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Sec. 3.500. - Purpose and scope.

- (a) The purpose of this subtitle is to regulate all exterior signs and interior window signs placed for exterior observance so as to protect property values, to protect the character of the various communities in the County, to protect health, safety and morals, and to promote the public welfare.
- (b) The principal features are the restriction of advertising to the business or use of the premises on which the sign is located, with limited exceptions for Downtown Columbia due to it being the urban center of the County, and the restriction of the total sign area permissible per site. Any sign placed on land or on a building for the purpose of identification or for advertising a use conducted thereon or therein shall be deemed accessory and incidental to such land, building or use. It is intended that the display of signs will be appropriate to the land, building or use to which they are appurtenant and be adequate, but not excessive, for the intended purpose of identification or advertisement. With respect to signs advertising business uses, it is specifically intended, among other things, to avoid excessive clutter among displays in their demand for public attention.
- (c) It is intended by this section that all temporary signs erected for directional purposes, for public information, or to call attention to special events shall be confined to those that are of general public interest and that such signs shall be limited to the giving of information.
- (d) All other signs, commonly referred to as outdoor advertising, billboards or poster panels, which advertise products or businesses not connected with the site or building on which they are located, are deemed by this section to constitute a separate use. Permanent display of outdoor advertising is deemed to be inappropriate to the character and the sound development of the County, and it is intended that such advertising be confined to temporary displays on unimproved property in industrial districts.
- (e) Provisions relating to Downtown Columbia were enacted as part of the Downtown Columbia Plan, a comprehensive development scheme to establish for the first time in the County an urban center that is well-planned, economically successful, vibrant, and visually attractive in order to draw in businesses, residents, and tourists and to attract events of regional, national, and international interest. The provisions governing signage in Downtown Columbia are intended to ensure that signs are an integral part of an overall development plan aimed at achieving an aesthetically pleasing and high quality visual

environment that reinforces the planned character of each of the neighborhoods, is compatible with the downtown-wide design guidelines and the six sets of Downtown Neighborhood Design Guidelines, enables easy identification and wayfinding for pedestrian and vehicular traffic, and establishes a coordinated and harmonic urban streetscape while, at the same time, provides for a signature environment for each of the six distinct neighborhoods that make up Downtown Columbia. The provisions are also aimed at achieving well-designed, coordinated signage and a process that encourages creativity in the use of signage to enhance the urban experience.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 56, 2010, § 2)

Sec. 3.501. - Sign standards by district.

- (a) *General.* The following sign standards by district shall apply to every existing district and to every new zoning district classification hereafter created in Howard County; to commercial or industrial uses permitted as conditional uses under section 131 of the zoning regulations unless the Board of Appeals shall expressly provide for stricter conditions for signs or billboards in granting such uses; and to the separate areas of residential, multifamily commercial and industrial uses in multiuse districts such as new town district (outside Downtown Columbia), planned community district and similar districts; and to all areas in Downtown Columbia which the Downtown Columbia Plan specifies as being the urban center of the County and therefore is determined to necessitate unique treatment under this subtitle. The districts are defined by the zoning regulations and official zoning maps. Only signs as described herein and as may be described under [section 3.502](#) "signs permitted in all districts," or [section 3.503](#) "exemptions," shall be permitted in each particular district.
- (b) *Residential Districts and Residential Areas.*
- (1) *Single-family.* Two home occupation signs not exceeding two square feet each in area shall be permitted per single-family dwelling. Such signs shall be set back at least six feet from the nearest property line and shall not be over five feet above the ground, whether freestanding or on a building. Other signs for single-family dwellings shall be subject to the standards set forth in subsection [3.503\(g\)](#). Illumination shall be in accordance with the restrictions set forth in [section 3.508](#)
 - (2) *Multiple-family.* In any multiple-family dwelling in which a professional or rental office is permitted, one sign shall be permitted at each vehicular entrance from a public right-of-way and at each major public entrance to the dwelling for all offices in the dwelling, the sign not to exceed one square foot for each office or ten square feet overall, whichever is smaller. Permitted signs shall be set back at least six feet from any property line, and the top of the sign shall not be over five feet above the ground, whether free-standing or on a building. The sign shall indicate only the name, address and occupation of the occupant. Illumination shall be in accordance with the restrictions set forth in [section 3.508](#)
 - (3) *Mobile homes.* Signs in mobile home parks shall be in accordance with the standards as set forth in subsection [3.501\(c\)](#) of this subtitle.
- (c) *Commercial Districts, Commercial Areas, all Areas Within Downtown Columbia, Industrial Districts and Industrial Areas.*
- (1) *Size.*
 - a. The provisions of this paragraph shall not apply in Downtown Columbia. A total sign area of two square feet for each lineal foot of building frontage shall be allowed. If the building has multiple frontages, an additional sign area of one square foot for each additional lineal foot of building frontage shall be allowed. The total area of all signs erected on the lot and building shall be within the allowable square footage. Where there are multiple frontages, no more than two square feet of sign area for each lineal foot of building frontage shall be allowed to face that frontage.
 - b. In Downtown Columbia, the total sign area allowed for a building shall be computed on the basis of two square feet of sign area for each linear foot of downtown building frontage, including all building frontages on buildings having multiple frontages. Buildings with less than 60 linear feet of downtown building frontage shall be allowed up to 120 square feet of sign area. Where there are multiple frontages, no more than two square feet of sign area for each lineal foot of building frontage shall be allowed to face that frontage. The total area of all signs erected on the lot and building shall be within the allowable square footage.
 - (2) *Location.*
 - a. *Flat wall signs.* Flat wall signs may be located anywhere on any wall of a building, except that, above the first floor, no window or part of a window shall be situated within the area, or surface area, as defined herein, of such sign, or its supporting structure. Except in Downtown Columbia, a sign, part of a sign, or the sign's supporting structure shall not cover a window or any part of a window. In Downtown Columbia, flat wall signs shall not cover all of a window. Flat wall signs that cover part of a window shall be in accordance with subsection [3.505\(a\)\(9\)](#) of this subtitle. No flat wall sign shall extend above the top of

the wall. In the case of a multistory building which has screening enclosing elevator shafts, stairs or heating and air-conditioning units, a flat wall sign may be permitted within the area of the screening.

- b. *Projecting signs.*
- (i) The provisions of this paragraph shall not apply in Downtown Columbia. Projecting signs may project over public rights-of-way only where there is no building setback, and then it may project no more than 42 inches beyond the right-of-way line. It may be no closer than eight feet to a curbline without variance from the Board of Appeals, except that on commercial properties within the Ellicott City Historic District it may be no closer than three feet to a curbline without variance from the Board of Appeals, and must have a minimum clearance of ten feet above the finished grade of a sidewalk and 18 feet above any road, driveway or alley. No projecting sign or supporting structure shall project more than 42 inches from the wall of a building, nor be less than ten feet from the ground level at the base of the building, nor be higher than 25 feet from the ground level to the top of the sign on a multistory building, and above the first floor, no window or part of a window shall be situated within the area, or surface area, as defined herein, of such sign, or its supporting structure, nor shall any such sign or part of such sign or its supporting structure cover any window or part of a window. Furthermore, no projecting sign or supporting structure shall be located in such a manner as to obstruct the light and vision of a window. Every face of a projecting sign shall be considered as a separate sign for the purposes of computing the allowable area, and the sum of the areas to all faces of a projecting sign shall not exceed 25 square feet. No projecting sign or supporting sign or supporting structure shall extend above the top of the wall.
 - (ii) In Downtown Columbia, projecting signs including under canopy, awning signs, and blade signs may project over public rights-of-way only where there is no building setback or the setback is less than 48 inches. A projecting sign or supporting structure shall not project more than 48 inches from the wall of a building, nor be less than 8 feet from the ground level at the base of the building and 18 feet above any road, driveway, or alley. The horizontal clearance between a projecting sign and the curbline shall not be less than three feet. A projecting sign shall not be higher than the parapet line of the building or 25 feet from the ground level to the top of the sign, whichever is less. Each face of a projecting sign shall be considered as a separate sign for the purposes of computing the allowable area, and the sum of the areas to all faces of a projecting sign shall not exceed 25 square feet. Under canopy signs shall be permanently attached to an overhead canopy or awning.
- c. *Freestanding signs.* The provisions of this paragraph shall not apply in Downtown Columbia. Where a building does not cover the full area of the property, business signs may be freestanding or ground-supported and may be located in the front yard. The height of the sign may not exceed one foot for each two feet the sign is set back from the right-of-way and shall not exceed 26 feet from the grade level to the top of the sign. Freestanding signs shall be permitted only where there is a minimum of 40 lineal feet of lot frontage. The maximum allowable area for a freestanding sign shall be one square foot for each one foot the sign is set back from the road right-of-way. The largest single face of a freestanding sign shall be considered for the purpose of computing allowable area under this section. No part of the sign shall extend beyond a property line or right-of-way line. Signs satisfying requirements for gas price posting are permitted up to an area of 32 square feet per face. Such signs may be affixed to the main freestanding sign and will not be assessed against the allowable area for the facility nor will they be considered for purposes of determining setback in relation to sign area.
- d. *Marquee signs.*
- (i) Except as provided in paragraph (ii) of this subsection, signs may be placed on the vertical faces of a marquee provided no part of the sign shall project above or below the vertical faces of a marquee.
 - (ii) In Downtown Columbia, marquee signs may project below or above the vertical face of a marquee, provided a vertical clearance of eight feet is maintained between the bottom of the sign and the grade below. The horizontal clearance between a marquee and the curb line shall not be less than three feet.
- e. *Roof signs.* Single-faced signs shall be permitted on the front profile of a building provided that the top of the sign does not exceed the height of the building, as defined in the zoning regulations.
- f. *Tall building signs.*
- (i) In Downtown Columbia, buildings over 100 feet tall may have tall building signs to identify tenants or the building name.
 - (ii)

On a flat topped building, tall building signs shall be located between the top of the windows on the topmost floor and the top of the roof parapet or within an area 16 feet below the top of the roof parapet. On buildings with stepped or otherwise articulated tops, tall building signs may be located within an area 16 feet below the top of the building or within an area 16 feet below the top of the parapet of the main portion of the building below the stepped or articulated top. Tall building signs shall be located on a wall and may not be located on a roof, including a sloping roof, and may not block any windows.

- (iii) A building may have tall building signs and the area of all tall building signs is included in the computation of the building's allowed tall building sign area. If a building has tall building signs on two or more sides of the building, the signage on each side shall consist of the same combination of names or corporate logos, provided that the names and logos on the signs need not be identical in appearance.
 - (iv) The total area of all tall building signs allowed for any building shall be computed on the basis of one square foot of sign area for each linear foot of downtown building frontage. The area for tall building signs is not counted toward the total sign area of the building as calculated in subsection (c)(1)b. of this section.
- g. Monument building sign.** In Downtown Columbia, a monument building sign, including its structure, shall be no more than six feet in height. The maximum sign area for a monument building sign is 30 square feet per side or face. Monument building signs are exempt from setback requirements.
- (3) **Area.** Except as otherwise provided in this subtitle, the total area of all signs erected on the lot and building shall be within the allowable square footage as calculated in subsection (c)(1) of this section.
 - (4) **Content.** Signs allowed shall be identification signs only, as defined elsewhere in this subtitle.
 - (5) **Unimproved property.** Signs for businesses conducted on unimproved lots shall be allowed a total area for all signs not to exceed one-half square foot for each lineal foot of lot frontage or 150 square feet overall, whichever is smaller. Signs on unimproved property shall comply with all other restrictions of subsection [3.501\(c\)](#).
 - (6) **Shopping centers and industrial parks.** A freestanding identification sign, stating the name of the facility and the major tenants, shall be allowed. The maximum allowable area of the sign shall be determined independently from the sign area allowed under subsection [3.501\(c\)\(1\)](#) for building frontage, and it may be one square foot for each lineal foot of lot frontage or 200 square feet, whichever is smaller. If the facility has frontage on more than one public road, one such identification sign may be allowed for each frontage. The height of the sign shall not exceed 26 feet from the grade at the base of the sign; provided, however, an increase in height may be allowed not to exceed 40 feet from the grade at the base of the sign, if it can be shown to the Board of Appeals that excessive grade, building interference, bridge construction and the like exist.
 - (7) **Illumination.** Illumination shall be in accordance with the restrictions set forth in [section 3.508](#)
 - (8) **Commercial directional signs.** The provisions of this paragraph shall not apply in Downtown Columbia. Commercial directional signs may be permitted by a variance by the Board of Appeals subject to a finding by the Board that the directional sign or signs are necessary for the public convenience and are consistent with the intent and purposes of this subtitle. Such signs shall be located only at road intersections and shall be subject to the approval of the Director of Inspections, Licenses and Permits of Howard County, based on criteria that he shall establish for the design and location of such signs. All directional signs at a single intersection shall be consolidated in a single frame or, if necessary, in several such frames. The maximum allowable area of any such consolidated sign shall be 12 square feet, and no more than four such signs shall be permitted for any single business. The content of such signs shall be limited to the name of the business, the principal product or services offered, and directional information.
 - (9) **Downtown Columbia directional signs.** In Downtown Columbia, directional signs are allowed as follows and are not counted toward the total sign area of the building as calculated in subsection [3.501\(c\)\(1\)b.](#) of this subtitle. A plan coordinating the design and appearance of directional signs with respect to style, color, and font shall be approved as part of the Downtown Neighborhood Design Guidelines. Directional signs will conform to any applicable Downtown Neighborhood Design Guidelines.
 - a. Vehicular directional signs are allowed and may contain the neighborhood name or "Downtown Columbia" or logotype, generic uses (such as "parking", "library", "plaza", "shops", "hotel", "restaurants", "grocery", "theatre", etc.) and wording of a directional nature, or public service information (such as information concerning transit routes and schedules, transportation demand management activities, community events, weather, and similar information). These signs may be placed on private land or in the public right-of-way, and shall be designed to direct and inform drivers to allow expedient movement through Downtown Columbia. Potential locations for vehicular directional signs shall be

indicated on the neighborhood concept plan. Final locations shall be approved as part of a site development plan unless erected pursuant to subsection 3.503(a) or subsection 3.505a(b) of this subtitle. The area of these signs shall not exceed 18 square feet per side.

- b. Pedestrian directional signs are allowed and may contain the neighborhood name or "Downtown Columbia" or logotype, generic uses (such as "parking", "library", "plaza", "shops", "hotel", "restaurants", "grocery", "theatre", etc.) and wording of a directional nature, or public service information (such as information concerning transit routes and schedules, transportation demand management activities, community events, weather, and similar information). These signs may be placed on private land or in the public right-of-way, and shall be designed to direct and inform pedestrians. Potential locations for pedestrian directional signs shall be indicated on the neighborhood concept plan. Final locations shall be approved as part of a site development plan unless erected pursuant to subsection 3.503(a) or subsection 3.505a(b) of this subtitle. The area of these signs shall not exceed 18 square feet per side.
- c. Directory signs which contain specific retail or office tenant names and information, directional information, and/or public service information (such as information concerning transit routes and schedules, transportation demand management activities, community events, weather and similar information) are allowed. These signs may be placed on private land only. Potential locations may be indicated on the Neighborhood Concept Plan. Final locations shall be approved as part of a site development plan, unless erected pursuant to subsection 3.503(a) of this subtitle. The area of these signs shall not exceed 12 square feet per side.
- d. Site directional signs such as "entrance," "exit," "parking" etc., shall be allowed. Site directional signs shall not contain any message other than the directional text and may be placed on private land or in the public right-of-way. Each sign may contain an arrow or graphic to accentuate its message and the area of each sign shall not exceed six square feet.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 53, 1974; C.B. 36, 1976; C.B. 77, 1981; C.B. 42, 1985; C.B. 62, 1988; C.B. 90, 1989; C.B. 29, 2001, § 1; C.B. 56, 2010, § 2)

Editor's note—

Section 101 of C.B. 62, 1988, declared the bill effective July 1, 1989.

Sec. 3.502. - Signs permitted in all districts.

Subject to the other conditions of this subtitle, the following signs shall be permitted anywhere within the County:

- (a) *Construction Identification Signs.* One sign shall be permitted for identifying all building contractors, one sign for identifying all professional firms, and one sign for identifying all lending institutions on-sites under construction. Each sign shall not exceed 32 square feet, and no more than three signs shall be permitted on one site. Permits are not required when such signs are six square feet or smaller. The sign(s) shall be confined to the site of the construction, construction shed or trailer and shall be removed no later than 14 days after the completion of the project. Freestanding construction signs shall be exempt from the setback requirements of this subtitle applicable to freestanding signs.
- (b) *Real Estate Signs.*
 - (1) One temporary real estate sign not exceeding 32 square feet in area and located on the property shall be allowed for each lot, parcel or tract two acres or over. If the lot, parcel or tract has multiple frontages, one additional sign, not exceeding 32 square feet in area, shall be allowed in the property, to be placed facing the additional frontage. Under no circumstances shall more than a maximum of two signs be permitted on the property. Signs shall be removed within seven days of the sale. Freestanding temporary real estate signs shall be exempt from the setback requirements of this subtitle applicable to freestanding signs.
 - (2) One temporary subdivision identification sign not exceeding 64 square feet in area and located on the property shall be allowed for each development of ten lots or more. Freestanding temporary subdivision identification signs shall be exempt from the setback requirements of this subtitle applicable to freestanding signs. Signs shall be removed within seven days of the sale of the last lot in the subdivision.
 - (3) One temporary subdivision approach sign may be erected near each major intersection to the subdivision, with a maximum of four such signs permissible for any one subdivision. Each sign shall not be more than three feet long and one foot high. No illumination will be permitted, and such signs shall be no less than 15 feet from the nearest edge of the pavement nor less than 100 feet from the nearest curb intersection of any street or road.

The content of such signs shall be restricted to the name of the subdivision, the name of the developer and/or agent, or identification emblem, and a directional arrow. The top of such signs shall not exceed eight feet above grade. In the event that there is a need for more than one sign at any major intersection, all such signs must be consolidated and confined within a single frame, subject to the criteria established by the Director of Inspections, Licenses and Permits for commercial directional signs.

- (c) *Street Banners.*
- (1) Except as provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection, street banners advertising a public entertainment or event, specifically approved by the County Executive and in approved locations, may be displayed 14 days prior to and seven days after the public entertainment or event.
 - (2) Street banners promoting a historic district, public event or institution, not containing a commercial entity's name or logo, and specifically approved by the County Executive and in approved locations, may be displayed in a historic district for a period of 12 months. Renewals for displaying a banner must be approved by the County Executive.
- (d) *Window Signs.* There shall be no limit to the number of such signs; provided, however, that the total area of all window signs shall not exceed 20 percent of the window glass area, which shall be calculated separately for each side of the building. An additional 20 percent of the window area may be used on a temporary basis. An additional ten percent of the window area may be used on a temporary basis to advertise nonprofit activities.
- (e) *Permanent Identification Signs.*
- (1) Signs of a permanent nature setting forth the names of religious facilities, communities, subdivisions, apartments, schools, public/quasi-public institutions and neighborhoods shall be permitted and are exempt from the setback requirements established in subsection [3.501\(c\)\(2\)c](#). Illumination shall be in accordance with restrictions set forth in [section 3.508](#). Except as provided in paragraph (2), of this subsection, such signs shall not exceed 32 square feet in area or six feet in height. Signs that are in existence on November 2, 1981, identifying a subdivision, apartment, condominium, village or neighborhood, which have been inventoried by the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits by March 1, 1982, shall be permitted and shall be exempt from the provisions of subsection [3.505\(a\)\(5\)](#) of this subtitle. Within Downtown Columbia, potential locations of permanent identification signs shall be indicated on the Neighborhood Concept Plan. Final locations must be approved as part of a site development plan.
 - (2) Messages on Downtown Columbia identification signs and Downtown Columbia neighborhood identification signs shall be limited to the Downtown Columbia or neighborhood name. The maximum sign area for each Downtown Columbia and Downtown Columbia neighborhood identification sign is 32 square feet per side of the sign.
- (f) *Civic, Religious and Quasi-Public Signs.* Name, directional and informational signs, and emblems of service clubs, places of worship, civic organizations and quasi-public uses shall be permitted on private property. Each sign shall be not more than 15 square feet in area. The top of such sign shall not exceed eight feet above grade. Illumination shall be in accordance with the restrictions set forth in [section 3.508](#); and in the event that there is a need for more than one sign at one location, all such signs must be consolidated and confined within a single frame, subject to the review and recommendations of the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits.
- (g) *Farm Signs.* Signs displayed on any working farm by the owner or other operator for the purpose of advertising solely the products thereof shall be permitted. No single sign shall exceed 32 square feet in area. The total area of such signs shall not exceed 64 square feet.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 53, 1974; C.B. 77, 1981; C.B. 44, 1983; C.B. 34, 1985; C.B. 42, 1985; C.B. 62, 1988; C.B. 90, 1989; C.B. 17, 1995; C.B. 41, 2001, § 1; C.B. 56, 2010, § 2)

Editor's note—

[Section 101](#) of C.B. 62, 1988, declared the bill effective July 1, 1989.

Sec. 3.502A. - Digital displays in Downtown Columbia.

- (a) *Digital Displays.* In Downtown Columbia, digital displays are allowed notwithstanding any other provision of this subtitle subject to the requirements set forth in this section.
- (b) For digital displays programmed with changing images which identify or advertise a use, product, business or service that is conducted or available on the premises where the digital display is located:
- (1) The maximum size of each digital display shall not exceed 150 square feet;
 - (2) The sum of (i) the area of each proposed digital display and (ii) the total area of any existing or proposed signage shall not exceed the total sign area permitted by subsection [3.501\(c\)\(1\)b](#);
 - (3)

Each digital display shall display an image that changes no more frequently than every two minutes between 7:00 a.m. and 2:00 a.m. and shall be nonoperational or nonchanging at all other times. Changes of image shall be instantaneous as seen by the human eye, and shall not use blinking, flashing, scrolling, fading, rolling, shading, dissolving, or similar effects as part of the change;

- (4) The digital display shall not have audio;
 - (5) Each digital display shall be located below the roofline of a building;
 - (6) Except for government uses including public schools and colleges, each digital display shall be part of a downtown revitalization project;
 - (7) Each digital display must be at least 150 feet from a residence in a residential area where such sign would be prohibited;
 - (8) Each digital display must be equipped with automatic dimming capability that adjusts the luminance of the displayed information based on ambient light conditions so as to not exceed 5,000 NITs (candelas per square meter) during daylight hours and a maximum illumination of 500 NITs (candelas per square meter) between dusk to dawn as measured from the sign's face at maximum brightness. A written certification from the sign manufacturer that the light intensity of the digital display will be preset to conform to the brightness levels established by this code shall be required prior to approval;
 - (9) Each digital display shall be equipped with a default mechanism that will stop the messaging or freeze the image at 500 nits in one position when a malfunction in electronic programming occurs; and
 - (10) Each digital display must comply with all other provisions of this subtitle applicable to Downtown Columbia.
- (c) The Planning Board may approve a digital display that does not comply with the restrictions set forth in subsections 3.502A(b)(1), (2), (3), (4), or a digital display that has programming which includes identifying or advertising a use, product, business, or service that is not conducted or available on the premises where the digital display is located. The Planning Board shall consider the recommendation of the Design Advisory Panel as to the proposed sign and determine prior to the issuance of a permit by the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits that the following conditions will be met:
- (1) The requirements of paragraphs (5), (6), (7), (8), (9), and (10) of subsection 3.502A(b); and
 - (2) The digital display will not adversely affect the use or development of adjacent property;
 - (3) The digital display shall be well integrated into the architecture or design of the site and located and oriented in a manner such that the sign does not adversely impact any residential area adjacent to Downtown Columbia where such signs would be prohibited. In making this determination, the Planning Board must find that distance, intervening structures, topography, existing or proposed landscaping or adjustments to the standards provided for in subsection 3.502A(b)(7) or subsection 3.502A(b)(8) will assure a compatible relationship;
 - (4) The digital display shall be a size such that it is in scale with its setting and intended audience;
 - (5) The digital display will not cause a traffic or safety hazard;
 - (6) The digital display will not have a blighting influence as a result of a proliferation of such signs within a particular Downtown Columbia neighborhood;
 - (7) Each digital display that uses animation or changing images will incorporate technology that assures the image motion is smooth and avoids quick and frenetic changes of content; and
 - (8) Audio speakers used in connection with digital displays allowed by this subsection shall not be audible beyond the property on which the sign is located;
 - (9) The digital display will contribute to the overall vision of downtown revitalization;
 - (10) The digital display will conform to any applicable downtown neighborhood design guidelines;
 - (11) The digital display will provide public service or community enhancement programming reflective of the extent of the Planning Board's approval(s) under this subsection; and
 - (12) That the issuance of any permit for a digital display under this subsection shall be expressly conditioned on the continuing compliance with all of the requirements of this subsection and conditions set in the Planning Board's approval(s).

(C.B. 56, 2010, § 2)

Sec. 3.503. - Exemptions.

The following types of signs are exempt from all the provisions of this subtitle, except for construction and safety regulations and the following standards:

- (a) *Public Signs.* Signs of a noncommercial nature and in the public interest, erected by, or on the order of, a public officer in the performance of his public duty, such as directional signs, regulatory signs, warning signs and information signs.
- (b)

Temporary Signs. Temporary signs not larger than 32 square feet announcing any public, charitable, educational, or religious event may be placed on the property at which the event will take place. Temporary signs announcing the event may be placed at other locations provided that the total area of these signs on any residential lot shall not exceed six square feet and the total area of these signs on any commercial or industrial lot shall not exceed 32 square feet. Such signs shall be permitted to be erected within a County public road right-of-way except in an area designated as an historic district in a form no larger than six square feet and of materials prescribed by the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits solely upon the specific written approval of the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits in accordance with subsection [3.505a\(b\)](#), provided that no more than two such signs are erected at any one time at any one location, and that placement of the signs does not create a situation hazardous to pedestrian or vehicular traffic. Such signs shall be allowed no more than 21 days prior to the event and must be removed within seven days after the event. Such signs may be illuminated in accordance with the restrictions set forth in [section 3.508](#). If building mounted, these signs shall be flat wall signs and shall not project above the top of the wall. If ground mounted, the top shall be no more than 12 feet above ground level.

- (c) *Integral Signs.* Names of buildings, dates of erection, monumental citations, commemorative tablets and the like, when carved into stone, concrete or similar material or made of bronze, aluminum or other permanent type construction and made an integral part of the structure.
- (d) *Private Traffic Direction.* Signs directing traffic movement onto a premise or within a premise, not exceeding eight square feet in area for each sign. Illumination of these signs shall conform to [section 3.508](#), except that standard traffic signal light devices may be used if needed. Horizontal directional signs on and flush with paved areas are exempt from these standards.
- (e) *Real Estate Signs.*
 - (1) *Signs on private property.* Temporary real estate signs not exceeding six square feet in area located on the subject property and limited to one such sign for each frontage of a home, lot, parcel or tract under two acres in area. Signs shall be removed within seven days of the sale.
 - (2) *Signs on approach routes.* Temporary real estate directional signs, not exceeding three square feet in area and four in number, showing a directional arrow and placed back of the property line, shall be permitted on approach routes to an open house. These directional signs announcing an open house may be placed in the County right-of-way between the hours of 4:00 p.m. Friday and noon on the following Monday. When a holiday occurs on a Monday or Friday, the hours in which these signs may be placed in the County right-of-way shall be extended by 24 hours to include the holiday. A Police Officer may remove these signs if in the opinion of the Police Officer, the signs so placed constitute a hazard to traffic.
 - (3) *Height of real estate signs.* The top of any temporary real estate signs shall not exceed three feet in height, except crossbar post signs located on the property, the crossbar of which shall be limited to no higher than five feet above the ground.
- (f) *Political Campaign Signs.* Signs announcing candidates seeking public political office and other data pertinent thereto shall be permitted up to a total area of nine square feet for each premises in a residential district and 32 square feet in a commercial or industrial district. These signs shall be located only on private property and shall be no less than 15 feet from the nearest edge of the pavement and no less than 100 feet from the nearest curb intersection of any street or road. These signs may be displayed 60 days prior to and seven days after the election for which intended. In cases where a final election follows within 75 days of a primary election, those candidates who won in the primary election may continue to display their signs during the interim period and up to seven days after the final election.
- (g) *Single-Family Residential Name and Street Address Signs.* Two single-family residential name signs not exceeding two square feet each in area shall be permitted per single-family dwelling. Such signs shall be allowed on mailboxes, but shall otherwise be set back at least six feet from the nearest property line and shall not be over five feet above the ground, whether freestanding or on a building. Two street number signs not exceeding two square feet in area shall be allowed in any district. Such signs shall be allowed on mailboxes and over doorways but shall otherwise be set back at least six feet from the nearest property line, shall not be over five feet above the ground when freestanding, and shall not be over ten feet above ground on a building.
- (h) *Flags.* Flags of a nation, State, municipality, educational institution or noncommercial organization. In addition, any commercial or industrial use may display its corporate emblem in the form of a flag, provided that there is not more than one such flag on any parcel. In Downtown Columbia, flag poles shall not exceed the height of the building or 70 feet, whichever is less. Building wall mounted flag poles must comply with the projection criteria for "projecting signs" in Downtown Columbia. Each parcel shall be allowed a maximum of three flag poles.
- (i) *Vending/Dispensing Machines.* Permanent signs on vending machines, gas pumps or similar dispensing devices.
- (j)

Banners. One temporary banner no more than 32 square feet in area is permitted for 14 days to announce the grand opening of an establishment. In Downtown Columbia, permanent and temporary banners are allowed on private land and may be mounted on buildings, street lights, and similar pole-like structures subject to the following:

- (1) Permanent banners shall be mounted perpendicular to a building with permanent brackets and constructed of canvas or other durable awning type material. Permanent banners are counted toward the total sign area of the building as calculated in subsection [3.501\(c\)\(1\)b.](#) of this subtitle.
 - (2) Seasonal banners may be displayed for up to 90 days and do not count towards the total sign area of a building provided the banner does not identify any specific commercial business. Seasonal banners shall not exceed 16 square feet per side. Seasonal banners shall be coordinated as to size, style, and placement.
 - (3) Temporary banners may announce a grand opening, entertainment, or other event and do not count towards the total sign area of a building. Temporary banners shall be removed after 14 days.
- (k) *Small Construction Identification Signs.* Signs six square feet in area or smaller to identify building contractors, professional firms and lending institutions are permitted at construction sites provided there are no more than three such signs per site.
- (l) *Athletic Playing Field Banners.* An entity that operates and maintains an athletic playing field used by youth sports teams may display temporary banners on the fences of the field. The top of the banner shall not be over eight feet above the ground. Notwithstanding [section 3.508](#) of this subtitle, a banner shall not be illuminated. The banners may be displayed only:
- (1) Facing the inside of the field; and
 - (2) From March 1 through December 1.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 77, 1981; C.B. 44, 1983; C.B. 34, 1985; C.B. 90, 1989; C.B. 106, 1989; C.B. 8, 2008; C.B. 56, 2010, § 2)

Sec. 3.504. - Nonconforming signs.

- (a) *Removed Immediately.* The Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits shall order the removal of any sign erected or maintained in violation of the law as it existed prior to the date of the adoption of this subtitle; provided, however, that if such signs are redesigned or altered so as to conform to the law as it existed prior to the date of the adoption of this subtitle and a permit is applied for within 90 days of the effective date of this subtitle, these signs shall be regarded as nonconforming signs subject to the provisions of subsection (b) of this section. Removal shall be in accordance with subsection [3.511\(d\)](#).
- (b) *Permitted.* Other signs existing at the time of the enactment of this subtitle and not conforming to its provisions, but which did conform to previous laws, shall be regarded as nonconforming signs which may be continued if properly re-paired and maintained as provided in this subtitle, if in conformance with other laws of the County, and if not prohibited under [section 3.505](#) of this subtitle. Nonconforming signs which are structurally altered, relocated or replaced shall comply immediately with all provisions of this subtitle.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 77, 1981; C.B. 62, 1988)

Editor's note—

[Section 101](#) of C.B. 62, 1988, declared the bill effective July 1, 1989.

Sec. 3.505. - Prohibited signs.

- (a) *Removed Immediately.* The following signs are prohibited and shall be removed immediately in accordance with subsection [3.511\(d\)](#):
- (1) Signs which imitate an official traffic sign or signal or which contain the words "stop," "go slow," "caution," "danger," "warning," or similar words, except as provided in subsection [3.503\(d\)](#).
 - (2) Signs which are of a size, location, movement, content, coloring or manner of illumination which may be confused with or construed as a traffic-control device or which hide from view any traffic or street sign or signal or which obstruct the view in any direction at a street or road intersection.
 - (3) Signs which advertise an activity, business, product or service no longer produced or conducted on the premises upon which the sign is located. Where the owner or lessor of the premises is seeking a new tenant, such signs may remain in place for no more than 90 days from the date of vacancy.
 - (4) Except as otherwise provided by this subtitle, signs which contain or consist of pennants, ribbons, streamers, spinners, strings of light bulbs, or other similar or moving devices. These devices, when not part of any sign, are similarly prohibited. However, strings of lights which are used to display merchandise or for security purposes are exempt from this section and shall comply with [section 3.508](#) of this subtitle.

- (5) Signs which are placed on a County right-of-way, except signs permitted pursuant to [section 3.505A](#) of this subtitle.
 - (6) Signs which are posted or otherwise attached to utility poles or trees.
 - (7) Banners other than those permitted pursuant to this subtitle.
 - (8) Inflatable device signs in Downtown Columbia.
 - (9) Signs which are erected, constructed, or maintained so as to obstruct a fire escape, required exit, or a window or door opening used as a means of egress.
 - (10) In Downtown Columbia, any sign with an area of three square feet or more that is advertising a business, product or service on a vehicle, trailer, or cart parked in a prominent location to be seen from a public roadway with the intent to use the vehicle, trailer or cart as a sign.
- (b) *Removal within One Year.* Except as otherwise provided by this subtitle, the following signs are prohibited and shall be removed, if not made to conform with the provisions of this subtitle within one year of the adoption of this subtitle, in accordance with subsection [3.511\(d\)](#):
- (1) Signs which move in any manner or have a major moving part which gives an illusion of motion.
 - (2) Signs which are painted directly on the wall, exterior of a window or any other structural part of a building, unless the Board of Appeals shall grant a variance for such signs based on findings that they contribute significantly to the historical, architectural or aesthetic character in the area in which the sign is located.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 77, 1981; C.B. 44, 1983; C.B. 90, 1989; C.B. 56, 2010, § 2)

Sec. 3.505A. - Permitted signs in County rights-of-way.

- (a) *Signs Not Requiring Prior Approval (Signs in Rights-of-Way).* The following signs shall be allowed in the County rights-of-way without prior approval or permit:
Temporary real estate directional signs as specified in subsection [3.503\(e\)](#).
- (b) *Signs Requiring Prior Approval (Signs in Rights-of-Way).* The following signs shall be allowed in County rights-of-way provided that the sign is approved by the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits and that the Director of Inspections, Licenses and Permits issues a revocable permit conditioned upon removal of the sign upon the County's request, at no cost to the County:
 - (1) Projecting signs as set forth in subsection [3.501\(c\)\(2\)b.](#);
 - (2) Marquee signs as set forth in subsection [3.501\(c\)\(2\)d.](#);
 - (3) Directional signs as set forth in subsection [3.501\(c\)\(9\)](#);
 - (4) Tall building signs as set forth in subsection [3.501\(c\)\(2\)f.](#);
 - (5) Street banners as set forth in subsection [3.502\(c\)](#);
 - (6) Permanent identification signs as set forth in subsection [3.502\(e\)](#);
 - (7) Identification signs for residential apartment complexes and condominiums as set forth in subsection [3.501\(b\)\(4\)](#);
 - (8) Temporary subdivision directional signs as specified in subsection [3.502\(b\)\(3\)](#); and
 - (9) Temporary signs announcing public, charitable, educational, or religious events as set forth in subsection [3.503\(b\)](#).

(C.B. 44, 1983; C.B. 34, 1985; C.B. 62, 1988; C.B. 106, 1989; C.B. 56, 2010, § 2)

Editor's note—

C.B. 62, 1988, effective July 1, 1988, amended subsection (b) of this section but identified it as subsection (b) of [§ 3.507](#)

Sec. 3.506. - Human, animal or product form sign.

Signs which are shaped to resemble any human, animal or product form or any animation of any human, animal or product shall be permitted in commercial districts, commercial areas, in industrial districts, and in industrial areas, subject to all other requirements for signs in the district or area in which located. The sign shall be reviewed and approved by the Board of Appeals as consistent with the requirements, intent and purposes of this subtitle.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 77, 1981)

Sec. 3.507. - billboards.

- (a) *General.* Outdoor advertising structures, billboards and poster panels (referred to as billboards), which advertise products or businesses not connected with the site on which they are located, shall be permitted only as temporary uses on unimproved property in industrial or manufacturing districts. Erection of billboards may be authorized only by a special permit issued by the Board of Appeals. The

maximum period for which such permits may be issued is one year; and except for permits for billboards containing directional information to an historic site, such permits shall not be renewable. Permits for billboards providing directional information to an historic site may be renewed where the Board makes the determinations required under [section 3.513](#) of the Howard County Code.

- (b) *Location.* No billboard shall be closer than 100 feet to any property line, nor located closer than 660 feet to the right-of-way line of any highway which is part of the interstate highway system, nor closer than 200 feet to the right-of-way of any other street or road.
- (c) *Height.* No billboard shall be more than 20 feet in height from the ground level; provided, however, a variance in height may be allowed by the Board of Appeals, if it can be shown to the Board that excessive grades, building interference, bridge obstruction and the like exist, in which case the height may be increased to 40 feet.
- (d) *Area.* billboards may be single-face or double-face, but no billboard shall contain more than two signs or panels and shall not exceed in aggregate a total area of 500 square feet per facing.
- (e) *Illumination.* Illumination shall be in accordance with the restrictions set forth in [section 3.508](#)
- (f) *Removal.*
 - (1) *Illegal.* The Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits shall order the removal of any billboard erected or maintained in violation of law, as it existed prior to the date of adoption of this section, in accordance with subsection [3.511\(d\)](#); provided, however, that any billboard existing on the effective date of this subtitle shall be granted nonconforming status as provided in subsection [3.507\(f\)\(2\)](#), if within 90 days of the effective date of this subtitle, such billboard is redesigned or altered to comply with the law as it existed prior to the adoption of this subtitle.
 - (2) *Nonconforming.* Other billboards existing at the time, of enactment of this section and not conforming to its provisions, but which did conform to previous laws, shall be regarded as nonconforming billboards which may be continued, if properly repaired and maintained as provided in this section and if in conformance with other laws of the County. Nonconforming billboards which are structurally altered, relocated or replaced shall comply immediately with all provisions of this section.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 77, a 1981; C.B. 62, 1988; C.B. 65, 1989)

Editor's note—

[Section 101](#) of C.B. 62, 1988, declared the bill effective July 1, 1989.

Sec. 3.508. - Illumination.

- (a) *Shading.* The light from any illuminated sign or billboard or from any light source, including interior of a building, shall be so shaded, shielded or directed that the light intensity or brightness shall not adversely affect surrounding or facing premises nor adversely affect safe vision of operators of vehicles moving on public or private roads, highways or parking areas. Light shall not shine or reflect on or into residential structures.
- (b) *Blinking or Flashing.* Except as provided in [section 3.502A](#) of this subtitle, a sign shall not have blinking, flashing or fluttering lights or other illuminating devices which have a changing light operated as to create an appearance or illusion of writing or printing. A variance may be granted by the Board of Appeals for movement showing the date, the time and the temperature exclusively. Nothing contained in this section shall, however, be construed as preventing the use of lights or decorations related to religious and patriotic festivities. Beacon lights or search lights shall not be permitted as a sign for advertising purposes.
- (c) *Strobe and Incandescent Lamps.* No exposed reflective type bulbs and no strobe lights or incandescent lamps which exceed 15 watts shall be used on the exterior surface of any sign so as to expose the face of the bulb, light or lamp to any public street or adjacent property.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 77, 1981; C.B. 56, 2010, § 2)

Sec. 3.509. - Permits and fees.

- (a) *Permit Requirements.* No sign or billboard shall be erected, altered or relocated without a sign permit issued by the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits. Any sign or billboard involving electrical components shall be wired by a licensed electrician in accordance with the Howard County Electrical Code, and the electrical components used shall be in accordance with the Howard County Electrical Code.
- (b) *Applications.* The permit application shall be signed by the Applicant, and when the Applicant is any person other than the owner of the property, the permit application shall also be signed by the owner of the property or his authorized representative. It shall contain the location of the sign structure, the name and address of the sign owner and of the sign erector, drawings showing the design, dimensions and location of the sign, and such other pertinent information as the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits may require to ensure compliance with the laws of Howard County.

- (c) *Fees.* Fees for sign permits shall be as determined from time to time by resolution of the County Council. Such fees shall cover the cost of enforcing this section.
- (d) *Nullification.* A sign permit shall become null and void if the work for which the permit was issued has not been completed within a period of six months after the date of the permit. A permit may be renewed.
- (e) *Permit Exceptions.* The following operations shall not be considered as creating a sign or billboard and shall not require a sign permit:
 - (1) *Replacing copy.* The changing of the advertising copy or message on an approved painted or printed sign or on a theater marquee and similar approved signs which are specifically designed for the use of replaceable copy.
 - (2) *Maintenance.* Painting, repainting, cleaning and other normal maintenance and repair of a sign or a sign structure unless a structural change is made.
 - (3) *Nonilluminated exempt signs and window signs.* Signs exempt under [section 3.503](#) of this subtitle and window signs are also exempt from permit requirements, unless illuminated.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 77, 1981; C.B. 62, 1988)

Editor's note—

[Section 101](#) of C.B. 62, 1988, declared the bill effective July 1, 1989.

Sec. 3.510. - Structural requirements.

All signs and billboards shall comply with the pertinent requirements of the Howard County Building Code.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 47, 2000)

Sec. 3.511. - Inspection; removal; safety.

- (a) *Inspection.* Signs and billboards for which a permit is required shall be inspected annually by the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits for compliance with this subtitle and the other laws of Howard County.
- (b) *Tagging.* All signs and billboards requiring permits shall display, in a place conspicuous to inspectors, evidence of the sign permit supplied by the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits and containing such data as may be designated by the Department.
- (c) *Maintenance.* All signs and billboards and components thereof shall be kept in good repair and in safe, neat, clean and attractive condition.
- (d) *Removal of Signs.* The Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits shall order the removal of any sign or billboard erected or maintained in violation of this subtitle. Ten days' notice in writing shall be given to the owner of such sign, billboard or building, structure or premises on which such sign or billboard is located, to remove the sign or billboard or to bring it into compliance with this subtitle.

Upon failure to remove the sign or billboard or to comply with this notice, the Department shall remove the sign or billboard immediately and without notice, if it reasonably appears that the condition of the sign or billboard is such as to present an immediate threat to the safety of the public. Any cost of removal incurred by the Department shall be assessed to the owner of the property on which such sign or billboard is located and may be collected in the manner of ordinary debt or in the manner of taxes and such charge shall be a lien on the property.

If a sign or billboard is placed illegally in the County right-of-way or if it is in the County right-of-way at times other than those permitted by this subtitle, the Department may remove the sign or billboard without notice to the owner.

- (e) *Abandoned Signs.* A sign shall be removed by the owner or lessee of the premises upon which the sign is located when the business which it advertises is no longer conducted on the premises. If the owner or lessee fails to remove the sign, the Department shall order it, removed in accordance with subsection (d) above. These removal provisions shall not apply where a succeeding owner or lessee conducts the same type of business and agrees to maintain the signs as provided in this subtitle or changes copy on the signs to advertise the type of business being conducted on the premises, provided the signs comply with the other provisions of this section.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 77, 1981; C.B. 62, 1988; C.B. 90, 1989)

Editor's note—

[Section 101](#) of C.B. 62, 1988 declared the bill effective July 1, 1989.

Sec. 3.512. - Administration and penalties.

- (a) *Administration, Interpretation and Penalties.*

- (1) *Rules and regulations.* The Director of Inspections, Licenses and Permits may promulgate reasonable rules and regulations for the administration, enforcement and interpretation of this subtitle in accordance with the Howard County Administrative Procedure Act. These regulations shall provide for issuance of civil citations for violations of this subtitle without prior issuance of a notice of violation. The Director of Inspections, Licenses and Permits shall issue final interpretations of this subtitle.
- (2) *Right of entry.* Upon presentation of the proper credentials, the Director or the Director's duly authorized representative may enter at reasonable times any building, structure or premises in Howard County to perform any duty imposed upon the Director by this subtitle.
- (b) *Rights of Appeal and Variances.* Upon denial of a sign permit by the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits, or to request a variance, a sign owner or owner of property on which a sign is located or for which a sign is requested may file an appeal or request for variance with the Board of Appeals within 30 days of the date of the Department's action. The Board of Appeals shall be authorized to hear such appeal or request for variance, in accordance with [section 3.513](#). The appeal or request for variance shall be in writing in the form required by the Board of Appeals.
- (c) *Penalties.*
 - (1) *Criminal penalties.* Any person who violates this subtitle shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction shall be subject to a fine of not less than \$250.00 nor more than \$500.00.
 - (2) *Civil penalties.* Alternatively or in addition to and concurrent with all other remedies, the provisions of this subtitle may be enforced pursuant to the provisions of [title 24](#), "civil penalties," of the Howard County Code. A violation of subsection [3.503\(e\)\(2\)](#) shall be a Class E offense; any other violation of this subtitle shall be a Class C offense. Each day that a violation continues shall be a separate offense.
 - (3) *Other remedies.* In addition to and concurrent with all other remedies, the Director or the Director's duly authorized representative may seek civil relief in a court of competent jurisdiction. Such relief shall include but not be limited to injunctive relief.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 77, 1981; C.B. 32, 1985; C.B. 82, 1988; C.B. 90, 1989)

Editor's note—

[Section 101](#) of C.B. 62, 1988, declared the bill effective July 1, 1989.

Sec. 3.513. - Variances.

- (a) *Variances Not Permitted.* Variances for signs prohibited by [section 3.505](#) of the subtitle may not be granted.
- (b) The Board of Appeals may grant variances outside of Downtown Columbia from the provision of this subtitle where the following determinations are made:
 - (1) That there are unique physical conditions or exceptional topographical conditions peculiar to the property on which the proposed sign is to be located, including the location of existing buildings and other structures, irregularity, narrowness or shallowness of the lot, irregularity of the road right-of-way, location on a highway that has a dependency on nonlocal use, which conditions lead to practical difficulty and unnecessary hardship in complying strictly with the provisions of this subtitle; or
 - (2) That there are obstructions, such as excessive grade, building interference, structures or landscaping on abutting property or properties which seriously interfere with the visibility of a proposed sign, resulting in practical difficulties and unnecessary hardship in complying strictly with the provisions of this subtitle; or
 - (3) That there are historical, architectural or aesthetic characteristics which shall be considered; and
 - (4) That the variance, if granted, will not adversely affect the appropriate use or development of adjacent properties, nor result in a dangerous traffic condition; and
 - (5) That the requested variance is the minimum necessary to afford relief, and can be granted without substantial impairment of the intent, purpose and integrity of this subtitle; and
 - (6) That such practical difficulties or hardships have not been created by the Applicant; provided, however, that where required findings pursuant to [section 3.513](#) are made, the purchase or lease of the property on which a proposed sign is to be located subject to the restrictions sought to be varied shall not itself constitute a self-created hardship.
- (c) In Downtown Columbia, the Planning Board may approve a variance from the provisions of this subtitle where the proposed signage is approved by the Planning Board and the Board determines that:
 - (1) The proposed signage is otherwise allowed;
 - (2) The proposed signage is appropriate given its location and the anticipated scale and intensity of existing or planned adjacent uses;
 - (3) The proposed signage will not adversely affect the use or development of adjacent property, nor result in a dangerous traffic condition;

- (4) The proposed signage will not be detrimental to the downtown revitalization; and
- (5) Extraordinary hardships or practical difficulties may result from strict compliance with this subtitle or that the goals of downtown revitalization will be served to a greater extent by the proposed sign.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 77, 1981; C.B. 56, 2010, § 2)

Sec. 3.514. - Definitions.

- (a) *Area* means the sum of display surfaces, that are enclosed by a standard geometric figure, the sides of which make contact with the extreme points or edges of the sign, excluding the supporting structure which does not form part of the sign proper or of the display. The area of a freestanding sign shall be the area of the largest single face. In the case where there is more than one sign on the structure, the area shall include the aggregate area of all signs on the face. Where printed or graphic information identifying or advertising a use is displayed within a larger graphic representation such as a mural, painting, or other noncommercial artwork, area includes only the area within the smallest standard geometric figure or figures that can surround the printed or graphic or both, printed and graphic, information identifying or advertising the use.
- (b) *Banner* means a strip of cloth, canvas, plastic sheet, cardboard or similar flexible lightweight material with lettering or graphics on it.
- (c) *Billboards* means outside structures which advertise products or businesses not connected with the site on which they are located.
- (d) *Department* means the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits.
- (e) *Digital display* means a device or technology for the electronic display of information identifying or advertising a use, product, business or service including text, images, video, animation or motion of images, and interactivity and includes technologies such as LED, LCD, plasma displays, projected images and other emerging display types.
- (f) *Director* means the Director of the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits, or that person's designee.
- (g) *Downtown building frontage* means each linear segment of a building perimeter located within Downtown Columbia which adjoins a private street, public right-of-way, Downtown Community Commons, or Downtown Parkland.
- (h) *Downtown Columbia* means that area defined as "Downtown Columbia" in the Howard County Zoning Regulations.
- (i) *Downtown Columbia neighborhood* means each of the six neighborhoods described in the Downtown Columbia Plan: (Warfield, the mall, the Lakefront and Lakefront Core, the Crescent, Merriweather-Symphony Woods and Symphony Overlook).
- (j) *Downtown revitalization* shall have the meaning set forth in [section 103](#) of the Howard County Zoning Regulations.
- (k) *Industrial park* means a tract of land ten acres or more in area that has been planned, developed and operated as an integrated facility for a number of individual industrial uses with special attention to circulation, parking, utility needs, aesthetics and compatibility.
- (l) *Inflatable device sign* means a sign that is cold air inflated made of flexible fabric, resting on the ground or attached to a structure and equipped with a portable blower motor that provides a constant flow of air into the device. *Inflatable device signs* may be restrained, attached, or held in place by a cord, rope, cable or similar method. An *inflatable device sign* is not an object that contains helium, hot air or lighter-than-air substance.
- (m) *Marquee* means a canopy or roof-like shelter attached to and supported by a building wall.
- (n) *Person* means any individual, corporation, association, firm, partnership and the like, singular or plural.
- (o) *Projection* means the distance by which a sign extends over public property or beyond the building line.
- (p) *Shopping center* means a shopping center shall be as defined in the zoning regulations.
- (q) Reserved.
- (r) *Sign* means a placard or structure containing graphic or printed information for identifying or advertising a use conducted on the premises where on such placard or structure is located. Sign shall include all exterior signs and all interior window signs.
- (s) *Sign, electric* means any sign, containing electric wiring. This does not include signs illuminated by an exterior flood light source.
- (t) *Sign, identification* means any sign which carries only the name of the firm, the major enterprise or the principal product offered for sale on the premises, or other graphic or printed information relevant to the business conducted on the property where the sign is located.
- (u) *Sign, monument building* means a sign where the entire base or bottom of the sign is ground-mounted.
- (v) *Sign, projecting* means a sign, other than a wall sign, which projects from and is supported by a wall of a building or structure.
- (w) *Sign, roof* means a sign located on or above the roof of any building.

- (x) *Sign, tall building* means a sign that is located near the top of a building over 100 feet tall that identifies tenants of the building or the building name.
- (y) *Sign, temporary* means a banner, pennant, poster or advertising display constructed of cloth, canvas, plastic sheet, cardboard, wallboard or other like materials and intended to be displayed for a limited period of time.
- (z) *Sign, wall, flat* means one affixed directly to the exterior wall or screening surface, confined within the limits thereof, and which projects from the surface less than 12 inches at all points.
- (aa) *Wall* means any vertical construction enclosing occupiable space.
(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 77, 1981; C.B. 62, 1988; C.B. 90, 1989; C.B. 56, 2010, § 2)
Editor's note—

Section 101 of C.B. 62, 1988, declared the bill effective July 1, 1989.

Sec. 3.515. - Historic districts.

Whenever an application for a sign permit is filed under these regulations for the erection of a sign in any area of Howard County classified as an "historic district," the application shall be subject to the approval of the Historic District Commission as well as the required approval of the Department of Licenses, Inspections and Permits.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 53, 1974)

Sec. 3.516. - Signs in Downtown Columbia; compliance and compatibility.

- (a) *Downtown Revitalization*. A sign proposed to be placed on property subject to an approved downtown revitalization final development plan shall comply with this subtitle and with Planning Board approved downtown neighborhood design guidelines for signage as determined by the Director in consultation with the Director of the Department of Planning and Zoning.
- (b) *Other Properties in Downtown Columbia*. A sign proposed to be placed on property in Downtown Columbia that is not subject to a downtown revitalization final development plan shall comply with this subtitle and shall be compatible in form, proportion, scale, color, materials, surface treatment, overall sign size, and the size and style of the lettering with the surrounding streetscape, adjacent structures, and the goals of downtown revitalization. Such compatibility determination shall be made by the Director in consultation with the Director of the Department of Planning and Zoning with reference to the Downtown Columbia Downtown-Wide Design Guidelines and any existing Downtown Neighborhood Design Guidelines for signage for the neighborhood in which the sign is to be placed.

(C.B. 56, 2010, § 2)

Sec. 3.517. - Severability.

If any clause, sentence, part or parts of this subtitle, or of any section thereof, shall be held unconstitutional or invalid, such unconstitutionality or invalidity shall not affect the validity of the remaining parts of this subtitle or of any section thereof. The County Council hereby declares that it would have passed the remaining parts of the subtitle or any section thereof if it had known such clause, sentence, part or parts of any section thereof should be declared invalid or unconstitutional.

(C.B. 1, 1972; C.B. 56, 2010, § 2)

Editor's note—

C.B. 56, 2010, § 2, adopted Mar. 15, 2010, renumbered § 3.516 as § 3.517, no other changes were made to the section.