

TCRPC

Planning Toolkit Fact Sheet



INTRODUCTION

Signs have played a role in businesses and communities success for many years and their success continues to depend on them today. The main function of signs is to identify the tenants of a property or provide information about goods or services pertaining to the business or facility located on a specific lot. They will vary in function, size, location and structural type. Well developed and located signs can play a very positive role for the community. There are many different types of signs, but they can be generally categorized between:

- **On Premise Signs:** these are signs that are supported by structures or supports that are placed or anchored in the ground, they are detached from any building or structure which attempt to deliver a message relating to an activity or business on the same property where the sign is located.
- **Off premise signs:** these are signs with a message that directs attention to a specific business, product, service, event, activity, or contains a message about something that is not sold, produced, manufactured on the premise of the signs location. These types of signs are also commonly referred to as billboards or outdoor advertising signs.

Signs can play a very negative role in communities if there are no rules or regulations in effect. Sign regulations are needed to reduce hazards, confusion, unsightliness, and putting the community character at risk. The highway beautification act of 1965 was implemented to preserve and improve the appearance of the nation's major highways by controlling the size, number and placement of billboards. The Act also requires state compliance to create standards and remove non-conforming and illegal signs. The Beautification Act controls the types of signs that can be placed within or along 660 feet of the right of way of any federal highway.

In Pennsylvania a majority of the regulations for signage come from municipal zoning ordinances and local government. Regulating the time, place, and manner of signs can help to ensure that signs do not obstruct necessary view of traffic, and doesn't interfere with a driver's ability to view necessary information from official traffic and road signs. The most common method of regulating signage within a community is through the zoning ordinance where a community is able to regulate any sign visible to the public using reasonable standards. Included in the zoning ordinance should be size of signs, location of signs, and types of signs permitted within an area. When thinking of implementing sign regulations it is important to consider everything surrounding the area. Municipalities can also adjust signage regulations for each individual zoning district to ensure that standards reflect the current community character in the specific district. Sign regulations can also be implemented through a combination of the municipal zoning code and building code.

BENEFITS

- Signs promote small businesses within a community
- Sign regulations help to keep the character of a community
- Size and location regulations result in less distraction for drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians

DRAWBACKS

- Can cause distractions from drivers passing by
- A lack of sign management regulations can affect the aesthetics of the neighborhood and can impact things such as property values and community character.



PRACTICAL TIPS

- Follow up and enforcement from local officials is necessary which requires local officials to stay up to date with local zoning ordinances and regulations
- Be sure the regulations remain content neutral in order to give equal opportunity to commercial and non-commercial signs.

RESOURCES

- **Susquehanna Township zoning ordinance (Signs)**
- **Upper Paxton Township zoning ordinance: Part 16**
- **Chester County Planning Toolbox: Digital and Electronic Sign Regulation**
- **Model Sign Ordinance- Montgomery County Planning Commission**

RELATED TOOLKIT FACT SHEETS

- **Traffic Calming**

