

Chapter 7-325

SIGNS

CROSS REFERENCES

Definitions — see Chapter 7-333.

Historic Overlay District — see Chapter 7-317.

Special exceptions and variances — see Chapter 7-323.

Environmental performance standards — see Chapter 7-331.

Nonconforming uses and structures — see Chapter 7-321.

§ 7-325.1. Purpose.

The purpose of this chapter is to promote and maintain overall community beautification and to establish reasonable time, place, and manner regulations on the exercise of free speech in order to promote communication that does not create nuisances, without regulating content. This chapter protects property values by ensuring that proposed signage does not negatively impact adjacent land uses, existing neighborhoods, and municipal historic districts. This chapter promotes traffic safety by avoiding distractions and sight distance obstructions and serves the other objectives of this Code.

§ 7-325.2. Applicability.

- A. A zoning and building permit shall be required before erecting, placing, rebuilding or reconstructing any sign except for signs meeting the requirements of §§ 7-325.7 and 7-325.8.
- B. A certificate of appropriateness shall be required before receiving a building permit to erect a sign located in a municipal historic district that is visible from the public right-of-way.
- C. Only types, sizes and heights of signs that are specifically permitted by this Code within the applicable district shall be allowed.
- D. Each sign permit application shall be accompanied by a plan(s) drawn to scale indicating the proposed dimensions and location of each sign.
- E. Any lawfully existing sign (including nonconforming signs) may be painted or repaired or changed in message without a new zoning permit provided that the changes do not increase the sign area or otherwise result in noncompliance or an increased nonconformity with this Code.

§ 7-325.3. Construction of signs.

- A. Sign construction shall conform in all respects to the City Building Code.

- B. Every permanent sign shall be constructed of durable materials and shall be kept in good condition and repair. No on-premises or off-premises sign (billboard) shall be painted on any wall, fence, or other surface.
- C. Any sign which becomes dilapidated or deemed to be unsafe may be repaired or removed by the City at the expense of the owner or lessee of the property on which it is located, after providing written notice to such owner or lessee.
- D. The Zoning Officer shall cause to be removed any sign that endangers the public safety, such as an abandoned, dangerous, or materially, electrically, or structurally defective sign, or a sign for which no permit has been issued.

§ 7-325.4. Existing nonconforming signs.

- A. Signs lawfully existing at the time of enactment of this Code which do not conform to the requirements of the same shall be considered nonconforming signs. Existing nonconforming signs may be continued to be used and may be repaired, repainted and changed in message but shall not be increased in their nonconformity.
- B. An existing lawful nonconforming sign may be replaced with a new nonconforming sign, provided that the replacement sign meets the following standards:
 - (1) It is not more nonconforming in any measurement than the previous sign (including but not limited to height and total square feet); and
 - (2) It meets the City Building Code.

§ 7-325.5. Determination of sign area.

To determine sign area, signs shall be measured as follows:

- A. The sign area shall be computed by multiplying the greatest height by the greatest length.
- B. For double-faced signs, only one side shall be considered when determining sign size when both sides are identical, both sign faces share the same structure and supports; and the sign faces are back to back with an interior angle formed by the two faces which is less than or equal to 45°.
- C. Structural members not bearing advertising matter and/or not in the form of a symbol or logo shall not be included in the computation of surface area.
- D. Unless otherwise specified, all square footages in regards to signs are maximum sizes.

§ 7-325.6. On-premises permanent signs.

- A. The following table¹ contains the requirements for on-premises signs which are permitted on a lot within the specified districts in addition to signs covered under §§ 7-325.7 and 7-325.8 and such other signs specifically permitted by other provisions of this chapter. The location of signs is regulated under § 7-325.10. Sign definitions are under Chapter 7-333.

§ 7-325.7. Exempt signs.

- A. The following signs are exempt from the regulations of this chapter:
- (1) Official or government signs, including but not limited to directional signs, safety signs, and transportation signs which are authorized by the City of Harrisburg, Dauphin County, or the State of Pennsylvania;
 - (2) Street signs;
 - (3) Historic signs that commemorate an important historic place, event, or person and that is specifically authorized by the City of Harrisburg, Dauphin County, or the State of Pennsylvania;
 - (4) Noncommercial signs;
 - (5) Holiday decorations;
 - (6) Signs which are not visible from the public right-of-way; and
 - (7) Signs which are carried.

§ 7-325.8. Criteria for signs not requiring permits.

- A. The following signs shall be permitted by right within all zoning districts and shall not be required to obtain a zoning permit based on the following criteria. No exceptions are permitted to the criteria. No sign permitted by this § 7-325.8 shall be internally illuminated, except a "time and temperature sign."
- (1) Christmas tree sign. A sign which advertises the seasonal sale of Christmas trees is limited to two signs per lot with a maximum sign area of 10 square feet and shall only be posted when such products are offered for sale.
 - (2) Charitable event sign. A sign which advertises a special event is limited to two signs per lot with a maximum sign area of 10 square feet and shall be placed no more than 30 days before the event and shall be removed no later than 10 days after the event.

1. Editor's Note: The table is included as an attachment to this chapter.

- (3) Contractor's sign. A sign which advertises work being performed on a lot is limited to one sign per lot with a maximum area of 10 square feet and shall be placed during the period of work and removed no later than 10 days after the completion of the work.
- (4) Directional sign. A sign which provides information regarding traffic direction, fire lanes, loading or service area, directions to apartment numbers or parking courts in a development.
- (5) Garage/yard sale sign. A sign which advertises a garage or yard sale is limited to two signs per lot and shall be installed no sooner than two days prior to the sale and shall be removed no later than one day after the sale.
- (6) Identification sign. A sign which identifies the name or title of the resident and or the name, street address, or use of a lot without any advertising shall be limited to one sign per lot with a maximum sign area of two square feet.
- (7) Open house sign. A sign which advertises the temporary open house of a property for sale or for rent is limited to one sign per lot and shall be placed no sooner than seven days before the open house and shall be removed at the end of the day of the open house.
- (8) Parking area sign. A sign which identifies the persons permitted to use the parking space and the rules of use is limited to two signs per lot, not including handicapped signs, and shall be a maximum sign area of four square feet.
- (9) Political sign. A sign which promotes a candidate or an initiative related to an upcoming election shall have a maximum sign area of 10 square feet and shall not be placed on any lot earlier than 60 days prior to the election and shall be removed no later than seven days after the election. Political signs shall be installed on private property only with the consent of the property owners and may not be installed on any public right-of-way including sidewalks, medians, and traffic islands.
- (10) Proposed development or funding sign. A sign which announces a proposed development that has received final approval and/or funding from the City is limited to two signs per lot with a maximum sign area of 10 square feet and shall be removed after receipt of a certificate of occupancy.
- (11) Real estate sign. A sign which advertises that a property is for sale or for rent is limited to one sign per street that the lot abuts and shall be placed on the lot only during the period when the property is for sale or for rent and shall be removed no later than seven days after the property is sold or rented. Real estate signs may be window signs, projecting signs, or wall signs. Freestanding real estate signs are permitted only on lots with a front yard setback. All real estate signs are limited to a sign area of 10 square feet.

- (12) Sidewalk or sandwich board sign. A sign which advertises a retail operation located on the same block and which is only placed on the sidewalk near the building and does not obstruct pedestrian traffic. A sidewalk sign must be taken inside when the business is closed and must not exceed four feet in height or four square feet in sign area on each face of the sign.
- (13) Time and temperature sign. A sign which announces the current time and temperature and any nonprofit public service message is limited to one sign per lot with a maximum sign area of 10 square feet.
- (14) Trespassing or warning sign. A sign which indicates that a road or lot is private or prohibiting certain activities is limited to two signs per lot with a maximum sign area of four square feet.

§ 7-325.9. Signs of closed businesses.

- A. Following the closing of any business, any and all related exterior signs shall be removed no later than 30 days from the effective closing date. However, a freestanding sign structure or wall sign structure may remain if all of the following conditions are met:
 - (1) Such sign is of substantial construction and in good condition;
 - (2) Such sign is clearly appropriate for reuse;
 - (3) A principal building of substantial construction suitable for reuse remains on the site;
 - (4) The business space is clearly being actively offered for rent or sale for a new use, or is being actively renovated;
 - (5) The sign is changed to a blank face or to a "for rent, lease or sale" sign; and
 - (6) Internal light bulbs inside of the sign are not visible.

§ 7-325.10. Location of signs.

- A. Only the following signs may be located or may be extended into public rights-of-way:
 - (1) Permitted official signs, nameplate signs, public service signs, and directional signs;
 - (2) Projecting signs which do not extend more than six feet into the public right-of-way or beyond the public sidewalk;
 - (3) An awning or canopy that has received an administrative easement permit from the Zoning Officer may contain a portion or all of the permitted sign area;

- (4) Temporary banners for 30 days which have received a permit from the Zoning Officer to advertise a public celebration or charitable event, but not a political campaign, cause or opinion and which are permitted to be attached to utility poles, bridges or other fixtures by the respective owner; and
 - (5) Wall signs attached to a building located close to the right-of-way, in which case the wall sign may extend a maximum of 24 inches into the right-of-way if necessary.
- B. The following requirements cover setbacks for freestanding signs:
- (1) Unless specifically stated otherwise, a freestanding sign for a nonresidential use shall be set back a minimum of five feet from the public right-of-way; and
 - (2) An internally illuminated freestanding sign shall not be located within 15 feet of a "residential lot line."
- C. No sign shall be so located or arranged that it interferes with safe sight distances for streets or driveways. However, the City does not accept responsibility to identify all such hazards.
- D. No signs except permitted off-premises, official, political or public service signs shall be erected on a property to which it does not relate.
- E. No sign shall be posted on any property or sign pole or public utility pole, unless permission has been received by the owner.
- F. No sign shall be stapled or nailed to a utility pole, except by an authorized utility or the City.

§ 7-325.11. Illumination of signs.

- A. See Chapter 7-331 regarding light and glare control.
- B. Permitted signs may include an electronically changing message, except for those signs prohibited by Section 7-325.13 below.

§ 7-325.12. Vehicles functioning as signs.

Any vehicle or structure to which a sign is affixed in such a manner that the carrying of such sign or signs no longer is incidental to the primary purpose of the vehicle or structure but becomes a primary purpose in itself shall be considered a freestanding sign provided it is located on the same lot as the business and as such shall be subject to requirements for freestanding signs in the district in which such vehicle or structure is located.

§ 7-325.13. Prohibited signs.

- A. The following signs are prohibited in all zoning districts:

- (1) Spinners, pennants or any moving object used to attract attention to a commercial use; flags and banners of more than 20 square feet per lot that contain a commercial message and that do not meet the requirements for a permitted sign.
- (2) Flashing, blinking, twinkling, animated or moving signs of any type, except for:
 - (a) Time and temperature signs; and
 - (b) Signs that have a nonflashing electronically changing message. This restriction specifically includes window signs but does not prohibit holiday lighting or displays.
- (3) Signs which emit smoke, visible vapors or particles, sound or odor.
- (4) Signs which contain information that states or implies that a lot may be used for any purpose not permitted under the applicable provisions of this Code.
- (5) Signs that are of such character, form, shape or color that they imitate or resemble any official traffic sign, signal or device or that have any characteristics which are likely to confuse or distract the operator of a motor vehicle on a public street (such as prominent use of the words "danger").
- (6) Signs that use reflective materials to give the appearance of flashing, blinking or twinkling.
- (7) Signs or displays that include words or images visible from any public right-of-way that are obscene or pornographic.
- (8) Balloons of greater than 25 cubic feet that are tethered to the ground or a structure and are primarily intended for advertising purposes.

§ 7-325.14. Off-premises signs (billboards).

- A. Off-premises signs shall meet all of the following requirements:
- (1) An off-premises sign shall only be permitted in the IND District;
 - (2) An off-premises sign is only permitted within a maximum of 250 feet of existing right-of-way of an arterial street or expressway;
 - (3) An off-premises sign shall have a maximum sign area of 350 square feet on each sign face. A maximum of two sign faces may be attached. One off-premises sign face shall only be attached to another off-premises sign face if they are generally back-to-back. V-shaped installations shall be regarded as one location providing they have a maximum open space of five feet;

- (4) Each off-premises sign shall be separated by a minimum of 500 feet from any other off-premises sign, including existing signs in other municipalities;
 - (5) The total height of the sign shall be a maximum of 40 feet above the average surrounding ground level.
 - (6) An off-premises sign may have direct or indirect lighting but internal illumination and electronically changing signage is prohibited.
 - (7) An off-premises sign shall meet the following minimum setback requirements:
 - (a) Two hundred fifty feet from a "residential lot line" (as defined by Chapter 7-333);
 - (b) Ten feet from any building;
 - (c) Fifty feet from an existing hospital building or nursing home building; or
 - (d) Ten feet from the existing right-of-way of a public street or any other lot line.
- B. Off-premises signs will be constructed and located to:
- (1) Ensure that a physical environment is maintained that is attractive to desirable types of development, especially light industries and offices;
 - (2) Prevent visual pollution in the City and protect property values, especially in consideration of the fact that most commercial areas of the City are within close proximity to existing residences;
 - (3) Prevent excessive light and glare on adjacent property and streets;
 - (4) Protect the open space character of public park corridors;
 - (5) Avoid the creation of additional visual distractions to motorists, especially along the high-speed expressways and along busy arterial streets that involve complex turning movements, congestion and numerous traffic hazards; and
 - (6) Carry out the purposes listed in § 7-325.1.
- C. This section applies to both commercial and noncommercial off-premises signs except as may be specifically provided for elsewhere in this Code.

§ 7-325.15. Posting of street address.

- A. The street number address shall be displayed on all principal structures.

- B. Each number shall be not less than two inches in height, but not greater than five inches in height. Each number shall be visible from a street.
- C. Each number is encouraged to be:
 - (1) Made of an architectural quality of material such as wood or metal;
or
 - (2) Rendered in painted/stained or etched glass in an historically accurate manner on the door glass or transom above the door.

§ 7-325.99. Penalty.

Chapters 7-701, and 1-305 shall apply.