

**1. What are the different sections of Sign Administration?**

- Plan Review & Inspections – Permitting & Regulation of On-Premises Commercial Advertising Signs
- Administration – Regulation of Fees, Tags, Renewal Notices & Certificates, Database Corrections, Open Records
- Off Premises – Regulation of Remaining Billboards (all of which are grandfathered; new billboards are prohibited)
- Management – Staff Training, Code Interpretation, Special Projects

**2. Can signs be electrical?**

- Yes. Electrical signs may only be permitted & installed by a locally licensed sign contractor.
- Business owners are allowed to permit & install their own non-electrical sign under limited circumstances.
- In all circumstances, the permit is issued to whomsoever is performing the work, & only the person to whom the permit is issued can perform the work.

**3. What is a Wall Sign?**

- An on-premises commercial advertising sign attached to an exterior elevation of the business building; Awning Signs (including Canopy Signs) are classified as Wall Signs.

**4. What is an Awning Sign?**

- An on-premises commercial advertising sign constructed of a fabric type material stretched over a rigid metal frame that is attached to the wall, roof or mansard of a building.
- This includes Canopy Signs, which have greater projection than width & commonly include supporting posts on the end farthest from the building. Note: Such Canopy Signs of the Awning & Canopy variety must first be permitted by The Building Department, as it is considered that they change the footprint of the building.

**5. What is a Projecting Sign?**

- An on-premises commercial advertising sign projecting outward from a building wall & typically featuring advertising on two sides.
- Projecting Signs are counted as Ground Signs. Usually, a Projecting Sign is installed in situations where there is no option for a Ground Sign.
- The code only allows one ground or projecting sign per frontage, for a maximum of two.

**6. What signs can a business owner permit & install themselves?**

- A non-electrical Ground Sign no taller than 8 feet & no larger than 60 square feet in size. A non-electrical Wall Sign no larger than 60 square feet in size & no higher above grade than 16 feet. Note: A Wall Sign installed between 8 & 16 feet overall height above grade requires engineering to be present in the plan set.

**7. Does Sign Administration provide a list of contractors?**

- Yes; it's available through Open Records & is now posted at our web portal.
- Another way to find a licensed sign contractor is word-of-mouth, or a search of local sources (landlord, neighboring business owners, internet, acquaintances, etc.).

**8. What signs are not allowed in Houston?**

➤ Banner Signs, Portable Signs – including Rolling Billboards & “Bandit” Signs - Roof Signs, Spectacular Signs, & anything prohibited by the Attention Getting Device Ordinance.

**9. Are decals on the door a sign?**

➤ Typically not. Most of what's on business doors is required by law, which is one of the first exceptions from permitting in The Houston Sign Code.

**10. Can you put advertising on a window?**

➤ Advertising applied directly to a glass storefront or window with paint or vinyl is regulated, in that it's limited to 20% or less coverage of the glass area, but no permit is required.

**11. Are banners permitted?**

➤ No. A banner by itself can't be permitted. But a banner which is backed & framed becomes a Wall Sign and can be permitted as such.

**12. Is there a Houston Sign Code for banners?**

➤ The Houston Signs Code first and foremost is very banner prohibitive – banner “unfriendly”.  
➤ The singular option for actually permitting a Banner Sign is as a Limited Use Banner.

**13. What is a Limited Use Banner?**

➤ A Banner Sign permitted for 7-consecutive days in a calendar month.  
➤ A Limited Use Banner must be flush-mounted against a building wall utilizing no ropes or ties.

**14. Are fence signs permitted?**

➤ Fence Signs are classified as Ground Signs but are not required to comply with the structural requirements of the code.  
➤ Fence Signs can be permitted but cannot exceed the height of the fence or 30 feet in width.

**15. Who is liable for hand-held signs?**

➤ Holding Signs on the street is regulated by HPD.

**16. Who regulates Election Signs?**

➤ Election Signs are regulated by the State and are not supposed to be in the right-of-way (ROW). If the sign is in the ROW, COH will confiscate it.

**17. Are there any businesses or activities which are exempt from the sign code?**

➤ Federal & state government facilities, including political subdivisions of the State of Texas.

**18. How long does a sign contractor license last?**

➤ These renew annually; reminders are sent out when renewal time is approaching.

**19. If someone moves into a new business and the previous owner did not pay for any of the sign operating permit renewals, is the new owner still responsible?**

➤ No; sign permits are completely & entirely non-transferrable.

**20. What does the new owner of an existing business need to permit existing signs?**

- Notify Sign Administration that ownership of the business has changed & that all existing signs will remain in-place & as-is.
- A Sign Administration Inspector is sent to survey & field-verify that the remaining signs are as originally permitted & that no changes have been made.
- Afterward, the results are submitted to the Sign Administration Admin section, which will generate & mail an invoice.
- Once the invoice is received, payment can be made online, remitted by mail, or made in-person @ the Houston Permitting Center, 1002 Washington Ave. Visit Sign Administration on the 4th floor to get a Sales Order, which is then transacted with the 1st floor Cashiers.

**21. Can signs be refurbished?**

- Refurbishment means to restore to like-new condition & is an option for most signs.
- Note: Refurbishment does not include retrofit, upgrade, modification, etc.

**22. Can the advertising display of an existing sign be changed-out?**

- Commonly referred to as a face change, this is a frequent option for new businesses opening-up in existing buildings with existing Ground, Wall, Projecting or Marquee Signs.
- The new advertising display must be permitted in accordance with Section 4605 (a), & the permit is issued to the licensed sign contractor performing the work.
- Under limited circumstances, a business owner may permit & change-out their own advertising display: Ground Signs no higher above grade than 8 feet, or Wall, Projecting or Marquee Signs no higher above grade than 16 feet.
- In all circumstances, the permit is issued to whomsoever is performing the work, & only the person to whom the permit is issued can perform the work.

**23. When a business moves out of a building or lease space, are they required to take down the sign(s) that they have permitted?**

- The advertising display should be removed or, if that isn't possible, the sign should be covered up.

**24. How long until a sign is considered abandoned?**

- A sign is considered abandoned as soon as a business vacates the premises without removing the sign.
- Usually an abandoned sign is identified when an operating permit renewal hasn't been paid. An Inspector is sent to field-verify that the sign is still up and/or in-operation (advertising display still in-place and/or visible).

**25. What are the limitations placed on the operation of Changeable Message Signs?**

- Messages must remain static and in place for at least 5 minutes at a time. When the message changes it must do so instantaneously, without effects (one second or less).
- When applying for a Changeable Message Sign permit, the Changeable Message and High Technology Acknowledgement Receipt of the sign permit application form must be completed. It talks about the limitation & must be completed by the business owner or location manager with a printed name, signature and a valid phone number (so Sign Administration can contact the responsible party in case of a violation.)

**26. Can a person appeal formal rejection of an application for a sign permit?**

- If a proposed sign is deemed by Sign Administration to not be permissible under The Houston Sign Code, an applicant and/or business owner can make an appeal to the General Appeals Board, challenging the Sign Administrator's interpretation of the code.
- Any person wishing so to do must notify the designated contact for the General Appeals Board within 10 business days of the formal rejection.

**27. Does The Houston Sign Code have a variance?**

- No.

**28. What kind of work can you do to Off-Premises Signs?**

- New permits for Off-Premises Signs have been unavailable since 1985.
- Remaining "grandfathered" billboards can only be worked on by the licensed contractor that owns the billboard.

**29. Does putting up a cross need a permit?**

- Religious symbols such as crosses – without advertising – are not signs & are therefore not regulated by The Houston Sign Code.
- However, a religious symbol with advertising on it would have to comply with The Houston Sign Code regarding placement & size.

**30. Where do I call to schedule an inspection?**

- Sign inspections are scheduled @ 832-394-8890.