

CITY OF PLATTEVILLE

COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT SIGNAGE & AWNING GUIDELINES

PLATTEVILLE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

AUGUST 2014

I. General Guidelines and Considerations for Signs & Awnings

In evaluating applications for signs and awnings, the Historic Preservation Commission considers and evaluates a sign in terms of the quality of its design, materials, and relationship to the surrounding business district. A sign should harmonize with and support a district's unique character and foster design quality that compliments the architectural and historic heritage of Platteville. Furthermore, a sign must be consistent with the Zoning Code and the following Guidelines.

(A) Style and Design

Sign style and design should begin with a determination as to whether there is adequate space on the building where a sign would look appropriate. Many commercial buildings are designed with a space for a sign; whether it is a horizontal space (lintel) across the top of the storefront, or a wide space (mullion) separating the storefront window and transom window above.

A building's proportions, as well as the street character and architectural character of neighboring buildings, are relevant to determining the proper size and style of a sign. Where insufficient "sign space" exists on a building, a wall sign with a vertical format, or a projecting sign may be appropriate.

A sign should be designed to be in proportion and scale with the building.



- The sign should be coordinated with the overall facade composition, including ornamental details and other signs.
- The scale of the signs should be in proportion to the building, so they do not dominate the building appearance.
- Signage should be designed and placed in order to avoid a sense of clutter or chaos on the building facade.
- A sign should be located on a building so it emphasizes and fits within the architectural features of the facade.

- Signs or letters that obscure significant architectural features of a building are inappropriate. Simple designs which are subordinate to the building are appropriate.

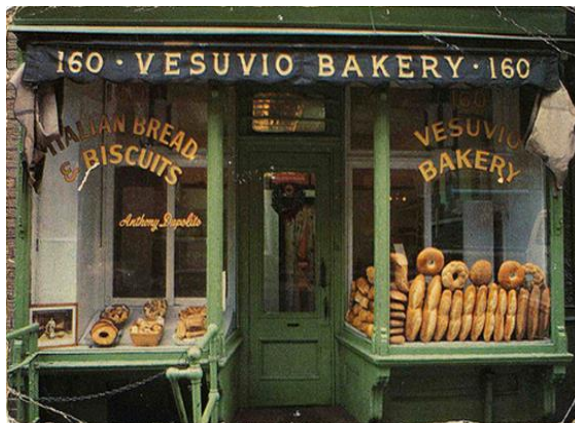


Inappropriate sign placement



Appropriate sign placement

Signage style and type should be harmonious with the character of the building with which it is associated in terms of form, design, scale, and proportion.



- Custom signs are preferable to mass-produced, standardized signs.



- The use of symbolic, three dimensional signs, such as the red and white barbers pole, is encouraged.

- Use of changeable copy signs is strongly discouraged. Where there is a need for changing advertising, portable signage may be a good solution.
- Electronic message signs are highly inappropriate in a historic district, and are usually not approved.

Use directory signs on multi-tenant buildings to reduce the visual clutter of many signs.



- Where several businesses share a building, signs should be coordinated. Align several smaller signs, or group them into a single panel to make them easier to locate.
- Similar forms or backgrounds should be used for the signs to visually identify them as serving the same building and make them easier to read.
- The individual nameplates on the sign should match each other in size, colors, letter size, case and styles.



(B) Size

Signs should be sized to the scale of the building, the storefront, and the street.



- Awnings that contain signs will have the sign area of the awning sign deducted from the maximum aggregate sign area allowed for the front facade.
- Signs within the historic district should be significantly smaller than those situated on commercial corridors. They should be scaled and oriented to relate to pedestrians, as well as passing motorists.



- Size should be determined by the scale of the building.
- Generally, freestanding signs should not exceed ten square feet. Smaller signs are preferable.

(C) Placement



Signs should have a human scale, and be pedestrian oriented.



- Signs that are illegible when viewed from the sidewalk, or are located too high upon a building are not encouraged.
- A sign should be located on a building so that it draws an individual's attention toward the building or the use that it is intended to support.
- The majority of signs should be concentrated at the street level close to the entrance of the building or storefront.





The use of signs placed on upper levels of a building should be limited since they will be visible over an extended distance and may not be related to the street or entrance level of the premises.



Poor sign & awning placement.

- Generally, signs shall not extend above the fascia line or coping line of a one-story building, or above the bottom of the second-story windowsills of a multi-story building.
- Roofs signs are highly inappropriate, except on one story buildings where there are few other good locations for signage and the roof sign is especially well crafted to integrate effectively into the design of the roof.

A sign should be installed in a manner that is appropriate for the building.

- Damage to architectural detail when attaching the sign should be avoided.
- Wherever possible, avoid drilling new holes or creating new fixing positions on historic facades, by using existing holes and fixing positions.
- On masonry buildings, it is preferable that bolts extend through mortar joints rather than through masonry units.

(D) Colors

Color should be used both to accentuate the sign design and message, and also to integrate the sign or lettering with the building and its context.



- The number of colors used on a sign should be limited. In general, no more than three colors should be used, although additional accent colors may be appropriate. Generally, two colors may be used for all lettering, wording, and accompanying designs and symbols, plus one additional background color.
- Sign colors should complement and be coordinated with the overall building colors. The use of subdued, muted, earth tone or primary colors is encouraged.
- Sign panels should avoid significant areas of white or cream, which have the effect of visually detaching the sign from the building.
- Colors generally best limited to accent areas are bright colors, primary colors and metallic colors.
- Use of high intensity colors, fluorescent colors and "day glow" colors is discouraged.
- Dark or medium colors are preferred for the main, background part of the sign and light colors for the lettering.



(E) Materials

Sign materials should be compatible with those of the historic building and the district. Materials characteristic of the building's age and style, when used in contemporary designs, can form effective new signs.

- Sign material should be high quality and limited to painted wood, metal, stone, architectural glass and canvas. Other materials may be considered on a case-by-case basis through review and approval by the Historic Preservation Commission.
- Solid wood is recommended over plywood since plywood tends to delaminate with age. "Medium Density Overlay" plywood or marine plywood may be used, but it must be edge banded.
- Brushed bronze, antique bronze, aluminum, stainless steel or painted cast iron are appropriate and should have a matt finish and not be reflective nor translucent.
- Unfinished materials should be designed and used carefully due to weathering.
- Highly reflective materials that will be difficult to read are not appropriate.



(F) Lighting

Illumination of a sign should be done with the objective of achieving a balance between the architecture, the historic district and the sign. Internally illuminated signs are generally not used in the downtown historic district. Nonetheless, they may be approved where determined appropriate.



- Use of internal illumination is strongly discouraged. The plastic feel of internally illuminated signs is inappropriate in a historic district. In rare cases, where the wattage is low and the sign is quite dark, internal illumination can be effective and would be acceptable.
- Where internal illumination is considered it should be limited to individual cut out letters with only the letter face illuminated, or letters routed out of the face of an opaque cabinet sign.
- The light source for internally illuminated signs should be white.
- The sign illumination source should be shielded and directed only toward the sign to minimize glare.
- Light intensity should not overpower the building or street edge.
- Small and discreet modern light fittings may provide an unobtrusive alternative to traditionally styled lamp units.
- Illumination of signs on upper levels should be limited to the brightness of lower level signs.



Consider halo illumination as an alternative to other types of internally illuminated signs.



- Reversed pan-channel letters with an internal light source reflecting off the building may be used for "halo" illumination.
- The light source should not be visible.

The selective use of neon will be considered.

- Neon should be used in limited volume to ensure that it does not become visually obtrusive and dominate the street frontage.
- In certain cases neon may be more appropriate when framed and shielded.

Wiring conduit for sign lighting should be carefully routed to avoid damage to architectural details and concealed as much as possible.

- Copper or colored sheathing should be used for wiring to minimize visibility.
- The wiring should be placed between the brick coursing and recesses to reduce its visibility.



(G) Historic Signs

Historic signs, as a distinctive feature of Platteville, should be retained and, where appropriate, restored.



- Keeping a historic sign is encouraged, even if the business or product promoted is no longer on site. Retaining the sign can exploit the recognition value of the old name and play upon the public's fondness for the old sign, especially when the sign is a community landmark.
- Historic signs add to the overall appearance and character of historic commercial buildings and should be treated as significant features of the property.
- Painted wall signs on a building facade should be left intact and not painted over or removed.
- Preserve signs that: reflect the history of a building or district; are characteristic of a particular historic period or style; are associated with events, people, or places; are evidence of the history of a product or business; display excellent craftsmanship, use of materials, or design; are incorporated into the buildings design or physical fabric.

II. Design Guidelines for Specific Sign & Awning Types

In addition to the General Guidelines for all signs and awnings in Part One, the following guidelines apply to specific sign and awning types. These guidelines and those in Part One are intended to encourage strong design and to provide direction on how to achieve that goal. These guidelines are not intended to limit creativity or restrict imagination, innovations, or variety of sign styles, but they seek to preserve and enhance the unique historic and architectural character of the downtown district.

- (A) Wall Signs.** *Definition:* Any sign attached to, erected on, or painted on the wall of a building or structure and projecting not more than twelve inches from the wall.



- When planning a wall sign, determine if a horizontal sign board exists on the building. If so, locate flush-mounted signs such that they fit within panels formed by moldings or transom panels on the facade.



- Wall signs should be generally oriented toward the pedestrian, and thus placed on a lower section of the building.
- Placing or dimensioning a wall sign so that it spans the pilasters or detailing of a building should be avoided.
- The projection of a wall sign should be minimized to the depth of the sign panel or letter so that it is relatively flush with the building façade.
- A wall sign should be designed to sit within, rather than forward of, the fascia or other architectural details of the building.
- In the case of a restaurant, a menu board is essential and will usually be considered appropriate. The board should be positioned near the main restaurant entrance.
- It may be appropriate to place an understated wall sign identifying a building on the band under the cornice (uppermost crown) at the top of a multistory building.

- A wall sign should be placed so that it is framed by the architectural details of the building and so that it reflects the fenestration pattern of the building.



- (B) **Window Signs.** *Definition:* Any sign that is visible to the public and that is located completely within a window, or attached to or painted upon the surface of a window of a building.



- Window signs may be either paint or vinyl applied directly to the surface of the glass or any signage on the inside of the building that is visible through a window or door on a permanent basis and is placed within eighteen inches of the glass.
- Only a minimal area should be covered so that the signage does not block the view into the establishment nor appear to be cluttered or chaotic.
- Window signage on upper stories, which advertises businesses on the upper stories, is appropriate provided it is not unduly prominent.



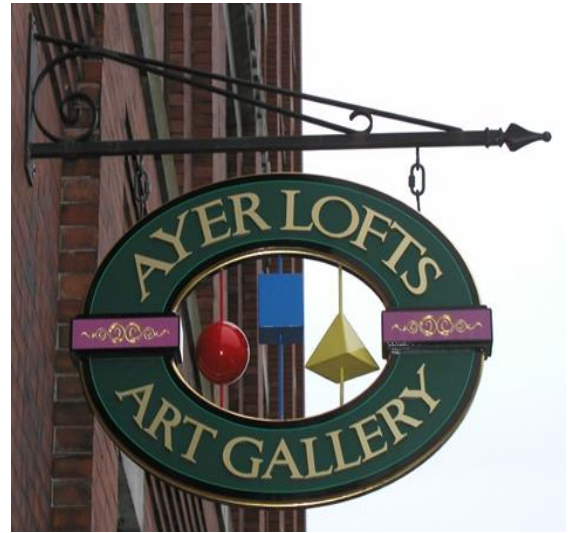
- (C) **Projecting Signs.** *Definition:* Any sign extending more than twelve inches, but no more than five feet from the face of a wall or building.



- Projecting signs should be placed perpendicular to the building, either projecting outward from a building wall or hanging from an architectural support, and should have two faces.
- Signs hung from a support should usually be centered on that support.
- The lowest point of a projecting sign or bracket shall not be less than eight feet above the sidewalk.
- Projecting signs may be illuminated.
- A projecting sign should be positioned where it will not damage or visually intrude upon architectural details, and where it will not obscure a wall sign.
- Brackets or other suspension devices should match the sign style and should be designed as a decorative or complementary part of the sign. Brackets are not included as part of the size of the sign.



- Sign brackets should be made of painted wood or prefinished, pre-painted metal. Guy wires, if needed, should be as inconspicuous as possible.



- A projecting sign should be attuned to the mass and scale of the building to which it is attached. A large projecting sign on a small building would compete with the architectural feel of the structure and therefore would not be encouraged.



- Generally, the appropriate area for projecting signs is above the storefront windows and below the sills under the second floor windows.
- A projecting sign should be located at or near the public entrance to the storefront or building.

- (D) **Awnings and Awning Signs.** *Definition:* Any sign attached to or made a part of an awning, canopy or marquee, including any sign hanging from underneath the awning, canopy or marquee.



- The awning design should be compatible with the architecture of the building and should not obscure architectural details of the building. Further, awnings should serve as an accent to the building's design but should not be the dominant architectural feature.
- Awnings and canopy signs should be located in a traditional manner above doors and windows, and should conform to the general shape of the opening.
- Awnings may be fixed or retractable, and may have open or closed end panels. Awning valances should be loose.
- Nylon, canvas or other similar materials are suitable for awnings. Material should be high quality, colorfast and sun fade resistant. Vinyl or plastic materials are not appropriate.
- Fixed awnings should have concealed rigid metal frames.
- Awning fabric may be solid or striped.



- The length of the awning should be restricted to the length of the storefront opening. Awnings should not continue over masonry piers.
- The vertical and horizontal dimensions of the awning should be proportional to the overall projection of the awning.



- Awnings shall be constructed and erected so that the lowest portion of the projecting frame shall not be less than eight feet, and the lowest portion of the descending valance shall not be less than 6'-8", above the level of the sidewalk or public thoroughfare.
- On masonry buildings, awnings should be anchored through mortar joints rather than directly into the masonry unit itself.
- Awning signage is only permitted for first floor businesses, and may occupy a maximum of twenty percent of the valance (vertical surface) area on each face of an awning.
- Illuminated/back-lit translucent awnings or translucent letters on opaque backgrounds are discouraged.



- (E) **Freestanding Signs.** *Definition:* Any sign which is supported by structures or supports in or upon the ground and independent of support from any building.



- Freestanding signs are only appropriate for properties where the building is well set back from the street and there are no other means of appropriate signage.
- Freestanding signs within a historic district should be carefully designed, located, and scaled in order that they not undermine the scale and character of the district.
- Monument signs are a generally less obtrusive alternative to a pole sign.
- Lighting of freestanding signs is permitted, provided that the lighting is shielded and directed only toward the sign. Internally illuminated monument signs should be avoided.
- Freestanding signs should be small in area and low in height to reinforce the pedestrian character of the district. Larger signs should be further set back from the sidewalk in order not to overwhelm the pedestrian.

