



# DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR ON-PREMISE SIGNS AND AWNINGS

(Adopted June 17, 2003)

---

## Introduction to the Guidelines:

The *Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings* are established to allow for effective signage that is appropriate to the character of the city's historic districts and landmarks, and preserves the integrity of historic structures. Property owners and their architects should carefully review the design guidelines before proceeding with a project or applying for a sign or awning permit for any historic property to determine if the plans are consistent with the design guidelines.

The Planning Department staff and Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) will evaluate sign or awning proposals for consistency with the design guidelines. Staff are available to review the plans with applicants at all stages of a project. Once plans are complete, an application for a *Certificate of No Change* or *Certificate of Appropriateness* must be submitted. Applicants should allow ample time for staff review and assistance.

A *Certificate of No Change* may be issued by staff for sign and awning proposals that conform to the design guidelines. A Certificate of No Change may be approved within several business days once the application is complete.

A *Certificate of Appropriateness* is required for sign or awning proposals that do not conform to the design guidelines. Approval generally takes one month and requires review by the HPC at its regular monthly public hearing. In determining whether to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for a sign or awning proposal, the HPC will consider special situations including building condition, building orientation, historic precedence and exceptional design proposals.

After receiving the signed copy of the approved *Certificate of No Change* or *Certificate of Appropriateness*, the applicant may take the approved application and stamped plans to the Inspections Department to receive a permit, if required.

**NOTE:** All signs and awnings also must comply with the requirements of Chapter 543 of the City's zoning code as well as other applicable regulations. If a provision of these design guidelines conflicts with a provision of the zoning code or with any other regulation, the more restrictive provision will apply. For example, the zoning code sign regulations for many residential uses are more restrictive than the HPC design guidelines. In such a case, the zoning regulations will govern. Therefore, property owners and their architects should carefully review the zoning code sign regulations before proceeding with a project or applying for a sign or awning permit to determine if the plans are consistent with the applicable zoning regulations.

For more information about the *Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings*, contact the Minneapolis Planning Department at 612-673-2597.

## **Design Guidelines for On-Premise Signs and Awnings:**

### **1. *In General:***

- a. *Sign message:* All signs, except window signs, real estate signs, project information signs, auxiliary signs, temporary signs and portable signs, are limited to the name and address of the establishment.
- b. *Historic signs:* Maintenance or restoration of existing historic signs is encouraged and should not be counted in number of allowable signs.
- c. *Number of signs:* Each principal building entrance that faces a public street, or each ground floor principal use, whichever is less, is allowed two signs. A corner lot with a principal entrance on each street is allowed two signs per street frontage. The two signs may be a combination of one wall sign, one projecting sign, one ground sign, one banner, and awning signage. However, a property may not have both a projecting sign and a ground sign. Only one of the signs should be illuminated, except that banners and awning signs should never be illuminated. Awning signs are limited to ground floor awnings and are subject to the specific guidelines for awnings and awning signs. Parking lot signs are subject to the specific guidelines for signs accessory to parking lots.
- d. *Location of building signs:* Wherever possible, signs should be placed in traditional sign locations including the storefront sign band area. Signs should not obscure or damage architectural features including windows, doors, pilasters, columns and historic signs. Building signs should be located only on the primary façade of the building adjacent to the street and should be no higher than fourteen (14) feet, except as otherwise provided in the specific guidelines for wall signs.
- e. *Color:* Sign colors and materials should be compatible with the colors of the building and its surroundings. Day-glo, light reflecting or fluorescent colors or materials are not allowed.
- f. *Installation:* Sign installation should have a minimal impact on the building and to the extent practical allow the building to be returned to its original condition if the sign is removed. Existing signboards and sign frames should be reused to limit drilling new holes into masonry. Wall signs should be attached to the building through the mortar joints. Projecting signs should be attached to a permanent mounting plate. Awnings should be attached to window or door frames and should never damage masonry.
- g. *Illumination:* Signs may be illuminated externally, internally, or by neon. Plastic face covers should not be placed on illuminated signs. All illuminated building signs should connect to a permanent mounting plate located near the entrance. Electrical conduit should be installed through the permanent mounting plate. Not more than one brick should be damaged by the installation of the permanent mounting plate. Electrical conduit and any lighting fixture should be attached to the sign and not the building wall.

### **2. *Sign Types Allowed:***

- |                      |                                     |                       |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Wall signs.       | e. Awning signs.                    | i. Real estate signs. |
| b. Projecting signs. | f. Window signs.                    | j. Temporary signs.   |
| c. Banners.          | g. Marquee signs, on theaters only. | k. Auxiliary signs.   |
| d. Ground signs.     | h. Project information signs.       | l. Portable signs.    |

### **3. *Sign Types Not Allowed:***

- a. Off-premise advertising signs and billboards.
- b. Roof signs, unless present during the period of significance.
- c. Backlighting signs, backlit awnings and backlit awning signs.
- d. Balloon signs.
- e. Individual letters or elements applied to the surface of a building.
- f. Pole signs, unless present during period of significance, or a project information sign, real estate sign, auxiliary sign or sign accessory to a parking lot.
- g. Canopy signs and service area canopy signs.
- h. Signs placed on or painted on a motor vehicle or trailer and parked with the primary purpose of providing signage.
- i. Signs placed or maintained on natural features.
- j. Audible signs.
- k. Signs with moving or swinging parts or elements.
- l. Any sign relating to sexually oriented uses and prohibited by the regulations governing such uses in Chapter 549, Downtown Districts.
- m. Searchlights and strobe lights.
- n. Signs attached to skyway bridges and intended to be read from the public right-of-way.
- o. Animated signs.
- p. Flashing signs.
- q. Changeable copy signs, except on a theater marquee or ground sign.

### **4. *Guidelines for Specific Types of Signs:***

- a. *Wall Signs:*
  - i. Location. Wall signs should be located between the first and second floor and should not be higher than fourteen (14) feet, except where the historic sign band is higher. Wall signs should not conceal architectural features or obstruct openings.
  - ii. Size. Wall signs should be no more than two (2) feet high and thirty-two (32) square feet in area and should not extend outward from the building more than eight (8) inches.
  - iii. Materials. Wall signs may be constructed of wood, metal, painted fiberglass or painted plastic.
  - iv. Installation. Wall signs should be attached to the building through the mortar joints. If illuminated, a wall sign should be placed adjacent to or over a permanent mounting plate for electrification. Electrical conduit and lighting fixtures should be attached to the top of the wall sign, and should not be attached to the building. Wall signs should not be painted directly on the surface of the building, except as part of the maintenance or restoration of an existing historic sign.
- b. *Projecting Signs:*
  - i. Location. Projecting signs should be located near a building entrance and should not be higher than fourteen (14) feet. Projecting signs should not conceal architectural features or obstruct openings, and should not be suspended from the soffit.
  - ii. Size. Projecting signs should be no more than twelve (12) square feet in area and should not project more than four (4) feet from the building. The thickness of a projecting sign should not exceed eight (8) inches.
  - iii. Materials. Projecting signs may be constructed of wood, metal, painted fiberglass or painted plastic.
  - iv. Installation. Projecting signs should always use a single permanent mounting plate.

- c. *Ground Signs:*
- i. Location. Ground signs should not obscure the significant architectural detail of adjacent buildings.
  - ii. Size. Ground signs should be no more than thirty-two (32) square feet in area and should not be higher than eight (8) feet.
  - iii. Materials. Ground signs should be constructed of materials similar to those found on the existing building or compatible with the existing building. Acceptable materials include brick, stone, stucco, metal or wood.
- d. *Banners:*
- i. Location. A banner should follow the location guidelines for a wall sign or a projecting sign.
  - ii. Size. A banner should follow the size guidelines for a wall sign or a projecting sign.
  - ii. Materials. A banner should be constructed of coated or uncoated fabric.
  - iv. Installation. A banner should follow the installation guidelines for a wall sign or a projecting sign.
  - v. Illumination. A banner should not be illuminated.
- e. *Awnings and Awning Signs:*
- i. Location. Awnings should fit within the window or door opening.
  - ii. Number of awnings. The number of awnings may not exceed the number of window or door openings.
  - iii. Number of awning signs. Awning signs are limited to ground floor awnings. There should be no more than one sign per awning. Awning signs should be no more than six (6) square feet in area. Where there are multiple awning signs on a building, all signs should be located in the same or similar position on the awnings.
  - iv. Materials. Awnings should be constructed of coated or uncoated cloth fabric.
  - v. Installation. Awning hardware should be attached to the window or door frame and should never damage masonry. Awnings should not be attached to or cover any part of the building wall.
  - vi. Illumination. Awnings and awning signs should not be illuminated.
  - vii. Awning shape. Awnings should project downward and outward from the openings in straight lines unless they are reflecting the curved shape of the opening. The projection of an awning should be less than its height. An awning drop or skirt should not exceed twelve (12) inches.
- f. *Window signs:*
- The number, size and location of window signs are not regulated by the HPC. A window sign may not include a backlighted sign, flashing sign, or any other sign type not allowed.
- g. *Project information signs:*
- i. Location. If attached to a building, a project information sign should be a window sign.
  - ii. Size. Freestanding project information signs should be no more than thirty-two (32) square feet in area and eight (8) feet in height.
  - iii. Number. One project information sign is allowed per street frontage and will not be counted toward the number of signs allowed.
  - iv. Illumination. Project information signs should not be illuminated.
- h. *Real estate signs:*
- i. Location. If attached to a building, a real estate sign should be a window sign.

- ii. Size. Freestanding real estate signs should be no more than thirty-two (32) square feet in area and eight (8) feet in height.
  - iii. Number. One real estate sign is allowed per street frontage and will not be counted toward the number of signs allowed.
  - iv. Illumination. Real estate signs should not be illuminated.
- i. *Temporary signs*:  
Temporary signs are limited to window signs and portable signs.
  - j. *Auxiliary signs*:
    - i. Location. If attached to a building other than a parking attendant building, an auxiliary sign should be a window sign.
    - ii. Size. Freestanding auxiliary signs should be no more than four (4) square feet in area and four (4) feet in height.
    - iii. Number. One freestanding auxiliary sign is allowed per street frontage or per parking lot street entrance and will not be counted toward the number of signs allowed.
    - iv. Illumination. Auxiliary signs should not be illuminated.
  - k. *Signs accessory to parking lots*.
    - i. Location. If attached to a building other than a parking attendant building, a parking lot sign should be a window sign.
    - ii. Size. Freestanding accessory parking lot signs should be no more than eight (8) square feet in area and six (6) feet in height. Commercial parking lot signs should be no more than fifteen (15) square feet in area and twelve (12) feet in height.
    - iii. Number. One freestanding parking lot sign is allowed per street entrance.
    - iv. Illumination. Parking lot signs should not be illuminated.
  - l. *Portable signs*.  
The number, size and location of portable signs are not regulated by the HPC. A portable sign may not include a backlighted sign, flashing sign, or any other sign type not allowed.
  - m. *Signs for multiple tenant buildings*:  
An application for approval of a master sign plan for a multiple tenant building may be submitted to the HPC for review and approval. Following approval by the HPC, staff will issue a Certificate of No Change for signs that are consistent with the approved plan.

## 5. *Definitions:*

*Awning*. A roof-like cover, often constructed of fabric, plastic, vinyl, metal or glass, designed and intended for protection from the elements or as a decorative embellishment, and which projects from a wall of a structure.

*Banner*. A piece of fabric or similar lightweight material generally with no enclosing framework, which is designed either for decoration or to provide signage, and which may be mounted to a pole or building at one (1) or more edges.

*Sign*. A structure, fixture, placard, announcement, declaration, image device, demonstration, logo or insignia used for direction, information, identification, attraction, or to advertise or promote any business, product, activity, service, interest or entertainment.

*Auxiliary sign.* A sign that has a purpose secondary to the use of the lot on which it is located such as “telephone,” “drive-through,” “cash machine,” “air,” “entrance,” “exit,” parking restrictions, security warnings or similar directives.

*Awning sign.* A sign printed on or in some fashion attached directly to an awning.

*Balloon sign.* A sign consisting of a bag or similar device made of lightweight material supported by helium, hot or pressurized air, which is greater than eighteen (18) inches in diameter.

*Canopy sign.* A sign printed or in some fashion attached directly to a canopy.

*Changeable copy sign.* A sign or portion thereof with characters, letters or illustrations that can be changed or rearranged without altering the face or the surface of the sign.

*Flashing sign.* A sign which exhibits changing light or color effect by any means, so as to provide intermittent illumination or the illusion of intermittent flashing light by any means. Also, any mode of lighting which resembles zooming, twinkling or sparkling.

*Freestanding sign.* A sign which has supporting framework that is placed on, or anchored in, the ground and which is independent of any building or other structure.

*Ground sign.* A freestanding sign with its sign face mounted on the ground, on a solid base at least as wide as the sign, or on one (1) or more poles or beams with not more than one (1) foot of open area between the sign face and the ground or base.

*Illuminated sign.* A sign lighted by or exposed to artificial lighting either on or in the sign or directed toward the sign.

*Back-lighted.* A light source contained within the sign element or sign cabinet that illuminates by shining through a translucent surface or sign face, except where only the letters of the sign copy are illuminated.

*External.* A light source outside the sign element or sign cabinet that illuminates by directing light onto the sign surface, or that illuminates only the letters of the sign copy, and which is not back-lighting.

*Internal.* A light source contained within the sign cabinet that illuminates by directing light onto the sign surface, or that illuminates only the letters of the sign copy, and which is not back-lighting.

*Neon.* A light source supplied by neon or other gas in which the light tube is bent to form letters, symbols or other shapes.

*Marquee sign.* A building sign painted on or attached to a marquee.

*On-premise sign.* A sign which directs attention to or promotes a business, establishment or activity conducted, or a product, service, interest or entertainment sold or offered, on the premises where such sign is located.

*Pole sign.* A freestanding sign which has its supportive structure anchored in the ground or on a solid base not at least as wide as the sign, or which as a sign face elevated above the ground or base by one (1) or more poles or beams and with an open area between the sign face and the ground or base of more than one (1) foot.

*Portable sign.* A sign which is designed or intended to be moveable, including by trailer or on its own wheels, even though the wheels of such sign may be removed.

*Project information sign.* A sign erected on the premises on which construction is taking place, identifying the project, the architects, engineers, landscape architects, contractors or similar artisans, or the owners, financial supporters, sponsors or similar individuals having a role or interest in the project.

*Projecting sign.* A sign which projects from a wall of a building in such manner that the sign face is perpendicular to the wall, or a sign which is suspended from a soffit or other permanent overhang.

*Real estate sign.* A sign which advertises the sale, rental or lease of the property on which the sign is located.

*Roof sign.* A sign which is mounted on the roof of a building or which projects above the top of the wall of a building with a flat, gambrel, gable or hip roof, or the deck line of a building with a mansard roof.

*Service area canopy sign.* A sign which is part of, or attached to, a service area canopy.

*Temporary sign.* A sign which is intended to be displayed for a limited time period only.

*Wall sign.* A sign attached parallel to or painted on a wall, which is supported by such wall, and which displays only one (1) sign surface, or a sign attached parallel to, or within forty-five (45) degrees of parallel, or painted on, the surface of the lower slope of a mansard roof.

*Window sign.* A sign that is placed inside a window or upon the surface of a window and is visible or is intended to be viewed from the exterior of the window.