
3.38 Signs.

The purpose of this section is to:

- A. Promote the safety of persons and property by providing that signs do not create traffic hazards or hazards due to collapse, fire, collision, decay or abandonment.
- B. To protect the public welfare and county property values by preserving the aesthetic quality of the natural environment.
- C. Promote efficient commercial and non-commercial identification or information by improving the legibility and effectiveness of signs through the control of their number, location, size, appearance, illumination, and animation.
- D. Preserve the right of free speech and expression.

3.38.1 Sign permits. All signs on commercial or industrial property must have a sign permit issued by the Effingham County Zoning Department. Multiple similar signs such as real estate or political signs shall only be required to have a single sign permit. All signs other than temporary event signs shall be required to get a building permit and meet all required wind load and building regulations.

3.38.2 Legal signs.

- A. Any permitted sign which complies with the provisions of this article, and any subsequent amendments hereto, is hereby deemed to be a legal sign. Any proposed alteration to or relocation of such sign shall require a new permit pursuant to this section.
- B. Any legal sign which does not comply with the provisions of this article solely due to the enactment of an amendment shall, upon the effective date of such amendment, become a nonconforming sign and shall be considered a legal sign unless it is relocated or altered.

3.38.3 Illegal signs. Any existing sign that does not have a permit issued by Effingham County pursuant to this section is hereby deemed to be an illegal sign and such sign and the person or persons responsible for such sign shall be subject to the enforcement and penalty provisions in this title.

3.38.4 Signs exempt from regulation.

- A. Governmental agency signs
- B. Property addresses up to 12 inches in height
- C. Incidental signs one square foot or less

3.38.5 Prohibited signs.

- A. Any sign, except those erected by a governmental agency, in a public street or highway right-of-way.
- B. Inflatable signs.
- C. Signs mounted on a roof or extending above the roofline.
- D. Ribbons, and pennants.
- E. Any sign resembling the shape, size, or color of a governmental traffic sign.
- F. Any sign with lights that resemble the lights used by police, fire, and emergency vehicles.
- G. Any light source on a sign that is directly visible from a vehicle or residence.
- H. Any flashing or intermittent light.
- I. Any sign attached to a natural feature such as a tree or rock.

-
- J. Any sign attached to a telephone pole or utility pole.
 - K. Any unpermitted sign attached to a permitted sign.
 - L. No sign shall be placed in or obstruct the view of an area of designated historic interest.

3.38.6 Billboards.

- A. *Uniform size.* The outside measurements of all billboards shall be 12 feet in height and 25 feet in length.
- B. *Location.* The billboard must be on commercial or industrial land. It must be located on a parcel with at least 200 feet of state or federal highway frontage.
- C. *Illumination.* All illuminated billboards shall use base-mounted lights. The light source must not be visible from a vehicle or a residence. No additional lighting shall be allowed.
- D. *Height.* All billboards shall be a minimum of ten feet above grade and a maximum of 30 feet above grade.
- E. *Extrusions prohibited.* Extrusions beyond the face of the billboard, excluding aprons, are prohibited.
- F. *Number of signs per location.* Only one billboard shall be allowed to face the same direction per location. This allows back to back or V formation billboards but prohibits two billboards facing the same direction.
- G. *Spacing.* Billboard location shall be no less than 500 feet from the nearest billboard measuring from the nearest point. No more than three billboards shall be permitted per mile when such billboards are located on the same side of the road.
- H. *Distance from property line.* Billboard structures shall be no less than ten feet from any property line.
- I. *State law.* All billboards must also comply with all aspects of the Georgia Outdoor Advertising Code.
- J. *Changeable copy signs.*
 - 1. General Rule — Animated or changeable copy signs shall be erected, posted, displayed or modified only in accordance with the criteria hereunder as well as all other generally applicable standards of this ordinance related to the location, height, size, and other characteristics. Billboards that move, flash or simulate movement are prohibited.
 - 2. Each message displayed on any changing billboard display shall remain static for at least ten seconds following the completion of its transition from the previous message. As used in this subsection "static" shall mean a display that is fixed in one position with no portion of the display being in motion or changing in color or light intensity.
 - 3. Changing of image shall be substantially instantaneous, two seconds or less, as seen by the human eye and shall not use fading, rolling, window shading, dissolving or similar effect as part of the change.
 - 4. No display or other effect from any electronically changed billboard shall cause a glare or other condition that impairs the vision of the driver of any motor vehicle or which otherwise interferes with the safe operation of a motor vehicle.
 - 5. Video technology in billboards shall use automatic level controls to reduce light levels at night and under cloudy or other darkened conditions, in accordance with the following standards. All electronic or digital display unit message boards shall have installed ambient light monitors, and such monitors shall at all times automatically adjust the brightness level of the electronic billboard based on ambient light conditions. Maximum brightness levels for electronic or digital display boards shall not exceed ambient light levels by more than 0.3 foot candles.

-
6. Any billboard using video technology which malfunctions, fails, or ceases to operate in its usual or normal manner causing therein motion, movement, flashing or any other similar effects shall be repaired or disconnected within 48 hours by the owner or operator of such billboard, and shall be equipped so that it may be turned off by the county in the event of such malfunction or failure.
 7. The county shall be permitted to post emergency notices on electronically changeable billboards on 24 hours' notice.
 8. Conversion of an existing billboard to an automatic changeable copy video billboard or to add an automatic changeable copy video element to it is allowed only if the billboard as modified will conform with all standards in this section and with all other applicable standards related to the height, size, location and other characteristics of the billboard.

3.38.7 Signs in commercial zones.

- A. Each parcel in a commercial zone is entitled to one freestanding sign for up to 200 feet of street frontage.
- B. Each parcel in a commercial zone may have an additional freestanding sign for each additional 200 feet of street frontage and must be separated by at least 200 feet from any other sign on the property.
- C. A multi-unit building on a single commercial parcel may have multiple tenant panels on a single sign.
- D. No sign shall encroach into the street right-of-way or be within 25 feet of an established street intersection and no sign or support thereof shall obstruct driver visibility.

3.38.8 Number of signs. In addition to any potential free standing sign, each business in a commercial or industrial zone shall be limited to one facade sign, one projecting sign attached to the building and one wall sign for each exposed side of the building other than the front.

3.38.9 Freestanding sign size. The maximum size of the signable area of a freestanding sign is as follows:

- A. In the B-2, B-3, and I-1 districts: 64 square feet for a single tenant parcel or 100 square feet for a multiple tenant parcel.
- B. In the B-1 zoning district: 32 square feet.
- C. In the R-3 and R-4 zoning districts: 50 square feet.
- D. In the R-1, R-1A, and R-2 zoning districts: Six square feet excluding signs at the entrance to neighborhoods which may be up to 24 square feet.
- E. In the CP zoning district: 16 square feet.
- F. In the PD zoning district: Sign regulations not less stringent than the regulations herein must be included in the written development text required by section 5.15.3.3 of the Effingham County Zoning Ordinance.

3.38.10 Height.

- A. *Maximum height.* In all commercial and industrial districts no freestanding sign shall exceed 30 feet from grade.
- B. *Clearance.* No hanging, suspended, or projecting sign shall have a vertical clearance of less than 14 feet over any vehicular public way, nor less than nine feet over any pedestrian public way. Public ways include privately owned sidewalks and drives customarily used by the public.

Permitted Freestanding Signs - By Land Use
--

	Agricultural Property	Single and Two Family Residential	Multi-Family Residential	Commercial Property	Industrial Property	Public or Community Use Property
Principal Freestanding Sign — Depending on Zoning District						
Maximum Number	1 per lot	1 per lot	1 per street frontage	1 per 200 feet street frontage	1 per 200 feet street frontage	1 per 200 feet street frontage
Maximum Signable Area	16 square feet	6 square feet	50 square feet	64 square feet for single tenant, 100 square feet for multiple tenants	64 square feet for single tenant, 100 square feet for multiple tenants	64 square feet for single tenant, 100 square feet for multiple tenants
Maximum Height	6 feet	5 feet	30 feet	30 feet	30 feet	30 feet

3.38.11 Institutional uses. Institutional uses are allowed one sign per 200 feet of street frontage with a maximum signable area of 64 square feet regardless of which zoning district they are located in.

3.38.12 Projections. No sign shall project more than six feet from the wall of a building.

3.38.13 Event signs.

- A. In the B-1, B-2, B-3, I-1, R-3, or R-4 zoning districts one temporary event sign not to exceed 24 square feet in size and not to be displayed for more than 30 days may be located on each parcel. Temporary event signs in these districts must be secured to a building.
- B. In all zoning districts each parcel is entitled to one temporary event sign not to exceed six square feet in size. Such signs may be displayed for the length of the event. Each parcel may have no more than three such events per calendar year.
- C. When there is the threat of a serious wind event the county reserves the right to remove any temporary event sign that it deems to be a hazard to public safety. It will be the responsibility of the sign owner to retrieve any impounded sign from the county zoning office.
- D. Signs not removed within ten days following the occurrence of an event or expiration of the permitted period may be removed by the county zoning office and impounded. The costs of removal shall be charged to the person owning or using the sign or the owner of the building or premises.
- E. Impounded signs will be held for ten days, after which they will be destroyed.

3.38.14 Flags. In the B1, B-2, B-3, and I-1 zoning districts no more than three flags are allowed per parcel. The combined square footage of all flags displayed on a parcel in these districts shall be no more than 64 square feet.

3.38.15 Sign conditions.

- A. **Unsafe signs.** Whenever a sign becomes structurally unsafe or otherwise endangers the safety of the building or the public, the zoning administrator shall order that such sign be made safe or removed. The person owning or using the sign or the owner of the building or premises on which such unsafe sign is affixed or erected shall comply with such order within ten days of receipt thereof.
- B. **Unmaintained signs.** Whenever a sign is physically damaged or is not maintained and is determined by the zoning administrator to negatively impact the visual character of the surrounding area or pose an unsafe condition, the zoning administrator shall order that such sign be properly maintained or

removed. The person owning or using the sign or the owner of the building or premises on which such unsafe sign is affixed or erected shall comply with such order within 60 days of receipt thereof.

3.38.16 Nonconforming signs. No nonconforming sign may be relocated or altered other than for routine maintenance without bringing the sign into conformance with the current sign ordinance. A temporary sign may not be considered a nonconforming sign for purposes of grandfathering.

3.38.17 Sign definitions.

Awning: A cloth, plastic, or other nonstructural covering that either is permanently attached to a building or can be raised or retracted to a position against the building when not in use. A sign on an awning is considered a projecting sign.

Banner: A sign on a lightweight material that is secured or mounted to a building.

Billboard: A large sign erected along a state or interstate highway and intended to be viewed from travelers on said highway.

Changeable copy: Copy, including text and/or graphics that changes at intervals.

External illumination: Illumination of a sign that is affected by an artificial source of light not contained with the sign itself.

Facade: The side of a building below the eaves.

Flag: Lightweight material, usually with a political symbol, that is attached on one side to a pole.

Flashing illumination: Illumination in which the artificial source of light is not maintained stationary or constant in intensity and color at all times when a street graphic is illuminated, including illuminated lighting.

Free standing sign: A sign that is not attached to a building or other structure.

Graphic: Written or pictorial representation.

Historic or scenic area: An area that contains unique historic or scenic characteristics that require special regulations to ensure that street graphics displayed within the area are compatible with its visual character.

Incidental sign: A sign of one square foot or less.

Indirect illumination: A source or external illumination located away from the sign.

Institutional uses: Schools, hospitals, churches, and government facilities.

Internal illumination: A light source that is concealed or contained within a sign.

Monument sign: A sign that is permanently affixed to the ground at its base, supported entirely by the base structure, and not mounted on a pole.

Multi-use building: A building consisting of more than one commercial use.

Neon sign: A sign that is created by bending a neon filled glass tube to form text or graphics.

Nonconforming sign: A sign that was lawfully constructed or installed prior to the adoption or amendment of this ordinance and was in compliance with all ordinances at the time of installation, but which does not presently comply with these regulations.

Pole sign: A freestanding sign other than a billboard that is permanently supported in a fixed location by a pole(s), uprights, or braces from the ground and not supported by a building or a base structure.

Portable sign: A sign not permanently attached to the ground or a building or designed to be permanently attached to the ground.

Projecting sign: A sign attached to and projecting from a wall and not in the same plane as the wall.

Roof sign: A sign that is displayed above the peak or parapet of the building.

Shopping center: A commercial development under unified control consisting of four or more separate commercial establishments sharing a common building, or are in separate buildings that share a common parking area or entryway.

Sign: Any structure, display, or device that is used to advertise, identify, direct, or attract attention to a business, institution, organization, person, idea, product, service, event, or location by any means, including words, letters, figures, design characteristics, symbols, logos, fixtures, colors, movement, or illumination.

Signable area: An area within a single continuous perimeter composed of a single rectangle, circle, or triangle enclosing the extreme limits of characters, lettering, illustrations, ornamentations, or other figures.

(Ord. of 2-4-97; Amend. of 11-7-06; Ord. of 4-7-09)