The street-level storefront is the most noticeable portion of a commercial building’s façade. Its purpose is to:
• allow goods to be displayed to the public,
• provide daylight to the shop interior, and
• offer a welcoming entry for shoppers.
These functions rely on large glass display windows, glass transoms, and doors to make the storefront transparent. Distinctive entry paving, bulkheads of contrasting materials, decorative storefront cornices, awnings, and other features often add architectural interest to a storefront.

**Guidelines for Preservation and Rehabilitation**

- Recommended actions or treatments are indicated by √.
- Actions or treatments not recommended are indicated by X.

**Retaining Important Features**

√ Identify and retain important features and materials, such as:
- stone, Carrara glass, or paneled wood bulkheads,
- distinctive display windows and/or freestanding display cases,
- transom windows, especially those with prism or leaded glass,
- window transparency,
- decorative storefront cornices,
- columns or pilasters (flat columns attached to a wall),
- recessed and/or upper-floor entries,
- decorative or distinctive entry paving,
- distinctive doors and/or hardware, and
- decorative medallions, moldings, or

**Important Considerations…**

Transparency is essential to the character of a commercial storefront.

The traditional commercial storefront is the appropriate ground-floor expression for the vast majority of downtown Roanoke’s commercial buildings.

A successful storefront reflects the architectural character of the commercial building to which it belongs, as well as the individual character of the business it serves.
Several storefronts in the H-1 District have unique pressed-metal bulkheads; they should be preserved.

Preserve and maintain original bulkhead materials such as tile.

Preserve original transom materials such as Luxfer glass.

Maintain historic ceiling materials.

Rehabilitation and Other Alterations

√ Rehabilitate a storefront that has been damaged or unsympathetically altered by:
  • reconstructing its historic appearance using historic photographs or other physical evidence and
  • designing and constructing a new storefront, as shown above, or to design a compatible new storefront, as shown on the following page.
front compatible in character to adjacent storefronts using traditional materials and proportions.

X Do not create unsympathetic alterations to a storefront, such as:

- recessing it more than one foot from the masonry piers,
- giving it a false “historical” appearance, and
- using a design theme not in keeping with the building’s or district’s character.

Storefronts that are recessed from the sidewalk disrupt the continuity of storefronts along the street.

New “Colonial” storefronts are inappropriate for the historic district. They create a false historic appearance.

Commercial buildings should not be altered to look like another type of architecture or provide a theme for an individual business.
Keep storefronts transparent, using a single large sheet of glass for display windows rather than several small panes. Panes should not be covered on the building interior or exterior.

Reconstruct display windows that may have been reduced in size. Avoid smaller or multi-paned display windows that may give a storefront a residential character or false historical impression.

Incorporate recessed entries and/or upper floor entries, whenever possible, into the design or new storefronts.

Reestablish transom windows by raising or angling the portion of the ceiling adjacent to the storefront. If changing the ceiling profile is not possible, place a black interior panel to help recreate a transom’s traditional appearance.

The design of a traditional storefront relies on large areas of glass.

### Appropriate Storefront Rehabilitation Materials

**Walls:** brick or stone, not wood shingles or shakes; wood, metal, or vinyl siding; plywood paneling; permastone; dryvit; or common concrete block

**Bulkheads:** painted paneled wood, marble panels, Carrara glass panels, not wood shingles or shakes; wood, metal, or vinyl siding; plywood paneling; permastone; dryvit; or common concrete block

**Display windows:** clear glass, not reflective or tinted glass

**Transoms:** clear glass, frosted glass, prism or stained glass, not reflective or tinted glass or any opaque material

**Storefront doors:** full-light glass in wood frames, painted steel frames, or anodized aluminum frames or frameless tempered glass, not solid wood or wood with small windows

**Entry paving:** terrazzo, quarry or other exterior ceramic tile, marble, concrete, not asphalt

By modifying lowered or dropped ceilings, original storefront transoms can be restored.

Black interior panels may help recreate a transom’s traditional appearance.
panel immediately behind the interior face of the transom to make it look transparent from the outside.
✓ Replace inappropriate bulkheads such as those that are:
• higher than two feet above the sidewalk or
• constructed of glass block or other transparent materials (unless there is historic evidence for this appearance or if they are part of a later storefront design that is significant).

✓ Replace inappropriate bulkheads such as those that are:

✓ Use or retain storefront doors that have large areas of glass or are set into a painted wood, stainless steel, or anodized aluminum frame. Avoid doors with multiple panes or raised panels that look residential or give a false historical impression.
✓ Retain or use paving of a different color, texture, material, or pattern to make recessed entries distinct from the adjacent sidewalk.
✓ Use display windows effectively to represent the commercial use of the ground floor. Even if the business does not require merchandise displays, find attractive and interesting ways to show the public the kind of services offered. First floor space should not be residential.
✓ Stabilize deteriorating conditions when a damaged or missing feature cannot be repaired or replaced immediately.
✓ Explore the use of salvaged materials or similar substitute materials with the same overall appearance as the original when replacement materials cannot be readily obtained.

These historic single-light wooden doors above are an appropriate model for storefront doors. Illustrated below are other models.

The different paving used in this recessed entry distinguishes it from the adjacent sidewalk, as was historically typical.

The large windows above are effectively used to advertise the business.
Conceal equipment or other unattractive interior features by locating them beneath the display windows behind the solid bulkhead. Consider adding an awning to control sunlight instead of using reflective glass, applied films, interior shutters, or blinds.

Removing Inappropriate Treatments

√ Remove plywood paneling or other exterior siding that:
  • conceals the masonry piers or other storefront features,
  • reduces the size and proportion of the display windows, or
  • gives the ground floor an appearance dramatically different from that of the upper façade.

√ Remove damaged Carrara glass paneling if it:
  • cannot be repaired or
  • has several missing panels that cannot be replaced with matching panels.

√ Remove oversized signs that obscure characteristic parts of a storefront.

√ Repair or replace damaged or missing features that have been revealed by the removal of inappropriate storefront treatments.

√ Remove interior film and tinted glass.

Shown is appropriate signage within a display window.

Awnings can shade storefront entrances and interior areas.