



City of Laguna Beach

Community Development
Department

INFORMATIONAL GUIDE FOR A

SIGN PERMIT

When is a Sign Permit required?

A sign permit is required whenever you are constructing, moving, altering, establishing, painting or creating a temporary or permanent sign in any area of the City. It applies to signs on windows or to signs located within areas less than 4 feet from any window or visible opening. It also applies to luminous tube signs (such as neon signs), regardless of internal or external location, if they are visible through a window. Certain building name, bulletin boards, incidental, open house and real estate signs which comply with the sign regulations concerning sign size, design, location and posting requirements are allowed without a sign permit. Please refer to the Sign Ordinance, Chapter 25.54 of the Municipal Code for details concerning the sign regulations. The City's Municipal Code can be referenced at www.lagunabeachcity.net.

Who reviews and approves Sign Permits?

Many signs require the review and approval of the Planning Commission. However, the following signs may receive administrative approval by the Community Development Department Director: 1) signs in conformance with an approved master sign program; 2) temporary signs; and 3) signs whose area or size does not cause the total signage for a site to exceed the maximum allowable sign area for the site. The letter size for administratively approved signs cannot exceed 8 inches. City staff will be able to advise you on the applicable review process, and the applications and plans that must be submitted.

What information is required?

Prepare and submit the required application, a complete set of the required plans and the required fees.

A complete set of plans includes:

- 1) A scaled drawing of all proposed and existing signs. The dimensions, area computation of each sign, location, height above the ground, sign copy (including any graphics), letter size, font style, sign materials, colors and lighting elements for all signs, including window signs are indicated.
- 2) A scaled site plan and elevation drawing showing lot, structure or suite are provided. The length of the lot or suite frontage is indicated.
- 3) Colored photographs of the elevations and existing signs are provided.
- 4) An 8-1/2" x 11" sized paper/poster board with material samples, color chips and/or color brochure samples of all sign materials, including fabric is provided.
- 5) A drawing of the lighting specifications (electrical components and wiring) and/or brochures of fixtures and bulbs are submitted. (Signs must be lighted from the top.)
- 6) A completed Building Permit Application must be submitted for any lighted sign, monument (ground) sign or new awning sign.

Required Additional Information for a Master Sign Program:

- 1) A complete set of coordinated, common sign standards, including the proposed allowed letter or font size, sign size(s), style, colors, types, placement, lighting elements, number and sign materials must be prepared.
- 2) A plot plan that accurately shows the locations and sizes of all existing and proposed signs in relation to existing and/or proposed buildings, parking lots, driveways, streets and landscaped areas must be prepared.

In the event a public hearing is requested, a second notice will be sent out notifying property *owners* within 300 feet and the *tenants or residents* within 100 feet of the subject property of a public hearing and its time, date and location. At the public hearing, all public comments concerning the proposed use will be heard by the Director of the Community Development Department. The Director will then make an administrative decision regarding the proposed use. The Director's decision is appealable to City Council by the applicant or the property *owners* within 300 feet or the *tenants or residents* within 100 feet of the subject property. The appeal must be filed with the City Clerk within 14 calendar days, and there is an appeal fee of \$2,000..

How is sign area computed?

Sign area is computed by establishing and measuring the simplest geometric shape that will encompass the outer limits of the sign copy or text and graphics, including any material or color forming an integral part of the background, but not including any supporting framework or bracing. A background panel not more than 2" thick, painted the same color as the wall or structure to which it is attached, will not be considered part of the sign area. The sign area for a sign with more than one face shall be computed by adding together the area of all sign faces. All individual signs on a site are added together and compared to the maximum allowable total and size limits. Lots fronting on two or more streets may be permitted the maximum allowable sign area for each street frontage. Properties having secondary frontage on a public alley may be permitted a wall sign at the entrance to the building from the alley. The basic rules outside of the downtown area for calculating the maximum allowable sign area is 1 square foot for each linear foot of street frontage, up to a maximum of 150 square feet per site and up to a maximum of 75 square feet per sign.

How is the height limit of a sign computed?

The height limit of a sign is computed as the distance from the top of the highest attached component of a sign to natural grade. Natural grade is the lower of the existing grade prior to construction or the newly established grade after construction, exclusive of any filling, berming or excavating done solely for the purpose of locating the sign. In cases where the natural grade cannot be reasonably determined, the normal grade shall be equated to the nearest street curb elevation or street centerline elevation, if there is no curb.

Are some signs prohibited?

Yes, all signs not expressly permitted or exempt from regulations are prohibited. Such signs include, but are not limited to:

- Animated signs
- A sign for a non-existing or closed business
- Permanent banners or beacons. (Temporary banners, which are a maximum of 5 square feet in the downtown and 10 square feet outside of the downtown, are permitted for up to 30 days with a temporary permit. Natural earth or pastel colors for the lettering and background should be used.)
- Except for marquees, internally illuminated signs
- Inflated display signs and tethered balloons
- Portable signs, except for menu a-frame or menu board signs
- Roof signs
- Pole signs
- Back-lit canopy/awning signs

What sign materials and illumination techniques are appropriate and allowed in sign design?

Signs should incorporate natural materials reflective of the village atmosphere of Laguna Beach, such as wood. The style, materials and colors should be compatible with the building architecture and streetscape. Special attention should be given to signs in the downtown and other pedestrian-oriented areas. For businesses open only during the day, lighting is generally discouraged. Any proposed illumination is limited to indirect, incandescent or fluorescent lighting. Such lighting must be shielded, mounted from the top of sign structure and provide a minimal level of lighting.

**For more information contact:
Department of Community Development
505 Forest Avenue
Laguna Beach, California 92651
(949) 497-0713**

**City of Laguna Beach
Summary of Significant
Sign Regulation Provisions**

Temporary Signs

- 1 per window or wall face
- Size limit of each temporary sign – 10 square feet, except within the Downtown Specific Plan area the temporary sign size limit is 5 square feet.
- 30 consecutive days and 60 days per calendar year

Luminous Tube (Neon) Signs

- 1 per site (property, suite or unit)
- Size limit – 3 square feet
- Limited to an interior building location that is 4 feet or more from the closest window
- Design review approval is required and strict design criteria is established per Section 25.54.018(d)(6).

General Criteria for Signs

- Signs should be compatible and integral with the architecture of the structure.
- The size of signs should be small and the font size should be related to the business location. Signs along Coast Highway might need a larger font size in comparison to signs within the downtown area which is a pedestrian oriented area.
- Blade or projecting and suspended signs are encouraged.
- Three-dimensional representational signs are encouraged.
- The use of natural, high quality materials in the construction of signs is encouraged.
- Signs may not be internally illuminated.
- A new or substantially remodeled building complex that includes 4 or more businesses or uses is required to have a master sign program prepared and approved before individual signs can be permitted.
- External indirect illumination from the top down is allowed, if the light intensity is shielded, minimal (low-intensity) and not producing glare.
- Canopies and awnings must be constructed with opaque materials.
- Billboard, animated, roof, portable, back-lit canopy or awning, and pole signs are not allowed.

Application Fees

Signs Eligible for Administrative approval - \$604; Temporary Signs - \$266; Planning Commission Signs - \$1,053; Master Sign Program - \$1,342.

**City of Laguna Beach
Summary of Significant
Sign Regulation Provisions**

Wall Signs

- Up to 3 per site (property, suite or unit)
- Size limit of each wall sign – 75 square feet, except within the Downtown Specific Plan area the wall sign size limit is 15 square feet.

Window Signs

- Up to 3 per site (property, suite or unit)
- Size limit of each window sign – 10% of the window area, up to a maximum of 10 square feet per window, except in the Downtown Specific Plan area the maximum size is 5 square feet per window. Window signs may not be illuminated; adjacent windows with mullions less than 3 inches in width are considered one window.

Blade, Projecting or Suspended Signs

- Discretionary, but usually limited to 1 per site (property, suite or unit)
- Size limit of each blade, projecting or suspended sign – 12 square feet per sign face.
- Minimum height clearance – 7 feet
- Blade or projecting signs may project a maximum of 5 feet from building wall.
- Exempt from maximum allowable total sign area

Maximum Allowable Total Sign Area

The combined allowable area of all permanent signs, (signs other than the following type of signs: alley, blade or projecting, building marker, incidental, marquee, miscellaneous business signs, open house, real estate, temporary and suspended), shall not exceed 1 square foot per linear building or suite frontage up to a maximum of 150 total square feet. Single signs shall not exceed 75 square feet in size.

Administrative Approvals

- Except for luminous tube (neon) signs, signs may be administratively approved, if they meet the following criteria:
 - o Signs in compliance with an approved master sign program;
 - o Temporary signs; or
 - o Signs that meet each of the following conditions:
 - Sign font must not exceed 8 inches
 - Sign does not cause the maximum allowable total sign area to be exceeded.

Temporary Banners

- 1 per site (property, suite or unit), which must be located on the face of a building, not within or on a window or ground mounted.
- Size limit of each temporary banner sign – 10 square feet, except within the Downtown Specific Plan area the temporary banner size limit is 5 square feet.
- 30 day term limit, with a possible extension approval of one additional 30 day period.
- Banner should be designed with the use of natural earth or pastel colors for the lettering and background.

City of Laguna Beach

**PICTORIAL GUIDE
TO THE
LAGUNA BEACH
SIGN
ORDINANCE**

Municipal Code Chapter 25.54

**Originally Prepared by the
Laguna Beach
Chamber of Commerce
December, 2002**



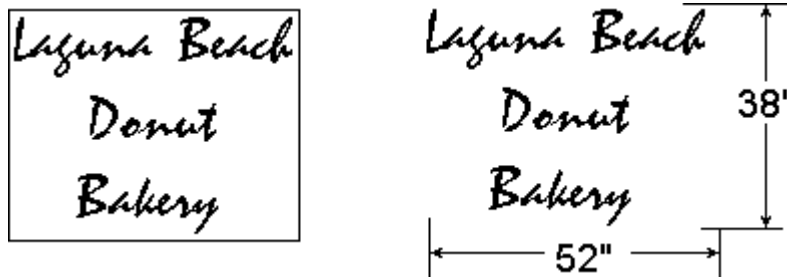
Introduction

This guide was originally prepared by the Laguna Beach Chamber of Commerce to explain Chapter 25.54 of the Laguna Beach Municipal Code, pertaining to sign regulations. It provides simple definitions with examples. It gives the basics of how the size of sign area should be calculated, and describes the rules governing design, placement and procedures. It is intended to show the more common signs and explain the rules for their design and display. It is recommended that all applicants for signs read Chapter 25.54, which contains additional information on signs that are prohibited, exempted and allowed, plus rules for real estate signs, construction signs and non-business signs.

Total allowable sign area is based on gross frontage area.

Total allowable sign area is calculated based on 1 square foot of sign per linear foot of frontage. Thus a building 20 feet wide has a total allowable sign area of 20 square feet.

To calculate the area of a sign, calculate the height and width of a rectangle that would enclose all of the lettering: everything within the rectangle is considered part of the sign. In the example below, the total area of the sign is 52" by 38", a total of 1,976 inches, or 13.72 square feet.



Thus, if the example above were for a window sign, and the total allowable square footage is 32 square feet, wall and/or awning signs may total 18.28 square feet.

Permanent Signs

A **BLADE SIGN** is one attached to or projecting from a building in such a manner that its leading edge extends more than 9 inches from the surface of such building. It may be up to 12 square feet in size, must have at least 7 feet clearance over the sidewalk or road, and may not project more than 5 feet from the building wall. It may contain the name of the establishment, logo and or a representation of the product or service provided by the establishment, may not contain advertising of another organization and is exempt from maximum allowable sign area calculations. Three dimensional signs, whether carved or sandblasted, are strongly encouraged.

Examples:



CANOPY AND AWNING SIGNS are signs that are a component of or attached to an awning or canopy. They are permitted with a maximum of 75 square feet per sign face. Sign copy must be located on front or leading edge only, and may not contain advertising of another organization.



A **WINDOW SIGN** means any sign that is placed, painted or attached upon a window and is visible from the exterior of the window. Three are allowed per site, and none may be illuminated from within or contain light-emitting devices such as neon, fiber-optic, fluorescent or incandescent light. (Note: where adjacent windows are separated by mullions less than three inches in width, the mullions will be considered window surface for the purpose of calculation.) Maximum allowable sign area is 10% of the window surface up to a maximum of 10 square feet, except Downtown (the area covered by the Downtown Specific Plan), where the maximum is 5 square feet. Miscellaneous business signs, such as credit card stickers, open and closed signs, hours of operation, etc., are not included in this calculation, provided that each group/set of miscellaneous business signs do not exceed 2.25 square feet in area and there is only one group/set of such signs per entrance. **Signs not attached to the window, but placed within 4 feet of the window are considered interior building signs.**

Examples of permissible window signs:



Four examples below are of signs not permitted, because they exceed allowable sign area. The Broadway Liquors window is filled with signs, in addition to the ones painted on the outside of the window.



WALL SIGN means any sign attached parallel to or painted on an exterior wall of a building, and which projects not more than 9 inches from such wall. Three are allowed per site. The maximum allowable sign area is seventy-five square feet, except Downtown, where the maximum is 15 square feet. The maximum side setback is 10% of frontage or a maximum of five feet. There is a minimum requirement of three feet separation between wall signs.



FLAGS, GONFALONS AND PENNANTS means any sign of lightweight fabric, plastic, paper or similar material that is attached to any permanent display or pole. Official flags of the United States, the State of California and other states of the nation, counties, municipalities, foreign nations and nationally or internationally recognized organizations are not considered signs. Banners are considered temporary signs. Gonfalons are non-rigid devices, generally made of cloth, hung from a horizontal bar, often secured at the bottom. Flags are non-rigid devices, generally made of cloth, hung from a vertical or oblique bar or pole.



City Gonfalon



Flags on flagpole, gonfalon on lamppost

One **DIRECTORY SIGN** up to 75 square feet per sign face is permitted, with a maximum height limit of 6 feet.



One **ALLEY SIGN** is permitted per building, up to a maximum of 10 square feet, and they are exempt from maximum allowable sign area calculations.



One **CHANGEABLE DISPLAY SIGN** is permitted per site, up to a maximum of 10 square feet, if permanently attached to the structure. Portable signs placed on the sidewalk are not permitted. Menu A-frame or menu board signs are allowed with an approved permit, but must be located on private property and not placed on a public sidewalk.



BUILDING MARKER means a sign indicating the name of a building and/or the date of construction and incidental information about its history. One per site, with a maximum of 2 square feet is allowed, and they are exempt from the maximum allowable sign area calculations.



Both of these signs are from the Wells Fargo Building. The one on the right is an excellent example of a building marker sign, but is prohibited because it is a sign for a defunct business.

SUSPENDED SIGN means a sign that is attached to the underside of a horizontal plane surface of a building. These double-faced signs may be a maximum of 12 square feet in size and must have a 7 foot height clearance.



In the picture at left, the oval sign is allowable, but the Kodak sign is not.

MENUS. A restaurant may display its current menu in a fixture up to 4 square feet in size permanently attached to the building in which the restaurant is located. Easels and A-frame signs may be displayed outside the restaurant with an approved sign permit. Chalkboards and other devices designed to display changing information such as daily specials must be affixed permanently to the building. Menu signs are not exempt from the maximum allowable sign area calculations.



INCIDENTAL SIGNS are, generally informational, having a purpose secondary to the use of the lot on which located and not containing a commercial message. Examples of such signs include "no parking," "loading only" and other similar directives. They may be up to 8 square feet in size, four feet in height and are exempt from maximum allowable sign area calculations.



WINDOW DISPLAYS are defined as presentations of merchandise provided by the establishment, along with associated artwork, placed behind a window. Examples of associated artwork might be beach toys and sand in a display of beachwear, a surfboard in a bookstore displaying books on surfing, and palettes, brushes, and paint tubes in an art gallery's window display. Window displays are not considered signs.



Permitted Temporary Signs

You may post temporary signs up to 60 days per year upon permit approval, but no single sign may be displayed for more than 30 of those days. The total area of temporary signs shall not exceed half of the permissible square footage for window display, or 5% of window space in the Downtown, 10% in the rest of the City. Banners are considered temporary signs.

TEMPORARY SIGNS are allowed, subject to permit. The maximum allowable sign area is 10 square feet, except in the Downtown, where the maximum is 5 square feet. Temporary signs will usually be fabric banners, paper or cardboard posters.

BANNERS are allowed subject to permit approval. Permissible banner size is 5 square feet per banner in the Downtown and 10 square feet in the rest of the City. Temporary banners are exempt from the maximum allowable sign area calculations.

Exempted Signs

1. Bus stop signs erected by a public transit company
2. Emergency warning or directional signs erected or placed by a governmental agency, a public utility company, or a contractor doing authorized or permitted work within the public right-of-way
3. Informational signs of a public utility regarding its poles, lines, pipes or facilities
4. Signs erected by or on behalf of a public agency to post legal notices or to direct or relocate pedestrian or vehicular traffic
5. Gonfalons or other signs erected on light standards by the City
6. Banners put up by the City across Forest Avenue
7. Any public notice or warning required by a valid and applicable federal, state, or local law, regulation or ordinance
8. Holiday lights and decorations with no commercial message, but only between November 15th and January 15th of the following year
9. Except for luminous tube signs (neon), interior building signs located 4 feet or more from any window or opening through which they might be visible

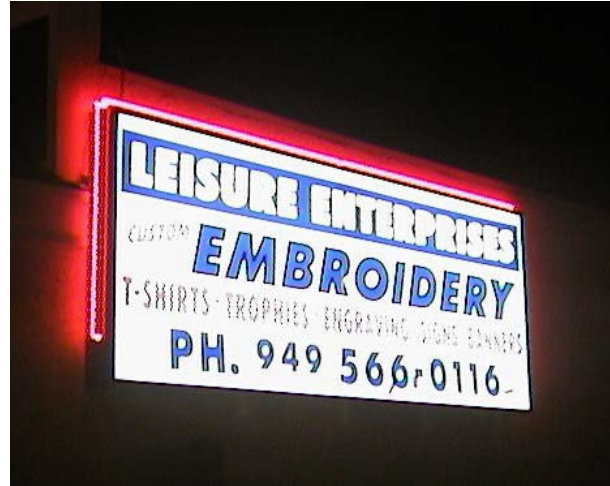
10. Miscellaneous business signs, such as credit card stickers, open and closed signs, hours of operation, etc., provided that each group/set of miscellaneous business signs do not exceed 2.25 square feet in area and there is only one group/set of such signs per entrance



11. Temporary election signs related to national, state, or local elections including candidates and/or other issues that have been placed on the ballot provided that each temporary election sign is posted on private property, subject to the permission of the property owner
12. Memorial signs or plaques
13. Signs not visible from a public street or pedestrian accessway
14. Interior building signs (signs located 4 feet or more behind a window) are permitted

Prohibited signs

Internally illuminated signs. These are typically boxes covered by a translucent plastic, with illumination from within.



A sign no longer identifying a bona fide existing business

Billboards (one is grandfathered until 2010)

Roof signs

Portable Signs. Any portable sign placed on the sidewalk or other public right-of-way, including blackboards, easels and A-frames. (Menu A-frames signs may be displayed outside a restaurant with an approved sign permit and only on private property.)





Non-Conforming signs

Upon written notification, existing permanent signs which are made nonconforming by the new provisions of the 2002 sign ordinance must be removed within 3 years, except that the period is 120 days for permanent window signs and 60 days for any luminous tube sign, (illuminated by neon or other internal devices). Applications for sign permits for existing signs that are made non-conforming by the new sign ordinance must be made to the Community Development Department.

No new permanent or temporary sign may be posted without a sign permit.

The establishment posting a sign that is illegal will be cited and given a date by which the sign must be removed or brought into conformance, a grace period of generally 60 days for permanent signs or one business day for temporary signs. Fines will be levied against establishments that fail to remove non-conforming signs or modify them so that they do conform to the sign ordinance.

Sign Application Procedure

The Community Development Department will administer the permitting of permanent and temporary signs in a prompt manner at a cost of \$70 for temporary sign permits and \$370 for permanent sign permits. Applicants must complete the required application, including a scaled drawing of the sign(s) desired, with the exact measurements and actual colors to be used, and for temporary signs, the dates they are to be posted. The applicant can take it to the Community Development Department at City Hall, 505 Forest Avenue, for processing or can mail the applications with supporting documentation to that Department.



REAL ESTATE SIGNAGE

(Definition: "a sign advertising or promoting the sale, lease or rental of real estate.")

- Allowed without a sign permit in all zones.
- Exempt from maximum allowable sign area calculations for lot
- Must advertise the property on which it is located.
- A maximum of one (1) 'rider' sign, 18 inches wide and 6 inches high, is allowed

SPECIFICATIONS:

- **Content:** Not regulated.
- **Number:** 1 per frontage.
- **Size:** 3 square feet per sign face (maximum).
- **Height:** 4 feet (maximum).
- **Location:** Minimum 5 feet inside property line - 7 feet inside property line if at a corner; Shall not be positioned so as to create a vehicular or pedestrian hazard; corner cutback applies per §25.50.006; if wall-mounted, minimum side setback equal to 10% of frontage, but does not have to exceed 5 feet.

OPEN HOUSE SIGNAGE

(Definition: "a temporary sign communicating that a property is available for inspection by prospective buyers and that the owner of the property or the owner's agent is on the premises during the time the property is open for inspection.")

- Allowed without a sign permit in all zones.
- Must be affixed to a single wood or metal pole.
- 'Rider' signs are prohibited.

SPECIFICATIONS:

- **Content:** Shall contain only the wording "OPEN HOUSE" with a directional arrow, except that the identification of the sign's owner may be affixed in a space not exceeding 3½ inches wide and 3 inches high placed in the upper left corner of the sign; Format shall be green, red or blue lettering on a white background.
- **Number:** Only one such sign per each direction of any intersection at any time.
- **Size:** 2 square feet per sign face (maximum).
- **Height:** 4 feet (maximum).
- **Location:** Shall not be placed on public property or within the public right-of-way, but only on private property with the prior consent of the property owner; Shall not be positioned so as to create a vehicular or pedestrian hazard.
- **Times:** Shall be installed no earlier 8:00 a.m. and removed no later than sunset on the day of the open house; Shall only be posted during the time that the owner/agent is on the premises and the premises are open for inspection.

IMPORTANT NOTE REGARDING BROCHURE OR LEAFLET HOLDERS:

- Please be advised that boxes, containers or other devices used for the purpose of holding real estate information or advertising materials are prohibited.

TEMPORARY BANNER SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

1. \$89.00 fee, payable after approval.
2. Color drawing (Natural earth or pastel colors should be used for the lettering and background).
3. Photograph of location (Banner should be located on face of building).

Limitations:

- Maximum size of 10 square feet outside of downtown, and a maximum size of 5 square feet in the Downtown Specific Plan area as shown on the City's zoning map.
- Valid for 30 days (30 day extension may be requested).