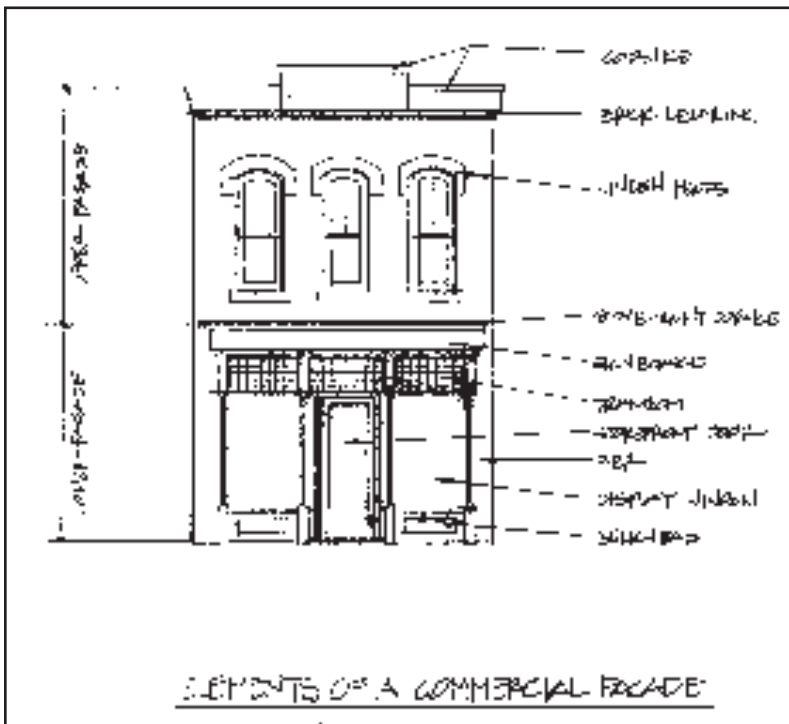




Commercial Building Facades



St. Joseph’s downtown and neighborhood commercial districts are comprised primarily of late 19th and early 20th century brick buildings that range from one to multiple stories in height. Most of these commercial buildings can be categorized as One-Part or Two-Part Commercial Block designs as set forth in Richard Longstreth’s publication, *The Buildings of Main Street*. These commercial buildings are based on two separate components of the facades – storefronts and upper facades. **One Part Commercial Blocks** are composed of storefronts and detailing such as an ornamental cornice just above the storefront. **Two-Part Commercial Blocks** are at least two stories in height with a storefront on the first floor and a separate treatment for the upper story areas.

Typically, a late 19th / early 20th century commercial building is oriented to the street and is positioned on the lot line with little or no setback from the public sidewalk. These buildings have storefronts

on the first floor level that are largely transparent in nature, incorporating large plate glass windows for the display of merchandise. Technological advances in the mid-19th century allowed for these larger glass areas. Storefront windows are typically framed on the sides by piers of wood, brick, stone, or cast iron that help to tie the storefront visually and architecturally to the rest of the building façade. These elements, along with horizontal steel beams positioned above the panes of glass, provide needed structural support for the upper stories of the building.

Several late 19th century commercial buildings in St. Joseph still retain their original cast iron storefronts. Many of these elaborate façade elements were manufactured locally in St. Joseph and in nearby Atchison, Kansas. The foundry name was sometimes incorporated into the storefront. A recessed entrance with wooden doors incorporating large panes of glass often is situated in the center of the storefront. Decorative tiles, occasionally incorporating the name of the business in the design, provided embellishment to the entrance floor and served as a unique form of advertising. A bulkhead or skirt board of wood, brick, stone, or metal measuring about two feet is placed below the storefront window to provide protection to the glass and to visually anchor the building to the ground. Situated above the display windows are transom windows, often made of leaded or translucent glass. These windows are designed to provide additional natural light to the interior store spaces. The storefront is then capped by a wooden, metal, or masonry cornice that usually includes a flat panel or frieze board for the placement of signage.

Commercial Building Facades



St. Joseph Landmark Commission

While most late 19th century storefronts had a limited palette of materials consisting primarily of wood, glass, brick, cast iron, and/or stone, early to mid-20th century storefronts saw the introduction of new materials such as bronze, monel metal, chrome, and tinted glass panels such as Carrara glass and Vitrolite. Preservation of these materials should be considered when evaluating the condition of a storefront.

The upper stories of commercial buildings contain additional windows to provide light for upper floor areas that often housed offices, residential units, or additional retail spaces. Most older commercial structures in St. Joseph generally have double hung windows of a smaller dimension than the storefront windows in the upper story areas. These windows also tend to have more of a vertical orientation. In the late 19th century, these windows often were embellished with decorative wooden, brick, stone, or cast iron window hoods and sills. Other windows were simply defined by brick soldier course lintels or jack arches. Less decorative and more functional designs in general became the hallmark of early 20th century design.

The building façade is then capped by a wooden or metal cornice, patterned brickwork (often referred to as “corbelling”), or a parapet wall that helps to articulate the façade and contribute to the building’s overall character. Again more elaborate cornice and parapet treatments were typical of late 19th century commercial architecture, while more streamlined and functional designs became prevalent in the first half of the 20th century.

Sadly, many of St. Joseph’s downtown and neighborhood commercial buildings have undergone alterations that have obscured or destroyed original architectural elements. Many of these insensitive changes have taken place since the 1950s in an attempt to “update” buildings in an effort to compete with the modern day shopping mall. Frequently, storefronts were altered with little regard for the upper stories which were spared from the modernizations. In other cases, facades were completely covered with modern materials that resulted in the loss of the building’s historic character. Collectively, these modernizations have eroded the architectural diversity that is the hallmark of St. Joseph’s commercial districts.



Two storefronts in Downtown St. Joseph, one carefully rehabilitated (top) and the other in need of rehabilitation (bottom), exhibit the basic elements of traditional commercial architecture: recessed entrance, large display windows, decorative cast iron supports, and bulk head treatment below the windows.



Commercial Building Facades



Rehabilitation of historic commercial buildings reinforces the character of St. Joseph's downtown.

Efforts should be focused on evaluating façade modifications to determine their condition and their overall impact on the character of the historic resource. Age, architectural compatibility, and the condition of the alterations will be the criteria the Landmark Commission uses in evaluating whether or not commercial façade alterations merit preservation. In some cases, alterations may have acquired significance over time and should be retained. This may include, for example, the installation of colored Carrara or Vitrolite glass panels in the 1940s over a Victorian wooden storefront. Significant changes that are deemed “historic” are generally at least 50 years old. In other cases, returning buildings

back to their original appearance may be appropriate if enough original fabric has survived or if documentary photographs or other sources provide a clue to original design features. In certain situations, creating a new design that is in keeping with the spirit of the original design may be advisable, particularly if original features do not survive and there is a lack of pictorial evidence to support restoration.

Commercial Building Facades: Guidelines

1. Retain and preserve historic building façade features such as storefront windows, bulkheads, transoms, entry doors, decorative entrance floor tiles and name plates, cornices, cast iron columns and pilasters, windows, and window hoods. Maintain the original materials of these features.
2. Follow a routine program of maintenance and repair to façade elements. Utilize the appropriate guidelines in this manual for the various building features and materials.
3. Repair historic façade features through patching, splicing, and reinforcing. Retention of original fabric is necessary to maintain the historic integrity of the building.
4. Replace historic façade features in kind when said features are too deteriorated to repair. Match the original in terms of design, dimension, texture, material, and color. Consider substitute materials only when it is not feasible to use the original material.

Commercial Building Facades



St. Joseph Landmark Commission

Commercial Building Facades: Guidelines continued

5. Preserve façade features and storefronts that have acquired significance over time such as Cararra Glass or Vitrolite that are commonly found on storefronts from the 1930s and 1940s. Condition and architectural compatibility of these features with the original architectural style of the building will be evaluated in determining the desirability of their preservation. Removal of such features may be authorized for the restoration of original design features based on surviving fabric or sufficient photographic or pictorial documentation of the original design. Salvage of removed façade materials, particularly older materials that may no longer be produced, is encouraged. These items may prove useful for repairs on other buildings.
6. Avoid adding architectural features to buildings that are stylistically incompatible with the original design or convey a false historical appearance.
7. Design new storefronts and façade details that are compatible with the building and surrounding historic buildings of the same period. Utilize the primary elements of commercial façade architecture in the new design.
 - Keep the storefront contained by the piers, storefront cornice, and bulkhead.
 - Make the storefront mainly transparent with large panes of glass to provide maximum visibility for merchandise display. Incorporate transom windows above the storefront windows and doors.
 - Incorporate the traditional recessed entry into the storefront design. This design feature will provide more display area for the storefront and will allow for doors to open outward to meet building code requirements. Use wooden doors that have a full pane of glass. Leaded and stained glass doors were typically not used in commercial doorways in St. Joseph and should be avoided. Beveled glass was often used and is therefore appropriate.
 - Use window sizes and patterns on the upper stories that are consistent with surrounding structures. Windows in upper stories are typically vertical in their orientation. Many upper story windows are of a double hung sash style. Other window types, including casement and fixed pane, are also found on some commercial buildings.
 - Incorporate a cornice element into the new design. Wood, metal, stone, and patterned brickwork are materials that historically were used to create a decorative cap on a building façade. This palette of materials should be used for new cornices.



Traditional canvas awnings enhance the storefront of the Downtown Furniture Emporium, 302 S. 3rd Street, South Fourth Street Commercial Historic District.



Commercial Building Facades



Rich detailing embellishes the upper stories of the Englehart & Winning Company North Building facade, 216 N. 4th Street, Wholesale Row Historic District. (Photo by Roger Martin)

Commercial Building Facades: Guidelines continued

- Examine neighboring buildings to gain an understanding of the proportion and rhythm of design elements and the use of materials. Compatible design involves relating as much as possible to the design vocabulary of the adjacent structures. The effect that a material's color and texture will have on a building's appearance in relation to its neighbors should be considered.
 - Choose appropriate materials for the new building and storefront. Utilize the palette of materials found in the commercial district.
 - Avoid inappropriate historical themes in the new design of the storefront and building. Imitations of "colonial" or "pioneer/log cabin" buildings, for example, are not appropriate in St. Joseph's late 19th/early 20th century commercial districts. A new façade should be a contemporary expression that respects the scale, massing, proportion, materials, and styling of surrounding buildings, yet continues the architectural evolution of the City. Avoid designs that create a false historical appearance.
8. Rehabilitate rear façades of buildings to provide for convenient, attractive access from inner-block parking areas. Make general repairs to masonry, windows, doors, gutters, downspouts, and paving. Where overhead utilities are a concern, consolidate to reduce visual clutter, if possible.
 9. Repaint commercial facades (that were previously painted) and storefronts in colors that are appropriate to the building and the commercial district. Although the Commission does not govern paint color selection, it does recommend the use of a palette of colors that are found on a given block and in the surrounding area. The Commission is available for color consultations on request.
 10. Introduce signage to the storefront that is compatible in scale, size, material and color. Do not place signage in areas that will obscure character-defining building features.
 11. Use fabric awnings with commercial storefronts. Awnings should relate to the building in terms of scale, form, and color. Awning installations should not obscure or damage character-defining architectural details.
 12. When considering the installation of light fixtures on commercial facades, use fixture styles that are compatible with the character and style of the building. Avoid using fixture styles that convey a false historic appearance (e.g., carriage lamps on an early 20th century industrial warehouse). Storefront lights should not compete with streetlights.
 13. Follow WINDOWS AND DOORS guidelines when considering repairs or changes to these architectural features.