

# STOREFRONTS AND COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

## The Least You Need to Know:

- It is common in smaller towns for earlier residential buildings to have been converted to commercial use over the years.
- The storefront of a historic building is very prominent and may not match the age or style of the remainder of the building.
- These older storefronts are important too.
- Alterations to existing storefronts or the addition or removal of a storefront is a significant change and the design should be compatible with the original building as well as the surrounding buildings.



## Introduction

Mercersburg does not have a large commercial district. Generally its commercial buildings are interspersed among residential buildings near the square. Commercial buildings include both buildings originally constructed for commercial purposes or for a combination of commercial and residential uses, and buildings originally constructed as residences that were later converted to commercial use. Because these buildings have different origins, they may require varying treatments.

However, careful coordination of all these buildings can enhance the appearance of the historic district, draw customers to the area, and make Mercersburg a better place for residents and visitors to live, work, and shop.

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Because many of the commercial buildings are so closely spaced along the street, the facades - or front walls - of the buildings are particularly important. Alterations to the facades must be carefully considered to ensure that the special character of the building is maintained.

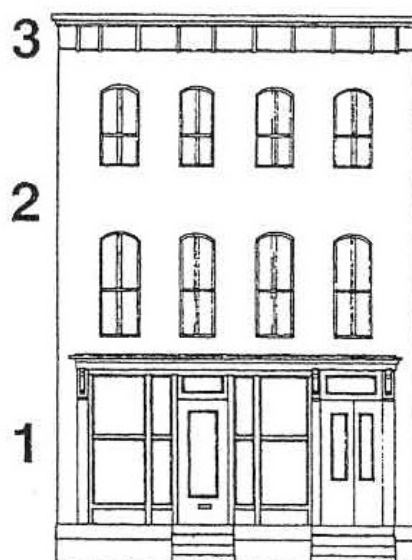
### The Storefront

Commercial buildings in Mercersburg are typically two or three stories high and are divided into three parts:

**A decorative cornice at the top**

**A middle section comprised mainly of windows**

**A storefront**



The lowest part of a commercial building, whether originally erected for residential or commercial purposes, includes the entrance to the business, windows to display merchandise, and associated structural and ornamental features. Some converted residential buildings might only receive enlarged windows, but many such structures have had storefronts installed.

The storefront is often the most significant feature of a commercial building. For this reason, it should be carefully maintained. For the same reason, it has historically been a prime target for alterations. Because storefronts are highly visible, sensitive design and rehabilitation can help draw customers into a business establishment. Such rehab is also a clear sign that the downtown is an active place, and this, too, will encourage consumers to shop downtown.

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The storefront is the most common form for the combination of entrance and display elements in buildings. Its primary characteristic is its open quality; a storefront typically has more glass than solid materials. Historic storefronts may be constructed of metal (cast iron, bronze, copper, tin, galvanized sheet iron, cast zinc, stainless steel), wood, masonry, or pigmented structural glass. Later alterations may have added plastic, imitation brick or stone, wood products, or new glass to the storefront.

### Repairing and Rehabilitating Storefronts

The repair and rehabilitation of a storefront can have a dramatic effect on the appearance of a building and on the number of customers who visit the building. The deterioration of individual elements of the storefront does not necessarily require the replacement of the entire storefront. Follow the options below to determine the appropriate treatment for a deteriorated storefront.

### Guidelines for Rehabilitating Existing Storefronts

Maintain the commercial character of the storefront. Avoid adding elements that appear residential in character.

Maintain the open character of the storefront that is achieved by using comparatively large amounts of glass. If a smaller window area is desired for a new use, retain the historic windows and install interior blinds, shutters, or curtains. Don't add solid materials to display window openings.

Use materials that were used historically. Because of the high visibility of storefronts, vinyl and aluminum siding, artificial masonry, and mirrored or tinted glass are not appropriate.

Historically, storefronts were set into the facade - not applied to it. This character should be maintained.

Maintain the location of the historic storefront entrance. If the entrance was always at the center of the building, avoid moving it to the side.



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## Priorities for Storefronts

- Remaining historic storefronts should be maintained and repaired, not replaced.
- Storefronts that have been altered or replaced should be restored to their historic appearance.
- Retain original designs and dimensions of recessed entrances.
- Maintain the historic size and shape of window openings of upper facades of commercial buildings. Reopen window and door openings that have been filled, and install appropriate doors and windows.
- Maintain all historic storefront cornices.

## Awning Guidelines for Commercial Buildings

Awnings have a number of advantages for commercial buildings. They help control heat gain in the summer, shelter customers, provide space for a sign, and add visual interest to the building.

Choose retractable awnings. They can be opened and closed as weather and lighting change.

Install awnings over entrances, large first story windows, and possibly over individual windows on upper stories of commercial buildings. On a storefront, they may be installed below the transoms or below the storefront cornice.

New awnings should be of canvas or natural, flexible fabrics. Plastic, metal and wood awnings reinforce the hard lines of the building, and the rigid character of the material does not allow flexibility in heating and in cooling.



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### Guidelines for Residential Buildings Converted to Commercial Use

Maintain the residential character of the building, particularly above the first story, by maintaining the historic size and shape of window openings, and the shape and character of the roof.

If the first story of the building remains residential in character, continue to maintain and retain that character.

If the first story has been altered to incorporate a storefront, that storefront may now be historic and significant. Maintain and retain such elements.

If unsympathetic alterations were made to incorporate a storefront at the first story, consider other options for making the building compatible with other buildings on the street, for example, through the use of appropriate awnings and signs.



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