

4.1 DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS FOR NEW SIGNS

Basic Approach

Today's approach to signage in commercial areas is more conservative than that of the 19th century. The number and frequency of signs has decreased as current aesthetic and cultural trends seek a more organized streetscape. However, signs remain important elements in business districts, and historic signage should be retained and maintained if possible. Painted advertising or signage on historic walls can provide evidence of early or original occupants of a building and artistic interest.

Internally illuminated signs are inappropriate on historic buildings. Large, non-historic, applied signs and signs attached to buildings can obscure significant architectural details and, therefore, should be removed from historic buildings. New signs should be of a size and style that is compatible with the historic character of a building, site or district.

These design guidelines apply to new construction and rehabilitation. Signs should be designed and installed in accordance with the Township's Zoning Ordinance. The Township's sign regulations found in Chapter 347 outline the amount of allowed sign area and placement. This ordinance was enacted to provide a clear, comprehensive sign code. Its intent is to control the appropriate size, location, and character of signs while ensuring the continuation of the historic character and overall attractiveness of the Township. Whenever there is a conflict between the regulations of the base zoning district and these design guidelines, the more restrictive apply. All new signage should be designed with the overall existing and historic context of a building in mind. Buildings with multiple tenants should have a master sign plan.

3. **Signs must conform to the current signage code.**
4. **Signs based on documented historic appearance are encouraged.**

Historic photographs may provide appropriate examples of sign designs for historic buildings.



Figure 147 - The signs at 211 Glenridge Avenue (above) and 517 Bloomfield Avenue (below) are based on historic sign type and placement.



Number and Location

Signs may be located in a variety of places on buildings, including storefront belt courses, façade walls, side walls, or on awnings or canopies. Signs may hang or be mounted in windows, or project from the face of the building. Signs may also be attached to windows or the glass areas of doors. Freestanding signs may be placed on the building site. Be sure that signs do not block pedestrian traffic or the visibility of motorists. Mounting hardware for signs should be attached so that historic surfaces are not damaged. Signage should not dominate the building visually.

5. Place signs in traditional locations.

Traditional sign locations include storefront belt courses, upper façade walls, hanging or mounted inside windows, or projecting from the face of the building. Movable a-frame signs or “menu easels” provide additional signage are also allowed.

6. Ensure building signage maintains the historic character of the building and surrounding properties.

Too many signs on a historic property can be visually distracting, overwhelm the appearance of the property and streetscape.



Figure 148 - This drawing shows traditional locations for commercial signage. Window signs will not count toward the total number of signs allowed

Appropriate Types of Signs and Design Guidelines

A variety of sign types may be appropriate for Montclair's historic districts or Landmark Sites. These include:

- **Wall Signs**

These are examples of signs which are inside or attached to a transparent glazed surface and oriented to the outside of the building.



Figure 149 - Example of appropriate wall signs: left: 44 Fairfield Street; right: window sign at 513 Bloomfield Avenue.

- **Window Signs**

Signs that are attached directly to the interior of a glass surface of a door or window facing a street or municipal parking lot.

- Metal leaf and subdued colors are historically appropriate window sign materials. Alternate materials may also be permitted.

- **Awning Signs**

These incorporate lettering and/or logos that are incorporated into awnings.



Figure 150 - Appropriate awning sign, above, at 123 Watchung Avenue and projecting sign, below, at 598 Valley Road.

- **Projecting/Hanging/Blade Signs**

These signs extend from a small pole or post that is attached to the exterior of a building. These include cloth banner signs as well as signs of wood, metal, or other materials.

- Install a projecting sign, canopy or marquee sign so that its bottom edge is a minimum of ten feet (10') above the sidewalk.
- Ensure the size of the sign is subordinate to the building.
- Other approvals for projecting signs may be required to allow a sign to overhang the public right-of-way.



- **Freestanding or Monument Signs**

These signs are not attached to a building but stand alone on the grounds of a property.

- Only one freestanding sign is permitted per principal building.
- Freestanding signs shall not interfere with adequate sight distance at street intersections or exits at streets or driveways;
- They should be set back at least five feet (5') from the property line, and the principal building shall have a minimum setback of fifteen feet (15').



Figure 151 - Appropriate example of a free-standing sign at 131 Watchung Avenue.

Inappropriate Types of Signs

Signs that are out of character with those seen historically and that would compromise the historic character of the building and streetscape.

- Internally illuminated signs.
- Oversized signs that dominate the visual appearance of a building.
- Signs attached to a building in such a way as to harm historic material and obscure significant architectural detailing.
- Flashing or moving signs, including time and temperature signs.
- Any sign using exposed light emitting diodes (LEDs) other than price signs at gas stations.



Figure 152 - NO - New, internally-lit, plastic signs are not appropriate on historic buildings.

7. Install signs that do not damage historic fabric.

Install signs in such a way that there is no damage to historic materials.



Figure 153 - NO - Do not allow signs to conceal or obscure historic building designs or detailing, such as an awning covering a historic transom.



Figure 154 - NO - Animated or electronic signs are not appropriate on historic buildings or in historic districts.

Materials

In order to be compatible with the historic character and appearance of historic buildings, new signs should be constructed of materials traditionally used in the historic period. For 19th and early 20th century buildings, this may include wood, glass, copper, or bronze. Finished wood signs are appropriate. Plastic, substrate or unfinished wood signs are not recommended.

For mid-20th century buildings that do not retain their original signs, new signs may be of materials traditional to their period such as backlit fluorescent or neon signs of glass or plastic, metal letters, or glass and metal projecting signs.

8. Use traditional materials for new signs.

Construct new signs out of materials such as wood and glass, and metals such as copper, bronze or aluminum. Ensure metal signs have matte or subdued finishes. Sandblasted wood signs are appropriate. The use of neon may be appropriate for mid-20th century storefronts.



Figure 155 - This wall sign at 467-469 Bloomfield Avenue is an example of period signage with metal lettering representative of mid-to late-20th century materials and style.

Illumination

Lighting for signs should be as unobtrusive as possible and be compatible with the character of the building. Simple spot lighting or up-lighting is most preferable for signs. This type of lighting is effective, yet does not dominate the appearance of a building or streetscape. Unless historically documented, intermittent or flashing light sources are not appropriate. Lighting should be dark-sky aware.

9. Conceal lighting for signs.

Spot- or up-lighting is appropriate for signs. These kind of light fixtures should be unobtrusive.

10. The use and reuse of original neon, illuminated and internally lit mid-20th century signs is appropriate.

Montclair's historic districts contain commercial buildings constructed in the 1940s and 1950s and some of these retain original signs. Property owners are encouraged to preserve or repair these signs and adaptively reuse them whenever possible. Neon signs are permitted when the illuminated tubing is formed to serve as the sign. Neon framing on a sign is prohibited.

Other Sign Considerations

11. Keep signs sized in proportion to the building.

Avoid oversized signs as they detract from the building's architectural design.



Figure 156 - Logo signs are an appropriate and creative way to advertise a business. Appropriate example of a business sign in a commercial neighborhood 441 Bloomfield Ave.

12. Do not allow signs to obscure or conceal architectural features, particularly for adaptively re-used buildings, such as offices in residential neighborhoods.



Figure 157 - Example of an appropriate banner sign.