



Façade Improvement Program Design Guidelines

Revised Summer 2008

**Grandmont Rosedale Development
Corporation
Detroit, Michigan**

Introduction

Commercial districts that have a unique sense of place have a significant competitive advantage over other, more ordinary commercial strips. The central purpose of these *Guidelines* is to encourage high quality building design in order to create an exciting, growing, and aesthetically pleasing commercial district that will attract shoppers, visitors, and those who may want to make future investments in properties and businesses in the Grandmont Rosedale communities.

Building or business owners receiving support from GRDC's Façade Improvement Program must follow these guidelines when designing storefront renovations. Others are encouraged to follow these guidelines on a voluntary basis.

All building construction and renovation projects in the City of Detroit are subject to applicable building and zoning codes and regulations. GRDC's Façade Improvement Program will not fund any projects in violation of city codes. In May 2005, the City of Detroit passed an amendment to the city Zoning Ordinance designating the Grand River commercial corridor from Evergreen to Woodmont as a "Traditional Main Street Overlay Area." This designation imposes special requirements on building construction and renovation projects within the district (see Article XI of the Detroit Zoning Ordinance for full details).

The *Guidelines* are generally consistent with City Codes, but there are instances where these *Guidelines* are more restrictive. In those cases, these *Guidelines* will determine whether a proposed project will be eligible for funding under the GRDC Façade Improvement Program. In cases where City codes are more restrictive or in cases where City codes address issues not specifically addressed by these *Guidelines*, City codes will take precedence.

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General

In general, façade improvements have the greatest impact when they are part of a holistic storefront design. All façade elements (signage, awnings, color scheme, architectural features, etc.) should be coordinated to produce a strong, unified, high quality image. Items like signs and awnings should never appear “tacked on” to a façade as an afterthought.

- When multiple tenants occupy a single building, all tenant signage and storefront designs should be coordinated to create a harmonious and consistent design
- Façade improvements should preserve or restore historic building features when present. Projects should not cover or remove historically significant elements like ornate brickwork. If there are missing elements, such as missing transoms, they should be replaced. Where buildings are either historically designated or eligible for designation, all renovations shall be consistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.

Signage

Signs provide businesses with advertising, image, and identity. Overall, signs that are properly designed as to scale, placement, and appearance can meet the business owner’s needs while also enhancing the image of the commercial district.

Simple signs are more attractive and communicate more effectively than a sign that is too “busy.” Keep in mind the 8-second rule – it takes the average person 8 seconds to walk past a typical retail establishment. Pedestrians cannot make out more than 4 words/symbols on a storefront within that timeframe. Motorists only have between 1 to 2 seconds to read a sign, which further underscores the importance of simple signs.

- New signs must conform to applicable City of Detroit codes and sign ordinances.
- All signs must be professionally designed and fabricated and made of quality materials.
- Sign colors and materials should be coordinated with the overall design of the storefront.
- Dimensional letters, when used, should be made of metal such as copper, bronze, stainless steel, cast aluminum or durable non-glare acrylic.
- Internal illumination of signage is prohibited except for channel letter signs. “Light Box” signs will not be funded. Retail storefront signage should be illuminated by external lighting.
- Front-lit signs should be illuminated by clear spotlights that shine on to the sign. The light bulbs should have some type of decorative shield to protect them from the elements and to direct the light toward the sign. The lighting system should not be obtrusive and distract attention from the sign itself.
- The primary business sign should be placed on the building façade above the storefront but below the first upper story windows. Signage should not conceal architectural details and features.
- Secondary signs could include window lettering in the storefront. However, signs placed on the glass should be limited in size and not obscure views into the business. Only a professional

should do lettering applied directly to the glass. Colors should be complementary to the façade colors.

- Along Grand River, a minimum of 80% of the display window at the street level façade must be unobstructed by signs and advertisements. Where facing a parking lot or side street, a minimum of 60 % of the display window at the street level must be unobstructed by signs and advertisements.
- Pole-mounted signs will not be approved for funding.
- Temporary signs, either free-standing or hung from the building façade, are prohibited. This includes sandwich board signs that sit on the sidewalk.
- Professional hand-painted signs applied to the masonry side walls (non-storefront walls) are permissible only if the masonry is a non-decorative type of masonry (i.e. cinder block, non-decorative brick, etc.) and has been previously painted.
- Hand-painted signs on the side of the building should be limited to the business name, logo and a business slogan. Listing the phone number is discouraged. Signs that list products sold, services offered, etc., will not be funded.
- Neon used as signage or as an accent to an architectural feature will not be funded. Flashing lights, strobe lights, and neon used as a window border or to outline architectural features will not be funded.
- When multiple tenants occupy a single building, all tenant signage and storefront designs should be coordinated to create a harmonious and consistent appearance.
- Obsolete and unused signs, sign frames, and brackets must be removed.

Awnings and Canopies

While awning and canopies are not appropriate for every building or storefront along Grand River, the installation of new awnings can dramatically improve a building's appearance at relatively low expense. Other benefits include the protection of sun-facing storefronts from sunlight damage to merchandise and shelter for shoppers during rain, snow, or harsh weather.

- Awning and canopy design should be integrated with the overall design of the façade. Awnings should complement and enhance building features rather than cover major portions of the facades. Generally, awnings should fit the storefront opening that they are protecting and not be out of scale in relation to the rest of the building. In most cases, a sloped rectangular awning will be most appropriate. Domed, bullnose, and bubble awnings will not be funded.
- Awnings should be made of fabric, metal or glass materials. Vinyl and plastic materials are prohibited.
- All awnings and marquees shall be supported entirely on the building on which they are erected, and there shall be no posts, brackets or other obstacles located on public property.

- In general, the bottom of any awning or canopy should be just above the top of the main entry door, but in no case higher than 8 feet, 6 inches. The top of the awning or canopy shall not exceed 12 feet above grade.
- The projection of the awning shall extend outward from the building no more than half the width of the sidewalk, or 4 feet, whichever is less.
- Wherever possible, the bottom and top edges of awnings should line up with adjacent awnings. Use similar shaped awnings and colors when facades abut one another.
- Awning colors should coordinate with the color scheme of the façade. Colorful awnings are appropriate but extreme, brilliant, or harsh colors should be avoided.
- Signage on awnings and canopies shall not exceed forty percent (40%) of the surface area.
- Signage on awnings and canopies is limited to the business name, address, logo or business slogan and shall not include any specific product advertising.
- Backlighting of awnings is prohibited. Accent lighting from above is preferred.
- Continuous awnings along blank walls are prohibited.

Colors & Materials

The color of individual façade elements (signs, awnings, trim, windows, etc.) should be part of a coordinated color scheme for the building. Colors should be selected to enhance the business image and convey a sense of quality.

- Colors selected should be harmonious with the color of existing building materials, including brick, limestone or porcelain enamel panels.
- In general, subdued color schemes are encouraged. A vibrant color palette may sometimes be appropriate, but harsh or garish colors must be avoided.
- **Materials such as brick or limestone that have not been previously painted should remain unpainted.**
- A minimum of 80% of any building façade which faces a public street, excluding window and door openings, shall consist of the following building materials: Masonry, stone or porcelain.
- Painted or unfinished concrete block, rough-textured concrete block, and split-face block are prohibited as new building materials on any façade abutting a public street.
- Fine and smooth-textured surfaces shall be used when using materials such as architectural precast concrete, textured block, or stucco.

Doors & Windows

- Original door and window openings and patterns should be preserved, especially on historically or architecturally significant buildings. “Bricking in” existing openings is prohibited. Opening up previously bricked-in openings is encouraged.

- In new construction or major storefront reconstruction, a minimum of 60% of the street level façade along Grand River shall consist of openings for doors and windows. The use of glass block shall not be considered as providing a window.
- Display windows shall be set at a maximum of thirty-two (32) inches above the finished grade and within 12 inches from the finished ceiling, not including window frames.
- Reflective or mirrored glass or glass that is dark-tinted is prohibited.
- Window frames, including display windows, shall be set back a minimum of two (2) inches from the typical wall plane in the window opening.
- Storefront doors should be compatible in design with the rest of the storefront. In general, the primary storefront door should be made largely of glass or contain a glass panel that customers can see through.

Storefront Security

Business owners need to be safe in order to be successful in business. However, heavily fortified stores detract from the attractiveness, popularity, and prosperity of commercial areas. Businesses need to address security issues without turning their stores into fortresses. Therefore, security features should be designed to be as invisible as possible.

The main way to accomplish this is for the commercial district to establish a perception that people respect and value the street and for the businesses themselves to take a pro-active stance towards fighting crime. This approach starts by keeping buildings in good repair, employing good lighting so potential customers feel secure, keeping public spaces free of debris, eliminating any signs of graffiti, removing any elements that have been recently vandalized until they can be repaired, and reducing the perception that security issues exist. Attracting more customers to the street will ultimately deter more crime from happening.

- When security gates are desired, an open-mesh type with a minimum of 30% open area must be used. Whenever possible, gates should be installed on the interior of storefront windows. Solid garage door style roll-down gates are prohibited.
- When installing a gate on the inside of the window is not feasible, a gate may be installed on the exterior of the building. However, the grille box must be as inconspicuous as possible. The exterior box shall be painted to match the building's color scheme and the entire box should be concealed by an awning or other enclosure.
- Fixed window bars placed on the outside or inside of windows will not be funded.
- Businesses may want to consider installing break-proof glass instead of security grates. This laminate glass looks and functions like traditional glass but is impossible to break through. The increased cost of the glass is offset since security grates and other expensive security measures are not needed.
- Businesses are encouraged to install monitored alarm systems. Alarm installation costs are eligible for Façade Improvement Program funding when part of a larger façade improvement

project. These systems can not only save a business from theft but also can save it from devastation with smoke and fire alarms.

- Burglar alarm sirens should not be mounted on the walls that are visible from the street. These can be concealed under awnings.
- Barbed wire on fences or any portion of the building or property is prohibited.

Exterior Lighting

- Exterior lighting should be integral to the overall storefront design, and should be used to enhance building and site features.
- Lighting fixtures shall be located, aimed, and shielded so as to avoid creating light spill into the night sky, distracting reflections, or glare into residential areas and adjacent properties.
- Flashing or moving lights will not be funded.

Off-Street Parking Lots

The visual impact of existing parking facilities along Grand River can be softened and screened with three-foot, semi-transparent screen walls and complimentary landscaping to reduce the visibility of parked cars from the street and the pedestrian corridor.

Interior landscaping is recommended, including islands defined by curbs and planted with shade trees, plus the addition of decorative style parking lot light fixtures, and parking identification signs for use throughout the business district.