

Model Ordinance Language

REVISED OAAA SUGGESTED SIGN ORDINANCE (APRIL 2026)

A SUGGESTED ORDINANCE FOR THE REGULATION OF OFF-PREMISE OUTDOOR ADVERTISING SIGNS

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

WHEREAS, (enter name of city, township, county, and state) desires to protect and enhance the economic vitality of the city; and

WHEREAS, outdoor advertising is recognized as a traditional and legitimate advertising medium involving the lawful use of private property; and

WHEREAS, outdoor advertising is recognized as an effective medium to direct and inform the general public; and

WHEREAS, outdoor advertising provides local businesses, as well as non-profit organizations, an effective and cost-efficient medium to advertise their goods and services; and

WHEREAS, (enter name of city, township, county, and state) desires to allow outdoor advertising signs that are reasonable in size, number, and spacing in commercial and industrial areas of the city to provide ample avenues of communication to such businesses and non-profit organizations; and

WHEREAS, (enter name of city, township, county, and state) desires to promote the general welfare of persons and their property in the vicinity of outdoor advertising structures, as well as to protect the rights of property owners; now, therefore,

BE IT ORDAINED by the (enter name of city, township, county, and state):

The following regulations shall be known as the off-premise outdoor advertising regulations of (enter name of city, township or county and state).

I. DEFINITIONS

A. Advertising Duration: the duration each static image is displayed on a digital billboard face.

B. Back-to-Back Sign: a sign consisting of two (2) sign facings oriented in opposite directions with not more than two (2) faces per sign facing.

C. Brightness: illuminance measured at a specified distance from the sign face, expressed as footcandles (fc), representing the light falling on a surface.

D. Digital Billboard Face: an off-premise sign face utilizing digital message technology, capable of changing the static message or copy on the sign electronically. A digital billboard face may be internally or externally illuminated. Digital billboard faces shall contain static messages only, and shall not have animation, movement, or the appearance or optical illusion of movement, of any part of the sign structure. Each static message shall not include flashing or the varying of light intensity.

E. Directional Sign: a sign erected for the convenience of the public, such as for directing traffic movement, parking, or identifying restrooms, public telephones, walkways, and other similar features or facilities, and bearing no advertising message.

F. Double Faced Sign: a sign with two adjacent faces oriented in the same direction and not more than ten (10) feet apart at the nearest point between the two (2) faces.

G. Face: the display surface of a sign on which advertising copy is affixed, painted, or otherwise displayed and visible. A face does not include the surrounding airspace or sign structure.

H. Facing: the direction a face is oriented toward traffic or viewers (e.g., northbound, eastbound, etc.).

I. Freestanding Sign: a sign erected on a freestanding framework supported and affixed by one (1) or more uprights or braces in or upon the ground.

J. Official Sign: a sign erected by a governmental agency or its designee, setting forth information pursuant to law.

K. Off-Premise Outdoor Advertising Sign: a sign, including the supporting sign structure, which is visible from a street or highway and advertises goods or services not usually located on the premises and/or property upon which the sign is located; also called a “billboard.” The following shall not be considered an off-premise sign for the purposes of this ordinance:

- 1.** Directional or Official Signs authorized by law
- 2.** Real Estate Signs
- 3.** On-Premise Signs

- L.** On-Premise Sign: a sign which advertises the primary goods or services sold or taking place upon the premises on which the sign is located.
- M.** Real Estate Sign: a sign which advertises the sale or lease of the property upon which the sign is located.
- N.** Roof Mounted Sign: a sign attached to the roof of a building.
- O.** Sign Structure: the support(s), framework, and component parts of a sign, including monopoles, supports, braces, and appurtenances.
- P.** V Type Sign: a sign structure which consists of multiple sign facings placed at angles to each other, oriented in different directions and not exceeding ten (10) feet apart at the nearest point to each other.
- Q.** Wall Sign: a sign attached to the wall of a building or structure.

II. PERMITTED ZONES

Off-premise signs shall be permitted in the following zones:

- A.** Commercial (per local definitions)
- B.** Industrial (per local definitions)
- C.** Manufacturing (per local definitions)
- D.** Any “Use” zone which is permitted for commercial, industrial, or manufacturing activities.
- E.** Any zone in which a subject property has been issued a “Use Permit” for an activity or activities of a commercial, industrial, or manufacturing nature

III. LEGAL NONCONFORMING SIGNS

Any off-premise sign lawfully erected and in existence on the effective date of this ordinance which does not meet the requirements of this ordinance may be maintained as a matter of right as a legal nonconforming sign. The sign may be rebuilt or relocated on the same property, provided that neither the sign’s face area nor its degree of nonconformity is increased.

IV. SIZE OF SIGNS

- A.** The maximum sign area for any facing shall not exceed twelve hundred (1,200) square feet, excluding the sign structure. Temporary embellishments shall not exceed twenty percent (20%) of the maximum sign area allowed.
- B.** The sign area shall be measured by the smallest square, circle, rectangle, or combination thereof which will encompass the entire sign face.
- C.** A sign structure shall have no more than three (3) facings with each facing having no more than two (2) faces.
- D.** Signs may be back-to-back, double-faced, V-type, and multiple-faced with such structure considered as one (1) sign.

V. HEIGHT OF AN OFF-PREMISE SIGN

An off-premise sign shall have a maximum overall height not to exceed seventy-five (75) feet above the grade level of the roadway from which the sign is designed to be viewed.

VI. CONSTRUCTION, MAINTENANCE, AND SAFETY STANDARDS

- A.** No sign shall be constructed which resembles any official marker erected by a governmental entity, or which by reason of position, shape, or color would conflict with the proper functioning of any official traffic control device. Signs must not cause beams or rays of light to be directed at the traveled way if the light is of such intensity or brilliance as to cause glare that impairs the vision of the driver of any motor vehicle or interfere with any driver's operation of a motor vehicle.
- B.** All signs shall be constructed in accordance with local and state building and electrical codes. Stamped structural engineering plans shall accompany sign permit applications and shall be subject to wind speed requirements as set forth in the latest adopted edition of the Uniform Building Code.
- C.** Off-premise signs shall be regularly maintained in good and safe structural condition.
- D.** Routine maintenance shall include, but not be limited to, minor structural repairs (not exceeding sixty percent (60%) of the fair market value of the sign; painting and corrosion prevention; lighting and electrical maintenance; vegetation control/visibility maintenance;

display surface repairs and replacements; cleaning and general upkeep; and operational checks and replacement for/of digital components. Substantial changes are defined as structural changes exceeding sixty percent (60%) of the fair market value of the sign; enlarging faces by more than ten percent (10%), other than by temporary embellishment; converting a printed face to a digital billboard face; relocation of the sign; or increasing the height, size, or adding lighting, where not otherwise allowed by law.

E. No permit shall be required for a sign owner to perform routine maintenance on an off-premise sign, including such sign's faces whether printed or digital billboard face. However, prior to performing substantial changes on an off-premise sign, a permit shall be required.

F. Any damage to a sign must be repaired within one hundred eighty (180) days from provision of written notice, weather permitting.

VII. SPACING FOR OFF-PREMISE SIGNS

A. No off-premise sign may be established within five hundred (500) feet on the same side of the same street or highway of any other permitted off-premise sign.

B. The distance shall be measured along the nearest edge of pavement between points directly opposite each sign. Directly opposite shall mean from the center of each sign structure perpendicular to the nearest edge the abutting roadway's pavement.

C. The spacing between signs does not apply to structures separated by buildings or other obstructions in such a manner that only one (1) of the signs' faces, located within the spacing distances, is visible from the street at any time.

D. Spacing from directional and official signs, on-premise signs, or any other sign which does not constitute an off-premise sign shall not be counted nor shall measurements be made from such signs for the purpose of determining compliance with these spacing requirements.

VIII. SETBACK REQUIREMENTS

A. Front: A minimum setback of five (5) feet is required from front lot line for any off-premise sign, regardless of zone.

B. In no case shall any portion of an off-premise sign overhang or be placed in the public right-of-way, unless allowed by the public entity.

IX. LIGHTING

Other than as related to digital billboard faces and as set forth in Section XI, off-premise signs may be illuminated subject to the following restrictions:

- A.** Signs which contain, include, or are illuminated by any flashing, intermittent, or moving light or lights are prohibited. Reflective surfaces or devices on sign faces with illumination are permitted, including digital billboard faces, provided such signs do not interfere with traffic safety and comply with Subsection B of this Section.
- B.** No sign shall be so illuminated that it interferes with the effectiveness of or obscures an official traffic sign, device, or signal. Signs must not cause beams or rays of light to be directed at the traveled way if the light is of such intensity or brilliance as to cause glare that impairs the vision of the driver of any motor vehicle or interferes with any driver's operation of a motor vehicle.

X. DIGITAL BILLBOARD FACE OPERATIONAL STANDARDS

- A.** Static Display Only: No animation, movement, scrolling, flashing, scintillation, or video. Transitions must be instantaneous, cross-fade, or dissolve within two (2) seconds.
- B.** Advertising Duration: Minimum six (6) seconds per message. (OPTION: eight (8) seconds where required by state regulations.)
- C.** Brightness: digital billboard faces shall not operate above three tenths (0.3) footcandles over ambient light, measured at preset distances based on closest, nominal sign size as set forth in Subsection D of this Section.
- D.** Preset Measurement Distances:
 - 1. 12'x25' face = 150 feet;
 - 2. 10.5'x36' = 200 feet;
 - 3. 14'x48' = 250 feet;
 - 4. 20'x60'|17'x59' = 350 feet.
- E.** Automatic Dimming: digital billboard faces must include light-sensing equipment that continuously adjusts brightness to ambient conditions.
- F.** Malfunction Default: each digital billboard face shall be operated with systems and monitoring in place to either turn the digital billboard face off or show a "full black" image on

the digital billboard face in the event of a malfunction that affects at least fifty percent (50%) of the digital billboard face area.

XI. RELOCATION AND JUST COMPENSATION

A. Where an off-premise sign, whether conforming or nonconforming, is subject to a governmental or quasi-governmental taking, the sign owner shall be provided the option to relocate the sign to a site on the remainder property or to another location that is in conformity with this ordinance. Where the taking is of a nonconforming sign, the relocation of such sign under this Section shall not increase the nonconformity.

B. Where an off-premise sign subject to a governmental or quasi-governmental taking cannot be relocated or the sign owner chooses not to relocate, just compensation shall be paid unto the sign owner for all of its interests. Amortization shall not constitute just compensation.

XII. SIGN PERMITS

A. Unless otherwise stated in this ordinance, no sign shall be erected without securing a permit from (insert name of proper authority) and payment of the permit fee.

B. Upon the filing of an application for a sign permit made by the property owner, a lessee or person holding an option or contract to purchase or lease the property, the owner of an easement for the use and operation of a sign, or an authorized agent of any such party, the (insert name of proper authority) shall examine the plans and specifications set forth hereinbelow within fifteen (15) business days. If deemed necessary, they may inspect the site where the sign is proposed to be erected.

C. If an application for a sign permit is complete and complies with all the requirements of this ordinance and other applicable codes, the (insert name of proper authority) shall issue a permit to the applicant. The permit shall be issued in print or electronic form. Any permit issued exclusively in electronic form shall be protected from further editing once issued. The permit shall be delivered by personal delivery, electronic mail, or by first-class mail, to the applicant and the property owner, if different from the applicant. The permit shall be delivered to the applicant's address provided on the application. If the applicant is different from the property owner, a written notice of the permit shall be delivered to the last address listed for the property owner on the county tax abstract.

D. If the permit is denied, the (insert name of proper authority) shall deliver a written notice of the decision to the applicant at the address on the application, and to the property owner, if different from the applicant. The written notice shall be provided by personal delivery or first-class mail and shall be delivered to the applicant's address provided on the

application. If the applicant is different from the property owner, the notice shall be delivered to the last address listed for the property owner on the county tax abstract. An appeal of the decision shall be made according to the relevant code.

E. Conversion of a legally existing printed face to digital billboard face shall be pursuant to the permit process outlined above and in conformance with the other applicable sections of this ordinance and other relevant codes.

F. Permit applications must include: (1) site plan; (2) structural details; (3) electrical plans; and in the case of a digital billboard face the permit application shall also include a (4) photometric plan demonstrating compliance with brightness limits at specified measurement points.

G. Permits expire after one hundred eighty (180) days of the date of issue if work has not been visibly started or if the work has been suspended or abandoned for one (1) year.

H. Digital billboard faces may revert to printed anytime with applicable fees prorated.

I. To obtain a permit, all fees, in accordance with the associated fee schedule, shall be paid.

J. Upon notification of completion by the permit holder, the (insert name of proper authority) or its designee shall make a final inspection of the sign to verify conformance with the permit and all applicable codes.

XIII. VARIANCES AND ADMINISTRATIVE ADJUSTMENTS

A. Issuance of a variance with regard to a sign shall be in conformance with relevant codes.

B. Notwithstanding Subsection A of this Section, minor administrative adjustments not amounting to more than fifteen percent (15%) of the square footage or height of off-premises sign face(s) shall be granted as of right.

XIV. SEVERABILITY

If any provision of this ordinance is held by a court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid, the remaining provisions of this ordinance shall remain in full force and effect.