

Exterior Lighting



St. Joseph Landmark Commission

Adequate exterior lighting is an important consideration for residents and business owners in the City’s historic districts and commercial centers because it increases visibility and contributes to a sense of security. Used effectively, exterior lighting can highlight and reinforce a building and district’s architectural character and can enhance and establish a theme in the landscape. Used ineffectively, lighting can detract from and overly emphasize a building or site. It can also be a nuisance to abutting property owners if the wattage is too high and the angle of illumination is not considered.

Certain areas within the City, including sections of Downtown and Patee Town, have witnessed the installation of ornamental “period” street lighting aimed at enhancing the visual quality of the environment and creating a theme in the landscape. A continuation of these efforts is encouraged.

All proposals for exterior lighting, including the introduction of entrance and porch light fixtures and low level security lighting, require a Certificate of Appropriateness. Public utilities also require approval for new light installations. See UTILITIES for additional commentary and guidelines. The City’s Historic Preservation Planner may approve certain light installations as a “minor works” item. See a listing of “minor works” items in the introductory sections of this manual.

The compatibility of proposed exterior lighting will be evaluated by the Landmark Commission in terms of design, materials, size, scale, location, wattage, and angle of illumination. Warm spectrum (white) light sources and unobtrusive fixtures are generally recommended. The preservation of original exterior light fixtures, commonly found on porch ceilings, should be a part of the maintenance schedule for historic buildings. Many of these fixtures date to the early 20th century when electricity became more widespread. They were usually of low wattage and meant to illuminate entrances. A variety of reproduction fixtures based on historical designs is available on the market today. Supplemental lighting can be considered if it is determined that vintage fixtures do not produce the necessary lighting level desired. Review of proposals for exterior lighting will require submission of a product description, product data sheet, and plot plan indicating placement. A sample of the light may be required to be submitted to the Commission for its review.



Ornamental sconces flank the terra cotta-embellished doorway of the Corby Building, 422 Felix Street, St. Joseph Commerce and Banking Historic District.



Exterior Lighting



New ornamental streetlights help to enhance the visual quality of Downtown St. Joseph's streetscapes.

Exterior Lighting: Guidelines

1. Preserve and maintain original lighting fixtures.
2. Select lighting that is compatible with the building and site in terms of period design, materials, use, scale, location, wattage, and angle of illumination.
3. Avoid placing fixtures in areas that will obscure or damage character-defining architectural or landscape features.
4. When adding a new light fixture to a building, consider placement of the fixture in a traditional location such as a porch ceiling above an entrance.
5. In selecting new lighting fixtures, choose designs that are simple and unobtrusive so that they do not compete with the building's architecture.
6. Avoid the use of mercury vapor, sodium, or fluorescent lighting. Use a white light source.
7. If outdoor lighting is desired, install lighting at levels that provide for adequate safety, yet do not detract from or overly emphasize the building or site.
8. Mount security lighting on the rear or sides of the structure rather than on the front of the building.
9. Make sure that exterior lighting is properly shielded so as not to be a nuisance for abutting property owners.
10. Locate lighting sources in strategic locations on the building or site to create a subtle and inviting ambiance.
11. Introduce low-level lighting in public areas and at the private-public edge of properties for the safety of pedestrians.
12. Screen from view ground-mounted accent lights or spotlights.

Consider the use of ornamental streetlights that reflect the late 19th/early 20th century character of the City's historic districts. Utilize a consistent family of street light fixtures. Such fixtures should be of a uniform color and material. Cast iron or aluminum is an acceptable material. The use of fiberglass for ornamental street light fixtures shall be prohibited.