

Town of Thetford Sign Ordinance

1. Authority, Purpose, and Applicability

This Ordinance is adopted by the Town of Thetford Vermont, under authority of 24 V.S.A. §§ 2291(7), (14), and (15), and 24 V.S.A. Chapter 59.

The purpose and intent of this Ordinance is to provide comprehensive and balanced sign regulations. These will include the preservation of the right of free speech and expression; avoid excessive levels of visual clutter or distraction that are potentially harmful to traffic and pedestrian safety, property values, business opportunities, and community appearance; and ensure that signs and other advertising structures, together with all of their supports, braces, hooks, guys and anchors, shall be of substantial and sturdy construction, and shall be maintained in good condition and repair.

Nothing in this ordinance is intended to prohibit the normal maintenance and repair of such signs.

2. Compliance

No sign shall hereafter be located, erected, moved, reconstructed, extended, enlarged, converted, or structurally altered without conformance to the provisions of this Ordinance and a sign permit, unless exempted from sign permit requirements. All signs to be erected in conjunction with a new site plan or a change in site plan shall be subject to Zoning Administrator review. No sign other than official street signs or traffic directions shall be erected or maintained within the road right-of-way. No sign shall be placed in such a position as to endanger motor vehicle or pedestrian traffic or obscure or otherwise cause confusion with official street or highway signs or signals. No sign that is considered a billboard according to the Vermont 1968 legislation that banned such signs may be erected in Thetford.

Off-premises Directional Signs may be permitted by the Zoning Administrator for conditional use. Such Directional Signs shall be used solely to direct persons to premises in the Town of Thetford and shall contain no advertising other than the name of the premises to which the directions relate. There shall be no more than two (2) Directional Signs to any premises and there shall be no more than one (1) Directional Sign on any one lot.

No Directional Sign shall be located within fifty (50) feet of another Directional Sign.

See 10 V.S.A. § 489 and 10 V.S.A. § 484. Applications for Official Business Directory Signs (OBDS):

<https://vtrans.vermont.gov/sites/aot/files/highway/documents/highway/SignsOBDSApplicationPackage.pdf>

No sign deemed as potentially harmful to traffic and/or pedestrian safety shall be located within or over the right-of-way of a public road.

Signs shall not be erected, attached, or maintained upon light poles or utility poles.

3. Existing Non-conforming Signs

- a. **Existing Signs** - Signs lawfully existing at the time of the adoption or amendment of this Ordinance may be continued although the size or location does not conform with the provisions of this Ordinance.
- b. **Involuntary Change** - A non-conforming sign may be relocated on a lot if the relocation is involuntary. Involuntary relocation is any relocation caused by street widening or other local, state or federal activity beyond the control of the property owner.
- c. **Other Change** - When a business or other use changes necessitate a new sign structure, the sign shall be brought into conformance with the provisions of this Ordinance, including an application for a sign permit.

4. Exemptions

The following signs are exempt from the regulations contained in this Ordinance:

- a. **A Sign Posted** by the Town of Thetford or a County, State, or Federal agency.
- b. **A Sign Integrated** into or on an automatic teller machine, coin-operated machine, or vending machine.
- c. **A Sign Carried** by a person.
- d. **A Sign Not Visible** from any public street, highway, sidewalk, bicycle path, or park.
- e. **Street Addresses and Numbers.**
- f. **Murals and other works of art** that are not related by logo, pictorial depiction, or other means to the advertisement of any product or service or the identification of any business.
- g. **While Non-Commercial** signs placed by the owner of a residential property on that property are generally exempted, the Town reserves the right to control such signs if size and prominence constitute a distraction potentially harmful to traffic and pedestrian safety.
- h. **Unlighted signs** not exceeding two (2) square feet in area or smaller including those bearing property numbers, post box numbers, or names of occupants of premises, with the exception of the **Thetford Hill Historic Preservation Overlay.**
- i. **Legal Notices** and identification, informational, warning or directional signs displayed in response to government regulations or requirements, or informational signs on government buildings that identify the building.
- j. **Small Signs Without Advertising** displayed for the direction, instruction or convenience of the public, including signs which identify restrooms, posted areas, parking lots, or the like, with an area not exceeding two (2) square feet, provided such signs are on the premises of the activity served by the sign.

- k. **One “Open” or “Welcome”** banner or flag per entry, provided that such sign has no other wording or logos, is less than fifteen (15) square feet in area, and is used in conjunction with a permitted non-residential use.
- l. **Signs to be maintained** for not more than four (4) weeks erected by fairs or expositions or signs announcing a garage sale, yard sale or auction, or an event of a civic, political or philanthropic service, or religious organization. These signs may be located off-premise with the permission of the landowner.
- m. **Temporary Signs advertising the sale of seasonal produce or agricultural products**, not exceeding twelve (12) square feet in area. ‘Temporary’ in the case of seasonal produce or agricultural products shall be interpreted to mean ten (10) months or less.
- n. **Temporary Signs advertising the sale of property** on which the sign is located, not exceeding six (6) square feet in area. ‘Temporary’ in the case of property sale(s) shall be interpreted to mean ten (10) months or less.
- o. **Contractor/Construction Signs** under 16 square feet.

5. Permit Procedures

No sign shall hereafter be located, erected, moved, reconstructed, extended, enlarged, converted, or structurally altered without a sign permit except those signs exempted in this Ordinance, and all signs shall fully conform with the provisions of this Ordinance.

A sign shall not be allowed for a non-residential property if the property or use on the property for which the sign relates is in violation of the Thetford Land Use Regulations or has not yet received local final approvals and permits. The fee for such a Sign Permit shall be payable with the application.

- a. Applications for a Sign Permit shall be made on forms provided by the Zoning Administrator and shall include the following information:
 - i. Name, address, and telephone number of the applicant and property owner.
 - ii. Location of the building, structure, or lot upon which the sign is to be attached or erected.
 - iii. Name of the person, firm, corporation, or association erecting the sign.
 - iv. Written consent of the owner or lessor of the building, structure, or lot upon which the sign is to be affixed. No written consent is required if the property owner is the applicant.
 - v. A scale drawing or image of the sign, including colors to be used. A written description of the drawing shall also be submitted, including a detailed description of the materials, colors, and letter height, type, and style to be used; the sign dimensions; the type of illumination, if any; and the method of construction and attachment.
 - vi. A scale drawing or image of the site indicating the location and position of the sign in relation to nearby buildings and structures, existing signs on the site, and abutting public streets, parks, and public rights-of-way.

- vii. A description of any existing signs that will remain on the site.
 - viii. Copies of any other permits required and issued for the sign.
 - ix. Any additional information as may be required by the Zoning Administrator.
- b. Sign Permit Applications shall be filed with the Zoning Administrator.
The Zoning Administrator shall review the application for its completeness and accuracy and approve or deny, in writing, the application within 20 working days of receipt of a complete application. When reviewing a sign permit application, the Zoning Administrator shall consider the following:
- i. The location, appearance, material, lighting, height, and size of the proposed sign and supporting structure in relation to the site and surrounding uses.
 - ii. The safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicle operators on adjoining streets and highways, and the rights of abutting property owners to enjoy their properties.
 - iii. Adherence to the stipulations of Thetford's sign ordinance.
- c. Authorization to Exceed Size or Height Restriction.
The Zoning Administrator may authorize installation of a sign that exceeds the applicable size or height restrictions by up to 20 percent of the maximum size or height prescribed by this chapter after determining that:
- i. The sign owner or user has demonstrated the existence of practical difficulties in complying with this Ordinance;
 - ii. A unique circumstance exists that makes compliance with the requirements of this Ordinance impractical;
 - iii. the modification is in conformity with the purposes of this Ordinance; and
 - iv. the modification does not lessen public safety requirements.
- The Zoning administrator shall record the details of a modification authorized under this section in the Town files.
- d. Time to Construct.
A sign permit shall become null and void if work authorized under the permit has not been completed within twelve (12) months of the date of issuance. The Zoning Administrator may approve extensions of up to twelve (12) months based on a written request from the applicant.
- e. Appeals.
Any person aggrieved by any action of the Zoning Administrator may appeal such action, or refusal to act, to the Development Review Board. Such appeal shall be lodged with the Development Review Board within fifteen (15) days of the Zoning Administrator's action or refusal to act, and shall be accompanied by an appeal fee. The fee for such appeal shall be the same as for appeals of actions of the Zoning Administrator to the Development Review Board pursuant to the Town of Thetford Zoning Bylaws. The hearing shall be held at the time and place set by the Chairman of the Development

Review Board but no sooner than seven (7) days, nor later than thirty (30) days, after public notice of such hearing has appeared in a newspaper having general circulation in the Town.

The Development Review Board may make such order or take such action, including the issuance of a permit or the revocation of same as is consistent with this Ordinance and/or **24 V.S.A. § 4470**. The Development Review Board may adopt rules governing the conduct of such hearings, and if such rules are adopted, it shall cause a copy thereof to be furnished to each applicant at the time that the appeal is taken.

6. Sign Dimensions & Allowances

The area of a sign face shall be computed by means of the smallest square, circle, rectangle, triangle or combination thereof that will encompass the extreme limits of the writing, emblem, or other display, together with any material or color forming an integral part of the background of the display or used to differentiate the sign from the back drop. This calculation does not include the structure against which it is placed, supporting framework, bracing, or decorative fence or wall clearly incidental to the display itself.

The height of a sign shall be computed as the distance from the base of the sign at normal grade to the top of the highest attached component of the sign. Normal grade shall be the lower of (1) existing grade prior to construction, or (2) the newly established grade after construction, exclusive of any filling, berming, mounding or excavating solely for the purpose of locating the sign.

Lighting & Movement:

- a. No flashing or moving signs or signs with visible moving parts or intermittent lighting to create the visual effect of movement are permitted. This includes forced air or mechanically activated signs.
- b. Illuminated signs which direct light or glare into the sky, onto a public or private right of way or onto adjoining properties are not allowed.
- c. No business sign shall be illuminated for more than one hour after the business closes for the night.
- d. However, signs including, but not limited to: 24 hour fuel pumps, ATM's, or EV charging stations may remain illuminated during the time(s) they are operational for the safety of customers.
- e. Neon, tubular, and LED signs are permitted when they are located within the building and are visible through a window.

7. Types of Signs

- a. Building Signs
 - i. Building signs shall protrude no more than twelve (12) inches from the wall upon which it is mounted and may not extend above the eaves of that part and side of the building to which the sign is attached.
 - ii. There is no maximum square footage for building signs that are flush with the wall of the building.
- b. Free-standing Signs
 - i. The maximum height of a free-standing sign shall be twenty (20) feet.
 - ii. A property that has no road frontage but has an easement or right-of-way for access to a road may place a free-standing sign within that easement or right-of-way.
 - iii. The maximum sign area for a free-standing sign advertising one business is thirty-two (32) square feet. The maximum sign area for a free-standing sign advertising more than one business located on the property served by the sign is sixty-four (64) square feet.
- c. Projecting Signs

No projecting sign and supporting structure shall be less than nine (9) feet above walking levels, project more than five (5) feet out from a building as measured at the point of mounting, or project higher than the highest peak of the roof. Canopy signs, soffit signs, roof signs, awning signs, marquee signs, and wall signs that protrude more than twelve (12) inches from the wall upon which it is mounted shall all be considered projecting signs.
- d. Appendage Signs
 - i. One or more sign appendages are allowed for each free-standing sign.
 - ii. The area of the sign face on an appendage sign shall not exceed two (2) square feet.
- e. Sandwich Board Signs
 - i. Sandwich board signs may be double-sided with not more than nine(9) square feet per side.
 - ii. Sandwich board signs shall be located on, directly in front of a parcel, or at the closest road intersection and are not subject to normal setback requirements. A property that has no road frontage but has an easement or right-of-way for access to a road may place a sandwich board sign within that easement or right-of-way.
 - iii. They shall be located so as not to interfere with pedestrian or vehicular circulation and safety.
- f. Portable signs
 - i. Portable signs shall meet the height and location requirements of free-standing signs as provided for in subsections 7.b.1 and 7.b.3.
 - ii. Portable signs shall not be in place longer than twelve (12) months. If they are, they shall be considered a free-standing sign.
- g. Canopy, Awning, Marquee Signs

These signs shall be considered projecting signs.

- h. Notwithstanding the other provisions of this Ordinance, the following shall apply:
- i. Subdivisions or Housing Projects
Subdivisions or housing projects may have one free-standing sign for identification purposes. Such sign shall not exceed thirty two (32) square feet.
 - ii. Home Occupations
For home occupations, one sign of not more than sixteen (16) square feet is permitted on the premises.
 - iii. Contractor/Construction Signs
 1. One contractor's sign may be displayed provided it is located on the lot where the construction is taking place and the sign is removed within two weeks of completion of construction or cessation of work. Winter shutdowns shall not constitute cessation of work provided work has commenced again by the June following the winter shutdown.
 2. Only contractor's signs that exceed sixteen (16) square feet shall require a sign permit.

8. Enforcement & Penalties

Prior to the issuance of a Municipal Violation Complaint, the Zoning Administrator shall issue a written Notice of Violation to the alleged offender. This written notice may be sent regular mail or hand delivered and shall state the offense and allow the defendant one hundred and eighty (180) days to remedy the violation and comply with this Ordinance without penalty.

- a. Each subsequent month that a property owner neglects or refuses to comply with the provisions of this ordinance shall be a violation. A violation of this ordinance shall be a civil matter which may be enforced in accordance with the provisions of 24 VSA §1974a and §1977 and as described herein. The Zoning Administrator shall be authorized to act as the Issuing Municipal Official to issue and pursue a municipal complaint.
- b. Once the Zoning Administrator has determined that a violation exists, the ZA shall issue a Notice of Violation before issuing a municipal complaint for a first offense of this ordinance in any calendar year. Said Notice shall include, as a minimum, the following:
 - i. The date the violation was first observed.
 - ii. The nature of the violation.
 - iii. What needs to be done to remedy the violation.
 - iv. The date by which the violation must be remedied.
 - v. Notification that if the violation is not cured by the date set forth in item iv, then a Vermont Municipal Complaint ticket may be issued or the Selectboard may seek injunctive relief.
 - vi. The fines and waiver fees associated with the ticket.

vii. Notification of the violator's right to appeal.

If a violator fails to remedy the violation by the date specified in the Notice of Violation, fails to appeal the Zoning Administrator's Notice of Violation, or if the Development Review Board (DRB) decides that a violation exists, the Zoning Administrator shall either:

- a. Issue a Vermont Municipal Complaint with a civil penalty of one hundred dollars (\$100) per month, subsequent to the one hundred and eighty (180) day interval period for remediation and/or removal.
- b. The Zoning Administrator, with Selectboard approval and on its behalf, shall enforce this matter pursuant to 24 VSA Ch. 59 and commence civil action against the sign owner to obtain injunctive and other appropriate relief or to pursue any other remedy authorized by law.

9. Administration

- a. **Liability for Loss by the Town Due to Violation.** Any Person violating any of the provisions of this Ordinance shall become liable to the Town for any expense, loss, or damage occasioned by the Town, including reasonable legal expenses, by reason of such offense.
- b. **Severability.** If any section of this ordinance is held by a court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid, such findings shall not invalidate any other part of this ordinance.
- c. **Date of Enactment.** Duly enacted and ordained by the Selectboard of the Town of Thetford, Orange County, State of Vermont, on this ___th day of _____, 20___, at a duly warned and duly held meeting of said Selectboard.
- d. **Effective Date.** This ordinance shall become effective 60 days after its adoption by the Selectboard. If a petition is filed under **24 V.S.A. § 1973**, that statute shall govern the taking effect of this ordinance.

10. Other Laws

This Ordinance is in addition to all other ordinances of the Town of Thetford and all applicable laws of the State of Vermont. All ordinances or parts of ordinances, resolutions, regulations, or other documents inconsistent with the provisions of this Ordinance are hereby repealed to the extent of such inconsistency.

11. Definitions

Appendage Sign

An appendage to a sign which is of a temporary nature or changes on a regular basis and which is incorporated into or under a permanent sign. An appendage is that which is attached as if by being hung on, a subsidiary adjunct or addition to, a sign.

Awning, Canopy, or Marquee Sign

A sign that is mounted to, or painted on, or attached to an awning, canopy, or other fabric, plastic, or structural protective cover over a door, entrance, window, or outdoor service area.

Banner Sign

A temporary sign composed of cloth, canvas, plastic, fabric, or similar lightweight, non-rigid material that can be mounted to a structure with cord, rope, cable, or similar method or that may be supported by stakes in the ground. Banners attached to fences shall be considered wall signs.

Commercial Message

Any sign wording, logo or other representation that, directly or indirectly names, advertises, or calls attention to a business, product, service or other commercial activity.

Contractor/Construction Sign

A temporary sign that gives the name of the principal contractor(s) responsible for the construction on the site where the sign is placed, together with other information included thereon.

Electronic Message Sign

A sign whose message is electrically activated.

Fascia Sign

A sign that is mounted or painted on, or attached to, the flat horizontal surface piece of a building typically located directly above the front door, and sometimes referred to as a signboard or nameplate.

Forced Air-Activated Sign

A sign, all or any part of, which is designed to be moved by action of forced air so as to make the sign appear to be animated or otherwise have motion.

Flag Sign

Devices generally made of flexible materials, such as cloth, paper, or plastic, and supported by a single vertical pole mounted into the ground or on a portable structure. They may or may not contain sign copy.

Freestanding Sign

Any sign which is supported by structures or supports in or upon the ground and independent from any building. Freestanding signs include ground signs, pylon signs, monument signs, and signs less than four feet in height supported by a single pole or post.

Ground Sign

A low sign independent from any building that is in contact with or in close proximity to the ground and usually supported by posts or pillars on the sides and/or a structural base.

Illuminated Sign

Any sign which has characters, letters, figures, designs, or outlines illuminated, either internally or externally, by electric lights or luminous tubes.

Incidental Sign

A sign, generally informational, that has a purpose secondary to the use of the lot on which it is located, such as "no parking," "entrance," and other similar directives.

Menu Board Sign

A permanently mounted sign displaying the foods, products, or services for a drive-through or walk-up facility.

Movable Sign

A sign that is not permanently attached to the ground or attached to a building or structure, and which is removed and stored inside daily.

Mural

A picture painted on an exterior surface of a structure. Murals may include graphics, design, or text.

Murals shall be allowed on any building in areas zoned as Village Residential or Business/Commercial with permission from the building owner.

Non-commercial Sign

Signs that do not advertise any commercial product, service, or event.

Non-Conforming Sign

A sign that does not conform to the requirements of this ordinance.

Pole Sign

Any freestanding sign composed of a sign cabinet, backboard, frame or base and the sign pole, or pylon, by which it connects to the ground and is detached from any building or structure.

Portable/Movable Sign

A sign that can be moved, and is not permanently attached to the ground by a pole or structure. A movable sign includes but is not limited to sandwich or A-frame signs (e.g., a sign mounted on wheels or trailers or a sign mounted on a vehicle if that vehicle is located primarily for display).

Projecting Sign

A sign that is wholly or partly dependent upon a building for support and which projects more than 12 inches from such building.

Pylon Sign

A freestanding sign permanently affixed to the ground by one or more supports so that the bottom edge of the sign face is eight feet or more above the ground. A pylon sign includes a sign supported by a single pole, also referred to as a "pole sign."

Real Estate Sign

A temporary sign advertising the sale, lease or rental of the property or premises upon which it is located.

Roof Sign

A sign mounted on the main roof portion of a building, and which is wholly dependent upon the building for support.

Sandwich Board Sign

A portable sign, typically constructed or shaped in the form of the letter "A" that generally advertises daily restaurant menus, retail sales or other short-term activities.

Shopping Center/Plaza

A group of commercial establishments planned, constructed, and managed as a unified entity that share a common on-site parking area for customers and employees, with provision for goods delivery separated from customer access, and with aesthetic considerations and protection from the elements.

Sign

Any object, device, display, structure, or part thereof which is designed to advertise, announce, direct, identify, or inform by any means, including words, letters, figures, designs, symbols, fixtures, colors, illumination, or projected images.

Signage

A commercial or non-commercial message by means of graphic presentation or alphabetic or pictorial symbols or representations.

Sign Copy

The message or advertisement and any other symbols on the face of a sign.

Sign Face

The area or display surface used for the message on a sign.

Soffit Sign

A sign hung from and within an overhang, which is attached to a building or structure and which covers a walkway serving the building or structure.

Temporary Sign

A sign that is in place for ten (10) months or less.

Vehicle or Trailer Sign

A sign permanently or temporarily attached to or placed on a vehicle or trailer and used primarily as a stationary sign.


Wall Sign


A sign fastened to or painted on the wall of a building or structure in such a manner that the wall becomes the supporting structure for, or forms the background surface of, the sign. This definition includes signs located on a parapet wall of a building and signs composed of individual letters, numbers, or symbols.


Window Sign

A sign that is applied, painted, or attached to the exterior or interior of a window or located in such manner within the building that it can readily be seen from the exterior of the building through a window.

Signature Page


Sharon Harkay - Selectboard Chair


David Goodrich - Vice-Chair


David Forbes


Li Shen


Steve Tofel

Adoption History

1. Discussed as an Agenda Item at regular Selectboard meetings held on:

4/15/2024	6/3/2024	6/17/2024
7/15/2024	8/5/2024	9/9/2024
12/16/2024	3/17/2025	6/16/2025
7/21/2025	8/4/2025	10/02/2025

2. Read and approved at the regular Selectboard meeting on 10/20/2025 and entered in the minutes of that meeting, which were approved on __/__/2025.

3. Posted at the Thetford Town Office, the Thetford Town Web Site, and the Thetford Hill Post Office on 10/21/2025.

4. Notice of adoption published in the Journal Opinion newspaper on 10/29/2025 with a notice of the right to petition pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 1973.