

# TOWN OF VIENNA | COMMERCIAL SIGNS GUIDE

The following is a summary of the Town Code relating to signage. All zoning regulations for signs in the Town of Vienna are found within [Division 6 of Articles 4B, 5A, and 5B](#) of Chapter 18 of the Town of Vienna Zoning Code. Business owners are encouraged to review the town code before submitting any applications for review, purchasing, or installing signage. Signs installed without an approved review by the Board of Architectural Review constitute a zoning violation and will result in fines.

## WHAT IS A SIGN?

Sign refers to any object, letter, figure, design, symbol, artistic display, trademark, illumination of other device intended to call attention to or identify or give direction to any place, subject, person, firm, business, public performance, article, machine or merchandise.

The Town utilizes 9 types of signs. Some of these are typically illuminated. This guide explains the common types of signs allowed in the Town, how to measure them, and the appropriate options for their illumination.

## WINDOW SIGNS

Window sign refers to signs placed over top or inside of a window. Window sign area per business shall not exceed 10 sq. ft., or 25% of the window area, whichever is less. When illuminated, any text in window signs is not permitted to move or flash.

## WALL SIGNS

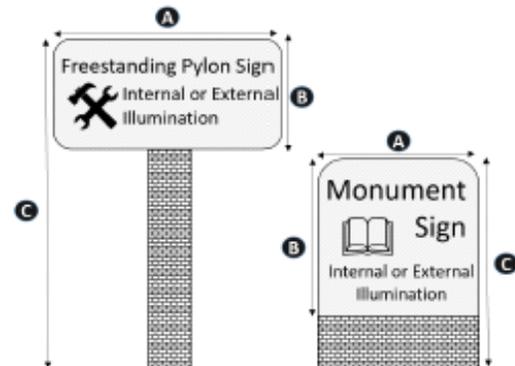
Wall sign refers to any sign which is affixed directly to or suspended from a wall, marquee, mansard roof, or parapet wall of a building, aligning with the exposed face of the wall and extending from it less than 12 inches. A wall sign may be either of one-piece construction or of individual letters or symbols. A wall sign may also be attached to an awning or canopy.

These signs may be illuminated externally by downward-directed lights, internally, or shadow backlit using the most appropriate Correlated Color Temperature (CCT) per the location's zone.

A total limit of 2 sq. ft. of wall sign area is permitted for each linear foot of commercial or industrial building frontage. If a building has multiple tenants within multiple stories, the maximum sign area for the building is based on the frontage of the ground level.

## FREESTANDING SIGNS

Freestanding signs are either pylon or monument signs. The area of freestanding signs is determined by multiplying the area of the sign face and width, A and B in the example image. The sign height is the distance between the grade at which the sign sits, and the top of the sign structure, unit C in the example image.



One freestanding sign not to exceed 36 sq. ft. in area shall be permitted for each separate building. Multi-tenant buildings must share the sign area of a single sign. The location of all freestanding signs must be shown on an approved site plan before review by the Board of Architectural Review.

These signs may be illuminated externally by downward-directed lights, internally, or shadow backlit using the most appropriate CCT per the location's zone.



**Department of Planning & Zoning**

127 Center Street South | Vienna, VA 22180

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## DIGITAL SIGNS

For institutional uses such as schools or community buildings, the Town allows pylon or monument Electronic Messaging Centers (EMCs). These signs must comply with Town regulations on colors and rate of change. EMCs are not allowable for commercial land uses.

When digital screens are necessary for a business such as a drive-through lane, they should comply with the Town's regulations for internally illuminated signs.

## POSITIVE VS NEGATIVE CONTRAST

Sign design applications should achieve adequate positive or negative contrast in their designs to support legibility and wayfinding in the community. For internally illuminated signs, positive contrast designs are highly encouraged.

### POSITIVE



### NEGATIVE



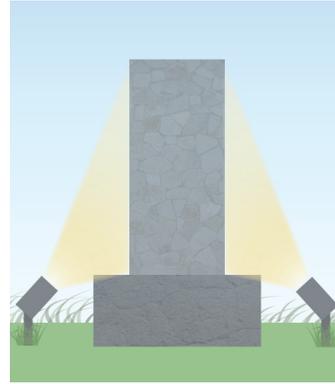
## APPROPRIATE LIGHT SOURCES

Internal illumination will fall between 3000K-4000K. 4000K will be considered when the sign is intended to be blue-toned in its appearance.

External lighting for freestanding signs is required to use the maximum light level and CCT per its zone. This will be 3000K in most locations.

For new signs and wherever possible when updating existing signs, lighting should be aimed downwards across the sign's surface.

## DISCOURAGED



## ENCOURAGED



## HOW IS SIGN AREA MEASURED?

Sign area includes the entire face of the sign and also any adjacent area contributing to its decoration. In the case of an open sign made up of individual letters, figures, or designs, the space between and around them would be included to create a rectangular shape. Open signs are encouraged in the Town.



In the above examples, the sign area is calculated by multiplying the width of the sign by the height of the sign face. The same method applies for any other type of freestanding sign.



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## ZONING REQUIREMENTS

The zoning code determines the maximum size, height, and location of any sign by zoning district. For illuminated signs, it also determines the maximum acceptable light level and the appropriate CCT options.

Town Staff reviews the signs for zoning compliance before signs are placed on the agenda of the Board of Architectural Review.

## SIGN REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

Any sign larger than 1.5 square feet in area and intended for permanent installation requires zoning approval from the Town of Vienna, review by the Board of Architectural Review, and potentially building permits from Fairfax County.

All signs fall into the categories of permanent or temporary. Temporary signs must comply with Town regulations, but do not require approval by the Board of Architectural Review.

## SIGN PERMIT APPLICATIONS

When applying for signs, applicants must provide some basic information to Town staff to verify the plans for the sign meet the zoning requirements.

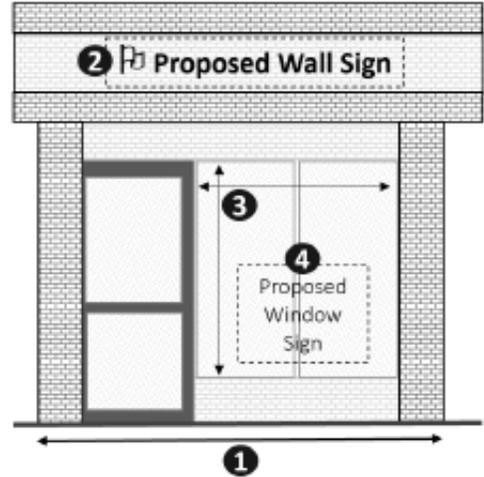
This would include:

1. The width of the tenant space or building at the ground level,
2. Location, size (height, width, depth), and design of all wall signs,
3. The height and width of the window area,
4. Location, size (height, width, depth), and design of all window signs.
5. Note of permission from the landowner where applicable

For illuminated signs, applicants would also need

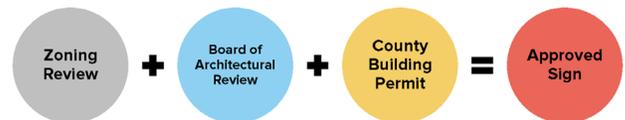
to provide a lighting plan, lighting compliance form, or certified statement of compliance from a qualified professional. This is to verify the lighting equipment to be used and whether the maximum light levels and CCT are compliant with zoning.

Town staff will process complete applications after confirming all zoning regulations were met.



Applicants to the Board are required to provide renderings and material samples of sign colors for the Board's review. The intended CCT of any white lighting should also be included. While not required, applicants are encouraged to consider adjacent landscaping, fonts, and sizes of existing signage where applicable.

The Board of Architectural Review meets the third Thursday of each month at 7:30pm to review signs and other exterior modifications. The Board is comprised of community members appointed by Town Council.



The Board of Architectural Review criteria can be found in [Chapter 4, Section 4-15. - Design criteria.](#)

**Questions? Contact Planning and Zoning at [DPZ@viennava.gov](mailto:DPZ@viennava.gov)**  
**To start a sign application, visit <https://vienna.idtplans.com/secure/>**



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