

Sign Code Handbook

A Companion to Arlington Municipal Code Chapter 20.68 "Signs"



Olympic Avenue in downtown Arlington, WA. Ca. late 1800s.



Department of
Community & Economic Development
18204 59th Ave NE
Arlington, WA 98223

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GETTING STARTED

How do I begin?

Welcome to the City of Arlington! We've recently updated our sign-code regulations and have put together this handbook to help give you a brief overview of the new code.

This handbook is intended *only* as a user's guide and is not a substitute for the actual requirements found in the code.

The Sign Code (AMC Chapter 20.68) is available online at arlingtonwa.gov.

City staff is here to help you understand the sign code, and will gladly answer any questions you may have. Please contact our department mainline at 360.403.3551 for assistance.



SIGN PERMITS

What is a sign?

A sign is any object or display that conveys a meaning. Signs can convey commercial or non-commercial information. Signs include such things as words, pictures, trademarks, flags, banners, and murals.

Do I need a sign permit?

New signs will likely require a permit from the City. Any sign visible to the public from a street, parking area, mall or other outdoor circulation area open to the general public is required to have a sign permit unless the sign qualifies as exempt under the provisions of the code. Some signs that don't require a permit, like real estate signs, are still subject to certain regulations within the sign code.



Why do I need a sign permit?

Sign permits are required to ensure that all new signs comply with the requirements of the sign code, and to protect the public from hazardous conditions that result from signs that are unsafe or obscure the vision of motorists. Sign permits also ensure consistent regulation of both commercial and non-commercial signs.

It is unlawful to display, erect, relocate or alter any sign without a sign permit (unless exempt) issued by the City's Department of Community and Economic Development.

Where do I get a sign permit?

Sign permit applications are available on the City's website and can also be obtained in person from the permit center, located at 18204 59th Ave NE, Arlington, WA (360-403-3551).

The sign code includes specific information about who can apply for a permit, revocation of permits, plan requirements, structural requirements, inspections, and fees.

How much do permits cost?

The cost of a sign permit is based on the sign cost valuation. For example, signs costing between \$500 and \$10,000 have an associated permit fee that ranges between \$31.00 and \$241.26 respectively.

How long does it take to get a permit?

Complete sign permit applications usually take a week or less to review. Incomplete applications delay the review process. Because of this, staff recommends that applicants talk with the staff at the permit counter before submitting an application to make sure it is complete.

How long does my permit last?

Sign permits are good for two (2) years from the date of issuance.

What do I need to submit for a permit?

You will need to include a completed sign permit application, a site plan, drawings of the sign(s), and other information pertinent to the application.

If I move my business, can I take my old sign with me?

You must apply for a new sign permit to install your old sign in a new location. The permit will be issued if the old sign meets the standards contained in the sign code, such as size and location.

Can I change my sign?

Most changes or alterations other than normal maintenance and repair require a new permit. The Permit Center will be happy to help you evaluate the need for a new sign permit.

Can I keep my old sign?

An existing legally nonconforming sign can remain, but cannot be changed or altered. It can be repaired and maintained, if repairs are greater than 50% of the sign value the sign must be replaced or updated. “Legally nonconforming” means the sign was properly permitted when installed.



PERMITTED SIGNS

Common examples of permissible signs within the City include:

Wall Signs are signs attached parallel to a building wall or face that do not project more than twelve inches from the face of the building wall or face.



Illustrative Photo

Freestanding Signs are signs that are detached from any building. Common types include monument signs, pedestal signs, pole signs, and A-frame signs.



Illustrative Photo

Projecting Signs are signs attached perpendicular to a building wall or face of a building.



Illustrative Photo

Suspended Signs are signs that are hung from ceilings of arcades, awnings or canopies.



Illustrative Photo

Joint Identification Signs are signs that identify multiple uses or businesses on the same property (e.g. a shopping center) They can either be attached to a building or freestanding.



Illustrative Photo

Window Signs are signs that are painted on, applied, or attached to a window.



Illustrative Photo

PERMITTED TEMPORARY SIGNS

Some temporary signs require a sign permit. The following are temporary signs that require a permit within the City:

Community Special Event Signs are signs intended for large scale city sponsored events or large scale charity fundraisers held in the City.



Illustrative Photo

City Sponsored Special Events Banners are signs intended to announce upcoming events within the City such as parades or festivals.



Illustrative Photo

Temporary Banners – Commercial Use are signs used by businesses to announce events such as a grand opening or a sale.



Illustrative Photo

Temporary Banners – Non-Profit Fundraising are banners used for small-scale fundraisers that are one-time or periodic events.



Illustrative Photo

EXEMPT SIGNS

Some signs within the City are exempt from requiring a permit but are still subject to certain regulations within the sign code. Examples of exempt signs include:

A-Frame or Sandwich Board Signs are temporary, portable signs that consist of two panels that connect at the top.



Illustrative Photo

Real-Estate and Open House Signs are temporary signs advertising the sale and showing of real property.



Illustrative Photo

Political Signs are temporary signs providing information relating to a local, state, or national election.



Illustrative Photo

Construction Signs are temporary signs that advertise development of property and usually include the name of the company performing the development.



Illustrative Photo

Vehicle Signs are signs placed on working vehicles.



Illustrative Photo

PROHIBITED SIGNS

Some signs are *not* allowed within the City. Examples of prohibited signs within the City include:

Off Premise Signs are signs that advertise or direct attention to a business, commodity, service or activity conducted, sold or offered elsewhere than on the same lot or within the same building upon which such sign is located.



Illustrative Photos

Wind Signs are signs consisting of one or more pennants, ribbons, spinners, streamers, captive balloons, or other objects or materials fastened in such a manner as to move upon being subjected to pressure by wind or breeze. Wind signs do not include flags or temporary banners.



Illustrative Photos

Inflatable Signs are temporary signs made of flexible material that is made to take on a three-dimensional shape when filled with air or gas.



Illustrative Photos

Roof Signs are signs painted on the roof of a building, supported by poles, uprights or braces extending from the roof of a building or projecting above the roofline or a building.



Illustrative Photo

Signs placed in Rights-of-Way are all signs that are unauthorized to be placed within any public right-of-way. A bandit sign advertising a sale or service is a common type of unauthorized sign placed with rights-of-way.



Illustrative Photo

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

How big can my sign be?

Allowable sign areas and heights vary by zone and sign type. In most cases the width of a building determines the amount of allowable sign area for that building. For example, a single tenant in an individual commercial building is allowed sign area as follows: 1.5 square feet of sign area for every one linear foot of business storefront for the first floor and 0.5 square feet for the second floor. Allowed sizes vary by zone.

How do I calculate my sign area?

Standard formulas for regular geometric shapes such as rectangles and circles are used. With irregular shapes, the sign area is the area inside a continuous perimeter up to 12 lines. The examples below show irregular shapes with six and eight lines.



Can I have more than one permanent sign?

Yes. A variety of sign types are allowed, including wall signs, window signs, freestanding signs, suspended and projecting signs. Every business location enjoys an allocation of total cumulative sign area that can be divided between the various permitted types.

Are there structural considerations?

Signs must be securely built and comply with the Building Code and National Electric Code. Building and electric permits may be required.

Can I illuminate my sign?

Yes. Most signs can be directly, indirectly, or internally illuminated. Exposed neon lighting is also acceptable.



Can I have an Electronic Message Center sign?

Yes. Electronic Message Center signs are permissible as part of a Freestanding Sign in zones one (1) through five (5). The Electronic Messaging Center can be no bigger than 1/3rd of the actual area of the freestanding sign.

Can I have a window display?

Yes. Attractive, colorful, artfully arranged window displays are encouraged. Window displays of merchandise available for sale are allowed and are not regulated as a sign and does not need a sign permit. All such items displayed must be located within the interior of the building where the business is located.

EXCEPTIONAL DESIGN INCENTIVE PROGRAM

What is the Exceptional Design Incentive Program?

The City of Arlington values well designed signs because of the aesthetic value they add to the City; therefore, the City has developed an Exceptional Design Incentive Program to promote high quality signs. The Exceptional Design Program can provide flexibility from the standards in the sign code for signs that demonstrate an exceptionally high quality of design creativity and craftsmanship.

This voluntary program allows businesses to propose limited deviations from the regulations set forth in the sign code. The intent of this process is to:

1. Encourage signs of high-quality materials and workmanship;
2. Encourage signs of unique design that exhibit a high degree of imagination, inventiveness;
3. Provide a process for the application of sign regulations in ways that will allow creatively designed signs that make a positive visual contribution to the overall image of the City, while mitigating the impacts of large or unusually designed signs.



How do I apply?

Any property owner or business owner in any sign zone is eligible to apply for an Exceptional Design Sign permit. The option to apply for the design incentive program is available on the application form for a sign permit.

How long does this take?

Approximately 21 days from the date a complete application is received.

Who reviews these?

It depends on how big the sign is. Signs 50 square feet or smaller are subject to review and approval by the Community Development Director. Signs larger than 50 square feet are subject to review and approval by Design Review Board.

Sign Review

Like all other design reviews, sign review under the exceptional design program is a function of the Arlington Planning Commission/Design Review Board.

What are the standards for review?

The Exceptional Design Program includes design standards that include architectural criteria and style, color, contextual criteria, design quality, illumination, number of signs, impact on neighborhood, relationship to buildings, and sign materials.

Can I appeal the decision if denied?

Yes. The applicant may appeal the final decision. Appeals are heard by the Arlington City Council, and must be received in writing within ten calendar days of the date of denial.

