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# The Main Street Approach to Commercial District Revitalization: Design



Matt Wagner, Ph.D.  
VP of Revitalization Programs

# Main Street Four-Point Approach®

## Simultaneous work in four broad areas:

- **Economic Vitality** - diversifying the district's economic base
- **Promotion** - marketing the district's unique characteristics and assets
- **Design** - getting the commercial district in top physical shape
- **Organization** - getting the community working toward consensus



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# A Four-Point Approach<sup>®</sup> to Preservation-Based Economic Development

- **Economic Vitality** Committee develops businesses/entrepreneurs
- **Promotion** Committee develops markets/customers
- **Design** Committee develops space/place
- **Organization** Committee develops partners/resources



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# Mission of the Design Component of Commercial District Revitalization

*To guide and implement physical changes in the district that make it physically attractive to shoppers, investors, business owners, and visitors.*



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# Design

- *Protecting historic properties, celebrating while allowing new development.*

**Get the District into top physical shape (capitalize on your best assets)**

- inviting atmosphere
- good window displays
- parking areas
- façade improvements
- street furniture
- signage
- lighting
- landscaping

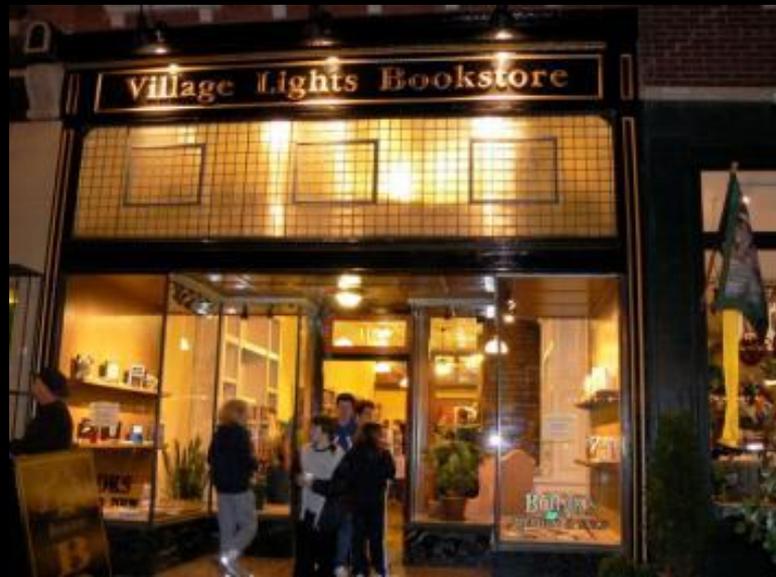


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# Design ~ How the District Looks and Functions

Basket Fence  
Artist Ida Edwards



# What can Commercial Districts expect to achieve?

## In the area of Design?

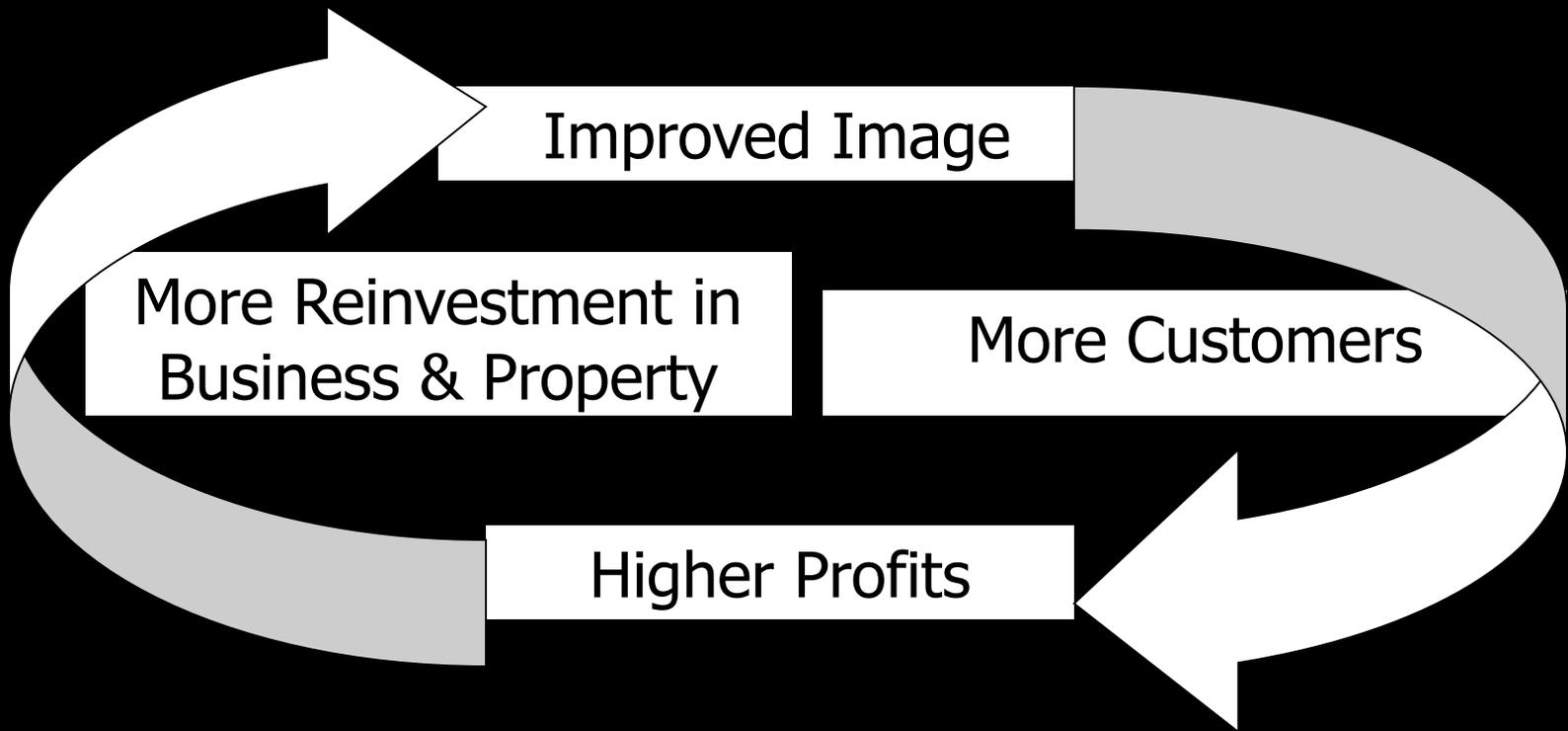
- Increased design appreciation
- Increased investment in buildings and properties
- Appropriate investment in buildings and properties
- Spaces that are better for business
  - Authentic, well-maintained, high quality, appropriate size



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# Cycle of Investment



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# Design Committee Responsibilities

- Design Education
- Design Incentives
- Design Assistance
- Planning & Review
- Public Spaces
- Clean, Safe & Green



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Historic Buildings have  
witnessed many material  
changes over time



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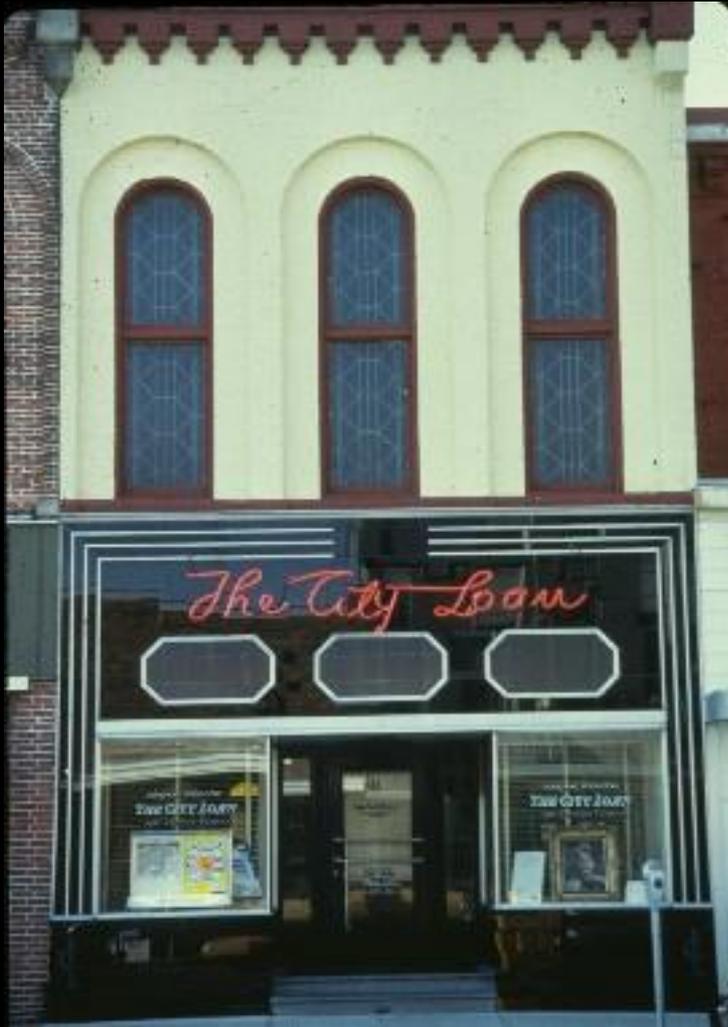
# Cast iron



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# Glass block and structural glass



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# Changing macro economics and consumer movements also impacted buildings.....



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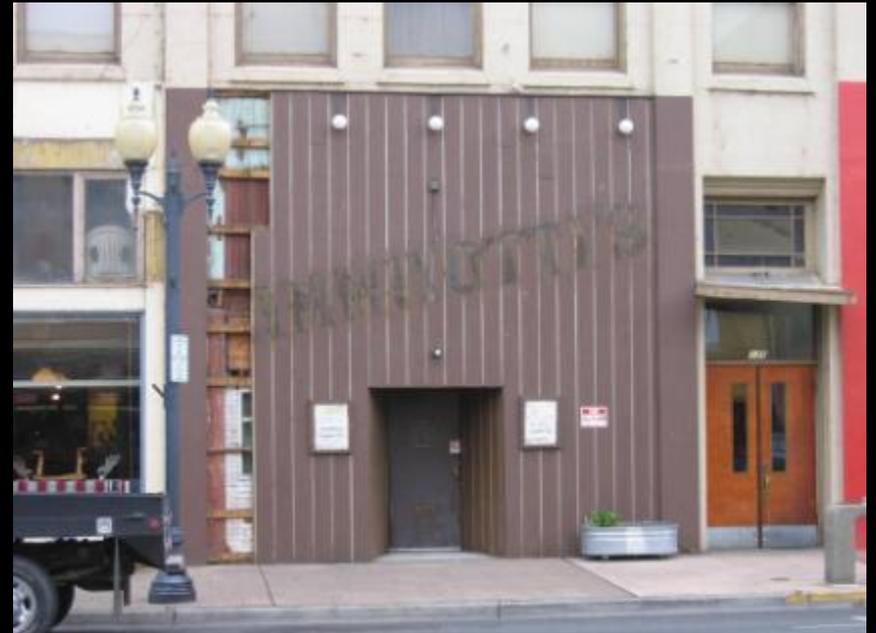
# What happened to that historic building?



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# Alterations Impacting Building Use



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# Irreversible Alterations



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# Irreversible - Demolished



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# How transportation shapes commercial architecture



Spring Street, Los Angeles, Cal.



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Silver Spring Shopping Center, Silver Spring, Md.



PHOTO BY RUPELAND

RB-1033



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# The next generation of commercial districts: Your Role....



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# Design Committee

typical areas of responsibility

- Design education
  - Maintenance
  - Building improvements
  - Signage and awnings
  - Visual merchandising
  - Placemaking
  - Public improvements
  - Graphic design
- Design incentives
  - Technical
  - Financial
- Planning & review
- Clean, Safe & Green (sustainability)
- Placemaking (design elements)



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# Prioritizing Design Needs

- Design audit: suggested in assessment report
- Identify buildings, through the condition survey in the Main Street Design Manual, which require major maintenance and repair to assure correction to maintain structural integrity.
- Identify the good, the bad, and ugly on the street.

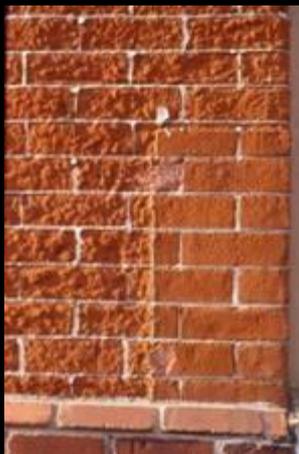


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# Maintenance & repair

*How designs work commercially*



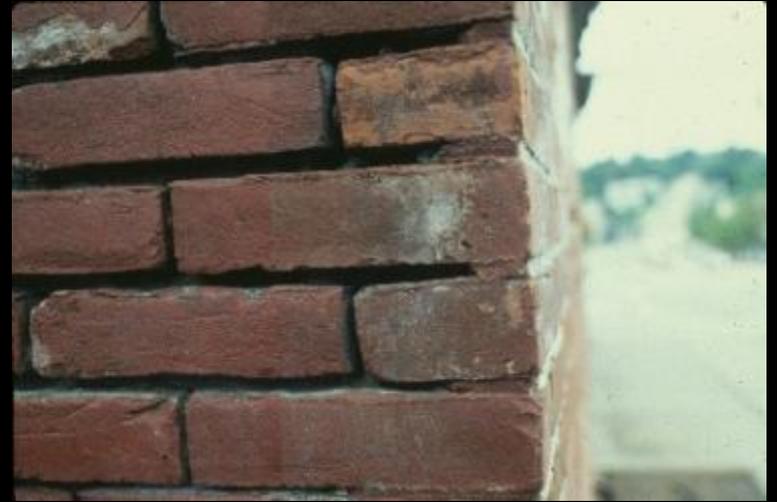
- Proper maintenance allows for real estate investments to appreciate
- Deferred maintenance leads to loss of improvement value
  - In some cases a total loss
- Deferred maintenance also leads to the need for repair
  - Which is much more costly than maintenance
- Building condition affects perception of business quality



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Seal places  
where water  
can enter



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# Avoid Excessive Cleaning and Sandblasting



# It's also about Protecting Interiors



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# Unique interior features



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# Cross the street and assess the building



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**Newkirk, OK and**

**Sheboygan Falls, “Falls Face Lifters”**



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# Texarkana Benjamin Moore ~ Paint What Matters



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# “Extreme Business Makeovers”



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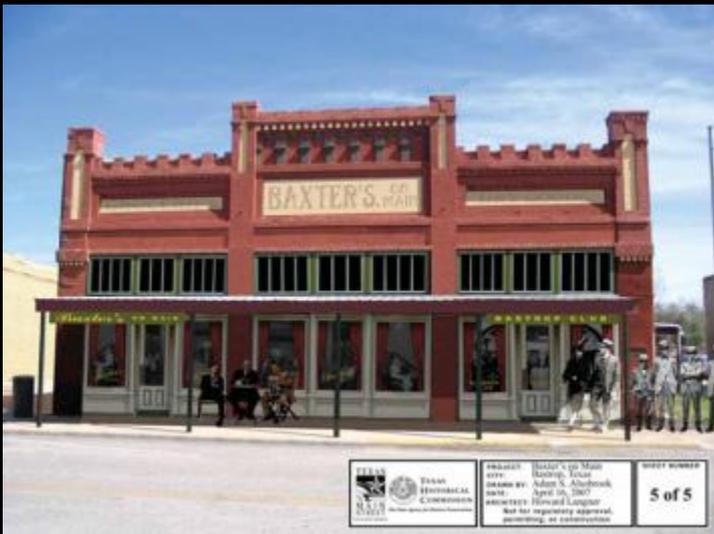
# After (Exterior)



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# Revitalization Program can provide Design Assistance



Baxter, TX



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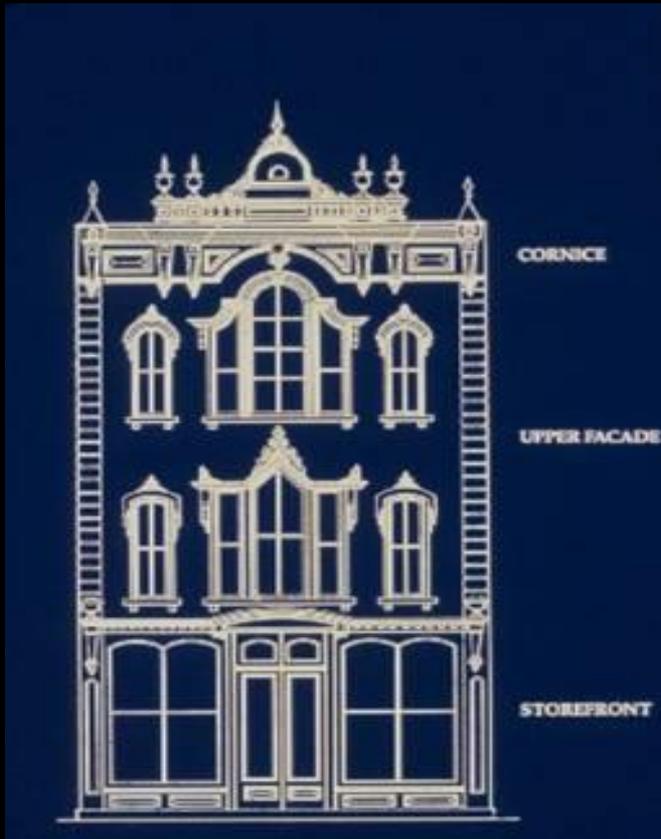
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# Design Education- Building Improvements: Elements of a Facade



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# Design Education- Building Improvements: Elements of a Facade

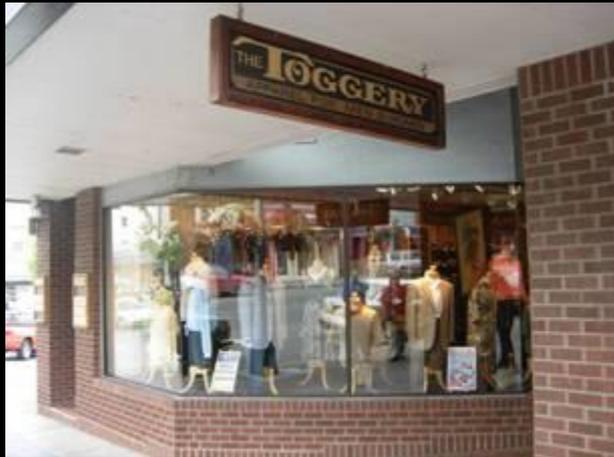


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# Building Improvements

*How designs work architecturally Transparency*



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# 27 Preservation Briefs

Technical Preservation Services



HPS  
National Park Service

## The Maintenance and Repair of Architectural Cast Iron

John G. Waite, AIA  
Historical Overview by Margot Gayle

- » [Maintenance and Repair](#)
- » [Deterioration](#)
- » [Condition Assessment](#)
- » [Cleaning and Paint Removal](#)
- » [Painting and Coating Systems](#)
- » [Caulking, Patching, and Mechanical Repairs](#)
- » [Duplication and Replacement](#)
- » [Dismantling and Assembly](#)
- » [Substitute Materials](#)
- » [Maintenance](#)
- » [Summary](#)



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# Improving the Commercial District's Appearance

## Before & After Case Studies



# Removing aluminum siding



Corning, NY



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# Before



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Chippewa Falls,  
Wisconsin



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Southside, Pittsburgh, PA (c) National Trust for Historic Preservation



Southside, Pittsburgh, PA (c) National Trust for Historic Preservation



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(c) National Trust for Historic Preservation

# Before & After:



Boston, MA

Gates, signage, paint



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# Littleton, NH



Littleton, NH



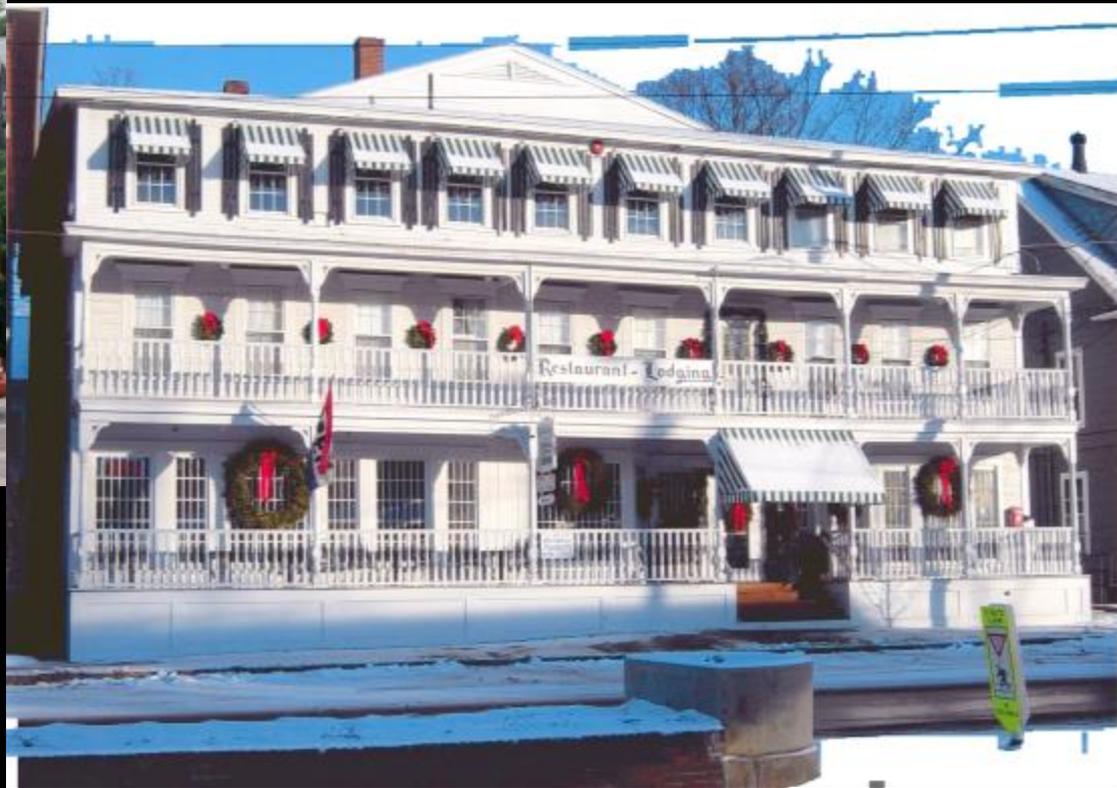
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# 1875 Inn Hotel and Restaurant, Tilton, NH



Tax Credit Project  
NH Investment Program



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# New Iberia, Louisiana



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# After:

Algoma, WI



Not all improvements  
have to break the bank



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# After



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# After



Baltimore,  
Maryland  
(Waverly)



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# Before & After:

Rice Lake, WI



Do what you can now, you  
can always do more later

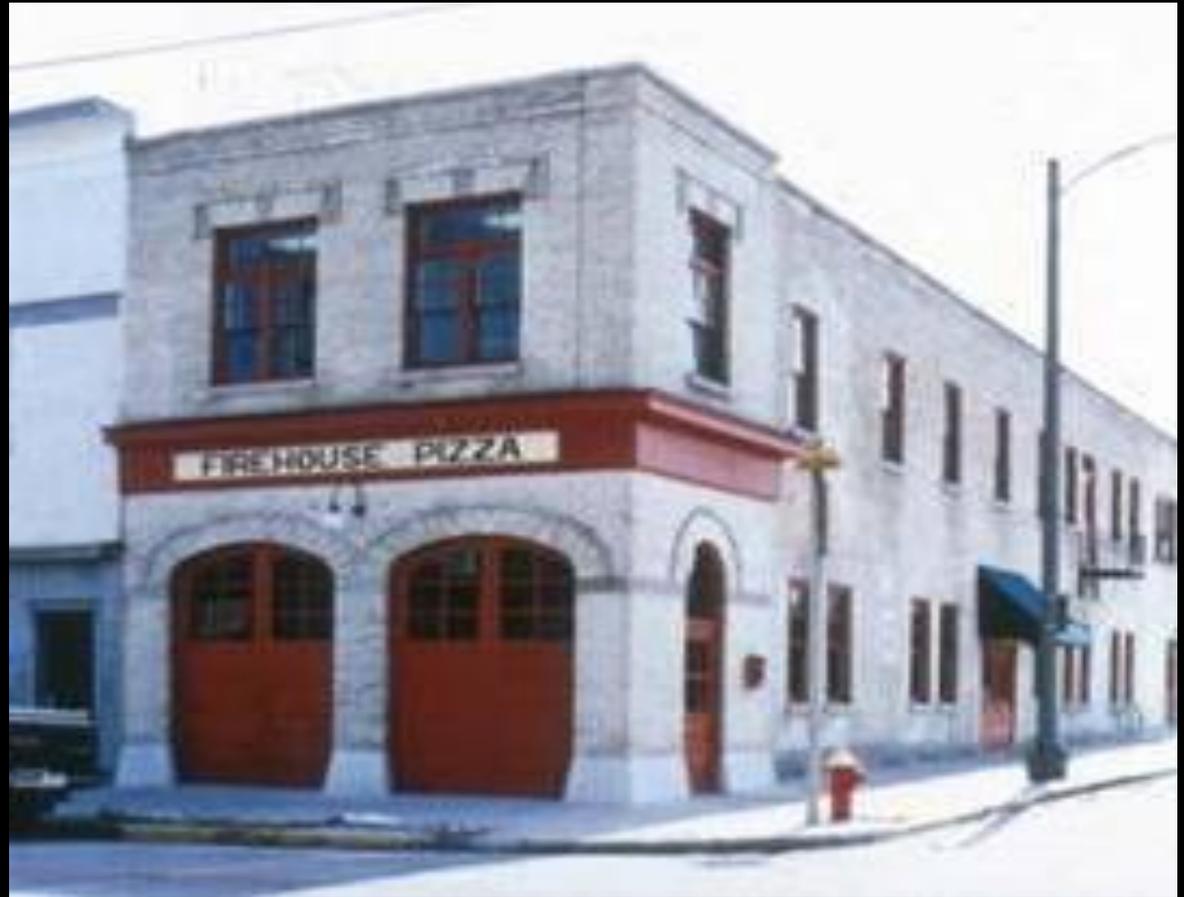


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# Before & After:

Sheboygan Falls, WI



**Exterior appearance affects perception of business quality**



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# Before and After

Huntsville, TX

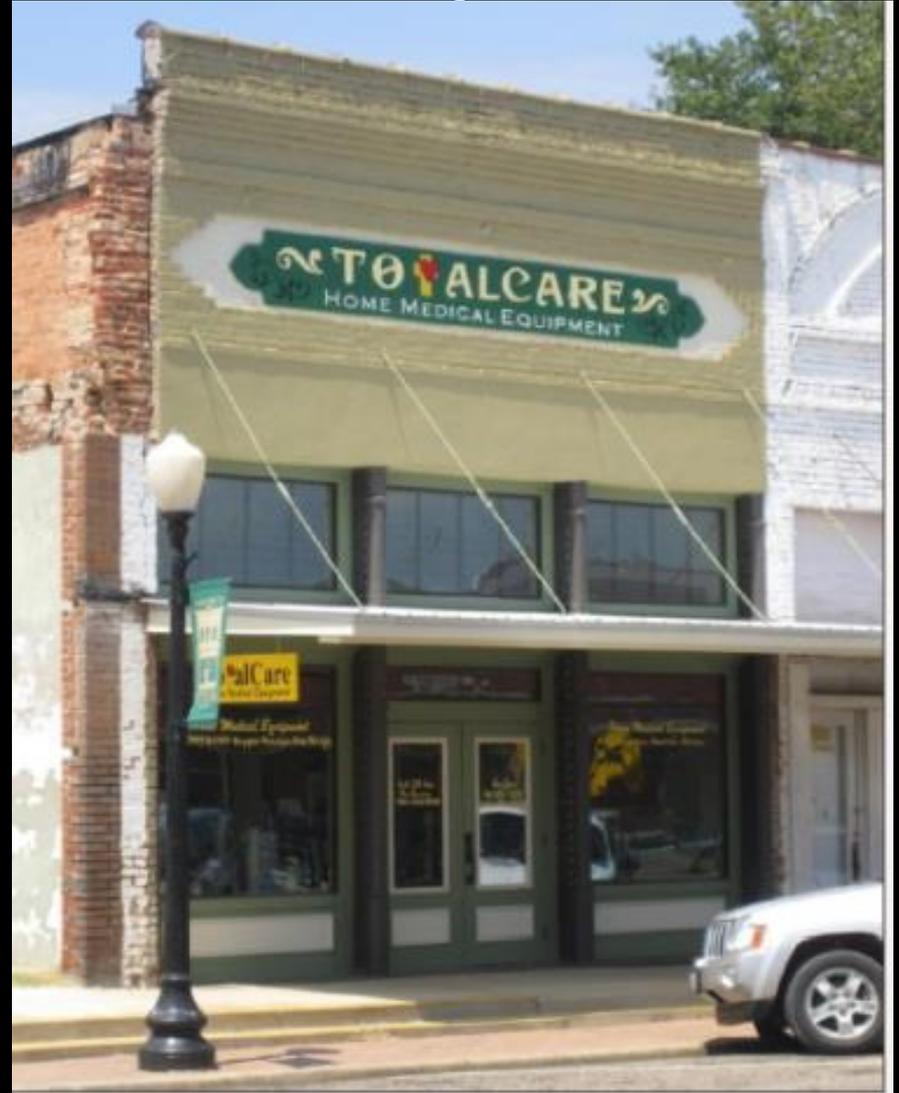


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# After

Pittsburg, TX



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# After

Green Bay, WI



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# Before and After



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# After

Palestine, TX



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# Before & After:

Green Bay, WI



**Take before and after photos from same vantage point**  
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# Providing Guidance



## Keeping Up Appearances Storefront Guidelines

**W**hat makes for a successful Main Street business? It can't be measured exactly; there is no single success formula. Product, price, display, service, location and market all play a part. So too does the appearance of the store, the outside image of the business.

Many store owners seem to regard appearance as secondary to the more immediate concerns of running a business. Too often, the building is neglected or mishandled.

Yet experience shows, time and again, that appearance is important to a healthy business downtown. With merchants working together to create an attractive image, downtown as a whole can benefit.

The 20th century brought changes for Main Street. The automobile brought new competition from commercial strips and shopping centers. Downtown merchants turned their attention to passing cars, erecting shiny new storefronts and eye-catching signs. Main Street stores tried to imitate their modern competitors.

In many ways, the result has been a sorry one. Down-

town now appears as a curious cross between neglected old buildings and a commercial strip. It presents a confused image to the shopping public.

The idea of visual relatedness is crucial to the goal of an integrated Main Street. Historically, Main Street facades complemented and reinforced one another. Compare the drawings on this page. Notice how the remodeling of the old facades has destroyed their continuity. They are no longer visually tied together. Each facade is unrelated to the next, and the character of the building group as a whole suffers.

With its buildings, history, setting and place within the community, downtown is unique and special. It makes sense to acknowledge these resources and take full advantage of them—to develop the qualities that are already present downtown.

What improvements can make your building work better for you? How can you make it more attractive to shoppers? The following pages present suggestions for improving appearances as well as ideas for prolonging the life of old buildings.



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### AWNINGS

The canvas awning was an important design element in the traditional storefront. It provided cover, added color and served as a transition between the storefront and the upper facade. Most buildings that face the sun had awnings. Look at old pictures of your building to see how awnings were used.

A standard street-level awning should be mounted so that the valance is about 7 feet above the sidewalk and projects out between 4 and 7 feet from the building. A 12-inch valance flap is usually attached at the awning bar and can serve as a sign panel.



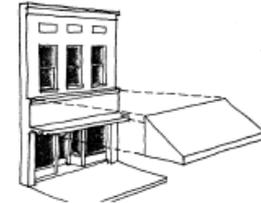
An awning can be attached above the display windows and below the cornice or sign panel. Sometimes it is mounted between the transom and the display windows, allowing light into the store while shading the merchandise and pedestrians from the sun.



An awning should reinforce the frame of the storefront and should not cover the piers or the space between the second-story window sills and the storefront cornice.



Inappropriate storefront alterations can be effectively disguised by mounting an awning over the alterations while maintaining the proportions of a traditional storefront.



Aluminum awnings or canopies generally detract from the historic character and should not be erected. If a flat canopy exists, it can be dressed up with a 12- to 24-inch awning valance.



Various awning materials offer different colors and patterns. There are several to choose from: canvas, vinyl-coated canvas and acrylic, a synthetic material. Each varies in cost and relative durability.

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# Rear Entrances and Alleys



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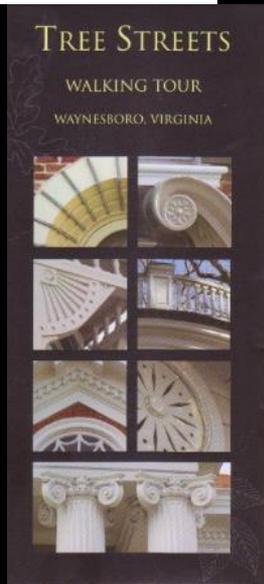
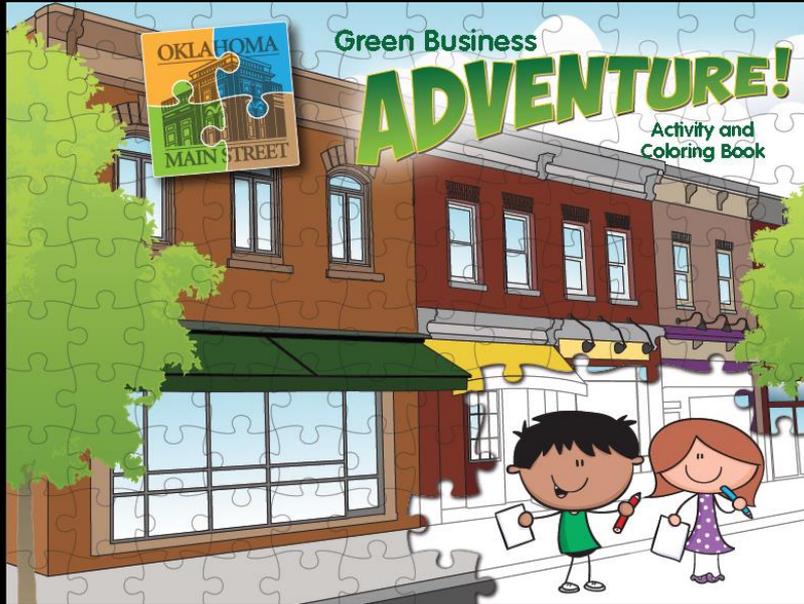
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**Our buildings  
and what they  
can do to add  
life to the  
experience!**

**How do we  
get that  
message to  
absentee  
property  
owners?**

# Preservation Education for Kids



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# Design Assistance

To assist neighborhood commercial district property owners and merchants in the proper design improvements of storefronts, facades, and signage.

- **Types of activities:**
  - **Technical assistance**
    - façade/storefront/signage
    - assistance provided by committee, state-citywide program or local architect
  - **Resources**
    - rehab resource library,
    - paint and awning samples
    - scrapbook
    - contractor referral list



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# Funding For What?

- **Small-scale building improvements including:**

- √ Signage
- √ Awnings
- √ Façade rehabs
- √ Interior renovations
- √ HVAC upgrades

- **Major building rehabilitation**

- √ Historic restoration
- √ Upper story conversions
- √ Codes upgrades
- √ Adaptive Reuse



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# Design Incentives

- The “carrot” factor
- Primarily financial
  - Work with Economic Restructuring committee
  - Offsets added cost of doing it right
  - Must ALWAYS follow guidelines
- Common types of financial incentives
  - Loan Pools
  - Revolving Loan Funds
  - Matching Grants
  - Tax Credits
  - Transfer of Development/Façade Easements
- Historic Building Code



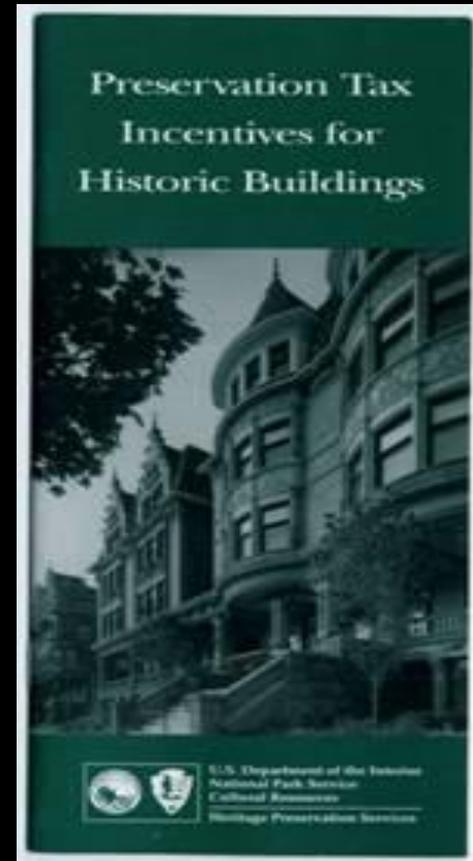
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# Design Incentives-

## Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits

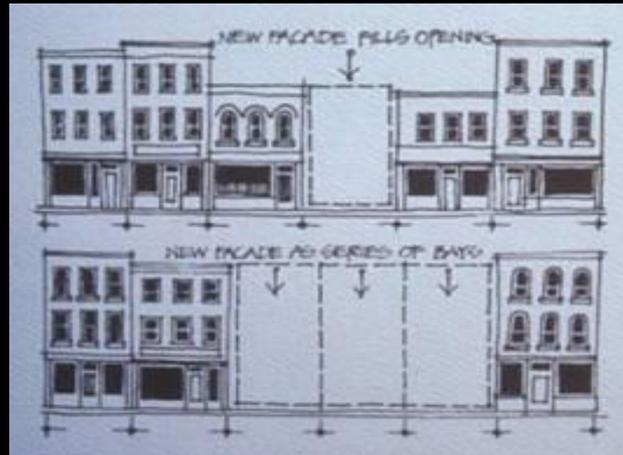
- Federal 20% Historic Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credit
  - Administered by National Park Service
    - In partnership w/ IRS and SHPO's
- 10% credit for properties 50 years old and NOT listed on the Register



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# Design Education- Building Improvements: New buildings (the right way)



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# Requirements for Sympathetic Design for National Chains

## Design Review



Bad



Good



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# New in-fill and construction



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Before

After, Meredith, NH



# Signs: the Good, the Bad, and the Very Ugly



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# Unique Signs



# Sandwich Board Signs once banned now making a comeback



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# Awnings



# Care of Awnings



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# Visual Merchandising

# Visual Merchandising



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# Lighting



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# Design Challenges

storefront churches



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# The Design Committee Charge

## Get the district into top physical shape

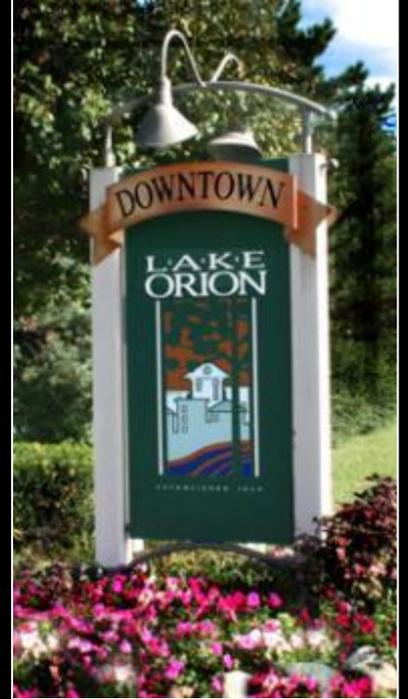
- capitalize on best assets
  - inviting atmosphere
  - good window displays
  - façade improvements
  - ***parking areas***
  - ***street furniture***
  - ***signage***
  - ***lighting***
  - ***landscaping***



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# Public Signage



# Gateways to the District



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# Get Creative



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# Parking Space Parks/Parklets



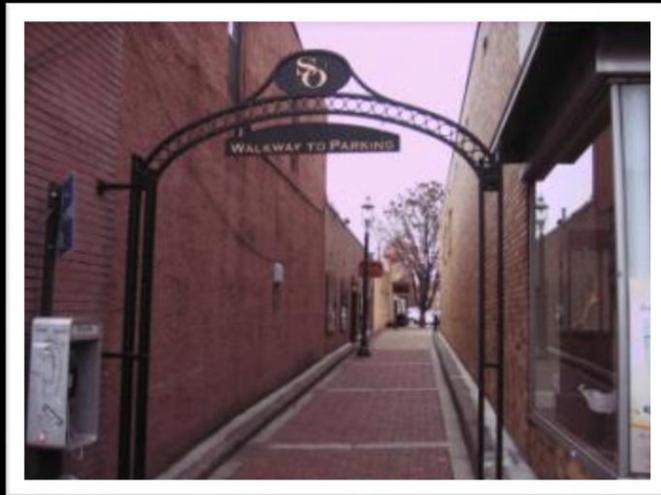
NE Alberta Street District, Portland, OR



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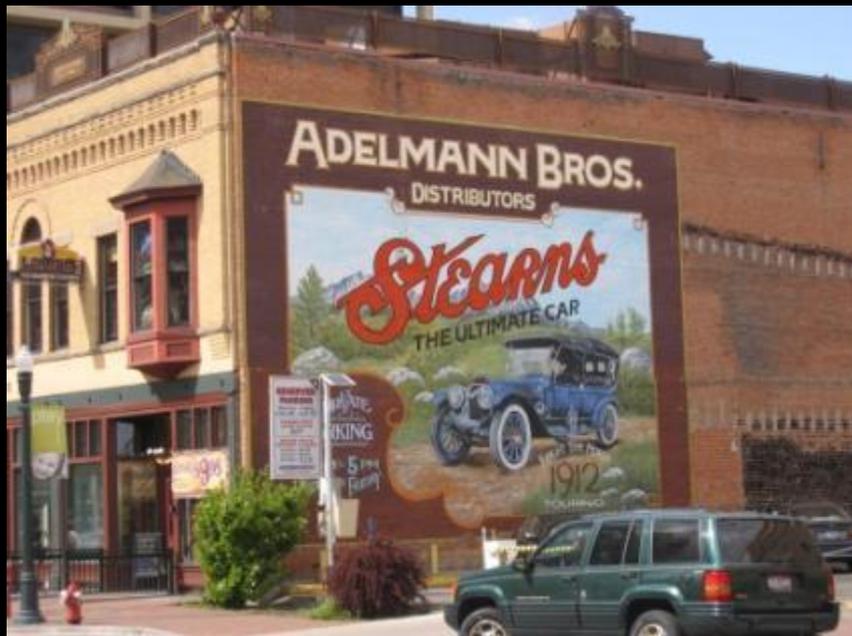
# Parking Access and Beautification



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# Ghost Signs



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# Graffiti



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# Art in the Public Space

## Art Alley, Rapid City SD



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Ashland, WI



# Different Kinds of Murals – in Motion

Marysville, KS



## Great Basin Pony Express Route



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# Bennington, VT – Traffic Calming Street Sculptures



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# Public Art



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# Give them something to stop for..



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# Promotion and Design Elements

## “Make a Little Music”



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**Sustainable Plantings in Pocatello**

# Greening of Downtown Rain Gardens



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# Greening Main Street -



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# Banners



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ArtScape  
on Main

Rice Lake, WI



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# Alberta District ~ Portland, OR

Arts district, locally-made, recycled signs



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# Questions on Design?

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