

# Summary Guide To Business Signs



The City of Portage recognizes the importance of signs to local businesses and the economy. Standards have been adopted by Portage that promote the effective use of signs as a directional and communication tool, while protecting public safety and property values, and promoting community character. The intent and purpose of Portage sign regulations<sup>1</sup> is to:

- ◆ Balance the right to identify a business location and attract customers with the public right to be free of signs that unreasonably compete, distract drivers and pedestrians, and produce confusion.
- ◆ Provide businesses with equal opportunity to attract customers by achieving uniformity in the size, number and placement of signs.
- ◆ Protect public health and safety by regulating the construction of signs.
- ◆ Enhance the aesthetics of the community.

In addition to the specifications included in city sign regulations, businesses are encouraged to carefully consider the following design elements regarding signs<sup>2</sup>:

- ◆ Signs should use creative and dynamic design, yet be compatible with the surroundings.
- ◆ Signs should be designed and located in a manner that enhances sign legibility.
- ◆ Signs should be constructed and designed to avoid hazards and distractions.
- ◆ Signs should be located so they do not block pedestrian or motorist vision or line of sight.
- ◆ Signs should be constructed of durable, quality material, and should be kept in good repair.



<sup>1</sup> The Code of Ordinances is available on the city web site at: [www.portagemi.gov](http://www.portagemi.gov). (See the Code of Ordinances, Land Development Regulations, Chapter 42 of the Code of Ordinances, Article 4, Zoning, and Article 11, Signs.)

<sup>2</sup> Photos of select award entries in the 2010 Sign Competition by the International Sign Association (Alexandria, VA)

## Temporary And Other Signs Allowed In Business Zoning Districts

**Copy Board Sign:** An additional 15-square-foot changeable letter/graphic sign may be added to any freestanding sign including a legal, nonconforming sign in any zoning district (except on new EMD signs erected since October 2007)

**Pedestrian-Oriented Sign:** One 6-square-foot sign for each use may be displayed within 10 feet of the business entryway during business hours (no permit required)

**Banner Sign:** One 20-square-foot banner sign mounted on a freestanding pole per zoning lot to identify a business or other non-residential use with one additional banner permitted for each 2 acres of zoning lot subject to location and height requirements

### **Grand Opening, Change of Business or Going out of Business Sign:**

- ◆ One 40-square-foot sign per business use on a business-zoned property for 14 days (with an additional 30 days if permanent sign not available, or other important reason)
- ◆ Flags, banners, balloons, etc. may be used in lieu of, or in combination with, up to the maximum 40-square-foot sign area

**Temporary Sign:** In addition to a Grand Opening, Change of Business or Going out of Business sign, each use is permitted one 40-square-foot temporary sign per calendar year for a display period not to exceed seven consecutive days

**Directional Sign:** Up to 4 square feet in area (no limit on the number of directional signs)

**Development Sign:** One 64-square-foot sign per development on the property may be displayed during active development for a period of up to 2 years

**Real Estate Sign:** One 64-square-foot sign per building or property, while the building or property is on the market for sale/rent/lease and 30 days thereafter (no permit required)

**Holiday Decorations:** Decorations associated with a national, state, local or religious holidays may be displayed for not more than 10 days, except decorations may be displayed from November 1 to January 15 (no permit required)

### **Public (noncommercial service) Event Sign:**

- ◆ One 64-square-foot sign for a property and for each street where the property has frontage on the street with an additional 64-square-foot sign for each 2 acres zoning lot (permit required except for signs 6 square feet or less in area)
- ◆ The public event sign may be displayed 7 days before and 2 days after event

**Public Event Banner Sign:** A 20-square-foot banner may be mounted on a municipal pole on public property/right-of-way for up to 60 days per calendar year with the approval of a permit from the City of Portage to use the municipal pole

**Mural:** A non-commercial message, picture, illustration, painting or scene applied or affixed to an exterior wall is not considered a sign and is permitted under the General Provisions of the Zoning Code after review and issuance of a mural permit.

The Department of Community Development is available and happy to assist businesses, property owners, and sign companies with verifying the number, size and location of permitted signs.

**Thank you and please call on us for assistance!**

Department of Community Development  
7900 South Westnedge Avenue  
Portage, MI 49002  
(269) 329-4477  
[www.portagemi.gov](http://www.portagemi.gov)

# Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Business Signs

## 1. What type of sign requires a sign permit?

Sign permits are required to ensure that signs situated on business-zoned property meet applicable city codes. This ensures fairness and consistency for all businesses. A sign is defined in the Zoning Code, as are the rules for various freestanding signs and wall signs that are permitted. A permit is required for new signs and alterations or changes to existing signs on business-zoned property and for some temporary signs.

## 2. Are there business signs that do not require a sign permit?

Signs that do not require a sign permit (and must meet location, size and duration of display requirements) include: pedestrian-oriented entryway signs, real estate signs, election campaign signs, construction signs, holiday decorations, and on-premise household goods signs (e.g., garage/yard sale). Signs inside a building do not require a sign permit.

Interior window displays and advertising on the inside of a building window glass are not regulated by the Zoning Code, and provide added business advertising options.

## 3. How much does a sign permit cost?

Fees are annually established by City Council. The current fee for a sign permit is: \$110 for a wall sign permit application; \$110 for a freestanding sign permit application; and \$55 for a temporary sign or a directional sign permit application.

## 4. What kinds of temporary signs are permitted to promote my business?

Businesses can promote special events and sales in a number of ways. An electronic message display (EMD) or changeable copy board can be incorporated into or added to a freestanding sign. Banner signs on a free-standing pole can also be used for advertising pedestrian-oriented entryway signs. In addition, a temporary wall sign or a freestanding sign is permitted for business grand openings, change of business or going out of business events and must meet location, size and duration of display requirements. Finally, one 40-square-foot temporary sign is permitted once per calendar year for a seven-day consecutive display period.

## 5. How many freestanding signs and wall signs can a business use?

- ◆ For freestanding signs on the property, the number and size permitted is dependent on the business zone where the property is located, the amount of frontage on the street and the number of business uses or tenants on the property.
- ◆ For wall signs on the building, the number and size permitted is dependent on the business zone where the property is located, and the wall area of the building where the business is located (*building width x building height*).
- ◆ Additional freestanding signs and wall signs are permitted for a business-zoned property that has frontage on more than one street, such as a corner property.

## 6. What is a “legal nonconforming sign” and can changes be made to the sign?

A sign is a “legal nonconforming sign” if it does not fulfill the sign requirements in the Zoning Code, but did comply with the sign requirements when it was placed on the business-zoned property. Changes are allowed in the following instances:

- ◆ The sign face may be changed provided no structural modifications are made to the sign.
- ◆ Other modifications or reuse of a non-conforming sign after 180 days may be permitted after an “Agreement to Remove Nonconforming Sign” is completed by the sign owner, property owner and the City of Portage.
- ◆ Alternatively, the sign may be modified or reused after an application for a variance is requested and approved by the City of Portage Zoning Board of Appeals. A variance may be authorized if the Zoning Code provisions for a variance are met.

# Summary Of Sign Regulations Applicable To Businesses

Zoning District	Freestanding Signs <sup>1</sup>	Wall Signs <sup>1</sup>
OS-1, Office Service  and  OTR, Office, Technology Research  and  B-1, Local Business	Sign(s) per business-zoned property (zoning lot): ◆ 1, with 1 additional sign for a zoning lot with more than 300 ft. of street frontage) ◆ 1 - 20 sq. ft. banner sign on a free standing pole per street frontage, with 1 additional sign for each 2 acres ◆ In an OTR district, 1 additional sign is permitted for each vehicular entrance	Sign(s) per business-zoned property (zoning lot): One or more wall signs permitted per business use
	Sign Area: ◆ 32 sq. ft. minimum to 50 sq. ft. maximum, with area based on street frontage ◆ May be increased up to 50% for multiple use zoning lots, or from 48 sq. ft. to 75 sq. ft.	Sign Area: ◆ 15% of the wall area per street frontage, up to 100 sq. ft. ◆ If no freestanding sign, wall sign area may be increased by 33% per street frontage
	Sign Setback / Height: 10 ft. from all property lines, 15 ft. next to one-family residential / 15 ft. high	Sign Setback / Height: NA
B-2, Community Business  and  B-3, General Business  and  CPD, Commercial Planned Development	Sign(s) per business-zoned property (zoning lot): ◆ 1, with 1 additional sign for a: - zoning lot with more than 320 ft. of street frontage - zoning lot that is on a street corner, or - zoning lot with frontage on more than one street ◆ 1 - 20 sq. ft. banner sign on a free standing pole per street frontage, with 1 additional sign for each 2 acres	Sign(s) per business-zoned property (zoning lot): One or more wall signs permitted per business use
	Sign Area: ◆ 50 sq. ft. minimum to 120 sq. ft. maximum, with area based on street frontage ◆ May be increased up to 50% for multiple use zoning lots, or from 75 sq. ft. to 180 sq. ft. ◆ For corner lot, if only one sign, area may be increased 100% up to a maximum of 120 sq. ft.	Sign Area: ◆ 15% of the wall area per street frontage, up to 100 sq. ft. ◆ May be increased, up to an additional 125 sq. ft. for buildings with at least 100 ft. of lineal wall frontage ◆ Area may be further increased, up to an additional 125 sq. ft. for buildings with 100 ft. of lineal wall frontage and a building setback of 300 ft. or greater ◆ If no freestanding sign, wall sign area may be increased by 33% per street frontage
	Sign Setback / Height: 10 ft. from all property lines / 25 ft. high	Sign Setback / Height: NA
PD, Planned Development	Sign(s) per business-zone property (zoning lot): ◆ 1, with 1 additional sign for a zoning lot with more than 300 ft. of street frontage ◆ 1 - 20 sq. ft. banner sign on a free standing pole per street frontage, with 1 additional sign for each 2 acres	Sign(s) per business-zoned property (zoning lot): One or more wall signs permitted per business use
	Sign Area: ◆ Up to 50 sq. ft. ◆ May be increased up to 50% for multiple use zoning lots, or up to 75 sq. ft.	Sign Area: ◆ 15% of the wall area per street frontage, up to 100 sq. ft. ◆ If no freestanding sign, wall sign area may be increased by 33% per street frontage
	Sign Setback / Height: 10 ft. from all property lines, which increases based on sign area, when abutting one-family zones / 15 ft. high	Sign Setback / Height: NA

<sup>1</sup> **Electronic Message Displays (EMD):** These signs may be stationary/permanent freestanding signs or wall signs (and electronically or mechanically changed), and are permitted in zoning districts per the provisions in the Zoning Code. For example, EMD sign messages must be static (limited motion / movement) and may change not more than once per four seconds. To protect neighborhoods, the EMD message may not change between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. when the EMD sign is located 200 feet from a residential zoning district and use.