



# CITY OF PATERSON

## Downtown Commercial Historic District

### DESIGN GUIDELINES

## SIGNS & AWNINGS



*The wrapping sign band with the simple text of the store name clearly brands this location.*

*The clear glass storefront with mannequins and minimal window signage allows potential customers to clearly see the merchandise being offered for sale.*

### PURPOSE OF GUIDELINES

- Provide design assistance for signs and awnings
- Encourage compatibility and provide a visual connection with the building and the historic district
- Provide variety and vitality in the Downtown Commercial Historic District (DCHD)
- Encourage the greatest amount of design flexibility
- Identify those elements that are detrimental to the historic streetscape
- Encourage the consideration of how proposed signage or awning relates to each property its surroundings

These *Guidelines* were developed in conjunction with the City of Paterson's Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and with input of many diverse stakeholders. Please review this information during the early stages of planning your project. Familiarity with this material can assist you in moving a project quickly through the approval process, saving you both time and money. The HPC staff is available for informal meetings and to provide you with valuable information as you consider making improvements to your property.

Additional *Guidelines* addressing other historic building topics are available at 125 Ellison Street, Suite 408 and on the City's website at [www.patersonnj.gov](http://www.patersonnj.gov). For more information, to clarify whether your project requires HPC review, or to obtain permit applications, please call the HPC staff at (973) 321-1355.

### IMPORTANCE OF SIGNS & 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 confused, poorly designed or poorly placed sign or awning can overwhelm buildings, detract from the streetscape, give an inappropriate impression, turn away customers and damage the historic materials or finishes of buildings. Historically, signs and awnings were attached to and placed near buildings. New signs can use similar features of historic ones to both enhance the character of the building and convey the desired information to potential customers.

### COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES

The HPC encourages the economic development and revitalization of the DCHD's retail and commercial properties within it. The HPC recognizes Paterson's vibrancy is linked to the viability of its businesses. We make every effort to assist building owners and their tenants with revitalizing buildings in the DCHD, helping to attract new customers while promoting an appreciation of historic architecture.

### NEW BUSINESS INFORMATION

If considering opening a new business in the City of Paterson, representatives are available to discuss zoning, construction and other requirements applicable to a specific project. Please contact the Office of Economic Development at (973) 321-1212 x 2270 for additional information.



*The most effective signs provide a clear message identifying the goods or services offered for sale. This sign, sized to fit within the band between the rows of windows, includes individually-mounted pin letters identifying the company name.*

## TYPES OF SIGNS IN PATERSON

Because most of the buildings within the DCHD are located along the sidewalk and property line, most of the signs are mounted on the buildings. The following illustrations are intended to provide general examples of the most common sign types that can be found within the DCHD.

### PATERSON'S PERMITTED SIGNAGE

The types of signage permitted for a business vary depending on whether the property is located in a residential or non-residential district, and the amount of street frontage for the building, and whether the property fronts on one or more streets.

When considering a new signage or awning project, applicants should contact the Division of Community Improvements (CI) and the HPC office early in the design process to understand the allowable signage at a specific property. It is also important to keep in mind that the following types of signs are subject to the requirements of the current sign regulations and review of the CI and HPC:

- All new exterior signs and interior signs that are visible from the exterior
- All changes or alterations of existing signs including the removal of unsafe signage (Refer to *Page 8*.)
- All temporary and movable signage
- All relocated or altered signage, including “recovers”
- All signage that requires significant repair or replacement of components including re-facing of existing signs (“recovers”)

The installation, modification or altering of any signage will require review by the Division of Community Improvements for code compliance and the HPC. Applicants should not install or alter any signage before obtaining all required approvals and permits.

**Wall Signs** are single-sided signs mounted parallel to and generally flat against a wall of the building. Wall signs can be made from a variety of materials to suit the individual needs of the business and unique character of the building onto which they are applied.



*This channel-letter wall sign includes internally illuminated letters and a logo.*

**Suspended Signs** are one or two-sided signs, generally suspended from an architectural element of the building such as a canopy or balcony, mounted perpendicularly to the face of the building.



*The suspended signs under this storefront canopy are the same size and have similar colors and designs. The smaller text is scaled for pedestrians.*



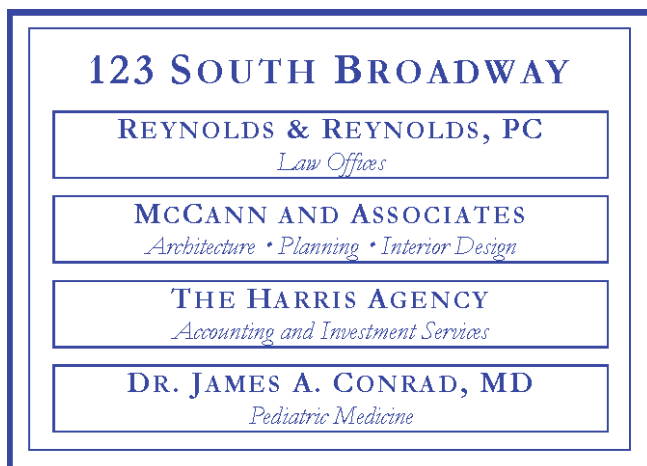
**Window Signs** are attached to the interior or exterior of the window or door glazing. The signs that are attached to the glazing are generally painted, vinyl appliques or etched / stained glass. Window signs are generally a good choice for professional offices with multiple tenants that see most of their clients by appointment rather than rely on drop-in business.

To allow potential customers and patrons to see the merchandise being offered for sale by local businesses, the sign regulations also establish the maximum allowable area of the glass that can be covered by windows signs.



*Window signs are often a good option for multi-tenant buildings, particularly for professional offices that see most of their clients by appointment rather than rely on drop-in business.*

**Directory Signs** can be either freestanding or attached to a building and are often used for professional offices. They include information about several businesses on a single larger sign, with an identifying building address and/or building name. The individual nameplates on the sign should match each other in size, colors, letter size, case and styles.



*Directory signs tend to be a good option for upper floor tenants of a building sharing a single entrance, particularly professional offices.*



**Projecting Signs** are generally two-sided signs, suspended from an iron bracket or building element, mounted perpendicular to the face of the building.

*Larger scale projecting signs that are mounted to the building at the top and bottom such as this example are sometimes referred to as blade signs.*

**Awning Signs** are typically located on the awning fabric. In addition to identifying a business, awnings can protect merchandise from sun damage and reduce solar heat gain. Therefore, they are a good option for businesses that are orientated to the south or west. (Refer to Page 6.)

## HISTORIC SIGNAGE

Historic signage is often an architectural feature that reflects the original owner and use of the building. Although abandoned signs from recent tenants must be removed immediately, (Refer to Page 8,) the HPC encourages historic signage to be retained. Retaining historic signage does not reduce the amount of allowable signage for an occupant.



*Although historic signage is typically located near the top of a building, it can also be paving typically located at store entrance doors.*

## SIGN MATERIALS

Historically, signs were typically made of wood and either attached directly to the building or suspended from metal brackets or galleries attached to the building. As technology advanced and building styles changed, a wider range of materials were used. Each material was popular during particular time periods or with certain building styles, and might not be appropriate for all buildings.

Some materials that were used historically may no longer be practical for signage installations due to limited availability or expense. For example, durable redwood for exterior installations can be expensive; but alternatives are available. If a wood appearance is desired, available substitutes for redwood include Urethane board and Medium Density Overlay (MDO) board. Both materials can be painted, carved or routed similar to wood, but are not subject to warping in the same manner as lower grade woods or plywood.

In addition to materials that appear historic, the HPC welcomes innovative sign designs and alternate materials that are appropriate to the specific building's style and placement.

**It is important to note that plastic, Plexiglas, or glossy coatings are not appropriate unless used in individual channel letter signs or routed signs. No other internally illuminated signage or box signs are permitted.**

## SIGN COLOR AND 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.

Similar to selecting a color, when considering letter style for signs and awnings, business owners must balance the need to make them legible, convey the business identity or logo, and complement the historic character of the building and environment. Too much text or highly stylized type styles can overwhelm a viewer and make the message confusing or difficult to read.

In general, there are three styles of lettering available, serif, non-serif and script. Within each style are many typefaces to choose from, which can be varied by making them bold or italicized. Similar to materials, different styles of lettering were typically used for specific historic periods. Applicants are encouraged to utilize lettering styles and materials that complement their particular property and historic period.

## SIGN SIZE & SHAPE

Paterson's sign regulations establish the maximum size and number of allowable signs; however the HPC determines the appropriateness of the size and placement relative to the building's design. In general, the HPC utilizes the following guidelines when reviewing the appropriateness of proposed sign's size:

- 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, and professional offices while larger scaled signs are appropriate to vehicular traffic
- Small scale signs are appropriate for building with several signs and often can be grouped in a single directory sign for a unified appearance
- A well-designed smaller sign can have more of an impact than a larger sign, particularly in commercial corridors where the means of travel is by foot or slow moving vehicles
- A sign's shape can reflect the type of business at the location



*Words are not always required to attract customers. This projecting ice cream shop sign, in the shape of a cone and suspended from a metal bracket, clearly conveys what is being offered and is visible from adjacent cross streets.*





*Signage that obstructs the view into stores is not permitted.*



*LED reader boards or changeable message signage is not permitted.*



*Exposed raceways for channel letter signage should be painted to match the adjacent wall surface.*



*Conduits should be concealed and not mounted to the face of the building. The number of lamps should be reduced to provide enough light for the signs to be read.*

## SIGNAGE GUIDE

### THE HPC ENCOURAGES:

- Maintaining and repairing historic signage with materials to match the original whenever possible
- Innovative signage that identifies the business, complements the style of the building and is appropriately scaled for its location
- Using materials that are consistent with the character of the building
- Using modern durable materials such as Urethane board or MDO board that are similar in appearance to historic materials
- Using existing ambient street light or storefront lighting in lieu of sign lighting whenever possible
- Using light styles for signage that is consistent with the character of the historic building including location, orientation and brightness

### THE HPC DISCOURAGES:

- ✗ The use of fasteners and hangers for sign installation that destroy important building fabric
- ✗ Obscuring distinctive architectural elements and features with signage
- ✗ Paper signs or graphic films adhered to glazing
- ✗ Signage that obstructs views into the store through storefront windows and glazing
- ✗ Internally illuminated box signs
- ✗ Removal, damaging, alteration or encasing of historic architectural building features to allow for the installation of signage
- ✗ Exposed conduit, junction boxes and raceways for channel letters or sign lighting
- ✗ Temporary signs or banners for more than 90 days

### SIGNAGE NOT PERMITTED:

- ✗ Signs with flashing lights or changing messages including LED scrolling signs
- ✗ Signs with exposed lighting including neon and incandescent bulbs
- ✗ Paper or painted signage applied to a wall surfaces
- ✗ Signs with moving components
- ✗ Signs that cover any portion of a window, cornice, balcony, or other architectural feature
- ✗ Signs that project above the roof or building parapet including roof or wall-mounted billboards



*The awning provides a unifying element along the storefront, visually connecting the two buildings that comprise this business. The name of the business can be found at each face of the awning. The color choice of the awning fabric also complements the storefront below.*

## AWNINGS

Awnings are a historically popular means of sheltering pedestrians, advertising a business and protecting window merchandise from sun damage. Several awnings along a streetscape can provide a sense of scale and separation of the storefront from the upper stories. 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 include a business name and logo, subject to the provisions of the sign regulations.

In Paterson, awnings can also serve to cover pre-existing exterior roll-down security gates, however, all new security gate installations are required to be on the inside of the display windows.



*Awnings can be used to conceal exterior security grates until they can be relocated inside of display windows.*

## AWNING GUIDE

### THE HPC ENCOURAGES:

- Canvas-like fixed or retractable awnings, whose color, style and location are compatible with the building's historic character
- Awnings sloped away from the building in a continuous angle possibly with an 6 to 8 inch straight or scalloped valance, in compliance with Paterson's Sign Regulations Ordinance
- Locating awnings over windows and doors and between storefront bays
- Limiting lettering and logos to awning valances when installed in conjunction with a wall sign
- Installing awning hardware in a manner that minimizes damage to historic building materials
- Installing awnings to conceal exterior security grates

### THE HPC DISCOURAGES:

- ✗ Awning shapes known as balloon, waterfall or barrel awnings
- ✗ The use of awning materials that act as wall signs
- ✗ The use of fasteners and hangers that destroy important building fabric for awning installation
- ✗ Pole supported awning canopies

### THE HPC DOES NOT PERMIT:

- ✗ Awnings that cover, alter or obscure architectural features
- ✗ Awnings installed in locations where they are non-functional, such as under a gallery or overhang
- ✗ Contemporary or glossy awning materials such as vinyl, plastics or leatherette
- ✗ Internally illuminated awnings
- ✗ Awnings with a solid or closed underside



## STOREFRONT CANOPIES

Many stores at the northern end of Paterson's Downtown Commercial Historic District feature storefront canopies in lieu of awnings. These canopies are a simple shed structures supported by metal posts in concrete piers topped with corrugated metal roofing with acrylic panels to provide natural light. (Refer to photograph on Page 2.) They are typically located below storefront cornices, and can be used to hang suspended signage. Some of the important considerations related to the construction of new storefront canopies include:

- All new canopies are subject to compliance with the Uniform Construction Code and Zoning Ordinance requirements including location, height, and distance from the street;
- The location where the canopy intersects with the wall or window;
- They are typically covered by corrugated metal roofing and often include acrylic panels to provide natural light;
- The type, material and style of the supporting system should be consistent with the building's character and style; and
- Posts are typically evenly spaced across a façade with a supporting posts at both ends of a canopy

The HPC recommends maintaining existing canopies and checking the supporting systems periodically to ensure canopies are secure and the structure is safe.



*Storefront canopies provide protection from the weather and direct sunlight.*



*Gooseneck lights illuminate this wall mounted sign.*

## 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 and placement of sign illumination is limited by the Zoning Ordinance. Gooseneck lighting or other unobtrusive light fixture is often the most appropriate choice to illuminate wall signage.



*Numerous holes have been drilled into the face of this granite pier and several previous fasteners remain.*

## MOUNTING SIGNS & 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, remove abandoned hardware and patch holes. When installing new signage or awnings, select mounting locations that can be easily patched if the sign or awning is relocated or removed. An example would be to locate anchors in mortar joints rather than mounting directly into brick or stone faces.

When installing signage, such as wall mounted signs, business owners are encouraged to recess fasteners and patch the fastener opening to match the sign background for a more finished appearance, unless the fasteners are part of the overall design.



*The former business owners mounted their signs below the historic sign band, leaving it visible and undamaged. However, it is the responsibility of the sign owner or lessee, or the property owner to remove all signage identifying or advertising a business or any product offered for sale within 60 days of the business ceasing operation.*

## SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS FOR SIGNS & AWNINGS

Property and Applicant Information application forms for sign and awning review are available at the HPC office or on their website at [www.patersonnj.gov](http://www.patersonnj.gov). It is often helpful to work with the company manufacturing the sign to complete the application and assemble the required submission materials. With the completed application, applicants for sign and awning review will be required to provide the following information:

- A description of the size, shape, total square footage, colors and any lighting for the proposed sign – Should be submitted as a scaled sketch labeled with dimensions
- Accurate information regarding the location of the sign in relation to the building – Can be submitted as a marked-up photograph indicating the location of the proposed sign or awning
- Freestanding signs must include a scaled site plan showing the location of the sign, locations of adjoining buildings, walkways, driveways and roadways
- Attachment details
- Proposed lighting
- Photographs of the building from different angles
- Drawings of any proposed logos or other graphic designs
- Material samples for awning signs
- The proposed font to be used for lettering
- Color and texture samples

## UNSAFE SIGNAGE

If the Division of Community Improvements determines a sign has become unsafe and represents a potential hazard, they will provide written notice requiring that the sign be made safe within 30 days. If the sign is altered or modified in any way that results in a visible change, the modification is subject to HPC review. (Refer to *Paterson's Permitted Signage*, Page 2.)



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## PREPARATION

All components of the *City of Paterson Downtown Commercial Historic District Design Guidelines* including all text, graphic design, photography and illustrations unless noted otherwise were prepared by:

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