

Design Guidelines: Signs

Both the residential and commercial areas of Corydon's historic district include signs as part of the landscape. Signs help to identify businesses and historic and cultural attractions, convey important information on goods and services, and provide direction and orientation to the traveler. Left uncontrolled, however, signs can introduce visual clutter to the landscape, particularly in the commercial center of downtown.

Signs are regulated through the town's sign ordinance (Ordinance #2017-07) and – other than murals – do not require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic Preservation Commission. The following information is provided as guidance for developing signs in the downtown commercial core, consistent with the regulations for the special sign district within the town's signage ordinance. This special sign district is roughly bounded on the north and west by Big Indian Creek, and on the south by Little Indian Creek. The eastern boundary goes from Little Indian Creek north on Maple Street to High Street, west on High Street to Farquar Street, and north on Farquar Street to Big Indian Creek.

As you are designing your sign, please keep the following principles in mind:

New signs in the historic district should:
Respect the historic, pedestrian-oriented context – New signs should complement, rather than compete with the character of the historic buildings and the surrounding district. Signage should be designed and scaled with pedestrians in mind, not drivers.

Encourage an interesting streetscape, free from visual clutter – Be creative in designing new signs, and remember that a single, well-designed and well-positioned sign can do more to identify and benefit your business than multiple poorly-designed signs.

Utilize durable, quality materials and be installed in a way to minimize impacts on the building – Consider the appearance of your sign over time, and use materials that have a proven track record of performance. Signs should be installed so they will cause little or no damage to the building, both now and when they are removed.



A well-designed and thoughtfully positioned sign does not need to be large to attract positive attention to a business.

Sg1 Design storefront-level signs that are primarily oriented to pedestrians and are scaled accordingly.

Sg2 Signs should complement and fit in with the building façade in color, composition and materials.

Sg3 Signs should not cover architectural elements or obscure the display area.

Sg4 Signs should be attached in a manner that does not damage the building materials. Any holes for mounting hardware should be drilled into the mortar of masonry buildings, rather than the masonry units themselves, and the number of anchor points should be minimized. Utilize existing mounting hardware if possible.

Sg5 A letter style should be chosen that is easy to read. Because the contrast between lettering and background greatly influences legibility, light colored letters on dark backgrounds are preferred. Lettering should occupy only about 60% of a signboard.

Sg6 Use appropriate materials for signage, including carved or painted wooden signs, signs applied to canvas awnings, smooth-surface metal signs, and lettering applied to glass using gold leaf, paint, etching, or vinyl.

Plastic is generally not acceptable as a sign material in the historic district. Printed vinyl materials, whether used as a banner or adhered to a backing board are also generally not acceptable as a permanent sign material in the historic district.

If durable modern materials such as Urethane or MDO board are utilized, they should be finished in a way that gives the appearance of traditional materials. Matte finishes are preferred to glossy.

Sg7 Historically significant signs should be retained and repaired.

Sg8 Historic neon signs should be maintained and preserved. New neon signs will be considered on a case-by-case basis.



Traditional sign types - including a free-standing sign and a flush-mounted sign - compliment this business's historic building, while the window signage provides more information about the store's offerings.

Sg9 Preserve and maintain historic “ghost signs,” as they enrich the character of the historic district. Avoid restoring these signs to like-new condition, where all evidence of their age would be lost, but instead choose treatments that maintain the character and patina of the sign while preserving it.

Sg10 A business should not have more than two signs – one primary and one secondary. Secondary signs should generally be no more than half of the primary signs’ dimensions. The total allowable area for signs in the special sign district is 100 square feet per business.

Sg11 Recommended sign types include flush-mounted signs; painted wall signs; projecting or hanging signs; awning signs; and window, door or transom signs.

Sg12 Flush-mounted wall signs should be attached directly to the face of an exterior wall, parallel to the building and in a location that will not obstruct or impact architectural features.

Sg13 The length of a flush-mounted wall sign should be no greater than 2/3 the width of the building storefront. The height of the sign should be no more than three feet or 50% of the sign width, whichever is less. Wider or longer signs may be considered on a case-by-case basis, particularly when warranted by architectural features.

Sg14 The length of a painted wall sign should be no greater than 1/3 the length of the wall on which it will be painted. The height of the sign should be no more than three feet or 50% of the sign width, whichever is less. New painted wall signs are not appropriate for previously-unpainted masonry buildings and would require HPC approval.

Sg15 Projecting or hanging signs should be of a scale appropriate to the building, but generally should not exceed sixteen square feet in combined area (both sides).

Sg16 Projecting signs shall:

- a. Not project (at a right angle) more than four (4) feet from the building.
- b. Not extend above the highest point of the roof line.
- c. Maintain a free clearance to grade of at least eight feet six inches (8’6”) over a sidewalk, or fourteen feet (14’) over a parking lot.

Any sign that projects over the right-of-way requires approval from the Board of Public Works and Safety.

Sg17 An awning provides an excellent opportunity for graphics and signage, particularly on buildings lacking space designed specifically for that purpose. The lettering or graphics on an awning sign should be no more than 24” high and cover no more than 1/3 of the awning area. For additional guidelines regarding awnings and canopies, see section AC.

Sg18 Painted, vinyl or gold leaf window signs may be up to twenty percent of the window area. Interior signs installed within 12” of the storefront glass and intended to be seen from the exterior are considered window signs.

Sg19 Painted, vinyl or gold leaf window signs may be up to fifty percent of the door glass area.

Sg20 Painted, vinyl or gold leaf transom signs may be up to fifty percent of the transom glass area.

Sg21 Free-standing ground signs should be of a scale appropriate to the building and its site. Sixteen square feet in combined area (both sides) is generally a good starting point for many buildings and locations in the district.

Sg22 The use of a sandwich board or back-to-back sign is allowed in the historic district on a limited basis, but must not contribute to visual clutter of the streetscape nor impede the flow of pedestrians using assistive devices, such as walkers or wheelchairs.

No more than one (1) sandwich board or back-to-back sign per business is allowed generally, although a corner business with entrances on both street frontages may be allowed one (1) additional sign of this type.

Sandwich boards or back-to-back boards may not exceed four (4) feet in height and two (2) feet in width. Traditional materials such

as wood or chalk board should be used, or if modern materials are used they should be finished in a way to give the appearance of traditional materials. The use of plastic for sandwich boards or back-to-back signs is not allowed.

Signs of this type are permitted only during operating hours and must be removed from outside the location at the close of the business day. These signs may not be put in place prior to 7 AM and must be removed by dusk.



This sandwich board provides a good space to display daily specials, and is appropriately placed to avoid impacting sidewalk traffic.

Sg23 Temporary signage announcing special events may not exceed twelve square feet or will require a permit. These signs should be removed promptly when the event is completed, and may be in place a maximum of thirty (30) consecutive days in any ninety (90) day period. Temporary signs shall not be illuminated. These signs may include banners, wind signs or portable signs. Feather banners are not permitted in the historic district.

Sg24 Lighted signs should use an indirect lighting method such as overhead or gooseneck lights. The appearance of the light fixture should be minimized if it is not a design element, and the light should be shielded to minimize glare. Internally lit signs, fluorescent lighting, and electronic signs are generally not appropriate for use in historic districts.

Changeable message LED readerboards, flashing, animated and other dynamic digital signs are not permitted in Corydon

Sg25 Murals will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Murals may not be painted directly on masonry walls that have not previously been painted. Subjects related to local history or having some other local significance are encouraged. The installation of a mural should complement and enhance the building and its surroundings. The location of the mural on the building should not cover or detract from significant or

character-defining architectural features. Murals should not be located in an area which may cause undue distraction to drivers, and should be sited far enough away from other murals as to allow the visitor proper appreciation of each individually and not cause visual clutter.

Sg26 In buildings that contain multiple businesses, signage should be unified. Consider designating a ‘tenant area’ for signs, where all tenants would be listed in a uniform format.

Sg27 A sign permit is not required for the installation of National Register plaques or state-approved historic markers. Plaques and markers are encouraged and should be installed in a manner that does not damage historic fabric or obscure architectural details.

For Further Information

Preservation Brief No. 25: The Preservation of Historic Signs (National Park Service)
<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/25-signs.htm>

Preservation Brief No. 11: Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts (National Park Service)
<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/11-storefronts.htm>

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings
<https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/rehab/index.htm>



*Clockwise from top left:
Flush-mounted sign (with appropriate gooseneck lights);
window sign; ghost sign (restored); awning sign;
free-standing sign*

