

THE SIGN BOOK

An informational guide for businesses, merchants, and landlords

The Winchester Building Department
Town of Winchester, Middlesex County, Massachusetts

Revised March 16, 2018 and Approved by the Winchester Design Review Committee

INTRODUCTION

This informational guide has been developed as a result of collaborative efforts from numerous groups including the Design Review Committee, the Historical Commission and the Chamber of Commerce. We prepared The Sign Book in the hope that it will serve as a guide for property owners, businesses, sign makers, designers and members of the general public interested in signage within the Town of Winchester. This revision updates the references to the Town's By-Laws.

This book contains references to Town by-laws and policies concerning the size, placement, and certain aspects of design of signs. These by-laws and policies have been developed in an effort to limit the clutter of uncontrolled signage, to integrate signs within the visual environment, and to improve the effectiveness of individual signs through emphasis on appropriate design. We have tried not to be overly restrictive and allow for innovations and individuality within the guidelines presented.

We seek to encourage signs that will be compatible with their buildings and surroundings, be informative, be legible and provide examples of quality graphics appropriate within the community. Nearly three hundred and fifty years old, Winchester is primarily a Victorian town. Many of our buildings have an architectural character and unity worth preserving and enhancing. Quality signage and graphics are an important part of that goal.

The Sign Book was prepared by the Winchester Design Review Committee, and approved for distribution by the Building Department as an informational guide.

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1. SIGNAGE IN WINCHESTER

All signs erected within the Town of Winchester are required to comply with the Signage By-Law (Chapter 9 of the Winchester Code of Bylaws) and the Outdoor Lighting Requirements of Section 5.4 of the Winchester Zoning By-Law. Any signage in violation of these By-Laws will be subject to fines and may require alteration in order to bring the signage into compliance. The Building Commissioner is designated and authorized with the enforcement of the Sign By-Law.

The Town of Winchester requires a permit, through the Town Building Department, for all signs, awnings and outdoor display structures. The Building Commissioner grants application approvals.

In the event that the erection of the proposed sign will require the use of staging or ladders on public property, you will be required to secure a Staging Permit from the Board of Selectmen. The Board of Selectmen, as a matter of policy, customarily refers Staging Permit Applications under consideration to the Design Review Committee for their comments.

2. SIGN PERMITTING PROCESS

- STEP 1:** Obtain a sign permit application from the Winchester Building Department.
- STEP 2:** Familiarize yourself with sign requirements as specified in Chapter 9 and Section 5.4 (Outdoor Lighting) of the Winchester Zoning By-laws, as well as the guidelines referred to in this document. See below a link to these references on the Winchester Town website:
Chapter 9: <https://www.winchester.us/DocumentCenter/Home/View/1933>
Zoning Bylaw: <https://www.winchester.us/DocumentCenter/View/228>
- STEP 3:** *Optional but highly recommended*, contact the Design Review Committee prior to submitting your application. The DRC can provide useful design advice in person at their monthly meeting.
- STEP 4:** Submit (2) copies of your sign application to the building department. Include with your application materials outlined on the following page.
- STEP 5:** Building Commissioner will notify the applicant if approval has been granted. The Building Commissioner has 30 days from the date of filing to respond to a Sign Permit Application.

PLEASE NOTE:

Any questions regarding the Chapter 9, Sign By-Law should be directed to the Building Commissioner. The Building Commissioner can be located at:

Winchester Building Department
Town Hall
71 Mount Vernon Street
Winchester, MA 01890
781.721.7115

- **If your application is approved**, permits are then available from the Building Commissioner's office. The Board of Selectmen shall determine fees for such permits. You will also need to obtain a **staging permit** if the proposed sign will require the use of staging or ladders on public property.
- **If your application is not approved**, you will be notified and referred to the By-Law section which is not in compliance. If you desire to re-submit, recommendations may be requested from the Design Review Committee to assist you in your application.

3. MATERIAL TO BE SUBMITTED TO OBTAIN A SIGN PERMIT

1. **A completed Sign Permit Application.** Copies are available through the Building Department and on the Town website.
2. **A scale drawing of the proposed sign** clearly indicating the following information:
 - The type of proposed sign (wall, hanging, awning, etc.)
 - Materials: what the proposed sign is to be constructed of (pine, bronze, etc.)
 - Colors: the drawing may be black and white but color chips must be attached for any colors other than black, pure white or gold leaf.
 - All designs and lettering.
 - Dimensions of the proposed sign, including thickness, and the lineal frontage of the business location.
 - Lighting specifications, if applicable.
3. **A scale drawing of the bracket.** This drawing should indicate dimensions, color, material and method of affixing it to the sign and to the building.
4. **A scale drawing of the building** showing where the proposed sign is to be located on it. This drawing may be a simple one, but it should accurately indicate doors, windows, lineal frontage, height above grade and any other necessary dimensions or design features. A photograph may be submitted in addition to, or instead of, the building drawing, but it should show the information required on the drawing.

Appropriate drawing scales should be used and noted, such as 1-inch equals 1 foot, or 1/2 inch equals 1 foot. Drawings and notations should be made on any special design features or construction details.

Sign Specifications


Type:


- Wall Mounted

Materials:


- 1" Clear Pine
- Pine Molding

Color:

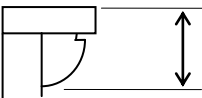

Sign


Lettering

Elevation:



Molding Detail:



4. SIGN DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

The guidelines in this section were developed by the Design Review Committee in an effort to encourage attractive, appropriate signs that will transmit legible messages and improve the quality of the streetscapes of which the signs are a part.

As a sign serves to identify a business and to act as a permanent advertisement expressing the activity of the place and the goods and services sold, we strongly emphasize the importance of an attractive, legible, well-designed sign. Although services and merchandise are a key factor in attracting and keeping customers, a well-designed sign can present an overall image and help to entice customers.

A sign on a building should be considered an integral but noticeable part of that building and not as an unrelated object attached to it. It is worthwhile to consider obtaining the professional assistance of a graphic designer or a commercial artist in choosing a sign design. The Winchester Design Review Committee is also available for free consultation and encourages businesses to discuss signage ideas with the committee prior to the actual sign design. The committee is knowledgeable in both sign design and the interpretation of the Sign By-Law, and is a resource for anyone considering a sign in Winchester.

The following paragraphs briefly outline some key considerations in sign design.

Legibility - Generally legibility is related to the overall relationship of the color, size and shape of any sign to its background; all are important and must be considered. For example: tall, thin letters are often less legible than shorter, wide letters. Normal to slightly-more-than-normal spacing between letters can also increase legibility.

In most instances the size of the principal letterforms should not exceed 1/2 the height of the sign, and the total message, including letter forms and designs, should not occupy more than 2/3 of the total sign area. Symbols are often more recognizable than lettering, and good sign designs often include both.

Color - It is important to note that color is often the most effective when used simply. The use of too many colors on any sign is often confusing. The colors chosen for a sign should enhance the legibility of the sign, relate to the colors of the building material, and be compatible with them.

The single most significant factor in sign color is often the degree of contrast between the sign message and the sign background. While light letters on a dark background are most easily read in day and night, the important factor is contrast.

Materials - Traditional materials such as wood, brass or bronze are most appropriate on historical buildings or in historic areas. Wooden signs should be constructed of dense, clear wood that will accept paint readily. Ordinary plywood will not withstand exposure; therefore, if plywood is considered exterior or marine plywood must be chosen, although its use is not encouraged. (Note: The edges of plywood require special treatment.)

Simplicity - A sign's success is generally a measure of its readability. A sign that incorporates a simple and direct message will be far more understandable than a cluttered sign that tries to communicate too much information. Items such as phone numbers and store hours are more appropriate for placement at eye level near the entrance.

Typography - On the following page are some examples of common, well-designed "classic" letter styles, also called typefaces or fonts. All are basic in design and are the source from which many other fonts are designed. This list is only intended as a guide; it is not our intention that letter styles be limited to this list.

All of the fonts shown are available in capital letters and in lower-case letters. However, the use of lower-case letters should be approached with caution for reasons of legibility. All of the fonts shown are suitable for use as painted, incised, or three-dimensional letters.

Script fonts are not included on the list because of poor legibility. However, many of the fonts shown are available in italic, which imitates script, but is more easily read. Italic fonts should be used with discretion.

While many of the fonts shown are available with extended or condensed spacing in addition to normal spacing, condensed spacing is often difficult to read at any distance and is generally inappropriate for use on signs.

It should be remembered that a letter style used for a logo, on stationery or on a business card does not always translate well into sign lettering. If a business anticipates coordinating its sign, business card and/or stationery, we recommend that the design of the sign be chosen first.

CLASSIC TYPOGRAPHICAL FONTS

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz1234567890
Times

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz1234567890
Futura Book

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz1234567890
New Century Schoolbook

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz1234567890
Helvetica

5. SIGN BY-LAWS: A QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Please refer to the Winchester Town website for links to the Sign By-Law (Chapter 9 of the Winchester Code of By-Laws) and the Outdoor Lighting By-Law (Section 5.4 of the Winchester Zoning By-Laws.)

Included below are some highlights and excerpts from Chapter 9 that help to summarize the key requirements for a proposed sign. ***Please note that any proposed signage must meet all the requirements as specified in the Winchester Town By-Laws, and these by-laws will take precedence to any excerpts included in this document.***

Section 1 includes definitions of sign types (for example, *Accessory sign, Free-standing sign, Temporary sign.*)

Section 2 includes general requirements for signage, including restrictions and prohibited sign types. Restrictions to note:

- Moving and/or flashing signs are prohibited. **(see Section 2.1)**
- Internally illuminated signs are prohibited: *“no sign may utilize translucent panels, canvas or other fabric, letters, devices or other similar components to create an image by allowing light to pass through.”* **(see Section 2.2.b)** Signs must be lit directly or by a completely concealed indirect source.
- No sign shall contain lettering in excess of forty (40) inches in height. **(see Section 2.7)**

Section 3 relates to signage in Residence and Conservancy Districts.

Section 4 relates to signage in Business and Industrial districts. The following requirements should be noted:

- **SIZE:** The aggregate area of all signs shall not exceed the product of two (2) square feet times the number of lineal frontage of a business. For example, a storefront with a frontage of 20 feet may be permitted a total of 40 sf of signage. Note that signage on awnings will count toward this total allowable area. **(see Section 4.1.b.1)**
- **NUMBER:** Up to two (2) signs may be affixed to each wall of the building (if within the maximum area as specified above). **(see Section 4.1.c.1)** Note that signage on awnings will count toward this total allowable number.
- **FREESTANDING SIGNS:** Freestanding signs require a special permit granted by the board of appeals. **(see Section 4.1.a.5 for requirements.)** Up to two (2) freestanding signs may be permitted, unless the lot has less than 200 feet of frontage, in which case only 1 free-standing sign is permitted. **(see Section 4.1.c.2)**

In addition to the Sign By-Law, all applicants should refer to Section 5.4 of the Winchester Zoning By-Law, which relates to Outdoor Lighting (including lighting of exterior signage.) The intent of this by-law is to restrict lighting in order to reduce light pollution, light trespass and glare while conserving energy and preserving the night sky as a natural resource. **Section 5.4.8.1** specifically refers to lighting of signage:

All outdoor light fixtures subject to this Bylaw shall be shielded. This provision shall not apply to any luminaire intended solely to illuminate any freestanding sign or the walls of any building but such luminaire shall be shielded so that its direct light is confined to the surface of such sign or building.