



## **DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

### **POLICY STATEMENT FOR SIGNS**

CITY OF CHARLESTON - DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & PRESERVATION  
2 George Street, Suite 3100 Charleston, South Carolina 29401 843-724-3765 [www.charleston-sc.gov/bar](http://www.charleston-sc.gov/bar)

*\*Properties in Savannah Highway Overlay Zone, Residential Office District, Commercial Transitional District, Daniel Island Town Center District, Gathering Place District, Neighborhood District, or Agricultural Districts may have different signage requirements*

*\*\* Always check the Zoning of the property to determine appropriate portion of the Sign Ordinance. The below applies to all other districts except for Savannah Highway Overlay Zone, Residential Office District, Commercial Transitional District, Daniel Island Town Center District, Gathering Place District, Neighborhood District, or Agricultural Districts*

City Sign Ordinance: <https://library.municode.com/sc/charleston/codes/zoning?nodeId=ART4SIRE>

#### **1. NEW FREESTANDING SIGNS:**

- a. All new freestanding signs shall be designed as monument signs; the use of single-pole signs is prohibited.
- b. When appropriate, freestanding signs should incorporate building materials, colors, and design elements found on the principal structure.
- c. Signs shall only contain the business name, address, and logo; repetitive or extraneous information is not permitted.
- d. Plastic sign faces shall have opaque backgrounds allowing only the text and/or logo to illuminate.
- e. Developments with 3 or fewer businesses:
  - i. Sign face area not to exceed 40 sqft per face (80 sqft total if two-sided).
  - ii. Height not to exceed 12 ft in height, but to be consistent with context and scaled for the site.
- f. Developments with 4-19 businesses:
  - i. Sign face area not to exceed 60 sqft per face (120 sqft total if two-sided).
  - ii. Height not to exceed 14 ft in height, but to be consistent with context and scaled for the site.
- g. Developments with 20 or more businesses:
  - i. Sign face area not to exceed 100 sqft per face (200 sqft total if two-sided).
  - ii. Height not to exceed 14 ft in height, but to be consistent with context and scaled for the site.
- h. Developments with frontages on 2 or more streets with a driveway access, one additional sign is permitted:
  - i. Sign face area not to exceed 35 sqft per face (70 sqft total if two-sided).
  - ii. Height not to exceed 10 ft in height, but to be consistent with context and scaled for the site.

#### **2. REFACE OF EXISTING FREESTANDING SIGNS:**

- a. Pole skirts are to be added to exposed poles on all existing signs being refaced. Generally, pole skirts are to be at least one-third the width of the sign cabinet.
- b. No changes can be made to the cabinet or structure of a non-conforming sign. A nonconforming sign may be refaced, but any other changes will require the entire sign to be brought into conformity with the zoning ordinance.
- c. Plastic sign faces shall have opaque backgrounds allowing only the text and/or logo to illuminate.

#### **3. FACADE SIGNS:**

- a. A façade sign shall be proportionate to the building façade, and its design should be compatible with the architecture.
- b. A façade sign shall only be permitted on a façade that faces a right-of-way or that has a public entrance.
- c. Sign faces to occupy no more than 10% per façade of the building or tenant lease space, whichever is smaller.
- d. Sign faces shall not exceed two-thirds (2/3) of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the uninterrupted wall plane, surface, or sign band within which they are located.
- e. Signs shall only contain the name of the business and/or logo (no repetitive or extraneous information). Services provided on a sign will be allowed on a case-by-case basis
- f. To provide a consistent and unified look within new multi-tenant developments, such as shopping centers and office parks, all tenant signs are to be similar in type, color, font size, font style, and method of illumination.
- g. When reviewing signs within existing multi-tenant developments, the type and method of illumination of existing signs within the development are to be taken into consideration. Except where the type is predominantly cabinet or box signs, which are no longer allowed as façade signs.

- h. The use of cabinet or box signs is prohibited. They must be removed and replaced with other types of signage rather than refaced when they need to be updated.
- i. Generally, the use of exposed neon or neon substitutes is not permitted.

**4. RIGHT ANGLE SIGNS:**

- a. A right-angle sign should have a unique design reflecting the nature of the business and relate to the architectural style and context.
- b. No more than one (1) per business/tenant.
- c. No more than nine (9) sqft, but must be appropriately scaled to the building façade. Size to be determined on a case-by-case basis, dependent on the size of the building, location, scale of the corridor, adjacent storefront, existing signage, etc.
- d. Signs should be attached to the building carefully to prevent damage to the building fabric.

**5. BLADE SIGNS (large right-angle signs):**

- a. Only allowed on a case-by-case basis for large-scale buildings:
- b. Only allowed in lieu of a freestanding sign.
- c. Only one (1) per development.
- d. Only contain name, address, and/or logo of development.
- e. Not to be used as a multi-tenant sign.
- f. No more than 18 sqft per side of sign, unless building has 3+ stories and more than 40,000 sqft of conditioned space, then no more than 40 sqft per side of sign.
- g. No more than 1/2 the vertical dimension of the building façade.

**6. WINDOW SIGNS/GRAPHICS:**

- a. Shall not exceed twenty percent (20%) of any glass area of a single window/door.
- b. Generally, to be located in the lower half of storefront windows so as not to block visibility into the business.
- c. Limited to ground-floor windows and/or businesses.
- d. Neon or equivalent "open" signs in windows not permitted.
- e. Interior signage within one (1) foot of the window is considered exterior and requires DRB review.
- f. Extraneous information such as telephone number, hours of operation, website, etc. generally allowed on the window/glass of the entry door(s).

**7. AWNING / CANOPY SIGNS:**

- a. Shall only be permitted over the ground-floor window or door opening it covers and shall not extend across the full façade.
- b. Internal or external illumination is not permitted.
- c. *Awnings*: text/graphics shall only be placed on the outside of the front valance and shall not exceed more than two-thirds (2/3) of the valance's height and length. Vinyl awning will not be permitted.
- d. *Canopies*: text/graphics shall only be placed on the outside of the front portion of the canopy and may not exceed two-thirds (2/3) of the canopy face's height and length, or sixteen (16) inches in height and two-thirds (2/3) of the length when mounted on top.

**8. SANDWICH BOARDS:**

- a. Prohibited in the public right-of-way (sidewalk or street). Only allowed to be located completely on private property.
- b. Not allowed on property with a freestanding sign.
- c. No more than 24 inches in width or 36 inches in height (24"x36").

**9. ILLUMINATION:**

- a. Generally, both internal and external illumination is permitted for signs.
- b. External Illumination: Light sources shall be shielded to direct light onto the sign face only. Fixtures shall be hidden through planting or other means unless the fixtures are decorative (submit cut sheets). Light output shall be a maximum of 10 foot-candles.

- c. Internal Illumination: Sign face is to be constructed of aluminum or similar material. Text and/or graphics are to be routed from the sign face and backed with translucent plastic to form the only lighted portion of the sign.
  - d. Traditional face-lit channel letters and reverse channel letters (back-lit "halo" effect) are both permitted.
  - e. Plastic sign faces should have opaque backgrounds allowing only the text and/or logo to illuminate.
  - f. The use of exposed neon is generally not permitted.
  - g. Uplighting/downlight of a building is prohibited.
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**SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS FOR SIGNS:**

- ☐ Completed Sign Application form. \$100 DRB review fee is invoiced once the reviews are completed.
  - ☐ **Digital submittal in pdf form:**
    - o Photograph(s) or elevation drawings of all sides of the structure(s) on which signage is proposed, including photos of any existing signage to remain. Dimension the area of the façade where a façade sign is to be located.
    - o Note the dimensions of an overall building façade and provide calculation of 10% of façade(s) on which façade signage is proposed. (sq. footage) Sign must not exceed 10% of building facade sq. footage.
    - o Photo rendering(s) of the proposed sign on the building.
    - o Detail drawing(s) noting materials, colors, dimensions/square footage, method of illumination, attachment to building, etc.
    - o For Freestanding signs, site plan or survey, depicting location of proposed sign, ensuring the sign is not located in the right-of-way and is not in the vision clearance triangle.
    - o For new freestanding signs, section of sign showing base and footing.
    - o Cut sheets of light fixtures or specifications for method of illumination.
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