



Village of Roslyn Historic District Board

GUIDELINES FOR COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS



Consistent placement and style of signage at this building provides visual uniformity while allowing businesses to identify themselves.

PURPOSE

These *Guidelines* were prepared to assist commercial property owners and tenants with information when considering the installation of signs and awnings and repair, alteration or installation of storefronts. They are not intended to replace consultation with qualified architects, contractors and the Historic District Board (HDB). The HDB will be happy to provide a preliminary consultation addressing design or materials issues to potential applicants free of charge.

These *Guidelines* were developed in conjunction with the Incorporated Village of Roslyn's Historic District Board (HDB). The HDB reviews Permit applications for proposed exterior alterations to properties within the Historic District. The applicant is responsible for complying with the provisions of the Zoning and Building Codes at the time of application. The applicant must obtain all necessary permits prior to proceeding with any work. For more information, or to obtain permit applications, please call the Building Department at (516) 621-1961.

Please review this information during the early stages of planning your project. Familiarity with this material can assist in moving a project quickly through the approval process, saving applicants both time and money. Additional *Guidelines* addressing other historic building topics are available at Village Hall and on its web site at www.historicroslyn.org.

COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE

As the Village as Roslyn prospered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, residential development increased creating additional demand for commercial goods and services. Many of the commercial buildings in Roslyn dating from this period were located along what is now known as Old Northern Boulevard, which continues to act as the business spine of the Village.

A well designed storefront and complementary, well placed sign or awning can make a good impression, attract potential customers and unify a streetscape. By contrast, a confused storefront or poorly designed or inappropriately placed sign or awning can overwhelm buildings, detract from the area, give an inappropriate impression, turning customers away and potentially damage historic materials or features. Some of the HDB's goals for commercial buildings are to:

- Encourage compatibility and provide a visual connection with the historic building and district
- Provide variety and vitality in the historic district
- Encourage the greatest amount of design flexibility
- Identify those elements that are indisputably detrimental to the historic streetscape
- Encourage the consideration of how proposed storefront, signage or awning relates to each property, the streetscape and the historic district



TYPES OF SIGNS IN ROSLYN

Historically, there are two types of signs, those that are attached to the building and those that are freestanding and placed near buildings. New signs can use similar features to traditional signs to both enhance the character of the building and convey the necessary information to the public.

The choice between attached or freestanding signs may be based upon the property's specific location, needs of the occupant, and limitations in the Zoning Ordinance. The following illustrations are intended to provide general examples of sign types that can be found within the Historic District.



Wall Signs are the most common type of signage in the Village of Roslyn. They are single sided signs mounted parallel to and generally flat against a wall of the building.

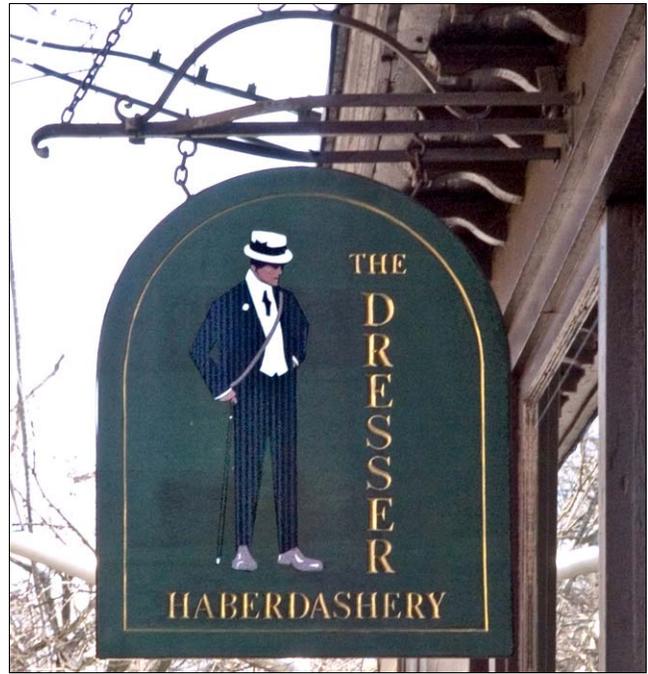


Freestanding Signs are not attached to the building, and are most appropriate when a building is set back from the street. They typically include information on two sides, suspended from a rail or bracket that is supported by one or two posts that are set in paving or landscape areas.

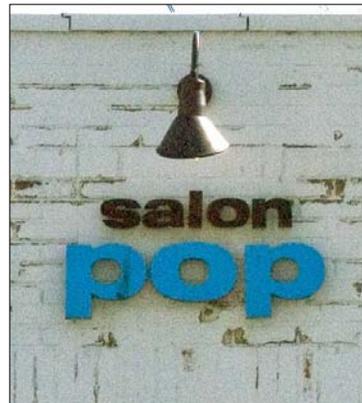
ALLOWABLE SIGNAGE IN ROSLYN

- The types of signage permitted for a business vary depending on whether the property is located in a residential or non-residential district
- All temporary signage is subject to the provisions of the signage code and varies within residential and non-residential districts
- Relocated or altered signage is subject to review

It is recommended that potential applicants for signage and awnings contact the Building Department early in the design process to understand the allowable signage at their property.



Perpendicular Projecting Signs are generally two sided signs, suspended from an iron bracket or projecting building feature, mounted perpendicular to the face of the building.



Pin Mounted Signs are composed of individual letters or logos mounted flat against or slightly proud of the wall of a building. Care should be taken to minimize damage to the wall surface during installation.

Storefront Window Signs include all signs that are attached to glass either at the interior or exterior of the building. These signs are generally painted, vinyl appliqués or etched glass, and can include stained glass.



SIGN MATERIAL

Most of the oldest signs were made of wood either attached directly to the building or suspended from wrought iron or wood brackets. As technology advanced and building styles changed, a wider range of materials were used including bronze plates attached to buildings, cast iron, stainless steel, etched or painted glass, leaded glass, gold leaf and tile in addition to wood. Each material was popular during particular time periods, and might not be appropriate at all building locations.

The HDB encourages:

- Using materials that are consistent with the historic character of the building including wood, bronze, brass, gold leaf, etched glass, paint, aluminum, stainless steel, enameled metal, leaded glass, appliqués and tile
- Mounting individual wood or metal letters to a building or sign board
- Using cast iron brackets to hang signs with hanging hardware of a compatible color and appearance

The HDB discourages:

- The use of contemporary materials and types of signs that are incompatible with the building's and Historic District's character
- Plastics or Plexiglas
- Plastic or glossy coatings
- Back-lit signs
- Sign boxes
- Banners
- The installation of neon

MOUNTING SIGNS AND AWNINGS

Care should be taken in mounting walls signs and awnings to minimize the damage to historic materials. This includes reusing hardware or brackets from previous signs or awnings, or attaching them at previous attachment locations.

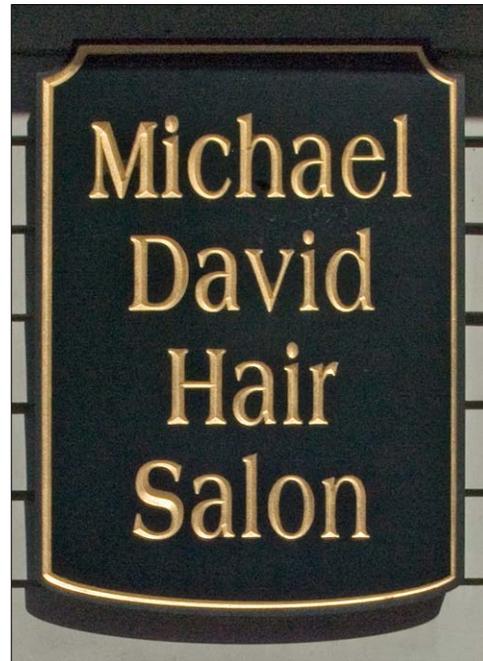
If reusing existing hardware or attachment locations is not an option, select mounting locations that can be easily patched if the sign is removed. This includes locating holes in mortar joints rather than directly into bricks or masonry. This will facilitate repair if the sign is removed or relocated in the future.



Geometric signs are generally appropriate for small signs or signs that use small amounts of text. Geometric signs can include rectangular, square, round or oval shapes and can be utilized for all sign types.

SIGN SHAPE

Most sign shapes are simple geometric forms, geometric shapes with decorative edges or rounded corners, or shapes that convey the type of business. When considering which sign shape is most appropriate for a specific location, the applicant should consider the sign type, information to be conveyed, size and location of the sign, building style, and other signs at the property or adjacent properties.



Geometric signs with decorative edges can include scrolled tops and bottoms.

SIGN ILLUMINATION

In many instances, available ambient street or storefront lighting can illuminate signs, which is preferred to the installation of additional lighting. The use of sign illumination is generally discouraged and limited by the Zoning Ordinance.

The HDB encourages:

- Using existing ambient street light or storefront lighting whenever possible
- Using small scale, indirect or hidden lights such as gooseneck or in-ground mounted lights directed up towards sign
- Using lights that are consistent with the character of the historic building
- Using low wattage bulbs to minimize potential glare to other properties, pedestrians and vehicle operators

The HDB discourages:

- High wattage light sources such as bare spot lights and metal halides



The gooseneck lights illuminate the sign in the evening. The style and placement of the lights complements the architectural style and features of the building.

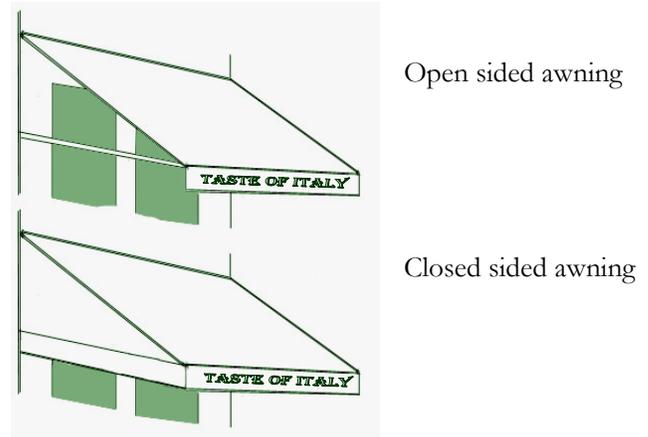
SIGN SIZE

The Village of Roslyn's Zoning Ordinance regulates the size of signage with variations on allowable size based on whether not the building is located within a residential district.

- Signage should be compatible to scale of the building, adjacent buildings, the streetscape and adjacent signage. Small scale signs are appropriate to smaller scale buildings.
- Small scale signs are also appropriate for building with more than one sign.
- A well-designed smaller sign can have more of an impact than larger signs. This is particularly true in Roslyn where the means of travel along the commercial areas is by foot or slow moving vehicles.

AWNINGS

Awnings are a historically popular means of sheltering pedestrians, advertising a business, and protecting window merchandise from sun damage. Historically, awnings project at a continuous angle away from the face of the building on a metal frame, terminating at a skirt or valance. Awnings can be fixed or retractable in configuration. Retractable awnings tend to be open sided, while fixed awnings can be either open or closed sided.



The HDB encourages:

- Locating awnings over the length of the storefront display or individual display windows or entrances
- Solid or striped canvas fixed or retractable awnings, whose color, style and location are compatible with the building's historic character
- Awnings that project approximately three feet from the face of the building in a continuous angle with a ten to twelve inch straight or scalloped valance
- Limiting lettering and logos to awning valances
- Installing awning hardware in a manner that minimizes damage to historic building materials

The HDB discourages:

- The use contemporary or glossy awning materials such as metal, plastics or leatherette, which are incompatible with the building's historic character
- Internally lit awnings
- The use of contemporary awning shapes or use of awning materials at typical sign locations such as rounded balloon awnings or flat mounted wall awnings
- The installation of awnings at historically inappropriate locations

SIGN AND AWNING COLORS

In considering appropriate colors for signs and awnings, applicants must balance the need to make them legible, convey the business identity or logo, and complement the historic character of the building and environment.

Legibility: The contrast between the logo or lettering and background color can greatly increase the overall legibility of the sign or awning. In many instances limiting the number of colors to those necessary to convey the information also increases the legibility.



The contrast between the letters and wall increases the legibility. The color tones of the awning complement the sign and building.

Color tones: Bright colors tend to be incompatible with the historic character of the buildings and environment as well as overwhelm the viewer. Simple designs with muted, simple color combinations are encouraged.



This sign features the business logo and is illuminated by the gooseneck fixtures above, which are stylistically similar to the wall mounted sconces flanking the window. The awning provides shade at the window below.

SIGN AND AWNING LOGOS

Logos can be an important identifying feature for any business, and generally, applicants are encouraged to utilize a logo or symbol that identifies their business. However, the HDB is not obligated to accept a sign or awning design that is based upon a national or regional image required by a corporation or franchise.

LOCATIONS OF SIGNS AND AWNINGS

The diagrams below are intended to provide general guidance for appropriate sign and awning locations for commercial and former residential buildings in the Village of Roslyn. It is important to note all sign types might not be appropriate for all buildings.

Signs should not extend above the roof line, nor should they obscure distinctive architectural elements or features. The Building Department identifies allowable sign and awning locations as well as the size and number of allowable signs for each property. The allowable signage sizes and types vary based on whether or not the business is located in a residential district. Applicants are encouraged to contact the Building Department early in the design process to verify size, quantity and location requirements.



Commercial Building

- (1) hanging from bracket perpendicular to front wall;
- (2) paint, vinyl or etching on window(s);
- (3) flush mounted wall sign;
- (4) freestanding sign when permitted;
- (5) under storefront cornice; (signs may also appear on the lower flap of an awning)

Adaptive Reuse of Former Residential Building

- (1) hanging from bracket perpendicular to front wall;
- (2) paint, vinyl or etching on window(s);
- (3) flush mounted wall sign;
- (4) freestanding sign when permitted;
- (6) on the lower flap of an awning (signs may also appear under a storefront cornice)





1. Storefront Cornice
2. Transom Windows
3. Display Windows
4. Entrance Door
5. Structural Support
6. Apron
7. Alcove Flooring

STOREFRONTS

Most people experience buildings at the ground floor level and in the case of commercial buildings within the Village of Roslyn, as a pedestrian. The attractiveness and overall maintenance of a storefront can greatly influence a casual observer’s perception of a building and the business within. Because a positive impression can help draw potential customers, regular maintenance and careful design can be positive on the bottom line.

The storefront is one of the most significant features of a commercial building whether the building was originally constructed for commercial purposes or converted from another use such as a former residence. By the late nineteenth century, storefronts often included large sheets of glass at display windows with minimally sized mullions and often recessed entries. This configuration allowed merchants to maximize the visibility of their wares to attract potential customers.

Historic storefronts were typically constructed of wood, metal (cast iron, bronze, copper, tin, galvanized sheet metal, cast zinc, or stainless steel), masonry (brick or stone) and clear, translucent or pigmented glass at transoms.

Although the specific configurations of storefronts can vary greatly based upon architectural styles, at different buildings and locations, a common feature is large expanses of glass to display merchandise. In addition, it is typical to have a principal entrance to the commercial space and possibly a separate entrance that includes a stair for access to the upper levels.



The bracketed cornice acts as both the storefront cornice and building cornice in this single-story building.

1. Storefront Cornices are projecting moldings at the top of storefront, providing a visual cap or termination to the storefront and a separation with the upper floors. Cornice materials can vary widely and include wood, pressed metal, limestone, terra cotta or decorative brick patterns. Cornice details can include brackets, dentils and panels.



The vertical divisions of these fixed transom windows follow the mullions at the storefront glazing below. The transoms provide additional light to the interior.

2. Transom Windows are located above display windows and doorways to provide additional daylight, and can be either fixed or operable for ventilation. They can be either single or multi-paned and historically were often leaded, stained, pigmented or textured glass. Transom windows can also include signage, lettering or other ornamental details.



The pair of projecting bays at this storefront creates what is in effect a central recessed entry and increases the display area. A simple muntin pattern divides the display windows into four large lights. Also note the glazed, paired entrance doors and wood paneled apron.

3. Display Windows are typically large expanses of glazing to present the available merchandise within a shop. Display windows typically flank the entrance door or alcove to a store and can include additional advertising to further entice potential customers.



The paired wood entrance doors include large areas of glazing allowing potential customers the opportunity to view the merchandise within.

4. Entrances at storefronts can be located flush with the outside of the building or recessed within an alcove providing additional display areas and shelter from the elements. In addition to commercial entrances, there can be secondary entrance doors that provide access to upper building floors.

5. Structural Supports at storefronts are necessary to carry the weight of the building and roof above and can be decorative, reinforcing the storefront's architectural style. Typically, structural supports flank entrance doors and display windows and can be constructed of wood, cast iron or masonry.



This apron features wood blocks that give the impression of stone and provides a base for the storefront window glazing system.

6. Aprons act as the base for the display windows and at the interior can provide a raised platform for merchandise display. Aprons can be constructed of a variety of materials with different finishes including wood, masonry and tile.



The flooring in this recessed alcove is ceramic tile with a contrasting border.

7. Decorative Flooring within storefront entrance alcoves were often composed of small ceramic tiles, a stone stoop, or in the early twentieth century terrazzo became an option. Historically, the configuration of tile or terrazzo often included decorative borders and patterns of various colors. It was not uncommon for the alcove flooring tiles to include the name of the business occupying the store.

STOREFRONT TREATMENT OPTIONS

Making changes to storefronts can be a costly endeavor that if not properly planned might negatively impact a business. Prior to considering alterations, property owners should identify the key storefront elements and consider options. By carefully studying alternatives, property owners tend to be much happier with the finished results. When contemplating storefront work, the following approach is recommended:

a. Identify Key Historic Elements:

Develop an understanding of the architectural character of the storefront including the overall size, major divisions or bays, placement of components such as doors, windows and distinctive elements. This can be based on selective removals or documentation such as old photographs or drawings.

b. Retain, Preserve and Repair:

Once important historic elements have been identified, they should be incorporated into the storefront design. Deterioration of some historic elements might require stabilization, replacement in-kind, or replacement with a similar substitute material utilizing the historic material as the guide.

c. Replacement:

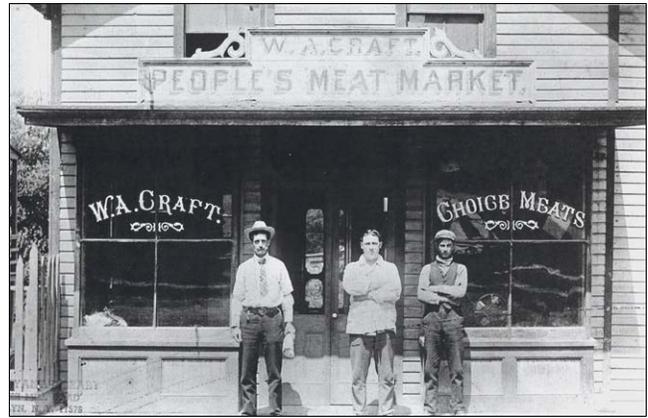
Replacement of a historic storefront is only encouraged when the existing storefront materials are too deteriorated to be repairable, or a historic storefront has been encased in a newer storefront and the historic form and detailing are still present allowing for an accurate representation. Replacement of historic storefronts with modern storefront systems is strongly discouraged.

d. Reconstructing a New Storefront With Historic Documentation:

If there is no physical evidence of a historic storefront, there might be sufficient historical or pictorial evidence to allow for appropriate reconstruction. Appropriate research is recommended to ensure the greatest degree of accuracy feasible in the reconstruction.

e. Installing a New Storefront Without Historic Information:

If there is not sufficient information and documentation to accurately reconstruct a storefront, the new design should be compatible in size, pattern, scale, material and color as the overall building and similar storefronts from the period, but have distinctly contemporary characters that reflect rather than copy historic storefronts.



Historic photographs, postcards or advertisements can be a good source of documentation to determine earlier appearances of buildings. (Photograph provided by the Bryant Library.)

DETERMINING THE HISTORIC APPEARANCE OF STOREFRONTS

For property owners hoping to restore the appearance their storefront to an earlier period, there are a number of places where you can find information that can guide the effort. Often remnants of earlier storefronts or “ghosts” of earlier materials are concealed under newer storefront materials and careful selective removals can reveal elements or clues. In cases where historic materials are revealed, property owners are encouraged to incorporate the materials into the new storefront. In addition to potentially uncovering storefronts, it can also be beneficial to look for old building materials stored in attics or basements.

Another potential source for information is old records, photographs or drawings. These can be advertisements or articles, newspapers, promotional materials from earlier businesses, postcards or paintings. Please keep in mind that some drawings and paintings include a certain amount of artistic license and might not be entirely accurate depictions.



This publication was initiated and overseen by the Incorporated Village of Roslyn and the Roslyn Landmarks Society. This project was made possible through a grant provided by the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA). However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the NYSCA nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the NYSCA.

Dominique M. Hawkins, AIA, of Preservation Design Partnership in Philadelphia, PA, prepared this publication.