

Signs

What types of signs are there?

Sandwich board, political, directional, monument, commercial, industrial, residential, portable, neon, un-lit, back-lit, front-lit, etc.... The list is practically endless. Because of this variety, Clark County Code handles different types of signs differently depending upon the zoning of the property where they will be located. Clark County Code Chapter 40.310 and Title 14 describe the regulations that affect signs in Clark County.

Included in this handout you will find a list of definitions that Clark County uses for governing signs. This list will help you in properly identifying the type of sign you would like. Once you have identified the type of sign you are seeking, you will be able to better obtain accurate and timely information from the Clark County Permit Center staff.

Note: Also included in this handout you will find a list of signs that are prohibited in Clark County.

When is a sign permit required?

Sign Permits are required for most signs so you should contact Permit Center staff located at the Public Services Building, 1300 Franklin Street, first floor, Vancouver, WA. Some signs, like political or real estate signs are permitted without having to get a permit, however, there are limits for these signs (like the number, size, height and location) and you should seek advice from county staff before you place any sign.

Generally, the following rules apply to signs in Clark County:

- Sign permits are required for all signs authorized in CCC 40.310 of the zoning ordinance, unless specifically exempted.
- One sign permit application may include all signs proposed for the premises.
- A temporary sign permit may include all temporary signs proposed within one year.
- All signs shall conform to the provisions of the zone code even if exempt from permits.
- A separate building permit may be required for the installation of each sign pursuant to Clark County Code Title 14.

Note: A short discussion of special sign situations is on page 7 in this handout.

Do signs require site plan review?

Not necessarily. In some cases signs do require site plan review but it is usually the use associated with the sign that requires site plan review. Any proposed new use or change of use for a site may need to go through Site Plan Review in accordance with the standards in CCC 40.520.040 Site Plan Review.

Do signs require building permits?

Building permits are not required for freestanding signs less than or equal to 8' high in height from grade to the top of the sign. In all cases where a building permit is required, the building permit must be obtained before a sign is constructed, even if you have an approved sign permit through the land use process.

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Community Development
1300 Franklin Street, Vancouver, Washington
Phone: (360) 397-2375 Fax: (360) 397-2011
www.clark.wa.gov/development



For an alternate format, contact the Clark County ADA Compliance Office.
Phone: (360)397-2322
Relay: 711 or (800) 833-6384
E-mail: ADA@clark.wa.gov

Applications for a building permit can be submitted at the same time as the sign permit application. However, should the sign permit decision require modification of the sign plans, the building permit application may need to be revised accordingly.

How long do I have to build my sign?

Building Permits must be obtained within five years from the date the Sign Permit was approved. If no building permit is required, the sign must be constructed within five years from the date the sign permit was approved.

What is the review process for sign permits?

Sign Permit applications are subject to a Type I administrative review process. Type I applications are those that result in an administrative decision based on standards requiring the exercise of professional judgment about technical issues.

After checking that the application is complete, Permit Center staff will accept the application so a decision can be made on the sign permit and/or the need for a building permit. Staff then has five business days to determine if the application is approved, approved with conditions, or denied. If you do not receive your decision after the fifth business day, immediately contact the Permit Center staff for an update on your application.

A copy of this decision will be issued to the applicant.

How do I apply for a sign permit?

The following is a step-by-step description of what must be done to obtain a sign permit:

1. Complete the Sign Permit application included in this handout and submit it with all required information. See the submittal requirements checklist.

2. Reference any other pending development applications, or known land use decisions, for the property.
3. Submit **two** complete sets (**one** original and **one** copy) of the complete application packet, see submittal checklist, along with fees to the Public Service Center, Permit Center at 1300 Franklin Street, first floor, Vancouver., WA.

Mail-in applications will **not be accepted** without prior written permission from Permit Center staff.

What if I do not submit a complete application packet?

Included in this packet is a Submittal Requirement checklist. Each item on that checklist must be submitted for county staff to consider the application to be complete and ready for review.

County staff will review the application packet at the permit counter to determine if the required information is complete.

After a complete application is accepted by the Permit Center staff, it can later be determined that additional research or review may be necessary. In these cases Permit Center staff may request additional information while holding the application for later review.

Note: The Permit Center staff will not hold a new application for the applicant in order to allow the later submittal of additional information. If an applicant wants additional information considered with an application, the application will be returned and must be resubmitted when all pertinent information is available.

Can I appeal a decision made on my sign application?

Type I permit determinations may be appealed by the applicant, or any interested party, if a written appeal is filed with Community Development within 14 calendar days after the decision. Appeals of a Type I decision are heard in a public hearing before a Hearing Examiner per CCC 40.510.010(E). Appeals to building permit determinations are heard by the Building Board of Appeal.

Packets for filing an Appeal are available at the Public Service Center, Permit Center, located at 1300 Franklin Street, first floor, in Vancouver.

How long is a temporary sign permit good for?

Temporary permits can be obtained but they are only good for 30 days and a \$1,000 cash or/and equivalent surety bond may be required prior to the permit being approved.

Failure to remove a sign approved under a temporary Sign Permit will result in the loss of the cash or surety bond and the possible removal and disposal of the sign.

Do I have to maintain my sign?

Yes, signs must be maintained per Clark County Code 40.310(O), or the sign will be considered a code violation. If a sign is not properly maintained, the Code Enforcement program may pursue a code enforcement action against the property owner and the sign operator, which could result in fines or the removal of a sign.

Also note, any person who owns or leases a sign shall remove such sign when its function has discontinued, or maintenance of the sign has ceased. Failure to do so could also result in a Code Enforcement action as discussed above.

Sign Definitions, CCC 40.310.010(C)

Banner: an on-site sign such as those used to announce an open house, a grand opening, or to make a special announcement. Normally, it is constructed of cloth, canvas, or similar material and is without a rigid frame. It will be considered either as a fascia or freestanding sign, depending on the method of attachments, and will have to comply with the normal zone requirements.

Billboard: same as an “off-premises sign.” See definition of “off- premises sign.”

Business complex: two or more commercial businesses on a lot or contiguous lots with common access and parking.

Business complex sign: a sign that is designed to identify a business complex where no single business identification and/or advertisement occupy more than 50 percent of the sign area.

Directional sign: any sign which is designed and erected solely for the purpose of traffic or pedestrian direction, and which is placed on the property to which the public is directed. See also “off-premises directional sign.”

Doorway identification sign: a non-illuminated sign limited to the name, address, and number of the building, institution, or person, and to the activity carried on in the building or institution, or the occupancy of the person; provided, that the lettering, excluding numbers, of each sign shall not exceed two square feet.

Electronic message center: a sign on which the copy changes automatically on a lampbank or through mechanical means, such as electrical or electronic time and temperature units.

Fascia sign: a flat sign which projects one and one-half feet or less horizontally from the vertical face of the wall of a building, or vertical face of a canopy awning or parapet upon which it is affixed, painted, or attached, running parallel for its whole length to the face or wall of the building and which does not extend beyond the horizontal width of such wall, awning or parapet.

Freestanding sign: sign not attached to or forming a part of a building.

Height of sign: the vertical distance measured from grade at the point of support, or average grade for multiple supports and monument signs, to the highest point on the sign and sign structure.

Industrial complex: two or more industrial businesses on a lot or contiguous lots with common access and parking.

Industrial complex sign: a sign designed to identify an industrial complex where no single business identification and advertisement occupies more than 50 percent of the sign.

Monument sign: a sign and supporting structure which has similar top and bottom dimensions and is constructed as a solid structure or one which gives the appearance of a continuous, non-hollow, unbroken, unfenestrated mass. Further, similar top and bottom dimensions shall mean dimensions that are within 10 percent of each other.

Nonconforming sign: a sign which was erected legally but which does not comply with currently applicable sign restrictions and regulations; provided, a sign which does not conform to the currently applicable sign code requirements, but for which a variance or conditional use permit was issued, shall not be considered a nonconforming sign.

Off-premises sign: a sign that advertises products, services or facilities or directs persons to premises different from where the sign is installed.

Off-premises directional sign: a sign which directs persons to a premises different from where the sign is located. These signs typically include an address or street name or direction such as "...two blocks north on the right."

On-premises sign: a sign which carries only advertisements strictly related to a lawful use of the premises on which it is located, including signs or sign devices indicating the business transacted, services rendered, goods sold or produced on the premises, name of the business, and name of the person, firm or corporation occupying the premises. "On-premises sign" also means a sign, which contains religious, political, social and other noncommercial messages.

Portable sign: any sign designed to move or be moved by trailer or vehicle to advertise at different locations. Further, these signs include any sign, which is not firmly fastened to a building or the ground.

Premises:

1. A legal lot; or
2. A combination of contiguous legal lots under one ownership; or
3. A group of legal lots with common access, parking and signage.

If more than one definition of "premises" can be applied to a group of lots, the choice of which definition applies shall belong to the owner(s) of the lots, or the applicant for a sign permit representing the owner(s); providing, only one definition may be applied at one time to a group of lots; further providing, all signs within the premises or subsequent revision to the premises, shall comply with the provisions of the sign code.

Projecting sign: a sign which projects more than one and one-half feet horizontally from the vertical face of a building, awning, canopy, or parapet.

Rooftop sign: a sign erected upon the roof of a building or canopy, or a sign attached to a building which projects vertically above the roof, eave, awning or parapet; however, this does not include signs attached to the vertical face of a parapet, awning or canopy; providing, the sign does not project above the vertical face of the parapet, awning or canopy to which it is attached.

Rotating sign: a sign in which the sign itself or any portion of the sign moves in a revolving or similar manner.

Sign: a display or device affixed to the ground, attached to a building, or other structure using graphics, symbols, and/or written copy designed specifically for the display of a commercial or other advertisement to the public.

Sign area:

1. The area of a freestanding sign or structure, not utilizing an integral part of the building for its background, means the largest cross-sectional area of the sign measured to a line encompassing all portions of the sign structure, including tubing used in lighting such sign or structure, but excluding posts without attached lighting. Further, the base on which a monument-type sign is set may be excluded; provided, there is no attached lighting.
2. The area of a double-faced sign (i.e., a sign painted on two sides, or signs which are erected in a "V" configuration with an angle between the two faces not exceeding 30 degrees, shall be the largest area on one side of the sign. Further, these types of signs shall be considered one sign for the purpose of determining the number of signs allowed.

3. The area of any sign or structure utilizing an integral part of the building or awning as a background means the area within the shortest line drawn to include all letters, design and tubing which are a part of the sign or structure; provided, that for illuminated awnings the area shall be limited to the area within the shortest line drawn to include all copy and graphics, excluding illuminated areas outside of these lines.

Street frontage: the linear frontage of a parcel of property abutting a single public street.

Temporary sign: any sign which is not permanently installed or affixed to any sign structure or building, and not displayed for longer than 30 days. In case of construction project signs, they may be maintained for the duration of the construction. Temporary signs shall also include balloons attached to buildings or property.

Prohibited Signs

Signs which bear or contain statements, words, or pictures of an obscene nature.

Signs advertising activities that are illegal under state or federal laws or regulations in effect at the location of such signs or at the locations of such activities.

Signs which do not bear the names of the owner or person responsible for the maintenance of the advertising sign.

Signs artificially illuminated which are of such intensity or placed in such manner as to interfere with, or impair the vision of the driver of a motor vehicle, or otherwise interfere with any driver's operation of a motor vehicle.

Signs which attempt or appear to attempt to direct the movement of traffic by interfering

with, imitating or resembling any official traffic sign, signal or device.

Signs which prevent the driver of a vehicle from having a clear and unobstructed view of official signs and approaching or merging traffic as defined under CCC Section 40.350.030(8)(b).

Signs which exceed a height of 35 feet, except as authorized under CCC Section 40.310.010(G). Signs authorized by the district standards under CCC Section 40.310.010(F)(2) & (3) shall comply with the height restrictions contained therein.

Signs located or projecting within the county right-of-way unless a written Street Use permit has been obtained.

Rooftop and rotating signs.

Portable signs, temporary signs, flags and banners unless the planning director has approved a temporary sign permit.

Signs containing strobe lights that are visible from beyond the property line.

Signs which contain flashing lights exceeding more than 10 percent of the area of the sign.

Off-premises signs (billboards), except for off-premises directional signs as allowed under CCC Section 40.310.010-1.

Any sign not specifically permitted by Clark County Code excluding those signs identified in the scope of CCC 40.310.

Special Sign Regulations

Signs facing residential districts: No sign advertising a business which is not conducted on the premises, or a commodity or service which is not a primary product or service on the premises, shall face or be oriented toward any adjoining or abutting residential district within 200 feet of the premises on which the sign is to be placed. (Ord. 1991-12-109)

On-site interference: The location and structural design of freestanding signs shall be such as to not interfere with the safe and efficient use of off-street parking and loading areas, including aisle-ways and access driveways. (Ord. 1991-12-109)

Illuminated Signs: Illuminated signs shall be placed so as not to be a nuisance to any residents or future residents of adjacent residentially zoned property within 200 feet of the sign. A nuisance shall be defined as flashing lights or lights of such intensity that they may interfere with the residents' peaceful occupancy of their home. As part of a sign permit or site plan review process, the planning manager may require signs to be screened, shielded, relocated or the lighting adjusted or other measures to mitigate a potential interference with adjoining residentially zoned property. (Ord. 1991-12-109)

Exempt from permits:

Traffic signs, governmental street signs, display of the national or state flag, doorway identification nameplates, holiday decorations, informational signs pursuant to CCC 13.20, temporary interior window signage, memorial signs, real estate signs, agricultural signs, and signage which is not visible from adjacent properties or adjacent public rights-of-way.

Submittal requirements

The following checklist identifies information to be included with the Application. **All** items below must be submitted before the application will be considered “**Counter Complete.**”

1. ___ Application form

The application form shall be completed and original signed in ink by the applicant.

2. ___ Application fee

The required fee for a Sign Permit shall accompany the application. The check is to be made payable to Clark County Community Development.

3. ___ Site plan

Drawn to scale showing the following information as required by the Sign Code CCC 40.520.050:

- Scale
- North arrow
- Property lines and dimensions of the whole site (complete lot area)
- Location and names of adjacent streets
- Existing buildings and structures, and existing sign locations
- Proposed sign location(s)
- Location of driveways, parking, paved areas, landscaped areas, etc.
- Dimensions from any proposed sign structure to property line, right-of- way, centerline or driveway.

4. ___ Construction plans – front elevation

Drawn to scale showing the following information as required by the Sign Code CCC 40.520.050:

- Scale
- Size and shape of sign
- Height of sign structure as measured from grade to bottom and top of sign
- Type of supports
- Permanent graphics
- Type of lighting, if any, such as direct or indirect, neon, internal, ground mounted, etc.

5. ___ Construction plans – side elevation

If the proposed building sign(s) project more than one foot beyond the building line **or** one foot above the eave of the building then side elevations are required.

Construction plans showing side elevations and the following information as required by the sign code CCC 40.540.050:

- Scale
- Size and shape of sign
- Height of sign structure as measured from grade
- Type of supports
- Permanent graphics
- Type of lighting, if any, such as direct or indirect, neon, internal, ground mounted, etc.

6. ___ Previously approved permits for the site

If available, one copy of any previous sign permits, previous land use decisions, or information detailing any pending development applications. Case reference numbers are acceptable, but permit processing may be delayed if staff must retrieve the file from archive storage. This information may be necessary before any sign permit decision can be made. Check with Permit Center staff.

7. ___ Site photographs

Photographs of the site showing all signs visible from abutting streets. Staff will accept original prints, Polaroid, color photocopies, or digital pictures. Applicants will be asked to certify in writing that the pictures accurately depict the number and size of signs currently existing on the site.

Failure to provide pictures may prevent your application from being processed within the five day timeline, since staff may need to schedule time to visit the site in person. Check with Permit Center staff.

8. ___ Submittal copies:

- One **original** of the submittal, bound by a jumbo clip or rubber band, with original signatures, and
- One **copy** of the submittal, bound by jumbo clips or rubber bands

The Development Services manager may request additional information if deemed necessary to insure compliance with applicable Clark County Code provisions.

Staff Notes

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Fees schedule

The following fees are required to be paid when the application is submitted.

Planning	\$210
Issuance	\$53
 Building Permit (if required)	
One freestanding sign or up to three fascia signs	\$617
One fascia sign	\$325
Issuance	\$94

This application was determined to be Counter Complete on: ____/____/____

Permit Technician:

Sign Permit Decision

Case Number: _____

County staff has reviewed this request against the standards and criteria in the Clark County Code Chapter 40.310 Signs using a checklist format, and has determined that this application is:

- Denied**
- Approved**
- Approved with additional conditions**

Standard conditions:

- Sign(s) must be in compliance with the site plan submitted with the sign permit application.
- Approval is for the following proposed signs by number corresponding to the application:
1 2 3 4
- State permit may be required from Washington Department of Transportation
- Building permit is required

Additional conditions:

If this is a permit for a temporary sign:

- \$1,000 surety bond or cash required
- May be displayed for up to 30 days
- No more than two temporary sign permits can be issued per business each year

Other: _____

Responsible Official

Date

All signs permitted by this approval must be installed and in place, in compliance with any conditions of approval, within five years after the date of this decision per CCC 40.500.010(B).

Appeal process: See the *Sign Permit* handout for appeal instructions