



**Santa Cruz County  
Community Development Department**

Airport - *Larry Tiffin*  
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Mary Dahl, Director

RE: Interpretation of Santa Cruz County Zoning and Development Code – Section 1707(I)

I have been requested to make an interpretation as to the applicability of Section 1707(I) of the County Zoning and Development Code to a couple of hypothetical circumstances related to political signs. Section 1707(I), which lists what signs are exempt from getting a permit, reads:

*Temporary political signs not exceeding thirty six (36) square feet advertising candidates or issues may be erected during the campaign for a period of forty-five (45) days prior to the election in which such candidates or issues are to be voted upon. Such signs shall be removed no later than 15 days following the final election for that candidate or issue. Successful primary candidates will not be required to remove temporary political signs between the primary and general elections. Unrecognized party candidates and issues appearing on the general election ballot may place temporary political signs in accordance with this Article upon announcement of the unofficial results of the primary election.*

Hypothetical #1: Signs on vehicles, including trailers: If a political sign is on a vehicle that is being used in a manner that it is normally and customarily used 365 days out of the year, with the normal variations for weekends, it would not be considered a temporary a political sign subject to the 45-day limitation. However, if the vehicle is used in an uncustomary way, such as being left at a busy street corner or along a busy thoroughfare for the day, it would be considered to be a temporary political sign and placement of such vehicles would be subject to the 45-day limit. The fact that it may go away at the end of the day is immaterial to this decision as most political signs are not visible in the dark unless treated with a reflective substance.

Hypothetical #2: Signs on fences and walls: The implication here is that one can argue that such signs are “placed” and not “erected”. This is a difference without a distinction. The ordinance must be interpreted in light of what it is attempting to do, which in this case is to limit the time that our streetscapes are littered with political signage. It doesn’t matter if the sign is on a piece of lathe or stuck on a wall, it still is a temporary political sign and is subject to the 45-day limit.

Approved April 30, 2012 by Mary Dahl, Director of Community Development:

**ARTICLE 17 – SIGN REGULATIONS**

- 1701---- PURPOSE
- 1702---- PERMIT REQUIRED
- 1703---- APPLICATION FOR PERMITS
- 1704---- ISSUANCE OF PERMITS
- 1705---- PERMIT REVOCABLE
- 1706---- LIABILITY ASSOCIATED WITH PERMIT ISSUANCE
- 1707---- PERMIT EXEMPTIONS
- 1708---- GENERAL REGULATIONS
- 1709---- MEASUREMENTS OF SIGNS
- 1710---- PROHIBITED SIGNS
- 1711---- PERMITTED SIGNS, RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS
- 1712---- PERMITTED SIGNS, COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS
- 1713---- PERMITTED SIGNS, INDUSTRIAL DISTRICTS
- 1714---- OFF SITE SIGNS
- 1715---- NON CONFORMING SIGNS
- 1716---- SPECIAL USE PERMIT
- 1717---- MAINTENANCE
- 1718---- ENFORCEMENT
- 1719---- STREET ADDRESS IN SIGNS
- 1720---- STREET NAMING AND PROPERTY NUMBERING
- 1721---- RESERVED

**SEC. 1701 PURPOSE**

Signs are herein regulated in the interest of promoting traffic safety, safeguarding public health and comfort, facilitating police and fire protection and preventing adverse community appearance. Regulations are designed to permit maximum legibility and effectiveness of signs, and to prevent their over-concentration, improper placement, and excessive height, bulk and area.

**SEC. 1702 PERMIT REQUIRED**

It shall be unlawful for any person, firm or corporation to erect, structurally repair, relocate or alter the size of any sign within Santa Cruz County as defined in this Ordinance, except as hereinafter provided, without first obtaining a Building Permit from the Building Inspector.

A building permit is not required for the repainting of or minor repair to the sign surface only. All illuminated signs shall, in addition, be subject to all provisions of the Electrical Code. See Section 1707. Permit Exemptions, for signs not requiring permits.

**SEC. 1703 APPLICATION FOR PERMIT**

In addition to information otherwise required for issuance of a Building Permit, application for Building Permits for signs shall include:



- A. Position of sign in relation to nearby buildings or structures.
- B. Two blueprints of plans and specifications, including method of construction and attachment to the building or ground;
- C. Structural calculations proving that the sign is designed for wind pressures in accordance with requirements of this Code.
- D. Name of person, firm, or corporation erecting structure.
- E. Written consent of the owner of the building, structure, or premises on which the sign is to be erected.
- F. Approval of all proposed wiring and connections of illuminated signs in compliance with the Electrical Code.

#### **SEC. 1704 ISSUANCE OF PERMITS**

If, upon examination of plan specifications and the premises on which erection of the sign is proposed, the Building Inspector finds that the proposed sign complies with all provisions of this Code and with all other ordinances of the County, he shall issue a Building Permit. If the work so authorized has not been completed within six (6) months thereafter, said permit shall become null and void.

#### **SEC. 1705 PERMIT REVOCABLE**

All rights and privileges acquired under a Building Permit are more licenses revocable at any time by the Building Inspector, and all such permits shall so state.

#### **SEC. 1706 LIABILITY ASSOCIATED WITH PERMIT ISSUANCE**

The granting of a Building Permit shall not be deemed to be a permit for or approval of any violation of this Ordinance. The provisions of this Ordinance shall not be construed as relieving or limiting in any way the responsibility or liability of any person, firm or corporation, erecting or owning any sign, or resulting from the negligence or willful acts of such person, firm or corporation, has or its agents, employees or workmen, in the construction maintenance, repair or removal of any sign erected in accordance with a permit issued here under. Nor shall issuance of such permit be construed as imposing upon Santa Cruz County or its officers or employees, any responsibility or liability by reasons of the approval of any signs, material or devices under the provision of this Ordinance.

#### **SEC. 1707 PERMIT EXEMPTIONS**

The following signs shall conform to all other applicable provisions of this Code and shall be permitted in all districts in which the use identified or advertised is permitted.



- A. Signs not exceeding one (1) square foot in area and bearing only property numbers, post box numbers, names of occupants of premises, or other identification.
- B. Professional name plates not exceeding two (2) square feet in area.
- C. Signs directing and guiding traffic and parking on private property in all distances but bearing no advertising matter, not to exceed three (3) square feet in area.
- D. Traffic or other county signs, directional signs for schools, airports, hospitals or emergency services, governmental agencies, legal notices, crossing signs and danger signals.
- E. Memorial signs or tablets, names of buildings, and dates of erection when cut into any masonry surface or when constructed of bronze or other non-combustible material not to exceed eight (8) square feet in area.
- F. Real estate signs in residential districts not exceeding four (4) square feet in area which advertise the sale, rental or lease of the premises upon which said signs are located. Real estate signs in commercial and industrial districts not exceeding twelve (12) square feet in area which advertise the sale, rental or lease of the premises upon which said signs are located.
- G. Signs for the purpose of directing the public to "open house" events, providing for sale, rental, or lease of premises other than upon which the sign is located provided said signs do not exceed three (3) in number and may remain for the life of the active development but in no instance for longer than two (2) years after the issuance of the building permits for the project being advertised. Said signs shall not be located in such a manner to cause a public safety hazard or nuisance and further said signs may not exceed an area of six (6) square feet of display surface on each sign. Such signs shall not be located in the public right-of-way. Sign location on private property shall have the written approval of the property owner.
- H. One (1) temporary, non-illuminated sign for a major project under construction not exceeding thirty-six (36) square feet in area. Message limited to identification of architect, engineers, contractors, and other individuals or firms involved with the construction and the name of building, purpose for which intended and expected completion date. It shall be removed prior to the issuance of the certificate of occupancy.
- I. Temporary political signs not exceeding thirty six (36) square feet advertising candidates or issues may be erected during the campaign for a period of forty-five (45) days prior to the election in which such candidates or issues are to be voted upon. Such signs shall be removed no later than 15 days following the final election for that candidate or issue. Successful primary candidates will not be required to remove temporary political signs between the primary and general elections. Unrecognized party candidates and issues appearing on the general election ballot may place temporary political signs in accordance with this Article upon announcement of the unofficial results of the primary election.
- J. One (1) non-illuminated name plate for a home occupation sign not exceeding three (3) square feet.



- K. Temporary signs which are intended for use at grand openings of new businesses only and limited to a maximum period of fourteen (14) calendar days. Size of this sign shall not exceed thirty-six (36) square feet. This includes banners, pennants, A-frame signs and inflated objects, portable signs and or signs painted on vehicles
- L. One (1) temporary sign per subdivision not exceeding thirty-six (36) square feet in area, message limited to identification of the subdivision and its sales agent. Two (2) such signs are permitted if the subdivision is five (5) acres or larger or if the subdivision has more than one (1) street frontage. Such sign or signs may remain for the life of the active development, but in no instance for longer than two (2) years from the date the subdivision was approved by the Board of Supervisors.
- M. Garage sale type signs located with the permission of the owners of the premises upon which the sign is located. Such signs, not to exceed a total area of four (4) square feet shall be removed within five (5) days after erecting, and shall not be to placed in public right-of-way nor on utility poles or structures.
- N. One (1) temporary, non-illuminated sign per residential lot, not exceeding three (3) square feet in area per contractor or subcontractor working on the lot, not to exceed six (6) square feet in total area. Each such sign shall be removed from the premises within twenty (20) days after completion of such construction or repairs.
- O. Holiday lighting.

**SEC. 1708 GENERAL REGULATIONS**

The following general regulations regarding signs shall pertain to all zoning districts in Santa Cruz County.

- A. Every sign and its supporting structure shall be designed and constructed to withstand a wind load of not less than forty (40) pounds per square foot of area.
- B. Every sign and all parts of its supporting structure which are not constructed of galvanized or other rustproof metal shall be properly painted at least once every two years.
- C. No sign shall be erected, relocated, or maintained so as to prevent free ingress to or egress from any door, window, or fire escape, nor shall any sign be attached to a standpipe or fire escape.
- D. No sign or any portion of any sign shall be located on or be projected over any portion of the street, sidewalk, or other public right-of-way.
- E. No sign shall be erected or maintained at or near any intersection of streets in such a manner as to obstruct free and clear vision; or at any location where, by reason of its position, shape, color, or illumination, it may interfere with, obstruct the view of, or be confused with any authorized traffic sign, signal or device , or with any device mounted on police or fire protection vehicle; or which makes use of the words, "STOP", "LOOK", "DANGER", or any other word, phrase, symbol or character in such manner as to interfere with, mislead or confuse traffic.



F. Signs shall be illuminated only during the hours of the business.

**SEC. 1709 MEASUREMENT OF SIGNS**

The following standards shall be utilized in measuring the area of signs:

- A. The area of signs composed of individual fabricated or painted letters mounted directly on a building facade without painted or other defined background shall be computed by measuring the sum of the squared-off area of the letters.
- B. For all other types of signs, the area shall include the entire area within a single continuous perimeter enclosing the extreme limits of the sign provided; however, that such perimeter shall not include any structural elements located outside the limits of the sign and not forming an integral part of the display
- C. The total square footage of all face surfaces of the spherical, double-faced, or multi-faced signs shall not exceed twice the allowable square footage of a single faced sign.

**SEC. 1710 PROHIBITED SIGNS**

It shall be unlawful for any person to erect, display or maintain a sign or advertising structure falling within any of the following descriptions.

- A. Off-Site signs.
- B. Moving signs or flashing signs or any signs or advertising structures which have any visible moving part of visible mechanical movement of any description or other apparent visible movement by any means, including intermittent electrical pulsations.
- C. Signs which are hazardous to traffic, imitative of official government signs; (i.e., Stop, Danger, Caution, etc.) or obstructive to visibility so as to create a hazard to the public.
- D. Windblown signs, such as posters, pennants, streamers, balloons or other inflated objects, except as provided for in Section 1707.
- E. Temporary signs except as permitted in Section 1707 (Permit Exemptions).
- F. Greeter boards, except a) one (1) sign on the premises of each person, firm or corporation selling or offering to the public at retail, fuel for use by internal combustion engines in motor vehicles. Such sign shall inform the public, subject to all regulations herein, in clear and legible numbers of uniform size, selling price or prices per gallon of such fuel sold or offered for sale on the premises; b) under marquee signs, except that (1) such sign may be used in connection with a theater; such advertising copy be restricted to attractions which the theater is currently offering or will be offering, and (2) no marquee sign shall be used for general advertising purposes and no



wooden, paper, cloth or other temporary signs shall be hung or attached to a marquee.

- G. No sign shall be erected in a residential zoning district containing information other than property numbers, street names, post box numbers, names of occupants or premises, home occupations, or as hereinafter permitted in Section 1711.
- H. Roof signs or signs mounted above the parapet wall.
- I. No sign shall be located less than six (6) feet horizontally or twelve (12) feet vertically from overhead electrical conductors which are energized in excess of 440 volts.
- J. Inflated signs, portable signs or signs attached to or painted on vehicles stationary for more than fourteen (14) calendar days. (See Section 1707(K)).

#### **SEC. 1711 PERMITTED SIGNS, RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS**

Signs as hereinafter provided may be erected in any GR, SR, R1-R5, MFR and MH districts. Such signs shall conform as provided by this article.

- A. **Permanent subdivision signs.** Message limited to name of subdivision only.
  - 1. Area. The total surface of permanent subdivision signs shall have a maximum area of thirty-six (36) square feet for each sign.
  - 2. Maximum Height. The maximum height of the permanent subdivision sign shall be ten (10) feet, if not in conflict with any required clear vision area, above grade.
  - 3. Number. Permanent subdivisions are limited to either two (2) wall signs or one (1) freestanding sign at each entrance, the total area not exceeding thirty six (36) square feet.
  - 4. Prior to issuance of the Building Permit, the Building Inspector shall have on file a copy of an acceptable finding and agreement describing the maintenance responsibility for the subdivision sign.
- B. **Permanent Multi-Dwelling Structures Signs.** Message limited to name of complex. Either one (1) free standing or one (1) wall sign.
  - 1. **Free Standing Sign.**
    - a) Area. A free standing, permanent, sign is limited to two (2) square feet per dwelling unit or a maximum area of thirty-six (36) square feet. Eighteen (18) square feet per display surface if the sign has two display surfaces.
    - b) Maximum Height. A free standing sign is limited to a maximum height of ten (10) feet above grade.



2. **Wall Signs.**
  - a) Area. A permanent wall sign is limited to two (2) square feet per dwelling unit up to a maximum of thirty-six (36) square feet.
  - b) Height and/or Clearance. No wall sign shall extend above the roof line at the wall or the top of a parapet wall, whichever is higher.
3. Prior to the issuance of the Building Permit, the Building Inspector shall have on file a copy of an acceptable agreement describing the maintenance responsibility for the multi-dwelling structures sign.

- C. **Sign Illumination.** Signs in residential zoning districts may have external illumination of the display surface if properly shielded from direct glare onto streets and adjacent properties. The source of sign illumination shall not be visible from any adjacent property.
- D. **Permitted Conditional Uses.** Signs for conditional uses permitted and approved under the provisions of the Code shall not exceed thirty-six (36) square feet in area and be located not closer than ten (10) feet to any adjoining lot.

## SEC. 1712 COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

- A. **Signs Permitted.** No sign shall be erected or maintained in commercial zoning districts, except as allowed under Permit exemptions or as otherwise noted in this section. These provisions shall be applicable to all commercial developments (B-1 and B-2).
- B. **Free Standing Sign.**
  1. Area. The maximum permitted area of a free standing sign shall be thirty-six (36) square feet per sign face. Double faced or multi-faced signs shall not exceed twice the allowable square footage of a single faced sign. (Sec. 1709 C).
  2. Maximum Height. The maximum height of any portion of the sign or sign structure shall not be greater than ten (10) feet above site grade.
  3. Number. One (1) multi-faced standing sign identifying the businesses, designating the principal goods, products, facilities, or services available on the premises, shall be permitted.
- C. **Wall Sign.**
  1. Area. The maximum permitted area of a wall sign or signs shall not exceed one (1) square foot for each one (1) linear foot primary building frontage or one (1) square foot for each one (1) foot of primary lot frontage; with the total area of any wall signs plus any free



standing sign not to exceed one hundred and twenty-five (125) square feet.

2. Maximum Height. No wall sign shall extend above the roof at the wall or at the top of a parapet wall whichever is higher.

**D. Maximum Square Footage by Multiple Frontage.**

On buildings having more than one street frontage, the maximum allowable number of square footage on on-site signs is permitted for each building frontage or occupancy. Said maximum allowance, however, is not transferable either in whole or in part from one building frontage to another, nor from one occupancy to another occupancy.

**SEC. 1713 INDUSTRIAL ZONING DISTRICTS**

- A. **Signs Permitted.** No signs shall be erected or maintained in Industrial Districts (M-1) except as allowed under permit Exemptions or as otherwise noted in this Section.

**B. Free Standing Signs**

1. Area. The maximum permitted area of a free standing sign shall be thirty-six (36) square feet per sign face or side. Double faced or multi-faced signs shall not exceed twice the allowable square footage of a single faced sign. (Sec. 1709 (C)).
2. Maximum Height. The maximum height of any portion of a sign or sign structure shall be ten (10) feet above grade.
3. Location. No free standing sign or any portion of any free standing sign shall be located on or projected over any portion of the street, sidewalk or other public right-of-way property, or clear sight area.
4. Number. One (1) multi-faced free standing directional sign identifying the businesses, or facilities on the premises shall be permitted.

**C. Wall Sign**

1. Area. The maximum permitted area of a wall sign or wall signs shall not exceed one (1) square foot for each one (1) linear foot of primary building frontage or one (1) square foot for each one (1) foot of primary lot frontage; with the total area of any wall signs not to exceed one hundred twenty-five (125) square feet.
2. Height and/or Clearance. No wall sign shall extend above the roof line at the wall or the top of the parapet wall, whichever is higher.
3. Number. Wall Signs are permitted in addition to one (1) free standing signs.



**D. Maximum Square Footage by Multiple Frontage.**

On buildings having more than one street frontage, the maximum allowable number of square footage of on-site signs is permitted for each building frontage or occupancy. Said maximum allowance, however, is not transferable either in whole or in part from one building frontage to another, nor from one occupancy to another occupancy.

**SEC. 1714 OFF SITE SIGNS**

Off Site signs are prohibited under Section 1710. Off Site Signs are defined as signs, billboards and other outdoor advertising structures that do not advertise a business or activity located on the property where the sign is erected.

**SEC. 1715 NON-CONFORMING SIGNS**

Any on site roof, wall, projecting, free standing or ground sign, which lawfully existed at the effective date of this Code, and which does not conform to all requirements of this Code for the district in which it is located, shall be considered legally non-conforming and may be continued and maintained; provided, however, that such signs shall not be enlarged, increased in area or height, relocated or abandoned except in conformity with this code. A change in the type of business will require all signs on the site to be brought into conformance with this code. A Building Permit, for any new sign, shall not be issued until all non-conforming signs, owned by the business, are brought into compliance with this code.

Any off site signs, which lawfully existed at the effective date of this Code, and which does not conform to all the requirements of this Code, and which does not conform to all the requirements of this Code for the district in which it is located, shall be considered legally non-conforming and may be continued and maintained: provided, however, that such signs shall not be enlarged, increased in area or height, relocate or abandoned, except in conformity with this code. If a change in the use of the property occurs, the offsite signs shall be removed.

**SEC. 1716 SPECIAL USE PERMITS**

In order to encourage and promote a harmonious relationship between buildings and signs, the Board of Adjustment shall have the authority to issue a Special Use Permit for signs which are designed to and are a part of an integrated architectural feature of a building or project where the provisions of the code would otherwise prohibit such signs.

- A. A Comprehensive Sign Plan may be submitted by the developers of a proposed commercial, industrial, residential, or mixed use development which shall include the location, size, height, lighting, and orientation of all proposed signs, in addition to any other information deemed necessary. This sign plan may be submitted in conjunction with the required Preliminary Site Plan for the development.



If the comprehensive sign plan is found to be acceptable exception to the provisions of this Code may be granted, if the sign areas and densities shown on the plan are in conformity with the intent of this Code and if such exceptions result in an improved relationship between the various parts of the plan.

Example: An Industrial Park with 10 parcels each with one hundred and twenty five feet of street frontage. The developer wants to place two large directory signs at two entrance points to the park and a free standing sign and wall mounted sign on each parcel:

Multiply 10 X 125' (lot frontage)	=	1,250 sq. ft.
add: 10 X 36' (free standing signs)	=	360 sq. ft.
		1,610 sq. ft.
a sum of: total aggregate sign area for the entire site	=	1,610 sq. ft.
subtract: 2 X 200 sq. ft. (entrance signs)		400 sq. ft.
for a remainder of:	=	1,200sq. ft.
divide by 10 for the sign area per lot	=	121 sq. ft.
subtract 36 sq. ft. (free standing sign)	=	36 sq. ft.
		85 sq. ft.
for a reminder of: (wall mounted sign)	=	85 sq. ft.

- B. Sign District: The owners of sixty percent (60%) or more of the street frontage, in feet, or properties on both sides of the street in any defined area may petition the Planning and Zoning Commission for the creation of a special sign theme in the area.  
The Planning and Zoning Commission shall hold a public hearing on such a request after posting the property in question at least fifteen days prior to the hearing, the Planning and Zoning Commission shall make its recommendation to the Board of Supervisors.
  
- C. A Community Sign Plan Permit may be applied for by a service and/or non-profit organization. A proposed sign plan showing the locations, height and size of the proposed signs shall be submitted to the Planning and Zoning Director and processed within five (5) working days. The permit shall not exceed thirty (30) calendar days from the date of issuance. All signs shall be removed within ten (10) calendar days after the event.

**SEC. 1717 SIGN MAINTENANCE**

The County Zoning Inspector is charged with the enforcement of this Code. He shall appoint, according to law, all subordinate officials and assistants necessary to the enforcement of this code as outlined in Article 9, Section 907 and Section 908 of the Santa Cruz County Zoning Ordinance of 1973.



**SEC. 1718 ENFORCEMENT.**

The County Zoning Inspector is charged with the enforcement of this code. He shall appoint, according to law, all subordinate officials and assistants necessary to the enforcement of this code as outlined in Article 9, Section 907 and Section 908 of the Santa Cruz County Zoning Ordinance of 1973.

**SEC. 1719 STREET ADDRESS IN SIGNS.**

All free standing signs in commercial or industrial districts shall contain the numbers of the street address in a size clearly legible from the street.

**SEC. 1720 STREET NAMING AND PROPERTY NUMBERING.**

All signs relating to street names and numbers shall comply with the "Santa Cruz County Street Naming and Property Address Numbering Ordinance". Ordinance No. 89-1, referred to as the "Street Naming and Property Numbering Regulations".

**SEC. 1721 RESERVED**

