

DarkSky International Policy

2026 Municipal Lighting Code - Illuminated Signage Supplement

January 27, 2026 – Version 1.1

1.1 Illuminated Signage

[Illuminated signage at night is a choice. When municipalities allow illuminated signage, the municipality must have a baseline municipal sign code that includes a permit process to address: applicability, prohibited areas, design criteria, construction methods, clearances, installation locations, and quantity and/or density. Of note, the baseline sign requirements may prohibit certain types of signage. For example, four states in the U.S. prohibit all off-premise signage (e.g., advertising billboards) and many cities ban new billboards (either static or digital) or include restrictions such as amortization, cap-and-replace models, and digital exchange ratios greater than 6:1.]

- A.** The following requirements are supplementary to the General Outdoor Lighting Requirements (**Section 2.1** and its subsections) to further regulate outdoor illuminated signage.
1. On-premise signage larger than 20 square feet may only be illuminated while the associated business or activity is taking place, and must otherwise extinguish during *Nighttime Curfew*.
 2. *Please choose one of the following paths for municipal requirements:]*
 - ☐ Illumination for off-premise signage (e.g., advertising billboard) is prohibited.
 - ☐ Illuminated off-premise signage (e.g., advertising billboard) is prohibited from having line-of-sight to *Residential Use* zone districts and school campuses.

Unless otherwise specified in this ordinance, illuminated off-premise signage is prohibited from operating during *Nighttime Curfew*.
 3. The maximum luminous / illuminated surface area of an individual sign must not exceed 27.9 square meters (300 square feet).
 4. Static signage may be illuminated externally, internally, or backlit, provided the light source itself is not directly visible from the public right-of-way or adjacent property.
 5. External illumination of static signage shall be mounted above the sign and directed downward.

6. The highest light level of any illuminated sign (as measured with an all-white display for electronic signs) shall not exceed 3 lux more than the ambient lighting conditions (defined here as not including non-essential, decorative, or other sign sources of light) as measured within 15 degrees of perpendicular (both horizontal and vertical) from the distances in **Table 2.5**. Illuminated signs that cannot be measured using an illuminance meter shall not exceed a luminance of 100 nits (100 candelas per square meter, cd/m²).

TABLE 2.5: ILLUMINATED SIGN MEASUREMENT DISTANCE			
Area of Sign (sq. ft.) ^[1]	Measurement Distance (ft.)	Area of Sign (sq. ft.) ^[1]	Measurement Distance (ft.)
10	32	65	81
15	39	70	84
20	45	75	87
25	50	80	89
30	55	85	92
35	59	90	95
40	63	95	97
45	67	100	100
50	71	150	125
55	74	200	150
60	77	300	175
[1] For signs with an area other than those specifically listed in this table, the measurement distance may be calculated with the following formula: Measurement Distance (ft) = square root of [Area of Sign (sq. ft.) x 100]			

B. Additional requirements for electronic signage are as follows:

1. Electronic signs shall have automatic dimming controls to properly adjust the sign luminance according to ambient conditions, including nighttime. Should an electronic problem prevent normal function, the sign shall default to night-mode or remain unlit.
2. Excluding trademark logos, electronic messages shall be positive-contrast (i.e., light-colored fonts and features on a dark background) and shall contain no more than 35% white area within the displayed image. *[Positive-contrast (light-on-dark) messages are more legible, and legible at greater distances (as much as one-third greater), than negative contrast (dark-on-light) messages. In addition, the increased light emitted by negative-contrast messages may overwhelm the darker features.]*
3. Unless otherwise allowed by law or specified within this code, electronic messages shall not change more often than every 8 seconds. Video and motion effects are prohibited. *[As designed, off-premise signage attracts driver attention (sometimes involuntarily as the eye detects brightness) with video and motion attracting longer and more frequent glances.]*