

# Criteria & Standards for Administrative Approval of Commercial Signs within the Historic Districts (draft 10/21/16)

The following signs may be approved administratively pursuant to sections 10-113 and 10-203 of the Zoning Ordinance for a BAR Certificate of Appropriateness.

## SECTION I: CRITERIA FOR GENERAL SIGN TYPES

### 1. General Sign Types

Two signs from the following sign types may be administratively approved for a commercial business and up to three signs if the building is located on a corner. The following signs can qualify for administrative approval:

#### **Wall sign**

A wall sign is a sign attached to a wall or painted on or against a flat vertical surface of a structure. The following signs are considered wall signs:

- A flat sign on a backing affixed to a wall.
- An individual letter, pin-mounted sign installed on a wood frieze board or sign band
- A painted wall sign, provided that it is painted on a frieze board or on an already painted building wall.

#### **Flag sign**

A flag sign is a sign on a piece of cloth or similar material. Flag signs are typically installed flat against a wall or projecting from a wall on a pole. Flags of any nation, state, or other geopolitical entity not related to a commercial business, product or service are not considered a sign, and are thus not regulated. All other flags are considered signs and are subject to the sign regulations.

#### **Projecting sign**

A projecting sign, also known as a blade sign or a hanging sign, is a one-piece, double-sided sign. The maximum square footage of a projecting sign is 7 square feet and it must be located such that the bottom of the sign is a minimum of 8 feet above a public sidewalk and 14.5 feet above an alley used by vehicles. The projecting sign cannot project more than 4 feet from the building wall, more than 4 feet into the public right-of-way, or within 1 foot of the curb line. When feasible, new hanging signs should be hung from existing sign brackets previously approved by the BAR so as not to cause additional damage to the building wall.

#### **Changeable Sign Case**

Staff may approve the installation of a wall mounted sign case which allows for changeable content and meets the following criteria:

- The sign case should be located where it does not damage the building or encroach or hide building features, respecting the building's solid-to-void ratio
- Only one sign case, not to exceed four square feet, may be installed
- It must be constructed of either wood or metal in a single color and may be no more than 4" deep
- The sign case may have subtle external illumination, such as a small targeted light of LED rope, but may not be back lit or internally illuminated
- The sign cannot have any digital or electronic elements, and content may only be changed manually

## 2. Size

The overall square footage for one sign may not exceed 1/2 (.5) of the linear footage of the building frontage. For example, the maximum size permitted for a single sign for a 20 foot wide building is 10 square feet. If a second sign is proposed, the aggregate signage square footage may not exceed 3/4 (.75) of the linear footage of the building frontage (for example, 15 square feet for a 20 foot wide building).

## 3. Lighting

Staff may administratively approve the installation of targeted external illumination (e.g. mini-spot lights) which are small in size, illuminate only the proposed sign(s), and do not damage the building in installation. Gooseneck lighting must be reviewed and approved by the BAR.

## **SECTION II: CRITERIA FOR MULTI-TENANT COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS**

The following signs may also be approved. However, the aggregate signage square footage on the building may not exceed 3/4 (.75) of the linear footage of the building frontage (15 square feet for a 20 foot wide building).

### 1. Signs for Buildings with Two or Three Tenants

A mid-block building can have a maximum of two signs, regardless of whether there is a single tenant or multiple tenants. The signs may contain the name of a single business, or contain a combination of business names or other content. It will be up to the tenants and landlord to devise an equitable distribution of sign area.

### 2. Sign for buildings with four or more tenants

Staff may approve the installation of a single sign adjacent to the main entrance for a building containing four or more tenants, provided that it meets the following criteria:

- Only one sign may be installed
- The size may not exceed ten square feet
- The sign should have removable plaques of the same size and material
- The sign may have subtle external illumination, such as small targeted lights directed at the face of the sign, but may not be back lit or internally illuminated.

- This sign does not count as an additional sign; however, the overall sign area may not exceed the maximum sign area outlined in this policy

### **SECTION III: GENERAL REQUIREMENTS APPLYING TO ALL SIGNS**

- All signs must be in conformance with Alexandria Zoning Ordinance requirements (Chapter 9 - Signs).
- Applicant must obtain a separate sign permit (and/or a building permit) through Code Administration, if required.
- Internally illuminated box signs and flashing or animated signs, such as “OPEN” signs or TV screens, are prohibited in the City of Alexandria (Zoning Ordinance Section 9-104).
- BAR administrative approval is not available for signs located more than 20’ above the building’s average finished grade.
- It is the Board’s practice to not review signs (such as historic plaques, building address numbers, etc.) on one and two-family residential buildings. Multi-family buildings and other non-residential buildings in residential zones must seek BAR approval for such signs.
- A four square foot non-illuminated window sign and a temporary sign no greater than six square feet do not require a Certificate of Appropriateness. The area of these exempted signs is counted toward the maximum allowable signage allowed by the underlying zone.
- A text or graphic sign which is affixed to a window or door, or is within four feet of the interior face of the window or door glazing and whose message is visible from the exterior, is considered a window or door sign and are regulated by the zoning ordinance. Window/door graphics may not cover more than 20% of the glazing area of each window or door. However, window and door signs which otherwise comply with zoning requirements, whether such signs are temporary or permanent, are not regulated by the BAR.
- Anchors for all signs and sign brackets must be installed into the mortar joints on masonry buildings.
- Previously approved signs and awnings, or awnings with signage, may be replaced in the same size and material, and with new signs, provided that they have the same or less sign area. These awnings and signs may be administratively approved by staff.
- A sign which meets the requirements of a coordinated sign master plan which has already been approved by the BAR for a multi-tenant commercial building can be administratively approved by Staff, regardless of whether the sign otherwise meets these requirement for administrative approval.

- Prior to receiving an administrative approval for signage, BAR Staff will conduct research and/or visit the site to evaluate the subject property and its context to determine if the proposed signage is appropriate.

All other signs types not specifically addressed here must be reviewed and approved by the BAR. Regardless of whether the sign meets the above criteria, staff may determine that the sign(s) must be approved by the BAR.

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