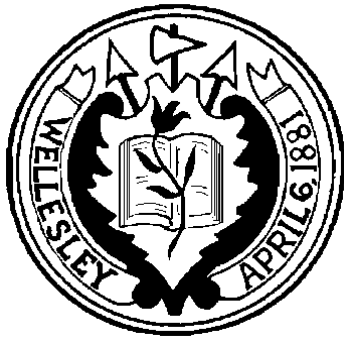


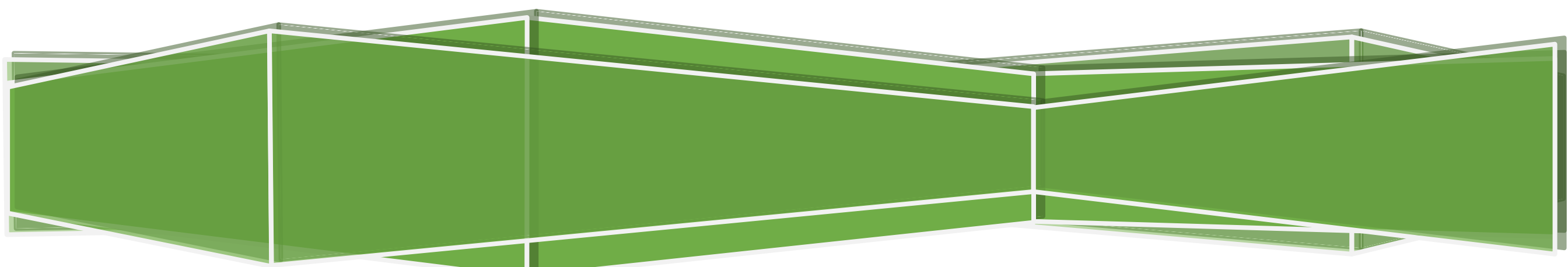
Wellesley Signage Guide

for Business Owners and Sign Contractors



Town of Wellesley, Massachusetts
Planning Department
888 Worcester Street, Suite 160
Wellesley, MA 02482

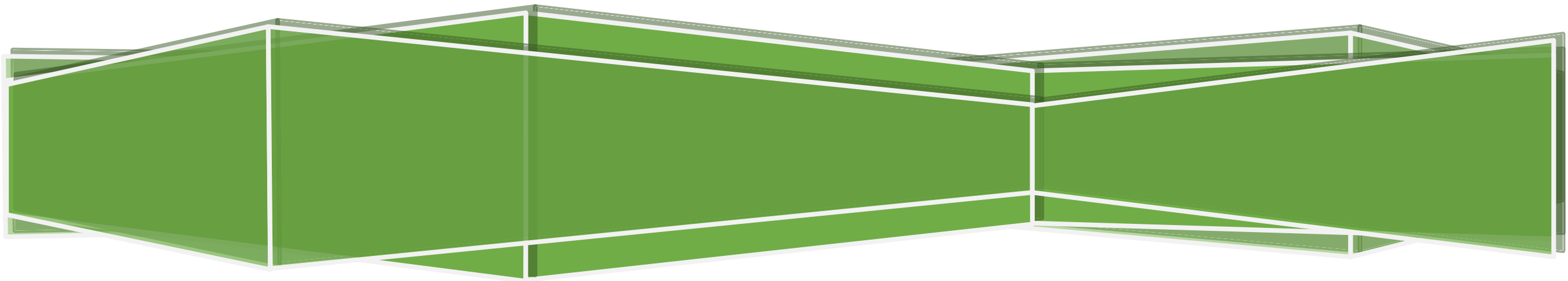
781-431-1019 x2232



Revised: August 2023

This guide is intended to serve as a helpful supplement to [Wellesley's Sign Bylaw](#) for business owners and sign contractors seeking a sign permit. It includes important signage term definitions from the Town's Sign Bylaw, an overview of the signage permitting process, an illustrated set of tables that depict each sign type and their corresponding requirements, and finally a list of frequently asked questions.

Applicants should consult this guide and meet with Planning Department staff prior to finalizing any signage designs or modifications to existing signage. For questions about signage, or to schedule a meeting with the Planning Department staff, call (781) 431-1019 ext. 2232.



KEY SIGNAGE DEFINITIONS

- * Sign type is exempt from Design Review and does not count towards the total amount of signage allowed for a business establishment.
 - ** Sign type is prohibited.
 - *** Sign type requires a Special Permit.
-
- **Address Sign***: A sign indicating the numerical location, or numerical and street location, of a particular property. Address signs, the letter and number height of which does not exceed eight inches, shall not count toward the total amount of signage allowed and shall be exempt from regulation under [ZBL Section 5.18.I.1](#).
 - **Animated Sign****: Any sign, or part of a sign, that uses any movement or change of lighting or color to depict action or create a special effect or scene.
 - **Awning**: Any device, fixed or retractable, of any material, which extends over or otherwise covers a sidewalk, courtyard, walkway, eating area, driveway, or other area or space whether that area or space is intended for pedestrians, vehicles or other purposes. Also known as a “canopy.”
 - **Awning Sign**: Any sign that is a part of, attached to, or displayed on an awning, canopy or other fabric, plastic or structural protective cover over a door, entrance, window, or outdoor service area.
 - **Building Sign**: Any sign attached to any part of a building, as contrasted to a ground sign.
 - **Directional Sign***: Any sign limited solely to directing both vehicular and pedestrian traffic within or setting out restrictions on the use of parking areas. Must be no greater than four sq. ft. in area.
 - **Directory Sign**: A sign which may be utilized by multiple business establishments occupying a single building with a shared public entrance.
 - **Externally Illuminated Sign**: A sign illuminated by an external light source directed solely toward such sign.
 - **Flashing Sign****: A sign, the illumination of which is not kept constant in intensity at all times when in use or which exhibits marked changes in lighting effects.
 - **Ground Sign**: Any sign, supported by structures or supports that are placed on or anchored in the ground, independent from any building or other structure.
 - **Internally Illuminated Sign*****: A sign illuminated by an internal light source, utilizing translucent panels, canvas or other fabric, letters, devices or other similar components to create an image by allowing light to pass through. *Note: A “reverse lit” or “halo” sign is not an internally illuminated sign.*
 - **Moving Sign****: Any and every sign any part of which moves, is designed to move, or to be moved, by any means.
 - **Non-Conforming Sign**: Any sign legally erected prior to the adoption of Wellesley [ZBL Section 5.18](#), or any amendment thereof, which does not conform to the requirements of this section or such future amendments.
 - **Permanent Sign**: Any sign of a type and construction as not to be easily or readily removed, which, when installed, is intended for permanent use. Types of permanent signs include, but are not limited to, standing signs, wall signs, awning signs, and window signs.
 - **Portable Sign****: A sign which is not permanently affixed to the ground or to a structure, including but not limited to signs on trailers which are parked in such a manner as to serve the purpose of a sign.
 - **Projecting Sign**: A type of wall sign which is perpendicular to the wall to which it is attached and projects away from such wall.
 - **Reverse Lit**: A type of sign and/or illumination using an opaque face and sides, generally constructed of aluminum and a clear polycarbonate back or no back. Light does not pass through the face of the sign, but rather comes out of the back of the sign and is cast off the wall behind the sign, thereby creating a silhouette of the outline of the sign face. Also known and referred to as “Reverse Back Lit”, “Halo”, or “Halo Lit” sign or sign illumination.
 - **Roof Sign****: Any sign erected and constructed above, or projecting above, the lowest point of the eave or the top of a parapet wall of any building, or which is pointed or otherwise attached or affixed to a roof.
 - **Standard Informational Sign**: A sign with no one side consisting of an area greater than six square feet, with a sign face made for short term use, containing no reflecting elements, flags, or projections and which, when

- erect, stands at a height not greater than six feet. Sandwich board signs shall be considered to be a type of standard informational sign.
- **Standing Sign:** A Permanent sign erected on or affixed to the ground and not attached to a building.
 - **Temporary Sign:** Any and every sign which by its design and/or use is temporary in nature and/or is not permanently mounted. Neither flags nor awning signs are considered temporary signs.
 - **Wall Sign:** A permanent building sign not considered to be a roof sign, window sign, temporary sign, temporary window sign, or directory, attached to or erected and confided within the limits of an outside wall of any building or structure, which is supported by such wall or building. Wall signs may be mounted parallel or perpendicular to a wall.
 - **Window Sign:** Any sign attached, painted, or otherwise similarly affixed directly to the glass surface of a window or door, either inside or outside the building, and/or any illuminated sign installed inside the building within one foot of the glass surface of a window or door, and designed to be visible from the exterior of the structure.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are the key elements to consider when designing a sign in Wellesley?

The Sign Bylaw sets forth a number of allowances for each sign type per zoning district. Included in these allowances are the number of signs, location, maximum size of all permanent signage and individual signage, maximum letter size, maximum height, and illumination (see tables beginning on page 8). A sign that meets the allowances is considered by right. A sign that exceeds the allowances requires a special permit.

What types of signs are prohibited?

Examples of prohibited signs include: audible signs, moving signs, animated signs, portable signs, and pennants. Additionally, any sign located in the right-of-way, other than those signs belonging to a government, public service agency, or railroad are also prohibited. It is important to note where your property line is because the sidewalk is often within the right-of-way, and therefore, placing signs on the sidewalk in the right-of-way is prohibited.

My existing sign or awning is damaged or worn. Can I replace it without a permit?

Normal maintenance and in-kind replacement of signs and awnings is allowed if they are worn or damaged. In-kind replacement means that the sign or awning will be replaced with exactly the same sign or awning. Although Design Review Board (DRB) review is not required for in-kind replacements, a sign permit may still be required. Prior to replacing your sign or awning, confirm with the Planning Department if DRB review is needed and with the Building Department if a permit is required.

If the previous business in my location had a sign(s) that does not comply with the Sign Bylaw, can I put a sign(s) up that matches?

No. Every new business must request a new sign permit following Design Review Board review. Any sign proposed must comply with the Sign Bylaw in effect at the time of application unless a special permit is requested. In other words, there are no grandfathering provisions in the Sign Bylaw.

What is the process to receive a sign permit?

To receive a sign permit, there is a two-step process starting with Design Review Board (DRB) review of the proposed sign(s) and/or awning(s). Following DRB review, depending on whether the proposal is by right or requires a special permit, the applicant requests a sign permit from the Building Department or a special permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals (see flow chart on page 6).

How do I apply for sign permit review by the Design Review Board?

You can apply for sign permit review in three ways:

- **Online:** Download the application form, design guidelines, and Sign Bylaw from the Town of Wellesley Design Review Board website:
<http://wellesleyma.gov/348/Design-Review-Board>
- **Phone:** Call the Planning Department at 781-431-1019 x 2232. We can mail you the application form with a list of required application materials and the Sign Bylaw.
- **In Person:** Visit the Planning Department (888 Worcester Street, Suite 160) between 8:30 am and 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday. Note: Town offices close at 12:00 pm on Fridays during the summer.

What do I need for a complete sign application?

The following materials are required to make the application complete:

- A scanned copy of the completed application form;
- Application fee in the form of a check made out to the Town of Wellesley
- One digital copy and one physical copy of the following:
 - Scaled, dimensioned drawings of the sign/awning including lettering, borders, and other design elements (min. scale $\frac{3}{4}$ ");
 - Location plan for standing signs showing setback from property lines (min. scale $\frac{1}{16}$ "); and
 - Drawing of façade showing proposed placement of sign/awning in relation to trim/significant architectural elements (min. scale $\frac{1}{4}$ ").
 - Color photographs of the façade and facades of adjacent buildings;
 - Samples of all colors proposed to be used on sign or awning;

What are the application fees for sign review by the Design Review Board?

- By right signs (signs that meet the Sign Bylaw allowances): \$50
- Special permit signs (signs that exceed the Sign Bylaw allowances): \$150

When should I submit applications for review by the Design Review Board?

You can submit an application anytime, but *complete* applications are due by 12:00 pm on the Wednesday prior to the Design Review Board meeting at which you plan to present to the Board. The submittal calendar can be found by visiting the Planning Department (Town Hall, Lower Level), or by going to the Board's website:

<http://wellesleyma.gov/348/Design-Review-Board>

When does the Design Review Board meet?

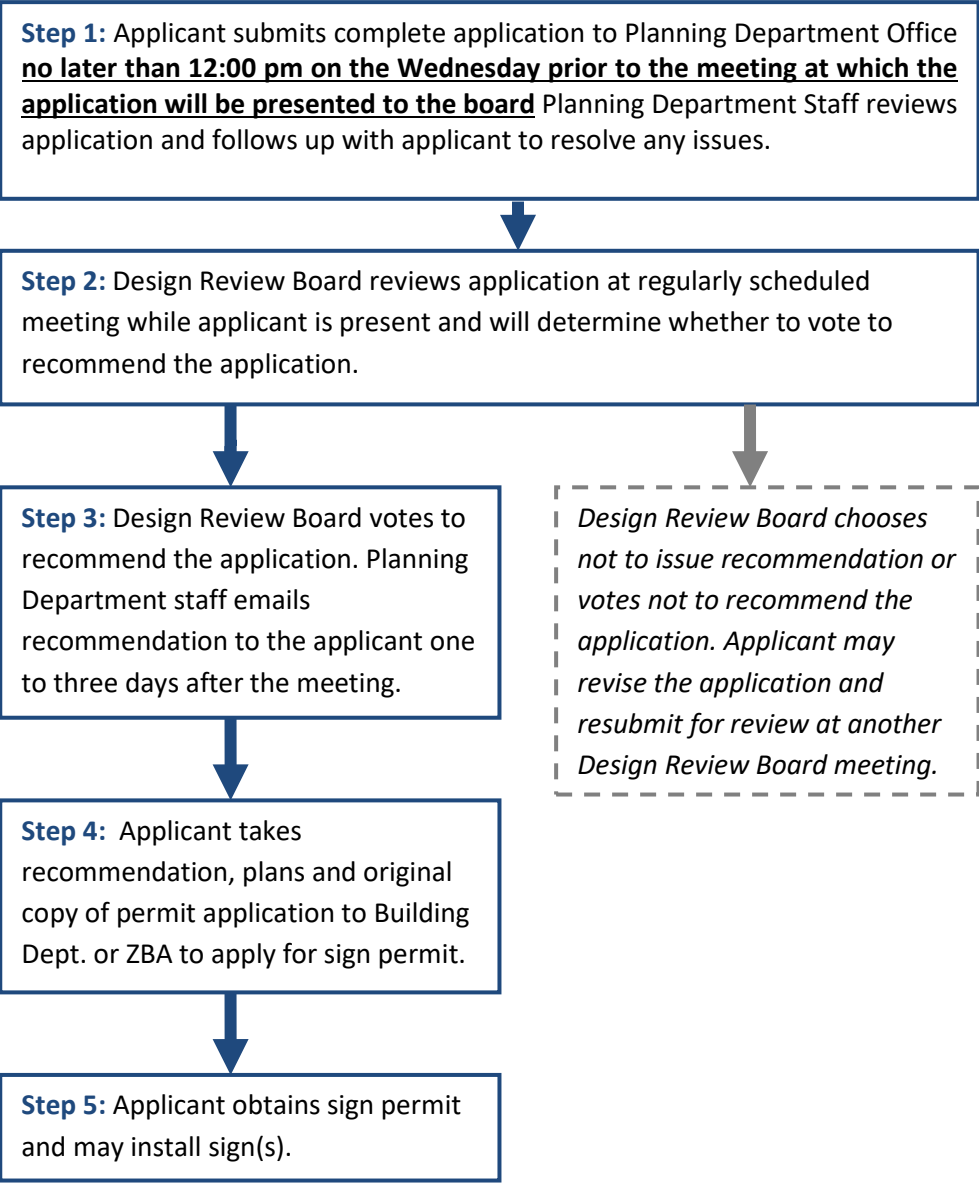
All of the Design Review Board (DRB) meeting announcements, agendas, and minutes are posted on the Town website: The DRB typically meets every second and fourth Wednesday of the month at 6:30 pm, via Zoom. The meeting calendar can be found by visiting the Planning Department (888 Worcester Street, Suite 160), or by going to the Board's website:

<http://wellesleyma.gov/348/Design-Review-Board>

What happens after Design Review Board review?

Following Design Review Board (DRB) review, the Planning Department staff will produce a recommendation letter summarizing the decision of the DRB. Staff will provide the recommendation to the Building Department and/or the Zoning Board of Appeals, depending on the type of application. A copy of the recommendation will also be sent to the project applicant. The entire process is summarized by the adjacent flowchart.

OVERVIEW OF SIGN PERMITTING PROCESS



SIGN TYPES IN WELLESLEY

Each business establishment is allowed two permanent signs consisting of no more than one wall sign, one window sign, or one awning sign, and each lot is allowed one standing sign. These are the most common types of signs in Wellesley, however the Sign Bylaw does allow for other sign types. Signage generally falls under one of the four following categories:









1. **Allowed Signs Not Requiring a Permit** – These signs are generally used on a temporary basis or are necessary for traffic control and way-finding. These signs are allowed to be installed without a Sign Permit; however, regulations pertaining to the total number of signs, size, height, and time of use may apply to the specific sign type and must be followed.
2. **Allowed Signs Requiring a Permit** – These signs are generally allowed for each business in the Town. Prior to installation of the sign it is necessary that a Sign Permit be applied for and issued. The Town’s Design Review Board must first review the Sign Permit application before a permit is issued and may recommend that changes be made to the sign.
3. **Design Elements Requiring a Permit** – These design elements are generally allowed and encouraged. Beyond obtaining a Sign Permit, no additional processes are required for the use of these design elements for your business or property.
4. **Prohibited Signs and/or Design Elements** – These signs and design elements are not allowed. In some instances, a Special Permit or Variance may be sought from the Zoning Board of Appeals to allow prohibited signs or design elements.









The following tables provide further details and photo examples for the four categories described above.









1. Allowed Signs, Sign Permit Not Required

The signs included in this table do not require permitting or the review of the Design Review Board, so long as such signs meet the specific criteria regarding their use.

Temporary Signs	Temporary Window Signs	Directional Signs	Directory Signs
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">– Limited to three 30-day periods per calendar year.– 30-day periods may be used consecutively.– One sign per lot.– Size and height of the sign from the ground varies depending on zoning and location (see Table 22A.1 below).– Registration required with the Inspector of Buildings.</div> <div></div>	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">– Limited to three 30-day periods per calendar year.– 30-day periods may be used consecutively.– Size not to exceed 25% of the area of the window in which it is located.– One per business.– Registration required with the Inspector of Buildings.</div> <div></div>	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">– Signage that is limited solely to directing vehicular or pedestrian traffic within the site or defining parking restrictions.– Area shall not exceed four sq. ft. in area.</div> <div></div>	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">– Allowed for buildings occupied by more than one business establishment sharing a public entrance.– Must be attached to the exterior wall of the building.– Must not exceed one sq. ft. for each business establishment occupying the building or six sq. ft., whichever is less.</div> <div></div>

2. Allowed Signs, Sign Permit Required			
Each business is limited to no more than 2 of the 4 following sign types . Sign Permits for the following sign types must first be reviewed by the Design Review Board.			
Standing Signs	Wall Signs	Awning Signs	Window Signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">One per lot.Maximum size and letter height varies depending on zoning and location (see Table 22A.1 below).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">One per business; an additional wall sign may be allowed with additional public entrances.Maximum size and letter height varies depending on zoning and location (see Table 22A.1 below).See Sign Bylaw section 22A.L.2.b for restrictions on projecting over a public way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">One per business.Area limited to 25% of the awning valence/canopy, or 10% of the business façade, whichever is less.Letter height limited to a maximum of eight inches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Two per business where one sign has area of one sq. ft. or less and one sign has area greater than one sq. ft.Signs one sq. ft. or less are exempt.Limited to a maximum area of ten sq. ft., or 10% of the area of all exterior windows of the business.
			
			

3. Permitted Design Elements			
The following are some examples of design elements allowed for both signs requiring a permit <u>and</u> those that do not.			
illumination	Letter Height	Address Numerals	Landscaping
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Signs may be illuminated by exterior illumination or by reverse lit (halo) illumination.Illumination shall be by white, steady, stationary light.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The use of individual letters without a sign band may allow for increased letter height (varies by district and location).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The use of address numerals for the identification of a property is exempt from permitting.Address signs, the letter and number height of which does not exceed eight inches, shall not count toward the total amount of signage allowed and shall be exempt from regulation under ZBL Section 5.18.I.1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Landscaping may be used around the base of standing signs.
			
			

4. Prohibited Signs and/or Design Elements			
The following signs and design elements are prohibited in the Town, except as may be allowed by the issuance of a Special Permit or variance.			
Internal Illumination	Roof Signs	Signs in the R.O.W.	Internally Illuminated Window Signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Signs may not use internal illumination where light passes through translucent panels, etc. to create an image.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">No sign may be painted, attached, or affixed to the roof, or project above the wall to which it is attached.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">No sign shall be located on a public sidewalk, street, or way.Signs must be located on the same lot as the principal building with which they are associated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The illumination regulations for wall signs also apply to window signs in that they are prohibited.
			
			

Town of Wellesley Zoning Bylaw Table 22A.1 - Signage Allowances Based on Zoning District or Use

Note: All applicants are encouraged to thoroughly read [Zoning Bylaw Section 5.18](#) for a complete overview on sign requirements and design considerations. While the following tables are a useful reference, they do not encompass all aspects of the sign bylaw. Exemptions, allowed and prohibited uses, illumination, and other considerations are further detailed in the bylaw, but not referenced in these tables. Please contact the Planning Department with any questions.

Table 22A.1, SIGNAGE ALLOWANCES BASED ON ZONING DISTRICT OR USE							
Sign Type	Standard	Zoning Districts and Uses					
		Residential Districts	Office and Professional Districts	Commercial Districts Fronting Streets Other Than Worcester Street	Commercial Districts Fronting Worcester Street	Gasoline Filling Stations	Institutional Uses
TOTAL PERMANENT SIGNAGE	Number of Signs	1 per lot	2 per building	• 1 standing sign per lot. • 2 permanent signs, consisting of no more than 1 wall sign, 1 awning sign, or 1 window sign (not to include window signs 1 sq. ft. or less in area) per business establishment.		NA	1 standing sign per lot
	Maximum Total Area	1 sq. ft.	30 sq. ft. (per building)	For the sum of all wall, awning, and window signs, 50 sq. ft. or 10% of the area of the façade of the business establishment, whichever is less, per business establishment; for standing signs, 25 sq. ft.	For the sum of all wall, awning, and window signs, 75 sq. ft. or 10% of the area of the façade of the business establishment, whichever is less, per business establishment; For standing signs, 50 sq. ft.	100 sq. ft.	25 sq. ft. for lots fronting on streets other than Worcester Street; 50 sq. ft. for lots fronting on Worcester Street

Table 22A.1, SIGNAGE ALLOWANCES BASED ON ZONING DISTRICT OR USE							
Sign Type	Standard	Zoning Districts and Uses					
		Residential Districts	Office and Professional Districts	Commercial Districts Fronting Streets Other Than Worcester Street	Commercial Districts Fronting Worcester Street	Gasoline Filling Stations	Institutional Uses
STANDING SIGNS	Permit Required	No	Yes				
	Number of Signs	1 per lot	1 per building	1 per lot			
	Maximum Area	1 sq. ft.	15 sq. ft.	25 sq. ft.	50 sq. ft.	50 sq. ft. for lots fronting on streets other than Worcester Street; 75 sq. ft. for lots fronting on Worcester Street	25 sq. ft. for lots fronting on streets other than Worcester Street; 50 sq. ft. for lots fronting on Worcester Street
	Maximum Letter Height	NA	14 inches	14 inches	18 inches	14 inches for lots fronting on streets other than Worcester Street; 18 inches for lots fronting on Worcester Street	
	Maximum Height	4 feet	6 feet		10 feet	6 feet for lots fronting on streets other than Worcester Street; 10 feet for lots fronting on Worcester Street	

Table 22A.1, SIGNAGE ALLOWANCES BASED ON ZONING DISTRICT OR USE							
Sign Type	Standard	Zoning Districts and Uses					
		Residential Districts	Office and Professional Districts	Commercial Districts Fronting Streets Other Than Worcester Street	Commercial Districts Fronting Worcester Street	Gasoline Filling Stations	Institutional Uses
WALL SIGNS	Permit Required	No	Yes				
	Number of Signs	1 per lot	1 per building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 per business establishment• 1 additional sign shall be allowed for each additional street level public entrance, beyond the principal entrance, utilized by the business establishment.• For business establishments occupying more than 1 building, 1 additional sign shall be allowed per building, to be affixed to such additional building.• For buildings occupied by more than 1 business establishment which share a common public entrance, 1 additional wall sign may be displayed on the building and such sign may be located on one or more business establishment's facade.		NA	

Table 22A.1, SIGNAGE ALLOWANCES BASED ON ZONING DISTRICT OR USE							
Sign Type	Standard	Zoning Districts and Uses					
		Residential Districts	Office and Professional Districts	Commercial Districts Fronting Streets Other Than Worcester Street	Commercial Districts Fronting Worcester Street	Gasoline Filling Stations	Institutional Uses
WALL SIGNS	Maximum Area	1 sq. ft.	15 sq. ft.	50 sq. ft. or 10% of the area of the façade of the business establishment, whichever is less.	75 sq. ft. or 10% of the area of the façade of the business establishment, whichever is less.	50 sq. ft. for lots fronting on streets other than Worcester Street; 75 sq. ft. for lots fronting on Worcester Street	
	Maximum Letter Height	NA	14 inches	Additional signs allowed per additional public entrances and additional signs allowed for building occupied by more than 1 business establishment, shall not exceed 25 sq. ft. or 10% of the area of the wall to which attached.		14 inches for lots fronting on streets other than Worcester Street; 18 inches for lots fronting on Worcester Street	
	Maximum Height	4 feet	15 feet	20 feet		NA	

Table 22A.1, SIGNAGE ALLOWANCES BASED ON ZONING DISTRICT OR USE							
Sign Type	Standard	Zoning Districts and Uses					
		Residential Districts	Office and Professional Districts	Commercial Districts Fronting Streets Other Than Worcester Street	Commercial Districts Fronting Worcester Street	Gasoline Filling Stations	Institutional Uses
AWNING SIGNS	Permit Required			Yes			
	Number of Signs			1 per business establishment			
	Maximum Area			25% of the area of the portion of the awning to which such sign is affixed or 10% of the façade of the business establishment, whichever is less.			
	Maximum Letter Height			8 inches			
WINDOW SIGNS	Permit Required			Yes; No, if sign area is 1 sq. ft. or less			
	Number of Signs			2 per business establishment, consisting of 1 sign, 1 sq. ft. or less in area, and 1 sign greater than 1 sq. ft. in area. Window signs 1 sq. ft. or less in area shall not count toward the Maximum Total Area of all Permanent Signage.			
	Maximum Area			10 sq. ft. or 10% of the area of all exterior windows (excluding doors) of the business establishment, whichever is less.			
	Maximum Letter Height			8 inches			
DIRECTORY SIGNS	Permit Required		No				
	Number of Signs		1 per shared public entrance to a building occupied by more than 1 business establishment				
	Maximum Area		1 sq. ft. per business establishment occupying the building or 6 sq. ft., whichever is less				

Table 22A.1, SIGNAGE ALLOWANCES BASED ON ZONING DISTRICT OR USE							
Sign Type	Standard	Zoning Districts and Uses					
		Residential Districts	Office and Professional Districts	Commercial Districts Fronting Streets Other Than Worcester Street	Commercial Districts Fronting Worcester Street	Gasoline Filling Stations	Institutional Uses
DIRECTIONAL SIGNS	Permit Required		No				
	Maximum Area		4 sq. ft.				
STANDARD INFORMATIONAL SIGNS	Permit Required	No					
	Number of Signs	1 per lot; lots shall be allowed an unlimited number of signs during a period beginning thirty (30) days before and ending five (5) days after any federal, state or local election, ballot initiative and/or referendum					
	Maximum Area	No single sign face shall exceed 6 sq. ft.					
	Maximum Height	3 feet or 6 feet for post and arm type signs					
TEMPORARY SIGNS	Permit Required		No Sign Permit is required, but the sign must be registered consistent with L.4.a. of this Section				
	Number of Signs		1 per lot. Refer to L.4.b of this Section for time limits on the display of such signs				
	Maximum Area		25 sq. ft.	12 sq. ft.	25 sq. ft.	12 sq. ft. for lots fronting on streets other than Worcester Street; 25 sq. ft. for lots fronting on Worcester Street	6 sq. ft.
	Maximum Height		15 feet				6 feet

Table 22A.1, SIGNAGE ALLOWANCES BASED ON ZONING DISTRICT OR USE							
Sign Type	Standard	Zoning Districts and Uses					
		Residential Districts	Office and Professional Districts	Commercial Districts Fronting Streets Other Than Worcester Street	Commercial Districts Fronting Worcester Street	Gasoline Filling Stations	Institutional Uses
TEMPORARY WINDOW SIGNS	Permit Required			No Sign Permit is required, but the sign must be registered consistent with L.4.a. of this Section			
	Number of Signs			1 per business establishment. Refer to L.4.b of this Section for time limits on the display of such signs			
	Maximum Area			25% of the area of the window on which it is attached			
OUT OF STORE MARKETING DEVICE SIGNS	Permit Required			No			
	Number of Signs			1 sign shall be allowed on each out-of-store marketing device			
	Maximum Area			14 sq. ft.			
	Maximum Height			No more than 2 feet above the device			
MENU SIGN	Permit Required			Yes			
	Number of Signs			1 sign per drive-thru facility			
	Maximum Area			10 sq. ft.			
	Maximum Height			6 feet			