

Designing Downtown NOW: Real Tactics and Tools to Enhance Your Businesses and Districts

Urban Businesses and Storefronts: Small Enhancements – BIG Difference

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District/Business Challenges – Waiting to Achieve the Long-Term Vision

- Lack of financial resources
- Time – need to make an impact now
- Lack of professional assistance
- Cumbersome review processes
- Getting hung up on wanting something better
- Pressure to wait for something better

Short-Term Opportunities – Effective, Easy Improvements

1. Use of Paint and Color

- Fairly inexpensive - \$2,500-\$5,000 per façade (depending on size of building)
- Use to highlight (or suggest) architectural features
- Distinguish your business/building from others
- Add vibrancy
- “Suggest” window openings (for covered window openings)
- Think also about highly visible rear facades, especially if they face *the street, pedestrian alleys and parking areas*
- Important to follow basic guidelines when combining colors
 - Complementary Colors – can be very bold and effective yet jarring if not used properly
 - Analogous Colors – subtle, be careful to make sure not too subtle
 - Triadic Colors - can be very bold but good to let one color be the main color and the others as accents

○ Split-Complementary Colors – similar to complementary but more forgiving...good for beginners.

- Good reference website: www.tigercolor.com/color-lab/color-theory/color-harmonies.htm

2. Blank Walls

- Take advantage of large highly visible surfaces
- Consider using to highlight map of district
- Murals
- Can be effective backdrop for umbrella tables, outdoor dining – create some “life” along the blank wall
- Can be effective backdrop for plantings – particularly potted plants with bold and colorful foliage/flowers against a contrasting backdrop (think about color schemes as you would with paint)

3. Awnings

- Economical - \$1000-\$2000 per façade
- Rich, dark colors work best
- Great opportunity to provide contrast to painted façade, particularly if there is not a lot of variety in façade colors
- Awnings can also double as signage
- Caution: reflective (plastic and highly reflective surfaces) can cheapen the look of the business and district
- Caution: too much sign information on the awning dilutes the key message (your business name/brand/logo) and creates visual chaos

4. Signs

- Can be economical - \$750-\$2,500
- Focus should be establishing business identity and brand
- Signs should be visible from the front (façade/window and awning signs) and from the side for approaching pedestrians (blade sign, side of awning)
- Keep it simple
- Consider use of merchandise as part of sign
- Caution: avoid temptation to try to convey too much information - advertising everything you have and displaying phone numbers

5. Lighting

- Can be economical
- Use to highlight architectural features
- Provides a sense of security and scale
- Consider image of the light fixture during the day as well as at night

6. Window Displays

- Can often cost nothing – just some time and creativity on your part
- Keep it simple

- Develop a theme
- Consider creative display of merchandise you already have – repetition of the same item is highly effective (snow shovels, radios, mixing bowls, etc.)
- Invite views into the business – don't block out views so that customers can't see inside
- Keep it fresh – change it around on a regular basis
- Use to take attention away from less attractive storefronts
- Keep the glass sparking! This costs nothing!
- Utilize vacant storefronts – if you are a property owner, consider making it available to the district for arts, promotions, etc.
- Consider “inter-active” temporary displays

7. Sidewalk Activity

- Can often cost nothing – with display of merchandise you already have. Otherwise, umbrella tables - \$500-\$1500, planters and pots - \$100-\$500
- Include merchandise displays, planter pots and plantings, outdoor dining with bright umbrellas
- Keep displays simple
- Use displays to entice customers
- Be creative with mundane objects – repetition of the same item is highly effective (wheelbarrows, Adirondack chairs, wagons, etc.)

8. Streetscape Elements

- Can cost property owner nothing – but needs support / cooperation of property owner
- Pick up the trash – it doesn't cost anything!
- Don't fight the use of street trees – rather, encourage the use of the right kind of tree (the canopies of small ornamental trees block window displays and sign panels while tall canopy trees allow sightlines underneath the canopies)
- Generally avoid Crape Myrtles and Cherry Trees, except as accents
- Avoid trees with heavy dark shade – Honeylocust are very effective and are light and airy; London planetree, while coarser texture are also effective with their fairly open habit
- Keep trees limbed up
- Get involved in your district streetscape projects so you can have a positive impact on the outcome
- Be open to creative use of parking spaces – the loss of one parking space can create bike parking for 20 potential customers or outdoor dining for 10-12 customers

9. Why is all of this important?

- **Make a big impact early on to begin changing perceptions**
- **Impression of district**
- **Impression of business**
- **Contribute to placemaking strategies and creating vibrancy**
- **Encourage customers to browse by contributing to attractive environment**
- **Increase property values**
- **Contributes to sense of safety – security doors, limited activity on the street all contribute to sense – whether real or not- that the district is unsafe**

10. Other Considerations

- It is important to understand the context of your building within the district
- How does your exterior relate to your business?
- What do you wish to do with your property long-term and short-term? How does this mesh with any district program goals?
- Does it make sense to coordinate with other businesses, particularly if one building is divided into multiple storefronts
- Are design guidelines in place?

11. Design Guidelines

- Carrot or stick?
- Don't make too complicated
- Include in the review board:
 - Non-design professionals
 - People outside of "Main Street"
 - City representatives
- Pre-meetings are critical
- Base review on guideline...not personal opinion
- Consider "tiers" of grants
- Consider application period as opposed to accepting applications all year long
- Keep record of "before" views
- Promote and recognize