
Village of Lancaster
Historic Preservation Commission
Signage Design Guidelines

Adopted 11/14/18 by the Village of Lancaster HPC ◻ www.villageoflancafterhpc.com

Purpose

These guidelines have been prepared to help business owners and property owners, along with their sign makers, develop signs that meet the objectives of the Village of Lancaster Local Historic Districts and Landmarks Code, and to facilitate the Historic Preservation Commission's implementation of the ordinance. This document is intended to serve as a guide and is not regulatory. Please note that all the signs depicted here are considered to be high quality signs that conform with the goals of these guidelines.

The Village of Lancaster Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) encourages signage within the Historic District that is handsome, distinctive, and creative. At the same time, it should also be pedestrian-oriented, restrained in character, and harmonious with the sensitive nature of the district. Large, bright, and conspicuous designs may be suitable on commercial corridors, such as Broadway and Central Avenue, that are geared to motorists, but such designs are not appropriate within the Historic District.

Overview

The following aspects of a sign are subject to review by the Historic Preservation Commission:

- Overall design
- Location of the sign on a building
- Size and shape
- Materials
- Colors
- Typefaces
- Illumination

The commission does not have purview over the specific words or message of a sign.

All signs must comply with: a) the Sign Regulations Code, a separate section (§350-35) within the Village of Lancaster, NY Code that controls the types of signs, dimensions of signs, number of signs, and other elements and b) the Historic Districts and Landmarks Code, also a separate section (§184) within the Village of Lancaster, NY Code, as administered and interpreted by the Historic Preservation Commission. These guidelines are provided to help clarify the intent of the Historic Districts and Landmarks Code. Pursuant to the Historic Districts and Landmarks code, the HPC may stipulate requirements that are stricter than the Sign Regulations Code.

The approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness by the HPC does NOT constitute a Building Permit. Applicants are required to obtain all permits required by local law.

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Because every building and every application is unique, the Historic Districts and Landmarks Code and these guidelines do not specify precise expectations. Rather, the HPC uses its reasonable judgment in applying them.

Where terms such as “should”, “appropriate”, “encouraged”, “desirable”, and “preferred” are used, the HPC may require conformance with the provision to the extent that it is applicable, practical, and reasonable in each situation.

The signs depicted here illustrate “good signage”, though each individual sign does not necessarily exemplify all of the desirable features that are discussed in this document.

General Principles

Signage should be harmonious with the character of the building with which it is associated in terms of form, design, scale, and proportion. Where multiple signs are used on one site they should be compatible with one another regarding these four elements and part of an overall sign plan for the building. Signage should be designed and placed to avoid a sense of clutter or chaos on the building façade.

While imaginative signage is encouraged, **simplicity and legibility are key to good design**. A sign with fewer words is more effective in conveying the message.

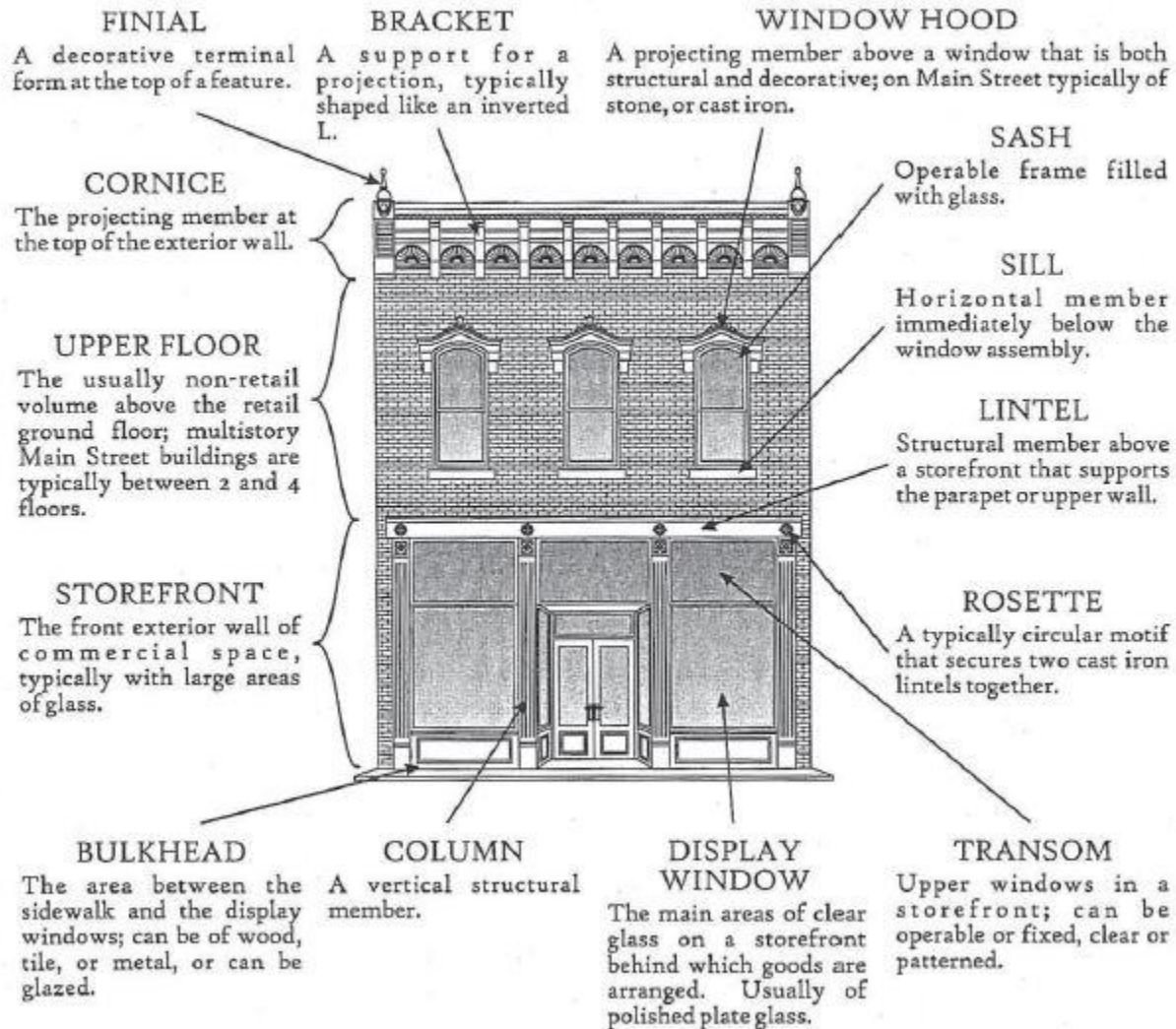
Signs should be mounted in such a way to minimize damage to historic materials. On masonry buildings, it is preferable that bolts extend through mortar joints rather than through masonry units.

Building mounted signage is more pedestrian oriented than free standing signs. Free standing signs within a historic district should be carefully designed, located, and scaled in order that it not undermine the scale and character of the district. It is preferable that freestanding signage not be used but it is allowed if there is sufficient space and it is desired by the applicant.

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ANATOMY OF A MAIN STREET BUILDING



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Size and Shape

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.

Signs should be sized to the scale of the building, the storefront, and the street. A storefront should not have more than two signs – one primary and one secondary. (revised 2/14/24)

Generally, wall signs should not exceed one square foot in area for each linear foot of building frontage nor two feet in height. Generally, freestanding signs should not exceed ten square feet nor eight feet in height, though smaller signs are preferable.

Most signs are rectangular. Wall signs are typically horizontal and projecting signs are typically vertical. Freestanding signs are more pedestrian oriented when they are small and vertical. Nonrectangular shapes add variety and interest and can be appropriate, but use of strange or highly irregular shapes, where not rationalized by the nature of the business, should be avoided.

Colors

Use of the following colors is encouraged:

- nature blending colors
- earth tone colors
- neutral colors
- pastel colors

The following colors are generally best limited to accent areas:

- bright colors
- primary colors
- metallic colors

Use of the following colors palettes is discouraged:

- high intensity colors
- fluorescent colors
- “day glow” colors

It is preferred that dark or medium colors be used for the main, background part of the sign and that light colors be used for the lettering. Use of white or light colors for the background is discouraged, especially for larger signs, reflective signs, and illuminated signs.

Suggested background colors are burgundy red, forest green, chocolate brown, black, charcoal, and navy blue. Suggested letter colors are ivory, white, or gold.

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Colors should be chosen to complement the color of the building.

In general, it is best to use no more than three colors on a sign: one for the background, one for the lettering, and a third color for accent (such as for borders, motifs, logos, or shading). A fourth color might be used for illustrations.

Many signs use gold leaf for lettering. With a dark background, gold leaf can bring much beauty to a sign. One need not be concerned about the gold being scraped off as the amount that could be collected would be virtually worthless.

Illumination

Lighting is an important factor in a sign's character. Signs may be externally illuminated - lit by one or more shielded, stationery bulbs projecting onto the sign; internally illuminated - where a translucent-plastic sign is lit from the inside; or made with neon - exposed tubes filled with a gas that glows when electrified. Often street lights or other area lights provide sufficient lighting, such that the sign need not be lit at all.

Use of internal illumination is strongly discouraged and will generally not be approved. The plastic feel of internally illuminated signs is inappropriate in a historic district.

Neon is generally appropriate for interior window signage only.

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 should not be approved.

Signs should be illuminated in such a way as to reduce the spill-over of light to adjacent properties and public right-of-ways. (revised 2/14/24)



While “goose-neck lamps” are prevalent in the Historic District – thin or modern LED fixtures are also acceptable.

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APPROPRIATE

Full cutoff fixtures



Fully shielded 'Period' style or contemporary fixtures



Shielded/properly-aimed PAR floodlights



Goose-necks, soffit, and lantern-style



Shielded lit bollards



INAPPROPRIATE

Drop lens and sag lens fixtures with exposed bulb



Wallpacks and wall-mounted fixtures



Unshielded 'Period' style or contemporary fixtures



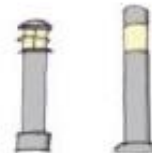
Unshielded or poorly-shielded floodlights



Single-tube fluorescent fixtures



Unshielded lit bollards



Single-tube fluorescent fixtures on arms



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Materials

Traditionally, the most attractive outdoor signs have generally been made of wood, mainly cedar, redwood and mahogany (though teak, cypress and others are sometimes used). These woods are dimensionally stable and resistant to rot and decay. They also hold paint and varnish well.

Various newer synthetic products achieve the desired look of hand-crafted traditional signage. Urethane, a synthetic material, is used increasingly. It is durable and easy to work, and, when painted, it resembles wood. Metal is also an appropriate material.

Materials should have a matte finish and not be reflective nor translucent.

The following materials are inappropriate:

- sheet plastic
- plastic substrates
- interior grade wood
- unfaced plywood

It is desirable that signs have a solid “feel” rather than a “plastic” feel.

Typefaces

A sign utilizing easily recognized symbols and clear, crisp lettering will identify a business or activity effectively and enhance and complement the general appearance of the street.

Every typeface has a particular style or “mood”. Typefaces should be carefully selected to be harmonious with the building and nature of the business.

The number of lettering styles should be limited to increase legibility, generally to two.



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Building-Mounted Signs

Building mounted signs – including wall signs, projecting signs, awning signs, and canopy signs – should be located in the most appropriate location on the building. There is frequently a horizontal band or panel, or an open section on the wall which is clearly the most logical location for a sign.

Generally, the appropriate zone for signage, including the brackets for projecting signs, is above the storefront windows and below the sills under the second floor windows.

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.

Window signage on upper stories, advertising businesses located on the upper stories, is appropriate provided it is not unduly prominent. Otherwise, signage placed above the second floor sills is discouraged, but may be approved if the design is suitably understated and is compatible with the building.

Signs should be placed where they respect an existing sign line established by the signs on adjacent establishments.

Signs should not obscure any architectural features, including the windows, of the building.

Wall signs should be affixed to the building, parallel to the building with one face showing.

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.



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Projecting Signs

Projecting signs should be placed perpendicular to the building and should have two faces. Generally, it is best that they be vertical rather than horizontal in form. It is most appropriate for projecting signs to be installed on the lower level of a structure. (revised 2/14/24)

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



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Awning and Canopy Signs

Lettering should be placed on the front valence, a cross gable as on the red sign, and on the side panels. Awnings should be made of canvas material.



convex



**traditional
(shed)**



**dome
(bubble)**



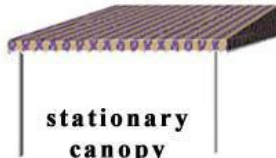
gable entrance



circular entrance



casement



**stationary
canopy**



**lateral arm
retractable**



concave

Common awning types

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Window Signs

Window signs may be painted on, attached to, or suspended behind the window. There should be a minimal area covered so that the signage does not block the view into the establishment nor appear to be cluttered or chaotic. It is best that lettering be placed either a) at the top and/or bottom of the window; or b) in the center of the window.



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Freestanding Signs

Use of building signage is preferred in the Historic District but freestanding signs may be used if desired by the applicant. They 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.

Freestanding signs should be supported by two wood, metal, or granite posts that, generally, are square in cross section. Alternatively, like the Governor's Inn sign, below, the sign may be hung from a bar cantilevered off one post. Use of round steel poles is not appropriate. Large pylon type signs are not appropriate.

As it complies with the Building Code, freestanding signs may be a maximum of eight feet in height or eight feet in width; however, the total sign area may not exceed 32 square feet and the total face area shall not exceed 24 square feet. (revised 2/14/24)



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Ghost Signs

Ghost signs on buildings in the historic district should not be removed, covered, altered or repainted.
(revised 2/14/24)

Inappropriate Signs in the Historic District

Changeable letter or changeable type signs are generally inappropriate, except where traditionally used (such as theater marquee signs).

Digital, LED or flashing signs are not appropriate within the historic district.

Inflatable signs or banners (for example, feather flag banners) are not appropriate within the historic district, except as they comply with local codes for temporary signage.

Billboard type signs and advertisements are not appropriate within the historic district.

A-Frame or Sandwich Signs are permitted within the historic district but must be brought inside at the close of business each day. Signs that are left out must comply with local codes and require an approved Certificate of Appropriateness and applicable building permits. (revised 2/14/24)

Murals

Refer to the Historic Preservation Commission Mural Guidelines (revised 2/14/24).