

Sign Permit Frequently Asked Questions

What types of signs require permits?

All permanent exterior signs, awnings, and interior signs that can be seen from the exterior are required to have a City of Salem Sign Permit before a sign can be installed. Alterations and relocation of existing signs also require a permit. The necessary permits must be obtained before the sign is fabricated, altered, or moved. Any electrical work requires a separate Electrical Permit from the City of Salem Electrical Department.

Why is a Sign Permit required?

The City of Salem is committed to protecting the historic architecture and urban design qualities of the City, especially in the downtown and entrance corridors. Signage is an important component of the City's character and can assist in making Salem a distinct and more attractive place to live, work, and shop. To protect those interests, the City of Salem encourages quality design to preserve the City's rich history and improve the physical and visual environment.

Do temporary signs require permits?

No - temporary signs including political signs, real estate signs (for sale/for rent), and advertising for events lasting less than 15 days (such a sale or concert) do not require a permit, but the Sign Ordinance limits the size and placement of temporary signs. Check with DPCD staff for more information if you are considering a large temporary sign.

Does DPCD have sign design guidelines?

Yes – the City of Salem Commercial Design Guidelines outline the qualities of well-designed signs recommended by the Department of Planning and Community Development. Following the recommendations will result in a quick permitting process and improve the appearance of your business. See pages 16 to 21 of the Commercial Design Guidelines: http://salem.com/Pages/SalemMA_DPCD/studiesreports/SDG_all_pages.pdf

What types of signs are prohibited by the Salem Sign Ordinance?

- Signs that move or consist of pennants or streamers that move
- Signs that blink, flash, change color, or light intensity
- Portable A-frame signs
- Signs attached to utility poles, trees, or fences
- Signs advertising a business that has not been in operation for over 90 days
- Off premise signs (signs located on one business but advertising another business) unless the sign meets the requirements for billboards outlined in the Sign Ordinance

What is the Sign Permit review process?

Depending on the location of the proposed signage and the zoning district the sign is located in, the proposal is reviewed by DPCD staff or by a governing board. The review processes in different zoning districts are as follows:

- **Residential and non-residential properties:** All proposed signage and/or changes to existing signage in areas **outside** of the Urban Renewal Area, Local Historic Districts, and Entrance Corridors is reviewed and approved by the City of Salem Department of Planning and Community Development and Building Department. Review by a governing board (such as the Salem Redevelopment Authority) is not required.
- **Entrance Corridors:** All proposed signage and/or any change to existing signage within an entrance corridor must be reviewed and approved by the City of Salem Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) and the Building Department, prior to receiving a sign permit. Review by a governing board (such as the Salem Redevelopment Authority) is not required.
- **Urban Renewal Area:** All proposed signage and/or any change to existing signage within the Urban Renewal Area must be reviewed by the Design Review Board (DRB) and approved by the Salem Redevelopment Authority (SRA). The Department of Planning and Community Development and Building Department will review the sign and issue a permit after the DRB and SRA approval is granted. See http://saalem.com/Pages/SalemMA_BComm/design for more information and application instructions.
- **Local Historic Districts:** All proposed signage and/or any change to existing signage within a Local Historic District must be reviewed and approved by the Salem Historic Commission. The Department of Planning and Community Development and Building Department will review the sign and issue the permit after the Salem Historic Commission approval is granted. See: http://saalem.com/Pages/SalemMA_Historic/index for more information and application instructions.

How long does the review process take?

Typically, it takes up to three weeks for a Sign Permit to be issued if the proposed sign meets the Sign Code requirements. Signs reviewed by a governing board may take eight weeks for review and an additional one to two weeks for the permit to be issued.

Is there a Sign Permit application fee?

Yes – If the estimated fabrication and installation cost is less than \$2,000 the application fee is \$20. If the estimated fabrication cost is more than \$2,000 the application fee is \$5 plus \$10 per \$1,000 of fabrication cost.

My Sign Permit was denied. Can I appeal the decision?

Yes, Sign Permit denials can be appealed at the monthly Zoning Board of Appeals meeting. See http://saalem.com/Pages/SalemMA_ZBA/index for further information and application requirements.

Who should I contact for further information?

Department of Planning and Community Development: (978) 619-5685