

STATE OF WISCONSIN
TOWN OF WASHINGTON, VILAS COUNTY
CODE OF ORDINANCES

**CHAPTER 24: TOWN OF WASHINGTON SIGN ORDINANCE
AMENDED January 5, 2026**

24.01 Title and Purpose

The title of this ordinance is the Town of Washington Sign Ordinance.

The purpose of this ordinance is to provide for and regulate the location and safe construction of signs in a manner to ensure that signs are compatible with surrounding land uses, are well maintained, express the identity of individual proprietors and the Town as a whole, and ensure that signage does not negatively affect public health, safety, and welfare.

The regulations included in this ordinance are not intended to and do not apply to signs erected, maintained, or otherwise posted, owned, leased by, on behalf of, or as specifically directed by federal, state, local government and governmental agencies, in the furtherance of authorized government operations or activities within the public right-of-way.

24.02 Authority

The town board has specific authority under §12.04, 60.10(2)(c), 60.22(1) and (3), 60.23 (29), and 61.34(1) Wis. Stats., and the town's village powers under §60.22, Wis. Stats., to adopt and enforce this ordinance.

24.03 Definitions

- A. Arrow sign is a directional sign that displays the name and/or address of residents and establishments.
- B. Bulletin Board is a sign with the name of the institution it serves and information pertaining to its activities.
- C. Clear Sight Triangle also known as a "vision corner" is a triangular area at street intersections where obstructions that could limit visibility for drivers are restricted, ensuring clear sightlines for motorists. The triangle is formed by the property lines of two intersecting rights-of-way and a third line connecting specified points on those lines.
- D. Farm Sign means a sign located on farm property which identifies the farm or advertises a farm product produced on that farm.
- E. Government sign means a sign authorized or installed by the Town, another governmental agency, the State of Wisconsin, or the federal government including, but not limited to, traffic-related signs.

- F. Ground sign is a free-standing sign mounted on supports or uprights and whose bottom edge is less than 8 feet above the ground.
- G. Non-conforming sign is a sign existing prior to the effective date of this ordinance which does not conform to the provisions of this ordinance.
- H. Off-premises sign is a sign which directs attention to a business, commodity, service, or entertainment conducted, sold, or offered elsewhere other than upon the premises where the sign is located.
- I. On-premises sign is a sign which directs attention to a business, commodity, service, or entertainment sold, offered, or conducted on the same premises that the sign is located.
- J. Political sign means a sign erected for the purpose of soliciting support for or opposition to a candidate or a political party or relating to a referendum question in an election held under the laws of this state.
- K. Private property protection sign is a sign, less than 2 square feet, that warns the public about trespassing on property, dangerous conditions, unusual hazards, high voltage, and fire dangers for example.
- L. Real estate sign means a sign advertising the sale or lease of land upon which it is located or of a building on that land.
- M. Roof sign is a sign erected on or over the roof of a building.
- N. Sign means any object, device, display, structure, or part thereof, situated outdoors, which is used to advertise, identify, display, direct or attract attention to an object, person, institution, organization, business, product, service, event, or location by any means including words, letters, figures, designs, symbols, figures, colors, illumination or projected images.
- O. Subdivision Entry sign is a sign located at an entrance to a particular residential development.
- P. Temporary sign is a sign which is installed for a limited time for any purpose. A permanently mounted sign shall not be considered as temporary even though the message is subject to periodic changes.
- Q. Wall sign is a sign mounted on and parallel to a building wall or other vertical building surface.
- R. Window sign is a sign painted on or affixed to a window.

24.04 Signs Permitted in the Town of Washington

The following signs are permitted in the Town of Washington, subject to the General Regulations as stated in 24.05 and to the sign-specific regulations:

- A. Real Estate signs not to exceed 16 square feet which advertise the sale, rental, or lease of the premises upon which said signs are temporarily located. One real estate sign shall be allowed per parcel.
- B. Farm signs placed on premises pertaining to the sale of farm products not to exceed 16 square feet.
- C. Name, Warning, and Private Property Protection signs located on the premises not to exceed 2 square feet.
- D. Home Occupation and Professional Home Office signs located on the premises not to exceed 2 square feet.

- E. Political signs provided that such sign shall not be erected prior to the first day of the "election campaign period" as defined in Section 12.04 of the Wisconsin Statutes and shall be removed within 4 days following the election. Election campaign signs shall not be placed within the public right-of-way.
- F. Rummage Sale and Garage Sale signs provided that no such signs be erected or placed within the public right-of-way and further that such signs be removed within 24 hours following the sale.
- G. Bulletin Boards for public, charitable, or religious institutions shall not exceed 32 square feet located on the premises.
- H. Local Non-Profit Organization signs may promote a local event no more than two weeks prior to the event, with the signs removed within 24 hours after the event.
- I. Temporary signs are to be displayed for 30 days or less.
- J. Government signs including Town of Washington, Vilas County, Northland Pines School District, State of Wisconsin, and the United States Federal Government which serve the purpose of providing information, direction, or regulation.
- K. Window signs shall be placed only on the inside of commercial buildings and shall not exceed 25% of the glass area of the pane upon which the sign is displayed.
- L. Wall signs placed against the exterior wall of a building shall not extend more than 12 inches from the wall and shall not extend above the roofline or beyond any building wall upon which it is erected. The maximum area of wall signs shall not exceed an area equal to 1.5 square feet for each linear front foot of building length.
- M. Subdivision Entry sign shall contain only the name of the subdivision or development and shall be placed beyond the road right-of-way.
- N. Arrow signs shall follow regulations as stated in the Town of Washington Arrow Sign Policy.

24.05 General Regulations

- A. All permanent signs shall be made of wood, metal or plastic designed for outdoor durability and shall be erected on their own self-supporting standards.
- B. Signs shall not exceed 114 square feet in size if located along town roads or 196 square feet if located along US Hwy 45, US Hwy 70, and US Hwy 17.
- C. No off-premises signs will be allowed except along US Hwy 45, US Hwy 70, and US Hwy 17.
- D. All signs shall be maintained in a safe condition and good repair so that all sign information is clearly legible by the owner or responsible party.
- E. Vehicles or other movable structures bearing signs will not be allowed along town roads within the town, or in front of any building, as intended use for stationary advertising, and may be subject to removal or dismantling at the owner's expense.

- F. No sign shall be located within the right-of-way except for government signs and local arrow signs.
- G. All signs located at the intersection of two roadways shall have a triangular setback area a minimum of fifteen feet along each roadway. Signs shall not obstruct visibility or movement of vehicles or pedestrians or otherwise cause any hazard to any person or property.
- H. Roof signs are prohibited in the Town of Washington.
- I. Wall signs shall not exceed an area equal to 1.5 square feet for each linear front foot of the building length.
- J. Signs that are illuminated shall be effectively shielded so as to prevent beams or rays of light from being directed at any portion of the traveled ways of any nearby public way in such an intensity or brilliance as to cause glare or impair the vision of the driver of any motor vehicle or otherwise interfere with any driver's operation of a motor vehicle.
- K. Flags shall be allowed as follows:
 - a. National, state, county, town and other governmental entities.
 - b. Businesses will be allowed one flag not to exceed 15 square feet.
- L. No sign in the Town of Washington shall be abandoned by the owner. Any sign not properly and reasonably maintained by the owner shall be removed by the owner within 30 days of receipt of a written notice from the Town. Failure to remove an abandoned sign, plus any foundation, within that period shall cause the Town to remove the sign after an additional 10-day written notice is mailed to the owner. Removal expenses will be charged to the owner of the sign or to the owner of the land where the sign is located. In the event removal costs are unpaid, they may be charged against the property as a special charge.
- M. Signs lawfully existing at the time of adoption of this ordinance may be continued although the use, size or location does not conform to the provisions of this ordinance.

24.06 Variances

- A. Variances from the requirements of this ordinance may be granted by the Town Board where it finds that a particular proposal for a sign is reasonable but is prohibited by strict compliance with the provisions of this ordinance.

24.07 Penalty Provisions

Any person, partnership, corporation, or other legal entity that fails to comply with the provisions of this ordinance shall, upon conviction, pay a forfeiture of \$50.00 plus court costs for the first offense, \$100.00 plus court costs for the second offense, or \$200.00 plus court costs for all subsequent offenses.

24.08 Severability

If any provision of this ordinance or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the invalidity does not affect other provisions or applications of this ordinance that can be given effect without the invalid

provision or application, and to this end the provisions of this ordinance are severable.

24.09 Adoption of Ordinance

This ordinance, adopted by a majority of the town board with a quorum present and voting and proper notice having been given, formally adopts the Town of Washington Sign Ordinance.

This ordinance repeals and replaces all Town of Washington sign ordinances.

24.10 Effective Date

The Town Clerk shall properly post or publish this ordinance under §60.80, Wis. Stats.

This ordinance shall take effect immediately upon adoption and posting or publication as provided by law.

Adopted this 5th day of January 2026.



Jim Egan, Town Chairperson

Attest:



Nancy Sobralski, Town Clerk

Published and/or posted this 6th day of January 2026.