

SCHEDULE F
Guidelines for SIGN DESIGN
in the
ESSEX HISTORIC OVERLAY DISTRICT

Where do I go?

Applying for a Sign in the Essex Historic District

All commercial signs within the Historic District are governed by the Town of Essex Zoning Law. Anyone wishing to erect a sign in the District must obtain site plan approval. Applicants must submit a facsimile of the proposed sign for review by the Planning Board. Submission should be a measured drawing indicating proposed color, materials, shape, and design of the proposed sign. The sign application will be evaluated according to the criteria set out in the Zoning Ordinance and this Schedule. Signs that do not conform to zoning requirements will be denied a permit and the applicant must re-apply once necessary changes to the proposal are made.

Guidelines for the placement of Wall Signs:

- Must extend no more than 12 inches from building surface.
- Must not cover second story windows, storefront windows, or obscure any architectural details or features.
- Must not be affixed to any parapet, cornice, or trim.
- Must not extend beyond the roofline or beyond ends of the wall to which it is affixed.

Guidelines for the placement of Projecting Signs:

- Must project no more than 5 feet from building face and extend no closer than 2 feet from the curbline.
- Must not extend into vehicle traffic areas, such as parking lots or driveways.
- Must be at least 10 feet above pedestrian traffic areas at their lowest point.
- The total surface area must not exceed 16 square feet (each side).
- Typically, only one projecting sign is allowed per business. Exceptions can be made where a business has more than one customer entrance or faces onto more than one public right-of-way.

Guidelines for the placement of Window and Door Signs:

- Must not occupy more than 30% of the total area of first floor windows or doors, so as not to obscure interior of retail businesses.
- An overabundance of window and door signs can become distracting, confusing, or redundant. No more than two signs are recommended per window or door, and no more than two per total business.

Guidelines for the placement of Sidewalk Signs:

- Must stand no higher than 4 feet off the ground, and must have a surface area no greater than 12 square feet (per side).
- Must be removed from the street after business hours.
- Must not obstruct pedestrian traffic more than 20% of the width of any pedestrian right of way.
- Wheels on signs are not permitted.

Guidelines for the placement of Free Standing Signs:

- Must not extend beyond property line or into any public right-of-way or be a visual obstruction to motorists or pedestrians.
- Should be placed where they can be easily seen, usually near the sidewalk.
- Should not obscure the building.
- Should not exceed 16 square feet in area (smaller is usually sufficient), or exceed six feet in height.

Guidelines for the placement of Multiple Signs:

- Must meet the same design guidelines as other signs of its type (i.e. wall mounted, projecting, freestanding, etc.)
- Should be placed as close to eye level as possible.

Guidelines for the placement of Temporary Signs:

- Must not impair pedestrian or vehicle traffic or visibility in any way.
- Should not exceed 10 square feet in area.
- Should not obscure views into store.
- Should not obstruct permanent signs.

What should I know about Sign Size?

- Signs must be no more than one square foot of cumulative sign area per lineal foot of building frontage on a public street or alley. For corner lots or buildings with both alley and street frontage, each façade shall be treated separately (i.e., frontages may not be combined). The maximum amount of total sign area allowed per frontage is fifty square feet.
- Signs must not obscure important architectural details or features, such as transform lights, upper story windows, cornice, or trim. Each sign should “fit” gracefully into the architecture of the façade.
- The size of a sign should be guided by the “signable area” on the building façade. All signs should be in proportion to the space on the façade within which they will fit.
- Signs should be coordinated in height and proportion with those on neighboring buildings, to project a unified and harmonious streetscape.

What should I know about Sign Lettering:

- Lettering should be clear and easy to read.
- Be sure that the lettering style chosen is in character with the project or service offered. A poor choice of style can detract from the image of your business.
- The style of lettering should complement the style and period of the building on which they appear. On buildings which feature fine architectural detailing, for instance, lettering should not be big and blocky.
- No more than two different lettering styles should be used on the same sign.
- Leave white space. No more than 60% of the total area of the sign should be occupied by lettering.

What should I know about sign Color:

- Colors used in signs should complement the colors of the building and the style of architecture. Colors should contrast without clashing.
- Generally, no more than three colors should be used on any one sign – one color for the background, one for the lettering, and a third for accents and highlights. More colors can be used if they are part of an illustration.

- As a guideline for choosing colors, the signs in an historic district often have a dark background with light letters. Examples of traditional background colors include burgundy red, forest green, chocolate brown, black, charcoal, and navy blue. Traditional colors for lettering include white, ivory and gold.
- Fluorescent colors are prohibited.

What should I know about Lighting:

- The type of lighting that is most appropriate to historic districts is direct illumination from a shielded light source. Light should be contained within the sign frame and should not spill over into other parts of the building or site.
- No sign shall be illuminated between the hours of 11 pm and 6 am, unless the premises on which it is located is open for business.
- Flashing, fluorescent, or moving lights are not permitted.
- Neon lighting can be accepted if the sign is designed to be compatible with the building's historic and/or architectural character.
- Where possible, light fixtures should be concealed in a cornice, eave, or soffit molding.
- No sign should be illuminated in a way that adversely affects motorists, pedestrians, or neighboring properties.

What should I know about Materials:

- Sign materials should complement the original construction materials and style of the building façade on which it appears. For this reason, wood and metal are generally more appropriate than plastic or vinyl. Internally lit plastic signs are out of context with the period and style of historic buildings and are often the most offensive kinds of signage in historic districts.
- Non-traditional materials, such as gas filled tubes (neon) are not allowed.
- Signs should be attached to a building's façade only in a manner which does not cause permanent damage to historic materials.
- Signs must be kept in good repair at all times.