



Signs are used to identify the location of a business and attract customers. Signs on commercial historic properties should be integral to the design of the building and clearly visible to customers. Sign design and placement also greatly impacts the character of a streetscape. Historic signs should be preserved wherever possible, while new signs should exhibit qualities of style, performance, and compatibility with historic signs in the district.

In addition to the following guidelines for preservation districts, the Louisville Metro Government provides sign regulations in Chapter 155 of the zoning code, and Chapter 8 of the Land Development Code and has published a Downtown Sign Manual that provides requirements for sizing and dimensional standards of signs, in addition to more specific requirements for signs in the downtown area.

Treatment of Historic Signs

Historic signs significantly contribute to the character of a historic building and the district as a whole. Originally, many signs in commercial areas were geared towards pedestrian foot traffic, so they were small and still effective. However, as automobile traffic increased, signs became larger to attract the attention of passing motorists. Today, these large signs may appear as “ghost signs” on the sides of historic buildings, but may also appear as large marquee signs that can obscure or overwhelm historic architectural details. While historic signs range in size, style, and content, they should be retained whenever possible, especially when they are a significant part of the building or district's history or design.



Elements of a Good Sign

- » Pedestrian-Oriented
- » Does Not Obscure Architectural Detail
- » Historically-Compatible Material
- » Limited Number of Lettering Styles
- » Basic, Geometric Shape
- » Simple Attachment



Consider history, context, and design when determining whether to retain a historic sign. Here, the careful installation of an awning underneath the historic cast-iron sign highlights the historic sign detail.

SIGN REGULATIONS INFORMATION

Consult the Department of Public Works with any questions regarding sign regulations. Licensing requirements for projecting signs and portable signs are specified by the Department of Public Works and must be followed before installation.

SG.1 Consider history, context, and design when determining whether to retain a historic sign. Retaining a historic sign is especially important when the sign is:

- » Associated with a historic figure, event, or place.
- » Significant to the building or preservation district, or as evidence of the history of the product, business, or service advertised.
- » Characteristic of a specific historic period.
- » Integral to the building's design or physical fabric.
- » Attached in a way that removal could harm the integrity of a historic property's design or damage its materials.
- » An outstanding example of the sign maker's art because of its craftsmanship, use of materials, or design.
- » Recognized as a popular focal point in the community.

SG.2 Maintain a historic wall sign whenever possible.

- » Leave a historic painted wall sign, or "ghost sign," exposed wherever possible.
- » Do not over-restore a historic wall sign to the point that it no longer provides evidence of a building's age and original function.

Sign Types and Positions

- A. Cornice Sign
- B. Upper-Floor Window Sign
- C. Transom Sign
- D. Hanging Sign
- E. Awning Sign
- F. Lower Display Window Sign
- G. Central Display Window Sign
- H. Glazed Door Sign
- I. Wall Sign for Upper-Floor Tenants



New Signs

As with historic signs, new signs impact the character of the district. New signs should be designed to be compatible with the associated building and the overall district as well as historic signs. They should be integrated into the architectural design of the building and should not dominate the facade or interfere with adjacent buildings. When considering a new sign, careful consideration should be given to its size, shape, and materials; where it will be positioned on the building; if and how it will be illuminated; and its content. The installation of a new sign must also comply with all other applicable city sign regulations.

Sign Size

The total area of the sign is regulated by Louisville's Land Development Code. The following guidelines support those regulations and provide more detail regarding the sizing of new signs in preservation districts.

SG.3 Limit the total area of a sign.

- » Design a storefront-level sign that is oriented to pedestrians and that is scaled appropriately to pedestrians.
- » Construct a flush-mounted sign to be under 2.5' in height.
- » Design a projecting sign to project no more than 5' or half the width of the sidewalk, whichever is less.

SG.4 Limit the number of signs installed on each storefront.

- » Generally, do not install more than two signs on any storefront.

Sign Installation

When installing a new sign on a historic building, it is important to maintain the building's key architectural features and minimize potential damage to the walls of the building.

SG.5 Install a sign in a manner that does not damage or obscure architectural features of the historic building.

- » Minimize the number of sign anchor points.
- » Use an existing sign bracket if possible.
- » Design a sign to integrate with the architectural features of the historic building.
- » Do not penetrate brick when attaching a sign to a masonry building.

Sign Location

A new sign should be located to preserve traditional signage patterns and help direct users toward the primary building entrance.

SG.6 Place a sign to be compatible with those in the preservation district.

- » Place attached wall signs over the unadorned frieze of a cornice or along the top of the storefront below the sill of the second-story windows.
- » For historic residential buildings, attach a sign near a doorway or on a porch.

Pedestrian-Oriented Signs



Over-Scaled Signs



Limit the total area of a sign and the number of signs installed on each storefront. The design of a sign greatly impacts the character of a streetscape. Historically, signs were geared to pedestrian foot traffic so they could be small and effective. However, as automobile traffic increased, signs became larger to attract the attention of passing motorists. Today, these large signs often obscure and overwhelm architectural details in historic commercial districts, and are therefore inappropriate to install.

- » Consult the Department of Public Works to determine whether a portable sign will be approved.
- » Do not install a free-standing sign where an attached sign will accomplish the same goal. A free-standing sign should be low to the ground and appropriately landscaped.
- » Do not install a marquee on any building other than an operating theater or hotel or another use that traditionally used a marquee.
- » Do not install a roof-top sign or billboard.

Sign Materials and Character

A new sign should be in character with the materials, colors, and details of the historic building, and its content should be visually interesting and clearly legible.

SG.7 Use a simple, context-specific design.

- » Use styles and colors that reflect the character of the business and/or the building.
- » When designing a window sign, use a style and color that contrasts with the interior space and does not obscure the display area.
- » Limit the amount of lettering styles and colors.
- » Design lettering on flush-mounted signs to be between 8" and 18" high and to occupy no more than about 65% of the sign board.

SG.8 Use a sign material that is compatible with the character and materials of the building and district.

- » Use a permanent, durable material that reflects Louisville's context.
- » Consider using a painted or carved wood sign, painted wall sign, sign applied to canvas awning, smooth-surface sheet metal sign, or lettering applied to glass using gold leaf, paint, or etching.

Sign Illumination

Lighting a sign is sometimes necessary and should be done in a way that enables the sign to be read, but does not illuminate an area beyond the sign. Sign illumination is also regulated by the Louisville Land Development Code.

SG.9 Place signage in a location that benefits from existing interior lighting and street lighting.

SG.10 Where necessary, use a compatible, shielded light source to illuminate a sign.

- » Use concealed incandescent lighting where possible.
- » Use neon sparingly.
- » Do not use a reader board in most cases. Consult with the Louisville Metro Government Planning and Design Services Office with questions regarding reader boards.
- » Do not use an internally-lit, plastic box sign, bare spot light, or high-wattage metal halide light.
- » Do not use a sign that flashes, moves, or has inappropriately-scaled graphics.