

DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR HISTORIC DOWNTOWN LARAMIE



**Design Committee
Laramie Main Street Program**



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II. INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1970s the National Trust for Historic Preservation spearheaded a movement, the Main Street Program, to revitalize historic downtowns with an emphasis on returning old buildings to their original splendor. The Main Street Program four-point approach (organization, economic restructuring, promotion, and design) has been used in a variety of communities over the last 25 years bringing vitality, commerce, and people back to traditional business districts. The Main Street Program method to historic preservation, proven successful around the country, will improve the aesthetics of downtown, foster economic development, increase tourism, encourage pedestrian traffic, and increase the tangible value of buildings.

Design is a major component of the Main Street revitalization effort and is aimed at enhancing the overall physical image of the downtown business district. Many features contribute to this image. Individual buildings – storefronts, signs, window displays and facades as a whole – generally establish the character of the downtown. These features are what make each town unique. Maintaining a design scheme for the downtown business district can enhance its existing physical assets and minimize its detractions. Design can serve to improve the district's appearance, unify diverse elements, strengthen downtown's image as a cohesive area, and provide balance between variation and consistency (Figure-1). Because the physical features of the downtown business district are key components of Laramie's overall historic and cultural fabric, they should be preserved and maintained for future generations.



Figure-1. Consistency of Building Tradition.

III. HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN LARAMIE

Downtown Laramie has a beautiful mixture of historic buildings, some of which date back to the mid-1800s. The architecture of many of these buildings reflects Laramie's long and rich history as a railroad town. The Union Pacific Railroad began selling lots in 1868 and most of the first

structures in Laramie were constructed out of wood and canvas. Laramie's first stone building was built in 1869 and in the early 1870s a brickyard was started. By 1875, most of the principal streets in the city were lined with brick commercial structures and homes. Early development was clustered around the Union Pacific Depot and Hotel, which was located at the foot of Ivinson Avenue and soon extended along First and Second Streets as far as Garfield Street. Most of the buildings still lining First and Second Streets from University to Garfield Street date from the late 1800s. This downtown business district has remained Laramie's center of activity for over 140 years.

Most downtown buildings were built of brick, and a few of stone. Many had cast-iron storefronts that bore the imprint of their manufacturer, which could be mail-ordered in a variety of styles and easily bolted to the building. Several of these storefronts are still visible today. From the 1860s-1920s, the Italianate style the most common type of architectural design. In the late 1860s, Gothic Revival influenced some of the Italianate structures and in the 1880s Romanesque Victorian also added fashion to existing buildings. By the 1920s the Art Deco movement swept through and stylized geometric motifs and brick decorations became popular (Figure-2). At this time, Bakelite black plastic materials were common facings for buildings and ceramic tiles were also popular. The Moderne Movement of the 1930s-60s introduced structural glass, aluminum paneling and stainless steel storefronts. Over time, some of the buildings have been modified to look more "modern" and their original architectural features have been buried or are no longer visible. During much of the 20th century, in spite of the gradual decline in the city's various industries, Downtown Laramie continued to grow and change and many of the downtown buildings were constructed or renovated during the 1920s and again during the 1940s.



Figure-2. Downtown Laramie, circa 1920s.
Photos courtesy of

IV. USING THE DESIGN GUIDELINES

These guidelines constitute an anthology of best practices and design principles that will help you think about renovations, improvements, and new construction that will maintain the historic integrity of Laramie's downtown district. Buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Downtown Laramie Historic District are especially encouraged to use these guidelines; however, the Design Guidelines are applicable throughout the entire downtown commercial district (Figure-3).

The Design Committee of the Laramie Main Street Program is available, at no charge, to provide technical expertise and assistance for restoration projects. Tax credits for rehabilitation work and low-interest loans for approved building improvements are available, as well as grants for historic preservation. The Design Guidelines are intended to make your project affordable, but also historically accurate and cohesive with the rest of the downtown environment.

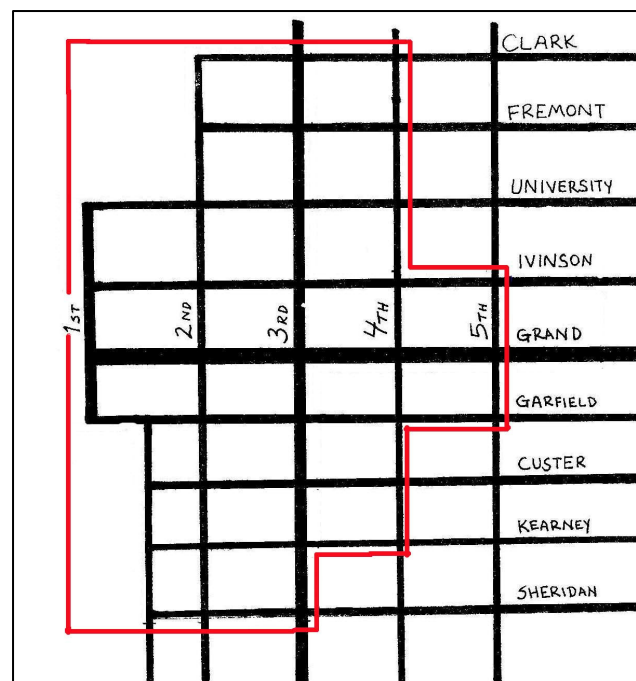


Figure-3. Map of Downtown District.

V. BUILDING DESIGN

A. General

Compliance with all codes and ordinances adopted by the City of Laramie is required.

B. Building Sizes and Proportions

Building height should be comparable to adjacent structures (e.g. a one-story building would not be appropriate in a block of two-, three-, and four-story buildings). A distinct cornice should be defined by

using at least one of the following elements: a horizontal projection or series of projections from the plane of the wall surface, a contrasting change in color, and a change in pattern or texture from the wall surface. A storefront cornice comparable to adjacent structures should be established (Figure-4). The size and proportion of window and door openings of a building should be similar to those on surrounding exemplary facades. The same applies to the ratio of window area to solid wall area for the facade as a whole (See ii. Windows).

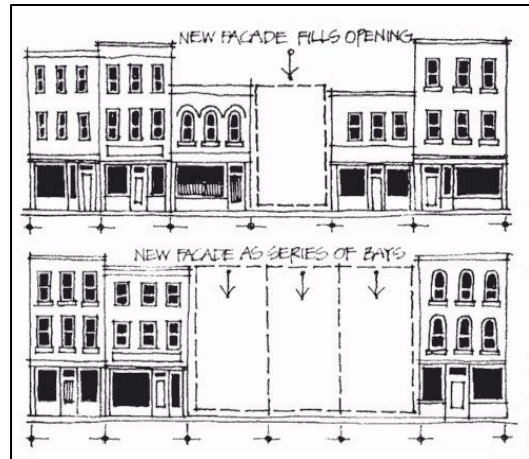


Figure-4. Building Heights.

C. Façade Elements

Appropriate materials and combinations of materials on a building facade have a substantial impact on the aesthetic quality, value, durability, and maintenance of a building (Figure 5). Material used for building facades should be sympathetic to the adjacent context and enhance the overall character of the area. The following criteria are intended to assist in achieving these goals. These criteria may be modified for (1) restoration projects as deemed necessary to preserve the valuable historic character of the building, or (2) to accommodate a unique design of outstanding

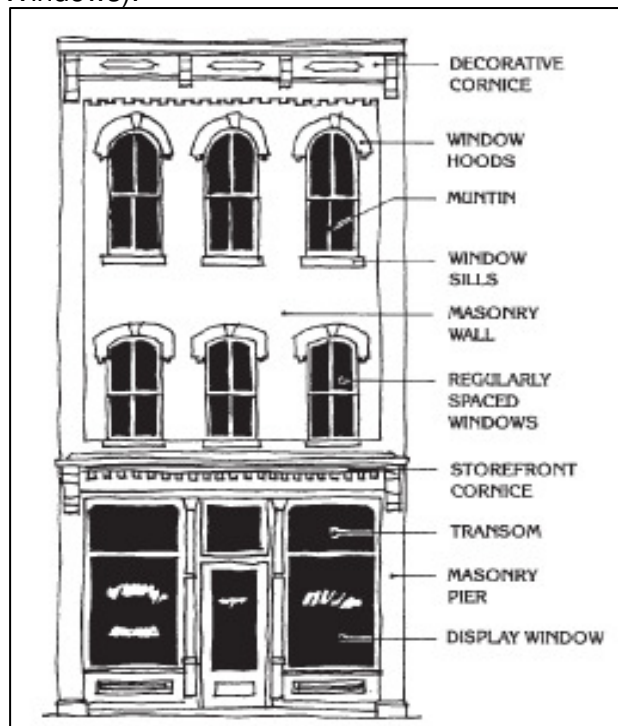


Figure-5. Building Façade Elements.

merit that clearly enhances the aesthetic value of the surrounding buildings.

i. Materials

PRIMARY MATERIALS are materials used historically and are encouraged within the downtown district. These materials coordinate best with the aesthetics and character downtown, usually make up the largest proportion of building facades and are encouraged in unlimited uses. In Laramie, primary materials consist of:

- *Brick* - Varying colors, sizes, and textures of brick as Laramie was blessed with high quality masons and availability of bricks for many decades.
- *Stone* – Preferably of local variety.
- *Terra Cotta*

SECONDARY MATERIALS are materials also used historically, but are best when utilized as accent materials as they may not coordinate as well with the aesthetics or historic nature downtown. Laramie's secondary materials include:

- *Wood (Finish Stock or Dimension Lumber and Plywood or Solid Wood Panels)* - Wood is best used for architectural elements such as pilasters, cornices, decorative raised panels, trim boards, brackets, lintels, etc. The use of wood as a general siding material is discouraged, however, due to maintenance requirements.
- *Concrete Block/Glazed Block/Ceramic Tile* - Concrete blocks look best when used in combination with other materials such as brick or stone. If a façade is to be constructed of only concrete block besides the window materials, use of more than one texture and/or color of block is encouraged for visual stimulation. Ceramic and porcelain tile are very durable when installed correctly and are good accent materials.
- *Concrete and Precast Concrete* - Architectural elements such as window hoods, cornices, columns, capitals, etc., formed from concrete are visually stimulating and durable.
- *Metal Flashing and Architectural Elements* - Metal, painted or exposed, forms long-lasting flashing and other architectural elements such as cornices and moldings.
- *Structural Steel* - Exposed structural pre-formed steel fulfills aesthetic purposes at lintels and columns in a manner similar to existing historic structures.
- *Glass Block* - Glass block is best used in structures to which glass block is coherent with the period of construction.

OTHER (or undesirable) MATERIALS: The following materials do not coincide with the historic values of Laramie’s downtown district due to lack of historic consistency or maintenance and aesthetic reasons.

- *Stucco/Plaster/EIFS* - Any material similar in texture and perception, either synthetic or natural, is best only used as an accent portion of a façade.
- *Mirrored or Darkened Glazing* - Consideration of historic value discourages the use of mirrored glazing in the historic district, though practical uses of mirrored glazing may override the historic significance of the building.
- *Metal, aluminum, or vinyl siding or preformed panels.*
- *Porcelain or baked enamel metal panels.*
- *Asphalt shingles or siding.*



Figure-6. Window Proportions

ii. Windows

- Storefront facades should mainly be windows (Figure-6).
- Buildings with more than one-story should have windows on the second-story facade as well, preferably windows that have similarities to surrounding buildings or are appropriate for the design of the building.

iii. Awnings

Awnings and canopy projections are building features found historically in downtown Laramie. Awnings add interest and aesthetic qualities to the area’s streetscape, and also provide sun and moisture protection.

- Awnings and canopies should fit within the transom area and be visually contained within the building framework of columns and other architectural trim. Storefront level awnings and canopies are best if they extend only to the tops of the display windows.
- Upper level awnings and canopies look best when protecting or accenting upper floor windows (Figure-7).

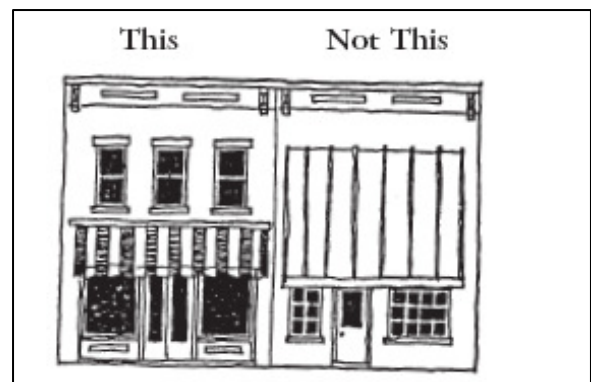


Figure-7. Awning Proportions.

- The awnings and canopies should be compatible with the building and/or window in scale, proportion and color. It is easy to overpower windows or the storefront with an awning.
- Avoid internally illuminated awnings.

D. Mechanical and Electrical Items

All mechanical and electrical items should be located out of view as much as possible. Any items requiring exposure should be painted to match existing materials and screened with an enclosure architecturally integrated with the building.

VI. SIGNS & DISPLAYS

A. SIGNAGE

Signs are a secondary design element to a building. When designing signs for the district, the signs should fit within the environment. Signs have the ability to enhance or detract from the qualities of designed architecture, and therefore, should meet the following criteria:



Figure-8. Signs Along Building Facades.

i. General

- Signs should meet all City codes and comply with applicable provisions of the Uniform Sign Code and the National Electrical Code as adopted by the City.
- Sign types should fit within the architectural details of the building they are placed on. The building should frame the sign. The size of any sign should not destroy the continuity of the building.
- Signs should relate to the architecture at least in one, preferably more, of the following categories: material, shape, and color.
- Frames and exposed supports for signs should be finished to blend with the architecture of the building.
- Only one projecting sign per business or storefront should be used.



Figure-9. Sign Dimensions.

ii. Location and Size

Sign location and size are important aspects of good sign design. When selecting a design, the most important thing to remember is that bigger is not necessarily better. Although a sign should be clearly visible, it should never dominate the building façade nor obscure its architectural details (Figure-9). Regardless of the sign location you choose, it is important to keep the following design guidelines in mind:

- A sign and sign lettering should appear to be in scale with the façade. Avoid overly large signs. Remember that unlike modern highway strip development, downtown Laramie’s buildings and streets were built at a human scale, oriented to pedestrians not cars. Consequently it is not necessary to depend on overly large signs to attract customers.
- Signs should not obscure architectural details or features. Arches, glass transom panels, and decorative brickwork are just a few of the features found on many downtown buildings which reflect a quality of workmanship difficult to duplicate today. This detailing greatly enhances the downtown atmosphere. Use signs to help reinforce the horizontal lines of moldings and transoms seen along the street (Figure-10).



Figure-10. Acceptable and Unacceptable Façade Signs.

- Coordinate the placement of signage on adjacent storefronts, especially those on the same building. Placing a sign higher or lower than adjacent signs may not increase readability, but instead create visual confusion. However, if the adjoining signs are not in scale with the building or are badly positioned, the only solution is to do what is best for your storefront and wait for neighboring merchants to follow your example.

iii. Sign Types

Banner Signs - Banner signs should only be used to announce openings of new businesses or transfer of ownership/management. While any banner sign is on display, it should be maintained.

Billboards - Strongly discouraged.

Directory Signs - Directory signs should be installed permanently to the glass portion of the door or sidelight accessing the spaces identified if available. If this is not appropriate, the sign should be installed adjacent to the door and of a size that is in proportion to the doorway.

Facade Signs (to include Transom Signs) - Façade signs usually fit within the transom area above the shop windows, and are visually contained within the building framework of columns and other architectural trim. It is important that the sign should fit within certain building proportions in order to look appropriate to the façade. Lettering should be proportional to the size of the sign and fill no more than 60% of the sign surface.

Monuments and Pole Signs - One monument or pole sign is appropriate if it is located entirely on private property.

Murals – Signs painted directly onto a building are strongly discouraged. Murals intended to serve an artistic and/or historic function rather than advertising are appropriate. Mural advertising is strongly discouraged.

Exception: - The preservation and protection of documented historic murals are encouraged even if they are of an advertising nature.

Non-conforming Signs - If a sign is repaired, replaced, resized, modified or relocated, it should comply with these guidelines.

Projecting Signs -

- Projecting signs should not project over public property more than 1/3 the distance from the building to the curb, and not project into a public alley or public parking lot. A sign should not project over the street line. Projecting signs should fit within the architectural features of the building and be a minimum of eight (8) feet above the ground. Projecting signs should not exceed fifteen (15) square feet per building face.
- Corner projecting signs are those that are visible from two or more intersecting streets, and are encouraged as long as they do not exceed fifteen (15) square feet per face.

Roof Signs - Roof signs are discouraged unless there is historic evidence of use.

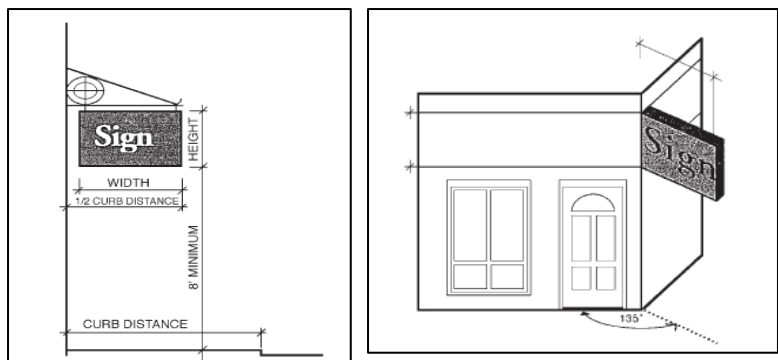


Figure-11. Projecting Signs.

Sandwich Signs/Street Signs -

- Sandwich signs or street signs should have one characteristic that mimics existing signage for the business or represents the business’ operations.
- Sandwich signs or street signs should be no more than 24” wide and 48” tall.
- No sandwich or street sign should block the pedestrian walking corridor.
- All sandwich and street signs should be constructed in a sturdy manner to withstand normal traffic and weather to ensure the safety of pedestrians.
- All sandwich and street signs should be maintained in good fashion.

Window Signs - Window signs consist of lettering applied to the interior of display windows. Window signs should have a minimum of opaque backgrounds, should not fill up more than 20% of the window area, and have letters between 4-8” high. It is recommended to use simple (sans serif) type fonts with few words and a simple professional design.

iv. Color

Color selection is one of the most crucial aspects of successful sign design, for it is the contrast in color between lettering and background that make a sign easy to read.

- Colorful signs can add interest to the streetscape, but should be compatible with and not overpower the storefront or other architectural elements.
- Sign colors should also be compatible with the building facade and adjacent signs.
- Use of historic colors is encouraged. Historic color palettes are available at local and major paint distributors.

v. Illumination

- External illumination should be provided by an external, shielded continuous lamp that is installed to prevent direct light from shining onto the street or adjacent properties.
- Flashing or moving lights are inappropriate and not advised.
- The light source selected should emit warm light, similar to daylight. Spot, track, overhang, or wall lamps are all acceptable light sources. Light should not shine directly in the eyes of pedestrians (Figure-12).
- The use of internally lit signs (back-lit plastic) is strongly discouraged.
- Neon style signs should meet the guidelines stated for façade and projecting signs.



Figure-12. Illuminated Sign.

B. STOREFRONT/WINDOW DISPLAYS

The lighting and layout of window displays, along with other merchandising techniques, have a major impact on how well a business reaches its target market. Attractive windows speak volumes about the quality and positive impressions your business will make on the public and they motivate potential customers to stop and enter a store instead of walking by. The following suggestions will help you enhance the overall impression of your storefront display windows and will also help improve the overall image of the downtown district:

- Do not overlook the value of good window display. Every business, whether it be retail or service oriented has something colorful or interesting to present.
- Utilize the display window as a natural lighting feature. Keep the display window intact to provide ample light for the business or apartment; it will help preserve the open and expansive look of the streetscape.
- Mix up the lighting scheme and adjust to highlight new objects. Various techniques can be used here such as raising the height of objects, use of accent lights, and employment of energy-efficient lighting (low-voltage halogen bulbs).
- Do not reduce the size of the display window. Filling in space of the storefront detracts from the inviting appearance you want to encourage.
- Do not use tinted glass. Although helpful in shielding the interior from direct sunlight, it can greatly reduce the visibility of what is displayed. Use of clear glass will ensure that shoppers get a clear, unobstructed view of displayed merchandise.

VII. MAINTENANCE

A. Site Maintenance

Performing routine site maintenance is important to present a positive image to the shopper and can also prevent costly repairs that affect other parts of your storefront and the overall downtown district. Examples of features that require regular maintenance are:

1. Doorways and thresholds.
2. Litter pick-up.
3. Window displays - unwashed windows, peeling paint, broken or missing tiles, etc.

B. Building Maintenance

All buildings and building features in the historic district should be preserved against decay, deterioration and structural defects.

This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- A deteriorated or inadequate foundation.
- Exterior walls, partitions or other vertical supports that split, lean, list or buckle due to defective material or deterioration.
- Parts that may fall and injure people or property, such as a deteriorating lentil or dentil (Figure-13).
- Exterior walls, partitions or other vertical supports that are of insufficient size to carry imposed loads safely.
- Roofs and roof supports or other horizontal members that sag, split or buckle due to defective material or deterioration.
- Deteriorated, crumbling or loose stucco.
- Defective weather protection for exterior walls including lack of paint or other protective coverings.
- Any fault in the building or structure that renders it structurally unsafe or not properly watertight, to include broken glass panes.
- Awnings and canopy projections, including all hardware, shall be kept in good repair and in a proper state of preservation and working order.

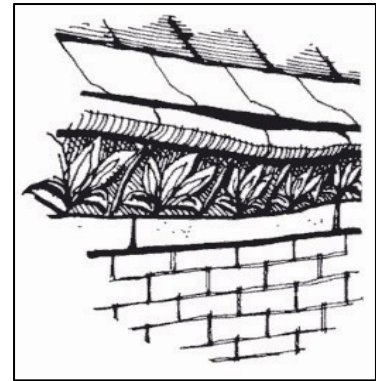


Figure-13. Deteriorating Façade Feature.

C. Graphic Maintenance

- Any vandalism that defaces or mars the building surface (i.e. graffiti) should be mitigated within 48 hours so as to prevent further vandalism (Figure-14).
- All signs together with all of their supports, braces, guys, and anchors, shall be kept in good repair and in proper state of preservation and working order. The display surfaces of all signs shall be maintained at all times. If the sign or any portions of its supporting system become damaged, then it should be repaired.
- Abandoned Signs — when a business ceases operation, the on-premise signage should be removed by the owner except

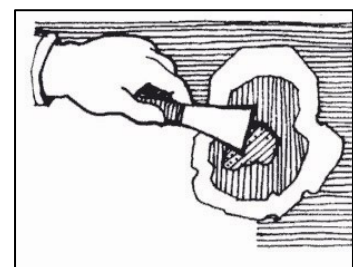


Figure-14. Graffiti Removal.

for signs with supported historic significance.

VIII. SITE DESIGN

Though many of the lots in Laramie’s downtown district are already developed, the following guidelines are provided for consideration when new construction is being planned.

A. Building/Location Context

There are three building locations that have different impacts on street presence; corner buildings, center buildings, and alley/open-side buildings. Building walls should reflect and complement the traditional materials and techniques of historic downtown

Laramie. To provide balance between

buildings, a constant distance from the street curb can be maintained as the street building line (sbl). Corner buildings present two full side-views of the building and the connecting corner. A presentation of façade similarity will assist in connecting the two sides of the building facing the

intersecting streets. The center building provides the continuity between buildings and best serves this purpose if aligned at the same distance from the street (sbl) as the adjacent, contiguous buildings (Figure-15). Height differences between center buildings and adjacent contiguous buildings should not be excessive or else the “canyon-effect”

becomes evident (Figure-16). Buildings that are adjacent to alleys or open spaces (mini-parks) create a unique situation with the alley/open building face that should present a safe, clean and comfortable area that integrates the side façade with the street façade, and at the same time the

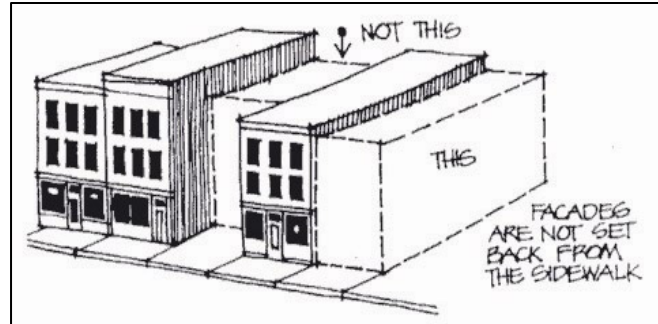


Figure-15. Façade Setbacks.

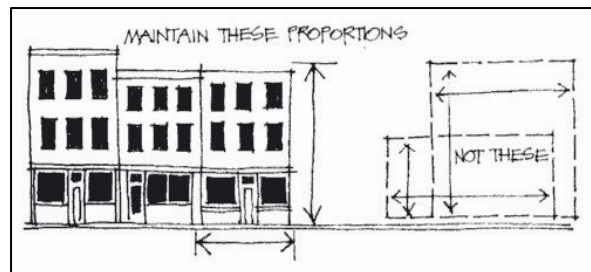


Figure-16. Contiguous Facades.

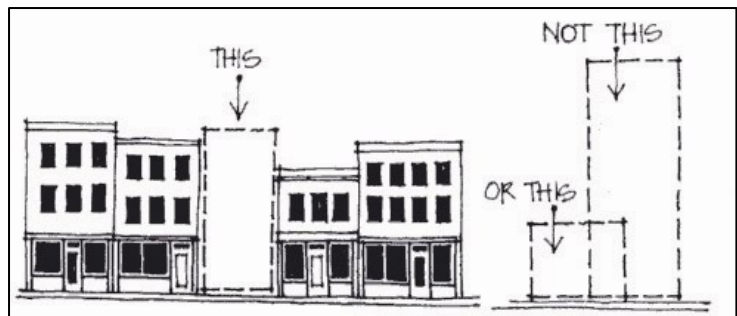


Figure-17. Building Proportions.

street facade follows the aesthetics of the adjacent buildings (Figure-17).

B. Streetscape Elements

The purpose of addressing streetscape elements is to ensure coherent street perspective and to assist building owners and occupants with understanding the relationship between the public space and the building face (Figure-18). Figure-18 provides an illustration of the streetscape area and its component parts. These guidelines present a set of parameters for the placement and characteristics of street trees, and other amenities or appurtenances (e.g., benches, signs, street lights, mechanical fixtures, landscaping) on or near each building site. Street trees and vegetation can be spaced so that they do not obstruct the building façade. Allowances should be made for curb cuts, fire hydrants, and other infrastructure elements. Benches and other moveable objects, e.g., bicycle racks, can be placed not to obstruct sidewalk traffic or diminish the appearance of the building façade. If possible, mechanical fixtures should not be placed in the streetscape area.

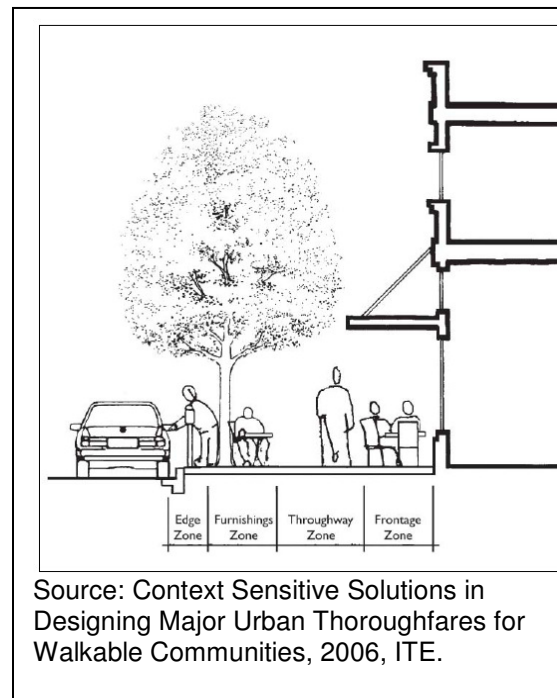


Figure-18. Roadside Zones.

- Edge Zone—area between the face of curb and the furnishing zone, an area of required clearance between parked vehicles or traveled way and appurtenances or landscaping.
- Furnishings Zone—area of the roadside that provides a buffer between pedestrians and vehicles, which contains landscaping, public street furniture, transit stops, public signage, utilities, etc.
- Throughway Zone—walking zone that must remain clear, both horizontally and vertically, for the movement of pedestrians.
- Frontage Zone—distance between the throughway and the building front or private property line that is used to buffer pedestrians from window shoppers, appurtenances and doorways. It contains private street furniture, private signage, merchandise displays, etc. This zone is sometimes referred to as the “shy” zone.

APPENDIX

A. Resources and Links

Local and Community Links

- Laramie Main Street Program – www.laramiemainstreet.org
- Downtown Laramie Business Association – www.shoplaramiedowntown.com
- City of Laramie – www.ci.laramie.wy.us
- Laramie Chamber of Commerce – www.laramie.org

Business and Development Links

- Laramie Economic Development Corporation – www.laramiewy.org
- Wyoming Community Foundation – www.wycf.org
- Wyoming Business Council – www.wyomingbusiness.org

Design and Historic Preservation Links

- Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office – wyoshpo.state.wy.us
- Wyoming Main Street Program – www.wyomingmainstreet.org
- National Main Street Program – www.mainstreet.org
- National Trust for Historic Preservation – www.nationaltrust.org
- The Main Street Approach to Commercial District Revitalization – <http://www.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=47§ion=2>

Green Building/Energy Conservation/Sustainability Links

- Healthy Building Network – www.healthybuilding.net
- Nebraska Energy Office: “Energy Efficiency and Historic Preservation: A Planning Guide for Buildings” – <http://www.neo.state.ne.us/rebuildbook.pdf>
- US Dept. of Energy “Rebuild America” Program Web Toolbox – <http://www.eere.energy.gov/buildings/info/index.html>

B. Definitions/Glossary

Architectural Element - A permanently affixed or integral part of the building structure, which may be decorative and contributes to the composition of the facade. For example: cornices, trim boards, brackets, lintels, dentils, columns, capitals, etc.

Alteration - A change in the exterior appearance of a building, which may involve changing surface materials, openings, and details.

Appropriate Period Detailing - Design detailing commensurate to any established construction period. Details vary for specific, commonly recognized building styles.

Architectural Decorative Block - Concrete block with special modules or textures used for aesthetic effect.

Awning - A roof-like covering, often adjustable, over a window or door to provide protection against the sun, wind, rain, or snow.

Canopy - A covered area which extends from the wall of a building, protecting an entrance or loading dock. OR an architectural projection that provides weather protection, identity or decoration and is supported by the building to which it is attached and at the outer end by not less than one stanchion. A canopy is comprised of a rigid structure over which a rigid covering is attached.



Figure-19. Canopies.

Canopy sign - Any sign that is a part of or attached to an awning, canopy, marquee or other fabric, plastic, or structural protective cover over a door, entrance, window, sidewalk or outdoor service area.

Capital -The upper member of column, pillar, pier or pilaster, crowning the shaft; usually decorated.

Cornice - A projecting horizontal feature that crowns an architectural facade or composition.

Dentil - A small block used in rows, resembling a row of teeth.

Directional sign (on-premise) - A sign located upon the premises of the business activity to which it refers that directs the movement or placement of pedestrian or vehicular traffic. An on-premise directional sign may contain only a business name or logo and directional information.

Directional sign (off-premise) - A sign not located upon the premises of the business activity to which it refers that directs the movement or placement of pedestrian or vehicular traffic. An off-premise directional sign may contain only a business name or logo and directional information.

Eaves/Eavelines - The lower edge of a sloping roof; the part of a roof of a building that projects beyond the wall.

Facade - The face or principal front of a building.

Façade Sign – Sign at the front of a building.

Finial - An ornament which terminates the point of a spire, pinnacle, etc.

Glazing - Translucent glass material.

Historic – See the National Park Service (NPS) definition as it pertains to nominations for the National Register of Historic Places and criteria for evaluation.

Lintel — A horizontal architectural member spanning and usually carrying the load

above an opening.

Molding –Decorative trim elements, often made of wood or plaster, which protrude from a ceiling or wall surface, or window and door openings.

Parapet - A low guarding wall at any point of sudden drop, as at the edge of a terrace, roof, balcony, etc.

Pilaster - A flat column against the face of a wall.

Restoration -To reproduce the appearance of a building exactly as it looked at a particular moment in time. This process may include the removal of later work that deviates from the original style or the replacement of historic features.

Scale – The size or apparent size of an object seen in relation to other objects, people, or its environment or format. Also used to refer to the quality or monumentality found in some objects regardless of their size. In architectural drawings, the ratio of the measurements in the drawing to the measurements in the building. OR The relative size of an object when compared to others of its kind, to its environment, or to humans.

Setback — Distance at which the building is placed from the street curb or property line.

Sheathing - Any durable material covering the original facade of the building.

Sill - A horizontal piece that forms one of the lowest members of a framework or supporting structure; for example: The horizontal member at the base of a window.

Spandrel Glass - Colored or reflective opaque glass material.

Transom - Any small window over a door or another window.

Transom Sign – A type of façade sign that fits above the door of a building but below the windows of the second story.

Vision Glass - Translucent glass material.

Window Hoods – decorative element at the top of a window; the top of a window.

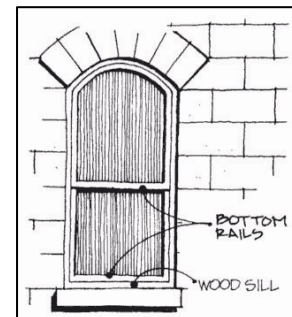


Figure-20. Window Features.