

# **Downtown Brockton**

## **Design Guidelines for Signs**



**Office of the City Planner, City of Brockton**

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## Introduction

The revitalization of downtown Brockton is important to every citizen. The traditional commercial center of the city, downtown today is the home of numerous governmental offices, financial and religious institutions, industries, social organizations, and a variety of small and large businesses. Downtown is also a local and regional transportation center and provides residential opportunities for many of Brockton's citizens.

The design of building signs in downtown Brockton should reflect its past and provides direction for its future. Existing signs range from well located and appropriately scaled wall signs, to signs located on storefront awnings. They include signs painted on or hung inside display windows, and a few hanging signs.

Some of downtown's signs are located on buildings that have been recognized for their architectural and historic importance by being listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Their materials, scale, details, and ornamentation contribute to the architectural character of the buildings as well as effectively promote business.

Design guidelines are created by cities concerned with the appearance of business signs and how that appearance contributes to economic revitalization and a sense of civic pride. Over two thousand towns and cities all across the country have adopted guidelines through ordinances, as part of economic development programs, or in other ways. They help to protect and enhance the quality of business signs, as well as the design of buildings, landscapes, and urban spaces. They provide a basis for objective decisions about the appropriate design of existing and new signs.

However, design guidelines cannot exist in a vacuum. If they are intended to guide development, they should be part of an overall revitalization strategy for a downtown. Design guidelines should reflect the quality of existing signs, buildings, and urban design in a downtown. They should accommodate the functional



and economic requirements of businesses, government, institutions, and other uses in downtown. And, they should provide guidance rather than prescriptions for future changes.

*Downtown Brockton: Design Guidelines for Signs* is intended to assist property owners, tenants, architects, developers, and others to understand the important characteristics of existing business signs and how those characteristics should be used to guide their rehabilitation and the construction of new signs.

*Downtown Brockton: Design Guidelines for Signs* is intended to improve the appearance of the existing and new signs by being sensitive to quality, effectiveness, and cost. Unlike sign guidelines written for historic districts, which may dictate expensive materials, these sign guidelines recognize that less expensive designs, construction methods, and materials can be used to create quality business signs.

*Downtown Brockton: Design Guidelines for Signs* is based on the design philosophy contained in *The Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*, which encourages sensitive treatment of historic buildings while allowing change to occur. The Secretary of the Interior's guidelines were developed to assist property owners, tenants, architects, and others involved in rehabilitating National Register buildings by recommending designs, construction methods, and treatment of existing materials appropriate to historic buildings including signs. The Secretary of the Interior's guidelines also discuss inappropriate designs and methods of construction and treatments that will result in physical deterioration or loss of important architectural character. However, the Secretary of the Interior's guidelines do not dictate any specific design or stylistic approach, material, or method of construction or treatment; rather they seek to preserve the best of the existing architecture and signs.

## Downtown Brockton

Brockton was the north parish of the Town of Bridgewater until 1821 when it became North Bridgewater. The community's birth as a separate town came soon after the beginning of Brockton's famous shoe industry. Legend has it that the shoe industry began in 1811 when Micah Faxon carried 100 pairs of shoes on horseback from Brockton to Boston. In those early days, all shoes were hand pegged in the home, thus there were no large factories as we now know them. Employment levels were not inconsequential though, since by 1837 over one thousand "hands" were employed by the town's shoe industry. Industrial expansion was greatly enhanced by the opening of the Old Colony Railroad in 1846 (first known as the Randolph and Bridgewater Railroad).

Two events further guaranteed Brockton's prominence as a shoe manufacturing center. One was the invention of the McKay Sewing Machine in 1858, which further accelerated the movement from home industry to factories. The second was the demand for boots and shoes brought about by the Civil War. It is claimed that half of the Union Army was shod by North Bridgewater.



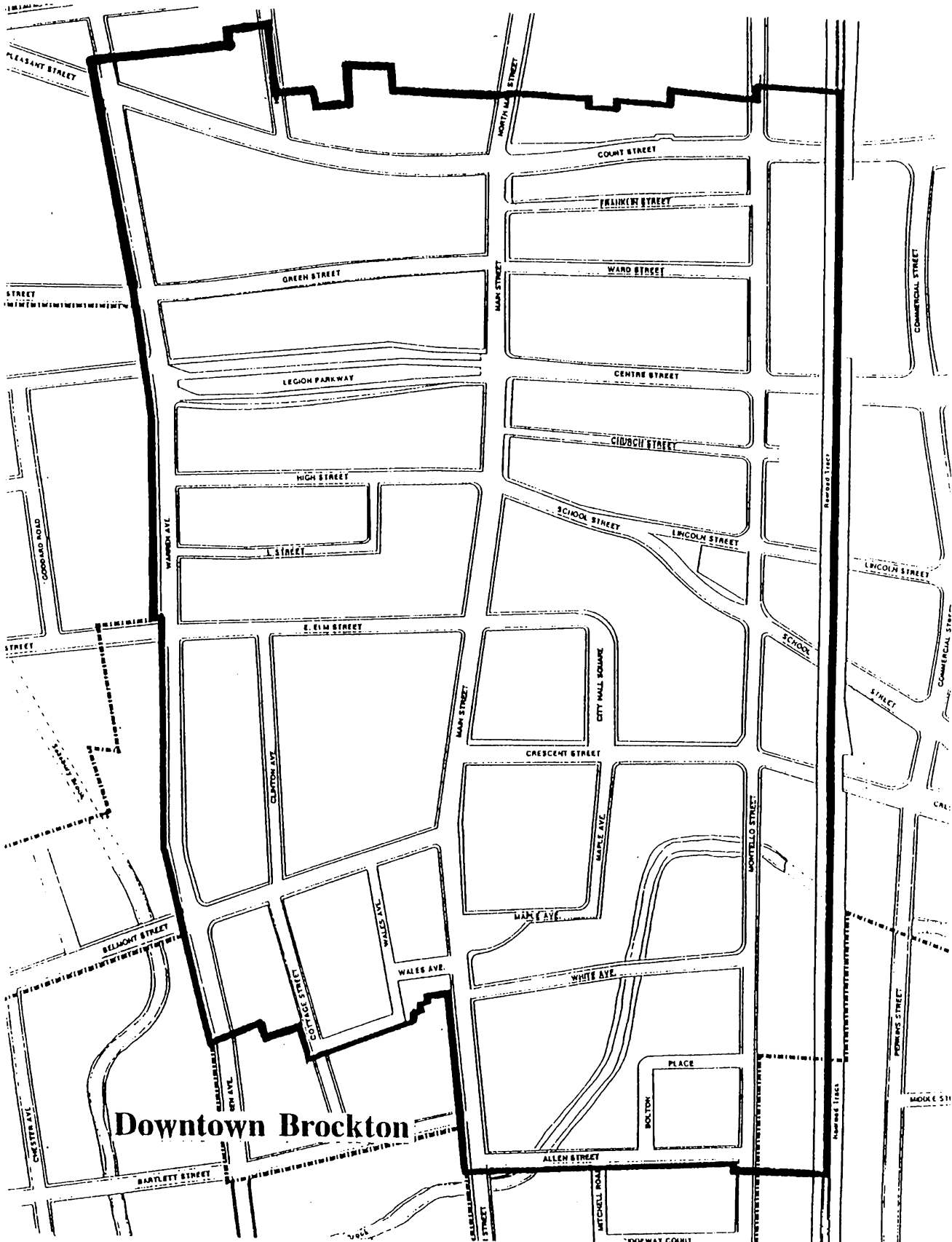
*Downtown Brockton at the turn of the century.*

By the 1860s, the town had grown to 6,500 people living in four villages. The largest was Centre Village (now downtown) that was described at the time as “a large and growing place . . . (its) facilities for trade are not surpassed by any in the country.” The second most important village was Campello, meaning “small plain”. Always known as a center for the manufacture of shoes, cabinets, and musical instruments, it was almost totally destroyed in the fire of 1853.

Another early village, Sprague’s Factory Village, was situated 3/4 of a mile east of Centre Village on today’s Crescent Street. It contained a large water-powered mill owned by Chandler Sprague. In close proximity to the mill, was Sprague’s mansion, workers’ housing, a school, and several smaller factories. The fourth village was known as North-West Bridgewater, located along the Boston to Taunton Turnpike (now Pearl Street). It was primarily a farming community, best remembered for its countryside and magnificent views.

Rapid industrial growth continued in Brockton between the Civil War and World War I. It was during this time that many mill buildings were constructed near the railroad tracks, with commercial, residential, and other types of buildings surrounding. During the 60 years between 1860 and 1920, Brockton’s population increased ten-fold to over 66,000.

With the end of World War I came a period of stagnation for Brockton. Businesses began to move south where costs were lower and profits higher. Population growth leveled off and construction of new buildings slowed dramatically. Growth was not to occur again until after World War II when the automobile age spurred suburban growth in the city.





## Guidelines for Business Signs

Business signs are important architectural components of commercial buildings in downtown Brockton. Well designed signs contribute to the visual appeal of the district as well as allow customers and clients to find businesses. Poorly designed signs detract from the appearance of downtown and suggest a less than quality business.

Common problems with poorly designed signs include excessive size, illegible graphics, poor color selection, and improper location. In addition too many signs for a single business produce visual clutter and compete with each other for attention.

A good business sign should convey a simple clear message. Lettering styles and graphics should reinforce the nature of the business and complement the architecture of the storefront and facade. Signs should be located for legibility and fit within the architectural surrounds of doors, windows, awnings or storefronts. Their colors should complement those on the building. If lighted, the lighting source should produce true color rendition and be shielded so as not to cause glare.

Many different types of business signs occur in downtown Brockton. Among the most common are:

Applied Wall Signs

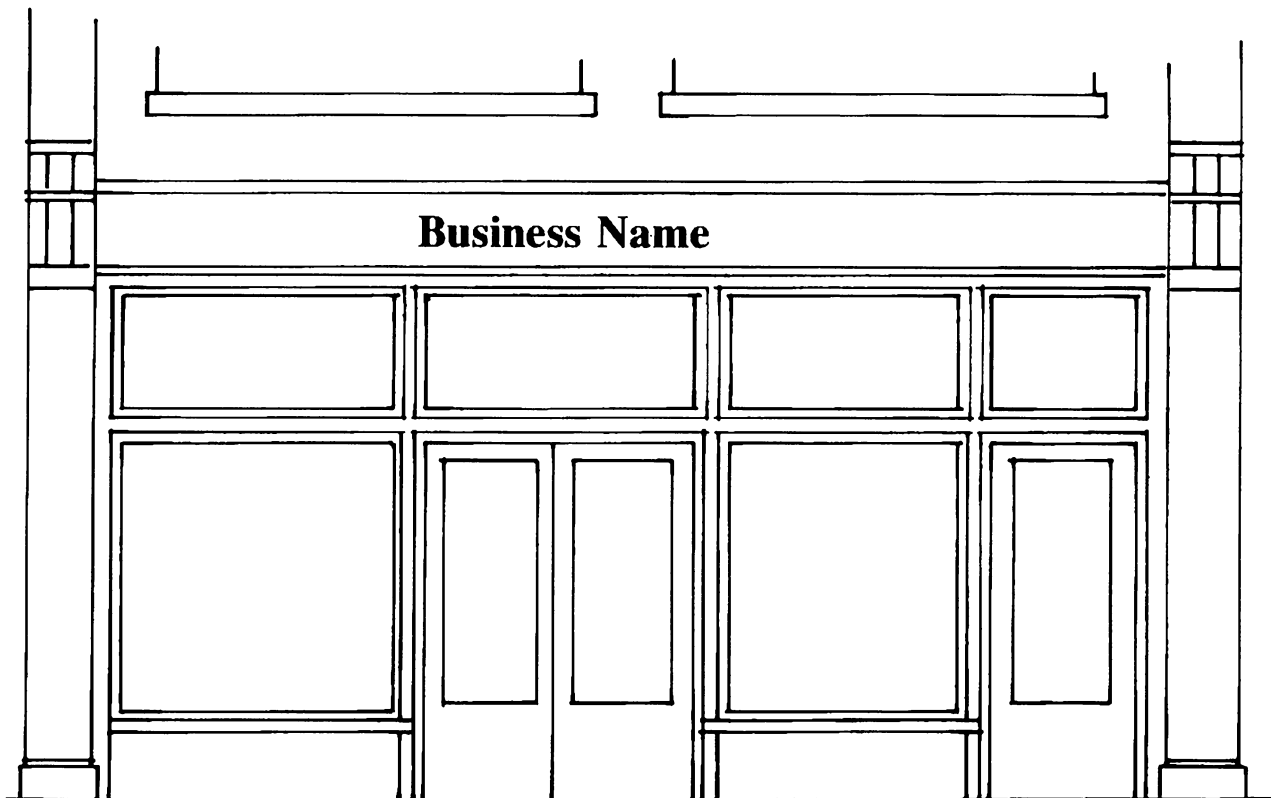
Hanging Signs

Display Window and Door Entry  
Signs

Awnings Signs

## Applied Wall Signs

Applied wall signs are typically located on the signboard area of a storefront or just below the storefront cornice. They may be painted on the facade or constructed of metal, wood or other appropriate materials and applied to the storefront. If lighted, they should be lighted from above using shields to protect pedestrians from glare.



*Applied wall signs should be located on the storefront cornice.*

## Recommended

1. Applied wall signs should typically be located flush on the signboard, below the storefront cornice, and centered on the entry to the ground floor business.
2. Applied wall signs should typically contain only the name of the business, or if appropriate, its logo.
3. No more than 65% of the signboard area should be devoted to the sign. Lettering or logos should be a minimum of 8" high, a maximum of 18" high, and fit within the signboard area.
4. Exterior lighting, using incandescent or fluorescent sources, should be used if the sign is illuminated.

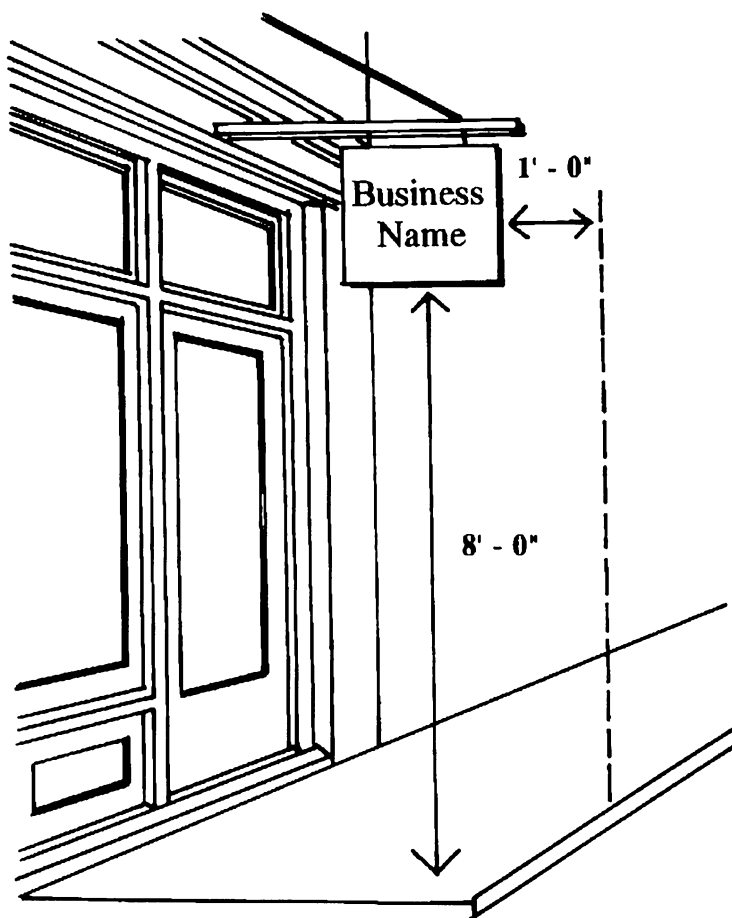
## Not Recommended

1. Applied wall signs projecting more than 6" from the face of the signboard.
2. Using nationally distributed signs.
3. Using vacuum-formed signs.
4. Using internally lighted signs.
5. Using flashing or moving-light signs.



## Hanging Signs

Small hanging signs are effective means of communicating the name of a ground floor business to pedestrians. Typically they are located over the entry to the business. For legibility, hanging signs should be located at least 20'-0" apart.



*Hanging signs are appropriate in downtown.*

## Recommended

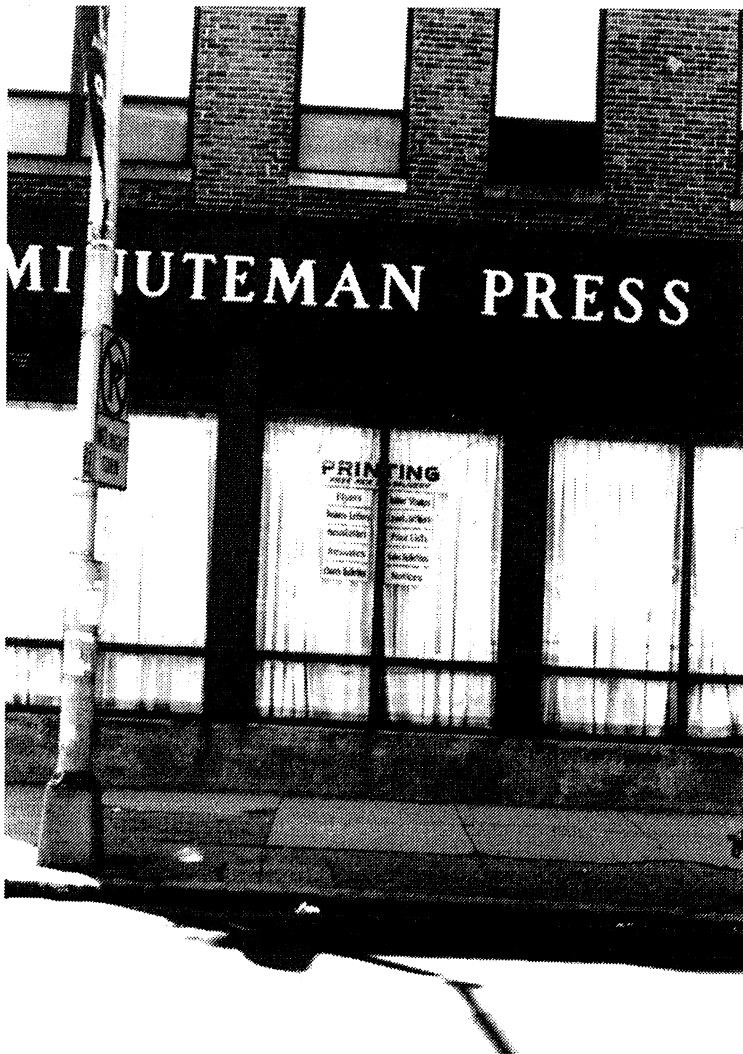
1. Hanging signs should be securely mounted perpendicular to the facade, with a minimum clearance above the sidewalk of 8'-0", project no more than 5'-0" from the face of the building, and be a minimum of 1'-0" behind the plane of the curb..
2. Hanging signs should be a maximum of 6.5 square feet.
3. Illumination for hanging signs should be external and shielded to protect pedestrians from glare.

## Not Recommended

1. Using flashing or moving-light signs.
2. Using nationally distributed signs.
3. Using vacuum-formed signs.
4. Using internally lighted signs.

## Display Window and Door Signs

Display windows and glass entry doors are often used as the location for permanent business name, product or service signs. Display windows are also often used as the location for temporary signs announcing sales or other special events. If well located, designed, and limited in number, signs on display windows and entry doors can be effective communicators to pedestrians.



*A limited number of signs is more effective than covering the entire display window.*

## Recommended

1. Display windows and glass entry door signs should be located and designed so that they do not obscure visibility into the ground floor.
2. Permanent signs located on display windows should occupy not more than 15% of the glass area. Temporary signs located on display windows should occupy not more than 10% of the glass area.
3. Permanent signs on glass doors should occupy no more than 10% of the glass area. No temporary signs should be located on glass doors.
4. Gold leaf and paint are appropriate materials for permanent signs applied to glass. Individual metal or wood lettering, open logo, or signs applied to plexiglass are appropriate for permanent signs hung inside display windows.
5. Paper or cardboard is appropriate for temporary signs located inside display windows.

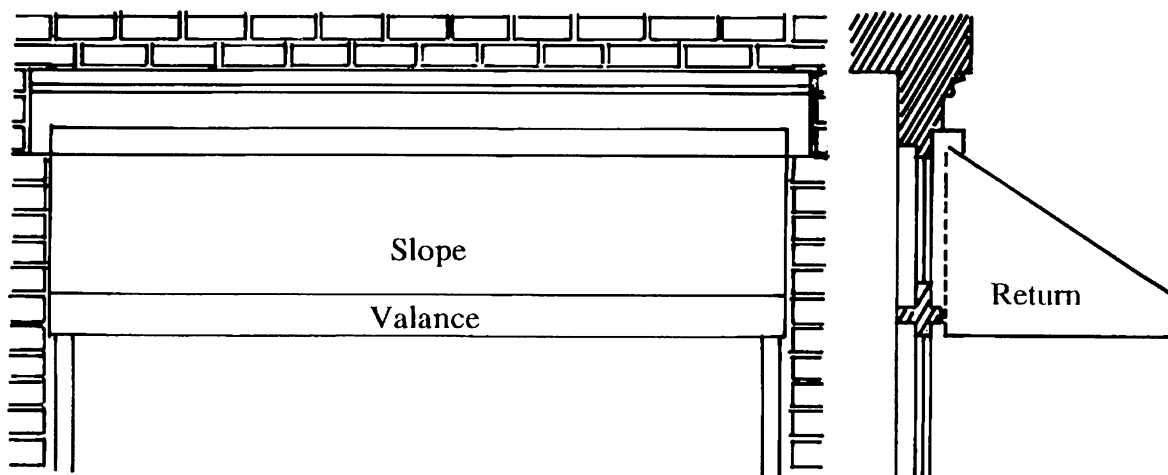
## Not Recommended

1. Using solid permanent signs and signboards inside or applied to glass.
2. Using vinyl letters.
3. Using vacuum-formed signs inside display windows.
4. Using nationally distributed signs.
5. Using flashing or moving-light signs.

## Awning Signs

Business name signs and logos may also be located on awning slopes, returns, and valances. To be legible, they should be in a color contrasting with that of the background or be outlined in a contrasting color.

Awning signs may be silkscreened onto the awning fabric, be made of awning fabric and sewn onto the awning, or be screened onto a backlighted translucent panel sewn into the awning valance.



*Awning signs can be effective and enliven storefronts.*

## Recommended

1. Awning signs should occupy no more than 50% of the slope, or 65% of the return or valance.
2. Lettering and logos on valances and returns should be a minimum of 8" high and a maximum of 14" high. On slopes lettering should be a minimum of 12" high and a maximum of 24" high.

## Not Recommended

1. Backlighting the entire awning.



## Assistance

For additional information on *Downtown Brockton: Design Guidelines for Signs*, or to obtain copies of *Downtown Brockton: Design Guidelines for Buildings* or *Downtown Brockton: Design Guidelines for Urban Design* contact:

Office of the City Planner  
City Hall  
45 School Street  
Brockton, Massachusetts 02401

For information on zoning or building permits contact:

Building Department  
City Hall  
45 School Street  
Brockton, Massachusetts 02401



