

Design Guidelines: Ground Floor Commercial

City of Chicago

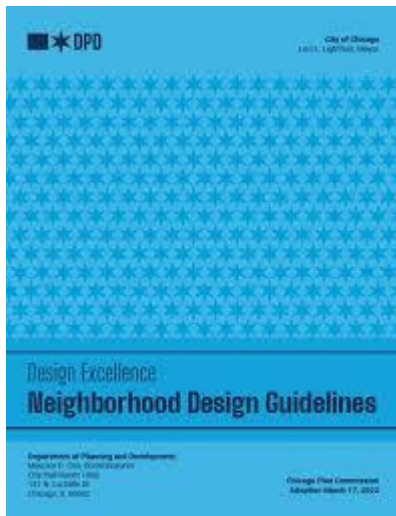
Department of Planning and Development

Chicago Plan Commission
Informational Presentation
September 19, 2024

Neighborhood Design Guidelines

Adopted March 2022

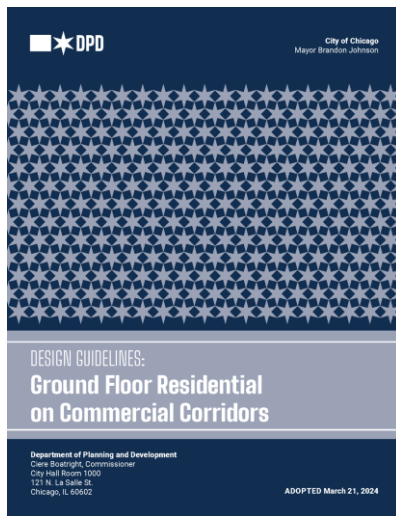
Baseline flexible urban design guidelines for neighborhood commercial corridors.



Ground Floor Residential on Commercial Corridors

Adopted March 2024

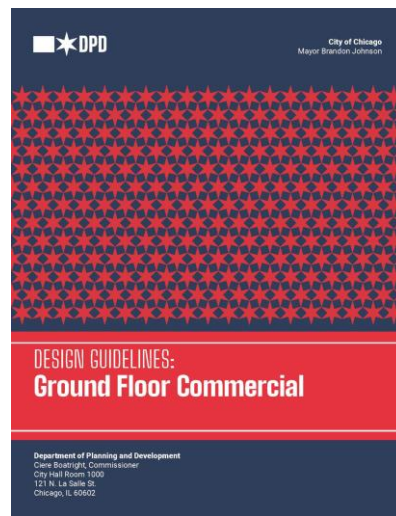
Specific best practices for ground floor housing on commercial corridors.



Ground Floor Commercial Design Guidelines

Planned adoption November 2024

Specific best practices for commercial design especially storefronts.



Purpose of the Design Guidelines

Project duration
October 2023–November 2024

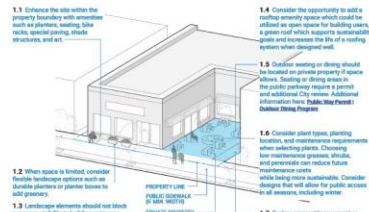
Purpose

- Create a set of user-friendly set of design guidelines and best practices examples for non-design professionals.
- Clear guidelines for future design review of renovation and new construction ground-floor commercial project proposals.

SITE DESIGN 1.0 URBAN LANDSCAPE

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Thoughtful landscape design can support business owners, customers, and others on the street by creating attractive and functional spaces. When designing a space, consider the natural systems and features of the site and its surroundings.

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- 1.1 Enhance the site within the property boundary with amenities such as planters, seating, shade, trees, special paving, shade structures, and art.
- 1.2 When space is limited, consider flexible landscape options such as elevated planters or planter boxes to add greenery.
- 1.3 Landscape elements should not block access or visibility to building entrance or public sidewalks. When needed, placing elements in the public parking may require a permit and additional City review. Additional information here: [Landscape Guidelines](#).
- 1.4 Consider the opportunity to add a rooftop amenity space which could be utilized as open space for building users, a green roof which supports sustainability goals and increases the life of a roofing system when designed well.
- 1.5 Outdoor seating or dining should be located on private property if space allows. Seating or dining areas in the public parking require a permit and additional City review. Additional information here: [Public Way Permit](#) and [Outdoor Dining Program](#).
- 1.6 Consider plant types, planting locations, and maintenance requirements when selecting plants. Choosing low maintenance grasses, shrubs, and perennials can reduce future maintenance costs while being more sustainable. Consider plants that will allow for public access to all seasons, including winter.
- 1.7 Explore permeable pavement or artistic surface elements for a functional and visually appealing solution.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES:
[Chicago Zoning Ordinance \(Sections 12.12-13\)](#) | [Landscape Guidelines](#) | [Public Way Permit](#) | [Outdoor Dining Program](#) | [Site & Land Use Design Standards](#)

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FAÇADE DESIGN

3.0 FAÇADE PROPORTIONS & CONTEXT

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Façades that preserve and enhance the existing architectural and design legacy of the building contribute to the unique charm and character of the corridor, fostering a vibrant atmosphere that attracts small businesses and foot traffic.

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- 3.1 Visibility includes customers, creates a sense of safety, and allows natural light into the space. Materials come from the sidewalk into store and attractive interior spaces. Blueprint windows and doors should use transparent glass whenever possible from knee level to ceiling height. Properties on City of Chicago designated Pedestrian Districts have specific requirements about window transparency.
- 3.2 When appropriate, maintain or restore existing or original facade ornamentation, including decorative rough openings, windows and door sizes and locations.
- 3.3 The ground floor facade should have visual interest along its length. Windows and doors should be sized in proportion to the facade, and blank walls should be avoided. Material, architectural details, and tall planters are common ways to make a blank wall more attractive.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES:
[Complete Streets \(Chicago\)](#) | [Pedestrian District](#)

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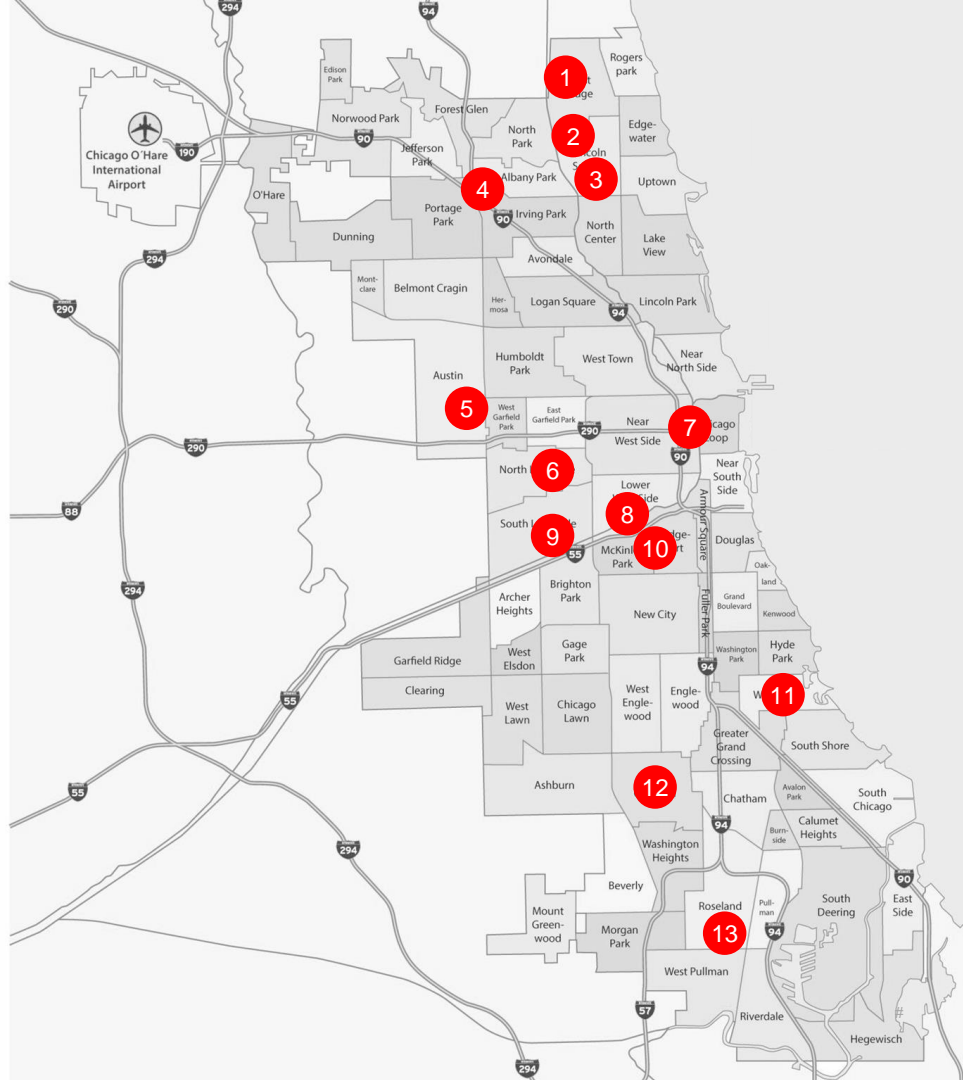
Design Guidelines as a Resource

- For both renovations and new construction.
- Available as a toolkit, resource, and design inspiration.
- Clarifying best practices – NOT taking policy positions, changing ordinances, or imposing additional requirements or processes.

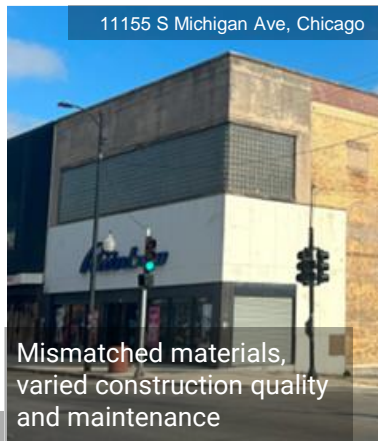


Commercial Corridors Initial Exploration

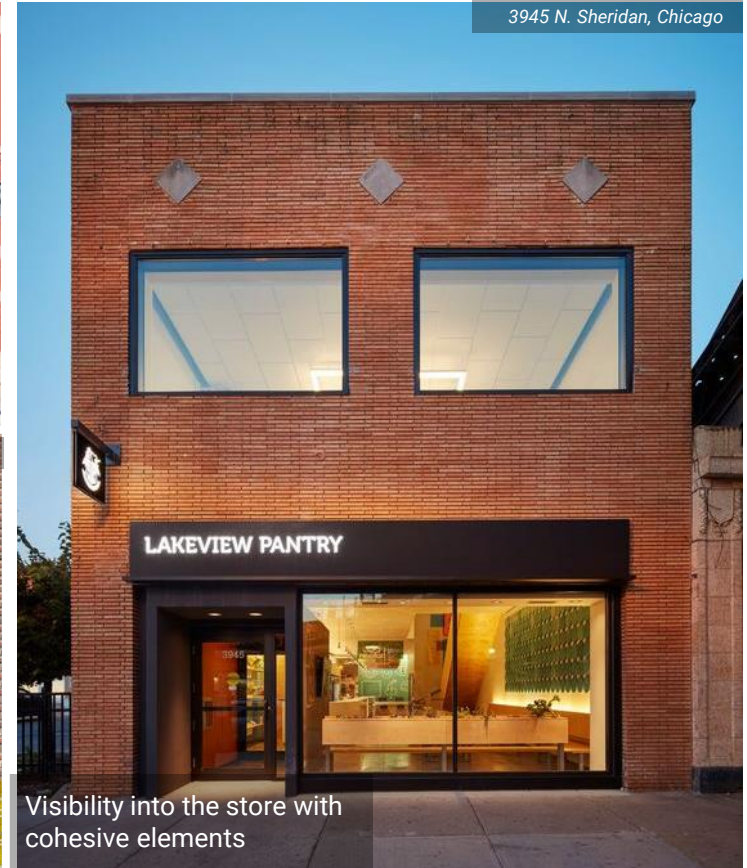
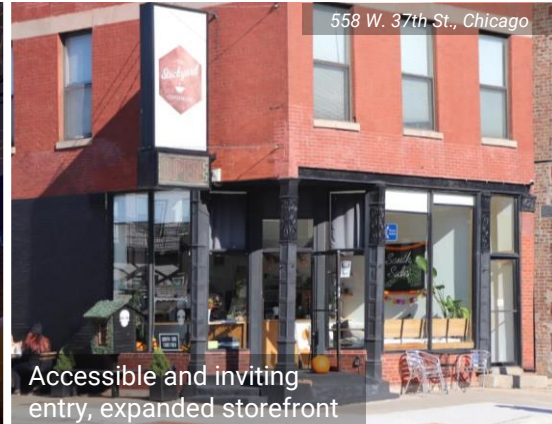
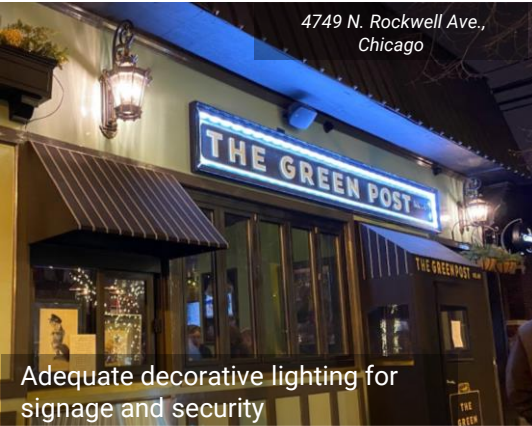
1. **Devon Ave:** Western to California (West Ridge)
2. **Lincoln Ave:** California Ave to Peterson Ave (Lincoln Square)
3. **Western Ave:** Lawrence to Wilson (Lincoln Square)
4. **North Elston:** Kentucky to Peterson (Old Irving Park)
5. **Chicago Ave:** Central to Laramie (Austin)
6. **W Roosevelt Rd:** Central Park to Independence (North Lawndale)
7. **Fulton Market:** Halsted to Aberdeen (West Loop)
8. **W 18th St:** Ashland to Wood (Pilsen)
9. **W 26th St:** Central Park to Homan (Little Village)
10. **Archer Ave:** Loomis to Throop (Bridgeport)
11. **W 63rd St:** King Drive to Cottage Grove (Woodlawn)
12. **W 79th St:** Ashland to Racine (Auburn Gresham)
13. **Michigan Ave:** 110th to 114th (Roseland)



Common Ground Floor Commercial Design Challenges



Ground Floor Commercial Storefront Solutions



Guidelines

Guideline Structure

- **Site Design:** Landscape, access and entries.
- **Façade Design:** Proportions & context, details & styles, materials, doors, windows, signage, exterior lighting.
- **Case Studies:** Built projects using best practices described in the guidelines.



Site Design Guideline Objectives

Landscape

- Promote pedestrian friendly and welcoming design along the sidewalk.
- Enhance amenities within the property boundary such as planters and outdoor seating.
- Encourage well-maintained landscaping within property limits.

Access & Entries

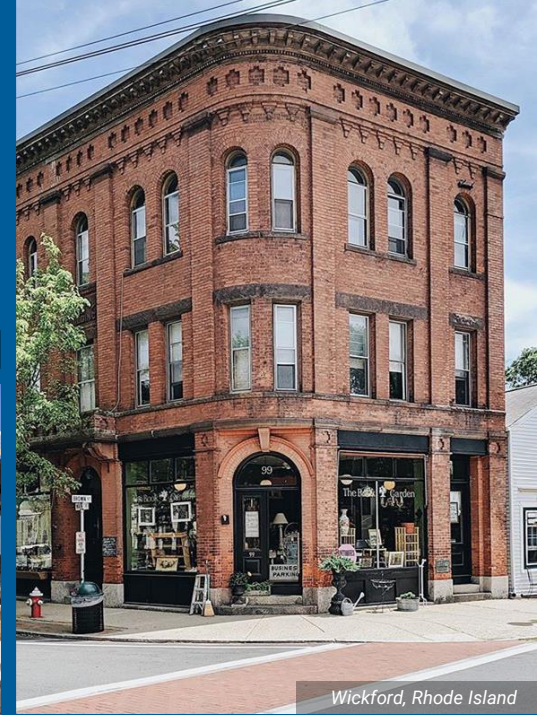
- Main building entries must be clearly visible and accessible from the street without obstructions.
- Recessed entries should be well-illuminated and visible from the sidewalk.
- Service entries should be separated from main entries.



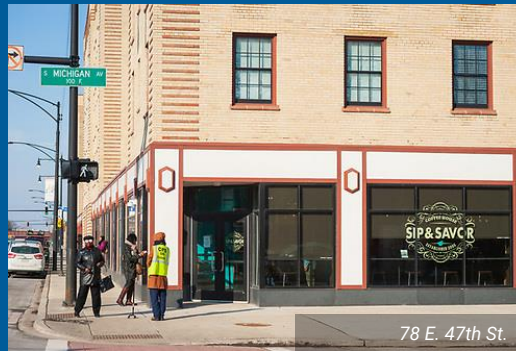
3325 N. Southport Ave., Chicago



8655 S. Blackstone Ave., Chicago



Wickford, Rhode Island



78 E. 47th St.



1924 W Chicago Ave., Chicago

Façade Design Guideline Objectives

Façade Proportions & Context

- Improvements should complement or be visually consistent with adjacent buildings considering factors such as architectural style, materials, colors and scale.

Façade Details & Styles

- Consider the overall architectural style of the building. Materials and details should match, complement or enhance original style of the building.

Façade Materials

- Preserve and repair high-quality existing building materials when possible, especially ones with unique architectural character.
- Replace or repair broken, rusted, or corroded elements.



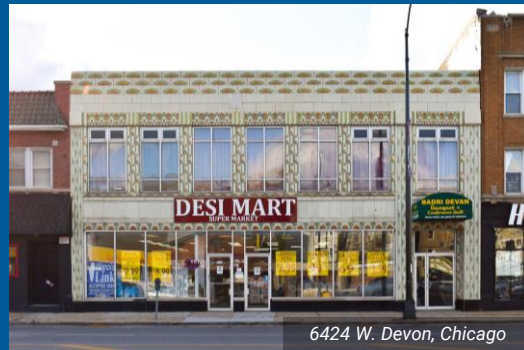
1462 E. 53rd St, Chicago



Toledo, Ohio



5426 N. Broadway, Chicago



6424 W. Devon, Chicago



2057 W. Roscoe St., Chicago

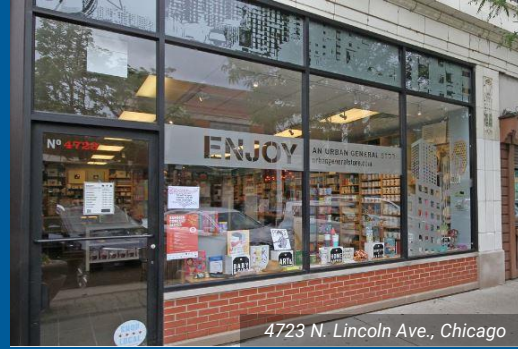
Façade Design Guideline Objectives

Doors

- Select or retain doors with complementary style to the building façade and consider the style of surrounding buildings.
- Doors that allow visibility from the sidewalk into the commercial building are encouraged.

Windows

- Window design, including scale of glass panes, frame styles, and materials should complement the rest of the façade.
- When possible, restore window proportions and materials to increase visibility.
- Avoid blocking views through windows with temporary or permanent coverings.
- Choose durable and high quality materials that maximize energy efficiency.



Façade Design Guideline Objectives

Signage

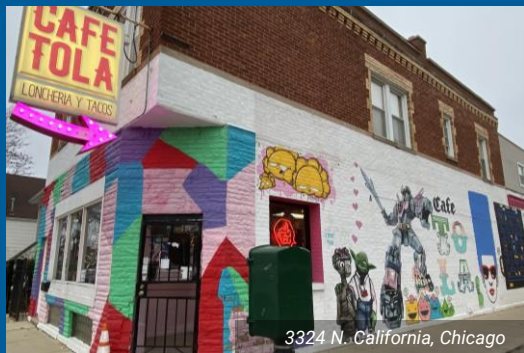
- Install permanent signs that are legible, clear and visible from the street.
- Integrate awnings with the proportions of the façade and historical period of the building.
- Signs and awnings on multi-storefront developments should have consistent style, size and placement.
- Choose signs that communicate the business's product and brand.

Exterior Lighting

- Use lighting to accentuate architectural features, signage and merchandise displays.
- Provide lighting adjacent to sidewalks to enhance storefront security and pedestrian safety.



1960 N. Western Ave., Chicago



3324 N. California, Chicago



4200 N. Broadway, Chicago



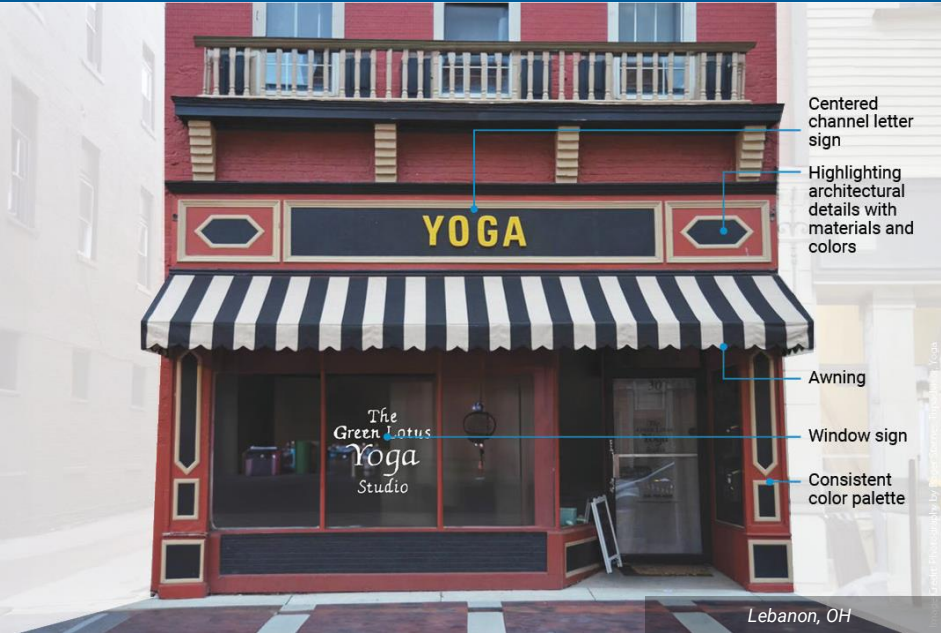
3205 S. Halsted St., Chicago



Rome, GA

Case Study Examples

Commercial Storefront Examples



Commercial Storefront Examples

Mural added

Bricks cleaned



Before

2135 W. Chicago Ave., Chicago



New fence and landscaping

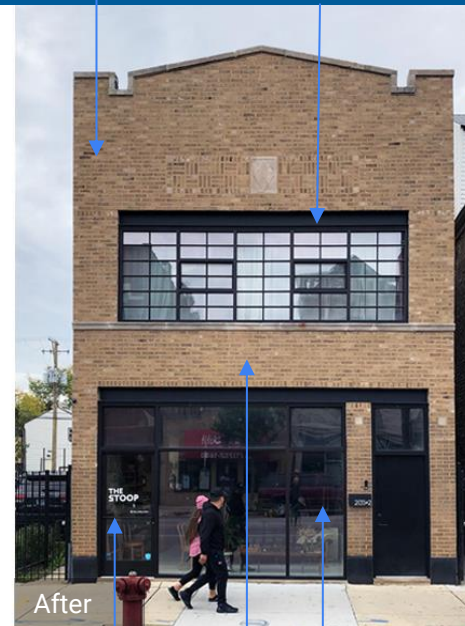
New door

Bricks repaired

Consistent color and matching materials



Before



Permanent door sign

Mansard awning removed

Larger, uncovered windows

Project Timeline

