



Funded by MA Downtown Initiative Program of:



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of
Economic Development

**MASSACHUSETTS
DOWNTOWN
INITIATIVE**

FAÇADE AND STOREFRONT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Prepared with a grant from the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative from the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities

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Special thanks to **Reyad Shah**,
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TABLE OF

CONTENTS

01	INTRODUCTION04
02	EXISTING CONDITIONS08
03	DESIGN GUIDELINES12
04	APPLICATION OF DESIGN GUIDELINES22

01 INTRODUCTION

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC, formerly Department of Housing and Community Development, DHCD) sponsored the development of this program through the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI), which promotes the revitalization of downtowns and commercial areas throughout Massachusetts. MDI paired Innes Associates, a planning and design firm, with the City of Framingham to develop a façade and storefront improvement program that addresses the specific needs of local businesses and property owners located in Downtown Framingham.

PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process for the Façade and Storefront Improvement Program in Framingham began with a comprehensive approach aimed at understanding the local context and community aspirations. The consultant team and City staff conducted a site walk to assess existing conditions and potential improvement areas, followed by regular check-ins with the City to gain feedback, and research into the City's goals and the specific needs which informed the next steps.

A key milestone was the public workshop and visual preference survey designed to solicit input directly from the business community. This collaborative effort culminates in the development of this final document which presents comprehensive recommendations and guidelines for storefront and façade revitalization aligned with community aspirations.



Façade IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Façade improvements and storefront designs play a crucial role in the revitalization of urban areas; fostering economic development, and supporting the success of small businesses. The improvements not only aesthetically improve the commercial districts, but also create a welcoming environment that attracts customers and results in safety and a memorable experience for the visitors. Façade improvements significantly contribute to the success of small businesses. Even minor changes such as improved lighting, signage upgrades, and enhanced landscaping can increase foot traffic, and also visibility and branding of businesses, resulting in increased sales. A program that assists several businesses can leverage the investment by enhancing an entire area.

Façade and storefront improvement programs can vary in scope and scale, including:

Design Assistance: Providing design services to help businesses create cohesive storefronts that align with the character of the neighborhood.

Financial Incentives: Facilitating grants, low-interest loans, or tax credits to offset the costs of façade improvements, making them financially feasible for small business owners.

Technical Support: Providing guidance on building codes, historic preservation requirements, and sustainable design practices to ensure improvements are compliant and sustainable.

Community Involvement: Collaborating with local artists and community members to incorporate public art installations and other cultural elements in the district to promote community identity, pride and social cohesion.

CITY'S GOALS AND NEED

The City of Framingham is actively engaged in comprehensive planning efforts aimed at revitalizing and enhancing the vibrancy of its downtown area. The 2019, Economic Development Strategy Plan Phase 1 identifies attracting new business and retaining and expanding existing businesses as one of the key goals.¹ The City has developed a strategic framework for downtown revitalization² which serves as a guiding document, outlining priorities, goals, and action steps to enhance the economic, social, and cultural vitality of the area. This framework emphasizes the importance of mixed-use development, historic preservation, and creating a pedestrian friendly environment.

In alignment with its broader downtown revitalization efforts, the façade and storefront improvement program directly supports the City's goal of fostering economic development and economic businesses. Improved façades not only attract more customers, but also enhance the marketability and competitiveness of local businesses, contributing to a vibrant commercial environment.

¹ <https://www.framinghamma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/42912/Framingham-Final-Report-512019>

² <https://www.framinghamma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/12278/S4-Develop-Plan?bidId=>



Source: Downtown Framingham Economic Development Strategic Plan

FUNDING

1. Microenterprise Assistance Grant Application Program

City grants up to \$5,000 for businesses with 5 or less employees, including the owner. Funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (July 1- December 31, 2023)

<https://www.framinghamma.gov/3364/Business-Assistance#:~:text=Microenterprise%20Assistance%20Grant%20Application%20%2D%20Program,or%20expansion%20of%20a%20business.>

2. Massachusetts EOED Programs and Grants

Small & Growing Businesses

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/eoed-programs-and-grants-business-and-innovation#small-&-growing-businesses->

3. Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation (MGCC)

CDFI and CDC Capital Match Program is administered by MGCC – it awards grants to nonprofit lenders who make loans to small businesses.

<https://www.empoweringsmallbusiness.org/what-we-offer/microlending-operations-support-cdfi-lending-capital-matching-funds-grant-program>

4. MassDevelopment Lending Products

Offers, bonds, tax credits, loans & guarantees and green finance.

<https://www.massdevelopment.com/products-and-services/financing/>

5. Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP)

Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD) offers businesses credits to lower taxes in exchange for job creation. This helps business growth.

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/economic-development-incentive-program-edip>

6. Small Business Technical Assistance Grant Programs – under MGCC

The grant program strengthens ongoing business-development activities in low-and moderate-income and underserved communities, and in Gateway Cities across the state.

<https://www.empoweringsmallbusiness.org/what-we-offer/small-business-technical-assistance-grant-program>

Downtown Framingham, Inc.

<https://downtownframinghaminc.org/>

An independent 501©(3) non-profit that works with the Economic Development Department and Planning Board of the City assisting small businesses in downtown Framingham including:

- Helping new businesses navigate the permit process
- Improving the appearance of downtown businesses
- Referring business owners to other funding sources
- Facilitating Workshops

02 EXISTING CONDITIONS





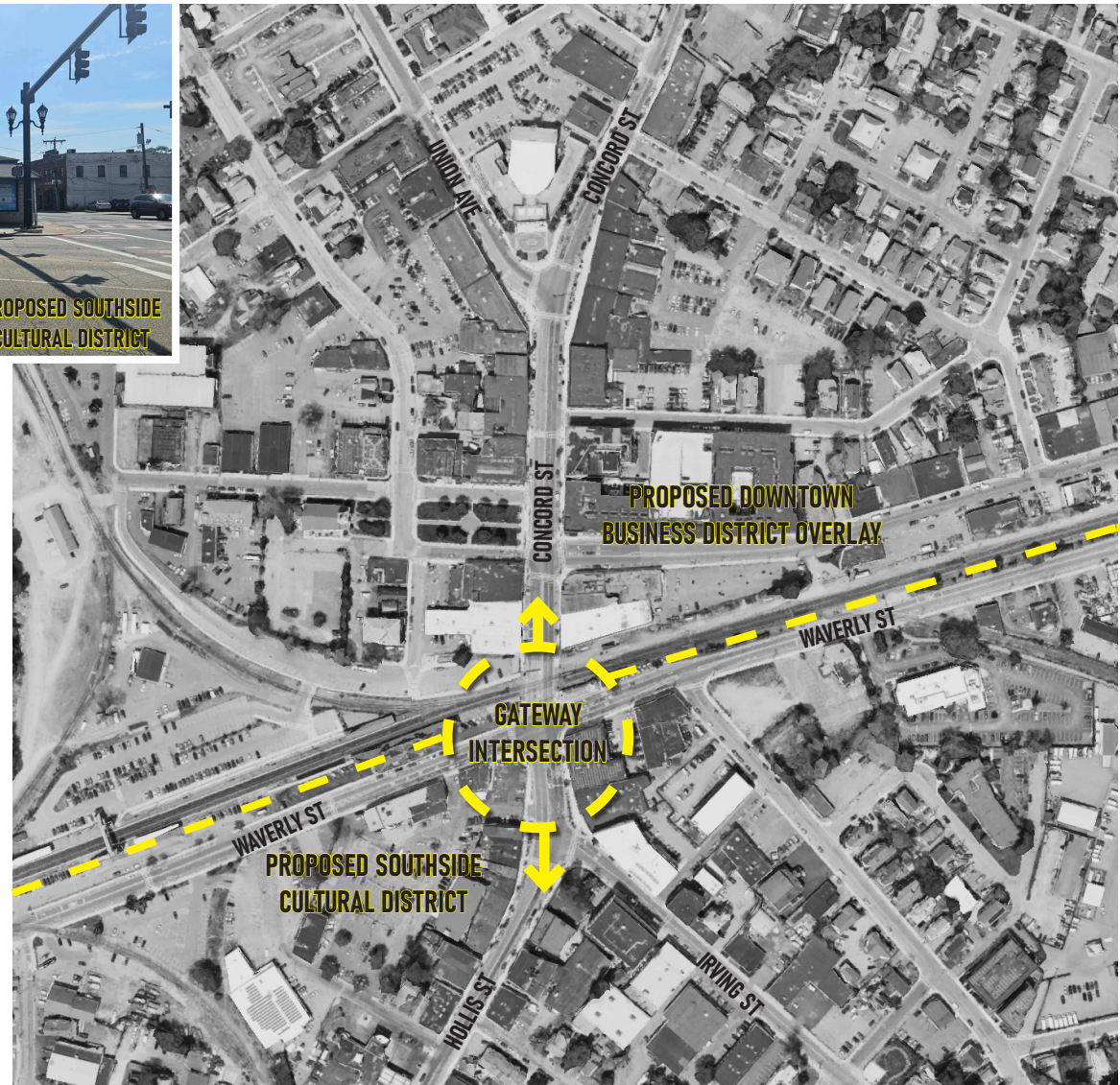




03 DESIGN GUIDELINES



Potential location
for mural to show
district identity



VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEY

The consultant team conducted a visual preference survey for business owners in downtown Framingham. This survey provided valuable insights into the preferred design styles of the community (shown in these images) and an understanding of what generated enthusiasm for both the businesses and proposed cultural district.



Source: Furniture Today



Source: Lazzoni Furniture



Source: sudaberica.wordpress.com



Source: Crested Butte + Gunnison



Source: DenisTanqney Jr

GENERAL GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following general principles provide overarching design principles and values that store and business owners can refer to make improvements;

- Ensure that the storefront design elements, such as materials, colors, and textures, create a cohesive and unified appearance that aligns with the overall character of the surrounding area.
- Design storefronts to maximize visibility from the street and ensure easy access for customers. Clear signage, unobstructed windows, and inviting entrances are crucial.
- Maintain a balanced scale and proportion of storefront elements relative to the building and adjacent structures. Avoid overly large or undersized features that may disrupt visual harmony.
- Prioritize efficient layout, adequate lighting, and comfort to enhance customer experience.
- Integrate energy-efficient lighting, use of eco-friendly materials, and water-saving landscaping to minimize operational costs.
- Use storefront design to reflect the brand identity and values of the business. Consistent branding elements such as logos, colors, and typography can strengthen brand recognition.
- Design storefronts that can adapt to future needs and changes in operations.
- Ensure use of quality materials that endure over time.
- Create two distinct districts, one north and the other south of the rail tracks; the north as a standard downtown business district, and the south a cultural district showcasing the distinct identity of the community.

Accessibility Standards

Accessibility for storefronts refers to design and implementation of features that ensure ease of use and inclusion of all individuals, including those with disabilities. It encompasses various elements that aim to provide to equal access to goods, services, and facilities offered by the businesses. These considerations include:

- Entrance Design
- Path of Travel (Public right of way to storefront)
- Doorways and Thresholds
- Signage and Communication
- Emergency Egress

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations are enforced through the Department of Justice (DOJ) and, in Massachusetts, monitored by the Disability Law Center (DLC), a Massachusetts Protection and Advocacy agency with federal authority to provide protection and advocate for people with disabilities.

This is a useful reference for businesses and property owners: ADA Primer for Small Businesses: <https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/smallbusiness/smallbusprimer2010.htm>

This is a useful reference for Town officials and staff: The One Step Project, Pittsburgh: [https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/One_Step_Project_Packet_\(Digital\).pdf](https://apps.pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/One_Step_Project_Packet_(Digital).pdf)

This document from the National Park Service is a guide to making historic properties accessible and can also be useful for addressing improved accessibility to older buildings, even if not historic: <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/upload/preservation-brief-32-accessibility.pdf>



Source: stopgap.ca

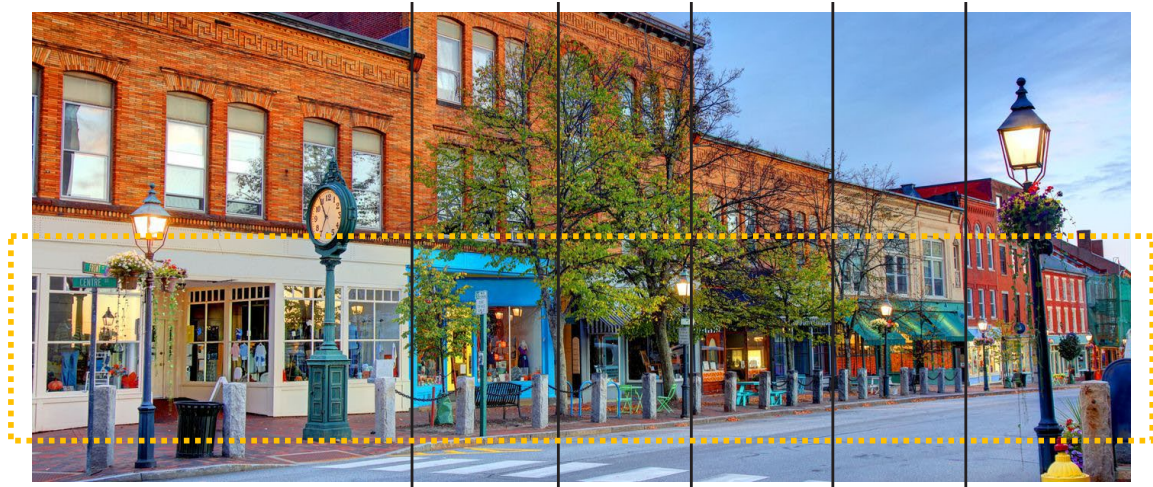
Creative Accessibility

Stopgap.ca, is a Canadian foundation, supports communities and businesses in improving accessibility through an affordable, portable ramp solution. These ramps facilitate wheelchair access to storefronts while also featuring vibrant colors that could reflect the unique identity of each community they serve.

Façades

Façade design for this program includes the following components:

Façade composition



- Each storefront should have a distinct façade design that reflects the unique identity of the business. However, maintain consistency in elements such as materials, colors, and architectural features to create a cohesive streetscape.
- Ensure that the heights of storefronts are consistent across the building façade to create a harmonious visual appearance. This consistency helps in establishing a unified street level presence.
- Design storefront entrances to be clearly visible and inviting.
- Incorporate ample glazing and display windows to enhance visibility into the store interiors. This transparency attracts the passerby and encourages interaction between customers and products.
- Ensure that storefront designs integrate seamlessly with the surrounding streetscape.



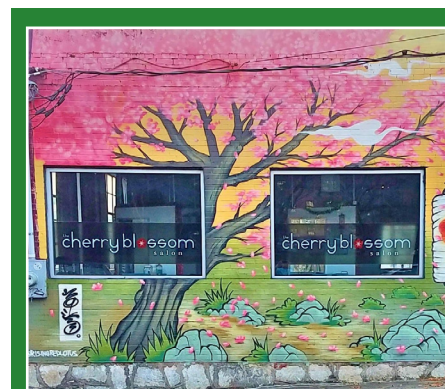
Clear window with minimal messaging providing a clear idea of the business and interaction with people on the street.



Multiple signage and banners obstruct the view inside, blocking the pedestrian's first look inside the business.

Storefront window display

- Include interactive elements such as digital displays, touchscreens, or QR codes to engage customers.
- Plan for regular rotations or updates of window displays to keep the presentation fresh and engaging. Consider collaborating with local artists for themed installations to resonate with the community.
- Adopt a minimalist approach with regards to signage. Focus on key messaging and elements.



Source: artsatl.com

Murals

Consider use of murals on façade walls or side of stores as a branding mechanism.

Signs



Signage with distinct branding and clear font visible from across the street.

Businesses may have more than one sign: its name, its hours of operation, its address, and services provided. Signage in the City of Framingham is regulated by the sign bylaw, which is part of the zoning bylaw. All non-residential signs must comply with the sign bylaw and all commercial signage not inclusive of corporate flags need a permit in the City of Framingham. Store signs encompass a variety of elements and can be tailored to different modes of transportation and needs.

Designed to communicate essential information effectively, components such as text size, font choice, and durable materials like aluminum or vinyl are critical considerations in sign design. Professional sign designers possess the expertise to create signage that meets regulatory requirements, enhances visibility, and effectively communicates messages across diverse urban environments.

Sign Permit Application: <https://www.framinghamma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1167/Sign-Application?bidId=>



Lack of clear signage with legible font makes readability difficult.

Multi Tenant/ Services Signs

For Signs that are for multiple businesses, or businesses providing multiple services, it is crucial to establish a clear hierarchy and organization. In both situations, use legible fonts with adequate spacing between letters and lines to ensure text sizes are appropriate for readability from varying distances and angles.

Use consistent layout with designated sections for each tenant, or language, to facilitate ease of navigation for the customers.

Ensure a clear hierarchy for services with the main service taking the majority of space, and subsequent services in descending visual importance.

Awnings and Canopies

- Awnings and canopies should complement the architectural style and character of the building and surrounding area. Design should be reviewed for compatibility with historic preservation guidelines.
- Installations must not obstruct pedestrian pathways or impede accessibility features, such as ramps and doorways. Retain the minimum clearance heights and setback requirements.
- Materials should be durable, weather-resistant, and fire-retardant. If possible, fabric awnings should be treated for UV protection and colorfastness to maintain appearance over time.
- Building owners/ Storekeepers are responsible for upkeep and repair of awnings and canopies to ensure they remain in good condition.

In the City of Framingham, awnings and canopies must comply with zoning ordinances and building codes. Non-compliance with local building codes will result in removal or fines.



Awning in the photo is not continuous, creating an illusion of two different stores. Stores should use awnings/ canopies of same color and style throughout the width of their store.



Clean awning, running the length of the store entrance with clear signage and branding.

Sidewalks

Creating inviting and functional sidewalks in front of stores involves incorporating planters, setbacks, interactive seating spaces, and designing windows to maximize engagement.

- Integrate planters or window boxes along storefronts to add color and texture to the façade, especially businesses with limited space. Make sure to not obstruct pedestrian flow.
- Create setbacks that enhance the visual appeal and functionality of the store. This could be in the form of recessed entryways, alcoves, or landscaped setbacks that create space for outdoor displays, seating, or artistic installations.
- Use benches, movable chairs, or integrated seating walls that are comfortable. Seating spaces attract pedestrians, encourage longer stays, and promote the overall vitality of the sidewalk area.



Blank sidewalks and façades are unattractive for pedestrians in Downtown.



Small planters provide a burst of vibrancy and visual interest along the walk.



A bench outside of the cafe provides a rest stop for customers.

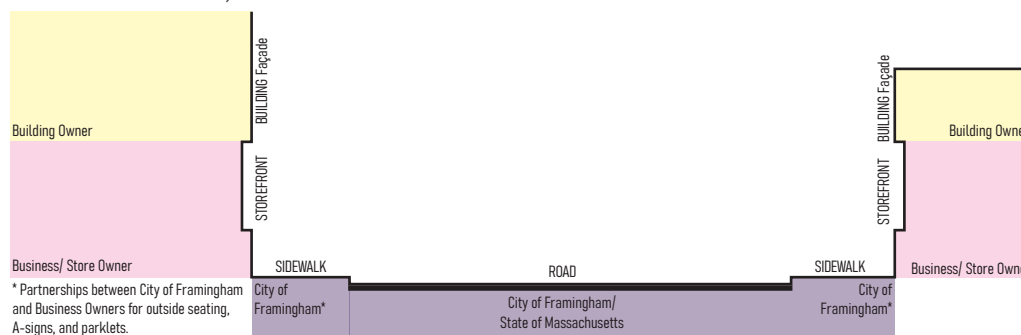
Responsibility

For consistent maintenance and upkeep of the storefronts, it is critical to have a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities between the store/ business owners, building owners and City of Framingham and where there is scope for partnerships.

Store owners are responsible for maintaining the appearance and condition of their storefront façades. This includes cleaning, painting, and repair of exterior surfaces such as windows, doors, and signage. If storeowners wish to install planters, or other decorative elements on the sidewalk, they are responsible for obtaining necessary permits from the City.

Building owners are responsible for structural integrity and overall maintenance of the building façade, including; repairs, renovations to exterior, such as roofing, masonry work, and façade improvement. Owners must ensure that sidewalks adjacent to their property are ADA compliant, including ramps, curbs, pathways.

City of Framingham is responsible for general sidewalk maintenance, overseeing the permits for any installations, construction, and repairs. The City is also responsible for facilitating parking and smooth movement of traffic, pedestrian and automobile, in the Downtown area.



“Adopt a Store” Program

Consider partnerships with universities and colleges such as Framingham State University with this design program to pair students with store/ business owners to provide with design solutions at a personalized level.

04 APPLICATION OF DESIGN GUIDELINES

Design Recommendation 1: Tropical Cafe, Hollis St

Elements recommended:

- Store entry sign.
- Awning.
- Brighter, fresh paint.
- Sidewalk seating options.
- Wider/ bigger windows.



Design Recommendation 2: Hollis St

Elements recommended:

- Awning design same, different colors for stores.
- Overhead lighting and lights under awnings for visibility.
- Sidewalk seating options.
- Potential for different storefront color for individual identity.
- Clear windows with less signage/ flyers.



Design Recommendation 3: 56 Hollis St

Elements recommended:

- Sidewalk overhead lighting.
- Clear windows with minimal signage to reduce visual clutter.
- Projecting flags from storefronts.
- Awnings in flag colors to represent individual cultures.
- Reclaim sidewalk area.



Design Recommendation 4: URBANO'S

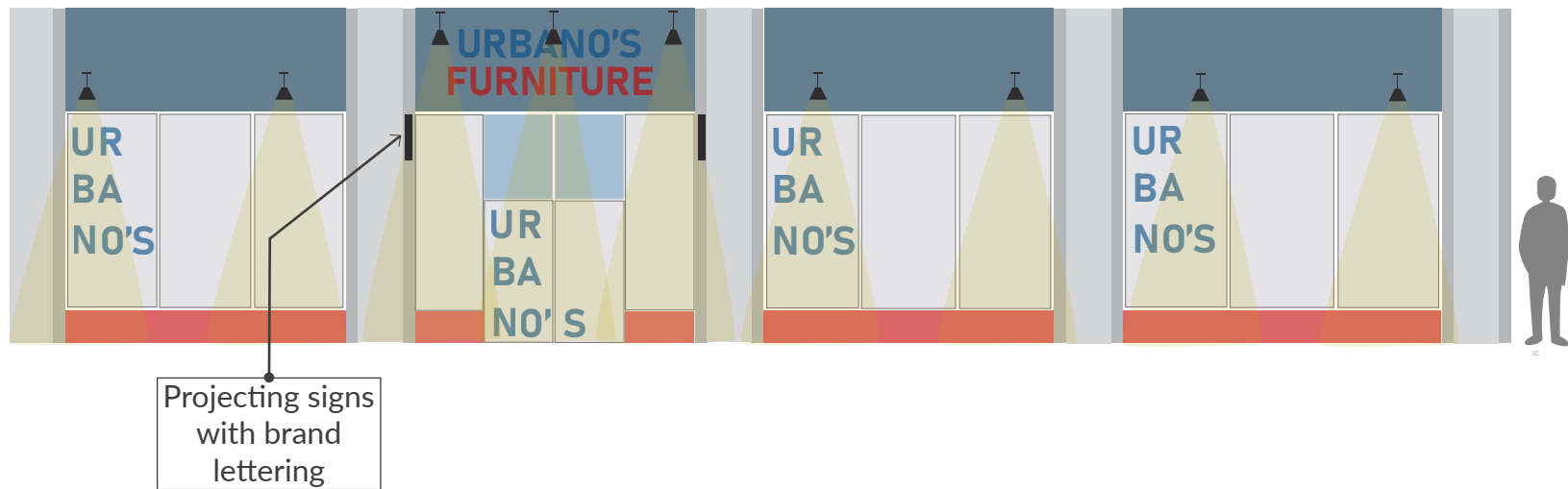
Elements recommended:

- Retain clear glass panel to maintain visual clarity.
- Potential for awning to represent brand.
- Projecting sign to attract pedestrians.



Design Option 1: URBANO'S

- White/ Blue lettering on clear glass for brand identification.
- Uniform knee wall with URBANO'S red color.
- Well-lit overhead lighting.
- Interior lighting to show displays.
- Store name over main entrance with lighting.



Design Option 2: URBANO'S

- White/ Blue lettering on clear glass for brand identification. This lettering runs horizontally to not be visually blocked by the awning.
- Uniform awning in URBANO'S brand color.
- Lighting to illuminate the store name.
- Uniform knee wall with URBANO'S red color.
- Well-lit lighting under the awning for pedestrian comfort and store illumination.
- Interior lighting to show displays.
- Store name over main entrance with lighting.

