

## Aesthetic Context: Designing for Place

*By Mark Hinshaw, FAIA, FAICP*

As a discipline within the profession of planning, urban design has evolved significantly over the past several decades. Until the 1990s, most community plans emphasized policies associated with land use, transportation, housing, and public facilities. Policies were implemented by zoning regulations and capital improvement programs. When urban design efforts were included, they tended to be somewhat narrow in focus, dealing with downtowns or historic areas. And it was mainly in larger cities that urban design elements were addressed, if at all.

In 1972, the City of San Francisco published a landmark document, the *Urban Design Plan*. Led by Allan Jacobs, director of the planning department, this document demonstrated that urban design principles could be usefully applied to many aspects and geographic sectors of a community.

Particularly noteworthy was the attention it gave to respecting the unique character of San Francisco's neighborhoods, suggesting ways to ensure that new development was compatible. It remains a model for addressing urban design concepts on a city-wide basis in a thorough, thoughtful, and graphically engaging manner.

In *Design as Public Policy* Jonathan Barnett (1974) presented a case for applying urban design principles in many aspects of city policies and regulations, and advocated design-oriented codes that would achieve public benefits through incentives offered to developers. While that book dealt principally with intense urban development, its basic approach has applicability to the regulation of signs.

In spite of these seminal pieces of work, community plans in the 70s and early 80s were viewed more as broad policy documents governing the location, intensity, and servicing of development rather than providing specific directions for its character and quality. Whether traditional comprehensive plans or longer-range strategic plans, they rarely concentrated on three-dimensional, visual aspects. This paralleled a shift in planning education away from physical planning toward skill sets associated with infrastructure, social needs, economic analysis, and demographic projections. In part, this movement was a reaction to the often heavy-handed and insensitive legacy of urban renewal when sweeping reconstruction was advanced as the way to improve communities.

While this trend had many merits, not the least of which was broadening the purview of planning in community development, the relative inattention to the physical environment has, over time, resulted in a degrading of the quality of many places. Rapid suburban expansion, linear development along commercial corridors, large-scale regional shopping centers, and look-alike apartment and office complexes have transformed hundreds of communities. Development standards have, in the past, emphasized the movement and storage of automobiles, often to the exclusion of other values. Development patterns have been transferred from one community to another with little deference to local history, climate, vegetation, or topography. Even older, more established metropolitan areas have seen new development that is more "suburban" than "urban" in character: large, boxy, freestanding buildings surrounded by expanses of asphalt. Finally, there has been a gradual shift in the retail sector toward national chains and franchises with uniform, "trademark" designs. The combined effect has been to produce places that look very much alike.

Communities have started to look at urban design techniques that can preserve, recapture, or establish a character to produce a sense of place. Communities of all types and sizes, from urban neighborhoods, to high-growth suburban centers, to small towns, are seeking out tools that address the form and quality of the built environment. There is an increasingly widespread desire for better compatibility between older and newer development, a greater sense of connectivity between developments, and a respect for established character. This is reflected in the growing interest in New Urbanism, with its emphasis on forms of development that are mixed use, compact, transit oriented, and walkable. Many communities—even those that are relatively well established—are beginning to look at ways of reflecting these principles.



Marya Morris

*The Macadam Corridor is one of several design overlay districts in Portland, Oregon, to which special sign, landscaping, and design guidelines apply. The primary objective of the overlay is to protect views of the Willamette River. Signs regulations for the corridor permit low-profile monument signs, awnings, and wall signs.*



Marya Morris

## POLICIES

Increasingly, urban design is being addressed in adopted community plans, whether for cities as a whole or for smaller geographic units. In addition to the traditional settings, such as downtowns, historic areas, and waterfronts, urban design policies have been directed to shopping districts, commercial corridors, transit hubs, brownfield sites, and neighborhoods. Within these areas, urban design policies have been used to address many different subjects, including gateway treatments, view preservation, landscaping, tree preservation, streetscape character, building bulk and form, roofline treatment, and architectural scale. Comprehensive plans for mature cities like Portland, Oregon, emerging suburban centers like Bellevue, Washington, and smaller communities like Bozeman, Montana, contain sections that address substantive urban design issues.

Urban design has also found its way into other subjects. Corridor planning now typically includes an analysis of visual quality in addition to moving vehicles more effectively. Mixing uses together is often seen as accomplishing urban design objectives. Urban design is viewed as an important part of adaptively reusing older structures and neighborhoods. There is a renewed interest in creating or restoring public spaces to be safe, active, and appealing—clearly a purview of urban design. Care in the design of signs—both public and private—is seen as a part of a larger effort in improving the quality of various places within a community.

## PROGRAMS

Of particular interest to planners and public officials is the desire to create districts and corridors that reflect a distinct character. In addition to fostering specific physical improvements, city officials have looked to regulations as a way of helping achieve this. Typically, this has translated into two related regulatory techniques: zoning regulations that are "tailored" to the characteristics of a given area and design guidelines that are intended to encourage compatibility and creativity.

The former technique often relies upon "overlay" districts to provide an added level of detail to regulations that may be applied in other districts. The latter technique differs substantially from conventional zoning in that a review process must be used to determine whether an individual proposal meets both the letter and the spirit of the guidelines.

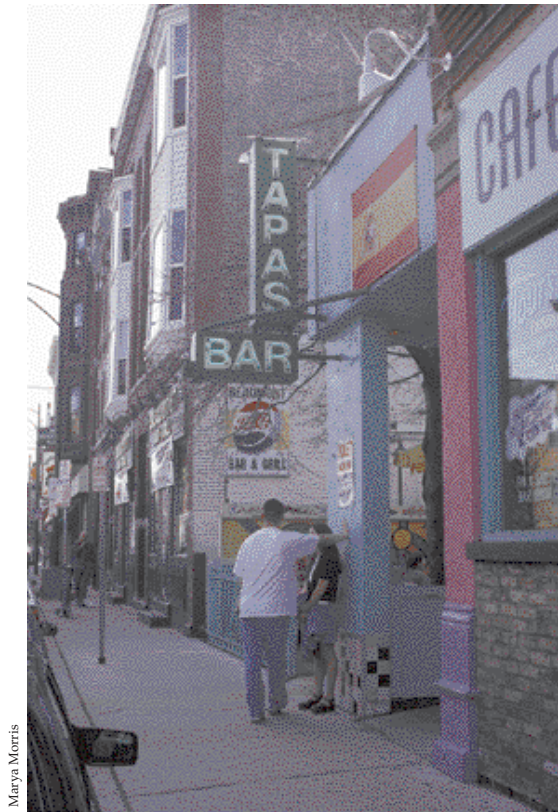
Both of these tools have potential relevance to regulating signs in a manner that recognizes context. Several years ago, San Diego, California, recrafted its zoning regulations to "tailor" them to specific areas. More recently, Tacoma, Washington, has adopted location-specific regulations for what they call "X" districts, mixed-use centers with design standards attached. And the small town of Bainbridge Island, Washington, has been using overlay zones for its town center that include references to signs as part of a set of design guidelines.

Neither approach, however, need be overly complex or complicated to administer. Standards and guidelines should be described briefly in plain English with key terms defined. Illustrations are useful. Review processes can be administrative, although some communities prefer to use appointed boards. For the regulation of signs, it may be better to use an administrative approach since the issues are not as involved as with entire buildings. In addition, the need for timeliness in review so that a tenant can begin to operate usually precludes the use of a citizen board.

The objective is to produce signs that recognize context; this involves stimulating creativity as much as it involves checking for compliance with dimensional standards. Indeed, standards, by themselves, cannot



*Design guidelines for signs should promote creativity, not uniformity. They are inherently flexible in order to reflect the specific attributes of context. Shown here, varied signage in a mixed-use commercial/residential district on Chicago's north side.*



Marya Morris



Martin Ince

*An attempt to create a unifying theme for signage in this strip mall has resulted in a bland lifeless commercial building that isn't serving customers or the business tenants well. Although the signage is legible, the excessive uniformity makes each business indistinguishable from the next.*

produce good design. There needs to be a spirit of "collaboration" between the agency and the sign proponent to produce a result that benefits the community as well as the business.

Two caveats are necessary here. First, while the focus of this report is on signs, standards and guidelines need to be devised to address other issues, such as building orientation and form, the location and landscaping of parking lots, the provision of pedestrian-oriented features, and the design of public spaces. Signs are part and parcel of these subjects, and regulations governing them should be considered as a part of a larger package of tools that direct the quality of the environment. Second, it is important to recognize that guidelines are not the same as standards. They are intended to promote creativity, not uniformity. They are inherently flexible in order to reflect the specific attributes of context. They are also intended to frame decisions and limit individual, personal opinion. If guidelines are crafted to be clearly understood by users, they will have passed one of the tests to being legally defensible. (See PAS Report 454, *Design Review*, for a more detailed discussion of these issues.)

## PROJECTS

Successful urban design involves the encouragement of projects that can enhance the physical setting. Streetscape enhancements, including landscaping, street furnishings, public art, and signage, can be powerful in establishing a sense of place. Public places, including sidewalks, schools, libraries, police and fire stations, and community centers, are increasingly being looked at to provide a focus for a neighborhood or district. Local government could combine the construction or renovation of public facilities with an areawide effort to enhance signage, both public and

private. Taking a holistic approach to all aspects of the built environment results in a place that many people can benefit from in tangible ways. When a place feels like it has been cared for, people enjoy spending time there, and purchasing goods and services. By the same token, businesses feel comfortable investing in such a location. In this sense, the issues of urban design in general and sign design in particular are not just aesthetic, but economic as well.

### **ENGAGING THE PUBLIC IN URBAN DESIGN**

Planners frequently present regulatory issues in both verbal and graphic form within official meetings. Typically, this consists of a report prepared by staff or a consultant that is discussed and debated. However, this form of communication does not allow for much interaction or learning by various interested parties. While common, this manner of presenting a proposed set of regulations can lead to contention and polarization, with threats of legal challenge. Sometimes this conventional process works, but, increasingly, interested parties—the "stakeholders" associated with an issue—desire more involvement. Furthermore, urban design is concerned with subjects that benefit from an understanding of scale, views, topography, and the texture of a community, all of which are difficult to portray and discuss completely in a typical public meeting. Several other techniques can be used to result in a "mutual discovery" of contextual characteristics that are relevant to the design of signs.

#### **Field Trips**

Field trips can be enormously useful in allowing people from different perspectives to directly experience the full dimensions of a place. They can be useful in helping people to understand a problem as well as to learn from a successful example. It is often possible to find a nearby community that has grappled with the subject previously and to see the results on the ground. It is instructive to observe how people are actually using a place, rather than to imagine it in the abstract. It is also helpful to see what has happened over time—how businesses have adjusted and what other improvements or investments have been made. Signs cannot be separated from other aspects of the environment that can encourage—or discourage—economic activity.

The intent of a field trip, however, is not to copy someone else's approach, but rather to learn from successes and mistakes and to infuse a process with a sense of reality. Furthermore, few communities are "perfect"; there are often many lessons about what not to do as well as what to do.

Obviously, it is not possible for every interested party to be involved in a field trip. Therefore, it is necessary to compose a committee or task force representing a cross-section of community interests. It would, of course, be possible to merely indicate the example and have people visit the location individually. But this is not as productive as a collective experience. A designated group of people visiting another place has several important benefits. First, everyone sees and hears the same information. Second, there is an opportunity to exchange observations, which often leads to a discovery that there is more similarity than difference of opinion. Third, a collective spirit usually develops in which people drop their separate "labels." Finally, the potential resolution of the issues at hand seems more realistic and doable.

Field trips do, however, need to be managed and organized carefully. Much information needs to be transmitted in a short period of time. The route needs to be traveled and timed in advance, so time is not wasted. Representatives of local government and the business community should be sought out for personal "testimonials."

It is also useful to capture the key observations and conclusions as shortly as possible after a trip. One way of doing this is to have a quick "debriefing" at the conclusion of the trip in which the reactions of participants are recorded on flip charts. Another technique is to give the participants inexpensive, throw-away cameras, and to ask them to photograph examples that appealed to them and bring them to future meetings.

Field trips are an opportunity to convey an enormous amount of information in a way that is at once visceral, intellectual, and memorable. They can be very effective in focusing the effort of a select group of people.

### **Depictions and Simulations**

It is not always practical to conduct field trips. Therefore, other techniques can be used to effectively communicate information about a place. One method is to take slide images, organizing them according to issue or location, and to present the findings in an illustrated narrative. (A variant on this is to use a video camera, but the difficulties of presenting information in this form to large groups often prevents its use.)

Graphic imagery is today aided by computer-based formats, such as PowerPoint. Images are scanned and combined with text to convey information and proposals in a compelling way. The technology associated with this form is becoming increasingly common as costs come down and earlier technical complexities are being resolved.

This form of presentation also has distinct advantage over slides in that the room need not be dark; discussion can be held so that people can see one another. The important role of text in a presentation cannot be overstated. Text placed next to images directs the audience's attention to the points being made. But, such text should be very brief, containing, typically, no more than three to five words for each point. Oral presentation can provide embellishments. There have been surveys conducted using slide images shown to viewers, asking for their reactions or numerical "ratings." Without verbal information to draw attention to particular themes, issues, or attributes, it is difficult to tell what people are actually reacting to. It is also possible for the person creating the images to bias (even unintentionally) the results by presenting "good" examples in a well-lighted and well-composed manner and "bad" examples in a poorer manner. In these visual surveys, there is also no opportunity for discussion. Information about the context can also be distorted by using a lens or photographic technique that exaggerates the situation, such as the often-used technique of the telephoto lens shot that compresses numerous signs together. For the discussion of the context to be useful and fair, images need to be as accurate as possible.

Hand-drawn renderings are useful in conveying certain types of information, especially broad concepts and diagrams. Renderings can help convey the essential idea of a proposal by giving it an appearance of being in a real context. However, renderings can also be deceiving. Renderers typically want to show subjects in the best light possible. Extraneous information is often omitted, when there may be important aspects of the surroundings that need to be known. For example, illustrations of signs typically focus upon the proposed sign and do not show other signs or structures that might be nearby that could be important in assessing the context. Worse are illustrations that show the subject from an angle not usually seen by a person, such as a "bird's eye" view. Finally, renderings are expensive to produce by hand. They are more useful for marketing purposes than for objective analysis.

Computer simulation has much to offer in portraying, economically and accurately, information about an issue or a proposal. Programs such as PhotoShop allow images of existing conditions to be modified to show

various "after" situations. The proposal can be "drawn" in, or similar examples can be inserted into an image. The result seems very real and all background information is intact and accurate. This method also allows for alternative proposals to be constructed and compared in a relatively quick and cost-effective way.

### **Workshops**

Workshops take a wide range of forms. There are "passive" forms that demand little from the participants. These sometimes are called "open houses." Essentially they involve displaying information and proposals so that viewers can gain a quick overview. Displays typically are accompanied by staff or consultants who can answer questions from individuals. Sometimes, participants are invited to record comments on flip-charts, clipboards, or survey forms. The main advantage of this type of workshop is that it is a relaxed, one-on-one form of communication. It avoids the "soapbox" dynamic that sometimes occurs in meetings in which some vocal attendees with an agenda attempt to dominate the proceedings. It suffers, however, from the fact that participants cannot hear others' comments and questions.

A more interactive form of workshop is one that involves a selected audience. This can be a steering committee or a selected cross-section of people from the community. It is best to "empower" such a group through some official status so that the members feel that their time and contribution is valued. The group participates in a discussion of issues, with presentations of information and alternatives by staff or consultants. Maps, drawings, diagrams, and other materials are distributed in advance. Sometimes diagrams or simple sketches are prepared during the discussion. This type of workshop can benefit from being managed by a facilitator who focuses the discussion, makes sure that everyone has a chance to speak, and ensures that the agenda is followed.

An even more interactive workshop involves assigning a task force specific tasks to accomplish, with a timeline and regular meetings. This "working group" method usually requires a considerable amount of preparation by staff to ensure productivity at each meeting. In this case, a facilitator is definitely advisable, along with a person who can record the discussion and decisions. This method also requires participants to commit to devoting a considerable amount of personal time in attending meetings. It is common for such a working group to feel that it needs more time to work out certain issues, especially contentious ones. Rarely is the original, often ambitious, schedule maintained, as participants think of additional subjects or questions to pursue.

A term that is often confused with workshops is the "charette." This is a French word that derives from the behavior of architecture students in Paris who waited until the last minute to finish assignments. As the cart (charette) passed by to pick up their work, they would jump on to continue finishing. Today, the term charette refers to a group of people doing a lot of work very quickly. Most of the time charettes involve a group of professionals who are invited and assembled to address a specific issue and develop a proposal. Sometimes this process is open to public observation; sometimes they are closed to allow participants to focus more intensely without distraction. The advantage is that a considerable amount of creative work can be accomplished in a short period of time. The drawback is that, in the speed of work, problems or local situations can be misunderstood and impractical solutions can be advanced. One check on this approach is to have the charette team present preliminary findings to a committee or task force before they are released to broader public distribution.



## RESEARCH ON SIGNS AND URBAN DESIGN

By Marya Morris

The lack of treatment of signage issues in urban design planning is reflected in the relatively small amount of research and critical thought by planners, architects, or designers on the role of signs in the built environment. The exception is the a multitude of studies on signage wayfinding systems for major institutions, such as campuses, hospitals, entertainment complexes, and other similar uses. Three major studies that address on-premise commercial signage are described here.

*Signs in the City.* A policy study conducted by Kevin Lynch et al., *Signs in the City* was intended to provide a basis for understanding the role of signs in the city's image, appearance, and design. The aim was to develop a public policy that coordinates all communication efforts "in the light of goals most desirable to sender, receiver, and city alike." The report was the first recognition by planners or architects of the role of signs in the city, and made the following specific recommendation:

In order to be able to plan the improvement of communication flow in the city, it is necessary that the sign policy be coordinated with any plan which may exist for improving the physical design of the environment. The objectives of a sign policy should reflect the objectives of the comprehensive plan.

The study links signage to Lynch's five-element system of "imageability" developed to define the elements of urban form (Lynch 1961). The five elements are paths, edges, nodes, districts, and landmarks. Lynch's taxonomy was developed by surveying residents in three cities on their observations about the physical form of the city in which they lived.

*Paths* are linear routes along which the people move and observe the city. Streets, sidewalks, transit routes, and expressways are typical paths.

*Edges* are linear elements that form boundaries or borders. Walls, shorelines, and the city limits are all examples of edges.

*Districts* are medium-to-large sections of a city, which a resident mentally "enters"; districts have an identifiable characteristic.

*Nodes* are areas of concentration or intersection, such as a high-density commercial area or a juncture of two major transportation routes.

*Landmarks* are external reference points, such as a monument, building, sign, or mountain. An observer does not enter a landmark as he or she does with a node or district, but instead uses it as a point of reference.

The positive and negative qualities of a city, as expressed in the five elements, and the complex interactions among them, are assessed to determine the desired attributes of community form. Design standards and guidelines are then used to support and reinforce the desirable attributes. *Signs in the City* makes specific reference to signage in three of these elements:

1. *Districts.* With regard to districts, Lynch recommended that sign controls be set up on a district-by-district basis. The districts would vary in intensity of signs, in types of messages, and in standards or orderliness and conformity. As an example, an entertainment district may allow stationary and moving signs of high intensity while a residential district may allow only low-intensity stationary signs. (Lynch defined "intensity" of a sign as the distance from which it can be read; therefore, signs with large letters are more intense.) (continued)



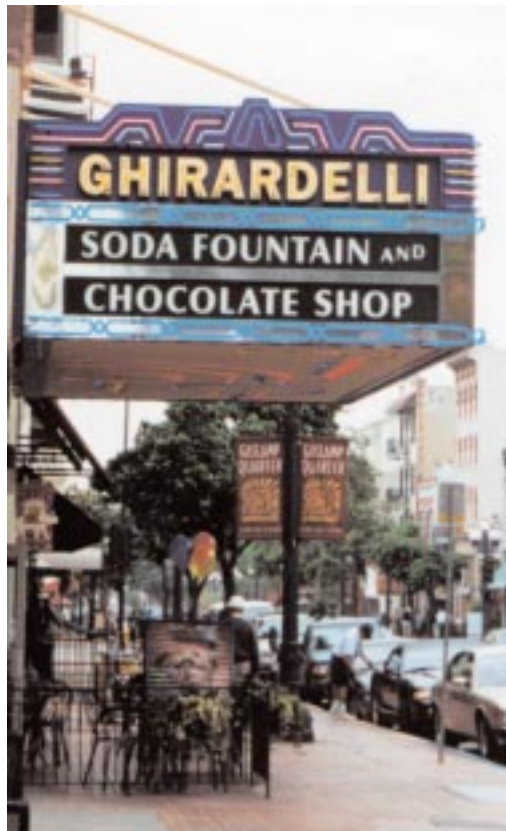
2. *Landmarks*. With regard to landmarks, Lynch noted that there would be certain locations where high-intensity signs would be of assistance in city orientation and wayfinding. In such locations, “distinctive signs could be used to identify certain streets,” and “roof signs could be used to locate certain nodal points in the city.”
3. *Paths* (also referred to by Lynch as “sequences”). Lynch recommended that sign control be devised to result in “meaningful sequences.” For example, sign intensity along a corridor could increase on approaching a business district. Also recommended is a system by which the density of signs would vary with the maximum permitted speed of the roadway.

Many of the ideas Lynch and Appleyard express in this document have found a place in modern sign regulations and design guidelines. They recommend, for example, that the artistic value of signs be improved and that there be a better relationship between signs and architecture. However, a major aspect of Lynch’s recommended programs that has not stood the test of time was that signs should be classified and regulated according to message content.

*Learning from Las Vegas*. Viewing the Las Vegas strip as the archetype of the American commercial strip, architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour (1996) inventoried and studied the elements of the built form of Las Vegas in the early 1970s. Eyeing the strip as the quintessential main street USA, the study concluded that modern architecture should be more responsive to the needs and activities of “common” people and reflective of our automobile-dominated culture. *Learning from Las Vegas*, the book that resulted from that study, deals extensively with signs and addresses their functions as roadside communication devices, art, sculpture, and a form of hyperbolic expression not just by the casinos and hotels but also by everyday businesses like gas stations, supermarkets, and restaurants.

*City Signs and Lights*. A policy study led by architect Stephen Carr for the Boston Redevelopment Authority (1971), analyzed the problems and potential of all signs and lights, both public and private. *City Signs and Lights* recommended a system of “information zoning” in which, for the purposes of signs and lights, the city would be divided into three zones: special information districts, general information districts, and local information districts. Special information districts are areas of high population density and economic activity or of specific historic, environmental, or other significance. Such districts would be “few in number” and the city would exercise central control over the area but would work with the affected groups in each area to develop special guidelines, incentives, prototype designs, and review procedures. General information districts would comprise almost all other parts of the city. These areas would be subject to “a simple code, easily administered with a minimum of discretionary review.” And, finally, the study recommends the formation of local information districts in which a neighborhood organization or planning council would be given discretion to develop a subset of guidelines for signs and lights that would be applicable to that area.

The BRA study was ahead of its time in that it recommended a content-neutral approach to sign regulation. It also advocated for the involvement of all parties who either send or receive information from signs in the process of regulating them. Although the recommendation that local information districts be formed has not been realized, the role of neighborhood planning groups in developing design guidelines for specific areas has certainly become commonplace.



Katherine Haak

*Photos that depict positive and negative examples of signs can help participants in an ordinance revision process to define problems with an existing ordinance and craft new regulations or design guidelines. Positive examples would include signs that are well designed graphically and are creative in composition and artistry (above). Negative examples would include signs that are blocking other signs or are overly dominant in their location, such as these signs below.*



Bob Brown

A variation on the charette approach is to reverse the roles of the professional group and the citizen committee. In this form, the citizen group (some members of which may have technical expertise) is assembled, given information, and assigned a set of tasks. The professionals observe and are available for assistance. At the conclusion of the work by the citizen group, a presentation is made to the professionals, who critique it and add suggestions. Refinements are made and a proposal is released to the public. This approach has the advantage of building an advocacy group within the community who can present and explain the proposal to the legislative body. The disadvantage is that citizens participating in such efforts have widely varying levels of interest and expertise; the groups can sometimes be dominated by individuals with specific agendas. Regardless of the form, charettes are very labor intensive, require a considerable amount of advance and ongoing staff work, and almost always require a facilitator to manage.

### ESTABLISHING A FOUNDATION FOR SIGN REGULATION

When developing any regulation, it is important to establish a rationale that is based on an analysis of existing conditions, a definition of the problem, and a description of how the regulations will address the issues. Moreover, having policies relating to the quality and character of development and specific areas of the community is important to provide legal underpinnings for the regulations. This part of the process not only assists in the defensibility of any standards, but offers a focus for directions. Often, the comfort level of legislative decision makers is increased when there is a foundation of analysis to support any new or revised regulations.

Sign regulations can be seen as one of a number of ways to imple-

ment urban design policies relating to neighborhoods and commercial corridors. The enhancement of pedestrian environments, the creation of attractive gateways, and the strengthening of the overall economic vitality and image of the community are all helped by adopting a good set of sign regulations. Sign regulations can help revitalize historic areas by ensuring the advertising and business identification are done in ways that are sympathetic to the architecture. Finally, the identity and economy of many communities are related to natural features and views that produce a unique setting valued by residents and visitors alike. Sign regulations can ensure that these public amenities are protected.

A number of tasks that can help provide a good foundation for code provisions are described in the following paragraphs.

### **Assess the Existing Character**

There are several steps to assessing community character. First, assuming there are current regulations of some sort, it would be useful to highlight the major provisions that determine the number, location, and size of signs. If these provisions are resulting in signs that seem to be out of scale or intrusive within their surroundings, examples should be documented. Photographs of these examples should be annotated with the provisions (or the absence of provisions) that are causing the situation.

Next, a general visual assessment of the community (or district or corridor, if the problem is specific to a location) should be prepared. This need not be a complicated exercise. Existing land-use maps can serve as the base of information. Areas that have some degree of distinct identity should be delineated, perhaps with broad, dashed lines. Important public buildings and places should be noted. The approximate location of street trees should be indicated. Photographs showing representative buildings, landmarks, landforms, and views down major streets should be placed around the perimeter of the map or contained in subsequent pages with location keys. Captions for photographs should summarize problems, such as signs that are:

- blocking public views or landmarks;
- out of scale with surroundings;
- blocking other signs;
- incompatible with the architectural features of the buildings on which they are mounted;
- overly dominant due to location, shape, color, or movement; and
- inconsistent with the quality of other development (including signs).

Photographs should also depict positive examples of signs that:

- are well designed graphically;
- reflect or enhance surrounding character;
- are creative in composition and artistry;
- indicate the character of the business;
- convey references to local history or include local materials; and
- reinforce the design of the buildings to which they are attached.

If sufficient positive examples cannot be found within the community itself, it may be necessary to find examples in other communities. It is best if these are found in places within the same region. Only rarely should

examples from distant locations be used. Too many factors, such as costs, climate, local economic conditions, and the type of community, can be different. Usually there are nearby jurisdictions that have revised their regulations and can serve as a source to see the effect over time. But best of all is for examples to come from the community. Doing so suggests that good sign design is possible and that some businesses are already moving in that direction.

Another task might be useful. This would involve researching or being mindful of the historic attributes of the community like major events, landmarks, and influences on commerce and culture. Such research can offer an interesting perspective on ways of using signs to tie a community to its roots. For example, in one western mountain community, proposed sign regulations would have made nonconforming a sign in the shape of a three-dimensional horse located at a major intersection. By considering the city's history, a provision was added to allow for special landmark signs of a unique character.

Finally, some communities place very high value on natural features like mountain ranges, river valleys, shorelines, ridgelines, forestlands, farmlands, greenbelts, and wetlands. These features should be noted, indicating where the public has views of them. If it appears that such features could be potentially damaged by signs, it may require a special technique (e.g., design review to ensure an appropriate location and size). Usually there are ways of accommodating the needs of businesses without devaluing public amenities. Both Boulder, Colorado, and Flagstaff, Arizona, are examples of communities that have crafted their regulations and guidelines to protect important natural features.

### **Determine Issues and Attitudes**

Sometimes planners can make the mistake of projecting their own values onto a community. While there is certainly a professional responsibility to propose ways of enhancing a community, it is nevertheless hazardous for a planner to assume that he or she knows what the community values. Determining the values and preferences of a community can inform the content of a code and can support legislative changes. Therefore, an effort should be made to assess community attitudes.

This could be done during a workshop, such as those described above. It could also be accomplished through a survey. Surveys can be expensive if they are conducted scientifically to ensure accurate, reliable responses. Perhaps a more cost-effective method is to rely upon the views of a committee to serve as an indication of local opinion. The key to the success of a committee is to ensure that its members represent a true cross-section of the community—not just business people and sign company representatives—however important their representation may be. Civic groups, neighborhood associations, design professionals, merchants, and residents should have voices in such a group. In larger communities, there may be a need to include representatives from different geographic areas, especially if there are varied cultural populations. A reasonable size for a group is at least 7, but no more than 13. This should allow for differing perspectives without being unwieldy. Chapter 7 contains case study examples of effective sign ordinance committees.

Planners should also enlist the involvement of the local media at the outset, rather than waiting for news stories associated with likely controversies over proposed codes. Letting a reporter know what the process and issues are, and who the key contacts are, is useful to setting the stage for even-handed reporting. Planners should also realize that reporters always look for opposing views, so it is necessary to be prepared for critical quotes. But at least informing the press in advance establishes a background that can make the subse-



quent reporting more balanced. Furthermore, newspapers are often willing to run special features that can do a more in-depth job of highlighting issues and potential solutions. It may be useful to prepare a fact sheet with names and numbers of key contact persons.

Many larger communities have standing boards or commissions that could provide valuable comments and ideas. In addition to the usual planning commissions, there may be landmarks boards, arts commissions, and design commissions. For a code revision project, one city drew from each of its standing commissions and added people from various community and commercial organizations to create a special task force.

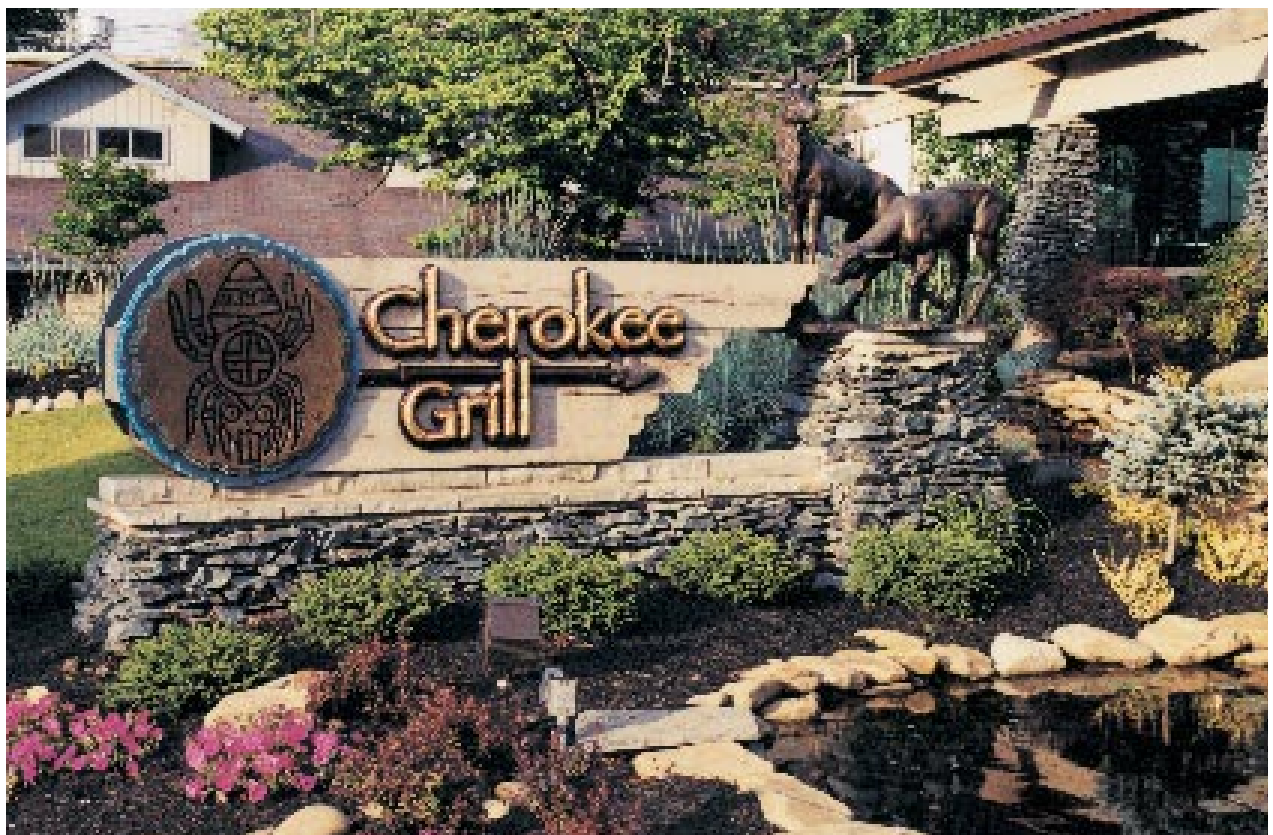
### Developing Broad Objectives

Before launching into the details of a code, it is useful to take stakeholders through a process of agreeing upon underlying objectives. This establishes a common



Jay Ogile

*Sign regulations should be based on clearly articulated objectives. Protecting views of natural features (such as the Great Smoky Mountains, above) and being supportive of local businesses are two very common objectives. Encouraging businesses to use signs made of natural materials native to the region, such as this sign in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, (below) is an increasingly common objective as well.*



Jay Ogile

yardstick by which to measure subsequent proposals. That way, when individuals express reservations about provisions, it is possible to recall the agreed-upon objectives. Sometimes it is even useful to post these objectives in the room where the committee meets so that they can be continually reminded of the overarching themes.

The first step in this process is to develop a short list of very broad objectives. These should be relatively few in number—no more than a dozen—and should be concise and directive. While these objectives would differ for every community and should evolve out of a collective discussion, the following are offered as examples.

- Sign regulations should be user friendly and easy to understand and apply.
- Sign regulations should support the local economy.
- Sign regulations should help nurture small businesses.
- Sign regulations should be consistently administered to ensure fairness.
- Sign regulations should strengthen the identity of the community and its neighborhoods.
- Sign regulations should encourage creative design that adds character to streets and districts.
- Sign regulations should protect historic areas, landmarks, and public views or vistas.
- Sign regulations should recognize the needs of various types of businesses.

These broad objectives might at a later point be translated into a preamble to the code provisions to establish intent.

### **Establishing Design Principles**

Out of the broad objectives, a set of guiding principles could be crafted. These would not be the regulations but would help frame them. The principles can address particular issues, geographic areas, unique attributes of the community, the needs of certain types of businesses that are found in the community, neighborhood characteristics, and aspects of the local economy or culture. They could be illustrated with photographs or simple diagrams. The principles should be fully discussed and agreed upon by the working group. Once there is consensus, the precise code language could be left to staff or consultants to develop.

Some examples of design principles include the following.

- Within pedestrian-oriented shopping districts (generally those in which buildings abut the sidewalk and drivers are not using signs to identify businesses), signs should be located and sized to be viewed by people on foot.
- Retail businesses should be encouraged to use signs in a creative, even whimsical manner, to identify the goods or services they offer.
- Signs should not be allowed to dominate the skyline of the city center; instead, architecture should define the image of a downtown.
- Small businesses should be nurtured through sign regulations that allow them to compete with national brands and corporate chains whose identifying symbols are well known.

- Signs mounted on buildings should be designed to complement the architecture rather than obscure it.
- Sometimes, blending with architectural features is appropriate; others times, breaking free from the architecture can allow the signs and the building to be read individually.
- The design of freestanding signs should recognize that they are a part of the landscape. The use of low mounting walls, masonry bases, shrubs and ground cover, and seasonal plantings can help integrate these signs with their sites.
- For commercial areas that primarily serve travelers, signs should be bold and prominently located so that customers can easily identify choices and desired destinations.
- Incentives should be offered to encourage better design of signs.
- Certain areas within the community, such as historic districts and scenic corridors, should be governed by a special set of sign standards (and possibly a special review process) to ensure appropriate location and compatible design.
- Sign standards should be clear and easy to understand, requiring few interpretations. Illustrations and diagrams should be used to help explain the standards.
- Signs should contribute to building the image of the community by conveying quality and distinctive character.

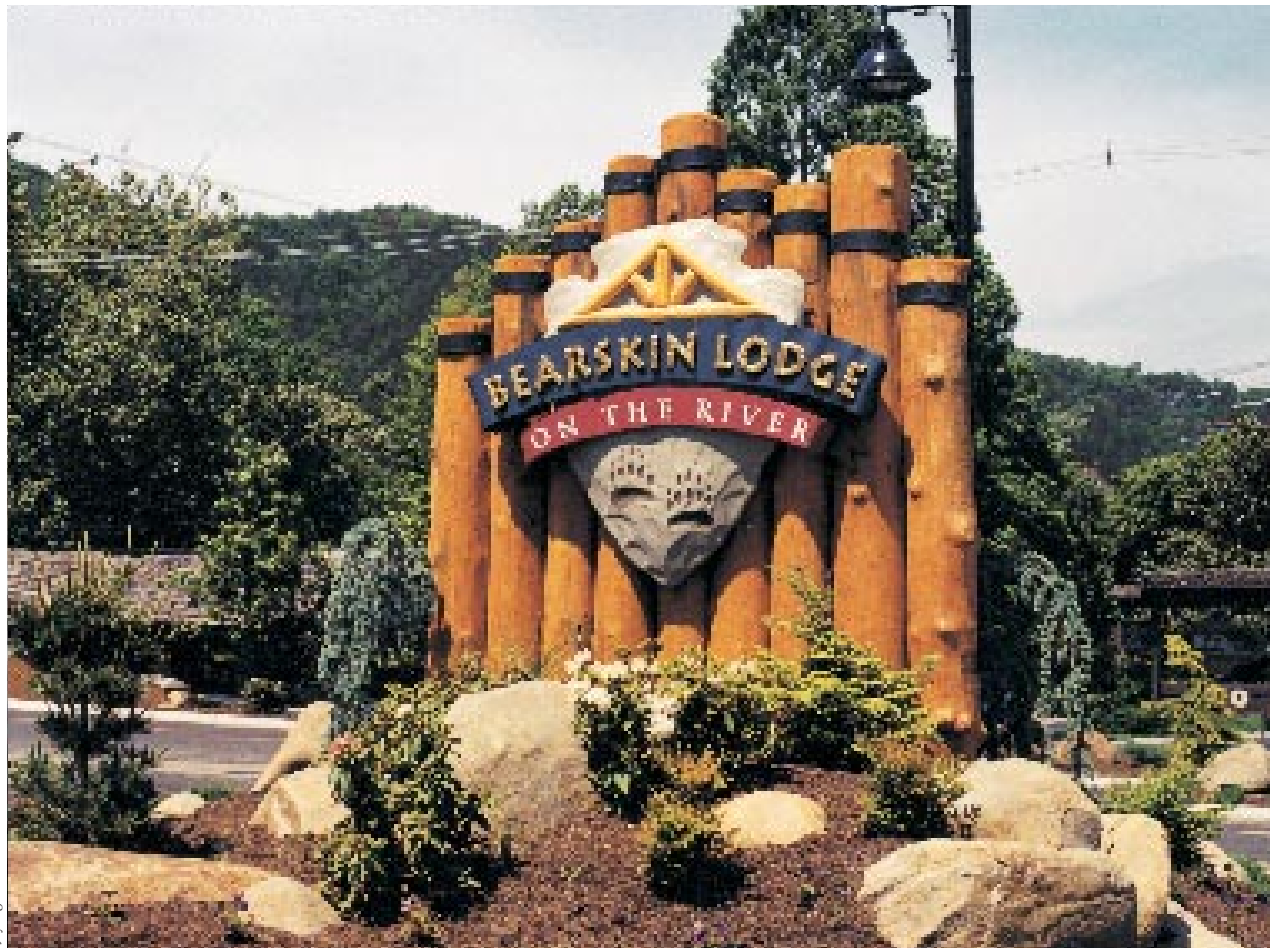
### **UNDERSTANDING THE COMPONENTS OF CONTEXT**

Developing sign regulations that reflect the context of a community requires an understanding of three aspects of the context: the regional setting, the community setting, and the business setting. Each of these brings different factors to bear upon the appropriate type, location, and design of signs. All three elements are important; the challenge is to respect and balance the influences, not allowing one to override the others. This understanding is important to ensure that regulations "fit" the context. Regulations cannot be merely transplanted from one place to another but must grow out of an understanding of the blend of contextual attributes.

#### **The Regional Setting**

Communities do not exist in isolation; they are part of a larger culture of communities that occupy a region. Each of these areas possesses a set of characteristics that set it apart from other places. Some regions have robust economies, with growing populations, while others are more stable and established. Some regions have a delicate ecological setting, marked by natural resources that have a strong economic value. Some regions are very urban, with a wide variety of communities, cultural groups, and intensities. Others are more monocultures, with patterns and traditions that are deeply held. The design of signs should reflect aspects of these regional qualities so that the individual character of each is strengthened.

This regional differentiation, of course, is counter to the trend over the past several decades in which various regions seem more and more alike, with corporate symbols and identities dominating the landscape. As firms like McDonald's have learned (and other chains are learning), it is possible to modify standard templates to reflect local conditions and context.



Jay Ogle

*The Bearskin Lodge sign in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, is reflective of that region's aesthetic context as a woodsy natural setting and its economic context as a major tourist destination.*

Countering the trend toward uniformity is an increasing desire in some communities and regions to maintain individuality. After all, people choose to live in a place because it offers an environment that appeals to them in comparison to others.

People within regions often share similar values, whether this involves the protection of the natural environment, access to water, cultural choices, proximity to recreational amenities, availability of good educational facilities, or other attributes. Sometimes these values are expressed in the form of public policy, such as environmental laws, growth management acts, taxation, and the funding of programs or physical improvements. Other times, these values are evident in the built environment itself or the type and intensity of commercial activity, such as is found in resort areas. Both Orlando, Florida, and Aspen, Colorado, have structured their codes to reflect the unique settings and roles with their regions. Regional differences can be still seen in the different types of products, or brands, that are available, which stand for certain types of choices or qualities of good and services (although widespread national franchising has certainly blurred these distinctions). Supermarkets and department stores are good examples of this, where local consumers know the nature of the merchandise offered. Certain businesses even can symbolize the region, such as the Bass Pro Shops do in areas where outdoor recreation is prominent.

Regions also differ in the forms of settlement. There are denser, urbanized areas in which communities seem to flow into each other. Many of these contain older, established centers that developed during the street-



car suburb era and exhibit concentrations and a mixing of uses that support the conduct of commerce on foot. Other areas are more dispersed, where the dominant type of commercial area is a strip of businesses set back from the road, separated from residential areas, and served principally by automobile. Yet other regions have a general pattern of dispersion but contain within them nodes of higher-density, compact development that is more urban in nature.

One of the challenges facing planners is how to accomplish a graceful transition from one pattern of development to another. A growing number of regions are attempting to transform themselves from a relatively dispersed pattern toward a more concentrated one. The management of patterns of growth is intended to reduce outward expansion into farm lands or forest lands and to provide a more cost-effective servicing with utilities and transit. The dilemma for people involved in both the provision of and the regulation of signs is what to do with areas that will undergo change as a result of changes in public policy. For example, a commercial strip might now have stores set behind parking lots, while policies and codes suggest a future pattern that is more pedestrian-oriented. Conflicts arise when signs are designed for an older pattern of development that does not comport with the intended new vision for an area.

In addition, planning policies across the country are addressing a fundamental restructuring of patterns of development to reflect regional differences. A growing number of places are no longer tolerating businesses that subject them to standardized, corporate symbols, whether in architecture or signage. Even places that are not resort or regional destinations are trying to attain or retain a sense of character. All sorts of businesses are beginning to respond to this growing trend by both differentiating themselves from competitors and providing something that speaks to local identity. This may be even more important in the future if many goods and services bypass physical enterprises in favor of commerce conducted through the Internet. It may be necessary for businesses to develop unique, user-friendly, "home-grown" imagery and advertising in order to survive this massive shift in the marketplace, although the true impact of e-commerce on stores and other outlets is yet to be realized.

Consumer behavior can differ quite widely from one region to another. In some regions, residents rely upon shops and services in their own immediate neighborhoods, patronizing them on a frequent basis, often walking. In other regions, the dominant consumer behavior involves driving once a week to scattered locations for bulk purchases. In some regions, both types of consumer behavior are present. One of the hallmarks in regions throughout North America is multidirectional traffic congestion as people attempt to reach scattered concentrations of single-purpose business activity. Again, a dilemma arises when planning policies suggest a preference for mixed-use concentrations in which people find a multitude of choices within a small area despite the fact that the existing pattern is one of scattered, single-use businesses.

Clearly American consumers have a strong preference for the car. (This preference to a large extent has been shaped by development patterns that have provided nothing other than automobile-dominated shopping districts, but that is a topic for other PAS Reports.) There is evidence to suggest that consumers appreciate having multiple options within a walkable area containing amenities. Publications, from the *Wall Street Journal*, to the *New York Times*, to *Newsweek*, have reported a growing trend toward aging baby-boom-era households preferring to live in close proximity to a variety of goods and services. Studies in 1999 by the Maine Office of

State Planning and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council both found that there is significant unmet demand for tight-knit, traditional neighborhoods where homes, stores, and places of employment are in close proximity to one another. During the past several decades, however, the predominant consumer behavior has been one of driving to widely dispersed locations. The implication for sign regulations is that it will be necessary to recognize that shifts in consumer behavior are slow. Eventually, there will likely be demands for more locally oriented concentrations of commercial uses in which signs can be more pedestrian oriented. In the meantime, however, many commercial areas will continue to be marked by wide streets, large parking lots, and big buildings set back from the street. Where these situations exist, signs need to be sized appropriately to communicate to the driving public.

*American consumers clearly have a preference for cars. Thus most signage is designed and placed with drivers in mind. But as unplanned growth and urban sprawl have become a key concern in many regions, planners have begun to redirect their attention to improving and revitalizing both existing commercial arterial streets and older downtowns. Signs can play a role in these revitalized areas by introducing a sense of identity. Shown here: Anytown, USA, in this case, Spokane, Washington.*



Mark Hinshaw

Finally, one of the consumer trends that is already occurring is the revitalization of older commercial areas—places that languished during the post-war decades when shopping centers and strip malls gradually dominated the marketplace. Many people—particularly inner-city residents—are rediscovering these places. Investments are being made in commercial businesses, such as restaurants and services, as well as in the renovation or infill development of housing. Some of these places qualify for designation as historic districts or conservation districts (districts with a distinct character that the community finds worth preserving but do not meet historic district requirements). In these areas, new sign regulations can be a tool to help reintroduce a sense of identity. Such districts benefit greatly from having a cohesive set of standards that can ensure that new investment will be protected. Special regulations and review procedures for signs may be warranted so as to not undercut the broader goal of the design standards.

### The Community Setting

One of the common errors made by public officials in the adoption of sign codes is to copy one used by another community. While this is not unique to sign regulation—zoning codes have been widely copied—it is hazardous in that communities can vary widely in their attributes. What makes sense in one location may not be workable at all in another. It is better to attempt to discover the characteristics of the community that

will drive a particular regulatory response and then craft provisions that can be responsive to these characteristics. It is certainly possible to learn from the experiences of other communities, but copying can produce some inappropriate results. For instance, some people are intrigued by the very restrictive design regulations associated with resort communities, such as Park City, Utah, or places that have, over time, developed a one-of-a-kind ambiance, such as Carmel, California. While it is tempting to see these places as models, most American communities are very different in character from those communities. While they may aspire to create a character similar to such a community, a transformation such as that would take time, political will, and community consensus.

Sign regulations, indeed most land-use regulations, need to recognize the basic structure of a capitalist economy in which an individual entrepreneurial spirit needs to be nurtured. It is a rare community that has achieved agreement on severely restrictive sign standards. Most communities recognize a need for balancing aesthetic goals with businesses' communication needs, and it is possible to craft regulations that will improve the appearance of the community while encouraging a vibrant local economy.

It is wise to assess the degree of heterogeneity within a community. Sometimes this can be deceptive, as in the case of a community that has been dominated by one cultural group. Increasingly, our communities are becoming more diverse with regard to ethnic composition. People from different backgrounds bring with them different needs and expectations when it comes to information conveying the availability of goods and services. For example, in Seattle there is a district that is several blocks long and has been attracting businesses catering to Vietnamese customers. It shops display a plethora of boldly lettered signs with few graphics. To an outside eye, this may seem unkempt and chaotic, but it reflects a manner of conducting commerce in that particular culture. It would be unfortunate if restrictive sign regulations were to drain this district of its lively character.

*A commercial environment that is visually appealing can attract both customers and businesses so that everyone benefits—more choices, more activity, more income for businesses.*



Katherine Haak

The economic complexion of a community can be a factor in context-sensitive sign regulations. The example of a specialized economy (resorts) has been mentioned. But the general vitality (or lack thereof) can be a factor. When businesses are struggling to attract customers, it is difficult to propose standards that might seem to exacerbate the situation. On the other hand, it is possible to consider the appearance of the community as fundamentally related to its economic health. A commercial environment that is visually appealing can attract both customers and businesses so that everyone benefits—more choices, more activity, more income for businesses. Even communities with long-term sluggish local economies contain pockets of vitality where people have recognized the importance of and reinforced a good collective image. Signs that are sensitive to nearby noncommercial uses, that respect the scale and proportion of buildings, and that contribute to the ambiance of a place can help secure and maintain a healthy economic climate.

It is also necessary to recognize the political will of a community. Some legislative bodies are greatly influenced by commercial interests who can conduct effective lobbying. Smaller communities are often dominated by a few families or strong individuals whose opinions have a great deal of weight. It is sometimes difficult for elected representatives to take a broader, longer view. There might also be a predisposition against regulation in general: sign regulation may seem like an infringement on individual choice. And there may be a sense that regulations reflect "personal" preferences regarding aesthetics. In these situations, it is probably difficult to persuade the legislative body to enact much more than basic standards.

In many communities, there are civic and business organizations that play roles in improving the general quality of a community. The local chapter of the American Institute of Architects may take an interest in advocating sign regulations. The Chamber of Commerce can be worked with to develop codes that meet both broader community objectives and business interests, as was the case in Georgetown, Texas, described in Chapter 7. The chamber's involvement in such cases may lead to an alliance between the business interests and community groups.

The local sign industry itself has an interest in consistent and effective enforcement and certain types of regulations that prevent cheap, "fly-by-night" companies (that do not take out sign permits) from inundating the market. The sign industry can be an effective partner in crafting regulations that are technically correct, practical, meet a variety of business needs, and respect the context. Working with such organizations, rather than viewing them as adversaries, can be useful in bolstering political will.

The physical character of a community is a very important issue. Larger communities often contain many types of districts that might suggest sign regulations that acknowledge diversity, while smaller communities may need only a simple code. Denser communities often have people living in close proximity to businesses, and the complexity of mixed use, whether "vertical" or "horizontal," should be reflected in the sign code. Some communities are rich with historic buildings in which signs must be carefully located and sized to respect the architectural character. Again, many communities have pockets that are older than others, and this may suggest an overlay approach that tailors certain standards to the location. Finally, communities can vary widely in spatial form. In some, commercial districts are spread along corridors where most shopping is done by car, traveling from one destination to another along the route. In other communities, businesses districts are compact and contain a mixture of uses that can be reached on foot. Awkward results can occur when regulations



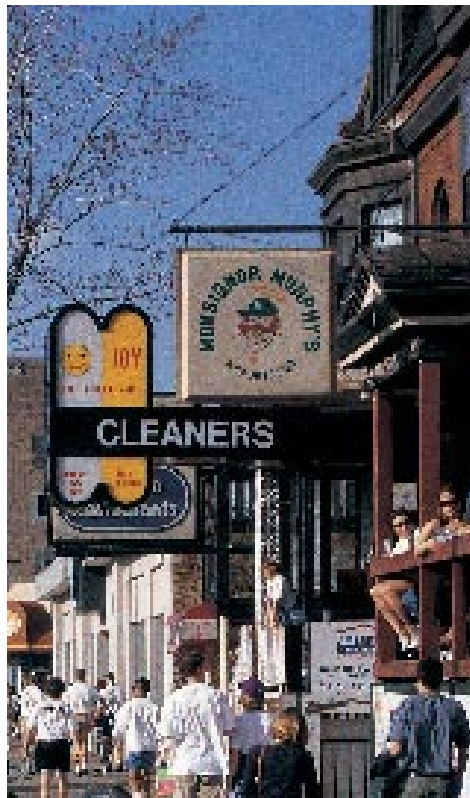
devised for strip commercial areas are applied to a downtown, and vice versa.

Finally, it is important to recognize that most communities have neighbors. There are instances in which one jurisdiction has radically different standards than the abutting one, with the consequence that businesses can threaten to leave for the less restrictive location. Moreover, both communities can suffer from the sudden, jarring discontinuity in appearance that can be evident. It is important, therefore, to also work with adjacent communities to identify common problems and potential solutions. Another interesting approach involves inter-local agreements. Again, cooperating with other entities can be effective in presenting a coordinated, widely supported package of codes to a city council.

### The Business Setting

The third major component of context for regulations involves the structure of economic activity within the community. Communities can vary quite widely in the nature of businesses, and sign regulations need to recognize the local commercial climate.

Some communities are dominated by corporations, with brand-name general merchandising or "big-box" retailers dominating the marketplace. Often these businesses are located within sites that are largely surface parking, with the buildings set well back from the roads. The adjacent roads themselves are typically multilane arterials, with fast-moving traffic. Signs associated with this pattern often need to be large to be visible. Freestanding signs mounted on poles typically announce the name of the place and its key tenants. Sometimes, signs mounted on buildings are made large enough to be seen from the roads. In other communities, commercial streets are marked by numerous



Marya Morris

*Communities can vary widely in the nature of businesses, and sign regulations need to recognize the local commercial climate. A typical urban neighborhood commercial street will contain a mix of locally owned outfits with a greater or lesser number of national franchises and chains, depending on the market.*



Marya Morris



Marya Morris

franchise retailers offering food service, gasoline, vehicle maintenance, appliances, furniture, clothing, music, books, and personal services. These are often contained in nonenclosed, "strip" malls. There may be a single sign identifying the name of the mall, with individual signs being more visible and readable once the parking lot is entered. In these two cases, design of signs is related to the national or regional identity of companies that rely on easy customer recognition. Finally, some communities have a number of neighborhood-scale shopping districts that contain both franchise businesses and locally owned stores and services. In this case, the locally owned businesses often look for ways to distinguish themselves from the others in order to attract customers who may tend to gravitate toward widely known names.

In fact, many communities have all three types of business environments. There might be one or more, older, established commercial districts with a multitude of small businesses, sometimes in an arrangement that lends itself to walking between businesses. There might be one or more streets that are lined with franchise operations, sometimes close to a freeway interchange. And one or more expansive sites that hold large, single-story buildings containing nationally known businesses. When several types are present within a community, it is important to not have a "one size fits all" sign ordinance.

Another factor in the business climate is the degree of competition. Some businesses cater to a large trade area, spanning a whole community—or even multiple communities. A community may have a limited number of choices of business available to residents. These businesses, which tend to dominate an area, may not actually require as much signage as those competing in a more complex setting. They may tend to rely on other forms of advertising than signs to attract customers. But they will nonetheless have a need to make their location and access visible.

Yet another aspect of the business setting is the varying need for identification. Some businesses offer very specialized goods and services; there may perhaps be only one such store in an entire community. In these cases, while signage is still important, the address may be more so. But many businesses do compete with others offering similar goods and services. There is often a desire to differentiate what is offered through highly individualized signs. Customers who are not already familiar with the business may be attracted to those with signs that convey a distinct and atypical message. There are also consumers who want to compare the price and quality of goods and services, and look for clues that indicate that a similar business is nearby. One of the recent phenomena in this vein is the growing number of businesses serving espresso drinks. They will often locate near one another and rely upon signs including some version of a steaming cup of coffee, the word "espresso" in neon tubing, or a simple, recognizable logo. Finally, some business settings are dominated by consumers who are family-oriented and are seeking places offering fast service at a low price. Other business settings that are dominated by young professionals exhibit more of a casual ambiance, with signs that convey upscale sophistication. The signs serving each may be quite different.

Signs are not the only means that a business has of attracting customers. Advertising in the local media is effective, although the expense of advertising through broadcast media is out of the reach of most smaller businesses. The Internet is a growing method of offering goods and services to customers but is expected to account for only a small portion of sales even as it gains in popularity. Some small, locally owned businesses depend upon newspaper ads to attract customers or remind them of the continued presence of the business. Even so, in order for customers to actually reach a busi-

ness, on-site signage must be clear and visible. There are also indications that newspapers are losing readership. And, as described in Chapter 4, due to the nature of how papers are circulated, a lot of newspaper advertising is essentially wasted on readers outside the typical trade area range of a business.

Different business areas may have quite different locational characteristics. In some, businesses may be packed tightly together on small lots or with several businesses in a building. Large signs positioned in close proximity can block one another. In this case, businesses often will look for more subtle approaches with special lighting, unusual typefaces, or other physical features to distinguish themselves. Another location attribute involves vegetation. Many communities in the last several decades have instituted extensive street tree planting programs or require them in new development. It is necessary to ensure that sign regulations work to complement other public actions. There is also a growing concern among many communities with unique natural features that signs detract from the visibility and importance of these prominent and important landmarks. It is possible to craft regulations that recognize the needs of businesses while at the same time protecting major visual assets that define the place.

Many state-of-the-art land-use regulations include tools such as “view corridors,” “scenic corridors,” “conservation districts,” and “sensitive area overlays” to ensure that natural values are maintained. Typically these provisions do not prevent the use of signs, but the allowable size, location, and design may be tempered to recognize the importance of protecting the larger economic generator. Many businesses, in fact, benefit from the presence of these amenities; it is the collective self-interest of businesses to ensure that everyone benefits.

All of these factors suggest an approach to sign regulations that recognizes the differing needs of particular settings. Before attempting to craft or fine-tune regulations to be related to specific places, it is necessary to first assess the type and character of the setting.

### **EVALUATING THE PLACE—A TYPOLOGY**

Signs are used in many areas of a community. In office parks, signs announce the overall development as well as individual businesses. In these types of developments, which are frequently master planned, the design of signs can be governed by lease agreements to ensure consonance with a particular corporate image. Within industrial areas, signs are often much simpler in form, as their intent is not to attract customers as much as to merely identify the businesses. In residential areas, the use of signs is sharply limited, but there can be real estate signs, signs marking apartment buildings, schools, and churches, and even signs denoting small businesses. None of these settings is the subject of this chapter.

Rather, the focus is on the larger, more complex, and intense commercial areas of a community where signs are found in great numbers. While issues can arise in the other areas mentioned above, it is generally the commercial districts and corridors where conflicts arise between business interests and governmental regulation, and where communities are concerned about their image and character. In the development of sign regulations that reflect the surrounding context, it is useful for planning agencies to assess the attributes of the commercial areas they contain. We are suggesting a typology that could help in sorting out the various issues to be addressed by sign codes and guidelines. It should be recognized, however, that this typology is somewhat abstract and idealized; many districts are combinations or hybrids of these forms. The following designations do, however, represent most, if not all, of the major types of commercial areas.

**Type 1: Downtowns**

Downtowns tend to have most, if not all, of the following characteristics that can have an influence on the location, size, and form of signs:

- Short Blocks (200 ft. - 600 ft.)
- Narrow Streets (60 ft. - 80 ft.)
- Generous Sidewalks (8 ft. - 16 ft.)
- On-Street Parking
- Variety of Street Furnishings (trees, lights, benches, bus shelters, trash containers, directional signs)
- Taller Buildings (from two to many stories)
- Many Goods and Services in Close Proximity
- Multiple Storefronts per Block
- Commercial Uses on the Sidewalk (vendors, newsracks, phones, moveable signs)
- Buildings Remain, while Tenants Change

Smaller downtowns can be a few blocks in size; some are arranged along one or two streets. Medium-size downtowns usually cover five to 10 blocks in two directions, although they may still likely have one or two principal retail streets. Larger downtowns can be comprised of dozens or even hundreds of blocks; some are large enough to contain several distinctly different districts each with their own principal street. At the smaller end of the spectrum, the regulation of signs should be kept fairly simple, perhaps responding to historic character if it is prevalent.

Mid-range downtowns might have sign standards tailored to different areas, but this should be done only after an analysis suggests that there is enough variation in character. Larger downtowns almost always benefit from having standards that recognize the different character of districts, so that each can convey a unique image.

By their nature, most downtowns have a greater intensity of use than other parts of a community. There is a greater mixture of uses. Frequently, buildings are set close to the street, and facades are composed of windows and entrances relating to pedestrian movement along sidewalks. Parking is found in shared facilities, such as lots, garages, and on-street stalls. The behavior of people using downtown for commerce is dominated by movement on foot; the car (or transit) may be used to reach downtown, but within the downtown setting, people tend to walk between destinations. Furthermore, the visual environment is largely comprised of streets and sidewalks framed by architectural forms. Viewing distances are relatively short, largely limited to what can be seen within a block.

Since people must interact with many more physical features on a downtown street (e.g., regular crosswalks, street trees, storefronts, poles, benches, and other objects in the sidewalk) as well as the movement of other people, attention is often focused on what is visible within the width of the sidewalk and the first floor or two of a building. Physiologically, humans tend to look straight ahead and slightly downward, scanning the space ahead in a horizontal manner; looking up is not a typical movement. Therefore, within downtowns, signs are most useful when placed within the envelope of space between the sidewalk and the second floor. Often it useful to have signs that project out over the sidewalk so that they can be more easily seen. It is



*Within downtowns, signs are most useful to potential customers when placed between the sidewalk and the second floor. Viewing distances are relatively short, largely limited to what can be seen within a block.*



often possible to integrate projecting signs into canopies, awnings, and overhangs, and to locate them on a column line or corner of a building. And, because people also scan across a downtown street for potential destinations, signs mounted flat on facades, windows, or projections are also useful.

Downtown commercial settings are dominated by retail storefronts that follow a loose set of rules that have worked successfully for many decades. Transparent glass windows and doors comprise most of the sidewalk-level facade. Entrances are often recessed, allowing for display windows to turn into the depth of the shop. (Occasionally the depth is great enough to produce showcase windows that flank the entry.) Windows rarely extend all the way to the ground; there is usually a low wall or "kick-plate." The bays of sidewalk-oriented retail space are typically higher than floors above. This allows daylight to penetrate through glass at the top of the storefront into the depth of the space and to project a "larger than life" ambiance toward the street. Some retail uses place a mezzanine level into the rear part of the high bay for storage or service functions. This basic arrangement is found in downtowns of all sizes.

Many downtown districts had their origins in pre-twentieth century eras, before the influence of the automobile. Consequently, they are generally compact and walkable. However, even with relatively established downtowns, buildings have been demolished and replaced with buildings that break the historic pattern. Or streets have been widened and sidewalk space has been reduced. In addition, the outer edges of some downtowns are "ragged" and contain land uses that are more conducive to business by car than on foot.



Michael Davidson

*Older established businesses in downtowns, like the Berghoff Restaurant in the Chicago Loop, often play host to the most interesting and historic signs in a community. These signs function as important visual landmarks for multiple generations of residents and visitors.*

A number of communities have been trying to repair these conditions through codes and design guidelines that redirect new development to support pedestrian activity. Over the last 20 years, Bellevue, Washington, has put in place numerous standards and design guidelines to rearrange the form and appearance of new development, moving it away from the previous suburban pattern. Similarly, Montgomery County, Maryland, has used innovative codes to alter previously car-dominated places like Bethesda and Silver Spring. Sign regulations have played a role in these efforts. For example, in the mid-80s, Bellevue took down the last “high-rise” sign within its newly urbanized downtown. One of the challenges is how to make the transition to a more compact and contiguous arrangement of businesses. The scale of detailing of signs can contribute to this by reinstalling an emphasis on walking. In such a situation, there may be an awkward period in which there is a mixture of larger, simpler signs aimed at customers in cars and smaller, more detailed signs aimed at customers on foot.

There are a number of downtowns that developed in the post-World War II era. Some of these types of downtown districts are attempting to redirect the form of development to acquire attributes of a more traditional downtown. Schaumburg, Illinois, Tustin, California, and West Milford Township, New Jersey, are all prime examples. In such places, sign regulation is difficult and sometimes controversial because of past patterns that were the result of an emphasis on automobile circulation. In these cases, more effort will need to be devoted to achieving community consensus; change will need to occur incrementally.

### **Type 2: Commercial Districts**

Commercial districts exhibit most, if not all, of the following characteristics:

- Longer Blocks (400 ft. - 1,000 ft.)
- Wider Streets (80 ft. - 100 ft.)
- Midrange Sidewalks (6 ft. - 10 ft.)
- On-Street Parking
- Some Street Furnishings (typically trees and lights)
- Low Buildings (1 to 3 stories)
- Variety of Goods and Services
- Multiple Stores per Block
- Mixtures of Older Buildings and Newer Buildings
- Occasional Jarring Discontinuities (continuous storefronts interrupted by a freestanding building)

Many commercial districts seem similar to downtowns. But such districts are frequently surrounded by lower-density residential development. Indeed, sometimes the commercial uses in such districts only extend to an alley beyond which is a single-use residential district. As a consequence, the disparity in the intensity of activity, hours of activity, and levels of lighting, as well as traffic movement and parking spillover can be the source of conflict between residents and businesses. Signs can play a role in either strengthening and tying together an area as a whole or, alternately, creating an environment that the neighboring uses turn away from.



Mark Hinshaw

*Commercial districts come in many shapes and sizes. They can be relatively high density, with a mix of shops, restaurants, and offices, serving pedestrians and drivers, or lower-profile clusters of stores separated by parking lots, landscaping, and streets. The scale of buildings, street width, and primary audience are key considerations when deciding what constitutes appropriate signage in such districts. Shown here are two variations on the commercial district theme, both in Bellevue, Washington.*



Mark Hinshaw

Because the integration of residential and commercial uses is difficult to leave to individual private-sector actions, commercial districts often benefit from a master planning effort that can identify improvements, guidelines, and programs to soften the relationship. For example, residential parking sticker programs can prevent commercial customers and employees from invading a neighborhood with their vehicles. With respect to signs, signs might be limited to those mounted on buildings and to facades that face the commercial street in order to reduce the appearance of commercialism. Other enhancements, including directional and interpretive signs, can instill a sense of character for the area as a whole, such that surrounding residents can feel that this is their "town center."

Many commercial districts could also benefit from an emphasis on a particular attribute, such as history or culture. Throughout the country, even in midsize cities, districts have emerged that reflect goods and services offered by particular ethnic groups, types of restaurants, or nightlife venues. These districts can add richness to a community. Sign regulations can encourage creative designs that reinforce the character and help achieve a unique ambiance.

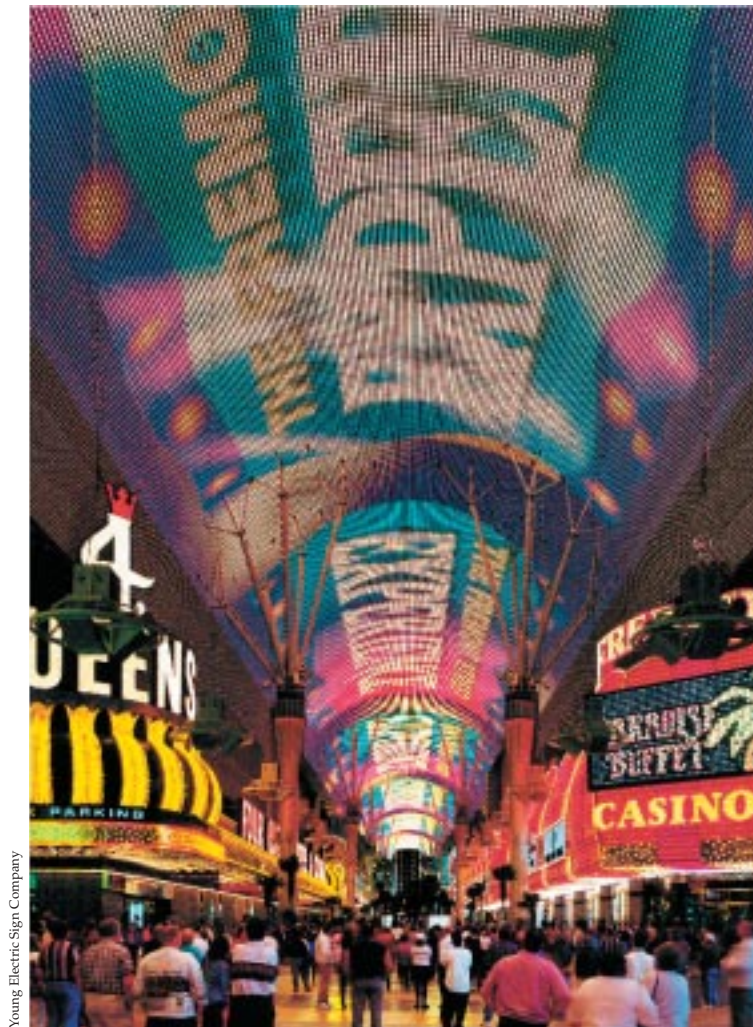


Many commercial districts principally serve a defined trade area. But some offer activities that attract customers from elsewhere in the city or the region. While it is important to allow businesses to expand their reach, it is also necessary to examine the impact on nearby residents who must live with added intensity. For example, large, flamboyant signs can set up an expectation that the district is more of a high-traffic commercial district or entertainment center than a mixed-use neighborhood. Ensuring that the atmosphere of commercial districts is compatible with nearby residential areas is an issue that is more appropriately addressed through basic land-use regulations that might, for example, establish a maximum building size, set a maximum number of movie screens, or disallow certain types of entertainment uses altogether.

### **Type 3: Entertainment Districts**

A number of larger communities, and even some moderate-size ones, are finding that certain commercial areas are appropriate for major entertainment uses. These typically draw from a large trade area. They can range from family-oriented amusement parks to malls that contain large national brand bookstores, multiscreen movie theaters, restaurants, and game stores, to more adult entertainment, such as casinos, taverns, and dance clubs.

*The Fremont Street Experience,  
the ultimate sign in the ultimate  
entertainment district, Las Vegas.  
(Designed and Fabricated by  
Young Electric Sign Co., Las  
Vegas Division.)*



Young Electric Sign Company



Entertainment districts are frequently characterized by the following attributes:

- Long Blocks (400 ft. - 1,200 ft.)
- Wide Streets (80 ft. - 100 ft.)
- Narrow Sidewalks (5 ft. - 8 ft.)
- No On-Street Parking
- Low Buildings (1 or 2 stories)
- Limited Range of Goods and Services
- Smaller Number of Larger Buildings Containing a Few Large Tenants
- Freestanding Buildings

Clearly, this type of district is intended to capture customers arriving by automobile. The architecture tends to be larger than life, perhaps with contrived or exaggerated facades. This is a case where large, more visually aggressive signs can be appropriate. The ambiance tends to rely upon light, movement, action, and a sense of fun. Unfortunately, some sign codes treat this type of area the same as other commercial areas and force signs to be smaller or tamer in appearance. The result is signs that are not very interesting. Users may try to employ jarring colors or glaring lights to attract attention. Instead, a jurisdiction might craft regulations for such a district that encourage whimsical designs with a lot of theatrical flourishes. New York City pioneered this idea in recent zoning for Times Square that actually requires large, flamboyant signs. Usually the buildings are not particularly interesting; the use of the area will be more during the night. Accordingly, signs that are expressive of their name or purpose might be a better fit with context than trying to tame them to conform to a preconceived notion of appropriate decorum. Many cities could, in fact, benefit from having a district that provides a concentration of lively commercial recreation. However, it is understandable that some legislative bodies might be reluctant to have an area that is considered tawdry, with garish signs. One solution might be to allow larger and more complicated signs if the proponent uses a graphic designer. This has a parallel in other types of code provisions in some communities in which, for example, a licensed landscape architect must stamp a landscape plan. Many communities within Washington State and California have this requirement. This does not necessarily ensure superior design, but at least someone trained in the art of design must be involved.

#### **Type 4. Commercial Arterials**

Commercial arterial streets are characterized by the following:

- Long Blocks (600 ft. - 1,200 ft.)
- Wide Streets (80 ft. - 100 ft.)
- Narrow Sidewalks (6 ft. - 8 ft.)
- No On-Street Parking
- Few Street Furnishings (e.g., street lights, bus shelters)
- Low Buildings (1 to 3 stories)
- Many Choices in Goods and Services
- Multiple Stores per Block
- Relatively New Buildings
- Combination of Freestanding Uses and Multitenant Buildings

*Commercial arterial streets, with varied building sizes, types, and setbacks, and a wide range of business types, tend to generate the most disagreement on the appropriate location, size, and form of signs. Plans for signage in such districts need to be done in concert with an overall streetscape and public improvement program for the area. Twenty-five years ago, car-intensive Bel-Red Road in suburban Seattle was redesigned to include trees and sidewalks. Signs were lowered and landscaping was added. Today the corridor is thriving economically and the freestanding signs are visible under the canopy of mature trees.*



Commercial arterials are often referred to as "strip commercial." Buildings are set well back from the street behind parking lots. It is necessary to drive from one to the other as pedestrian connections are minimal. Newer development tends to have site landscaping, while older development often includes little or no landscaping.

This is a form of commercial development that tends to most often generate disagreement on the appropriate location, size, and form of signs. Because of the often discordant arrangement of buildings and parking, and the distance of the buildings from the road, commercial users employ larger and/or more signs to attract customers. Cities sometimes wish to change the character of the corridor so that it might become more oriented to pedestrian movement. Some cities have begun to alter aspects of the land-use regulations to allow, encourage, or even require new buildings to be set close to the street, using overlay zoning for traditional neighborhoods or flexible planned unit development standards that allow substantial deviation from conventional commercial development standards. They are installing sidewalk improvements, decorative lighting, and street trees in an effort to diminish the extent of "commercialism."

Signs can play a role in transforming districts such as this, but several conditions should exist. First, there should be a comprehensive set of changes and enhancements that are developed with involvement of both the community and the business sector. Second, there should be a method for phasing-in changes over time. And, third, the jurisdiction may want to expedite this process by offering incentives in the form of business improvement loans for facade and site improvements, or grants for frontage enhancements. Acceptance of financial support could include an agreement to redesign signs.

Twenty-five years ago, Bellevue, Washington, completed a streetscape project for the arterial connecting it with neighboring Redmond to the east. The project included closely spaced evergreen street trees along with a meandering sidewalk. This was done at the same time that new sign standards were adopted that lowered the maximum height of freestanding signs to five feet. Most of the businesses then—as today—were auto oriented (strip malls, car washes, tire stores, and roadside cafes). The result today is that businesses are thriving with freestanding signs that are entirely visible below the canopies of the now mature trees. And Bel-Red Road is one of the most handsome green streets in the entire region, despite its intensely commercial nature. Clearly, it is possible to accommodate commercial, environmental, and aesthetic values.

Unless a community is willing to engage in a holistic approach to the improvement of a commercial corridor, it may be difficult to persuade businesses to abandon the usual request for larger and more numerous signs. Even in such cases, it should still be possible to craft regulations that require or encourage freestanding signs to include low plantings and building-mounted signs to be within a particular size. It should be recognized that signs alone—now matter how limited they may be—do not determine the character of a commercial corridor. If an improved character is desired, other tools will need to be brought to bear.

#### **Type 5. Main Streets**

Main Streets are the principal commercial streets of small and midsize towns. They exhibit the following qualities:

- Short Blocks (200 ft. - 400 ft.)
- Narrow Street Widths, generally (60 ft. - 80 ft.)
- Midrange Sidewalks (6 ft. - 12 ft.)
- On-Street Parking
- Street Furnishings (e.g., trees, lights, benches, trash containers)
- Low to Midrise Buildings (1 to 5 stories)
- Limited Range of Goods and Services in Close Proximity
- Multiple Storefronts per Block

Main Streets in most cases are no more than five or six blocks in length, given that it is hard to sustain more commercial activity in a small town setting. Occasionally, there is a cross street that is a secondary Main Street. Main Streets typically retain some aspect of an earlier era in history, such as rows of older commercial buildings, a city hall, post office, or county courthouse. Main Streets are frequently held in high regard by the local residents as the center of home grown, locally owned businesses and face-to-face neighborliness.

The vitality of many Main Streets declined during the 60s and 70s as shopping malls, chain stores, and freeway construction drew customers away. In the last 15 years, there has been a resurgence of interest in Main Streets as residents appreciate the community values represented by these places. Thanks to national and state Main Street revitalization programs, many of these places are strong, vibrant centers. Their renewed health is in part due to aging and younger households who choose to live near a concentration of shops, services, cultural activities, and the character that Main Streets convey.



Mark Hinshaw



*Big box retail stores, such as Wal-Mart, Target, and Home Depot, have become a flashpoint for citizens concerned about the economic impact of large multinational retailers on small local businesses and the aesthetic impact of warehouse-type buildings on the character of commercial districts and arterial streets. Increasingly communities have had success in getting the stores to alter their prototype exterior appearance by adding pitched roofs, brick exteriors, neutral or natural colors, and to also incorporate the signage into the architecture, as in this example from Woodinville, Washington.*

Marva Morris



*Signs for Main Streets are a more delicate proposition than for other commercial settings. There is often a historic building pattern, and shops and storefronts tend to be small, locally owned, and geared primarily towards pedestrians and slow-moving traffic. The sign ordinance should allow for creativity and encourage compatibility with building architecture.*

Sign regulations for Main Streets are a much more delicate proposition than for other types of settings. There is often a historic pattern. The scale of buildings and storefronts is smaller. Businesses are predominantly local; attempts by franchises and chains to locate on Main Streets are often met with stiff resistance. Most businesses choosing to locate on Main Streets are small, family-owned enterprises with their own personalized way of operating.

This social context offers a community an opportunity to develop signs that are home-grown and unique. A number of Main Streets have nurtured a cottage industry of sign makers who enjoy the craft of producing one-of-a-kind signs. Some of these can be very artistic, using fanciful brackets to support projecting signs. Some make use of graphic symbols to convey the nature of the shop. Signs painted on storefront windows display fonts and flourishes that recall earlier eras of fine craftsmanship. For a community with a Main Street, it is imperative to ensure that the sign code allows for and even rewards creativity. In addition, this type of environment may well warrant the use of a design review process to



make sure that one person's sensitive investment is not jeopardized by an insensitive addition.

#### **Type 6. Neighborhood Shopping Streets**

Neighborhood shopping streets can have many of the same attributes as a Main Street. Some are simply small versions of such streets, even though they are found within a larger city. Some of these streets may have actually been the main street of a village or town that was absorbed into the larger community. They typically involve only a few blocks. As is true for businesses on a Main Street, it is important to allow the character of individual businesses on a neighborhood street to be conveyed through their signs. But, again, it is worth considering the use of tailored standards and design review to ensure that no one enterprise's sign breaks the overall character of the other signs on the street.

#### **Type 7. Special Districts**

Special districts include a host of unusual or unique settings, such as historic districts, conservation districts, cultural districts, and scenic corridors. The characteristics of each vary greatly. These districts are also very delicate; their economic value derives from maintaining a particular identity. To adequately direct the location, size, and design of signs in these places almost always requires a form of design review that looks in detail at the specific site conditions. It is possible to establish a number of basic standards and guidelines, but to effectively manage signs in these places requires an ongoing, hands-on effort. Some communities make use of special commissions to make sure that signs are thoughtfully designed and placed. In these instances, details such as color and lighting can be particularly important in protecting what is seen as a community treasure.



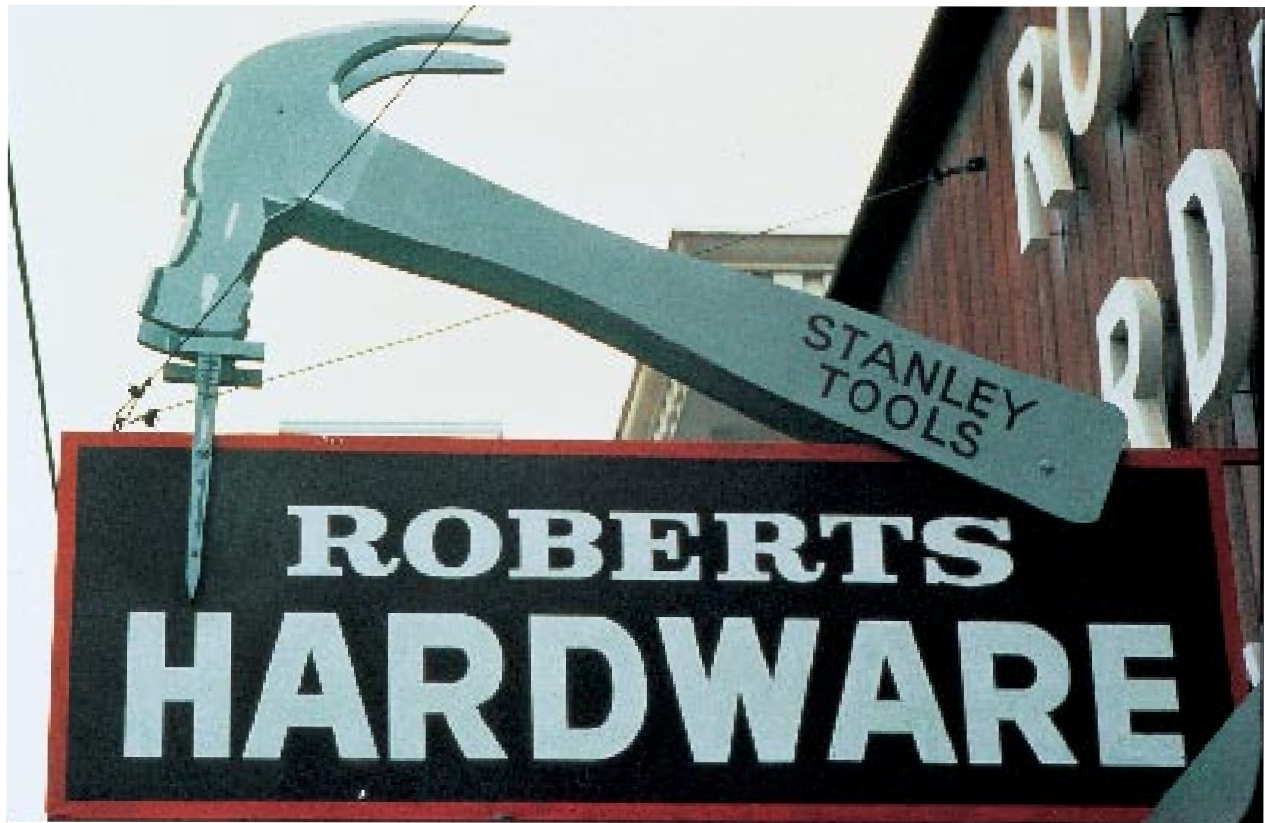
Mark Hershaw

*Neighborhood shopping streets are similar to Main Streets, although they typically are a few blocks long and often have a mix of national franchises and locally owned businesses. Some also have auto-oriented uses, such as banks or fast-food drive-through restaurants interspersed with small storefronts that abut the sidewalk.*



Maya Morris

*Signs in historic districts must fit with the historic architecture and character of the buildings. Many communities have enacted design guidelines for signs in historic districts that stipulate appropriate sign types, materials, fonts, and colors.*



National Main Street Center

*Roadsides, Main Streets, and entertainment districts all provide businesses and the community in general an opportunity to be inventive and playful with signs. Fun signs often become local visual landmarks that make people smile. And is there any doubt what these two businesses are selling?*



Marya Morris

## CHARACTERISTICS OF PLACES

In each of the types of districts just described, there are six measures that can be used to determine and direct the character of development and signs within various districts: quality, urban form, streetscape, architectural character, natural features, and landmarks.

### Quality

Fitting individual districts and corridors into a typology is only one aspect of evaluating the setting. The quality of a place is very important in determining and directing its character. This is also a double-edged sword, for some districts are so well established and mature that the principal concern is to preserve the character, while other districts are raw and rough edged, and the major concern may be how to alter character. Nonetheless, different qualitative attributes will likely generate different responses and regulatory approaches.

### Urban Form

The size, height, intensity, and complexity of districts and corridors can vary greatly. A commercial district comprised mainly of 10-story, widely spaced buildings, is quite different in quality than a commercial district comprised of two-story, adjacent buildings. The former might suggest an approach to signage that relies more upon well-landscaped freestanding signs, while the latter would potentially prohibit such signs in favor of building-mounted flat or projecting signs. Similarly, the degree of diversity within a setting can suggest alternative approaches. If all uses are retail with large floor areas, the approach might involve treating building facades as large "signs," combining architectural forms, color, and text in a composition that is visually interesting. This has been done in some recent centers in which architecturally designed towers combine names of businesses, dramatic lighting, and sculptural shapes to create a marker, a unique ambiance, and announce the businesses to customers. On the other hand, a setting that contains numerous small-scale, individually owned businesses might benefit from more intimately scaled, hand-crafted signs that convey the special goods and services offered. In both cases, the design of signs derives from an understanding of the context and a desire to display a craft, rather than merely to erect a generic sign that could be found anywhere. With this attitude toward sign design, signs can be a powerful way of strengthening the character of individual places.

### Streetscape

The streetscape is often a major determinant of the type of sign that might be most appropriate. Very wide arterials carrying fast-moving traffic suggest an attitude of "roadside architecture" in which forms, color, and lighting are bold and larger than life. Again, the dilemma for many communities is that these places are treated as interchangeable with corporate and franchise signs and very nondescript signs dominating the landscape. This is an opportunity to encourage playfulness. And this does not necessarily mean gaudiness. We have a great tradition of fascinating roadside signs—giant milk bottles, ice cream cones, hot dogs, animal figures, and the like. In one community, a roadside café was designed like a large hamburger with a tan, bun-shaped roof, a green corrugated metal awning to resemble lettuce, and dark tinted windows that looked like a meat patty. In effect, the building was the sign. This kind of expressiveness in sign design, while inappropriate in a dense urban setting, may be entirely appropriate in low-density setting.

One of the most important factors in determining the appropriate approach to signage is where buildings are relative in relationship to the street. Buildings fronting on sidewalks typically create an envelope of space bounded by the street and the flanking buildings in which the entire setting is perceived as a unit. Individual businesses with their separate signs contribute an additional layer to the texture of the district, but customers will often view the larger place as a destination. In this case, they will often park and reach their various destinations on foot. Signs will therefore be most effective when aimed at pedestrians. On the other hand, when buildings are pushed back from the street substantially, there is very little pedestrian movement on the sidewalks. Signs would need to be larger, simpler, and less refined in detail. Again, this does not mean that the signs must be the generic, internally lighted metal and acrylic boxes that are so often seen along arterial streets. There are many opportunities to be distinctive, dramatic, and even whimsical.



**Architectural Character**

Cities typically contain one or more districts with a collection of older buildings. Some are true historic districts, others are neighborhood conservation districts, while others may have no designation at all. Regardless, sign design must respect the fundamental components, composition, and character of the building they are mounted on. Obscuring windows, cornices, canopies, and major details of a building smacks of a disrespect for the neighborhood, an attitude that advertising is more important than a community's heritage. There are many examples of signs that respect the character of a structure and that are also effective in communicating the identity and nature of a business. These aspects are not mutually exclusive. Having signs that fit into the geometry and proportions of a building can enhance the visual effectiveness of both the sign and the building.

Sign companies often employ designers who can carefully fit a sign onto a building in a way that enhances its innate qualities. Architects can also find ways of working signs into the arrangement of a facade. There is also a growing field of "environmental graphic design" that addresses the integration of signs into architectural forms.

**Natural Features**

For many communities, the natural environment serves as a defining element in their character. This can manifest itself in many ways:

- Trees, both in natural stands and in stately, planted rows along streets
- Terrain, such as valleys, ridges, mountains, and bluffs
- Water, such as lakes, shorelines, rivers, wetlands
- Views of landforms, panoramic vistas, landmarks, mountains
- Unique ecologies, such as deserts or bayous

These features hold great meaning to residents of an area. They shape the nature of a locale and distinguish it from others. They also can hold real economic value and are an attraction to visitors.

Signs must be designed so that they do not damage these places. It may mean that signs are restricted in size, location, and height in order to preserve these collective assets. But it should still be possible to design signs that are effective. In most cases, it should be possible to incorporate some reference to the natural feature, such as using "forest green" as a color in an area dominated by trees or "monument" signs that maintain views of a mountain range.

**Landmarks**

Most communities contain buildings, structures, or unusual land forms that are seen as symbols of pride, identity, and the heritage of a place. Commercial signs must respect these "sacred" places. This may necessitate special review procedures to ensure that businesses within a certain distance temper their size, location, or lighting. Communities across the country are lamenting the loss of their individual identities and fear that their character is being usurped by interchangeable corporate symbols. Sensitive designed signs can meet the needs of businesses as well as reinforcing the distinctive character of a community.

**IMPLICATIONS**

In considering all of the factors associated with different physical settings, a number of questions arise that could be helpful in framing an appropriate set of regulations:





Summaster of Naples, Inc.

1. *Uniformity vs. Variety*: Would a setting benefit from having strong continuity in the types of signs or would it benefit more from diversity of expression?
2. *Predictability vs. Flexibility*: Should standards be strict, precise, and quantitative, or should there be room for solutions that meet more general performance criteria or guidelines?
3. *Continuity vs. Creativity*: Is having a continuous set of repetitive and similar signs appropriate? Or, instead, should a considerable amount of creativity be allowed and encouraged?
4. *Detailed vs. General*: Should standards attempt to address every possible proposal and condition or, instead, establish larger concepts and principles that can be satisfied many ways?
5. *Ministerial vs. Discretionary Review*: Should the decision be "black and white," following exact standards or formulas, or should the decision involve judgment by an administrative or appointed body?
6. *Single Approach vs. Multiple Approach*: Is the community simple enough to have a uniform regulatory approach, or is it sufficiently complex to warrant different approaches for different settings?
7. *Simplicity vs. Complexity*: Given the type of users, how complicated can the regulations be? Similarly, given the type of administration, how complex should the regulations be?

*Awning signs are used often on historic buildings, such as this restaurant in Naples, Florida. They provide businesses with identification and visibility, and meld nicely with the historic building forms.*

In conclusion, there are many types of settings, with different characteristics. If we are to pursue context-sensitive sign regulations, we must be prepared to understand the nature of these areas and tailor standards, guidelines, and procedures to reinforce their respective qualities.