

GUIDELINES FOR AWNINGS



An early- 20th-century photograph shows that the Demarest Hardware store had traditional striped awnings over display windows.

In the early 20th century, small town “Main Street” commercial buildings, such as those in Closter, typically used retractable awnings over the storefronts to provide climate control and shelter to pedestrians. This is particularly true for buildings facing south and east. Awnings were also occasionally used on the windows and porches of houses to provide solar protection.

Today, appropriately designed awnings contribute visual variety as well providing climate control and shelter. They enhance the pedestrian and historic character of historic downtowns. Another benefit is their effectiveness in hiding incompatible alterations. Because fabric awnings do not last many years, historic awnings rarely remain, but some historic awning hardware may remain.

For Landmarks and all buildings within Landmark Districts, a Certificate of Appropriateness (C/A) is required for the installation of a new awning. It is not needed for the repair of an existing awning using the same material as the one being repaired. If the repair will change the exterior architectural appearance of the awning or the building, a C/A is required.

Awnings on Non-Contributing Buildings within Landmark Districts are reviewed as Minor Applications unless found to be not compatible, then they must have a public hearing.

GUIDELINES

Identify whether awnings are appropriate for the building. Awnings are not appropriate for all Landmarks or all buildings within a Landmark District.

Repair rather than replace any historic awning hardware.

Design a new awning that is compatible with the historic building and district and reflects the shape of the storefront, window, door, or porch opening it covers.

Break long expanses of awnings into segments to reflect the composition of the building and maintain pedestrian scale.

For Landmarks and Key Contributing and Contributing Buildings in Landmark Districts

RECOMMENDED

- When old photographs indicate that awnings were an important visual characteristic of a building, consider installing awnings that match the documented originals.
- Install a new awning where no awning previously existed only when it is compatible with the building and the streetscape.
- Consider installing an awning to hide inappropriate changes.

For Landmarks and Key Contributing and Contributing Buildings in Landmark Districts

RECOMMENDED CONTINUED

- Base the location and design of the awning on physical and/or documentary evidence. Locate awnings within the building elements which frame storefronts, window, door, or porch openings. For a storefront, an awning is usually attached immediately above the display windows and transom and/or below the storefront cornice or signboard. It should not cover side piers, if they are present on either side of the storefront. On a porch, the awning is usually installed under the porch cornice. A window awning is usually the width of the window frame and entirely covers it, except when it is under a decorative cornice or lintel.
- Install awnings whose shape complements the geometry of the façade design. While the traditional triangular shed-frame shape with free-hanging flaps is appropriate for many storefronts, arched awnings are appropriate for arched openings.
- Install awnings whose proportions relate to the overall building façade. On a wider building, break awnings into segments that reflect the composition of the building's façade. On a building with multiple storefronts, align each storefront's awning with other awnings on the building, unless doing so will continue an inappropriate condition.
- Within a streetscape of similar commercial buildings or a building with multiple storefronts, consider using similar awnings. Varied, but complementary, colors may be used to distinguish the different retail establishments. If different designs are used, they should be consistent in scale and location.
- For early-20th-century buildings, consider having a hanging flap with a decorative profile.
- Install new awning hardware so that it does not damage historic materials. Clamps and fasteners on masonry buildings should

penetrate mortar joints rather than masonry surfaces.

- Consider using a retractable frame.
- Use awning fabrics which are opaque and in colors compatible with the architecture of the building and with other awnings in the streetscape. Use awning coverings of durable, protective, water-repellant, non-shiny material, preferably canvas or materials that resemble canvas in appearance and texture (canvas blends, solution-dyed acrylic, or acrylic-coated polyester-cotton).

NOT RECOMMENDED

- Placing the awning on a historic building so that it covers important architectural features, such as a decorative transom.
- Extending awnings into the second story of the building.
- Using shiny fabrics such as vinyl or plastic as awning materials.
- Using very bright or fluorescent colors for awning coverings.
- Using unpainted or unclad metal awning frames.
- Backlighting or illuminating awnings.
- Generally, using awnings that simulate mansard roofs, umbrellas, or domes.
- Using a marquee, unless there is historical documentation for its use.



Recommended: Install awnings within the building's elements.

For Non-Contributing Buildings in Landmark Districts

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- Install awnings whose proportions relate to the overall building façade and, on a wider building, break into segments that reflect the composition of the building's façade. On a building with multiple storefronts, align the awning with other awnings on the building, unless doing so will continue an inappropriate condition.
- Within a streetscape of similar commercial buildings or a building with multiple storefronts, consider using similar awnings. Varied, but complementary, colors may be used to distinguish the different retail establishments. If different designs are used, they should be consistent in scale and location.
- Use awning fabrics which are opaque and in colors compatible with the architecture of the building and with other awnings in the streetscape. Use awning coverings of durable, protective, water-repellant, non-shiny material, preferably canvas or materials that resemble canvas in appearance and texture (canvas blends, solution-dyed acrylic, or acrylic-coated polyester-cotton).
- Consider using a retractable frame.

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An early-20th -century photograph documents the correct placement of awnings on a house to provide shade to a porch.

RESOURCES FOR AWNINGS

National Park Service, *Preservation Brief 44: The Use of Awnings on Historic Buildings*, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief44.htm>