

Hamlet Center Commercial Buildings: Guidelines for Site Plan Review



Jacksonville 1965 photo courtesy Jacksonville Community Association

Hamlet of Jacksonville

Introduction

The goal of the Design Guidelines is to create a useful set of design tools for the Hamlet of Jacksonville that relate to a site-specific context for the Hamlet Center Zone. The guidelines create a framework which supplements the existing Site Plan Review requirements (see Town of Ulysses § 212-19 Site Plan Review), which also apply across the entire Town of Ulysses. The guidelines are geared towards commercial development and should not be required for single family homes.

These standards and guidelines have been developed to incorporate local identity and values into the commercial development process. The primary goals are to:

- encourage development that contributes to Jacksonville's unique character; and
- supplement existing Site Plan Review criteria (Town of Ulysses § 212-19 Site Plan Review) with more specific interpretation for the Hamlet of Jacksonville.

The basic parameters of designing, building, and growing traditional walkable hamlet areas are a few simple and time-tested rules. In order to guide property owners and Town officials in designing and evaluating projects in hamlet areas, these Design Guidelines focus on the traditional parameters that lead to great places to live, work, and play. These are guidelines that in some circumstances may warrant small adjustments for a specific context or project.

Zoning

The Zoning Law (Town of Ulysses § 212) lays out very basic and uniform requirements for the allowed height, density, location, orientation, and use of individual parcels in each zone. Though existing buildings and their uses are usually grandfathered, zoning dictates the shape and organization of future development to encourage the kind of growth the community would like to see. In general, all new construction, including expansions or renovations to existing structures, must conform to the regulations outlined in that local zoning ordinance. These Design Guidelines are supplementary to that underlying zoning.

Site Plan Review

Site Plan Review allows the Planning Board to review the layout and design of the development of a single parcel of land. Site Plan Review is indispensable as a method of looking at development on a case-by-case basis to evaluate a parcel of land's idiosyncratic qualities or the proposed development's application of intent promoted in the Zoning Law and Comprehensive Plan. These guidelines should be used to inform the Site Plan Review process. Site plans should display both the existing and proposed features of a land parcel. This includes topography, vegetation, drainage, floodplains, marshes, wetlands, and waterways; open spaces, walkways, means of ingress and egress, utility services, landscaping, structures and signs, lighting and screening devices. Site plans should also show building plans and elevations and other submittals (such as a utilities plan or planting plan) to inform the Planning Board when approving a Site plan.

Key Hamlet Center Form Elements

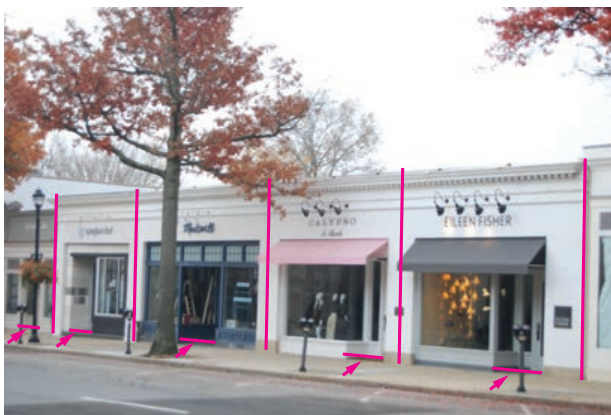
Building Fronts Meet the Sidewalk
Buildings Fill Corners
Streetwall Creates Outdoor Room



Human Scale Detail



Rhythm on the Street: Frequent Entries Facing Sidewalk
Narrow and Deep Buildings



GENERAL SITE PLAN REVIEW CHECKLIST

- Location, arrangement, size, design and general site compatibility of buildings, exterior lighting and signs based on elevation plans at an appropriate scale for all exterior facades of the proposed structure(s).
- Adequacy and arrangement of vehicular and bicycle traffic access and circulation, including intersections, road widths, pavement surfaces, dividers and traffic controls.
- Location, arrangement, and appearance of off-street parking and loading.
- Adequacy and arrangement of pedestrian traffic access and circulation, walkway structures, and bicycle storage.
- Adequacy of stormwater and drainage facilities, including their landscape elements, such as grass areas, filter strips, and bioswales.
- Adequacy of water supply and wastewater disposal facilities.
- Adequacy, type and arrangement of trees, shrubs and other landscaping constituting a visual buffer between the applicant's and adjoining lands, including the maximum retention of existing vegetation.
- Adequacy of walls or other materials with substantive mass acting as a noise buffer between the applicant's and adjoining lands.
- Adequacy of fire lanes and other emergency zones and the provision of fire hydrants where feasible.
- Location and arrangement of proposed overhead and underground utilities.
- Special attention to the adequacy and impact of structures, roadways and landscaping in areas with susceptibility to ponding, flooding and/or erosion, based on site topography showing contours at an interval appropriate for the site (typically 2' intervals).
- Preservation of open space, natural features, vegetation and trees.
- Live plant materials and maintenance schedule, including protection of existing mature vegetation, especially trees over twelve inches DBH (diameter-breast-height).
- Minimization of impervious surfaces and the use of permeable materials such as porous asphalt and structural soil.
- Plan compliance with New York Standards and Specifications for Erosion and Sediment Control

HAMLET CENTER SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS IN SITE PLAN REVIEW

Blocks / Alleys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All lots should front a street. • No block should exceed 400 feet without a mid-block alley, access easement, or pedestrian pathway. • Alleys should provide access to the rear of all lots (Alley dedication is required on interior lots where an alley cannot be included with construction.) • Curb cuts should be limited to one every 200 feet along main streets.
Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All building facades along a street frontage should include a primary entrance on the street.
Streetscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street trees should be required along both sides of all streets. • Pedestrian scale (less than 15' tall) streetlights should be required along both sides of all streets in hamlet center, spaced 60 feet on center.
Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-street parking should be created, preserved, or restored on both sides of hamlet center • Off-street parking should be prohibited on corner lots • Off-street parking should only be allowed behind or to the side of buildings, not between buildings and the sidewalk
Retail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ground floor of Hamlet main street buildings should be occupied by retail uses to the greatest extent practicable • The ground floor of Hamlet Center streets may be occupied retail uses; residential and office uses may be included as well.
Historic Preservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional character (that is, almost all development before 1950) is generally better at creating a people friendly street and public space and should be preserved as much as possible. • Historic structures and historic facade preservation and reuse should be encouraged, they should be exempted from any parking requirements, some streetscape requirements, and building envelope standards should be modified in order to preserve historic character. • Streamlined approvals for projects preserving historic structures or facades, fee reductions, and flexible use requirements can all help incentivize reuse rather than demolition

Hamlet Design

Traditional Hamlet Center design principles can be used to reinforce a sense of place, to ensure that any new development improves a community rather than detract from it, and to create and enhance places that people will care about and invest in for decades into the future. While some communities develop stringent design standards or guidelines controlling a wide breadth of stylistic and architectural elements, the most important parts of traditional Hamlet Center urban design can be implemented in a straightforward way that does not impinge on property owner's personal sense of style and expression while still supporting an attractive and functional public realm for the community.

Communities are best developed incrementally and are intended to change and grow over time. Communities often started with inexpensive and quickly-built log or wood frame buildings and over time the neighborhood and Hamlet Centers were improved with larger, more expensive and more durable buildings and the neighborhoods in walkable proximity were frequently redeveloped into more efficient housing as demand increased. During the late 1800's and early 1900's redevelopment of larger and more durable buildings was commonly the result of frequent fires that were much more common when buildings were lit and heated with gas, oil, coal, wood, and candles.

Most traditional villages and Hamlet Centers in Tompkins County were built before zoning was in place and many of the elements that are vital to creating and supporting the traditional community form were outlawed when zoning was adopted. At that time, those traditional building forms were considered dated and out of style in the early and mid-20th century. Yet the traditional design principles that created Tompkins County's population centers are experiencing a resurgence.

Traditional design principles start with defining different place types in a community. Development within each type of place should support the context of that type of place. The types of places most often found in traditional villages, hamlets and towns range on a spectrum from open space, working agricultural lands, village, hamlet neighborhoods, and hamlet centers.

For example, the design elements of a traditional Hamlet Center include buildings with front doors on or near the sidewalk or street, buildings that are generally deep and narrow, many buildings close together along each block, and minimal curb cuts or street fronting off-street parking lots.

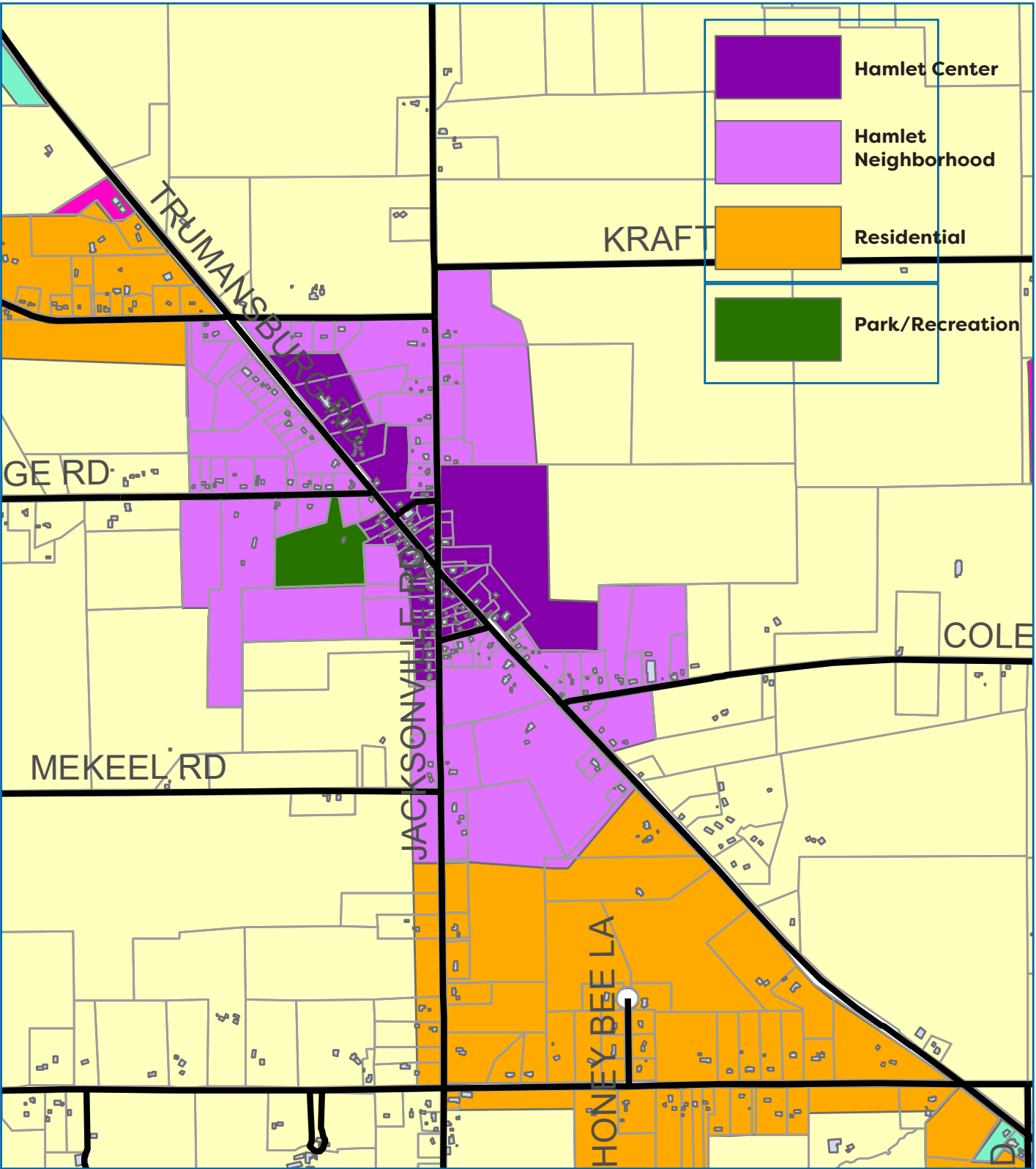
Traditional Hamlet Center buildings are generally 2-4 stories in height, creating space above ground-floor businesses for offices and apartments and creating a sense of enclosure or an "outdoor room" in the public space, the street and sidewalks, between buildings. Traditional Hamlet Center buildings generally have a large proportion of the ground floor dedicated to large windows and smaller, vertically-oriented windows on upper floors, and generally use materials that are durable enough to be easily maintained on the ground floor along the sidewalk.

Following this simple traditional pattern architects and owners can execute designs in a wide variety of styles, materials and price points while still contributing to the traditional Hamlet Center context.

Applicability

The principles and guidelines in this document apply to all proposals for new development and exterior alterations to existing buildings within the Hamlet Center Zone; see map, adjacent.

Draft Zones



Ground Floor Residential

Hamlet Main Streets require a strong core of retail/commercial interest along the sidewalk which works best when every 30'-50' there is a new interesting window display to look into. Yet in order to make historic main street building reuse financially feasible is it often useful to include some residential use on the first floor to comply with ADA requirements and increase the financial viability of the project when the market for retail/commercial space may be weaker than the residential market.

This can be achieved by placing ground floor residential units in the back of the building while maintaining a small storefront in the front of the building. In a small Hamlet, micro retail spaces (approximately 300-1000 sq ft) may be more attractive to local entrepreneurs interested in starting small local businesses due to the reduced startup costs and low upfront risks. In the limited commercial market of a small Hamlet attracting niche locally focused retail and services may be the best bet for maintaining a strong commercial core.

At the far edges of the Hamlet Center zone where there are existing medium-large homes, density increases to townhouse, apartment, or small lot homes that are exclusively residential on the ground floor can positively contribute to Main Street by adding potential customers within walking distance so long as these areas are at the edges and do not cut off the flow between existing ground floor retail buildings.

Walkability, visitability, accessibility

Streets should be as narrow as possible, with short setbacks to allow buildings to come up to sidewalks, street trees, and other pedestrian friendly features. Narrow lanes and street trees tend to slow down drivers, both reducing the severity of crashes and allowing passers-by to see what's happening in town. Narrow streets also shorten crosswalks, reduce stormwater runoff, and generally use fewer materials and land.

For a walkable center to be successful, people must feel comfortable walking around. Almost everyone, including drivers, must walk to conduct almost any kind of business. Finding a balance between walking and driving is

essential for any urban environment. Shop owners should consider parking behind their buildings, as frequent turnover of parking spots in front of stores generates higher revenues for businesses.

Sidewalk Design

- 5-foot minimum width (6-foot wide preferred); 8 to 15 feet in Hamlet Center;
- 7-foot minimum height clearance;
- Durable materials (Concrete or brick pavers preferred);
- At least 5 feet (preferably 6 feet) back from the curb to separate walkers from traffic and road spray, allow room for street trees and snow storage, and prevent side slopes at each driveway;
- All new facilities should be designed to meet the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Sidewalk Location

- Both sides in Hamlet Center, Hamlet Neighborhood, and new developments of more than 3 buildings;
- At least on one side in other zones when an opportunity to connect with existing or planned sidewalks exists;
- Optional one side or wide shoulder in areas where no sidewalks exist and density is below 1 unit per acre.

Crosswalks

- As short as possible with small corner radii;
- About 10 feet wide, well-lit, boldly marked with bar stripes or textured surface, and at every major intersection and selected higher volume mid-block crossings;
- Extend curbs/sidewalks into parking lanes and shorten crosswalks and increase visibility.

Green Infrastructure

Just as municipalities invest and plans for “grey” infrastructure such as sidewalks and surface roads, they also need to invest in green infrastructure. Green infrastructure is the interconnected network of open spaces and natural areas, such as greenways, wetlands, parks, forest preserves and native plant vegetation, that naturally manages stormwater, reduces flooding risk and improves water quality. A 2015 study by the US EPA on the Flood Loss Avoidance Benefits of Green Infrastructure for Stormwater Management found that green infrastructure can reduce flood losses when applied watershed-wide.

Green infrastructure usually costs less to install and maintain when compared to traditional forms of infrastructure. Rain gardens, landscaping with native trees, green roofs, bioswales, porous pavement, and greenways are all examples of green infrastructure.

To allocate limited resources to provide as much benefit to the community and the environment as possible, municipalities should evaluate green infrastructure opportunities to identify the most suitable locations. For example, sites with some open space that have moderate to high soil infiltration and flat or moderately sloped topography will likely be the most appropriate for green infrastructure.

Large parking lots systems and their connecting road networks shed large volumes of runoff because of their impervious surfaces. Water runs off asphalt into a storm gutter or along a curb until it reaches storm sewer drains or road ditches.

Bioswales (photo, right) replace traditional concrete gutter with an earthen one. The vegetation reduces the water’s velocity allowing for treatment and infiltration. Because they behave like a gutter, these trenches are best suited along roadsides or parking lots.



Bioswale photo courtesy NACTO

Hamlet Center Building Guidelines

Materials

1. Prefer repair/restoration of existing finishes, details and materials over replacement with new materials. Traditional materials such as brick, wood, plaster, and stone last hundreds of years with basic maintenance.

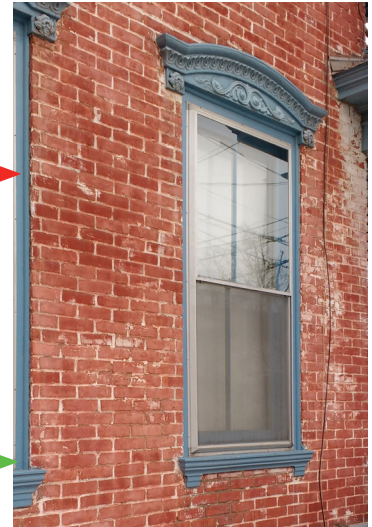
2. Avoid painting brick or stone; these materials provide a classic and low-maintenance beauty to Main Street buildings that is timeless. A paint job in the latest color may be stylish for a few years, but painted masonry and stone will require extensive stripping and repainting on a continuous basis thereafter. Whenever possible, masonry and stone facades should be cleaned and restored to a natural condition.

3. If materials have degraded due to delayed maintenance to a point that repair/restoration is not a viable option, prefer replacement with durable long lasting materials. Brick, stone, wood and fiber cement can easily be maintained for generations. Smooth fiber cement clapboard is an acceptable and durable replacement for wood.

4. Avoid applying facade materials that cover or obscure existing building details. Vinyl and aluminium siding applied over existing buildings are common examples of materials that obscure the details that make historic buildings desirable and also frequently cause damage to underlying materials due to poor durability, faulty flashing, waterproofing, and other common installation mistakes.

Do not
paint brick
or stone

Do restore
original
brick by
removing
paint when
possible



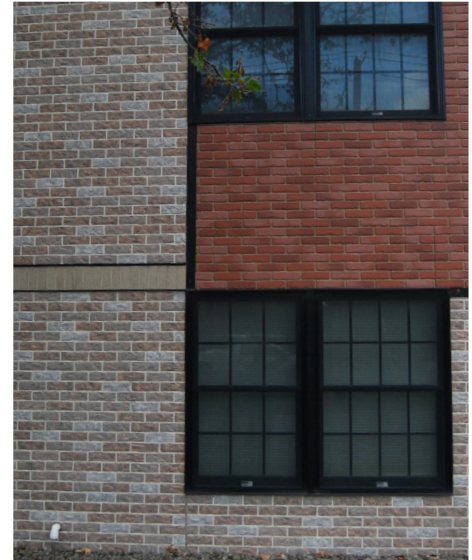
Do use smooth fibre
cement clapboard as a
durable replacement for
wood



5. Do not use sheet materials that imitate brick or stone; these systems do not accurately represent the details or character of traditional masonry buildings and are not as durable. However, there are high-quality brick and stone veneer products that – when well-detailed and correctly installed – can provide a satisfactory and low-maintenance facade. Special attention should be paid to details around corners, windows, doors, and other features to accurately replicate traditional masonry detailing and to ensure that veneers wrap around the side of buildings rather than ending with an unsightly exposed edge along the front of the building.

6. Avoid use of thin vinyl, metal, or fiberglass siding on front facade of buildings. While inexpensive, these materials rarely excel in replicating traditional trim, lintel, and edge conditions. These materials usually result in a flat facade that can cause buildings to look too uniform and more massive than necessary.

7. Avoid use of EIFS (Exterior Insulation and Finish Systems) for any part of a main street building first floor along a sidewalk. This material is easily damaged and lacks the durability needed for the areas where pedestrians will interact with building facades.



Do not
use sheet
material that
imitates brick



Do not use Exterior Insulation and Finish Systems (EIFS) for any part of a main street building that pedestrians may be able to touch



Storefront Windows

1. Attractive storefront windows improve safety and security and increase sales for businesses while improving the area's walk appeal and character. Traditional detailing and opening sizes should be preserved in existing buildings and replicated in new buildings. Buildings where openings have been reduced for non-retail uses or other reasons damage the character and walk appeal of main street, storefront window openings should be restored and well-detailed.

2. Do not use blinds, curtains, frosted glass, or any other elements that block views into storefronts from the sidewalk. Awnings should be used for sun control to protect merchandise in window displays, preserve occupant comfort and reduce building energy consumption.

3. Window displays should allow views into businesses from the sidewalk, where privacy is needed for a business or residential use, windows should be maintained with a display area at least 3' deep and high quality displays in this space should be rotated frequently, behind the 3' area private interior space can be protected where necessary, though greater transparency is preferred for a main street context.



Do not block the view into store fronts from the sidewalk

Do restore window openings and create visual access into businesses



Do maintain a display area of at least 3' depth before the private interior space



4. Maintain large frame and sash profiles to complement trim elements. The materials to be used for traditional facades trim elements are wood or materials that have the same dimensionality and character of wood.

5. Break large window areas to human scale by using vertical and horizontal elements. For example, use transoms to break up large store fronts and address the door heights. The windows should be sized to fit with the existing vertical and horizontal elements.

6. Window and door proportions should be maintained across the facade.



Do use transoms to add a horizontal line that breaks the height of the door and storefront



Do establish a rhythmic pattern to break up large storefront areas



Doors

1. Uninterrupted full-glass and half-glass doors should be used for storefronts to allow for visibility into and out of the store from the sidewalk.
2. The exterior doors for access to residential second floor should be wooden doors. No need to use full-view glass for residential.
3. Transoms should be used above doors that lead to second floors to allow for light to enter the stairway.
4. Wood or wood-like materials should be used for doors, and vinyl or steel doors should be avoided.
5. Using external security installations such as coiling shutters, accordion gates, etc. should be avoided as they create an impression that the street is unsafe. Instead, alarm and lighting systems should be used.

Do use full glass entry doors for storefronts



Do not use aluminium storefront doors



Do not use residential type doors for nonresidential buildings uses

Do use full glass doors for second floor access doors, and transoms above doors



Upper Floor Windows

1. Original openings of upper floor windows should be restored wherever possible. To maintain the historic character of the buildings, wood or aluminium-clad wood windows should be used.
2. Reduction of upper floor window openings should be avoided. Spandrel glass should be used to maintain window openings for upper level windows that have been blocked and cannot be opened up.
3. No air conditioners or satellite dishes should be placed on street side facades.

Do maintain or restore original window openings



Do not reduce window openings



Do not block window openings with air conditioners



Do not cover window openings

Signage

1. A variety of signs and fonts should be used along main street that identify and define individual businesses.
2. The sign boards above storefront windows or awnings should not cover second floor windows and should be proportionate to the height of the facade.
3. Avoid oversized lettering or signage.
4. The size of the lettering should fit within the signage board space. Any additional words should appear as lettering on awnings, window lettering, and perpendicular signs. Flat vinyl lettering should be avoided.
5. Sign boards should not cover or reduce second floor window openings.
6. Sign boards should be made of wood, and fibre cement board panels should be used for mounting letters or signs.



Do not use oversized sign boards



Do not cover 2nd floor windows with sign boards

Do make sign board size proportionate to building height



7. Perpendicular signage should be actively used. Perpendicular signs should not project more than 5 feet from the building facade. There should be a minimum of nine feet from the sidewalk to the bottom of the sign and signs should be a maximum of 15 to 20 square feet in various shapes.

8. Oversized backlit signs should not be used. Instead, lighting should be provided for perpendicular signs.

9. Signs should be suspended from horizontal standards or brackets mounted to the building. The actual sign boards should not touch the building face.

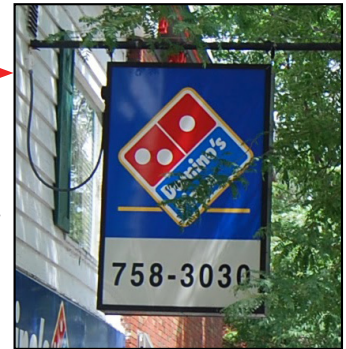
10. Awnings should be placed in a way that does not interfere with visibility to the sign.

11. Window lettering should not clutter or prohibit the view into the business, and should be less than 10% of each window area. The color scheme of lettering should complement the color and font style of the business.

Do use perpendicular signs



Do not use oversized, backlit, or plastic perpendicular signs



Do use brackets to suspend perpendicular signs



Do make any solid window signs 25% of the total glass area

Do use lettering without cluttering the view in and out



Lighting

1. Gooseneck lights or fluorescent linear lights should be used to light sign boards. Backlit signs should be avoided; they are expensive but can look cheap and dated.

2. Perpendicular signs should only be lit on one side. Avoid lighting perpendicular signage on both sides.

3. Illumination of sign boards (sandwich boards) should not shine into upper levels. External light sources intended to illuminate the sign face must be fully shielded, direct light only in a downward manner, and placed close to, and directed upon, the sign face.

4. Externally illuminated signs must be illuminated only with steady, stationary, fully shielded light sources directed solely onto the sign without causing glare.

5. Interior lighting for displays should be used to ensure that the displays are visible and also for security purposes. Interior lighting also draws attention to the business and indicates that the business is open and it is an occupied space.



Do use gooseneck fixtures to light signs



Do not use backlit sign boards



Do not use backlit sign boards



Awnings

1. Awnings extend the presence of business onto the sidewalk making the business more inviting, and at the same time protecting customers from the elements.

Use fabric awnings and color coordinate these with the proposed color scheme of the business and the building. Use triangular or curved awnings, and fixed or retractable.

2. Awnings should be sized proportionate to the window openings. Maintain a minimum of 7'-6" of height from the sidewalk. Make sure that the awnings do not project more than one-third of the width of the sidewalk.

3. Prefabricated metal awnings should not be used.

4. Awnings provide the opportunity to share supplemental information about the business without cluttering other signage locations. Lettering signs should be placed on awnings. Lettering height should fit within the awnings apron space and should be limited to one row.

Do use fixed or retractable awnings in curved or triangular profiles



Do color coordinate awnings with the color scheme of the building or the business

Do use the size of awning based on vertical and/or horizontal separations



Do not use metal awnings

Do utilize awnings for supplemental lettering



Detailing

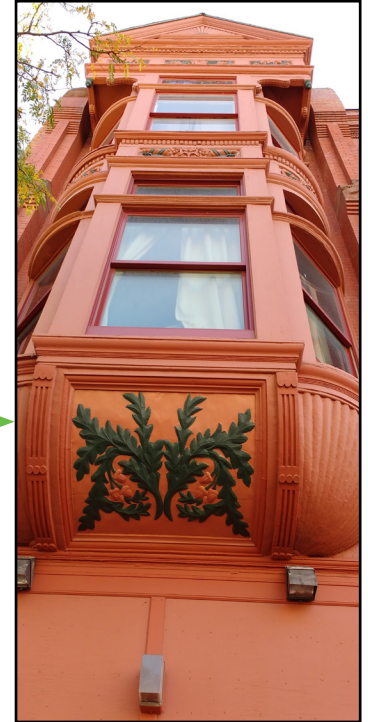
1. Fragments of the existing facade that have retained some of their more intricate detailing should be preserved in order to re-establish its own recognizable character and unique identity.

2. Facade detailing should be highlighted through careful and complementing color selection. Details should not be the same color as the building.

3. Column, lintel, and parapet detailing provide historic character to the buildings. These should not be covered or removed.

4. Visual separation should be provided between the first and second stories with a shadow line that delineates the top of the first story. The separation could be created by using decorative trim, awnings, or a change of material.

Do restore and highlight intricate details with careful color selection



Do create visual separation between first and second stories



5. Including buildings' history on facades addresses the unique character of the Hamlet. Use plaques attached to the facade to share building history, or incorporate it into facade renovations.

Do include Jacksonville's history into facade renovations



Do use plaques to share building history



Non- historic Buildings

Detailing

1. The facade of non-historic buildings should be inviting, layered, and pedestrian-scaled. The five important characteristics for creating facades of non-historic buildings include:

- Depth and layering of facade elements
- Focus on human scale
- Street-level interest
- Transparency
- Rhythmic pattern
- Detail

2. Large, empty, windowless facades should be avoided as they are not human-scale and make pedestrians feel small and unwelcome. Storefronts should have substantial windows that add depth and make a business more inviting.



Do not create large uniform surfaces that do not address pedestrian scale



5. For non-historic buildings, awnings may be custom-designed and fabricated as the storefront is not limited by a historic character. Awnings should be installed on storefronts to reduce direct sunlight, protect from rain and snow, and provide a human scale for the street.

6. Avoid painting large facades in black. Consider painting murals or graphics to break up the facade.

Do replace inappropriate non-historic facade renovations with appropriate traditional details

