



Borough of Phoenixville Historical Architectural Review Board

GUIDELINES FOR SIGNS AND AWNINGS



In some instances, smaller and simpler signs can have a large impact. This bronze sign conveys a sense of permanence within the community and is well suited for a recognized local historic landmark.

These guidelines were developed in conjunction with the Phoenixville Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB). The HARB reviews Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications for proposed exterior alterations to properties within the Historic District that are 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 COA as well as all necessary permits prior to proceeding with any work. For more information, or to obtain permit applications, please call the **Zoning Officer at Borough Hall at (610) 933-8801**.

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 information and *Guidelines* addressing other historic building topics are available at Borough Hall and on its web site at www.phoenixville.org.

PURPOSE OF GUIDELINES

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

It is not intended that these guidelines should replace consultation with qualified architects, contractors and the HARB, or to make all signs and awnings in the Borough appear the same.



Signage should be clearly legible and convey the nature of the goods or services offered within a commercial establishment.

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 a building, detract from the area, give an inappropriate impression, turn customers away and potentially damage historic materials or finishes. Historically, signs and awnings were attached to and placed near buildings. New signs can use similar features as their historic counterparts to both enhance the character of the building and convey the necessary information to the public.



This projecting sign makes use of the ambient lighting provided by the streetlamp.

TYPES OF SIGNS IN PHOENIXVILLE

Generally, there are two types of signs in the Borough of Phoenixville, those that are attached to the building and those that are freestanding. The choice between attached or freestanding signs are largely based upon the specific location, building setbacks, needs and the limitations of the Zoning Code.

Because most of the buildings within the Phoenixville Downtown Historic District 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 Historic District.



The dark background of the storefront cornice provides a strong contrast to the light colored individual letters and logo of this wall signage. The individual pin-mounted letter installation provides a more modern appearance.

Wall Signs are the most common type of signs in the Borough. Wall signs include any sign that is painted onto or mounted to the face of the building that does not project more than 12 inches. Mounted signs can include a flat board surface or individual letters. Internal illumination is only permissible with separate letters, characters, numbers, symbols and logos. Internally illuminated box signs are not permitted.

Projecting Signs are generally double-faced signs, suspended from a bracket that is mounted perpendicularly to the wall of a building and projects more than 12 inches. The bottom edge of projecting signs should be installed a minimum of eight feet above the walking surface if it is located above a sidewalk or walkway.



The twisted bracket for this projecting sign is more ornate than most brackets and complements the flower motif on the sign. The hanging hardware is black, making it less visually obtrusive.

Window Signs include all signs that are attached to glass either at the interior or exterior of the building. These signs are generally painted, vinyl appliques or etched glass, and can include stained glass. Window signs can include words and logos without a painted background while allowing potential customers to see into the storefront.



Window signage can be a good alternative to wall mounted signage for a professional office, to identify an entrance or hours of operation.



This awning retracts revealing the storefront transom window.

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.

<p>234 BRIDGE STREET</p> <p>REYNOLDS & REYNOLDS, PC <i>Law Offices</i></p> <p>MCCANN AND ASSOCIATES <i>Architecture • Planning • Interior Design</i></p> <p>THE HARRIS AGENCY <i>Accounting and Investment Services</i></p> <p>ROBERTS ENGINEERING, PC <i>Structural Engineers</i></p> <p>GREENBERG GROUP <i>Notary and License Services</i></p>
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Directory Signs can be either freestanding or attached to a building. 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.



The sign for the National Bank of Phoenixville was carved into the cornice frieze above the entrance.

Historic Signs that are an architectural feature of the building and often reflect the original owner and use for the building.



The sign for the Odd Fellows Temple is incorporated into the building cornice.

PHOENIXVILLE'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 signage is subject to the provisions of the Signage Code
- The relocation or altering of signage is subject to HARB review
- No signage with flashing lights is permitted
- No back-lit box signs 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.

SIGN MATERIAL

Historically, early signs were made of wood, either attached directly to the building or suspended from metal 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 a particular time period, and might not be appropriate for all buildings.

Some materials may no longer be practical for signage installations due to limited availability or expense. For example redwood is more durable for exterior installations than other types of wood but is very expensive; similarly, wrought iron is 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 similarly 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. MDO board has an approximate seven-year life span.

The HARB encourages:

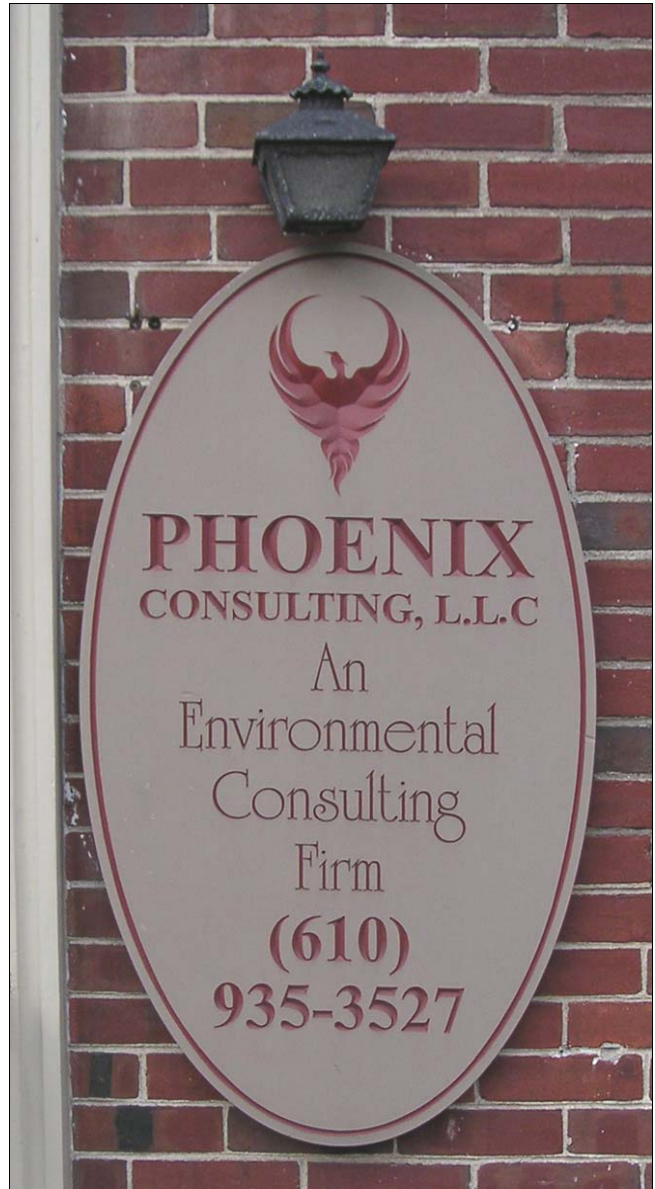
- Using materials that are consistent with the historic character of the building including wood, bronze, brass, gold leaf, etched glass, paint, aluminum, stainless steel, enameled metal, leaded glass, appliques, tile, and terrazzo
- Mounting individual wood or metal letters to a building or sign board
- 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 hardware of a compatible appearance
- Repairing historic signage with materials to match the original whenever possible
- Regular maintenance of signage

The HARB discourages:

- The use of contemporary materials such as plastics or plexiglass, or plastic or glossy coatings, which are incompatible with the building's historic character
- Temporary paper signs mounted to the building wall, or to exterior or interior window glass

SIGN SHAPE

Most sign shapes are either simple geometric forms such as squares, rectangles, circles and ovals; geometric shapes with decorative edges or rounded corners; or shapes that convey the type of business. 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.



By orienting the oval sign in the vertical direction and locating the sign in an area that is at eye level for pedestrians, the business owner was able to provide a lot of information clearly within a narrow space. Also note the simple logo and colors that complement the red brick and trim.

SIGN ILLUMINATION

In many instances, available ambient street or storefront lighting can illuminate signs, which is preferred to the installation of additional lighting. The Zoning Code also limits the use of sign illumination.

The HARB encourages:

- Using existing ambient street light or storefront lighting whenever possible
- Using small scale, indirect or hidden lights such as gooseneck lights directed towards sign
- 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 HARB discourages:

- High wattage light sources such as bare spot lights and metal halides
- Internally illuminated signs and awnings with the exception of channel letters at compatible locations



Gooseneck lights illuminate the pin-mounted signage. Also note the consistent use of colors throughout the façade elements.

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 the historic districts, the use of exterior neon is carefully reviewed by HARB to determine compatibility.

The HARB encourages:

- Customizing neon to enhance the style or character of a building, if appropriate, in consultation with HARB

The HARB discourages:

- The use of neon signage at a building's interior that is highly visible from a public way
- The installation of interior pre-manufactured neon signs advertising a product or service that is highly visible from a public way



This projecting sign includes a primary oval shape with suspended stars to attract potential customers. The sign is illuminated with small spot lights mounted onto the bracket. The spotlight housing and conduit are painted black to match the bracket.

SIGN SIZE

The Borough of Phoenixville's Zoning Code regulates the size and total number of signs permitted for each property.

- Signage should be compatible to the scale of the building, adjacent buildings, the streetscape and adjacent signage.
- Small-scale signs are also appropriate when using more than one sign.
- All exterior signs are included in the calculation of the sign area for each property.
- A well-designed smaller sign can have more of an impact than larger signs. This is particularly true in the commercial areas of Phoenixville where the means of travel is by foot or slow moving vehicles.

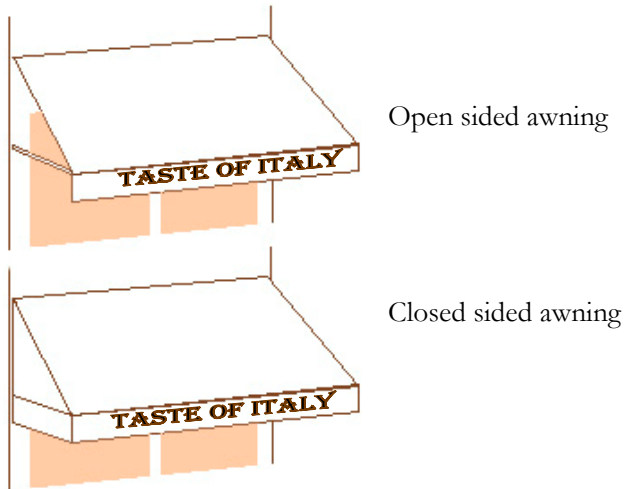
MOUNTING SIGNS AND AWNINGS

Care should be taken in mounting wall signs and awnings to minimize the damage to historic building 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.

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.



The HARB encourages:

- Locating awnings over the full length of the storefront display or individual display windows or entrances
- Fixed or retractable awnings with solid or striped canvas, whose color, style and location are compatible with the building's historic character
- Awnings made of cloth based materials
- Awnings that project approximately three feet from the face of the building in a continuous angle with an eight 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
- Regular maintenance for awnings

The HARB discourages:

- Using 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 such as rounded balloon awnings
- The use of canvas and awning materials for signs
- The installation of awnings at historically inappropriate locations



This awning is appropriately sized and located on this storefront. The awning extends to cover the storefront window and entrance but excludes the upper floor entrance door to the right. The store name is located on the awning valance and the font style is complementary to the type of merchandise offered within.

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. In addition, applicants can consider light colored letters or logos on a dark background which can make their message more prominent.

Color tones: Colors that are complementary to the historic building and environment are encouraged. Bright colors tend to be incompatible with the historic character of the buildings and environment as well as overwhelm the viewer.

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. In general, there are three styles of lettering available, serif, non-serif and script.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMN**OP**QRSTUVWXYZ
 abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Serif Alphabet

ABCDEFGHIJKLMN**OP**QRSTUVWXYZ
 abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Non-Serif Alphabet

*ABCDEFGHIJKLMN**OP**QRSTUVWXYZ*
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Script Alphabet

Within each general style numerous typefaces are 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.



This signs are of a consistent color and design and are all located below the storefront cornice, providing visual continuity.

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, HARB is 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 Phoenixville Borough. It is important to note all sign types might not be appropriate for all buildings.

Signs should not extend above the eave of a sloping roof or the roof line of a flat roof, nor should they obscure distinctive architectural elements or features such as cornices. 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 Office 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 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 an awning (signs may also appear under a storefront cornice)



HARB SIGN AND AWNING REVIEW

The HARB reviews all signs, awnings, mountings, brackets and illumination located at the exterior of a building as well as window signs that are visible from a public way. In its review of signs and awnings, the HARB utilizes *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*; the national standards utilized in all HARB reviews. When reviewing applications, HARB considers the appropriateness of the sign or awning's components of installation and design in relationship to the building and streetscape for which it is proposed. What may be appropriate at one location might not be appropriate at another.

CERTIFICATES OF APPROPRIATENESS

The HARB forwards a recommendation for all reviewed Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications to the Building and Planning Committee and the Board of Commissioners. A minimum of four to six weeks is needed from the submission of a COA application to the issuance of a sign or building permit. This process could take several months if the application is incomplete, the HARB requests modifications or Borough deadlines are not met.

The HARB generally meets monthly. Please confirm meeting dates with the Zoning Officer. Applicants or their representatives are required to attend the HARB meeting to provide clarification. To be added to the agenda, all submission materials must be delivered to the Code Enforcement Office at the Borough Hall a minimum of fourteen (14) days prior to the meeting.

The HARB's COA recommendation becomes an agenda item for the next scheduled Borough Council Meeting, generally held on the second Tuesday of the month, at 7:00 p.m. at Borough Hall. Attendance at this meeting is optional. Applicants do not typically attend the meetings if they find the HARB recommendation acceptable. Similar to the HARB, Borough Council can recommend approval as submitted; approval with conditions; tabling for further consideration or pending additional information; or denial, with recommended changes to result in an approved application.

If the COA is approved by Borough Council, or approved with conditions, the applicant can then obtain a building permit for the approved work from the Code Enforcement Office, provided the application complies with all other Borough codes. The denial of a COA application will result in disapproval of the building permit application. The applicant can appeal Borough Council's decision to the County Court of Common Pleas within the time specified by law.

TIMING FOR REVIEW

Typically, a minimum of six to eight weeks is required from the submission date of the COA application to the issuing of a building permit. Incomplete submissions will extend the application review time period. Including all required materials with a complete application expedites the review process. Contact the Zoning Officer for assistance at (610) 933-8801

APPLICATION SUBMISSION INFORMATION

The HARB must have all required information to review a COA application. If information is incomplete the application may not be forwarded to HARB for review, may be recommended for denial or tabled until all information is received. The following checklist is provided for information purposes only. Please verify submission requirements with the Zoning Officer at Borough Hall at (610) 933-8801.

- 8 collated copies of completed Certificate of Appropriateness Application and all supporting printed information including photographs
- 4"x6" (or larger) color, labeled photographs showing all public views of the property
- Copies of catalog cuts for hangers, posts and finials, and light fixtures (if applicable)
- Scaled drawings indicating:
 - a. façade elevation with proposed sign or awning accurately scaled and located
 - b. dimensioned elevation of sign or awning with letter style, logo and layout
 - c. detail of attachment to building
 - d. detail of illumination (if applicable)
 - e. detail of edge treatment (if exposed)
- Scaled plot plan (for free standing signs)
- Samples of colors and materials to be used
- Any additional information required by the HARB after an initial consultation or review

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The contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the County of Chester, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the County of Chester.

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