

APPENDIX D

Sign Guidelines

Guntersville Historic Preservation Commission

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Guntersville Historic District Sign Guidelines

**Adopted by the Guntersville Historic Preservation Commission on
May 19th, 2015**

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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 Historic District Ordinance, and to facilitate the Historic Preservation Commission's (HPC) implementation of the ordinance. Note that all the signs depicted here are considered to be high quality signs that conform with the goals of these guidelines.

The City of Guntersville 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 U.S. Highway 431 on top of the mountain, that are geared to motorists, but such signs are not appropriate within the Historic District.



Overview

Signs are key to commercial enterprise, and historically, commercial buildings offered a wide array of sign designs and placement. Original and historic signs should be preserved. New signage should follow traditional placement and blend harmoniously with the district's historic character in dimensions, materials, graphics, color, and hardware. All new signs must comply with current Guntersville sign ordinances as well. Graphics should be legible and visible. Smooth-surface wooden signs are more compatible in the historic district than contemporary, rough-textured, stained signs or signs of plastic.

For residences now used for commercial or office space, use low-based ground signs adjacent to the front walk, near the public sidewalk. Plantings used to screen the bases of such signs can enhance them. Lighting may be accomplished with ground-level spotlights hidden from view. Historic markers and plaques can be mounted near the entrance on the exterior wall as to not interfere with architectural details.

Commercial buildings historically incorporated their name into the façade either in the cornice, mid-cornice or frieze just above the main entrance. Other traditional sign locations are the transom over the main entrance, on the glass display windows, and on fabric awnings over the storefront. Select one or two of these options, and choose sign locations that do not interfere with historic features or details. Examples of inappropriate contemporary signs include billboards, portable signs, internally illuminated signs, and flashing signs.

Guntersville's commercial buildings were largely built at the turn of the twentieth century and before the automobile. Building signage was oriented towards pedestrians rather than to automobiles and this approach is encouraged for future sign designs and locations. Common signage types include projecting or "blade" signs, hanging signs, window signs, and awning signs. Signs are encouraged, but their number, design, and size should not overwhelm or obscure architectural features and details.

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

- a) Overall design
- b) Location of the sign on a building
- c) Size and shape
- e) Colors
- f) Typefaces
- g) Illumination

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



This image illustrates historically appropriate locations for signs including windows, walls, awning valences, storefront glazing, recessed masonry sign board, and signs that hang above the entrance or project from the face of the building.

All signs must comply with: a) the Sign Ordinance, a separate section within the Zoning Ordinance that controls the types of signs, dimensions, number of signs, and other elements and b) the Historic District Ordinance, also a separate section within the Zoning Ordinance, as administered and interpreted by the HPC. These guidelines are provided to help clarify the intent of the Historic District Ordinance. Pursuant to the Historic District Ordinance, the HPC may stipulate requirements that are stricter than the Sign Ordinance.

Because every building and every application is unique, the Historic District Ordinance 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 a given 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.

Article I: 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 in order to avoid a sense of clutter or chaos on the building facade.

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

Signs should be mounted in such a way so as 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.

Article II: Sizes and Shape

Signs within the historic district should be significantly smaller than those situated in commercial corridors. They should be scaled and oriented to relate to pedestrians, as well as passing motorists.

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. Non-rectangular 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.

- The size of the sign shall be in proportion to the building and the neighboring structures and signs.
- The total maximum allowable square footage for the display area of a monument sign is 50 square feet, for pole signs 40 square feet, and for projecting signs 40 square feet.
- The total maximum allowable sign area is one and one half square feet per linear front foot of the principal building, not to exceed 64 square feet. A multi-tenant building is also limited to a maximum of 64 square feet.
- The size of the sign shall be determined by measuring the area within each face of the geometric shape enclosing all elements of informational or representational matter including blank masking. Structural supports not bearing information shall not be included in the computation of display area. For double faced signs, each side shall count toward the maximum allowable square footage.

Article III: Colors

Use of the following colors is encouraged:

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

The following colors are best limited to accent areas:

- bright colors
- primary colors
- metallic colors

Use of the following color 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, forest green, chocolate brown, black, charcoal, and navy blue. Suggested letter colors are ivory, white, or gold.

Colors should be chosen to compliment the exterior 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 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.

Article IV: Illumination

Lighting is an important factor in a sign's character. Signs may be **externally illuminated** - lit by one or more shielded, stationary bulbs projecting onto the sign; **internal illumination** -where a translucent-plastic sign is lit from the inside; or made with **neon** – exposed tubes filled with gas that glows when electrified, are prohibited. Often street lights or other area lights provide sufficient lighting, such as 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. In rare cases, like the Edward Jones sign, where the wattage is low and the sign is quite dark, internal illumination can be effective and may be acceptable.

Neon and LED rope lighting is generally inappropriate.

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 the historic district and will not be approved.**

- Internally lit signs are prohibited.
- Lighted signs shall be focused, low intensity illumination. Such lighting shall not shine into or create glare at vehicular or pedestrian traffic, nor shall it shine into adjacent area. Light fixtures mounted on the ground shall be screened by landscaping.
- Flashing, blinking, revolving, or rotating lights are not permitted.



Neon Is Acceptable Only Inside a Window

Article V: 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. MDO and composite 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.

- The structural material of the sign should match the historic materials of the building. Wood, metal, stucco, stone, or brick, is allowed. Plastic, vinyl or similar materials are prohibited. Neon, resin to give the appearance of wood, and fabric may be used as appropriate.

Article VI: 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.



Wood is the Preferred Sign Material in the Historic District

Article VII: Wall -Mounted Signs

Wall or 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.

Roof 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.

- No sign shall extend above the cornice line at the top of the building. Roof top signs are prohibited.



Wall-Mounted Signs



Wall Mounted Sign



Letters Mounted on a Building

Article VIII: Projecting or Blade 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.

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



Projecting Sign

Article IX: Hanging Signs

Hanging signs may be placed below awnings which project from the building. These types of signs typically are fastened by metal brackets beneath a fixed or canvas awning.

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



Hanging Sign

Article X: Awning and Canopy Signs

Lettering should be placed on the front valance only (or on a cross gable as on the sign below) and on the side panels. Awnings should be made of fabric or canvas material.



Awning Signs

Article XI: Window Signs

Window signs may be painted on, attached to, or suspended behind the window. There should be 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.

- Signs painted directly painted on the window glass or hung on the windows are permitted. Such signs will be counted toward the maximum size requirement, and are limited to 20% of the window area.



Window Signs

Article XII: Freestanding Signs

- The height of free standing signs shall not exceed 8 feet.
- Signs shall not be located in the right-of-way except for sandwich board signs.
- Off premise signs are prohibited.



Freestanding Sign



Freestanding Signs

Article XIII. Electronic and Moving Signs

Electronic and moving signs are prohibited in the Historic District.

Article XIV: Special Purpose Signs

Special Purpose signs are not reviewed except as noted.

- On site construction signs are signs giving information about the construction or renovation of a building on the same site. They must be removed at the completion of the project.
- Directional signs or incidental signs are signs as “entrance” or “exit” that give information but do not contain advertisements. They require a COA but do not count toward size requirements of this document.
- Informational signs are signs that give information of a non-commercial or advertising nature such as historic markers, highway identification markers, or traffic signs within the parking area of a building.
- On site real estate signs are signs informing the public that the building or land is for sale or lease.
- Political signs are signs for a political candidate or issue. They are allowed for a time limited to three months prior to an election and must be removed within seven days following the election. These are not reviewed but must meet the requirements of the sign ordinance of the City of Guntersville.



Historical Plaque

Article XV: Multi-Tenant Buildings

- Owner shall submit an overall sign plan addressing the placement, materials, and design. Signage for the building and for the tenants shall be consistent.
- The size requirements for multi-tenant buildings are laid out under the **SIZE** requirements above.
- Multiple free standing signs are prohibited.

Article XVI: Signs in Disrepair

Existing signs that are in disrepair are required to submit a COA for repairs or changes. All signs in the Historic District are required to be repaired if damaged by weather, sun, inappropriate use of materials, or vandalism.

Article XVII: Existing Signs in the Historic District

Not all signs currently in the review board areas meet these guidelines. Therefore do not use existing signs as a guide for design.