

CHALFONT BOROUGH HISTORIC DISTRICT SIGN & AWNING DESIGN GUIDELINES

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDELINES

Signs are a basic element of a commercial area: they attract customers as well as identifying the location of retail and office businesses. Signs and awnings in the Chalfont Historic District are regulated to avoid visual competition between businesses and to encourage compatibility with the architectural character of the district; a Certificate of Appropriateness is required from the HARB for all signs erected in the historic district. All signs must meet borough sign zoning requirements, as outlined in Chalfont Zoning Ordinance, Part 15, §27-1501 to §27-1511.

The HARB applies the same standards of compatibility, including The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, as it does in reviewing renovations and new construction. The HARB review process provides applicants with design assistance in the form of examples of recommended practices, without requiring that all signs and awning in the district look alike.

Applicants should consider using a qualified design professional when undertaking a sign or awning project.

Types of signs

Wall-mounted: a single-sided panel or individual letters attached to a wall.

Projecting: a (usually) double-sided panel hung from a bracket or otherwise attached to a building façade or porch.

Free-standing: signs not attached directly to a building. These can be mounted on one post or between two posts, or they may be suspended from a post. The posts are generally located in paved or landscaped areas.

Directory signs: free-standing or attached signs that provide information about a building's tenants, usually on a larger sign area that includes the building's name or street number.

Window signs: painted or etched directly on window glass or may consist of a panel affixed to the inside or outside of the window.

Awning signs: painted or sewn onto the awning fabric.

Elements of a sign can include a business's name and/or logo, the street number, type of business, etc. It is important that the amount of information on a sign be balanced with the need for clarity, and legibility. National franchises and corporations with specific identity programs, logos, and colors, must also comply with zoning and historic district procedures.

The HARB encourages:

- Materials**
- Signs that complement a building by using materials consistent with the historic period and character of the building.
 - Appropriate materials including wood, bronze or brass, gold leaf or paint, etched glass, or modern materials that simulate the appearance of wood.
 - Incised lettering that is more historically accurate than raised letters on a sand-blasted background (although both fabrication methods may be acceptable).



Hanging sign with a wood bracket and finial and a graphic symbol. The colors are subdued but the gold leaf provides sufficient contrast to see the letters clearly. The sign combines the serif ("Agabiti's," "Cobbler") and the more modern sans-serif ("Pennington") typefaces effectively.



Window sign painted on glass



Graphic symbols are often more effective than words at conveying messages (and the character of a business) quickly. A simple well-designed sign may be better at catching the eye than a larger sign.



Attached directory sign: Directory signs are usually mounted on a larger sign, but can also be effective when a unifying design is used.



The logo and color of this sign are modern, but the size, shape and mounting method fit into a historic district.



The sign on the left is lit by overhanging gooseneck lights, while that on the right is lit by the nearby postlight.



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- Shape**
 - Simple brackets of wood or cast iron to hang signs.
 - Sign shapes that are fairly simple and reflect historic precedence.
 - Signs may include decorative edge details.
 - Type style**
 - Sign borders and serif-style letters that are often more appropriate to historic buildings than sans-serif type.
 - Sign & letter colors**
 - Colors that have enough contrast for legibility and should be compatible with the historic building colors.
 - Size**
 - Sign sizes that are compatible with the scale of the building: smaller signs are more appropriate for smaller buildings.
 - Signs should also reflect the scale of signs and buildings in the immediate vicinity.
 - Signs that reflect the type and speed of traffic they are meant to attract: pedestrians and drivers of slow moving cars do not need the same size signs as highway traffic.
 - Illumination**
 - The use of indirect or hidden lights such as goosenecks above a sign panel or small ground-level lights directed upwards onto a sign panel.
 - The use of ambient light from streetlights or storefronts.
 - Light fixtures that reflect the design period of the historic building
 - Awnings**
 - Awning material of canvas or ultraviolet-resistant fabric
 - Awning locations above individual windows or entrances or across a storefront
 - Traditional awning shapes: simple open-sided or close-sided sloping style with an approximate three-foot projection
 - Colors compatible with building color
 - Lettering limited to the hanging awning valance
- The HARB discourages:**
- Materials**
 - The use of modern materials such as plastic, aluminum, or Plexiglas.
 - Exterior or interior neon lights as signage.
 - Elaborately shaped or inappropriate scrollwork brackets.
 - Sign & letter colors**
 - Bright or garish colors that conflict with a historic building's color.
 - Size**
 - Excessively large signs in a pedestrian area that carry too much information.
 - Illumination**
 - The use of modern backlit signs.
 - Bare spotlights.
 - Any lighting system that might cast glare that affects drivers or pedestrians.
 - Awnings**
 - Metal or plastic awnings.
 - The use of modern awning shapes that would not have been present in a historic commercial center.
 - Installations that obscure important architectural features.