

HISTORIC SIGNAGE OVERLAY DESIGN GUIDELINES

HISTORIC SIGNAGE OVERLAY

INSIDE



METROPOLITAN HISTORIC ZONING COMMISSION

Metropolitan Government of
Nashville and Davidson County

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. THE HISTORIC SIGN ZONING OVERLAY

Please also see *MHZC Hand Book*.

Neighborhoods in more than two thousand towns in the United States use historic zoning as a tool to protect their unique architectural characters. There are quantifiable reasons for historic zoning: it gives neighborhoods greater control over development; it can stabilize property values; it decreases the risk of investing in one’s house; it promotes heritage tourism; it protects viable urban housing stock; and it preserves natural resources by conserving building materials. And there are less quantifiable, but equally important, reasons for historic zoning -- it protects our past for future generations, it nurtures a sense of community, and it provides a sense of place.

Historic zoning overlays are **locally** designated and administered by the Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission (MHZC), an agency of the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County. Historic zoning overlays are applied in addition to the base or land-use zoning of an area. *Historic zoning overlays do not impact use.*

Like the National Register of Historic Places, historic zoning honors an area’s historical significance. With that recognition, certain exterior work on buildings, structures, and signs are reviewed to ensure that a neighborhood’s or a structure’s special character is preserved.

There are six types of historic zoning overlays: historic preservation, neighborhood conservation, historic bed and breakfast, historic landmarks, historic landmark-interiors and historic landmark-signs.

WHAT IS REVIEWED:

IN HISTORIC SIGN OVERLAYS

- *Alterations*
- *Removal/replacement in full or in part*
- *Relocation*

IN A HISTORIC LANDMARK OVERLAY

- *New construction (primary and secondary structures)*
- *Additions – increased footprint, height or building envelope of an existing structure*
- *Demolition (in whole or in part)*
- *Relocation of structures*
- *Construction of appurtenances (with the exception of portable storage buildings less than 100 square feet)*
- *Signage*
- *Repairs and Alterations to existing structures*
- *Setback Determinations*

IN A HISTORIC PRESERVATION OVERLAY

- *New construction (primary and secondary structures)*
- *Additions – increased footprint, height or building envelope of an existing structure*
- *Demolition (full or in part)*
- *Relocation of structures*
- *Construction of appurtenances (with the exception of portable storage buildings less than 100 square feet)*
- *Signage*
- *Repairs and Alterations to existing structures*
- *Setback Determinations*



I. INTRODUCTION

B. WHAT ARE THE DESIGN GUIDELINES?

The Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission (MHZC) is the architectural review board that reviews applications for work on properties within historic zoning overlay districts. Its nine volunteer members, appointed by the mayor, include representatives from zoning districts, the Metropolitan Planning Commission, the Metropolitan Historical Commission, architect(s) and others. Design review is administered according to a set of design guidelines. The guidelines are criteria and standards, developed by the MHZC and based on the National Park Services' Secretary of Interior Standards. The guidelines provide direction for project applicants and ensure that the decisions of the MHZC are not arbitrary or based on anyone's personal taste.

The guidelines protect the neighborhood from new construction or additions not in character with the neighborhood and from the loss of architecturally or historically important buildings.

By state and local legislation, design guidelines for historic overlays must be in accordance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*—criteria developed by the National Park Service and used by private and public preservation organizations throughout the country.

Italicized sections of the guidelines contain interpretive information that is meant to make the guidelines easier to understand; they are not part of the guidelines themselves. Illustrations and photographs are intended only to provide example buildings and circumstances. It is important to remember that every building is different and what may be appropriate for one building or site may not be appropriate for another.

*IN A NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION OVERLAY (NCZO)
(also B&B Homestays)*

- *New construction (primary and secondary structures)*
- *Additions – increased footprint, height or building envelope of an existing structure*
- *Demolition (in whole or in part)*
- *Relocation of structures*
- *Setback Determinations*

WHAT IS NOT REVIEWED IN HISTORIC SIGN OVERLAYS

- *Regular maintenance such as cleaning or sealing sources of water penetration*
- *Replacement of electrical components*



I. INTRODUCTION

C. PURPOSE OF THE DESIGN GUIDELINES

Within the zoning ordinance, “historic zoning” is used as the general term for Nashville’s five types of zoning overlay districts applicable to historic properties: historic preservation, neighborhood conservation, historic landmark, historic bed and breakfast, and historic sign.

A. Design guidelines are criteria and standards which the Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission must consider in determining the appropriateness of proposed work within an historic zoning district. Appropriateness of work must be determined in order to accomplish the goals of historic, as outlined in Article IX (Historic Zoning Regulations), Metropolitan Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance:

1. To preserve and protect the historical and/or architectural value of buildings or other structures;
2. To regulate exterior design, arrangement, texture, and materials proposed to be used within the historic district to ensure compatibility;
3. To create an aesthetic appearance which complements the historic buildings or other structures;
4. To foster civic beauty;
5. To strengthen the local economy; and
6. To promote the use of historic districts for the education, pleasure, and welfare of the present and future citizens of Nashville and Davidson County.



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D. SECRETARY OF INTERIOR STANDARDS

By state law, all local design guidelines must comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties. The Standards shall be followed for alterations of all Historic Signs:

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal changes to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historical significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design,



The L&L Restaurant Equipment Company sign remains at 3814 Charlotte Avenue, although the business is gone.



I. INTRODUCTION

color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials.

Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.

7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means necessary.
8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future. The essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.



II. GENERAL POLICY

A. "Signs" refers to a great number of verbal, symbolic or figural markers. Buildings themselves can serve as signs. Historically significant signs are ones that provide evidence of our evolving pattern of cultural history and may be significant on their own, for the message contained in the sign, or by the art of the sign painting, design or craftsmanship. They may also be important for their relationship to a building or site.

B: Characteristics of Historic Signs

- associated with historic figures, events or places.
- significant as evidence of the history of the product, business or service advertised.
- significant as reflecting the history of the building or the development of the historic district. A sign may be the only indicator of a building's historic use.
- characteristic of a specific historic period, such as gold leaf on glass, neon, or stainless steel lettering.
- integral to the building's design or physical fabric, as when a sign is part of a storefront made of Carrara glass or enamel panels, or when the name of the historic firm or the date are rendered in stone, metal or tile.
- outstanding examples of the signmaker's art, whether because of their excellent craftsmanship, use of materials, or design.
- local landmarks, that is, signs recognized as popular focal points in a community.
- elements important in defining the character of a district, such as marquees in a theater district.

Information provided by the National Park Services'

Preservation Brief #25: The Preservation of Historic Signs



II. GENERAL POLICY

- C. Recreated historic signs are not eligible to be a Historic Landmark Sign, unless the recreated sign itself has gained historic significance.

- D. Generally fabric awning signs are not eligible to be a Historic Sign due to the inability to preserve historic fabric that has been exposed to the elements.

- E. At the time of designation, the defining features of the sign, its illumination and its manner of attachment to a structure or the ground shall be identified and should be preserved. Non-historic features may be removed if removal can be done without altering the historic design of the sign.



Example of a painted or “ghost sign” on 2nd Avenue South.



III. REPAIR

- A. An historic sign may be repaired or restored if there is sufficient surviving fabric or sufficient historical documentation (photographs, postcards, permits, or other records) on which to base the treatment concept. An existing historic sign may be repaired or restored either in place, or off-site and then re-erected on site.

- B. An historic sign may be repaired or restored to any past appearance prior to fifty years before the date of application. If there is documentation or physical evidence that the original design included intermittent lighting features (e.g., flashing, blinking, chasing or sequentially lit elements which create the appearance of movement) or moving parts, those sign elements may be repaired and restored.

- C. Porcelain Enamel Signage Repair
 - 1. For rust, clean the rust off carefully and touchup the area with cold enamel (type of epoxy used mostly in jewelry) or with enamel paints.
 - 2. Dents should be left alone as attempting to hammer them out risks further damage.

- D. Goldleaf or Gilding Repair
 - 1. Gilded signs, both surface and reverse on glass, can be cleaned gently with soap and water, using a soft cloth. Additionally, for glass signs, the varnish backing should be replaced every seven years or less.
 - 2. Historic gilded signs can be repaired, typically by regilding damaged areas. The sign can then be sealed with a clear, water-resistant varnish.



III. REPAIR

E. Painted Wall and Ghost Signs

1. Leaving painted signage to fade (ghost signs) is often the most appropriate action. However, painted signage may be repainted with the same type and color of paint following the original design and dimensions when necessary to preserve the historic sign. “Over-restoration” should be avoided, as this can diminish evidence of a sign’s age and significance.

F. Neon sign Repair

1. Broken neon tubing should be replaced with neon. Replacement with LED or other type of lighting is not appropriate.
2. Scrape and repaint rusted metal cans. Replacement is only appropriate if the rust is too pervasive to be removed and holes are irreparable.
3. Replacement of transformers and other electrical components do not require review.

G. Plastic and Acrylic Signs

1. Plastics do not lend themselves well to repair. Pieces that are beyond repair may be replaced with a similar material in the same dimension, color and texture as the original piece.

H. Integral Signs

1. Integral signs are signs that are etched into the building itself (typically masonry) and often provides the name of the building or date of construction. This type of signage should not be removed, replaced or altered.



III. REPAIR

2. Generally, this type of signage should not be covered. Clear acrylic new signage with etched lettering placed over the historic sign may be possible if installation does not harm any character defining features of the building or sign.



Although this sign does not have etched lettering, the new sign at the L&C Tower, 401 Church Street, is similar to the type of clear glass sign proposed by these design guidelines. It allows the original “integral” sign to be preserved while also rebranding the building.



IV. ADAPTIVE REUSE

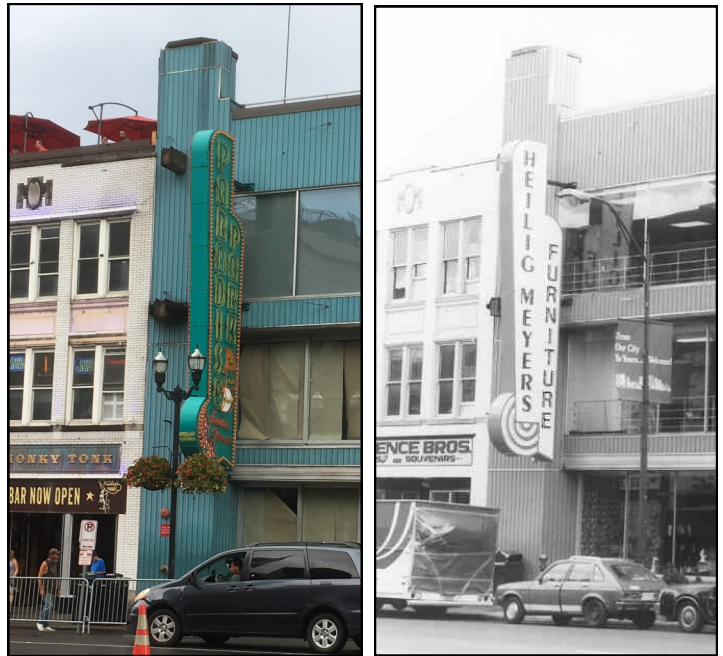
A. Accommodating new businesses

There are two options to accommodate new businesses with historic wall, projecting and monument signs:

1. Retain historic sign in its original or similar location and install new sign elsewhere on the property. This is the preferred option.
2. Alter lettering of sign for new business name.
 - a. Painted or “ghost” signage should not be altered or re-painted as it is easy to accommodate a new business with a wall or projecting sign that does not require removal of the painted sign.
 - b. If lettering, such as neon, wood, or plastic lettering, is required to be replaced, new lettering should match the original in terms of font, scale, coloring, and location on the sign.

B. Signage Illumination

1. Illumination should not be added to signage where it was not originally a part of the design of the sign. Building illumination, pointing towards a sign is appropriate.
2. Lighting on signage shall not be made to blink, flash, chase or be sequential, nor shall signage or a component of signage be made to move if these features are not a part of the sign’s original design.



This sign at 411 Broadway is an example of how the form of the historic sign was retained but the text was revised to promote a later business.



V. ALLOTMENT

A. Signage Allotment and Number of Signs

The number of signs or signage allotment shall follow the regulations for Historic Landmark Signs. Following are the regulations in place at the time of development of these design guidelines.

1. Where the Landmark Sign does not identify the business occupying the premises, and is not used by an owner or occupant of the premises to advertise a business currently occupying the premises, the Landmark Sign shall not count against the total allowable sign area for the premises and shall not count against the number of signs allowed for the premises.

2. Where the Landmark Sign does identify the business occupying the premises or is used or adaptively reused by an owner or occupant of the premises to advertise a business currently occupying the premises, fifty percent (50%) of the square footage of the Landmark Sign shall count toward the total allowable sign area and shall count against the number of signs allowed for the premises.



Loveless Café sign located at 8400 TN-100.



VI. REMOVAL AND RELOCATION

A. Removal

1. Temporary removal of signage during building repair/rehabilitation is encouraged, if removal insures the protection of the sign. The sign should be returned to the original location within 90 days of removal.
2. Historic signage shall not be destroyed unless the sign has irretrievably lost its design, historical integrity and significance.

B. Relocation

1. When it is not feasible to retain the original location of the sign, it may be moved.
2. When relocating, signage should be relocated to a location on the premises or to another location that houses the same or similar business.
3. An appropriate new location is one that similar to the style of the historic sign. For instance, ideally a pole sign should not be moved to a wall or vice versa, unless the new location insures preservation of the sign.
4. If there is no viable exterior location, an interior location can be appropriate.
5. A designated landmark sign shall not be relocated to a R, R-A, RS, RS-A, RM or RM-A zoned property.



The Becker's Bakery sign, originally located at 2543 Lebanon Pike, has been removed.



VI. REMOVAL AND RELOCATION

6. A designated landmark sign shall not be relocated within one hundred fifty feet of a primary structure on R, R-A, RS, RS-A, RM or RM-A zoned property.
7. The sign must be located no less than twenty feet from the face of the curb or edge of pavement. Where there is no curb, the measurement shall be taken from the street property line.
8. Projecting signs that project into the public right-of-way shall follow the rules and procedures of metro government for an encroachment.



VII. APPENDIX

A. Important Dates in the History of American Signage

- 1700s-1900s *Typical signs of this era were on wood and located on a building, projecting from a building or on free-standing poles.*
- 1840s: *Signs illuminated by gas lights*
- 1860s: *Electric signs with incandescent bulbs*
- 1870s: *Signs integrated into the architecture gained in popularity and were made of both wood and metal*
- 1911: *Gunning v. St. Louis ruling supports a municipality's ability to regulate signage*
- 1920s: *Neon usage in the states*
- 1930: *Signage often designed in conjunction with the modern architecture of the building to which it relates*
- 1939: *Technological innovations provide more neon color options*
- 1940s: *Start to see signs separated from architecture with more land available in suburbs and the need to capture the attention of motorists. Often large and on the street with the building pushed back.*



1330 Dickerson Road.



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- 1950s: Plastic signs gain in popularity because of their minimal maintenance requirements and the growth of a disposable-culture. They were often internally lit with neon or fluorescent tubes.*
- 1950s: Popularity of large pylons as a structural component for roadside signs*
- 1965: Passage of the Highway Beautification Act and other legislation imposed unprecedented limits on the size and number of signs*
- Late 1970s: Country starts to gain an appreciation of historic signs.*



VII. APPENDIX

B. Historic Signs (as of xx/xx/2018)

Example of potential listings—not currently a part of the design guidelines:—included here to show that the character defining features of a sign will be determined at the time of designation

LAVERTE’S LIQUORS, 1313 51st Avenue North—This 1962 pylon type sign has a Googie (mid-century modern) design. Significant features include: tall, narrow, red arrow pointing to the tall, narrow primary text, which reads “Laverte’s.” (The compressed arrow was a popular design type for signage of this period.) Below is neon that states “drive in.” The neon “Liquors” below and the box sign that reads “discount tobacco beer” located just above “drive in” were added sometime between 2007 and 2014 and are not character defining features of this sign. Designated 00/00/0000; Ordinance No. BL2000-0000



Laverte’s Liquors at 1313 51st Avenue North



VII. APPENDIX

Definitions

Alteration: *A replacement or change in a sign's material or design; the addition or elimination of any feature of a sign; a repair that reconstructs any part of an existing sign.*

Appropriate: *Suitable for, or compatible with, a property or district, based on accepted standard and techniques for historic preservation.*

Certificate of Appropriateness: *See Preservation Permit.*

Character-Defining Features: *Individual physical elements of the sign that contribute to its overall historic character, and for which it is recognized as historically significant.*

Shall: *What must happen.*

Should: *What must happen unless circumstances illustrate why an alternative is more appropriate.*



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The Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission reviews applications to create new historic overlay districts and reviews and approves preservation permits in historic and conservation districts for new construction, alterations, additions, repair and demolition. For design guidelines, permit applications, and meeting information, visit us at www.nashville.gov/mhc.

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