



# TOWN OF RYE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION Guidelines for Signage

## SIGNAGE

Both commercial and institutional buildings share the need for signage and accessibility. A well-designed and well-placed sign or awning can make a good impression, attract potential customers and unify a streetscape.

By contrast, a clutter of multiple signs, or a confused, poorly designed or poorly placed sign or awning can overwhelm buildings and potential customers, detract from the area and the company's message, and present a disorganized business impression.

New signs can enhance both the character of the building and convey the necessary information to the public. The location of the sign or awning on the historic building should be a primary consideration. During the design process, applicants should select a size, shape, material, and color to complement the building's character and convey their business' message.

## Types of Signs in Rye

Historically, there are two types of signs; those that are attached to the building and those that are freestanding and placed near buildings. New signs can use similar features of traditional signs to both enhance the character of the building and convey the necessary information to the public.

The choice between attached or freestanding signs may be based upon the property's specific location, needs of the occupant, and limitations in the Zoning Ordinance. The following illustrations are intended to provide general examples of sign types that can be found at historic properties and within a historic context.

These *Guidelines* were developed in conjunction with the Town of Rye's Historic District Commission (HDC). Please review this information during the early stages of planning a project. Familiarity with this material can assist in moving a project forward -saving both time and money. The Building Department is available for informal meetings with potential applicants who are considering improvements to their properties.

*Guidelines* and application information are available at the Rye Town Hall and on the Commission's website at [www.town.rye.nh.us/historic-district-commission](http://www.town.rye.nh.us/historic-district-commission). For more information, to clarify whether a proposed project requires HDC review, or to obtain permit applications, please call the Building Department at (603) 964-9800.



*Wall signs should be proportional and fit their location. Lighting, such as these gooseneck lights, should be directed towards the wall sign.*

**Wall Signs** are single sided signs mounted parallel to and generally flat against a wall of the building. Wall signs can have information displayed on a board or by mounting individual letters directly on the wall surface..



*Wall signs should be proportional and fit their location. Lighting, such as these gooseneck lights, should be directed towards the wall sign.*

*Freestanding signs are mounted to a post, in this case granite, set in the landscape. The formal lettering style and gold leaf suggests the building's prominence.*

*Light fixtures, if incorporated, should be minimally visible and light should be directed towards the sign surface.*



**Freestanding Signs** are not attached to the building. They are most appropriate when a building is set back from the street, and often reflect the building's style. They can include information on one or two sides, mounted on the ground or suspended from a rail or bracket that is supported by one or two posts that are set in paving or landscape areas.

## Sign Material

Early signs were typically 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 materials included bronze, cast iron, stainless steel, etched or painted glass, leaded glass, gold leaf, tile, terrazzo, concrete, stone and enamel and metal panels. Each material was popular during particular time periods, and might not be appropriate at all building locations.

To maintain the historic character of Rye, signs should be made of wood, painted in a manner that is compatible with the building and conveys the message of the building or institution.



*Awnings can provide shelter for pedestrians and protect merchandise from the sun's rays.*

## Awnings

Awnings are a historically popular means of sheltering pedestrians, advertising a business, and protecting window merchandise from sun damage, particularly for storefronts oriented to the south or west. 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 be fixed or retractable in configuration. Retractable awnings tend to be open sided, while fixed awnings can be either open or close-sided.

Awnings that include text, logos, graphics or designs are considered to be signs that are subject to the applicable Zoning Ordinance requirements. By contrast, plain cloth awnings are not signs, but are still subject to HDC review.

### Information for New Businesses

Building Department representatives are available to discuss zoning, construction and other requirements applicable to starting a new business. Please contact them at (603) 964-5523 for more information.

## Sign and Awning Guide

### *The HDC encourages:*

- Installing wood signs that reflect the architectural characteristics with materials that are consistent with the historic character of the building and scaled for the location
- Installing signs that are clearly legible and in a color that is complimentary to the building
- Utilizing existing ambient street light or storefront lighting in lieu of sign lighting whenever possible
- Installing lights that are compatible with the building character including location, orientation, and brightness
- Installing compatible canvas fixed or retractable awnings, whose shape, color, style and location are compatible with the building and the associated openings
- Awnings whose slope projects down approximately 3-feet from the face of the building in a continuous angle of approximately 45-degrees, possibly with an 8- to 12-inch straight or scalloped valance
- Limiting lettering and logos to awning valances

### *The HDC discourages:*

- Installing signs or awnings that obscure architectural features, or fasteners and hangers that destroy important building fabric for the installation of signs or awnings
- Paper signs or graphic films adhered to the exterior of glazing or any signage that obstructs views through storefront windows and glazing
- Installing contemporary awning shapes, such as balloon or barrel awnings
- Installing awning materials that act as wall signs

### *The HDC strongly discourages:*

- Removing, damaging, altering or encasing historic architectural features with signage or awnings
- Installing exposed conduit, junction boxes, and raceways for signage or lighting
- Installing new billboards, internally illuminated box signs, LED reader boards, flashing or changeable message signage
- Installing neon signs at the interior or exterior of a building that are highly visible from the street
- Installing awnings in locations where they are non-functional, such as under a balcony or overhang
- Installing contemporary or glossy awning materials such as vinyl, plastics or leatherette, internally illuminated awnings or awnings with a solid or closed underside

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