

Improving the relationship between pedestrians, buildings, and the street in retail districts can create a sense of vitality that is good for business. Making a trip downtown into a rich, stimulating experience should be the goal of individual businesses, businesses groups, and the town. The following pages give examples of the types of improvements that Wakefield should encourage in order to achieve this goal. The towns should ease permitting of these kinds of improvements, provide design guidelines, and offer funding. Business groups can support creative thinking about how to give identity to a business, and to a business district.

BUSINESS DIRECTORIES

Most shopping malls offer the convenience of directories listing merchants and their locations. Downtowns can offer a similar amenity, providing useful information and creating a meeting place for shoppers. Improved paving, benches, outdoor dining, and landscaping can reinforce the directory location as an orientation point.



In Arlington Heights a directory is located at a prominent intersection. It is designed to reinforce the historic character of the area.



A three sided kiosk located at the train stop in Coolidge Corner in Brookline offers a community bulletin board along with information about local businesses.



In Somerville's Davis Square, the directory is located at the Transit station, and is surrounded by a spacious plaza with outdoor dining.

ORIENTATION

Street names, maps, and locations of important places can be integrated into a signage system that provides useful information, a festive environment, and suggests pride in a town's history and current environment.



By systematizing signage, Lynn creates a signature design that ties the downtown together. Craftsmanship is combined with a clean, contemporary feeling.



Directions to civic buildings and open spaces are given in a clear and concise way in Lynn. The importance of these places is emphasized.



Awnings, like banners are a lively presence on Main Street in Melrose.

BANNERS AND AWNINGS

Banners have become a common feature in downtown environments. Hanging on light poles, off buildings, or over streets, they are an effective way of signaling a concern for the vitality of a retail environment. Their bright colors and rhythm of repetitive forms have a festive quality. Their presence along the street acts as a scaling device to give a sense of intimacy to wide urban thoroughfares.



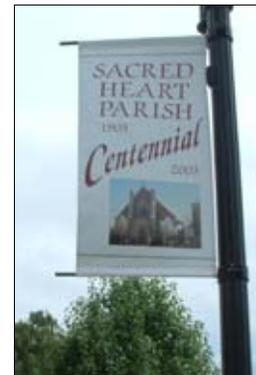
Bright colors and ornamental lettering add character to the pedestrian environment.



The repetition of the banners ties the business district together. The first one suggest entry, the last one a departure.



Banners can be changed within a district to call attention to special features in the urban landscape.



Banners can mark special places, historic features, or celebrate special events.



There are many locations where banners can be effective. Hung on the side of a building they can identify its owner, history, or upcoming events inside.

GATEWAYS

San Diego has been very successful at revitalizing its neighborhood retail districts. "Branding" each one with a name, and providing a prominent gateway, has turned the street into an outdoor room of sorts, with a defined character and place in the larger urban landscape. The city and local business groups all worked together on a broad range of redevelopment ideas and implementation strategies appropriate for local conditions and the city's architectural traditions.



A wide street creates a place for a central island with a broad cantilevered sign. Contemporary illuminated lettering is combined with regional references implied by the ceramic tile base.



Little Italy adjoins a trendy loft district. Its gateway suggests the sophisticated taste of those who live and work nearby.



Bright colors contrast with the neutral colors of the surrounding buildings. The gateway elements provide a more intimate scale against the taller buildings.

OUTDOOR DINING

Downtown Wakefield's 14 foot wide sidewalks are wide enough to accommodate outdoor dining. Combined with awnings, umbrella tables, and flowers, it brings a sense of vitality to a retail district.



Streetscape elements, paving, flower boxes, furniture, awnings, lights, and umbrellas all serve to "zone" the sidewalk, establishing places for eating and places for walking. Many towns in the area encourage outdoor dining. Beacon Street in Brookline offers many examples of creative outdoor dining solutions. A new development on Sidney Street in Cambridge carefully coordinates paving, facades, storefronts glazing and furniture.

Contemporary awning brackets and light fixtures play off the original Art Deco storefront in Woburn, rather than imposing inappropriate period details.

SIDEWALK DISPLAYS

Generous openings between sidewalk and store with merchandise spilling out on to the street create an exciting environment that attracts shoppers. Recessed entries or awnings help control the overlapping indoor and outdoor spaces. Shop keepers start to take ownership of the sidewalk, keeping it clean and festive. Shoppers enjoy the farmer's market atmosphere. Shopping malls have learned these lessons from successful downtowns; downtown Wakefield could learn from successful shopping malls.



Flowers from the florists shop on Beacon St. in Brookline extend down the street. When plants are placed along the storefront owners are more likely to take care of them than when they are closer to the curb. Here curbside flowers complement those in pots.



Recessed entries allow for outdoor displays protected from the weather and out of the way of pedestrians in Coolidge Corner in Brookline.



Fruits and vegetables make for particularly attractive sidewalk displays on Harvard Avenue in Brookline..