CHAPTER 8
Guidelines for Signs

Signs are a vital part of the limited commercial areas of Loudoun County's Historic and Cultural Conservation districts. A balance should, therefore, be struck between the need to call attention to individual businesses and the need for a positive image of the entire district.

The entrance to the E. E. Lake General Store is clearly marked by a sign placed above the storefront.

A. INTRODUCTION

Signs are a vital part of the limited commercial areas of Loudoun County's Historic and Cultural Conservation districts. A balance should, therefore, be struck between the need to call attention to individual businesses and the need for a positive image of the entire district.

Signs can complement or detract from the character of a building depending on their design, placement, quantity, size, shape, materials, colors and condition. Historically significant signs should be retained even if the business is no longer associated with that particular structure.

Since the historic district zoning is an overlay to the underlying zoning for the area, all signs should follow these guidelines in addition to the existing sign section of the County's zoning ordinance (Section 5-1200). A sign permit is necessary for the erection of any sign in the county. Where the guidelines herein are more restrictive than the ordinance, the guidelines should take precedence.

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources reviews the content of historical markers such as this example.

MAINTENANCE

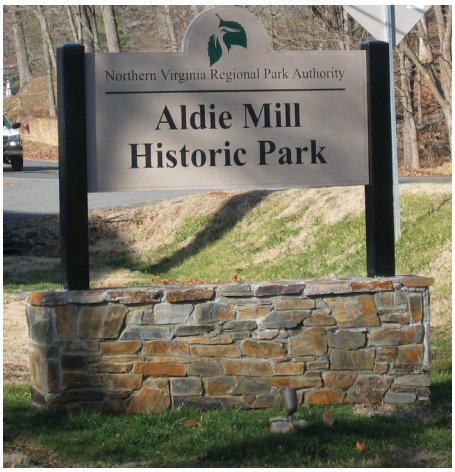
1. Signs should be kept in good repair.
2. Signs that are not properly maintained and that have no historical significance should be removed, as should signs of businesses that no longer occupy a building or storefront.

INAPPROPRIATE TREATMENTS

1. Do not mount a sign on a balustrade or covering a window or any other architectural detail of the building.
2. Avoid neon, formed plastic signs with backlights, and any other form of internally lighted signs.
3. Roof-mounted signs are not appropriate in the districts.
4. Signs should not display national brand names or logos.
5. Avoid hand-painted signs.

Signs may also provide information once you have entered a site.

This professionally executed sign clearly states the name of the business and the address. The three colors used in the design coordinate with the building and are from a historic palette.



The colors used for this sign blend with the native stone used for its base. The most important information is lettered in the largest type.

B. DESIGN, COMPATIBILITY AND EXECUTION

GUIDELINES

1. The design of signs in the historic districts should reinforce and relate to the existing architectural character and era of the building.
2. Commercial signs should fit within the building's design and should not obscure significant design elements of the building it is identifying.
3. Ensure that signs are readable and convey an image appropriate for the business. Sign painters or graphic designers can assist with sign design.
4. Signs should be executed by sign professionals who are skilled at lettering and surface preparation.

C. SIZE AND NUMBER

GUIDELINES

1. The number of signs used should be limited to encourage compatibility with the building and discourage visual clutter.
    a. A limit of two to three signs, which can be of different types, is appropriate for most buildings in the historic commercial areas.
2. A building should have only one wall sign per street frontage.
3. All the signs on a commercial building should not exceed 50 square feet.

D. SHAPE, COLOR, MATERIALS AND LIGHTING

GUIDELINES

1. As appropriate, make the shape of the sign conform to the area where the sign is to be located.
2. A projecting sign may take the shape of the product or service provided, such as a shoe for a shoe store.
3. Use colors that complement the materials and color scheme of the building, including accent and trim colors. Three colors are recommended, although more colors may be appropriate in exceptional and tastefully executed designs.
4. Use traditional sign materials such as wood, wood composites, glass, or meal. Gold leaf, raised individual metal or painted wood letters, or painted lettering may be appropriate dependent on the style of the individual sign.
5. Signs, if lit, should be indirectly illuminated with a shielded incandescent light source.
6. Place building-mounted lighting for signs in an unobtrusive location.
7. Situate ground-mounted sign lighting where it can be screened from public rights-of-way.

Gold leaf on a dark background with a small multi-colored logo makes this design an acceptable exception to the three color rule of thumb.

The piers to which this sign is mounted echo the brick construction of the school.

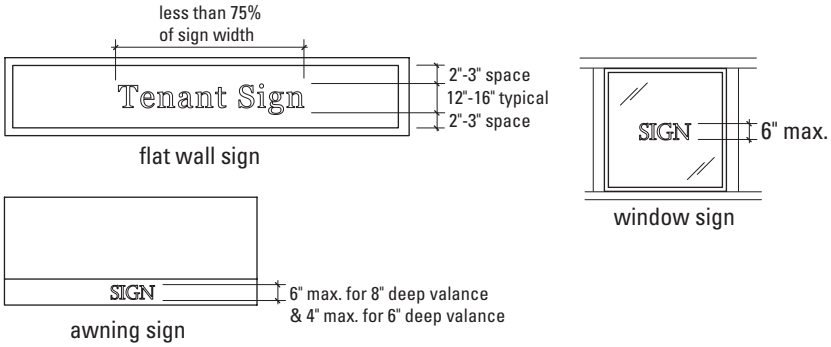
E. LETTERING STYLES

There are many lettering styles that may be appropriate for signage in Loudoun County's Historic and Cultural Conservation Districts.

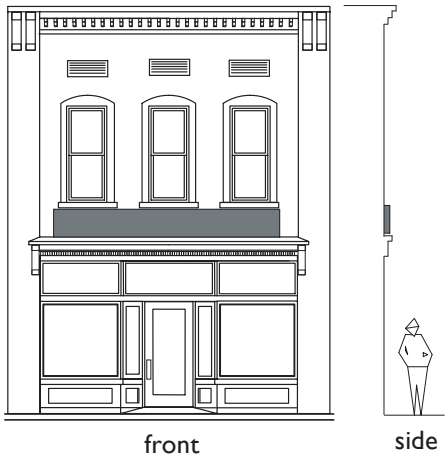
GUIDELINES

1. Consider using lettering styles that relate to the era of the building's architecture.
2. Ensure that the lettering style chosen for the sign is easily read from a distance.

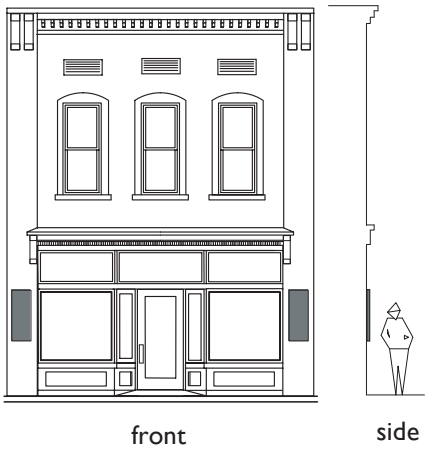
LETTERING SIZE ON SIGNS



FLAT WALL SIGN



PIER-MOUNTED SIGNS



F. WALL-MOUNTED SIGNS

These signs, also referred to as flat wall signs, are panels or individual letters mounted to the wall or cornice. Large wall signs can be read by pedestrians from a distance and from passing motorists.

For commercial buildings, it is appropriate to locate a wall-mounted sign above the storefront, within the frieze of a storefront cornice, on a pier that frames a display window, or on unadorned flat surfaces of the facade.

For residential buildings used for commercial purposes, wall-mounted signs can be attached to the wall at the first floor level or suspended from the porch cornice and centered between porch columns. Wall-mounted signs on residential buildings should be no taller than 18 inches and should not project more than six inches from the surface of the building.

INAPPROPRIATE TREATMENT

1. Do not paint the sign directly onto the wall surface unless it is in an effort to professionally rehabilitate a historic painted wall sign.

GUIDELINES

1. Place wall-mounted signs in the building's sign band whenever possible.
2. Size wall-mounted signs so that they do not obscure existing architectural details.
3. Design wall-mounted signs to be no larger than one-and-one-half square feet per linear foot of the front facade of the building, up to a limit of 40 square feet per business.
4. Use lettering and symbols between 12 and 16 inches in height and allow for two to three inches of space between the lettering and the top and bottom of the sign band.
5. Design the sign so that the width of the lettering extends no more than 75 percent of the width of the sign band.
6. Place a flat, wall-mounted directory sign at each primary building entrance to represent any upper floor tenants. Such a directory sign should not exceed 10 square feet.
7. Coordinate all wall-mounted signs in terms of size, placement, lettering, color, and overall design in buildings with multiple storefronts.

G. PROJECTING SIGNS

These signs can be hung from brackets or otherwise mounted so that they hang perpendicular to the building. They may also be attached to the underside of an approved awning. Projecting signs are intended for viewing by pedestrians from a moderate distance.

INAPPROPRIATE TREATMENT

1. Do not place a sign higher than the top of the porch.

GUIDELINES

1. Ensure that the sign face does not exceed 10 square feet.
2. *For commercial buildings*, place projecting signs at a height at least nine feet from the sidewalk and extending no more than four feet from the vertical surface of the building.
3. *When used for a residence converted to professional use*, attach a small projecting sign to the wall at the first floor or to a porch column.

A projecting sign should be mounted high enough that pedestrian traffic can safely walk beneath it.

This projecting sign is mounted to the porch post and hangs into the road rather than over the sidewalk.

FLAT WALL SIGN

front side

The lettering on the shades made for the storefront windows at the E. E. Lake Store acts as a window sign.

AWNING SIGNS

front side

H. WINDOW/DOOR SIGNS

Painted onto or adhered to display windows or entrance doors, these signs are intended for pedestrians.

INAPPROPRIATE TREATMENT

1. Window and door signs should not be three-dimensional.

GUIDELINES

1. Place window or door signs with a centerline approximately five and one-half feet above the sidewalk for good visibility.
2. Alternatively, locate window signs in the top or bottom 18 inches of the display window glass.
3. Obscure no more than 20 percent of the window glass.
4. Design window and door signs so that the average height of lettering and symbols is not more than six inches.
5. Limit upper-level tenants to one small window sign not to exceed two square feet.
6. Use vinyl letters for window signs or employ a professional sign painter.

I. AWNING AND CANOPY SIGNS

A sign can be painted, screened, or applied to the front panel or valance area of an awning. Typically, the drop of an awning valance measures between six and eight inches. The maximum drop should never exceed 12 inches.

INAPPROPRIATE TREATMENT

1. Avoid hand-painted or individually made fabric letters that are not professionally applied.
2. Avoid backlit awning signs.

GUIDELINES

1. Size letters to allow for an inch of open space at both the top and bottom of the valance.
2. Ensure that the lettering extends no more than 75 percent of the width of the awning.

J. FREE-STANDING SIGNS

Freestanding signs are mounted to posts or other supports and placed in front of buildings that are set back from the street. They may also be placed in the front yard of a residence converted to commercial or office use.

GUIDELINES

1. Size pole-mounted, freestanding signs to be no higher than eight feet.
2. Design the total sign area to not exceed 16 square feet.

Aldie's welcome sign may be adapted for a business with multiple tenants. The smaller hanging signs can identify each tenant.

A gable-roofed freestanding sign incorporates a historic form of a changeable message area.