

Section VIII. Signs (Adopted by STM 2016)

A. Purpose

The purpose of this bylaw is to promote the effectiveness of signs through emphasis on appropriate design, limiting sign clutter, and integrating signs with Ipswich's architectural and historic environment.

B. Definitions

For the purposes of this Section, certain terms and words are defined as follows:

AREA OF SIGN: The area, including all lettering, wording, and accompanying designs and symbols, together with the background on which they are displayed, the frame around the sign, and any "cutouts" or extensions, but not including any supporting structure or bracing.

AWNING, CANOPY: Any device, fixed or retractable, of any material, which extends over a sidewalk, courtyard, walkway, eating area, driveway, or other area or space, whether that area or space is intended for pedestrians, vehicles or other purposes.

BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENT: Any non-residential use consisting of one or more buildings. In a building with more than one (1) non-residential tenant, each tenant is considered a separate business establishment.

CLEARANCE: A completely open and unobstructed space measured from the ground level to the lowest portion of a hanging sign.

FLAG: Any fabric or bunting containing colors, patterns, or symbols used as a symbol of a governmental or institutional organization.

INSTITUTIONAL USE: Any religious, educational, philanthropic, or agricultural use.

LINEAL BUILDING FRONTAGE: The length in feet of a building or storefront, which abuts a street or public right-of-way at its first floor or entrance level, as shown in diagram #4; also referred to as a "façade".

PROJECTION: An extension forward or out from a wall of a building.

SIGN: Any device, fixture, placard, or structure affixed to, supported by, or suspended by a stationary object, building or the ground that uses any color, form, graphic, illumination, symbol, or writing to communicate information the public. Specific sign types are further described as follows:

- **ADDRESS:** A sign indicating the numeric and street location of a particular property or establishment.
- **AWNING, CANOPY:** Any sign painted, sewn or attached onto an awning or canopy.
- **BANNER:** Any sign constructed of fabric or flexible material. For regulatory purposes, banners are considered wall signs.
- **DIRECTIONAL:** Any sign limited to directing or setting out restrictions for vehicular or pedestrian traffic relative to the use of sidewalks, driveways and parking areas. A directional sign may be freestanding, wall mounted or a pavement marker.
- **DIRECTORY:** A sign which may be utilized by multiple business establishments occupying a single building with a shared public entrance.
- **FLASHING:** An illuminated sign or part thereof operated to create flashing, which is a change in light intensity, color or copy or intermittent light impulses every ten seconds or less.
- **FREESTANDING:** Any sign structurally separate from a building that is supported by itself, on a stand, or on legs.

- **HANGING:** Any sign that is attached to, and projects from, the wall or face of a building, including an arcade or marquee sign.
- **ILLUMINATED:** A sign lit by an external light source directed solely at the sign (i.e., externally illuminated, which may include a reverse lit source mounted within an opaque component of a sign so that no light passes through it) or an internal light source (i.e., internally illuminated, utilizing translucent panels, canvas or other fabric, letters, devices or other similar components to create an image by allowing light to pass through).
- **INTERMITTENT:** An illuminated sign or part thereof, which changes light, color or copy between once every eleven seconds and once every thirty minutes.
- **MOVING:** Any sign which moves or is designed to move, in whole or in part, by any means.
- **OFF-PREMISES:** A sign that draws attention to, or communicates information about, a business, service, product, event, attraction or other enterprise or activity that exists or is conducted, manufactured, sold, offered, maintained or provided at a location other than on the premises where the sign is located.
- **PENNANT, STREAMER:** Any sign made of lightweight plastic, fabric, or other material, whether or not containing any writing, suspended from a rope, wire, or string, usually in a series, designed to move in the wind.
- **PLAQUE OR HISTORIC MARKER:** A sign that identifies a structure or site recognized by the Ipswich Historical Commission as being historically or architecturally significant.
- **ROOF:** Any sign erected or projecting above the lowest point of the eave or the top of a parapet wall of any building, or which is painted or otherwise affixed to a roof.
- **SANDWICH BOARD:** A mobile sign structurally separate from a building and supported by itself. For purposes of this Section, sandwich board signs are classified as standard informational signs.
- **STANDARD INFORMATIONAL:** A freestanding sign intended for non-permanent display, such as a real estate, construction or political sign, which contains no reflecting elements, flags or projections.
- **TEMPORARY SIGN:** Any sign which is intended for a limited period of display, and by design and/or use is temporary in nature and thus not permanently mounted.
- **WALL:** Any sign painted on or affixed to, but which does not project from, a building wall, including those that consist of three dimensional letters applied directly to a building surface.
- **WINDOW:** A sign either affixed to the surface of the glass on the windows of a building, or located in the building interior within three (3) feet of the window and visible from the outside of the building. Window displays of actual products or merchandise for sale or rent on the business premises are not considered window signs.

C. Sign Standards and Requirements

1. General Requirements

The following general requirements shall apply to all signs, except as otherwise noted:

a. Illumination

Sign illumination is permitted only between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m., except that signs for non-residential uses may be illuminated during any hours the establishments are open to the public. Externally or reverse lit illuminated signs are allowed by right, while internally and/or intermittently lit signs are allowed only by special permit. Exposed sources of

illumination, such as neon tubes, are not permitted, nor are signs that cause harmful glare to motorists, pedestrians or neighboring premises. All illuminated signs must be so shielded, shaded, directed or maintained at a sufficiently low level of intensity and brightness so that the illumination does not adversely affect neighboring properties or the safe and convenient use of public ways.

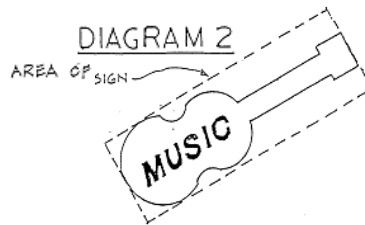
b. Sign Area Measurement

Sign area shall be calculated as follows:

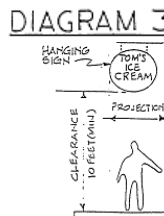
- i. For two-dimensional double-faced hanging and freestanding signs, the area shall be based on one face.
- ii. For two-dimensional signs affixed to or fabricated from a mounting background or signboard, the area shall consist of the smallest rectangular area that wholly contains the sign, as shown in diagram #1.



- iii. For two-dimensional signs consisting of individual letters or symbols affixed directly to a building wall, window, freestanding sign supports, or awning, the area shall consist of the smallest area which encompasses all of the letters and symbols, as shown in diagram #2. In the case of freestanding signs, the area is exclusive of the sign supports.



- c. Projection: Signs shall project no more than five (5) feet from a building or over more than two-thirds ($2/3$) of the width of a sidewalk, whichever is less, as shown in diagram #3.



- d. Sign Location: Except for freestanding signs, all signs must be attached to the portion of the building that corresponds to the portion owned or leased by the sign permit applicant.
- e. Sign Mounting Height: The highest part of wall, window and awning signs may not exceed twenty (20) feet above grade.

2. Requirements Based on Sign Type

a. Awning Signs

Awning signs shall be painted on, or attached flat against, the surface of the awning or canopy. Attaching a sign to an awning or canopy in any other manner is prohibited.

b. Freestanding Signs

Freestanding signs shall be mounted permanently on the ground, located on the same lot as the principal building, and set back at least five (5) feet from any property line. Signs shall be situated so as to not impair visibility or restrict the ability to use any public way by impeding minimum sight distance requirements established by the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and as interpreted by the Building Inspector. Freestanding signs shall not be mounted on trees, utility poles, light fixtures, or any other structure that is not built solely to accommodate signs.

c. Hanging Signs

Signs hanging over a public way or area accessible to the public shall provide at least ten (10) feet of clearance measured from the ground surface to the bottom of the sign, as shown in diagram #3, and shall not impair visibility or restrict the ability to use any public way or area accessible to the public.

d. Wall Signs

Wall signs must be mounted parallel to the wall of a building and shall not project more than one (1) foot beyond the face of the wall to which they are attached.

D. Sign Allowances Based on Type and District

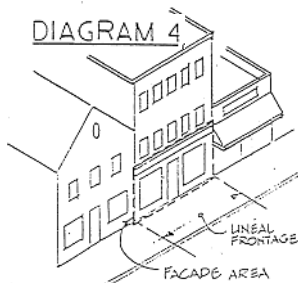
“Table A: Sign Allowances by Type and District,” “Table B: Maximum Number and Area of Signs Allowed by District,” and “Table C: Temporary Sign Allowances,” are provided on accompanying pages and are a part of this Section.

E. Sign Allowances for Institutional Uses

The following signs are permitted for institutional uses in any zoning district:

1. Directional signs, the appropriate number and placement of which shall be subject to Building Inspector approval, with a maximum area of four (4) square feet and a maximum height of six (6) feet;
2. One (1) freestanding sign, with a maximum area of thirty (30) square feet, a maximum height of six (6) feet above grade, a maximum letter height of fourteen (14) inches, and a minimum setback of ten (10) feet from property lines;
3. One (1) standard informational sign, with a maximum area of six (6) square feet per sign face, and a maximum height of six (6) feet above grade for post and arm type signs and three (3) feet for all other sign types. During periods beginning thirty (30) days before and ending five (5) days after any federal, state or local election, ballot initiative or referendum, the number of signs related to such events is not limited. Signs shall be removed no later than five days after the advertised event has ended; and
4. One (1) wall sign per building (except for a corner lot, for which one (1) sign shall be allowed facing each of the frontage streets), having a maximum area of twenty (20) square feet, a maximum height of twenty (20) feet, and a maximum letter height of fourteen (14) inches;

The total area of all signs allowed for an institutional use shall not exceed fifty (50) square feet or twenty percent (20%) of the total first floor building façade area, whichever is less. The first floor building façade area shall be calculated by multiplying the lineal frontage of a building/storefront by its total first floor or entrance level height, as shown in diagram #4.



F. Sign Permitting

No person shall install, erect, or alter any sign other than temporary signs without first obtaining a sign permit from the Building Department. Applications for sign permits shall be filed in the Building Department and must contain sufficient information to demonstrate that proposed signs comply with this Section.

G. Exempt Signs

The following are exempt from regulation under this Section:

1. Address and home occupation signs, provided that the area does not exceed two (2) square feet and the letter and number height does not exceed eight (8) inches;
2. Any public notice or warning required by applicable federal, state, or local law, regulation, or statute;
3. Flags;
4. Any sign that is posted or installed within the right-of-way or on Town-owned property, pursuant to General Bylaws, Chapter 12, Section 4;
5. Signs created or approved by the Ipswich Historical Commission that display information about historic properties;
6. Works of art that do not include a commercial message;
7. The standard type gasoline or electric charging station pump signs bearing the name or type of energy and the price in usual size and form, except that any the restrictions on illumination imposed by this Section shall apply; and
8. One (1) wall or window mounted sign, no greater than two (2) square feet in area, identifying information about public access to a building or premises, such as a sign showing hours of operation or security measures employed by the establishment.

H. Prohibited Signs

The following types of signs are prohibited in any district:

1. Any sign not specifically allowed in the table in Subsection D, or which has not obtained the appropriate approvals required by that Subsection;
2. Flashing signs;
3. Signs within rights-of-way, except for hanging signs which project over a right-of-way but otherwise comply with this Section, and those signs belonging to or approved by a government, public service agency, or railroad;

4. Signs which are considered obscene or depict obscene matter, as defined in M.G.L. Chapter 272, Section 31, or which advertise an activity that is illegal under federal, state or local laws;
5. Signs in violation of building codes, or containing or exhibiting broken panels, visible rust or rot, damaged support structures, or missing letters;
6. Signs identifying abandoned or discontinued businesses. Such signs shall be removed within thirty (30) days following the abandonment or discontinuance;
7. Pennants/streamers;
8. Roof signs;
9. Moving signs; and
10. Off-premises signs.

I. Special Permits:

1. Applicability

The following signs are allowed only by the issuance of a special permit:

- a. Signs allowed by this Section that are associated with projects requiring Site Plan Review or a Special Permit from the Planning Board;
- b. Signs allowed by this Section that exceed either the dimensional requirements for height, area, letter height, setback, projection, and illumination; or the allowed number of signs, as listed in the Tables referenced in D. above; and
- c. Internally illuminated and/or intermittent signs.

1. Special Permit Granting Authority

The Planning Board shall serve as the Special Permit Granting Authority (SPGA) for signs associated with projects requiring a Planning Board Special Permit. For signs described in I.1.b and c. above that are not associated with projects requiring a Planning Board Special Permit, the Zoning Board of Appeals (“ZBA”) shall serve as the SPGA.

2. Signs Associated with Site Plan Review

Signs associated with projects requiring Site Plan Review approval from the Planning Board are subject to the requirements of this Section. For signs associated with Site Plan Review applications described in I.1.b and c. above, the Planning Board will serve as the SPGA.

3. Required Findings

A Special Permit for a sign may be issued if the SPGA makes the following findings:

- a. Sign scale is determined to be reasonably related to building and site development, viewer distance and travel speed, and sign sizes on nearby structures;
- b. Sign size, shape, and placement serve to define or enhance architectural elements of the building such as columns, sill lines, cornices, and roof edges, and does not unreasonably interrupt, obscure, or hide them;
- c. Sign design is in reasonable continuity with the mounting location, height, proportions and materials of other signs on the same or adjacent buildings or fixtures;
- d. Sign materials, colors, lettering style, illumination and form are reasonably compatible with building design, neighborhood context and use;

- e. Sign size, location, design and illumination do not present a safety hazard to vehicular or pedestrian traffic; and
- f. For signs which exceed the quantity and dimensional requirements, the sign complies with all provisions of this Section other than those for which relief is being sought.

J. Nonconformance of Signs

Pursuant to Section II. A of this zoning bylaw, any sign legally erected before the adoption of this Section that does not conform to its provisions may continue to be maintained. Pursuant to Section II.B.2 of this zoning bylaw, any such sign may be subsequently enlarged, altered, replaced, changed, or relocated after the adoption of this Section by grant of a special permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals, provided that such enlargement, alteration, replacement, change or relocation does not increase an existing nonconformity or create a new nonconformity. Minor changes to a nonconforming sign, such as changing a panel on a directory sign, updating a sign without changing its size and dimension, or small repairs, are not considered an alteration and thus do not require a special permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals. Exemptions provided in this Section of the bylaw shall not apply to any sign that advertises a use or activity which has been discontinued.

Table A: Permanent Sign Allowances by Type and District*

SIGN TYPE	STANDARD	ZONING DISTRICT			
		Residential (IR, RRA, RRB & RRC)	Central Business (CB), General Business (GB)	Planned Commercial (PC), Limited Industrial (LI)	Highway Business (HB), Industrial (I)
Awning	Number	N/A	1 per business		
	Max. Area	N/A	1/2 square foot per linear foot of storefront or building upon which the awning is attached		
	Max. Letter Height	N/A	14 inches		
Directional	Number	N/A	Number and placement subject to Building Inspector approval		
	Max. Area	N/A	4 square feet per sign		
	Max. Height	N/A	6 feet per sign		
Directory	Number	N/A	1 per shared public entrance to a building occupied by more than one business establishment		
	Max. Area	N/A	1 square foot per business establishment occupying the building or 6 square feet, whichever is less		
Freestanding	Number	One per main entrance to subdivision, Green Space Preservation Development, or multi-family development	N/A	1 per lot	
	Max. Area	12 square feet	N/A	50 square feet	40 square feet
	Max. Height	6 feet	N/A	10 feet	10 feet
	Max. Letter Height	14 inches	N/A	18 inches	14 inches
Hanging	Number	N/A	1 per business except an additional hanging sign allowed if building fronts on more than one public street	N/A	
	Max. Area	N/A	8 square feet	N/A	
	Max. Letter Height	N/A	14 inches	N/A	
Wall	Number	N/A	1 per business; an additional wall sign allowed if building fronts on more than one public street		
	Max. Area	N/A	20 square feet	30 square feet	25 square feet
	Max. Letter Height	N/A	14 inches	18 inches	14 inches
Window	Number	N/A	1 per business		
	Max. Area	N/A	Not more than 15 % of total façade window area		

*Sign requirements for institutional uses are established in Subsection E. of this Section.

Table B: Maximum Number and Area of Permanent Signs Allowed by District

STANDARD	ZONING DISTRICT			
	Residential (IR, RRA, RRB & RRC)	Central Business (CB) and General Business (GB)	Planned Commercial (PC) Limited Industrial (LI)	Highway Business (HB) and Industrial (I)
Number of Signs	One freestanding sign per main entrance of any subdivision, Green Space Preservation Development, or multi-family residential development	Up to two permanent signs, per Table A. One additional wall sign allowed if building has second facade	One freestanding sign per lot plus up to two permanent signs per Table A. Additional sign(s) allowed if building fronts on more than one public street per Table A	
Maximum Total Area	N/A	Total area of all allowed signs shall not exceed twenty percent (20%) of first floor building area of each allowed use. First floor building area shall be calculated by multiplying lineal frontage of a building or storefront by its total first floor or entrance level height, as shown in diagram #4.		

Table C: Temporary Sign Allowances

SIGN TYPE	STANDARD	ZONING DISTRICT				
		Residential (IR, RRA, RRB & RRC)	Central Business (CB) and General Business (GB)	Planned Commercial (PC) Limited Industrial (LI)	Highway Business (HB) and Industrial (I)	Institutional Uses
Wall Signs	Number	N/A	1 per business			
	Max Area	N/A	20 square feet			
	Duration	N/A	Maximum of three 30-day periods per calendar year			
Standard Info. Sign	Number	1 per lot, except an unlimited number is allowed during periods beginning 30 days before and ending 5 days after any local, state or federal election, ballot initiative or referendum				
	Max Area	6 square feet per sign face				
	Max Height	3 feet (6 feet for post and arm type signs)				
Window Signs	Number	N/A	N/A			
	Max. Area	N/A	Not more than 15% of the façade window area			
	Duration	N/A	Maximum of three 30-day periods per calendar year			