



FACADE IMPROVEMENT DESIGN GUIDE 2025



MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF
COMMERCE

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INTRODUCTION

This Facade Improvement Style Guide is designed to help downtown building owners in Ronan, MT invest wisely, confidently, and creatively to preserve and enhance our Main Street and commercial district. Written with guidance from a steering committee of community members, this handbook is a roadmap to help balance history, functionality, and modern needs for those looking to renovate or update their commercial facade.

The Importance and Benefits of Facade Improvements:

Facade improvements are a powerful tool for economic development, historic preservation, and community identity. In downtown Ronan, thoughtful design updates will not only attract new businesses and support existing ones, but also enhance the pedestrian experience and increase property values throughout our commercial district. Informed by the Ronan Downtown Master Plan and the Main Street Approach, these improvements serve broader goals: bolstering tourism and community patronage, supporting entrepreneurship, and reinforcing Ronan's distinct character.

The Key Benefits of Facade Improvements:

- *Economic Growth:* Enhanced storefronts increase foot traffic, support local businesses, and make downtown more attractive for private investment.
- *Community Engagement:* Improvements to downtown aesthetics build civic pride and support community-centered events and gathering spaces.
- *Public Safety:* CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles embedded in facade improvements reduce crime and improve perceptions of safety.
- *Energy Efficiency:* Upgraded windows, lighting, and materials lower long-term operational costs.

This handbook guides property and business owners through facade improvement elements, offering scalable options from low-cost upgrades to transformative renovations while aligning with Ronan's heritage and economic vision.

The Ronan Pilot Community Tourism Grant Program

Building a Thriving Rural Region through Placemaking, Downtown Revitalization, and Strategic Tourism Infrastructure

This guide was developed under the auspice of the Ronan Regional Pilot Community Tourism Grant Program (PCTGP). The PCTGP is a five-year grant program led by the Montana Department of Commerce and designed to help rural communities transform from “gateway” towns into tourism destinations. Through strategic investment, planning, and community-driven projects, the program empowers towns like Ronan to harness the economic benefits of tourism by elevating local assets, revitalizing downtowns, and promoting cultural identity.

The program is administered by *Mission West Community Development Partners* (MWCDP), in partnership with a steering committee of regional stakeholders and community members.

Goals of the Ronan Tourism Grant

- Transform regional communities from “Gateways” to “Destinations”
- Sustainable Downtown and Regional Revitalization
- Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development
- Regional Collaboration and Economic Growth in Lake, Sanders, Mineral Counties, & The Flathead Indian Reservation

www.ronantourismgrant.com

Mission West Community Development Partners

Mission West Community Development Partners is the Montana Department of Commerce's Regional Certified Economic Development Organization representing Lake, Sanders, and Mineral Counties, as well as the Flathead Indian Reservation. MWCDP is committed to improving the quality of life for all residents in the region by supporting local businesses, producers, and organizations through customized assistance and strategic collaboration.

www.missionwestcdp.org



Facade Improvement Grant Program

FIG Program Overview

The Facade Improvement Grant (FIG) Program is a sub grant initiative under the Ronan Pilot Community Tourism Grant Program (PCTGP) created to enhance the historic character and visual appeal of commercial properties in Ronan, MT. This program will provide matching grant funds for up to 5 eligible projects in the first year of the program (2025-2026). Applications will open July, 2025. The FIG grant can be used to match owner investment and/or low-interest financing options available through the Tourism Development & Enhancement Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) administered by Mission West Community Development Partners (MWCDP). If successful, additional funding opportunities will open up in years 2-5 (2026-2030) of the program.

Funding Structure & Grant Details

- **Grant Matching:** The FIG program offers an overall cap of \$50,000 in year one and will match owner investment on a one-to-one basis up to \$10,000. Larger grant amounts may be considered for projects with strong merit and depending on overall demand.
- **Complementary Financing:** Applicants may apply for additional funding through the Tourism Development RLF (low-interest loans from \$5,000 to \$250,000).
- **Eligibility:** Commercial properties located along Ronan's Downtown or in Ronan's designated commercial district.
- **Project Timeline:** All projects must be completed within 12 months of grant approval.

Objectives & Expected Impact

Facades should reflect the character & soul of community through quality and thoughtful improvements. With that in mind, the FIG program is intended to:

- *Increase Tourism & Economic Growth:* Improve the aesthetic appeal of Main Street, drawing more visitors and boosting local businesses through increased local patronage.
- *Promote Historic Preservation and Enhance Aesthetic Cohesion in Ronan's Downtown:* Encourage property owners to maintain and restore the historical integrity of their buildings, as well as meet the style guidelines set forth by the Ronan Downtown Revitalization Committee.
- *Encourage Investment:* Provide financial incentives to business owners to invest in property improvements.
- *Support Local Jobs:* Stimulate employment in construction, architecture, and related fields.

Facade Improvement Grant Program

Eligible Improvements

Projects must focus on the restoration, rehabilitation, and maintenance of permanent tourism-related assets. Eligible improvements include:

- Restoration of historic facades, including windows, doors, and cornices.
- Exterior painting and cleaning.
- Structural repairs to maintain building integrity.
- Signage upgrades that align with historic or community character.
- Storefront enhancements, including awnings and decorative lighting.
- Accessibility improvements, such as ramps and entryway modifications.
- Crime Mitigation Through Environmental Design (CPTED) improvements

Ineligible Uses

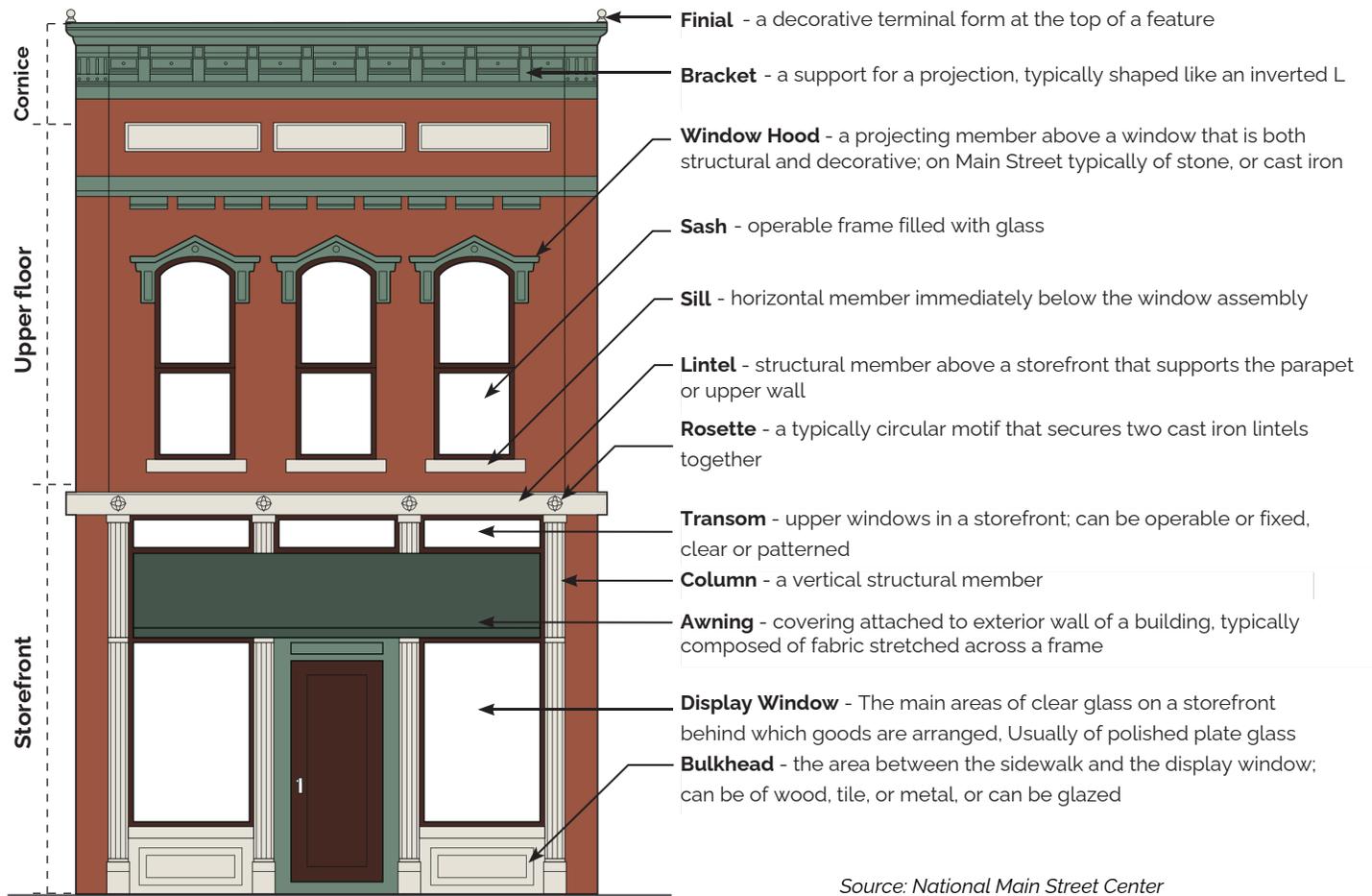
The following expenses are **not** eligible for funding:

- Routine maintenance (e.g., basic cleaning, small repairs).
- Interior renovations
- Non-permanent features (e.g., temporary signage, banners).
- Business operational costs (e.g., payroll, inventory).
- New construction or property acquisition
- Payment of debt or refinancing of existing debt
- Projects for businesses on federal or state debarment lists.

FIG Program Application & Approval Process

1. Pre-Application Meeting: Property owners meet with the MWCDP grant administrator to discuss project feasibility.
2. Formal Application Submission - Applicants provide:
 - a. Project scope and cost estimates.
 - b. Evidence of financial commitment (matching funds).
 - c. Design plans (if applicable).
 - d. A letter of support from a tourism organization or local business association.
3. Review & Approval - The review committee evaluates applications based on:
 - a. Alignment with program goals.
 - b. Historical significance of improvements.
 - c. Financial feasibility.
 - d. Tourism and economic development potential.
4. Funding Disbursement: Upon approval, funds are distributed on a reimbursement basis.

ANATOMY OF A MAIN STREET BUILDING



Source: National Main Street Center

Good Design = Good Business

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's *Dollar & Sense* series found that:

- Commercial building improvements resulted in an increase in sales in the year after the improvements were made and sales improvements were sustained for several years
- Sales increases exceeded increases in local taxes
- The improvements attracted new businesses and shoppers to the target area
- Participants were often motivated to make additional improvements (such as to interior spaces or product lines)
- Owners/tenants of properties and businesses in surrounding areas were motivated to make improvements
- 70% of first-time sales are generated by customers drawn inside by a building's appealing exterior

NTHP Dollars & Sense #12: An Analysis of the Economic Impact of Physical Improvements on Retail Sales
(<https://plannersweb.com/2013/10/how-facade-improvement-programs/>)

The 3 Goals of Facade Design

PEDESTRIAN SCALE

Design that encourages pedestrian activity.

- Human-scaled windows, doors, signs, lighting, awnings, & other architectural elements
- Eliminate exterior bars or gates on doors and windows in favor of night security roller doors
- Having outdoor seating/activities that can be seen from the street
- Tactile and visually friendly building materials
- Weather protection via awnings and overhangs

TRANSPARENCY

Design that promotes interior visibility.

- Having window and door openings that face the public right of way and allow pedestrians to see inside the structure. Avoid tinted or reflective windows or films
- Welcoming window displays that invite people to enter the business

CONTEXT

Design that compliments the surrounding area.

- On traditional buildings, architectural work may include adding or restoring the bulkhead, storefront window/doors, transoms, columns, or cornices.
- Historical brick should be restored through cleaning and repointing.
- Opening up windows and doors that may have been covered or not present

PEDESTRIAN SCALE



Human-scaled facades create a welcoming atmosphere and draw people inside the building.

TRANSPARENCY



Large, transparent windows paired with good lighting increases business visitation and improves the overall security of the building.

CONTEXT



Brick and traditional storefront windows and doors, transoms, and recessed entrance bring back the historical roots of this building.

BUILDING ELEMENTS

STOREFRONTS

Objective:

Facade updates should aim to promote vibrant, transparent, and pedestrian-friendly storefronts that reflect Ronan's small-town authenticity and historic roots.

General Recommendations:

- Storefronts should be aligned with the sidewalk
 - Windows and doors should be prominent and transparent
 - Bulkheads, window frames, and sign boards should be of quality materials and construction
 - Materials that cover original facade should be removed
 - Brick or stone preferred when possible
 - Recessed doors preferred when possible
- **Low-Cost:**
 - Clean and repaint exterior surfaces
 - Refinish and repaint existing trim and cornices
 - Add seasonal window displays and tasteful window decals
 - **Medium-Cost:**
 - Replace or repair bulkheads and window framing
 - Install new wood or aluminum-framing on storefront windows
 - Add architectural trim and new painted signage above entrances
 - Seasonal and/or fabric awnings
 - **Higher-Cost:**
 - Full storefront reconstruction based on historical patterns or your businesses brand
 - Integrate transom windows and recessed entryways
 - Architectural Awnings

What to Avoid:

- Tinted or mirrored glass
- Dark metal paneling
- Obstructed or blank window displays

EXAMPLES



WINDOWS

Objective:

Window updates should strive to maintain pedestrian proportions, allow for visibility and daylight, and support energy efficiency. Ground floor windows should be uncovered and support natural surveillance by allowing night viewing in and out of the business. Upper floor windows should be uncovered and have trim that compliments the overall design.

Recommendations:

- Create bulkheads, display windows and transoms
- Use transparent glass windows
- Update to energy efficient windows such as UV Argon efficient panes when possible
 - **Low-Cost:**
 - Clean and repair existing glass
 - Clean and repair existing trim
 - **Medium-Cost:**
 - Replace windows with historically scaled double-hung or fixed-pane units where architecturally appropriate
 - Install transom windows over doorways
 - **Higher-Cost:**
 - Restore historic window openings and decorative trim
 - Custom sized quality window units
 - Energy efficiency updates
 - Roll down security doors and grilles that match the general facade aesthetic

What to Avoid:

- Removing window openings or reducing transparency
- Tinted, filmed, or mirrored glass
- Mismatched replacement windows
- Vinyl windows
- Windows with fake mullions
- Inconsistent mixed-material trim
- Permanent bars, gates, or boarding over windows

EXAMPLES



Before



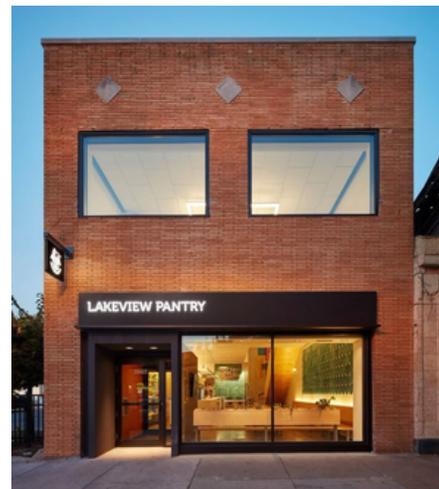
After



Before



After



DOORS

Objective:

To provide functional, welcoming, and accessible entrances that reinforce the character of each building. Doors should be ADA-compliant, oriented towards the sidewalk, well-lit, and scaled to the storefront. Repurposed and restored historical doors are encouraged.

Recommendations:

- Replace solid doors with ones that include transparent sections
- Orient door towards sidewalk
- Accessible, friendly hardware
- Fresh, inviting accent colors

- **Low-Cost:**
 - Paint and refinish door panels
 - Replace outdated hardware
 - New door hardware
- **Medium-Cost:**
 - Replace non-historic doors with salvaged or new doors to match historic or brand profile of wood or other compatible materials
 - Install sidelights or transom windows for added visibility
- **Higher-Cost:**
 - Fully restore or custom fabricate doors to match or integrate with new windows for historic restoration or brand profile cohesion
 - Integrate accessibility upgrades and vestibules

What to Avoid:

- Aluminum or plywood doors
- Opaque materials that obscure entry visibility
- Black door handle hardware that heats up in direct sunlight

EXAMPLES



AWNINGS & CANOPIES

Objective:

To provide protection from the elements and to add visual interest while enhancing storefront identity. Canopies should complement the building's materials and/or colors, and should typically be mounted between the ground floor windows and the signage band.

Recommendations:

- Awnings should be appropriately scaled to the storefront
- Keep awnings fresh with regular cleaning
- Rod supported or cantilevered horizontal metal awnings are encouraged when possible
- Standard sloped fabric awnings, whether fixed or retractable, are appropriate for most buildings
 - **Low-Cost:**
 - Clean or replace canvas fabric on existing frames
 - Add branding or logos to existing awnings
 - **Medium-Cost:**
 - Install retractable or fixed awnings in canvas or metal
 - Coordinate awnings across multiple storefronts for cohesion
 - **Higher-Cost:**
 - Custom-designed steel or wood canopies

What to Avoid:

- Illuminated awnings or vinyl canopies
- Overly large structures that obscure architectural details
- Awnings too heavy for the facade structure to support

EXAMPLES



LIGHTING

Objective:

To enhance visual appeal, highlight architectural features, and improve nighttime safety. Lighting elements should be shielded, targeted, and downward pointing with warm color temperatures below 3200K when possible.

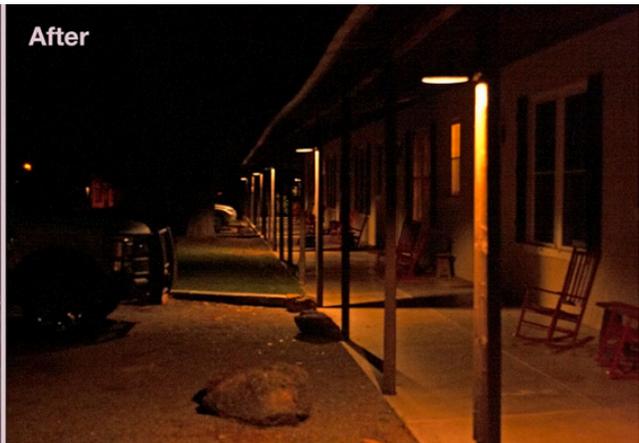
Recommendations:

- Wall sconces, barn lights, goose-necks, downward wall wash lighting, fully recessed downlights, and cove integral lighting are all encouraged. Dimmable LED fixtures that can be temperature adjusted are preferred. More exterior fixtures with soft light rather than single sources with bright or harsh light should be prioritized.
 - **Low-Cost:**
 - Install downward-facing LED bulbs in existing fixtures
 - Add solar-powered path lights
 - **Medium-Cost:**
 - Replace outdated fixtures with pedestrian-scale gooseneck or barn lights
 - Illuminate entryways and signage with LED accent lighting
 - **Higher-Cost:**
 - Full architectural lighting systems with timed or motion-activated controls and energy saving design

What to Avoid:

- Overly bright, unshielded and non-targeted floodlights
- Lighting that causes glare, high contrast shadows, or spills into neighboring properties
- Exterior lamps or bulbs with daylight or blue light color temperatures (3700K or above)
- Mixed color temperature lights/bulbs/lamps on the facade interior

EXAMPLES



SIGNAGE

Objective:

To create legible, appropriately scaled, and aesthetically integrated signage that supports business identity and historic continuity. Signage should be coordinated with storefront proportions and overall building style.

Recommendations:

- Traditional sign materials (wood, metal, painted letters) are encouraged
 - Limit the number of signs to avoid visual clutter
 - Align signage perpendicular to street for optimal visibility
 - True and/or traditional neon lettering for historical or brand profile identity
- **Low-Cost:**
 - Painted window lettering or hanging blade signs
 - **Medium-Cost:**
 - Projecting signs mounted above entry
 - Exterior wall signs with raised letters or backlit effects
 - **Higher-Cost:**
 - Custom-carved wood, metal, or integrated facade signage

What to Avoid:

- Flashing and/or internally illuminated box signs
- Long-term use of plastic and/or temporary banners
- Signs that obstruct significant architectural details
- LED neon signage with color temperature above 3700K

MATERIALS

Objective:

To preserve and use durable, locally compatible materials that respect the building's era and construction quality. Prioritize repair over replacement. When replacement is necessary, use materials that replicate the original material in appearance and texture. Building colors are left to the discretion of the owner/designer but color schemes should aim to fit the context of surrounding buildings, historical identity, or brand profile.

Recommendations:

- Brick or masonry veneer preferred for aesthetic appeal, fireproofing, and longevity
- For historical renovations consider fiber cement board as siding, panels, boards and batten, shakes, trim are low maintenance, can be prefinished, add fire shielding, and are primed to paint
- Replicate traditional details in a modern material
 - **Low-Cost:**
 - Repaint faded surfaces
 - **Medium-Cost:**
 - Repoint masonry
 - Replace missing or broken cladding with matching material
 - **Higher-Cost:**
 - Restore historic material (brick, wood, stone)
 - Upgrade to a contemporary facade
 - Add energy efficient insulation and design upgrades
 - Address structural problems for long-term viability

What to Avoid:

- Non-durable or incompatible modern materials
- Covering original facades with false facades

SITE ELEMENTS

Objective:

To create a safe, welcoming, and visually appealing Main Street through coordinated landscaping, hardscaping, and building infrastructure. Site design should boost curb appeal and community value with functional elements like greenery, seating, screening, and other aesthetic enhancements.

Recommendations:

- Add landscaping, decorative paving, seating, and site furniture.
 - Convert unused paved or graveled areas into landscaped features
 - Install rain gardens, bioswales, and planters at downspouts
 - Maintain a clear pedestrian path
 - Screen unattractive uses (e.g., dumpsters) from view
 - Use low walls, decorative fencing (not chain-link), and landscaping
 - Blend outdoor spaces and/or enclosures with building architecture when possible
 - Coordinate improvements with adjacent properties
 - Ensure visibility for drivers by maintaining sightlines
 - Include benches, trash receptacles, planters, bollards, and decorative paving
 - Ensure furniture is visually and functionally appropriate
 - Avoid visual and physical clutter and prioritize accessibility
 - Include painted furniture, colorful site elements, sculptures, and water features.
 - Combine public art with functional elements (e.g., benches, planters)
 - Use complementary colors for vibrancy and cohesion
- **Low-Cost:**
 - Flower pots, sandwich boards, holiday decor
 - **Medium-Cost:**
 - Bike racks, benches, branded trash receptacles
 - **Higher-Cost:**
 - Permanent art installations or sculptural planters

What to Avoid:

- Obstruction of pedestrian pathways
- Non-matching or conflicting street furnishings
- Improperly zoned or unpermitted site elements

HISTORICAL REFERENCES



Gaiety Theatre, Ronan, MT 1919 Photo By: Fred Eckley

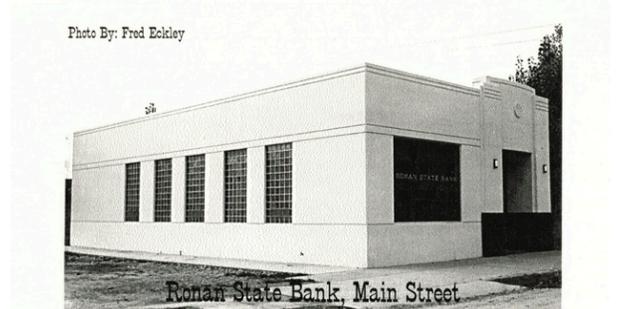


Photo By: Fred Eckley

Ronan State Bank, Main Street

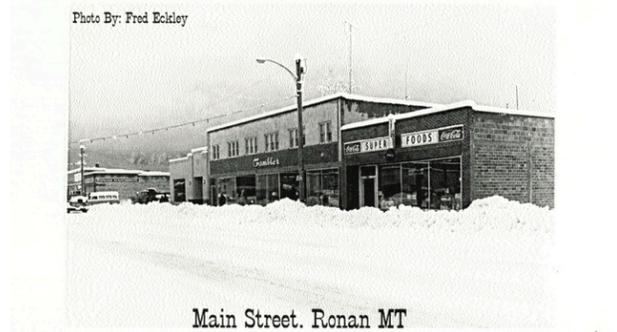


Photo By: Fred Eckley

Main Street, Ronan MT



Photo By: Fred Eckley

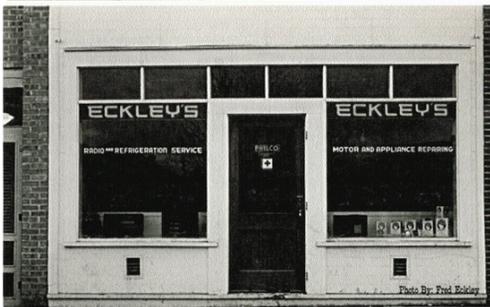
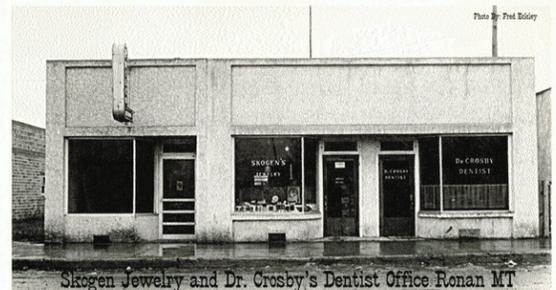


Photo By: Fred Eckley



Stop n Shop, Main Street Ronan

Photo By: Fred Eckley



Skogen Jewelry and Dr. Crosby's Dentist Office Ronan MT

BRANDING

BRANDING THEMES

Ronan Brand Mission Statement

Rooted in the rich history and diverse cultures, Ronan seeks to weave together the stories of the Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Kootenai peoples, the homesteaders, and all who call this land home. Inspired by the steady flow of Spring Creek, the turquoise waters of the Flathead River, and the towering Mission Mountains, we envision a vibrant tapestry of art and culture that honors our past, celebrates our present, and inspires our future. Through color, creativity, music, connectivity and collaboration, we aim to beautify our town and multiply opportunities for gathering while deepening and reinforcing our connection to the land, each other, and visitors.

Ronan Themes

Spring Waters
"Turn West"
Gathering
Connectivity
Mission Mountains
Center City

Ronan Brands



RONAN CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE



BRANDING CONSIDERATIONS

Use Branding to Guide Public Art & Enhance Wayfinding

Visibility

- *Strategic Placement:* Position signs at critical decision points such as intersections and entrances to facilitate navigation.
- *Sightlines:* Ensure signs are within the natural line of sight for both standing adults and wheelchair users to enhance accessibility.

Readability

- *Typography:* Utilize clear, legible fonts that are appropriately sized for viewing from a distance.
- *Contrast:* Employ high-contrast color schemes between text and background to improve legibility, especially in low-light conditions.

Simplicity

- *Concise Messaging:* Present information succinctly to avoid overwhelming users.
- *Universal Symbols:* Incorporate widely recognized icons to transcend language barriers and aid quick comprehension.

Consistency

- *Design Uniformity:* Maintain a cohesive visual language across all signage, including consistent use of colors, fonts, and symbols.
- *Standardization:* Adopt uniform sign formats for specific types of information (e.g., directions, restrooms) to facilitate quick recognition.

What to Avoid:

- *Inconsistent Design Elements:* Disparities in design can confuse users and weaken brand identity.
- *Poor Placement and Visibility:* Signs that are obscured or placed at inappropriate heights can be ineffective.
- *Complex or Unfamiliar Symbols:* Using non-standard icons can hinder quick understanding.
- *Outdated Information:* Failing to update signage to reflect current layouts or information can mislead users.
- *Neglecting Design Aesthetics:* Overlooking the visual appeal of signage can detract from the user experience and brand perception.

RESOURCES

CODES & REGULATIONS

When planning a development project in Ronan, Montana, it is essential to adhere to the city's zoning regulations. These regulations encompass requirements related to yard dimensions, building setbacks, and other pertinent provisions. Additionally, considerations such as signage, awnings, and similar features are governed by supplemental regulations. In certain cases, zoning changes or variances may be necessary to achieve appropriate setbacks or to accommodate specific project needs.

For detailed information on Ronan's zoning ordinances, please refer to the official city ordinances available here:

<https://cityofronan.org/your-government/ordinances/ronan-mt-ordinances/>

or

https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/ronanmt/latest/ronan_mt/0-0-0-1

City of Ronan Building Department:

<https://cityofronan.org/departments/planning-department/>

Lake County Zoning Codes:

<https://www.lakemt.gov/232/Zoning>

ORGANIZATIONAL MATERIALS

For access to

The Ronan Downtown Master Plan

&

MWCDP's

Regional Community Economic Development Strategy

Visit:

<https://www.missionwestcdp.org/about-us/organization-materials>

TOOLS & GUIDES

[Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design](#)

[Main Street America Design](#)

[Beyond the Facade: Layering Downtown Spillover Investment](#)

[Dark Sky Design Resources for Responsible Lighting Practices](#)

FACADE GRANT INFO AND APPLICATION

<https://ronantourismgrant.com/facade-2025/>

Reach out for more information, connection to architectural resources, or additional assistance!

CONTACT INFORMATION

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