



Historic neon signs add character to their buildings and should be retained.

Downtown commercial signs reflect the slower pace of downtown traffic and pedestrians – in contrast to their large, brightly colored, and illuminated counterparts found along a commercial strip. Downtown signs generally are smaller and sometimes more highly detailed. Signs add identity and vitality to commercial buildings, but large, numerous, or poorly designed signs can produce visual clutter. Attractive and effective signs require equal design consideration to other façade improvements.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS...

Signs are most effective when they are kept simple and easy to read.

Signs are generally meant to advertise or identify a particular business, not upstage or overwhelm an entire building.

Many of the features of a traditional storefront provide an opportunity for commercial signage.

GUIDELINES FOR PRESERVATION AND REHABILITATION

- **Recommended** actions and treatments are indicated by ✓.
- Actions or treatments **not recommended** are indicated by X.

✓ Retain historic signs that are important to the character of a building, such as:

- painted wall signs,
- neon signs,
- symbolic signs, and
- signs that identify a building's original owner or the date of a building's construction.



Downtown Roanoke contains many signs that have become familiar commercial landmarks.

✓ Stabilize areas of deterioration when a historic sign cannot be repaired immediately.

✓ Explore whether suitable replacements can be fabricated from substitute materials when missing sign features cannot be replaced in kind.

GUIDELINES FOR COMPATIBLE DESIGN

- ✓ Choose one or more sign types that are visible to both motorists and pedestrians.
- ✓ Use the same type of signs for two or more storefronts that occupy a single building. Choose a sign type that related to building features common to both storefronts or to the façade as a whole.
- X Do not use transom signs when the tran-

DEFINITIONS

Baffle: An opaque or translucent plate used to shield a light source from view.

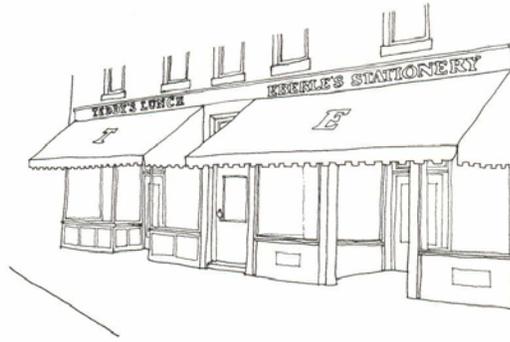
Building frontage: The length of a building site along a street.

Cornice signband: A flat, wide panel located just below the decorative molding of the cornice.

Pier: A vertical structural support, usually rectangular in shape.

Transom: A window located above a door opening.

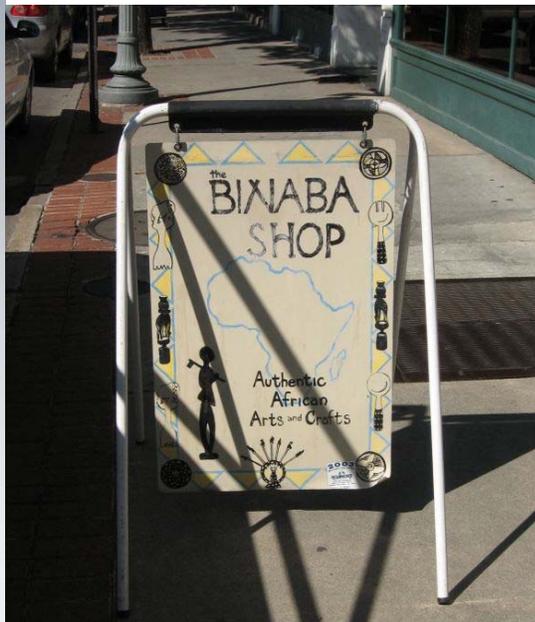
som provides light for the store interior.



The cornice sign band and awnings common to both these storefront provide coordinated sign treatments.

✓ Consider using attractive retail signs in the following situations:

- to present changeable information, such as menu specials,
- to announce special events and seasonal promotions, and
- to identify upper floor businesses.



Retail signs and sandwich boards can present information and advertise offerings.

✓ Remember that retail signs on city sidewalks need a temporary sign permit. Such signs should:

- use stable supports,
- avoid obstructing pedestrian access,
- be displayed only during business hours,
- be well-designed for the particular type of business and be attractive, not generic,

changeable signs, and

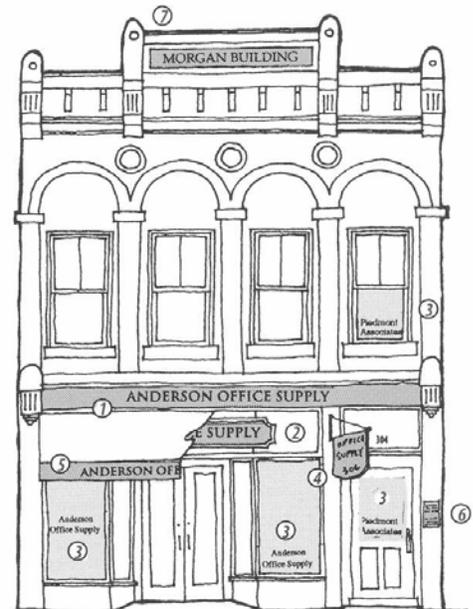
- be on private property unless permitted on the sidewalk by the city



The daily display of attractive portable signs helps signal the start of the business day.

✗ Do not use internally illuminated signs, such as those made of plastic or other translucent materials.

✓ Consider using neon signs within a display window to add color and light to a storefront.



Types of Signs

1. **Cornice sign:** painted or raised lettering applied to a cornice sign band; generally the most appropriate choice for traditional storefronts.
2. **Flat or Wall signs:** applied sign panel; used when a storefront cornice is not present.
3. **Transom sign:** flat sign located on a transom.
4. **Window sign:** painted on the inside of a storefront, upper-story window, or upper-floor entry door; suitable for businesses where window displays are not prominent.
5. **Hanging or projecting sign:** double-sided panel (total sign area equals twice face area); generally the most visible to motorists and pedestrians.
6. **Awning sign:** painted or sewn fabric letters on an awning's valance or slope.
7. **Directory sign:** lists one or more business names and locations, usually removed from the sign location, such as on an upper floor.
8. **Parapet sign:** provides building identification or construction date.

Number and Size

✓ Check the city zoning requirements on the number and size of signs.

✗ Do not exceed one square foot of total sign area per linear foot of building frontage for all uses in any commercial building.

✓ Limit the number of signs for each storefront or ground-floor business in a building to two, with not more than one sign – considered the primary sign – being one of the following:

- cornice sign,
- flat or wall sign,
- transom sign,
- hanging or projecting sign, or
- awning sign.

The secondary sign may be a window sign. A total of two window signs may be used in conjunction with a primary sign when:

- the location of the store entrance separates the display window into two parts or
- the combined area of the proposed window signs is smaller than the primary sign

✓ Signs identifying upper story businesses should not exceed 15% of the area used for

signs identifying the ground floor business.

✓ Limit the number of signs for each upper-story business to two of the following sign types:

- one directory or hanging sign adjacent to the upper-floor entry and
- one painted window sign in an upper-story window.



The use of awnings may influence a storefront's sign strategy. On buildings without awnings, such as the one on the left, a cornice sign band is visible to both motorists and pedestrians. On buildings with awnings, such as the one on the right, an awning sign may be supplemented by two small window signs for increased visibility.



Calculating appropriate sign areas:

$44' \text{ frontage} \times 1.0 \text{ sf/linear foot of frontage} = 44 \text{ sf}$
(22 sf per storefront)

$44 \text{ sf} \times 15\% = 6.6 \text{ sf for upper floor (combined)}$

Left storefront:

Transom sign: $12' \times 1'6'' = 18 \text{ sf}$

Window sign: $3' \times 1'4'' = 4 \text{ sf}$

Total = 22 sf

Right storefront:

Hanging sign: $2' \times 3' \times 2 = 12 \text{ sf}$

Window sign: $2'6'' \times 4' = 10 \text{ sf}$

Total = 22 sf

Upper floors:

Directory sign: $1'6'' \times 2'6'' = 3.75 \text{ sf}$

Window signs: $2'6'' \times 6'' \times 2 = 2.5 \text{ sf}$

Total = 6.25 sf

✓ Use only one sign per business on the rear façade of a building. The total area of such signs should not exceed 30% of the sign area for the front of a building.

Location

✓ Locate hanging signs at or below the storefront cornice for a ground floor business, but no higher than 15' above the ground. Hanging signs may also be located at the piers or in front of the recessed entry. Be considerate not to block the view of neighboring signs.



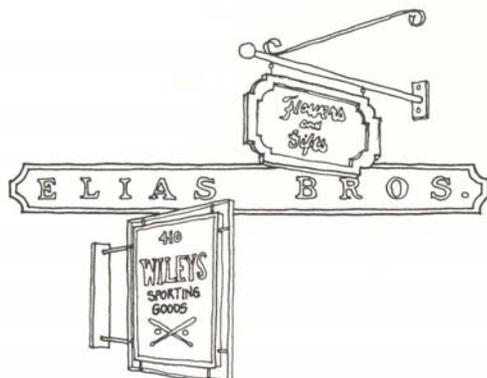
The placement of this hanging sign below the storefront cornice is appropriate.

✓ Maintain a minimum clearance for all hanging signs of 8' above the sidewalk.

✓ Maintain a maximum projection of 4' for hanging signs.

Design and Shape

✓ Use horizontal signs at cornice sign bands and transoms; more compact shapes generally are more suitable for hanging and wall signs.



The general proportions of a sign should be determined by its type and location. Shown above are various sign types.



Logo signs are appropriate for downtown businesses.

✓ Work with national manufacturers, distributors, or companies to adapt their logos and sign systems to create appropriate signs for the historic district. Compatibility of scale and materials is especially important.

✗ Do not make the entire transom area into a sign. A sign panel no larger than two-thirds the height of the transom should be applied so that it projects slightly from the face of the transom (if the original transom glass is still in place).



Limit the size of transom signs to avoid blocking light to the interior or obscuring the transom glazing.

✗ Do not use large window signs that block views from or into display windows. Use smaller lettering, more appropriate for closer pedestrian traffic, near the bottom of the window.

Materials

✓ Use painted wood for most panel signs. Use marine-grade exterior plywood or

high-density wood composites with banded edges to prevent moisture penetration. Applied moldings or routed edges can add additional character.



The painted wood used for this sign and its banded edges are appropriate, add character, and prevent moisture penetration.

✓ Use ornamental metals such as brass, bronze, or copper only for small-scale signs such as directories.

✗ Do not use etched-glass signs. Etching should never be done on historic glass.

Color

✓ Choose simple color schemes for painted signs using no more than three colors that relate to the overall color scheme of the building.



This painted window sign's usage of only two colors and coordination of the paint colors with the building material colors are appropriate.

✓ Consider using traditional gold-leaf lettering for window signs. Avoid a solid painted background behind window letter-

ing because it destroys the transparency of the storefront.



Using gold-leaf lettering preserves a traditional image. Avoiding a solid background preserves the transparency of the storefront.

Lettering

✓ Choose simple lettering for commercial signs that is:

- easy to read,
- appropriate to the character of the business, and
- compatible with the architecture of the building.

Serif

...lettering has a traditional appearance and is appropriate for most older buildings.

Script

...lettering is suitable for key words or painted window signs.

Sans Serif

...lettering is more contemporary.

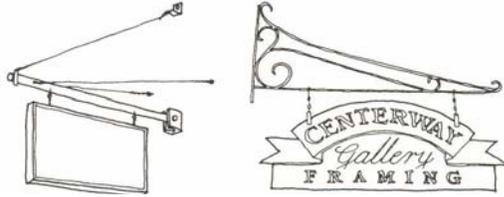
DECORATIVE

...lettering can create a strong impression but should be used sparingly.

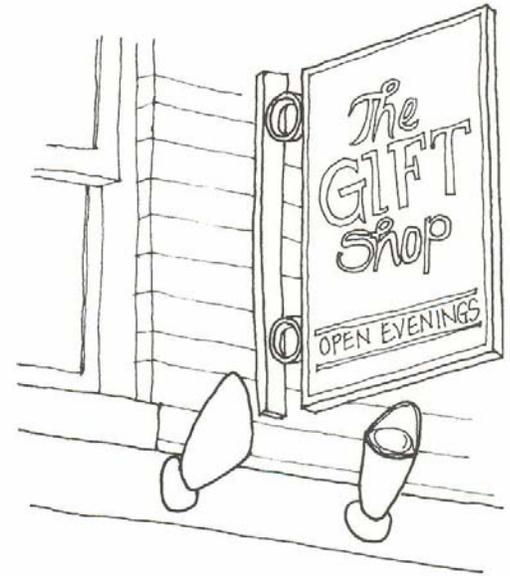
Attachment

✓ Attach signs to buildings inconspicuously and in a manner that will do the least permanent damage to building materials.

✓ Use attractive supports and hardware to mount all signs, particularly hanging signs.



Although attachment hardware for signs need not be elaborate, it should be neat in appearance. The hardware above and on the left is too utilitarian. That on the right and that pictured below is more decorative and, hence, appropriate.



The angle and metal shades of these light fixtures prevent glare and camouflage the bulb from view.

Lighting (see also *Exterior Lighting*)

✓ Use illuminated signs for businesses that are open in the evening, such as restaurants. For other businesses, an illuminated storefront window generally provides sufficient nighttime identification.

✓ Provide illumination for signs where appropriate. Do not use plastic, internally illuminated signs.

✓ Conceal the light source to prevent glare by directing the light upward and shielding the bulb from the viewer. Consider the use of

- angled light fixtures,
- fixtures with metal shades, and
- fixtures hidden behind baffles.

✓ Choose modest light fixtures to light signs. Install the fixtures and their associated wiring inconspicuously to avoid detracting from the daytime appearance of a building.

✓ Consider the use of neon as an attractive way to combine signs and nighttime lighting.

✗ Do not use flashing or moving lights on signs.