

A community's identity and character are critical components of its quality of life and economic vitality. The design of small towns should celebrate and improve the quality of the physical environment in relation to the social, economic, ecological, political and historic driving forces that give it its unique character. This unique character goes far beyond the design and appearance of individual buildings and landscapes. It arises from the heritage of the community and its people. The enhancement and design of small towns involves:

1. UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU HAVE;

- What makes the community look the way it does?
- What are the things that have influenced, and are influencing the character of the community?
- Where do you take visitors?
- Where do you **not** take visitors?
- What makes the community unique?

2. DECIDING WHAT YOU WANT;

- What's important to the community?
- What are we willing to do?
- What will be the impact of the changes?

3. TAKING ACTION; AND

- What are the community's priorities?
- Who's going to do it?
- What can we do when?
- Does the community have the resources it needs to get the job done?

4. GETTING THE JOB DONE.

SMALL TOWN DESIGN PRINCIPLES



FOWLER, INDIANA

When asked, most people who live in small towns will say they do so because of the community's small town character and charm. Some of the things that give a small town its character, identity and charm include:

1. ARCHITECTURAL COMPATIBILITY:

A community will benefit visually from a consistency of architectural character. While much of a community's character comes from the often eclectic assortment of buildings, there should be a compatibility (but not uniformity) of architectural styles. Buildings should be sensitive to the basic character of the community and reflect its continuing development.

Each community or district should find its own unique combination of elements, character and features. This helps to give the community or district its identity. While it is important to avoid cute "themes," establishing a clear character (i.e. gas light district, turn-of-the-century village, etc.) helps maintain and promote the community's visual quality.

Some of the key points to consider in examining the architectural compatibility of small towns include:

- A **consistency** of roof style and height;
- All buildings should follow the same **orientation** (narrow, wide, square, etc.);
- The **proportion** (height and width) and scale (relative size) of buildings should be the same across the entire district. This not only helps define the visual character of the district, but also helps define the district itself;
- There should be a distinct and characteristic **rhythm** (spacing) of building openings (windows and doors);
- The general **massing** and **details** of the buildings in the district should be consistent;
- Each building should have a clear and characteristic **entrance**;
- In order to establish a clear **edge**, all buildings should have a similar setback from the curb; and
- Buildings should use similar **materials, colors** and **textures**. New buildings should be of compatible materials and textures. New and renovated buildings should preserve basic architectural details.

2. GATEWAYS:

The first impressions of a community are lasting ones. The community should have a distinct entrance, or gateway. Each individual district should also have clear boundaries and entrances.

By focusing on infill development in the downtown and maximizing density, the sprawl along corridors leading into town can be minimized and traffic congestion, visual clutter, and the need for costly services can be greatly reduced.

3. DENSITY AND INFILL DEVELOPMENT:

A community gains much of its character from the density of its buildings and activities. Whenever possible, new development should locate in the downtown district. Upper floors should be utilized as offices and/or apartments. This helps bring life and vitality to the downtown and avoids the “missing teeth” that are too often a part of small towns.

Vacant lots should be developed as community gardens or pocket parks until appropriate uses can be found for the space. Discourage the temptation to make them into parking lots.

4. OPEN SPACE:

While density of buildings and activities is important to the visual quality of a community, open space is important as well. Activities need places to happen. The spaces should provide for a variety of events and relaxation. Larger spaces can be home to community events and recreation while small places can provide for relaxation. Community gardens can be a great way to bring citizens together and be a positive addition to the visual character of the community as well.

5. PARKING:

Parking (or the lack of it) is often mentioned as a problem in small town downtowns. In reality, it rarely is. If the destination is of quality and the path is well designed, most people don't mind a slight walk. In fact, most downtown shopping areas have closer parking than large suburban shopping malls.

While on-street parking is important to businesses' success, the majority of parking should be in lots behind the stores, or in non-prime building lots in or near downtown. Lots should be well landscaped and well lit to be a positive addition to the community.



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6. SIGNAGE:

It is important for businesses to inform customers of their location. The types, size, location and character of signs should be consistent and well designed. A well designed signage system can be an effective part of a community's visual character and an important marketing resource for the businesses as well.

Wayfinding is also important in a community. A well designed system of information signs clearly directing visitors is an important part of community character and design.

7. SIDEWALKS AND ALLEYS:

Not only are sidewalks and alleys important circulation elements, they are also critical design elements. The importance of well maintained sidewalks and alleys goes without saying. The character of these very public places is a major factor in the visual character of the community. They should be pleasant places to walk and should convey to patrons a sense of security.

8. STREET FURNITURE:

Seating, lighting, newspaper racks, waste containers, flower boxes, etc. are all important ingredients in a community's visual character. Like all other aspects of small town design, street furniture should be compatible with the design of the buildings and spaces and not a design afterthought.

WHY MAKE IMPROVEMENTS TO MY BUILDING?

There are numerous reasons to improve your building. Making improvements to your building can:

1. Extend the life of the structure;
2. Enhance its appearance, thus improving the market image of the business or businesses which operate in it. A “tired” looking building is far less likely to attract new clients or customers to the businesses;
3. Reduce the energy consumption, thus reducing the operation/overhead costs to the businesses;
4. Increase the income generation from a building via increasing rent/lease rates. In some downtowns, building owners have been able to renovate the upper stories into elderly or studio apartments;
5. Result in receiving tax credits on the amount of money invested in the structure. Buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places are eligible for income tax credit.
6. Improve the overall character of the downtown and the community. Upon improving the overall character of a downtown, improved vitality is sure to follow.

WHAT TYPE OF IMPROVEMENTS SHOULD I MAKE?

There is not a standard answer for each building, but in general, the following rules should apply:

1. Focus first on structural damage or deterioration. Deteriorated stone or brick, collapsing roof structure, and leaky roofs are examples of structural damage;
2. Second, maintenance needs should be attended to. Items such as tuck-pointing, painting, re-glazing windows and weatherproofing are considered maintenance items;
3. Finally, if the building is structurally sound and in good repair, consider cosmetic improvements. Some enhancements may include: replacing single pane windows with thermal insulated windows; cleaning exterior brick and stone; replacing or repairing architectural details which have been removed, are damaged, or are deteriorated; or adding or replacing an awning.

BASIC CONSIDERATIONS



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MAKING “MAIN STREET” WORK

*adapted from a presentation at the Congress for
New Urbanism VII Conference*

by Joseph Kohl; Dover, Kohl & Partners

The success of beautification and design efforts in small communities depend largely on providing a good pedestrian environment and in providing something of interest to visit and be a part of. The downtown area of a community is its *front yard* - the focus of community identity and pride.

The following factors are paramount whether fixing or maintaining an existing Main Street, or building a new one:

Making the pedestrian feel comfortable

- **Wide sidewalks:** Sidewalks need to have enough room for friends to walk side by side.
- **Shade and shelter:** Shoppers need shelter from the summer sun and rain.
- **Spatial enclosure:** Buildings need to be up against the sidewalk to create a “sense of place.”
- **Safety:** Pedestrian safety is improved by having these:
 - Large storefronts and upper story windows facing the street for natural surveillance
 - On-street parking to create a physical barrier between moving cars and pedestrians
 - Aligned building facades to minimize places for people to hide
 - Mixed-use buildings to increase pedestrian activity at all hours of the day and night
 - Small curb radii at corners reducing the width of roadway to make it easier to walk across the street, and slowing turning vehicles
 - Narrow car lanes, as few as practical, to control the pace of vehicles & minimize pavement

Providing points of interest

- **What’s for sale?** Well-designed displays in the storefront windows entice shoppers, provide entertainment, and increase pedestrian activity.

Stores & services people want

- As retail markets change, merchants have to keep up with what people are willing to spend money on; otherwise no one will go there.

Buildings with architectural character

- **Avoid boring blank facades:** there has to be articulation.

Human action

- People like to watch people and see what they're doing.

Generating Pedestrian Activity

- **Doors facing the sidewalk:** People will use the sidewalk if the building's main entrance is there.
- **Large storefronts facing the sidewalk:** People want to see what's for sale.
- **Mix of uses:** People will use the sidewalks during more hours of the day and night if there is a mixture of residences, offices, stores, and entertainment.
- **Street Furniture:** Benches, planters or low walls. People like to rest and enjoy being in the center of activity.

Pedestrian activity creates a subconscious reinforcement that it's okay to spend your money there. When people are visible from the street, curious passersby are more likely to park, get out of their cars, and find out why everyone is there. Being "where the action is" can be irresistible for many people.



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THE PAST AND PRESENT CONDITION OF BUILDINGS

Many buildings are altered over time. The drawings below illustrate how this can happen. Sometimes alterations made to buildings are very beneficial; other times they are damaging to both the structure and character of the building as well as the integrity of the downtown.

Buildings can be described on a scale between the “original design” and “significantly altered.” The drawings below illustrate buildings on both ends of the continuum. The position on the continuum will determine what redevelopment or improvement options are available for a building.

BUILDING CONDITION



Original Design



Minor Alterations



Storefront is Lost



Significantly Altered



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ORIGINAL DESIGN OR MINIMALLY ALTERED BUILDINGS



Do:

- Maintain the historic fabric of the building (i.e. maintain the original stone or brick);
- Spruce up a “tired” look. Add color selectively by painting the building’s details, window trim, or cornice;
- Add a cloth awning which complements the storefront or upper story windows, where appropriate;
- Maintain the original facade design and signage.

DON'T:

- Cover up or alter architectural details such as the cornice, decorative hoods above upper story windows, or clerestory windows;
- Paint or stucco-coat the original brick and mortar. Once a historic structure is painted or covered with stucco it usually can never be reversed without substantially damaging the integrity of the brick;
- Substitute modern metal and tinted windows or doors for the original ones;
- Use large signage or excessive neon lighting.

Buildings that have been significantly altered have a variety of options for improvements. Those options range from reconstructing the original facade to disguising it to reduce the impact to the overall character of the downtown. Some examples of how this can be accomplished are illustrated below.

Do:

- Investigate the potential for removing the materials covering the original facade;
- Restore original facade, if possible;
- Add or enhance elements which may reflect the scale, patterns, and lines of neighboring buildings;
- Add an awning to add color and help disguise the substantial alterations;
- Add color selectively to complement colors used by neighboring structures.

DON'T:

- Use large, protruding signage;
- Continue altering the architectural style.
- Use bold, eye catching color or materials.

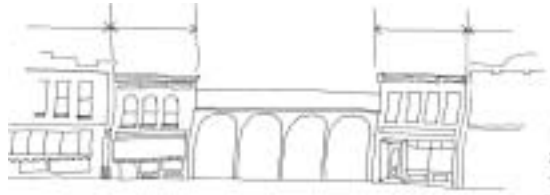
SUBSTANTIALLY ALTERED BUILDINGS





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NEW CONSTRUCTION/INFILL



Out-of-character infill



In-character infill

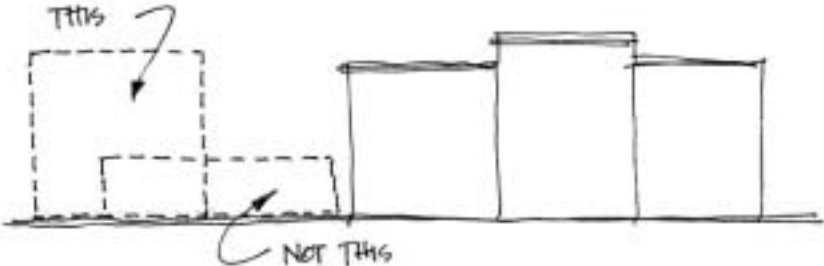
New construction/ infill in the downtown can have a good or bad result. Buildings which are constructed to match or reflect the context are positive additions to a historic downtown. New buildings which ignore height, width, scale, building lines, rhythm and the indigenous materials used by surrounding buildings generally are not good neighbors in the downtown.

Do:

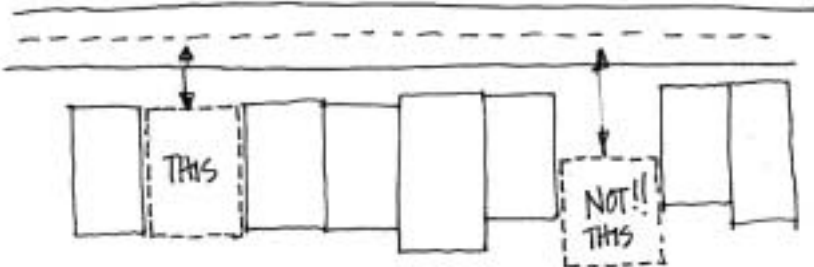
- Use materials which match or complement surrounding building's patterns, color and appearance;
- Match the sizes, scale and rhythm of the windows and store fronts of neighboring buildings;
- Use signage which is not overpowering.

DON'T:

- Introduce materials which are not already found in buildings in the downtown;
- Use exotic shapes or patterns which will disrupt visual continuity;
- Try to imitate historic styles without professional assistance and thorough investigation of the scale, materials, proportions, and characteristics of that style. Some historic styles such as Colonial, Federal, and Beaux Arts are not appropriate in a downtown.



Encourage similar proportions to existing buildings.



All buildings should be on the same vertical plane. Irregularities in this pattern detract from the downtown's overall cohesiveness.



Roof patterns should conform to or accentuate existing facades and roof patterns.



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STOREFRONT DESIGN

A storefront is often the heart of a business' identity. It acts as an invitation, and therefore, its design, relationship to the pedestrian, and relationship to the street are very important. Because of this, it is often the most frequently changed component of a building's facade. Though change is positive and necessary for maintaining an image, there are some traditions that should be considered when altering a building's storefront.

The storefront, historically, was built into the facade, whereas many of today's storefronts appear to be applied as additions to the front of the building. This interrupts the historic pattern established by the openings. The following guidelines apply to storefronts:

1. Storefronts of adjacent buildings should be of similar proportions, scale and height;
2. The pattern of storefronts creates a very strong relationship between the buildings on a street and the pedestrian. Traditionally, it is appropriate to slightly recess the storefront at the sidewalk edge. A storefront that is pushed back into the building more than a few inches, however, isolates the first floor from the street;
3. Storefronts of the era when many Indiana downtowns were built were composed largely of windows with a recessed entry. This was a functional solution to allow natural light to penetrate into the building. The design also allowed for visual access from the sidewalk deep into the building giving the pedestrian a chance to view merchandise without entering the store;
4. Storefront windows usually consist of an upper band of transoms, the large display windows, and a lower base of wood, masonry or some other material;
5. Usually the door had a vision panel. Recessing the door emphasizes the entry and is a way to provide shelter for customers when going in or out. It also lessens the hazards of opening a door directly onto the sidewalk and must be done to meet codes;
6. Display windows and transoms are appropriate places for subtle painted signs. Decoration of the storefront should be carefully considered, as the design may detract the customer's attention from merchandise. Loud patterns, colors or signs will not make it easy for the customer to look through the storefront;
7. When choosing materials for your storefront, consider first those that are indigenous to the buildings along the street. They should be simple and inconspicuous so that the emphasis is on the entry and the relationship of the sidewalk to the interior is strong; and
8. Avoid using materials in nontraditional applications; variations in the overall pattern may negatively isolate the building.

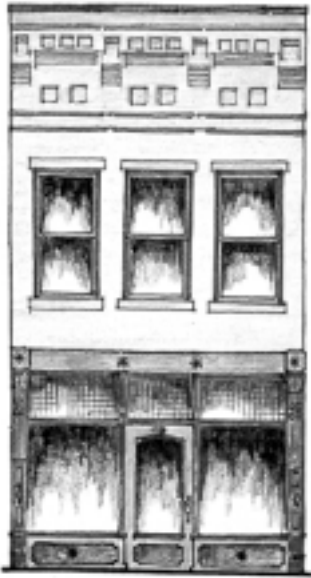
BEAUTIFICATION AND DESIGN GUIDELINES

Existing condition



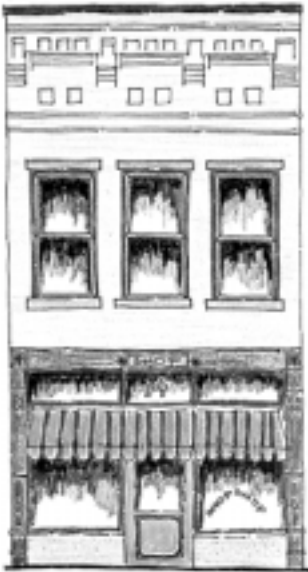
Minor Improvements:

- Paint trim
- Add awning
- Reglaze windows



Significant Improvements:

- Clean exterior surfaces
- Use historic kickplates
- All items from minor improvements listed above



These kickplates have been radically altered and replaced with glass. What is important is that the kickplate proportion has been maintained.



Original (historic) kickplate.



FOWLER, INDIANA

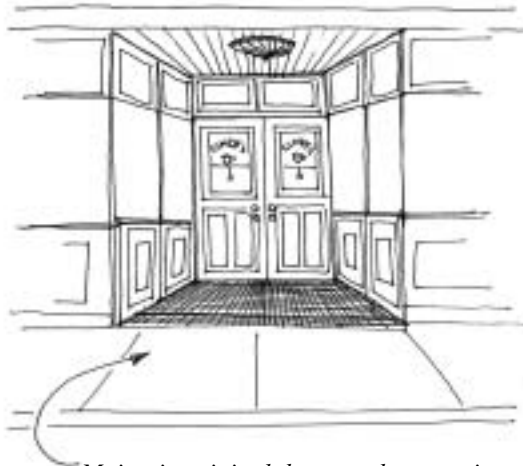
DOORS

Doors are a very important design feature of a storefront. Doors are not only for a person to walk through, they also add character and identity to the storefront. Doors serve also as an insulator from weather and can provide light.

When choosing a door consider the following:

1. Use a door which imitates the original. If the original door has been removed find a historic photo to base your decision (if possible);
2. Avoid “slab” doors. These doors not only do not fit the character of downtown buildings, they are uninviting to the customer as well;
3. Doors with windows are generally more inviting. People naturally tend to avoid entering spaces they cannot see into;
4. The door should be made of materials which look compatible to the rest of the facade;
5. Doors for external stairway entrances (secondary doors) should have less detail to avoid drawing attention to them; and
6. If you choose an aluminum and glass door, select one which has a dark finish rather than a reflective one.

Maintenance Note: All original doors in good repair should be kept. New hinges and hardware can be added to make them more operable and secure. Wood doors should be kept well sealed with a varnish or paint.



Maintain original doors and proportions.



Poorly altered entryway: door relocation, modern door with no windows.

Decorative elements, or details, add visual interest and character to the streetscape. These can be in the form of carved ornaments, mouldings, stained glass or painted graphic elements. Care should be taken not to introduce too much detail into a building facade as this may result in visual clutter.

The typical details found in many midwestern downtowns are brick, stone or metal:

- **Brick** - many building facades have incorporated decorative brickwork. If brick must be replaced at any time, it is important that the craftsmanship and pattern of the existing masonry be respected. This includes coursing, brick shape or design, and pointing.
- **Stone** - stone details can be very elaborate or simple accents to other elements.
- **Metal** - metal is used frequently in cornices and bracket details.

In restoring the details of downtown buildings, you should:

1. Uncover any original elements that are hidden by inappropriate additions or alterations. For example, cast iron columns are decorative structural elements that often are covered by storefront modernizations and are likely to still be in place; and
2. Many times, pieces of decorative elements are removed for alterations, such as modern signage; or pieces simply deteriorate. It is important to protect and preserve existing decorative elements, as reproduction of details can be costly. However, it is recommended that missing elements be replaced to match existing if possible. It is the collection of details that creates a building's character and enhances the overall streetscape.

DECORATIVE ELEMENTS



An example of a very unique building material.



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PAINTING AND COLOR

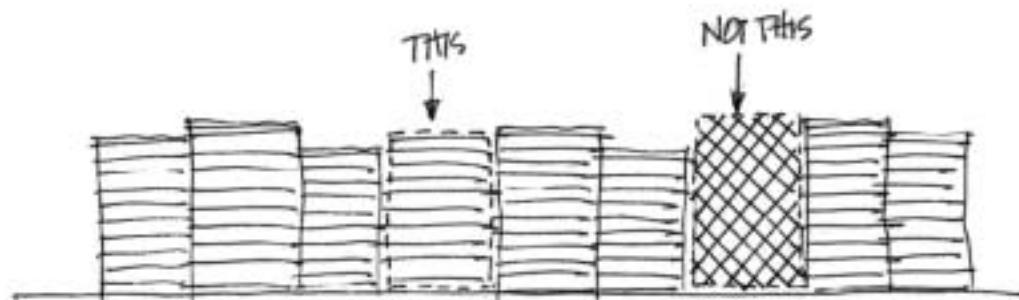


When painting windows or architecture details, use medium to light shades versus dark colors as seen here. Lighter colors highlight buildings details.

A building's color can have the single most significant effect on its appearance. Buildings painted using complimentary colors are inviting. On the other hand, buildings that have been painted with single, bland colors will have the opposite effect. Additionally, paint that is peeling or in bad condition makes a building unattractive.

Below are some things you should consider when painting a building.

1. Look at your neighbor's properties to select a color which will not clash with its surroundings or duplicate the scheme of another building. Being a good neighbor is important in building a clear identity for downtown;
2. The weather and sun will fade and damage paints. To ensure longevity of your paint, buy top quality paint, properly prepare the surfaces, and select colors which are less likely to fade;
3. If you are not good at selecting colors that match or work well together, consider consulting with someone who can. Consulting with someone may make a considerable difference between a bland building and an exciting one;
4. Consider using colors which were used at the time the building was built. Most major brand paint companies have specific pallets for historic buildings. White paint was not used in the periods which most buildings in Indiana downtowns were built;
5. Do not paint details or trim in dark colors;
6. Once a brick building has been painted, it generally should always be repainted verses restoration back to the original brick;
7. Repoint brick before painting (if necessary);
8. Reglaze (reputty) windows before painting;
9. Remove all peeling and loose paint; and
10. Consult a paint specialist to determine the best paint for the surface you are painting.



Awnings serve numerous purposes and should be considered by building owners as a wise addition to their structure. On this page these benefits are described.

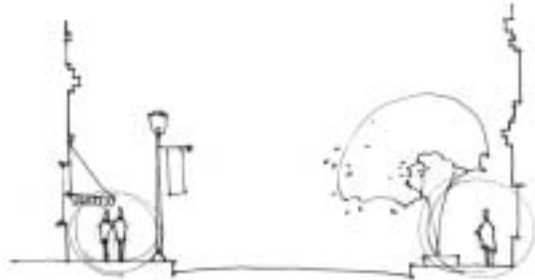
1. Protect merchandise, interiors, and furnishings from sun damage;
2. Provide shade and shelter from elements for customers and pedestrians;
3. Reduce heat loss and heat gain;
4. Help establish a pedestrian scale - encourage street activities;
5. Can be operable or fixed and are available in a variety of styles;
6. Variety of materials - canvas, plastic and vinyl. Canvas is traditional material, but requires maintenance. Vinyl is durable;
7. Provide opportunity to add color to building;
 - to decide on a color - consider colors that will contribute to variety and diversity of street;
 - if building is rich in detail, use a subtle color for awnings;
 - if building has fewer architectural details, use a bright color to enliven facade;
8. Provide an effective space for signage. Advertising on awnings is encouraged. Signage on awnings should be used primarily for identification and be limited to simple designs.
9. Awnings should be weather resistant and vandal resistant;
 - consider durability against wind damage, color fastness (resistance to sun-bleaching), retardant to deterioration caused by rain and snow;
 - certain colors are more likely to fade than others. Dark colors tend to fade faster; and
10. Can be used to “hide” inappropriate store front alterations.

INAPPROPRIATE AWNINGS:

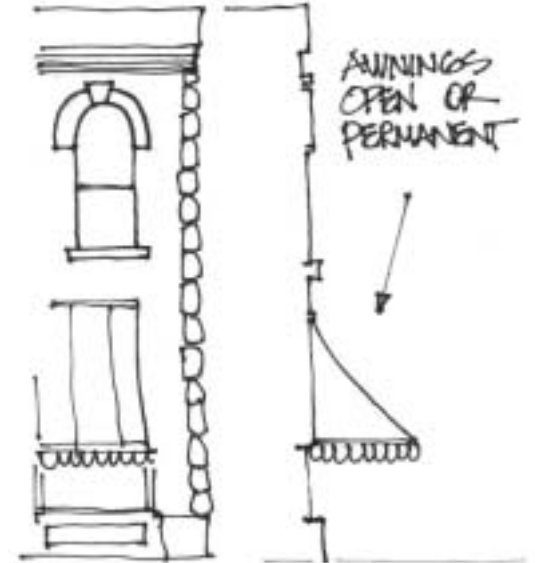
In a historic downtown like Fowler’s, there are several types of awnings that are considered inappropriate and out of place. They include:

1. Metal, flat awnings on historic buildings;
2. Back-lit cloth, vinyl, or plastic awnings;
3. Permanently constructed;
4. Shake/shingle Mansard awnings.

AWNINGS



Awnings establish pedestrian scale.





FOWLER, INDIANA

REAR/SIDE ENTRANCES



Example of enhanced quality of side entrance.

Many businesses have benefited greatly by introducing a side or rear entrance. The advantage of a side or rear entrance is that customers, clients, owners, and employees can park behind the building, utilizing typically wasted space. Rear entrances, whether they are used frequently or not, improve the overall character of the building.

Nice rear entrances also make alleys feel safer for pedestrians who are frightened to walk in an alley. Adding a rear or side entrance will cater to the people parking in these spaces and can also increase fire safety.

The following are guidelines on how to improve or add a side or rear entrance

1. Remove all garbage and debris away from the entrance;
2. Place a small sign by the door along with an open/ closed sign;
3. Consider placing a small awning over the doorway to communicate that the door is operable and in use;
4. Windows or loading docks near the entrances should not be boarded up. This condition will indicate that the rear or side door of the building is not operable;
5. Creating a window display in windows along side the entrance will help indicate its purpose as an entrance; and
6. For reasons of security, cash registers, etc. should be located so both doors can be monitored.

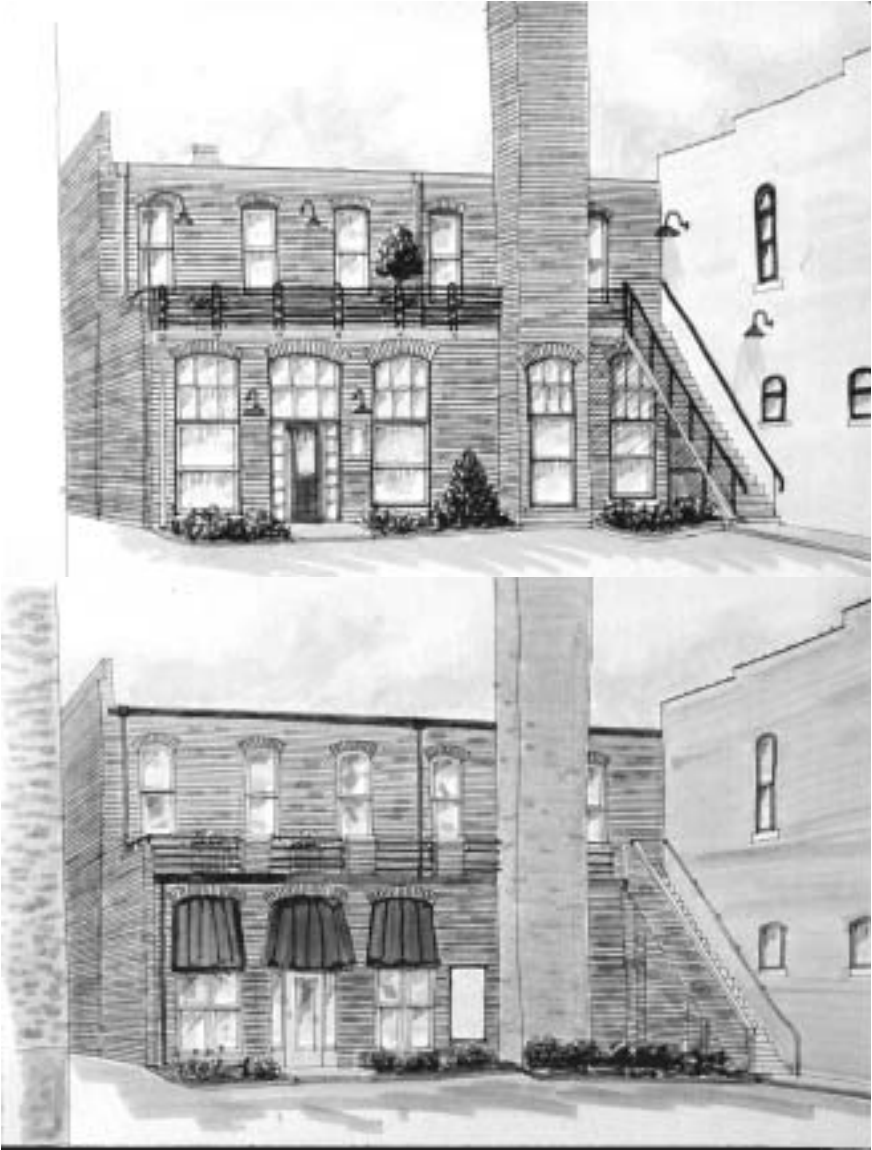


Before



After

BEAUTIFICATION AND DESIGN GUIDELINES



Examples of significant improvements to rear entrances.



FOWLER, INDIANA

SIGNAGE

Signs are used to draw attention to a business and to help develop the identity and image of that business. In a historic downtown like Fowler's, signs should be selected wisely to complement the buildings and to avoid a clustered appearance.

In general, signs in Fowler's downtown should follow these guidelines:

1. Use the smallest sign necessary to convey your message;
2. The sign should not dominate the facade. The shape and scale of the sign should complement the building;
3. Determine who you want to see your sign. If you want to attract pedestrians consider window signs, signs hanging from the entry, and signs above the doorway. Use awning signs and wall mounted signs to attract vehicular traffic;
4. Use materials which reflect and compliment the building materials;
5. If you use neon, it should be used carefully so as not to be overpowering;
6. Backlit plastic signs are not encouraged in the downtown;
7. Keep your message simple. Signs are generally a part of a complex, visual environment; and
8. Avoid flashy colors. These colors should be used on a highway, not in the downtown.



Downtown signage



Awning signs are effective for attracting vehicular attention.



Window signs gain the attention of pedestrian traffic.

It is very important to maintain a building's masonry skin, as neglect can lead to accelerated deterioration of the structure resulting in very costly damage. Locating problems with masonry does not require a trained eye: the most serious problems include mortar deterioration and brick decay. However, the origin of the problem and its proper remedies may require the opinion of a professional. Often damage to mortar or to masonry units is caused by water infiltration. It is imperative that masonry be properly drained, including adequate flashing and weeps. Building owners should inspect bricks and mortar for signs of water infiltration. If the mortar has become soft it will allow water to seep into the brick. After this occurs, the protective outer covering of the brick will deteriorate, requiring that the brick be replaced, at risk of compromising the structural integrity of the wall.

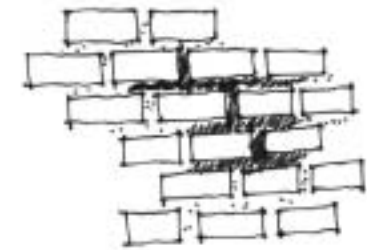
When making repairs to deteriorated masonry:

1. Care should be taken to avoid obvious patching. The color, configuration, size of mortar joints and coursing of the existing masonry should be matched as closely as possible. Repointing brick is often all that is required, but the same attention should be given to duplicating the old mortar strength, composition, color and texture. After patching or repointing it is recommended that surface treatments to repel water infiltration be applied.
2. If a masonry facade has historically been painted, the paint should not be removed from the masonry, nor should the type or color of the paint be radically changed. The paint acts as a protectant for the masonry and removing it may cause damage to the brick.
3. Cleaning masonry is only recommended when necessary to halt deterioration to the brick or to remove heavy soiling. If masonry is painted, and is still in good condition, cleaning is acceptable. If masonry is dirty, microorganisms can multiply on the masonry, damaging it over time. The decision to clean masonry is not easy, so seeking advice is recommended.
4. The process of cleaning is very technical and requires a professional. Many methods are available, but not all are appropriate for all masonry. The wrong method can accelerate deterioration. Some appropriate methods available include simple water and detergent cleaning and chemical cleaning.
5. Sandblasting to remove soil and paint from masonry is highly discouraged and unacceptable, as it considerably damages the masonry and mortar. If a cleaning will be done, take care in selecting a contractor with a good reputation. Require that a test patch be executed and allowed to weather for several months before commencing with the project. Consider the effect that cleaning may have in areas that have been patched.

MASONRY MAINTENANCE



Tuck point brick walls when water infiltration is occurring or pockets in the mortar have formed (see graphic to left). Tuck pointing is simply reapplying mortar to the joints between bricks as pictured below.





FOWLER,
INDIANA

There are several steps in a community beautification/enhancement program.

1. ASSESS THE PHYSICAL CONDITION OF THE BUILDINGS

It is important to do a thorough physical assessment of the buildings to determine if they are structurally sound and up to current code. Issues such as roof integrity (does it leak), tuck pointing of masonry, HVAC, electrical and plumbing systems being up to code, broken or leaking windows, etc. **must** be addressed first. While these things may not be exciting, if the building isn't sound, no amount of cosmetic improvement will help.

2. ESTABLISH A COORDINATED EFFORT TO IMPLEMENT IMPROVEMENTS

Through a coordinated effort there is a greater chance that things will get accomplished and the individual property owners and businesses can benefit from grants, programs, etc. that are not available to individuals or individual property owners. The establishment of a *Local Economic Development Organization* (LEDO) or a *Main Street* organization will be critical to the success of these improvement programs. A more detailed description of these can be found in the *Detail Section* of this report.

- One way to help local property owners is through *collective purchasing* types of arrangements. If it is determined that several buildings need repair/maintenance/etc. - negotiate with a **local** contractor to get a *quantity* discount on services. Many contractors will offer *deals* if they have the opportunity to do multiple projects in one area. This can be done with more cosmetic treatments as well (painting, awnings, etc.). This would be an important opportunity for the community to provide assistance through a grant program or a revolving loan program.
- It is also important that if there is an improvement/enhancement program put in place that the property owners/businesses are **not** penalized for making those improvements. Many communities have *killed* enhancement projects by reassessing properties and levying higher taxes on the improvements. Simply - don't. If propoerty owners and businesses participate in the coordinated program you should award them a tax abatement on the improvement for 3 years.
- An alternative approach is to establish a *Tax Increment Financing* (TIF) program that would provide public support for infrastructure improvements to be *paid back* through increased tax revenues.

GETTING IT DONE



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- Fowler should also consider the establishment of a *Business Improvement District (BID)*. In this program local businesses voluntarily assess a *tax* on themselves for enhancements and programs. Being an organization formally recognized by the Indiana state government, it is eligible for funding programs not otherwise available to private enterprise.
- The establishment of a Fowler and/or Benton County *Community Foundation* to accept and distribute donated funds, services and materials and administer grants is also a consideration worth making.
- The *Community Reinvestment Act* provision of the banking statutes requires local banking institutions to reinvest moneys locally. This is an opportunity not often explored by local banks or economic development groups. It could serve as the seed for a revolving loan pool or similar program.
- There a numerous grants available, but as a community you are encouraged to weigh the pros and cons of each carefully. Many grants, especially governmental grants have many conditions associated with them that may make them more costly than local funding options.

3. IMPLEMENT

The bottom line is that there are many opportunities to getting these projects done. None of them are radically different or unusual. The recommendations made in this report are no more expensive than many “quick fix” improvements. It’s mostly a determination that it needs to be done and that there is a benefit from a coordinated effort.

And don’t underestimate the power of volunteers.

The steps outlined here are only preliminary suggestions. They will require a coordinated effort of the property owners and the town council (as well as several state agencies, most notably the Indiana Department of Transportation) to determine which approach is best for the Town of Fowler. The Indiana Department of Commerce, Community Development Division, The Indiana Main Street Organization (associated with the Indiana Department of Commerce) and the Indiana Historic Landmarks Foundation can provide invaluable technical assistance in getting these programs underway.

Probably the most effective tool in implementing beautification and enhancement standards is through a grant program administered through a B.I.D., L.E.D.O. or similar organization.

The guidelines for such a program are outlined below:

THE PROCESS:

1. Establish the Fowler Beautification Committee as a formal community organization. The membership of the committee should be a broad cross-section of community stakeholders. The following rules are to apply to the Fowler Beautification Committee:
 - No member shall be pursuing a grant award or their own property;
 - All members shall score the grant applications independently and objectively; and
 - No member shall directly assist the applicants in applying for the grants.
2. Upon developing the Fowler Beautification Committee a property owner meeting shall be held to:
 - Make proper notification of the grant program and building owner meeting;
 - Distribute the applications;
 - Discuss the Building and Design Guidelines;
 - Announce the deadline for grant applications;
 - Make clear the scoring criteria for the grants; and
 - Answer questions
3. All interested building owners must deliver their application to the Town Manager’s office by a specified date. No extensions, or exceptions will be awarded.
[note: it is recommended that this program be renewed on an annual basis]
4. The Fowler Beautification Committee will score grant applications according to the published Scoring Criteria.
5. Announcements of grant awards will be made by a date specified by the committee.
6. A press release announcing the grant recipients should be prepared for publishing in the next edition of the newspaper.
7. Work/Construction can begin immediately upon award.
8. All work must be completed by a specified Construction Deadline.
9. The Fowler Beautification Committee shall meet within 6 months to assess project progress. All grant projects will be reviewed for their adherence to the grant rules, expediency of the process and for meeting the project goals.

**AWARD GUIDELINES FOR
DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENT
GRANT**



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10. The Fowler Beautification Committee shall meet shortly after the construction deadline to prepare a Program Report to the Town Council. This report shall address the strengths and weaknesses of the grant program and make a recommendation for continuing, altering, or eliminating the program.

THE GRANT APPLICATION GUIDELINES:

The following are the Grant Application Guidelines which determine the eligibility and parameters for each applicant.

1. The maximum grant award is two thousand dollars (\$2,000);
2. The grant will match a dollar for every dollar invested by the owner up to the maximum allowable grant award of \$2,000. All additional costs associated with the improvements are the responsibility of the owner;
3. Only buildings in the defined district are eligible for the grant program;
4. All privately-owned buildings in the specified district are eligible for a grant. Owners of two or more buildings in the district are eligible for a grant for each building;
5. Decisions by the Fowler Beautification Committee are final;
6. All improvements, as described in the grant application, must be completed within twelve (12) months from the award date, or be subject to deobligation by the Fowler Beautification Committee. Project extensions and/or modifications may be awarded with the approval of a majority of the Fowler Beautification Committee;
7. If work has not begun by the specified date, a report must be submitted to the Fowler Beautification Committee describing the reasons for the delay, and offering a revised time schedule for completion. The Fowler Beautification Committee may approve an extension or revoke the grant at that time;
8. A change to the scope of the project outlined in the grant application must be presented to the Fowler Beautification Committee for approval. If the change is substantial, a decision will be made by the Fowler Beautification Committee to deobligate the grant or allowed to continue;
9. Any deobligated grant project is eligible to reapply for another grant, if or when, additional funds are available;
10. Grant funds awarded to a building owner will be paid to the owner upon substantial completion of the project, at the discretion of the Fowler Beautification Committee. The

grants will be used to reimburse expenses incurred to complete the project.
Material, consultant fees, and labor costs qualify for reimbursement;

- 11. Proof of all costs, fees and labor must be submitted to the Fowler Beautification Committee prior to grant award disbursement; and
- 12. “Sweat Equity” or donations will not count as matching funds.

SCORING CRITERIA FOR THE COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT GRANTS:

The following criteria will be used to score all grant applications. The maximum score is 100 points.

- 1. Amount of matching funds (20 point maximum). The minimum amount for matching funds is one dollar per every grant dollar. If the matching amount exceeds the minimum amount, additional points will be awarded. The below chart describes the scoring for matching fund amounts.
 - Minimum match (\$1 match per \$1 grant): 10 points
 - Exceeds \$2 match per \$1 grant: 15 points
 - Exceeds \$3 match per \$1 grant: 20 points
- 2. Readiness to proceed (15 point maximum): Projects that demonstrate that they can be started immediately will be awarded more points than projects that cannot start for several months. Projects that are not ready to proceed have a higher likelihood of not being completed within the twelve (12) month deadline. Furthermore, a goal of this program is to make an impact on the existing conditions as soon as possible. If the improvements can be started and completed within a short time frame, a higher point scoring will be awarded. Projects that are ready to proceed immediately will be awarded the maximum points. Projects that have considerable steps to accomplish prior to being ready to proceed will be awarded less than the maximum.
- 3. Demonstration of need (15 point maximum): Additional points will be awarded to building owners who demonstrate a need for the grant due to financial constraints, hardship, or due to emergency. Projects that can be afforded by the owner and that are not in an emergency situation will not score as high.
- 4. Degree to which the project follows the *Fowler Beautification and Design Guidelines* (20 point maximum): *Fowler Beautification and Design Guidelines* have been developed to steer building improvement decisions, to ensure consistency throughout the community, and



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to ensure quality improvements. These guidelines should be followed where applicable. The degree to which the ***Fowler Beautification and Design Guidelines*** are followed will determine the scoring in this category. Projects which disregard the Building and Design Guidelines shall receive few or no points in this category.

5. Discretionary scoring (30 point maximum). The discretionary score will be determined using the following criteria: (A) existing condition of building - buildings which are in deteriorated condition, or are in disrepair will score higher, (B) impact to the overall structure, (C) impact to the overall downtown, (D) impact to the current business or operation in the building, (D) occupancy of building - buildings which are vacant will take priority, and (E) amount of grant request.

Downtown Improvement Grant Application

Fowler, Indiana

Name of owner: _____

Address of building: _____

Mailing address of owner: _____

General description of proposed project: _____

Total cost of improvement: _____

Total grant amount being requested: _____

Time frame of project (include start date, benchmarks in the process, and completion date): _____

Need for grant funds: _____

How does this project meet the *Fowler Beautification and Design Guidelines*?:

How will this project improve the overall condition of the building, tenant(s) and the downtown?: _____

