

Design Guidelines - Signs

Both the residential and commercial areas of New Albany's Historic Districts include signs as part of the landscape. Signs help to identify businesses and historic and cultural attractions, convey important information on area goods and services, and provide direction and orientation to the traveler.

Rather than being an advertisement, signs can effectively communicate information as well as enhance the image of a given area. Left uncontrolled, signs can introduce visual clutter to the landscape, particularly in the primarily commercial Downtown Historic District.



Creative, attractive signs, like this one on East Third Street, help call positive attention to a business.

The New Albany Historic Preservation Commission must consider a proposed sign's style, its impact on the building and district, its placement and other aesthetic factors when reviewing signs for approval. For these reasons, the Commission may not approve a sign that would be the maximum size allowable under the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

In reviewing requests for a new sign, the New Albany Historic Preservation Commission

evaluates the material, location, size, style, color, graphics, support structure, and height of the proposed sign. As a general rule, new signage should be made of traditional materials such as wood, metal, or stone. The sign should be placed so not to visually compete with the building or streetscape, or damage or obscure character defining architectural features of the building.

The Commission is very concerned with the quality of proposed sign materials. Historically, signs were typically made of wood and attached directly to the building or suspended from wrought iron brackets. Later, as building styles changed, a wider range of materials was used, including bronze or brass plates, cast iron, etched or painted glass, leaded glass, gold leaf, tile, and terrazzo.

The Commission encourages the use of materials that convey a business' identity and are consistent with the historic character of the building. These include wood, brass, bronze, gold leaf, etched glass, paint, aluminum, stainless steel, enameled metal, leaded glass, appliques, tile, and terrazzo. Mounting individual wood or metal letters to a signboard is also encouraged. In all cases, using durable and quality materials is recommended.

The Commission discourages the uses of plastic, vinyl or extruded metal sections for signs in the Local Historic Districts.

Drawings of the proposed sign must accompany a Certificate of Appropriateness Application.

These drawings:

- a. Must have front elevation with sign drawn to scale.*
- b. Must include side elevation of dimensional signs to show proposed depth of signage.*
- c. A site plan is required to show exact location.*

- d. *Color samples and material samples must be submitted.*

In mounting signs, care should be taken to avoid or minimize the damage to historic facades and materials. Whenever possible, reusing hardware or brackets from previous signs, or attaching them in the same location, is preferred.

If the reuse of existing hardware or locations is not possible, using mounting locations that can be easily patched if the sign is removed is recommended. For example, placing holes for mounting hardware in sound mortar joints rather than directly into masonry would allow for future repair if the sign is removed or relocated.

Sg1 Historically significant signs should be retained and repaired.

Sg2 A business should not have more than two signs – one primary and one secondary. A primary sign typically has the name of the business, while secondary signs would inform the customers of products sold, services rendered, or phone numbers. Secondary signs should be no more than half of the primary signs' dimensions.

Sg3 In buildings that contain multiple businesses, signage should be unified. Consider designating a 'tenant area' for signs, where all tenants would be listed in a uniform format.

Sg4 Signs should not cover architectural elements or obscure the display area. They should be attached in a manner that does not damage the building materials.



This signboard on Pearl Street lists the building's tenants in an attractive, easy to read format.

Sg5 Signs should complement and fit in with the building façade in color, composition and materials.

Sg6 Acceptable sign types include flush-mounted panel signs; painted non-panel signs; projecting or hanging signs; and window, door or transom signs.

Panel Signs: These types of signs are those that are applied directly onto a placard or panel. This placard is then attached to the wall in architecturally open spaces.

Non-panel Signs: Usually applied directly to a display or transom window, an awning valence or the building itself, these signage types are used on buildings lacking space designed specifically for signage such as a sign frieze.

Projecting (or Hanging) Signs:
These two-sided signs are similar to panel signs. Attached to the building so that they stand away from the building's surface, in many cases they are installed at a right angle or on a building's corner.

Sg7 Flush-mounted panel wall signs should be attached directly to the face of an exterior wall, parallel to the building.

Sg8 The length of flush-mounted panel wall signs shall be no greater than 2/3 the width of the building storefront. The height of the sign should be no more than three feet or 50% of the sign width, whichever is less. Wider or longer signs shall be considered on a case-by-case basis, particularly when warranted by architectural features.

Sg9 The length of a painted wall sign shall be no greater than 1/3 the length of the wall on which it will be painted. The height of the sign should be no more than three feet or 50% of the sign width, whichever is less.

Sg10 Projecting signs shall be of a scale appropriate to the building, but generally should not exceed twelve square feet in combined area (both sides).

Sg11 Projecting signs shall

- Not project (at a right angle) more than four (4) feet from the building.

- Not extend above the highest point of the roof line.
- Not exceed one per premise.
- Maintain a free clearance to grade of at least ten (10) feet.

On Main Street, INDOT regulations require projecting signs to be mounted at least 14 1/2 feet above the sidewalk. Any sign that projects over the right-of-way requires approval from the Board of Public Works and Safety.

Sg12 Painted or gold leaf window signs may be up to twenty percent of the window area.



Historically, signs were often located in the storefront cornice area, as seen on this Pearl Street building.

Sg13 Painted or gold leaf window signs may be up to fifty percent of the door glass area.

Sg14 Painted or gold leaf transom signs may be up to twenty percent of the transom glass area.

Sg15 Free-standing ground signs, if approved by the commission, shall be no more than sixteen square feet in combined area (both sides).

Sg16 Temporary signage announcing special events may not exceed sixteen square feet. These signs shall be removed when the event is completed or after three months, whichever is less. Temporary signs should not be illuminated. “Spinner,” triangular flag or pennant roping and other draped or tied banners are prohibited within historic districts.

Sg17 Lighted signs shall use an indirect incandescent lighting method such as overhead or gooseneck lights. Internally lit signs, fluorescent lighting, spotlights and electronic (LED and similar technologies) signs are not appropriate for use in historic districts.

Flashing, animated and blinking lights are not appropriate for use on signs and should be avoided. No sign that revolves, or is put into motion by the atmosphere shall be permitted.

Sg18 In general, murals and new painted signs on walls are discouraged, but may be considered on a case-by-case basis.



The Schmitt Furniture sign is just one example of a historic neon sign found downtown, and has served as inspiration for new neon signs nearby.

Sg19 Historic neon signs should be maintained and preserved. New neon signs will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Sg20 A sign should express a direct, easy-to-read message.

Sg21 A letter style should be chosen that is easy to read. Because the contrast between lettering and background greatly influences legibility, light colored letters on dark backgrounds are preferred. Lettering should occupy only about 60% of a signboard.

Sg22 Use appropriate materials for signage, including carved or painted wooden signs, signs applied to canvas awnings, smooth-surface metal signs, and lettering applied to glass using gold leaf, paint or etching. The total square-foot regulations apply to all applications listed above, including canvas.

Lettering and graphics can be painted or carved onto the background of the primary materials. All wood signs should be painted. In most cases natural stained or varnished finishes that create a rustic appearance are not appropriate and should be avoided.

Plastic is generally not acceptable as a sign material in the historic district. Printed vinyl materials, whether used as a banner or adhered to a backing board are generally not acceptable as a sign material in the historic district and are discouraged.

Sg23 Design storefront-level signs that are primarily oriented to pedestrians and are scaled accordingly.

Sg24 Preserve and maintain historic “ghost signs,” as they enrich the character of the historic district.

Sg25 A Certificate of Appropriateness is not required for the installation of National Register plaques or state-approved historic markers. Plaques and markers are encouraged and should be installed in a manner that does not damage historic fabric or obscure architectural details.

Sg26 An awning valence provides an excellent opportunity for graphics and signage. For this reason, the Commission encourages using the valence for signage. They are an appropriate solution for signage on buildings lacking space designed specifically for that purpose. For additional guidelines regarding awnings and canopies, see section AC.

Sg27 The use of a sandwich board, back-to-back sign or V-board is allowed in the historic district on a limited basis and must not contribute to visual clutter of the streetscape nor impede the flow of pedestrian traffic.

No more than one (1) sandwich board, back-to-back sign or V-board per business is allowed. Signs of any of these types must be considered as a portion of the overall allowable square footage for each individual building. The

signs must conform to the basic guidelines for signage including color, material, style, graphics and placement.

Sandwich boards, back-to-back boards or V-boards may not exceed ten (10) square feet on either side, for a total of twenty (20) square feet for the whole sign. The sign may not exceed four (4) feet in height.

Signs of this type must be removed from outside the location at the close of the business day. The use of plastic for sandwich boards, back-to-back signs or V-boards is not allowed.

For Further Information

Preservation Brief No. 25: The Preservation of Historic Signs (National Park Service)

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring & Reconstructing Historic Building, Kay D. Weeks and Anne E. Grimmer (National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, 1995)

Technical Brief on Rehabilitation Design: General Guidelines for Sensitive Façade Rehabilitation in Older Commercial Areas (March-April 1989)

Guidelines: Signs for Main Street, National Trust for Historic Preservation (Washington, DC, Preservation Press, 1987)

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*Clockwise from top left:
ghost sign, projecting sign,
panel/flush-mounted sign
(with backing), panel/flush-
mounted sign (without
backing), free-standing ground
sign, painted window/ non-
panel sign.*

