

Overview:

What is a permit?

A permit for a sign is a legal document showing authorization by a regulatory body, indicating that a review and approval was performed for the sign's use, construction, installation, or other consideration or application. A permit also can outline specific guidelines and conditions that must be met by the sign owner in order to comply with local ordinances. Application reviews, permits and guidelines can vary greatly by municipality and state, and will often reflect the particular needs and resources of the different areas.

Permits are required for installation of most commercial business signs (building wraps, billboards, banners, permanent, temporary, political signs, awnings, pole signs, etc.). Depending on the specific municipality or state, this can also include signs painted directly on outside walls, as well as fabricated signs hung on an outside wall or projecting from a building. In almost all cases, any structural component of an installation or attachment of a sign would require some form of a permit (building, electrical, excavation, general, etc.).

Along with receiving a permit comes the responsibility for the sign owner to understand and adhere to the guidelines and/or conditions attached to the particular permit issued. It is important to also note that different city and state regulatory authorities may phrase these approvals and permissions in terms other than "sign permits," which may fall under the umbrella of building permits, installation permits, registrations, general applications or license.

One easily forgotten sign mistake is when a business changes hands. The new business owner not only inherits the business and building, but also the existing sign and its permit conditions. Because most sign permits are associated with the owner of the sign, the new owner will need to apply for a new permit in their name. If it was an exempt sign but is going to be changed, the replacement may now require a permit.

DEFINITION OF TERMS:

The following definitions are the most common types of terms that will be used when researching what type of permit will be needed for the job.

Issued Sign Permits:

Issued sign permits can be very specific. They can be just for the sign, installation, or general, the entire scope of a project from delivery, construction, installation and use. For instance, a district may require a sign permit and then require a building permit for the construction or installation of that sign, and then require an additional permit for any traffic disruption caused by the delivery of the sign.

Sign Category:

Sign categories include: electrical and or illuminated, billboards, banners, permanent, temporary, pole signs, monument signs etc.

The category in which a sign is labeled will define which permit will be needed for that job.

A sign's category and location can be critical to permit requirements, as well. For instance, if an exempt sign has certain content restrictions (allowing only messages for your business) and then you change the message to promote a different business or activity, it could be in violation. You could face a penalty, and need to re-categorize or permit the sign. A similar situation is when a sign is simply misclassified from the beginning, and is listed as an exempt sign when in fact it is a permit-required sign. In such cases a penalty may be assessed, and the sign may need to be removed until a full permit approval process is complete.

Exemptions:

There are some types of signage that does not require permits. Typically these would be interior signs, or signage not visible from the outside. Temporary signage and signage directly painted into a building or a window. Even if the signage has previously been declared exempt, it is prudent to check on other requirements associated with your sign category for approval.

Grandfathered:

Grandfathered is a term used for signage that was installed under an older ordinance. If the signage is going to be removed, repaired, relocated or replaced, this sign may now be subject to a new ordinance and new requirements. Also, it may also be that a grandfather clause established for a municipality or state is only valid for a period of time before it expires.

VARIANCES

A sign variance is required when a proposed sign does not conform to the requirements of the County Zoning Ordinance pertaining to the size of the sign or its location. At times your business needs may require designing a sign that is not allowed to be built under your local sign code. If that occurs, you will need to apply for a variance from the sign code. A variance is a legal exception from the code. Often your sign manufacturer will be able to help you through this process, though you may also need the services of an attorney.

Some typical reasons why you might need to apply for a variance include:

- Permitted signage would not be able to be easily seen by passing motorists in one or both directions because existing buildings, trees, traffic (particularly large trucks), or other obstructions would block it from view.
- Permitted signage would not be seen by passing motorists in time to safely react and stop at the business.
- Existing signs on nearby parcels would substantially reduce the visibility or advertising impact of a conforming sign on your parcel.
- Construction of a conforming sign would block motorists' view of the road or otherwise endanger the health or safety of passers-by.
- Natural land features would have to be removed or severely altered if a conforming sign was constructed (such as removal of trees, alteration of the natural topography, filling of wetlands, or obstruction of a natural drainage course).
- Variance from certain sign regulations would be offset by increased building setback, increased landscaping, or other such enhancements, so that the overall effect would make the parcel look much better than it would if the sign was built according to code.
- A taller or larger sign than allowed by the code would be more appropriate in scale because of the large size or frontage of the parcel or building.

Be prepared to explain the reasons why you have selected the sign design you would like to build. Consult with your professional sign designer. The more the municipality understands why you have chosen particular colors, graphics, materials, and sizes, the better they will understand your need for a variance.

In the variance application, it is best to demonstrate how the request will not only help your business, but also how it is in the interest of the local community to grant the request. Show how the improvement to your property will contribute to a revitalization of the district itself and how the resulting increases in income and property value will increase local tax revenues. Talk about the safety benefits that will result from the enhanced readability of the proposed sign.

KEY ITEMS TO ADDRESS:

Finding the Permit Requirements: Online, In-person, by phone

Search keys for on-line ...

- Sign permits; sign regulations; zoning codes-signs; (for name of location)

Sign permits; sign terms/definitions; sign standards; prohibited signs; (use your sign description as a start; example: temp sign)

Depending on the sign type and location...

- City/County/State (DOT)

Click below for Naperville's sign code.

<http://www.naperville.il.us/globalassets/media/projects/ted-business-group/sign-code-update-2016/sign-code-update---rev.-2016-09-v07.pdf>