

**City of Port Townsend
DESIGN GUIDELINES
for
NEON SIGNAGE
in the
Special Overlay Design Review &
National Landmark Historic Districts**

PURPOSE

These Design Guidelines are established for the following purposes:

1. To supplement land use regulations which encourage and promote public health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Port Townsend.
2. To provide guidance to urban design decisions that will promote development of high environmental and visual quality throughout the city.
3. To assist applicants in the preparation of development applications.
4. To assist decision-making by the Historic Preservation Committee in the review of development applications.
5. To recognize that neon signage does have a place in Port Townsend's Historic Commercial districts.
6. To prevent excessive neon signage from causing negative impacts to the character of the Port Townsend National Landmark Historic District and Urban Waterfront Special Overlay Design Review District.

INTRODUCTION

The design guidelines for neon signage in the commercial areas of the Port Townsend National Landmark Historic District and in the Special Overlay Design Review District are intended to be used as an aid to appropriate design and not as a checklist for compliance. The purpose of the guidelines is to create awareness of the unique character of the District during the design of neon signage. These guidelines identify the design elements deemed important in reviewing neon signage for appropriateness and are the basis for decisions made by the Historic Preservation Committee

GUIDELINES

Signage identifies a business, and provides a linkage between a building's exterior and the interior use. A good sign can help a business by making it distinctive. Within the Commercial Historic Districts signage is regulated by the Port Townsend Municipal Code (PTMC). The following guidelines apply to neon signage within the Port Townsend National Landmark Historic District and Urban Waterfront Special Overlay Design Review District:

1. **Compliance with Sign Code:** All neon signage shall be in strict conformance with the requirements of Port Townsend sign code, chapter 17.76 of the PTMC.
2. **Administrative Design Review.** Neon signs that are 2 square feet or less in sign area shall be subject to **administrative review** by the PCD Director. A single business or single storefront may have up to 2 neon signs reviewed through administrative review. Additional neon signs for that business or storefront, or neon signs larger than 2 square feet shall be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Committee.
3. **Historic Neon Signage:** Existing historic neon signage shall be restored and/or renovated, and shall not be altered in exterior appearance. For the purpose of these guidelines, Historic Signage shall meet one of the following standards:
 - a. Signage that is a minimum of 50 years old; or
 - b. Original signage located on a building which has been designated by the Secretary of the Interior as “contributing” to the Historic District and/or has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or is listed on the Port Townsend Register of Historic Places; or
 - c. Original signage located on a building that has been found to contribute to the Port Townsend Historic District by the Historic Preservation Committee.

Pursuant to the above, the duplication or reconstruction of historic neon signage shall be permitted provided that historic photographs, drawings or plans are available that clearly indicate the design, size and placement of the original sign. The proposed replacement neon signage shall be consistent in design, size and placement with that of the original sign.

4. **Non-historic Neon Signage:** Proposed neon signage that is not based on historical precedent shall be evaluated by the following criteria:
 - a. **Location.** Neon signage shall normally only be placed behind window glazing. Alternative placement of neon signage (such as projecting signs) are discouraged. Alternative placement should only be authorized in situations where other types of signage are either not possible or are ineffective. Alternative placement for neon signage may also be approved based upon historical precedent for that business or building.
 - b. **Exterior signs and architectural details.** Where neon signs are permitted exterior to the building they shall not cover architectural details of the building.
 - c. **Pedestrian oriented signage.** The total sign area as well as the size of individual letters shall be as small as possible while still being clearly legible to pedestrians on either side of adjacent streets. Individual letters should be at least 3 inches high to be visible across an adjacent street.

- d. **Keep message simple.** A brief message should be used whenever possible. The fewer the words, the more effective the sign. A neon sign with a brief, succinct message is easier to read.
 - e. **Blockage of window views.** Sidewalk-level storefront windows should provide views of the business interior. Neon signage should not obscure views of the interior from the adjacent sidewalk. Neon signs should be placed above or below eye level to avoid blocking window views.
 - f. **Graphic signs.** Symbolic or graphic signs that effectively indicate the type of business are encouraged.
 - g. **Encouraged use of neon signage.** Neon signs are especially effective in the following situations:
 - i. A small amount of sign area is desirable;
 - ii. The storefront is in shadows or bright sunlight that makes other types of signage difficult to see;
 - iii. Transient accommodations (vacancy/no vacancy signs) and food service establishments. Both rely on out of town customers and provide basic services (lodging and food) that can be succinctly communicated with neon signage (“pizza”, “Mexican food”, “espresso”, etc.).
 - h. **Creative design.** Signs should make a positive contribution to the general appearance of the street and commercial area in which they are located. A well-designed sign can be a major asset to a building. Imaginative and innovative sign designs are encouraged.
 - i. **Location of mechanical equipment.** The placement of transformers, backing plates or other mechanical devices accessory to the proposed neon sign shall be hidden or screened from public view. Placement of the proposed sign behind a window shall be considered as providing adequate screening.
 - j. **Unique Port Townsend Products.** Neon signage for products unique to Port Townsend (such as for a local beer) shall be encouraged.
8. **Decorative Use Prohibited.** The decorative use of neon as a means of accenting windows, doors, cornices or other architectural elements of a building shall be prohibited.

Adopted by Ordinance 2871
November 29, 2004

Director, PCD

