

**SAN DIEGO COUNTY**  
**COMMUNITY SIGNS AND BANNERS IN THE PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAY**  
**PROGRAM GUIDELINES**

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**SAN DIEGO COUNTY**  
**COMMUNITY SIGNS AND BANNERS IN THE PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAY**  
**PROGRAM GUIDELINES**

**Purpose**

A program for installing community oriented signs and banners within public road right-of-way maintained by the County of San Diego is established to:

- Welcome travelers, tourists and visitors;
- Help motorists find services;
- Locate local points of interest and places of historical significance;
- Provide directional guidance to events, attractions and centers of commerce;
- Enhance community character, beauty and safety for residents and communities.

The purpose of these program guidelines is to define how, when and where it is appropriate for community members to use decorative and/or informative signs and banners in the public right-of-way while ensuring a safe roadway environment that adheres to existing laws and regulations. These Program Guidelines do not address signs, marquees and awnings within the scope of Chapter 1, Division 1 of Title 5, commencing with Section 51.101, of the San Diego County Code.

**Sign Types**

**Permanent Signs:**

- Community Identification Signs
- Community Information Signs
- Directional Wayfinding Signs
- Neighborhood and Business Watch Signs

**Temporary Community Event Banners:**

- Horizontal Street Spanning Banners
- Vertical Pole Mounted Banners

**Applicable County Regulations:**

The San Diego County Zoning Ordinance (Zoning Ordinance) and San Diego County Code of Regulatory Ordinances (County Code) define regulations applicable to signs and banners in the public right-of-way. Applicable regulations include, but are not limited to:

- Zoning Ordinance Section 6205 entitled “Off-Premise Signs”
- Zoning Ordinance Section 6207 entitled “Special Purpose Off-Premise Signs”
- Zoning Ordinance Section 6217 entitled “Abatement Of Sign Violations”

- County Code Section 51.105 entitled “Encroachment Permit Required for Signs, Marquees or Awnings Overhanging Road Rights-of-Way”
- County Code Section 51.125 entitled “Revocation or Suspension of Permit”

**Roadway Safety Criteria:**

- Signs and banners installed in the public right-of-way must be located to minimize hazards to all roadway users and not detract from efficient use of roads.
- Signs and banners shall not obstruct roadway visibility, distract motorists from traffic control devices or the task of driving, use traffic control terms (e.g., one way, left turn only, etc.), or require a call to action (e.g., stop, turn, slow, detour, etc.).
- Sign and banner colors, font and sign structure shall not match traffic control devices in a way that could confuse users of the right-of-way (e.g., white print on red background that mimics a stop sign).
- No person or entity shall install, use or maintain any sign or banner in the public right-of-way when such installation, use or maintenance endangers the safety of persons or property, or when such sign or banner unreasonably interferes with the use of public infrastructure or permitted private encroachments such as poles, posts, traffic signals, or other objects.
- Signs and supports shall be located at the furthest edge of the right-of-way, the furthest distance from the roadway, and outside of the roadway clear recovery zone as defined in American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials standards.
- Signs and supports in a landscaped median shall be located outside of the deflection distance of any guide rail or median.

**Application Process:**

County staff will review and manage all applications for signs and banners in the public right-of-way through the existing Site Plan Permit and Encroachment/Construction Permit review processes. With the exception of Neighborhood and Business Watch Signs, no sign or banner will be installed within any public right-of-way without an applicant first obtaining an approved Site Plan Permit. All sign types named in these Program Guidelines (with the exception of Neighborhood and Business Watch Signs when installed on private property) require an Encroachment Permit prior to installation. All sign types that have construction activity to install permanent structures require a Construction Permit. The County of San Diego has final approval of all signs and banners.

**Site Plan Permit:**

A Site Plan Permit, pursuant to Zoning Ordinance Section 7150 and as described in Zoning Ordinance Section 6207, is required for:

- Installation of Community Identification Signs, Community Information Signs and Directional Wayfinding Signs.
- Installation of poles that support temporary Horizontal Street Spanning Banners.
- Approval of poles within a community for Vertical Pole Mounted Banners.

The Site Plan Permit review process is extensive and can take six months or more to complete. Site Plan Permits will be reviewed for consistency with applicable Community Design Guidelines and/or Community Plan and with the desired community character. Additionally, Site Plan Permits will be reviewed by the applicable Design Review Board, Community Planning Group or Community Sponsor Group.

Site Plan Permit content shall include the following information:

- Plans, drawings and sketches to provide information as required by the applicable Design Guidelines and/or Community Plan.
- Input from the local Community Planning or Sponsor Group.
- Plot plan that identifies the location(s) of each proposed sign.
- Elevation drawings that show the general appearance of the sign(s) with regards to color(s), dimensions (width, height and area), type face, font size(s), and material(s).
- For Community Identification Signs and Community Information Signs, details on any proposed lighting including, but not limited to, luminosity, type, and size, appearance, number and orientation of fixtures.
- Details on any proposed grading, clearing, trenching and/or any other proposed work in the right-of-way to install the sign(s).
- A text description of the general appearance of the sign(s) and type.

Repair or replacement of signs and banners in a manner that substantially conforms to the initial approved Site Plan, or complete removal of signs and banners, shall not require subsequent Site Plan review. Alteration of a previously approved sign project such as aesthetic changes to the sign(s) and change in location(s) requires review for substantial conformance with the previously approved Site Plan. A Site Plan Modification would be required if the change does not substantially conform to the previously approved Site Plan.

**Site Plan Permit Application Costs:**

Site Plan Initial Deposit

Submit at Zoning Counter:

(see PDS fee schedule)

**Encroachment/Construction Permit:**

Encroachment/Construction Permits for signs and banners in the public right-of-way cannot be issued without first obtaining an approved Site Plan Permit (with the exception of Neighborhood or Business Watch Signs for which Site Plan review is not required). Land development counter staff will ensure that the Encroachment/Construction Permits comply with the approved Site Plan Permit.

Encroachment/Construction Permit applications for signs and banners in the public right-of-way shall include:

- Notation of the approved Site Plan Permit number.
- Traffic control permit application with certification that roadway safety criteria are met.
- Name, address, telephone number and e-mail address of the applicant and responsible organization, if different from applicant. The applicant and responsible organization shall each be considered a permittee.
- A certificate of insurance naming the County of San Diego, and the County's officers, agents and employees as an additional insured with general liability coverage of not less than \$1 million per occurrence.
- For temporary banners, date of banner placement and planned removal, applicable community event, and name of the organization hosting the event.

Land Development counter staff will review all applications for substantial conformance with the approved Site Plan. Submittals must include a schematic and written description of any proposed changes to previously approved Encroachment/Construction Permits such as changes to the sign(s) and change in location(s). Additional information may be requested to assist in the review.

Encroachment/Construction permit applications for banners shall be submitted at least 30 days, but not more than 90 days, prior to an event to which it relates. Application requests shall be scheduled on a first-come first-served basis and all scheduling decisions shall be at the discretion of the County.

**Encroachment/Construction Permit Application Costs:**

Encroachment Permit Application	
Submit at Land Development Counter:	(see PDS fee schedule)
Construction Permit Application	
Submit at Land Development Counter:	(see PDS fee schedule)

**Permittee Responsibilities:**

**Production:** Permittees shall be responsible for production, design, procurement, printing, manufacture and storage of signs and banners and all associated costs. The County is not responsible for damaged, lost, missing or stolen signs and banners. The County is not responsible for retaining, storing or warehousing signs or banners.

**Installation:** Permittees shall be responsible for installation of signs and banners including utility coordination (e.g., utility installation, hook-up or relocation) and all associated costs through approved, licensed contractors. Signs and banners shall only be installed during normal working hours (7:00 am to 5:00 pm). Nighttime installation is prohibited. Signs and banners shall only be installed or removed during light traffic and fair weather conditions.

**Maintenance:** Permittees shall be responsible for maintenance of signs and banners and all associated costs through approved, licensed contractors. Permittee shall immediately replace, repair, or clean any sign or banner that is damaged, in disrepair, been defaced, or has reached the end of its effective service life. Signs and banners are to be maintained in good order, in a neat and clean condition, and in accordance with the Site Plan Permit. Permittee is responsible for damage to signs and banners caused by vandalism, accident, natural causes, or other events. The County may inspect signs and banners and make recommendations to the applicant when repairs are deemed necessary by the County. If signs and banners are not properly maintained, the County may cause the signs and banners to be removed and bill the permittee for all costs associated with removal and disposal. Payment shall be made within 30 days of the receipt of a bill from County.

**Removal:** Permittees shall be responsible for removal of signs and banners and all associated costs through approved, licensed contractors. The County reserves the right to cover, relocate, or remove any signs or banners for maintenance or construction operations, or when deemed to be in the best interest of the public without advance notice.

**Damage:** Permittees shall be solely responsible, at Permittees' sole cost, for repairing all damage that occurs to County right-of-way or property as a result of the installation or maintenance of signs and banners; and to the signs and banners and associated hardware.

**Incurred Costs:** County shall not be obligated to, but may elect at Permittees' expense to maintain or remove signs or banners in the event that permittee fails, with or without notice, to install or maintain the signs or banners in accordance with the Site Plan Permit or Encroachment Permit. Permittees shall reimburse County promptly upon receipt of a bill for County costs. Payment shall be made within 30 days of the receipt of a bill from County. .

**Enforceability:** Regulations for the placement of signs and banners in the public right-of-way are enforceable by both the Department of Public Works and the Department of Planning and Development Services.

**Waiver of Claims:** Permittees waives and releases any and all claims, causes of action or demands for money, damages or other action however arising, in law or equity, against County, and County's officers, employees, contractors and agents, for the loss, damage or destruction of signs and banners and any supporting structure or hardware. This waiver shall extend to and include a waiver and release of rights under Civil Code Section 1542 which provides that: "A general release does not extend to claims which the creditor does not know or suspect to exist

in his or her favor at the time of executing the release which if known to him or her must have materially affected his or her settlement with the debtor.”

Assumption of Risk and Indemnity: Permittee assumes all risk of loss, damage or injury resulting from the installation or maintenance of signs and banners in the public right-of-way. Permittee agrees to defend and indemnify the County, and County’s officers, employees, contractors and agents, in accordance with County Code Section 71.103. This defense and indemnification obligation shall extend beyond the termination or expiration of the Encroachment Permit and Site Plan Permit, and shall apply to matters arising under both the Site Plan Permit and Encroachment Permit.

Conflicts: In the event of a conflict between these General Provisions and the terms of a Site Plan Permit or Encroachment/Construction Permit, the terms most favorable to County under the circumstances shall control.

## **Community Identification Signs**

**Description:** Ground mounted or street spanning non-commercial, civic-oriented decorative signs located in the public right-of-way, erected as an alternative to the standard white text on green background community identification signs identifying the primary entrances into defined town centers, welcoming travelers, and expressing a community's sense of identity.

### **Guidelines:**

- Installation subject to Site Plan Permit and Encroachment Permit reviews and approvals.
- Communities are limited to one ground mounted or street spanning sign at each principal approach to a village area as designated in the County General Plan.
- Signs shall be located entirely within the right-of-way of County of San Diego General Plan Mobility Element roads.
- Signs shall provide the name of the community and may include a community slogan and/or logo.
- Sign text size shall be legible from a reasonable distance based on prevailing approach speeds.
- Ground mounted signs shall provide information on one side only.
- Street spanning signs may provide information on two sides.
- Signs may be illuminated following existing lighting policies and standards.
- Scrolling or variable messages are not allowed.
- Signs shall not provide directions or destinations.
- Signs shall not include sponsorship or advertising of any kind.
- Signs shall not include any photography.
- Signs shall not include landscaping.

(See Zoning Ordinance Section 6207 for complete information)



## **Community Information Signs**

**Description:** Ground mounted non-commercial, civic-oriented decorative signs located in the public right-of-way, with changeable shingles that identify upcoming community events and enhance community character.

### **Guidelines:**

- Installation subject to Site Plan Permit and Encroachment Permit reviews and approvals.
- Communities are limited to four ground mounted signs in a village area as designated by the General Plan.
- Signs shall be located entirely within the right-of-way of County of San Diego General Plan Mobility Element roads.
- Signs shall not be located within 500 feet of intersections.
- Signs shall contain a consistent community thematic enhancement marker indicating the name of the community.
- Signs may provide information on both sides.
- Signs may be illuminated following existing lighting policies and standards.
- Scrolling or variable messages are not allowed.
- Signs shall not provide directions or distances to destinations.
- Signs shall not include sponsorship or advertising of any kind.
- Signs shall not include any photography.
- Signs shall not include landscaping.
- Sign legend and background colors shall be consistent in each community planning area and shall be determined by the applicable Community Planning or Sponsor Group.
- Red, yellow, orange, purple, or their fluorescent versions, and fluorescent yellow-green shall not be used as background colors to minimize confusion with standard signs.
- Signs shall be rectangular in shape, 4 feet wide and 8 feet tall.
- Engineer grade reflective material will be used to insure night visibility and meet CA MUTCD requirements.
- Signs and their structural supports, posts, foundations and mountings shall be of consistent design within a community planning area and shall be crashworthy and meet breakaway requirements as defined in the CA MUTCD.
- Signs may have up to six shingles for eligible community event information.
- Shingles may be used for community events open to the public with an anticipated attendance of at least 200 people.
- Each shingle shall include the name of the community event.
- Each shingle shall be 12 inch high and 48 inch wide.
- Sign lettering on the shingles shall be up to 6 inch tall and 3 inch wide capital letters. Multiple lines of text are allowed when necessary to describe the event. Only the name, date, location and time of the event may be specified.
- Event shingles may include non-verbal graphic designs, images, or art relating to the event.
- Event shingles shall be displayed during a period of no more than 30 days prior to the event and ending 7 days after the event.
- Blank placeholder shingles may be required when community events are not scheduled to maintain an aesthetically pleasing appearance to the sign.

(See Zoning Ordinance Section 6207 for complete information)

## **Directional Wayfinding Signs**

**Description:** A network of uniform and permanent directional and destination signs in the public right-of-way to provide visitors guidance to local civic, cultural, visitor, and recreational destinations within a specified region, strategically placed in or near established village areas as identified in the General Plan.

### **Guidelines:**

- Installation subject to Site Plan Permit and Encroachment Permit reviews and approvals.
- The geographic area of each established San Diego County Regional Community Planning and Sponsor Group shall constitute a separate wayfinding region.
- Signs may be installed on County of San Diego General Plan Mobility Element roads.
- Sign assemblies shall only be permitted on the same side of the roadway as the direction of travel.
- Sign legend and background colors shall be consistent in each community planning area and shall be determined by the applicable Community Planning or Sponsor Group.
- Red, yellow, orange, purple, or their fluorescent versions, and fluorescent yellow-green shall not be used as background colors to minimize confusion with standard signs.
- Minimum contrast value of legend to background color of 70% is required.
- Signs shall be rectangular in shape, 4 feet wide and 8 feet tall.
- Individual signs shall be prioritized with left turns on top, right turns in the middle, and straight moves on bottom.
- Each sign may contain a consistent thematic enhancement marker at the top.
- Signs may provide information on two sides.
- Engineer grade reflective material will be used to insure night visibility and meet CA MUTCD requirements.
- Signs and their structural supports, posts, foundations and mountings shall be of consistent design within a community planning area and shall be crashworthy and meet breakaway requirements as defined in the CA MUTCD.
- The bottom edge of the sign must be a minimum of 7 feet above the ground.
- Signs shall not provide scrolling or variable messages.
- Signs shall not include any sponsorship, advertising or photography.
- Sign structures shall be a minimum of five hundred (500) feet apart measured along the right-of-way.
- Install between 150 and 400 feet of the closest intersection where motorists must make a decision to turn or continue on a path
- Signs may have up to six shingles listing points of interest.
- Each shingle shall include name of eligible destination, directional arrow, and distance (if desired).
- Each shingle shall be 12 inch high and 48 inch wide.
- Shingle lettering shall be up to 6 inch tall and 3 inch wide capital letters.
- Each line may contain one general icon 6 inch tall and 6 inch wide.  
Blank placeholder shingles may be required when destinations are not identified to maintain an aesthetically pleasing appearance to the sign.

(See Zoning Ordinance Section 6207 for complete information)

## **Neighborhood and Business Watch Signs**

**Description:** The Sheriff's Neighborhood Watch and Business Watch programs currently allow citizens to help in the fight against crime by being the eyes and ears for law enforcement without having to take the law into their own hands. This program allows recognizable Neighborhood and Business Watch signs to be installed in the public right-of-way as a declaration to would-be criminals that they're being watched.

### **Guidelines:**

- Installation within County maintained roads subject to Encroachment Permit reviews and approvals.
- Applicants shall review and follow the steps outlined in the San Diego County Sheriff's Department Crime Prevention Unit Neighborhood Watch Brochure.
- Applications for installation of Neighborhood Watch and/or Business Watch signs shall require advance approval by the San Diego County Sheriff's Department Crime Prevention Unit.
- Neighborhood Watch signs are rectangular and up to 18 inches wide x 24 inches tall.
- Business Watch signs are rectangular and up to 18 inches wide x 24 inches tall.
- Signs are 1/16" thick aluminum or other durable material resistant to oxidation and corrosion with reflective coating, rounded corners and two 3/8" mounting holes.
- Order standard signs through the National Neighborhood Watch Institute or an approved equal.
- Signs shall reference the San Diego County Sheriff's Office.
- Signs shall be mounted at right angles to the road and at least 10 feet above the ground on existing County street light poles or on 4 inch x 4 inch wood posts, 8 feet from the edge of the roadway where there is no curb or 2 feet behind a curb.

(See Zoning Ordinance Section 6207 for complete information)

## **Horizontal Street Spanning Banners**

**Description:** Horizontal banners span the roadway from County approved structural poles on both sides of the road and are designed with an aesthetic and festive look announcing or promoting a community event within the village area as delineated by the General Plan or applicable Community Plan. The poles must be approved by a Site Plan Permit. Banners may only be installed on approved poles and may not be installed on any other structures, vehicles or other objects.

### **Guidelines:**

- Installation subject to Site Plan Permit and Encroachment Permit reviews and approvals.
- One horizontal banner is allowed in a permanently established village area as designated in the General Plan. The ultimate location is at the discretion of the County of San Diego.
- County street light poles or traffic control devices may not be used to mount horizontal banners above and over the roadway.
- The applicant shall provide support poles or provide the County of San Diego with a letter of authorization from whoever owns the pole on which the banner will be mounted. In no event shall unpermitted poles be used to support a banner.
- Support poles shall be approved for use by an appropriate structural or civil engineer.
- Banners support poles shall be installed mid-block. Installation of banners at or near intersections or on traffic signal poles is not permitted.
- Banners shall be no taller than 4 feet high and no wider than the traveled lanes up to a maximum of 70 feet.
- Banners shall be mounted a minimum of 19 feet above the highest portion of the travel lanes and a maximum of 30 feet above travel lanes and at least 10 feet above any walkway at the support ends.
- Banners shall be displayed during a period of no more than 30 days prior to the event and ending 7 days after the event.
- Banners may provide information on two sides with text size based on approach speeds.
- Banners must contain the name, date, and location of the event.
- Banners may include non-verbal graphic designs, images, or art relating to the event.
- Banners may contain the name and logo of sponsors provided no more than 20 percent of the banner is used for this purpose. Sponsor name lettering shall be no larger than 3 inches in height and width. Logos shall be official corporate logos and no larger than 36 square inches.
- Banners shall be vented to reduce wind resistance.
- Banners shall be made from industrial grade matte finish vinyl, marine acrylic canvas or other durable cloth or nylon. Threads shall be at a minimum 138 polyester bonded, stretched and twisted. Yarn size shall be at a minimum 200/2/3 cord with 150 tensile size after manufacturing with a minimum strength of 21.5 pounds. Fabric must be durable, fade and weather resistant, repel water, be impervious to rotting, guaranteed non-shrink, allow printing with no bleeding.
- The banner shall be hemmed, fitted with 1 inch by 2 inch metal grommets and constructed with a 5/16" or larger nylon rope for mounting to the support cable. The banner is mounted to a 3/8" or larger steel cable strung between the cable mounts. Suspended banners shall be connected to each supporting pole with approved metal cables and locks at both, top and bottom ends of banner. Information shall be submitted

demonstrating the method of hanging and any necessary engineering calculations  
demonstrating the mounting system will support the banner from failing.

(See Zoning Ordinance Section 6207 for complete information)

## **Vertical Pole Mounted Banners**

**Description:** Vertical banners are located on County street poles within village areas as delineated by the General Plan and are designed with an aesthetic and festive look announcing or promoting a community event or recognized holiday. Generic community oriented banners may be used to highlight the County's diverse regions when event specific banners are not being used.

### **Guidelines:**

- Installation subject to Site Plan Permit and Encroachment Permit reviews and approvals.
- The Site Plan Permit will identify the specific street light poles within a community which will be authorized for the installation of vertical banners.
- Vertical banners shall be installed on existing County maintained street light poles on County of San Diego General Plan Mobility Element roads within village areas as designated by the General Plan.
- The maximum number of banners displayed in any village area is 100.
- Installation of banners at intersections on traffic signal poles or other traffic control devices is not permitted.
- Banners shall have vertical clearance at least 10 feet above the walkway and 19 feet above any vehicle travel way that they overhang.
- Banners on poles 20 feet in height or taller shall be 30 inches wide by 72 inches tall. Banners on poles less than 20 feet in height shall be 24 inches wide by 60 inches tall.
- Banners may provide information on two sides with text size based on approach speeds.
- Banners may include non-verbal graphic designs, images, or art relating to the event.
- Banners may contain the name and/or logo of sponsors limited to 20 percent of the banner. Sponsor name lettering shall be no larger than 3 inches in height and width. Logos shall be official corporate logos and no larger than 36 square inches.
- Banners shall be displayed during a period of no more than 30 days prior to the event and ending 7 days after the event. Community placeholder banners may be displayed for a longer period of time.
- Banners shall be made from industrial grade matte finish vinyl, marine acrylic canvas or other durable cloth or nylon. Threads shall be at a minimum 138 polyester bonded, stretched and twisted. Yarn size shall be at a minimum 200/2/3 cord with 150 tensile size after manufacturing with a minimum strength of 21.5 pounds. Fabric must be durable, fade and weather resistant, repel water, be impervious to rotting, guaranteed non-shrink, allow printing with no bleeding.
- Banners shall have 7 inch pockets on top and bottom.
- Banners shall be installed with top and bottom hanging bracket systems. All parts shall be resistant to oxidation and corrosion with at least a 60 MPH wind rating without permanent distortion
- Top bracket shall be a minimum of 2 feet below any existing pole appurtenance.

(See Zoning Ordinance Section 6207 for complete information)

### **Modification and Use of Guidelines**

These Policy Guidelines may be modified, amended or supplemented consistent with applicable County ordinances by the Director, Department of Public Works, with concurrence from the Director, Department of Planning and Development Services, or by the Director, Planning and Development Services, with concurrence from the Director, Department of Public Works, to reflect generally applicable requirements or on a case by case basis to ensure the design, installation and maintenance of authorized sign types is consistent with applicable community design requirements and right-of-way safety and operational requirements. The Permittee Responsibility portions of these Policy Guidelines as they currently exist or may be subsequently amended shall be incorporated into and deemed a part of all issued Site Plan Permits and Encroachment/Construction Permits. These Program Guidelines shall not limit the authority of the County and Director, Planning and Development Services, to condition Site Plan Permits or the County and Director, Department of Public Works, to condition Encroachment/Construction Permits.