



# Old Sacramento Special Sign District

## Sign Guidelines and Permit Application Instructions

# **Old Sacramento Special Sign District**

The Old Sacramento Special Sign District ordinance, Chapter 15.152 of the City Code, was revised in the spring of 2005 and has been enforced since August 1, 2005. Because Old Sacramento relies on its historic design theme and physical beauty to attract commerce and tourism, it is critical that Old Sacramento establishments comply with the sign ordinance.

The purpose of the Old Sacramento sign regulations is to preserve and maintain the historic ambience of the Old Sacramento historic district, a National Historic Landmark. These regulations help Old Sacramento recapture the physical environment as it appeared during the Gold Rush era of the late 1800s.

**For information and assistance:**

City of Sacramento  
551 Sequoia Pacific Blvd.,  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
(916) 808-7031

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## **Attachments**

1. Sign design and construction companies list
2. Example sign drawings for submission with permit application
3. Sign Design Application (submit to City of Sacramento, History Division)
4. Sign Permit Application (submit to Community Development Department)
5. Sign Permit Submittal Checklist (submit to Community Development Department)
6. Old Sacramento Special Sign District ordinance (Chapter 15.152 of the City Code)

## Sign Permit Application Instructions

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### Old Sacramento sign ordinance regulations

It is critical that Old Sacramento property owners and merchants read and understand the Old Sacramento Special Sign District ordinance. A copy of the ordinance is provided as an attachment to this packet. The complete ordinance is available on-line at [www.qcode.us/codes/sacramento](http://www.qcode.us/codes/sacramento), Chapter 15.152. Additional copies of the ordinance are also available from the City of Sacramento office at (916) 808-7031.

The Old Sacramento sign ordinance regulations apply to all signs visible from any public area (street, sidewalk, walkway, etc) including those signs inside buildings that are less than six inches from the building's front wall, window, or door.

#### **Key regulations in the Old Sacramento sign ordinance include:**

- a. All permanent signs must have a valid City of Sacramento permit. Permits are NOT transferable from one sign to another.
- b. A-frame or portable signs are not permitted unless used for valet services.
- c. Neon, string lighting, spot lighting, fluorescent lighting is not permitted.
- d. Signs may not obstruct more than 20% of a window or door.
- e. Signs may not contain thumbtacks, staples, tape, or similar temporary bonding materials.
- f. Signs may not consist of plastic in any part.
- g. Wood signs must be painted, not stained, and cannot contain carved messages.
- h. Grand opening signs may not be displayed for more than 30 days.
- i. Menu signs must be enclosed in a glassed-in case of historic character and only one case is permitted per building façade. Menu cases do not require permits; however they must be approved in advance by the City Historian.
- j. Neon or illuminated signs within a business may not be directed to outside pedestrians or traffic
- k. Certain signs, such as open/closed signs, credit card decals, help-wanted signs, real estate (for rent or for sale signs), and street address signs do not require permits as long as they comply with specific criteria in the ordinance.

## Old Sacramento sign design guidelines

In order to recapture the ambiance of California's capital city during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Old Sacramento businesses must adopt advertising techniques and images from that period.

**All permitted signs in Old Sacramento must resemble signs that would have been present in town during the Gold Rush era from 1849 to 1875.** To ensure this, signs must meet design and fabrication criteria described in the *Guideline for Signs* that is a companion to the sign ordinance.

The *Guideline for Signs* manual describes the types of signs and sign installation methods that are permitted in Old Sacramento and provides illustrations and advice on designing signs that enhance the historic character of Old Sacramento. The sign guidelines preserve and improve the historic ambience of the Historic District as a place to live and work and make Old Sacramento an attraction for visitors who come to shop, dine, and play.

**Exterior signs must follow the design guidelines – including sign shape, scale, materials, lettering style, colors, message, and visual balance – to produce signs representative of the Gold Rush era from 1849 to 1875.**

The City of Sacramento's History and Archives Division is responsible for assisting merchants with sign regulations and ensuring compliance with the Old Sacramento sign design guidelines.

**For new signs, owners and merchants should make sure their sign company (or whoever is designing the sign) has a thorough understanding of all guidelines and has reviewed the *Guideline for Signs, Sign Designer and Fabricator's Edition*.**

## Sign Permit Application Instructions

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### Sign permit process

Described below are the basic requirements for obtaining a sign permit. Additional steps may be required prior to issuance of a sign permit.

**Step 1** Carefully review the Old Sacramento Special Sign District ordinance and the companion *Guideline for Signs* manual.

**Step 2** Design your sign and ensure it meets the design and fabrication criteria described in the *Guideline for Signs*.

**Step 3** **Drawings**

Develop **detailed site plan and elevation drawings** of the proposed sign. Prepare multiple drawings if necessary to capture all aspects of the sign design, construction, and installation.

- Site plan drawings depict the sign and surrounding features from a “bird’s eye” view.
- Elevation drawings show the sign as it will look to a person standing on the street.

**The drawings must:**

- Be on heavy paper no smaller than 8½” x 11” and no larger than 11” x 17”.
- Show name, address, and telephone numbers of both business and sign contractor.
- Show location of proposed sign.
- Show the site address, nearby street names, and a north arrow.
- Be clear enough to indicate the nature and extent of the work to be done, including:
  - Sign construction material(s)
  - Colors to be used, including name of paint
  - Font style(s)
  - Sign dimensions
- Show complete installation or anchoring detail, including:
  - How the sign will be braced or supported

- Type of hardware that will be used (type, size of bolts, etc).
- Show location and dimensions of existing signs at the location.
- Show location of all adjacent structures and fixtures, such as street lights, drop shades, awning support poles, parking meters, sidewalk furniture, etc. and distances between these items and the proposed sign.

**Step 4      Design Review**

Complete the one-page Sign Design Application (not the Sign Permit Application), attach the drawings of the proposed sign, and submit two copies of the entire package to:

City of Sacramento  
551 Sequoia Pacific Blvd., Sacramento, CA 95811  
(916) 808-7031 / (916) 808-7072  
*\* Allow two weeks for design review.*

**Step 5      Community Development Department**

When the sign design has been approved by the History Manager, contact the City's Community Development Department to complete the permit process:

City of Sacramento, Community Development Department  
300 Richards Blvd, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor (Public Counter), Sacramento, CA 95811  
Email: [signs@cityofsacramento.org](mailto:signs@cityofsacramento.org)

Sign permit forms are available on the City's website at:  
<http://www.cityofsacramento.org/dsd/forms/sign-permit-application.cfm>

**Step 6**      If you are not the building owner or a licensed contractor, you will need a letter from the building owner, on the owner's letterhead, giving you permission to apply for a sign permit.

**Step 7**      Install the sign as permitted and attach the sign permit tag to the sign. You may also chose to paint the permit tag number directly on the sign.

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of business:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Sign Permit Application Instructions

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Address of business: \_\_\_\_\_

Owner: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_  
(If different from business owner)

Applicant Email: \_\_\_\_\_

The Old Sacramento *Guideline for Signs* preserves and improves the historic ambience of the Old Sacramento Historic District as a place to live and work and makes Old Sacramento an attraction for visitors who come to shop, dine, and play. The City of Sacramento's History and Archives Division are jointly responsible for assisting merchants with sign regulations and ensuring compliance with the Old Sacramento sign design guidelines.

All signs in Old Sacramento must resemble signs that would have been present during the Gold Rush era. The *Guideline for Signs* manual describes the types of signs and installation methods that are permitted in Old Sacramento and provides illustrations and advice on designing signs that enhance the historic character of Old Sacramento. **Exterior signs must follow the design guidelines – including sign shape, scale, materials, lettering style, colors, message, and visual balance – to produce signs representative of the Gold Rush era from 1849 to 1875.**

Attach the following drawings to this application, as explained in the Sign Permit Application Instructions:

- Drawing(s) of the proposed sign, including description of installation hardware
- Site plan drawing(s) of the proposed sign and location
- Elevation drawing(s) of the proposed sign and location
- Letter of approval from property owner

**Submit this application and all drawings to:**

City of Sacramento  
551 Sequoia Pacific Blvd.  
Sacramento, CA 95811

*\*\*Please allow two weeks for design review.*

**STAFF USE ONLY**

Date received \_\_\_\_\_  
By \_\_\_\_\_

Date reviewed \_\_\_\_\_  
By \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Approved      \_\_\_ Denied  
*(List reasons on reverse)*



**STAFF USE ONLY: Design Review comments**  
*Old Sacramento sign permit application*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

## Sign Permit Application Instructions

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The following sign companies have designed and/or manufactured signs for Old Sacramento businesses in the past.

The City of Sacramento **does not endorse or recommend** any particular sign designer, manufacturer, or fabrication company.

The City recommends that business owners in need of a sign designer or fabrication company consult other businesses in Old Sacramento for referrals and recommendations.

### **Fleenerwerks**

Derrell Fleener  
(916) 722-1704  
dafleener@comcast.net

### **Jim Ingram Signs**

Jim Ingram  
(916) 652-6502

**Martha's Lettering** (painting and lettering only)  
(916) 775-4710

### **Poorboy Design Works**

James West  
(916) 662-4258

### **Rich Design**

Wendell Nelson  
(916) 761-1634  
richdesign@comcast.net

### **Window and Sign Design Company**

Amber Mark  
(916) 256-6994  
signthis@gmail.com

## Minor modifications to existing signs

Per the Old Sacramento sign ordinance, an applicant may request a Minor Modification Permit to make minor changes to an existing legal sign. The proposed changes to the existing sign must “not substantially alter the size, structural design, visual balance, and typeface style of the existing legal sign...” and the sign after the modifications must be consistent with all applicable guidelines, rules, and regulations.

Minor modifications include changes like:

- Repainting the sign with the original colors and design (to refresh the paint)
- Repainting the sign with new colors but with no change to the design or lettering
- Changing the lettering to include a new product (no change to the name of the business)
- Repairing minor damage to the sign (not structural)

### Minor Modification Permit process:

1. Obtain a Sign Design Application from the City of Sacramento and review the Old Sacramento sign ordinance and *Guidelines for Signs* publication.
2. Complete the permit application and develop simple, clear drawings and/or a written description of the proposed modifications to the sign.
3. Submit two sets of the application and drawings of the proposed sign modifications to the City of Sacramento History Division for review and approval.
4. The City Historian will review the sign modifications and:
  - a. If the proposed modifications to the sign meet the criteria for “minor modifications, the City Historian will issue the minor modification permit.
  - b. If the City Historian believes that the proposed modifications are NOT minor and constitute an entirely new sign, the City Historian will direct the applicant to complete the entire permit process as for a new sign.
5. Minor modifications are exempted from permit fees.
6. No new permit tag will be issued.

## Sign Permit Application Instructions

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### Exterior canvas drop shades

All exterior canvas drop shades (sun shades) attached to buildings in Old Sacramento require a permit.

- If the drop shade will be completely blank, with no any text or graphics painted on it, a building permit is required.
- If the drop shade will have text or graphics of any kind, it will require a sign permit.

#### Drop shade design requirements:

1. All drop shades must be constructed from fire-rated canvas.
2. All canvas shades must be functional. Shades must have built-in capability to be raised and lowered by a rope and pulley system consistent with the historic period. Hand-crank mechanisms are prohibited.
3. Drop shades must be located on or just below the canopy fascia on the street side of the canopy posts. Historic-style hardware should be used for installation.
4. The width of a canopy or balcony bay determines the width of the drop shade.

#### Drop shade permit process:

1. All drop shades with signage (text or graphics) must follow the sign permit process described in this packet.
2. In addition to the drawings and other requirements, applications for drop shade permits must include:
  - a. A sample of the canvas fabric to be used and;
  - b. A copy of the fabric specification sheet from the manufacturer.