STEARNS WEAVER MILLER WEISSLER ALHADEFF & SITTERSON, P.A.

August 22, 2025

Mr. Matthew G. Minter, County Attorney
Ms. Tracy Straub, Assistant County Administrator
Mr. Chuck Varadin, Growth Services Director
Marion County
601 SE 25th Avenue
Ocala, FL 34471

Via Email

Re: Request for Amendment to Land Development Code ("LDC") Pursuant to Article 2, Division 4 of the LDC

Dear Messrs. Minter and Varadin and Ms. Straub:

Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson, P.A. ("SWM") represents On Top of the World Communities, L.L.C. and Colen Built Development, LLC (collectively, "OTOW"). As you know, we have had numerous meetings regarding an outdated portion of the sign code. Specifically, two big box retailers—Home Depot and Target—are seeking to open new locations within Marion County, but have encountered the sign code as a major obstacle. If such obstacle cannot be overcome, Home Depot and Target (and likely many other big box retailers) will be forced to seek locations outside of Marion County. The purpose of this letter is to request a privately-initiated amendment to the LDC to amend one provision within the County's antiquated sign code. Enclosed as Attachment #1 is an agent authorization signed by OTOW authorizing SWM to submit this application. Enclosed as Attachment #2 is the proposed amendment in redline format ("Proposed Amendment").

CURRENT SITUATION

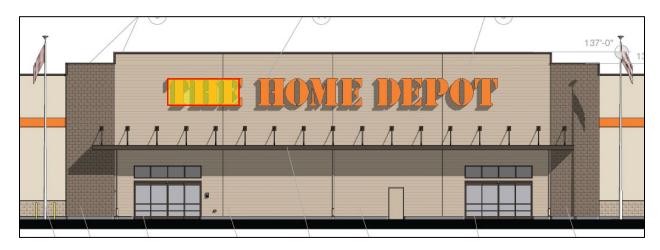
Section 4.4.4 regulates on-site signs within all commercial and office zoning classifications and in the R-O, P-MH and P-RV zoning classifications, including freestanding signs and wall signs. Section 4.4.4.F.(1)(c) provides:

(c) Wall Signage:

- 1. Single occupancy. **Three wall signs**, not to exceed two square feet in sign area for each linear foot of that occupancy's building frontage **up to a maximum of 96 square feet** in aggregate sign area. One of the allowed wall signs above may be placed on the side of the occupancy.
- 2. Shopping centers. Wall signage shall not exceed one and three-quarters square feet in sign area for each linear foot of each occupancy's building frontage.

This antiquated sign code provision adopted at least 33 years ago, is inexplicably much more restrictive for single occupancy buildings—and therefore big box retailers—than shopping centers. While shopping centers do not contain a maximum number or square footage of signage, single-occupancy buildings and big box retailers are restricted to only three signs with a total of 96 square feet.

To put a visual to the absurdity of the 96 square foot limitation, **Attachment #3** is a standard sign package for Home Depot, which has very common and familiar branding across all of its stores. A limitation of 96 square feet does not even encompass the entire "THE" in "THE HOME DEPOT." The below yellow-shaded box is 96 square feet.



When one considers the scale of the building (580 linear feet) and the roadway frontage of the parcel (734 linear feet), it makes sense to allow for a formula to calculate maximum signage, without any upper threshold limitation.



Likewise, Target is proposing a building with 455 feet of building frontage. Under the current sign code, only one "bullseye" symbol would be permitted. With the Proposed Amendment, Target (being treated as a shopping center) would be allowed up to 796 square feet of signage. Target's draft sign plan, **Attachment** #4, meets this limitation.



What's more, the County's minimum parking space requirement at 162 square feet (9' x 18'; Sec. 6.11.8, LDC) is 60% *larger* than the maximum signage allowance. Therefore, no matter how large the building is or how much frontage the parcel has, a single occupancy building, which includes big box retailers, is limited to a sign that is only 40% the size of the smallest vehicular parking space permitted in the County.

To add to this confusion in the discrepancy in treatment between single occupancy buildings and shopping centers, the County does not define "shopping centers" or address big box retailers whatsoever.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT

The Proposed Amendment, included as **Attachment #2**, proposes to treat big box retailers the same as shopping centers with respect to wall signage. Specifically, the Proposed Amendment adds definitions for "big box retailer" and "shopping centers," both of which are currently undefined, and simply adds "big box retailers" to the existing wall signage provision applicable to shopping centers.

"Big Box Retailer" is proposed to be defined as follows:

As it relates to sign regulations, a commercial retail establishment that occupies a large, single-use building or connected series of buildings, typically with a floor area of 75,000 square feet or more, and often comprised of distinct areas devoted to specific functions or types of merchandise. These stores are often part of national or regional chains and generally include large surface parking areas and a warehouse-style layout. Examples include home improvement stores, warehouse clubs, department stores, and general merchandise retailers.

"Shopping Center" is proposed to be defined as follows:

As it relates to sign regulations, a group of commercial retail establishments developed and managed as a unified site with shared access, off-street parking, and common areas.

Section 4.4.4.F.(1)(c) is proposed to be amended as follows:

(c) Wall Signage:

1. Single occupancy. Three wall signs, not to exceed two square feet in sign area for each linear foot of that occupancy's building frontage up to a maximum of 96 square feet in aggregate sign area. One of the allowed wall signs above may be placed on the side of the occupancy.

2. Shopping centers <u>and big box retailers</u>. Wall signage shall not exceed one and three-quarters square feet in sign area for each linear foot of each <u>occupancy's</u> building's frontages.

Importantly, no changes are proposed in the sign size or number regulations. Instead, the Proposed Amendment would treat big box retailers the same as shopping centers. As described below, the retail industry has significantly changed since the wall signage regulation was adopted in 1992 via Ordinance No. 92-22. In order for Marion County to attract big box retailers such as Home Depot and Target, it must update this portion of the sign code, as proposed above.

CHANGES IN THE RETAIL INDUSTRY

Big box retailers have evolved significantly in the last three decades and now function in many of the same ways as traditional shopping centers. Given their role as multi-functional commercial hubs and their importance in modern consumer behavior, it is both logical and equitable to grant big box retailers signage allowances that are consistent with those granted to shopping centers.

While traditionally considered single-occupancy buildings, many big box retailers now host multiple departments, service centers, and concession areas under one roof—similar to smaller-scale shopping centers. Examples include:

- Walmart locations with vision centers, pharmacies, car repair, garden centers, and fast-food restaurants.
- Target stores housing CVS/Pharmacies, Starbucks, and Ulta Beauty shops.
- Home Depot stores with garden centers, rentals, and contractor-specific areas.

These internal tenants or brand segments are analogous to individual tenants in shopping centers, and they benefit from appropriate exterior identification. In fact, many big box stores often exceed or rival the square footage and parking footprint of smaller shopping centers. As proposed, the Proposed Amendment defines "big box retailer" as those retailers with a typical footprint of 75,000 square feet or more.

Signage is needed to support effective navigation and public safety. Big box retailers are now hubs for multiple consumer needs (groceries, pharmaceuticals, electronics, etc.), and limited signage impairs a shopper's ability to safely and efficiently locate specific entrances or identify critical services like pharmacies, clinics, or curbside pickup zones. By treating them like shopping centers with respect to signage allowances, the County would support better traffic flow, reduce confusion, and improve public safety and accessibility.

Additionally, big box retailers commonly use consistent branding across all of its stores, which is essential for wayfinding and brand continuity. The County should accommodate big box retailers through sensible signage codes because each new big box retailer creates hundreds of permanent jobs, demonstrating the importance of stable retailers like Home Depot and Target to a community.

We would appreciate Marion County's assistance to quickly process and approve the Proposed Amendment in order to ensure that both Home Depot and Target locate their businesses here in Marion County. If you have any questions or require further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Cordially,

Reggie Bouthillier, Esq. Jessica Icerman, Esq. Ken Metcalf, AICP

Enclosures

- 1. Agent Authorization
- 2. Proposed Amendment
- 3. Home Depot Signage Plan
- 4. Target Signage Plan

cc: Kenneth Weyrauch, Deputy Director Christopher Rison, Senior Planner Elizabeth Madeloni Marion County

> Robert "Boe" Stepp On Top of the World Communities, L.L.C.

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> Tamara Fleischhaker Ocala Metro Chamber & Economic Partnership (CEP)

Drew Jones Vanessa Butwell VancoreJones Communications

Sec. 4.4.4. On-site signs.

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- 2 A. Signs not requiring permits.
- 3 (1) Construction signs of 64 square feet or less.
- 4 (2) Direction or information signs of six square feet or less.
- 5 (3) Name plates of four square feet or less.
 - (4) Public signs or notices, or any sign relating to an emergency.
- 7 (5) Real estate signs of 64 square feet or less.
- 8 (6) Temporary window signs placed on inside of windows which do not cover more than 50 percent of the window area.
 - (7) Posted notices, No Trespassing signs or markers.
- 11 B. Temporary signs.
 - (1) Except as indicated above, no temporary signs shall be erected without obtaining a permit. Signs failing to comply with the requirements of this section are illegal and subject to immediate removal.
 - (2) A temporary sign may be a ground or building sign.
 - (3) Real estate signs indicating that a property owner is actively attempting to sell, rent or lease the property on which the sign is located. (Refer to Section 4.4.4.D(2)(a), for size, height and number of signs allowed.)
 - (4) Signs indicating the grand opening of a business. This signage may be displayed for a period not exceeding ten days within the first three months the business is open.
 - (5) Signage indicating the existence of a new business, or a business in a new location, pending installation of permanent signs. Such signage may be displayed for a period of not more than 60 days or until installation of permanent signs, whichever shall first occur.
 - (6) Signage indicating the opening of a new business or a special sales event including but not limited to search lights, banners exceeding 36 square feet in size, and portable signs. This signage shall be granted a temporary permit not exceeding 30 days within the first three months the business is open or for a period not to exceed 21 consecutive days per event for temporary sales events. This type of signage is limited to four events per year. When more than one portable sign is placed on a property they shall be spaced 100 feet apart.
 - (7) Construction signage shall not be displayed more than 60 days prior to the beginning of actual construction of a project and shall be removed when construction is completed. Should construction be discontinued for any reason, for a period of more than 60 days, the signage shall be removed pending resumption and continuation of construction activities.
 - (8) Signage announcing or advertising such temporary uses as fairs, carnivals, circuses, revivals, sporting events, flea markets, or any charitable, educational, public or religious event or function. The Planning/Zoning Manager shall maintain a record of each applicant's performance in obtaining permits and removing signs as a basis for issuing future permits. Such signage shall be professionally made and shall be removed within five days after the conclusion of the special event. The construction and installation shall meet the wind load requirements of the Building Code. Maximum size shall not exceed 64 square feet.
- 39 C. Permanent signs.
 - (1) Permanent signs may be a ground or building sign.

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1 No person shall erect or place any commercial sign upon benches, transit shelters or waste receptacles 2 of 55 gallons or less, or be placed on the County road right-of-way without obtaining approval from the 3 Board. 4 Electronic message signs and Time Temperature Date Signs are permitted on commercially developed 5 parcels. These signs shall display information in an easily comprehensible way. The information shall be 6 visible for a minimum of three seconds and shall be kept accurate. They may be ground or building signs, 7 and are subject to the regulations applicable to such signs. They shall be counted as part of an occupant's 8 allowable sign area. 9 Directional signs are limited in area to six square feet, giving directions to motorists regarding the 10 location of parking areas and access drives. They shall be allowed as permanent signs on all parcels and 11 shall not be counted as part of an occupant's allowable sign area. 12 Entrance signs. A permanent accessory sign may be displayed at the entrance to residential 13 developments, farms and ranches. Refer to Section 4.4.4.E for residential development sign setbacks. 14 (a) Restrictions. 15 An entrance sign is permitted at only one entrance into the development, farm or ranch from 16 each abutting street. The sign may be a single sign with two faces of equal size or may be a 17 single face sign located on each side of the entrance. No single face of the sign shall exceed 18 64 square feet in size with a maximum total size of 128 square feet and may be illuminated 19 by a steady light source only. 20 2. When considering the placement of such signs, the Planning/Zoning Manager shall consider 21 the location of public utilities, sidewalks and future street widening. 22 3. The Planning/Zoning Manager shall ensure that such signs shall be maintained perpetually 23 by the developer, the owner of the sign, a pertinent owner's association, or some other 24 person who is legally accountable under a maintenance arrangement approved by the 25 Planning/Zoning Manager. If no accountable person accepts legal responsibility to maintain 26 the signs and no other provision has been made for the maintenance of them, the signs shall 27 be removed by the developer or owner. 28 (6) Flags. 29 Number. No more than three flags or insignias of, religious, charitable, fraternal or other 30 organizations may be displayed on any one parcel of land. Cemeteries are exempt from this 31 provision. 32 Size. The maximum distance from top to bottom of any flag shall be 20 percent of the total height 33 of the flag pole, or in the absence of a flag pole, 20 percent of the distance from the top of the flag 34 or insignia to the ground. 35 (7) Utility signs. Public utility signs that provide information or identify the location of underground utility 36 lines and facilities, high voltage lines and facilities, and other utility facilities and appurtenances are 37 permitted along utility easements and rights-of-way so long as they do not exceed three square feet in 38 size. 39 Blocking exits, fire escapes, etc. No sign or sign structure shall be erected that impedes use of any fire

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escape, emergency exit, or standpipe.

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Clearance standards. All signs over pedestrian ways shall provide a minimum of 7 feet 6 inches of

clearance. All signs over vehicular ways shall provide a minimum of 13 feet 6 inches of clearance.

- (10) Relationship to building features. A building sign shall not extend beyond any edge of the building or the building surface to which it is attached, nor disrupt a major architectural feature of the building such as windows or doors.
- (11) Signs painted on building walls or innovative signs which meet the requirements of this article may be issued a permit in accordance with Section 4.4.1.D. Applications for these type signs shall include information on layout, graphics, color and any additional information requested by the Planning/Zoning Manager or provided by the applicant to support his application for the construction permit.
 - (a) Signs painted on building walls shall be located in B-4, IC, M-1 and M-2 zoning classifications. The size of the sign face shall not exceed 675 square feet.
- (12) Maximum projection. A building sign shall project no more than four feet perpendicularly from the surface to which it is attached.
- (13) Maximum window coverage. The combined area of permanent and temporary signs placed on the exterior of or attached to windows of retail stores shall not exceed 50 percent of the total window area at the same floor level on the side of the building or unit upon which the signs are displayed. Window signage on convenience store windows shall be installed and maintained so that there is a clear and unobstructed view of the cash register and transaction area from the exterior of the store.
- (14) Multiple occupancy complexes. Signage for multiple occupancy complexes such as an office building, shopping plaza, shopping center or any commercial or industrial building having more than one tenant, constructed or remodeled after the effective date of this Code shall conform to an approved sign format. The sign format shall be included as a submittal for authorization to erect such a sign and shall be maintained on file in the Growth Services Department. The format shall be presented as a master signage plan or sketch, together with written specifications in sufficient detail to enable the Planning/Zoning Manager to authorize signs based on the specifications. As a minimum, the sign format shall specify the types of signs and dimensions (not to exceed the size limits contained in this article) which will be permitted each occupant within the complex. The sign format shall also contain common design elements, such as placement, color, shape, or style of lettering, which lend a unified appearance to the signs of the occupants within the complex. The sign format may only be modified with the approval of the Planning/Zoning Manager upon submission of a revised master signage plan and specifications detailing the revised format.
- D. Location and design criteria.

- (1) General Requirements.
 - (a) Where a sign is composed of letters or pictures attached directly to a wall or facade, window, door, or marquee, and the letters or pictures are not enclosed by a border or trimming, the sign area shall be the area within the smallest rectangle, parallelogram, triangle, circle or semicircle, the sides of which touch the extreme points of the letters or pictures.
 - (b) The signable wall or facade area is a continuous portion of a building unbroken by doors or windows and shall be measured by determining the area within an imaginary rectangle drawn around the area. The area shall include roof slopes of less than 45 degrees as measured from the vertical plane, that form a side of a building or unit.
 - (c) Where four sign faces are arranged in a square, rectangle, or diamond, the area of the sign shall be the area of the two largest faces.
 - (d) Where a sign is in the form of a three-dimensional object, the area shall be determined by drawing a square, rectangle, parallelogram, triangle, circle or semicircle, the sides of which touch the extreme points or edges of the projected image of the sign and multiplying that area by two. The

- (2) Temporary Signs.
 - (a) Real Estate Signs Residential shall comply with the following table:

Table 4.4-2 Real Estate Signs—Residential Standards

Dwelling Type	Maximum Number	Maximum Size Each (square feet)	Maximum Height (feet)
Single Family	1 sign	6	3
Two Family	For 2 signs	6	3
	For 1 sign	10	8
Three Family	For 2 signs	6	3
	For 1 sign	15	8
Four Family	For 4 signs	6	3
	For 1 sign	20	8
Over Four Family	1 sign	32	8

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(b) Real Estate Signs - Commercial or Industrial and Construction Signs shall comply with the following:

- Number maximum of two signs per parcel. Refer to Section 4.4.4.H(2) for large parcels and corner parcels.
- 2. Size one square foot of signage per ten feet of frontage up to a maximum of 96 square feet.

 An individual sign shall not exceed 64 square feet.
- 3. Height maximum of 16 feet.
- 4. Spacing minimum of 100 feet apart.
- c) All other temporary signs:

Number, size, height and spacing to be specified in special permit to be issued by the Planning/Zoning Manager.

- E. Signs permitted in residential zoning classifications:
 - (1) Signs allowed in residential zoning classifications are as follows:
 - (a) Two subdivision identification signs per neighborhood, subdivision, or development, not to exceed 64 square feet in sign area per sign.
 - (b) Two identification signs per apartment or condominium complex, not to exceed 64 square feet in sign area per sign.
 - (c) For permitted non-residential uses, including places of worship, one freestanding sign, not to exceed one square foot in sign area for every two lineal feet of street frontage and one wall sign not to exceed 24 square feet in sign area. Total aggregate sign area shall not exceed 200 square feet.
 - (2) Special sign regulations for residential zoning classifications are as follows:

(b) Multiple Occupancy Usages - one freestanding, on-site directory sign, not to exceed the maximums in the following table:

Table 4.4-3 Multiple Occupancy Usage Sign Standards

up to a maximum of 130 square feet per sign face.

Zoning Classification	Maximum Size	
B-1, Neighborhood Business	200 square feet per sign face	
B-2, Community Business	300 square feet per sign face	
B-4, Regional Business	350 square feet per sign face	
RAC, Rural Activity Center	200 square feet per sign face	

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(c) Wall Signage:

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Single occupancy. Three wall signs, not to exceed two square feet in sign area for each linear
foot of that occupancy's building frontage up to a maximum of 96 square feet in aggregate
sign area. One of the allowed wall signs above may be placed on the side of the occupancy.

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2. Shopping centers and big box retailers. Wall signage shall not exceed one and three-quarters square feet in sign area for each linear foot of each occupancy's building's frontages.

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d) Surface area of the on-site sign structure supporting the sign face may not exceed the allowable

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sign area.

Incidental signs, not to exceed six square feet in aggregate sign area per occupancy.

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(e) One under-canopy sign per occupancy, not to exceed four square feet in sign area.

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(g) On-site identification signs located within 2,000 feet of all intersections located on I-75, shall not exceed 55 feet in overall height.

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(h) Outdoor Menu Boards for fast food or drive-thru restaurants shall not exceed 60 square feet in aggregate sign face area.

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(2) Location, Setbacks and Height:

29 30 (a) The onsite identification or directory sign shall be located in the area between the structure and the access street and shall be set back a minimum of five feet from the front property line.

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(b) On-site signs shall not exceed a height of 30 feet.

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(3) Special regulations and allowances for commercial and office zoning classifications are as follows:

2			(a)	where occupancy is on a corner or through lot, or has more than one main street frontage, two wall signs and one additional freestanding sign will be allowed on the additional frontage, not to exceed the size of other allowed wall and freestanding signs.		
4 5 6			(b)	Freestanding and under-canopy signs shall have a setback of five feet from any public vehicular right-of-way and a minimum clearance of 12 feet over any vehicular use area and seven feet over any pedestrian use area.		
7 8 9 10 11			(c)	Auto dealerships, furniture stores, boat sales and similar retail sales facilities are allowed to combine the freestanding on-site signage and the building signage, not to exceed two square feet in sign area for each linear foot of main street frontage. The freestanding signage shall not exceed 130 square feet per sign face. Multiple freestanding signs are allowed and shall be spaced a minimum of 150 feet apart.		
12	G.	Signs	s perm	ermitted in agricultural zoning classifications:		
13		(1)	Signs	s allowed in agricultural zoning classifications are as follows:		
14 15			(a)	Farm Entrance Signs. One double faced sign or two single faced signs not exceeding a total of 128 square feet of sign area. The allowed sign area per sign face is 64 square feet.		
16 17 18			(b)	Signs for Home Occupations. One sign, either single or double faced, non-illuminated, not exceeding six square feet in size and not higher than four feet, may be located no closer than five feet to the front property line.		
19 20 21 22			(c)	For permitted and SUP authorized agriculturally related non-residential uses or community facilities uses, including places of worship, one freestanding sign, not to exceed one square foot in sign area for every two lineal feet of street frontage and one wall sign not to exceed 24 square feet in sign area. Total aggregate sign area shall not exceed 200 square feet.		
23	Н.	Signs	s perm	rmitted in heavy commercial and industrial zoning classifications:		
24 25		(1)	Signs follo	ns allowed in heavy commercial and industrial zoning classifications: B-3, B-5, IC, M-1, M-2 are as ows:		
26 27			(a)	One freestanding on site sign per premises, not to exceed two square feet in sign area for each linear foot of main street frontage up to a maximum of 400 square feet per sign face.		
28 29			(b)	One wall sign per occupancy, not to exceed one and three-quarters square feet in sign area for each linear foot of that occupancy's building frontage up to a maximum of 200 square feet; or		
30 31				Two roof signs per premises, not to exceed two square feet in sign area for each linear foot of that occupant's building frontage up to a maximum of 200 square feet; or		
32 33				Three awning signs per occupancy not to exceed 30 percent of the surface area of an awning, or three marquee signs, not to exceed 50 square feet in sign area for each marquee.		
34			(c)	Two under-canopy signs per occupancy, not to exceed eight square feet in aggregate sign area.		
35			(d)	Incidental signs not to exceed six square feet in aggregate sign area per occupancy.		
36 37			(e)	On-site identification signs located within 2,000 feet of all intersections located on I-75, shall not exceed 55 feet in overall height.		
38 39 40			(f)	The freestanding on-site signage or directory signage shall be located in the area between the structure and the local commercial access street and shall be set back a minimum of five feet from the front property line.		
41			(g)	On-site signs shall not exceed a height of 30 feet.		

1	(2)	Truck stop signage:		
2 3 4		(a)	One free standing on-site identification sign per lot or parcel, not to exceed two square feet in sign area for each lineal foot of main street frontage up to a maximum of 600 square feet per sign face: Such signs shall not exceed a height of 55 feet.	
5 6 7		(b)	Wall signage or roof signage or combination thereof per occupancy, not to exceed two and three-quarters square feet in sign area for each linear foot of that occupancy's building frontage up to a maximum of 520 square feet: Signage may be placed on the front or side of the building.	
8 9		(c)	Direction signs not to exceed 16 square feet of sign area per face: Such signs shall not exceed a height of ten feet.	
10 11		(d)	Menu boards, either single faced or double faced, for drive-thru restaurants shall not exceed 60 square feet in sign face area, measured on one face of the sign.	
12		(e)	Truck scale signs shall not exceed 80 square feet per sign face and shall not exceed 20 feet in height.	
13 14		(f)	On-site identification signs located within 2,000 feet of all intersections located on I-75, shall not exceed 55 feet in overall height.	
15 16		(g)	The on-site identification sign(s) shall be set back a minimum of five feet from the front property line.	
17 18		(h)	All signage shall conform to the requirements of Section 5.5.16 sight triangle (corner vision clearance) requirement at all access and egress points.	
19 20	(3)	Special Regulations and Allowances for Heavy Commercial and Industrial Zoning Classifications at follows:		
21 22 23 24		(a)	Where a lot has in excess of 300 feet of main street frontage, one additional freestanding sign will be allowed for each additional 150 feet of main street frontage. Such signs shall be subject to the size and height limitations of the first allowed freestanding sign and may be placed no closer than 150 feet to any other freestanding sign on the same premises.	
25 26 27		(b)	A projecting sign may be used instead of any allowed wall or freestanding sign, not to exceed a sign area of two square feet for each linear foot of occupancy's building frontage up to a maximum of 64 square feet.	
28 29 30		(c)	All freestanding, projecting, awning, marquee, and under-canopy signs shall have a minimum setback of five feet from any vehicular public right-of-way, and a minimum clearance of 13 feet, six inches over any vehicular use area and seven feet over any pedestrian use area.	
31	(Ord. No. 13-20, § 2. 7-11-2013)			

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