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# URBAN DESIGN

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*Guidelines For Downtown Madison*

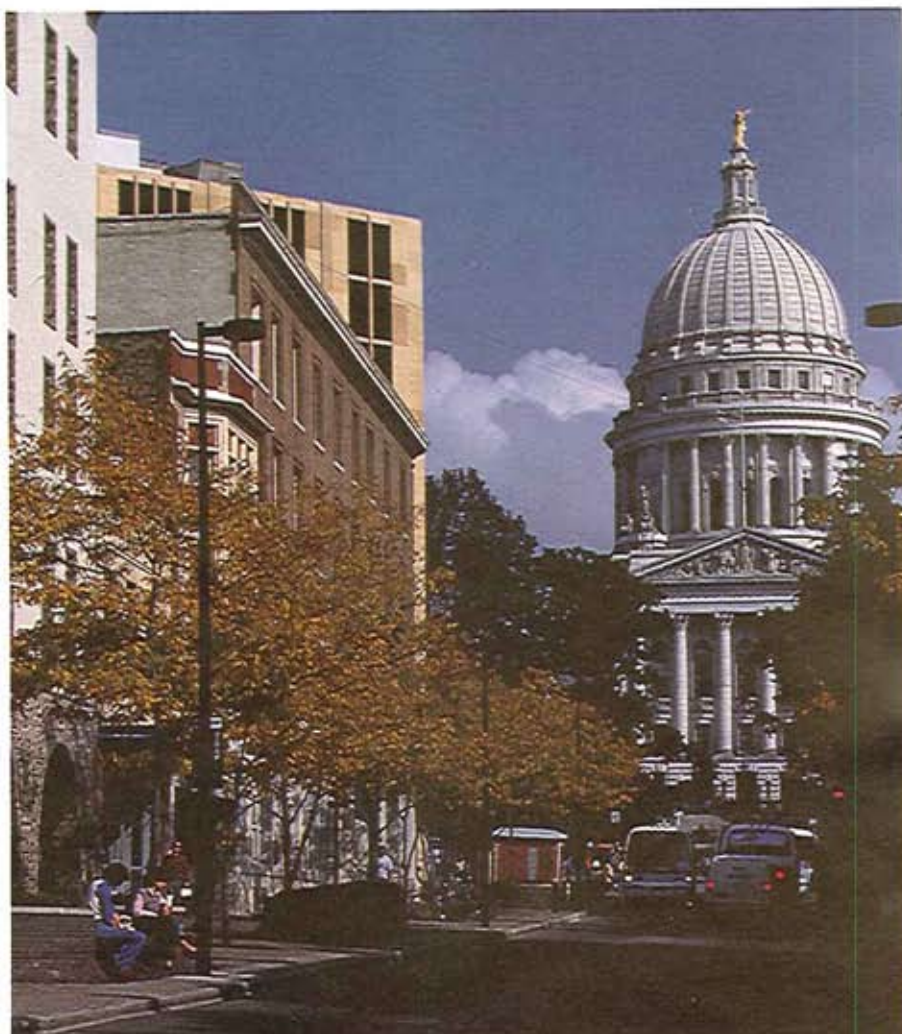
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## **Prologue**

This booklet has been prepared to assist property owners, tenants, designers and contractors in improving the overall appearance of the State Street Mall-Capitol Concourse Area. It contains a set of design guidelines relating to new building construction and the remodeling of existing structures. Also included is helpful information on obtaining necessary City and State approvals and permits.

In recent years, the public and private sectors have invested heavily in the future of Downtown Madison. The Mall-Concourse, the Civic Center and the Capitol Centre development are dramatic examples of the level of commitment to a healthy central city. Property and business people have begun upgrading their buildings as the economy of the area has improved. By using these design guidelines, the architectural qualities, which contribute to the unique quality of downtown will be preserved and enhanced.

Produced by the:  
Urban Design  
Commission  
Madison, Wisconsin



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In recent years, the congestion, the antiquated infrastructure, the deteriorated sidewalks, curbs and gutters which once characterized State Street and the Capitol Square have been replaced by the tree-lined Mall and Concourse. The atmosphere of this beautifully detailed pedestrian space is enjoyed daily by the thousands of employees, students, shoppers and nearby residents.

The area has also become the stage for a variety of special events and activities. The Farmers Market, the annual Art Fair, the Holiday Parade and the Summer Concerts on the Square draw additional thousands to the Downtown area to enjoy a unique urban ambience that can be found no where else in the Midwest.

Given this, it is only natural that there is concern about the appearance of the built-environment which frames the Mall-Concourse. The individual buildings that collectively make up the street facade possess architectural details and qualities which, in many cases have been ignored, violated or covered up. Building materials totally foreign to those used in the original structure have been introduced in poorly conceived storefront renovations. First floor exteriors have been changed without regard for the upper story facades. A plethora of signs detract from the area's overall appearance.

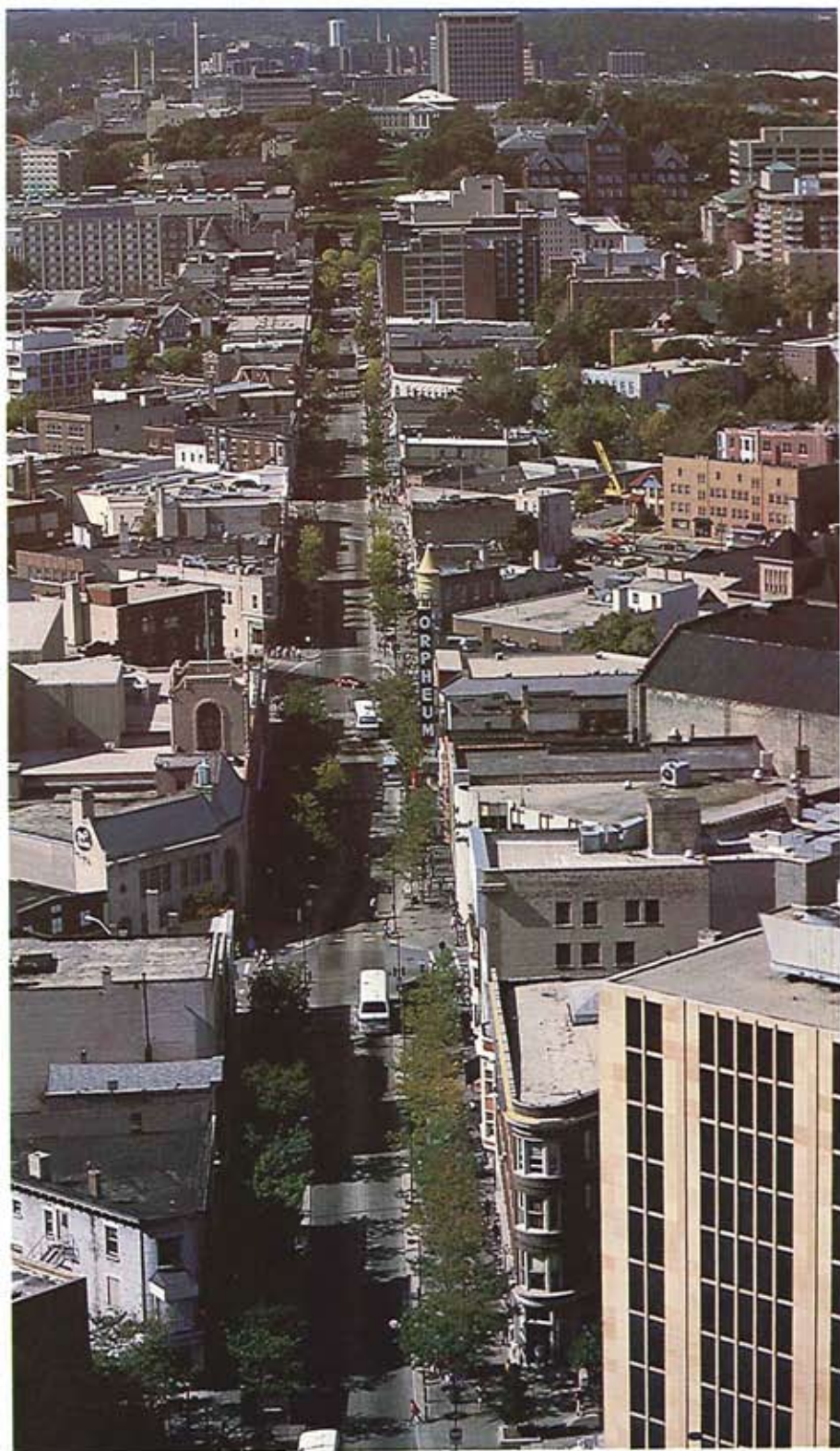


## Areas of Concern

The area shown on the map is the economic heart of our community and therefore deserves special attention. In addition to the State Street Mall and Capitol Concourse, portions of the University Avenue Redevelopment Area as well as the Olin Plan Development District are also included. There are numerous development opportunities within this total area. It is here where the application of these design guidelines is most important.



# 1



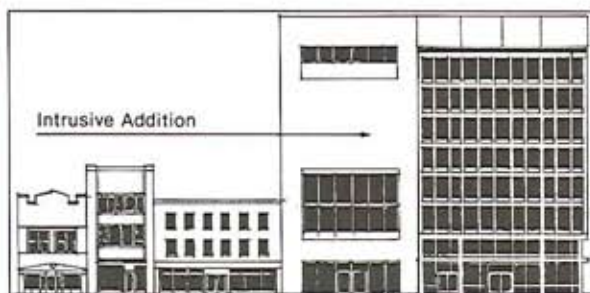
Throughout the downtown area, there are a variety of design concerns which are common to both new construction and rehabilitation. They are basic to any design solution and should be given thoughtful attention by a project designer.

The height, width, shape and bulk of buildings impact on the aesthetics of the downtown by either integrating with, or disrupting the established scale of the area. Larger buildings enjoy greater visual prominence and, therefore, have greater impact upon the streetscape and skyline. Each new building or major addition should be assessed in terms of its size, mass, shape and scale and how it relates to its surroundings. The composite of these shapes and forms over the years defines the skyline and appearance of the Central Business District.



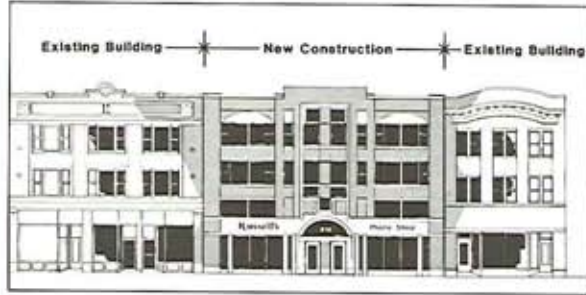
## **Relating To Other Buildings**

Downtown is a sequence of spaces through which people move; it is a series of buildings connected physically and visually. Therefore, the design of a new structure will have a significant visual impact on adjacent structures. While new buildings and major additions should possess their own character, design solutions that are obtrusive and present extreme contrasts with adjacent structures should be avoided. By respecting the proportion of window openings and doors of existing buildings, new structures and major additions will possess an appearance of "belonging" rather than one of "intruding".



This addition looks if it were part of the original building.

In new and remodeled structures, the window and door openings should have proportions that are in harmony with other buildings in the block. If the buildings in the block have vertical windows, the openings in the remodeled building should have similar proportions. These concerns are more important on State Street than on the Concourse.



A change in building's use often influences its exterior appearance.

Originally designed to house a department store, windows on the upper floors were impractical.



When the upper floors of the building were converted to offices, large windows and glass doors opening onto balconies were introduced.





It's at the street level where the pedestrian is most conscious of his surroundings. For this reason, the relationship of the ground-level facade of buildings to the sidewalk area is a crucial one. The Mall and Capitol Concourse provides a shopping atmosphere which can, and should be, reinforced when new construction, remodeling and restoration occur.



The street-level building facade should create interest for the passerby. Attractive, well-lit display windows permit the shopper to experience the activity inside. Some restaurants have been designed to showcase the food preparation behind street level windows. Blank walls are dull and uninteresting and should be avoided.

## Outdoor Space

When the use is appropriate, such as a cafe or a coffee shop, the floor plan should take advantage of the excitement and beauty of the Mall and Concourse. Indoor dining areas which, in good weather, can be opened up to establish a more natural relationship with the outdoor space, are encouraged.



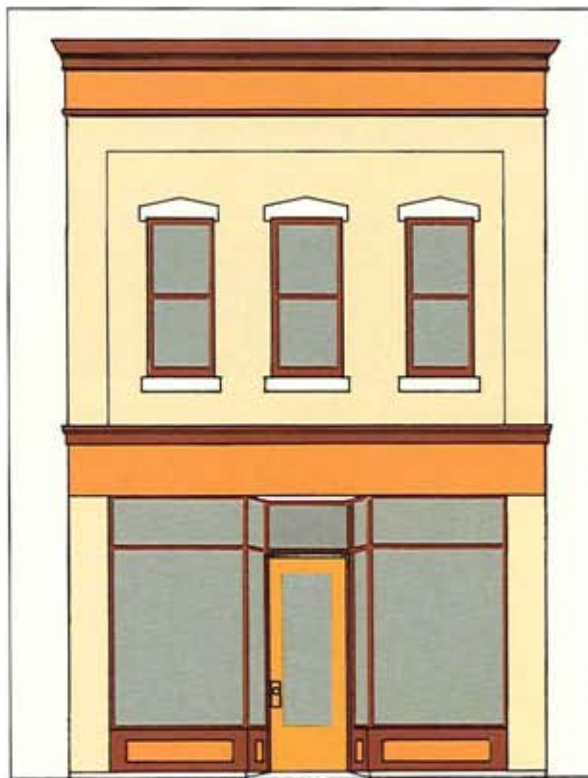
The ambience of the Mall and Concourse can be enhanced by the addition of sidewalk cafes. Their size, location, design and appearance, however, must be considered in the planning of these amenities. For instance, pedestrian capacity along the Mall and around the Concourse must be preserved. The sidewalk space immediately adjacent to the storefronts must be unobstructed. This is not only to accommodate pedestrians, but also to assist the physically handicapped who use the area and depend upon a consistent, barrier-free corridor in this location.

Furniture should be of an urban character and scaled to fit the space. Rustic picnic tables for example, would not be appropriate.

Sidewalk cafes are regulated by City Ordinance. Check with the Zoning Administrator if you are considering such a facility.

Color, texture and material are three design elements that are everywhere. Their effects are subtle and often unnoticed. They are discussed together because of the close relationship they share. For example, a yellow brick has both color and texture. Of the three elements, color has the most dramatic impact on the visual harmony of street facades. The choice of color is important in integrating a building within the block.

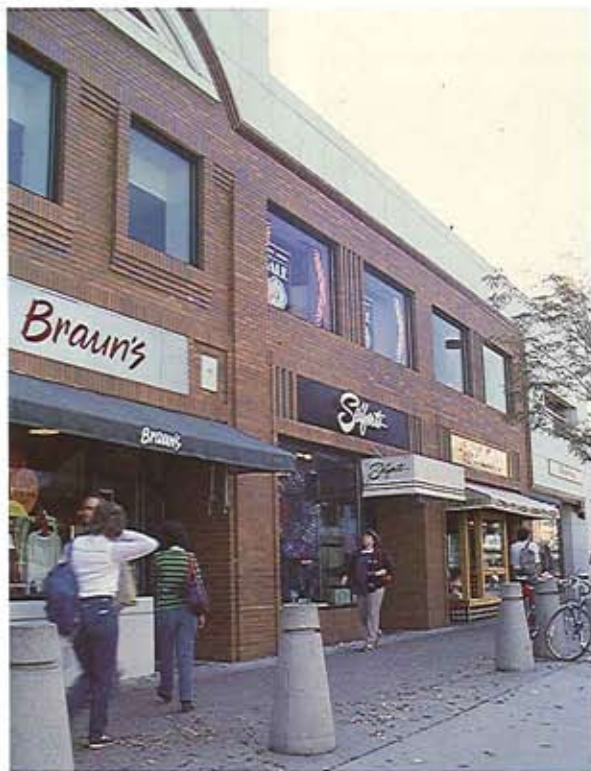
Color schemes should be simple, using the minimum number of colors necessary to achieve the desired look.



The basic guidelines for color are as follows:

- Along the Mall, the color selection should complement the predominant hues of the adjoining buildings.
- Brighter and darker hues should be used sparingly for accent or to draw attention to details, like a door.
- Brick should not be painted. If it is necessary to unify brick color due to patching or deterioration, the use of brick stain is recommended.
- When restoring a building, consider the original color scheme, if possible.





Materials and textures for the Mall area can be slightly different than the Concourse area. The Concourse can integrate highly urban materials, which have smooth finishes, such as glass, porcelain or precast masonry panels. Along the Mall, where buildings are smaller and the right-of-way is narrow, the use of more traditional materials, such as brick and smooth-cut stone is more appropriate.

Signs are a necessary part of any business. On State Street and the Square, it is important to communicate and identify businesses in an effective and tasteful way. As a visual element, signs can enhance or detract from the appearance of a commercial area.

The shape of signs should reflect the architectural lines of the building. Often there is a transom area above the first floor windows which lends itself perfectly to the location of a sign. Of course, if the transom is of a decorative material, such as luminaire glass or stained glass, it should not be covered. Signs should look like they belong on the building, rather than looking like they were tacked on as after-thoughts.

There are some types of signs which are inappropriate in the Mall Concourse area. Combination signs which identify the business as well as a product sold inside cheapen the appearance of the building and the street. Portable free-standing signs, placed in the right-of-way impede pedestrian traffic, detract from the appearance of the area and are prohibited by City ordinance. Nationally recognized logos and identification signs of franchised fast food or similar operations will be permitted only when they are scaled down in size and when they are integrated into the design of the facade on which they are located.



In some instances, it may be necessary to create signable areas. A signable area is a defined term in the City's Street Graphics Ordinance which regulates all signs. One designated area of a facade of a building up to the roofline which is free of windows, doors or architectural details is a signable area on which a sign can be located. Only one of these is permitted on each facade and the sign itself cannot exceed 40 percent of the designated area. This favors the use of individual raised letters which can be larger since the space between letters is not counted as part of the sign area. Appropriately scaled signable areas should be designed into new buildings.

The sign approval and permit should be obtained from the City *prior* to having the sign fabricated. This will eliminate needless expense and delays should the proposed sign be unacceptable.

## Window Awning and Banner Signs

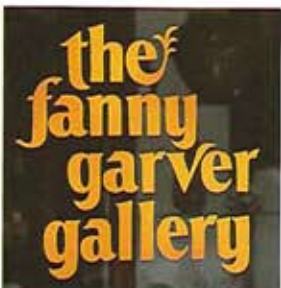
Due to the pedestrian nature of the Mall-Concourse area, attractive window signs of gold-leaf or neon tubing can be effective sign solutions. Signs silk-screened on banners or awnings are another acceptable way of identifying businesses.





Color should be compatible with the exterior tones of the building. It is recommended to use no more than two to three colors on signs. In recent years, the tasteful use of neon lighting has become popular and is acceptable. Raised individual letters externally lit or back lit are the preferred method of signing a building.

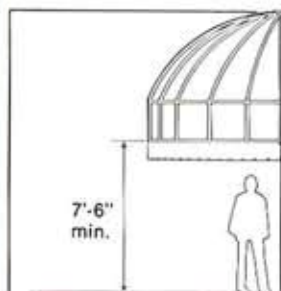
The quality of a sign is important because of its high visibility. This quality will be influenced by the choice of materials, type of sign, lettering and lighting.



In the case of multiple tenant buildings, the signing problem deserves careful attention. Each tenant is permitted an identification sign within the designated signable area. While individuality is encouraged in the tenant's selection of such things as type face, there should be some consistency in the type of sign treatment.

## Awnings

Awnings are functional, and they add color and interest to a building. Awnings shelter the pedestrian from the elements, protect window displays from sun damage, and help to keep store interiors cooler during hot summer days. During the winter, the awning can be retracted to capture solar warmth and natural lighting. Awnings can increase the visibility of businesses, particularly, in the case of second floor locations. By combining signage with an attractive awning treatment, the identity of the business can be improved. Awnings not only are historically compatible, but can be easily removed at a later date if tastes or uses change. They should complement the building color and architectural style. A minimum clearance of 7'-6" should exist between awning frames and the sidewalk.



A problem may arise when one tenant in a building which houses several shops, decides to remodel his storefront while the neighbors are not interested in remodeling. What can be done to insure that the overall integrity of the entire building facade can be preserved while permitting the partial facelift?

In most cases, leases are structured to make remodeling the responsibility of the individual tenants. It is unlikely that this concept will change. At such time as one tenant elects to remodel, the owner and all of the tenants should participate in preparing an overall plan for eventually treating the entire building facade. The overall plan should be subjected to the same approval process as the individual storefront and should be kept on file in the office of the City's Building Inspection Unit where permits are issued. In this way the architectural quality of the entire building will be protected while permitting individuality in the treatment of each storefront.

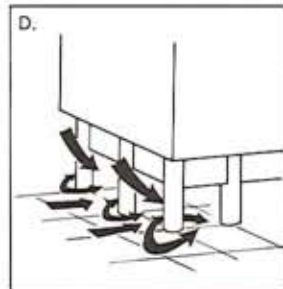
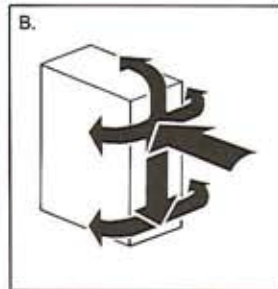
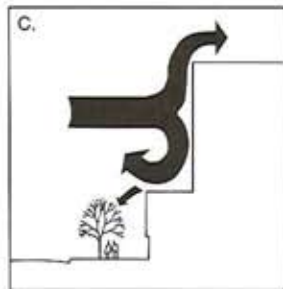
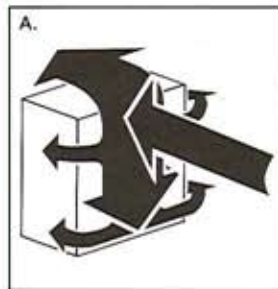


New multiple-tenant buildings such as this one, afford individuality to each shopkeeper by varying the materials and detailing in the facade. Identification signs use different lettering styles and lighting techniques, but are located at a consistent height above store entrances and are appropriately sized for the building.



Urban planners, architects and developers can combine their skills with the knowledge of local climatologists to make urban climates more tolerable, either by avoiding some of the worst side effects of the built environment or by capitalizing on the positive effects that the built environment can have on climate.

The micro-climate is the climate of a particular site. The height, mass, shape and orientation of a building on a site can significantly effect the micro-climate of the site and the surrounding area. Reduction of wind velocity at the street level to minimize discomfort to the pedestrian is the principle task. This means that the proper building design at the lower floor levels is crucial in most cases.



A. Rectangular buildings, 4 stories or more, with a main facade rising uninterrupted from ground level facing the prevailing winter wind direction, should be avoided. The taller the building, the higher the wind speed at the top of the building. Lower wind pressure at the lower level of the building draws air down the windward face of the building creating what is called "downwash". Downwash, when it hits the ground, produces other air movements which are swept around the building corners. The discomfort caused by these air movements can be quite severe during the winter months.

B. In some situations, it may be possible to turn the building 90 degrees so that the narrower facade is oriented to face the worst wind. This reduces the frictional drag of the wind on the building and accommodates the natural air flow.

C. The building can also be placed on a podium—the larger lower levels would intercept the downward wind flow before it reaches pedestrian level and deflect it.

D. Arcades and colonades at the base of an exposed building can induce uncomfortable wind conditions.

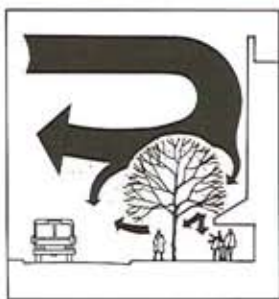
Sunlight is very important, particularly during the winter months when temperatures are most uncomfortable. Upper story building setbacks on tall buildings are encouraged to maximize sunlight penetration to the street, warming pedestrians and southfacing storefronts.

Awnings should be retracted on sunny winter days to permit the capture of light and heat.

Southfacing building facades should recognize passive solar potential in the building treatment.



Pedestrian safety and comfort can be improved through the use of skywalks. In Madison, the development of an extensive network of these facilities is limited by the fact that no structures are permitted which obstruct views of the State Capitol from approaching streets. There are, however, opportunities in the Olin Place area, to bridge across several streets carrying heavy traffic, and in these cases, the use of skywalks is encouraged.



### *Trees*

Trees and awnings at the building's base can improve conditions by providing shade and reducing precipitation and wind speeds at the pedestrian level.

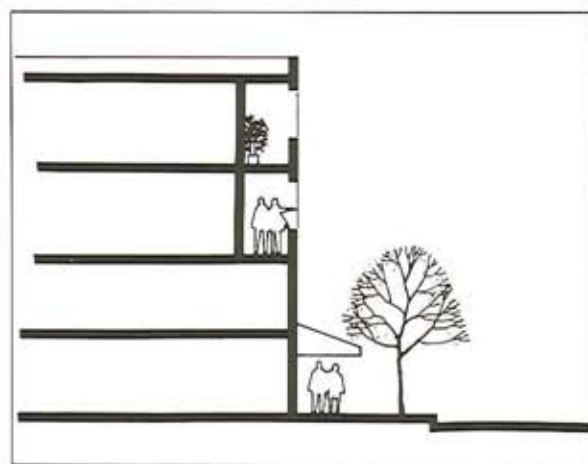
Trees help to diffuse the wind generated by the downwash of building facades as well as winds blowing along unobstructed streets or across open parking lots.

## **Balconies and Miscellaneous Design Issues**

Balconies afford their users a different perspective of the urban environment. They can also add interest to the appearance of a building. When balconies are included in the remodeling of an existing building, they may project over the sidewalk area. To minimize the shading of pedestrians at the street level, this projection should not exceed eight (8') feet. Storm water should be collected and drained into the storm sewer system. Projecting balconies should be open to the sky. Awnings or umbrellas may be used to shade balcony areas. On new buildings, balconies should be recessed from the property line avoiding the need to project into the right-of-way.

Air conditioner units should be tastefully integrated into the facade. Discharge water must be disposed of on the premises.

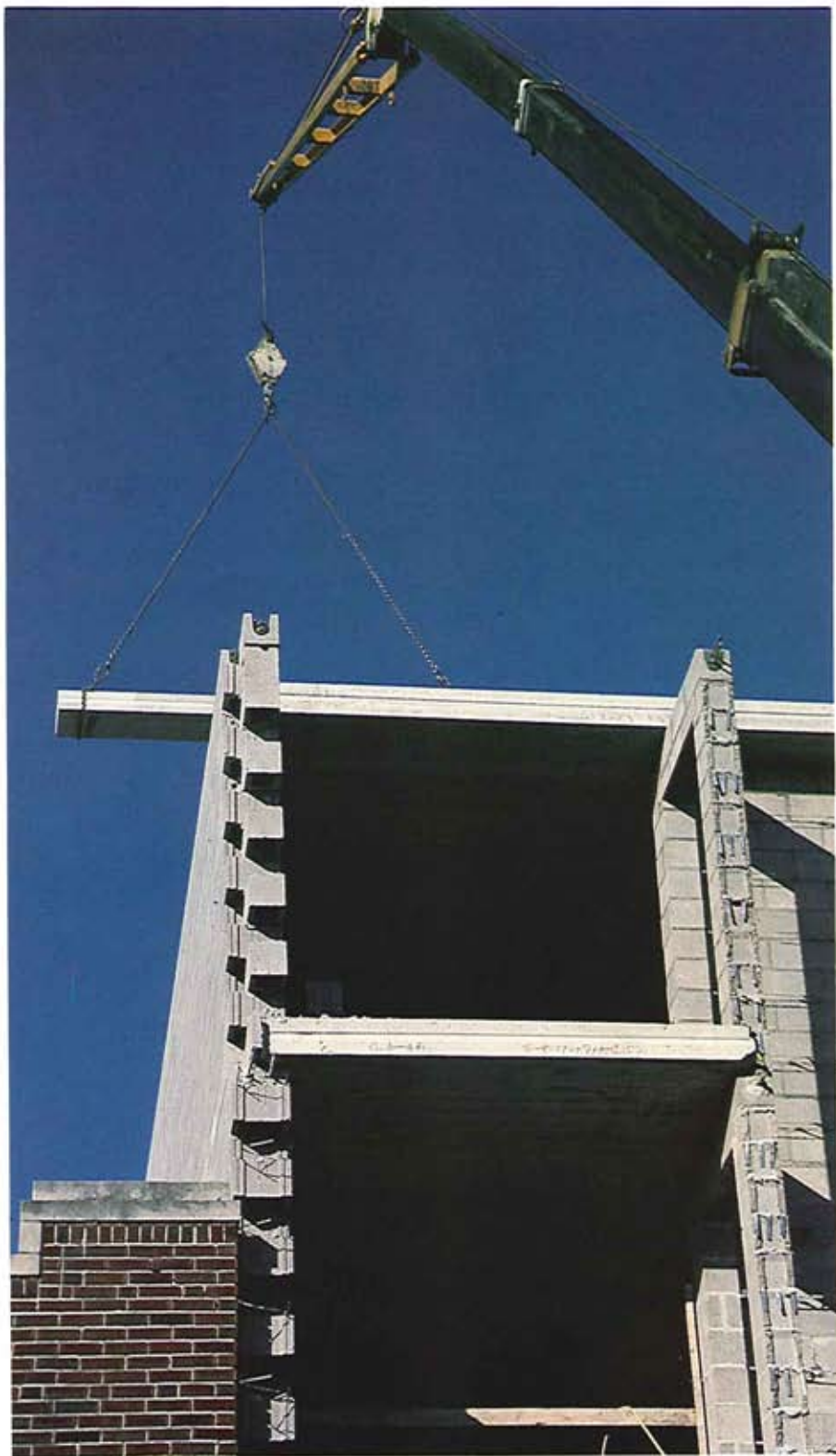
Trash storage is a problem, especially in the Mall area. Whenever possible, holding rooms should be provided in the building for this purpose. If space exists on the site for containers such as dumpsters, it should be attractively screened from view from the street. Sidewalk areas are for pedestrians, not trash storage, which is against city code.





## 2

New buildings or building additions along the Concourse or the Mall must be approved by the City's Plan Commission and Urban Design Commission. A discussion of several of the basic design considerations relating to new construction in the area follows.



## *Around The Concourse*

The Capitol is, and should remain, the most important structure in the City. The Capitol View Preservation provision in the zoning ordinance prohibits buildings within a mile of the Square from exceeding the elevation of the base of the Capitol Dome columns (187.2 feet above the level of Lake Monona).

In addition to the height concern, the choice of building materials color and shape of new structures around the Square should complement, not compete with or detract from the Capitol.

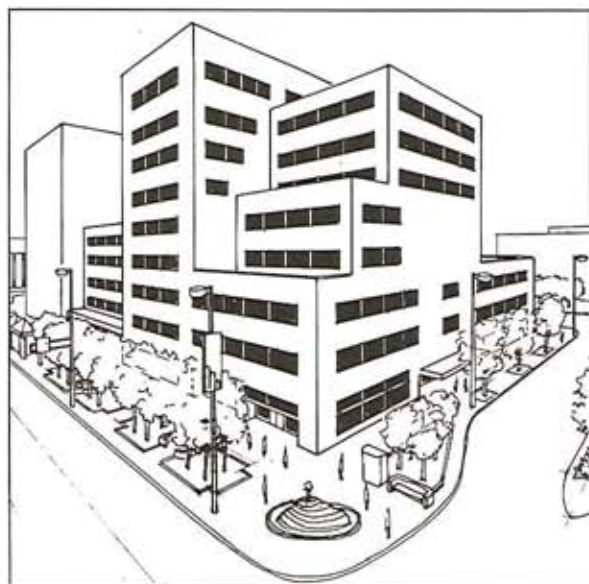


Most large downtown buildings are located on or near the Capitol Concourse, where the zoning ordinance permits ten-story structures. While the Capitol Park affords the pedestrian a feeling of openness, this can be jeopardized by a series of high-rise buildings with no setbacks.

The taller structures have been situated on corner lots, while midblock buildings are generally low-rise. Should this development pattern change, setting back the upper stories of taller buildings will preserve the character of the area while accommodating more density.

Another approach to reducing the mass of buildings is to integrate setbacks or recesses into the facade treatments.

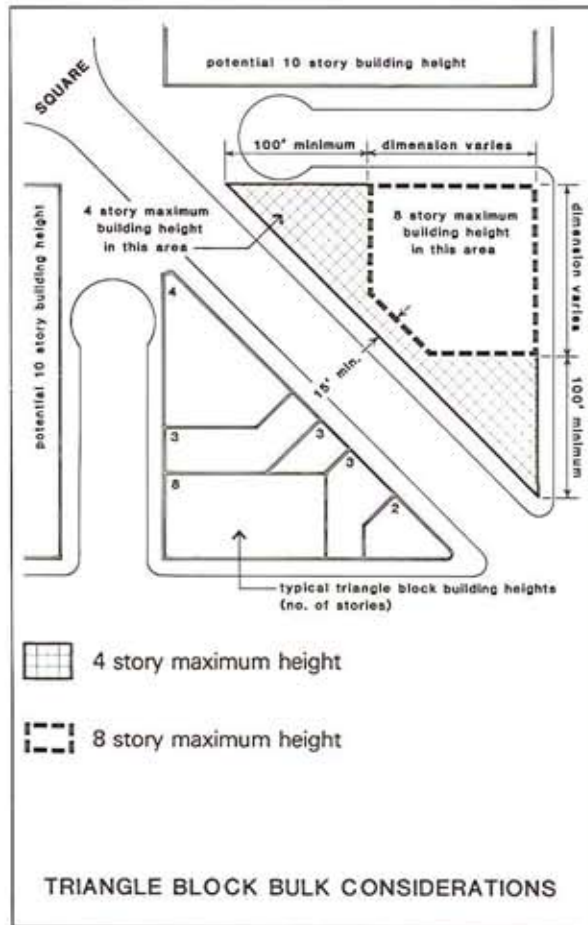
The buildings on the corners of the Concourse warrant more careful consideration for scale, mass and bulk, because of the prominences they enjoy. The illustrations and photo (above and right) demonstrate the effective use of setbacks.





## The Corners Of The Concourse

At each corner of the Square, the two triangular blocks present special design problems. Each of the diagonal streets approaching the Square is terminated by a view of the Capitol. To insure the preservation of these vistas, new buildings along these street frontages should not exceed four stories. Taller structures should be generally limited to the "right angle" portions of these blocks, away from the diagonal streets.



Part of the charm and character of State Street results from the consistency of the height and width of buildings up and down the street. The present situation provides a friendly pedestrian space with ample sunlight and interesting amenities. New buildings should respect this existing scale, rhythm and proportion.



Rhythm and proportion are important considerations in the design of new buildings along the Mall. Such things as the size and placement of doors and windows and a variety of architectural reliefs and projections contribute to the overall appearance of the streetscape and should be reflected in new structures.

The widths and heights of buildings on State Street establish a visual rhythm. To maintain this, architectural details can be used to divide the facade into similar proportions to reflect the scale of the adjacent properties.

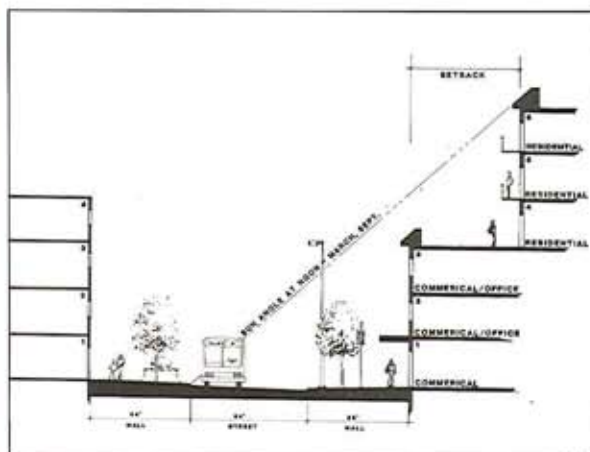


The use of exposed aggregate concrete and paver block and brick similar to those used on the Mall-Concourse sidewalk area in building entries and plazas will make these areas seem like extensions of the streetscape.



## ***Building Setbacks***

The zoning ordinance permits four-story buildings along the Mall. Taller structures are possible if approved by the City. To preserve the existing pedestrian scale of the area, upper floors of taller buildings should be stepped back from the sidewalk area. These setbacks will also permit sunlight into the Mall area.





# 3

Madison has many fine old buildings, which should be considered for restoration. Restoration in this context is the exterior reinstatement of the original architectural integrity or structural form to the level of quality buildings of the past. Restoration should be approached in a practical way to recreate the spirit of the building with the aid of present day materials. Restoration affords the community a unique link with its local heritage and, in many cases, the cost of restoration may be less than remodeling or new construction.

Buildings of lesser architectural and historical significance are candidates for rehabilitation. In "rehabing" a building, some of the quality of the old is retained, but not necessarily in any authentic way. Remodeling, on the other hand, is changing from its present appearance to a total new look.



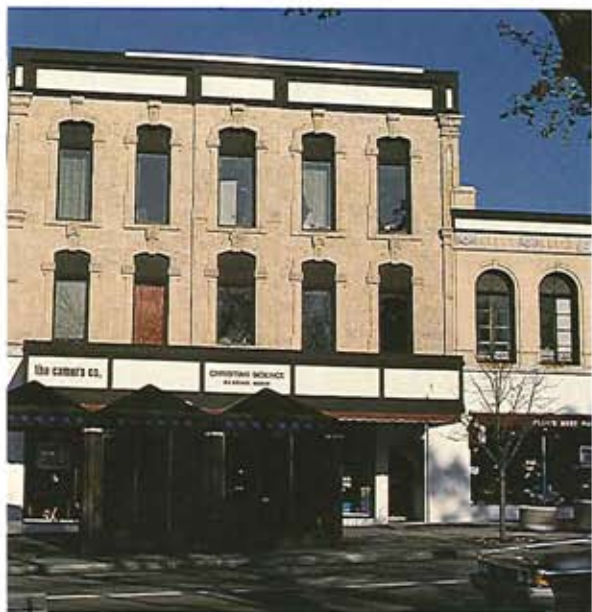
The best approach to rehabilitating the exterior appearance of an existing building is most often the conservative approach. Remodelings that attempt to modernize the design of a building usually look dated and old-fashioned after a few years. Simple renovations that respect the original design of a building can be classic in character and never go out of style.

If you are considering changing the exterior of your building, here are a few suggestions which could produce the best results while possibly saving you time and money.

Stand across the street and take a good look at your building. Take note of its original architecture and building materials and how it relates to the adjacent buildings. Take a couple of photographs for future reference during the design and decision-making process.

Chances are, the original storefront has been covered over during previous remodeling efforts. Have your contractor carefully remove parts of the existing facade, so you can see what's behind. You may find the original storefront still intact and suitable for restoration.

At this point, you should take advantage of the expertise that is available at the Department of Planning and Development. Sit down with the staff there and discuss the options. They have a good deal of experience in this area, and can advise you on which approach would be most appropriate, what approvals are needed and how to obtain them.



Too often, not enough attention is given to preparing plans for rehabilitation and remodeling. The type or level of planning and design skills required will depend upon the process you choose. If it is restoration, select a contractor experienced in this field. Here, the plan may be a set of recommendations of the tasks to be performed to restore the building to its original character. In the case of remodeling, consult with an architect who is familiar with the complexities of this type of work.

Remodeling requires special skills. A well-conceived remodeling documented with a detailed set of plans is a good investment.

With your plans complete you are ready now to obtain the necessary approvals and begin the actual work. A visit with the Planning and Development staff will help to simplify the approval process and assure you and the community of a successful effort.

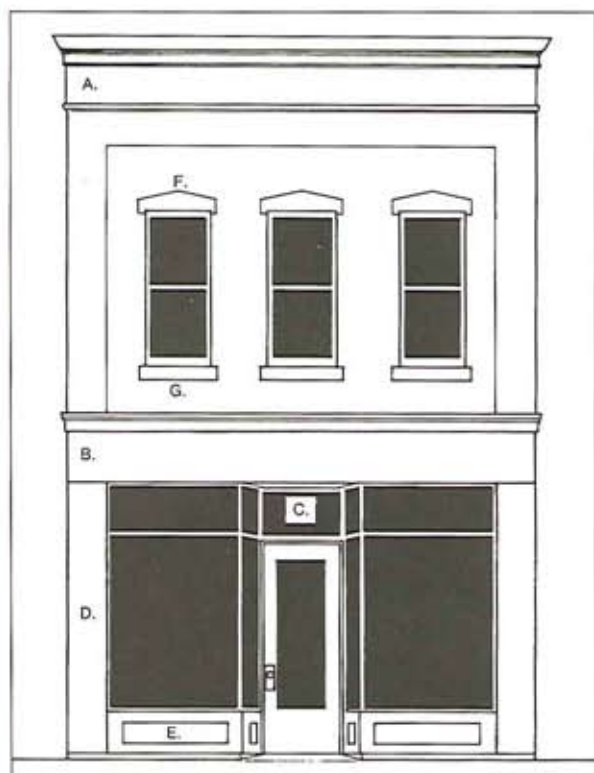


There are two important principles to be considered in restoration, rehabilitation or remodeling:

1. Each building visually shares the block with the other buildings. It is important that changes reflect the overall character of the street facade. Individuality and creativity are encouraged as long as this principle is not violated.

2. The entire street facade of a building must be treated. The visual integrity of the structure is significantly diminished when the street level storefront is upgraded while the upper story facade is left untreated.

In most cases, the upper floors of older buildings in the Mall-Concourse area have retained their original character. The street level facade has usually been changed by a succession of tenants with varying needs. Early on in the planning process, it must be determined to what extent restoration is practical, or even desirable. If for example, many elements of the original storefront facade have been eliminated or significantly damaged, restoration may not be practical. In such cases, a skillful designer can create a contemporary storefront which respects the original building character.



Typically, older building facades along the Mall and around the Concourse feature similar design elements. Recognition of these elements by name will provide for better communication between yourself, your designer, city staff and the Urban Design Commission.

- A. Building Cornice
- B. Storefront Cornice
- C. Transom
- D. Pilasters
- E. Kick Panels
- F. Lintel
- G. Sill





## Materials

Materials should be selected which respect those of the adjacent buildings. Materials, such as rough sawed wood, raw aluminum, imitation brick or stone, rustic shingles or aggregate panels should not be used.

### Masonry

In selecting brick or stone in remodeling projects, the color and proportions of the individual masonry unit should not contrast sharply with those which are common to most of the structures in the area.

Masonry in older buildings can be fragile. If it needs cleaning, choose a gentle method such as washing with water, chemicals or possibly steam. Sandblasting can damage the surface of brick and lead to deterioration due to moisture penetration. Since cleaning and tuckpointing can be messy, do it first.



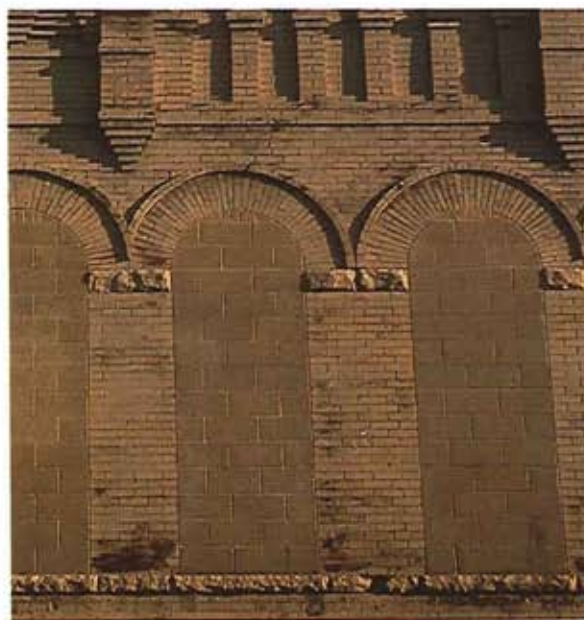
Wood should be protected with preservatives, primers and paint. If the surface is not properly prepared, the paint will peel within a year or two. Color of paint should be carefully selected and should complement the tone of the building.



The size of existing window openings contribute to a rhythm which should be maintained. Correctly sized windows for the existing opening should be used to avoid partially blocking up the opening for the convenience of using standard windows.

If privacy is required, permanently closed interior shutters or drapes can be used, or if necessary, spandrel glass can be inserted in place of the window glass. Partially blocked up windows disrupt the rhythm of the building.

Raw aluminum should not be used as it destroys the original character of a building. Extruded aluminum window mullions and frames should have a dark anodized finish. If existing storm windows are made of raw aluminum, they can be painted after they have weathered a few years.





## *Architectural Details*

Important architectural details should be preserved. Decorative cornices, columns, reliefs and projections in the facade are expressions of the building style and the builder's craftsmanship. By the same token, the application of details which are not authentic should be avoided. For example, shutters are inappropriate, since only two or three buildings in the area are old enough to have once been equipped with them.







The Urban Design Commission hopes that these guidelines will help you in making decisions about your property. The Mall-Concourse area is a very special place. A sensitive approach to upgrading individual properties will produce an environment which reflects the best of the old while integrating the architecture of today.



## Obtaining Approvals

Various approvals and permits are required before proceeding with new construction or remodeling in the downtown area. Some can be obtained by merely stopping at the permit counter in the Department of Planning and Development office. Others, however, may require public hearings before a Board, Commission, or possibly even, the Common Council. To facilitate your planning and scheduling, look over this handy summary to see what approvals or permits your project may require.

| Activity                                    | Permits Required                              | Approximate Time Required |
|---|---|---------------------------|
| Rezoning                                    | Ordinance Amendment                           | 6-8 weeks                 |
| Conditional Use                             | Conditional Use Permit                        | 3-5 Weeks                 |
| Demolition                                  | Wrecking Permit<br>Conditional Use Permit     | 3-5 Weeks                 |
| New Building                                | Building Permit<br>Conditional Use Permit     | 3-5 Weeks                 |
| Exterior Remodeling                         | Building Permit<br>Conditional Use Permit     | 3-5 Weeks                 |
| Signs                                       | Street Graphic Permit                         |                           |
| Awnings                                     | Awning Permit                                 |                           |
| Parking Lots                                | Building Permit<br>Conditional Use Permit     | 3-5 Weeks                 |
| Street or Sidewalk Encroachment             | Privilege in Street                           | 2-4 Weeks                 |
| Banners in Public Right-Of-Way              | Privilege in Street                           | 2-4 Weeks                 |
| Banners on Private Property, Sidewalk Cafes | Privilege in Street<br>Conditional Use Permit | 3-5 Weeks                 |
| Murals                                      | Conditional Use Permit                        | 3-5 Weeks                 |

| <b>Board, Commission or Staff Approvals Required</b>         | <b>For Information Telephone</b> |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Plan Commission<br>Common Council<br>Urban Design Commission | 266-4560                         |
| Plan Commission<br>Urban Design Commission                   | 266-4560                         |
| Plan Commission<br>Landmarks Commission                      | 266-4560                         |
| Plan Commission<br>Urban Design Commission                   | 266-4560                         |
| Plan Commission<br>Urban Design Commission                   | 266-4560                         |
|  | 266-4569                         |
|  | 266-4558                         |
| Traffic Engineer<br>Plan Commission                          | 266-4761                         |
| Street Encroachment Committee                                | 266-5974                         |
| Director, Department of<br>Planning and Development          | 266-5974                         |
| Plan Commission<br>Street Encroachment Committee             | 266-5974                         |
| Plan Commission<br>Urban Design Commission                   | 266-4560                         |



## ***Acknowledgements***

*F. Joseph Sensenbrenner, Jr., Mayor*  
*George E. Austin, Director, Department of*  
*Planning & Development*  
*Charles R. Dinauer, Director, Planning Unit*

## ***Urban Design Commission***

*Jeff Kavanagh: Chairman*  
*Horst Lobe*  
*Ross Potter*  
*Richard Shutter*  
*Anne Monks*  
*Dolly Harman*  
*Kent Johnson*  
*John Stockham*  
*Ed Kleckner: Secretary*

## ***Participating staff***

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*Archie Nicolette, Planner II*