

Sign Regulations from Zoning & Building Codes

From Chicago Zoning Ordinance, Chapter 17-12 SIGNS

Prohibited signs include roof signs like A-frame type structures for support projecting signs (§17-12-0702, terminology roof sign §17-17-02150) nor are any roof mounted signs (but guy chains are allowed); and Flashing and Video Display Signs (§17-12-1004)

Vinyl signs are legal but the only permit for them is for permanent installation

17-12-1005-F Projecting Signs. Projecting signs may project into the public way provided they are set back at least 18 inches from the curb line. Signs that project over the public way by more than 12 inches must have a minimum clearance of 9 feet. (also applies to awnings & canopies; under-lit lighting for awnings/canopies are prohibited per §17-12-1005-A)

17-12-0700 Prohibited signs.

17-12-0711 video display signs; provided that this prohibition does not apply to any video display sign located within a planned development in which the principal use is: (1) a sports stadium; or (2) an exhibition or convention center.

17-17-0248.5 Dynamic image display sign. Any sign, or portion thereof, with characteristics that appear to have movement or that appear to change, caused by any method other than physically removing and replacing the sign or its components, whether the apparent movement or change is in the display, the sign structure itself, or any other component of the sign. This includes a display that incorporates a technology or method allowing the sign face to change the image without having to physically or mechanically replace the sign face or its components. This also includes any rotating, revolving, moving, blinking, or animated display and any display that incorporates rotating panels, LED lights manipulated through digital input, “digital ink” or any other method or technology that allows the sign face to present a series of images or displays.

17-17-02190 Video Display Sign. A video display sign is a type of dynamic image display sign that has text, images or graphics on the face of the sign that: (1) depict motion; (2) change more than once every 10 seconds; or (3) have a twirl time that exceeds 0.25 seconds. For purposes of this section, “motion” and “twirl time” have the meanings ascribed to those terms in section [13-20-510](#).

Sign Area & Height Table

Regulation	B1, B2 Districts	DC, DX Districts	B3, C1, C3, DS Districts	C2, M Districts
Maximum Total Sign Area (square feet)	3 × street frontage or 600 whichever is less	5 × street frontage or 800 whichever is less	4 × street frontage or 1,500 whichever is less	5 × street frontage or 1,800 whichever is less
Max. Freestanding Sign Area	50% of Maximum Total Sign Area Limit (above)			
Maximum Freestanding Sign Height (feet)	24; or 35 if located on a zoning lot with more than 75 feet of street frontage on a single street that has a right-of-way width of more than 80 feet; or 50 if located on a zoning lot with more than 150 feet of frontage on a single street with a right-of-way width or more than 80 feet			
Min. Guaranteed Wall Sign Area for Ground-floor Tenants	32			
Max. Wall Sign Area	33% of building wall area			

ARTICLE XIII. SIGNS, BILLBOARDS, SIGNBOARDS AND RELATED STRUCTURES

Signs. Signs are deemed to be a name, identification, description, display, illustration, or character which is affixed to, or represented directly or indirectly upon a building, structure, or piece of land and which directs attention to an object, product, place, activity, person, institution, organization, or business.

Signs (electrical). Electrical signs are signs that are electrically illuminated.

“Dynamic image display sign” means any sign, or portion thereof, with characteristics that appear to have movement or that appear to change, caused by any method other than physically removing and replacing the sign or its components, whether the apparent movement or change is in the display, the sign structure itself, or any other component of the sign. This includes a display that incorporates a technology or method allowing the sign face to change the image without having to physically or mechanically replace the sign face or its components. This also includes any rotating, revolving, moving, flashing, blinking, or animated display and any display that incorporates rotating panels, LED lights manipulated through digital input, “digital ink” or any other method or technology that allows the sign face to present a series of images or displays. A “dynamic image display sign” shall include, but not be limited to, a changing-image sign, as that term is defined in Section [17-17-0234](#), a video-display sign, as that term is defined in Section [17-17-02190](#), and a flashing sign, as that term is defined in Section [17-17-0256](#).

Flat signs. Flat signs are signs which are placed flat against the building or structure from which they are supported and which run parallel thereto. Signs supported from a canopy are deemed to be flat signs when they are single face.

Ground signs. Ground signs are signs supported by a structure which rests on or in the ground.

Projecting signs. Projecting signs are signs which project obliquely or at right angles from the building or structure from which they are supported.

Roof signs. Roof signs are signs which are erected on and supported by the roof of a building or structure.

Signboards (billboards, paintboards, and posted panelboards). Signboards are signs which fall into this general classification and are commonly known by this or other titles.

“Static sign” means a sign that does not rotate, move, or have any appearance of changing or movement in the sign, sign components or structure. A “static sign” shall not include any sign that has any characteristics of a dynamic image display sign.

Part D. Limitations to Signs

13-20-650 Height and location.

Sign size and location shall be limited as follows:

(a) The overall vertical height of a roof, ground, or projecting sign or signboard shall not exceed 75 feet (22.9 m) above ground, or grade, level.

(b) Signs which project over the public way more than 12 inches (305 mm) shall clear such public way (sidewalk) by nine feet (2.74 m) and 16 feet (4.88 m) in alleys.

(c) Signs flat against the building shall not project more than 12 inches (305 mm). Flat signs complying with this subsection shall be permitted to be erected at entrance door height.

(d) Flat signs shall not project above the parapet of the building unless in accordance with all of the following conditions:

(1) The erection of the sign does not prohibit access to the roof from the exterior of the building without passing over the sign.

(2) The sign shall not extend more than four feet (1.22 m) above the parapet of where there is no parapet more than four feet (1.22 m) above the roof line.

(3) In no case shall more than 50 percent of the sign project above the parapet or above the roof line where there is no parapet.

(4) A sign shall not be permitted to be supported from the parapet.

(5) Special permission is obtained in writing from the building commissioner before the permit application is submitted.

(e) A sign may be erected at the edge of a roof on a building which has no parapet walls provided:

(1) The building is no more than one story in height, and

(2) No sign section is more than four feet (1.22 m) in height and

(3) No sign section has an area of more than 40 feet (12.19 m²).

All such signs, where there is no parapet, shall be erected independently of each other.

(f) Projecting signs shall be supported by a structure anchored wholly within the lot line.

(g) Projecting signs shall not extend into the public way a greater distance than within 18 inches (457 mm) of the curb line.

(h) Projecting signs shall have that portion of the sign nearest the supporting structure not more than two feet (610 mm) from the lot line.

(i) No sign shall be attached to or supported by a chimney or water tank unless special permission has been obtained in writing from the building commissioner before the permit is issued.

13-20-670 Dimensions.

Projecting electrical signs shall have a thickness of drum or box not exceeding 24 inches (610 mm) except by special permission.

(a) Vertical type “V” shaped signs, vertical type “V” shaped projecting signs shall not project more than six feet (1.83 m) from the building and shall not exceed six feet (1.83 m) in width along the face of the building. Said signs shall be enclosed at the top and the bottom and an open space of not more than three inches (76.2 mm) shall be allowed between the building and the sign.

(b) Supported from roof structure. Signs supported by a structure from a roof shall have a minimum distance of three feet (914 mm) from the bottom of the structure or the display, whichever is lower, to the roof. The minimum distance from the face of the display to the exterior wall of the building shall be three feet (914 mm), except as provided for in Section [13-20-650](#).

(c) Supported from the ground. Signs supported by a structure from the ground shall have a minimum distance of nine feet (2.74 m) from the bottom of the structure or display, whichever is lower, to the ground. No exposed live parts (lamps, sockets, neon tubes or sockets, etc.) shall be within nine feet (2.74 m) of the ground.

Exception: Ground signs on private property supplied by branch conductors which are protected by an approved ground-fault circuit-interrupter device may have a distance of less than nine feet (2.74 m) from the bottom of the structure or display if all the electrical components are totally enclosed within the sign assembly. All such signs shall be readily accessible.

Oversized Signs (13-20-680 Council approval.)

A city council order approving a sign shall be required in addition to the normal permit for any sign which exceeds 100 feet² (9.3 m²) in area or any roof or ground sign, structure or signboard over 24 feet (7.32 m) in height, excluding city digital signs identified in a coordinated city digital sign program agreement entered into pursuant to Section [10-28-046](#), or identified in an amendment to such a program agreement approved by the city council.