



BUILDING AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

Licensing & Code Compliance Division

18400 MURDOCK CIRCLE

PORT CHARLOTTE, FL 33948

www.charlottecountyfl.com/bcs

"To exceed expectations in the delivery of public service."

COMMERCIAL BUSINESS GUIDE

Charlotte County is "Open for Business." Charlotte County is a great place to own and operate a business and we want to do everything we can to help you succeed. Like every jurisdiction, we do have our necessary local rules and regulations that every business owner must follow. Enclosed in this guide are answers to some of the common questions you may have when starting a new business and contact information for people who can help. We know how difficult it is to own and operate a business and we hope this will help make your life a little easier.

The FIRST step is to make yourself aware of what is permitted in the Zoning district and what is not, in relation to the business you are going to operate. Different Zoning classifications have different requirements. Commercial General zoning, which is the most restrictive of the Zoning classifications, does not allow for outdoor display of merchandise or for certain types of businesses. Some Developments of Regional Impact commonly known as DRI's, such as the Murdock DRI, have specific regulations which prohibit banners or other temporary advertising devices commonly referred to as "TADS".

QUESTION: HOW DO I VERIFY WHAT MY ZONING DISTRICT IS AND IF MY BUSINESS IS ALLOWED IN THIS ZONING DISTRICT?

ANSWER: You can call the Zoning Department at 941.743.1964 or if you know your Zoning District and want to review the permitted uses allowed go to our website at www.charlottecountyfl.com/bcs and follow the link for Codes. Zoning is located under Chapter 3-9.

The SECOND step in occupying a commercial location is to apply for a Commercial Name Change permit. This permit is required for any business that is locating or relocating to a new business location. This inspection is required under Florida Building Code. The following will be inspected:

ZONING CODE COMPLIANCE:

1. Will verify that the business use is permitted in the particular Zoning District.
2. Will verify whether any impact fees are due if a change of use occurred.
3. Will verify that the street numbers are properly posted on the building and the unit number is posted on the door, if applicable.
4. Will verify that there is sufficient parking for the use proposed and that handicap parking spot(s) and signage is installed.
5. Will verify that the proposed business has a current Local Business Tax Receipt.
6. Will verify that there are no unpermitted signs or banners installed.

FIRE INSPECTOR:

1. Will verify the type of occupancy proposed.
2. Will verify that the exit and other doors are accessible and in good working order.
3. Will verify that the exit lights and emergency lighting are operational.
4. Will verify that fire alarms and fire sprinklers (if required) are operational.
5. Will verify that Fire Extinguishers/extinguishing systems are in place and are operational.
6. Will verify that any grease hoods/suppression systems are in place and operational (if required).
7. Applicable requirements for daycare centers/health care centers are met.

ELECTRICAL INSPECTOR:

1. Will verify that the electrical system meets code and will also verify that no work has been done without permits first being obtained.
2. Will verify that the existing electrical system is safe for the employees and customers.

QUESTION: HOW DO I APPLY FOR A COMMERCIAL NAME CHANGE PERMIT?

ANSWER: You may pick up an application at our office or print the application through our website www.charlottecountyfl.com/BCS/ and listed under Applications/forms.

The THIRD step once you have moved into a new building is to draw attention to yourself in order to generate business. Most of you will go through the expense of having signs installed and having banners made. This section will assist you in making yourself aware of the rules and regulations governing signs and Temporary Advertising Devices (TADS). This section will explain the main types of signs, what is permitted and what is prohibited and how to obtain the necessary permits.

Definitions as found in Charlotte County Code 3-9-95

Portable sign shall mean a sign that is not permanently affixed to a building structure or the ground and can be moved from one (1) location to another.

Primary class "A" (on-premises) signs are freestanding pole or monument signs which advertise any product for sale or service to be rendered on the premises where the sign is located. Primary signs are to be utilized as the principal advertising for the parcel or lot where one (1) or more business entities are located on the parcel or lot.

Secondary class "A" (on-premises) signs provide advertising for individual businesses on a parcel or lot and are painted on or attached to fixtures such as awnings, canopies, or other appurtenances which are attached to a building which advertise any product for sale, or service to be rendered on the premises where the sign is located. Generally, secondary signs include wall signs, canopy signs, awning signs, marquee signs, projecting signs, and other types of signs which are not freestanding.

Sign shall mean any outdoor advertising display using letters, words, figures, symbols, pictures, designs or combinations thereof or symbols to advertise, attract attention, indicate direction, announce the purpose of, or identify the purpose of a person or entity, or to communicate information of any kind to the public. Two-sided signs that have the same face on each side shall be considered as a single face sign so long as the sides are back to back and have no separation other than structural support.

Temporary advertising devices (TADs) shall mean any cloth, plastic, paper or similar material used for advertising purposes attached to or appended on or from any structure, staff, pole, line or framing. Examples of such include banners, pennants, streamers, pinwheels, windsocks, balloons, and other gas-filled figures.

Number of signs.

1. **Primary signs** - Only one (1) primary sign per street frontage per lot or parcel is allowed provided, however, a maximum of two (2) primary class "A" signs with at least 100-foot separation is allowed under the following circumstances: for a corner parcel, one (1) primary class "A" sign is allowed for each street frontage; and when a parcel has at least one hundred twenty (120) feet of accumulative street frontage. Where more than one (1) sign is allowed, no individual class "A" sign shall exceed the maximum size.
2. **Secondary signs** - One (1) secondary sign per business per street frontage. In the event a business does not front on a street, it shall be allowed one (1) secondary sign on each side which faces a public parking lot.

NOTE: Window signs which occupy twenty-five (25) percent or less of each window panel, for a total window sign area of twelve (12) square feet or less are exempt from permitting, however, all window signage in excess of twelve (12) square feet, and any window sign that occupies more than twenty-five (25) percent of any window panel, shall count towards the secondary signage allowed for the business in whose window the window sign appears.

Prohibited Signs

It shall be unlawful for any person to construct, maintain or permit:

1. Any sign prohibited by state or federal law.
2. Any sign creating a traffic hazard by obstructing vision at intersections or producing a hazardous amount of glare.
3. Any sign preventing free ingress or egress from any door, window, fire escape or other entrance or exit to any building, or any sign attached to a standpipe or fire escape.
4. Any sign which is obscene or constitutes a public nuisance.
5. Any primary class "A" or secondary class "A" sign advertising an establishment no longer in business.
6. Any sign containing lights which are not shielded from direct view or which exceed ten (10) candlepower per square foot of sign measured ten (10) feet from the sign.
7. Any sign which displays intermittent or flashing lights.
8. Any sign affixed to a tree or utility pole.
9. Portable signs, unless otherwise authorized by law.
10. Temporary advertising devices (TADs) except as provided in other sections of this chapter.
11. False or misleading signs.
12. Any sign that is attached, painted or placed onto or inside a parked vehicle which is used primarily for advertising any matter other than the sale or rental of the vehicle itself is prohibited. This is not intended to prohibit vehicle signs on a truck, bus, trailer, taxi, or other vehicle parked on their own premises while in the course of business provided the primary use of the vehicle is not for the purpose of the advertisement.
13. Roof signs.

14. Any sign, except those specifically exempted herein, located upon any public property or right-of-way. The zoning official or his designated representative may at any time summarily remove any such sign. Any sign so removed shall be held by the county for a minimum period of five (5) days. At any time during the five-day holding period the owner of the sign may reclaim the sign after having paid a removal and storage fee of twenty dollars (\$20.00). If, after the fifth day, the sign has not been claimed and the removal and storage fee paid, the sign may be destroyed summarily.

QUESTION: HOW DO I APPLY FOR A SIGN PERMIT?

ANSWER: You can pick up an application at our office or print the application through our website and listed under Applications/Forms: www.charlottecountyfl.com/bcs/.

QUESTION: HOW DO I APPLY FOR A TEMPORARY ADVERTISING DEVICE (TAD) PERMIT?

ANSWER: You can pick up an application at our office or print the application through our website and listed under Zoning forms: www.charlottecountyfl.com/bcs/. Once the application is complete the permit application must be submitted to the zoning department a minimum of three (3) working days prior to the beginning of the display period. A fee, to be established by resolution of the board of county commissioners, shall be paid at the time of permit application submittal. The permit sticker will be issued, which reflects the approved display time period and the number of devices to be displayed. You must place the sticker in the lower left-hand corner of the temporary advertising device. In the case of an unusually shaped device, you should place the sticker in a conspicuous location. After the permit expires an inspection will be done by a Compliance Officer to verify that the TAD has been removed.

QUESTION: ARE TADS ALLOWED IN ALL ZONING DISTRICTS?

ANSWER: TADs are allowed in all commercial and industrial zoning districts and in commercially designated areas of planned developments (PDs) unless otherwise specified through specific design standards or development orders. They shall be prohibited in all other zoning districts, including OMI (office, medical, institutional).

QUESTION: HOW MANY TAD PERMITS CAN I APPLY FOR EACH YEAR AND WHAT IS THE MAXIMUM SIZE?

ANSWER: At the current time, a maximum of two (2) permits may be obtained per calendar year, per business. The maximum size allowed is 40 square feet. There is no number to the amount of TADs that can be displayed as long as the aggregate total does not exceed the 40 square foot requirement.

QUESTION: WHERE CAN I INSTALL MY TAD?

ANSWER: On the parcel of which the business is located but not on the roof, utility poles, County or State Right of Ways or attached to trees or landscaping.

QUESTION: I PLACED PORTABLE SIGNS IN THE COUNTY RIGHT OF WAY AND THEY WERE PICKED UP HOW CAN I CLAIM MY SIGNS?

ANSWER: Any sign or TAD, portable or permanent, that was placed in a County or State Right of Way, and removed by the Charlotte County Code Compliance Division, will be held by the county for a minimum period of five (5) days. At any time during the five-day holding period the owner of the sign may reclaim the sign after having paid a removal and storage fee of twenty dollars (\$20.00). If, after the fifth day, the sign has not been claimed and the removal and storage fee paid, the sign may be destroyed summarily. If the sign was located in a State Right of Way and the Code Compliance Division did not pick it up, the **Department of**

Transportation should be contacted at 23016 Harbor View Road, Port Charlotte, FL 33980,
PHONE: (941) 255-7426.

**QUESTION: CAN I PARK A TRAILER OR OTHER VEHICLE WITH MY BUSINESS NAME
PAINTED ON IT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO MY BUSINESS?**

ANSWER: Vehicle signs are allowed as long as they are located on a truck, bus, trailer, taxi or other vehicle which is being operated or parked on their own premises while in the course of business, provided that the primary use of said vehicle is not for the purpose of the on-premises advertisement. Such vehicles must have a current license plate and be in operable condition, and shall only be parked in paved parking areas located either in association with loading or delivery areas, or, in the absence of parking areas associated with loading or delivery areas, in the closest, non-handicapped parking space(s) to the main building of the business advertised on the vehicle. In no case shall such vehicles be parked in rights-of-way or on publicly owned land unless it is in the course of business and only for the duration of the actual business transaction which necessitates the temporary placement of the vehicle at that location.

IMPORTANT CONTACT NUMBERS:

**Charlotte Co. Building and Growth Management Department
& Code Compliance Division: 941.743.1201**

Charlotte Co. Zoning Department: 941.743.1964

Florida Department of Transportation: 941.255.7426

MY NOTES:

Charlotte County Building and Growth Management Department
Licensing & Code Compliance Division
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