

Charlotte County update for 7/27/16

## **Know the code about campaign signs**

By Claire Jubb, Charlotte County Community Development director

As most of you have probably realized, we are in election season. No matter who you support or what your level of involvement is, you can't help but notice the increased number of advertisements and political signs.

Here at Charlotte County Community Development, this time is one of our busiest in terms of code enforcement. We are the department within Charlotte County responsible for ensuring the political signs you put out to help your candidates meet all local and state requirements.

There are some basic requirements and tips to follow that will help you, your candidate and us have a smooth election season in terms of political signs.

First, let's talk about timing. Two dates need to be remembered. Aug. 30 is the primary election and Nov. 8 is the general election.

Political signs can be placed no more than 45 days before the election date, so we are already seeing signs for the primaries. We do, however, receive questions about when signs should be removed.

Signs must be removed by the candidate or volunteer no more than 15 days after one of the following:

- The candidate withdraws from the election.
- The candidate is eliminated or loses in the primary. (If a candidate is successful in the primary and on the ballot for the general election, we do not require them to remove the signs in the interim).
- The general election.

What constitutes a sign and what size can they be? The signs themselves can be no larger than 32 square feet and no greater than six feet tall. Smaller signs — sometimes referred to as snipe signs — are allowed but must follow the location requirements.

Signs may be placed on vehicles but should be in the form of a magnet, graphic wrap, window tinting or some other sign incorporated into the vehicle in safe manner.

The biggest issue we encounter, and the one we receive most complaints about during election season, is improperly placed signs. Here are a few tips to make sure you place signs in the right place:

- The signs must be on privately owned property.
- You must have the owner's permission to place the sign on their property.
- Only one sign per candidate is allowed on any one lot.

Most importantly, no sign may be placed in the county's right-of-way. As the county right-of-way extends beyond the edge of the paved road or sidewalk, a good rule of thumb is that the sign should be placed on the residence side of a swale or behind the line created by power poles. If

you are unsure, the closer to the business or house, the more likely it is on the private property and not in the right-of-way.

When it comes to the day of the election, you can support your candidate by actively campaigning at the polling location but must adhere to all State regulations regarding distance from the polling facility. You must be physically holding the sign and cannot set up tents or tables etc. at the facility.

This may seem like a lot of rules and regulations but they are mainly in place to ensure that you are safe when you are placing the signs, that the signs don't block visibility, that there are not an excessive number of signs in an area and that they are placed in an area that the property owner — not a tenant — approves of.

What happens when signs don't conform to the regulations? We know it is often not the candidates themselves who are placing their signs, but their well-meaning volunteers who want to help get them elected. Please remember, though, it is the candidate who is ultimately responsible for the placement of their signs. The following action will be taken by code compliance in certain cases:

- If the sign does not meet any of the size or location criteria, code staff will contact the candidate and request they correct the violation. If the issue is not corrected within 24 hours, we will remove the sign.
- If we get a complaint that a sign has been placed on property without the owner's permission, we will contact the candidate and ask them to remove it. Remember, the owner of that property is within their rights to remove that sign themselves.
- If the sign is in the right-of-way or fastened to power poles or street signs or is in any other way causing an obstruction staff will remove the sign without notice.

In the event we have to remove the sign, we will contact the candidate and give them five days to collect the sign at a fee of \$20 per sign. If signs are not collected, we will dispose of them.

All of these requirements are either found in Florida State Statutes or in the Charlotte County Code and have been sent to candidates and the supervisor of elections. Candidates depend on their volunteers to help them with their campaigns so please take the time to read this and if you have questions about where a sign can be located, please call us at 941-743-1201.

*Claire Jubb is the director of the Charlotte County Community Development Department. Readers may reach her at [Claire.Jubb@CharlotteCountyFL.gov](mailto:Claire.Jubb@CharlotteCountyFL.gov).*