

# Signs

## General Information for Property and Business Owners

### INTRODUCTION

Article 12 of the Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance regulates the number, size and type of signs that businesses may display and, in certain instances, the length of time that signs can be posted. Generally, no permanent sign should be installed, altered, refaced or relocated unless a sign permit has been issued by the zoning administrator. The county is committed to working with you to make sure that your business or property is adhering to the county's Zoning Ordinance.

This brochure provides property and business owners with tips for having the greatest visual impact with your signs. Additionally, this brochure contains contact information on where to go to get more in-depth information and assistance regarding signs.



## BUSINESS SIGNAGE—A CASE FOR “LESS IS MORE”

How do you attract potential customers to your business when they are in cars and buses traveling at 30-45 miles per hour? One answer is through signs. Signs are one of the best ways to promote a business. However, research shows that when there are too many signs, the result is visual clutter that actually detracts customers. Too many signs along roadways can be unsafe for drivers who are trying to read the messages when they should be paying attention to their driving, and also can result in the intended message getting lost or misunderstood. When it comes to signs, the old adage holds true — “Less is more.”



**Too many signs or makeshift temporary signs give the impression of clutter and disorganization and can be distracting, making it harder to discern the main message.**

### HOW CAN YOU HAVE THE GREATEST IMPACT WITH YOUR SIGNS?

- Signs are often a customer's first impression of your business. To be most effective, signs should be maintained in a safe, neat and clean condition.
- Too many signs, lots of different types of signs or a cluttered arrangement of signs may convey a negative message about your business.
- The name of your business, products and services offered or a key promotion can get lost among too many signs.
- Shopping centers with multiple tenants should consider a coordinated signage plan that fosters a unified look, while allowing for individuality among businesses.

Coordinating the arrangement of signs makes them easy to read.

Permanent signage creates a better impression than temporary, inexpensive signage.

High quality and appropriately scaled pedestrian signs create a welcoming environment.

Window signage should leave room to see in and out.



**Appropriately scaled, organized and high-quality, signs are inviting to customers.**

## DIFFERENT SIGNS HAVE DIFFERENT RULES\*

### Permanent Signs

Permanently displayed signs on private property may be freestanding or building-mounted and, in most cases, require a permit prior to installation. Building or electrical permits may also be required depending on the type of sign. Fairfax County has size, type and location standards that vary depending on the building use and the zoning district where the sign is located.

### Temporary Signs

There may be a number of reasons why a person may want to install a temporary sign on a property—grand openings, sales, going-out-of-business—just to name a few. Fairfax County places restrictions on temporary signs. In some instances, temporary signs may not be displayed for more than 14 days and are limited in size to 20 square feet.

## UNDER MOST CIRCUMSTANCES, SIGNS THAT ARE NOT PERMITTED INCLUDE\*

- Signs in state rights-of-way and attached to a utility pole, highway sign, fence, tree or to any object within the limits of a roadway.
- Signs that can move by any means, including fluttering or rotating.
- Signs displaying flashing, intermittent/intensifying lights or animated scrolling.
- Signs that obstruct a window, door, fire escape, stairway or other access.
- Temporary store window signs for a sale or promotion that cover more than 30 percent of the total window area of a business.
- Vehicles that have signs on them that are parked within 25 feet of a roadway.

\* Refer to Article 12 of the Zoning Ordinance for specific sign regulations.

## HOW CAN YOU APPLY FOR A SIGN PERMIT?

An application for a sign permit is filed with the zoning administrator on forms furnished by the Fairfax County Department of Planning and Zoning, Zoning Administration Division. In most cases, one completed sign permit application is required for each proposed sign and a separate fee is charged for each sign permit. You must apply in person at the county's Zoning Administration Division office. Application information can be found at: [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/zoning/signs.htm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/zoning/signs.htm)

## SIGN ENFORCEMENT

Sign regulations are enforced by the Department of Code Compliance. Failure to comply with the Zoning Ordinance could subject a business or property owner to a notice of violation and potentially fines. More information is available at: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/code/signs/>

## FAIRFAX COUNTY'S SIGN REMOVAL PROGRAM

Fairfax County has been authorized by the Virginia Department of Transportation to remove signs that are illegally placed in the public road right-of-way. This includes political campaign signs, advertising signs and others. For more information about the sign removal program visit:

[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/signs/signremovalprogram.htm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/signs/signremovalprogram.htm)

For more information and for sign permits, contact:

### Department of Planning & Zoning, Zoning Administration Division Zoning Inspections Branch

12055 Government Center Parkway, Suite 820, Fairfax, VA 22035 • 703-324-4300, TTY 711

The Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance is available at:

[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/zoningordinance](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/zoningordinance)

Complaints may be directed to:

### Department of Code Compliance

703-324-1300, TTY 711

[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/code](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/code)

Prepared in consultation with the Department of Planning and Zoning and Department of Code Compliance by:



**Office of Community Revitalization**

Fairfax County, Virginia

[www.fcrevit.org](http://www.fcrevit.org)

703-324-9300



This document is available in an alternative format upon request, call the Office of Community Revitalization at 703-324-9300, TTY 711. Please allow 10 working days for preparation of material.