

DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES PLANNING DIVISION

DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR SIGNS

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A. INTRODUCTION

Well-designed signs can add to the attractiveness of an area, while signage that is cluttered or overbearing detracts from the beauty of the streetscape. Signs also serve as a symbol for businesses and can help merchants build a positive business image. The intent of these guidelines is to encourage signage that helps maintain the positive image of the area enjoyed by the residents and businesses of Menlo Park. Every Menlo Park business is encouraged to post an attractive sign stating the name of the business. The sign should be at a scale appropriate to the pedestrian and vehicular streetscape and the nature of the business.

It is important to remember that these guidelines must be used in conjunction with the Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Ordinance contains precise rules with respect to size and types of signs. These guidelines address visual and design issues that are not found in the Zoning Ordinance.

B. GENERAL CRITERIA

1. Signs should be integrated to the facade of the building, and their design should be consistent with the building architecture in terms of style, materials, colors, proportions, etc.
2. Signs should be proportionate to the size of the building and the size of the site. The size of signs should also be compatible with other signs in the surrounding area.
3. Sign dimensions as specified in the Zoning Ordinance are maximum dimensions. In reviewing sign applications for consistency with these guidelines, the outcome may result in signs that are smaller than the maximum permitted by the Zoning Ordinance.
4. Use of individual letters and symbols are encouraged rather than cabinet or box signs (existing cabinet signs may be refaced but not enlarged). In general, lettering between 8 inches and 18 inches is considered acceptable. Lettering larger than 24 inches may be considered for buildings with large setbacks from the street.

B. GENERAL CRITERIA (cont'd.)

5. Signs lit with an external source are recommended over internally lit signs. External light sources should not be visible and should be concealed in shrubbery or in decorative structures. Another acceptable method of illumination is a “halo” type sign, which uses solid letters with a light source behind them, illuminating the wall around the letters. If internally illuminated signs must be used, illumination of letters and graphics is preferred over the illumination of the background. In all cases, lighting should not cause glare on surrounding streets or property nor distract from the surrounding environment.
6. Awning signs are allowed. Graphics on awnings should be confined to vertical surfaces.
7. Colors, materials, and design of the sign should be compatible and harmonious with the colors, materials, and design of the building and the surrounding area. Signs using the bright colors listed below shall require Planning Commission review and approval, unless such colors comprise 25 percent or less of the sign area, in which case the signs can be approved at an administrative level. The use of techniques such as creating borders around signs containing bright colors can be useful in making the color more compatible and harmonious with the surrounding neighborhood. The following colors are considered bright colors for purposes of determining the level of review required (using the Pantone Matching System [PMS]):
 - Yellow: Process Yellow, 102, 108, 109, 116, 123, 395, 396, 3955, 3965, 803
 - Orange: Process Orange, 136, 137, 1375, 151, 1575, 1585, 165, 1655, 804
 - Red: Process Red, 171, 172, 178, Warm Red, 179, 1788, 1795, 185, 186, 192, 199, 200, 206, 213, Rubine Red, 226, 485, 805, 806
8. Existing businesses with corporate logos containing bright red, orange, or yellow colors exceeding the intensities and percentages outlined in B.7, above, may be replaced and upgraded subject to an administrative review, provided that the total square footage of such signs does not increase, and provided the signs maintain approximately the same percentage and shade of bright colors.
9. Building signs should be mounted flush against a building, and may not project above the eave of the roof or the top of a parapet.
10. Sign text should avoid needless repetition.
11. Each business or tenant should be limited to one building-mounted sign on each street frontage of a parcel. In addition, each business is allowed one suspended or blade sign to be placed under awnings or canopies. These blade signs can be up to three (3) square feet in size, and are not counted toward the maximum square footage of signage allowed for each parcel. Blade signs shall have a minimum clearance of eight (8) feet above the ground.
12. Exposed-tube neon signs are not encouraged.

C. MULTI-TENANT BUILDINGS

1. A coordinated sign program should be prepared for properties with more than one tenant. A sign program consists of a detailed plan in written and graphic form that outlines the size, type, number, location, lighting, color, etc. of all signs within the development.
2. Signage for the complex should be coordinated with respect to sign type, letter style, color, and placement on the building facade.
3. For multi-tenant buildings, the concept of fair sharing will be used in determining the sign area for each tenant. Fair sharing allows the maximum sign area to be proportionately allocated to each tenant according to the building frontage of each tenant space.

D. FREESTANDING SIGNS

1. Freestanding signs should either be monument style or housed in an appropriate frame. However, monument signs are preferred. New pole mounted signs are not encouraged.
2. Freestanding signs should include the name and address of the project as the primary component of the sign face. Only tenants that occupy a minimum of 25% of the total gross leasable area of the property qualify for space on a freestanding sign. No more than one freestanding sign should be placed on each street frontage of a development parcel.
3. Freestanding signs should not exceed 8 feet in height. Taller freestanding signs may be permitted if necessary due to sight visibility issues.
4. The materials used in the construction of the sign frame and base should be the same as the materials and colors used in the building, or should be complementary to the building materials and colors.

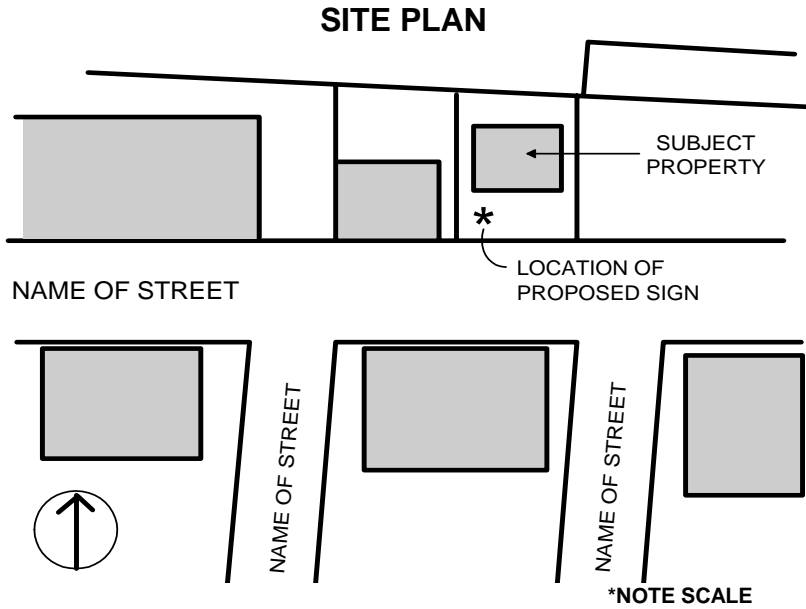
E. DIRECTIONS FOR SUBMITTAL

1. The Sign/Awning Application form is to be completed by the applicant. A fee is required for Sign/Awning Applications (please refer to the current Planning Division fee schedule).
2. The completed application form must be signed by both the applicant and the property owner and submitted with detailed plans (see illustrations below), including a sample of color and/or materials. Incomplete applications will not be accepted. Applications submitted with insufficient or wrong information may result in a delay of the review process.

3. Signs on Buildings, Free-Standing Signs, Awnings, and Awning Signs

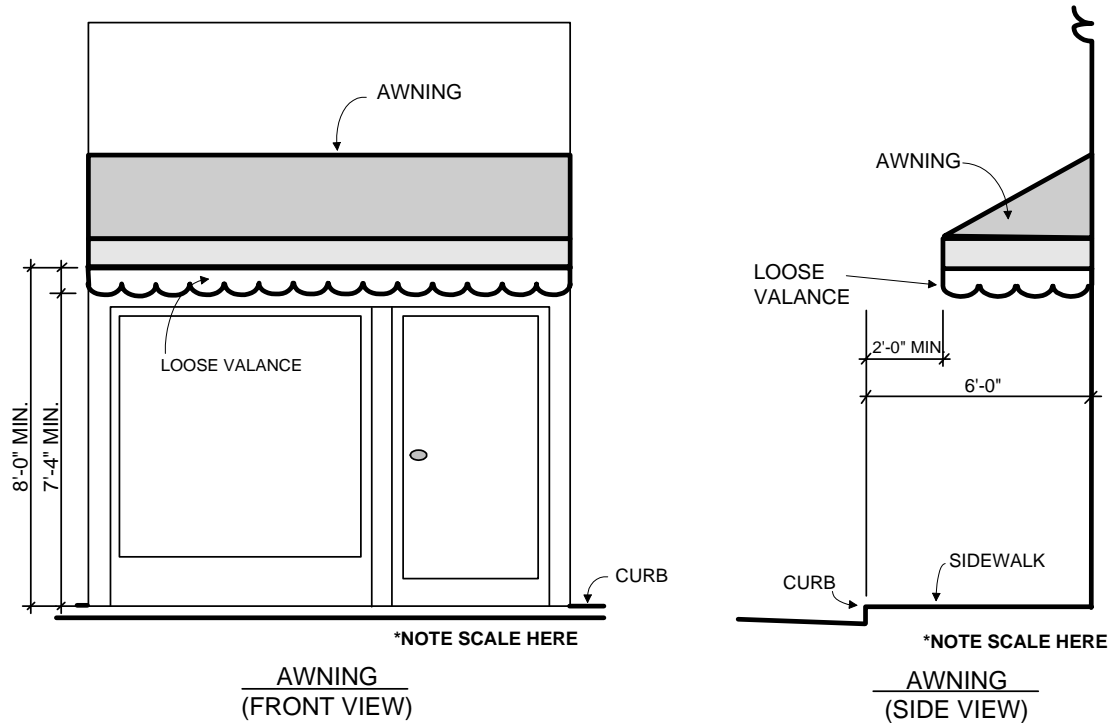
Three (3) sets of 11”x 17” plans are required for all sign/awning applications. The plans shall include the following information:

- a) Site Plan: A site plan drawn to scale showing all property lines, existing buildings, and the exact location of the proposed sign/awning (see example below).



- b) Elevation Drawing: An elevation drawing drawn to scale, indicating the size, text, colors, and materials to be used, shall also be included in the application. The applicant shall also indicate if the sign/awning is to be illuminated and show the exact location and design of the light fixtures drawn to scale (see examples below).

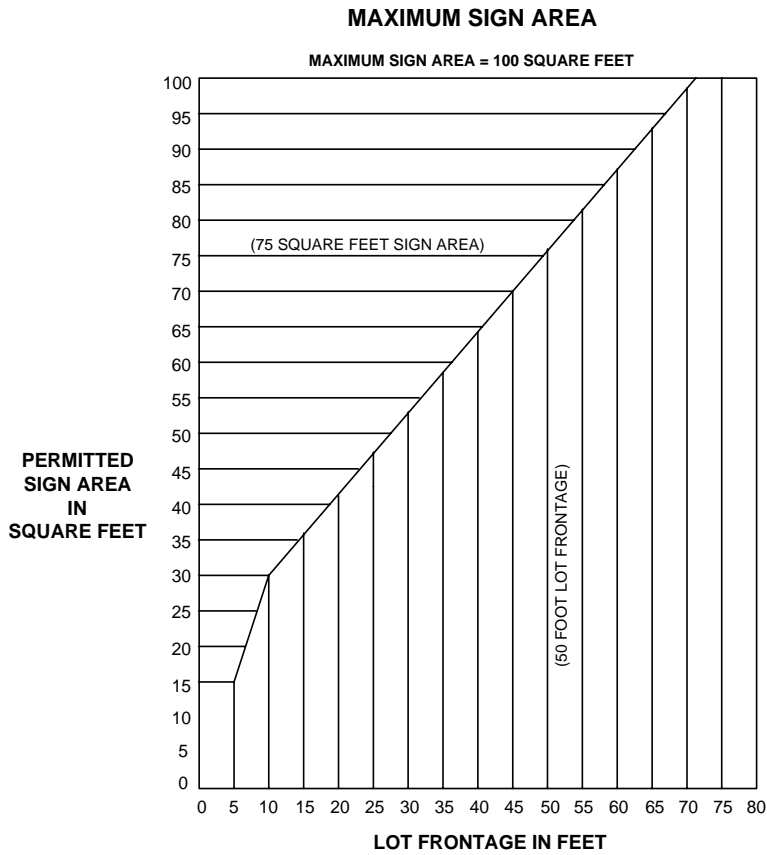
AWNINGS



- c) Photographs: As part of the application, the applicant should submit photographs of all facades of the building where new signage/awning is proposed. For free-standing signs, submit a photograph of the site showing the location of the proposed sign in the foreground. Please identify the address of the property in the photograph and any directional information (i.e., eastern elevation, view from parking plaza, etc.).

F. SIGN RESTRICTIONS

1. All signs require approval by the Director of Community Development or his/her designee and a building permit. Changes to existing signs require Planning Division staff approval.
2. Signs are subject to size restrictions that vary according to the frontage of the lot (see chart below).



EXAMPLE: If a store is situated on a lot that has a frontage of 45 feet, then that store is allowed to have a maximum sign area of 70 square feet.

- With lots having more than one tenant, the concept of “Fair Sharing” shall apply in determining the sign areas for each tenant. “Fair Sharing” allows the maximum sign area to be proportionately allocated to each tenant according to the building frontage of each tenant space.

EXAMPLE: Building X is located on a lot that has a frontage of 100 feet. Based on the chart above, this building could have up to 100 square feet of signage. Tenants A, B, and C occupy Building X. The building frontage of each tenant space is: Tenant A - 40 ft.; Tenant B - 25 ft.; and Tenant C - 25 ft. The total frontage of Building X is 90 feet. The maximum sign area allowed for each tenant is as follows:

$$\frac{40 \text{ ft. Tenant Space A}}{90 \text{ ft. Building Frontage}} = 44\% \text{ (\% of Building Frontage)}$$

$$44\% \text{ (\% of Building Frontage)} \times 100 \text{ ft.} = \text{Maximum Allowable Sign Area}$$

The Maximum Sign Area allowed for Tenant A is 44 square feet.

The same calculation is used to determine the maximum sign area allowed for Tenants B and C:

	Building Frontage	Maximum Sign Area Allowed
Tenant A	40 ft.	44 sq.ft.
Tenant B	25 ft.	28 sq.ft.
Tenant C	25 ft.	28 sq.ft.
Building X	90 ft.	100 sq.ft.

4. For complete sign regulations, please refer to the Zoning Ordinance Chapter 16.92 - Signs.

G. AWNING AND AWNING SIGN REGULATIONS

1. All awnings require approval by the Director of Community Development or his/her designee, as well as a building permit. Changes to existing awnings require Planning Division staff approval.
2. The total area of vertical panels will be considered as sign area if containing text or message of any kind. If text appears on any other portion of the awning, then the total awning area may be considered as sign area.
3. The awning shall be no closer than 2 feet from the face of the curb.
4. The awning shall not project more than 10 feet from the face of the building.
5. The awning support must be at least 8 feet above the sidewalk; the bottom edge of the loose valance must be at least 7 feet 4 inches above the sidewalk.
6. The Engineering Division must review and approve the location of the awning in relation to traffic signals, street signs, etc.

H. PERMIT ISSUANCE

Note: It is strongly recommended that all permits be secured prior to ordering or fabricating the signs/awnings.

1. Sign/Awning permits are issued administratively.
2. Administrative actions are effective after ten (10) business days, unless the action is appealed to the Planning Commission.
3. Appeals from the decision of the Director of Community Development or his/her designee shall be made in writing to the Planning Commission within ten (10) business days of the date of the decision being made public.
4. After receiving approval from the Director of Community Development or his/her designee, a Building Permit must be obtained prior to installation of the sign/awning. Please consult the Building Division for the current fees.

I. EXEMPT SIGNS

The following types of signage are exempt from regulations and not counted toward the maximum square footage of signage allowed for commercial properties as outlined in Section 16.92.110 of the City of Menlo Park Zoning Ordinance:

1. Interior signs. Signs located in the interior of a building or in an enclosed lobby or court of any building or group of buildings, and not visible from any public right-of-way. Such signs must be a minimum of one (1) foot from any outside display windows.
2. Public notices and warnings. Notices posted by a public officer in the performance of a public duty, or by any person for the purpose of giving legal notice, and warning and informational signs required or authorized by governmental regulations and required to be visible to the public right-of-way.
3. Miscellaneous informational signs. Informational signs not to exceed three (3) square feet in area, and not advertising the business in question, such as credit card signs, community membership and business affiliation signs, and help wanted signs.

The following types of signage are not counted toward the maximum square footage of signage allowed for commercial properties as outlined in Section 16.92.110 of the City of Menlo Park Zoning Ordinance. For the following categories of exempt signs (subsections 4-6), a maximum of up to 20% of any individual window area is allowed, with a maximum cap of six (6) square feet of exempt signs in any single window and a total of twelve (12) square feet of exempt signs per business, unless otherwise restricted below. Any additional square footage of such signs would require a Temporary Sign Permit as outlined in Section K of these Guidelines:

4. Community activity signs. A sign associated with religious, charitable, cultural, civic, or educational organizations that promote an event. Such signs shall be removed no more than 10 days after the event. Such signs shall not be illuminated, and shall be limited to no more than eight (8) such signs per business at any one time, subject to the square footage caps above.
5. Seasonal decorations. Holiday greetings, decorations, and displays, such as those that relate to Christmas, Thanksgiving, Fourth of July, and the like, excluding advertising signs that are incorporated in seasonal decorations. Season decorations shall be installed no more than 45 days before the event, and removed no more than 14 days after the event.
6. Temporary window signs. Advertising signs placed inside windows and intended for exterior display. This signage shall conform to all other applicable regulations in these Guidelines, and shall not be illuminated. Any given temporary sign shall not be displayed for longer than 120 days per calendar year, and/or more than 60 continuous calendar days per year.

J. PROHIBITED SIGNS

The following types of signage are specifically prohibited in the City of Menlo Park unless expressly exempted by these Guidelines.

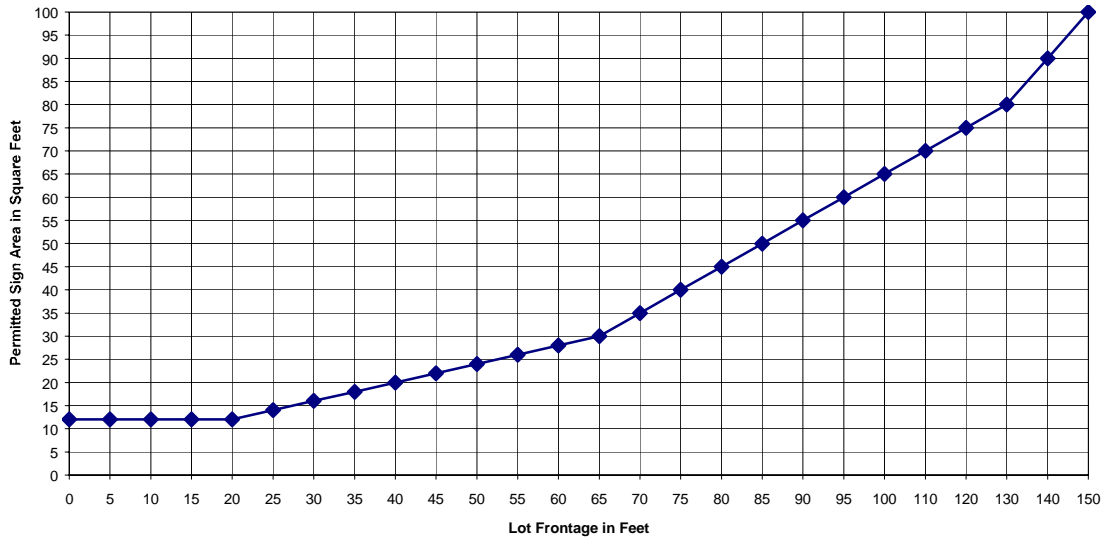
1. Signs in the public right-of-way, except for special event signs permitted by the City, such as the annual Connoisseur's Market.
2. Off-premise advertising.
3. Any advertising sign affixed or attached to any vehicle or trailer, unless the vehicle or trailer is intended to be used in its normal business capacity and not for the primary purpose of advertising a use or event or attracting persons to a place of business.
4. Roof signs and sky signs extending above the roof line, such as balloons, kites, and similar devices, except as permitted with a special events permit.
5. Reflective, flashing, or moving signs, except for public service time and temperature signs, which shall not be flashing, animated, or revolving in nature.
6. Streamers, flares, flags, pennants, twirlers, and similar attention-getting devices, unless approved with a temporary sign permit, with the exception of one national, state, and local governmental flag properly displayed upon a single flagpole.
7. Portable signs, particularly "A"-frame signs, with the exception of real estate signs on residential properties.
8. Any excessively bright sign when its brightness is detrimental to the reasonable enjoyment of surrounding property or is a traffic hazard.

K. TEMPORARY SIGN PERMITS

A temporary sign is a device, such as a window sign or display banner, that is designed or intended to be displayed for limited periods of time. Notwithstanding the exempt and prohibited signs listed under Sections I and J of these Guidelines, temporary signs are permitted subject to obtaining a Temporary Sign Permit from the Community Development Department. Generally, a Temporary Sign Permit may be obtained over the phone or on a walk-in basis. Restrictions for temporary signs are as follows:

1. Approved temporary signs are to be on display for a period of no more than 30 consecutive calendar days, and for no more than 60 days each calendar year.
2. Signs must be completely attached to the building tenant space and shall not extend above any roof line.
3. Temporary signs requiring temporary sign permits (i.e., excluding the up to twelve (12) square feet of temporary window signs listed as item [6] under Section I, Exempt Signs) are subject to size restrictions that vary according to the frontage of the lot (see chart below). These sign dimensions are maximum dimensions. In reviewing temporary signs for consistency with these guidelines, the outcome may result in signs that are smaller than the maximum permitted by the chart below:

MAXIMUM SIGN AREA FOR TEMPORARY SIGNS
MAXIMUM SIGN AREA = 100 SQUARE FEET



Should you have any questions regarding sign/awning applications, please contact the Planning Division at (650) 330-6702.

Adopted by the Planning Commission in March, 1996
Revised by the Planning Commission in July, 1999
Revised by the City Council in November, 2003