



Winston-Salem/Forsyth County
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
 Bryce A. Stuart Municipal Building
 100 East First Street
 P.O. Box 2511
 Winston-Salem, NC 27102
 CityLink 311 (336.727.8000)
www.cityofws.org/departments/planning-and-development-services

Memorandum

TO: ALL POLITICAL CANDIDATES
FROM: Planning and Development Services
DATE: June 2024
SUBJECT: Revisions to Political Sign Placement and Enforcement

Background:

This information is being provided to you to assist in your campaign preparations for the General Election in November. The purpose is to advise you and your campaign staff of the zoning regulations for political signs and our enforcement procedures. Please share this information with your campaign staff and supporters, especially those who install your political signs.

Sign Size (see Table I):

Table I

	Private Property in Residential Districts (YR, AG, MH, RS, RM Districts)	Private Property in Nonresidential Districts	Right-of-Way With Adjacent Property Owner Permission
<i>Sign Size</i>	<i>Maximum Area (Square Feet)</i>		
Winston-Salem City Limits	6sf	32sf	6sf
Unincorporated Forsyth County and Municipalities*	2sf	2sf	6sf

*These standards apply to all municipalities in Forsyth County except Winston-Salem, Kernersville, Clemmons, Lewisville, Walkertown, High Point, and King.

City of Winston-Salem:

Effective August 1, 2013, the City will not be enforcing the two (2) square feet maximum size limitation for political signs, but rather, will operate under a policy wherein all noncommercial signs, including political signs, are regulated under the following maximum size limitations and conditions:

A noncommercial sign in the YR, AG, MH, RS and RM Zoning Districts shall be allowed a maximum area of six (6) square feet. In all other Zoning Districts, noncommercial signs shall be allowed a maximum area of thirty-two (32) square feet.

YOUR LINK TO CITY SERVICES



CALL: 311 [336-727-8000]
TEXT: 855-481-LINK [5465]
citylink@cityofws.org

City Council: Mayor Allen Joines; Denise D. Adams, Mayor Pro Tempore, North Ward; Barbara Hanes Burke, Northeast Ward; Robert C. Clark, West Ward; John C. Larson, South Ward; Jeff MacIntosh, Northwest Ward; Kevin Mundy, Southwest Ward; Annette Scippio, East Ward; James Taylor, Jr., Southeast Ward; City Manager: W. Patrick Pate

County Commissioners: Don Martin, Chairman; Gloria D. Whisenhunt, Vice Chair; Dan Besse; Richard V. Linville; Tonya McDaniel; David R. Plyler, Malishai Woodbury; County Manager: Dudley Watts, Jr.

City-County Planning Board: Chris Leak, Chair; Jason Grubbs; Vice Chair; George M. Bryan, Jr.; Walter O. Farabee; Clarence R. Lambe, Jr.; Mo McRae; Salvador Patiño; Brenda J. Smith; Jack Steelman

The square footage maximums have been arrived at to ensure that noncommercial signs are not treated any more restrictively than commercial signs. The six (6) square feet maximum should also minimize confusion that may exist due to the six (6) square feet provision applicable to state-maintained roads. Finally, in residential areas, traffic signs are generally less than six (6) square feet in size, yet the important traffic message is still able to be properly conveyed and understood.

Forsyth County:

Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) Section 3-2.1(B)(1)(e) for Forsyth County and all municipalities except Kernersville states:

- (e) **Political Signs. Political signs shall not exceed two (2) square feet in size.**

Signs are measured by multiplying the width in inches by the length in inches and dividing by 144 inches per square foot.

Placement (See Table II):

Table II

		Residential Districts (YR, AG, MH, RS, RM Districts)	Nonresidential Districts
<i>Sign Location</i>		<i>Allowed</i>	
Property Adjacent to City-Maintained Streets	On private property with permission of property owner, outside right-of-way	yes	yes
	Within right-of-way with permission of adjacent property owner	no	no
Property Adjacent to State-Maintained Streets*	On private property with permission of property owner, outside right-of-way	yes	yes
	Within right-of-way with permission of adjacent property owner	yes	yes

*For the purposes of regulating political signs, State-maintained streets include segments of major arterials in the Winston-Salem corporate limits maintained by the City.

- **POLITICAL SIGNS ARE NOT ALLOWED WITHIN THE PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAY, EXCEPT AS SET FORTH IN THE FINAL BULLET BELOW;**
- Political signs are allowed in any zoning district on private property with the permission of the property owner;
- Signs must be placed outside the right-of-way and cannot be attached to utility poles or other utility structures within the right-of-way. The width of rights-of-way vary throughout the community, but for the purpose of enforcement in residential areas only, **signs should be located behind a utility pole/box or a line between two consecutive utility poles/boxes, behind a fire hydrant or a line between two consecutive fire hydrants, behind a utility meter or a line between two consecutive utility meters or behind the back of the sidewalk. In the absence of the indicators listed above, the sign shall be located at least six (6) feet behind the curb or pavement edge to be considered out of the right-of-way and on private property. Right-of-way width varies in commercial, office and industrial areas.**
- It is also important to remember that for any sign placed in commercial zoning districts that require holes to be dug, a utility locate must be performed prior to its installation in accordance with the North Carolina Underground Damage Prevention Act (call 811), to determine a safe location for installation.
- Per NCGS 136-32, signs may be placed within the right-of-way of roads/streets maintained by the State of North Carolina with the permission of any property owner of a residence, business, or religious institution fronting the right-of-way where a sign would be placed/erected, **all subject to the restrictions contained within the statute. A copy of this statute is attached to this memo.** Since many of the main arterials (Peters Creek Parkway, Silas Creek Parkway, New Walkertown Road, Reynolda Road, Country Club Road, Main Street, Robinhood Road, etc.) switch maintenance back and forth between the City and State along their length, we will consider these and similar “arterials” to be state-maintained for the purposes of enforcement. Such exemptions are not valid for neighborhood streets. If in doubt, please contact Planning and Development Services staff for clarification.

Enforcement:

City of Winston-Salem Code Section 70-17 makes the posting of signs in the right-of-way a **Civil Penalty punishable by a \$ 50.00 fine for each sign and for each day that the violation continues.** Staff’s primary task will be to monitor and enforce the proper placement of political signs by ensuring that such signs do not constitute safety hazards and are not placed in the right of way (except as allowed under NCGS 136-32). Signs found in violation of these provisions will be removed and destroyed.

Thank you for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please call 336-747-7455.

NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL STATUTE 136-32:**§ 136-32. Regulation of signs.**

(a) Commercial Signs. – No unauthorized person shall erect or maintain upon any highway any warning or direction sign, marker, signal or light or imitation of any official sign, marker, signal or light erected under the provisions of G.S. 136-30, except in cases of emergency. No person shall erect or maintain upon any highway any traffic or highway sign or signal bearing thereon any commercial or political advertising, except as provided in subsections (b) through (e) of this section: Provided, nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit the erection or maintenance of signs, markers, or signals bearing thereon the name of an organization authorized to erect the same by the Department of Transportation or by any local authority referred to in G.S. 136-31. Any person who shall violate any of the provisions of this section shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor. The Department of Transportation may remove any signs erected without authority or allowed to remain beyond the deadline established in subsections (b) and (b1) of this section.

(b) Compliant Political Signs Permitted. – During the period beginning on the 30th day before the beginning date of "one-stop" early voting under G.S. 163-227.2 and ending on the 10th day after the primary or election day, persons may place political signs in the right-of-way of the State highway system as provided in this section. Signs must be placed in compliance with subsection (d) of this section and must be removed by the end of the period prescribed in this subsection. Any political sign remaining in the right-of-way of the State highway system more than 30 days after the end of the period prescribed in this subsection shall be deemed unlawfully placed and abandoned property, and a person may remove and dispose of such political sign without penalty.

(b1) Compliant Farm Signs Permitted. – During a farm's seasonal operation, persons may place farm signs in the right-of-way of the State highway system as provided in this section. Signs must be placed in compliance with subsection (d) of this section and must be removed by the end of the farm's season. Any farm sign remaining in the right-of-way of the State highway system more than 30 days after the end of the period prescribed in this subsection shall be deemed unlawfully placed and abandoned property, and a person may remove and dispose of the farm sign without penalty.

(c) Definitions. – For purposes of this section, the following definitions apply:

- (1) Farm. – Any property that is used for a bona fide farm purpose as provided in G.S. 106-581.1.
- (2) Farm sign. – A sign that advertises a farm, products grown, raised, or produced on a farm, or services provided on a farm; or that provides customers with directions to a farm.
- (3) Political sign. – Any sign that advocates for political action. The term does not include a commercial sign.

(d) Sign Placement. – The permittee must obtain the permission of any property owner of a residence, business, or religious institution fronting the right-of-way where a sign would be erected. Signs must be placed in accordance with the following:

- (1) No sign shall be permitted in the right-of-way of a fully controlled access highway.
- (2) No sign shall be closer than three feet from the edge of the pavement of the road.
- (3) No sign shall obscure motorist visibility at an intersection.
- (4) No sign shall be higher than 42 inches above the edge of the pavement of the road.

(5) No sign shall be larger than 864 square inches.

(6) No sign shall obscure or replace another sign.

(e) Penalties for Unlawful Removal of Signs. – It is a Class 3 misdemeanor for a person to steal, deface, vandalize, or unlawfully remove a political sign that is lawfully placed under this section.

(f) Application Within Municipalities. – Pursuant to Article 8 of Chapter 160A of the General Statutes, a city may by ordinance prohibit or regulate the placement of political signs on rights-of-way of streets located within the corporate limits of a municipality and maintained by the municipality. Any such ordinance shall provide that any political sign that remains in a right-of-way of streets located within the corporate limits of a municipality and maintained by the municipality more than 30 days after the end of the period prescribed in the ordinance is to be deemed unlawfully placed and abandoned property, and a person may remove and dispose of such political sign without penalty. In the absence of an ordinance prohibiting or regulating the placement of political signs on the rights-of-way of streets located within a municipality and maintained by the municipality, the provisions of subsections (b) through (e) of this section shall apply. (1921, c. 2, s. 9(b); C.S., s. 3846(r); 1927, c. 148, ss. 56, 58; 1933, c. 172, s. 17; 1957, c. 65, s. 11; 1973, c. 507, s. 5; 1977, c. 464, s. 7.1; 1991 (Reg. Sess., 1992), c. 1030, s. 39; 1993, c. 539, s. 981; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 24, s. 14(c); 2011-408, s. 1; 2017-6, s. 3; 2018-146, ss. 3.1(a), (b), 6.1; 2019-119, s. 1; 2023-63, s. 2.)