

Amendment to Council Resolution No. 138 - 2010

**BY: Chairperson at the request
of the County Executive**

**Legislative Day No. 3
Date: March 7, 2011**

Amendment No. 3

(This amendment inserts a new Appendix 4, Sign Design Guidelines, into the Downtown-wide Design Guidelines.)

- 1 In the attachment, insert Appendix A4, as attached to this Amendment.

DOWNTOWN COLUMBIA:

SIGN DESIGN GUIDELINES





DOWNTOWN COLUMBIA: SIGN DESIGN GUIDELINES

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Purpose

The Downtown Columbia Plan envisions Downtown Columbia as a vibrant urban center where people will live, work, visit, and enjoy a variety of cultural and recreational amenities and experiences. The creation of an exciting and interesting environment where retail, commercial, entertainment, recreation and residential uses are easily identified and located will be important to its success. Similarly, the ability to navigate Downtown easily, whether on foot, by bicycle, via transit or in an automobile will also be critical to its success.

The intent of these Guidelines is to facilitate the achievement of this vision for Downtown Columbia through the provision of a coordinated and aesthetically pleasing sign program. These Guidelines are also the basis for establishment of the signage requirements for the Neighborhood Specific Design Guidelines. As such, these Guidelines encourage the use of artistic imagery, lighting, color, texture, graphics and materials to ignite a creative spirit in the design and presentation of information to the public, which will help create a high quality, exciting and interesting Downtown.

All signage in Downtown Columbia should exhibit a high degree of thoughtfulness, imagination,



inventiveness and spirit. While signage should inform the public in a meaningful way, it should also improve the aesthetic qualities of a building or landscape and have a positive visual impact on the surrounding area consistent with the character of a vibrant urban center.

Unlike the sign code, these guidelines are intended to provide visual and textual examples of a variety of signs that should be used to interpret the community's expectation for quality signage. These are not set rules, but supplement the requirements

Goals

The goals of the sign design guidelines are to accomplish the following:

- Promote an aesthetically pleasing high-quality visual environment by encouraging signs that reinforce the planned character of the area, are complementary to their surroundings and effectively communicate their message.
- Establish reasonable design standards for business identification and wayfinding.
- Encourage creative and innovative approaches to signage within the established framework.
- Assist property and business owners in understanding community expectations.
- Promote economic vitality



Sign Overview

- Signs should be designed, fabricated, and maintained comparable to signage found in first class mixed-use projects in major metropolitan areas
- Signs should be designed, fabricated, and maintained comparable to signage found in first class mixed-use projects in major metropolitan areas
- Signs should be designed with the purpose of promoting retail and street activity while enhancing the pedestrian experience.
- Signs should respect the immediate context of the building's location and the overall character of its Downtown Columbia neighborhood
- Signs should relate to their surroundings in terms of size, shape, color texture, and lighting so that they are complementary to the overall design of buildings and their uses.
- Signs should be located in logical "signable areas" which relate to the architectural pattern of the façade. Signable areas are often, but not always continuous wall surfaces uninterrupted by doors, windows or architectural detail.
- Signs should enhance and relate to, not obscure the architectural features of buildings.
- Signs are to be kept in good repair such that they are always in clean, working condition and the copy is not obscured or damaged.

Permitted Signs

PERMITTED SIGNS IN DOWNTOWN

- **FLAT WALL SIGNS**
- **PROJECTING SIGNS**
- **MARQUEE SIGNS**
- **ROOF SIGNS**
- **TALL BUILDING SIGNS**
- **MONUMENT BUILDING SIGNS**
- **DIRECTIONAL SIGNS**
- **PERMANENT IDENTIFICATION SIGNS**
- **BANNER SIGNS**
- **WINDOW SIGNS**

Discouraged Signs

- Internally Illuminated Awnings
- Conventional Plastic Faced Box or Cabinet Signs
- Formed plastic faced box or injection molded plastic signs

Sign Types

1. Flat Wall Signs are affixed securely to a building wall. These signs should be legible and easily distinguished from other signage on each building and serve to guide and orient pedestrian and vehicular traffic going to the building.

Flat Wall signs should:

- Be placed within a clear signable area.
- Be mounted in locations that respect the design of a building, including the arrangement of bays and openings.
- Not obscure windows, grillwork, piers, pilasters, and ornamental features. Typically, wall signs should be centered on horizontal surfaces (i.e., over a storefront opening).

2. Projecting signs are affixed perpendicularly to a building and include blade, awning and under canopy signs.

A. Blade Signs are affixed to the face of a building. These signs bring creativity and fun to the streetscape and are oriented to pedestrians passing on the sidewalk in front of the buildings.

Blade signs should:

- Complement the architecture of each building, or a portion thereof, or relate to the design of a storefront
- Reflect the character of each business while fitting comfortably with other adjacent signage
- Be creatively designed with visually interesting elements such as geometric or irregular outlines with painted or applied letters, two or three dimensional symbols or icons and/or internal cutouts.

- Have mounting hardware that is attractive and integral to the sign design.



B. Awning Signs are printed on, painted on, or attached to an awning or canopy above a business door or window. They generally serve to bring color to the streetscape and are oriented toward pedestrians .

While only the signage on an awning is regulated by the Howard County Sign Code, the following design advice is presented to ensure well built, aesthetically pleasing awnings and canopies as the backdrop for awning signs.

- Awnings and canopies must be sturdy and permanently attached to buildings.
- Awnings must be mounted at a height, which ensures that when under canopy signs are included, they will be a minimum of 8 feet from ground level at the base of the building.

- Open-ended awnings are preferred.
- Awnings should be designed to project over individual window and door openings and not project as a single continuous feature extending over masonry piers or arches.
- Awnings with backlit graphics or other kinds of interior illumination are discouraged.
- Metal, glass and matte finish canvas are desirable materials for awnings or canopies.



C. Under Canopy Signs are similar to blade signs except that they are suspended below a marquee or under an awning or canopy. These signs are generally smaller than blade signs and are oriented to pedestrians passing under them.

Under Canopy signs should:

- Be used primarily at ground floor locations but can be considered for upper floor businesses with covered entry porches and balconies.

Sign Types (cont.)

- Impart a sense of creativity in their design.

3. Marquee Signs are affixed to the face of a marquee and used to accentuate primary building entrances, major tenant entrances or other significant building entry points and aid in orienting pedestrian and vehicular traffic going to the building.

Marquee signs should:

- Complement the architecture of the marquee or canopy structure
- Be designed as an integral part of the overall building or storefront architecture



- Scaled so that the signs appear proportional to and well supported by the marquee
- Be encouraged on theaters, cinemas and performing arts facilities



4. Roof and Tall Building Signs are flat signs at the top of a building that enhance the skyline by announcing the identity of a building. They promote wayfinding and are intended to be easily seen from a distance both day and night.

Roof and tall building signs should:

- Integrate signs with distinctive building tops whenever possible.
- Use logos and logotypes over lengthy business names as clear identifiers
- Be designed for subtly with subdued colors and appropriate illumination
- Be constructed of high quality, durable materials that are compatible with the building materials.
- Incorporate cutout letters that are individually pin-mounted and backlit creating a halo around the signs

5. Monument Building Signs have a lower height configuration and are used for building complexes that are separated from adjacent streets by setbacks.

Freestanding monument building signs should:

- Be constructed of materials that complement building structures and their uses
- Have architectural lines that complement the building
- Have a low profile and be flanked by either columns or decorative uprights, or have a solid base on the ground.
- Be illuminated either by external fixtures designed to complement the appearance of the sign, backlit to create a halo around the lettering or internally lit so that only the lettering and logo are visible after dark
- Be limited to the building or project name, logos, and the business address.



Sign Types (cont.)

6. Directional Signs promote convenient wayfinding in the downtown. They include standardized directional signs, vehicular directional signs, pedestrian directional and directory signs and directory signs that are used to identify businesses within multitenant buildings. Preliminary locations for commercial directional signs must be indicated on each Neighborhood Concept Plan, with final locations approved as part of a site development plan application.

A. Vehicular Directional Signs should be:

- Designed and constructed as a family of signs with an emphasis on clarity and readability for vehicle occupants
- Placed to expedite movement throughout the downtown



B. Pedestrian Directional should be:

- Designed and constructed as part of a family of signs that enhances the pedestrian experience
- Pedestrian in scale and height
- Used to direct and inform pedestrians



C. Directory Signs should:

- Be mounted flat against a wall or incorporated into a freestanding sign located on private property
- Include the building or project name, project logo, address and business tenant names
- Be constructed of materials that compliment its surroundings and its use
- Be scaled to inform pedestrians



7. Permanent Identification Signs announce the primary entry points to Downtown, each of Downtown Columbia's six new neighborhoods, as well as locations such as religious facilities, apartments/condominium communities, schools and other public/quasi-public institutions and are oriented to guide pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Preliminary locations for permanent identification signs must be indicated on each Neighborhood Concept Plan, with final locations approved as part of a site development plan application.

Sign Types (cont.)

Permanent identification signs should be:

- Designed as a family of signs during the development of the Neighborhood-specific Design Guidelines
- Designed as an integral part of a site's hardscape and landscaping
- Compatible with the architecture of respective downtown neighborhoods



8. Banner Signs

- A. **Permanent Banner Signs** help to add visual interest and color to facades of buildings. They are vertically oriented, and compatible with the overall character and color of the building.

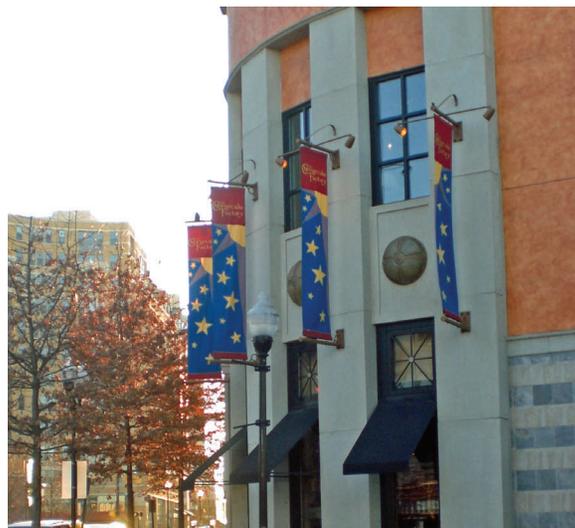
Permanent banners should:

- Look like or complement purposeful elements of the building
- Be fabricated from durable heavy weight fabric, metal, glass or other awning materials

- Be mounted perpendicularly to the building facade at both the top and bottom from metal brackets of a size and design that are appropriate to the banner and the architectural character of the building.
- Contain easily recognized business names and logos

B. Seasonal and Temporary Banners add to the streetscape by either celebrating holidays, advertising community events or the grand opening of a business. They are limited in duration and scaled for both pedestrians and vehicular occupants.

Temporary banners should be carefully designed and constructed to enhance the streetscape and the reputation of the businesses.



9. Window Signs are professionally painted, posted, displayed, or etched on interior translucent or transparent surfaces, including windows or doors. This type of signage generally contains only text but can express a special business personality through graphic logos or images combined with color.

Permanent window signs may cover 20% of the glass area and should be designed so that visibility into and out of the window is not obscured.

In addition window signs should:

- Be created from high-quality materials such as paint or gold-leaf or techniques including sandblasting or etching
- Be applied directly to the interior face of the glazing or hung inside the window concealing all mounting hardware and equipment.

General Guidelines



1. Design & Materials

- Quality materials and creative design should be used as a means to attract attention rather than excessively bright colors or over-scaled letters.
- Signs should respect the neighborhoods dominant characteristics.
- While design and alignment of signs on multiple use buildings should generally complement each other, the colors and lettering styles should also complement the building façade and harmonize with neighboring businesses
- Signs should be professionally constructed using high-quality durable materials such as metal, stone, hardwood or brass-plating.
- Dimensional signs, letter forms and decorative bracketry are encouraged.
- Sign letters should be pin mounted and have dimensional returns to give the appearance of solid dimensional material.
- Internally lit plastic letters or plastic box signs are highly discouraged.

2. Sign Placement

The architecture of the building often identifies specific locations for signs, and these locations should be used.

- The size of signs should be in proportion to the size of their location.
- Repetitious signage information on the same building frontage should be avoided, regardless of the sign area square frontage allowed in the sign code.
- To minimize irreversible damage to masonry, mounting and supports should be inserted into mortar or other joints and not into the face of the building skin. This technique minimizes damage to the building and allows for easy removal.



3. Sign Lighting Details

Lighted signs help create the night streetscape while assisting with identification and wayfinding. It is important to illuminate signage carefully to ensure safety.

- Arrange any external spot or flood lighting such that the light source is directed away from passersby. The light source must be directed against the sign such that it does not shine into adjacent property or cause glare for motorists and pedestrians.



- Backlit, halo-lit illumination, or reverse channel letters with halo illumination are highly encouraged for lighting purposes. Such signs convey a subtle and attractive appearance and are very legible under moderate ambient lighting conditions.
- Projecting light fixtures used for externally illuminated signs should be simple and unobtrusive in appearance. They should not obscure the graphics of the sign.

General Guidelines (cont.)

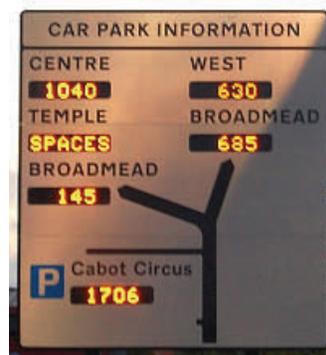
- Sign lighting should be designed and installed to achieve appropriate illumination of the particular sign type and condition. Effort should be made to only illuminate the graphic surfaces, background and letterforms of the sign, while limiting light spill over to other adjacent uses, buildings, pedestrians and vehicles. All raceways and transformers for individual letters and signs should be hidden.
- Signs that use blinking or flashing lights are not permitted.

4. Digital Displays

Digital Displays provide for the electronic display of text, images, video, animation, motion of images and interactivity. It is envisioned that this technology will primarily be used to enhance the overall experience in Downtown Columbia by displaying creative images, graphics and other information to complement the distinctive, vibrant and dynamic character envisioned for Downtown.



Selective and imaginative use of digital displays as part of the overall signage plan in each Downtown neighborhood will help create a sense of place that is



unique in Howard County and which will further the continuing evolution of Downtown Columbia as the County's urban center.

To achieve these objectives, Digital Displays should:

- Employ unique designs to include creative imagery that emphasizes graphics and color over text
- be programmed to include public service messaging and other programming designed to enhance the streetscape and provide a benefit to the community
- Utilize LED, LCD, plasma displays, projected images and other emerging technologies
- Complement and enhance the architectural elements of buildings and be of a size that is in scale with the setting and intended audience
- Be located in such a way that existing communities surrounding Downtown Columbia are not adversely impacted
- Be placed in the downtown so as to avoid visual clutter

Although not the primary use, digital displays may also identify or advertise businesses, products and services. Advertising should be integrated into the overall programming and be designed to emphasize the unique and creative capabilities of this technology.



General Guidelines (cont.)

5. Sign Style

Well-designed signage that coordinates multiple uses and messages is more effective than disjointed, “in your face” signage.

- Sign titles should be as brief as possible, to promote ease of use and readability.
- Sign fonts should be selected to provide both clarity and artistic integrity.



Encouraging Creativity & Innovation

Creativity in signage is encouraged in Downtown Columbia. Not all creative signs will meet the requirements of the sign code, but a variance process exists to facilitate innovative design. The variance process can be found in Section 3.513 of the Howard County Code. The examples on this page may not meet the sign code requirements, but they are included for inspiration.

