CITY OF NEW ORLEANS
Historic District Landmarks Commission

Guidelines for Commercial Buildings

Commercial Buildings

The HDLC encourages the economic development and revitalization of New Orleans' historic retail areas and the commercial properties within them. The HDLC recognizes New Orleans' vibrancy is linked to the viability of its businesses and makes every effort to assist commercial building owners and tenants with revitalizing older retail areas and buildings, helping to attract new customers while promoting an appreciation of historic architecture.

Information for New Businesses

If considering opening a new business in New Orleans, City representatives are available to discuss zoning, construction and other requirements applicable to a specific project. Please contact the HDLC at (504) 658-7040 for more information.

Section Index

The HDLC reviews all commercial, institutional and large-scale residential modifications, materials and features that are visible from the street, including:

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All applicants must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (CofA) as well as all necessary permits prior to proceeding with any work. Please review this information during the early stages of planning your project. Familiarity with this material can assist in moving a project quickly through the approval process, saving applicants both time and money. Staff review of all details is required to ensure proposed work is appropriate to the specific property.

Additional *Guidelines* addressing other historic building topics are available at the HDLC office and on its web site at www.nola.gov. For more information, to clarify whether a proposed project requires Historic District Landmarks Commission (HDLC) review, to obtain property ratings or permit applications, please call the HDLC at (504) 658-7040.

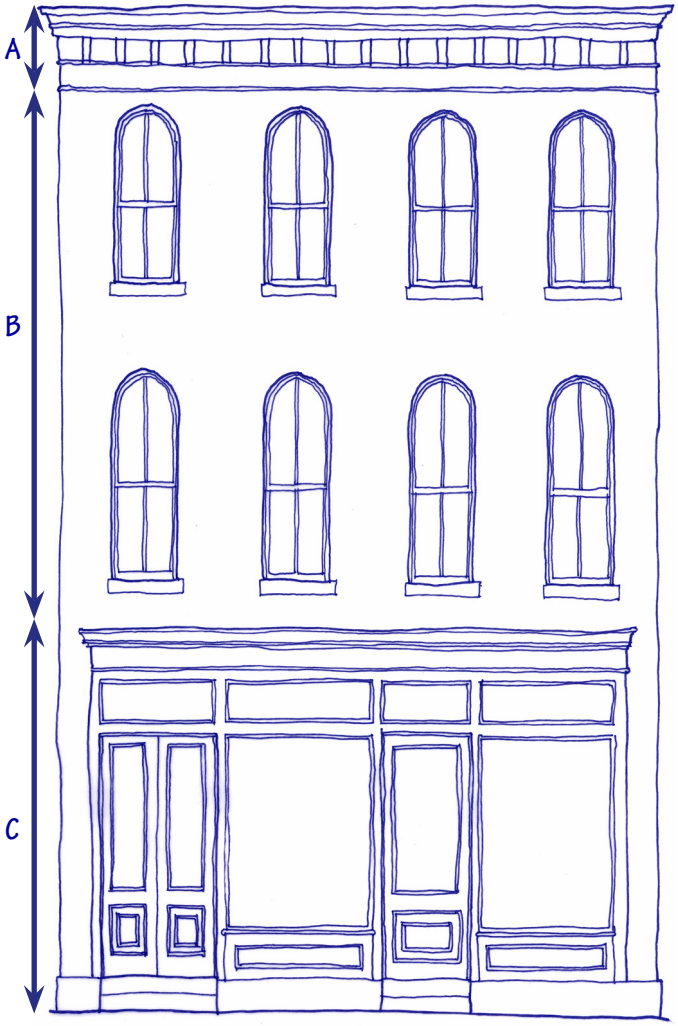
Using These *Guidelines*

The first step in using these Guidelines is to understand the rating. The rating corresponds to the historical and/or architectural significance of properties and determines what will be permitted within local Historic Districts or at local Landmarks under the jurisdiction of the HDLC.

S *Significant Properties – Retain the highest degree of architectural and historical merit.*

C *Contributing Properties – Contribute to the overall District and city character.*

N *Non-Contributing Properties – Do not contribute to the overall District character.*



Commercial Building

This represents a typical 3-story, commercial building in New Orleans. It has three distinct, stacked zones:

A. *The bracketed ornamental building cornice provides a visual cap or termination at the top of the building.*

B. *Upper floor operable windows appear to be "punched" through the flat, relatively solid, typically masonry, wall surface in a regular pattern that does not align with the storefront openings below.*

C. *A storefront capped by a storefront cornice runs along the ground floor with large display windows topped by transom windows.*

Commercial Building Reference Guide

An informative reference guide to commercial building features is *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* by Richard W. Longstreth. (National Trust for Historic Preservation. Washington, DC, 1987.)

Many of the buildings along Canal Street were constructed solely for commercial uses.

Commercial Building Types

Commercial buildings are structures designed to accommodate uses that provide goods and services including stores, restaurants, offices and hotels.

In the City of New Orleans, there are a variety of commercial buildings of different styles, scales and types. These include:

- Buildings designed for purely commercial use – Such as those in the Central Business District;
- Buildings with storefronts at the ground floor and residences above – Such as corner stores and those found on secondary commercial corridors, such as Magazine Street and Frenchmen Street; and
- Former residences converted into commercial use.

Corner stores often include residential space above.

This Moderne building serves as professional offices. Similar to most commercial buildings, second floor windows appear "punched" through the masonry.

Many buildings along Frenchmen Street were constructed with commercial spaces at the ground floor and residential space above. Ground floor display windows include large expanses of glass.

This former residence has been converted into a retail store.

The large glass openings accentuate the cast iron columns.

Vitrine windows flank the central entrance at this storefront.

This building's Vitrolite glass storefront is distinct from the residence above. It is historically significant and should be retained.

This former manufacturing building has been adaptively reused for condominiums. The new entrance canopy is a relatively minor exterior modification to the building.

Institutional and Large-Scale Residential Buildings

Institutional buildings generally provide public services and include religious buildings, schools, museums, libraries, hospitals and government buildings. They can be found throughout New Orleans' neighborhoods.

Large-scale residential buildings include apartment or condominium buildings, generally with more than six units. These can include buildings constructed originally for multi-family use, former warehouses converted into lofts or former institutional buildings adapted into apartment units. In some cases, large-scale residential buildings include ground floor commercial uses, such as retail or a restaurant, and possibly parking.

Institutional and large-scale residential buildings share many of the same concerns as commercial buildings including storefronts, signage, parking and accessible entrance needs. References throughout this section to commercial buildings shall also be applied to institutional and large-scale residential projects by the HDLC.

Large-scale commercial buildings often include signage indicating the building name. This example is a blade sign and includes the street number incorporated into the design.

Schools and other institutional buildings will often include ramps for accessibility. The limestone base matches the building and the railings are simple.

The signage at this building is located within the central stained glass panel.

This former library has been converted into a museum. The original stair has been retained at the front of the building and an accessible ramp is located at the side.

Storefront Development

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

Commercial storefronts can:

- Serve a key role in a commercial building's identity
- Define a pedestrian's visual experience and create a sense of transparency at the ground floor
- Attract potential customers with eye-catching merchandise displays

Storefronts

The storefront is one of the most significant features of a retail commercial building, whether it was originally constructed for commercial purposes or converted to retail from another use. Most people experience buildings at the ground floor level and the attractiveness and overall maintenance of a storefront can greatly influence a casual observer's perception of a building and the business within. Because a positive impression can help draw potential customers, regular maintenance and careful design can positively affect the success of a business.

Although the specific configurations of storefronts can vary greatly depending upon different styles, sizes and locations of buildings, the typical construction includes large expanses of glass to display merchandise and one or more entrances. Historic storefronts were typically constructed of wood, metal (cast iron, bronze, copper, tin, galvanized sheet metal, cast zinc or stainless steel), masonry (brick or stone), large display windows and clear, translucent or pigmented glass at transoms.

Storefront Components

Storefronts are made up of a number of different components. One of the key aspects of storefronts is that they are designed holistically, with all of the various pieces and parts forming into a unified expression. It should be noted, however, that all storefronts do not necessarily include all components.

Storefront Cornices are projecting moldings located at the top of a storefront. Cornices provide a visual cap or termination to the storefront, a separation from the upper floors and a "drip edge" protecting the storefront below. Cornice materials can vary widely and include wood, pressed metal, limestone, terra cotta or decorative brick patterns. Cornice details can include brackets, dentils and panels.

The storefront cornice visually separates the storefront from the upper building levels.

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

These multi-light transom windows provide additional light to the interior and add detail to the exterior storefront. Many transom windows were historically operable and allowed additional ventilation.

Display Windows are typically large expanses of glazing to present the available merchandise within a shop. Display windows often flank the entrance alcove to a store and can include additional advertising to further entice potential customers.

Vitrines are a specific type of display window, generally three-sided, projecting from the first floor street elevation of a commercial building. They can be, supported by heavy, ornamental wooden brackets. Many of them, such as this example, display a high level of craftsmanship and detailing.

The removal of vitrines is highly discouraged by the HDLC. Such a removal will only be considered by the HDLC if there are structural or other concerns that necessitate their elimination.

Entrances at storefronts can be located flush with the outside wall of the building or recessed within an alcove providing additional display areas and shelter from the elements. In addition to commercial entrances, there can be secondary entrance doors that provide access to upper building levels.

The paired door includes large glazed panels with a decorative pediment and is topped by a transom window.

Structural Supports at storefronts are necessary to carry the weight of the building and roof above and are often decorative, reinforcing the storefront's style. Typically, structural supports flank entrance doors and display windows and are either fronted with a granite post and lintel system or a cast-iron post and lintel design attached to masonry piers. Most of the granite street-fronts have simple Greek Revival detailing, while cast-iron versions tending to be much more ornamental and used at more high-style examples such, as Italianate buildings.

The granite lintel is structural, spanning between the flanking Greek Revival pilasters.

Bulkheads act as the base for the display windows and at the interior can provide a raised platform for merchandise display. Historically, bulkheads were constructed of a variety of materials with different finishes including paneled wood, brick, marble, granite and tile. More recently, storefront bulkheads are being clad with cast stone.

The vertical mullion divisions in the window above correspond to the wood panel divisions at the bulkhead below.

STOREFRONT ENTRANCE ALCOVES

A storefront's entrance alcove acts as a transitional space from the sidewalk to the commercial entrance. It provides shelter from the weather, and is often designed to increase the display area of the storefront to entice potential customers. Entrance alcoves tend to include a decorative ceiling and floor, and be flanked by large storefront display windows leading to a central entrance door. (For security concerns, refer to Page 11-22.)

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

The alcove ceiling is vaulted in shape. The alcove floor includes a decorative tile pattern with the previous owner's name featured in the design.

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

The rabbet or groove at the front of the windows allows for the installation of night blinds.

BI-FOLD AND TRI-FOLD STORE DOORS WITH NIGHT BLINDS OR GRILLES

Store doors are typically found on mid 19th century commercial buildings. They resemble French doors in that they have a paneled lower portion and are glazed above the lock rail. The difference is that store doors often incorporate a night blind or metal grille to cover the glazed portion for security, and when opened allow the entire bay to be open. Grilles were permanently fixed and were usually reserved for warehouses or similar buildings. Night blinds were removable and were put into place at night and removed when the shop was open.

Due to the rabbet or groove necessary to hold the night blind, and because doors of this type were often 11'-0" to 12'-0" tall, they were often very thick (on the order of 2-1/2"). Smaller doors were sometimes thinner, and details varied slightly because of the reduced thickness. **The practice of attempting to simulate the appearance of store doors with night blinds by routing a groove around the glazed portion of conventional French doors is strictly prohibited by the HDLC.** When located between piers, the doors were usually hung behind the piers with no visible frame and swung inward. The number of doors per opening varied from 2 to 6, with multiple doors hinged onto one another. Since store doors were equipped with night blinds, exterior shutters were never used.

The framing and tongue and groove boards are clearly visible at the underside of this canopy that is supported by chamfered wood posts. Note that the locations of the posts align with the corner of the masonry building.

Storefront Canopies

Many warehouses and stores feature a simple canopy topped with standing seam metal roofing. These canopies are supported in one of three ways: with cable stays from above; by wall mounted brackets from below; or with posts of either wood or cast iron. They can be located between transom windows and display windows. Some of the important considerations related to the construction of new storefront canopies include:

- The required minimum height under a canopy and distance from the street curb is typically regulated by the building code
- The location where the canopy intersects with the wall or window

Other design issues related to storefront canopies include:

- They are typically covered by a standing seam or corrugated metal roofing over tongue and groove boards since they tend to have a low slope;
- The type, material and style of the supporting system should be consistent with the building's character and style
- Posts are typically evenly spaced across a façade with a supporting posts at both ends of a canopy (Refer to *Porch, Gallery and Balcony Guide; Guidelines for Porches, Galleries and Balconies*, Page 09-11)

The HDLC recommends maintaining existing canopies and inspecting the supporting systems periodically to ensure canopies are secure. All new canopies over a public way are required to lease air rights from the City. (Page 11-19)

Abat-vent

An abat-vent is a roof extension, almost flat, supported by metal or wood outriggers cantilevered from the façade at the roof line.

Decorative cast iron brackets and a frame support tongue and groove decking with standing seam roofing above.

This canopy includes a standing seam metal roof. Canopy supports should be reviewed periodically, particularly where canopies are not level, to ensure they are well supported and not in danger of collapse.

Monumental entrance canopies can include awning valances if the detailing is appropriate to the style of the building.

Porches, Galleries and Balconies

Refer to the *Guidelines for Porches, Galleries and Balconies* for additional information.

A new wood storefront was installed that includes transom windows, sidelights, glazed paired entry doors and a secondary door to access upper building levels.

Installing Storefronts

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

a. **Identify Key Historic Elements** – An important place to begin is the identification of key elements in the existing storefront or building style to determine what might be appropriate. For example, an aluminum storefront system might not be appropriate for an Italianate building constructed at the end of the 19th century; however, it might be a good option for an early 20th century building. (Refer to *Guidelines for Building Types and Architectural Styles* for additional information.)

b. **Locate Structural Supports** – One of the important factors in designing a storefront is understanding the building's structure. A storefront serves two primary functions, providing structural support of the loads above while maximizing the merchandise display area. Identification of the locations of the structural supports will inform where openings, such as windows and doors can be installed. In the case of buildings with granite piers or cast iron facades, the location of the structure is fairly obvious. In buildings that have been clad with another material, investigation might be necessary.

c. **Review Other Storefronts** – When beginning the design process for a new storefront it is often helpful to look at the design of existing storefronts at similar historic buildings. Existing storefronts can provide information about the size, location and pattern of doors and windows; the types of materials used; the design of the elements including the display windows, doors, bulkheads and cornice; and the detailing and proportions of the components.

d. **Designing a New Storefront** – The new storefront design should be compatible in size, pattern, scale, material and color with the overall building and similar storefronts from the period. The elements of the design should be considered holistically, and should not include elements from multiple buildings and styles. (Page 11-3 includes a small sampling of storefront types and Pages 11-6 to 11-9 include some of the components that can be found at storefronts. It should be noted that all storefronts do not necessarily include all components.)

Although not stylistically compatible to the wood framed building, this Vitrolite glass storefront has gained historic significance in its own right and should be retained. Vitrolite is no longer manufactured and there are few remaining examples in New Orleans. The new store owners have retained the historic signage and added a new projecting sign.

Keep in Mind...

Existing storefronts, which are stylistically dissimilar to a building, might have gained historic importance in their own right, and as such, they should be retained. This might be the case if an Art Deco storefront was installed at a 19th century building. Please contact the HDLC at (504) 658-7040 for additional information about specific properties.

When Considering Modifying or Installing a Storefront

The HDLC Recommends:

- Integrating interior security mechanisms into the design where required (Refer to Page 11-22)
- Installing compatible lighting where appropriate (Refer to Page 11-20)
- Including areas appropriate for signage and awnings in the design (Refer to Pages 11-12 to 11-18)
- Providing for accessibility without installing an exterior ramp or lift (Refer to Page 11-19)

Blinds can be installed within storefronts or glazed openings to provide privacy while retaining historical integrity.

Non-Retail Storefronts

Some non-retail businesses and residential uses also can be found in former commercial buildings with storefront windows, including restaurants and professional offices. Although many of these uses do not require large display windows, the HDLC encourages maintaining unobstructed glazing in many locations. Businesses are encouraged to use alternate means of providing privacy, while using display areas.

- Installing display materials related to the business or service being offered
- Installing blinds, curtains or other semi-transparent or translucent screening that can be opened or closed during the course of the day
- Placing plants, seasonal displays and decorations in merchandizing display area

In addition, businesses are encouraged to retain transom windows and maintaining their operation.

Storefront Review	
Repair or restore storefront with appropriate documentation	
S C N	HDLC Staff review.
Install new appropriate storefront or modify existing storefront	
S C	Commission review.
N	Architectural Review Committee.
Install inappropriate storefront	
S C N	Commission appeal.

Storefront Guides

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

The HDLC Recommends:

- Maintaining the rhythm, size and shape of upper floor windows and associated trim and moldings
- Reopening previously infilled windows
- Retaining residential characteristics of residences converted into commercial buildings
- Retaining and maintaining all building cornices, features and details; and replacing missing features

The HDLC Discourages:

- Locating air conditioners in street elevation windows
- Infilling or altering window and door openings
- Installing built-in furniture or walls visually blocking the inside of display windows or French doors
- Installing any material other than clear glass within a display window

The HDLC Does Not Permit:

- Introducing a new storefront or element that alters or destroys historic building materials
- Enclosing or removing elements, such as building cornices and storefronts
- Installing inappropriate materials at storefronts including vinyl siding, EFIS, ceramic tile and T1-11 siding
- Installing stylistic elements from periods that are different from the storefront or building and do not complement the overall stylistic expression
- Altering size or shape of major building forms, such as window, door and transom openings or altering doors to swing out unless required by code
- Altering a façade from commercial to residential character, unless the building was previously residential and there is sufficient evidence or documentation to provide an accurate representation
- Installing through-wall air conditioners that are visible from the public right-of-way or removing windows to install air conditioner units
- Installing exterior shutters at large display windows or where they did not previously exist such as at French doors with night blinds or grilles

This halo lit sign is illuminated behind the individually raised letters.

Signs and Awnings

A well designed and located sign or awning can make a good impression, attract potential customers and unify a streetscape. By contrast, a confused, poorly designed or placed sign or awning can overwhelm buildings, detract from the area, give an inappropriate impression, turning customers away and potentially damaging historic materials or finishes. Historically, signs and awnings were attached to and placed near buildings. New signs can use similar features to both enhance the character of the building and convey the necessary information.

Cultural institutions rely on signage to attract patrons. This wall mounted sign is made of metal and shaped to project away from the building wall.

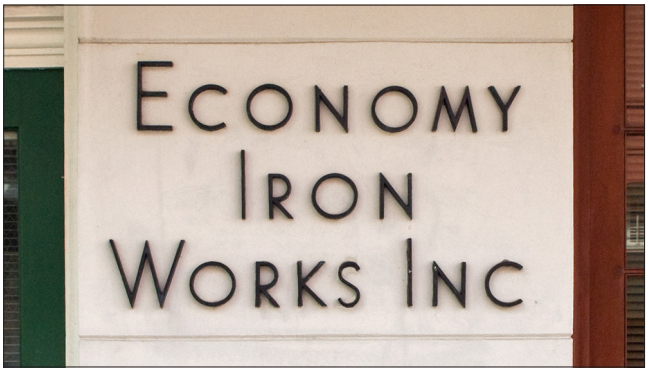
Types of Signs in New Orleans

Generally, there are two types of commercial signs in the City of New Orleans, those that are attached to the building and those that are freestanding. The choice between attached or freestanding signs is largely based on the specific location, building setbacks, and the requirements of the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance. Since many of the city's commercial buildings are constructed on or near the property line, the overwhelming majority of signs are mounted on buildings. In some locations where the buildings are set back from the roadway, freestanding signs can be installed if permitted by the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance.

This internally individual illuminated channel letter sign is mounted flush to the wall and does not have an exterior raceway.

This routed sign includes a brushed aluminum face and an internal light that shines through the individual green letters.

Wall Signs are single sided signs mounted parallel to and fastened to a wall of the building. Wall signs can be made from a variety of materials to suit the unique character of both the business and the building onto which they are applied.



Individual letters can be applied to building features.

Projecting Signs are generally two sided signs, suspended from a metal bracket or building element, mounted perpendicular to the face of the building.

Suspended Signs are one or two sided signs, generally suspended from an architectural element of the building, such as a gallery, canopy or balcony, mounted perpendicularly to the face of the building.

Window Signs are generally applied to the interior of the window or door glazing. Signs that are attached to the glazing are generally painted, vinyl appliqué or etched glass. A related option is stained glass. All window signs that are attached to the exterior of the glazing are subject to HDLC review. Window signs mounted at the interior of the glazing are not subject to HDLC review but are subject to review by the Department of Safety and Permits for code compliance.

Awning Signs are typically located on the awning valance. In addition to identifying a business, awnings can protect pedestrians from rain and merchandise from sun damage, as well as reduce solar heat gain. They are a good option for businesses that are orientated to the south or west.

Freestanding Signs are not attached to the building. They can include information on one or both sides. They are often located in landscaped planting beds and their height and location are regulated by the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance.

Directory Signs can be either freestanding or attached to a building and are often used for professional offices. They include information about several businesses on a single larger sign, with an identifying building address and/or building name. For a unified appearance, the individual nameplates on the sign should match each other in size, materials, colors, letter size, case and styles.

Blade Signs are generally two sided signs that project from the face of a building and span multiple floors.

Historic Signage

Historic signage is often an architectural feature that reflects the original owner and use of the building. Although abandoned signs from recent tenants should be removed, the HDLC encourages historic signage to be retained. Retaining historic signage does not reduce the amount of allowable signage for an occupant.

Stained and colored glass was sometimes used to create building signage. Historic signage should be retained if it reflects a historic building name, owner or early business.

Sign Material

Historically, signs were typically made of wood, either attached directly to the building or suspended from metal brackets or galleries. As technology advanced and building styles changed, a wider range of materials were used. These included bronze, cast iron, stainless steel, etched or painted glass, leaded glass, gold leaf, tile and terrazzo. Each material was popular during particular time periods, and might not be appropriate at all building locations.

Some materials might no longer be practical for signage installations due to limited availability or expense. When using modern materials care should be taken to select those that offer improved performance, while replicating the appearance of traditional materials. Some modern materials such as plywood may replicate the appearance of a traditional wood sign but will warp or split over time.

In addition to materials that appear historic, the HDLC welcomes innovative designs and alternate signage materials that are appropriate to the building style and location. **However, plastic, Plexiglas, or glossy coatings are not appropriate unless used in locations such as individual channel letter signs or routed signs. No other internally illuminated signage or box signs are permitted.**

This metal sign is made of various metals and reflects the industrial character of the building.

This wall mounted sign has a unique shape that is specific to the business and the font is compatible to the Moderne style of the building.

Neon

Neon signs, originally developed in the 1920s, are made of narrow, gas filled electrified tubes. Given New Orleans's stylistic variety, the use of neon is carefully reviewed by the HDLC to determine compatibility with the building and surrounding area. In general, neon is most appropriate on 20th century buildings in highly commercial locations such as the Canal Street Historic District.

Neon has been used in the vertical blade sign as well as on the entrance marquee. At the blade sign, neon is used as an accent over individual channel letters. At the marquee, neon is used in the decorative stripes and central emblem.

Neon Guide

The HDLC Recommends:

- Customizing neon to enhance the style or character of a building, if permitted by the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance and appropriate, in consultation with the Architectural Review Committee

The HDLC Discourages:

- The installation of pre-manufactured neon signs at the interior or exterior of a building, advertising a specific product or service, such as alcohol and tobacco produces that is highly visible from a public right-of-way

The small text on this suspended sign is scaled for pedestrians.

Sign Size and Shape

New Orleans's Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance establishes the maximum size and type of signage; however, the HDLC determines the appropriateness of the placement relative to the building's design. In general, the HDLC utilizes the following guidelines when reviewing the appropriateness of proposed sign's size:

- Signage should be compatible to scale of the building, adjacent buildings, the streetscape and adjacent signage
- Small scale signs are appropriate to smaller scale buildings and pedestrian traffic, while larger scaled signs are appropriate to vehicular traffic
- Small scale signs are appropriate to primarily residential areas and uses such as professional offices
- Small scale signs are appropriate for buildings that require several signs. These can be grouped in a single directory sign for a unified appearance
- A well-designed smaller sign can have more of an impact than a larger sign, particularly in historic commercial corridors, where the means of travel is by foot or slow moving vehicles
- A sign's shape can reflect the type of business or institution at the location, increasing its impact

This wall mounted sign conforms to the profile of the figures.

Sign Location

Although it is helpful to understand a building's type, style and design when locating a sign, in general:

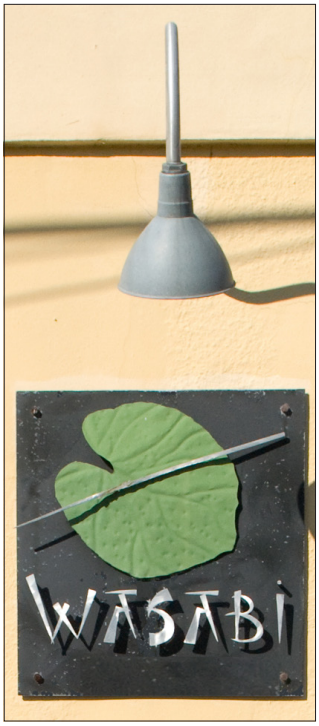
- Signs should not be installed in locations that damage or obstruct important architectural features
- Signage for 1st floor businesses should be located below 2nd floor window sills
- No sign or sign support other than blade signs should be located on the roof or extend above a roof cornice

Murals

Murals are reviewed and approved in accordance with the CZO; however, the HDLC does not permit the painting of murals on previously unpainted masonry wall surfaces. (Refer to Murals, Guidelines for Exterior Woodwork, Page 06-16 for additional information.)

Sign Illumination

In many instances, available ambient street or storefront lighting can illuminate signs, which is preferred to the installation of additional lighting. The use and placement of sign illumination is subject to the approval of the HDLC. Gooseneck lighting or other unobtrusive light fixture is often the most appropriate choice to illuminate wall signage.



A single gooseneck light illuminates this wall mounted sign.

Sign Color and Legibility

The contrast between the logo or lettering and background color can greatly increase the overall legibility of the sign. In many instances, limiting the number of colors to those necessary to convey the information also increases the legibility.

Similar to selecting a color, when considering letter style for signs and awnings, business owners must balance the need to make them legible, convey the business identity or logo, and complement the historic character of the building and environment. Excessive amounts of text or highly stylized type styles can overwhelm a viewer and render the message effectively illegible.

In general, there are three styles of lettering available, serif, non-serif and script. Within each general style are numerous typefaces available, many of which can be varied by making them bold or italicized. Similar to materials, different styles of lettering were typically utilized for specific periods. Applicants are encouraged to utilize lettering and materials that complement their particular property and business.

The variety of letter styles is related to the business identity. The contrast with the background increases legibility.

Signage that obstructs the interior view is discouraged.

Exposed raceways for channel letter signage are not permitted.

Internally illuminated box signs are not permitted.

Conduit should be concealed and not mounted to the face of the building. The number of lamps should be reduced to provide enough light for the signs to be read.

LED reader boards or changeable message signage is not permitted.

Signage Guide

The HDLC Recommends:

- Maintaining and repairing historic signage with materials to match the original whenever possible
- Innovative signage that identifies the business, complements the style of the building and is appropriately scaled for its location
- Using materials that are consistent with the character of the building including wood, bronze, brass, gold leaf, etched glass, paint, aluminum, stainless steel, enameled metal, leaded glass, appliqués, tile and terrazzo
- Using modern durable materials such as Urethane board or MDO board that are similar in appearance to historic materials but offer increased performance
- Using existing ambient street light or storefront lighting in lieu of sign lighting whenever possible
- Using light styles for signage that are consistent with the character of the historic building including location, orientation and brightness

The HDLC Discourages:

- The use of fasteners and hangers that destroy important building fabric for the installation of signs
- Paper signs or graphic films adhered to the exterior of glazing
- Signage that obstructs views into the store through storefront windows and glazing

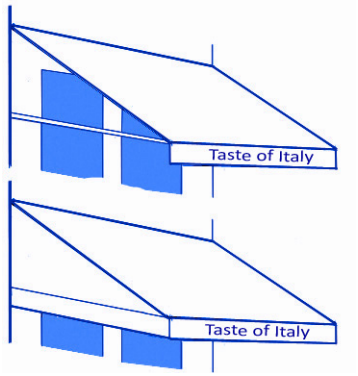
The HDLC Does Not Permit:

- Removing, damaging, altering or encasing of historic architectural building features to allow for the installation of signage
- Exposed conduit, junction boxes and raceways for channel letters or sign lighting
- Obscuring distinctive architectural elements and features with signage
- Temporary signs or banners for more than 90 days
- Inappropriate signage for the type or style of building
- Signage installed in an inappropriate location
- New billboards
- New internally illuminated box signs

Awnings provide shelter and can include signage and logos. These are located within the façade bays.

Awnings

Awnings are a historically popular means of sheltering pedestrians, advertising a business, and protecting window merchandise from sun damage. Several awnings along a streetscape can provide a sense of scale and separation of the storefront from the upper stories. Historically, awnings project at a continuous angle away from the face of the building on a metal frame, terminating at a skirt or valance. Awnings can include a business name and logo, subject to the provisions of the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance. The installation of awnings over a public sidewalk requires the leasing of associated air rights from the City. (Refer to Page 11-19.)



Open sided awning

Closed sided awning

Awning Guide

The HDLC Recommends:

- Awning shapes that correspond with the openings they protect
- Canvas fixed or retractable awnings, whose color, style and location are compatible with the building's historic character
- Awnings whose slope projects down approximately 3'-0" from the face of the building in a continuous angle of approximately 45 degrees, possibly with an 8" to 12" straight or scalloped valance
- Locating awnings between storefront bays
- Limiting lettering and logos to awning valances
- Installing awning hardware in a manner that minimizes damage to historic building materials

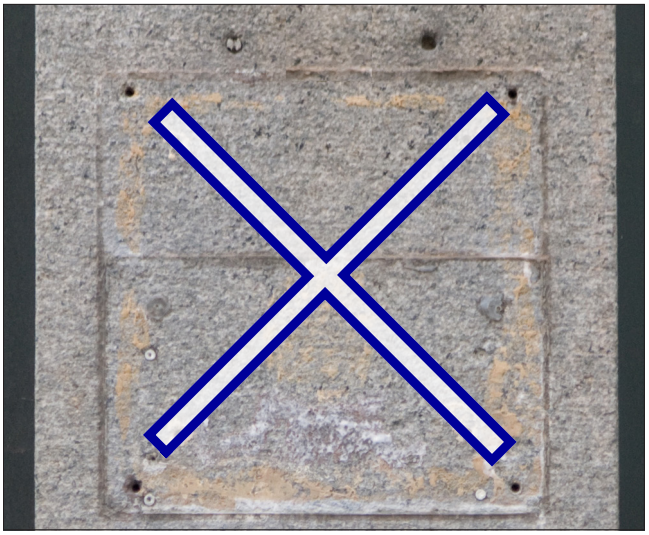
The HDLC Discourages:

- Contemporary awning shapes, such as balloon or barrel awnings
- The use of awning materials that act as wall signs
- The use of fasteners and hangers that destroy important building fabric for awning installation
- Pole supported awning canopies
- Awnings that obscure architectural features

The HDLC Does Not Permit:

- Awnings installed in locations where they are non-functional, such as under a gallery or overhang
- Contemporary or glossy awning materials such as vinyl, plastics or leatherette
- Internally illuminated awnings
- Awnings with a solid or closed underside

The awnings are located between all of the building's bays, providing a unifying element for the storefront.



Numerous holes have been drilled into the face of this granite pier and several previous fasteners remain.

Mounting Signs and Awnings

Care should be taken in mounting walls signs and awnings to minimize the damage to historic materials. This includes reusing hardware or brackets from previous signs or awnings. If reusing existing hardware or attachment locations is not an option, remove abandoned hardware and patch holes. When installing new signage or awnings, select mounting locations that can be easily patched if the sign or awning is relocated or removed. An example would be to locate anchors in mortar joints rather than mounting directly into brick faces.

When installing signage, such as wall mounted signs, business owners are encouraged to recess fasteners and patch the fastener opening to match the sign background for a more finished appearance, unless the fasteners are part of the overall design.

The awning is mounted between the granite piers. The poles are fastened to the stucco surface rather than the masonry, facilitating future repair if removed.

Submission Requirements for Signs and Awnings

Certificate of Appropriateness (CofA) application forms are available at the HDLC offices or on our website at www.nola.gov. With the completed CofA application, applicants for sign and awning review will be required to provide the following information:

- A description of the size, shape, total square footage, colors and any lighting for the proposed sign – *Can be submitted as a scaled sketch labeled with dimensions*
- Accurate information regarding the location of the sign in relation to the building – *Can be submitted as a marked-up photograph indicating the location of the proposed sign or awning*
- Freestanding signs must include a scaled site plan and elevation showing the location of the sign, locations of adjoining buildings, walkways, driveways and roadways

In addition, it is often helpful to include the following:

- Photographs of the building
- Drawings of any proposed logos or other graphic designs
- The proposed font to be used for lettering
- Color samples
- Material samples for awnings

Sign and Awning Regulation

Prior to installing any permanent or temporary sign or awning, applicants must verify that the proposed sign or awning is compliant with all zoning, building, Development District and other applicable requirements. In addition, applicants must:

- Obtain a CofA
- Obtain a Building Permit
- Lease air rights for signs or awnings that project over the public right-of-way (Refer to Page 11-19)

Sign and Awning Review
Repair or modify existing signage; or install new appropriate sign, awning or sign lighting S C N HDLC Staff review.
Remove historic signage S C N Commission review.
Install new inappropriate sign or awning or sign lighting S C N Commission appeal.

This former warehouse building includes a ramp with an industrial aesthetic located at the building's side elevation.

Accessibility

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

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

This library has an accessible ramp that both maintains the original entrance steps and allows physically challenged patrons to utilize the main entrance door of the building.

Accessibility Guide

The HDLC Recommends:

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

Accessibility Review

Repair, modify or remove existing ramp or lift; modify a door or window opening appropriately to accommodate an accessible entry

S	Commission review.
C N	HDLC Staff review.

Install new appropriate ramp or lift

S	Commission review.
C N	HDLC Staff review.

Modify a door or window inappropriately or install an inappropriate ramp or lift

S C	Commission appeal.
N	HDLC Staff review.

Leasing Air Rights

All exterior building components such as stairs, ramps, galleries, awnings and outdoor seating that projects into or over public sidewalks or right-of-ways are required to lease air rights for these encroachments from the City of New Orleans. Contact the Department of Property Management, Office of Real Estate and Records at (504) 658-5455 for additional information.

Lighting

The type and placement of lighting plays an important role in maintaining the authentic historic character of a building. However, historic lighting is often considered inadequate for modern uses. Therefore, when modifying or installing lighting, there must be a balance between providing sufficient lighting to create a secure feeling and fitting within a neighborhood context. All lighting should be installed in a manner that only illuminates the building, walkway surfaces and parking areas, without spillover onto adjacent properties or into the night sky. In addition the color and quality of the proposed light should mimic the soft, warm tone of incandescent lamps. **Exposed conduit, wiring or junction boxes are not permitted.**

When possible, the HDLC encourages the use of original lighting adapted for contemporary use, such as increasing brightness with new or additional bulbs. **Fluorescent tube lighting and flood lights are not permitted at street elevations.** Where the building no longer has original exterior lights or never had them, the HDLC encourages the development of a lighting design that includes fixtures which are compatible in age, style and scale to the building or which are unobtrusive and not suggestive of a style or age. In addition, the HDLC requires that lighting be maintained and burned-out bulbs be replaced.

Lighting Types

Decorative Lighting is typically ornamental and it represents the only type of lighting that should be highly visible at a façade. Types of decorative lighting in New Orleans include gas lamps, marquees, neon and seasonal lighting. Since the visual appearance of the fixture is highlighted, its style should be compatible with the building. In most instances, the number of decorative lights should be limited, and located at the primary entrance. They should be installed in a manner to minimize damage to historic building fabric and evenly spaced on a post or around an element such as a door. They should be of a material and scaled appropriately for the proposed location. Some faux historic materials, such as varnished, polished brass, are not appropriate. In addition, any traditionally temporary lights such as seasonal Christmas lights, or decorative light displays that are installed for more than 90 days are subject to HDLC review and approval.

Ceiling Fans

Ceiling fans should be as simple as possible and with a style that complements the building. They should be limited in number, evenly spaced and mounted on short poles. **The installation of exterior ceiling fans with integral lighting is not permitted. The installation of ceiling fans underneath balconies, canopies or galleries over ground floor sidewalks is prohibited.**

The decorative gas lamps are centered on the granite piers and appropriately scaled and designed for the Greek Revival building.

Ambient Lighting provides a wash of general illumination of the storefront and sidewalk area, and in some cases, up-lighting of a building's façade. Since the emphasis of ambient lighting is the illumination rather than the fixture, all ambient lights should be small, unobtrusive and installed as discreetly as possible. An example would be to install recessed lighting under a gallery. Applicants are encouraged to provide a number and type of fixture that will allow an even wash of light across the area being illuminated without hot spots or shadowed areas.

Security Lighting should be located as discreetly as possible, preferably on rear or non-street elevations. The number of security lights should be limited, and they should be activated by motion sensors whenever possible.

Freestanding Lighting, such as parking lot lights, should be designed and installed in such a way as to minimize visibility of the fixture during daylight hours and to provide a uniform lighting pattern. **The HDLC does not permit freestanding lights that exceed 25 feet in height above the adjacent ground level. All freestanding lighting must be installed on poles designed for that purpose.**

Television Screens can be visually distracting from the aesthetic quality of the structure and neighborhood. The HDLC does not allow the installation of exterior, mounted television screens.

Lighting and Ceiling Fan Review	
Remove historic lighting	
S C	Commission review.
N	HDLC Staff review.
Install new appropriate lighting or ceiling fan	
S C N	HDLC Staff review.
Install new inappropriate lighting, ceiling fan, security camera, speaker, television screen	
S C	Commission appeal.
N	HDLC Staff review.

Rooftop mechanical equipment should not be installed in a visually intrusive manner.

Building Equipment

Modern mechanical equipment includes HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) equipment, restaurant exhaust fans, electrical supply, generators and energy vaults. Although they represent necessities of modern life, the design and location of this equipment can have a significant negative impact on historic integrity of a building or area.

In many cases in the City of New Orleans, buildings are constructed to their property lines and the opportunity to locate equipment in rear or side yards is not viable. In these situations it might be necessary to locate items such as HVAC equipment and restaurant exhausts on roofs or energy vaults at ground level. In either instance, the equipment should be made as unobtrusive as possible. (Refer to *Guidelines for Site Elements* for additional equipment guidelines.)

This HVAC equipment is located within this building's courtyard, partially concealed by a fence at a secondary street elevation. It would be preferable if the height of the equipment was lowered to the fence height to minimize visibility.

The rhythm of the storefront was maintained in the installation of the building equipment behind the louvered window and door.

Restaurant ventilation equipment should not be mounted to the face of publicly visible elevations, nor should features like windows be removed for installation. Electric meters should not be located on the front elevation.

If modification of a storefront is necessary for the installation of equipment, care should be taken to maintain the major structural components and rhythm and patterns of the openings. If equipment ventilation is required, louvered screens should be installed and painted to be as unobtrusive as possible. It is also recommended that original doors, windows or other architectural features if required to be removed, be stored on-site for use by a future owner.

Restaurant ventilation systems typically provide exhaust for cooking equipment. **Restaurant vents and exhausts should be installed in a location where they are minimally visible from the public right of way and within the building envelope. All exterior building equipment that is visible fro**m a public way**, including plumbing, irrigation systems and electrical connections,** must receive a Certificate of Ap**propriateness (CofA) and comply with mechanical and building codes.**

Building Equipment Review	
Install unobtrusive building equipment	
S	Commission review.
C N	HDLC Staff review.
Modify a storefront and install building equipment – Such as energy vaults	
S C	Commission review.
N	HDLC Staff review.
Install visually prominent building equipment	
S C	Commission appeal.
N	HDLC Staff review.

Exterior security grille housings are not permitted.

Security

Traditionally, one of the best means of securing a property was to close shutters or apply night blinds. However, commercial buildings with large expanses of glass did not historically have shutters. In these cases, the installation of shutters is not appropriate. The HDLC recommends installing tempered glass, which provides a barrier that is difficult to break and shatter. Electronic security systems, motion detectors, lights and warning devices can be installed at the interior of doors and windows without altering the historic appearance of the building's exterior. (Refer to *Guidelines for Porches, Galleries and Balconies, Security Cameras*, Page 09-10.)

If metal bars or grilles are considered the only acceptable method for securing a building, the HDLC encourages property owners to install them at the interior of the window, door or display window. **If metal bars or grilles are installed at the exterior, the HDLC only permits the use of simple barrier grilles without decorative detailing. The bars or grilles should be properly sized to fit the opening and align with the frame opening and muntin configuration.**

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

Window and Door Security Review	
Install appropriate or unobtrusive security device	
S	Commission review.
C N	HDLC Staff review.
Install solid roll-down shutters, exterior bars, grilles or other security device	
S C	Commission review.
N	HDLC Staff review.

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

These historic solid shutters provide security for display windows and building entrances.

The parking garage entrance is located at a secondary street elevation. A split transom window remains over the door and the doors to the right conceal parked cars. The apron utilizes the same material as the adjacent sidewalk.

Parking

In New Orleans' recent history, the demolition of historic buildings was seen as a means of providing parking areas, particularly within the Central Business District. As a result, many architecturally significant buildings have been demolished and replaced with parking lots. **The HDLC strongly discourages the demolition of buildings for parking.**

Although it can be desirable to install parking lots in front of new buildings, it is more appropriate within the context of New Orleans to maintain a consistent building setback, which typically places the building adjacent to or near the sidewalk. Even non-contributing buildings play a role in maintaining the streetscape. If parking lots are desired and the configuration of the existing property allows it, such as those locations outside of the Central Business District, they should be located to the side and rear of buildings or along secondary elevations or streets whenever possible.

The HDLC encourages the screening of the perimeter of parking lots with evergreen shrubs or a low wall. If desired for security, perimeter solid metal picket fencing can be installed atop a low wall or on posts set into the ground. (Refer to the *Guidelines for Site Elements* for additional information regarding fencing.) Parking lot lighting must comply with the lighting requirements on Page 11-20, and any new or altered paving material is subject to HDLC review. Any parking area with over 8 spaces requires a photometric plan. In addition, parking lots must comply with landscaping requirements contained in the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance.

The fence around this parking lot has hollow metal pickets mounted to the outside face of the horizontal rails. Vertical pickets should be solid and pass through rails.

The modification of architectural features to accommodate parking is highly discouraged.

Alternatives to open parking lots include constructing new parking structures, incorporating parking in a new building or modifying an existing building to accommodate parking. (Refer to the *Guidelines for New Construction, Additions and Demolition* for new parking structures, building or the demolition of existing buildings.)

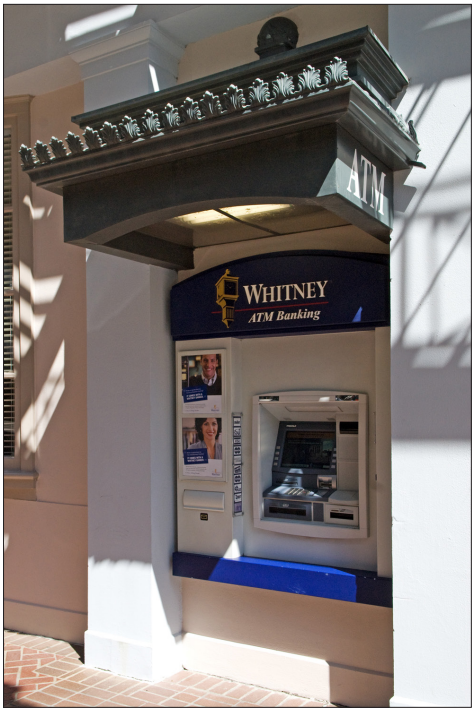
Commercial buildings often need dedicated parking and possibly loading docks. Typically, the most significant alteration required for the modification of an existing building to accommodate parking is the need to install a new opening or garage door in the building. **The HDLC discourages the removal, relocation or modification of architectural features to accommodate garage doors and openings.** If parking is desired, the entrance should be located on side or rear elevations. If the removal of any feature is required, such as a door, window, or significant trim, it is recommended that the feature be stored on site.

The style of the garage doors should also be compatible with the building. (For further information, refer to the *Guidelines for Windows and Doors*.) Another change that is often required is the installation of a curb cut and apron. The HDLC encourages the continuation of the adjacent sidewalk material at the apron whenever possible.

Parking Review	
Modify existing building for parking	
S C	Commission review.
N	HDLC Staff review.
Install or modify paving, visual screening, fencing	
S	Commission review.
C N	HDLC Staff review.

Parking Requirements

In addition to HDLC review, applicants are required to comply with all applicable code requirements when proposing new parking.



This ATM canopy was designed in a manner that complements the building's style and includes integrated down-lighting illuminating the immediate area.

Walk-Up Elements

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

It should also be noted that many of these elements also require protective coverings, such as awnings or canopies in addition to lighting. The addition of canopies or awnings and lighting should comply with the applicable sections in the *Guidelines.* (Refer to Pages 11-9, 11-17 and 11-20.)

Walk-Up Element Review
Install new appropriate walk-up element
S C N Commission review.

Many small businesses rely on residential-style refuse containers. These containers are not subject to HDLC review.

Refuse

Refuse or garbage collection bins are often a visually obtrusive necessity. Many of the smaller commercial offices and shops rely on individual collection bins that are similar to those used at residences. In larger buildings, garbage and recycling collection is often handled at a loading dock or adjacent to a rear or secondary entrance.

For larger commercial uses, if refuse collection bins are located on the property at the exterior of a building, they should be located to minimize visibility and screened with opaque fencing that meets HDLC requirements. (Refer to *Guidelines for Site Elements* for additional information.) In addition, shrubs and plantings can be installed to reduce the visual impact.

Refuse Container Review	
Install or modify visual screening, fencing at refuse containers	
S	Commission review.
C N	HDLC Staff review.

This material is based upon work assisted by a grant from the Department of the Interior, National Park Service. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of the Interior.
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