

Part V: Signs

Part V is intended to improve the pedestrian experience in Downtown Columbia by providing design strategies that support creative, pedestrian-scaled, and appropriately placed signs that relate to the public realm.

Signs

Communicate information in attractive and creative ways that visually enhances the pedestrian experience.

While signs attract the attention of pedestrians and motorists by conveying messaging and information, the cumulative effects of signs create an overall visual aesthetic for the public realm.



Intent

Improve the pedestrian experience in Downtown Columbia by supporting creative, pedestrian-scaled signs.



Freestanding Signs

While wall signs and projecting signs are the preferred sign types for Downtown Columbia, monument and pylon signs are suitable in some locations.

- ▶ Monument signs are allowed in locations where the building includes an entry courtyard set back from the right-of-way at least twenty (20) feet.
- ▶ Pylon signs are limited to street frontages where the entire building is set back at least twenty-five (25) feet from the street right-of-way.
- ▶ On parcels where buildings are set back from the sidewalk by more than ten (10) feet, post signs are also an allowed type sign type. This sign type is most appropriate for the adaptive reuse of structures and mixed office-residential areas to promote cottage businesses, not-for-profit or professional uses, creative arts studios, and similar uses. Suspend the sign panel from one or two wooden or metal posts.

Freestanding Sign Allowances		
Speed Limit of Adjacent Street	Height (Max.)	Area (Max.)
0-25 MPH	4 feet	20 square feet
26-35+ MPH	7 feet	40 square feet

All Signs

Legibility

An effective sign should do more than attract attention; it should be legible to communicate its message.

- ▶ Use contrasting coloring and simple, large typefaces to increase legibility.
- ▶ Limit the number of typefaces to increase legibility.

Materials

- ▶ Use one of the following permitted materials in Downtown Columbia:
 - ▷ Wood (carved, sandblasted, etched, and properly sealed, primed, and painted, or stained);
 - ▷ Metal (formed, etched, cast, engraved, and properly primed and painted or factory coated to protect against corrosion);
 - ▷ High-density pre-formed urethane or similar material;
 - ▷ Custom neon tubing or LED neon tubing, in the form of graphics or lettering, may be incorporated into signs; and
 - ▷ Plastic facing used in channel letters or dimensional signs.
- ▶ Do not use any of the following prohibited materials in Downtown Columbia:
 - ▷ Plastic facing when used in flat panels in cabinet signs;
 - ▷ Paper and cloth (except on awnings and banners); and
 - ▷ Balloons or inflatable material signs.
- ▶ Use cabinet (box construction) and monument signs with opaque, non-internally illuminated face panels. Only individual letters and logos may be back-lit, not the entire surface of the sign.
- ▶ Avoid glossy reflective surfaces for face panels, but plastic for internally illuminated letters (rounded/stenciled/embossed) with an opaque matte background is allowed.
- ▶ Complement the color and architecture of the wall when attaching building-mounted wall signs and/or raceway cabinets.
- ▶ Do not paint directly on brick facades in historic districts. However, historic painted signs may be preserved.

Freestanding Sign Allowances

Where they are allowed, freestanding signs must comply with the height and area limitations in the table to the right.

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Sign Types

Wall Signs

Place signs in a consistent manner with the proportions and scale of the elements within the structure's façade. For example, a particular sign may fit well on a plain wall area but might overpower the finer scale and proportion of a lower storefront. A sign that is appropriate near an entry may look tiny and out of place above the ground level.

- ▶ Locate signs where architectural features or details suggest a location, size, or shape for the sign. The best location for a wall sign continues to be a band or blank area between the first and second floors of a building.
- ▶ Avoid removing or altering permanent architectural features of the building to accommodate signage.
- ▶ Place signs on buildings consistent with sign locations on adjacent buildings. This approach can establish visual continuity among storefronts.

Avoid placing signs above the roof or cornice line of a building.

In pedestrian-oriented areas, relate signs to pedestrians on the sidewalk instead of motorists. In this case, small projecting signs under awnings are most appropriate. Place signs in close proximity to the store entrance.

Window Signs

Do not cover more than 50% of each window with permanent and/or temporary window signs to ensure visual transparency in and out of windows.

Window signs may consist of individual letters, characters, and graphics but may not include solid backgrounds to preserve visibility through the window.



Projecting Signs

Hang projecting signs at a 90° angle from the face of the building. It should be pinned at least six (6) inches away from the wall for optimal visibility and should not project beyond a vertical plane set two (2) feet inside the curb line.

Locate projecting signs at least fifty (50) feet from the nearest projecting sign for maximum visibility.

- ▶ Decorative iron and wood brackets that support projecting signs are encouraged.
- ▶ Harmonize the lines of brackets with the shape of the sign. However, the most important feature of a bracket should be its ability to hold up the sign.
- ▶ Avoid damaging brick and stonework by designing brackets so that they can be bolted into masonry joints when possible.

On a multi-storied building, suspend the sign between the bottom of the second-story windowsills and the top of the doors or windows of the first story. On a one-story building, suspend the top of the sign no higher than the lowest point of the roof.

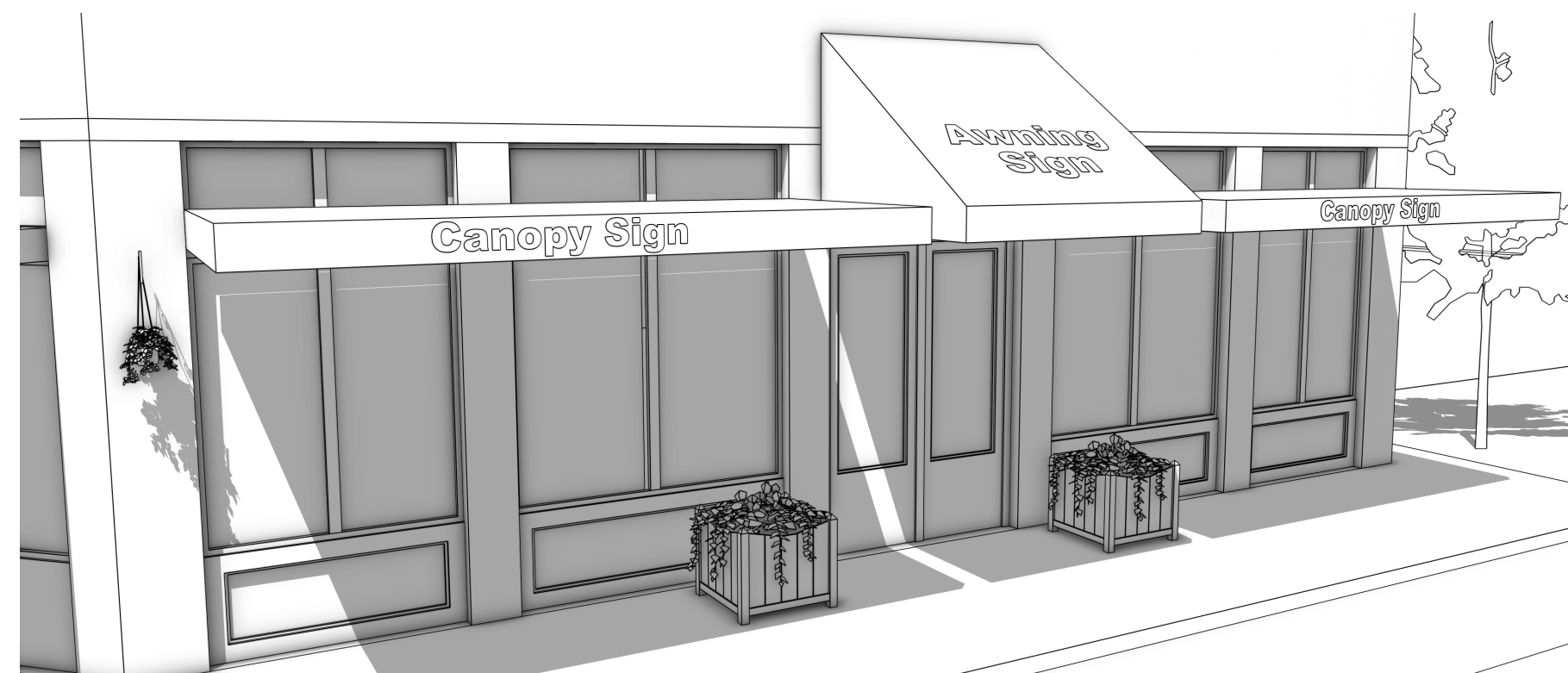
Figurative Signs

Signs shaped like symbols or figures, such as shoes, keys, glasses, books, etc., are encouraged. Figurative signs may be incorporated into any of the allowable sign types identified above.

Awning Signs

Construct awnings with removable fabric, valances, and end panels when initially installed to accommodate future changes in sign copy.

Replace awning fabric when it is faded, frayed, or damaged.



Illumination

The most appropriate type of sign illumination in Downtown Columbia is indirect lighting.

- ▶ Indirect lighting causes a sign to appear better integrated with the facade, not something that was added later.
- ▶ Indirect lighting is also more appropriate for historic districts and produces a more intimate ambiance on the street.

Illuminate signs only to the minimum level required for nighttime readability. The light source in indirect lighting fixtures (LED, fluorescent, or incandescent) requires shielding to prevent glare from spilling over into residential areas and any public right-of-way.

Halo illumination of opaque letters is preferred to internally illuminated channel letter signs. Signs comprised of opaque individually cut letters mounted directly on a structure can often use a distinctive element of the structure's facade as a backdrop that provides better integration of the sign with the structure.

Changeable Copy Signs

Where allowed by Section 17-5.10: Signs, of the Unified Development Ordinance, signs featuring changeable copy that is produced by light emitting diodes (LEDs), incandescent or low-voltage lamps or bulbs, or cathode ray tubes (CRTs), the following additional standards apply:

- ▶ Cabinets or frames for changeable copy signs shall complement the color and architecture of the building for attached signs and shall match the color of the sign support structure for freestanding signs.
- ▶ The background color of the display panel for changeable copy signs must be dark (black is preferred) but may not be white, yellow, orange, green, or red. Lettering may be displayed in lighter colors that contrast with the dark background.
- ▶ Changeable copy signs must include an automatic shut-off that turns off the sign in the event of a malfunction.
- ▶ In the case of a malfunction, a changeable copy sign must be turned off until repaired.