



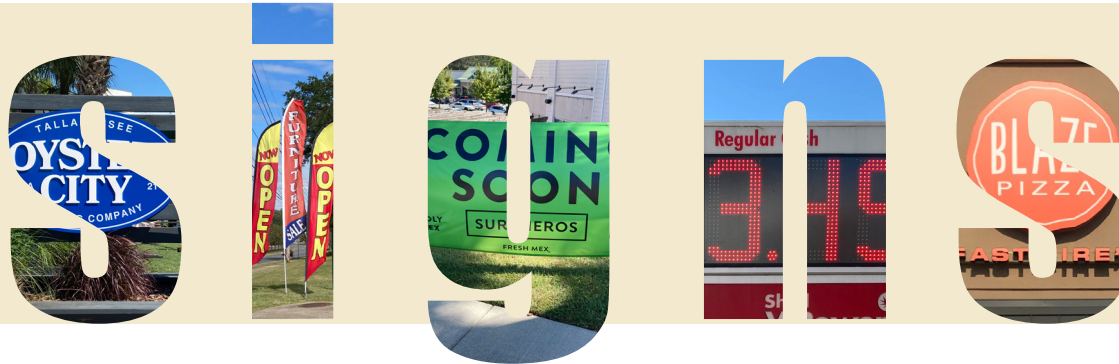
CITY OF
TALLAHASSEE



Zoning Spotlight

Signs

Growth Management Department
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Introduction

Welcome to the Zoning Spotlight! This issue provides an overview of how the Tallahassee Land Development Code (TLDC) handles signs at [Chapter 7](#). Obviously, signs are common in all cities and range from small entry signs above doorways to large billboards. In most cities, what a sign looks like is governed by the local code. Local sign codes focus on the design of the sign, and typically address features like size, quantity, height, illumination (e.g., internal versus external), materials, location (e.g., front versus rear of building, windows, awnings, etc.), and similar concerns.

There isn't one right answer regarding how the design of signs should be regulated. Each city balances the legitimate need for businesses to advertise their location, versus the community's desire to maintain the streetscape's appearance. While signs are an important component of the identity of a business, signs that are too large, too tall, too numerous, or too bright make the scale of a street less human and less walkable. A sign code is an expression of how each community balances those sometimes competing objectives.

In Tallahassee, if a sign is greater than 24 square feet, it requires a building permit and is reviewed for consistency with both the zoning and building codes. Of course, signs that are smaller than 24 square feet must still meet the other development standards described below, such as the maximum sign area allowed per frontage. The permit standards for signs are found at [Sec. 7-31, TLDC](#), and applications are filed for sign permits at the [City's permit portal](#).

Signs and Context

As you'll see in the following pages, sign standards vary based on the context of where the sign is located. For example, consider the photographs in Figure 1. The CVS sign in a historic district reflects the scale of the narrow street and small buildings, while the IKEA sign at a big box retail use is much larger. This variation in context is captured in the Land Development Code by linking sign standards to broad land use categories, to zoning districts, to geographic areas, and to road type.

1. Broad Land Use Categories

The majority of the Land Development Code's sign regulations are based on broad land use categories. For example, the columns in Table 1 on page 7 indicate that [Chapter 7](#) has sign standards for five categories, including all non-residential uses other than shopping centers, shopping centers, residential subdivisions, multi-family developments, and mobile home parks.

The sign standards vary between the above categories. For example, an allowable sign in a shopping center is different from what is allowed in a multi-family project. However, uses in the same category have identical sign standards. An office and a restaurant are both in the "Non-residential uses" category, and have the same sign allowance. This variation between the categories recognizes their differences. For example, signs are smaller in a residential area given the slower pace and the emphasis on people and their homes. In contrast, signs in a commercial district are larger given the faster, automobile oriented pace.

2. Zoning Districts

It isn't the norm throughout the Land Development Code, but some zoning districts also have sign standards that are unique to that zoning category. For example, the [Mahan Corridor Node](#) (MCN) district limits ground signs to a height of 10 feet and prohibits externally illuminated signs. Likewise, [Sec. 7-68](#) notes that letters on monument signs (i.e., freestanding ground signs) can't be bigger than 6 inches in the All Saints zoning district. The point is that some zoning districts are tailored for areas that have a need for unique sign standards.

Figure 1 - Signs at Historic District versus Big Box Retail



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The CVS is in a historic district, while the IKEA is in a car dominated big box retail setting. Therefore, the context is very different, with the historic district sign being very small, and the IKEA sign being quite large for the big box retail. Note that the cars parked below the IKEA sign provide a sense of scale.



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Figure 2 - Sign Context Varies by Road Size



Sign on arterial road



Sign on collector road



Sign on local road

3. Geographic Areas

Sign standards also vary by area. The best example of this is the Multi-Modal Transportation District (MMTD), which includes downtown Tallahassee and the surrounding neighborhoods. The MMTD encourages multiple types of transportation, ranging from walking to cycling and from transit to cars. The emphasis is on walkability. To foster that type of development, the MMTD allows signs that are generally shorter, that minimize glare, and that blend in with the primary structure. The goal is to make signs better fit their surroundings and to create a more human, walkable scale. For example, the MMTD does the following:

- Prohibits pole mounted signs except on arterial roads;
- Limits monument signs to height of 10 feet except on arterial roads;
- Requires signs to use building materials similar to that of primary structures they serve;
- Limits window signs to the first story of buildings;
- Requires externally illuminated signs to be fully shielded; and
- Prohibits internally illuminated signs on awnings and canopies.

4. Road Type

The signs shown above in Figure 2 are from 3 different locations of the same business. From left to right, the business locations are on an arterial road, a collector road, and a local street. The City's Land Development Code responds to the context of these 3 different streets by requiring that the signs become smaller and shorter as you move from the arterial street on the left to the local street on the right.

Discussion of Tables 1 through 3

The sign features that are typically regulated by cities include the number of signs allowed at a project, as well as their area, height, type, and lighting. Each of those features are addressed in Tables 1 through 3 on pages 7 and 8.

1. Table 1 - Rows 1 and 2 define the total area of allowable signs. For all nonresidential uses except shopping centers, the total area of allowable signs is calculated as the greater of either 2 times the building frontage or 1 times the property frontage, with a total

Figure 3 - Calculation of Sign Allowance



maximum ranging from 80 to 200 square feet, depending on the location and the number of tenants in each building. As noted in Table 1, the total allowable square footage is significantly less in both single family and multi-family projects.

Figure 3 illustrates the calculation of the total sign allowance. The project is a single occupancy office building. The project boundary is shown by the solid white line, with the property and building frontages shown by the red dotted line and yellow solid line, respectively. In this case, the property frontage is 1,354 feet, and the building frontage is 307 feet. Notwithstanding the significant property frontage, the maximum applies, and the total allowable sign area is 200 square feet.

Table 1 also establishes the maximum number of ground and wall signs per frontage at rows 3 and 4. All nonresidential uses (except shopping centers) are limited to 1 ground and wall sign per frontage. This standard limits sign clutter along public roadways.

Another issue addressed by Table 1 is sign height (row 7), which varies by land use in the columns and by the type of roadway. Roads are classified by the traffic volume that they're designed to accommodate. Interstates, of course, are the largest, and are followed by arterials, collectors, and local streets. Table 1 illustrates how sign height varies according to the adjacent road.

2. Tables 2 and 3 - Shopping centers are unique land uses given that they typically have very large property frontages, are set back significant distances to provide space for parking, and have numerous tenants. All of these characteristics impact the visibility and utility of the project's signs. The Land Development Code addresses that need by providing more fine tuned standards for shopping centers. For example, the key point of Table 2 is that as a shopping center use is set back further and further from the road, it's allowed more area for its wall sign so that the sign is visible from the public right-of-way. Table 3 serves a similar purpose for ground signs at shopping centers. As a project's size increases from a neighborhood to a community to a regional shopping center, both the allowable sign area and number of signs increase.

Types of Signs

The majority of sign permit applications are for wall and ground signs as described on the previous pages. However, there are a wide variety of other types of signs. In fact, [Chapter 1](#) of the Land Development Code references 42 different types of signs that are regulated by [Chapter 7](#). Other types include billboards, electronic reader boards, banners, pole signs, roof signs, temporary signs, and many more. Please consult [Chapter 7](#) of the Land Development Code if you have questions about these other types of signs.

Neighborhood Compatibility

Most residential neighborhoods have an edge where the residential units stop and some type of non-residential development begins. The Land Development Code has compatibility criteria to ensure that new non-residential development adjacent to that residential edge doesn't create adverse impacts to existing homes. One of the issues addressed by the compatibility criteria is signs. The [sign compatibility standards](#) apply to non-residential uses on local streets that are either adjacent to or across the street from a protected residential use.

The sign compatibility standards reduce the sign allowance, provide standards for placement of monument and wall signs, limit monument signs to a height of 6 feet, require either external lighting with shielded fixtures or no lighting, and identify additional prohibited signs.

Prohibited Signs

[Sec. 7-81, TLDC](#), prohibits signs that:

- Do not meet the Land Development Code;
- Resemble a traffic control device or sign, or emergency vehicle markings;
- Obstruct free and clear vision on a street;
- Produce glare or are a hazard or a nuisance;
- Are animated, except public service signs;
- Are banners or flying paraphernalia, except specified flags;
- Produce noise or sounds capable of being heard;
- Emit visible smoke, vapor, particles, or odor;
- Cause radio, television, or communication interference;

- Include motion pictures visible from any public street or sidewalk;
- Obstruct firefighting, light, and ventilation;
- Are on public property, except signs installed by public authority;
- Are on trees, rocks, or other natural features;
- Are on a vehicle parked on a public road;
- Are sandwich signs, with exceptions;
- Are snipe signs;
- Are window signs that cover more than 20% of the window glass surface area;
- Are bench signs;
- Are flashing signs incorporated onto or attached to portable signs;
- Are tethered inflatable signs, with limited exceptions; and
- Are electronic reader board signs on historic properties or historic structures.

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to read this issue of the Zoning Spotlight. If you have further questions, you can reach our staff at (850) 891-7001 (option 4) or at zoning@talgov.com. Our office is located on the 3rd floor of the Renaissance Building at 435 North Macomb Street in downtown Tallahassee.

There are two disclaimers that apply to this report. First, if a conflict is ever identified between the City's Land Development Code and an issue of Zoning Spotlight, the Code will control. The Zoning Spotlight reports don't replace the Land Development Code. Second, this report includes photographs of various development projects. The photos were included solely for educational purposes and are not intended to represent an endorsement of any particular project.



Table 1

	Sign Standard	Non-Residential (Not Shopping Centers)			Shopping Centers (d)	Subdivisions (e)	Multi-Family and Mobile Home Park (f)	MMTD (g)
		Single Occupancy (a)	Multiple Occupancy ¹ (b)	Central Core and Special Character District (Single/Multi-Occupancy) (c)				
(1)	Aggregate surface area of all signs, as further limited by row (2) ⁶	2 sq. ft. / foot of building frontage, or 1 sq. ft. / foot of property frontage	Same as column (a)	Same as column (a)	See Tables 2 and 3	NA	NA	Same as column (a)
(2)	Max aggregate surface area per frontage ⁶	200 sq. ft.	150 sq. ft.	80 sq. ft. ²	See Tables 2 and 3	40 sq. ft.	32 sq. ft. (if > 16 units), OR 2 sq. ft. per unit (if < 16 units)	See columns (a) - (f)
(3)	Max # ground signs per frontage	1	1	1	See Tables 2 and 3	1 per entrance	1 ground or wall sign / frontage	See columns (a) - (f)
(4)	Max # wall ³ signs per frontage ⁶	1	1	1	See Tables 2 and 3	NA	1 ground or wall sign / frontage	See columns (a) - (f)
(5)	Transfers permitted between frontages	Yes	Yes	No	No	NA	NA	See columns (a) - (f)
(6)	Sign on rear of building w/o frontage (for multiple occupancy buildings only)	No	No	No	No	NA	No	Yes ⁴
(7)	Max height ground sign: - Arterial - Within 660 ft. of interchange - Other	25 ft. 100 ft. 18 ft.	25 ft. 100 ft. 18 ft.		25 ft. 100 ft. 18 ft.	10 ft. 10 ft. 10 ft.	8 ft. 8 ft. 8 ft.	25 ft. NA 10 ft.
(8)	Special conditions	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	See below. ⁵

Notes:

- ¹ Individual establishments in multiple-occupancy buildings shall be permitted wall signs and wall sign areas as though each were located in an individual building with individual street frontage.
- ² Lettering on awnings and canopies and permanent lettering on windows shall be included in the maximum signage allowed.
- ³ Wall signs include wall, mansard, marquee, canopy, and roof signs.
- ⁴ Each establishment is allowed an additional wall sign on the rear of the building, the maximum size of which is limited to the greater of 24 square feet or 50% of the allowable sign area on the front of the building.
- ⁵ Additional standards apply in the MMTD and are listed in the section titled "Geographic Areas" on page 4.
- ⁶ Note that the number and area of wall signs may be larger based on distance from the public right-of-way. See Table 2 on the next page for further details.

Table 2				
		<p>If use in shopping center has \geq 100,000 sq. ft. and if max distance to ROW line of street is within range of columns (b) to (d), wall signs are allowed per below.</p> <p>(Please note that columns b, c, and d below also apply to other land uses, and are applied to the base sign allowance allowed by those uses.)</p>		
	Base Sign Allowance for Shopping Centers (a)	\geq 100 ft. but < 400 ft. (b)	\geq 400 ft. but < 600 ft. (c)	\geq 600 ft. (d)
Aggregate surface area of wall signs for each establishment, as further limited by row (2) below	One sign not to exceed 2.5 sq. ft. of surface area for each lineal foot of store frontage	Column (a) multiplied by 4	Column (a) multiplied by 5	Column (a) multiplied by 6
Max aggregate surface area of wall signs	200 sq. ft.	300 sq. ft.	600 sq. ft.	800 sq. ft.
Max # of wall signs	1	2	3	4
Additional signs	Each establishment in the shopping center shall be allowed 1 hanging marquee sign with a height of 1 foot, and a width of either 6 feet or the width of the canopy, whichever is less.			
Signs cannot be on rear or sides of a shopping center if oriented to a residential neighborhood.				

Table 3			
	Neighborhood Shopping Center \geq 25,000 but < 100,000 sq. ft. (a)	Community Shopping Center \geq 100,000 but < 300,000 sq. ft. (b)	Regional Shopping Center \geq 300,000 sq. ft. (c)
Max aggregate surface area of ground signs	175 sq. ft.	200 sq. ft.	300 sq. ft.
Max # of ground signs	One ground sign for the first 500 lineal feet of frontage adjacent to a street and one additional ground sign for each additional 500 lineal feet of frontage or major fraction thereof.		
Signs cannot be on rear or sides of a shopping center if oriented to a residential neighborhood.			