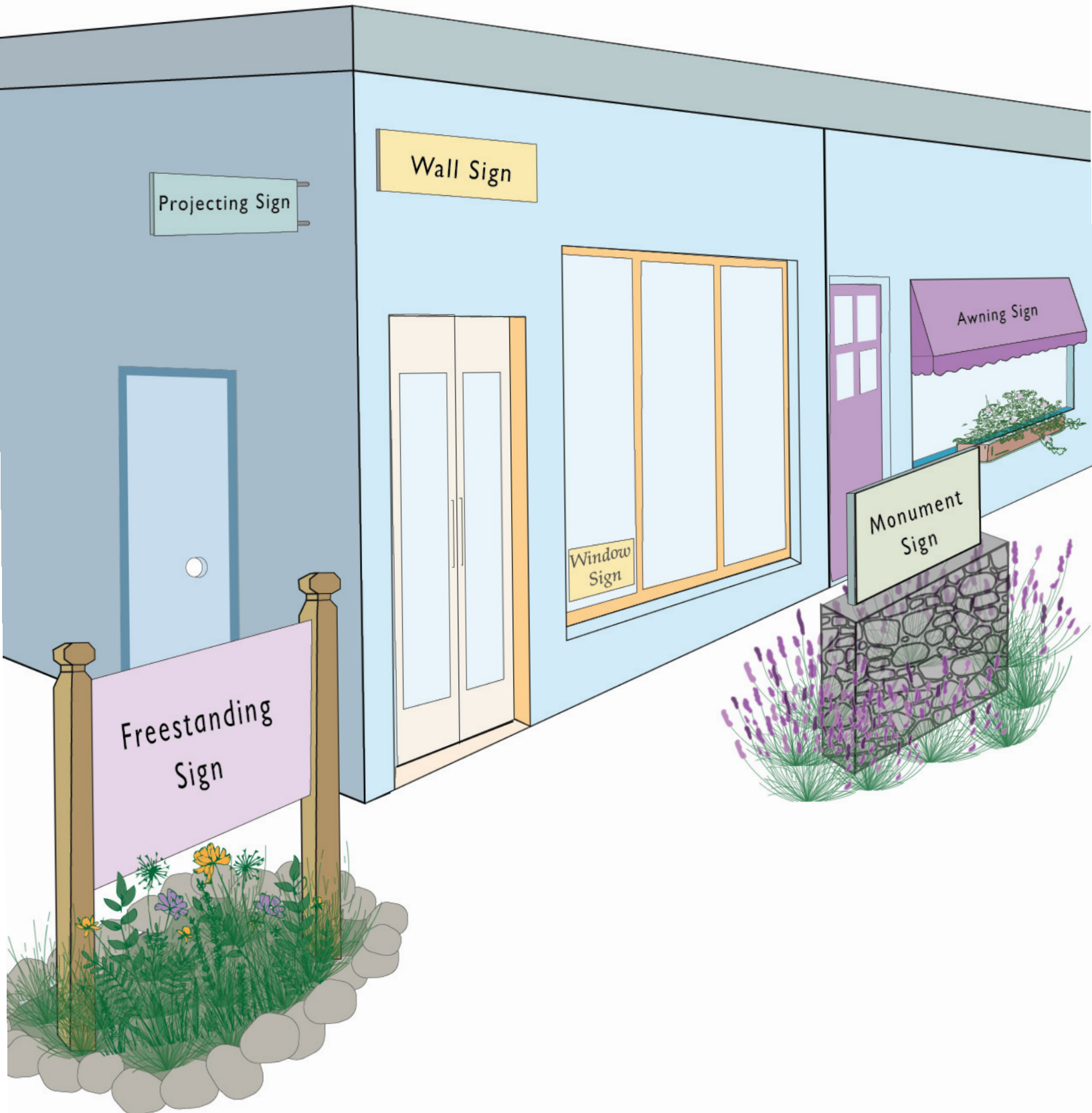




Acton Sign Guide

A Pictorial Summary of Section 7 of
The Town of Acton's Zoning Bylaw





Sign Guide Contents

This guide is intended to assist businesses and organizations in the creation of signs per the Acton Zoning Bylaw. The official Acton Zoning Bylaw remains the governing document for all sign regulations.

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Have further questions? Don't hesitate to reach out to Acton's Planning Division!

Call the Planning Division at (978) 929-6631, reach out via email at Planning@actonma.gov or come by to Town Hall at 472 Main Street.

Looking for more information on operating a business in Acton? Reach out to the Economic Development Director, Julie Pierce at jpierce@actonma.gov

Find the official Sign Bylaws via the Town of Acton Website in Section 7 of the Zoning Bylaw.

Tip: Signs must be located on the same lot as the business/organization. It is important to check the zoning district in which the business/organization is located. Find the zoning district by searching your address [here](#) or email the Planning Division at planning@actonma.gov



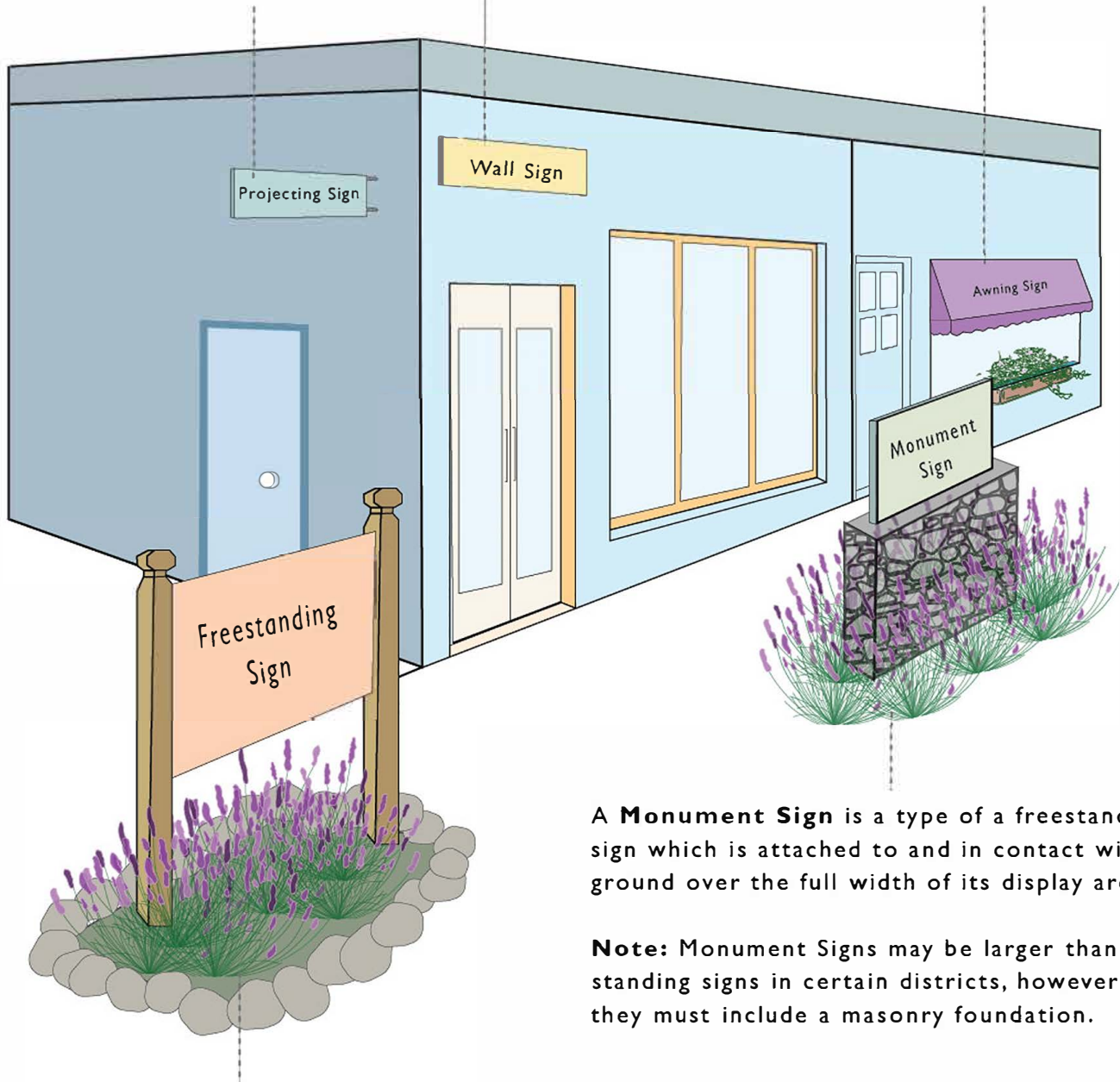


Acton Sign Types

A **Wall Sign** is painted or otherwise permanently affixed perpendicular to a vertical exterior surface of a building or structure.

A **Projecting Sign** is a sign which permanently juts out from the exterior surface of a building.

An **Awning Sign** is a permanent sign which is affixed to or consists of a permanent or retractable awning or marquee permanently mounted to the exterior surface of a building.



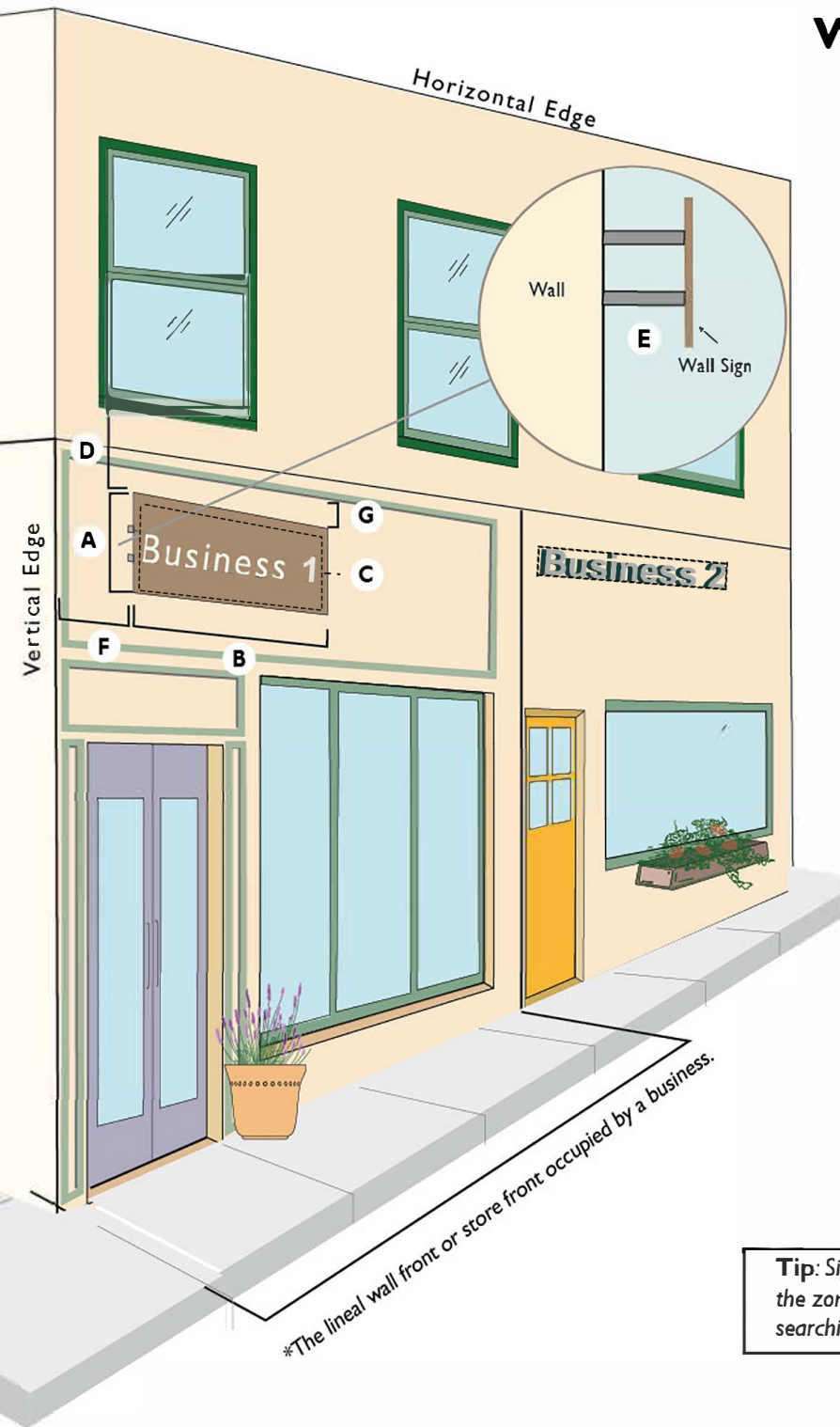
A **Monument Sign** is a type of a freestanding sign which is attached to and in contact with the ground over the full width of its display area.

Note: Monument Signs may be larger than free standing signs in certain districts, however they must include a masonry foundation.

A **Freestanding Sign** is a non-movable SIGN not affixed to any building but constructed in a permanently fixed location on the ground with its own support structure.

Note: Freestanding signs and monument signs require landscaping per bylaw specifications in Section 7.8.3.

Wall Signs (Bylaw Section 7.7.4)



- (A) Sign Height (7.7.4.2)**
 Business, Industrial and Office Districts: Maximum of 4.5 ft.
 East Acton Village and East Acton Village- Districts (EAV & EAV2): Maximum of 3 ft.
 All other Village Districts (WAV, SAV, & NAV): Maximum of 2 ft.
- (B) Sign Width (7.7.4.3)**
 Business, Industrial and Office Districts: Width may not be wider than 1 foot for each 2 lineal feet of wall(*), up to 30 feet.
 Example: A business with a wall of 30 ft. may have a sign that is a maximum of 15 ft. wide.
 Village District: Width may not be wider than 1 foot for each 3 lineal feet of wall(*) up to 20 feet.
 Example: A business with a wall of 30 ft. may have a sign that is a maximum of 10 ft. wide.
- (C) Display Area (7.7.4.1)**
 All Districts: Display area is the total surface area of a sign and may not exceed 1 square foot for each lineal foot of wall(*). Example: A business with 30 ft. of linear wall may have a sign with a maximum of 30 sq. ft. total display area.
- (D) Distance from Windows (7.7.2)**
 All Districts: Signs may only be erected on the ground floor and up to 1 foot below the windows of the story above.
 Note: See section 7.7.4.4 for second/third floor business sign exceptions.
- (E) Sign Distance from Wall (7.7.4.6)**
 All Districts: Sign may not project more than 1 foot from the surface of the wall to which it is attached.
- (F) Distance from Vertical Edge (7.7.4.7)**
 All Districts: Sign may not be erected within 2 feet of any vertical edge of a building/structure.
- (G) Distance from Horizontal Edge or Architectural Feature (7.7.3)**
 All Districts: Sign may not be erected within 6 inches of any horizontal edge of a building/structure or architectural feature. See 7.7.3 of list of features.

Tip: Signs must be located on the same lot as the business/organization. It is important to check the zoning district in which the business/organization is located. Find the zoning district by searching your address [here](#) or email the Planning Division at planning@actonma.gov



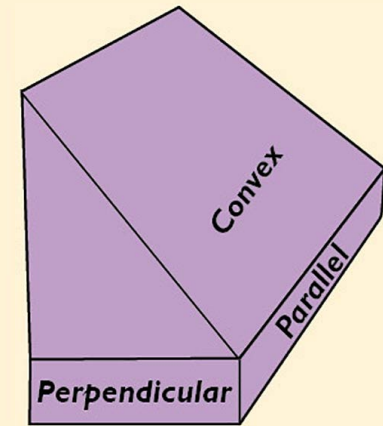
Awning Signs (Bylaw Section 7.7.6)

An awning sign may consist of letters or symbols affixed to an awning in a parallel, perpendicular and/or convex position to the wall onto which the awning is mounted.

Businesses with an awning sign are permitted one additional exterior sign (a wall sign or a projecting sign), only if the awning sign is erected on an awning manufactured with canvas on a frame that is retractable to the wall. **Note:** This is not permitted in East Acton Village District.

Letters and symbols on an awning sign must be flush with the surface of the awning.

Note: Village Districts Convex position of letters to the wall is not allowed in the village districts.



- (A) Display Area:** Measured by drawing the smallest rectangle around all letters, symbols and logos. No more than 12 square feet for surfaces positioned **parallel** or **convex** to the building wall.

No more than 6 square feet for surfaces positioned **perpendicular** to the wall.

- (B) Projection:**
An awning sign must not project more than 3 feet from the wall

- (C) Clearance**
An awning must maintain a minimum clearance of 8 feet above a walkway or sidewalk.

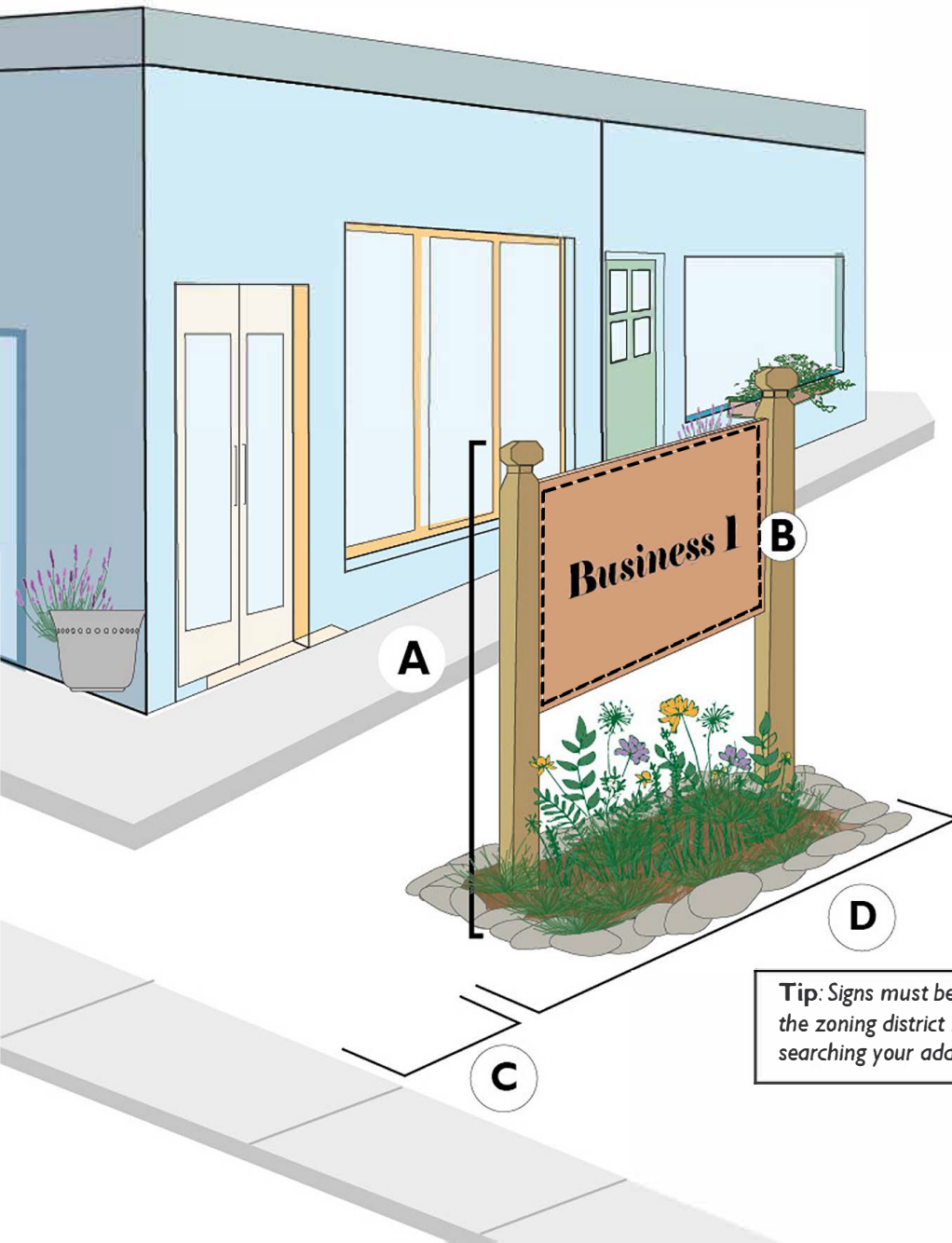
Note: If a business has an awning sign, all other awnings are subject to the same dimensional requirements.

Tip: Signs must be located on the same lot as the business/organization. It is important to check the zoning district in which the business/organization is located. Find the zoning district by searching your address [here](#) or email the Planning Division at planning@actonma.gov



Business Freestanding Sign (Bylaw Section 7.8)

In most cases, one freestanding sign is allowed on the lot. For exceptions where 2 are permitted, please see Section 7.8.8.3 and 7.8.5.3. In the North Acton Village, South Acton Village and West Acton Village districts there are cases where no freestanding signs are permitted. Please see 7.8.7.1 and 7.8.7.2.



A Sign Height

Business, Industrial and Office Districts: Maximum of 7 ft. (7.8.5.1)

Village District Maximum of 5 ft. (7.8.6.1)

B Display Area

Measured by drawing the smallest rectangle around all letters, symbols and logos (7.8.5.1).'

Business, Industrial and Office Districts: Maximum of 12 sq. ft. (7.8.5.1)

Village District: Maximum of 8 sq. ft. (7.8.6.1).

C Location (7.8.2)

All Districts: Sign may not be erected within 5 ft., or closer than the height of the sign to a street or any right of way customarily used by the general public.

Example: If height of sign is 6 ft the set back must be at least 6 ft.

D Landscaping (7.8.3)

All Districts: Sign must be centered and integrated within a landscaped area that is planted and maintained around the base, for example with shrubs and perennial flowers.

The landscaped area will be the height of the sign multiplied by two, by the power of two.

Example: Sign height = 6 ft: $6 \text{ ft.} \times 2 = 12 \text{ ft.}$; $12 \text{ ft.} \times 12 \text{ ft.} = 144 \text{ sq. ft.}$

Tip: Signs must be located on the same lot as the business/organization. It is important to check the zoning district in which the business/organization is located. Find the zoning district by searching your address [here](#) or email the Planning Division at planning@actonma.gov



Monument Sign (Bylaw Section 7.8)

A sign is a monument sign when the support structure consists of masonry material which remains in its natural color. The display area is the area to the lowest portion of any letter, symbol or illustration, and does not include the masonry.

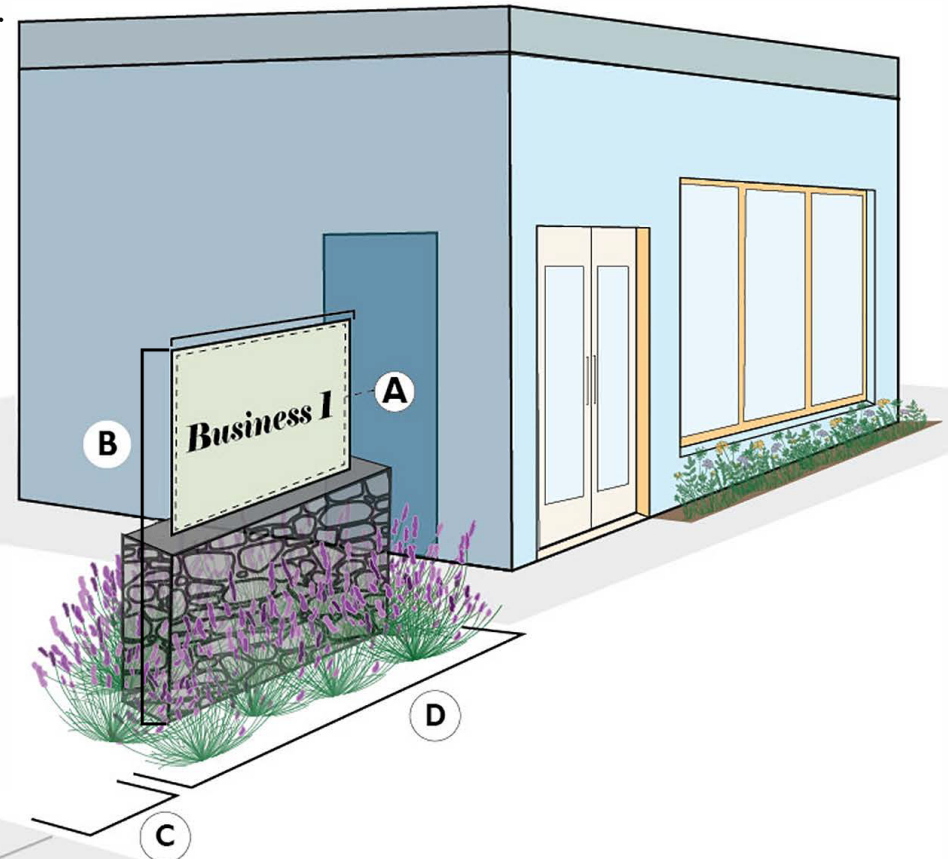
- (A) Display Area:** All area above the masonry base (7.8.4).
Business, Industrial and Office Districts: Maximum 16 sq. ft. when the height of the sign is 4 ft. or less, or maximum 16 sq. ft. when the height is 6 ft. or less and the width is 3 ft. or less.

Village Districts Maximum 12 sq. ft. so long as the height of the sign is 4 ft. or less, or maximum of 5 sq. ft. when the width is 3 ft. or less.

- (B) Sign Height**
Business, Industrial and Office Districts: Maximum 7 ft.
Village Districts Maximum 5 ft.

- (C) Location (7.8.2)**
All Districts: Sign may not be erected within 5 ft., or closer than the height of the sign to a street or any right of way customarily used by the general public.
Example: If height of sign is 6 ft. the set back must be at least 6 ft.

- (D) Landscaping (7.8.3)**
All Districts: Sign must be centered and integrated within a landscaped area that is planted and maintained around the base, for example with shrubs and perennial flowers. The landscaped area will be the height of the sign multiplied by two, by the power of two.
Example: Sign height = 6 ft: $6 \text{ ft.} \times 2 = 12 \text{ ft.}$; $12 \text{ ft.} \times 12 \text{ ft.} = 144 \text{ sq. ft.}$

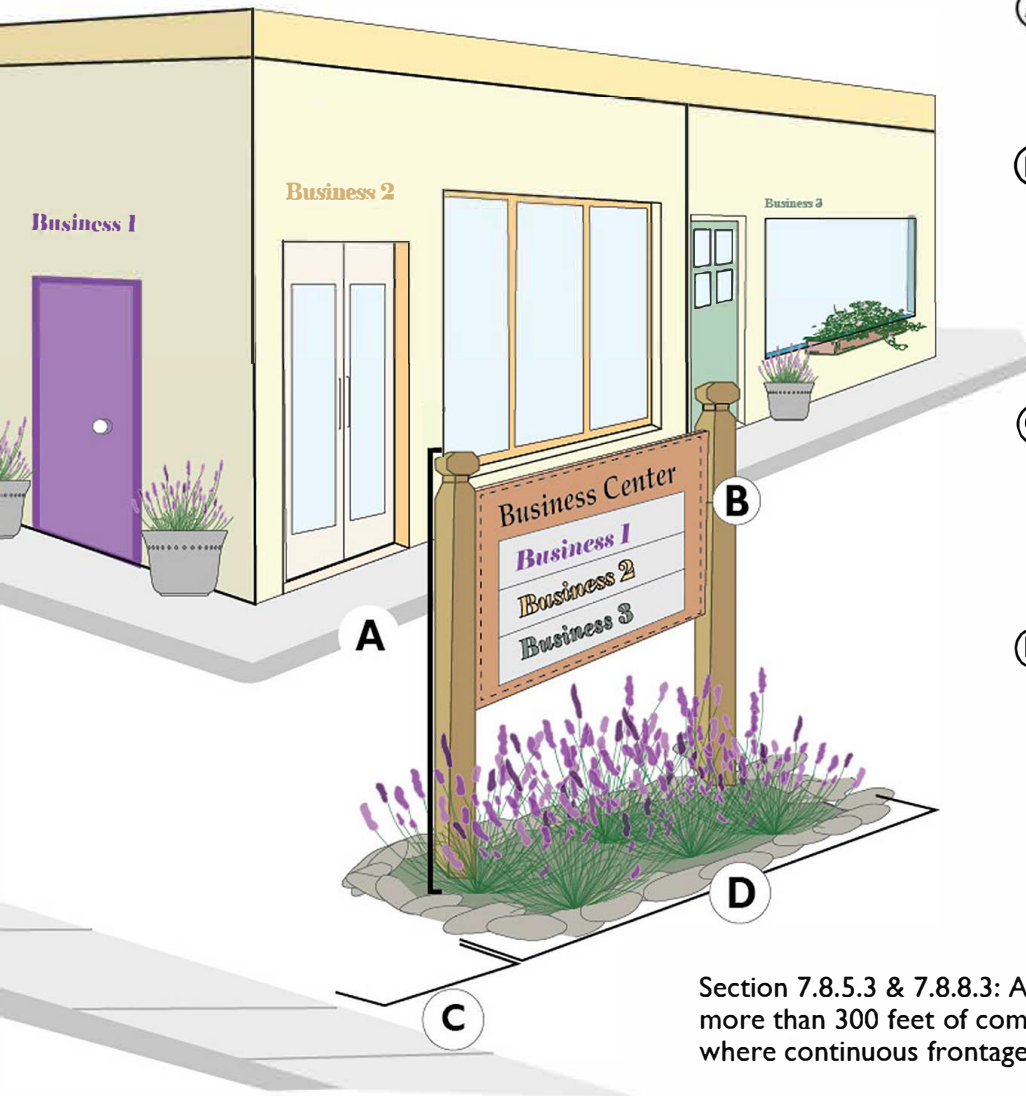


Tip: Signs must be located on the same lot as the business/organization. It is important to check the zoning district in which the business/organization is located. Find the zoning district by searching your address [here](#) or email the Planning Division at planning@actonma.gov



Business Center Freestanding Sign (Bylaw Section 7.8)

When a freestanding sign identifies a business center, the business center and each business located within may display their identification together, provided that the sign remains integrated with a coherent design and complies with all applicable standards. A freestanding business center sign is allowed if no other freestanding signs identifying an individual business is on that lot (7.8.5.2).



(A) Sign Height

Business, Industrial and Office Districts: Maximum 12.5 ft.

North, West and South Acton Village Districts: Maximum of 6 ft.

East Acton Village and East Acton Village-2 Districts: Maximum of 9 ft.

(B) Display Area

Business, Industrial and Office District Maximum 50 sq. ft.

North, West and South Acton Village District: Maximum 12 sq. ft.

East Acton Village and East Acton Village-2 Districts: Maximum 27 sq. ft.

(C) Location

All Districts Sign may not be erected within 5 feet, or closer than the height of the sign to a street or any right of way customarily used by the general public. See restrictions for NAV, SAV, and WAV in Section 7.8.7.1

(D) Landscaping

All Districts Sign must be centered and integrated within a landscaped area that is planted and maintained around the base, for example with shrubs and perennial flowers.

The landscaped area will be the height of the sign multiplied by two, by the power of two.

Example: Sign height = 6 ft: $6 \text{ ft} \times 2 = 12 \text{ ft}$; $12 \text{ ft} \times 12 \text{ ft} = 144 \text{ sq. ft.}$

Section 7.8.5.3 & 7.8.8.3: A business center is eligible for two freestanding signs when the lot(s) have more than 300 feet of combined frontage provided that not more than one of those signs must be placed where continuous frontage on one street measures less than 300 feet.

Tip: Signs must be located on the same lot as the business/organization. It is important to check the zoning district in which the business/organization is located. Find the zoning district by searching your address [here](#) or email the Planning Division at planning@actonma.gov



Business Center Monument Sign (Bylaw Section 7.8)

A sign is a monument sign when the support structure consists of masonry material which remains in its natural color. The display area is the area above the masonry.

A Display Area

Business, Industrial and Office Districts: Maximum 62.5 sq. ft.

North, West and South Acton Village Districts: Maximum 20 sq. ft.

East Acton Village and East Acton Village-2 Districts:

Maximum of 40 sq. ft.

B Sign Height

Business, Industrial and Office Districts: Maximum 10 ft.

North, West and South Acton Village Districts: Maximum 4 ft.

East Acton Village and East Acton Village-2 Districts: Maximum 8 ft.

C Location

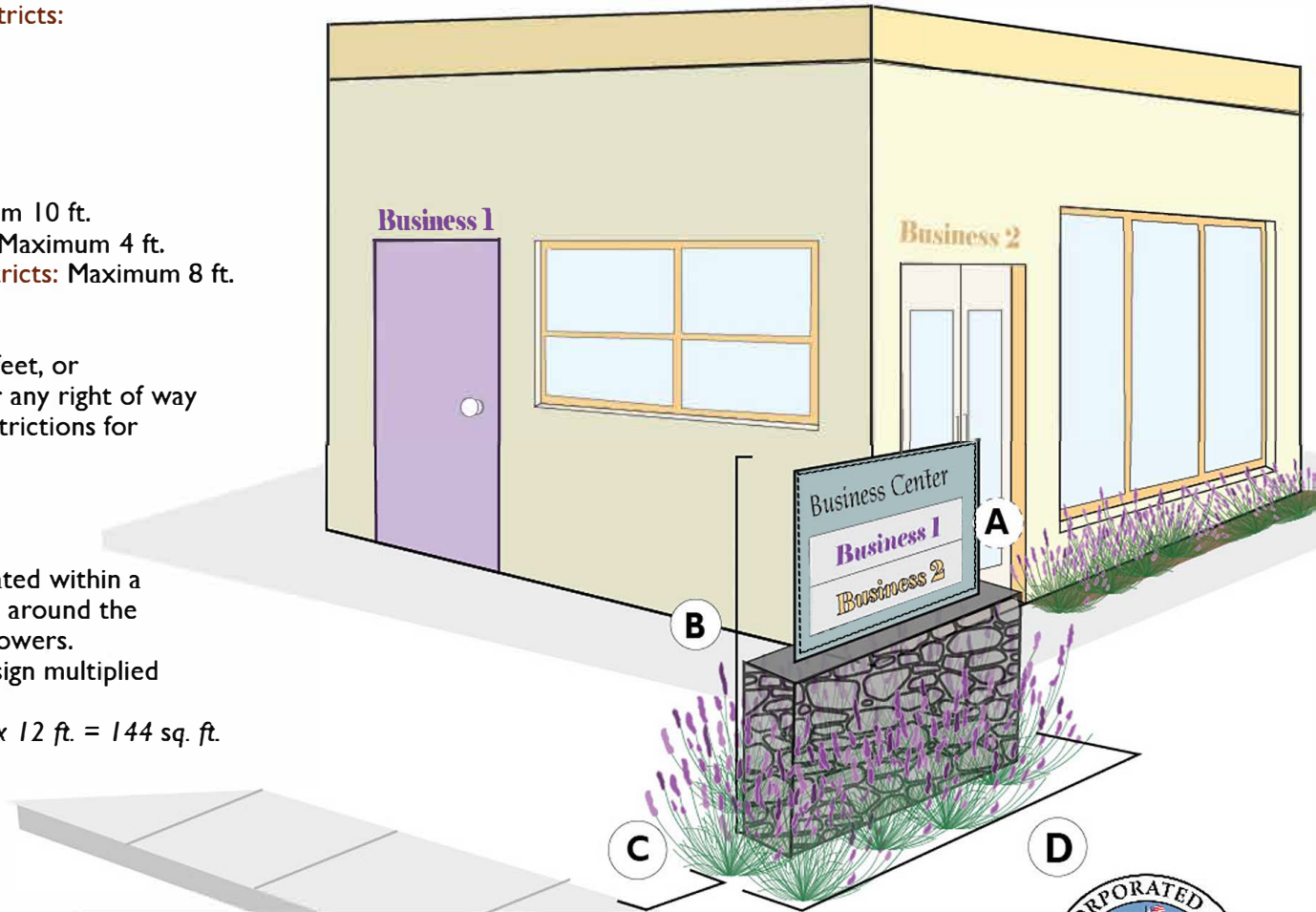
All Districts Sign may not be erected within 5 feet, or closer than the height of the sign to a street or any right of way customarily used by the general public. See restrictions for NAV, SAV, and WAV in Section 7.8.7.1

D Landscaping

All Districts Sign must be centered and integrated within a landscaped area that is planted and maintained around the base, for example with shrubs and perennial flowers.

The landscaped area will be the height of the sign multiplied by two, by the power of two.

Example: Sign height = 6 ft: $6 \text{ ft} \times 2 = 12 \text{ ft}$; $12 \text{ ft} \times 12 \text{ ft} = 144 \text{ sq. ft.}$



Tip: Signs must be located on the same lot as the business/organization. It is important to check the zoning district in which the business/organization is located. Find the zoning district by searching your address [here](#) or email the Planning Division at planning@actonma.gov



Projecting Sign (Bylaw Section 7.7.5)

A **Projecting Sign** is permanently affixed to the exterior surface of a building or structure with the display area jutting out from the wall (see image below).

(A) Display Area

Business, Industrial and Office Districts: Maximum 12 sq ft. **Village Districts:** Maximum 6 sq ft.

(C) Projection from Wall Face

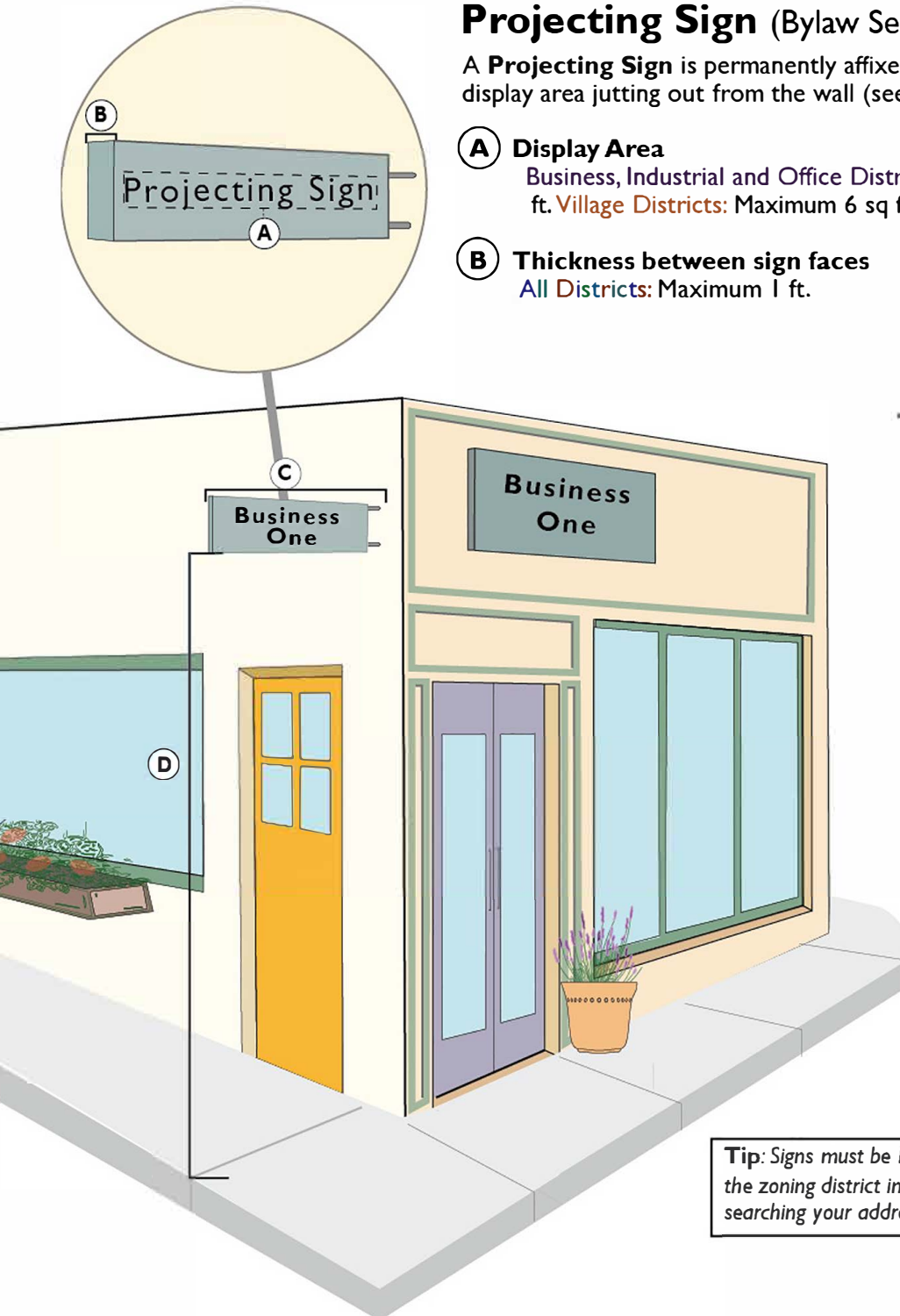
All Districts: Maximum 3 ft.

(B) Thickness between sign faces

All Districts: Maximum 1 ft.

(D) Clearance

All Districts: Minimum of 8 ft. above sidewalk/walkway



Secondary Exterior Signs (Bylaw Section 7.7.7)

Display Area

All Districts: Maximum 6 sq. ft.

Secondary Sign Allowance

If a business has a direct entrance in a wall other than the front wall, there may be a secondary wall sign, projecting sign or awning affixed to the wall where the second entrance is.

If the business has a wall other than the front wall without a direct entrance to the business that faces a street or parking area, there may be a secondary wall sign affixed to such wall; but no business is allowed to have more than two secondary exterior signs.

East Acton Village (EAV) District, an additional secondary sign is allowed on the front wall, only if it is a different type (wall sign, projecting sign, or awning sign) than any other sign on the front wall.

Tip: Signs must be located on the same lot as the business/organization. It is important to check the zoning district in which the business/organization is located. Find the zoning district by searching your address [here](#) or email the Planning Division at planning@actonma.gov



Signs Types and Dimensions Allowed Without a Permit (Section 7.5)

① A For Sale, Rent or Lease sign
Business, Industrial and Office Districts Display Area cannot exceed 20 sq. ft.

All Other Districts 8 square feet for property located in any other district.

② Window Signs & Window Decals

Business, Industrial and Office Districts Display area must cover no more than 25% of the window

*Signs promoting a public service or charitable event do not count in the allowed 25 percent.

③ Directory Sign: One directory sign listing the name and location of the occupants may be on the sign.

Business, Industrial and Office Districts Display area cannot exceed 1 square foot per occupant on the sign, or 12 square feet total.

All Other Districts Display area cannot exceed one half of a square foot for each occupant on the sign, or 6 square feet total.



④ Directional Signs Examples: A directional sign may be a sign required for occupational safety and health reasons, posted to prohibit trespassing, hunting, or certain other activities on private property or providing essential direction or guidance. A directional sign may also be a sign displaying a street name or unit/building number. Additionally a directional sign may identify handicapped parking and access.

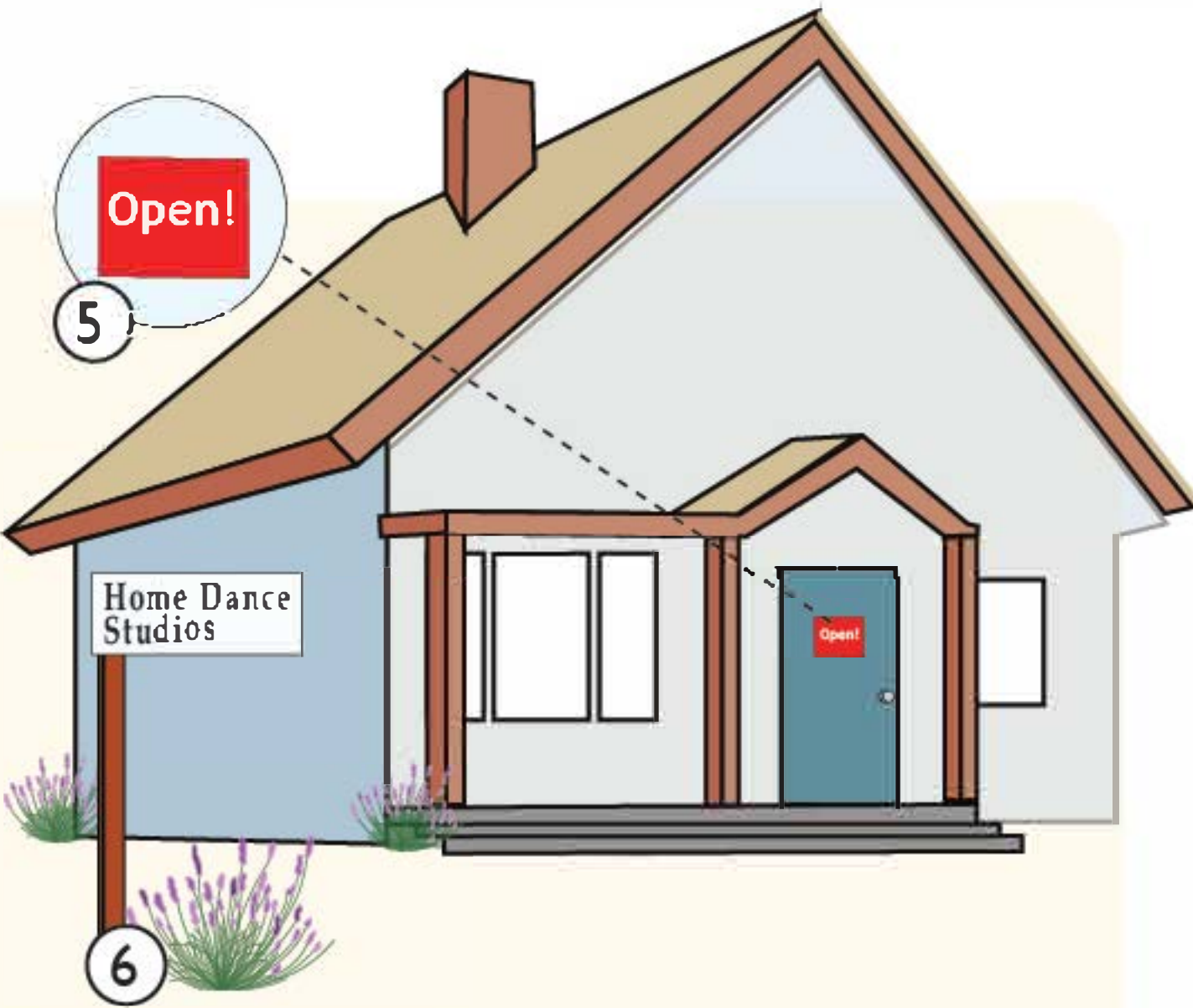
Display Area cannot exceed 2 sq. ft.

Height - No directional sign mounted on a wall of a structure can be erected more than 6 feet above ground level, No directional free standing sign can be erected more than 4 feet above the ground.

⑤ “OPEN” Signs One “Open” sign, other than a window sign, associated with a principal use is permitted.

Such a sign must be either affixed to the building as near as practically possible to the entrance of the establishment or to a free-standing sign otherwise permitted under this Bylaw.

Display Area: Such a sign cannot exceed 6 sq. ft.



⑥ Identification signs

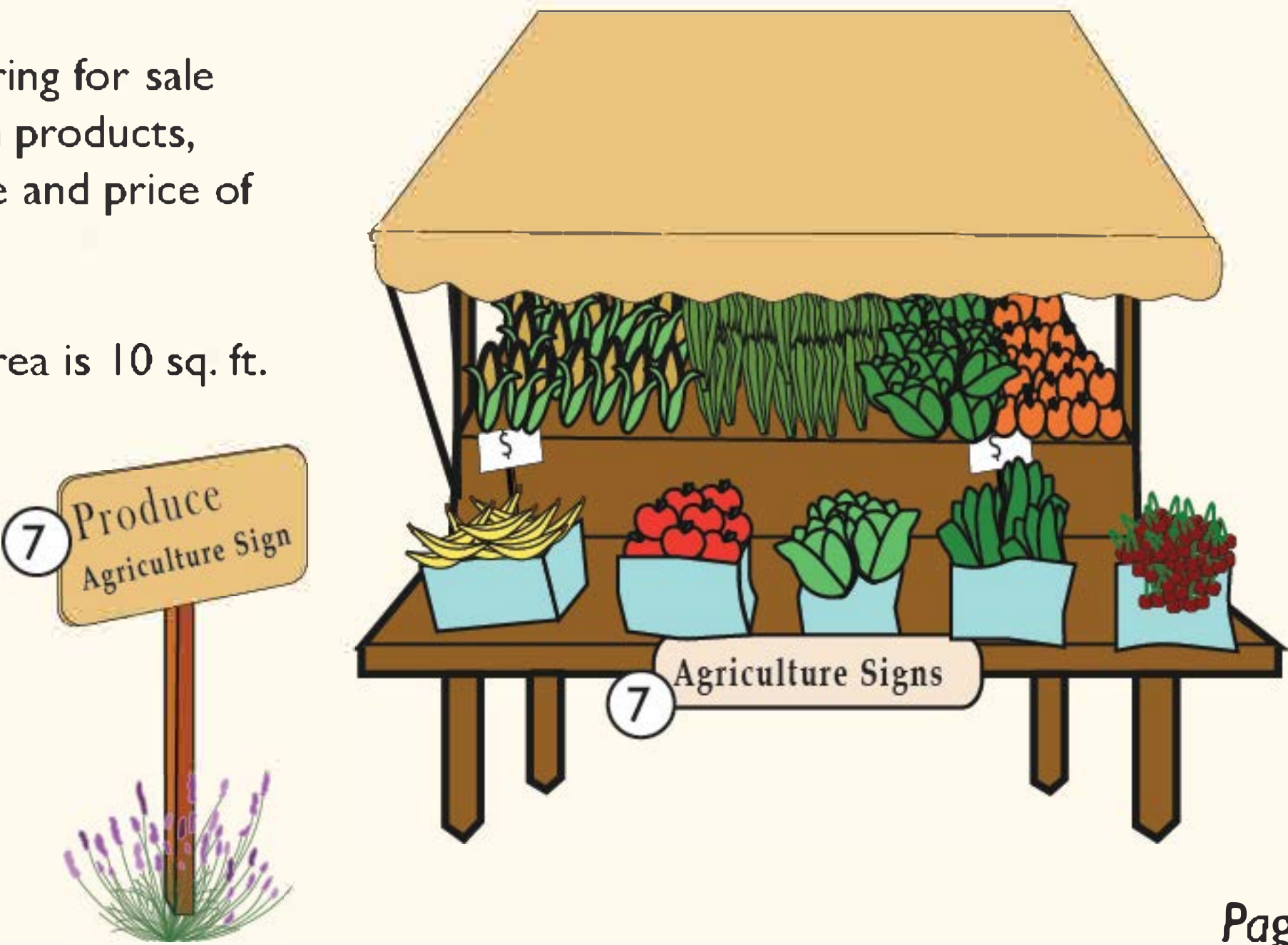
For single and two family residential uses in any Zoning District, one sign on a lot identifying the occupants of the dwelling, an authorized home occupation and/or any other permitted use which is conducted on the lot and is permitted in a Residential District. In a Residential District, one SIGN on a LOT identifying a non-conforming USE.

Display Area: Identification signs cannot exceed 2 sq. ft.

Illumination: Signs cannot be illuminated (except when coincidental to the illumination of a building, driveway etc.)

⑦ Agriculture Sign - offering for sale produce and other farm products, indicating only the name and price of farm products for sale.

The maximum display area is 10 sq. ft.



Note: Though these signs do not require a permit, they may not be erected within 5 feet of the sideline of a street or any other right of way customarily used by the general public.

Illumination of Signs (Bylaw Section 7.4.3)

Illumination Restrictions

All Districts:

- Illumination of a sign cannot cause blinding or otherwise obstruct the safe vision of any traffic participant.
- Illumination through an external source must always be white or off-white.
- No sign can be illuminated longer than 30 minutes before opening or after closing of the store or business.
- The display area of an illuminated sign may have a maximum average luminance of 50 foot-candles measured directly on the surface of the SIGN.
- Where possible, the light fixtures used for SIGN illumination should be classified as "energy efficient", as defined by the power utility company serving the lot.

South, West and North Acton Village Districts:

- Projecting and awning signs must not be illuminated.
- Wall signs and freestanding signs may only be illuminated if they are opaque individual letter signs or lit by an external source (which must come from above for wall signs).

Illumination Allowances

The sign types below are permitted with internal or quasi-internal illumination, only if they comply with all applicable standards of the previous section. **Note:** The word "opaque" as used in the following Sub-Sections means the opaque object appears black when the sign is lit at night.



Neon or LED Window Signs: Bylaw Sections 7.5.17 Business, Industrial and Office Districts do not require a permit when the display area is less than or equal to 10 sq. ft., or covers less than 25% of the window, whichever is less.

Village Districts - A neon or LED Window sign may only be placed in a ground floor window. See 7.13.1.6. for special permit information on Neon Signs of logos/symbols.



Opaque Individual Letter Signs or Symbols, back-lit with a white and concealed light source, thereby creating an effect by which the letters or symbols are silhouetted against a wall illuminated by said light source.



Cut Out Letter Signs, featuring individual letters or symbols which are cut out from an opaque facing and back-lit with a white and concealed light source, thereby creating an effect by which the facing, from which the letters or symbols are cut out, is silhouetted against a wall illuminated by said light source.



Back-lit Awning Signs, with the light source internal or concealed from public view. These signs are **not** permitted in any **Village District**.



Individual Letter Signs, with translucent letter faces, internally illuminated with a soft-glow light source; or signs with an opaque sign face with cutout translucent letter surfaces which are internally illuminated with a soft-glow light source. These signs are **not** permitted in any **Village District**.



Tip: Signs must be located on the same lot as the business/organization. It is important to check the zoning district in which the business/organization is located. Find the zoning district by searching your address [here](#) or email the Planning Division at planning@actonma.gov

Note: Signs in historic districts are further regulated by the Historic District Commission. Additional lighting regulations apply.

Temporary and Special Event Signs (Bylaw Section 7.10)

A Special Event Sign may be erected to announce one of the events below, or a similar event and must be located on the same lot where the event is to occur:

- Bazaar
- Fair
- Circus
- Festival
- Business or shop opening
- Special sale by a store or business

Display Area of both Temporary and Special Event Signs All Districts:
Maximum of 10 sq. ft.

Content: The event's sponsor organizer and main feature.

Duration: Each principal use on a lot may display special event signs for a total of 45 days per calendar year.

Removal: The sign must be removed no later than 1 day after the event.

While awaiting a Sign Permit: Business, Industrial and Office Districts or Village District A principal use that does not have a permanent free-standing sign or exterior sign may erect a temporary sign for the time between the application filing date for a permanent sign permit or special permit pursuant to section 7.6 and 7.13. If approved, the temporary sign may remain for up to 45 days after the issuance of a sign permit pursuant to section 7.6.

Location: A Temporary or Special Event sign may not be erected on, nor within 5 feet from the sideline of a street or right of way customarily used by the general public.

***Special Event Signs include Sandwich Boards**

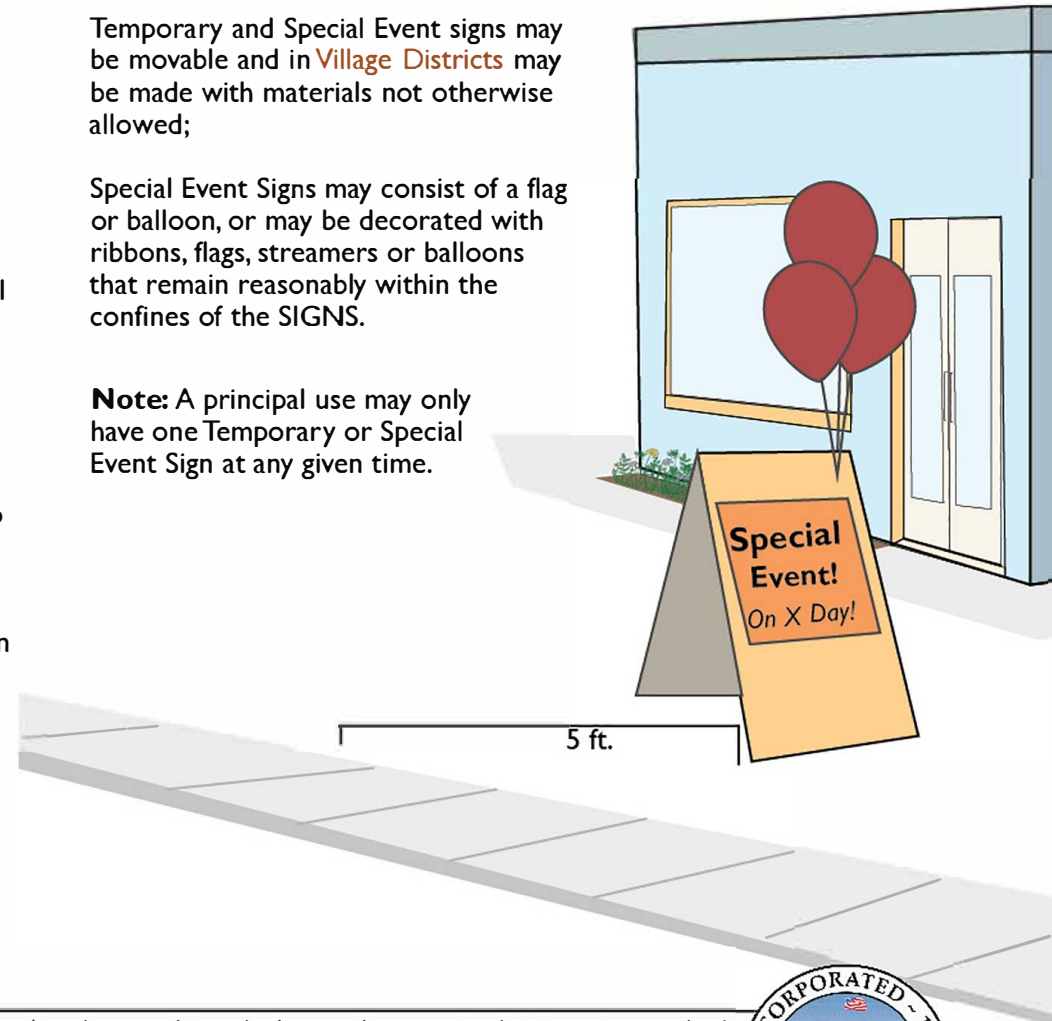
Sign Permit: Temporary and Special Event Signs require a permit which states the specific dates and time periods during which the sign will be erected and the specific location or locations on a lot.

Temporary and Special Event Signs must comply with the provisions of Sections 7.3 and 7.4.

Temporary and Special Event signs may be movable and in Village Districts may be made with materials not otherwise allowed;

Special Event Signs may consist of a flag or balloon, or may be decorated with ribbons, flags, streamers or balloons that remain reasonably within the confines of the SIGNS.

Note: A principal use may only have one Temporary or Special Event Sign at any given time.



Tip: Signs must be located on the same lot as the business/organization. It is important to check the zoning district in which the business/organization is located. Find the zoning district by searching your address [here](#) or email the Planning Division at planning@actonma.gov





How to Apply for a Sign Permit (Bylaw Section 7.6)

Application (Bylaw Section 7.6.1)

Application Checklist

- ☐ 1. Street Address of the location of the proposed sign.
- ☐ 2. Name of the owner of the lot where the sign will be erected.
- ☐ 3. Scaled drawing of proposed sign with required dimensions & location on building or lot.
- ☐ 4. The signature of owner of the lot where the sign will be erected.
- ☐ 5. Any additional information requested by the Zoning Enforcement Officer once the application is received and being reviewed.

Timeline - After receiving the completed sign application, the Zoning Enforcement Officer will review the sign permit within 45 days.

Fees - Permanent sign applications are \$45 per application. Nonprofit organizations' fee is \$0.

Tip: Signs must be located on the same lot as the business/organization. It is important to check the zoning district in which the business/organization is located. Find the zoning district by searching your address [here](#) or email the Planning Division at planning@actonma.gov





Special Permits for Signs *(Bylaw Section 7.13)*

The Planning Board, acting as the Special Permit Granting Authority, may approve, special permits for signs if they are necessary for adequate identification of a business which would not reasonably be possible under the otherwise applicable standards and available for site specific reasons.

Special Permits for signs require a public hearing. See Section 7.13.1 for special permit options. If your business or organization is in a historic district, the Historic District Commission is the Special Permit Granting Authority per 7.13.5.

Special Permit signs must also meet the requirements of Sections 7.13.1-7.13.1.1.9 as well as the following criteria:

- The sign is consistent with the intent and purpose of Section 7.
- The sign is consistent with the character and use of the area.
- The sign will be attractively designed, appropriately scaled, and compatible with the elements of the building to which it relates, as well as the general area.
- The sign has continuity with other signs nearby.
- The colors, materials and illumination of the sign are harmonious with the building and do not detract from the aesthetic qualities of its surroundings.
- The sign does not unduly compete for attention with any other sign and uses the minimum graphic elements needed to convey the primary message.

Tip: Signs must be located on the same lot as the business/organization. It is important to check the zoning district in which the business/organization is located. Find the zoning district by searching your address [here](#) or email the Planning Division at planning@actonma.gov





Frequently Asked Questions

- Q: How long will it take for my sign application to be reviewed?
 - The bylaw requires applications to be reviewed within 45 days.

- Q: How long does the sign special permit process take?
 - The sign special permit process takes approximately 3 months.

- Q: What should I do if I am opening my business before my sign is approved?
 - A: Businesses may apply to erect a temporary sign on the lot where their business is located while they wait for their permanent sign or a sign special permit approval.
 - Temporary signs require a permit, but have a quick turnaround of 1-2 days. The time period between applying for your permanent sign and gaining approval does not count towards the 45 day limit for temporary signs.

- Q: Do I need a sign permit if I am refacing an existing sign?
 - A: Yes, refacing a sign does require an administrative sign permit

- Q: How should I apply for a banner sign that hangs across a street?
 - A: The Building Department issues permits for signs that are within the Town's Right of Way. The application can be found at: <https://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7188/Banner-Sign-Application>

- Q: What should I do if my business is in a historic district?
 - A: If your business is located in a Historic District, you should first apply for a certificate of appropriateness through the Historic District Commission (HDC) before applying for a sign permit. Applications can be found at: <https://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentView.asp?DID=365>.
 - Once you receive approval from the HDC, submit your Certificate along with your administrative sign permit application to the Planning Division.

Tip: Signs must be located on the same lot as the business/organization. It is important to check the zoning district in which the business/organization is located. Find the zoning district by searching your address [here](#) or email the Planning Division at planning@actonma.gov

