



# TOWN OF SENECA FALLS

Building Improvement Fund  
Downtown Design Guidelines



## SECTION 1: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These design guidelines are intended to promote high quality development within downtown Seneca Falls and are not intended to supercede or bypass NYS Building Code, the development standards for Seneca Falls nor the requirements set by the Seneca Falls Historic Preservation Commission.

The following guiding principles provide a foundation for the design guidelines. Each project should be consistent with these Guiding Principles.

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### ACHIEVE EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN

- All development in Downtown should achieve excellence in design by utilizing high quality materials and construction methods.
- Thoughtful designs should establish a distinctive sense of character and provide a positive pedestrian-oriented experience.
- Design of buildings should be human scaled in order to create an appealing public realm. This is conducted through the use of appropriate organization, scaling and massing, and composition of architectural elements. Large buildings may break massing up into separate modules with upper floor setbacks or changes in materials and colors.
- Building design should be compatible with downtowns existing building stock and fit the character of Seneca Falls. Buildings which are highly valued should be preserved.

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### ENCOURAGE CREATIVITY

- Downtown has a mix of building types and architectural styles. This variety should be embraced and projects that exhibit architectural creativity are encouraged.
- Renovation projects should draw design inspiration from older, traditional buildings in creative new ways.
- Each project should contribute to the public realm by enhancing interest and comfort for pedestrian.

## SECTION 2: BUILDING DESIGN

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### MATERIALS

- Building materials such as brick, stone, manufactured stone, terra cotta accents, metal accents and wood are encouraged as they provide visual interest.
- Repair original materials before replacing them with new materials whenever possible. Whenever possible, it is preferred that period-correct materials be utilized.
- Projects should never include the covering of original materials, column, cornice, sill, lintel, window, or panel detailing.
- If features are beyond repair, materials which don't require replacement as the sole option for maintenance should be utilized.
- Prohibited Materials:
  - a. Thin veneer applications
  - b. Fake brick or stone
  - c. Vinyl or metal siding
  - d. EIFS (Exterior Insulation and Finish Systems) / False stucco.

\* Replacing EIFS on building facades is highly encouraged, as the material has issues with durability and typically is not maintained adequately

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### COLOR

- Exterior colors should complement the hues of nearby buildings.
- Choose building and accent colors that are appropriate to the period or architectural style of a building.

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### WINDOWS

- Windows should be kept in proportion to the building façade and be of compatible design and material to any historic context of the building. Replacement should maintain original configuration.

- Window openings that were previously reduced or enlarged should be restored to the original configuration
- At the pedestrian level (the first 8 feet) 60%-80% of the storefront should be clear glass, window area.
- Avoid obstructing views, allowing customers to clearly see what goods and services are available. Don't have too many signs, posters, or advertisements in the window.
  - Maintain a three feet (3') minimum visual access into storefronts from the pedestrian zone and avoid using displays and signs that prohibit views in and out, including large shelving units with their backs facing the window.
  - Vertical blinds or other elements that will block views into storefront windows are prohibited. In some cases, storefronts may contain professional offices. For these storefronts, alternate privacy and shading elements may be appropriate.
- Frame and sash profiles should be large enough to complement trim elements.
- Transom windows should be restored if they were previously removed or hidden. Existing transom windows should be maintained.
- For commercial storefronts, use of wood or aluminum clad wood windows is preferred. In special cases, using dark, anodized-aluminum windows with appropriately dimensioned frame and sash profiles would be considered.
- New or replacement windows should be energy efficient.
- Vinyl windows and windows that have been tinted or treated with reflective coating are prohibited.
- Visual interest should be created through sills, lintels, divided lights and style

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## DOORS

- Entrances/Door should be clearly visible and welcoming from the street.
- Doors should be kept in proportion to the building façade and be of compatible design and material to any historic context of the building. Replacement should maintain original configuration.
- Orient primary building entrances to a public street
- Primary commercial doors should be uninterrupted full-glass.

- Exterior doors that lead to residential second floors may be stile-and-rail doors without glass. Doors without glass should appear as ancillary compared to the full glass doors which lead to first floor businesses.
- Steel doors should be used only when historically appropriate. Vinyl is not an acceptable alternative.
- Transoms above doors to second floors should be restored to allow for light to enter into the stairway.

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## ROOFLINES

- New buildings and major renovations should integrate cornice treatments. Cornices should have detailing and be in scale with the rest of the building.
- New cornices should never cover original features.
- Parapets should be designed to be complementary to the building architecture.

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## SIGNAGE AND AWNINGS

- Signs and awnings should complement the building architecture and character of the surrounding neighborhood. These features Signs and awnings shall be in proportion to the existing building scale, not oversized, and should avoid covering any historic building details or block views of stores interior.
- Sign design shall be kept simple and clutter free.
- All efforts should be made to repair and restore any historically significant signage and awnings.
- Utilize high-quality, illuminated signs as they offer a sense of place and security
- No sign shall include lights which flash, move, or appear to move.
- Signs shall not be internally-lit.
- Perpendicular signs should be lit from both sides.
- Neon signs may be appropriate for the original character or aesthetic of the business or façade, but should be subject to design review.
- The shape and materials of awnings should be determined by the style of building and the area that is being shaded. Both fabric or metal awnings must coordinate with the proposed color scheme. Avoid materials that simulate others, such as aluminum awnings that mimic fabric - with plastic strictly prohibited.

- Any awnings should be sized relative to the window openings that they are sheltering to maintain vertical separations. Awnings shouldn't extend too far from the building and should be at least 8+ feet above the ground.
- Awnings can provide an opportunity for supplemental sign information. Placing lettering on the awnings allows businesses to share more information without cluttering other locations such as windows and sign boards.

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## LIGHTING

- Lighting should be carefully designed and placed to enhance safety, enhance character, and minimize unnecessary light pollution.
- Placement of lighting should aim to highlight the storefront entrance, display window, sign, and/or any historic building elements. It should complement and draw attention to the business.
- Light spill onto adjacent properties and toward the sky shall be minimized through the use of a fixture(s) that are:
  - a. Oriented towards the ground
  - b. Shielded to limit off-site glare
  - c. Provides even lighting for open areas
  - d. Refrain from using flashing lights or lights that project too high above store entrance.
- Lighting fixture shall be compatible with the design and materials of the overall building and site
- Consistency in lighting among multiple properties, including design and warmth of color, can have a big impact on the character of downtown.
- Lighting should be energy efficient.
- All effort should be made to repair/restore any existing historic lighting fixtures.

### SECTION 3: GLOSSARY

Articulation – Changes in the depth of the surface of a building face or facade such as attached columns, recessed windows or window bays, horizontal banding or decorative cornices. Articulation gives texture to the building surface.

Cornice - An ornamental molding on a building above the storefront, typically adjacent to the signboard area and made of either wood or metal.

Divided Lights – A window with a number of smaller panes of glass separated and held in place by muntins.

Exterior Insulating Finishing Systems (EIFS) – A multi-layered exterior finish system that provide exterior walls with an insulated finish surface and waterproofing in an integrated composite material system.

Facade – Building surface or face. A single side elevation.

Frame and sash profile - The thickness of a window and it's framing in relationship to the trim elements on a building.

Human scaled - Features are of a size and shape that allow for reasonable use by the average individual.

Lintel - A horizontal support of timber, stone, concrete, or steel across the top of a door or window.

Massing - The general shape and form of a building, or elements of a building.

Public realm- Publicly-owned street rights-of-way and other publicly accessible open spaces such as parks, squares, plazas, courtyards, and alleys

Scale - The size relationship between a building or its parts and the human body

Screening - Elements used to visually screen or separate detrimental elements of a site. Commonly used to obscure parking areas, utilities, and dumpsters, etc.

Setback (Building Setback) – The distance of the building façade or front of the building to the front lot line.

Sill - A shelf or slab of stone, wood, or metal at the foot of a window or doorway.

Stile-and-rail - A door typically used for residential applications that consists of horizontal (rail) and vertical (stile) framing members surrounding either wood or glass panels.

Transom Windows - A window set above the top of a door or storefront