FACADE IMPROVEMENT GUIDELINES

WHITBY & BROOKLIN

PREPARED BY
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FOR
THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT
OF
THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF WHITBY
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Volume II - Street Elevations........Bound Separately
Overview

There is dynamic tension between the Chutzpah of retail and the genteel traditions of an historic town core. A village that may have developed over several generations of bespoke tailors and family grocers has inherited the buildings as heirlooms, but is trying to succeed in a marketplace of fast food and fashion trends. How do you respect this inheritance, but compete with your immediate neighbours and the local shopping malls?

The answer is what has been the long-standing tradition of entrepreneurs of all ages. Turn a potential liability into an asset and market it. The current expression for this re-tooling of thinking is called a “paradigm shift”, which is the sociologists own way of re-marketing an old product.

The trends in marketing have affected the trends in storefronts since the mid 1800’s that produced most of the pattern, if not the actual building stock, that dominates the downtown core of Whitby and to a lesser extent, Brooklin. In that century, retail was a compilation of products and services. If you could get a good look through the storefront into the interior, the products sold themselves, along with the smiling faces of the proprietor and his many customers. Now, the marketing is done through the packaging on the outside of the product, the signs on the outside of the store and the television commercials on the outskirts of town.

Niche Markets

The shift in understanding is to realize that in a larger urban area of 3.5 million people, there are significant niche markets that can sustain alternatives to the shopping mall experience, if in fact they are true alternatives. To be true alternatives, they should not aspire to look like shopping mall failures, but as unique shopping districts.

Unique Shopping Experience

The uniqueness is already there in the fabric of the buildings and of the streets and it is time to polish those attributes that will attract customers.

Although styles change constantly, the elements of good composition and good design have not changed since they were formally recognized and borrowed from nature by the Greeks and other ancient civilizations. Variety creates interest; too much variety causes visual clutter.

For the downtown area to work towards mutually beneficial goals, the owners and tenants and proprietors of shops and businesses must not only work together in a cooperative business environment, but also to present to customers a cooperative and unified shopping experience.
In both Whitby and Brooklin, the public portion of the streetscape has been visually unified by the consistent design of the street signs, the street lights and the seasonal decorations. In Brooklin, where the width of the main street is less well defined by a continuous row of storefronts, there are locations where the continuity is maintained by trees and landscape forms. In Whitby, beyond the 19th century downtown core area, the main street perspective is dissipated by locations where the edge of the street is not visually defined. These locations could be improved with simple tree planting. See “Strip Plazas”.

Figure 1 - Brock Street South - Elevation Looking East

Building Form and Massing

In a thriving retail business community, friendly competition has always required close proximity of the various merchants and businesses to each other and has dictated premium land values. Economics and shopping convenience determined that buildings were pressed to the street line and to each other and economics also determined in building height the graphic representation of land value increasing towards the business core. Note Figure 1 - Brock Street South - Elevation Looking East. In a developing economy and in a stable economy, the streetscape clearly represents the economic health by presenting fully utilized properties of similar height. Vacant lots and dissimilar heights suggest troubling inconsistencies in a pattern familiar to shoppers. The continuous storefronts form not only a wall of retail and business ventures, but also form the containment of the street. Few locations except seaside resort streets work as one-sided business area. Commercial development on both sides of the street provide an amplification of the commercial activity and pedestrian interaction.

Street Form

The enclosure formed by a continuous row of storefronts two or three storeys high on either side of a typical 66’ (two chain) road allowance is a recurring downtown image in most Ontario towns. This image is a favourite drafting exercise for one point perspectives because the close confinement of view from side to side is relieved by the apparent continuity of view to the horizon in the distance. In both Whitby and Brooklin, the public portion of the streetscape has been visually unified by the consistent design of the street signs, the street lights and the seasonal decorations. In Brooklin, where the width of the main street is less well defined by a continuous row of storefronts, there are locations where the continuity is maintained by trees and landscape forms. In Whitby, beyond the 19th century downtown core area, the main street perspective is dissipated by locations where the edge of the street is not visually defined. These locations could be improved with simple tree planting. See “Strip Plazas”.

Baldwin Street Looking South - Brooklin
Building Material and Construction Methods

Within the uniformity created by the similarity and continuity of the box shapes, the materials, construction methods, and structural integrity of buildings built at the same time have a consistency resulting from both the economics of the time and the limited number of materials and builders in a local developing economy. Not only were the types of materials limited, but also the source of materials. Local brick and stone displayed similar colours and characteristics. Local builders developed construction techniques that they applied uniformly throughout their careers. The size of the timber available locally would determine the economic span and natural rhythm of the bearing walls. The size of glass sheets would determine the shop window details.

Building Regulations

In a democratic society, rules for construction and land development were applied uniformly. To reduce the risk of fire, regulations were imposed limiting the types of building materials and construction practices. Whereby business people are entrepreneurs constantly seeking new opportunities and unique marketing advantages, Building Departments and Municipal Governments have always been conservative, erring in favour of the status quo and life safety concerns for the citizens they represent.

Zoning Regulations and Fair Competition

Planning Departments, Business Associations and Utility Departments have been working together to enhance the attractiveness of the business areas and to balance the competing desires of the individual merchants, businesses and the public. The basic shared understanding is that individuals benefit individually when the community prospers collectively.

Most individuals are willing to be restrained by regulations that permit them to put their best foot forward, but not at the direct expense to the neighbours. Hence, sign bylaws generally restrict projecting signs that would potentially obscure the signs of neighbouring stores. Some such regulations impose a strict and narrow level of compliance that begins to work against the original merit of variety.

Functional Details

For buildings that were designed and constructed to satisfy the specific purpose of retail (at street level), consistent details were applied to most storefronts.

The maximum glass area was used across the front of the store up to a height where a sign could be prominently displayed to the traffic on the street, usually at the second floor level. Above that, the building reverted to standard commercial construction up to the roof level whether the upper floors were used for residential or business occupancy.

At the street level, many owners chose to recess an entranceway some distance into the store facade. This recess increased the glass frontage for the display area, but more importantly, generously offered privately-owned and weather-protected space to the public street. The intent was not entirely altruistic. The moment of delay, the impulse to enter the recess, the interruption of the progress along the street might generate a sale. The recess later became required by law in most municipalities when exterior doors were required to swing out without encroaching on the street.

I loved the historical look of the storefront, which was built in 1885, the large walk in display windows, ...

Shirley Stewart
Owner of “One Small Step”
Building Style

The single, greatest opportunity for showing individuality was in the decorative style that was chosen by the owner or builder in the finishing details of the design of his or her storefront. When given this choice, most of us want to go with a winner and wear or build what is considered stylish by our contemporaries. The same was true during Victorian, Georgian and other periods when most new buildings adopted the contemporary style for decorative details and finishes and colours.

The Automobile

Like Toady in “Wind in the Willows” we as a society are smitten by our affection for the automobile. Freedom, convenience, adventure are all positive assets afforded us since the explosion of vehicles into our communities.

Whitby is lucky to have a critical mass of shopping facilities representing both pre and post auto eras. The pre-auto stores in the downtown core benefit from both the access to communities much farther away and the marketing created by drive-past vehicles able to see into the shop windows.

The convenience of off-street parking in the downtown core encourages people to drive and park and walk to specialty shops. Similarly, for people who want to load up the car with the weekly grocery shopping, the convenience of plaza style supermarkets has won the popular choice of shoppers. The two options are not mutually exclusive in a close community, but generate traffic and interest for each other.
Strip Plazas

Strip shopping plazas in all four directions from the downtown core represent the growth and change throughout the history of Whitby. Brooklin has leap-frogged that stage of development and is going straight from a village to suburban town centre. The existing plazas in Whitby are mostly well groomed and prosperous looking. As a gesture to the common elements that bind all of the merchants together along the main street, there are certain visual improvements that would help. The pedestrians who are walking along the main street should feel welcomed by the strip mall. To that end, a landscaped boulevard with an avenue of trees forming a buffer between the parking lot and the sidewalk would be as welcome as a small linear park. For the sake of ease of maintenance, the landscaping could be mostly hard surfaced with raised planter boxes with shrubs and ivy, benches and short walls to lessen the visual impact of acres of cars. A raised earth berm planted with grass and trees would also work if the town or adjacent owner would take responsibility for the grass. The avenue of shade trees would be as welcome to the drivers along the road and to the people parked in the plaza. The crown of the trees would eventually be high enough to reduce any interruption of view from the street into the plaza. For drivers on the road the plaza façade would be artistically framed in the foreground between the low landscaping and the continuous crown of trees.
The Goal

This report acknowledges the basic economic fact that most buildings have to pay for themselves and that changing economic conditions must be reflected in the buildings. It is essential to maintain a balance between the attractive qualities of the historic buildings and the attractive features of current retailing. Permitting original building details to deteriorate through neglect is not good economy for any sustainable purpose. Disrespecting those same details by stretching plastic banners haphazardly across the façade only provides a Band-Aid mask that focuses attention on the visual discord rather than the message of the banner.

We have entered an era whereby advertising extends everywhere including our clothing and the lift gates at the entrance to parking lots. Where our children may be happy to wear a sweatshirt with the Nike swoosh, it is not the choice of our grandparents’ generation and it is inappropriate to force granny or the buildings of her era to wear commercial logos and advertising in places where it doesn’t fit.

The variety that is created by mixing new buildings with old should be celebrated. As in any urban planning process, the edges where they touch should be considerate of each other and the portions concealed or exposed by the differences between their shapes should be as carefully designed as the individual buildings.

New buildings that are thoughtfully designed are a positive addition to a streetscape. Old buildings that were poorly designed should be improved or replaced. Old buildings that were well designed and then modified with poor maintained can be restored to the quality of the earlier period. The best approach requires some research to determine with some certainty the actual design features that were part of the earlier building. This is not an appropriate reason to make the building quaint or cute by adding decorative features from an imaginary past. There is evidence available from archives, from newspaper files, and best of all, buried in the layers of building materials that collect like accretions onto old buildings. In the layers buried, there are clues about the materials, details and colours that have adorned most buildings.
The traditional stores were constructed with plain walls three sides and much more elaborate details on the street façade. The design effort and construction skill that is displayed on the street façade is generally beyond the expertise and expense that most owners and builders are able to incorporate into recently constructed buildings. The good quality construction from any period should be recognized as an asset and displayed prominently and not concealed by poor quality construction or poor quality signs.

Signs

Signs should be as artistic and as carefully crafted as the remainder of the façade. The problem with the ubiquitous back-lit fluorescent sign is that it draws great attention to tacky craftsmanship poorly integrated into the remainder of the building. There are no sacred rules about signs except that their purpose is to attract both attention and customers. When retail areas are flourishing with high-end trade, there are few back-lit fluorescent boxes used as the primary signage. Look in any of the trendy shopping districts.

Part of the problem of the back-lit signs is their brightness, particularly when the plastic sheet is mostly white. At night, the sign creates blinding glare that obscures everything around it, particularly the features of the building façade. The signage system that was popular for the first half of the twentieth century was kinder to the building and the people in the street. A sign of any design that is lighted by lights extending beyond the building face, lights both the sign and the surrounding building and sidewalk with the overspill. The signs should confine themselves to the traditional fascia sign location, or in the instance that they extend over the original façade of the building, should be see-through sculptural elements that complement the original façade, not conceal it. The same holds true for projecting signs. Works of art are worth preserving and encouraging. Highly sculptural and highly see-through designs are worthy additions to the streetscape.
Lighting

There have been wonderful modern inventions that can benefit both newly constructed and traditional storefronts. The best of these is the electric light. But like almost any of our inventions it can be a tool or a weapon depending on use. Good lighting plays with the textures and features and colours of the best parts of the building, its signs and the rest of the street. Bad lighting offends its neighbours and glares at prospective customers. And when it is bad, quantity makes it worse. Few lighting installations that have started with fluorescent lights have created the sparkle and colour that provide a welcoming retail environment. If in doubt, use incandescent.

Awnings

Awnings that are awnings are a valuable contribution to the streetscape, the pedestrians and the shop owner for their colour, protection and changeable variety. Awnings that are back-lit fluorescent signs in drag do not effectively shelter the street from rain or the shopfront from sun and they lack any of the spontaneity and responsiveness of their original cousins.

Masonry

Brick and stone are remarkably durable materials. But not indestructible. When many years pass, it is easy to get the false impression that masonry needs no maintenance. The fact is that the small amount of maintenance required is often deferred until severe deterioration has taken place, not just in the renewable mortar joints, but also in the body of the brick or stone. The small amount of regular maintenance costs saved, even with interest, will not pay for major masonry restoration. Even unlimited funds cannot replace some stone or brick from historic sources.

It is also tempting to pursue the expedient solution of cladding over original masonry with some type of siding. Most of the less expensive cladding materials such as vinyl or aluminum do not protect the original substrate from continued deterioration and they themselves have a life cycle much less than the original. The process of installing the cladding also damages the original masonry with mechanical fasteners.

Only under the circumstances that the original masonry is beyond the economic scope of full restoration should the surface be clad. When that decision is made, only a quality, insulated system with an acrylic stucco surface will avoid deterioration long enough to recuperate the cost of installation in a commercial exposure. The insulated stucco system should mimic as much of as is possible the original detail to preserve and re-interpret the original rhythm of the street.
Street Level Windows & Doors

Most shops were designed with the maximum amount of glass at the street level. Banks, however, demonstrated financial stability and security with solid walls and monumental doors. The shop windows at street level should be preserved or restored to their original design using pane sizes and framing elements in original proportions. Updating to insulated glass and current framing is usually acceptable if the colours and designs are compatible with the surrounding façade. The front door is the first and possibly only part of the shop that will actually be touched and felt by the customers. The door provides a tactile contact and should represent the image of the building and the shop. The original solid door design with raised panels and a glass vision panel may better represent the shop than aluminum framed glass doors.

Upper Level Windows

These windows are essential expressions of the style and pattern of the building façade. Too often they are replaced by windows that are the wrong shape or size for the masonry openings. Worse, they are replaced by larger windows that “let more light in” and they were available half price because they were the wrong size for some other building. Just a bit of saw cutting and a piece of steel angle for a lintel and the deed is done. Worse again, each tenant in each room makes similar, but different decisions and the sense of community collaboration is out the window. Wood framed windows do need to be maintained with paint and putty and if severely deteriorated, re-built or replaced. But replacement should only be a once in a lifetime expense. The replacement should be to the size and shape of the original with the same glass divisions and operating system. Should the cost of new curved top custom windows really be prohibitive, consider repairing the existing. Temporary replacement windows with shaped and painted transom panels is preferable to cutting the masonry to fit the window shape.
Carpentry and Joinery

The ancient Greeks took common wood construction and writ it large and fine in marble. Skilled carpenters in North America re-interpreted classical design features in the material most available for construction - wood, mostly pine.

The public façade of stores exhibited the finest examples of shaped and turned pilasters, cornices, mouldings, brackets, paneling, window mullions, muntins and sash frames and doors. The fine skill of joinery ensured that many pieces of wood that all started as straight lumber shapes, added together to create flat panels, rectangular frames, round medallions and stayed together with limited fasteners, and kept the water out.

By need and by custom, the finished assemblies were painted for protection and for colour. The need for paint is greater than ever when joinery skills are reduced to nailing plywood together. Luckily, paint formulations are greatly improved from those available 100 years ago, but good joinery details are still required to present a finished appearance that will stand up to weathering. Again, it is better to restore or copy existing carpentry details and protect with a regularly maintained paint coating.
OTHER MATERIALS

Brick and stone and painted wood are not the only materials that are worthy to grace the façade of a store. There are beautiful tiles, terra cotta, opaque and translucent glass and metals that have been used for most of the last century. Enamelled metal, stainless steel, titanium, marble, granite and precast concrete have all been used successfully in recent years. New acrylic stucco has the ability to be moulded on site and prefabricated into elegant details. Some materials have connotations that are inappropriate for an area that is seeking a successful image. Unfinished concrete block may be durable, but looks like a basement. Unpainted barnboard, vinyl and aluminum siding and many stucco finishes illustrate the lack of skill and care in their installation more often than they proclaim pride of ownership. Many of these easy clad solutions also age poorly by fading, cracking, denting, coming unfixed and developing holes and may require more maintenance than a more durable and permanent installation. The Ontario Building Code also requires that wall materials and window sizes comply with a table limiting the risk of fire spreading from one building to another.

New materials artistically incorporated into traditional storefronts can be successful, but unless the design is well thought through, traditional materials are less likely to conflict. The use of extensive amounts of clear anodized aluminum framing and of glass panel doors is inclined to conflict with the traditional details of carved and painted wood trim unless very carefully considered and constructed.

SUBSTITUTE MATERIALS

This is a topic that causes enormous debate in the heritage restoration community. In the process of preserving our past, there are many opportunities to make expedient decisions and re-write history. There are the two extremes. One is to replicate with absolute integrity to both the original materials and the original techniques. This would suggest using clear pine, hand tooled, for all mouldings and square hand forged nails and one inch thick boards two feet wide for roof sheathing. This extreme is both economically unattainable and somewhat deceptive in its attempt to pretend the construction is original. Where studying style and technique may result in a more sensitive restoration or renovation, the presence of plywood as a substrate assists future renovators in establishing the progression of historical interventions. The other extreme is the careless assembling of materials and details that appear to be old fashioned. As the Greeks re-interpreted wood details into marble and the early American carpenters re-interpreted stone back into wood, there is nothing wrong with the appropriate use of new technology to augment traditional materials and techniques.
The Traditional Storefront Elements

- Take paint scrapings for heritage colour restoration
- Use sensitive colour schemes
- Colour of existing building should be enhanced
- Use analogous colours

Colour

Colours have the ability to raise passions of all kinds. Like other design issues, building colours have been determined traditionally by supply and demand. Many early materials were produced with limited colour choices. Brick was only red in most of Ontario up until about 1875 when buff yellow became available from larger manufacturers. When many of the early stores were built in Whitby and Brooklin, limited colour ranges were available from the paint manufacturers. Many heritage restoration guidelines suggest that paint scrapings be undertaken to establish the true original colours of the painted portions of the building. Where this may be appropriate for museum-type restorations, many sensitive colour schemes are available from manufacturers who offer heritage pallets. Ralph Loren paints, for example, provide arrays of traditional colours that are well matched to each other, but not quite fool proof.

The colour scheme should start with the fixed or given colours in the permanent finish materials. The brick or stone of the building face should be enhanced by either similar or contrasting colours. If the business has a proprietary colour schedule (Home Hardware, KFC) these must be accommodated in the general paint colours, but modified to suit the building.

One painting technique that has always been popular (except in the all white sixties) is to use various analogous colours (close to each other on the colour wheel) to accentuate building features and trim. Several facets of one continuous wood moulding may have slightly different colours changing at the ridges in the profile. The strongest colours or deepest tints have been used for the receding surfaces to reveal the profile. The strongest colour would often be reserved for the front door to attract attention and then the customer into the store.
The Video Image - Brooklin

58 Baldwin Street

The following examples were selected as significant landmark buildings in each community of Brooklin and Whitby and each presents building features that could be well promoted for good business attention.

In both cases, the basic building appears to be in good condition and only modest cosmetic improvements are required. The proposal in each case is to restore the traditional elements of the building façade that may have been in the original design.

Cam’s New & Used - Whitby

116 Dundas Street South

Research should be undertaken to confirm the actual design and details of the original facade. The finishing trim materials suggested are readily available moulded profiles, or easily formed sheet metal sections.
Recognize Need

An enterprising business community regularly reviews the strengths and weaknesses in its marketing strategy to build on the strengths and improve the weaknesses. The photographs recorded in this report illustrate the broad range of building types and façade condition that comprises the overall streetscape of the downtown core areas of Whitby and Brooklin. Whereas the streetscape is enriched by the variety of styles representing different periods of history and creative endeavour, deteriorated finishes and materials, poor quality construction and expedient flimsy repairs lessen the design image and economic well-being of the area.

Review the composite photos in Volume II and the general comments.

If a building is fulfilling the use that is expected of it, maintain it with care, change the display, repaint the sign, update the lighting to feature what is there, but avoid stylistic trends to change the design appearance of the building to something more modern. Even when undertaken with the best intentions and unlimited budget, more is lost than what is gained. Often these renovations are not recognized as mistakes until the new facing looks weathered and dated and it is difficult to reverse the change.

Observation and Research

Assess the assets available from the existing façade either on the surface or on an earlier layer below. Find out more about the history of the building. There are several sources available, including the public archives for Whitby and Brooklin that have historic photographs of most areas of the main street at various periods. The local LACAC is a committee dedicated to the understanding and preservation of heritage buildings. There may already be a file of documents for the subject building, or similar buildings close by.

Most original construction is designed with an Architect, or constructed by builders with broad talents. Renovations later on, particularly small projects, are often focused on single issue problems, and solve those problems at the expense of the larger design issues that affect the whole façade or the whole street. Step back and look at the whole façade and the street context. Step back in time through research to look at the design continuity that may have been the original intent.

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Establish Goals and Incremental Process

From research, determine the finished appearance and results that would best suit the building and location. This may be a combination of working backwards to reveal details and qualities of the façade that exist on a buried layer, and working forward to replace, restore, change, reconstruct and add to the existing.

Clearly, the basic structural design is most important to reduce risk and guarantee the longevity of the building.

Next is the integrity of the building envelope, the details and assemblies that contain and protect the building from the ingress of wind and water.

The mechanical and electrical systems are essential, not only for the comfort and convenience of the occupants, but also to ensure that pipes and foundations don’t freeze or wiring doesn’t overheat to cause damage to the building fabric.

All of these and other life safety issues that ensure people can safely live in and evacuate a building are within the scope of the Ontario Building Code and are not optional improvements to a building.

The issue of the building envelope is expanded by the issues of these Façade Improvement Guidelines. The most damaging element to the common construction materials that form the exterior skin of buildings is water, and its more aggressive cousin, frost. Not only should the roof shed the rain, but also the path of water draining from all areas of the exterior of the building should be carefully examined. Traditional construction practices in Ontario recognized this need and provided roof overhangs, flashings and watertables to shed water away from the main walls of a building. These creative devices became formalized design elements on the principal façade. The storefront cornice, for example, provides a ledge or small roof to shed water away from the more vulnerable painted shopfront and sign. That small roof should be protected with a waterproof material such as metal flashing to ensure that the water really does shed away from the building. The unfortunate examples of back lit box signs often unwittingly reverse this practice and create ledges to direct water into hidden pockets where it causes damage.

Bad Design, Good Plagiarism and Other Free Assistance

Individually humans have very limited potential to create new from nothing. Collectively, we have aspired to greatness and created beautiful buildings. Many examples of truly unique design creations are design failures for not recognizing basic rules derived from nature. Do what the professionals do. Buy or borrow books, travel to interesting locations, observe, photograph and copy. It is no coincidence that much of what we like about the best parts of Whitby and Brooklin downtown cores is repeated along the street to create a familiar pattern. It is not a coincidence that when originally built many of the buildings closely resembled each other. It is not only acceptable to copy good design, it is worthy to learn from and replicate successful examples.
Professional Advice

For structural changes an architect or an engineer should be consulted, and will be required to provide drawings to seek a permit for most non residential renovations or for the conversion of residential dwellings. For most repairs and restoration of materials such as wood and masonry, competent contractors can offer good advice, but usually wants the details spelled out to them before becoming involved in a construction process.

An owner or tenant is wise to become familiar with the history of his building and the range of design options available and to prepare photo examples of similar successful renovations. However, it is important for the longevity of the finished project to hire an Architect, Engineer or BuildingEnvelope Consultant long enough to review issues such as flashings, weatherproofing, damp proofing and rot and termite control for any extensive storefront restoration. It may also be a requirement of the building department for the extent or type of renovation planned. Ask at the Building Department as soon as you know what you are planning to get their advice.

Approvals (Preconsultation is encouraged)

Most building projects require both a building permit and planning approval. The Building Department reviews the proposed work to ensure compliance with the Ontario Building Code (OBC) that provides minimum standards for issues of life safety and health concerns. The Planning Department reviews the proposed work to ensure compliance with zoning and other bylaws concerning use, density and other community issues such as heritage, landscape and parking.
The Approved Plan

When you have a design that satisfies all your own requirements and the requirements of the authorities, you will need to “tender” the work which means to ask builders to give you a fixed price bid to undertake the work shown in the drawings. Be wary of “estimates” that permit flexibility in the final billing. Some professional advice may make this part easier for you. You may ask to have certain items as separate prices if, for example, you may have to defer some of the work to another year for budget reasons.

The Contractor and Trades - “Do it Right”

For any renovation, it is essential that one person or company takes responsibility for all aspects of the work. If the work is simply the replacement of windows, for example, be certain that the company or person is well experienced in the type of work and that you have discussed the extent of finishing you are expecting from the contractor. It is better to ask before the contract is signed, whether your contractor intends only to do his specialty and leave you with the associated plaster repair and painting for example. The best way to find out surprises is to ask to speak to several previous customers who have learned what to expect from completing a similar project.

For work involving masonry repair, great skill and extensive knowledge and experience is required. Talk with the contractor and ask about the specialty skills required to protect historic masonry from deterioration. Competent and knowledgeable tradespeople are proud to give recent references.
In the process of researching the proposed project, ask people who have completed similar work to advise you on costs and consultants and contractors. Most owners are pleased to talk about their experience, particularly the bad bits, and advise you how to avoid the difficulties they had and to enjoy the finished product.

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The Cost

Renovations are frequently the cause of cost surprises, often in inverse relationship to the actual size of the project. Prepare for the unexpected in a combination of three ways:

1. Pay up front for some professional advice from a consultant familiar with the type of work anticipated. He will be able to estimate the kinds of issues that may arise during construction and include that advice to the Contractor.

2. Make exploratory openings in locations that can be temporarily re-closed. It is far better to have some indication of concealed elements prior to the contractor’s discovery.

3. Be prepared during the work to be flexible either in the amount of work that is completed in each phase, or the amount of money expended. If the complete package of work is fully explored and described in advance of the Contractor’s involvement, few surprises will be revealed during construction.
The Town of Whitby is actively encouraging the improvement of the public facades of the downtown core of Whitby and Brooklin. Several studies besides this one have been undertaken to determine the interventions that will promote the whole area. The Planning Department is a resource that can provide good advice at various stages of a proposed façade improvement. Where it is not the intent for a public department to take responsibility for private property improvements, they can advise early to avoid unnecessary and abortive work that does not satisfy building and planning requirements.


The Ontario Government offers advice for Heritage Building conservation on their web site: [http://www.culture.gov.on.ca/english/culdiv/heritage/connotes.htm]

and particularly for storefronts at: [http://www.culture.gov.on.ca/english/culdiv/heritage/conote8.htm]

The National Parks Service in the United States provides a web site dedicated to the Technical Preservation Services for Historic Buildings at: [http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/presbhom.htm]

and particularly for storefronts, they have published Preservation Brief #11, Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts at: [http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/brief11.htm]

For moulded stone profiles see web site: [http://www.canamould.com/]

For moulded wood profiles see web site: [http://www.fypon.com/]

