

Bringing Storefronts Back to Life

Seven Steps to Unstick Your district

for Houston-Galveston Area Council

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4-22-2025

About me (Rik Adamski)

- Masters in Urban Planning - University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC)
- Before starting my company - worked for City of Fort Worth and national groups such as American Planning Association, Congress for the New Urbanism, and Center for Neighborhood Technology
- Developed a focus on bottom-up planning, centered around real world results
- My goal: helping places get unstuck



My firm (ASH+LIME)

- A Dallas-based planning and consulting firm, founded in 2013
- Long term planning...but started with on what to do in 1-6 months
- Work in more than 30 communities in Texas - in rural, small town, suburban, and big city contexts
- What we've learned: every place has something to work with. You just need the right spark, and the right tools.



ASH+LIME

Storefronts at the heart of our work

- Working on the downtown and neighborhood level brings us into constant contact with storefronts
- Small storefront improvements have led to big long-term changes
- In all of our projects, storefronts have been key



The Storefront Renaissance League

- I co-founded the League in August/2024
- It brings together people with deep real-world experience in small business support, incremental development, creative storefront design, and popup activation.
- We're not a big firm or a fixed team. We help you break the logjam, find early wins, and build momentum that sticks.
- We work with groups such as Storefront Mastery, Crowdfund Better, Zero Empty Spaces, SmartStart—only when it's a good fit.

Storefront
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L E A G U E

Every Town Needs A Superhero

Why Focus on Storefronts?

- They're the front line between public life and private investment
- The place where one person can make visible change, quickly
- Home to the “mom and pop” businesses which are the soul of the community
- They “advertise” whether your town is open to business - or out of ideas
- **They say more about your town than any plan ever will!**



Why a League?

- Underperforming or overlooked storefronts are holding downtowns and neighborhoods back
- Fixing them isn't one skill—it takes design, policy, coaching, activation, and more
- We bring in the best specialists we know, based on what each place actually needs
- We know the tools—but you know your community
- We help *you* fix your place—with the right tools, at the right time

Corsicana, the Birthplace of Abundant American Energy



Parks such as the one in the image, built from salvaged materials, signal innovation, grit, and sustainability.

Corsicana, Texas, The Birthplace Of Abundant American Energy. Corsicana ignited the country's oil boom, fueling the industrial age. The story of oil has always been about renewal and power, much like what we envision for Corsicana's downtown today.

Themed museum-like displays can help educate the users and build up the "Birthplace" brand.



Our approach in Corsicana combines storefront revitalization strategies with recommendations for active gathering spaces. By salvaging and repurposing materials like decommissioned oil rigs, we honor Corsicana's legacy. Benches, window displays, and parklets become symbols of innovation and grit, recharging the town with spaces that are vibrant, fun, and welcoming. We celebrate the heart of Corsicana by celebrating its energy-based past and its lively, inclusive future.



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Corsicana's numerous blocks of downtown storefronts reflect the historic prosperity of this exceptional downtown. The League's assessment has identified a number of opportunity sites for improved storefront conditions, with proposed redesigns to illustrate potential improvements. To supplement this, we are recommending various policies in categories including historic preservation, pop-up retail, code enforcement, and facade improvements.

Step One: Take a Storefront Inventory

- Ownership
- Contact Info
- Square footage
- Type of use (retail, office, storage, etc.)
- Vacancy status
- Lease Terms and Prices
- Facade/Storefront Condition (ranked 1-4)
- Code Violations
- ADA Accessibility
- Evening lighting
- Owner willingness to allow pop ups, improve space, etc.
- Investments Needed

Step Two: Assess what you have

- Calculate vacancy rate
- Break down uses (retail, food, office, personal services, storage, etc.)
- Rank storefront quality (1-4)
- Estimate investment needs
- Typical lease prices per square foot
- *Optional: mapping exercise to visualize conditions*

Step Three: Identify Opportunity Sites

- Vacant - Move-in ready: Vacant, C.O. in place or close
- Needs coaching: Vacant but awkward (e.g. too large, needs rethinking)
- Underused: Occupied but low-impact or poorly configured
- Untapped storefront potential: Solid business—room to improve display, facade, or lighting
- Display-ready: Vacant, but ideal for window displays or activation
- **Keystone factor:** Property and business owners who are ready to engage

Step Four: Review the regulations

- Zoning and overlays
- Signage and awning regulations
- Temporary Certificates of Occupancy
- Building codes
- Parking requirements
- “Red tape” around change of use or occupancy

Step Five: Evaluate the policies

- Code enforcement: active, inconsistent, or absent?
- Small business support: Main Street, SBDC, chambers
- TIFs, PIDs, and other funding tools
- Facade grants, window display programs
- Event-based retail tie-ins or popup support
- Alignment across departments (or lack of it)

Step Six: Strengthen the District

- Expand or improve small business support (coaching, capital, signage help)
- Simplify permitting and regulations where appropriate
- Coordinate pop-ups and storefront activation
- Make incentives visible and usable (grants, display programs, startup funds)
- Align across city departments and partners (EDC, Main Street, code enforcement, SBDC)

Step Seven: Focus on Select Opportunity Sites

- Identify 1–3 storefronts with high potential and public visibility
- Look for the keystone factor: property or business owners who are ready to engage
- Use the tools that fit—coaching, facade improvements, design, pop-up activation, lease support
- Clear barriers, provide support, and make it work

Design Concepts: Existing Businesses



Storefront Designs: Vacant Buildings



Your next step: Get started this month

- Pick a block. Walk it. Write down what you see.
- Identify one storefront that's close to ready.
- Talk to one owner who might be open to change.
- Choose one small barrier you could remove.

Thank you!

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