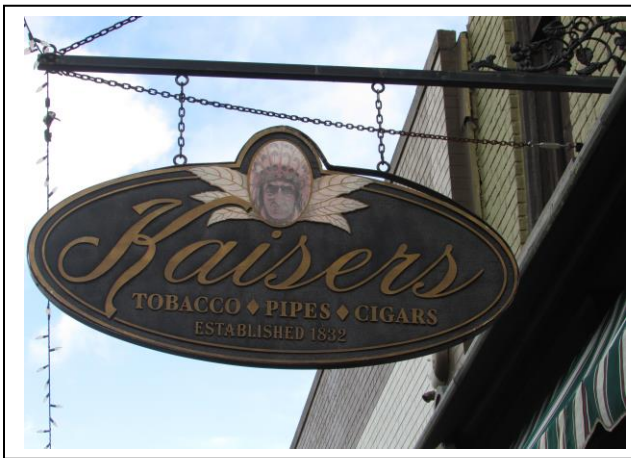


# Design Guidelines - Signs

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 goods and services, and provide direction and orientation to the traveler. Left uncontrolled, however, signs can introduce visual clutter to the landscape, particularly in the primarily commercial Downtown Historic District.

In reviewing requests for a new sign, the New Albany Historic Preservation Commission evaluates the material, location, size, style, color, support structure, and height of the proposed sign. It also takes into account the impacts on the building and the surrounding district; for these reasons, the Commission may not approve a sign that would be the maximum size allowable under the Historic Preservation Ordinance. Please be aware that the city's zoning ordinance also regulates signage, and when there are differences between these two, the stricter regulations will apply. Most signs will require a sign permit from the city, in addition to a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Preservation Commission.



*Creative and well-placed signs, like this one on Pearl Street, can call positive attention to a business regardless of their size.*

*As you are designing your sign, please keep the following principles in mind:*

*New signs in the historic district should:*  
**Respect the historic, pedestrian-oriented context** – New signs should complement, rather than compete with the character of a historic building and the surrounding district. Signage should be designed and scaled with pedestrians in mind, not drivers.

**Encourage an interesting streetscape, free from visual clutter** – Be creative in designing new signs, and remember that a single, well-designed and well-positioned sign can do more to identify and benefit your business than multiple poorly-designed signs.

**Utilize durable, quality materials and be installed in a way to minimize impacts on the building** – Consider the appearance of your sign over time, and use materials that have a proven track record of performance. Signs should be installed so they will cause little or no damage to the building, both now and when they are removed.

*Drawings of the proposed sign must accompany a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application. These drawings:*

- a. Must have front elevation with sign drawn to scale and with dimensions, shown in proposed location. If the sign will be visible from another elevation (e.g. a projecting sign that will be seen from the side), a rendering showing that view must also be provided.*
- b. Color samples and material samples must be submitted.*

**Sg1** Design storefront-level signs that are primarily oriented to pedestrians and are scaled accordingly.

**Sg2** Signs should complement and fit in with the building façade in color, composition and materials.

**Sg3** Signs should not cover architectural elements or obscure the display area.

**Sg4** Signs should be attached in a manner that does not damage the building materials. Any holes for mounting hardware should be drilled into the mortar of masonry buildings, rather than the masonry units themselves, and the number of anchor points should be minimized. Utilize existing mounting hardware if possible.

**Sg5** 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.

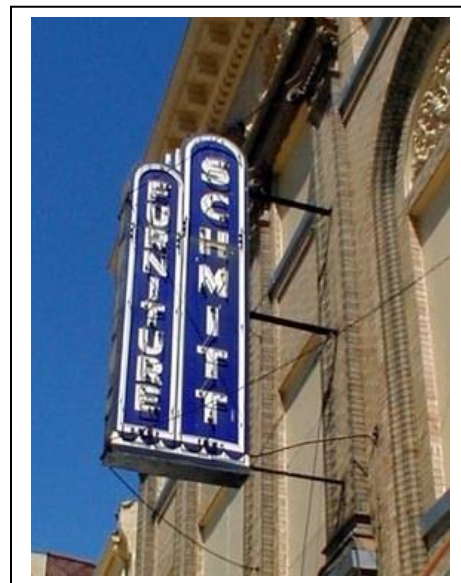
**Sg6** Use appropriate materials for signage, including carved or painted wooden signs, signs applied to canvas awnings, smooth-surface metal signs, and lettering applied to glass using gold leaf, paint, etching, or vinyl.

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

also generally not acceptable as a permanent sign material in the historic district. If durable modern materials such as Urethane board or MDO board are utilized, they should be finished in a way that gives the appearance of traditional materials. Matte finishes are preferred to glossy.

**Sg7** Historically significant signs should be retained and repaired.

**Sg8** Historic neon signs should be maintained and preserved. New neon signs will be considered on a case-by-case basis.



*The historic Schmitt Furniture sign is an important part of the downtown streetscape, and has served as inspiration for new neon signs nearby.*

**Sg9** Preserve and maintain historic “ghost signs,” as they enrich the character of the historic district. Avoid restoring these signs to like-new condition, where all evidence of their age would be lost, but instead choose treatments that maintain the character and patina of the sign while preserving it.

**Sg10** A business should not have more than two signs – one primary and one secondary. Secondary signs should generally be no more than half of the primary signs’ dimensions. Additional signage may be approved for corner buildings at the discretion of the HPC.

**Sg11** Recommended sign types include flush-mounted signs; painted wall signs; projecting or hanging signs; awning signs; and window, door or transom signs.

**Sg12** Flush-mounted wall signs should be attached directly to the face of an exterior wall, parallel to the building and in a location that will not obstruct or impact architectural features.

**Sg13** The length of a flush-mounted wall sign 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.

**Sg14** 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. New painted wall signs are not appropriate for previously-unpainted masonry buildings.

**Sg15** Projecting or hanging signs shall be of a scale appropriate to the building, but generally should not exceed twelve square feet in combined area (both sides).

**Sg16** Projecting signs shall:  
a. Not project (at a right angle) more than four (4) feet from the building.  
b. Not extend above the highest point of the roof line.

**Administrative sign approvals:**  
Signs that fit within the design guidelines can typically be approved at the staff level, without the need for applicants to wait for or attend a regular meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission. A sign permit or other city approvals will still be required, for most sign types.

c. Maintain a free clearance to grade of at least eight (8) feet, with ten (10) feet the preferred clearance. Any sign that projects over the right-of-way requires approval

from the Board of Public Works and Safety.

**Sg17** An awning provides an excellent opportunity for graphics and signage, particularly on buildings lacking space designed specifically for that purpose. The lettering or graphics on an awning sign should be no more than 24” high and cover no more than 1/3 of the awning area. For additional guidelines regarding awnings and canopies, see section AC.

**Sg18** Painted, vinyl or gold leaf window signs may be up to twenty percent of the window area. Interior signs installed within 12” of the storefront glass and intended to be seen from the exterior are considered window signs.

**Sg19** Painted, vinyl or gold leaf window signs may be up to fifty percent of the door glass area.

**Sg20** Painted, vinyl or gold leaf transom signs may be up to twenty percent of the transom glass area.



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

**Sg21** Free-standing ground signs, if approved by the commission, shall be of a scale appropriate to the building and its site. Sixteen square feet in combined area (both sides) is generally a good starting point for many buildings in the district.

**Sg22** The use of a sandwich board or back-to-back sign is allowed in the

historic district on a limited basis, but must not contribute to visual clutter of the streetscape nor impede the flow of pedestrians using assistive devices, such as walkers or wheelchairs.

No more than one (1) sandwich board or back-to-back sign per business is allowed generally, although a corner business with entrances on both street frontages may be allowed one (1) additional sign of this type.

Sandwich boards or back-to-back 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. Traditional materials such as wood or chalk board should be used, or if modern materials are used they should be finished in a way to give the appearance of traditional materials. The use of plastic for sandwich boards or back-to-back signs is not allowed.

Signs of this type must be removed from outside the location at the close of the business day.

**Sg23** 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 shall not be illuminated. “Spinner,” triangular flag or pennant roping and other draped or tied banners are prohibited within historic districts, as are “feather” ground signs and human sign holders.

**Sg24** Lighted signs shall use an indirect lighting method such as overhead or gooseneck lights. The appearance of the light fixture should be minimized if it is not a design element, and the light should be shielded to minimize glare. Internally lit signs, fluorescent lighting, and electronic signs are not appropriate for use in historic districts. Changeable message LED readerboards or digital signs are not permitted in the historic district.

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.

**Sg25** Murals will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Murals may not be painted directly on masonry walls that have not previously been painted. Subjects related to local history or having some other local significance are encouraged. The installation of a mural should complement and enhance the building and its surroundings. The location of the mural on the building should not cover or detract from significant or character-defining architectural features. Murals should not be located in an area which may cause undue distraction to drivers, and should be sited far enough away from other murals as to allow the visitor proper appreciation of each individually and not cause visual clutter.

**Sg26** 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.

**Sg27** 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.

## **For Further Information**

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

<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/25-signs.htm>

*Preservation Brief No. 11: Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts (National Park Service)*

<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/11-storefronts.htm>

*The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*  
<https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/rehab/index.htm>

*Revised 11/28/18*



*Clockwise from top left:  
ghost sign (appropriately restored), projecting sign, unified tenant / marquee sign,  
painted wall sign, window sign, flush-mounted wall sign.*

