

SIGN APPROVAL GUIDELINES

MEDFORD DOWNTOWN HISTORIC PRESERVATION OVERLAY DISTRICT



No. 23, Design for a Board Panel
from Atkinson's *Sign Painting Up to Now*, 1915

Landmarks and Historic Preservation Commission
Medford, Oregon

DECEMBER 2007

The following guidelines have been adopted by the City of Medford Landmarks and Historic Preservation Commission to guide evaluation of sign installation in the downtown commercial core. These guidelines delineate discretionary approval for quality, historically-based, and historically-compatible, sign design that supports and enhances the downtown's character. Compliance with these guidelines allows the Commission an alternative approval process that grants applicants greater flexibility in sign design and character than is otherwise available under Article VI of the Medford Municipal Ordinance.

1. PURPOSE & INTENT:

Medford's downtown commercial district is the heart of the community and plays an important social, cultural, and economic role in defining the city's character. Since the listing of Downtown on the National Register of Historic Places as a district, the City, in partnership with local business and property owners, has sought to improve the economic vitality of the area by emphasizing the restoration and rehabilitation of historic buildings in a manner that respects their architectural character. As more projects undertake major façade improvements relying upon historic design to revitalize and enhance that history, the interest in retaining or re-establishing portions of Medford's historic signscape identified the potential conflict with certain portions of the City's sign regulation process. As a result, these alternative guidelines were developed to allow the Medford Landmarks and Historic Preservation Commission some flexibility in sign regulation, provided that such proposed signage clearly supports and enhances the city's other goals for Downtown revitalization.

2. AREA OF APPLICABILITY:

The following guidelines apply with the "Downtown" commercial historic district of the Medford Historic Preservation Overlay as defined by the Medford Municipal Ordinance and shown on the following map. This area is roughly bounded by Oakdale, Eighth, Bear Creek and Fourth streets.

3. LEGAL AUTHORITY:

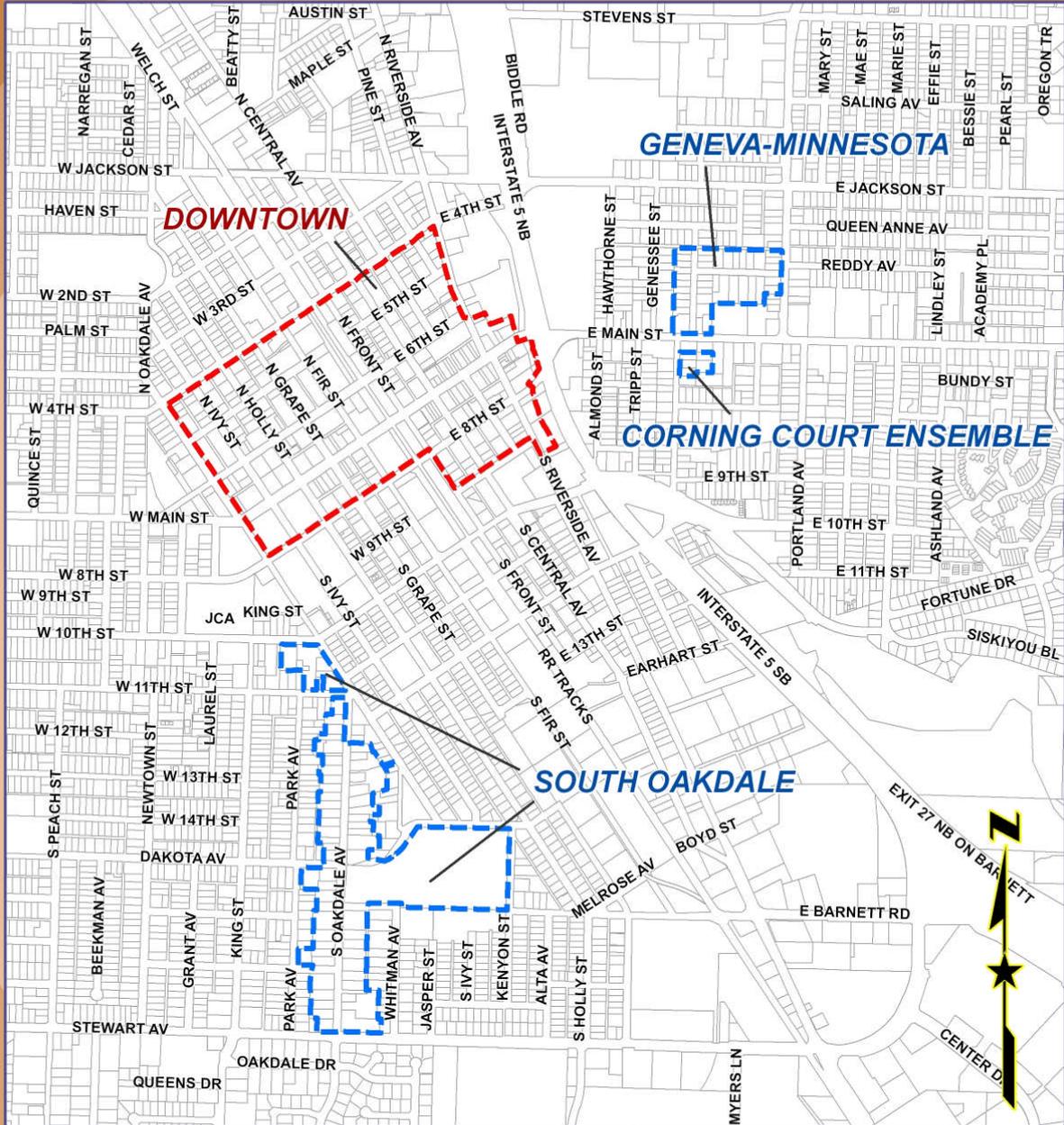
Section 10.136 of the Municipal Ordinance enumerates the powers and duties of the Landmarks and Historic Preservation Commission, including 10.136(2)e, that recognizes the Commission's authority:

To adopt approval criteria and/or design guidelines for signage within the Historic Preservation Overlay. Such criteria or design guidelines may authorize signs that differ from the standards of Article VI when necessary to meet historic compatibility and preservation goals.

Article VI 10.1022(11) specifically extends the Commission's authority to allow for specific approval criteria for signage within Historic Preservation Overlay districts:

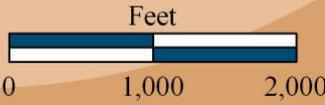
... Such signs may differ from specific standards of Article VI if authorized by the Landmarks and Historic Preservation Commission pursuant to design criteria and/or guidelines for signs adopted by such Commissions.

MEDFORD HISTORIC DISTRICTS



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	Commercial Historic District
	Residential Historic District
	Taxlots



Map produced on 9.20.07



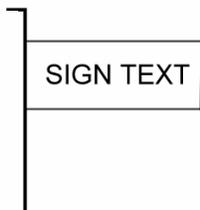
4. APPLICATION PROCESS:

All applications processed under these guidelines are subject to the standard submittal requirements associated with sign review permits per Article VI, 10.1020 et seq. In addition, all applications for discretionary review under these approval guidelines must also submit the following as part of a complete application.

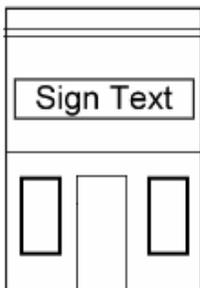
- 1) Historic images of the subject property area (when available) that document previous sign installation or design.
- 2) Scale renderings or mock-up/computer generated images of the site showing the proposed sign to scale, in context.
- 3) Narrative statement requesting review under these guidelines and waiver from provisions of Article VI of the Municipal Ordinance. Application must specify exactly what waivers are requested, the justification for each such request, and the relative scale of the waiver (for example, an applicant might request a sign that is 50% larger in area than typically permitted under Article VI, justified by the documented scale of a pre-existing sign).
- 4) A signed statement acknowledging the discretionary nature of these approval guidelines and the Medford Landmarks and Historic Preservation Commission's final authority in all matters relative to determining compliance with these guidelines.

5. DEFINITIONS: SIGN TYPES AND TERMINOLOGY:

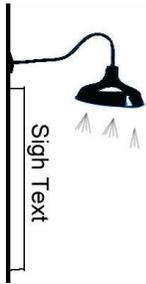
The following list of terms covers sign illumination and mounting forms, as well as other sign-specific terms as used in these guidelines.



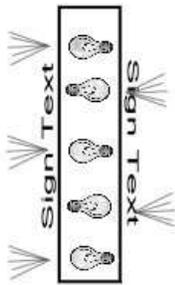
BLADE: A form of projecting sign in which the sign face is horizontally oriented and extends out from the building face into the air space above the public right of way.



FAÇADE: Mounted directly on a building exterior surface, parallel to the public right of way (also termed "Wall Signs"). Façade signs are built features, as distinct from Wall Graphics, painted directly on the building exterior.



INDIRECTLY ILLUMINATED: Method of illuminating a painted or other sign form without any inherent illumination. Indirectly illumination often relies upon gooseneck-type lighting, as shown at left.



INTERNALLY ILLUMINATED: Method of illumination in which neon, fluorescent or incandescent light sources are placed within a semi-transparent ‘can’ and shine through sign panels, typically made of plastic. Internally illuminated signs became popular in the 1960s and later and are generally inconsistent with downtown Medford’s historic character.

GOOSENECK: Projecting metal conduit used to hold lighting that shines back toward a building or sign face. (see light standard in Indirectly Illuminated, above)

LEGACY SIGNAGE: Signage related to a structure but not to the present occupancy or use. Legacy signage includes extant signage, portions of which may or not be visible but can be documented by historic photographs, and may also include accurately reconstructed or entirely repainted signage based upon such documentation, provided that such signage is not representative of the current occupancy. Legacy signage may be painted or constructed, as in a blade, pylon, or rooftop sign. Painted wall graphics, including accurately replicated/re-painted wall graphics related to on or off-site content, are treated as Legacy Signage provided they exactly duplicate an earlier sign on the subject property.



“Legacy Sign” examples, showing pre-existing on and off-site signage in different forms

MARKER BLOCK: An integrated building element, usually at parapet level, that identifies a building by name and, typically, date of construction. Marker blocks are generally not considered “signs” for area calculation.

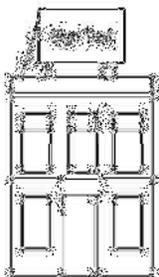
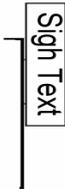
NEON: Multi-colored tube-form light source created by electrically charged gases, a traditional form of sign lighting. Neon can be in “exposed” tubes, where tubing is visible atop the sign can, “formed letters” in cans or exposed, or indirect, where tubes illuminate painted or other surfaces.

ON-SITE: Signage located at the same location as a business, including almost all historic signage in the downtown core area.

OFF-SITE: Signage advertising products or services sold elsewhere than the sign location. Typical off-site signage includes painted wall graphics for national or regional products painted on buildings occupied by businesses primarily offering other goods or services.

PROJECTING: Mounted at an angle (typically, but not always 90-degrees) from a building exterior and projecting away from the wall. (See *Pylon* and *Blade*, both of which are additionally referred to as “projecting” signs)

PYLON: A form of projecting sign in which the sign face is vertically oriented. Pylon signs may, but do not necessarily, extend above the building roof line. Some pylon signs, typically associated with Art Deco and Art Moderne architecture, are integral elements of a building.



ROOF SIGN: Mounted atop a building roof, typically on a metal structural frame, and visible from the public right-of-way (also called a SKY sign).

WALL GRAPHIC: PAINTED directly on a building exterior. Wall graphics include *all types* of painted materials including signs, murals, artwork, commercial and non-commercial speech.



6. MEDFORD'S SIGN HISTORY

Founded in 1883 in anticipation of the arrival of the railroad to Jackson County, Medford's commercial district initially developed along Main and Front streets, surrounding the railroad depot. Early wood frame businesses, most with painted wood signs, were replaced by more elaborate and substantial brick volumes as the town prospered. Throughout the late 19th century signage remained fairly simple, with non-illuminated painted projecting or façade-mounted signs and wall graphics.



Central, Looking South toward Main, 1910
G. Kramer Postcard Collection

In the early years of the 20th century, after the construction of the valley's first electric plant at Gold Ray Dam, small incandescent lamps were used to illuminate signage. What was among the first truly electrified signs in Medford was installed in 1911, atop the Mail Tribune Building. "Its blazing white lights are visible miles away...letters two feet in length and 156 tungsten lights make it night bright" (*Medford Mail Tribune*, 1-Jun-1911). Other signage of the day (prior to WWI) consisted of projecting and pylon type signs, most of painted wood or metal. Exposed building walls were still frequently used for wall graphics, announcing both on- and off-site uses.

There is no record of the first neon sign in Medford but it almost certainly arrived in the late-1920s or early 1930s, a few years after the first neon sign in the United States literally caused a traffic jamb in Los Angeles with its vibrant 'orange' tube lettering. Medford's earliest neon signs were probably manufactured in larger cities and shipped here but it did not take long before the Neon-Ad Company,

operated by “Wild” Bill Catlett, became Medford’s first neon sign shop, bending tubing and sheet metal for small scale early neon displays.¹ Joined later by area branches of larger national firms such as Federal Sign or Electrical Products Corporation, Catlett’s business expanded greatly after the arrival of Ralph and E. J. Ellis, formerly of Los Angeles. The Ellis’ later started Medford Neon Sign Inc. and soon became the major sign manufacturer in the Southern Oregon/Northern California region. They would remain so well into the 1960s, spawning most of the area’s other sign shops as Medford Neon employees would leave to start their own businesses. Several of the region’s largest shops today, including Blaze Signs of America and SignsETC, trace their roots to the Ellis’ company.

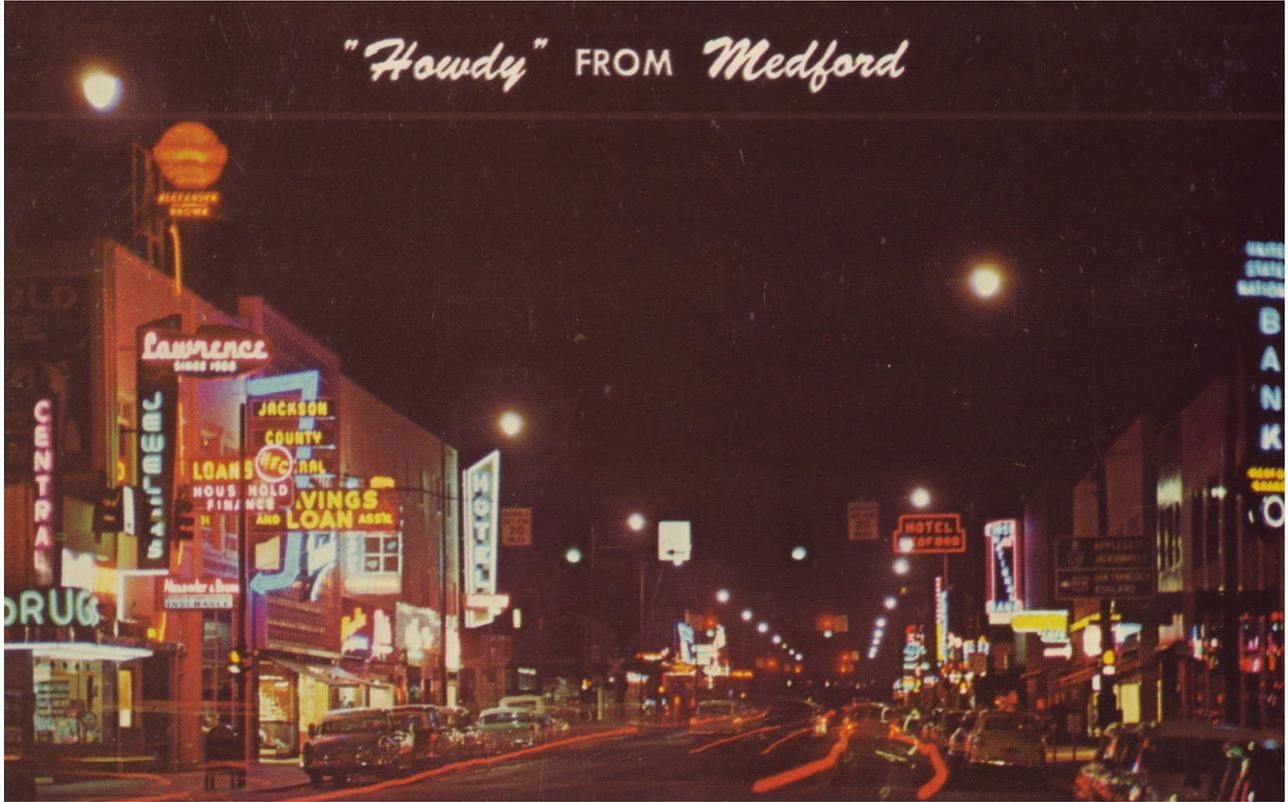
Photos of downtown Medford in the late-1930s and 1940s document a varied and exuberant signscape, with multiple forms extending over the public right-of-way and vying for consumers attention. Neon predominated, as the primary form of the era, and night shots of Main Street during this period and into the 1950s and 1960s document the city’s colorful sign displays of the era. Signs, especially neon, were an important part of downtown Medford through much of its 20th century history.



Central, Looking North toward Main, c1940
G. Kramer Postcard Collection

¹ Until recent years two Catlett designed signs remained in Medford, both advertising long-time bars — The Spot and the Beau Club.

By the late 1960s neon signage began to fall out of favor, as locally owned businesses were often replaced by tenants that chose to minimize their investment in sign displays. New sign technologies, most notably internally illuminated signs with florescent light sources and vacuum-formed plastic faces, became increasingly popular.



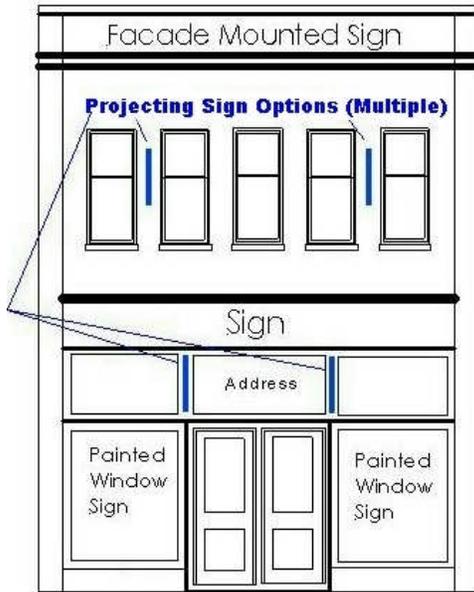
Main and Central at Night, Looking West, circa 1958
G. Kramer Postcard Collection

In the mid-1980s, as community opinions about signage changed, Medford adopted regulations that established limits on sign size and quantity for the first time. That trend, coupled with the growth of national and regional chains that sought standardized advertising programs and the closure of many local stores in the face of increased competition, all resulted in the loss of much of Medford's earlier, locally-designed, sign displays. As interest in downtown's historic architecture has risen, recognition and appreciation for the role that signage played in creating downtown's vibrant and active character during that period resulted in the adoption of these alternative design guidelines.

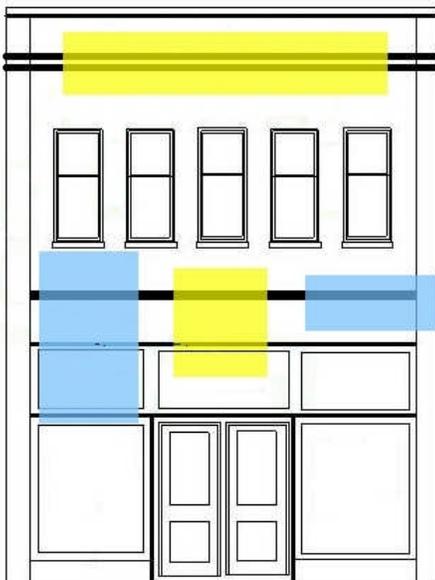
7. HISTORICALLY APPROPRIATE SIGN DESIGN:

All signage applying for approval under these guidelines will be reviewed for compliance with the following design criteria.

A) Placement: Signage shall be installed in appropriate “sign areas” as defined by the existing architecture of the façade. [See following graphic for *examples* of appropriate sign areas.]



Appropriate Sign Placement Options that respect the architectural scale of the façade by fitting entirely within horizontal and vertical elements. Pylon signs may extend above the parapet (top) of the building.



Inappropriate Sign Placement Options that ignore the architectural scale of the façade and cross or obscure horizontal and vertical elements

- 1) No sign shall be placed or located so as to obscure or cover a vertical architectural element such as a column or pilaster.
- 2) Signage will fit entirely within horizontal divisions to the extent feasible.
- 3) Where no architectural divisions exist or are evident, signage will be proportionately scaled to the façade and placed to respect window and door openings.
- 4) No sign shall cover the entire width of any façade.

B) Material: Sign materials shall be consistent with the traditional character of the Historic Preservation Overlay Zone. Appropriate materials are:

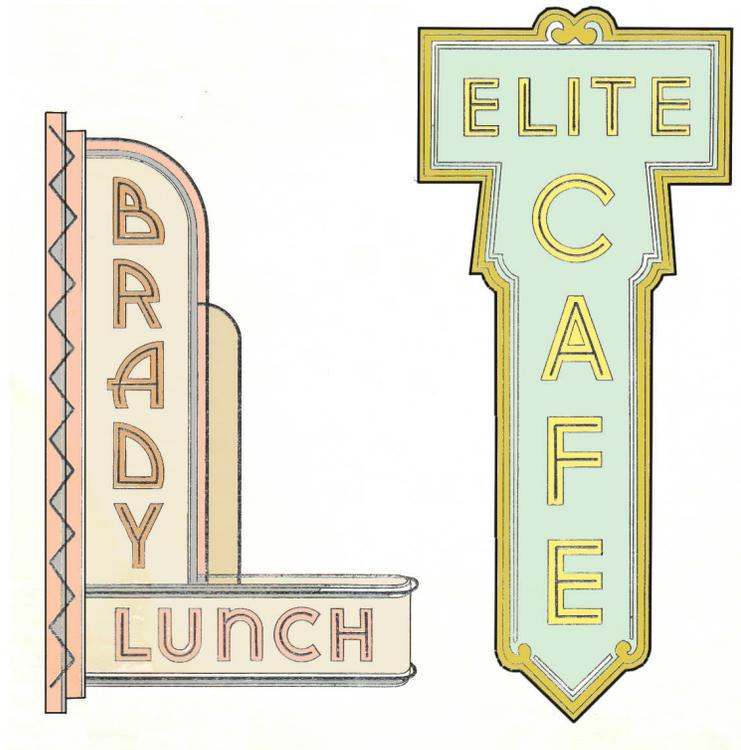
- Metal (Iron, Steel, brass, copper, aluminum and other natural finishes)
- Painted metal, including powder-coated or enameled metals.
- Wood (painted or natural, including carved or sand-blasted lettering)
- Vinyl or other sheet claddings (for backing panels or cut lettering only)
- Glass
- Fiberglass, high-density urethane foam, and similar “cast” or formed materials to create 3-dimensional objects, including individual lettering.
- Painted Graphics: All wall graphics (as distinct from Legacy Signage) are treated and regulated under Article VI.

C) Illumination: Signs may be illuminated or non-illuminated. Illuminated signage shall use lighting forms consistent with the traditional character of the Historic Preservation Overlay Zone, including:

- Exposed neon tubing
- Exposed incandescent bulbs
- Indirect illumination (gooseneck type)
- Signs utilizing mixed illumination types such as neon and exposed incandescent bulbs subject to other provisions of these guidelines, are strongly encouraged.

- Internally illuminated signage is not traditional or subject to approval under these guidelines.

D) Shapes: Signage in the Downtown Central area is encouraged to employ complex shapes rather than simple rectangles, circles, or squares. Signs utilizing mixed mounting types or multiple forms, subject to other provisions of these guidelines, are strongly encouraged. *Sample* “Complex” Sign shapes are shown below.



8. REVIEW CRITERIA

A. APPROVAL REQUIREMENTS

No application under these guidelines will be approved unless it meets all of the following:

1. The proposed design is based upon or substantially duplicates a sign design that was historically located at the subject tax lot or building in shape, scale, method of illumination, materials and other general visual character.
2. The proposed design meets the applicable design guidelines of these guidelines (Section 7).
3. The proposed design will enhance and support the historic character of the Historic Preservation Overlay.
4. The proposed design meets all applicable elements of the building code as determined by the Medford Building Department.

B. ALTERNATE APPROVAL GUIDELINES:

The following provisions of Article VI governing sign installations are subject to discretionary waiver by the Landmarks and Historic Preservation Commission where such waiver is determined to meet the goals of Medford Municipal Ordinance 10.401 and Section 1 of these guidelines. Some provisions, as stated below, are subject to limited waiver only.

10.1120 Abandoned Signs:

10.1120 (1) This provision will be waived if the Commission determines the sign is historically significant.

1. Upon application and approval by the Commission, Legacy Signage related to a previous on- or off-site use of the property may remain in place and be excluded from any sign area or quantity calculations. For example the area of a painted wall graphic will not be included in a square foot allotment based upon building linear frontage (Example: Fluhrer Bakery sign facing North Ivy Street).
2. Documented wall graphics formerly associated with the specific site may be repainted and excluded from area calculations as Legacy Signage, provided:
 - A) Such signs are identically and accurately re-created as they existed historically at the subject tax lot, building or site, and
 - B) Such signs can be documented physically or photographically with sufficient clarity to determine original content, and
 - C) The accurate replication of such signage will contribute to the character of the Historic Preservation Overlay.

3. Previously existing wall-graphics modified in *any* manner from their historically documented character are not subject to waiver as abandoned signs. Such historically-based but modified signage, as well as any proposed new wall graphic, may apply for waiver as new sign installations under 10.1600, below.

10.1600 Central Business Overlay (CB) Basic Regulations:

10.1600(2) Wall Signs

Principal Façade (a):

1. Aggregate area of all signs may exceed the allowable area as defined by the one and one-half square feet per linear foot of business frontage calculation. There is no fixed maximum area allowed. Aggregate area is only limited by the Commission's determination of appropriate scale and relationship to the building's architectural character, historic character, and determined compatibility.
2. Portions of a sign may exceed the height of the building as defined in Section 10.1010, limited to no more than 25% of the total building height or forty-eight (48) inches, whichever is the lesser. Such signs are subject to adequate structural support as per the Building Official.

10.1600(2) Wall Signs

Secondary Façade (b):

1. Aggregate area of all signs may exceed the allowable area as defined by the two square feet per linear foot of business frontage calculation. Aggregate area is only limited by the Commission's determination of appropriate scale and relationship to the building's architectural and historic character.
2. Secondary wall signs may be placed flat or project from the building supporting the sign.
3. Portions of a sign may exceed the height of the building as defined in Section 10.1010, limited to no more than 25% of the total building height or forty-eight (48) inches, whichever is the lesser. Such signs are subject to adequate structural support as per the Building Official.

10.1600(3) Projecting Signs

1. Projecting Signs may exceed 20 square feet in area. Area is only limited by the Commission's determination of appropriate scale and relationship to the building's architectural and historic character. (Note, projecting signs, by definition, include vertically oriented signs or pylons. In such case the standard restriction on height may additionally be waived as the allowance of 10.1600 (2)a, above).

10.1100 Prohibited Signs for All Districts:

10.1600(8) Roof-top or Sky Signs

1. Upon application and approval by the Commission, roof-top or sky signage may be installed, waiving the requirements of 10.1100(8), subject to the following
 - A) Except where substantially based upon a historically documented rooftop or sky sign at the subject location, no rooftop or sky sign shall have any element that exceeds a maximum height of fifteen (15) feet above the existing parapet height, being the highest point of the exterior wall on the subject building elevation.
 - B) Except where substantially based upon a historically documented rooftop or sky sign at the subject location, no roof top or sky sign shall exceed a total 150 square feet in area.
 - C) All roof top or sky signs shall be mounted on a support structure and meet all applicable code requirements as determined by the Building Official.

10.1600(9) Other Signs Not Listed

1. Upon application and approval by the Commission, other sign types may be installed, waiving the requirements of 10.1100(9), provided such signage can be demonstrated as historically associated with the subject location and otherwise meets the goals and intents of these guidelines.