

Section 17C.240.010 Intent and Purpose

- A. Signs have a strong visual impact on the character and quality of the community. As a prominent part of the scenery, they attract or repel the viewing public, affect the safety of vehicular traffic, and their suitability or appropriateness helps to set the tone for the neighborhood. The City relies upon its scenery and physical beauty to attract commerce, aesthetic considerations assume economic value. It is the intent of the City, through this Chapter, to protect and enhance the City's historic and residential character and its economic base through the provision of appropriate and aesthetic signage. In addition, it is the intent of the City to limit the size, type and location of signs in order to minimize their distracting effect on drivers and thereby improve traffic safety. The City seeks to balance the need for the protection of public, health, safety, welfare and community aesthetics, with the desire to protect the freedom of speech, and prevent discrimination in the application of free speech principles and tenets through the use of content-neutral regulations.
- B. The purpose of this Chapter is to promote the public health, safety and welfare through a comprehensive system of reasonable, effective, consistent, content-neutral and nondiscriminatory sign standards and requirements. This Chapter has also been adopted to:
1. Promote and accomplish the goals, policies and objectives of the City's Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code;
 2. To provide minimum standards in order to safeguard life, health, property and public welfare, and promote traffic safety by following the established design standards, including quality of materials, construction, illumination, size, location and maintenance of sign and sign structures;
 3. Recognize free speech rights by regulating signs in a content-neutral manner;
 4. Promote the free flow of traffic and protect pedestrians and motorists from injury and property damage caused by, or which may be fully or partially attributable to, cluttered, distracting and/or illegible signage;
 5. Protect the beauty of the City's built environment by encouraging signs that are compatible with the architectural style, characteristics and scale of the building to which it may be attached, and to encourage signs that are compatible with adjacent buildings and businesses;
 6. Protect property values, the local economy, and the quality of life by preserving and enhancing the appearance of the streetscape;

7. Provide consistent sign design standards;
8. Encourage creative and innovative approaches to signage, and signs that are of a quality design, pleasing in appearance and are appropriate in size, materials and illumination to the surrounding neighborhood;
9. Provide an improved visual environment for the citizens of and visitors to the City; and
10. Adopt clear, understandable regulations which enable the fair and consistent enforcement of this Chapter.

Section 17C.240.060 Exemptions

The following signs are exempt from a sign permit (unless otherwise noted). The area and number of such signs shall not be included in the area and number of signs permitted for any site or use, however, all other relevant requirements of this chapter shall apply. This shall not be construed as relieving the owner of the sign from the responsibility of its erection and maintenance and its compliance with the provisions of this chapter or any other law or ordinance.

- A. Flags. Any flags, provided that they conform to all provisions of this chapter for signs. Freestanding flagpoles require a building permit for structural review.
- B. Memorial signs or tablets, names of buildings, stained glass windows, and dates of erection, when cut into the surface or the facade of the building or when projecting not more than two inches.
- C. Governmental signs. Signs installed by the City, County, or a federal or State governmental agency for the protection of the public health, safety and general welfare, including, but not limited to, the following:
 - 1. Emergency and warning signs necessary for public safety or civil defense;
 - 2. Traffic and/or wayfinding signs erected and maintained by an authorized public agency;
 - 3. Signs required to be displayed by law;
 - 4. Signs showing the location of public facilities including public and private hospitals and emergency medical services; and
 - 5. Any sign, posting, notice, or similar sign placed by or required by a governmental agency in carrying out its responsibility to protect the public health, safety and general welfare.
- D. Signs of public utility companies indicating danger or which serve as an aid to public safety or which show the location of underground facilities.
- E. Flush-mounted wall signs, used to identify the name and address of the occupant for each dwelling provided the sign does not exceed two square feet in sign area.
- F. Non-visible signs. Signs not visible beyond the boundaries of the lot or parcel upon which they are located, or from any public right-of-way. Such freestanding signs require a building permit for structural review.

- G. Changes to the face or copy of changeable copy signs, digital signs, electronic messaging signs, provided such changes do not change the material or appearance of the sign as originally permitted by the City.
- H. The normal repair and maintenance, (painting, repainting, cleaning) of conforming or legal nonconforming signs that does not involve structural alteration of the sign or supporting structure.
- I. Sculptures, fountains, mosaics, murals, public art and design features which do not otherwise constitute a sign.
- J. "No trespassing," "no dumping," "no parking," "private" signs identifying essential public needs (i.e., restrooms, entrance, exit, telephone, etc.) and other informational warning signs, which shall not exceed three square feet in surface area.
- K. Publicly approved non-illuminated interpretive signs, or historical signs, or tablets displayed by a public, educational non-profit agency, or private development pursuant to [SMC 17E.060.820](#) through [SMC 17E.060.840](#), strictly for the purpose of informing or educating the public.
- L. Illuminated wall highlights that do not contain words, logos, or corporate images
- M. Interior signs. Signs or displays located entirely inside of a building and located at least three (3) feet away from transparent doors and windows.
- N. Temporary signs (provided they comply with 17C.240.XXX, Temporary Signs).

[Section 17C.240.070](#) Prohibitions

The following are prohibited and existing ones must be removed:

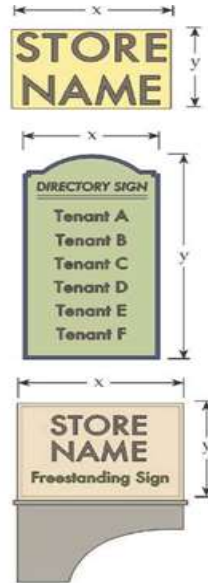
- A. Flashing signs or lights. A sign that contains an intermittent or flashing light source, or a sign that includes the illusion of intermittent or flashing light by means of animation, or an externally mounted intermittent light source, except as consistent with the standards contained in Table 17C.204-3.
- B. Abandoned sign structures.
- C. Signs placed on or painted on a motor vehicle or trailer parked with the primary purpose of providing signs not otherwise allowed by the code.
- D. Permanent balloon signs.
- E. Hazardous signs. Any sign that is dangerous or confusing to motorists on the public right-of-way, including any sign which by its color, wording, design, location or illumination resembles, conflicts, imitates or interferes with the effectiveness of any official traffic control device or which otherwise impedes the safe and efficient flow of traffic.
- F. Signs which are located upon or projecting over public streets, sidewalks, or rights of way except as provided for awnings and marquees in [SMC 17F.040.140](#), sandwich board signs in [SMC 17C.240.240\(G\)\(9\)](#), and signs extending into the right-of-way allowed in [SMC 17C.240.240\(C\)](#).
- G. Off premises signs (except as expressly allowed in other sections of this chapter). No permanent sign shall be located on a vacant lot, parcel or easement. No permanent sign shall be located on a lot, parcel or easement as the principal use of that lot, parcel or easement. Signs may only be established as an accessory use to a principally permitted use.
- H. Strings of banners, pennants, and other graffiti-like material with advertising copy except temporary signs as allowed in [SMC 17C.240.240\(G\)](#).
- I. Signs erected, constructed or structurally altered that are required to have a permit that were erected, constructed, or altered without a permit.
- J. It shall be unlawful for any person, except a public officer or employee in the performance of his public duty, to affix, post, paint, nail, fasten, place, or locate any sign, card, banner, handbill, poster, advertisement or notice of any kind, or cause the same to be done, upon public streets, highways, public right-of-way or any publicly owned or maintained property within the City of Spokane, or upon any curbstone, traffic control device, street sign, utility pole, hydrant, fence, lamp post, guardrail, tree or shrubbery or any other structure situated within any such areas or to affix the same to a wire or appurtenance thereof, except as may be authorized by the

ordinances, laws, or regulations of the City of Spokane, the State of Washington or the United States. City-owned or maintained structures include, but are not limited to, bridges, overpasses, street medians, retaining walls, fences, street furniture, and shelters, among other structures located upon public streets, highways, public right-of-way or other public property. The prohibition contained herein shall not apply to temporary signs which are permitted pursuant to the regulations set forth in [SMC 17C.240.240](#).

- K. No sign may impede free ingress and egress from any door, window or exit way required by building and/or fire code regulations.

Section 17C.240.140 Sign Face Area

- E. Background panel or surface. Sign copy mounted, affixed or painted on a background panel or surface distinctively painted, textured or constructed as a background for the sign copy, is measured as that area contained within the smallest rectangle, parallelogram, triangle, or circle that will enclose the sign copy and the background, as shown in Figure 6.



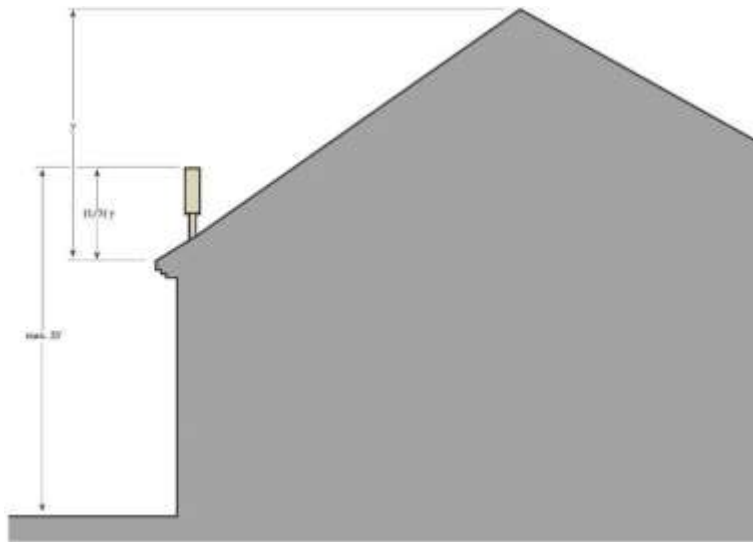
- G. Painted Wall Signs.

Painted wall signs are measured as the sum of the smallest square, rectangle, parallelogram, triangle or circle that will enclose each word, sentence and complete message, and each graphic in the sign.

SMC 17C.240.200 Roof-Mounted Signs

A. No permit shall issue for a roof-mounted sign which does not comply with the following standards:

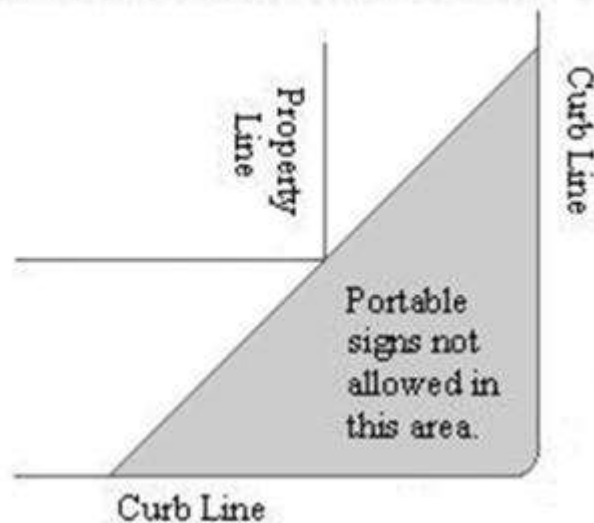
1. Number. No more than one (1) roof-mounted sign shall be allowed for each building.
2. Area. The area of the roof-mounted sign shall not exceed the total amount of wall sign area that would be allowed for the building or site on which the roof mounted sign is located.
3. Location. Allowed on the slope of peaked/sloped roof buildings only, and only on the lowest one-third (1/3) of the slope of the peaked roof. Roof-mounted signs shall be installed so that the structural supports of the sign are minimized. Angle irons, guy wires, braces or other secondary supports shall appear to be an integral part of the roof or roof-mounted sign.
4. Zone. Roof-mounted signs are permitted in nonresidential zones only.
5. Design. Roof-mounted signs may be non-illuminated, internally illuminated or indirectly illuminated, provided that the light is limited to the sign face only.



SMC 17C 240.220 Temporary Signs

- A. No Permit required. No sign permit is required for temporary signs.
- B. Removal. Temporary signs shall be removed if the sign is in need of repair, is worn, dilapidated or creates a public nuisance.
- C. Materials. See the definition of “temporary sign” in Section XXX.
- D. City property (excluding City right-of-way). Temporary signs on City-owned property (excluding City right-of-way) are allowed only in conjunction with an approved Special Event permit.
- E. City Right-of-Way outside of the Roadway. Temporary signs allowed to be placed in the right-of-way in [SMC 17C.240.240\(G\)](#) shall meet the following standards:
 - 1. The sign is entirely outside the roadway.
 - 2. The sign is no larger than nine square feet in size.
 - 3. The sign is entirely outside of the area of a right-of-way corner that is between the curb and the lines created by extending the property line to the curb face (See Figure 10a).

FIGURE 10a
Placement of Portable Signs in the R-O-W



- 4. The sign is entirely outside the area of a sidewalk that is between the lines created by extending the edges of any curb ramp across the sidewalk to the property line.
- 5. The sign is within six inches of the curb (See Figure 10b).
- 6. The sign does not obstruct a continuous through pedestrian zone of at least six feet in width except in center and corridor zones, sandwich board signs which are located on

the sidewalk shall be located in such a manner as to leave a pathway at least four feet wide that is free of obstructions.

7. The sign does not obstruct pedestrian and wheelchair access from the sidewalk to any of the following:

- a. Transit stop areas.
- b. Designated disabled parking spaces.
- c. Disabled access ramps; or
- d. Building exits including fire escapes.

8. Physical Attachment to Public Property.

Except as allowed for community banners, temporary signs placed in the right-of-way must remain portable and may not be attached or anchored in any way to trees or to public property including utility or light poles, parking meters, the ground, or pavement.

9. Additional Placement Standards for Temporary Signs.

Temporary signs placed in the right-of-way must meet the following additional standards:

- a. Where no curb exists, the sign must be placed outside the roadway at least five feet from the edge of the roadway. Temporary signs may not be placed in medians, traffic islands, or other areas within the roadway.
- b. Temporary signs must not be placed in parking spaces, pedestrian pathways, or bicycle paths. Residential zones.

- F. Temporary signs may be placed on property residentially zoned in accordance with the requirements of this Section and the following:

1. Freestanding signs (includes post-mounted, stake and portable signs).

- a. Single-family zones: Temporary free-standing signs shall not exceed four (4) square feet in size and five (5) feet in height, if the sign is post mounted on the ground, and not to exceed three (3) feet in height if the sign is stake-mounted or portable.
- b. Multi-family zones: Temporary free-standing signs shall not exceed six (6) square feet in size and five (5) feet in height if the sign is post mounted on the ground, and not to exceed three (3) feet in height if the sign is stake-mounted or portable.

2. Surface-mounted signs. Limited to sites two (2) acres or larger:

- a. Size. No larger than thirty-two (32) square feet.
 - b. Location. Must be flatly affixed to walls below the fascia or parapet line, or flatly affixed to on-site fences either facing or abutting the street, or facing inward to the subject site. Signs shall not be attached or tethered to other site improvements.
- G. Non-residential zones. Temporary signs are allowed on non-residentially zoned property in accordance with the requirements of this Section and the following:
 1. Freestanding signs (including post-mounted, stake and portable signs): Size/height. Limited to four (4) square feet and five (5) feet in height if the temporary sign is mounted in the ground, and not to exceed three (3) feet in height if the temporary sign is portable.
 2. Surface-mounted signs:
 - a. Size. Limited to thirty-two (32) square feet.
 - b. Location. Must be flatly affixed to walls below the fascia or parapet line, or flatly affixed to on-site fences either facing the abutting street, or facing inward to the subject site. Signs shall not be attached or tethered to other site improvements.

SMC 17C.240.230 Sandwich Board Signs

A. Sandwich board signs shall be limited to one sign per street address. These signs are subject to the following conditions:

1. Size.

The area of the sign shall not exceed nine square feet per side in size and shall not exceed three feet in any dimension.

2. Maintenance Standards.

Signs shall be constructed out of materials able to withstand typical northwest weather. Such materials may be metal, finished wood, chalkboard, whiteboard, or plastic; signs and copy shall be of professional quality. Owners of sandwich board signs shall be required to keep their signs in a legible, intact, and well-maintained manner.

3. Display Time.

Signs may only be displayed during business hours. If business hours continue past daylight hours, precautions should be taken to place the sign in a location where it is readily visible after dark. This shall not be construed to allow the wiring of a sign for lighting.

4. Location.

Signs may be located no further than twelve feet from the entrance to the business or sponsoring establishment. Such signs shall not be placed in a location which is within the vision triangle or any location which will impede vehicular traffic. Further, such signs shall not be placed in a manner which will block or otherwise obstruct the safe use of sidewalks, building entrances or stairs by pedestrians, including pedestrians who are visually impaired or otherwise handicapped.

SMC 17C.240.240 Community Banners

A. Community Banners.

Such signs may be permitted and extend into the public right-of-way by permission of the city administrator or appointed representative. Such signs may only be placed at City-designated locations provided that the banner:

1. is not commercial advertising but, rather, has as its principal purpose the promotion of a civic event, public service announcement, holiday decoration, or similar community interests;
2. complies with all applicable codes and officially adopted city policies; and
3. does not, in the judgment of the street director, present a traffic hazard.

[Section 17C.240.260](#) Off-premises Signs

- A. No new off-premises signs may be constructed, on any site.
- B. Off-premises signs now in existence in any zone, and for which permits were previously issued are declared nonconforming uses and may remain, subject to the following restrictions:
 - 1. A nonconforming off-premises sign may not be increased in size or elevation, relocated to another site or to a new location on the same site or expanded, enlarged, or extended in any way, including, but not limited to, the addition of advertising faces or the addition of rotating faces with movable panels designed to create additional advertising, except as provided for in the public works exception below.
 - 2. Public Works Exception.

An existing off-premises sign that is allowed to remain in conformance with [SMC 17C.240.250\(B\)](#) shall be allowed to be relocated if necessitated for the accomplishment of a governmental public works project. This relocation of these off-premises signs for public works projects shall be subject to the limitations in subsections (a) through (f) below:

- a. No increase in square footage of off-premise sign copy shall be permitted. These signs shall be replaced at the same size they existed at immediately prior to relocation.
- b. No additional sign faces shall be added.
- c. No increase in height of the existing off-premise sign shall be permitted except where needed to provide for minimum height clearance (from the ground to the bottom of the off-premises signs) to comply with roadway safety.
- d. The off-premise sign shall be relocated along the same roadway it was removed from in the geographical vicinity and shall comply with the Scenic Vistas Act of 1971 (chapter 47.42 RCW and chapter 468-66 WAC) if located along a state highway. For purposes of this provision, “the same roadway” shall be construed to be the actual street upon which said sign is currently located, and shall not be construed to incorporate any parallel streets that may function together with the actual street as a couplet.
- e. The off-premise sign shall not be relocated to a site with a Center and Corridor zoning designation including CA zones, or located within an historic district, regardless of the zoning or district of the original sign location.

- f. The relocation of the off-premise sign shall be subject to all current City of Spokane rules, regulations, and procedures relating to the regulation and control of signs, excepting size, height, and off premise advertising limitations.
3. A nonconforming off-premises sign may not be structurally altered. Structural alterations mean alterations to, including replacement of, either the off-premises sign face, or the supporting structure. Normal maintenance and repair including painting, cleaning, or replacing damaged parts of the off-premises sign, shall not be considered a structural alteration.
4. Any nonconforming off-premises sign which deteriorates, is damaged, or destroyed by fire, explosion, wind, act of nature, failure to maintain, or other accidental means may be restored if the cost thereof does not exceed fifty percent of its replacement cost. Off-premises signs damaged in an amount in excess of fifty percent of replacement cost shall be removed.
5. All nonconforming off-premises signs shall be kept in good repair and maintained in a neat, clean, attractive and safe condition. Any work required to repair or maintain an off-premises sign shall be completed promptly so long as the off-premises sign is not structurally altered, and so long as the cost of such repair and/or maintenance does not exceed fifty percent of the cost of replacing the off-premise sign.

[Section 17C.240.300](#) Exceptions

- A. Approval Required. An exception may be granted from the strict application of the regulations in this Chapter which apply to: (a) sign placement on a parcel or building frontage; (b) sign area; or (3) sign height, as regulated in this Chapter. An exception may not be granted to allow any prohibited signs or prohibited sign features, as described in Section 17C.240.070, or for any other purpose not listed in this subsection A. The exception procedure in this Section does not apply to any street Right-of-Way Use permit or Building permit.
- B. Need for Sign Permit, Consolidation of Processing. An application for an exception may be submitted before or concurrent with the associated sign permit application.
- C. Review Procedures. The following steps shall be followed in the processing of sign exception applications (hyperlink to appropriate section of the City's Permit Processing chapter):
 1. Determination of Complete Application (Section __.__.__)
 2. Determination of Consistency (Section __.__.__)
 3. Notice of Decision by Director (Section __.__.__)
 4. Administrative Appeal, if any (open record hearing, Section __.__.__)
- D. Application Requirements. A complete sign exception application shall consist of the following:
 1. Application form. A completed sign exception application, including the applicant's name, address, phone number and e-mail address. If the applicant is not the property owner, then the property owner must be identified and the application must include an affidavit from the property owner, verifying that the property owner has given permission to the applicant for the submission of the sign exception application and for the installation/posting of the sign on the property owner's property.
 2. Sign Permit Application (all of the materials required by Section 17C.240.090 Sign Permit required). However, the applicant may submit an exception application without a sign permit application as provided in subsection B above.
 3. A narrative report which describes the requested exception in detail. The report shall identify all of the sections of this Chapter from which the applicant is requesting the exception, as well as the nature and extent of the exception (in size, area, location on the property, height).
 4. The narrative report shall also include the applicant's description of the manner in which the sign exception satisfies all of the exception criteria in subsection E below.
 5. Fees. Payment of the appropriate sign exception application fee.

E. Exception Criteria for Approval. Sign exception applications shall be reviewed by the planning director to determine whether all of the following criteria are satisfied. In order to approve any sign exception, the director must make written findings to show that all of the following criteria have been met:

1. The request for an exception is due to unusual conditions pertaining to sign visibility needs for a specific building or lot; and
2. The sign will not create a hazard; and
3. The sign will not violate any state statute or any City Code provision (other than the ones identified in this Chapter relating to signs); and
4. The sign will not negatively affect adjacent property; and
5. The sign will be in keeping with the general character of the surrounding area and the granting of the exception would not result in an alteration of the essential character of the surrounding area; and
6. The proposed exception is consistent with the purposes and intent of the Zoning Code and the purposes of this Chapter; and
7. The exception is consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan; and
8. The applicant has established that there are practical difficulties in complying with the provision(s) of this Chapter and that the proposed sign is a reasonable use of the property. (Economic considerations alone do not constitute practical difficulties.); and
9. The plight of the applicant is due to circumstances unique to the property, which were not created by the applicant or landowner; and
10. The exception will not permit any sign type or use that is not allowed in the zoning district where the affected land is located, nor will it allow any sign or sign feature prohibited under Section 17C.240.070.

F. First Amendment Exception. Where an applicant can demonstrate that the strict application of the regulations in this Chapter would violate his/her First Amendment rights, the City may grant an exception that does not conform to all of the exception criteria in subsection E above. However, the applicant shall submit an application which provides his/her response to each of the exception criteria in subsection E. The City need not make findings that all of the exception criteria have been satisfied, but if not all criteria have not been satisfied, the exception may only be granted to the extent reasonably necessary to protect the applicant's First Amendment

rights. If a First Amendment exception is granted, it shall be treated as an approval of an exception for purposes of this Chapter.

- G. Notice of Final Decision. A Notice of Decision incorporating the decision on the exception application shall issue not more than 120 days after issuance of the Determination of Complete Application.
- H. Expiration of Exception. If the exception is approved, the sign identified in the exception must be installed within 180 days or the exception will expire. No sign may be erected if there is no sign permit for the sign, or if the exception or the sign permit has expired, even if the applicant has received associated building permits or street Right-of-Way Use permits, and the latter have not expired.