



**The City of Palo Alto requires an Architectural Review of all\* exterior sign installations. This applies to all new signage and replacement signage. Architectural Review is not required for sign maintenance.**

**As of 2023, most individual tenant signs are reviewed and approved during their intake appointment (aka over-the-counter), see submittal checklist links below for required information and how to make an appointment. For questions, contact the Planner-on-Duty at [planner@cityofpaloalto.org](mailto:planner@cityofpaloalto.org).**

- **Sign submittal checklist - [bit.ly/PAsignchecklist](https://bit.ly/PAsignchecklist)**
- **Master Sign Program submittal checklist - [bit.ly/PAmastersignchecklist](https://bit.ly/PAmastersignchecklist)**

**\*See Section 16.20.160(b) for exemptions to the design review process.**

## Chapter 16.20 SIGNS\*

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\* For state law authorizing cities to regulate outdoor advertising, signs and billboards - See Gov. C.A., §§ 38774 and 65850. Prior ordinance history: Prior code §§ 34.401 - 34.422, and Ordinance Nos. 2104, 2124, 2144, 2391, 2392, 2428, 2489, 2558, 2582, 2704, 2749, 2778, 2800, 2818, 2848, 2863, 2960, 2996, 3063, 3169, 3184, 3217, 3334, 3386, 3389, 3394 and 3445.

### **16.20.010 Definitions.**

(a) The following words and phrases whenever used in this chapter shall be construed as defined in this section:

(1) "Awning" means a shelter supported entirely from the exterior wall of a building and composed of a collapsible frame covered completely with nonrigid material.

(2) "Building face" means the general outer surface of a main exterior wall of a building. For example, a building whose plan is rectangular has four main exterior walls and four building faces.

(3) "Design guidelines" mean documents adopted by the architectural review board to afford guidance to the public and to city staff containing general design parameters for areas of the city having unified design or historical character.

(4) "Erect" means and includes erect, construct, place, relocate, enlarge, substantially alter, attach, suspend, paint, post, maintain and display.

(5) "Flashing sign" means any sign or advertising structure which has any flashing device, intermittent illumination, revolving or rotating light device in which the brilliance thereof is caused to vary by mechanical or other means.

(6) "Freestanding sign" means any sign standing on the ground. Such signs are usually, but not necessarily, supported from the ground by one or more poles or posts or similar uprights, with or without braces.

(7) "Frontage" means a frontage on a public street.

(8) "Marquee" means any permanent roofed structure attached to and supported by a building and projecting over public property.

(9) "Moving sign" means any sign or advertising structure which has any visible moving parts, visible revolving or rotating parts or visible mechanical movement of any description, excepting clocks and barber poles.

(10) "Mural" means a work of art applied to a building wall for decorative purposes only. Use of murals for advertising is not permitted.

(11) "Pitched roof" means a roof with a slope of a four-inch rise in a twelve-inch run, or greater.

(12) "Projecting sign" means any sign, other than a wall sign, which is suspended from or supported by a building or wall and which projects outward therefrom. Any sign suspended under a marquee, porch, walkway covering or similar covering structure and in a place approximately perpendicular to the wall of the adjoining building shall be deemed to be a projecting sign.

(13) "Roof sign" means any sign erected upon or over the roof or parapet of any building, including the roof of any porch, walkway covering or similar covering structure, and supported by or connected to the building or roof.

(14) "Sign" means any sign, display board, handbill, poster, picture, lithograph, map, plat, banner, pennant, balloon, valance, sample, model, graphic or lettered surround, structure or other device used to announce, declare, demonstrate, display, advertise or attract the attention of the public, including but not limited to clocks, barber poles and similar devices.

(15) "Sign area" means and is determined as follows:

(A) Where the lettered or illustrated material of a sign is placed upon a sign board or other sign structure having a continuous or essentially continuous surface or face (whether plane, curved, angulated or otherwise), the exposed surface or face area of such sign board or sign structure shall be the sign area.

(B) Where the lettered or illustrated material of a sign is not placed as described in subdivision (15)(A) of this subsection, but is framed either mechanically or visually by the design or layout of the sign itself, then the area so framed shall be the sign area.

(C) Where the lettered or illustrated material is not placed or framed in the manner described in subdivisions (15)(A) or (15)(B) of this subsection, but is composed either vertically, horizontally, diagonally or otherwise, essentially in the form of a rectangle, parallelogram, pyramid or similar geometric figure, the area of the geometric figure within which such material could be enclosed shall be the sign area; except that when the space between the elements comprising the sign exceeds one and one-half times the average size of the elements themselves, the area of the elements may be measured separately as provided in subdivision (15)(D) of this subsection.

(D) Where the lettered or illustrative material is not placed, framed or composed as described in subdivisions (15)(A), (15)(B) or (15)(C) of this subsection, the total area of the rectangles or other simple geometric shapes within which the individual words, letters, illustrations, or other elements comprising the sign could be enclosed shall be the sign area.

(16) "Temporary sign" means any sign constructed of paper, cloth, canvas, light fabric, cardboard, wallboard or other light material, with or without frames.

(17) "Wall sign" means any sign posted or painted or suspended from or otherwise fixed to the wall of any building or structure in an essentially flat position, or with the exposed face of the sign in a plane approximately parallel to the plane of such wall. Any sign suspended from or attached to, and placed approximately parallel to the front of a canopy, porch, or similar covering structure shall be deemed to be a wall sign.

(Ord. 5373 § 1 (part), 2016; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

#### **16.20.020 Design review required.**

(a) No person shall erect or cause to be erected any sign upon any fence, post, pole, tree, building, or any other structure, or attached to any standing vehicle in the city without first applying for and receiving architectural review approval of the sign's location, design and dimensions pursuant to [Chapter 18.76](#) (Permits and Approvals).

(b) Application for design review shall be filed with the planning division in such form, and contain such information as the planning division may require. Said application shall be accompanied by a fee as set forth in the municipal fee schedule. Regulations that are more restrictive than those set forth in this chapter may be required pursuant to architectural review approval under [Chapter 18.76](#) (Permits and Approvals). The architectural review board, in making recommendations on the design of a sign to the director of planning and development services, shall take into consideration the design guidelines adopted by the architectural review board.

(Ord. 5494 § 3, 2020; Ord. 4826 § 8, 2004; Ord. 4305 § 1, 1995; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

### **16.20.030 Master sign program.**

Upon payment of a fee as set forth in the municipal fee schedule, an applicant may request architectural review approval of a master sign program in accordance with [Chapter 18.76](#) (Permits and Approvals), or through the city council for signs in areas or for projects subject to site and design review pursuant to [Chapter 18.30\(G\)](#). "Master sign program" means a program allowing the occupants of a building or project including a number of buildings to combine the total lawful sign coverage into one or more lawful signs in an integrated design concept.

The master sign program shall designate the sign locations and areas of all signs in the program, as well as typical sign designs, colors and faces.

Pursuant to the approval of the master sign program, subsequent individual signs may be erected without further design review.

(Ord. 4826 § 9, 2004; Ord. 4305 § 2 (part), 1995; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

### **16.20.040 Exception procedure.**

(a) An application for exception from any of the regulations of this chapter (except a temporary sign which is regulated by [Section 16.20.050](#)) may be made in conjunction with an application for architectural review approval under [Chapter 18.76](#) (Permits and Approvals), in such form and including such information as the director of planning and development services may prescribe. Such application shall be accompanied (1) by the written consent of the property owner and (2) by the application fee set forth in the municipal fee schedule. An exception may be approved by the director of planning and development services or city council, if on application and/or the facts presented, it is found that:

- (1) There are exceptional or extraordinary circumstances or conditions applicable to the property involved that do not apply generally to property in the same district;
- (2) The granting of the application is necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of a substantial property right of the applicant and to prevent unreasonable property loss or unnecessary hardships;
- (3) The granting of the application will not be detrimental or injurious to property or improvements in the vicinity and will not be detrimental to the public health, safety, general welfare or convenience.

In granting any such exception, such reasonable conditions or restrictions as are deemed appropriate or necessary to protect the public health, safety, general welfare, or convenience, and to secure the purposes of this chapter may be imposed.

(Ord. 5494 § 3, 2020; Ord. 4826 § 10, 2004; Ord. 4305 § 3, 1995; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

### **16.20.050 Temporary sign permits.**

(a) General application may be made for a temporary sign as defined in [Section 16.20.010](#) upon payment of an application fee as set forth in the municipal fee schedule. The chief building official may, but need not, refer the application for architectural review approval pursuant to [Chapter 18.76](#) (Permits and Approvals). A temporary sign permit shall be issued for an uninterrupted period of no longer than thirty days, with specified beginning and ending dates. The period of the permit may be extended once for an additional fifteen days upon the payment of a fee as set forth in the municipal fee schedule. In granting a temporary sign permit, such reasonable conditions or restrictions as are deemed appropriate or necessary to protect the public health, safety, general welfare, or convenience, and to secure the purposes of this chapter may be imposed.

(b) Private Property. If the temporary sign is on private property, (1) from the date of issuance of the permit, no additional permit shall be issued for one year for any one place of business and (2) the maximum area of the temporary sign shall be calculated from Table 3\* provided, that each place of business may have up to sixty square feet.

(c) Public Property. A temporary sign may be placed on public property only if the sign commemorates or relates to a season or an historical, cultural or artistic event.

(Ord. 4826 § 11, 2004; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

\* Editor's Note: Table 3, referred to herein, may be found at the end of this chapter in a printed edition of this code.

### **16.20.060 Failure to obtain permit.**

Whenever a sign has been erected without a required permit or design review having been first obtained therefor, the fee for any permit issued under this chapter shall be doubled to cover the additional expense to the city.

(Ord. 4305 § 4 (part), 1995; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

### **16.20.070 Inspection.**

The building official, Director of Planning and Development Services or designee may, at any time, make such inspection as may be necessary or appropriate to ascertain whether any sign will comply or is complying with this chapter and other applicable laws. If required by the building official, an inspection shall be called for the permittee upon the completion of the structural portions of every sign and before the structural connections to the building or structure are concealed or covered.

(Ord. 5494 § 3, 2020; Ord. 5373 § 1 (part), 2016; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

### **16.20.080 Exempt signs excepted.**

Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to prohibit any sign, notice or advertisement prescribed or required by law, or any notice posted by any lawful officer.

(Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

### **16.20.090 Prohibited signs.**

(a) No flashing, moving or roof signs shall be erected within the city. Flashing or moving signs for which a sign permit was issued prior to April 3, 1969, are continued to be declared nonconforming and shall be amortized in accordance with the provisions of this chapter. Roof signs for which a sign permit was issued prior to November 28, 1973, are continued to be declared nonconforming and shall be amortized in accordance with the provisions of this chapter.

(b) Unless otherwise expressly provided in this chapter, no sign shall be erected or used for advertising purposes of any kind except such signs as shall be located on a place of business, enterprise or calling and used solely for naming, designating or identifying said business, enterprise or calling. No sign shall advertise or display the make, brand name or manufacturers name of any product, article or service unless the same assists in and is done incidentally to the naming, designating or identifying of said business, enterprise or calling. "Place of business, enterprise or calling" means that portion of a building which is occupied by the business, enterprise or calling to which the sign refers, except that where a master sign program has been approved pursuant to the provisions of [Section 16.20.030](#), such term shall refer to the entire building.

(Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

### **16.20.100 Prohibited locations.**

Unless otherwise expressly provided in this chapter, all signs shall comply with the following location requirements:

(a) Public Property. No sign shall be placed on any public property, including but not limited to any city building, sidewalk, crosswalk, curb, street lamp post, hydrant, tree, shrub, tree stake or guard, railroad trestle, electric light or power or telephone or telegraph wire pole or wire appurtenance thereof or upon any fixture of the fire alarm system or upon any lighting system, street sign or traffic sign, except for signs that comply with the city's adopted parklet standards affixed to parklets permitted via permit per PAMC Chapter 12.11.

(1) Nothing in this section shall apply to the installation of terrazzo sidewalks or sidewalks of similar construction, sidewalks permanently colored by an admixture in the material of which the sidewalks is constructed and for which the department of public works has granted a written permit.

(2) Nothing in this section shall apply to the painting of house numbers on curbs pursuant to [Chapter 16.36](#).

(3) Application may be made for an encroachment permit pursuant to [Chapter 12.12](#) for the installation of a metal plaque commemorating an historical, cultural or artistic event, location or personality. The department of public works may grant such an encroachment permit only upon the approval of the city council.

(4) Application may be made for an encroachment permit pursuant to [Chapter 12.12](#) for a portable sign to be placed on public property. The department of public works may grant such an encroachment permit only upon architectural review approval of the sign

pursuant to [Chapter 18.76](#) (Permits and Approvals) and pursuant to the guidelines for portable signs adopted by the architectural review board.

(5) Application may be made, pursuant to [Section 16.20.050](#), for a temporary sign on public property if the sign commemorates or relates to a season or an historical, cultural or artistic event.

(6) Any sign found posted on public property contrary to the provisions of this section may be removed by the division of inspectional services or the police department.

(b) Fire Escapes. No sign shall be erected in such a manner that any portion of the sign or its support is attached to or will interfere with the free use of any fire escape, exit or standpipe, or obstruct any required stairway, door ventilator or window.

(c) Marquees. No sign shall be placed upon the roof or on the face of any marquee except on a theater.

(d) Traffic. No sign shall be erected in such a manner that it will or reasonably may be expected to interfere with, obstruct, confuse or mislead traffic.

(e) Intersections. No sign over three feet in height shall be erected at the intersection of any street improved for vehicular traffic, within a triangular area formed by the curb lines, and their projection and a line connecting them at points thirty-five feet from the intersection of the projected curb lines, unless the sign, in compliance with the provisions of this chapter, has a clearance of at least ten feet above curb grade and no part of whose means of support has a single or combined horizontal cross-section exceeding eight inches.

(f) Residential Districts. No sign shall be erected in any residential district except as provided below:

(1) Churches and Other Organizations. In all residential districts churches and other permitted or conditional uses in the district may erect signs on the premises identifying the premises or announcing activities thereon.

(2) Identifying Signs. In all residential districts except R-1, R-E and R-2, signs may be erected identifying the property or building on which the sign is situated.

(3) Special Purpose Signs. Special purpose signs may be erected in residential districts in compliance with the provisions of [Section 16.20.160](#).

(4) Size and Height. Except as otherwise provided in [Section 16.20.160](#), wall signs in residential districts shall not exceed an area of one square foot of sign for each forty square feet of wall area except that regardless of the size of the building face, (1) any such sign or combination of signs may have an area of at least six square feet and (2) no such sign or combination of signs shall have an area greater than one hundred fifty square feet. Freestanding signs shall meet the requirements of Table 1\*. No projecting signs or roof signs shall be erected.



(5) Lighting of Signs. No sign in a residential district shall be constructed in such a way that any light bulb, light filament, neon tubing or similar material is visible from the front of the sign or from beyond the property line.

(6) PC Planned Community Districts. Unless otherwise provided in the ordinance approving the PC development, signs hereafter erected in PC districts shall be governed by the rules applicable to residential districts as set forth in this subsection.

(7) Signs on Landscaped Freeways. Notwithstanding anything elsewhere contained in this chapter, no sign shall be erected on any property adjacent to a section of landscaped freeway, expressway or any other landscaped limited access street or highway in such a way as to be viewed by persons traveling on such landscaped freeway, expressway or any other landscaped limited access street or highway except when such sign is used exclusively:

(A) To advertise the sale or lease of the property upon which the sign is situated; or

(B) To designate the name of the owner or occupant of the premises upon which the sign is situated, or to identify such premises.

(Ord. 5594 § 9, 2024; Ord. 4826 § 12, 2004; Ord. 4797 § 2, 2003; Ord. 3359 § 1 (part), 1984)

\* Editor's Note: Table 1, referred to herein, may be found at the end of this chapter in a printed edition of this code.

### **16.20.110 Fuel price signs.**

(a) Every person or business organization offering for sale or selling any gasoline or other motor vehicle fuel to the public from any place of business shall erect a sign which indicates the actual price per gallon, including all taxes at which such gasoline or other motor vehicle fuel is currently being offered for sale or sold. Such sign shall be clearly visible from any street or highway adjacent to such place of business. If more than one grade of gasoline or other motor vehicle fuel is offered for sale or sold, the price of at least two grades of such gasoline or fuel shall be indicated on such sign.

(b) The sign required by this section shall conform to the requirements of Article 8 (commencing with Section 20880), Chapter 7, Division 8 of the Business and Professions Code and the other requirements of this chapter, but is exempt from architectural review approval pursuant to [Chapter 18.76](#) (Permits and Approvals) and the requirements of Chapter 18.30(G) (Site and Design Review) of this code. The permit required by [Section 16.20.020](#) shall be issued without fee.

(c) If compliance with this section would cause the total area of lawfully erected signs to exceed the area allowed by other provisions of this chapter, one freestanding sign not over five feet in height and three feet by four feet in dimension may be erected, but only in order to comply with this section. Such sign may have two faces if both faces are back-to-back in approximately parallel planes.

(Ord. 4826 § 13, 2004; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

### **16.20.120 Freestanding signs.**

Except as otherwise provided in this chapter, every freestanding sign shall comply with the requirements of this section.

(a) Freestanding Signs Over Five Feet. Freestanding signs over five feet in height shall be permitted only on nonresidential properties in the Hospital zone, GM zones and on El Camino Real in the CN and CS zones and for service stations, restaurants and shopping centers elsewhere.

(1) Area and Height. The maximum area and height of such signs is set forth in Table 2.\*

(2) Location. Every sign shall be wholly on the owner's property, except that for any site that encompasses a minimum of ten acres in size and contains a minimum of 50,000 square feet of retail square footage, but does not have its primary frontage on a freeway, expressway, or major arterial, a freestanding sign may be located offsite on private property with frontage on the nearest major arterial roadway. The sign size and height shall be governed by the criteria set forth in Table 2\*, using the average site length dimension as the lot frontage for calculation purposes, but in no case shall the sign size exceed fifty square feet. The sign shall comply with all other regulations of this chapter, the total site signage (including the offsite sign) shall not exceed the total allowed for the site, and all other signs on the offsite property must comply with sign regulations for that site.

(3) Number. Subject to the provisions of [Section 16.20.170](#), there may be one such sign for each frontage and one additional sign for any portion of frontage in excess of two hundred fifty feet. The size of any additional sign shall be determined from Table 2\* by counting as frontage that portion thereof which is in excess of two hundred fifty feet. In the case of shopping centers and other multiple occupancies having a common frontage, the frontage shall be deemed to be that of the shopping center or commonly used parcel and not the frontages of the individual businesses or occupancies.

(4) Construction. In addition to the requirements of [Section 16.20.190](#), every such sign shall be constructed wholly of metal, incombustible plastic or other approved fire-resistant material.

(b) Freestanding Signs Five Feet or Less In Height. Freestanding signs five feet or less in height shall be permitted in all districts within the limitations set forth in this section.

(1) Area. The maximum area of such signs is set forth in Table 1.\*

(2) Location. Every such sign shall be wholly on the owner's property.

(3) Number. Subject to the provisions of [Section 16.20.170](#), there may be no more than one such sign for each frontage. In the case of shopping centers and other multiple occupancies having a common frontage, the frontage shall be deemed to be that of the shopping center or commonly used parcel and not the frontages of the individual businesses or occupancies.

(c) Multisided Freestanding Signs. Freestanding signs constructed back-to-back, with faces in approximately parallel planes (such as both sides of a single panel) shall count as only one sign both as to number and area (i.e. only one side need be counted). Every other freestanding sign having multiple sides or faces, including a sign constructed in the form of a cylinder or sphere or similar figure shall be limited to total area to that shown on Table 1\* or Table 2\*, whichever is applicable.

(d) Lighting of Freestanding signs. No freestanding sign shall be constructed in such a way that any light bulb or filament is visible from the front of the sign or from beyond the property line. Nothing herein shall be construed to prohibit signs of neon tubing or similar self-illuminating material of equivalent or less intensity.

(Ord. 5123 § 3 (part), 2011; Ord. 4923 § 6, 2006; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

\* Editor's Note: Tables 1 and 2, referred to herein, may be found at the end of this chapter in a printed edition of this code.

### **16.20.130 Wall signs.**

Except as otherwise provided in this chapter, every wall sign shall comply with the requirements of this section.

(a) Area. The maximum wall sign area for each building face shall be as indicated on Table 3\*.

(b) Height. No part of any wall sign shall extend above the top level of the wall upon or in front of which it is situated. Any such sign which is suspended or projects over any public or private walkway or walk area shall have an overhead clearance of at least seven feet.

(c) Thickness or Projection. No such sign, including any light box or other structural part, shall exceed a thickness of ten inches. In any sign consisting of cutout or raised characters, said characters shall project no more than six inches from the mounting surface, except that when the average area of the individual characters exceeds six square feet, the projection may be increased by one-half inch for each additional square foot of average area over six feet, in no case to exceed fifteen inches.

(d) Number. Subject to the provisions of [Section 16.20.170](#), there may be any number of such signs for each building face, but in no case shall the total wall sign area for each face exceed that shown in Table 3\*. No building shall be deemed to have more than four building faces. (Ord. 3359 § 1 (part), 1984)

\* Editor's Note: Table 3, referred to herein, may be found at the end of this chapter in a printed edition of this code.

### **16.20.140 Projecting signs.**

Every projecting sign shall comply with the requirements of this section.

(a) Projecting signs in the GM zones and on El Camino Real frontage in the CS and CN zones.

(1) Area. No such sign shall exceed five square feet in area.

(2) Height. No part of any projecting sign shall exceed a height of the building's adjacent parapet upon or in front of which it is situated, or in the case of buildings having sloping roofs, above the roof ridge. Any such sign which projects over public property shall have a clearance of ten feet above the ground.

(3) Location. No such sign shall project more than one foot over public property.

(b) Projecting Signs in Other Zones.

(1) Area. No such sign shall exceed three square feet in area.

(2) Height. No part of any projecting sign shall exceed a height of twelve feet, nor shall any part of such sign extend above the top level of the wall upon or in front of which it is situated. Any such sign over any public or private sidewalk or walkway shall have a minimum clearance below the sign of seven feet.

(c) Number. Subject to the provisions of [Section 16.20.170](#) there may be no more than one projecting sign for each place of business for each building face.

(d) Multisided Projecting Signs. Projecting signs constructed back-to-back, with faces in approximately parallel planes (such as on both sides of a single panel) shall count as only one sign both as to number and area (i.e., only one side need be counted). Every other projecting sign having multiple sides or faces, including a sign constructed in the form of a cylinder or sphere or similar figure, shall be limited in total area to that set forth above.

(Ord. 5373 § 1 (part), 2016; Ord 3735 § 26, 1987; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

**16.20.150 Awning signs.**

Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to prohibit the erecting and placing of awning signs, subject to the requirements of this section.

(a) Type of Sign - Limitation. Awning signs shall be limited to those signs printed, painted, fixed, marked, stamped or otherwise impressed upon the surface of an awning covering.

(b) Area. The maximum awning sign area on any awning shall be equal to the area allowed by Table 3\* (Wall Signs), on the wall from which the awning is supported. However, on any wall the aggregate of the wall sign area on said wall plus the awning sign area, on an awning or awnings supported from said wall, shall not exceed the maximum wall sign area allowed on said wall.

(c) Height. No part of any awning sign shall extend above the top level of the wall from which it is supported.

(Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

\* Editor's Note: Table 3, referred to herein, may be found at the end of this chapter in a printed edition of this code.

### **16.20.160 Special purpose signs.**

(a) Permit Required. Signs for the special purposes set forth in this subsection (a) shall be permitted as provided herein upon obtaining design review and a permit as set forth in [Section 16.20.020](#).

(1) Directory Signs. In all districts where group occupancies in office buildings are permitted, directory signs may be erected displaying the names of the occupants of a building who are engaged in a particular profession, business or the like. Such signs shall be situated at least two feet inside the property line and shall not exceed eight feet in height. Such signs may have an area of four square feet, plus one and one-half square feet per name, in no event to exceed seventy-five square feet. In the HD district, director and directional signs may be up to twelve feet in height, thirty square feet in area, and located no less than two feet from the nearest public right-of-way unless an alternative location is approved by the planning director.

(2) Construction Project Signs. Signs may be erected in conjunction with construction projects and used for the purpose of publicizing the future occupants of the building or the architects, engineers and construction organizations participating in the project. In residential districts, no such sign shall exceed twelve square feet in area and no freestanding sign shall exceed five feet in height. In other districts no sign shall exceed the area for the applicable frontage set forth in Table 1\* and no freestanding sign shall exceed eight feet in height. All such signs shall be removed before a final release on the construction is given by the building official.

(3) Directional Signs. Directional signs may be erected for the purpose of facilitating or controlling the efficient or safe movement of pedestrians or vehicles on private property. Such signs shall not be used for advertising purposes and particularly shall not include the name of any person, firm, company, organization or any product or service except as approved to designate directions to different businesses on the same site. Such signs shall be located on the property to which they pertain, shall not exceed an area of six square feet nor a height of three feet and shall be located at least twenty feet within the nearest property line, except that directional signs of not more than three square feet in area may be located not less than ten feet within any front property line. Such signs shall not be permitted in R-E, R-1, or R-2 districts.

(4) Subdivision Signs. Any person or firm offering real estate for sale in an approved subdivision may erect not more than two signs indicating the location of the subdivision. No such sign shall exceed forty square feet in area. Such signs may state the name of the subdivider or subdivision or both. No such sign shall be erected on or situated within one hundred feet of any occupied residential property. No such sign shall be illuminated. The permit for any such sign shall be issued for a period of six months. At the end of such period additional extensions of ninety days each may be granted by the building official for good cause shown. Upon expiration of the permit or any extension thereof the sign shall be removed by the applicant.

(5) Off-site Advertising by Art Organizations. Nonprofit organizations having tax exempt status which are located within the city and which have been established solely for the

purpose of supporting the performing and cultural arts in the city and other jurisdictions shall be permitted to utilize walls for off-site murals which may incorporate wording to name, designate, or identify the organization and/or the arts. The application shall be made jointly by the nonprofit organization and the property owner who owns the property where the mural is to be located. Said application shall be subject to review by the visual arts jury in accordance with the provisions of [Chapter 2.26](#) and shall require architectural review approval pursuant to [Chapter 18.76](#) (Permits and Approvals). Additionally, the following provisions shall apply:

- (A) The provisions of [Section 16.20.130](#) shall be applicable to said murals except that no part of a mural shall be counted as part of the allowable sign area for the off-site location.
- (B) Murals must be painted directly on a building wall; no pennants or the like may be used.
- (C) The property owner shall give his/her consent to erect, maintain, and remove the mural.
- (D) The mural must be properly maintained by the nonprofit organization.
- (E) The visual arts jury shall establish a maximum time period for the existence of a mural.
- (F) The property owner shall be responsible for removing the mural at the completion of the authorized time period; however, nothing shall prevent an agreement that the nonprofit organization shall pay for and remove the mural.
- (G) No organization shall be permitted to have more than two off-site advertising murals at any one time.
- (H) Murals which are erected on city property or with city moneys shall be regulated solely by the provisions of [Section 16.20.100](#) and [Chapter 2.26](#).

(6) Transit Shelter Advertising Signs. Informational and advertising signs may be erected on transit shelters furnished by contract with the Santa Clara County Transit District, provided that the shelter prototype (but not each individual shelter or sign) has been approved by the architectural review board, that the location of each shelter containing advertising signs has been approved in writing by the director of planning and development services or designee, and that an encroachment permit has been obtained pursuant to [Chapter 12.12](#) for each shelter placed on public property.

(b) No Permit Required. Signs for the special purposes set forth in this subsection (b) shall be permitted as provided herein without design review or a permit being required.

(1) For Sale or Lease Signs. In all districts signs may be erected on real estate, advertising such real estate for sale or lease. In R-1, R-E, and R-2 districts such signs shall not exceed an area of six square feet. In all other districts such signs shall meet with the requirements set forth in Table 1\*.

(2) Political Signs. Political signs may be erected in conformity with this chapter including [Section 16.20.100](#) which prohibits signs on public property. In addition, an election sign must be completely removed no later than six days following the day of the election to which it relates. Any election sign not removed within six days shall be considered abandoned and shall be removed by the building division.

(3) Window Signs. A place of business which sells goods or services to consumers may install and maintain signs on the interior face of a window of the premises or in a position inside such place of business, otherwise viewable through a window of the premises, subject to the following conditions:

(A) No more than twenty percent of the total window space on a wall may be covered by window signs at any time.

(B) A sign affixed to the interior face of a window and a sign inside a place of business, any point on which is within three feet of any point on the interior face of a window, through which window said sign may be viewed from outside such place of business, shall be deemed to be a window sign for the purposes of the window coverage limitation of this section. The full area of any window sign shall be used when window coverage is calculated for purposes of this section.

(C) Merchandise on display, which does not constitute a sign (as defined in [Section 16.20.010](#)), shall be exempt from the window coverage limitation of this section.

(Ord. 5494 § 3, 2020; Ord. 5123 § 3 (part), 2011; Ord. 4826 § 14, 2004; Ord. 4797 § 3, 2003; Ord. 4305 § 1 (part), 1995; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

\* Editor's Note: Table 1, referred to herein, may be found at the end of this chapter in a printed edition of this code.

### **16.20.170 Combinations of signs.**

In each place of business or occupancy there shall be permitted the following combinations of signs:

(a) Where there is a freestanding sign, any one of the following: a flat wall sign, a projecting wall sign, or an awning sign;

(b) Where there is no freestanding sign, any combination of two of the following: a flat wall sign, a projecting wall sign, an awning sign;

(c) On corner lots, each frontage shall be treated separately for the purposes of subsections (a) and (b) of this section;

(d) Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, when architectural review is required pursuant to [Chapter 18.76](#) (Permits and Approvals), one type of sign may be disapproved where a combination of two or more types is permitted.

(Ord. 4826 § 15, 2004; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

### **16.20.180 Classification of signs.**

Every sign erected or proposed to be erected shall be classified by the PDS Director in accordance with the provisions of this chapter. Any sign which does not clearly fall within one of the classifications provided herein shall be placed by the PDS Director in the classification which the sign, in view of its design, location and purpose, most nearly approximates. Such classification by the PDS Director shall be final.

(Ord. 5373 § 1 (part), 2016; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

### **16.20.190 Construction and maintenance.**

The appropriate sections of the building code ([Chapter 16.04](#)) shall apply to the construction of signs. All signs shall be able to resist the applicable wind loads set forth in Section 1615 of the 1998 California Building Code, as amended from time to time. All signs having built-in illumination shall be constructed wholly of metal, incombustible plastic or other approved fire-resistant material. Guy wires or horizontal struts shall not be used. Signs and sign structures shall be maintained at all times in a state of good repair, with all braces, bolts and structural parts and supporting frames and fastenings free from deterioration, rot, rust and loosening. Without limiting the foregoing, no person shall maintain or permit to be maintained on any premises owned or controlled by him any sign which is in a sagging, leaning, fallen, decayed, deteriorated or other dilapidated or unsafe condition.

(Ord. 4642 § 25, 2000; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

### **16.20.200 Amortization of nonconforming signs.**

All signs within the city shall be altered, removed or otherwise made to comply with the provisions of this chapter during the following time periods:

(a) General Rule. Signs painted on buildings, walls or fences - two years from the date of nonconformity. All other signs - five years from the date of nonconformity;

(b) Signs legally erected pursuant to a valid sign permit issued within the two years immediately preceding April 3, 1969:

(1) Signs painted on buildings, walls or fences - three years from permit date,

(2) All other signs - seven years from permit date;

(c) Flashing or moving signs legally erected pursuant to a valid sign permit - seven years from permit date;

(d) Signs rendered nonconforming due to the general one-third size reduction amendments to [Chapter 16.20](#) of 1974, and legally erected pursuant to a valid sign permit issued within the two years immediately preceding October 11, 1974:

(1) Signs painted on buildings, walls or fences - three years from permit date or two years from October 11, 1974, whichever period is greater,

(2) All other signs - seven years from permit date;



(e) Signs rendered nonconforming subsequent to the effective date of this section, by reason of the annexation to the city of the territory upon which the sign is located, amendment of this chapter to render such sign noncomplying, or otherwise shall be subject to the amortization provisions hereof. The period within which such sign must be abated as provided in this section shall commence to run upon the effective date of such annexation, or of such amendment, or the date upon which the sign otherwise becomes nonconforming.

(Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

#### **16.20.210 Abatement of nonconforming signs.**

Nonconforming signs shall either be made to conform with the provisions of this chapter or be abated within the applicable period of time hereinabove set forth. In the event they are not, the PDS Director shall order the sign abated by the owner of the property and any other person known to be responsible for the maintenance of the sign. It is thereafter unlawful for any such person to maintain or suffer to be maintained on any property owned or controlled by him any such sign. Unless some other mode of abatement is approved by the building official or PDS Director in writing, abatement of nonconforming signs shall be accomplished in the following manner:

(a) Signs painted on buildings, walls or fences: by removal of the paint constituting the sign or by permanently painting over it in such a way that the sign shall not hereafter be or become visible;

(b) Other Signs. By removal of the sign, including its dependent structures and supports; or pursuant to a sign permit duly issued, by modification, alteration or replacement thereof in conformity with the provisions of this chapter.

(Ord. 5373 § 1 (part), 2016; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

#### **16.20.220 Modification of nonconforming signs.**

No nonconforming sign shall be in any manner altered, reconstructed, moved or its face changed without being made to comply in all respects with this chapter. Normal maintenance or repair of any nonconforming sign is not prohibited by this section.

(Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

#### **16.20.230 Abandoned signs.**

No person shall maintain or permit to be maintained on any premises owned or controlled by him any sign which has been abandoned. Any such sign shall promptly be abated by the owner or such other person. Any sign which is located on property which becomes vacant and unoccupied for a period of three months or more, and any sign which was erected for an occupant or business unrelated to the present occupant or his business, and any sign which pertains to a time, event or purpose which no longer pertains, shall be presumed to have been abandoned.

(Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

### **16.20.240 Unsafe and unlawful signs.**

(a) Public Property. Any sign posted on public property contrary to the provisions of [Section 16.20.100](#) may be removed by the division of inspectional services or the police department.

(b) Unsafe or Abandoned Signs. Any sign deemed by the police department or the chief building official or PDS Director to be (1) unsafe, due to interfering with the public's health, safety, welfare or convenience, or (2) abandoned, including but not limited to election signs posted more than six days after the election to which they relate, may be removed by the division of inspectional services or the police department.

(c) Whenever a sign, other than those on public property or those deemed to be unsafe or abandoned, is found to be erected or maintained in violation of any provision of this chapter or of any other ordinance or law, the building official or PDS Director may order that such sign be altered, repaired, reconstructed, demolished or removed as may be appropriate to abate such condition. Any work required to be done shall, unless a different time is specified, be completed within ten days of the date of such order. Failure, neglect or refusal to comply with such order of the building official or PDS Director shall be sufficient basis for the revocation of any permit or approval granted under this chapter and shall constitute a separate offense. In addition to any other remedies provided by law, the building official may remove, or cause to be removed any such sign erected or maintained in violation of the provisions of this chapter.

(Ord. 5373 § 1 (part), 2016; Ord. 4305 § 1, 1995; Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

### **16.20.250 Parking of advertising vehicles prohibited.**

No person shall park any vehicle which has attached thereto or suspended therefrom any advertising sign on the street or on private property to display, demonstrate, advertise or attract the attention of the public. This section shall not apply to a peddler who has received a permit from the chief of police pursuant to [Chapter 4.10](#).

(Ord. 3559 § 1 (part), 1984)

### **16.20.260 Violations - Penalties.**

Violation of any provision of this chapter is an infraction, punishable as provided in this code. Each day of violation constitutes a separate offense and may be separately punished.

(Ord. 3595 § 1, 1985)

### **16.20.270 Enforcement - Citation authority.**

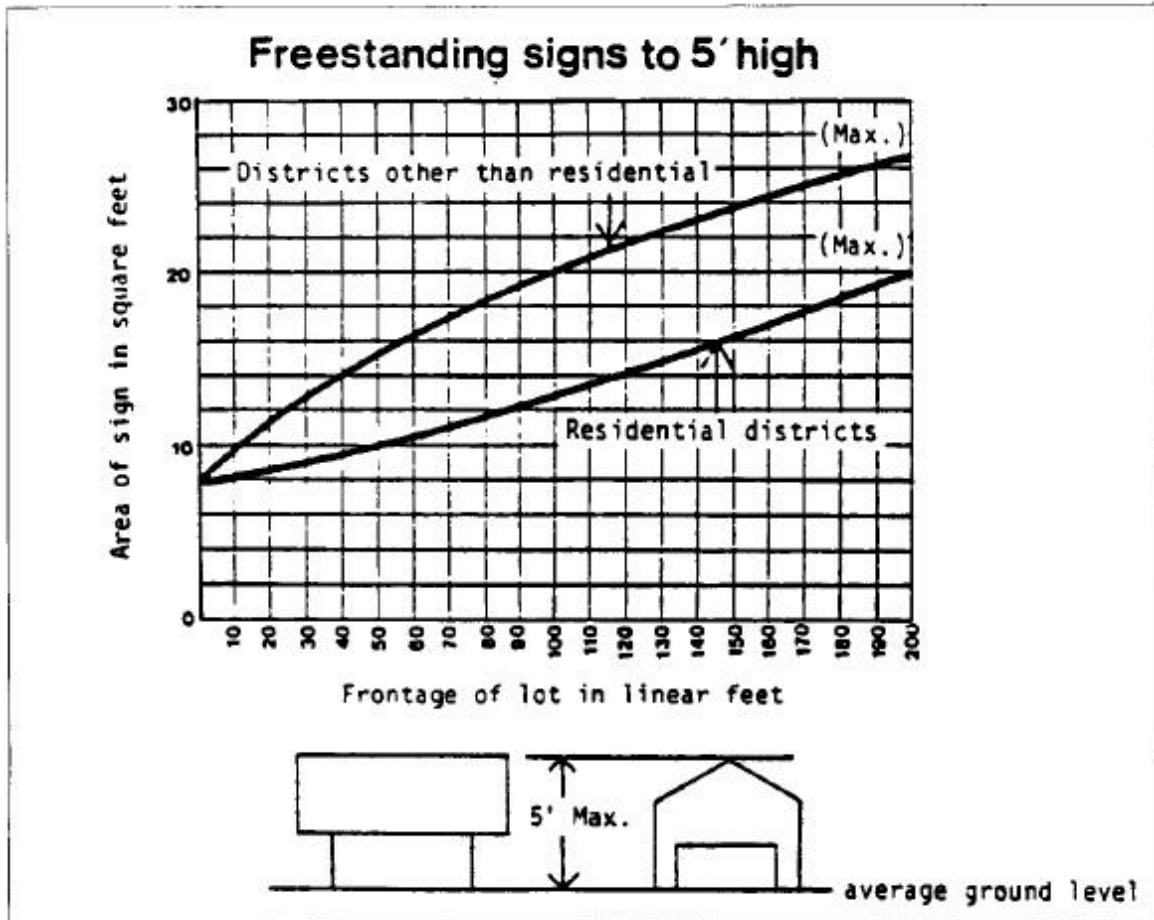
Persons employed in the following designated employee positions are authorized to exercise the authority provided in Penal Code Section 836.5 and are authorized to issue citations for violations of this chapter: PDS Director (or designee), chief building official, assistant building official and code enforcement officer.

(Ord. 5373 § 1 (part), 2016; Ord. 4305 § 1, 1995; Ord. 3595 § 2, 1985)

### Chapter 16.20 — Table 1

#### Allowable Sign Area for Freestanding Signs up to Five Feet High

NOTE: THESE ARE MAXIMUM DESIGN DIMENSIONS, AND MAY BE REDUCED IN THE DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS PURSUANT TO [CHAPTER 18.77](#) (Processing of Permits and Approvals)



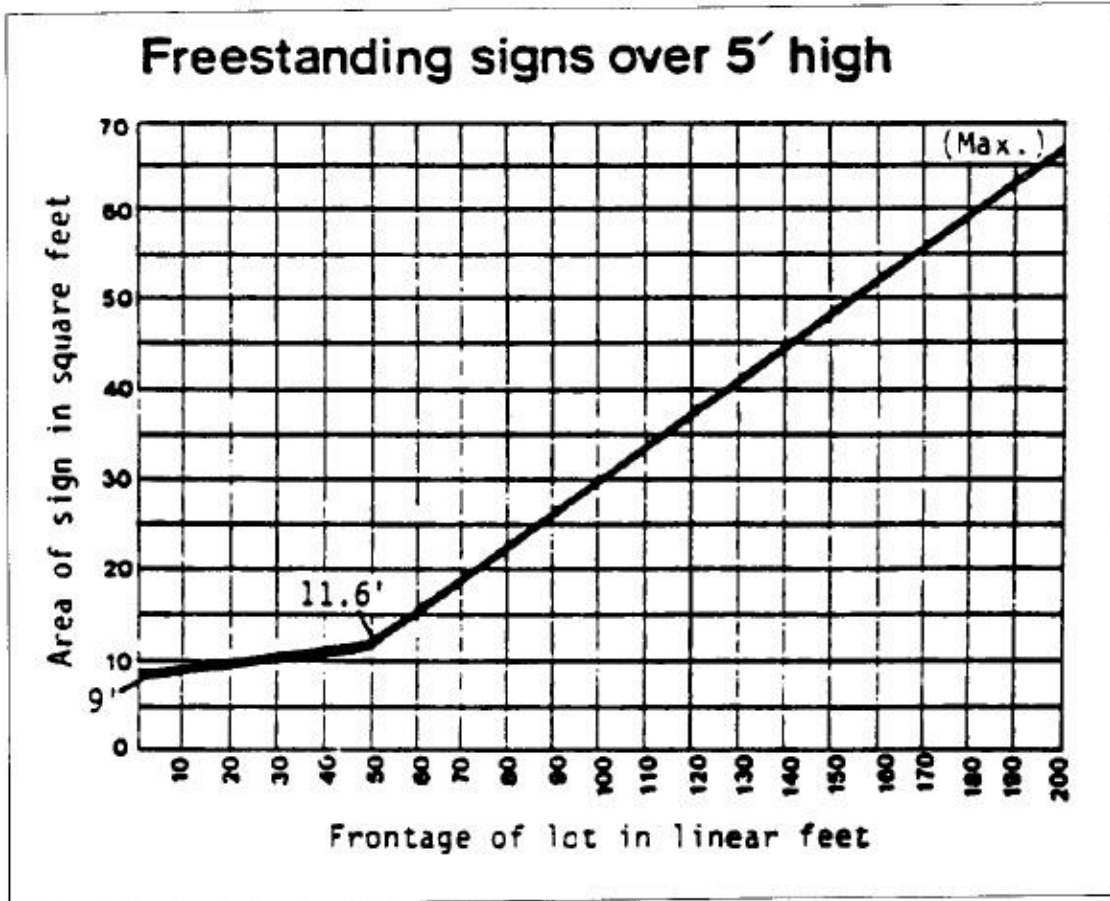
- This table is to be used in all Zoning Districts except for the GM zones, the Hospital District, and for El Camino frontages of CN and CS zoned properties.
- For requirements affecting freestanding signs generally, see [Section 16.20.160](#).
- For further requirements as to freestanding signs in residential districts, see [Section 16.20.120](#).
- For computation of sign area generally, see [Section 16.20.010\(11\)](#).

(Ord. 5373 § 1 (part), 2016)

**Chapter 16.20 — Table 2**

**Allowable Sign Area for Freestanding Signs Over Five Feet High**

NOTE: THESE ARE MAXIMUM DESIGN DIMENSIONS, AND MAY BE REDUCED IN THE DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS PURSUANT TO [CHAPTER 18.77](#) (Processing of Permits and Approvals)



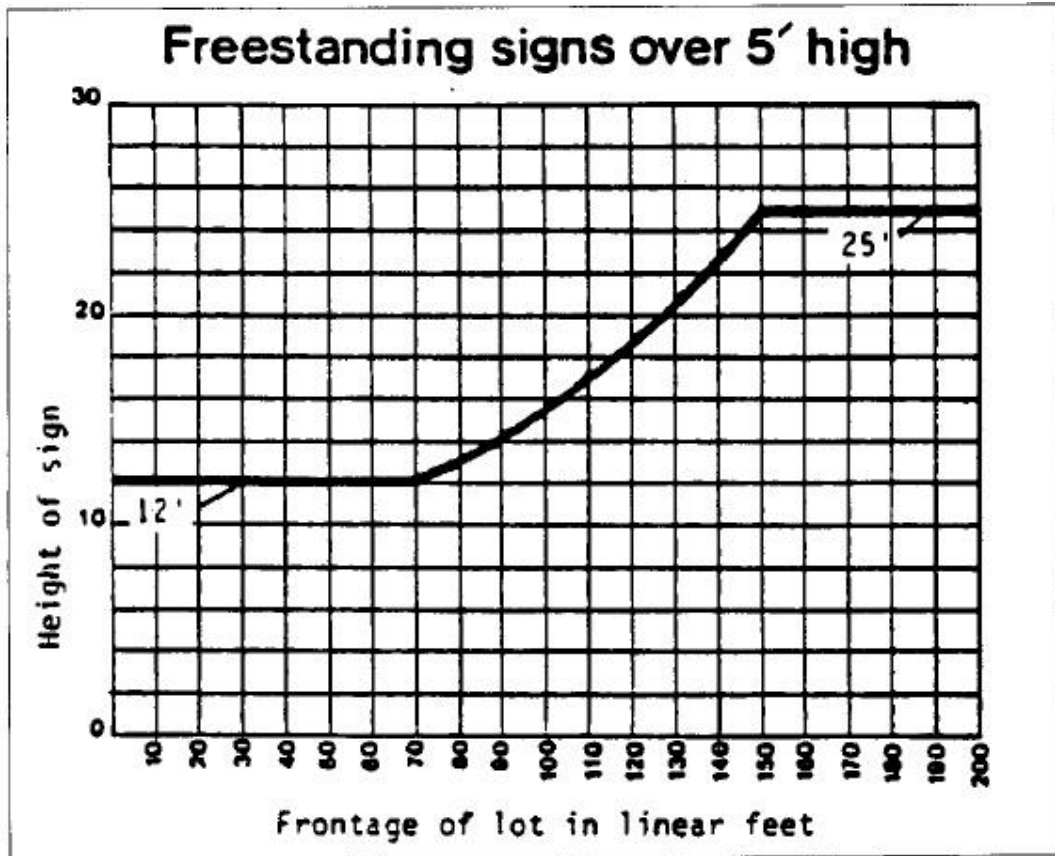
- Applicable to nonresidential properties in the GM zone and El Camino Real in the CN and CS zones. Also applicable to restaurants, service stations and shopping centers in other zones.
- For requirements affecting freestanding signs generally, see [Section 16.20.160](#).
- For computation of sign area generally, see [Section 16.20.010\(11\)](#).
- For requirements in the HD district, see [Section 16.20.160\(a\)\(1\)](#).

(Ord. 5373 § 1 (part), 2016)

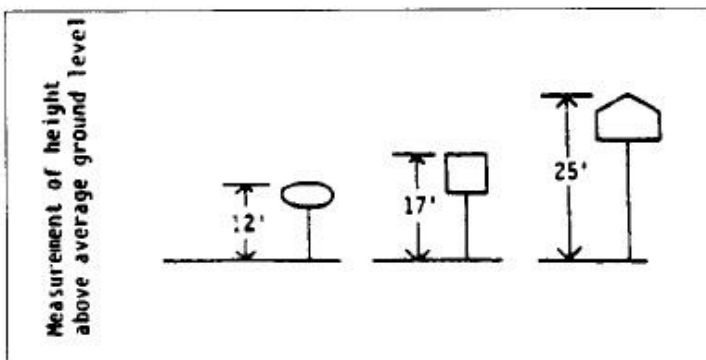
**Chapter 16.20 — Table 2**

**Allowable Sign Height for Freestanding Signs Over Five Feet High**

NOTE: THESE ARE MAXIMUM DESIGN DIMENSIONS, AND MAY BE REDUCED IN THE DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS PURSUANT TO [CHAPTER 18.77](#) (Processing of Permits and Approvals)



- Applicable to nonresidential properties in the GM zone and El Camino Real in the CN and CS zones also for service stations, restaurants and shopping centers in other zones.



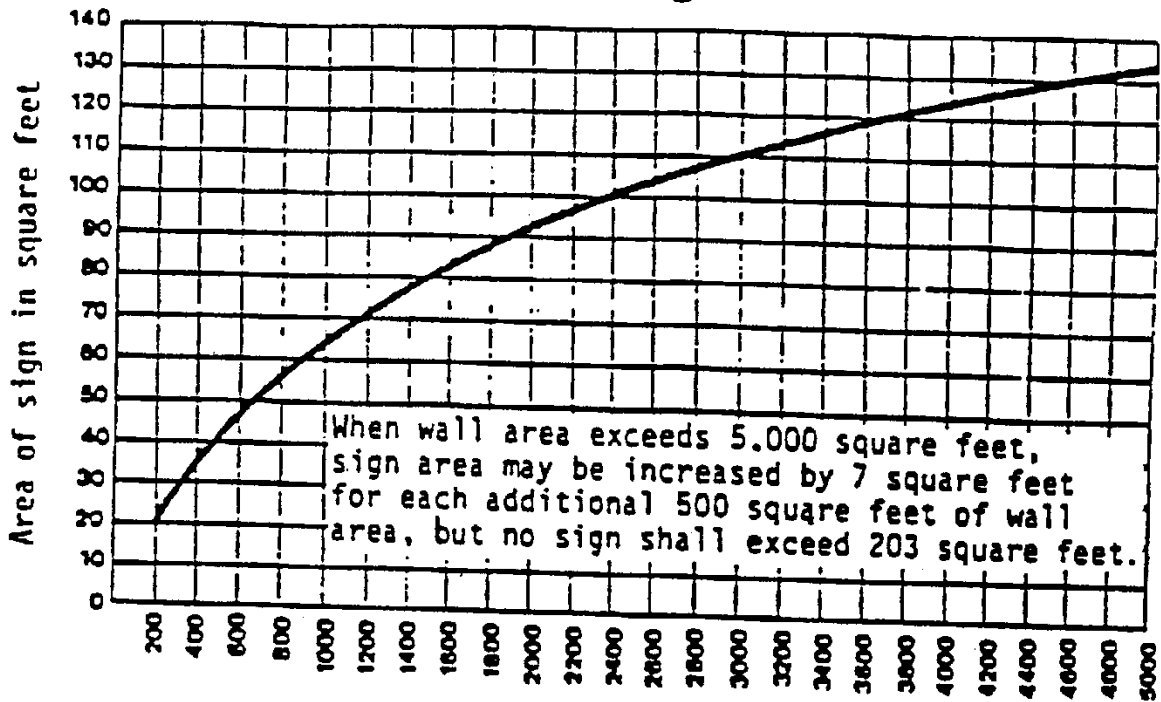
(Ord. 5373 § 1 (part), 2016)

Chapter 16.20 — Table 3

Allowable Sign Area for Wall Signs

NOTE: THESE ARE MAXIMUM DESIGN DIMENSIONS, AND MAY BE REDUCED IN THE DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS PURSUANT TO [CHAPTER 18.77](#) (Processing of Permits and Approvals)

Wall signs



Area of wall in square feet  
(height x width of wall on which  
sign is situated)

Non-residential zones only

For wall signs in residential zones  
see section 16.20.120

