



A guide to UDC sign regulations

An ordinance regulating signs for the City of Baton Rouge and Parish of East Baton Rouge went into effect May 18, 1994. It replaced a sign ordinance, last revised in 1986, that was often considered confusing and difficult to enforce. The new regulations, incorporated into the Unified Development Code (UDC), are designed to end the confusion and to improve, in a fair and reasonable manner, the appearance of the community.

The importance of the visual quality of the Parish is emphasized in the Horizon Plan, the comprehensive land use and development plan that is the guide to the future for the community. In neighborhood planning meetings for the Horizon Plan, it was indicated that the Parish has many areas that exhibit a low level of visual aesthetic quality, due in part to excessive billboards and portable signs. Many of these areas are along high traffic corridors.

The sign regulations of the UDC include the following purpose:

“Exterior signs have a clear impact on the character and quality of the city. As a prominent part of the urban environment, signs may attract or repel the viewing public, affect the safety of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, and help set the character and legibility of neighborhoods in the City-Parish. This chapter establishes minimum standards to promote life, health, safety, welfare, convenience and enjoyment for the public by regulating the design, quality of materials, construction, location, electrification and maintenance of all On- and Off-Premise Signs, and advertising devices visible from public rights-of-way.”

The Horizon Plan also encourages economic growth. The sign regulations provide for effective public communication of business locations. A key element of commerce in the community is the ability of businesses and services to adequately identify themselves and to efficiently convey information to customers.

Sign regulations intend that “businesses and services may clearly identify themselves,” and that “no person or group is arbitrarily denied the use of the sight line from the public right-of-way for communication purposes.”

Sign Regulations

A sign is generally defined as any structure, device, material or thing that includes a public notice for any person or organization on any land or building. The UDC makes it unlawful to erect, substantially modify, or relocate any sign without obtaining a sign permit. In general, permits are not required for public service signs, window signs, farm product signs (placed on premises where produce is grown), seasonal business signs, motor fuel pump signs, directory signs (showing occupants of a building) and wall signs. These signs, if not illuminated or electric, are allowed in appropriate zoning districts. The ordinance, however, does include some regulations for the exceptions and should be reviewed for details.

Signs that complied with the previous sign ordinance and permit requirements, but do not conform to the UDC, are now considered “non-conforming” signs. They may remain if they are properly maintained, and not replaced with another non-conforming sign, nor structurally altered, expanded, relocated, re-established after substantial damage, or modified in a way that would increase the non-conformity.

The sign regulations set specific size, height, spacing and setback limits for different types of signs in various zoning districts and locations. Compared to previous sign regulations, the UDC generally reduces the maximum size of signs that are allowed in all zoning districts, and limits their height. For instance, a single business sign located in a commercial district, with 100 feet or less of road frontage, is limited to 100 square feet in message area, and a height of 35 feet. Sign area increases to 150 square feet for single businesses with 101 to 200 feet of road frontage, and to 200 square feet for single businesses with more than 201 feet of road frontage.

Political and campaign signs, previously unregulated in the Parish, now require a permit by the candidate or organization. Political signs are limited to no more than 18 square feet in area within commercial, industrial and rural zoning districts, and no more than 8 square feet in area within residential and transition zoning districts. This type of “temporary sign” cannot be displayed earlier than six months prior to election qualifying or six months before balloting on propositions, and all must be removed within seven days after balloting. Signs not removed within the allotted time may be removed by the Building Official at a cost of \$25 per sign. Any political signs placed in public right-of-way,

passages, servitudes, boulevards, streets or medians, or attached to utility poles, public trees or public buildings are considered “litter” and may be removed by any individual. The regulations will reduce the number of signs allowed in shopping centers or multi-tenant properties through provisions for consolidation of signs. Shopping centers and multi-tenant facilities generally are limited to one sign structure per street frontage with a maximum of two sign structures. Sizes of signs are determined by the amount of road frontage.

The sign regulations also differentiate between “on-premise” and “off-premise” signs. Billboards are the most common type of off-premise sign, and the UDC is more restrictive on their use than the provisions of previous ordinances. For example; off-premise sign minimal distances from any residential district is no longer based on the height of the sign. Off-premise sign set backs are based upon the square footage of the face. As the area increases, the minimal distance (setback) also increases from the property line of any property zoned A1-A2.7, Rural, SPUD, or PUD with A1-A2.7 land uses. Off-premise signs are not allowed within 200 feet of any historic site, district or place, or designated scenic routes, rivers and areas within the Parish. Designated locations include Highland Road from Chimes Street southward to I-10, Old Scenic Highway from Samuel’s Road (U.S. 61) northward to the Parish boundary, Greenwell Springs Road from Beaver Bayou northward to the Parish line, River Road from the I-10 bridge southward to the Parish boundary, the Amite River, Bayou Manchac, the Mississippi River, the Comite River, Bluebonnet Swamp, Capitol Lake, the University Lake system, Profit Island, Thomas Point, Devil Swamp, Duncan or Conrad Point and Manchac Swamp.

The UDC includes a measurement standards section, which explains how to determine area, height, clearance, spacing and setback of signs in a consistent manner. For example, height is measured from the average level of the grade below the sign to the topmost point of the sign, and clearance is measured from the average grade below the sign to the lowest point of the sign face.

Permitting and Administration

Sign permits can be obtained from the City-Parish Building Official (Inspection Division) of the Department of Public Works, 300 N. 10th St., Baton Rouge, LA (225-389-3043). An application form is available in the Permit Office of the Inspection Division, and it must be completed and submitted for review. The application requires the following information: name, address and telephone number of the property owner, sign owner and sign contractor; if a license is required to erect the sign, the license number of the licensed sign company; the location by street address of the sign and, if applicable, the lot number, square, and subdivision name of sign’s location, or a legal description, with a sketch showing lot lines, intersecting streets and nearest detached signs; a site plan, elevation drawings and captioning for the proposed sign; plans indicating the scope and structural detail of the work to be done, including details of all connections, guide lines, supports, footings and materials to be used; and if the sign is electric, electrical diagrams, details and name of the licensed electrical installer, and an agreement to defend, indemnify, and hold harmless the City-Parish for all damages, demands or expenses created by the sign, sign structure, or sign installer. For off-premise signs, an applicant should attach to the application the written consent of the property owner of the land where the sign is to be placed. The application includes a

fee schedule. Fees vary according to the type of sign. The fees, unless otherwise stated, will be due at the time application for the permit is made. The UDC assures that all applications for permits will be processed in a timely manner if the applicant has supplied all of the necessary information. A sticker with identification numbers is issued with the sign permit. The sticker must be displayed on the sign where it is visible for inspection by a Code Enforcement Officer. If it is not possible to display the sticker on the sign, then it must be displayed on the premises where the sign is located.

Sign permits do not have to be renewed and remain valid as long as the sign owner continues to comply with the sign regulations and keeps the sign in good repair in its approved form and location. But if the sign is not constructed within a period of six months after the date of issuance, the permit is canceled. A final inspection for approval of installation must be requested by the applicant within the six-month time period or the permit becomes void. No portion of the permit fees will be refunded if the permit is voided.

An applicant wishing to appeal a decision or ask for a variance to the sign regulations should file a written request to the Planning Commission stating the reasons for the appeal. The Planning Commission may vary the application of any of the sign provisions within the UDC when special conditions or circumstances exist.

Also, the Building Official may, at his or her discretion, make slight adjustments to the Unified Development Code's sign regulations, with some exclusions, or grant a permit for a roof sign in lieu of another type when special circumstances exist.

An appeal of a Planning Commission decision must be made within 10 days of the decision to the Metropolitan Council, Room 364, Governmental Building, 222 St. Louis St., Baton Rouge, LA (225-389-3123).

Obtaining the Sign Regulations

This Information Bulletin is general in nature and addresses many of the procedural aspects of obtaining sign permits in East Baton Rouge Parish. Specific regulations for signs vary by zoning districts, on-premise or off-premise locations (billboards), types of signs (banners, portable signs, political signs, etc.) and purpose (subdivision, business, shopping center, etc.). Applicants should refer directly to the Unified Development Code for specific sign regulations. The Unified Development Code may be obtained at the Planning Commission or the Building Inspection Division of the Department of Public Works. The cost of the publication is \$50.

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