

Ann Arbor Historic District Sign Guidelines

For any property in a historic district, all signs must be approved by the Historic District Commission.

- All new signs must receive a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic District Commission.
- Some signs can be administratively approved by staff, on behalf of the Commission, if they are replacing a sign with one of the same or a smaller size and in the same location.

In order to be approved, signs must meet several requirements:

- If the building is masonry, signs must be mounted in mortar joints, NOT through masonry units, such as brick or stone.
- New business signs may NOT be internally illuminated.
 - If an existing business wants to reface their internally illuminated box sign, they may do so and keep it lit. If the business changes, the new sign may NOT be lit from within. The box sign may be refaced, but it cannot be turned on. Illumination must come from an external source.

Acceptable sign lighting:

- Simple, low-key designs that do not detract from the building. These designs include gooseneck lamps, LED light strips, small spotlights.
- New wiring must go through the masonry joints, not the masonry units.
- Sign lighting is usually a staff approval that does not require review by the Commission.

Pedestrian scale signs:

These signs are intended to help pedestrians find a business from the sidewalk. They are usually not a business's primary signage. Pedestrian scale signs should be:

- Located near the business's entry, at least 8' from the ground on the first floor.
- Mounted on an arm or arms or hung from a bracket.
- Aligned with similar signs on the block.
- Sized not to exceed 4.5 square feet per side. This is roughly a 28" diameter circle, or 25" square. Odd shapes are welcomed and will be reviewed on a case by case basis.

Banners:

Banners, pennants, and similar temporary signs that are often made of fabric or vinyl are not appropriate in Ann Arbor's local historic districts.

All signs must also meet the sign code: Chapter 61 of the Ann Arbor City Code, Sign & Outdoor Advertising

Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines for Signs

The following guidelines should be followed when replacing or installing new signage in historic commercial settings.

Appropriate

- Preserving historic painted signs where they exist.
- Installing signage that is subordinate to the overall building composition.
- Mounting signage to fit within existing architectural features using the shape of the sign to help reinforce the horizontal lines of moldings and transoms seen along the street.
- Installing signage in the historic sign band area of the building, typically the area above the transoms or just above the storefront.
- Attaching signage through masonry joints, not masonry units, or through material that can be easily repaired, such as wood, when the signage is removed.
- Painting signs on window glass, or using vinyl decal letters, that can be removed without damaging historic materials.
- Installing signage that is compatible in size, style, material, and appearance to the historic resource and district.
- Installing signage that is lit from external light fixtures above or below the sign.
- Placing signs to align with others along the commercial block face.
- Consolidating signage for multiple businesses at a single storefront to reduce the total number of signs on the building.
- Providing a consolidated directory listing sign for all offices in a building to reduce the total number of signs on the building.

Not appropriate

- Installing signs that are too large or that are made from a material that is incompatible with the historic building or district.
- Obstructing character-defining features of a historic building with signage.
- Installing signs through brick, stone, or other masonry units in a manner that damages historic materials.
- Installing signs that are made of unfinished, pressure treated wood, or that have a rough, unfinished surface.
- Installing signs that have interior illumination or are backlit.
- Installing signs that are overly complex, use more than three or four colors or use fluorescent colors.
- Installing signs that use highly reflective materials that are difficult to read.
- Installing permanent free-standing signs.
- Mounting signs to project off of an awning.
- Installing several signs to advertise a single business.