

Chapter 17.32 SIGNS

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17.32.010 Purpose.

- A. The purposes of this section are to:
1. To protect the public health, safety and welfare;
 2. To minimize adverse visual safety factors to travelers on public roadways and private areas open to public vehicular traffic;
 3. To provide for the safe construction, location, erection and maintenance of signs;
 4. To maintain or improve the aesthetic quality of the city's residential, commercial and industrial environments;
 5. To encourage the effective use of signs as a means of communication in the city;
 6. To protect property values;
 7. To provide aesthetic benefits to business districts and the community at large through consistency in style, placement, and scale of signs with buildings, natural settings and other signs;

8. To maintain the city's ability to attract sources of beneficial economic development and growth;
9. To minimize possible adverse effects of signs on abutting or adjacent public and private properties;
10. To prevent the proliferation of signs and sign clutter;
11. To provide for constitutionally protected forms of free speech and to comply with state and federal laws and court decisions; and
12. To provide for sign-related administration, permitting, fees payment, enforcement and appeal on a fair and consistent basis.

17.32.020 Applicability.

- A. This section applies to all signs within the city which are visible from any street, sidewalk, or public place, regardless of the type or nature.
- B. This section is not intended to, and shall not be interpreted to, restrict speech on the basis of its content, viewpoint, or message. Any classification of signs in this section which purports to permit speech by reason of the type of sign, identity of the sign user or otherwise, shall be interpreted to allow commercial or noncommercial speech on the sign. No part of this section shall be construed to favor commercial speech over noncommercial speech. To the extent that any provision of this section is ambiguous, the term shall be interpreted not to regulate speech on the basis of the content of the message.

17.32.030 Sign permit.

- A. Permit Required. No person shall erect, alter, or relocate any sign requiring a permit under this section without first submitting a sign permit application and receiving approval of the sign permit from the city, in accordance with the provisions of this title, unless the sign is determined to be exempt and a permit is not required.
 1. Some sign types may be regulated under other codes adopted by the city, which may contain additional permits that are subject to additional regulations.
 2. Signs for which permits are not required shall nonetheless comply with all applicable provisions of this section.

17.32.040 Exemptions.

- A. The following signs are exempt from the permitting requirements of this section. The city recommends consulting with the city department of community development to confirm that a sign is exempt and a permit is not required before installing or displaying any of the following signs:
 - A. Changes to the face or copy of changeable copy signs, digital signs, and electronic messaging signs, provided such changes do not change the material appearance of the sign as originally permitted by the city;
 - B. Normal repair and maintenance of conforming and legal nonconforming signs;
 - C. Legal notices, postings, or similar sign placed by or required by a governmental agency carrying out its responsibility to protect the public health, safety, and general welfare;
 - D. Signs required by law, including the Americans with Disabilities Act;
 - E. Signs owned and maintained by a federal, state, or local government agency including but not limited to street and highway signs, signs necessary to protect the public health and safety, directional and wayfinding signs, and/or public information signs;
 - F. Approved interpretative signs and historic markers;
 - G. Stone or cement plaques and cornerstones with engraved or cast text or symbols and permanently embedded in the building's foundation or masonry and signs integral to a historic site or building;
 - H. Building address numbers;
 - I. National flags, or flags of political subdivisions;
 - J. Privately maintained traffic control signs on private roads or property;
 - K. Signs necessary to the expression of constitutionally protected forms of free speech as determined by the city attorney;
 - L. Newspaper and advertising circular dispensers located in the right-of-way (sidewalks); provided, that they do not obstruct pedestrians, impede access to buildings, or adversely affect the public safety, and they are well maintained at all times;
 - M. Signs attached to benches or furniture that are less than one square foot in area per bench;

- N. Interior signs. Signs or displays located entirely inside of a building and located at least three feet from transparent door or windows;
- O. Signs in a city recreational facility approved through a facility use agreement or comparable instrument, as determined by the city; and
- P. Nonvisible signs. Signs and associated support structures not visible beyond the boundaries of the lot or parcel upon which they are located or from any public right-of-way.

17.32.050 Signs prohibited in the city.

- A. Signs Prohibited in the City. No person shall erect, alter, maintain, or relocate any of the following signs in any zone in the city:
 - 1. Signs that are dangerous or confusing to motorists on the public right-of-way, including any sign which by coloring, lighting, shape, wording or location resembles or conflicts with traffic control signs or devices or otherwise impedes the safe and efficient flow of traffic;
 - 2. Signs that create a safety hazard for pedestrian or vehicular traffic;
 - 3. Flashing signs;
 - 4. Signs attached to or placed on a vehicle or trailer parked on public or private property, stored or displayed conspicuously in a manner to attract the attention of the public; provided, however, that signs that are permanently painted or wrapped on the surface of the vehicle, or adhesive vinyl film affixed to the interior or exterior surface of a vehicle window, or signs magnetically attached to motor vehicles or rolling stock that are actively used in the daily conduct of business are not prohibited so long as such vehicles are operable and parked in a lawful or authorized manner;
 - 5. Permanent signs on vacant lots or parcels. Signs may only be established as an accessory use to a principally permitted use;
 - 6. Roof signs;
 - 7. Awning signs;
 - 8. Rotating, spinning, or motorized signs;
 - 9. Inflatable signs;
 - 10. Signs attached to towers or wireless communication support towers, except as required by law;
 - 11. Signs attached to benches or furniture that are greater than one square foot in area per bench;

12. Signs attached to utility poles, fences, or trees;
13. Signs that are determined by the city attorney to meet the judicial standards for obscenity; and
14. Abandoned signs.

17.32.060 Nonconforming signs.

- A. Legally installed signs that do not meet the provisions of this section shall be considered legal, nonconforming signs and may be continued; provided, that they are maintained in good repair in accordance with the following provisions. A nonconforming sign shall immediately lose its nonconforming designation if:
1. The sign is altered in structure or sign face area which tends to be or makes the sign less in compliance with the requirements of this section than it was before the alteration; or
 2. The sign is relocated; or
 3. The sign is replaced; or
 4. Any new sign is erected or placed in connection with the enterprise using the nonconforming sign; or
 5. The sign face and/or sign structure is not maintained in good repair so as to cause the potential for public harm or injury to life or property.

17.32.070 Maintenance and safety.

- A. All signs and components thereof must be maintained in good repair and in a safe, neat, clean and attractive condition. Maintenance of a sign shall include periodic cleaning, replacement of flickering, burned out or broken light bulbs or fixtures, repair or replacement of any faded, peeled, cracked or otherwise damaged or broken parts of a sign, and any other activity necessary to restore the sign so that it continues to comply with the requirements and contents of the sign permit issued for its installation and provisions of this section.
- B. The provisions of this section shall not be construed as relieving or limiting in any way the responsibility or liability of any person, business or organization erecting, owning or operating a sign within the city of Kelso for personal injury or property damage resulting from the placement of a sign, or resulting from the negligence or willful acts of such person, business or organization, its agents, employees, contractors or workmen in the construction, maintenance, repair or removal of any sign erected in accordance with a permit issued hereunder. Nor shall it be construed as imposing on the

city or its officers or employees any responsibility or liability by reason of the approval or disapproval of any signs, materials or devices under the provisions of this section.

1. No sign may be erected or displayed in a manner that may present a threat to public safety and required sight distances shall be maintained at all times.

17.32.080 Enforcement and removal.

- A. Any violations of this section such as the placement of prohibited signs on a property or the failure to maintain existing or new signage in good condition shall be subject to the code enforcement actions according to this section and Chapters [1.50](#) and [8.24](#).
- B. In addition to the remedies in this section and Chapter [1.50](#), the city shall have the authority to require the repair, maintenance or removal of any sign or sign structure which has become dilapidated or represents a hazard to the safety, health or welfare of the public, at the cost of the sign and/or property owner.
- C. Abandoned and Illegal Signs. Any abandoned or illegal sign is hereby declared to be a danger to the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of Kelso. Any sign that is partially or wholly obscured by the growth of vegetation or weeds or by the presence of debris or litter also presents a danger to the health, safety and welfare of the citizens.
- D. Abandoned or illegal signs are hereby deemed to be a public nuisance and shall be removed by the property owner within forty-five days after notice from the city. Any sign not removed following such notice may summarily be abated by the city in accordance with Chapters [1.50](#) and [8.24](#).
- E. Legal, conforming structural supports for abandoned signs may remain, if installed with a blank sign face and supporting structures are maintained.

17.32.090 Permitted Signs in Zoning Districts

- A. The following table shall be used to determine whether a particular type of sign may be permitted in a given zoning district.
 1. Only those signs identified with a P (permitted) or a footnote (1), (2), (3), etc., may be approved; provided, that they comply with all provisions and the standards of this section. Those uses identified with an X or a blank cell are not permitted in that zone.

Type of Sign/Zoning District	RSF-5/10	RMD	RMF	NC	GC	RC	LI	GI	OPN
Freestanding signs	(1)	(1)	(1)		P (2)	P	P	P	
Freeway signs						P	P	P	
Portable signs				P	P	P	P	P	
Projecting signs				P	P	P			
Temporary signs	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Wall signs	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	

Footnotes:

1. Only on the site of schools, churches, or government offices in accordance with the provisions of this section.
2. Not allowed within the West Main Street pedestrian overlay.

17.32.100 General standards applicable to all signs.

- A. All signs shall comply with the standards specified in the tables and the written standards and regulations contained within this section.
- B. All signs shall provide evidence of compliance with this section, the International Building Codes as adopted by the city, and all other applicable state and/or federal regulations concerning signs prior to installation and uses.
- C. All signs except for temporary signs recognized by this section shall be permanently attached to the ground, to a building or another structure by direct attachment to a rigid wall, frame or structure.
- D. The size of signs shall be determined by the city based upon a measurement of the area of the sign devoted to copy or electronic message boards.
- E. Where a numerical height limit is imposed by this section, the height shall be measured from finished grade of the nearest public street to the top of the sign face or sign face enclosure.
- F. Signs may not located in or extend into the public right-of-way unless specifically authorized or pursuant to a temporary use permit or special event permit.
- G. No sign may be constructed or displayed in a manner that adversely affects the public safety or required sight distances, and sight triangles shall be maintained at all times.

- H. Externally illuminated signs shall be illuminated only with steady, stationary, fully shielded light sources directed solely onto the sign without causing glare. Light shielding shall ensure that the lamp or light source is not visible beyond the premises and shall further ensure that the light is contained within the sign face.
- I. It is important to note that some signs may also be subject to the provisions of state and federal laws, such as the Scenic Vistas Act (Chapter [47.42](#) RCW), the regulations of the Washington State Department of Transportation, and/or the regulations of the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board.
- J. It shall be the responsibility of the applicant to be knowledgeable of and comply with the provisions of applicable local, state, and federal standards.
- K. The city may require documentation of compliance with applicable state and local standards.
- L. All signs must be accessory to the primary use of a lot.

17.32.110 Master sign plans.

- A. Property owners with multiple buildings, multiple tenants, mixed-use developments, and/or master planned developments are encouraged to submit a master sign plan for city review and approval.
 - 1. A sign permit is not required for new signs designed, constructed, and installed in accordance with an approved master sign plan.

17.32.120 Sign standards.

- A. Wall Signs.
 - 1. General Standards.
 - a. Wall signs must be attached or erected parallel to and not extending more than ten inches from the wall, facade, or face of any building to which it is attached and supported throughout its entire length with the exposed face of the sign parallel to the plane of the wall or facade.
 - b. Wall signs may not extend above the parapet or eave line.
 - 2. In the Single-Family Residential Zones (RSF-5, RSF-10, and RMD).
 - a. One nonilluminated wall sign, no larger than two square feet in area, may be attached to the front wall of a single-family residence.

- b. One wall sign per street frontage, no larger than thirty-two square feet, may be attached to schools, churches, or government offices.
3. In the Multifamily, Commercial, and Industrial Zones (RMF, NC, GC, RC, LI, and GI).
 - a. Except within the RC zone, no more than two wall signs or one wall sign and one projecting sign per street frontage may be permitted;
 - b. The total area of wall signs and projecting signs in the RMF and NC zones may not exceed thirty-two square feet per street frontage;
 - c. The total area of wall signs and projecting signs in the GC ~~and RC zones~~ shall not exceed two hundred fifty square feet in area; and
 - d. The total area of wall signs and projecting signs in the RC, LI, and GI zones shall not exceed three hundred fifty square feet in area.
4. If more than one business is located in a building or on a site, a wall sign may be shared or each business may have a wall sign; provided, that the total size of all signs does not exceed the size limitation. For example, if there are five businesses in a building in the GC zone, the businesses could share a two-hundred-fifty-square-foot wall sign or each business could have a fifty-square-foot wall sign.

B. Projecting Signs.

1. No more than one projecting sign may be permitted per street frontage.
2. Projecting signs may be two-sided and not exceed thirty-two square feet per side.
3. Projecting signs may encroach into the public right-of-way (sidewalks) up to four feet if vertical clearance of eight feet is maintained; and provided, that the sign is no closer than two feet from the edge of the road or curb.
4. The area of a projecting sign must be subtracted from the area allowed for a wall sign. For instance, a business in the GC zone may have up to two hundred fifty square feet of wall signs. If a business installs a projecting sign that is eight square feet in size, that business may then only have two hundred forty-two square feet of wall signage.

C. Freestanding and Monument Signs.

1. No more than one freestanding sign or one monument sign per street frontage may be permitted.

2. Freestanding signs in the single-family residential zones (RSF-5, RSF-10, RMD) are permitted only on the site of schools, churches, or government offices; provided, that:
 1. The maximum height is eight feet; and
 2. The freestanding sign may have two sides and the maximum area is thirty-two square feet per side.
3. Freestanding signs in the RMF zone may be permitted; provided, that:
 1. The maximum height is eight feet; and
 2. The freestanding sign may have two sides and the maximum area is thirty-two square feet per side.
4. Freestanding signs in the GC and RC zones may be permitted; provided, that:
 1. The maximum height is ten feet plus the distance of the sign base from the nearest property line, but no higher than twenty feet;
 2. The freestanding sign may have two sides and the maximum area is thirty-two square feet per side; and
 3. May include electronically changeable messages or digital signs in accordance with the provisions of this section.
5. Freestanding signs in the LI and GI zones may be permitted; provided, that:
 1. The maximum height is thirty-five feet;
 2. The freestanding sign may have two sides and the maximum area is one hundred twenty-five square feet per side;
 3. In the LI and GI zones the maximum height of freestanding signs is thirty-five feet; and
 4. May include electronically changeable messages or digital signs in accordance with the provisions of this section.
6. Freestanding signs may not exceed the following size limitations:
 1. In the RMF zone a freestanding sign may have two sides and shall not exceed thirty-two square feet per side.

2. In the NC, GC, and RC zones a freestanding sign may have two sides and shall not exceed thirty-two square feet per side.
3. In the LI and GI zones a freestanding sign may have two sides and shall not exceed one hundred twenty-five square feet per side.

7. Monument signs may not exceed five feet in height, twenty feet in length, or one hundred square feet in area per side.

7-8. Subdivisions are permitted to have one monument sign at each entrance and shall include maintenance provisions within the HOA.

8-9. If more than one business is located in a building or on a site a freestanding or monument sign may be shared; provided, that the total size of all signs does not exceed the size limitation. For example, if there are five businesses in a building in the GC zone, the businesses could share a thirty-two-square-foot freestanding sign.

D. Freeway Signs.

1. Freeway signs may only be permitted on lots abutting Interstate 5 and must be located within a one-thousand-foot radius of the interstate entry/exit point.
2. Freeway signs may not exceed one hundred feet in height.
3. Freeway signs may have two sides and may not exceed one hundred twenty-five square feet per side.
4. May include electronically changeable messages or digital signs in accordance with the provisions of this section.

E. Digital Signs. A digital sign is not a separately allowed sign type. The purpose of this section is to regulate the manner in which digital sign technology can be applied to sign types that are otherwise allowed in this section. It is not intended to allow more signs or larger signs than otherwise permitted in this section.

1. All digital signs shall conform to the following standards:
 - a. Maximum luminance: fifty nits during nighttime hours;
 - b. No motion except for the instantaneous change of messages; and
 - c. A minimum hold between messages of at least eight seconds.

2. Programming. To ensure that EMCs are programmed and continue to operate according to local standards, EMCs shall be designed for local on-site control and programming. The applicant shall provide a written certificate from the sign manufacturer that the nighttime light intensity has been factory preset not to exceed allowable levels under this section, and that this setting is protected from end-user modification by password-protected software or other method that ensures compliance.

17.32.130 Portable and temporary signs.

Portable and temporary signs that meet the following criteria, as determined by the city, do not require a permit. Portable or temporary signs that do not meet the following criteria must receive a permit or be removed. Businesses are encouraged to consult with the department of community development before they incur any expense to confirm that their proposed sign meets the following criteria and that a permit is not required.

A. Portable Signs.

1. Design and Materials. Must be designed with durable materials, otherwise they will be regulated as temporary signs. Portable signs must be designed to withstand wind and may include a heavy weighted base for pole-mounted signs, and a heavy weight suspended between the opposing faces of a sandwich board sign.
2. Size and Height. Sandwich board signs: maximum of four feet in height, maximum of three feet in width. (Note: sandwich board sign height is measured in the flat standing position, rather than in open standing position.) Pole-mounted signs: maximum of five feet in height, two feet in width.
3. Number. Not more than one portable sign may be displayed per business, per tenant space.
4. Location. Must be located no further than ten feet from the primary building of the business, or, if there is only one business or tenant space on the site, it may be located not farther than ten feet from the site's driveway entrance. No portable sign may be located on the city right-of-way (which includes the sidewalk), without a street right-of-way use permit.
5. Display Hours. Portable signs, including temporary portable signs, may be displayed during business or operating hours only.
6. Type. Portable signs may not be changeable copy signs or illuminated in any manner.

B. Temporary Signs. Nothing in this section shall preclude the city from approving temporary signs in conjunction with a special use or event permit.

1. **Materials.** Temporary signs may only be made of nondurable materials, including but not limited to paper, corrugated board, flexible, bendable, or foldable plastics, foam core board, vinyl canvas or vinyl mesh products of less than twenty-ounce fabric, vinyl canvas and vinyl mesh products without polymeric plasticizers and signs painted or drawn with water soluble paints or chalks. Signs made of any other material shall be considered permanent and subject to the permanent sign regulations of this section.
2. Temporary signs may not be changeable copy signs or illuminated in any manner.
3. **Public Safety.** No temporary sign shall obstruct required sight distances or adversely affect public safety. Signs shall not be placed in a manner that obstructs pedestrians or impedes access to driveways, sidewalks or buildings.
4. **City Property.** Temporary signs on city-owned property, excluding the city right-of-way, are prohibited except in conjunction with an approved special event permit.
5. **City Right-of-Way.** Temporary signs are prohibited in the roadway. Temporary freestanding signs on stakes are allowed within the right-of-way outside the roadway and are limited to four square feet and three feet in height. All other signs are prohibited unless allowed in conjunction with a special event permit, temporary use permit or a right-of-way permit.
6. **Signs on Private Property in RSF, RMD, and RMF Zones.** Temporary freestanding stake signs shall not exceed four square feet in size and three feet in height.
7. **Signs on Private Property in NC, GC, RC, LI, and GI Zones.** Temporary freestanding stake signs are limited to four square feet and five feet in height. Temporary portable sandwich board signs are limited to twelve square feet in total area and five feet in height. Portable sandwich board signs are allowed only during business hours and as an accessory use to a principally permitted use.
- 7.8. **Election Signs.** Temporary signs are permitted during election season and must comply with the standards of 17.32.130 (B). Election signs may be displayed up to 45 days prior to an election and must be removed within ten days after the event.
- 8.9. **Removal.** Temporary signs must be removed within ten days after the event or activity. In addition, temporary signs shall be removed if the sign is in need of repair, worn, dilapidated or creates a public nuisance. (Ord. 3992 § 4 (Exh. B), 2023; Ord. 3889 § 3 (Exh. A), 2017)