

Storefront Improvements



A Guide for
Neighborhood
Commercial Districts

NYC
Small Business
Services

careers
businesses
neighborhoods

The Department of Small Business Services (SBS) helps unlock economic potential and create economic security for all New Yorkers by connecting New Yorkers to good jobs, creating stronger businesses, and building thriving neighborhoods across the five boroughs. For more information, visit: nyc.gov/sbs.

Gregg Bishop
Commissioner

Special thanks to the New York City Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities and the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission.

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Why Storefront Improvements Matter

Storefronts are important to New York City neighborhoods. They house local businesses, are a visible part of the street, and define the character and feel of a community. Strong neighborhoods are home to well-designed storefronts that enhance and give identity to the commercial district.

Storefront improvement is a simple way to upgrade the visual appeal of a commercial district, making it a place where people want to live, work, and play. An active street becomes the center of a safe, stable, and thriving community.

This guide to storefront improvements will help you understand the parts of a traditional storefront—the sign, awning, lighting, display window, and security devices—and make good design decisions. It also includes an overview of some costs and regulations related to storefronts and guidance to start a storefront improvement program in your neighborhood.

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EXCEPT DELIVERIES
THIS BLOCK

7 AV SOUTH

ONE WAY

SPEED
LIMIT
20

SLOW
ZONE

PLAGE
CIGARS

CIGARS

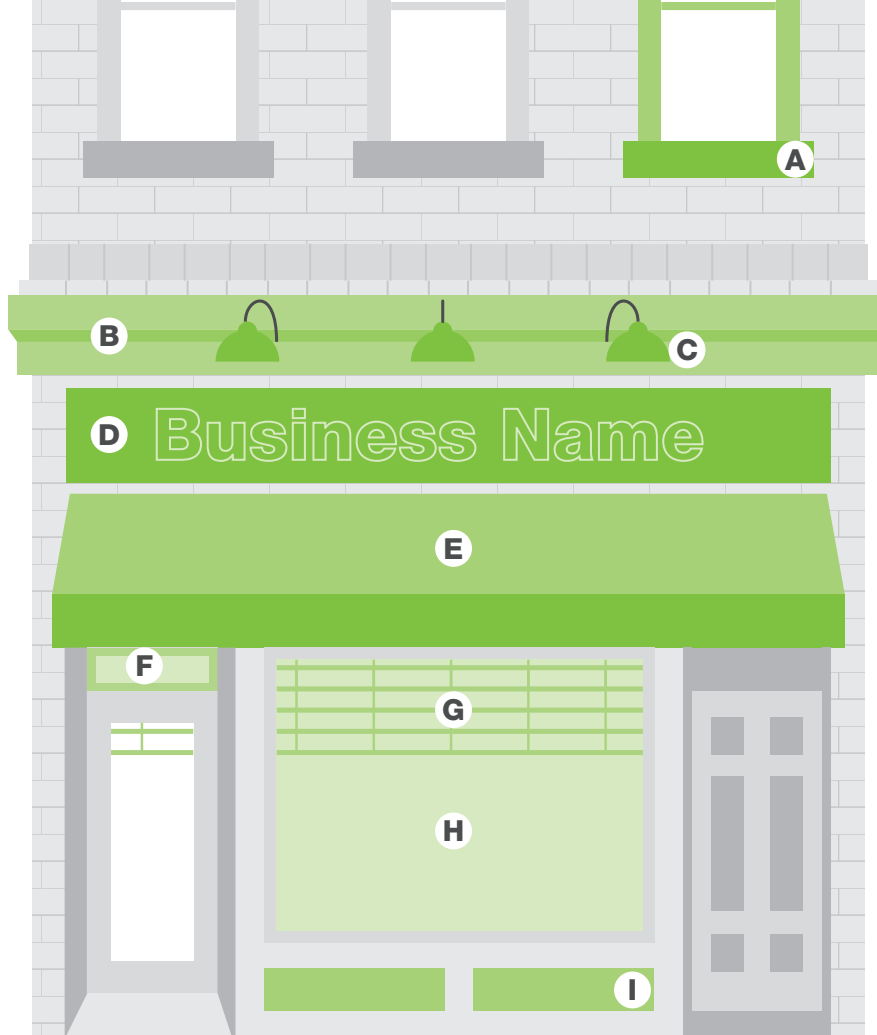
DUNKIN' DONUTS

fat cat

The guiding principle of good storefront design is to keep it simple. **Following these guidelines will help business owners attract customers, save money, promote a safe and appealing neighborhood, and follow City regulations.**

Not all buildings have every part described here, but the following are common to most building types in New York City.

What Makes a Storefront?



A Windows

Upper floor windows should be kept clear of signs and existing detail should be preserved and maintained.

B Cornice

The cornice is a significant decorative and unifying piece of the storefront. Be sure to preserve existing materials.

C Lighting

Lighting is used to illuminate signage and display windows. Good lighting is both eye-catching to shoppers and enhances safety.

D Signage

Signs provide the best space to advertise the name of a business. Effective signs are simple; they are not too large and fit within the scale of the building.

E Awning

Awnings add depth to the storefront and protect shoppers and window displays from sun and bad weather. They should fit appropriately above windows and doors and not project too far over the sidewalk.

F Transom Window

Transom windows allow for more light to enter the store. Keep them clear of opaque materials like cardboard or air conditioning units.

G Security

Security is important for protecting businesses and making customers feel safe. Open-grille security gates can be installed on the interior or exterior of the store. Interior is preferred, as it allows for a clean storefront and greater visibility.

H Display window

Display windows provide a great opportunity to show off merchandise. Be sure to limit the amount of signs and posters. Small decals are an effective and inexpensive alternative.

I Bulkhead

Bulkheads create a defined platform for window displays and are located at the base of the storefront. They should be proportionate to the size of the building.

Top 10 Storefront Tips

1

Less is more

The simpler the design, the better. Too much clutter makes it difficult for shoppers to see your business and take notice. One well-placed sign will grab the most attention.

2

Rethink security gates

Replacing your security gate with an electronic security system will increase the visual appeal of your business. If you must have a gate, an open-grille gate mounted on the interior of your store will improve nighttime security and allow customers to window shop after hours.

3

Choose quality materials

Cheap materials break down and often need replacing. If your storefront is in disrepair, shoppers will be discouraged from entering.

4

Know who you're hiring

Most storefront work, including installation of awnings and large signs, requires a permit from the NYC Department of Buildings. Architects, engineers, and sign hangers must be licensed and insured.

5

Don't forget maintenance

Clean windows and awnings regularly, and keep signs, bulkheads, and lighting in good repair. A fresh coat of paint is a good investment as is regular repair of brick or masonry.

6

Show your building's history

Beautiful historic buildings are often covered by layers of modern materials. Removing these layers may reveal historic detail that will add character and draw attention to your store.

7

Know your neighborhood

Each neighborhood has its own unique character. Ensure the look of your storefront emphasizes this character and appeals to local customers.

8

Make it easy to see into your store

Let your merchandise speak for itself. Clear windows with minimal signage invite customers into stores and make for a more secure environment.

9

Use inviting lighting

Install lighting to showcase signage, window displays, or other building details. It makes the storefront and the rest of the street more pleasant.

10

Remember: Keep it simple!

Creating a Storefront Improvement Program

Local community organizations can play a vital role in enhancing a commercial district by administering a storefront improvement program. This type of program can provide technical assistance to business owners, including help with design, contractor selection, and general project management. These programs can also provide matching grants to incentivize business owners to improve their storefronts. Learn more at: nyc.gov/storefronts.

Where to Start

The first steps are to identify the storefront improvement needs within a district and create program goals. When looking at a commercial district, the number of issues with storefronts may be overwhelming. To begin, identify the most common problems or the “worst offenders.” If solid-panel security gates are prevalent, perhaps structure your program to address this issue. There may be more issues in the district, but identifying one common problem can give focus to a first-round storefront improvement program and make results more quickly attainable.

What You’ll Need

The following is a list of materials and resources an organization may need when administering a storefront improvement program:

Program application

Design and project selection guidelines

Contractor recommendations

Designers or architects

Funding for grants (optional)

How to Get Funding

SBS’s Avenue NYC Grant Program allows community-based organizations in low- to moderate-income neighborhoods to apply for funding for soft costs and other program management expenses.

Learn more at: nyc.gov/avenuenyc.

Funding to cover capital costs for storefront improvements can also come from public grants, though this type of funding is limited. Be prepared to seek private funds—corporate sponsorships or other fundraising—as many public grants and BID assessment dollars cannot be used to fund capital improvements on private property.

The New York Main Street Program is a competitive statewide program that provides funds to community organizations to award grants to business and property owners to complete building renovations. Learn more at: nyshcr.org/programs/nymainstreet.

Storefront Improvement Success: Myrtle Avenue Revitalization Project

Since its founding in 1999, the Myrtle Avenue Revitalization Project LDC (MARP) has continuously assisted local merchants and property owners with storefront improvements. This work has been a critical piece of the organization's comprehensive neighborhood revitalization strategy. Storefront improvements have enhanced the district's appearance and supported the organization's business retention and attraction efforts.

In addition to providing matching grants, MARP provides technical assistance to business and property owners, including design, project bidding and contractor selection, and project management. The program's success can be attributed to a few key points:

Scale

With more than half of the district's storefronts assisted, the collective impact is transformative.

Staffing

A trained staff member has consistently managed the program.

Funding

MARP offers two storefront improvement programs that fund small to large scale projects using money from private donations/sponsorships, as well as public grants. These programs fund projects ranging from \$2,500 to \$50,000.



To date, MARP's storefront improvement program has:

Assisted 93 storefronts.

Provided \$975,000 in matching grants.

Generated \$2.2 million in private investment from participating business and property owners.

Signage

Signs are one of the most common and effective ways of drawing attention to a business. A good sign is memorable and showcases the quality and personality of a business and neighborhood. The simpler the sign, the more attention it will likely get. A bigger, busier sign is not necessarily better—if a sign is too cluttered, customers may pass it by. See page 36 for more information on sign regulations.

Flat Panel Signs

These common signs are mounted flat against the building between the cornice and awning. They can be made from a variety of durable materials like carved wood, metal, and acrylic.





Channel Letter Signs

Channel letter signs are usually internally lit and made from metal or plastic. They can be highly visible and mounted directly to a building or sign panel.

Window Signs

Signs located in display windows can be low-cost and attractive. These include hand painted signs and simple decals that don't cover too much window space.



Blade Signs

Blade signs, also known as shingle signs, hang perpendicular to a building and are a good way to attract customers on foot, bike, or car. They are mounted to a building with brackets that can be simple or decorative.





Three-Dimensional Letter Signs

Three-dimensional letters, mounted to a sign panel or building façade, add interest and texture to a storefront. They come in a variety of materials that range in durability and cost.

No Permit Required

Signs painted onto walls and non-illuminated signs that are six square feet in total area or less do not require a permit.

Neon Signs

Simple neon signs are noticeable day and night. When well-placed and maintained they add a unique and custom look to a storefront.



Historic Signs

When maintained, older signs can make businesses stand out and showcase the character and history of a neighborhood.



Illuminated Signs

In neighborhoods where businesses are open late, an illuminated sign may be a desirable option. These signs need a special permit that must be renewed every year.



✘ Don't install oversized signs that cover building details.



✘ Don't put too much information on signs. They appear cluttered and are hard to read.

Awnings

Awnings help define storefronts and embellish the commercial street. They provide shade to protect merchandise from the sun and shelter customers from bad weather. Awnings should fit within or just above storefront doors and windows and should not be used to cover architectural details or damaged parts of a building. For a more attractive appearance, traditional angled awnings are best.

This clean, simple awning is made from durable canvas material, fits well within the storefront framing, and does not cover building details.



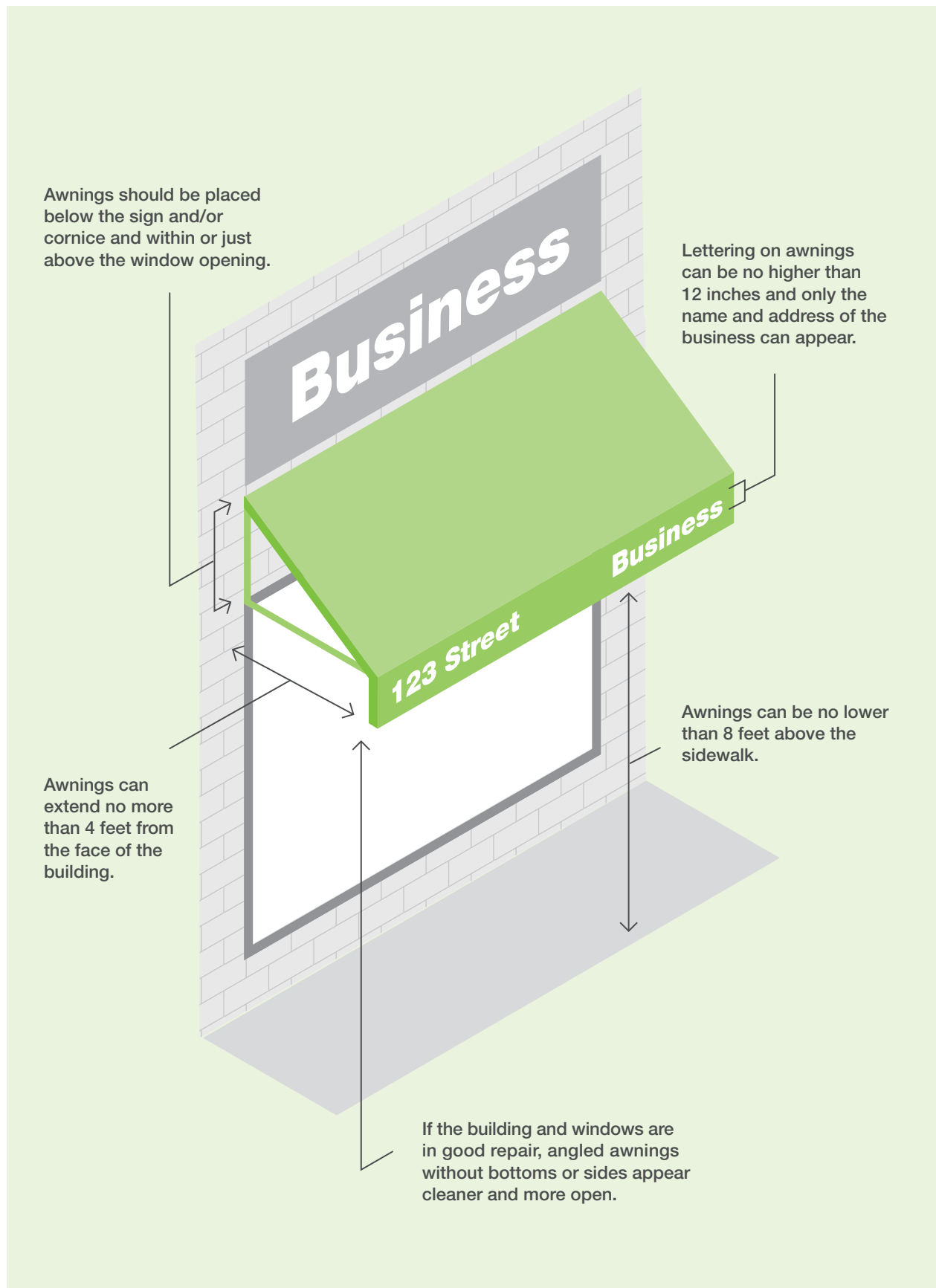
Awnings should be placed below the sign and/or cornice and within or just above the window opening.

Lettering on awnings can be no higher than 12 inches and only the name and address of the business can appear.

Awnings can extend no more than 4 feet from the face of the building.

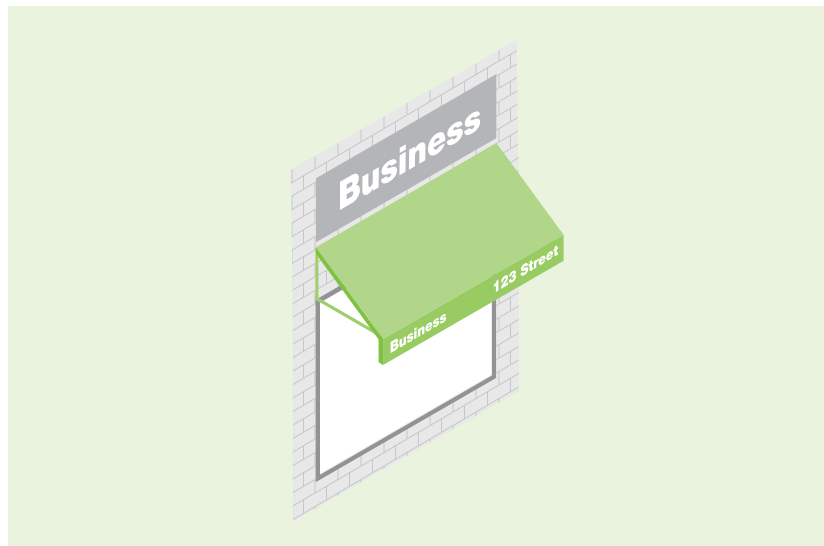
Awnings can be no lower than 8 feet above the sidewalk.

If the building and windows are in good repair, angled awnings without bottoms or sides appear cleaner and more open.



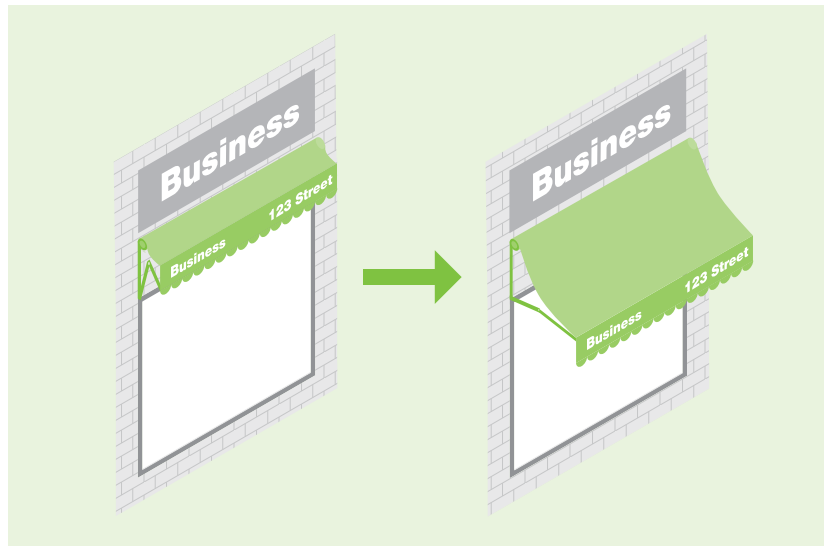
Fixed Awnings

Fixed awnings are durable and easy to clean. They should be made from high-quality, weather-resistant canvas rather than cheaper alternatives like vinyl. Sunbrella® canvas is a popular choice and comes in a variety of colors and textures.



Retractable Awnings

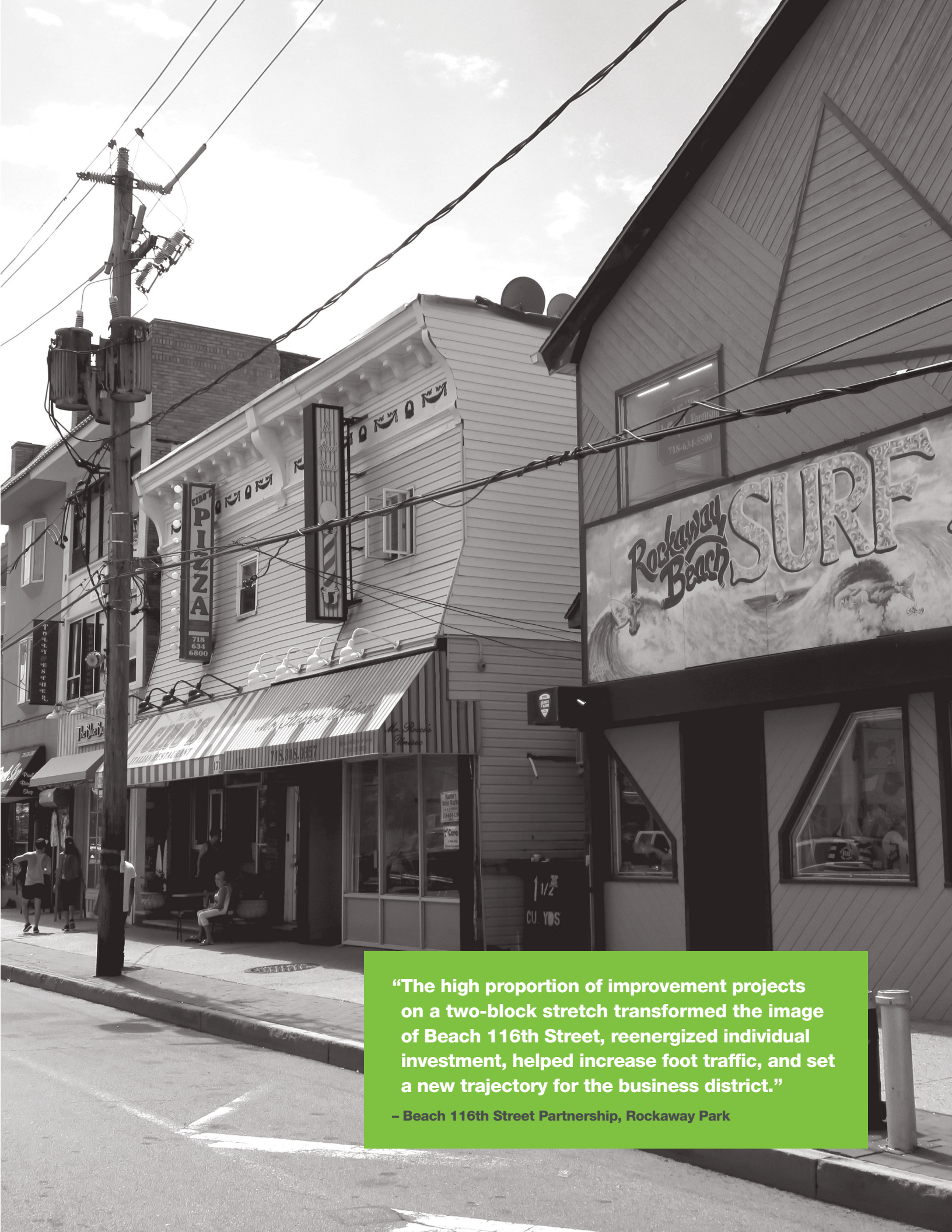
Retractable awnings are a great choice for restaurants with outdoor seating or stores with products for sale in windows or on the sidewalk. Their classic look creates an inviting appearance to any storefront.



Don't put corporate logos on awnings. Only the business name and address can appear.



Don't cover large portions of the building or hide architectural details.



“The high proportion of improvement projects on a two-block stretch transformed the image of Beach 116th Street, reenergized individual investment, helped increase foot traffic, and set a new trajectory for the business district.”

– Beach 116th Street Partnership, Rockaway Park

Lighting

Lighting not only enhances the appeal of storefronts and the commercial street, it also increases public safety. Good lighting can help advertise products in display windows and allow customers to see inside during evening hours. All lighting should be energy efficient and installed by a licensed electrician.

Storefront lighting should be directed and used with purpose—to illuminate a sign, entrance, or display window. Refrain from installing too many fixtures or directing light away from the storefront.



Exterior and Interior Lighting

Light fixtures should provide warm, ambient lighting to the sidewalk, enhancing the safety of pedestrians and attractiveness of the street.

Interior lighting promotes the products and services inside a business at all hours. It can also prevent break-ins.



Fixtures

Choose fixtures that complement the storefront design and building details. Gooseneck lights and sconces are popular options.



✘ Don't use flashing lights or lights that project above the storefront. They are against City regulations.



✘ Don't use lighting that shines into residential upper floors.

Security

The security of streets and businesses is important. Business owners should feel their stores are protected and shoppers should feel they are safe in the neighborhood. Electronic security systems are recommended instead of security gates as they discourage graffiti and allow customers to view merchandise 24 hours a day.

Security Camera Systems

Cameras, available in a range of sizes and styles, can be easily incorporated into any storefront. Various backup or video retention options and the ability to view footage from mobile devices make contemporary security camera systems a great alternative to security gates.

Security cameras can be installed discreetly on a storefront or in a prominent position to further deter crime.



Open-Grille Security Gates

In 2011, the City of New York passed a law banning the installation of solid-panel security gates for commercial stores. Existing security gates that are not open-grille must be replaced with open-grille gates by 2026.

Open-grille gates prevent break-ins while allowing customers and police to see inside a business at night. If you choose to install a gate, City law requires at least 70% transparency. These gates ensure merchandise is always on display, allow interior light to shine on the sidewalk, and make the street more appealing.

This retailer sells expensive products but has installed open-grille gates inside the store for security and compliance with City law.



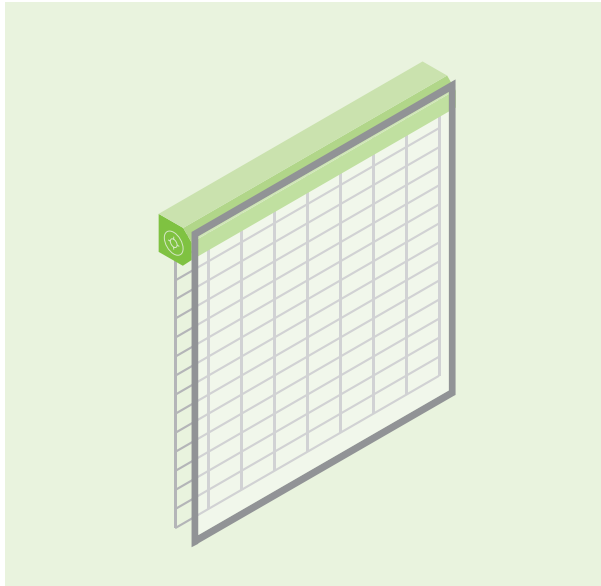
Don't use solid-panel gates, they close off the streetscape and make an area appear darker and less safe.



Don't use gates with less than 70% transparency, they attract graffiti and reduce visibility.

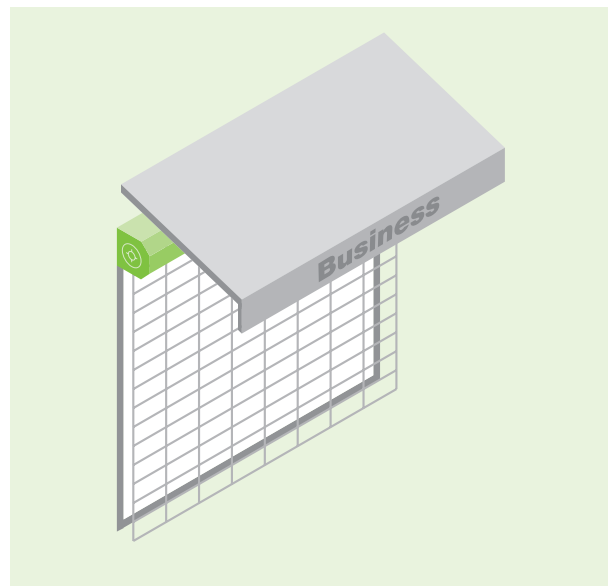
Gateboxes

Gateboxes that house security gates when not in use are unattractive additions to a storefront. Installing the gatebox inside the store, behind the display window is ideal. At a minimum, it should be hidden behind the awning. If none of these options are feasible, paint the gatebox to fit with the building or signage color scheme.



Inside

Interior installation conceals the gate's mechanical systems allowing for a clean and open storefront.



Under Awning

Covering the gatebox with an awning can be a good alternative to interior installation. Be sure to keep the awning at a simple angle rather than build an odd shape around the gatebox.

Painted

This painted gatebox complements the color and design of the storefront.





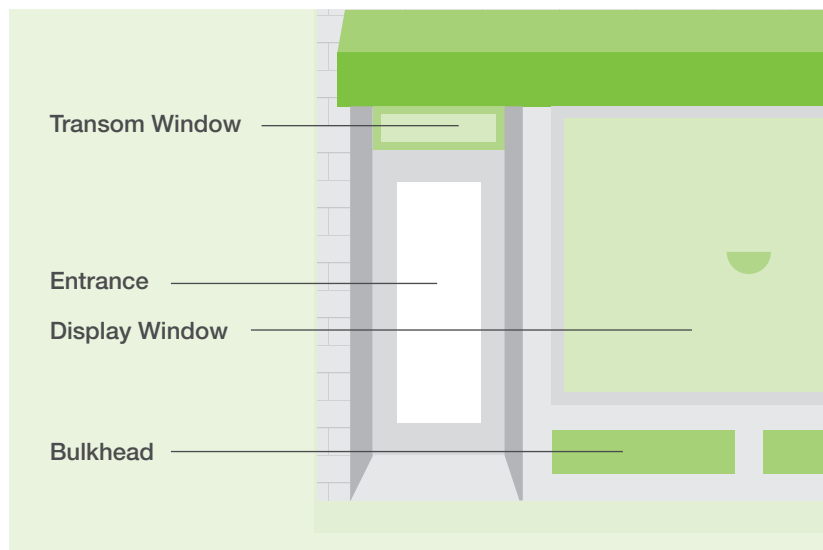
“On 82nd Street, many property owners and commercial tenants do not comply with the Jackson Heights Historic District storefront design guidelines. The Partnership’s Storefront Improvement Program helped property owners and tenants restore six building facades; in doing so, we transformed the corridor’s streetscape from one that was lackluster and disorderly into one that is attractive and better for business.”

– 82nd Street Partnership, Jackson Heights

Framing, Windows, & Entrances

Framing, windows, and entrances together make what is referred to as the “storefront system.” All the parts within the storefront system should be compatible; the materials, color, and scale of these parts should work together to make a pleasant design that attracts customers and enhances the commercial corridor.

When renovating and replacing a storefront system, be sure to consider all components, including solid framing and bulkheads, large display windows, transom windows, and inviting entrances.



Storefront Framing

The two most common choices for framing materials are metal or wood.

Metal Frame

Metal storefronts come in a variety of prices, depending on the material (e.g., aluminum or steel) and finish (e.g., color coated or rustic finish).



Wood Frame

Wood storefronts are an attractive option, especially if the wood is original to the building. Keep in mind that wood can be more expensive and may need more maintenance.





Bulkheads

Bulkheads are commonly made of wood or masonry. They can also be surfaced with ceramic tiling, metal panels, marble, or other materials. They create a defined platform for window displays and add interesting detail to the streetscape.

Windows

Storefronts should have plenty of window space, allowing customers to see clearly into the store. In historic buildings, the windows should have similar proportions to the building's original design, preventing the business from clashing with other stores in the neighborhood and looking out of place. When selecting glass, work with an architect or contractor to pick insulated windows that meet the City's energy efficiency requirements and can withstand extreme temperatures.



Multipane Windows

Using several panes of glass rather than one or two full-sized ones can help reduce costs and save expenses on maintenance when glass may need replacing.



Display Window

Window displays provide a great opportunity to add creativity to a storefront and highlight merchandise without high costs. Lighting, color, and arrangement of products can leave a lasting impression on customers.



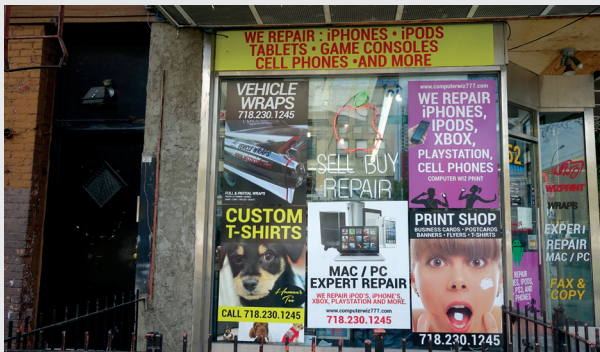
Transom Window

Clean transom windows allow for more light and can serve a decorative function.



Plants & Planters

Plants near entrances and in front of windows add beauty and color to a storefront and make a big visual impact on the street.



✘ Don't have too many signs, posters, or products that clutter windows. City regulations require 80% transparency in display windows.



✘ Don't fill transom windows with an air conditioning unit or opaque materials. Air conditioning units often drip and make entrances unsightly.

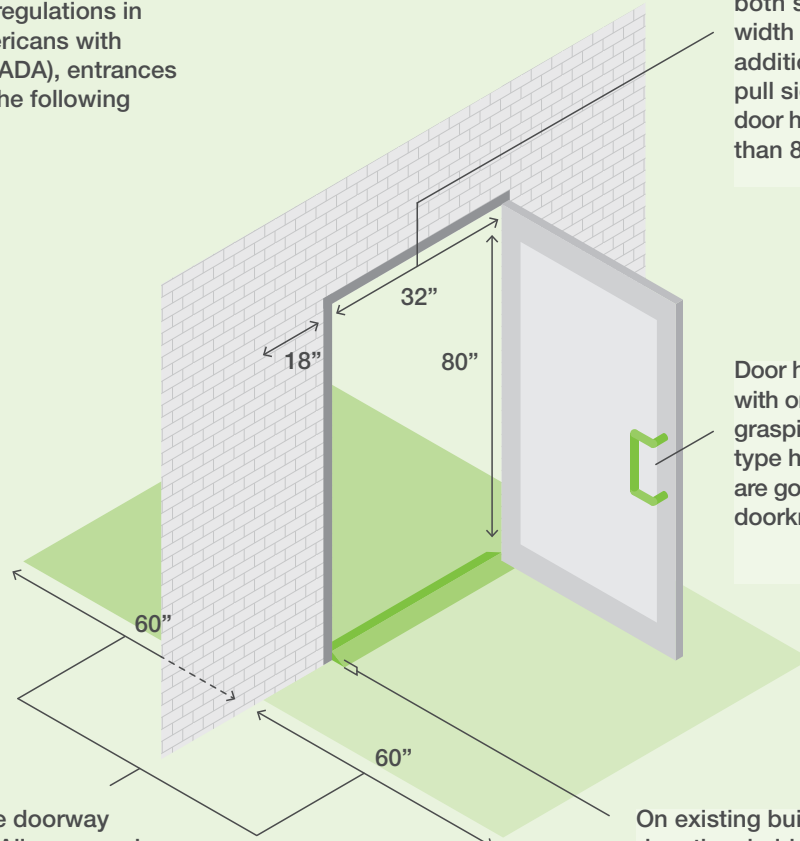
Entrances

Entrances should be clearly marked and welcoming to all customers. Doors should be made from durable, commercial grade materials and have large glass panels for maximum visibility.



ADA Accessibility

To comply with regulations in the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), entrances should include the following features:



Doors should be clear on both sides with a minimum width of 32 inches and an additional 18 inches on the pull side of the door. The door height should be no lower than 80 inches.

Door handles must be operable with one hand without tight grasping of the wrist. Lever type handles and pull handles are good options, but round doorknobs are not accessible.

Both sides of the doorway should be level. Allow enough maneuvering room (at least 60 inches) on both sides of the door for a person in a wheelchair to get through easily.

On existing buildings the door threshold (the sloped crosspiece that extends across the bottom of the door area) should be no higher than 3/4 inches with angled edges.

THE SALTY PAW

Pet Accessory Emporium & Grooming Spa



TY PAW

THE SALTY



38

38



“Because I own a specialty shop, not everyone walking down the street is a potential client. I have to work harder to attract foot traffic, so having a creative storefront with my branding is essential to my success. Thanks to the funding I received, I am seeing new clients I would have never had before!”

**- The Salty Paw Pet Emporium,
South Street Seaport Historic District**



Historic Detail

Highlighting historic detail is an easy way to create a distinct and memorable storefront. In most cases, preserving, repairing, and maintaining existing architectural detail is recommended over covering them or installing new materials. If your business is within a landmark building, historic district, or special use district, preserving these details may be required.

Architectural Details

Columns, carved stonework, decorative cornices, and tiling should be highlighted on all storefronts. Finding these special features and exposing them help maintain the character and history of a neighborhood.





Landmarks, Historic Districts, and Special Purpose Districts

The City's Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) has guidelines for protecting historic and architecturally significant buildings and areas. When making changes to buildings in designated historic districts, business owners must follow the rules unique to that district. Special purpose districts are areas with distinct characteristics and restrictions tailored to the needs of the area. Businesses in these districts are also subject to a specific set of regulations. To determine if your building is in a historic or special purpose district, visit the City's zoning and land use map at: maps.nyc.gov/zola.

Maintenance

Regular maintenance goes a long way toward improving the appearance of a storefront. Because they are durable and easier to maintain, quality materials can save time and money. Establishing a regular schedule for cleaning and repairs can have a big impact with little cost. Poorly maintained stores with peeling paint, ripped awnings, or broken windows make streets appear run-down and unattractive.

Some recommended tasks to be completed regularly and as needed:

Wash windows and sidewalks

Apply a fresh coat to painted areas

Remove or paint over graffiti

Repair windows and window frames

Replace broken light fixtures

Clean and repair brick, stucco, masonry, and other building materials

Clean, repair, and replace signs and awnings as they become dirty or damaged.

Remove all old or non-functioning signs, brackets, and other fixtures

Fix or replace planters, seating, and other non-permanent fixtures

Update window displays to showcase new merchandise

Graffiti

Graffiti gives neighborhoods the appearance of being unsafe and ignored. The Graffiti-Free NYC Program—the City’s street-by-street graffiti cleaning service—is free of charge to property and business owners. Property owners and their tenants can request these services by calling 311.



Costs

Storefront improvements include costs for materials and labor (hard costs), as well as professional services and obtaining required building permits (soft costs). These soft costs might include an architect's fee, asbestos testing, building permits, sign hanging permits, and more. To obtain a work permit from the Department of Buildings, a licensed architect or engineer will need to file plans.

Sample budget for a typical 20-foot-wide storefront improvement project:

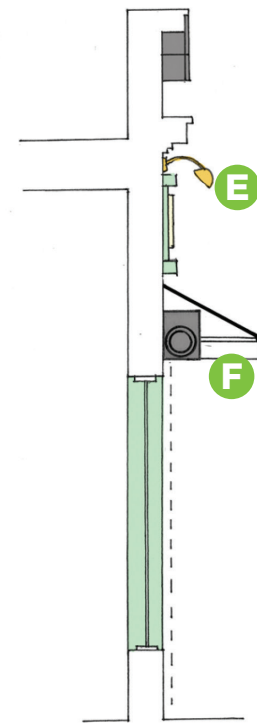
Soft Costs*

Architect Fee (includes the cost of permit filing)	\$3,500
Asbestos Testing	\$500
DOB Permit Fee	\$800
Sign Hanging Permit Fee	\$50

Hard Costs*

A Aluminum Sign	\$1,500
B Canvas Awning	\$1,300
C Window Decals	\$200
D Aluminum Storefront Framing and Glass	\$9,000
E Gooseneck Lighting	\$1,300
F Motorized Open-Grille Security Gate	\$2,000

*costs are estimated and will vary



CAFFE REGGIO ORIGINAL CAPPUCCINO



Caffe Reggio

Original Cappuccino Since 1927

Caffe Reggio