

**CITY OF OPELIKA
SIGN ORDINANCE
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
(FAQS)**

Sign regulations for the City of Opelika are contained in Section IX of the Opelika Zoning Ordinance. A copy of this ordinance is available online at www.opelika.org under “Spotlight” section on the home page. The information provided here is intended to provide a brief overview of what you should know before you install or display a sign. There are various provisions and exceptions that are not included in this document, and sign decisions should not be based on this document alone. No permanent sign should be ordered until the Opelika Planning Department confirms that the sign will comply with all City regulations. The Opelika Planning Department is located at 700 Fox Trail, Opelika, Alabama; the phone number: 334-705-5156; email address is gkelley@opelika-al.gov.

What is considered a “sign”?

Generally, a “sign” is defined as any device, fixture, placard or structure, including its component parts, which draws attention to an object, product, place, activity, opinion, person, institution, organization or place of business, or which identifies or promotes the interest of any person in which is to be viewed from any public street, road, highway, right-of-way or parking area (collectively referred to as a “public area”). Refer to the Zoning Ordinance for the full definition of what constitutes a sign in Opelika.

What are prohibited signs?

Prohibited signs are signs and sign types listed in Section 9.4 of the Zoning Ordinance. These sign types are prohibited within the City limits. Examples of prohibited signs are:

- Billboards
- Off-site commercial signs
- Discontinued signs
- Abandoned signs
- Animated signs
- Flashing signs
- Moving signs
- Blinking signs
- Scrolling signs
- Twirling signs
- Swinging signs
- Multi-prism signs
- Tri-vision signs
- Revolving signs
- Rotating signs
- Flutter signs

- Feather signs
- Wind-activated signs, such as pennants, streamers and balloons including wind-activated banners, cold air inflatables and other fixed aerial advertising signs or signage, when used for commercial advertising
- Holographic display signs
- Bandit signs
- Snipe signs
- Signs nailed, fastened, affixed or painted on any tree or part thereof (living or dead) or other vegetation
- Signs that emit sound, vapor, smoke, odor or gaseous matter
- Roof signs
- Wrap signs
- Signs in, on or over the public right-of-way, other than government signs
- Signs located on real property without the permission of the property owner

All existing non-conforming temporary signs of the sign types listed above must be removed. Existing non-conforming permanent signs of the types listed above may be grandfathered and are subject to the provisions of Section 9.10 of the Zoning Ordinance.

What is a permanent sign?

A permanent sign is any sign that is intended to be and is so constructed as to be of lasting and enduring condition, remaining unchanged in character, condition (beyond normal wear and tear) and position and in a permanent manner affixed to the ground, wall or building. Examples of permanent signs are freestanding signs, wall signs, projecting signs, drive-thru lane signs, awning signs, canopy signs, window signs and changeable copy signs.

How do I know if I need a sign permit?

Nearly all permanent signs in the City of Opelika need a permit, including new signs as well as any modifications to or replacements of existing signs. Businesses can verify whether a sign permit is needed by calling or visiting the Planning Department.

Why do I need to know the zoning district that I am located in to get a sign permit?

Sign regulations differ based on the zoning district that the permanent sign is located in. For example, sign regulations for industrial districts can be very different from sign regulations for commercial districts. In addition, special overlay districts, such as the gateway corridor overlay district, can have specific sign regulations for that district.

Once I know the zoning district, how do I learn what kind of sign is allowed?

Businesses should refer to the Opelika Zoning Ordinance to learn what kind of signs are allowed, including, among other things, where the sign can be located, what the maximum size of the sign can be, how many signs can be on-site and the type of lighting that can be used.

Businesses are encouraged to work with a reputable, professional sign company familiar with Opelika's Sign Ordinance to help ensure compliance.

I want to change the face of my existing sign, do I need a permit?

Generally, you will not need a permit to simply change the face of an existing sign. A permit is required, however, for things such as structural or size changes, or if your existing sign will be taken down or otherwise removed and replaced. Refer to the Zoning Ordinance for more details. Contact the Planning Department to learn if you need a permit for the type of work you propose to do.

What is a changeable copy sign?

A changeable copy sign is a sign with the capability of content change. The message copy can be changed either manually or by electronic means to display different messages. Electronic changeable copy signs are sometimes referred to as digital signs, LED signs or electronic message signs.

Can I install an electronic changeable copy sign in front of my business?

On-premise electronic freestanding and wall signs are allowed as long as they comply with Section 9.5(24) of the Zoning Ordinance. The changeable copy components of the sign must not make up more than fifty percent (50%) of the allowable sign area. The display time for each message on the sign must be at least ten (10) seconds, and the change sequence must be accomplished within an interval of two (2) seconds or less. All electronic (LED) signs must comply with the brightness level requirements of Section 9.12(2) of the Zoning Ordinance.

Does maintenance of my existing sign require a permit?

Generally, routine maintenance of signs, including necessary non-structural repairs, does not require a permit. To ensure compliance, all repairs or changes to signage should be reviewed and approved by the Opelika Planning Department.

What if I want to display a sign in my business window?

Generally, window signs are permitted provided that the window sign does not cover more than thirty percent (30%) of the area of any window. A permit is not required for this type of sign.

I want to place a portable or A-frame type sign in front of my business. Is this allowed?

One temporary A-frame and/or T-frame sign is allowed per business. The sign may not exceed three feet (3') in width and three and one-half feet (3 1/2') in height. The sign may be displayed only during business hours. A permit is not required for this type of temporary sign.

How big can my sign be?

The maximum size allowed is determined by a number of factors, such as, among other things, the zoning district the sign is located in, and the total square footage of the building or development to which the sign is attached or applied. Refer to the Zoning Ordinance for details and consider working with a professional sign company familiar with the ordinance to help ensure compliance.

Where on my property can I put a sign?

Generally, signs must be located out of the right-of-way and sight-visibility triangles. Additional details can apply depending upon other factors such as the zoning district. Refer to the Zoning Ordinance and contact the Planning Department for specific questions.

What is a sight-visibility triangle?

The area needed to be clear of sight obstruction for safe vehicular turning movements is called the “sight-visibility triangle”. Sight-visibility requirements affect the location of all signs. Signs may not obstruct vehicular or pedestrian visibility.

May I keep a sign that is larger than the maximum sign height or sign area for a zoning district?

An existing permanent sign that is larger than what the ordinance allows may be “grandfathered”. Such signs may be allowed to remain provided that any work on the sign is considered routine maintenance. Grandfathered, nonconforming permanent signs must be removed and replaced with conforming signs when certain events occur, such as when substantial alterations are made to the sign or the size of the sign is enlarged. All temporary signs must meet the size and height requirements of the Zoning Ordinance. Temporary signs are not entitled to “grandfathered” status.

Can I install a sign that is not allowed by the Zoning Ordinance?

No. Signs that violate the Zoning Ordinance are not allowed and are subject to citations and penalties.

Can I install a sign in the street right-of-way?

No. Signs are prohibited from being placed in the public right-of-way throughout the City of Opelika. No signs may be placed outside the boundaries of a business or individual’s property line.

Can I attach a sign to a utility pole?

No. Signs attached to utility poles, traffic signal poles, street lights, etc., are expressly forbidden and are subject to citations and penalties.

What signs may be erected as temporary signs?

Examples of temporary signs are contractor signs, lender signs, election signs, political signs, real estate signs (for sale, for lease and open house signs), grand opening signs, vendor signs, developer signs, coming soon signs and yard/garage/estate sale signs.

What are the requirements for displaying temporary signs?

In most instances, sign permits are not required for the installation and display of temporary signs. Temporary signs must meet size, height, time and spacing requirements. In residential areas, eight temporary signs are allowed per parcel. The maximum size for a temporary sign in a residential district is eight square feet and the maximum height is six feet. In commercial and industrial areas, four temporary signs are allowed per parcel. The maximum size for a temporary sign in a commercial or industrial district is 32 square feet and the maximum height is six feet. See Table 9.7.1b of the Zoning Ordinance for the requirements, criteria and limitations for temporary signs.

How many flags are allowed to be displayed in front of a business?

Flags are allowed as long as they comply with Section 9.5(15) of the Zoning Ordinance. Upon each parcel and development site that is over one-half (1/2) area in size and is in a commercial or industrial district, up to three flag poles may be installed and up to two (2) flags may be displayed per flag pole. Up to six (6) flags per parcel or development site may be displayed. However, they must be displayed on flag poles. A flag in a non-residential zoning district on a pole must not exceed one hundred and fifty (150) square feet in size. Flags in non-residential use may be externally illuminated.

Are any signs exempt from the sign regulations?

Yes. The sign ordinance is not applicable to:

- A sign, other than a window sign, located entirely inside the premises of a building or enclosed space.
- A sign on a car other than a Prohibited Vehicle Sign or signs.
- A statutory sign.
- A government sign.
- A traffic-control device sign.
- Any sign not visible from a public street, sidewalk, right-of-way or from a navigable waterway or body of water, except that the foregoing does not exempt a sign for a commercial use that is visible from an abutting residential use.

What are common examples of sign code violations?

- Signs installed without permits or inspections.

- Signs illegally placed on utility poles, utility equipment, fences, trees and public signs/posts.
- Signs placed on public rights-of-way.
- Off-premises and advertising snipe signs on public rights-of-ways, vacant lots and medians

How do I apply for a sign permit?

Sign permit applications, together with renderings or drawings of the sign and other required information, should be submitted to the Planning Department located at 700 Fox Trail between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Monday-Friday

Are building permits required for most business signs?

Yes. Where there is an electrical or structural component to a sign, a **Building Permit Application** will also be required. The requirement of a building permit is separate and independent of the requirement for a sign permit. Permit fees for a building permit must be paid in accordance with the applicable City building fee schedule. Typically, the fee for obtaining a building permit is determined by the value or cost of the sign. For additional information or questions relating to a building permit, contact the Building Inspection Division at 334-705-5420 or visit the office located at 700 Fox Trail, between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., Monday-Friday.

I have received a notice of violation. What should I do?

You must correct the violation within the amount of time established in the notice. Failure to do so will result in additional action. If you have more questions concerning the enforcement action, you may visit the Code Compliance Office at City Hall between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday or contact the Jerry Bush, Code Compliance Officer, at 334-705-5158 or Martha E. Wright, Code Compliance Officer, at 334-705-5165.

Where can I get a copy of Opelika's sign regulations?

Opelika's sign regulations can be found online at www.opelika.org under "Spotlight" section on the home page.