

# Chapter 5

# Signage



Signage has always been used by businesses to advertise goods and services. The Commission recognizes that vibrant commercial activity depends, in part, on dynamic and effective signage that both respects and animates the New York City streetscape. Typically, signs were painted or affixed above storefronts in signbands, installed within display windows, suspended from brackets, or hung beneath canopies. These historic uses serve as the basis for LPC's rules for installing, modifying, and removing signage.

(See **LPC Rules**, Section 2-13, available on our website, [www.nyc.gov/landmarks](http://www.nyc.gov/landmarks).)

# In This Chapter, You Will Find:



This chapter explains LPC's rules for signage. Our goal is to help you submit a fully completed permit application for work that conforms to LPC Rules so you can get your permit more quickly.



**Note:** If you are installing signage on an awning, please see *Chapter 4, Awnings and Sidewalk Canopies*, for further information.

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# Section A

## How to Get Started



Before applying for your permit, you should:

### Find Information about Your Building

This will help you determine how the rules apply.

#### What type of building is it?

Search for the building on the [Discover NYC Landmarks map](#) to determine how the rules apply to your specific building type.

Click on your building to find **construction date, architect and style, building and landmark type**, and a link to the **LPC designation report** with additional historical background.

#### What did the building look like?

Find **historic tax photos** from the 1940s and 1980s, available through the NYC Department of Records & Information Services' [NYC Municipal Archives Collections](#).

Additional information, including guidance on finding **historic maps**, can be found in the **LPC Resource Guide** [Researching Historic Buildings in New York City](#), available at [www.nyc.gov/landmarks](http://www.nyc.gov/landmarks).

#### What about zoning?

Since maximum size and projection of bracket signs is determined by the zoning applicable to your building and the character of the historic district, check [New York City Planning's Zoning and Land Use Map](#).

### See if the Work Requires a Permit

#### Maybe you don't need a permit.

LPC generally requires a permit for installing signage, but a permit is **not required** for:

*Replacing banners or flags on "grandfathered" or previously LPC-approved signs on brackets and flagpoles.*

*Installing interior signs more than 18 inches behind a storefront display window.*

*Replacing signs not permanently attached to railings or storefront elements.*

*Replacing lenses on preexisting box signs.*

*Placing sandwich boards or installing temporary signage that does not physically attach to any part of the building or can easily be moved.*

#### Unsure whether your work requires a permit?

Contact LPC at 212-669-7817 or [info@lpc.nyc.gov](mailto:info@lpc.nyc.gov).

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# What You Will Need

A complete application requires all the materials listed below.

## Basic Application Materials

- **LPC Permit Application Form** filled out and signed by the property's owner.
  - **Color photos** of the entire building and close-ups of the storefront or commercial entrance that show location and context of proposed work.
  - **Drawings:**
    - Elevation of storefront with proposed signs and lighting
    - Elevation, section, and/or side elevation of proposed signs and lighting
    - Details of signs and lighting, plus installation methods
  - **Material specifications/ manufacturer cut sheets.**
  - Two sets of Department of Buildings (DOB) **filing drawings**, if proposed work requires a DOB permit.
- All signage must be as-of-right, in accordance with the NYC Zoning Resolution and the NYC Building Code. You can find zoning resolution information on the NYC City Planning website at [www.nyc.gov/planning](http://www.nyc.gov/planning) and the NYC Building Code is available on the DOB website at [www.nyc.gov/buildings](http://www.nyc.gov/buildings).
- **Color specifications/ paint cards.**

# Section B

## LPC Rules and Criteria



This is how the Landmarks Preservation Commission works:

The LPC Rules establish the criteria that allow staff to review and approve proposals for certain types of work at landmark properties. Permit applications for work that meets the LPC Rules can be approved faster. If the work does not meet the rules, staff may suggest alternatives that do meet the rules — or your proposal may be presented to the LPC Commissioners for review at a public hearing. Staff can guide you through this process. Visit [www.nyc.gov/landmarks](http://www.nyc.gov/landmarks) for more information.

This section explains and illustrates the rules and criteria for the most common types of work involving signage. See [LPC Rules](#), Section 2-13, for more information.

### → In This Section:

#### Signage in Signbands and Within Storefronts

- Installing Painted and Pin-Mounted Signage
- Installing Flat Sign Panels
- Installing Dimensional Letters On or In Front of a Metal Channel
- Installing Painted and Vinyl Signage

#### Bracket Signs

- Installing Bracket Signs

#### Illumination of Signage

- Installing Illuminated Signage above Storefronts
- Installing Halo-Lit Signage
- Installing Neon Signage
- Installing Bracket Sign Lighting

#### Other Types of Commercial Signage

- Installing Signage in Commercial Spaces Below the Sidewalk
- Installing Plaques
- Installing Poster Boxes
- Installing Menu Boxes
- Installing Flags and Banners

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# General Criteria

Staff can approve installation of signage if it meets the general criteria discussed below.

Certain types of installations have additional requirements. See the appropriate work type for more information.

**All types of signage must be as-of-right**, pursuant to the NYC Zoning Resolution and the NYC Building Code. See *Section A* for how to find information on your building.

**Signage cannot be installed through decorative features** and cannot damage, obscure, or eliminate architectural features. To confirm compliance, provide annotated photos and notes on drawings with your application.

**Signage, both individually as well as the cumulative impact of all signs, cannot detract from the architectural features** of the building, adjacent buildings, or the streetscape.

*If the Commission has already approved signage or it is grandfathered, staff will consider the overall amount of signage for the storefront and building, including lettering on awning skirts, signage in the signband or applied to storefront glazing, and bracket signs when reviewing an application. The LPC may require that some signage be eliminated or reduced.*

# Signage in Signbands and Within Storefronts

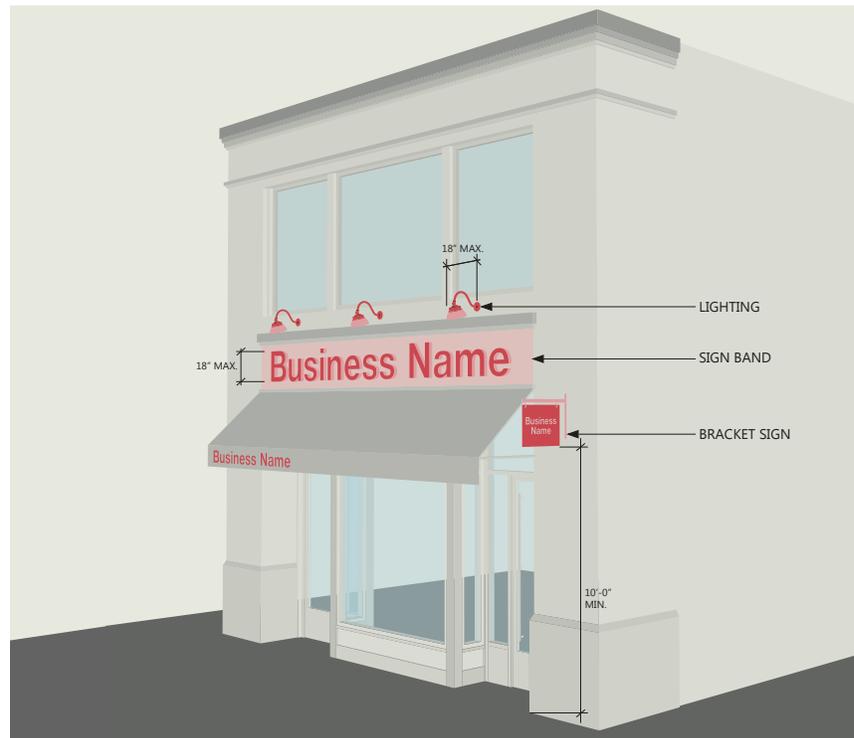
LPC staff can approve signage in signbands and on storefronts. Signs must be in proportion to the signband, typically leaving an open border along the perimeter. Letters and / or graphics cannot exceed 90 percent of the signband area.

## Installing Painted and Pin-Mounted Signage

Staff can approve installing signage in signbands and storefronts if it meets the following criteria:

### Location

Letters and logos can be attached in the signband (see *Glossary*) or onto a channel in front of a storefront or transom



Staff can approve installing signage in many places on the storefront, including but not limited to on the signband, on an awning, on a bracket sign, or on a display window or transom.

## Required Application Materials

- Photos** of building facades.
- Photos of storefront** or commercial entrance locations of proposed new signs.
- Storefront or building elevation** showing sign.
- Elevation** for each proposed signage type:
  - Height and coverage of lettering and logo
- Section or side elevation** of the proposed sign:
  - Height and depth of lettering and logo
  - Installation method
- Details of the proposed integrated light fixtures, if any.**
- Material specifications.**
- Color samples.**

*If LPC requires additional materials after your application is reviewed, you will receive a Materials Checklist from LPC staff.*

window. They should not be attached to a decorative cornice or historic storefront framing. Signage should be located and attached in such a manner as to avoid obscuring or damaging architectural features.

### Material

Letters and logos can be painted directly onto the historic masonry signband or a flat sign panel installed within the signband. Letters and logos can also be individual dimensional letters made of wood, metal, or painted plastic.

### Dimension

Individual dimensional letters can be no taller than 18 inches. Dimensional letters can project up to two inches from the signband, sign panel, or metal channel.

### Installation

Pin-mounted letters that require attachment to the historic masonry signband should use mounting strips or a channel to limit penetrations, where feasible.



The **signband** is the flat, horizontal area on the facade, usually located immediately above the storefront and below the second story window sill where signs were historically attached. Signbands can also be found immediately above the storefront display window but below the masonry opening's lintel. A signband shall not include the flat portion of a cornice that is less than 12 inches in height. A signband may exist above a second story storefront. See this chapter's *Glossary* for more information.



Lettering mounted on a metal channel within a transom.

## Installing Flat Sign Panels

In addition to the criteria for installing painted and pin-mounted signage, there are additional criteria that apply specifically to installing a flat sign panel. Staff can approve installing flat sign panels in signbands and storefronts if it meets the following criteria:

### Location

A sign panel should be located in the signband.

### Material

A sign panel can be made of wood, metal, or opaque glass. Letters can be painted or pin-mounted metal, wood, or painted plastic.

### Dimension

The sign panel should be proportional to the signband, and must not exceed 90 percent of the signband's area. Letters can be up to 18 inches high. The sign panel can project up to two inches from the facade; dimensional letters attached to the sign panel can project up to two additional inches, for a total of four inches of projection.

## Installing Dimensional Letters On or In Front of a Metal Channel

In addition to the criteria for installing painted and pin-mounted signage, additional criteria apply specifically to installing dimensional letters on or in front of a metal channel. This type of installation allows for individual free-standing letters attached to a metal channel, which in turn can be mounted to the facade with a minimal number of attachment points or in front of a transom or display window. Staff can approve installing dimensional letters on or in front of a metal channel if the installation meets the following criteria:

### Location

The metal channel can be placed in a signband or in front of a transom window.

### Design

The channel must be straight or slightly bowed.

**Material**

Letters attached to the channel can be made of wood, metal, or painted plastic. Where installed in front of the transom, the letters cannot be taller than the transom.

**Dimension**

The channel can be no more than one inch in height and cannot project beyond the plane of the facade. Individual dimensional letters can be no taller than 18 inches. Letters may project up to two inches from the channel.



Pin-mounted lettering on a sign panel.

**Installing Painted and Vinyl Signage**

Staff can approve installing painted and vinyl signage if it meets the following criteria:

**Location**

Vinyl letters, numbers, and graphics/logos can be applied directly onto storefront glazing, including glazing at the display window, transom, and door.

**Dimension**

Vinyl signage can occupy no more than 20 percent of the glazed area. The signage area is calculated by the total area of the sign as a visual object, without subtracting for voids between letters, numbers, or graphics/logos.



Vinyl lettering applied to storefront glazing.

# Bracket Signs

Bracket signs are a common form of signage found in historic districts. While the LPC Rules provide a great deal of flexibility in materials, finishes, and overall design for bracket signs, location and size are also dictated by the NYC Zoning Resolution. Familiarize yourself with your property's zoning restrictions before submitting your application.

## Installing Bracket Signs

Staff can approve installing bracket signs if they meet the following criteria:

### Location

**Bracket signs must be installed in close proximity to the commercial tenant** identified on the sign.

**The armature must be installed below the second story**, or above the second story at the lowest possible point that meets minimum height requirements of the NYC Zoning Resolution. The armature must be installed within the storefront opening or flat face of plain masonry, wood, or metal pier, but not cast iron.

**Signs located at historically industrial buildings** with a metal canopy can be mounted to the

canopy's underside, as long as the bottom of the sign is at least ten feet above the sidewalk.

### Installation

**Signs can be either fixed or swing freely** from points of attachment to the armature. They cannot be made to move by mechanized or controlled means.



This bracket sign with armature has been anchored to the storefront framing and not through the historic cast iron.

## Required Application Materials

- Photos** of building facades.
- Photos of storefront** or commercial entrance locations for proposed new signs.
- Storefront or building elevation** or side elevation.
- Height of installation above sidewalk.
- Elevation and side elevation** of proposed sign and armature.
  - Height and depth of sign, lettering, logo, and armature
  - Installation method
- Details of the proposed integrated light fixtures**, if any.
- Material specifications.**
- Color samples.**

*If LPC requires additional materials after your application is reviewed, you will receive a Materials Checklist from LPC staff.*



A bracket sign anchored through mortar joints at plain masonry.

**Design, Materials, and Finish**

**The armature** must be simply designed and in a finish that is harmonious with the storefront finish.

**The bracket sign** can be made of wood or metal.

**Letters, words, numbers, or graphics** can be painted, applied, or pin-mounted to the sign and made of wood, metal, or painted plastic.

**Display faces, letters, words, numerals, illustrations, or graphics** must be colors that do not detract from significant architectural features. Jarring colors and graphics must be avoided.

**Size and Projection**

**Signage cannot exceed the following dimensions:** 24 × 36 inches, with a projection up to 40 inches from the facade in historic districts that were historically manufacturing or industrial; 18 × 24 inches, with a projection up to 18 inches from the facade in historic districts that were historically commercial; and 12 × 18 inches, with a projection up to 12 inches from the facade in historic districts that were historically residential.

The NYC Zoning Resolution also regulates the size and projection of bracket signs. Be sure to also check the Zoning Resolution to make sure your proposal complies with those rules as well.

**Novelty shapes** such as circles, polygons, and irregular shapes are permitted, provided they fall within general surface area size parameters.

Measured from face to face, **overall sign width** cannot exceed two inches. Signs with raised lettering or graphics cannot exceed three inches in total width.

**Bracket signs under canopies** have different requirements for size and projection under the NYC Zoning Resolution but must generally fall within area size parameters for bracket signs.

**Number**

One bracket sign can be installed per storefront. Corner storefronts may qualify for two. Buildings with more than one ground floor tenant can have multiple signs, as follows:

**One sign per establishment**, with no more than two signs per 20 feet of building street frontage.

**Size, design, placement, materials, and details of armatures must be similar** or match each other.

**Ground floor corner storefronts** may qualify for two signs.

**One bracket sign can be installed on each building facade** with at least 20 feet of street frontage. However, each facade must have a primary entrance and the sign must be in close proximity to the entrance.

**Only one bracket sign can be located within 20 feet of the corner** of a building.



A bracket sign in a novelty shape.

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**Can bracket signs be installed for upper story tenants?**

Bracket signs for upper story tenants can be installed adjacent to the building entrance, as follows:

*One sign per tenant is permitted on armature.*

*Signs must hang underneath one another on the same armature.*

*Total dimensions of signs taken together cannot exceed specified size requirements.*

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**Can a bracket sign be installed if the building already has a flagpole and a banner?**

New bracket signs are not permitted if an existing Commission-approved, grandfathered, or unapproved flagpole exists on the building. A new bracket sign may be permitted if the existing flagpole is removed.

# Illumination of Signage

Staff can approve installation of light fixtures above storefronts to illuminate signage in signbands, or to illuminate storefronts where signbands or sign panels do not exist. Signs can also be “halo-lit.” There are options for external illumination of bracket signs and for interior neon signs behind display windows. **Staff cannot approve exterior signage that is internally illuminated**, e.g., light emitted through the front or sides of letters or a logo. All other interior illuminated signage, aside from what is described below, must be installed at least 18 inches behind the inside plane of the display window glass or transom.



Halo-lit, pin-mounted lettering at a signband.

## Installing Illuminated Signage Above Storefronts

Staff can approve storefront signage illumination that meets the following criteria:

**Light fixtures installed in or on plain masonry, metal, or wood** (but not cast iron).

**Signbands and sign panels with integrated cove fixtures in the same finish** as the sign.

**Small projecting light fixtures 12 inches or less** in diameter, length, or width can be installed above the sign or storefront in the following quantities and spacing:

*One fixture if the storefront opening is 1–6 feet*

*Two fixtures if the storefront opening is 6–12 feet*

## Required Application Materials

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Photos</b> of building facades.  | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Details of the proposed integrated light fixtures</b> , if any.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Photos of storefront</b> or commercial entrance locations and signage locations to be illuminated. | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Material specifications.</b>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Elevation and side elevation</b> of proposed light fixtures.                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Color samples.</b>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Height and projection.  | <i>If LPC requires additional materials after your application is reviewed, you will receive a Materials Checklist from LPC staff.</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Installation method.  |  |

*Three fixtures if the storefront opening is 12–18 feet*

*Four fixtures if the storefront opening is 18–24 feet*

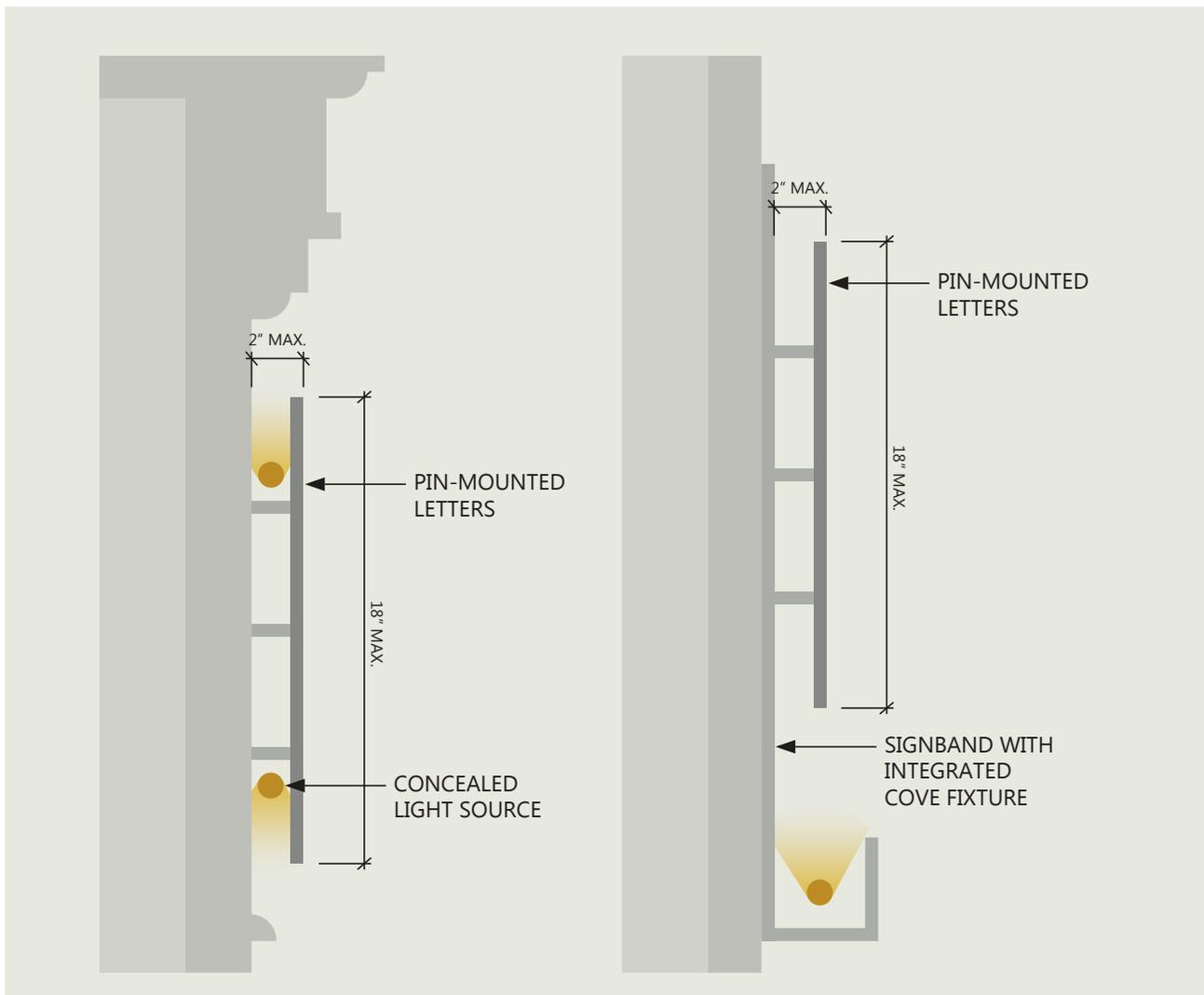
**Light fixture armature cannot project more than 18 inches** from the sign.

**Conduit must be concealed.**

### Installing Halo-Lit Signage

Staff can approve installing halo-lit signage with a concealed light source that emits a glow behind solid letters or logo but does not emit light through the front or sides. Halo-lit signage must otherwise meet criteria for pin-mounted signage at signbands, as described earlier in this section.

Below left, a section drawing of halo-lit signage; below right, a section drawing of signage illuminated with an integrated cove fixture.



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### Installing Neon Signage

Staff can approve installing one interior neon sign per display window if it meets the following criteria:

**Backing panel must be clear.**

**Sign must be installed at least six inches behind** the glass.

**Sign must not exceed 15 percent of the area** of the display window or transom.

Visible illuminated lighting strips that outline display windows are **not permitted**.

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### Installing Bracket Sign Lighting

Staff can approve lighting a bracket sign by concealed lighting integrated into the sign or by small, discrete light fixtures on projecting arms attached to and finished to blend with the sign or armature. **Staff cannot approve internally illuminated bracket signs.**



A combination of neon and vinyl signage that meets staff-level rules.

# Other Types of Commercial Signage

Signage can be installed at locations other than within or adjacent to storefront infill. Often these are commercial spaces that are not necessarily storefronts or locations that do not qualify for other types of signage.

## Installing Signage in Commercial Spaces Partially below the Sidewalk

Staff can approve installing signage in commercial spaces below the sidewalk if it meets the following criteria:

**Sign panels can be installed on a plain masonry band or wall** above the commercial space opening and must otherwise follow criteria for sign panels above storefronts.

**Flat metal or wood signs** up to 12 × 36 inches in size and one inch thick with painted or applied lettering can be attached to an existing areaway fence in front of or associated with the store.

## Required Application Materials

- **Photos** of building facades.
  - **Photos of storefront** or commercial entrance locations of proposed new signs.
  - **Storefront or building elevation or side elevation:**
    - Height of installation above sidewalk
  - **Sign elevation for each proposed signage type:**
    - Height and width of sign, plaque, or poster / menu box
  - **Section or side elevation** of proposed sign, plaque, or poster / menu box:
    - Height and depth of lettering and logo
    - Installation method
  - **Details** of the proposed integrated light fixtures, if any.
  - **Material specifications.**
  - **Color samples.**
- If LPC requires additional materials after your application is reviewed, you will receive a Materials Checklist from LPC staff.*



An example of a sign panel installed at plain masonry for a below-grade commercial space.



Plaque signage marks the entrance to a building.

### Installing Plaques

Staff can approve installing plaques if they meet the following criteria:

On the entrances of institutional buildings or other commercial buildings that **cannot typically utilize other sign types**.

**Composed of metal, glass, or stone and installed at plain masonry, metal, or wood, but not cast iron.**

**Up to 12 × 18 inches** and 1/2 inch thick.

**Mounted on a free-standing metal pole** with a dark finish up to six feet tall, installed through non-historic paving within an areaway. Each plaque must be no larger than 6 × 12 inches, with no more than three plaques total on the pole.

### Installing Poster Boxes

Staff can approve installing poster boxes if they meet the following criteria:

**Installed at buildings that traditionally used poster boxes**, including religious institutions, community centers, libraries, museums, and clubs.

**Must be installed in areas of plain masonry, wood, or metal**, but not cast iron. Must have a metal or wood frame with clear glass.

**Lighting must be inside the box** with concealed wiring.



An example of a poster box at an institutional building.

### Installing Menu Boxes

Staff can approve installing menu boxes if they meet the following criteria:

**At or near a storefront entrance**, installed on plain masonry, wood, or metal, but not cast iron.

**With a metal or wood frame and clear glass**, and no larger than 28 × 30 inches.

**Lighting must be inside the box** with concealed wiring.

Menu boxes installed at areas of plain masonry at a corner storefront.



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## Installing Flags and Banners

A new fabric flag with signage can be hung on an existing flagpole armature, provided that the flagpole was approved by the Commission or present at the time of designation. Staff cannot approve a new flagpole unless one existed historically. Staff may suggest alternatives — or the proposal may be presented to the full Commission for review at a public hearing. Flags with signage must comply with zoning requirements as well.

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# Section C

## Technical Guidance and Resources

→ In This Section:

[Glossary](#)

[Master Plans](#)

This section provides additional guidance and resources to help you understand LPC's rules and criteria — and submit the correct materials with your permit application.

# Glossary

**Armature**

is a metal structural support for a rigid projecting sign. The armature may support the bracket sign by means of one or two projecting arms.

**Bracket Sign (or Blade Sign)**

is a rigid outdoor sign installed perpendicular to a building facade and attached to an armature, consisting of the (two) display faces and all letters, words, numerals, illustrations, and logos associated with the establishment that are applied to the faces. In addition, a bracket sign may consist solely of an outline of a shape and/or letters intended to act as a symbol or sign for the establishment.

**Cornice**

is a projecting architectural molding that tops the elements to which it is attached, used especially for a roof or the crowning member of an entablature (the lintel and its architectural components), located directly above the frieze or flat portion of the entablature.

**Channel-mounted Sign**

is a sign made up of dimensional letters attached to a metal channel or bar that spans in front of the transom window, mounted directly to the storefront framing or the returns of the piers of the storefront surround.

**Cove Lighting**

is a form of indirect lighting built into projecting coves or trays at the top or bottom of sign panels or installed on existing ledges, recesses, or the cornice or entablature above the storefront. Illumination can be directed upwards or downwards on the sign.

**Dimensional Letters**

are painted wood, metal, or plastic three-dimensional letters (solid or with an open back) that are applied to sign panels, sign bands, sign channels, or bracket signs.

**Display Window**

is the large glazed portion of the storefront infill, and the associated framing, above the bulkhead and below the transom, extending pier to pier. The display window is typically used for the display of goods and to provide daylight and visibility into the commercial space.

**Flat Panel Sign**

is a sign made up of digital print, die-cut vinyl, or dimensional letters attached to a wood or metal substrate (the panel) that can be mounted directly to the building above a storefront.

**Gooseneck Light Fixture**

is a type of projecting light fixture that is curved like the neck of a goose, with a lamp shade shielding the light bulb and directing the illumination downward toward the sign.

**Halo Illumination**

is a type of indirect illumination where the source is placed behind the face of the letters to create a glow effect onto the wall or backing panel that the sign is mounted to.

**Lintel**

is the horizontal member or element above a door, window, or storefront opening.

**Pier**

is an exterior vertical member(s) or element(s) (usually of brick, stone, or metal), placed at intervals along a wall, which typically separates storefront openings within a single building or defines a single storefront opening.

**Pin-mounted Sign**

is a sign mounted directly on the signband of a building wall as individual letters, numbers, or symbols without a background. Individual letters, numbers, or symbols can also be pin-mounted to a sign panel.

**Sign**

is a fixture or area containing lettering or graphics used to advertise a store, goods, or services.

**Signband**

is the flat, horizontal area on the facade, usually located immediately above the storefront and below the second story window sill where signs were historically attached. Signbands can also be found immediately above the storefront display window but below the masonry opening's lintel. A signband shall not include the flat portion of a cornice that is less than 12 inches in height. A signband may exist above a second story storefront.

**Storefront**

is the first or second story area of the facade that provides access or natural illumination into a space used for retail or other commercial purposes.

**Storefront Infill**

is the framing, glazing, and cladding contained within a storefront opening in the facade, including display windows, bulkheads, entranceways, etc.

**Storefront Opening**

is the area of the facade between the piers and lintel that contains storefront infill.

**Transom**

is a glazed area above a display window or door that is separated from the display window or door by a horizontal framing.

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# Master Plans

Master plans, which generally do not have an expiration date, allow you to perform repetitive signage work over time as finances and vacancies permit (See *Section 2-02* of the LPC Rules). Master plans are more efficient because once approved, applications can be processed more quickly.

**Master plans can be approved at the staff level or by the Commission**, depending on whether the work meets the LPC Rules.

**Once a master plan is established, you can move forward** with work covered by the master plan by submitting a completed application form to the Commission, describing the scope of work and stating that it conforms to master plan drawings and other documents.

**Staff reviews the application and generally issues an Authorization to Proceed permit** prior to commencement of work.