



D o w n t o w n
St. Charles



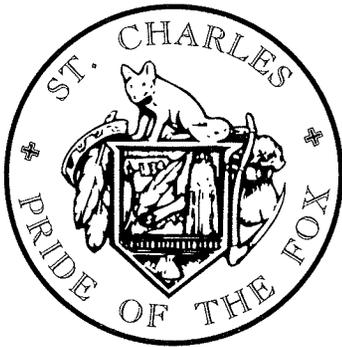
**Design
Guidelines**





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Approved by St. Charles City Council
on May 20, 1996

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Introduction

When historic preservation is combined with downtown development to create a working, growing, and aesthetically pleasing business center, the economic vitality and values that the downtown stands for are reinforced and rekindled—solidifying the image of a downtown as the unique commercial and social heart of the city.

Improving the visual appearance of Downtown St. Charles helps to make the area a fun place to visit and is as critical to the success of the area as are improving economic performance, strengthening public participation, recruiting new businesses, and expanding parking.

Most of Downtown St. Charles lies within the officially designated Historic District. Each individual building facade plays an important role in the makeup of the district. Storefronts, window displays, signage, color, canopies and architectural details all play an integral part in the successful design of individual buildings. Rehabilitating your Downtown St. Charles building can be mind-boggling:

- ◆ What materials should I use?
- ◆ What colors are best?
- ◆ Is an awning appropriate?
- ◆ What kind of sign would look best?

MAIN STREET ST. CHARLES AND THE
CITY OF ST. CHARLES
MUNICIPAL BUILDING,
VIEWED EAST.



"The goal of all building improvements should be to make each building the best possible expression of itself that it can be."

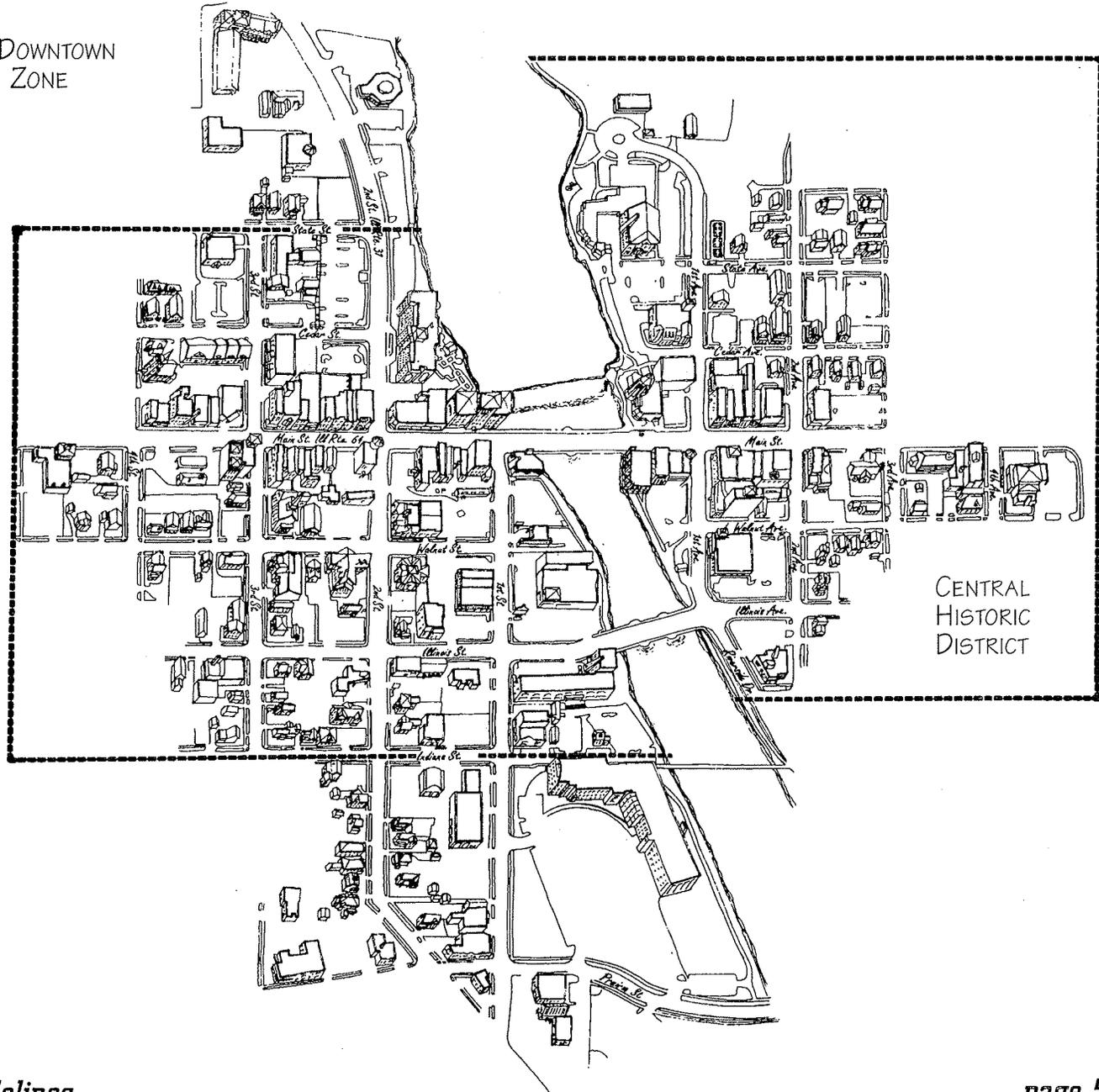
Property owners or tenants who wish to improve their buildings should begin by assessing the current visual condition of the entire facade:

- ◆ How could storefront improvements relate to the entire visual impact of the building?
- ◆ How does the building relate to neighboring buildings?
- ◆ How does a storefront improvement relate to the historic upper portion of the building?
- ◆ What changes are needed to improve the appearance and integrity of the upper portion of the building?

Fortunately, many of these questions can now be answered within the contents of these design guidelines. While local building codes must be complied with, and more information regarding them is available from the City of St. Charles, these guidelines can help take the guesswork out of your rehab project by providing you with examples of challenging areas and possible solutions. Paint, awnings, signs, windows and doors are just some of the areas where information is offered to assist you in your project.

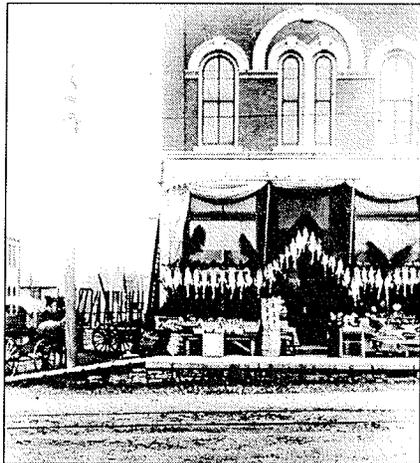
The goal of all building improvements should be to make each building the best possible expression of itself that it can be. These design guidelines serve as a guide for various improvement projects, still keeping in mind that each building is unique. The guidelines are intended to suggest ways in which property/business owners can take advantage of Downtown St. Charles' unique charm and history.

ST. CHARLES DOWNTOWN
REVITALIZATION ZONE





MAIN STREET ST. CHARLES, VIEWED NORTHEAST FROM 1ST AVENUE. CIRCA 1900s.



AWNINGS WERE USED TO PROTECT WARES FROM SUN AND WEATHER.

Photos courtesy of the St. Charles Heritage Center.

A Brief History of St. Charles

At a time in St. Charles' history when we are seeing it reach the limits of physical growth and become an integrated part of the Chicago metropolitan area, it is essential that the downtown area remain a core representation of the unique charm and history that has made St. Charles such an attractive destination for so many newcomers.

The Early Years

The Indian peace treaty after the Blackhawk War of 1832 opened up the Fox River Valley for settlement. The area offered fertile soil and water power. Local gravel deposits, clay, limestone and timber provided building materials.

In 1833, Evan Shelby and William Franklin, two Indiana men originally from New England, laid claim to land east of the river. There they built the first log cabin in St. Charles in 1834.

The first dam across the Fox River was constructed in 1836 and provided energy for a saw mill, grist mill and carding mill. The first blacksmith shop opened in 1835, and the first general store opened in 1836. By 1840, St. Charles had five hotels serving travelers between Chicago and the Mississippi River.

The entrepreneurial spirit, in combination with a dedication to quality service, was evident early on in St. Charles. The Anderson family operated an early dairy business in town, which they expanded after 1905 to produce that new taste sensation—ice cream. The company is still in operation today under the name "Colonial Cafes & Ice Cream."

John Colson came in 1853 and worked his way up to a partnership—and later the ownership—of a dry goods store. Colson's was one of the few businesses to survive fire, floods and the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Except for a slowdown during the Depression, St. Charles has experienced continuing economic growth.

In 1856, the town annexed a four-square-mile area toward the southwest and spent the next 100 years filling it in. Not until the 1950s did further annexation begin.

The 1960s produced large-scale industrial development east of town. From the 1970s to the present, residential development and annexation have been dominant as more and more people seek out the small-town setting and unique historical charm St. Charles offers.

The history of St. Charles, as preserved by the St. Charles Heritage Center, shows that its residents and business people always have taken pride in their homes, businesses and community and have prized the “home town” atmosphere to be found here, as well.

This zealous guarding of the St. Charles small-town charm was evident even in 1848 when residents deferred the opportunity to welcome the railroads to neighboring Elgin. They reasoned that the railroads would carry people through the town without stopping.

Although Elgin prospered financially and grew at an astounding pace, St. Charles was able to retain its friendly reputation, unique historical charm and small-town atmosphere while still offering opportunities to entrepreneurs, who included quality service on their list of important business assets.

And, although St. Charles now encompasses industrial parks and shopping malls, these prized qualities are most evident in the downtown area—the true “heart” of St. Charles.

MAIN STREET ST. CHARLES, VIEWED
SOUTHWEST FROM 1ST AVENUE.
CIRCA 1912-1913.

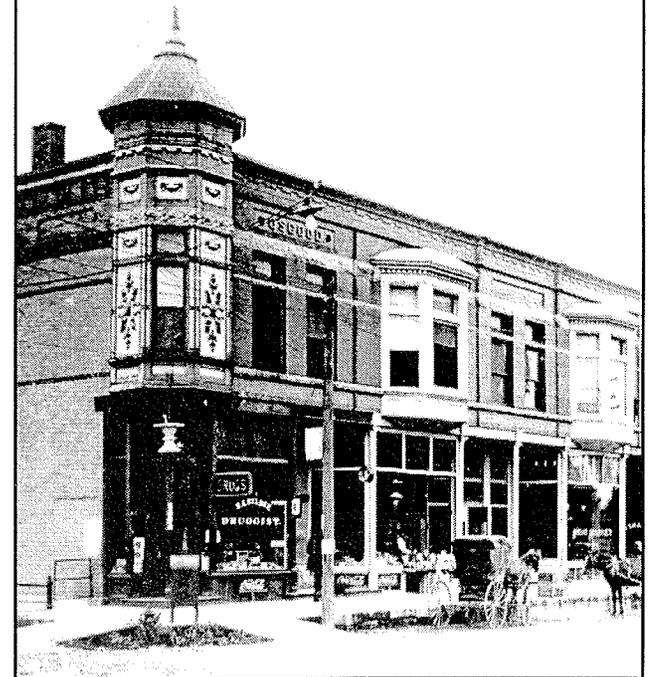


Photo courtesy of the St. Charles Heritage Center.