

# Portland Main Street Design Objectives, Guidelines and Standards (Façade Improvement Incentive Program)

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**Introduction:** Completed applications on forms provided with all required attachments, must be submitted 45 – 90 days prior to the anticipated project start date.

**IMPORTANT: If façade improvements begin prior to funding approval, an applicant will not be eligible for reimbursement.** Please note that all grant-funded improvements must be permanent and fixed in type and/or nature. Improvements must meet all City of Portland code requirements including zoning, building, and safety codes

The Portland Main Street Program has the distinction to be named to the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district. We encourage property owners, merchants and residents to protect and promote the district's unique character, identity and history. In establishing these guidelines, we hope to achieve several important objectives, including:

1. Preservation and enhancement of historic buildings, architectural features and streetscape.
2. Enhancement of the commercial health of Portland by presenting a pleasant experience for shoppers, visitors and residents

The elements discussed and available as [links](#) in this document represent the objectives, guidelines and standards each Façade Improvement Application will be evaluated against.

**Overall Goals:** It is the intention of these Design Standards to provide that:

- ✓ the District's buildings become better versions of themselves, not to imitate any other community, design scheme or commercial district.
- ✓ encourage rehabilitation and improvements which create an attractive image for individual businesses, while respecting the original design parameters of its façade, and how it fits in the District.
- ✓ encourage solutions, so that business and property owners benefit, rather than suffer, economically by the process.
- ✓ a building's unique and distinguishing elements be identified and preserved when possible.
- ✓ if a building has historic or aesthetic value, improvements be designed to reveal the building's original style, form and materials, wherever possible to maintain historic integrity.
- ✓ in instances where changes to an original building have provided their own historic significance (ie: Maynard Allen Bank-Corner of Kent & Bridge has different era of historical significance) and contribute positively to the building and the district, they should be identified and preserved. However, when they are not of significance, they should be removed.
- ✓ the colors of historic buildings, including their awnings, treatments, lighting and signs should be chosen with their historic character in mind. Suggested NPS & Secretary of Interior color palettes are available at these links. [Sherwin Williams](#) / [Benjamin Moore](#) / [Valspar](#)
- ✓ individuality within a unified appearance is *encouraged* for single businesses or buildings with multiple storefronts. If a single business occupies more than one building, individual buildings *should* retain their individual character within a standardized or unified appearance.

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The Portland Main Street Façade Improvement Program, including elements of lighting, awnings and signs, and will use the following Design Standards. Application of these standards to individual projects will be a major factor in deciding the extent, if any, of funds, credits and other resources will be made available. Stricter standards may apply when utilizing State of MI or Federal funds and programs.

Please reference the [Secretary of Interiors Standards for Rehabilitation](#) that are closely referenced when the Design Team considers an application for Portland Downtown Façade Improvement Incentive Program.

## Four Approaches to the Treatment of Historic Properties

There are Standards for four distinct, but interrelated, approaches to the treatment of historic properties:

1. **Rehabilitation - It is the approach Portland Downtown emphasizes the most.**  
[Please link here for more information.](#)
2. Preservation
3. Reconstruction
4. Restoration

[Link here for definitions, appropriate applications, specifics to allowed and not allowed treatments.](#)

## Frequently Considered Components of Façades



### Awnings:

Awnings enhance the historic character of the area, while providing sun protection for display windows, shelter for pedestrians, and a sign panel for businesses. They can also add interest and color to a storefront. Awnings are considered one component to a façade rehabilitation and are generally not awarded as a single component unless the whole of the façade is considered to meet historic character standards.

We encourage:

- Using consistent size, profile and location for awnings on a single building
- Using creative awning shapes and materials that are complementary to the overall building
- Using appropriate lettering and messaging when using an awning as signage

[Please link here for Guidelines and Standards](#)

Not recommended:

- Metal, plastic or fiberglass awnings
- Backlighting or illuminating awnings
- Shingled pent-roof or shingled mansard awnings

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## Doors & Windows (Fenestrations) / Storefronts

We encourage:

- Large, open views into the commercial space enhancing the pedestrian experience by providing a visual connection to the use inside the building.
- On upper levels, windows should provide privacy while aesthetically and functionally serving the building.

Please link here for [window guidelines which also often apply to doors.](#)

Please link here for [storefront guidelines which include windows & doors](#)

Not recommended:

- Reflective or tinted glass tinted more than 30%
- Less than 30% of ground level utilizing windows & doors, unless rear façade where 15% doors & windows is acceptable.



## Lighting

Lighting in the downtown should serve to illuminate façades, entrances and signage and provide an adequate level of personal safety while enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the buildings.

**Guideline:** Avoid colored lighting schemes in order to achieve continuity in building lighting within the downtown.

**Standard:** Building and signage lighting must be directed at the

building or sign illuminated, with the light source(s) shielded or hidden from direct pedestrian and motorist view, e.g., shaded gooseneck or directed lamps.



## Landscaping

Landscaping treatments should be used to enhance the pedestrian experience, complement architectural features and/or screen utility areas.

**Guideline:** The use of flower boxes, planters and hanging flower baskets is encouraged.



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## Materials & Detailing

### Masonry, Stone, Brick, Wood, Metals, Glass

Rehabilitation or restoration projects should be constructed to be long lasting and use materials and detailing that apply the Interior Secretary's Standards to maintain the distinct character and harmony of the district.

As provided in the [City of Portland zoning ordinance](#):

- Buildings shall utilize high quality architecture and landscaping that creates an integrated, pedestrian-oriented environment. At least thirty percent (30%) of first floor office and commercial development shall be clear glass.
- In the Central Business District, primary building materials shall comprise a minimum of fifty percent (50%) of the remainder of buildings including masonry material, such as brick, stone or split face block.

Materials that attempt to mimic traditional materials are allowed. An example would be fiberglass panels that are molded to look like brick.

Please link here for [guidelines in materials & detailing](#)

Not recommended:

- Concrete block or brick larger than 4" in height
- 12" in length Aluminum, vinyl or fiberglass siding or roofing materials
- Painting previously unpainted brick is not allowed.

## SIGNS

Please reference specific Portland Downtown Incentives available for Signs both within the Main Street District and the greater Downtown Development Authority District.



**Utility & Mechanical Screening**

Utility areas and mechanical equipment should be designed so that they do not detract from the aesthetic appeal of the district.

***Recommended***



**Standard:** The screening of exterior trash and storage areas, service yards, loading areas, transformers and mechanical units must use the same materials, color and/or style as the primary building in order to be architecturally compatible with the building it is adjacent to.

If the utility area is separate from the building it serves, it should be consistent with the district's streetscape theme. All roof equipment must be screened from public view if visible from the street.

***NOT Recommended***



All exterior trash and storage areas, service yards, loading areas and mechanicals units must be screened from view.

Camouflaging air conditioning units is an acceptable screening method.

***Recommended***



***NOT Recommended***

