



City of Douglas
Downtown Douglas Historic District
Rehabilitation Standard

CONTEXT AND CHARACTER

The downtown commercial area in Douglas consists of a once densely developed set of blocks immediately east of the rail line. As developed by circa 1920, the Hotel LaBonte defined the north end of the area as did the railroad tracks the west side. Most of the commercial buildings were north of Oak Street on the south end of the area. Fourth Street was a transitional area where civic buildings (the Masonic Hall), and commercial buildings stood on the west side and dwellings and a church stood on the east side of the street.

The blocks were platted in narrow, 25-foot lots and the buildings erected were primarily 25 of 50 feet in width. The long, narrow buildings rose from the edge of the sidewalk with no setbacks and the consistent street walls were interrupted by only a few vacant properties north of Center Street and alleys. The sidewalks edge the street and are plain grey poured concrete, as was typical in small towns. Alleys provided access to the rear of the buildings

One-story commercial buildings. Many of the one-story commercial buildings in Douglas are 25 feet wide, though there are some wider ones as well. Some of the brick buildings of this type have a tall façade, evoking the wood false-front building, which gives the small buildings more presence in the streetscape. Cornices and shaped parapets appear on these buildings. Others have flat roofs and the façade serves mainly as a frame for the storefront.

Two-story commercial buildings. These buildings known as commercial blocks are typically brick. The ground stories are filled with storefronts and usually have an entrance to the stairs that lead to the upper level; alternatively, the staircase is accessed from the main space on the ground floor. The upper levels consist of brick walls pierced by windows set in a regular fenestration pattern. Patterned brickwork or a projecting cornice appears on the parapet wall that edges the nearly flat roof.

Storefronts. This portion of the building follows standard forms for commercial buildings: kick plate or bulkhead between the sidewalk and show window; transom windows above the show windows; a sign band or storefront cornice above those windows; and a centered or side entrance to each storefront area. The entrance may be somewhat recessed and flanked by angled walls, but the larger “exterior lobbies” added to many buildings during the mid-twentieth century are not common in Douglas. No doubt, many of these buildings had retractable awnings that were positioned either immediately above or below the transom windows that are positioned above the main show windows.

Aluminum-framed storefronts have been added to many buildings; this took place after World War II when aluminum was used for various types of building components. Aluminum flat awnings were added to shelter some of these newer storefronts, as well

as older ones. Mansard-shaped awnings clad with wood shingles are components of later storefront refurbishment during the last decades of the twentieth century.

Garage/automobile repair buildings. The importance of the Yellowstone Highway through Douglas is reflected in the large number of automobile related buildings in the downtown commercial area. These buildings typically had a commercial/industrial appearance with brick exterior walls framing vehicular door openings. The buildings' fenestration and roof forms facilitated ventilation.

Others: fraternal halls, residences, hotels. The downtown area includes other buildings types that have individual character.

Materials, forms, and finishes. All downtown buildings were built with materials that have a finish that protects their surfaces and withstands exterior exposure. Brick has its "skin" added in a kiln; stone has a weathered surface; wood and metal are painted; and terra cotta and tile have glazed exteriors. Unfinished wood – used as siding or as shingles – is not part of this vocabulary. Neither is material that is intended to replicate another; faux stone veneer is the most common example of this. These materials – unpainted wood and simulated stone and other veneer products – tend to date a building to a certain period when changes were made – rather than present a building in the more "timeless" vocabulary of stone, brick, painted wood, and painted metal. Canvas awnings (rather than modern vinyl materials), glass, and ceramic products complete the palette of historic downtown buildings. Bubble awnings and mansard-shaped awnings are modern forms that are not part of the traditional vocabulary. Stucco-on-lathe has been added to facades for two main reasons: to conceal failing façade materials or for aesthetic reasons. The condition of the façade underneath a stucco "slip cover" should be carefully investigated before an entire façade is removed. The application of manufactured stucco panels and other laminated and paneled materials changes the character of historic buildings.

REHABILITATION STANDARDS

The City of Douglas will assess proposed changes to Downtown Commercial District that are based on the *Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*. These ten standards appear in bold type; the interpretation of these standards in Douglas follows. The overall goal is that proposed changes be *compatible* with the overall historic character of the property they affect directly and be *appropriate* within the historic character of the downtown historic district as a whole.

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.

2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.

Proposed changes shall have a "light touch" and not cause the removal or concealment of character-defining features.

New features shall be designed in a way to complement, rather than to overwhelm or to recast the historic character of a building.

Window openings on the upper levels have a shape, size and fenestration pattern that contributes to the character of the building; window openings shall not be changed in size.

3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.

4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.

These standards address changes already made and those proposed.

Downtown commercial buildings often have storefront components that are newer than the building; the installation of new storefronts during the Post WW II building boom was common. These mid-century storefronts, particularly if intact, may have acquired significance as part of the physical record of changes over time. They add a layer of richness and sense of organic change in a downtown commercial area. The removal of "Slip covers," materials that conceal historic brick, stone, or other materials, is appropriate.

In contrast, some storefronts have been repeatedly and incrementally altered and do not represent any era or design concept; they are more likely candidates for appropriate alterations. One of the represented designs could serve as the basis for proposed changes, or a new, compatible design could be appropriate.

Small elements of a storefront, including missing storefront signbands and cornices, transom windows, and kickplate facings, and components of the larger façade, such as a parapet cornice or cap, can be added to a storefront without creating a false sense of historical development. Creating a themed storefront, basing a storefront design and/or on materials that were not used in Douglas, and the replication of a commercial building that did not stand in Douglas would be inappropriate changes because they would not meet this standard.

5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.

This standard refers to character-defining features. Historic surfaces and their finishes, such as unpainted brick, wood-framed windows, stone elements in a brick façade, and the reflective qualities of architectural glass and porcelain enamel should be retained and exposed. New materials added to buildings should not simulate traditional materials or introduce unfinished wood elements on commercial buildings. Simulated stone, simulated brick panels, and precast stucco panels are not appropriate for the buildings in downtown Douglas.

6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.

Proposed changes will not include the replacement of features that can be repaired and kept in use. In particular, the following elements shall be repaired:

Exterior wood trim elements: window frames and heads, cornices, decorative moldings and other elements shall be repaired rather than replaced.

Windows in second-story openings should be repaired if possible; if they must be replaced, the new windows shall replicate the historic or existing ones in operation, muntin pattern, and color. A replacement material is acceptable at the second story and on elevations that do not face the street.

Metal components shall be repaired or replaced in kind; for instance, aluminum sheet metal canopies that must be replaced could be replaced in sheet metal.

Replacement features will have a finished quality, such as painted wood and painted metal.

7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.

Douglas Standards:

Brick should be left unpainted and repointed if at all possible. No brick or stone shall be sandblasted. If paint is to be removed from exterior brick surfaces, the gentlest approach shall be taken.

8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.

The district includes some vacant lots on which buildings used to stand. Prior to excavation for new construction, the property owner will consult with city officials on the likelihood of significant below-grade material that should be considered during the project.

9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

New construction: new buildings erected within the boundaries of the historic district shall be no taller than 50 feet. The width of the street façade(s) shall have design elements that provide for bays 25 or 50 feet in width in order to maintain the rhythm of the streetscapes. New buildings shall have no front setback and will rise from the edge of the sidewalk unless there is a compelling reason to break this pattern. At least 75 percent of the ground story will be glazing presented in the form of storefronts. Upper stories will have windows.

Additions: additions to existing buildings shall not overpower the existing component in height, width, scale or presence. Additions shall not replicate the historic or existing design of exterior walls, but will be compatible with them. Exterior walls shall remain intact except for discreet door openings if they become interior walls due to an addition.

Materials: New construction and additions should use the materials that are common in the district. These include brick, stone, and stucco for exterior walls. Metals and painted wood are used as smaller elements in buildings. Simulated stone and simulated brick panels are not appropriate for buildings in downtown Douglas.