

SIGNS

Integrate signs into their site by using building signs as accessory elements within high quality architecture and embedding any freestanding signs into the overall landscaping.

Signs often form the first and lasting impression of a place. Effective and attractive signs are especially important in areas where the economy benefits from outside visitors. Since they must provide instant information from moving vehicles, overly complex signs or cluttered groupings are a dangerous distraction to drivers. Allowing signs to compete by being bigger, brighter, and more garish than their neighbors is a self-defeating spiral toward an ugly streetscape that just repels potential customers. Everyone wins when cities and towns instead encourage competition for the most creative signs, designed to be eye-catching because of their distinctive qualities, not because they dominate the site or block views of adjacent buildings.

Signs Should Not Shout

Sign standards cannot regulate content, but can limit size, location, number of signs and even the number of words, all in the interest of traffic safety and a legitimate concern for community appearance. Fewer words and colors are best (suggested maximum of 6 words and 3 colors), combined with a symbol or logo for quick recognition. Sign variances should not be granted lightly, only under unique conditions and when minimal exceptions will not be undesirable to the character of the community.

A good sign passes three tests:

- It conveys its message clearly and quickly;*
- It compatibly fits within the structure and its surroundings;*
- It promotes the visual image of the entire community.*



Natural looking materials are preferred, including wood and metal signs with stone, masonry, or landscaped bases.

Dark backgrounds with light lettering are recommended.

They are much easier to read and, if internally lit signs are allowed, cause far less glare.



This monument-style sign proves that franchise outlets will conform to community standards if local boards stand firm.



Certain distracting signs should not be allowed and existing ones phased out over a set time period, such as flashing, moving or glaring signs, roof signs, and portable or reader board signs.



Too many signs, including one blocking the sidewalk, create visual chaos and detract from the entire area.

Building Signs, including wall and window signs, projecting signs, and awnings, should be subordinate features, framed within interesting architecture. Signs too often overwhelm the structure and obscure architectural details, but when architecture and signs work as a complementary arrangement, the entire building becomes a sign of quality.



An excellent wall sign and a projecting picture sign combine with adjacent awnings and storefront signs to create a diverse, inviting, and historically compatible streetscape at a pedestrian scale.



Encourage awnings in traditional forms and canvas-like materials to add color and depth to storefronts and provide shelter and shade to sidewalks.



A clash of conflicting wall and window signs allows none of these village storefronts to stand out. Limit window signs to under 20 percent of glass area.



Plastic, metal, and vinyl awnings are generally inappropriate and should not be used to provide excessive sign area, especially when internally lit at night.



Buildings should not be allowed to have roof lines and false facades primarily designed to emphasize overly large signs on bland boxes.



A unique and attractive sign, large enough to be seen, yet low enough to complement its landscaped setting.

Freestanding signs are only needed when buildings are set back too far from the street for signs to be seen. Otherwise, and especially in centers, building signs are sufficient and separate freestanding signs should be avoided. Low, monument-style freestanding signs are recommended over taller pole or pylon signs because ground-based signs can be better integrated with landscaping. At 4 to 7 feet high, they can also be directly seen from the eye level of drivers and are less likely to obstruct views of neighboring properties or the sky.

Large, off-premise signs mar the landscape and should be removed. Billboards can be phased out according to time limits in state law, with exceptions for industrial zones and along certain federal highways.



Reader boards should be discouraged because they add too many extra words and secondary signs as they multiply down the road. Signs should be used primarily for identification, not advertising.

The effectiveness of any landscaping effort along the frontage is clearly degraded by dominant pole or pylon signs in overly bright colors.



Directory signs with multiple listings are distracting and are not safely read from the road. Grouped businesses should be limited to wall signs and one freestanding sign identifying the plaza or building with, if deemed necessary, at most 3 or 4 individual names.

Sources: Scenic Hudson, Inc., Signs of the Times, 1992

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