5A: GUIDELINES FOR SIGNS AND AWNINGS

PURPOSE OF GUIDELINES
- Provide applicants with design assistance for commercial signs and awnings
- Encourage compatibility and provide a visual connection with the historic building and district
- Provide variety and vitality in the district
- Encourage the greatest amount of design flexibility
- Identify and discourage those elements that are indisputably detrimental to the streetscape
- Encourage the consideration of how proposed signage or awning relates to each property, the streetscape and the historic district

It is not intended that these guidelines should replace consultation with qualified architects, contractors and the HARB, or to make all signs and awnings in the Township appear the same.

These guidelines were developed in conjunction with Lower Merion’s Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB). The HARB reviews Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications for proposed exterior alterations to properties within the historic districts visible from a public way. The applicant is responsible for complying with the provisions of the Zoning and Building Codes at the time of application. The applicant must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) as well as all necessary permits prior to proceeding with any work. For more information, call the Department of Building Regulations and Zoning at (610) 645 - 6200.

Please review this information during the early stages of planning your project. Familiarity with this material can assist in moving a project quickly through the approval process, saving applicants both time and money.

The three-dimensional rubber stamp adds visual interest and draws attention to the business.

IMPORTANCE OF SIGNS AND AWNINGS
A well designed and well-placed sign or awning can make a good impression, attract potential customers and unify a streetscape. By contrast, a confused, poorly designed or poorly placed sign or awning can overwhelm a building, detract from the area, give an inappropriate impression, turn customers away and potentially damage historic materials or finishes. Historically, signs and awnings were attached to and placed near buildings. New signs can use similar features to both enhance the character of the building and convey the necessary information to the public.
TYPES OF SIGNS IN LOWER MERION

Generally, there are two types of signs, those that are attached to the building and those that are freestanding. The choice between attached or freestanding signs may be based upon the specific location, needs and the limitations of the Zoning Code. The following illustrations are intended to provide general examples of sign types that can be found within the historic district.

Wall Signs are the most common type of signs in the Township. Wall signs include any sign mounted to the face of the building, painted on a building and all signage at windows and doors that does not project more than 12 inches from the face of the building.

Storefront Window Signs are a type of wall sign. They include all signs that are attached to glass either at the interior or exterior of the building. These signs are generally painted, vinyl appliqués or etched glass, and can include stained glass.

Channel Letter Signs consists of three-dimensional letters, individually applied to a wall, which may or may not be internally illuminated.

Perpendicular Projecting Signs are generally double-faced signs, suspended from a bracket mounted perpendicularly to the wall of a building, projecting more than 12 inches. In some locations, these signs might need to be hinged or collapsible to meet Zoning regulations.

Parallel Projecting Signs are single or double-faced signs, generally suspended from an architectural element of the building such as the edge of a porch, mounted parallel to a face of the building.
Nameplate Signs are attached to the building. They include information about several businesses on a single large sign, with an identifying building address and/or name. The individual nameplates on the sign should match each other in size, colors, letter size, case and styles.

Freestanding Signs (Landscape) are not attached to the building, structure or fence. They can be supported by one or more posts, or rest upon a masonry monument. Freestanding signs can include information on one or two sides.

Freestanding Signs (Suspended) are not attached to the building. They typically include information on two sides and are suspended from a rail or bracket that is supported by one or two posts set in paving or landscape areas.

Mounting Signs and Awnings

Care should be taken in mounting wall signs and awnings to minimize the damage to historic building materials. This includes reusing hardware or brackets from previous signs or awnings, or attaching them at previous attachment locations.

If reusing existing hardware or attachment locations is not an option, select mounting locations that can be easily patched if the sign is removed. This includes locating holes in mortar joints rather than directly into bricks or masonry. This will facilitate repair if the sign is removed or relocated in the future.
SIGN MATERIAL

Historically, early signs were made of wood, either attached directly to the building or suspended from metal brackets. As technology advanced and building styles changed, a wider range of materials were used. These included bronze plates attached to buildings, cast iron, stainless steel, etched or painted glass, leaded glass, gold leaf, tile, and terrazzo. Each material was popular during a particular time period, and might not be appropriate for all buildings.

Some materials may no longer be practical for signage installations due to limited availability or expense. For example redwood is more durable for exterior installations than other types of wood but is very expensive; similarly, wrought iron is considerably more labor intensive and expensive to manufacture than cast iron.

Available substitutes for redwood include Urethane board and MDO board. Both materials can be painted, carved or routed similarly to wood, but are not subject to warping in the same manner as lower grade woods or plywood. Urethane board is compressed, hardened foam, and is generally lighter and thicker that MDO board, which is made of six layers of alternately grained wood material to protect against warping. MDO board has an approximate seven-year life span.

The HARB encourages:

- Using materials that are consistent with the historic character of the building including wood, bronze, brass, gold leaf, etched glass, paint, aluminum, stainless steel, enameled metal, leaded glass, appliqués, tile, and terrazzo
- Mounting individual wood or metal letters to a building or sign board
- Using modern durable materials such as Urethane board or MDO board that are similar in appearance to historic materials
- Using cast iron brackets to hang signs with hardware of a compatible appearance
- Repairing historic signage with materials to match the original whenever possible

The HARB discourages:

- The use of contemporary materials such as plastics or plexiglass, or plastic or glossy coatings, which are incompatible with the building's historic character
- Temporary paper signs mounted to the building wall, or to exterior or interior window glass

SIGN SHAPE

Most sign shapes are either simple geometric forms, geometric shapes with decorative edges or rounded corners, or shapes that convey the type of business. When considering which sign shape is most appropriate for a specific location, the applicant should consider the sign type, information to be conveyed, size and location of the sign, building style, and other signs at the property or adjacent properties.
SIGN ILLUMINATION

In many instances, available ambient street or storefront lighting can illuminate signs, which is preferred to the installation of additional lighting. The Zoning Code also limits the use of sign illumination.

The HARBobourc:

- Using existing ambient street light or storefront lighting whenever possible
- Using small scale, indirect or hidden lights such as gooseneck or in-ground mounted lights directed towards sign
- Using lights that are consistent with the character of the historic building
- Using low wattage bulbs to minimize potential glare to other properties, pedestrians and vehicle operators

The HARBobourc:

- High wattage light sources such as bare spot lights and metal halides
- Internally illuminated signs and awnings with the exception of channel letters at compatible locations

NEON

Neon signs, originally developed in the 1920s, are made of narrow, gas filled tubes that are illuminated through electrification. Given the age and character of many buildings within the historic districts, the use of exterior neon is carefully reviewed by HARBob to determine compatibility.

The HARBobourc:

- Customizing neon to enhance the style or character of a building, if appropriate, in consultation with HAB

The HARBobourc:

- The use of neon signage or decorative neon at a building's interior that is highly visible from a public way
- The installation of interior pre-manufactured neon signs advertising a product or service that is highly visible from a public way

Termiini Bros.
GOLD MEDAL PASTRY

The metal sign is illuminated with a thin overhead fixture. The area of the sign and awning are added in the calculation for allowable signage.

SIGN SIZE

Lower Merion Township’s Zoning Code regulates the size and total amount of signage permitted for each property.

- Signage should be compatible to the scale of the building, adjacent buildings, the streetscape and adjacent signage.
- Small-scale signs are also appropriate when using several signs.
- All exterior signs and window signs are included in the calculation of the sign area for each property.
- A well-designed smaller sign can have more of an impact than larger signs. This is particularly true in the commercial areas of Lower Merion where the means of travel is by foot or slow moving vehicles.

Customized neon is appropriate for certain locations, buildings and sign styles.
AWNINGS

Awnings are a historically popular means of sheltering pedestrians, advertising a business and protecting window merchandise from sun damage. Historically, awnings project at a continuous angle away from the face of the building on a metal frame, terminating at a skirt or valance.

Open sided awning

Closed sided awning

The HARB encourages:

- Locating awnings over the full length of the storefront display or individual display windows or entrances
- Fixed or retractable awnings with solid or striped canvas, whose color, style and location are compatible with the building's historic character
- Awnings that project a few inches to approximately three feet from the face of the building in a continuous angle with a height to twelve inch straight or scalloped valance
- Limiting lettering and logos to awning valances except for those awnings with smaller projections
- Using retractable or collapsible hardware for awnings that project more than 12 inches
- Installing awning hardware in a manner that minimizes damage to historic building materials

The HARB discourages:

- Using contemporary or glossy awning materials such as metal, plastics or leatherette, which are incompatible with the building's historic character
- Internally lit awnings
- The use of contemporary awning shapes such as rounded balloon awnings
- The use of canvas and awning materials for signs
- The installation of awnings at historically inappropriate locations

SIGN AND AWNING COLORS

In considering appropriate colors for signs and awnings, applicants must balance the need to make them legible, convey the business identity or logo and complement the historic character of the building and environment.

Legibility: The contrast between the logo or lettering and background color can greatly increase the overall legibility of the sign or awning. In many instances limiting the number of colors to those necessary to convey the information also increases the legibility.

Although not very large, this sign is very legible and provides clear information to pedestrians and vehicle passengers. It includes a distinctive logo and typeface for the business name, a simpler typeface for the address and additional information and a bold telephone number. The simple color scheme also complements the building.

Color tones: Colors that are complementary to the historic building and environment are encouraged.
SIGN AND AWNING LETTERING
Similar to selecting a color, when considering letter style for signs and awnings, applicants must balance the need to make them legible, convey the business identity or logo, and complement the historic character of the building and environment. Excessive amounts of text or highly stylized type styles can overwhelm a viewer and make the message effectively illegible. In general, there are three styles of lettering available, serif, non-serif and script.

ABCDEFHJKLMNQPQRSTUVWXY
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Serif Alphabet

ABCDEFHJKLMNQPQRSTUVWXY
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Non-Serif Alphabet

ABCDEFHJKLMNQPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
Script Alphabet

Within each general style numerous typefaces are available, many of which can be varied by making them bold or italicized. Similar to materials, different styles of lettering were typically utilized for specific periods. Applicants are encouraged to utilize lettering and materials that complement their particular property.

SIGN AND AWNING LOGOS
Logos can be an important identifying feature for any business, and generally, applicants are encouraged to utilize a logo or symbol that identifies their business. However, HARB is not obligated to accept a sign or awning design that is based upon a national or regional image required by a corporation or franchise.

LOCATIONS OF SIGNS AND AWNINGS
The diagrams below are intended to provide general guidance for appropriate sign and awning locations for commercial and former residential buildings in Lower Merion Township. It is important to note all sign types might not be appropriate for all buildings.

Signs should not extend above the eave of a sloping roof or the roof line of a flat roof, nor should they obscure distinctive architectural elements or features such as cornices. The Zoning Ordinance identifies allowable sign and awning locations as well as the size and number of allowable signs for each property. Applicants are encouraged to contact the Zoning Office early in the design process to verify size, quantity and location requirements.

Commercial Building
(1) hanging from bracket perpendicular to front wall; (2) paint, vinyl or etching on window(s); (3) flush mounted wall sign; (4) freestanding sign when permitted; (5) under storefront cornice; (signs may also appear on awning)

Adaptive Reuse of Former Residential Building
(1) hanging from bracket perpendicular to front wall; (2) paint, vinyl or etching on window(s); (3) flush mounted wall sign; (4) freestanding sign when permitted; (5) on an awning (signs may also appear under a storefront cornice)
HARB SIGN AND AWNING REVIEW

The HARB reviews all signs, awnings, mountings, brackets and illumination located at the exterior of a building as well as window signs that are visible from a public way. In its review of signs and awnings, the HARB utilizes The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, the national standards utilized in all HARB reviews. When reviewing applications, HARB considers the appropriateness of the sign or awning's components of installation and design in relationship to the building and streetscape for which it is proposed. What may be appropriate at one location might not be appropriate at another.

CERTIFICATES OF APPROPRIATENESS

The HARB forwards a recommendation for all reviewed Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications to the Building and Planning Committee and the Board of Commissioners. A minimum of four to six weeks is needed from the submission of a COA application to the issuance of a sign or building permit. This process could take several months if the application is incomplete, the HARB requests modifications or Township deadlines are not met.

The HARB generally considers applications at 8:30 a.m. on the first Tuesday of each month. Applicants are strongly encouraged to attend the HARB meeting to provide clarification. To be added to the agenda, all submission materials must be delivered to the Department of Building Regulations at the Township Building a minimum of eight days prior to the meeting.

Once the HARB reviews an application, it forwards a recommendation to the Building and Planning Committee and Board of Commissioners that a COA be issued or denied for the proposed work. If the applicant concurs with the HARB's recommendation, it is not necessary to attend these meetings. If the applicant wishes to challenge the recommendation, they are encouraged to attend the Building and Planning Committee meeting, generally held at 7:30 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month and the Board of Commissioners meeting, generally held at 8 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month.

Once the Board of Commissioners has approved a COA application, the applicant must comply with all necessary Township Zoning and Building Code regulations prior to the issuance of a permit to commence work. Other Code reviews can occur concurrently with the HARB review. For specific meeting times and deadline requirements, please contact the Building Department at (610) 645 - 6200.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION INFORMATION

The HARB must have all required information to review a COA application. If information is incomplete the application may not be forwarded to HARB for review, may be recommended for denial or tabled until all information is received. The following checklist is provided for information purposes only. Please verify submission requirements with the Department of Building Regulations and Zoning at (610) 645 - 6200.

- 2 copies of completed original Certificate of Appropriateness Application
- 4"x6" (or larger) labeled photographs showing all public views of the property
- Copies of catalog cuts for hangers, posts and finials, and light fixtures (if applicable)
- Scaled drawings indicating:
  a. façade elevation with proposed sign or awning
  b. dimensioned elevation of sign or awning with letter style, logo and layout
  c. detail of attachment to building
  d. detail of illumination (if applicable)
  e. detail of edge treatment (if exposed)
- Scaled plot plan (for free standing signs)
- Samples of colors and materials to be used
- Any additional information required by the HARB after an initial consultation or review

This publication was initiated and overseen by the Township of Lower Merion and made possible through a grant provided by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

This project has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior.

This program receives Federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability or age in federally assisted programs. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity; National Park Service; 1849 C Street, N.W.; Washington, DC 20240.

Dominique M. Hawkins, AIA, of Preservation Design Partnership in Philadelphia, PA, prepared this publication.

April 2001