

# THE USER'S GUIDE TO SIGNAGE IN OLD STRATHCONA

JANUARY 2015

Edmonton



Old Strathcona Historical Commercial Direct Development Control Provision Area.

## Introduction

Although Old Strathcona, including its famous Whyte Avenue commercial strip, is known as Edmonton's premier historic district as well as the Province's second Provincial Historic Area, it has not always been viewed as such. In the past, when Old Strathcona was threatened with demolition, the local community recognized something worth saving and fought hard to preserve this unique historic area. After successfully saving Old Strathcona, the community banded together once more and led a major revitalization and renovation initiative, resulting in a number of historical buildings being restored and the area being recognized as Edmonton's first heritage district.

It is because of the area's small scale historic buildings and heritage character that Old Strathcona is attractive to visitors and residents alike. A custom zoning called the Historical Commercial DC1 Provision was enacted to regulate land use in the area to ensure its character is retained and it remains Edmonton's premier shopping district. The Historical Commercial DC1 Provision applies to those properties located in the original core commercial area of the Town of Strathcona (refer to map at left). This provision can be found in the Old Strathcona Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP)

## Sign Regulations in Old Strathcona

For those properties located within the Historical Commercial DC1 boundary, signage is regulated by the Historical Commercial DC1 Provision, which can be found in the Strathcona Area Redevelopment Plan. For those properties in Old Strathcona located outside the boundary, signage is regulated by Section 59 of the Zoning Bylaw and will vary by land use zone. Although the regulations related to signage in the Historical Commercial DC1 apply specifically to those properties located within the Historical Commercial DC1 boundary, they are encouraged as guidelines for those areas of Whyte Avenue and the surrounding area that lay outside this boundary.

The Historical Commercial DC1 Provision and the Zoning Bylaw are subject to periodic amendments. Where there are discrepancies between the Historical Commercial DC1 Provision or the Zoning Bylaw and this document, the Historical Commercial DC1 Provision and Zoning Bylaw shall prevail.

All signs require a valid sign permit issued by the City of Edmonton despite where they are located. The Sign Permit application form can be found at [http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws\\_licences/permanent\\_sign\\_application\\_form.pdf](http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws_licences/permanent_sign_application_form.pdf). Projecting signs and awnings also require an encroachment agreement, because they extend into the public right-of-way. The Encroachment Agreement Application form can be found at [http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws\\_licences/encroachment\\_agreement\\_application\\_form.pdf](http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws_licences/encroachment_agreement_application_form.pdf)



## The Approach to the Design of Signs and Awnings in Old Strathcona

Although each sign should satisfy the specific requirements of each individual business, it is especially important in Old Strathcona that the signs complement each other to contribute to the overall heritage streetscape design. Signs should also be limited to those types and forms that were originally present on the buildings to preserve the heritage character of the area. When new elements, technologies or materials are introduced, they should integrate into the overall design of the building and traditional signage forms. In addition, because the area supports high levels of pedestrian traffic, the signs should be oriented to pedestrians, not to automobile traffic moving through the district.

These regulations and guidelines reflect the traditional forms, materials and applications of signs of the past, yet recognize the need to adapt these to today's marketing and fabrication needs.

## Why Should you Conform?

One poor sign may not make a difference in the grand scheme of things; however, as more and more non-conforming signs appear, they compete and hide architectural features of the buildings or become cluttered, slowly eroding the historic charm that people have come to appreciate. Over signing your property will not attract any more customers than one unique, legible sign. Studies show that shoppers favour signs that are visible, legible and informative; they are drawn to unfamiliar stores based on clear, attractive signs. 29% of overall shoppers are drawn into stores based on the quality of its signage, and 55% of people aged 18 to 24 go into stores based purely on the draw of its signage<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>University of Cincinnati, 2011

All buildings within Historic Commercial DC1 boundary are required to conform to the applicable sign regulations. It should be noted that if the regulations are ignored, enforcement will occur and a penalty may be expected. Businesses that fall outside of the heritage district are still strongly encouraged to consider their contribution to the overall Historic Whyte Avenue shopping experience.

The section that follows lays out sign definitions, regulations and guidelines to provide direction when planning for signage in the Old Strathcona Provincial Historic District.

**REGULATIONS** – practices that are controlled by law that must be complied with to receive a permit; they include a legal penalty if ignored.

**GUIDELINES** – best practices that are highly recommended and encouraged by the City of Edmonton and the Old Strathcona Foundation that go above and beyond the enforced regulations. Best practice guidelines have been proven by studies to attract more customers to your business.





## Regulations and Guidelines for Best Practices

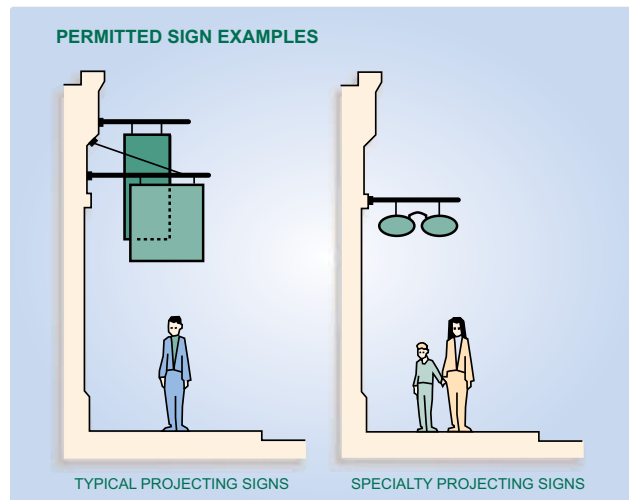
### Projecting Signs

#### Definition

Any sign, except those attached to an awning, that is supported by an exterior building wall and projects outward from the building wall by more than 14.5 cm (6 in.).

#### Regulations for Projecting Signs

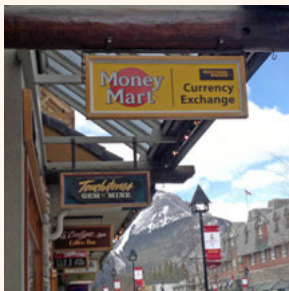
- No projecting on-premises sign shall be located such that, in the opinion of the Development Officer, it significantly obstructs existing, approved signs
- A projecting on-premises sign shall have a vertical clearance of at least 2.4 m (7.9 ft.)
- The top of a projecting on-premises sign on a one-storey building shall not extend more than 30 cm (13 in.) above the building roof or parapet wall
- The top of a projecting on-premises sign on a building two storeys or higher shall not extend more than 75 cm (2.5 ft.) above the floor of the third storey, nor higher than the window sill level of the third floor
- The horizontal separation distance between a projecting on-premises sign and the curb line of a public roadway shall be not less than 0.6 m (1.97 ft.)
- The maximum projection from the building face shall not exceed 2.5 m (8.2 ft.)
- The maximum projection for a corner projecting on-premises sign shall not exceed 2.5 m (8.2 ft.)
- Corner projecting on-premises signs shall be placed at equal angles to the two frontages at the corner of the building
- Except in the case of corner signs, a projecting on-premises sign shall be placed at right angles to the building face to which it is attached
- If illuminated, projecting on-premises signs shall be lit from an external source. Internally lit, or backlit projecting on-premises signs are not permitted, except where only the lettering is backlit
- The maximum permitted size of a projecting on-premises sign is 7.5 m<sup>2</sup> (80.7 sq. ft.) in area.



#### Guidelines for Projecting Signs

- Projecting on-premises signs should complement the building to which the sign is to be attached
- Use a framed wooden board or solid material in a simple shape whenever possible
- Use bold, plain lettering, centered on the face of the sign on both sides
- Projecting on-premises signs can be illuminated by fixtures mounted to the building or sign support
- Historic symbolic signs (i.e. shoe shapes and barber pole) can be effectively used
- Specialty projecting on-premises signs are encouraged. These are signs where the shape and details of the sign are reflective of the nature of the business referred to on the sign. Examples are optometrist signs in the shape of eyeglasses, shoe repair signs in the shape of shoes, etc.
- Avoid installations that damage the original fabric of the structure (e.g. anchor the bolts into the mortar; not the masonry).

## Projecting Signs - Permitted



## Projecting Signs - Not Permitted



## Awning Signs

### Definition

A non-illuminated sign painted or stenciled on the fabric surface of an awning supported entirely from the exterior wall of a building and designed to be collapsible, retractable or capable of being folded against the wall of the supporting building. Non-retractable awnings (awnings fixed to the façade and not to be moved) are permitted, but must be introduced with great care and not in boxed-out fascia form, (see below). Awning signs are addressed in the Zoning Bylaw as projecting on-premises signs attached to an awning.

### Regulations for Awnings

- The original, traditional awnings found in Strathcona were three or four point retractable awnings with a skirt or valance
- New awnings shall have the traditional profile and may be fixed or retractable with a skirt (valance) utilizing canvas or material similar in appearance
- New awnings shall provide weather protection for pedestrians with a minimum projection of 1.5 m (5.0 ft.) from the building face
- Backlit or bubble awnings, and awnings less than five feet deep, whose primary function is signage are not permitted
- New awnings shall be mounted between the wood or masonry piers that frame the storefront, and shall align horizontally (where structurally possible) with neighbouring awnings

### Regulations for Signage on Awnings

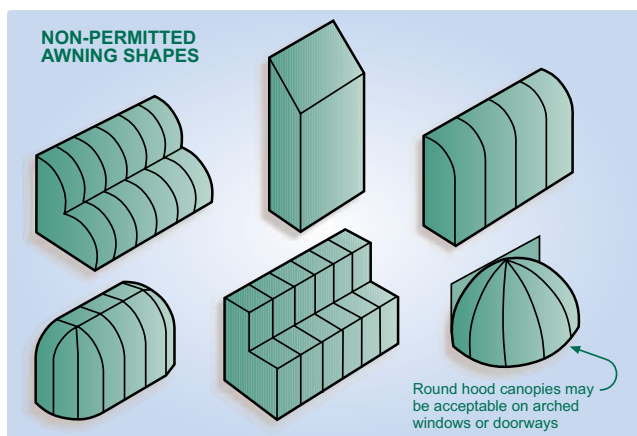
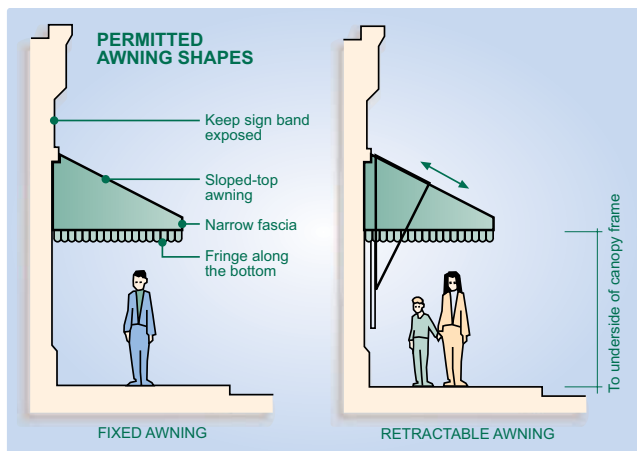
Projecting on-premises signs attached to an awning shall comply with the following:

- Signs shall be a non-illuminated sign painted or stenciled on the fabric surface of an awning
- Signs shall be located on awnings on the main floor of a building to provide pedestrian protection and to shade display windows, but may also be located above upper floor windows
- Signs shall be painted on or directly affixed to the awning covering. No sign shall be suspended from an awning covering or support structure
- The copy on the sloping portion of awning signs shall be restricted to the name or logogram of the business conducted within the premises
- Local advertising signage on awning signs shall be limited to the valance or end panels of the awning

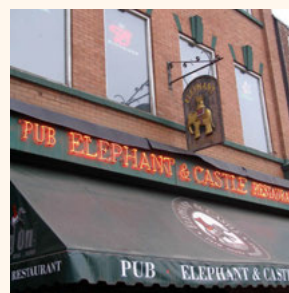


## Guidelines for Awnings

- Original awnings were retractable with a skirt or valance. New awnings should continue to convey the traditional profile
- Use awnings for pedestrian shelter and shade, and to reinforce the historic quality of Old Strathcona; not just as a sign opportunity
- Use retractable awnings if possible. Design fixed awnings with a simple standard sloped profile, narrow front panel, and edges finished with a scallop or flaps
- Do not use boxed-out fascias
- Fixed, round-headed canopies are only acceptable over arched windows and doors
- Use fabric materials that are durable and withstand the elements. Use plain or striped fabrics. Large areas of bright colour are inappropriate
- Use end panels and front “fringes” for signs. Use a lettering size in proportion to the available space
- Awnings collect dust and dirt quickly, but will last a long time if properly maintained
- Avoid installations that damage the original fabric of the structure



## Awnings - Permitted



## Awnings - Not Permitted



## Fascia Signs

### Definition

Any sign painted on or attached to an exterior building wall so that the sign does not extend more than 14.5 cm (6 in.) out from the wall or beyond the horizontal limits of the wall.

### Regulations for Fascia Signs

- If illuminated, signs shall be lit from an external source. Backlit or internally illuminated fascia on-premises signs are prohibited, except where only the lettering is backlit
- If feasible, fascia on-premises signs shall be located in the traditional locations as follows:
  - a) Sign band above the display or transom windows
  - b) Sign band below upper cornice
  - c) Sign band immediately above an awning
- A fascia on-premises sign shall not extend more than 14.5 cm (6 in.) beyond a building wall
- Fascia on-premises signs that consist only of a company logogram or an identification sign formed of individual letters shall be allowed. Not more than one such sign per business shall be allowed per building face, and the sign shall only be used to identify the tenants of the building.

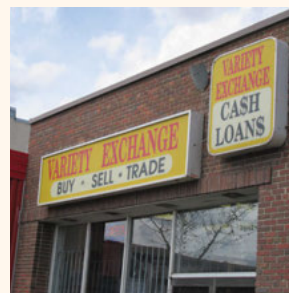
### Guidelines for Fascia Signs

- Use a simple framed rectangular board to display the name and nature of the business. Use one line of lettering where possible, and leave out secondary information
- On historic buildings, use painted or raised lettering centered on a framed wooden name board. On non-historic buildings, a similar approach can be taken using compatible current materials
- Where the available flat surface is restricted, consider using individual letters mounted directly on the wall
- Centre the signboard over the entrance door or the display window, or run it the full width of the storefront, but within the limits of the storefront's pilasters and sign bands
- For legibility, use a readable style of lettering which contrasts with the background. Outlining and shadows can be used to enhance the contrast
- Sign boards can be illuminated by lights mounted on the exterior of the building (See section on lighting)
- Avoid installations that damage the original fabric of the structure

### Fascia Signs - Permitted



### Fascia Signs - Not Permitted





## Window Signs

### Definition

Fascia on-premises signs may be put on windows and be considered window signs. A window sign is any sign painted on or affixed to the inside or outside of a window, or installed inside a window and intended to be viewed from outside the premises. Window signs do not include merchandise on display.

### Regulations for Window Signs

- The area of the window sign shall not exceed 25 percent of the window on the ground floor in which it is located
- A business may display permanent window signs in any or all windows

### Guidelines for Window Signs

- Where it is desirable to keep display space clear, insert a sign at the base or the head of the window
- Use window signs to advertise secondary information about the business, such as house of operation, services offered or products sold. Avoid using mass-produced "pasted-up" signs
- Keep lettering small and centered. Use several lines if necessary and consider curving the top line
- Panels suspended inside the window are an alternative to applying letters directly to the glass
- Illuminated signage may be useful for window signs
- Whenever possible, display the street numbers on entrance doors
- Try to avoid negative signs (e.g. "No dogs allowed" or "Shoes are required") as they deter customers. Be helpful, not hurtful
- Ensure that pedestrians can see into the premises; as to see the activity/products inside

### Window Signs - Permitted



### Window Signs - Not Permitted





## Painted Wall Sign

### Definition

A form of fascia sign that is painted directly on the side or back of a building or onto a plywood-type (solid) material that is affixed directly to the exterior wall of a building.

### Regulations for Painted Wall Signs

- The total sign area per location shall not exceed 65 m<sup>2</sup> (699.4 sq. ft.). The development officer may increase the sign area at his discretion, in consultation with the Heritage Officer.

### Guidelines for Painted Wall Signs

- Painted wall signs should be limited to the side or rear façades of a building
- Painted wall signs should be easily readable from a distance and should take on traditional forms
- Paint chosen should be "breathable" to ensure the masonry (brick) behind the paint is not negatively impacted over the long term.

#### Painted Wall Signs - Permitted



## Sandwich Board / A-Frame Signs

### Definition

A moveable standing sidewalk sign made up of two pieces of wood or metal hinged at the top that is used for advertising. This form of signage should be tasteful and match the heritage character of the area.

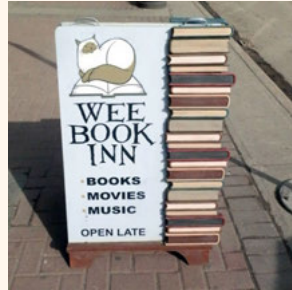
### Regulations for Sandwich Board / A-Frame Signs

- Regulations related to sandwich board / A-frame signs are found in the Traffic Bylaw; ([http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws\\_licences/TrafficListings2013.pdf](http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws_licences/TrafficListings2013.pdf))
- The sign shall be portable
- The sign shall have a maximum sign face of 0.6 m wide by 1.0 m high and constructed of a material that is a minimum of 6 mm thick
- Each sign shall be mounted on an A-frame
- There shall be a limit of one sign per business frontage
- The sign shall be placed in line with street light poles and parking meters so as not to obstruct pedestrian traffic
- The sign shall be constructed of a painted wooden or metal material such that a rigid frame is provided, and debris such as torn paper and cardboard is not present
- The sign shall be allowed directly in front of a business property only during the hours that the premises are open for business
- The sign shall not be located within 2 m of an intersection
- The sign shall not be located on roadways (including paved shoulders), centre medians, medians between main roads and service roads, "pork chop" islands, traffic circles, or any islands/medians separating traffic

### Guidelines for Sandwich Board / A-Frame Signs

- Try to use historic typefaces
- Use creative graphics
- Use clear, legible stylized lettering
- Try to avoid homemade or amateurish signs
- Avoid large expanses of white backgrounds; coloured backgrounds are preferred over white.
- Locate board where it will not hinder pedestrian traffic to maintain a pedestrian friendly walkway

## Sandwich Board / A-Frame Signs - Permitted



## Sandwich Board / A-Frame Signs - Not Permitted



## Guidelines for Designing Signs and Awnings

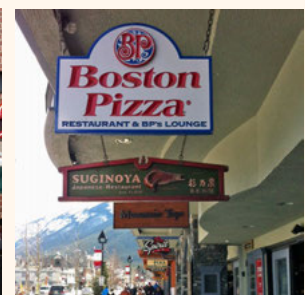
### Coordination of Signs

- Do not put up signs in a piecemeal fashion. Take the time to consider the relationship with surrounding signs. View the building as a whole in relation to its neighbours, and plan a unified design strategy to take advantage of all possible sign locations – awnings, roof, window, etc.
- Tenants and owners should consider the use of an integrated lettering style and colour scheme on one building and the use of other unifying techniques such as common sign size, border treatment, etc.
- Design your signs to emphasize the individuality of buildings and their unique architectural qualities



### Materials

- Use painted wood where possible. It is the authentic material and will look appropriate in the streetscape of Old Strathcona
- Use modern materials only when other design factors such as location, size and colour will ensure that the finished sign will be appropriate to the building and the historic character





## Lighting

- Use indirect lighting with a preference given to external source. Place wall-hung spotlights discretely so they are not highly visible and do not cause glare for pedestrians
- For detail lighting of signs, choose a simple and sturdy style
- Consideration should be given to individually back-lit or halo features/letters on signs
- Do not use flashing or intermittent lights;
- Do not use backlit canned or box signs—either projecting or wall-mounted



## Shape of Signs

- Design the sign to fit and fill the available space and to relate to the size and scale of the building. Consider using long narrow signs spanning the full width of the façades within the signbands or between the pilasters
- Frame all board signs with a border
- If a projecting sign is desired, it may be simple in shape, small in size, and utilitarian in design
- Window signs should be symmetrical in layout and position. Top lines may be curved
- Sometimes symbolic signs representing the merchandise of a store are appropriate. In the past, bicycle shops, optometrists, pharmacies, bakeshops, etc. were represented by symbolic signage. A revival of this signage type would be appropriate in Old Strathcona today; especially for projecting signs.



## Colour

- Choose colours and tones that are in keeping with the historic flavour of Old Strathcona whenever possible
- Choose tones with sufficient contrast to be clearly legible: dark on light, or light on dark
- Vibrant colours should be limited to lettering or logos

## Lettering

- Choose a style of lettering that is legible from a distance
- Fit the sign to the location. Fascia signs that are seen from close range do not need to be big to be legible. Keep them in proportion to the available space
- Make sure there is sufficient tonal contrast with the background for easy reading. The use of traditional raised letters is helpful in this respect.



## Conclusion

This document has been prepared to assist business owners and building owners with the design of signs for buildings in the Old Strathcona area. Since Old Strathcona has a distinctive ambience, due in large part to its historic streetscape, it is important that signs do not obscure or detract from its special character. A review of this publication should provide owners with an understanding of the regulations and guidelines related to signs in Old Strathcona, as well as the design principles informing them.

## Coinciding Regulations

Strathcona Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP) for guidance:

[www.edmonton.ca/city\\_government/documents/Strathcona\\_ARP\\_Consolidation.pdf](http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/Strathcona_ARP_Consolidation.pdf) (page 56 onwards)

City of Edmonton Traffic Bylaw

[www.edmonton.ca/bylaws\\_licences/C5590.pdf](http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws_licences/C5590.pdf)

## Contacts

Development Planner, City of Edmonton

780-442-6858

[sachin.ahuja@edmonton.ca](mailto:sachin.ahuja@edmonton.ca)

Heritage Planner, City of Edmonton

780-442-5045

[scott.ashe@edmonton.ca](mailto:scott.ashe@edmonton.ca)

The Old Strathcona Foundation

Executive Director

780-433-5866

[info@oldstrathconafoundation.ca](mailto:info@oldstrathconafoundation.ca)

Old Strathcona Business Association

780-437-4182

[info@oldstrathcona.ca](mailto:info@oldstrathcona.ca)

