

## GUIDELINES FOR SIGNS & AWNINGS

These Guidelines were developed in collaboration between the Gloucester City Urban Enterprise Zone (GCUEZ) and the Gloucester City Historic Preservation Commission (GCHPC) in order to enhance the visual aesthetics in the Gloucester City commercial and historic districts.

### Program Overviews:

The GCHPC reviews Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications for proposed exterior alterations to properties within the historic districts visible from a public way. The applicant is responsible for complying with the provisions of the Zoning and Building Codes at the time of application. The applicant must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) as well as all necessary permits prior to proceeding with any work. For more information, or to obtain permit applications, please call the Administrative Zoning Officer at (856) 456-7689.

The GCUEZ program promotes economic growth by helping neighborhood businesses succeed through offering incentives which encourage growth while stimulating the local economy. One of these such programs is the GCUEZ signage and matching façade grant program where UEZ businesses only can receive up to \$10,000 in matching facade grants as well as \$1,000 in signage grants to enhance their business storefronts. For more information, contact the UEZ Coordinator at (856) 456-6075 or via email at [uez@cityofgloucester.org](mailto:uez@cityofgloucester.org).

### Using the *Guidelines*:

Please review this information during the early stages of planning your project. Familiarity with this material can assist in moving a project quickly through the approval process, saving applicants both time and money.

Additional *Guidelines* addressing other historic building topics and application forms are available at the Municipal Building and on the City's web site at [www.cityofgloucester.org](http://www.cityofgloucester.org).

### PURPOSE OF GUIDELINES

- Provide applicants with design assistance for commercial signs and awnings
- Encourage compatibility and provide a visual connection with the building and district
- Provide variety and vitality in the district
- Encourage the greatest amount of 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 district



### 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 confused, poorly designed or poorly placed sign or awning can overwhelm buildings, detract from the area, give an inappropriate impression, turning customers away and potentially damaging historic materials or finishes. Historically, signs and awnings were attached to and placed near buildings. New signs can use similar features to both enhance the character of the building and convey the necessary information to the public.

## TYPES OF SIGNS IN GLOUCESTER

Generally, there are two types of signs in the City of Gloucester, those that are attached to the building and those that are freestanding. The choice between attached or freestanding signs is largely based upon the specific location, building setbacks, needs and the limitations of the Zoning Code. Because most of the buildings within the City of Gloucester are located along the sidewalk and property line, most of the signs are mounted onto buildings. The following illustrations are intended to provide general examples of the most common sign types that can be found within the City.

**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.



*The most typical wall sign consists of letters painted onto or applied to a wood board or other material.*



*In the channel letter sign pictured above, each individual letter has internal illumination.*



*Individual letters can be painted onto or applied to building features such as the examples above and below.*



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



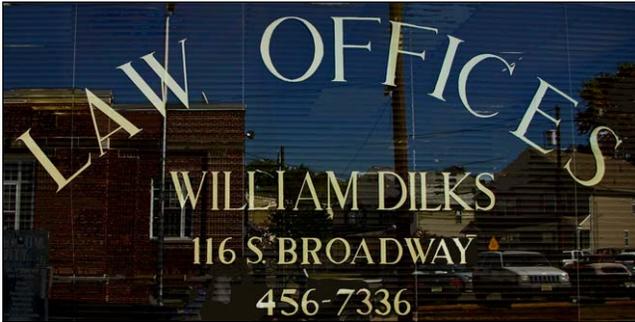
**Historic Signs** can be an architectural feature and often reflect the original owner and use for the building.

### GLOUCESTER'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
- All temporary and movable signage is subject to the provisions of the Signage Code
- The relocation or altering of signage is subject to City review
- No signage with flashing lights is permitted
- No back-lit box signs are permitted
- No paper signs adhered to glazing are permitted

It is recommended that potential applicants for signage and awnings contact the Zoning Officer early in the design process to understand the allowable signage at their property.

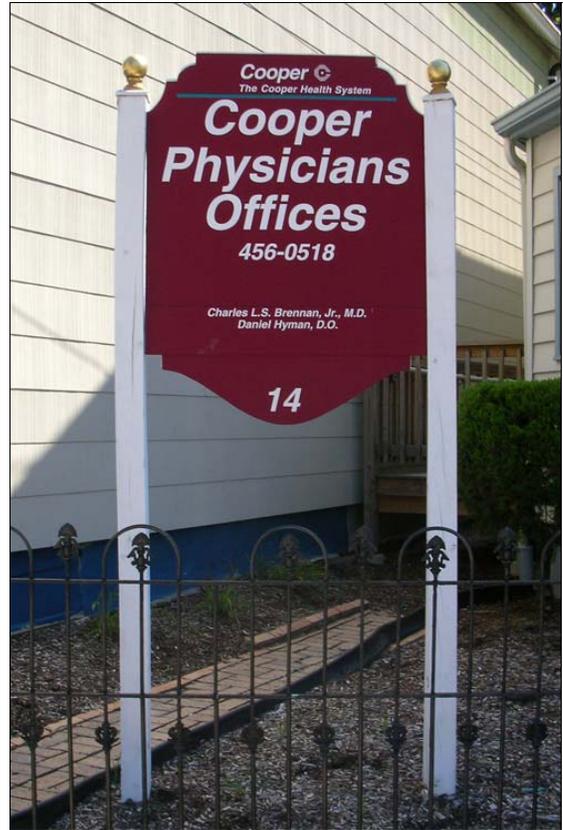
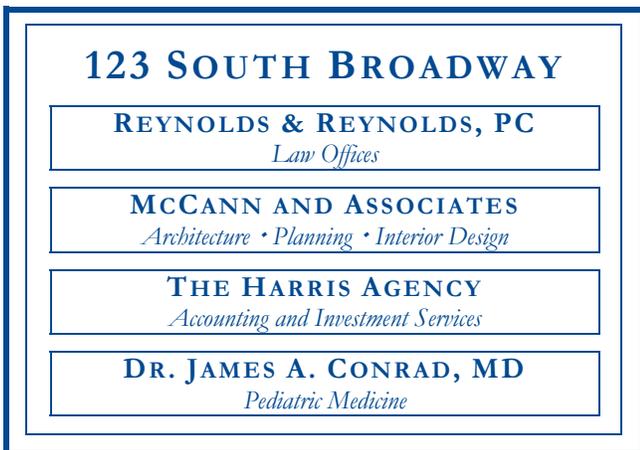
**Storefront Window Signs** include all signs that are attached to glass either at the interior or exterior of the building, or are located within twelve inches of the interior of glazing. The signs that are attached to the glazing are generally painted, vinyl appliques or etched glass, and can include stained glass. The signs that are within twelve inches of the interior of a window can be made of a limitless variety of materials including neon.



**Awning Signs** are typically located on the awning valance. In addition to identifying a business, awnings can provide sun damage protection for merchandise and reduce solar heat gain, and are a good option for businesses that are orientated to the south or west.



**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.



**Freestanding Signs** are not attached to the building. They can include information on one or two sides, spanning between two posts, or suspended from one post that is set in paving or landscape areas.



**Sandwich Board Signs** are movable signs with an A-frame construction that are placed on the sidewalk immediately in front of the advertised business.

## 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 were used. These included bronze plates attached to buildings, 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.

Some materials might no longer be practical for signage installations due to limited availability or expense. For example redwood is more durable for exterior installations than other species of wood and is very expensive, and wrought iron, considerably more labor intensive and expensive to manufacture than cast iron.

Available substitutes for redwood include Urethane board and 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. Urethane board is compressed, hardened foam, and is generally lighter and thicker than MDO board, which is made of six layers of alternately grained wood material to protect against warping, and has an approximate seven-year life span.

### *The GCHPC and GCUEZ encourage:*

- Using materials that are consistent with the historic character of the building including wood, bronze, brass, gold leaf, etched glass, paint, aluminum, stainless steel, enameled metal, leaded glass, appliques, tile, and terrazzo
- Mounting individual wood or metal letters to a building or sign board
- Using modern durable materials such as Urethane board or MDO board that are similar in appearance to historic materials
- Using cast iron brackets to hang signs with hanging hardware of a compatible appearance
- Repairing historic signage with materials to match the original whenever possible

### *The GCHPC and GCUEZ discourage:*

- The use of contemporary materials such as plastics or plexiglass, or plastic or glossy coatings, which are incompatible with the building's historic character
- Back-lit sign boxes
- Signage with flashing or moving lights
- The use of dry-erase surfaces for changeable message signage



*This sign has a unique shape that is specific to the business. Also note the indirect illumination provided by the spotlight.*

## SIGN SHAPE

Most sign shapes are simple geometric forms, geometric shapes with decorative edges or rounded corners, or shapes that convey the type of business. Geometric signs can include rectangular, square, round or oval shapes and can be utilized for all sign types. When considering which sign shape is most appropriate for a specific location, the applicant should consider the sign type, information to be conveyed, size and location of the sign, building style, and other signs at the property or adjacent properties.

## 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.

## 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.

### *The GCHPC and GCUEZ encourage:*

- Using existing ambient street light or storefront lighting whenever possible
- Using small scale, indirect or hidden lights such as gooseneck or in-ground mounted lights directed up towards signage
- Using lights that are consistent with the character of the historic building
- Using low wattage bulbs to minimize potential glare to other properties, pedestrians and vehicle operators

### *The GCHPC and GCUEZ discourage:*

- High wattage light sources such as bare spot lights and metal halides

## NEON

Neon signs, originally developed in the 1920s, are made of narrow, gas filled tubes that are illuminated through electrification. Given the age and character of many buildings within Gloucester, the use of neon is carefully reviewed by the GCHPC and GCUEZ to determine compatibility.



### *The GCHPC and GCUEZ encourage:*

- Customizing neon to enhance the style or character of a building, if appropriate, in consultation with the GCHPC and GCUEZ
- The use of decorative neon at a building's interior, if appropriate, in consultation with the GCHPC and GCUEZ

### *The GCHPC and GCUEZ discourage:*

- The installation of pre-manufactured neon signs at the interior or exterior of a building, advertising a product or service that is highly visible from a public way

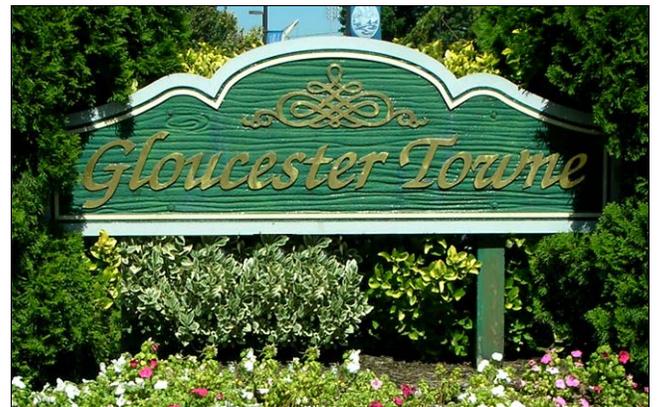


*This sign utilizes the ambient light provided by the ceiling-mounted fixture for illumination. The size of the sign and smaller text are scaled for pedestrians.*

## SIGN SIZE

City of Gloucester's Zoning Ordinance regulates the size of signage.

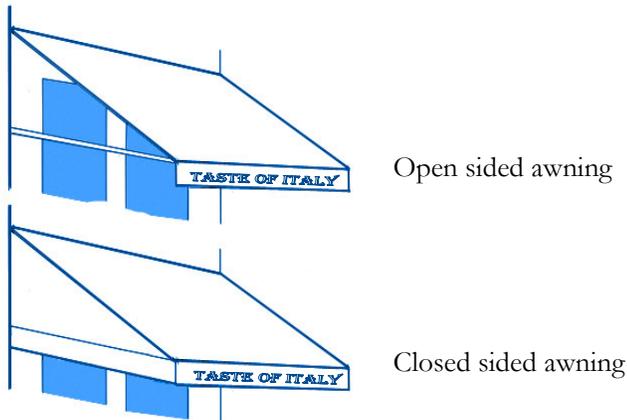
- Signage should be compatible to scale of the building, adjacent buildings, the streetscape and adjacent signage. Small scale signs are appropriate to smaller scale buildings.
- Small scale signs are also appropriate for building with several signs.
- A well-designed smaller sign can have more of an impact than larger signs. This is particularly true in Gloucester where the means of travel is by foot or slow moving vehicles.



*Large scale signs are generally more appropriate for larger scale buildings with more surrounding open space that are primarily accessed by vehicles.*

## AWNINGS

Awnings are a historically popular means of sheltering pedestrians, advertising a business, and protecting window merchandise from sun damage. 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, address, telephone number and logo.



### *The GCHPC and GCUEZ encourage:*

- Locating awnings over the length of the storefront display or individual display windows or entrances
- Solid or canvas fixed or retractable awnings, whose color, style and location are compatible with the building's historic character
- Awnings that project approximately three feet from the face of the building in a continuous angle with a ten to twelve inch straight or scalloped valance
- Limiting lettering and logos to awning valances
- Installing awning hardware in a manner that minimizes damage to historic building materials

### *The GCHPC and GCUEZ discourage:*

- The use contemporary or glossy awning materials such as metal, plastics or leatherette, which are incompatible with the building's historic character
- Internally lit awnings
- The use of contemporary awning shapes or use of awning materials at typical sign locations such as rounded balloon awnings or flat mounted wall awnings
- The installation of awnings at historically inappropriate locations

## SIGN AND AWNING COLORS

In considering appropriate colors for signs and awnings, applicants must balance the need to make them legible, convey the business identity or logo, and complement the historic character of the building and environment.



**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.



**Color tones:** Bright colors tend to be incompatible with the historic character of the buildings and environment as well as overwhelm the viewer. Simple designs with muted, simple color combinations that are compatible to the building are encouraged.

## SIGN AND AWNING LETTERING

Similar to selecting a color, when considering letter style for signs and awnings, applicants must balance the need to make them legible, convey the business identity or logo, and complement the historic character of the building and environment. Excessive amounts of text or highly stylized type styles can overwhelm a viewer and make the message effectively illegible.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

*Serif Alphabet*

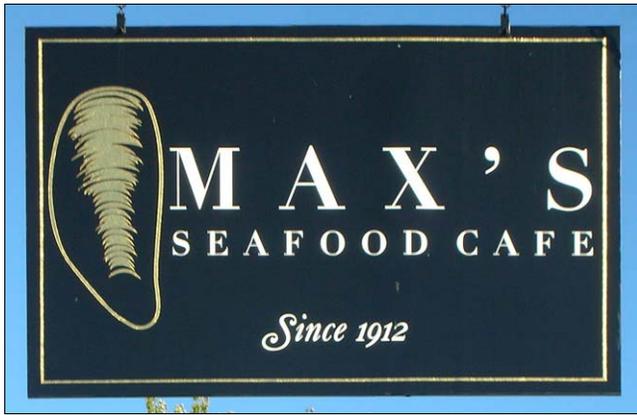
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

*Non-Serif Alphabet*

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

*Script Alphabet*

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



This sign includes two lettering styles and a distinctive logo.

## SIGN AND AWNING LOGOS

Logos can be an important identifying feature for any business, and generally, applicants are encouraged to utilize a logo or symbol that identifies their business. However, the GCHPC and GCUEZ are not obligated to accept a sign or awning design that is based upon a national or regional image required by a corporation or franchise.

## LOCATIONS OF SIGNS AND AWNINGS

The diagrams below are intended to provide general guidance for appropriate sign and awning locations for commercial and former residential buildings in City of Gloucester. It is important to note all sign types might not be appropriate for all buildings.

Signs should not extend above the eaves of a sloping roof or the roof line of a flat roof, nor should they obscure distinctive architectural elements or features. The Zoning Ordinance identifies allowable sign and awning locations as well as the size and number of allowable signs for each property. Applicants are encouraged to contact the Zoning Officer early in the design process to verify size, quantity and location requirements.

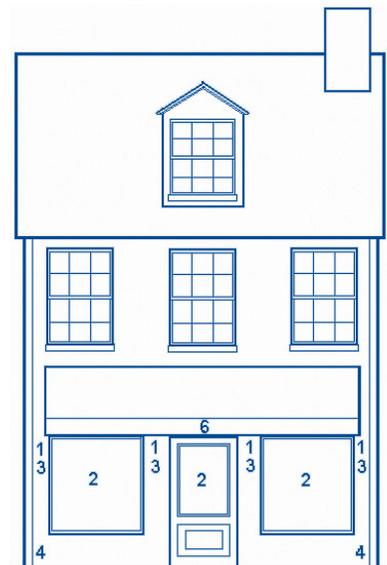


### Commercial Building

- (1) hanging from bracket perpendicular to front wall;
- (2) paint, vinyl or etching on window(s);
- (3) flush mounted wall sign;
- (4) freestanding sign when permitted;
- (5) under storefront cornice; (signs may also appear on the lower flap of an awning)

### Adaptive Reuse of Former Residential Building

- (1) hanging from bracket perpendicular to front wall;
- (2) paint, vinyl or etching on window(s);
- (3) flush mounted wall sign;
- (4) freestanding sign when permitted;
- (6) on the lower flap of an awning (signs may also appear under a storefront cornice)



## GLOUCESTER SIGN AND AWNING REVIEW

All proposed signage and awnings within the City of Gloucester are subject to review under the Signage Ordinance. The types of signage and awnings that are subject to review include:

- Permanently mounted signage and awnings
- Temporary signage and movable signage
- Signage at the interior of a building located within 12 inches of the glazing

When reviewing signs and awnings the City Zoning Officer considers the following:

- The location and zoning of the property
- The length of street frontage of the property
- The number and types of existing and proposed signage and awnings
- The square footage of existing and proposed signage and awnings
- The type of business, such as professional office or retail establishment, that is being advertised
- The proposed duration of temporary signage

Because the circumstances for each property are unique, business owners are encouraged to speak with the City Zoning Officer early in the process when considering adding a sign or awning to their property. The Zoning Officer can be reached at (856) 456-7689.



*Historic signage, such as the carved limestone panel and stained glass window are not included within the calculations for allowable signage at a building. Businesses are encouraged to maintain historic building signage.*



*Too much signage can be visually disorientating to potential customers and is inappropriate in Gloucester. In the photograph above, the signage also blocks visibility into the store, which is discouraged. The Gloucester Zoning Ordinance reviews all signage at the interior of a building within 12 inches of the glazing.*

## GCHPC SIGN AND AWNING REVIEW

In its review of signs and awnings, the GCHPC utilizes *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*; the same national standards utilized in all GCHPC reviews. When reviewing applications, GCHPC 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.



This publication was initiated and overseen by the City of Gloucester City and made possible through a Smart Future grant provided by the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (NJDCA). Regardless, the contents and opinions expressed in these *Guidelines* do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of NJDCA nor does the mention of trade names constitute endorsement or recommendation by NJDCA.

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