

Sign Permits

The Tacoma Municipal Code (hereinafter TMC) regulates signs according to type and location. This guide lists common types of signs that may be exempt, prohibited, or require permitting.

EXEMPT SIGNS – Examples of signs allowed without a permit (See a complete list in TMC 13.06.521.B.)



Window Signs



Works of art containing no commercial message or logo



Incidental or Warning Signs

REGULATED SIGNS – Regulated signs are categorized as either freestanding or wall-mounted.



Freestanding Sign



Wall-mounted Sign

SIGN PERMIT APPLICATION CHECKLIST

- Application Form completed and signed
 - List the number and square footage of all existing sign(s) on site.
 - List street frontage and/or tenant space frontage of the existing building. Frontage is the length of the building parallel to the abutting right-of-way (See complete definition of “frontage” for signage in TMC 13.06.700.F.)
- Site Plan to scale - Show existing property lines, the distance from the sign to the property lines, building footprints, parking spaces, and driveways. Show where all existing and proposed signs are located and label accordingly. Show all of the existing & proposed signs on the property.
- Sign Elevations to scale (exterior view of all sides). Show sign clearance, and overall sign height in feet.
- Structural engineering details

Completed application packets may be submitted at the Planning and Development Services Intake Center, in the Tacoma Municipal Building, 747 Market Street. Payments can be made online or in-person.

COMMERCIAL SIGN PERMIT APPLICATION

Applications can be submitted in-person on the 3rd floor of the Tacoma Municipal Building at 747 Market Street, or on-line at: <https://aca.accela.com/tacoma/Default.aspx>



Note: This Tip Sheet does not substitute for codes and regulations.

The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.

More information: City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | www.tacomapermits.org (253) 591-5030

To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5030 (voice).

TTY or STS users please dial 711 to connect to Washington Relay Services.

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NONCONFORMING SIGNS

A nonconforming sign is a sign that was erected before the adoption of an applicable regulation, and therefore can continue to remain, be repaired, and be modified to a certain extent, without complying with that regulation. See Tip Sheet L-630 and TMC 13.06.630.J.

SIGN VARIANCE SUBMITTAL CHECKLIST

- Land Use Application completed and signed
- Site Plan to scale - Show existing property lines, the distance from the sign to the property lines, building footprints, parking spaces, and driveways. Show where all existing and proposed signs are located and label accordingly.
- Sign Elevations to scale (exterior view of all sides) – Show square footage, sign clearance, and overall sign height.
- Structural engineering details
- Written response to sign variance criteria (listed below)
- Application fee

SIGN VARIANCE CRITERIA

If it appears you have circumstances that prevent compliance with the sign regulations, the variance process can be discussed with a Land Use staff person over the phone at (253) 591-5577 or in-person at Building and Land Use Services on the 3rd floor of the Tacoma Municipal Building, 747 Market Street. The processing time for a variance application generally takes about 60 days and has a two week appeal period; after which, if approved and not appealed, the applicant will submit for a commercial sign permit application. Variances are categorized into either “Level 1” or “Level 2” categories:

- **Level 1 Sign Variances:** Any sign variance request for up to a 25 percent increase in the permitted sign area or height or to allow an increase in the permitted number of signs. Such variance requests shall be reviewed against the criteria outlined in Section 13.06.645.B.5.b. In no instance, shall a Level 1 Sign Variance allow the height of a sign to exceed 35 feet or exceed the height of the building it identifies, whichever is lower, if located on a site with freeway frontage. For Level 1 sign variance requests, applicants must describe how the variance request meets at least one of the criteria below for approval:
 - Describe how proposed signage creates visual harmony between the signs, structures, and other features of the property through the use of a

consistent design theme, including, but not limited to, size, materials, color, lettering, and location.

- Describe how the proposed signage will preserve a desirable existing design or siting pattern for signs in an area, including, but not limited to, size, materials, color, lettering, and location.
- Describe how the proposed signage will minimize view obstruction or preserve views of historically or architecturally significant structures.
- If the location of the proposal is in a shopping center or mixed-use center, describe how the proposed sign plan provides an integrated sign program consistent with the overall plan for the center.
- If the location of the proposal is in a shopping center or mixed-use center, describe how the variance is warranted because of the physical characteristics of the center, such as size, shape, or topography, or because of the location of existing signs.
- **Level 2 Sign Variances:** Any sign variance request beyond 25 percent of the permitted sign size or height and any request for relief from sign setback, separation, location, or other sign standard not identified above. Such requests shall be reviewed against the criteria outlined in Sections 13.06.645.B.1.b (listed on Tip Sheet L-645) and 13.06.645.B.5.b. (Level 1 Criteria listed above)

PROHIBITED SIGNS – Signs types that are not allowed (See complete list in TMC 13.06.521.C.)

- Roof signs (except when incorporated into a building to provide an overall finished appearance)
- Signs attached to any stationary vehicle or trailer (except for company cars, taxis, buses, etc.)
- Portable signs (except those specifically allowed by the regulations within the applicable zoning district)
- Signs which create safety hazards as determined by the City Engineer. An engineer can be reached at 253-591-5500.

APPLICABLE REGULATIONS

- Tacoma Municipal Code Section: [13.06.521 - General Sign Regulations](#), [13.06.522 - District Sign Regulations](#), [13.06.630 - Nonconforming parcels/uses/structures](#), [13.06.645 - Variances](#)
- Tacoma Municipal Code Section: [2.02 - Building Code](#)



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