

Harford County, Maryland

ZONING CODE



Chapter 267 of the Harford County Code, as amended

Effective December 22, 2008

Amended thru July 22, 2013

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

Harford County, Maryland

FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT PROGRAM, Chapter 131

and

SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS, Chapter 268

of the Harford County Code, As Amended

are included at the end of
The Development Regulations.

**ZONING CODE
AMENDMENT INFORMATION:**

<u>Bill Number</u>	<u>effective date</u>
09-01	4/6/09
09-11	6/15/09
09-19AA	8/17/09
09-31AA	1/22/10
09-33AA	1/22/10
10-03	4/20/10
10-30	12/13/10
10-32AA	12/27/10
11-04AA	5/23/11
11-05AA	5/23/11
11-03	5/31/11
11-32	12/12/11
11-44	12/19/11
11-62AA	1/13/12
12-07AA	5/14/12
12-14	5/21/12
12-44	1/26/13
12-48AA	2/11/13
13-4AA	5/6/13
13-17	7/22/13

§ 267-33. Signs. [Amended by Bill 13-17]**A. Zoning certificates; fees.**

- (1) Zoning certificate requirement. It shall be unlawful for any person to erect, alter or relocate any sign or other advertising structure, as defined in this Part 1, without first obtaining a zoning certificate and making payment of the required fee.
- (2) Application. Application for a zoning certificate for a sign shall be signed by the property owner or authorized agent. The zoning certificate application shall require the name and address of the sign owner or the sign erector, drawings showing the copy design, dimensions, height and location of the sign and such other pertinent information as the Department may require to ensure compliance with the laws of Harford County, Maryland. Whenever an application for a zoning certificate is filed for the erection of a sign on property designated as an Historic Landmark, the application shall be subject to the approvals of the Historic District Commission and the Department.

B. General provisions. Signage shall be constructed in an unobtrusive manner which compliments the architectural elements of quality, style, color and material of the building, and the architectural period of the building(s). The following broad categories of sign types are regulated by this section unless otherwise provided herein:

- (1) Canopy signs. A canopy sign must have its lowest point no closer than 8 feet to the ground.
- (2) Freestanding signs. The maximum area of any freestanding sign shall not exceed 120 square feet. The setback measured to the edge of the sign shall be equal to 1/3 of the required building setback. Unless otherwise provided herein, the maximum height allowed for any freestanding sign is 20 feet measured from the base of the sign.

Electronic message Boards are permitted as freestanding signs and are limited to 1 single- or double-sided sign per road frontage. Temporary or portable electronic message Boards are not permitted. Electronic message Boards shall not exceed 60 square feet in size, and shall display only on-premises messages, or time and/or temperature displays. An electronic message Board shall consist only of alphabetic or numeric characters and shall not include any graphic, pictorial or photographic images or videos. The appearance of any animation, motion, flashing, blinking or shimmering is not permitted. A single message, or segment of a message, shall have a display time of at least 2 seconds, including the time needed to move the message onto the sign Board, with all segments of the total message to be displayed within 10 seconds. A display traveling horizontally across the message Board shall move between 16 and 32 light columns per second. Requirements for display times do not apply to time and/or temperature displays.

- (3) Wall signs. Wall signs shall include all flat signs which are placed against a building or other structure and attached to the exterior front, rear or side wall of any building or other structure. Flat wall mounted signs may be located on any wall of a building and may extend not more than 8 feet above the parapet wall

or roofline of the building to which they are attached. However, no window, or part of a window, shall be covered by the sign area or its supporting structure.

- (4) Temporary signs. Temporary signs may be displayed for periods not exceeding 30 consecutive calendar days and not exceeding 60 calendar days in any 1 year. Temporary signs shall be set back not less than 10 feet from the property line, shall have a maximum sign area of 32 square feet and shall not exceed a height of 6 feet.
- (5) Projecting signs. Projecting signs may not extend over public rights-of-way, or project more than 4 feet from the wall of a building. Projecting signs may not have less than 10 feet clearance, as measured vertically from the ground to the bottom of the sign or supporting structure, and shall not exceed a height of 25 feet, as measured vertically from the ground to the top of the sign or supporting structure. Projecting signs shall have a maximum sign area of 60 square feet.
- (6) Directional signs. The maximum area of any directional sign shall not exceed 6 square feet. Directional signs can be located at the nearest intersection of any major collector or arterial road and set back 10 feet from the property line. Unless otherwise provided herein, the maximum height allowed for any directional sign is 6 feet above the nearest public road grade.
- (7) Billboards.
 - (a) General. Billboards shall be permitted in the General Industrial (GI) district only. New billboards may not be constructed within the Chesapeake Science and Security Corridor or the Edgewood Neighborhood Overlay District (ENOD).
 - (b) Location. Billboards shall be limited to 1 per parcel. Billboards shall not be permitted to be erected within 750 feet of any residence, historic structure or building as defined in §267-4 (Definitions), public square or the entrance to any public park, public, private or parochial school, library, church or similar institution. All such signs shall be set back from the front property line the distance required for a principal building in the zoning district in which located. No billboard shall be permitted to be erected within 100 feet of a road intersection unless the base of the sign is not less than 10 feet above ground level or road surface, whichever is higher. No billboard shall be erected within 660 feet of any highway which is part of the interstate highway system.
 - (c) Height. A billboard shall be no more than 30 feet in height from road grade.
 - (d) Area. The maximum area of any billboard shall not exceed 300 square feet.
 - (e) Illumination. Illumination shall be in accordance with the provisions of this section.

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- (8) Permanent residential entrance, and Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) signs. Residential entrance, development project identification and CCRC signs, with letters or advertising area not to exceed a total area of 48 square feet, shall be permitted on the property, provided that it is located not less than 10 feet from the road right-of-way. In addition, the height of the sign or structure shall not exceed 6 feet. If the parcel or lot has a multiple frontage of at least 50 feet, additional signs with letters or advertising area, not to exceed a total of 48 square feet, shall be permitted. Such sign or structure shall not exceed 6 feet in height and shall not be located less than 10 feet from the road right-of-way. Said signs may be split entrance signs; however, the overall advertising area may not exceed 48 square feet.
- C. Exemptions. The following types of signs are exempt from all the provisions of this section, except for construction and safety regulations and the following standards:
- (1) Public signs. Public signs, erected by, or on the order of, a public official in the performance of duty, such as directional signs, regulatory signs, warning signs, informational signs and legal notices.
 - (2) Integral signs. Integral signs that are carved into stone, concrete or similar material or made of bronze, aluminum or other permanent type construction and made an integral part of the structure, as well as signs forming an integral part of or attached to pumps dispersing fuels, vending machines and service appliances.
 - (3) Political campaign and public issue signs, except for billboards, signs announcing candidates seeking public office and advocating the support or defeat of public issues shall be permitted, provided that the total area of the signs does not exceed 16 square feet for each premises in a residential district and 32 square feet in an agricultural, business or industrial district. These signs shall be confined to private property. No sign shall be placed within 60 feet of the center of a road intersection or in such a manner as to impede vision.
 - (4) Agricultural identification signs. Agricultural identification signs not to exceed 32 square feet in area and not to be located less than 35 feet from the center line of the road or 10 feet from the road right-of-way, whichever is greater.
 - (5) Directional signs. Directional signs for any public, charitable, educational or religious function to be set back 10 feet from road right-of-way. These signs shall not exceed 2 square feet in sign area and shall not exceed 4 feet in height above the road grade.
 - (6) Private traffic control. Signs directing traffic movement onto a premises or within a premises, not exceeding 4 square feet in area for each sign. Illumination of these signs shall conform to the provisions of this section.
 - (7) Real estate signs. Real estate signs not exceeding 6 square feet in area and located on the subject property tract. They shall be removed within 7 calendar days after execution of a lease or transfer of the property.

- (8) Noncommercial flags. On-site flags of a nation, state, political subdivision, educational institution or noncommercial organization, provided that any flagpole utilized to display such flag is not more than 30 feet in height above the ground.
- (9) Ballpark signs. Signs installed on public property, with the permission of the Department of parks and recreation, at ball fields owned or operated by the County Department of Parks and Recreation. Said signs shall not exceed 6 square feet in size and shall be erected for no longer than 4 months.
- (10) Project development sign. Temporary signs for undeveloped parcels to be set back at least 10 feet from the road right-of-way and not to exceed 10 feet in height above the road grade. One sign shall be permitted for each road frontage of at least 50 feet. The maximum sign area shall not exceed 32 square feet.

D. Calculation of advertising or sign area.

- (1) Double-faced signs. One face of a sign having obverse and reverse faces shall be considered in calculating the advertising area. In the event that the faces of a sign are of a different area, the face having the larger area shall determine the advertising area of the sign.
- (2) Multi-faced or curved surface signs. The advertising area of a multi-faced or curved surface sign shall be calculated from dimensions derived from its greatest plane projection.
- (3) Modular signs. The advertising area of signs consisting of 2 or more individual letters, characters, numbers or figures shall be determined by the area of a described rectangle completely enclosing the extremities of all of the individual letters, characters, numbers or figures, provided, however, that if individual modules are mounted on a background, other than an integral structure component of a building, the entire area of such a background shall be calculated as advertising area.
- (4) Cylindrical signs. The advertising area of cylindrical signs shall be computed by multiplying $\frac{1}{2}$ of the circumference by the height of the sign.

E. Illumination.

- (1) The light from any illuminated sign, including those on the interior of a building, shall be so shaded, shielded or directed so that the light intensity or brightness shall not interfere with the vision of motor vehicle operators or directly reflect onto adjacent residential lots or buildings.
- (2) No sign shall have blinking or flashing lights. With the exception of electronic message boards, as defined in §267-4 (Definitions), no sign shall have illumination devices which have a changing light intensity, brightness or color or which are so constructed and operated so as to create an appearance or illusion of writing. Nothing contained in this section shall be construed as preventing the use of lights or decorations commemorating religious and patriotic holidays.

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- (3) No exposed reflective type bulbs, and no strobe lights or incandescent lamps exceeding 15 watts, shall be used on the exterior surface of any sign so as to expose the face of the bulb, light or lamp to a public street or adjacent property.
- F. Prohibited signs. The following signs are prohibited in all districts and shall be removed in accordance with this section.
- (1) Signs containing statements, words or pictures of an obscene, indecent or immoral character that offend public morals or decency of the community.
- (2) Signs of a size, location, movement, content, coloration or manner of illumination which may be confused with or construed as a traffic control device, or which hide from view any permitted signs, or which distract or obstruct the view of road or pedestrian traffic in any direction at a road intersection.
- (3) Unless authorized by the utility, signs posted on any building, fence, pole or other property owned, leased or controlled by a public utility.
- (4) Except as provided in this section, signs that are placed within the County or State right-of-way.
- (5) Freestanding signs advertising business uses in Planned Residential Development projects.
- (6) Variable message boards.
- G. Inspection, maintenance and removal.
- (1) All signs and supporting structures shall be kept in good repair and in a safe and attractive condition. Signs for which a zoning certificate is required may be inspected periodically by the Director of Planning for compliance with this section.
- (2) In the event that a billboard ceases to be used for advertising or falls into disrepair for a period of 3 months, the billboard will be deemed abandoned. Solicitation for advertising to be displayed on a billboard does not constitute advertising. Once a billboard has been abandoned, the Director of Planning shall notify the owner of the property and the owner of the billboard that the billboard has been abandoned and must be removed. The owners shall be responsible for taking all necessary steps to dismantle the billboard and remove and dispose of all visible remnants and materials from the subject parcel 90 calendar days after notification by the Director of Planning that the billboard has been abandoned.
- (3) The Director of Planning may order the removal of any sign, erected or maintained, in violation of this section. Written notice shall be given to the owner of such sign, building, structure or premises on which such sign is located to remove the sign or to bring it into compliance with this section within 10 calendar days from the date of the notice. Upon failure to remove the sign or to comply with this notice, or if it appears that the condition of the sign is such as to present an immediate threat to the safety of the public, the Department may remove the sign immediately without any additional notice. Any cost of removal incurred by the Department shall be assessed to the owner of the property on which such

sign is located and may be collected in the manner of ordinary debt or in the manner of taxes and such charge shall be a lien on the property.

- (4) Where the Director of Planning determines appropriate, signs within the AG, VB and VR Districts constructed along Scenic Byways shall be designed using the guidelines developed by the State Highway Administration to the greatest extent possible.
- (5) Any freestanding sign, permanent institutional sign, or permanent residential entrance sign and Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) sign in the RR, R1, R2, R3, R4, RO, B1, Chesapeake Science and Security Corridor and ICSC Development shall have appropriate landscaping.
- (6) Billboards shall be landscaped with height appropriate plantings.

H. Nonconforming signs.

- (1) All signs or other advertising structures which were lawful prior to the enactment of this Part 1 or subsequent amendments, and which do not conform to regulations and restrictions under the terms of this Part 1 or amendments thereto, shall constitute nonconforming signs. Unless otherwise provided herein, nonconforming signs shall be replaced to conform to the requirements of this section when a sign is replaced or a site is redeveloped as defined in this Part 1.
- (2) All other signs or other advertising structures which were erected in violation of the law, or which are erected in violation of the provisions hereof, shall be removed, altered or replaced so as to comply with this section within 6 months of the effective date of this Part 1.

I. Sign standards by zoning district and development type.

- (1) Agricultural district. In addition to the requirements set forth in this section, signs in the Agricultural (AG) district must comply with the following standards:
 - (a) Commercial signs (including agricultural public events, agricultural retail, agricultural seasonal and any sign in connection with an approved special development or permitted nonresidential use). One externally lighted sign, not exceeding 16 square feet in area, on lots not exclusively used for residential purposes shall be permitted. These signs may be attached flat against the building or, if freestanding, located not less than 20 feet from the road right-of-way. Freestanding signs may not exceed 6 feet in height.
 - (b) Permanent institutional signs. One lighted sign setting forth the name of places of worship, service clubs, civic organizations, public or service centers, public institutions, schools or other similar uses shall be permitted. These signs shall be located not less than 20 feet from the road right-of-way, shall not exceed 40 square feet in area and shall not exceed 8 feet in height.
 - (c) Permanent residential entrance or Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) signs are permitted pursuant to the provisions of Subsection B(8).

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- (d) Construction signs. One sign shall be permitted for all construction contractors, 1 for all professionals and firms and 1 for all lending institutions on sites under construction. Each sign shall not exceed 16 square feet in area, and no more than 3 such signs shall be permitted on 1 site. The signs shall be confined to the construction site, construction shed or trailer and shall be removed within 15 days after the beginning of the intended use of the project.
 - (e) Directional signs. One directional sign, not exceeding 6 square feet in sign area and no more than 6 feet above ground level, or 6 feet above road grade, whichever is higher, shall be permitted per business use or agricultural use, if set back 10 feet from the road right-of-way and located at either the nearest intersecting arterial road or the nearest intersecting road.
 - (f) Home occupation signs. One lighted sign, not exceeding 2 square feet in area and attached flat against the building, is permitted in conjunction with approved professional or home occupations.
 - (g) For permitted temporary uses, 1 temporary sign shall be permitted, provided that the sign shall not exceed 32 square feet or 6 feet in height and shall be located not less than 20 feet from the road right-of-way.
 - (h) Electronic message boards displaying a message and content relating to public safety and designed to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public shall be permitted, as a special exception, subject to approval of the Board, on properties that contain public safety facilities. Electronic message boards must be located at least 10 feet from the road right-of-way, shall not exceed 6 feet in height, and must not have a sign area exceeding 10 square feet. Only local and State law enforcement agencies, emergency operation centers and fire companies shall constitute public safety facilities.
- (2) RR, R1, R2, R3 and R4 residential districts. In addition to the requirements set forth in this section, signs in the RR, R1, R2, R3 and R4 district must comply with the following standards:
- (a) Home occupation signs. One lighted sign, not exceeding 2 square feet in area and attached flat against the building, is permitted in conjunction with approved professional or home occupations.
 - (b) Except for electronic message boards, freestanding signs may be permitted as a special exception, subject to approval of the Board, provided they are located at least 10 feet from the road right-of-way, shall not exceed 6 feet in height and must not have a sign area exceeding 4 square feet. Electronic message boards shall not be permitted within the RR, R1, R2, R3 and R4 districts.

Notwithstanding anything contained in this paragraph, electronic message boards displaying a message and content relating to public safety and designed to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public shall be permitted, as a special exception, subject to approval of the Board, on properties that contain public safety facilities. Electronic message boards must be located at least 10 feet from the road right-of-way, shall not exceed 6 feet in height, and must not have a sign area

- exceeding 10 square feet. Only local and State law enforcement agencies, emergency operation centers and fire companies shall constitute public safety facilities.
- (c) Permanent institutional signs. One lighted sign setting forth the name of places of worship, service clubs, civic organizations, public or service centers, public institutions, schools or other similar uses shall be permitted. These signs shall be located not less than 20 feet from the road right-of-way, shall not exceed 32 square feet in area and shall not exceed 6 feet in height.
 - (d) Permanent residential entrance or Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) signs are permitted pursuant to the provisions of Subsection B(8).
 - (e) Construction signs. One sign shall be permitted for all construction contractors, 1 for all professionals and firms and 1 for all lending institutions on sites under construction. Each sign shall not exceed 16 square feet in area, and no more than 3 such signs shall be permitted on 1 site. The signs shall be confined to the construction site, construction shed or trailer and shall be removed within 15 days after the beginning of the intended use of the project.
 - (f) For permitted temporary uses, 1 temporary sign shall be permitted, provided that the sign shall not exceed 16 square feet or 6 feet in height and shall be located not less than 20 feet from the road right-of-way.
 - (g) All permanent signs shall be compatible with the style, character and design of the residential neighborhood in which the sign is erected.
- (3) RO Residential Office district. In addition to the requirements set forth in this section, signs in the RO district must comply with the following standards:
- (a) One freestanding sign per parcel, which shall have a maximum of 16 square feet in area, shall be no more than 6 feet in height, shall be placed perpendicular to the road and shall be no more than 20 feet from the right-of-way.
 - (b) A wall sign for each use, which shall be attached only to the front of a building, shall be adjacent to the front entryway and shall be no larger than 4 square feet in area.
 - (c) Freestanding and wall signs shall be constructed primarily utilizing the materials and colors of the primary structure on the site. They may be externally and internally illuminated.
 - (d) Home occupation signs. One lighted sign, not exceeding 2 square feet in area and attached flat against the building, is permitted in conjunction with approved professional or home occupations.
 - (e) Construction signs. One sign shall be permitted for all construction contractors, 1 for all professionals and firms and 1 for all lending institutions on sites under construction. Each sign shall not exceed 16 square feet in area, and no more than 3 such signs shall be permitted on 1 site. The signs shall be confined to the construction site, construction shed or trailer and

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- shall be removed within 15 days after the beginning of the intended use of the project.
- (f) Permanent institutional signs. One lighted sign setting forth the name of places of worship, service clubs, civic organizations, public or service centers, public institutions, schools or other similar uses shall be permitted. These signs shall be located not less than 20 feet from the road right-of-way, shall not exceed 32 square feet in area and shall not exceed 6 feet in height.
 - (g) Permanent residential entrance or Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) signs are permitted pursuant to the provisions of Subsection B(8).
 - (h) For permitted temporary uses (see §267-28 (Temporary Uses)), 1 temporary sign shall be permitted, provided that the sign shall not exceed 16 square feet or 6 feet in height and shall be located not less than 20 feet from the road right-of-way.
- (4) VR Village Residential district. In addition to the requirements set forth in this section, signs in the VR district must comply with the following standards:
- (a) Home occupation signs. One lighted sign, not exceeding 2 square feet in area and attached flat against the building, is permitted in conjunction with approved professional or home occupations.
 - (b) Freestanding signs may be permitted as a special exception, subject to the approval of the Board, provided that they are located not less than 10 feet from the road right-of-way, do not exceed 6 feet in height and do not have a sign area exceeding 4 square feet.
 - (c) Freestanding and wall signs shall be constructed primarily utilizing the materials and colors of the primary structure on the site. They may be externally and internally illuminated.
 - (d) Permanent residential entrance or Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) signs are permitted pursuant to the provisions of Subsection B(8).
 - (e) Construction signs. One sign shall be permitted for all construction contractors, 1 for all professionals and firms and 1 for all lending institutions on sites under construction. Each sign shall not exceed 16 square feet in area, and no more than 3 such signs shall be permitted on 1 site. The signs shall be confined to the construction site, construction shed or trailer and shall be removed within 15 days after the beginning of the intended use of the project.
 - (f) Permanent institutional signs. One lighted sign setting forth the name of places of worship, service clubs, civic organizations, public or service centers, public institutions, schools or other similar uses shall be permitted. These signs shall be located not less than 20 feet from the road right-of-way, shall not exceed 32 square feet in area and shall not exceed 6 feet in height.
 - (g) For permitted temporary uses (see §267-28 (Temporary Uses)), 1 temporary sign shall be permitted, provided that the sign shall not exceed 16 square

feet or 6 feet in height and shall be located not less than 20 feet from the road right-of-way.

- (5) VB Village Business district. In addition to the requirements set forth in this section, signs in the VB district must comply with the following standards:
- (a) One freestanding sign per parcel, which shall have a maximum of 18 square feet in area, shall be no more than 6 feet in height, shall be placed perpendicular to the road and shall be no more than 20 feet from the right-of-way.
 - (b) A wall sign for each use, which shall be attached only to the front of a building, shall be adjacent to the front entryway and shall be no larger than 10 square feet in area.
 - (c) Freestanding and wall signs shall be constructed primarily utilizing the materials and colors of the primary structure on the site. They may be externally and internally illuminated.
 - (d) Home occupation signs. One lighted sign, not exceeding 2 square feet in area and attached flat against the building, is permitted in conjunction with approved professional or home occupations.
 - (e) Construction signs. One sign shall be permitted for all construction contractors, 1 for all professionals and firms and 1 for all lending institutions on sites under construction. Each sign shall not exceed 16 square feet in area, and no more than 3 such signs shall be permitted on 1 site. The signs shall be confined to the construction site, construction shed or trailer and shall be removed within 15 days after the beginning of the intended use of the project.
 - (f) Permanent institutional signs. One lighted sign setting forth the name of places of worship, service clubs, civic organizations, public or service centers, public institutions, schools or other similar uses shall be permitted. These signs shall be located not less than 20 feet from the road right-of-way, shall not exceed 32 square feet in area and shall not exceed 6 feet in height.
 - (g) Permanent residential entrance signs are permitted pursuant to the provisions of Subsection B(8).
 - (h) For permitted temporary uses (see §267-28 (Temporary Uses)), 1 temporary sign shall be permitted, provided that the sign shall not exceed 16 square feet or 6 feet in height and shall be located not less than 20 feet from the road right-of-way.
- (6) B1 Neighborhood Business, B2 Community Business, B3 General Business, CI Commercial Industrial, LI Light Industrial and GI General Industrial districts. In addition to the requirements set forth in this section, signs in the B1, B2, B3, CI, LI and GI districts must comply with the following standards:
- (a) Signs erected on and attached to commercial or industrial buildings. The total area of all signs erected on and attached to commercial or industrial buildings shall not exceed 2 square feet per each linear foot of building width, measured along the front wall or entrance wall of a building. If a