ARTICLE XIV. - SIGNS[^6]

Footnotes:

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Editor's note— Amd. of June 17, 2003 changed the title of Art. XIV from off-premise signs to signs.

Cross reference— Street signs, § 9-40 et seq.

Sec. 12-281. - Permit required for signs.
(a) Except as otherwise provided in subsection (c) no off-premise sign may be constructed, erected, moved, enlarged, illuminated or substantially altered in the unincorporated areas of the county not subject to municipal zoning except in accordance with the provisions of this section. Mere repainting or changing the message of a sign shall not, in and of itself, be considered a substantial alteration.

(b) Off-premise signs not exempted under the provisions referenced in subsection (c) may be constructed, erected, moved, enlarged, illuminated, or substantially altered only in accordance with a sign permit issued by the administrator.

(1) Sign permit applications and sign permits shall be governed by the same provisions of this chapter which are applicable to zoning permits.

(c) The following signs are exempt from regulation under this section.

(1) Signs not exceeding three (3) square feet in area that are customarily associated with residential use and that are not of a commercial nature, such as signs giving property identification names or numbers or names of occupants, signs on mailboxes or newspaper tubes, and signs posted on private property relating to private parking or warning the public against trespassing or danger from animals.

(2) Signs erected by or on behalf of or pursuant to the authorization of a governmental body, including legal notices, identification, informational, traffic, directional, or regulatory signs.

(3) Official signs of a noncommercial nature and message erected by public utilities.

(4) Flags, pennants, or insignia of any governmental or nonprofit organization when not displayed in connection with a commercial promotion or as an advertising device, provided such signs, etc., shall not exceed sixteen (16) square feet in surface area.
(5) Signs erected in connection with elections or political campaigns. Such signs shall not exceed sixteen (16) square feet in surface area and shall be removed within three (3) days following the election or conclusion of the campaign.

(6) Existing conforming signs listed for taxation with the county tax assessor as of January, 1991.

(7) Signs not exceeding thirty-two (32) square feet shall be exempted if constructed in accordance with the following standards:

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**Standards for Exempted Signs**

**Sec. 12-282. - Sign standards.**

All off-premises signs, not exempted under the provisions of section 12-281(c), shall conform to the following standards:

(1) Signs shall be spaced at least one thousand (1,000) feet apart from each other, whether on the same side or opposite sides of the road, such distance being measured along the centerline of said road perpendicular to each sign. Any sign located within four hundred (400) feet of the right-of-way of said road shall be deemed to be located along said road (regardless of the road upon which the sign fronts).

(2) The total area of a single display shall not exceed three hundred twenty-five (325) square feet, including any border or trim used, or any advertising material which appears on the base or apron of a side of any sign. The total display area may be increased to four hundred (400) square feet along an interstate highway.
(3) Off-premises signs may have displays on two (2) sides if structurally attached to the same base, but not more than one (1) principal message board per side shall be allowed. The combined area of two (2) message boards on one (1) side shall not exceed three hundred twenty-five (325) square feet or four hundred (400) square feet along an interstate highway. Message boards on the same side shall be separated no more than three (3) feet vertically and two (2) feet horizontally. V-shaped signs shall also be considered as one (1) sign only if the display boards are located no farther than fifteen (15) feet from each other.

(4) Maximum permitted height of thirty-five (35) feet as measured perpendicular from the centerline grade of the road. The maximum permitted height may be increased to fifty (50) feet along an interstate highway.

(5) Maximum permitted length of forty (40) feet per message board.

(6) Off-premises signs may either be lighted or luminous provided that no illumination or lighting is flashing, intermittent or moving.

(7) Lighting shall be effectively shielded as to prevent beams or rays of light from being directed at any portion of the traveled ways of the road or any residential dwellings and which are of such intensity or brilliance as to cause glare and to impair the vision of the driver of any motor vehicle, or which otherwise interferes with any drivers operation of a motor vehicle or the effectiveness of an official traffic sign, device, or signal.

(8) The following setback requirements shall be measured from any adjoining rights-of-way or property lines:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential district boundary</td>
<td>= 300’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Four lane limited access highway</td>
<td>= 50’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other public roads</td>
<td>= 30’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal building</td>
<td>= 50’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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(Amd. of 5-20-97; Amd. of 12-17-02)

**Sec. 12-283. - Unlawful cutting of trees or shrubs.**

No person may, for the purpose of increasing or enhancing the visibility of any sign, damage, trim, destroy, or remove any trees, shrubs, or other vegetation located:
(1) Within the right-of-way of any public street or road, unless the work is done pursuant to the express written authorization of the NCDOT or other agency having jurisdiction over the streets.

(2) On property that is not under the ownership or control of the person doing or responsible for such work, unless the work is done pursuant to the express written authorization of the person owning the property where such trees or shrubs are located;

(3) In any area where such trees or shrubs are required to remain under a permit issued under this chapter.

Sec. 12-284. - Nonconforming signs.
(a) No person may engage in any activity that causes an increase in the extent of nonconformity of a nonconforming sign. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, no nonconforming sign may be enlarged or altered in such a manner as to aggravate the nonconforming condition, nor may any illumination be added to any nonconforming sign.

(b) A nonconforming sign may not be moved or replaced except to bring the sign into complete conformity with this chapter.

(c) If a nonconforming sign is destroyed by natural causes, it may not thereafter be repaired, reconstructed, or replaced except in conformity with all of the provisions of this chapter, and the remnants of the former sign structure shall be cleared from the land. For purposes of this section, a nonconforming sign is "destroyed" if damaged to an extent that the cost of repairing the sign to its former stature or replacing it with an equivalent sign equals or exceeds fifty (50) percent of the value (tax value if listed for tax purposes) of the sign so damaged.

(d) The message of a nonconforming sign may be changed so long as this does not create any new nonconformities (for example, by creating an off-premises sign under circumstances where such a sign would not be allowed).

(e) Subject to the other provisions of this section, nonconforming signs may be repaired and renovated so long as the cost of such work does not exceed, within any twelve-month period, fifty (50) percent of the value (tax value if listed for tax purposes) of such sign.

(f) If a nonconforming sign other than a billboard advertises a business, service, commodity, accommodation, attraction, or other enterprise or activity that is no longer operating or being offered or conducted, that sign shall be considered abandoned and shall be removed within thirty (30) days after such abandonment by the sign owner, owner of the property where the sign is located, or other party having control over such sign.
A nonconforming billboard may not be moved or replaced except to replace as a monopole structure, if setback to the maximum extent possible and in complete conformity with other requirements of this section. If a nonconforming billboard remains blank for a continuous period of one hundred eighty (180) days, that billboard shall be deemed abandoned and shall, within thirty (30) days after such abandonment, be altered to comply with this article or be removed by the sign owner, owner of the property where the sign is located, or other person having control over such sign. For purposes of this section, a sign is "blank" if:

1. It advertises a business, service, commodity, accommodation, attraction, or other enterprise or activity that is no longer operating or being offered or conducted;
2. The advertising message it displays becomes illegible in whole or substantial part;
3. The advertising copy paid for by a party other than the sign owner or promoting an interest other than the rental of the sign has been removed.

Sec. 12-285. - On-premise signs.

(a) Business and/or identification signs shall be permitted in RA, NB, GB, LI and HI zoning districts subject to the following regulations:

1. One (1) attached sign per street front, size not to exceed one (1) square foot of area per lineal foot of each building wall facing a public street.
2. One (1) detached sign per development, except on lots having frontage on two (2) or more streets, in which case two (2) detached signs per establishment shall be permitted. Detached signs shall be limited to three (3) square feet per lineal foot of the front building wall facing a public street, or three hundred (300) square feet, whichever is less.
3. Signs may be illuminated or lighted, but non-flashing.

(b) Business and/or identification signs shall be permitted in the Corridor Protection Overlay District (CP) subject to the following regulations:

1. For a multiple tenant development: One (1) ground sign per street front not to exceed one hundred fifty (150) square feet in area. In addition, each establishment shall be permitted one (1) attached sign at the place of occupancy not to exceed one (1) square foot per lineal foot of each building wall facing a public street.
2. Any other establishment: One (1) ground sign per street front not to exceed one hundred (100) square feet in area. In addition, each establishment shall be permitted one (1) attached sign at the place of occupancy not to exceed one (1) square foot per lineal foot of each building wall facing a public street.
(3) All signs shall be a maximum of twelve (12) feet in height, and shall be located no closer than ten (10) feet to the street right-of-way or fifteen (15) feet to the traveled portion of a street where the right-of-way does not exist or cannot be determined.

(4) Signs may be illuminated or lighted, but not flashing.

(Amd. of 6-17-03)