



Signage Guidelines for the Downtown District

Silver City MainStreet encourages downtown businesses to invest in good signage. We often hear that there are no businesses downtown when there are more than 130 businesses downtown! Why do you think there is this perception? One reason is the numerous flat signs on buildings.

Drive or walk along Bullard and Broadway Streets and you'll notice that most of the signs – mounted flush on the fronts of the buildings – are extremely difficult to see from anywhere but directly in front of each shop. That's not good for business.

To improve visibility in these situations, one of the best technologies the signage industry has developed is the "blade" sign.

Hanging signs (Blade signs) are very effective and literally makes your business stand out. Studies have shown they can attract up to 70 percent more views than a traditional wall sign. That's an incredible return on investment! They are among the most effective ways to raise visibility and attract foot traffic to your business.

Blade Signs operate in a similar function as a "way-finding" sign. The sign sticks perpendicularly out from the building – pulling the eye to look at it for navigation. This is beneficial for street traffic to see that your business stands out from the rest luring customers to come inside and see what's "in store."

- Blade signs are particularly popular in downtown shopping areas where there is a lot of foot and street traffic. Blade signs can be designed in various ways, shapes & sizes. Blade signs are typically double sided, and stay consistent with the stores brand identity, look & feel.
- The history of blade signs stems back all the way to the fourteenth century – Blade signs became more elaborate in the 1930s all the way through to the 1960s and have become a cherished vintage part of some older buildings.

DOWNTOWN SIGNAGE DESIGN GUIDELINES

Signage: What does it do?

For businesses and especially for retail stores, the most cost-effective, efficient, and readily-available form of advertising to potential customers is the on premise sign. In fact, the business sign is the basic link to customers in 98% of all United States retail transactions (totaling \$3trillion annually), and is essential both in impulse shopping and in the development of repeat customers for the good, product, or service. It is, in a sense, the broadest of all the communication forms. As with many forms of commercial speech, whether verbal or visual, sign use is site specific and an essential business strategy component.

No amount of money spent in other forms of communication media will equal the investment of the well-designed and optimally visible on premise sign. Surveys of new businesses show that the on premise business sign either (1) provided the new customer with their first knowledge of the company or (2) provided the new customer with their first impression of the company.

Why guidelines for downtown signage?

If everyone "shouts," will anyone be heard? Such is the case when either several oversized signs or many smaller signs compete for the public's attention. A better idea is for everyone to "speak" at the same moderate level while not trying to provide too much information at once. Too many signs are sized to be viewed from distant autos while others are cluttered with messages other than the name of the business. The combined effect is a mishmash of attempted communication.

Other common downtown sign problems include the use of cheap materials, using banners for signs, sloppy workmanship, poor selection of typefaces, garish colors, interior illumination, and placement and sizing that bear no relation to the building's architecture.

Signboards (Fascia Signs):

This is a common type of signage that has historical tradition in most downtowns and usually consists of a painted, wooden board that is mounted onto the façade. Fascia signs should be placed above transom and display windows and in many instances can be designed to fit within the signboard area that exists on many older buildings. Such signs are usually proportioned to be longer than they are high.

If business turnover is a problem fascia signs can be easily removed.

- Generally lettering should be 8 to 18 inches high and occupy no more than 65% of the signboard.



Here is an example of a signboard in a color that complements the storefront and a typeface that enlivens the sign.

Painted Signs:

Painted signs, traditionally used on many downtown buildings, can be very effective as well as visually pleasing. The best such signs use contrasting lettering, appropriate business or graphical styles, and a placement that fits nicely on the building. Many older signs have become local icons. Even if the business that they served is long gone, such signs should be kept in place.

- Signs should not be painted directly on unpainted brick. In such cases, fascia signs (signboards) are recommended.

In some cases, signs can be painted directly onto the façade. This photo shows a contemporary sign and the one above is of an historic sign.



Window Signs:

Signs may also be placed on the display windows of a business. Here they are most visible to pedestrians and they may include secondary information that is not appropriate for the main business sign. Original window signs were of gold leaf applied to the interior of large window panes.

- Signs should not consume more than one-third of the glazed area of the window.



Business signs can also be painted directly onto the storefront windows. They can also be made of vinyl and be easily removed if the business changes.

Hanging (Blade) Signs:

These project out over the sidewalk and are most effective for attracting pedestrian traffic. These signs were commonly used in the nineteenth century and were usually placed to complement window or painted signs.

- Hanging signs must be no greater than twelve (12) square feet and have a maximum width of three (3) feet.
- Signs cannot extend beyond the first floor of the building.
- No less than ten (10) feet of clearance be provided between the sidewalk elevation and the lowest point of the hanging sign.
- Maximum distance between the sign and the building face is one (1) foot.



Well-designed hanging signs add character to the street and are usually used with other signage. Blade signs invite you down the street to see what that shop is!

Historic Signs:

Neon signs of the early twentieth century are rare and often one-of-a-kind pieces. Those that are well designed and that have stood the test of time should be protected.

Faded wall signs, often called “ghost signs,” are found in many downtowns. Typically painted in styles and typefaces that are no longer common, these signs preserve advertising slogans, symbols, logos, and other visual reminders of the past. They should be preserved as they are.



Historic signs have a place in downtown even if they do not meet current design standards. Historic signs are relatively rare and should be refurbished and protected if possible.

Ghost Signs are reminders of past places, people and businesses in downtown. Resist the urge to freshen up or clean up such signs.



Other Types of Signs:

Awning signs typically have business names and addresses on the valance or skirt of the awning and sometimes on the awning side panels.

Individually mounted letters saw a rise in popularity during the 1920s and 1930s. Shadows bring three-dimensionality to a façade during the daylight hours and can be illuminated from behind (but not within) after dark.



Individually mounted metal letters offer an alternative to painted signboards and hanging signs.



A-Frame signage is permitted on sidewalks in the downtown. An example of an A-frame sign used to promote a business.

GUIDELINES for SIGNAGE:

- Signs should be viewed as part of an overall graphics system for the building. The building's form, name and outstanding features, both decorative and functional, also support the advertising function of the sign. **Signs should work with the building, rather than against it.**
- Sign placement is important. Signs should not obscure or damage historic architectural features. Signs above a storefront should fit within the historic signboard, for example
- New signs should respect the size, scale and design of the building. Often features or details of the building will suggest a motif for new signs. They should also respect neighboring buildings and not shadow or overpower adjacent structures.
- Projecting and hanging signs are encouraged but should be limited in size.
- Lighting for externally illuminated signs should be simple and unobtrusive.
- Use traditional materials commonly found on turn-of-the-century commercial buildings such as wood, metal, or stone. As an alternative, use modern materials that have a traditional appearance.
- Signs can be painted directly on the inside of display windows. Gold leaf is an effective material for such signs.
- Wall-mounted signs on above storefront windows should be of an appropriate size and fit cleanly within the surface area above the windows/door. The space between the lintel (a horizontal beam that supports the weight of the building above an opening such as windows or doors) and the bottom of second-floor windows is also a good location for these signs in most cases, but do not make the sign larger than necessary.
- Sign colors should complement the color of the building. Light color letters on a dark background are easiest to read.
- New signs should be attached to the building carefully, both to prevent damage to historic materials, and to ensure the safety of pedestrians. Fittings should penetrate mortar joints rather than brick and sign loads should be properly calculated and distributed.
- Utilize the services of a sign maker whose work you admire. A sign is a material investment that will become a primary indicator of your business to the community. Make certain the end result is a quality product installed in a professional and secure manner.
- It is often desirable to keep certain old signs in place because they have artistic appeal or are pieces of the community's history. Examples include business signs and advertisements painted onto building walls (typically on side walls), many old neon signs, masonry signs (often found on cornices), and business signs crafted in terrazzo at store entrances.
- Be sure to check with the Town of Silver City's Community Development Department if you have any questions about your signage. Phone them at 575-534-6348.



More Examples of Signage

A trifecta of good signage.

- Painted sign
- Hanging sign
- Window sign

A very good example of making a business welcoming.



Hanging signs in Silverton, CO

Inviting residents and tourists to come down the street to shop.
No guessing what is down the street.

What is down the street on the right?

Who knows! There are no signs to invite you to explore.

Good signage:

- #1 helps residents see your business
- #2 helps tourists see your business
- #3 is one of your best advertising investments!

