



Horizontal facade features which align with other buildings.
(Washington, Missouri)

5.4.13 Rear Entrances

Back entrances have become more important for public use as off-street parking lots are developed behind buildings. Consider how your image can be improved here while also remembering that service functions must be accommodated.

- **Develop the rear entrance for shared public and service access when possible**

Use material and colors that coordinate with the main facade, so customers will learn to recognize that both entrances are related to the same business. Use a smaller version of the front sign to identify the rear entrance. Provide lighting at the rear entrance that is similar to the lighting in the front.

- **Screen service equipment and trash containers**

Use solid wood or masonry partitions, lattice screens, or hedges to screen trash areas. This will make the entrance more attractive to customers. Keep electrical service boxes and conduits in good repair and painted. Consider using a color scheme on these screens that matches that of the building. It may also be possible to consolidate trash containers from several buildings in a central area.



Screened waste receptacles or large dumpsters.



Rear entrance which is well maintained with landscaping and lighting.
(Washington, Missouri)

5.4.14 Illumination

Buildings should be interesting at night as well as by day for pedestrians and motorists. Even when a business is closed, a well-lit storefront creates a positive impression about Downtown and people are encouraged to return during business hours.

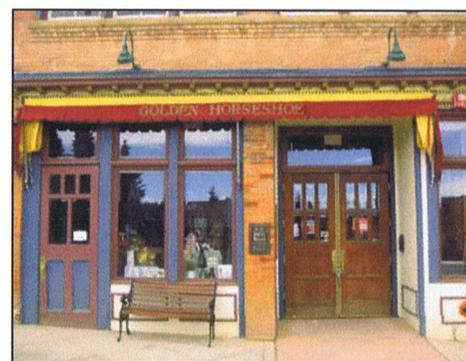
- **Use lighting to unify the building composition at night**
Use lighting as a design element to draw attention to the entire building, not just the sign. Coordinate lighting of these four elements:
 - Window displays
 - Entrances
 - Signs
 - Building details

The display window lighting should remain the dominant element; do not overpower this with extensive lighting on of other facade elements.

- **Balance the color and intensity of lighting among building features**
Sign lighting should be balanced in color and intensity with light in display windows. Warm-colored light is preferred for all exterior lighting since this is more pleasing to the eye and will easily draw attention to window displays. Avoid blue fluorescent light. Fixtures should be concealed, a very simple design, or a style that is appropriate to the period of the building. Indirect lighting from spot lights makes a good impression and complements building products and colors.



Exterior lights for building signage.
(Washington, Missouri)



Use lighting to highlight
building entrances.
(Cripple Creek, Colorado)