

Notes From the Commish

Signs

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In our community; persons, business, organizations have a need to convey messages to people traveling along the ways and roads of Charlton. For a business there is the need to identify the goods and services that are available at that location, the government may need to identify the buildings function or display a warning, a candidate or political cause may wish to announce their message, or guidance to a location may be needed, these are some of the purposes signs may be erected.

The erection of signs within the Town of Charlton is governed by the [Zoning Bylaw](#), Section 5.6 Signs; which was adopted in 1991 and modified in 1999, and tries to strike a balance between the various entity's needs to erect signs and to avoid as The Five Man Electric Band's hit song *Signs* chants "Sign Sign every where a sign; blocking out the scenery breaking my mind; do this, don't do that, can't you read the sign?" Yes, I remember the lyrics of the whole song, if you care to look they are available at; <http://www.fivemanelectricalband.ca/signslyrics.html>

Signs are divided into three major types of signs; permanent, temporary and exempt. Starting with exempt signs; these are signs erected by government agencies, some signs for churches, home occupations, athletic league signs on sports fields, parking lot directional signs and signs required by government regulation. Exempt signs may not require permit but "shall comply with the spirit and intent" of the signs bylaw or may not exceed a specific size. Temporary signs may advertise an event or sale, opening of a business or be used to persuade you to vote for a candidate or cause. Some temporary signs require permits from the Building Inspectors office and are regulated by size, time for display and locations. Permanent signs all require permits from the Building Inspectors office, these signs have specific requirements for the; number, size, location, height, illumination and construction. For more detailed information on any of the sign categories, consult the Town of Charlton Zoning Bylaw, available from the Town Clerk or Planning Board and on line at; <http://www.townofcharlton.net>.

The allowed dimensions for signs is governed by their location on the property or building, type and the zone the property is located in. Generally for residentially zoned areas (Agricultural “A” and Low Density Residential “R-40”) the size, height and number of signs is smaller, compared to the so called commercial areas (Community Business “CB”, Industrial General “IG” or Business Enterprise Park “BEP”) which are predominantly located along route 20 and 169, which allows larger and higher signs..

Sometimes there is a need to erect a sign on property other than your own; including temporary and permanent off-premises signs, along with off premises directional signs. Off-premises signs are allowed with restrictions; which include size, number and written permission from the property owner that the sign is to be located on submitted, with the sign permit application.

Some locations and types of signs are prohibited. Section 5.6.2 of the Zoning Bylaw states, “No sign shall be erected or maintained in any street right of way, on utility poles or trees.” Also prohibited; pennants in all zoning districts, except with a permit for grand openings, and signs having “moving, flashing, or animated light or visible moving parts.”

For the past several months, the Building Commissioner/Zoning Enforcement Officer and his staff have been educating and assisting those persons and entities who feel the need to decorate; utility poles, trees, intersections and other locations with non-complying signs, of the allowed placement and regulations that govern signs in the Town of Charlton. This office will continue to work with all persons and businesses to understand and comply with the sign and other portions of the Zoning Bylaw.

Signs in place when the sign section was added to the Zoning Bylaw may remain. If the existing sign does not meet the requirements of the Bylaw it is considered non-conforming and according to § 5.6.5 “may not be enlarged, moved or have its character changed or altered unless such sign is brought into conformance with the requirements of this section. Any such sign which is changed but is exempt from conforming with the requirements of this section shall not be made more nonconforming than the present sign.”

With Charlton's annual election in May, the open seat for State Representative, along with other State and National primaries in September and the general elections November there is the potential for numerous signs purporting support for the various candidates or causes. Political signs are exempt from permit requirements, but are regulated as temporary off-premises signs. The requirements for a political sign include; not more than two (2) square feet in "A" and "R-40' zones, twelve (12) square feet in R-SE and NB zones, and a maximum of thirty two (32) square feet in "CB", "IG" and "BEP" zones, the zoning map is available in various offices in the Town Hall.

It is the opinion of the Zoning Enforcement Officer that a political sign may be erected sixty (60) days before the election, March 8th for local contests, July 21st, for primary races, and September 8th for general elections, with those signs removed five (5) days after the event, as long as those signs meet the all the other applicable requirements of section 5.6 of the Zoning Bylaw.

Political signs may not be erect on utility poles, trees or street right of way, nor may the sign interfere with the free and clear vision from any street or driveway. Political signs may be placed in a person's yard with the property owner's permission. The Charlton Board of Selectman has voted a policy that allows the erecting of political and non profit signs on municipal property at the southeast corner of Old Worcester Road, Muggett Hill Road where they intersect with Main Street, signs at these locations should not exceed twelve (12) square feet and be no more than eight (8) feet off the ground.

The Commish, would like to suggest and enlist the help of the various community and school groups that have a need to erect signs, advertise events on a reoccurring bases at the southeast corner of Old Worcester Road and Main Street come together and build a nice permanent standing ladder type sign, with easily changeable panels of a uniform size, that could be used by all. The erection of a single ladder sign would be an asset to our community and help keep the various signs that are displayed at this location; easily visible to all and kept from blowing over or being damaged.

Additional information about building permits, zoning issues and more is available online at Town of Charlton [Building Commissioners](#) web page, part of the Town of Charlton web site www.townofcharlton.net. In addition past *Notes from the Commish* and a section “[Frequently Asked Questions](#)” have been posted on the Commissioner web page.

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