



City of Easton, Pennsylvania HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

GUIDELINES FOR SIGNS AND AWNINGS

This brochure, published by the City of Easton Historic District Commission, contains guidelines for commercial signs and awnings within the Historic District. Please review this information before planning a sign or awning for your property. Familiarity with HDC standards can help move a project quickly through the approval process, saving applicants both time and money.

Signs in the Local Historic District should be the point of designation for a product or store. Rather than being an advertisement, signs should communicate immediate information about the business or service, and otherwise add to the attractiveness of the entire streetscape.



Signs are necessary for communication, as well as identifying available goods and services. But signs can affect the image of an entire district. It is therefore important that signs be well-designed, and that they reflect Easton's historic character.

HDC REVIEW

The Historic District Commission (HDC) reviews all Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications for proposed exterior signs, awnings, and associated lighting within the Easton Local Historic District. The HDC reviews each sign application as a unique case and considers the appropriateness of the components of the sign or awning design and installation in relationship to the building and the streetscape as a whole.

The applicant must obtain a COA as well as all necessary permits prior to proceeding with any work. For more information, or to obtain applications, please call the Bureau of Codes and Inspections at City Hall at (610) 250-6724.

The HDC hopes these guidelines will

- encourage the consideration of how proposed, as well as existing, signage relates to each property, the streetscape, and the Local Historic District;
- provide applicants with design assistance for commercial and professional signs and awnings;
- encourage compatibility and a visual connection with the building on which the sign or awning will be placed; and
- aid in identifying elements that are detrimental to the overall Local Historic District streetscape.



A small but well-designed sign can be very effective in promoting a clear business message.

SIGN AND AWNING DESIGN

A well-designed and well-placed sign or awning should be an important part of the design of the building. New signs enhance both the character of a building and convey

necessary information about a business or service to the public. The design of any sign should depend on the nature and location of the business as well as the style of the building on which, or in front of which, the sign is to be placed. The size and shape of the sign board, the colors and graphic style, and the lighting are all important elements of sign design.

During the design process, the applicant should select the sign material, size, location, and illumination to convey the intended message as well as complement the building's character.



The background provides a unique frame for the mounted letters and complements the horizontal frieze. Distinctive lettering identifies the business and acts as its logo.

SIGN MATERIAL

The HDC is primarily concerned with the quality of the proposed materials. Historically, signs were typically made of wood and attached directly to the building or suspended from wrought iron brackets.

Later, as building styles changed, a wider range of materials was used, including bronze or brass plates, cast iron, etched or painted glass, leaded glass, gold leaf, tile, and terrazzo.

The HDC encourages the use of materials that convey a business' identity and are consistent with the historic character of the building. These include wood, brass, bronze, gold leaf, etched glass, paint, aluminum, stainless steel, enameled metal, leaded glass, appliqué, tile, and terrazzo. Mounting individual wood or metal letters to a building or sign board is also encouraged. In all cases, using durable and quality materials is recommended.

The HDC discourages the uses of plastic or extruded metal sections for signs in the Local Historic District.



This window sign fits the historic nature of the building.



These letters have been individually mounted to the frieze of the building. The color chosen for the lettering presents a strong contrast with the brick making them clearly legible.



This hanging sign uses an unusual shape and distinctive lettering to convey its message.

SIGN SIZE AND SHAPE

The City of Easton's Zoning Ordinance regulates the allowable size of signage. In general, small signs of simple design will be more appropriate to the Local Historic

District. The size and shape of the sign board should be determined by the proportion and design of the storefront and the character of the entire façade. Sign boards should not obscure or cover architectural details on the building.

A smaller, well-designed sign can have more impact than larger signs, especially where there is heavy pedestrian traffic.



This sign is a traditional projecting sign. It is clearly legible and identifies the business with a simple message.

SIGN LOCATION

The City of Easton's Zoning Ordinance regulates allocable sign locations, but it is generally helpful to review the location of other signs as well as the overall building design when selecting the location for a new or replacement sign.

Signs should be placed on a building façade so as to appear as an integral design element. Signs should enhance, rather than cover, the architectural features of a building. Virtually every building in the Local Historic District has a logical surface for sign location.

On older buildings, the original location of signs on the building is a guide to appropriate sign placement. The frieze panel over the entryway has historically been used for a sign board. The cornice top and space between the rows of windows are also potential areas for signs.

As a rule, signage for first floor businesses should be located below the second floor window sills. Signs for upper-floor businesses may be lettered within upper-floor windows. Signs may be lettered

within storefront windows, but should not obscure the goods in the store.



This painted window sign uses custom lettering and a distinctive logo to identify the type of business.

One of Easton's underused assets is the volume of second story display windows.



When the view of first floor windows and storefronts is blocked by parked cars, people, or traffic, the upper portions of a building can become the focal point. Attractive window displays

and small signs in the upper stories of a building can be very effective.



The indirect lighting of this sign is directed down towards the sign, minimizing glare.

ILLUMINATED SIGNS AND AWNINGS

Available ambient street or storefront lighting is often sufficient to illuminate signs. This is preferred to the installation of additional lighting. The use of sign illumination is generally discouraged and limited by the Easton Zoning Ordinance.

If a sign is to be illuminated, however, the light source should focus on the sign without causing a glare. Any lights should be unobtrusive or designed as a part of, or ornament for, the sign.

When designing a sign or awning, the applicant is encouraged to select materials

or colors of sufficient contrast that the need for illumination is minimized. In addition, the HDC encourages the use of

- existing ambient street light or storefront lighting whenever possible;
- small scale, indirect, or hidden lights such as gooseneck or wall-mounted lights with low wattage light bulbs directed towards to sign or awning face to minimize glare; and
- lights that complement or are consistent with the historic character of a building.

The HDC strongly encourages the removal of pre-manufactured, stock, extruded aluminum sign boxes with internal fluorescent lights.

The HDC will not recommend for approval high wattage light sources, or signs that flash, move, or are illuminated intermittently. Pre-manufactured, stock, extruded aluminum signs boxes with internal lighting and translucent sign faces will not be recommended for approval by the HDC.

AWNINGS

Awnings are a good alternative to signs to identify a service or business. They

provide shade for merchandise in storefront windows as well as protection for pedestrians from the weather.

The HDC encourages the use of awnings made of canvas or canvas-like vinyl that match the shape of the top of the window or door (e.g., using arched topped awnings only over arched openings). The construction and attachment components should be hidden from general view.

The HDC will not recommend for approval metal awnings or awnings which are internally illuminated.



This awning is illuminated at night by indirect lights.

MOUNTING SIGNS AND AWNINGS

In mounting signs and awnings, care should be taken to avoid or minimize the damage to historic facades and materials. Whenever possible, reusing hardware or brackets from previous signs or awnings, or

attaching them in the same location, is preferred.

If the reuse of existing hardware or locations is not possible, using mounting locations that can be easily patched if the sign is removed is recommended. For example, placing holes in mortar joints rather than directly into masonry would allow for future repair if the sign is removed or relocated.

The HDC strongly discourages installing signs or awnings in locations that obscure architectural features, or the re-facing of existing internally illuminated box signs.



This sign was customized for the business and provides a clear identity of the services provided.

NEON

Neon is made of gas filled tubes that are illuminated through electrification. Originally developed in the 1920s, neon signs can be appropriate for some businesses.

The HDC encourages the use of individualized neon designs that complement a building's architecture and reflect the business' identity.

The HDC discourages the use of stock neon signs (generally available from product manufacturers or restaurant supply distributors).



Businesses located at corners face particular challenges. This sign is projected out from the corner and is therefore visible from both streets.

WHO CAN HELP ME?

If you are considering a new sign or awning for a building in the historic district, contact the HDC to review your project in its earliest stages.

The HDC has reserved 15 to 20 minutes at the end of its monthly meetings to provide consultation and advice to members of the public. Contact the Bureau of Codes and Inspections at (610) 250-6724 to confirm the date of the next HDC meeting and schedule a consultation.

Additional Sources of Information

Contact the National Trust for Historic Preservation or visit online at www.nationaltrust.org.

Contact the US Government Bookstore or visit www.nps.gov for *Preservation Briefs*, National Park Service.

Further reading:

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

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring & Reconstructing Historic Building, Kay D. Weeks and Anne E. Grimmer (National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, 1995)

Technical Brief on Rehabilitation Design: General Guidelines for Sensitive Façade Rehabilitation in Older Commercial Areas (March-April 1989)

Guidelines: Signs for Main Street, National Trust for Historic Preservation (Washington, DC, Preservation Press, 1987)

Acknowledgments

These *Guidelines for Signs and Awnings* were prepared for the City of Easton and Historic District Commission with help and guidance from the following:

Easton Design Guide

Annapolis Historic District *Design Guidelines for Signs*

South Bethlehem Historic Conservation Commission *Guidelines for Signage*

City of Easton
Historic District Commission
C/O Bureau of Codes and Inspections
Easton City Hall
1 South 3rd Street
Easton, PA 18042

