

# DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR SIGNS

This chapter presents design guidelines for the design of signs. The design guidelines are organized into a series of relevant design topics. Within each category, individual policies and design guidelines are presented, which the City will use in determining the appropriateness of the work proposed.

Traditionally, a variety of signs were seen in the downtown. Five different types occurred:

- Small, freestanding signs mounted on a pole or post; located near the sidewalk because the primary structure or business was set-back from the street (e.g., an area with residential character); printed on both sides
- Medium-sized, square or rectangular shaped signs that projected from the building above the awnings or canopies; printed on both sides
- Small, horizontally-oriented rectangular signs that protruded from the building below the awnings or canopies but above pedestrians' heads; printed on both sides
- Medium- to large-sized, horizontally-oriented rectangular signs attached flat against the building, above and/or below the awnings; printed on one side only
- Window signs, painted on glass; used at the street level and on upper floors

Signs that were mounted on the exterior advertised the primary business of a building. Typically, this use occupied a street level space and sometimes upper floors as well. In the case of a large structure that included several businesses on upper floors, the name of the building itself was displayed on an exterior sign. Tenants relied on a directory at the street level.

In addition, signs were mounted to fit within architectural features. In many cases, they were mounted flush above the storefront, just above moldings. Others were located between columns or centered in "panels" on a building face. This method also enabled one to perceive the design character of individual structures.

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Each nonresidential structure in the Downtown and Old Town Overlay Districts may have up to five types of signs in use at any given time: primary, secondary, window, portable, and temporary. Multi-tenant buildings shall share signage through co-locating the various businesses' advertising on directories and monument or other approved signs via an approved Master Sign Plan.

- A primary sign represents the owner's largest sign expense and is likely the most important of the five sign types. Only one primary sign will be allowed per business per building. The primary sign's audience is specifically the viewer driving past in a vehicle.
- Secondary signs are utilized in addition to the primary building sign. Typically, a secondary sign protrudes from the building below the awnings or canopies but above pedestrian heads, printed on both signs. This may also be a small to medium free-standing sign mounted on a pole or post. The secondary sign is generally intended to capture the attention of the pedestrian walking on the sidewalk.
- Window signs are painted or applied to the glass used at street level and/or on upper floors. The window signage is intended for the pedestrian walking on the sidewalk and conveys specific information about the business offered.
- Portable signs are intended for the pedestrian walking on the sidewalk. Portable signs include sandwich boards, signs mounted on easels, or freestanding frames with sign inserts.
- Temporary signs are used for a special purpose, such as limited-time offer or a sale. Planning and Development Department staff may approve temporary signs for up to 45 days. If more time is requested the item will be forwarded to HARC.

***The applicable sign standards shall be those contained within these design guidelines. In the event that no standard exists, the standards in the Unified Development Code, Chapter 10, shall apply, and may be modified in order to more accurately reflect the express language or the intent of these design guidelines in regards to signs. The sizing, placement, manner, and overall aesthetics of a sign shall be regulated to conform to other guidelines in this chapter. A business logo cannot be altered if it is federally trademarked.***

**Policy: Design a sign to be in balance with the overall character of the property.**



*The overall facade composition, including ornamental details and signs, should be coordinated.*

A sign typically serves two functions: first, to attract attention, and second to convey information, essentially identifying the business or services offered within. If it is well designed, the building front alone can serve the attention-getting function, allowing the sign to be focused on conveying information in a well-conceived manner. All new signs should be developed with the overall context of the building and of the area in mind.

**9.1 Consider the building front as part of an overall sign program.**

- Coordinate a sign within the overall façade composition.
- A sign should be in proportion to the building, such that it does not dominate the appearance.
- Develop a master sign plan for the entire building; this should be used to guide individual sign design decisions.
- This is especially important in Area 2 where the use of contemporary building forms and styles and several colorful, attention-getting signs have appeared in the past. Such a typical “strip-commercial” development pattern is inappropriate in the Downtown and Old Town Overlay Districts.

**9.2 A sign shall be subordinate to the overall building composition.**

- A sign should appear to be in scale with the facade.
- Locate a sign on a building such that it will emphasize design elements of the facade itself.
- Mount a sign to fit within existing architectural features. Use the shape of the sign to help reinforce the horizontal lines of moldings and transoms seen along the street.



*A sign should be in proportion to the building, such that it does not dominate the appearance.*

**Policy: Appropriate signs include freestanding, flush mounted, window, projecting, hanging, awning, and directory signs.**

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Well-designed signs are needed in the historic District for communication and identifying goods and services available in the District. But signs are artifacts in themselves. They are a significant component of the environment. Signs affect the quality, image, and cohesiveness of the entire historic District.

The placement or location of a sign is a critical factor in maintaining the order and integrity of the Downtown Overlay District and Old Town Overlay District. Consistent placement of signs according to building type, size, location, and even building materials create a visual pattern that the pedestrian can easily interpret and utilize to the mutual benefit of merchants, tourists, and customers.



*Freestanding or pole mounted signs may be considered.*

**9.3 A primary sign should identify the services or business offered within.**

- To avoid driver confusion, the information on the primary sign should be in a large enough font or design that it is easily viewable from a vehicle.
- The sign should contain only enough information to alert the viewer in a vehicle to the location of the business or entity at the building.
- Whenever possible, other signs should be utilized for information geared towards pedestrian or other viewers.
- The primary sign should be easily viewable from a vehicle with as little visual clutter as possible.

**9.4 A secondary sign should identify the services or business offered within.**

- Typically, a secondary sign is intended to capture the attention of pedestrians walking on the sidewalk.
- The sign should contain only enough information to alert the viewer on a sidewalk to the location of the business or entity at the building.
- The secondary sign should be easily viewable from the sidewalk with as little visual clutter as possible.

**9.5 Freestanding or pole mounted signs may be considered.**

- A freestanding sign may be used in the front yard of a former residence with a commercial use.
- A freestanding sign may also be used in areas where the primary use is set back from the street edge.

**9.6 A flush-mounted wall sign may be considered.**

- In many cases, turn-of-the century building types common in Georgetown have a sign frieze, which is a panel by trim that sits just above the transom. This is the ideal location for the primary building sign. The sign frieze is typically located above the transom and below the second-floor windows.
- When utilizing the sign frieze as the sign placement location, it is important to respect the frieze borders. In other words, the sign should not overlap or crowd the top, bottom, or ends of the frieze.
- When feasible, place a wall sign such that it aligns with others on the block.



*Locate a flush-mounted sign such that it fits within a panel formed by moldings or transom panels.*

**9.7 A flush-mounted wall sign shall not exceed one square foot for every one foot of linear facade width.**

- For instance, a building with twenty feet of street frontage would be eligible for a sign of twenty square feet ( $20 \times 1 = 20$ ). In true sign dimensions, this would be a sign of approximately two feet by ten feet.
- Note that the formula establishes the maximum permitted sign area, when all other factors of scale, proportion, and compatibility are met. A sign does not have to be as large as this equation allows. The first consideration shall be compatibility with the size and character of the facade.
- In a case where a building has more than one face exposed to a public way, the allowed sign area may not be combined.



*When utilizing the sign frieze as the sign placement location, it is important to respect the frieze borders.*



*A window sign may be considered. A window sign may be painted on or hung just inside a window. (Wichita, KS)*

#### **9.8 A window sign may be considered.**

- A window sign may be considered in addition to the primary building sign to convey specific information regarding contact information (i.e. telephone number, email, or web address of a business), other business locations, or list more than one (1) specific product or service.
- A window sign should cover no more than thirty percent (30%) of the total window area.
- It may be painted on the glass, attached with flush vinyl, or hung just inside a window using appropriate attachment materials, as reviewed and approved by HARC.
- No more than 50% of a window shall be covered by business signage, advertisements, open signs, hours of operation, and other messages.
- One small (maximum 2 square feet) window sign with a dark background displaying the business' hours of operation with contrasting, but not in a vivid color, lettering is allowed without Certificate of Design Compliance review; if additional size or design is requested, then a CDC is required.
- One small (maximum 1.5 square feet) 'open' sign per business is allowed to be placed in a window without Certificate of Design Compliance review, if additional size is requested then a CDC is required. The sign message cannot be in a flashing or traveling mode.
- Electronic message center signs that are designed to be visible from the right-of-way are not allowed.
- While window displays are not reviewed by HARC, their use is very important to retailers. The attractiveness of a display is likely the highest contributing factor to whether or not a pedestrian will enter a store, and its design should be carefully planned.
- *Please note that HARC will take cognizance and assume jurisdiction of signs within a store that is obviously intended to be viewed through a window.*

**9.9 A hanging sign may be considered.**

- A small hanging sign is easier for a pedestrian to read than other sign types and is encouraged.
- A small hanging sign should be located near the business entrance, just above the door or to the side of it.
- A hanging sign installed under a canopy should be a maximum of 50% of the canopy's width.
- A hanging sign should be mounted perpendicular with the building facade.
- A hanging sign should provide a minimum of eight feet clearance between the sidewalk surface and the bottom of the sign. However, a hanging sign mounted under a canopy may provide a minimum clearance of seven feet.
- A hanging sign shall be no more than eight square feet in size.



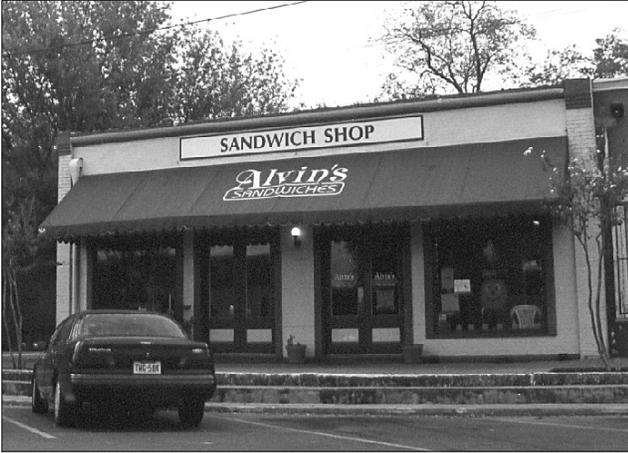
*A small hanging sign should be located near the business entrance.*

**9.10 A projecting sign may be considered.**

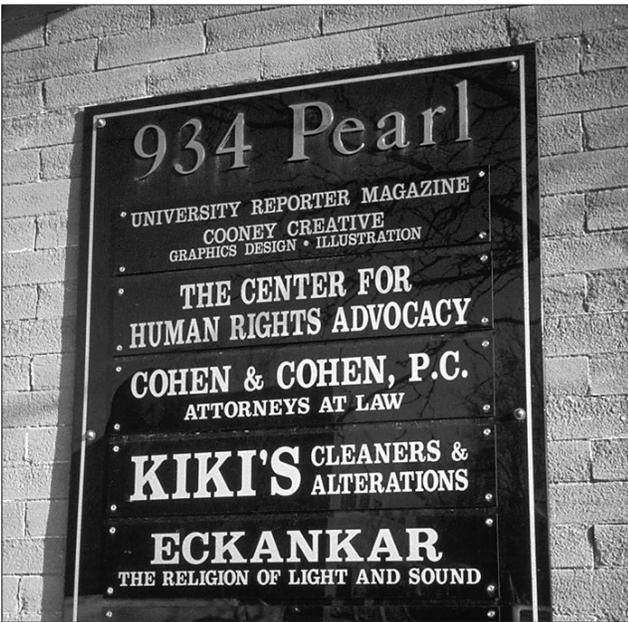
- A projecting sign should appear to be in proportion with the building. It should not overwhelm the appearance of the building or obscure key architectural features.
- A projecting sign shall provide a minimum clearance of eight feet between the sidewalk surface and the bottom of the sign.
- A projecting sign shall be no more than fifteen square feet in size with a maximum sign height of five feet.
- Additionally, a projecting sign shall in no case project beyond 1/2 of the sidewalk width.
- Signs should not obscure the view of any windows, existing signs, and/or adjacent buildings to an unreasonable extent.
- A large projecting sign is not permitted unless other types of signage are not appropriate for the building.
- A large projecting sign, if approved, should be mounted higher, and centered on the facade or positioned at the corner of a building. Generally, a projecting sign should not be located above the second floor.
- "Blade" signs are considered projecting signs and should follow the guidelines for projecting signs.
- Any two-sided sign shall be designed to be back to back and in no case shall both sides of the sign be visible at any time to the reader.



*A larger projecting sign should be mounted higher, and centered on the facade or positioned at the corner of a building.*



*Awning and canopy signs may be considered.*



*Where several businesses share a building, coordinate the signs. (Boulder, CO)*

**9.11 Awning and canopy signs may be considered.**

- An awning or canopy sign shall not exceed one square foot for every one linear foot of facade width. In no case should an awning or canopy sign exceed the size of the awning or canopy surface to which it is applied.
- The size of an awning or canopy sign shall be calculated by its actual area and shall be included in the calculation for total allowable building signage.
- Consider mounting a sign centered on top of a building canopy where a flush-mounted sign would obscure architectural details.
- A sign mounted on top and affixed to a building canopy, and located perpendicular to the building shall not be allowed.
- Appearance of a sign as viewed from an upper level out must be considered.

**9.12 A directory sign for multi-tenant buildings must be considered.**

- A Master Sign Plan is required for multi-tenant buildings.
- Where several businesses share a building, coordinate the signs. Align several smaller signs, or group them into a single panel as a directory.
- Use similar forms or backgrounds for the signs to tie them together visually and make them easier to read.
- The manner in which a directory sign is mounted to a building, either flush to or projecting from a wall, will determine the maximum allowable sign area.
- Electronic message centers are not allowed.
- Signage allocation must be considered when setting up a building for multiple tenants, and the appropriate distribution of allowable sign square footage and sign sizes and locations planned for the various tenants.
  - For the maximum area of a flush-mounted sign see design guideline 9.7.
  - For the maximum area of a projecting sign see design guideline 9.10.

**9.13 A portable sign may be considered, in the Downtown Overlay District.**

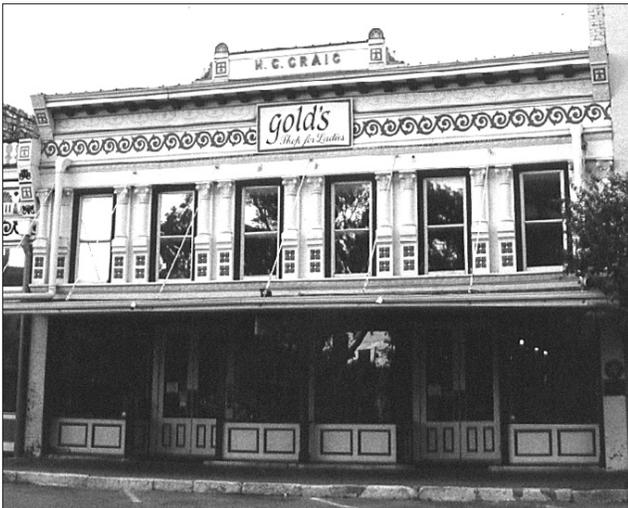
- Portable signs are intended for pedestrian traffic on the sidewalk and can convey specific information regarding contact information.
- A portable sign may list more than one specific product or service and/or promotional information (i.e., daily specials, sales, or business related announcements.)
- Portable signs include A-frame, sandwich boards, signs mounted on easels or free-standing frames with sign inserts.
- An A-frame or sandwich board sign should be limited to 12 square feet of surface per side and should in no case exceed four feet in height and three feet in width.
- A sign mounted on an easel or a free-standing frame with a sign insert should be limited to six square feet of surface per side and should in no case exceed five feet in height and three feet in width.
- A portable sign should not interfere with pedestrian traffic.
- A portable sign should be secured to the sidewalk. If an eye bolt is used it should be installed by the City of Georgetown and placed below the sidewalk surface, and a steel wire should be used to attach the sign to the bolt.
- If the sign is not anchored with an eye bolt, then the sign shall be internally weighted rather than secured with sand bags or other external means.
- Portable signs shall be taken inside when the business being advertised is not open.
- Portable signs in Area 2 are discouraged, except when placed on a sidewalk adjacent to a street with heavy pedestrian traffic.



*A portable sign may be considered, in the Downtown Overlay District.*



*This position keeps details visible. (2008)*



*Although this sign is appropriately designed and scaled to fit this traditional building, it is mounted in a manner that obscures architectural details. (2001)*

**9.14 A temporary sign may be considered.**

- A temporary sign (including banners) should be limited to a maximum of twenty-four square feet in area with a maximum height of three feet.
- A temporary sign, when installed, should not obscure windows or other architectural details of a building.
- In no case will a temporary sign be allowed to substitute as a permanent sign.
- Planning and Development Department staff may approve temporary signs for up to 45 days, a request for a longer time period will be forwarded to HARC.
- Temporary signs should respect the design and color guidelines for permanent signs.

**9.15 A sign should not in any way obscure or compete with architectural details of an historic building facade.**

- This is especially important for a building with historic significance.
- A sign should be designed to integrate with the architectural features of a building not distract attention from them.

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**Policy: A sign should be in character with the material, color, and detail of a building.**

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**9.16 Signs that are out of character with those seen historically and that would alter the historic character of the street are inappropriate.**

- Animated signs are prohibited.
- Any sign that visually overpowers the building or obscures significant architectural features is inappropriate.
- Murals that include signage may be considered appropriate and HARC may exclude portions of the mural from the size calculations of Guideline 9.7.
- Murals shall not be painted onto previously unpainted brick or masonry of historical significance.



*Painted wood and metal are appropriate materials for signs.*

**9.17 Sign materials should be compatible with that of the building facade.**

- A simple, easy-to-read sign design is preferred.
- Typefaces that are in keeping with those seen in the area traditionally are encouraged.
- Select letter styles and sizes that will be compatible with the building front. Generally, these are typefaces with serifs.
- Avoid hard-to-read or overly intricate typeface styles.
- Painted wood and metal are appropriate materials for signs. Their use is encouraged. Unfinished materials, including untreated wood, are discouraged because they are out of character with the context of the Overlay Districts.
- Plastic is not permitted, except for flush, adhesive, professionally installed lettering.
- Highly reflective materials that will be difficult to read are inappropriate.
- Painted signs on blank walls were common historically and may be considered.



*Symbol signs add interest to the street, are quickly read and are remembered better than written words. (Durango, CO)*

**9.18 Using a symbol for a sign is encouraged.**

- A symbol sign adds interest to the street, can be read quickly and is remembered better than written words.

**9.19 Use colors for the sign that are compatible with those of the building front.**

- Sign colors should be limited. In general, no more than three colors should be used. For these Guidelines, black and white are not counted as colors.
- HARC may consider different shades of a color similar enough to count as one color in the determination of the number of colors being allowed.
- Signs with photo images, including multiple colors, are appropriate on A-frame/ sandwich board type signs only.



*Symbol signs, like this barber's pole, were used historically and their use is encouraged today.*

**9.20 The light for a sign should be an indirect source.**

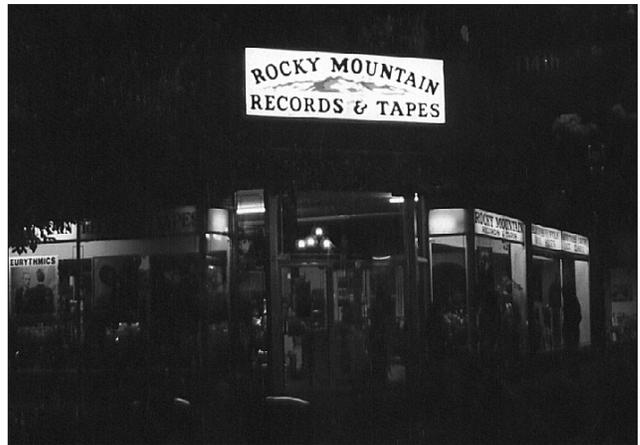
- Light should be directed at the sign from an external, shielded lamp.
- The fixture should have a sense of design, which is coordinated with the sign surface and appropriate to building style and character.
- A warm light, similar to daylight, is appropriate.
- Light should not shine directly or reflect into the eyes of pedestrians.
- Exposed up-lights are inappropriate.



*Lighting that is directed at a sign from an external, shielded lamp, is preferred.*

**9.21 If internal illumination is used, it should be designed to be subordinate to the overall building composition.**

- Internal illumination of an entire sign panel is discouraged. If internal illumination is used, a system that backlights only the sign text is preferred.
- Neon and other tubular illumination may be considered. However, use neon in limited amounts so it does not become visually obtrusive.
- Internal illumination of an awning is inappropriate.



*Internal illumination of an entire sign panel is discouraged.*

**9.22 Neon signs may be considered in limited situations.**

- The use of neon signs is more appropriate to new construction, non-historic structures, and historic structures built after 1930. These signs should have an historic character.
- Neon is not appropriate on structures built before 1930 or on residential structures.
- Unshielded neon is not permitted, per the UDC.



*Signs should have a professional quality and a finished appearance.*

**9.23 Sign brackets and hardware should be compatible with the building and installed in a workman-like manner.**

**9.24 Maintenance of signs shall be required.**

- Re-secure sign mounts to the building front.
- Repaint faded graphics.
- Repair worn wiring.
- Replace burned out bulbs.
- Remove non-historic, obsolete signs.
- Preserve historic painted signs in place as decorative features.

**9.25 Signage should have a professional quality and a finished appearance.**

- Signs that appear to be temporary, unfinished, or homemade are not allowed.
- A change in a portion of a multi-tenant sign should be consistent with the original, approved design.

**9.26 Changing tenants in buildings with approved multiple tenant signs.**

- Staff may approve sign face changes if they are the style of the approved multi-tenant sign.

Note: Signs for home-based businesses are not allowed per the Unified Development Code. The limitations of Unified Development Code Chapter 5 related to Home-Based Business shall apply.