



Designing Effective Signs



Legibility

One of the most important determinants for motorists viewing a sign is driving speed. Therefore, driver reaction time (the time it takes a driver to see a sign, read it, and respond to it) is an important consideration.

Color

Colors contribute to legibility and design of the sign. Avoid using too many different colors, as this can make the sign more difficult to read.

A substantial contrast should be provided between the color of the background and the letters or symbols to make the sign easy to read during the day and at night. Light letters on a dark background or dark letters on a light background are the easiest to read.

Lettering

Select a font that can be read easily from a distance and under different lighting conditions. Some examples of such fonts include **Arial** and **Tahoma**. Fonts like *Old English* or *Mistral* are much more difficult to read. Lettering should be limited to no more than two or three typefaces per sign to prevent confusion.

Spacing is also important- letters that are spaced **too closely together** or **too far apart** will be difficult to read. Sign messages should be kept to a minimum of words, but where longer messages are necessary, the use of both upper and lower letters is recommended, as they are easier to read.

Design Factors and Letter Height

Number of Lanes	Vehicle Speed (mph)	Letter Height (inches)
2	15-25	5"
	30-40	8"
	45-55	12"
4	15-25	6"
	30-40	10"
	45-55	15"

Copy Area & Negative Space

Copy Area is the area that encloses the words or message on a sign. Negative space is the blank space around the lettering and extending to the edge of the sign. The role of negative space is to enhance the legibility of the signs. Sign lettering should be no more than 25% to 40% of the copy area in order for the sign to be easily read.

Location

Signs must be located outside of the public right-of-way. Generally, the public right-of-way means anything between utility poles and the road, including medians and intersections.

Signs must also be located outside of applicable sight distance triangles at intersections, ensuring that motorists will have optimum visibility of oncoming traffic. Your sign should be noticeable without reducing the safety of the road by distracting drivers.

Every property is unique, so you will need to refer to your survey for specific right-of-way or sight distance triangle information.

Signs located in architectural, historic, or scenic areas are to be designed to enhance the special quality of the area.

Additional Resources

Huntersville Zoning Ordinance, Article 10

Questions?

Town of Huntersville Planning Department

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