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# ROUTE 12 CORRIDOR PLANNING COUNCIL

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## Sign Guidelines for Corridor Development



Prepared By:

Lake County Department of  
Planning, Building & Development

# **Route 12 Corridor Planning Council Sign Guidelines**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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This is a joint corridor planning report prepared cooperatively by representatives from the Villages of Deer Park, Kildeer, Lake Zurich, Hawthorn Woods and North Barrington; Ela Township; and the Lake County Department of Planning, Building and Development; with the assistance of the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission.

### **Rand Road Yesterday and Today**

The Rand Road corridor within the boundaries of Ela Township overlaps unincorporated land and the territory of five villages. This jurisdictional pattern presents a multiplicity of land use regulations within a relatively small area. Historically, residential development has been the primary land use pattern in this portion of Lake County. In recent years, however, increased population in Western Lake County, a concomitant increase in vehicular traffic along Rand Road and economic prosperity have all contributed to an accelerating trend of large-scale non-residential development in the area. In light of this increasing development pressure, leaders from the five villages have recognized that a joint-municipal approach to corridor land use planning would facilitate orderly growth along the corridor.

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## **Formulation of Route 12 Corridor Planning Council**

Representatives from Ela Township and the participating villages agreed in 1997 to convene a series of meetings to discuss shared strategies to enhance development along the portion of Rand Road within Ela Township. Representatives from the Lake County Planning Department and the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission were also invited to participate in the discussion. This group is referred to collectively as the Route 12 Corridor Planning Council.

## **The Corridor Vision**

From the outset, Council members shared the vision of Rand Road as a gateway to and from Southwestern Lake County. The “gateway” concept becomes even more relevant as an ever-increasing number of motorists travel the Rand Road corridor on a daily basis. Formation of the Council presents an opportunity to harness this unique geographic characteristic. In turn, coordinated land use planning strategies can help foster in residents and visitors alike a “sense of place”. This collaborative effort could also help ensure that the Rand Road corridor stands out as an example of Lake County development at its best.

## **Establishment of Priorities**

Meetings over the first two years focused attention on particular physical aspects of corridor development that merit improvement. Several development aspects were identified as presenting a significant impact on the physical character of corridor development, including landscaping, setbacks, signage, and building height. It was recognized that treatment of all such aspects would involve considerable time and resources. Accordingly, the Council agreed to prioritize these issues for discussion, in order to establish a planning strategy that was both timely and manageable.

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## **Sign Guidelines**

Of the preceding aspects, corridor signage was established as a second priority for discussion. Ideally, the regulation of corridor signage should strike a balance between advertising interests and corridor aesthetics. Signs can be designed, constructed and placed in a manner that effectively advertises roadside development while not visually overwhelming or distracting the motorist. When designed in accordance with aesthetic conventions, signs can even complement or enhance a property's appearance. As such, corridor sign guidelines represent an opportunity to improve motorists' driving experience along Rand Road and "showcase" development within member communities.

## **Implementation of Sign Guidelines**

These corridor design guidelines are intended to be implemented primarily through the local development review and approval process. Lake County and the five member villages all regulate development, in part, through the conditional use permit and planned unit development (PUD) process. Additionally, member villages review new development proposals in the context of annexations. All such processes allow the imposition of reasonable conditions on new development along the Route 12 Corridor. Member communities have agreed, accordingly, to incorporate these guidelines into the process of reviewing new development along Rand Road.

It is also envisioned that each member community will disseminate these guidelines to developers in order to encourage them to incorporate the guidelines into their development plans.

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## **PROCESS OF FORMULATING QUALITATIVE SIGN GUIDELINES**

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Initially, it was agreed that corridor signage should create a pleasant visual experience for passing motorists while not sacrificing the advertising needs of corridor development.

The Council in turn established an action plan to identify qualitative sign characteristics that tend to support these balanced goals. From these characteristics, the Council would formulate a series of qualitative “visual performance standards”, or qualitative sign guidelines intended to promote the desired effect for passing motorists. Ultimately, these guidelines could then be used by the County and member villages in reviewing development plans.

### **Visual Preference Survey**

In early 2001, Lake County representatives conducted a photographic survey of the signage along various existing corridor developments throughout Lake County. These photographs were taken from a County vehicle in the roadway, at a distance intended to simulate the vantage point of a motorist driving along Rand Road. The results of this field work formed the basis of a “visual preference survey”, designed to address aesthetic aspects of signage. The Council had already successfully used this “visual preference survey” technique to establish a series of landscaping guidelines in 2000.

Specifically, after selecting a series of photographs representing a broad range of sign types, Lake County representatives presented these photographs to the Council. Council members were then invited to discuss the photographs with their village commissioners and trustees and to rank the various sign types in order of aesthetic preference. Council members were also asked to explain their aesthetic preferences, from the perspective of a motorist.

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## **Formulation of Qualitative Sign Guidelines**

Upon receipt and tabulation of the survey results, Lake County representatives identified qualitative sign characteristics that the respondents repeatedly rejected, and sign characteristic that the respondents ranked highly.

From the reaction of the survey respondents, clear preference patterns emerged. These preference patterns were distilled into qualitative sign guidelines, which could then be incorporated directly into sign plan reviews.

For example, images depicting shiny, plastic sign materials elicited a consistently negative reaction from the survey respondents, whereas images depicting wood, stone, brick, masonry, or metal sign materials drew consistently high scores. This preference pattern led to the conclusion that “plastic or glass surfaces” should generally be avoided from the perspective of a motorist; whereas “wood, stone, brick, masonry, or metal surfaces” should be encouraged. This sign guideline could then be utilized in creating a more aesthetically pleasing sign pattern along Rand Road, to enhance the driving experience.

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## **PROCESS OF FORMULATING QUANTITATIVE BUILDING SIGN GUIDELINES**

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Upon formulation of the qualitative sign guidelines, the Council agreed to address various quantitative aspects of building sign design such as sign area, sign length, and other dimensional attributes. The Council simultaneously reserved the option to address quantitative aspects of freestanding signage at a later time. The Council in turn established an action plan to identify quantitative building sign characteristics that tend to support the balanced goals of creating a pleasant visual experience for passing motorists and preserving the advertising needs of corridor development.

From these quantitative attributes, the Council would formulate a series of quantitative “visual performance standards”, or guidelines designed to promote the desired effect for passing motorists. Ultimately, in conjunction with the qualitative guidelines, these quantitative guidelines could then be used by the County and member villages in reviewing development plans.

### **Video Sign Inventory**

It was decided that a drive-by video, taken from a motorist’s vantage point, would assist the Council in most precisely capturing the varied perspectives from which building signs could be viewed in terms of their quantitative attributes. In late 2001, Lake County representatives conducted a video sign inventory of ten (10) commercial developments throughout Lake and Cook Counties. The inventory was taken from a moving County vehicle approaching and passing each development from both directions. This video inventory was then presented to the Council. Although it was clear that qualitative sign characteristics tend to influence their impressions, Council members were asked to focus specifically on the dimensional attributes of signage to the greatest extent possible. Council members were then invited to rank these developments from this perspective in order of preference, from the viewpoint of a motorist, and to explain their reasoning.

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## **Formulation of Quantitative Building Sign Guidelines**

From the reaction of the survey respondents, clear preference patterns emerged, as was the case with the visual preference survey conducted earlier in the year. Among the ten inventoried developments, respondents clearly favored certain corridor developments over others, as a reflection of the quantitative attributes of building signage contained in these developments. Lake County representatives then identified the top three (3) corridor developments based on the respondents' rankings, and evaluated the dimensional attributes of signs contained in these three developments.

The Council's preference patterns were then distilled into quantitative building sign guidelines, which could be incorporated directly into sign plan reviews. These guidelines are expressed as relationships, given the recognition that a sign's appropriate dimensional attributes are somewhat dependent on the context in which it is located.

For example, the appropriate height of lettering on a building sign is dependent upon the distance of the building to the roadway. In particular, at greater distances, a larger letter height is necessary to achieve the appropriate degree of visibility from a motorist's perspective. Therefore, a guideline that takes into account the variables of distance and height may be expressed as a ratio between sign height and the building setback to the street. This sign guideline could then be utilized in conjunction with qualitative guidelines in creating a more aesthetically pleasing sign pattern along Rand Road, to enhance the driving experience.

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## QUALITATIVE SIGN GUIDELINES

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The qualitative sign guidelines are organized into several categories, based on major areas of concern elicited among survey respondents: Colors; Sign Material; Lighting; Sign Composition; Integration of Signage with Façade or Supporting Structure; Freestanding Sign Supporting Structures; Integration of Freestanding Signs with Landscaping and Topography; and Prohibited Sign Types. Each category contains a number of specific sign guidelines. These guidelines are not all-inclusive; future discussions are intended to elicit additional qualitative guidelines. The Council also retains the option to refine existing guidelines, when appropriate.

### Colors

- The sign and any background should together consist of no more than 2 colors or shades of the same color



*Preferred: Mounted sign letters consisting of only one color*

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## Colors (Continued)

- Primary, white and “day-glo” colors should be avoided



*Discouraged: Primary-colored lettering on white background*

- If 2 colors are used, at least 1 color should closely match the color of the most significant façade feature(s) or the predominant color of the façade or supporting structure to which the sign relates
- The color of text should not so closely match the façade or background color as to appear unreadable
- Preferred Color Combinations: Black on beige, ecru or natural limestone background; Earth-tones on complementary earth-tone background; Beige or ecru on red brick background; Forest green on beige, ecru or red brick background; Burnished gold on forest green background

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## Sign Material

- Polished, glossy, shiny or reflective surfaces are discouraged



*Discouraged: Glossy plastic mounted letters*

- Matte, natural, brushed, patina-like or burnished surfaces are preferred
- Plastic or glass surfaces are discouraged
- Wood, stone, brick, masonry or metal materials are preferred

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## Lighting

- For mounted letters, back-lighting is preferred



*Preferred: Back-lighting softly illuminates mounted letters*

- Internal illumination should be avoided
- Protruding overhead lights or lamps should be avoided
- Lighting devices should be hidden or softened by or integrated into architectural features or landscaping
- Natural (soft halogen or incandescent) lighting is preferred over bright or fluorescent lighting

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## Lighting (Continued)

- Lighting devices for antique, historical or other similar unique architectural themes should be integrated stylistically into facades



*Preferred: Antique fixtures flanking sign*

- Lighting should be focused and only so bright as to effectively illuminate the sign surface encompassing the extreme limits of the text
- For freestanding signs, ground-based external lighting is preferred, subject to the above guideline

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## Sign Composition

- Softer, subtler alternatives to prominent corporate logos are preferred to an extent that will reasonably preserve customer recognition



*Preferred: Softer alternative to typical corporate sign*

- The sign text should consist of no more than 2 fonts or sizes
- Italicized, bold and plain text should not be mixed
- The use of images, pictures and logos should be minimized but, if used, shall be simplified in appearance and integrated into the site's overall architectural and color schemes

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## Sign Composition (Continued)

- Solid lettering is preferred over highlighted or accented lettering



***Discouraged:*** Highlighted and accented lettering

- Longer text strings are preferred over text stacking
- Continuous text strings should consist of only one size, font or style

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## Integration of Signage with Façade or Supporting Structure

- For facades containing raised or recessed horizontal architectural features, lettering should harmoniously relate to these features



*Preferred: Integration of signs into recessed surface*

- For single-tenant buildings, multiple signs on the same façade should be avoided
- For multi-tenant buildings, all signage on the same façade should be consistent in color, size and elevation

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## Freestanding Sign Supporting Structures

- Monument signs are preferred over post-mounted signs to avoid a temporary, fragile or rickety appearance



**Discouraged:** Ramshackle post-mounted sign

- Freestanding signs should emphasize horizontal rather than vertical massing
- The surface of monument signs should contain visible indentations or see-through spaces of appropriate dimensions at appropriate intervals to avoid overt massing, where applicable

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## Integration of Freestanding Signs with Landscaping and Topography

- Landscaping consistent with the Route 12 Corridor Planning Council Guidelines should be planted around the base of freestanding signs, preferably at a surface area ratio of one-to-one or greater, based on the expected plant growth at maturity



*Preferred: Landscaping exceeds 1:1 ratio*

- Freestanding signage designed with a base elevation above the site's average finished grade should emphasize horizontal rather than vertical massing

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## Prohibited Sign Types (including but not limited to the following)

- Wind-actuated signs or other similar attention-getting devices (including pennants, buntings, streamers, banners, propellers, and spinners)



***Prohibited:*** Attention-getting streamers and banners

- Animated signs
- Electronic signs
- Beacons/lasers/holographic signs or other similar attention-getting devices
- Signs containing obscene/pornographic images or text
- Flags (exceptions: American, Municipal or County flags in accordance with local ordinances)

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## Prohibited Sign Types (Continued)

- Portable or moveable signs



*Prohibited: Portable sign on wheels*

- Signs painted on or affixed to benches, fences, utility poles, trees, or other similar structures
- Roof signs (including signs protruding over the vertical surface of a mansard roof)
- Signs in the right-of-way
- Strings of lights (except those whose purpose is not intended to draw attention to the site)
- Inflatable signs (including blimps, balloons, and figures)
- Signs on parked vehicles

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## Prohibited Sign Types (Continued)

- Billboards



*Prohibited: Billboard*

- Off-site advertising signs
- Signs relating to abandoned or closed businesses
- Signs that, by their position, working illumination, size, shape or color, obstruct, impair, obscure or interfere with motorists' vision, mimic any traffic control sign, signal or device, or otherwise present a traffic hazard
- Attention-getting devices: Fluttering; Undulating; Swinging; Rotating/Revolving; Blinking; Flashing; Incorporating Sounds

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## QUANTITATIVE BUILDING SIGN GUIDELINES

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The quantitative building sign guidelines are organized into eight distinct ratio thresholds, based on major areas of concern elicited among survey respondents: (1) Height of Sign: Height of Fascia; (2) Height of Sign: Height of Building; (3) Height of Sign: Setback to Street; (4) Elevation of Sign: Elevation of Eaves; (5) Elevation of Sign: Elevation of Roofline; (6) Total Sign Area: Total Façade Area; (7) Total Sign Length: Total Façade Length; and (8) Tenant Sign Length: Tenant Store Length. During the sign design process, a proposed ratio threshold should not exceed the threshold contained in any given guideline unless clearly warranted by exceptional circumstances unique to the development in question.

These guidelines are not all-inclusive; future discussions may elicit additional quantitative guidelines, including guidelines for freestanding signage. The Council also retains the option to refine existing guidelines, when appropriate.

### Specific Terms Defined

*Height:* The vertical dimensions on a particular item (not to be confused with elevation, below).

*Elevation:* The vertical distance of a particular item to the ground (not to be confused with height, above).

*Fascia:* A broad, flat, unbroken building surface under the roofline upon which sign letters may be mounted.

*Eave:* The lowest edge of the roof.

*Ridge:* The peak of the roof.

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## Height of Sign: Height of Fascia

- The ratio of [Height of Sign: Height of Fascia] should not exceed 30% (in cases when the fascia section upon which the sign is mounted incorporates a peaked projection, the height of the peaked projection shall be measured as  $\frac{1}{2}$  the vertical distance between the base and the ridge of the peaked projection).



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## Height of Sign: Height of Building

- The ratio of [Height of Sign: Height of Building] should not exceed 8% when the façade section upon which the sign is mounted contains a primarily horizontal roofline.

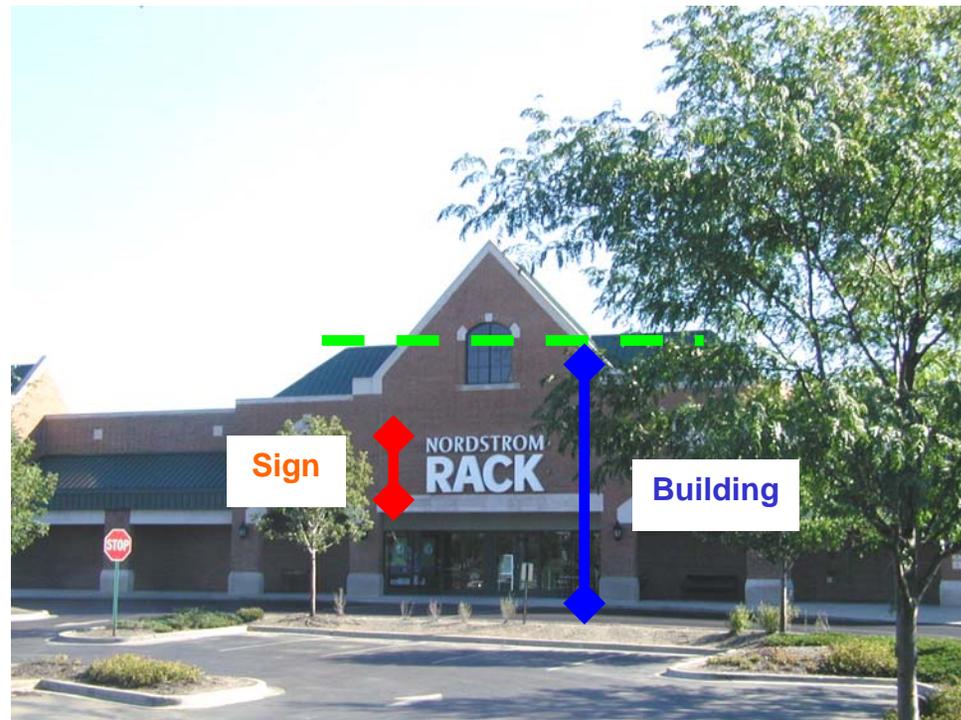


*Horizontal Roofline*

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## Height of Sign: Height of Building (Continued)

- The ratio of [Height of Sign: Height of Building] should not exceed 13% when the façade section upon which the sign is mounted contains a primarily peaked roofline (in such cases, the peaked roofline shall be measured as  $\frac{1}{2}$  the vertical distance between the eaves and the ridge of the peaked roofline).



*Peaked Roofline*

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## Height of Sign: Building Setback to Street

- The ratio of [Height of Sign: Building Setback to Street] should not exceed 1.5%



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## Elevation of Sign: Elevation of Eaves

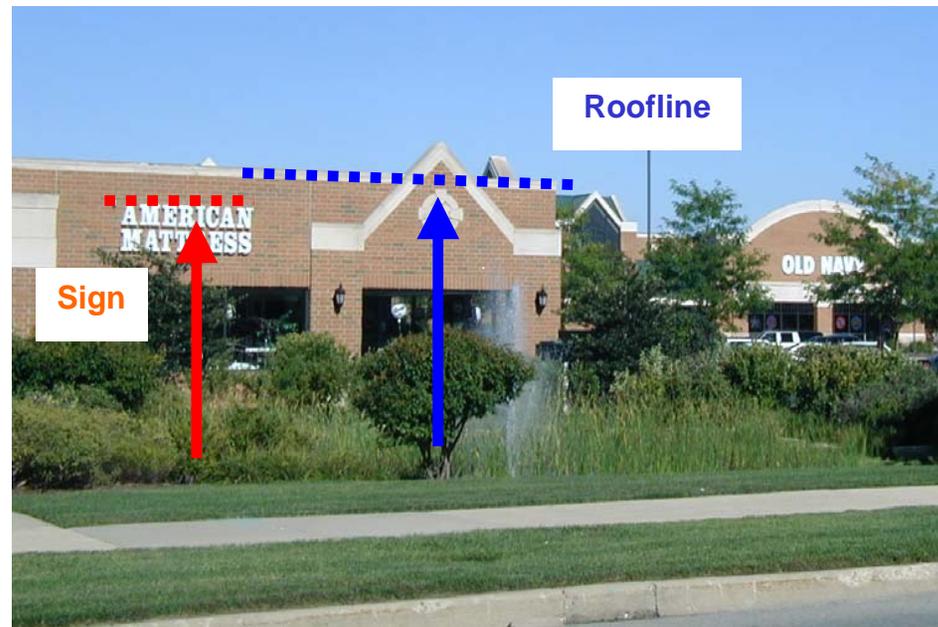
- The ratio of [Elevation of Sign: Elevation of Eaves] should not exceed 75%



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## Elevation of Sign: Elevation of Roofline

- The ratio of [Elevation of Sign: Elevation of Roofline] should not exceed 75% when the façade section upon which the sign is mounted contains a primarily horizontal roofline.

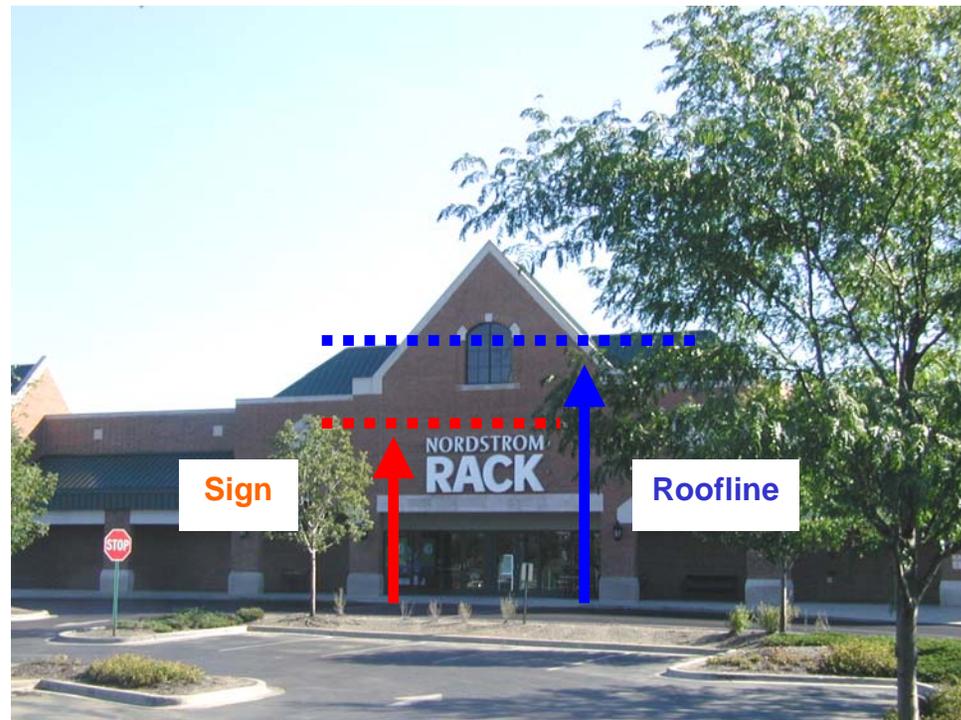


*Horizontal Roofline*

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## Elevation of Sign: Elevation of Roofline (Continued)

- The ratio of [Elevation of Sign: Elevation of Roofline] should not exceed 60% when the façade section upon which the sign is mounted contains a primarily peaked roofline (in such cases, the peaked roofline shall be measured as  $\frac{1}{2}$  the vertical distance between the eaves and the ridge of the peaked roofline).

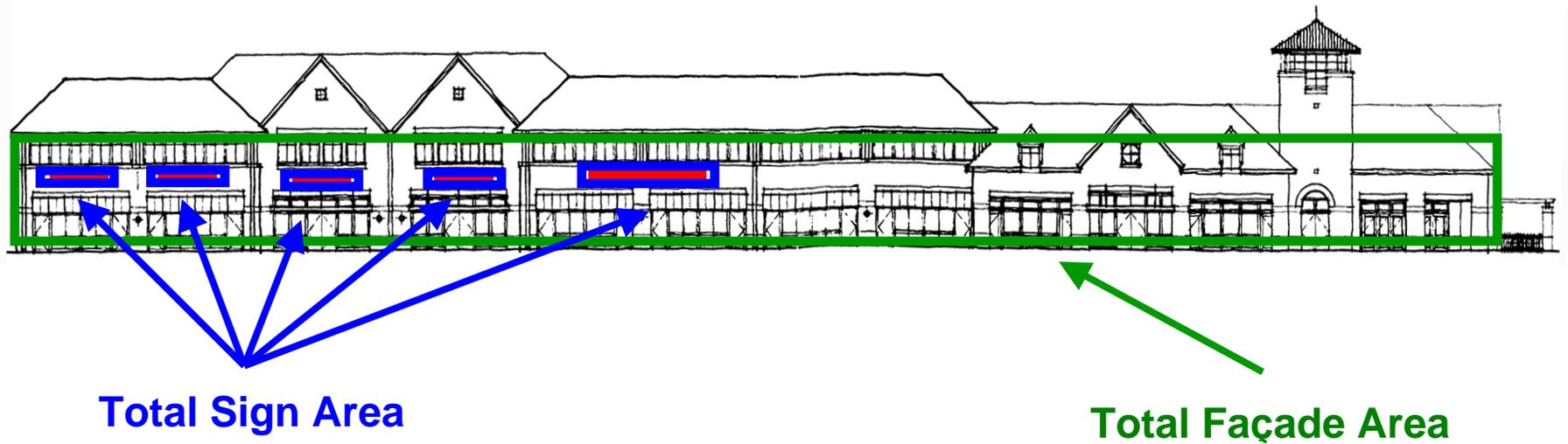


*Peaked Roofline*

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**Total Sign Area: Total Façade Area**

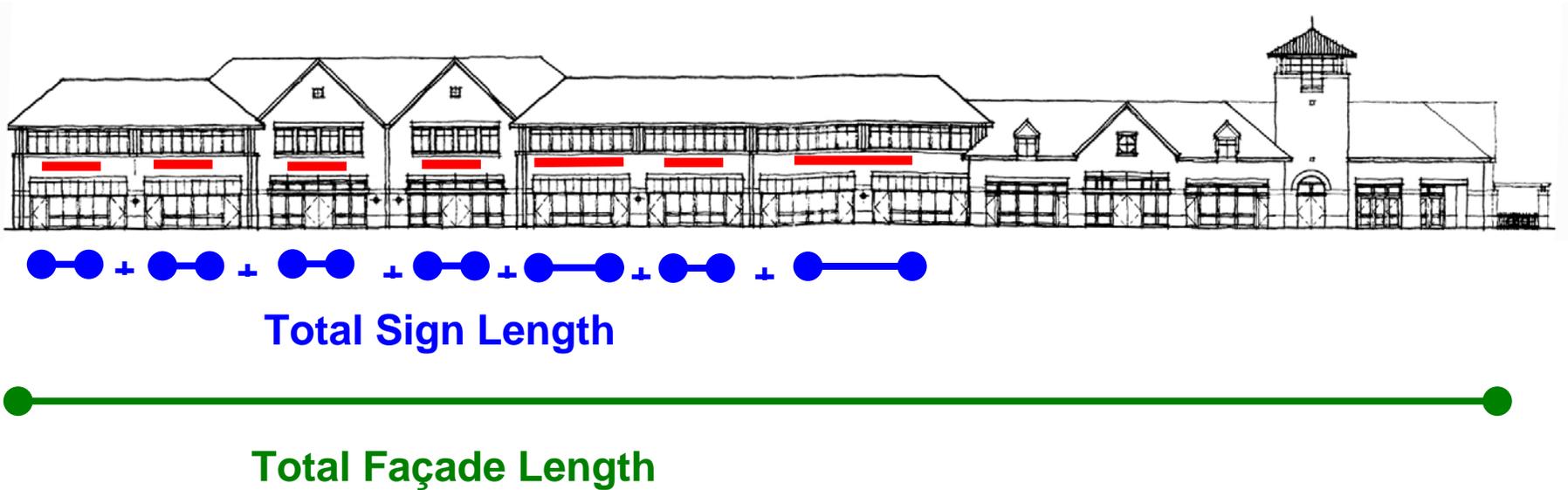
The ratio of [Total Sign Area: Total Façade Area] should not exceed 2%



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## Total Sign Length: Total Façade Length

The ratio of [Total Sign Length: Total Façade Length] should not exceed 25%



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## Tenant Sign Length: Tenant Store Length

- The ratio of [Tenant Sign Length: Tenant Store Length] should not exceed 25%. This guideline may be modified in the case of exceptionally narrow tenant storefronts.

