

Sebastopol sign regulations

Draft 1 — Replacement Chapter 17.120

Discussion draft • September 2026

This document contains proposed replacement chapter text. The companion drafting notes identify proposed policy changes, numerical choices, and related code amendments needed before adoption. This draft replaces the chapter as a whole; its section numbers do not retain their former subjects.

Question	Section
Does the chapter apply?	17.120.010
What does a term mean?	17.120.020
Do I need a sign permit?	17.120.030
How do I measure my sign?	17.120.040
What permanent signs can I have?	17.120.050
What about sidewalk signs, window signs, banners, and event signs?	17.120.060
Can my sign be illuminated or electronic?	17.120.070
What about murals, sculpture, and historic signs?	17.120.080
Can I use a sign program or request an exception?	17.120.090
Can I keep or repair an existing sign?	17.120.100
How do decisions, appeals, and enforcement work?	17.120.110

17.120.010 Purpose and scope

A. Purpose

This chapter provides clear sign allowances for businesses, residents, and other lawful uses. It allows legible and creative signs while protecting pedestrian access, traffic visibility, neighboring properties, and the character of Sebastopol's streets.

B. Applicability

This chapter applies to outdoor signs and window signs within the City. It also applies to electronic displays as provided in Section 17.120.070. A sign must meet the standards for its type and location unless this chapter expressly provides an exemption, an existing approval remains effective, or an exception is approved under Section 17.120.090.

C. Items outside this chapter

The following are not regulated by this chapter:

1. Interior signs other than window signs and electronic displays subject to Section 17.120.070.
2. Signs that are not visible from a public right-of-way or another property, except for the safety and maintenance requirements of Section 17.120.100(B).
3. Signs installed by a public agency for traffic control, emergency response, or another governmental function. Private advertising on public property is not exempt under this paragraph.
4. Signs required by law, to the extent of the required number, area, location, content, and illumination. Additional voluntary signage is subject to this chapter.
5. Signs carried by a person or worn on clothing, unless installed as a fixed display.
6. Signs on vehicles and trailers regularly used for transportation or delivery. A vehicle or trailer stationed as a fixed advertising display is subject to this chapter.
7. Merchandise displayed for sale and ordinary building materials, colors, and architectural details. Outdoor merchandise displays remain subject to applicable outdoor-use and right-of-way requirements.
8. Decorative lighting and seasonal decorations that do not contain a sign. Applicable electrical, fire, and nuisance regulations continue to apply.

D. Messages and private consent

1. A noncommercial message may replace any message on a lawful sign without a new sign permit. The sign remains subject to its applicable physical and operating limits. The substitution does not make the sign off-premises or abandoned.
2. The City shall not approve or deny a sign based on agreement or disagreement with its message or viewpoint. This chapter does not authorize speech prohibited by applicable law.
3. Commercial signs must relate to a business, product, service, or activity on the site, except as provided for real estate signs in Section 17.120.060(F) and temporary event signs in Section 17.120.060(H). New off-premises commercial advertising signs are prohibited. Lawful existing signs are governed by Section 17.120.100.
4. A sign allowance does not grant a right to use another person's property or the public right-of-way. The person displaying a sign must have lawful authority to use its location.

E. Relationship to other requirements

1. Building, electrical, fire, accessibility, historic-resource, and right-of-way requirements continue to apply. A sign permit does not waive those requirements or authorize an otherwise prohibited land use.
2. A sign allowed without a sign permit may still require another permit. The City shall identify any additional City permit required when responding to a sign-permit application.
3. The definitions, sign allowances, and sign-review procedures in this chapter control over conflicting general sign definitions or sign-review provisions elsewhere in Title 17. A specific state or federal requirement controls where it conflicts with this chapter.
4. Design guidelines provide examples and recommendations. Failure to follow a recommendation is not grounds to deny a sign that meets this chapter and other applicable mandatory requirements.

17.120.020 Definitions

The following definitions apply to this chapter. Other terms have the meanings given in Chapter 17.08.

Banner. A sign made of flexible material secured to a building or temporary construction barrier. An ordinary flag is not a banner.

Board. The Design Review Board.

Commercial message. A message advertising a business or offering goods, property, or services for sale, lease, or exchange. Payment to create artwork does not, by itself, make the artwork a commercial message.

Director. The Planning Director or the Director's designee.

Electronic display. A sign or portion of a sign whose words or images can be changed electronically, including a screen, electronic message board, or projected image. Ordinary controls that switch or dim lighting on a fixed sign do not make it an electronic display.

Eligible frontage. A tenant's exterior frontage measured under Section 17.120.040(B) and used for that tenant's sign allowance. A tenant may use no more than two eligible frontages.

Feather flag. A flexible sign stretched along a vertical or curved pole to form a blade, feather, or teardrop shape, whether or not it moves in the wind.

Freestanding sign. A permanently installed sign supported from the ground rather than attached to a building. A portable sign is not a freestanding sign for purposes of this chapter.

Frontage. The horizontal width of the exterior wall enclosing a tenant space or building, measured under Section 17.120.040(B).

Mural. An image painted, tiled, or otherwise applied directly to an exterior wall. A mural may contain words. A mural may be lit by external light fixtures. A banner, an internally illuminated sign, and an electronic display are not murals.

Noncommercial message. A message other than a commercial message, including personal, political, religious, artistic, and community expression.

Ordinary flag. A rectangular flag of flexible fabric attached along one edge to a pole or building-mounted bracket, hanging freely and moving naturally in the wind. National, state, regional, civic, institutional, and decorative flags are ordinary flags. A flag bearing a business name, logo, or other business information is a sign and is not an ordinary flag. A feather flag is not an ordinary flag.

Portable sign. A movable, self-supporting sign placed on the ground, such as an A-frame or sandwich board, without permanent attachment.

Primary sign. A wall, fascia, or awning sign using the primary sign allowance in Section 17.120.050.

Projecting sign. A sign attached to a building with its display face extending outward from the wall, including a hanging sign under an awning or canopy. An ordinary wall or awning sign is not a projecting sign.

Public entrance. An exterior entrance regularly available to customers or other visitors. An emergency exit, service-only door, or door not regularly used by visitors does not establish an additional sign allowance.

Sign. An object, surface, or display installed or arranged to communicate a message visually. The exclusions in Section 17.120.010(C) and the mural rules in Section 17.120.080 apply to this definition.

Site. A lot, or adjoining lots operated as one development with shared access or common facilities. A shared site does not combine individual tenants' frontage allowances.

Temporary sign. A sign made or mounted for limited-duration display, including a banner or removable panel. Display periods are established in Section 17.120.060; the term does not impose a separate time limit.

Tenant space. A separately occupied or leasable space for one lawful business or other use, whether occupied by an owner or a tenant. Internal departments, counters, and concessions without separate enclosed premises are not separate tenant spaces.

Window sign. A sign attached to glazing, or an outward-facing sign located within two feet of the interior surface of the glazing and visible from outside the building. Measure the shortest horizontal distance from the glazing to the nearest

part of the display face. If any part of the face is within two feet, the entire face is a window sign. Merchandise is not a window sign. Electronic displays are governed by Section 17.120.070, which uses the same two-foot measurement.

17.120.030 Permits and exemptions

A. Which approval is required?

Table 17.120-1 identifies sign-permit requirements. An exemption from a sign permit does not exempt a sign from its listed standards.

Table 17.120-1. Sign approvals

Work or sign type	Sign approval	Standards
An item outside this chapter	None	Section 17.120.010(C)
Maintenance, message changes, or equivalent replacement described in subsection B	None	Subsection B and Section 17.120.100
Entrance plaques and small entrance signs	None	Section 17.120.050(C)
Portable signs	None; right-of-way authorization is separate	Section 17.120.060(B)
Non-electronic window signs, including fixed illuminated window signs	None	Sections 17.120.060(C) and 17.120.070
Small removable signs on private property	None	Section 17.120.060(D)
Ordinary flags	None	Section 17.120.060(A)
Temporary banners	Simple registration; noncommercial banners need no registration	Section 17.120.060(E)
Real estate signs	None	Section 17.120.060(F)
Temporary event and directional signs	None	Section 17.120.060(H)
Construction-site signs	Staff sign permit	Section 17.120.060(G)
Other new permanent signs and physical changes to permanent signs	Staff sign permit	Sections 17.120.040, 17.120.050, and 17.120.070
Murals	Staff sign permit for any counted sign component; no sign permit for the remainder	Section 17.120.080(A)

Work or sign type	Sign approval	Standards
Sculptural signs	Staff sign permit, or Board review where an exception is required	Sections 17.120.080(B) and 17.120.090
Retention of a historic sign not previously identified as a historic resource	Board approval	Section 17.120.080(C)
Sign programs that meet this chapter	Staff approval	Section 17.120.090(A)
A departure from an eligible standard	Design Review Board exception	Section 17.120.090(B)

B. Changes that do not require a sign permit

1. Cleaning, repainting, and repair that do not enlarge or relocate the sign or increase its approved illumination.
2. Changing the message within an existing lawful sign's approved display area, including manual copy changes and permitted electronic message changes. A change may not introduce an otherwise prohibited sign or operating feature.
3. Replacing a lawful sign face or nonstructural sign components with components of the same dimensions and substantially equivalent durability, without changing the sign's location, supports, or approved illumination. A different message, color, or lettering style does not by itself require a permit.
4. Replacing a damaged conforming sign in the same location with a sign of the same dimensions and approved illumination, using sound existing supports. Historic-resource requirements still apply.

Replacement of a nonconforming structure is governed by Section 17.120.100, rather than paragraph 4. Structural or electrical work may require a building or electrical permit even when no sign permit is required.

C. Applying for a staff sign permit

One application may include all proposed signs for a tenant or site. The application must include:

1. The applicant's contact information and evidence of authority to install the sign, such as owner consent or a lease provision authorizing signage.
2. A photograph or drawing showing the sign's location and dimensions, the relevant frontage, existing signs using the same allowance, and required clearances.
3. The sign's materials, attachment method, and any illumination or electronic components.
4. The fee established by City Council resolution.

The City shall accept clear, dimensioned photographs or drawings. Professionally prepared plans may be required only when required by another applicable code or necessary to demonstrate a structural or other technical requirement.

D. Staff approval

The Director shall approve a complete application that meets this chapter and applicable mandatory requirements. Approval may include conditions only as necessary to meet an identified requirement. A compliant application shall not be referred to the Board solely because of its size, style, material, or illumination.

17.120.040 Measurement and placement

A. Sign area and number

1. **Panels and backgrounds.** Measure the entire display panel, including its frame and a contrasting background made specifically for the sign. Do not count a supporting post, foundation, or ordinary architectural feature unless it carries sign copy.
2. **Separate letters and graphics.** Without a display panel, measure the smallest rectangle enclosing each distinct group of letters or graphics. Add the rectangles. Do not include blank wall between separate groups. Letters in one word or line of text are one group.
3. **Signs with multiple faces.** For a flat projecting sign with two parallel, back-to-back display faces, count the larger face once; do not add the two faces. Apply the same rule to other signs with two parallel, back-to-back faces and to A-frames whose faces meet only at their upper edges. For signs with three or more display faces, or two faces arranged otherwise, add the area of every display face. An unlettered panel edge is not a display face. Each sign must meet its applicable area limit using this calculation.
4. **Sculpture.** Measure the largest projected outline of the sign from its front, side, or rear, as provided in Section 17.120.080(B).
5. **One installation.** A coordinated set of letters and graphics on one mounting area is one sign. Opposite faces on one support are one sign. Separate freestanding structures or display panels at separate locations are separate signs.
6. **Separate allowances.** Add signs only within the allowance that applies to them. Projecting signs, entrance signs, directories, freestanding signs, window signs, portable signs, and temporary signs do not reduce the primary sign allowance unless this chapter expressly states otherwise.

B. Frontage

1. Measure the tenant's exterior wall along a public street, public pedestrian passage, or on-site pedestrian route serving its public entrance. Measure in a straight horizontal line; do not add recesses, returns, or internal walls.
2. A tenant may use no more than two exterior frontages. Signs allocated to a frontage must be installed on that frontage. A corner does not allow the same length of wall to be counted twice.
3. Ground-floor tenants use their own frontage. Do not divide a building's allowance equally among tenants or count upper-floor tenants when calculating a ground-floor tenant's allowance.
4. Measure fractional feet to the nearest tenth of a foot. Do not round an allowance upward to the next whole square foot.

C. Height and projection

1. Measure freestanding-sign height from the existing grade at the base to the top of the sign and its supports. A mound or raised planter installed for the sign does not increase the height allowance.
2. Measure projection horizontally from the building wall to the outermost part of the sign or support.
3. Measure overhead clearance from the walking surface directly below the sign to its lowest part.

D. Placement and safety

1. A sign must not obstruct a required exit, accessible route, entrance maneuvering area, fire equipment, required ventilation opening, or required traffic sight distance.

2. A sign must not conceal a traffic-control device or imitate its placement, shape, color, or illumination in a way that would reasonably confuse road users.
3. A sign must not be attached to a tree, utility pole, or public fixture without authorization from the responsible owner or agency.
4. Required overhead and electrical clearances apply to signs and their supports. This chapter does not authorize a reduction in clearances required by another applicable code or the agency controlling a right-of-way.
5. Freestanding permanent signs must remain at least five feet behind the back of the sidewalk, or behind the right-of-way line where there is no sidewalk. They must not project into the public right-of-way. This setback does not apply to portable or small removable signs governed by Section 17.120.060.
6. Wall, fascia, and awning signs must remain within the surface to which they are attached. New roof signs and signs extending above the roof or parapet are prohibited. Projecting signs must meet Section 17.120.050(C).
7. A sign must be securely attached or stable against ordinary wind and contact. Permanent exterior signs must use materials and finishes suitable for outdoor exposure. Except for portable signs under Section 17.120.060(B)(7), no particular lettering method or material is required if the sign meets these standards.

17.120.050 Permanent signs

A. Select the applicable allowance

Commercial, office, industrial, community-facility, and other lawful nonresidential uses use subsections B and C, except as provided in subsection D. Residential uses use subsection D. Signs do not authorize a land use that is otherwise prohibited.

B. Primary signs for nonresidential tenant spaces

1. Each ground-floor tenant may have up to two primary signs on each eligible frontage. Their combined area on that frontage must not exceed Table 17.120-2. The combined primary sign area for one tenant on all frontages must not exceed 175 square feet.
2. A tenant above or below the ground floor, or without an eligible exterior frontage, may have primary signs totaling 10 square feet on the exterior wall enclosing its space or at its public entrance. Entrance signs and directories under subsection C are additional.
3. A tenant may divide its primary allowance among wall, fascia, and awning signs. There is no limit on the number of words.
4. A shared sign program is not required to use these allowances. Voluntary coordination and redistribution are addressed in Section 17.120.090.

Table 17.120-2. Primary sign area per frontage

Frontage width	Maximum combined primary sign area on that frontage
25 feet or less	25 square feet
More than 25 feet	25 square feet, plus 1.5 square feet for each foot over 25 feet, up to 175 square feet

C. Additional signs for nonresidential uses

Each allowance below is separate from the primary sign allowance. All signs remain subject to placement and illumination standards.

Table 17.120-3. Additional permanent signs

Type	Number and area	Placement and height
Projecting sign	One per public entrance on an eligible frontage; no more than two per tenant; six square feet of counted sign area, measured under Section 17.120.040(A)(3)	Maximum projection three feet, including supports; minimum overhead clearance 7.5 feet; entirely below the roof or parapet
Small entrance signs and plaques	Each sign no more than two square feet; combined area no more than six square feet per public entrance	On the wall or door within five feet of the entrance; shared entrances share this allowance; signs on glazing also count toward the window-coverage limit
Shared directory	One per shared public entrance; 16 square feet maximum	Wall-mounted, or freestanding no more than five feet high; a freestanding directory must be inside the site at the entrance it serves
Freestanding site sign	One per public street frontage, no more than two per site; 32 square feet per sign for a single-tenant site; for a multi-tenant site, 10 square feet per tenant space, with a minimum of 32 and maximum of 100 square feet per sign	Eight feet maximum height; subject to the permanent-sign setback in Section 17.120.040(D)(5)

The freestanding site-sign allowance replaces, rather than adds to, a separate shopping-center, area-identification, or monument-sign allowance for the same nonresidential site. A shared directory is not an additional street-front site sign and may not be placed at the street frontage unless the shared building entrance is there.

D. Residential and special settings

The allowances in Table 17.120-4 replace subsections B and C unless a row expressly provides otherwise. Signs under Section 17.120.060 remain available where that section allows them. A home-based business may display only the commercial sign authorized in this table; this restriction does not limit noncommercial expression or real estate signs unrelated to that business.

Table 17.120-4. Residential and special settings

Setting	Permanent allowance
Home-based business	One wall sign, five square feet maximum, nonilluminated; no portable commercial sign
Multifamily residential building	One wall or freestanding sign, eight square feet maximum; freestanding height six feet maximum

Setting	Permanent allowance
Residential development entrance	Up to two signs per entrance, 16 square feet combined; height five feet maximum; these are additional to individual building signs
Lawful nonresidential principal use in a residential district, other than a bed and breakfast	Up to two wall or freestanding signs, 32 square feet combined; freestanding height eight feet maximum
Bed and breakfast in a residential district	One wall or freestanding sign, eight square feet maximum; freestanding height five feet maximum
CF Community Facility or OS Open Space district	Primary wall or fascia signs totaling 30 square feet per tenant or principal use; the additional allowances in subsection C apply, except freestanding site signs are limited to 32 square feet and six feet in height
PC Planned Community district	A specific sign standard in an approved development plan controls. Where the plan is silent, apply this section according to each use; residential and nonresidential uses are evaluated separately
Motor-fuel service station	Up to two primary or freestanding signs, 100 square feet combined; no more than one freestanding sign, limited to 32 square feet and eight feet in height. Small entrance signs and signs under Section 17.120.060 are additional; the other allowances in subsection C do not apply

Required address and fuel-price signs are addressed in Section 17.120.010(C)(4). Residential window and small removable signs are addressed in Section 17.120.060.

17.120.060 Portable, window, and temporary signs

A. General rule

The allowances in this section are separate from permanent-sign allowances. Signs must meet Section 17.120.040(D). The time limits in this section apply only where expressly stated. A change of message does not restart a display period. A portable sign cannot use the removable-sign allowance to avoid portable-sign requirements.

Feather flags, pennants used as signs, searchlights used as signs, and inflatable advertising devices are prohibited. Each dwelling or nonresidential tenant may display up to two ordinary flags, each no more than 15 square feet, from a building-mounted bracket or permanent flagpole on private property without a sign permit or a time limit. This

allowance is separate from other allowances. A flagpole remains subject to applicable height and construction requirements. The flag and its supports must not obstruct pedestrian clearance or traffic sight distance.

B. Portable signs

1. **Eligibility and number.** No more than one portable sign may be displayed per building containing a lawful nonresidential use other than a home-based business. This limit applies to all entrances, frontages, and tenants of the building combined, including signs on private property and in the adjoining public right-of-way. Additional tenants or entrances do not create additional allowances. The property owner shall designate the responsible operator in writing. The sign may serve one tenant or several tenants within that building. A portable sign may not be shared among separate buildings.
2. **Size.** Each face may be no more than six square feet. Overall height may be no more than three feet. The base, braces, and feet must fit within a ground footprint no more than three feet wide by two feet deep.
3. **Location.** Place the sign beside a public entrance or within the building's frontage. Maintain at least 10 feet between portable signs along the same common pedestrian route, measured between their closest edges. Where that spacing cannot be maintained, the sign may not be placed in the public right-of-way, and may be placed only on private property outside the pedestrian route. Relocating a sign does not increase the one-per-building limit.
4. **Walking space.** Maintain a continuous unobstructed pedestrian route at least 4.5 feet wide, or any greater width required by applicable accessibility standards or the right-of-way permit. Do not place a sign in an entrance maneuvering area, curb ramp, transit boarding area, or access to a marked crossing. The sign must be detectable by a person using a cane and must not create a protruding-object hazard.
5. **Public right-of-way.** Obtain authorization from the City or other agency controlling the right-of-way before placement. A City sign allowance does not authorize placement within a state highway right-of-way. Right-of-way authorization does not increase, transfer, or create an exception to the one-per-building limit.
6. **Operation.** Remove the sign from the public right-of-way when all businesses it serves are closed to the public. Portable signs must be nonilluminated, stable, and maintained in good repair. Electronic displays are not allowed in portable signs.
7. **Materials and finish.** Portable signs must have wood frames and wood or chalkboard display faces. Metal hinges, fasteners, and stabilizing hardware are allowed. Stone, ceramic, or metal decorative details may be incorporated into the wood frame. Plastic frames, plastic display faces, plastic lettering, and vinyl lettering, decals, or wraps are prohibited. Use painted, carved, stenciled, or chalk lettering. Surfaces must have a finished appearance, with no exposed unfinished panel edges, peeling finishes, or makeshift attachments. Ordinary paint, chalkboard coatings, and protective finishes are allowed.

C. Window signs

1. Window signs may cover no more than 25 percent of the glazing on each exterior elevation of a nonresidential tenant space. Include door glazing. Calculate each elevation separately; do not transfer unused coverage to another elevation.
2. Count both permanent and temporary window signs as defined in Section 17.120.020. Count overlapping signs once for coverage. Do not count merchandise, required signs, or ordinary window treatments that contain no sign.
3. There is no display-period limit and no limit on message changes. Window signs do not reduce the primary sign allowance.
4. A non-electronic illuminated window sign may have no more than two square feet of illuminated display area. No more than one illuminated window sign is allowed per public entrance. It counts toward window coverage and must meet Section 17.120.070. This allowance does not depend on its message or whether it uses neon or another fixed light source.

5. Noncommercial signs in dwelling windows do not require a sign permit and are not subject to the percentage limit. They must not obstruct an opening required for emergency escape or ventilation. Commercial window signs for a home-based business count toward its allowance in Table 17.120-4.

D. Small removable signs on private property

1. Nonilluminated removable signs may be displayed on private property without a sign permit. Each sign may have no more than six square feet per face and, if ground-mounted, may be no more than four feet high.
2. Commercial signs under this subsection are limited to two per site and are not allowed for home-based businesses. Their messages must meet Section 17.120.010(D)(3).
3. Noncommercial signs under this subsection have no numerical or calendar limit. They must be maintained and located outside required sight-distance areas and pedestrian routes. Larger noncommercial signs may use another applicable sign allowance or an exception under Section 17.120.090.
4. A sign mounted on a building must remain below its roof or parapet. No sign under this subsection may be installed in the public right-of-way. Banners are governed by subsection E, and window signs by subsection C.

E. Temporary banners

1. **Allowance.** Each nonresidential tenant may display one banner at a time, no more than 32 square feet, for up to 30 calendar days in a calendar year. Display may be divided among several periods. Each day of display counts once, regardless of message changes. Each tenant has its own allowance.
2. **Location.** Secure the banner to the building, below the roof or parapet. Where construction prevents use of the building frontage, it may be secured to a permitted construction fence or barrier on the site. It must not block required access or sight distance. Banners may not be installed on vehicles, in landscaping, or above a roof or parapet.
3. **Registration.** Before display, submit the location, dimensions, and intended display dates to the Director on a City form. Registration is effective upon submission of a complete form identifying a compliant banner. Registration does not authorize a noncompliant sign. No separate discretionary approval or sign-registration fee is required.
4. **Noncommercial banners.** A noncommercial banner on private property may use the same size and placement allowance without registration or a calendar limit. One is allowed per dwelling or nonresidential tenant space. The exception from calendar limits does not authorize a prohibited device.
5. **Condition.** Banners must be nonilluminated, securely fastened, and replaced or removed when torn or detached.

F. Real estate signs

1. Signs protected by California Civil Code Section 713 may be displayed on the owner's property, or another owner's private property with consent, subject to reasonable location, dimensions, design, and public-safety requirements. They may contain the information protected by that section. No particular color, material, or hanging-post design is required.
2. A sign meets this chapter's ordinary dimensional standards if it is no more than six square feet per face and six feet high. On a commercial or industrial site of at least 20,000 square feet, an on-site sign may be up to 40 square feet per face and eight feet high. These signs do not use another sign allowance.
3. A request for a different dimension or design protected by Section 713 shall receive a written staff determination under Section 17.120.110(A), without an exception application or sign-permit fee. A departure from paragraph 2 is not, by itself, grounds for denial; the determination must apply Section 713's reasonableness and safety requirements.

4. Remove the sign within seven days after the property is no longer offered for sale, lease, or exchange. Signs placed for an open house must be removed when the open house ends. A sign may not be placed in a public right-of-way without the controlling agency's authorization.

G. Construction-site signs

During active construction under a valid permit, a site may have up to two nonilluminated temporary wall or freestanding signs, totaling no more than 50 square feet. Freestanding height may be no more than eight feet. Remove them within 30 days after completion or permit expiration unless another provision authorizes continued display. Required construction notices are outside this allowance. A construction fence may carry these signs, subject to Section 17.120.040(D).

H. Temporary event and directional signs

1. **Allowance.** Signs for a temporary event at a specific location may be displayed without a sign permit. This includes a sale held at a residence and a community, civic, school, religious, or charitable event. Portable signs and banners remain subject to subsections B and E, respectively.
2. **At the event.** Up to two signs may be displayed at the event location, each no more than six square feet. A ground-mounted sign may be no more than four feet high.
3. **Directional signs off the site.** Up to four signs directing people to the event may be displayed away from the event location, each no more than four square feet and no more than three feet high. Place them only on private property with the owner's consent, or in the public right-of-way where the agency controlling that right-of-way authorizes it. Section 17.120.010(D)(3) does not apply to signs under this paragraph.
4. **Timing.** Display may begin no more than 14 days before the event begins and must end within 2 days after the event ends. For an event lasting two days or less, display may begin no more than 2 days before.
5. **Placement.** Signs must be nonilluminated and must meet Section 17.120.040(D). Do not attach a sign to a tree, utility pole, traffic sign, or other public fixture. Do not place a sign in a required sight-distance area, a pedestrian route, a curb ramp, a median, or a transit boarding area.
6. **Responsibility.** The person who places a sign under this subsection is responsible for removing it by the deadline in paragraph 4.

17.120.070 Illumination and electronic displays

A. Fixed illumination

1. Permanent signs may use shielded external lighting, illuminated individual letters, halo lighting, or static neon or equivalent fixed lighting. On internally illuminated panels, the background must be opaque so that light passes through letters and graphics rather than the whole panel.
2. Light sources must be shielded or directed so that they do not shine into a dwelling window or create disabling glare for pedestrians or drivers. A sign must not obscure the visibility of traffic signals or nearby objects through excessive brightness.
3. Signs for residential uses must be nonilluminated, except required address signs and externally illuminated multifamily or residential-development entrance signs. Home-based-business signs must remain nonilluminated. A lawful nonresidential use is not prohibited from illuminating a sign solely because a dwelling is nearby or above it.
4. Illuminated signs for nonresidential uses must be switched off no later than one hour after closing and may be switched on one hour before opening. Required signs are governed by Section 17.120.010(C)(4).

5. Flashing, scrolling, animated, rotating, and mechanically moving signs are prohibited. Ordinary on/off switching, gradual adjustment of brightness for ambient conditions, and incidental movement of a permitted banner, flag, or suspended sign in the wind are not prohibited animation.

B. Electronic displays

1. New electronic displays are prohibited outdoors and in outward-facing window installations, whether they show still or changing images, except as provided in this subsection.
2. An interior display is subject to the prohibition in paragraph 1 if any part of its display face is within two feet of the interior surface of exterior glazing and the display is visible from outside the building. Measure the shortest horizontal distance from the glazing to the nearest part of the display face. If any part of the face is within two feet, the entire display is subject to this subsection.
3. An interior display located more than two feet from the interior surface of exterior glazing is not regulated by this chapter. Its size, orientation, and visibility from outside the building do not change this result, and it does not require a sign permit.
4. For a projected image, the surface receiving the image is the display location. An image projected onto exterior glazing, or onto a surface within two feet of exterior glazing, is subject to paragraph 2.
5. Displays integral to an ATM, point-of-sale terminal, fuel dispenser, or charging station are allowed when limited to the information and controls needed to use the equipment. A separate advertising screen on that equipment is not exempt.
6. Electronic display of information required by state or federal law is allowed to the extent needed to meet that requirement. The exception does not authorize an additional advertising panel or animation. Required signs remain subject to Section 17.120.010(C)(4).
7. The Board may approve a new electronic display through an exception under Section 17.120.090. Lawful existing displays and their approved operating conditions are governed by Section 17.120.100. Changing a permitted message within those conditions does not require another permit.

C. Correcting illumination

The City may inspect a sign's illumination. If it violates subsection A or an applicable permit condition, the Director may require shielding, dimming, redirection, repair, or adjustment of operating hours sufficient to correct the violation. The written notice must identify the observed condition and the requirement violated. Notice, correction periods, and appeals follow the City's general code enforcement provisions. A complaint alone does not establish a violation.

17.120.080 Murals, sculptural signs, and historic signs

A. Murals

1. A mural is not a sign. It has no maximum area under this chapter and does not require a sign permit, except for the sign components described in paragraph 2. Applicable building and historic-resource requirements continue to apply.
2. Words, numerals, business names, logos, and trademarks within a mural are sign components. Measure each distinct group under Section 17.120.040(A)(2), add the groups, and count the total against the primary sign allowance for the tenant space the mural serves. Do not count any other part of the mural.
3. Depicting a product, occupation, or service does not make an image a sign component. An artist's signature and date are not sign components.
4. A mural may be illuminated only by external light fixtures meeting Section 17.120.070(A). Internal illumination and electronic displays are not permitted in a mural.

5. A mural may not display off-premises commercial advertising prohibited by Section 17.120.010(D)(3). City review addresses the physical requirements of this chapter and the measurement of sign components. It does not address the artistic merit or the viewpoint of the mural.

B. Sculptural signs and ornament

1. A sign may incorporate sculpture, shaped panels, and decorative supports. These features do not require an exception if the complete installation fits within the applicable sign's permitted area, height, projection, and clearances.
2. For a three-dimensional sign, measure the smallest rectangle enclosing its silhouette in each principal direction; use the largest rectangle once. Do not add the surface area of curved or irregular faces.
3. Ordinary decorative brackets, bases, and trim without sign copy do not count toward sign area, but do count toward height, projection, and clearance limits. An enlarged product image or other sculptural display is part of the sign, not an excluded support.
4. An installation exceeding an eligible physical limit may be considered under Section 17.120.090. Independent artwork that is not a sign is not subject to sign-area limits; applicable public-art, historic-resource, structural, and placement requirements remain in effect.

C. Historic signs

1. A sign identified as a historic resource through the City's cultural-heritage process may be retained and repaired notwithstanding this chapter's dimensional or sign-type limits. Required safety work remains applicable.
2. For a sign not previously identified, the Board may approve retention upon written findings that photographs, records, or other substantial evidence establish its historic significance to the building, business district, or City. A professional report may be required only when the available evidence is insufficient to make the determination.
3. Retention approval must identify the sign and the physical features being preserved. Approval does not authorize enlargement, a new electronic display, or a change in operating characteristics.
4. Repair that preserves those features does not require a new sign approval. Separate historic-resource approval, where required, remains applicable. Retained historic signs do not reduce a current tenant's primary sign allowance.

17.120.090 Sign programs and exceptions

A. Sign programs

1. A property owner may submit one sign program for a multi-tenant building or site. The program may establish sign locations, mounting methods, common physical features, and allocation of shared signs.
2. The Director shall approve a program that meets this chapter. A separate Board hearing is not required unless an exception is requested.
3. A program may redistribute primary sign area among tenants on the same frontage with the written consent of affected occupants and the property owner. The total may not exceed the sum otherwise allowed, and the program may not transfer area to a different frontage or sign category. An unoccupied space must retain an identified allowance for a future tenant.
4. Compliance with a program may be shown with a dimensioned photograph or drawing. Message changes and work exempt under Section 17.120.030(B) remain exempt.
5. A tenant may apply under the chapter's standard allowances when no program exists. A preexisting program remains effective under Section 17.120.100, but the owner may seek a staff amendment to use this chapter's standard allowances. The City shall not require a new program solely because a tenant changes.

6. The City shall make approved programs available with the property's permit records.

B. Exceptions

1. **Eligible departures.** The Board may approve a departure from a permanent sign's area, number, height, projection, or location; the placement or size of a mural's counted sign component or a sculptural sign; the number, size, height, materials, location, or spacing of portable signs; the size or height of a noncommercial sign under Section 17.120.060; or the prohibition on new electronic displays under Section 17.120.070(B). Temporary-sign duration is not eligible for an exception.
2. **Application.** Identify the exact standard, the requested departure, and the physical condition that makes the departure necessary. The sign-permit application may include this information; a separate set of sign plans is not required.
3. **Required findings.** The Board may approve only if all of the following are supported by the record:
 - **a.** A building feature, setback, entrance location, visibility obstruction, or the geometry of a sculptural installation prevents a workable sign within the standard allowance.
 - **b.** The departure is limited to what is needed to address that condition.
 - **c.** The sign preserves required access, sight distance, structural safety, and the illumination protections of this chapter.
 - **d.** The approval identifies the dimensions and location allowed and does not depend on the identity of the owner or tenant or approval of the sign's message.
4. **Limits.** No exception may authorize a sign prohibited by Section 17.120.010(D)(3), 17.120.040(D)(6), 17.120.060(A), or 17.120.070(A), or waive another agency's approval or an applicable safety requirement. Historic retention is governed separately by Section 17.120.080(C).
5. **Procedure.** Every request for an exception under this section requires a Board hearing and decision under Section 17.120.110. The Director may not approve an exception. An exception applies to the approved sign and physical conditions. It does not expire solely upon a change of ownership, tenant, or business name.

17.120.100 Existing signs and maintenance

A. Lawful existing signs

1. A sign lawfully installed before this chapter's effective date may remain under its existing approval. A sign does not become unlawful solely because this chapter changes an allowance or approval procedure.
2. Lawful nonconforming signs may receive customary maintenance, repair, and message changes under Section 17.120.030(B). A change in ownership, tenant, business name, or message does not, by itself, require removal or conformity of that sign or other signs on the property.
3. New signs and proposed enlargements, relocations, or changes to illumination or display technology must meet this chapter. Work on one sign does not require correction of unrelated lawful signs.
4. Where an existing sign uses a primary frontage allowance, count its area when determining the remaining allowance for that frontage. This does not require reduction or removal of a lawful existing sign that already exceeds the new allowance.
5. A lawful exception or sign program remains effective according to its terms. An applicant may request an amendment under this chapter. No existing private agreement is changed by a City sign approval.
6. No removal, limitation on customary use or repair, or denial of replacement of a qualifying on-premises display shall be required contrary to California Business and Professions Code Chapter 2.5, commencing with Section 5490.

Before requiring such action, the City shall identify the applicable legal authority and provide any compensation or process required by law. This paragraph does not legalize a sign that was unlawful when installed.

B. Safety and maintenance

1. Signs and supports must comply with the City's applicable building, electrical, fire, and accessibility codes and must be kept securely attached and structurally sound.
2. Repair loose supports, broken components, exposed electrical wiring, and detached or torn sign faces. Remove or secure an immediate hazard promptly. Normal weathering that does not impair attachment, structural condition, or legibility is not a violation.
3. The owner of a sign is responsible for its maintenance. A property owner is responsible for signs installed or maintained on the property with the owner's authorization. Enforcement against either person must identify the condition that person is responsible for correcting.

C. Vacant premises and abandoned displays

1. A commercial display may be treated as abandoned when the business or activity it advertises has ceased on the site for 12 consecutive months and the display is not being lawfully reused. Noncommercial messages, approved historic signs, and current real estate signs are not abandoned because no business occupies the premises.
2. Before ordering removal, the Director shall give notice under the City's general code enforcement provisions. Evidence of active repairs, permitted reconstruction, or a documented reopening plan must be considered in setting a reasonable correction period.
3. Removal or covering of obsolete copy is sufficient where the remaining support is safe and capable of lawful reuse. The City shall not require removal of the support solely because the copy is obsolete.
4. Any further removal of a qualifying on-premises display must comply with subsection A(6).

17.120.110 Decisions, appeals, and enforcement

A. Permit decisions

1. **Completeness.** Within 10 business days after a sign-permit application is submitted, the Director shall identify missing information in one written list or confirm that the application is complete. Later requests must concern missing items, changed plans, or information needed to resolve a newly identified conflict with an applicable requirement.
2. **Staff decision.** The Director shall decide a complete staff application within 15 business days. A statutory review or separate approval that must lawfully precede the decision may extend this period; the City must identify that requirement and the expected decision date in writing. Delay does not authorize installation without a required approval.
3. **Board decision.** Board applications shall use the public-notice and hearing procedures of Chapter 17.460. The Board shall decide within 60 calendar days after the application is complete, unless the applicant agrees to an extension or controlling law requires additional review. The notice must identify the requested exception or historic-sign determination.
4. **Written reasons.** An approval, condition, or denial must identify the applicable standard and explain the decision. A denial must identify the change needed for compliance where one is reasonably available. The decision must state the appeal procedure and deadline.
5. **Permit term.** A sign permit authorizes installation for 12 months after the decision becomes final. The Director shall grant one additional 12-month extension requested before expiration if the approved plans remain unchanged and no applicable law prevents installation. Once installed, a sign permit does not require periodic renewal.

6. **Appeals.** Permit, exception, and historic-sign decisions are appealable under Chapter 17.455 and the decision-making assignments in Table 17.400-1. Mandatory standards in this chapter govern the appeal; an appeal does not create discretion to deny a compliant sign on aesthetic grounds.

B. Violations and enforcement

1. Installing or maintaining a sign contrary to this chapter or to an applicable approval is a violation of this Code. Failure to obtain a sign permit is a violation only where this chapter requires a permit.
2. Violations of this chapter are enforced under the City's general code enforcement provisions, including Chapter 17.470 and the City's administrative citation, abatement, and nuisance procedures. This chapter does not establish separate notice, hearing, penalty, storage, or cost-recovery procedures, and does not limit any remedy otherwise available to the City.
3. Each sign installed or maintained in violation of this chapter is a separate violation. A single sign is one violation regardless of the number of letters, panels, or display faces it contains.
4. A sign placed in the public right-of-way without authorization from the agency controlling that right-of-way is subject to the City's existing right-of-way and abatement authority.
5. A sign that presents an immediate safety hazard is subject to the City's existing building, fire, and nuisance abatement authority.