Chapter 4

Awnings and Sidewalk Canopies

Awnings and sidewalk canopies have a long history of use at various types of buildings found throughout New York City. Many historic buildings with storefronts had awnings installed as a climate control measure to keep the sun out. They also allowed businesses to advertise. Other buildings had awnings installed over windows, doors, and porches, or sidewalk canopies installed at the main entrance for practical and decorative purposes. The historic uses and appearance of awnings and canopies in New York City are the basis for LPC’s rules for work involving these installations. (See LPC Rules, Section 2-12, available on our website at www.nyc.gov/landmarks.)
This chapter explains LPC’s rules for installation, replacement, and modification of awnings and sidewalk canopies. Our goal is to help you submit a fully completed permit application for work that conforms to the LPC Rules so you can get your permit more quickly.

In This Chapter, You Will Find:

Section A
How to Get Started

Section B
LPC Rules and Criteria

Awnings
– Installing Storefront Awnings
  Historic Districts
  Individual Landmarks
– Installing Residential Awnings

Sidewalk Canopies
– Installing Sidewalk Canopies

Section C
Technical Guidance and Resources

Glossary
Master Plans
Section A
How to Get Started

Before applying for your permit, you should:

Find Information about Your Building
This will help you determine how the LPC Rules apply.

What type of building is it?
Search for your building on the Discover NYC Landmarks map to determine how the LPC Rules apply to your specific building type.

Click on your building to find construction date, architect and style, building and landmark type, and a link to the LPC designation report with additional historical background.

What did the building look like?
Find historic tax photos from the 1940s and 1980s, available through the NYC Department of Records & Information Services NYC Municipal Archives Collections.

Check to See if the Work Requires a Permit
Maybe you don’t need a permit. A permit is not required for the following work types:

- Seasonal removal/reinstallation of awnings and sidewalk canopies
- Patching awnings and canopies in a matching material
- Maintaining/repairing hardware and frames
- Cleaning awning and sidewalk canopy material

Consider Establishing a Master Plan
Is this going to be the first of many projects?
If your building has many storefronts, you might want to consider establishing an awning master plan, which will allow you to do repetitive awning work incrementally over time.

Once you have a master plan, future applications can be quickly reviewed since specific work standards are established and approved. This type of permit generally does not expire. See Section C for more information.

Unsure whether your work requires a permit?
Contact LPC at 212-669-7817 or info@lpc.nyc.gov.
What You Will Need

A complete application requires all the materials listed below.

Required Application Materials

- An LPC Permit Application Form, filled out and signed by the property owner.
- Color photos of the entire building and close-ups of the storefront, entrance, window, or terrace that show the location of the proposed work and its context.
- Drawings:
  - Elevation, section, and/or side elevation of proposed awning or sidewalk canopy
  - Details of the awning or sidewalk canopy, and showing installation methods
- Color specifications / canvas samples.
- Material specifications / manufacturer cut sheets.
- Two sets of Department of Buildings (DOB) filing drawings if the proposed work requires a DOB permit.
  - All awnings and canopies must comply with the NYC Zoning Resolution, NYC Department of Transportation regulations, and the NYC Building Code

If LPC needs additional materials once your application is reviewed, you will receive a Materials Checklist from LPC staff.
The LPC Rules establish criteria that allow staff to review and approve proposals for certain types of work at landmark properties. Permit applications for work that meets the LPC Rules can be approved faster. If the work does not meet the rules, staff may suggest alternatives that do meet the rules — or your proposal may be presented to the LPC Commissioners for review at a public hearing. Staff can guide you through this process. Visit www.nyc.gov/landmarks for more information.

This section explains and illustrates the rules and criteria for the most common types of work involving awnings and sidewalk canopies. See LPC Rules, Section 2-12, for more information.
Awnings

Historically, awnings were typically made from cloth or canvas and featured a straight slope, a flexible skirt, and open sides. They were installed within a door, window opening, or storefront, depending on the type of building. The rules are different depending on whether you are installing an awning at a storefront or at a residential building, so be sure to read the appropriate section.

Installing Storefront Awnings

Many 19th and 20th century storefronts had awnings installed at transoms, at the tops of openings, or built into the storefront itself. Staff can approve awning installation at ground floor storefronts/display windows or second floor display windows. See Section A on how to determine landmark type.

Staff can approve storefront awnings that meet the following criteria:

Operation
Awnings can be fixed or retractable, unless the storefront was designed with an integral retractable awning housing.

With an integral retractable awning housing, the housing and mechanism must be restored or retrofitted and a new awning installed.

At individual landmarks, a fixed awning must have a “lean-to” frame with no connection between the top bar and the side bar that is perpendicular to the facade. The side bar must be round; the frame must have a natural gray metal or gray painted finish.

Installation
The awning must not obscure or damage significant building features, such as historic stained glass transoms or other decorative elements.

The awning must be installed at the top of the storefront opening or at the transom. If that is not possible, install it just above the opening.

Typical storefront awning location and dimensions.
The awning can be installed slightly above the top of the opening if:

- It would not obscure or detract from significant features.
- It would result in the lowest framed portion of the awning being less than eight feet above the sidewalk.

An existing roll-down security gate makes it impossible to install the awning at the top of the opening.

Awning framing must attach to the storefront framing or surround, avoiding historic or decorative features. Limit the number of framing elements and penetrations as much as possible.

Design
The awning must project at an angle and be proportional to the length, size, and slope of the storefront’s size and height. The length must not exceed the length of the storefront opening. Edges must closely align with the inside face of the storefront piers or wall.

The awning’s underside must be open, with minimal framing elements and no “ceiling.”

The lowest framed portion must be at least eight feet above the sidewalk; the lowest unframed portion, typically the skirt, must be at least seven feet above the sidewalk.

The awning must have an unframed skirt that is proportional to its height and size, but not larger than 12 inches. Lettering or graphics can be painted on the skirt only, not on the awning’s sloped portion, and must be proportional to the skirt’s height.

Material
The awning can be clad with matte-finished canvas or fabric of a similar texture.

Fabric must consist of a solid color or vertical stripes that harmonize with the building’s historic color palette. In most cases it is not required to match other awnings at the storefront. Avoid visually jarring colors and patterns.

Awnings that are “grandfathered” (present when the building received designation) but do not meet LPC Rules can be re-clad in matte-finished canvas or fabric of a similar texture, in a solid color or vertical stripes that harmonize with the historic color palette of the building.

Material
The awning can be clad with matte-finished canvas or fabric of a similar texture.

Fabric must consist of a solid color or vertical stripes that harmonize with the building’s historic color palette. In most cases it is not required to match other awnings at the storefront. Avoid visually jarring colors and patterns.

Awnings on second-story display windows are subject to the same criteria as awnings on ground-floor storefronts.

A retractable storefront awning installed at the top of the storefront infill within the opening.
Installing Residential Awnings

Many row houses, apartment buildings, and freestanding houses built in the 19th and 20th centuries had canvas awnings installed over windows, doors, and porches. Awnings were usually retractable or designed to be installed seasonally. They were often decorative, with a wider variety of colors, patterns, and designs than storefront awnings. Staff can approve residential awnings that meet the following criteria:

Operation
Awnings at windows, doors, and porches can be either fixed or retractable.

Location
Awnings should be installed at the tops of openings and the length should fit within the window/door opening. Window awnings should cover more than one opening.

Installation
Framing must attach to a window frame, door frame, or the porch, and avoid historic or decorative features. The number of framing elements and penetrations should be as limited as possible.

Awnings installed at terraces and setbacks above the ground floor can extend over more than one window or door opening as long as their depth does not exceed the depth of the terrace.

Design
The awning must project at an angle and be proportional in length, size, and slope to the size and height of the window, door, or porch opening.

Material
The awning must be clad only with a matte canvas or similar fabric, in a solid color or vertical stripes that harmonize with the building’s historic color palette. Avoid visually jarring colors and patterns.

Awning canopies that are “grandfathered” (present when the building received designation) but do not meet LPC Rules, or that were previously approved by the Commission, can be re-clad in matte-finished canvas or fabric of a similar texture, in a solid color or vertical stripes that harmonize with the historic color palette of the building.

At primary or visible secondary facades, the new awning must match the fabric color and pattern of existing awnings.
Sidewalk Canopies

Many larger residential buildings built in the 19th and 20th centuries had canvas sidewalk canopies installed at the main entrance. These canopies were usually installed after the building was built, and typically constructed of light-gauge metal tubing with canvas cladding that was removed seasonally or when not needed.

Installing Sidewalk Canopies

Staff can approve sidewalk canopies at apartment buildings, hotels, and buildings historically constructed with an accessory residential component, such as private clubs. Historic precedent may exist for a sidewalk canopy at your building or buildings of a similar type within the historic district. Staff can approve sidewalk canopies that meet the following criteria:

Installation
The canopy must not obscure or damage significant features.

The canopy frame can attach to the facade at mortar joints or plain masonry. Limit penetrations as much as possible.

The canopy must be installed within architectural features and frame the opening, except where installation within the opening would result in the lowest portion of the canopy being less than eight feet above the sidewalk or operation of the door would be
impeded. Overlap at the opening must be avoided, as possible.

**Canopy poles** must attach to non-historic paving when possible.

**Design**
Size and design must be consistent with canopies historically found at buildings of the same type.

**The canopy must be at least eight feet above the sidewalk,** with an open underside and no “ceiling.”

**The canopy must have a bowed profile,** or, if precedent exists, a profile that relates to the shape of the opening.

**The canopy’s front and sides can note the building or institutional name and address in numbers and letters less than 12 inches high,** plus a logo — provided the logo appears on the street-facing end of the canopy and is no more than four square feet.

**Material**
The canopy must be clad in matte canvas in a color that matches the historic color or does not detract from the building. It must have round metal poles with a painted or natural finish that is in keeping with the style and age of the building.

**Fixtures**
Small, simply designed light fixtures can be attached to the framing underneath the canopy. Cameras and heat lamps can also be installed, as long as they are only visible from directly beneath the canopy.
Section C
Technical Guidance and Resources

This section provides additional guidance and resources to help you understand LPC’s rules and criteria and submit the correct materials with your application.
Glossary

**Awning**
is a metal frame clad with fabric attached above or within an opening, or within an integral housing, at a window, door, porch, or storefront to provide protection from the weather.

**Bulkhead**
is the part of the storefront that forms a base for one or more display windows.

**Canopy**
is a metal frame clad with fabric that extends from a building entrance over the sidewalk to the curb, where it is supported on vertical posts.

**Display Window**
is the large glazed portion of the storefront infill, and the associated framing, above the bulkhead and below the transom, extending pier to pier. The display window is typically used for the display of goods and to provide daylight and visibility into the commercial space.

**Facade**
is the entire exterior face of a building.

**Fixed awning**
is an awning with a non-retractable metal frame clad with fabric.

**Historic Fabric**
is a building’s original or significant historic facade construction material or ornament, or fragments thereof.

**Lintel**
is the horizontal member or element above a door, window, or storefront opening.

**Pier**
is the exterior vertical member or element, usually of brick, stone, or metal, placed at intervals along a wall that typically separates storefront openings within a single building or defines a single storefront opening.

**Residential Awning**
is any awning on a residential building and any awning on a commercial or mixed-use building except for storefront awnings.

**Retractable Awning**
is an awning attached to a frame which allows it to be extended out or folded or rolled back tight against the building facade.

**Skirt**
is a bottom finishing piece of fabric that hangs from the lower edge of an awning.

**Storefront**
is the first or second story area of the facade that provides access or natural illumination into a space used for retail or other commercial purposes.

**Storefront Bay**
is the area of a storefront defined by and spanning two piers.

**Storefront Infill**
is the framing, glazing, and cladding contained within a storefront opening in the facade, including but not limited to display windows, bulkheads, and entranceways.

**Storefront Opening**
is the area of the facade between the piers and lintel which contains storefront infill. Steps and platforms in front of, and leading up to, an entry door are not part of the storefront opening.

**Storefront Surround**
is decorative elements or treatment on the facade around the storefront opening.

**Transom**
is the glazed area above a display window or door separated from the display window or door by a horizontal framing member (“the transom bar”). The glazing in the transom may be fixed or operable.
Master Plans

Master plans, which generally do not have an expiration date, allow you to perform repetitive awning work over time as finances or vacancies permit (See Section 2-02 of the LPC Rules). Master plans are more efficient because once approved, applications can be processed more quickly.

**Master plans can be approved at the staff level or by the Commission**, depending on whether the work meets the LPC Rules.

**Once established**, you can move forward with work covered by the master plan by submitting a completed application form to the Commission, describing the scope of work and stating that it conforms to master plan drawings and other documents.

**Staff reviews the application** and generally issues an Authorization to Proceed prior to commencement of work.