Guidelines for Awnings in Historic Districts and on Individually Listed properties in accordance with KSA 75-2724, Kansas State Historic Preservation Law

According to the state preservation law (KSA 75-2724), new signs and awnings (that require a local permit) installed on buildings individually listed in the state or National Register or those within a historic district are subject to review in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. This document is intended to illustrate the Standards and provide specific examples of signs and awnings that do and do not meet the Standards.
Historic Background: Awnings

The primary purpose of historic awnings was to function as cover for inclement weather and shade from high sun exposure. Historically, awnings were covered with canvas. Early awnings were the typical shed type and were often retractable. Later in the 19th century awnings could be shaped to fit arched openings. Over time awnings became more than just climate control devices; they were used as decorative details and featured scalloped edges, multiple colors, and lettering. Beginning in the 1940s, metal awnings appeared in downtowns as well as on residential buildings, but for the most part awnings have not changed as drastically as signs have. Canvas awnings are still widely used today and are very appropriate for a historic building.

When creating a new awning for a historic building or within a historic district consult the following: Preservation Brief #44: The Use of Awnings on Historic Buildings: Repair, Replacement, and New Design (located on the National Park Service website: nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/brief44.htm) and refer to the following examples:

Downtown Ottawa 1898. Note awning shapes and placement.
Awnings that are compatible with historic buildings and districts:

Shape:
- Shed shaped awnings that are fixed or operable with fixed or free-hanging valances
- Awnings that are shaped to the window opening

Material:
- Canvas
- Synthetic fabrics such as acrylic or polyester coated canvas

Placement:
- Awnings that reflect the storefront openings and structural bays; one awning for each bay
- Awnings that do not obscure or damage historic features

Compatible new operable canvas shed awnings. This building on the top features a separate awning for each storefront. The design and fabric are the same resulting in a unifying theme on this segmented building. The building on the bottom features different types of coordinating awnings for different storefront configurations.
Awnings that are *not compatible* with historic buildings and districts:

- Inappropriately placed awnings that obscure historic features such as windows
- Vinyl awnings
- Internally illuminated awnings
- Inappropriately sized awnings; awnings spanning more than one storefront
- Dome or spherical awnings
- Pent or mansard roof additions

There is precedence for wood frame awnings that extend over the sidewalk on mid-19th century downtown buildings (photo at top); however, the photo on the bottom illustrates a wood frame awning on an early 20th century (1930) building that is incompatible. The awning stretches across multiple buildings, is too large, and partially covers second story windows, which detracts from the architectural integrity.
Both the sign and the awning inappropriately span two storefronts. One awning for each separate building would be appropriate. The sign is also too large, obscuring historic features.

This internally illuminated vinyl awning functions more as a sign and is not appropriate for a historic building or district.
There is no historic precedent for a pent roof or a mansard roof on the front of a historic commercial building. Roof additions require more material than a typical awning and are often much too large resulting in damage to the storefront and obscured historic features.