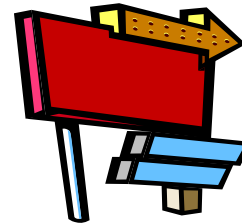


## Sign Codes, What Can I do?

By Aaron Green, Kwik Car Wash President

Signage for our businesses is a big thing. It is the only thing that can work for you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year and you never have to pay it overtime or hear it complain. Done right, it can take a marginal location and make it a viable business. Done wrong, however, it can be a disaster. Cities generally break signs into one of three categories:

1. Building/Wall Signs
2. Freestanding/Monument Signs
3. Temporary Signs



The following is from the Town of Parker's municipal Code:

*The purpose of this Chapter is to promote the public health, safety and welfare by establishing standards and criteria for the construction, installation, maintenance and operation of signs in the Town of Parker, which are subject to the provisions of this Chapter. More specifically, this Chapter is intended to:*

- (1) Enhance and protect the physical appearance of the Town.*
- (2) Protect property values.*
- (3) Promote and maintain visually attractive, high-value residential, retail, commercial and industrial areas.*
- (4) Promote the economic well-being of the community by creating a favorable physical image.*
- (5) Ensure that signs are located and designed to:*
  - a. Provide an effective means of way-finding in the community.*
  - b. Afford the community an equal and fair way to advertise and promote its products and services.*
  - c. Reduce sign clutter and the distractions and confusion that may be contributing factors in traffic congestion and accidents, and maintain a safe and orderly pedestrian and vehicular environment.*
  - d. Minimize the disruption of the scenic views which when maintained protect important community values.*
  - e. Afford businesses, individuals and institutions a reasonable opportunity to use signs as an effective means of communication.*

*(6) Provide review procedures that assure that signs are consistent with the Town's objectives and within the Town's capacity to efficiently administer the regulations.*

*(7) Prohibit all signs not expressly permitted by this Chapter.*

Sign codes are written with the best of intent but to a business owner it is certainly restrictive and prohibitive. While the exact language may change from city to city the basic principle is the same: regulate and control what is and is not allowed to attract customers to your business.

A Building/Wall Sign's size will most often be determined by a math formula based on the linear feet of street frontage you have for individual parcels of land. If you are in a shopping center that has a 'planned sign program,' the size and location was determined for you when the center was developed. In most cases, the size and location are not negotiable with the city, however, you can ask for a variance to the code based on special circumstances.

Freestanding/Monument signs are again pretty cut and dry- you are either allowed one or you are not. If you are allowed a sign, the code will tell you minimum setbacks from the street, height, size and construction requirements. If you are allowed LED signs, the sign code regulates size and how often you can change the message. Again, you can ask for a variance if you feel there are special circumstances.

Temporary Signs-this is what most of us battle with every day. This category includes things like banners, A-Frame/windsigns, balloons, pennants, wind dancers and employees holding signs on the street. This is where you and I try to promote specials, attract a customer's attention on slow days or slow seasons and let people know something new or different is going on at our business. Without going into much detail, just understand that most cities do not allow wind dancers, balloons, pennants or people holding signs on the street. Most cities have regulations on banner size, how many days a year you can hang a banner and what the banner must be attached to, i.e. a permanent structure. They often regulate how many A-Frame signs you are allowed as well. While frustrating, it is important to remember that fighting with the city will really do nothing more than put a bulls eye on your business. You will not win the war, no matter the outcome of that battle.

Instead, get creative and look for areas in the code you can work with. Talk with a city planner, most of them can be very helpful. Here are a few areas to consider when looking for more signage or ways to attract attention to your store.

1. Directional Signage-almost every city allows directional signage on a property and out towards the street. This includes entrance and exit signs out on the street, car wash entrance this way (with an arrow), vacuum's this way (with and arrow), stop pay here, do not enter, etc. Directional signage can be a great way to let people know what your business is and how to navigate the property and it does not count against your sign allowance with the city.

2. Flags-A city cannot stop you from putting up an American Flag (of any size) and most will allow you to hang your own flag provided that the American Flag is highest, followed by the State Flag and

third is yours. Remember that when you put up an American Flag there are requirements that go with it, e.g. lighting the flag at night.

3. Informational Signage-This includes menu boards, disclaimers and rules. This can be another area for branding and attract people's attention and again this does not count against your sign allowance.
4. Decoration-By law you are allowed to decorate for ANY and EVERY holiday if you choose, a giant gorilla with a Santa Clause hat on top of your store is allowed, if you love Christmas that much. If you look at the calendar I bet you can find a holiday you love almost every month!
5. Seasonal color/landscaping-Don't underestimate the value of landscaping and beautiful flowers as marketing. It provides an appearance of a well run facility and bright flowers that are changed with the season can attract a customer's eye from the road.
6. Charity Events-While hosting a charity event does not repeal the cities sign code they will sometimes turn the other way for the day and allow you to hang a banner for the day or have kids holding signs on the corner of your wash. Great community public perception can go a long way in promoting your facility.



These are just a few ideas to help you look at the sign code in your town with a new understanding. Always visit and talk with a planner before investing a significant amount of capital in any project just to make sure you have their blessing, and if you do get it in writing!