



HISTORIC REVIEW COMMISSION OF PITTSBURGH

DESIGN GUIDELINES: SECURITY DEVICES FOR STOREFRONTS

A. The Problem

The problem of security devices for storefronts in historic districts arises mainly because commercial buildings and storefronts were not built with security devices in the past. In fact, the principal goal in the design of storefronts was always to open the display area up with as much glass as possible, in order to display merchandise and to bring as much natural light as possible into the store. A review of many old photographs of commercial buildings shows that storefronts were not fitted with security devices, except in rare instances when an entryway was closed off with a scissors-type gate.

This means that the installation of security devices on the outside of a storefront is not justifiable by historic precedent. Exterior security devices also conflict with the traditional design of storefronts, by imposing a large metallic device on the facade, and they contradict their traditional open character. Many security devices are not well maintained, and so become eyesores, and they impart an image of insecurity far in excess of the problem that they are supposed to correct.

B. Historic Review Commission Policy

The Historic Review Commission *will not* approve the installation of exterior security devices in the City's historic districts. If the owner of the property believes that it is necessary to install a security device, then the Commission urges the owner to install such a device on the inside of the storefront.

Such an installation avoids the problem of conflict with the exterior facade design; it reduces the impact on the visual image of the street; it does not impose the visual costs of security devices on the public; and it is no longer in the jurisdiction of the Commission (which reviews only exterior features).

The only exceptions to this policy are those few cases where the physical layout of the store and storefront are so constrained or unusual that, in the Commission's opinion, a security device can only be installed on the outside.

C. Types of Security Devices

1. There are basically five kinds of security devices for use in storefronts: strengthened glass; electronic alarms; fixed metal grilles or "fences"; side-mounted grilles or gates; and overhead-mounted grilles or gates. Of these, the first two are not controversial, since they do not affect the appearance of the storefront or the building. The last three kinds of devices can be installed either inside the storefront windows, or outside the windows on the facade of the building:
 - a. Fixed metal grilles: Open metal grilles, constructed like ornamental iron fences, can be installed across a display window. They tend to produce a "caged" look. They can be fixed in place, or they can be manufactured as panels that can be dismantled and stored away during business hours, and reassembled afterward.
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- b. Side-mounted grilles or gates: These devices include “scissors”-type gates and side-coiling open metal grilles. The scissors-type gate was the principal product used in the recent past, so it has certain validity due to its age. The metal grilles are often used today in shopping malls and in service windows. Their open character does not block merchandise displays, and their flexibility allows them to be fitted to curved (or otherwise problematic) windows.
 - c. Overhead-mounted grilles or gates: Overhead grilles and gates have become the common sort of security device installed in recent years, in part because of their regular use in shopping malls. Open grilles allow views of merchandise. A principal problem with overhead devices is the large size of the mechanical box into which the device rolls up.
 2. Examples of all three kinds of security devices can be seen installed on the outsides of storefronts in Downtown Pittsburgh and in the neighborhood commercial districts. However, there is no technical reason why these devices cannot be installed on the insides of storefronts, and, in fact, there are examples of their use inside storefronts across Pittsburgh.
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