

## 8.9 Regulation of Signs

### 8.9.1 General Objectives

- A. Signs are regulated and restricted in order to place limitations on the size, location, type and illumination, and to ensure appropriateness for the district, building and use, and be protective of property values and the safety, convenience and welfare of the Town of Southbridge residents. It is also the intent of this by-law to:
1. Prevent adverse community appearances while protecting the character of the area in which they are located.
  2. Protect and enhance the visual environment of the Town and to prevent or minimize damage to the environment.
  3. Restrict private signs and lights which violate privacy, or which increase the probability of accidents by distracting attention or obstructing vision.
  4. Encourage signing and lighting and other communications which aid orientation, express local history and character.
  5. Reduce conflict among private signs and lighting from environmental information signs, such as alternating time and/or temperature signage
  6. Permit maximum legibility and effectiveness of signs and to prevent over concentration, improper placement and excessive bulk and area, by providing a limiting control.

The rules and regulations contained herein shall govern the construction, alteration, repair, maintenance, replacement, and erection of all signs within the Town of Southbridge.

### 8.9.2 Permitting

- A. Permit requirements. Applicants must submit sign permit applications with drawings to the Building Inspector prior to purchasing and affixing a sign. No permanent sign shall be erected, altered, replaced, or relocated without a permit issued by the Building Inspector. No sign shall be allowed unless it is in conformance with the current Massachusetts State Building Code except as specifically permitted.
- B. A signed permit shall become null and void if the work for which the permit was issued has not been completed within a period of six (6) months from the date of the permit. The Building Inspector may at their discretion issue extensions covering a period not to exceed one (1) year from the date of issue of the original permit.
- C. Sign regulations vary based on the zoning district in which the sign is located. The Town of Southbridge has eight (8) zoning districts:
1. Residence 1 Districts (R1)
  2. Residence 2 Districts (R2)
  3. Residence 3 Districts (R3)
  4. Retail Business Districts (RB)
  5. General Business Districts (GB)
  6. Central Core District (CC)

7. Office Research Districts (OR)
8. Manufacturing Districts (M)

All zoning districts can be found in multiple locations throughout the Town. The zones are referred to by the abbreviations listed above.

### 8.9.3 Allowed Signs and Sign Regulations

- A. General Regulations. The following requirements shall apply to all signs and other advertising devices in all zoning districts.
  1. No sign or other advertising device with visible moving or movable parts or with flashing, animated, or intermittent illumination, shall be erected or maintained except as approved by the Zoning Enforcement Officer.
  2. No illumination shall be permitted which is visible from any portion of a way so as to create a traffic hazard.
  3. Signs may be illuminated by a steady stationary light of reasonable intensity shielded and directed solely at the sign, an internal light of reasonable intensity, a neon or gas-filled tube; or light emitting diodes (LED).
  4. All signs lighted externally shall be shielded or directed in such a way as to prevent spillage on the building or onto streets, parking, driveway areas, or surrounding properties.
  5. No freestanding sign or other advertising device, or part thereof, shall be more than twenty (20) feet above ground level.
  6. No sign or other advertising device attached to a building shall project above the roof or parapet line.
  7. No sign or other advertising device attached to a building shall project more than three (3) feet from a building or two-thirds the width of the sidewalk, whichever is less.
  8. No sign shall be erected in any manner that will completely cover windows or doors.
  9. No signs shall be erected on public property without express written permission from the Town.
  10. No remote signs, (i.e., on a neighboring or other property), shall be erected.
- B. Residential Districts (R1, R2, R3). The following requirements shall apply to all signs and other advertising devices in all residential zoning districts:
  1. One (1) sign for each family residing on the premises indicating the name of the owner or occupant or pertaining to a permitted accessory use, provided that each sign does not exceed six (6) square feet in area.
  2. One (1) sign not over sixteen (16) square feet in area pertaining to permitted buildings, structures, and uses of the premises other than dwellings and their accessory uses.
  3. Each temporary sign pertaining to the sale or lease of the premises must be unlighted and not over eight (8) square feet in area, and all signs must not aggregate more than eighteen (18) square feet in area.
  4. Unlighted directional signs not exceeding six (6) square foot in area pertaining to churches, schools, institutions, and other non-profit or public uses.

- C. Business Districts (GB, RB, CC). The following requirements shall apply to all signs and other advertising devices in business zones:
1. Sign area shall not exceed ten (10) percent of the side of the building upon which the sign is to be attached. Mall style shopping centers shall not exceed four hundred fifty (450) square feet aggregate.
  2. One Freestanding sign of not more than forty-eight (48) square feet for premises of less than three (3) acres, sixty-four (64) square feet for premises of more than three (3) acres, such sign shall not exceed twenty (20) feet in height.
  3. Only one (1) exterior sign with an area not exceeding twelve (12) square feet shall be erected on any non-conforming building or use.
  4. Only one (1) sign shall be allowed on each side of a structure facing upon a public way.
  5. Within the Central Core (CC): Signage is strongly suggested to follow the Urban Renewal Plan Downtown Center Design Guidelines. These design guidelines seek to preserve, and enhance the rich and diverse history of Southbridge, seeking to blend in new development while preserving the Downtown Center's historic character.
- D. Office Research and Manufacturing Districts (OR, M) – The following requirements shall apply to all signs and other advertising devices in the office research and manufacturing zones:
1. No freestanding sign shall exceed a height of twenty (20) feet.
  2. Freestanding signs shall be placed no more than half the setback distance away from the building.
  3. No sign shall exceed ten (10) percent of the side of the building upon which the signs are to be located.
  4. If more than one (1) sign, designating more than one (1) use of a structure, is erected, the accumulated sign area shall not exceed fifteen (15) percent of the side of the building upon which the signs are to be attached or located.
- E. Temporary Signs. The following signs, banners, pennants, easily removed signs attached to windows, or advertising displays are allowed on a temporary basis, may be freestanding, and do not need a permit from the Town. Temporary signs shall be removed within thirty (30) days of placement, unless specified below.
1. Construction Signs. One (1) unlighted sign of up to thirty-two (32) square feet identifying parties involved in construction is allowed on the premises where the sign is located. The sign shall be removed prior to the issuance of any occupancy permit. Construction signage is temporary and limited to the span of the project's valid building permit.
  2. Real Estate Signs. Each sign pertaining to the sale or lease of the premises must be unlighted and not over eight (8) square feet in area, and all signs must not aggregate more than eighteen (18) square feet in area in all residential districts, and each sign must be not over eighteen (18) square feet in all other districts pertaining to the sale, rental or lease of the premises on which the sign is displayed. Signs shall be removed within fourteen (14) days after sale, rental or lease.

3. Event Signs. Unlighted signs of up to thirty-two (32) square feet in business and industrial districts and eight (8) square feet in residential districts, may be displayed on private property and are limited to one (1) per street frontage announcing a drive or event of a civic, philanthropic, educational or religious organization. Signs shall be installed no sooner than thirty (30) days prior to the event and shall be removed within seven (7) days after the event.
4. Political Signs. Due to federal first amendment rights, political signs are exempt from regulations except that they are subject to public safety requirements. Political signs shall be installed no sooner than ninety (90) days before an election and shall be removed within seven (7) days after the close of the polls.
5. Banner Signs. Non-profit, charitable, community organizations shall be allowed to erect sign banners not to exceed one hundred (100) square feet in area. Banner signs shall be installed no sooner than thirty (30) days prior to the event and shall be removed within seven (7) days after the event.
6. Display Window/Door Signs. Signs on the surface of windows/doors or inside windows/doors can only be lit by the building illumination and cover no more than twenty-five (25) percent of the display window or door area.
7. Non-Commercial Signs. Buildings occupied solely for the civic, philanthropic, educational, religious, or other non-commercial purposes are exempt from regulations except that they are subject to public safety requirements.
8. Seasonal Decorative Signs – Seasonal decorative signs and residential decorative signs are exempt from regulations, except that they are subject to the public safety requirements.
9. Yard / Garage Sale Signs – Not to exceed five (5) square feet displayed on private property and limited one to each premise. Not to be erected earlier than three (3) days preceding the sale and shall be removed within twenty-four (24) hours following.

F. Removing or reconstructing signs. No sign heretofore approved and erected shall be repaired, altered or removed, nor shall any sign, or substantial part thereof, which is blown down, destroyed or removed, be re-erected, reconstructed, rebuilt or relocated unless it is made to comply with all applicable requirements of this by-law.

8.9.4 Enforcement. Any violation of Section 8.9 of the Zoning Bylaw shall be enforceable by the Zoning Enforcement Officer or a designee of the Town through the means described in Section 2.2 of these bylaws. Signs which were legally erected before adoption of this by-law shall not be voluntarily rebuilt, altered or relocated without conforming to this by-law.

**Amend Section 10 by adding the following definitions under umbrella term “Signs”, as stated below:**

**SIGN TERMS. The following terms apply to the regulation of signs.**

**BANNER SIGN:** Signs made of cloth, fabric, paper, non-rigid plastic or similar types of material; national flags, flags of political subdivisions and symbolic flags of an institution or a business are excluded.

**CONSTRUCTION SIGN:** A temporary sign erected on the premises on which construction is taking place, during the period of such construction, indicating the names of the architects, engineers, landscape architect, contractors or similar artisans, and the owners, financial supporters, sponsors, and similar individuals or firms having a role or interest with respect to the structure of project.

**ELECTRONIC MESSAGE CENTER:** Means any sign on which the characters, letters or illustrations can be changed automatically or through electronic or mechanical means. Electronic Message Centers include time and temperature signs.

**FREESTANDING SIGN:** A sign attached to the ground and supported by uprights placed on or in the ground.

**SIGN AREA:** The area defined by the frame or edge of a sign; however, where there is no geometric frame or edge of the sign, the area shall be defined by a projected, enclosed, rectilinear shape which most closely outlines the said sign. Sign area includes the advertising surface and any framing, trim or molding, but not the supporting structure.

**SIGN HEIGHT:** The vertical distance from the grade below the sign to the uppermost module, cabinet or character.

**POLITICAL SIGN.** A temporary sign which advertises a candidate or candidates for public elective office, a political party, or which promotes a position on a public or ballot issue.

**REAL ESTATE SIGN.** A temporary sign which advertises the real estate on which it is located for rent, lease, or sale.

**SHOPPING CENTER SIGN.** A pylon type sign announcing the shopping center itself, and shall be a maximum of twenty (20) feet in height, and shall be appropriately landscaped.