

5.15 Signs

5.15.1 Purpose:

The City of Torrington understands the needs of its citizens to communicate and convey messages regarding their businesses, beliefs or events. These regulations attempt to manage those needs and balance them with the City's overall need to maintain its character, ensure the safety of its citizens and create visual harmony within the community.

The purpose of a sign is to provide information about various services and goods, as well as communicate messages that are fundamental to the welfare of the public (e.g. traffic signs). Because of possible harmful impacts, signs must be regulated to:

1. Prevent hazards to automobile and pedestrian traffic by regulating size, height, location and number of signs.
2. Ensure clarity and legible content.
3. Complement the overall character of the City of Torrington.
4. Support both businesses and community by making services and goods easily accessible.

5.15.2 Definitions:

Banner – Any sign of lightweight fabric or similar flexible material that is securely mounted to a building or structure. Banners must be securely mounted and cannot be mounted by rope, string or other method of tie that would allow the banner to flap or come loose. A banner shall count in the calculation of maximum sign total for a property whether used for temporary purposes or not.

Billboard - A very large board erected by the roadside or attached to a building, used for displaying advertisements. It can be permanent or mobile. No new billboards are permitted.

Canopy Sign – A sign that is part of or attached to an awning, canopy or other fabric, plastic or structural protective cover. A marquee or a gas station canopy is not considered a canopy sign.

Construction Sign – A sign erected on the lot during the time of active construction on that lot. A construction sign may indicate only the name of the project, a projected completion date, the names, affiliations and addresses of those involved in the construction and information related to the sale, leasing, funding or hiring for the project.

Farm Directional Sign – An off premise sign to direct drivers to a farm. Farm directional signage is permitted as long as all of the following conditions are met:

1. The directional sign furthest from the farm shall be no more than 4.5 miles from the farm.
2. A directional sign shall be located only at each street intersection at which a driver is to turn to reach the farm.
3. Each directional sign shall be no more than four square feet in area.
4. A directional sign shall not be considered in computing the maximum allowable signage on a property.
5. A directional sign shall not be illuminated.

6. State of CT agricultural signage is not considered farm directional signage under these regulations and is governed solely by the State Department of Agriculture.

Flag - Any lightweight plastic, fabric or similar material suspended from a pole or rod and are designed to move with the wind. A flag may or may not contain a message. Flags of Federal, State or municipal governments and flags or other nations or non-profit organizations and 'Open' flags are exempt from these regulations.

Free Standing Sign – Any sign that is not attached to a building and is meant to be permanent. Ground signs, pylon signs, monument signs would be considered free standing signs. Free-standing signs must meet the following criteria:

1. There shall be a maximum of one free-standing sign per street where the lot fronts. The exception shall be a lot with building(s) exceeding 20,000 square feet in gross floor area with more than one tenant – a second free-standing sign may be allowed by Special Exception.
2. Only one side of the free-standing sign shall be included in the computation of total sign area. The supporting framework or structure shall not be included in the sign area but shall be including in calculating the height of the sign.
3. Free-standing signs shall not interfere with any sight lines on streets or driveways.
4. Free-standing signs shall be at least 10 feet away from a side or rear property line.
5. In Downtown District, Local Business and CIR zones the following requirements shall apply:
 - a. The maximum height shall be 17 feet.
 - b. The maximum sign area shall be 125 square feet.
6. In Industrial and Industrial Park zones the following requirements shall apply:
 - a. The maximum height shall be 8 feet.
 - b. The maximum sign area shall be 35 square feet.
7. In all residential zoning districts the following requirements shall apply:
 - a. The maximum height shall be 5 feet.
 - b. The maximum sign area shall be 20 square feet.
 - c. For home occupations – see definition of 'home occupation sign' for requirements.

Home Occupation Sign – A sign directly related to a legal home occupation according to **Section 5.10**. A free standing sign is the only permitted type of home occupation sign and shall not exceed 10.5 square feet in size, no taller than 5' height at its highest point including support or frame, and shall maintain 10 feet distance to any neighboring property boundary.

Incidental Sign – An informational sign that is meant for the convenience and safety of those using the property. This includes such signs as 'no parking', 'loading zone', 'entrance', 'exit', 'ATM', and 'one way'. An incidental sign cannot include business names, lighting or branding images.

Lamp Post Banner – Any lightweight fabric or similar material mounted to a light post designed to provide color and aesthetics to a property. No messages, slogans symbols or other information pertaining to a business would be allowed. Seasonal images, colors, or patterns are permitted. The only exception to the lamp post banner would be for City/community sponsored banners within a public right of way

or on public property and may include off-premise advertising.

Marquee – Any permanent roof-like structure projecting beyond a building or extending along and projecting beyond the wall of a building. It is designed and constructed to provide protection from precipitation. A gas station canopy is an example of a marquee when a sign is added to it.

Off-Premise Sign – A sign which directs attention to a business, commodity, service or activity conducted, sold offered or held at a location other than the lot on which the sign is located. A ‘billboard’ is an example of an off-premise sign.

Pennant – Any lightweight plastic, fabric or similar material suspended from a rope, wire, string or similar support, designed to move with the wind. A pennant may or may not contain a message of any kind.

Portable Sign – Any sign not permanently attached to the ground, building or other permanent structure. Portable signs must meet the following criteria:

1. Portable signs are only permitted in the Local Business and Downtown District Zones and are limited to one per business or business location. A portable sign can be temporary or allowed daily based on the site: If a free-standing sign location is available the portable sign will be temporary – if no free-standing sign location is available the portable sign can be used daily year-round.
2. Portable signs shall not exceed 10.5 square feet in size or 3 feet in height.
3. A Zoning Permit is required for a portable sign location approval. In an area with a sidewalk and no front yard (allowed year round) the area to be approved will be within the first two feet of the sidewalk next to the street. In areas where there is a front yard (temporary sign) the approved area will include the installation of a 2 x 2 pre-cast concrete patio block within the front yard setback of the property where the sign will be permitted to be displayed. For properties with multiple tenants the 2 x 2 pre-cast concrete patio blocks will be adjusted in field to assure clear sightlines are maintained and no sign blocks another excessively.
4. No portable signs will be allowed in any public right of way with the exception of those within a public sidewalk where no front yard/free-standing sign is available.
5. A portable sign area shall count in the calculation of maximum sign total for a property. Only one side of the sign shall be used in the calculation.
6. Plastic yard signs, rolling signs or similar signs are not permitted as portable signs. ‘A’ frame or sandwich board signs are the only approved type of portable sign.

Projecting Sign – Any sign attached to a building that projects more than 10 inches in a horizontal direction from the building.

1. The bottom edge of the sign shall be at least 8 feet above ground level when located in an area where the public walks.
2. No projecting sign shall extend more than 6 feet from the wall to which it is attached or extend beyond a vertical plane that is 2 feet inside the curb line whichever is less.
3. No part of the sign shall be above the height of the building.
4. Only one side of the projecting sign shall be included in the computation of maximum total sign area.

Rear Entrance Sign – Signs designating a public entrance not on a major thoroughfare, often on the back side of a building connecting with additional parking.

Residential Development Sign – A sign identifying the entrance to a residential subdivision or multi-family development.

Residential Sign – A sign located on a property used for one, two or three family residences. Examples of residential signs include: property naming, owner's names or political or personal messages.

Roof Sign – Any sign attached, in part or entirely, to the roof of a building. No part of a roof sign may project above the highest part of the roof to which it is attached.

Sign – Any device, fixture, placard or structure that uses any color, form, illumination, symbol or writing to convey information of any kind to the public.

Temporary Sign – A portable sign not permanently affixed to the ground, meant to be used for a defined period of time. Temporary signs are permitted for one 30-day period, five times a calendar year. A single zoning permit will be required for the temporary sign, renewed annually, that will outline the (5) 30-day periods the business intends to use. Banners are not temporary signs.

Wall Sign – Any sign attached parallel to a wall of a building or structure. The sign is supported by the building or structure and at its closest point, is within 10 inches of the supporting wall.

Window Sign – Any non-illuminated sign painted or attached to the inside of a window. The sign is visible from the exterior of the building. Window signs are not included in the calculation of the maximum total sign area. If a window sign is illuminated it shall be treated as a wall sign and will be included in the calculation of the maximum total sign area. No more than 50% of the window area can be covered with window signage. It is recommended by the Torrington Police Department that the window area near the register remain unblocked for safety concerns.

5.15.3 Computing the Area and Height of Signs

- A. The area of a sign shall be computed by including the entire area within the smallest rectangle or square that will encompass the extreme limits of form, illumination, symbol, writing or other display. Any material or color forming an integral part of the background of the display or used to differentiate the sign from the backdrop or building against which it is placed shall be included in the area.
- B. The height of a sign shall be measured from the average finished grade 5 feet out from the sign support, pylon, structure or wall on which the sign is attached to the highest part of the sign or supporting structure including finials, decorative cornices and other decorations, numbers or lights associated with the sign. The grade cannot be altered by filling berming, excavating or other means for the purpose of altering the height of the sign.

5.15.4 Maximum Total Sign Area

- A. Except as specified below the maximum total sign area of all signs on a building or structure shall not exceed two (2) square foot of sign per one (1) lineal foot of building frontage with the exception of E. & F.
- B. In structures where there are two or more uses, the linear area of building frontage shall be measured along the part of the building actually occupied by the tenant.
- C. In structures with more than one floor and different tenants on higher floors, the maximum allowable total sign areas for upper floors shall be .5 square foot of sign per one (1) linear foot of building frontage and shall not be less than thirty (30) square feet total. The upper level signs must be attached to the structure within the area occupied by the specific tenant.
- D. For structures with a marquee the total signage allowed shall be .5 square foot of sign per one (1) linear foot of marquee frontage.
- E. For corner properties maximum total sign area can be calculated for each building side facing a street and must *remain exclusive to each side* and shall not exceed two (2) square foot of sign per one (1) lineal foot of building frontage.
- F. For properties creating a public entrance to their building from an area behind their main entrance, the rear entrance signage shall not exceed two (2) square foot of sign per one (1) lineal foot of building frontage.
- G. Signs required by the State or Federal Government shall not be included in the calculations for total sign area provided the number and size of such signs are kept to the minimum required.
- H. Menu boards signs used for drive-in windows shall not be included in the calculations of total sign area provided that the messages on such menu boards are not legible from a public right of way.

5.15.5 Signs Permitted by Type and Zoning District

- A. Signs requiring a zoning permit and are over 32 square feet in size shall also be required to obtain Site Plan approval from the City Planner or the Planning & Zoning Commission. The Zoning Enforcement Officer may require a sign of less than 32 square feet to obtain Site Plan approval if in the opinion of the officer; the sign could have a significant impact of the appearance of the property or the surrounding area *(revised 4-14)*.
- B. Although a sign may be permitted it must conform to all other requirements set forth in the regulations.

Table 1 – Signs by Type in All Zoning Districts

Sign Type	DD	LB	I	IP	CIR	Residential
Banner	S	S	S	S	S	N
Billboard	N	N	N	N	N	N
Canopy	S	S	S	S	S	N
Construction	S	S	S	S	S	S
Farm Directional	P	P	P	P	P	P
Flag	P	P	P	P	P	P
Free-standing	S	S	S	S	S	S
Home Occupation	S	S	S	N	N	S
Incidental	P	P	P	P	P	N
Lamp Post Banner	P	P	N	N	N	N
Marquee	S	S	N	N	S	N
Off-Premise	N	N	N	N	N	N
Pennant	N	N	N	N	N	N
Portable Sign	S	S	N	N	S	N
Projecting Sign	S	S	N	N	N	N
Rear Entrance Sign	S	S	S	N	S	N
Residential	P	P	P	N	N	P
Residential Development Sign	N	N	N	N	N	S
Roof Sign	S	S	S	S	S	N
Temporary Sign	S	S	S	N	N	S
Wall Sign	S	S	S	S	S	N
Window Sign	P	P	P	P	P	N

S = allowed with Zoning Permit

P = allowed by right, no zoning permit required

E = allowed by Special Exception approval

N = not allowed

5.15.6 Sign Illumination

- A. Signs may be illuminated either internally or externally. If the sign is illuminated by an external source, the light shall shine directly onto the sign. No light trespass will be allowed. The light shall be shielded to block the light source from view from a public right of way.
- B. No sign may contain or be illuminated by flashing or intermittent lights or lights of changing degrees of intensity except for signs that indicate time, date and temperature or gasoline sales prices. LED or electronic changeable signs are not permitted.

5.15.7 General Prohibitions

- A. Signs that revolve, move or appear to move are prohibited.
- B. No sign may be located so that it interferes with the view necessary for the safe movement of pedestrians and/or motor vehicles.
- C. Beacons, pennants, streamers, propellers, inflatable signs or marketing items, balloons, or other marketing devices not listed that are meant to catch someone's attention are not permitted.
- D. No sign shall be directly painted on the exterior surface of any wall. A sign differs from a mural or artwork based on the images content and any direct and obvious relationship with the use(s) within the building or structure on which the mural is painted.
- E. Signs that extend out over a road or highway are prohibited.
- F. Gas pump and gas pump island signs are strictly prohibited. The only permissible signs for gas pump areas are those necessary for sale of gasoline.

5.15.8 Exceptions

- A. Writing or images on mailboxes or paper tubes.
- B. Light displays associated with the observance of specific holidays. Such displays shall not contain images not directly related to the holiday. Such displays shall be removed/turned off within 30 days following the holiday.
- C. Real Estate signs. Signs identifying a property is for sale, lease or rent along with the owner or agent information are not regulated as long as the sign is less than 32 square feet in size, the sign is located on the lot in which it is advertising and the sign is removed immediately after the sale, lease or rental is completed.
- D. Signs which are not visible from the public right of way. Example: signs within a 'campus' style community.
- E. Off-premise signs placed on facilities owned and operated by the City of Torrington provided the individual sign is no more than 32 square feet in size, unilluminated and no more than 10 feet above grade. An example would be ballpark sponsor signs.
- F. Political and non-profit public event signs.
- G. Grand Openings are permitted to use beacons, pennants, streamers, propellers, inflatable signs or marketing items, balloons, or other marketing devices not listed that are meant to catch someone's attention for no more than 30-days from the opening day.

5.15.9 Nonconforming Signs

- A. Legally nonconforming signs existing on the effective date of this regulation may be continued and maintained. A nonconforming sign may not be enlarged or illuminated – if not previously illuminated – or altered to create any additional nonconformity.
- B. The message of a nonconforming sign may be altered provided no new nonconformity is created.
- C. Any nonconforming sign which advertises, identifies or pertains to any activity no longer in existence shall be removed by the property owner within 60 days from the time the activity ceases. This provision shall not apply to seasonal activities during the regular periods in which they are closed.

5.15.10 Maintenance of Signs

- A. All signs shall be maintained in good structural condition and in good repair.
- B. Except for during routine maintenance, sign facing shall not be removed so as to expose the inside of an internally illuminated sign.
- C. When a sign is no longer in use, it shall be removed within 60 days of the abandonment.

5.15.11 Permits

- A. Signs identified with an 'S' or an 'E' require a zoning sign permit to be issued prior to the signs erection, installation, creation or modification to ensure any changes meet the intent of these regulations.
- B. The zoning sign permit application shall be accompanied by detailed drawings of the sign's size, shape, construction, location, dimensions and any other piece of information deemed necessary for the Zoning Enforcement Officer to clearly determine compliance with the regulations.