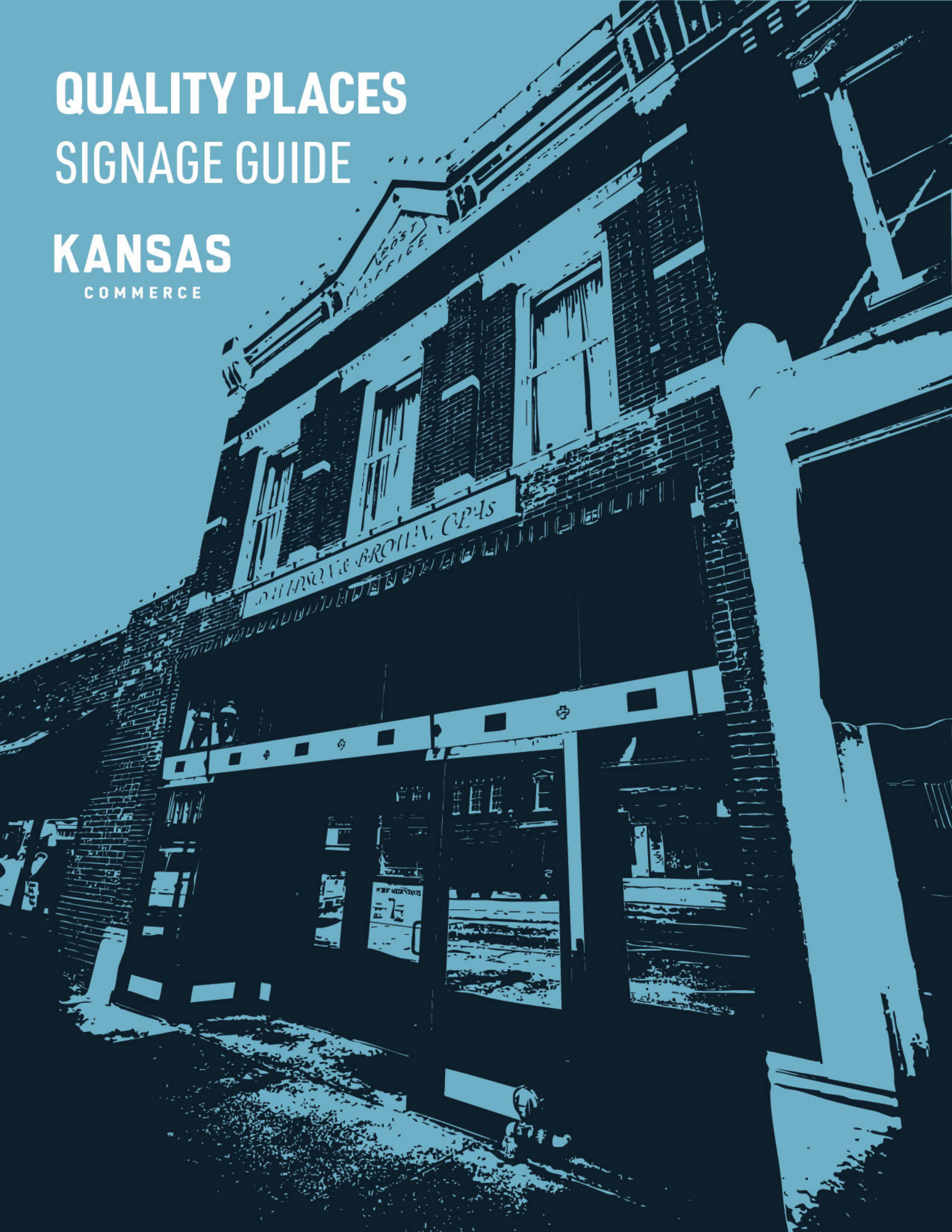


QUALITY PLACES SIGNAGE GUIDE

KANSAS
COMMERCE



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is to act as a starting point for improving the physical commercial and retail signage in your downtown district. It is intended to be an active resource for your community.

Good signage has an important influence on the way consumers perceive downtown and its businesses. Easy to read, well-designed and high-quality signs contribute to an overall welcoming feeling in the downtown area and call attention to your individual businesses. An effective sign not only communicates the location of your business, but also conveys the “flavor” of an individual business while complementing the building’s design

While reading this guide, keep an eye out for language related to things “to do” and things to “avoid” Also keep in mind that small moves are better than no action at all. Incremental improvements can make a big difference over time and larger projects can often be more manageable when broken into phases.

GOOD SIGNS ARE:

- Easy to read
- Well-designed
- Made from high-quality materials
- Exhibit good craftsmanship
- Reflect the business’s brand, personality and identity
- Compliments the building’s design and the surrounding environment.

**This document is a guide and is not regulatory in nature. Local guidelines, or local or state codes and regulations should take precedent over any recommendations made here.*



Robert McLaughlin, Kansas Main Street Design Specialist, creates tailored sign designs that reflect the unique character and vibrancy of Kansas communities. Each project is personalized, incorporating community themes, local landmarks, and branding elements to enhance Main Street revitalization efforts.

RECOMMENDED TYPES OF SIGNS:

- **Historic signs** should be retained when possible.
- **Projecting, hanging, or blade signs** should be designed in accordance with local codes if applicable. These types of signs should be mounted at least seven (7) feet from the sidewalk to allow clearance for people to walk underneath.



Blade signs are designed to be easily visible to pedestrians walking by.

The Hoof and Horn Steakhouse, Sedgwick

- **Awning signs** can be printed on the valance for a more traditional look or integrated as large-scale graphics on the body of the awning.

- **Building, facade, or flush-mounted signs** should be contained to the width of the storefront opening and should not be more than two and a half feet tall. Lettering should be between 8 inches (can be read from 250 feet away) and 18 inches tall (12 inch letters can be read from 400 feet) and occupy no more than 65% of the sign board.
- **Individual letter signage.** Often referred to as dimensional letter signs, each letter is individually mounted to the building, generally above the storefront. They can either be mounted directly to the wall or installed with stand-offs or pins for added depth. Individual lettering can be back-lit or hallowed.



Letter signs are an attention-grabbing option that are more durable than many other types.

The Bullpen, Baldwin City

- **Pole signs.** Signs installed on poles are recommended only if they are historic, being restored, and are not back-lit plastic.
- **Window signs.** Be careful that signs do not obscure window displays. As a general rule of thumb, signs should take up no more than 25% of the window area.

WHAT TO AVOID:

- **Electronic signs** are generally not recommended but can be used for theater marquees in some cases.
- **Flashing signs** are not recommended
- **Oversized signs.** Design signs to complement the building in size, shape and color. They should not compete with or obscure building features.
- **Internally lit plastic signs** also known as backlit plastic signs are generally not appropriate because they are typically hard to customize, are the wrong scale for historic buildings and can appear thrown onto the building.



Historic neon signs provide character and enhance the sense of place in a community.

Central National Bank, Junction City

OCCASIONAL USES:

- **Freestanding signs** are not common in downtown districts, as most buildings have a zero-lot line, and therefore, no space in front of a building for one.
- **Historic neon signs** can be significant to the building's design and should be retained and preserved. New neon signage can be incorporated successfully if at an appropriate scale for the building and allowed by local codes.
- **Sandwich board signs** are effective when utilized to notify customers of restaurant specials or sales. Place signs in locations that will not impede traffic flow or become a safety issue. Note that these signs are typically only out when the business is open and are taken down at night.



Top: Crest Theater, Great Bend

Bottom: Historic Theatre & Arts Council, Augusta

GENERAL GUIDELINES:

- Follow any local ordinances regarding allowable sign type, size and location.
- Keep signs simple, straightforward and to the point. In general, limit the colors in your signs to three (3) or less.
- Mount signs into mortar joints – never drill into brick, stone, or other masonry units.
- Coordinate signage at multiple scales when appropriate. Large signage on the façade is more visible from a distance, while smaller signage on windows and doors appeals more to pedestrians.
- Consider the contrast of lettering and logos. White letters on a dark background tend to be the most legible. When using individual letter signage, choose light colored letters for dark walls and dark letters for a light building. Window letters are easiest to read when they are light colored, or gold leafed with a dark outline.
- Install building street numbers by the front door or in transom openings above the entrance.
- Locate signage for second-story businesses on the first floor and next to the path leading up to the second floor. Avoid placing signs above upper story windows, as this is inappropriate in most cases.
- Consider external illumination so signs can be read at night. See the lighting section for more information.
- Avoid placing signs on the upper facade or covering architectural details.
- Use materials like wood, metal, glass, or high-quality polymers (plastic bubble letters are prohibited in historic districts).



Sign colors, materials and lighting should be restrained and harmonious with the building architecture.

Oz Winery, Wamego



Proper proportion ensures that the elements of the sign are balanced with the building.

Davidson & Brown CPA, Ottawa

AWNINGS:

Awnings are a relatively inexpensive way to make a big impact on a building's appearance. Awnings can add color and dimension to the sidewalk, disguise missing transoms or previous inappropriate alterations to the upper storefront area, provide sun shading, and act as a venue for business signage.

Fabric awnings were historically used on commercial Main Street buildings, installed in either an operable or fixed (permanently open) position. In many cases, the underlying structure of a previous awning remains and can be retained and utilized with replacement fabric.

- Awning shapes and sizes should be proportionate to the corresponding building opening. A rectangular opening should have a traditional rectangular awning with a sloped shape while an arched window should have a rounded awning.
- Consider scale of individual awnings and surroundings. Be sure that the awning does not cover too much of the storefront vertically or extend too far over the sidewalk. Awning width should only extend slightly beyond the storefront to allow it to be anchored and should not conceal the columns. Leave at least eight (8) feet clear from the bottom of the awning to the sidewalk.
- Use a scalloped or shaped edge on a fabric awning for a more traditional look. A straight edge or no valance at all will create a contemporary feel. Omitting side panels altogether will also create a more contemporary feel.
- Use multiple awnings to break up a façade. Awnings should not extend continuously over multiple storefronts.

- The use of sloped metal or shingle covered awnings on existing buildings should be avoided as they are generally not appropriate for historic commercial buildings however metal awnings can be appropriate in some more modern buildings. Flat cantilevered canopies and canopies suspended by rods or chains can also be appropriate in some buildings.
- Remove awnings that detract from the historic character during building rehabilitation (e.g., corrugated metal or asphalt shingles).
- Awnings should be well maintained and cleaned regularly to remove natural soiling.
- Avoid back-lit awnings; use spotlights or soffit lighting instead. See the lighting section for more information.



Awnings should feature minimal information to maintain clarity and readability, especially when placed on a sloped surface. If incorporating a logo, ensure it is appropriately sized and does not overwhelm the structure.

The Chanute Tribune, Chanute

- In some cases, awnings on upper windows may be effective and appropriate for covering window openings which have been infilled on the top and cannot be replaced with full-height windows, or to provide sun shading for upper story occupants. Do not install upper story awnings that would obscure ornate window hoods or lintel detailing.
- Coordinate awning colors with the overall color scheme for the building, which can include obvious things such as signage and more subtle sources such as flecks of color in masonry. Balance strong and detailed graphic signs with a solid awning or simple signage designs with a bolder striped awning.

WALL PAINTED SIGNS:

- Wall painted signs are prohibited on primary or street-facing secondary facades in Historic Districts.
- They are permitted on exposed walls where adjacent buildings were demolished, provided the wall is stable and prepared.
- Wall painted signs depicting business names or products are classified as signs and prohibited in Historic Districts.
- Wall painted signs should not substitute for building maintenance or cover damaged masonry.
- Breathable paints (e.g., lime wash, silicate) must be used on historic brick; avoid latex or enamel.
- Block or stucco walls not facing the street are most suitable for wall painted signs.

LIGHTING:

Lighting can illuminate signage and increase legibility at night, create a design feature during the day, and even highlight certain building features. Good lighting adds to the downtown ambiance during evening hours and provides a sense of safety and security.

- Keep light fixtures and schemes simple to avoid overwhelming the building.
- Be deliberate with what you are trying to illuminate and direct lights accordingly. Lighting should be designed so that the pedestrian or motorist does not look directly into the light source.
- Back-lit push through acrylic letters are an excellent way to light signs.
- Avoid rope lights, LED strip lights or strings of exposed bulbs in storefront windows.
- Gooseneck lights are an excellent way to incorporate external lighting for signage and add an architectural element to the storefront. They can be mounted above individual letter signage, a sign panel and/or an awning.
- Install any light fixture anchors into mortar joints to avoid damaging masonry units.
- Storefront merchandise and display windows should be lit from the inside, with lighting directed on the display. Windows and storefronts should be lit during evening hours to maintain pedestrian interest and add to district safety and ambiance.
- Using warm lighting (4000K) for sign illumination is recommended. Back-lit sign faces are discouraged and not allowed in Historic Districts.



*Illuminating signage with external lighting adds business visibility and vibrancy to the pedestrian realm.
Apron Strings, Salina*

CODES AND REGULATIONS:

Be aware of different codes and regulations that might apply to building projects depending on your local jurisdiction; many historic building rehabilitation projects will require upgrades to enhance the building's safety. Consult with local officials early on to find out what health, safety and welfare measures are required, what building codes allow and whether a building permit is required for the scope of work proposed. Zoning regulations might affect permitted uses, allowable signage or parking requirements. Your district might also have local design guidelines that should be followed to encourage appropriate design or a design review process that requires approval before construction begins. Engaging with local officials at the earliest stage of the planning process possible is key to identifying requirements and achievable solutions.

Questions?

CONTACT THE COMMERCE TEAM

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