

SIGNAGE AND LIGHTING



Backlit plastic signs and underlit awnings with lettering are inappropriate for historic buildings.



Flat signboards, low-profile projecting signs, painted lettering on the display windows and awning valance are appropriate.

Signage is an essential element in any commercial district. Anonymity is clearly not good for business. Unfortunately, signage has often been one of the most disfiguring elements in the urban landscape. A visual clutter of oversized and ill-positioned signs presents a negative image for the entire street.

A business' sign is important not only as an identifier, but equally significant as an expression of an image for the business. Don't underestimate the value of quality signage. A clear message, presented with style, will encourage passersby to venture in. Money spent on quality signage is usually money well spent.

When thinking about signage, consider the following:

Size and placement

In a densely built downtown area, signage should be directed at and scaled to the pedestrian. Don't assume that the largest sign is the best. Pay particular attention to how your sign relates to your building. Look for logical signage locations on your facade.

Continuous flat wall areas above display windows or above upper story windows are typically good choices. Don't cover windows, doors, or architectural ornament. A good sign looks like it belongs where it was placed. It should be an extension of the overall design of your facade.

Message and design

A good sign is simple and direct. Don't be tempted to say too much. Choose a letter style or graphic treatment that projects your image and is clear and easy to read. Coordinate sign colors with the colors of your building. Remember that visual clutter will only dilute your message.

A good sign can take many forms. It may be painted on a flat panel, or it might have a sculptural quality. Individual letters might be applied to the facade. Logos or lettering can be painted, stenciled, or engraved on windows. Even the valance of an awning can be an excellent signboard. Neon signs inside shop windows are usually appropriate and possess a charm that can be very attractive, if not overused. Neon signage is not appropriate on the building exterior, however, unless it was an original feature of the building. Lighting for other kinds of signage should be limited to direct illumination by incandescent lamps.

Certain sign types are generally considered inappropriate in an historic commercial district. These would include large projecting signs, rooftop signs, and internally illuminated awnings and signs. Replacement of these kinds of signs should be strongly considered in planning for rehabilitation. To address this issue, the City of Northfield has adopted a sign ordinance that regulates signs within the historic downtown district.

General Sign Guidelines

- Signs should be made of traditional materials such as wood or metal panels with painted or ornamental metal lettering.
- Signage should be sized appropriately and in proportion to its building.
- Signs and graphics should have colors that are coordinated with the overall building colors and the colors of the adjacent buildings.
- Signs should have serif, sans serif, or script lettering.
- Signage should be placed at traditional sign locations including the storefront beltcourse, upper facade walls, hanging or mounted inside windows, or projecting from the face of the building.
- Signs should not conceal any architectural features.
- Signage mounting brackets and hardware should be anchored into mortar, not masonry.
- Signs which are lit should have concealed lighting—spot or up-lit lighting for signs is recommended.
- Internally-lit or flashing signs are not appropriate for historic commercial districts.

