

DOWNTOWN DESIGN GUIDE

CITY OF LOS ANGELES



Chapter 10: Signage

The provisions in this section supplement the Zoning Code.

Applicants with limited experience in signage design and implementation are encouraged to review Appendix A. Guide to Tenant Signs.

A. MASTER SIGN PLAN

Signage can contribute to creating strong building identity when it is well-integrated with the design of the architecture. A project's signage program must begin during design development to better achieve integration with the architecture.

1. All projects over 50,000 square feet, or that have more than 50 residential units, shall submit a master sign plan for the entire project during the design development phase. The master sign plan shall identify all sign types that can be viewed from the street, sidewalk or public right-of-way.

The plan shall be designed and prepared by a single graphic design firm or signage design company to assure a cohesive, integrated approach to the variety of signs required for building identification, wayfinding and regulatory needs.

The master signage plan shall include:

- A site plan identifying location of all sign types and that identifies each proposed sign by number, showing its location in relation to structures, walkways and landscaped areas;
- A matrix describing general characteristics of each sign type, sign name or number, illumination, dimensions, quantity); and
- A scaled elevation of each sign type showing overall dimensions, sign copy, typeface, materials, colors and form of illumination.

B. SIGNAGE GUIDELINES BY TYPE

The following guidelines do not supersede regulations in the Central City Signage Supplemental Use District, but are intended to provide design guidance to achieve visually effective and attractive signage throughout Downtown.

These design recommendations and visual examples are meant to help Applicants understand what is generally considered good signage design for a corporate campus, residential or retail project.



Campus Identity Sign. Example of a corporate campus identity sign that is integrated with the architecture and landscaping.

Corporate Campus Signs

A corporate campus refers to a commercial property that may include multiple buildings with commercial or institutional tenants, often with ground floor commercial and retail spaces, open space, parking garage and loading dock. In the Financial Core or Bunker Hill, they are typically exemplified by high-rise towers.

1. Signage should reinforce the corporate or campus identity.
2. All signs integrate with the architecture, landscaping and lighting, relate to one another in their design approach, and convey a clear hierarchy of information.
3. Signs that hold multiple tenant information should be designed so individual tenant information is organized and clear within the visual identity of the larger campus or building.
4. For buildings over 120 feet tall, see requirements for tall building signs.



Corporate Identity and Retail Signs. Campus identity can be derived from prominent public art, as shown here (top). Signs for retail or public amenities should be related to the overall campus identity (below).



Campus Identity Sign. The corporate campus name and graphic identity should be established at the most prominent public corners.



Campus Parking Sign. Secondary information for valet parking or a loading dock should be related in its design to the campus identity sign.

Residential Project Signs

5. Signage should reinforce the identity of the residential complex and be visible from the most prominent public corner or frontage.
6. All signs shall be integrated with the design of the project's architecture and landscaping. As a family of elements, signs should be related in their design approach and convey a clear hierarchy of information.
7. Signage should identify the main/visitor entrance or lobby, resident or visitor parking, community facilities, major amenities and commercial uses. These signs should be related in style and material while appropriately scaled for the intended audience.
8. Residents soon learn the project entries and facilities so signs should not be too large or duplicative.
9. Signs for community facilities should be prominent and easily read by first time visitors.
10. Mixed-use projects with commercial or retail tenants shall comply with the retail section below.



Integrated Design. Examples of residential identity signage integrated into a sculptural seating and lighting element at the main entry (left) and into an entrance canopy (right).



Hierarchy of Signs. Examples of residential identity signage present at the most prominent corner. A related family of signs ranging from overall project identity to the parking garage are shown here (above).



Multi-Tenant Retail Signs. Examples of multi-tenant retail where individual signs are treated in a consistent manner and integrated with the architecture (above).

Retail Signs

11. Retail signs should be appropriately scaled from the primary viewing audience (pedestrian-oriented districts require smaller signage than fast moving automobile-oriented districts).
12. The location, size, and appearance of tenant identification signs should contribute to street activity and enhance the street-level experience that is appropriate to each Downtown district or neighborhood.
13. For projects that have multiple storefront tenants of similar size, generally all signage should be of the same type (i.e., cut out letters, blade, or neon) and the same relative size and source of illumination. Retail tenants will appear to be different by their store name, font, color and type of retail displays.
14. Historic buildings with ground floor retail shall have signs that do not obscure the architecture, but are integrated into the original or restored storefront elements.



Ground Floor Retail Signs at Historic Structures. Examples of new retail signage that is integrated with the architecture of the historic structure (above).



No Duplicative Signs. Example of retail signage that is not allowed because it duplicates information on panels and on the awning (above).



Appropriately Scaled Signs. Example of retail sign appropriately scaled to the storefront in a pedestrian-oriented environment.

Tall Building Signs

Buildings at least 120 feet tall may have “Tall Building Signs” that identify the building, subject to the following criteria:

15. **Location.** On a flat topped building, Tall Building Signs must be located between the top of the windows on the topmost floor and the top of the roof parapet or within an area 16 feet below the top of the roof parapet. On buildings with stepped or otherwise articulated tops, Tall Building Signs may be located within an area 16 feet below the top of the building or within an area 16 feet below the top of the parapet of the main portion of the building below the stepped or articulated top. Tall Building Signs must be located on a wall and may not be located on a roof, including a sloping roof, and may not block any windows.
16. **Maximum Sign Area.** A Tall Building Sign may not occupy more than 50% of the area in which the sign may be located on a single building face or 800 square feet, whichever is less and may include only a single line of text.
17. **Number of Tall Building Signs.** A building may have no more than two Tall Building Signs on any two sides of the building. In the case of a cylindrical or elliptical building, the building should be considered to have four quadrants, which will in no case exceed 25% of the perimeter of the building. Both Tall Building Signs on a building must be identical.
18. **Materials.** Tall Building Signs must be constructed of high quality, durable materials that are compatible with the building materials. Cut-out letters that are individually pin-mounted and backlit are encouraged. Box signs are prohibited.
19. **Orientation.** To the extent feasible, Tall Building Signs shall not be oriented toward nearby residential neighborhoods.
20. **Flexibility.** Tall Building Signs shall be designed to be changed over time.
21. **Other Guidelines.** Tall Building Signs are encouraged to meet the following guidelines:
 - The use of symbols, rather than names or words, is encouraged.
 - Tall Building Signs should be integrated into the architectural design of the building.
 - Nighttime lighting of Tall Building Signs, as well as of distinctive building tops, is encouraged and the two should be integrated. Lighting of Tall Building signs should include backlighting that creates a “halo” around the skylight sign. Backlighting may be combined with other types of lighting.



Tall Building Signs are intended to identify downtown high rises both in a distance skyline view and from the streets Downtown.

C. SIGNAGE GUIDELINES FOR ALL SIGN TYPES

Signs in Context



1. Signs should be conceived as an integral part of the project design so as not to appear as an afterthought.
2. The location, size, and appearance of signs should complement the building and should be in character with the Downtown district in which they are located.
3. Signs should respect residential uses within and adjacent to a project. The intent is to promote a more peaceful living environment without undue impacts upon residential uses. Small signs, no animation, limited lighting and shorter operating hours are appropriate where signs are visible from residences.

Sign Location in Relation to Street Trees



4. Except in locations where street trees are not required, no signs shall be located between 14 feet above sidewalk elevation and 40 feet above sidewalk elevation to avoid conflicts with the tree canopy, except where the Applicant demonstrates that no conflict will occur.
5. To accommodate tenant signs below the tree canopy, a street tree's lateral branches may be removed below a height of 14 feet above the sidewalk elevation, provided that: a) no removed branch has a diameter of more than 1/4 of the trunk diameter or 3", whichever is less, and b) the total tree height is 2.5 times the clear trunk height. For example, if the total tree height is 35 feet, the lateral branches along the trunk may be removed below 14 feet. If the total tree height is 25 feet, the lateral branches may be removed below 10 feet.
6. Trees may not be topped or headed back on the sides to expose signs. If a tree is topped or headed back to expose a sign, the tree shall be replaced by the sign permit holder or sign owner with a tree equal in size to the topped or headed tree prior to topping or heading.



Tenant signs located below the tree canopy eliminate the potential for conflicts between signs and trees.

Sign Illumination and Animation

7. Illuminated signs that reflects the individual character of the Downtown districts are encouraged.
8. Signs shall use appropriate means of illumination. These include: neon tubes, fiber optics, incandescent lamps, cathode ray tubes, shielded spotlights and wall wash fixtures.
9. Signs may be illuminated during the hours of operation of a business, but not later than 2 a.m. or earlier than 7 a.m.

Prohibited Signs

10. The following signs are prohibited:

- Internally illuminated awnings
- Conventional plastic faced box or cabinet signs
- Formed plastic faced box or injection molded plastic signs
- Luminous vacuum formed letters
- Animated or flashing signs
- Wall murals covering windows.