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Ordinance 2025-03
CITY OF HARRISON SIGN ORDINANCE

AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE CODE OF THE CITY OF HARRISON BY amending the City Code, Ordinance Number 22.050-22.051.

Adopted: November 17, 2025

Ordinance Number 22.050–22.051 of the Harrison City Code is hereby revoked and restated as follows

Section 1 – Purpose

This ordinance regulates signs to protect public health, safety, and welfare; preserve property values; promote economic development; reduce visual clutter and distractions; and maintain the overall character and quality of life within the City of Harrison. These standards are designed to balance the right to free expression with important government interests, using the least restrictive means available.

The City's compelling interests include, but are not limited to:

- Promoting traffic and pedestrian safety;
- Protecting children's security and ability to be supervised;
- Preserving community aesthetics and scenic integrity;
- Supporting property values and economic development;
- Avoiding nuisance-like conditions such as visual blight and clutter;
- Ensuring effective property identification for emergency services;
- Facilitating safe and efficient vehicular and pedestrian wayfinding.

This ordinance establishes reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions that are content-neutral. The regulations are not intended to restrict or favor any particular message, viewpoint, or type of noncommercial or commercial

speech. Instead, they are intended to regulate signs based on their physical characteristics, installation, and location to serve the important objectives listed above.

This ordinance shall be interpreted and enforced in a manner consistent with the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and Article I, Section 5 of the Michigan Constitution, and is not intended to regulate the content of protected speech.

Section 2 – Definitions

Sign: Any device, display, or structure visible from a public space that promotes, identifies, or gives information.

Temporary Sign: A sign not permanently anchored to a building or the ground, intended for display on a temporary basis. Allowed size, placement, and duration depend on the zoning district and are regulated in Sections 4, 5, and 7 of this ordinance.

Permanent Sign: A fixed sign intended for long-term display, including business signs.

Electronic Message Sign: A digital sign that changes display automatically or remotely.

Illuminated Static Sign: A sign that is illuminated internally or externally to make its message visible at night or in low-light conditions but that does not contain moving, scrolling, changing, or flashing images or text.

Sandwich Board Sign: A portable sign shaped like an A-frame, often used by businesses.

Nonconforming Sign: A sign that was legal when installed but no longer meets current rules.

Noncommercial Message: A message that does not propose a commercial transaction but instead expresses political, religious, social, ideological, or other opinions protected by the First Amendment.

Commercial Message: A message that proposes a commercial transaction or advertises a business, product, service, or other commercial activity.

Right-of-Way: The publicly owned area typically located between private property lines that is reserved for roads, sidewalks, ditches, utilities, or other

public infrastructure. The width and layout of the right-of-way may vary by street. This includes any area maintained or controlled by the City or other public agency for public use or access.

Sign Area: The total space used to display a message. It includes all lettering, images, logos, and backgrounds used to attract attention, measured as a rectangle around the outer edges of the sign's design. For signs with more than one face (such as double-sided signs), only one face counts if the sides are back-to-back and no more than two feet apart.

Monument Sign: A type of freestanding sign mounted directly to the ground or a solid base, with no exposed support poles. Monument signs are typically made of materials such as brick, stone, concrete, or wood and are designed to appear as a permanent part of the site. Monument signs are subject to the same regulations as ground signs unless otherwise specified.

Freestanding Sign: A permanent sign supported by a base, post, or other structure anchored in the ground and not attached to any building. Freestanding signs include ground signs and monument signs.

Ground Sign: A type of freestanding sign that is mounted directly to the ground or a base, with little or no open space between the sign face and the ground.

Projecting Sign: A sign that is mounted perpendicular to a building wall and extends outward more than 12 inches from the wall surface. Projecting signs are designed to be visible from a distance by pedestrians or motorists and may be fixed or hanging from a bracket.

Window Sign: A sign placed on, attached to, or visible through a window and intended to be seen from outside the building.

Pole Sign: A sign mounted on a single upright post or pole, where the sign face is elevated above the ground and has open space between the sign and the ground. Pole signs are not attached to a building or mounted on a base or monument.

T-Post Sign: A type of temporary sign supported by one or more vertical stakes, posts, or rods pushed directly into the ground. T-post signs are treated as temporary signs under this ordinance and are subject to the standards and limitations provided in Section 7.

Section 3 – General Standards

3.1 Permits Required

A sign permit is required for all permanent signs and for any temporary sign not compliant with Section 7.

The Zoning Administrator shall have the discretion to refer any sign permit request, interpretation, or borderline case to the Planning Commission for review and recommendation when, in their judgment, the proposal involves unusual circumstances, unclear classification, or potential impacts that merit public review.

3.2 Substitution of Message

Any sign authorized under this ordinance, whether permanent or temporary, may contain a noncommercial message in place of any other message. This substitution may occur without additional approval or permitting, provided that the size, location, illumination, and other aspects of the sign comply with this ordinance. No sign shall be required to display a commercial message in order to receive a permit or to remain lawful.

3.3 Prohibited Signs

The following signs are prohibited unless otherwise expressly authorized:

- Signs mounted to utility poles, public benches, or public trees.
- Flashing, scrolling, animated, or moving lights or images.
- Signs placed in the public right-of-way without City approval.
- Pole signs or monument signs in residential districts, except as allowed for institutional or community uses in Section 4.3.
- Signs that block sidewalks, create trip hazards, or obstruct sightlines for vehicles or pedestrians.
- Signs displayed on vehicles or trailers that are parked solely or primarily for the purpose of functioning as a static sign are prohibited. This does not apply to vehicles that are regularly used in the normal course of business and legally parked.
- Any sign type, design, size, placement, or use not expressly authorized by this ordinance shall be considered prohibited.

3.4 Murals, Sculptural, and Artistic Displays

- Murals, statues, architectural features, or other artistic installations that do not display commercial messages or identifying text are not regulated as signs under this ordinance.
- Any artistic feature that includes a logo, business name, or other promotional content shall be reviewed as a wall sign, unless otherwise approved by the Planning Commission as a decorative or public art element.
- The City may require Planning Commission review for any large-scale display where the distinction between art and signage is unclear.

3.5 Enforcement

Violations of this ordinance shall be enforced as follows:

- First offense: Written warning.
- Second and subsequent offenses: Municipal civil infraction, punishable by a fine up to \$500 per violation, per sign.
- Each sign in violation shall constitute a separate offense.
- The City may remove any sign placed in the public right-of-way or on public property without notice. Removed signs shall be considered abandoned and may be disposed of without liability to the owner or responsible party.
- The City may cite or invoice the person, business, or organization identified on the sign; any party reasonably determined to have placed, authorized, or caused the sign to be placed; or any property owner or business that directly benefits from the placement of the sign.

Section 4 – Residential Districts

Signs in residential districts are permitted only as expressly authorized below. Any sign not expressly permitted is prohibited.

4.1 Temporary Signs

- Maximum sign area: 6 square feet per sign face.
- Maximum height: 5 feet above ground level.

- No lighting, illumination, or electronic features allowed.
- Signs must be placed entirely on private property and not within any public right-of-way or utility easement.
- Temporary signs must not obstruct sidewalks, driveways, traffic sightlines, or create any hazard to public safety.

All temporary signs in residential districts must comply with the additional standards and durations established in Section 7.

4.2 Permanent Signs

- Allowed only for home occupations, authorized conditional uses, or other permitted similar residential uses.
- Maximum sign area: 6 square feet per sign face.
- Sign type: Wall-mounted flush to the building or freestanding ground sign.
- Ground-mounted signs must be located at least 5 feet from any public right-of-way, sidewalk, or property line.
- No illumination or internal lighting is permitted.
- Maximum of one permanent sign per property.

4.3 Additional Standards & Prohibited Signs

- Pole signs and monument signs are generally prohibited in residential districts.

Exception – Institutional and Community Uses:

Churches, schools, parks, and other institutional or community uses may have one permanent sign per street frontage, subject to the following standards:

Zoning Administrator Approval (no site plan required):

- Pole or monument sign (including masonry):
 - Maximum 8 feet in height
 - Maximum 24 square feet per sign face
- All signs must be:

- Set back at least 5 feet from property lines, sidewalks, and driveways
- Non-illuminated or externally lit only

Planning Commission Approval & Site Plan Review is required for any sign exceeding 24 square feet in total area, or more than 8 feet in height.

- Externally illuminated signs are allowed only for institutional or community uses and must comply with the standards in Section 4.3. All light must be retained on owner property.
- Electronic message signs.
- Sandwich board signs located within the public sidewalk, public right-of-way, or blocking pedestrian access. Sandwich board signs placed entirely on private property are allowed if they do not create a safety hazard or obstruction.

Section 5 – Commercial and Industrial Districts

5.1 Electronic Message Signs (EMS)

- Electronic message signs are permitted in non-residential districts.
- Messages may change no more frequently than once every 8 seconds, and must transition instantly without flashing, scrolling, fading, or animation.
- Flashing, scrolling, bouncing, pulsating, animated, or moving graphics or text are prohibited.
- Maximum brightness shall not exceed 5,000 nits during daylight hours and 300 nits between sunset and sunrise, as set through the sign's internal dimming controls.
- The maximum size of an electronic message sign is 60 square feet per sign face.
- Larger EMS signs may be allowed only through Planning Commission site plan approval if the proposed signage is compatible with the scale of the building or site, does not create visual clutter, and meets all

applicable safety and visibility standards.

- EMS signs must be set back a minimum of 25 feet from any shared residential lot line.

5.2 Wall Signs

- One wall sign is permitted per business façade. Corner lots may have one wall sign per street-facing façade.
- Maximum sign area is the lesser of 10% of the wall area facing the street or 80 square feet.
- Wall-mounted electronic message signs must comply with all EMS standards above.
- Larger wall signs may be permitted through Planning Commission site plan approval if compatible with the building, site, and surrounding context.

5.3 Ground Signs

- One ground sign is allowed per street frontage.
- Maximum sign area:
 - 60 square feet per sign face on local streets.
 - 120 square feet per sign face along highway corridors (such as M-61 and US-127).
- Maximum height:
 - 8 feet on local streets.
 - 35 feet along highway corridors.
- Taller or larger signs may be permitted through Planning Commission site plan approval if they are compatible with the scale and function of the site and surrounding properties.
- Ground signs must not obstruct public sidewalks, utility easements, clear vision areas, driveways, or traffic sightlines.
- Small directional signs, such as “Enter,” “Exit,” or “Drive-Thru,” are permitted in addition to the primary ground sign, provided they are:
 - No larger than 6 square feet per sign face,
 - No taller than 4 feet,

- Located entirely on private property and not within the public right-of-way.

5.4 Illuminated Static Signs

- Illuminated static signs (signs that are lighted but do not have changing or animated messages) are permitted as wall or ground signs.
- These signs must be designed and maintained to avoid glare, excessive brightness, or unsafe distraction for motorists or pedestrians on adjacent streets or properties, as reasonably determined by the City.

5.5 Sandwich Board Signs

Sandwich board signs are permitted in non-residential districts subject to the following standards:

- Must be placed entirely on private property unless otherwise permitted by the City.
- Must not block sidewalks, ADA access routes, or create a safety hazard.
- Must be well-constructed, durable, and maintained in good condition, free from visible damage or deterioration.
- Maximum size: 3 feet wide by 5 feet tall.
- Must be removed at the close of business each day.
- No illumination or lighting is permitted.

5.6 Temporary Signs

- Temporary signs in non-residential districts must comply with Section 7 – Temporary Signs.
- Feather flags, pennants, and similar fabric-based displays are considered temporary signs and must follow all applicable temporary sign regulations.
- Temporary signs must be located entirely on private property unless otherwise permitted.

- They must not be illuminated, must be kept in good condition, and must not obstruct sidewalks, driveways, traffic sightlines, or any public access routes.

Section 6 – Signs in the Right-of-Way

Private signs are prohibited within the public right-of-way, including medians, ditches, traffic control areas, and attached to trees, utility poles, fences, or traffic control devices.

Temporary signs directly related to the property immediately behind the right-of-way, such as yard sale signs, real estate signs, or contractor signs, may be placed within the mowed frontage (the grassy area between sidewalk and street) for a maximum of five (5) consecutive days, provided they:

- Are placed on private property or within the frontage directly adjoining the sign owner's lot;
- Do not obstruct sidewalks, driveways, or vehicle sightlines;
- Are freestanding and not attached to any trees, poles, or public infrastructure;
- Are removed promptly after the event or temporary use concludes.

This exception does not apply to corner lots, undeveloped parcels, or property not under the direct control of the sign owner.

Unauthorized signs in the public right-of-way may be removed immediately by City staff without notice. Removed signs shall be considered abandoned and may be disposed of without liability to the owner or responsible party.

Any sign proposed within or adjacent to a state trunkline right-of-way may require review and approval by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), in addition to City permitting. It is the responsibility of the applicant to obtain all necessary MDOT approvals prior to installation. City approval does not exempt a project from MDOT jurisdiction or permitting requirements.

Signs placed on vacant or undeveloped property are presumed to be unauthorized unless the individual or entity placing the sign provides written permission from the property owner upon request.

The City may issue a citation to the individual, business, or organization identified on the sign, or to any person reasonably determined to have placed or authorized the sign.

A written warning may be issued for the first violation. Additional violations may result in a municipal civil infraction and fine under Section 9 – Penalties.

Section 7 – Temporary Signs

7.1 Purpose

Temporary signs are allowed to promote free expression, events, public information, and short-term activities, while protecting the community from visual clutter and maintaining public safety.

7.2 Where Permitted

Temporary signs are permitted on private property and within the adjoining mowed frontage (the grassy area between sidewalk and street) associated with that property, provided they do not obstruct sidewalks, driveways, clear vision areas, or traffic sightlines.

Temporary signs are not permitted:

- In medians, ditches, traffic control areas, or public parks.
- Attached to trees, utility poles, fences, or traffic control devices.
- In the public right-of-way unless expressly permitted under Section 6.

7.3 General Standards

- Signs must be freestanding and not attached to any structure, utility pole, tree, or fence.
- Temporary signs must be made of weather-resistant materials and maintained in good condition.
- No temporary sign may be illuminated or lighted in any form.

7.4 Size Limits

- In residential districts: Maximum of 6 square feet per sign face.
- In non-residential districts: Maximum of 32 square feet per sign face.

7.5 Display Duration

- Event signs may be displayed for up to 15 days prior to the scheduled event and must be removed within five (5) days after the event concludes. Event signs must include the name and date of the event and comply with all applicable size and placement standards.
- Construction-related signs may remain in place for the duration of the active construction project and must be removed within ten (10) days of project completion. Signs may not remain on site once work has ceased or been completed.
- Real estate signs may remain in place during an active property listing and must be removed within ten (10) days of sale or lease closing.
- Political, ideological, and other noncommercial opinion signs displayed on private property are not subject to display duration limits but must comply with all size, placement, and safety standards.
- Repetitive temporary signs advertising the same event or service may not be reinstalled within 30 days, unless the sign message has changed in a meaningful way. The Zoning Administrator may waive this limit for ongoing work, community events, or seasonal activities where repeat signage is appropriate.

7.6 Number of Temporary Signs

- Residential properties: Unlimited number of temporary signs, provided they meet size, and safety requirements.
- Non-residential properties: Up to four (4) temporary signs per street frontage, unless additional signage is approved through site plan or temporary permit review.

7.7 Removal of Temporary Signs

- Temporary signs must be removed promptly after the conclusion of the associated event or activity.
- The City may remove any temporary sign placed in violation of this ordinance without prior notice, consistent with Section 6 – Signs in the

Right-of-Way.

- The property owner or responsible party may be cited for failure to remove signs in accordance with this section.

Section 8 – Nonconforming Signs

8.1 Purpose

This section is intended to balance the rights of property owners with the public interest in achieving compliance with current sign standards over time.

8.2 Continuation of Nonconforming Signs

Any sign that was lawfully installed prior to the effective date of this ordinance, but that does not comply with the requirements herein, shall be deemed a legal nonconforming sign and may continue to be used and maintained, subject to the provisions of this section.

8.3 Maintenance and Repair

- Routine maintenance and minor repairs are permitted, provided they do not increase the degree of nonconformity.
- Painting, cleaning, and minor repairs that do not involve structural changes are allowed.

8.4 Alteration, Enlargement, or Movement

- A nonconforming sign shall not be enlarged, relocated, replaced, or structurally altered unless the entire sign is brought into full compliance with this ordinance.
- Changing the copy or message on a nonconforming sign is permitted, provided no structural alterations are made.

8.5 Destruction or Damage

- If a nonconforming sign is damaged or destroyed by any means to the extent of fifty percent (50%) or more of its replacement value, it shall not be rebuilt, repaired, or replaced except in conformance with this ordinance.
- If the damage is less than fifty percent (50%), the sign may be repaired to its pre-damage condition without becoming conforming.

8.6 Voluntary Removal

- If a nonconforming sign is voluntarily removed by the owner, it may not be reinstalled or replaced except in compliance with this ordinance.

Section 9 – Penalties

- First offense: Written warning
- Second offense and beyond: Civil infraction, up to \$500, consistent with other City penalties
- Each sign is considered a separate violation
- The City may assess enforcement costs to the property owner or responsible party
- Violations occurring within a 12-month period may be considered subsequent offenses.

Section 10 – Severability

If any section, clause, or provision of this ordinance is found to be invalid or unconstitutional, the remaining portions shall remain in full force and effect.

Section 11 – Short Title

This ordinance shall be known and may be cited as the City of Harrison Sign Ordinance.

Section 12 – Effective Date and Repeal

This ordinance shall take effect on January 1, 2026, following publication as required by law. It replaces and repeals all prior sign regulations.

First Reading: November 3, 2025

Second Reading & Adoption: November 17, 2025

YEAS:

NAYS:

ABSENT:

APPROVED: _____

Daniel F. Sullivan
Mayor

ATTEST: _____

Justin Cavanaugh
City Manager & Clerk

I hereby certify that the foregoing was duly adopted by the City of Harrison, Michigan, at its regular meeting on the Seventeenth (17th) Day of November, 2025, that of _____ members of the City Council, _____ were in attendance and _____ voted for the adoption of the Ordinance. I further certify that the above and foregoing ordinance is recorded in Ordinances for the City of Harrison.

Effective Date

This Ordinance shall take effect thirty (30) days following date of publication as required by law. All Ordinances or part Ordinances in conflict with any of the provisions of this Ordinance are hereby repealed.

Justin Cavanaugh
City Manager & Clerk