

SIGNS AND SIGNAGE

Signs often form the first and last impression of a place of business or area. Effective and attractive signs are especially important in communities where the economy benefits from outside visitors. Since they must provide instant information primarily to moving vehicles, overly complex signs or cluttered groupings can be a dangerous distraction to drivers. Allowing signs to compete by being bigger, brighter, and more garish than their neighbors is a self-defeating spiral toward an ugly streetscape that can repel potential customers.

Recommended Sign Etiquette

Sign standards cannot regulate content, however, they can affect size, location, number of signs and even the number of words. Such requirements promote traffic safety and convey legitimate concerns for community appearance and business survival. Fewer words and colors are best (suggested maximum - 6 words and 3 colors), combined with a symbol or logo for quick recognition. Sign variances should not be granted lightly, only under unique conditions when minimal exceptions will not be undesirable to the character of the neighborhood or community.



Example of competing signs along a road

GENERAL SIGN PRINCIPLES

- Signs with dark backgrounds and light lettering are recommended. They are much easier to read and, if internally lit signs are allowed, cause less glare.
- Natural looking materials are preferred, including wood, and metal signs with stone, masonry or landscaped bases.
- Too many signs create visual chaos and can detract from the entire area.
- Use of monument signs by franchises prove they can and will conform to community standards.
- Certain distracting or cluttered signs such as flashing, moving, or roof signs, and portable or reader board signs should be placed in relatively few areas, if at all.

Sign standards based on context

Context is important for signage regulations. Most urban areas typically have slower speed limits and more pedestrians. Therefore, smaller signs should be encouraged as slower speeds allow viewers more time to read them. However, suburban and rural areas with faster speed limits necessitate larger signs to ensure legibility as vehicles typically pass by at a faster rate.



Sign example: local sign along a 25 - 30 mph rural suburban road

Sign context size based on neighborhood or speed limit:

- ✓ Slower speed or downtown 30 mph areas:
 - 12 foot height limit, 12 square feet in size
 - ✓ Medium speed areas at less than 45 mph:
 - 12 feet in height and 24 square feet in size
 - ✓ Highway areas with greater than 45 mph:
 - 20 feet in height and 40 square feet in size
- (Example source: Saratoga Springs, New York)



Sign example: sign along a 30 mph urban street

Building Sign Design - Integrate signage into sites by using the signs as accessory elements within quality architecture. Building signs include wall and window signs, projecting signs, and awnings. They should be subordinate features and framed within interesting architecture. Signs too often overwhelm the structure and obscure architectural details, however, when the building and signage complement each other, the development reflects harmony and balance with a clear message.



Three appropriate building sign examples...



A GOOD SIGN PASSES THREE TESTS:

- Conveys its message clearly and quickly;
- Compatible with the structure and its surroundings;
- Promotes the visual image of the community.

Freestanding Signs - are typically needed when buildings are set back too far from the street for building signs to be readily seen. Otherwise, and especially in village centers/downtowns, building signs are sufficient and separate freestanding signs should be avoided. Low, monument style freestanding signs are recommended over taller pole signs because ground-based signs can be better integrated with landscaping. Also, at 4 to 7 feet high, they can be directly seen at eye level and are less likely to obstruct views of neighboring properties or the sky.

Freestanding sign example:
Directory signs with many multiple listings can be distracting and can be difficult to read from the roadway. Where feasible, business signs should be limited to wall signs with a freestanding sign identifying the plaza. Or if necessary, a limited number of individual names allowed.



Freestanding sign example with landscaping



Freestanding sign: close to the building



Sign Lighting - Sign lighting should produce limited amounts of glare. Shielded downlighting or back-lighting should be encouraged for externally lit signs. Internally lit signs should use dark backgrounds and light colored letters. Otherwise, bright backgrounds with dark letters result in bright, glare producing signs harder to discern in the dark. Bright backgrounds force viewers eyes to adjust to the contrast from the night environment, therefore, dark backgrounds are preferred.

Downward shielded light fixtures - two examples



Internally lit sign example



Off premise signs - Large signs can be distracting and tend to mar the landscape. They should be limited along Scenic Byways and other priority character areas such as Village Centers and Downtowns. Gateway areas to Towns and Villages may also wish to limit their prevalence. Billboards and their related nighttime glare can impact residential areas and otherwise dark environments. Smaller, more unobtrusive location signs assist in place finding without the impact on the landscape and immediate neighbors due to glare.



Off-premise billboard examples - several in a row along both sides of a national/statewide scenic byway



Off-premise billboard example - includes website, hours, directions, too much text to read safely

Digital Signs - Signs with electronic type can provide changeable advertising and promote special events. They display messages that flash or scroll and can run animations or videos. They can stand out in an overcrowded streetscape and display information in any eye-catching way. Residents and drivers in the vicinity of digital signs often attest to their distracting brightness or moving message. Signs with light changing displays can intrude on the use and enjoyment of nearby properties. Opponents claim 24 hour flashing animations and messages, with intense light and colors, are a detriment to neighborhood living. In some areas, community members realize too late that Digital LED overload could drastically alter an area's character.



Digital examples - during the day,



dusk,

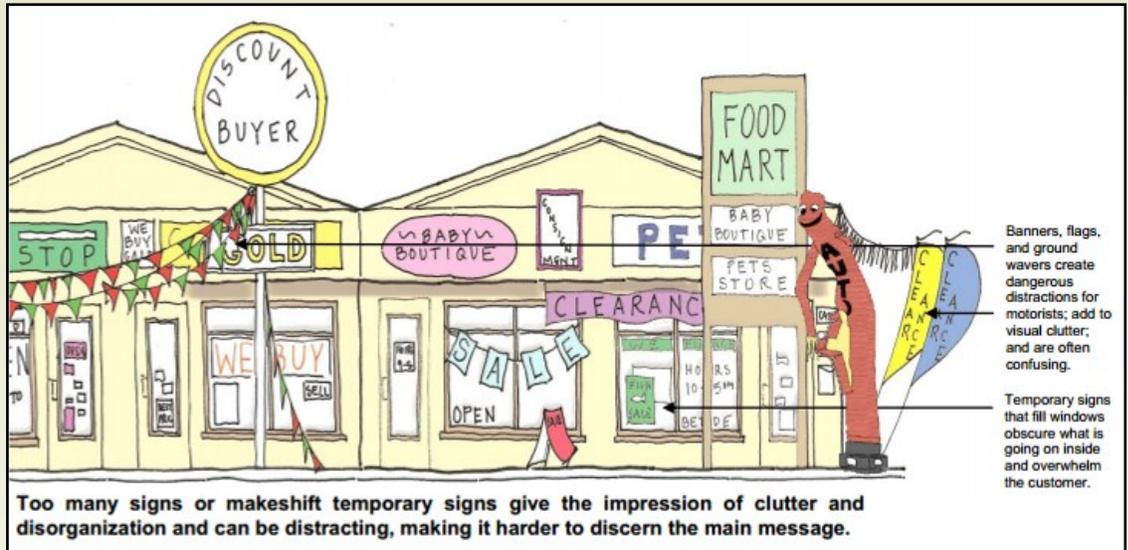


and night



Sign's Role/Purpose - On-premise signs can perform a major role in the success of retailers and local economies in their capacity as identification, advertising, and way finding aids. As an advertising medium, signage can make or break a businesses ability to be competitive. For small businesses, signage is often the most important means of communicating with potential customers. Using well-crafted and fairly administered regulations and/or design standards, a community can encourage signage that creates a sense of place and economic identity in central business districts, neighborhood commercial areas, entertainment districts, tourist destinations, and commercial corridors.

In considering the economic context of signs in a community, planners need to consider what types, sizes, and number of signs work best for business, for citizens in each district or area of a community, and for the community as a whole, both aesthetically and economically.



Where areas of a community are zoned for commercial use, it should naturally be a goal of the community to ensure that businesses locating in commercial zones are able to succeed. Research supports the conclusion that improvements in building signage and appearance have a positive affect on sales. Research also shows that the economic effect of subtle changes in the allowable size of signs is difficult to measure.

A common sense approach is needed - one that recognizes/balances a consumers need for information and businesses need to identify itself and advertise its goods and services. This should be balanced with the community's need for aesthetically pleasing commercial districts that enhance or at least do not detract from the desired character of the community.

TO MAKE THE GREATEST IMPACT WITH COMMERCIAL SIGNAGE:

- Signs often provide the customers first impression of a business. To be most effective, signs should be maintained in a safe, neat, and clean condition.
- Too many signs, lots of different types of signs, or a cluttered arrangement of signs may convey a negative message about the business or businesses.
- The name of the business, products, and services offered or a key promotion can get lost among too many signs or too much verbiage.
- Shopping centers with multiple tenants should consider a coordinated signage plan that fosters a unified look, while allowing for individuality among businesses.