

## Case Study: Urbandale, Iowa

For more than a decade, this established Des Moines suburb has insisted on brick for its commercial construction. According to Paul Dekker, Urbandale's Director of Community development, the brick requirement was initiated by a council member who thought that concrete buildings were "too cold", while brick was perceived as "warm" and considered a "long-lasting, quality material."

Dekker was particularly pleased that the brick requirement provided an architectural context within which Urbandale could grow while maintaining its historical integrity. Dekker elaborates, "Brick provided the city with a definitive and understandable criteria which did not require a time-consuming architectural review process." While the City didn't have the time or staff to enforce a more complex architectural code, a requirement for brick was a fairly cut and dried rule to monitor.

Dekker adds that the brick requirement also helped the city get away from the generic look of "corporate architecture". Many chain retailers have moved into the area since the brick requirement has been in place and all have been able to easily adapt their signature looks to brick construction.

The City's architectural standards state that the buildings must include enough brick so that the average person would perceive the building as brick. According to Dekker, this usually means more than 50%, but in many cases entirely brick.

Benefits for any city considering a brick requirement include an increased tax base. For example, the brick buildings on Urbandale's 100th Street carry a higher valuation than their metal neighbors and owners are able to charge higher rental rates. He notes that even in zones that are not included in the brick requirement, they are seeing more brick buildings, simply because the bar has been raised and people want their buildings to be comparable to others in town.

When asked about trends in materials, Dekker mentioned that they are seeing more concrete panel and thin brick being proposed. Neither currently meets the City's standards, he adds, "because there is no evidence that they age well."

### JUST THE FACTS

City:	Urbandale, Iowa
Population:	29,000
Founded:	1917
Masonry Requirement:	Commercial = 50%+ Brick; Multi-Family = 30% Brick
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