SAN FRANCISCO
PLANNING
DEPARTMENT

Design Standards for **Signage & Awnings**

in the Kearny-Mason-Market-Sutter Conservation District

HISTORIC PRESERVATION DESIGN STANDARDS

SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT | DRAFT JUNE 2009







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INTRODUCTION

The Kearny-Market-Mason-Sutter (KMMS) Conservation District makes up one of the most important commercial centers for visitors and residents in San Francisco. While most sign requirements are located within Article 6 of the Planning Code, all proposed signs and awnings for any building that is identified as significant or contributory (Categories I - IV), or any building located within any Article 11 Conservation District is subject to additional review pursuant to Section 1111.7 of the Planning Code. The following standards are meant to supplement any relevant sections of Article 11 in order to provide additional guidance for tenants, property owners, and the general public for the installation of signage within the Kearney-Mason-Market-Sutter (KMMS) Conservation District. While there are sign guidelines for other districts in San Francisco, these will be the first to serve the KMMS Conservation District. In order to facilitate approval, these standards may be used as a guide for other similar Conservation Districts where no specific information is given within Sections 6 and 7 of the applicable Conservation District Appendices for signage in that district.

The KMMS is one of the city's most vibrant shopping areas and tourist attractions, and the purpose of these standards is to protect and enhance the character of the district by encouraging signage that allows tenants to successfully convey their image, that compliments the public realm, and that respects the character-defining features of the district.

The Planning Department acknowledges that nationwide retailers prefer uniform branding programs for all of their outlets; however, the unique character of the KMMS District may require further refinement of sign or awning materials, methods of illumination, etc., to be found in conformance with these standards.



The purpose of this document is to avoid overwhelming and confusing streetscapes as indicated above. In this example the signs and awnings do not correspond well to the appropriate business, extend over bays and storefronts, and they obscure the character-defining features of the buildings.

These standards are based on the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* and are meant to provide tenants and property owners with clear design guidance for all new commercial signs and awnings. Conformance with these standards authorizes the Planning Department to administratively approve signage and awnings without a Historic Preservation Commission public hearing. Please note that the KMMS Sign Standards will be used by the Planning Department to evaluate all new sign and awning permit applications and while only those proposals that meet the standards will be approved, the Department will review all proposals on a case-by-case basis.

The information within this document is divided into general requirements for all signs and awnings and those requirements that are specific each type. The general requirements address materials, methods of attachments, and methods of illumination. Additional requirements by sign type are outlined to address size, number, and location. All subsections are meant to provide clear instructions to meet the minimum requirements of this document. There are also images to serve as examples and to better express the intent of the standards. If you have additional questions regarding these standards, please visit or call the Planning Information Center at 1660 Mission Street, 4th floor, at 415-558-6377.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

Materials

- All signs should be constructed out of durable high-quality materials that retain their characteristics within a high-traffic area over time. Poor quality materials that are prone to fading, rapid deterioration, or damage are discouraged.
- Materials should be compatible with the color, craftsmanship, and finishes associated with the district. Glossy or highly reflective surfaces will not be approved.
- Awnings should be constructed out of cloth or a material similar in appearance and texture to cloth.
- Retractable and operable awnings are encouraged, however a fixed awning may be acceptable if it expresses the same characteristics as retractable awnings or has a free-moving valance, and does not appear to be rigid, hard, or inflexible.

Methods of Attachment

- All signs should be attached in a manner that avoids damaging or obscuring any of the character-defining features associated with the subject building.
- For masonry buildings, projecting signs should be anchored through mortar joints or attached to the jamb of a non-historic storefront system.
- All other signs should be attached in a manner that allows for their removal without adversely impacting the exterior of the subject building. Please note that under no circumstances should a sign be anchored to any cast iron or terra cotta elements of a building. Cast iron columns and exterior architectural details may be brittle and could potentially suffer irreparable damage. The glazing and the structural integrity of historic terra cotta cladding units may be significantly compromised if pierced for anchorage.
- The visibility of conduit and raceways should be minimized; however, if raceways must be exposed, they should be finished to match the facade or integrated into the overall design of the sign.

Methods of Illumination

- Ideally, all signs should appear to be indirectly illuminated. This is most commonly achieved by installing an external fixture to illuminate the sign or by using a reverse channel halo-lit means of illumination.
- Awnings that are internally illuminated are not permitted.
- In general all signs should have an opaque background that does not transmit light and text and logos should be individually illuminated.
- Unless a sign has been determined to be of historic significance, no sign or awning should flash or display animation or moving text.
- In order to reduce the depth and profile of a sign, the transformer should be located in a remote location and not housed within the sign itself.
- A sign may also be reduced in profile or depth by using a light emitting diodes (LED) method of illumination. For more information on LED lighting, please contact your sign contractor.
- All conduit required for all new signage must be concealed and may never be attached or left exposed on the face of the building, the sign structure, or the sign itself.

PROJECTING SIGNS

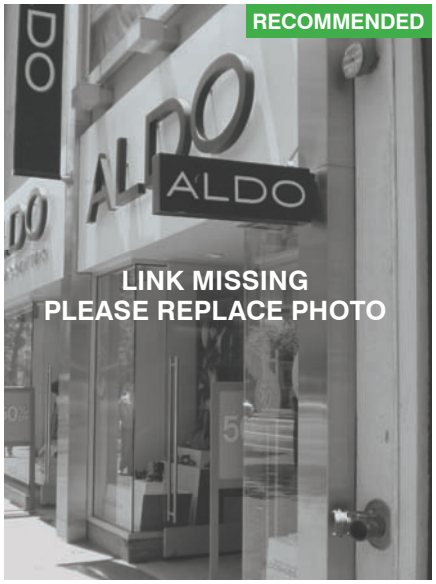
Projecting or “blade” signs have evolved dramatically over the last century. Often paired with a flush or a “wall” sign, blade signs have increased in size and number to catch the attention of pedestrians and to alert passers-by in cars or on public transportation. Today, there are a number of examples throughout the city where blade signs were installed at an overwhelming scale and dominate the building and the public realm, sometimes covering multiple floors and obscuring significant architectural details. When used correctly, a blade sign expresses the individuality of the business, attracts customers, respects the architecture of the building, and compliments the public realm. When used incorrectly, blade signs create visual clutter, overwhelm pedestrians and drivers with visual stimulation, and obscure or damage architectural details of the building. The standards below detail the various size, number, and locations that generally respect the character of the district.

SIZE

The size of any projecting sign will be influenced by the location proposed and any height clearance requirements by other permitting agencies. In general, the size of all projecting signs will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Projecting signs near the base of the building should relate to the pedestrian scale and the character-defining features of the building and the district. Projecting signs or signs for building identification above the base of the building should not extend above the roof line and cannot obscure the character-defining features.

Important factors that will be considered are:

- → Covering, altering or obscuring architectural details or window openings should be avoided
- → Projecting signs should be located on or immediately adjacent to the storefronts corresponding to the business and should not extend below, above, or across other storefronts or along a frontage associated with a different use.
- → Projecting signs are encouraged to be located at a height that relates to a pedestrian scale.





LEFT: This blade sign is placed at a height that relates well to the pedestrian scale of the street. It is low enough to read but high enough not to block the public right-of-way. It is also attached to a contemporary storefront so not to damage the building’s historic elements.

RIGHT: The blade sign is attached according to the standards; it is anchored through the mortar joints, avoiding damage to the masonry.

NUMBER

Generally, corner buildings are allowed a greater number of projecting signs because they occupy more linear street frontage; however, the final number is still subject to review and approval by the Planning Department. The Department discourages the installation of projecting signs, including banners, and flags, at each column or bay of an establishment because they obscure character-defining features of the building, may appear to be excessive, and tend to create visual clutter within the public right-of-way. Evaluated on a case-by-case basis, the number of projecting signs allowed for any one establishment will be determined by the following:

- The cumulative number and location of business signs attached to the subject building, including the proposed signage under review
- The amount of linear street frontage occupied by the business
- The floor-to-ceiling height of the commercial space visible from the public right-of-way

LOCATION

Signs should be located in an area that does not obscure any of the character-defining features associated with the subject building. Projecting signs may not be located above the window sill of the first residential floor of a building, nor may any portion of a sign be located at a height above the lintel of the corresponding storefront, unless it has been determined by the Planning Department Preservation Staff or the Historic Preservation Commission that an alternate location is acceptable in order to avoid obscuring or adversely impacting the character-defining features of the subject building.

- The amount of linear street frontage occupied by the business
- The overall character-defining features of the building
- The width of the sidewalk
- The number of adjacent existing and potential establishments within the subject building
- The floor-to-ceiling height of the commercial space visible from the public right-of-way.

BELOW: Both of these wall signs comply with the standards. These signs are comprised of individual letters that are mounted to the business storefront. The letters are placed in an area that does not cover or obscure any of the architectural details. Also, both signs are placed horizontally within the bay between the first and second floors.





WALL SIGNS

Wall signs are commonly comprised of signboards or individual die-cut letters that run parallel to the facade of a building. Often paired with a blade sign, wall signs have increased in size and number throughout the district. Today, there are a number of examples throughout the city where wall signs appear at an overwhelming scale and blanket significant architectural details. When used correctly, wall signs express individuality, attract customers, and respect the character-defining features of the building. The standards below detail the various size, number, and locations that generally respect the character of the district.

SIZE

The size of any wall sign will be influenced by the location proposed. In general, the size of wall signs will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Wall signs consisting of individual letters mounted to the building facade are encouraged; large, opaque sign panels behind individual letters are discouraged. Important factors that will be considered are:

- → Wall signs covering, altering, or obscuring architectural details or window openings should be avoided. Specifically, wall signs that obscure, cover, damage, or alter architectural elements such as friezes, lintels, spandrels, and historic sign bands will not be approved.
- → Signs are encouraged to be located at a height that relates to a pedestrian scale.
- → Wall signs should be centered on horizontal surfaces, within bays or over storefront openings and should not extend above, below, or beyond the storefront the related business occupies.
- → Wall signs should maintain a physical separation between all tenant signage so that it is clear that which signs relate directly to the respective business.

BELOW LEFT: The excessive number of wall signs attached to the facade are covering many architectural details of the building. The number of wall signs at this location creates a blanketing effect and negatively impacts the building and the public realm.

BELOW RIGHT: This sign is placed in an appropriate location within the bay opening and centered over the storefront entrance. The sign material is compromised of individual letters and is also in compliance with these standards.





NUMBER

Generally, one wall sign should be permitted per establishment per street frontage; however, the Department will evaluate proposals on a case-by-case basis and more than one wall sign may be permitted in certain instances. Building owners are encouraged to meet with a Planning Department Preservation Technical Specialist early in the process to facilitate review and approval of multiple tenants. The number of wall signs allowed for any one establishment will be based on the following factors:

- → The overall character-defining features of the subject building
- → The number of adjacent existing and potential establishments within the subject building

LOCATION

Wall signs should be located in an area that does not obscure any of the character-defining features associated with the subject building. The location of wall signs allowed for any one establishment will be based on the following factors:

- → The overall character-defining features of the subject building
- → The amount of linear street frontage occupied by the business
- → The cumulative number and location of business signs attached to the subject building, including all existing and proposed signage.

AWNINGS

Historically, awnings have provided a number of important functions for commercial storefronts. Not only did they provide climate control, awnings were used to protect merchandise and displays from glare and fading and window shoppers from bad weather. Today, awnings come in a variety of shapes, sizes, frames, and fabrics, but their primary function has shifted from shelter to signage. When used correctly, awnings still allow a business to attract customers, express its individuality, respect the architecture of the building, and compliment the public realm. When used incorrectly, awnings create visual clutter along the streetscape, obscure important architectural features of the building, and weaken the identity and presence of the business. The standards below detail the various size, number, and locations that generally respect the character of the district and should be used for awning design and construction.

SIZE

The size of any awning will be influenced by the location standards provided in this document and any height clearance requirements by other permitting agencies. In general, the size of all awnings will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Important factors that will also be considered:

- → The overall character-defining features of the subject building
- → The width of the storefront openings
- → The amount of linear street frontage occupied by the business
- → The width of the sidewalk
- → The number of adjacent existing and potential establishments within the subject building
- → The floor-to-ceiling height of the commercial space visible from the public right-of-way

NUMBER

In general, a business is permitted to have one awning per occupied storefront opening. Please note that text may not be allowed on the free-hanging valance of each awning. The Department discourages the attachment of a single awning that spans uninterrupted across a number of commercial storefronts, which is deemed to be excessive and contributes to the visual clutter within the public right-of-way. Evaluated on a case-by-case basis, the number of awnings allowed for any one establishment will be based on the following factors.

- The cumulative number and location of business signs attached to the subject building, including the existing and proposed signage.
- The amount of linear street frontage occupied by the business

LOCATION

Of the types of signage discussed within this document, the location of an approvable awning specifically limited to the window or storefront opening only. Please note that awnings may not be located at a height above the lintel of the storefront, unless the Planning Department Preservation Staff or the Historic Preservation Commission determines that an alternate location would avoid obscuring or negatively impacting the character-defining features of the subject building. The location of the awning within the opening will be based on the following factors:

- The Planning Department encourages awnings to be located at a level that relates to a pedestrian scale.
- An awning should not extend so far into the public right-of-way that it impedes pedestrian traffic, nor should it extend outside the piers and lintel of the storefront opening.
- As visibility contributes to the success of the business, awnings should not cover the first floor or the transom windows of the building.
- Awnings should be located in an area that does not obscure, cover, or alter any of the architectural or character-defining features of the building.

BELOW LEFT: Fabric awnings with free-moving valnces are encouraged by the Planning Department. This awning is installed in an appropriate location within the window opening and does not cover any architectural details.

BELOW RIGHT: This awning does not meet the standards. It covers the transom windows and extends the length of the building obscuring the piers and lintels of the storefront openings. The structure of the awning also appears rigid and inflexible which adds volume to the facade that is out of character with the building.









HISTORIC SIGNS

There are a number of historic signs located within the KMMS District that are significant in themselves because they represent a tangible link to the past and posses a level of craftsmanship and artistic expression that is rarely a feature of contemporary signage. Although most of these historic signs have outlasted the associated business, because of their rarity these signs are recognized as important character-defining features of the KMMS District. The Planning Department recognizes the unique challenge a new business faces when they are required to modify their own signage program to accommodate a historic sign that is not related to their use. However, these historic signs have become easily-identified markers within the district, and because the majority of these signs no longer meet the requirements of the Planning Code, they often provide new tenants with increased exposure due to their size, materials, method of illumination, and unique design. Any tenant or building owner that may need assistance incorporating a historic sign into their sign program is encouraged to meet with a Planning Department Preservation Technical Specialist early in the process to facilitate developing a successful project that respects the historic sign and provides the new tenant desired visibility.

Sign programs and other signs that affect historic signs within the district are reviewed on a case-by-case basis and are assessed using the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*.

MARQUEES & CANOPIES

Marquees and canopies commonly refer to large structures placed over the entrance to most theaters and hotels. Both marquees and canopies gained popularity during the beginning of the 20th century, when the size and prominence of the signage associated with them also grew. Historically, materials commonly used in marquee or canopy construction were steel, bronze, copper, and aluminum. They often also possessed elaborately painted patterns, and pressed sheet metal ornamentation. Methods of illumination varied; however, white or yellow flashing bulbs were the commonly used. Over time, and reaching their peak in the late 1930s, marquees and canopies increased in size, possessed increasingly elaborate designs, large text, and substantially projected into the public right-of-way to be further distinguished from other types of business in the immediate area. Construction of these sign types has decreased over time and is no longer permitted for new projects in many zoning districts; however, a number of existing marquees and canopies are protected as historic character-defining features within the KMMS Conservation District.

Some historic marquees, canopies, or any other large, projecting signs as defined by Section 188(e) of the Planning Code may be rehabilitated or reconstructed in order to preserve the character of a historic theater. Please note that these signs may be subject to review and approval by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). All work to marquee and canopy signage will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and will be assessed using the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*.

NOTES

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:
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Planning staff are available by phone and at the PIC counter.
No appointment is necessary.