

Utilities and Rear Facades

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR THE H-1 DISTRICT

Utilities can have a significant impact on a building's appearance, particularly when located on the front façade. Even when placed on the side or rear of a building, utilities may contribute to a cluttered appearance and interfere with efficient use of these areas.

The visibility and accessibility of the rear façade from adjacent off-street parking areas makes improving the appearance of these areas desirable. Rear facades may provide increased opportunities for additional access to both ground-floor and upper-story activities.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS...

The architectural character of a commercial façade can be destroyed by the numerous or obtrusive placement of utilities.

Improving the appearance of rear facades of commercial buildings—especially those visible from adjacent parking areas or open spaces—can increase opportunities for business identity and patron access.

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 original or significant later materials and features of a building's rear façade. Although changes to the rear of a building are generally more acceptable than those to a front façade, it is particularly important to retain features that are of the same design as original features present on the principle façade.

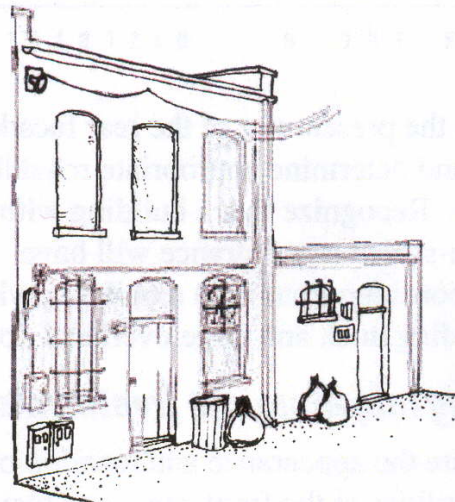
✓ Assess the present use of the rear façade of a building and determine appropriate rehabilitation treatments. Recognize that a build-

ing with a pedestrian-scaled rear entrance will have different considerations than a building with a raised loading dock and large overhead doors.

Removing Inappropriate Treatments

✓ Evaluate the appearance and location of existing utilities at the front, side, and rear of a building, including:

- electric lines, panels, and meters,
- telephone lines and panels,
- gas and water meters,
- cable television lines,
- satellite dishes,
- solar panels,
- fire alarms, sprinklers, and security systems,
- window air-conditioning units,
- fuel tanks and mechanical equipment,
- trash containers and recycling bins,
- loading/delivery area, and
- private parking.



Inappropriate window treatments, outdated utilities, and trash add to the cluttered appearance of a rear façade.

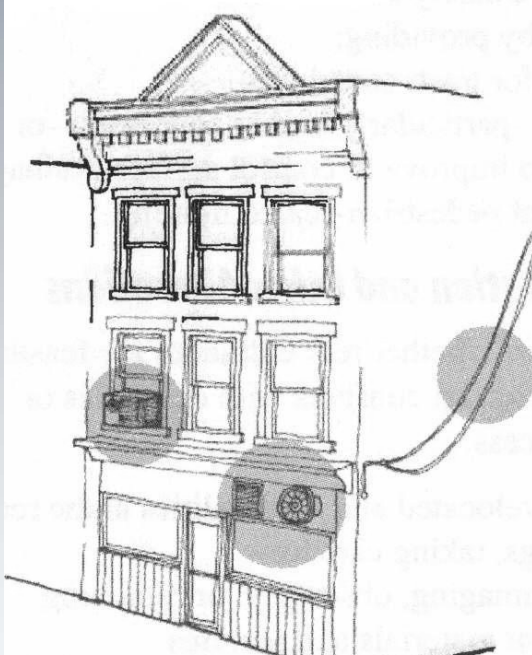
DEFINITION

Rehabilitation: Making possible a compatible new use for a building through repair, alterations, or additions while preserving portions or features that are important to the building's historic or architectural character.



Removing inappropriate window treatments, outdated utilities, and providing a trash area can improve the appearance of a rear façade.

✓ Relocate conspicuous utilities whenever possible to less visible locations. Plan utility placements and connections so that they do not interfere with public access to rear entrances.



Removing exhaust fans and power lines to a less conspicuous location at the side or rear of a building will improve the appearance of its façade.

✓ Remove materials that detract from the appearance of a rear facade whenever possible, such as:

- metal panels, plywood siding, or other cover-up treatments,
- masonry, metal, or plywood window

infill,

- window grates, window-mounted fans, or mechanical equipment, and
- outdated signs, lighting, utilities, wires, and hardware.

✗ Do not allow water dripping from air-conditioning units to fall on pedestrians or cause deterioration to building materials.

Repairing Damage

✓ Make sure that gutters, downspouts, and drains work properly and that the ground slopes away from the rear of the building to avoid water damage and building deterioration.

✓ Improve safety and maintenance at the rear of buildings by providing:

- an area for trash containers,
- paving—particularly to rear entrances—or gravel to improve or control surface drainage, and
- sufficient pedestrian-scaled lighting.

Rehabilitation and Other Alterations

✓ Consider whether rear entrances are feasible. Reduce potential conflicts with deliveries or service access.

✓ Install relocated and new utilities at the rear of buildings, taking care to:

- avoid damaging, obscuring, or removing important materials and features,
- reduce conflicts at access of rear entrances, and
- install the utilities in a neat manner and an inconspicuous location.

✓ Enclose and screen trash collection areas rather than leaving trash cans or dumpsters in full view.

✓ Consolidate the location of utility meters and servicing requirements for several adjacent buildings and provide a centralized trash pick-up site.

✓ Explore ways to reduce the visual impact of utilities by screening them or painting them the same color as the walls of the building when they cannot be eliminated or relocated.

✓ Make public access to the rear of a building identifiable, inviting, and safe by providing:

- separate pedestrian and delivery/ service access,
- adequate walkways, paving, and lighting, and
- clearly identifiable entrance door and signage.

✓ Relate the design of the rear façade to the design of the principle façade. The relationship may be reinforced by the similar treatment of:

- color,
- entrance door and hardware,
- sign shape and lettering style,
- (smaller) display windows,
- awnings, and
- lighting.

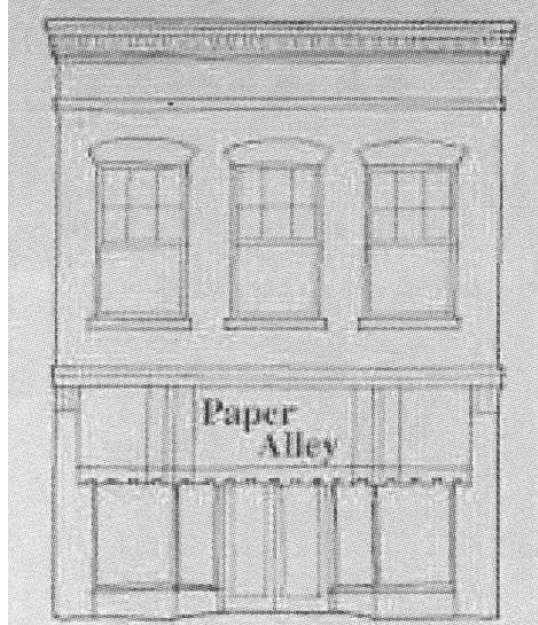
✓ Consider that a rear entrance may be different in design from the storefront if the rear of the building serves a different tenant, such as an upstairs office, but make both the rear entrance and the main storefront relate to the overall character of the building.

✓ Consider using plant materials at the rear of buildings to improve their appearance and make entrances more inviting. Avoid, however, planning schemes that will require considerable maintenance.

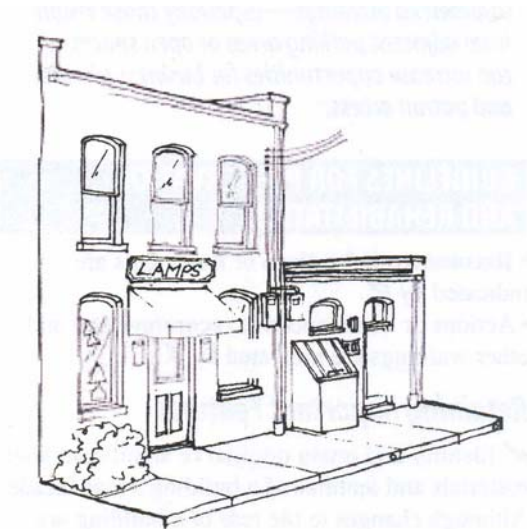
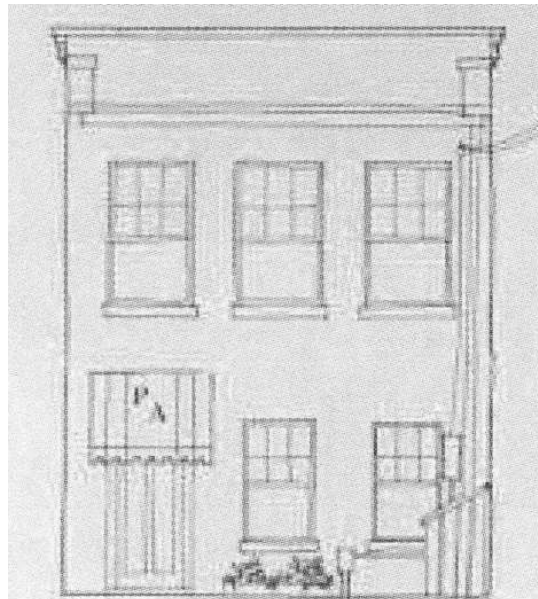
✓ Satellite dishes should be sized as small as possible.

✓ Public visibility of satellite dishes should be as limited as possible. They should never be sited on building fronts.

✓ Solar panels and other roof top utilities should be screened from public view by placement behind parapet walls or being set beyond the field of view from the street.



The design, materials, features, and color scheme of a rear face such as that shown below, particularly one that provides public access, should relate to the front façade in a relationship similar to the one illustrated.



Rehabilitated rear faces make safe and attractive secondary entrances to ground-floor commercial spaces.