

GUIDELINES FOR SIGNS IN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS OR AT A CITY HISTORIC LANDMARK HISTORIC SIGN STANDARDS

These standards apply to City of Austin historic landmarks, local historic districts, and National Register districts. The Historic Landmark Commission and City Historic Preservation Office consider the following guidelines these standards in reviewing new sign applications for signage and changes to existing signage, per City of Austin Land Development Code § 25-10-81.

Purpose

These standards explain requirements for new signage and preservation and maintenance of existing signage. They apply to all types of exterior signage.

All signs must comply with applicable standards in the Land Development Code. Historic Preservation Office staff may refer any sign application to the Historic Landmark Commission.

What Is a Sign?

The Land Development Code § 25-10-4 (18) defines a sign as “a display surface, structure, light device, banner, plaque, poster, billboard, pennant, figure, painting, drawing, flag, or other thing, whether mounted on land, air, or water, that is designed, intended, or used to display or draw attention to a communicative visual or graphic image, whether or not the image includes lettering, and that is visible from any portion of the public right-of-way open to vehicular or pedestrian traffic. A sign includes both on- and off-premise signs, including billboards, and any moving part, lighting, sound equipment, framework, background material, structural support, or other part thereof.”

Definitions

Historic Sign: Any sign, as defined by the City of Austin Land Development Code definition (Section 25-10-4 (18)) and/or otherwise meeting the requirements of Section 25-10-121, that is included within the designation language of the district or property, was present on the building or building site at the time of designation, or meets other requirements for review by the Historic Preservation Office and/or Historic Landmark Commission, such as minimum age or cultural importance.

Preservation: Preserve historic signs, such as ghost signs or other signs characteristic of the building’s or district’s period of significance or those that have otherwise gained cultural importance whenever feasible.

Maintenance: Repair historic signs and replace historic parts in-kind when deteriorated beyond repair.

STANDARDS FOR NEW SIGNS

Number of Signs:

~~The Commission~~ Each building is ~~allowed~~ permitted one sign per building, unless the building has multiple tenants. In this case of multiple tenants, the Commission may allow one sign per façade module is permitted, provided that if the façade modules correspond to tenant spaces.

~~The Commission may also allow~~ One sign for each street frontage is permitted if the building is at an intersection located at a street corner or faces multiple street frontages.

A single directory sign is appropriate for ~~a larger buildings with multiple tenants~~ the size of the directory sign not exceeding these requirements.

Sign Types:

The Commission may allow window signs, awning signs, projecting signs, and flush mounted signs for most commercial buildings. Freestanding signs are allowed for office and retail uses in historic residential buildings. City codes prohibit the Commission from approving the following sign types: (1) rotating, (2) off-premise, (3) roof signs, (4) portable, or (5) signs which flash or blink at intervals. City code also prohibits handbills, posters, or placards on a structure except inside a window or on a bulletin board.

Sign Size:

The maximum size for signs depends on the sign type and scale of the building. The following size limitations are for buildings no greater than 3 stories above grade:

1. Total requested signage shall not exceed 40 square feet.
- 2.
1. Projecting (blade) signs: _____ 6 square feet
23. Flush-mounted signs: _____ 7% of the overall façade area, with a maximum height of 2 feet and a maximum size of 20 square feet
34. Window signs: _____ The lesser of 20% of the window or 8 square feet
45. Awning signs: _____ The lesser of 20% of the awning panel or 8 square feet.
- Large commercial buildings (over 3 stories): _____ Cumulative signage may not exceed 40 square feet per façade and must comply with a signage plan for the building.

A license agreement may be required for any signs or awnings ~~which that~~ project over city right-of-way. ~~Please call 974-8091~~ Contact Austin Development Services for more information.

Sign Design, Coloring and Materials:

~~Use simple shapes, such as rectangular or oval signs. The Commission recommends painted wood or metal signs with matte finishes for all signs; plastic, reflective materials, and unfinished surfaces are not allowed. Limit the colors used in a sign to no more than three. New signage should meet the requirements of the Land Development Code. For sites/properties with multiple signs, all signs should have corresponding or matching designs, coloring and materials and sizes. Signs should match or complement the existing color scheme of the building to the maximum extent feasible.~~

Lettering:

No more than two typefaces are allowed. Avoid lettering which appears too contemporary in the sign. Select letter styles and sizes that are complementary to the building façade.

Lighting:

Lighting must be indirect, ~~and may be accomplished through including but not limited to~~ shielded incandescent lights ~~attached to the top of the sign, bare-bulbed sources, “halo” lighting, or recessed can lighting in awnings.~~ All illumination must be steady and stationary. Incorporate neon signage as an integral architectural element appropriate to the site and building character.

Internally-lit cabinet signs, exposed LED strip lighting, and rope lights are not allowed ~~for signs on historic buildings or within the historic districts.~~

Neon Signs:

Neon signs are prohibited on pre-1950 building facades; an exception may be made for existing pre-1950 neon signage, or with photographic proof of a historic (pre-1950) neon sign on the building, but only if the neon sign does not detract from the historic character of the building or area. The Commission may consider limited neon on a post-1950 façade, but encourages backlit neon over exposed neon.

Sign Placement:

Position Flush-mounted and projecting (blade) signs ~~should be positioned near the business entrance immediately above the principal entry to the business.~~ Single-tenant signs are not allowed over doorways serving multiple tenants. ~~As required by the city land development code, the bottom of the sign shall be a minimum of nine (9) feet above the sidewalk.~~ When feasible, place signs to align with others in the block. Signs ~~should~~ must not obscure or cover architectural elements, such as windows, decorative banding, or other ornamentation.

Sign Mounting:

Structural attachment of n ~~New signages should utilize any existing mounting components when feasible apparatus whenever possible. New anchorage penetrations, if required, must be installed in a manner that limits If new bolt holes or brackets are necessary for sign installation, care should be taken to ensure that installation does not damage to existing cladding, including minimizing anchorage sizes. historic building materials in any way. When feasible, install new anchors into~~ Bolting through mortar joints avoids damage to historic at stone or brick masonry buildings.

Exceptions: The City Historic Landmark Commission and Historic Preservation Office may consider exceptions ~~to the foregoing provisions or modifications on a case-by-case basis,~~ when warranted, and not otherwise prohibited by City ordinance.

NOTE: Existing signs do not always meet these Guidelines or City of Austin ordinance requirements, and either predate the ordinance or are illegal. Illegal signs are subject to enforcement action by the City of Austin.

STANDARDS FOR PRESERVATION AND MAINTENANCE OF EXISTING SIGNAGE

Existing signs that were installed at the time that the building was included within the National Register historic district, local historic district, or was designated a historic landmark and considered to be integral to the character or history of the buildings shall meet the standards herein.