



Clawson Sign Guidelines

Adopted October 2003

Grant Program

In July 2003, the Clawson Downtown Development Authority instituted a Grant Program. The program was created to encourage economic investment, building improvements, and revitalization in the historic downtown of Clawson. Grants are available for signage with a reimbursement up to 50% of the purchase/ installation of the sign not to exceed \$1500 to approved applicants. Clawson Downtown Development Authority reviews proposed signage and determines grant approval. The guidelines used by the DDA to determine approval are based upon materials from the National Main Street Center, National Trust for Historic Preservation and focus on design, character, material and compatibility. This brochure has been produced to help potential applicants design and select signage that will qualify for funding and will enhance the success of the business and the look and character of Clawson.

Signs

from the 1995 National Main Street Center, National Trust for Historic Preservation



Signs are a vital part of any Main Street. With a sign, you call attention to your business and create an individual image. But it's often forgotten that signs contribute to a commercial district's overall image as well. Merchants try to out-shout one another with large, flashy signs.

If Main Street is to present a harmonious appearance, its signs must serve both of these images. Consider the following guidelines when designing your signs.



1. Stand back and question the purpose of your sign.

- Does it merely identify your business
- Do you want to let the personality of your store or office shine through?

- Is it necessary to provide information about your products on the sign?
- What kind of customers are you trying to attract?
- Is the sign meant to be read by pedestrians, motorists, or both?

2. Think about the type of sign you want.

- *Word sign* – This type of sign employs words to describe your business and its products.



- *Symbol sign* – Often, a recognizable symbol conveys the image of a business better than words.



- *Numbers sign* – Some signs use numbers instead of symbols or words; the most common of these are street address signs that help customers locate your business.



Perhaps you'll want to combine words, symbols, and numbers in the same sign.

3. Consider the possibilities of using different materials. Each has unique qualities that can be exploited to create a sign suited to your needs.

4. You may want to look at photos that show how your building looked in the past to see how signs were related to historic architectural details.

5. Visualize how your sign will appear in relation to the entire facade.

The sign should not dominate; its shape and proportions should fit your building in the same way a window or door fits.

For example, a sign hung under the store front cornice complements the building's architecture and therefore presents a strong image.



6. Decide where you want to put your sign. There are several suitable options:

- Under the storefront cornice

continues on page 2

Signs (continued from page 1)

- Painted on glass
- On the side of the building
- Projecting from the building
- On the awning valance or return
- On the canopy face

Some types of signs are not appropriate, such as signs made of vacuum-formed plastic or oversized signs placed on top of the building or applied over the upper facade.

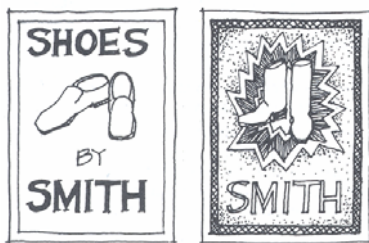
7. Decide how much you want your sign to say. It is important to keep the message simple and to the point. Remember, your sign will be viewed as part of a very complex environment filled with written and visual messages.



8. Now step back and take a look at the color of your building and the colors you see on the surrounding structures. Take hints from these when selecting colors for your sign.

You will usually get the best results if you opt for a simple color scheme — a range of three colors. Avoid garish, Day-Glo colors; they belong out on the highway.

9. As with color, lighting is important. If you illuminate your sign at



night, the light source should be as inconspicuous as possible. Try to avoid obtrusive or gaudy lighting

techniques that merely distract attention from the sign.

Signs can be illuminated with incandescent, fluorescent, or halogen lights. Incandescent lighting is used primarily to “wash” the entire sign with a soft, yellowish light either from above or below. Fluorescent bulbs produce a white light. They are often concealed behind the face of the sign and shine through a translucent material. Fluorescent bulbs are most effective if only the sign’s message, not its background is lit. Halogen lighting produces a white light. While the bulbs are very small and thus can be easily concealed, they are fairly expensive.

10. Express the personality of your establishment through the type style you select. To learn about various styles, look at other signs around town. Think about what each style says about the business and product it advertises. Then, define the image you want your sign to project.

There are three basic styles

ABCdAbCd	Serif
ABCdabcd	This is a historically appropriate style, with many variations, from plain to fancy.
ABCdabc	
Sans Serif	ABCDEF
This is a more contemporary letter style, with cleaner, bolder lines.	ABCdabc
	ABCdabcd
KKK. Beatty	Script
	A more personal and decorative style, script is often used for signs painted or gold-leafed on glass. (Both upper- and lower-case letters should be used in script-style signs.)

of type — serif, sans serif, and script—with numerous variations of each. Ask local sign makers to show you a selection of types styles.

11. Quality of workmanship and construction is a vital consideration. A simple, well-made sign speaks more highly of your establishment than an extravagant, but sloppy sign. Choose a sign—maker carefully; ask to see samples of previous work.



12. Signs provided by national distributors are not appropriate. They don’t reflect the individuality of your business and usually appear as add-ons to your storefront adver-



Your best advertising

tising. The signs you display should advertise your personal business message.

13. Now consider this idea. Your entire building conveys an image that acts as a sign. Your building’s appearance is more subtle than a word, symbol, or number sign, but can be more effective.

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Signs of a Successful Main Street

The following excerpts are from the Main Street Center of the National Trust for Historic Preservation training slide show entitled *Signs of a Successful Main Street*. The information provided will help focus on the various issues you will confront when developing signage for your business.

Signs do more than identify a business. They project an image — — — good or bad — — — of the type and



quality of goods and services offered both inside and throughout the commercial district. Effective Signs reflect the best qualities of both.

Let's start with some definitions of sign types. Most typical are signs mounted flush to building facades.

Facade signs usually fit within a "transom area" above the shop windows but below upper floor windows, and are visually "contained"



within the building framework of columns, and other architectural trim.

The sign should "fit" within certain building proportions.

Obviously, this sign ignores every aspect of the style and proportions of not just this building, but its neighbors as



well. The image of the area is cheapened and both businesses and district lose.

In contrast, this facade sign



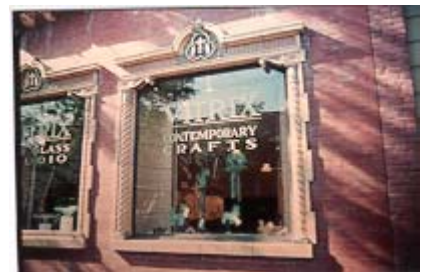
fits neatly within the proportions of the building, covering the storefront transom area. Studies show that 7 words are the maximum number that can be easily understood by passers-by. The dark background is a rich contrast with the off-white raised letters. Notice how a third color of the "signature bar" distinctly identifies the type of business as well as its quality. By coordinating sign and storefront colors, the business's image expands.

In this example, facade sign and transom purpose is beautifully blended together by creating glass panels that are inset in the transom, identifying more than just the



business name. There's a powerful message about this shop's quality and specialty, communicating a sense of permanency and optimism about future prosperity. Avoid lettering that is overly ornate or difficult to read. There are many typefaces available, but try to keep all type in one style and match it to the image of the business and district. Letters should generally be less than 15" tall, filling no more than 60% of the sign surface

Window lettering is another type of sign that frequently is



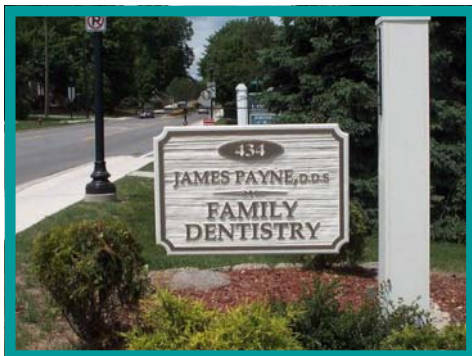
most visible...especially to pedestrians.

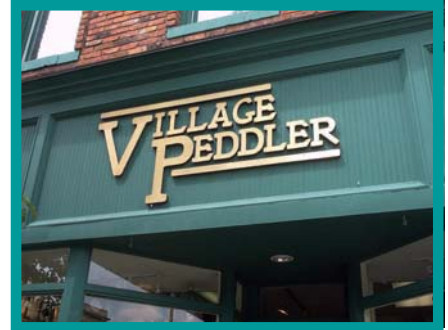
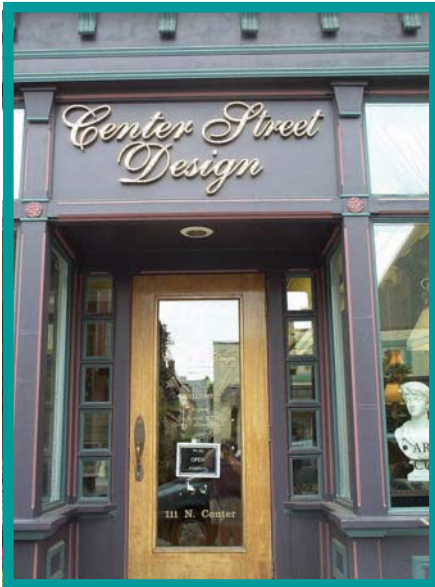
continued on page 6

Stylish and appropriate scale for in town



Appropriate for businesses on the edge of the downtown





Signs do more than identify a business. They project an image --- good or bad.



continued from page 3

Again, the fewer the words the better, appropriately placed to be both readable while not blocking the view of merchandise or store interior.

Occasionally an appropriate alternative to window application maybe interior-hung panels, such as this one. By carefully choosing



colors, size and contrast, a simple—and removable—sign can be made economically.

Neon can provide an exciting focal point that substitutes for window lettering, provides night time



illumination and identification, and when sensitively designed, adds to street-scape vibrancy. Avoid stock franchise trademarks and insist upon carefully designed neon by a professional sign designer. Keep the overall design and number of colors simple.

To be effective, window signs should have a minimum of opaque backgrounds, should not fill-up

more then 20% of the window area, and has letters between 4-8” high.



Simple designs, professionally created, using a minimum of lettering styles and clear graphics will create a powerful image to pull customers inside.

Projecting signs, when carefully designed, can create visual interest and make the shop more visible to pedestrians on the sidewalk. They should have a clearance of at least 7’ and a sturdy, uncluttered bracket. Using shapes and forms indicative of the type of business helps to reinforce the message.

The character of the business determines the style of signs, materials and colors selected here.

This candy stores’ sign uses 3-dimensional illustrations that literally “pop-off” the signs in bright colors and dynamic compositions to reflect a high-energy enterprise.



By contrast, this art boutique uses classical colors, materials and proportions to reflect an elegant and subdue image. This is a great place



to consider special materials and unusual designs.

Lighting signs on Main Street requires careful selection of fixtures and placement. For many districts, “goose neck” lamps such as these are ideal.



Their traditional appearance is far superior to the cheap modern, unshielded flood lamps often used, and perform well in directing glare away from pedestrian and traffic. Such lamps are commercially available and affordable.

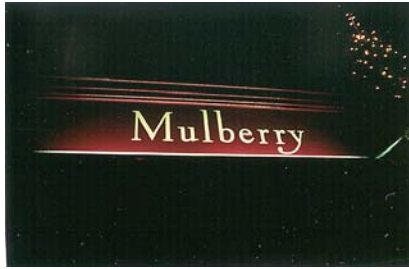
This example offers another



attractive, but more expensive alternative. Using raised letters backed with neon, the effect is a gentle halo of light around the letters providing dramatic but soft illumination.

Another acceptable illumination type is demonstrated by this sign which is lit by a projecting box situated just below the sign panel. This box fits a florescent tube which is shielded from the eye by the woodwork, yet floods the sign.

All three examples demonstrated carefully shielded lighting that is



subtle and attractive. Insist on quality design and material.

Many older signs should be retained, because of their inherent qualities of design or construction or historic status, in cases when the signs complement the building and districts, such as these. Such signs add to the visual heritage of the community and makes Main Street unique from any other, as



well as setting the district apart from outlying strip centers.

Most importantly, good design starts with the business. Your first consideration should be in helping improve and sharpen your image through good signage. “Who are your customers? What do you offer that no one else does? How would your customers describe your shop?” These answers provide clues to successful sign ideas.

In this example, discussions with the business owner revealed a

product line that was eclectic, collected on shopping trips abroad, and a wide array of floral-motif products. This graphic and slogan was developed to capture



those feelings, increasing sales 20% in the first month the sign was installed. Notice that three colors were alternated, with every letter having a contrasting outline for readability.

Here, an evolving business outgrew it’s “ski shop” identity into a wider array of sports-related equipment. After extensive brainstorming with the client, the words “outdoor

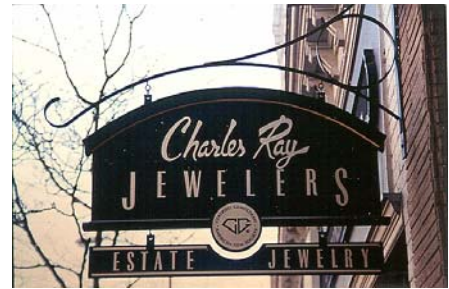


adventure” was suggested to describe the image desired. This sign helped this business successfully capture a larger chunk of this market.

For this jewelry store, a new sign offered the opportunity to promote unique, occasional offerings, such as estate jewelry.

The sign design accommodated the need for a removable panel that advertised an offering

available only at special times. The sign and bracket shapes were drawn from facade details. The



elegant presentation of the sign helped to bolster this maturing retailers business.

Keep in mind that collectively, signs define the image of the entire downtown and community. Investing in good design and signage can make a dramatic improvement to the visual appearance of Main Street, drawing more customers, and enhancing the sense of community.

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Guidelines

The following guidelines are used by the Clawson Downtown Development Authority when considering applications for signage grants.

1. The DDA considers **only** grant applications which are submitted prior to purchase, fabrication and installation of the sign.
2. The DDA considers **only** grant applications for signs which comply with the existing ordinance. Signs requiring a variance shall not be considered unless unique circumstances exist, not caused or created by the applicant.
3. The DDA considers applications for a variety of styles, materials and sizes of signs. However, since it is difficult to produce backlit plastic panel or molded signs which have appropriate style and character, and pole and pylon are types which do not reinforce the downtown character and desired atmosphere; it is likely that these types of signs will not be approved for funding. The DDA considers the following questions when reviewing the application:

Is the sign of the same character as the building and surroundings. If the building is historic - - - is the sign historic in character or does it use historic elements - - - materials, colors, shapes etc.

4. The DDA considers grant funding for signs which are of appropriate size, scale and character to the building and site. The DDA considers the following questions when reviewing the application:

Is the sign the appropriate size for the building and/or site? Does it fit nicely as an over-all element or does it overwhelm or stand out?

5. The DDA encourages the use of colors which are historically appropriate or compatible with the building color scheme and neighboring buildings. The DDA considers the following questions when reviewing the sign application:

Is the color appropriate? Does it use appropriate historical colors? Is the color appropriate to the surroundings and building?

6. The DDA considers grant applications for signs appropriately placed on the site and or building. Wall signs on the building should be placed in the transom area of the building. Ground signs should not obstruct sight distances for autos accessing the street from the drives. Ground signs should in no way impact site circulation or pedestrians.
7. The DDA considers grant applications for lighting on signs that illuminate only the sign itself. Lighting should not reflect or shine directly so that it becomes a nuisance to residents, pedestrians or drivers.
8. The DDA encourages applicants to meet with the DDA Director or consultant staff prior to and during the planning phase of developing signage to increase the likelihood of favorable grant consideration.
9. The DDA encourages the use of a professional sign designer and fabricator.
10. The DDA encourages business owners to be creative in the design of signage using images and graphics to communicate product and purpose.
11. The DDA encourages signage which will add to the character and value of the downtown. The DDA considers the following questions when reviewing the sign application.

Does this sign improve the visual quality and character of the downtown?

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