

TOWN OF ATHOL



DOWNTOWN DESIGN GUIDELINES

Funded by MA Downtown Initiative Program of:



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of
Economic Development

MASSACHUSETTS DOWNTOWN
INITIATIVE (MDI)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1.

INTRODUCTION

Benefits of Design Guidelines

Buildings are the most important physical component of the downtown business district economically, functionally, and aesthetically. Equally important for the business district is an organized flow of traffic, convenient parking, legible signage, well-lit walking areas and attractive landscaping. All of these components make up a pedestrian-and-patron-friendly atmosphere.

It does little economic good, in fact, deters that growth if buildings are neglected or mishandled with covered up metal sidings, peeling paint, obscured with overhanging signs and are in a state of disrepair.

All business in the downtown benefit from the improvement of a single building. With a little evidence of caring about the building, the shoppers and the neighborhood goes a long way. Building life is extended, business activity is enlivened, and downtown morale is positively stimulated.

Many renovation projects, however, are planned to change a downtown's image, to modernize, and to attract attention. Long-term costs and benefits, improvements that extend a building's usefulness, and coordination between several shops within a building is often overlooked.

Most often the effect of these individual, uncoordinated renovations tends to make the overall downtown appearance less attractive. The shopper is confused by the barrage of competing signage information and the downtown loses the special and personal identity it once had.



Athol, MA Station, November 19, 1905.
Source: picryl.com

History of Athol

In Athol, the change has been gradual and may not be noticeable to the merchants who frequent the downtown on a daily basis. Historically significant buildings have been allowed to deteriorate, and many have been covered or defaced. Inappropriate siding and back lit signs have been erected at the expense of existing craftsmanship.

Most downtowns had their beginnings more than 150 years ago as the hearts of their communities. Many of Athol's buildings were built during the Victorian era. This was a period of historically significant architecture that is known for its richness in ornamental and surface detailing.

Throughout time and economic eras, the buildings appearances have changed, particularly the storefront facades, creating an inconsistent, unorganized and uncoordinated appearance. New building of commercial strips in the 1930s to 1950s gave the downtown a different appearance. Now in the 21st century, most of the buildings are in need of repair and a more unified appearance to help re-establish a healthy downtown district and to recapture its signature.

Purpose and Goals

Athol's architectural style and foundation is strong. Many of the buildings only require minimal improvements, while others require extensive rehabilitation. This assessment and its approach, is crucial for improvements now and for the future. These Downtown Design Guidelines provide a unifying theme for the downtown that links individual storefront and buildings improvement projects. The Guidelines stress retaining the special history and character of downtown Athol by preserving, restoring, and accentuating the original architectural features. The end result of this cooperative public and private effort will be the enhancement of downtown Athol as an attractive, safe and pleasant place to reside and do business.

The Town of Athol received grant funding from the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) to assist in updating the Design Guidelines for Downtown Athol through the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) Program. The current set of guidelines date to 1997. This document incorporates the existing text, with some modifications, and supplements that text with additional requirements and up-to-date graphics.

Applicability and Use

Design Guidelines serve as a guidance for creating harmonious and aesthetically pleasing development in a community. These guidelines can be used to assess development during the process of,

- Building permit
- Site plan approval
- Special permit
- Variance

By integrating design guidelines as a reference in regulatory processes, it promotes cohesive development for Downtown Athol.

Tax Credits/ Financing

Façade and storefront improvements enhance the aesthetic appeal and functionality of businesses, attracting more customers and boosting sales. Funding options available for improvements in the Town of Athol include grants, loans, and incentive programs aimed at revitalizing commercial areas and promoting economic growth. These programs vary in scope and scale, targeting different elements such as façade renovations, signage enhancements and accessibility upgrades, aiming to support the diverse needs within the commercial community. The available grants for the business community are as follows:

FEDERAL AND STATE GRANTS/FUNDING/TAX CREDIT OPTIONS

1. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

federally funded competitive grant program for small cities and towns.

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/community-development-block-grant-cdbg>

2. Mass Cultural Council

<https://massculturalcouncil.org/blog/supporting-downtown-vitality/>

3. MassDevelopment also provides loans and guarantees through the **State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI)** (especially focusing on *Socially or Economically Disadvantaged Individuals - SEDI*).

<https://www.massdevelopment.com/products-and-services/financing/loans-and-guarantees/#state-small-business-credit-initiative>

4. Massachusetts Vacant Storefronts Program

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-vacant-storefronts-program-mvsp>

5. **Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit**
Deadline December 31, 2027

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhctax/taxidx.htm>

6. National Park Service - Historic Preservation Tax Incentives

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/taxincentives/hpca-electronic-submission.htm>

Allows for a 20% income tax credit on rehabilitation of “certified historic structures” and must comply with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. Owner occupied, residential, historic properties do not qualify.

7. U.S. Small Business Administration

<https://www.sba.gov/>

Provides for:

- 7(a) loans, the SBA’s primary loan program – used for real estate, purchasing of machinery and equipment, furniture, fixtures and supplies
- 504 loans which can be used for purchase or construction of facilities, and improvement of land, street, utilities and existing facilities.
- Lender matches

LOCAL FUNDING

1. Vacant Storefront Improvement Program

The DVC provides local match to the State Program

<https://www.athol-ma.gov/downtown-vitality-committee/bulletins/vacant-storefront-improvement-program-business-assistance>

Planning Process

TASK 1 PROJECT INITIATION

February 1, 2024
Site Walk

TASK 2 INITIAL ANALYSIS

February 13, 2024
DVC Meeting

TASK 3 COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

March 12, 2024
Public Workshop

TASK 4 DRAFT GUIDELINES

May 14, 2024
DVC Meeting: Discuss Draft

TASK 5 PUBLIC PRESENTATION

June 11, 2024
Public Presentation

TASK 6 FINAL GUIDELINES

June 30, 2024
Final Guidelines



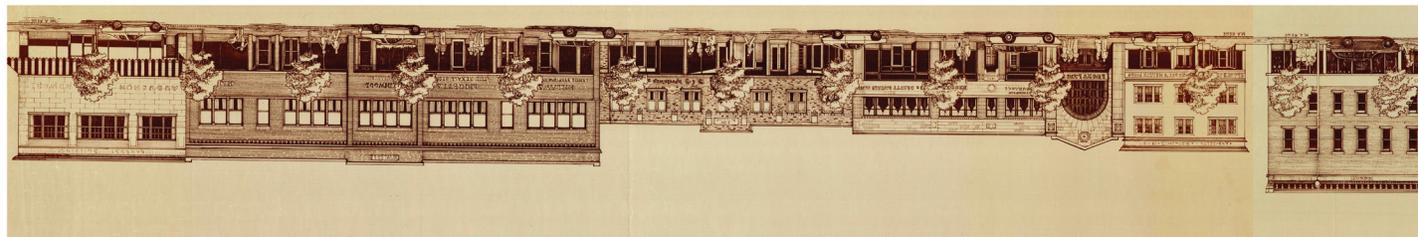
This side of the road is the “winter side” of the road. People tend to walk on that side of the road during winter months because of the ample sunlight.

Source: Town of Athol



Main St.

Main St.



Source: Town of Athol, MA. Handsketched by Madhukar Anant Rege.

Public Input

After conducting the public workshops, the following were identified as the key concerns of the community members that need more improvement in the Downtown.

1. Needs more identity.
2. Clear Signage.
3. More public/ private space overlap.
4. Transparency.
5. More homogeny and proportionality.



This opposite side of the road is the “summer side” due to the buildings throwing their shade and providing protection from the sun in the summer months.

2.

EXISTING CONDITIONS



1. 3-part storefront with sign band

2. Projecting signs

3. Town lighting and crosswalk infrastructure



Signage for Rear Businesses



Percent of Window Coverage



Use of Sign Band



1. Sign size not proportional to sign band



2. Temporary sign, placement extends beyond the sign band

3. Sign size not proportional to sign band

Storefronts



Recessed Entry



Flat Entry; flat window under overhang



Flat Entry; protruding window; use of awnings

Window Display



Town street furniture and materials



Bin, streetlight base, bench



Concrete, brick, standard tree-grate

3.

SIGNS

Signs are a vital part of any Main Street and is often a customer's first introduction to a business. A sign calls attention to a business and creates an individual image. Well-designed signs add interest and variety to a building's façade and enliven the street scene. Poorly designed signs confuse customers and detract from an otherwise attractive storefront. The most compelling and legible signs are often not the largest, the brightest, or the most clever. In a cluttered downtown environment, restraint may be a more effective way of capturing attention.

The sign is an inexpensive place to begin projecting a store's image, through careful selection of materials, typeface and color. Good sign design considers all the following factors: layout and composition, materials, color, size, graphics, typeface and installation. The best signs deal with these issues in a way that is compatible with the design and materials of the buildings on which they are placed. Also, regularly maintained, properly lighted signs are generally known to attract more positive attention. Correctly installed signs will present a harmonious appearance and enhance the commercial district's overall image.

General proportionality guidance to maintain for the harmonious appearance are as below;

- **Sign Height:** The height of the sign should be between 50-70% of the total height of the sign band.
- **Sign Width:** The width of the sign should occupy 60-80% of the total width of the sign band.
- **Margins:** There should be a clear margin of at least 10% of the sign band's height and width on all sides to frame the sign.
- **Lettering Size:** The height of the main text in the sign should be approximately 40-50% of the sign height, ensuring visibility while maintaining proportionality within the overall sign size.

Types of Signs

Sign Bands



Source: Signarama.com

ALLOWED with restrictions

A sign band refers to a designated area on a commercial storefront where signage, logos, or other promotional displays are prominently displayed.

They are located above eye level and spanning across the width of the storefront, it serves as a visual focal point for branding and marketing purposes, ensuring visibility and recognition for the business among passerby and potential customers.

Flat Signs and Mounted Letters



Source: architecturaldigest.com

ALLOWED with restrictions

Flat signs refer to signage that is printed or painted directly onto a flat surface, such as a panel or a board, and mounted on the exterior of a commercial storefront. Mounted letters, on the other hand, are individual 3-D letters or characters attached directly to the storefront facade.

Both type of signage are crucial for enhancing visibility and brand recognition in a commercial environment.



Source: signsny.com

Blade and Pendant Signs

RESTRICTED



Source: aboutsigs.ca

Blade signs are rectangular or square signs that are perpendicular to the storefront façade, often mounted on a bracket or arm. They are designed to be visible from a distance and attract foot traffic by displaying information or branding perpendicular to the building face.

Pendant signs, alternatively, are suspended from an overhead structure or awning, hanging down vertically. Stores can use them to effectively draw attention to the entrances or specific areas of interest within the commercial space, providing directional or promotional matter.

Window Signage

UNDEFINED



Source: designbrandprint.com

Window signage refers to any promotional or informational displays applied directly onto the glass surfaces of the storefront. These can include vinyl decals, window clings, or graphics that advertise products, promotions, business hours or brand identity. Stores can place window signage to attract attention from passerby and potential customers, effectively utilizing the storefront's visibility.

Temporary and Festival Signs

UNDEFINED



Source: squaresigns.com

Temporary signs for commercial stores are used for short-term promotions or events, such as sales or new product launches. These signs are intended to be displayed temporarily and are often removable or adjustable as needed.

Festival signs for commercial stores are designed for seasonal or holiday-themed promotions, aligning with specific cultural or calendar events. Stores can use these signs to attract customers during festive periods and often incorporate thematic elements.

Sign Code

The following outlines the approval process/ entity responsible for items as per the Town of Athol, Massachusetts Zoning Bylaws *as amended to October 23, 2023*, Article III - General Regulations, Section 3.9 Sign Regulations.

In **subsection 3.9.1** The Town restricts illumination, motion, sound and location of signs. No approval process.

Subsection 3.9.1.7 allows for the location of Special Event Signs with approval from the Board of Selectmen.

Subsection 3.9.2 states that the maintenance of all signs must be satisfactory to the building inspector.

Subsection 3.9.4 Sign Regulation Schedule allows the following sign types without permit (with varying conditions):

Do's

1. When a building façade contains a “sign band” or panel to carry a sign (usually above the storefront), locate a flat sign in that space.
2. Align multiple signs on a building and with adjacent and neighboring buildings.
3. When signs share a building, coordinate the shapes, materials, colors, typefaces, and graphics.
4. Three dimensional signs (carved wood and raised letter signs) are encouraged.
5. Signs should be properly installed. Hardware should be either shielded from view or selected as an ornamental design feature.
6. Sign messages should emphasize business identity: name and principal product. (Don't use name brands unless it is the business specialty.)
7. Use logos where possible: “one picture is worth a thousand words.”

- Sale or Rent: Temporary, Unlighted
- Construction: Temporary, Unlighted
- Window: Illuminated by building illumination
- Special Event: On-Site
- Political: Unlighted

With the granting of a Building Permit (with varying conditions):

- Permanent Accessory: wall, iconographic or hanging.
- Building Directory: free standing, wall or hanging
- Directory: Included within a Building Directory sign
- Identification: Free standing or hanging
- Directional: Unlighted
- Banners: Unlighted

With Board of Selectmen approval:

- Special Event – Off-Site

Don't

1. Signs should blend with the architecture and not hide or cover detailed elements which maintain the building's design integrity.
2. Signs should not hide architectural detailing such as cornices, moldings, and decorative trim.
3. Merchandising and advertising messages should be in temporary displays, not in the sign. (Example: Pepsi, Coca-Cola, etc.) Telephone numbers should not be displayed on the main sign. Smaller window stenciling may be more appropriate.

4.

ENTRANCES AND DOORWAYS

A door is more than a place to enter. It is a person's first point of contact with a store, a place where shoppers form a strong impression. Doors should be attractive and comfortable to operate. Entering a store should be a pleasant experience.

Historically, the Athol storefront entry was more than just a door; the entries were tall and stately, frequently built of wood with large glass panels, beveled or etched with the name of the store. Stained glass panels or gold-leaf lettering gave a rich sense of craftsmanship to the store. The traditional storefront door looked substantial yet inviting to the customer. Doorways can be gracious and welcoming, or dark and unfriendly by their designs and materials. Stores today can also have special entries and doorways to enhance the downtown appearance.

A recessed entry alcove invites shoppers to browse and protects against the weather. It is important that customers feel a special invitation as they approach and open the door. Athol's Pequoig Building has deeply-recessed entries which extend display areas and offer sheltered browsing. Shallower alcoves, on the other hand, give more space over to interior retailing and display uses.



Do's

1. Wood or glass doors are recommended for store front entrances, rather than solid metal or clad doors.
2. Doorways leading to upper floors should be set off from entries to street level shops.
3. Hardware should be attractive and easy to use. It should meet access codes for use by people with disabilities.
4. Rear and side doorways should also be well-designed, particularly when leading to a public parking area or pathway.
5. Exterior doors should swing in the direction of exit travel when entry alcoves are recessed.
6. Doorways should be recessed wherever possible, to protect the entry from weather. Entry alcoves should be well-lit at night.
7. Doors shall be 3 feet wide and a minimum of 6 feet 8 inches high.
8. The building code requires tempered glass for door windows and other hazardous storefront areas.
9. Entrance floors must have non-slip surfaces, and be pitched to drain away from the building.
10. Provide accessible entrance areas, meeting requirements of access codes.
11. Doorways should be attractive. Colors, materials, style, and shape should compliment building.

Don't

1. Doors should not impede pedestrian traffic when open.
2. Wood and carpet pose maintenance problems, and should be avoided as exterior flooring materials.
3. Don't use the main entrance for services and loading/ unloading of goods.
4. Doors should not be incompatible with the building design.

5.

AWNINGS AND CANOPIES

Awnings offer a way to unify a building, add color, and soften the hard lines of a streetscape. Awnings provide shelter from inclement weather, reduce glare, save energy and protect from the sun. Awnings help create an attractive pedestrian environment. They define a “browsing” zone between the private store interior and the busy public sidewalk. On sunny days, people can be found standing in the shade of the awing. On rainy days awnings are equally welcome. Awnings add to the character of the façade and can serve as a unifying theme for the streetscape.

Awning materials vary in translucency. Striped or plain awnings are usually the best. Signs can be painted on an awning instead of using sign-band signage to avoid redundancy. Fixed awnings offer the advantage of a unified appearance. A series of retractable awnings, with some up and some down, can appear haphazard. Awnings require periodic maintenance as well as full fabric replacement every 5-10 years.

Awnings are appropriate additions to most buildings. Older photos of downtown Athol show many awnings. The building can be researched with the Athol Historical Society and the Library and designed to match the original style of awning used, if practical. Awnings are most effective when they are attractive in color, shape, and location, and compliment the overall design of a building.



 **Do's**

1. Merchants within a single building should coordinate over the use and design of awnings wherever possible.
2. Locate awnings within the lines of the building wherever possible. Consider curved awnings within arches.
3. The store name may be painted on an awning.
4. Use either fixed or retractable awnings on a building, and keep all open or closed at the same time.
5. Use awnings without a valance when a more contemporary look is desired.
6. Use canopies on pole supports only when the storefront is set back from the sidewalk.
7. Locate awnings over doorways, doors and windows, or the length of the store.
8. Awning hardware should be hidden from view. Locate supports on walls or window frames, and paint to complement building color scheme.
9. The lowest part of an awning may be no lower than 7 1/2 feet above the sidewalk.
10. Allow adequate ventilation around air conditioners.
11. Uplight awnings from below when using translucent fabrics, if appropriate.

 **Don't**

1. Canvas or acrylic are preferred materials for awnings. Aluminum, wood, or rigid plastic awnings should not be used.
2. Don't use awnings of different heights across the buildings. On adjacent buildings, retain a similar height.
3. Don't design awnings of different color, look and shape on the same building.
4. Don't conceal architectural details of a buildings with awning placements or oversized awnings.
5. Don't use awnings with warm lighting underneath. This provides a space for birds to roost.

6.

COLOR AND MATERIALITY

Color and materials can unify different parts of a façade and bring order to an entire streetscape. Color is a practical and inexpensive way to upgrade the appearance of a building and enhance the surrounding area. There are a number of natural places for color: awnings, signs, displays, panels, doors and trim. Brick and brownstone, limestone and buff-toned brick, along with a traditional color palette are time-tested colors to be used for renovations and new construction. Consistency and compatibility with neighboring stores is crucial.

Use dark colors where dirt build-up is a problem. Use light colors to brighten dark areas of a building. Consider the effect color has on mood: bright colors suggest gaiety and action while earthy tones suggests dignity and tradition.

Color schemes for commercial buildings differ by region of the country. They also differ according to the period when the building was constructed. The older buildings from the early to mid 1800s used soft, neutral tints. In the late 1800s, darker, richer shades were used. In the early 1900s the colors reverted back to the lighter, calmer colors once again.

Athol's Main Street buildings consist of a mix of all of these periods. Colors and materials should be focused on those trends according to the building's design. They are also the best way to display the stores' branding and overall image.

Do's

1. Use color to set off decorative details from the basic tone of a building.
2. 2-3 colors are recommended for each building façade: a basic neutral or earth tone building color with darker or lighter accents.
3. Select base colors from a palette of Athol's traditional earth-tones and neutral hues: antique red, forest green, charcoal gray, slate-blue, cream, sandy-beige, and chocolate brown.
4. Bright colors shall be limited to use as accents: trims, details, awnings and signs.
5. Gold is an appropriate accent color; gold-leaf was frequently used for lettering in Victorian-era signs. Green is also an appropriate color to accent the red brick buildings.
6. Select colors on materials and under lighting conditions where they will be used. For historic buildings, research the original paint colors and finishes. (Athol Historical Society, Athol Library or Athol Historical Commission may have information). Repaint with those colors, or with colors appropriate to the building period.
7. Use anodized-aluminum window and door frames rather than mill-finish, as the latter becomes dull and pitted with exposure to the elements.

Don't

1. In general, do not paint over masonry surfaces (brick and stone). However, where a masonry wall has been extensively patched, it may be best to paint for a uniform surface.
2. Use glaring colors.
3. Use incompatible trim and moldings across the building façade.
4. Paint over unclean and unprepared surfaces.



Hues of antique red, through brick facades and sandy beige of limestone facades are predominant in Athol Downtown.



Forest green, pale yellows are the most common colors for storefronts currently used in Downtown Athol.

7.

MAINTENANCE AND STRUCTURE

Public perception of the downtown area is greatly affected by its appearance. Litter on sidewalks, broken windows, and noticeable vacancies have an adverse effect on all commercial activity. By the same token, storefront and building improvement work can boost morale and enhance business.

Buildings are both an important piece of Athol history and a continuous investment. Historic features and valuable architectural details can be forever lost if a building is not maintained. A regular maintenance program helps to discover deterioration early, saves expensive repairs later on and raises the present value of a property. Such concerted efforts by merchants are the best ways to ensure a clean downtown.

Storefront materials should be selected for ease of maintenance and long-term benefits. For example, a plywood panel below display windows will cost much less initially than a brick wall, but it will also crack and discolor within a year and has to be replaced within a decade. Insulated glass for windows costs twice as much as single pane, but pays for itself in five years of reduced heating bills. Painting over a brick wall hides defects for the moment, but cracks and holes can continue to allow water damage and peeling paint, making long term repair costs much greater.



Source: finehomebuilding.com



Source: Adobe Stock photos

Building Maintenance

1. Replace broken fixture and burnt-out light bulbs.
2. Update displays and advertising regularly.
3. Maintain door hardware in good working order.
4. Check annually the roof, gutters, downspouts, and foundation wall for leaks and repair defects as soon as possible when discovered.
5. Check building openings (doors and windows) and seams between different materials (between porch roof and wall, between brick and wood) for leaks and repair to prevent water damage.
6. Maintain wood siding and trim by painting or staining regularly to keep the coating protection.
7. Replace broken bricks and repoint masonry as mortar crumbles.
8. Patch and paint stucco. Re-stucco when necessary, matching existing texture and color.
9. Check windows regularly. Re-hand, seal, caulk, glaze, or replace windows as needed. Clean regularly.
10. Check basement structure for signs of building movement. Some settling is natural for a building, but cracks that continue to widen and lengthen should be checked by a structural engineer. Mark and measure cracks yearly to see if they are expanding.
11. Investigate areas where exterior paint is peeling. This is often a symptom of moisture penetration through the material behind. Unless the source of leaking is stopped, new paint will continue to peel away.



Source: remingtonarchitecture.com

“More retail, clean up storefronts”

Visually appealing storefront and districts attract more foot traffic, leading to increased economic success, safety, and vibrancy in the area. Individual merchants should be responsible for maintaining their storefronts and the public area in front of their buildings.

This includes, but is not limited to: snow removal and maintenance, sweeping, washing and landscaping where appropriate.

District Maintenance

1. Organize partnerships with the Town for regularly scheduled clean ups, sidewalk maintenance, availability of trash cans and plantings.
2. Encourage the business and building owners to see themselves as a part of the community.
3. Remove old advertising and fliers from light posts.

8.

WOOD RESTORATION

All restoration aims to preserve the building, to retain historic or special features, and to keep water from penetrating the building's skin. Water rots wood, which invites insect damage. Freezing water can cause cracks and deterioration which, if unchecked, will leave the building open to serious and costly deterioration.

Nearly all buildings have wood trim or windows which need regular maintenance. Most buildings have wooden columns and beams. A yearly visual inspection will usually be adequate to catch potential trouble-spots. Early repairs will prolong the life and safety of the building, at lowest cost to the owner.

Following is a list of places where water commonly enters a building and attacks building materials:

- Loose or missing shingles or clapboards
- Deteriorated paint on façade
- Clogged gutters and downspouts
- Wood in contact with the ground
- Horizontal wood handrails, steps, trim boards, porch, mansard or roof
- Window sills, sash
- Inadequate flashing at soffits, eaves, and dormers
- Inadequate caps on the chimney and parapets

Many of the elaborate details on old and historic buildings, are made of wood. These areas typically collect water and deteriorate quickly. While it is generally less expensive to remove rather than

restore these areas, removal is discouraged. These details are an essential part of a building's character and appearance and illustrate the history of downtown Athol and of the building.

The Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Structures require that such features be retained and preserved wherever possible.

For more information, visit <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/treatment-standards-rehabilitation.htm>

Do's

1. Bristle-brushes and low-pressure water should be used for wood restoration. Chemical strippers and cleaners shall be used only with Architect's approval.
2. Sandblast only with prior approval of an Architect. Sand surface completely smooth after using abrasives.
3. Protect against water infiltration through wood portions of a building's façade. Check building walls and roof to locate sources of incoming water. Divert water from the building using gutters or downspouts, at upper surfaces, drainage slopes at ground level.
4. For wood to be painted, scrape all loose paint. Paint or stain using high-quality exterior grade finishes to cover.
5. Protect adjacent surfaces, buildings, and grounds during cleaning and painting procedures.
6. Provide a test-patch of all cleaning and refinishing work for approval prior to proceeding with the whole building.

Don't

1. For wood to be stained, use chemical paint removers and scrape to completely remove paint. Assess and, if reasonable to do so, dip decorative millwork in strippers. Electric heat plate may be used, with garden hose at hand. Do not use a heat gun.
2. Rebuild or replace missing significant architectural features, such as cornices, brackets, railings, shutters, clapboards, shingles, window architraves and doorway pediments. Do not eliminate these features altogether.
3. Don't disregard the importance of retaining the basic massing, proportions, and decorative details when remodeling buildings.
4. Don't paint with colors inappropriate to the building and period. For historic buildings, discover the actual paint colors and finishes.
5. Don't remove painted wood corner boards and door and window casings if vinyl or aluminium siding is installed; retain them to maintain the original scale.

9.

BUILDING EQUIPMENT AND HARDWARE

Building hardware includes mechanical and air conditioning equipment, vents, and louvers, alarm boxes, standpipes, electrical conduits, sign and awning hardware, door locks and kickplates, corner guards, bank depository boxes, mail boxes and slots, flashing, gutters, and downspouts. Most buildings have several kinds of hardware located haphazardly along their facades. In a good design, these elements are planned as carefully as the signs and window displays.

Although building equipment and hardware may not be an attractive element on buildings, they are necessary. In order to maintain the integrity of the building's design, strategic planning of the equipment's location is the key to a successful overall appearance.

Much equipment and hardware can be located to the side or rear of a building. The actual contours and lines of a building framework offer natural places to conceal many hardware items. Other items can be tastefully centered on a plan, or grouped together in a pleasing arrangement. Since some equipment must be located within view and easy access of the users, it is often important to integrate the design rather than conceal it.



👍 Do's

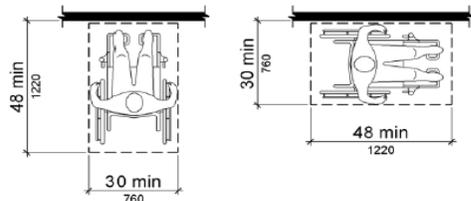
1. Conceal electrical conduit within the building, or run it along existing lines in the building framework.
2. Center wall vents at windows and panels, and align along a building façade.
3. Fit mailboxes into the building design. Carefully locate slots in doors or walls. Consider eliminating a mail entry if the shop is open during delivery hours.
4. Locate through-wall air conditioners to the side or rear of the building.
5. On a store façade, locate through-wall air conditions flush with the building line or set into compatible building materials. Consider a louvered enclosure or an awning to tastefully screen the air conditioner.
6. Screen mechanical equipment and dumpster from view using a low wall or planting. Locate central air conditioning equipment on the roof if possible.

👎 Don't

1. Don't overlook the removal of outdated hardware and signs from the building.
2. Locate door and window decals in the center of the glass. They will interfere with a clear view inside.
3. Locate gutter and downspouts outside the building framework, especially at the front of store and in way of the pedestrian traffic.
4. Design incompatible graphics including inconsistent style, poor quality, inconsistent branding for store sign. Locate the street number on the store.
5. In high use areas, don't overlook the necessity for sturdy building corners. Consider beveled edges or the installation of replaceable corner guards and trim boards integrated within design lines and color schemes.

10.

ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS



Position of clear floor or ground spaces (Figure 305.5)

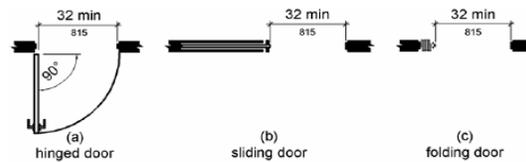
Source: <https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/design-standards/2010-stds>

The ADA provides a guide to help small businesses understand and comply with the updated regulations; the ADA Update: A Primer for Small Business at : <https://www.ada.gov/resources/title-iii-primer/> (last updated February 28, 2020).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1991 has been updated by 28 CFR Part 36 Subpart D (last amended 5/20/2024)¹, 2004 ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG)² and the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design (the “2010 Standards”). When following the requirements of the 2010 Standards, include both the Title III regulations at 28 CFR part 36, subpart D; and the 2004 ADAAG at 36 CFR part 1191, appendices B and D, where requirements between the two differ, the requirements of 28 CFR part 36, subpart D, prevail. (<https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/design-standards/2010-stds/>). Public and commercial facilities, and accommodations, are required to comply with the 2010 Standards for both new construction and alterations to existing facilities.

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.³

In Massachusetts, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 22, § 13A, the Architectural Access Board (MAAB) has issued



Clear width of Doorways (Figure 404.2.3)

state regulations “in order to make public buildings and facilities accessible to, functional for, and safe for use by persons with disabilities.”

The MAAB states the intention under 521 CMR 2.00 is to provide safe use and access to “educational, living and recreational opportunities” to people with disabilities. Compliance under 521 CMR 3.00 applies to all additions, reconstruction, remodeling and alterations or repairs to existing public buildings or facilities. MAAB establishes a threshold for accessibility upgrades, related to the cost of work being done on a building:

1. If the cost of work is less than 25% of the 100% Equalized Assessed Value (EAV) of the building, and less than \$50,000, then only new work must comply.
2. If the cost of work is less than 25% of the EAV, and more than \$50,000, then the building must have an accessible entrance and toilet (this means that if a toilet is provided, it must be accessible).
3. If the cost of work is more than 25% of the EAAV, then the entire building must comply.

These requirements generally mean, for storefront renovations in Athol, that doorways must be widened, hardware changed, and steps eliminated from entrances. A variance for non-compliance from MAAB may be sought, but only if this work cannot be done for hardship, or preservation reasons.

¹<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-28/chapter-I/part-36/subpart-D?toc=1>

²<https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/design-standards/>, <https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/regulations/title-iii-regulations/>

³<https://www.mass.gov/aab-rules-and-regulations>

11.

SITE IMPROVEMENTS

Landscaping provides the streetscape with shade, shelter, and color. Trees purify the air and soften the harder environment of downtown. Unbuilt downtown spaces are prime candidates for a program of landscaping and site improvements.

While the sidewalks and streets fall under Town jurisdiction, there are site improvements that can easily be handled by a building owner or merchant. For example, bike racks and benches are encouraged and frequently used. Brick paving and plantings already contribute much to the downtown.

Street furniture includes benches, planters, trash receptacles, low walls, lamps, signs, bike racks and information kiosks. Furniture makes a street feel comfortable and eases its use. A neighborhood improvement plan should include landscaping and street furniture any place where people wait, gather or relax.

The following sub-sections provide comprehensive guidelines for optimal development and upkeep of the public realm/ street. However, the effective implementation of these guidelines relies on a clear understanding of the responsibilities for each component of the streetscape. To facilitate this, the illustrative diagram on page 38-39 offers a simplified visual reference, clarifying which entity or individual is responsible for each element. This ensures that any initiatives or improvements can be directed to the appropriate person/ entity for efficient execution.

Athol's downtown already displays a friendly atmosphere with park benches, flower boxes and brick paved sidewalks. Maintenance of these assets will ensure the continuation of an inviting appearance. All store merchants can improve their façades easily with window boxes filled with fresh flowers from spring through fall. Lots should be planned using the same principles for site improvement that apply to retail shops.

Street and Alley Design

1. Construct the street furniture out of solid wood and heavy gauge iron or steel to ease maintenance.
2. Landscape parking lots and driveways around the perimeter to screen cars from view.
3. Design front yards with a garden, shrubbery, trees, or special paving.
4. Ensure alleys are well-lit to enhance visibility and consider decorative lighting to add aesthetic appeal.
5. Provide ample seating options, to encourage rest and social interactions.
6. Commission local artists to create murals and incorporate features like interactive art, play structures to engage different age groups and provide "place to stay."

Site and Landscape Design

1. Place the window boxes, gardens, or hanging planters for stores in sunny locations.

2. Select plant materials and locations appropriate to the downtown environment.
3. Any new trees should be healthy and mature with a minimum of 3 inches in diameter.
4. Wrap new tree trunks during planting to protect bark. Install guide wires or guards to protect the trees until they take a firm hold in the ground, usually for 1 year.
5. Maintain, water and prune plantings. Remove fallen leaves and debris around the trunk and planter regularly.
6. Locate trees so as not to obscure important architectural or historic details.
7. Select the plants carefully considering climatic requirements, growth potential, and adaptability to the urban environment, as well as your own maintenance program.

Public Realm

1. Locate street furniture any place where people wait, gather, or relax.
2. Provide adequate trash receptacles at all gather places.
3. Provide public signage as needed to guide and ease use of public spaces.
4. Include pedestrian amenities in automobile service lot design. Service stations and parking lots should have planted "buffer zones" separating the cars from the sidewalk.



Source: flowerwindowboxes.com



Source: Alley Lights, Jeremiah Edmonds

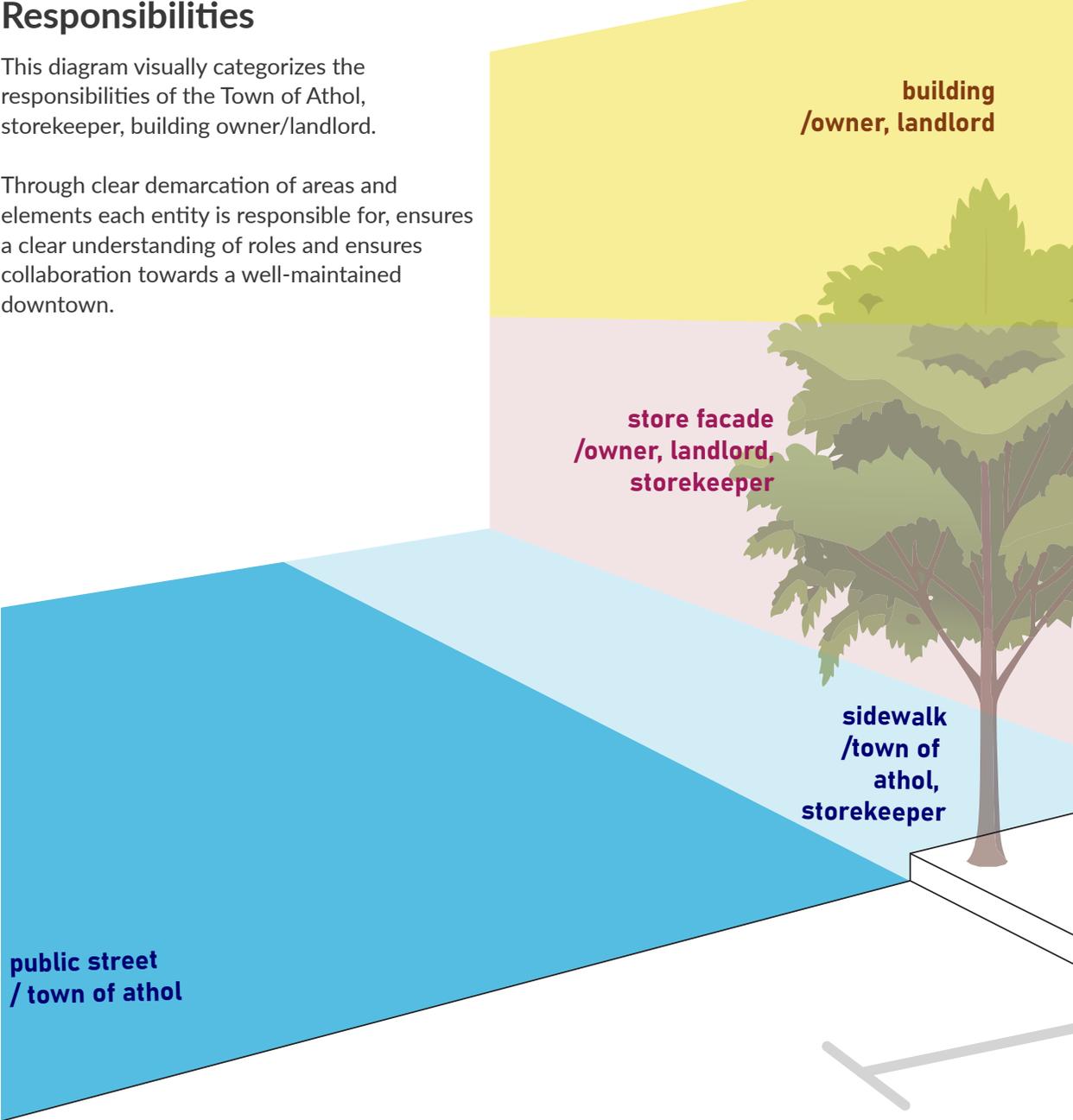


Source: Indowncity.com - Providence, RI

Responsibilities

This diagram visually categorizes the responsibilities of the Town of Athol, storekeeper, building owner/landlord.

Through clear demarcation of areas and elements each entity is responsible for, ensures a clear understanding of roles and ensures collaboration towards a well-maintained downtown.





**window display
/shopkeeper**

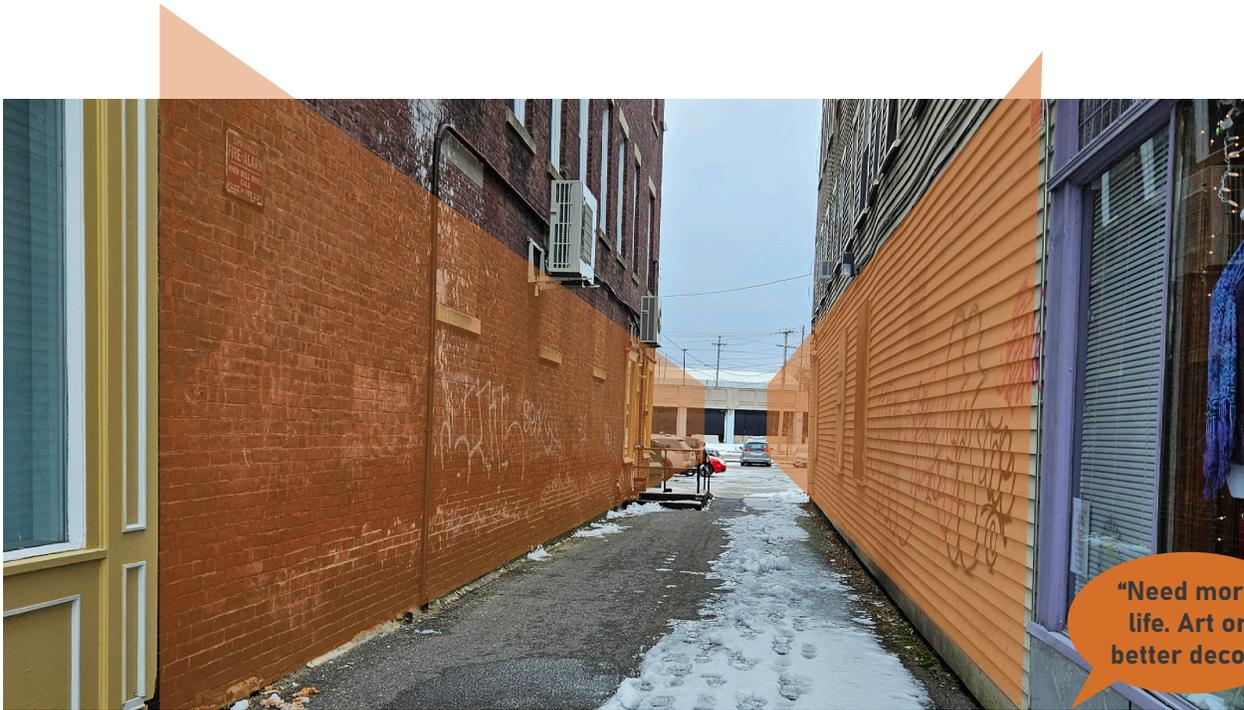
**interiors
/shopkeeper,
landlord**

12.

PUBLIC ART AND CULTURE

Public art and culture play a crucial role in the vitality and appeal of a Downtown. They enhance the aesthetic appeal, create a sense of place, and foster community pride. By integrating art installations, murals, and cultural events into the streetscape, Downtowns become dynamic spaces that attract visitors and encourage social interaction. This boosts local businesses by increasing foot traffic and giving people “a place to stay” cultivating a vibrant atmosphere.

By making space for Public Art and Culture in Athol’s Design Guidelines, it serves as a starting point for identification of spaces that can serve as a canvas to initiate these processes and in turn become the backdrop for future community activities.



Alleys can be used as a potential canvas for art illustrations, to revitalize the otherwise blank spaces.

1. Install public art in central locations such as main building facades, intersections to maximize visibility and public engagement.
2. New and proposed art installations should be compatible with surrounding landscape and architecture.
3. Preference should be towards more interactive art installations, such as seating areas, performance spaces to engage people.
4. Ensure that the art is reflective of Athol's history and community.
5. Select long lasting durable material to ensure longevity of the installations.
6. Establish ongoing maintenance schedules to upkeep the appearance of the art.
7. Prioritize local artists and businesses in the commissioning process and also involve local residents in the selection process to foster a sense of pride and ownership.
8. Ensure compliance with the local zoning laws, safety regulations and accessibility standards.
9. Implement and define a process for application and selection of public art installation.

13.

SUSTAINABILITY

Introducing a few key sustainability guidelines in Athol's Downtown is crucial for enhancing the environmental resilience. Implementing these guidelines leads to a healthier community and supports local ecosystems. Achieving these requires a robust partnership between the Town, business and building owners.

While the store owners can adopt certain green practices, the Town will need to lead by integrating the principals into municipal policies. This collaborative effort ensures that sustainability becomes a shared responsibility, improving the overall quality of life.



Source: thereminder.ca



Source: pinterest.com/easygrass/

1. Integrate recycling facilities to manage waste effectively.
2. Provide bike racks to encourage alternative transportation.
3. Implement systems to manage site water run offs reducing impact on local water bodies.
4. Promote use of LED and other energy-efficient lighting to decrease energy consumption and operational costs.
5. Use native plants to support local biodiversity and ensure low maintenance.
6. Install green pavers where possible to reduce urban heat, and enhance stormwater management.
7. Choose local materials for façade improvements to support local economies.
8. Prioritize infill development to make use of existing spaces and reduce sprawl.

14.

STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION

Substantial tax credits are available under the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 for rehabilitation of historic buildings. The Federal Government has established the following 10 guidelines for rehabilitation. The Massachusetts Historical Commission is the local agency charged with administering the program.

If the building is a Certified Historic Structure, and if the renovations planned meet the criteria for eligibility, a tax credit of up to 25% of the cost of improvements can be realised. Non-historic properties are eligible for tax credits amount to 15-20% of the rehabilitation process.

The first step is to confirm that the property meets the eligibility requirements. After that, submit an application to the Massachusetts Historical Commission to obtain Certification. Then the improvements must be detailed and architectural plans submitted and approved. Finally, the Historical Commission must certify that the work was completed in accordance with the plans, and with these Standards for Rehabilitation.

Since the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation sets the ground rules for historic properties nationwide, they have been adopted as the basis for Athol's Downtown Design Guidelines. These standards are listed below:

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

For more information, visit <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/secretary-standards-treatment-historic-properties.htm>

For more information contact:
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Blvd.
Boston, MA 02125
617-727-8470

“Preserve
the Historic
Character”



Source: <https://cinematreasures.org/theaters/20350/photos/302202>

GLOSSARY OF ARCHITECTURAL TERMS

Air-entraining Additive:

An ad-mixture for concrete or mortar mixes that causes air bubbles to form increasing workability of the mix and preventing cracking in the freeze/thaw cycle.

Alkaline:

Water soluble salts of alkali metals, in concrete and mortar mixes, which may cause expansion and subsequent cracking.

Anodized:

A metal surface with a hard delectrolytically-created non-corrosive film of aluminum oxide, either clear or colored.

Architrave:

Ornamental moldings around door or window openings.

Bay:

A full height area of a façade, measured from column center lines, and repeated.

Bracket:

An angle used to support a projecting portion of a building or structure; usually wood, stone or metal on a façade.

Clapboard:

Horizontal wood siding boards, usually with tapered edges and overlapping installations.

Conduit:

Pipe used to carry or protect a material; on a façade, conduit is used to carry electrical wires.

Cornice:

An exterior ornamental trim at the top of a structure.

Counter-flashing:

A thin strip of metal inserted into masonry construction, bent over other flashing to prevent water from running down the masonry and behind the base flashing.

Dormer:

A projection through the slope of a roof for a vertical window.

Double-glazing:

Window with two panes of glass, with an air space between for increased thermal and sound insulation.

Eaves:

The bottom edges of a sloping roof that projects beyond the outside walls of a building.

Façade:

The exterior wall of a building, including indentations and projections.

Fascia:

A vertical portion of a building element: at the roof edge, that area on which a horizontal gutter is fastened.

Flashing:

A thin, impervious sheet of material placed in construction to prevent water penetration or direct the flow of water, used especially at roof joints, between a roof and a vertical wall, in masonry walls over cornices.

Fluorescent:

Visible light characterized by low energy use and short wave lengths, generally with a bluish tinge.

Galvanic Action:

Electrochemical action resulting from the contact of dissimilar metals in the presence of an electrolyte, creating resistance to rust.

Hydraulic Cement:

Cement whose constituents react with water in ways that allow it to set and harden under water.

Incandescent:

Visible light characterized by warm tones, found in most household bulbs.

Keystone:

The center stone at a high point of an arch, either brick or stone.

Lally Columns:

A pipe column from 3" to 6" in diameter, sometimes filled with concrete.

Laminate:

A material formed by bonding together several layers or sheets with adhesive under pressure and sometimes with nails or bolts.

Lintel:

A material used to span an opening on a façade, generally steel, stone or brick above a window.

Louver:

A framed opening in a wall, fitted and fixed or movable slanted slates, used in doors and windows, and in ventilating systems for air intake and exhaust.

Molding:

An ornamental strip of material used at joints, cornices, bases, door and window trim, and panels usually made of wood, plaster, plastic or metal.

Non-Combustible:

Any material which will not ignite at a temperature of 1200 degrees F. when exposed to fire.

Parapet:

The part of a wall that extends above the roof level.

Patina:

Color and texture added to a surface as a result of oxidation or use, such as the green coating on copper or its alloys.

Psi: Pounds per square inch.

Rebar: Reinforcing bar, steel.

Soffit:

The underside of part of a structure, such as at entry alcove ceilings or roof edges.

Transom:

A panel above a door or window, usually glass or wood.

Window Sash:

The framework of a window that holds the glass. Some windows consist of several sashes.

Zinc-rich chromate:

Pigment used in paints to inhibit rust formation.

