

# SECTION 6

## SIGN REGULATIONS

### 6.01 INTENT

This section provides an administrative framework for controlling the establishment and maintenance of signs in the City and for the enforcement of the standards and regulations. It intends to provide maximum safety for motorists using the streets and for the pedestrians using public ways. This section intends to allow necessary identification with reasonable, orderly, and effective display of signs and outdoor advertising and to avoid the "canceling out" effect of conflicting adjacent signs and to conserve property values. It intends to support the general purpose of the City of Tiffin Zoning Ordinance and Comprehensive Future Land Use Plan of the City. It intends to prevent wasteful use of natural resources and to assure the continued attractiveness of the community.

### 6.02 DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this Ordinance, the following terms have the meaning indicated in this Section.

**Sign** is any identification, description, illustration, or device illuminated or non-illuminated that is visible from any public place or is located on private property and exposed to the public. A sign directs attention to a referent. A sign includes any emblem, painting, banner, pennant, placard, temporary sign, lights, balloons or other device designed to attract attention, advertise, identify, or convey information. A sign includes its supporting structures.

**Sign, Advertising:** A sign that advertises or solicits for a referent that is not located on the premises where such sign is located, or within the building to which the sign is affixed.

**Sign, Business:** A sign that directs attention to a commercial use and the sign is located on or in the building where the commercial use is located.

**Sign, Construction** is any sign identifying individuals or companies involved in a construction project where the sign is placed on the premises while the project is ongoing.

**Sign, Flashing** is any illuminated sign where the artificial light or lights are not maintained stationary or constant in intensity and color at all times when such sign is illuminated. A sign that displays the time, temperature, or other written message by intermittent lighting is not a flashing sign; such a sign requires a Special Use Permit.

**Sign Face:** The surface area of a plane that covers a sign when viewed from one side or direction. When more than one sign is located on the same sign structure or building and is separated by less than five feet, the sign face includes the total surface area of the plane that covers all signs when viewed from a single direction. The total sign face area must not exceed the restrictions for Maximum Sign Size Per Sign Face as presented in Table 1 of this Sign Regulations Section of the Ordinance.

**Sign Area** is the area of the smallest square or rectangle that encloses the sign face, or if a sign has more than one (1) face, the total area of all faces. Trim, molding, supports, or screening that does not serve to attract attention is not included in the sign area calculation. Peripheral sign elements that serve to attract attention to the sign, such as lights and arrows, intended to focus special attention to the sign, are included in the sign area calculations.

**Sign, Ground** is any sign or other advertising structure placed upon the ground and not attached to any building.

**Sign, Illuminated** is a sign where the lighting source is an integral part of the sign.

**Sign, Indirectly Illuminated:** A sign where the source of illumination is outside of the sign, but where the source of illumination indirectly illuminates the sign.

**Sign, Instructional** is any sign that notifies the public about limitations or regulations of designated uses of certain lands or rights-of-way, and including warning signs, exit signs, traffic signs, and directional signs for parking or parking restrictions.

**Sign, Moving** is any sign that revolves, rotates, swings, undulates, or otherwise attracts attention by moving parts, whether operated by mechanical equipment or by natural sources, but not including flags or banners.

**Sign, Portable** is any sign not permanently attached to the ground, a building, or other permanent structure. Any sign that has wheels will be considered a portable sign, as well as any sign attached to a frame that is not permanently attached to the ground or a building.

**Sign, Projecting** is any sign that is attached to a building or other structure and extends beyond the line of the building or structure by more than 18 inches.

**Sign, Roof** is any sign erected, constructed, and maintained upon or over the roof or top of the wall, wall tower, or turret of any building and that is principally supported by the roof.

**Sign Structure** is any structure that supports a sign, including a decorative cover.

**Sign, Temporary** is any sign, banner, pennant, valance, or advertising display that is not permanent, constructed of cloth, canvas, lightweight fabric, cardboard, wallboard, or other lightweight materials with or without frames, intended to be displayed for a short period of time only.

**Sign, Wall:** is any sign attached to and supported by the exterior surface of the wall of a building or structure in a place substantially parallel to that of the supporting wall.

**Street Frontage** is the lot line or the length of a lot line that is also the line of any public street right-of-way other than an alley. The street frontage of a lot or parcel that is legally created or described as extending to the center line of a street must be measured along the line that denotes the edge or boundary of the easement established for the street. The street must exist or have been created for street purposes and may be a limited access or controlled access roadway but is not be a utility right-of-way, drainage way, park, or railroad, and is not an alley.

## 6.03 GENERAL PROVISIONS APPLICABLE TO ALL ZONES

### A. Prohibited Signs and Prohibited Conditions

1. No sign may be erected or maintained at any location whereby reason of its position, wording, illumination, size, shape, or color it may interfere with any authorized traffic control device.
2. No sign may use any word, phrase, symbol, shape, form, or character in such manner as to interfere with moving traffic.
3. No illuminated or indirectly illuminated sign may be permitted within 50 feet of property in any residential zone, unless the illumination of the sign is designed not to shine light directly onto any adjacent property or into any street.
4. No part of any sign attached to a building may be erected to a height greater than that permitted for the building. Freestanding signs may not exceed 30 feet in height, unless modified by other sections of this Ordinance.
5. The owner, lessee, or manager of a ground sign, and the owner of the land where the same is located, must keep grass or weeds and other growth cut and debris and rubbish cleaned up and removed from the lot where the sign is located.
6. Advertising signs, business signs, and identification signs that may become rotted, unsafe, or unsightly must be repaired or removed by the licensee or owner of the sign on notice of the Zoning Officer.
7. No part of any sign may extend into the public right-of-way, except those signs established by, or by order of, any governmental agency.
8. No single face sign or other sign where the exposed sign structure would be generally within public view will be permitted unless appropriate screening or a decorative cover is provided.
9. Unless specifically permitted elsewhere in this Ordinance, no sign is permitted that includes flashing lights, moving parts, or noise emissions.
10. No sign over two square feet may be suspended by chains, ropes, or other means that readily permit the sign to swing or move freely.
11. No sign may be affixed directly to a tree, utility pole, light pole, traffic control device, barn, shed, or roof of a building or structure.
12. No sign may be attached or painted onto an inoperable or unlicensed motor vehicle in view of the public right-of-way. No sign may be attached to a licensed vehicle that is maintained in full view of the right-of-way or on the property where the sign refers for more than seven consecutive days.

13. No portable signs are permitted including, but not limited to, signs on trailers, A-frame or sandwich board signs are prohibited unless permanently attached to the ground or firmly attached to a permanent structure so that they are not readily portable. Paper or cardboard signs wrapped around or fastened to support poles or forms that are readily portable and not permanently attached to the ground or a building are also prohibited.
14. Unless permitted under other sections of this Sign Ordinance or unless granted under the Special Use Procedures of the Tiffin Zoning Ordinance, special attention attracting devices, such as banners, pennants, searchlights, balloons or other gas-filled figures, propellers, spinners, streamers, reflectors, strobe lights, flashing lights, strings of lights, and similar devices that attract attention are prohibited. This restriction includes signs used in store-front windows. For special occasions, such as grand openings, special promotions, or other similar special occasions not exceeding seven days and not occurring more than two times annually for any one zoning lot. Banners, pennants streamers and balloons, less two feet in diameter are permitted on private property if they are not a harmful to the health and safety of the general public.
15. No sign may be painted directly on the wall, roof , or on a fence or other accessory structure or directly on any paved surfaces other than required traffic control information.
16. No sign may be located at the rear of premises facing residential property.
17. Obsolete business signs that advertise an activity, business, product or service no longer available on the premises where the sign is located or signs no longer in use are prohibited and must be removed within 14 days after written notification from the Zoning Administrator.
18. Neon tubing, outside of a Sign Area and independent of any information conveyed by a sign permitted under this Section, which is used as an architectural element or a feature of a building or other structure, is prohibited from being affixed directly to any building or structure, except as a special use in the C/B-2 and C/S-2 zoning districts.

**B. Exempt Signs:** Signs are permitted for the following uses and purposes without a permit unless otherwise stated.

1. For each permitted or required parking area that has a capacity of more than five cars, one sign, not more than two square feet in area, designating each entrance or exit; and one sign, not more than nine square feet in area, designating the conditions of use of the parking area.
2. One "For Sale" or "For Rent" sign per zoning lot, not more than nine square feet in area. Corner lots may have one (1) additional sign. Such signs must be removed within seven days after the sale, rental or lease has been accomplished.

3. Signs established by, or by order of, any governmental agency.
4. For construction on or development of a lot, one sign not more than twelve square feet in area, indicating the name of the contractors, engineers, or architect, or products being used in the construction of a building, but only during the time that construction or development is actively underway; up to a period of three months. In this case no permit is required.
5. For an event of public interest such as a horse show or church affair, one sign, not over forty-eight square feet in area, located upon the site of the event. The sign may not be erected more than 30 days before the event and must be removed immediately after the event. Also directional signs, not more than four (4) square feet in area, showing only a directional arrow and the name of the event. The signs must not be erected more than seven days before the event and must be removed immediately after the event.
6. Temporary political signs may be permitted for a period of not more than 60 days before and five days after an election without obtaining a permit. No sign may be located within 15 feet of the public right-of-way at a street intersection, nor over the right-of-way.
7. For each real estate subdivision that has been approved in accordance with the Tiffin Subdivision Regulations, there may be one sign located on some portion of the property being offered for sale. This sign may not be more than 300 square feet in area. One additional similar sign may be permitted for each one 100 lots in the subdivision in the zone where they are located. These signs may be permitted only during the time some portion of the land offered for sale remains unsold and an active sales program is underway. Permits for such signs are required and may be issued for a one year period and may be renewed for additional one year periods to allow time for reasonable display.
8. Signs not visible from any public thoroughfare or right-of-way or from beyond the boundaries of the lot or parcel where they are located.
9. Signs within completely enclosed buildings and not visible from the outside of the building.
10. Directional and instructional non-electric signs that provide instruction or direction and are located entirely on a property to which they pertain and do not exceed eight square feet each in area and that do not advertise a business. This includes, but is not limited to, such signs as those identifying restrooms, telephone, parking areas, entrances and exits.
11. Non-illuminated emblems or insignia of any nation or political subdivision, profit or non-profit, organization.
12. Home occupation signs associated with a home occupation as defined in the Zoning Ordinance provided such signs are non-illuminated wall signs that do not exceed two square feet in area.

13. In residential zones, the house numbers and names used may be as large as possible yet fit within a sign that is not less than nor more than two square feet in total area. In commercial or industrial zones, the building numbers and letters may be as large as possible yet fit within a sign that is no less than four square feet nor exceeds four square feet in total area.
14. Memorial signs or tablets, names of buildings and date of erection, that are cut into masonry surface or inlaid so as to be part of a building or when constructed of bronze or other non-combustible material not more than four square feet in area.
15. No trespassing and no dumping signs that exceed four square feet in area per sign.
16. When a sale of goods or services is being conducted by a business establishment, a non-illuminated sale sign may be permitted on the interior surface of a glass show window as a temporary window promotional sign. The sign may be in addition to all other authorized signs, and may not exceed 50 square feet in size. No promotional or sale signs are permitted to be affixed to the exterior of any window, wall or exterior surface of the structure.
17. A non-illuminated sign painted or lettered directly on a window for the specific purposes of identifying the proprietor or name of the business to the passerby. Such a sign may be in addition to all other authorized signs, and may not exceed 25% of total glass area of the window or glass door on that it is located. The sign may not be construed to be a window promotional sign.
18. Religious symbols, commemorative plaques of recognized historic agencies, or identification emblems of religious orders or historic agencies are permitted as on-premise symbols or insignias.
19. Vehicular signs on a truck, bus, trailer or other vehicle, while operating in the normal course of business, which is not primarily the display of signs.
20. Neighborhood identification signs in any zone including a sign, masonry wall, landscaping, or other similar material and feature may be combined to form a display for neighborhood or subdivision identification provided that the legend of such sign or display must consist only of the neighborhood or subdivision name.
21. Awnings with signs consisting of one (1) line of copy upon the border of the awnings not exceeding six (6) square feet of copy area.
22. Warning signs placed in areas of danger that are accessible to the public by utility companies or others.
23. Holiday decorations on private property clearly incidental and customary, and commonly associated with national, local or religious holidays are permitted, provided they must be displayed for a period of not more than thirty (30) days for each holiday.

24. Building details that are an integral part of the overall architectural design of a building or works of art that are not so located that their primary purpose is attract attention to a commercial solicitation.

**6.04 PROVISIONS APPLICABLE TO RESIDENTIAL ZONES**

In the residential zones, signs are permitted as follows:

- A. Signs identified in Section 6.03.B. that propose to exceed the standards specified in that section may request a special exception use under the provisions of the Tiffin Zoning Ordinance.
- B. For any permitted principal use other than a residential use, one sign, not to exceed 24-square feet area, is permitted. The sign must indicate nothing more the name and address of the premises and the schedule of services or other information relevant to the operation of the premises. The sign must be set back from all property lines at least one foot for each one square foot of sign area.

**6.05 PROVISIONS APPLICABLE TO COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL ZONES**

In the Commercial and Industrial Zones, signs may be permitted as follows:

- A. The total surface area of all advertising, business and identification signs on a lot may not exceed the total area determined by applying the ratio of permitted sign area in square feet to linear feet of street frontage as shown in the following Table 1.
- B. The number of advertising and business signs for a zoning lot may not exceed the number shown in Table 1.
- C. The surface area in square feet of any one face of any permitted advertising or business sign may not exceed the area shown in Table 1.
- D. For non-business and non-industrial uses, signs are permitted as regulated by the Business classifications on Table 1.
- E. No wall sign may project above the roof or parapet line more than 48) inches nor extend into any required yard more than 18 inches from the wall to which it is attached.
- F. No sign may be erected directly upon the roof of any building.
- G. Only one business ground sign is permitted within the front yard or corner side yard for each street frontage of a business or industrial use on a lot, and the bottom edge of any ground sign erected in the front yard or corner side yard may be at least ten feet above ground level or the top edge of the sign may be less than three feet in height. The sign, including its sign structure, must be set back from all property lines adjacent to a street one foot for every ten square feet of sign area for the largest single face of any sign, and in no case may the setback be less than one-fourth of any required front or corner side-yard distance. No business ground sign may exceed a height of 30 feet above the grade of the closest public right-of-way line, except business ground signs located along a toll way may be permitted to a height of 60) feet above the grade of the closest public right-of-way when approved as a Special Use.

- H. Advertising signs are permitted only in the zones as indicated on Table 1. If an advertising sign is allowed in any of the remodeling commercial, or industrial districts under the State of Iowa Highway Advertising Control Act, an applicant may follow the procedures for a Special Use and appropriate proof of control under Iowa Code provisions for both the subject site and subject sign must be submitted to the City Council. The City Council may apply specific standards on a Special Use that protect the public health, safety, and welfare where specific standards under the Iowa Code have not been specifically stated.
- I. All advertising signs including their sign structures and all other parts may be set back from all public rights-of-way and/or residential zones at least one (1) foot for every two square feet of sign area. No advertising ground sign may exceed a height of 30 feet above the grade of the closest public right-of-way, line except advertising ground signs located along interstate highways or expressways may be permitted to height of 60 feet above the grade of the closest public right-of-way when approved as a Special Use. Advertising ground signs that propose to exceed these heights must follow the provisions for variances under this Ordinance.
- J. The surface area in square feet of any one face of any advertising sign that may be allowed as a Special Use may not exceed the area shown in Table 1. If the State of Iowa Highway Advertising Control Act does allow a larger surface area for a sign on a specific property, then the provisions of letter H. of this Section must apply concerning a Special Use and the provisions of Section I. of this Section concerning setbacks and heights.
- K. Advertising sign structures as a Permitted Use are limited to not more than one along any 1,000 feet of street frontage on the same side of a street. Advertising sign structures as a Special Use may be allowed at not more than one along any 500 feet of street frontage on the same side of a street. No structure may carry more than two signs per facing and the total area of the sign or signs for any one facing may not exceed the maximum sign size per sign face restrictions shown on Table 1.

## **6.06 NONCONFORMING SIGNS**

- A. Signs existing on the effective date of this Ordinance that do not conform to these regulations are non-conforming signs. Non-conforming signs may not be rebuilt, structurally altered, or moved to a new location without obtaining compliance with the requirements of this Ordinance.
- B. Business signs on the premises of a non-conforming use or building may be continued, but the signs may not expand in number, area, height, or illumination. New signs may not exceed 35 square feet in aggregate sign area and may be erected if all other signs existing at the time of adoption of the Zoning Ordinance are removed.
- C. Non-conforming signs that are listed in the Prohibited Sign Section of this Ordinance and have a value of less than five hundred dollars (\$500.00) must be removed within ten days after receiving written notice by the Zoning Administrator.



- D. Non-conforming signs of any business or other legal entity that ceases the activities to that the signs refer or that is replaced by a different business or other entity, must be removed, relocated, or rebuilt in a conforming manner or permitted to continue only as a Special Use with a specific amortization agreement established by the City Council with recommendations from the Planning and Zoning Commission. The period of the amortization agreement may not be less than five years or more than 15 years. The specific time period for the amortization for a specific sign must consider the extent of the difference between the non-conforming condition or conditions of the sign and the requirements of the City of Tiffin Sign Ordinance, as well as the extent of any economic hardship in altering or removing the specific sign to assure conformity with the provisions of the City of Tiffin Sign Ordinance.
- E. Any non-conforming sign that the Zoning Administrator finds to be unsafe must be removed immediately.

**6.07 PERMITS AND ADMINISTRATION AND ENFORCEMENT**

- A. On and subsequent to the effective date of this Ordinance, any person proposing to erect any business, advertising, or other sign not specifically listed as an exempt sign must submit to the Zoning Officer an application for a sign permit. Application for such permit must be accompanied by detailed plans, including proposed advertising copy, and other necessary information to determine the location and compliance with all applicable regulations. A permit may be issued within ten days of the date of an application submission including fees or the applicant must receive a written notice indicating the status of the application.
- B. Permit fees for business, advertising and other signs, as established by the City of Tiffin and that may be periodically amended by resolution of the city council, must be submitted at the time application is made for the sign permit.
- C. If the work associated with a sign permit has not been completed within one year of the date of the issuance of the permit, the permit expires.

Table 1 - Signs Number and Area Regulations for Signs in Commercial and Industrial Zones											
Zone	Type of Sign Permitted		Advertising and Business Sign Patio to Street Frontage (1)		Limit on Number of Advertising and Business Ground Sign Structures Per Zoning Lot (2)		Maximum Sign Size Per Sign Face Including Ground, Wall and Other Signs Requiring Permits				
							Business (sq. ft.)		Advertising (sq. ft.)		
	Permitted	Special	Permitted	Special	Permitted (3)	Special	Permitted	Special	Permitted	Special	
C-1B	Business	*	2:1	3:1	1		3	75	150	-	-
C-1O	Business	*	2:1	3:1	1		3	75	150	-	-
C-2B	Business Advertising	*	3:1 (4)	4:1	1		3	150 (5)	300	250	300
C-2S	Business Advertising	*	3:1 (4)	4:1	1		3	150	300	250	300
C-2O	Business Advertising	*	1:1	2:1	1		3	150	300	250	300
C-1S	Business	*	1:1	2:1	1		5	250	500 (6)	-	-
M-1	Business Advertising	*	2:1	3:1	1		3	150	300	-	300
m-2	Business Advertising	*	2:1	3:1	1		3	150	300	-	300

\* Any Permitted Sign that exceeds the standards provided in the "Permitted" columns, but does not exceed the stated standards in the "Special" columns, may be processed as a Special Use. Any requirements to exceed the standard stated in the "Special" Column (with the exception as noted by footnotes) must also apply for a Variation as provided under the Zoning Ordinance.

(1) Total sign area permitted in square feet: compared to lineal feet of street frontage.

(2) Number limit shown is for all sign structures erected on the ground that may or may not have one or more signs or sign faces on each sign structure.

(3) For corner lots, one ground sign structure is permitted per street frontage provided that not more than one of these structures may be used for any Advertising Signs.

(4) The maximum total sign area in square feet compared to lineal feet of street frontage for permitted signs shall not exceed one thousand (1,000) square feet. Proposals to exceed this maximum must follow the provisions for Special Use under the Zoning Ordinance.

(5) Signs within one hundred (100) feet of the C/S-3 District shall be limited to a maximum sign size per sign face of seventy-five (75) square feet.

(6) One temporary business sign to promote new attractions in the C/S-1 zone, not to exceed twenty-four (24) months, may be authorized with a maximum of six hundred fifty (650) square feet.

(7) Each one (1) lineal foot of neon tubing, attached to a building or structure for attention attracting purposes shall be counted as one (1) square foot of signage and shall be calculated as part of the maximum total sign area permitted for a particular use or development. (Amended Per Ord. No. 99-134, December 6, 1999)