Village of Romeo Central Business District

Model Design Guidelines for Signage*

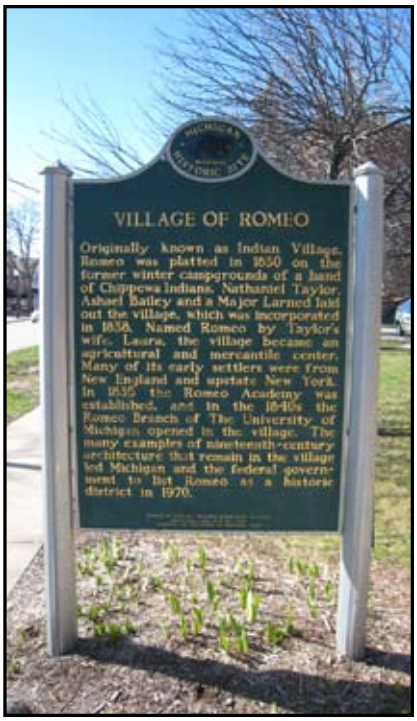
DownTown
THE HEART OF ROMEO

Provided by the Romeo Downtown Development Authority

**All applications for signage must be submitted to the Village of Romeo for ordinance compliance and permit approval.*

Rev. 4/1/09

The Romeo Downtown Development Authority (Romeo DDA) is pleased to be leading the ROMEO Blueprint 2006 downtown revitalization effort for Michigan's oldest Village. Our mission at the DDA is to make Historic Downtown Romeo a destination for shopping and dining as well as living and working. To this end, the DDA is forging collaborations with both public and private sector groups and organizations to implement the shared vision of the "Blueprint" action strategies. Furthermore, the DDA is committed to becoming your clearinghouse for business assistance and investment-related information for downtown.



The Village of Romeo is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is a State Register of Historic Site. It is honored with a Michigan Historical Marker as well. (107 Church Street)

Elements such as signs, awnings and exterior lighting are an important part of a vibrant commercial core, both historically and in modern times. By carefully considering designs and different signage options, businesses can successfully attract clientele while at the same time preserving the character of the streetscape.

These Design Guidelines apply to all structures and sites within the Central Business District (DDA District). They are intended to provide guidance to property owners, business owners, architects and contractors who are proposing signage on any building or site within the Central Business District. ***The goal of these Standards is to protect the architectural resources and historic character of the Village of Romeo, while enhancing the overall value of property by encouraging the preservation of the character of historic structures and by requiring new signage to be compatible within the Central Business District.*** The Village of Romeo is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is a State Register of Historic Site. It is honored with a Michigan Historical Marker as well. (Kezar Library lawn)

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SIGN GUIDELINES

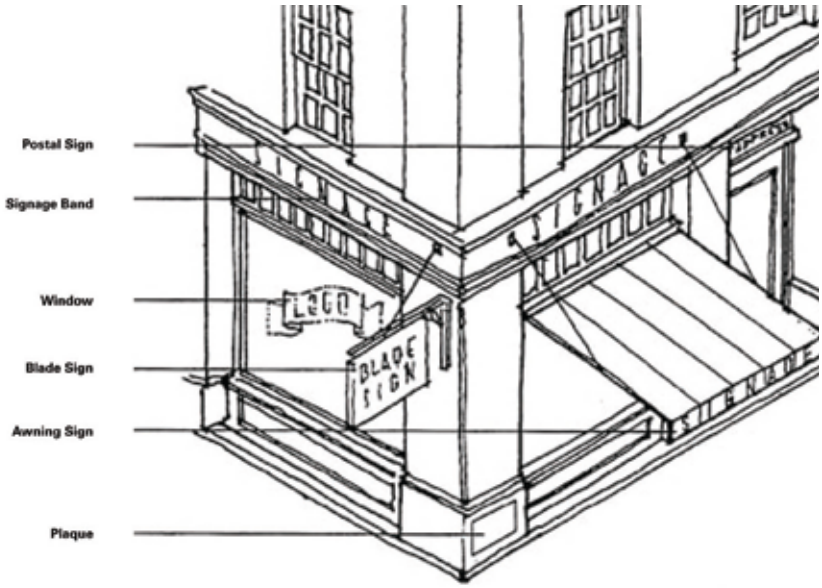
PURPOSE: The purpose of the sign guidelines is to enhance the visual character of downtown through appropriate selection of sign design, location, materials, colors and type of lettering. These guidelines are to be used as a guide by property owners in the sign design process; creativity and individuality are encouraged.

Signs are a vital part of any downtown. Your sign is your calling card. With a sign, you call attention to your business and create an individual image for your store or business. It reflects your personality, your taste, your attitude. It is often forgotten that signs contribute to an overall image as well. Your signs and others along your street form a statement of how you and your neighbors feel toward the Historic Village of Romeo. They speak of cooperation, of neighborliness, of community. A successful sign can reinforce the image of the downtown, as well as serve the needs of the businesses.

In order to make sure that signs in the Historic District reflect the historic architectural character of the downtown area, that they conform to generally accepted good taste, and that they tend to accentuate our beautiful, extraordinary downtown, the DDA and the Planning Commission has approved sign guidelines. These guidelines were written for merchants and property owners within the Central Business District, but the ideas can be applied throughout the Village.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SIGN GUIDELINES

DESIGN: When you begin to think of design, how should you proceed? Your architect and a professional sign designer. Even before you begin, you should do a certain amount of preparation in advance. ***Here are eight steps that will help you decide what kind of sign you want.***



1. **SIGN MESSAGE:** A sign should express an easy to read, direct message. Think about what your sign should do. What kind of personality do you want to project? What kind of customer do you want to attract? Will the name of your place be sufficient or must you tell the public what kind of a store you have?

2. **SIGN HISTORY:** Locate old photos of your building and note what kind of sign it originally had. Facades are often designed with signs in mind. A sign should not dominate a storefront; it should fit in with the shape, proportions and architectural features.

3. **SIGN TYPES:**
   What kind of sign do you want?
   - A conventional word sign?
   - An object sign – a wooden shoe; for instance, if you are a cobbler or shoe store?
   - A symbol sign – like a barber pole?
   - A combination?

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SIGN GUIDELINES

4. **SIGN LOCATION:**
   Consider where you want to place the sign. Stand across the street and visualize how a new sign might look. Don't be swayed by what is already there. Should you place the new one under the lower cornice, hanging from the building, painted on the glass, or on the awning flap?

5. **SIGN COLOR:** Think about colors. Disregard flashy tints or Day-Glo. Get your inspiration from the color of your building and its neighbors, and what was common in the era in which your structure was built. The colors of the letters should contract with the display background.

6. **SIGN WORDING:** What do you want your sign to say? Often just the name of the business is enough or perhaps you want to add a generic word or two. The rule is to keep the words few and the message simple.

7. **SIGN LETTERING:** ***Tasteful lettering is vital for your image.*** Check other signs about town to see what their lettering says about the businesses. There are hundreds of letter styles available. The letter should be chosen that is historically appropriate, easy to read and reflects the image of the business that it represents.

8. **SIGN QUALITY:** Choose a sign maker carefully. Quality of workmanship and construction is as vital as any of the considerations just discussed. A sloppily constructed or lettered sign will undo all your careful planning. Select your sign painter or architect with care, making sure you see samples. This applies to temporary signs as well.

The overall composition, including ornamental details and signs, should be coordinated,

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SIGN GUIDELINES

IN GENERAL …

Signs are an important part of the building design. On older storefronts, they should be similar to those the building had originally. They should blend with the facade, fitting onto the storefront proportionally, without hiding the architectural details. They should be simple, containing only the name of the business and one or two words describing it. Signs of different merchants in a single building should preferably have similarity of character. At least they shouldn't seem to clamor for attention. Excessive size, loud colors and excess wording do not increase effectiveness; they overwhelm the potential customer. A garish sign cheapens the store, the building and the whole Streetscape.

The Village of Romeo and the DDA expects that any new sign or any sign that replaces an existing sign be designed with great care, that a good deal of thought be given to its integration with the building's features, and that no sign will add visual clutter.

It is important to note the total square footage for signage permitted by the current Village of Romeo Sign Ordinance within the Central Business District.

SIGNAGE CATEGORIES AND TYPES

Commercial signage generally falls into four categories as follows:

• ***Primary Sign.*** A business should generally have only one primary sign, which is usually a flush mounted sign in the Central Business District and is often a monument sign for other local landmarks.

• ***Secondary Signs.*** Secondary signs are utilized in addition to the primary building sign. Typically, a secondary sign is an awning, hanging or window sign. The secondary sign is generally intended to capture the attention of the pedestrian walking on the sidewalk, while the primary sign's audience is specifically the viewer driving past in a vehicle.

• ***Temporary Signs.*** Temporary signs are used for a special purpose, such as limited-time offer or a sale and should be used only for short periods of time as specified in the Village of Romeo Sign Ordinance.

Example of appropriate primary signage.
(112 S. Main Street, Romeo, MI)

Example of appropriate secondary signage.
(112 S. Main Street, Romeo, MI)

Within the signage categories discussed above, a number of individual signage types are appropriate.

Primary Signs should be proportional in size to the building facade and located within the "sign band" if one is available. The sum of all signage shall be no more than as allowed by the Village Sign Ordinance. Permits are required. A separate Electrical Permit will also be required if the sign is to be illuminated. Installation must be approved by The Village Inspector after completed installation.

Projecting signs may be considered. A larger projecting sign should be mounted higher and centered on the facade or positioned at the corner of a building. A projecting sign shall provide the minimum clearance between the sidewalk surface and the bottom of the sign as allowed by the Village Sign Ordinance.

(138 S. Main Street, Romeo, MI)

Examples of appropriate projecting signage.

Small hanging signs are encouraged. A small hanging sign should be located near the business entrance, just above the door or to the side. A hanging sign should be mounted perpendicular with the building facade and shall provide the minimum clearance between the sidewalk surface and the bottom of the sign as allowed by the Village Sign Ordinance.

(106 S. Main Street, Romeo, MI)

Awning and canopy signs may be considered. A street-level awning should be mounted so that the valance is about eight feet higher than the sidewalk and extends four to seven feet from the building face. A valance flap can be attached at the awning bar to serve as a sign panel. The awning may be attached just below the storefront cornice or between the transom and display windows. The awning should fit within the storefront opening, visually no wider than the glass width, see figure A on page 9.

The awning sign is generally intended to capture the attention of the pedestrian walking on the sidewalk
(227 N. Main Street, Romeo, MI)

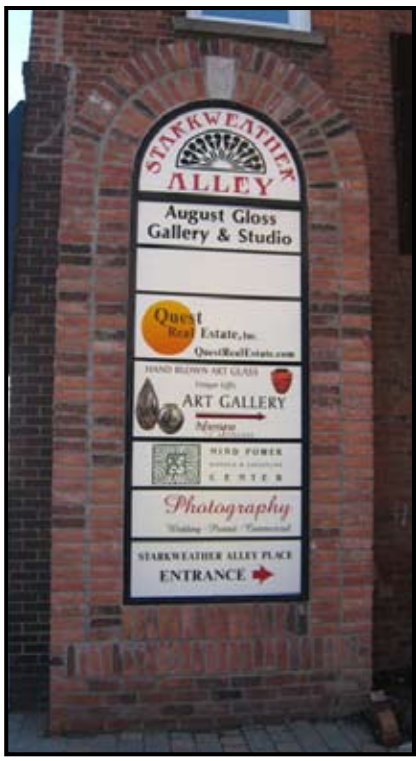
Metal or fiberglass awnings or curved fixed-frame awnings are not historically appropriate.

Window and Door Signage may be considered for secondary signage. However, the primary purpose of windows is to display goods. Hang permanent window signs just inside the window. Paint temporary window signs on the glass. In general no more than approximately 30% of the total storefront window area should be utilized for signage. Tenant and address identification in the door window should be within the top half of the door window and should not exceed the square footage as allowed by the Village Sign Ordinance.

(106 S. Main Street, Romeo, MI)

Parking of advertising vehicles is not allowed. Any advertising vehicle shall not be parked on a public right-of-way, on public property.

Directory signs may be considered. Where several businesses share a building, coordinate the signs. Align several smaller signs or group signs into a single panel as a directory. Use similar forms or backgrounds for the signs to tie them together visually and make them easier to read.



Where several businesses share a building, coordinate the signs. (Starkweather Alley, Romeo, MI)

CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT GUIDELINES

The size and placement of a sign are critical in maintaining the visual order of the Central Business District and local landmarks. Consistent placement of signs according to building type, size, location and even building materials create a visual pattern that the pedestrian can easily interpret and utilize to the mutual benefit of merchants, tourists and customers.

Signage should enhance the architectural details of the historic buildings facade. This is especially important for a building with historic significance. A sign should be designed to integrate with the architectural features of a building and not distract attention from the features

The "sign band" is the most appropriate location for primary signage. Locate flush mounted wall signs in the "sign band" area above the transom or storefront windows and below any second floor windows. Respect the sign band borders. The sign should not overlap or crowd the top, bottom or ends of the band. Mount a wall sign to align with others along the block, when feasible.

Flush mounted wall signs shall maintain the overall proportions of the building facade. Ideally, a commercial building in the Central Business District would include a sign band integrated into the architectural detailing of the front facade. A wall mounted sign should be proportionate in size to the architectural elements on the building.

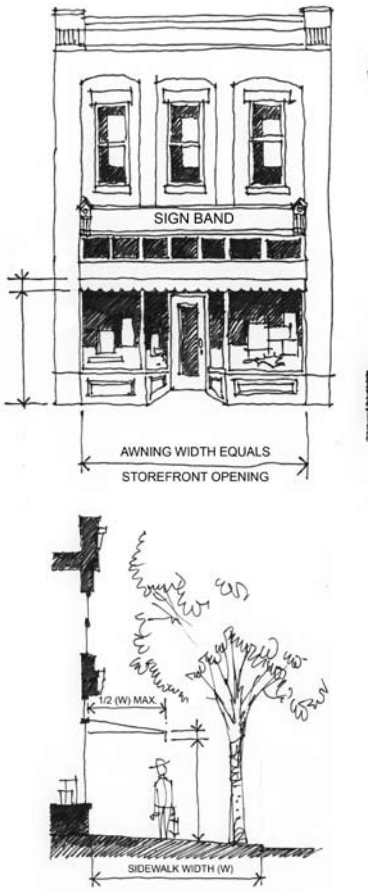


Figure A. *See page 7.*

The "sign band" is located above the transom or storefront window. (135 South Main, Romeo, MI)

SIGNAGE MATERIALS, COLORS AND LIGHTING

The materials, colors and lighting used for signage within the Central Business District and on local landmarks play a major role in defining the scale and continuity of the street. Sign materials and colors should be chosen carefully to ensure commercial structures and spaces are easily identified while maintaining the traditional feeling of the area. Lighting should be subtle and serve only to help identify buildings or storefronts at night.

Light should be directed at the sign from an external, shielded lamp. (160 S. Main Street, Romeo, MI)

Sign materials should be compatible with that of the building facade. Painted wood and metal are appropriate materials for signs, their use is encouraged. Unfinished materials including unpainted wood, plastic, and vinyl materials are discouraged from use, except for flush mounted adhesive lettering. Highly reflective materials that will be difficult to read are inappropriate. Painted signs on blank walls were common historically and may be considered.

Use colors for the sign that are compatible with those of the building front. In general, the use of no more than three (3) colors is recommended.

Appropriate lighting example. (164 S. Main Street, Romeo, MI)

Lighting for a sign should be an indirect source. Light should be directed at the sign from an external, shielded lamp. A warm light color, similar to daylight, is appropriate. All lighting should be shielded and not shine directly in the eyes of pedestrians or vehicular traffic. Care should also be taken to avoid nearby buildings and upper level residences with direct light.

Internally illuminated signs and back-lighted awnings are discouraged.

SIGNAGE MATERIALS, COLORS AND LIGHTING

Using a symbol or logo for a sign is encouraged. A symbol/logo sign adds interest to the street, can be read quickly and is remembered better than written words.

Use simple typefaces on signage. Typefaces that are in keeping with those seen in the area traditionally are encouraged. Select letter styles and sizes that will be compatible with the building front. Generally, these are typefaces with serifs. Avoid hard-to-read or overly intricate typeface styles.

A symbol sign adds interest to the street, can be read quickly and is remembered better than written words.
(229 N. Main Street, Romeo, MI)

The DDA's goal is to maintain the historic integrity of the Central Business District at the level it was when the District was created. Committee members realize that by providing advice and education, publishing easy-to-understand design review guidelines they can help property owners become better informed about the history and architecture of their buildings. As a result, signage will be compatible with the original design elements found in the District.

For more information on the DDA please visit their website:

http://www.romeodda.org/

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Romeo Downtown Development Authority Document adopted May 7, 2008; revised 4/1/09

Photographs courtesy of the Romeo DDA