

SIGN GUIDELINES

Signs are important because they identify buildings and businesses, provide essential information, and attract customers. They can provide a unique business identity and add visual interest when placed appropriately on a building. Signs should be compatible with the architectural character of the building on which they are placed and with the surrounding historic district. A careful balance must be reached between the need to call attention to individual businesses and the appearance of the district as a whole. The presence of too many signs that are not well designed can result in visual clutter and detract from the district. Whether signs enhance or detract from a building or district depends on their design, placement, size, number and condition. Factors such as size, color, type face, content, lighting, and choice of materials should all be considered carefully.

All signs must be in compliance with the regulations set forth in the local zoning ordinance. Check these regulations first to determine what is permitted. The following are recommended guidelines for the design and placement of signs in the Blacksburg Historic District.

TYPES OF SIGNS

- **Window Signs** are painted on or applied to window or door glazing.
- **Wall Signs or Attached Signs** are panels or individual letters mounted to the wall or frieze of the storefront cornice.
- **Awning or Canopy Signs** are painted, printed, sewn, or attached onto the valence or slope of the awning or canopy.
- **Projecting Signs** are mounted perpendicular to the face of the building and are generally double-sided.
- **Suspended Signs** are mounted parallel or perpendicular to the face of the building and are generally double-sided.
- **Freestanding Monument Signs** are mounted on the ground, to posts, or other supports and placed in front of buildings that are set back from the street. They are typically appropriate in the front yard of a residence that has been converted for commercial or office use.
- **Portable Signs**, such as sandwich boards, can be easily moved from one location to another.
- **Temporary Signs**, such as banners, are typically fabric of some type and suspended from the building wall.
- **Murals** are considered signage if they include a message; otherwise, they are considered public art.



SIGN PLACEMENT & ATTACHMENT

- Place signs in a manner that is complementary, or subordinate to, the architecture of the building.
- Locate signs on flat, unadorned areas, such as horizontal sign bands, existing signboards, or vertical piers.
- Place signs at or below the storefront cornice for a ground level business.
- Attach signs in a manner that will not obstruct or damage any character-defining features, which include, but are not limited to: a storefront or building cornice, decorative or patterned masonry, or window and door trim.
- Minimize the number of sign attachments to the building.
- Attach signs in mortar joints rather than drilling holes in brick, stone or concrete walls.
- Use attractive supports and hardware to mount signs, particularly projecting signs.
- Where appropriate, take advantage of the locations of former signs to minimize additional impact on the building by attaching new signs.
- Position portable signs so that they do not interfere with pedestrians or traffic sight lines at intersections.

NUMBER AND SIZE

- Limit the number of signs on windows to reduce clutter.
- Choose one location for the main sign and perhaps one additional location for a secondary sign.
- Sign size should be proportional to the element on which it is placed.
- Size the lettering and graphics of window signs to be clearly legible but not block views into or from display windows.
- Limit the size of transom signs to avoid blocking light to the interior or obscuring the transom glazing.
- Use signs that are pedestrian oriented and of a scale comfortable for a walking customer.



Use attractive supports and hardware to mount projecting signs



Window signs should not obscure the storefront



Logo signs are appropriate in the historic district

MATERIALS

- Use appropriate materials for new signs that complement the style and materials of the historic building.
- Use traditional sign materials (wood, glass, metal) or newer products that have the same visual characteristics as traditional sign materials.
- Finish edges of sign to provide character and durability.
- Avoid shiny plastic products, including internally-lit, plastic box signs.



Use appropriate sign materials, such as wood or metal

COLOR

- Use colors that complement the building, including accent and trim colors.
- A maximum of three colors is recommended per sign, although more may be appropriate in some cases.
- Use colors that relate to the overall color scheme of the building.
- Use light or neutral colors on window signs—such as white or gold—that are easy to read.
- Minimize solid painted background behind window lettering as it reduces storefront transparency.



A directory sign at the main entrance can be used to identify all tenants

SIGNS FOR MULTI-TENANT BUILDINGS

- Submit a comprehensive sign plan for multi-tenant buildings.
- Place a sign that identifies the entire building, rather than individual tenants, in a central location or at the main entrance.
- Place signs for individual stores or offices near their entrances or storefronts.
- Use one wall-mounted directory sign at the primary entrance to collectively identify all occupants if there are several businesses in one location with a common entrance.
- Locate a small projecting or wall-mounted sign adjacent to the entry door for an upper story business.

SIGNS IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS

- Signs on historically-residential buildings should be a size that is appropriate for the residential character of the building and the surrounding residential neighborhood. Wall signs, projecting signs, and freestanding monument (or ground) signs may be appropriate.
- Use freestanding monument signs for buildings that are set back from the street.
- Integrate freestanding monument signs into the yard and streetscape by using plantings around the base.
- Attach projecting signs from the porch entablature, parallel to the front of the building, or from a bracket or porch column, perpendicular to the face of the building.
- Locate wall signs adjacent to the front entrance.
- Use traditional sign materials (wood or metal) or newer products that have the same visual characteristics as traditional sign materials.



Freestanding ground signs are appropriate in residential areas for houses converted to commercial use

ILLUMINATION

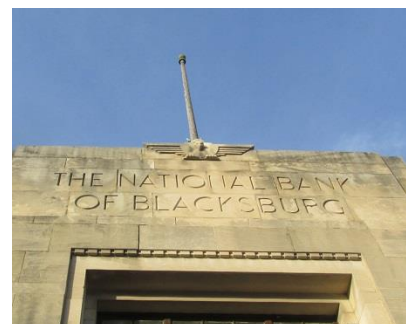
- Choose simple lighting fixtures that complement the architecture of the building.
- Illuminate signs indirectly with a shielded light source.
- Install the fixtures and associated wiring inconspicuously to avoid detracting from the appearance of the building and without obscuring or damaging character-defining features and historic materials.
- Avoid internally illuminated translucent signs and electronic message board signs.



Sign illuminated indirectly with shielded light source

SIGN MAINTENANCE

- Keep signs maintained, properly attached to the building and painted.
- Remove signs that are not properly maintained.
- Remove signs of a business no longer occupying a building or storefront unless historically significant.



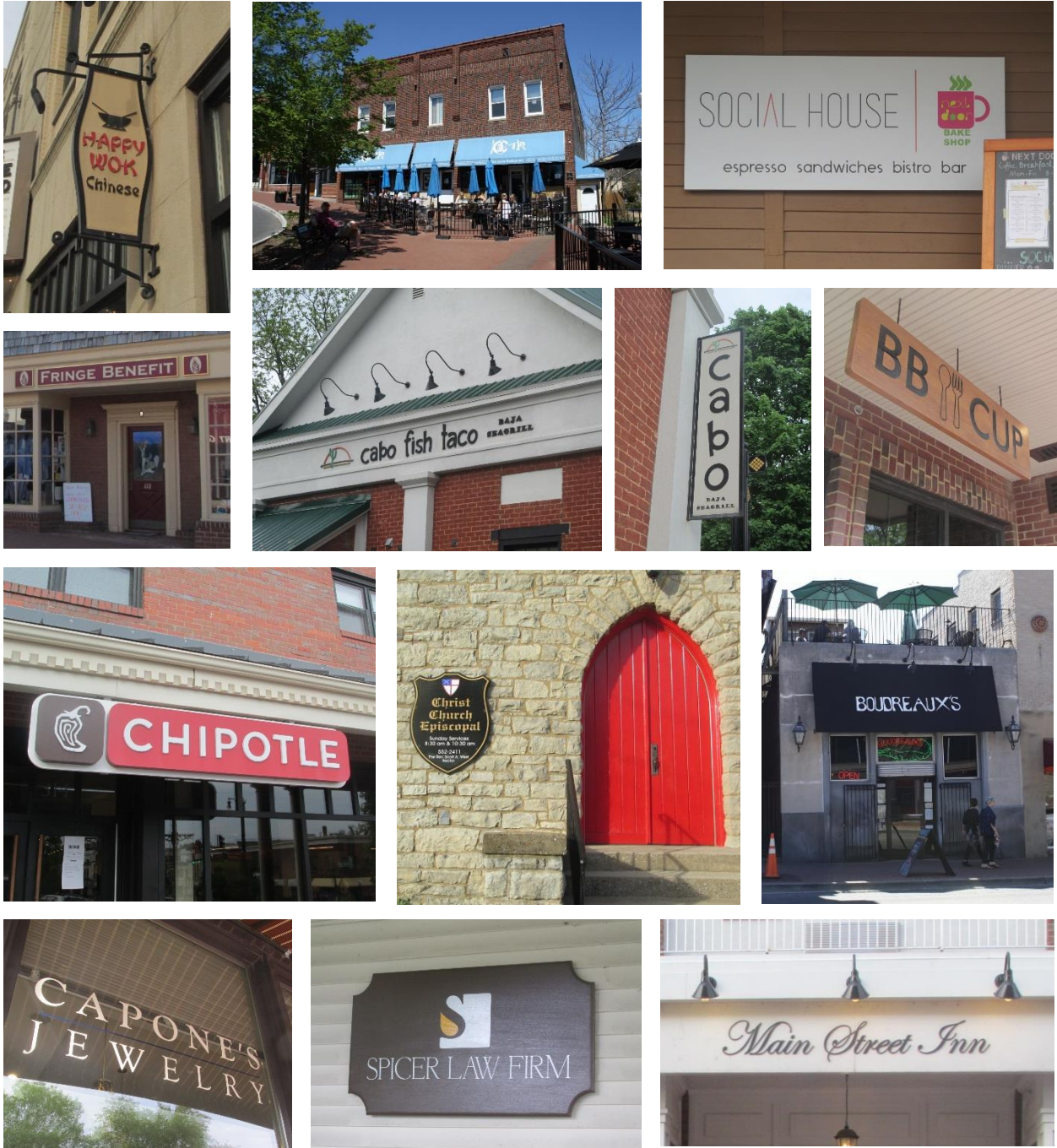
Historic signs that relate to the historic name of the building should be retained

MURALS

- Murals are appropriate in the historic district only if they previously existed on a wall or are located on a non-primary elevation with no design features. New murals should be compatible with district character.
- Avoid painting new murals on previously unpainted brick walls. Once a brick wall is painted, it is difficult to remove the paint without damaging the brick.
- Seal or prepare the masonry to minimize damage to brick when mural is removed.
- Utilize new techniques, such as attaching fabric mural material with heat adhesive.
- Maintain murals frequently to retain their message and aesthetic quality.
- Note that if murals contain a message, they are considered signs and must comply with the current sign ordinance.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Avoid painting signs directly on unpainted masonry walls.
- Keep the sign message simple, easy to read, and in scale with the building and elements on which it is placed.
- Retain historic signs that relate to the historic name of the building or signs that have acquired cultural significance over time. Historic signs may require special restoration and may need to be serviced by professionals. Historic signs can include painted wall signs, neon signs, and signs that identify the original name of owner or building, and/or construction date.



Examples of appropriate sign types in the Blacksburg Historic District.