



# City of New Prague



## Central Business District Design & Sign Guidelines

Prepared by the New Prague Planning Commission

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Anton Philipp founded the City of New Prague in 1856. The first settlers in the community were primarily Czechoslovakian in decent. One of the first buildings constructed in the city was St. Wenceslaus Church which became the center of the new community. New Prague's settlers brought their Czechoslovakian and German heritage to the community and developed main street buildings with old world charm. Many of the original brick buildings located in downtown New Prague include murals which pay tribute to the culture and history of New Prague's first settlers.

New Prague's population grew steadily, with a large growth period in the 1950's. The largest growth period, however, occurred between 1990 and 2010, with the population doubling during this twenty year period. During this latest growth period the City of New Prague developed and adopted two Comprehensive plans that would guide the City's planning and decision making for the next twenty years. In both Plans, adopted in 2000 and 2005, public input was extensively solicited. Community members, business owners, and community leaders were gathered and used to identify "what the community wants to be." Again and again, the community said that one of the things it saw as important – to the point of being a defining characteristic of the town – was the downtown area. The community's desire to maintain a "strong, traditional downtown" was built into the Vision Statement of the City, shown below:

### *New Prague Vision Statement*

*"New Prague will be a community that maintains a unique identity by recognizing its heritage while providing opportunities for residents to share and enjoy both rural and urban lifestyles.*

*The City will maintain a traditional "Mainstreet" which will be a vibrant destination for residents and visitors and the focal point of commerce and government.*

*Parks and open space will be important features of the community landscape – offering people of all ages and abilities places to recreate and play....."*



This document is the means by which New Prague will carry out this vision of a vibrant and traditional Main Street. The guidelines provide business and property owners with a framework that defines the architectural and aesthetic preference of the community.

These guidelines have been developed with concern for the appearance of the City, and also for the economic abilities and commercial interests of the building owners. It is the intention of the City of New Prague to preserve the historic character and vibrancy of Main Street while permitting and encouraging necessary changes.

## II. PURPOSE

As stated in the New Prague Comprehensive Plan, our community is one that recognizes its heritage and wants to preserve it. A significant part of our heritage is the architecture of our city. We have several notable buildings dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century that are visual landmarks of our City. Preservation of these grand halls of our history is indispensable both to keeping our “traditional Main Street” and to recognizing and preserving our heritage, two key community objectives identified in the Comprehensive Plan.

The purpose of the Design & Sign Guidelines is to encourage standards for the design and construction of New Prague’s Central Business District. These guidelines are applicable to the exterior rehabilitation or improvement of buildings. They do not apply to interior modifications or construction.

The guidelines within this manual are intended to preserve and create quality, historic spaces and continue the unique quality and character of New Prague’s central business district. The guidelines are intended to offer solutions which are flexible, allowing property owners to arrive at a design which protects the integrity of the Central Business District and assists in achieving the overall vision for the historic character of the downtown, while allowing for property owner creativity and choices.

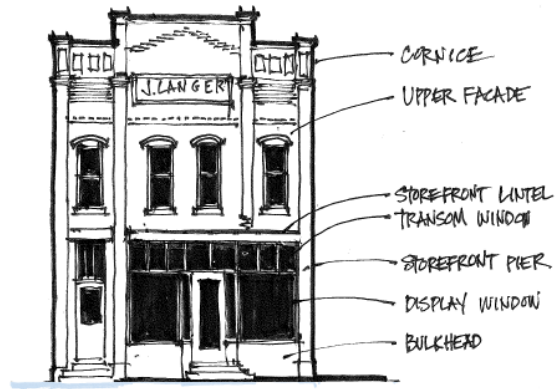
This document contains guidelines; it is not an ordinance which requires adherence to the suggestions contained within. However, if low interest loans or grants become available for building or sign improvements, adherence to the guidelines may be a requirement.



### III. GUIDELINES FOR RENOVATIONS OF HISTORIC STRUCTURES

#### *Storefronts*

Storefronts define the character of our Main Street. Storefronts are the main repositories of the historic character New Prague has and preference will always be given to preservation of historic structures – that is, any structure that is more than 50 years old. In all cases, these guidelines will stress preserving the original form and use as opposed to removal or covering over of historic surfaces or architectural details.



*Bulkhead: A bulkhead is the space located between the sidewalk and the bottom of a traditional storefront.*

*Display Windows: The storefront window is used to display merchandise and allows light and heat into the building.*

*Transom Window: Located directly over the storefront window, the transom window allows light to reach the back of the store.*

*Upper Story Windows: Allow light and ventilation into the upper story spaces.*

*Awnings: Used to control the light that went into the store, and control sun/heat.*

*Piers: Piers frame the storefront and define space between adjacent buildings and storefronts. Piers typically match the design and detailing of a façade's upper stories.*

*Cornice: The projecting member of a building elevation which spans the top of the storefront. Cornices help to reduce scale by defining stories.*

## ***Bulkhead***

When renovating an historic building, special attention must be paid to the bulkhead area of the building. This is the front part of the building directly below the storefront window. The bulkhead, or kickplate, serves many functions. First, it protects the storefront window; second, it puts the merchandise up at a better viewing point for the customer, and finally it can define the entrance. Traditionally, the bulkhead was made of wood with trim applied. Later, many bulkheads were altered with aluminum, structural glass, or brick.

### ***Renovation of the bulkhead***

The bulkhead should be restored to its original look if at all possible. Removal of the existing bulkhead may be necessary if the existing bulkhead covers the original. If the original bulkhead does not exist, it should be rebuilt or recreated.

Sometimes the bulkhead has been completely altered in both size and design. At that point it is important to consider the size of the window. If the bulkhead was downsized to fit a larger storefront window, the existing bulkhead should be used.



*This bulkhead area has been restored with historic Bead-board materials.*



*Restored bulkhead*



*Brick bulkhead*

## ***Windows***

The main purpose of the storefront window is to display merchandise. It also allows for natural light and heat to enter the building. It is the link between the passerby and the store interior. The large window gives more of a sense of openness and friendliness. Closed street-level facades turn their backs on visitors and do not promote direct interaction and connection with the street.

Windows along the street should be tall in order to allow daylight to penetrate deep into the narrow, closely spaced buildings.

### ***Renovation of windows***

The storefront windows should be kept open. If the original windows have been covered up they should be uncovered as close to their original size as possible. In most cases, interior barriers that block the view of the passerby to the inside of the store should be taken out. Clear (untinted) glass is recommended on the first floor.



*These renovated windows in the former West End bowling alley show how opening up windows brings an older building back to life. The above picture shows the building prior to the renovation which restored the front windows in 2002.*



*Beautifully restored windows, surrounded by copper.*

### ***Transom Windows***

Originally the transom was directly over the storefront window and allowed light to reach the back of the store. Since the age of the fluorescent light, many of the transoms have been closed up and the ceiling lowered. The transom was often made of prism glass, or a tinted glass.

### ***Renovation of transom windows***

An existing transom should not be filled or covered. A transom that has been covered should be uncovered and exposed as it was originally. If the transom no longer exists, it should be restored. There are a number of options for restoring the transom windows. Less expensive glasses can be used to simulate the original transom. If the ceiling has been lowered inside, the glass can be back-painted or reflective glass can be used. There are many inexpensive options and all should be explored.



*The Rynda Building has a wonderful transom window. These were very useful in a time before electric lighting*



*The transom window is visible behind this retractable awning at New Prague Floral*

### ***Upper Story Windows***

Upper story windows add rhythm and balance to a multi-story building. Often, it is the window for an apartment or an office. Windows were large to allow maximum light and ventilation. In some communities, these windows have been filled in with boards or smaller windows. This disrupts the rhythm of the building and projects a negative closed-up image.

### ***Renovation of upper story windows***

If the original windows exist, they should be repaired, repainted and weatherproofed. Under no circumstances should upper story windows be blocked in, covered over, or eliminated. If the windows have been infilled, they should be replaced. Historic photos of a building should be looked at to best match the original windows. Most window manufacturers offer energy efficient matches to historic windows.



*Upper story windows that have been replaced at the Hertaus Floors building, a big improvement over the picture below.*



*Upper story windows that have been covered up, alter the building to the point that it has lost its character.*

## *Awnings*

Cloth awnings were typically used in historic districts and downtowns. Traditionally, awnings were retractable and were used to control the light that went into the store. They were also used as protection from the elements, allowing shopping and storefront gazing to continue during inclement weather. They were placed above the transom window.

### *Renovation of awnings*

Overhangs, awnings and canopies shall reflect the style and character of the structure, in material and color. Metal, aluminum or plastic awnings should be replaced with opaque cloth or canvas awnings. Both fixed and retractable awnings can be used. The awning should provide shade for the storefront window and protection for the pedestrian. To do this, the awning must extend at least three feet out from the building. The distance from the bottom awning to the sidewalk should be at least eight feet. The top of the awning should not extend more than six inches over the top of the transom window if one exists. Lettering and signage on the awning should be limited to the valance area. Signage can be placed on the awning over the entrance. Backlighting of the awning is acceptable only over the entrance.



*The Simmer Building has used an awning in a way that compliments their original windows and door.*



*The Corner Bar Building has used an awning in a way that compliments their nicely-maintained classic Chaska brick storefront*



*These awnings add color and texture to an otherwise plain building.*

## ***Doors***

Storefront doors were usually made of wood with a glass panel and built with attention to detail. The door is the first experience that the customer has when he/she walks into the store. Ornate or unique doors can define the character of the business.

### ***Renovation of doors***

Every effort should be made to utilize or recreate the original storefront door. Plate glass and aluminum doors are not recommended. Therefore we encourage the storeowner to paint the door a color that compliments the color of the building. Appropriate materials for the door range from wood to steel. A standard aluminum door with a wide style can be used. Baked or dark anodized enamel finish is recommended.

Building recesses are encouraged to define entryways. Recesses allow out-swinging doors that do not encroach into the sidewalk.



*This door enhances entrance to this gift shop on Main Street.*



*The Tupy Insurance Building and its wonderfully welcoming pair of front doors use an effective combination of wood, brick and copper to create a very pleasing entryway onto Main Street.*

## *Cornices*

The cornice can be one of the most ornate parts of the building. It is the projected molding along the top of a building where roof and wall meet. Those that exist should be rebuilt to their original splendor. As in all aspects of building renovations, repair of the existing should come before replacement. Under no circumstances should they be removed from the building.



*Renovating and maintaining cornices, like this one above Granny's restaurant, might seem an expense for no commercial gain and removing it is tempting, but how does that affect the charm of the stripped building? And what effects will that in turn have on business?*



*Schumacher's cornice has been beautifully maintained.*



*Cornices of the Corner Bar and Rynda Hardware buildings*

## *Brick surfaces*

Brick is a uniquely solid and attractive building material and it is a key part of the historical character of New Prague. As such it is imperative that brick be preserved. Under no circumstances should a brick surface be covered over. If a brick surface is worn or damaged, it must be repaired and not replaced.

Brick buildings should be painted only in extreme cases. If paint exists on brick buildings, the owner should make every effort to remove the paint and restore the brick color. If the brick has no paint then it should be left the natural color and should not be painted.



*Can one imagine Schumacher's painted or stuccoed? What a loss it would be for all of us!*

Many brick buildings need to be cleaned periodically. This can be done with a low-pressure wash and a light scrubbing, or in some cases, a low-pressure wash with appropriate chemical cleaners. Under no circumstances should a building be sandblasted. Sandblasting destroys brick, stone and wood. The only material on a historic building that should be sandblasted is cast iron.

#### **IV. GUIDELINES FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION OF NON-HISTORIC STORE FRONTS**

For renovation of existing structures that cannot be said to be historic (less than 50 years old), there are expectations that materials will be used that are of high quality, both architecturally and aesthetically.

For new structures in the downtown area, compatibility with existing structures and quality of construction will be the primary consideration.

##### ***Storefronts***

The principal concern for storefronts is their compatibility with other neighboring storefronts and the aesthetic contribution it makes to Main Street. While some structures may not be historic, they still have the same power to add or detract from a pleasing downtown. Uniformity is not necessarily the goal; rather it is the consistent application of key design features that contribute to an overall pleasing effect.

New storefronts represent the opportunity to “get it right” from the outset, rather than having to undo problems created by past design decisions. Therefore new storefronts on Main Street should be held to the highest standards.

New building construction in the central business district should emulate, in façade width and height, the proportions that reflect the image of individual lot ownership on narrow lots.

Developments that cover multiple lots shall mimic the narrow width-to-height proportion. Storefronts should be based on modules of approximately 25 feet wide. New buildings that are wider than existing facades on the street should be broken down into a series of “structural bays” by use of pilasters or columns. Recessed entrances are encouraged.

Corner buildings should include storefront design features for at least 50% of the wall area on the sidewall.



*These buildings represent a fine example of how newer buildings can fit comfortably in with older neighbors on Main Street. The bulkhead area is brick, there is ample window space and they have made effective use of awnings and complimentary colors*

## ***Building Materials***

For new storefronts in the central business district, exterior building materials need to compliment the historic character of the town. Because history is always being created, buildings need not replicate those of the 1900's, rather the materials used to construct new buildings need to possess the same quality of the materials used in historic structures. Qualities such as durability, scale, color, and detailing, all help define a building's place in the ongoing history of New Prague.

An existing New Prague ordinance does currently require that the *predominant* building materials be brick. Artificial / adhered brick systems and exterior insulation finish systems (EIFS) are discouraged.

Prohibited façade materials include formed metal panels, aluminum, vinyl, lap siding, porcelain panels, non-textured concrete panels and asphalt shingles, although the use of these materials as trim or accents may be permitted. No reflective glass should be installed on the first floor.

Buildings shall have a mix of façade materials and design features to reduce long, blank walls. Design features may include windows, doorways, pillars, cornices, recesses, and niches.

## ***Colors***

Unlike freeway businesses that rely on eye-catching colors and trademark features for identification, the atmosphere of the central business district does not rely on these tools to draw in motorists. Here, connections are between businesses and slower street and pedestrian traffic. Colors should be muted or earth-toned. Major paint manufacturer's Historical Color Palettes are generally acceptable.

## ***Windows***

Regardless of the age or historical significance of a storefront, windows are the portal between the pedestrian and the inside of the store. The size of the window impacts the impression pedestrians or motorists have of the store and ultimately of the City. The larger the window, the more open and accessible the store and the people within seem to be. The smaller the window, the more closed and bunker-like the storefront appears. A cold and distant impression is created.

New Prague zoning ordinances require that a minimum of 40% of the first floor storefront area be window. Installing more than 40% of the storefront as window is encouraged. Windows in existing structures should not be blocked in, covered over, or eliminated.

## ***Upper story windows***

If upper story windows exist, they should be preserved to maintain the balance and rhythm of the building. Under no circumstances should upper story windows be covered up, eliminated or filled in.

## *Awnings*

Awnings are a pleasing way to shield the windows and passersby from the elements and to enhance the architecture. The proper use of proportionate shapes, complimentary colors and quality construction materials gives awnings their inviting appeal.

Awnings should be proportionate to the building. They should be made from an opaque canvas or cloth material and backlighting is only acceptable over the entrance. Any graphics should be confined to the valance area of the awning.



*The awning over the door and windows of Patty's Place adds considerable charm to an otherwise bland facade*

## V. SIGNS

### SIGNAGE ON MAIN STREET

Signage is a necessary element of a well-functioning city. Signs give us direction and necessary information. As a planned feature, a business sign can be colorful, decorative, even distinguished. However, too often signs are misused, poorly planned, oversized, inappropriately lit, badly located and altogether too numerous.

In an effort to attract business, merchants often engage in a destructive competition to produce the most attention-getting signs. In this competition, both the city and the merchants lose when the scene it creates is cluttered, confusing, and ugly. New Prague can start to lose its uniqueness under a hail of franchise logos, neon, and billboards.

New Prague's zoning ordinances are specific and generally encompass most of what is desirable for signage in our community. The downtown area however is more sensitive to overuse of aggressive signage. Designs that complement the existing traditional character of our downtown are listed below.

#### *Type of Sign*

Internally lit plastic signs are not appropriate for downtown. Their original intention was to be used in strip shopping center areas with newer structures. The integrity of the "traditional downtown" is lost when plastic signs are applied.

Electronic variable message signs are not appropriate in the central business district as they also detract from the historic nature of the downtown.

Neon is also not generally appropriate for buildings downtown for the same reasons that plastic signs are not encouraged. However, it is possible for neon to be used in

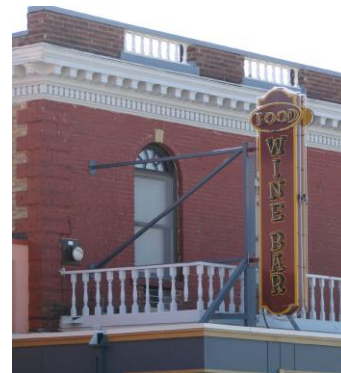
ways that are complimentary to the downtown that we hope to preserve, much the way neon is used in the warehouse district in Minneapolis.

Banner type signage is subject to rapid deterioration and is likely to quickly become an eyesore and is therefore not preferred but may be used as a short-term form of signage. City zoning ordinances restrict banner signs to only temporary time periods. Painted window art is discouraged in the central business district.

Wooden painted, carved, or wooden letters are appropriate for the downtown area. Metal signage is also appropriate. Small projecting signs, window decals, and awning signs (limited to valance area) are encouraged for the central business district.



*Cranky Alice has effective signage without resorting to visual "shouting" that can degrade the scene.*



*This neon sign at the Schumacher's Hotel compliments the colors of the building and is an example of an appropriate use of neon signage.*



*This simple sign complemented by a wrought iron hanger has been tastefully designed and compliments the historical downtown.*



*This window signage offers an effective alternative to building signage.*

### **Lighting of signage**

Lighting of signage should be from above and should be aimed down, not up. This is to prevent a generalized glare from being projected into the air above downtown. The direct downward facing lighting also provides more emphasis on the sign itself.



*The downward facing lighting above Cranky Alice helps illuminate the building signage*

### **Placement of signage**

Signs should be directed at and scaled to the pedestrian. A good sign looks like it belongs where it was placed. It should be an extension of the overall design of the façade, so particular attention should be paid to how the sign relates to the building. The best location is at the continuous flat wall area over the storefront display windows and below the upper level windows. Small projecting signs located at street level are encouraged. Window decal signs are historical and appropriate. If signs are placed on an awning, the valance of the awning is the best place for the sign.

### **Colors for signs**

Neon or fluorescent colors are not acceptable for downtown signage. The best signage is limited to three or four colors.

### **Pylon Signs**

Pylon signs are not appropriate for downtown. They are more appropriate to a place where the sign will be viewed from a distance, such as from a highway. Main Street is a much more closed-in environment and there is no need for such a dominating form of signage. Use of pylon signs downtown would disrupt the comfortable pedestrian scale and it could lead to competition to create ever taller and larger signs.



*The sign shown above would disrupt the character and charm of New Prague's Main Street.*

## **VI. SITE DESIGN**

### ***Building Setbacks***

Buildings along Main Street should be constructed to the front lot line and side corner lot lines. Buildings must be oriented to the street and have their main entrance off of the public sidewalk.

Buildings may establish a setback that accommodates ramps for individuals with mobility impairments.

### ***Parking***

From the earliest photographs of the downtown area it is evident that on street parking in front of New Prague's businesses existed, and it remains an important feature today. Convenient parking is an important life link for businesses.

Centralized parking areas are encouraged but should be well thought out, as to not detract from the charm of downtown.

Off street parking areas should not be allowed between the front of any building and the sidewalk in areas along Main Street. All off-street parking areas should be paved with concrete, bituminous, or another durable product as approved by the City Engineer. Curbs or bumper stops shall be placed to prohibit vehicles from extending into sidewalks or other pedestrian ways.

### ***Lighting***

Decorative lighting contributes to the downtown image. The City Council has chosen to install historical light fixtures in the downtown area, similar to those that existed in the early 1900's. A similar decorative lighting feature is encouraged where necessary to illuminate off-street parking areas or pedestrian ways.

### ***Landscaping***

New Prague recognizes the importance of landscaping in the central business district. It provides screening and shading of parking areas, softens building features, creates green spaces for pedestrians to gather and rest, and encourages a colorful landscape.



*This landscaping in the central business district softens the landscape while providing shade for the pedestrian. It also separates the open parking area from the street.*



*An area for pedestrians to rest in the shade.*

## VI. COLLECTION OF HISTORIC BUILDING PHOTOGRAPHS

The following photographs were obtained from the New Prague Historical Society and the Minnesota Historical Society. Many of the buildings shown have been significantly altered or removed. These guidelines are intended to encourage preservation of these community assets - realizing that the preservation, maintenance, and continued tasteful design will preserve property values in the downtown area and ultimately promote its continued economic vitality.



*The original architectural features of the building have been well preserved.*



*The architectural features of the Rynda Hardware building have been beautifully preserved. Everything down to the transom window appears original.*





Most of the original features of this original hotel have been covered up or painted over.



The Rybak building shown above has lost many of its architectural detailing including the turret, the cornice, the upper story door and balcony, historical front windows, and corner door (see below).



This building has been demolished and replaced with a parking lot.





The far two buildings shown in this picture no longer exist. The far building has been replaced with the steel structure shown below.



It is believed that the building shown above is now the Marquardt Jewelers building shown below. Now covered by stone and stucco, almost all architectural detail has been lost.



This building once stood where West End Liquor now stands, on the west end of the historic Main Street.



## **VII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thank you to the following Planning Commissioners who helped develop these guidelines:

Grant Gengel  
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Thank you to the New Prague Historical Society and the Minnesota Historical Society for sharing their historical photographs with the City of New Prague.