

All signs installed in the downtown area of Bismarck, Downtown Core or Downtown Fringe, follow a specific ordinance and review process intended to promote the visual quality and economic vitality of downtown.

The purpose of this guides is to provide an overview of these rules. The full ordinance requirements may be found in Chapter 14-03.1-09 of City Ordinances.

Types of Signs

Signs are categorized into several different allowable types, and this guide summarizes the rules for each type. Certain types of signs are not allowed, including:

- Off-premise advertising signs (e.g. billboards)
- Signs attached to the roof
- Electronic message centers
- Portable signs, except for sidewalk signs
- Feather flag and air-blown signs.



Pole Signs

While discouraged, pole signs are allowed in certain cases. The sign may not be > 20 feet in height, with eight feet of clear space below. One sign is allowed per parcel per street frontage. The pole and supports must be covered.



Monument Signs

Monument signs are freestanding signs with a solid base. The sign may not be higher than eight feet, or three feet if roadway visibility is blocked. One sign is allowed per parcel per street frontage.



Window Signs

Window signs do not require a permit, are only permitted on ground-floor windows, and cannot cover more than 25% of the window without special approval, unless interior is vacant. Signs with see-through lettering may be larger.



Wall Signs

Wall signs are affixed flat on the surface of the wall. Non-illuminated wall signs must use raised lettering for a three-dimensional effect and cannot extend beyond the extent of the wall. Signs cannot be painted on the front of a building, only on a side not facing the street.



Projecting Signs

Projecting signs extend from the wall at a right angle. They may not project out more than four feet, must be at least eight feet above the sidewalk, and cannot be above the roofline or a second-floor window sill. Non-illuminated projecting signs must also use raised lettering.



Sidewalk Signs

Sidewalk signs are portable sandwich boards placed in the sidewalk. No permit is required. One is allowed per business and only while business is open. Maximum size is 2.5' wide by 4' tall. They must allow a 6'-wide path through sidewalk. Owner is responsible for wind resistance.



Awning Signs

These signs are placed on a fixture of the building that extends from the wall. The component may not extend more than two feet back from the curb. Eight feet of clearance below the sign is required. Signs must be contained within the fixture.

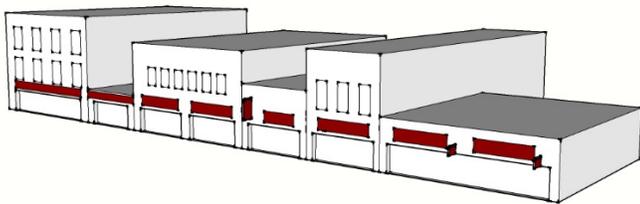
Allowable Sign Area

Each building is allowed to install a certain amount of signage, of any type, based on the length of the street frontage in front of the building.

Allowable Area of Sign Per Foot of Street Frontage

	Downtown Core	Downtown Fringe
Primary Street	2 ½ Square Feet	1 Square Foot
Secondary Street	1 Square Foot	½ Square Foot

For example, in the illustration below each building has either 25 feet or 50 feet of primary street frontage. This is in the Downtown Core, so the smaller buildings are entitled to 62.5 SF and the larger 125 SF of signs.



Any permit-exempt sign, such as window signs and sidewalk signs, are not included in area calculations.

Other Considerations

- Creative and unique signs are encouraged. The Downtown Design Review Committee may waive any provision of the ordinance to allow high-quality design.
- All signs, other than window and sidewalk, must be installed by a licensed sign installer.
- Existing non-conforming signs may remain unless altered in size, location, or technology.
- Signs that hang over the public right-of-way also require an encroachment permit from the Engineering Department.

Public Art



Murals and other installations of public art required downtown design review approval and are subject to certain requirements:

- Art is not installed on the front of the building. Sides or alleys are appropriate
- Art doesn't convey a commercial message
- Art is not installed on a vacant building
- Art is not installed on the original wall of an historic building, unless on a removable panel.

How to Apply

1. Apply for a Sign Permit

The sign permit should be applied for by the sign company installing the sign. A description, diagram and dimensions of the proposed sign is submitted with the permit to the Building Inspections Division. A request for public art may be submitted to the Planning Division.

2. Review by Staff or Design Review Committee

Signs that clearly meet all ordinance requirements may be approved by City staff typically within one week. Signs that are unique or vary from requirements must be approved by the Downtown Design Review Committee. This committee meets monthly. Allow extra time if this review is necessary.

3. Install Sign

As soon as Downtown Design Review is completed and any encroachment agreements are signed, if applicable, the City will issue the permit, and the sign may be installed according to the approved design. Any changes in the design must be resubmitted for additional review.

For additional information, contact the City of Bismarck Planning Division at 355-1840 or the Building Inspections Division at 355-1465 or visit the City-County Office Building 221 N. 5th Street during standard office hours.