

Outdoor Displays of Merchandise

Outdoor merchandise displays are a way to highlight your merchandise and attract passers-by. Display of merchandise outside your store requires a permit from the City's Planning Department. You will need to provide a site plan showing that there is sufficient clearances for pedestrians (including those with disabilities), and provide proof of insurance naming the City as additional insured.

Limitations on the size of the display include a total footprint of no more than 16 square feet per business, a maximum display height of 7 feet, and extension of the display from the adjacent storefront of no more than 2 feet. Larger displays can be approved by the Design Review Commission.

Merchandise display hours are limited to the operating hours of the business and the display must be kept clean, attractive, and safe.

Outdoor merchandise display permits are good for up to one year. For more information on how to apply for a merchandise display permit, contact the City's Planning Department at (707) 938-3681.



Plaza Periphery Wayfinding Signs

As a way to support the local economy by increasing pedestrian traffic to the blocks just off the Plaza, the City has installed Plaza Periphery Business Wayfinding signs at several intersections around the perimeter of the square. The signs are designed to highlight the types of businesses known to be critical in attracting foot traffic in a downtown area.

Priority for inclusion on the Plaza Periphery Wayfinding Signs is given to ground-floor retail, restaurant, wine-related, and visitor-oriented uses. Based on your business type, location and available space on the sign, you may qualify to have a placard included on the sign, with your only cost being fabrication of your business placard. For project details, contact Laurie Decker, Economic Vitality Partnership Manager, at (707) 327-7338, who can also provide you with information about other resources to assist you in successfully marketing your business.



Sonoma Valley Economic Vitality Partnership:

City of Sonoma
City Hall, #1 The Plaza, Sonoma 95476
(707) 938-3681 phone
www.sonomacity.org

Sonoma Valley Chamber of Commerce
(707) 996-1033
www.SonomaChamber.com



Information About Business Signage & Outdoor Displays in the City of Sonoma



Your Business Signage

Your signage and the exterior appearance of your business can play an important role in your success. The City of Sonoma has regulations regarding the number, size, and design of business signs. The intent of these regulations is not to limit your ability to market your business, but to ensure compatibility with the City's unique historic character, and to protect and enhance the overall appearance of the city as an attractive place to live, work, and visit (among other goals).

Because the signage regulations cover a wide variety of situations, it can sometimes be difficult to figure out which rules apply to your signage plans. The fastest way to get your signs and other exterior modifications

(awnings, paint color changes, etc.) approved is to check in first with Planning Department staff at 938-3681. Some types of signs can be approved over the counter. Staff can explain when review and approval by the Design Review and Historic Preservation Commission (DRHPC) is required and provide the necessary application forms. This commission meets only once each month, so you'll need to plan ahead.

Be aware that some landlords have their own guidelines for exterior building modifications and signs with which their tenants must comply. Many signs and other types of exterior improvements (e.g. awnings) will also need a building permit because they involve electrical or structural work. Typically it is to your benefit to hire a design or signage professional to assist you.



Banners & Other Temporary Signs



To promote grand openings, sales, and other special events, your business can display a decorative banner for up to 15 consecutive days and for a total of no more than 45 days in a calendar year. The banners should not include advertising copy (e.g. product names or logos). A permit is not required for banners that meet these guidelines.



Please note that some common types of temporary signs and banners, such as "feather" signs, are prohibited in the City of Sonoma.



Permanent Signage

As you develop your plans for new or modified signage, talk with Planning Department staff, who can outline the requirements and review process that apply to your business. Staff can assist with your application and can work with you to approve temporary signage that you can use while your application is in the review process.

Examples of types of permanent signs that can be approved at the staff level include wall signs of no more than 10 square feet in area; hanging (or "blade") signs with less than 6 square feet per side; and permanent window signs that cover up to 10% of the window area.

However, unless you are a very large business, approval of the DRHPC will be required if you have more than two permanent signs for your business.

Portable Freestanding Signs

Some businesses like to use portable freestanding signs to draw in customers. Because portable signs can impede foot traffic and create visual clutter, approval requires a determination that special circumstances apply in terms of your business visibility.

Only one portable freestanding sign is allowable per business (even if located on private property), and there are requirements as to the sign's location, sidewalk clearance, hours of display, proof of insurance (naming the City as additional insured), etc. Sidewalk signs are not allowed for businesses fronting on the Plaza, and restrictions apply for businesses located in alleyways and paseos.



For further details, pick up a "Portable Freestanding Sign Guidelines" brochure at City Hall. To apply for a permit for a freestanding sign, contact Planning.

Variations and Appeals

If your proposed signage does not conform to the requirements of the Sign Ordinance, there is a process for requesting a variance, which can be granted by the DRHPC if certain findings can be made. There's also an appeal process; any Planning Department staff action can be appealed to the Commission, and any action of the Commission can be appealed to the City Council. The full text of the City's sign ordinance can be found at sonomacity.org (under "Find It Fast", click on Municipal Code).