



# Montgomery County, Virginia SIGNS

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**What is considered a sign?** A sign is any object, device, display or structure or part thereof, visible from a public area which is designed and used to communicate information to persons in public area and attract attention to an institution, organization, business, product, service, event or location by any means, involving words, letters, figures, designs, symbols, fixtures, logos, colors, illumination, or projected images. A sign does not include the display of merchandise for sale on the site of the display.

**Why are signs regulated?** The sign code is intended to promote signs that are compatible with the use of the property to which they are appurtenant, landscape, and architecture of surrounding buildings while not impeding traffic safety for motorists and are maintained in a structural and sound condition. The sign ordinance regulates size, color, illumination, movement, materials, location, height and condition of all signs placed on private property for exterior observation. The sign ordinance shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the First Amendment guarantee of free speech.

## **Types of Signs:**

**Flags:** a piece of cloth or similar material, typically oblong or square, attachable by one (1) edge to a vertical pole or rope and used as a symbol or decoration, including pennants. Flagpoles must have a diameter of less than or equal to eight (8) inches.

**Permanent:** any non-portable sign supported by a fence, retaining wall, upright structural members, poles, braces on or in the ground or attached to a building wall or painted on or against a flat vertical surface of a structure. This includes but is not limited to: freestanding, monument, wall, projecting, awning, electronic message sign, marquee, minor, pole, roof, window, and neon signs.

**Temporary:** A sign intended for short term use and constructed of cloth, canvas, vinyl, paper, plywood, fabric or other lightweight material not well suited to provide a durable substrate or if made of some other material, and is neither permanently installed in the ground nor permanently affixed to a building or structure which is permanently installed in the ground. This includes but is not limited to: a-frame, banner, blade, feather, portable, vehicle or trailer, and window signs. Temporary signs shall not be displayed more than thirty (30) days unless otherwise permitted.

## **How are signs measured and where can they be placed?**

**Area:** For signs that are regular polygons or circles, the area is calculated by the mathematical formula for that polygon or circle. If the sign is not a regular polygon or circle, the sign area is calculated using all that area within a maximum of three (3) abutting or overlapping rectangles that enclose the sign face.

**Faces:** Only one (1) face of a double faced sign is calculated if the internal angle between its two (2) faces is no more than forty-five (45) degrees. If one face is larger than the other, the area of the larger face shall be calculated.

**Height:** The maximum height for any sign shall be twelve (12) feet unless otherwise specified. Height is measured as the maximum vertical distance from the base of the sign at normal grade to the top of the highest attached component of the sign.

**Placement:** All freestanding signs shall be set back at least ten (10) feet from any property line.

**Sign Illumination:** All permitted signs may be backlit, internally lighted, or indirectly lighted unless otherwise specified. All lighting must comply with the standards outlined in sections 10-45 and 10-46 of the Montgomery County Zoning Ordinance. In no event shall the illumination of any sign resulting from any internal or external artificial light source adversely affect surrounding properties, cause offensive glare, or create a traffic hazard.

**Electronic Message Signs:** Each message or image on an electronic message sign shall remain fixed and unchanged for a minimum period of five (5) seconds. Images or messages may not flash, blink, move, scroll, dissolve, or fade on the screen. The illumination intensity, contrast, or coloration of the message text must remain constant for each display period. The intensity/brightness of such sign shall not exceed the industry standard recommended 0.3 foot candles above ambient light and shall be equipped with technology that automatically dims the illumination intensity commensurate with ambient light conditions.

**Do I need a permit?** A sign permit is required prior to the display of any new sign or reface of an existing sign except in certain instances as outlined in Section 10-46(a)(3)(4).

**Sign Requirements per Zoning District**

**Agricultural Districts:** Agricultural (A-1) and Conservation (C-1) Zoning Districts

TYPE	FLAGS		TEMPORARY		PERMANENT	
	Residential	Non-Residential	Residential	Non-Residential	Residential	Non-Residential
<b>SIZE (each/total)</b>	16 s.f./no limit	24 s.f./no limit	16 s.f./32 s.f.	16 s.f./32 s.f.	4 s.f./4 s.f.	50 s.f./50 s.f.
<b>MAXIMUM NUMBER</b>	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited	1	Unlimited – 1 free-standing or monument sign
<b>ILLUMINATION</b>	As required by law		None		Indirect	Internal or Indirect
<b>SETBACK</b>	Equal to height		10 ft.		None	10 ft.
<b>MAXIMUM HEIGHT</b>	25 ft.		4 ft.		4 ft.	12 ft.

**Residential Districts:** Rural Residential (RR), Residential (R-1), (R2), (R3), Residential Multi-Family (RM1), Planned Unit Development-Residential (PUD-Res), Planned Mobile Home Residential Park (PMR), Traditional Neighborhood Development and Infill (TND-I), and Planned Unit Development – Traditional Neighborhood Development (PUD-TND)

TYPE	FLAGS		TEMPORARY		PERMANENT	
	Residential	Non-Residential	Residential	Non-Residential	Residential	Non-Residential
<b>SIZE (each/total)</b>	16 s.f./no limit	24 s.f./no limit	16 s.f./32 s.f.	16 s.f./32 s.f.	4 s.f./4 s.f.	50 s.f./50 s.f.
<b>MAXIMUM NUMBER</b>	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited	1	Unlimited – 1 free-standing or monument sign
<b>ILLUMINATION</b>	As required by law		None		Indirect	Internal or Indirect
<b>SETBACK</b>	Equal to height		10 ft.		None	10 ft.
<b>MAXIMUM HEIGHT</b>	25 ft.		4 ft.		4 ft.	12 ft.

**Commercial Districts & Industrial Districts:** Community Business (CB), General Business (GB), Planned Unit Development – Commercial (PUD-COM), Manufacturing (M1), Manufacturing Light (ML), Planned Industrial (PIN)

TYPE	FLAGS	TEMPORARY	PERMANENT
<b>SIZE (each/total)</b>	32 s.f./no limit	32 s.f./32 s.f.	150 s.f./150 s.f.
<b>MAXIMUM NUMBER</b>	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited – 1 free-standing/monument sign
<b>ILLUMINATION</b>	As required by law	None	Internal/Indirect
<b>SETBACK</b>	Equal to height	10 ft.	10 ft.
<b>MAXIMUM HEIGHT</b>	25 ft.	6 ft.	12 ft.

**For additional information contact:**  
**Montgomery Co. Planning & GIS Services**  
**755 Roanoke Street, Suite 2A**  
**Christiansburg, VA 24073**  
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This sheet is intended to only be a guide for development regulations in this zoning district. Please see Chapter 10 of the Montgomery County Code for the specific regulations. The full texts of the zoning and subdivision ordinances are available at the Planning Department Webpage or at [www.municode.com](http://www.municode.com).