

Chapter 15.04

DESIGN CRITERIA

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15.04.010 Purpose and intent.

The purpose of this chapter is to establish minimum standards for the design of new construction or exterior renovation of existing structures in the C-3 central business commercial district for the city of Decorah, Iowa, to accomplish the following objectives:

- A. Both new and rehabilitation projects should be constructed to be long lasting. These projects should use materials that maintain the distinct character and harmony of the downtown;
- B. Maintain the distinctive character of the district and avoid plain facades especially at street and alley elevations;
- C. Rooflines should mimic the separate yet complementary rhythm of existing buildings;
- D. To break up the monotonous appearance of long facades;
- E. To enhance the unique characteristics of the downtown while providing sun protection for display windows, shelter for pedestrians and a sign panel for businesses;
- F. Utility areas and mechanical equipment should be designed so that they do not detract from the aesthetic appeal of the C-3 zoning district;
- G. To provide a rear entrance to the buildings that is aesthetically appealing as well as functional;
- H. To provide adequate lighting at entrances and exits to meet life safety requirements and to enhance the design and appeal of the development without encroaching on neighboring properties;
- I. Maintain a pedestrian-friendly environment without clutter and without blocking vehicle or pedestrian flow.

(Ord. 1075 § 1 (part), 2005)

15.04.020 Definitions.

For use in this chapter, certain terms or words used shall be interpreted or defined as follows: Words used in the present tense shall include the future; the singular shall include the plural; the plural shall include the singular; and, the term "shall" shall always be mandatory.

"Alteration" means any act or process which changes the exterior appearance of a structure, site or area including, but not limited to, the erection, construction, reconstruction, restoration, removal or demolition of any structure or part thereof, excavation or the addition of an improvement, and excludes regular building maintenance such as painting or tuck pointing.

"Demolition" means any act or process which destroys in part or in whole a structure.

"Exterior features" means the architectural style and the general design and arrangement of the exterior of a structure, including, but not limited to, the kind and texture of the building material(s), and the type, style and arrangement of all windows, doors, light fixtures, signs and other appurtenant elements, or the natural features of a structure. In the case of outdoor advertising signs, "exterior feature" includes the style, material, size and location of the sign.

"Improvement" means any building, structure, parking facility, fence, gate, wall, work of art or other object constituting a physical betterment of real property, or part of such betterment.

"Owner of record" means any person, firm, corporation or other legal entity listed as owner on the records of the county recorder of Winneshiek County.

"Renovation" means the major alteration of visible elements, demolition and replacement of visual elements, and replacement of visual elements after damage by fire or natural disaster of an existing structure. Renovation required due to damage caused by accidental fire, flood, accident or weather shall restore the structure to its previous condition or may voluntarily meet the standards set forth in this chapter.

(Ord. 1075 § 1 (part), 2005)

15.04.030 Permit required.

Every owner of any tract or parcel of land located within the C-3 central business commercial zoning district of the city of Decorah who constructs a new structure or renovates the exterior of an existing structure shall obtain a permit before proceeding with the new construction or exterior renovation.

(Ord. 1075 § 1 (part), 2005)

15.04.040 Procedure for issuance of a permit.

Application for a design criteria permit shall be made to the city's zoning administrator, shall be accompanied with payment of a fee in the amount of fifty dollars and shall be submitted

two weeks prior to the next scheduled meeting of the planning and zoning commission. The zoning administrator shall forward the application to each member of the planning and zoning commission. The planning and zoning commission shall review the application for conformity with the regulations and standards contained in this chapter and may confer with the property owner on changes deemed advisable. The planning and zoning commission shall either approve or disapprove of the application and submit it to the city council. The city council shall, upon receipt of the action of the planning and zoning commission, either approve or disapprove the application for the proposed design criteria permit. If approved, the permit shall then be issued by the zoning administrator. Any permit issued under the provisions of this section must have the construction or restoration completed within three years of issuance. In the event that the developments are not completed within the allotted time period, the owner will be required to file a performance bond in an amount to be determined by the planning and zoning commission if the construction is underway at the time of the expiration of the three-year time period.

All applications for permit shall include the following, as applies:

- A. Demonstration and compliance with existing site plan approval procedures of the municipal code of the city of Decorah;
- B. Building design information including the following:
 - 1. Accurate, detailed scale drawings and elevations illustrating the proposed construction or alteration. All visible elevations must be presented,
 - 2. Accurate detailed drawings or photographs showing existing conditions of the building and relationship of new construction to existing buildings,
 - 3. Accurate detailed scale drawings of site plan,
 - 4. Samples, specifications and/or photos of all visible materials; i.e., doors, windows, grills, brick, stone, trim, handrails, fencing, etc.,
 - 5. Specifications/cut sheets and locations for all mechanical equipment, trash bins and other infrastructure when such infrastructure is located outside the building,
 - 6. Narrative explaining the scope of the work proposed,
 - 7. Additional accurate, scaled drawings or sections for trim and finish work,
 - 8. Roof drainage plan or narrative;
- C. Sign information including the following:
 - 1. Accurate, scaled rendering of proposed sign or photograph, if already existing,

2. Specification and/or sample of material,
3. Photograph or accurate, scaled drawing of building elevation(s) showing location(s) of wall signage, window signs, entrance signs and all other attached signage,
4. Photograph or accurate scaled drawing showing location of freestanding signs on the site,
5. Type and location of all lighting fixtures for sign illumination;

D. Outdoor fixtures information including the following:

1. Accurate, scaled drawings and location of fences, screening, benches, seating, tables, architectural ornamentation, flag poles or other outdoor fixtures,
2. Manufacturer's cut sheets for all outdoor fixtures and/or poles,
3. Accurate, scaled site plan showing planter boxes, tree grates or other landscaping or ornamental vegetation;

E. Exterior lighting information including the following:

1. Accurate, scaled site plan showing number and location of proposed site lighting,
2. Manufacturer's cut sheets and/or photos for all exterior lighting fixtures and/or poles,
3. Type of bulb and intensity for each fixture,
4. Accurate, scaled drawings or photographs of building elevations with wall-mounted lights;

F. Awnings/canopies information including the following:

1. Photo or brochure showing proposed design,
2. Color sample or swatch of proposed material,
3. Photograph or accurate, scaled drawing of building showing location of awning and its relationship to existing structures.

(Ord. 1075 § 1 (part), 2005)

15.04.050 Standards for review.

The planning and zoning commission shall consider each design review on the merits of the individual case and shall consider, among other things, general designs, character and appropriateness of design, scale of buildings, arrangements, texture, materials and color as well as the scale design and appearance in relation to structures in the immediate and surrounding area.

The following elements will also be considered by the commission:

- A. **Materials.** Traditional materials such as brick, stone (including cast stone) and stucco should be used as the primary exterior materials. Tile, stone, glass block, copper flashing, metal and wood should be considered for accent materials. For rear entrances, the primary materials should be used in such a way so as to highlight the entrance.

The following materials are prohibited on the facades or sides of buildings that are visible:

1. Aluminum, vinyl or fiberglass siding or roofing materials;
 2. Wood shake shingles, barn wood, corrugated metal, mirror or reflective glass, plywood and chipboard siding;
 3. Regular concrete masonry units (Split face, fluted and other decorative concrete block will be considered.);
 4. Materials that attempt to mimic traditional materials (e.g., fiberglass panels molded to look like brick) without specific approval by the planning and zoning commission and council in the site plan approval process.
- B. **Detailing.** A high to moderate level of design and architectural detail is preferred. Design should harmonize with the detailing of the surrounding buildings in window shape, cornice lines and brickwork. Building renovations and alterations should restore the architectural details of cornices, brickwork, transom, display windows and bulkheads.
- C. **Roofs and Parapets.** Flat roofs (slightly sloped to drain) are preferred with parapets that articulate the rhythm of the buildings. Parapets should be embellished with detailing and be stepped or sloped to achieve a visually interesting yet harmonious sequence along the building facade.

Sloped roofs are not allowed unless concealed by the parapet or false front. Exceptions may be granted if the sloped roof is used to define the residential character of the upper floors and is demonstrated to complement

adjacent buildings. The city engineer must review roof drainage plans for compatibility with street and sidewalk drainage. Use of underground drainage systems may be required where available.

D. Facades. A building more than forty-five feet in width or length should be divided into increments of no more than twenty feet through articulation of the facade. This can be achieved through combinations of the following techniques:

1. Divisions or breaks in materials;
2. Window bays;
3. Separate entrances and entry treatments;
4. Variation in roof lines;
5. Building setbacks.

Street level front facade shall have a minimum of fifty percent glazing. Entrance doors shall be commercial, fully glazed doors. Street-level main entrance doors shall be set back a minimum of thirty-six inches from the building face. Entry doors for upstairs apartments are not required to be set back but must maintain the commercial, fully glazed look of the main entrance.

Street side balconies shall reflect the design and characteristics of the building. Balconies shall be supported with cantilevered structure or by the building structure. Supporting posts at the sidewalk are prohibited. Balconies must not extend farther than current code allows. Underside of balconies shall be enclosed with an acceptable material. Balconies shall meet all life safety requirements. Drainage and the formation of ice should be considered.

E. Awnings/Canopies/Signs. Retractable or operable awnings are encouraged. Long expanses of awning should be broken into segments that reflect the door or window openings beneath them.

Awnings cannot extend across multiple storefronts and/or multiple buildings. Awnings must be constructed of durable, protective and water-repellant material. Awnings should not project farther than current code allows. Neighboring buildings and signage should be considered when constructing awnings.

Window Signs. Permanent window signs should cover a minimal area. Large window signs are discouraged.

F. Utility Areas and Mechanical Equipment. The screening of exterior trash and storage areas, service yards, loading areas, transformers and air conditioning units must use the same materials, color and/or style as the primary building in order to

be architecturally compatible with the building it is adjacent to. If the utility area is separate from the building it serves, it should be consistent with the streetscape theme. All roof equipment must be screened from public view if visible from the street.

All exterior trash and storage areas, service yards, loading areas and air conditioning units must be screened from view or made as inconspicuous as possible. Loading areas, if screening is not possible, shall be incorporated into the aesthetic design of the building and disguised as much as possible. Camouflaging air conditioning units is an acceptable screening method. Buildings must be set back ten feet in alleys or incorporate a ten-foot by ten-foot area that is not covered by a roof, awning, trellis or structure.

- G. Color. The color of buildings should work in harmony with other C-3 structures and should maintain the unique quality of the downtown. The accent colors should complement the primary color.
- H. Rear Entrances. The rear entrance should be clean and well maintained. A small sign, awnings, display windows and planter boxes can improve the appearance.

Rear entrances should mimic the design criteria for the front as much as is practical and reasonable and use the same primary materials where possible. The features described under "Guidelines" are to be encouraged; however, recognizing that this objective is to primarily encourage improvements to rear entrances and recognizing the differences with rear entrances, no specific standard is adopted.

- I. Exterior Lighting. Exterior lighting should enhance the development just as design elements such as trim and material selection.

Bare bulbs are not acceptable (holiday and special event lighting excluded). Fixtures without adequate shades for bulbs are discouraged.

- J. Site Appurtenances (Benches, Tables, Fences, Flagpoles, Landscaping, etc.). Pedestrian safety, accessibility and intrusion into pedestrian or vehicle thoroughfares will be considered.

Satellite dishes shall not be visible from main streets. Communication/television cables and antennae wires shall be hidden from view.

(Ord. 1075 § 1 (part), 2005)

15.04.060 Inspection.

After a permit has been issued to the applicant, the zoning administrator, city engineer or other local authority may from time to time inspect the work authorized and take such action as is necessary to enforce compliance with the approved plans.

(Ord. 1075 § 1 (part), 2005)

15.04.070 Violations.

It is unlawful for any person to omit, neglect or refuse to comply with any provision of this chapter, and such violation shall constitute a misdemeanor. The city shall have authority to obtain compliance by the use of injunctive relief, municipal infraction enforcement and all other civil remedies available for enforcement.

(Ord. 1075 § 1 (part), 2005)

15.04.080 Variances.

Where, in the case of a particular proposed application for a design criteria permit, it can be shown that strict compliance with the requirements of this chapter would result in extraordinary hardship to the property owner, because of unusual or other conditions, the planning and zoning commission the city council may vary, modify or waive the requirements so that substantial justice may be done and the public interests be served; provided, however, that such variance, modification or waiver will not have the effect of nullifying the intent or purpose of this chapter. Each variance shall be determined by the particular facts and circumstances in each instance. In no case shall any variance or modification be more than a minimum easing of the requirements and in no instance shall it be in conflict with any zoning ordinance or other city ordinance. The granting of a variance shall not be considered the grounds or basis for granting of a subsequent variance as each case is to be decided upon its own peculiar facts and circumstances.

(Ord. 1087 § 1, 2006)