



# COMPREHENSIVE PLAN / ZONING & ORDINANCES AUDIT: SIGN REGULATIONS

Use form to provide key audit information: 1) Review both the 2001 and 2019 Comp Plan to note policy gaps and issues not addressed. 2) Review three ordinance documents (Zoning, FSM, LSDO) to determine existence or levels of enforcement for policies/issues. Use Section (§) references where applicable. 3) Describe Issue and Recommendations. Links to key documents: [2019 Comp Plan](#), [2001 Comp Plan \(RGP\)](#), [CPAM Revisions to the 2001 RGP](#), [Facilities Standards Manual \(FSM\)](#), [Land Subdivision & Development Ordinance \(LSDO\)](#).

1. Comp Plan Policy or Issue Area (2001 & 2019)	2a. Zoning Ordinance § Reference or N/A (Brief text or summary)	2b. Facilities Standards Manual § Reference or N/A (Brief text or summary)	2c. Land Subdivision & Dev. Ordinance § Reference or N/A (Brief text or summary)	3. Issue Description / Recommendations
<b>QD Policy 8, Section 8.1 D.</b> Review and revise county sign regulations to facilitate signage and way-finding at appropriate heights that incorporate Braille, tactile markings, and other accessibility improvements.	N/A (recommended in the new Comprehensive Plan)			<b>SIGN HEIGHT AND SIZE / BRAILLE, ETC.</b> should not be affected by this addition.  <u>RECOMMENDATION:</u> Do not increase sign size.
Glossary 3 B: : <b>Built Environment:</b> Human-made surroundings that provide the setting in which people live, work, learn, and play on a day-to-day basis, and how they are interrelated as a complete and connected system in relationship to human activity. The built environment includes uses such as buildings and structures, parks, utilities and communication infrastructure, roads, paths, transportation infrastructure, streetscapes, <b>signage</b> , man-made landscapes, and open space.	<b>Section 5-1200 5-1201 Division C: Sign Regulations Sign Regulations.</b>			<p><b>SIZE MATTERS</b>  <b>ISSUE:</b> Each ordinance revision results in an unnecessary increase in sign size. Citizens can see the signs that are out there to get information and direction to the places they wish to go.</p> <p><u><b>RECOMMENDATION:</b></u> Do not to increase sizes or numbers of signs allowed.</p> <p><u><b>Highlights from current Zoning Ordinance:</b></u>  <b>Purpose.</b> <i>The visual environment has an effect on, and is an important element of, safeguarding life, health, and property, and preserving the natural beauty, historic and cultural attributes, unique character, and attractiveness of communities. Careful control of signs can protect the general welfare, safety of individuals, and property values, support economic vitality and viability, and enhance Loudoun’s communities overall. <b>The intent of this section, therefore, is to establish well-designed signage that contributes in positive ways to Loudoun County’s visual environment while expressing local character and helping to develop a distinctive image of the County. The primary purposes of sign regulations are (1) to help people find a location without difficulty or confusion, and (2) to clearly identify places of business and communities. Signs shall be considered accessory components of an overall composition of architectural elements, not as dominant architectural elements by themselves.</b></i></p>

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				<i>Signs shall be <b>subordinate</b> to the structures and land use functions that they reference. This Section establishes standards for the location, design, construction, installation, display, and safety of signs. More specifically, while not restricting freedom of expression, regulations are hereby established to: (1) Ensure the compatibility of signs with land uses, (2) Promote orderly, attractive, and effective signage, (3) Establish the type, number, physical dimensions, design, and location of signs, (4) Treat similar types of signs consistently, and (5) Minimize competing demands for visual attention to graphic messages or displays by preventing and reducing visual clutter.</i>
<b>Chap 2; page 5:</b> Loudoun County’s growth management strategy has comprised an approach that 1) focuses the location and intensity of development in eastern Loudoun and around towns, which maintains the agricultural character, <b>pastoral landscapes</b> , and natural resources of the County’s rural area Glossary 3 B: : <b>Built Environment:</b> Human-made surroundings that provide the setting in which people live, work, learn, and play on a day-to-day basis, and how they are interrelated as a complete and connected system in relationship to human activity. The built <b>environment</b> includes uses such as buildings and structures, parks, utilities and communication infrastructure, roads, paths, transportation infrastructure, streetscapes, <b>signage</b> , man-made landscapes, and open space.	Table 5-1204D; sign requirements matrix. <b>Temporary signs</b> , 32 sq ft Maximum sq dt: 32 Permit limited to 120 days within a twelve (12) month period. Dates of sign display, which do not have to be consecutive, included with zoning permit. Signs shall be removed prior to permit expiration.			<b>UNLIMITED TEMPORARY SIGNS</b>  <b>ISSUE:</b> This unlimited (in number) temporary signs on any site in the County, whether Rural, Urban, Suburban, Commercial, etc. was an unwarranted addition to the sign ordinance when it was proposed and adopted.  These signs do not “protect and enhance the County’s (visual) environments resources” no encourage “pastoral landscapes”.  <b>RECOMMENDATION:</b> This section, 5-1204D, Temporary Signs needs to be revoked.

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Chapter 3: <b>Vision</b> <b>Protect</b> and enhance the County's <b>natural, environmental, and heritage resources</b> , which are fundamental to the health, <b>safety</b> , welfare, sustainability, and enjoyment of current and future generations.	2. (E) <b>Alternative Sign Regulations - Sign Development Plan.</b> Alternative sign regulations for permitted signs may be requested with the submission of a Sign Development Plan. Requests for approval of Sign Development Plans or revisions to approved Sign Development Plans (or Comprehensive Sign Packages) shall be made in accordance with the procedures for a Special Exception application as set forth in Section 6- 1300, except that the Issues for Consideration shall be as set forth in Section 5-1202(E)(1).			<b>ALTERNATIVE SIGN REGULATIONS</b>  <b>ISSUE:</b> Signs in certain areas can submit a Sign Development Plan are allowed “minor revisions” to the “Signs Permitted” ( <b>section #3E Alternative Sign Regulations</b> )  Unfortunately, these “minor revisions” are what has allowed monster signs at shopping centers on Loudoun County Parkway and others even when the development is clearly visible to drivers from the road. It will be difficult to restrict future applications from duplicating such signs when they have been allowed in the past. These signs should be rendered “grandfathered”.  <b>RECOMMENDATION:</b> If this section is not revised, “minor revisions” should be allowed when necessary for public safety.
<b>Comprehensive Plan, Chap 2; page 5:</b> Loudoun County's growth management strategy has comprised an approach that 1) focuses the location and intensity of development in eastern Loudoun and around towns, which maintains the agricultural character, <b>pastoral landscapes</b> , and natural resources of the <b>County's rural area</b>	<b>Section 5-1200 5-1201 Division C: Sign Regulations Sign Regulations. Purpose.</b>			<b>PROTECT VISUAL RURAL ENVIRONMENT ISSUES:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Requests in rural areas have been made for larger signs and multiple signs that are not allowed in other areas. Rural areas are special in that houses and business are mixed together unlike suburban areas which have commercial/business/industrial areas separate from housing areas.</li><li>• There appears to be a difference between actual rural, agricultural property and suburban fill-ins at one house on 3 acres, clustered lots or any small lot. These suburban-type developments in the rural landscape can cause a number of conflicts with complaints about smells, noise, machinery, guns, etc.</li></ul> <b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rural businesses in these “suburban,” more densely populated areas, need special sign consideration especially when there is no homeowner's association to make rules. In these areas, something similar to the restricted allowances in housing areas in the East would be appropriate: (see 1993 Zoning Ordinance: Section 5-400)</li><li>• This mix of homes and business in the Rural Policy Areas dictate careful consideration of sign usage. Signs along a rural road are very visible when trees</li></ul>

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				<p>and meadows line the road. Large signs, multiple signs, balloons, feather flags, etc. are not needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In addition, GPS and online descriptions of markets and directions reduce the need for signage. One example of government helping people find farmers markets is <a href="http://news.minneapolisismn.gov/2019/04/24/interactive-map-makes-easy-find-farmers-markets/">http://news.minneapolisismn.gov/2019/04/24/interactive-map-makes-easy-find-farmers-markets/</a> Once found, buyers will come again and again to purchase crops.</li></ul>
Chapter 3: <b>Vision</b> <b>Protect</b> and enhance the County's <b>natural, environmental, and heritage resources</b> , which are fundamental to the health, <b>safety</b> , welfare, sustainability, and enjoyment of current and future generations.	<p><b>5-1201</b> “The primary purposes of sign regulations are (1) to help people <b>find a location</b> without difficulty or confusion, and (2) to clearly <b>identify places</b> of business and communities. Signs shall be considered accessory components of an overall composition of architectural elements, not as dominant architectural elements by themselves. Signs shall be <b>subordinate to the structures and land use functions</b> that they reference. This Section establishes standards for the location, design, construction, installation, display, and safety of signs. More specifically, while not restricting freedom of expression, regulations are hereby established to: (1) Ensure the compatibility of signs with land uses, (2) <b>Promote orderly, attractive, and effective signage</b>” Section 5-500 Temporary Uses/Zoning Permits. Article 8: Definitions <b>Wayside Stand</b>: Any structure or land used</p>			<p><b>SO-CALLED TEMPORARY BUSINESSES</b></p> <p><b>ISSUE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Signs for businesses such as Wayside stands, includes up to 3 on-site signs and up to 4 off- site directional signs.</li><li>• It appears that many of these businesses are considered “temporary” even though they are in the same spot each year with permanent structures but are only open for about 10 months of the year. These businesses indeed are not temporary and should not be given the right to multiple or off-site signs.</li><li>• Many of these Wayside stands sit on property where produce is not grown. The character of the premises <b>is</b> changed by these distractive signs which do not meet the standard of being orderly and attractive.</li></ul> <p><b>RECOMMENDATION:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assign these businesses the same signs other businesses uses are allowed. Off-site signs in the VDOT right-of-way are not legal.</li></ul>

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	for the sale, by the owner or his family or tenant, of agricultural or horticultural produce, livestock or merchandise principally produced on said farm, but may include produce grown on other farms and accessory products, and which is clearly a secondary use of the premises and does not change the character thereof.			
Chapter 3: <b>Vision</b> <b>Protect</b> and enhance the County's <b>natural, environmental, and heritage resources</b> , which are fundamental to the health, <b>safety</b> , welfare, sustainability, and enjoyment of current and future generations.	<b>5-1203 Administration and Enforcement</b> 1. (A) <b>Sign Permits.</b>			<p><b>NO ENFORCEMENT ISSUE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No discussion of actual enforcement is mentioned in the 1993 zoning ordinance except for required removal of unsafe signs. Without enforcement, spending time writing rules is a waste of time.</li> <li>Reporting signs suspected of violating the ordinances must be done by citizens, pitting neighbors against neighbors. With spotty reporting, uneven enforcement allows some signs to remain. Others put up illegal signs knowing that they will probably not be reported.</li> <li>Business will not risk putting up expensive signs if they know they will be required to remove them; therefore, the incidence of illegal signs will fall.</li> </ul> <p><b>RECOMMENDATION:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enforce the Zoning Ordinance by County staff without requiring citizen complaints</li> </ul>
Chapter 3: <b>Vision</b> <b>Protect</b> and enhance the County's <b>natural, environmental, and heritage resources</b> , which are fundamental to the health, <b>safety</b> , welfare, sustainability, and enjoyment of current and future generations.	5-1202 General Provisions. (A) Signs Prohibited. Signs with the following characteristics are prohibited: (1) Other than on property or structure to which it directs attention. Is located anywhere other than on the property or structure to which it directs attention or to which it is appurtenant, except (a) any sign erected or maintained by or under			<p><b>PROHIBIT OFF-SITE SIGNS ISSUE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Off-site signs are prohibited for safety and visual impact yet some categories are allowed such signs and other put up many off-site signs. No one should be allowed to put up off-site signs and enforcement is essential for safety, and the visual environment.</li> <li>Signs appear on roadsides, on telephone poles, on bridges, and other places stipulated in #3. Enforcement is necessary to stop the misuse of these signs.</li> </ul> <p><b>RECOMMENDATIONS:</b></p> <p>(1) Enforcement to stop the misuse of these signs.</p>

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	the supervision of county or other governmental authority or the Virginia Department of Transportation, and (b) any other off-site sign which is specifically provided for in this Section 5-1200. <b>5-1204(D) (f) Wayside stands</b> ....4 SF off-site .			(2) Revision of the Zoning Ordinance to take out any reference to allowing these illegal off-site signs.
<b>Chapter 3: Vision</b> Protect and enhance the County's natural, <b>environmental</b> , and heritage resources, which are fundamental to the health, safety, welfare, sustainability, and enjoyment of current and future generations.				<p><b>PRETENDING ADDED MATERIAL IS NOT SIGNAGE:</b> <b>ISSUE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signs may be attached to large square of the sign material and/or painted in the same color, making what to the eye appears to be a huge sign out of proportion to the zoning ordinance.</li> <li>This is allowed (quotes from county enforcers) because “the bottom part of the structure, since it doesn't have any writing, illustration, or other markings and is actually a separate piece it is not considered part of the signs.” And “The sign portion from the approved permit is only the area where the writing is on the sign, so everything outside of that is not being measured as part of the sign”).</li> </ul> <p><b>RECOMMENDATION:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signs may be restricted as to size, but, clearly, this loophole which allows these signs to be attached to large “empty” material should be eliminated in this ordinance. Enforce the rules for the total sign size without additions.</li> </ul>
<b>Chapter 3: Vision</b> Protect and enhance the County's natural, environmental, and heritage resources, which are fundamental to the health, safety, welfare, sustainability, and enjoyment of current and future generations.				<p><b>DISTRACTIVE SIGNS</b> <b>ISSUES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Balloons, “air dancers”, and many other distractive devices are continually used in the County.</li> <li>Enforcement is essential to give citizens a rest from these visual assaults and, importantly, give equal treatment to those businesses which follow the zoning ordinances.</li> <li>Changeable digital signs are being placed in the County and business will want similar signs. These signs are distractive for drivers as shown in many reports, one shown here: Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice <a href="#">Volume 122</a>, April 2019, Pages 85-98 “The impact of road advertising signs on driver</li> </ul>

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				<p>behavior and implications for road safety: A critical systematic review: "there is an emerging trend in the literature suggesting that roadside advertising, particularly those signs with changeable messages, can increase crash risk (Cairney and Gunatillake, 2000, Sisiopiku et al., 2015). "</p> <p><b>RECOMMENDATION:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Put driver safety first and enforce the ordinance for all so balloons, air dancers, digital signs and other devices do not distract drivers and clarify the ordinance where needed.</li></ul>

Section 5-1200 5-1201  
Division C: Sign Regulations Sign Regulations.

**Purpose.** The **visual environment** has an effect on, and is an important element of, safeguarding life, health, and property, and preserving the natural beauty, historic and cultural attributes, unique character, and attractiveness of communities. **Careful control of signs can protect the general welfare, safety of individuals, and property values, support economic vitality and viability, and enhance Loudoun’s communities overall.** The intent of this section, therefore, is to establish well-designed signage that contributes in **positive ways to Loudoun County’s visual environment** while expressing local character and helping to develop a distinctive image of the County. The primary purposes of sign regulations are (1) to help people find a location without difficulty or confusion, and (2) to clearly identify places of business and communities. Signs shall be considered accessory components of an overall composition of architectural elements, not as dominant architectural elements by themselves. Signs shall be subordinate to the structures and land use functions that they reference. This Section establishes standards for the location, design, construction, installation, display, and safety of signs. More specifically, while not restricting freedom of expression, regulations are hereby established to: (1) **Ensure the compatibility of signs with land uses**, (2) **Promote orderly, attractive, and effective signage**, (3) Establish the type, number, physical dimensions, design, and location of signs, (4) Treat similar types of signs consistently, and (5) **Minimize competing demands for visual attention to graphic messages or displays by preventing and reducing visual clutter.**

**Section 5-400**  
Home Occupations. Home occupations are permitted within any dwelling unit, accessory building associated with a dwelling unit, or tenant dwellings permitted pursuant to Section 5-602, subject to the following:

- (A) The use of the dwelling unit for the home occupation shall be clearly **incidental and subordinate** to the use of the dwelling unit for residential purposes by the home occupation operator.
- (B) Members of the home occupation operator’s family residing on the premises shall be permitted to be engaged in such home occupation.
- (C) **One employee (one full-time equivalent)**, other than members of the home occupation operator’s family residing on premises, shall be permitted to work on site.
- (D) An employee permitted to work on-site pursuant to subsection (C) shall require the provision of one (1) off-street parking space in addition to the minimum off-street parking requirements for the dwelling unit under Section 5-1102 of this Ordinance. Any other need for parking generated by the conduct of a home occupation shall be met solely by off-street parking. Off-street parking required by this subsection shall not be located in a required front yard, unless located within an existing driveway.
- (E) **No visible evidence of the conduct of such home occupation shall be permitted other than signage permitted pursuant to Section 5-1200 of this Ordinance.**

**5-1203 Administration and Enforcement.**

- (A) **Sign Permits.** No sign, with the exception of "Government Signs/Official Notices", "Historical Markers", "Danger, Aviation, Railroad, Bridge, Ferry Transportation, Red Cross, and Other Similar Signs", "No Hunting, No Fishing, or No Trespassing Signs", "Residential Name Signs", "Window or Display (Non-Business) Signs", and "De Minimis Signs", shall be erected without first obtaining a sign permit from the Zoning Administrator. No such permit shall be issued unless a fee, if required, and as set by the Board of Supervisors, is paid and unless the proposed sign conforms to the requirements of this ordinance.
- (B) **Removal of Signs.** Whenever a sign becomes structurally unsafe or endangers the safety of a structure or premise or the public, or is erected or maintained in violation of this ordinance, the Zoning Administrator shall order such sign to be made safe or comply with the ordinance, as the case may be, or be removed. .... Within five working days of the receipt or refusal of the order, the owner or violator must correct the sign based on the Zoning Administrator’s order. The Zoning Administrator may grant one extension, not to exceed ten (10) working days, based on written justification for the need of an extension. Failure to comply shall constitute grounds for the Zoning Administrator to issue a civil summons pursuant to Section 6-504 and to take other appropriate actions to have the sign removed.