



City of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

South Bethlehem

Historic Conservation Commission

GUIDELINES FOR SIGNAGE



This etched window signage uses custom lettering and a distinctive logo to identify the type of business.

SBHCC SIGN AND AWNING REVIEW

The South Bethlehem Historic Conservation Commission (SBHCC) reviews all Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications for proposed exterior signs, awnings and associated lighting within the Historic Conservation District that are visible from a public way. In its review of signs and awnings, the SBHCC utilizes *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*; the same national standards utilized in all SBHCC reviews. When reviewing applications, SBHCC considers the appropriateness of the components of the sign or awning installation and design in relationship to the building and streetscape for which it is proposed. What might be appropriate at one location might not be appropriate at another.

The applicant must obtain a COA as well as all necessary permits prior to proceeding with any work. For more information, or to obtain permit applications, please call the Planning and Zoning Office at City Hall at (610) 865-7088.

PURPOSE OF GUIDELINES

- Provide applicants with design assistance for commercial signs and awnings
- Encourage compatibility and provide a visual connection with the building and Historic Conservation District
- Provide variety and vitality in the Historic Conservation District
- Encourage design flexibility
- Identify those elements that are indisputably detrimental to the historic streetscape
- Encourage the consideration of how proposed signage or awning relates to each property, the streetscape and the Historic Conservation District



A smaller, well-designed, understated sign can be very elegant and promote a clear business message. Strong contrast between the letters and background color increases the legibility.

IMPORTANCE OF SIGNS AND AWNINGS

A well-designed and well-placed sign or awning can make a good impression, attract potential customers and unify a streetscape. By contrast, a clutter of multiple signs, or a confused, poorly designed or poorly placed sign or awning can overwhelm buildings and potential customers, detract from the area and the company's message and present a disorganized business impression. When neighboring businesses compete and try to outdo each other's signage, the entire character of the commercial streetscape can be changed to a negative image that can hurt business.

New signs can enhance both the character of the building and convey the necessary information to the public. The location of the sign or awning on the historic building should be a primary consideration. During the design process, applicants should select a size, shape, material and color to complement the building's character and convey their business' message.



The copper background provides a unique frame for the mounted letters of the business' name and compliments the horizontal orientation of the frieze. The distinctive lettering both identifies the business and serves as its logo.

SIGN MATERIAL

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

The SBHCC encourages:

- Using materials that are consistent with the historic character of the building and expressive of the business' identity including wood, bronze, brass, gold leaf, etched glass, paint, aluminum, stainless steel, enameled metal, leaded glass, appliquéés, tile, and terrazzo
- Mounting individual metal letters to a building or sign board
- Using modern durable materials to individualize a business



The letters have been individually pin-mounted to the parapet and frieze of the building. The color of the letters strongly contrasts the brick, making it clearly legible. The historic function of the building as a train station is also recognized in the name.

SIGN SIZE

The City of Bethlehem's Zoning Ordinance regulates the allowable size of signage.

- 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 several signs.

A well-designed smaller sign can have more of an impact than larger signs. This is particularly true in South Bethlehem where there is heavy pedestrian traffic.



This projecting sign is traditional in design. The unique font identifies the business and is clearly legible with a simple message.

SIGN LOCATION

The City of Bethlehem's Zoning Ordinance regulates the allowable sign locations, but it is usually helpful to review the overall building design and locations of other signs when selecting the best location.

- Signage for first floor businesses should be located below second floor window sills
- Signs may be lettered within storefront windows
- Signs for upper-floor businesses may be lettered within upper-floor windows
- No sign or sign support should be located on the roof or extend above the top of the building



This hanging sign features a pronounced logo that promotes business identity.



Indirect illumination of the hanging sign from below allows it to be visible in the evening. The spotlight is directed up towards the sign, minimizing glare to other properties, pedestrians and drivers. The conduit and light socket have been painted to match the adjacent woodwork and decrease visibility.

SIGN AND AWNING 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 SBHCC encourages:

- **Removal of pre-manufactured, stock, extruded aluminum sign boxes with internal fluorescent lights**
- Using existing ambient street light or storefront lighting whenever possible
- Selecting materials or colors of sufficient contrast that the need for supplemental lighting is minimized
- Using small scale, indirect or hidden lights such as gooseneck or wall-mounted lights directed towards the sign or awning
- Using lights that are consistent with the character of the historic building and signage
- Using low wattage bulbs directed towards the sign or awning face to minimize potential glare to other properties, pedestrians and vehicle operators

The SBHCC will not recommend for approval:

- **Pre-manufactured, stock, extruded aluminum sign boxes with internal fluorescent lights and translucent sign faces**
- High wattage light sources such as bare spot lights and metal halides
- Signs that move, flash or are intermittently illuminated

AWNINGS

Awnings can be a good alternative to signage to identify a business on a streetscape. Awnings can provide shade for merchandise in storefront windows and protection for pedestrians from the weather. Several awnings along a streetscape can provide a sense of scale and separation of the storefront from the upper stories.

The SBHCC encourages:

- Awnings made of canvas or canvas-like vinyl where the construction and attachments are hidden from general view
- Awnings that match the shape of the top of window or door – arched topped awnings only over arched openings

The SBHCC will not recommend for approval:

- Internally illuminated awnings
- Metal awnings



This awning is illuminated in the evening with gooseneck lights. The business name is clearly identified using a font style consistent with its identity.

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.

The SBHCC strongly discourages:

- Re-facing existing internally illuminated box signs
- Installing signs or awnings in locations that obscure architectural features



Neon has been used for signage since the 1920s and fits into the South Bethlehem Historic Conservation District's period of significance of 1900 through 1950. This neon sign has been customized for the business and clearly identifies the type of available merchandise.

NEON

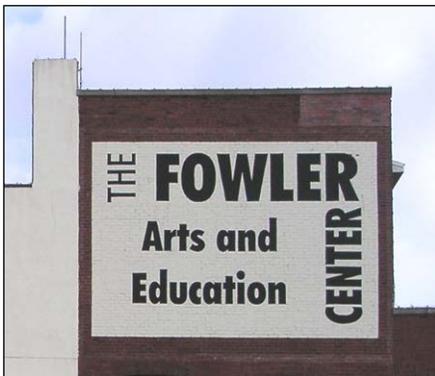
Originally developed in the 1920s, neon is made of gas filled tubes that are illuminated through electrification.

The SBHCC encourages:

- Individualized neon designs complimenting a building's architecture and reflecting the business identity

The SBHCC discourages:

- Stock neon signage, generally available at restaurant supply distributors or product manufacturers



The Banana Factory employs a painted wall sign to convey its message, a technique that has been used historically for signage.



Signs for businesses located at corners can pose particular challenges. At this location, the sign is projected out from the corner and is visible from both streets. The coffee cup shape reinforces the business identity.



Property owners are encouraged to retain signage that represents an important architectural feature such as this tile sign flooring.

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