

## Signs

Signs are a vital part of any downtown area, providing businesses with advertising and identity. Appropriate signs also contribute to the overall image of Downtown St. Charles. Because they are such a visible storefront element, signs must be designed, selected and utilized appropriately so as not to detract from the facade. With a little forethought and careful planning, signs can fulfill the business owner's needs and enhance the image of Downtown St. Charles.

### Placement and Number

Each storefront should be limited to two signs—one primary and one secondary. The primary sign should be located on the building facade above storefront display windows, but below the sills of second floor windows. Turn-of-the-century buildings often used a continuous brick ledge, or corbelling, to separate the storefront from the upper stories. This space is ideal for sign placement, as it often was created for this purpose.

The secondary sign can be a small hanging sign that identifies the business for the pedestrian, or a sign painted on a door or display window. This sign generally is oriented toward pedestrians. A sign in a window should not obscure the display area and should occupy no more than 25 percent of the glass area.

Signs or lettering on awnings or canopies may be appropriate as primary or secondary signs. If used for signage, awnings and canopies should follow the design guidelines found in the "Awnings & Canopies" section. Lettering can be painted or sewn on to the valance. In most cases, 6- to 8-inch letters are sufficient.

**"The City of St. Charles has ordinances that control the size, height and placement of signs.**

**"Before investing money in a sign, determine whether it will comply with the applicable requirements and restrictions. A City permit is required prior to installation for most types of signs."**



*Photo © courtesy of Stapleton Photography.*

THE SIGN'S STYLE, SIZE AND LETTERING SHOULD COMPLEMENT A BUSINESS'S PRODUCT OR SERVICE.

### **Size**

Big does not necessarily mean powerful. Signs should be visually integrated with the storefront to produce a consistent and unified statement about the business within. A sign that overpowers the storefront does not communicate a positive image to the customer. Signs should always be in scale with their surroundings. Actual size may vary, but in general, a wall-mounted sign or sign board should be no more than 2 1/2 feet high and should not extend across more than 3/4 of the building. Lettering should be 8- to 18-inches high and occupy between 50 and 65 percent of the sign board.

### **Lettering and Graphics**

There are hundreds of lettering types available from sign contractors and designers. The building owner should select a style that expresses the business message and is compatible with the building and Downtown St. Charles. Decorative, serif and sans serif styles can all be used in the downtown area but should be selected for compatibility with the type of business and type of building.

In most cases, signs should be limited to a maximum of three colors, two materials and one lettering style. Use available information about the colors, materials, lettering style and placement of the original signs on the building when designing new ones. Sign colors should complement the building colors.

Wooden signs with raised letters, metal signs, painted signs and neon and gold leaf are all appropriate downtown, though not for every building.

Nationally distributed or mass produced signs should be avoided; they typically do not express the character of Downtown St. Charles or its unique businesses.

## **Content**

Signs should express an easy-to-read, direct message: "Keep it simple." Wording should be minimal, limited to the name of the business and, if necessary, a word or two that expresses its character. Simple wording is easily read by pedestrians and motorists without creating a distraction.

## **Sign Lighting**

Illuminated signs may be appropriate downtown if they respect the proportions of the storefront and the other sign design guidelines. Use lighting that provides a true color rendition. The light source should be designed as part of the sign or hidden from view. Exposed lights that produce glare are unpleasant for customers and neighbors. Electrical fixtures, conduits and wires should be concealed. Exposed neon letters can be effective, adding color and vitality to the street, if appropriate to the architecture of the building.

## **Sign Design and Construction Services**

Choose a professional sign maker carefully. Quality of workmanship and construction is as vital as quality of design. Ask the contractor where you can see examples of previous work.

## **City Ordinance Requirements**

In addition to these design guidelines, the City of St. Charles has ordinances that control the size, height and placement of signs. Before investing money in a sign, determine whether it will comply with the applicable requirements and restrictions. A permit is required prior to installation for most types of signs.

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