

STREETSCAPE AND DESIGN GUIDELINES

DOWNTOWN AREA

**CITY OF PLATTSBURGH,
NEW YORK**

THIS REPORT WAS PREPARED FOR THE CITY OF PLATTSBURGH OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, DIVISION OF COASTAL RESOURCES AND THE NEW YORK STATE QUALITY COMMUNITIES COMMUNITY CENTER REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE..

MAY 2009



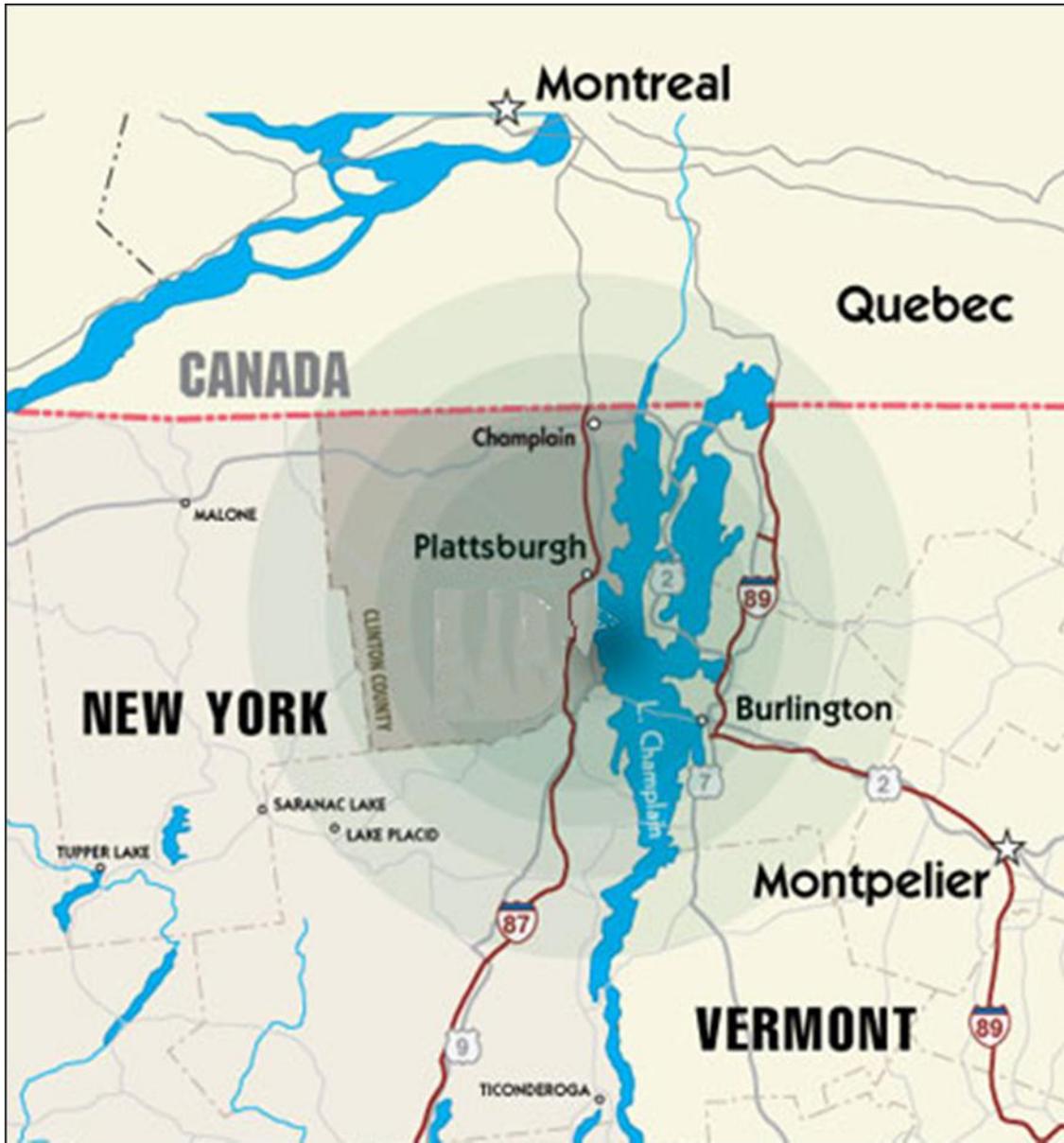
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Introduction

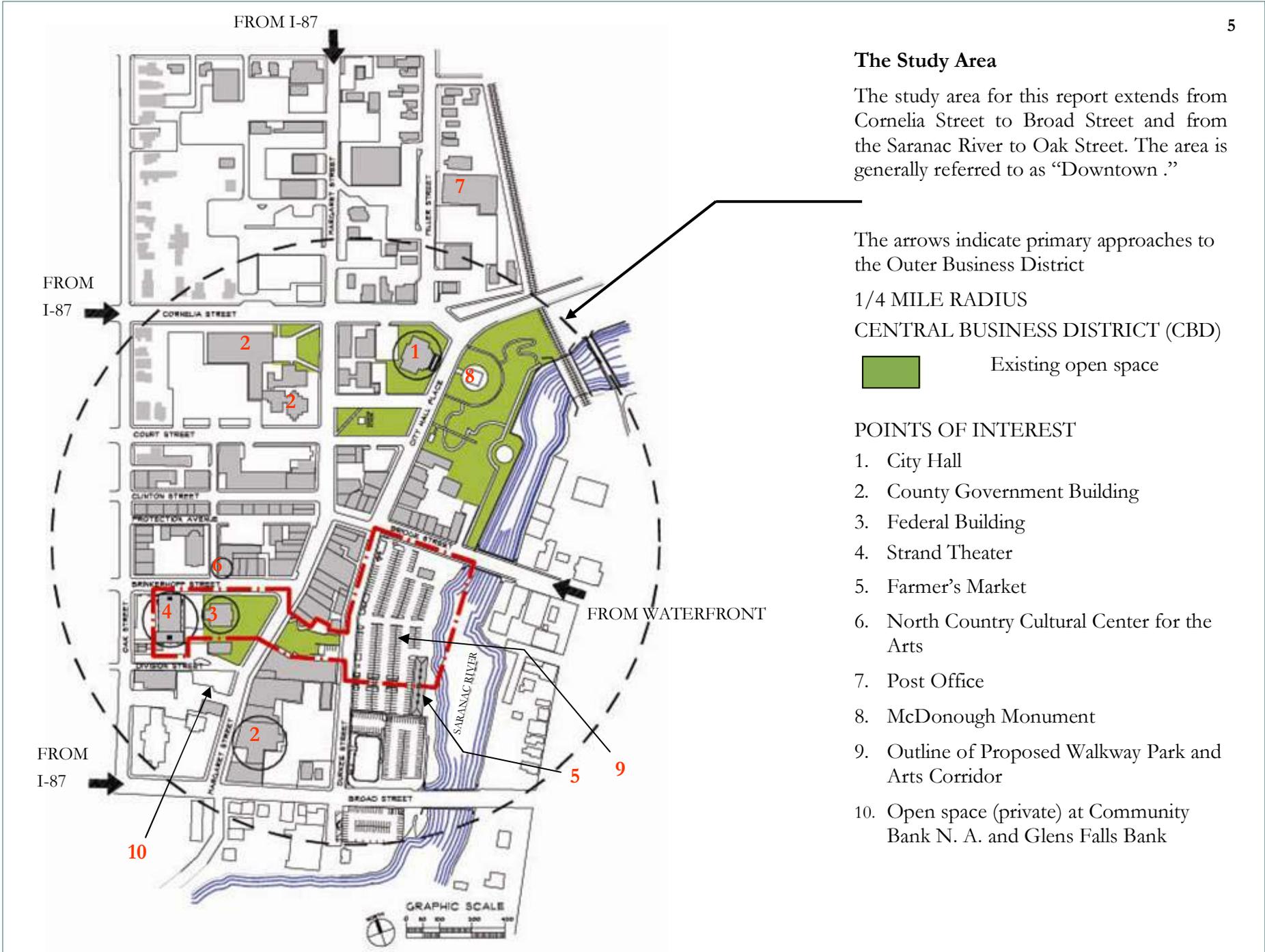
The Governor's Quality Communities Task Force recommended revitalizing New York's downtowns, main streets and community centers to create new economic opportunities. The City of Plattsburgh is one of twelve communities to be designated as a participant in this project and has been a recipient of funds from the Department of State and other various State agencies to revitalize its downtown.

The creation and implementation of "Design Guidelines" for Plattsburgh's downtown is a major step to ensure that visual compatibility is maintained. These guidelines will ensure a coordinated effort exists between the City and interested downtown parties. Requirements for the siting of buildings, to include height, setback and bulk, façade improvements, sidewalks, street furniture, lighting and landscaping are addressed. The overall character of future development in Plattsburgh's downtown will be established.



CITY OF PLATTSBURGH
LOCATION MAP

The City of Plattsburgh is located in Northeastern New York on the shores of Lake Champlain 25 miles south of Canada and 150 miles north of Albany. The area is generally described as the North Country.



Intent

This report will establish a set of design guidelines for the Downtown area in Plattsburgh. It has been prepared in response to both public and private concerns about the quality of the environment in the Downtown area at all hours of the day and its physical relationship to the neighborhoods surrounding it. When new buildings are proposed, or existing structures are to be renovated or reconstructed, these guidelines are intended to ensure that the completed project is a pleasant contribution to the downtown district.

The City of Plattsburgh has implemented many improvements to the downtown area. The 7-Point Hub at the conjunction of Margaret Street, Clinton Street, Bridge Street, City Hall Place and Durkee Street has been completed. New street lighting, more trees and streetscape amenities have been installed and, where possible, the sidewalks have been widened and brick pavers installed. Although a number of surface transformers exist, overhead wiring has been removed and electric power is conveyed mainly underground.

New developments and renovations are proposed for the downtown area and to maintain the character of the city and its unique features, a set of guidelines should be followed.

These guidelines are intended as a reference to be used in conjunction with the zoning ordinance. When undertaking a project, a developer may use these guidelines to establish design. The planning commission may use the same guidelines to evaluate the proposed project. It is anticipated that the “Design Guidelines” will be incorporated into the City Zoning Ordinance. In addition, the city should consider establishing a design board to assist the planning board with the evaluation of proposed developments.



7 Point Hub—Gateway to Downtown



Transformers at Durkee Street

General objectives

Downtown city streets pass through a diverse group of structures. At any location along the streets a mix of local and city-wide uses can be found. This mix varies with the individual streets thus forming the unique character of the streets as a whole.

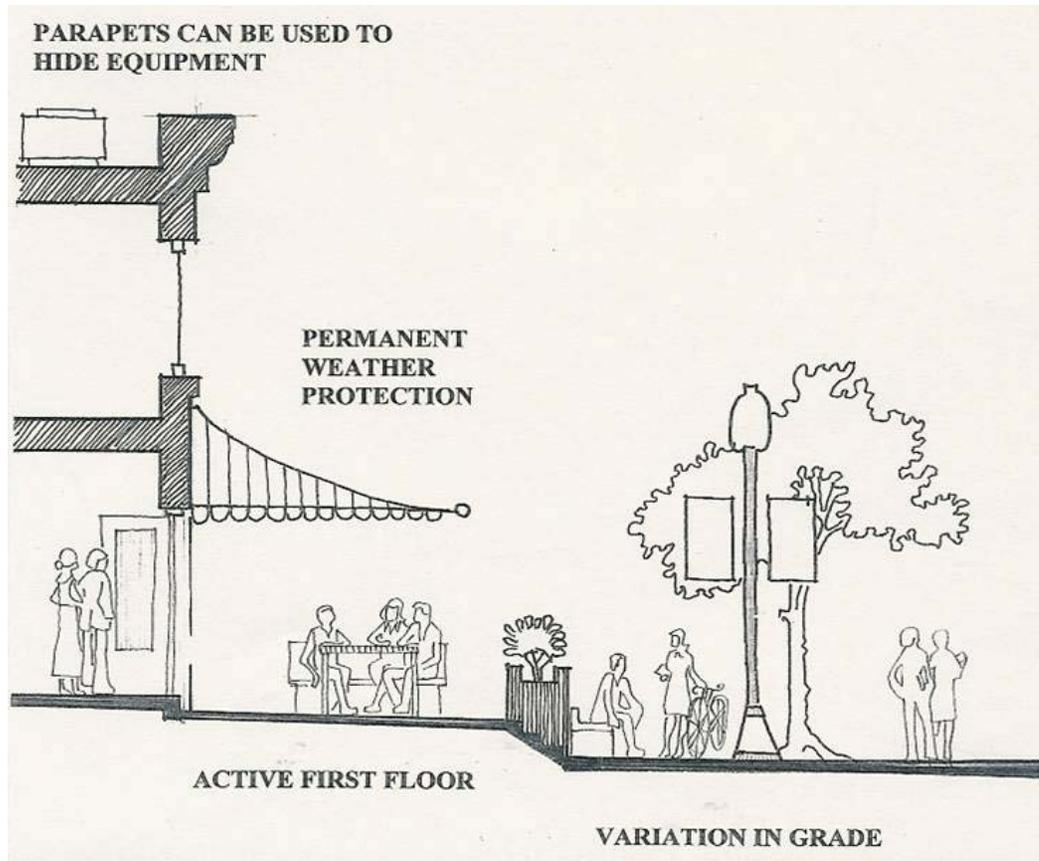
The guidelines are designed to reinforce this mixed use, while encouraging a progressive level of quality in new, historically significant and rehabilitated constructions throughout the downtown area.

In addition, general design guidelines establishing requirements for the siting of buildings, height, setback, bulk and overall character will be developed to ensure compatible developments in the City.

The overall goals for this study are as follow:

- Maintain a sense of diversity in use and physical character along all streets.
- Encourage new development to be compatible in scale and character with abutting properties.
- Improve the pedestrian environment and encourage active use at the ground level while promoting physical improvements to the streetscape.
- Encourage wide, tree lined sidewalks wherever possible.

- Encourage mixed use development.
- Provide architectural guidelines for renovations and both infill and larger developments.
- Encourage weather protection for pedestrians at sidewalk level.
- Preserve open spaces at undeveloped intersections.
- Promote public spaces for formal and informal gatherings.
- Encourage and maintain vistas and establish points of interest.
- Encourage the retention and sensitive rehabilitation of historic structures and features.
- Maintain and encourage a specific character, or sense of place, for the downtown area.



Landscaping

Landscaping can be used to screen parking, loading, and other undesirable features of a site from the pedestrian. Landscaping can also be used to help make larger buildings compatible with the neighborhoods beyond, and can screen noise and light from these buildings.

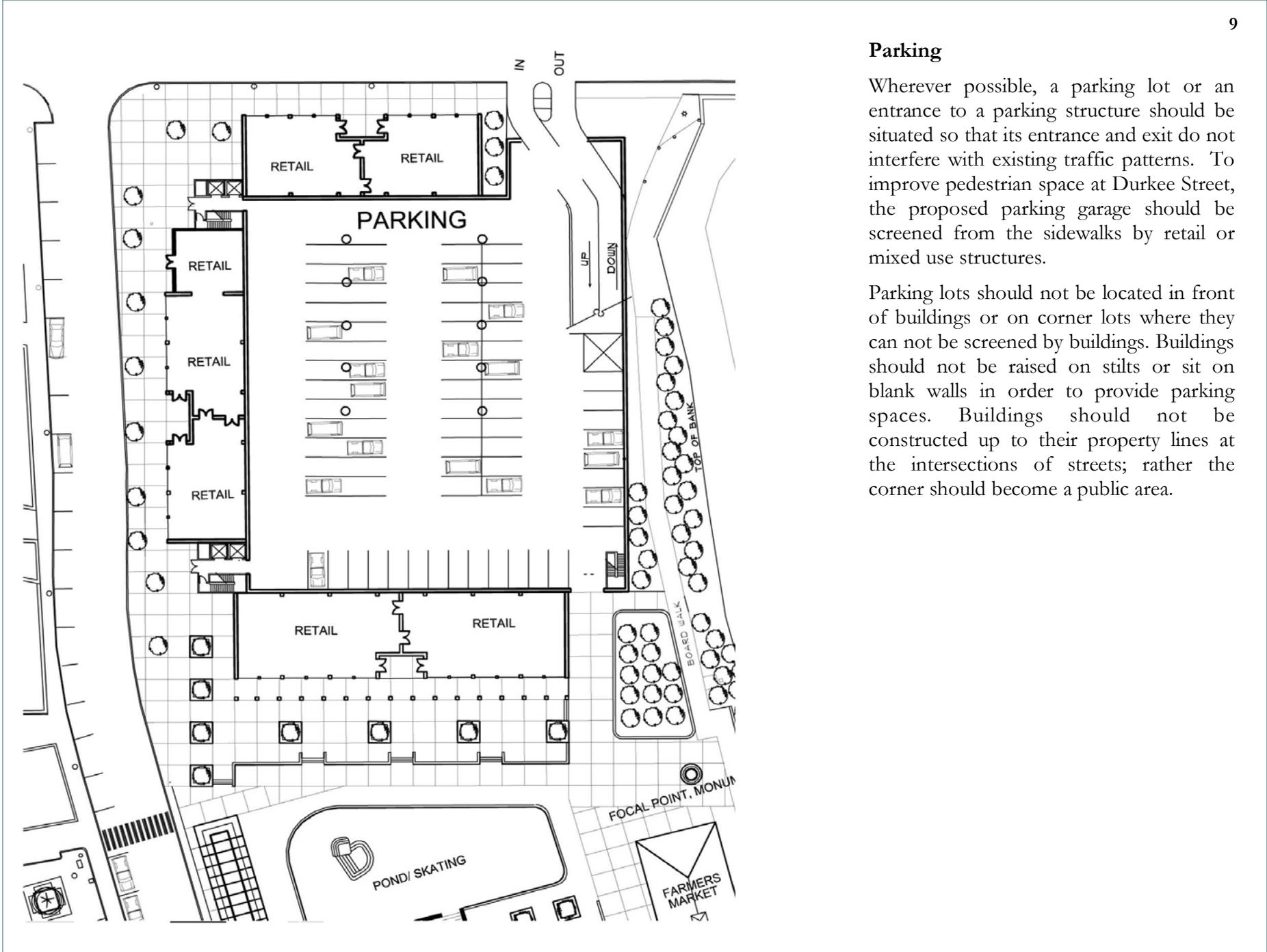
Landscaping and variations in grade elevations can be used to provide visual interest and perspective. Landscaping could create buffers and variety to sidewalks and form linkages to open spaces. Chain-link fences should not be used as a landscaping feature. The existing practice of seasonal decorations, street tree planting, planters and window boxes should be maintained and expanded. Many wild grapes (Plattsburgh Chardonnay) flourish in the city, gracing several of the older structures.



Wild grapes typical in downtown



Downtown chain link fence



Parking

Wherever possible, a parking lot or an entrance to a parking structure should be situated so that its entrance and exit do not interfere with existing traffic patterns. To improve pedestrian space at Durkee Street, the proposed parking garage should be screened from the sidewalks by retail or mixed use structures.

Parking lots should not be located in front of buildings or on corner lots where they can not be screened by buildings. Buildings should not be raised on stilts or sit on blank walls in order to provide parking spaces. Buildings should not be constructed up to their property lines at the intersections of streets; rather the corner should become a public area.



The Buildings

The existing buildings in Plattsburgh contain a variety of shapes and details. Regardless of their age, the buildings contribute to a lively streetscape and have some common features. These features use a variety of surface textures, small scale architectural articulation, bay windows, balconies and quality of material. These materials break up the mass of repetitive buildings, relate newer buildings to older structures and make larger buildings compatible with smaller ones. Recessed entrances at street level with splayed side windows are unique features in Plattsburgh.

Architectural articulation as in the use of projecting bays on the front or side walls is encouraged.

Façade modulation or the recessing of buildings at various depths from the property line tends to break up the mass of longer blocks and may emphasize a special part of the building, such as an entrance.

Small Scale Elements

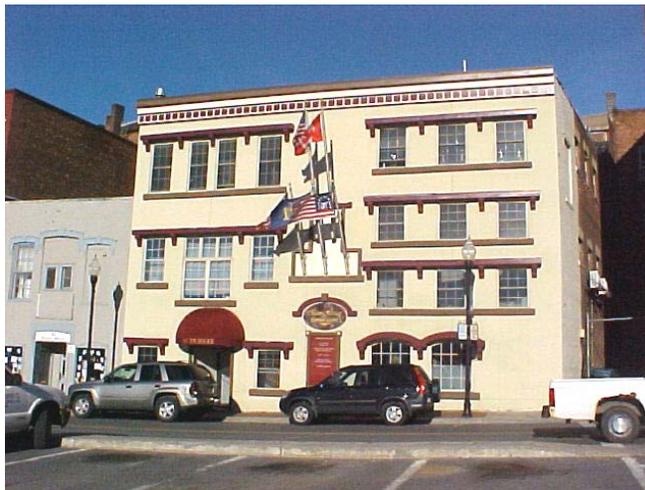
Elements such as entrance ways, balconies and awnings are encouraged as a way of relating the architecture to its inhabitants and helping to give the streets a more human scale. This is especially true along commercial frontage where a long uninterrupted wall could be enlivened by a number of the previously mentioned elements without harming the retail façade.



Building Massing

Building massing along the streets should be designed to step down to residential areas beyond so as not to overwhelm the smaller structures in adjacent neighborhoods. This transition exists at the downtown fringes and should be encouraged as new developments approach adjacent neighborhoods.

Building design should also be encouraged wherever rear façades are exposed to view.



Roof Forms and Roof Lines

A variety of roof forms should be encouraged to avoid monotony while increasing the aesthetic appeal of the skyline. These forms include detailed cornices, roof shapes, and dormers



Building Material

Traditional materials such as brick, stone and wood should be used to relate to the existing context of the city streets. These materials should highlight the architectural features of the buildings. This could also be achieved by breaking up the larger surfaces of a building or dividing the building into several pieces. Large blank walls of any material should be avoided and large decorative screens and chain link fence should not be used. Vinyl material and imitation stone should also be avoided.



Storefronts.

Storefronts should have sufficient glass area to provide good visibility and light into the business establishment, utilizing shades to limit visibility when needed rather than permanently closing in the storefront. There should be a plan configuration which is compatible with the original character of the building while complying with accessibility requirements. Storefronts generally possess elements which are historically characteristic of storefront design (base, large window, glazed doors, transom and/or signboard, and cornices) in either a historic or contemporary design and in proportion to the building and the streetscape

Glass

Glass openings should be similar to the traditional types as evident on Margaret, Clinton and Brinkerhoff Streets. The glass openings should include a variety of proportions. The windows should be seen as distinct elements and should not blend into a glass wall. An exception to this would be storefronts at the first floor of commercial buildings. Mullions, transoms, and divisions should be encouraged. Reflecting glass should not be used.

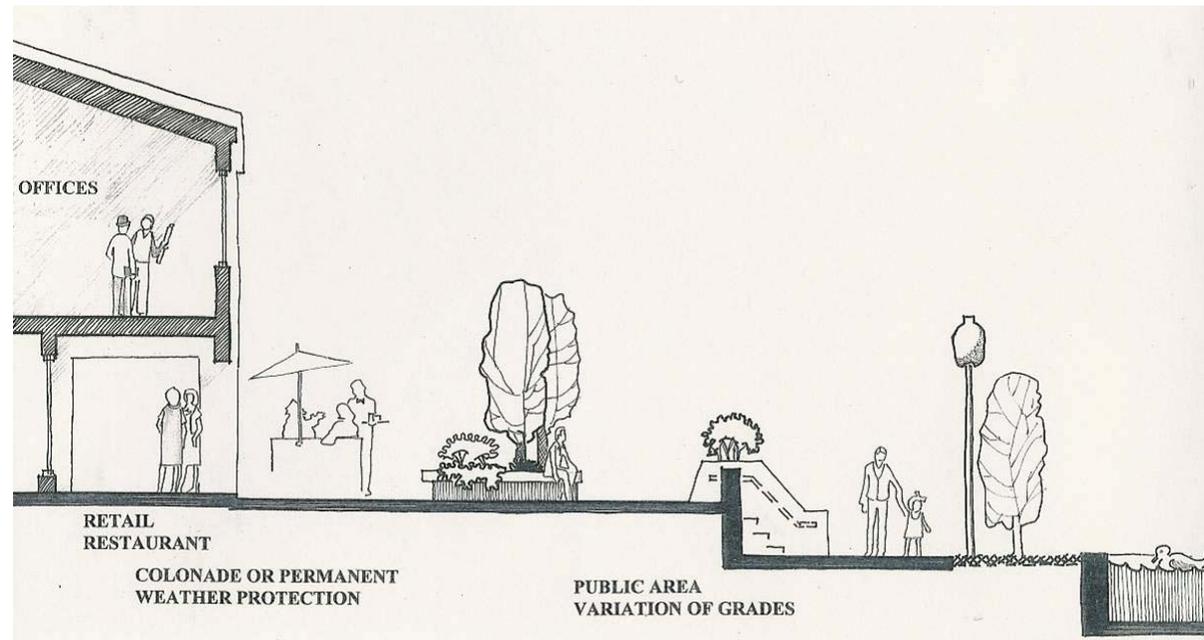


The Fabric of the City

The preceding design elements have been taken from the fabric of the city streets. Below are several examples of these elements as they exist in Plattsburgh.



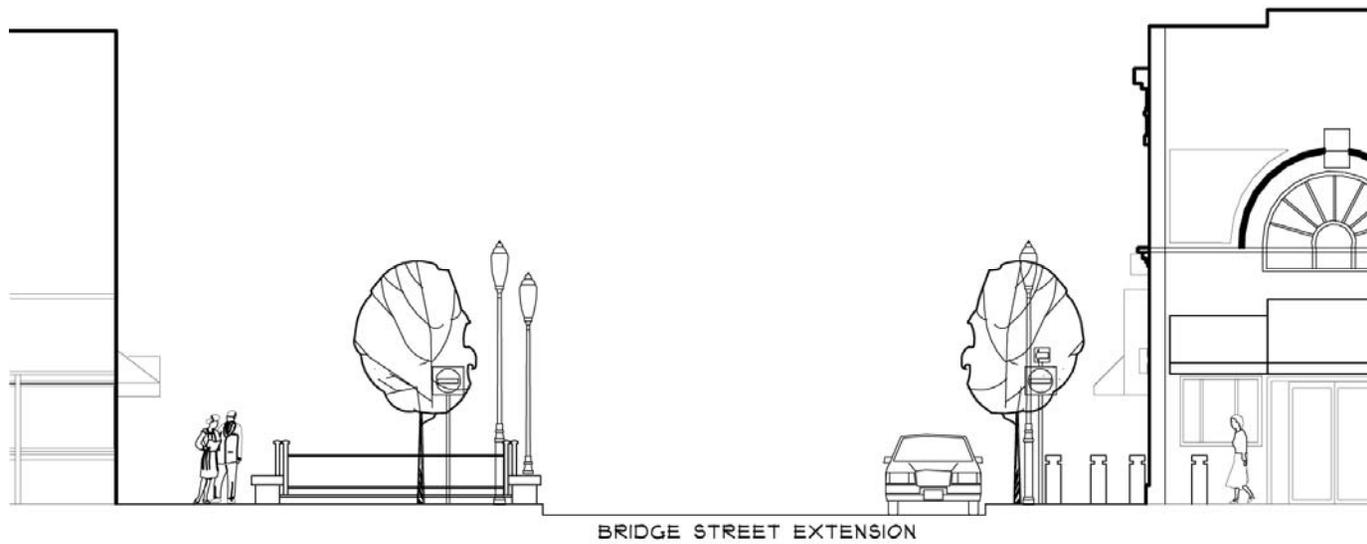
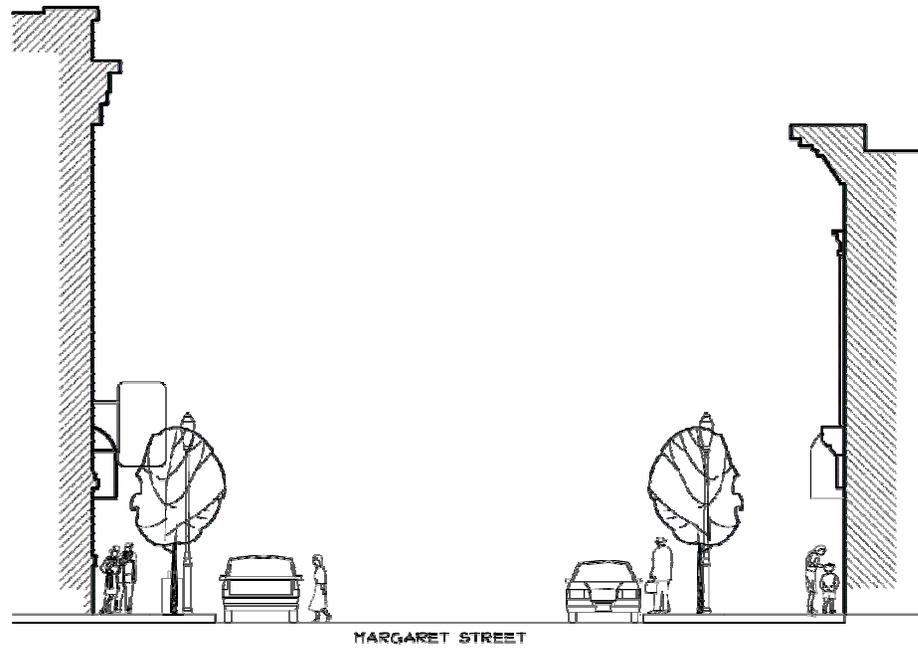
Margaret St. Plattsburgh - Existing Conditions

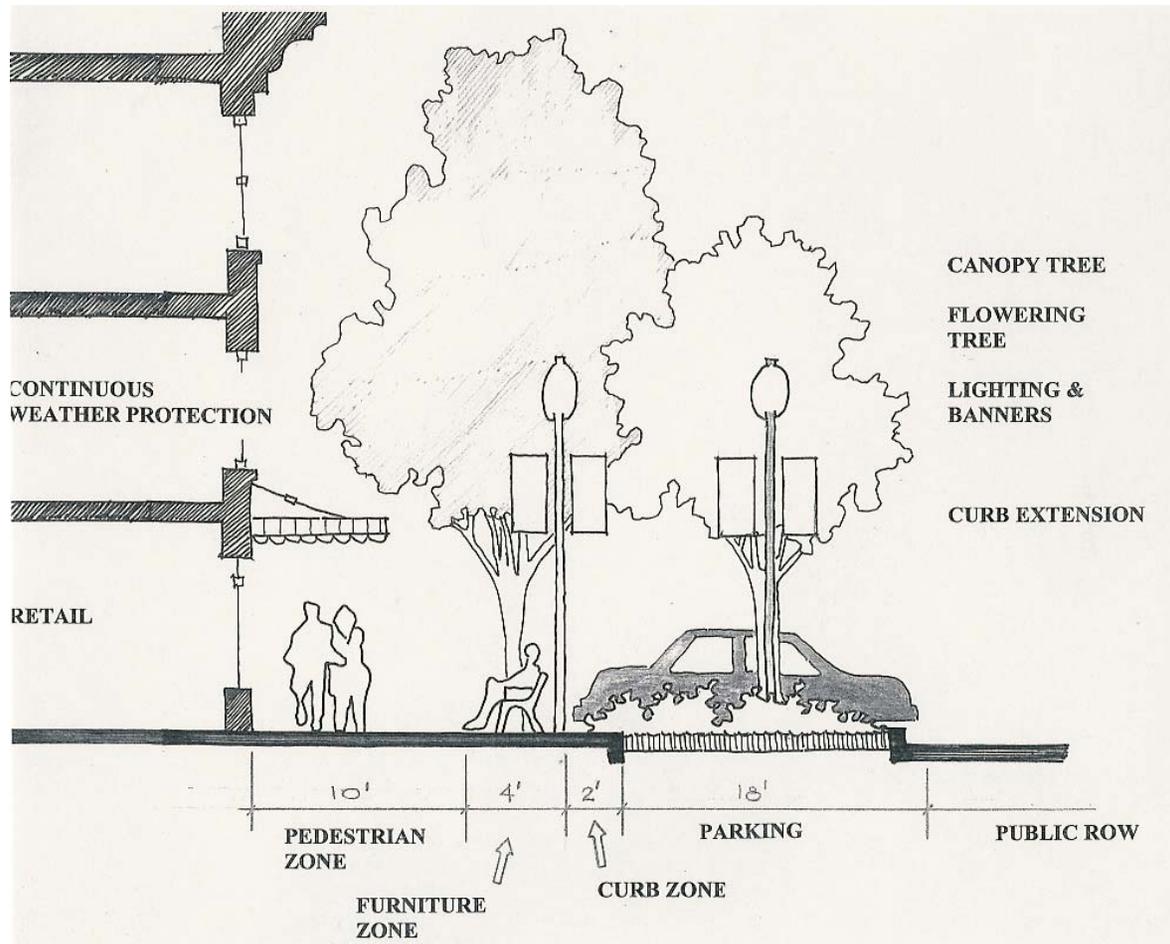


Design Elements

The character and streetscape of City Hall Place and its extension of Durkee Street vary greatly. City Hall Place is an established street lined with 3- and 4-story buildings. At Bridge Street, where City Hall Place changes to Durkee Street and where the municipal parking lot is located, any new development should take into account the rich architectural heritage and the attention to detail which characterize many of the older structures in the city. An overall framework and design plan should exist upon before any development is proposed

The following four pages are intended to serve as a reference of basic design elements along the city streets and can also be used as a guideline for making design decisions for various parts of the streets and proposed developments.





Streetscape

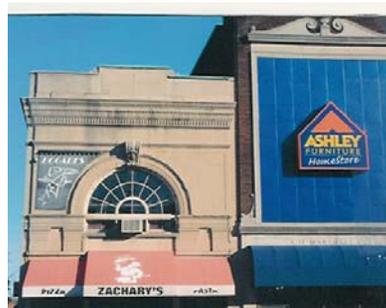
The streetscape of downtown, in particular that of Durkee, Margaret and Bridge Streets should be an inviting place for pedestrians and an efficient way for vehicles. Several aspects of the streetscape could contribute to make all the streets feel like an inviting thoroughfare.

Street Lighting

Street Lighting can do more than provide illumination. Smaller scale light fixtures can be used along with street lights to relate to the pedestrian scale and unite the architecture along the streets to the public space of the sidewalk. Architectural features can also be lit as landmarks contributing to the overall streetscape.

Street Trees

Street trees should be used wherever possible to provide shade, a relief to large paved areas and a continuous rhythm as one moves along.



Colors

Many brick structures in the downtown area have been painted without considering the effect on the surrounding area. A wide spectrum of harmonious colors should be established for painted structures and signage.

Colors should

1. Be historically appropriate and compatible with neighboring buildings.
2. Be lively without being glaring (such as white) or garish.
3. Be selected from a palette of recommended color schemes or from original colors found on the historic buildings. Three color schemes from a previously implemented Façade program are included in these guidelines at pages 25, 26, and 27.

Signage

The earliest signs to appear on buildings used for commercial and professional purposes were decorative and informational elements that named a building or described functions and activities carried on within. Modern signs, if thoughtfully designed, can continue this tradition and provide dignified and attractive contemporary ornamentation.

As a general rule, signs should be limited in size depending on their location on the façade of a building and should not be allowed to conceal architectural details.

Street level signs identifying commercial establishments should be placed within an information band immediately above the storefront or should be applied directly on the display window. The information band should be no longer than the overall length of the storefront and should be confined to the width of an existing band defined by the architecture of the building. If two establishments share a common storefront, then both should use the same sign format..

Examples of signs worked into the architecture can be seen below.



Signage (con't)

Second and third floor businesses should be identified primarily by a street level directory. However, second floor businesses should be permitted to display signs which are placed either directly beside or immediately above a related window, or are applied directly on the window glass. A sign placed beside the window should be no higher than the height of the window opening while a sign placed immediately above should be no wider than the overall width of the window. No signs should be permitted on the façade of the building above the second floor level except those which are applied on the window glass.

Projecting signs should only be permitted for street level businesses. Those located on the street level should be placed within the informational band; should not project further than three feet beyond the façade of the building; and should be no more than the height of the information band. Additional signs should also be permitted around the skirts of storefront awnings only if the signs are a permanent part of the awning. Signs should not block visibility of neighbor's signs.

Retail signage should contribute to the actual character along streets and be designed to be oriented to pedestrians, not automobiles. They should not be readable from a distance of more than two blocks away.

A continuous information band of uniform height in which all signs are placed should be established for a row of individual buildings of different architectural styles which are similar in scale and maintain a continuous façade line. The same would be true for a row of architecturally similar buildings designed as a block. Signage in character and scale with their surroundings can be used to enliven the streetscape and provide information. Bill boards and large signs should be avoided.

The site

Traditionally all buildings along downtown streets were built up to their property lines. The streetscapes along Margaret Street, City Hall Place and Durkee Streets are pleasantly interrupted by several small parks and large landscaped front lawns of government buildings. This historic setting can be maintained, and combined with sensitive site planning, should be encouraged.

Historic Preservation

The structures in the Downtown area represent a broad spectrum of Plattsburgh’s history. A number of structures have been well maintained, others recently have been upgraded and more improvements are encouraged with NYS Main Street Grants. A few structures have been razed and altered substantially. A considerable number of structures have been designated as historic. Most of the downtown area has been designated as a significantly historic area.

Paving

The use of small scale material has been established on most city streets in the downtown area. Continuing the use of pavers and stone similar to those at the 7-Point Hub should be encouraged. Where possible, median strips and cross walks should enhance the pedestrian environment. The elements could be brick, stone and concrete pavers. Along Margaret Street bollards have been installed at the intersections at Court, Clinton and Bridge Streets. This practice should also be encouraged in other locations.



Architectural Design Guidelines for Building Facades

These guidelines discuss details common to all facades such as windows, entrances, store fronts, signage, siding and material. The guidelines are not intended to establish a specific architectural style for new buildings but to encourage sensitive treatment of design elements that complement existing structures and to achieve an overall harmonious streetscape. A certain amount of uniformity could be achieved contributing to the fabric of the city. Cities change over time, and keeping that in mind, structures can co-exist.

Façade Renovations

Each street in Plattsburgh has its own character or flavor. The renovation process starts with an idea that should be developed to meet the criteria. The goal is to design a store front and building façade that is compatible with the architectural character of the street and district. The proposed design must also meet the intent of the structure, satisfy the need of the owner and business and consider the overall structural integrity of the building. Other factors that may play a role are:

Is the building of particular historic significance?

Will the renovation be a face lift or is major reconstruction the issue?

What is the original architectural style of the building?

Are historic details hidden under applied siding?

What was the original purpose of the building and the business that it housed?

What is the new purpose of the storefront, what should be expressed?

Façade Organization

Typical elevations of city streets are composed of cornices, windows, entrances, awnings, signage, details and a variety of building material. The elements relate to each other and establish a pattern to express the character of the individual buildings.

Façade Elements– Windows

The size, shape and projections of windows define a definite pattern in the elevations and streetscape. Second and third story windows should relate to the first floor, storefronts and entrances. Large store front windows can be divided to reflect the window pattern from the upper stories. In addition, the horizontal alignment of windows to adjacent structures should also be considered.

Façade Elements– Entrances

Entrances to buildings are defined by the function, style and site conditions. Most entrances are at sidewalk level and generally are an important detail in the elevation. Doors should be recessed (which is a typical detail in Plattsburgh) and not swing out onto the sidewalk. The sides of the set-back for the entrances may be used for added display space and provide some weather protection. Ideally, the first floor at the pedestrian level should permit a view of the interior and serve as prime merchandising space.

Façade Elements– Awning and Weather Protection

Northern cities should provide continuous and permanent cover for all shopping streets. This may be in the form of awnings, free-standing shelters or colonnades as part of new construction. Awnings and weather protection can provide additional opportunity for signs and provide additional merchandising space.

Façade Elements– Signage

Signs identifying the individual businesses are important elements of a façade. Nearly all buildings in the city constructed prior to 1960 have a sign entablature, a space above the storefronts identifying the business. Re-establishing such uncluttered signage would enhance the overall appearance when colors, letters and symbols are part of the design. Signs should not have flashing or moving bands of lights, preferably not illuminated from the interior and should be limited in size as part of the overall appearance of the street. Attractive, projecting overhead signs is another possibility to introduce variety to the streetscape when combined with seasonal decorations.

Façade Elements– Materials and Colors

Most downtown buildings are constructed of brick and stone, some of glass and metal. Brick, stone and newer material, such as textured stucco, should be used effectively to enhance the facades. Many downtown buildings have been painted and in the 1990's the city prepared a color scheme for downtown buildings to be rehabilitated. More recently other color schemes have been introduced. However the original historic palette prepared by paint manufacturers should be followed. If possible, metal siding, false windowless second stories and large screens should be avoided.

Design guidelines have been formulated to aid all parties in achieving the best results possible. Work should restore the character of historic buildings, make newer buildings more compatible with their neighbors, overcome the deterioration problems of the buildings and any appearance of neglect, provide a more inviting appearance for businesses, and emphasize the unique downtown character of the district in contrast to the homogenized imagery of commercial strips and malls.

The following specific guidelines are applicable to all construction or rehabilitation of buildings downtown:

Materials shall:

1. Be durable and high-quality so as to prevent rapid deterioration.
2. Be appropriate to their use and to the historic character of the building and the district.
3. Imitation materials will not be used if existing historic material is reparable at a reasonable cost and life expectancy is equivalent to imitation masonry or plastic imitating wood.

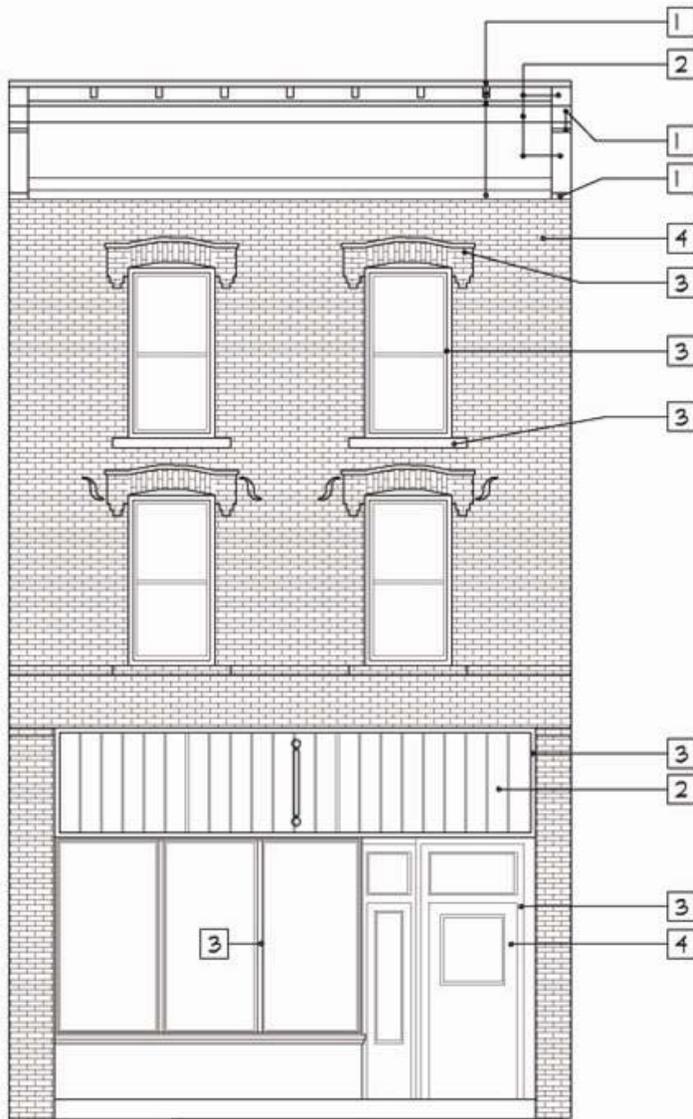
New or replacement building components and materials should:

1. Be characteristic of commercial or residential buildings of the historic period in which the building was designed.
2. Respect the proportional principles of the building and the rhythm and other characteristics of the streetscape.
3. Match historic components, when replacing same, in type, style, size and material, including replacement windows where applicable.

Recommendations

The city should consider establishing a design review board to assist the planning board with the evaluation of proposed developments. Plans submitted for city design review should include the following:

1. Site Plan (New Construction). Should illustrate surrounding natural and proposed construction including parking, planting, lights, walks and street furniture. The site plan should also show building entrances and exits, as well as floor plans to make the building's relationship to the site understandable.
2. Elevations. Should include major elevations of the project subject to public view as well as surrounding buildings.
3. Sections. Should indicate the profile of the wall facing the street, extended out to the curb and showing all streetscape elements.
4. Materials. Should include a description of exterior materials and colors with sample colors and finishes.



Examples of Color Schemes

Prepared by Argus Architecture & Preservation 1991-1992

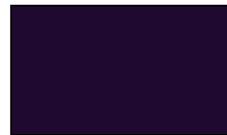
The colors are based on Pratt and Lambert's identifications.



1 #1223 "Noir"



2 #2251 "Appaloosa"



3 #2326 "Midsummer Gale"

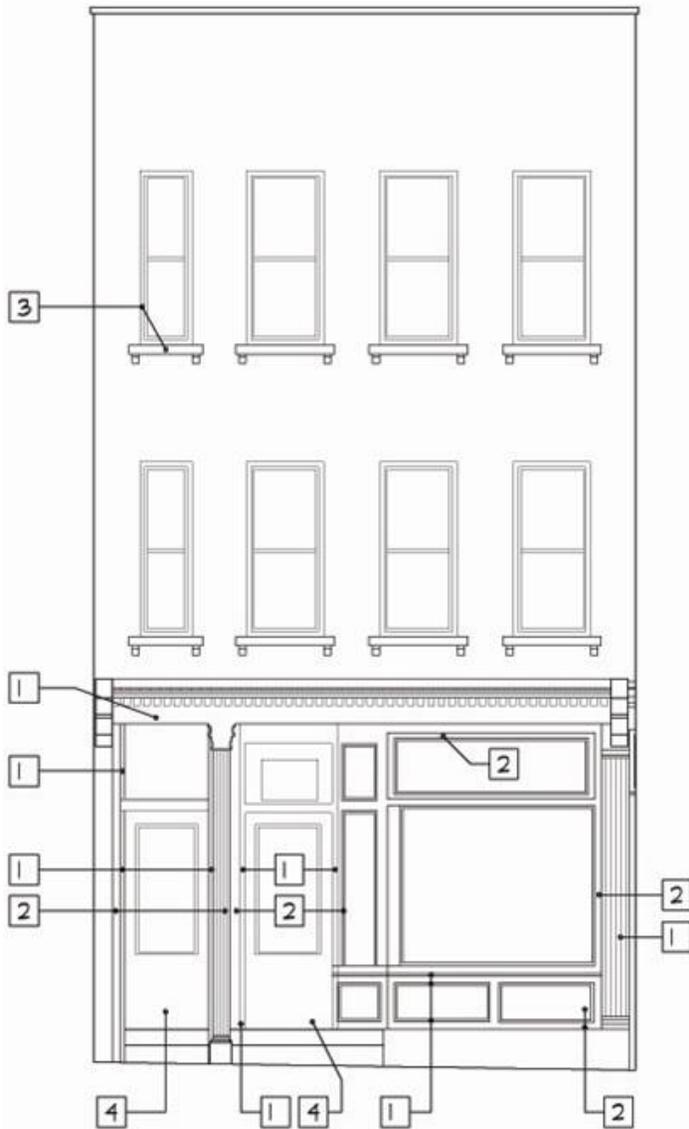


4 #2234 "Pewter"

Examples of Color Schemes

Prepared by Argus Architecture & Preservation 1991-1992

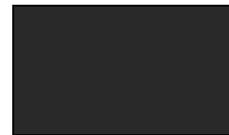
The colors are based on Pratt and Lambert's identifications.



1 #2224 "Graphite"



2 #1313 "Misty Moors"



3 #2294 "Obsidian"



4 #1890 "Burnished Mahogany"

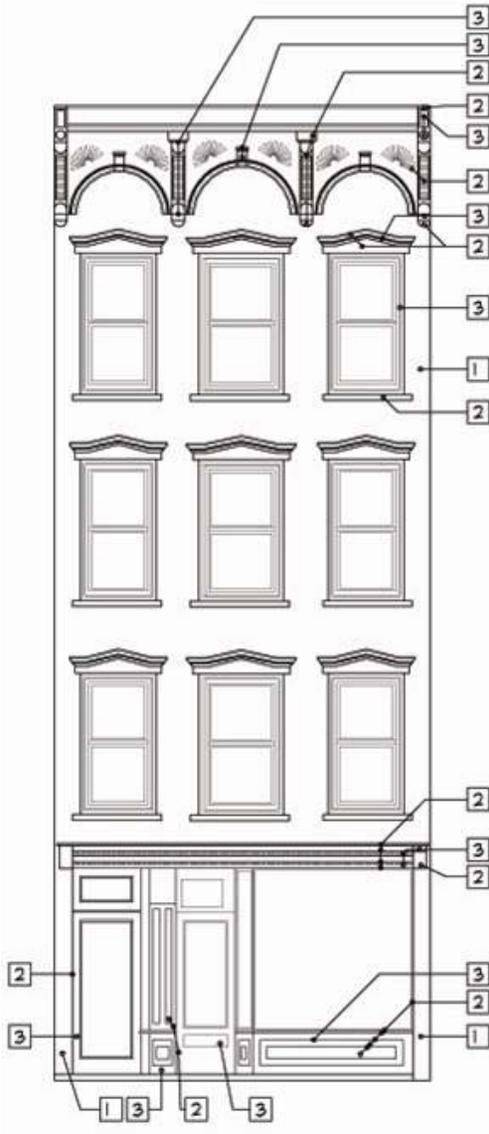


5 #1312 "Gunnel"

Examples of Color Schemes

Prepared by Argus Architecture & Preservation 1991-1992

The colors are based on Pratt and Lambert's identifications.



1 #2257 "Shadow Beige"



2 #2015 "Loam"



3 #1890 "Burnished Mahogany"