

City of Shakopee
First Avenue Design Guidelines
For Use in Connection with the Façade Loan Program

Preface

In 1999, the Shakopee City Council developed, and adopted “Downtown Design Guidelines.” These guidelines served as the basis for evaluating applications for loans under the City’s Downtown Façade Improvement Program.

In 2006, the City Council and Economic Development Authority (EDA) decided to expand the loan program to include façade improvements for commercial properties in the City’s First Avenue corridor. These guidelines were developed to use for applications for loans for buildings in the First Avenue corridor. It borrows heavily from the Downtown Design Guidelines. Where an application is for a historic building in the First Avenue corridor, and if there is any conflict in specific provisions of the two sets of guidelines, the “Downtown Design Guidelines” should control.

The First Avenue corridor poses special challenges and opportunities for façade improvements as against the Downtown. Like the Downtown, there are a number of historic structures in this corridor. However, most of the historic structures in the First Avenue corridor were built as single-family residences, and, because of this difference in function, they are different in architectural character than the historic Downtown structures that were originally developed for commercial use. Some of these houses have now been converted to office and business use, while others remain in single-family use.

Because the First Avenue corridor developed along what was previously a major arterial roadway over a long period of time, there are a range of additional building types constructed at different times in the City’s development that do not follow the architectural principles evidenced in older Downtown commercial buildings and discussed in the “Downtown Design Guidelines.” Thus, the challenge in developing the First Avenue guidelines is to develop criteria that can be utilized in evaluating improvement plans for both historic and non-historic buildings.

This guide is part of the City’s ongoing efforts to encourage building improvements in the City’s historic commercial areas.

INTRODUCTION

Building Project Categories

Because the First Avenue Corridor contains buildings that date from the late 19th and early 20th century to buildings that are typical of highway architecture from the 1950s to the 1980s., each building project in the Corridor is likely to be unique. Even so, most work on buildings in the corridor will likely fall into one of the following categories:

Preservation-For buildings that have experienced little change through time

Preservation consists of retaining and properly maintaining the existing historic aspects of a building, whether turn of the century or mid-twentieth century. Buildings that retain and reflect the historic character of the Corridor or the older area of the City provide an important connection to the historic Downtown. The importance of maintenance cannot be overstated. As buildings age, weather and deteriorate, maintenance is easy to postpone. However, simple preventative measures such as window caulking, repainted of exposed and worn surfaces, and prevention of water leakage can go a long way toward preserving buildings and saving maintenance costs in the long run.

Restoration-For buildings that have architectural significance, but have gone through some change

Shakopee generally, and the First Avenue corridor specifically has buildings that are historically or architecturally significant, but which may have been altered. Restoration is the process of returning a structure to its original appearance. Restoration does not, however, mean the creation of a precious museum piece. If the costs of restoration are to be justifiable, a structure must have an economically feasible use.

Renovation-For buildings that have been modified extensively or are not per se historically or architecturally significant

Historic buildings can sometimes benefit from some degree of renovation using modern materials and techniques that make them more efficient, but still convey the character of the original features of the building. On the other hand, renovation often involves undoing previous layers of maintenance or “modernization” (e.g. stripping off applied wood or aluminum siding, uncovering original floors). For more modern buildings that are not historically or architecturally significant, renovation may be the process of modifying the façade(s) of the building to reflect more closely the architectural styles and elements of historic buildings in the corridor.

Recycling-

New uses can be found for single purpose buildings. Warehouses, banks, service stations, and restaurants are all examples of single-use structures. The challenge is to recycle buildings whose original use is obsolete, by finding new uses that add to the economic vitality of the First Avenue Corridor.

Redesign (For buildings that are basically sound, but do not enhance the First Avenue streetscape)

There are some buildings in the First Avenue Corridor that are basically sound, but are neither historic nor particularly unique in their architectural design, and as a result may not enhance the visual character of the corridor. Such buildings can be redesigned to better support the visual character of the corridor. This can be accomplished by either a) redesigning them to include visual elements that are consistent with existing historic structures, or b) utilize proportions and/or materials that better integrate them into the character of the corridor. In carrying out such redesign it is important that the new façade(s) contain architectural elements and use building materials that are compatible with the overall streetscape for the corridor.

Demolition (For buildings that are structurally unsound)

In some cases, renovation may no longer be a cost effective solution for a neglected building. When a building is no longer structurally sound, has outlived its purpose, and re-use is not practical, demolition may be justified. In such cases, demolition can create opportunities with new construction to a) give the new building a better visual relationship to the corridor, b) make the property more pedestrian friendly, c) create new open space, d) provide more, better designed, or less obtrusive off-street parking which should be carefully studied. Of course any new building/use should be designed to complement and further enhance the character of the streetscape in this important corridor.

New Construction (For filling gaps in the streetscape)

An important element is the quality of infill construction. The desired effect of new construction in the First Avenue Corridor is to complement existing structures and streetscape, and to “knit” existing and new structures and uses into a coherent image and environment. The basic design elements of new construction (size, mass, material, color) must be compatible with surrounding structures. These guidelines suggest ways of achieving compatibility.

Planning for Rehabilitation

Evaluate Your Building

Look closely at your building. It is often easy to see where changes have been made over time. Look at buildings along the street that may not have had major alterations. If your building is a historic one, look for historic photographs. Good sources are the book *Shakopee Scrapbook*, the Minnesota Historical Society, and the Scott County Historical Society. Even if your building is not a historic structure, you may want to look at historic buildings to develop ideas about how your building could be redesigned to be more compatible with such structures.

Set a Budget

Don't feel that you have to do everything at once. While your plan to update the building and its façade(s) should reflect an overall approach, you may want and choose to complete the actual work in phases. Keep in mind that there may be potential sources of assistance, such as those available through the City of Shakopee's economic development office.

Decide on an Approach

The previous section described six basic façade improvement options. Your project may fit into one of these categories, or it may overlap categories. Your budget and building should be your guide in deciding on your approach. Try to pay special attention to the functional and visual impacts your plans will have on neighboring buildings and the streetscape.

Apply the Design Guidelines

The Design Review Subcommittee of the Shakopee Downtown/First Avenue Committee is responsible through the Downtown/First Avenue Façade Loan Program for preserving and enhancing a) the historic character of the Downtown District, and b) the architectural character of the First Avenue Corridor. In that capacity the Subcommittee has design review authority over building improvement projects that utilize funds from the loan program.

Complete Design Review Application

Before a Façade Loan Program application will be considered for approval by a participating financial institution, the Design Review Subcommittee must approve the proposed design changes. The Subcommittee will make a recommendation to the City EDA regarding approval of applications.

The following information is required in the program application form:

Building Information:

The address, common name, historic name (if any), original use, construction date, architectural style, and historic designation (if any) should be provided.

Project Information:

- A current photograph(s) of the exterior(s) of the building or site whether the work is proposed to take place;
- A scaled elevation drawing illustrating the proposed alternations;
- A site plan (if new construction);
- A description of the methods and materials to be used in all proposed exterior work and how this will affect the architecture of the building.

The Design Review Process

Applications for loans under the Façade Improvement Program will first be reviewed by a committee consisting of representatives of the City's Historic Preservation Advisory Committee (HPAC), Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) and Downtown Partnership. This group makes a recommendation to the EDAC and EDA regarding whether to make a loan. The City's economic development office will notify the lending institution(s) in writing of the design approval, with a copy of the program application and specific design plans going to the lender working with the applicant. The applicant presents the signed and notarized Design Review Consultation and Agreement form to the participating lender of his/her choice.

Financial Incentives for Building Owners

Downtown and First Avenue Corridor Façade Loan Program

The Shakopee Downtown and First Avenue Corridor Façade Loan Program was first established by the Downtown/First Avenue Revitalization Committee and the Shakopee banking community to provide low-interest funding incentives to promote and improve economic growth and development, to preserve historic and existing buildings, and to revitalize the downtown area. In 2006, the program was expanded to include the First Avenue Corridor.

The program consists of special reduced interest loans and exterior design assistance. Participating financial institutions agree to allocate an investment fund from which loans are available at a low interest rate; considerably lower than what is available through conventional financing.

Basic Architectural Design in Shakopee

By the early twentieth century, the City of Shakopee was home to several large banks, newspaper publishers, insurance firms, law firms, and a collection of regional retail establishments. Most of the notable building in the neighboring downtown took place from the 1870s to the early part of the twentieth century. While some of the construction in the First Avenue corridor took place in that same timeframe, much of the commercial building took place later. Still the building types used in the downtown transcend styles, and can still serve as a basis for new construction in the First Avenue corridor and for the redesign of existing buildings.

Storefronts

The most important feature of commercial buildings in and near the downtown is the storefront. The storefront emphasizes transparency that is created by the use of thin structural members framing large sheets of plate glass. Large windows allow merchandise display, and encourage window-shopping. Below the display windows are base panels called bulkheads that are made of stone, wood or metal. Typically, the entrance door is recessed to avoid disturbing sidewalk traffic and to provide cover.

Historic Building Types in Shakopee

The “City of Shakopee Downtown Design Guidelines” contains a good, brief introduction and illustration of the historic building types that exist in the Downtown. This information is useful, especially for projects involving new construction, or significant redesign, in that they can guide the property owner and designer in trying to develop a project that will better fit the corridor aesthetically, and visually pull together with other buildings near by.

Historic Building Styles in Shakopee

Similarly, the “City of Shakopee Downtown Design Guidelines” is a good resource for information regarding commercial architectural types utilized in the corridor. However, many of the more historic structures in the corridor were not initially commercial buildings, but rather residential structures. In developing plans for adaptive re-use of such structures, it is important to analyze those changes that are necessary to make the building function well for non-commercial use, but still maintain a good visual relationship both to the street and to other buildings in the corridor.

In addition to historic buildings that date back to the nineteenth or early twentieth century, First Avenue is home to a number of buildings whose original highway-oriented architecture has garnered more interest over the years. Examples include the original Perkins, El Toro (former Happy Chef) and Hennens. For such buildings it may be worth examining the alternative of redesigning them to fit in with the character of older, more historic buildings in the Downtown and First Avenue area.

Building Maintenance and Guidelines: Information on building maintenance is available from the “Downtown Design Guidelines.”

General Storefront Design Considerations

Contain the Storefront

A storefront should be designed to fit within the original façade opening, and not extend beyond it. The storefront might be set back slightly (a few inches) from the vertical plane of the façade to accentuate this sense of visual containment.

Transparency

Large display windows were a prominent feature of the traditional storefront. As a design element, they are integral to the overall proportioning of the building façade. Functionally, the large glass area makes the entrance to the building more inviting, and provides maximum light and display area, while visually opening the façade to the street. As a general rule, the storefront should be comprised primarily of glass, while the upper façade (if one exists) should consist of more solid appearing materials with smaller, evenly spaced windows.

Appropriate Materials

The color and texture of storefront materials should be simple and unobtrusive. The storefront frame can be of;

- Wood;
- Cast iron;
- Aluminum with a baked enamel finish.

Windows should be of the following materials;

1. Display windows should be of clear glass;
2. Transom windows may be of clear, prism or stained glass;
3. The entrance door should have a large glass panel, and be made of wood, steel or aluminum.

Base panels (bulkheads) can be of wood, polished stone, glass, tile or aluminum-clad plywood panels. The storefront cornice can be made of wood, cast iron, sheet metal, or sometimes the horizontal supporting beam can serve as the storefront cap. Side piers should be of the same material as the upper façade.

In order to reflect and enhance the historic character of the Downtown and First Avenue corridor, the following materials and historical themes should be avoided on commercial buildings, unless they were indeed part of an original historic structure;

- Mansard roofs with wooden shingles;
- Rough textured wood siding;
- Metal siding;
- Fake bricks;
- Stone;
- Gravel aggregate materials;
- Small window panes;
- Colonial doors and other Colonial features;
- Shutters.

Doors and Windows

Doors and windows help to define the architecture of historic Downtown and First Avenue Shakopee. Storefronts, with their large glass areas open the buildings to the street, inviting pedestrians to look and possibly come inside. Most storefront doors in the areas were wood frame with a large glass area to match the openness of the storefront as a whole. Upper story windows can establish a visual rhythm in the streetscapes that tie facades together.

For historic buildings, whenever possible it is desirable to retain original doors and windows. When they have to be replaced, they should be replaced with elements that duplicate the original form and material closely.

For non-historic buildings, replacement doors and windows should be chosen to echo traditional door and window sizes and materials found on historic buildings in the district.

Replacement Windows

When more energy efficient double- or triple-glazed aluminum or wood windows are to be used as replacements, it is important that they match the original in size and style. Aluminum windows should be finished in a baked enamel finish and not clear unfinished aluminum.

Storm Windows

Storm windows may be desirable on upper story windows for energy conservation. They should conform to the size and shape of the existing sash and be painted to match as well. Interior storm windows are a good choice where original windows might be obscured by the additional of exterior storm sash.

New Construction

Applying the Guidelines to New Construction and Redesign of Non-Historic Buildings in the First Avenue Corridor

In developing plans for infill structures in the corridor or developing plans for the redesign of existing, non-historic buildings, the following basic design considerations should be kept in mind.

Proportions of the Façade

The average height and width of the surrounding buildings should help determine the general set of proportions for an infill structure. If possible, a redesign of an existing building should also reflect the height and width of surrounding buildings. Where that is not possible, efforts should be made to diminish visual conflicts with surrounding buildings.

Composition

The composition (that is the organization of its separate elements) of an infill façade, or the redesign of an existing façade should be similar to that of surrounding business building facades. Where there are visual rhythms that carry through buildings on a particular block (such as window spacing) they should be incorporated into the new or redesigned façade.

Proportions of the Openings

The size and proportion of window and door openings of an infill building or redesigned existing building should be similar to those found on surrounding facades. The same applies to the ratio of window area to solid wall for the façade as a whole.

Detailing

Infill architecture should reflect some of the detailing of surrounding buildings in window shapes, cornice lines, and brick work.

Materials and Colors

Infill and redesigned facades should be composed of materials similar to adjacent facades, and should use colors that relate to the building's neighbors.

Appendix A – Public Signage

Few communities in Minnesota have addressed how much and what types of signage should be located in their historic downtowns or the areas (like the First Avenue Corridor) that surround or lead to them. The challenge for the community is to balance the desire for a visually appealing corridor or downtown with the need to maintain public safety and to effectively direct traffic flow. As a general rule, public signage should be clear and should use clear and conventional shapes, colors, and reflectivity. Public signage falls into the following three categories;

- Traffic signs;
- Limit signs;
- Directional/Information Signs.

Traffic Signs

Because First Avenue/CSAH 101 serves not only the corridor and Downtown Shakopee, but is part of an important network of regional roadways, to wit CSAH17/Marschall Road and TH 212, traffic signs are the most critical in the First Avenue Corridor. Well designed and placed traffic signs are required to insure the smooth and orderly flow of traffic, and to minimize the possibility of accidents. Traffic signs must conform to the *Minnesota Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MMUTCD)* from the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT). While limited, there is some latitude in the design of these signs, which can help to create a consistent look and theme in the corridor. Determining minimum requirements and reducing redundancy is necessary to make the First Avenue Corridor a more attractive, more easily navigated location.

Limit Signs

Limit signs (such as parking limits, handicapped parking, no parking zones, etc.) are not as critical to safety concerns, but still need to be visually pleasing in their design and location. While these signs should ultimately be uniform in style, at the outset of their design there is more design latitude available. They should be prominently displayed and large enough to be easily read, but should not overpower their surroundings.

Directional/Informational Signs

Informational signs include directions to important landmarks or areas (e.g. Huber Park, the Downtown district), public parking, or other information needed to guide people to key areas in the First Avenue Corridor, as well as adjacent and nearby areas. These signs need to be clear and uniform in appearance, but provide the greatest design latitude for professional designers engaged in designing them. The following principles should be kept in mind when developing directional and informational signage:

- Less is more. Using the least amount of signage needed to be effective will keep the corridor from appearing cluttered or overpowering.

- All public signage in the First Avenue Corridor should be of uniform and high quality design and construction.
- Signage can be effectively placed on existing decorative light posts and well-designed sign posts.
- Signage, as well as banners and other temporary displays, should be color-coordinated with a limited palette of colors complimentary to the predominant building color palette in the Corridor.