

Process for Obtaining a City Permit for a Neighborhood Entrance Sign

Neighborhood entrance signs are community assets for a variety of reasons. An attractive and well-maintained entrance sign is a point of pride for residents. Designing, building, and maintaining an entrance sign is a community activity that brings neighbors together. Entrance signs serve as way-finding landmarks. Entrance signs help drivers understand that they have entered a residential neighborhood and need to slow down.

All neighborhood entrance signs must be permitted by the City, either under the City's sign ordinance or through a separate process if the sign can be located in city right-of-way (ROW). Also, any sign located in an H-1 historic overlay district must receive a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic Zoning Commission.

A. Entrance Signs on Private Property outside of City ROW

More than likely, most signs will need to be sited on private property outside of the City's ROW. In these cases, the neighborhood organization must apply for a sign permit under the City's standard sign regulations.

If the proposed area for the entrance sign is zoned residential according to [KGIS Maps](#), the following steps apply. If the property is not zoned residential, please contact the City's Zoning Inspector at 215-3669 to discuss regulations applicable in the non-residential district.

1. **Application.** A neighborhood organization recognized by the Office of Neighborhoods (OON) should apply for a sign permit through the Plans Review & Inspection Department (located in Suite 505 of the City County Building). [Download the Sign Permit Application](#). Questions may be directed Brandon Littlejohn or Beth Goodman at 865-215-3669.
2. **Requirements.** Here are the sign requirements:
 - a. Subdivisions with 25 or fewer lots cannot have an entrance sign.
 - b. There can be no more than one sign for each separate street, and the street must be at least 150 feet long.
 - c. The maximum height is six feet, and the maximum sign area is 36 square feet.
 - d. The sign must be at least 10 feet from the ROW line or 15 feet from the road, whichever is greater.
 - e. The sign may be externally illuminated, but shall not be internally illuminated.

These requirements are contained in the City's sign ordinance, located in the City Zoning Regulations, Article VIII, Section 11.4, Sub-Section a, Paragraph 3).

Please note: Even though signs may be as large as 36 square feet, they can be and in many cases perhaps should be smaller than the maximum allowable size. Groups are urged to design the sign and sign size to be compatible with site conditions.

3. **Variance.** If the Neighborhood Organization applies for a sign that does not comply with these stated requirements, it will be informed that the proposed sign does not comply with city code. The Organization may then either modify its proposal or apply to the Board of Zoning Appeals for a variance from the regulations. The nonrefundable appeal fee is \$250. Call 215-2988 or 215-4244 to learn about the filing deadlines.
4. **Attachments.** The Neighborhood Organization must attach the following to the Application:
 - a. A rendering or drawing of the sign; the rendering should include dimensions and a site plan showing where the sign is proposed to be located on the property, including dimensioned setbacks;
 - b. A notarized, written permission letter from the property owner authorizing the Neighborhood Organization to apply for and place the sign on their property; and
 - c. The applicable sign permit fee.

The applicable sign permit fee is the sum of a base permit fee (\$75) and an additional fee based on the value of the construction (\$5 for every \$1000 or fraction thereof of construction costs). If the neighborhood organization requests more than one entrance sign in the same permit application, the base permit fee is \$75 and the added fee is \$5 for every \$1000 or fraction thereof of the total construction cost for all signs in the application.
5. **Issuance of Permit.** Once the application has been determined to meet the requirements of the City sign ordinance, the permit will be issued. Permits expire after one year if the work allowed by the permit has not commenced.
6. **Site Inspection.** Once the Neighborhood Organization receives the permit, it must call 811 to have the area marked for underground utilities. Once this has been done, the Neighborhood Organization can dig the holes for the sign posts. Before installation of the sign, the Neighborhood Organization must call to schedule an inspector to ensure the sign is sited correctly. The number to call for this inspection is 215-4830; there is no additional charge for this inspection.
7. **Sign Installation.** If the inspector approves the site, the Neighborhood Organization can proceed with constructing and completing the sign installation. After sign installation is complete, the Neighborhood Organization must call for a final inspection. There is no additional cost for this inspection.

B. Entrance Signs in City Right-of-Way

This is the step-by-step process for obtaining a permit for a neighborhood entrance sign in City-managed ROW.

Please Note: The City does not and cannot permit a sign located in state ROW on state and U.S. routes managed by TDOT. State-managed routes inside city limits include but are not limited to Alcoa Highway, Asheville Highway, Broadway, Chapman Highway, Clinton Highway, Henley Street, Kingston Pike, Maryville Pike, Middlebrook Pike, Northshore Drive and Rutledge Pike.

- 1. Application.** A neighborhood organization recognized by the Office of Neighborhoods (OON) submits a request to the OON for a neighborhood entrance sign. [Download the Application](#). Questions may be directed to Debbie Sharp at 215-4382.
- 2. Requirements.** Here are the sign requirements:
 - a. The sign cannot block the sight distance of vehicles using the roadway(s) near the sign.
 - b. The applicant neighborhood organization must obtain written permission from the owner of the property adjacent to the right-of-way, since this property owner is responsible for maintaining the right-of-way.
 - c. Only wood posts can be used, with a maximum size of 4 inches by 4 inches.
 - d. The maximum height is six feet, and the maximum sign area is 36 square feet.
 - e. Electrical conduit cannot be supplied to the sign or the area around the sign in City ROW.
 - f. Sign materials must be approved by Engineering.

Please note: Even though signs may be as large as 36 square feet, they can be and in many cases perhaps should be smaller than the maximum allowable size. Groups are urged to design the sign and sign size to be compatible with site conditions.
- 3. Office of Neighborhoods Review.** Upon receiving the Application, the OON will:
 - a. Verify that the Applicant is a neighborhood organization in good standing with the City.
 - b. Verify that the proposed wording does not contain commercial advertising.
 - c. Request that the Neighborhood Organization stake out the preferred location(s) of the sign(s).
 - d. Refer the request to the Department of Engineering.
- 4. Engineering Review.** The Department of Engineering will:
 - a. Review the request.
 - b. Contact the Neighborhood Organization to schedule a site inspection.

Representatives of the neighborhood may wish to be present for the site inspection but do not have to be.

- c. Ask that the Neighborhood Organization call 811 at least 3 days prior to the scheduled inspection to mark any underground utilities.
Tennessee 811 inspections are free. Once you put in a request, the utilities will have 72 hours (excluding weekends and holidays) to mark their lines. So if you called at noon on a Wednesday, the utilities would have until noon the following Monday to mark their lines.
Your ticket stays good for 15 days. If you need to work past that time period, you would need to call 811 again so that the utilities can make sure their markings are still good.
 - d. Verify that the location is in the ROW.
 - e. Confirm that the sign and planned landscaping will not block sight distance for vehicles.
 - f. Identify any other issues or obstacles.
 - g. Advise and consult with the neighborhood representative(s).
- 5. Issuance of Permit.** If there is enough ROW to accommodate the sign and all other conditions are met, the Department of Engineering issues a ROW permit (approximate cost is \$20). There shall be a separate permit issued (and fee paid) for each entrance sign requested and approved.
- Note:** If the sign cannot be located in the ROW, the Neighborhood Organization has the option of applying for a sign outside of the ROW and on private property through the regular sign permitting process (Section A above).
- 6. Site Inspection.** Upon receiving the permit, the Neighborhood Organization digs the holes for the sign posts and calls Engineering for an inspection. This inspection is to ensure that the sign is sited correctly. There is no additional cost for this inspection.
- 7. Sign Installation & Final Inspection.** After the Engineering Department approves the post hole locations, the Neighborhood Organization can proceed with constructing and completing the sign installation. After sign installation is complete, the Neighborhood Organization must call the Department of Engineering for a final inspection. There is no additional cost for this inspection.

C. Signs in an H-1 Overlay District

Neighborhood groups wishing to erect an entrance sign in H-1 Historic Overlay Districts should apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Knoxville-Knox County Historic Zoning Commission (HZC). The application for this certificate is located at http://archive.knoxmpc.org/dandf/forms/hzc_ca.pdf. The application fee is \$50.

HZC staff will review the proposal for appropriateness of materials and form. Generally natural materials of wood, brick, and metal or smooth-finished synthetics that look like wood when painted can be approved by staff. If in staff's discretion the sign size, shape and material are not typical or appropriate, then the review would be deferred to the HZC for approval. Generally, however, issues can be worked out to arrive at staff approval. For more, contact Kaye Graybeal, historic preservation planner for the Metropolitan Planning Commission, at 215-3795 or kaye.graybeal@knoxmpc.org.

A Certificate of Appropriateness is not required for neighborhood banners.

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