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CHAPTER 5 SIGNS & COLORS

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

The placement or location of a sign is a critical factor in maintaining the order and integrity of the Downtown and Old Town Overlay Districts. 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.

Traditional Character of Signs

Traditionally, a variety of signs were found in the Downtown. Five different types occurred:

- Small, freestanding signs mounted on a poles or posts; located near the sidewalk because the primary structure or business was set back from the street (e.g., an area with residential character); and 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 and 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.

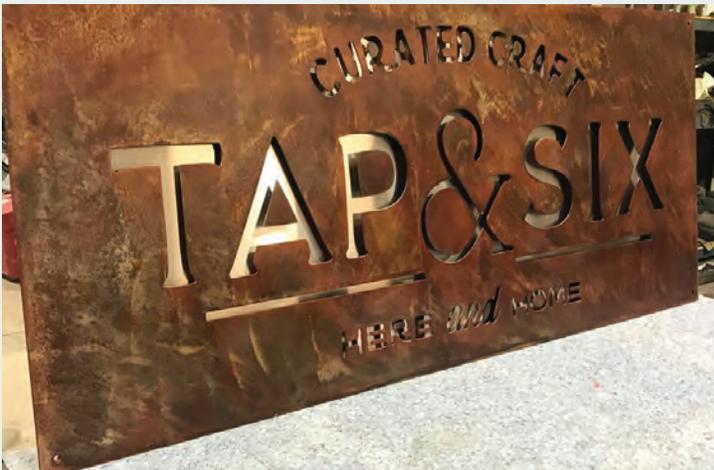


Painted sign on glass.



Signs 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 and architectural features of individual structures.



T-B: Appropriate signs.

5.1 Types of Signs

The Downtown and Old Town Overlay Districts may have a variety of the following five types of signs: primary, secondary, window, portable, and temporary.

Primary Sign

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.

1. A primary sign should identify the services or business offered within.
2. The primary sign's audience is specifically the viewer driving past in a vehicle. To avoid driver confusion, the information on the primary sign should be easily viewable from a vehicle.
3. 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.
4. Whenever possible, other signs should be utilized for information geared towards pedestrian or other viewers.
5. The primary sign should be easily viewable from a vehicle with as little visual clutter as possible.

Secondary Signs

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 sides. This may also be a small to medium free-standing sign mounted on posts. The secondary sign is generally intended to



Example of secondary sign.



Examples of primary and secondary signs.

capture the attention of the pedestrian walking on the sidewalk.

1. A secondary sign should identify the services or business offered within.
2. 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.
3. The secondary sign should be easily viewable from the sidewalk with as little visual clutter as possible.



Window Signs

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

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

Temporary signs are used for a special purpose, such as a limited-time offer or a sale. Temporary signs may be permitted for up to 45 days. Signs installed for more than 45 days are considered permanent signs and require approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness.



T-B: Examples of secondary signs.



Example of portable sign.

5.2 Number of Signs

A business may have one (1) primary sign and two (2) secondary signs.

The secondary sign must be subordinate to the primary sign and comply with the specific sizes in the Guidelines. For purposes of counting the number of signs an under-canopy sign is one, a window sign is one per window, a portable sign is one. A sign on a door is counted as a window sign.

An upper-story tenant may have one (1) sign no larger than 4 square feet on the face of the building. It is preferred that the sign be painted on an upper story window as this was a traditional location keeping with the historic character of Georgetown. An upper story tenant may also have their name on a multi-tenant directory.

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 shall apply, and may be modified in order to more accurately reflect the express language or the intent of these Design Guidelines in regard 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.



Example of primary and secondary signs.



Original secondary sign.

5.3 Placement of Signs on a Building

Design a sign to be in balance with the overall character of the property. A sign typically serves two functions: first, to attract attention, and second to convey information, 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 the surroundings in mind.

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

B. Coordinate a sign within the overall façade composition. A sign should appear to be in scale with the façade.

C. A sign should be in proportion to the building, such that it does not dominate the appearance. A sign shall be subordinate to the overall building composition.

D. Locate a sign on a building such that it will emphasize design elements of the façade itself. A sign should be designed to integrate with the architectural features of a building not distract attention from them.

E. A sign should not in any way obscure or compete with architectural details of an historic building façade. This is especially important for a building with historic significance.



Sign placed for pedestrian view.



Excessive use of signs.

5.4 Flush-Mounted Wall Signs

A. Where available, mount signs within the historic building frieze. In many cases, turn-of-the-century building types common in Georgetown have a sign frieze, which is a panel 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 second-floor windows or the cornice.

When utilizing the sign frieze as the sign placement location, respect the frieze borders. In other words, the sign should not overlap or crowd the top, bottom, or ends of the frieze.

B. When feasible, place a wall sign such that it aligns with others on the block.

C. A flush-mounted wall sign shall not exceed one square foot for every one foot of linear façade width.

1. 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.

2. 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 design of the façade.

3. In a case where a building has more than one face exposed to a public way, only the width of the façade on which the sign is being placed may be counted.

4. For buildings with multiple tenants on the ground floor, the size allowance for façade signs shall be based on the linear width of the tenant lease space.



T-B: Wall-mounted signs.

5.5 Window Signs

A window sign may be considered in addition to the primary building sign. Window signs include contact information (i.e. telephone number, email, or web address of a business), or list specific products or services.

Coverage area

A window sign should cover no more than thirty percent (30%) of the total window area.

Materials

Window signs may be painted on the glass, attached with flush vinyl, or hung just inside a window using appropriate attachment materials for the location and sign type.

Total window signage

No more than 50% of a window shall be covered by business signage, advertisements, open signs, hours of operation, and other messages.

Open signs

Signs indicating business hours or that the business or entity is open for business are treated as window signs and are included within the calculation for maximum allowed size. These signs may not be electronic and if illuminated the sign cannot be in a flashing or traveling mode.

Window displays

Signs within a store that are obviously intended to be viewed through a window, including neon signs, require approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness.



T-B: Window signs.

5.6 Under Canopy Hanging Signs

A small hanging sign is easier for a pedestrian to read than other sign types and is encouraged.

Location

A small hanging sign should be located near the business entrance, just above the door or to the side of it.

Proportions

Size should be relative to the canopy. A hanging sign installed under a canopy should be a maximum of 75% of the canopy's width.

Placement

A hanging sign should be mounted perpendicular with the building façade.

Clearance

A hanging sign should provide a minimum of seven feet clearance between the sidewalk surface and the bottom of the sign.

Size

A hanging sign shall be no more than eight square feet in size.



T-B: Under canopy hanging signs.

5.7 Projecting Signs

Proportions

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. It should align with features on the building such as centered between horizontal banding, or vertical elements.

Clearance

A projecting sign shall provide a minimum clearance of eight feet between the sidewalk surface and the bottom of the sign.

Size

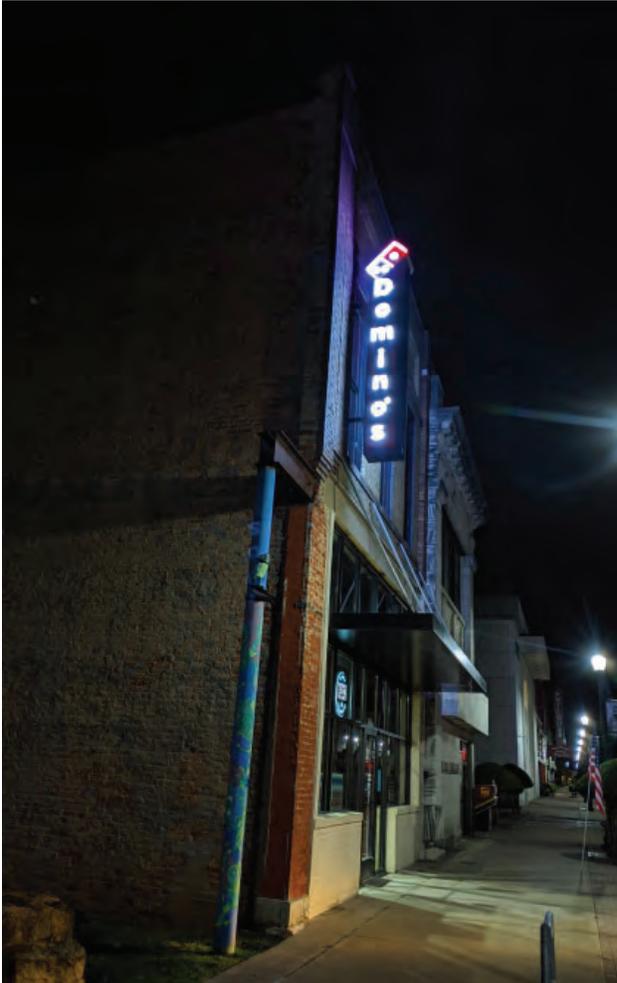
A projecting sign shall be no more than fifteen square feet in size with a maximum sign height of five feet.

Width

Additionally, a projecting sign shall in no case project beyond 1/2 of the sidewalk width.

Placement

Signs should not obscure the view of any windows, existing signs, and/or adjacent buildings to an unreasonable extent.



T-B: Projecting signs.

Large Signs

A large projecting sign is not permitted unless other types of signage are not appropriate for the building.

1. A large projecting sign, if approved, should be mounted higher, and centered on the façade or positioned at the corner of a building. Generally, a projecting sign should not be located above the second floor.

2. Blade signs are considered projecting signs and should follow the Guidelines for projecting signs.

3. 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.



T-B: Large scale signs.

5.8 Awning and Above Canopy Signs

Size

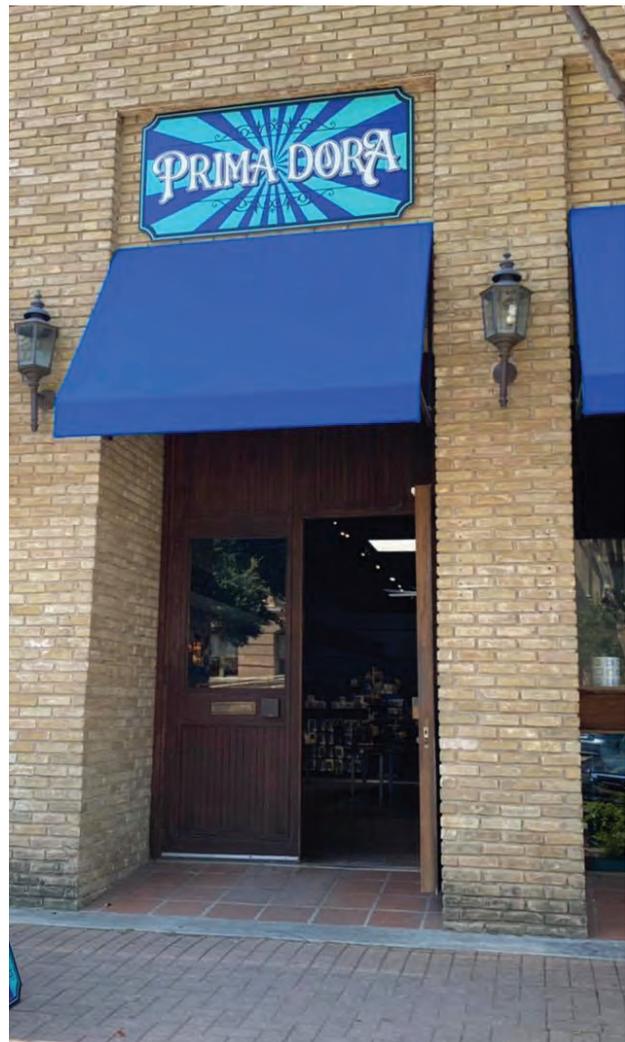
An awning or canopy sign shall not exceed one square foot for every one linear foot of façade width. The maximum height of a sign is limited to 36 inches. In no case should an awning or canopy sign exceed the width and height of the awning or canopy surface to which it is applied.

Calculating Area

The size of an awning or canopy sign shall be calculated by its actual area of the sign face or a regular rectangle drawn around the sign image (words and graphics) on an awning and shall be included in the calculation for total allowable building signage.

Location

Consider mounting a sign centered on top of a building canopy where a flush-mounted sign would obscure architectural details. Appearance of a sign as viewed from an upper level out must be considered. The sign shall not completely block view of the square or the street from the second floor windows.



T-B: Signs above canopies or awnings.

5.9 Signage for Multi-Tenant Buildings

A Master Sign Plan is recommended for multi-tenant buildings.

Grouping signs

Where several businesses share a building, coordinate the signs. Align several smaller signs, or group them into a single panel as a directory.

Cohesiveness

Use similar forms or backgrounds for the signs to tie them together visually and make them easier to read.

Location

A directory sign mounted to the building in the Downtown Overlay District should be small and discreet. 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.

Purpose

A multi-tenant building may have a sign indicating the name of the building placed on a building. The purpose of this sign is so that a tenant may refer to the name of the building, with their suite number. This sign shall not be the name of a business in the building.

Signage allocation

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 are subject to the size regulations as well as the number of signs.



T-B: Multi-tenant signs.

5.10 Free Standing Signs

Freestanding signs are not attached to a building, and may include information on either or both sides. Small scale freestanding signs can help reinforce the historic character of a residential buildings and streetscapes that have been adapted for office and retail uses, while providing necessary identification for businesses.

Use

Freestanding signs are most appropriate in locations where building forms are set back from the street, such as in areas where historic residences have been adapted for office or retail uses, or in commercial districts where they may be used to identify parking areas or other accessory uses.

Location

Place freestanding signs near the public right-of-way where they are clearly visible to passing pedestrians and motorists, a minimum of five feet from the street right-of-way and ten feet from all interior side lot lines. No freestanding sign should be placed in a manner that obstructs the pedestrian walkway.

Amount

Limit the number of freestanding signs per lot to one when used as the primary sign.

Height

Limit the height of freestanding signs to no more than six feet.

Size

The size of new signs should be appropriate within the historic context, and should not exceed 24 square feet on either side, for a total of 48 square feet. Appropriate size shall be determined by considering historic precedent, sign patterns within the historic districts, and conditions specific to individual



T-B: Freestanding signs.

properties.

Structural supports

Use subtle structural elements (in terms of their scale and mass) with historically compatible materials to support a freestanding sign. A single pole is not allowed.



T-B: Appropriate size signs.

5.11 Portable Signs

Use

Portable signs are intended for pedestrian traffic on the sidewalk and can convey specific information regarding contact information.

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.)

Types of Portable Signs

Portable signs include A-frame, sandwich boards, signs mounted on easels or free-standing frames with sign inserts.

A-frame or sandwich board

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.

Easel-mounted or free-standing frame signs

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.

Right of way

A portable sign should not interfere with pedestrian traffic.

Installation

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.



Acceptable portable sign.

Weighted signs

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.

After hours storage

Portable signs shall be taken inside when the business being advertised is not open.

Portable signs in Area 2

Portable signs in Area 2 are discouraged, except when placed on a sidewalk adjacent to a street with heavy pedestrian traffic.



T-B: Temporary signs.

5.12 Temporary Signs

Size

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.

Location

A temporary sign, when installed, should not obscure windows or other architectural details of a building.

Impermanence

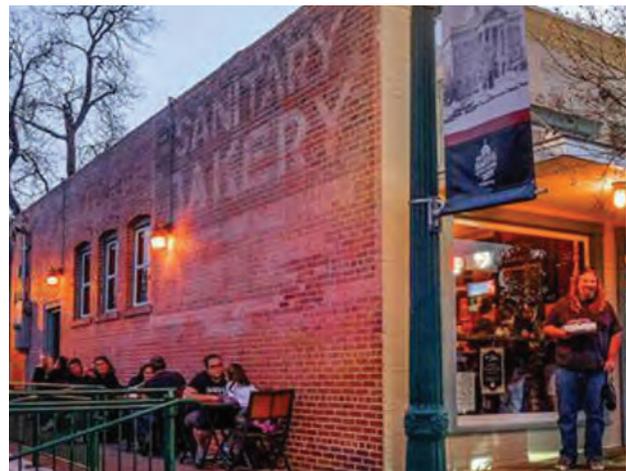
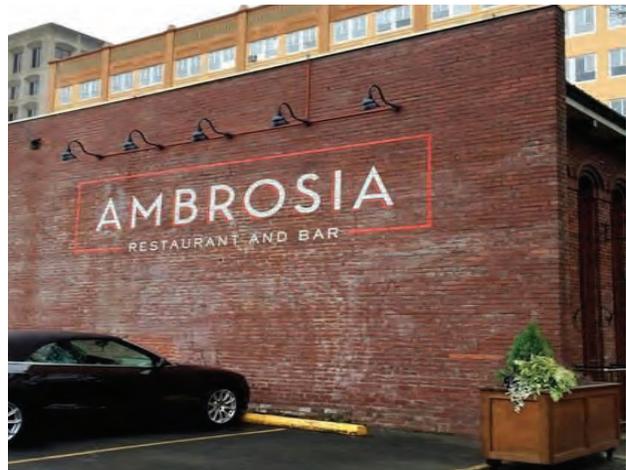
In no case will a temporary sign be allowed to substitute as a permanent sign.

Duration of use

Temporary signs may be approved for up to 45 days.

Appearance

Temporary signs should respect the design and color Guidelines for permanent signs.



T-B: Painted signs

5.13 Murals

A. Murals with signage

Murals that include signage may be considered appropriate.

B. Murals on masonry walls

Murals shall not be painted onto previously unpainted brick or masonry of historical significance.

5.14 Sign Design

Sign design should be compatible with that of the building façade.

Simplicity

A simple, easy-to-read sign design is preferred.

Symbols

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.

Compatible colors

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

Limited colors

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.

Signs with photos

Signs with photo images, including multiple colors, are appropriate on A-frame/ sandwich board type signs only.

Quality

Signage should have a professional quality and a finished appearance.

Appearance

Signs that appear to be temporary, unfinished, or homemade are not allowed.



T-B: Personal sign design.

5.15 Sign Materials

Appropriate materials

Painted wood and metal are appropriate materials for signs. Their use is encouraged.

Unfinished materials

Unfinished materials, including untreated wood, are discouraged because they are out of character with the context of the Overlay Districts.

Plastic

Plastic is not permitted, except for flush, adhesive, professionally installed lettering or when used for illuminated signs.

Reflective materials

Highly reflective materials that will be difficult to read are inappropriate.

Painted signs

Painted signs on blank walls were common historically and may be considered. However painting on unpainted masonry is not appropriate.

5.16 Sign Lighting

A. The light for a sign should be an indirect source.

B. Light should be directed at the sign from an external, shielded lamp.

C. The fixture should have a sense of design, which is coordinated with the sign surface and appropriate to building style and character.

D. A warm light, similar to daylight, is appropriate.

E. Light should not shine directly or reflect into the eyes of pedestrians.

F. Exposed up-lights are inappropriate.



T-B: Appropriate sign materials

5.17 Internal Illumination

A. In Area 1

Internally illuminated signs are not appropriate in Area 1 as these do not reflect the historic character of the buildings and would not have been used during the period of significance.

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

C. If internal illumination is used, illuminate only the sign next rather than the sign panel. Illumination may be front-lit channel letters, "halo", or "push-thru" illumination styles when the light is a warm, white light.

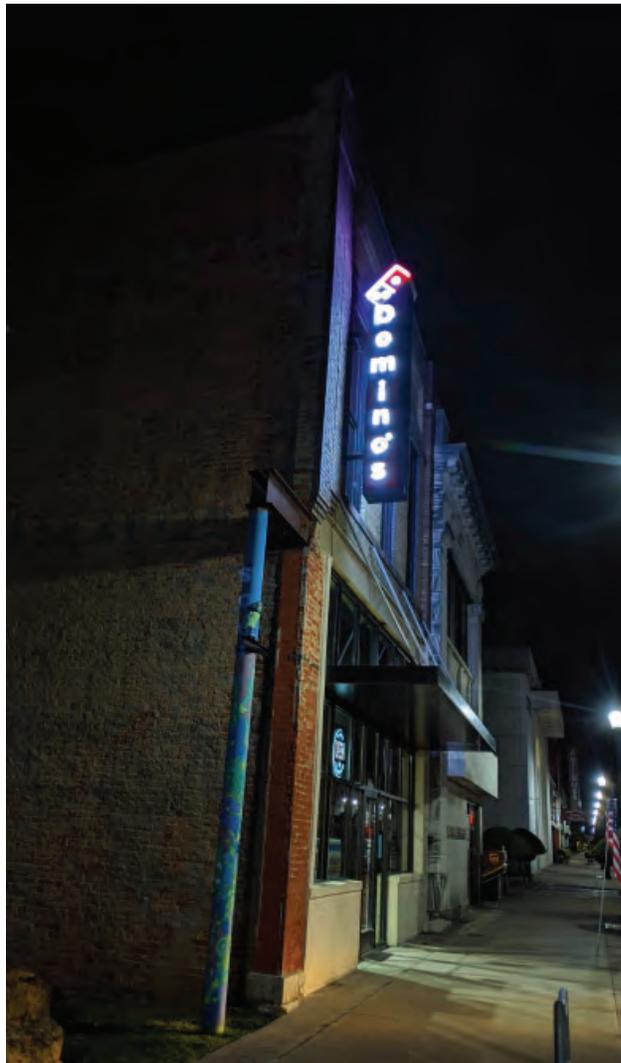
D. Back lit channel letters are appropriate in Area 2 and Old Town, however the electric raceways must be concealed.

E. Internal illumination of an awning is inappropriate.

F. Neon signs may be considered in Area 2 and Old Town.

G. 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.

H. Neon is not appropriate on structures built before 1930 or on residential structures.



T-B: Appropriate sign illumination.

5.18 Sign Mounting and Hardware

- A. Sign brackets and hardware should be compatible with the building and installed in a workman-like manner.
- B. Place mounting brackets in mortar joints rather in stone or brick face.
- C. Stainless Steel mounting hardware is preferred.
- D. Non Galvanized metal is prohibited.



5.19 Maintenance of Signs

- A. Maintenance of signs is required.
- B. Re-secure sign mounts to the building front.
- C. Repaint faded graphics.
- D. Repair worn wiring.
- E. Replace burned out bulbs.
- F. Remove non-historic, obsolete signs.
- G. Preserve historic painted signs in place as decorative features.



5.20 Change in Multi-Tenant Signs

Changes to the multi-tenant signs must be of the same style, materials and colors as the approved multi-tenant sign.



T-B: Appropriate signs.

5.21 Prohibited Signs

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

- A.** Billboards and junior billboards.
- B.** Reader board signs with electronic or changeable letters.
- C.** Advertising benches, chairs, tables, umbrellas or other street furniture.
- D.** Pole signs.
- E.** Revolving signs or signs with a kinetic component.
- F.** Animated signs.
- G.** Internal illumination of an entire sign panel unless the sign is designed to be compatible with the style and age of significance of a historic structure.
- H.** Roof mounted signs, except in the case of an existing sign determined to be contributing by the Historic Preservation Officer.
- I.** Digital and/or LED lighted signs, not to include LED light sources that do not meet the definition of a sign.
- J.** Moored balloons, floating signs or inflated objects meant to draw attention to a business that are tethered to the ground or to a structure.
- K.** Nonconforming signs that do not meet the requirements of Chapter 14 of the UDC.



Inappropriate sign.

5.22 Color

A. Develop a color scheme for the entire building that coordinates all the façade elements.

- Using the historic color scheme is encouraged.
- Choose a base color that will link elements of the entire building face together.
- A single color scheme should be used for the entire exterior so that upper and lower floors and subordinate wings of buildings are seen as components of a single structure.
- For a newer building in the Overlay Districts, use a color scheme that complements the historic character of the district.

B. Paint colors should enhance individual building elements while creating a unified, coordinated appearance for the entire structure.

- Paint colors and placement should create a cohesive look for the structure. There should be one main color on the body of the building to unify the façade.
- Choose colors for trim, accents, and architectural details that complement the main color on the body of the structure.
- Consider the palette of surrounding structures to create a harmonized appearance along the block face.
- Background and accent colors should be consistent across separate buildings, where several buildings are attached, or where unity in theme is desired.



Color accent on architectural features and natural masonry.



Color accent on architectural features.

C. A muted color is preferred for the base color of most buildings.

- Use muted colors to minimize the apparent scale of buildings and blend them with the natural colors of area.
- Matte finishes are preferred to glossy finishes.

D. Roof colors must complement the style and overall color scheme of the structure.

E. In general, use bright colors for accents only.

- Colors of a vivid saturation are not appropriate for the body of commercial buildings.
- Overly strong or bold colors are not appropriate for the main body of a structure. Reserve the use of strong, bright colors for accents when you want to draw the customer's eye, such as to the sign, the building's ornamentation or entrance.
- In most cases one or two accent colors should be used in addition to the base color.
- Doors may be painted a bright accent color, or they may be left a natural wood finish. Historically, many of the doors would have simply had a stain applied.
- Window sashes, casings, and trims are also an excellent opportunity for accent color.
- Brilliant luminescent or day-glow colors are not appropriate.



Color combination of muted colors.



Color accent on architectural features.



Inappropriate paint application and color.

F. Paint colors should highlight architectural details.

- Plan painting to use more than one color. It is inappropriate to allow architectural details to be camouflaged by painting them the same color as the background of the structure.
- Strong or bold colors can be appropriate for trim, accents, and architectural details.

G. Leave natural masonry finishes unpainted when feasible.

- Where the natural color of the materials exists, such as with stone or brick, they should be left unpainted. Painting an unpainted brick or stone wall may trap moisture inside the walls and will drastically alter its character and appearance.
- For other parts of the building that require painting, select colors that will complement those of the natural materials.



Color accent on architectural features and natural masonry.