



## Signage

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## SIGNAGE

Signs as communication devices, have evolved over the years, with their size, placement and message display formats often the focus of considerable controversy in a community. In past years, and without regard to neighborhood compatibility, proper sign placement, graphic treatment or traffic safety, sign manufacturers and designers have heavily influenced and encouraged merchants and other sign users to use bigger, larger-scaled, brightly illuminated, free-standing and/or roof or wall-mounted signs as a means to attract the attention of motorists as they drive past a commercial site. In those communities where sign regulations were lax or did not exist, this approach, led to “sign clutter”, deterioration in the visual environment, a lessening of the distinction between differing commercial areas, and overall confusion among potential sign readers as to the sign’s intended message. Merchants and other providers of goods and services rely heavily upon signage to advertise their products and services, and to identify their places of business to potential customers. Likewise, non-commercial and public signage is used to communicate directional and locational information to motorists and pedestrians to facilitate their safe and efficient movement through and around a neighborhood and community. How a community responds to accommodating these needs for signage is one of the most defining elements in establishing a community’s image and character.

While the City of Surprise desires to be responsive in meeting the needs of sign users, it also desires to promote a quality visual environment by encouraging only those signs that are well designed and appropriately scaled; integrated with surrounding buildings and landscape treatment; compatible with their surroundings; and effectively communicate their message and contribute to reinforce the City’s desired character, image and quality of development as set forth in General Plan 2020.

In recent years, more sophisticated marketing and advertising techniques have decreased both the advertiser’s and general public’s need for and reliance upon the use of large, garish signs to promote a product or identify places of business. Today, most merchants and other sign users have come to realize the importance of utilizing well-designed, well-placed signage that provides a simple and direct advertising message in a size, graphic format and lettering style that both the pedestrian and motorist can easily interpret and understand.

This section of the Planning and Design Guidelines Manual addresses the issues of size, placement, lettering, style, color and illumination of signs. It also provides suggested approaches and techniques to help business owners, developers and other sign users to design and install quality signs that will add and contribute to a positive, unified image and sense of pride and vitality for the City of Surprise.

In addition, guidelines will assure that future signage in the City of Surprise:

- provides each sign user an opportunity for effective identification and advertising, consistent with traffic standards of safety and the needs of the traveling public.
- is clearly visible and legible, and consistently sited so different types of information are easily located; and that chaotic proliferation of signage is prevented;
- is integrated into its surroundings in a way that the message is clear but the sign is not the dominant feature;
- provides information sufficiently in advance of choices people have to make;
- avoids the unnecessary and unsightly clutter of multiple signs and/or large, single, signs incorporating multiple tenant signs and the resulting confusion of information;
- enhances the visual appearance of scenic corridors, designated historic areas and commercial and industrial areas;
- protects residential areas adjoining non-residential development from any adverse impacts of near-by signs.
- is constructed, mounted and maintained properly to sustain the sign's intended alignment and orientation.

This



Not This



**GENERAL SIGN GUIDELINES** - *Good signs communicate their message well, are easily seen and understood by people, and relate harmoniously to the building(s) they are placed on or near. The following general design guidelines set forth criteria for creating well-designed signs.*

- Signs should be considered a component of the site's design and building(s) architecture; and they should be architecturally integrated with their surroundings in terms of size, shape, color, texture and lighting so that they are complimentary to the overall design of the building and are not in visual competition with other signs in the area.
- All signs should:
  - complement their surroundings without competing with each other, and have overall shapes that are simple and do not detract from the sign's message;
  - contain no more than two primary colors and a third secondary color that can be used for accent or shadow detail.
  - convey their message clearly and legibly by using as few words as possible and symbols that are recognizable;
  - avoid hard-to-read and overly intricate typefaces, and have letter styles that are appropriate for the business and the development;
  - maintain a proportion where, as a general rule, letters should not appear to occupy more than seventy-five (75) percent of the sign area;
  - be vandal-proof and weather resistant; and
  - if illuminated, not be overly bright for their particular surroundings nor contain flashing or moving parts.
- New development should anticipate the need for signage and provide a Master Sign Program that:
  - delineates logical sign areas for a specific development and integrates all signage of the development into a unified design.
  - allows flexibility for new users as a building is re tenanted;
  - provides for convenient and attractive placement of signs;
  - specifies quality materials that complement the style, color and materials of the building.

- New signs proposed for attachment to existing buildings should provide a compatible appearance with the building signage of other tenants; and where multiple signs exist on a single building, every attempt should be made to include unifying elements such as size and/or color to reduce sign clutter and confusion.



**figure 8.1:** Place Signs to Complement Building Facade



**figure 8.2:** Avoid Blocking Building Facade Elements

- The use of single signs that display multi tenant names and information are strongly discouraged.



**figure 8.3:** Multi-Tenant Reader Board Signs Confuse Motorist

**USE OF COLORS AND SIGNAGE** *Guidelines provide direction in using colors in signs to capture the eye of the passerby and visually communicate ideas and the character of a development.*



- Colors selected for signs should complement the colors used on the structure(s) in the development and the project as a whole.
- The total number of colors used in any one sign should be limited in order to avoid confusing and/or negating the sign message and its readability.
- Signs should always strive to provide a contrast in lettering to insure legibility; with light letters utilized for dark sign backgrounds, or dark letters on a light background.
- Colors or color combinations that interfere with legibility of the sign copy, or that interfere with viewer identification of other signs, should be avoided.



**SIGN MATERIALS** - *The following guidelines address the types of materials recommended for signs in the City of Surprise.*



- Sign materials should always be compatible with the design of the facade upon which they are placed.
- The use of wood is an acceptable material for signs, provided the use of a wood sign is compatible with the architectural character of the development and it is properly scaled, primed and painted or stained.
- Metal that has been formed, etched, cast, engraved and properly primed, treated, painted or factory coated to protect against corrosion is an acceptable and recommended material to be used for signs.
- Materials selected for a sign should contribute to legibility of the sign.
- The use of high density pre formed styrofoam or similar material may be considered appropriate material for a sign, provided the sign has been designed in a manner consistent with the sign guidelines included herein, and the material has been painted and treated to compliment the architecture of the development or individual building.
- Custom neon tubing in the form of graphics or lettering for a sign should be allowed for a variety of the sign types described herein.
- Plastic faced cabinet signs that are illuminated internally are strongly discouraged; as is the use of paper and/or cloth materials for exterior signage.

- Flat sheet signs such as plywood should have a trimmed edge or frame to provide sign stability and improve the finished appearance of the sign.

**SIGN LEGIBILITY** - *Sign legibility is a function of letter size, style and spacing. The following sign guidelines provide direction in creating signs that enable the observer, under normal viewing conditions, to understand the information conveyed by symbols and the grouping of letters used to form words and sign messages.*

- Faddish or bizarre typefaces should be discouraged as the image conveyed may quickly become that of a dated and unfashionable business.
- All signs should contain brief, simple messages whenever possible to permit easier reading and a more attractive sign.
- In selecting lettering styles for signage, the general rule to follow should be to limit the number of different letter types to no more than two for small signs and three for larger signs.
- Extremely small letters on a sign face, or very small individual letters used as part of a sign should be discouraged.
- The use of italics, bold letters and letter size variations to create emphasis to a sign message should be encouraged rather than creating disharmony and sign clutter by mixing lettering sizes on one sign panel.
- Letters should not be spaced too closely together in order to avoid obscuring the sign message by the crowding of letters, words or lines.



- Hard to read, overly intricate typefaces and symbols should be avoided so that the sign message is more easily read and communicated.



figure 8.4: Type Face Lost in Intricate Design





- Symbols, logos and pictographic images register more quickly in the viewer's mind, and should be used in the place of words whenever appropriate.

**SIGN ILLUMINATION** *The way in which a sign is illuminated can have considerable value in visually communicating the sign's intended message. The following guidelines set forth approaches to lighting signs when it has been determined that a sign should be lighted.*



- The light source for any sign proposed for direct or indirect illumination should be properly shielded and have light levels sufficiently bright to present the sign message; while at the same time, have light levels low enough to avoid glare and spillover onto adjoining areas.
- Wall or roof mounted, and/or freestanding monument signs that are flashing, blinking or animated are not consistent with the City of Surprise's desire to foster a quality living environment and enhanced community image, and should be strongly discouraged.
- Movement or apparent movement of or in a sign, or change in sign text and intensity of illumination, should be discouraged.
- Rapidly flashing, blinking or stroboscopic lights or signs, and/or signs that are of such brilliance or so positioned that they would impede the vision of travelers on a highway or local thoroughfare, should be discouraged.
- External spot or flood lighting should be placed in a manner so that the light source is screened from the direct view of passersby, and it is directed against the sign and does not shine onto adjacent property or produce a glare that can blind motorists and pedestrians.
- Illuminated "cabinet" signs placed along the front facade of a structure, and that are lighted by an indirect source of light, should be permitted only if the sign is integrated with the building's architecture and emphasizes continuity of the building's surface.



- Neon lighting for signs should be utilized only when the sign and lighting is part of the total design of the building.
- Halo lit or backlit letters should be encouraged for both office and retail signage as they convey a subtle and attractive appearance and are very legible under moderate ambient lighting conditions.
- Illumination of individual letter signs by spot lights is strongly discouraged for both skyline signs and signs placed high on building walls.



- Illuminated signs that interfere with the City of Surprise’s desire for “dark skies” should be discouraged.

**PLACEMENT OF SIGNS** - *Signs and their messages become meaningless if they are not able to be clearly seen and understood by both passing pedestrians and motorists. These guidelines are intended to provide direction in the proper placement and integration of signs into the overall design of a development and/or individual building so that maximum visibility of the sign can be achieved without detracting from the architecture of the individual building(s) or the overall aesthetic appeal of the total development.*

- Freestanding or monument signs identifying a particular commercial, office, industrial/business park or multi family residential development should be designed and placed as an integral part of the landscaped area required for the perimeter of the development.
- Signs should be set back at least twenty (20) feet from the back of the curb line of the adjacent street or highway, and positioned so that they do not obscure or block the views of oncoming traffic for those motorists entering or exiting a development site.
- The location and placement of freestanding, or monument signs, should be coordinated with other street furnishings adjoining the site.
- Freestanding signs should not extend over a public right of way; or be closer than fifty (50) feet to another freestanding sign or projecting sign on the same site.
- Signs should always be placed perpendicular to, and within the viewers acceptable reading area, or “cone of vision”, to minimize any distortion in legibility.
- No sign should be placed where it obscures or blocks the view of another sign.
- Signs for individual buildings should be consistent with the proportions and scale of the design elements of the building facade upon which it is placed.
- Wall signs should be placed to establish a facade rhythm, scale and proportion on buildings that have a monolithic or plain facade.





- Wall signs should be placed along the band or in the blank area between the first and second floors of a building where the addition of a sign can enhance the architectural features or details of the building facade.
- No sign should project above the eave or parapet, including the eave of a mansard roof, unless as part of a Master Sign Plan, or the sign can be architecturally integrated into a sloping roof fascia or mansard roof.
- In order to establish visual continuity among storefronts on the same site, new signs should be placed in a manner that is consistent with sign locations on adjacent buildings and that complies with a Master Sign Program for the area.
- Signs on multistory office buildings should be located below the parapet at a height and scale that is architecturally compatible with the building.

**TYPES OF SIGNS** - *The following sign types reflect the quality and character of signs desired by the City of Surprise. The guidelines address how different signs types should be designed and installed.*

**PROJECTING SIGNS**

Projecting signs extend over a sidewalk and provide a pedestrian and intimate sense of scale



figure 8.4: Projecting Sign

- The number of projecting signs for a business should be limited to one sign; with the distance between projecting signs no less than fifty (50) feet apart to assure maximum visibility.
- A projecting sign should be hung at a ninety (90) degree angle from the face of a building wall, with the sign's inner edge set at least six (6) inches away from the building wall

- Projecting signs should not extend into a public right of way.
- The distance which the outer edge of a sign extends outward from a building wall should be based upon architectural design considerations and how well the sign is integrated into the overall design of the building. Under no circumstance should a sign extend outward beyond another projecting sign that is placed along the face of the building.

- The bottom edge of a projecting sign should maintain at least a ten (10) foot pedestrian clearance from the sidewalk level.
- Projecting signs should be permitted on multi storied buildings located in commercial retail areas, provided the sign is suspended between the bottom of the second story window sills and the top of the doors or windows of the first story.
- Decorative iron and wood brackets that support projecting signs are encouraged in those pedestrian oriented developments where they would contribute to, and not detract from, the overall quality and character of development.
- The illumination of projecting signs should be permitted, provided the sign is an integral part of the façade design of a building and is in character with the overall development, and the illumination levels are consistent with those of other signs in the project. All light sources for illuminating projecting signs should be screened from view of pedestrians and motorists.



## WINDOW SIGNS

A window sign is any sign in which the name, logo, address, telephone number or hours of operation is applied directly to the window(s) of a place of business and is intended for view from outside.

- A window sign, either permanent or temporary, should not cover more than fifteen (15) percent of each window surface located at the front of a building.
- Window signs should be placed to accommodate the pedestrian and should always be at eye level.



**figure 8.7:** Window Signs Should be Part of Overall Store Design

- Window signs should be compatible with the overall design of the building and designed to aesthetically enhance storefronts.
- Window signs should be limited to individual glass mounted, silk screened or vinyl die cut letters and logos applied directly to the interior surface of the window.
- The permanent or temporary application of letters, symbols and/or logos that are painted on a window(s) should be discouraged.

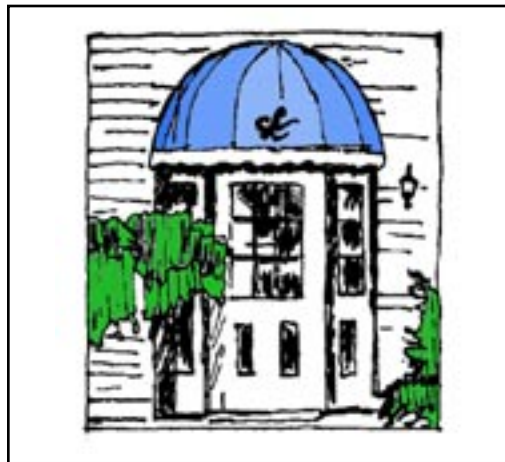
### EXTERIOR DOOR SIGNS

A door sign is any sign that is affixed to either a glass or solid entry door to provide the name, address, telephone number, logo and hours of operation for a business.

- Permanent door signs, either solid or glass, should be placed at eye level for ease of reading by pedestrians.
- Permanent door signs should be limited to individual vinyl cut or painted letters affixed to the exterior of the door, and should not cover more than fifteen (15) percent of the total door area.
- The use of a graphic or graphics as part of a door sign should be encouraged, provided the graphic and sign information are designed to portray a single message.

### AWNING SIGNS

An awning sign is a sign attached to a temporary retractable shelter that is supported from the exterior wall of a building.

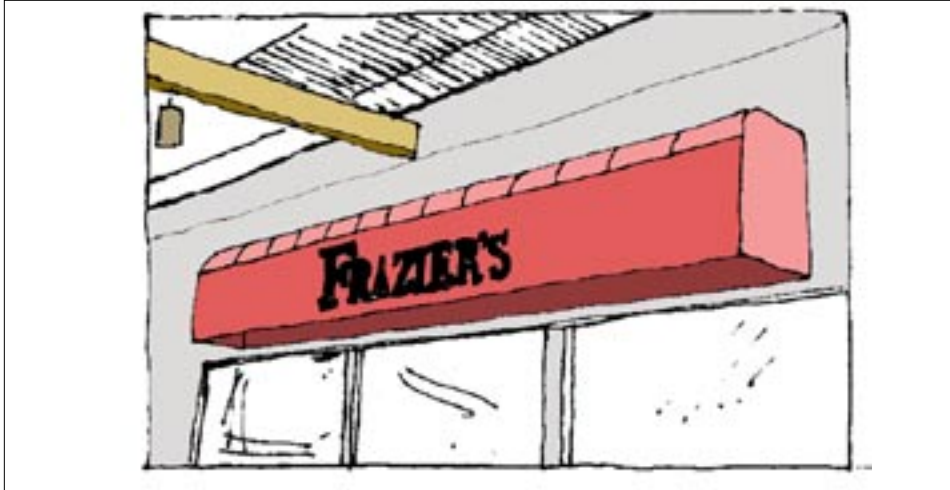


- Sign, or text, copy should be limited to the business name and/or logo; and should be centered on the awning to achieve symmetry.
- The shape, design and color of fabric awnings should be carefully designed to coordinate with, and not dominate, the architectural style of the building.

figure 8.9: Awning Enhances Storefront



- Awnings should be provided with removable valances and end panels to accommodate future changes in sign copy.
- Sign copy should be sized to be proportional with the size of the awning.



**figure 8.10:** Awnings Provide Both Shelter and Facade Enhancement

- When using more than one awning on a building, the design and color of the sign awnings should be coordinated with all other awnings.



**figure 8.11:** Canopy Signs as an Integrated Part of Building Architecture

- The placement of a sign on top of an awning, as well as the painting of an awning for purposes of changing sign copy, are both strongly discouraged.





## WALL SIGNS

A wall sign is a sign that is attached or erected on the exterior wall of a building, with the display surface of the sign parallel to the building wall. Wall signs should be sized proportionally to complement the scale and architecture of the building façade upon which it is placed.



figure 8.12: Wall Sign is Scaled and in Proportion to Facade



- Wall signs should not project more than sixteen (16) inches from a building wall, nor extend above a building's roofline.
- The use of individual color channel letters rather than a cabinet type sign should be encouraged.



## FREESTANDING MONUMENT SIGNS

Any sign that is permanently attached to the ground and which does not have a building as its primary structural support.

- Freestanding signs should have solid architectural bases and sides and be a part of an overall landscaped entry design for a development.



figure 8.13: Locate Monument Signs at Key Entries



- Freestanding monument signs should be constructed of materials that match an architectural element of the commercial retail or office development it serves. Pole signs should be discouraged.

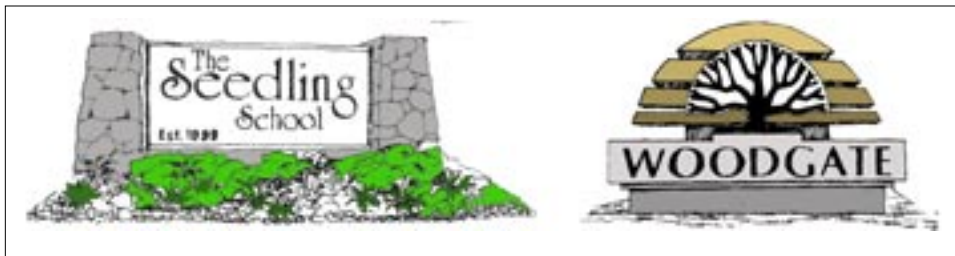


figure 8.14: Monument Signs Reflect Materials Used for Buildings in the Development

- Freestanding signs should be placed at the entry of a development; and in a manner that does not impede vehicular sight distances.

- The height of a freestanding sign should be compatible with the overall scale of the development it serves and the building heights therein; but under no circumstance should the height of a freestanding sign exceed twelve (12) feet.

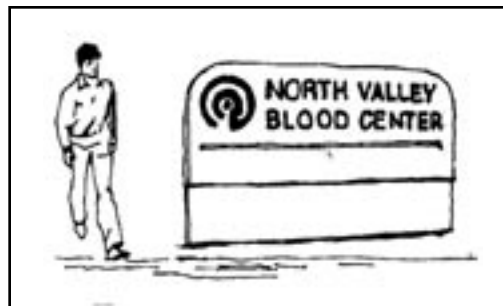


figure 8.15: Signs Should Be Scaled to Reflect the Surrounding Area





## CANVAS SIGNS, BANNERS, FLAGS AND STREAMERS

Defined as temporary or wind-type signs made of cloth, plastic, canvas or other materials which have been tested and shown to have long life expectancy and resistance to the elements.

- The use of canvas signs, banners, flags and streamers should be encouraged; provided they are:
  - not used for advertising;
  - maintained in good repair and replaced when fading or deterioration occurs;
  - an integral part of the design of a building;
  - creatively used to enhance, promote and engender a festive atmosphere for pedestrian activity in designated areas of the City.
- Temporary or wind type signs such as banners and canvas signs should be permitted to be placed on a site or building to announce the opening of a new business, special event, or a public service; or to introduce a new product or service, provided:
  - the banner or sign is not displayed or used for more than fifteen (15) days;
  - the sign does not create a safety hazard or block signs or other types of information identifying adjoining businesses;
  - the sign does not cover any windows or doors of the building(s) upon which it is located; and
  - the sign does not detract from the overall visual environment of adjacent businesses or surrounding neighborhoods.



## KIOSK SIGNS

The City of Surprise utilizes “kiosk signs” to provide directional information to residential and commercial developments. A kiosk sign is a freestanding, multi-sided structure owned by the City and placed within public rights-of-way.

- Kiosk signs should continue to be used as a means to reduce the visual blight attributed to sign proliferation by providing a uniform, coordinated means of offering developers and homebuilders a means of providing directional signs to advertise the location of their product.

- All kiosk signs throughout the City should conform to a single design approach, including height, width, and use of materials and colors to minimize confusion among prospective buyers wishing to inspect development projects.
- Kiosk signs should be well maintained and placed in the public right of way in a manner that promotes traffic safety and does not impede motorist visibility.
- Kiosk signs should be strategically placed in the City adjacent or in close proximity to the developer's or builder's project. In any event, there should be a minimum spacing of two (2) miles between kiosk signs along major thoroughfares within the City of Surprise.



## **STREET ADDRESSES AND VISIBILITY**

Street addresses significantly aid the general public and emergency services safely and efficiently locating individual residences and business establishments.

- All residences and businesses in the City of Surprise should continue to be required to provide street numbers that are clearly visible from public rights-of-way and emergency services access points.
- Street numbers should have a suitable size, location and style of numerals that reflect the character of the building.
- Street addresses for commercial retail, office, industrial, and institutional buildings should be conspicuously placed at each property access point and on each building on the property.
- Street address numbers for non residential buildings should be illuminated at light levels consistent with the overall lighting of the building(s).

## **COMMUNITY GATEWAY SIGNAGE**

Public entry and guide signage that is located and designed as a part of a community's gateway; and which is used to announce to motorists, pedestrians and cyclists their arrival in a community, and the major attractions therein.

- The design of community gateway signage should be unique to the City of Surprise; including the incorporation of a professionally designed logo that will provide a distinctive name and identity for the gateway area, giving it a special and recognizable image.

- Community gateway signs should be designed as an integral part of the specific gateway, and should be incorporated in all aspects of the landscaping and paving design of the gateway.



**figure 8.17:** Provide Dramatic and Special Entry Signage at City Gateways

- Gateway entry signs should be of sufficient size to be clearly seen by motorists traveling at average speeds of twenty-five (25) miles per hour.

### **OTHER SIGN TYPES**

Other types of signage include both permanent and temporary signs that, collectively, can impact the visual quality of a community and its neighborhoods if not regulated.

- Off site advertising and billboard signs should be discouraged as they contribute significantly to the visual blight of the City.
- Driveway directional signs in commercial and office complexes should only be used in those projects where onsite traffic circulation and parking layouts are complex and confusing, and traffic must proceed through the site along a specific path for service.
- Public signs providing street names should be visually appealing and reflect the character of the community in which they are located.

- The location of advertising signs on those bus shelters that are certified annually as official transit stops in the City of Surprise should be encouraged, provided:
  - the sign display area(s) has been integrated into and is a part of the overall design of the bus shelter;
  - the sign(s) is in compliance with all State and City of Surprise regulations; and
  - the sign(s) is well maintained.
- Any sign(s) that resembles an official marker, directional, warning, danger or informational sign erected by the City, County, State or any governmental agency, or that, by reason of position, shape, color, illumination would conflict with the proper functioning of any traffic sign or signal or would be a hazard to vehicular or pedestrian traffic, should be discouraged.
- Real estate signs should be appropriately scaled for the development, and in residential neighborhoods, limited to one per lot.
- A temporary off site directional real estate sign should be permitted provided the sign is not located on a wall or fence in the public right of way, on a utility pole, nor on a public sidewalk, street, median strip, traffic island, or public landscaped area; and the sign does not have balloons, flags or other attachments to the sign.
- Directional real estate signs, including portable should be permitted for advertising a real estate “open house” provided the number of signs used to advertise a single open house is limited to no more than four (4) signs; there are no attachments to the signs and the signs are removed immediately upon conclusion of the open house.
- Construction signs that provide information announcing the future occupants of the building, as well as the architect, engineers, financial institution and construction organizations that are participating in the project, should be permitted provided the sign is not freestanding but integrated into the fencing of the construction site and will be removed within one week following issuance of a certificate of occupancy.
- Political campaign signs should be allowed, provided the sign is not prematurely installed prior to an election, and the sign is removed within five (5) days after the election if the candidate is not a candidate in a follow up run off election.



**MASTER SIGN PLAN** *A Master Sign Plan should be a required submittal to be reviewed at the City of Surprise's Technical Advisory Committee. The Master Sign Plan should present an appropriate balance between building architecture, signage and area and neighborhood aesthetics. The following guidelines provide direction in preparing a Master Sign Plan.*

- A Master Sign Plan should be required for each of the following:
  - a commercial or other non residential center having a single tenant occupying thirty thousand (30,000) or more square feet;
  - any site having three (3) or more non residential occupants;
  - residential subdivisions and/or Planned Unit Developments consisting of ten (10) or more dwelling units where an entry sign and internal directional signs are proposed.
  - Multiple family residential developments that utilize freestanding monument or wall signs; and
  - Any development in which signage must be reviewed to ensure compliance with the quality and character of adjacent community and/or neighborhood signage.
- A Master Sign Plan should reflect signage design that complements the style, color and materials of the building upon which it is to be placed; as well as demonstrate integration of the building signage as a natural part of the building façade.
- A Master Sign Plan to be submitted to the Technical Advisory Committee should include:
  - scaled drawings delineating the site the proposed to be included within the signage program, as well as the general locations of all proposed signs;
  - drawings and/or sketches indicating the dimensions and site of the sign area for freestanding and directional signs;
  - drawings and/or sketches indicating the exterior surface details of all buildings on the site on which wall signs, directory signs or projecting signs are proposed; and
  - a statement of the reasons for any requested modifications to any sign guidelines and
  - regulations.



- In approving Master Sign Plans, the City should find that:
  - the plan’s contribution to the design quality of the site, the buildings located thereupon and the surrounding area meet the overall design standards for enhancement of the visual quality and character of the community; and
  - the proposed signs are compatible with the style and/or character of existing improvements on the site, and are well related to one another.

