

Sign Bylaws



Route 20 in Westfield

What are the objectives of a sign bylaw?

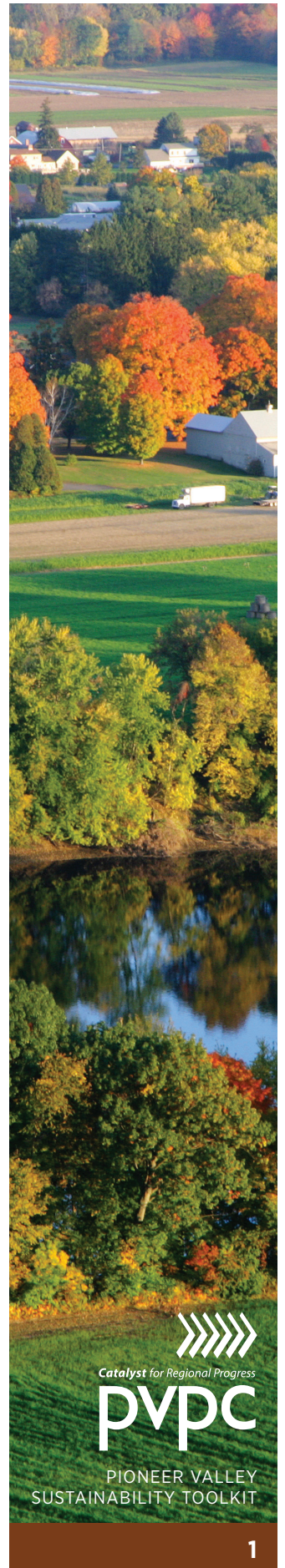
Sign bylaws establish guidelines and procedures designed to enhance the health, safety and visual environment of the community while still permitting businesses adequate visual exposure to patrons through the use of signage. Sign regulations, which at times may seem excessive, serve to curb unsightly clutter and provide a sense of uniformity to our communities making them more attractive and desirable.

Why do we need a sign bylaw?

Signage is an essential component of most land uses as well as way finding. Sign bylaws encourage the proper development and regulation of signs and signage systems to prevent them from becoming a distraction or obstruction to the safe flow of pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Sign regulations also prevent signage from becoming a nuisance to adjacent properties or uses while protecting and encouraging a healthful economic business environment and protecting the general health, safety, and welfare of the community. Effective sign regulations can promote economic development, create civic identity, identify community activities and events, and create vibrancy and excitement.

How do sign bylaws work?

Sign bylaws should be based on valid public purposes and further community goals. Well written sign bylaws provide comprehensive regulations that are clear, understandable and are easy to both comply with and enforce. They regulate size, quantity, type placement, location and illumination and permit signs which are appropriate for the districts in which they are located. Because there is such a wide variety of sign types, defining what constitutes a sign is critical. At what point does a mural become a sign? Does a canopy or awning sign constitute a wall sign? Signs are typically by-right upon the issuance of a



sign permit by the Building Inspector. However some communities require design review to encourage signage that is consistent and complementary with a district's particular existing character. Some communities require a Special Permit for certain types of signs (large signs, interior illuminated, scrolling message signs, etc.) so they can exercise a level of control. Sign bylaws should be flexible to facilitate creativity and need to be updated to keep pace with emerging technologies such as automatic changeable copy signs. While political signs cannot be prohibited, they can be reasonably regulated in terms of size, longevity and placement. Some communities provide flexibility to their sign regulations by permitting waivers to strict compliance through a Special Permit process.



DID YOU KNOW...

That the most effective sign bylaws are reached through consensus by balancing the needs of the local business community with the needs and interests of local residents and elected officials?

Cottage Street in Easthampton

A model Sign Bylaw is included in the Pioneer Valley Sustainability Toolkit. The model sign bylaw is intended to show what is typically included. Because each community is different, sign bylaws should be developed to reflect the unique challenges and opportunities of each individual community. The model can be used as a menu which can be tailored to address the needs and character of each individual business district.

A model bylaw or strategy is included in the Pioneer Valley Sustainability Toolkit.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

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