

## ARTICLE XII

**Signs and Projections**

**[Added 5-5-2015 by Ord. No. 15-12; amended 10-4-2016 by Ord. No. 16-18;  
10-2-2018 by Ord. No. 18-12; 12-21-2021 by Ord. No. 21-43]**

**§ 550-129. Purpose.**

- A. The purpose of this article is to establish standards for the fabrication, erection, and use of signs, and to regulate the location, type, size, materials, and height of signage for all properties within the City of Watertown. The adoption of this article reflects the formal finding of fact by the City of Watertown Plan Commission and Common Council that regulation of signage advances the following governmental interests:
- (1) Reduce signage that the City has determined to be a cause of unsafe traffic and visibility conditions for pedestrians, bicyclists, drivers, and passengers.
  - (2) Protect pedestrians, bicyclists, drivers, and passengers from injury caused by the faulty and uncontrolled construction and use of signs within the City.
  - (3) Protect pedestrians, bicyclists, drivers, and passengers from injury caused by distractions, obstructions, and hazards created by certain signs or by cluttered, distracting, or illegible signage.
  - (4) Promote the public welfare, health, and safety of all persons using public thoroughfares and rights-of-way within the City of Watertown in relation to the signage displayed thereon, or overhanging, or projecting into such public spaces.
  - (5) Preserve the value of private property by assuring the compatibility of signs with surrounding land uses.
  - (6) Assure that public benefits derived from expenditures of public funds for the improvement and beautification of public streets and other public structures and spaces are protected by exercising reasonable controls over character of design of signage.
  - (7) Advance the aesthetic goals of the City throughout the community and ensure the effectiveness and flexibility in the design, creativity, or use of signage without creating a detriment to the general public.
  - (8) This article must be interpreted in a manner consistent with the First Amendment guarantee of free speech.
- B. Furthermore, this regulation leaves ample and adequate alternative channels of speech communication for the messages portrayed on advertising signs - namely, distributed print media, broadcast media, and point-of-purchase display - and is narrowly defined so as to limit said prohibitions to speech on exterior signage and signage intended to be viewed from beyond the boundaries of a site.
- C. The penalties of the City of Watertown Municipal Code may be applicable to

violations of the provisions of this article under § 550-158.

**§ 550-130. Definition of a sign.**

- A. Definition of a sign. In this article, the word "sign" means a name, identification, description, or display, which is affixed to, painted or represented directly or indirectly upon a building, or other outdoor surface which directs attention to or is designed or intended to direct attention to the sign face or to an object, product, place, activity, person, institution, organization or business. Each display surface of a sign or sign face must be considered a sign.
- B. Signs do not include:
- (1) Government signs are signs that are constructed, placed or maintained by the federal, state, county or local government, or a sign that is required to be constructed, placed or maintained by the federal, state, county, or local government either directly or to enforce a property owner rights.
    - (a) Government signs may be located within the public right-of-way and on City of Watertown property.
  - (2) Decorations that are incidentally and customarily associated with any national holiday, religious holiday, or similar event.
  - (3) Flags.
  - (4) Art works, including but not limited to wall murals, which are erected solely for aesthetic purposes. Graffiti does not fall under art works.
  - (5) Building colors and lighting which do not contain commercial message, logo, or colors.
  - (6) Interior site signs located on the interior of the grounds of the following land uses: a passive outdoor public recreation facility, an active outdoor public recreational facility, or an outdoor institutional facility, which are primarily oriented to persons within the grounds.
  - (7) Interior building signs located on the interior of a building and not attached to a window, which are primarily oriented to persons within the building.
  - (8) Window displays of merchandise, pictures, or models of products or services incorporated in a window display, which are not directly attached to an interior or exterior window surface.
  - (9) Window signs that are attached to the inside or outside face of an exterior window, and may face towards the outside, inside, or both.
  - (10) Vehicles that are licensed, operable, and parked in legal parking spaces.

**§ 550-131. Definitions and rules related to sign groups, sign categories, and sign types.**

This section provides the structural definitions and rules related to various sign groups, sign categories, and sign types. Tables 550-132A(1) through 550-132A(4) provide the regulations for these signs applicable to each zoning district. Any sign type not addressed by this article shall be construed to be prohibited.

**A. Definitions and rules related to the permanent sign:**

**Permanent sign.** A sign which is permanently located on a parcel. "Permanent signs" are a sign group containing various sign categories and sign types that a zoning district may be eligible to use. Permanent signs include the following sign categories: freestanding signs, on-building signs, pedestrian signs, and permanent changeable signs. See Table 550-132A(1) for additional rules for permanent signs related to zoning districts.

(1) **Freestanding sign category.** A sign permanently resting on or supported by a slab, pedestal, post, pylon, or any other form of base located on the ground. The following freestanding sign types are addressed by this article:

- (a) **Monument sign.** A type of freestanding sign in which the bottom edge of the sign face is located within one foot of a ground-mounted pedestal.
- (b) **Dual post sign.** A type of freestanding sign mounted to the sides or ends of two or more posts, with the majority of the sign area located between the outermost posts, with the bottom edge located within an average of three feet of existing grade.
- (c) **Pylon sign.** A type of freestanding sign erected upon one or more pylons or poles, generally of a height that is taller than permitted for a dual post sign.

[1] New pylon signs shall only be permitted within the "S.T.H. 26 Pylon Sign Allowance Areas" under § 550-132C.

[a] **Exception.** Substandard lots, defined under § 550-15, in which a monument sign or dual post sign shall cause a visibility standard issue under § 550-106 may apply for a conditional use permit for a pylon sign. The applicant must provide substantial evidence, as defined under Wis. Stats. § 62.23(7)(de)1.b., that a pylon sign is the only freestanding sign category option to comply with the visibility standard. The applicant shall specify the height, setback, square footage for the pylon sign as part of the conditional use permit. The applicant shall also include photo simulations (before and after) of the site.

[2] Existing pylon signs outside of the "S.T.H. 26 Pylon Sign Allowance Area" are permitted as legal nonconforming signs per the requirement of § 550-137.

- (2) On-building sign category. A type of sign permanently affixed to an outside wall of a building. The following on-building sign types are addressed by this article:
- (a) Wall sign. A type of on-building sign that is mounted directly on, and parallel to, a building facade or other vertical building surface.
    - [1] The top edge of a wall sign shall not extend above the top edge of the vertical exterior wall or above the lowest edge of a roof line of the portion of the building to which it is mounted, except:
      - [a] No more than 2/3 of a wall sign's height may be permitted to project above the top edge of the wall through the conditional use permit process.
    - [2] Wall signs shall not project more than 18 inches horizontally beyond the edge of any wall or other surface to which they are mounted.
  - (b) Awning sign. A type of on-building sign that is directly affixed via sewing, silk screening, painting, or similar method to a nonrigid removable awning which is mounted to the facade of a building.
    - [1] Sign copy shall not project above, below, or beyond, the awning surface.
  - (c) Canopy sign. A type of on-building sign that is directly affixed via bolts, brackets, or similar method to a rigid permanent canopy which is mounted to, or adjacent to, the facade of a building.
    - [1] Sign copy shall not project above or below the canopy face.
  - (d) Marquee sign. A type of on-building sign that is mounted to a permanent roof-like structure that projects out from the exterior wall of a structure and shelters the entrance and/or entrance approaches to a building.
    - [1] Marquee signs may have changeable copy.
  - (e) Projecting sign. A type of on-building sign that is mounted at any angle other than parallel to the wall on which it is mounted, extends beyond 18 inches from the face of the wall, and/or is internally illuminated.
    - [1] New projecting signs are not permitted in the City of Watertown. Existing projecting signs are permitted as legal nonconforming signs per the requirements of § 550-137.
- (3) Pedestrian category. A sign attached perpendicularly to the facade of a building and mounted just above sidewalk level, and which is oriented and sized for visibility to nearby traffic. The following pedestrian sign types are addressed by this article:
- (a) Blade sign. A type of pedestrian sign that is mounted perpendicular to the

wall on which it is mounted, extends less than 48 inches from the wall, and is oriented to pedestrian traffic. Minimum ground clearance shall conform to § 550-133C.

- (b) Suspended sign. A type of pedestrian sign that is mounted perpendicular to the nearest wall and suspended from the underside of a horizontal plane surface, such as a covered porch, arcade, or canopy. Minimum ground clearance shall conform to § 550-133C.
- (4) Permanent changeable sign category. A permanent sign that typically changes daily and which usually includes changeable copy. The following permanent changeable sign types are addressed by this article:
  - (a) Wall-mounted changeable sign. A type of permanent changeable sign mounted flat against a wall containing changeable copy.
    - [1] Wall-mounted changeable board sign shall be securely affixed to the exterior wall of the building containing the use.
    - [2] Wall-mounted changeable board sign shall not be extended more than four inches from the wall on which they are mounted.
  - (b) Freestanding changeable sign. A type of permanent freestanding changeable sign located on-site containing changeable copy.
  - (c) Drive-through sign. A type of permanent changeable sign used in conjunction with vehicular drive-through lanes.
    - [1] Drive-through signs shall require a conditional use permit. The conditional use permit application for a drive-through sign is typically reviewed as a component of a conditional use permit application for an in-vehicle sales and service land use, but a drive-through sign may be applied for as a distinct conditional use permit.
    - [2] Drive-through signs shall be freestanding or mounted on the exterior wall of the building containing the use.
    - [3] Freestanding two-way microphone/speaker devices shall not count towards the maximum permitted area of the drive-through sign.

**B. Definitions and rules related to the temporary sign structures group:**

**Temporary Sign.** A temporary sign which directs attention upon the site where the sign is located. Temporary signs do not require a sign permit and are typically used to be temporary. "Temporary signs" are a sign group containing various sign categories and sign types that are eligible to use. Temporary sign includes the following sign categories: temporary board and banner signs, temporary changeable signs, and temporary approved development signs. See Table 550-132A(2) for additional rules and time restrictions for temporary signs related to zoning district.

- (1) Temporary board and banner sign category. A sign located outside of a

building for up to two limited periods of display in a calendar year. The following temporary board and banner sign types are addressed by this article:

- (a) Board sign. A type of temporary board and banner sign that is temporarily placed on the ground and is made of rigid material such as plywood or corrugated plastic.
  - (b) Banner sign. A type of temporary board and banner sign that is made of flexible materials such as cloth or vinyl and is supported along one or more sides or at two or more corners by wires, ropes, string, nails, or other removable fastening materials.
  - (c) Feather sign. A sign consisting of a piece of vertically elongated, flexible material such as cloth or vinyl which is affixed to a single pole driven into the ground or portable base.
- (2) Temporary changeable sign category. A sign that typically changes daily and which usually includes changeable copy. The following temporary changeable sign types are addressed by this article:
- (a) Sandwich board sign. A temporary, freestanding sign that typically changes daily and which usually includes changeable copy.
    - [1] Sandwich board signs shall be permitted only in the Central Business (CB) Zoning District. Only one sandwich board sign per sidewalk entrance shall be permitted.
      - [a] Fire exits shall not count as a sidewalk entrance.
    - [2] Sandwich board signs shall not count towards the number of signs, or the area of signs allowed on the property.
    - [3] Location requirements for sandwich board signs.
      - [a] Sandwich board signs are permitted within a street terrace or on private property within the Central Business (CB) Zoning District.
      - [b] Sandwich board signs within a street terrace shall only be located within the street frontage of the principal structure of which the owner or tenant occupy.
      - [c] Sandwich board signs shall only be located on the street frontage for which the sidewalk entrance is located.
      - [d] Sandwich board signs shall be placed to allow a minimum of 36 inches of unobstructed sidewalk passage.
      - [e] Sandwich board signs shall be placed a minimum of one foot from any of the following: doorway, loading zone, crosswalk, curb cut, bike rack, bench or any other public facility or fixture

for vehicles or pedestrians.

[f] Sandwich board signs shall not obstruct access to any fire hydrant, fire escape or fire door, or obstruct the clear view of any traffic signal, regulatory sign, or street sign. Whether such a prohibited obstruction is created by the sandwich board sign shall be in the sole, exclusive and irrebuttable determination of the City.

[g] Sandwich board signs shall meet the visibility standards of § 550-106.

[h] Sandwich board signs shall be kept inside the building when the property owner or tenant is not occupying the principal structure.

[4] Configuration requirements for sandwich board signs.

[a] No portion of a sandwich board sign shall be more than four feet high or more than two feet wide, including any part of its frame or supporting structure.

[b] Anything attached to a sandwich board sign shall not project outside the perimeter of the sign face nor project in excess of one inch from the sign face.

[5] Material requirements for sandwich board signs.

[a] Sandwich board signs may be made of any material.

[b] Sandwich board signs shall be heavy enough to remain stable in moderate wind conditions.

[6] Illumination requirements for sandwich board signs.

[a] Sandwich board signs may not be illuminated by any means other than an ambient light source, such as the sun or a streetlight.

(3) Temporary approved development sign category. A sign which is limited to display only during the active development of an approved building or City-approved plat. The following temporary approved development sign types are addressed by this article:

(a) Active building board sign. A type of temporary approved development sign that is made of banner material or rigid material such as plywood or corrugated plastic, which may be displayed only on the site of a building under construction.

(b) Active plat board sign. A type of temporary approved development sign that is made of a banner material or rigid material such as plywood or

corrugated plastic, which may be displayed only on the site of a subdivision plat under construction.

- (4) Prohibited temporary sign category. Exterior signs or similar eye-catching devices with the characteristics described in § 550-135 are prohibited at all times by this article.

C. Definitions and rules related to the permanent miscellaneous sign group:

Permanent miscellaneous sign. A permanent sign that is available to all sites in the City regardless of land use. "Permanent miscellaneous signs" is a sign group containing various sign categories and sign types that a parcel is eligible to use. Permanent miscellaneous signs includes the following sign categories: optional miscellaneous signs. See Table 550-132A(3) for additional rules for permanent miscellaneous signs related to zoning districts.

- (1) Optional miscellaneous sign category. Signs in this category are only permitted through official government action, including designation of historic places, creation of outlots in a plat or certified survey map. The following optional miscellaneous sign types are addressed by this article:

- (a) Plaque sign. A type of optional miscellaneous sign available to officially-recognized federal, state, or local historic properties, sites, or districts.
- (b) Permanent plat sign. A type of optional miscellaneous sign typically indicating the name of a neighborhood, neighborhood association, or subdivision approved by the Plan Commission and/or Common Council of the City of Watertown.

[1] Permanent plat signs shall require a conditional use permit.

[2] Permanent plat signs shall be configured as dual post signs or monument signs.

D. Definition and rules to the temporary miscellaneous sign group:

Temporary miscellaneous sign: A temporary on-site sign. Temporary miscellaneous signs do not require a sign permit and are typically used to be temporary. "Temporary miscellaneous signs" is a sign group containing one sign category, yard signs, which is available to all land uses. See Table 550-132A(4).

- (1) Yard sign category. A sign category that is intended to accommodate a wide variety of sign purposes, often needed on a temporary basis. Such signs are freestanding and mounted on one or two stakes or posts and do not have footings. The following yard sign types are addressed by this article:

- (a) Stake sign. A type of yard sign that consists of a sign face erected upon one or more metal wires or wood, metal, or plastic stakes of no more than three inches in width.

- (b) Frame sign. A type of yard sign that consists of a frame into which a sign



face can be inserted and erected upon two wood, metal, or plastic stakes or ground spikes.

- (c) Arm and post sign. A type of yard sign mounted on a post or posts, either with a bracket arm extending outward to support a hanging sign, with the sign attached directly to the side of the post, or with the sign mounted between two posts.

E. Prohibited signs. Refer to § 550-135 for additional sign prohibitions and limitations.

- (1) Abandoned sign. Any sign and/or sign structure remaining in place on a site or a portion of a site (such as a single tenant in a multitenant building) that has been vacant, closed, or otherwise unoccupied for a period of 90 days. See § 550-158 for removal of abandoned signs and sign structures.
- (2) Vehicle sign. A vehicle, trailer, or other piece of equipment which contains any sign or advertising device, which is unlicensed and/or inoperable, and which fall under Chapter 497 of the City of Watertown Municipal Code.
  - (a) Vehicles legally parked in any of the locations described below shall not be considered vehicle signs.
    - [1] A vehicle parked on-site and in a parking space designated for vehicle parking or storage on a site plan approved by the City; or
    - [2] A vehicle legally parked on-site at the residence of an employee (including driveways and legal off-street parking spaces).
- (3) Beacon/search beacon sign. Any light with one or more beams directed into the atmosphere or directed at one or more points not on the same site as the light source; also, any light with one or more beams that rotate or move.
- (4) Flashing/scrolling/animated sign. A sign having lights or illumination which flashes, scrolls, moves, rotates, twinkles, blinks, flickers, varies in intensity of color, or uses intermittent electrical pulsations. Electronic message signs meeting the definition and requirements of § 550-131.1 of this chapter shall not be considered flashing, scrolling, or animated signs.
- (5) Graffiti. Means any unauthorized inscription, word, figure, painting or other defacement that is written, marked, etched, scratched, sprayed, drawn, painted, or engraved on or otherwise affixed to any surface of public or private property by any graffiti implement, to the extent that the graffiti was not authorized in advance by the owner or occupant of the property, or despite advance authorization, is otherwise deemed a public nuisance by the City. Graffiti includes snipe signs.
- (6) Inflatable sign. A sign capable of being filled with and expanding by air or other gas, including animated or "dancing" inflatable signs.
- (7) Mobile/portable sign. A sign not permanently attached to the ground that is

designed to be moved from one location to another. Also, a sign mounted on a frame or chassis designed to be easily relocated, including unlicensed or inoperable vehicles and/or trailers whose principal use is for signage.

- (a) Licensed and operable vehicles, trailers, or other pieces of equipment shall not be considered mobile or portable signs.
  - (b) Sandwich board signs meeting the definition and requirements of § 550-131B(3)(a) of this chapter shall not be considered mobile or portable signs.
  - (c) Feather signs meeting the definitions and requirements of § 550-131B(2)(c) of this chapter shall not be considered mobile or portable signs.
- (8) Off-premises advertising sign. A sign which directs attention to a business, commodity, service, or entertainment that is conducted, sold, or offered elsewhere than upon the site where the sign is displayed. Off-premises advertising signs include billboards.
- (a) Existing legal off-premises advertising signs made nonconforming by this section shall be permitted to continue as legal, nonconforming signs, subject to the requirements of § 550-137. These legal nonconforming signs include the following list:
    - [1] Highway 26 north (business), at the approximate address of 1101 North Church Street: one eight-foot-by-fifteen-foot double-faced triangular sign and one eight-foot-by-nine-foot single-faced sign;
    - [2] Highway 26 south (business), located at the approximate address of 38 Stimpson Street: one eight-foot-by-twenty-foot double-faced sign;
    - [3] Highway 26 south (business), located at the approximate address of 1610 South Church Street: one eight-foot-by-ten-foot single-faced sign;
    - [4] Highway 19 west, located at the approximate address of 940 West Main Street: two ten-foot-by-eighteen-foot single-faced side-by-side signs;
    - [5] Highway 19 east, located at the approximate address of 323 Summit Avenue: one eight-foot-by-eight-foot single-faced sign; and
    - [6] Highway 16, located at the approximate address of 804 Hillside Lane: one eight-foot- by-twelve-foot double-faced sign.
- (9) Roof sign. A sign displayed above the eaves or cornice of a building, unless with an approved conditional use permit.
- (10) Snipe sign. Any small sign, generally of a temporary nature, made of any

material, when such sign is tacked, nailed, posted, pasted, glued or otherwise attached to trees, poles, stakes, fences or other objects not erected, owned and maintained by the owner of the sign.

F. Other definitions.

**BUILDING FRONTAGE** — The width of the building facade that fronts a public street.

**CHANGEABLE COPY** — Sign copy that may be changed manually to provide different information such as boards with changeable letters, bulletin boards, and chalkboards.

**COPY** — Words, letters, numbers, figures, designs, or other symbolic representations incorporated into a sign.

**CUSTOMER ENTRANCE** — The entrance that the public can use when an establishment is open to the public.

**ELECTRONIC MESSAGE SIGN** — See § 550-131.1.

**ELEVATION, BUILDING** — The view of any building or other structure from any one of four sides regardless of the configuration or orientation of a building. No building shall be treated as having more than four building elevations. Each elevation will generally be identified as a north, south, east or west building elevation.

**EXTERNAL ILLUMINATION** — The lighting of an object from a light source located a distance from the object.

**FACADE** — See "elevation, building."

**GRAFFITI IMPLEMENT** — An aerosol point container, a broad-tipped marker, gum label, paint stick or graffiti stick, etching equipment, brush, or any other device capable of scarring or leaving a visible mark on any natural or manmade surface.

**HEIGHT OF SIGN** — The vertical distance from the base of the sign at average grade to the top of the highest attached component of the sign. See § 550-133B for the measurement of sign height.

**LIGHTING, AMBIENT** — Illumination in which the only light that falls onto the sign comes from the sources that are available naturally (e.g., sunlight, moonlight) or from artificial lighting sources used for other purposes in the vicinity of the sign (e.g., streetlights, lighting installed for other purposes or sites).

**LIGHTING, BACKLIT** — Illumination that arranged in such a way that the light is cast from behind the sign to the eyes of the viewer. Often, the lighting element is unshielded but concealed behind individual freestanding letters, creating a silhouette effect.

**LIGHTING, GOOSENECK** — Illumination resulting from light emitted directly from a shielded light fixture located at the top of the sign and angled downward onto the sign face. The light fixture is attached to a curved neck which is often flexible, allowing the user to position the light source onto the sign face.

**LIGHTING, INTERNAL** — Illumination emanating from a lighting element that is located behind the sign face and which is completely enclosed. Such illumination is diffused through a translucent material such as plastic or frosted glass. These include internally-lit cabinets or internally-lit individual letters or characters.

**MAINTAIN** — Maintaining the existing appearance of the sign; replacing the sign face or the supporting structure with identical materials, colors, and messages; replacing electrical or lighting components that maintains the existing sign face; changing the message of a marquee sign; or changing the face of an off-premises advertising sign.

**PLAT PHASE** — The collection of lots, right-of-ways, and outlots located within the perimeter boundary of a City approved final plat.

**SIGN AREA** — The entire face of a sign, including the extreme limits of writing, representation, emblem, or other display, together with any material or color forming an integral part of the background of the display but not including any supporting framework. See § 550-133D.

**SIGN FACE** — The area or display surface used for the message.

**SITE** — A site shall include all lots that are contiguous, under unified single ownership and intended to remain under unified single ownership under the jurisdiction of this chapter.

**STREET FRONTAGE** — The width of a parcel that fronts a public street.

**TEMPORARY SIGN** — A sign or advertising intended to be displayed for a certain limited period of time. If a sign display area is permanent, but the message displayed is subject to periodic changes, that sign shall not be considered as temporary. A mobile or portable sign shall not be considered a temporary sign or used for such a purpose. Refer to Table 550-132A(2) and Table 550-132A(4) for rules and time periods related to temporary signs.

**TENANT** — A person who rents property for agricultural, residential, commercial, institutional, or industrial purposes. A property may have more than one tenant under a group development granted by the Plan Commission.

**TENANT FRONTAGE** — The portion of a building frontage occupied by a single tenant space having a public entrance within the building frontage. For a tenant located on the interior of a building without building frontage, the building elevation providing customer access shall be considered the tenant's frontage.

**THREE-DIMENSIONAL SIGNS** — Signs that have depth or relief on their surface. Where a sign consists of one or more three-dimensional objects (i.e., balls, cubes, clusters of objects, sculpture or statue-like trademarks), the sign area shall be measured as their maximum projection upon a vertical plane.

**WINDOW PANE** — The area defined by any combination of the window frame and mullions located within said frame.

### **§ 550-131.1. Electronic message signs.**

- A. Electronic message sign. A type of sign that displays a message which may be changed electronically to provide different information, and which includes computer signs, electronic reader boards, video screens, LCD signs, electronic time and temperature signs, and other signs with electronically-controlled changing or moving displays.
- (1) Electronic message signs shall be permitted only with a nonresidential land use.
  - (2) No more than one electronic message sign shall be permitted per site.
  - (3) Electronic message signs may be integrated into the design of the following sign types: monument signs, wall signs, or drive-through signs.
    - (a) Drive-through signs: no more than 33% of a sign's actual area shall contain an electronic message sign.
    - (b) Electronic message signs shall count toward the site's maximum permitted signage.
  - (4) Messages and nontext images shall not change appearance more than once every 60 seconds, and transition between messages shall be via instantaneous change. Use of electronic message signs for images, text, or lighting that change appearance in a manner not permitted above shall be considered flashing, scrolling, or animated signs, which are prohibited per § 550-135.
  - (5) Electronic message signs shall be equipped with photosensitive equipment which automatically adjusts the brightness and contrast of the sign in direct relation to the ambient outdoor illumination.
  - (6) Electronic message signs shall comply with the exterior lighting standards of § 550-110.
  - (7) Electronic message signs shall be maintained so as to be able to display messages in a complete and legible manner.
  - (8) In addition to the setback requirements of this chapter, no electronic message sign shall be located within 100 feet of any parcel within a residential zoning district.
    - (a) Exception. Backlit or internally luminated signs may be replaced with an electronic message center that meets standards of § 550-131.1A. **[Added 11-1-2022 by Ord. No. 22-71]**
      - [1] The electronic message center's square footage shall not exceed an additional 10% of the original backlit or internally illuminated sign's square footage.
      - [2] This exception shall not apply to signs in historic and special districts under § 550-132B.

- (9) Electronic message signs existing prior to the adoption of this chapter and are not in conformance with this chapter are permitted as legal nonconforming signs per the requirements of § 550-137.

#### **§ 550-131.2. Fuel price signs.**

- A. Fuel price signs. A type of sign that lists the price of gasoline and diesel fuel sold on-site, as required by Wis. Stats. § 100.18(8).
  - (1) Fuel price signs shall not be separate signs, but rather shall be integrated into the design of a permitted monument sign, described in § 550-131A(1)(a) and in Table 550-132A(1).
  - (2) Fuel price signs may list up to one price per type of fuel, which shall be displayed on a single structure.
  - (3) Fuel price signs may be illuminated, per the exterior lighting standards of § 550-110.
  - (4) Fuel price signs may contain changeable copy or electronic message signs, per the requirements of § 550-131.1.

#### **§ 550-131.3. Group developments.**

- A. In order to accommodate increased signage needs for multitenant buildings, group developments (defined under § 550-68), shall be permitted an increase in total permitted sign area and height.
  - (1) Each tenant shall be eligible for integration into a group development sign. The allocation of sign area for each tenant shall be determined by the property owner.
  - (2) Group development signs shall be monument signs per § 550-131A(1)(a) or a wall sign per § 550-131A(2)(a).
  - (3) Group development signs may be increased by up to 50% in area and up to two feet in height.

#### **§ 550-131.4. Street banners.**

- A. Street banners displayed over a public street, alley, or highway shall be permitted only upon approval by the Engineering Division.
  - (1) Banners on City-owned bridges shall be permitted only upon approval by the Engineering Division.
- B. Street banners shall be displayed for limited period of time, as approved by the Engineering Division.
- C. Street banners shall be erected only in locations approved by the Engineering Division.

**§ 550-132. Permitted sign rules.**

A. Signs shall be allowed on private property in the City of Watertown in accordance with Tables 550-132A(1) through 550-132A(4), which addresses permitted signage as it relates to permits, quantity, area, location, lighting, and zoning districts. The requirements set forth in Tables 550-132A(1) through 550-132A(4) shall be declared to be part of this chapter. Figure 550-132A illustrates the specific sign types.

- (1) The rules for permanent signs are located in Table 550-132A(1).
- (2) The rules for temporary signs are located in Table 550-132A(2).
- (3) The rules for permanent miscellaneous signs are located in Table 550-132A(3).
- (4) The rules for temporary miscellaneous signs are located in Table 550-132A(4).

Table 550-132A(1): Permanent Sign Group <sup>1</sup>						Sign Area and Height Maximums for Zoning Districts		
Sign Categories and Sign Types	Sign Permit Needed	Number of Signs Allowed	Sign Area Formula (each side)	Sign Location Requirements	Sign Lighting Allowed	ER, CR, SR, TR	MR, SNR, RH, NO, NB	PO, PB, GB, CB, PI, GI, HI
A. Freestanding Sign Category:*								
1. Monument sign	Sign Permit required for each new sign.	Limit of 1 freestanding sign for every 330 feet of street frontage or 1 sign per each site entrance, regardless of the number of tenants	Maximum of 1 square foot of sign area for every foot of the site's street frontage - up to the District maximum	Minimum sign setback from each property line shall be greater than or equal to the sign height	Standard <sup>2</sup>	2 square feet maximum area per sign 5 feet maximum height per sign	50 square feet maximum area per sign 6 feet maximum height per sign	100 square feet maximum area per sign 15 feet maximum height per sign
2. Dual post sign							50 square feet maximum area per sign 6 feet maximum height per sign	100 square feet maximum area per sign 6 feet maximum height per sign
3. Pylon sign							Limit of 1 pylon sign for each site, regardless of the number of tenants	Not allowed
B. On-Building Sign Category:* All on-building signs on the same building facade shall be the same type of sign (1-5), below.								
1. Wall sign	Sign permit required for each new sign	Limit of 1 on-building sign for each tenant, on each building facade that faces (roughly parallel to) a public street	Maximum of 1 square foot of sign area for every foot of building's facade length - up to the District maximum	No part of any sign shall extend higher than the building parapet or eave and minimum overhang clearance required	Standard <sup>2</sup>	2 square feet maximum area per sign	100 square feet maximum area per sign	200 square feet maximum area per sign
2. Awning sign					Ambient only			
3. Canopy sign					Ambient and internal			

Table 550-132A(1): Permanent Sign Group <sup>1</sup>						Sign Area and Height Maximums for Zoning Districts		
Sign Categories and Sign Types	Sign Permit Needed	Number of Signs Allowed	Sign Area Formula (each side)	Sign Location Requirements	Sign Lighting Allowed	ER, CR, SR, TR	MR, SNR, RH, NO, NB	PO, PB, GB, CB, PI, GI, HI
4. Marquee sign							100 square feet maximum area per sign	200 square feet maximum area per sign
5. Projecting sign							Not allowed	
C. Pedestrian Sign Category:* All pedestrian signs on the same building facade shall be the same type of sign (1-2), below.								
1. Blade sign	Sign permit required for each new sign	Limit of 1 pedestrian sign for each tenant.	None needed. Use maximum area limit	On-building. Must be located in front of a customer entrance.	Ambient only	Not allowed	14 square feet maximum area per sign	16 square feet maximum area per sign
2. Suspended sign								
D. Permanent Changeable Sign Category:*								
1. Wall-mounted changeable sign	Sign permit required for each new sign	Limit of 1 permanent changeable sign for each tenant.	None needed. Use max area limit	On-building. Maximum 4 inches from wall	Ambient only	Not allowed	8 feet maximum area per sign	
2. Freestanding changeable sign				Freestanding. Within 10 feet of public entrance			8 feet maximum height per sign 12 square feet maximum area per sign	
3. Drive-through sign				Per C.U.P.	Standard <sup>2</sup>		Not allowed	24 square feet maximum area per sign 8 feet maximum height per sign

\* Refer to § 550-131A for definition and rules for each sign category (lettered) and each sign type (numbered).

<sup>1</sup> Available to land uses identified in Article IV of this chapter as agricultural, institutional, commercial, storage or disposal, transportation, and industrial.

<sup>2</sup> "Standard" means the following forms of sign lighting: ambient, backlit, internal character or cabinet, and gooseneck.

Table 550-132A(2): Temporary Sign Group <sup>1</sup>						Sign Area and Height Maximums for Zoning Districts		
Sign Categories and Sign Types	Sign Permit Needed	Number of Signs Allowed	Sign Area Formula (each side)	Sign Location Requirements	Sign Lighting Allowed	ER, CR, SR, TR	MR, SNR, RH, NO, NB	PO, PB, GB, CB, PI, GI, HI
A. Temporary Board & Banner Sign Category:* Temporary board, banner, or feather sign maybe displayed permanently, but typically are not.								
1. Board sign	Sign permit not required	Any combination of sign type, not to exceed 2 signs per site, or 1 sign per each site entrance, or Limit 1 sign type per each tenant	None needed. Use maximum area limit	On-building or free-standing. Minimum sign setback from each property line shall be greater or equal to the sign height.	Ambient only	32 square feet maximum area per sign	40 square feet maximum area per sign	6 feet maximum height per sign
2. Banner sign						6 feet maximum height per sign		



Table 550-132A(2): Temporary Sign Group <sup>1</sup>						Sign Area and Height Maximums for Zoning Districts		
Sign Categories and Sign Types	Sign Permit Needed	Number of Signs Allowed	Sign Area Formula (each side)	Sign Location Requirements	Sign Lighting Allowed	ER, CR, SR, TR	MR, SNR, RH, NO, NB	PO, PB, GB, CB, PI, GI, HI
3. Feather sign		Limit of 2 feather signs for each site or limit 1 per each tenant				Not allowed	30 square feet maximum area per sign 10 feet maximum height per sign	
B. Temporary Changeable Sign Category:* Temporary changeable signs may be displayed daily <sup>3</sup>								
1. Sandwich board sign	Sign permit not required	Limit of 1 Sandwich Board Sign per sidewalk entrance during owner/tenant occupation of the property.	Shall not be more than four feet high or more than two feet wide, including frame or supporting structure.	Street terrace or on private property within the Central Business (CB) Zoning District	Ambient only	Not allowed	Allowed in CB Zoning District Only 8 square feet maximum area per sign 4 feet maximum height per sign	
C. Temporary Approved Development Sign Category:*								
1. Active building board sign	Sign permit not required	Limit of 1 for each approved building with a valid Building Permit	None needed. Use max area limit	On-building or free-standing. Minimum sign setback from each property line shall be greater or equal to the sign height	Ambient only	32 square feet maximum area per sign 6 feet maximum height per sign		
2. Active plat board sign		Limit of 1 for each public street intersection at the perimeter of any active plat phase				32 square feet maximum area per sign 6 feet maximum height per sign		

\* Refer to § 550-131B for definition and rules for each sign category (lettered) and each sign type (numbered).

<sup>1</sup> Available to land uses identified in Article IV of this chapter as agricultural, institutional, commercial, storage or disposal, transportation, and industrial.

<sup>3</sup> Shall be kept inside the principal structure when the property owner or tenant is not occupying the principal structure.

Table 550-132A(3): Permanent Misc. Sign Group <sup>1</sup>						Sign Area and Height Maximums for Zoning Districts		
Sign Categories and Sign Types	Sign Permit Needed	Number of Signs Allowed	Sign Area Formula (each side)	Sign Location Requirements	Sign Lighting Allowed	ER, CR, SR, TR, MR, SNR	RH, NO, NB	PO, PB, GB, CB, PI, GI, HI
B. Optional Miscellaneous Sign Category:*								
1. Plaque sign	Sign permit required for each new sign	Up to 3 per designated historic property, site, or district	None needed. Use max area limit	On-building, within 10 feet of the main entrance.	Ambient only	6 square feet maximum area per sign 8 feet maximum height per sign		
2. Permanent plat sign		Per final plat or Certified Survey Map		In plat or Certified Survey Map Outlot	Ambient only	100 square feet maximum area per sign 8 feet maximum height per sign		

\* Refer to § 550-131C for definition and rules for each sign category (lettered) and each sign type (numbered).

<sup>1</sup> Available to all land uses.

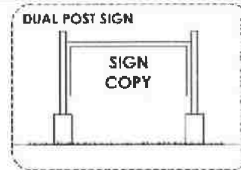
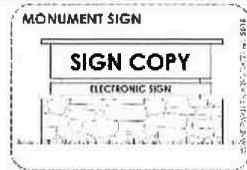
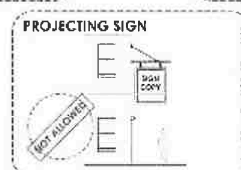
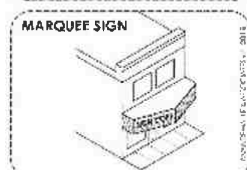
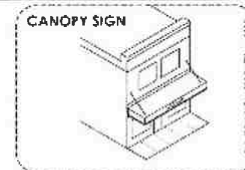
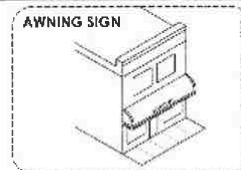
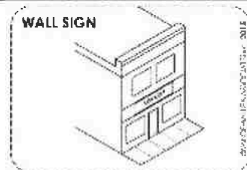
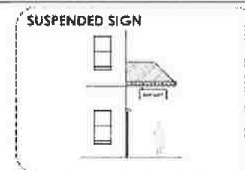
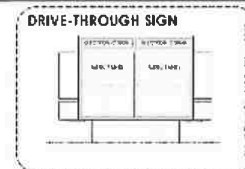
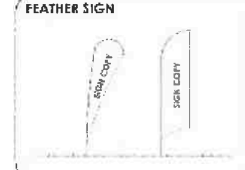
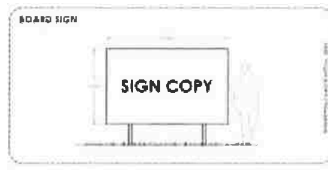
<sup>2</sup> "Standard" means the following forms of sign lighting: ambient, backlit, internal character or cabinet, and gooseneck

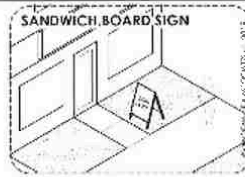
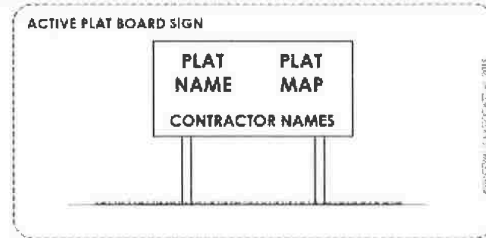
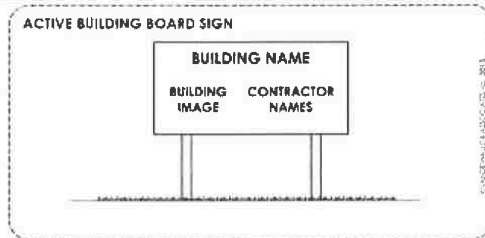
Table 550-132A(4): Temporary Misc. Sign Group <sup>1</sup>						Sign Area and Height Maximums for Zoning Districts			
Sign Categories and Sign Types	Sign Permit Needed	Number of Signs Allowed	Sign Area Formula (each side)	Sign Location Requirements	Sign Lighting Allowed	ER, CR, SR, TR, MR, SNR	RH, NO, NB	PO, PB, GB, CB, PI, GI, HI	
A. Yard Sign Category:* A Yard Sign may be displayed permanently, but typically is not.									
1. Stake sign	Sign permit not required	Unlimited	None needed. Use maximum area limit. <sup>2</sup>	Must be located on-site. <sup>2</sup>	Ambient only	6 square feet maximum area per sign 4 feet maximum height per sign			
2. Frame sign									
3. Arm and post sign				9 square feet maximum area per sign 6 feet maximum height per sign					
Minimum sign setback from each property line shall be greater than or equal to sign height.									

\* Refer to § 550-131D for definition and rules for each sign category (lettered) and each sign type (numbered).

<sup>1</sup> Available to all land uses.

<sup>2</sup> Sign must be located on-site and must not be located within any street right-of-way (which includes the entire public sidewalk and street terrace area).

**Figure 550-132A: Illustration of Sign Types****Freestanding Sign Category****On-Building Sign Category****Pedestrian Sign Category****Permanent Changeable Sign Category****Temporary Board & Banner Sign Category**

**Temporary Changeable Sign Category****Temporary Approved Development Sign Category****Optional Miscellaneous Sign Category****Yard Sign Category****B. Signs in historic and special districts.**

- (1) In designated historic districts and special districts, in addition to the sign regulations in this article, all signs within any historic district and special district shall be subject to the provisions of Chapter 325, Historic Preservation, of the City's Municipal Code.
- (2) Prior to the issuance of a sign permit, as defined in § 550-134C the applicant shall have the design reviewed by the Historic Preservation and Downtown Design Commission prior to approval.
- (3) All internally illuminated signs, plastic or otherwise, are strictly prohibited within a historic district.
  - (a) Except marquee signs, defined under § 550-131A(2)(d).
- (4) Marquee signs.
  - (a) Marquee signs shall be permitted on a historic site or a contributing property with evidence, historic photos and any other documentation of a prior marquee sign.

- (b) Marquee signs on a historic site or a contributing property shall be restored to their original appearance and dimensions based on historic photos and any other documentation.
  - [1] The City of Watertown Historic Preservation and Downtown Design Commission may, with the granting of a certificate of appropriateness, allow a marquee sign to deviate from the original appearance and dimension based on historic photos and any other documentation.
- (c) Marquee signs on a historic site or a contributing property may have lighting restored to their original appearance and dimensions based on historic photos and any other documentation.
- (d) Marquee signs on a noncontributing property may be allowed pending a certificate of appropriateness from the City of Watertown Historic Preservation and Downtown Design Commission.
- (5) All pedestrian category signs within an historic district or a special district shall be designed to enhance and complement the historic character of the buildings within the historic district or special district and shall be subject to the following guidelines:
  - (a) No building may have more than one pedestrian category sign per customer entrance and no more than one pedestrian category sign per tenant for each street frontage where the building is built up to the sidewalk.
  - (b) No pedestrian category sign shall be more than four feet in width, with a maximum total outward extension, including bracketry, of five feet from the building to which it is attached. The pedestrian category sign itself shall not be closer than six inches to the building to which it is attached.
  - (c) Three-dimensional signs are allowed but may not exceed two feet at their largest cross section. The sign message shall be limited to the two surfaces perpendicular to the building.
  - (d) All fasteners and bracketry shall be securely fastened to the building at both the top and bottom of the sign. All bracketry shall be part of the overall design and shall be made to enhance the sign. The fasteners shall be bolted to masonry joints wherever possible to avoid damage to brick or stonework.
  - (e) Pedestrian category signs shall be positioned so they are an integral design feature of the building and should help to define and enhance architectural features. Signs shall only be placed in the horizontal lintels or "sign space" above the storefront windows or in other historically appropriate areas approved by the Historic Preservation and Downtown Design Commission.

- (f) No pedestrian category signs shall be placed, mounted or erected in such a manner as to interfere with any exit, fire escape, window or architectural ornamentation.
- (g) Pedestrian category signs may be externally illuminated only as follows:
  - [1] Gooseneck lighting from above the sign.
  - [2] Lighting shall be directed onto the sign and no other part of the building.
- (h) Sign colors should blend with the building facade to which the sign is attached. No more than six colors shall be used. Colors shall be selected from the low-intensity colors on the color chart provided by the Historic Preservation and Downtown Design Commission.
- (i) Allowable pedestrian category sign materials shall be made of a rigid standardized sign material (e.g., wood, wood laminate, metal, etc.).

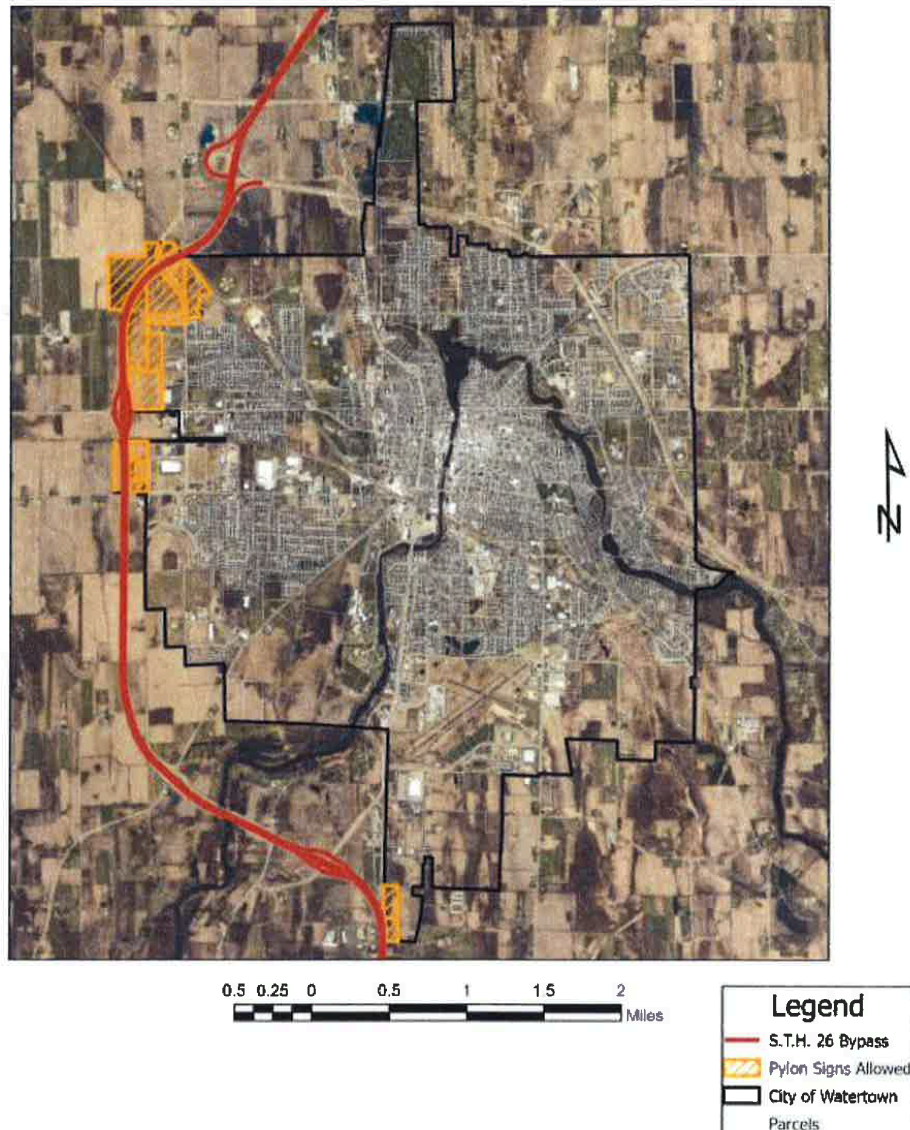
C. S.T.H. 26 pylon sign allowance areas.

- (1) Location. Pylon signs shall only be permitted within the S.T.H. 26 pylon sign allowance areas in Figure 550-132C.
- (2) Height. Pylon signs may not exceed the maximum building height bulk requirement for the corresponding Zoning District for the property upon which the pylon sign is being erected.
  - (a) Pylon signs may exceed said maximum height regulations with the granting of a conditional use permit which specifically states the maximum permitted height of the proposed pylon sign.
  - (b) In no instance shall a pylon sign extend into the Airport Approach Protection Zone or Height Limitation Zone identified in Chapter 211 of the City of Watertown Municipal Code.
- (3) Maximum permitted sign area: one square foot of signage for every foot of the adjacent public street frontage selected for the lot — up to a maximum sign area of 150 square feet.
- (4) Pylon signs shall have signage plans approved and stamped by a professional engineer registered in the State of Wisconsin and accompanied by a statement of compliance with state laws.
- (5) Pylon signs shall meet all other requirements for the freestanding sign category in Table 550-132A(1).

**Figure 550-132C: S.T.H. 26 Pylon Sign Allowance Area**

## S.T.H. 26 Pylon Sign Allowance Areas

### City of Watertown, WI



#### Section § 550-133: Sign Setback, Height, Measurement, and Flexibility

##### § 550-133. Sign setback, height, measurement, and flexibility.

- A. Sign setbacks. Freestanding signs shall be set back a distance greater than or equal to the height of the sign and shall be set back no less than five feet from the property line. See Subsection B(1) below.
- B. Sign height.

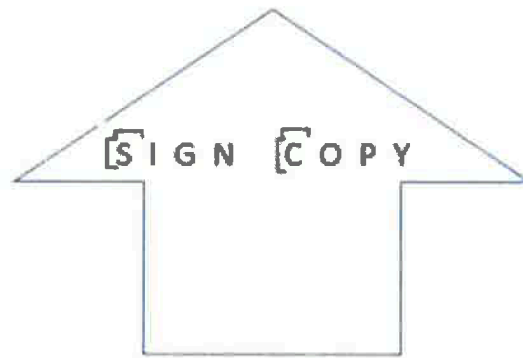
- (1) In all instances, the maximum permitted sign height shall be less than or equal to the sign's provided setback. See Subsection A above.
  - (2) The height of a freestanding sign shall be measured from the average ground level adjacent to the sign to the top of the sign, or from the centerline grade of the nearest adjacent public road, if such information is supplied by the permit application and confirmed by the Zoning Administrator, whichever is higher.
  - (3) The average ground level is defined as the average elevation of the ground upon which the sign supports are placed, except when the sign supports rest upon a berm or other area elevated above the surrounding ground. In such cases, the average elevation of the base of such berm or other area shall be considered as the ground level.
- C. Minimum ground clearance. All awning, canopy, marquee, blade, and suspended signs shall have a minimum clearance of 14 feet above a drive, alley, or street and a minimum of eight feet above a sidewalk, path, trail, or other ground-level surface.
- D. Measurement of sign area: The measurement of sign area is based on the arrangement of sign copy and sign background.
- (1) In the case of a freestanding sign (including three-dimensional objects), sign area includes the total sign areas that can be viewed from any single vantage point, i.e., for a typical freestanding sign that faces two directions, only the largest sign face visible from any single vantage point shall count toward the total permitted sign area. Sign area shall not include any elements of the sign structure designed solely for support of the sign structure and located below or to the side of the sign message. Examples of parts of a freestanding sign structure which are exempt from the sign area include sign base and the supporting columns, posts, or poles.
  - (2) For signs comprised of individual letters and related copy which are attached to a background surface with one or more neutral surface colors, sign area shall be measured as the sum of the smallest rectangle enclosing each letter or related copy. (See Example 1 in Figure 550-133.)
  - (3) For signs comprised of individual letters and related copy which are attached to a background surface with one or more non-neutral background colors, sign area shall be measured as the sum of the smallest rectangles and right triangles enclosing entire sign message and any and all non-neutral background color areas. (See Example 2 in Figure 550-133.)
  - (4) For signs comprised of letters and related copy surrounded by one or more sign background colors on a single panel, frame, or cabinet, the sign area shall be measured as the smallest single rectangle enclosing the entire sign message and any and all background color areas. (See Example 3 in Figure 550-133.)
  - (5) For signs comprised of individual letters and related copy surrounded by one or more sign background colors on individual panels, sign area shall be measured as the smallest single rectangle enclosing the entire sign message



and any and all background color areas. (See Example 4 in Figure 550-133.)

- (6) For signs comprised on one or more three-dimensional objects (i.e., balls, cubes, clusters of objects, sculpture or statue-like trademarks), the sign area shall be measured as their maximum projection upon a vertical plane.

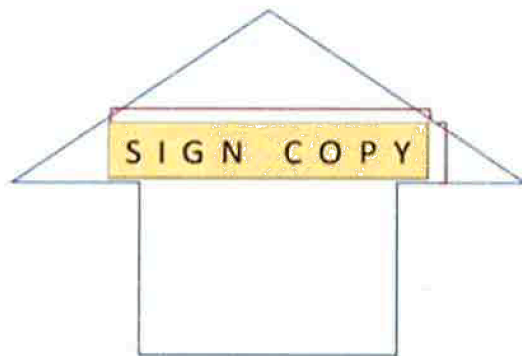
**Figure 550-133: Measurement of Sign Area**



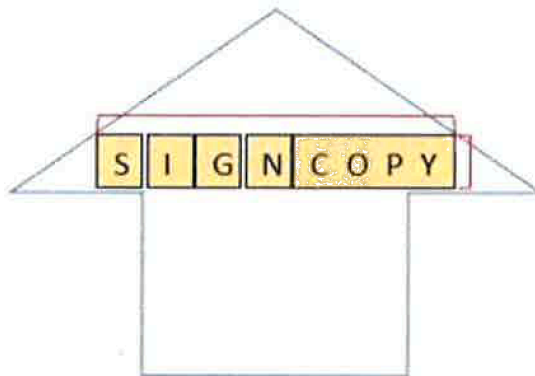
**Example 1:**  
Individual letters on a neutral surface  
Sum of smallest rectangles



**Example 2:**  
Individual letters on a colored background  
Sum of smallest rectangles and right triangles



**Example 3:**  
Individual letters or words grouped on one or more panels  
Smallest single rectangle



**Example 4:**  
Individual letters on separate panels  
Smallest single rectangle

**§ 550-134. Sign permits - Application, enforcement, and revocation.****A. Applicability.**

- (1) No permanent signs listed under § 550-131A or optional miscellaneous signs listed under § 550-131C(2) shall be erected, installed, constructed, or maintained without the granting of a permit from the Zoning Administrator in accordance with the provisions of this section.
- (2) For signs requiring a permit in Subsection A(1), above, this section shall apply and be construed to require a permit for a change of copy on any sign or changes in the sign structure.
- (3) This section shall not apply to repainting or resurfacing with the same sign copy, cleaning, repair, or other normal maintenance of the sign or sign structure.
- (4) No new permit is required for signs which are in place as of the effective date this chapter, and such signs may remain as legal nonconforming signs. Any alterations or relocation of such signs shall conform to the requirements of this chapter. Refer to § 550-137 for rules pertaining to nonconforming signs.
- (5) Any sign permit granted hereunder may not be assigned or transferred to any other sign, including a modified sign face or modified sign structure.
- (6) Each proposed sign on a parcel shall constitute an individual permit.

**B. Sign permit application. Each sign permit application shall include:**

- (1) The name, address, phone number, email address, and signature of the applicant.
- (2) The name of the business or land use the proposed sign will serve.
- (3) The name, address, phone number, email address, and signature of the property owner.
- (4) The name, address, phone number, and email address of the sign contractor.
- (5) The property's zoning designation.
- (6) The property's current land use or uses for entire subject property, including all indoor and outdoor areas.
- (7) A signage plan, drawn to a recognizable scale, shall be submitted showing the following:
  - (a) Location, type, height, width, and area of the proposed sign.
  - (b) Location, type, height, width, and area of all existing signs on the property and indication of whether sign(s) will remain or be removed/replaced.

- (c) All property lines and buildings on the property and within 50 feet of the proposed sign.
  - (d) All parking areas, driveways, and public roads.
  - (e) Methods of attachment, structural support, method of illumination, and sign materials.
  - (f) Approximate value of the sign to be installed, including cost of installation.
- (8) If the sign has lighting or an electrical component and the sign contractor is not UL listed, the applicant shall have an electrical subcontractor to supervise the work and obtain an electrical permit.
  - (9) Payment of the sign permit fee as established by the Common Council and may from time to time be modified by resolution. A schedule of fees established by the Common Council shall be available for review in City Hall.
  - (10) If any sign is suspended, projects above, or within a public right-of-way, the issuance and continuation of a sign permit shall be conditioned on proof of liability insurance from the property owner and tenant.
  - (11) A written statement that all temporary signs will be removed per the limits.
  - (12) Any other information that may reasonably be requested by the Zoning Administrator for the purpose of application evaluation.
  - (13) Any existing or proposed sign on property abutting a state highway shall also require approval from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

C. Granting and issuance.

- (1) The Zoning Administrator shall review the application to ensure it is complete per the requirements of Subsection B, above.
- (2) In cases where no other review or approvals are required under this chapter, the Zoning Administrator shall review said application for compliance with Subsection D, below, and shall, in writing, either approve or deny said permit within 10 working days of the acceptance of the complete application and payment of the required fee.
- (3) Denial of a sign permit shall not result in total or partial reimbursement of permit fee paid.
- (4) A granted sign permit shall expire, and shall be null and void, if the sign is not attached or erected within 180 days of the issuance of the sign permit.

D. Basis for granting a sign permit. In deciding whether or not to grant a sign permit, the Zoning Administrator shall determine whether the proposed sign is in compliance with the provisions of this chapter. In such review, the Zoning Administrator may also consider the following factors:

- (1) Whether the sign is designed, constructed, installed, or maintained in such a manner that it does not endanger public safety or traffic safety.
- (2) Whether the sign is in compliance with all provisions of the City of Watertown Municipal Code and Building Code, including those related to traffic safety, traffic visibility, sign setbacks, and structural integrity.

E. Enforcement and revocation of sign permit.

- (1) A sign permit may be revoked if the applicant has failed to comply with the provisions of this chapter or any conditions that may have accompanied the permit at the time of issuance. Revocation requires written notice by either the Zoning Administrator for Zoning Ordinance violations or the Building Inspector for Building Code or other construction code violations.
- (2) In the event that construction, installation, or manufacture of a sign for which a permit has been issued but has not commenced within 180 days from the date of the issuance of such permit, said permit shall be null and void and automatically revoked. If work authorized by such permit is suspended or abandoned for a period of 90 days any time after the work is commenced, the original permit shall become null and void. In such cases, a new permit shall be obtained to complete the work and a new permit fee shall be required.
- (3) Any sign subject to a revoked permit shall be removed by the licensee, sign owner, or property owner within 45 days of such revocation.
- (4) Revocation shall not result in total or partial reimbursement of permit fees paid.

F. Appeals. Any person affected by a decision of the Zoning Administrator may petition for a hearing before the Zoning Board of Appeals. The filing of such petition automatically stays removal of any sign involved and already legally erected until the Zoning Board of Appeals decides whether to sustain, modify, or withdraw the notice.

G. Removal of signs in violation of this chapter.

- (1) If the Zoning Administrator determines that any sign exists in violation of this chapter, the Zoning Administrator shall notify the sign permit holder or the owner of the property on which the sign is located. Said notification shall indicate that such violation shall be corrected within 60 days of receipt of said notice on penalty of automatic revocation of any sign permit, and that removal of the sign by the City may occur at the expense of the owner of the property.
- (2) If notification is sent and the violation is not corrected within 60 days, the Zoning Administrator shall revoke the permit for any sign which is in violation of this chapter. It shall be the duty of the Zoning Administrator to cause removal of such sign.
- (3) The expense of removing such sign shall be charged to the owner of the

property on which the sign is located. If the owner fails to pay such expense within one month of being billed therefore, or has not made arrangement for payment satisfactory to the City Attorney, then such expense shall become a lien on the property and shall be placed upon the tax roll.

- (4) Any sign illegally placed in a public right-of-way shall be subject to immediate removal and confiscation without notice by the Zoning Administrator.

### **§ 550-135. Sign prohibitions and limitations.**

The regulations contained in this subsection apply to signs in all zoning districts.

#### **A. Sign prohibitions.**

- (1) No sign shall be erected at any location where it may, by reasons of its position, shape, color or design, interfere with, obstruct the view of, or be confused with any authorized traffic sign, signal or device, nor shall such sign make use of words such as "stop," "look," "danger," or any other word, phrase, symbol or character in such a manner as to interfere with, mislead, or confuse users of streets or highways.
- (2) No fluttering, undulating, swinging, rotating, or otherwise moving signs such as windsocks, motorized signs, pennants, and streamers shall be permitted. This shall not apply to temporary board and banner signs as defined in § 550-131B(1) or street banners as defined in § 550-131.4.
- (3) No signs shall project above the building parapet or eave.
- (4) No flashing, scrolling, or animated signs shall be permitted.
- (5) No signs shall be mounted to an unlicensed trailer or other unlicensed vehicle.
- (6) No beacons or search beacons shall be permitted.
- (7) No billboards or off-premise advertising shall be permitted.
- (8) No abandoned signs shall be permitted. See § 550-131E(1).
- (9) No sign, temporary or permanent, shall be displayed on private property without the owner's permission.

#### **B. Sign limitations.**

- (1) No sign shall be erected, relocated, or maintained so as to prevent free ingress to or egress from any door, window, or fire escape, and no sign shall be attached to a standpipe or fire escape.
- (2) No sign shall be placed in a manner that would impede vehicular or pedestrian safety or impede access or visibility. Signs shall meet the visibility requirements of § 550-106.
- (3) No signs shall be erected, installed, or placed on a parcel that is owned by the

City of Watertown.

- (4) No private sign shall be attached to or painted on any natural feature (e.g. tree or rock), fence, fire hydrant, public utility pole, public light pole, or traffic regulatory structure.
- (5) Except for permitted awning, canopy, marquee, blade, and suspended signs, or unless otherwise allowed by this chapter, no sign shall be permitted within or extend into a public right-of-way.
  - (a) Sandwich board signs under § 550-131B(2)(a) shall also be exempt.
- (6) No person shall: paste, tape, staple, or otherwise fasten any paper or other material to, nor paint, stencil, or otherwise write or color any object, vegetation, or pavement located within any street right-of-way; nor shall any of such object, vegetation, or pavement be defaced in any manner. The only exception to these restrictions is that painting may be allowed on public infrastructure (e.g. curbs, fire hydrants, sidewalk, electrical panels/boxes) when approved by the Common Council upon receiving a favorable recommendation from the Public Works Commission, after review of a written request.
- (7) No sign shall violate Chapter 532 of the City of Watertown Municipal Code.

**§ 550-136. Appearance, construction and maintenance of signage.**

- A. All signs shall be constructed, mounted, and maintained so as to comply with the appropriate detailed provisions of the Building Code as adopted by the City relating to the design, structural members and connections. Signs shall also comply with the applicable provisions of the Electric Code as adopted by the City.
- B. The base or support(s) of all ground-mounted signs shall be securely anchored to a concrete base or footing and shall meet applicable minimum wind load capabilities.
- C. The footing and related supporting structure of a permanent freestanding sign, including bolts, flanges, and brackets, shall be concealed by landscaping using the formula of two landscaping points for every foot of sign's width as measured on the sign face or sign base — whichever is greater.
- D. Signs shall be mounted so that the method of installation is concealed. Signs applied to masonry surfaces should be mechanically fastened to mortar joints only and not directly into brick or stone. Drilling to provide electrical service shall follow the same rule.
- E. No sign shall be suspended by chains or other devices that will allow the sign to swing due to wind action. Signs shall be anchored to minimize any lateral movement that would cause wear on the sign face or supporting members or connections.
- F. All permanent signs and their supporting members shall be constructed of

standardized sign materials,

- G. Sign materials should be compatible with the design of the face of the facade where they are placed and should contribute to the legibility of the sign.
- H. No combustible materials other than approved plastics shall be used in the construction of electrical signs.
- I. All signage within the jurisdiction of this chapter shall remain in a state of proper maintenance. Proper maintenance shall be the absence of loose materials (including peeling paint, paper or other material), absence of electrical and lighting failure (including burned-out light bulbs or lighting fixtures), the lack of excessive rust, the lack of excessive vibration or shaking, absence of fading or faded colors and/or text, and the presence of the original structural integrity of the sign, its frame and other supports, its mounting, and all components thereof.
- J. Every freestanding or on-building sign hereafter erected shall have marked in a conspicuous place thereon the date of erection, the manufacture's name, and the voltage of any electrical apparatus used in connection therewith.
- K. The repainting, changing of parts, and preventive maintenance of signs which completely conform to the requirements of this chapter, and result in absolutely no change in the appearance of the sign from that originally approved, shall not be deemed alterations requiring a sign permit.
- L. The owner, lessee, or manager of a sign, and the owner of the land on which the same is located, shall keep grass or weeds and other growth cut and debris and rubbish cleaned up and removed from the site on which the sign is located.
- M. Any signs which may be, or may hereafter become rotted, unsafe, or in a state which is not properly maintained shall be repaired or removed by the licensee or owner of the sign or owner of the property upon which the sign stands, upon notice of the Zoning Administrator.

#### **§ 550-137. Nonconforming signs.**

- A. Nonconforming signs. Permanent signs existing as of the effective date of this chapter, which do not conform to the provisions of this chapter, such as brightness, scrolling, size, height, and location provisions, shall be nonconforming signs.
- B. Continuation of a nonconforming sign.
  - (1) Nonconforming signs shall be maintained.
  - (2) Nonconforming signs shall not be altered or moved to a new location without being brought into compliance with the requirements of this chapter. See Subsection C(1), below, for what would constitute an alteration of a sign.
  - (3) When the principal structure located on the site undergoes a change in land use per the land use described in Article IV of this chapter, all nonconforming signs shall be brought into conformance with the provisions of this chapter or



shall be removed.

- (4) Whenever there is a change in the sign user (excluding off-premises advertising signs), sign owner, or owner of the property on which the sign is located, the new sign user, sign owner, or new property owner shall forthwith notify the Zoning Administrator of the change. No new sign permit is required unless there is modification of the sign face or sign structure. The sign will continue to be considered nonconforming.

C. Alteration of nonconforming signs.

- (1) For the purpose of this section, alteration of a sign is considered to be any change to the sign's frame, supporting structure, lighting, material, height, location, or any other alterations as determined by the Zoning Administrator.
- (2) Altering a sign does not include maintaining the existing appearance of the sign; changing the appearance of the sign face; replace the sign face or the supporting structure with identical materials, colors, and messages; changing the message of a marquee signs; or changing the face of an off-premises advertising sign.
- (3) A tenant sign which comprises part of a group development sign may be replaced to accommodate a new tenant sign without triggering the need to bring the entire project identification sign, or any of its parts, into compliance with the provisions of this chapter.

**§ 550-138. Removal of sign and sign structures where principal land use is no longer occurring.**

- A. A building, portion of a building, or site shall be determined to be vacated based on the following criteria: vacancy, cessation of some or all utilities, or lapse or termination of occupational license or conditional use permit. Vacation of a building, structure or site shall have the following effect:
- (1) At 90 days, nonconforming signs shall lose their legal nonconforming status.
  - (2) At 90 days, the owner of the property shall take action regarding any permanent or temporary signs and/or sign structures associated with the vacant building, portion of a building, or site located on the property. At the property owner's option, the property owner shall do one of the following: removed all such signs and structures or replace the face of such signs with a blank sign face made of rigid materials. The blank sign face shall not be the previous sign face inverted. If the property owner is granted an extension under Subsection A(3) below, the requirement shall not apply during the extension period.
  - (3) An extension allowing signs and/or sign structures associated with vacant buildings, portions of buildings, or sites to remain on the property for an additional six-month time period after the original 90 days have lapsed may be granted under the following conditions:

- (a) The property owner shall submit an application with the appropriate fee and allow the Zoning Administrator to inspect the signs and/or sign structures on the vacated building, portion of a building, or site.
  - (b) The Zoning Administrator shall review the application and sign to determine that the sign will not be a hazard, safety concern, or blight for the duration of the extended time period.
  - (c) Signs shall be properly blanked out with a rigid material and contain no message. In no instance can a previous sign face be inverted.
  - (d) If the sign has been damaged during the vacated period to the point it becomes a safety hazard or blight on the property, the Zoning Administrator may have the structure removed pursuant to the terms of this chapter.
  - (e) After the original six-month extension, one additional six-month extension may be approved by the Zoning Administrator for up to one year upon submittal of a new application and fee. Any additional applications for an extension, beyond the first year, shall be approved by the Plan Commission.
  - (f) Owners of nonconforming signs may also apply for an extension; however, the sign shall not thereafter be reestablished except in full compliance with this chapter.
- B. Sign structures that have been left without a sign face, or where a permit holder no longer has any interest in the site as owner or tenant, any of which for a continuous period of 90 days, shall be deemed abandoned and shall be removed by the owner of the sign structure or the City shall proceed to remove such sign structure pursuant to the terms of this chapter if the owner has not been granted an extension.
- C. If the sign and/or sign structure(s) have not been removed, the City shall send written notification to the property owner of record and/or last known occupant, via certified mail, return receipt requested, indicating that said property owner or occupant remove the sign and or sign structure or apply for and be granted an extension. If the sign and/or sign structure have not been removed within 30 days after the City sends notice, and an extension has not been granted, the City may have the sign and/or sign structure removed pursuant to the terms of the chapter.
- D. Any and all cost incurred by the City in removal of a sign and/or sign structure pursuant to the provisions of this section, which authorized assessment of the cost, shall constitute a lien against the property upon which the sign or sign structure existed and shall be collected in the same manner as provided elsewhere in the regulations of the City of Watertown.