



# CITY OF PATERSON

## Downtown Commercial Historic District

### DESIGN GUIDELINES

## STOREFRONTS

### STOREFRONTS

The storefront is one of the most significant features of a retail commercial building. 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 positively affect the success of a business.

### PURPOSE OF GUIDELINES

- Provide storefront design assistance to encourage compatible alternatives for a building's retail identity
- Define a pedestrian's visual experience and create a sense of transparency at the ground floor
- Identify key elements of historic storefronts, appropriate alterations, and components for new storefronts
- Encourage security options that encourage after-hours window-shopping by pedestrians
- Attract potential customers with eye-catching merchandise displays
- Encourage sensitive alterations to existing buildings to allow access to all citizens including those with physical challenges

These *Guidelines* were developed in conjunction with the City of Paterson's Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and with input of many diverse stakeholders. Please review this information during the early stages of planning your project. Familiarity with this material can assist you in moving a project quickly through the approval process, saving you both time and money. The HPC staff is available for informal meetings and to provide you with valuable information as you consider making improvements to your property.

Additional *Guidelines* addressing other historic building topics are available at 125 Ellison Street, Suite 408 and on the City's website at [www.patersonnj.gov](http://www.patersonnj.gov). For more information, to clarify whether your project requires HPC review, or to obtain permit applications, please call the HPC staff at (973) 321-1355.



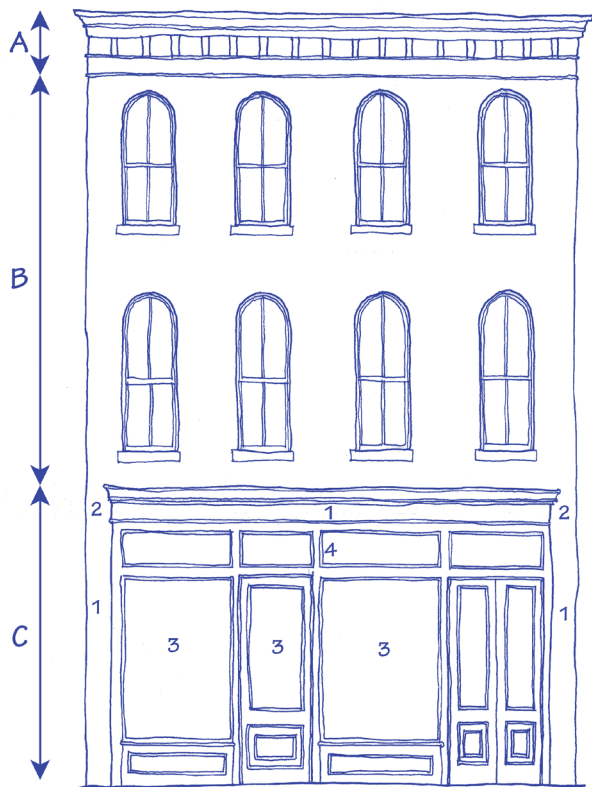
*A well designed storefront can attract potential customers and provide a positive impression. The clear glass windows of this storefront allow pedestrians to see what is being offered for sale.*

### COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES

The HPC encourages the economic development and revitalization of the retail and commercial properties within the Downtown Commercial Historic District (DCHD). The HPC recognizes Paterson's vibrancy is linked to the viability of its businesses. We make every effort to assist building owners and their tenants with revitalizing buildings in the DCHD, helping to attract new customers while promoting an appreciation of historic architecture.

### INFORMATION FOR NEW BUSINESSES

If considering opening a new business in the City of Paterson, representatives are available to discuss zoning, construction and other requirements applicable to a specific project. Please contact the Office of Economic Development at (973) 321-1212 x 2270 for additional information.



## COMPOSITION OF COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

This represents a typical multi-story, commercial building in the City of Paterson. It has three distinct vertically stacked zones:

- A. The bracketed ornamental building cornice provides a visual cap or termination at the top of the building.
- B. Upper floor operable windows appear to be “punched” through the flat, relatively solid, typically masonry, wall surface in a regular pattern that does not align with the storefront openings below.
- C. A storefront capped by a storefront cornice runs along the ground floor with large display windows topped by transom windows.

In reviewing potential locations for signage on the building above, the following should be considered:

1. Wall-mounted sign
2. Projecting sign
3. Window sign
4. Awning sign

It is important to note that the location, number, and size of signs is limited by the sign regulations. Please refer to the *Guidelines for Signs & Awnings* for more information.

## STOREFRONT DEVELOPMENT

A storefront is typically defined as a ground-level façade constructed with large areas 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 19th century, the configuration of storefronts was also modified. Smaller windows were replaced with larger sheets of glass and new materials, such as cast iron, were introduced into architecture as structural and decorative components. Advances in structural design also allowed new building configurations, including corner entrances with wrap-around storefronts to maximize commercial visibility.

Commercial storefronts can:

- 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
- Attract potential customers with eye-catching merchandise displays



*This four-story building retains the three vertically stacked zones, typical of commercial buildings, namely the ornamental cornice at the top of the building, punched windows on the upper floors, and the storefront with large display windows at the ground floor.*





Storefront Cornice

Transom Windows

Display Windows

Entrance Door

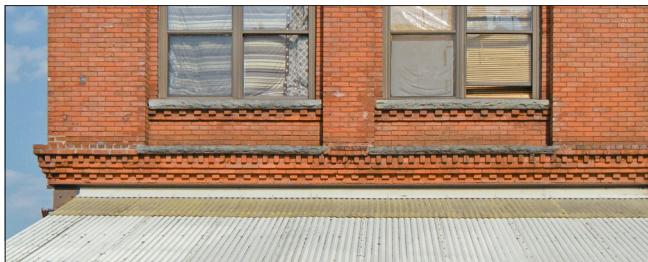
Structural Support / Mullion

Bulkhead

## STOREFRONT COMPONENTS

Although the specific design of storefronts can vary greatly depending upon different styles, sizes and locations of buildings, the typical construction includes large amount of glass to display merchandise, an entrance to the store, and often a second entrance to upper floors. 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,) large display windows and clear, translucent or pigmented glass at the transoms. Many later 20th century and 21st century storefronts are made from aluminum.

One of the key aspects of historic storefronts is that all of the various pieces and parts combine into a unified expression or style. It should be noted, however, that all storefronts do not necessarily include all components.



Storefront cornices separate upper floor windows from the storefront below. They can be made of a variety of materials, such as this decorative brick example.

1. **Storefront Cornices** are projecting moldings at the top of storefront. They provide a visual cap or termination to the storefront and separate it from 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 as well as decorative paint highlighting.



These leaded transom windows have translucent glazing that provide additional light to the interior.

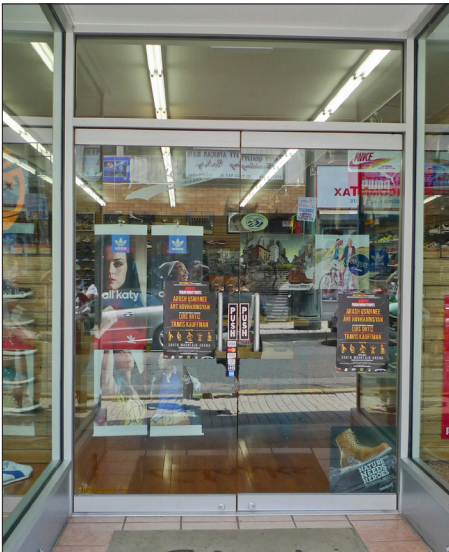
2. **Transom Windows** are located above display windows and doorways to provide additional daylight, and can be either fixed or can open for ventilation. They can be either single or multi-paned and are often leaded, stained, pigmented or textured glass. Historically, transom windows could also include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





*Display windows with an alcove increase the visibility of merchandise for sale.*

**3. Display Windows** are typically large areas of glass to show the available merchandise within a shop. Display windows are usually found on both sides of the entrance door or alcove to a store, and can include additional advertising to further entice potential customers.



*Glass storefront doors can act as a display window and allow potential customers to see merchandise offered for sale inside of a shop.*

**4. Entrances** must be recessed from the sidewalk 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 floor levels.

**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 are found on either side of the entrance doors and display windows. They can be constructed of wood, cast iron or masonry.



*This cast iron structural support is a fluted pilaster. When considering the alteration or addition of a storefront, property owners and tenants are encouraged to retain and reuse historic decorative building elements whenever possible.*

**6. Aprons**, or knee walls, act as the base for the display windows and at the interior can also provide a raised platform for merchandise display. Historically, aprons were constructed of a variety of materials with different finishes including paneled wood, brick, marble, granite and tile.



*This polished granite apron provides the base for the storefront window and includes a metal vent.*



## STOREFRONT ENTRANCE ALCOVES

A storefront's entrance alcove acts as a transitional space from the sidewalk to the commercial entrance. It provides shelter from the weather, and is often designed to increase the display area of the storefront to entice potential customers. Entrance alcoves tend to include a decorative ceiling and floor, and be flanked by large storefront display windows leading to a central entrance door.

**Decorative Ceilings** within entrance alcoves were often decorated with patterns, textures or materials that included lighting and reinforced the architectural style of the building and geometry of the space. The materials used within the entrance alcove ceiling may be repeated on the ceilings of the flanking display windows. Historically these materials included paneled wood, beaded board and pressed tin, with flatter surfaces, such as stucco gaining in popularity in the early 20th century.



*The entrance alcove allows for additional display window area for potential customers and an area protected from in bad weather. The name of the former business remains in the terrazzo flooring of the entrance alcove.*

**Decorative Flooring** within storefront entrance alcoves was often composed of small ceramic tiles in square or hexagonal shapes. In the early 20th century terrazzo became a popular option. Historically, the configuration of tile or terrazzo was only limited by the creativity of the installer, and often included decorative borders and patterns of various colors. It was not uncommon for the tiles to include the name of the business occupying the store within the alcove flooring.

## INSTALLING STOREFRONTS

Making changes to storefronts or installing new storefronts can be a costly endeavor, which if not properly planned might negatively impact a business. When designing storefront work, the following approach is recommended:

- Identify Key Historic Elements** – An important place to begin is the identification of key elements in the existing storefront or building style to determine what might be appropriate. For example, an aluminum storefront system might not be appropriate for a building constructed at the end of the 19th century; however it might be a good option for an early 20th century building.
- Locate Structural Supports** – One of the important factors in designing a storefront is understanding the building's structure. Although the front wall is desirable for display windows, it also must support the wall and/or roof structure above. By identifying the locations of the structural supports, it will inform where openings such as windows and doors can be installed. In the case of buildings with granite piers or cast iron facades, the location of the structure is fairly obvious. In buildings that have been clad with another material, investigation might be necessary.
- Review Other Storefronts** – When beginning the design process for a new storefront it is helpful to look at the design of existing storefronts at similar historic buildings. Existing storefronts can provide information about the size, location and pattern of doors and windows; the types of materials used; the design of the elements including the display windows, doors, aprons and cornice; and the detailing and proportions of the components.
- Designing a New Storefront** – The new storefront design should be compatible in size, pattern, scale, material and color with the overall building and similar storefronts from the period. The elements of the design should be thought of holistically, and should not include elements from multiple buildings and styles. (Pages 3 to 5 include some of the components that can be found at storefronts. It should be noted that all storefronts do not necessarily include all components.)

### INFORMATION FOR NEW STOREFRONTS

If considering installing a new storefront, please contact the HPC at (973) 321-1355 to review stylistically appropriate options for specific buildings.



*Security grilles should be open weave and located at the interior behind storefront display areas and entrances whenever possible.*

## SECURITY

Security systems can have a negative impact on the visual character of a building, particularly roll-down security grilles installed on the outside of store fronts. As an alternative, the HPC recommends installing tempered glass as a deterrent, providing a barrier that is difficult to break and shatter. Electronic security systems, motion detectors, lights and warning devices can be installed at the interior of doors and windows without altering the historic appearance of the building's exterior.

If considering the installation of roll-down security grilles, they should be of an open-weave pattern and installed inside of the display windows and ideally the display area. This allows people passing by to see into the storefront even when the business is closed. It also conceals the housing for the roll-up security grilles. The HPC does not permit the installation of new solid or opaque security grilles or the installation of visible grille housings at publicly visible exterior elevations.



*Exterior security grille housings are not permitted.*

## MERCHANDISING

Storefront display windows are a key means of attracting potential customers. The potential merchandising area of a storefront can extend as much as four to five feet within the store area, therefore merchandising and storefront display materials should be designed to be as transparent as possible to highlight the merchandise being offered. In addition, this area should have flexible lighting within the display area to feature various arrangements.

- Using simple graphics and clean appropriately large scale displays to keep the windows transparent and maintain views into the store
- Maintaining a minimum of 70% of the window area unobstructed to keep the windows transparent and maintain views into the store
- Using seasonal or holiday decorations to accentuate the storefront
- Constructing storefronts display areas of high quality, durable materials
- Installing flexible lighting within the display area and keeping the lights on until 9:00 pm to maintain pedestrian interest
- Installing interior security grates behind storefront displays so pedestrians can clearly see what is offered for sale after business hours



*Interior open-weave security grilles provide protection while allowing the merchandise to be visible when the store is closed.*



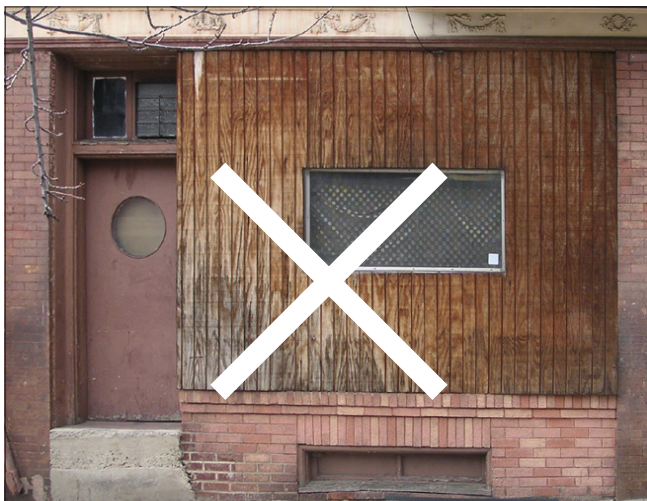


*Walk-up services such as ATM machines should be compatible with a building's storefront and style.*

## WALK-UP SERVICES

Walk-up services include automated teller machines (ATMs), pay telephones, vending machines and take-out windows. The installation of these services should not include the removal of historic building fabric or negatively impact the historic character of the building. When considering the addition of a walk-up service, it is preferred if they are located at the interior of the building such as an ATM lobby. The modification of historic building materials should be avoided and the features installed should be sympathetic to the historic building. The locations of these services should be discreet and unobtrusive, and the overall building design should be considered as part of the process. In addition, power and other supply services, such as conduit, junction boxes and water supplies, should be concealed and not mounted on the exterior of the building.

It should also be noted that many of these services also require protective coverings, such as awnings or canopies in addition to lighting. The addition of canopies or awnings and lighting should comply with the *Guidelines for Signs & Awnings*.



*It is generally not appropriate to alter a commercial storefront for residential use.*

## STOREFRONT GUIDE

Although each storefront is unique, the following provide general recommendations when addressing storefronts. Property owners are invited to consult with the HPC early in the process when contemplating storefront modifications.

### ***THE HPC ENCOURAGES:***

- Reopening previously infilled windows
- Retaining and maintaining all building cornices, features and details; and replacing missing features
- Providing attractive merchandising to encourage potential customers

### ***THE HPC DISCOURAGES:***

- ✗ Locating air conditioners where visible from the street
- ✗ Infilling or altering window and door openings
- ✗ Installing built-in furniture or walls visually blocking the inside of display windows
- ✗ Installing any material other than clear glass within a display window
- ✗ Installing walk-up services that damage historic materials or are not compatible with the building

### ***THE HPC DOES NOT PERMIT:***

- ✗ Introducing a new storefront or element that alters or destroys historic building materials
- ✗ Enclosing or removing elements, such as building cornices and storefronts
- ✗ Installing inappropriate materials at storefronts including vinyl siding, EFIS, ceramic tile and T1-11 siding
- ✗ Installing stylistic elements from periods that are different from the storefront or building and do not complement the overall stylistic expression
- ✗ Altering size or shape of major building forms such as window, door and transom openings or altering doors to swing unless required by the code
- ✗ Installing exterior security grilles
- ✗ Installing solid security grilles that do not allow the interior of a storefront to remain visible
- ✗ Altering a commercial storefront for residential use
- ✗ Removing windows to install air conditioner units



*The two steps at the right side of the opening were cut-down to allow wheel chair access from the sidewalk.*

## ACCESSIBILITY

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) strives to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities. The ADA recognizes that, for people with disabilities to participate in the everyday activities in their communities such as going to work, eating in a restaurant or shopping in a store, they need to have access to the goods and services provided by businesses. Many business and institutional facilities in Paterson were constructed prior to the enactment of the ADA in 1992 and lack features to accommodate people with disabilities, including those who use wheelchairs.

As existing buildings are renovated, they are often required to make accommodations for people with disabilities. One of the most visible exterior alterations required by ADA is the installation of a wheelchair ramp or lift to provide building access. In many locations, these ramps or lifts have been successfully incorporated at the interior of the building envelope with modification of existing door sills. When installing ramps, it is important to remember that if the ramp is too steep or railings are not secure, it can potentially be hazardous.

Other historic features that might require modification to accommodate individuals with special needs are doors, particularly paired doors. The individual leaves of doors tend to be too narrow to allow the passage of a wheel chair. In some cases, the hardware at paired doors can be modified for automatic operation or reconstructed as a single leaf in a manner that matches the overall design and arrangement of the historic doors.

## THE HPC OFTEN APPROVES:

- Retaining the historic entrance stairs and doors
- If access to the front door is not possible, providing a respectful accessible entrance that is located close to the principal entrance and designed in a manner that is visually unobtrusive and complements the building's style
- Complying with all aspects of the accessibility requirements, while minimizing alterations of the primary building façade and architectural features
- Modifying sidewalk, walkway or entry alcove elevation a few inches, where possible to provide an accessible entry and meet all code requirements
- Installing ramps and/or lifts within the building envelope where it is possible to modify an existing door sill to allow entry at grade – The design of interior features that are visible from the exterior are also subject to HPC review
- Installing a lift in lieu of a ramp if it would be less obtrusive
- Ramp or lift styles that are compatible with the building
- Railings that are as simple and visually unobtrusive



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## PREPARATION

All components of the *City of Paterson Downtown Commercial Historic District Design Guidelines* including all text, graphic design, photography and illustrations unless noted otherwise were prepared by:

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