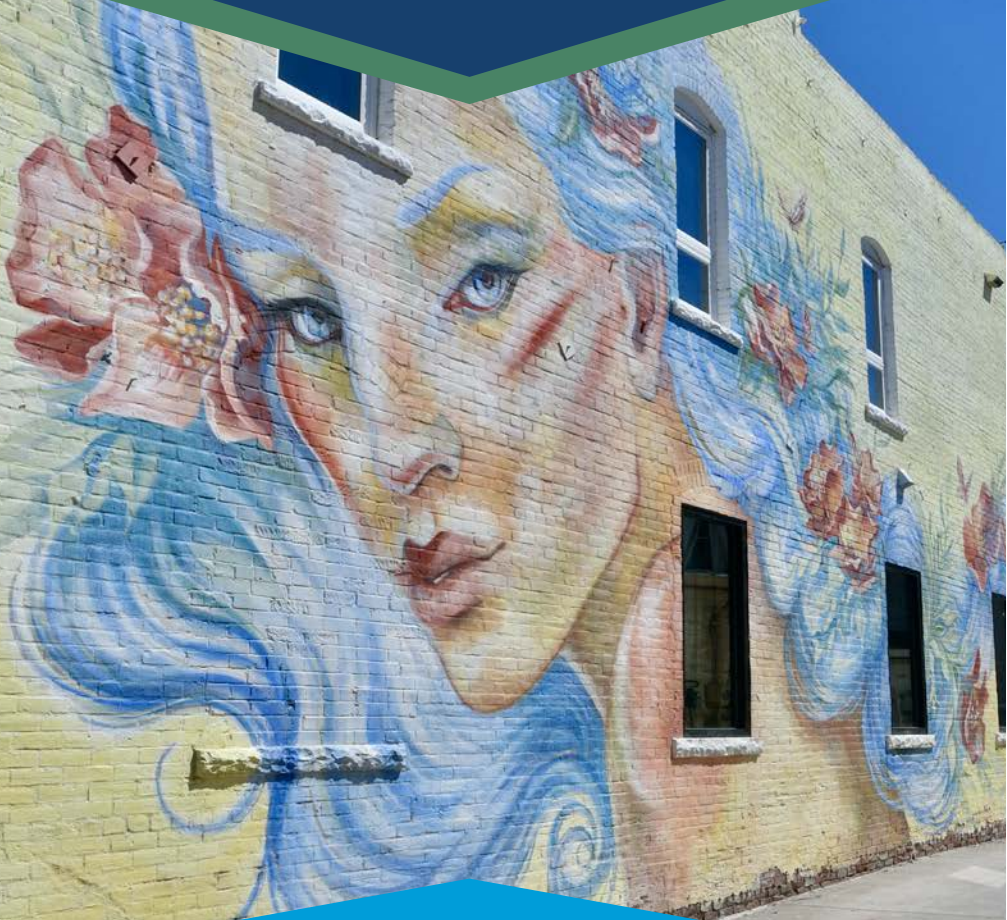




DEVELOPMENT SERVICES



A COLORFUL CONUNDRUM

Murals and Other Exterior
Paint Projects on Brick Buildings

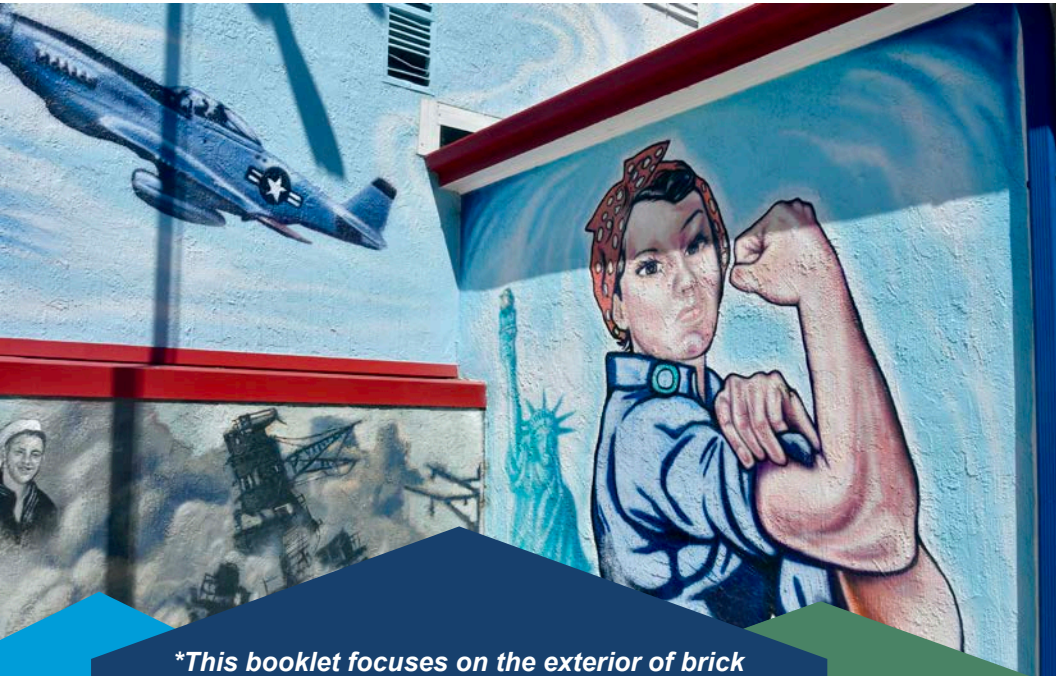


Introduction

Although painting your brick building might seem like an easy way to make your property stand out, the decision may come back to haunt you. Painting brick can be appropriate in some circumstances, but more often than not, painting brick is a significant financial risk that can be difficult to recover from.

If you are considering adding a pop of color to your brick/masonry building with a mural or another painted feature, there are some options for you to achieve your goals without painting on the brick, which could save you some headache, and some money, in the long run.

The intent of providing this information regarding painting murals on exterior walls is not meant to limit the size, quantity, or content of murals. The intent is to provide options that will allow murals or other art on buildings that do not permanently damage the integrity of the exterior wall surfaces.



****This booklet focuses on the exterior of brick buildings, but these principles apply to all exterior masonry walls, e.g., brick, stone, concrete, concrete block, stucco, etc.***

Here are four reasons why you should think twice before painting your brick building:

1

You could destroy the brick.

Bricks are naturally breathable and porous. Water enters the brick when it rains or snows on the exterior of your building, or when you're taking a shower on the inside of your building, and eventually evaporates. If brick is painted or sealed, water can get trapped in the brick. When the water freezes, it expands and stresses the brick. This can lead to some serious damage like crumbling and flaking brick faces falling off of your building. The only real way to fix bricks in this condition is to carve them out and replace them.

2

You could damage your building's structural integrity.

Painting brick can also impact your building's structural integrity – and you might not even know it's happening. The freeze-thaw cycles that damage brick also damage the mortar holding them in place. With the mortar joints hidden beneath the paint, you might not even notice structural issues until they become severe.



**What's the Big Deal about
Painting Brick?**



3

You could be camouflaging architectural features that make your building special.

Many brick buildings showcase masonry details that set them apart, such as decorative bond patterns, dentils, corbeling, dog tothing, and more. Particularly, historic masonry buildings tend to feature these decorative elements, which give the buildings their historic character. Painting your brick building visually washes out these architectural features, making your walls feel a lot less interesting.

It's hard to go back.

4

Painted brick is not maintenance free. In addition to normal wear and tear from weather and sun exposure, as the brick beneath paint is affected by trapped water, the paint on top chips and flakes away as well. After a few years of maintenance to your painted brick, you might decide you are done with it and want to remove the paint. Easier said than done. In addition to taking time and money, removing paint by sandblasting or chemical treatments can harm the integrity and appearance of the underlying brick. The least harmful way to remove paint from brick is to wait and let it deteriorate naturally or to gently scrape it away by hand.



Is it **EVER** okay to paint brick?

Yes! Some brick buildings were intended to be painted. In the United States, brick buildings constructed before the 1870s were very often made of a much softer, more porous type of material that needed to be protected from the elements by paint. The paints used on these buildings were natural, mineral-based paints, such as limewash or milk paint, which were breathable. By the end of the nineteenth century, machine-made bricks were the norm, and these new bricks were strong enough to withstand weather by themselves.

If your brick building is already painted, repainting or maintaining that paint, or painting a mural, may be an acceptable approach as well. Removing the paint “naturally” can take an impractical amount of time, and removing paint by other means, such as sandblasting, can itself damage the underlying brick. To properly remove paint on masonry, consult with a masonry paint removal expert.



Are murals an option for brick buildings?

Yes! There are several options you can use to put a mural on your unpainted brick building without painting directly on the surface of the brick. These alternative surfaces, such as aluminum composite panels or non-woven media fabric, can be painted elsewhere, like in the comfort of an artist's studio, then the mural can be attached to the building like a giant painting on a wall. The sealants used on murals, which can themselves cause damage to brick, can be applied to the mural "off-site" as well to ensure the mural stays vibrant and stands the test of time.

If you are attaching a panel to a historic brick building, be sure to drill into the mortar joint rather than the bricks themselves, which can be destroyed by the screws and can be weak anchor points.



Read about some options for safely applying a mural to a masonry building here:

[Painting Old Brick | City of Loveland](#)



Best practices for murals on historic buildings:

- Murals should be compatible with existing architecture and the area surrounding the proposed site.
- Murals should not obscure significant architectural elements of historic buildings, structures, or sites, including existing historic ghost signs.
- Murals should have a wall surface suitable to receive the proposed mural materials; the proposed materials should not cause unreasonable permanent damage to the historic cladding and should be appropriate for long-term use on the wall surface.
- Unless it is detrimental to the wall surface, murals should be sealed or otherwise maintained for their longevity and vibrancy.



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Beyond Murals

The heart of Loveland is art. In addition to the many beautiful murals on our buildings, community members have enlivened our streetscapes and buildings with other examples of local creativity. See examples like the one below here: [Painting Old Brick | City of Loveland \(lovgov.org\)](#)

Additional Resources and Bibliography:

- <https://www.lovelandpublicart.org/grants/>
- <https://downtownloveland.org/facade>
- “Mural Production: A Resource Handbook, 2nd Edition.” Mural Routes. 2014. <https://muralroutes.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/muralresourcehandbook.pdf>
- “Preservation by Prevention: Paint and Historic Brick.” Preservation by Prevention. 2009. <https://architecturaltrust.org/preservation-by-prevention-paint-and-historic-brick/>



Photo by Jenny Sparks, *Loveland Reporter Herald*.