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PRESERVING HISTORIC SIGNS IN THE COMMERCIAL LANDSCAPE:
THE IMPACT OF REGULATION

by

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A THESIS

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APPROVED:

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Michael Shellenbarger.

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Signs are an important element in the commercial landscape. Despite this, often historically significant signs are threatened by modern sign code regulations. This study documents the history and current methods of sign control in the United States. Using legal decisions, primary historical documents including early City Beautiful writings, and photographs of early downtowns, the development of the present bias against signage is documented. The potential eligibility of signage under the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places is analyzed and the potential for signs to contribute to a

dynamic sense of place in a downtown commercial environment is described. Three Oregon cities serve as case studies to demonstrate the changes in a streetscape from its actual historic appearance to its modern, controlled, interpretation. Finally, suggestions on how to revise a typical sign code so as to better permit the retention of determined significant signage in the streetscape are provided.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

What we as preservationists are doing is documenting American lifestyles, economic eras, and the sweep of our society through time. We are planting signposts showing where our society has been, and how it has changed.

Dan Becker

Dan Becker's statement¹ reflects a growing shift in the attitude of the professionals interested in the preservation of the built environment in America. The field has grown not only in the number of resources that have been successfully "saved" but, more importantly, in the kinds of resources that are deemed worthy of trying to save at all. Once limited to the works of nationally prominent architects or landmarks of the "George Washington slept here" variety, mainstream preservation now includes our common heritage; including buildings of local significance, worker's housing, and industrial buildings. Nor is preservation limited to buildings alone. Bridges and other works of engineering, urban and rural landscapes, ships and trains, and a wide variety of

¹ Dan Becker, quoted in Shain Dennison, "Modern-day Historic Preservation: An Oxymoron for the Eighties?", Tennessee Heritage Alliance 5, Winter 1988, 1.

other man-made elements of the environment all now qualify for formal recognition as landmarks or historic objects. With increasing frequency America is documenting and restoring the less imposing, the less grand, elements of its past.

But despite these trends, the bulk of preservation activity centers upon traditional, turn-of the century, commercial and residential buildings.² The major focus remains, as it always has, on the building. Although historic districts implicitly recognize the value of preservation of context, most nominations to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) continue to concern single, independent, resources.

Focus upon the building raises many questions as to the accuracy, intentions, and implications of historic interpretation. The design of most restoration work is based upon a determination of the building's appearance during its "period of significance." In practice this often results in a streetscape controlled so that every element conforms to the period theme. This may or may not reflect any actual historic appearance of the area.

² The National Register process, in general, is geared toward resources of 50 years of age or older. The institutional cut-off date of what is "historic" and what is not therefore moves forward. As the average human lifespan increases, many find buildings younger than themselves considered historic. The "historic significance" of such buildings is often disputed. For a further discussion of age as a criteria in determining significance see Chapter VI.

The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation, as interpreted by the National Park Service, serve as the rulebook by which most local, and all federal, preservation projects are guided. While the Standards do recognize that in some cases later facade alterations may have acquired merit in their own right and should, in that situation, be retained, the underlying assumption for most preservation is that the significance of the original building fabric generally outweighs that of any later modification or additions. It is unstated but implied that the building itself is of penultimate interest. Specific to signs, the subject at the hand, the National Park Service states that:

Signs were an important aspect of 19th and early 20th century storefronts . . . In examining old photographs one is struck by the number of signs---in windows, over doors, painted on exterior walls, and hanging over (sometimes across) the street. While this confusion was part of the character of 19th century cities and towns, today's approach . . . tends to be more conservative. Removal of some signs can have a dramatic effect in improving the visual appearance of a building . . . for this reason their removal is encouraged in the process of rehabilitation."³ (emphasis added)

With few exceptions, regardless of their significance, signs are seen as an ephemeral appendage in

³ H. Ward Jandl, "Rehabilitation Historic Storefronts", Preservation Brief 11, 10.

the overall design of a resource. By definition, signs are seen by preservationists, architectural historians, and planning agencies as something affixed to and independent from the "architecture" behind it. They are viewed as obstructions to our clear perception of the resource of which they are a part, if they are viewed as a part of it at all. But, signs, as advertising, were intended as the most visible element of any retail structure by design. They are what the owner hoped or expected would catch the eye of the consumer and direct him or her into the store. For that reason alone signs may be important historic artifacts. Subsequent changes to a building's facade and its signage represent the efforts of a retailer to remain "modern" or "viable" within the marketplace. Those changes and additions are indicative of a period of American commercial and design history and have an equal or perhaps greater potential to teach us about the world that created them than the original building itself.

The following study of sign regulation and its consequences on historic preservation in the United States raises questions which go to the root of preservation of the built environment in America. Signs are only a single element within a complex built environment. They are typically neither the most, nor the least, important. But signs of all types are commonly treated as an expendable element in our cities.

They have been singled out for removal by planners, preservationists and historians as is no other non-noxious or life-threatening component of the American city. This raises the question of how and why we as a people choose to retain specific elements of the past. My intent is not to answer this question---even were it within my ability to do so. But by analyzing the regulation of signs in America, and how they have come to be seen as intrusions in the historic commercial landscape, this study does question some of the basic assumptions under which historic preservation currently operates. These are assumptions that are too infrequently challenged.

Due to the financial and temporal limitations of the project, the following study primarily uses Oregon examples. Nothing in my research gives me any reason to believe that Oregon's attitude or regulatory reaction to signage within historic districts is anything but typical. A more exhaustive national survey would further clarify this issue.

Within the above limits, this project explores how the present attitude toward commercial signage developed, how sign regulations operate, and the effect they have on the integrity of the preservation of the built environment in the United States. It brings into question the ethics of the manipulation and

reinterpretation of the past to suit the philosophical
and economic priorities of the present.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORY OF SIGN REGULATION

In the United States, few segments of the built environment are regulated as are commercial signs. Federal, State and Local planning agencies have control over how and of what materials signs are constructed, how they are designed, their overall size and their placement within the streetscape to a far greater extent than any other commonplace landscape elements.

For the purposes of this thesis the terms "signs" and "signage" are used to refer to any structure, device, light, letter, word, model, or other 2- and 3-dimensional representation visible from the outside of a building and used for commercial, for profit, communication.¹ There are two broad categories of commercial, for profit, advertising, into which every sign must fall. On-site signage, as the name implies, includes any and all types

¹ The regulation of informational, not-for-profit, signs such as directional or traffic information, though frequently a major portion of the signscape, and often regulated in similar manner to their for-profit counterparts will not be discussed. Not-for-profit graphics are typically the property of governmental bodies and only rarely, as in so-called "welcoming signs" exhibit any of the individuality of design which this study focuses upon. For more information on welcoming signs see Wilbur Zelinsky's excellent article in Landscape 30 (Nov 1988).

of commercial representations, usually but not necessarily limited to graphics, that are part of the physical location of the business to which they refer. Off-site signage is that which is located outside the legal property line of the business or vendor of the product offered. For example, a free-standing sign fronting a parking lot of a pizza parlor is an "on-site" sign. Another advertisement at the next corner stating "one block to great pizza" is an "off-site" sign. Billboards are by far the most common off-site sign type and both terms (billboard and "off-site") are often used interchangeably. The sign industry refers to the entire range of fixed commercial communications, both on- and off-site, as "outdoor advertising."

Although the major focus of this study is on-site signs, some background on the history of the billboard and its regulation is required to understand the development of sign control legislation in the United States.

"The Billboard Wars"

The use of signs to advertise services and products is hardly a modern phenomena. Ancient and Medieval businessmen announced their locations with a variety of popularly understood symbols. "The enterprising merchant of ancient Babylonia is recorded as being among the first to realize the value of hanging a

sign above his place of business . . ."² Even today many of our signs use symbols that date from the design conventions of pre-literate advertising. These include the bloody and bandaged wrapped pole of the barber, the three balls of the pawn shop or money lender, and the once ubiquitous tobacconist's wooden Indian.

Many factors in 19th Century America contributed to the phenomenal growth in the use of freestanding billboards, advertising signs, and posters. The rise of transportation networks, expanded markets and the growth of retail empires to satisfy those markets coincided with improved printing technologies such as the development of high speed presses. This ease of production led to the proliferation of printed advertisements and competitive advertising throughout America as well as much of the world. The height of this competitive posting, the middle of the 19th century, has been called by a later historian the period of "guerrilla posting."³ In 1869, the development of "hoardings", or leased bill-posting walls, was the first attempt to create orderly and planned advertising poster displays. Hoardings, sometimes two or three levels high, encircled vacant lots

² Phillip Tocker, "Toward a Society of Visual Quality" chap. in Outdoor Advertising, ed. John Houck (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 16.

³ Frank Presbrey, The History and Development of Advertising (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1929), 490.

and low-rent buildings and made off-site advertising a major element of urban landscape. (see Figure 1) As the advertising industry developed and gained in influence, a semi-standardized system of billboard communication began to control poster size and density. Excesses were common, however, and the billboard became a dominant feature in metropolitan areas to an extent that is now difficult for us to comprehend. (see Figure 2) By the first decade of the 20th century the proliferation of commercial signs rose to such a level that some were motivated to seek regulation of this newly perceived "menace."

There are two factors that contributed to the increased reliance on billboards at the end of the 19th century that are of prime importance to the future regulation of modern signs. First, a large percentage of American consumers in the last half of the 19th century were recent immigrants who, at least initially, had little or no understanding of written English. The graphics employed in billboards were often expressly targeted to this new and growing group of consumers. In this era of an increasingly mobile population and burgeoning retail economy, well-designed graphics and representational signs assumed a new importance to the retailer or service provider---they could communicate messages and solicit business in ways which the printed

newspaper could not.⁴ Second, the larger merchant's economic success drove smaller entrepreneurs to greater fervor in attempts to maintain what today is called market share. Larger, and more eye-catching, billboards and signs were seen as a method of combating the marketing strategies of the new mass merchandisers. With the invention of the electric light bulb, and the rapid realization of its potential for advertising, an entire new sign technology was available to merchants trying to reach consumers. Huge "spectaculars" with thousands of lights and multiple and changing images were installed in major cities. Signs such as the New York Edison Company's "Chariot Race" (see Figure 3) took on in the public eye the aspect of an art form. This seven-story high spectacular contained 20,000 bulbs and created ". . . seeming motion of the horses, the driver's bodies and their whips . . . by [using] 2,500 flashes per minute . . . [it required] 70,000 connections and 2,750 switches."⁵ Reportedly this sign itself became a major tourist attraction in New York during its four year existence.

By the turn of the century, progressive civic leaders became increasingly concerned about the

⁴ For a further discussion of the rise of billboards as an advertising media geared to non-English speakers see Quentin J. Schultze, "Legislating Morality: The Progressive Response to American Outdoor Advertising 1900-1917," The Journal Of Popular Culture 17 (Winter 1983), 37-44.

⁵ History of Advertising, 509.

conditions of the American city. The social makeup and economic conditions of the nation were changing. New social strata developed with a wealthy leisure class of business owners and a growing class of highly educated professionals. Members of these levels of society were increasingly confronted with the "evils" of their own economic success; a nation turning more and more urban and away from the pastoral ideal that had nourished America since its birth. The large immigrant populations, drawn to America by the chance to succeed, were crowded into dark and unsanitary cities. Partly out of genuine concern for those less fortunate, and fortified by their belief in their own rightness and good taste, educated and upper class progressives began a nationwide "City Beautiful" movement. They sought to increase urban open space, improve sanitation, water and sewer systems, and, with a variety of other projects, hoped to change the quality of urban life for those less fortunate than themselves. The City Beautiful had many laudable goals and in many ways was a great success. It is not my intent to diminish the movement's good works. But on many levels the movement consisted of the elite segments of American society "knowing what was best" for others and having the political and financial clout to see their plans enacted. Most City Beautiful programs included the limitation, control or, in some cases, elimination of billboards as a major point in their

campaigns. Groups such as The American Roadside Council and the American Civic Association published information on progress towards "eradicating the billboard nuisance." Influential leaders of the City Beautiful movement such as Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Charles Mulford Robinson and others wrote articles and gave lectures on the "the advertising problem."⁶ That advertising, in what historian Daniel Boorstin has called a nation of "go-getters", had so shortly become a "problem" and a "nuisance" is quite telling of the motivations of the City Beautiful leaders. While the "common folk" were flocking to New York's Time Square to view the Chariot Race sign as the "the eighth wonder of the world", the City Beautiful leaders were deploring the commercialism and self-promotion of the advertising industry. It is ironic that most of those same individuals owed the financial security that gave them the time to pursue the beautification of their cities, at least in part, to the very commercialism that advertising triumphed. As

⁶ See, for example, F.L. Olmsted and Cass Gilbert, Report of the New Haven Civic Improvement Commission (Dec. 1910), p. 33, where the authors state "No one can question that the presence of large and frequently garish advertising signs designed specifically to stand out . . . tends to make the city less agreeable" or Charles Mulford Robinson, The Improvement of Towns and Cities, 3rd ed., revised (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1909), p. 76 which has an entire chapter entitled "The Advertisement Problem." Andrew Wright Crawford, "Important Advances Toward Eradicating the Billboard Nuisance," American Civic Association 11 (March 1920) is typical of the articles published by the various national civic and roadside improvement associations in the first few decades of the 20th century.

America became increasingly urbane, or at least urban, business and exuberant displays of commercialism took on negative connotations within "polite society." They soon became a favorite target in the "Progressive" agenda.

With the increased availability of the automobile, improved roads, and the concept of "the Sunday drive", the country roadside became an increasingly valuable venue for promoting products and services. By the 1920s two-lane highways across the nation were lined with billboards presenting what some felt to be a visual cacophony and a dangerous distraction to drivers. The infusion of "commercialism" in the pastoral countryside prompted editorials and political cartoons which attacked billboards as defacing the scenic beauty of America. This opposition to billboards has been perhaps most succinctly encapsulated by Ogden Nash in his parody of Joyce Kilmer's poem "Trees":

I think that I shall never see
A billboard lovely as a tree
Indeed, unless the billboards fall
I'll never see a tree at all.⁷

Amid the growing controversy about billboards, local and state governments grew increasingly bold in their legislative methods of regulation. The billboard industry organized to thwart what they quite naturally perceived as an attempt to drive them out of business.

⁷ Ogden Nash, "Song for the Open Road", The Face is Familiar (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1941), 21.

It was the industry's goal, through self-regulation of admitted abuses, to avoid the legal limitations on its activities that were being advocated by the civic reformers. As early as 1872 the International Bill Posters Organization of North America had been formed in St. Louis. By 1909 organizations of printers of advertising posters and of owners of poster display space had adopted uniform guidelines on a national scope. Both groups bound ". . . their members to the observance of rules of display which would avoid arousing the animosity of reasonable-minded people. The day of indiscriminate-- 'as-chance-may-offer' ---posting was over . . ."8

Quickly, the billboard battle moved into the judicial system, as it obviously had to on an issue that concerned free speech, free enterprise, aesthetic regulation and property use.

The Legal Basis for the Regulation of Signage

The Tenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States expressly reserves all powers not granted to the Federal Government to the separate states. The Fifth Amendment provides that "No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use without just compensation", but otherwise states are free to enact laws and legislation that

8 Tocker, 32.

regulate activity concerning private property within their boundaries. This broad grant of power is known as the plenary police power.

. . . the police power is generally considered to be the power to regulate human conduct---without any compensable taking of property---in order to protect the public health safety welfare, morals, or general welfare.⁹

State governments, through enabling legislation, in varying degree pass on to individual county and municipal governments a portion of these police powers so that each may regulate their own internal affairs at a more localized level.¹⁰ Simplistically, this is the grant of power by which all authority for any municipal or local decision is made.

Local governments, in attempting to control billboard and sign proliferation, began to pass legislation and from them ordinances which limited the manner of construction, the permitted locations and the overall size of billboards within their jurisdictions. They claimed their right to do so as a constitutional extension of their police powers. In the early 20th Century, the police power was generally limited to the

⁹ Daniel R. Mandelker and Roger A. Cunningham, Planning Control and Development 2nd ed., (Charlottesville, Virginia: The Michie Company, 1985), 50.

¹⁰ The grant of power from state to local government works somewhat differently in "home rule" states such as Oregon but the differences do not substantially effect the present discussion.

regulation of nuisances or noxious activities that were contrary to the "health, safety and welfare" of the general public.¹¹ The key difference between an exercise of "police power and "eminent domain" is that of required compensation. The owner of a use regulated by police power, even when regulated to the point of elimination of the use, is not due any "just compensation" from the city as is the owner of a property affected by the exercise of eminent domain. Obviously it is to a city's financial advantage to regulate by police power and to a property owner's to have such regulation deemed a "taking"; an unconstitutional exercise of that power. If a taking is found by a court an owner will either be permitted to continue the use or the city will be required to use the power of eminent domain and pay compensation to achieve its desired goals. Accordingly, from the city standpoint, any billboard or sign control legislation had to be justified along traditional police power grounds---that billboards constituted a "nuisance" or, conversely, the definition of "police powers" had to be expanded to include other types of threats to the "health, safety and welfare." Since few cities could afford to purchase the offending billboards by exercising eminent domain, early

¹¹ Typical nuisances or noxious uses included, for example, stockyards, cesspools, unsanitary waste disposal or a blatantly unsafe and dangerous structure. A modern-day nuisance might be a pig farm in a residential area or an unfenced and dangerous gravel pit located next to an elementary school.

sign control hinged on justifying regulations under the existing interpretation of police power.

Most courts were slow to uphold ordinances which regulated or expressly prohibited the design and erection of advertising signs and so ruled in the cases brought before them for the sign owners. Typical of such cases is the 1905 case of *City of Passaic v. Paterson Bill Posting, Advertising and Sign Painting Co.*¹² which found a Passaic ordinance that required billboards to be not less than 10 feet from the street line as beyond the scope of police power regulation and thus invalid. Passaic, the defendant, had claimed their ordinance a just regulation in that billboards so close to the street represented a danger to the public due to the potential danger of them falling on pedestrians during severe storms or as a result of structural decay. The Court, however, declared that:

It is probable that the enactment of . . . the ordinance was due rather to aesthetic considerations than considerations of the public safety. . . . Aesthetic considerations are a matter of luxury and indulgence rather than of necessity, and it is necessity alone which justifies the exercise of the police power.¹³

Courts consistently interpreted the use of police powers as limited to regulation of a narrow definition of nuisances or other threats to the health, safety and

¹² 62 A. 267 (N.J., 1905).

¹³ Ibid., at 268.

welfare of the community. Visual offense, unlike noise or odor, was viewed, as *Passaic v. Paterson* makes clear, as an aesthetic factor and courts were unwilling to let stand billboard regulations that did not tie control to the accepted definitions of the general welfare. Civic leaders and progressive planners were dismayed at these strict judicial interpretations. One typical report pointed out that;

Of the five human senses, that of sight, the greatest of all, is inadequately protected. The human person is theoretically inviolate so far as the sense of touch is concerned. One man may not lay violent hands upon another, nor inflict pain upon him. Odors which offend the sense of smell may be restrained as nuisances, and unnecessary noises which interfere with personal comfort may be suppressed. There are rigid laws against the pollution of food and water by cause which, in addition to affecting the health, offend the sense of taste. But the sense of sight, which the quickest and most powerful appeal is made to the highest faculties, and upon which, more upon the other four, human happiness depends, is left largely unprotected.¹⁴

Since municipalities could not control aesthetics per se, billboard and sign controls were tied, albeit tenuously, to the traditional police power concerns of fire control, sanitation, traffic safety or, in the case

¹⁴ Report of the Mayor's Billboard Advertising Commission of the City of New York, by Robert Grier Cooke, Chairman, (New York: City of New York, 1913), 22.

of "lewd" advertisements for liquor or vaudeville shows, morality. Some courts were more sympathetic to these attempts than others. The most famous of the cases in which an early court upheld a billboard regulation as a justified extension of the police powers is the often quoted 1911 St. Louis Gunning Advertising Company v. City of St. Louis,¹⁵ which reads in part:

. . . signboards . . . are constant menaces to the public safety and welfare of the city; they endanger the public health, promote immorality, constitute hiding places and retreats for criminals and all classes of miscreants. They are also inartistic and unsightly.

In cases of fire they often cause their spread and constitute barriers against their extinction; and in cases of high wind, their temporary character, frail structure and broad surface, render them liable to be blown down and to fall upon and injure those who may happen to be in their vicinity. The evidence shows and common observation teaches us that the ground in the rear thereof is being constantly used as privies and the dumping ground for all kinds of waste and deleterious matters and thereby creating public nuisances and jeopardizing public health; the evidence also shows that behind these obstructions the lowest form of prostitution and other acts of immorality are frequently carried on, almost under public gaze; they offer shelter and concealment for the criminal while lying in wait for his victim; and last, but not least, they obstruct the light, sunshine and air, which are so conducive to health and comfort.¹⁶

¹⁵ 137 S.W. 929 (Mo. 1911).

While the extent to which the Missouri court went to find billboard control within the police health, safety and welfare powers is somewhat comical from our modern perspective, it is illustrative of the kind of machinations that were required to justify the regulation of billboards on non-aesthetic grounds.

By the 1930s and 1940s, with varying success, cities were able to convince courts to establish precedents for the validity of aesthetics as a justified concern in police power regulations, particularly as a contributing factor within other, more traditional, health, safety and welfare issues. With the landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling of *Berman v. Parker*, the judiciary finally acknowledged the validity of aesthetic regulations as a proper concern of the police powers independent of other factors. In that opinion Justice William O. Douglas wrote for the majority:

It is within the power of the legislature to determine that the community should be beautiful as well as healthy ... If those who govern ... decide that ... [their community] ... should be beautiful as well as sanitary there is nothing in the Fifth Amendment that stands in the way.¹⁷

Following *Berman v. Parker* came the adoption of amendments to the Federal Highway Act in 1958 and, in

¹⁶ Ibid., at 942.

¹⁷ *Berman v. Parker*, 348 U.S. 32 (1954).

1964 the Highway Beautification Act and Keep America Beautiful campaign of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society . Both of the Highway Acts acts contained specific regulations and funding for the control and elimination of billboards along federal roadways. Similar guidelines were adopted by states for other, non-federally funded, roads. In an era of growing concern about the environment, with support from federal programs and judicial decisions, the already proficient and proven constitutional methods of zoning and traditional health, safety and welfare regulation of signs, were increasingly augmented by the addition of aesthetic controls. In an ever growing number of American communities sign control ordinances were implemented to regulate the design and quantity of not only off-site but on-site signage as well. The modern era of sign control regulation had begun.

Historic Preservation Controls

In the mid-20th Century, municipalities were expanding their use of design and structural controls in other areas besides signage. Among these new regulatory controls, of interest here is the development of the concept of special areas designated as having "historic significance. Declared "historic districts" these areas are often governed by a separate set of development standards---both for signage and any other activity

requiring a building permit. Similar standards also guide the development and use of individual historic properties that are not part of a formal district.

The legal basis for historic preservation on the local level, and restrictions upon private property usage that protect the historic environment, developed and flowered in the United States during the 20th century. It is unnecessary to here document the various cases that led to the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 which established the basic administrative processes that govern National Register resources in America and the extension of the concept of "historic significance" to state and locally important resources. Suffice it to say that at the same time cities were gaining the ability to regulate signs on aesthetic, as well as health, safety and welfare bases, a parallel development in the ability to regulate land uses that were detrimental to significant historic properties was also fought out in the legal system. With little hesitation these two threads of growing municipal control of the built environment came together and special sign controls for "historic" areas or sites were developed.

In the late 1980s sign control is a common and expected component of most city land use ordinances. The goals of the progressive, anti-billboard, city beautiful reformers of the century's first decade have been achieved to a scale they never dared dream of. Signs are

subject to a higher degree of scrutiny than most other built elements of a city. How typical sign regulations operate, and how those in historic areas differ from other areas, are covered in the next chapter.



FIGURE 1: Billboard "Hoarding"
 (From Report of the Mayor's Billboard Advertising Commission of the City of New York, August 1, 1913).

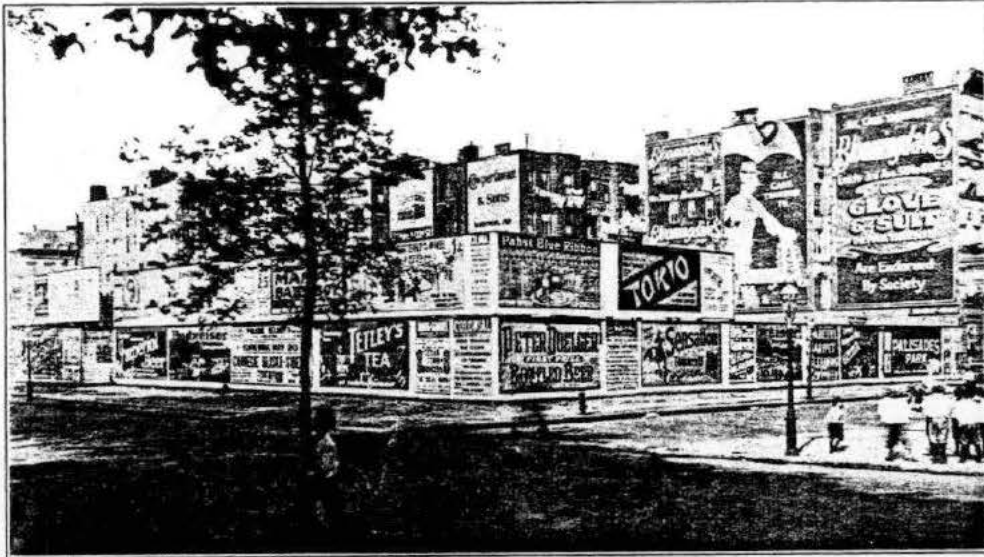


FIGURE 2: "The Usual Class of Advertisements"
 (From Report of the Mayor's Billboard Advertising
 Commission of the City of New York, August 1, 1913)



FIGURE 3: The Chariot Race Sign (From Presbrey,
The History and Development of Advertising, 1929,
 Photograph by of New York Edsion Company).

CHAPTER III

THE MECHANICS OF SIGN REGULATION

Most American cities regulate signage on the basic levels of safety and structure. Pursuant to the traditional police power concerns of health, safety and welfare, cities impose basic structural requirements such as the use of metal to support a sign to reduce fire hazards, set minimum performance standards at specified wind speeds for stability or limit signs to a maximum height near airports for runway clearance. Also typical is a prohibition on signs that mimic traffic directional signals such as "STOP" or "YIELD" and may confuse drivers. Almost all cities regulate how close signs or billboards may be to the public right-of-way to assure ease of visibility and the minimum height of a sign over a public sidewalk to provide headroom for pedestrians. While these types of ordinances do regulate signage they are often found in other sections of land-use guidelines, such as the building code, and are not normally considered "sign codes" as such. Many cities, however, oversee their signage more stringently with specific, detailed, code provisions. While no nationwide standard sign code exists, virtually all cities that further

regulate their on-site signs do so using the same basic strategies. An understanding of how these controls operate is essential in a discussion of how sign codes effect the historic integrity of an area.

The broadest level of municipal control of signage is deciding in which zones of a city, i.e. residential, professional/office, business district, industry etc., it will be permissible to erect signs at all. Although most cities have varied regulations for each individual zoning class, the following discussion relates primarily to sign controls within the central business district (CBD) zone. This zone may be labeled in a variety of manners, such as C-1 or C-1-D, depending upon the jurisdiction. In general, the CBD is the area comprising the traditional business core of a community. It usually will have the highest percentage of older signs and, often, the highest level of sign control.

Basically, commercial on-site signage is regulated by three elemental criteria: construction method, type, and size. The construction of a sign may be of a variety of materials. The building structure itself may simply be painted to convey information. A flat material of wood or metal, may be painted and fastened to the building. Signs may be built of glass, plastic, carved or built-up wood, various metals, or virtually any other material imaginable. In some cases an ordinance may prohibit or discourage any one of these materials out-

right. The prohibition may be city-wide or only within selected zoning classes. For example, in the Annapolis, Maryland Historic District, "The Commission discourages the uses of plastic or extruded metal"¹ A more stringent prohibition is that of Ashland, Oregon " No signs which use plastic as part of the exterior visual effects . . . in the Historic District . . . [shall be permitted]."²

Method of lighting is an additional component of sign construction that is regulated under the general heading of materials. There are two basic, seemingly exclusive, categories of sign illumination; internal and external.³ The basic sign illumination methods are:

Internally Illuminated Signs:
usually a glass or plastic panel
set in front of a series of
parallel light sources of
fluorescent, incandescent or neon.
(see Figure 5)

Neon Signs: signs with externally
visible neon tubing. Neon is
usually seen over a painted metal
facing, providing highlighting to a
painted metal sign. (see Figure 6)
The tubes themselves may be formed
into actual letters or may simply
be used for accent. Neon freely
mounted (exposed on both sides) is
often used in repetitive series to
imitate motion. (see Figure 7)

¹ Annapolis, Maryland, Design Guidelines for Signs, 1985, 17.

² City of Ashland, Oregon, Land Use Guidelines, 18.96.040 (J).

³ Seemingly exclusive since each method may be combined within a single sign, as in an internally lighted plastic sign with a blinking row of exposed incandescent bulbs on its edges. (see Figure 8)

Indirectly Lighted Signs: usually 3-dimensional or facade mounted signs with spot-light type lights shining onto them. (see Figure 8)

Incandescently Lighted Signs: signs with exposed incandescent bulbs. (see Figure 9)

Any of the above methods may be installed utilizing relays or switches to produce a flashing or flickering effect. And, as noted, more than one method may be combined within a single sign. Signs that are composed of a series of lighted rows of incandescent bulbs which can be controlled to produce a moving message, referred to as electronic reader-boards, are of relatively recent development.⁴ The more common reader-board or marquee sign is a simple internally lit easel on which changeable plastic letters may be placed to create a message. (see Figure 10)

Method of illumination is a specific and easily definable element of sign design; most signs have but a single source of illumination whereas they might be built of a multiple number of materials. Those that do combine illumination usually have a primary method that is easily discernible. As a result, method of illumination can be a method by which cities eliminate an entire genre of

⁴ Many cities do, however, discourage reader-boards or label existing ones as nonconforming. This poses the question as to whether any of the early reader boards will have the opportunity to achieve historic significance before they are removed.

signage within zones or throughout the jurisdiction. The sign code in Tigard, Oregon, for example, states:

Flashing Signs: A sign which displays flashing or intermittent or sequential lights of changing degrees of intensity, with each interval in the cycle lasting two seconds or less. . . [shall be prohibited]. . .⁵

Whereas the sign code in Ashland, Oregon, in addition to prohibiting flashing signs as does Tigard, goes further and states:

No exposed sources of illumination shall be permitted on any sign, . . . including, but not limited, to neon or fluorescent tubing and flashing incandescent bulbs, except when the source of illumination is within a building, and at least ten (10) feet from a window . . . or when a sign is internally illuminated or the source of illumination is fully shielded from public view.⁶

Signs may be associated with a structure and constitute "on-site" signage either through location on the same site or actual physical attachment to the building itself. Signs may be installed or attached to the building of which they are a part in a number of ways. The term "free-standing" sign is used to refer to any on-site sign device that is self-supporting irregardless of the method of support itself.⁷ Typical

⁵ City of Tigard, Oregon, Community Development Code, 18.114.070 "Certain Signs Prohibited", Paragraph J (Flashing Signs), 269.

⁶ City of Ashland, Oregon, Land Use Guidelines, 18.96.040 "Prohibited Signs", (I).

free-standing signs are mounted on wood or metal poles or various tripod or frame structures. They may be constructed using a variety of materials and illumination methods. (see Figure 11)

An on-site sign that is physically connected to its associated building will be of one of the following types:

Facade: A sign which is attached to, and in the same plane as the building; a flush-mounted sign. Also called "wall" signs, they occur on all elevations not only the primary facade. (see Figure 12)

Roof-top or "sky" signs: Signs which are mounted atop the structure. They are usually supported by a metal scaffolding and are also known as "sky" signs since they are silhouetted against the background sky. (see Figure 13)

Projecting: Signs that are attached along one edge perpendicular to the structure and project into space, away from the building. Projecting signs have two faces, each containing information. Often small guy wires provide additional support. (see Figure 14)

Wall Graphics: Signs that are literally painted onto the building and have no special sign support structure. This sign type is most common on brick or concrete block buildings. (see Figure 15)

Pylon Signs: Signs that are vertically oriented and extend beyond the cornice or roofline and project into space as a tower-like

⁷ Free-standing is used as opposed to "billboard", which normally refers to off-site signage as discussed in Chapter II.

structure. They can either be independent structures or integrated into the building itself such as the pylon signs of the art deco and art moderne styles of architecture. (see Figures 16 and 17)

Signs codes also use movement as a "type" or category of sign. Signs that move, rotate or revolve on a fixed point will also fall within one or more of the already named categories based on their construction or illumination. Both moving signs and flashing or blinking signs, as discussed under illumination, are often called "active" signs and treated as a separate type by sign codes. Moving signs, which may also be intermittently illuminated, are distinct from flashers in having actual physical movement rather than the illusion of motion created by a lighting effect. A sign may move in its entirety (see Figure 18) or have a moving portion with an otherwise fixed base (see Figure 19) Moving signs, usually thought of as a distraction to drivers, are amongst the most common type or class of sign to be prohibited outright. Typical is Klamath Falls, Oregon's ordinance:

Prohibited are signs which . . . move in any manner or have a major moving part.⁸

The "method of attachment" is the major factor in classifying sign into types, with illumination as a

⁸ City of Klamath Falls, Oregon, Community Development Ordinance 14.345 "Prohibited Signs", Paragraph 5, 134.

secondary descriptor (i.e. projecting, neon signs or free-standing, internally illuminated signs). The sign industry has used the various above named elements, along with many other types not included in the present discussion, in virtually every combination imaginable.⁹

The third and final major area in which municipalities control signage is by size. As already noted, signs are controlled as to maximum allowable height and the minimum clearance between the bottom of a sign and the public walkways below. More critical, and more complicated, is the manner in which the allowable sign area for a given structure is determined. The amount of sign size allowed has the greatest single impact on the role signs will play in the image of a given area. Small inconspicuous signs are inherently limited to the basic communication role of identification---larger areas provide a greater opportunity for expression and individuality.

The simplest way to limit sign area within a CBD is simply to set an allowable size per structure or

⁹ Other types of signage not discussed include "A-frame sandwich boards, bench signs, awnings, building directories, ground-level free-standing (as is professional lawn signs), drive-in order stations, temporary signs, time and temperature signs, and many, many, others each specifically defined in any comprehensive sign control ordinance. These types are not included either since their form does not tie them to a specific building or, temporally, they have not been commonly in use for long enough to be generally considered potentially "historic" or they are not of a scale or placement to have a significant impact on the creation of a sense of place.

building lot. Each business, without regard to its size or type, is allowed so many square feet of sign space. Planning and business realities being what they are this is rarely done. Buildings or businesses have differing signage needs based on the physical characteristics of the site, the type and number of clientele they seek to attract, and other factors. A Safeway supermarket set back from the street, for example, has vastly different sign requirements than a dentist whose office is located on the second floor of a traditional storefront row even when each is in the same zoning district. Another method of controlling size is to set a maximum allowable sign area or number per frontage, by district, and allow each business to determine how to allocate it themselves.

Perhaps the most frequent method of controlling sign area per site is the use of an equation based on the building's square footage, street frontage or some other physical factor and a pre-determined multiplier to arrive at a maximum allowable sign area for each building. Additional standards usually set both a minimum and maximum allowable total square footage or sign number per site. The minimum and maximum square footage limits (i.e. signs based on the above formula or "X" feet) allows a city to control unwanted large scale signage or provide reasonable identification for very small storefronts. Except as limited by other restrictions on method of construction or illumination, a business is free to use

their allowed square footage as they see fit in designing their exterior signage. The multipliers are usually less than 2.0 but will vary from city to city and sometimes from zone to zone. A very thorough sign code of this type is that of the City of Medford, Oregon which uses different equations based on sign type (i.e. method of attachment) and zoning district. In the Medford downtown district (CB zone) wall (facade) signs, for example, are regulated by:

Principal Facade: On that side of a building facing the street, the aggregate area of all signs shall not exceed one and one-half square feet for each linear foot of business frontage.¹⁰

In this zone of Medford, then, a business with 50' of primary street frontage would be allowed up to 75 square feet (50' frontage x 1.5 = 75' square feet) of wall sign on its principal facade. A corner location would be governed by additional provisions covering secondary facades¹¹ and those buildings with alley

¹⁰ City of Medford, Oregon, Land Development Code, 10.1610 Central Business Overlay (CB) Basic Regulations, Paragraph 2(a) Wall Signs, 286.

¹¹ Ibid. Paragraph 2(b) Secondary Facade ". . . Signs shall be limited in size to less than 36 square feet, unless building is set back a distance greater than 20 feet from adjoining property, then aggregate signage may not exceed 64 square feet.

frontage are governed by a third.¹² Similar sections concern other types such as projecting signs.

Obviously a modern sign ordinance, in even a medium sized community such as Medford, is designed to cover virtually every possible contingency that might occur. In metropolitan areas, with many different zoning classifications, a sign code can literally be hundreds of pages long.

Although sign control in some form is not a new element in municipal codes, for many cities in the United States the level of regulation as described above is a relatively recent occurrence. Following the adoption of a sign code, every city is faced with the problems posed by the existing signs within the community. In such a situation there is always at least one sector of the community that views these "pre-existing" signs as undesirable, and as a result advocated for the adoption of the new code. It is, therefore, common for cities to attempt to persuade signs owners to remove any signs that would no longer be allowed under the newly adopted regulations. Such signs, after the adoption of a new or revised sign code, are considered "nonconforming" and cities use a variety of methods to hasten their removal.

The elimination of pre-existing, nonconforming, signage is generally a major stumbling block in passing a

¹² Ibid. Paragraph 2(c) Alleys ". . . signs shall be limited to a total of 24 square feet and must be placed flat against the building. . .", 287.

sign code. Business people are generally resistant to sign control as a restriction on their right to free enterprise. When their own existing signs are threatened additional factors compound the situation. Signs represent a considerable investment and the typical small business owner is unlikely to be willing to remove a functioning sign simply because the city has adopted a new set of standards. A sign may have traditional or emotional ties to the business or even to the community that, despite its non-conformity, make it a revered local object. So-called landmark signage, such as the "Citgo" sign in Boston, are considered valuable parts of the community and their potential removal has been met with public outcry.¹³ While some business owners will remove a sign that others perceive as an "eyesore" simply in the name of good public relations, others are hesitant to remove a sign that may soon, given the higher restrictions on any new signs in the area, become a very visible and eye-catching element of their advertising strategy. In Santa Rosa, California in the mid-1970s, one such sign, a roof-top neon sign that revolved on its base, was visible for miles. Its owner, a local furniture company called "Valley Furniture", confidently told its customers to "Look for the Big V" in an endless stream of advertisements. The sign, surrounded by

¹³ William Stage. "Saving Signs of Past Times" The Christian Science Monitor (February 14, 1989), 12.

smaller post-regulation signs, served quite literally as beacon for its owner. Other complications in regulating pre-existing nonconforming signs arise from those that are installed only shortly before the adoption of the new code. Some businesses may have recently opened and innocently erected now nonconforming signs while other, existing businesses, may try to "sneak in" a larger sign before any new limits take effect.¹⁴

The manner that cities choose to treat pre-existing nonconforming signage is of particular interest as, at least currently, most if not all signs that might be eligible for recognition as significant historic elements pre-existed sign codes. Many of these are now nonconforming on one or more levels.

Originally, with the adoption of a new, stricter, sign code many cities opted for an amortization process to phase out pre-existing nonconforming signage. Elaborate equations based on original or replacement cost, years in service or estimated life were developed to provide owners with a reasonable time frame in which they would be required to remove their offending sign or bring it into compliance with the new sign code.¹⁵ Other

¹⁴ Many cities, to avoid the latter situation declare a moratorium on replacement signs to correspond with any public announcement of discussion on potential sign code revisions or adoption.

¹⁵ See James Patterson, The Amortization of Nonconforming Signs in Scottsdale, Arizona, (Scottsdale: WICHE Resources Development Internship Program, 1973).

cities, following methods used by the Federal and State Governments in the billboard eradication programs authorized under the Federal Highway Acts simply condemned signs under eminent domain and provided owners with compensation. Because of legal or financial concerns, formal amortization or condemnation is no longer the ordinary method of bringing about removal of pre-existing nonconforming signs.

The more common method by which cities regulate pre-existing signage is to allow them to continue for either a fixed time period or until a change occurs, after which they must be removed. In some cities this is only allowed following some minor modifications.¹⁶ The fixed time frame usually is five or ten years from date of code adoption and often, given the volatile nature of small business, is not a factor as the use of the building changes prior to the deadline. In the case of franchises of gas stations and fast food restaurants this type of regulation has been subject to a variety of court cases and litigation which has produced mixed results.¹⁷

For the typical small business, whose signage is more likely to have local historic significance, the use

¹⁶ Such modifications might include the disabling a sign's rotating motion or disconnecting the switches that create blinking or flashing lights. (See City of Tigard, 18.114.110 "Nonconforming Signs", (G), 278).

¹⁷ See, for example, *David v. City of Dunedin* (473 So. 2d 304) concerning a Florida City's amortization of a "golden arches" sign at a MacDonald's restaurant.

of the criteria of change as an end to allowed nonconformity is potentially more threatening than a fixed date for removal. In the terms of such a provision, change may include change of copy, ownership, location, or major repair. Consequently a long-standing sign, after sale of the business to a new owner, may no longer be allowed. A store that moves, even if only to the next building, may not be able to bring its traditional sign with it. While minor repairs and maintenance can be done without endangering a sign's status, a major repair, usually defined as a percentage of replacement cost, will result in a sign becoming illegal and make its removal necessary. Thus a pre-existing nonconforming sign damaged by accident or act of God is subject to removal even should its owner be willing to repair it. Typical of this type of provision is that of Tigard, Oregon:

Should a nonconforming sign . . . be destroyed or repaired by any means to an extent of more than 50 percent of its replacement cost, it shall not be reconstructed except in conformity with the provisions of this title.¹⁸

Some communities also tie any building permit approval, of say an expansion or remodeling project, to the correction of all other existing non-conformities at the location whether or not the work involved will effect that portion of the site. A sign may, in this case, be

¹⁸ Tigard, 8.114.110 (F), 277.

removed because its owners are successful and seek to expand their business.

Often cities designate historic districts, or overlays, as special areas within a larger zone. A portion of a CBD that has been determined to have historic importance may be classified as C-1-"H" or something similar and development within this area will be subject to an additional level of review to preserve its historic integrity or character. Frequently this is accomplished via a Historic Review Board (HRB) that reviews development prior to the normal review of the Planning Commission. Projects or designs in such designated historic areas¹⁹ must then meet not only standard code requirements but also satisfy the historic integrity concerns of the HRB.²⁰ Sign control ordinances in these areas are often more restrictive than in other, non-historic, areas of the same zoning classification. This may consist of use of a smaller multiplier for determining allowable sign area, restricted use of materials as already mentioned in Annapolis, Maryland and Ashland, Oregon, or less choice in sign type, as in a prohibition on projecting signs. Often, while not formal prohibitions, HRB's are prone to be less accommodating to

¹⁹ Sometimes HRBs rule on specific properties rather than geographical areas.

²⁰ Sign permits and other minor actions may also be handled at the city planning staff level following guidelines adopted by the HRB.

certain types of sign applications. The Annapolis HRB, quite directly states:

Illuminated signs, although permitted by the zoning code in B2, C2, and M1 zones, are, as a matter of policy, discouraged by the Commission. In most cases, permitted illuminated signs have been front lit, rather than back [internally] lit. The traditional goose-neck light fixture is considered most appropriate. . . in the retail and office areas of the historic district.²¹

Similar "suggestions" exist for sign typefaces, colors, shape, placement and a variety of other design factors.

Coupled with the amortization or required removal of pre-existing nonconforming signage, restrictions such as the above tend to create within historic districts very uniform and sedate signscapes, as is the intent. Again from the Annapolis guidelines:

Signs affect the quality, image, and cohesiveness of the entire historic district. Therefore, each sign should contribute to the visual character and harmony of the historic district, be compatible in scale, and increase the efficiency of communication.²²

At the philosophical root of sign guidelines such as Annapolis' is a desire to allow the transfer of required commercial communication in the least distracting manner possible. Historic areas, especially on the Atlantic seaboard, often trace their period of

²¹ Annapolis, 15.

²² Ibid., 3.

significance to a pre-automobile era. Small signs, designed for the pedestrian, are thought to be more in keeping with the area's "historic" character. This is at least partially based on a determination that an area's character is formed by its buildings and that signs, and any other "peripheral" elements of the streetscape, are secondary elements that, while serving a legitimate purpose, should not cover the main attraction of the buildings. But, in actual historical fact, this is a determination that is questionable. Photographs of early 19th century urban streetscapes illustrate that even in this pre-automobile period, signs played a dramatic and prominent role in the commercial landscape.

Main Street advertising---as American as the hot dog---has always been as aggressive as technology permitted. Blatant they are, these carved and gilded signatures, painted board and canvas, placards, electric light boxes, supersized wall graphics and hung signs, steel space frame and neon-tube stabiles, but lively too, preserving layers of time, displayed imagination and ingenuity, promising comfort, delight and fulfillment. The decline of the art occurred in the 1950s.²³

As many cities have demonstrated code requirements can be flexible to retain built elements that are considered worthy of preservation. Fire Marshalls and Building Inspectors are all familiar with variances and practices such as those provided for in the Basic or

²³ Carole Rifkind, Main Street: The Face of Urban America (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 75.

Uniform Building Codes²⁴ that allow rehabilitation of historic structures without complete compliance with current building practices. These are examples of code flexibility that are not usually challenged by developers of new structures as unfair nor is any danger presented to the public. They are variances that are consciously made, within required safety limits, specifically to permit the continued existence and useful life of a communities' valued historic elements. In recent years a few progressive communities have begun to recognize that similar flexibility is required in sign codes for similar reasons, so as to maintain select "historic" pre-existing nonconforming signage within the commercial landscape. While these examples will be discussed in more detail later, some of the reasoning by which signs may be viewed as historic and contributing elements within an area are covered next.

²⁴ See Building Officials and Code Administrators International, Inc., Basic Building Code Sec. 516.1 (Homewood, Ill. 1981) as cited in Christopher Duerkson, ed. A Handbook on Preservation Law, Washington, D.C.: the Conservation Foundation and The National Center for Preservation Law, 1983, 54.



FIGURE 4: Internally Illuminated Sign.
(Eugene Athletic, Eugene, Oregon)



FIGURE 5: Neon Used to Highlight Painted Letters.
(South Salem Pharmacy, Salem, Oregon)



FIGURE 6: Neon Freely Mounted to Create Motion.
(V & P Shoe Repair, Roseburg, Oregon)



FIGURE 7: Indirectly Lighted Sign.
(Key Rexall Drugs, Salem, Oregon)



FIGURE 8: Multiple Methods of Illumination
with Internal, Neon, and Incandescent Lights.
(Canton Garden Restaurant, Salem, Oregon)

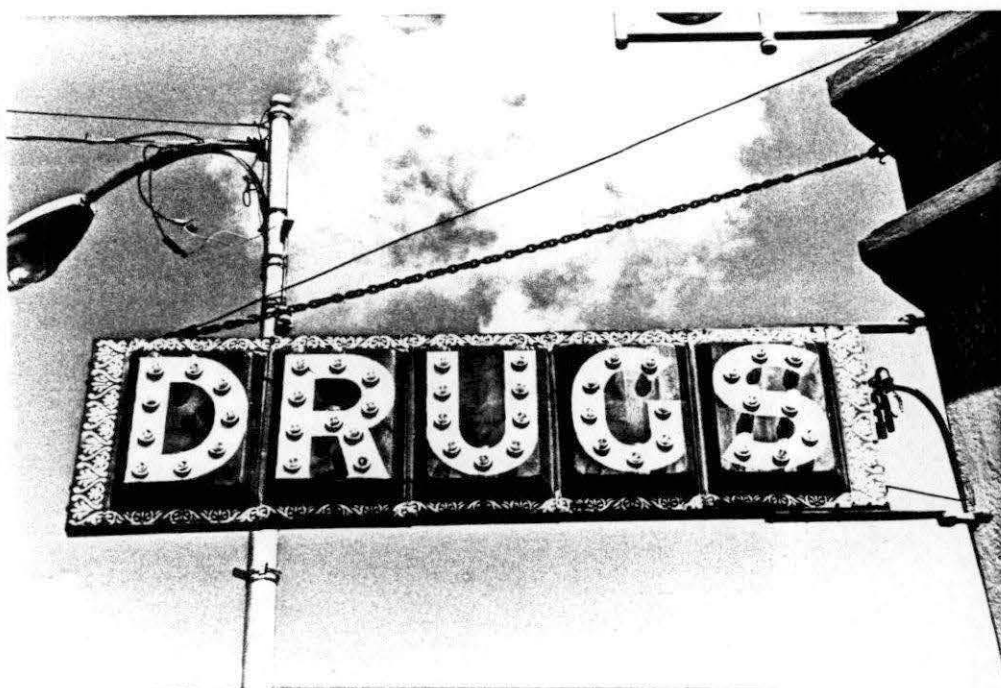


FIGURE 9: Exposed Incandescent Bulbs.
(Chapman's Drug Store, Roseburg, Oregon)



FIGURE 10: Internally Lighted Marquee Sign.
(Industrial Finishes, Eugene, Oregon)



FIGURE 11: Freestanding Sign on Steel Post.
(Jackson Hot Springs, near Ashland, Oregon)



FIGURE 12: Facade Mounted Sign.
(MacKenzie Outfitters, Eugene, Oregon)



FIGURE 13: Roof-Top or Sky Sign.
(Southern Oregon Sales, Medford, Oregon)

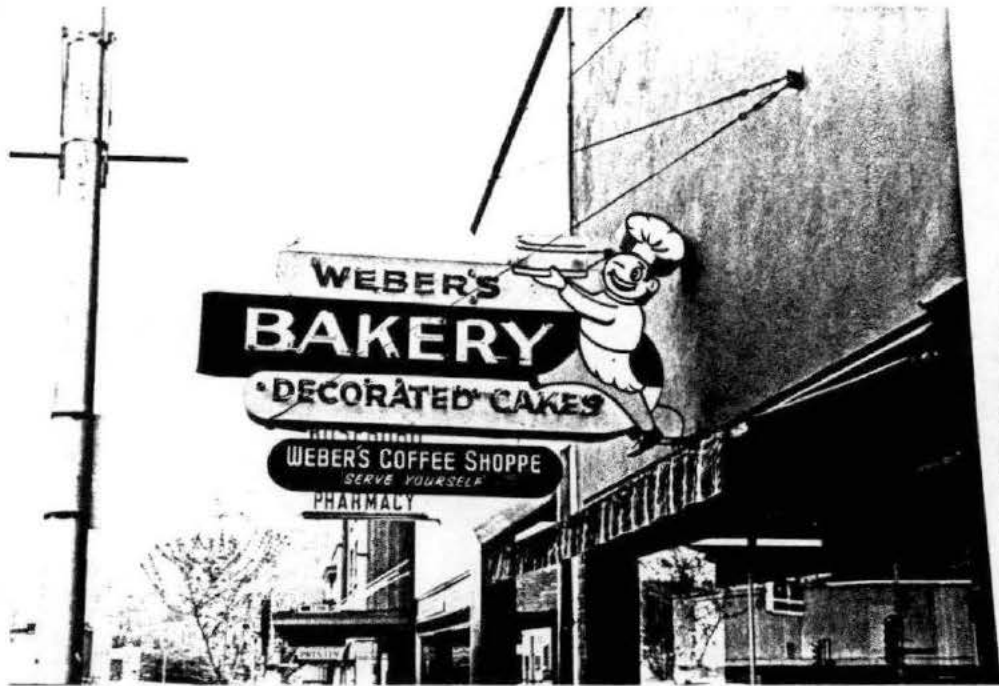


FIGURE 14: Projecting Sign.
(Weber's Bakery, Roseburg, Oregon)



FIGURE 15: Painted Wall Graphic.
(Smeed Hotel, Eugene, Oregon)



FIGURE 16: Pylon Sign, Independent Structure.
(Packard Sign, Cottage Grove, Oregon)

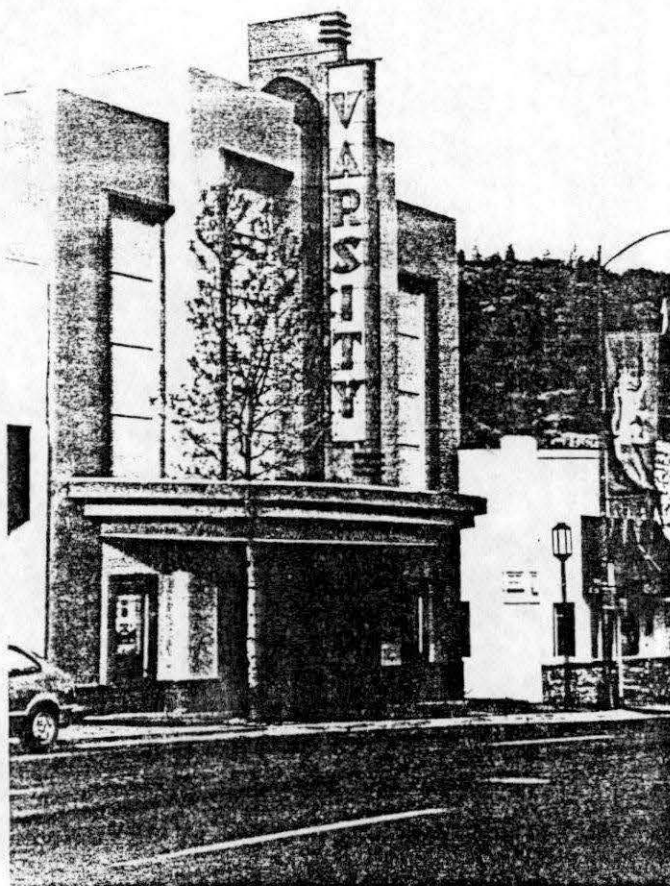


FIGURE 17: Pylon Sign, Integral.
(Varsity Theater, Ashland, Oregon)



FIGURE 18: Rotating Sign.
(Medo-Bell Dairy, Klamath Falls, Oregon)

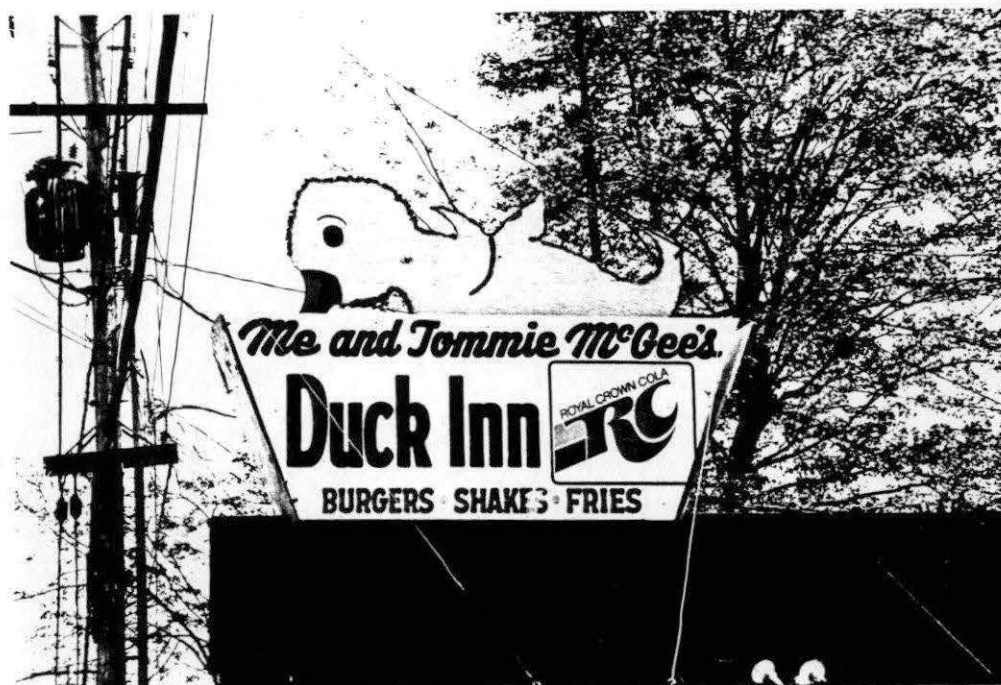


FIGURE 19: Partial Motion, Fixed Pivot Point.
(Duck Inn, Salem, Oregon)

CHAPTER IV

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SIGNAGE

Living in a world of swift and sudden transitions and constant acceleration in the pace of innovation, Americans revel in the new and the rapid: they are sulky or bored with the old and the static. Choice, change, movement, and progress are the new gods.

Wilbur Zelinsky

Zelinsky's American¹ seems an unlikely proponent of the preservation of the built environment. In the stereotypical American mind, "new and improved" is almost unquestioningly synonymous with progress. Historic preservation in such a society, the keeping of portions of the past for the future, runs directly counter to the culture's general values. But even with its contrary goal, preservation is predominantly within the main American ethic; it also values change and progress. What preservationists save, for whatever reason, is a built history of the changes in our environment and of the progress in building technology. At least partially, we

¹ Wilbur Zelinsky, The Cultural Geography of the United States, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1973), 53.

preserve with the intent of maintaining a built record that teaches us about our.

In the historic commercial landscape, signs are powerful indicators of change and development. They help us comprehend the values and life of an earlier time. How then can preservationists justify the basic systematically entrenched view that signs are not significant or valuable elements within a complex historic landscape? How do they distinguish signs from other resources to warrant this different treatment? Exploring the manner in which specific signs might potentially embody the same historic and artistic values as other structures is the first step in encouraging increased recognition of signage as a contributing factor in the historic landscape. It is the beginning of seeing signs as historic elements that represent America's past rather than as "visual clutter" to be removed without question.

Signs may gain significance worth preserving on two main levels; either as 1) integral components of an already designated resource or 2) significant independent objects. The four criteria of the National Register of Historic Places provide the legal and operational standards by which preservationists in the United States evaluate resources in the built environment. To qualify for placement upon the Register a resource must demonstrate significance and integrity for at least one of the following reasons:

- (a) That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- (b) That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- (c) That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- (d) That have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

With the exception of criterion (d), "prehistory", it seems reasonable to assume that there are numerous individual signs in the United States whose significance could be justified under each of these criteria. Many individual signs may meet more than one of the NRHP criterion. Some of the potential ways in which signs qualify for recognition are outlined below.

Signs of the Past: Criterion (a)

The development of the business world in America has had a profound effect on our nation. In broad terms, "The business of America", as Calvin Coolidge so epigrammatically put it, "is business." The growth and development of huge monopolies of commerce, transportation, manufacturing, and finance has shaped American society since the Civil War.

Today, the business world remains a fundamental part of our culture. Before the complications of pollution, energy consumption and multi-national politics raised ethical questions about their current practices, business and the vitality of the American economy was a great source of national pride. Our economic strength helped form our identity in the 20th century and made the United States a world power. In the 1920s to 1950s, the peak period of electric sign design, signs were seen as emblems of this burgeoning economy. They were "synonymous with prosperity"² and their exuberance not only mirrored the vitality of our nation but celebrated the American infatuation with motion, color and excitement.

American business, on both the corporate and small independent level, is integral to our society. It has helped to shape the appearance of our cities and towns through its effect on architectural design, merchandising, business property use, location and siting as well as the more obvious signs and advertising. As indicators of our economic strength, advertising is literally a "sign" of this nation's development.

The expansion of the American economy produced the competition between merchants that spurred the development of advertising. As cities and retail trade grew, signs

² Iver Peterson, " On the Way Out: Outdoor Neon Signs," New York Times 10 Feb 1985, Sec. I, 2.

quickly expanded beyond their primary requirement of simple business identification and became larger and more eye-catching to accommodate their new advertising function. With the development of large national corporations at the end of the 19th century the advertising industry itself became a major force in America. Even the smallest "Mom and Pop" operation had to change its marketing strategies just to remain viable in the newly aggressive retail environment. Advertising, and signage, assumed a new and more prominent role than ever before. Simply as an element within the appearance of a cityscape signs have played an considerable role. Gordon Cullen has written of what he calls "outdoor publicity" that;

. . .of all things, this is the most characteristic, and, potentially, the most valuable contribution of the twentieth century to urban scenery. At night it has created a new landscape of a kind never before seen. . .³

For what they collectively represent and as a part of the modern cityscape, like them or not, it is difficult to eliminate retail signs from consideration as an element in "the broad pattern of our history." Signs were, and remain, an undeniable portion of our past. For these reasons alone some may potentially meet the requirements of criterion (a).

³ Gordon Cullen, The Concise Townscape, (London: The Architectural Press, 1961, 2nd ed., 1971), 151.

Signs of Life: Criterion (b)

Criterion (b) focuses on a resource's association to, and ability to relate, the life of an important individual of the past. A sign stating "Smith's Hardware" is no less capable of meeting this criterion than the Smith Hardware building or the Smith family home. Signs are integral elements to the business they advertise. A sign dating from the time in which the significant individual was involved with a structure is surely as related as any other remaining element and may be more so. Judging the building as being "more associated" with a given person than a sign seems logically indefensible as a general assumption.

Were NRHP to define individual or "person" as does the judicial system, signs relating to corporate identities could also be considered items worthy of preservation. Legally, corporations in America along with ships, trusts, and certain other non-human entities, are considered to be "persons" and have the same legal rights as do individuals. The evolution of corporate logos such as the American Telephone and Telegraph "bell" or the Mobil Oil Corporation "flying horse" would, for example, each be considered as associated with the lives of significant "persons" and might warrant preservation.

Without going to the lengths of expanding the definition of what is covered by criterion (b), some signs will be able to meet this criterion simply by their occurrence on a structure already deemed to be associated with a particular individual. We must assess each building, and each sign, that potentially meets this criterion on an individual basis rather than generally eliminating certain elements as a group.

Signs of Distinction: Criterion (c)

As of 30 September 1988, there were 78,605 resources listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Of these, over 41,000, or slightly more than 52%, were found to be eligible under criterion (c) for their design or structural merit.⁴ If signs were considered a more appropriate candidate for NRHP designation as independent, distinct objects, it is likely that this is the criterion by which most nominations would be justified. In the exact same manner as a building or any other object, a sign may have significance for its artistic value or construction. The technological development that resulted in electric signs, and then their animation with elaborate systems of relays and switches, is surely of interest for the same

⁴ National Register of Historic Places: Number of Applicable Criteria per year, unpublished list provided by the National Parks Service to the author, dated 1 October 1988.

reasons as is balloon framing, cast iron or terra cotta. All are evidence of a technological improvement that changed the way Americans designed their houses and cities. The signs at the former Earle C. Anthony Packard Dealership in Los Angeles, the first known use of neon in the United States, should qualify as a significant example of technological history and merit preservation simply because of that fact.⁵

Signs are often a discrete element of a facade with no additional structural requirements beyond self-support. As such, they can be freer and more rapid in their response to developments in new technologies or design trends than are buildings. Many stylistic developments begin in print media. Architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner, for example, traces Art Nouveau, to the work of mid-19th century book illustrators in Britain.⁶ As developments occurred in graphics and lettering design, signs were able to quickly utilize these new fashions. They often represent the most visible, and potentially most enduring, examples of

⁵ Anthony, a noted patron of good design (architects Greene and Greene designed his Los Angeles residence, Bernard Maybeck designed his San Francisco showroom) installed two identical neon signs which simply read "Packard" that he had specially made in France in 1923. As of 1974 they were still functioning. See Rudi Stern, Let There Be Neon, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1979), 19.

⁶ Nikolaus Pevsner, The Sources of Modern Architecture and Design, (New York: Frederick A Praeger, 1968), 43-50.

individually short-lived artistic periods. The use of the highly stylized alphabets of art deco or art moderne signage is but one example. Some signs may represent the only remaining environmental element of an artistic period and as such deserve to be considered as potentially significant.

Signs represent the works of a variety of skillful and talented, but primarily unknown, designers and artisans. While some prominent firms, such as Young Electric Sign Company in Las Vegas and the ArtKraft-Strauss/Douglas Leigh collaboration that designed much of Times Square are well documented, the artists responsible for the typical commercial sign are largely anonymous. Certainly there has been innovative work done with smaller scale signs than those of Las Vegas or Times Square. Further research could likely uncover significant design developments and who was responsible for them. Once these masters of sign design are identified, examples of their works might be designated as significant simply through that association.

Signs in Common: Criterion (d)

Criterion (d) of the NRHP standards, concerning potential likelihood to yield information on our history is a deceptive one. Unlike the three previous categories, each of which favors prominent or strikingly important works or people, criterion (d) covers the more commonplace. It is a truism in archaeology that the most valuable items in

understanding a lost culture are its everyday artifacts; the pottery, utensils, clothing or other items that reveal what life in the civilization was actually like. Remnants of the rulers and higher society in, for example, Classical Rome, are surely prized. They were saved and treasured in museums. Many important public Roman buildings have remained against adversity simply due to their superior construction. It is the ephemera, though, the items of everyday life that are often of more interest simply because we are so lacking in examples. No one thought of such things as valuable enough to save. This is one reason why a find such as Pompeii, where all elements of the city are available for study, frozen at the moment of the eruption, is so interesting to archaeologists and historians. Certain types of signs might be viewed as commonplace objects whose value also goes unrecognized. It is arguable that signs represent a landscape element whose impact on our cities is so great that even well-designed examples have been ignored or lost in the sheer quantity of signage. The once ubiquitous "Burma Shave" placards are now prized collectibles yet were removed. The Holiday Inn Corporation's so-called "Great Sign" (see Figure 20) is now seen by organizations such as the Society of Commercial Archaeology as a significant element in America history but only a few of these signs still stand.⁷ In less than

seventy-five years the entire neon sign industry has developed, blossomed and faded. Current neon craftsmen see themselves as participants in a "revival" of a dying craft, a craft that only began in America in 1923. Some of the neon signs that do remain from the 1930s-1950s period represent a level of skill that might never again be attained. America has not yet reached an acceptable historic perspective for us to properly judge what value signs, neon and otherwise, may potentially yield to future historians.

It seems likely that any given sign might have the qualities required by NRHP and the many local landmark designations that mimic its four criteria for recognition as a significant historic element. They may qualify under these criteria either individually or as portions of the structure with which they are associated. Why then are they not seen so more often? Why has the elaborate regulatory and legal infrastructure described previously been created? And ultimately why does the historic preservation movement, that denounces the thoughtless removal of virtually every other early or original historic element, actually condone and recommend that signage be removed in the process of

⁷ In the late 1970s the Holiday Inn Corporation itself made a decision to begin removal of these signs and replace them with more "modern" ones. See Iver Peterson, "On the Way Out: Outdoor Neon Signs," New York Times 10 Feb 1985, Sec. I, 2.

rehabilitation? The answer obviously lies in the way that signs are thought of by Americans in general.

Some of the "problems with signs" have been touched upon in Chapter Two. The progressive era's ambivalence toward commercialism is surely a factor and this opinion continues into the present. Americans have never been comfortable with the "necessary evil" of advertising. The current trend of "commercial zapping" and "channel hopping" occasioned by the widespread use of VCRs and remote control is only the latest example of that. Members of the general public, and even design professionals are often hard-pressed to see signage as an art form or its creators as artists. "Art" and business are somehow seen as mutually exclusive.

The legal maneuvers of the billboard wars which required planners and local governments to declare signs "nuisances" so that they could regulate them constitutionally via police powers has undoubtedly left a residual negative connotation. Over the years that attitude has become ingrained in many who teach and practice in the design professions. This inherited bias colors modern professionals and through them helps to create the perception of the public toward signage. These factors further complicate our ability to judge the significance of signs without bias.

Historically we might be better able to see signage as a significant element if more early signs remained. But

the systematic removal of signage by government regulations, coupled with the normal turn-over of so integral a commercial element has resulted in very few signs having survived to the point at which they, or the individuals who are associated with them, might be seen in a historic context. Until recently a rigid 50-year age requirement on NRHP or local designation was standard practice. It was only the rare sign, usually a painted wall graphic, that might retain the integrity to denote significance after that span of time.

The very nature of signs works against their achieving the longevity usually considered appropriate for a landscape element to gain "historic" significance. As more ephemeral entities than buildings, signs are inherently threatened by the ebb and flow of commercial success and failure. A great proportion will be lost through normal business attrition. Another portion will be lost by continuing firms such as Holiday Inn, seeking to modernize and update their images. Unlike a building itself, a sign can only rarely be modified to suit a change in use or ownership without obliterating its historic character. Nor is adaptive re-use usually possible due to the limitations on change that are part of many sign codes. During modernization or remodeling, when the original building exterior is often simply covered with new materials, a sign is often physically removed. Such signs are separated from

their original context and "junked" in the yard of a sign company. Cities are filled with these backlots, each with its collection of decaying signs saved only for salvage or the cannibalization of parts.

Only a small percentage of businesses last more than a few years. Current policies do not add to the possibility of any individual sign serving more than its original owner. For such a landscape element a fifty year survival requirement for historic acceptance is tantamount to absurd. But, against all odds, some signs do manage to evade regulation, fashion and just simple weathering and continue in use. These survivors deserve serious attention from historic preservationists if only for their tenacity and endurance.

Signs in the Landscape

In discussing the applicability of the NRHP criteria I have, for clarity of discussion, treated signs as if they were independently valuable elements within the historic commercial landscape. But signs, just as buildings or any other element of a retail commercial environment, do not stand in isolation.

Building groups in combination with other constructed elements, landscaping, and the street furniture---paving, fences, benches, lampposts, mailboxes, utility poles, chute covers, transit shelters, kiosks, street signs and commercial signs create a streetscape.

Added to the natural environment, these give us townscapes, the unique ensembles that mark the identity for every place where humans have put their hands.⁸

It is as a portion of this context that signs offer the most potential for preserving both an existing historic sense and, as new elements, continuing the tradition of place that "Main Street" has always held in popular mythology. This is somewhat complicated by the current model for preservation of the typical small-town commercial area. This image, based on a mid-western, late-victorian small town, stems at least partially from the "Main Street" that Walt Disney created at his Disneyland theme park in 1955. Disney and his design staff adapted the elements of a typical small town and used them to create an idealized landscape. In his 1977 article "Main Street USA: the Creation of a Popular Image" Richard V. Francaviglia notes "Disney controlled the townscape to a degree unheard of in real small-town America."⁹ But this created image has, to a degree, influenced the past thirty years of commercial area preservation in America.

Disney chose to portray an era that marked a major change in America. In the late 1890s, we were moving away

⁸ Tony P. Wrenn and Elizabeth D. Mulloy, America's Forgotten Architecture (Washington, D.C.: The National Trust For Historic Preservation, 1976), 44.

⁹ Richard V. Francaviglia, Main Street USA: The Creation of a Popular Image, (Landscape 21, #3, Spring 1977), 18-22.

from a rural village ideal, with the closing of the Frontier, to an urban nation of cities. The Spanish-American War, the Presidency of Teddy Roosevelt, the Panama Canal and the Great White Fleet, all marked the beginnings of our emergence as a world power. In modern America this period has been popularly idealized as one of simplicity, a time of the "good old days."

In terms of design, Disney's Main Street is that of a city prior to the impact of automobile. Significantly, it is also prior to the advent of neon and other forms of electric signage. Disneyland's immense success made it a national model for main streets. Since storefronts in Disneyland are generally free of electric signs¹⁰ that is the image which to a large extent has guided the general vision of downtown revitalization and preservation in modern America. It is arguable that Disney's use of medieval style sign hangers, quaint typeface lettering and gilt ornament has been the well-spring for the countless "Ye Olde Shoppe" characterizations that were once endemic to any revitalized commercial district.

¹⁰ The signs on Disney's Main Street are non-electric although they, and the buildings themselves are outlined in small strings of lights as part of the "Main Street Electric Parade" event. The image of the street, however, is of a pre-electric, rural town square. Fact, as is usually the case, is a mutable element in the world of icons.

Naturally the actual "period of significance" of a main street or other commercial area did not always occur during the late Victorian one that Disney's Main Street evokes. Many cities, particularly those in the west, experienced their greatest growth and activity during the 1920s, 1930s, or even later. Traditionally, though, it is the earliest time period, the "as-built" appearance, without regard to the actual development of the area, that is given the highest priority for restoration. This tendency accounts for the often seen "frontier town" style architecture that was so popular in the 1960s. Some cities, such as Sisters, Oregon, are literally false creations---a frontier town that never in fact existed.¹¹ Perhaps as the 50-year rule continues to diminish in import, or as pre-WWII periods approach that age, more 1930 to 1950 resources, signs and otherwise, will be recognized in "historic" terms.

The very phrase "period of significance", at least when it assumes a determining role in a restoration design scheme, is somewhat problematic. It defines significance temporally and implicitly negates the significance of change; the traditional American value of progress. A period approach isolates the building, landscape, object or whatever rather than viewing it as part of a continuum. "If

¹¹ Although even this sort of architectural fantasy is preferable to faux Colonial or "Mount Vernon" Savings and Loan offices in states not settled by white Americans until the late 19th century.

we take an honest look, however, we find that the stuff of history is not made up of single events alone. Events are only punctuation marks; the process itself is history."¹² The concept of a period of significance provides a framework that lends itself to museum style interpretation. It makes sense in clarifying a residential setting, a person's lifespan or an environment directly associated with a specific historic event. It might not, however, be an appropriate model for a dynamic and living environment such as a commercial retail area. But how do we preserve without a temporal window such as a period of significance? How do we determine which of a building's or street's various past or present appearances is the one that is "significant" and worthy of saving if change itself is the important element?

Perhaps the answer lies in widening our view. It could be argued that the reason main streets were traditionally the center of the community was because of the sense of place that they created---the hustle-bustle of commerce, the promise of the growing city, the affluence of the prosperous merchants who could afford to build its substantial structures. Main streets were the locus of community identity for countless towns and would-be cities across America. Each individual element of a traditional main street commercial area---its buildings, open spaces,

¹² Wrenn and Mulloy, 15.

transportation network, business type, street lights, and signs combine in a diverse pattern creating a "place" that generates a certain feeling. If we look at preserving that sense of place, rather than only some of the specific elements that create it, change and preservation are jointly possible. It may be the relationship between the elements collectively, rather than the individual elements themselves, that are significant in a typical main street.¹³

The difficulty in planning good environments is well documented. Astute observers of the American city from Jane Jacobs to Pierce Lewis have noted that good neighborhoods or streets are not designed---they just are. It is not often possible to "create" a successful environment in one motion, as the urban renewal experiments of the 1950s and 1960s so tragically proved. As Lewis has written "Cities are more complicated than most people give them credit for being."¹⁴ It stands to reason, then, that each individual element of a streetscape plays a role in creating the sense of place, be

¹³ Here I am speaking of the average commercial landscape. Those which may contain works of nationally prominent designers such as Louis Sullivan or Walter Dorwin Teague, or those associated with nationally influential persons, such as the bicycle shop of the Wright Brothers, obviously have independent significance over-riding their contribution (or detracting) from the atmosphere of the area in which they are located. These individual resources are separated by their unique character and removed from the general sense of the street.

¹⁴ Peirce F. Lewis, "The Future of Our Past: Our Clouded Vision of Historic Preservation", Pioneer America Vol. 7 (July 1975), 14.

it positive or negative, that might not be readily apparent. An understanding of this fact is reflected, at least partially, in the fields of both planning and preservation. Each take an area-wide view of their subject. Planners divide a city into zones or districts and try to regulate like or compatible uses within each. Preservationists seek to preserve the context as well as the specific site and are concerned if a neighboring use would have an adverse impact on an identified historic resource. The federally mandated preservation process, the so-called "106" review, is based on concern over the potential impact a federal undertaking may have on a designated historic resource, even if that impact is only indirect. In light of the complexity of urban landscapes, the multi-level components in the creation of a sense of place, it is highly improbable that any particular existing landscape element, in this case signs, can be severely regulated with predictable results to the environment.

The terms "sense of place", atmosphere, feeling or ambience as they relate to a commercial streetscape are hard to define in an exact or precise way. Each consists of an subjective judgment of value that does not lend itself to easy quantification in a community development plan. How can a city require that a new project, building, or sign be in keeping with an area's sense of place? Some American cities have, however, recognized that the nature of an area

is created by a multiplicity of elements, including signage. They have sought to develop guidelines whose intent is to encourage the "sense" that is traditional in a given area. Design guidelines of the type that govern many historic districts, although they usually have a negative, non-historically-based, impact on existing signs, are an attempt at "sense of place" planning. They seek to maintain an environment while still allowing change. The fault lies in that all too often, especially where signage is concerned, such guidelines do not re-create or maintain, but establish an area appearance that heretofore never actually existed. In most historic districts current sign control methods are actually an anti-historic force. They serve to remove remaining historic elements, often against the owners wishes, and replace them with signs that conform to a misguided view of a history that never was.

Not surprisingly, the first areas where existing signs have been acknowledged as having a positive impact are places whose special qualities have been long recognized. The prime example is Times Square in New York City. This area, dubbed the "crossroads of the world" and "The Great White Way", is an American institution. It is the traditional locale of American celebrations from V-E day to the annual New Year's Eve gathering. There is little doubt that much of the energy and excitement that makes Times Square a special area comes from its over-sized and well-

designed signs. Though renowned as an "entertainment" district with theaters, ballrooms and nightclubs ". . . to many . . . the best shows were outside on the theater marquees and signs that cluttered [the] rooftops."¹⁵ Since the invention of electric and neon signs, Times Square has been the site of many of the most famous installations--- from the block long Wrigley Sign in the 1920s to the "Smoking Camel Sign" designed by Douglas Leigh, constructed by ArtKraft-Strauss, and last re-built in 1953. (see Figures 21 and 22)

In the 1960s and 1970s redevelopment of Times Square focused on cleaning up its "shabby" image which, at least architecturally, included the construction of large plain structures at odds with the area's traditional larger-than-life intensity. Higher buildings reduced the possibility of large rooftop signs and, as new buildings went up the signs came down. Coupled with existing codes that sought reduced sign impact in Times Square, the effect of the new ordinances was a change to the area's vitality and character. Tama Starr, president of ArtKraft-Strauss, the company who built many of Time Square's most renowned signs, commented "When the lights go, Times Square will go."¹⁶ After much debate and public outcry, urban planners in New

¹⁵ Vance Muse, "Lights Dim on the Great White Way", Life, December 1987, 87.

¹⁶ Ibid.

York realized that signs were a vital part of what made Times Square a national attraction. In 1986 it was designated a "unique sign district" in which the typical sign code has been reversed.¹⁷ Minimum, not maximum sign area is controlled. New and exciting signage is encouraged and older signs are retained when possible. It is too early to know whether this strategy will allow increased development and still retain Time Square's traditional energy. But the planners, and the public, in New York have realized that it is the special sense of Times Square, including its signs, and not the individual, unchanging, elements within it, that is is the crucial factor in making it a special part of the city, the nation, and the world.

Not all areas need to be of the intensity or quality of Times Square, or Las Vegas, for their signs to be recognized as a contributing element to their character. Many smaller metropolitan areas have such sections on a smaller scale. In many towns as well there are special individual signs which may add to the sense of main street as a community focal point.

Historically, signs played a major role in creating the image of a typical commercial downtown. Often what has been "preserved" in America may not, in actuality have ever occurred as we are portraying it. As Joseph Woods has

¹⁷ See Alan S. Oser, "Planning for a Brighter Times Square," The New York Times, December 14, 1986, Sec. 8, 6.

written "The result of such contrivance, whether it is a consequence of design review or simply of historicist notions, is a pseudoplace, a place that stands for something that never existed."¹⁸

Tracing the development of a streetscape over the past century through photographs illustrates how the appearance of main street areas have looked at different periods of their history. In areas now designated as "historic" these photos clearly show how modern preservation ideals may effect the scale of signs, reducing them from their historic prominence to insignificant landscape elements. The following chapter traces three downtown commercial areas, each governed by a different level of sign control.

¹⁸ Joseph S. Woods, "Nothing Should Stand for Something That Never Existed", Places 2 (Spring 1985), 82.



FIGURE 20: Holiday Inn Corporation, "The Great Sign", Solano County, California.



FIGURE 21: The Wrigley's Sign, Photograph Copyrighted by Brown Bros. (From Presbrey, The History and Development of Advertising, 1929).

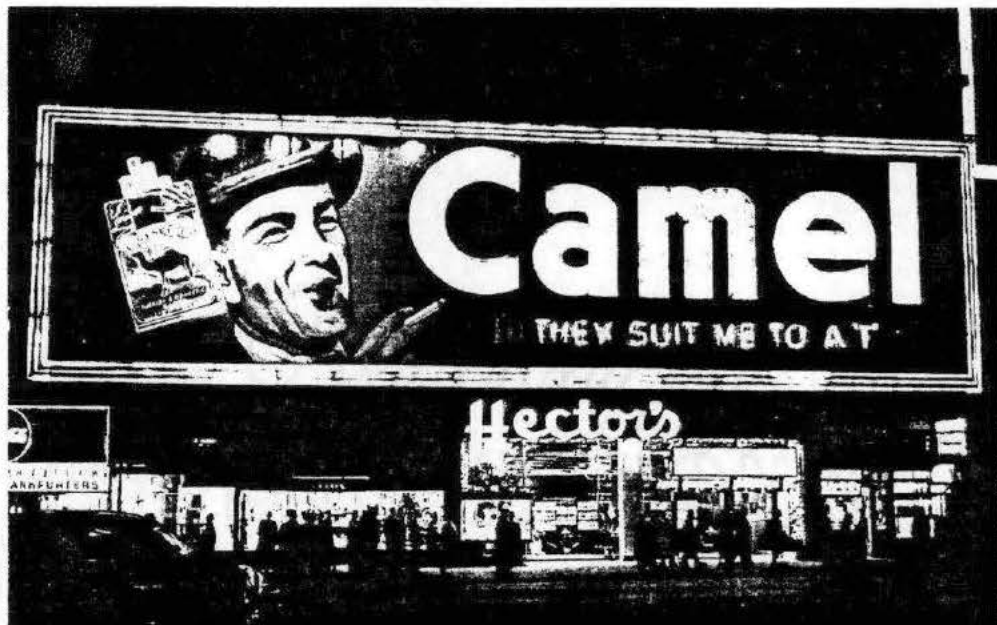


FIGURE 22: "The Smoking Camel Sign", Final Version 1953. Photograph by Artkraft-Strauss Company. (From Stern, Let There Be Neon, 1979).

CHAPTER V

CASE STUDIES

Ashland, Roseburg, and Portland all lie along the I-5 corridor running north to south in western Oregon. Ranging from a small, tourist based, college town, to the county seat of a timber dependent region, and finally to a large metropolitan area that serves a major financial and manufacturing economy, these three cities present very different images, both physically and philosophically, of community. In terms of sign control one has a very strong and specific code, one virtually no code at all, and, in the case of the Broadway District of Portland, a "unique sign area" code, similar to Times Square's, that encourages normally prohibited sign types and sizes. The three specific streets in the following case studies; The Plaza/North Main area in Ashland, Jackson Street in Roseburg, and Broadway in Portland are each the traditional "main street" of their respective towns. These are the streets down which parades went, where people from out of town came to visit, and, especially in the two smaller towns, the street where the finest stores and restaurants were. In Ashland and Roseburg the two streets have always

filled the traditional main street roles as the financial and retail center of town. Broadway, due to its location in a larger city, has a more defined yet equally prominent role as the hub of the entertainment district.

Ashland, Roseburg and Portland, in their historic development, the sophistication of their built environments and the relative limits they place on signage serve as a microcosm for much of the western United States. Their study provides insight applicable beyond their admitted geographic limitations.

Ashland: The Plaza and North Main Area

Ashland is located in Jackson County at the southern end of the Rogue River Valley in southwestern Oregon. The city was founded in 1855 and incorporated in 1874. Originally, Ashland was a lumber and mill town and then, from 1886 until the late 1920s, a Southern Pacific Railroad division point. Now it has a primarily tourism-based economy dependent upon the Oregon Shakespeare Festival Association (OSFA), Southern Oregon State College, and the nearby outdoor recreational opportunities of the Rogue River, Winema and Siskiyou National Forests. Since the city's founding the Plaza area has been the traditional core of the business district. It remains the most desirable and most expensive commercial area within the city as it is close to both Lithia Park and the OSFA theater complex.

Many of the buildings on the Plaza are built of brick and date from the 1880s and 1890s after a major fire in 1879 destroyed many of the earlier wooden structures. These brick storefronts now primarily house small eating and retail establishments, most geared toward the tourist trade.

Historically, Ashland has the reputation of a town that is concerned with its appearance. City beautification activities and interest in environmental amenities have been a prominent part of Ashland's development since its earliest years. In the 1950s and 1960s, the construction of I-5 to the east of downtown eliminated the use of North Main (Highway 99) as a major thoroughfare.¹ With the rapid growth of OSFA, the boom in the tourist economy, and an influx of transplanted urbanites, Ashland citizens became increasingly active in preserving the city's "small town" charm. One expression of that concern was the passage, in 1968 of the city's first sign code to include non-structural or safety regulations. This ordinance, considerably strengthened in 1973 and again revised in March 1988, remains basically unaltered. It is possibly the most stringent sign ordinance in Oregon and outright prohibits, in general², the following sign types:

¹ The plaza was also changed in 1943 when the row of stores facing the camera in Figure 26, behind the central tree, were demolished as part of a widening of Highway 99.

² Slightly less prohibitive restrictions are applicable in a special "freeway district" for service

1. Flashing Signs.
2. Moving, rotating, or otherwise animated signs.
3. Three-dimensional statues, caricatures or representations.
4. Roof signs or signs which project above the roof [pylon signs].
5. Exposed sources of illumination including but not limited to neon, fluorescent tubes, and incandescent bulbs.
6. Bulletin boards or changeable copy signs.
7. Wall graphics.
8. Projecting signs (over 2 feet from wall)³

For many other cities, Ashland's ordinance was seen as a model example of city control. It garnered (and retains) great support from the local population. One traveller's guide published shortly after the passage of the revised code gushed:

It's immediately obvious that Ashland is an exceptionally attractive city. There are a number of reasons, one of them being a far-sighted sign ordinance; you'll notice that Ashland, unlike many other potentially attractive cities, is not cluttered by a hodge-podge of unsightly signs.⁴

Like many cities, Ashland originally attempted to set time limits on the continuance of pre-existing non-

related industries located at the I-5 interchanges north and south of town. See Ashland Municipal Code, Land Use Guidelines, Section 18.96.100, "Freeway Sign Zone".

³ For complete text see Appendix B, "18.96.040, Prohibited Signs".

⁴ [Peggy Crawford], A Traveller's Guide to Southern Oregon, (Ashland: Bud Mahanay and Associates, 1977), 16.

conforming sign installations. A major thrust of the 1973 sign code revisions were requirements that such signs be eliminated. One Planning Commission member stated that many such signs ". . . have been up for 100 years. The whole idea of a sign ordinance is to get them in line."⁵ Another Commissioner voiced the general tenor of the sign debate in Ashland by stating, "Everything should be done to make this a beautiful town. People who don't like it [the sign ordinance] can go either north or south."⁶

Concurrent with the interest in a sign code as a method of improving Ashland's appearance was a revived appreciation of the town's history. Following an ill-advised foray into an Elizabethan England architectural scheme (which thankfully failed), Ashland settled on what Alan Lew has called "Historic Preservation as a Retail Theme."⁷ In the early 1970s the Ashland Historic Commission was formed by the Mayor and given an advisory role on planning, design and construction issues within the "Ashland Historic District", a locally designated planning area that encompasses most of the older parts of town and all of the Plaza and North Main business area. In practice, great

⁵ "Planners Adding Takedown Rule to Sign Code Proposal," Ashland Daily Tidings (January 16 1973), 1.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Alan Lew, Thematic Revitalization of Older Retail Districts in the Pacific Northwest. Master's Thesis in Geography, University of Oregon, August 1983, 74.

community pressure if not actual regulation has resulted in the Plaza area being substantially "restored" to an upscale "historic" image. Many of the buildings fronting on the five blocks lining the Plaza and North Main area (see map, Figure 23) have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Work towards national recognition as a historic district is currently underway.

Generally the difficulties in meshing sign control with historic preservation are not perceived as a problem in Ashland. The strong sign code is seen as a benefit in protecting the integrity of the historic area from unsightly new intrusions. The City has never fully enforced the 1973 provisions aimed at eliminating pre-existing non-conforming signs such as, for example, that of the Varsity Theater (Figure 17) which is non-conforming on at least three levels (oversize, neon and internally lighted, pylon attachment method), Ashland's "Noted 2nd Hand" (wall graphic), or the small IOOF sign (exposed neon). (see Figures 24 and 25) While these technically illegal signs are at present in little apparent danger, they and others like them are tolerated in Ashland not appreciated.

There seems little likelihood of any substantive changes to Ashland's sign code in the foreseeable future. In October 1986 a Planning staff supported revision to permit a single non-flashing, facade mounted only, neon sign per storefront in the business district was soundly

criticized at the public hearing and not adopted.⁸ A subsequent revision that permits neon on the interior of a store was passed but such neon is only allowed if it is not visible from the street.

Clearly, Ashland's sign code has resulted in the removal of most of the signs whose existence prompted its adoption. The disparity between the current appearance of downtown Ashland and that of an earlier period is most dramatically seen by comparing Figures 29 and 30, showing North Main Street looking north from the intersection of Second. In the span of only 37 years the streetscape has been completely transformed. The wall graphics of the "Grocceteria" are gone; it is now a professional office. Most noticable in the "HOTEL" sky sign. This sign was one of the main focus of the 1967 ordinances and was removed shortly after its adoption. The building remains, still a hotel, with only modest signage.

All new signs installed under a strong ordinance such as Ashland's are by nature similar. They tend to blend together, forming a visual montage rather than distinct sign entities. At night, the signs along the Plaza and North Main are dark and, depending on your viewpoint, create a landscape that is either quaint or boring. Within the confines of available historic photographs, the following

⁸ City of Ashland Planning Staff, "Memorandum: Sign Code Amendments Relative to Neon Signs", (October 1986).

show the various changes in the appearance of The Plaza and North Main business areas over the last century. They demonstrate, with little doubt, that Ashland's Plaza area is, at least in terms of signs, far from being historically authentic.

Roseburg: Jackson Street

Roseburg is the seat of Douglas County, a large rugged and mountainous land that stretches from the Cascade Mountain Range on the east to the Pacific Ocean on the west. Over 40 percent of the county is covered with forest and the timber and lumber products industries account for a quarter of employment county-wide. Now the largest city in the county, Roseburg is the hub of government, business and entertainment in the Umpqua River Valley.

In 1851 a New York born Jewish merchant, Aaron Rose, settled at the confluence of the South Umpqua River and Deer Creek. His townsite, eventually named Roseburg in his honor, became the county seat in 1854 and incorporated in 1872. The new city benefited greatly as the termination point of the Oregon and California Railroad from 1872 to 1882.⁹ Roseburg became the shipping point for imports and exports of product for all of southwestern Oregon. As the

⁹ Stephen Dow Beckham, The Land of the Umpqua, (Roseburg: The Douglas County Board of Commissioners, 1986), 138.

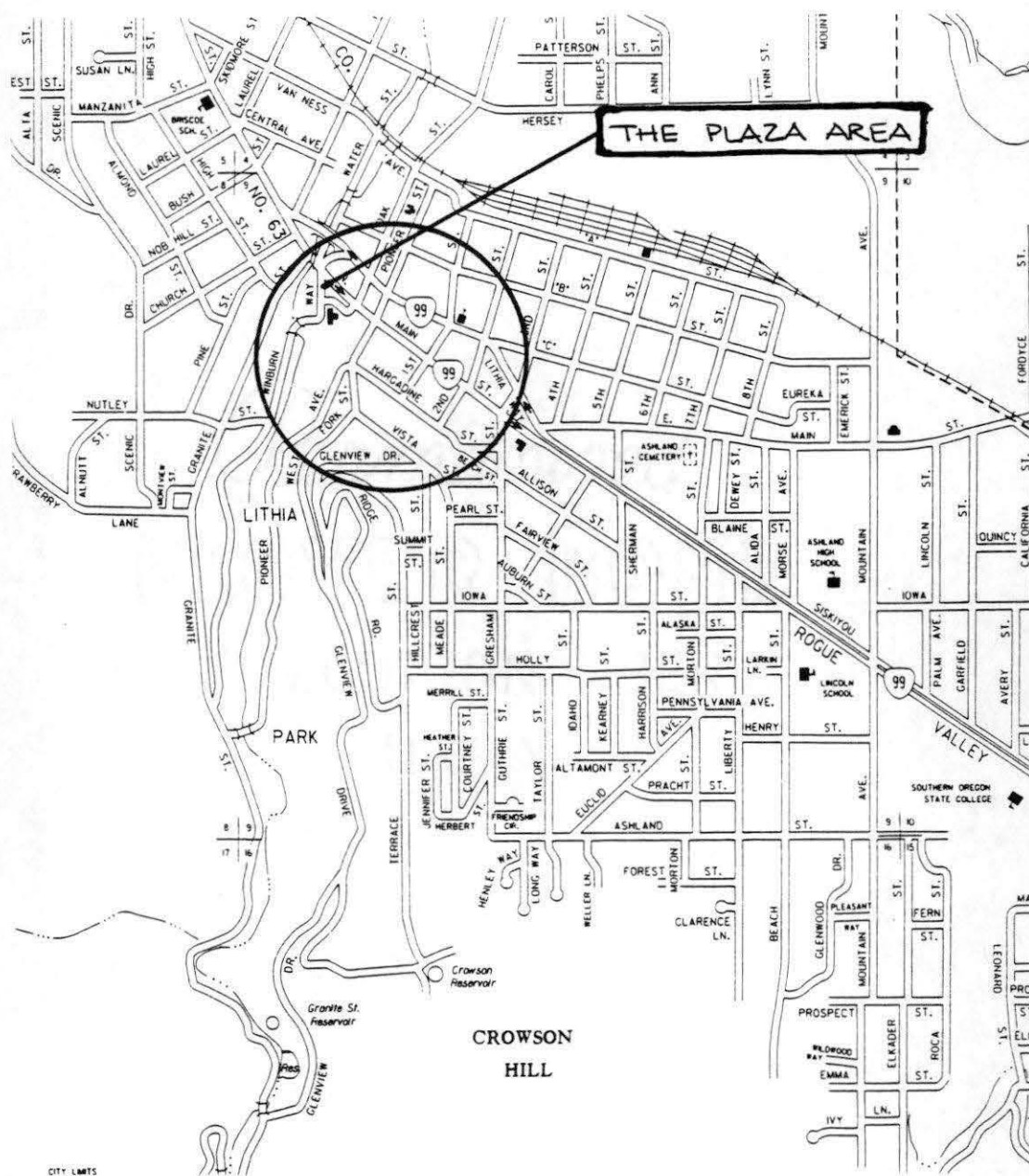


FIGURE 23: The Plaza and North Main Street Business District, Ashland, Oregon (Oregon Department of Transportation, 1984)



FIGURE 24: IOOF Sign
(Ashland, Oregon)



FIGURE 25: Ashland's Noted Second Hand Sign
(Ashland, Oregon)



FIGURE 26: The Plaza, Looking Southwest, circa 1881
(Southern Oregon Historical Society
Photograph, Negative No. 8919)



FIGURE 27: The Plaza, Looking Northeast, circa 1915.
(Southern Oregon Historical Society
Photograph, Negative No. 69)



FIGURE 28: The Plaza, Looking Northeast, 1989.



FIGURE 29: North Main and Second, Looking North, 1952
(Southern Oregon Historical Society
Photograph, Negative No. 5444)

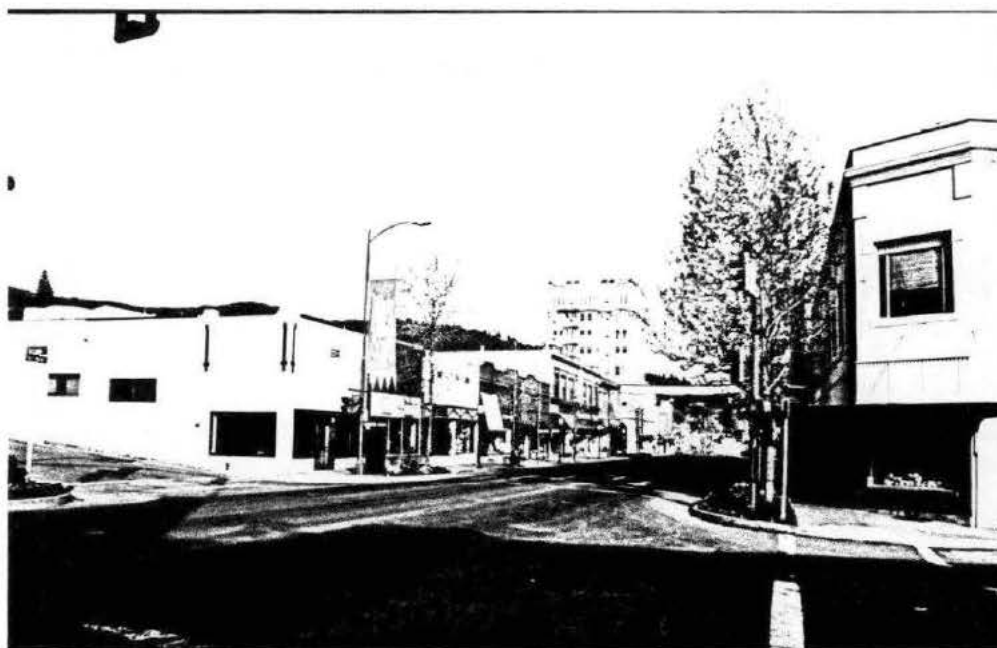


FIGURE 30: North Main and Second, Looking North, 1989



FIGURE 31: The Plaza, Looking West From Oak Street, circa 1955 (Southern Oregon Historical Society Photograph, Negative No. 154)



FIGURE 32: The Plaza, Looking West From Oak Street, 1989

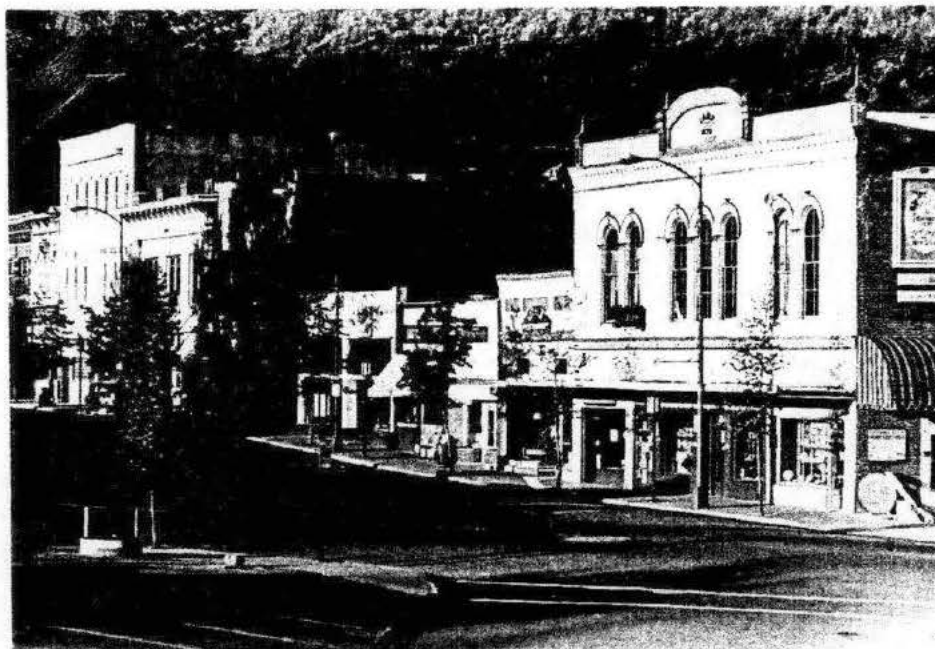


FIGURE 33: The Plaza, Looking West from Water Street, 1980. (Southern Oregon Historical Society Photograph, Negative No. 12478)



FIGURE 34: The Plaza, Looking West from Water Street, 1989.

town prospered, its downtown area east of the Railroad Depot took on a more permanent appearance. Jackson Street, a north-south axis, emerged as the prime retail and financial center of the city. Brick structures replaced earlier wood frame storefronts. Many of these 19th century buildings, along with others dating from the first decade of the 20th century, still stand. Despite the construction of newer shopping areas to the northwest, Jackson Street remains one of Roseburg's major retail and business centers.

For unknown reasons, some perhaps stemming from an independently minded business community dubious of governmental control, Roseburg has never adopted any sort of sign control regulations. Within the four blocks of Jackson Street between Douglas and Lane virtually no limitation on the type, number, size or location of commercial signage exist beyond the minimal clear vision area requirements reproduced in Appendix C.¹ As a result, Roseburg's business' have complete freedom of choice in the design of their signage. While some of the signs on Jackson Street are somewhat larger than those found in similar sized cities, this lack of restriction has not resulted in the "neon jungle" that advocates of sign control so often predict in such an unrestrained signscape.

¹ According to the staff of the Roseburg Planning Department the only true limits on signs within the city limits are height restrictions in the vicinity of the airport but even these have never been an issue.

It is debatable whether Roseburg's lack of sign restrictions has been especially effective in preserving original or early signage. Such was certainly not an intended result of the lack of control. Jackson Street's signscape appears in most respects to be much like any other city's. Free of restrictions and amortization processes though, Roseburg does retain early signage to a higher degree than Ashland or many other cities with sign codes that fall between the two extremes these case studies represent.

Many of the situations which result in sign loss in other communities are absent in Roseburg. For example, a sign may move with a business when it relocates. The shoe repair sign (Figure 6) was recently moved to its current location from a storefront two doors to the south after the shop was forced to change locations.² A sign may also be relocated on the same building in response to changes in transportation or traffic patterns. The exposed incandescent bulb and enameled panel Chapman Drug sign (See Figures 9 and 35) has been moved from its original position on the center of the Jackson Street facade of the Masonic Building to that building's corner. Installed in 1909 when the building itself was completed, this sign, built by the

² Manager of V & P Shoe Repair, conversation with the author, 5 May 1989.

Federal Sign Company and bearing the patent date of 1903, has been in use for the last 80 years. It is the earliest electric sign still serving its original location and owner so far identified in Oregon.

Whether Roseburg's signs remain through the lack of regulation or the simple longevity of businesses is open to dispute. The lack of restrictions does without question add to the potential for early signs to continue in use. Roseburg's lack of a sign code has permitted these signs to remain if and when their owners were able or wanted to keep them without any city-wide program requiring their removal. In and of itself this simple ability, free of non-conforming status or amortization programs, should account to a great degree for the continued existence of those remaining older signs in Roseburg. Where businesses change and sign replacement is unavoidable, Roseburg's lack of code allows for a continued exploration of new sign design. Jackson Street's lack of homogeneity is in complete opposition to the enforced, and directed, limits on sign design that a code such as that in Ashland will by nature create.

In the following photographs the changes to the five blocks of Jackson between Douglas and Lane over the last century are readily apparent. In terms of signs, however, the general affect on the "sense of place" of Jackson Street from the the 1930s to the present is not as drastically altered as it is in Ashland. In its treatment of signage,

Roseburg has benefited from the often seen preservation by neglect. Now that some of its signs, such as that at Chapman's Drug Store have achieved an age where they are becoming viewed as significant or historic elements, perhaps Roseburg will begin to take active preservation efforts. The city is fortunate that it still has so many signs to preserve.

Portland: The Broadway District

For most of the 139 years of Oregon statehood, Portland has been the state's largest city. By 1910 the population of Portland proper was almost 250,000, over 35% of the people living in the state. As Portland grew into a modern metropolitan city it lost the traditional sort of multi-purpose main street that developed, and to a certain extent remains, in both Ashland and Roseburg. There is no single street in Portland that serves all of the diverse main street functions to the same extent as The Plaza or Jackson Street. In Portland, the increased demands of a larger population spurred the development of many specialized business areas. These concentrations have each assumed, in effect, a portion of a main street's traditional roles. By the early 1900s one of these concentrations of use, centered around Broadway south of Burnside, became known as the "theater district". Still a focus for entertainment in

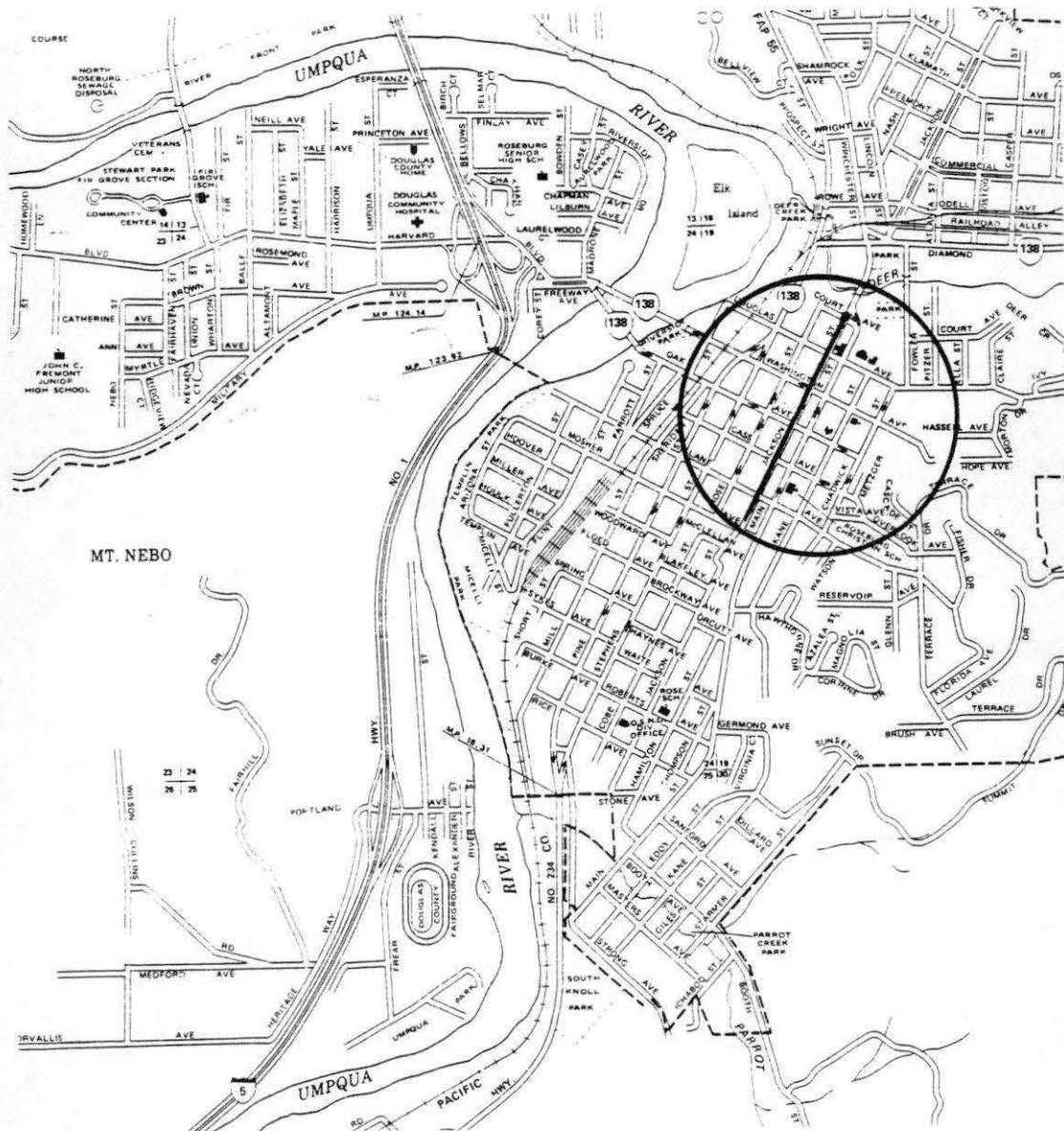


FIGURE 35: Roseburg, Oregon
 (Oregon Department of Transportation, 1980)

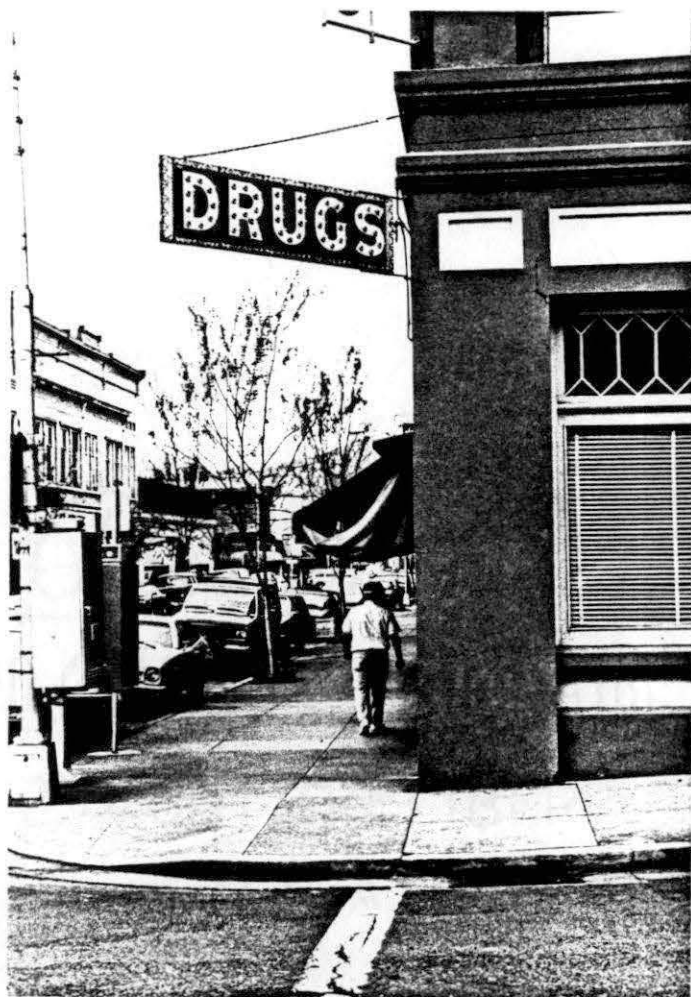


FIGURE 36: Chapman Drugs in the Masonic Building,
Roseburg, Oregon, 1989



FIGURE 37: East Side of Jackson Between Washington and Oak, Looking South circa 1890 (Douglas County Museum Photograph)



FIGURE 38: East Side of Jackson Street, Looking North From Washington, circa 1989



FIGURE 39: West Side of Jackson Between Washington and Oak, Looking South circa 1920 (Douglas County Museum Photograph, Negative 12428)



FIGURE 40: West Side of Jackson Between Washington and Oak, Looking South, 1989



FIGURE 41: East Side of Jackson Between Washington and Oak, Looking North, circa 1940 (Douglas County Museum Photograph Negative 13387)



FIGURE 42: East Side of Jackson Between Washington and Oak, Looking North, 1989



FIGURE 43: Northwest Corner, Jackson and Washington,
Looking North, 1959, (Douglas County Museum
Photograph Negative 12712)



FIGURE 44: Northwest Corner, Jackson and Washington,
Looking North 1989



FIGURE 45: Jackson From Oak, Looking North,
circa 1910, (Oregon Historical Society
Photograph, Negative 7987)



FIGURE 46: Northwest Corner, Jackson and Washington,
1989



FIGURE 47: Jackson Looking North from Cass,
May 9, 1910 (Douglas County Museum
Photograph, Negative 1371)



FIGURE 48: Jackson Looking North
from Cass, 1989



FIGURE 49: Looking North, Jackson and Cass, circa 1930. (Oregon Historical Society Photograph, Negative 83977)



FIGURE 50: Southeast Corner, Jackson and Cass, 1989



FIGURE 51: Jackson Looking South from Washington, circa 1940 (Oregon Historical Society Photograph, Negative 97871)



FIGURE 52: Jackson, Looking North From Lane, 1989

Portland, it is this area that is the subject of the final case study.

When it was first laid out Broadway was known as 7th Avenue. Soon though, the street began to develop the character it is famous for. The name was later changed to Broadway, perhaps in part to evoke images of a well known New York counterpart.¹ Broadway was the home of many of Portland's early entertainment services---the nickelodeons, the hotels, and the restaurants and bars. In the decade between 1930 and 1940 the first ten blocks of Broadway south of Burnside were the site of seven motion picture theaters, eight hotels and many coffee shops, restaurants, bars and other tourist or entertainment related businesses. These businesses erected signs not only on their buildings but spanning the streets in what looked like electrified versions of the temporary event banners now often seen across downtown streets. "Portland was famous in theater circles for its ornate signs hung horizontally over the streets."² Not to be outdone, business types not normally associated with extravagance installed signs that were in

¹ Broadway, like all of Portland, is divided into North and South by Burnside Street. The portion of South Broadway from Burnside to Madison is the focus of the discussion and shall be referred to simply as "Broadway" or "the Broadway area".

² Harry Stein, Kathleen Ryan and Mark Beach, Portland: A Pictorial History, (Virginia Beach/Norfolk, Virginia: Donning, 1980, 125.

keeping with the growing nightlife character of the area. Note, for example, the KOIN rooftop sign in Figure 58 or the Portland Gas and Electric sign in Figure 64. Broadway in the 1930s and 1940s represented all the hustle-bustle of life in the big city. As Portland's answer to the "neon jungles" and "Times Squares" of the eastern seaboard, Broadway presented a traditional "big city" image for those who stayed in the hotels scattered in between the theaters, bars and restaurants.

The City of Portland took an early interest in controlling its physical development. A Planning Commission was first established in 1918 and zoning was fully integrated into the development code by 1959.³ In 1964 an early version of sign control was adopted for commercial areas. No copy of this version of Portland's sign ordinance was located for this study but it likely was typical of other early ordinances, including limits on height, area, and selected methods of illumination or attachment. In 1982-3 Portland adopted a method of sign control that not only controlled signs in each different zoning classification but provided for more individualized district level guidelines. These specialized sub-divisions within, for example, the C1 zoning classification, were aimed at

³ Laura Campos, The Portland Planning Commission: An Historical Overview, (Portland: City of Portland Bureau of Planning, 1979), 19.

reflecting the actual sense of the existing signage of the specific area, similar to the code in Times Square discussed in the previous chapter. Four of these "unique sign districts" were created, each encompassing an area whose special character had been recognized and deemed valuable to the City. With the creation of the unique sign districts the Portland planners have legally recognized that signs play a role in the creation of a sense of place. On its own, that is not particularly remarkable. What is important about the unique sign districts, especially the Broadway District, is that large, electrified signs were for the first, and so far only, time in Oregon seen as a contributing factor rather than a negative one.

The Portland Bureau of Planning did an admirable job in stating the motivation for the Broadway Unique Sign District. The guidelines for new signage in the area provide an excellent example of an attempt toward the preservation of "sense of place" even where preserving individual elements themselves may not be possible. The "issue" on Broadway as described in Portland's Downtown Design Guidelines was stated as follows:

Broadway was one and still is the brightest and busiest entertainment street in Downtown. From the 1920s through the 1940s, this street was dominated by movie theaters, night clubs, hotels and restaurants. Though few of these remain, what does remain shapes the unique character of Broadway. . . . Signs, in particular, . . . have

historically been larger, brighter and more lavish than in most of Downtown. The special atmosphere of this district is enhanced when new development and signage expresses and outward vitality or contributes toward and exciting display of Downtown splendor and liveliness.⁴

Specific guidelines for new signage in the Broadway area were given as follows:

- A. Provide opportunities for the development of large, brighter, and flamboyant signs which exhibit exceptional graphic design and sign craftsmanship and which enhance the Broadway environment.
- B. Lighted signs may be approved which exceed the maximum area, number, projection, height, and lighting regulations, or which flash or include exposed incandescent lamps provided the constructively add to the nighttime entertainment atmosphere of the district.

Examples are signs which accentuate theaters, playhouses and after hours use of hotels and restaurants.

Bright and lavish lighting methods, such as neon tubing and incandescent bulbs are preferred.

- C. Signs shall be located so as not to conceal or disfigure significant architectural or historical features of buildings.

- D. All signs shall receive proper maintenance

⁴ Michael Harrison, AICP, Downtown Design Guidelines: Portland, Oregon, January 1983, (Portland: City of Portland, 1983), 66.

All lighted portions of signs shall be kept in working order. Painted surfaces of signs should not be allowed to deteriorate.

E. Signs shall be constructed and positioned so as not to present a hazard to the public.⁵

These guidelines, especially paragraph "B" virtually turn the typical sign ordinance on its head. Signs and sign types that most often are prohibited are in Broadway being encouraged. But again, signs are not seen as being historical or equal in significance to architecture as provided for in paragraph "C". As the historic photographs of Broadway show, many of the streets original signs did conflict with the architecture behind them.

It is interesting to note that included within the same publication as the above guidelines are those for the unique sign districts in the Yamhill and Skidmore/Old Town Unique Sign Districts. Each of these qualifies as a typical "preserved" retail district. Here, the Portland Planning Bureau is not as progressive as in Broadway. "Guidelines [for sign design] which are less restrictive than the regulations [for the rest of the city] are appropriate for the Broadway and Chinatown Unique Sign Districts, while guidelines which are generally more restrictive are

⁵ Ibid.

appropriate for the Yamhill and Skidmore/Old Town Unique Sign Districts."⁶

At this writing, the Unique Sign District encompassing Broadway has not resulted in the resurgence of neon or a continuation of the traditional kinetic signscape that Portland's planners hoped for. Some individual signs, such as the replaced Paramount sign on the new Performing Arts Center, which recreates an earlier sign at the same location, have been installed. But the wonderful marquee and flamboyant signage on the Broadway Theater at the southwest corner of Salmon Street intersection, have been lost to make way for a new multi-story development. The sign on the Fox Theater, one of the most striking of Broadway's remaining signs will soon be removed as well.⁷

⁶ City of Portland, Portland Municipal Code Title 33, "Planning and Zoning", Sec. 33.44.132 Unique Sign Districts. Technically, this section, along with the rest of 33.44.100- was repealed in May of 1986 and replaced with Chapter 33.535 (see Appendix C). This action resulted from a free speech related legal decision which is not directly pertinent to the present discussion. At present, the above referenced language and attitude is not formally incorporated into the Portland code due to a re-writing of the Downtown Design Guidelines as a portion of the Downtown Central Plan. According to Leo D. Williams of the Portland Planning Bureau in a phone conversation on 15 June 1989 there will be no changes to the Unique Sign Districts or the guidelines for them when the new plan is adopted. This is expected to be finalized by the end of 1989.

⁷ Leo D. Williams, Portland Planning Bureau, phone conversation with the author, 15 June 1989.

It would be rather poignant to blame the lack of success of the Broadway district on the demise of the sign craft and the inability of modern designers to recreate signage of the grand levels of the heydays of the 1930s to 1960s. The truth, however, is somewhat less dramatic. Land on Broadway, in the center of the city, has become too valuable for its traditional entertainment uses. The professional and financial interests who move into the buildings are not of the business sector who normally erect the type of signs the guidelines encourage. Broadway is a changing area, moving away from its traditional purposes. Even when entertainment uses do go into the area, with the exception of the Performing Arts Center, they tend to be smaller, more modest, structures without the large signs those uses traditionally generated. When new structures, such as the the high-rise office building that will replace the demolished Broadway Theater, are constructed, they are of a height or a design that does not usually generate the kind of signage that makes Broadway a special area. This is the same problem that New York City faces with new development in Times Square but their sign code has gone one step further than Portland's in requiring a certain amount and types of signage on replacement structures.

While Portland deserves much credit for adopting the unique sign district idea, it is crucial to note that even here there is no intent to view the signs on Broadway as

significant or historic elements in the historic preservation sense. The unique sign districts in Old Town/Skidmore and Yamhill Historic Areas are just as restrictive, and presumably threatening, toward any remaining out-of-scale signage as is Ashland's. The large signs of Broadway are seen more as interesting curiosities of the past than as significant and important artifacts of our cultural history. The key area of import in the Broadway area is the attempt, sadly unsuccessful, to maintain a traditional sense of place amid a changing pattern of use by promoting comparable types of signage.

The following photographs have been chosen from among many similar scenes. As a city, Portland grew up with the camera and Broadway, one of its most prominent streets, is nothing if not well documented. I have chosen photos which show the streetscape itself so as to relate convey the image Broadway historically conveyed. The designs of the individual signs themselves is best seen in photos of buildings rather than the streetscapes reproduced here. Some, such as the Broadway Theater or the Jolly Joan Restaurant, (see Figure 64) are arguably among the most creative and dynamic signs ever in operation within Oregon. Even now, with both of these signs and many, many, others gone, Broadway is still the closest thing to Times Square Oregon has to offer.

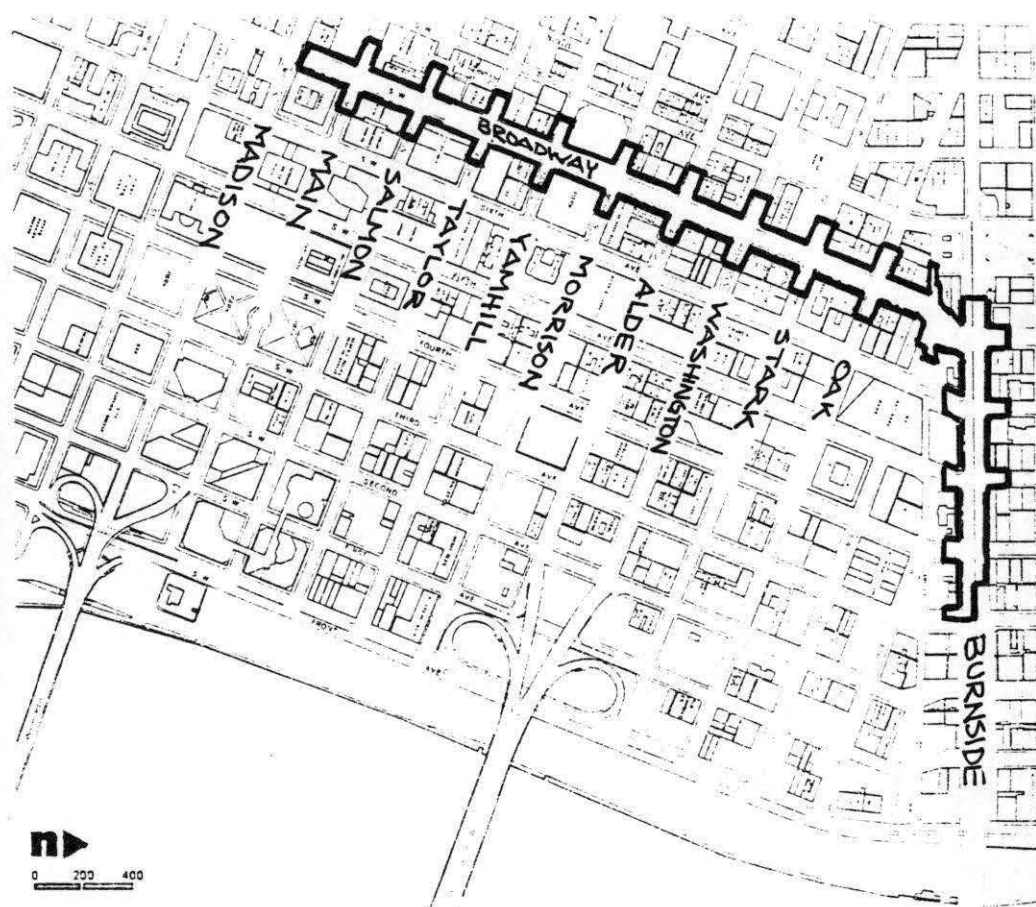


FIGURE 53: The Broadway Unique Sign District,
(Portland Planning Bureau Map)



FIGURE 54: Broadway Avenue, circa 1910
(Oregon Historical Society
Photograph, Negative 64813)



FIGURE 55: Broadway and Oak, Looking South,
circa 1950 (Oregon Historical Society
Photograph, Negative 24550)



FIGURE 56: Broadway and Oak, Looking
South, 1989



FIGURE 57: Broadway from Main, Looking North, circa 1935, Oregon Historical Society Photograph, Negative 17624



FIGURE 58: Broadway From Main, Looking North, 1989



FIGURE 59: Broadway From Madison, Looking South, circa 1955. Oregon Historical Society Photograph, Negative 17625)



FIGURE 60: Broadway From Madison, Looking South, 1989



FIGURE 61: Broadway Avenue, Looking South, circa 1925
(Oregon Historical Society Photograph,
Negative 37925)



FIGURE 62: West Side of Broadway Looking North to Morrison, circa 1958 (Oregon Historical Society Photograph Negative 66822)



FIGURE 63: Broadway Avenue, Looking North From Salmon Street, 1989)

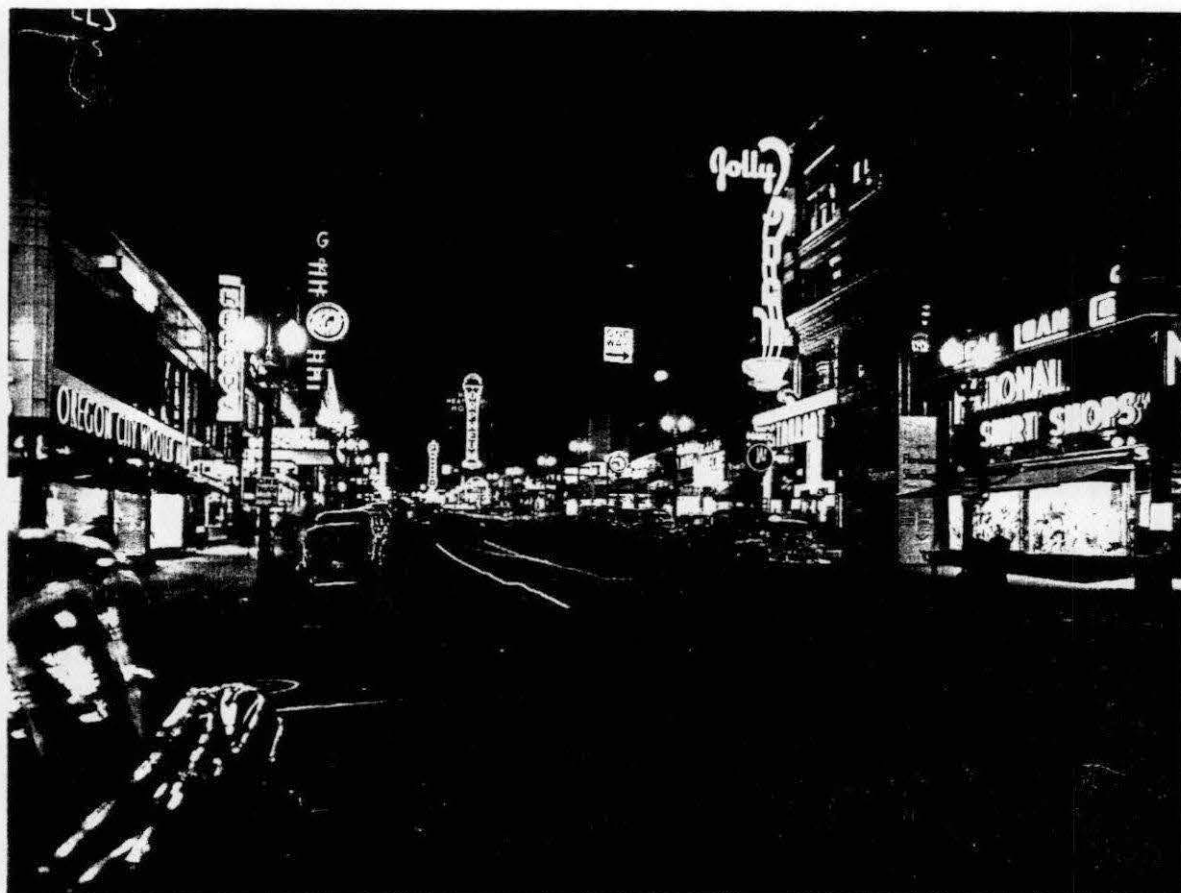


FIGURE 64: Broadway Avenue At Night, Looking South
From Washington, circa 1950 (Oregon Historical
Society Photograph Negative 12695)

CHAPTER VI

REVISING A SIGN CODE

When a city or other government entity has determined that certain signs within its jurisdiction may be of historic significance, some method of formally and legally designating them as such is desirable. Formal recognition provides a traditional and accepted bureaucratic structure that equates significant signage with other types of historic and cultural resources. Additionally, it is a necessary legal component in justifying any beneficial treatment accorded designated sign as opposed to other, "non-historic", signage within the jurisdiction.

Currently, most jurisdictions have the legal authority to exempt certain sign types, including pre-existing non-conforming signage, from their sign control ordinances so as to permit such signs to remain in service. Typical exemptions are temporary "event" signage for fairs and exhibitions, political signs, flags and real estate lawn signs. Some cities have already formally designated and exempted identified "historic" or landmark signage.¹ The

¹ The use of the term "historic" to describe significant or designated signage is here used as a

leading example of this type of ordinance is that of Pasadena, California, which was adopted in 1987². This ordinance provided the basis on which much of the following guidelines are based. Other cities have also recently adopted so-called "historic sign" ordinances including Culver City, California, Pendleton, Oregon and Dallas, Texas.³

Most sign codes will require revisions of already existing regulations to exempt designated significant signage. Consequently, each jurisdiction will require an individual response based on the nature of sign control currently present. The following general guidelines should be viewed as suggested steps in undertaking a legal correction of a typical sign code to better retain significant signage. These steps, each discussed in greater detail in the following text, are:

1. Moratorium

convenience since it is a commonly applied adjective, both legally and conversationally, for describing or defining resources. The temporal limitations implied by the term and the problems that may result from its use in defining significance are dealt with in greater depth later in this chapter. In general, the use of "historic" is included here only when it appears in a direct quotation of a title or ordinance passage. The more appropriate and recommended descriptor for signage, or any other cultural resource, is the far less problematic term "significant".

² Pasadena Municipal Code. Chapter 2.46, 17.12 and 17.88 as amended by Ordinance 6206.

³ For further information see Peter H. Phillips, AICP, "Sign Control for Historic Signs", American Planning Association PAS Memo, (November 1988).

2. Inventory
3. Evaluation of resources
4. Evaluation of current code impact
5. Revision and adoption of modified code
6. Owner requirements and formal designation of "significant signs"

Moratorium

The first step in preparing to re-write a sign code to allow the retention of significant signs is to impose a moratorium on required removal during the re-write period. This is necessary to avoid the unfortunate legal complications that may result from any changes that occur prior to a revised code taking effect. Since a code revision may be a lengthy process, a formal adoption of a moratorium on required removal of non-conforming signage enables a jurisdiction to disregard its existing code until the revisions take effect. Without such a legal action, a jurisdiction faces the potential of having to either contravene its own law (by not enforcing an existing provision that requires removal of a significant sign involved in a permit application during the re-write period) or unnecessarily losing a significant sign just as it was in the process of being recognized as such.

Inventory

After adoption of a moratorium, an inventory of potentially significant signage should be undertaken. It is

assumed that at present most significant signage will be pre-existing and possibly non-conforming to the current code. All significant signs however, regardless of their age, should be included in the survey. The inventory should be undertaken by staff or consultants knowledgeable about sign design and the history of the area using the general procedures accepted as standard practice for other cultural resource inventories. Each sign should be photographed and documented as to type of illumination, method of attachment, estimated age, present condition, and any other pertinent historical data that is readily available. The sign inventory should be more detailed than a typical historic building windshield survey. Far fewer resources will be involved, there being few signs on residential architecture, and historic research may simply consist of interviewing the current sign owner or sign maintenance company.⁴ In very large metropolitan cities it may be useful to limit the scope of the initial survey geographically to a specific area. It is unlikely that in any but the largest of cities such a limit will be required. In Pasadena, with approximately 150,000 people, a preliminary inventory identified only 169 signs thought to be eligible for the proposed significant sign designation.⁵

⁴ Most cities will have prior knowledge of all pre-existing non-conforming signage in use along with ownership information.

This was estimated as fewer than 0.5% of all signs remaining in the city.⁶

An inventory serves additional purposes beyond assessing the quality and quantity of sign resources within a community. Using a process that is integral to the assessment of other types of significant resources reinforces the idea that signage should be viewed as significant elements. The publicity surrounding such a project also serves to increase awareness of significant signage within the community and may have an educational role in addition to the primary planning purpose.

Evaluation

As with other significant resource evaluation processes, specific and non-arbitrary criteria must be developed and adhered to for any historic designation to withstand future legal challenges. The adoption of clear and concise evaluation criteria, and the proper application of them in assessment, is a crucial step in determining the potential significance of any historic resource.

⁵ See Appendix A for the evaluation criteria used by Pasadena to determine eligibility.

⁶ City of Pasadena Historic Sign Inventory, "Introduction" and "Preliminary List". Unpublished information supplied to the author by the City of Pasadena Urban Conservation Department, dated April 1987.

Some cities, such as Pasadena and Culver City, California have developed criteria specific to sign evaluation. The Pasadena code permits, following application from its owner, an identified sign to be designated significant if:

- . . . it was installed prior to January 1 1960 [the date of adoption of the Pasadena Sign Code] and meets one or more of the following criteria:
- 1. The sign is exemplary of technology, craftsmanship or design of the period when it was constructed, uses historic sign materials and means of illumination, and is not significantly altered from its historic period.
- 2. The sign is integrated into the architecture of the building. Such signs shall include but not be limited to sign pylons on buildings in the Moderne style.
- 3. A sign not meeting criteria 1 or 2 may be considered for inclusion in the inventory if it demonstrates extraordinary aesthetic quality, creativity, or innovation and findings to that effect are made by the Cultural Heritage Commission.⁷

The use of specialized criteria for the designation of signage is necessary in cities where other significant resources are not currently designated. It is assumed however, that any local government which is at this time considering its signage as potentially significant will already have in place an existing system of evaluation for

⁷ Ibid.

more traditional types of historic and cultural resources. In this latter situation, the use of a separate set of criteria for signage is not recommended. Rather, signs should be considered as "objects" or integral portions of already recognized significant sites under the established criteria and, if necessary, those criteria should be modified so as to better allow the designation of signs as significant elements.

Establishing a separate set of criteria, though often only the result of existing bureaucratic organization (sign control may be a function of a Planning Commission rather than a Historic Review Board) creates a dual, and possibly inconsistent, review of signs as opposed to other significant resources. It is not necessary, practical, nor desirable to establish separate and distinct criteria for each of the wide variety of elements in the landscape that may be recognized as significant.

Most existing local criteria for evaluation of significant resources are patterned after the four criteria of eligibility for inclusion on the National Register. Briefly, successful National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) nominations must have significance as related to;

- (a). association with broad patterns of history;
- (b). association with the lives of significant people or events;

(c). association with exemplary or unique design, technology or craftsmanship;

(d). potential to yield future information related to history or pre-history.⁸

As was shown in Chapter IV, individual signs may qualify as significant elements under any one of these four criteria. Since most local jurisdictions model their criteria after those of the National Register, it is likely that signs will prove similarly eligible under local evaluation criteria.

Evaluation of Current Code Effect and Determination of Required Revisions

For the purposes of the protection of designated significant signage, most codes can be easily revised by simply adding to the list of exempted signs a category called "designated historic signs." Such signs will be excluded from prohibitions on sign size, method of attachment and method of illumination. It is important that if a historic sign is to be preserved that no limitation based on current taste or aesthetic judgment be added to this exemption. In some cities, for example, there may be a desire to allow a method of illumination otherwise prohibited but continue a prohibition against "flashing" or

⁸ For the complete text of the NRHP criteria see Chapter IV.

physical motion.⁹ Either clause defeats the purpose of a significant sign designation. A sign should retain as much of its original or historic character as is possible. When a sign is designated as significant it should be excluded from any and all additional requirements of the sign code except those relating to electrical or structural safety.¹⁰

Often as a management strategy, local significant resource ordinances will require a certain age before a property may be recognized as a significant element. Such clauses will require revision for the designation of significant signage. In some of the sign evaluation procedures reviewed for this project a fixed date is used as a limiting criteria. Pasadena limits "historic" designation to signs that pre-existed the city's 1960 adoption of a sign code. This use of a fixed date presupposes that no additional sign code changes will be made and, more importantly, that no signs erected after the original adoption of a sign code will ever merit designation as

⁹ Such a limitation might exempt a neon sign from the ordinance yet continue a prohibition on its moving or flashing even where there is a historical precedent for such movement.

¹⁰ In terms of any significant resource, if the present code does not contain provisions for granting building code variances it should be so revised. A long-standing and well-maintained sign that does not meet current code should not be held to present construction practices when no public danger is created. Variances, if required and reasonable, should be available following inspection for soundness by the city building official.

significant elements. Such a decision may be made for political convenience, but the use of a fixed date will necessarily require further revision if new regulations are adopted and add to the list of non-conforming signs. To assume that no sign installed in Pasadena after 1 January 1960 will ever merit designation as a significant historic element is so unlikely that it requires no further comment.

In general, the requirement that a sign achieve a certain age prior to designation is a far better alternative than a fixed cut-off date. It mirrors the typical age requirements used for other significant resources at the local level. The Pendleton, Oregon ordinance limits designation to signs that are "forty (40) years old or older. . ."¹¹ Other age requirements range from 50 years in Culver City, California to 15 years in Dallas, Texas.¹² While better than the fixed date approach however, this also is not a recommended method when establishing criteria for the significance of historic resources, especially signage. "This is an inflexible approach that has little to recommend it."¹³ When any age requirement is included in the

¹¹ City of Pendleton Municipal Code, Section 8.04 Exceptions: Historic Signs, Section B(1). Adopted June 21, 1988.

¹² Phillips, 2.

¹³ Christopher Duerkson, Handbook of Historic Preservation Law. (Washington, D.C.: The Conservation Foundation and The National Center for Preservation Law, 1983), 85.

criteria, even though other factors are considered, it can only serve to exclude many valuable resources.¹⁴ This is particularly true in the case of signage, which may only rarely meet the age requirements thought appropriate for other resources. The fifty year age required by the Culver City ordinance, for example, would remove from consideration almost 70% of the 153 signs listed in the Rockford, Illinois survey.¹⁵ It is probable that a similar percentage would be eliminated in Pasadena or other cities.

The suggested method concerning age or date of installation for evaluation of historic significance for signs (or any resource) is to avoid setting any specific requirement. Each resource should be evaluated individually independent of its age. If some temporal criteria must be included, a "Rule of Thumb" such as the fifty-year limit on National Register nominations, if only used as such, may be suggested in administrative guidelines. It should not however, be formally included within the wording of the significant resource or sign code itself. In such

¹⁴ Recent controversies concerned the landmark designation of "modern" architecture such as the Lever and Seagrams buildings in New York City revolved around their relatively recent (1950s) dates of construction.

¹⁵ Restoration Education, Inc., Sign Up: A Survey of Signs in Older Commercial Areas of Rockford, Illinois. 1983 This survey is one of the earliest known surveys that specifically inventoried signs as historic elements. The figures used are based on 106 signs dated as "1940s" or newer versus 47 signs dated either "1920s and before" or "1930s" in the "Sign Survey Listing."

guidelines a lower age, of twenty-five years maximum, is recommended as a basis for sign evaluation. By removing any legal limitations on the age of resources a city will assure future flexibility and provide for unforeseeable situations without requiring a code revision. As all too often happens these deficiencies in a code only come to light as a result of a crisis in which they prove inadequate to retain or protect a specific resource.

Given that any sign, of any age or construction, will potentially be eligible for recognition under the above recommendations, strict adherence to the established evaluation criteria will be essential in avoiding legal challenges to the ordinance. At the local level, staff involvement and review should help to advise potential applicants and serve to eliminate inappropriate, frivolous, or premature nominations for significant signage designation. Naturally no prohibition on re-application for designation should be made so as to allow for evolution of understanding or appreciation of potential significant elements.¹⁶

Designation Process

Following the survey, an assessment of each sign according to the established criteria should be done. After

¹⁶ A short term prohibition of re-application within the following twelve months may be appropriate.

evaluation, some ranking will stratify the resources into levels of significance. In Pasadena, a three-tiered rating system is used, dividing signs into "Highest", "Major" and "Contextural or Historic" categories of significance.

Whether or not the prioritization of signs on the inventory is required, other than for establishing a minimum level to determine designation, is a decision that must be made based on the individual characteristics of the area, its signs, and the present method of regulating significant resources. In general though, signs should be treated as are other significant cultural resources. If a "primary, secondary, and contributing" rating process is used for buildings, the system and nomenclature used should remain consistent for signage.

The actual evaluation of signage on the preliminary inventory may be done by staff, a private consultant or the municipal historic review body. A preliminary eligibility list should be generated from the survey and the owners of signs that are potentially significant must be formally notified of the pending actions regarding their property. A public hearing or comment period should be established along with a timeline for final confirmation of designation. Adequate publications and notification city-wide should be undertaken both to fulfill legal requirements and potentially generate additional information about signs

surveyed or inadvertently missed in the preliminary inventory.

Each city considering a designation process must determine whether or not owner consent is to be required for inclusion on the significant sign list. Although the federal government requires owner consent for NRHP listing, most local jurisdictions may choose which option to establish. It is recommended that owner consent not be a prerequisite to the listing of a resource.

For an ordinance intended to provide effective protection, these [owner consent] provisions make little sense; landmarks are landmarks no matter what an owner might think and should be designated and protected accordingly.¹⁷

Owner consent will likely not constitute a stumbling block to the designation of significant signs to the degree that it often does for buildings. The changes so far suggested to an existing sign code might all be seen as a benefit to the owner of a significant sign.¹⁸ Permitting a non-conforming sign to remain indefinitely and eliminating most public control over it, as long it remains unchanged,

¹⁷ Duerkson, 75.

¹⁸ Indeed in at least one city, Pendleton, Oregon, such designation is viewed as a potentially unfair favoritism. "Historic Sign" designations in that city are subject to comment by neighboring businesses who may feel unfairly impacted by the retention of a nearby non-conforming sign. See City of Pendleton Sign Code, Section 8.04 (d) "Notice to Property and Business Owners", as amended June 21, 1988.

are hardly likely to be perceived as threats to private property. Cities should, however, also include some proactive requirements to insure that significant signage is properly maintained and ultimately, remains a visible portion of the streetscape for as long as is possible. It is these requirements that may lead to some owner resistance.

The purpose of designating a sign as a significant element is, ultimately, to ease the retention of it within the landscape. Cities should therefore impose certain minimum maintenance requirements on significant signage. Signs should be maintained in good working order so that lighting and any moving parts are functional. Any physical damage should be repaired in a timely fashion. It is counter-productive, however, for a city to require removal of a significant sign that does not conform to the above maintenance standards. Of the more than two dozen sign ordinances reviewed for this study none contained specific details on the penalty for failure to maintain a designated sign except Pasadena's, whose code states;

Failure to maintain the historic sign in conformance with paragraph (b) of this section shall constitute grounds for rescinding the sign exception.¹⁹

¹⁹ Pasadena Municipal Code, Section 17.88.070 B, subsection 6(f).

If possible, a method of maintaining the sign and encouraging repair should be incorporated in the ordinance. When owners do not maintain their signs, an active city intervention could provide minimum levels of maintenance or repair. Costs could be added as a property tax lien or otherwise billed to the owner. Similar to common weed abatement ordinances, this should be employed only as a last resort. Certainly significant signs should be exempt from "abandonment" clauses designed to remove signs of closed businesses pending the determination of what new use will occupy the site.

A process by which a significant sign can be altered with a change in business ownership or location should be included in the original ordinance. It is not necessary to include specific clauses as to degree or type of change permitted. All applications should be reviewed by staff or the review board and determinations should be based upon the individual design and significance of the sign. A good example of this type of clause is that of Pendleton;

Alteration of Historic Signs: A sign owner, business owner or property owner wishing to alter the size, appearance, structure, location, or copy of a designated historic sign shall submit design drawings and other evidence to the Planning Commission to enable the Commission to determine if the proposed alteration will materially detract from the historic character of the sign.²⁰

²⁰ Pendleton Code, Section 8.04 (e).

Cities may additionally choose to purchase or otherwise acquire easements on significant signage so that significant elements can not be destroyed by an unknowing or unsympathetic owner. Private non-profit agencies can also fulfill this role and provide design assistance for signs similar to the role of an easement owner for other exterior features.²¹ Removal of designated signs, corresponding to "demolition" provisions for building resources, should also be included to require application and approval of the Historic Review Board to insure adequate documentation or other possible preservation options.

After public hearing and owner input the review board must formally adopt the list of significant signage following the legal process used for other resources. Provisions must be included for both additions to and, if necessary, removal from the inventory. Once a significant sign designation process has been developed, future National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), local landmark reviews and other related activities should include review of actions regarding potentially significant signage and, when needed, add identified signs to the inventory. Since currently the National Register process is either blind or disinterested toward most forms of signage except as they

²¹ For information on the use of easements as a preservation tool see Duerkson, A Handbook on Preservation Law, 485-498.

detract from what is viewed as the primary resource; i.e. the building, this may require local advocacy at the state or federal levels of review. Determinations of the importance of a sign that is beyond a building's pre-determined "period of significance" (as in a 1930s sign on an 1890s building) will be especially problematic given the National Register's current review process. As signs gain recognition as significant elements and this type of situation is more frequently encountered at all levels of review, clearer guidelines and procedures will likely evolve.

Post-Designation Changes Within the Signscape

No matter how significant a sign is determined to be, it is unlikely that a city will be able, or even want, to eternally prevent its removal. Only in very specific cases would such a policy be justifiable if a non-static retail environment is to be maintained.²² In such a situation two concerns arise. First is the disposition of the significant sign itself which, though no longer useful to the historic location or owner, is otherwise fully

²² Various highly significant signs, much as other resources, would theoretically justify continued retention on the street even after they no longer serve their original function. Typical examples are rooftop signs such as the "White Stag" sign in Portland, Oregon, "Citgo" sign in Boston or the "Pegasus" sign in Dallas, all of which remain in the use with or without a direct connection to their site.

functional. Second is the design and impact of whatever sign device will replace it. This latter practice is often highly regulated by current sign codes---any new sign that replaces a removed designated one would usually be required to fully comply with all code requirements. While some cities, such as was shown by the Portland Case Study in the preceding chapter, set up a more flexible code for special sign districts, such areas are still regulated to a great degree. The impact and appropriateness of strict control of new sign design, and its affects on the creativity of artists who may choose to work within sign mediums, is a complex issue. Such concerns are integral to the preservation of "sense of place" as discussed in Chapter IV. The constraints of time, space, and focus that prevent them from being further discussed here do not diminish their importance. In brief, however, a sign code that includes limitations on materials and design to a degree that creates a primarily uniform signscape is not desirable nor appropriate. This is especially true in an area with a traditionally flamboyant sense of place such as in Broadway or Times Square, or in an area which purports to accurately represent an earlier time as in a restored commercial district. The propriety of restrictive sign codes themselves, meaning those that regulate beyond structure and into aesthetics, is not beyond question. The Roseburg case study, although only a single example, implies that the

average business person is not as likely to ravage the streetscape with signage as was once thought. As presently constituted, most sign codes do in fact drastically alter the appearance of a city. I do not believe that this is always for the better.

The fate of a significant sign, after it has been removed, presents some interesting preservation options simply due to the nature of the resource. When a business closes there is little likelihood that a sign at the location will remain viable. Obsolete painted wall signs face limitations on re-use similar to other "non-movable" resources. Such a sign is intrinsically part of a particular building. If it can not be adapted to the new use it becomes expendable unless extraordinary effort or concern is direct towards its retention. Often painted wall signs are exposed when a neighboring building is demolished and may only remain visible while the lot is vacant. (see Figure 65) Such signs might be protected and documented but their continued visibility is unlikely unless the lot is forever vacant. Wall signs that are visible above their neighbors should be protected if possible. Though their preservation options are limited, painted wall signs are the least likely form of significant signage to be removed when they no longer relate to the current use of the structure.

Options for the three-dimensional signs are more varied than for those painted on a structure. Alterations

to designated three-dimensional signs as per the previously discussed Pendleton guidelines should be encouraged to keep such signs in their original location. In many cases though, such alteration will not be possible or desirable. Changing a neon shoe repair sign, as in Figure 66, to fit a new tenant, say a beauty parlor, is somewhat preposterous. In this situation, if the sign is to remain in use, other alternatives will need to be found.

Besides alteration, the simplest method of maintaining obsolete signs in the landscape is for the city or other organization to obtain ownership, or broker a transaction, and encourage the transfer of a significant sign to another similar location in the city. In this example, another shoe repair shop could be found, the sign moved, and thus remain a part of the landscape. Some fair method of determining which of several potentially competing shoe shops would be allowed to purchase the sign will need to be developed. This could be based on proximity to the original location, knowledge of a previously extant sign that was similar, or through an auction with the sign going to the highest bidder. While the relocation of resources may pose questions of historic integrity, with certain types of signs these conflicts should be minimal. In the example, a shoe with a neon hammer, no copy needs to be changed to adapt the sign its new location. Historically signs such as this were produced and distributed nationwide much as modern

"Open" or trademarked franchise signs are. Compare, for example, Figure 66 with the sign shown in Figure 6. Similar mass-produced signage served butchers, optometrists, druggists, fish markets, and many other common types of businesses.²³ Typically, these stock signs were used in conjunction with customized signage specific to the individual shop, perhaps painted directly onto the display window. Moving such common sign forms should not create any undo historic inconsistency.

Given the widespread use of stock signs, a nationwide exchange might be established to recirculate them when they are no longer needed in their original location or region. Such a network could help such signs migrate to jurisdictions throughout the nation whose codes are more accepting or appreciative of them. A similar system now seeks to retain historic bridges that have outlived their original purpose. Such bridges are are offered through publications such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Preservation News at no or minimal charge to others for re-assembly. The same process could be used with significant signs to help them remain a viable and continuing part of the commercial landscape. It is not known if advertising dismantled historic bridges, often done as a part of the mitigation process required under the

²³ See Rudi Stern, Let There Be Neon, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1979), 44-5.

National Historic Preservation Act, section 106(a) or the Department of Transportation Act, section 4(f), is actually successful in keeping the bridge in use. Certainly it should be easier and less costly to transport and relocate a sign than a bridge and therefore potentially more viable.

With more elaborate or customized significant signage the potential for relocation is considerably reduced. Such signs may derive much of their significance through their association with a specific area, building or individual, but have little design quality that would make them a valuable element anywhere else. Except for interest in the sign as a design object, the odds of finding a home for a non-generic sign (i.e a sign stating the name or location of the use such "Bowen's Shoe Repair" or "Laurel Street Shoe Shop") are slim at best. Currently the major method by which such signs are saved from destruction is through the collector market. Neon and enameled signs in particular have become highly valuable and are often seen as antiques. Such signs, removed from their original location and context, are restored for use as interior objects d'art or in some cases museum pieces.²⁴ In at least one city, Philadelphia, a private collector restores neon signs and

²⁴ Typical museum installations are remaining examples of national advertising signs. The American Advertising Museum in Portland, Oregon has in its permanent collection a Mobil Oil "Flying Horse", a Greyhound Bus "Running Greyhound" and other once common signs.

lends them ". . .to downtown merchants who provide exhibition space fulfilling his criteria for a suitable home. The business or restaurant must have a stable history, maintain the sign, . . . and perhaps most important, give it a location near a big picture window."²⁵ While it is admirable that such signs are restored and displayed for the public to enjoy, turning significant signs into collectibles will likely only hasten the elimination of remaining early signage as a vital and continuing element of the historic commercial landscape. As the collector market increasingly becomes interested in early signs their value may rise to a point that maintaining them in their original use is not economically viable. The de-contextualization the collecting of signs encourages is not a preferred method of preservation. The collections of "sign museums" are an important element in maintaining already removed signage, but for currently in-use signs, museums should only be viewed as a final and unhappy alternative. As with most other significant resources, it is highly preferable to maintain the historic context and use of a sign whenever possible.

The primary reason that signs, once exempt from the legal constraints upon them outlined in Chapter III, become obsolete and expendable is the closing of the business that

²⁵ Jessica O'Dwyer , "When Neon Signs Were Art", Americana, 17 #2 (June 1989), 53.

they advertise. A popular assumption, often reinforced by the sign code, is that the retention of signs that no longer serve their original owner is detrimental to a business and distracting to the buying or driving public.²⁶ When a new business of a different type inhabits a space, a sign representing an earlier use is not only superfluous but may actually confuse the consumer and be counter to the basic sign purpose of identification. Even the most historically conscious property owner will be hesitant to retain a significant sign from a previous use if it threatens to detract or diminish from his or her own present business. Such "remaindered" signs, by which I mean a sign that continues in a location that is now used for an unrelated purpose, are not commonly found and businesses are often penalized should they wish to retain them.²⁷

It is not advocated here that vast numbers of obsolete or remaindered signage be retained in the streetscape. Yet there may be select situations where the

²⁶ For a recent discussion of this opinion see Jack L. Nasar, "The Effect of Sign Complexity and Coherence on the Perceived Quality of Retail Scenes", APA Journal (Autumn 1987), 499-507.

²⁷ Under many current sign ordinances an owner who does choose to retain such an obsolete sign would have its area counted against the allowable sign footage for the site thereby reducing the amount available for his own advertising. Even if a designated significant sign inventory is not to be adopted, code revisions should be encouraged to allow the continued existence of such signs where possible.

continued existence of such signage is desirable and will not conflict with current business identification or intelligibility. Two parallels currently exist by which signage relating to a previous, and now non-existent, use is not only allowed but encouraged. Many cities, even those with strict sign codes, allow the continued existence of painted wall graphics or "ghost-signs" advertising soft drinks or other uses. Such signs are viewed as "quaint" and though not formally allowed by many codes are conveniently ignored by many planning departments. Recently a number of remaindered wall graphics in Cottage Grove, Oregon have actually been "restored" and repainted.²⁸ (see Figure 67) More prevalent is the existence of building tablets or markers. (see Figures 68 and 69) Though not normally considered "signs" as such, they in fact are advertising devices of a type. Proclaiming the name of the original occupant these markers were used as a combination sign and, in a way, cornerstone. Their presence and date vouched for the longevity and stability of the original owner. Almost universally such signs are now remaindered, their namesakes long dead. In part due to the nature of their installation, they are only rarely removed. While certainly not signs in the traditional sense, it is difficult not to include these

²⁸ This is a situation which may or may not be appropriate. Brightened with modern pigments these high contrast signs seem at odds with their probable original appearance.

markers as such, at least at a legal or code enforcement level.

Building markers are prized by most preservationists, and ignored by sign codes, not only for their help in dating construction but for the architectural interest they add to both the building and the street. Like ghost signs, the buying public seems not only capable of locating the present business without confusion but to actually admire and value these signs as interesting elements of the streetscape. They are not seen, as the ghosts signs especially once were, as "signs" of visual clutter but rather as remaining picturesque portions of our commercial heritage. Is it unreasonable to expect that more recent sign technologies will one day be viewed in the same vein?

The intrinsically portable nature of much of America's signage offers an almost unique opportunity for the preservation of these elements of our history. Every effort at maintaining significant signage in situ should be explored. But when these methods fail, and given the function of signs and the desire for a dynamic retail environment they certainly should be expected to, an entire range of options not often available to more traditional historic resource types presents itself. But these options for maintaining significant signage as a part of the historic commercial landscape will prove successful only if

America's planners, historians and preservationists choose
to explore them.



FIGURE 65: "Ghost Sign" Exposed by
Demolition of Adjacent Building
(Grants Pass, Oregon)



FIGURE 66: Stock Shoe Repair Sign
(Cottage Grove Shoe Repair,
Cottage Grove, Oregon)

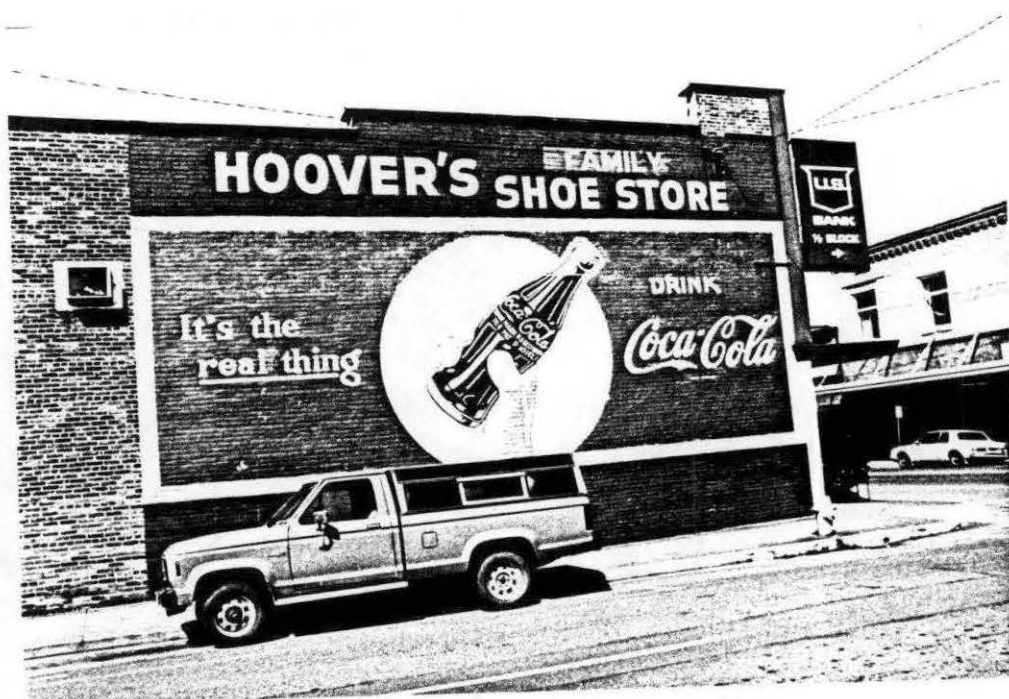


FIGURE 67: Coke-Cola/Hoover's Family
Shoe Store, Repainted Wall Graphic
(Cottage Grove, Oregon)



FIGURE 68: Chase Bag Company.
(Portland, Oregon)



FIGURE 69: The Gray Building, 1891.
(Springfield, Oregon)

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The commercial architecture by the side of the road is very important; it is America's definitive contribution to the art of design in the twentieth century. It is not "that awful commercial garbage" that our parents hated so much; it is not blight and ugliness and bad taste.

John Margolies

While some, with good reason, might take exception with Margolies' claim that, the "stuff" by the side of the road, is our nation's definitive contribution to 20th century design, the main point of his statement is a valid one.¹ Roadside architecture, the mimetic buildings in the shapes of dogs or ice cream cones or owls, the gas stations, the drive-ins, the motels and the signs, everywhere the signs, that advertised them, are distinctly 20th century elements in the American landscape. Each reflects not only the impact of the automobile but the mobility, commercialism and values of American culture. Our cities were as irretrievably changed when Earl Anthony installed two small

¹ John Margolies, The End of the Road, (New York: Penguin Books in collaboration with The Hudson River Museum, 1981), 13.

neon "Packard" signs on his Los Angeles showroom as when Henry Ford rolled his first Model T off the assembly line.

It is still the rare sign, however, that is recognized as significant; as an element that represents an important portion of our environment or our history. Witness the opening sentence of an article in a recent issue of Preservation Forum, a publication intended as the journal of America's professional preservationists:

The adverse impact of billboards and other inappropriate signage on adjacent landmarks or in heritage corridors is so obvious that the point need not be labored.²

Certainly there are situations of inappropriate billboard and sign installation. Such signs have the potential to adversely impact not only "heritage corridors" but cities in general. But not always. And not so commonly that preservationists should accept without question the Forum's pronouncement. "Nearly all items in human landscapes reflect culture in some way."³ This study has tried to document and disprove what seems a commonly held view of signs as an essentially negative element devoid of value and undeserving of appreciative study or protection.

² "Regulation of Signs of [sic] Public or Private Property", Preservation Forum 3 (Spring 1989), 6.

³ Pierce F. Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape", In The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes, ed. D.W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 18.

It is a view that is unfortunately reinforced by planning codes and the judiciary. After all, what's so wrong, so horrible, about signs? They intrinsically are no more of "a blight upon the land" than a theater, an office building, a supermarket, a ranch house or any other element in the landscape.

This study helps to establish the obvious; that signs have the same potential for significance as other landscape elements. As such, signs deserve study and consideration as the important parts of our cities that they are. There is ample precedence for pushing the currently drawn limits of historic preservation to include signage. Recent years have seen the growing acceptance of the significance of first victorians, in addition to colonial structures, then bungalows and now Art Deco, Art Moderne, the International Style, and, in at least some circles, the commercial architecture of the 1950s. Signs too deserve our consideration.

As professionals, if we are going to preserve or restore portions of our environment to reflect their appearance in a time past, we owe the general public no more than honesty. The simple act of indentifying a site as "historic" or "significant" tends to remove it from the "real world". Changes within are subject to greater scrutiny and manipulation to either maintain its "true" image or to conform with an idealized version of what that

image should be. Such segregation from the current of daily change may be appropriate for an individual, highly significant, site. When preservation concerns an entire area or district, especially a dynamic commercial environment, such controlled change may be misapplied.

A restored streetscape is arguably a force in shaping the general public's image of the past. Preservationists effect the appearance of "restored" areas and if we are going to drastically manipulate the truth of the past to suit a present sense of beauty, we should at minimum be clear this is in fact what we are doing. Assuming that the past is knowable at all, events are filtered to present understanding, ability or taste. The homogenization of the past may be appropriate. Indeed, in a retail environment, the re-creation or manipulation of a past theme may be seen as simply another chapter in the dynamism of the area. Change, the American ideal, can also include a retrospective, restorative, model. But the result is a creation, of interest culturally, but not historic in the true sense of the word.

In the physical restoration of a structure it is a preferred preservation practice to leave "clues", subtle hints, where the new meets the old so that a conscientious observer will know which is which. At least currently, such is not the common method for a restored streetscape. Most people know they are going to a world of fantasy when they

visit Disneyland's Main Street, but many are not aware that, to a degree, they are doing the same when they visit the "restored" districts of America's cities and towns.

The point of this, using signs as an example, is to provoke thought about what we as preservationists do when we select and determine what of America's built history is significant or valuable. If we are to use the built environment to foster our society's appreciation of its own history, we must be as clear as possible about what that history is or is not. Partially, we are bound by our own semantics; "preservation" implies a continuation of something that exists; "restoration" implies that something which once existed is being re-built or duplicated. What often passes for both in America's historic commercial landscape has little connection to any previous reality. While this deception may be intentional, and even justifiable, the edge between real and creation is too often ambiguous.

Signs, as mentioned in the first chapter, are neither the most, nor the least, important element in a complex urban landscape. But the bias that operates against them is only more visible and, at the present, more accepted, than those that concern other landscape elements. The regulation of signs provides a clear model of the larger concerns about preservation's role in the design of American cities and towns. This is a discipline that often is

reactive. Preservationists frequently find themselves attempting to "stop" something; a demolition, a remuddling, a freeway. The larger questions are often not fully answered or even asked. Are we as preservationists truly "preserving" an earlier time or are we only using similar elements to create a collage that is more in keeping with what we hoped our past would have been? Are we filtering the past through a modern aesthetic viewpoint to serve the interests of nostalgia and economics? Are we documenting the past, as we like to think, or are we subtly helping to create a myth?

There has been progress in preserving those signs that remain from the pre-code era. Pasadena, Pendleton and others are only the first of many cities who will likely revise their existing ordinances to slow the removal of such early signage from the landscape. The ordinances in Times Square and Broadway are the beginnings of municipal encouragement to use signs to retain the sense of place that makes these places unique and important. Professional associations such as The Society for Commercial Archaeology are seeking to broaden professional and public recognition of signs as well as other "roadside" elements as being worthy of attention and preservation.

Future studies might follow the effects that the Times Square and Broadway ordinances have had in maintaining those areas. Similar documentation on elements other than

signage in the commercial landscape would further explore the conflicts between historic truth and modern aesthetics. More work needs to be done to determine the effects of sign regulation in those parts of the country settled earlier than the Oregon cities with which this study has been primarily concerned.

The larger questions about historic preservation---whether it should serve the truth of the past, the requirements of the present, or both, will provide interesting debate for as long as people seek to preserve. For now, the regulation of signage is an entrenched and accepted element in many municipal land use regulations. It is unlikely that there will be any sudden or drastic reversal in the view of signage as a contributing rather than detrimental factor in the streetscape. Like the once garish but now cherished Victorian house, the best of America's remaining early signs, without the support of those trained in the appreciation and interpretation of the built environment, will be lost before their true significance is realized.

APPENDICES

Commoned
FLOWER BOWLS
BOWLS

APPENDIX A

PASADENA EVALUATION CRITERIA

Criteria for Rating Historic Signage, Pasadena
California.

1. "Highest Significance" Signage which is a rare or unique example of its period, type, or style. An exceptional example or masterpiece which retains the physical features, design, evidence of workmanship and historic fabric which lend it historical significance. There may exist a strong and identifiable relationship between signage and architecture or the sign may be programmatic in design. Signage so designated may be eligible for listing of the National Register and are of highest priority for Cultural Heritage Landmark status.
2. "Major Significance" Signage which retains a high degree of integrity of design as to convey the feeling of the period in which it was crafted or retains enough of its significant design or feeling so that important elements could be restored. Signage reflects the overall development of commercial history along the street, or in the community or region. Signage is a rare example of a vanishing sign type. Signage is a visible symbol of an enterprise which has made a significant contribution to local, regional, or national history. May be eligible for Cultural Heritage Landmark Status.
3. "Contextual or Historical Importance" Signage may be distinguished by integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling. Signage is a representative example of a period or style of craftsmanship. Conveys the feeling of the period when it achieved significance. Sign pylon forms an architectural element of a building and loses its architectural or historical

significance if it is no longer used for signage. Sign is historically associated with a building or its uses. Contribution to the significance of other signage along a streetscape.

APPENDIX B**CITY OF ASHLAND SIGN CODE**

The following appendix contains Chapter 18.96 of the Ashland Land Use Ordinance, as edited by the author.

CHAPTER 18.96

SIGN REGULATIONSSections:

- 18.96.010 Purpose
- 18.96.020 Definitions Relating to Signs
- 18.96.030 Exempted Signs
- 18.96.040 Prohibited Signs
- 18.96.050 Sign Permits
- 18.96.060 General Sign Regulations
- 18.96.070 Residential Sign Regulations
- 18.96.080 Commercial - Downtown Overlay District
- 18.96.090 Commercial, Industrial and Employment Districts
- 18.96.100 Freeway Sign Zone
- 18.96.110 Abatement of Nuisance Signs
- 18.96.120 Construction and Maintenance Standards
- 18.96.130 Nonconforming Signs
- 18.96.140 Enforcement
- 18.96.150 Governmental Signs

18.96.010 Purpose. This Chapter shall hereafter be known and designated as the "Sign Ordinance of the City of Ashland", and is adopted in recognition of the important function of signs and the need to safeguard and enhance the economic and aesthetic values in the City of Ashland through regulation of such factors as size, number, location, illumination, construction, and maintenance of signs; and thereby safeguard public health, safety and general welfare.

18.96.020 Definitions Relating to Signs.

1. Alteration - Any change excluding content, and including but not limited to the size, shape, method of illumination, position, location, materials, construction, or supporting structure of a sign.
2. Area - The area included within the outer dimensions of a sign. In the case of a multiple-faced sign, the area of each face shall be included in determining sign area, excepting double-faced signs placed no more than 24 inches back-to-back.
3. Awning - A temporary or movable shelter supported entirely from the exterior wall of a building and composed of non-rigid materials except for the supporting framework.
4. Building Face of Wall - All window and wall area of a building in one plane or elevation.
5. Bulletin Board or Reader Board - A sign of a permanent nature, but which accommodates changeable copy.
6. Business - A commercial or industrial enterprise.

7. Business Frontage - A lineal front footage of a building or portion thereof devoted to a specific business or enterprise, and having an entrance/exit open to the general public.

8. Business Premises - A parcel of property or that portion thereof occupied by one tenant.

9. Canopy - A non-movable roof-like structure attached to a building.

10. Direct Illumination - A source of illumination on the surface of a sign or from within a sign.

11. Election - The time designated by law for voter to cast ballots for candidates and measures.

12. Flashing Sign - A sign incorporating intermittent electrical impulses to a source of illumination or revolving or moving in a manner which creates the illusion of flashing, or which changes color or intensity of illumination. This definition is to include electronic time, date and temperature signs.

13. Frontage - The single wall surface of a building facing a given direction.

14. Ground Sign - A sign erected on a free-standing frame, mast or pole and not attached to any building. Also known as a "free-standing sign".

15. Indirect illumination - A source of illumination directed toward a sign so that the beam of light falls upon the exterior surface of the sign.

16. Illegal sign - A sign which is erected in violation of the Ashland Sign Code (18.96).

17. Marquee Sign - A sign which is painted on, attached to, or supported by a marquee, awning or canopy.

18. Marquee - A non-movable roof-like structure which is self-draining.

19. Non-conforming Sign - An existing sign, lawful at the time of enactment of this Ordinance, which does not conform to the requirements of this Code.

20. Projecting Signs - Signs, other than wall signs, which are attached to and project from a structure or building face, usually perpendicular to the building face.

21. Roof Sign - Any sign erected upon, against, or directly above a roof or top of or above the parapet of a building.

22. Shopping Center or Business Complex - Any business or group of businesses which are in a building or group of buildings, on one or more lots which are contiguous or which are separated by a public right-of-way or a privately owned flag drive used for access and not greater than 35 feet in width, which are constructed and/or managed as a single entity, and share ownership and/or function.

23. Sign - Any identification, description, illustration, symbol or device which is placed or affixed directly or indirectly upon a building, structure or land.

24. Sign, Public - A sign erected by a public officer or employee in the performance of a public duty which shall include, but not be limited to, motorist informational signs and warning lights.

25. Street frontage - The lineal dimension in feet that the property upon which a structure is built abuts a public street or streets.

26. Temporary sign - A sign which is not permanently affixed. All devices such as banners, pennants, flags (not including flags of national, state, or city governments), searchlights, sandwich boards, sidewalk signs, curb signs, balloons or other air or gas-filled balloons.

27. Wall Graphics - Including but not limited to any mosaic, mural or painting or graphic art technique or combination or grouping of mosaics, murals, or paintings or graphic art techniques applied, implanted or placed directly onto a wall or fence.

28. Wall Sign - A sign attached to or erected against the wall of a building with the face in a parallel plane of the building wall.

29. Wind Sign or Device - Any sign or device in the nature of banners, flags, balloons, or other objects fastened in such a manner as to move upon being subject to pressures by wind or breeze.

18.96.030 Exempted signs. The following signs and devices shall not be subject to the provisions of this chapter except for 18.96.140.

A. Informational signs placed by the City of Ashland, or by the State of Oregon in the publicly owned right-of-way.

B. Memorial tablets, cornerstones, or similar plaques not exceeding six square feet in size.

C. Flags of national, state or local governments.

D. Signs within a building provided they are not visible to persons outside the building.

E. Temporary signs not exceeding four square feet, provided the signs are erected no more than thirty days prior to and removed within seven days following an election.

F. Temporary, non-illuminated real estate (not more than one per tax lot) or construction signs not exceeding six square feet in residential areas or twelve square feet in commercial and industrial areas, provided said signs are removed within fifteen days from the sale, lease or rental of the property or within seven days of completion of the project.

G. Small incidental signs provided said signs do not exceed two square feet in area per sign, not more than two in number on any parcel or two per street frontage, whichever is greater.

H. Temporary signs painted or placed upon a window in a non-residential zone, when such signs do not obscure more than twenty percent of such window area, and are maintained for a period not exceeding seven days. Signs which remain longer than seven days will be considered permanent and must comply with the provisions of the Ashland Sign Code (18.96).

I. Any sign which is not visible to motorists or pedestrians on any public highway, sidewalk, street or alley.

K. Temporary non-illuminated signs not exceeding 16 square feet for charitable fundraising events placed by non-profit and charitable organizations. Such signs shall not be placed more than seven days prior to the event and must be removed within two days following the event. No more than two such events may be advertised in this manner per lot per year. (Ord. 2323, 1984).

All of the foregoing exempted signs shall be subject to the other regulations contained in this Chapter 18.96 relative to the size, lighting or spacing of such sign. (Ord. 2221 S2, 1982)

18.96.040 Prohibited Signs

A. No sign, unless exempt or allowed pursuant to this Chapter, shall be permitted except as may be provided in Section 18.96.030. (Ord. 2221 S3, 1982).

B. No movable sign, temporary sign or bench sign shall be permitted except as may be provided in Section 18.96.030.

C. No wind sign, device, or captive balloon shall be permitted except as may be provided in Section 18.96.030. (Ord. 2221 S1, 1982; Ord. 2440, 1988).

D. No flashing signs shall be permitted.

E. No sign shall have or consist of any moving, rotating, or otherwise animated part.

F. No three-dimensional statue, caricature or representation of persons, animals or merchandise shall be used as a sign or incorporated into a sign structure.

G. No public address system or sound devices shall be used in conjunction with any sign or advertising device.

H. No roof signs or signs which project above the roof shall be permitted.

I. No exposed sources of illumination shall be permitted on any sign, or for the decoration of any building, including, but not limited to, neon or fluorescent tubing and flashing incandescent bulbs, except when the source of illumination is within a building, and at least ten (10) feet from a window which allows visibility from the public right-of-way, or when a sign is internally illuminated or the source of light is fully shielded from the public view.

J. No signs which use plastic as part of the exterior visual effects or are internally illuminated in the Historic District, as identified in the Ashland Comprehensive Plan, or in any residential districts shall be permitted.

K. No bulletin boards or signs with changeable copy shall be permitted, except as allowed by Section 18.96.060(D).

L. No wall graphics shall be permitted.

M. No unofficial sign which purports to be, is an imitation of, or resembles an official traffic sign or signal, or which attempts to direct the movement of traffic, or which hides from view any official traffic sign or signal shall be permitted.

18.96.050 Sign Permits.

A. Sign permit required. A sign permit is required in each of the following instances:

1. Upon the erection of any new sign except exempted signs.
 2. To make alteration to an existing sign, including a change in the size or materials. Permits shall not be required for minor maintenance and repairs to existing signs or for changes in sign copy for conforming signs.
 3. To alter an existing non-conforming sign, subject to Section 18.96.150.
 4. To erect a temporary sign for a new business subject to Section 18.96.050(D).
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2. Conditional Uses. Uses authorized in accordance with the Chapter on Conditional Use Permits may be permitted one ground sign not exceeding an overall height of five feet and an area of fifteen square feet, set back at least ten feet from property lines; or one wall sign in lieu of a ground sign. Such signs shall be approved in conjunction with the issuance of such conditional use permit. Said signs shall not use plastic as part of the exterior visual effect and shall not be internally illuminated.

3. Retail commercial uses allowed as a conditional use in the Railroad District and traveler's accommodations in residential zones shall be allowed one wall sign or one ground sign which meets the following criteria:

- a) The total size of the sign is limited to six square feet.
- b) The maximum height of any ground sign is to be three feet above grade.
- c) The sign must be constructed of wood and cannot be internally illuminated.

18.96.080 Commercial-Downtown Overlay District (C-1-D).
Signs in the Commercial-Downtown Overlay District shall conform to the following regulations:

A. Special Provisions.

1. Frontage. The number and use of signs allowed by virtue of a given business frontage shall be placed only upon such business frontage, and no building shall be credited with more than two business frontages.

2. Aggregate number of signs. The aggregate number of signs for each business shall be two signs for each business frontage (a frontage with an entrance/exit open to the general public).

3. Material. No sign in the Commercial-Downtown Overlay District shall use plastic as part of the exterior visual effects of the sign.

4. Aggregate area of signs. The aggregate area of all signs established by and located on a given street frontage shall not exceed an area equal to one square foot for each lineal foot of street frontage. Aggregate area shall not include nameplates, and real estate and construction signs.

B. Types of signs permitted.

1. Wall signs.

a) Number. Two signs per building frontage shall be permitted for each business, or one sign per frontage for a group of businesses occupying a single common space or suite.

b) Area. Total sign area shall not be more than one square foot of sign area for one lineal foot of legal business frontage. This area shall not exceed sixty square feet.

c) Projection. Signs may project a maximum of eighteen inches from the face of the building to which they are attached, provided the lowest portion of the sign is at least eight feet above grade. Any portion lower than eight feet may only project four inches.

d) Extension above roof line. Signs may not project above the roof or eave line of the building.

2. Ground signs.

a) Number. One sign, in lieu of a wall sign, shall be permitted for each lot with a street frontage in excess of fifty lineal feet. Corner lots can count one street frontage. Two or more parcels of less than fifty feet may be combined for purposes of meeting the foregoing standard.

b) Area. Signs shall not exceed an area of one square foot for each two lineal feet of street frontage, with a maximum area of sixty square feet per sign.

c) Placement. Signs shall be placed so that no sign or portion thereof shall extend beyond any property line of the premises on which such sign is located. Signs on corner properties shall also comply with the vision clearance provisions of Section 18.96.060(F).

d) Height. No ground sign shall be in excess of five feet above grade.

3. Marquee or Awning Signs.

a) Number. A maximum of two signs shall be permitted for each business frontage in lieu of wall signs.

b) Area. Signs shall not exceed the permitted aggregate sign area not taken up by a wall sign.

c) Projection. Signs may not project beyond the face of the marquee if suspended, or above the face of the marquee if attached to and parallel to the face of the marquee.

d) Height. Signs shall have a maximum face height of nine inches if placed below the marquee.

e) Clearance above grade. The lowest portion of a sign attached to a marquee shall not be less than seven feet, six inches above grade.

f) Signs painted on a marquee. Signs can be painted on the marquee in lieu of wall signs provided the signs do not exceed the permitted aggregate sign area not taken up by wall signs.

4. Projecting Signs.

a) Number. One sign shall be permitted for each business or group of businesses occupying a single common space or suite in lieu of a wall sign.

b) Area. Except for marquee or awning signs, a projecting sign shall not exceed an area of one square foot for each two feet of lineal business frontage that is not already utilized by a wall sign. The maximum area of any projecting sign shall be 15 square feet.

c) Projection. Signs may project from the face of the building to which they are attached a maximum of two feet if located eight feet above grade, or three feet if located nine feet above grade or more.

d) Height and extension above roof line. Signs shall not extend above the roofline, eave or parapet wall of the building to which they are attached, or be lower than eight feet above grade.

e) Limitation on Placement. No projecting sign shall be placed on any frontage on an arterial street as designated in the Ashland Comprehensive Plan.

18.96.090 Commercial, Industrial and Employment Districts. Signs in commercial, industrial and employment districts, excepting the Downtown-Commercial Overlay District and the Freeway Overlay District, shall conform to the following regulations:

A. Special Provisions.

1. Frontage. The number and area of signs allowed by virtue of a given business frontage shall be placed only upon such business frontage and no building shall be credited with more than two business frontages.

2. Aggregate number of signs. The aggregate number of signs for each business shall be two signs for each business frontage (a frontage with an entrance/exit open to the general public).

b) Area. Signs shall not exceed the permitted aggregate sign area not taken up by a wall sign.

c) Projection. Signs may not project beyond the face of the marquee if suspended, or above or below the face of the marquee if attached to and parallel to the face of the marquee.

d) Height. Signs shall have a maximum face height of nine inches if attached to the marquee.

e) Clearance above grade. The lowest portion of a sign attached to a marquee shall not be less than seven feet, six inches above grade.

f) Signs painted on a marquee. Signs can be painted on the marquee in lieu of wall sign provided the signs do not exceed the permitted aggregate sign area not taken up by wall signs.

18.96.100 Freeway Sign Zone.

A. Purpose. This special overlay zone is intended to provide for and regulate certain ground signs which identify businesses in commercial districts located at freeway interchanges.

B. Establishment and Location of Freeway Sign Zones. Freeway sign zones shall be depicted on the official zoning map of the City and identified as the Freeway Overlay District.

C. Freeway Overlay Sign Regulations. All signs in this district shall comply with Section 18.96.090, except for ground signs, which shall comply with the provisions of Section 18.96.100(D), ground sign regulations.

D. Ground Sign Regulations.

1. Number. One freeway sign shall be permitted for each lot in addition to the signs allowed by 18.96.090 of this Chapter. (Ord. 2290, S3, 1984)

2. Area. Signs shall not exceed an area of one hundred (100) square feet per sign.

3. Height. Signs shall not exceed a height of 2028 feet above mean sea level.

18.96.110 Abatement of Nuisance Signs. The following signs are hereby declared a public nuisance and shall be removed or the nuisance abated:

A. Flashing sign visible from a public street or highway.

B. Temporary and movable signs.

C. Illegal signs.

D. Signs in obvious disrepair which are not maintained according to the standards set forth in 18.96.120C.

18.96.120 Construction and Maintenance Standards.

A. Materials of construction.

1. Single and Multi-family residential districts. All signs and their supporting member may be constructed of any material subject to the provisions of this Chapter.

2. Commercial and industrial districts. All signs and their supporting members shall be constructed of non-combustible materials or fire-retardant treated wood which maintains its fire-resistive qualities when tested in accordance with the rain and weathering tests of the U.B.C. Standards No. 32-37, unless otherwise provided in this Section.

3. Non-treated signs. All wall, ground, marquee and projecting signs of twenty square feet or less may be constructed of non-treated wood.

4. Real estate and construction signs. All signs may be constructed of compressed wood particle board or other material of similar fire resistivity.

5. Directly illuminated signs. All signs illuminated from within may be faced with plastics approved by the Building Code.

6. Glass. All glass used in signs shall be shatter-resistant, or covered by a shatter-resistant material.

7. Wood. Wood in contact with the ground shall be foundation-grade redwood, foundation-grade cedar, all heartwood cypress, or any species of wood which has been pressure-treated with an approved preservative. Trim and backing strips may be constructed of wood.

B. Construction Methods.

1. All signs shall be constructed of such materials or treated in such manner that normal weathering will not harm, deface or otherwise affect the sign.

2. All letters, figure and similar message elements shall be safely and securely attached to the sign structure.

3. All signs shall be designed and constructed to resist the applicable wind loads set forth in the Building Code.

C. Maintenance

All signs shall be maintained at all times in a state of good repair, and no person shall maintain or permit to be maintained on any premises owned or controlled by him, any sign which is in a sagging, leaning, fallen, decayed, deteriorated or other dilapidated or unsafe condition.

18.96.130 Nonconforming Signs.

A. Any sign which does not conform with a provision of the Ashland Sign Code, and has been in existence for more than five years, is subject to this Section.

B. Alteration of any existing nonconforming sign. It is unlawful to alter any existing nonconforming sign. The sign must be brought into conformance with this Title upon any physical alteration. Acts of God or vandalism which damage these nonconforming signs shall be exempt from this Section, if the cost of the repair is less than 50% of the cost of replacing the sign with a conforming sign. However, the signs must be restored to their original design and a permit with a \$10.00 fee will be required prior to the repair work.

C. Any nonconforming sign used by a business, shopping center, or business complex must be brought into conformance prior to any expansion or change in use which requires a Site Review or Conditional Use Permit. All nonconforming signs must be brought into conformance with the same provisions as are required for new signs. No building permits for new construction may be issued until this provision is complied with.

D. Variances can be granted using the variance procedure of this Title to alleviate unusual hardships or extraordinary circumstances which exist in bringing nonconforming signs into conformity. The variance granted shall be the minimum required to alleviate the hardship or extraordinary circumstance. (Ord. 2357 S, 1985)

18.96.140 Enforcement. The portions of this Chapter relating to the structural characteristics and safety of signs shall be enforced by the Building Official or his designate; all other portions shall be enforced by the Staff Advisor or his designate. (Ord. 2176, 1982)

18.96.150 Governmental Signs. Governmental agencies may apply for a Conditional Use to place a sign that does not conform to this code when the Commission determines that, in addition to the criteria for a conditional use, the sign is necessary to further that agency's public purpose. (Ord. 2557 S3, 1985; Ord. 2440, 1988)

APPENDIX C

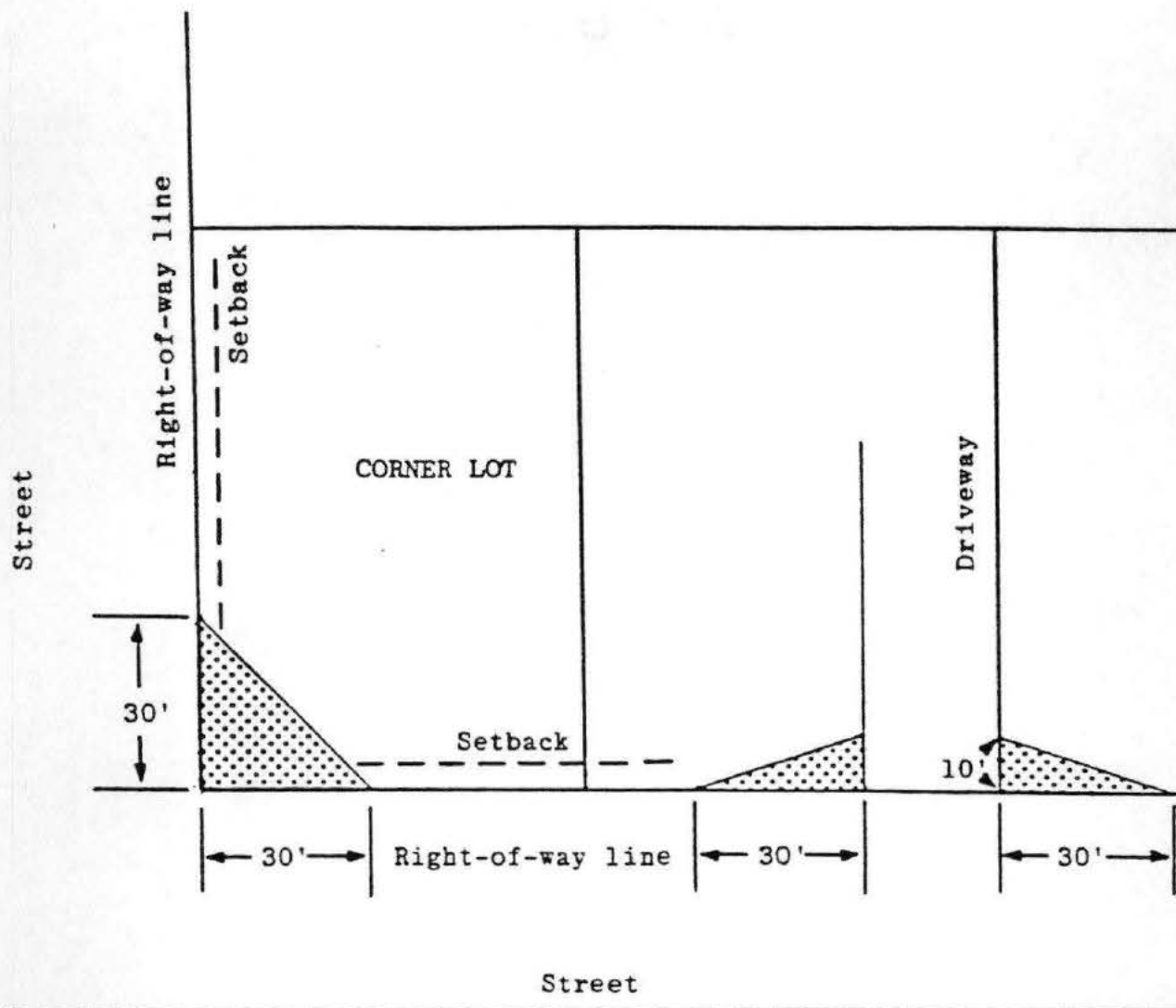
CITY OF ROSEBURG CLEAR VISION AREA

The following contains Section 3.35.050 of the City
of Roseburg Municipal Code.

SECTION 3.35.050 CLEAR VISION AREAS.

1. A Clear Vision area shall be maintained on the corners of all property at the intersections of two streets, or of a street and a railroad. In multi-family residential, commercial, and industrial zones, a clear vision area shall be maintained at the intersection of an alley and a street or a driveway and a street, except that the Community Development Director may, after receipt of a recommendation from the City Engineer, reduce or eliminate the clear vision area required at an intersection of an alley and a street or a driveway and a street. Required clear vision areas shall contain no planting, fence, wall, sign, structure, vehicle or
- temporary or permanent obstruction within the area between
- three (3) feet and twelve (12) feet in height, measured
- from the top of the curb, or, where no curb exists, from the alley or driveway or established street center-line grade. However, the provisions of this Section shall not apply to any of the following:
 - a. A public utility pole.
 - b. A tree, trimmed to the trunk, to a line at least eight (8) feet above the level of the intersection.
 - c. An official street sign, warning sign, or signal.
 - d. Two sign poles other than the above per clear vision area. The maximum cross-section of any such sign pole shall not exceed twelve (12) inches.
2.
 - a. In all zones, except as otherwise provided by this Ordinance, a clear vision area at the intersection of two (2) streets, or of a street and a railroad shall be a triangular area formed by the right-of-way lines at such intersections and a straight line connecting said right-of-way lines at points which are thirty feet distant from the intersection of the right-of-way lines measured along such lines.
 - b. In multi-family residential, commercial, or industrial zones, except as otherwise provided by this Ordinance, a clear vision area at the intersection of a street and an alley shall be a triangular area, formed by the rights-of-way lines of the street and the alley at such intersections and a straight line connecting said right-of-way lines at points which are thirty feet distant from the intersection of the right-of-way lines along the street right-of-way, and 10 feet distant from the intersection of the right-of-way lines along the alley right-of-way.
 - c. In multi-family residential, commercial, or industrial zones, except as otherwise provided by this Ordinance, a clear vision area at the intersection

of a street and a driveway shall be a triangular area formed by the right-of-way line of the street and the edge of the driveway at such intersections and a straight line connecting said right-of-way line and said driveway edge at points which are 30 feet distant from the intersection along the street right-of-way and 10 feet distant from the intersection along the edge of the driveway.



APPENDIX D

CITY OF PORTLAND SIGN CODE

The following contains Chapter 33.535 of the
Portland Municipal Code, edited by the author.

Chapter 33.535

SIGNS

(Added by Ord. No. 158535
passed and effective May 22, 1986.)

Sections:

- 33.535.010 Purpose.
- 33.535.020 Applicability and Scope.
- 33.535.030 Conformance.
- 33.535.040 Severability.
- 33.535.050 Definitions.

General Regulations

- 33.535.100 Exempt Signs.
- 33.535.110 Prohibited Signs.
- 33.535.120 Sign Measurement.
- 33.535.130 Undeveloped Sites.
- 33.535.140 Nonconforming Signs.
- 33.535.150 Sign Adjustments.

Base Zone Sign Regulations

- 33.535.200 C3, C2, M3, MX, M2, M1, GE, GI and HI Zones.
- 33.535.210 C1 Zone.
- 33.535.220 C4 and RX Zones.
- 33.535.230 C5 Zone.
- 33.535.240 FF, R20, R10, R7, R5, R2.5 R2, R1 and RH Zones.

Specific Sign Development Regulations

- 33.535.300 Applicability.
- 33.535.310 Sign Placement.
- 33.535.320 Signs Extending Into the Right-of-Way.
- 33.535.330 Fascia Signs.
- 33.535.340 Projecting Signs.
- 33.535.350 Flush Pitched Roof Signs.
- 33.535.360 Marquee and Awning Signs.
- 33.535.370 Directional Signs.
- 33.535.380 Temporary Signs.

33.535.010 Purpose.

A. This Chapter regulates signs which are visible from the right-of-way and

from beyond the property where erected. These regulations balance the need to protect the public safety and welfare, the need for a well maintained and attractive community, and the need for adequate identification, communication and advertising for all land uses. The regulations for signs have the following specific objectives:

1. To ensure that signs are designed, constructed, installed and maintained so that public safety and traffic safety are not compromised;

2. To allow and promote positive conditions for meeting sign users' needs while at the same time avoiding nuisances to nearby properties and promoting an attractive environment;

3. To reflect and support the desired character and development patterns of the various zones;

4. To allow for adequate and effective signs in commercial and industrial zones while preventing signs from dominating the visual appearance of the area; and

5. To ensure that the constitutionally guaranteed right of free speech is protected.

B. The regulations allow for adequate and multiple types of signs for a site. The provisions do not necessarily assure or provide for a property owner's desired level of visibility for the signs.

33.535.020 Applicability and Scope.

This Chapter regulates the number, size, placement and physical characteristics of signs. The regulations are not intended to, and do not, restrict, limit or control the content or message of signs. The regulations of this Chapter apply to all zones in the City. Signs in Design Zones, historic districts, Portland Historical Landmarks, S Zones, or plan districts may also be subject to additional regulations. Signs 32 square feet or less in area are not subject to design review in Design Zones. The regulations of this Chapter are in addition to all other regulations in the Municipal Code applicable to signs.

33.535.030 Conformance. No sign may be erected unless it conforms with the regulations of this Chapter. Sign permits, as required by Title 32, must be approved prior to erection of the sign. When required, signs in Design Zones must be approved through the design review process. All signs in historic districts or buildings, or sites containing Portland Historical Landmarks must be approved through the historic landmarks review process.

33.535.040 Severability. If any portion of this Chapter is for any reason ruled invalid or unconstitutional by a court of competent jurisdiction, that portion shall be deemed a separate, distinct and independent provision and such ruling shall not affect the validity of the remaining portions of this Chapter, Title, or Code.

33.535.050 Definitions. Sign related definitions are listed in Chapter 33.12.

General Regulations

33.535.100 Exempt Signs. The following signs are exempt from the provisions of this Chapter, but may be subject to other portions of the Municipal Code:

- A. Signs not oriented or intended to be legible from a right-of-way, private road or other private property;
- B. Signs inside a building, except for strobe lights visible from a right-of-way, private road or other private property;
- C. Signs legally erected in the right-of-way in accordance with Titles 16 and 17;
- D. Building numbers required by Chapter 17.92 of the Municipal Code.
- E. Signs carved into or part of materials which are an integral part of the building;
- F. Flags on permanent flag poles which are designed to allow raising and lowering of the flags;
- G. Painted wall decorations and painted wall highlights; and
- H. Signs affected by stipulated

judgments to which the City is a party entered by courts of competent jurisdiction.

33.535.110 Prohibited Signs. The following signs are prohibited and shall be removed:

- A. Strobe lights and signs containing strobe lights which are visible beyond the property line;
- B. Signs placed on or painted on a motor vehicle or trailer and parked with the primary purpose of providing a sign not otherwise allowed for by this Code; and
- C. Abandoned signs.

33.535.120 Sign Measurement.

- A. Sign face area.
 - 1. The area of sign faces enclosed in frames or cabinets is determined based on the outer dimensions of the frame or cabinet surrounding the sign face (see Figure 535.1). Sign area does not include foundations, supports, and other essential structures which are not serving as a backdrop or border to the sign. Only one side of a double faced sign is counted.
 - 2. When a sign is on a base material and attached without a frame, such as a wood board or plexiglass panel, the dimensions of the base material are to be used unless it is clear that part of the base contains no sign, related display or decoration.
 - 3. When signs are constructed of individual pieces attached to a building wall, sign area is determined by a perimeter drawn around all the pieces (see Figure 535.2).
 - 4. For sign structures containing multiple modules oriented in the same direction, the modules together are counted as one sign face (see Figure 535.3).
 - 5. The maximum surface area visible at one time of a round or three dimensional sign is counted to determine sign area.
 - 6. When signs are incorporated into awnings, the entire panel containing the sign is counted as the sign face unless it is clear that part of the panel contains no sign, related display or decoration.
- B. Height of signs. The overall

height of a sign or sign structure is measured from the grade directly below the sign to the highest point of the sign or sign structure (see Figure 535.4).

C. Clearances. Clearances are measured from the grade directly below the sign to the bottom of the sign structure enclosing the sign face (see Figure 535.5).

D. Primary building frontages. Primary building frontages are derived for each ground floor occupant's qualifying exterior walls (see Figure 535.6).

E. Corner signs. Corner signs facing more than one street shall be assigned to a frontage by the applicant. The sign must meet all provisions for the frontage it is assigned to.

33.535.130 Undeveloped Sites.

Permanent signs are not allowed on undeveloped sites except for allowed subdivision signs.

33.535.140 Nonconforming Signs.

Nonconforming signs are not subject to the provisions of 33.94, Nonconforming Uses. Unless previously approved through an exception process, lawfully erected signs not conforming to the regulations of this Chapter may continue to exist and are subject to the following provisions.

A. Maintenance, repairs, and changing of sign faces, when no structural alterations are made, are allowed.

B. Signs and sign structures which are moved, replaced, or structurally altered shall be brought into conformance with the current sign regulations.

C. Temporary signs. Nonconforming temporary signs shall be removed.

33.535.150 Sign Adjustments. Under the provisions of 33.98.450 to 490, sign adjustments may be requested for all sign regulations including items not allowed, but not for prohibited signs.

Base Zone Sign Regulations

33.535.200 C3, C2, M3, MX, M2, M1, GE, GI and HI Zones. For all uses and sites in the above stated zones, the following types, numbers, sizes, and features of signs are allowed. All allowed signs must also be in conformance with the sign development regulations of 33.535.300 to 380.

A. Freestanding signs.

1. Allowable area. Freestanding signs are allowed 1 square foot of sign face area per lineal foot of site frontage, up to a maximum of 300 square feet.

2. Number. One freestanding sign is allowed for the first 300 lineal feet of site frontage and one for each additional 300 feet of site frontage or fraction thereof. The second sign's area is determined by the length of frontage not part of the initial 300 feet.

3. Height. The maximum height of a freestanding sign is 30 feet.

4. Extension into the right-of-way. Freestanding signs may extend into the right-of-way subject to the provisions of 33.535.320.

B. Signs attached to buildings.

1. Total allowable area. For ground floor occupants, the total allowable area for all permanent signs attached to the building is determined as follows.

a. If there is no freestanding sign on the site frontage toward which the building wall is oriented, then 1-1/2 square feet of sign face area per lineal foot of the occupant's primary building frontage is allowed, or 32 square feet, whichever is more. If the total of all signs attached to the building is more than 1 square foot of sign face area per lineal foot of primary building frontage, then no freestanding sign is allowed.

b. If there is a freestanding sign on the site frontage towards which the building wall is oriented, then 1 square foot of sign face area per lineal foot of occupant's primary building frontage is allowed, or 32 square feet, whichever is more.

2. Individual sign face area. The maximum size of an individual sign within

FIGURE 535.1
SIGN FACE MEASUREMENT



FIGURE 535.2
SIGN FACE MEASUREMENTS



FIGURE 535.3
SIGN FACE MEASUREMENTS

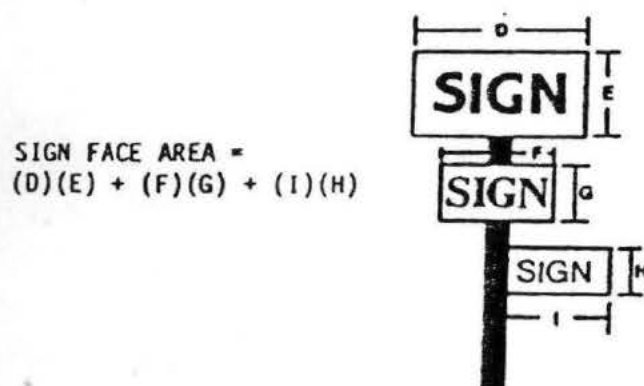


FIGURE 505.4
SIGN HEIGHT

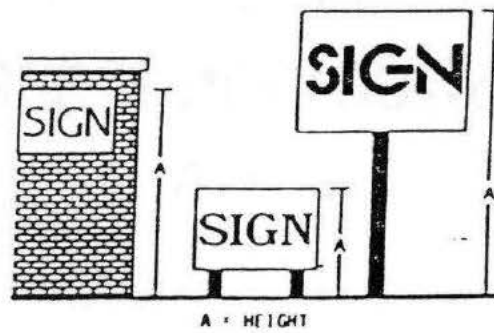


FIGURE 505.5
SIGN CLEARANCES

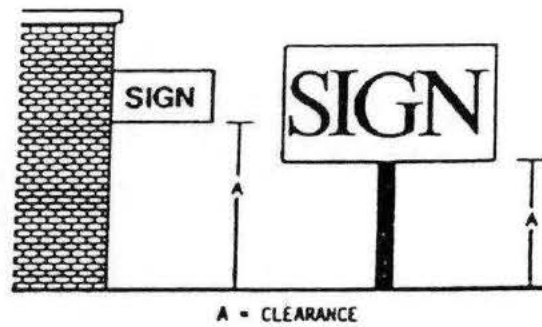


FIGURE 505.6
BUILDING FRONTAGE MEASUREMENT

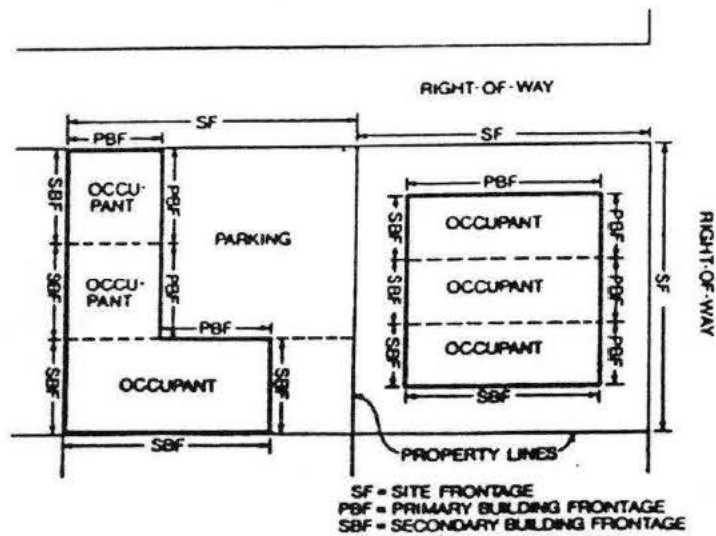
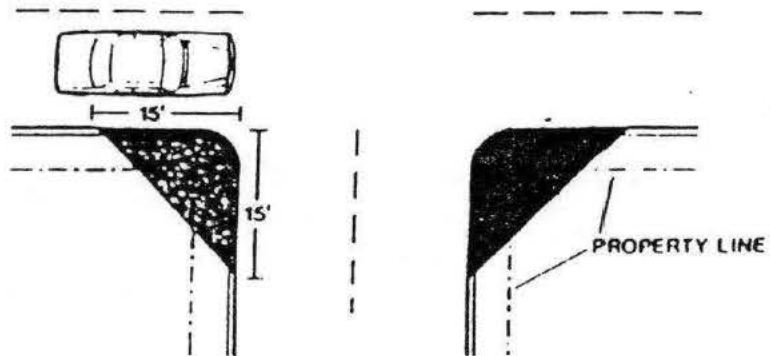
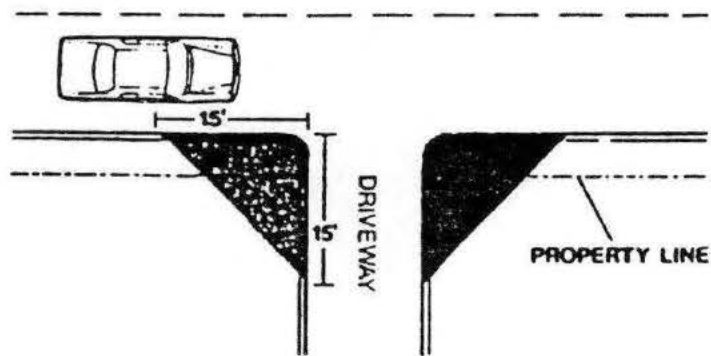


FIGURE 535.7
VISION CLEARANCE AREA

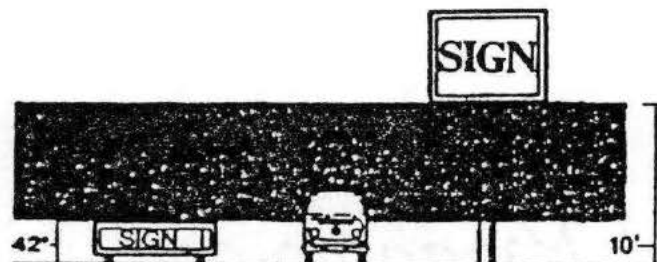
VISION CLEARANCE FOR STREET INTERSECTIONS



VISION CLEARANCE FOR DRIVEWAYS



VERTICAL VISION CLEARANCE AREA



the total allowable area limits is 300 square feet.

3. Types of signs. Fascia, projecting, marquee, awning, and flush pitched roof signs are allowed. Roof top signs are not allowed.

4. Number of signs. There is no limit on the number of signs if within the total allowable area limit. However, only one projecting sign is allowed per building frontage, and shall only be allowed if there is no freestanding sign on the same site frontage.

5. Extensions into the right-of-way. Projecting, marquee and awning signs may extend into the right-of-way subject to the provisions of 33.535.310.

C. Sign features. Permanent signs may have the following features.

1. Signs may be indirectly, internally, or directly illuminated.

2. Electronic message centers are allowed.

3. Thirty percent of a marquee sign area and 15 percent of the face of all other sign types may be flashing.

4. Rotating signs are allowed.

5. Moving parts are not allowed.

D. Additional signs allowed. In addition to the sign amounts allowed based on the site and building frontages, the following signs are allowed.

1. Directional signs.

2. Temporary lawn, banner, and rigid signs.

3. Subdivisions may have a freestanding sign at each entrance, up to a total of four, each of which may be up to 10 feet in height and 50 square feet in area.

4. Painted wall signs. Painted wall signs are allowed on all walls up to 50 percent of the exposed wall area.

33.535.210 CI Zone. For all uses and sites in the CI Zone, the following types, numbers, sizes, and features of signs are allowed. All allowed signs must also be in conformance with the sign development regulations of 33.535.300 to 380.

A. Freestanding signs.

1. Allowable area. Freestanding

signs are allowed 1 square foot of sign face area per lineal foot of site frontage, up to a maximum of 75 square feet.

2. Number. One freestanding sign is allowed per site frontage.

3. Height. The maximum height of a freestanding sign is 20 feet.

4. Extension into the right-of-way. Freestanding signs may extend into the right-of-way subject to the provisions of 33.535.320.

B. Signs attached to buildings.

1. Total allowable area. For ground floor occupants, the total allowable area for all permanent signs attached to the building is determined as follows.

a. If there is no freestanding sign on the site frontage toward which the building wall is oriented, then 1-1/2 square feet of sign face area per lineal foot of the occupant's primary building frontage is allowed, or 32 square feet, whichever is more. If the total of all signs attached to the building is more than 1 square foot of sign face area per lineal foot of primary building frontage, then no freestanding sign is allowed.

b. If there is a freestanding sign on the site frontage toward which the building wall is oriented, then 1 square foot of sign face area per lineal foot of occupant's building frontage is allowed, or 32 square feet, whichever is more.

2. Individual sign face area. The maximum size of an individual sign within the total allowable area limits is 150 square feet, except for projecting signs which are limited to 75 square feet per face.

3. Types of signs. Fascia, projecting, marquee, and awning signs are allowed. Roof top and flush pitched roof signs are not allowed.

4. Number of signs. There is no limit on the number of signs if within the total allowable area limit. However, only one projecting sign is allowed per building frontage, and shall only be allowed if there is no freestanding sign on the same site frontage.

5. Extensions into the right-of-way. Projecting, marquee and awning signs may extend into the

right-of-way subject to the provisions of 33.535.320.

C. Sign features. Permanent signs may have the following features.

1. Signs may be indirectly, internally, or directly illuminated.

2. Electronic message centers may not be greater than 20 square feet in area.

3. Flashing signs are not allowed.

4. Rotating signs are not allowed.

5. Moving parts are not allowed.

D. Additional signs allowed. In addition to the sign amounts allowed based on the site and building frontages, the following signs are allowed.

1. Directional signs.

2. Temporary lawn, banner, and rigid signs.

3. Signs in special sign districts which have been approved through the design review process.

4. Subdivisions may have a freestanding sign at each entrance, up to a total of four, each of which may be up to 10 feet in height and 50 square feet in area.

5. Painted wall signs. Painted wall signs are allowed on all walls up to 50 percent of the exposed wall area.

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