

**CITY OF AUSTIN
HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION
GUIDELINES FOR SIGNS AT HISTORIC LANDMARKS OR WITHIN HISTORIC DISTRICTS**

The purpose of these design guidelines for Austin's historic landmarks and historic districts is to ensure that all signage is compatible with the historic character of the building and/or the district. Signs should never interfere with a person's ability to appreciate that a building is historic or within a historic district, whether during the day or at night.

I. SIGN TYPES

A. FLUSH-MOUNTED SIGNS

A flush-mounted wall sign is one that is mounted flat to the wall.

LOCATION

- Locate a flush-mounted wall sign just above the display window. Do not locate a flush-mounted wall sign above second-floor windows.
- When feasible, place a wall sign such that it aligns with others in the block.
- When planning a wall sign, determine if decorative moldings exist that could define a "sign panel." If so, locate flush-mounted signs such that they fit within panels formed by moldings or transom panels on the façade. In no case should a sign obscure significant façade features.

SIZE

- In general, the maximum wall sign area on a building should not exceed 7% of the overall façade area; in some cases, however, the Commission may consider approving a maximum of 10%, if overall compatibility with the District is demonstrated.
- The maximum height of an individual flush-mounted sign shall be 2 feet.

NUMBER OF SIGNS

- Only one flush-mounted sign shall be allowed for each distinct façade module.

B. PROJECTING SIGNS

LOCATION

- A projecting sign should be located near the business entrance, just above the door or to the side of it, near eye level. The bottom of the projecting sign, however, shall be a minimum of 9 feet above the sidewalk.

SIZE

- The maximum size of an individual projecting sign (one face) shall be 6 square feet. It may not extend from the building façade for a greater distance than 6 feet or a distance equal to 2/3 the width of the abutting sidewalk, whichever distance is less.

NUMBER OF SIGNS

- In general, only one projecting sign per building façade is allowed. However, where the Commission determines that the result would be compatible with the District, one projecting sign shall be allowed for each distinct facade module of a building.

C. WINDOW SIGNS

LOCATION

- A window sign may be painted on or hung just inside a window.

SIZE

- The maximum area of a window sign may not exceed 20% of the window or 8 square feet, whichever is the lesser amount.

D. AWNING SIGNS

An awning sign may be woven, sewn, or painted onto the fabric of an awning. A panel sign painted or mounted on the edge of a rigid canopy also shall be considered an awning sign.

SIZE

- The maximum area of an awning sign may not exceed 20% of the awning panel, or 8 square feet, whichever is the lesser amount.

E. DIRECTORY SIGNS

Where several businesses share a building, coordinate the signs. Align several smaller signs, or group them into a single panel as a directory to make them easier to locate. Use similar forms or backgrounds for the signs to tie them together visually and make them easier to read.

SIZE

- The maximum area of a directory sign shall not exceed 8 square feet.

INAPPROPRIATE SIGN TYPES

- Signs that are out of character with those seen historically, and that would alter the historic character of the street.
- Free-standing signs, either pole-mounted or monument types.
- Animated signs.
- Sandwich (or menu) boards that stand on the sidewalk are generally discouraged.
- Any sign that visually overpowers the building or obscures significant architectural features.
- Roof signs.

II. SIGN MATERIALS

- Use materials that are compatible with the materials of the building façade.
- Painted wood and metal are appropriate materials for signs. Do not use unfinished materials, including unpainted wood.
- Use plastic only in limited amounts. Plastic may not be the predominant materials on any sign.
- Do not use highly reflective materials.

III. SIGN CONTENT AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

- Use symbol signs when appropriate for the business.
- Use colors for the sign that are compatible with those of the building front. Limit the number of colors on the sign to no more than three (3).
- Use a simple sign design and typeface, and a style and size of lettering that will be compatible with the building front. Avoid sign types that appear too contemporary.

- Limit the height of letters to 10 inches.

IV. SIGN LIGHTING

- Use an external, shielded lamp to direct light at the sign. Halo lighting (pin-mounted letters over the lighting source) or recessed can lighting in awnings are acceptable.
DO NOT USE:
 1. Internal illumination
 2. Fluorescent lights
 3. Sodium vapor lights.

NEON

- Exposed neon lighting is strongly discouraged, but may be permitted where the Commission determines it is appropriate to the context of the building and does not impede interpretation of the historic character of the building. Neon may be used to highlight reverse-channel lettering on a sign to create a “halo” effect.
- Applications for signs with exposed neon lighting must show through photographic documentation that the building had a sign with exposed neon in the historic period.

V. WALL ART AND GRAHICS

- Wall art should be in character with the building, and should fit within architectural features on the building.
- Wall art may not be installed on the front of a historic building. It is permitted only on the side or rear walls of the building.
- Historic signs may be preserved as wall art.
- Images that depict the historic character of the street are preferred.

VI. GENERAL DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

- Consider the building front as part of an overall sign program. Coordinate signage with the composition of the façade, including ornamental details. Signs should always appear to be in scale with the elements of the façade.
- Signs should be in proportion to the building and must not dominate the façade.
- Develop a master sign plan for the entire building front and coordinate signage for different businesses within the same building.
- Locate a sign on a building to emphasize design elements of the façade. In no case should a sign obscure architectural details or features.
- Mount signs to fit within existing architectural features. Signs should help reinforce the horizontal lines of moldings and transoms seen along the street.
- The total area of all sign faces on a façade module may not exceed 20 square feet.