



**TOWN OF**  
**VIENNA**  
*since 1890*

# Outdoor Lighting Regulations and Design Standards Project Update

---

Board of Architectural Review  
April 8, 2026

# Project Background

- Town issued an RFP in May 2024 seeking a consulting firm to assist with establishing outdoor lighting standards to:
  1. Reduce the impacts of light trespass and light pollution
  2. Promote safety and security
  3. Improve the aesthetic quality of the Town
  4. Encourage energy conservation
- Two products sought:
  1. Update to relevant articles in the Zoning Ordinance
  2. Design standards for BAR and applicant use
- Clanton & Associates selected as consultant firm; wrapped up work in January 2026
- DPZ staff working to refine and better tailor recommendations to Vienna in conjunction with Town Attorney



# Consultant Recommendations

- Address exterior lighting fixtures (*luminaires*) and lighting for signs, lighting plan requirements
- Establish maximum light levels and color temperatures for exterior luminaires
- Minimize light pollution by mitigating upward-directed lighting through shielded and aimed luminaires
- Establish a nighttime curfew (10 PM-6 AM) for non-essential exterior luminaires (ex: recreational lighting)
- Require that new luminaires conform to lighting regulations once the regulations are adopted



# Three Main Policy Decisions for Town Council

- Should code require that on-premise signage larger than 100 square feet is illuminated while the associated business or activity is taking place and must otherwise be extinguished during nighttime curfew (10 PM-6 AM)?
- Should the Church Street District and Church Street Vision Incentive Overlay signage standards align with one another?
- Should electronic message centers be allowed for public, institutional, and community uses?



# Church Street Signage Standards Alignment

Policy Question: Should the Church Street District and Church Street Vision Incentive Overlay signage standards align with one another?

## Considerations:

- Church Street Vision Incentive Overlay purposefully has stricter regulations than the Church Street District
- Developers opting into Church Street Vision Overlay accept stricter standards for certain elements in exchange for additional building square footage, reduction in parking requirements, and an expedited review process
- Aligning sign illumination requirements would produce a more consistent visual appearance for Church Street's signage, but could also lead to buildings with more traditional architecture having incongruous signage



# Electronic Message Centers for Community Uses

Policy Question: Should electronic message centers (EMCs) be allowed for public, institutional, and community uses?

Considerations:

- Recommendations have standards to minimize visual impact
  - Text must use positive contrast (light text on darker background)
  - Messages shall not be displayed for less than 20 seconds before changing
  - Signs shall automatically dim based on ambient conditions and must be extinguished during nighttime curfew (10 PM-6 AM)
- Commercial uses would still be prohibited from having EMCs
- Recommendations may produce unwanted signage in single-family detached neighborhoods where most community uses are located
- DPZ staff conveying BAR's concerns at the April 20 work session on lighting



# Design Guidelines

- Intended to be a high-level process overview used in conjunction with existing guidance, such as application checklist
- Incorporates new guidance developed for lighting into existing code language
- Guidelines include information on elements pending Council's input (e.g., EMCs)
- DPZ received comments from individuals about suggested changes but not the BAR as a whole
- Comments impacting other elements of guides not included in consultant's recommendations require further code revisions



TOWN OF  
**VIENNA**  
since 1890


### TOWN OF VIENNA | EXTERIOR LIGHTING GUIDE

The following is a summary of the Town Code relating to exterior lighting for properties subject to Board of Architectural Review (BAR) purview. All regulations for lighting in the Town of Vienna are found within [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 lighting. New permanent, exterior lighting installed without an approval by the Board of Architectural Review may result in fines.


**WHAT IS EXTERIOR LIGHTING?**  
Exterior lighting includes privately or publicly owned lighting that is outside the public right-of-way (thus excluding street lighting). This includes lighting such as facade or building-mounted lighting, landscape or hardscape lighting, permanent decorative lighting, and security lights.

**CHOOSING APPROPRIATE LUMINAIRES**  
Exterior lighting in commercial and mixed-use spaces in the Town is expected to be fully-shielded. This means the light source is contained within the luminaire in such way that it is not easily visible from most angles and light is being directed downwards towards hardscape or targeted to the object intended to be lit, such as a historic facade feature.  
Managing light by using properly shielded luminaires reduces light pollution and light trespass into residential properties. Several common examples are shown to the right.

**PARKING & HARDSCAPE LIGHTING**



Exposed light source contributing to glare and light trespass.



Shielded light source keeps light on the hardscape.

**OTHER LIGHTING EQUIPMENT**  
There are many lighting equipment strategies that can comply with the Town's regulations for dimming, Nighttime Curfew, and motion sensing. It is important applicants understand any motion sensors should not be tripped from beyond their property line and that lighting for ingress or egress is not exempt from Town regulations in most cases.

**DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ZONING**  
127 Center Street South | Vienna, VA 22180  
Phone: 703-255-6341 | Email: DPZ@vienna.gov | www.viennava.gov

### TOWN OF VIENNA | COMMERCIAL SIGNS GUIDE

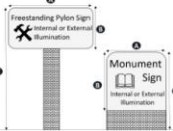
The following is a summary of the Town Code relating to signage. All zoning regulations for signs in the Town of Vienna are found within [Division 6 of Articles 4B, 5A, and 5B](#) of Chapter 18 of the Town of Vienna Zoning Code. Business owners are encouraged to review the town code before submitting 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.

**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  
Phone: 703-255-6341 | Email: DPZ@vienna.gov | www.viennava.gov

# Next Steps

- **Ongoing:**
  - BAR approves memo to Town Council re: EMCs and provides Town Council with feedback on any additional potential code changes
  - BAR revises and refines design guidelines; provides recommendations to DPZ staff
  - DPZ staff works with BAR to finalize design guidelines and identify any additional code changes that may be warranted
- **April 20:** Work session with Town Council
  - DPZ staff will relay any updates that may impact design guidelines to BAR
- **TBD:**
  - Work session and public hearing with Planning Commission
  - Public hearing with Town Council to approve code revisions
  - BAR adopts design guidelines



# Comments? Questions?

Project Contact:

Lyndsey Clouatre, Principal Planner

[lyndsey.clouatre@viennava.gov](mailto:lyndsey.clouatre@viennava.gov)

**Thank you!**

