

## COMPATIBLE SIGNS IN THE DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Downtown Historic District has a different look and feel than other commercial areas in Pocatello because of the time period when it was built. The district is an important community resource which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A Historic Preservation Code has been adopted to preserve its historic character. The Historic Preservation Commission has been charged with conducting design review of exterior building features, including signs, to ensure that the district's historic character is maintained.

This brochure is meant to be a guide for you as you choose your business signs. Signs should fit a business owner's taste and style, but also need to be compatible with the character of the Downtown Historic District. Compatible signs should reflect the district's period of significance (1892-1939) and a pedestrian orientation. Design tips are included in this brochure to help businesses find a sign that meets their needs and is also compatible with the district.

## THE DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

In addition to a sign permit, a Certificate of Appropriateness must be obtained for signs in the Downtown Historic District. Certificates of Appropriateness are issued by the Historic Preservation Commission after they conduct a review of the proposed design. In addition to review for items listed in the code, the Historic Preservation Commission also evaluates the proposed sign design based on the compatibility with the historic character of the District and compatibility with the building on which the sign is located.

The Certificate of Appropriateness process typically takes two to three weeks. Unlike sign permits in other districts, there is no permit fee for signs in the Downtown Historic District. Application forms can be obtained from the City of Pocatello Development Services Center (234-6161) where staff is available by appointment to answer questions.

## **Special Funding Available**

To assist business owners in the creation or preservation of signs that complement the Downtown's unique historic characteristics, the City of Pocatello has a special sign improvement incentive within its Facade Improvement Program that may provide grants up to \$500 toward signs and up to \$1,500 towards awnings. For more information, contact the staff assigned to the Historic Preservation Commission at 208-234-6500.

## **Common Historic Sign Types**

Signs are an important part of a commercial district. Like building architecture, sign designs have changed with the times. Below are some examples of common sign types within the period of significance of the Downtown Historic District (information from U.S. Department of Interior Preservation Brief #25: The Preservation of Historic Signs).

**Fascia Signs-** These signs are placed on the horizontal band located between the storefront and 2nd story or cornice. Because this type of signage was so common, many buildings are specifically designed with a place where a fascia sign can be placed. These signs are typically very narrow and usually contained little more than the name of the business and perhaps a street name.

**Window Signs-** Advertisements were often painted or etched on the glass in window, doors and transoms. Goldleaf was a common material used in window signs.

**Awning Signs-** The fringe or skirt of the awning, as well as the panel at the side, were typical places for a business name or a street number to be listed.

**Symbolic Signs-** Symbolic signs date back to a time when much of the population could not read. A sheep signified a tailor, a tankard a tavern, a red and white striped pole signified a barbershop and three gold balls signified a pawn shop. Symbolic signs that include pictures or shapes that represent products are often seen in historic districts and contribute to a “quaint” atmosphere.

**Hanging or Projecting Signs-** These signs contained both lettered and symbolic advertisements. Projecting signs were often paired and placed at a 45-degree angle to increase visibility. Projecting signs were very common in the early days of Downtown Pocatello.

**Lighting-** Before internally illuminated plastic signs became common, signs were generally illuminated by light shining onto them. Some larger signs were created from light bulbs arranged to form symbols and words. Neon first appeared in signs in the 1920’s and reached the height of popularity in the 1940’s.

## **Design Tips**

The Downtown Historic District historically was a vibrant and active commercial center. While the Commission reviews for compatibility with the historic character of the district, creativity and individuality in sign designs are encouraged. Below are some design tips to give you an idea of what the Historic Preservation Commission will be looking for while reviewing your sign:

**Sign Type.** Sign Application will be reviewed for compatibility with the historic character of the Downtown Historic District. Signs styles common during the period of significance are likely to be considered compatible.

**Size.** Sign code Section 15.20.230(B) specifies a maximum of signs of 1.5 square foot per lineal foot of the first 25- feet of building frontage and 0.5 square feet for each additional lineal foot of building frontage. Exceptions may be granted if it can be shown that a larger size allowance is more compatible with the historic character of the district or building.

**Materials.** Sign Code Section 15.20.250(A) specifies that signs must be wood or metal, which were the common materials during the period of significance. Plastic signs are generally discouraged, but because plastic performs well in local harsh weather conditions it may be considered as a substitute material if the sign mimics sign types commonly made of wood or metal. Plastic is not an appropriate material for awnings.

**Colors.** Historic paints and materials came in all shades and colors, but tended to be more muted than the range of the colors and materials now available. A sample of the historic paint chips is available at City Hall and also through most paint companies.

**Illumination.** External illumination provided by spotlights (such as gooseneck lights) are allowed. Neon is generally acceptable and encouraged. Internal illumination using backlit Plexiglas is not permitted. Existed backlit signs may receive approval of a face change, but new business will be encouraged to phase out backlit plastic signs.