



No: \_\_\_\_\_

### CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS Application for Permit for the Erection and Alteration of a Sign

Date: \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_

Application is hereby made to the City Zoning/Planning Administrator of the City of Columbia Falls for Permission to:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Subject to all ordinances covering the zoning and the erection of signs in the City of Columbia Falls and extraterritorial zone.

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Block: \_\_\_\_\_ Lot: \_\_\_\_\_ Subdivision: \_\_\_\_\_  
Business Name on Sign: \_\_\_\_\_ Zone: \_\_\_\_\_

Owner Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Owner Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Builder's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Builder's Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Electrical Contractor's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Attach drawings of sign(s) with all dimensions & specifications as specified under Columbia Falls Municipal Codes Title 18, Chapter 18.438 SIGNS.

Total Value of Sign Installed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

City Official Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Variances to the above application: Electrical permits are separate from the Sign permit: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

FEE:\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Date Paid \_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 18.438 SIGNS

### 18.438.010 – Signs - Purpose

The purpose of these standards is to prescribe standards for the location, design, color, illumination, height and size of all types of signs within the City of Columbia Falls in order to protect the unique natural beauty and small town character of the City, our primary assets. This article also intends to promote the following:

- A. To ensure that signs preserve and protect the public health, safety, and welfare by not allowing signs that constitute a traffic or pedestrian safety hazard, or obstruct public ways; or create a nuisance.
- B. To protect and enhance the community's image while allowing local businesses to communicate with potential customers in a reasonable manner.
- C. To encourage the innovative use of design that is creative and distinctive, compatible with its surroundings, is an integral component of the style and character of the building to which it relates, is appropriate to the activity to which it pertains and is appropriately sized for its context.
- D. To maintain and enhance the aesthetic environment while promoting creativity and the City's ability to attract sources of economic development and growth.
- E. To promote both renovation and proper maintenance.
- F. To encourage the construction of signs of natural materials which are compatible with the historic, cultural and natural surroundings.
- G. To promote clear views of the natural surroundings by minimizing visual clutter and reducing the competition for airspace.
- H. To eliminate distracting lighting, excessive glare and light pollution by reasonably limiting the illumination of signs and buildings to subdued, adequately shielded or concealed light sources.
- I. To enable the fair and consistent enforcement of these sign regulations.

### 18.438.015 Scope.

This chapter shall not regulate official traffic or government signs; the copy and message of signs, signs not intended to be viewed from public right-of-way; product dispensers and point of purchase displays; scoreboards on athletic fields; flags of any nation, government or noncommercial organization; gravestones; religious symbols; commemorative plaques; decorative holiday displays; traditional barber poles; the display of street numbers; or display or construction not defined herein as a sign.

### 18.438.020 Signs permitted in all districts without a permit.

- A. The following temporary signs are allowed in all zoning districts and do not require a permit:
  1. Signs advertising the sale, lease, or rental of the premises upon which the sign is located, and not exceeding twelve (12) square feet in area, except in all residential districts where the area of the sign shall not be more than six (6) square feet.
  2. Legal notices, identification, information, or directional signs erected or required by governmental bodies.
  3. Political signs, each not exceeding twenty (20) square feet.



4. One sign per contractor of a building which is under construction, provided the advertising display area of such a sign shall not exceed sixteen (16) square feet in residential districts or twenty (20) square feet in other districts.
  5. Signs associated with garage or yard sales, non-profit community events, or similar activities are allowed as long as they meet the following requirements: (1) Such signs may be posted or displayed for no more than five (5) days; (2) All such signs must be dated with the date of posting; (3) All such signs must be removed within forty-eight (48) hours after the sale or other activity in question.
- B. Directional Signs.
1. Signs directing and guiding traffic and parking on private property, but bearing no advertising matter, and not exceeding twelve (12) square feet in area, except in all residential districts where the area of the sign shall not be more than six (6) square feet.
  2. Way Signs erected by a Governmental Agency or in Cooperation with a Governmental Agency.
  3. "Entry" or "Welcome To" Signage installed by a Governmental Agency or in Cooperation with a Governmental Agency.
- C. Identification Signs: Signs bearing only property numbers, post box numbers, names of occupants of premises, or other identification of premises and not exceeding twelve (12) square feet in area, except in all residential districts where the area of the sign shall not be more than six (6) square feet.
- D. Architectural Elements: Integral decorative or architectural features of buildings, except letters, trademarks, moving parts, or moving lights.
- E. Bulletin Boards: Bulletin boards for churches, schools, or other public, religious, or educational institution provided such sign is located not less than ten (10) feet from the established right-of-way line of any street or highway and does not obstruct traffic visibility at street or highway intersections. Such signs shall not exceed forty square feet in area; if free standing, each side may not exceed forty square feet in area. Electronic Changeable Copy sign or internal lighting is permitted provided<sup>i</sup> it complies with 18.438.040 C. and is not intrusive on adjacent property.
- F. One subdivision sign per entrance on streets with different names not exceeding twenty four (24) square feet per face nor exceeding six feet in height. The subdivision may have multiple signs at the entrance provided the total square footage does not exceed twenty four square feet. Fences or landscape features, such as rock or log features, do not count against the square footage when the signage on such structures.

#### 18.438.030 Signs Prohibited in All Districts.

- A. Revolving Signs. No revolving signs shall be permitted.
- B. Billboards. No billboards shall be permitted.
- C. Abandoned signs or any sign which identifies or advertises an activity, business, product, service or special event which is no longer produced, conducted, performed or sold on the premises where the sign is located. A sign is considered abandoned if it meets this definition for a period of six (6) months or longer. If a new business occupies a structure or site, the period for removing the abandoned sign is thirty (30) days.
- D. Rotating, flashing or blinking signs, strobe lights and searchlights except electronic message signs as provided elsewhere in these regulations.

- E. Signs that have been unlawfully or illegally erected and/or maintained.
- F. Permanent display of banners, pennants, festoons, balloons, tethered objects, strings of flags, streamers, inflated objects or any device intended as an attractant that is affected by the movement of the air.
- G. Roof signs higher than the apex of the roof.
- H. Signs imitating or resembling official traffic or government signs or signals.
- I. Advertising matter or sign painted, mounted or attached on a vehicle, trailer or boat, outdoor storage containers and/or waste receptacles or their enclosures which are stored, parked or displayed in a conspicuous manner intended to attract the attention for advertising purposes.
- J. Any sign with exposed incandescent, metal halide or fluorescent light bulbs.
- K. Any sign which emits audible sound, odor, smoke, steam, laser or hologram lights or other visible matter, including any device that employs any stereopticon, motion picture or audio projection.
- L. Any sign placed in any public right of way except for signs erected by the city, county, state or other authorized government agency; or as authorized by the city council issuance of a right of way encroachment permit.
- M. In no event may an illuminated sign be placed or directed to cause glare or reflection that constitutes a nuisance in residential areas or a traffic hazard.

18.438.040 On-site signs requiring a permit.

All on-site signs permitted as accessory uses in business and industrial districts require a permit and are subject to the following regulations:

- A. PROJECTION:
  1. Projection of wall signs shall not exceed two (2) feet measured from the face of the building.
  2. No wall sign may project above the highest point of roof structure of the building to which it is attached.
- B. SETBACK:
  1. No on-site, freestanding sign may be set nearer to the lot line adjacent to a street than the required minimum setback for the principal uses permitted in the district.
  2. No freestanding sign may be erected or placed closer than fifty (50) feet from a side or rear lot line abutting a residential district.
- C. ELECTRIC CHANGEABLE COPY SIGNS:
  1. Such signs are allowed not to exceed twenty (20) square feet per face.
  2. Such lighting shall be limited to bulbs up to eleven (11) watts and equivalent neon lighting. In no event may an illuminated sign be placed or directed to cause glare or reflection that constitutes a nuisance in residential areas or a traffic hazard.
  3. All wiring, fittings, and materials used in the construction, connection, and operation of illuminated signs shall be in accordance with the state electrical code.
  4. Electronic changeable copy signs shall not be permitted in the CB-3 and CB-4 Districts.
- D. HEIGHT:
  1. No freestanding sign shall exceed twenty (20) feet in height.
  2. In the CB-4 District no sign shall exceed ten (10) feet in height.
  3. In the CB-3 District no free-standing signs are permitted.



E. NUMBER OF SIGNS PERMITTED:

1. In business and industrial districts, one (1) freestanding sign per frontage, provided such sign meets all other requirements of this title.
2. Multiple freestanding signs on a lot shall have a minimum spacing of fifty (50) feet.
3. In addition, up to three (3) wall signs per building frontage may be installed provided the total area does not exceed the allowable area.
4. Where there are multiple businesses, each business shall be allowed one (1) wall sign provided the total allowable area does not exceed the other requirements in this title.

F. PERMITTED SURFACE AREA:

1. Freestanding Signs:
  - a. The total surface area of all freestanding signs on a property is limited to one hundred (100) square feet per side plus ten (10) square feet for each additional tenant in multi-tenant buildings or one (1) square feet for each five (5) feet of frontage over one hundred (100) feet. In no case shall a single face of a freestanding sign exceed one hundred and fifty (150) square feet and in no case shall the total surface area exceed three hundred (300) square feet.
  - b. Each face of the sign is counted in the total surface area for free standing signs.
  - c. Freestanding signs in the CB-4 District are limited to fifty (50) square feet on any one side.
  - d. In the CB-3 District no freestanding signs are permitted.
2. Wall signs:
  - a. Wall signs shall be permitted to cover twenty-five (25) percent of the exposed facade of the building on which they are mounted.
  - b. Wall signs in the CB-4 District are permitted to cover fifty (50) square feet.
  - c. Wall signs in the CB-4 District are permitted to cover fifty (50) square feet plus one (1) square foot for each one (1) foot of lineal frontage in excess of fifty (50) feet.

G. PROJECTING SIGNS:

1. The sign shall be erected at right angles to the building face and be at least nine (9) feet above grade and shall not extend over any vehicular right-of-way.
2. The maximum area per sign face shall not exceed twenty (20) square feet plus one (1) square foot for every one (1) linear foot of frontage.

H. MEASUREMENT OF SIGN AREA: Sign area for the purpose of measuring total square footage shall be measured as a total of all sign faces including multifaced signs.

1. Sign Copy With Background: Sign copy mounted, affixed or painted on a background panel or area distinctively painted, textured or constructed as a background for the sign copy, is measured as that area contained within the sum of the smallest rectangle(s) that will enclose both the sign copy and the distinctive background panel or area.
2. Individual Letters: Sign copy mounted as individual letters or graphics against a wall, fascia, mansard or parapet of a building or surface of another structure, that has not been painted, textured or otherwise altered to provide a distinctive background for a sign copy, is measured as a sum of the smallest rectangle(s) that will enclose each word and each graphic in the total sign.
3. Area Calculation: Sign area for the purpose of measuring total square footage shall be measured as a total of all sign faces including multi-faced signs.

18.438.050 Off-site signs requiring a permit.

- A. SETBACK: No off-site sign may be set nearer to the lot line adjacent to a street than the required minimum setback for the principal uses in the district in which they are placed. No sign may be erected or placed closer than fifty (50) feet from a side or rear lot line abutting a residential district.
- B. AREA: No off-site sign may exceed fifty (50) square feet in total area or twenty-five (25) feet for one (1) side.
- C. HEIGHT: No off-site sign shall exceed the height limitations of the district in which it is located as measured from either the grade at the sign or the grade of the nearest roadway, whichever is higher.
- D. LOCATION; Off-site signs shall be limited to frontages along U.S. Highway 2.

18.438.060 Temporary signs requiring a permit.

- A. The following signs may be issued a temporary permit by the zoning administrator:
  - 1. Portable reader boards may be permitted for up to thirty (30) consecutive days.
  - 2. Special event signs may be permitted for up to ten (10) consecutive days. Such signs may use moving devices such as banners, balloons, spinners, streamers, and pennants.
  - 3. "Going out of business" sale signs may be permitted for a period of up to sixty (60) consecutive days. There shall be a twenty-four (24) month interim period between the expiration of one "going out of business" permit and the issuance of another to the same applicant, business, or entity.
- B. The area of temporary signs shall be limited to fifty (50) square feet.
- C. Inflatable signs are permitted as temporary signs provided that the sign shall be no more than ten (10) feet and on a tether no longer than ten (10) feet measured from the ground. Such signs shall not be allowed on the roof of a building.
- D. Upon expiration of the permit, the temporary sign and all appurtenances thereto shall be removed.
- E. There shall be a ninety (90) day interim period, beginning the date of expiration of the permit, before another permit may be issued for a temporary sign on the same parcel of land. This shall not apply to "Going out of business" signs; see subsection (A)(3) of this section.

18.438.070 Mural Exhibits

- A. Purpose. It is the intent of the city to provide opportunities for noncommercial mural exhibits of a social, cultural or historical event that beautifies and appeals to all segments of the community.
- B. Mural Exhibits Defined. A noncommercial painted or mosaic tile style exhibit which covers all or a major portion of a wall or a building facade and which contains no sign.
- C. Mural exhibits are permitted in CB-2 and CB-4 zoning districts.
- D. All mural exhibits shall be required to submit a graphic representation of the proposed mural to the City Council for approval. The Council shall use the following criteria to determine if such exhibits are consistent with the provisions of this section:
  - 1. The location, scale and content of a mural should be in keeping with and enhance the building, wall, fence or hoarding on which it is located, as well as the local environment; it should enhance community identity; and it should contribute to the visual delight of passers-by and the visual quality of the city.



2. Adjacent developments or signs should not detract from the appearance or effectiveness of the mural.
  3. Murals should not contain any identification, advertisement, insignia or promotion of the interest of any person, entity, product, or service.
  4. Mural exhibits should not contain obscene, offensive, or gang related symbols, depictions, or graphics.
- E. A mural should be properly maintained and cleaned or repaired as necessary.

18.438.080 Permitted signs in zoning districts.

- A. Permitted signs in zones CSAG-20, CSAG-10 and CSAG-5 shall be as follows:
1. Exempt signs listed herein;
  2. One freestanding sign plus one wall sign for each place of business;
  3. One off-site sign when otherwise permitted and when located in same zoning district as business.
- B. Permitted signs in zones CR-1, CR-2, CR-3, CR-4, and CR-5 shall be as follows:
1. Exempt signs listed herein;
  2. One sign not exceeding six (6) square feet in area, in connection with a nonresidential permitted or conditionally permitted use;
  3. No sign shall exceed five (5) feet above ground elevation.
- C. Permitted signs in zones CRA-1, CB-1, CB-5 shall be as follows:
1. Exempted signs listed herein;
  2. One freestanding sign per developed multi- family or business lot provided the subject matter of such sign shall be limited to the name of the primary business and the business tenants of the building, as appropriate;
  3. One wall sign;
  4. Freestanding signs shall not exceed six (6) feet in height; and
  5. The sign area shall not exceed sixteen (16) square feet per face.
- D. Permitted signs in zones CB-2, CI-1, and CI-2 shall be as follows:
1. Exempt signs listed herein;
  2. Freestanding signs;
  3. Wall signs;
  4. Projecting signs;
  5. Freestanding multiple business signs;
  6. Electronic Changeable Copy;
  7. Off-site sign; and
  8. Affiliation sign not exceeding four (4) square feet.
- E. Permitted signs in zone CB-3 (Limited Business)
1. A maximum of two (2) signs of any combination for the following signs shall be allowed; One (1) wall sign, one window sign, one (1) projecting sign, one (1) awning sign.
  2. Awning – In the CB-3 District, the sign area of the awning shall equal no more than fifty (50) square feet
  3. Wall Signs – Signs shall have finished or framed edges.
  4. Materials – Signs may be constructed of, but not limited to painted, stained or carved wood; brick or stone; glass; high density urethane foam; gold leaf and silver leaf; metal which is painted, rusted or anodized, rust resistant, or otherwise treated to prevent reflective glare.

5. Prohibited materials include: plexiglass, polymers, plastics, acrylic, lexan and flex face, with the exception of those used for letters.
6. Bright and glossy or fluorescent colors and reflective surfaces are prohibited.
7. Internally illuminated individual letters and internally illuminated signs are prohibited in the CB-3 district. Canopies, awnings, fascia and similar structures, whether or not they contain sign copy, may not be illuminated with direct illumination.
8. Use of neon and/or other lighting arranged around a building or other structure for the purpose of attracting attention is prohibited.
9. Because night light pollution is a growing problem, reduction or turning off sign lighting during non-operating hours is encouraged

F. Permitted signs in zones CB-4 (Central Business)

1. A maximum of two (2) signs of any combination for the following signs shall be allowed; One (1) wall sign, one window sign, one (1) projecting sign, one (1) awning sign, one (1) freestanding sign.
2. Awning – In the CB-4 District, the sign area of the awning shall equal no more than fifty (50) square feet
3. In addition to the chosen combination of signs a business may hang an "under canopy sign." Under canopy signs shall be constructed of rigid material, and shall not project more than twelve (12) inches below the canopy and shall not be less than seven and one-half (7-1/2) feet above the sidewalk or grade line. The under canopy sign shall not exceed ten (10) square feet in area of each face, and shall not have more than two (2) signage surfaces.
4. Freestanding signs are allowed only if the building has a twenty (20) feet setback.
5. One "menu" or "A-frame" sign is allowed per developed site that does not exceed six (6) square feet per side but not more than two (2) feet wide; and businesses must maintain a minimum of forty-four (44) inches of clearance around any sign located in the public sidewalk to meet ADA requirements.
6. Wall Signs – Signs shall have finished or framed edges.
7. Materials – Signs may be constructed of, but not limited to painted, stained or carved wood; brick or stone; glass; high density urethane foam; gold leaf and silver leaf; metal which is painted, rusted or anodized, rust resistant, or otherwise treated to prevent reflective glare.
8. Prohibited materials include: plexiglass, polymers, plastics, acrylic, lexan and flex face, with the exception of those used for letters.
9. Bright and glossy or fluorescent colors and reflective surfaces are prohibited.
10. Because night light pollution is a growing problem, reduction or turning off sign lighting during non-operating hours is encouraged.

G. Permitted signs in the zone of CPUD shall be as follows:

1. Exempt signs listed herein, and
2. As otherwise permitted in CB-4, CB-5 or CR zones.

18.438.090 Permits.

- A. General. It is unlawful to display, erect, relocate, or alter any sign without first filing with the building inspector a written application and obtaining a sign permit except as exempted in these regulations.



- B. Application. Each application for a sign permit must be accompanied by a plan or plans drawn to scale and including:
  - 1. The dimensions of the sign and, where applicable, the dimensions of the wall surface to which it will be attached;
  - 2. Dimensions of the sign's supporting structure;
  - 3. Height of the sign;
  - 4. The proposed location of the sign relative to the face of the building and to the boundaries of the lot;
  - 5. Description of building materials, illumination, and colors; and
- C. A processing fee in the amount determined by the city council.
- D. Issuance. Upon review of the application materials, the building inspector shall issue a permit for the installation of a sign that conforms with these regulations. Any question concerning the conformity of a sign should be directed to the building inspector or zoning administrator. Requests for variance from these sign regulations shall be processed by the zoning administrator.
- E. Master Sign Plan: A master sign plan will be required for all multiuse buildings and commercial developments containing more than one tenant and/or building that will be kept on file with the city. The master sign plan must be approved prior to issuance of a building permit for all new buildings, additions or renovations. The master sign plan shall run with the multiuse building or commercial center and not with the individual tenants.

#### 18.438.100 Maintenance.

- A. All signs shall be kept in a neat, clean, and attractive condition. This includes the periodic cleaning, painting, repairing, and/or general maintenance of the sign. Maintenance shall also include the updating of the information provided by signs. All signs shall give an accurate representation of the current goods/prices offered, occupant, and/or other circumstances that are advertised on the sign. This maintenance shall be the responsibility of the holder of the sign permit. Any sign that is not properly maintained shall be deemed to be an illegal nonconforming use.
- B. All wiring, fittings, and materials used in the construction, connection, and operation of illuminated signs shall be in accordance with the current electrical code adopted by the State of Montana.

#### 18.438.110 Non-Conforming Signs

- A. A sign, which was in existence prior to the adoption of this chapter under permit, shall be considered a legal nonconforming sign if it is not altered in any way that increases its noncompliance.
- B. Signs located in areas annexed by the city after the adoption of this chapter shall, or included in a city planning area that was expanded due to an annexation, shall be considered legal nonconforming signs except prohibited types of signs which shall be unlawful. Billboards in these areas shall be brought into compliance within seven (7) years of being annexed or included in the planning area.
- C. Any sign which is nonconforming shall nevertheless comply with this chapter if:
  - 1. The sign is replaced, including due to a change in business. Repairing the face does not constitute replacement;

2. The sign is abandoned;
  3. The sign suffers damage of greater than fifty (50) percent of its appraised value;
  4. Nonconforming billboards shall comply within seven (7) years of the effective date of adoption of this amendment.
- D. All nonconforming signs on a zoned lot shall be brought into compliance within ninety (90) calendar days of notice from the city if:
1. The use advertised is suspended for one hundred eighty (180) calendar days;
  2. The use changes;
  3. The name of the business or the franchise changes;
  4. The sign is altered in any way except for ordinary maintenance; or
  5. The sign is relocated.
- E. Any illegal sign which was in existence prior to the adoption of this chapter shall not be considered a legal nonconforming sign. Illegal sign shall be brought into compliance within twelve months after notice by the zoning administrator.
- F. Businesses may request an exemption from the provisions of this section per a variance procedure if they can demonstrate that a sign is of historic significance or, in the case of an illegal sign, that the removal or alteration within twelve months is such a hardship that a longer period is necessary.

#### 18.438.120 Violations

- A. When, in the opinion of the administrator, a violation of this chapter or the building code exists, the administrator shall issue a written order to the alleged violator. The order shall specify those sections of the code which the individual may be in violation of and shall state that the individual has thirty (30) days from the date of the order in which to correct the alleged violation or to appeal to the board of adjustment. Appeals shall be decided by a majority vote of the board.
- B. If, upon inspection, the administrator finds that a sign is abandoned or structurally, materially or electrically defective, or in any way endangers the public, the administrator shall issue a written order to the owner of the sign and occupant of the premises stating the nature of the violation and requiring them to repair or remove the sign within fourteen (14) days of the order.

In cases of emergency, the administrator may cause the immediate mitigation of a dangerous or defective sign without notice. Signs removed in this manner must present a hazard to the public safety as defined in the local building or traffic codes.

---