

City of Evanston
Neighborhood Storefront
Improvement Program
Design Guidelines

Sponsored by
The City of Evanston Community Development Department
Planning Division
(847) 866-2928

Introduction

The following design guidelines are intended to help you develop a plan for improving your commercial building's appearance in a way that the City of Evanston would be willing to help finance. The City of Evanston places an emphasis on working with a building's existing architectural strengths in order to bring out its best features. We pay particular attention to proper maintenance, color selection, restoration (where appropriate), building materials, appropriate signage, necessary upgrades, construction details and how the massing of the improved property will complement neighboring structures. We do not encourage creating "new look" storefronts and disguising the original building. However, this is not a pure preservation program; we realize there are cost, energy, and functional issues unique to buildings that should be considered. Many of these design guidelines have their origins in the *Zoning Ordinance*, *Preservation Ordinance*, *Comprehensive General Plan*, *Evanston Design Guidelines*, building or sign code – they are not arbitrary rules, but were designed with the aesthetic good of the overall community in mind. We will work with you, however, to accommodate your project and unique design sensibilities in as flexible a manner as possible.

These guidelines are not meant to be specific design solutions, but principles and techniques for you to consider while arriving at a decision. Each building must be considered on its own unique characteristics. We want to help you achieve attractive, practical and cost effective results that are long lasting and satisfying.

The Evanston Community Development Department's Planning Division is here to assist you in this undertaking. We will explain the program requirements, meet with you on site to evaluate your existing commercial storefront, and help you arrive at a design decision. We believe you will find it helpful to meet with us before arriving at a final design or improvement decision.

The Evanston Storefront Program provides rebate grants to merchants or property owners for rehabilitating commercial storefronts. Our goal is not only to help you improve your building's appearance but to generate additional business for Evanston's commercial areas.

Storefronts

The design guidelines for a commercial area pertain to the storefront itself. A storefront includes all building sides with street frontages, porches and any entrance areas leading the door. It also includes display windows and their components such as: sidelights, transoms, display platform devices, along with lighting and signage designed to be viewed from the public right of way.

Signs

- I. Whenever possible, the City encourages the use of sign design plans. Signs should be limited to those identifying the use of the commercial space inside. Advertising by material or product manufacturers and suppliers other than the primary use of the property is not permitted without prior approval by the City. All lighting elements such as wires, conduits, junction boxes, transformers, ballasts, switches, and panel boxes should be concealed from view as much as possible.
- II. Painted signs on building surfaces with framed backings or use of separate cutout letters shall be permitted in accordance with the above limits for flat signs. However, signs painted on exterior walls or on fences are expressly prohibited unless approved by staff.
- III. Roof top signs on or above the parapet of a building, billboards, or outdoor advertising signs painted or mounted on structures other than billboards are not permitted.
- IV. Painted or sewn signs, designating only business name or address on awnings or free standing canopies are permitted. A new marquee with a sign or a sign that is part of an original marquee, may be permitted if in keeping with the building type or use, with prior approval of the Community Development Department.
- V. All signs, awnings, and canopies shall comply with City of Evanston Ordinance 10-0-87: *“Sign Regulations of the City.”*
- VI. Wall mounted projecting box type signs are not permitted.

Awnings

- I. If compatible and harmonious with the scale and character of the structure and adjoining structures, soft, flameproof awnings are permitted over the first floor and on upper floors above windows only.
- II. The lowest portion of the projecting frame of an awning shall be not less than **seven feet six inches** and lowest portion of the descending skirt shall be not less than **six feet eight inches** above the level of the sidewalk or public thoroughfare. Awnings shall not project more than **thirty-six inches** out from the building upon which they are attached.

- III. Rigid or fixed awnings or canopies are not permitted unless an integral part of the structure are compatible and harmonious with the scale and character of the structure and adjacent structures and should pose no visual impedance to adjacent buildings. New rigid or fixed awnings may be added to existing structures subject to the restrictions outlined above and with prior approval of the Community Development Department, Building and Planning Division.
- IV. All signs, awnings, and canopies shall comply with City of Evanston Ordinance 10-0-87: *“Sign Regulations of the City.”*

Windows

- I. All display windows, including entrances, signs, lighting, sun protection, porches, security grilles, etc., should be compatible and harmonious with the scale and character of the structure. All storefront elements should be located within their original opening height, unless approved by the Community Development Department, Building and Planning Divisions.
- II. Display windows should not be painted for permanent advertising purposes but may be painted for authorized identification of place of business as authorized by the Community Development Department, Planning Division and in accordance with the section “Signs”.
- III. Existing display windows with trim, mullions or muntins not consistent with or compatible with overall façade design, should be replaced with appropriate fixtures and painted accordingly.
- IV. Glass in show windows should be transparent; clear, bronze or gray tinted. Translucent opaque, reflective or colored glass, other than gray or bronze tinted, will be permitted only with prior approval by the Community Development Department, Planning Division.
- V. Solid or permanently closed or covered storefronts are not permitted, unless receiving prior approval from the Community Development Department, Planning Division; consideration will only be given to projects where such an improvement is treated as an integral part of the building façade using wall materials and window detailing compatible with upper floors or other building surfaces. Generally, this will only be considered in cases of interior layouts that are obsolescent/incompatible with business; staff will work first with building owners and tenants to seek less permanent alternatives.
- VI. All damaged, sagging or otherwise deteriorated storefronts, display windows or entrances should be repaired or replaces.
- VII. All windows must be tight fitting and have sashes of proper size and design to be compatible and harmonious with the scale and character of the structure. Sashes with rotten wood and/or deteriorated metal, broken joints or loose mullions or muntins should be repaired or replaced with appropriate materials. All broken and missing glass should be replaced with new glass or approved glazing material.

- VIII. Window openings in upper floors of the front of the building should not be boarded up, filled, nor panes painted.
- IX. If ceilings, partitions or other interior elements terminate inside the window area, and are visible through the window from the exterior, they should be stopped short of the glass and the exterior edge or face should be treated in a manner so as not to be obvious from the exterior.
- X. Burglar gates should be removed from all glass areas and replaced with less obvious security devices such as strength transparent coverings.

Exterior Walls

- I. Brick and stone with smooth, glazed, or ornamental surfaces should not be sandblasted, since these materials have porous surfaces. Such materials can be permanently damaged by the abrasion of sandblasting, and should be cleaned with acid washes, high pressure water, or steam.

Masonry surfaces should be properly tuckpointed to avoid moisture seepage and excessive wear on the masonry. New mortar should be compatible with color/texture of original material.

- II. Unpainted masonry walls may be painted where necessary to conceal mixed material or patched wall coverings. Other unpainted masonry walls may be painted only with the approval of the Community Development Department, Planning Division. Existing painted masonry walls should have loose material removed and painted a single color except for trim which may be another color. Samples of all proposed colors should be submitted for approval to the Planning Division with proposed improvement plans. Patched walls shall match the existing adjacent surfaces as to material, texture, color, bond and jointing.
- III. In most cases, applied facing material not original to the building should be removed to reveal the original exterior material which can be cleaned and repaired as required.
- IV. If a building side is exposed to view from a public right-of-way, the face of the building so exposed should be improved in a manner consistent with these architectural guidelines as necessary to avoid detracting from the area's appearance.
- V. Existing miscellaneous elements on the building fronts, such as empty electrical conduits, unused sign brackets, etc., should be removed and the building surface repaired or rebuilt as required to match adjacent surfaces.
- VI. Sheet metal gutters, downspouts and copings should be repaired and replaced as necessary and shall be neatly located and securely installed. Gutters and downspouts that require painting should be painted to harmonize with other building front elements.

- VII.** Exterior lighting of building façade should be accomplished with projecting or concealed fixtures at the roof line or above signs. Such fixtures should be inconspicuous and harmonious with the building's design. Flashing, moving, or portable signs other than barber poles should not be used.

Structural/Decorative

- I.** All structural and decorative elements of building fronts and sides visible from the street shall be repaired or replaced to match as closely as possible with the original building materials and construction of that building. Rotten, deteriorated or weakened portions should be removed, repaired and replaced to match as closely as possible to the original.
- II.** Chimneys, elevator penthouses, mansard roofs or any other auxiliary feature that is a contributing part of the façade should be repaired and improved in a manner consistent with the character of the building.

Exterior Building Elements

- I.** Window air conditioning units should not be installed in front or side wall, windows, when possible. When visible from the street, units should be painted or otherwise made as unobtrusive as possible, should not project more than six (6) inches, and should not unnecessarily detract from the building character and appearance. In all cases, prior approval should be secured from the Community Development Department, Planning Division.
- II.** Grilles, louvers, vents, and other mechanical and electrical items including utility service locations may be installed in or on exterior walls, where unavoidable and necessary for the function of the building, subject to prior approval from the Community Development Department, Planning Division. Such items should be treated so as to be as unobtrusive as possible and so they do not detract from the building's character and appearance.
- III.** Any mechanical equipment placed on a roof should be located so as to be hidden from view from the street, and to be as inconspicuous as possible from other viewpoints. Equipment should be screened with suitable elements of a permanent nature or finished so as to harmonize with the rest of the building. Where such screening is unfeasible, equipment should be treated in such a manner as to minimize its visibility.

Please note that the installation of such equipment is not eligible for funding under the Evanston Neighborhood Storefront Improvement Program; however, the cost for screening such equipment may be eligible on a case-by-case basis.

Other Factors You Should Consider

Each project is very different and needs to be reviewed on an individual basis; however, according to the Community Development Department's Building Division the following items should be considered with most storefront renovation projects:

- I. Hazardous glazing locations should be confirmed. Safety Glazing may either be tempered or laminated. There are specific locations that are identified in the *BOCA Building Code*, but the most common would be:
 - 1.) glazing in fixed panels having a glazed area in excess of nine (9) square feet with the lowest edge less than eighteen (18) inches above the finished floor or waling surface with thirty-six (36) inches or
 - 2.) glazing in or adjacent to a door.
- II. The Illinois Accessibility Code requires compliance whenever a doorway is altered. The new doorway must comply with the current standard. The Code requires only a ½ inch maximum difference between the outside (sidewalk) or inside, and threshold condition. This is very critical to many existing building that have more extreme changes in elevation. The City of Evanston **DOES NOT** and **CAN NOT** waive this requirement. Any request for variance from this requirement must be made at the State level. The Capital Development Board is responsible for that aspect of enforcement, and may be reached at (217) 782-8529.
- III. **Any signage, awnings or canopies require a separate permit application** and must comply with the requirements of the City of Evanston Sign Ordinance. A copy of the ordinance may be obtained from the City Clerk on the first floor of the Evanston Civic Center.

This design manual is provided as a guide for working with Evanston's Commercial buildings, many of which are visually appealing and often architecturally interesting. However, adhering to design guidelines does not ensure that a building renovation project meets all applicable sign, building, zoning, historic preservation and other codes. Prior to finalizing plans, you should consult with the Community Development Department's Building Division to make sure that these are not overlooked.

We encourage you to call us early on in the process of your storefront design in order that your project proceeds in an expedient and cost effective manner.

Community Development Department

Planning Division	- (847) 866-2928	Evanston Storefront Prog. and Historic Preservation
Building Division	- (847) 866-2932	Building Codes, Permits and Sign Ordinance
Zoning Division	- (847) 866-2930	Zoning Issues

Business Licenses - (847) 866-2256

City Clerk's Office - (847) 866-2925