

SECTION 13 - SIGN REGULATIONS

13.A. FINDINGS, PURPOSE, AND SCOPE

1. The City has determined that:

- a. Since 1951, the City of Stamford has had in effect a comprehensive system of *Sign* regulations governing the location, size and number of *Signs* that can be erected in the City. These regulations are intended to create a legal framework for a balanced system of signage to improve and enhance the City of Stamford's interests in promoting public safety, preventing traffic hazards, and creating an aesthetically pleasing community. The City finds that *Signs* provide an important medium through which individuals may convey a variety of messages. However, left unregulated, *Signs* can become a threat to public safety as a traffic hazard and detriment to property values and the City's overall public welfare as an aesthetic concern.
- b. As a result of its comprehensive sign regulations, and in particular its restrictions on the height, area and location of signage, the City of Stamford presents an aesthetically pleasing environment and provides for traffic substantially free of unsafe diversions.
- c. It has never been the intention of the City and its enforcement efforts to interpret, restrict or regulate the messages contained on signage in the City.

2. The purposes of this Section are to regulate the number, location, size, type, and use of *Signs* within the City in order to promote the public health, safety and welfare; to maintain, enhance and improve the environment of the City by preventing visual clutter that is harmful to traffic safety and the appearance of the community; to balance the rights of persons to convey their messages through *Signs* and the right of the public to be protected against the unrestricted proliferation of *Signs*; and to ensure the fair and consistent enforcement of sign regulations, while providing for effective means of communication, consistent with constitutional guarantees. This Section does not regulate, nor is it intended to regulate, the message displayed on any *Sign*, *Building* design or any display not defined as a *Sign*.

3. It is hereby declared unlawful for any person, corporation or entity to construct, place, install, alter, change, maintain, use or to permit the construction, placement, installation, alteration, change, maintenance, or use of any *Sign* contrary to or in violation of the provisions of this Section.

13.B. NONCOMMERCIAL SIGNS

Notwithstanding any other provision in this Section or these Regulations to the contrary, any *Sign* authorized in these Regulations may contain any noncommercial copy in addition to, or in lieu of, any other copy. *Signs* containing only noncommercial copy shall be deemed to be *On-site Signs*, not *Off-site Advertising Signs*.

13.C. PERMITS

13.C.1. Permits Required

Except as provided elsewhere in these Regulations, it shall be unlawful for any person to post, display, substantially change, or erect any *Sign* authorized by this Section without first having obtained a *Zoning Permit* as prescribed in Section 17 of these Regulations. The cost of a *Zoning Permit* for a *Sign* shall be established pursuant to the separately adopted Fee Schedule.

13.C.2. Contents of Permit Application

An application for a *Zoning Permit* under this Section shall include the following information:

- a. An accurate plan showing the proposed location of the *Sign* on the subject property in relation to property lines, existing *Signs*, and *Principal Buildings* and other site improvements, if any.
- b. An accurate elevation drawing of the proposed *Sign* and the supporting *Structure* or *Building* façade intended to receive the *Sign*, showing the sign dimensions, area, and height above finished grade, and proposed location of the *Sign* in relation to the *Building* façade and roof line.
- c. The property address, the name and address of the property owner, and, if the applicant is not the property owner, the written consent of the owner or his/her agent to the placement and maintenance of the proposed *Sign*.
- d. The name, address, phone number and license number of the sign contractor, if any.
- e. The aggregate area of all existing *Signs* on the *Plot*.
- f. The type of construction, sign supports, and any mechanical or electrical details as required by the applicable *Building* code.
- g. Whether the proposed *Sign* is an *On-site Sign* or an *Off-site Advertising Sign*.

13.C.3. Permit Procedures, Appeals, Variances

The procedures for applying for a *Zoning Permit* for a *Sign*, including the time for decision by the Zoning Officer and appeals from a denial of a permit application, are set forth in Sections 17 and 19 of these Regulations. The procedures for seeking a *Variance* for a *Sign* are also set forth in Section 19 of these Regulations.

13.C.4. Repair and Replacement of Permitted Signs

A *Sign* which conforms to the standards of this Section may be repaired by repainting, replacement of lettering and accompanying symbols, and repair of structural supports, and such repainting, replacement and repair shall not be considered a substantial change requiring a *Zoning Permit* within the meaning of this Section, provided that the outside dimensions, location, height and

illumination of the *Sign* are not changed.

13.C.5. Signs Exempt from Permit Requirements

The following *Signs* do not require a *Zoning Permit*, but must comply with all standards of this Section and all other provisions of these Regulations:

- a. *Signs* that are not illuminated and have a *Sign Area* of sixteen (16) square feet or less.
- b. Flags.
- c. *Signs* installed flush with or on the interior of a window and designed for viewing from the outside of the premises. However, such *Signs* shall not exceed thirty (30) percent of the available window area.
- d. Public Notice *Signs* required pursuant to Section 20.C.

13.D. PROHIBITED SIGNS IN ALL DISTRICTS

1. No *Sign* shall use or be illuminated by lighting of flashing, intermittent or varying intensity, including, but not limited to, flashing, beacon, strobe, rotating beacon, chasing or zip lights.
2. No *Sign* shall be illuminated by exposed tubes, bulbs or similar exposed light surfaces, or by exterior spot lighting or other illumination that would cause glare observable to a Residence District or hazards to vehicular traffic.
3. No *Sign* shall include any visible moving parts.
4. No *Sign* shall simulate emergency lights on emergency vehicles or traffic control signals or devices, or hide from view any traffic control device, signal or *Sign*.
5. No *Sign* shall obstruct road or highway visibility, interfere with the safe and orderly movement of traffic, or otherwise pose a hazard to traffic.
6. All *Off-Site Advertising Signs* are prohibited.
7. All *Roof Signs* are prohibited except as expressly permitted under subsections G, H and L of this Section. (214-30)
8. No *Pole Sign* or *Ground Sign*, including its base, may exceed twenty-one (21) feet in height. This height limit shall not apply to flags.
9. No *Sign* or sign *Structure* above a height of three (3) feet shall be erected or maintained within fifteen (15) feet of the intersection of the right-of-way lines of two (2) *Streets*, or of a street intersection with a railroad right-of-way (the “Corner Visibility Area”). However, a *Sign* support *Structure* not more than ten (10) inches in diameter may be located within the Corner Visibility Area if all other requirements of this Section are met and the lowest elevation of the sign surface is at least twelve (12) feet above the ground level.

13.E. IN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS, non-illuminated *On-site Signs* are authorized on each *Plot* under the following conditions:

1. One or more *Wall Signs* and/or *Ground Signs*, in the aggregate not exceeding fifteen (15) square feet in area, and no single *Sign* exceeding six (6) square feet in area or a height of six (6) feet when ground mounted, may be placed not in advance of the property line.
2. Properties supporting only a permitted non-residential use may display one additional *Wall Sign* or *Ground Sign*, not exceeding twelve (12) square feet in area and eight (8) feet in height when ground mounted, placed not in advance of the setback line.
3. Flags, in the aggregate not exceeding twenty-four (24) square feet in area, may be displayed, provided that no flag may exceed 25 feet in height.

13.F. IN THE C-N NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS DISTRICT, *On-site Signs* are authorized on each *Plot* under the following conditions:

1. The total area of any *Signs* placed on the front wall of a *Building* shall not exceed two (2) square feet in area for each lineal foot of *Building* frontage.
2. The total area of *Signs* placed on the side and rear walls of a *Building* shall not exceed thirty (30) square feet per wall.
3. Where a *Parking Area* is provided on a *Plot*, *Signs* may be erected at the entrances and exits of such *Parking Area*, provided the total area of all such *Signs* shall not exceed twelve (12) square feet and no such *Sign* exceeds eight (8) feet in height.
4. One (1) additional *Ground Sign* or *Wall Sign*, not exceeding sixteen (16) square feet in area and ten (10) feet in height when ground mounted, may be displayed on any *Plot*. This *Sign* may be erected on a temporary protective fence on a property in the process of construction, demolition, remodeling or repair.
5. Flags, each not to exceed twenty-four (24) square feet in area and twenty-five (25) feet in height, and in the aggregate not exceeding seventy-two (72) square feet in area, may be displayed on vertical or mast-arm flagpoles.
6. One (1) *Ground Sign* or *Pole Sign* may be erected on a *Plot* in addition to all other signage permitted in this subsection 13.F. Such *Ground Sign* or *Pole Sign* shall not exceed fifty (50) square feet in area, and no side of the sign face may exceed ten (10) feet in length, nor shall such *Sign* exceed twenty-one (21) feet in height.
7. Other than as expressly provided herein, all *Signs* permitted by this Section shall be placed to the rear of the setback line for the property on which the *Sign* is to be located and no part of any *Sign*, including *Pole Signs*, shall project over sidewalks.

13.G. IN ANY C-L LIMITED BUSINESS DISTRICT, C-G GENERAL COMMERCIAL DISTRICT, AND C-I INTERMEDIATE COMMERCIAL DISTRICT *On-site Signs* are authorized on each *Plot* under the following conditions:

1. On the front walls of *Buildings*, the total area of *Signs* for each *Story* shall not exceed two (2) square feet for each lineal foot of *Building* frontage.
2. The total area of *Signs* placed on the side or rear walls of a *Building* shall not exceed sixty (60) square feet.
3. Where a *Parking Area* is provided on a *Plot*, *Signs* may be erected at the entrances and exits to such *Parking Area*, provided the total area of all such *Signs* shall not exceed twelve (12) square feet and no such *Sign* exceeds eight (8) feet in height.
4. One (1) additional *Ground Sign* or *Wall Sign*, not exceeding sixteen (16) square feet in area and ten (10) feet in height when ground mounted, may be displayed on any *Plot*, or on a temporary protective fence on a property in the process of construction, demolition, remodeling or repair.
5. Flags, each not to exceed one hundred (100) square feet in area and fifty (50) feet in height, and in the aggregate not exceeding three-hundred (300) square feet in area, may be displayed on vertical or mast-arm flagpoles.
6. One (1) *Ground Sign* or *Pole Sign* may be erected on a *Plot* in addition to all other signage permitted in this subsection 13-G. Such *Ground Sign* or *Pole Sign* shall not exceed sixty (60) square feet in area, and no side of the sign face shall exceed ten (10) feet in length, nor shall such *Pole Sign* exceed twenty-one (21) feet in height. In the C-G District on *Lots* of one (1) acre or larger with multiple street frontages within the Architectural Review Design District, one (1) additional *Ground Sign* may be erected provided that all such *Signs* are separated by a distance of not less than ten (10) feet and two *Signs* facing a single street frontage may only be allowed pursuant to the review procedure of Section 7.6-E. (213-12)
7. Other than as expressly provided herein, all *Signs* permitted by this Section shall be placed to the rear of the setback line for the property on which the *Sign* is to be located and no part of any *Sign*, including *Pole Signs*, shall project over sidewalks.
8. Where a property is located in the C-I District (Intermediate Commercial District) or C-G District (General Commercial District) and abuts I-95, the abutting area shall be considered a “Front” *Yard* for purposes of wall mounted signage. The total area of such wall signage on a *Building* façade facing I-95 shall be restricted to one (1) square foot per linear foot of *Building* frontage with a maximum of two (2) *Wall Signs* per such *Building* frontage. Any such *Wall Sign* shall contain only the name or logo of the person or entity which owns the *Building* or the name or logo of any tenant occupying at least twenty thousand (20,000) square feet of leasable floor area within the *Building*, and shall not be used to promote any product line, service or like advertising. (209-028; 214-30)

9. Where a *Building* fronts on more than one *Street*, one of which is I-95 or a state highway, is on a *Lot* in excess of three (3) acres and is used exclusively for commercial purposes, the Zoning Board may authorize by issuance of a *Special Permit Wall Signs* to be mounted above the established roofline on a parapet façade of uniform height so long as said *Sign* does not extend above the top of the parapet façade. (214-30)

13.H. IN THE C-C CENTER CITY DISTRICT *On-site Signs* are authorized on each *Plot* under the following conditions:

1. The total area of *Signs* placed on the front wall of the *Building*, shall not exceed one and one-half (1 ½) square feet per lineal foot of such façade length. Such *Wall Signs* may not project more than twenty-four (24) inches from the face of the *Building*. On any *Building* approved subject to the provisions of Section 19.E. of these Regulations, a “blade” type *Sign* may be provided, and such blade *Sign* may project over sidewalks and any required setback lines but may not project more than nine (9) feet from the face of the *Building* and not beyond the property line. The bottom of such *Signs* must be no lower than the base of the second floor of the *Building*. No more than one (1) blade *Sign* may be provided on any frontage. For any proposed blade *Sign* with two faces, total *Sign Area* for such *Sign* shall equal the surface area of one sign face and shall exclude any non-advertising ornamentation attached to such *Sign* provided the ornamentation does not exceed twenty-five percent (25%) of the sign. Signage shall be designed to be compatible with the *Building*, in scale with the storefront and the intended viewer. Simple and clear designs maintaining strong contrast between letters and background and constructed of high quality materials are encouraged. Exterior illumination shall not be overly bright and should be non-glaring and inconspicuous. Internally illuminated *Signs* shall be limited to the illumination of characters only. The direct source of light shall be shielded from pedestrians’ view. Flashing, revolving, intermittent or animated lighting is prohibited. Lighting such as: spotlights, flood lights, warm fluorescent, neon or incandescent lamp source is suggested. Mercury or sodium vapor lighting is prohibited. No text or illustration shall be permitted on the narrow face of such *Sign*. Blade *Signs* shall be approved by the Zoning Board administratively during or following Site Plan review. (204-01, 218-49)
2. The total area of *Signs* placed on the side or rear walls of a *Building* shall not exceed sixty (60) square feet.
3. Where a *Parking Area* is provided on a *Plot*, *Signs* may be erected at the entrances and exits to such *Parking Area*, provided the total area of all such *Signs* shall not exceed twelve (12) square feet and no such *Sign* exceeds eight (8) feet in height.
4. One (1) additional *Ground Sign* or *Wall Sign*, not exceeding sixteen (16) square feet in area and ten (10) feet in height when ground mounted, may be displayed on any *Plot*. This *Sign* may be erected on a temporary protective fence on a property in the process of construction, demolition, remodeling or repair.

5. Flags, each not to exceed two hundred and sixteen (216) square feet in area and sixty (60) feet in height, in the aggregate not exceeding six hundred and fifty (650) square feet in area, may be displayed on vertical or mast-arm flagpoles.
6. One (1) ground or *Pole Sign* may be erected on a *Plot* in addition to all other signage permitted in this section 13.H. Such *Ground Sign* or *Pole Sign* shall not exceed fifty (50) square feet in area, and no side of the Sign face may exceed ten (10) feet in length, nor shall such *Sign* exceed twenty-one (21) feet in height.
7. Other than as expressly provided herein, all *Signs* shall be placed to the rear of the setback line for the property on which the *Sign* is to be located and no *Signs*, including *Pole Signs*, shall project over sidewalks.
8. Where property abuts I-95, the abutting area shall be considered a “front” *Yard* for purposes of signage.
9. Where a *Building* fronts on more than one *Street* and is on a *Lot* in excess of two acres, the Zoning Board, by issuance of a *Special Permit*, may authorize the transfer of front wall signage rights to another front, side or rear wall of the *Building*, the wall of an attached garage that fronts on a *Street*, or to a ground mounted *Sign* or *Signs*, upon a finding by the Zoning Board that such transfer (i) will result in a *Sign* or *Signs* appropriate to the architecture of the *Building*, (ii) will promote identification of the *Building*, and (iii) is consistent with the goals and policies of the *Master Plan*. Any signage rights transferred shall remain on the same *Lot* from which they originate. A request to transfer signage rights shall be accompanied by plans, subject to Zoning Board approval, showing the intended location, number, size and design of the intended new signage. Where a portion of the requested signage transfer is unallocated to an approved sign plan, the amount of such unallocated signage transfer shall not exceed two hundred (200) square feet per *Lot*.
 - a. Any such wall signage shall contain only the name or logo of a person or entity having an ownership interest in the *Building* or the name or logo of a tenant or tenants occupying not less than twenty thousand (20,000) square feet of leasable floor area within the *Building*, and shall not be used to promote any product line, service or like advertising. Any such *Wall Signs* shall satisfy the following criteria, as determined by the Zoning Board: (A) except in an instance where the Zoning Board has previously approved signage with internally illuminated lettering or logos on the same *Building*, illumination of signage shall be with back lighting or indirect lighting and no internally illuminated lettering or logos shall be permitted; (B) in addition to a background color, no more than two colors may be used within a *Sign*; and (C) *Signs* shall be compatible in color, height and alignment to other *Signs* on the same frontage of a *Building*. The *Sign Area* calculation for open-type *Signs* permitted under paragraph H.1 above shall not apply to any signage rights transferred under this paragraph 9. (215-16)
 - b. Such *Ground Signs* shall not exceed one (1) *Sign* per street frontage, subject to the limitation that the *Sign Area* of any individual *Ground Sign* shall not exceed 125 square

feet, as defined in Definition 94.1, and no individual sign face shall exceed a width of seven (7) feet. Notwithstanding paragraphs D.1 and H.7 above, such *Signs* may be allowed within a front setback area and/or within Corner Visibility Areas, provided the Zoning Board makes a finding that visibility will not be impaired.

- c. Where a *Special Permit* has approved the transfer of unallocated signage rights, the location, number, size and design of all new wall and *Ground Signs* pursuant to this paragraph 9, shall be subject to administrative review and approval by the Zoning Board. Alterations, replacement and changes in the content of existing *Signs* shall be subject to administrative review and approval by the Zoning Board, consistent with the standards and criteria of this paragraph 9. (206-07B; 209-24)
- d. Where a *Building* fronts on more than one *Street*, one of which is a state highway, is on a *Lot* in excess of three (3) acres and is used exclusively for retail purposes, the Zoning Board may authorize the following *Signs* by issuance of a *Special Permit*:
 - (1) On *Building* walls facing public *Streets* or private drives leading to a municipal parking garage, the total area of *Signs* on a *Building* façade facing such *Streets* or drives shall not exceed 2.0 square feet per lineal foot of façade length, for each *Story* at or below 3 *Stories*, and may include so called “blade *Signs*” which do not project more than 5 feet from the *Building* façade and do not extend above the parapet wall.
 - (2) The Zoning Board may authorize any *Sign* to be mounted above the established roofline on a parapet façade so long as said *Sign* is completely contained within the parapet façade. The Zoning Board may authorize such *signs* at such time as the initial approval of the *Building* design or subsequently. (206-51)

13.I. IN A M-L LIGHT INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT OR A M-G GENERAL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT, *On-site Signs* are authorized on each *Plot* under the following conditions:

1. On the front walls of *Buildings*, the total area of *Signs* shall not exceed an area of one and one-half (1½) square feet for each lineal foot of *Building* frontage.
2. The total area of *Signs* placed on the side or rear walls of a *Building* shall not exceed sixty (60) square feet.
3. Where a *Parking Area* is provided on a *Plot*, *Signs* may be erected at the entrances and exits to such *Parking Area*, provided the total area of all such *Signs* shall not exceed twelve (12) square feet and no such *Sign* shall exceed eight (8) feet in height.
4. One (1) additional *Ground Sign* or *Wall Sign*, not exceeding sixteen (16) square feet in area and ten (10) feet in height when ground mounted, may be placed on any *Plot*. This *Sign* may be erected on a temporary protective fence on a property in the process of construction, demolition, remodeling or repair.
5. Flags, each not to exceed one hundred (100) square feet in area and fifty (50) feet in height, in the aggregate not exceeding three hundred (300) square feet in area, may be displayed

on vertical or mast-arm flagpoles.

6. One (1) *Ground Sign* or *Pole Sign* may be erected on a *Plot* in addition to all other signage permitted in this section 13-I. Such *Ground Sign* or *Pole Sign* shall not exceed fifty (50) square feet in area, and no side of the *Sign* face shall exceed ten (10) feet in length, nor shall such *Sign* exceed twenty-one (21) feet in height. However, in the case of a large scale retail establishment fronting on a State highway, the Zoning Board, by *Special Permit*, may allow a *Ground Sign* or *Pole Sign* of no more than one hundred (100) square feet and no more than twelve (12) feet in length, if the establishment meets the following criteria:
 - a. It must be on a parcel or two or more contiguous parcels under common ownership, with a combined *Lot Area* in excess of 300,000 square feet and with at least one parcel fronting on a state highway, and with the primary entrance and exit driveway for access to said parcel or parcels on said state highway;
 - b. It must be used primarily for retail purposes, supporting at least 100,000 square feet of retail floor area, with shared internal driveways and/or parking;
 - c. Said *Sign* must be the only *Pole Sign* or *Ground Sign* on all of said parcels;
 - d. Said *Sign* shall be located so as to identify the primary access driveway for said parcel or parcels and may only display businesses located on such parcel or parcels. (206-13)
7. Other than as expressly provided herein, all *Signs* shall be placed to the rear of the setback line for the property on which the *Sign* is to be located and no *Signs*, including *Pole Signs*, shall project over sidewalks.

13.J. BUILDINGS IN ADVANCE OF SETBACK LINE

On any *Building* located in advance of the setback line, a *Sign* may be erected on the front wall of the *Building* that otherwise conforms to all other applicable provisions of this Section for the applicable district.

13.K. NON-CONFORMING SIGNS AND USES

A *Sign* that complied with the then-applicable provisions of this Section when it was erected, but that does not comply with this Section as amended, is a non-conforming *Sign*. A non-conforming *Sign* may not be replaced, altered or relocated except to make the *Sign* comply with all of the standards of this Section. A non-conforming *Sign* that is discontinued or abandoned for a continuous period of one (1) year may not thereafter be re-used, repaired or replaced except with a *Sign* that conforms to the standards of this Section for the district in which the property is located. Minor repairs to and maintenance of non-conforming *Signs* shall be permitted. No existing *Sign* for any non-conforming use may be enlarged or relocated unless such *Sign* conforms with this Section.

13.L. PENTHOUSE SIGNS

A *Sign* placed on and not extending beyond the vertical wall of a decorative architectural screening or a fully enclosed mechanical penthouse *Structure* located on the roof of a *Building* of not less than four (4) *Stories* in a commercial or industrial district is declared to be a class of *Wall Sign*. Except for location, such *Signs* shall conform to all other applicable standards for a *Wall Sign* in the applicable district. (210-21)

13.M. SEVERABILITY

The provisions of these Sign Regulations are declared severable, to the maximum extent permitted by law. If any provision or provisions of these Sign Regulations or the application thereof to any person or circumstance is held invalid or unlawful, it is the intent of the Zoning Board of the City of Stamford that said invalidity shall not affect other provisions of these Regulations, which shall remain in full force and effect as if such portion so declared invalid or unlawful were not originally part of these Regulations, even if the surviving parts of the Regulations result in greater restrictions after any unlawful provisions are stricken. In particular, and without limitation, in the event any portion of these Regulations are declared invalid as applied to noncommercial *Signs*, the Regulations, or any surviving portions thereof, shall remain in full force and effect as applied to commercial *Signs*.

13.N. This Section shall not apply to any *Sign* required by regulation or statute of any federal, state or municipal government or department. (200-32)

13.O. SPECIAL REGULATIONS FOR GASOLINE FILLING STATIONS AND CAR WASH ESTABLISHMENTS (223-30)

The following additional standards shall apply to signage for Gasoline Filling Stations and Car Wash Establishments in all districts where such uses are permitted:

1. When the Gasoline Filling Station or Car Wash Establishment is fronting on one *Street*, one Pole Sign and one Ground Sign shall be permitted. When fronting on two or more *Streets*, one Pole Sign and one Ground Sign shall be permitted for every street frontage exceeding 100' in length.
2. Pole Signs shall not exceed sixty (60) square feet in area and no side of the sign face may exceed ten (10) feet in length. No part of any Pole Signs shall exceed a height of twenty-one (21) feet from the finished curb.
3. Ground signs shall not exceed five feet (5') in height, six feet (6') in width, and thirty square feet (30 sf) in area.
4. For each *Street* on which the *Lot* fronts, a maximum of twenty (20) square feet of additional

signage may be erected on a canopy over pump islands.

5. No *Sign* shall obstruct visibility for drivers or pedestrians.
6. There shall be no illuminated signage facing any *Interior Lot Lines*.
7. Signs on *Buildings* shall not exceed two feet (2') for each foot (1') of building frontage on a public *Street*.

SECTION 14 [*deleted*] (219-25)