LINCOLN PARK

• CHAMBER OF COMMERCE •

LINCOLN PARK

Guide to Good Storefront Design

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Introduction

Design matters. Commercial streets that have a distinctive character and appeal to shoppers and diners are typically more successful. The Lincoln Park Chamber of Commerce has developed this guide as a resource for current and aspiring business and property owners to ensure that good design is part of their retail storefront.

This guide provides you with the general City of Chicago requirements for signs, awnings, window displays and lighting. It also is provides specific recommendations about what good design looks like in the context of Lincoln Park, and some basic guidelines to follow that should help your business to thrive in the neighborhood.

The core components of a retail façade—the storefront, awning, signage, window display, lighting and landscaping—all work together to present a story to pedestrians and people moving through the district. A good storefront follows some key guidelines, while adding its own unique elements that emphasize what is special about the business.

A series of good storefronts together draws attention, creates an ambiance in which pedestrians want to linger and typically attracts more customers. Retail success relies on more than just having a good product and great service.

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About The Lincoln Park Chamber of Commerce

The Lincoln Park Chamber of Commerce supports and celebrates the Lincoln Park community as a thriving destination to live, work and play. We assist businesses with gaining exposure, finding new customers, creating new partnerships, and staying knowledgeable about issues and challenges affecting their business. We're also a useful tool and guide for the entire neighborhood, offering resources, referrals and community events. The LPCC is invested in the future of Lincoln Park and a champion for its growth and success. For more information on upcoming events, neighborhood news or how to get involved in the Lincoln Park community, visit the LPCC at **lincolnparkchamber.com**.

Your Neighborhood

Before you begin designing a sign, awning or façade improvements, you need to consider the context. Each part of Lincoln Park, and each building, has a unique history, look, feel, and scale. The key questions you should ask before designing signage are:

- What Ward am I located in?
- What neighborhood association serves my location?
- Am I located on a pedestrian-focused commercial street?
- Is my building in or adjacent to a City-designated landmark district?
- What is the overall "feel" of the street, neighborhood or commercial corridor?
- What is the historical character of the street and the surrounding area?

These questions are important in the design and implementation of your project and how your business fits in the community and the street.

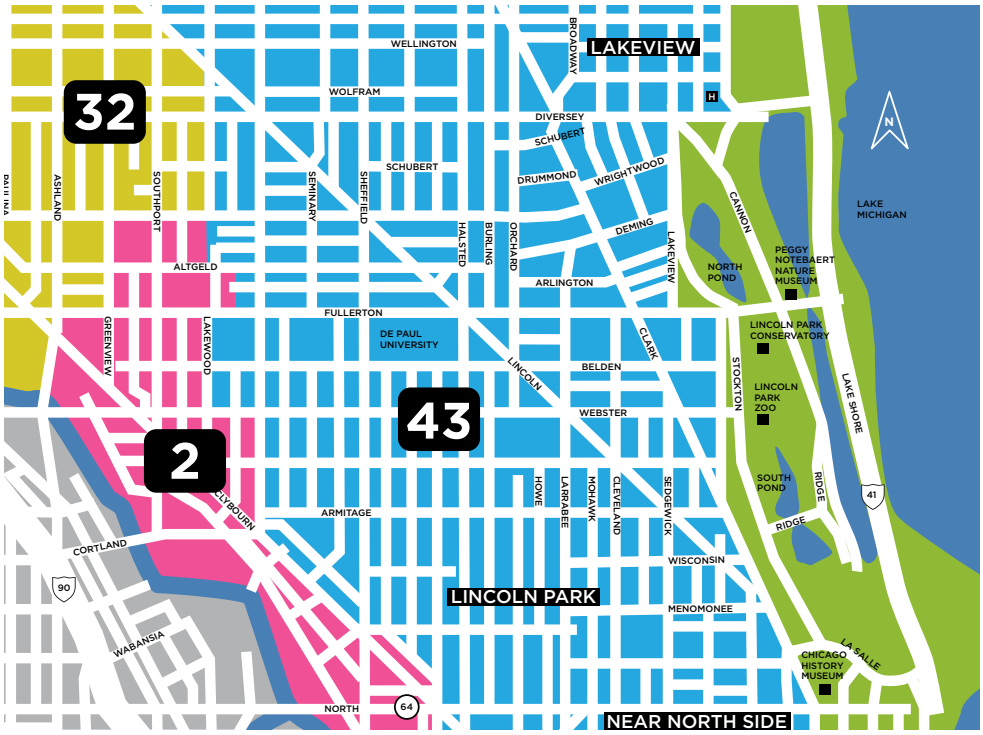
Aldermen

Most building, awning, and sign permits must be approved and signed off by your local city council representative—your Alderman. Please familiarize yourself with your Ward and Alderman. Along with the Lincoln Park Chamber of Commerce, your Alderman should be a partner in helping you navigate any community and city processes as they relate to your business or façade improvement.

2nd Ward
Alderman Brian Hopkins
Office: 1400 N. Ashland
Phone: (312) 643-2299
Email: ward02@cityofchicago.org
Web: **aldermanhopkins.com**

32nd Ward
Alderman Scott Waguespack
Office: 2657 N. Clybourn
Phone: (773) 248-1330
Email: info@ward32.org
Web: **ward32.org**

43rd Ward
Alderman Michele Smith
Office: 2523 N. Halsted
Phone: (773) 348-9500
Email: yourvoice@ward43.org
Web: **ward43.org**

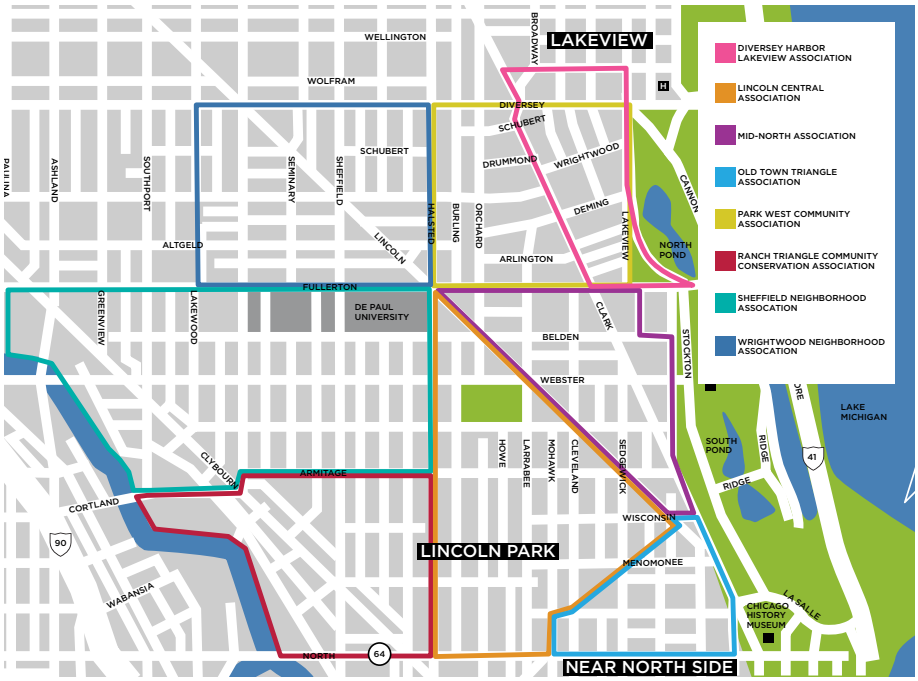


Neighborhood Associations

Your local Alderman will often ask for the local neighborhood associations and the Lincoln Park Chamber of Commerce for feedback on sign and building permits that require his or her signature. Get to know your local neighborhood group, and reach out to them if you have any questions on their particular requirements.

- **Wrightwood Neighbors**
- **Park West Community Association**
- **Sheffield Neighborhood Association**
- **Mid-North Association**
- **Lincoln Central Association**
- **RANCH Triangle Association**
- **Old Town Triangle Association**

Visit **lincolnparkchamber.com** for contact information for our neighborhood associations.

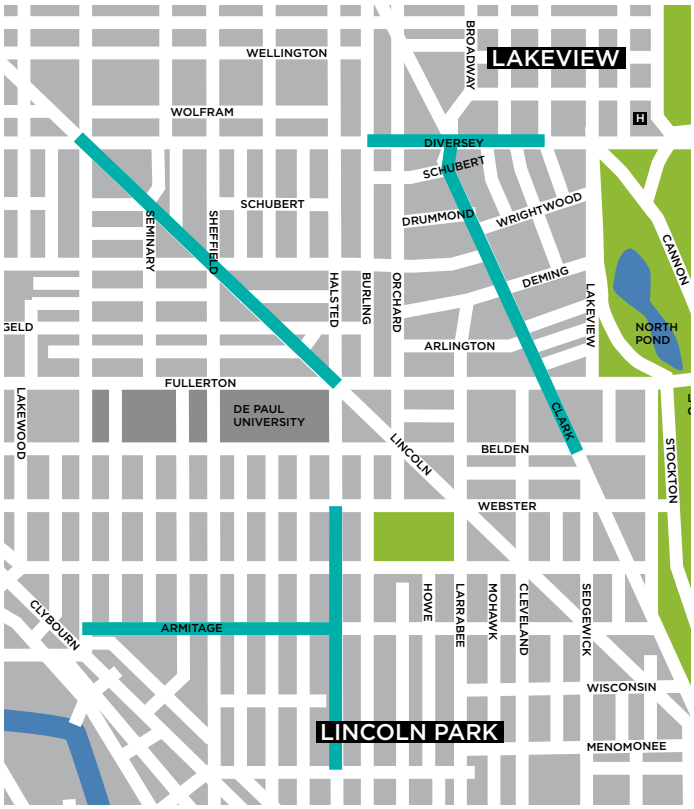


City-Designated Pedestrian Districts

In addition to business clusters scattered throughout the neighborhood, Lincoln Park has several city-designated pedestrian business districts (§ 17-3-0500). In these districts, signage, awnings, lighting, landscaping, and façade improvements must be geared towards pedestrians, and some specific guidelines apply. These districts include:

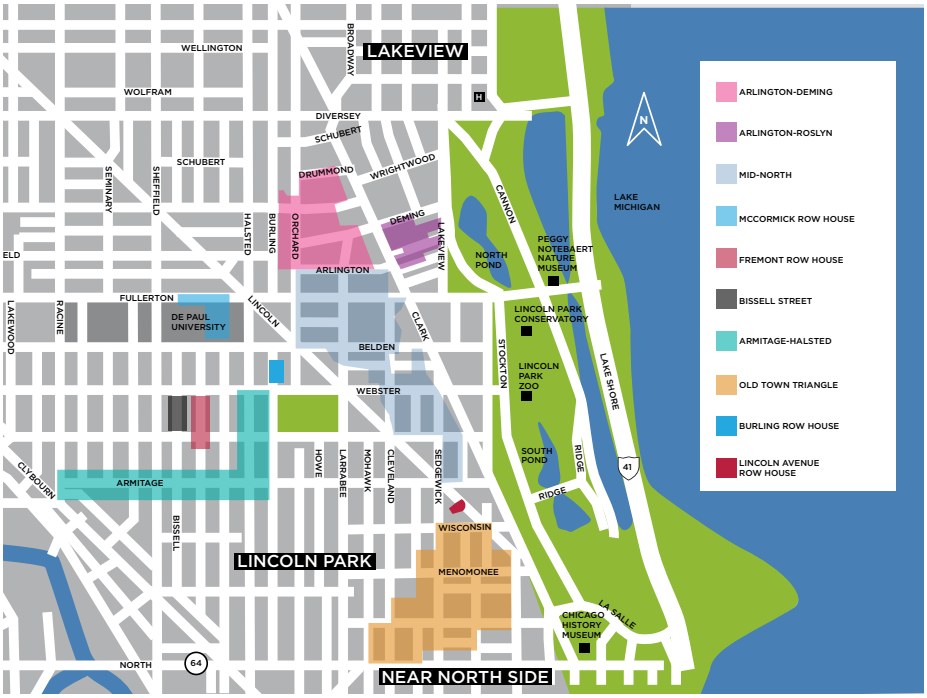
- Armitage (Halsted to Racine)
- Clark (Belden to Diversey)
- Lincoln (Fullerton to Diversey)
- Halsted (Willow to Webster)

Since Lincoln Park is a very walkable community, most other areas of the neighborhood are also pedestrian-focused, even if they are not city-designated pedestrian districts. Given our urban environment, all signage and façade improves should consider pedestrians.



Historic Landmark Districts

The architecture of Lincoln Park honors the past while embracing the future. Several sections of Lincoln Park are designated by the City of Chicago's Commission on Historic Landmarks as historic landmark districts. The most notable designated commercial landmark district is the Armitage-Halsted corridor. Any building updates, awnings, and signage in these districts must follow specific guidelines to ensure that the historic features of the building are maintained. While these districts are primarily residential areas, adjacent commercial districts should reflect or compliment the style and character of the nearby historic district. In addition, most neighborhood associations and Aldermen will refer to City of Chicago landmark district guidelines when approving building, sign, or awning permits.



In Lincoln Park there are many historic and distinct buildings located outside of designated landmark districts. Historic and distinct facades should be maintained to keep the character of the neighborhood vibrant and diverse. Please refer to the

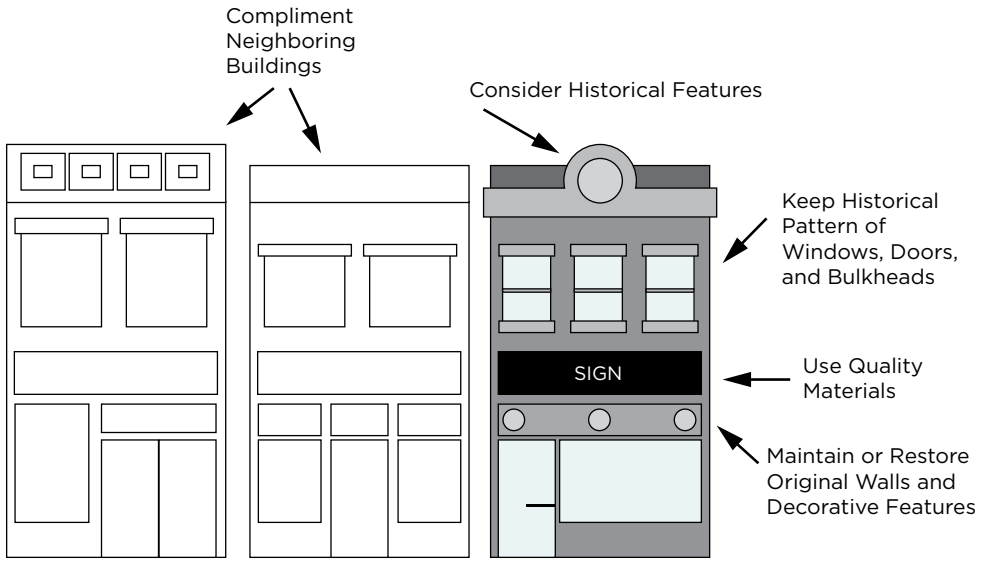
Commission on Chicago Landmark's **Guidelines for Alterations to Historic Buildings and New Construction** and the City

Of Chicago's **Guidelines for Commercial, Industrial and Mixed Use Buildings** for detailed information on historic building alterations and new construction in keeping with historical districts. Many of these guidelines are included in this guide.

Design Guidelines

Building Façades and Storefronts

A good façade is the foundation of a good storefront. Historic facades give our neighborhoods their unique character and sense of history. New facades should compliment their neighboring buildings. Facades should be maintained and updated regularly to be in good repair.

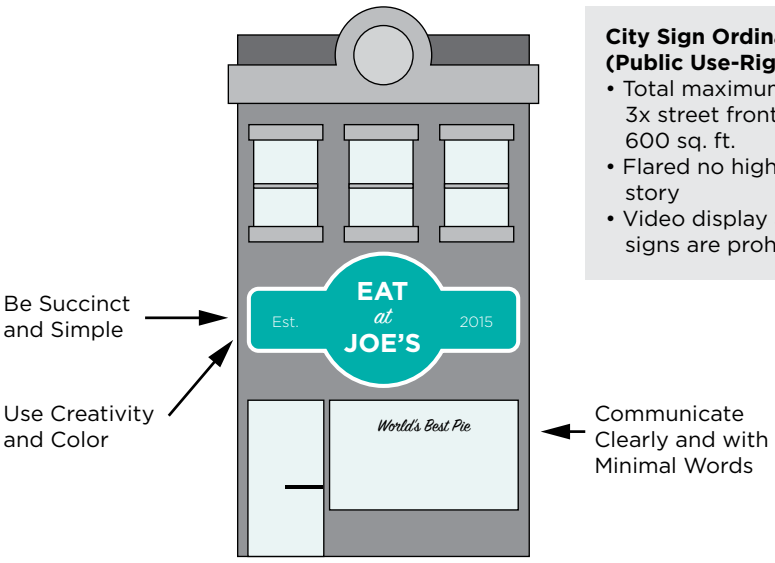


Recommendations:

- Use energy-efficient glass and windows.
- Consider electrical needs when updating the façade.
- Use masonry, terra cotta and quality tuck-pointing, and match mortar color with brick.
- Do not sandblast masonry; use other, more gentle cleaning methods.
- Maintain or restore original decorative features such as ornamental masonry, ceramic title, pressed metal, wrought iron work, limestone, among others. Do not obscure decorative details with changes to your building or signage.
- Use original wall materials whenever possible. Avoid dry-vit, imitation stucco, plastic or metal siding, or other "false front" treatments. If walls have these treatments, remove them and restore or replace the original materials.
- When masonry or decorative features cannot be restored, they should be replaced to match the originals in terms of size, color, finish, texture, and material.
- Keep or replace transoms (windows above a door or recessed entrance) and bulkheads (the low wall area under the storefront window).

Signage

Well-designed signs make a strong first impression and can be a creative demonstration of business character. Signs should clearly communicate the name and identity of the business in a few words without obscuring windows or covering architectural details of the building. The sign should also reflect or compliment the common styles of signage in the area.



City Sign Ordinance Regulations (Public Use-Right of Way):

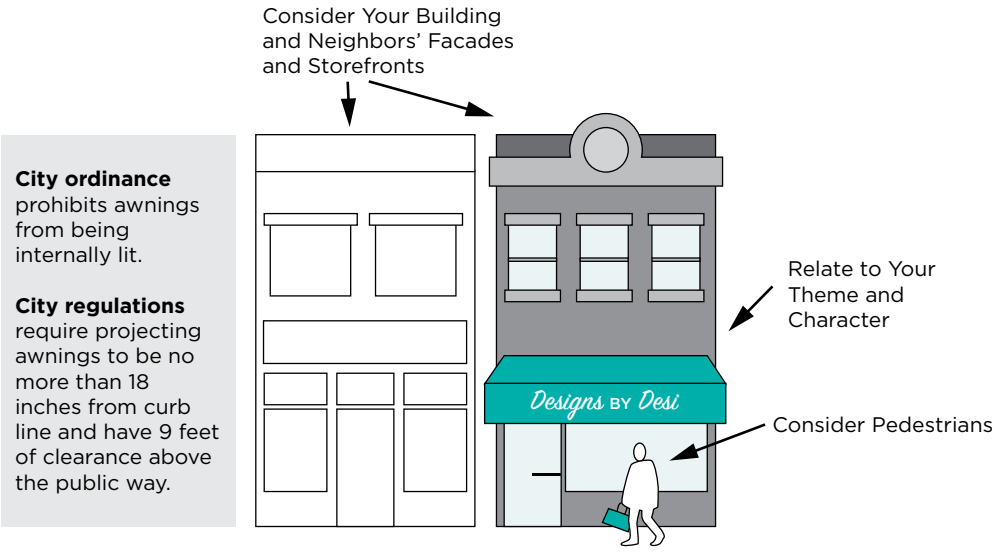
- Total maximum sign area of 3x street frontage, up to 600 sq. ft.
- Flared no higher than second story
- Video display and flashing signs are prohibited

Recommendations:

- Remove nonfunctioning signs.
- Place flat signs above the store's windows.
- Reuse and restore historic signs.
- Use materials consistent and compatible with those found on building.
- The size, shape and style of signage should be similar or compliment surrounding uses.
- Avoid any backlit signs or light box signs, flashing lights, internally lit channel letter signs, LED displays, or digital light boards, especially in pedestrian districts.
- Neon lights will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

Awnings

Awnings can shelter customers, merchandise, and storefront windows from direct sunlight. They also provide space for signage, welcome customers, help to visually define the width of an individual store and can contribute to business identity. Awnings should be complimentary in color, design and profile and should not cover distinctive architectural details of the building.



City ordinance prohibits awnings from being internally lit.

City regulations require projecting awnings to be no more than 18 inches from curb line and have 9 feet of clearance above the public way.

Recommendations:

- Keep it simple.
- Use minimal words and information.
- Awning material should be canvas or fabric-like, not plastic.
- Use a straight awning, not curved, with signage on valence
- Awning should extend at least 30"+ from the building.
- Keep sides of awnings open.
- Don't use too much white or light colors, which can get dirty easily.

Window Displays

Storefront windows are very important for most retail and service businesses. Transparent storefronts assure both surveillance of the street and sidewalk and create an inviting pedestrian experience. Large spans of solid wall area reduce the opportunity to display goods and services to passing customers, are uninviting for pedestrians, and provide a tempting surface for graffiti.

City Ordinance for Pedestrian Streets:

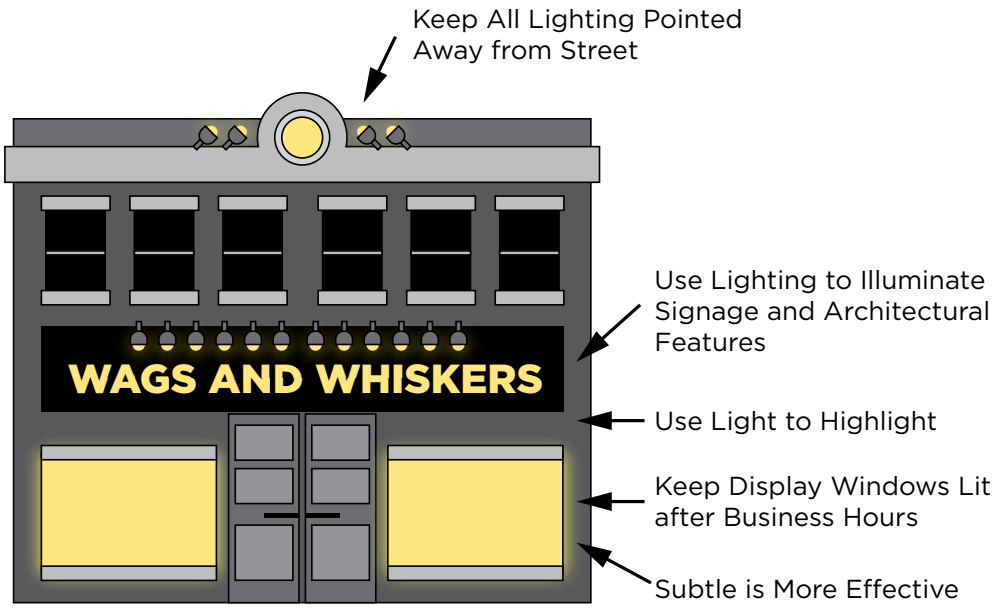
- A minimum of 60% of the street-facing building façade between 4 feet and 10 feet in height must be comprised of clear, non-reflective windows that allow views of indoor commercial space or product display areas.
- The bottom of any window or product display window used to satisfy this requirement may not be more than 4.5 feet above the adjacent sidewalk. Product display windows used to satisfy these requirements must have a minimum height of 4 feet and be internally lighted.

Recommendations:

- Keep window signage to a minimum.
- Allow for viewing into store from the sidewalk and the street.
- Maintain overall historic pattern of windows and columns.
- Restore windows to original size and configuration if they have been covered or altered.
- Use clear glass and energy-efficient insulated windows.
- Keep or replace transoms (windows above a door or recessed entrance) and bulkheads (the low wall area under the storefront window).
- Do not add bulkheads more than 24 inches high.
- Avoid security grills and bars.

Exterior Lighting and Landscaping

Lighting systems provide needed visibility for storefronts, drawing attention to key functional or aesthetic elements such as doorways, windows, signage, or architectural details. Landscaping, including window boxes and planters, can enhance the pedestrian experience as well as provide separation from the street for outside seating areas.



Recommendations:

- Use of energy efficient LED lighting instead of sodium and mercury vapor lights or fluorescent strip lights.
- Using lighting strategically to feature signage and architectural elements instead of washing entire storefront in bright light.
- Use of inconspicuous light fixtures.
- Avoid back-lit signage and flashing or blinking lights.
- Refer to the **Chicago Landscape Ordinance** for more information.

Permits and Zoning

City of Chicago Zoning Ordinance

Available at www.cityofchicago.org

- Sign Regulations: Ch. 17-12
- Awning Regulations: Ch. 17-12
- Storefront Window Displays: Ch.17-3
- Lighting and Landscaping: Ch. 17-11/12

City of Chicago Permit Information

Building and Electrical Permits

The City of Chicago requires building permits for most repair work and additions or alterations to a building. Replacing storefront windows and performing masonry maintenance on your building are examples of work that require building permits. For more extensive renovations or additions, applicants may be required to submit architectural plans. Electrical works, such as exterior light fixtures or neon signs also require electrical permits from the City of Chicago. Building and electrical permits are issued by:

City of Chicago Department of Buildings

City Hall, Room 900
121 N. LaSalle St.,
Phone: (312) 744-3449
Website: **www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/bldgs.html**

Signs and Awnings

Awnings, signs, benches, landscaping, sidewalk cafes, and canopies that project over the public right-of-way require Public Way Use permit from the City of Chicago. Please allow at least 90 days to receive a Public Way Use permit. Permits will need to be signed by the local Alderman. Permits are issued by:

Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection – Public Way Use Unit

City Hall, Room 800
121 N LaSalle St.
Phone: (312) 744-6060
Website: **www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/bacp/provdrs/public_way.html**

Barricade Permits

Many construction projects that include a barricade along the public right-of-way will be required to have a permit. Barricade permits are issued by:

Department of Transportation

City Hall, Room 905
121 N. LaSalle St.
Phone: (312) 744-4652.
Website: **www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/cdot/provdrs/construction_information.html**

Financing

Clark Street Special Service Area Façade Rebate Program

The Clark Street Special Service Area (SSA) #23 funds rebates to qualified façade, signage, and awning projects for business and property owners within the boundaries of SSA #23.

- The Clark Street SSA includes all properties fronting Clark Street from Armitage Avenue on the south to Diversey Parkway on the north, as well as all properties on the south side of Diversey Parkway from Orchard Street on the west to Lakeview Avenue on the east.
- Applications must be approved prior to beginning the project. If construction or other work on a project has begun, the project will not be eligible for a rebate.
- Projects must follow the guidelines presented in this document and are subject to committee review.
- Find out more information at **VisitClarkStreet.com/FacadeRebate**

Lincoln Avenue Special Service Area Façade Rebate Program

The Lincoln Avenue Special Service Area (SSA) #35 funds rebates to qualified façade improvement projects for business and property owners within the boundaries of SSA #35.

Visit **lincolnparkchamber.com** for more details.

Acknowledgements

Many of the items within this document come from the City Of Chicago's **Guidelines for Commercial, Industrial and Mixed Use Buildings**.

Special thanks to Thom Greene of Greene & Proppe Design, Inc. and PLACE Consulting. This guide was designed by Andiamo Creative.

Part of the funding for the development of this guide was provided by the Clark Street Special Service Area (SSA #23).

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