

Frequently Asked Questions about Window Sign Regulation

Do any of Saint Paul's Special Sign Districts regulate window signs?

Yes. Four do. None of them regulate the new digital signs beyond the percentage of window coverage allowed.

White Bear Avenue limits window signs to 10% of store window glass.

Highland Village special district sign plan states, "Window signs shall not exceed 10% of the store window glass area. The lettering of the business name should not exceed six inches in height. The lettering for other information should not exceed one inch in height."

Grand Avenue special district sign plan states, "temporary window signs add to visual clutter and should be used only to advertise the property for sale rent, or lease, or for specific short-term sales for no more than three nonconsecutive times per calendar year for a period of not more than thirty days per time." "Window signs, including temporary window signs should not exceed 30% of the store window glass area."

SDC Shepard Davern commercial redevelopment overlay district: Permanent window signs, without advertising, may be painted on the surface of the window. Such signs shall not exceed 10% of the window glass area. Temporary window signs, without advertising, may be affixed to the inside of the window. Such signs shall not be in place longer than thirty days and shall not exceed 10% of the window glass area.

Who is responsible for enforcing special sign district regulations?

City staff from the Department of Safety and Inspections is responsible for enforcement of all city sign codes, including the special sign districts.

Would the proposed ordinance regulate signs inside the store?

Yes. The regulation is aimed at signs inside stores that are intended for an audience outside the store. Ordinary signs inside the store that are aimed at customers inside the store are not regulated by this ordinance.

Would the proposed regulation supercede the special sign district regulations?

The proposed regulation is a floor, not a ceiling. Special sign districts could be more restrictive, but not less restrictive.

Are window displays of merchandise regulated by this ordinance?

No. This does not apply to shades, curtains nor window displays, only signs.

There are limits on how long temporary signs can be in the window. How will the city know how long a sign has been up?

All temporary signs must have the date the sign was hung marked on the sign so an inspector or citizen can tell how long it has been in place.

Are electronic signs covered by this proposal?

Yes. Regulating these signs is a key element of the proposal. This regulation will cover an electronic sign hung inside the store but facing out so the intended audience is outside the building. The city's existing sign code covers digital signs that are hung on the outside of the store. New technology has reduced the price of these signs so they are highly affordable and their use is proliferating without any regulation. The proposed ordinance will ensure that their regulation is similar to that of signs hung outside the store and their impact on the surrounding community is minimized by limiting: the size, brightness, operation when the business is closed, and movement and distance from residential areas. Flashing signs may not be used as window signs.

Would permits be required to have a window sign?

No. Enforcement would be handled on a complaint basis. This is how most communities handle enforcement of window signs. If a sign requires special wiring, regular permits are required.

If a store does not have windows, would they have to put them in?

No. Nearly all retail stores have windows but this ordinance does not require a store to have them.

If this ordinance were to pass, would Saint Paul be the first city in the region to have this type of regulation?

No. Many suburban areas have these types of ordinances. Some nearby cities with similar ordinances include: Little Canada, 20%, Maplewood, 25%, Mounds View, 25%, and Roseville prohibits window signs which block the view into the building from a public street into the cashier's work area.

What are the reasons most cities impose this type of regulation?

The primary reasons for window sign regulation are safety (crime prevention through environmental design), improving the appearance of shopping areas, and decreasing driver distraction. All signs are by design distracting but the new digital signs are particularly distracting and can be a hazard for automobiles and pedestrians alike.

Will existing signs be grandfathered in?

Under state law permanent structures that are regulated by zoning laws are grandfathered in if the underlying zoning law changes. We do not believe this law protects temporary sign. The proposed ordinance would require that all temporary signs be dated when they are hung so it is possible to know how long signs have been in place.

What is 'crime prevention through environmental design'?

City planners have found that the built environment influences behavior, including criminal behavior. Windows can provide visibility of the street and what is going on there; and those on the street can see what is happening inside the store. Windows that people can see into and out of actually bring the eyes of the street into the store and the eyes of the store into the street. Many cities have 'crime prevention through environmental design' standards for their commercial and residential areas and those standards include maximum window coverage allowed for signs. Restrictions in other cities range from a maximum of 10% to 30% coverage.

Who supports this type of regulation?

District 7 Planning Council, Union Park Land Use Committee, Scenic Saint Paul, Mothers Against Tobacco, and Scenic Minnesota.