



# Portland Downtown Sign Design Guidelines

## Applicability

- The standards and guidelines set forth in this manual apply to all properties within the Portland DDA district which includes the core historic area, that wish to receive assistance under the Portland Downtown Sign program. A map of the district is included in these guidelines.
- Signs not consistent with the guidelines stated herein, are still subject to the Sign Ordinance of the City of Portland.
- **Owners participating in the Sign Incentive program may not change or install the signs until the project is approved by the program.**
- Many non-conforming signs will exist within the Portland Main Street district after the guidelines are implemented. The intent of the Program is to improve the Downtown experience for everyone. Therefore, voluntary observance of these guidelines is highly encouraged for businesses with existing signage.



**Purpose** The intent of the sign design guidelines is to accomplish the following:

- Establish reasonable and improved standards for business identification
- Assist property owners and business owners in understanding sign program expectations
- Reduce the time and fees for processing sign approvals
- Encourage creative and innovative approaches to signage within an established framework
- Promote economic vitality in the downtown
- Enhance overall property values and the visual environment in the city by discouraging signs which contribute to the visual clutter of the streetscape
- Ensure that commercial signs are designed for the purpose of identifying a business in an attractive and functional manner, rather than to serve primarily as general advertising for business

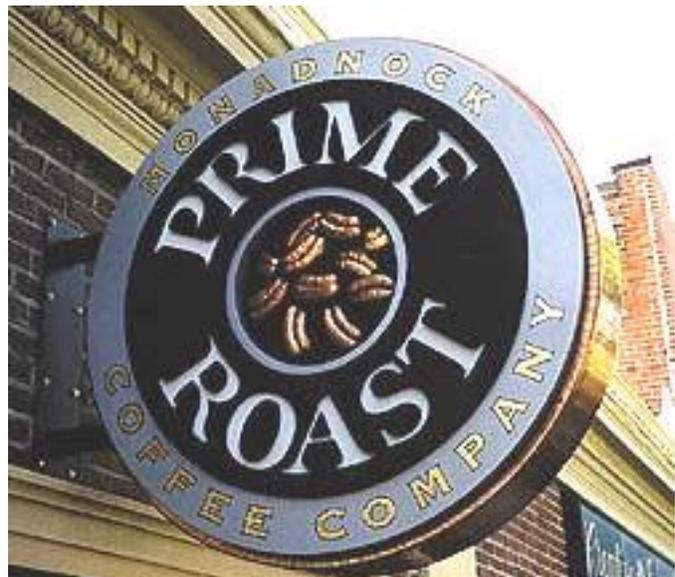


- Ensure signs on the façade of buildings reinforce the existing character and are integrated into the architectural scheme of the building
- Promote a quality visual environment by allowing signs that are compatible with their surroundings and which effectively communicate their message.

- Signs Encouraged by the Sign Incentive Program in the Downtown:
  - Wall Signs
  - Awning & Canopy Signs
  - Projecting Signs
  - Window Signs
  - Plaque Signs
  - Restaurant Menu Signs
  - Low Profile & Monument Signs
  - Tenant Directory Signs

### *Sign Overview*

- All signs should be architecturally integrated with their surroundings in terms of size, shape, color texture, and lighting so that they are complementary to the overall design of the buildings.
- Signs should reflect the character of the building and its use.
- Signs should respect the immediate context of the building's location and the overall character of Downtown.
- Signs should enhance the primary design elements or unique architectural features of buildings.
- Signs should be designed with the purpose of promoting retail and street activity while enhancing the pedestrian experience.
- The size of signs and its letters should be located in logical "signable areas" which relate to the pattern of the facade.
- The number of signs per building façade should be limited to the fewest necessary to clearly identify businesses located within.



- Signs are not permitted to cover or obscure architectural features of buildings.
- Consider the layout and shape of the architectural features of the building when determining the size and location of a sign.
- Design elements such as window patterns (vertical and horizontal rectangles, arches, squares, etc.) will help determine the sign shape that will suit the building.
- All signs are to be maintained properly such that they are always in clean, working condition and the copy is not obscured or damaged.
- New signs proposed for existing buildings should provide a compatible appearance with the existing signage of other tenants. Signs should attempt to unify the business with its nearest neighboring tenants.

Signs should be oriented toward the pedestrian and impart a sense of creativity in its design.

### *Signs Considered By The Program*



- The Sign Program gives weighted consideration to three-dimensional projecting signs and awning signs, but considers all signs that meet the guidelines of the program.
  - The architecture of the building often identifies specific locations for signs, and these locations should be used.
  - The size of signs should be in proportion to the size of their location.
  - Repetitious signage information on the same building frontage should be avoided, regardless of the sign area square frontage allowed in the sign ordinance.
- To minimize irreversible damage to masonry, all mounting and supports should be inserted into mortar joints and not into the face of the masonry. This technique does not damage the surface and allows for easy removal.
  - Signs that are placed on stucco or drivit exteriors can result in unattractive “patched” areas. These potential maintenance problems should be addressed during the approval process for the sign replacement.

### ***Multi-Storyed Buildings***

- Ground floor tenants should place signs at the storefront level.
- Window signs are permitted on upper portions (see ordinance for qualifying signs).
- Signs on the upper façade of multistoried buildings may be permitted for ground floor tenants in accordance with the sign ordinance.
- Window signs for upper story tenants are permitted if the tenant has an entrance at the sidewalk and a directory sign is located at the ground floor.

### ***Design & Materials***

- Exterior materials, finishes, and colors should be the same or similar to those of the building or structures on site.
- Signs should be professionally constructed using high-quality materials such as metal, stone, hard wood, brass-plated, and exposed neon.
- Internally lit plastic letters or plastic box signs are discouraged.
- The colors and lettering styles should compliment the building façade and harmonize with neighboring businesses.
- Excessively bright colors or over-scaled letters should not be used as a means to attract attention.
- The design and alignment of signs on multiple use buildings should compliment each other such that a unified appearance is achieved.
- Signs should respect the district's dominant characteristics.

### ***Sign Message***

- Primary signs contain only the name of the business and/or its logo. Secondary text identifies products and should be located in a secondary location.
- Sign message must be designed to fit properly into the sign location.
- Modifications to logos and corporate identifiers may be required to fit attractively in the space provided.
- Sign fonts should be selected to provide both clarity and artistic integrity.

### ***Sign Lighting***

- Arrange any external spot or flood lighting such that the light source is directed away from passersby. The light source must be directed against the sign such that it does not shine into adjacent property or cause glare for motorists and pedestrians.
- Signs that use blinking or flashing lights are not permitted (by Sign Ordinance).
- Visible raceways and transformers for individual letters are discouraged. Sign installation details should indicate the location of the transformer and other mechanical equipment.
- Projecting light fixtures used for externally illuminated signs should be simple and unobtrusive in appearance. They should not obscure the graphics of the sign.
- Where signs face near-by or upper-story residential areas, a low level of brightness should be maintained with the use of downcast lighting (i.e., gooseneck fixtures).

### ***Wall Signs***

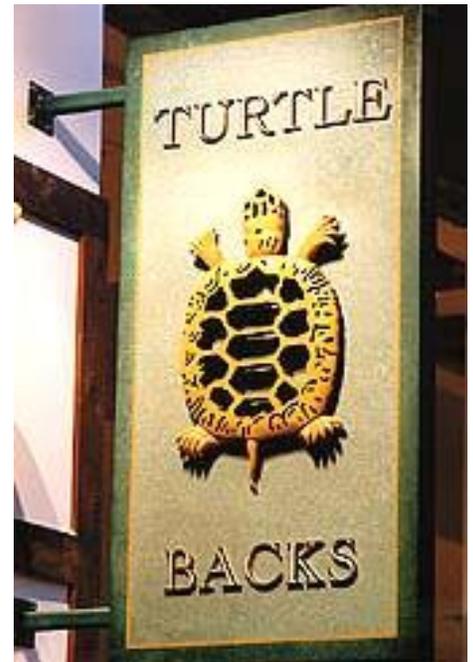
- Wall Signs are to be mounted flush and fixed securely to a building wall, projecting no more than 12 inches from the face of a building wall, and not extending sideways beyond the building face or above the highest line of the building to which it is attached.
- Wall signs should be located on the upper portion of the storefront, within or just above the enframed storefront opening. The length of the sign should not exceed the width of the enframed storefront.
- Wall signs should be placed within a clear signable area. Signable areas are defined as an architecturally continuous wall surface uninterrupted by doors, windows or architectural detail.
- Wall signs should be mounted in locations that respect the design of a building, including the arrangement of bays and openings.
- Signs should not obscure windows, grillework, piers, pilasters, and ornamental features. Typically, wall signs should be centered on horizontal surfaces (i.e., over a storefront opening).
- Wall signs should be designed to be compatible with the storefront in scale, proportions, and color.
- Signs should be designed to create a clearly defined edge, provide shadow relief, and a substantial appearance. This effect is generally difficult to achieve by painting the sign directly on the building or signboard. For this reason, painted signs are discouraged.

### ***Awning & Canopy***

- Awning signs are signs that are printed on, painted on, or attached to an awning or canopy above a business door or window. They generally serve to bring color to the shopping environment and are oriented toward pedestrians from the opposite side of the street.
- Sign lettering and/or logo should occupy the fascia surface of an awning or canopy.
- Awnings and canopies must be permanently attached to buildings.
- The minimum height of awnings should be 8 feet from the lowest point to the sidewalk.
- Awnings and canopies should be mounted on the horizontal framing element separating the storefront window from the transom (a crosspiece separating a doorway from a window).
- Awnings should be designed to project over individual window and door openings and not project as a single continuous feature extending over masonry piers or arches.
- Awnings with back-lit graphics or other kinds of interior illumination are not permitted.
- Matte finish canvas, glass, or metal are appropriate materials for awnings or canopies.
- Awnings with a solid color are preferred. Striped awnings may be appropriate for some buildings without ornamental facades. Striped awnings with highly contrasting, bright colors may be visually blaring and inappropriate.

### ***Projecting Signs***

- Projecting Signs are affixed to the face of a building or structure and project in a perpendicular manner more than 12 inches from the wall surface of that portion of the building or structure to which it is mounted. Projecting signs are strongly encouraged and should be carefully designed to reflect the character of each building and business as well as fitting comfortably with other adjacent signage.
- Projecting signs should not be mounted above the second floor window-sill in multi-storied buildings.
- The design of the sign should consider visually interesting elements such as square or rectangular shapes with painted or applied letters, two or three dimensional symbols or icons, irregular outlines, and/or internal cut-outs.
- Projecting signs should be small in scale and provide a vertical clearance of 8 feet along pedestrian areas.
- Projecting signs should be oriented to pedestrians passing on the sidewalk in front of the buildings rather than to automobiles or pedestrians on the far side of the street. This can be achieved by providing a minimum clearance of 12 inches between the building face and sign and maintaining a projection of 36 inches.



- Projecting signs should fit within an imaginary rectangle with a maximum area of 10 (ten) square feet.
- Mounting hardware should be an attractive and integral part of the sign design. Simple round pipe brackets with plugged ends or added decorative end elements are generally appropriate for signs. However, metal brackets of a more decorative and complex shape are strongly encouraged where appropriate to add to the character of the building.

### ***Marquee Signs***

- Marquee signs are projecting signs attached to or supported by a permanent canopy often made of metal and glass. Marquee signs are to be installed only on buildings occupied by theaters, cinemas, performing arts facilities, or parking structures.
- The sign copy of marquee signs should be limited to include only the facility's name and changeable copy related to current and future attractions.
- The facility name portion of the sign should not exceed 40 percent of the total sign area and the changeable copy portions of the sign should not exceed 80 percent of the total sign area.

### ***Window Signs***

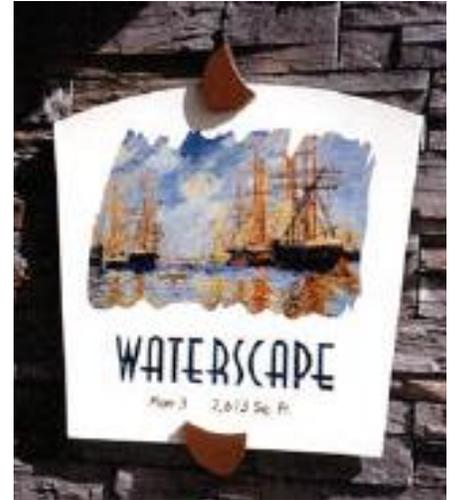
- Window signs are signs that are painted, posted, displayed, or etched on an interior translucent or transparent surface, including windows or doors. This type of signage generally contains only text but in some circumstances can express a special business personality through graphic logos or images combined with color.



- Window signs should not exceed 15% of the window area so that visibility into and out of the window is not obscured.
  - Sign copy should not exceed 8 inches in height.
  - Window sign copy should be applied directly to glazed area.
  - Window signs should be created from high-quality materials such as paint, gold-leaf, or neon. Appropriate techniques for window signs include sandblasting or etched glass.
- Window signs should be applied directly to the interior face of the glazing or hung inside the window thereby concealing all mounting hardware and equipment.
  - Well-designed window graphics should be used in the construction of the sign to attract attention but still allow pedestrians to view store interiors.

### ***Plaque Signs***

- Plaque Signs are small versions of Wall Signs that are attached to surfaces adjacent to shop front entries.
- Plaque signs are to be located only on wall surfaces adjacent to tenant entries.
- Plaque signs are to fit within an imaginary rectangle with a maximum area of 2 square feet.
- Limit plaque sign projections from wall surfaces to a maximum of 2 inches.
- Signs are to include the business name and a business logo.
- Plaque signs are encouraged to include unique designs or other visually stimulating decorations and may be irregular in outline shape.



### ***Restaurant Menu***

- Restaurant Menu Signs are signs that incorporate a menu containing a listing of products and prices offered by the business. Such signs facilitate the customer in locating a restaurant in which to patronize. Therefore, prominently displayed menus with prices and other important information can help the customer in making this decision.
- Restaurant menu signs should be located in a permanently mounted display box on the surface of the building adjacent to the entry. Taping a menu to a box is not an appropriate menu sign.
- High quality materials and artistic designs should be used in the construction of menu signs.
- Restaurant menu signs are not included in the calculation of maximum sign area.
- The allowable area for restaurant menu signs should be a maximum of 6 square feet.
- Restaurant menu signs should be appropriate in size, location, and design to the character and architectural detail of the building as well as to the character of the restaurant.



Questions on sign design and the Sign Incentive Program may be directed to the Portland Main Street Manager/DDA Managing Director at [ddamainstreet@portland-michigan.org](mailto:ddamainstreet@portland-michigan.org) 517-647-5027

Questions on Portland's [Sign Ordinance](#) may be directed to the City Manager at 517-647-2931.