

City of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

South Bethlehem

Historic Conservation Commission

GUIDELINES FOR STOREFRONTS

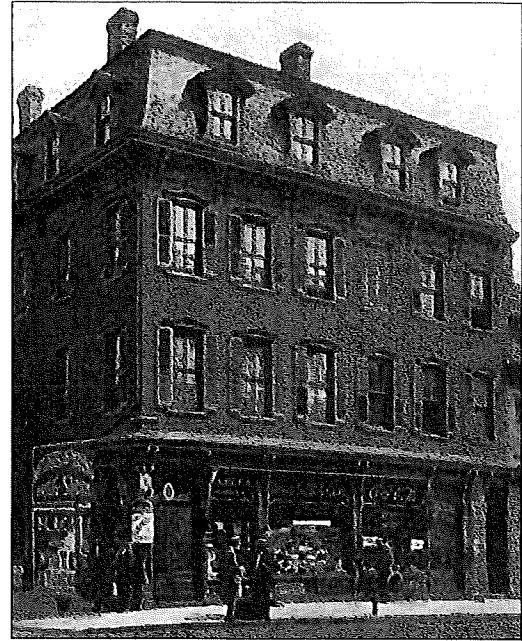
COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTH BETHLEHEM

The early twentieth century commercial and residential development of South Bethlehem was directly tied to the prosperity of Bethlehem Steel. As more families emigrated to work at the mill, additional residential and commercial buildings were constructed. The building styles reflect the community's diversity, needs and period of construction. The majority of South Bethlehem's commercial buildings are located along Third and Fourth Streets with several scattered through residential and mixed use areas.

The South Bethlehem Historic Conservation Commission (SBHCC) encourages the economic development and revitalization of the South Bethlehem Historic Conservation District and the commercial properties within it. The SBHCC recognizes the vibrancy of the Historic District is linked to the viability of its businesses. It makes every effort to assist commercial building owners and tenants to revitalize older retail areas helping to attract new customers while promoting an appreciation of the area's history.

These guidelines were developed in conjunction with South Bethlehem Historic Conservation Commission (SBHCC). The SBHCC reviews Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications for proposed exterior alterations to properties within the Historic Conservation Districts that are visible from a public way. The applicant must obtain a COA as well as all necessary permits prior to proceeding with any work. For more information, or to obtain permit applications, please call the **Planning and Zoning Office at City Hall at (610) 865-7088**.

Please refer to the *Design Guidelines* and *Guidelines for Signs and Awnings* and review the information in this brochure during the early stages of planning your project. Familiarity with this material can assist in moving a project quickly through the approval process, saving applicants both time and money.

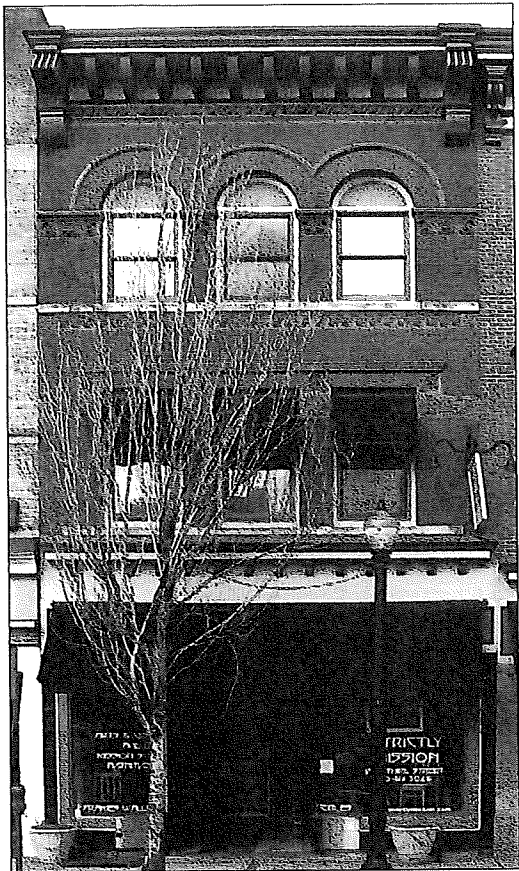


This storefront at the northeast corner of Fourth and New Streets was an important part of the overall building. Both the building and storefront have since been greatly modified.

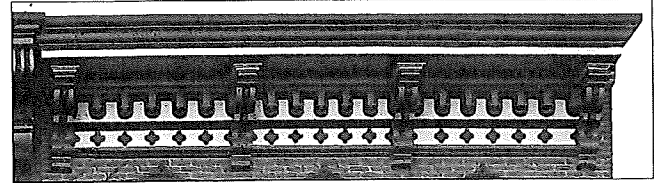
STOREFRONT DEVELOPMENT

A storefront is typically defined as a ground-level façade constructed with large sheets of glass to display merchandise. The development of storefronts was linked to the desire to increase commercial visibility and merchandise display possibilities. As technology progressed through the middle of the nineteenth century, the configuration of storefronts was also modified. Smaller windows in commercial buildings were replaced with larger sheets of glass and new materials such as cast iron were introduced into architecture. Advances in technology also allowed new configurations of buildings including corner entrances with wrap-around storefronts to maximize commercial visibility. Commercial storefronts can:

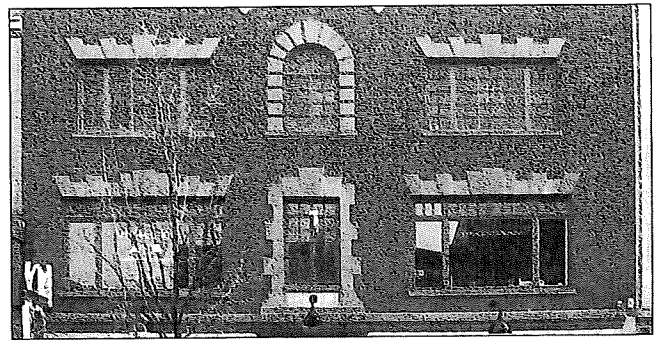
- Attract potential customers with eye-catching merchandise displays
- Serve a key role in a commercial building's identity
- Define a pedestrian's visual experience and create a sense of transparency at the ground floor



Commercial buildings are composed of three vertically stacked zones: 1. Ornamental Cornices; 2. Upper Floors; 3. Storefronts.



2. **Upper Floor** walls at commercial buildings in South Bethlehem tend to be brick and relatively solid with the windows appearing to be “punched” through the wall surface. Upper floor windows are usually operable and arranged on a flat wall surface in a regular pattern that does not necessarily coincide with the storefront openings below. Upper floor windows can be arched and have decorative trim components or detailing.



3. **Storefronts** can be defined as a ground-level façade constructed with large sheets of glass to display merchandise. Storefront entrances are usually recessed within an alcove with a secondary door to provide access to upper levels.

COMPOSITION OF COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

Those buildings originally constructed for commercial purposes in South Bethlehem, as opposed to buildings converted from other uses, are generally two to four stories in height. These commercial buildings have several similar features including three vertically stacked zones as depicted in the above photograph. Although the three zones of a commercial building are distinct, they are integrated into a unified design. Retaining the characteristic sections of commercial buildings with their distinctive elements is important for maintaining the character of individual buildings and the streetscape as a whole.

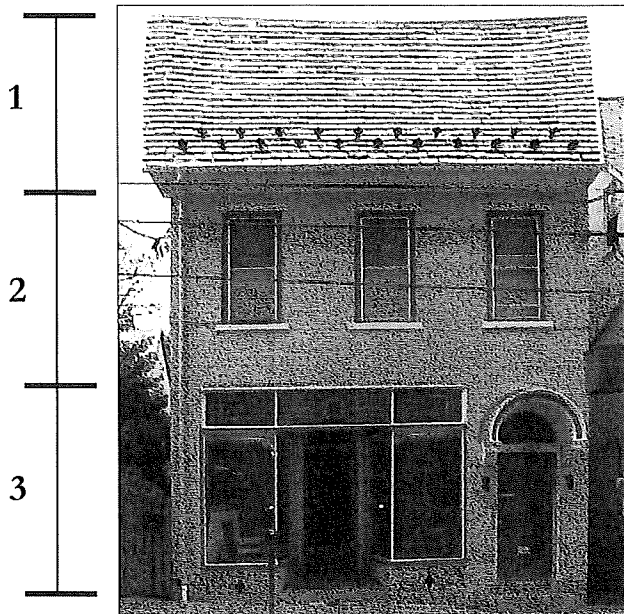
1. **Ornamental Building Cornices** tend to be composed of projecting moldings at the top of building wall, providing a visual cap or termination to the building. The complexity of the cornice will often reflect the style of the building with many including panels or brackets. The cornice materials can also vary widely and be constructed of wood, pressed metal, limestone, terra cotta or decorative brick patterns.

The SBHCC encourages:

- Retaining the characteristic elements of the three distinct zones of commercial buildings
- Retaining and maintaining all building cornices, features and details
- Maintaining the rhythm, size and shape of upper floor windows and associated trim and moldings
- Reopening previously infilled windows

The SBHCC discourages:

- Enclosing or removing elements, such as building cornices and storefronts
- Locating air conditioners in street elevation windows or creating new openings for thru-wall air conditioners that are visible from the street
- Infilling or altering window openings
- Removing a building cornice without providing a compatible new cornice of similar scale and detailing



This residence has been modified for commercial purposes with the addition of a storefront but retains the residential character of the building above. Separate entrances for the residential and commercial uses are clearly distinguished and identifiable. Residential buildings converted for commercial uses are composed of three vertically stacked zones: 1. Roof and Building Cornice; 2. Upper Floors; 3. Storefronts.

RESIDENCES CONVERTED INTO COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

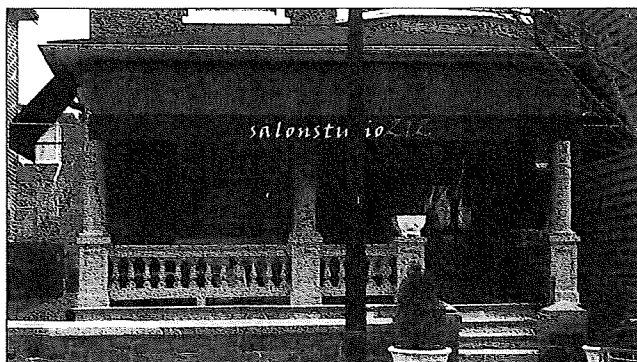
Numerous buildings in South Bethlehem were originally constructed as residences and have since been adapted for commercial purposes. Residential buildings adapted for commercial uses tend to have one or one-and-a-half stories above the storefront that retain their residential character as depicted in the above photograph. Because of their dual use, these buildings can have very different characters on their lower and upper floors. Additionally, residences vary stylistically, and the vertical divisions between parts of a residential building adapted for commercial use are not as consistent as those constructed as commercial buildings.

1. Roofs and Building Cornices tend to be residential in design with sloped or gabled roof surfaces unlike the typically concealed or flat roof surfaces of commercial buildings. Many of the roofs have been replaced with asphalt shingles, although earlier roof materials would likely have been either slate or wood shingles. Cornices at converted residences are usually wood and of a smaller scale and less elaborate in design than commercial building cornices, acting as a transition between the wall surface and the roof edge.



The residential character is retained at the roof and upper floor of this residential building modified for commercial use.

2. Upper Floors at converted residential buildings in South Bethlehem have a residential appearance and scale. The wall materials vary greatly from wood frame to masonry and can include projections such as bay windows. Upper floor windows are usually operable and are typically arranged to compliment the original style of the former house.



The awnings identify the commercial use at this former residence.

3. Storefronts at converted residences were typically created by enlarging former window openings, modifying the first floor by adding a new storefront, or constructing a storefront addition at the front of a former residence. Given the variety of types, these storefronts can have greatly different appearances.

The SBHCC encourages:

- Retaining residential characteristics of upper floors of residences converted into commercial buildings

The SBHCC discourages:

- Enclosing or removing elements, such as building cornices and storefronts

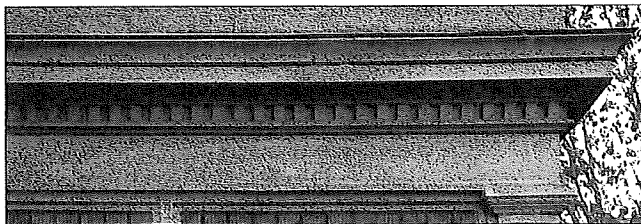


- 1. Storefront Cornice
- 2. Transom Windows
- 3. Display Windows
- 4. Entrance Door
- 5. Structural Support
- 6. Apron

STOREFRONTS

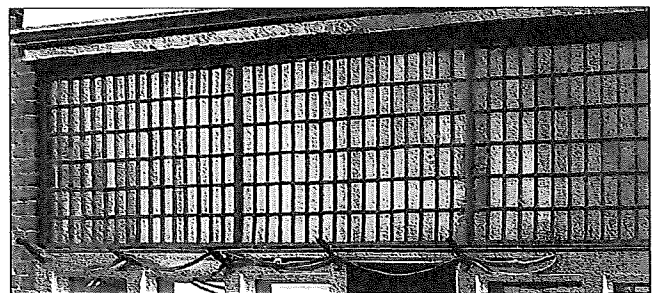
The storefront is one of the most significant features of a commercial building whether it was originally constructed for commercial purposes or converted from another use. Most people experience buildings at the ground floor level and the attractiveness and overall maintenance of a storefront can greatly influence a casual observer's perception of a building and the business within. Because a positive impression can help draw potential customers, regular maintenance and careful design can be positive on the bottom line.

Although the specific configurations of storefronts can vary greatly at different building locations, the typical construction includes large expanses of glass to display merchandise and one or more entrances. Historic storefronts were typically constructed of wood, metal (cast iron, bronze, copper, tin, galvanized sheet metal, cast zinc, or stainless steel), masonry (brick or stone) and clear, translucent or pigmented glass at transoms.



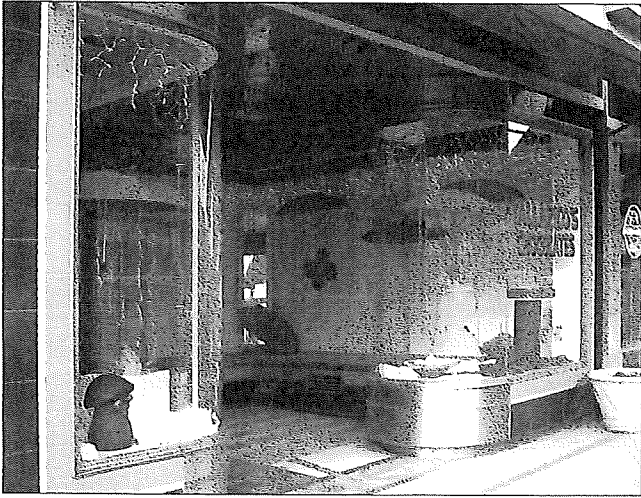
The cornice separates the storefront from the upper building levels.

1. Storefront Cornices are projecting moldings at the top of storefront, providing a visual cap or termination to the storefront and a separation with the upper floors. Cornice materials can vary widely and include wood, pressed metal, limestone, terra cotta or decorative brick patterns. Cornice details can include brackets, dentils and panels.



These leaded transom windows have translucent glazing that provide additional light to the interior. The leaded surrounds can be found in a variety of patterns.

2. Transom Windows are located above display windows and doorways to provide additional daylight, and can be either fixed or operable for ventilation. They can be either single or multi-paned and are often leaded, stained, pigmented or textured glass. Historically transom windows could also include signage, lettering or other ornamental details.



This storefront has a unique curvilinear Art Deco design. The large sheets of glass and undulating display windows allow for increased merchandise visibility. The Art Deco design continues at the alcove ceiling and terrazzo floor.

3. Display Windows are typically large expanses of glazing to present the available merchandise within a shop. Display windows typically flank the entrance alcove to a store and can include additional advertising to further entice potential customers.



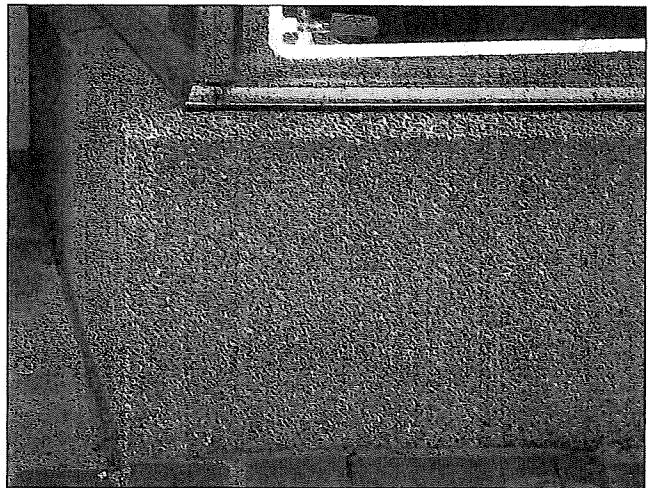
This pair of entrances located within the alcove provides access to the two businesses. The wood doors have large glazed areas that include applied signage and operable transom windows above.

4. Entrances at storefronts can be located flush with the outside of the building or recessed within an alcove providing additional display areas and shelter from the elements. In addition to commercial entrances, there are often secondary entrance doors that provide access to upper building levels.



The fluted wood structural supports separate large display windows and defines the sections of the apron below.

5. Structural Supports at storefronts are necessary to carry the weight of the building and roof above and are often decorative, reinforcing the storefront's style. Typically, structural supports flank entrance doors and display windows and can be constructed of wood, cast iron or masonry.



The granite apron provides a base for the storefront window glazing system. The profiles of storefront window frames were very ornate compared with most present-day aluminum storefront systems.

6. Aprons act as the base for the display windows and at the interior can provide a raised platform for merchandise display. Aprons can be constructed of a variety of materials with different finishes including wood, masonry and tile.

STOREFRONT TREATMENT OPTIONS

Making changes to storefronts can be a costly endeavor that if not properly planned might negatively impact a business. Prior to considering alterations, it is recommended that property owners take the time to identify the key storefront elements and consider alternatives prior to proceeding with the work. By carefully studying alternatives, property owners tend to be much happier with the finished results. When contemplating storefront work, the following approach is recommended.

- a. **Identify Key Historic Elements:** Develop an understanding of the architectural character of the storefront including the overall size, major divisions or bays, placement of components such as doors, windows and distinctive elements. This can be based on selective removals or documentation such as old photographs or drawings.
- b. **Retain, Preserve and Repair:** Once important historic elements have been identified, they should be incorporated into the storefront design. Deterioration of some historic elements might require stabilization, replacement in-kind, or replacement with a similar substitute material utilizing the historic material as the guide.
- c. **Replacement:** Replacement of a historic storefront is only encouraged when the existing storefront materials are too deteriorated to be repairable, or a historic storefront has been encased in a newer storefront and the historic form and detailing are still present allowing for an accurate representation. Replacement of historic storefronts with modern storefront systems is strongly discouraged.
- d. **Reconstructing a New Storefront With Historic Documentation:** If there is no physical evidence of a historic storefront, there might be sufficient historical or pictorial evidence to allow for appropriate reconstruction. Appropriate research is recommended to ensure the greatest degree of accuracy feasible in the reconstruction.
- e. **Installing a New Storefront Without Historic Information:** If there is not sufficient information and documentation to accurately reconstruct a storefront, the new design should be compatible in size, pattern, scale, material and color as the overall building and similar storefronts from the period, but have distinctly contemporary characters that reflect rather than copy historic storefronts.



Historically businesses featured their buildings as part of their advertisements allowing the customers to identify with the location. Advertisements can be a good source of documentation to determine earlier appearances of buildings.

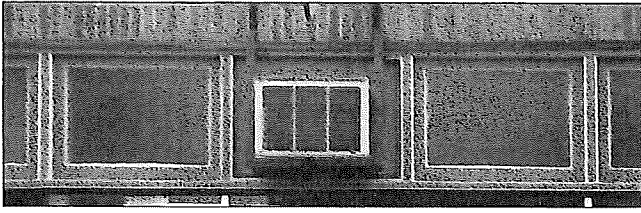
DETERMINING THE HISTORIC APPEARANCE OF STOREFRONTS

For property owners hoping to restore the appearance their storefront to an earlier period, there are a number of places where you can find information that can guide the effort. Often remnants of earlier storefronts or "ghosts" of earlier materials are concealed under newer storefront materials and careful selective removals can reveal elements or clues. In cases where historic materials are revealed, property owners are encouraged to incorporate the materials into the new storefront. In addition to potentially uncovering storefronts, it can also be beneficial to look for old building materials stored in attics or basements.

Another potential source for information is old records, photographs or drawings. These can be advertisements or articles, newspapers, promotional materials from earlier businesses, postcards or paintings. Please keep in mind that some drawings and paintings include a certain amount of artistic license and might not be entirely accurate depictions. Local sources for historic documentation, photographs and drawings are:

- **Bethlehem Room – Bethlehem Area Public Library;** 11 W. Church Street; Bethlehem, PA 18018; (610) 867-3761; www.bapl.org
- **South Bethlehem Historical Society;** 479 Brighton Street; Bethlehem, PA 18015; (610) 758-8790; www.southbethlehemhistoricalsociety.org
- **Historic Bethlehem Partnership;** 459 Old York Road; Bethlehem, PA 18018; (610) 882-0450; www.historicbethlehem.org

Some local residents and business owners also have private collections of historic photographs of the area.



The installation of air conditioners in transoms is discouraged.

STOREFRONT DO'S AND DON'TS

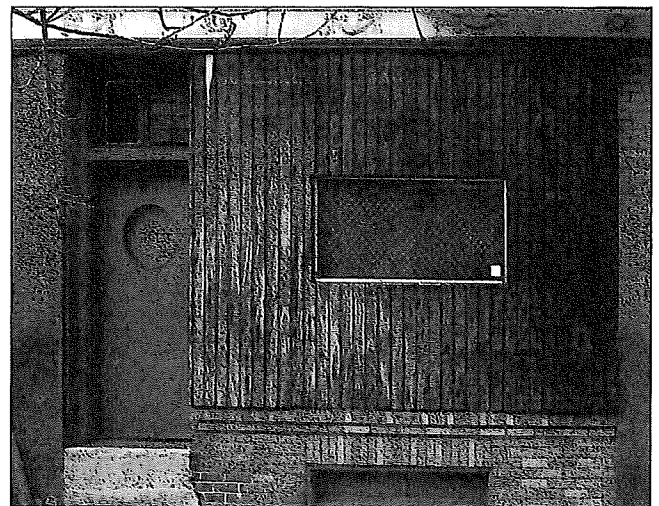
Although each storefront is unique, the following lists provide general recommendations when addressing storefronts. Property owners are invited to consult with the SBHHC early in the process when contemplating storefront modifications. In some instances the SBHCC can suggest less costly new or alternate materials that can simulate the details and appearance of historic storefronts.

The SBHCC encourages:

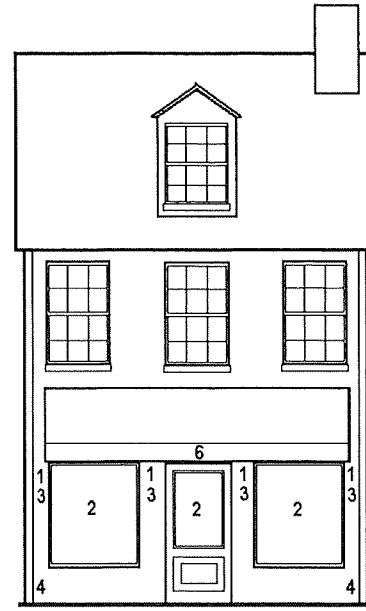
- Understanding the historic character of the storefront through investigation and documentation prior to making changes
- Retaining historic character and elements of storefronts including building material and forms
- Retaining storefront entrance and display alcoves
- Retaining storefront windows after a change in use and installing blinds or thermal curtains behind storefront windows if privacy is desired
- Opening previously closed windows
- Reconstructing storefronts based upon evidence of original materials or pictorial documentation
- Retaining original locations of entrances and windows
- Retaining historic building materials where feasible – appropriate suitable alternate materials that convey the same visual appearance can be used where the use of historic materials is not technically or economically feasible
- Respecting the scale and proportion of the existing building when contemplating a new storefront and not extending beyond the original in height or width
- Maintaining the planes of the historic storefront relative to the building façade including flush, projecting or recessed areas
- Considering merchandizing needs when modifying a storefront design
- Although the SBHCC does not review paint, it recommends that a paint scheme be selected that complements the style and features of a storefront and building

The SBHCC discourages:

- Enclosing or removing elements, such as building cornices and storefronts
- Altering size or shape of major building forms such as window, door and transom openings
- Installing stylistic elements from periods that are different from the storefront or building and do not complement the overall stylistic expression
- Altering a façade from commercial to residential character unless the building was previously residential and there is sufficient evidence or documentation to provide an accurate representation
- Installing inappropriate materials at storefronts including vinyl siding, some types of wood siding, artificial brick, masonry and mirrored glass
- Installing any material other than clear glass within a display window
- Installing built-in furniture visually blocking the inside of display windows
- Altering an existing residential building into a commercial building
- Installing window air conditioners in transom windows or thru-wall air conditioners that are visible from a public way
- Introducing a new storefront or element that alters or destroys historic building materials
- Creating an incompatible design or false historic appearance based upon insufficient documentation
- Adding a false front or false story to a building



This storefront window has been infilled with wood reducing the window opening size and changing the character of the building.



Commercial Building Signage Locations

(1) hanging from bracket perpendicular to front wall; (2) paint, vinyl or etching on window(s); (3) flush mounted wall sign; (4) freestanding sign when permitted; (5) under storefront cornice; (signs may also appear on the lower flap of an awning)

Adaptive Reuse of Former Residential Building

(1) hanging from bracket perpendicular to front wall; (2) paint, vinyl or etching on window(s); (3) flush mounted wall sign; (4) freestanding sign when permitted; (6) on the lower flap of an awning (signs may also appear under a storefront cornice)

LOCATING SIGNS AND AWNINGS ON COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

As a general rule, signs and awnings should be placed to complement a building's features rather than conceal them. In addition, they should be installed in a manner that minimizes potential damage to historic building materials. Please refer to the *Guidelines for Signs and Awnings* available from the Planning and Zoning Office for additional information.

Historically, canvas awnings were used for climate control and signage. If contemplating a new awning, it should typically be installed below the storefront cornice or transom and extend over the length of the storefront glazing area.

The location of signage on a building tends to vary if a building was originally constructed as a commercial building or converted from a former residence. The diagrams above indicate general placement possibilities for signage.

All signage and awnings must comply with zoning regulations. Please contact the Planning and Zoning Office to confirm the signage location and size being contemplated is permissible at a specific building location.

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