



# Open for Business!

A Guide to Storefront Design  
in New Bedford



City of New Bedford



New Bedford Economic Development Council  
Uniting New Bedford's economic strengths





## Introduction

All of us want the front entrance of our home to be welcoming and attractive for guests and family. New Bedford's downtown, Acushnet Avenue corridor and south end commercial districts often serve as gateways to our city, creating the first impression for those visiting New Bedford.

This publication is intended to offer guidance and useful ideas to help make your business and property more attractive to residents, visitors, and customers. When customers feel welcomed and comfortable they will stay longer and spend more.

Included in this publication are many local examples of good design practices for storefronts, window displays, signs and awnings.

Available grant and lending programs, as well as the zoning rules and design regulations that may be pertinent to the downtown and commercial districts are also listed.

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- **Signs**
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For questions or assistance, please contact the Office of City Planning at 508-979-1488.





### Why is my front entrance important?

- Attractive and clean commercial districts protect property values
- Historic communities are tourist draws
- Local shopping is convenient
- Our commercial districts are ideal for new and independent businesses
- The commercial districts are a direct reflection of our community image
- The commercial districts represent public/private investments
- Commercial districts often prevent sprawl
- Downtown is the historic core of our community

## Storefronts and Façades

The visual appeal of a storefront may often be accomplished with small improvements and the removal of inappropriate elements.

Studies show that a customer takes just four seconds to decide whether or not to enter your store. This decision is based on the aesthetics and cleanliness of the exterior of your storefront.

Make a good first impression and potential customers will not pass you by.

## ENCOURAGED

- Keeping your sidewalk swept and your storefront windows clean
- Ensuring your storefront complements the architecture of the building
- Repairing, restoring, replacing important storefront features
- Repainting and repairing brick, wood or other façade materials
- Removing old paint and graffiti from masonry façades using appropriate methods

## STRONGLY DISCOURAGED

- Installation of historically inaccurate or incompatible façade or material treatments such as imitation brick or stone
- Removing existing materials that contribute to the historical architecture of the building
- Painting unpainted masonry especially in historic district and/or the National Park
- Using restoration materials that do not match the existing materials
- Reducing the size of pedestrian travel paths on sidewalks
- Covering, altering or damaging architectural elements of the façade with signs, awnings or other elements
- Sandblasting or using harsh chemicals to clean brick or other masonry



### A good sign means customers

- Make sure your sign is an appropriate size for its location
- Develop a theme that fits in with your other marketing
- Keep it short and simple
- Consider providing appropriate lighting so it may be read at night

## Signs

Well-designed and well-placed signage is critical to successful communication for businesses, especially in a walkable commercial district such as the downtown or Acushnet Avenue.

Your sign needs to get your message across to potential customers. Decide which types of signage work best for you, i.e. wall mounted sign, banner, or flags. Create a uniform theme to use upon your sign and all other marketing items.

## ENCOURAGED

- Signs should be integrated into the particular architectural character of the building and neighborhood
- Signs should be of equal quality of materials, design, and workmanship of surrounding architecture and should be linked to particular building colors and/or materials
- Signage lighting should be subtle, pedestrian oriented, and not in competition with adjacent illuminated signs

## STRONGLY DISCOURAGED

- Neon signs are prohibited in the Historic District and are strongly discouraged in the downtown and commercial districts
- Covering doorways and windows with signs
- Signage that does not match/complement existing architecture
- Obstructing views into the store
- Signs that are too big for the building or the location



### A Great First Impression

- Sweep away debris and litter from the sidewalk in front of your store
- Install flower boxes and planters
- Add a new welcome flag or sign
- Refresh your window displays periodically
- Decorate for the season
- Dust and organize your merchandise
- Ensure your lighting works properly
- Make sure your sign is fresh and clean
- Give your front door and trim a fresh coat of paint

## Door/Window Displays

Your storefront door and windows are your greatest marketing opportunity. They allow those passing by to see your merchandise or service and attract potential customers.

The more windows that people may see through the better. Generally, more visibility into the store is more inviting and potential customers will feel more secure.



## ENCOURAGED

- Restoring or replacing doors with appropriate commercial doors
- Installing storefront doors made of glass to allow for increased visibility
- Adding new doors to meet disabled accessibility laws
- Restoring or increasing the percentage of transparent glass on a storefront
- Replacing dark tinted or textured glass with clear glass
- Matching new windows to originals
- Preserving historic features such as frames, special glazing, and decorative moldings
- Using upper floor windows as retail display areas

## STRONGLY DISCOURAGED

- Adding new doors that are not required by code that distract from the storefront image
- Sealing or closing off existing entrances or windows with any material
- Blocking doors with merchandise
- Installing doors that swing directly onto the sidewalk
- Covering or replacing glass door panels with any opaque substance that lowers visibility



### Dressing up your storefront

- Colorful, well-designed awnings attract customer attention
- Appropriate lettering on your awning can function as signage
- Awnings protect window displays from fading due to sunlight
- Window shopping is more enjoyable when shoppers are protected from the weather

## Awnings

Awnings are canopies made of canvas, metal and other materials and are used to shelter people, merchandise and display windows.

Awnings should fit into the storefront's overall architecture and appearance. Awnings may be used to enhance a storefront by adding color, and interest. Awnings provide needed shade and cover from an unexpected shower.

### ENCOURAGED

- Installing new canvas awnings that fit in with existing windows and doors
- Installing retractable or fixed type awnings
- Illuminating storefronts from beneath the awning
- Using a consistent size, profile and location for awnings on a single building. Fonts may differ from store to store
- Designing creative awning shapes that are complementary to the overall building

### STRONGLY DISCOURAGED

- Backlighting or internally lighting plastic awnings
- Applying large signage to the slope portion of the awning
- Concealing architectural details including transoms, cornices, etc.
- Using material other than canvas or metal



## Look Through Your Customer's Eyes

### SIDEWALK

Is it clear from debris, litter and snow?

Is it easy for your customer to access your business?

Do you have an attractive mini-streetscape or a sea of weeds, leaves, and cigarette butts?

### WINDOWS

Can you see directly into the store from the sidewalk?

Is the window glass clean?

Are there unnecessary, out of date, faded or hand-lettered posters or signs?

Is it well lit with state of the art halogen bulbs?

Lighting a window display is the least expensive advertising you can do.

### FRONT DOOR & FAÇADE

Does your door open easily?

Is it clean and well painted?

Are plantings and window boxes kept up and changed seasonally?

Are flags fresh and clean?

Is your sign in good condition?

Are your store hours posted?



## Grant & Lending Programs

The City's Office of Housing and Community Development offers loans and grant programs for commercial improvements. The New Bedford Economic Development Council also offers lending products to assist your business needs. These programs include:

- Storefront Reimbursement Program – provide financial assistance for necessary rehabilitation/restoration of commercial storefronts located within eligible census tracts.  
<http://www.newbedford-ma.gov/cd/pdfs/storefront%20appl%20pkg.pdf>
- Housing and Commercial Rehabilitation Program – a commercial-based program to assist business owners with their properties, including rehabilitation and restoration for properties located within eligible census tracts. [http://www.newbedford-ma.gov/cd/pdfs/Resid.Commerc %20Rehab%20Brochure.pdf](http://www.newbedford-ma.gov/cd/pdfs/Resid.Commerc%20Rehab%20Brochure.pdf)
- NBEDC Mirco-Enterprise Loan Program – Rehabilitation and storefront improvements are eligible under this program. Other NBEDC lending programs are available for gap financing and other project expenses.

## Zoning Rules & Regulations

The following are zoning rules and regulations that may apply to your signage, awnings, displays, etc. Please review all regulations and contact appropriate municipal departments to obtain all necessary approvals prior to enhancing your storefront.

### City Code of Ordinances

[http://www.newbedford-ma.gov/solicitors/Code\\_of\\_Ordinances.pdf](http://www.newbedford-ma.gov/solicitors/Code_of_Ordinances.pdf)

- Chapter 6 Article IV Signs, Awnings, Marquees and Fire Escapes in or over the Street – Any sign, billboard, marquee that hangs over a sidewalk requires a permit from the City.
- Chapter 6 Article V Sign Code for the Central Business District – Regulates and restricts all signs within the CBD, including the downtown historic district.
- Chapter 9 Comprehensive Zoning – This article was enacted to promote the general welfare of the City of New Bedford and regulates signage throughout the city.
- Chapter 22 Article IV Relative to Permits for Street and Sidewalk Projections - Sidewalk Café License – conditions and standards for a license to operate an outdoor café on a City public right-of-way.

Historic District Rules & Regulations – Rules pertaining to signs in the district.

<http://www.newbedford-ma.gov/NRHistoric/NBHC/page27.pdf>

- Article XI Sec. 2-150 to 156 New Bedford Historical Commission; Historic Districts

### Other Useful Guides

- City's Graffiti Removal Guide  
<http://www.newbedford-ma.gov/Planning/Brochureview.pdf>

*Cite: A Guide to Storefront Design in the District of Columbia*

## Contact Information

Planning Department

<http://www.newbedford-ma.gov/Planning/planning.html>

508.979.1488

Inspectional Services

<http://www.newbedford-ma.gov/inspectionalservices/inspserv.html>

508.979.1450

Historic Commission

<http://www.newbedford-ma.gov/NRHistoric/NBHC/AboutUs.html>

508.996.4095

New Bedford Economic Development Council

<http://www.nbedc.org/>

508.991.3122

Housing and Community Development

<http://www.newbedford-ma.gov/cd/welcome.html>

508.979.1581





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