



# Oelwein Central Business District Architectural Design Guidelines

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## Oelwein Central Business District Architectural Design Guidelines

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## 1. Introduction

- Several of the buildings within the central business district have unique physical attributes that contribute to the overall character. In particular, many of these buildings exhibit historic features that are directly associated with the character of downtown Oelwein.
- Since 2005, the City of Oelwein has renewed its commitment to restore and upgrade the physical features within the central business district through a comprehensive plan of streetscape and utility improvements. Based on the scope and character of these "public" improvements, the City of Oelwein, and its private sector partners wishes to establish a set of architectural and urban design standards that preserve the established character of the area rather than see a dramatic change. This Design Standards Manual is intended to serve as a guide for future building construction or alteration projects with an emphasis on maintaining and preserving the historic character of buildings within the district.
- These downtown guidelines are recommendations for all downtown buildings. These recommendations are required to be followed should the property owner received public funds such as Downtown TIF loan program, Revolving Loan Fund, and other programs provided by or through the City of Oelwein.

## 2. Purpose

- To foster and maintain the economic viability of Oelwein's central business district by encouraging redevelopment and new development;
- To regulate exterior scale, massing, design, arrangement, texture, and materials within the district to promote compatibility with the existing character of downtown Oelwein. To provide a comprehensive guide for exterior redevelopment and new construction projects;
- The goal is to create a unified design and avoid monotonous uniformity or standardization of architectural forms;
- To maintain the unique identity of Downtown Oelwein;
- To prepare and implement ordinances and policies consistent with Iowa Code Chapter 414 concerning powers granted to cities for the purpose of regulating land use.

## 3. Oelwein's Central Business District

- The Central Business District is comprised of a grid street system with Fredrick Avenue and Charles Street serving as the two primary arterial streets serving the area. In addition, First Street NE, First Street SE, Second Street SE, and State Highway 150 are home to several additional businesses.
- Many of the buildings within this area house commercial retail businesses, financial institutions, and service-oriented businesses. Most buildings are two-story structures with the upper floor dedicated to storage space or residential use.
- Most buildings constructed along Charles Street and Fredrick Avenue were built between the late 1800s and early to mid-1900s. A tornado event that occurred in 1968 caused substantial damage to several downtown properties.
- The first phase of a streetscape project began in 2005 and was completed in November 2006. The scope of improvements included replacement of utility services, upgrades to streets and sidewalks, including decorative paving and planting areas. The City also installed benches, trash receptacles, decorative lighting, and associated amenities. While these improvements have greatly enhanced the physical and aesthetic character of the area,



several adjacent buildings are suffering from lack of investment and maintenance. Moreover, buildings lack a cohesive or unified design standard.

- Figure 1 represents the area that is subject to the guidelines and requirements associated with this Manual and associated Zoning Overlay Ordinance.
4. Creation of the Design Manual: The original Design Standards Manual was created in consultation with a Steering Committee comprised of representatives from the Oelwein City Council, City staff, Oelwein Chamber of Commerce (OCAD), and downtown business owners. The overlay zoning ordinance does provide the necessary regulatory authority to ensure that new construction and renovation of existing structures is consistent with character-defining elements summarized in this manual. The OCAD downtown committee revised the manual in 2021 and collaborated with Planning and Zoning and City Council.
  5. Review Principles: The Planning and Zoning Commission will be charged with reviewing requests for exterior renovation projects and the new construction buildings within the designated area. The following review principles are intended to focus the evaluation.
    - These guidelines shall only apply to the exterior of buildings and to portions of buildings that would be visible at the pedestrian level from public rights-of-way, including alley ways.
    - While economic costs are not a primary factor in the review process, economic cost will be considered in relation to the adherence to these guidelines.
    - It is understood that a project may not meet every guideline to conform to the document's intent. However, it is the responsibility of the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council to determine which guidelines most effectively achieve the larger design objectives for the district.
    - It is not the intent of these guidelines to require existing buildings to be in full compliance with these guidelines. Existing buildings that contain non-conforming elements are encouraged to make alterations that will improve the overall appearance of the building. As non-conforming buildings are altered, improvements shall be consistent with the guidelines set forth in this document and associated Central Business District Overlay Zoning Ordinance.
    - Staff and the Planning and Zoning Commission will review proposed projects in a consistent, fair, and equitable manner. Review of downtown guidelines by the Planning and Zoning Commission are final unless the applicant appeals to the City Council.
    - The design guidelines summarized in this document shall be effective within the boundaries of the central Business District Overlay Zoning Ordinance. If the guidelines are, more or less restrictive than the regulations of the underlying zoning district, these regulations shall take precedence.
  6. New Construction and Additions: Additions and new infill construction must adhere to the patterns that prevail in nearby or adjacent structures. When new buildings are constructed, it is best to think of it as one element in a larger group of buildings. In this context, the construction of new buildings or building additions specific emphasis should be to establish design guidelines for specific building elements, such as storefronts, offices, etc.
    - Facade Height Guidelines:
      - ◆ The height of the building must be considered in proportion to its width and the story-to-story height of the building.

- ◆ The height of new buildings and additions shall relate to the surrounding buildings. Every effort should be made to avoid new construction that varies greatly in height from adjacent buildings. In general, new construction should not be more than two-stories (24 feet) higher than the adjacent buildings.
  - ◆ Corner buildings should be higher than those located in the interior of the block. (Figure 1)
  - ◆ Corner buildings shall be a minimum of two-stories in height.
  - Facade Width Guidelines:
    - ◆ The facade width associated with improvements with infill construction should completely fill the available space.
    - ◆ Facade widths for new buildings and additions should correspond with the width of other buildings in the same block.
    - ◆ If the site is large, the mass of the facade should be broken down into a number of smaller bays, to maintain a rhythm similar to surrounding buildings.
  - Composition Guidelines:
    - ◆ The composition of the infill facade shall be similar to the surrounding facades in the block.
    - ◆ Physical elements that carry throughout the block (e.g., window spacing, etc.), shall be incorporated into the new facade.
    - ◆ The size and proportion of window and door openings of the new construction should be similar to other buildings in the block.
    - ◆ The ratio of window area to solid wall for new construction should be similar to other buildings in the block.
  - New construction shall be constructed with a shared-wall when feasible (faux shared wall)
  - Figure 2: Grouped Windows
  - Addition Guidelines:
    - New building additions should be placed in the rear of existing structures.
7. Preservation of Historic Buildings: The downtown area is not presently designated as an historic district. However, significant consideration must be given to planned alteration and renovation projects associated with buildings that were constructed before 1950. To this end, the following guidelines shall be applied.
- Alterations and/or Renovations to Historic Buildings:
    - ◆ Alterations to and renovations of historic buildings should incorporate measures to protect and preserve the historic character and features.
    - ◆ A property used for historic purpose or placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
    - ◆ Alterations and/or, renovations, construction, development, or other form of improvement to the exterior of any building constructed before 1950 should take appropriate measures to protect and preserve the historic character of existing features. Several sections of the Design Standards Manual references

guidelines that can be used to preserve historically significant buildings in the affected area.

- Building Demolition:
  - ◆ Demolition requests that are unrelated to public safety should be accompanied by additional documentation indicating the existing condition of the building and the proposed use for the site. Documentation should include proposed plans and elevations and an explanation of why the current structure is not feasible for reuse.
- 8. Preservation of Non-Historic Buildings: Alterations to non-historic buildings should incorporate design features that are stylistically compatible with the existing structure.
  - Alterations or Renovations to Non-Historic Buildings:
    - ◆ Any historic features, such as storefront elements and façade detailing, should be retained.
    - ◆ Renovations that convert the character of the building into a structure that exhibits more of an historic appeal is encouraged.
    - ◆ If additional stories are added to one story structures, renovations should incorporate a visually compatible raised front parapet wall which is at least four feet above the eave height.
    - ◆ Figure 3: Example of a Non-Historic Building
    - ◆ Particular attention should be given to design guidelines referenced in other sections of this manual.
  - Building Demolition: Demolition requests that are unrelated to public safety should be accompanied by additional documentation indicating the existing condition of the building and the proposed use for the site. Documentation should include proposed plans and elevations and an explanation of why the current structure is not feasible for reuse.
- 9. Signage: Signs should be architecturally compatible with the style, composition, materials, colors, and details of the building and with other signs on nearby buildings, while providing for adequate identification of the business.
  - Guidelines:
    - ◆ Downtown signs should be oriented toward pedestrians, not vehicular traffic. Figure 4 Blade Sign
    - ◆ Signs which use materials common to the structure and architectural style of the building are encouraged.
    - ◆ All signs must be maintained.
    - ◆ Lighted signs, detached signs (except for sandwich board signs), and signs that extend into the public right-of-way are prohibited.
    - ◆ Signs should not obscure the architectural detail elements.
    - ◆ Signs should be subordinate to the building's facade. The size and scale of the sign shall be in proportion to the size and scale of the street level facade.
    - ◆ Signs should be in design harmony with the building.
    - ◆ Signs with multiple storefronts within the same building should align with each other.



10. Rooflines and Parapet Roofs: The roofline establishes the relationship with adjacent buildings. In general, roofs in downtown Oelwein tend to be flat roofed structures with a parapet added for decoration and to screen roof mounted equipment.

- Guidelines:
  - ◆ Retain the original roofline and parapet features.
  - ◆ Rooflines should be consistent with adjacent buildings and avoid improvements that are not in scale with adjacent buildings.
  - ◆ Traditional roof line features of historic buildings should be preserved where visible. These features include cornices, pediments, brackets, caps, etc. Historically authentic materials, overhang proportions, and details should be used.
  - ◆ Roofs for non-historic buildings should normally be screened by raised parapet walls with decorative masonry cornices.
  - ◆ For any building, visible roofs should not appear above walls in their respective visible proportions from street views.

11. Existing Ornamentation: Several buildings in downtown Oelwein exhibit embellished limestone and brickwork. These elements should be maintained because they contribute to unique architectural details in the downtown.

- Architectural Details:
  - ◆ Intact original ornamentation or architectural details should be maintained and preserved. Figure Sign
  - ◆ If original detailing is covered, exposing and restoring the features is encouraged.
  - ◆ While the use of original material is encouraged, substitute materials can be used subject to the Planning and Zoning Commission approval.
  - ◆ Cornices shall not be removed. A determination will be made by the Building Inspector as to safety.

12. Building Facades: Traditional commercial facades have three horizontal sections:

- Building Cornice: Traditional building materials include stone, brick, wood, metal, or other materials to visually cap the building.
- Upper Facade: The upper facade is generally constructed of brick, stone, stucco, or pressed tin. It is also characterized by a symmetrical design and regularly spaced window openings.
- Storefront: Characteristics commonly associated with the storefront are significantly different from the upper facade. This area is primarily composed of large display windows surrounded by enframing piers and a storefront cornice, awning, or canopy.
- The design guidelines that follow make distinctions between the following facade areas:
  - ◆ First Floor
  - ◆ Front of Building- Upper Floor
  - ◆ Shared Walls
  - ◆ Rear Facades
  - ◆ Corner Building Facades
- Guidelines regarding First Floor Facades:

- ◆ Storefronts are encouraged to reflect the scale of the original design if known. If unknown, it should be in scale with the total facade.
  - ◆ Existing historic elements such as original display windows, transoms, doors, and integrated wall signs should be preserved. New buildings and renovations are also encouraged to incorporate these elements.
  - ◆ Exterior security bars or shutters on storefronts should be avoided where possible.
  - Guidelines regarding Front of Building Upper Floor Facades:
    - ◆ Historic window arrangements, including lintels, sills, and masonry surrounds, should be preserved when present.
    - ◆ No new improvements relative to adding or closing window openings will be permitted. Windows for new buildings should be organized to create rhythmic, symmetrical patterns. Windows should be aligned vertically and horizontally.
    - ◆ Window dividers in historic buildings should reflect the original design pattern.
    - ◆ Window mounted air conditioners are not allowed on the street facing windows.
    - ◆ Upper story windows shall only have minimal tinting and should appear transparent from the street.
    - ◆ The facade of upper floors should be balanced in design and shall provide a distinction between lower and upper sections of the building.
  - Guidelines regarding Shared Walls:
    - ◆ Window openings may be introduced; however, the design must be compatible with other windows on the building.
    - ◆ Window replacement in existing buildings is permitted; however, the use of original window patterns and finishes is encouraged.
    - ◆ Walls shall not be painted unless approved by the Planning and Zoning Board.
  - Guidelines regarding Rear Facades:
    - ◆ Rear entrances that face public parking areas are encouraged.
    - ◆ Rear facades should provide sufficient architectural detail, such as window and door openings to articulate the building facade; it should not compete with the primary facade.
    - ◆ Window replacement in existing buildings should use original window patterns and finishes.
13. Mechanical Equipment: The placement of mechanical equipment (e.g., heating, ventilation and air conditioning units; window mounted air conditioners, satellite or related antennas, etc.) can diminish the aesthetic character of buildings within the district. The guidelines summarized below are designed to screen or displace this equipment to other areas of the building.
- Guidelines:
    - ◆ For historic buildings, fire escapes, or other mechanical features (such as louvers) should not be installed in ways that damage historic features or materials. On masonry buildings, mounting hardware should be attached to mortar joints rather than to the masonry itself.



- ◆ Rooftop mechanical equipment should not be visible from street views.
- ◆ Where feasible, fire escapes, window-mounted air conditioners, or other mechanical features should not be located on facades which front on major streets.

14. Permitted Construction Materials: Surface materials are a key factor in the appearance of a building and its relationship to adjacent buildings. The original building material shall be retained if possible. If the original material has been overlaid by such coverings as aluminum, these alterations should be removed and the original material maintained, repaired or replaced with similar materials. The permitted construction materials are specific to the following facade areas:

- ◆ Primary Façade
- ◆ Secondary and Rear Facade
- ◆ Shared Walls
- ◆ General Masonry
- ◆ Roofing
- Guidelines regarding the Primary Façade:
  - ◆ The original building material shall be retained when possible. If the original material has been overlaid with aluminum or stucco, building owners will be encouraged to remove the overlay materials and restore the use of the original materials via maintenance, replacement or repair with similar materials.
  - ◆ Additions or alterations to existing buildings shall use traditional building materials consistent with existing traditional building stock.
  - ◆ For all construction, materials should be combined in historically appropriate combinations.
  - ◆ Vinyl and aluminum siding is not allowed.
- Guidelines regarding the Secondary and Rear Facade:
  - ◆ Secondary facades that are exposed to the public right-of-way shall be composed of building materials consistent with the existing building stock. This would include brick, stone, terracotta, stucco, or equivalent materials.
- Guidelines regarding the Shared Walls:
  - ◆ Building materials for shared walls are typically less costly than materials used on primary and secondary facades. Rubble limestone, brick, and tile block are common shared wall materials.
  - ◆ Materials which are to be painted, such as previously painted facade materials and window frames, should be repainted in colors that complement the materials on the building.
  - ◆ Unpainted or previously painted facade materials should only be painted when the Planning and Zoning Board has approved the painting plan.
- Guidelines regarding General Masonry:
  - ◆ Proper maintenance should be done by re pointing and cleaning processes.
  - ◆ Masonry walls that are visible from public right-of-ways should not be clad with stucco, artificial stone, or EIFS (Exterior Insulation Finish Systems).
  - ◆ Mortar color should not significantly contrast with the masonry hue or darkness.

- ◆ Existing unpainted masonry walls shall not be painted.
  - Guidelines regarding Roofing Materials:
    - ◆ Roofing materials that are visible from the public right-of-way should use traditional materials such as slate, metal, tile, or reasonable facsimiles thereof, used in appropriate traditional combinations.
15. Canopies and Awnings: The form of the awning or canopy shall provide pedestrians with protection from the elements and compliment the character of the building.
- Guidelines:
    - ◆ Typically, fabric, wood, and metal are the most common materials used for awnings and canopies.
    - ◆ Awnings and canopies shall be in proportion to the overall building facade and should match the width of the storefront or window opening.
    - ◆ Awnings on the storefront level should not extend into the second story of the building facade.
    - ◆ Upper floor awnings shall be mounted within the window opening.
    - ◆ Post or pole supported canopies are not allowed.
    - ◆ Back-lit awnings and are allowed. Colors of light should complement the downtown design.
16. Color of Materials Used: The colors of materials used for building facades and canopies/awnings are important to creating a unifying design and theme for the district. Guidelines regarding the use of colors focuses on the following building elements:
- ◆ Building Facades
  - ◆ Awnings and Canopies
  - Guidelines regarding the Color of Building Facades:
    - ◆ Renovations to existing historic buildings must use original color(s) common to the building.
    - ◆ Colors associated with new building construction must compliment the color of adjacent buildings and the area as a whole.
  - Guidelines regarding the Color of Awnings and Canopies:
    - ◆ The colors associated with awnings and/or canopies will be complimentary to the primary structure and adjacent buildings. Exhibit B provides a list of recommended colors.
    - ◆ Neutral and earth tone colors are generally accepted with other accent colors subject to approval by planning and zoning.
17. Screening of Waste and Storage Areas: Exterior storage and waste disposal areas detract significantly from the design and aesthetics of the area.
- Guidelines:
    - ◆ All exterior waste disposal and storage areas shall be placed in the rear of buildings and screened from public view.
    - ◆ Measures shall be taken to prevent debris from disbursing from the affected property.

Figure 1 Corner Buildings



Figure 2: Grouped Windows



Figure 4: Example of a Non-Historic Building



Figure Sign



Figure 4 Blade Signs



Map

