A. Introduction

Signs play an important role in the success of any business by providing necessary identification and advertising. Signs integrated into the building design provide a personal quality that contributes to the ambiance of the commercial complex or streetscape, especially the more unique signs. Conversely, signs can intrude upon pleasant surroundings when applied as an afterthought.

These guidelines are intended to balance the legitimate advertising needs of businesses with the need to prevent visual clutter. The sign examples shown are drawn from the City of Kerman and other communities. They are for the purpose of illustrating specific guidelines only, and might not be appropriate for all locations. Each sign will be reviewed within the context of the proposed project buildings and the surrounding area.

A good quality sign enhances the aesthetic character of the development.
B. Purpose

The purpose of the Sign Design Guidelines is to:

- Provide guidance in the way signs are designed, constructed, and placed in order to foster a more cohesive visual appearance for the community
- Assist property and business owners in understanding city expectations regarding signage
- Enhance the community’s image by avoiding the visual chaos of excessive or inappropriate signage
- Ensure that commercial signs are designed for the purpose of identifying a business in an attractive and functional manner, rather than to serve as general advertising for business

C. Applicability

The Sign Design Guidelines are applicable to all new signs and the modification or reconstruction of existing signs throughout the City. The Sign Design Guidelines will be utilized during the City’s review of Sign Permit applications or through the review of other permit applications when signs are a part of a larger project. Signs will be reviewed for their “consistency” with the Guidelines and the standards contained in the Sign Code.
D. Relation to the Sign Ordinance

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

E. Sign Design Guidelines Objectives

The Sign Design Guidelines for Kerman are based on the following objectives:

- Provide creative, high quality signage that positively contributes in the improvement of the visual environment, expression of local character, and development of a distinctive City image
- Enhance the building’s architectural design
- Consider the scale proportions and character of signage in the immediate vicinity
- Provide the guidance for review and approval for all sign concepts and programs
- Provide merchants with a way to effectively communicate without creating sign clutter

Quality material and landscaping enhance sign appearance.

Keep signs as simple as possible.
F. General Design Guidelines

1. Sign Compatibility.

No sign should dominate the façade. Signs should be designed to be compatible with building design in terms of relative scale, overall size, materials, and colors. Signage elements should incorporate materials, colors, and shapes that appropriately reflect and complement the building's architecture style and surrounding environment. Large signs that dominate a building façade and the streetscape are strongly discouraged.

2. Sign Legibility

An effective sign should do more than attract attention; it should communicate its message. Usually, this is a question of the readability of words and phrases. The most significant influence on legibility is lettering.

a. Use a brief message. Signs with fewer words are typically more effective. A sign with a brief, succinct message is simpler and faster to read, looks cleaner and is more attractive.
b. Ensure legibility. An effective sign should do more than attract attention; it should communicate its message clearly. Usually, this is a question of the readability of words and phrases. The most significant influence on legibility is lettering style and spacing. Use the following guidelines to help ensure sign legibility.

- Avoid hard-to-read, intricate typefaces. Typefaces that are difficult to read reduce the sign's ability to communicate.

- Avoid spacing letters and words too close together. Crowding of letters, words or lines will make any sign more difficult to read. Conversely, over-spacing these elements causes the viewer to read each item individually, again obscuring the message.

- Limit the area of sign text. Lettering and logos should not occupy more than 75 percent of the sign face.
c. Use significant contrast. If there is little contrast between the brightness or hue of the message of a sign and its background, it will be difficult to read.

e. Use symbols and logos. Pictographic images will usually register more quickly in the viewer's mind than a written message.

f. Avoid large areas of blank space. Large areas (50 percent or more) of blank sign area should be avoided. If the total allowed sign area is not required to convey the message effectively, it is best to reduce the overall size of the sign.
3. Location and Size.

a. Signs should be designed to relate to the architectural features of the building on which they are located and create visual continuity with other storefronts in the same building and adjacent buildings.

b. Signs should be placed to indicate the location of access to a business. Signs should be placed at or near the public entrance to a building or main parking area to indicate the most direct access to the business.

![Inconsistent sign patterns create confusion.](image1)

![Employ a consistent sign pattern.](image2)

Well-placed sign at main entrance

c. Signs should be placed and sized consistent with the proportions of the building’s facade.

d. The overall size of a building mounted sign and the height of its lettering should relate to the distance the sign is from the street and its ability to be seen clearly.
e. Signs should not be located so that they cover or interrupt the architectural details or ornamentation of a building’s facade.

f. Signs should not project above the edge of the rooflines and should not obstruct windows, and/or doorways.


a. Use of colors is one of the primary means of visual communication. Excessive and uncoordinated use of colors confuses and negates the message of a sign. Choose colors that are complementary yet provide good contrast with one another.

b. Contrast is an important influence on the legibility of signs. The most aesthetic and effective graphics are produced when light colored letters and images are placed on a dark, contrasting colored background.
5. Illumination.

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

b. Individually illuminated letters, either internally illuminated or back-lighted solid letters (reverse channel), are strongly encouraged over internally illuminated cabinet signs. Signs comprised of individual letters will be better integrated with their background as opposed to cabinet signs.

c. The use of internally illuminated cabinet-type signs with translucent panels are not allowed unless the sign's panels are opaque so that when illuminated only the lettering, not the background, is illuminated.

d. Whenever indirect lighting fixtures are used, care shall be taken to properly shield the light source to prevent glare from spilling over into residential areas and public rights-of-way.

a. Sign materials should be selected with consideration for the architectural design of the building’s façade. Sign materials should complement materials used on the building and should also contribute to the legibility of the sign.

b. The glossy materials (e.g., plastic, acrylic) used on many cabinet signs are often difficult to read because of glare and reflections and should therefore be avoided.

c. Sign materials should be very durable. Paper and cloth signs are usually not suitable for exterior use because they can deteriorate quickly. If these nonpermanent materials are used, they must be continuously maintained in good condition at all times.

d. If wooden signs are used, they should be properly sealed to keep moisture from soaking into the wood and causing the sign’s lettering to deteriorate.
7. Electrical raceways and conduits.

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

b. If raceways are necessary, they should be as thin and narrow as possible and should never extend in width or height beyond the area of the sign's lettering or graphics.

c. All exposed conduit and junction boxes should be concealed from public view.

Examples of channel letter signs with integrated raceway.
G. Design Guidelines for Specific Sign Types

1. Wall and Building Signs

Wall signs are to be mounted flush and fixed securely to a building wall, projecting no more than 12 inches from the face of a building wall, and not extending sideways beyond the building face or above the highest line of the building to which it is attached.

   a. Wall signs should be centered on horizontal surfaces (sign band) located on the upper portion of the storefront, within or just above the primary entrance.

   b. Signs cannot be longer than 60% of the sign band or wall area where the sign is located.

   c. No wall sign shall be longer than 36 feet in length.

   d. Wall signs shall not exceed 15% of the building façade (the exterior walls of a building exposed to public view).

   e. One secondary wall sign may be permitted for each wall abutting a public street or an on-site parking lot (where a primary sign is not used).
f. Maximum area for a primary sign is determined by multiplying occupancy frontage by 0.9.

g. Wall signs shall be designed to be compatible with the storefront in scale, proportions, and color.

h. If signs are to be internally illuminated, individually cut channel letters or solid backlit letters or the use of external, direct illumination are the preferred methods.

Calculating Permitted Sign Size:

- Occupancy frontage is the length of the wall with the primary public entrance for primary wall sign.

- o.f. x 0.9 = permitted sign area for the primary wall sign (up to 150 square feet)

Example:
50' occupancy frontage x 0.9 = 45 square feet of sign areas is permitted.
2. Projecting Signs

Projecting signs are relatively flat, two-sided solid panels attached to brackets which are mounted on and perpendicular to the face of buildings and storefronts. They often include graphic images in addition to text, and express the unique personality of an individual business.

a. The use of pedestrian-oriented projecting signs is strongly encouraged.

b. Projecting signs should be used for ground floor uses only. The maximum sign area should not exceed ten square feet.

c. Sign supports and brackets should be compatible with the design and scale of the sign and the architectural design of the building.

d. The text, copy, or logo face should not exceed 75 percent of the sign face of a projecting sign.

e. The sign should be hung at a 90-degree angle from the face of the building.

f. External illumination of projecting signs is encouraged.

g. Projecting signs may not project over rooftop.

h. Only one projecting sign per business when a wall sign is not used.

i. Projecting signs shall be oriented to pedestrians passing on the sidewalk in front of the buildings. This can be achieved by providing a minimum clearance of 6 inches between the building face and sign and maintaining a projection of 36 inches.
3. Hanging Signs

Hanging signs are relatively flat panels, generally two-sided, which are similar to projecting signs, but are smaller and suspended below awnings, bay windows, balconies, and similar projections. They are intended primarily for business identification to pedestrians passing on the sidewalk.

a. Use high quality materials such as wood or metal and avoid shiny plastic or fabric.

b. Suspend signs with metal rods, small scale chain, cable, or hooks.

c. Mount signs to provide a minimum of 8 feet clearance between the sign and the sidewalk. Orient hanging signs to pedestrian traffic.
4. Window Signs.

a. Permanent window signs should consist of individual letters and/or logos placed on the interior surface of the window. Glass-mounted graphics may be applied by painting, silk screening, or vinyl die-cut forms.

b. Window signs should be located so that they do not block views into the business. This is not only good for business, but also increases visibility for security purposes.

c. The use of nonpermanent materials such as paper is not allowed.

d. Limit the amount of signage used. Window signs should be limited to a maximum of 25% of any individual window, and an aggregate area of no more than 10% of all ground floor windows on any building face.

e. Limit the size of the letter: The maximum height shall be ten inches. Exceptions may be granted for the leading capital letters as shown in the Rock Café window sign below.

f. The text or sign copy of a window sign should be limited to the business name and brief messages identifying the type of product or service (e.g., “Maternity wear” or “surf accessories”) or pertinent information (e.g., “reservations required”).
5. Awning Signs.

These sign types are printed on, painted on, or attached to an awning or canopy above a business door or window. They generally serve to bring color to the shopping environment and are oriented toward pedestrians from the opposite side of the street.

a. Lettering shall be allowed on awning valances only and shall not exceed eight inches in height. Logos, symbols, and graphics that do not include text may be allowed on the shed (slope) portion of an awning and shall not exceed 15% of the sloped surface area or no greater than four square feet in area for each awning.

b. Awnings should not be internally illuminated. Signage on the awning’s sloped face may be illuminated by shielded and attractive directional spot lights.

c. Sign lettering and/or logo shall comprise no more than 30% of the total exterior surface of an awning or canopy.

d. Generally, limit awning signs to the business name, business logo, services or type of business, and/or the business address number.

e. Limit sign width on awning valences to a maximum of 85% of the awning width. Limit the letter height to a maximum of 80% of the valence height.
6. Plaque Signs

Plaque signs are pedestrian-oriented flat panels mounted to wall surfaces near the entry to a business. They include signs that identify a specific business, directory signs for multiple businesses, and menu boxes for restaurants.

a. Limit the location and size of plaque signs Locate signs only on wall surfaces adjacent to tenant entries or entry passageways to off-street courtyards. Signs identifying a single business should be limited to an area of 4 square feet.

b. Directory signs for the identification of multiple second floor or courtyard tenants may be larger, but no more than 8 square feet in area.
7. Tenant & Directory Signs

Tenant directory signs are used to identify multi-tenant buildings and businesses that do not have direct frontage on a public street. Tenant directory signs shall be constructed and oriented to the pedestrian.

a. Tenant Directory signs shall be mounted flat against a solid wall or incorporated into a freestanding sign located on the property on which the tenants are located.

b. The maximum sign height, including the sign base, is not to exceed 4 feet in the office professional district.

c. The sign copy may include the building or project name, project logo, address, business tenant names, and suite numbers or letters.

d. Tenant Directory signs should be constructed out of materials that compliment both the building structure and its use.

e. The letter size of the building name, project name, or logo shall not exceed 4 inches in height. All other copy shall not exceed 2 inches in height.
Informational and directional ground signs are smaller signs that assist motorists in safely exiting from moving traffic lanes to on-site uses in projects with multiple entries.

- One directory sign permitted per driveway.

- Directional Signs are limited to a maximum area of 6 square feet, and only allowed on collector and arterial streets.

8. A-frame Signs

A-frame signs (sandwich boards) are designed to stand alone either on public or private property. Such signs are portable and are usually placed along public sidewalks to attract pedestrian into the shopping area.

- A-Frame signs are permitted in the Historic Townsite only as defined in the General Plan.

- A-frame signs must be constructed using one of the following durable materials: wooden or metal signs suspended form a wire frame, wooden A-Frame signs with open bases, or shaped silhouette signs made of plywood, metal, or similar wood-like material that can withstand various weather conditions.

- A-Frame signs are not permitted near the curb area, in or near the center of the sidewalk, nor can they be placed in any way that would impede pedestrian traffic (i.e., minimum 4 feet of passage on sidewalk).

- The maximum size for rectangular A-Frame signs is 4 feet in height and 3 feet in width.

- Only one A-Frame sign per business (and only during business hours).
9. Freestanding (Monument) Signs

a. Between 5 to 10 percent of the sign area should be dedicated to identification of the street address.

b. Information on freestanding or monument signs should generally be limited to the project or primary business identification name and/or logo and address.

d. Monument signs shall have a well designed solid base structure that is architecturally compatible with the site.

Example of well-designed monument sign that is in scale with adjacent development and includes street address.

c. All free-standing (monument) signs shall be limited to a maximum height of ten (10') feet and have a sign area (face) of sixty square feet.

Good example of architecturally compatible signs.
e. Freestanding signs must be illuminated either by external fixtures designed to complement the appearance of the sign or halo-lit illumination.

f. Internal illumination may be permitted and shall be designed such that only text and logos illuminate.

g. Only one freestanding or monument sign is permitted per parcel or group of parcels functioning as a unit.

h. The inclusion of services and products offered should not be included on ground signs.

i. Avoid blocking any vehicular or pedestrian sight lines which might result in safety problems.

j. Freestanding signs shall be set back a minimum of five feet from a street property line, a minimum of five feet from an interior property line, and a minimum of 10 feet from the edge of a driveway.

k. Landscaping with automatic irrigation shall be provided at the base of the supporting structure equal to twice the area of one face of the sign or 75 square feet, whichever is greater. For example, 40 sq. ft. of sign area = 80 sq. ft. of landscaped area.

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

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

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

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

- Multi-tenants signs for shopping centers are restricted to a maximum height of 10'.
1. Auto Dealership Signs
   
   a. Maximum Sign Area and Height:
      - 125 sq. feet / 10 feet high for first sign
      - 75 sq. feet / 6 feet high for any additional approved freestanding sign
   
   b. Sign information should be limited to the following:
      - Auto brand name and/or logo
      - Special dealer recognition (e.g., Gold Medal Dealership)
   
   c. Solid bases, as shown on the Toyota/Scion sign to the right, are preferred to minimize the visual bulk of freestanding signs.
   
   d. Solid bases will be considered if their width and height are minimized as shown in the Volvo and the GMC Pontiac/Buick example to the right.
10. Sign Illumination

a. Interior illuminated *can signs* which include multiple letters within a single sign enclosure will not be allowed for any wall sign.

b. Neon wall signs may be allowed, but will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

c. Conceal all sign and sign lighting raceways and other connections.

d. Back-lit, halo-lit illumination, or reverse channel letters with halo illumination are highly encouraged for lighting purposes.

e. Projecting light fixtures used for externally illuminated signs should be simple and unobtrusive in appearance. They should not obscure the graphics of the sign.
f. Lighting for ground signs must be by direct spotlight illumination from fixtures mounted either at the top of the sign or on the ground below the sign. Fixtures must be shielded to avoid direct view of the bulbs.

11. Temporary Signs

Temporary signs can take the form of banners, window graphics, or as cards integrated with a window display. Temporary signs may contain written messages and should use a simple font that is easy to read.

Temporary signs is any sign, banner, valance or advertising display constructed of cloth, canvas, light fabric, cardboard, wallboard, or other light materials, with or without frames and not permanently mounted.

a. Permits are required for temporary signs.

b. Permits may be obtained for four non-consecutive fifteen-day periods per calendar year.

c. Temporary banners must be wall mounted.

d. Maximum size for temporary signs is 32 square feet.
e. A grand opening sign permit may be obtained upon opening a new business, this one time permit is valid for a thirty-day period.

f. Hot or cold air balloons, pennants, and flags are temporary signs, and must meet certain criteria (such as being attached to the building).

g. Temporary signs shall not cover more than 10% of the total window and door sign area visible from the exterior.

h. Temporary signs are permitted to contain no more than 5 square feet of text and shall not exceed 10 square feet in size.

i. Temporary signs should be made of durable materials and shall not incorporate fluorescent or intensely bright colors.

j. Temporary signs should be carefully designed and constructed, as they reflect on the quality of the business.

k. Temporary signs are to be displayed for no more than thirty days in a calendar year.
12. Master Sign Plans

A Master Sign Plan is intended to integrate project signs into the architectural design of the site, thereby creating an architectural statement of high quality. A Master Sign Plan provides a flexible means of applying and modifying the sign regulations in the zoning ordinance to ensure high quality in the design and display of multiple permanent signs for a project or use and to encourage creativity and excellence in the design of signs.

It is expected that the design quality of signs proposed under a Master Sign Plan will be of a superior quality and creativity to those that might result through the normal sign permit process. The provisions of a Master Sign Plan shall not include temporary banners.

The approval of a Master Sign Plan shall be required whenever any of the following circumstances exist:

- Whenever four or more separate nonresidential tenant spaces are created on the same parcel;
- Whenever four or more permanent non-exempt signs are proposed for a single use;
- Automobile dealerships;
- Non-residential development on parcels with any one public street frontage greater than 300 lineal feet.
- Whenever the Director determines that a Master Sign Plan is needed because of special project characteristics (e.g., the size of proposed signs, limited site visibility, a business within a business, the location of the site relative to major transportation routes, etc.) or when unique, creatively designed signs are being proposed and certain aspects of the sign’s design (e.g., animation) might not otherwise be allowed.

The Master Sign Plan shall be approved by the Planning Director if:

- Implementation will provide signage compatible with the surrounding development
- Implementation will result in architecture and graphics of a scale appropriate for the surrounding neighborhood
- Implementation will provide signage consistent with the architecture and site plan characteristics of the proposed development
- Implementation of the Master Sign Plan will result in a substantial reduction in the number and area of free standing signs associated with the project, as compared to strict compliance with the sign ordinance.
13. Electronic Message Centers

Electronic Message Centers provide a variable message sign that utilizes computer generated messages or some other electronic means of changing copy.

These signs include displays using incandescent lamps light emitting diodes (LEDs) or a flipper matrix.

Electronic Message Centers will be allowed on free-standing signs, and will be included in the calculation of the area of free-standing signs.

Electrical message centers shall not exceed ten feet in height.
14. Non-Conforming Signs

A non-conforming sign is an advertising structure or sign which was lawfully erected and maintained in compliance with the requirements in effect at the time, and which has subsequently come under new amended requirements and does not now completely comply.

a. Continuation and maintenance

- A legal, nonconforming sign may be continued, except as provided in Section C. below, or unless ordered discontinued, modified, or removed as a public nuisance in compliance with the Municipal Code.

- Routine maintenance and repairs may be performed on a nonconforming sign.

b. Alteration and enlargement

- Nonconforming signs shall not be altered, enlarged, or moved unless approval is first obtained by the Planning Department.

- If a nonconforming sign is destroyed by natural causes, it may not thereafter be repaired, reconstructed, or replaced except in conformity with all the provisions of these guidelines, and the remnants of the former sign structure shall be cleared from the land.

- A nonconforming sign shall be considered "destroyed" if it receives damage to an extent of more than fifty (50) percent of the sign's value immediately prior to the sign having received said damage

c. Elimination of nonconforming signs

- If the business, service, product or person advertised or identified by a legally nonconforming sign ceases to be conducted at that site for a period exceeding 90 days without being replaced by a new business, service, product or person, the non-conforming sign shall be classified an abandoned sign and removed.
15. Prohibited Signs

- Illuminated, highly reflective signs, beacons or spot lights which hamper the vision of motorists or bicyclists are not allowed, nor will other signs with flashing, moving, or swinging displays;

- Any sign, banner or display placed on any curb, sidewalk post, pole, hydrant bridge, tree, or other surface located on, over, or across any public street or within a public right-of-way (other than a government sign or permitted sign);

- Any banner placed on stakes on a property, unless otherwise permitted. Banners shall be permitted to be attached to buildings and existing signs only;

- Cabinet (can) signs, as shown below, that are mounted flush against a building wall, except for corporate logos. Cabinet signs with opaque backgrounds and illuminated letters are allowed as projecting signs only;

- Signs that imitate an official traffic sign or signal, or contain the words "stop," "go," "slow," "caution," "danger," "warning," or similar words, excepting construction signs and barricades, and except when the words are incorporated in the permanent name of a business;

- Advertisings, banners, bills, cards, notices, placards, posters, signs, stickers, or other devices designed to attract the attention of the public that are posted or otherwise affixed upon any street, street furniture, right-of-way, public sidewalk, crosswalk, curb, lamppost, fencing, hydrant, tree, alley, telephone pole, public telephone, lighting system, or other public alarm or communication system;

- Awnings that are back-lit (internally illuminated) so that the awning radiates light;

- Signs containing statements, words, pictures, or other representations that violate Section 311 et seq. of the Penal Code of the State;
• Signs that advertise an activity, business, service, or product no longer conducted or sold on the premises 45 days after the discontinuance or abandonment, except signs listed on, or eligible for, the City's historic sign inventory;

• Signs that blink, flash, or move in any manner, have any portions that move, or have the appearance of moving;

• Balloons, lighter-than-air devices, inflatable signs and objects, except as may be allowed through a Temporary Sign Permit;

• Banners, pennants, ribbons, spinners, streamers, or other similar devices, except as specifically allowed through a Temporary Sign Permit;

• Signs mounted on the roof of a building, including mansard roofs, and similar architectural roof-like elements;

• Signs that are displayed on the exterior of a building and are made of materials that are impermanent and will not stand exposure to the weather;

• Outdoor advertising signs (billboards);

• Signs erected so that any portion of its surface or supports interfere with the free use of a fire escape, exit, or standpipe, or obstruct a required door, stairway, ventilator, or window;
Pole signs are prohibited.