

# COMMERCIAL CITYWIDE DESIGN GUIDELINES

Pedestrian-Oriented/Commercial & Mixed-Use Projects  
Objective 2: Employ High Quality Architecture to Define the Character of Commercial Districts



Los Angeles  
Department  
of City Planning

## OBJECTIVE 2:

Employ High Quality Architecture to Define the Character of Commercial Districts

### Pedestrian Scale

- 1 Maintain a human scale rather than a monolithic or monumental scale. High-rise buildings in particular should take care to address pedestrian scale at the **ground floor**.
- 2 At entrances and windows, include overhead architectural features such as awnings, canopies, **trellises**, or **cornice treatments** that provide shade and reduce daytime heat gain, especially on south-facing facades.
- 3 Differentiate the ground floor from upper floors. Changes in massing and architectural relief add visual interest and help to diminish the perceived height of buildings.

#### RECOMMENDED



✓ Ground floor retail provides pedestrian scale

✓ Differentiate ground floors from upper floors through architectural features

#### NOT RECOMMENDED



⚠ Ground floor height dwarfs pedestrian scale

⚠ Poorly defined hierarchy of building uses

## Objective 2: Employ High-Quality Architecture to Define the Character of Commercial Districts

### Building Façade and Form

- 1 Vary and articulate the building façade to add scale and avoid large monotonous walls.
- 2 Architectural elements such as entries, **porticoes**, **cornices**, and awnings should be compatible in scale with the building massing and should not be exaggerated or made to appear as a caricature of an historic architectural style.
- 3 Layer building architectural features to emphasize certain features of the building such as entries, corners, and the organization of retail or office spaces.
- 4 Incorporate and alternate different textures, colors, materials, and distinctive architectural treatments that add visual interest while avoiding dull and repetitive façades.

#### RECOMMENDED

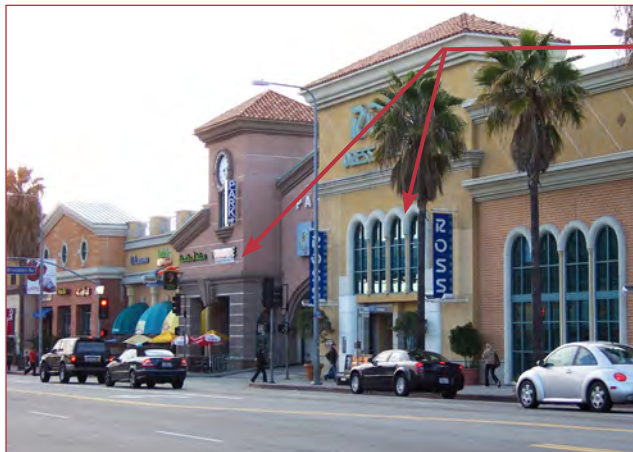


- ✓ Strong corner treatment establishes visual prominence



- ✓ Building facade can be articulated by breaking up a single wall into multiple wall planes

#### NOT RECOMMENDED



Exaggerated features do not connote a unified architectural style



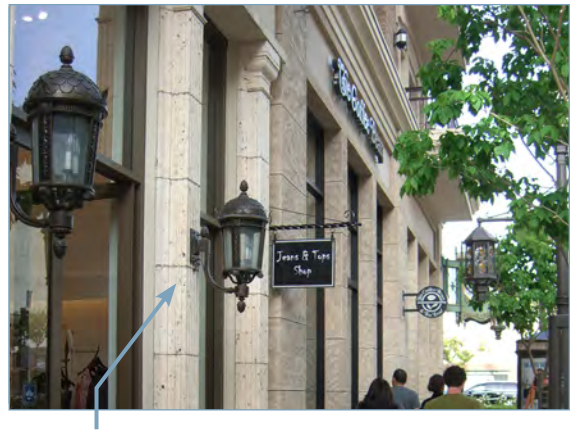
### Building Façade & Form (cont.)

- 5 Incorporate windows and doors with well designed trims and details as character-defining features to reflect an architectural style or theme consistent with other façade elements.
- 6 Treat all façades of the building with an equal level of detail, articulation, and architectural rigor.
- 7 Integrate varied roof lines through the use of sloping roofs, modulated building heights, **stepbacks**, or innovative architectural solutions.
- 8 Reinforce existing facade rhythm along the street where it exists by using architectural elements such as trim, material changes, paved walkways, and other design treatments consistent with surrounding buildings.

### RECOMMENDED



✓ Architectural elements used to define characteristic features of the building and existing streetscape



✓ Strong facade rhythm reinforced by defining architectural features of the building

### NOT RECOMMENDED



⚠ Façade rhythm along street not reinforced



**Objective 2:** Employ High-Quality Architecture to Define the Character of Commercial Districts

- 9 In **mixed-use projects**, orient windows in street-facing units toward public streets, rather than inward, to contribute to neighborhood safety and provide design interest.
- 10 In mixed-use buildings, ensure that balconies are sized and located to maximize their intended use for open space. Avoid "tacked on" balconies with limited purpose or function.

**RECOMMENDED**



✓  
Functional balconies  
with street-oriented  
doors and windows

## Building Materials

- 1 Approach character-defining details in a manner that is true to a style of architecture or common theme.
- 2 Apply trim, metal- and woodwork, lighting, and other details in a harmonious manner, consistent with the proportions and scale of the building(s).
- 3 Select building materials, such as architectural details and finishes that convey a sense of permanence. Quality materials should be used to withstand the test of time regardless of architectural style.
- 4 Apply changes in material purposefully and in a manner corresponding to variations in building mass.

### RECOMMENDED



Cohesive style and appropriate building materials convey a sense of permanence



Application of details is to scale and remains true to the architectural style of the building

### NOT RECOMMENDED



Lack of architectural style and sense of permanence in building design and materials

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- 5 Use white or reflective paint on rooftops and light paving materials to reflect heat away from buildings and reduce the need for mechanical cooling.
- 6 Use exterior surface materials that will reduce the incidence and appearance of graffiti.
- 7 Fences should incorporate changes in materials, texture, and/or landscaping to avoid solid, uninterrupted walls. Avoid materials such as chain link, wrought iron spears, and cyclone.


**RECOMMENDED**



Climbing vegetation used to create texture and visual interest while discouraging vandalism

**NOT RECOMMENDED**



 Materials such as wrought iron spears and cyclone should be avoided



 Avoid large blank walls which are more susceptible to graffiti



### Building Materials *(cont.)*

- Utilize landscaping to add texture and visual interest at the street level. Where limited space is available between the building and the public right-of-way, incorporate climbing vegetation as a screening method.

#### RECOMMENDED



Vegetation and pop out columns provide visual interest on an otherwise solid wall

#### NOT RECOMMENDED



Bulky landscaping can create an unnecessary barrier between pedestrians and the building

**Objective 2:** Employ High-Quality Architecture to Define the Character of Commercial Districts

**Storefront Character**

- 1 In multi-tenant buildings, ensure that storefronts convey an individual expression of each tenant's identity while adhering to a common architectural theme and rhythm.
- 2 Design storefronts with a focus on window design to create a visual connection between the interior and exterior.
- 3 Incorporate traditional storefront elements in new and contemporary commercial buildings by including a solid base for storefront windows. Use high quality durable materials such as smooth stucco or concrete, ceramic tile, or stone for the window base.
- 4 Provide shelter from the sun and rain for pedestrians along the public right-of-way where the buildings meet the street. Extend overhead cover across driveways or provide architecturally integrated awnings, arcades, and canopies.

**RECOMMENDED**



✓ Storefront design is repeated for consistency in façade rhythm but different colors have been applied to each storefront to distinguish between individual businesses

**NOT RECOMMENDED**



### Storefront Character (cont.)

- 5 Align awnings with others on the block, particularly the bottom edge of the awning. Coordinate the awning color with the color scheme of the entire building front.
- 6 Ensure that store entrances are recessed, not flush, with the edge of the building façade to articulate the storefront and provide shelter for persons entering and exiting.

#### RECOMMENDED

✓  
Awning provides shelter for patrons and a sense of rhythm along the street

✓  
Traditional storefront elements such as large display windows and landscaping create an inviting space for pedestrians



✓ Use of solid base at storefronts frames the view

✓ Pedestrian shelter contributes to articulated storefront character

#### NOT RECOMMENDED

! No shelter for persons accessing the building

! Store entrance flush with the wall

! Lack of traditional storefront elements makes the facade appear two-dimensional



! Metal security gate is visible behind the glass





## Special Design Considerations for Historic Properties

Ensure that any additions, alterations, or improvements to buildings designated as Historic Resources or otherwise identified as eligible Historic Resources as part of Survey LA, comply with the U.S. Department of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Guidelines for preserving, rehabilitating, and restoring historic buildings can be found online at: [http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/standguide/overview/choose\\_treat.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/standguide/overview/choose_treat.htm)

### **Repair deteriorated materials or features in place, if feasible.**

Preserve, repair, and replace, as appropriate, building elements and features that are important in defining historic character. Retain the original building continuity, rhythm, and form created by these features. Consult historic documentation and photographs of the building before commencing work.

- Original building materials and details should not be covered with stucco, vinyl siding, stone, veneers, or other materials.
- Materials, which were originally unpainted, such as masonry, should remain unpainted.
- Avoid hiding character defining features behind displays, signage, and/or building alterations and additions. Remove non-historic additions to expose and restore the original design elements.
- The materials and design of historic windows and doors should be preserved.



**Repair deteriorated materials or features in place, if feasible.**

When it is infeasible to retain materials or features, replacement should be made with in-kind materials or with substitute materials that convey the same form, design, and overall visual appearance as the original.

**Design building additions on historic buildings to be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features of an historic structure or site, while clearly reflecting the modern origin of the addition.**

- Additions should be subordinate in massing to the main structure and located toward the rear, away from the primary façade.
- Within historic districts or eligible historic districts, new infill structures should harmonize in style, scale, and massing with the surrounding historic structures.
- New window and door openings should be located on a secondary façade. The arrangement, size, and proportions of historic openings should be maintained; avoid filling in historic openings, especially on primary facades.

