ARTICLE XVII

SIGNS

Section 15-270 Definitions.

Unless otherwise specifically provided, or unless clearly required by the context, the words and phrases defined in this section shall have the meaning indicated when used in this article.

(1) **SIGN.** Any device that (i) is sufficiently visible to persons not located on the lot where such device is located to accomplish either of the objectives set forth in subdivision (ii) of this definition, and (ii) is designed to attract the attention of such persons or to communicate information to them. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, a device that might otherwise be categorized as a sign that is located at least fifteen feet to the interior side of any exterior wall shall not be regarded as a sign so long as it is not internally illuminated, illuminated with spotlights, or otherwise illuminated to draw special attention to it. **(AMENDED 3/11/86)**

(2) **FREESTANDING SIGN.** A sign that (i) is not directly attached to, erected on, or supported by a building or other structure having a principal function other than the support of such sign, but (ii) is instead attached to, erected on, or supported by some structure (such as a pole, mast, frame, or other structure) that is not itself an integral part of a building or other structure having a principal function other than the support of a sign. A sign that stands without supporting elements, such as "sandwich sign", is also a freestanding sign.

(3) **OFF-PREMISES SIGNS.** A sign that draws attention to or communicates information about a business, service, commodity, accommodation, attraction, or other activity that is conducted, sold, or offered at a location other than the premises on which the sign is located.

(4) **SANDWICH BOARD SIGN.** A freestanding sign consisting of two panels joined together at the top and configured in the shape of an inverted "V" (Λ) so that the bottom of the sign rests upon or near the ground. **(AMENDED 12/08/92)**

(5) **TEMPORARY SIGN.** A sign that (i) is used in connection with a circumstance, situation, or event that is designed, intended or expected to take place or to be completed within a reasonably short or definite period after the erection of such sign, or (ii) is intended to remain on the location where it is erected or placed for a period of not more than fifteen days. If a sign display area is permanent but the message displayed is subject to periodic changes, that sign shall not be regarded as temporary.

Section 15-271 Permit Required for Signs (AMENDED 1/22/85)

(a) Except as otherwise provided in Sections 15-272 (Signs Excluded From Regulation) and 15-273 (Certain Temporary Signs: Permit Exceptions and Additional Regulations), no sign may be erected, moved, enlarged, or substantially altered except in accordance with the provisions of this section.

(b) If plans submitted for a zoning permit, special use permit, or conditional use permit include sign plans in sufficient detail that the permit-issuing authority can determine whether the proposed sign or signs comply with the provisions of this chapter, then issuance of the requested zoning, special use, or conditional use permit shall constitute approval of the proposed sign or signs.

(c) Signs not approved as provided in subsection (b) or (d) exempted under the provisions referenced in subsection (a) may be erected, moved, enlarged, or substantially altered only in accordance with a sign permit issued by the administrator. **(AMENDED 6/26/12)**

(1) Sign permit applications and sign permits shall be governed by the same provisions of this chapter applicable to zoning permits.

(2) In the case of a lot occupied or intended to be occupied by multiple business enterprises (e.g., a shopping center): **(AMENDED 3/4/86)**

a. Subject to Subsection 15-271(b), sign permits shall be issued in the name of the lot owner or his agent rather than in the name of the individual business, and it shall be the sole responsibility of such owner or agent to allocate among the tenants the permissible maximum sign surface area.

b. Upon application by such owner or agent, the administration may issue a master sign permit that allocates permissible sign surface area to the various buildings or businesses within the development according to an agreed upon formula and thereafter sign permits may be issued to individual tenants only in accordance with the allocation contained in the master sign permit.

(d) In the B-1(C) and B-1(G) zoning districts, with respect to developments that (i) require the issuance of a conditional use permit, (ii) are intended to be occupied by multiple commercial enterprises, and (iii) will contain one or more buildings that are at least three stories in height, the Board of Aldermen may approve a master signage plan that shows in detail the dimensions, locations, and characteristics of all signs within that development other than those signs that are excluded from regulation under Section 15-272 or that do not require permits under Section 15-273. **(AMENDED 6/26/12)**

(1) Such master signage plan may be approved as part of the issuance of the original conditional use permit or as a minor amendment to the original conditional use

permit, provided that no such master plan shall be approved through the minor amendment process unless the Board of Aldermen first holds a public hearing on the proposed amendment. Amendments to a master signage plan approved under this section may be approved in accordance with the provisions of Section 15-64 (Amendments to and Modifications of Permits).

(2) In approving a master signage plan as authorized by this subsection, the Board may allow deviations from the requirements of this chapter relating to the number and type of permissible signs as well as other dimensional restrictions applicable to such signs if the Board concludes that such deviations are warranted given the height, shape, dimensions, and orientation of buildings on the development site, the number of individual businesses likely to occupy the development site, the need of the traveling public to be able conveniently and safely to locate and access destination businesses (e.g. hotels and restaurants) and parking areas.

(3) In approving a master signage plan as authorized by this subsection, the Board may also authorize the construction of one or more off-premises signs that direct motorists to the location of parking for a Carrboro hotel or motel, so long as such signs are located in a commercial zoning district on private property with the consent of the property owner. **(AMENDED 1/29/13)**

Section 15-272 Signs Excluded From Regulation.

The following signs are exempt from regulation under this chapter except for those stated in Subsection 15-282(b) through (e).

(1) Signs not exceeding four square feet in area that are customarily associated with residential use and that are not of a commercial nature, such as signs giving property identification names or numbers or names of occupants, signs on mailboxes or paper tubes, and signs posted on private property relating to private parking or warning the public against trespassing or danger from animals.

(2) Signs erected by or on behalf of or pursuant to the authorization of a governmental body, including legal notices, identification and informational signs, and traffic, directional or regulatory signs.

(3) Official signs of a noncommercial nature erected by public utilities.

(4) Flags, pennants, or insignia of any governmental or nonprofit organization when not displayed in connection with a commercial promotion; provided that such flags, pennants, or insignia may be displayed within a public right-of-way only when authorized by a resolution adopted by the Board of Aldermen. **(AMENDED 05/09/89)**

(5) Integral decorative or architectural features of buildings or works of art, so long as such features or works do not contain letters, trademarks, moving parts, or lights.

(6) Signs directing and guiding traffic on private property that do not exceed four square feet each and that bear no advertising matter.

(7) Church bulletin boards, church identification signs, and church directional signs that do not exceed one per abutting street and sixteen square feet in area and that are not internally illuminated.

(8) Signs painted on or otherwise permanently attached to currently licensed motor vehicles that are not primarily used as signs.

(9) Signs proclaiming religious, political, or other non- commercial messages [other than those regulated by Subdivision 15-273(a)(5)] that do not exceed one per abutting street and sixteen square feet in area and that are not internally illuminated. **(AMENDED 1/22/85)**

(10) Signs attached to the interior of a building window or glass door, or visible through such window or door, so long as such signs, individually or collectively, do not cover more than thirty percent (30%) of the surface area of the transparent portion of such window or door. **(AMENDED 3/11/86)**

a. For purposes of determining whether a sign not attached to the interior of a window or door but visible by looking through such window or door complies with this subdivision, the area of such sign shall be computed in accordance with Section 15-275 and the sign shall be deemed to "cover" an equivalent amount of the surface area of the window or glass door through which it is visible.

b. If a sign located inside a building is visible through glass doors or windows on more than one side of a building, then the relevant windows or doors for purposes of this subdivision are those facing the street toward which the sign has its primary orientation.

c. Notwithstanding the foregoing, signs attached to the interior of a building window or glass door or visible through such window or door that are internally illuminated or externally illuminated by spotlighting or other illuminating technique designed to draw particular attention to them shall not be exempt from regulations.

d. Signs that do not exceed four square feet and that advertise an event or activity sponsored by a nonprofit enterprise shall not be included in determining compliance with the thirty percent (30%) surface are coverage

limitation set forth above, so long as such signs are removed after the event or activity has occurred.

(11) Displays of merchandise offered for sale or rent on the premises where displayed. Only merchandise of the type that is actually for sale or rent, and not pictorial or other representations of such merchandise, falls within this exemption.

(12) Signs posted near structural BMPs to comply with Subsection 15-263.1(h) that do not exceed four square feet. **(AMENDED 6/26/12)**

Section 15-273 Certain Temporary Signs: Permit Exemptions and Additional Regulations

(a) The following temporary signs are permitted without a zoning, special use, conditional use, or sign permit. However, such signs shall conform to the requirements set forth below as well as all other applicable requirements of this chapter except those contained in Section 15-276 (Total Sign Surface Area) and 15-278 (Number of Freestanding Signs).

(1) Signs containing the message that the real estate on which the sign is located (including buildings) is for sale, lease, or rent, together with information identifying the owner or agent. Such signs may not exceed four square feet in area and shall be removed immediately after sale, lease, or rental. For lots of less than five acres, a single sign on each street frontage may be erected. For lots of five acres or more in area and having a street frontage in excess of four hundred feet, a second sign not exceeding four square feet in area may be erected.

(2) Construction site identification signs. Such signs may identify the project, the owner or developer, architect, engineer, contractor and subcontractors, funding sources, and may contain related information. Not more than one such sign may be erected per site, and it may not exceed thirty-two square feet in area. Such signs shall be erected prior to the issuance of a building permit and shall be removed within ten days after the issuance of the final occupancy permit.

(3) Signs indicating that, on the lot where the sign is located, a new business is opening, a previously existing business is going out of business, a one- time auction is planned, or some other non- recurring activity of a similar nature is scheduled. Signs referring to sales or other events designed to promote a pre-existing, ongoing business or commercial venture or any specific product or service offered by such business or commercial venture are not authorized under this subsection. Signs authorized under this subsection may be erected or displayed not sooner than two weeks before the activity that is advertised and must be removed not later than three weeks after they

are first erected or displayed. **(REPEALED 3/11/86; AMENDED 12/03/91)**

(4) Displays, including lighting, erected in connection with the observance of holidays. Such signs shall be removed within ten days following the holidays.

(5) Signs erected in connection with elections or political campaigns. Such signs shall be removed within three days following the election or conclusion of the campaign. No such sign may exceed sixteen square feet in area. Such signs may not be attached to any natural or man-made permanent structure located within a public right-of-way, including without limitation trees, utility poles, or traffic control signs. **(AMENDED 08/25/83); 08/25/92)**

(6) Signs indicating that a special event such as a fair, carnival, circus, festival or similar happening is to take place on the lot where the sign is located. Such signs may be erected not sooner than two weeks before the event and must be removed not later than three days after the event.

(7) Temporary signs not covered in the foregoing categories, so long as such signs meet the following restrictions:

a. Not more than one such sign may be located on any lot.

b. No such sign may exceed four square feet in surface area.

c. Such sign may not be displayed for longer than three consecutive days nor more than ten days out of any 365-day period.

(b) Other temporary signs not listed in subsection (a) shall be regarded and treated in all respects as permanent signs, except that (as provided in Section 15-276) temporary signs shall not be included in calculating the total amount of permitted sign area.

Section 15-274 Determining the Number of Signs.

(a) For the purpose of determining the number of signs, a sign shall be considered to be a single display surface or display device containing elements organized, related, and composed to form a unit. Where matter is displayed in a random manner without organized relationship of elements, each element shall be considered a single sign.

(b) Without limiting the generality of subsection (a), a multi-sided sign shall be regarded as one sign.

Section 15-275 Computation of Sign Area.

(a) The surface area of a sign shall be computed by including the entire area within a single, continuous, rectilinear perimeter of not more than eight straight lines, or a circle or an ellipse, enclosing the extreme limits of the writing, representation, emblem or other display, together with any material or color forming an integral part of the background of the display used to differentiate the sign from the backdrop or structure against which it is placed, but not including any supporting framework or bracing that is clearly incidental to the display itself.

(b) If the sign consists of more than one section or module, all of the area, including that between sections or modules, shall be included in the computation of the sign area.

(c) Except as provided in subsection (d), the sign surface area of two-sided, multi-sided, or three dimensional signs shall be computed by including the total of all sides designed either to attract attention or communicate information. This means that, with respect to the typical two-sided sign, where the message is printed on both sides of a flat surface and the sign is erected perpendicular to the street, the sign surface area will equal twice the area of a single side of the sign (i.e., twice the area determined by multiplying the dimensions--length times width--of the sign panel). **(AMENDED 3/12/85)**

(d) With respect to signs covered under Sections 15-272, 15-273, and 15-276(b), the sign surface area of two-sided, multi-sided, and three dimensional signs shall be computed by including the total of all sides designed to attract attention or communicate information that can be seen at one time by a person from any vantage point. Thus, for example, signs directing traffic on private property are exempt from regulation so long as such signs do not exceed four square feet [Subsection 15-262(6)]. A back-to-back sign having dimensions of two feet by two feet would qualify for this exemption. **(AMENDED 3/12/85)**

(e) The sign surface area of any sign located on the wall of a structure where the closest element of the sign is at least 60 feet from the street centerline shall be computed by multiplying the true sign surface area [Section 15-275(a)] by 0.5. **(AMENDED 3/12/85)**

Section 15-276 Total Sign Surface Area.

(a) Unless otherwise provided in this article, the total surface area devoted to all signs on any lot shall not exceed the limitations set forth in this section, and all signs except temporary signs shall be included in this calculation.

(b) Unless otherwise provided in this article or in Article XI (Supplementary Use Regulations), the maximum sign surface area permitted on any lot in an R-2, R-3, R-7.5, R-10, R-15, R-20, R-R, or R-S.I.R. district is four square feet. **(AMENDED 2/4/86)**

(c) Subject to the other provisions of this section, the maximum sign surface area permitted on any lot in a commercial or manufacturing district as set out in Section 15-136 or 15-137 shall be determined as follows: **(AMENDED 2/4/86)**

(1) There may be not more than 0.5 square feet of sign surface area per linear foot of street frontage up to 200 feet of frontage.

(2) There may be up to 0.75 square feet of additional sign surface area per linear foot of lot frontage in excess of 200 feet.

(d) If a lot has frontage on more than one street, then the total sign surface area permitted on that lot shall be the sum of the sign surface area allotments related to each street [as determined in accordance with subsection (c)] on which the lot has frontage. However, the total sign surface area that is oriented toward a particular street may not exceed the portion of the lot's total sign surface area allocation that is derived from frontage on that street. **(AMENDED 4/ /82)**

(e) Whenever a lot is situated such that it has no street frontage on any lot boundary and an applicant desires to install on such a lot a sign that is oriented toward a street, then the total sign surface area permitted on that lot shall be the sign surface area that would be allowed [as determined in accordance with subsection (c) and Section 15-275 subsection (d)], if the lot boundary closest to the street toward which such sign is to be oriented fronted on such street. The applicant shall be restricted to using only one street and the closest lot boundary to this street for determining the total permitted sign surface area. However, the applicant shall be given the opportunity to determine the one street used in the calculations and toward which this sign will also be oriented.

(f) The sign surface area of any sign located on a wall of a structure may not exceed 50% of the total surface area of the wall on which the sign is located.

(g) Whenever a tract located within a B-4 zoning district is subdivided, then, subject to the following requirements, the subdivider may allocate among the lots so created the total sign surface area that would be allowed under this section on the tract prior to subdivision. **(AMENDED 3/4/86)**

(1) Information concerning the exact nature of the sign surface area allocation must either be indicated on the face of a recorded plat of the subdivided tract or included in a separately recorded document, which document must be referenced on the recorded plat in a manner that indicates the general nature of such document and specifies the book and page number where such recorded document can be located in the Orange County Registry.

(2) Sign surface area allocation may be shifted only from a lot bordering a street to another lot bordering the same street.

(3) No sign allocation may be made affecting (by adding sign surface area to or subtracting sign area from) any lot after such lot has been conveyed by the subdivider.

(4) Once a sign allocation has been made in accordance with this section, the allocation so made shall control the amount of total sign surface area permissible on any lot affected, regardless of the street frontage of such lot.

(5) An allocation under this section shall not affect the provisions of Section 15-277, which will continue to govern the determination of the maximum area of a freestanding sign on any subdivided lot.

Section 15-277 Freestanding Sign Surface Area.

(a) For purposes of this section, a side of a freestanding sign is any plane or flat surface included in the calculation of the total sign surface area as provided in Section 15-275. For example, wall signs typically have one side. Freestanding signs typically have two sides (back to back), although four-sided and other multi-sided signs are also common.

(b) A single side of a freestanding sign may not exceed 0.3 square feet in surface area for every linear foot of street frontage along the street toward which such sign is primarily oriented. However, in no case may a single side of a freestanding sign exceed 50 square feet in surface area if the lot on which the sign is located has less than 200 feet of frontage on the street toward which that sign is primarily oriented, 75 square feet on lots with 200 or more but less than 400 feet of frontage, and 100 square feet on lots with 400 or more feet of frontage.

(c) With respect to freestanding signs that have no discernible "sides", such as spheres or other shapes not composed of flat planes, no such freestanding sign may exceed 0.3 square feet in total surface area for every linear foot of street frontage along the street toward which such sign is primarily oriented. However, in no case may such sign exceed 100 square feet in surface area.

Section 15-278 Number of Freestanding Signs.

(a) Except as authorized by this section and Section 15-283, no development may have more than one freestanding sign. **(AMENDED 12/08/92)**

(b) If a development is located on a corner lot that has at least 400 feet of frontage on each of the two intersecting public streets, then the development may have not more than one freestanding sign along each side of the development bordered by such streets.

(c) If a development is located on a lot that is bordered by two public streets that do not intersect at the lot's boundaries (double front lot), then the development may have not more than one freestanding sign on each side of the development bordered by such streets.

(d) If a corner lot contains a building, then a freestanding sign may be located along each of the intersecting streets that abut such lot if the freestanding signs are located such that, when a person is standing next to one such sign, the building on that lot totally obscures the view of the other freestanding sign. **(AMENDED 12/03/91)**

Section 15-279 Subdivision and Multi-Family Development Entrance Signs.

At any entrance to a subdivision or multi-family development, there may be not more than two signs identifying such subdivision or development. A single side of any such sign may not exceed sixteen square feet, nor may the total surface area of all such signs exceed thirty-two square feet.

Section 15-280 Location and Height Requirements.

(a) Freestanding signs other than sandwich board signs shall observe the setback requirements set forth in Section 15-184. **(AMENDED 12/08/92)**

(b) No sign may extend above any parapet or be placed upon any roof surface, except that for purpose of this section, roof surfaces constructed at an angle of 75 degrees or more from horizontal shall be regarded as wall space. This subsection shall not apply to displays, including lighting, erected in connection with the observation of holidays on the roofs of residential structures.

(c) No sign attached to a building may project more than forty-two inches from the building wall. Any sign that is attached to a building wall and that projects more than twelve inches from the building wall shall not exceed twelve square feet (generally, six square feet per sign face, see section 15-275) and shall be constructed so that the lowest part of the sign is at least eight feet above ground level and the highest part is not more than fifteen feet above ground level. **(AMENDED 08/25/92)**

(d) No sign or supporting structure may be located in or over the traveled portion of any public right-of-way unless the sign is attached to a structural element of a building and an encroachment permit has been obtained from the town (and from the state, if necessary).

(e) No part of a freestanding sign may exceed a height of fifteen feet, measured from ground level.

Section 15-281 Sign Illumination and Signs Containing Lights.

(a) Unless otherwise prohibited by this chapter, signs may be illuminated if such illumination is in accordance with this section.

(b) No sign within 150 feet of a residential zone may be illuminated between the hours of 12 midnight and 6:00 a.m., unless the impact of such lighting beyond the boundaries of the lot where it is located is entirely inconsequential. Freestanding signs located in residential districts may not be internally lit. **(AMENDED 11/26/85)**

(c) Lighting directed toward a sign shall be shielded so that it illuminates only the face of the sign and does not shine directly into a public right-of-way or residential premises.

(d) Internally illuminated freestanding signs may not be illuminated during hours that the business or enterprise advertised by such sign is not open for business or in operation. Notwithstanding any other provision of this ordinance, existing situations that violate the provisions of this subsection shall not be regarded as lawful, nonconforming situations.

(e) Subject to subsection (g), illuminated tubings or strings of lights that outline property lines, sales areas, roof lines, doors, windows, or similar areas are prohibited.

(f) Subject to subsection (g), no sign may contain or be illuminated by flashing or intermittent lights or lights of changing degrees of intensity, except signs indicating the time, date or weather conditions.

(g) Subsections (e) and (f) do not apply to temporary signs erected in connection with observance of holidays.

Section 15-282 Miscellaneous Requirements.

(a) "As provided in the Table of Permissible Uses, off-premises signs may only be located in the M-2 district, except that, within a commercial zoning district, off-premises signs directing motorists to the location of Carrboro hotel parking may be approved in accordance with the provisions of Subsection 15-271(d)(3)." **(AMENDED 1/29/13)**

(b) No sign may be located so that it substantially interferes with the view necessary for motorists to proceed safely through intersections or to enter onto or exit from public streets or private roads.

(c) Signs that revolve or are animated or that utilize movement or apparent movement to attract the attention of the public are prohibited. Without limiting the foregoing, banners, streamers, animated display boards, pennants, and propellers are prohibited, but signs that only move occasionally because of wind are not prohibited, if their movement (i) is not a primary design feature of the sign, and (ii) is not intended to attract attention to the sign. The restriction of this subsection shall not apply to signs specified in subdivision 15-272(4) or to signs indicating the time, date, or weather conditions.

(d) No sign may be erected so that by its location, color, size, shape, nature or message it would tend to obstruct the view of or be confused with official traffic signs or other signs erected by governmental agencies.

(e) Freestanding signs shall be securely fastened to the ground or to some other substantial supportive structure so that there is virtually no danger that either the sign or the supportive structure may be moved by the wind or other forces of nature and cause injury to persons or property.

Section 15-283 Sandwich Board Signs (AMENDED 12/08/92)

(a) Sandwich board signs shall be allowed subject to the provisions of this section to the extent that any other provision of this article is inconsistent with this section, the provisions of this section shall be controlling.

(b) Any business or commercial or noncommercial entity that has a place of business or occupancy on a lot within a B-1(c), B-1(g), B-2, or CT zoning district may place not more than one sandwich board sign on the lot where such business or other entity is located. If such business or other entity is not located on a lot that has street frontage, then it may (with the permission of the lot owner) place a sandwich board sign on the closest lot that has street frontage.

(c) Each single side of a sandwich board sign may not exceed six square feet and may not exceed a height of three feet, measured from ground level. The sign surface area authorized herein shall be in addition to the sign surface area otherwise allowable under this article.

(d) A sandwich board sign shall be of sufficiently solid construction and weight that it will not be blown over in winds of less than forty miles per hour.

(e) Sandwich board signs need not observe the setback requirements set forth in Section 15-184. However, such signs may not be located within the traveled portion of any street or sidewalk or in any other place or manner that would tend to obstruct the free movement of vehicles or pedestrians or block the view of motorists at street intersections or driveway entrances.

(f) Sandwich board signs may not be internally or externally lighted.

(g) Sandwich board signs shall be stored within a completely enclosed building whenever the enterprise advertised by such sign is not open for business.

(h) Sandwich board signs authorized under this subsection must contain a permanently affixed message (i.e., one that does not change daily, weekly, or monthly).

Section 15-284 through 15-289 Reserved.