

Mississippi Downtown Design GUIDELINES



Fred Carl Jr.
SMALL TOWN CENTER



MISSISSIPPI
MAIN STREET
ASSOCIATION



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MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
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The Fred Carl, Jr. Small Town Center is a community design center in the College of Architecture, Art, and Design at Mississippi State University. We provide a range of design and planning services for communities and research about small town challenges. With over 40 years of experience in over 50 communities, the Small Town Center provides a variety of design services including community engagement and visioning; master planning; project feasibility studies; downtown revitalization; bike and pedestrian planning; research; creating and building; grant writing; and design seminars and workshops.

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INTRODUCTION



PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is to be an active resource for improving the physical assets in your community. Consistent use of these guidelines within your community will strengthen the built environment and will enhance property values by making your downtown a more desirable place to live, work, and play.

This document was prepared by the Fred Carl Jr. Small Town Center (STC), the Mississippi Main Street Association (MMSA), and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) as a guide for local Main Street programs, Certified Local Governments, city staff, downtown development groups, property owners and volunteers that work to revitalize and maintain the physical assets of their downtowns.

As a Main Street America Coordinating Program, Mississippi Main Street Association follows the Main Street Approach for downtown revitalization. The four points developed by the National Main Street Center are economic vitality, design, organization, and promotion. Although this document focuses on the design point, the impact does not stop there. Successful design positively impacts environmental sustainability, economic resiliency, and social well-being. In other words, good design can strengthen the other three points.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

We encourage you to share the digital version of this file widely, keep your own physical copy available, make notes in the margins and continue to reference it throughout the evolution of your downtown. It should be referenced during strategic planning and can be adopted in addition to, or in lieu of, individual community guidelines. Please note that this document is a guide and is not regulatory in nature. Local guidelines, or local or state codes and regulations should take precedent over any recommendations made in this document.

While reading this guide, keep in mind that small improvements are better than no action at all. Incremental changes can make a big difference over time and larger projects can often be more manageable when broken into phases. Successful design will honor the past, meet the current needs of businesses, and sustain the physical environment for the future.

Read through these sections first:

- Part 1, Understanding Mississippi's Context – an overview of the history of architecture and downtowns in Mississippi
- Part 2, Design Fundamentals for Your Community – general guidance that can act as a foundation for design projects and is intrinsic to the guidance provided in other sections

Refer to these sections according to project type:

- Part 3, The Importance of Public Space – deals with the design of public improvements for the entire downtown district
- Part 4, Addressing Existing Buildings – may be the most detailed and important section; explains how to recognize the historic character of individual buildings and provides guidance on appropriate design and treatment
- Part 5, Managing Change – delivers guidance on managing change and designing compatible infill construction

Reference these tools and resources as needed:

- Appendix – shares some additional tools and resources related to design and construction, with the Examples of Renovations section intended to be a quick visual reference for users on what works and what does not





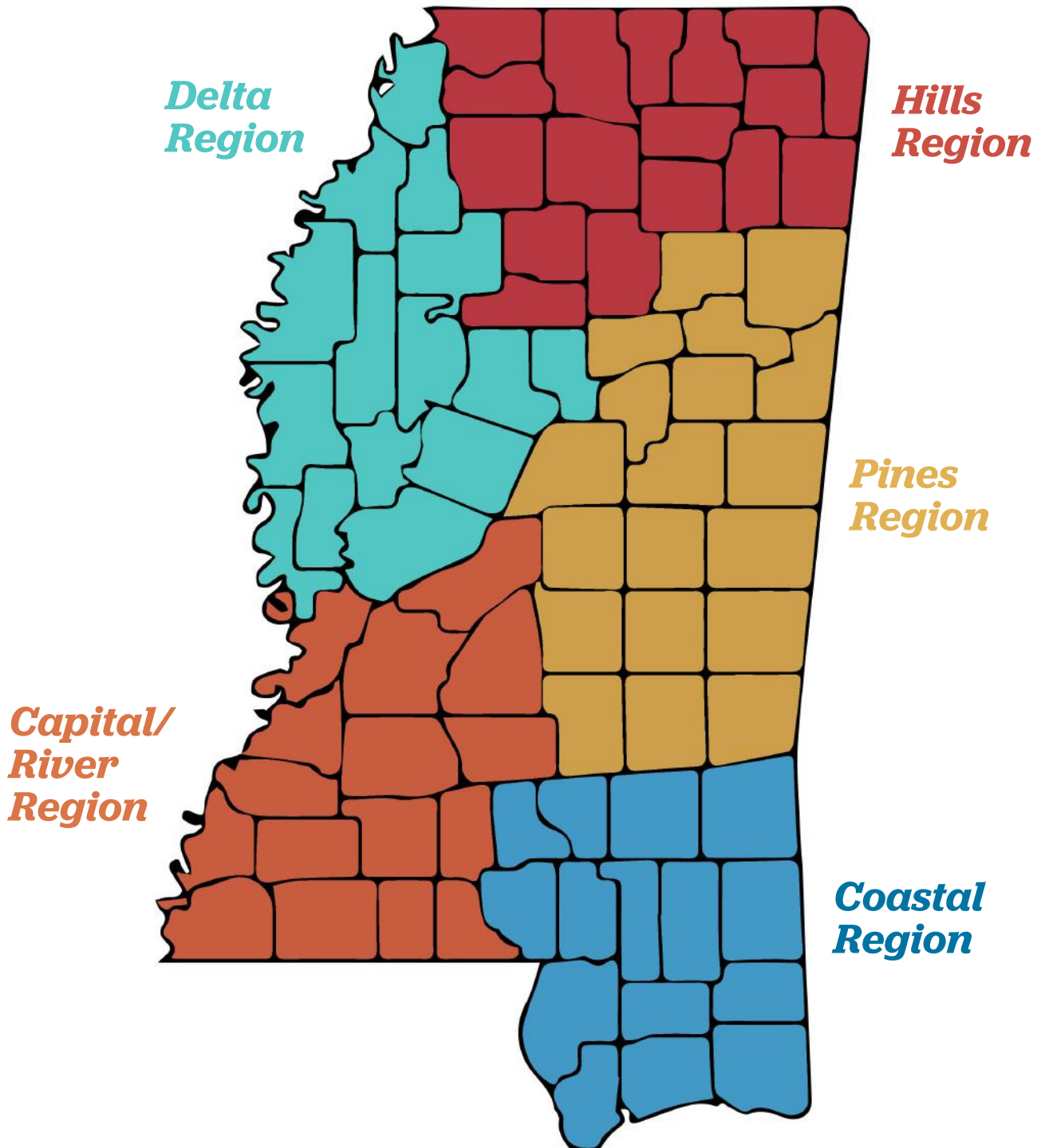
PART I

Understanding Mississippi's Context

Understanding the context of your community within its region and state will help you maintain and preserve its unique character. The regional knowledge and history may guide you or others in design decisions in the future.

MISSISSIPPI REGIONS

Mississippi has 362 places: 298 incorporated places and 64 census designated places (CDPs). The incorporated places consist of 110 cities, 169 towns, and 19 villages. Cities have a minimum population threshold of 2,000, towns require a population between 300 and 1,999, and villages require a population between 50 and 299. It is divided into the following regions:





Hills Region

Notable towns in the Hills Region: Corinth, Hernando, Holly Springs, Horn Lake, New Albany, Olive Branch, Oxford, Southaven, Tupelo



Delta Region

Notable towns in the Delta Region: Belzoni, Clarksdale, Cleveland, Greenville, Greenwood, Indianola, Tunica, Yazoo City



Pines Region

Notable towns in the Pines Region: Aberdeen, Carthage, Columbus, Kosciusko, Louisville, Meridian, Philadelphia, Quitman, Starkville, West Point



Capital / River Region

Notable towns in the Capital/River Region: Brandon, Brookhaven, Canton, Clinton, Jackson, McComb, Natchez, Port Gibson, Ridgeland, Vicksburg



Coastal Region

Notable towns in the Coastal Region: Bay St. Louis, Biloxi, Collins, Diamondhead, Gautier, Gulfport, Hattiesburg, Kiln, Laurel, Long Beach, Moss Point, Ocean Springs, Pascagoula, Pass Christian, Picayune, Seminary, Waveland

MISSISSIPPI DOWNTOWNS

The following excerpt is from the book, "Buildings of Mississippi," written by Jennifer V.O. Baughn and Michael W. Fazio, and summarizes the history of the planning of towns and communities in Mississippi:

Most Mississippi towns, particularly those founded after the Civil War, were established along railroad lines and were laid out on a grid pattern, sometimes oriented to the cardinal points, sometimes to a river or to railroad tracks. A water tower is often the tallest structure and displays the town's name. Many passenger and freight depots remain, and if a town once had a reason for passengers to stay over-night, a hotel may still stand nearby. Industries also lined the railroad tracks, especially cotton gins and cottonseed oil mills, but also saw-mills, brick plants, packing sheds, box factories, and icehouses. Some towns, such as Cleveland and Brookhaven, built rows of commercial buildings facing the tracks, further emphasizing the importance of the railroad to their existence.

Segregation accompanied the development of Mississippi's railroad towns, with separate neighborhoods for blacks and whites. While neighborhoods for whites were in a town's choicest areas, African American neighborhoods usually occupied less desirable zones near

industries or flood plains. The largest black communities developed self-contained business and cultural districts.

Most of the state's towns never expanded past their original gridded boundaries, typically one-mile square, but by the turn of the twentieth century a few grew large enough to have a streetcar system. Some, such as Vicksburg, Jackson, and Meridian, had multiple lines extending to new suburbs, and a few, such as Pascagoula, Moss Point, and Laurel-Ellisville, boasted interurban systems. Although replaced by buses in the 1930s, their impact on development patterns remains evident in early-twentieth-century neighborhoods. By the 1950s, highways built to bypass congested downtowns had generated such automobile-related buildings as service stations and motels.

In many of Mississippi's counties, the county seat is the only town of any size, functioning as the political, economic, and cultural center. Most were laid out with an open block for the courthouse and town square, which, surrounded by



Marks Watertower

brick commercial buildings erected over several decades, display an impressive urbanism within a modest acreage while providing public green space. Often the buildings were linked by sidewalk canopies supported by wood or iron columns.

Whether within a square or not, the courthouse is typically the most monumental and architecturally sophisticated building in a county seat and often in the entire county. Only a few antebellum courthouses remain, notably the modest Federal-style Amite County Courthouse in Liberty. Late-nineteenth-century courthouses are larger and often feature Italianate cupolas or imposing Romanesque Revival towers. The construction of the New Capitol, beginning in 1901, brought a renewal of classicism to



courthouse designs, seen immediately in the Sharkey County Courthouse in Rolling Fork. N. W. Overstreet designed many courthouses in the early twentieth century and introduced an informal classicism fused with Prairie and Mediterranean influences, as in Meadville and Corinth. Courthouses of the 1930s, such as those in Carthage and Leakesville are Moderne, a style that at its heart is classical.

Banks and fraternal lodges often occupied street corner locations. Sometimes lodges shared space with civic institutions, as in the Chickasaw County Courthouse in Okolona and the Jackson City Hall, revealing just how embedded freemasonry once was in the life and power structure of Mississippi communities. This held true for African American lodges, which were usually on or near church property as, for example, the Soria City Lodge in Gulfport. The Stringer Grand Lodge in Jackson leased office space to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other organizations.

Religious buildings are plentiful in the state and are predominantly Baptist and Methodist for both blacks and whites. These preaching-centered congregations/churches typically took a meetinghouse form or, later, an auditorium plan. Larger churches typically added educational or Sunday school wings, as at the First United Methodist Church in Yazoo City. Although Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians had long preferred classical styles, they embraced Colonial Revival and Gothic Revival modes by the early twentieth century. Nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Episcopalian and Catholic churches in the state, as elsewhere, are usually Gothic Revival in style. Many small Mississippi towns once had significant Jewish populations; the most distinctive



L-R / Top to Bottom: Amite Co Courthouse, Liberty, MS; Sharkey Co Courthouse, Rolling Fork, MS; Franklin Co Courthouse, Meadville, MS; Alcorn Co Courthouse, Corinth, MS; Leake Co Courthouse, Carthage, MS; Greene Co Courthouse, Leakesville, MS



L-R / Top to Bottom: Chickasaw Co Courthouse, Okolona, MS; Jackson City Hall, Jackson, MS; Soria City Lodge, Gulfport, MS; Stringer Grand Lodge, Jackson, MS



FUMC Yazoo City; Moorish Revival Port Gibson

surviving temple is the Moorish Revival building in Port Gibson.

In 1920 just 13.4 percent of Mississippi’s citizens lived in towns of more than 2,500 inhabitants, and Meridian, then the state’s largest city, had a population of only 23,000. In 1930 Jackson overtook Meridian as the state’s largest city. Its suburban expansion after World War II led to numerous annexations; by 2010 it counted a population of 170,000, and by 2010, 50 percent of the state’s population lived in urban areas.

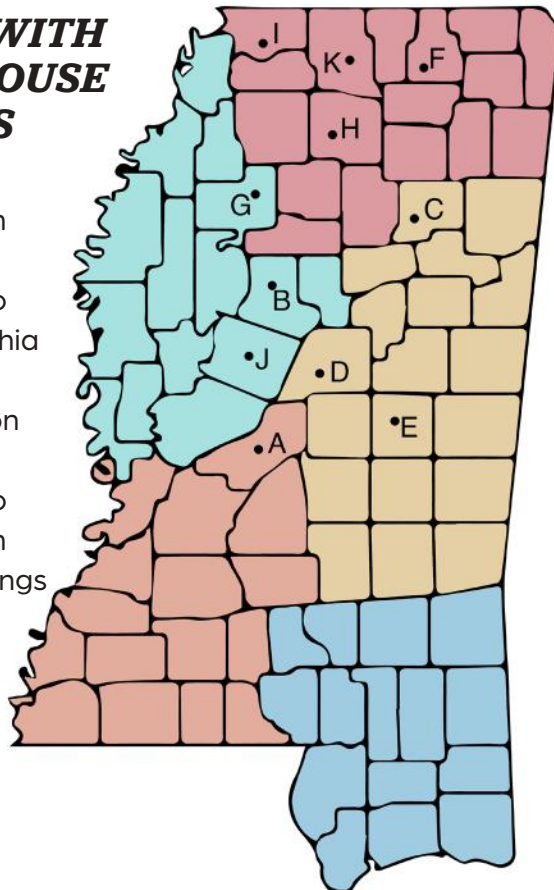
The twentieth-century growth of coastal towns, notably Gulfport, Biloxi, and Pascagoula, was predicated on middle-class tourism, enlargement of military bases during World War I and the Cold War, and expansion of the shipyards in Pascagoula. Today, Jackson and the Biloxi-Gulfport Pascagoula metropolitan area constitute the state’s only urbanized areas outside of the Memphis-oriented counties in the northwest corner of the state.

Baughn and Fazio touched on courthouse squares. In mississippiencyclopedia.org, Todd Sanders, formerly with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, expands on the different types of courthouse squares and Mississippi’s remaining courthouse squares:

One of the most identifiable public spaces in Mississippi is the courthouse square. Courthouse squares are defined as places located at the center of the original town plan and designated as the location for the county courthouse. Courthouse squares were theoretically located equidistant from citizens in all parts of the county, just as many southern states had placed their capitals in geographically central locations to improve access for all citizens.

TOWNS WITH COURTHOUSE SQUARES

- A. Canton
- B. Carrollton
- C. Houston
- D. Kosciusko
- E. Philadelphia
- F. Ripley
- G. Charleston
- H. Oxford
- I. Hernando
- J. Lexington
- K. Holly Springs



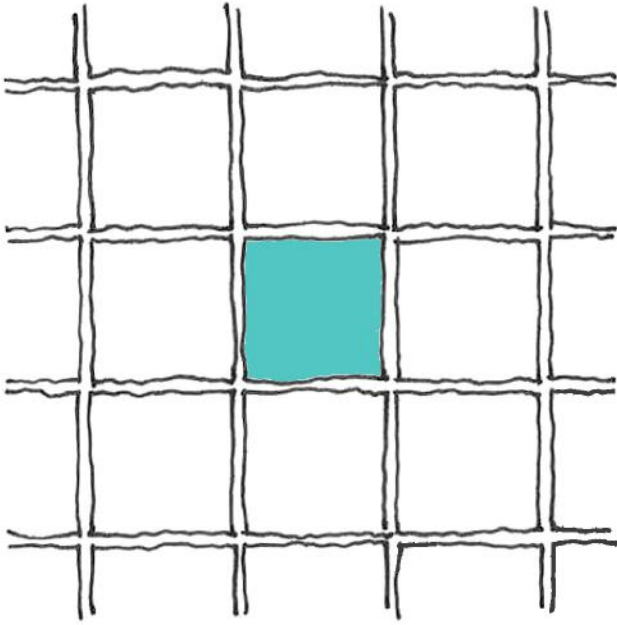
COURTHOUSE SQUARES are not as ubiquitous or as similar as many people believe. They can generally be classified into four common types:

BLOCK SQUARE

PHILADELPHIA OR LANCASTER SQUARE

HARRISONBURG SQUARE

FOUR-BLOCK SQUARE



BLOCK SQUARE: The center square of a nine-block grid is the location of the courthouse. The streets bordering the square intersect at right angles. This is the most common type of central courthouse square in Mississippi. Included in this type are Canton, Carrollton, Houston, Kosciusko, Philadelphia, and Ripley.



A
Canton Square



B
Carrollton Square



C
Houston Square



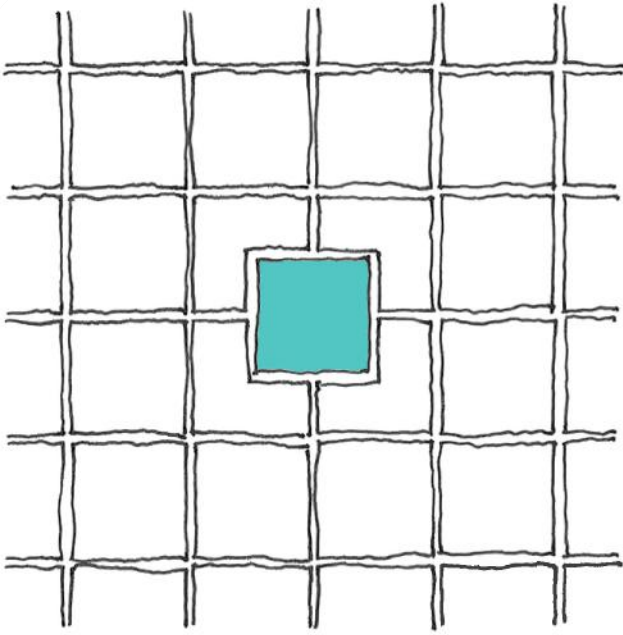
D
Kosciusko Square



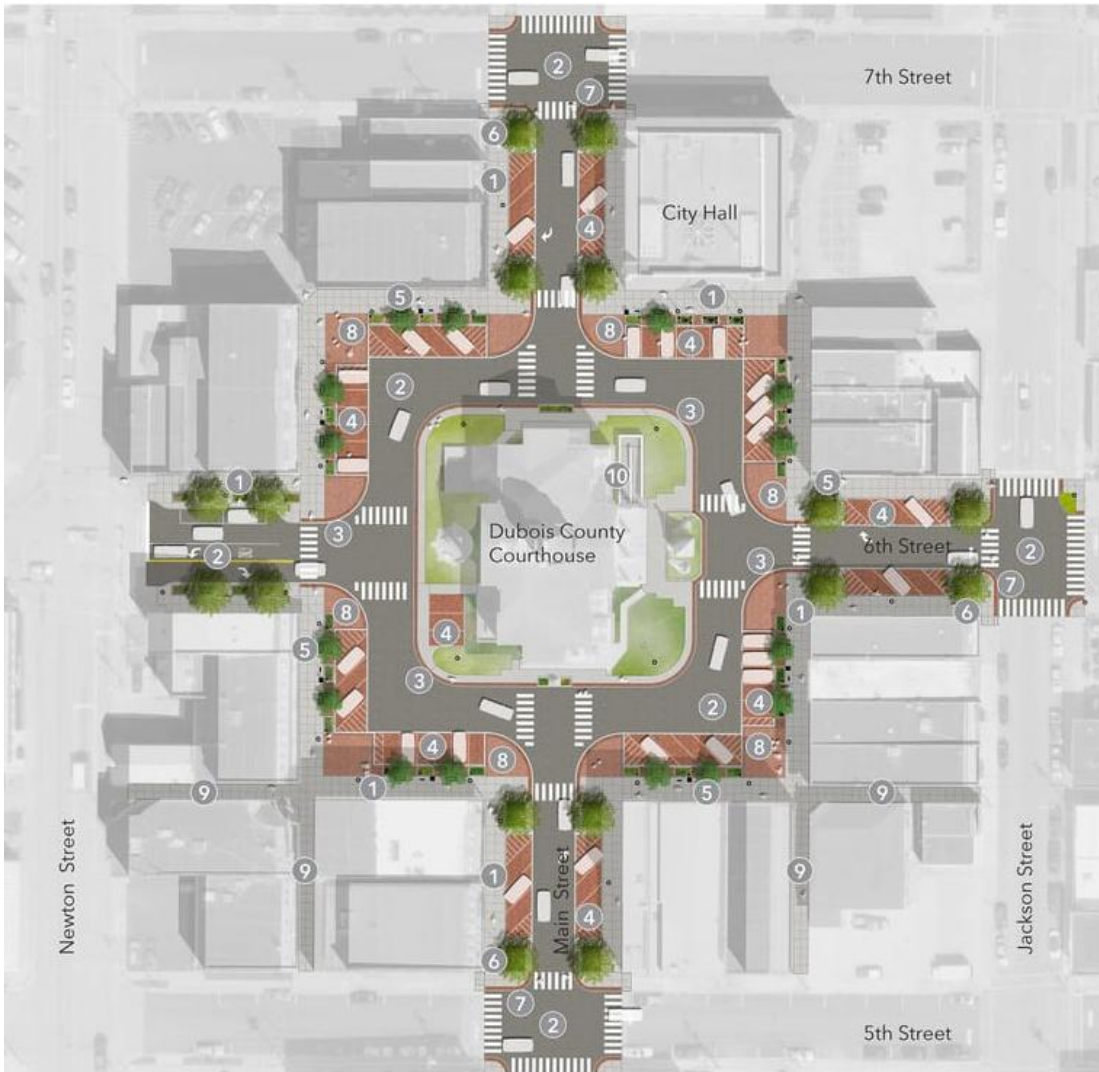
E
Philadelphia Square



F
Ripley Square



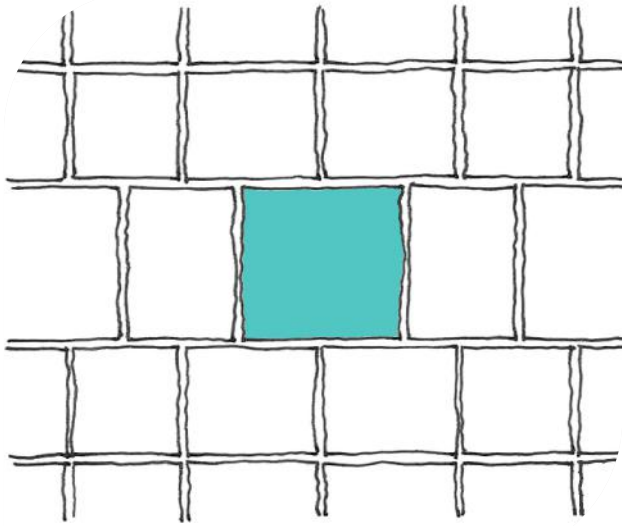
PHILADELPHIA OR LANCASTER SQUARE: The center square is superimposed over the intersection of two roads, with the corner area from each surrounding square taken to form the center square. Each street intersects the central square at the midpoint of a side. Mississippi currently has no squares that follow this pattern.



Proposed Improvements:

- 1 Concrete Sidewalks
- 2 Asphalt Street
- 3 Flush Curb in Square
- 4 Permeable Brick Pavers
- 5 Street Tree in Planter
- 6 Stormwater Planter
- 7 ADA Curb Ramps
- 8 Clay Brick Amenity Zone
- 9 Accent Lighting in Alleys
- 10 Courthouse ADA Ramp

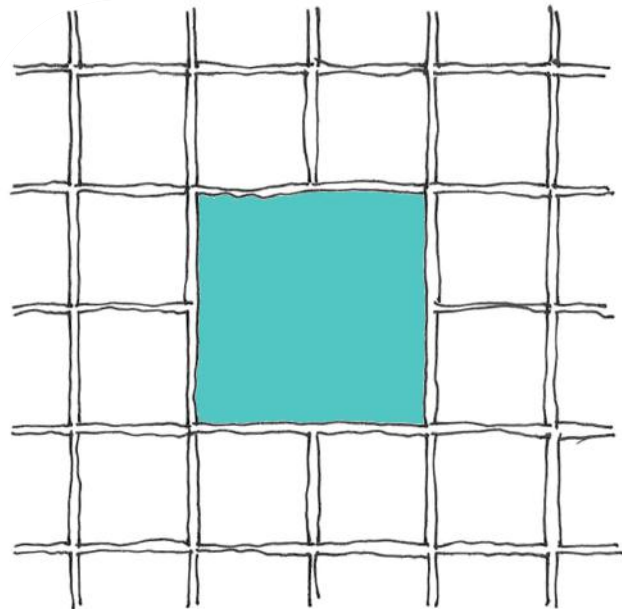
Dubois Case Study / Image Source: <https://www.reasite.com/projects/courthouse-square-redevelopment>



HARRISONBURG SQUARE: The center square has streets intersecting the midpoint on two flanking sides, with no intersecting streets on the other two sides. In Mississippi, Charleston and Oxford follow this layout.



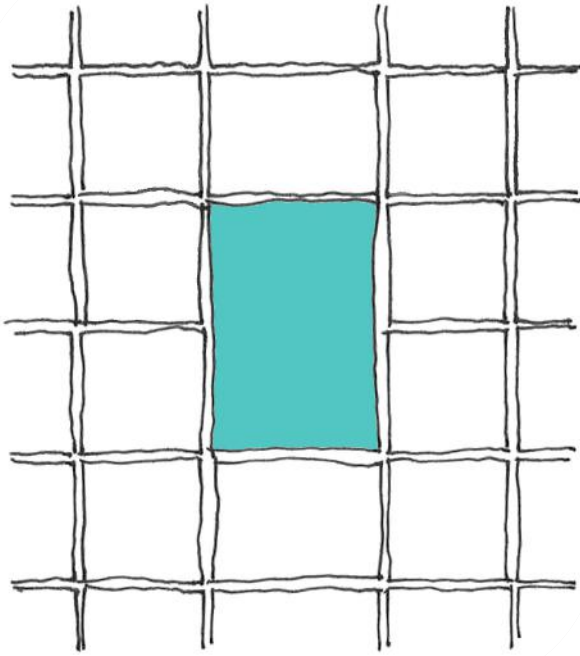
Top image: Charleston Square; Bottom image: Oxford Square



FOUR-BLOCK SQUARE: The center square has streets intersecting each of its sides as well as intersecting streets at each corner, meaning that a total of twelve streets enter the square. Hernando and Lexington are two Mississippi examples of this type.



Top image: Hernando Square; Bottom image: Lexington Square



Holly Springs Square

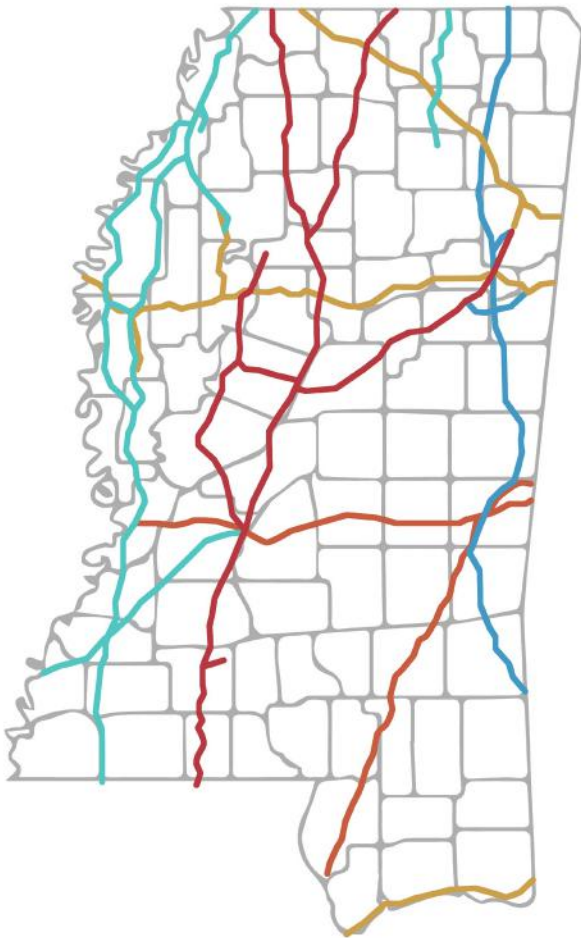
The square in Holly Springs is a combination of the **Harrisonburg** and **Four-block square** plans. The square in Holly Springs is more of a rectangle, with roughly twice the space of the better-known Oxford square.

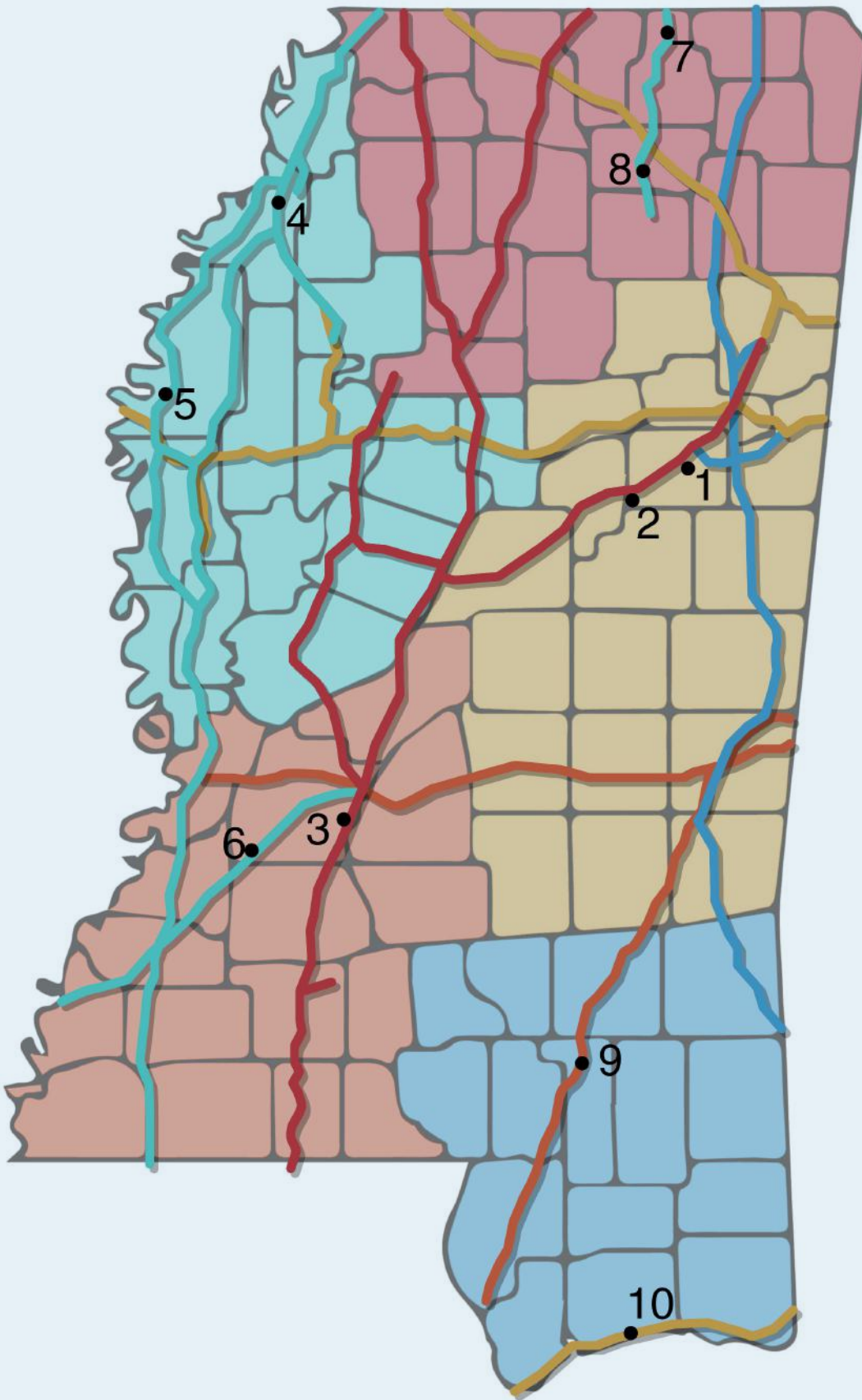
As Baughn and Fazio mentioned, most towns in Mississippi were established around railroad lines. Like other states, Mississippi started with a few rail lines to move lumber from mills to waterways, but eventually, at the height of the Industrial Revolution, opportunities arose for those rail lines to grow and connect to larger rail systems, allowing goods and passengers alike to travel from state to state. Five major lines were prevalent in Mississippi in the mid to late 1800s.

The following towns are just a few of the many railroad towns in Mississippi that are explored in this document. By examining a couple of towns among the various railroad lines from each of Mississippi's five regions, city planning patterns emerge that may expose modern day idiosyncrasies within a downtown's road network, architectural styles, and storefront adjacencies. Once again, learning the history can help understand the present and guide future design decisions of Main Street.

RAILROAD LINES

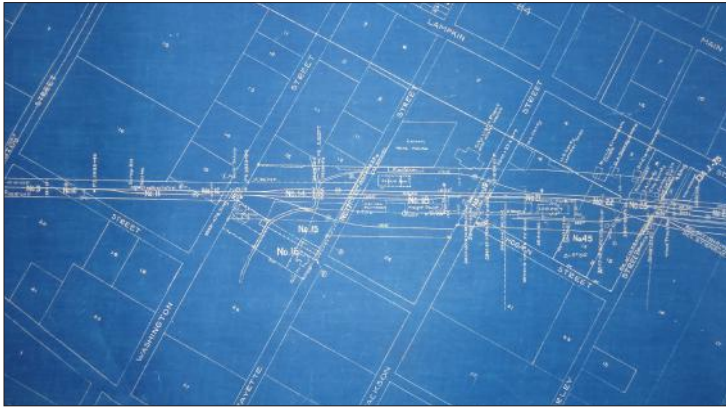
- Illinois Central, incorporated in MS in 1872
- Yazoo & MS Valley, incorporated in MS in 1882
- Georgia Pacific, incorporated in MS in 1881
- Mobile and Ohio, incorporated in MS in 1848
- Queen and Crescent, incorporated in MS in the 1880s





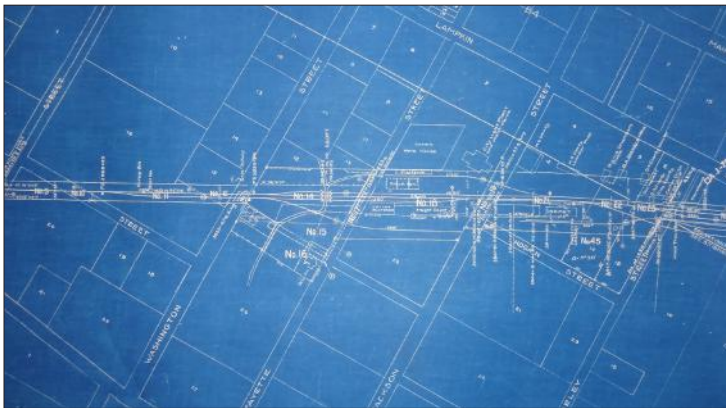
***RAILROAD
TOWNS***

- 1. STARKVILLE
- 2. STURGIS
- 3. BYRAM
- 4. COAHOMA
- 5. BENOIT
- 6. UTICA
- 7. WALNUT
- 8. NEW ALBANY
- 9. HATTIESBURG
- 10. GULFPORT



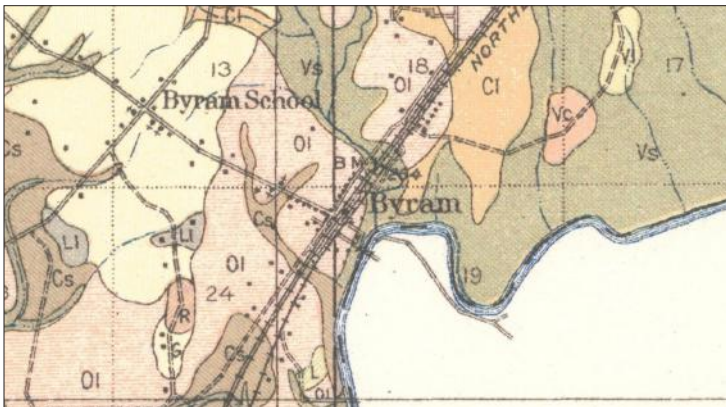
1. STARKVILLE

Starkville is in the Pines region of Mississippi and is located on the Illinois Central Railroad. The grid of Starkville's street network follows the cardinal directions of NSEW with little regard to the location and direction of the rail line. Buildings within the blocks of the train tracks respond to the location, and services directly benefitting from and to the rail line were strategically placed in those blocks.



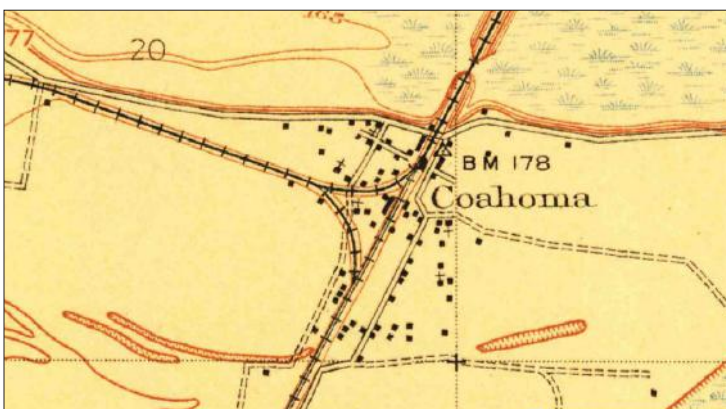
2. STURGIS

Sturgis is in the Pines region of Mississippi and is located on the Illinois Central Railroad. The grid of Sturgis's street network follows the cardinal directions of NSEW, which, conveniently, is also in line with the rail line which runs east to west through town.



3. BYRAM

Byram is in the Capital/River region of Mississippi and is located on the Illinois Central Railroad. The street network seems to react to the angle and location of the rail line. However, much of Byram's development takes place around the Interstate system, which is almost parallel to the rail line, which may be by design due to geological conditions.

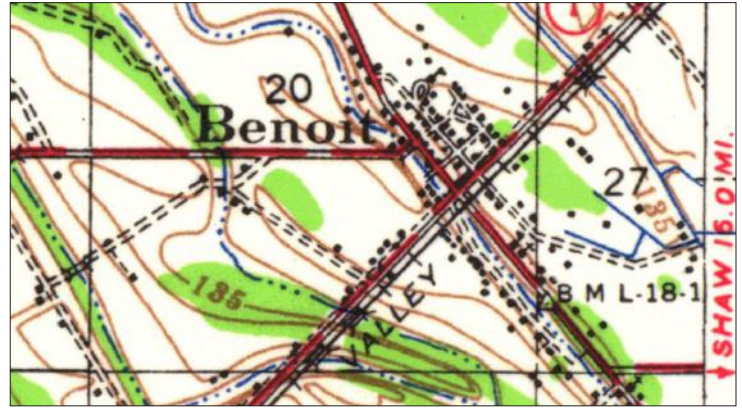


4. COAHOMA

Coahoma is in the Delta region of Mississippi and is located on the Yazoo & MS Railroad. The grid of Coahoma's street network directly correlates to the rail line and remains that way today.

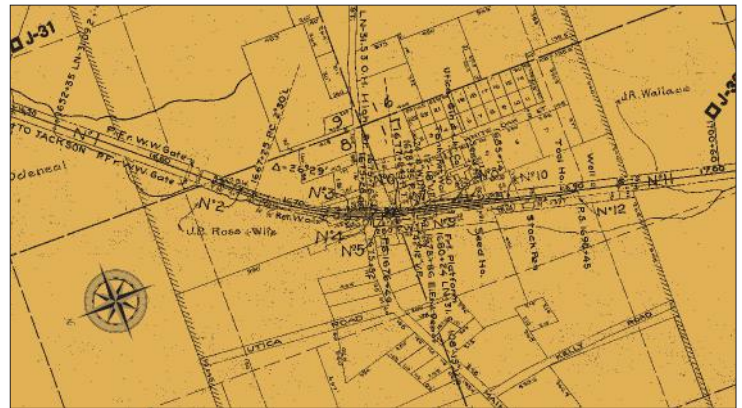
5. BENOIT

Benoit is in the Delta region of Mississippi and is located on the Yazoo & MS Railroad. The grid of Benoit's street network directly correlates to the rail line, with Main Street running parallel to the rail line, and the street grid remains intact today.



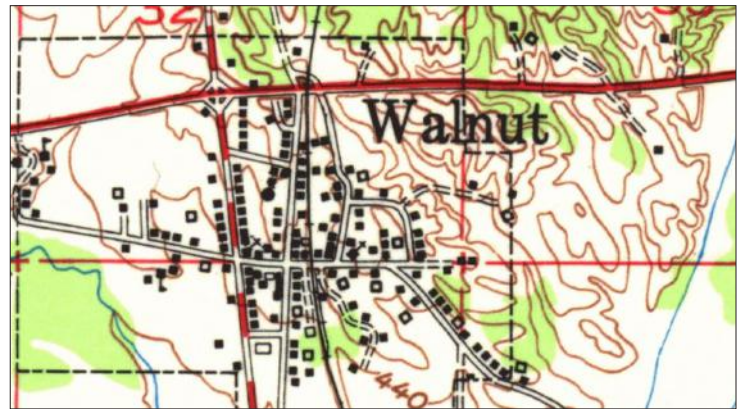
6. UTICA

Utica is in the Capital/River region of Mississippi and is located on the Yazoo & MS Railroad. The grid of Utica's street network follows the cardinal directions of NSEW with little regard to the location and direction of the rail line. Buildings within the blocks of the train tracks respond to the location, and services directly benefitting from and to the rail line were strategically placed in those blocks.



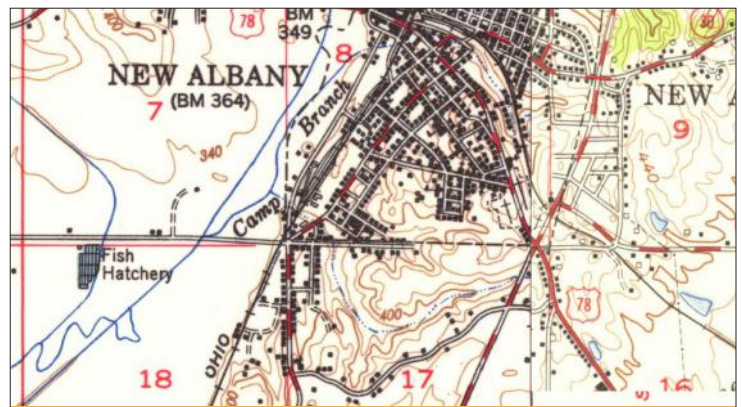
7. WALNUT

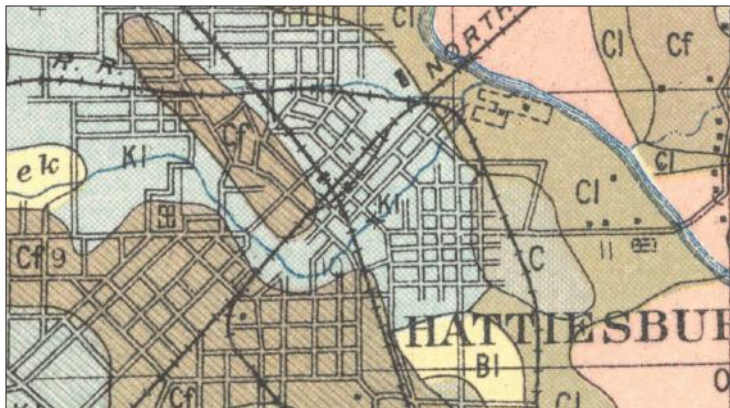
Walnut is in the Hills region of Mississippi and is located on the Yazoo & MS Railroad. Walnut's street grid is seemingly haphazard and not in relation to the rail line. Built structures around the town appear to respond to the street and rail line for orientation and location.



8. NEW ALBANY

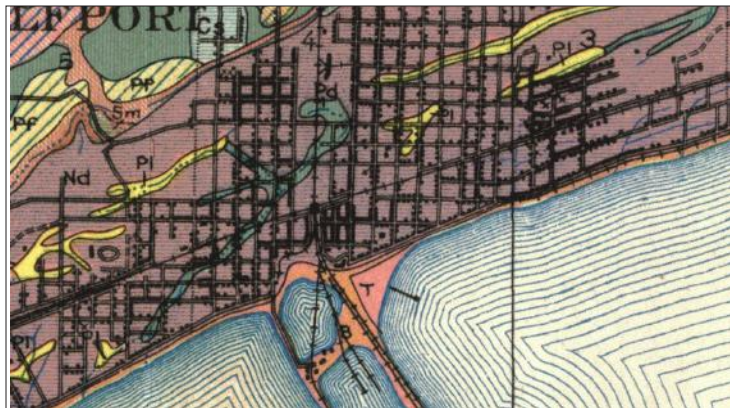
New Albany is in the Hills region of Mississippi and is located on the Yazoo & MS Railroad. New Albany's street grid is seemingly haphazard and not in relation to the rail line. Built structures around the town appear to respond to the street and rail line for orientation and location.





9. HATTIESBURG

Hattiesburg is in the Coastal region of Mississippi and is located on the Queen & Crescent Railroad. Most of Hattiesburg's street grid is oriented with the cardinal directions of NSEW; however, where all of the rail lines within Hattiesburg merge at the heart of the city, the blocks' orientations turn in response to the rail lines.



10. GULFPORT

Gulfport is in the Coastal region of Mississippi and is located on the Georgia Pacific Railroad. The grid of Gulfport's street network follows the cardinal directions of NSEW with little regard to the location and direction of the rail line. Buildings within the blocks of the train tracks respond to the location, and services directly benefitting from and to the rail line were strategically placed in those blocks.

MISSISSIPPI ARCHITECTURE

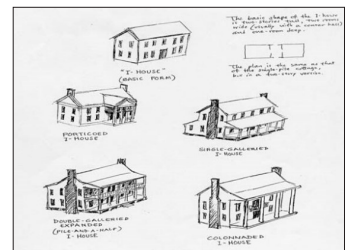
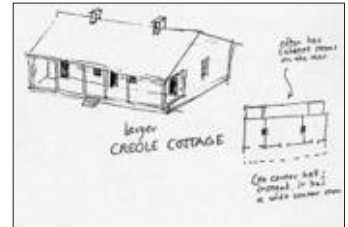
Understanding the architectural style of an individual building or of surrounding buildings helps guide design decisions when undergoing a construction project in a commercial district. The following projects, although mostly residential, highlight the history of Mississippi architecture, and it is safe to assume these architectural styles bled into the downtowns.

VERNACULAR STYLE – a traditional form of building that reflects local environmental influences, uses locally available building materials, and is passed down from generation to generation.

TOP: The French colonists developed the Creole Cottage, the earliest house form designed in the area that would become the state of Mississippi. Drawing by Richard Cawthon. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

MIDDLE: The De La Point-Krebs house in Pascagoula, Mississippi, built around 1770, is a good example of the Creole Cottage, and is the earliest surviving building in the lower Mississippi River Valley. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

BOTTOM: Anglo-American settlers introduced the vernacular I-House form to Mississippi. Drawing by Richard Cawthon. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



FEDERAL STYLE – First architectural style to appear in Mississippi. Identified by classical columns, ornament inspired by ancient Roman architecture, semi-circular fanlights over doors, oval windows in pediments, delicately carved interior woodwork. Popular in the old Natchez District.

Auburn, a suburban villa built near Natchez about 1812, is an example of the Federal style. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



GREEK REVIVAL STYLE – Most often associated with antebellum South, identified with tall white columns.

TOP: Ravenna, a Greek Revival house in Natchez, was built in 1835. The Greek Revival architectural style is the one most often associated with the antebellum South. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

BOTTOM: The Commercial Bank in Natchez, built in 1836, in the only Greek Revival structure in Mississippi with a real marble façade. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.





GOTHIC REVIVAL STYLE – steeply pitched roofs, strong vertical emphasis, elaborate gable decorations, pointed arch windows, board and batten siding, stucco over brick to imitate stone, and one-story porches.

TOP: Grace Episcopal Church in Canton, Mississippi, is an example of Gothic Revival, a style that was used primarily in Mississippi for churches. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



BOTTOM: Airliewood in Holly Springs, Mississippi, is a fine example of a Gothic Revival house. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



ROMANESQUE REVIVAL STYLE – round or Roman arches instead of the pointed arches of the Gothic

The Tate County Courthouse in Senatobia, Mississippi, is built in the Romanesque style. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



ITALIANATE STYLE – low pitched roofs, wide overhanging eaves with heavy brackets and cornices, and Roman or segmented arches above doors and windows

Rosedale in Columbus, Mississippi, is an antebellum Italianate style house. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

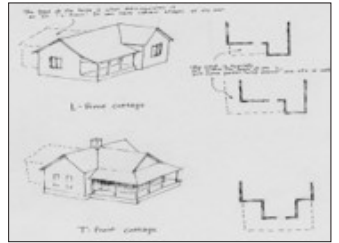


ECLECTIC STYLE – melding of the Greek Revival with the Gothic and Italianate Styles

Many Mississippians combined the Greek Revival style with Gothic Revival and Italianate to produce an eclectic style. Shadowlawn in Columbus, Mississippi, is eclectic style. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

VICTORIAN VERNACULAR STYLE – Houses adorned with flat, jigsaw-cut trim in a variety of patterns, decorated with spindles or other lathe-turned woodwork.

Houses built in the Victorian Vernacular style often had the L-shape floor plan. Drawing by Richard Cawthon. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



SECOND EMPIRE STYLE – tall mansard roof

The Schwartz House in Natchez is Second Empire style. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



QUEEN ANNE STYLE – towers, turrets, wrap-around porches, other fanciful details, often what people refer to as a “Victorian house.”

The Keyhole House in Natchez is among the many houses in the Queen Anne style. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



BEAUX ARTS STYLE – order, symmetry, formal design, grandiosity, elaborate ornamentation, used for public buildings such as museums, railway stations, libraries, banks, courthouses, and government buildings.

TOP: The Beaux Arts style in Mississippi includes the Meridian City Hall. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



BOTTOM: The Merrill Maley House in Jackson, circa 1910, is among the houses built in the Classical Revival style, a simpler interpretation of Beaux Arts style. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



COLONIAL REVIVAL STYLE – symmetrical front façades, classical columns and porticoes, pedimented openings, hipped and gabled roofs, multi-pane sash windows, details such as quoins.

The John Dicks House in Natchez is the earliest example of the Colonial Revival style in Mississippi. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.





NEOGOTHIC STYLE – similar to the Gothic Revival style, some serious interpretations, some playful variations

Built in 1925, Castle Crest in Jackson is an example of the Neogothic style. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



CRAFTSMAN STYLE – built as a reaction to the over-industrialization of art and architecture, focused on craftsmanship and honest use of materials, usually modest in size, low pitch roof, wide overhanging eaves, exposed rafter tails, windows usually grouped in twos or threes, typically reserved for housing.

This 1925 bungalow in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, represents a frequent interpretation of the Craftsman style, which was a style built all over Mississippi from the 1910s to the late 1940s. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



ART DECO STYLE – usually falls into two basic versions, decorative and simplified. The decorative version includes abstract decoration while the simplified version uses monochromatic stone or brick and is built in a shape reminiscent of classical temples.

The Threefoot Building in Meridian is one of Mississippi's three Art Deco style skyscrapers, built 1929–1930. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



ART MODERNE – sleek and plain

One of Mississippi's best examples of the Art Moderne style is the former Naval Reserve Building in Jackson. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

RANCH HOUSE STYLE – one story house form, low pitched hip or gable overhanging roof

Ranch House style in Jackson, Mississippi. The Ranch House was the most influential new house style of the post-World War II era. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



INTERNATIONAL STYLE – known for its attempt to remove all historical and regional decorative elements from architecture and focus on the structure itself.

Built in 1954, the United Gas Company Building in Jackson, now the Mississippi College School of Law, is a good example of the International style. Courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.




Sources: <https://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/architecture-in-mississippi-from-prehistoric-to-1900>; <https://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/architecture-in-mississippi-during-the-20th-century>





PART 2

Design Fundamentals for Your Community



The history, the architecture, and the people of your community make it unique within the context of the state of Mississippi. Celebrating the commonalities and differences of the people while respecting the history and preserving the architecture will make your community a place people want to stay and visit.

DESIGNING FOR EVERYONE

Celebrate the Diversity in Your Community

- Each downtown in Mississippi has its own unique culture and that culture should be celebrated.
- Embrace the idea that your downtown is for everyone.
- Make sure your board and design committee(s) have representatives of various ages, genders, races, cultures, etc. Use census data as a tool to make sure the voices at the table are truly representative of your community.
- If your district has existing design guidelines, ordinances, façade grant programs, etc., reread them with inclusivity in mind to ensure there are no unintended barriers to minority-owned businesses.



Members of The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians perform a traditional dance in front of The Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience in Meridian. Picture courtesy of The Meridian Star.

Make Your Community Accessible

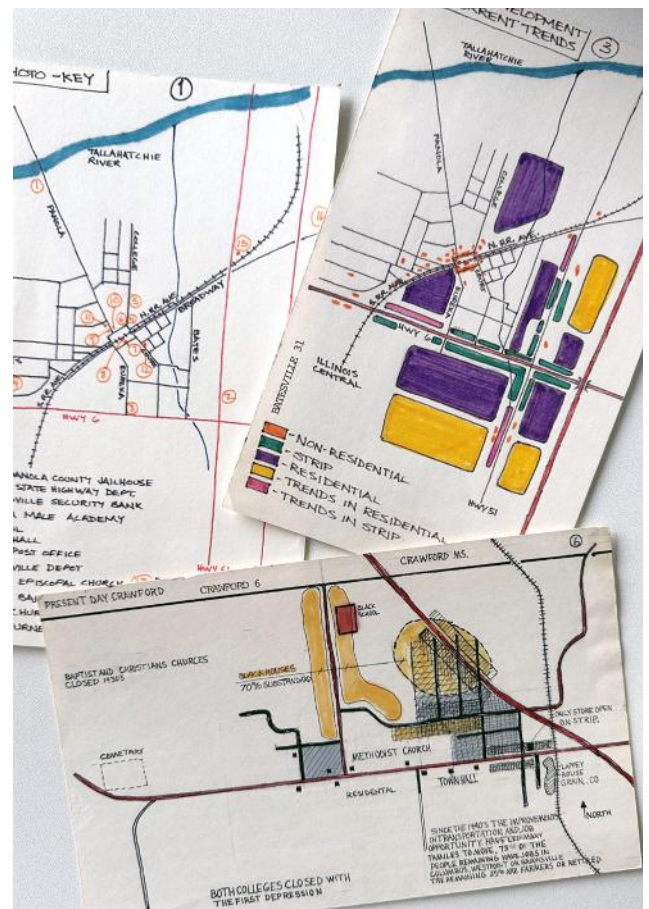
- If people cannot get to and through building entrances, they cannot shop, dine, or participate in entertainment. Making spaces accessible is not only good practice, but it is also the law. The Americans with Disabilities Act outlines standards and guidelines for making public spaces accessible to everyone regardless of mobility.
- Ramps and accessible paths are not only necessary for those with limited mobility but also beneficial for parents with strollers.
- Seating spaced throughout your downtown is great for older people and those that need to rest periodically, as well as helpful for those looking for a lunch break spot.
- Sculptural signs and logos with graphics are best for children, those with impaired vision, and anyone with a language barrier.



RESPECTING COMMUNITY HISTORY

One way to celebrate your community's uniqueness is to understand its history. Historical research may reveal unique physical attributes in the city planning or architectural details that may otherwise go unnoticed. Consider using the following resources to get a full overview of your community's history before starting any design project in your downtown, as the history may help guide some of your design decisions.

- The National Register of Historic Places (MDAH has a direct link to Mississippi listings on their website)
- Local and State Historical Society and library documents
- Historic photographs
- Newspaper archives
- Old city directories



National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. Mississippi has more than 1,300 listings in the National Register. Most are houses, but there are also archaeological sites, battlefields, bridges, buildings, cemeteries, forts, and historic districts.

[Search Mississippi properties listed on the National Register](#)

Benefits of National Register Listing:

- Tax incentives
- Grant assistance
- Protection from demolition or development
- Enriching our understanding of local, state, and national history
- Recognizing significant events and developments, notable people, and types of buildings and architectural styles

National Register Listing DOES NOT:

- Restrict a private owner's use of the property, unless development of the property involves federal funding, federal rehabilitation tax credits, or participation in some other federal program.
- Require public accessibility.



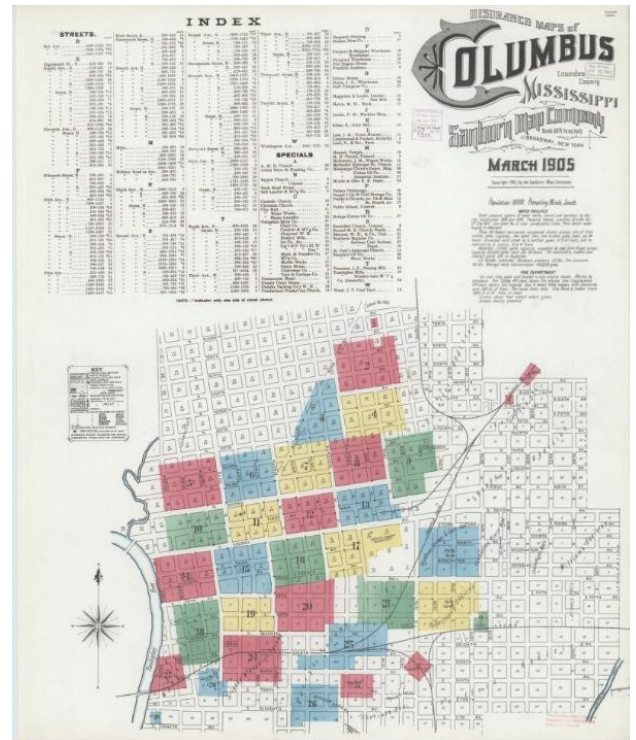
IDENTIFYING PHYSICAL ASSETS

Note what styles of architecture are present in your downtown. Each commercial district usually has a mixture of styles; some elaborate and 'high style,' some simple and more utilitarian, and some with modern alterations or additions that may be significant. Not every building will fit neatly into an architectural classification but can contribute to the physical character of your downtown and is important to your district's history and significance.

Once your community's history is understood, you can start to research individual buildings and properties. Sources to explore include:

- Existing historic property inventories and surveys
- Fire insurance maps (these can be accessed for free online at Library of Congress)
- Property records and deeds, abstracts of title (may be found at county courthouse)
- County assessor's records (can be accessed online for most counties)
- Building permits
- Plans or drawings from original and later construction projects

Assess other buildings and public spaces in your downtown. What makes each building unique from surrounding buildings (i.e. – their color palette, their ornamentation)? What do buildings have in common (i.e. – their materials, window patterns)? How can this help you make decisions in future design projects?



DETERMINING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Because every building is unique, the level of significance and how it relates to the rest of your downtown can make a difference in what physical improvements are appropriate. Consider the following when determining historic significance:

- When was it built? Did your district gain its significance during a certain period and was the building built during or after this time? Generally, buildings over 50 years old are considered historic.
- What is the building's physical integrity? How much has it been altered over the years? How many original features exist? Is its original form easily recognizable?
- Does the building have a social history? Is there something special about the building that is not related to its design? Did something significant happen there?

Once you understand a building's historical significance, determine its character-defining features. According to the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior, "Character-defining elements include the overall shape of the building, its materials, craftsmanship, decorative details, interior spaces and features, as well as various aspects of its site and environment." See Preservation Brief 17 published by the National Park Service for more information on character-defining features.

The Small Town Center has put together a Preservation Toolkit that helps guide some of these questions, and this is discussed further in the Appendix. The digital interactive toolkit can be found on smalltowncenter.msstate.edu.



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS

One of the first steps when making any physical improvements to a building site is to determine the appropriate treatment to guide the project. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties is a set of federal guidelines that consists of four approaches: Preservation, Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Reconstruction:

- **PRESERVATION** – Preservation entails sustaining the existing form, integrity, and materials of historic properties. The goal is to protect, stabilize, and repair the structure rather than replacing. This treatment has the highest retention of historic fabric and form. (TOP LEFT: Cotesworth House)
- **REHABILITATION** – Rehabilitation is repurposing a building for a new use through repairs, alterations, and additions while preserving features of historical, cultural, or architectural value. The adaptive reuse of buildings is included under this process. This is the most common

treatment because it has the most flexibility. The Standards for Rehabilitation are outlined below. (TOP RIGHT: Burns Belfry)

- **RESTORATION** – Restoration is accurately depicting the form and character of a property as it was during a specific period. This can include removing elements that are not from said period and reconstructing missing elements from the correct period. The goal is to preserve the materials, features, and spaces from its period of significance and remove those from other periods. Depending on the building and its history, the owner or project team will need to decide which period design decisions should be based on. (BOTTOM LEFT: Chalmer's Institute)
- **RECONSTRUCTION** – Reconstruction is newly constructing the form and features of lost elements of the landscape, building, or structure to replicate the appearance at a specific period. There is a limited framework on the replication process. This is not a common treatment. (BOTTOM RIGHT: Coker House)



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION

The Standards (Department of Interior regulations, 36 CFR 67) pertain to historic buildings of all materials, construction types, sizes, and occupancy and encompass the exterior and the interior, related landscape features and the building's site and environment as well as attached, adjacent, or related new construction. The Standards are to be applied to specific rehabilitation projects in a reasonable manner, taking into consideration economic and technical feasibility.

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.
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.
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.
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.
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.
8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
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.

Sources: <https://www.nps.gov/crps/tps/rehab-guidelines/stand.htm>



PART 3

The Importance of Public Space

Public spaces are critical for enhancing the quality of life in your city. These spaces should provide places to gather, linger, and explore. Good public spaces foster town pride and are an opportunity to contribute positively to the overall look and feel of your community.

WAYFINDING + SIGNAGE

Wayfinding is crucial to successful commercial districts. If visitors cannot find the downtown of a community, they cannot find the businesses, amenities, or events, and ultimately, will not spend their money there. It should be clear how to find the commercial district once entering a community and it should be clear once entering the downtown – without having to look at a map. This information can be communicated through wayfinding signage and the overall branding of the area. Creating a unified wayfinding system is not just important for visitors; it can also help reinforce community identity and foster community pride.

- Use design consistent with local Main Street or community branding to reflect and reinforce your unique local identity.
- Install gateway signs or elements at the edges of the Main Street district to define entrances.
- Strategically place directional signs at key intersections and connect to regional pathways such as bicycle trails.
- Determine specific landmarks to include in wayfinding signage. These landmarks could include parking, public transportation, public restrooms, the visitors' center, library, anchor businesses and more.
- Consider multiple scales in the signage system – some should be visible from the road for drivers, while others should appeal to pedestrians on the sidewalk.
- Include travel distances to landmarks on signage – driving time or mileage for things that are farther away or walking time or number of blocks away for things that are closer. Posting walking distances can help make use of underutilized parking that people might otherwise perceive as too far away. Encouraging walking also encourages people to spend more time on Main Street.
- Utilize icons and symbols to communicate quickly and effectively.
- In general, make letters one inch tall for every 40 feet of desired readability.

TOP to BOTTOM: New Albany Bankhead 2013 Before and After; Laurel Wayfinding



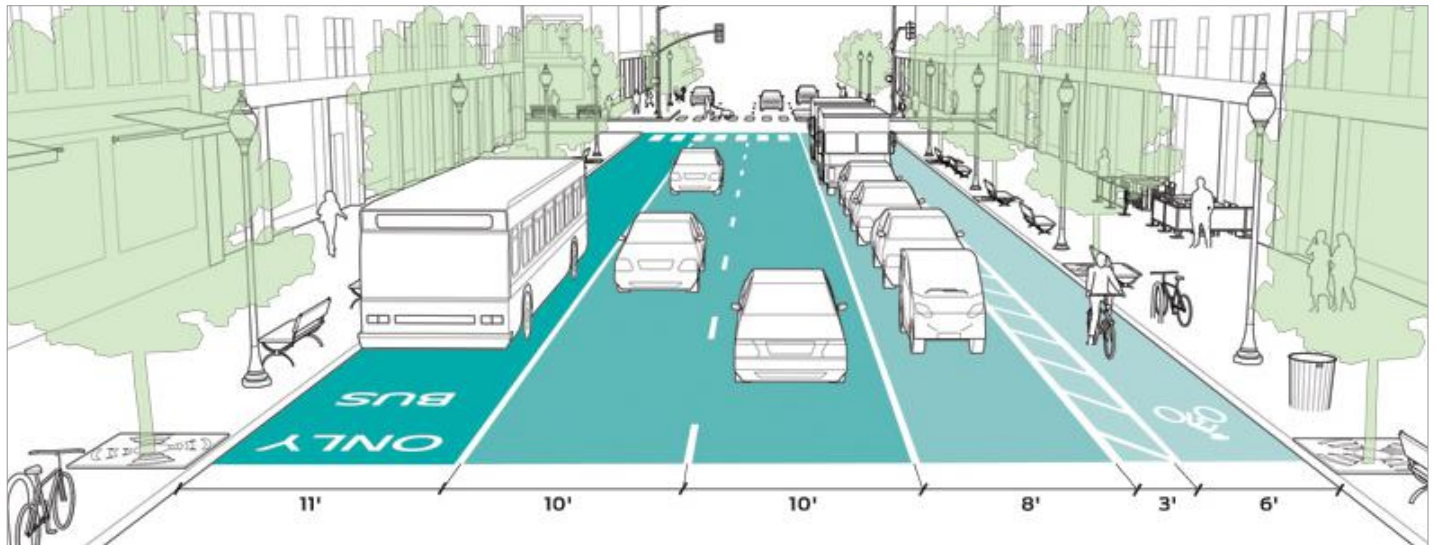


STREETSCAPES

A streetscape is defined as the visual elements of a street, including the road, adjoining buildings, sidewalks, street furniture, trees, and open spaces, etc., that combine to form the street's character. Streetscape components include paving, sidewalk amenities, landscaping, accessibility improvements, lighting, and anything else that you can see along public paths. Utilizing these elements should help shape the public space in downtown, provide safety and comfort measures, and balance the needs of all users. For larger scale improvements, work together with local government partners and engage the public and business community early in the planning process.

- Consider the streets in your community in terms of activity “zones” to accommodate multiple activities in the public realm. For example, zones might include the following: driving lanes, parking, bicycle lane, loading zones, plantings, pedestrian walkway, and outdoor dining/shopping space.
- Design intersections and mid-block crossings with pedestrian safety in mind. Clearly differentiate pedestrian crossings with ground-level markings or by changing the color, texture, or type of ground surface. Bump outs are recommended at the corners of intersections and mid-block crossings to reduce the width for safe pedestrian travel. Retain historic street, sidewalk, or alley pavers and incorporate them into the new design if feasible.
- Consider accessibility when creating routes from parking, to sidewalks, to buildings.
 - Integrate curb cuts and truncated domes (ground surface differentiation with small bumps) into the edge of sidewalks at all pedestrian street crossings.
 - Watch for abrupt or steep grade changes. Create ramps to main entrances when necessary. In some cases, creating a ramp can be avoided by altering the sidewalk elevation.
 - Ensure that there is adequate space around all street features to accommodate wheelchairs.
 - Coordinate the appearance of the accessible features throughout your Main Street. For example, using the same handrails for all entrance ramps will greatly improve the appearance of your streets and will avoid making accessibility look like an afterthought.
- Incorporate greenery and landscaping to soften the streetscape, provide shade, and create a more walkable, inviting environment.
- Consider what amenities people need to spend time on your Main Street. Benches, trash cans and bicycle racks are minimum elements that should be readily available.
- Develop a plan to maintain the cleanliness of your district. Consider partnering with local organizations to schedule regular clean-up days.
- Take sustainability into account in streetscape design. Some examples:
 - Self-watering flowerpots require less water and reduce maintenance needs.
 - Install electric vehicle charging stations as an added amenity that encourages users to linger downtown.
 - Choose the type of lighting best suited to what you want to light – for example, pedestrian lighting should be lower to the ground, while overall streetlighting or lights for a public square would be higher up. Any new lighting should direct light downwards whenever possible for increased energy efficiency and to reduce light pollution.
 - Use pervious pavers to control storm water by facilitating its path back into the soil and filtering it in the process.

In their Urban Street Design Guide, the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) divides street design elements into six categories: lane width, sidewalks, curb extensions, vertical speed control elements, transit streets, and stormwater management. The following is a brief overview of what is covered in depth on nacto.org.



- **LANE WIDTHS** of 10 feet are appropriate in urban areas and have a positive impact on a street's safety without impacting traffic operations.

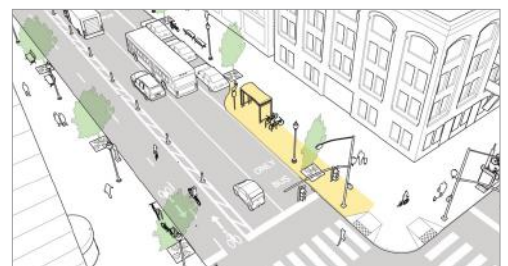
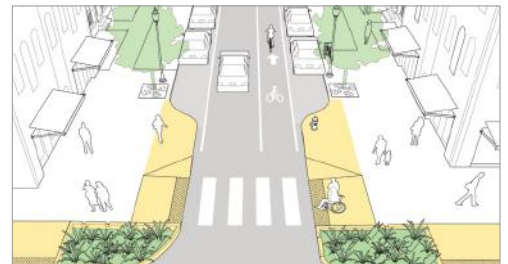


- **SIDEWALKS** consist of four zones: the frontage zone which is directly in front of the storefronts and acts as an extension of the buildings; the pedestrian through zone which is the accessible pathway that runs parallel to the street and should be 8-12 feet in downtown areas; the street furniture or curb zone which consists of amenities such as lighting, benches, utility poles, tree pits, bicycle parking, and newspaper kiosks; and the enhancement zone which is the space immediately next to the sidewalk that consists of the curb extensions, parklets, stormwater management, parking, bike share stations, bike lanes, and cycle tracks.



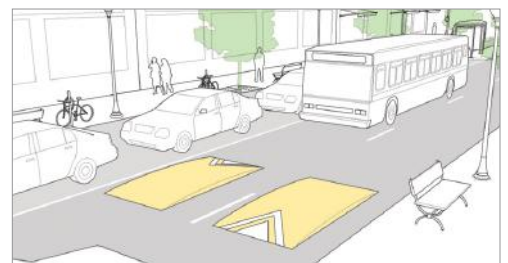
- **CURB EXTENSIONS** increase the overall visibility of pedestrians by aligning them with the parking lane and reducing the crossing distance for pedestrians.

- When installed at the entrance to a low speed street, a curb extension is referred to as a **“gateway”** treatment.
- When utilized as a traffic calming treatment, mid-block curb extensions are referred to as **“pinchpoints”** or **“chokers.”**
- Offset curb extensions on low volume streets create a **“chicane”** effect that slows traffic speeds considerably.
- **Bus bulbs** are curb extensions that align the bus stop with the parking lane, allowing buses to stop and board passengers without ever leaving the travel lane.





- **VERTICAL SPEED CONTROL ELEMENTS** have been shown to slow traffic speeds, creating a safer and more attractive environment.
 - **Speed humps** are 3–4 inches high and 12–14 inches wide, with a ramp length of 3–6 feet, depending on target speed. Speed humps reduce speeds to 15–20 mph.
 - **Speed tables** are midblock traffic calming devices that raise the entire wheelbase of a vehicle to reduce its traffic speed. Speed tables are 3–3.5 inches high, 22 feet long, and reduce speeds to 25–45 mph depending on the spacing.
 - **Speed cushions** are either speed humps or speed tables that include wheel cutouts to allow large vehicles to pass unaffected, while reducing passenger car speeds.

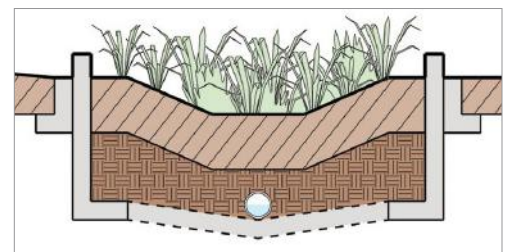
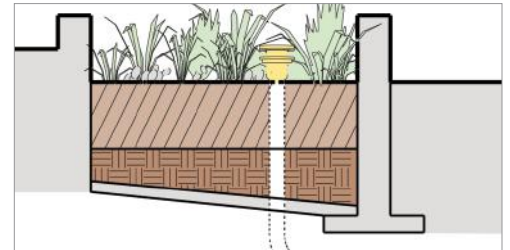
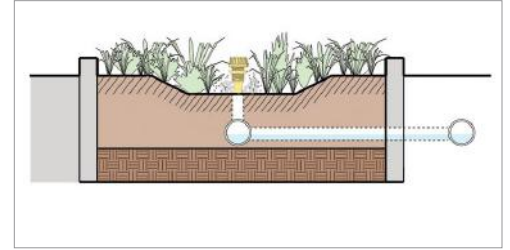
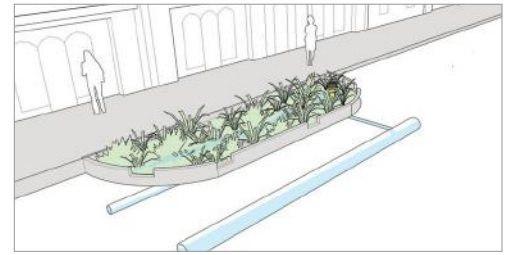
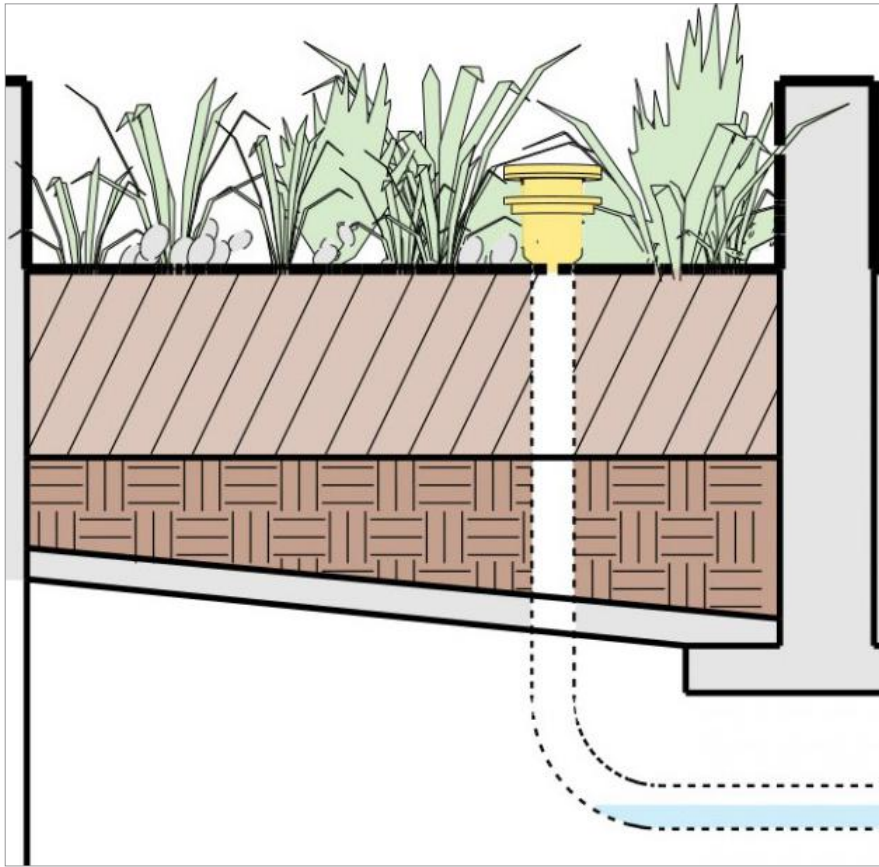




- Dedicated **TRANSIT LANES**, appropriate base signal timings, and operational traffic improvements ensure that the transit vehicle experiences minimal wait time at intersections and can move freely regardless of traffic congestion, providing a passenger experience competitive with driving.

- **Dedicated curbside/offset bus lanes** may be located immediately at the curb or in an offset configuration, replacing the rightmost travel lane on a street where parking is permitted.
- **Dedicated median bus lanes** are applied along the centerline of a multi-lane roadway and should be paired with accessible transit stops in the roadway median where needed.
- **Contra-flow bus lanes** enable connectivity and shorten travel times for bus routes by allowing only buses to travel the opposite direction down a one-way road in a designated lane.
- At major **bus stops**, cities may enhance the experience of passengers and passers-by through the addition of shelters, benches, area maps, plantings, vendors, or artworks.





- **STORMWATER MANAGEMENT** for downtowns should aim to achieve the following: improve water quality, detain stormwater flows, reduce stormwater volumes, and relieve burden on the municipal waste systems.
 - **Bioswales** are vegetated, shallow, landscaped depressions designed to capture, treat, and infiltrate stormwater runoff as it moves downstream.
 - **Flow-through planters** treat water by allowing runoff to soak through its soil matrix and filter into an underdrain system.
 - **Pervious strips** consist of native plants which increase biodiversity, act as a pollinator habitat, and are well-adapted to the regional climate, increasing their chances for survival.
 - **Pervious pavements** have multiple applications, including sidewalks, street furniture zones, and entire roadways.

PLACEMAKING

Placemaking is both a process and a philosophy. It inspires communities to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces, bringing people together in spaces that belong to everyone in the community. Placemaking capitalizes on existing physical assets, recognizes potential, and re-imagines everyday spaces into places where people linger, share stories, and create meaningful connections that inspire them to keep coming back.

Open Space

Coordinate open public spaces – vacant lots, pedestrian alleys, public squares, parks, and other open areas – with streetscape elements. Treatment of these spaces can be the difference between a vibrant downtown district and an underutilized environment with little activity. Good outdoor improvements contribute to better shopping experiences for customers, attract new businesses, increase property values downtown, and result in enhanced community pride.

In general:

- Retain green spaces and encourage connection to natural features and the landscape.
- Retain original scale and width of alleys – do not infill with a building or structure when there was not one historically.
- Utilize signage, gateway features and historical markers to communicate a sense of place and identify edges and boundaries.

Take stock of your existing open spaces and their uses:

- Who owns them – the City, an organization, an individual?
- Who maintains them and handles improvement projects?
- How are they currently used?
- Is that the highest and best use?
- Is the designated use appropriate but the space is underutilized because it is lacking the right amenities? For example, is outdoor seating not used because it is in a sunny spot with no shade?

Consider improvements to your open spaces to support their functions.



- Reverse-engineer both daily activities and special events to design your open spaces. Do you need any infrastructure like water or electricity access?
- Use public space to support local businesses. Add tables and seating options to public spaces that can be used by patrons of local eateries.
- Address ground surface issues. Proper drainage of areas with impermeable paving is crucial to a functional space. Dirt or grassy areas can also become soggy if not properly graded or planted.
- Consider placement of trees and other plantings to facilitate comfortable microclimates. Provide a mixture of shade and sunny areas. Create wind blocks and areas for breezes to circulate. Year-round structures such as pergolas or gazebos can also help for shelter, while seasonal fabric umbrellas or shade sails may also be desirable to create color and visual interest.
- Add appropriate seating to support the function(s) of the space. For example, stadium-style seating is perfect for outdoor concerts and movies, while moveable seating provides ultimate flexibility for groups of various sizes.
- Consider improving lighting for areas that are used at night and to improve safety for those that are not active at night.
- Consider adding recreational and family-friendly opportunities such as play equipment, sports goals, or water features.
- Consider creating areas for pop-up activities such as business incubation space or designated food truck parking.



Public Art

Public art is a great opportunity to represent diverse cultures in your community, add color and visual interest to the street, and set your district apart from others. In general, it is important to consider how public art affects your district's appearance, impacts historic structures and materials, and whether people have a direct interaction with the art or just observe it.

Public art can:

- Be usable or functional elements such as benches, trash receptacles, water features to cool off, etc.
- Be stand-alone sculptural pieces or integrated into sidewalks, on buildings and other infrastructure.
- Be a part of a large collection of related pieces scattered throughout your downtown or pieces with individual subjects.
- Enliven existing eye sores or blank canvases and make them more attractive.
- Act as a focal point in a public space, be placed at a node for existing activities, or even create activity.
- Tell the story of your community's history and/or set the stage for its future.

Remember to:

- Consider the historic fabric of your district.
- Create "reversible" artwork, meaning that it can be uninstalled, if necessary, without damaging the building or public space it is on. This might mean installing a mural on panels instead of directly on the building, taking care to use anchors that do not damage the underlying building (e.g., drilling into mortar and not masonry).
- Engage all stakeholders in the implementation of public art – from public meetings and planning events to ribbon cuttings.
- Include maintenance for public art in long-term planning efforts and contracts to ensure they do not get overlooked.
- Consider creating guidelines or review processes for initiating and managing artwork throughout your district.

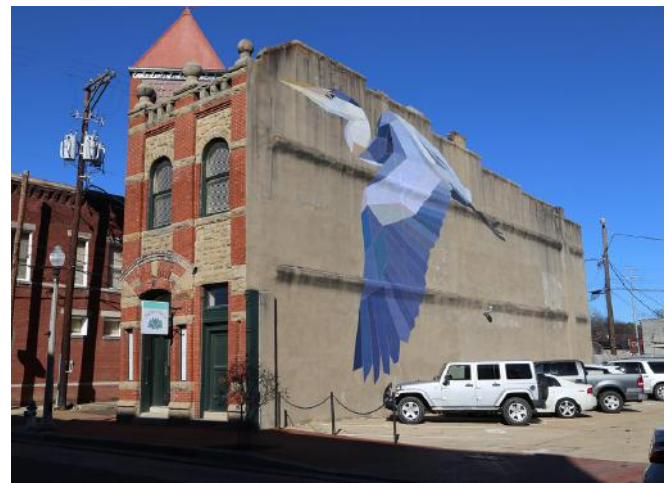


Murals

A mural is an expression of public art painted directly on the exterior of a building or on a backing that is affixed to a building and is sanctioned by the property owner. Murals should not contain commercial speech or images, which would constitute advertising or signage. Murals can be an important enhancement to the built environment, as well as having a beneficial impact on quality of life. In these cases, such murals serve as a form of public art.

Treatment:

- Murals are not appropriate on building primary elevations.
- The appropriate location for the placement of murals is on side and rear elevations of buildings.
- Murals should not be placed on unpainted brick or stone walls of historic/contributing buildings.
- The paint used for creating a mural should be appropriate for use in an outdoor setting, for an artistic rendition and should be of a permanent, long-lasting variety.
- Murals should not cover or obscure architectural elements, such as windows, doors, trims, cornices, or other such features.



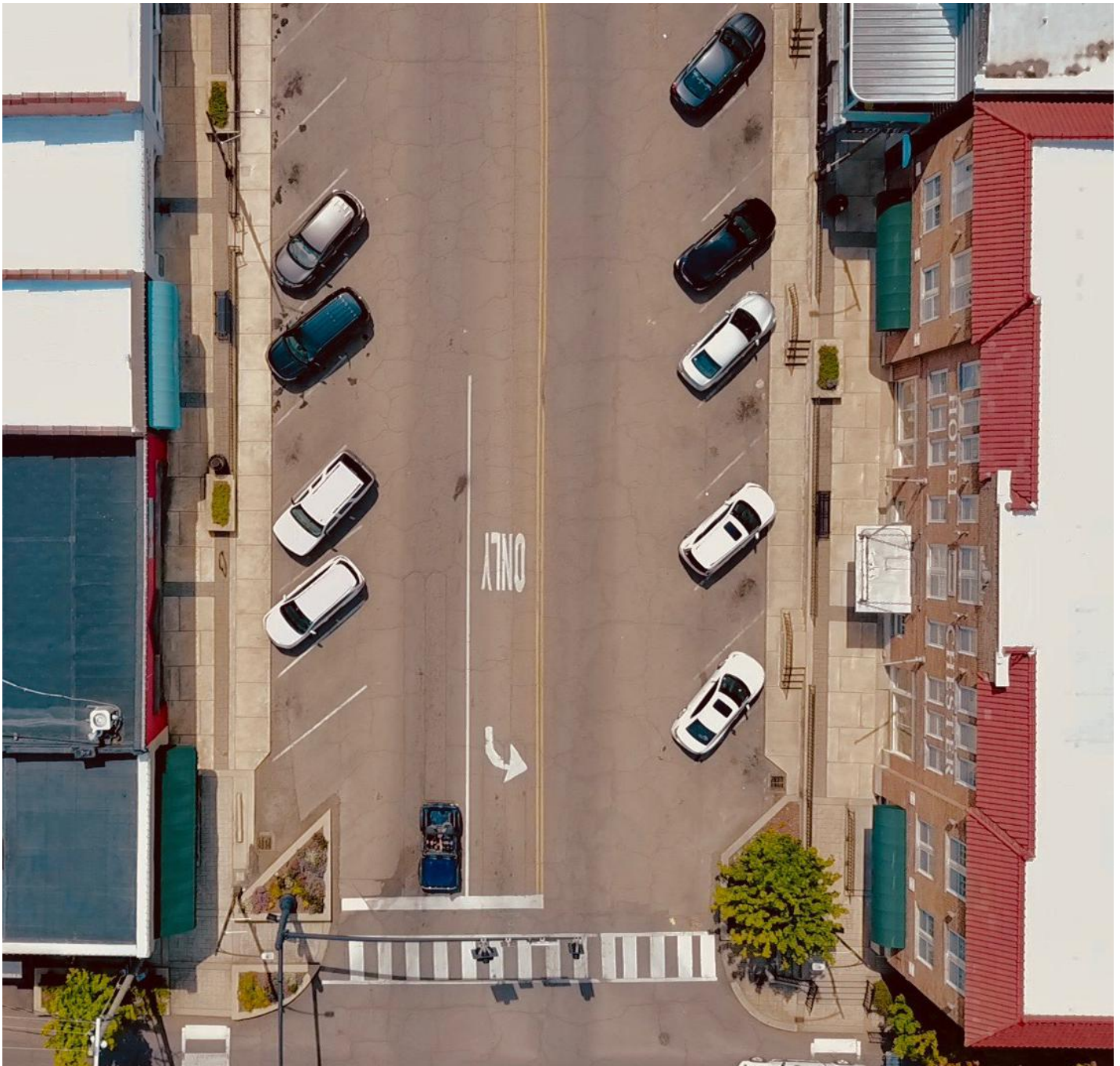


PARKING

Parking in commercial districts can be a contentious issue – there is either not enough parking, it is too far away, or it is not convenient for users. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to parking issues, all districts should be aware of local parking demand, availability, and needs.

- Perceived parking issues are often not an issue of the actual number of available spaces, but poor parking management. People simply do not know where available parking spaces are or whether there are requirements like time limits, fees, etc. Proper wayfinding signage on the way to parking areas and identifying signage at individual spots or lots can help alleviate this issue.
- Understanding and accommodating different needs among user groups is key. Consider designated areas for downtown employees so prime spots in front of storefronts are available for visitors and shoppers. Downtown residents will need parking during evening and overnight hours.
- Create designated accessible parking spaces that meet the design specifications of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Make sure the parking spaces connect to accessible paths on the street, sidewalks, and business entries.
- On street parking is generally preferred in traditional commercial districts, as it increases safety for pedestrians by creating a buffer between the sidewalk and traffic. It is also seen as the most convenient way to access storefronts and creates a visual representation of the visitors to the buildings along the street.
 - Parallel parking may be necessary if streets are too narrow to accommodate angled parking.
 - Angle parking head-in (or 90 degree) parking is more efficient and easier to use than parallel parking but requires a wider street. Some communities have instituted back-in only parking which helps with the safety of entering traffic from a space but can be harder for the driver initially.

- Off street parking can provide supplemental space when street parking is insufficient and when long-term parking is required (like for downtown residents).
 - Lots should be located behind buildings when possible and should be limited to one lot wide when they front the street. Consider 90-degree parking for efficient layouts that maximize available space or 60-degree parking when ease of use is the priority. Incorporate trees and green spaces into parking lots for interest, shading, and stormwater management. Screen lots from the pedestrian sidewalk by providing a visual buffer of landscaping.
- Parking structures can be effective parts of a downtown parking strategy, but they should be carefully designed to contribute to the overall district aesthetic. Make sure circulation paths within a structure are clearly marked and provide adequate lighting and site lines for safety.





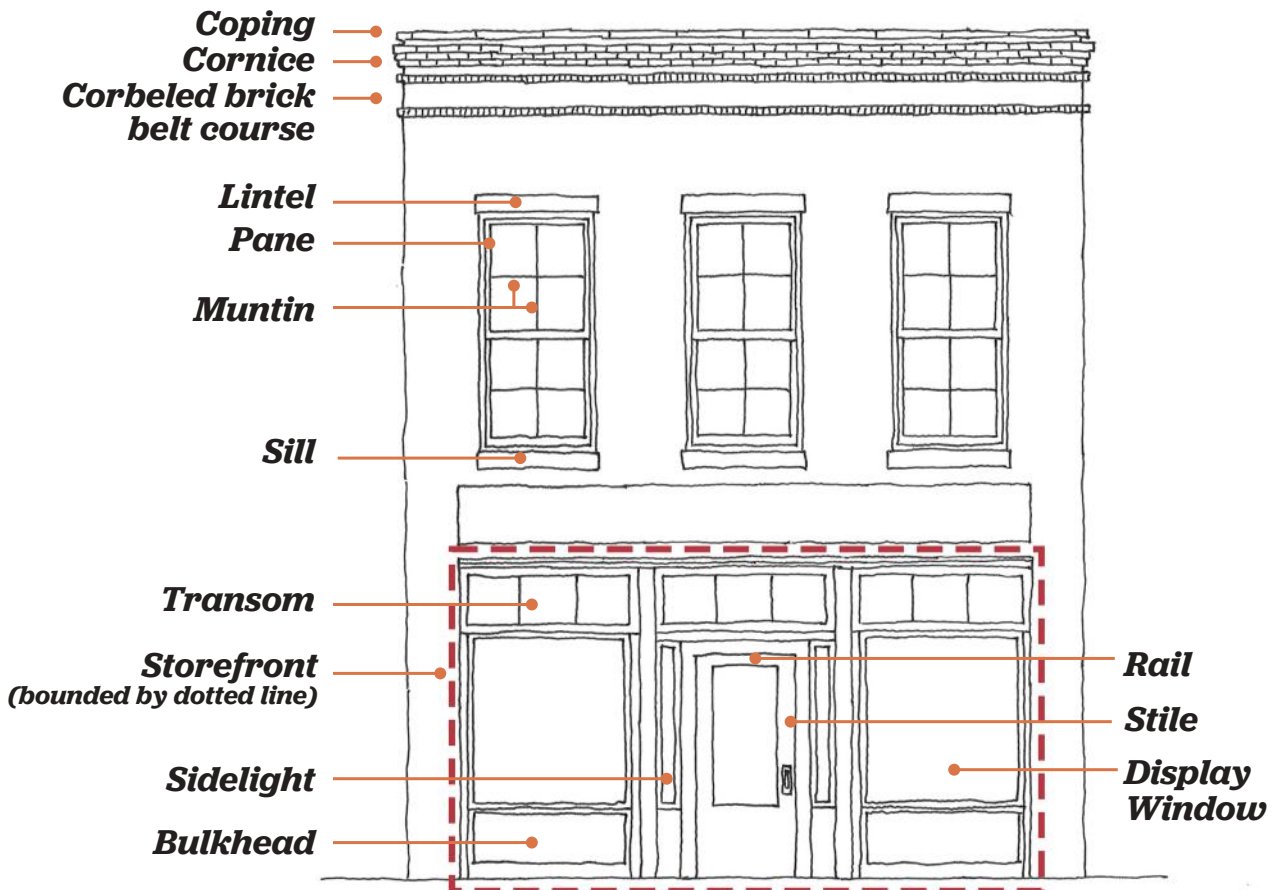
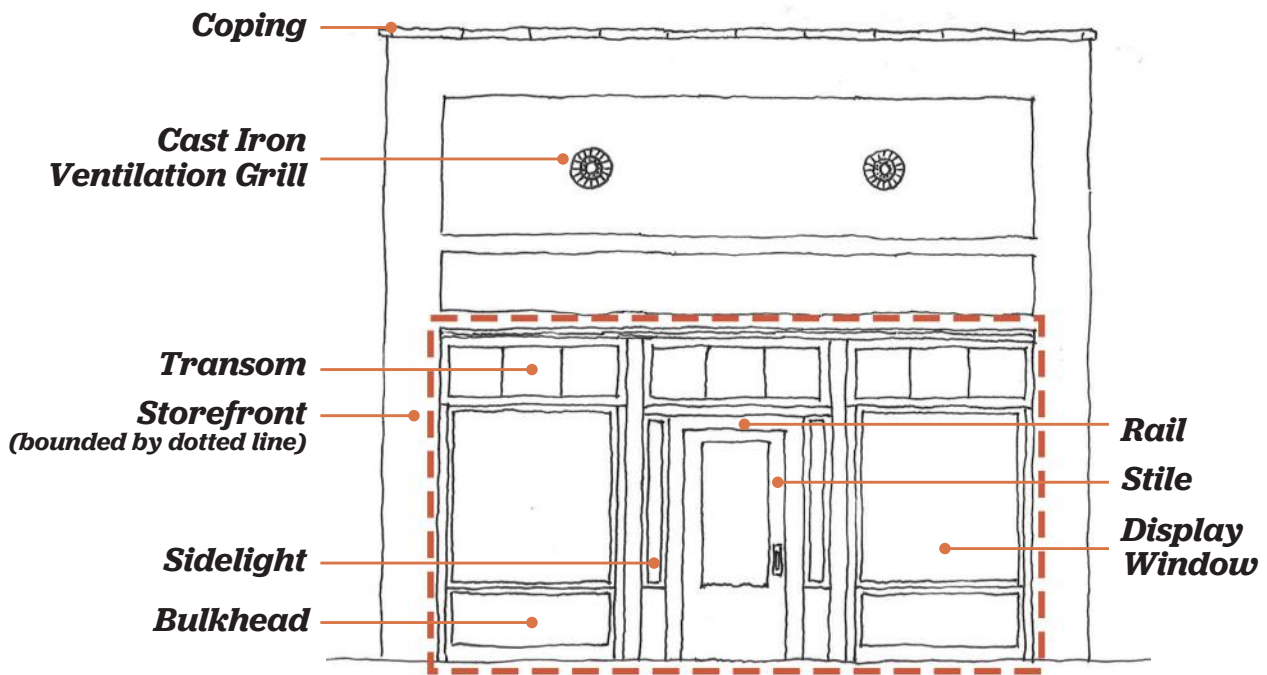


PART 4

Addressing Existing Buildings

Existing buildings are arguably the biggest asset of a commercial district. Knowing where to invest time and money into existing buildings can guide a downtown to its full potential. This section focuses on Mississippi's historic downtowns and how to bring façades back to their original glory based on certain architectural elements. See the Appendix for other examples of transformations, both historic and nonhistoric.

UNDERSTANDING BUILDING COMPONENTS





FAÇADE DESIGN

A façade is one face of a building, with the principal façade being the front face, meaning the face addressing the street or principal street. On a façade, stories are the vertical subdivisions, and bays, which are established by windows and doors, are the horizontal subdivisions. On a typical commercial building, façades are composed of first-floor storefronts, windows above, and capping cornices and parapets. The paramount concerns in façade design are scale, proportion, and pattern in the form of something called solid-to-void (solid/void) relationships, as illustrated in the façade drawings on the opposite pages.

Scale concerns sizes of buildings or structures relative to the human body. Monumental scale is created by larger elements and is typically used for important public buildings such as courthouses. There can also be a human scale created by smaller elements, which is used for more modest structures such as residences or for commercial building components like storefronts. Commercial buildings are most commonly built of brick, which give them a particular scale by virtue of the relatively small size of their masonry units. When brick is covered with stucco, a building's scale is radically changed and most often not for the better.

Proportion concerns the magnitude of one dimension or size relative to that of another or relative to the whole. So, for instance, there is a height-to-width proportion for a door or a window, and there is a door or window size relative to the size of a complete façade.

Storefronts and windows are openings, or voids, in a façade, and they create solid/void relationships, with these relationships representing, among other things, the percentage of opening to the percentage of wall. A solid/void relationship incorporates aspects of both scale and proportion. Consequently, it is the most important consideration in achieving coherent and cohesive façade design. The solid/void relationship often varies from floor to floor. For instance, the first floor of a commercial vernacular building is the most open, while windows above are smaller, repeated openings, and the cornice and parapet have few, if any, openings.

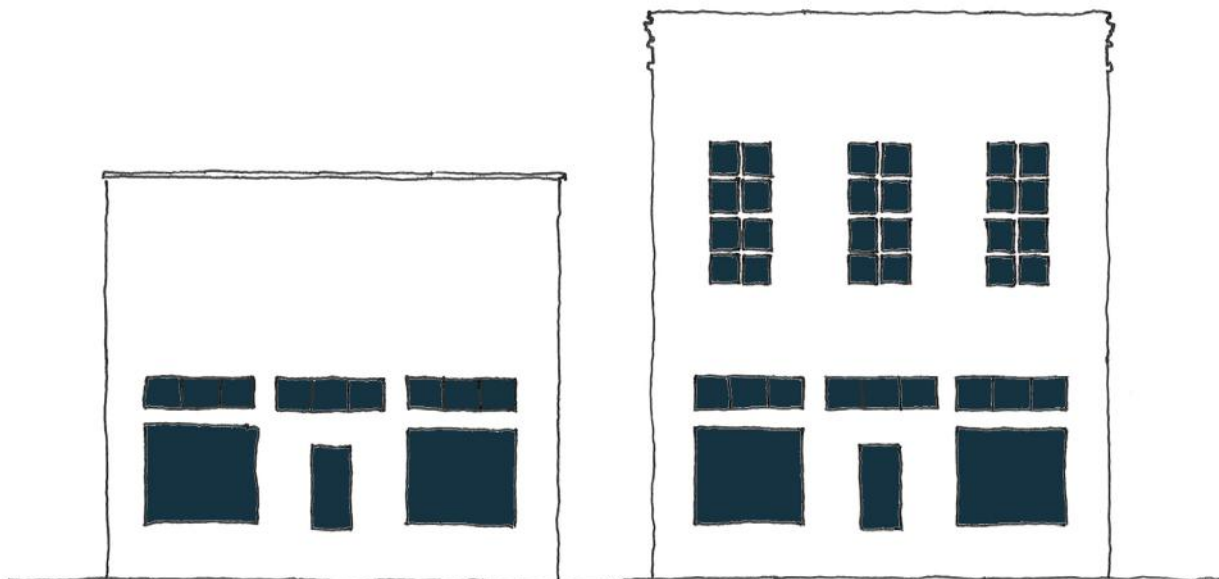
The scale, proportions, and solid/void relationships on the façades of commercial vernacular buildings were established and refined over a long period and so, while these façades may at first appear to be only utilitarian and so be easily taken for granted, they encapsulate much design wisdom and changes to them should be made only after careful consideration.

Best Practices

- If a façade's original pattern of openings has been changed, strong consideration should be given to reversing the changes and restoring the façade's original appearance and character.
- New construction should follow façade patterns found on local historic examples, meaning heights of stories, distribution of bays, solid/void relationships, etc.
- Additions should not be made at the front of historic buildings.
- Many high-style buildings have multiple exposed façades and a strongly three-dimensional character and as a result require a more complex analysis and design solution.

See Preservation Briefs no. 14 - "New Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings: Preservation Concerns" for additional guidance.

In general, see Preservation Briefs no. 35 - "Understanding Old Buildings: The Process of Architectural Investigation," no. 17 - "Architectural Character - Identifying the Visual Aspects of Historic Buildings as an Aid to Preserving Their Character," and no. 16 - "The Use of Substitute Materials on Historic Building Exertion."



STOREFRONTS

Storefronts are the most frequently altered parts of historic commercial buildings. They typically include the primary entrance, which is usually centrally located and often recessed and adjacent to display windows, with pier or column elements separating the parts. Beneath the windows there are bulkhead panels and above the windows and doors there are glazed transoms. There may also be additional ornamental features or architectural details. Storefronts sometimes have a door to one side, which provides access to stairs leading to upper floors.

Most historic storefronts in Mississippi date from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. While retail conditions have changed since that time, these storefronts remain very functional. Because they are located at street level, they are the most important part of downtown buildings for pedestrians, meaning that historic storefronts can produce a unified urban experience for those walking along downtown sidewalks.

Traditionally, historic signage was placed immediately above storefronts.

Best Practices

- If possible, damaged or deteriorated storefront features should be repaired, not removed or replaced.
- The designs of replacement storefronts should be based on historical documentation such as photographs. In instances where an original storefront design cannot be determined, a new design should be similar in placement, size, color, texture, and other visual qualities to existing historic storefronts in the district or, if no such examples remain, they should be based on the appearance of classic historic storefronts discovered through broader research.
- Historic storefronts should be retained and, as required, rehabilitated.
- Storefront features should not be enclosed, relocated, or covered over, nor should they be overlaid with thematic redesigns such as a “French Quarter” or “Old West” look, which would be out of character with the rest of the downtown area.
- Storefronts in new buildings should be similar in placement, size, color, texture, and other visual qualities to existing historic storefronts in the district or be based on the appearance of classic historic storefronts discovered through broader research.

See Preservation Briefs no. 11 - “Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts.”



■ Inappropriate Construction

ENTRANCES + DOORS

Entrances should not be made more elaborate than they were in their original historic form. Storefront entrances typically have single or double doors. These historic doors consist of vertical stiles and horizontal rails, typically framing glazed panels. When considering a replacement door, the best practice is to examine any remaining evidence such as historic photographs or other historic doors in the area. If none is relevant, then broader research can produce useful information. Aspects to consider are materials, colors, percentage of glazing, ornamental features, and accessory hardware. It is also important to recognize that a door considered appropriate in one location, say on Royal Street in New Orleans, will probably not be a harmonious replacement in a traditional Mississippi downtown.

Best Practices

- Primary entrance locations should not be changed.
- New entrances should not be added to primary façades.
- Historic entrances should be retained and, if necessary, rehabilitated using compatible materials. They should not be altered, embellished, enclosed, or relocated.
- A replacement door should match the original historic door or, if the design of this door is unknown, should have materials, colors, percentage of glazing, ornamentation, and accessory hardware compatible with historic doors remaining in the area.
- Doors in new construction should have materials, colors, percentage of glazing, ornamentation, and accessory hardware compatible with historic doors remaining in the area.



■ *Inappropriate Construction*

WINDOWS

Commercial buildings with ground-level storefronts have large expanses of glass to provide potential customers with the opportunity to window shop. Windows above the storefront level are typically of a residential scale and frequently have a vertically sliding sash like those seen on residences. These windows are typically set in isolation and have prominent sills beneath them and lintels at their heads, with these elements sometimes ornamented. Window-pane size increased over the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and only the appropriate pane size for the period of the building's construction should be used.

Best Practices

- The preservation of its windows is paramount in maintaining a building's historic character. Both the overall window design and the individual components and accessories should be retained and, if necessary, rehabilitated.
- Historic windows should not be eliminated, resized, or covered over, nor should their openings be filled in. If a window opening has been filled in, owners

should consider reopening it and reinserting a window identical to or very similar to the original one. During a rehabilitation, repairs should be limited to affected components. If a window must be replaced, the replacement should match the historic window in its materials and all visual aspects of its design. Unpainted aluminum sash and snap-in muntins should never be used.

- Details such as ornamented sills or lintels should be retained and, if necessary, rehabilitated.
- Window glass should not be tinted or coated with a reflective material.
- While historic windows do not conform to today's standards for energy efficiency, interior storm sashes can greatly improve their effectiveness without altering their exterior appearance.
- Historic shutters should be retained and, if necessary, rehabilitated. Replacement shutters should reflect the building's original design and use.
- Windows in high-style buildings have a form distinctive to the particular style, and care must be taken to understand and retain this form.

Also see Preservation Briefs no. 9 - "The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows" and no. 13 - "The Repair and Thermal Upgrading of Historic Steel Windows"



■ Inappropriate Construction

CORNICES

The cornices of commercial buildings may be made of stone or pressed metal but those of commercial vernacular buildings were most often produced only through the skillful work of brick masons. Historic cornice features for commercial vernacular buildings include corbeled brick, raised and recessed panels, saw-tooth and dentil courses, and terra-cotta and cast-iron features, such as panels and grills. When such cornices are removed, the upper reaches of buildings lose their essential character, intended scale, and appropriate level of detail.

Best Practices

- Historic cornices should be retained and, if necessary, rehabilitated.
- Where historic cornices have been removed, every consideration should be given to replacing them in kind. Because historic brick cornices involve only the outer wythe, or layer of brick, such a replacement is straightforward, as the structural integrity of the front wall is not at risk.



■ *Inappropriate Construction*

PARAPETS + ROOFS

For most commercial buildings, roofs are hidden behind false walls called parapets. These parapets may be horizontal or have a central pediment or curving segments or a stepped configuration, and each of these types creates a distinctive profile when it is seen against the sky. The top level of a parapet is the coping, which may be stone, cast stone, or metal, and prevents rainwater from entering the top of the front wall.

High-style buildings typically have visible roofs with shapes that reflect their style and historical period.

Best Practices

- Parapets should be retained and, if necessary, rehabilitated. Such features as chimneys should not be removed, even if they are no longer functional.
- Historic roof designs should be retained and preserved.
- If roofs behind parapets must be modified, the new roof should not be visible from the street level.

- During roof repair and replacement, new materials should match historic materials.
- Secondary features and distinctive materials should be retained.
- Because they are almost flat and receive rainwater, roofs on commercial-vernacular buildings should be regularly inspected and maintained by trained personnel, who should also inspect associated flashing, gutters, and downspouts.
- Roofs on new high-style buildings should be consistent in form with local historic examples. Care should be taken to break up building masses so that sloped roofs do not become unacceptably tall and bulky.
- Any roofs converted into patios shall abide by the previous practices. Avoid street-facing patios, keeping the addition of an occupied rooftop space towards the rear of the building. Always consult with a professional to verify weight loads before planning to add activity on the roof of a historic structure.

Also see Preservation Briefs no. 4 - "Roofing for Historic Buildings"



■ *Inappropriate Construction*

DETAILS + ORNAMENTATIONS

While architectural details and ornaments typically have no utilitarian value, they make a building more interesting, draw attention to themselves or to nearby features, and typically reflect the architectural style, age, and historic use of the building. They include such features as molded cornices, column shafts and capitals, brackets, belt courses, terra-cotta panels, and cast-iron ventilation grills.

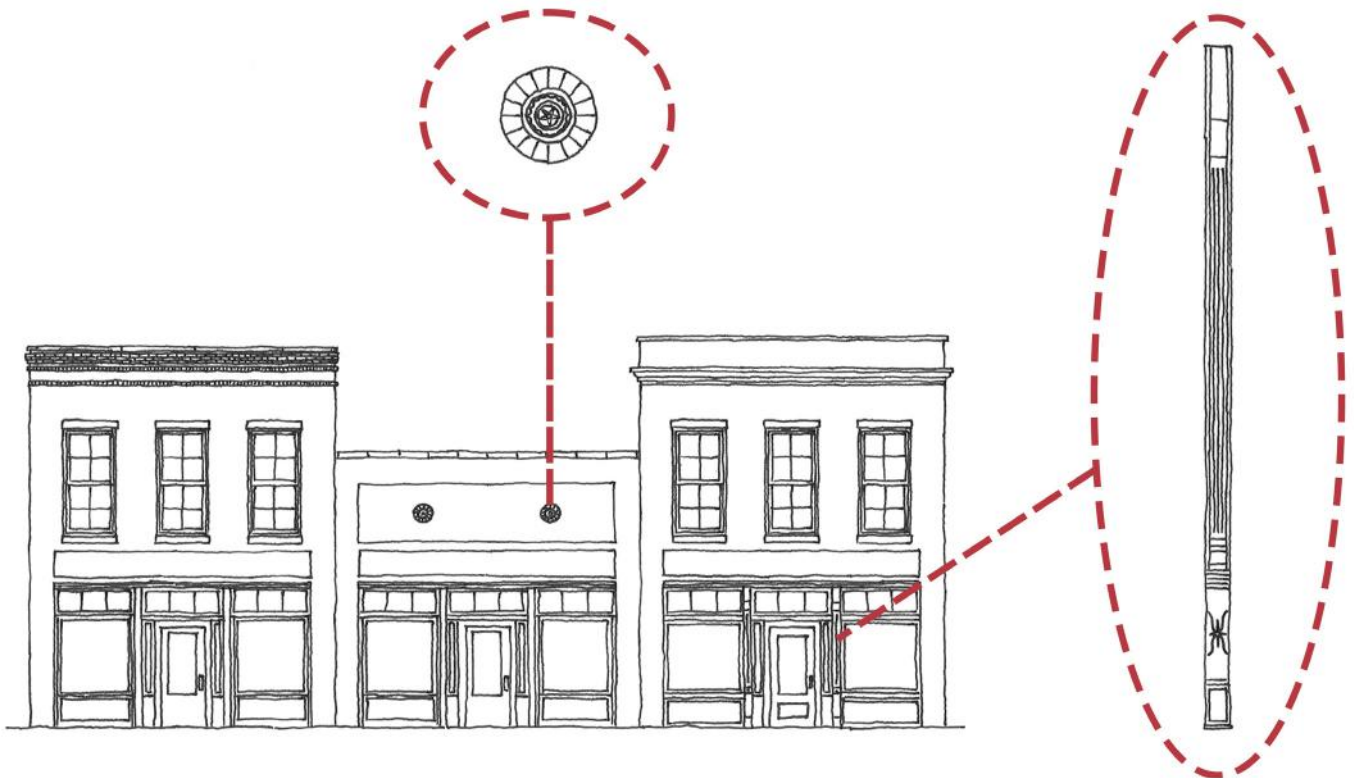
Details and ornamentation are typically found in well-established locations. At the sidewalk level, they can be seen close-up by passersby and may be part of cast-iron columns or piers or be cast into terra cotta. Higher up, they are commonly found at window heads on lintels or lintel covers. At the cornice level, they can be made of pressed metal, cast iron, or terra cotta, but on commercial vernacular buildings, they are most commonly made of brick in the form of raised or recessed panels, corbeling, sawtooth courses, and polychromatic patterning. At the top of the parapet, copings may also have ornamental features.

Where details and ornamentation have been lost, the appearance of replacements should be based on

photographic evidence. If such evidence is unavailable, the appearance should be based on historic precedents, particularly those found on nearby historic buildings or on historic photographs of them.

Best Practices

- Historic details and ornamentation should be retained and, if necessary, rehabilitated. Where rehabilitation is not possible, replacement components should match the original ones in location, configuration, size, color, texture, and other visual qualities.
- Details and ornamentation should not be obscured or painted over.
- Details and ornamentation should not be added where, historically, there was none.
- In general, the character and amount of details and ornamentation on new construction should be consistent with that found on historic examples.
- Details and ornamentation on high-style buildings are reflective of the specific style. They should be respected and not mixed with new elements drawn from a different style.



SHELTER STRUCTURES + AWNINGS

Porches and porticoes are typically found on civic and institutional buildings built in a high style, while commercial buildings have traditionally had their storefronts protected by fabric awnings and metal canopies.

Best Practices

- Porches, galleries, and balconies should not be added to buildings that did not historically have them.
- Historic shelter constructions on commercial buildings should be retained and, if necessary, rehabilitated. Original shelter designs should not be altered, but inappropriate shelter structures added more recently are best removed or incorporated into a more historically appropriate design. The design of replacements should be based on historical documentation for the building and, if that is lacking, be based on examples remaining on neighboring historic buildings. Fabric is the most appropriate material for awnings, and metal is the most appropriate one for canopies.
- New shelter constructions should be compatible in size and shape with the openings that they shelter and should be similar in design to the original shelter constructions or to historic examples found nearby. New shelter structures may stretch across an entire storefront but should not extend across more than one building.

See Preservation Briefs no. 44 - "The Use of Awnings on Historic Buildings: Repair, Replacement, and New Design" for additional guidance.



COLOR

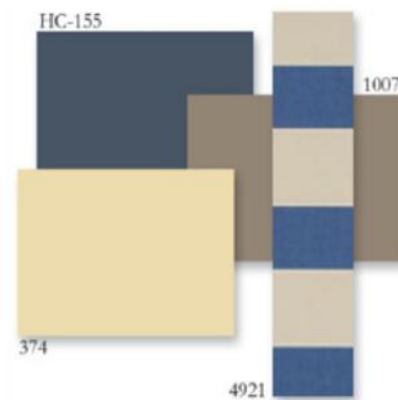
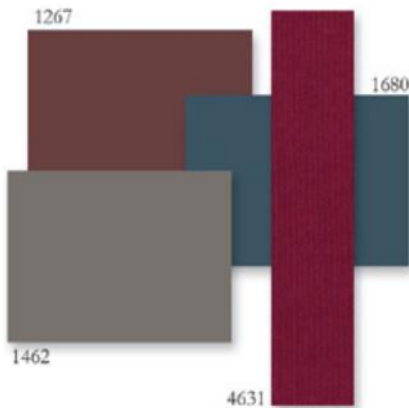
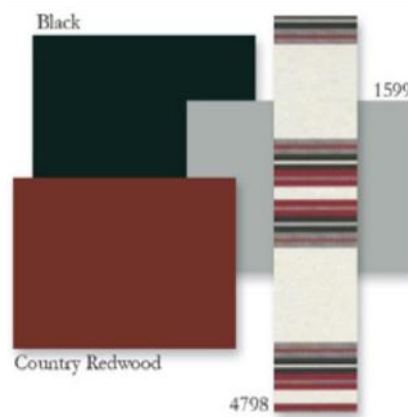
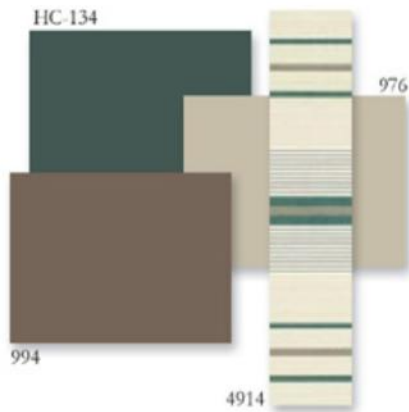
One of the most common questions that arise during a design project is, "What colors should I choose for my building?". A building's color scheme should be carefully considered for appropriateness and impact. Remember the following when undergoing a painting project:

- Do not paint a portion of a building that has not been painted historically.
- Always choose compatible exterior-rated paint for exterior areas. Verify with the paint manufacturer.
- Make sure the area is dry and clean prior to painting for good adhesion and to assure that moisture does not get trapped behind the paint.
- Always protect adjacent areas before painting to ensure that no historic materials are damaged as part of a painting project.
- Always paint a sample of colors in a small, inconspicuous place before painting a large area.

Best Practices

- Look at neighboring buildings and the street. Colors don't need to match but should be compatible with the overall environment.
- Use 3-4 colors max (including the base brick color) to sufficiently highlight the façade details.
- Coordinate with awnings and existing brick or stone color.
- Colors specific to individual businesses can be used as accents or in signage.

See Preservation Briefs no. 10 for further guidance on exterior paint and 28 for guidance on painting historic interiors.





PART 5

Managing Change

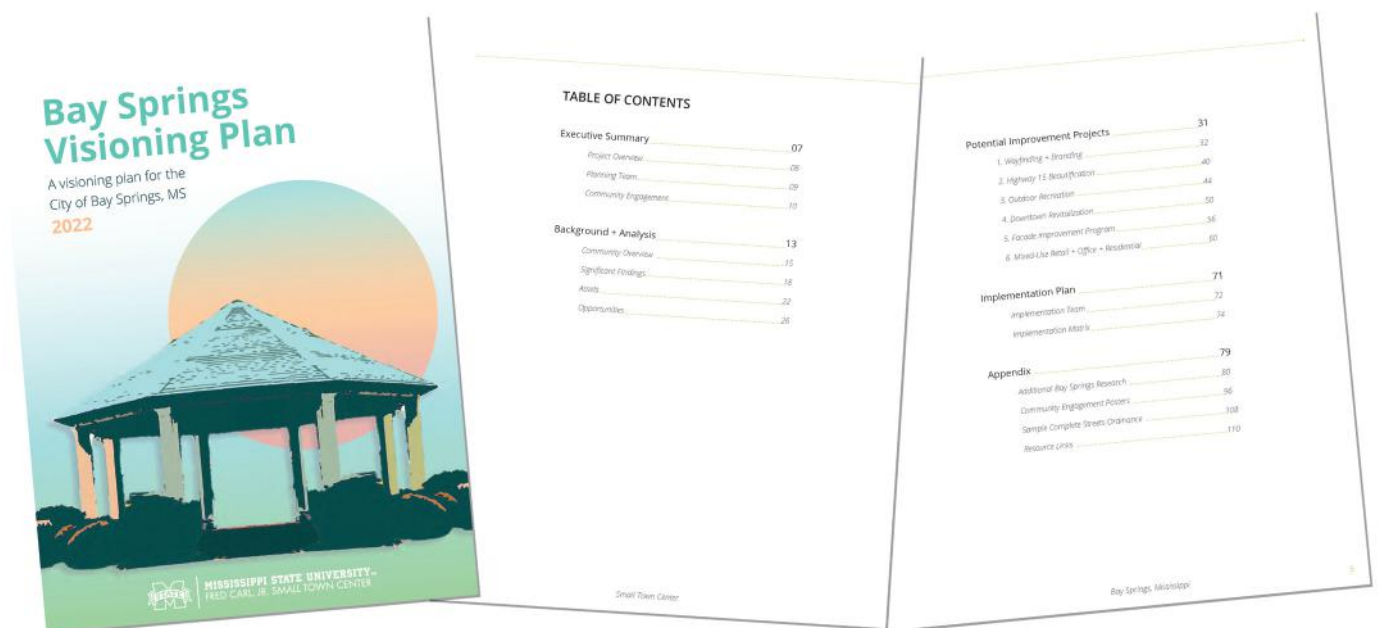
New development is a sign of a healthy community and district but is not always appropriate for historic commercial districts. This section can serve as a starting point for managing change and growth, and the strategies shown here should be tailored to your unique circumstances.

MASTER PLANNING

Master plans are typically created for an entire community and contain segments devoted to the Main Street district. Communities that are lucky to get them usually have master plans produced every 5–20 years by a municipal planning commission or a task force of citizens working with a planning consultant. Regular reassessments should be made of master plans every few years to allow them to evolve with the needs of the communities, while keeping the core mission intact. Master plans prove invaluable as they can guide policy, direct design decisions, set goals, and create a vision to work towards. For this reason, Main Street executive directors should serve a major advisory role during the planning process.

A typical planning process follows this progression:

1. Discovery – history research, assessment of current physical and market conditions and gaps, and inventory of properties
2. Visioning – community engagement and documentation
3. Scenario exploration – prediction of future development pressures based on the first two and recognizing problems that may occur
4. Compiling – take information gained and define goals
5. Production – draft report
6. Feedback/Revision – release to public and revise based on feedback
7. Publish





VACANT AND UNDERUTILIZED PROPERTIES

Most downtown districts have vacant buildings that cause problems for the citizens, neighboring business owners, and city leaders. The first step to remedy this situation is to identify these properties and why they are lying dormant. Common types of underutilized properties that could be overlooked include:

- Absentee building owner (out-of-state perhaps) lets it sit empty.
- Lower stories occupied by business but upper stories vacant.
- Property's upper story, or the whole building, is used as storage.
- Lower story is occupied as residence.
- Upper story housing is rundown, and no attempt has been made to occupy or improve it.
- Building has deteriorated, or is not up to code, and it is cost-prohibitive to redevelop it.

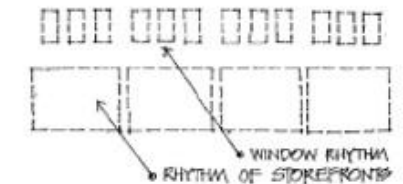
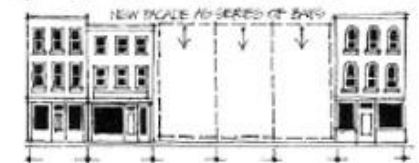
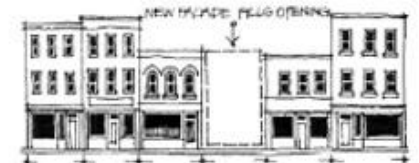
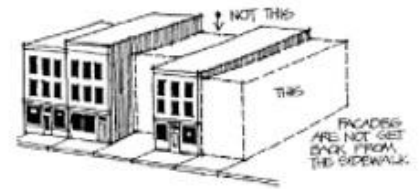
Steps to activate dormant properties:

- Activate buildings with temporary interventions– pop-up shops, mobile museums, idea contests, historic photos or creative window displays in empty storefronts.
- Identify historic assets in danger and nominate them to be on Mississippi Heritage Trust's Mississippi's Most Endangered Places list: <https://www.10mostms.com/>.
- Work with the local municipality to enact tools like a vacant building registry and/or a minimum maintenance ordinance. Once such tools are on the books, make sure you are enforcing nuisance properties.
- Require active uses on the lower levels and make ordinances that prohibit residences in street-facing spaces on the main level.
- Audit your zoning to ensure that prohibitive zoning does not contribute to your vacant or underutilized building problem. Make sure uses you want are allowed and that parking requirements are realistic.
- Encourage upper story housing and upper story office use.
- Promote small-scale manufacturing with retail/dining spaces such as bakeries and breweries.
- Sometimes properties need some work to get to a reasonable "white box" condition. Consider local partnerships and funding sources to address structural issues, deferred maintenance needs, or out-of-date infrastructure to make a property more feasible and marketable for new business opportunities.
- Implement a Façade Improvement Program and offer incentives to encourage property owners and businesses to improve the exterior appearance of their buildings and storefronts. They focus on either commercial or residential properties in historic or non-historic areas and provide financial incentives such as a matching grant or loan, a tax incentive, and design assistance. See an example from Gulfport: <https://www.downtowngulfport.org/facade-grant-program>.

New Construction

While Main Street design prioritizes maintenance and rehabilitation of existing historic buildings, appropriate new and infill construction is necessary where gaps are missing in our downtowns. Consider the following for appropriate new construction for commercial and mixed-use downtown buildings:

- Distinguish new construction from historic structures.
- Do not imitate historic styles. Use of historic features may create a false sense of history.
- Use building materials that are compatible or similar to those traditionally used within the district.
- Rooflines should be hidden by parapets, like the traditional commercial buildings.
- Building setbacks should be the same as the rest of the street.
- The primary building elevation should be parallel to the street.
- Building heights and stories should be similar to surrounding buildings. Generally, this would mean new construction should be “low-rise,” between one and four stories in height.
- Building widths should be standard throughout the district. Do not infill an existing alley.
- Consider the rhythm of window and door openings present on the existing storefronts on the block and design to fit within this rhythm.
- Design mechanical and HVAC equipment so that it is not visible from the street. Orient service areas such as garbage cans, service entrances, and other utilities away from the storefront and main façade when possible.
- Keep design at a human scale.
- All street-level stories should be designed and used for commercial purposes. We recommend upper levels be used for upper story housing.



Design considerations for infill in historic districts. Image: National Trust Building Improvement File.





APPENDIX

EXAMPLES OF RENOVATIONS

Before

After



2009 Columbus, MS - Varsity Town



2022



Old Greenville, MS - Sears Building



2023



2008 Laurel, MS - Mercantile



2023



2008 Laurel, MS – Magnolia St.



2023



2008 Laurel, MS – Magnolia St. Eatery



2023



2008 Laurel, MS – MS 537



2023



2008 New Albany, MS – Bankhead St.



2023



2008 New Albany, MS – Bankhead St. Barbershop



2023



2013 New Albany, MS – Bankhead St.



2023



2008 Ocean Springs, MS – Washington Ave.



2022



2008 Ocean Springs, MS – Washington Ave.



2022



2008 Tupelo, MS – Façade Change



2022



2016 Tupelo, MS – W. Main St. Façade Change



2022



Fred Carl Jr.
SMALL TOWN CENTER



**MISSISSIPPI
MAIN STREET**
ASSOCIATION