

# Town Of Cortlandt Sign Design Manual

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# **Sign Design Manual Town of Cortlandt, NY**

**Linda Puglisi, Supervisor**

**Joseph D. Cerreto, Councilman**

**Francis X. Farrell, Councilman**

**Ann Lindau, Councilwoman**

**John Sloan, Councilman**

Prepared by: Stephen Lopez, ASLA, AICP

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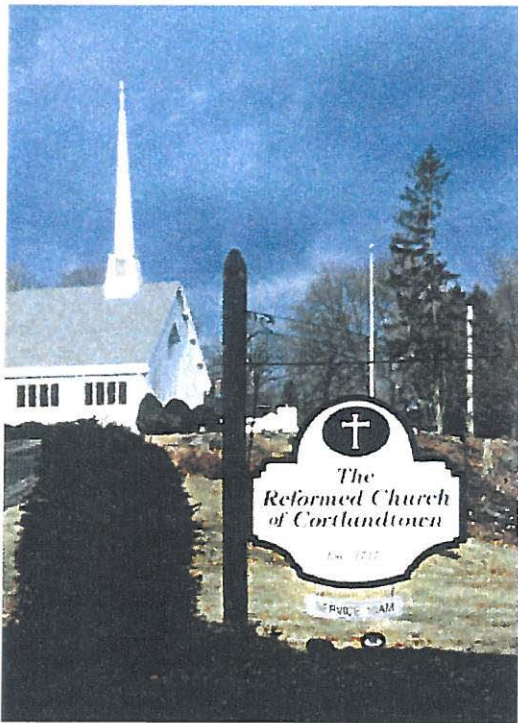
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## 1. Introduction

This sign design manual was prepared at the direction of the Town Board of the Town of Cortlandt. The intent of this manual is to illustrate simply and clearly what the town sign ordinance (Chapter 245, Signs) was intended to regulate and also to provide general recommendations on sign design. The sign ordinance legislation cites its general purpose as *"...to provide standards for the use and display of signs."*

For many people, however, legislative intents do not convey the real purpose of sign or other government regulations. With respect to signs the intent is to provide parameters that allow free expression but control size, placement and certain other aspects. The controls are intended to protect the general public from the end result of unrestrained competition which would almost surely lead to signs with size, color, lighting and other features greatly exaggerated beyond what carefully considered controls would allow.



Photograph 3. Reformed Church

The controls are designed to protect one use from the unreasonable excesses of another, and to protect the overall community, including the residents, from a general deterioration in the quality of life, property values and safety that would likely result from the unrestrained proliferation of signs.

This sign design manual is therefore intended to explain the sign ordinance, and good sign design principles, visually and in writing to help the business person and professional sign fabricator better understand the town's intent in enacting the sign regulations in Chapter 245, Signs.

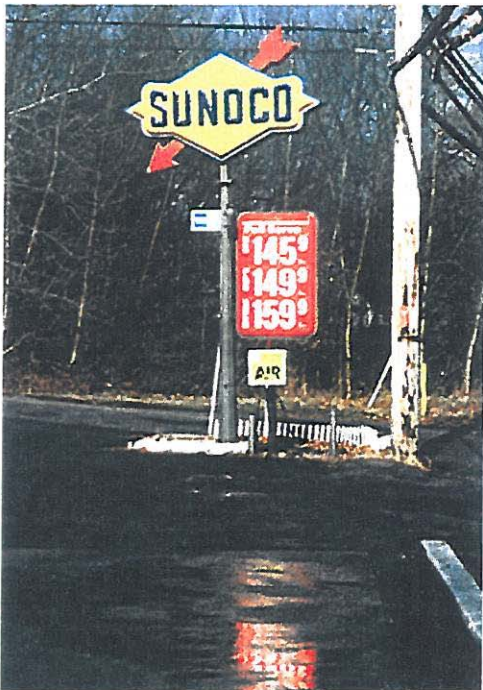
## 2. Signs in the Town of Cortlandt

Signs in the Town of Cortlandt are most often associated with businesses. The town's retail development can be found in both retail strips and in village or hamlet centers.

Examples of retail strips are Oregon Road, Routes 9A, 202 and 6. Oregon Road and Route 9A are two lane, winding roads with generally small to mid size businesses. Signage tends to be accordingly smaller than that on Route 6 which is four lane and relatively straight.



**Photograph 4.** Country Store. Note the removable message board under the principal sign. Flowers add color.



**Photograph 5.** Service stations contribute much of the visual clutter on the roadside.

Businesses on Route 6 are generally larger than Route 9A, and in addition Route 6 has the Cortlandt Town Center with several big box retail stores. The signs on Route 6 tend to be large and communicate one, two or three word store names. Route 202 has similarities to both Route 9A and Route 6. However, for all retail strips the general sign design philosophy should be to simplify signage to that which can be easily and quickly read by a passing motorist.

In contrast to both types of retail strips, the hamlet centers in Verplanck and Montrose tend to have exclusively small businesses, and function more as neighborhood shopping centers. Speeds tend to be slowest in hamlets, and there is



**Photograph 6.** Mobile. This landscaped sign is an example of a chain with a clear and attractive message.

frequently more proliferation of window and other signs presumably to attract the local customer. However, oversignage often results only in a more cluttered appearance as few, if any, potential customers park or stand outside shops reading all the signs.

Finally there are several scattered areas of businesses such as those on Albany Post Road by Annsville Creek and Roa Hook Road off Bear Mountain Bridge Road. The Albany Post Road concentration shares a mixture of hamlet and small retail strip characteristics while the Roa Hook Road businesses are largely an enclave of industrial uses.

Residential signage is typically found at major developments where the sign identifies the name of the development. These signs are usually found at entrances to guide visitors in. They are typically designed to convey a residential look and therefore should be landscaped and maintained according.

The following sections of this manual describe the town's sign design guidelines in detail, presenting examples of both recommended sign design and mistakes to avoid.



**Photograph 7.** Cross Creek. A simple message with very elegant lettering personalizes this housing development.



### 3. General Provisions of the Sign Ordinance

The first section of the sign ordinance sets forth the Town's "Purpose" in enacting the ordinance.

The Town cites six purposes as follows (paraphrased from the ordinance):

- a. encourage sound practices of sign design*
- b. support the existing businesses and promote new development*
- c. protect public investment*
- d. protect and enhance aesthetics*
- e. reduce hazards on public ways*
- f. promote public safety and welfare*

These purposes guided the development of the sign regulations found in the code.



**Photograph 8.** This shopping center sign promotes safety by clearly delineating the exit.

The next section of the Town sign ordinance is "**Definitions**". In this section of the ordinance, signs are defined generally and then various attributes of signs are described. The general definition of a sign, simplified for ease of understanding, is: *Any writing, picture, emblem, flag, or other figure which is attached to or painted on a building or other structure.*

In addition to this general sign definition, the ordinance also defines sign area, business signs, illuminated and non-illuminated signs, freestanding signs, billboards, identification signs, master sign plans, nameplate signs, political signs, portable signs, projecting signs, sale or lease signs, temporary signs, wall signs, weekend directional signs, and wind signs. Please refer to the local ordinance for descriptions of each of these.

The "**Exceptions**" section of the ordinance lists in which situations the sign regulations do not apply. There are fourteen such situations :

- a. government signs for safety or convenience*
- b. government or other organization flags*
- c. decorative flags less than ten square feet in area*
- d. official public notices*
- e. memorial plaques*
- f. nameplate signs four square feet or less in area*
- g. signs required by law*
- h. non-illuminated signs for direction, safety or convenience*
- i. holiday decorations*
- j. sale or lease signs eight square feet or less in area*
- k. temporary signs for non profit or charitable events*
- l. political signs, eight weeks before and seven weeks after an election*
- m. weekend directional signs*
- n. non-illuminated construction or subdivision signs twenty square feet or less in area*

Please note that these descriptions are simplified from the actual code which should be referenced to determine any additional requirements for each of these exceptions.

## 4. Sign Regulations

The town's sign regulations are, for the most part, contained in the sections entitled "General Requirements", "Signs permitted in R Districts", and "Signs permitted in Commercial and Industrial Districts". These sections provide both text and tables for Commercial and Industrial Districts. Their provisions are summarized below.

The "General Requirements" section stipulates a variety of requirements as follows:

- a. signs are deemed accessory uses and must be related to the principal use of the lot*
- b. no signs may project above the ridge line of a building*
- c. on lots with buildings of less than 200 square feet of coverage, one wall or freestanding sign is permitted with one square foot of sign area allowed for each four lineal feet of frontage, but no more than twenty four square feet total is allowed*
- d. no signs are allowed in the public right of way*
- e. no moving signs or signs with changing illumination are allowed*
- f. a master site plan is required for multiple tenancy commercial buildings*
- g. wind signs for grand openings or special events are allowed for up to thirty days*
- h. a removable message board of twelve square feet is allowed in commercial and industrial zones*



**Photograph 9.** Cortlandt Town Center. A multiple tenancy sign.

- i. signs prohibited in all zones include: portable signs, sign types not identified in the code, private signs in public places or on public objects*
- j. no signs may obscure road vision or contain words motorists may confuse with traffic signs*
- k. the Planning Board shall approve all aspects of signs within its jurisdiction when Site Development Plan approval is required (see Article XII of the Zoning Ordinance)*
- l. signs may only be illuminated until 10 PM*



**Photograph 10.** Red Mill crossing. A non illuminated sign with attractive fence and landscape treatment.

These sign design standards must be observed in all instances, and therefore provide a beginning point for any sign design effort. If any of these basic design requirements is not met, the Planning Board cannot approve a sign and a permit can not be issued by the Director of the Division of Code Enforcement. An appeal may be filed with the Zoning Board of Appeals with cause.

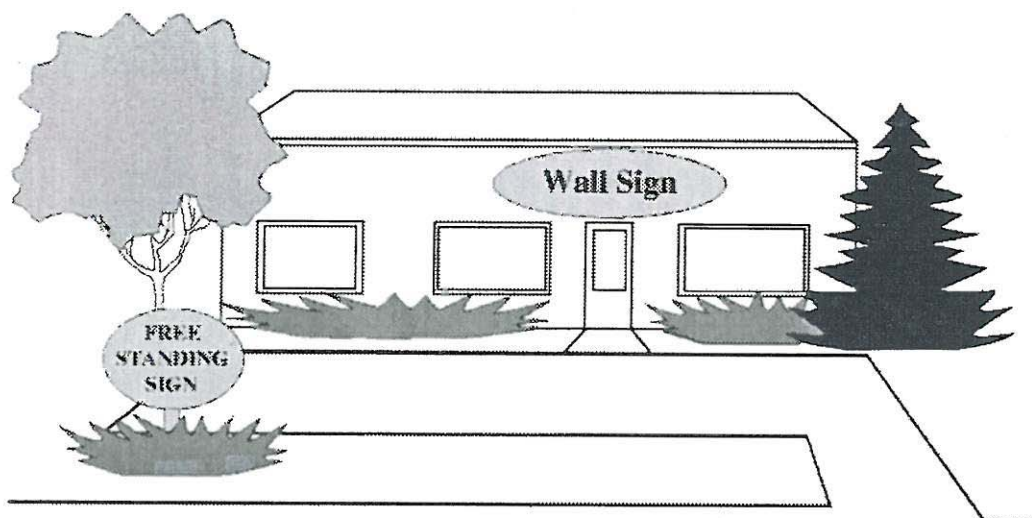
The requirements of the sign code for "**Signs permitted in R Districts**" are that:

- a. sign exceptions under Section 245-3 are permitted*
- b. a non-illuminated subdivision, neighborhood or activities sign not exceeding twenty square feet or a height of seven feet is allowed*
- c. a non-illuminated sign not exceeding twenty square feet for certain principal and special permit uses excluding one family dwellings or multifamily dwellings up to six units*

Section 245-7 of the code outlining "**Signs permitted in Commercial and Industrial Districts**" is primarily comprised of requirements set forth in three tables. However, the general provision is made that all signs allowed in R districts will also be allowed in commercial and industrial districts (please refer to Appendix B for illustrations).

## 5. Sign Design Guidelines

The sign design guidelines presented in this manual are suggested "best design practices" and are culled from various sources, including an assessment of the Town of Cortlandt's visual character and typical sign settings as described in section 2, "Signs in the Town of Cortlandt."



**Illustration 1.** Recommended simplified sign use with complimentary landscape treatment.

The common thread for sign design in these various business locations is that they must simply and quickly inform potential customers of the location of a business with products that the consumer may wish to purchase. In automobile-related strip commercial development, business signage must be visible to potential customers passing by in motor vehicles. The passing motorist has only a brief moment to read the message and respond by deciding to slow down and enter the parking area serving the business.



**Photograph 11.** Monteverde Restaurant. Signs should convey messages simply and quickly.

A field survey of the town's business signage was conducted in January, 1997. It was noted that there are many examples of good design and signs that could be improved. The most common mistakes businesses make are summarized below.

The most common sign design mistakes are:

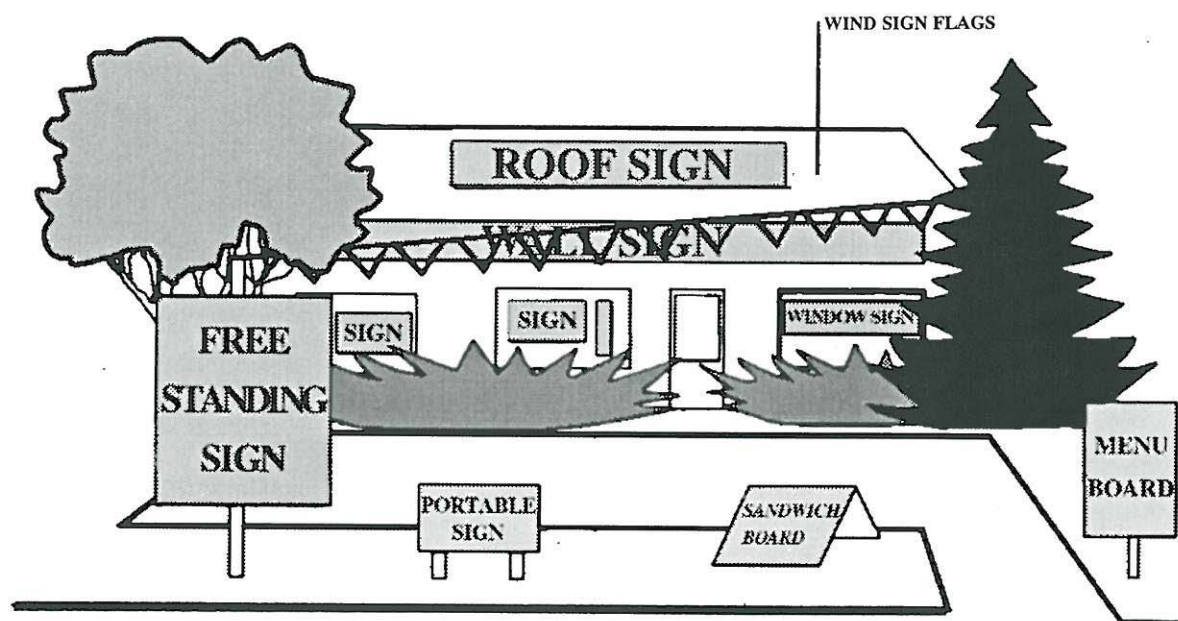
- a. too many messages to read*
- b. too many competing signs*
- c. sign lettering too small or too thin (in letter weight) to read*
- d. excessive variation in signs for individual businesses, or for adjacent businesses, that distracts from the messages*
- e. unattractive sign design, and placement out of character with architectural elements and the surrounding area.*



**Photograph 12.** Carbone Building. This multi-tenant retail building demonstrates good coordination in size and placement of business signs.

This list could be applied to many if not most retail strips. Many business people are not aware of the principles of good design for visibility. Frequently they ask their signmakers to produce signs with unrealistic expectations of what can be displayed. When individual businesses in a free market economy compete for visibility in a limited space, it is only natural each business will strive to promote its own product and retail niche. The resulting over proliferation of signs is counterproductive to helping the consumer find the business he or she wants. Therefore the net effect of too many signs is that everyone loses. Fewer signs with clearer and shorter messages will be more effective in communicating with potential customers, especially those in moving vehicles.

To best service the overall business community, it is necessary to develop community-wide sign regulations. It is also important to develop a consensus in the local business community of commitment to projecting an image of consistency and professionalism. The commitment of the business community will develop over time as the benefits of good sign design are incrementally realized. Sign design guidelines will also contribute towards the town's commitment to promote tourism.



**Illustration 2.** Common sign design mistakes: too many signs, overgrown plants around building, no plants around signs, distracting ancillary features such as wind signs.

The following sign design principles are suggested for businesses in the town. They are not meant to be exhaustive, nor are they meant to dwell on minutiae or to be overly restrictive of style, color or other design features. They are intended to provide a simple guideline for successful individual and collective business signage.

The elements of good sign design include the following list of items. Notice that these guidelines do not dictate individual sign designs.



**Photograph 13.** Montrose Animal Hospital. A professional business sign well integrated into the architecture of the building.

*a. to the greatest extent possible, integrate signs with the architecture of the building. Give consideration to building size, scale, entrance, color and details.*

*b. limit wall signs to one per business, except on corner lots.*

*c. on buildings with more than one business, maintain uniform sign band height on the building wall, and maintain general consistency among wall sign sizes and materials.*

*d. use letters that are of the appropriate size and weight to be read from the street, and with adequate color contrast to be easily seen.*

*e. avoid using building walls for posting other signage.*

*f. avoid distracting window signs - keep messages simple and limit the number of window signs.*

*g. limit freestanding signs to no more than the code allows*

*h. be sensitive to styles of adjacent uses, use contrast carefully and tastefully.*



**Photograph 14.** Hudson Heritage. A nicely detailed wall sign, well proportioned and placed relative to building façade.





**Photograph 15.** Cortlandt Golf Center. This message is clear and the sign is attractive. Landscaping would compliment it.

- i. keep signs well maintained for appearance and fire safety.*
- j. consider using materials complimentary to the sign such as landscaping for freestanding signs, or match letter color to building trim*
- k. landscape the base of signs with evergreens and flowering plants.*
- l. externally light signs with a focused light source.*
- m. match color and materials of freestanding and wall signs.*
- n. Note the general requirements of Section 245-4 of the Sign Code.*

A number of illustrations in this manual are intended to show local signs that convey messages well and that have achieved this with a positive aesthetic impact.



a. Plain sign



b. Sign with Landscaping



c. Sign with Stone Base & Landscaping



d. Sign with Stone Base, Landscaping at front and framing the sign at sides

**Illustration 3.** Examples of free standing sign design treatments ranging from the plain in the first example to successively more detailed.



Further requirements under the "**Permits**" section are that if the sign application is part of a site development plan application before the Planning Board, then the Division of Code Enforcement must refer the application to the Planning Board and shall approve the sign only after the Planning Board has approved the sign. The Division of Code Enforcement shall follow all the conditions set down by the Planning Board, and shall additionally consider any and all other relevant codes in preparing and issuing the permit. The permit shall be valid for three months with one three month extension allowed. All signs must be maintained in a clean and neatly painted condition, free of defective wiring, loose fastening or other hazardous conditions, or the Division of Code Enforcement may direct the repair or removal of the sign.

The "**Nonconforming Signs**" section requires that all signs not specifically allowed under the code must be removed within one year of the approval of the code. Signs which are allowed but do not meet the standards of the code must be removed within seven years of the code's approval. The code was adopted on August 15, 1995.

The code provides for "**Appeals and Variances**" to the Zoning Board of Appeals, subject to all rules and procedures of that board. "**Enforcement**" is stipulated to be by the Division of Code Enforcement. And finally, the section on "**Penalties for Offenses**" provides for fines not exceeding \$1,000 for violations deemed civil penalties, and provides for fines not exceeding \$250 and fifteen days in jail for criminal offenses.

## **Appendix A. Sign Permit Application Process Outline**

### Step 1. Complete Application

- Site Plans
- Construction Details

### Step 2. Submit Application and Fee to Division of Code Enforcement

#### a. If no Site Development Plan is required

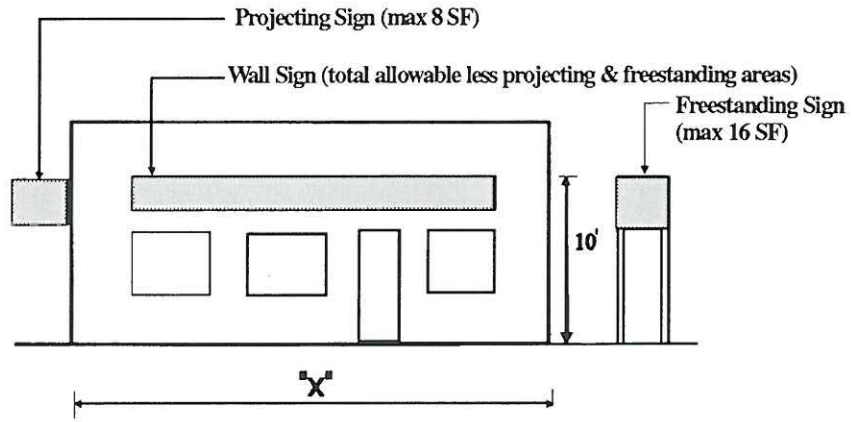
- Refer to ARC, 30 day response
- Issue or deny permit

#### b. If Site Development Plan approval is required

- Refer to Planning Board
- Refer to ARC
- Receipt of Planning Board approval or denial
- Issue or deny permit

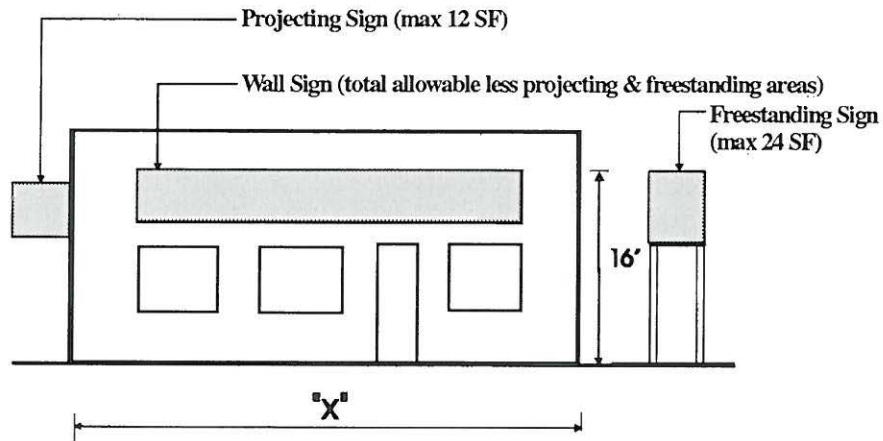
## **Appendix B. Illustrated Sign Design Regulations**

- CC District Sign Regulations
- HC, CD, MD, M-1 District Sign Regulations
- CC, HC, CD, MD, M-1 District Window Sign Regulations
- HC, CD District Multiple Tenant Sign Regulations



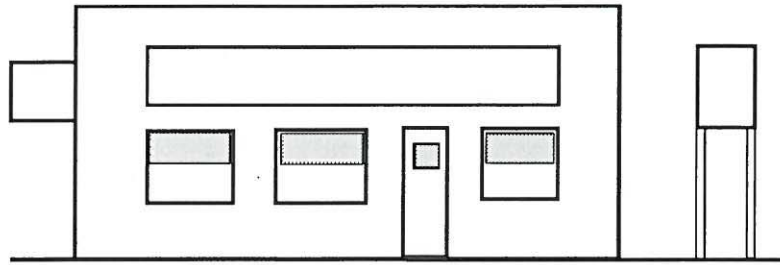
<b>Total Sign Area</b>	= "x"/2 (up to 40 SF max.)
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**Illustration 5.** CC District Sign Regulations



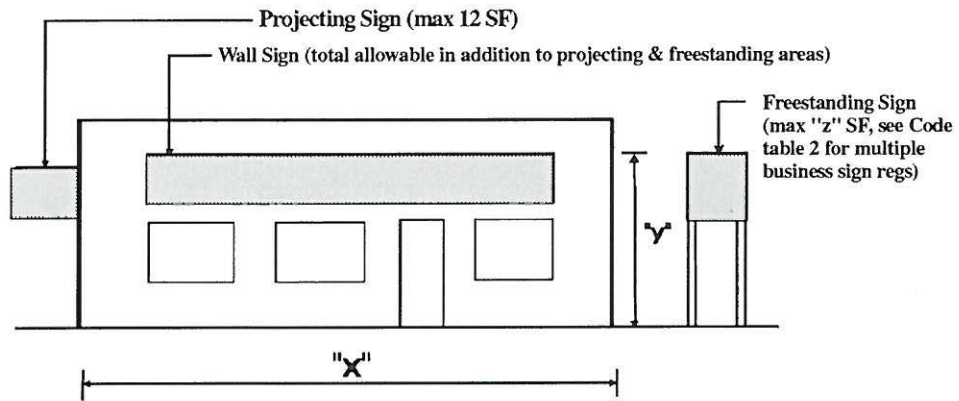
<b>Total Sign Area</b>	= "x" (up to 80 SF max.)
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**Illustration 6.** HC, CD, MD, M-1 District Sign Regulations



<b>Total Sign Area</b>	CC	= "x"/2 (up to 40SF, max. ea. 4SF, max. ea. window 50%)	0%)
	HC,CD	= "x" (up to 80SF, max. ea. 8SF, max. ea. window 50%)	%)
	MD,M-1	= none allowed	

**Illustration 7.** CC, HC, CD, MD, M-1, District Window Sign Regulations



<b>Total Sign Area</b>	= (for sites 99,999 SF or less), "x" (up to 80 SF)
	"y" = 16' max., "z" = 24 SF max.
	= (for sites 100,000 to 499,999 SF), "x" (up to 80 SF)
	"y" = 20' max., "z" = 75 SF one sign, 50 SF ea. two
<b>Total Sign Area</b>	= (for sites 500,000 SF or more), "x" (see Code table 2)
	"y" = 24' max., "z" = 150 SF one, 120 SF ea. two, 100 SF ea. three signs

**Illustration 8.** HC, CD District Multiple Tenant Sign Regulations

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