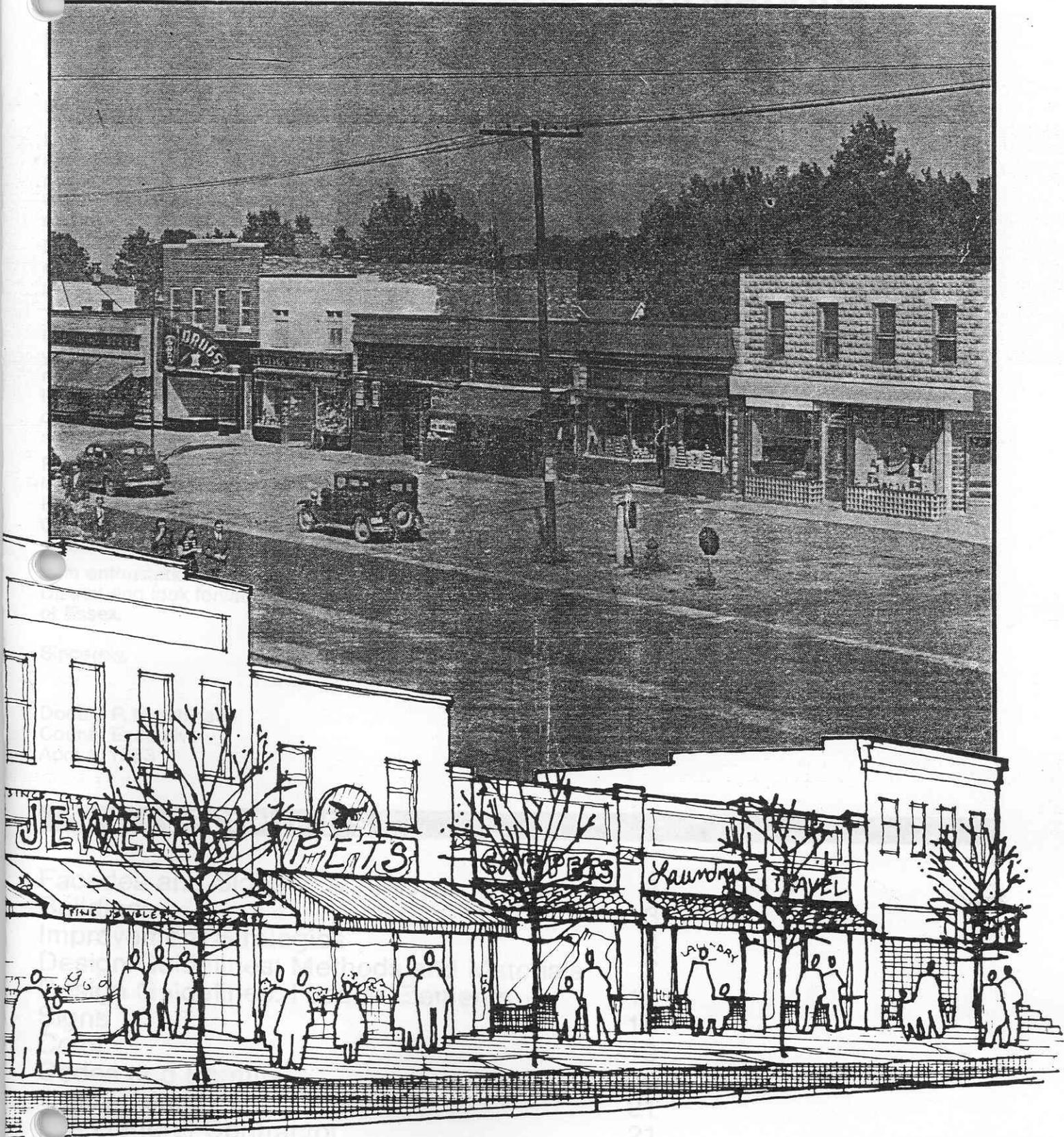


ESSEX DESIGN GUIDELINES

for Commercial Facade Renovations



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INTRODUCTION

Dear Merchant:

I am pleased with the progress which has been made in the revitalization of the Essex Business District. Through the siting of public, social and educational facilities in the commercial corridor, we are seeing an increase in pedestrian traffic and an expansion of the customer market.

Participation by the private sector through its reinvestment in existing business is critical to the on-going success of the revitalization effort.

To assist business owners define an improvement program, Design Guidelines have been developed and are recommended for your use. The guidelines have been prepared with both the merchant and customer in mind. While revitalization requires the individual actions of many merchants, application of design standards can assure that the overall impact of the separate improvements support a unified revitalization of the Essex Business District.

Funding of design improvements can be obtained through the low-interest revolving loan program operated by Maryland National Bank in cooperation with Baltimore County. As such, the Design Guidelines establish a framework for improvements while the revolving loan program offers a mechanism for their implementation.

I am enthusiastic about the activities on-going in the Essex Business District and look forward to your participation in the revitalization of Essex.

Sincerely,

Donald P. Hutchinson
County Executive
April 4, 1983

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FACADES AND SIGNS



People who come to Essex to shop are the most important economic force in the business community. Essex's location along Eastern Boulevard gives businesses a visibility to a great number of people every day. These people must be attracted and enticed to stop and shop in the area. To do this the stores must present an attractive image to those in passing cars and then further the image to pedestrians.

Potential customers must be able to orient themselves, to locate specific services and to move about easily – they should be made to feel welcome. An attractive environment is essential in making this welcome felt, and it can only come about through the efforts and work on the part of merchants and property owners.

The sidewalks and highway right-of-way of Eastern Boulevard are the responsibility of the local and state government, but the quality and character of the storefront is the responsibility of the occupants. Facade treatments and signs have an impact on the image a store and business projects.

The most important contributing factor to the visual quality of a commercial district are the buildings. They provide a wall, an edge, that defines the street space. There is a pattern and rhythm established by the openings of windows and doors on the street – the visual continuity of the street is determined by the strength of this facade pattern. It is possible to maintain the identity of each storefront and facade while maintaining the continuity of the pattern and streetwall.

Though the unique visual quality of a shopping district is based on a unity of design, unity should not lead to a sterile sameness of all the buildings. The assets of a facade should be used to the greatest advantage. The design should pull together the various pieces of the facade into a well balanced composition.

It is important to plan a facade and sign design to clearly reflect the products and services being offered. Signs, logos, symbols, displays and the storefront itself, through surface materials and colors, can communicate an image of a store to the shopping public. Former tenants may have made alterations to the building (such as closing off windows), or successive remodelings may have added layers of material to a facade. These may be removed to help give an appropriate effect for the business.

The primary design consideration should be the image a storeowner wishes to project. It is the facade and sign that make the initial impression on potential customers – it is the first line of advertising.

The following general guidelines for building and facade renovation are the basic directions that should be followed. Latter sections will deal with detailed approaches and specific problems.

- The proportions of existing facades should be kept. New work should fit within the first floor building openings and repeat the window and door rhythms that already exist. Ground floor openings should relate or align with second floor openings.
- Materials already employed in the block should be used. Eastern Boulevard materials are brick, masonry, wood, porcelain steel and decorative glass.
- Signs should be mounted to establish lines along the block to align with others on the block, or within the natural sign band formed by details and cornices of a building.
- Existing decorative elements should be maintained during renovation.

No attempt should be made to make a building look older than it is. Most reproduction details are not to the proper scale and their use can give an awkward visual effect.

- The use of smaller elements such as signs, awnings, symbols and window boxes should be considered to express the nature of the business.
- In designing signs, simplicity and directness should be emphasized. Graphic symbols and simple messages are best.

BUILDINGS

The buildings of Essex reflect its history as a community and a business center. The existing buildings date primarily from the mid 20th century, with some examples from the mid and late 19th century. Some buildings were built specifically for business, while others were built as residences and have become professional offices and businesses. Almost all structures show some evidence of remodeling, some of which have changed the image of a building in a very drastic way. This kind of change and remodeling is a healthy, visible, process that allows the community to grow. Each kind of building, commercial structures and conversions, have specific properties and problems that should be addressed during remodeling.

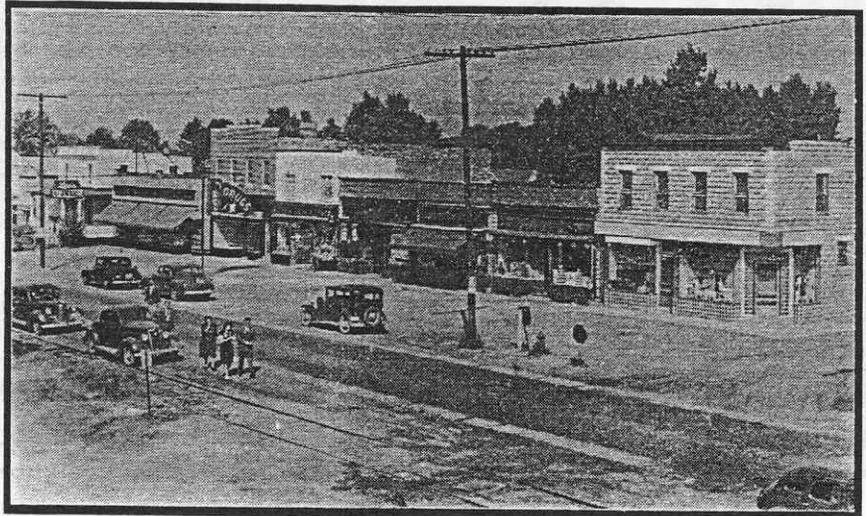


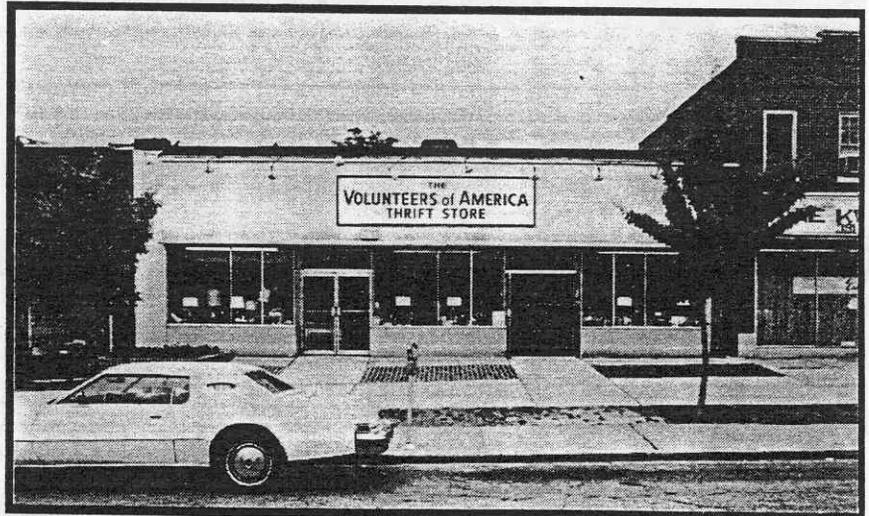
Photo courtesy of the Essex Heritage Society

Commercial Buildings

This category of building represents both one and two story structures that were built specifically for commercial use. Masonry construction, large expanses of glass for display windows on the first floor, and a provision for sign location are basic characteristics. Second story uses range from apartment, to storage and office use. For the most part, the second floors have smaller, double-hung windows.

Specific guidelines for these commercial buildings are:

- The signage for the building should fit within areas of the building naturally defined by piers, columns, window lines and parapets. This area is usually located above the storefront, below the second floor windows on two story buildings.
- The sign should have a size that fits the general overall proportions of the building.
- New storefronts should fit into the first floor store opening. Storefront replacement can be easily and inexpensively accomplished if kept within this area. Renovations affecting the wall may lead to moisture problems and structural complications.



- Openings should line up between the first and second floors.
- If second story space is not used, the window openings should be considered and treated attractively and not simply boarded up.
- The architectural style and character of the building should be respected. Inexpensive and attractive renovations can be accomplished by avoiding a complete, costly, facelift to an earlier era. Respect the 19th and 20th century heritage of Essex as reflected in its architecture.
- Exterior renovations must deal with both stories to avoid a patchy, incomplete, look.

Commercial Conversions



The commercial conversions are buildings which started their life as residences. In earlier years, a mix of business and residential uses in a commercial area was not uncommon. In fact, this mix of uses is a healthy one and is still evident in Essex with a number of second floor apartments in use or being renovated for use. In some instances, whole houses have been converted into offices and businesses. Many of these activities fit very well into the houses; small interior spaces, small windows; residential details and landscaping give the right image for the use. This type of building has its own list of requirements.

- The residential size and proportions should be maintained. Windows and doors should not be enlarged.

- Original materials should be maintained or replaced when possible. New materials should maintain the texture and overall effect of earlier material.
- Front porches are an attractive and functional part of the building and should be maintained or replaced if missing.
- Details should be maintained or replaced.
- Signage should be small scale and dignified, to fit with the image of the building.
- Color schemes for residential conversions can be more elaborate than those of commercial buildings. Trim and details can be highlighted to provide a counterpoint to the siding.

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

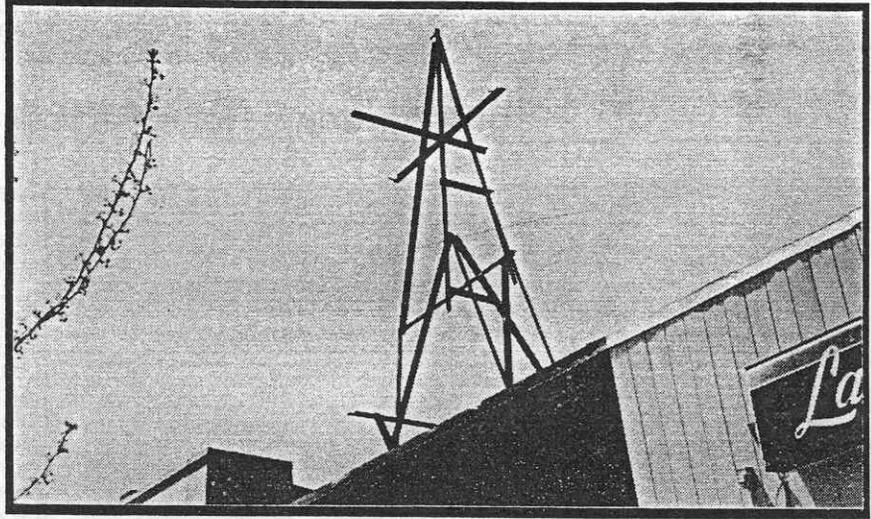
There are several approaches to renovation and facade improvements. These approaches can be characterized by different levels of involvement and cost. Efforts for revitalization by different store owners and merchants combine to form a unified strategy for revitalizing Essex. Each plays a significant role in the complete effort, taking clues from buildings recently completed, as well as influencing future efforts by neighboring storefronts.

In developing facade and sign guidelines for Essex, it was discovered that significant improvements in the visual character of the stores can be accomplished through efforts that are not very expensive or time consuming. These efforts can be characterized as maintenance and removal.

Removal

Removal is a simple process to complete and one which has great impact. Store owners and property owners should make the following efforts:

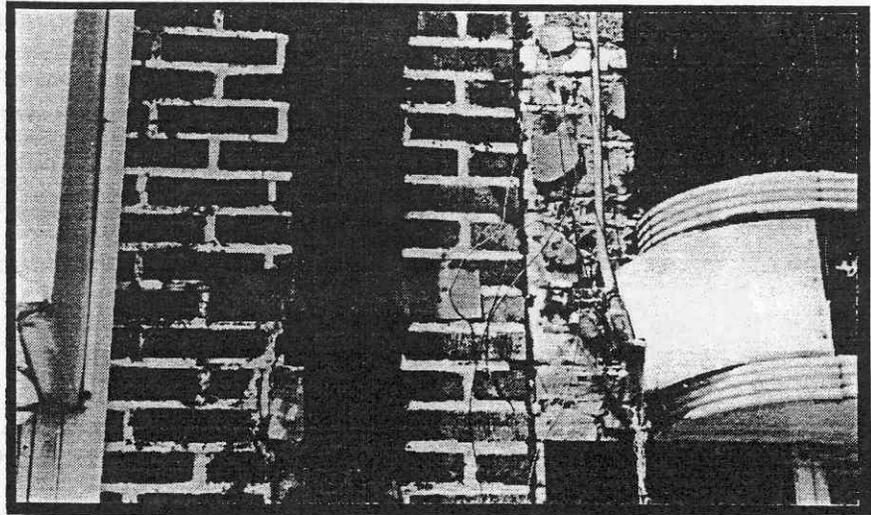
- Dismantle and remove unused sign brackets, frames, guy wires and hardware from the roof, building wall, parapet and front yard of the building.
- Remove false fronts, siding, non-conforming signs and advertising from the facade of the building. This includes formstone, fascia panels, mansard roofs and any other material that covers and disrupts the original detailing and materials of the building.
- Remove, dismantle or, in some cases, paint over signs which are no longer relevant to the current store. Often signs remain on a building long after a business has left the area. These signs detract from current business signs and give a cluttered appearance.
- Trash and litter on the ground and sidewalk surrounding the store and building should be removed on an ongoing basis, and disposed of properly.
- Remove all temporary window signs and displays that do not apply to current or forthcoming store business.



Maintenance

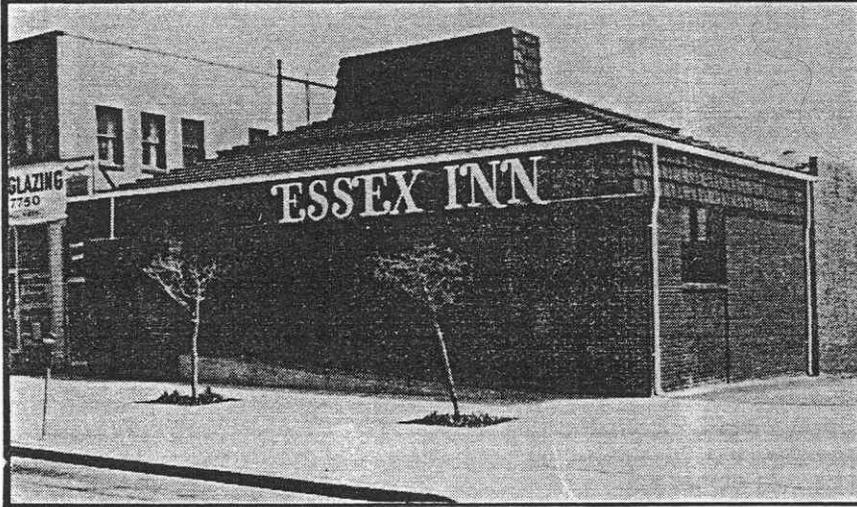
Maintenance is a procedure of repair and replacement that normally occurs as an ongoing effort. Due to economic factors, it is often neglected. By continuing, or re-instituting, a program of servicing and maintaining a storefront, facade or sign, major repairs and expenses can be avoided. Repainting and refinishing woodwork, signs and trim, repointing masonry, cleaning signs and replacing burnt out bulbs, repairing sidewalks, and simple cleaning the facade and windows are a few of the tasks that should be a part of an ongoing process.

- Repair or replace damaged building components resulting from excess weathering or moisture exposure. This includes replacing missing or damaged building details, repairing and repointing brick and masonry and the patching of concrete.
- Clean all building facades to remove soot, dirt, and discoloration that has resulted from weathering or neglected maintenance.
- Replace broken glass in windows and doors.
- Repaint window and door frames, signs and the building front (see painting). A new paint job can be the first step in revitalization efforts.
- Roof, gutters and downspouts should be checked for leaks.
- Electrical and mechanical systems should be checked and repaired or upgraded as necessary.



- Displays and advertising should be well designed and updated regularly.
- Once a building has been repaired or renovated, it should be checked periodically for wear and tear. A dirty or peeling sign or storefront often reflects a dilapidated business.
- Design storefronts and facades with future maintenance in mind. Easy access for window, sign and facade cleaning should be considered as well as a careful selection of durable materials and easily maintained details.

Renovation, Reconstruction & New Construction



When redesigning or replacing storefronts and signs, the basic guideline should be to respect the existing building storefront and materials.

Renovation should not be confused with historic reconstruction in which meticulous care is taken to return a building's appearance to that of a particular point in time. Rather it is a solution that emphasizes long-term, yet economic, improvements. These improvements should respect the architectural features which enhance the existing building and design.

- Design new storefronts to fit within the first floor building frame (opening) as formed by columns, piers and cornices.
- Do not remove, destroy or cover

up existing architectural detailing. Such detailing can become an important part of a renovation effort.

- Select and use materials that are compatible with the existing materials in color and texture. Too many patterns can give a busy, hard to see image.
- Relate the design of first floor storefronts to design details of the second story and upper levels of the building facade.
- Separate storefronts in one building should consider locating signs of similar size and at the same height to form a sign band for the building.

There are cases and locations in Essex where a vacant lot exists, a building is missing or a particular building has deteriorated to a point where, as in the other cases, a new building can be constructed. This break in the street facade can be felt as one moves along the sidewalk. New construction should respect the neighboring buildings and storefronts, while adding interest and vitality to the street.

Each new project is different, but there are some general guidelines to follow:

- A new building should be a product of its own time and use, and not a copy of an older architectural style.
- The existing 25 foot setback along Eastern Avenue should be maintained by new buildings.
- New construction should harmonize with the existing colors, materials and scale (heights, proportions, openings, etc.) of Eastern Avenue.
- New uses and functions should add to the vitality of the area.

DESIGN GUIDELINES: METHODS AND MATERIALS

Structure

The structural stability of a building is one of the primary reasons for any repair or renovation project. The following is a list of general points to be considered when changes are being made.

- Before facades and storefronts are renovated, all structural problems should be corrected. Realizing the special problems of older structures, visible signs of deterioration such as bending beams, cracking and obvious failure should be investigated thoroughly. Failure to treat problems such as these will cause them to escalate and possibly shorten the useful life of the building.
- Structural repairs should match the existing system whenever feasible or economical.
- Plans for interior or exterior changes to a building should first consider the structural stability and strength of the building.
- Structural work should be done by bonded contractors with extensive experience in the system requiring repair or renovation. The structural condition of a building is one area that should be analyzed by a knowledgeable engineer, architect or building contractor.



Brick & Masonry

Brick and block are the most common materials in the Essex commercial district. Brick used ranges from hard glazed brick in yellows and browns to red face brick. Brick and block maintenance consists of cleaning, repointing and replacing sections of walls, piers and columns that have become damaged. Some of the brick used was never intended to be exposed; it can be identified by large, uneven mortar joints and uneven courses. This infill brick, when exposed to the weather, can allow water to enter the building and cause damage.

Water is responsible for the breakdown of masonry in buildings. Disintegration of brick and mortar is caused by water penetration followed by successive periods of freezing and thawing, or wet and dry cycles.

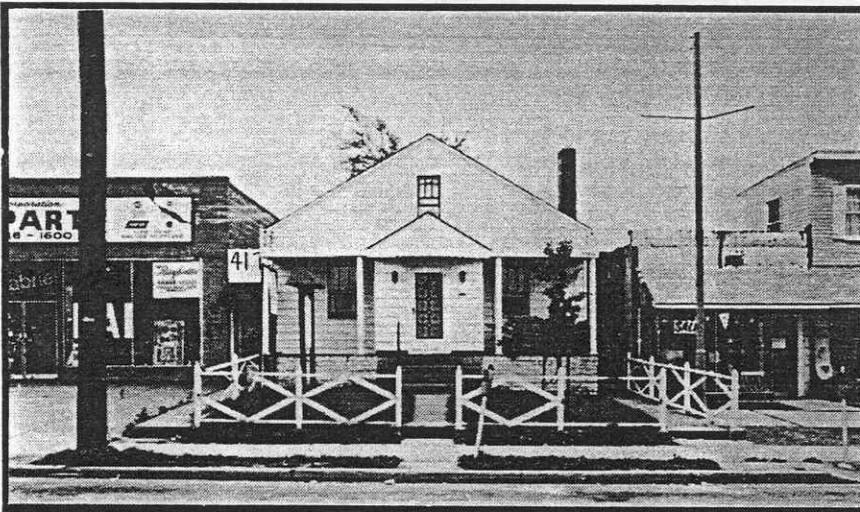
Water also acts as a catalyst for chemical deterioration. One preventive operation is to maintain gutters and downspouts, roofdrains and flashing in good condition to keep excessive water from masonry walls.

- Brick should be cleaned by gentle methods to avoid damage to the hard outer layer of brick. Acceptable methods are: low-pressure water along with soft brushes, mild detergents, diluted acids or steam cleaning. (Before starting, a method should be tested on an unseen part of the building.)



- Abrasive cleaning such as sandblasting or strong chemical solutions are **not** recommended due to the damage that can be done to the hard outer layer of the brick.
- Whenever possible, original masonry should be retained without applying any surface treatment.
- Formstone should **not** be applied to masonry, or any, building facade.
- Brick that has been painted is generally impossible to return to its original color. Previously painted brick should be repainted in colors that complement other facade details.
- In cases where stucco needs repair, a mixture that matches the original in texture and appearance should be used.
- Mortar joints should be repointed (replaced) only when moisture problems have been detected or in cases where the mortar has already chipped away.
- Repointing consists of removing the damaged outer layer of mortar to a depth of $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch and resealing the joint with new mortar.
- When duplicating mortar, joint size and profile as well as composition, color and texture should be maintained for a consistent wall appearance.
- Masonry mortar **must** be used and **not** Portland cement mortar.

Wood Frame



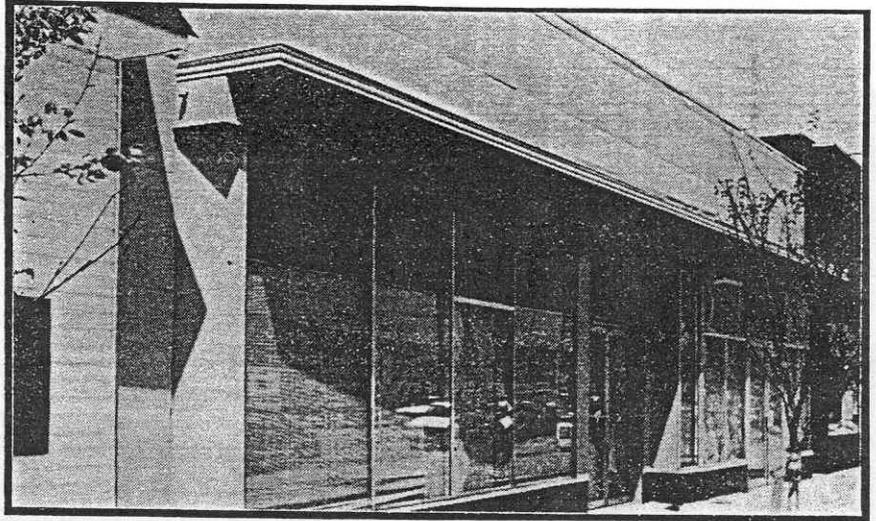
Wood frame buildings are also common in Essex. Most are former houses that have been converted for commercial and office use. Wood buildings are the easiest to maintain. Correction of damaged structural pieces involves easily accomplished repair, replacement or duplication. The most common problems are the deterioration of the frame and structural pieces and structural failure. These buildings should be periodically checked for structural problems, rotting or insect infestation.

- Special attention should be given to basement and foundation areas where rotting sills or wooden piers may cause extensive damage through the rest of the building.
- When defective structural areas are identified, they should be removed or replaced with new material of similar dimension. If only a section has been affected and most the structural piece can be salvaged, the damaged area should be cut out within 12 inches of the damage, and a new piece spliced and joined.
- Complex trim details can be reconstructed using readily available stock shapes and mouldings.
- Wooden clapboards are standard building materials for non-masonry buildings. These materials will last a considerable period when properly maintained. Replacement material should match the details, dimensions and application of original siding and trim.
- Asbestos shingles should **not** be used under any circumstances, and should be removed if at all possible.
- Vinyl and aluminum siding can be an acceptable material if proper trim details are used to give an attractive appearance. Window, door and corner trim boards should be used, and siding must **not** be used to cover up cornice or eave details. Contrary to popular belief, these sidings do not add to the insulating value of a wall unless they are backed with an insulating material. Neither are they maintenance free – they may require repainting or replacement due to cracking, bending or denting. In addition these materials can trap moisture and hide rot until such damage has become extensive.
- Siding materials should be of the proper fire rating through the use of treated material or flame resistant coatings.

Metals

Some storefronts in Essex have been constructed of porcelain steel, stainless steel or aluminum panels. These materials offer an image of the modern period and can be very attractive. Like any other material, these must be maintained to retain their appearance as well as to insure their life and function.

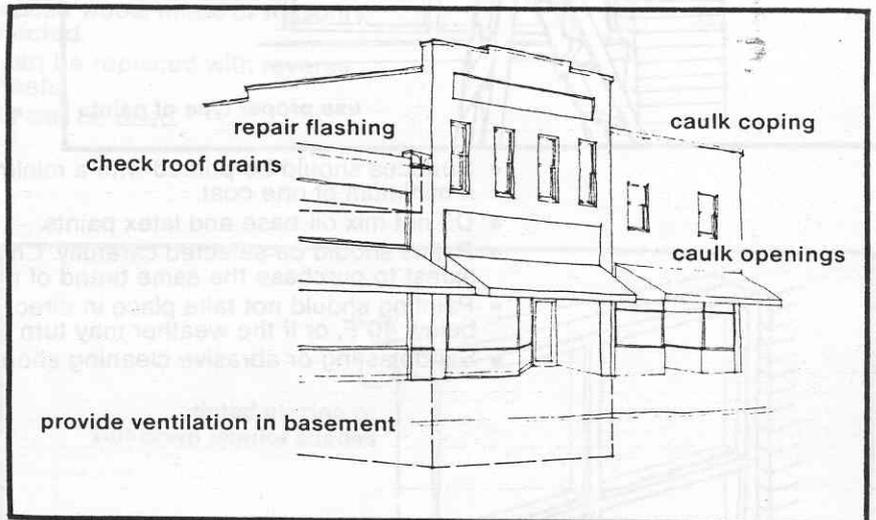
- Repaint panels as required to avoid rusting and corrosion. Loose rust must be removed and the exposed surface primed before repainting.
- Damage can be repaired with fiberglass patching material before repainting.
- Joints between panels should be caulked and filled before painting to avoid moisture penetration.
- Replacement panels can be fabricated with sheet metal and painted to match the existing material.
- Avoid contact between different materials (especially aluminum) to avoid corrosion.



Moisture Protection

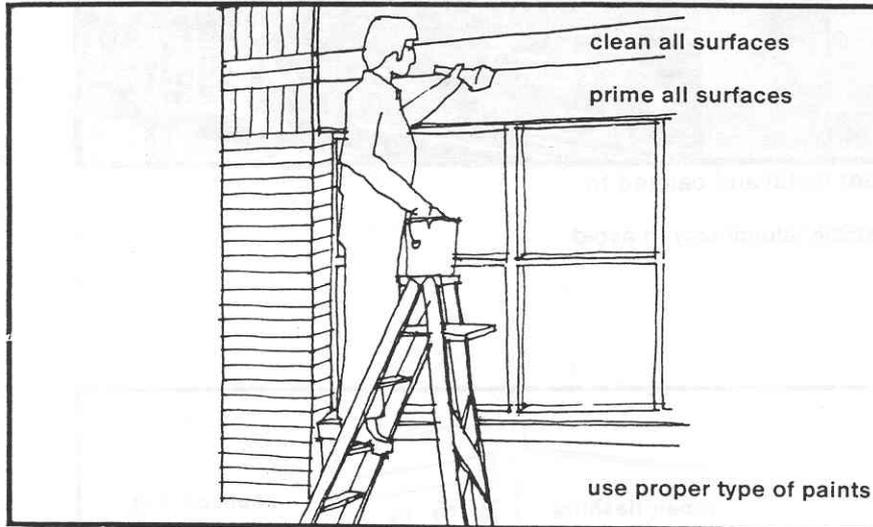
Moisture can cause damage to all buildings and often goes unnoticed until extensive problems have developed. Moisture problems occur through the penetration of water and water vapor through basement floors, foundation walls, improperly flashed exterior joints and through leaking roofs. Additionally, ground moisture seeks the warmer and dryer conditions of basements and ground floor slabs on grade. While moisture penetration is unavoidable, it can be controlled.

- Provide adequate ventilation in basements; keep wooden construction 12 to 18 inches above the ground.
- Drains around exterior foundation walls will remove excess ground water.
- Repair and patch damaged flashing at window and door openings, eaves, soffits and foundation walls.
- Caulk openings and cracks with a silicone type sealant, pushing sealant into the areas to cause a tight seal.
- Replacement, or new, wooden pieces in contact with concrete, or near the ground, should be pressure treated against moisture and insects.
- Provide a vapor barrier and insulation between basement and ground floors, as well as in roof and attic areas.
- Roofs protect the building from the elements and from water damage to the structure. Leaks often do not show until damage has occurred. Most roofing will last about 20 years, but it should be checked periodically for damage, holes or cracks.
- Repair flashing where flat roofs meet building walls.



- Replace damaged or missing roof shingles. When reroofing, the appearance of the entire roof must be considered when making material and color selections.
- Roof shingles should be of a class "A" fire rating.
- Gutters and downspouts must be maintained and cleaned periodically. It is important that they be of a proper size to avoid the accumulation of water at the edge of the roof. Downspouts should carry water away from the building and be provided with a splash blocks.
- Built-up (flat) roofs should have adequately maintained roof drains or an adequate pitch to avoid standing water. (Minimum slope – ¼" per foot.)
- Copings at the top of building walls should be caulked or replaced if damaged.

Painting



Painting is one of the most common maintenance procedures in the care and improvement of commercial properties. New types of paint have made this task easier, but there is more to an attractive and thoroughly complete painting job than a simple coat of paint.

- Old flaking, peeling or cracking paint should be removed. Sanding, chemical removers and heating are methods for removing paint from wooden surfaces.
- Metal surfaces should be cleaned of loose rust, corrosion and paint. The surface should be patched before repainting. Galvanized steel should be etched before painting to allow proper adhesion of paint coats.
- Caulk all joints and clean all surfaces to be painted.

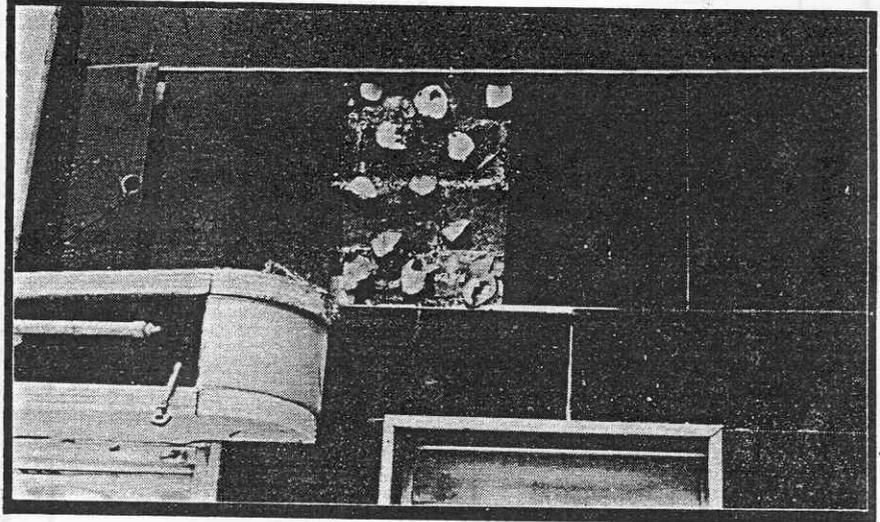
- Surfaces should be primed with a minimum of one coat and finished with a minimum of one coat.
- Do not mix oil-base and latex paints.
- Paints should be selected carefully. Choose a good quality paint. It is safest to purchase the same brand of primer and finish paint.
- Painting should not take place in direct sun, when the temperature is below 40°F, or if the weather may turn to rain.
- Sandblasting or abrasive cleaning should **not** be used to remove paint.

DESIGN GUIDELINES: FACADE ELEMENTS

Architectural Details

Most commercial facades have some decorative architectural detail: some over the entire length of the building which establish a visual continuity. This continuity is defined by a uniform moulding, coping line or parapet, or by columns and piers which give a rhythm and scale to the front of a building. Some details have been covered with roof panels, false-fronts and large sign panels. Such additions destroy the style of the building and detract from the quality of the streetscape. Details and ornamentation are a vital part of Essex's visual character and should be uncovered during renovation.

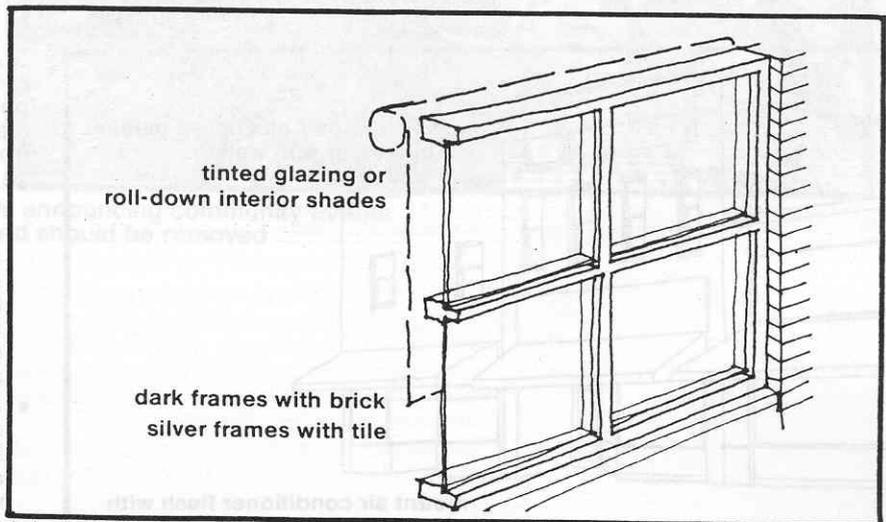
- Details of the building must be retained and enhanced during facade renovations. New storefronts and signs must not cover significant building details.
- Details that cannot be maintained or repaired in their original form can be modified or simplified to match the original in size.
- Metals such as porcelain steel and aluminum should be cleaned by non-abrasive methods.
- It is not recommended that renovation expose wood, metal or masonry that was intended to be covered and protected.
- Decorative glass paneling in storefronts can be replaced with reverse painted clear plastic or colored plastic sheets.
- Sand blasting or abrasive cleaning should **not** be used.



Windows

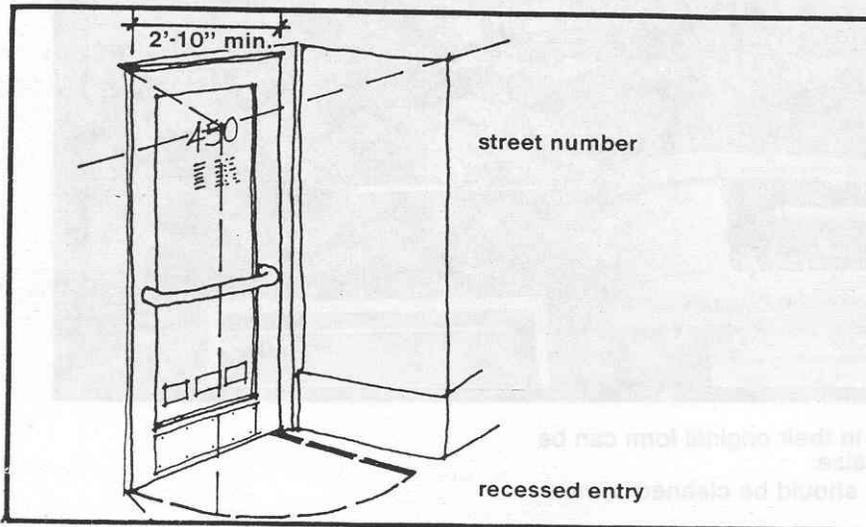
Window sizes along Eastern Avenue vary. In stores and shops they are larger, in taverns and restaurants they are small or non-existent. Most of the professional offices have residential (house) sized windows. When making improvements, it may be desirable to reduce the size of the individual glass panes to allow easier and less expensive replacement. Both wood and aluminum are appropriate frame material for this type of window, but it is important to relate the new design to the pattern of adjoining buildings and openings.

- Blocking down, or filling in older openings to fit stock window sash is not recommended.
- Window frame finish should be chosen to be compatible with the colors and textures of the building material: dark finishes for brick and dark material; "silver" finishes for use with tile and glossy material.
- Avoid conflicts of style: A Victorian or Colonial window should not be added to a 20th century building.



- Plate glass and safety glass are appropriate glazing materials. Wire glass, textured glass, mirrored glass, or plastic/acrylic are not appropriate. Stained glass is an acceptable and attractive detail for certain locations such as door transoms, as part of a larger window or in taverns and restaurants.
- Sun control through tinted glazing or roll-down interior shades are recommended.

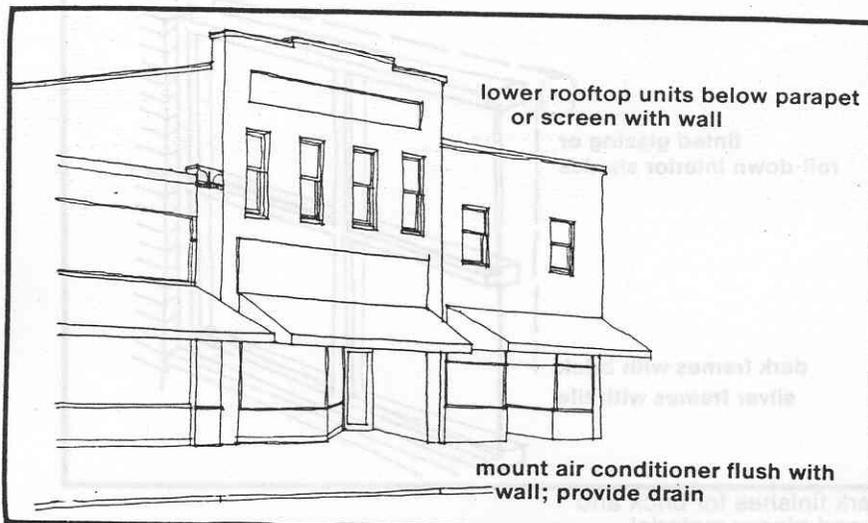
Doors



The doors and entrances of Essex stores provide rhythm and a sense of proportion to the street. Historically, the doors to the commercial buildings have been aluminum or wood with glass panels; the former houses have wooden, paneled doors. During renovation doors that are compatible with the storefront and building should be used.

- Avoid conflicts of style: A Victorian or Colonial door should not be added to a 20th century building.
- Aluminum doors should match the color of the window frames.
- Doorways should be in a recessed entranceway. This provides a protected area for customers and allows more viewing of merchandise displays.
- Doors should swing in and out if possible, and out as a minimum.
- Doors should be a minimum of 2'10" (3' is better) in width; easily gripped handles and pulls should be provided.
- Street numbers and store hours are an important and inexpensive detail for doors. Street numbers should be a minimum of three inches high for legibility.

Equipment & Systems



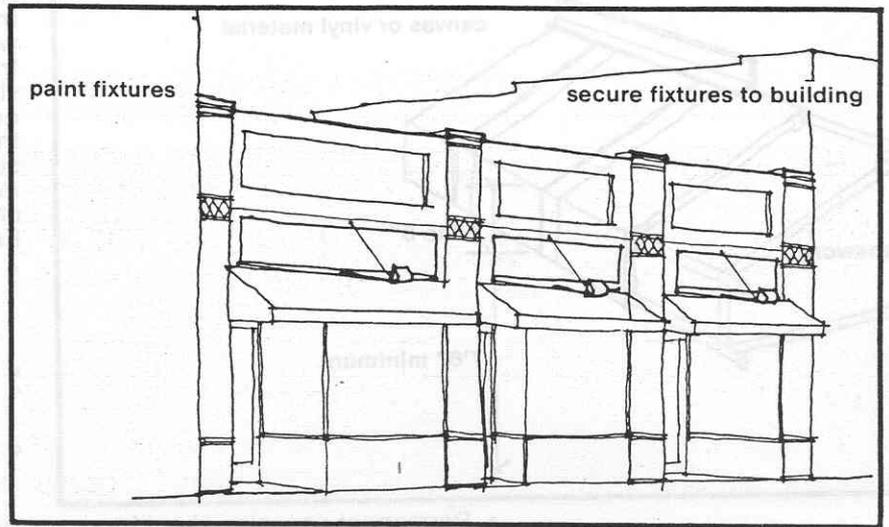
During facade improvements and renovations, some attention should be paid to removing and relocating mechanical equipment that detracts from the appearance of the building.

- Air conditioning units protruding from windows obscure storefronts and drip on customers. Units should be placed on the side and rear facades if possible. If a storefront location is necessary, it should be mounted flush with the exterior wall surface, and a drain should be provided.
- Rooftop mechanical systems should be lowered below sight lines from the street or screened and painted a color that blends with the building.
- Mechanical systems should not be installed in a way which covers up or obscures interior or exterior details of features.

Lighting

Storefronts do not need separate lighting. At night, display windows should be lit from within to make the merchandise display a form of advertising, to add interest to the sidewalk and to provide security and visibility for the store.

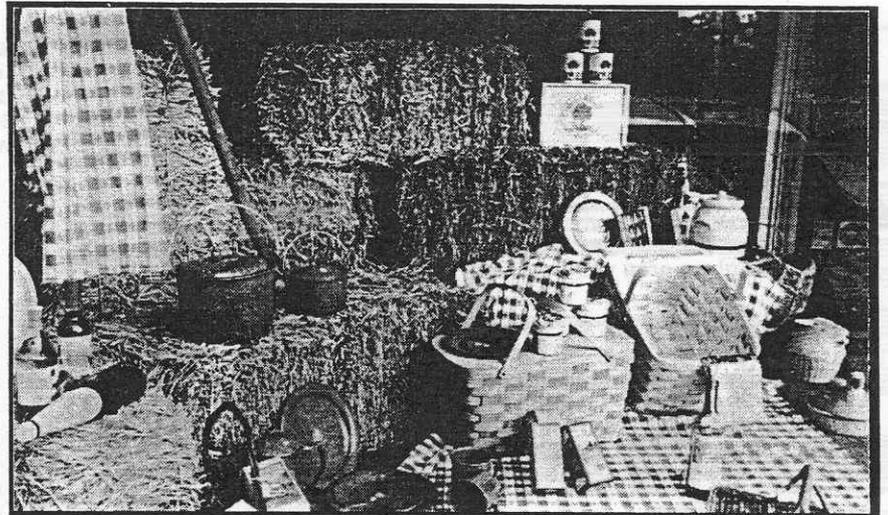
- Facade lighting should be restricted to the building sign, the light that comes from street fixtures and internal display and window lighting.
- Light fixtures should be securely fastened to the building and braced with guy wires and brackets.
- Light fixtures and conduit should be painted to blend with the facade colors.



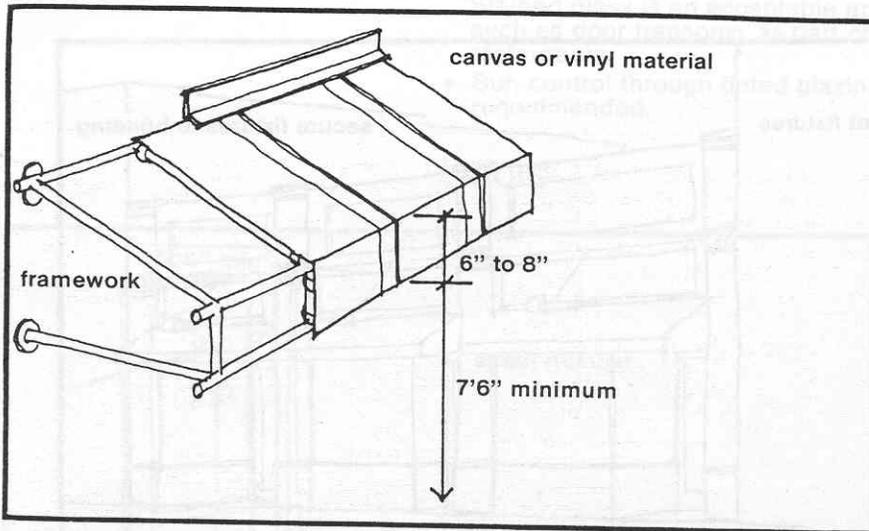
Window Displays

Window displays are an important element of the overall appearance of a store front, as well as being a form of advertisement. An interesting display of merchandise arranged to be seen by passing pedestrians provides an open and attractive view to the rest of the store.

- Window displays can be organized by using large items of merchandise or through a system of shelves for smaller items.
- Drapes or curtains are inappropriate for commercial use and shutters and blinds are more businesslike.
- Parking information, acceptable credit cards and other information should be organized in an area near the door.
- Special sale announcements and posters announcing community events should be arranged neatly in one area and should be removed when no longer needed.



Awnings & Canopies

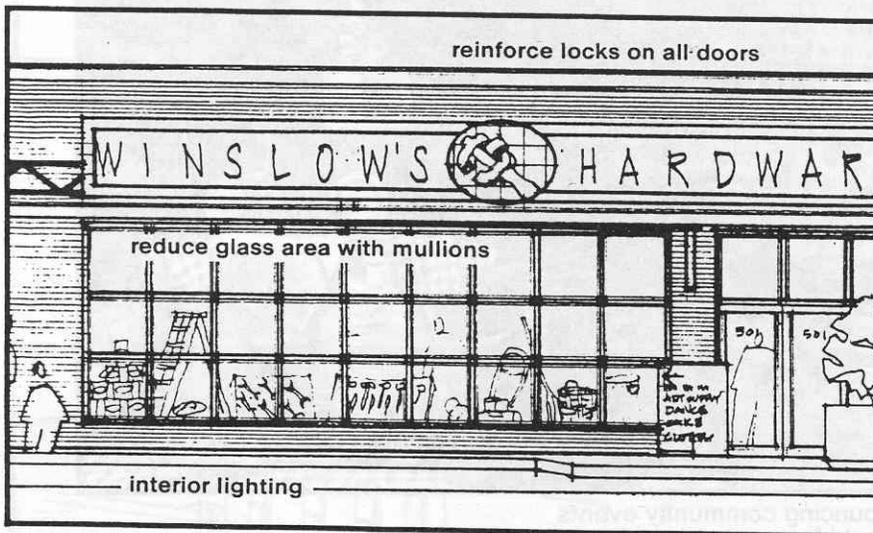


- Permanent canopies should be constructed in materials and colors that blend with the building facade.

Awnings and canopies are traditional methods to give protection from the weather and to protect merchandise from the sun. In addition, they provide color and a three-dimensional quality to a storefront. Printed with the name and street number of the store, and properly designed and maintained, they can add to the character of Eastern Boulevard and Essex.

- Heavy canvas and vinyl material should be used for all awnings. Aluminum and plastic are **not** recommended.
- Awnings can either be retractable or built on permanent pipe frameworks.
- Awnings and canopies must provide a minimum clearance of 7'6" above the sidewalk.

Security



- Check windows and door frames for looseness or rotting.
- Consider installing an alarm system.
- If security grilles are installed they should be incorporated into the store design and not simply attached to the surface. Roll down grills are preferred because they allow store displays and the store interior to be seen from the street. Solid type screen should be painted to improve the appearance when in use.
- On storefront windows, permanently attached grilles, wire mesh screens, or removable screens or grilles are **not** recommended.

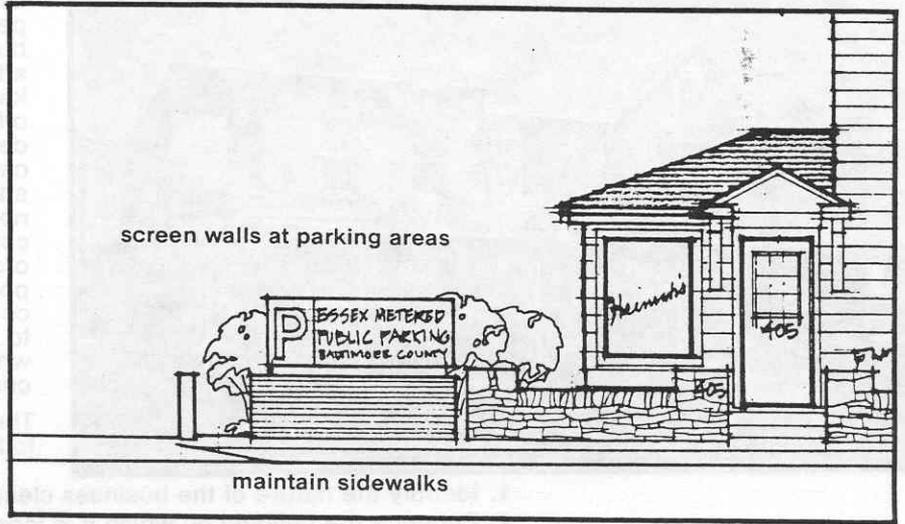
Security is a major concern of Essex merchants and property owners. Vandalism and theft are the primary security problems facing store owners.

- Large glass areas can be reduced with intersecting mullions. This provides for easier and less costly glass replacement, as well as giving more strength to the window.
- Lighting for store windows will provide visibility for the interior.
- Secure all doors with keyed deadbolts and other effective locking devices. Padlocks should be solidly mounted and never left open.
- Reinforce rear and side doors with cross bars, and install gratings or bars on rear and side windows as well as roof openings, skylights and basement hatches.

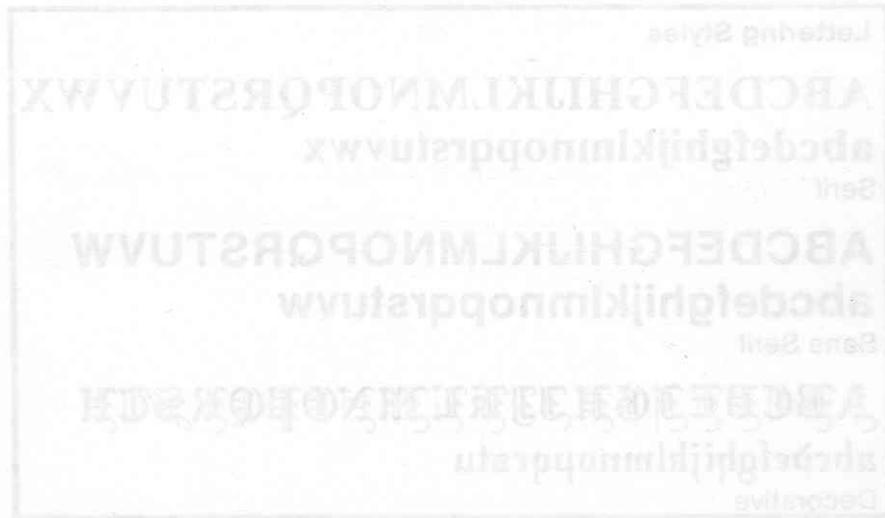
Landscaping

Individual, private site details such as planting, paving, curbing, fencing, etc., can contribute significantly to the quality of the district and the neighborhood. Planting can provide shade and privacy while adding color and texture to the street.

- Walls and fences can visually screen large, paved off-street parking areas. Exposed concrete block, chainlink, and unfinished board or split-rail fences should be avoided or concealed by plantings.
- When sidewalks are wide (as they are in Essex) plant beds or boxes can be installed.
- Residential conversions are appropriate locations, due to their scale, for window boxes.
- Sidewalks and walkways should be maintained in good condition and patched when damaged. (This enables the property owner to avoid insurance claims as well as improves the quality of the street and neighborhood.)



Sign Design



The role of the sign is to identify a business and to describe the goods and services being offered. Secondary roles for signs are the enhancement of building, providing an image for the business, and contributing to the visual character of the neighborhood. To achieve these goals, a sign should address the factors of simplicity, composition, proportion, size and color.

- Signs should be simple. Too much information gives a cluttered image that becomes illegible, especially from a moving car.
- Signs should be sized for both automobile and pedestrian viewing. The automobile sign should allow for quick understanding and identifying of a business, while signs for pedestrians can contain more detailed information.

- All signs should be compatible with the architecture and design of the building and neighboring buildings when feasible.
- Colors for signs should be limited to two or three for legibility.

SIGNS



A storefront sign is the single most important part of a storefront – it is a permanent advertisement of the business. The function of a sign is to attract customers and to let them know the goods or services being offered at the store, in addition the design of the sign expresses the character of the store and the attitude of the storeowner. Signs are not an unimportant detail, in a commercial area they can make order or chaos – unattractive or poorly maintained signs make a confusing facade which contributes to an unattractive shopping area which can turn away paying customers.

The elements of a good sign are as follows:

1. Identify the nature of the business clearly and attractively.
2. Enhance the building on which it is located.
3. Contribute to the appearance of the shopping area.

The simpler the sign, the better – too much information can be confusing. In Essex, it is important to orient the building signage in two ways. First, for the passing automobile – the message needs to be large enough to be seen and understood, and the message needs to be simple – name, type of store, etc.; a flat sign attached to the building is most appropriate for automobile audiences. The second way is to orient the sign for pedestrians – once people have parked their cars, they need to orient themselves and locate a particular store. At this level, information can be more detailed and specific. Projecting signs and window lettering are appropriate.

Sign Design

Lettering Styles

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x

Serif

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w

Sans Serif

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u

Decorative

The role of the sign is to identify a business, and to describe the products and services being offered. Secondary roles for signs are the enhancement of buildings, providing an image for the business, and contributing to the visual character of the neighborhood. To achieve these goals, a sign should address the factors of simplicity, comprehension, size and color.

- Signs should be simple. Too much information gives a cluttered image that becomes illegible, especially from a moving car.
- Signs should be sized for both automobile and pedestrian traffic. The automobile sign should allow for quick understanding and identifying of a business, while signs for pedestrians can contain more detailed information.

- All signs should be compatible with the architecture and design of the building, and neighboring buildings when feasible.
- Colors for signs should be limited to two or three for legibility.

- Lettering style should reflect the type of business activity, with legibility being the most important requirement. Basic, classic lettering styles are usually best. Script is difficult to read for large words and messages and should be used cautiously – italics give a similar effect. Decorative faces can be used for effect and image, but should be avoided for large messages. Major lettering in a sign should be between $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the sign height.
- Symbols appropriate for the business are encouraged, particularly for projecting and window signs.
- All signs must be properly maintained after installation, including repairs, repainting and cleaning.

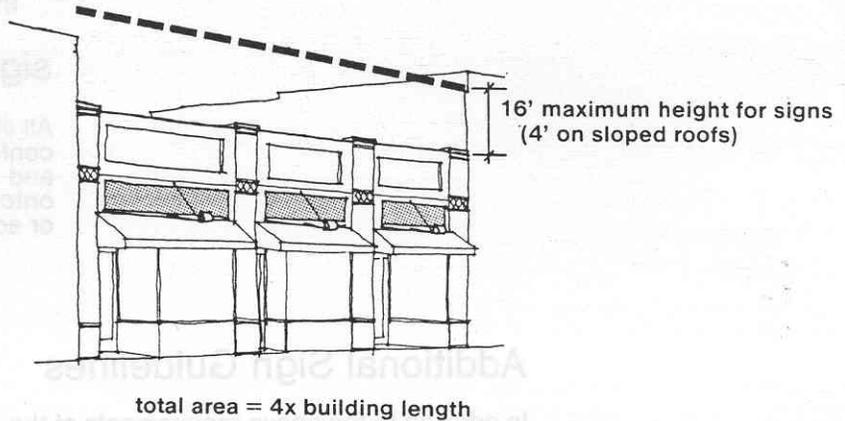
Sign Requirements

The following sign requirements are based on the Baltimore County sign code for business zones. These requirements of the Baltimore County sign code are the law and are the minimum guidelines that must be followed.

flat signs

(Signs which are attached to, or painted on, a building wall.)

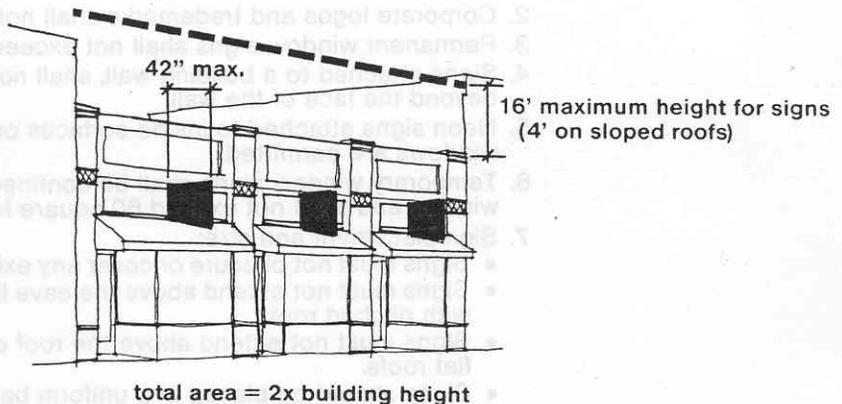
1. The total area of all signs attached to a street facade wall shall not be more than four square feet for every foot of the length of the wall to which they are attached.
2. The total area of signs attached to other walls shall not exceed the area permitted for the front wall.
3. Any sign attached to the building shall not extend more than 16 feet above any part of a flat roof or parapet wall, or four feet above the eave line of a sloped roof.

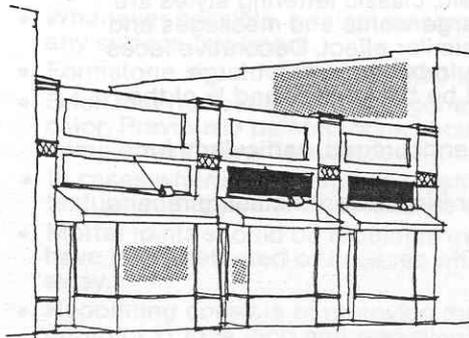


projecting signs

(Signs which are hung on brackets or other supports at a right angle to the building wall.)

1. The total area of projecting signs shall not be more than two square feet for every foot of height of the wall to which it is attached.
2. Projecting signs shall not extend more than 42" beyond the face of the building wall.
3. Projecting signs shall not be higher than 16' above a flat roof or parapet wall, or four feet above the eave line of a sloped roof.





other signs

Free-standing signs:

1. No free standing sign shall be more than 25' above the level of the street.
2. No sign shall be allowed in a public right of way.
3. All signs shall allow adequate sight lines for driveways and intersections.

Other signs:

1. Businesses are allowed no more than three other signs and their total area shall not exceed 100 square feet.
2. Temporary signs such as seasonal streamers, banners, sale signs, etc., may be displayed continuously for 30 days and not more than 60 days in a year.

sign lighting

All illumination of a sign must be confined to the surface of the sign and shall avoid glare and reflection onto a highway, oncoming vehicles or adjoining residential property.

Additional Sign Guidelines

In addition to the above requirements of the Baltimore County sign code, the following guidelines have been developed for the Essex commercial area to foster more attractive development and renovation. In some cases these are stricter than the requirements of the sign code.

1. Information contained on a sign is limited to the following: Street number; name of business; kind and type of business, service or facility; hours; trademarks; and a short slogan.
2. Corporate logos and trademarks shall not exceed 20% of the sign area.
3. Permanent window signs shall not exceed 25% of the glass area.
4. Signs attached to a building wall, shall not extend more than 12 inches beyond the face of the wall.
5. Neon signs attached to inside surfaces or suspended on the inside of windows are permitted.
6. Temporary window signs shall be confined to the lower one-third of the window and shall not exceed 60 square feet in area.
7. Sign placement and size:
 - Signs must not obscure or cover any existing detail or building element.
 - Signs must not extend above the eave line or roof trim line on buildings with pitched roofs.
 - Signs must not extend above the roof or parapet line of buildings with flat roofs.
 - Signs should be placed in a uniform band on buildings or blocks of stores with two or more individual storefronts.
8. Lighting:
 - No flashing or blinking lights are permitted.
 - Lighting should be indirect to illuminate the sign and to draw attention to any surrounding building detail.

COLOR

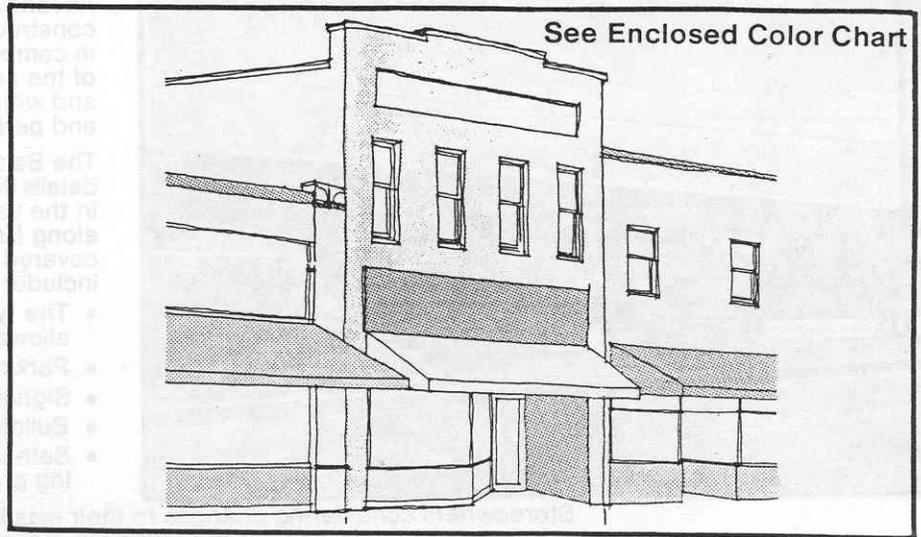
The choice of color for facades and signs is the most important, and difficult, decision to be made by a property owner or merchant. The coloring of a building will have a greater impact than that of detailing or storefront design; it is after a building's color has made an impact and impression that the rest of the design is considered.

Choosing colors is an emotional, personal and sometimes even a controversial decision, but the choice of color has an effect on the overall character of the streetscape. A color scheme should be neighborly as well as aesthetically effective on the individual building and sign.

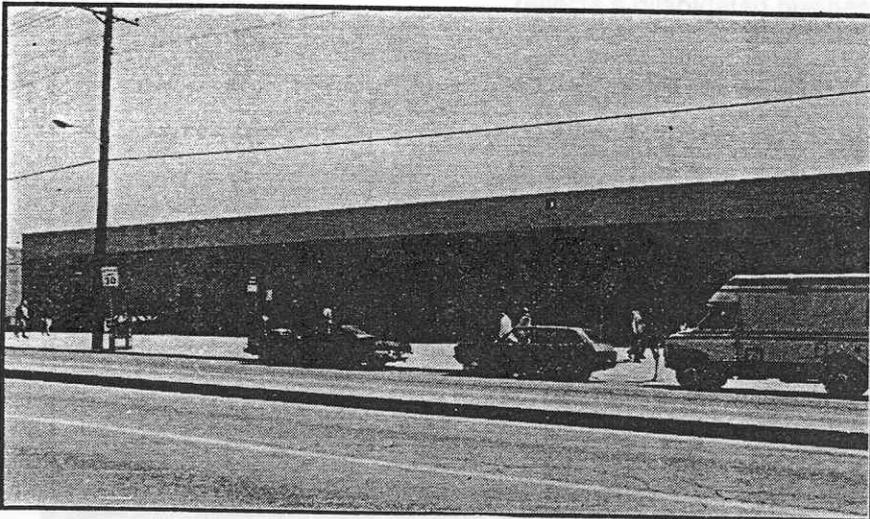
Advice and help in sign design and color can come from local designers, and sign painters. Often they are a resource for advice that can be helpful for the overall facade as well as the sign.

Some color recommendations are:

- Consider the overall color scheme for the entire building. Coordinate between storefront, sign and building.
- The natural color of the building wall will be the largest and dominant expanse of color and can be used as a unifying background.
- Limit the number of colors used on a building. There should be one base color and one or two trim colors. Additional colors can be used for accent. As the number of colors increases, coordination and legibility suffer.
- Natural and muted colors such as warm grey, blue grey, beige, terra-cotta, ochre, cream and tan are colors that relate well to our climate. Pastel and pale colors should be avoided.
- Acceptable color choices for window sash on masonry buildings are dark brown, dark grey and black. For frame buildings the color of the sash and frame should match the trim or be white. Shutters should be a dark color.
- Frames around windows and doors, cornices, lintels, and sills should be similar in color to the surrounding wall surface, or should be painted a contrasting but compatible color.
- Wooden doors should be painted black, dark red, brown, green or ochre.
- New aluminum storefront systems should be of a darker finish for facade renovations. "Silver" finish should only be used for replacement or repair of existing storefronts.
- High gloss paint shows imperfections; matte finishes collect dirt, grime and dust and are difficult to maintain. Semi-gloss finishes are recommended.



CODES AND PERMITS



All renovation, rehabilitation and new construction work in Essex must be in compliance with the requirements of the zoning code, building code and with the appropriate licenses and permits.

The Baltimore County Zoning Code details the requirements of businesses in the various commercial zones along Eastern Boulevard. Items covered by the Zoning ordinance include:

- The type of businesses and uses allowed
- Parking requirements
- Signage requirements
- Building height
- Setback requirements from adjoining properties and streets.

Storeowners considering changes to their existing business or new construction should contact the Baltimore County Zoning Department in Towson to find out the requirements for their particular location. The phone number for zoning information is 494-3391.

Any construction work, whether it is for a new building, a new sign, or for renovations to an existing building, must be completed in accordance with the building code for Baltimore County. To insure this, it is required that a building permit be obtained for all work from the Department of Licenses and Permits. Permits are divided into the following types:

- Building permit – for all construction work including interior and exterior renovations, additions and new construction.
- Electrical permit – for any work involving electricity, including re-wiring, increasing the service to a building, new lighting or additions to the existing electrical system.
- Plumbing permit – for all plumbing work, including bathrooms, gas lines and connections, sewer hook-ups, etc.

(A separate permit is required for electrical and plumbing work, even if it is part of a larger project.)

In addition to the normal requirements of the building code, Essex is in a designated fire district which places additional limitations on construction work. Requirements of the fire district include: providing adequate fire exits from a building, limitations on the types of materials that can be used in construction work, and the kind of physical (fire) separation required from adjoining properties.

For most small projects, a permit can be obtained based on a written description of the work to be done and the materials to be used. Larger projects will require drawings and specifications. Questions concerning building permits and filing permits and licenses procedures and requirements can be answered by the branch office in the Multi-Government Service Center of 439 Eastern Boulevard. The Department of Permits & Licenses phone number is 494-3953.

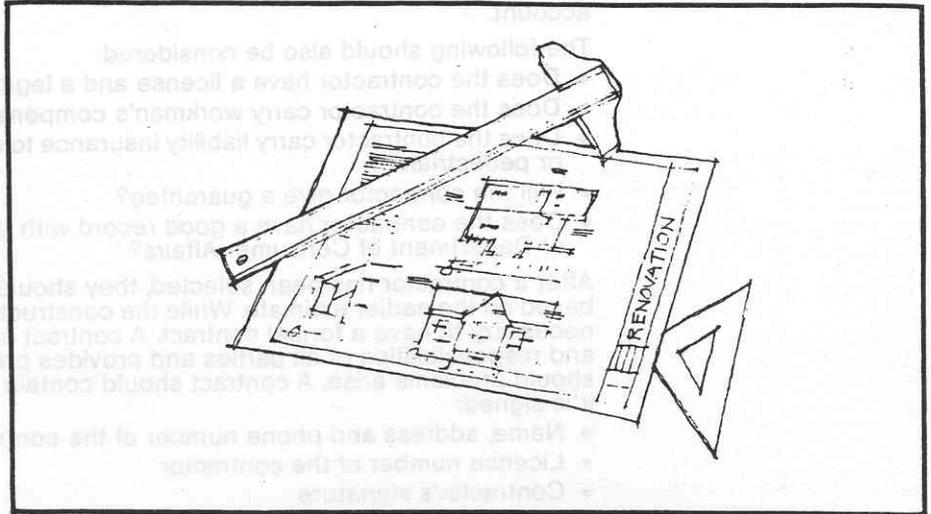
If an architect or contractor is involved in a rehabilitation project, they can point out the requirements of the building codes; in most cases, it should be the responsibility of the contractor to obtain the required permits and inspections.

THE ARCHITECT

Including an architect in the storefront renovation project can increase the likelihood that it will contain the basic requirements of a storeowner. Simply put, an architect can prepare a set of drawings and specifications detailing the requirements of all phases of construction. An architect can be hired for full or partial services, including:

- Analyzing the problem.
- Developing sketches of alternative solutions
- Reviewing alternative materials, methods and costs.
- Preparing drawings and specifications for bidding
- Reviewing and selecting a contractor.
- Supervising construction

An architect's fee can be figured on an hourly or lump sum basis depending on the scope of work involved. It is a good idea to ask several architects for proposals and lists of references and completed projects. To make an accurate comparison, each architect should be given the same information and project requirements.



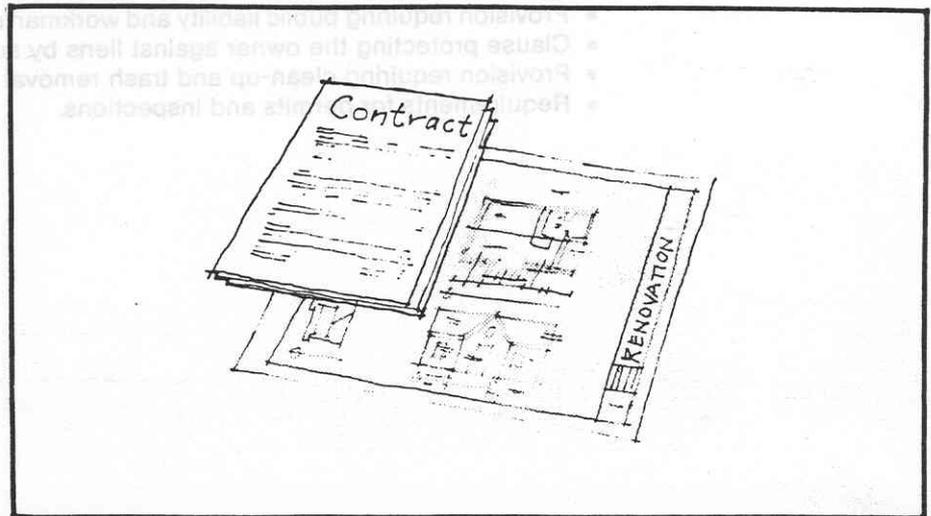
THE GENERAL CONTRACTOR

One facade and sign improvements can be easily accomplished by the merchant or storeowner. However, if extensive or complicated work is planned, it is appropriate to hire a contractor who will complete and supervise the project. A general contractor will give a price for completing the project as designed and will be responsible for obtaining permits, approvals and seeing that the work is completed in compliance with the building codes.

To insure accurate and competitive bids, it is important to have a detailed description, or drawings, of the proposed work. This will insure that there are no extra bills for work that the contractor was unaware of or had not considered in the scope of work.

In selecting a contractor, it is important to review past performance and experience. Bids should be requested from at least three contractors, and all three should be given a chance to visit the building site, and all should be given the same scope of service or set of drawings. In addition, the contractors should answer the following questions:

- When can work begin?
- What permits will be necessary?
- How long will it take?
- What is the total cost?
- What guarantees and warranties are given?
- What will be the payment schedule?



When the contractors have submitted bids, one can be selected for the work. This kind of competitive bidding will save some money, but the lowest price is not always the best-track record and experience should be taken into account.

The following should also be considered:

- Does the contractor have a license and a legitimate business address?
- Does the contractor carry workman's compensation for employees?
- Does the contractor carry liability insurance to cover injuries to customers or pedestrians?
- Will the contractor give a guarantee?
- Does the contractor have a good record with the Better Business Bureau or Department of Consumer Affairs?

After a contractor has been selected, they should submit a written contract based on the earlier estimate. While the construction work may be small, it is necessary to have a formal contract. A contract spells out the requirements and responsibilities of all parties and provides protection and proof should problems arise. A contract should contain the following before it is signed:

- Name, address and phone number of the contractor
- License number of the contractor
- Contractor's signature
- Name, address and phone number of the merchant
- Name and address of the work
- Date of the contract
- Starting and completion date of the work
- Detailed statement of the work to be completed and the materials to be used.
- Total price of the work and a payment schedule
- Provision requiring written approval of any changes
- Guarantees and warranties in clear terms
- Provision requiring public liability and workman's compensation insurance
- Clause protecting the owner against liens by sub-contractors
- Provision requiring clean-up and trash removal
- Requirements for permits and inspections.

This publication was prepared with funding from a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant to Baltimore County.

Baltimore County
Economic Development
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Essex Development
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- Materials already employed in the block should be used. Common materials are brick, masonry, wood, painted steel and glass.
- Signs should be mounted to establish the rhythm of the block to other signs on the block, or within the natural eye line formed by entries and corners of a building.
- Existing decorative elements should be maintained during renovation.

Baltimore County,
Maryland
Donald P. Hutchinson,
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