



## Town of Lexington, Massachusetts Sign By-Law Guidelines

Lexington's sign by-law was amended at the 2003 Annual Town Meeting and, upon approval by the Massachusetts Attorney General, became effective in September 2003. The purpose of the new sign by-law is "to preserve and enhance the historical ambience and aesthetic character of the town, and to maintain public safety, consistent with constitutional requirements protecting freedom of speech." This is a summary of the key requirements of the new by-law for the placement of signs in residential districts.

- Permitted Signs:** The major categories of signs that are permitted are resident identification signs; real estate signs; yard or garage sale signs; construction, painting or remodeling signs; and noncommercial message signs, including political campaign signs. Commercial signs and billboards are prohibited in residential districts.
- Size:** With a few limited exceptions, signs in residential districts may not exceed four square feet in area. The four square foot limitation applies to campaign signs.
- Height:** Standing signs (signs attached to a stake or otherwise erected on the ground) may not exceed four feet in height.
- Number:** The by-laws permit two resident identification signs; one real estate sign; one yard or garage sale sign; and one construction, painting or remodeling sign. There is no limit on the number of noncommercial message signs that may be displayed. **However, no more than two *standing* signs may be located on a residential property at one time.**
- Setback:** No part of any standing sign may be located within ten feet of the edge of the pavement of any street or obstruct a sidewalk.
- Windows and Roofs:** Removable signs on the inside of windows or transparent doors are permitted. Roof signs are prohibited.
- Removal of Temporary Signs:** Signs that advertise or relate to a particular event (for example, a real estate sign, a campaign sign, or a yard sale sign) must be removed promptly, and in no event more than seven days, after the conclusion of the event.

For more detailed information, consult Chapter 135, sections 74-78 of the Zoning By-Laws. The Zoning By-Laws can be found under "Code of Lexington" on the town web site, <http://ci.lexington.ma.us/>, or a copy may be purchased from the Planning Department.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **What is a noncommercial message sign?**

A noncommercial message sign is any statement or message, including but not limited to a political election campaign endorsement, that does not advertise, call attention to or promote for commercial purposes any product, service or activity; and for the display of which no consideration is provided or received.

### **May I display a flag or banner?**

Government flags and insignia, except when displayed in connection with commercial promotion, are exempted from the by-law. Other flags or banners may also be displayed, subject to the general requirements applicable to all signs.

### **Are signs allowed on fences?**

**Signs on fences are "standing signs,"** which are defined in the by-law as "any and every sign that is erected on the land." That means that they are limited to two in number, may not be more than four feet high, and must be set back at least ten feet from the edge of the street.

### **Are signs allowed on the sides of houses?**

Residents cannot simply tack up signs on the sides of their houses; however, a wall sign would be permissible if affixed to an intermediate sign board that is securely fixed and complies with Building Code requirements.

### **Do I need a building permit to erect a sign?**

There is no requirement to obtain a building permit for a sign on residential property.

### **What if I want to install more signs, or a larger sign, than the by-laws permit?**

A resident may apply to the Zoning Board of Appeals for a special permit for more or larger signs, or for signs of a different type or purpose than the by-laws allow as of right.

### **Can my non-resident landlord display a campaign sign on property that I rent?**

No. Under Lexington's sign by-law, only an occupant of the premises has the right to display a noncommercial message sign.

### **Does the sign by-law cover car-top signs or hand-held signs?**

No. Signs mounted on registered motor vehicles or carried by hand are not covered by the Lexington by-law.