

SIGN ADMINISTRATION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**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 larger than 60 square feet in size & no higher above grade than 16 feet.
Note: A 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.
- However, the best way to find a licensed sign contractor is word-of-mouth, or a search of local sources (Yellow Pages, landlord, neighboring business owners, internet, 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 contractor state 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 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 10 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.
- 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.