

# sign guidelines





# City of Dana Point -- Sign Design Guidelines

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# City of Dana Point -- Sign Design Guidelines

## A. Introduction

Signs are one of the most noticeable visual elements along Dana Point's commercial streetscapes. Not only do signs communicate something about the goods or services being offered at a particular establishment, they also communicate something about the quality of the businesses and the image of the community as a whole. Taken together with other visual elements in the City's environment, signs play a major role in how people perceive the City's image. Well-designed signs that communicate their message clearly, without attempting to compete for attention will help create a more pleasant visual environment along Dana Point's streets.



## B. Purpose

The purpose of this Sign Design Guidelines manual is three fold. First, is to further implement the intent and purpose of Chapter 9.37 (Signs and Advertising Devices) of the Dana Point Zoning Code, otherwise referred to as the Sign Code. Second, it is intended that the design guidelines will assist business owners and sign designers to better understand the City's expectations for well-designed, quality signs. Third, the Guidelines are intended to assist those with the responsibility of reviewing sign permit applications to have established criteria with which to judge the appropriateness of a sign's design.



*A good quality sign enhances the aesthetic character of the development.*

## C. Applicability

1. The Sign Design Guidelines are applicable to all new signs and the modification or reconstruction of existing signs throughout the City. The Sign Design Guidelines will be utilized during the City's review of sign permit applications or through the review of other permit applications when signs are a part of a larger project. Signs will be reviewed for their "consistency" with the Guidelines and the standards contained in the Sign Code.
2. The Sign Design Guidelines are designed to help ensure quality signs that communicate their message in a clear fashion; however, the "Guidelines" are not strict sign "standards" as are found in the City's Sign Code. The decision making body may interpret the Design Guidelines with some flexibility in their application to specific signs/projects. This is in recognition that not all design criteria may be workable or appropriate for each sign or project. In some circumstances, a particular guideline may be relaxed to facilitate compliance with another guideline determined by the decision making body to be more important. These decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis. The overall objective will be to ensure that the main principles of the Guidelines are followed in each case.
3. To encourage compliance with the Guidelines, sign permits will be issued administratively, provided the proposed sign is in substantial compliance with the Guidelines. Alternative sign designs that are not in compliance with the Sign Guidelines will be forwarded to the Planning Commission for their consideration. See Sign Code Section 9.37.060 for procedures for obtaining required permits.



*Design guidelines help ensure good quality signs.*

## D. Relation to the Dana Point Sign Ordinance

The Sign Design Guidelines are intended to supplement the Sign Code. The Guidelines establish positive criteria for the creation of well-designed signs and further clarify and support the intent of the City's sign regulations by providing examples of the City's expectations for well-designed, consistent signage that is pleasing in appearance and promotes a high-quality business environment.

## E. General Design Guidelines.

### 1. Sign Legibility.

- a. **Use a brief message.** The fewer the words, the more effective the sign. A sign with a brief, succinct message is simpler and faster to read, looks cleaner and is more attractive. Evaluate each word carefully, and, if it does not contribute directly to the sign's message, it should probably be eliminated.
- b. **Ensure legibility.** An effective sign should do more than attract attention; it should communicate its message clearly. Usually, this is a question of the readability of words and phrases. The most significant influence on legibility is lettering style and spacing. Use the following guidelines to help ensure sign legibility.



*Keep signs as simple as possible.*



*A brief message is easier to read.*

- **Avoid hard-to-read, intricate typefaces.** Typefaces that are difficult to read reduce the sign's ability to communicate.
- **Avoid spacing letters and words too close together.** Crowding of letters, words or lines will make any sign more difficult to read. Conversely, over-spacing these elements causes the viewer to read each item individually, again obscuring the message. Lettering should not occupy more than 75 percent of the sign face.



*Avoid typefaces that are hard to read at a quick glance.*

- **Limit the number of lettering styles in order to increase legibility.** A general rule to follow is to limit the number of different letter types to no more than two for small signs and three for larger signs.
- **Avoid faddish and bizarre typefaces.** Such typefaces may look good today, but soon go out of style. The image conveyed may quickly become that of a dated and unfashionable business.

- c. **Use significant contrast.** If there is little contrast between the brightness or hue of the message of a sign and its background, it will be difficult to read.
- d. **Avoid signs with strange shapes.** Signs that are unnecessarily narrow or oddly shaped can restrict the legibility of the message. If an unusual shape is not symbolic, it will probably be confusing.
- e. **Use symbols and logos.** Pictographic images will usually register more quickly in the viewer's mind than a written message.

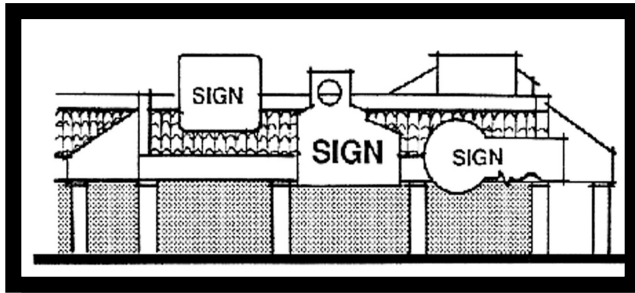
## 2. Location.

- a. Signs should be designed to relate to the architectural features of the building on which they are located and create visual continuity with other storefronts in the same building and adjacent buildings.
- b. Signs should be placed to indicate the location of access to a business. Signs should be placed at or near the public entrance to a building or main parking area to indicate the most direct access to the business.

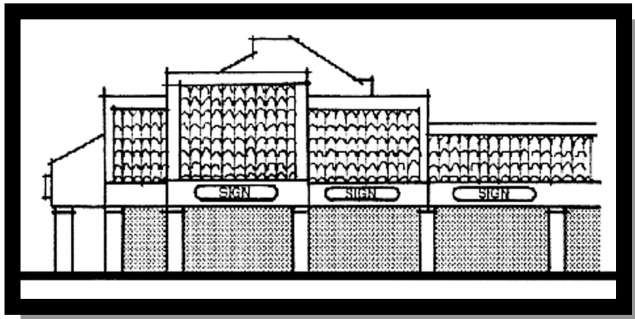


*Small signs near entrances welcome customers.*

- c. Signs should be placed consistent with the proportions of the building's facade. For example, a particular sign may fit well on an upper, more plain wall, but would overpower and obstruct the finer detail of a lower storefront area. A sign appropriate near the building's entry may look tiny and out of place above the ground level.



*Don't do this. Inconsistent sign patterns create confusion.*



*Do this. Employ a consistent sign pattern.*

- d. On buildings that have a monolithic or very plain facade, proper sign placement can establish appropriate rhythm, scale, and proportion.



*Place signs above storefronts in a logical location.*

- e. Signs should not be located so that they cover or interrupt the architectural details or ornamentation of a building's facade.
- f. Signs should not project above the edge of the rooflines and should not obstruct, windows and/or doorways.

### 3. Color.

- a. Too many different colors on a sign can interfere with the basic function of communication because they compete with the content for the viewer's attention. Limited use of the accent colors can increase legibility, but large areas of competing colors tend to confuse and disturb. Typically it is best to limit colors to no more than three on a single sign.
- b. Contrast is an important influence on the legibility of signs. The most aesthetic and effective graphics are produced when light colored letters and images are placed on a dark, contrasting colored background.

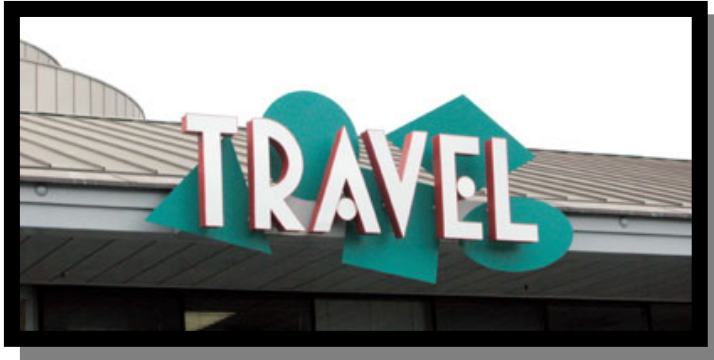


*Light colored letters on contrasting backgrounds make signs easier to read.*



*The colors and materials used in this sign are aesthetically pleasing.*





*Color can be used to add visual interest to signs, but overly bright, garish colors should be avoided.*



- c. Colors or color combinations that interfere with legibility of the sign copy or that interfere with viewer identification of other signs should be avoided. Bright day-glo (fluorescent) colors should be avoided as they are distracting and do not blend well with other background colors.
- d. Colors should relate to and complement the materials or paint scheme of the buildings, including accent and trim colors.

#### 4. Illumination.

- a. If the sign can be illuminated by a direct source of light, this is usually the best arrangement because the sign will appear to be better integrated with the building's architecture. Light fixtures supported in front of the sign cast direct light on the sign and generally a portion of the face of the building as well. This direct lighting emphasizes the continuity of the building's surface and signs appear as more of an integral part of the building's facade. Conversely, internally illuminated cabinet signs where only the sign face is illuminated tend to stand out and do not appear integrated with the building's facade.

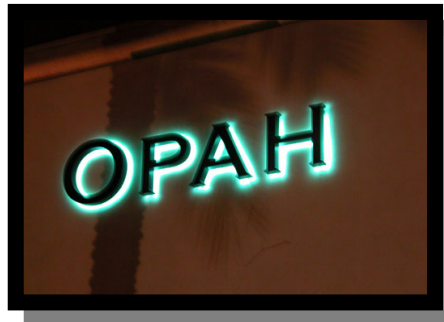


*At night, light is cast on the sign and a portion of the building, thus integrating the sign with the building's architecture.*



*Signs illuminated by an indirect source of light are encouraged.*

- b. Individually illuminated letters, either internally illuminated or backlit solid letters (reverse channel), are a preferred alternative to internally illuminated plastic-faced cabinet signs. Signs comprised of individual letters will be better integrated with the building because they use the building's façade as their background.
- c. The use of backlit, individually cut letter signs is strongly encouraged for all types of business and signs, including monument-type signs.

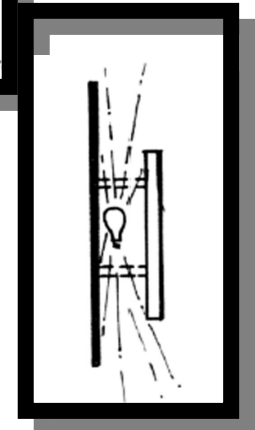


*Good example of a backlit sign that is easy to read at night.*

- d. The use of internally illuminated cabinet-type signs with translucent panels or panels with reflective surfaces, including, but not limited to, acrylic, fiberglass, plastic, or metal are strongly discouraged and the Sign Code prohibits their use for monument-type signs. If internally illuminated cabinet signs are used for wall signs, their sign panels should be opaque so that when illuminated only the lettering, not the background, is illuminated. The background or field should have a nongloss, nonreflective finish.
- e. Whenever indirect lighting fixtures are used, care should be taken to properly shield the light source to prevent glare from spilling over into residential areas and public rights-of-way.



*Backlit letter signs are encouraged.*



## 5. Materials.

- a. Sign materials should be selected with consideration for the architectural design of the building's façade. Sign materials should compliment materials used on the building and should also contribute to the legibility of the sign.
- b. The glossy materials (e.g., plastic, acrylic) used on many cabinet signs are often difficult to read because of glare and reflections and should therefore be avoided.
- c. Sign materials should be very durable. Paper and cloth signs are usually not suitable for exterior use because they can deteriorate quickly. If these nonpermanent materials are used, they must be continuously maintained in good condition at all times.
- d. If wooden signs are used, they should be properly sealed to keep moisture from soaking into the wood and causing the sign's lettering to deteriorate.



*Good example of carved wood sign.*



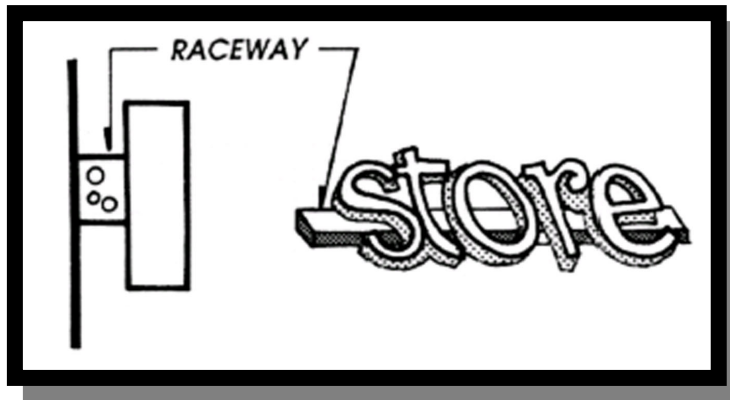
*This cloth sign creates visual interest, but will need to be replaced more frequently than a sign made of more permanent materials.*



*This carved wood sign fits well with the design of the building's facade.*

## 6. Electrical raceways and conduits.

- a. Electrical transformer boxes and raceways should be concealed from public view. If a raceway cannot be mounted internally behind the finished exterior wall, the exposed metal surfaces of the raceway should be finished to match the background wall, or integrated into the overall design of the sign.



- b. If raceways are necessary, they should be as thin and narrow as possible and should never extend in width or height beyond the area of the sign's lettering or graphics.
- c. All exposed conduit and junction boxes should be concealed from public view.

## F. Design Guidelines for Specific Sign Types

### 1. Wall and Building Signs.

- a. A wall sign should be located where architectural features or details suggest a location, size, or shape for the sign. The best location for a wall sign is generally a band or blank area between the first and second floors of a building.
- b. New wall signs in a shopping center should be placed consistent with sign locations on adjacent businesses. This will establish visual continuity among storefronts and create a unified appearance for the center.



*Place signs where architectural features suggest the most appropriate location.*



Wall signs of consistent size and placement are encouraged.

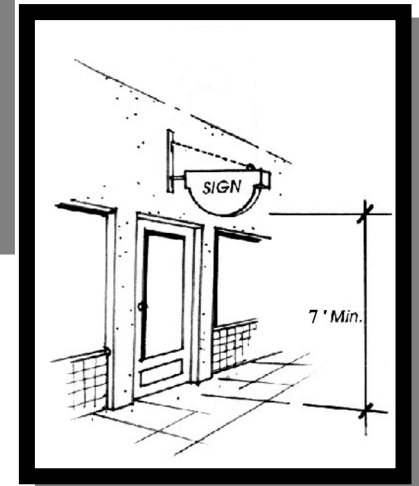
- c. Lettering should not occupy more than about 75 percent of the area of the sign to avoid a cluttered look and to help maintain the readability of the sign.
- d. Wall signs should not project from the surface upon which they are attached more than the required for construction purposes and in no case more than 12 inches.
- e. Internally illuminated cabinet-type signs are strongly discouraged. If signs are to be illuminated, internally illuminated, individually cut channel letters or solid backlit letters or the use of external, direct illumination are the preferred methods.



Good example of backlit sign.

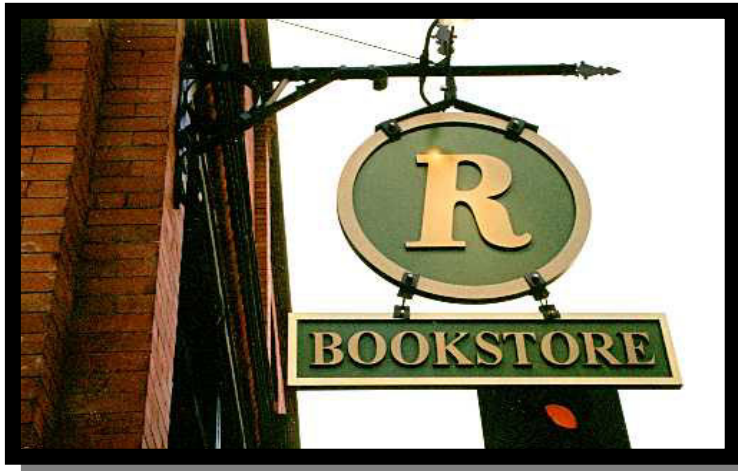
## 2. Projecting Signs.

- a. The use of pedestrian-oriented projecting signs is strongly encouraged.
- b. Projecting signs should be used for ground floor uses only. The maximum sign area should not exceed nine square feet.
- c. Projecting signs should be at least 7 feet above finished grade, to ensure clearance for pedestrians.
- d. Sign supports and brackets should be compatible with the design and scale of the sign and the architectural design of the building.





*Good examples of sign supports that are compatible with design and scale of sign.*



- e. Internal illumination of a projecting sign is prohibited.
- f. The text, copy, or logo face should not exceed 75 percent of the sign face of a projecting sign.
- g. The sign should be hung at a 90-degree angle from the face of the building.

### **3. Window Signs.**

- a. Window signs on ground level, coverage shall not exceed 25 percent of the total window area. Window signs should not be used above the second level.
- b. Permanent window signs should consist of individual letters and/or logos placed on the interior surface of the window. White or gold leaf is the recommended colors. Glass-mounted graphics may be applied by painting, silk screening, or vinyl die-cut forms.
- c. The use of nonpermanent materials such as paper is strongly discouraged.



*Good example of simple window sign.*



*Good examples of window signs that allow views into storefront.*

- d. Window signs should be limited in size so as not to block views into the storefront windows.

#### 4. Awning Signs.

- a. Signs on awnings should be limited to ground floor and second floor uses. On the ground floor, signs should not exceed one square foot of sign area per each linear foot of canopy width or 30 percent of the total exterior surface area of each awning whichever is less. On the second floor level, awning signs should not exceed one square foot per linear foot of canopy width or 20 percent of the total exterior surface area of each awning whichever is less.
- b. Awning signs should be limited to awnings covering a main or side/rear entrance on a street or parking lot.
- c. The shape, design, and color of awnings should be carefully designed to coordinate with, and not dominate, the architectural style of the building. Where multiple awnings are used on the building, the design and color of the sign awnings and all other awnings should be coordinated.



*Good example of awning shape coordinated with window size/shape.*

- d. Only permanent signs that are an integral part of the awning or canopy should be used. To avoid having to replace awnings or paint out previous tenant signs when a new tenant moves in, the use of replaceable valances should be considered.



*Lettering on valance only is encouraged.*



## 5. Freestanding Monument Signs

- a. Freestanding monument-type signs (on ground) are encouraged. Pole or pylon signs exceeding 5 feet in height are not allowed.



*Example of well-designed monument sign that is in scale with adjacent development.*

- b. Between 5 to 10 percent of the sign area should be dedicated to identification of the street address.
- c. Freestanding monument signs should be placed perpendicular to the street.
- d. Freestanding monument signs should be placed so that sight lines at entry driveways circulation aisles are not blocked.



- e. Freestanding monument signs may only be externally illuminated, either with light cast directly on to the sign or with individual backlit letters.



*Freestanding monument signs should be landscaped along their base.*



*Good example of monument sign with solid base and strong cornice.*



*Good example of monument sign with street address.*

f. Monument signs should be designed to create visual interest and compliment their surroundings. Signs should incorporate architectural elements, details, and articulation as follows:

- Provide a solid architectural base that supports the sign. The base should be a minimum of one-foot in height.
- Provide architectural elements on the sides and top to frame the sign pane(s). Use columns, pilaster, cornices, and similar details to provide design interest.
- Incorporate materials and colors into the sign support structures to match or be compatible with materials and colors of the development the sign serves.
- Keep the overall size of the sign in proportion with the development it serves.

g. Each monument sign should be surrounded by a landscape planter that extends a minimum of one foot in all directions beyond the base of the sign.

h. Multi-tenant monument signs with multiple tenant identification panels present a special challenge in delivering their message in a clear manner. To help overcome the problems associated with these types of signs, the following guidelines should be followed:

- Monument signs should have no more than five individual tenant signs or four tenant signs and the name of the center.

- Individual tenant sign panels should be uniform in size recognizing that the major tenant or the name of the center may require a slightly larger sign panel.

- The size, letter style, and number of tenant names should be to provide visual interest and to minimize the look of a plain, uninteresting list of tenants.

## 6. Neon Signs and Architectural Lighting

The use of neon tubes for signs or architectural elements is allowed in commercial zoning districts, subject to the following guidelines:

- a. Neon signs are allowed for use as wall signs, window signs, and freestanding monument signs. They are not allowed for use as projecting signs.



*Good example of well-designed neon sign.*

- b. Neon tubing should not exceed one-half inch in diameter.
- c. Neon signs and architectural lighting adjacent to residential uses should not exceed one-half footcandle in brightness measured at the property line.
- d. Neon tubing should not be combined with any reflective materials (e.g., mirrors, polished metal, highly-glazed tiles, or other similar materials) that would cause glare and increase the spread of light.
- e. When used as an architectural element, neon tubing should be used only to reinforce specific architectural elements of the building and should be compatible with the architectural style of the building and the character of the overall development. Neon building trim is limited to 30 percent of the total building trim area.
- f. Neon lighting that completely surrounds a window, door, or similar element is strongly discouraged.
- g. Neon window signs shall not exceed 25 percent of the aggregate area of the window.



*Well-designed neon signs are encouraged.*



*The use of neon tubing can add nighttime interest to a building but should be carefully used and in limited amounts.*