

MEMO

TO: Planning and Zoning Commission Members

FROM: Luke Parris, City Planner

DATE: April 11, 2016

RE: Sign Regulations

The City of Norwalk has seen steady residential growth for the last few years. We have recently started to see development projects that will begin to grow the commercial side of Norwalk as well. Most of this commercial growth will be focused on the Iowa Highway 28 corridor and nearby ground. This new development will shape the look of the City for years to come. One way that the aesthetic of the community will be affected is through the signage put up for these new commercial developments. This memo serves as an overview of the City's sign regulations and as a discussion point for the type of signage that the community will desire in the future.

The City's sign regulations are included in Chapter 17.70 of the Zoning Ordinance (pages 201-212). The regulations cover prohibited signs, exemptions, on-premise signs, freestanding identifications signs, directory signs, building signs, projecting signs, marquees and awnings, directional signs, and temporary signs. The signs that will impact the aesthetics of the community the most are building signs and freestanding identification signs associated with commercial businesses.

Section 17.70.060 describes the regulations for freestanding signs. This section allows one freestanding sign for each street frontage of a lot, or one sign for each 300 feet of street frontage, whichever is greater. Commercial lots zoned C-O, C-1, C-2, and C-3 are allowed to have a monument sign or project identification sign. The C-3 district is also allowed to have a pole sign.

Monument Signs

A monument sign is a low to the ground sign for a specific business. Below are several examples of monument signs:



In the commercial districts, a monument sign is allowed size of 80 square feet and height of 7 feet. The monument sign must be setback from the front lot line a minimum of 10 feet. The code does allow for a monument sign to be larger than 80 square feet and 7 feet tall if it is setback further than 10 feet from the front lot line. For each one foot in additional setback, the height of the sign may increase by one foot, to a maximum of 15 feet. Additionally, for each one foot in additional setback, the area of the sign may increase by 4 square feet, to a maximum of 80 square feet (this may be an error in the code as the standard area identified and the area a sign can increase are the same).

Project Identification Signs

A project identification sign is a sign that identifies the name of a retail shopping center, or office, or industrial complex that has more than one tenant on a lot of 100,000 square feet or more and a minimum 300 feet of street frontage. Below are some examples of project identification signs:



A project identification sign is allowed to be 200 square feet in area, 25 feet high, and must be setback 15 feet from the front lot line. There is no provision to allow for a project identification sign to be larger than described.

Pole Signs

The only commercial district that allows a pole sign is the C-3 district. Pole signs are not defined by the zoning ordinance. Common knowledge states that a pole sign would be a sign elevated to a height on a pole. Below are some examples of pole signs:



A pole sign is allowed to be 80 square feet in area, 25 feet high, and must be setback 10 feet from the front lot line. There is no provision to allow for a pole sign to be larger than described.

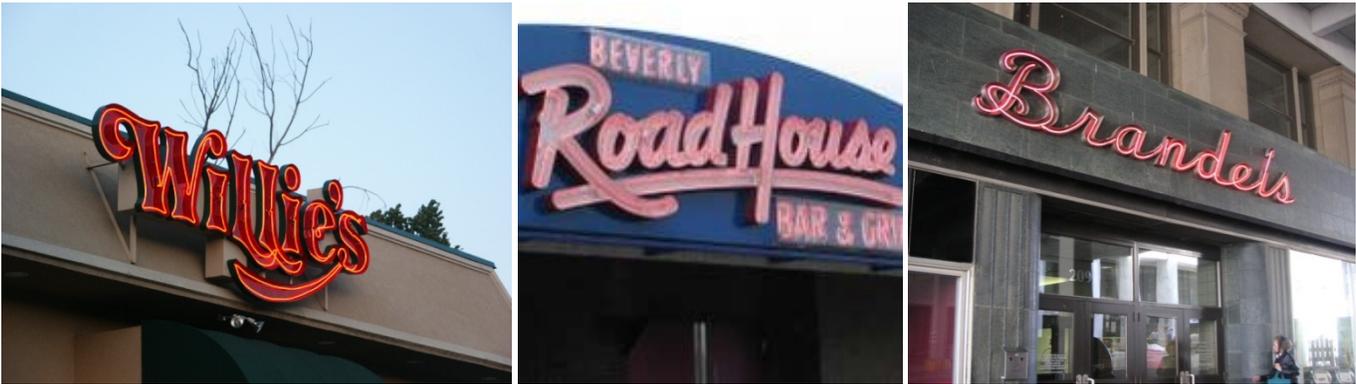
Building Signs

Buildings on commercial lots are allowed to have buildings signs in addition to any freestanding signs. Each street facing wall is allowed to have a building sign. Each wall may have multiple signs provided that the combined area of all building signs not exceeds 5 percent of the total square footage of the wall façade.

The code encourages building signs to be composed of solid individual letters and logos or individual illuminated self-contained letters and logos attached to the building exterior. Open-channel neon signs are permitted provided the neon does not flash. Panel signs are allowed for buildings with one occupant. Uniform panel sign systems for a multi-use building may be allowed if approved by Council with a recommendation by the Commission. Signs painted on the exterior wall are prohibited.



Examples of solid individual letter and logo signs



Examples of open-channel neon signs



Examples of panel signs

Style and Content of Signs

The types of signs allowed in the City greatly affect the aesthetic of commercial property in the community. For freestanding signs, the regulations require that they are constructed of materials which are acceptable to the City and compatible with the principal building's exterior wall materials. Building signs are required to incorporate aesthetic features compatible with the overall character of the zoning district and neighborhoods. Both of these statements offer guidelines for City staff when reviewing sign permits, though some thought could be given towards tying the language to the City's new architectural standards.

The content of a sign is considered to be protected speech and cannot specifically be regulated by the City. The sign regulation does prohibit signs that display obscene, indecent or immoral matter.