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HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN BELLEVUE

Historic buildings in Bellevue help to define it as a unique and attractive community. Bellevue's historic character and its proximity to the Mississippi River attract visitors and economic activity. It also helps to attract and retain permanent residents. Bellevue's historic buildings have varying types and architectural styles. Buildings of a similar type and style provide continuity for the downtown streetscape. Differences in type and style create visual variety and help to distinguish one building from another. These differences result from variations in designs and fashions that were popular during different eras of construction, the use of the building, or the whim of the designer, builder, or owner. Learning about the style of a building can help answer many preservation questions, including those about original treatments, color schemes, and what should replace missing elements. Knowledge of historic building types and styles can also help to design and construct new buildings in a way that does not detract from historic buildings.

The majority of the historic buildings in Downtown Bellevue were constructed during the late 1860s and 1910s. During this time most commercial buildings in the United States were a derivation of Italianate and Queen Anne styles. Common elements distinguishing the Italianate style are large, heavily bracketed cornices, ornate window caps and brackets, decorative window hoods, and semi-circular or segmental arch-headed windows. The Queen Anne style is known often for its asymmetrical façade, dominant front facing gable and turrets, often cantilevered from the primary façade. Although high-style examples exist, most historic commercial buildings in Bellevue were essentially vernacular, meaning they were constructed in a culturally accepted method and form, on which standard (and sometimes prefabricated) decorative elements were placed.

GUIDELINES FOR BUILDING FACADE MAINTENANCE AND RENOVATION

MASONRY

Moisture

Brick and stone are exceptionally durable building materials, but they can and do deteriorate. Most often water infiltration is responsible. Moisture can enter through the top of a wall or where the wall meets the roof. Check roof, flashing, parapets and wall copings periodically for soundness. Gutters and downspouts should also be inspected periodically for leakage. Any foliage or other organic material should be periodically removed from masonry to assure that moisture escapes properly.

Tuckpointing

The sand and high lime mortar commonly used in older masonry buildings gradually erodes as water runs over the wall surface and with freeze/thaw cycles. Joints should be inspected periodically for crumbling or missing mortar. Before any masonry repairs are completed, the root cause of the deterioration should be determined and remediated to prevent recurrence of deterioration. All repairs should be completed according National Park Service Preservation Brief No. 2: *Repointing Mortar Joints in Historic Masonry Buildings* (available on the National Park Service website). If mortar joints have eroded to the extent that there is water infiltration or the integrity of the wall is compromised, they should be repointed with new mortar to prevent water infiltration and

ensure the integrity of the wall. New mortar joints should match the original in style, size, mortar composition, and color. It is especially important to repoint with a mortar of the same hardness as the original. The softer historic mortar compresses as the bricks expand in warm weather and flexes as they contract in cold weather. It is by design the sacrificial element of the wall and gradual erosion is to be expected. Harder modern mortars with a high content of Portland cement should be avoided entirely because they will resist the warm weather expansion of the brick, causing cracking and spalling of the brick surface. In cold weather this same inflexibility may cause cracks to open up as the historic bricks contract.

Cleaning

Masonry cleaning can have a dramatic impact on the appearance of a building. Most historic masonry buildings have never been cleaned and accumulated dirt may be obscuring the original masonry color. Dirt may also hold airborne pollutants which can erode the surface of the masonry.

Any cleaning of the masonry of a historic building should be done according to National Park Service Preservation Brief No. 1: *Assessing Cleaning and Water Repellent Treatments for Historic Masonry Buildings* (available on the National Park Service website). Masonry should always be cleaned by the gentlest possible method. In many cases low pressure water washing (no more than 250 psi), together with scrubbing with a natural bristle brush may be sufficient.

If paint or heavy grime must be removed, a chemical cleaner may be required. There are a wide range of chemical cleaners available and a qualified cleaning contractor should be consulted to evaluate your building and recommend a treatment. Whatever treatment is selected, a test patch should first be tried and allowed to weather for a few weeks or months. If the results of the test are satisfactory and no damage is observed, it should be safe to proceed.

Sandblasting

Sandblasting should be avoided at all cost. See National Park Service Preservation Brief No. 6: *Dangers of Abrasive Cleaning to Historic Buildings* (available on the National Park Service website). Sandblasting is especially harmful to brick surfaces, eroding the hard outer layer to expose a softer, more porous surface that will weather rapidly. You should be aware that sandblasting will disqualify a project from consideration when applying for federal tax credits.

Painting

In general, exposed masonry should never be painted. Unless the surface was painted from the first, as was sometimes the case with very soft brick, cleaning and tuckpointing of the masonry is always preferable. A previously painted surface should be chemically cleaned. Only if chemical paint removal proves impracticable (due to a cementitious paint coat, for example) should previously painted brick or stone be repainted.

WOOD

Storefronts, cornices, brackets, and other decorative facade elements were often made of wood. These original exterior woodwork elements should be retained wherever possible. Regular maintenance will prevent deterioration. Check periodically for soft, rotted areas, splits, and dampness. Damaged or decayed sections can usually be repaired by re-nailing, caulking, and filling. Epoxy pastes and epoxy consolidants can also be very effective in repairing even seriously rotted wood. When painting, use an oil-based primer followed by two final coats of oil-based paint.

Severely rotted or missing pieces may be reproduced by a good carpenter or millwork shop. Try to match or at least complement the existing details when replacing woodwork. Any repairs to wood storefront elements

should be done in accordance with Preservation Brief No. 11: *Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts* (available on the National Park Service website).

METAL

Decorative elements of cast iron and sheet metal were frequently applied to brick and stone facades. The ease with which intricate detail could be reproduced in cast iron or stamped sheet metal ornament permitted the appearance of expensive carved or turned work at a fraction of the cost. Needless to say, this kind of architectural ornament became quite popular.

These architectural elements are essential to the character and appearance of your building. They should not be removed unless absolutely necessary.

Cast iron was used extensively for storefront columns and window lintels and is quite permanent. A sound paint coat is essential, though, to prevent rust and corrosion. Rust or paint build-up may be removed by chemical treatment or low-pressure dry grit blasting (80-100). If parts are missing, they can be reproduced in fiberglass or aluminum using existing pieces to make a mold. If the missing pieces are relatively free of ornamental detail, wooden pieces might be substituted.

Pressed or stamped sheet metal was most often used to create the sometimes very elaborate cornices that crowned many 19th century commercial buildings. This thin metal cornice was typically nailed to a wooden framework attached to the building.

Stamped metal ornamentation may be of sheet copper, which requires no surface protection, or of sheet iron, usually coated with zinc or lead to retard rusting. Galvanized or lead-coated sheet metal should always be kept painted. If stamped metal is to be cleaned, a chemical paint remover should be used. Dry grit blasting, while usually safe for cast iron, should never be used on the thinner, more flexible pressed metal.

Reproductions of missing pressed metal ornaments can often be made by a sheet metal shop. In some cases, pressed metal decorative items, stamped in the original molds, are available commercially.

All metals requiring painting should first be primed with a commercial metal primer followed by two finish coats of oil-based paint.

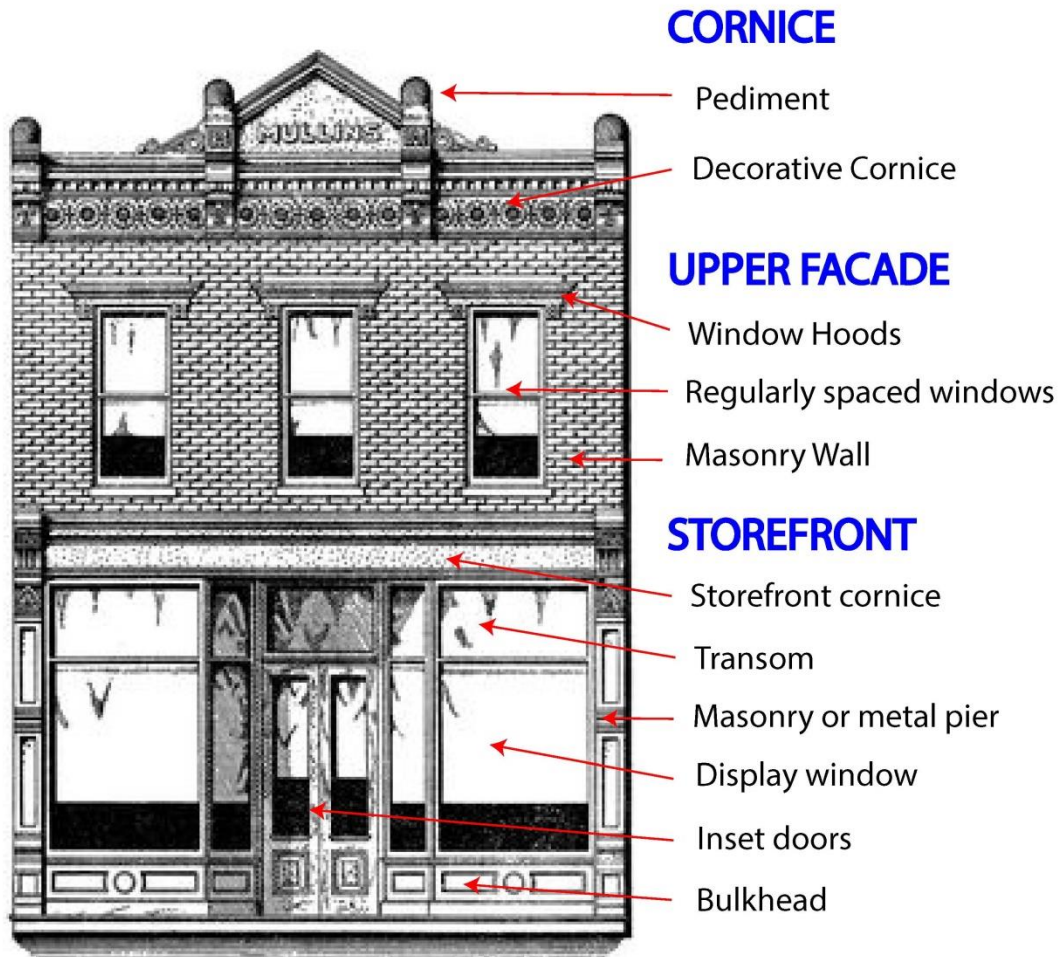
Any repairs to metal storefront elements should be done in accordance with Preservation Brief No. 11: *Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts* (available on the National Park Service website).

GENERAL STOREFRONT DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Whether you are restoring your storefront or considering a more contemporary treatment, your plan should be based on a traditional storefront design. Before completing a restoration or design for a new storefront, you should review Preservation Brief No. 11: *Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts* (available on the National Park Service website).

Below is an image of a typical historic commercial building with typical characteristics labeled. These characteristics were pretty standard across style types and construction eras.

Typical Historic Storefront Elements



Provided courtesy of:



**HERITAGE
WORKS**

Historic commercial buildings typically had their storefronts changed multiple times in different eras. The focus of these guidelines is on late 19th-early 20th Century buildings and storefronts. However, some historic buildings have storefronts that were constructed in the Post World War II era and which may be historic in their own

right. These storefronts should be retained/restored if they are good examples of storefronts from the 1940s-1960s.

One characteristic of the traditional commercial facade is a well-defined frame for the storefront. This area is bounded by a pilaster or pier on either side, the sidewalk below and the storefront cornice above. It is important to contain the storefront within this frame. When the storefront is allowed to extend beyond its frame, it may no longer appear as an integral part of the overall facade design; rather it may appear tacked on. Look at historic photographs of your building or of similar buildings to learn the original configuration of your storefront.

Following are some ideas to consider when planning your storefront renovation. Each originates on the design of the traditional storefront; however, they are not solely historical concepts. They represent sound design principles aimed at enhancing both appearance and accessibility.

CONTAIN THE STOREFRONT

A storefront should be designed to fit within the original facade opening and not extend beyond it. The storefront might be set back slightly (perhaps 3 inches) from the plane of the facade to accentuate this sense of containment. Another way to define the storefront is to have the entrance setback from the plane of the storefront.

TRANSPARENCY

Large display windows were a prominent feature of the traditional storefront. As a design element, they are integral to the overall proportioning of the facade. Functionally, the large glass area provides maximum light and display area, while visually opening the facade to the street. As a rule, the storefront should be composed primarily of glass, while the upper facade should be more solid and contained with smaller, evenly spaced windows.

APPROPRIATE MATERIALS

The color and texture of the storefront materials should be simple and unobtrusive: (1) The storefront frame can be wood, cast iron, or aluminum with a baked enamel finish; (2) the display windows should be clear glass; (3) transom windows may be clear or stained glass; (4) the entrance door should have a large glass panel and can be made of wood, steel, or aluminum; (5) the aluminum-clad plywood panels; (6) the storefront cornice can be made of wood, cast iron, or sheet metal or sometimes the horizontal supporting beam can serve as the storefront cap; (7) the side piers should be of the same material as the upper facade.

Certain materials and design elements should never be used on a traditional commercial building. For example, a storefront should never have a permanent awning such as mansard awning with wooden shingles. Other inappropriate materials are rough textured wood siding, metal siding, fake bricks or stone, and gravel aggregate materials.

Inappropriate historical themes should also be avoided. Small window panes, a colonial door, and storefront shutters are 18th century elements that do not belong on most 19th or 20th century facades, unless the building was originally constructed with those themes in mind.

SIMPLICITY

Whether you are renovating an existing storefront or designing a new one, remember that the emphasis should be on transparency. The fundamental design should include large display windows with thin framing members, a recessed entrance, a cornice or a horizontal sign panel above the storefront to separate it visually from the

upper facade, and low base panels/bulkheads to protect the windows and define the entrance. Adhere as much as possible to the typical proportions used on historic storefronts for the height of bulkheads, display windows and transoms.

This same basic arrangement will be equally appropriate whether constructed using traditional or modern materials.

WINDOWS & DOORS

Windows and doors are essential design elements in the historic commercial building. Upper story windows establish a rhythm in the streetscape that ties the facades together. The storefront with its large glass area links the facade to the pedestrian scale of the street.

Always retain historic doors and windows if possible. Often normal maintenance and replacement of broken panes, caulking, and a good paint job will be all that is necessary to preserve them. Uncover boarded-up windows and repair or replace the original sash as necessary. Small areas of rotted wood can be repaired using an epoxy paste filler. If a window or door is missing or has deteriorated too severely, replacements should be sought that closely match the originals in material and configuration. Openings should never be enlarged or partially blocked to accommodate a replacement window or door.

Replacement Windows

If more energy efficient double-glazed wood or aluminum windows are to be used for replacement, they too should match the original wood windows in size and profile. Never replace a multi-pane window with a single large pane of glass. Aluminum windows should be in a baked enamel finish rather than the color of clear unfinished aluminum.

Storm Windows

Storm windows may be desirable on upper story windows for energy conservation. When mounted on the exterior, they should match the size and shape of the existing sash and they should be painted to match. Interior storm windows are a good option where original windows might be obscured by the addition of exterior storm sash.

Shutters

Shutters are seldom an appropriate window treatment for historic 19th and 20th century commercial buildings. In general, they should be avoided unless they were an original feature of the building. Shutter panels should exactly match the size and shape of the window opening.

Awnings

Canvas awnings were a familiar feature of 19th and 20th century storefronts. Apart from their primary function of sun and glare protection, they also offer shelter to pedestrians and can be an attractive addition to the storefront. Additionally, the valance can serve as a sign panel for your business. Naturally, if your building faces north, they will be of lesser practical benefit.

Select awnings that closely follow historical precedents in shape and design. They may be either operable or fixed. Always fit the awning within the storefront opening. Awnings should never extend continuously across several storefronts. Choose a water-repellent canvas or vinyl-coated canvas material; aluminum awnings or canopies are generally inappropriate. A wide variety of canvas colors are available, and you should pay special attention to choosing a color or color combination that coordinates with your building and its surroundings. Back-lighting of awnings is not acceptable.

Storefront Entry Doors

Storefront entry doors should present an attractive appearance and should be visually appropriate for your storefront. Original doors should be retained if possible. Wood panel doors with large glass panels were typical of the turn-of-the-century commercial storefront. If a new door is to be installed it should closely resemble the design and proportions of the original door. Wood is the preferred material, but steel or aluminum with a baked enamel finish may also be used. Colonial or Early American style aluminum doors and other very decorative door designs should be avoided.

ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENT

Architectural ornament includes a variety of decorative features characteristic of early commercial storefronts. Window hoods, cornices, columns, brackets, and decorative moldings are examples of the ornamentation most often seen in Downtown Bellevue. These features are often crucial to the historic and architectural character of the building. Given the similarity of many downtown commercial facades, these elements were often the architects or designers only opportunity to express an architectural style and to give the building a unique appearance. These ornamental features should never be removed or altered unless it is absolutely necessary. If they have already been removed, every effort should be made to replicate them.

COLOR SELECTION

Painting can have a dramatic visual impact on your building. A carefully considered color scheme can unify the facade and enhance the streetscape. Color choice is a matter of personal preference, but you should generally choose colors that were available at the time your building was constructed and that complement the natural brick or stone color. Earth tones (greens, dark reds, pale yellows and browns) were popular in the latter half of the 19th century; lighter shades predominated in later decades. Many paint manufacturers have collections of historic color palettes, to aid in the selection of historically appropriate colors. If you are restoring your building, you will want to take paint samples from the major facade elements in order to duplicate the original colors. Even if you are not restoring, the original colors are always appropriate. Pay special attention to the relationship of your color scheme to those of adjacent buildings.

Keep your color scheme simple. A typical color scheme might use 2 or 3 colors: a base color, a second color for major trim, and sometimes a third color to highlight the minor trim. Most often the base color will be the natural brick or stone of your building. The major trim color should be chosen to complement the base color. If your facade has natural stone or terra cotta trim, the major trim color might match these. The minor trim color should enhance the effect of the base and major trim colors, serving as an accent on minor trim details. Often a darker or lighter shade of the major trim color is an effective choice.

When painting wood or metal, always prepare the surface by removing all loose paint and sanding all rough edges that remain. Prime the surface with a high-quality oil-base primer and follow with two finish coats of oil-based paint.

SIGNS AND GRAPHICS

Signage is an essential element in any commercial district. Anonymity is clearly not good for business. Unfortunately, signage has often been one of the most disfiguring elements in the urban landscape. A visual clutter of over-large and ill-positioned signs presents a negative image for the entire street.

A business sign is important not only as an identifier, but equally importantly as an expression of an image for the business. Don't underestimate the value of quality signage. A clear message, stylishly presented, will encourage passersby to venture in. Money spent on quality signage is usually money well spent. When thinking about signage, consider the following:

SIZE & PLACEMENT

In a densely built downtown area, signage should be directed at and scaled to the pedestrian. Don't assume that the largest sign is the best. Pay particular attention to how your sign relates to your building. Look for logical signage locations on your facade. Continuous flat wall areas above display windows or above upper story windows are typically good choices. Don't cover windows, doors, or architectural ornament. A good sign looks like it belongs where it was placed. It should be an extension of the overall design of your facade.

MESSAGE & DESIGN

A good sign is simple and direct. Don't be tempted to say too much. Choose a letter style or graphic treatment that projects your image and is clear and easy to read. Coordinate sign colors with the colors of your building. Remember that visual clutter will only dilute your message.

A good sign can take many forms. It may be painted on a flat panel, or it might have a sculptural quality. Individual letters might be applied to the facade. Logos or lettering can be painted, stenciled, or engraved on windows. Even the valance of an awning can be an excellent signboard. Neon signs inside shop windows are usually appropriate and possess a charm that can be very attractive, if not overused. Neon signage is not appropriate on the building exterior, however, unless it was an original feature of the building. Lighting for other kinds of signage should be limited to direct illumination by incandescent lamps.

Certain sign types are generally considered inappropriate in an historic commercial district. These would include large projecting signs, rooftop signs, and internally illuminated signs and awnings. Replacement of these kinds of signs should be strongly considered in planning for rehabilitation. To address this issue, the City of Bellevue has adopted a sign ordinance that restricts oversized signs within the historic district.

REAR ENTRANCES

Alleys and rear entrances should not be overlooked when planning downtown improvements. Often dirty, neglected and shunned, alleys can be turned into attractive secondary corridors through the business district. Development of rear entrances (double fronting) improves customer access from parking areas and can substantially improve pedestrian circulation throughout the downtown area.

Open alleyways alleys that have been exposed to view by the removal of other buildings offer opportunities for developing inviting rear entrances in an enhanced alleyscape to the benefit of the whole streetscape. Naturally, this kind of project is best approached as a cooperative effort among adjoining store owners.

The design of improvements to your alley facade should closely follow the conventions you have established on the street facade of your building. You have already developed a readily identifiable image. You should follow through with it here.