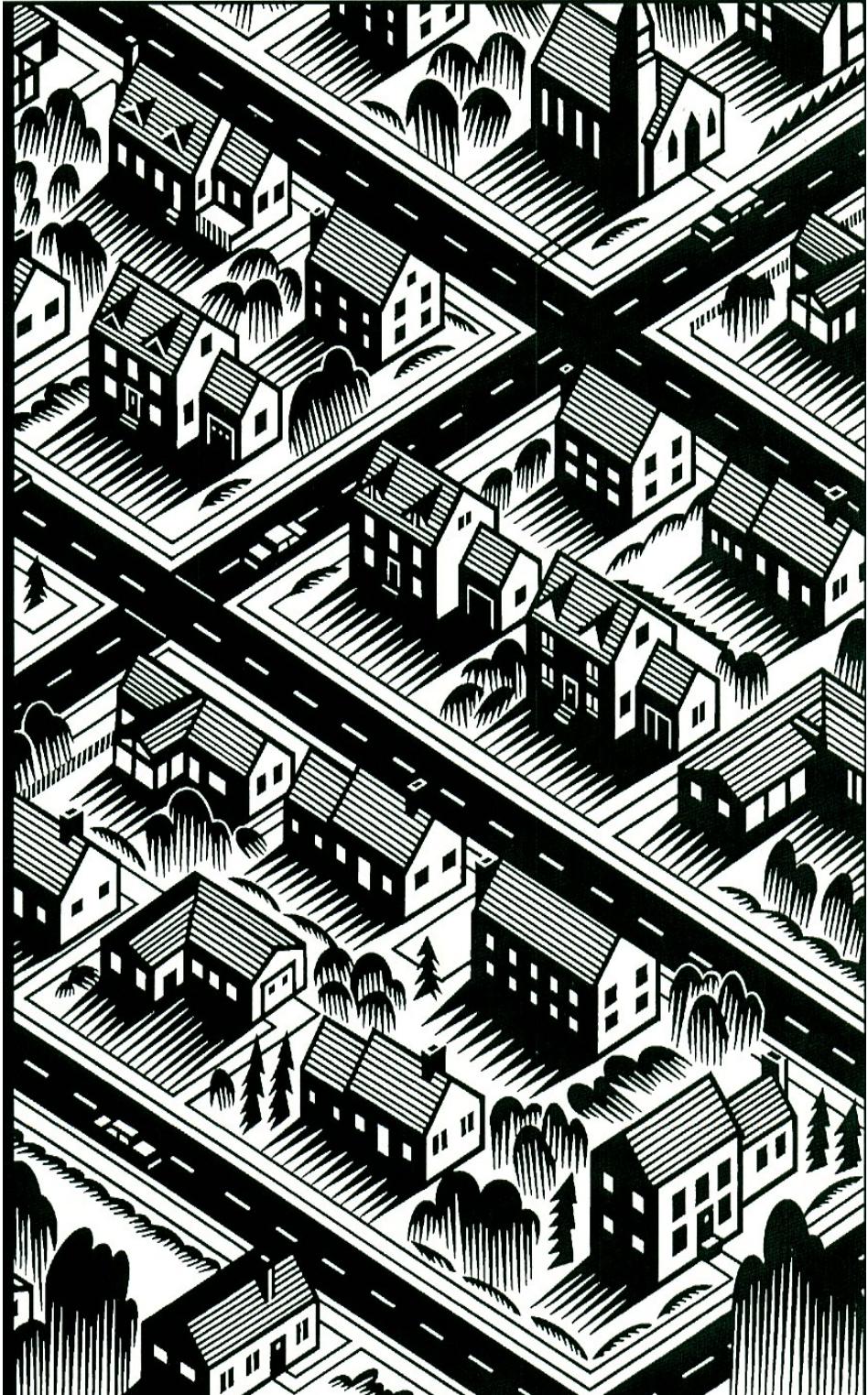


# Requesting a Sign Variance



THE CITY OF  
**DUBUQUE**  
*Masterpiece on the Mississippi*



Planning Services Department, 50 West 13th Street, Dubuque, IA 52001-4845  
(563) 589-4210; e-mail: [planning@cityofdubuque.org](mailto:planning@cityofdubuque.org)

# Requesting a Sign Variance

Guidelines to help you through the application process.

## **What is a Sign Variance?**

A sign variance allows a property owner to request to install signs in a way that is not permitted by the City's Unified Development Code. Only the Zoning Board of Adjustment has the authority to grant a sign variance.

## **When do I need a sign variance?**

You may need to file an application for a sign variance if you need to seek relief from dimensional requirements such as size, setbacks, height, or number of signs. The process is intended to provide relief in some limited and/or unique situations where strict compliance with the Unified Development Code would cause undue hardship for a property owner. A sign variance cannot be granted to allow a sign which is not permitted by the Unified Development Code.

## **How long does the application process take?**

In most cases, the application process takes 21-30 days from the application deadline. Filing an application, however, does not guarantee approval.

## **Who is the Zoning Board of Adjustment?**

The Board is a volunteer group of 5 citizens from the community who are appointed by the City Council to meet once a month to make decisions on requests like yours.

## **What criteria are considered when granting a sign variance?**

The Zoning Board of Adjustment uses 5 criteria when reviewing a sign variance request.

- 1) The particular property, because of size, shape, topography or other physical conditions, suffers a unique disadvantage in meeting the zoning regulations, and this disadvantage does not apply to other properties in the vicinity; and
- 2) Because of this disadvantage, the owner is unable to make reasonable use of the affected property; and
- 3) This disadvantage does not exist because of conditions created by the owner or previous owners of the property; and
- 4) Granting the variance request will not confer on the applicant any special privilege that is denied by this ordinance to other lands, structures, or buildings in the same district; and
- 5) Granting of the variance will not be contrary to the public interest, will not adversely affect other property in the vicinity, and will be in harmony with the intent and purpose of this ordinance.

# Requesting a Sign Variance

Guidelines to help you through the application process.

When presenting your case to the Board try to address each of these criteria very carefully. Your licensed sign contractor can assist you by completing the required supplemental questions for a sign variance. While financial hardship may be your primary concern, it cannot be the basis on which a sign variance request is judged and granted.

## **How do I apply for a sign variance?**

To apply for a sign variance you need to:

- Complete an application form.
- Submit a site diagram of your property that includes location of all buildings and signs, both existing and proposed if applicable (see sample).
- Submit a diagram showing exterior dimensions (height, length, width) of all existing and proposed sign structures and sign panels, and length and width of all lettering, symbols, logos, etc., if applicable (see sample).
- For sign variance applications, submit the Required Supplemental Questions completed by your licensed sign contractor (attached).
- Submit any other pertinent information that is available or required.
- Submit the above information and the fee. Fees are not refundable. (See the attached Schedule of Fees.

Please feel free to include any other documentation that will help clarify your request and support your position by the application deadline. (For application deadline dates and other information, please call the Planning Services office at 589-4210.)

For information on sign permits and other related permits (e.g., electrical) , contact the Inspection & Construction Services Department at 563-589-4150. For information on underground utilities, call Iowa One-Call at 800-292-8989.

## **How does Planning Services staff help you through the process?**

When we receive your application materials, your request will be placed on the agenda for the next available meeting date.

During the next two weeks, staff will review your application and will send notices to property owners within 200 feet of your property. Staff also will visit your property, take photos and write a staff report and an agenda for the meeting.

We also are required to publish a public notice about your request in the local newspaper prior to the meeting. One week before the meeting, you will receive a copy of the staff report regarding the request

# Requesting a sign variance

Guidelines to help you through the application process.

## **Do I need to be at the meeting?**

Yes. You or a representative need to present your request to the Board and be available to answer questions, if needed. If you or your representative aren't at the meeting, your request will be tabled. The Board will either approve, modify, deny or table your request for more information.

The Board generally meets at the Historic Federal Building City Council Chamber (Post Office Building, 350 W. 6th Street, 2nd Floor) on the 4th Thursday of each month at 5:00 p.m. Check the attached meeting schedule for the exact date.

## **What happens at the meeting?**

At the meeting, both Planning Services staff and you or your representative will make presentations to the Board. The meeting then will be opened to the public to allow comments and questions.

## **What happens next?**

If approved, you may apply for a building permit from the Inspection & Construction Services Department the next day. Building, electrical, and other codes may limit the location or configuration of your sign.

**Please note:** It is your responsibility to locate your property lines and to check your abstract for easements and restrictive covenants. For example, overhead power lines may impact sign height and location.

If denied, you may appeal the Board's decision to District Court within 30 days or submit a revised proposal

*This guide is not intended to cover every aspect of the Sign Variance application process, and should not be considered the final or definitive authority on any of the matters it addresses. It is only a general guide. Questions on specific projects should be addressed to the Planning Services Department, 50 W. 13th Street, Dubuque, Iowa 52001, phone (563) 589-4210; e-mail: [planning@cityofdubuque.org](mailto:planning@cityofdubuque.org).*

## Attachments

1. Application form
5. Required Supplemental Questions for sign variance
6. Sample site diagram
7. Sample sign diagram
8. Meeting Schedule
9. Fee Schedule

## **City of Dubuque, Iowa**

### **Sign Variance Application: Required Supplemental Questions**

**Applicants for a sign variance must complete all five (5) of the supplemental questions.**  
As a professional with expertise in the placement, design and impact of signs, it is recommended that the licensed sign contractor for the project prepare or assist with the responses to these questions. Attach additional sheet(s) as needed to answer each question.

Dubuque City Code Section 16-8-6-3 establishes Requirements for Granting of Variance. The Board can grant a variance only under exceptional circumstances where practical difficulty or unnecessary hardship is so substantial, serious and compelling that relaxation of the general restrictions ought to be granted.

The applicant is responsible for making the case to the Board that a variance is warranted in accordance with the criteria in the City Code. When presenting a case to the Board, the applicant should try to address each of the following five (5) criteria very carefully. While financial hardship may be the applicant's primary concern, by City Code the Board cannot consider prospective financial loss or gain to the applicant.

**For a variance to be granted, the applicant must show and the Board must find that all five (5) of the following requirements are met:**

1. The particular property, because of size, shape, topography or other physical conditions, suffers singular disadvantage, which disadvantage does not apply to other properties in the vicinity. *Explain how the request meets this requirement.*
2. Because of this disadvantage, the owner is unable to make reasonable use of the affected property. *Explain how the request meets this requirement.*

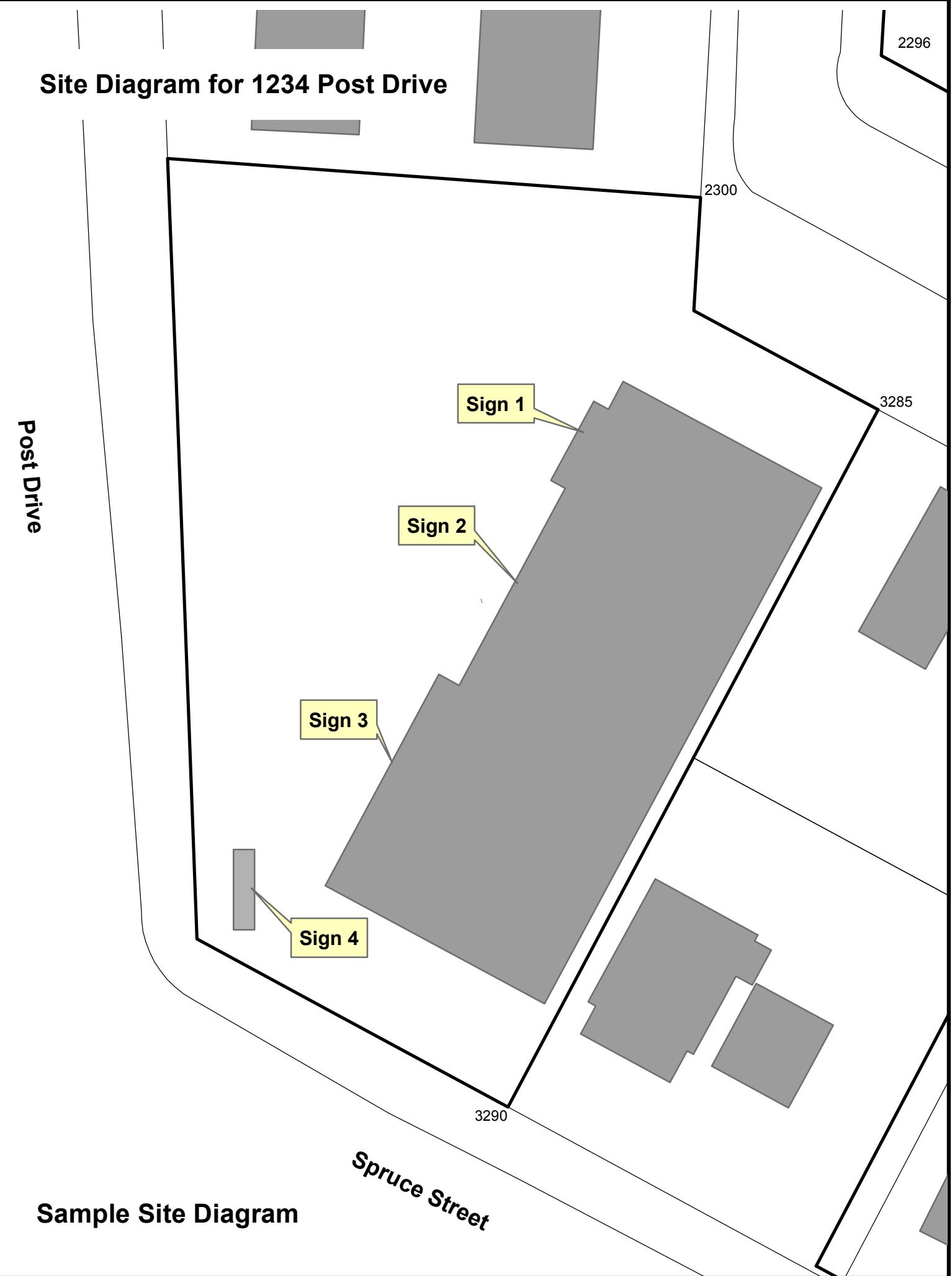
## **City of Dubuque, Iowa**

### **Sign Variance Application: Required Supplemental Questions**

3. This disadvantage does not exist because of conditions created by the owner or previous owners of the property. *Explain how the request meets this requirement.*
4. Granting the variance requested will not confer on the applicant any special privilege that is denied to other lands, structures, or buildings in the same district. *Explain how the request meets this requirement.*
5. Granting of the variance will not be contrary to the public interest, will not adversely affect other property in the vicinity, and will be in harmony with the intent and purpose of the provision waived. *Explain how the request meets this requirement.*

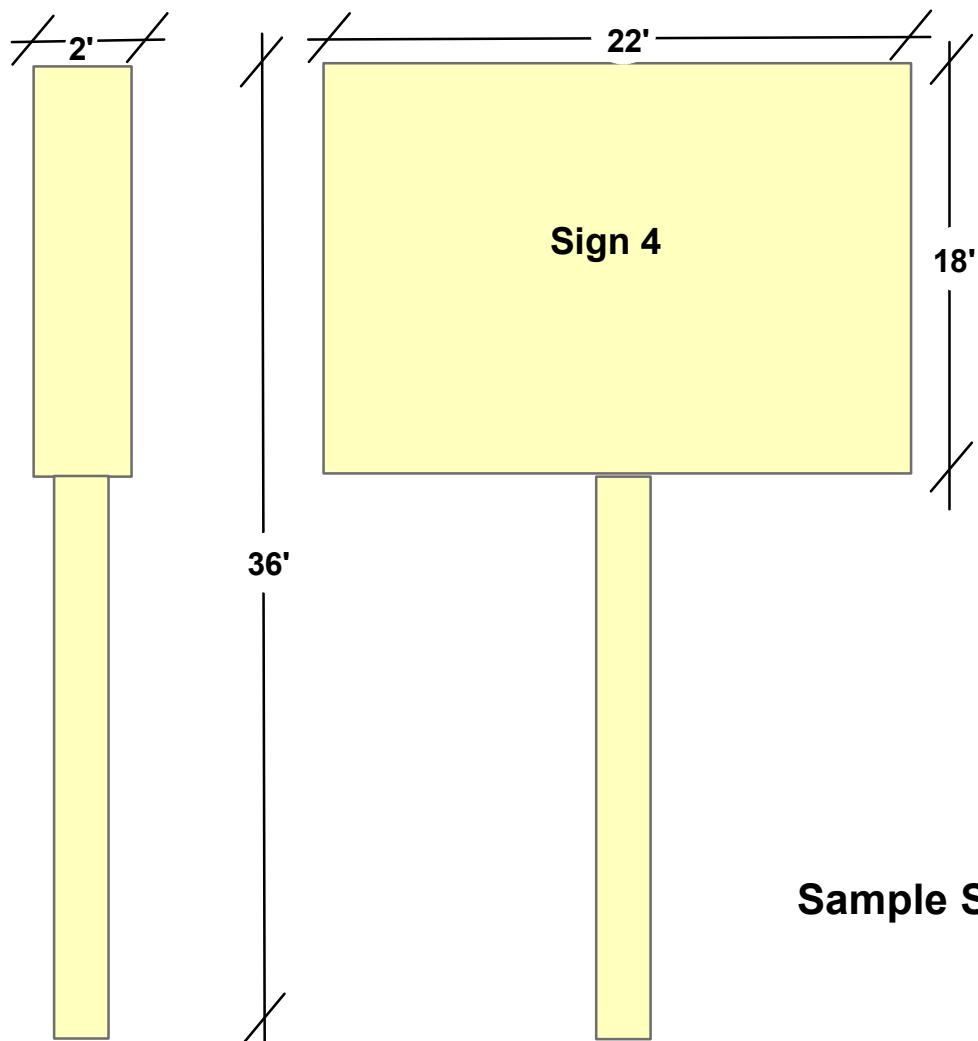
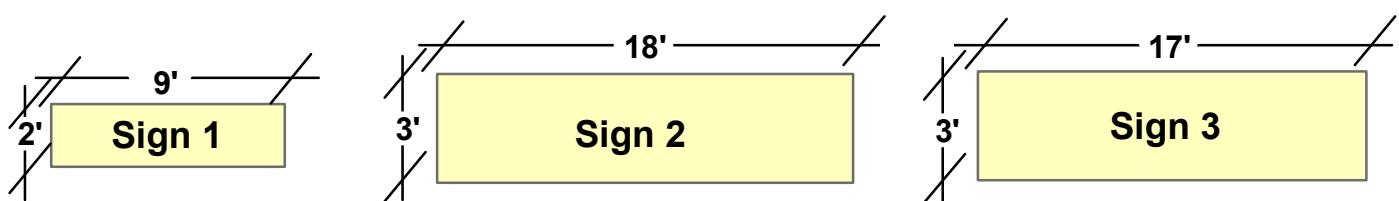
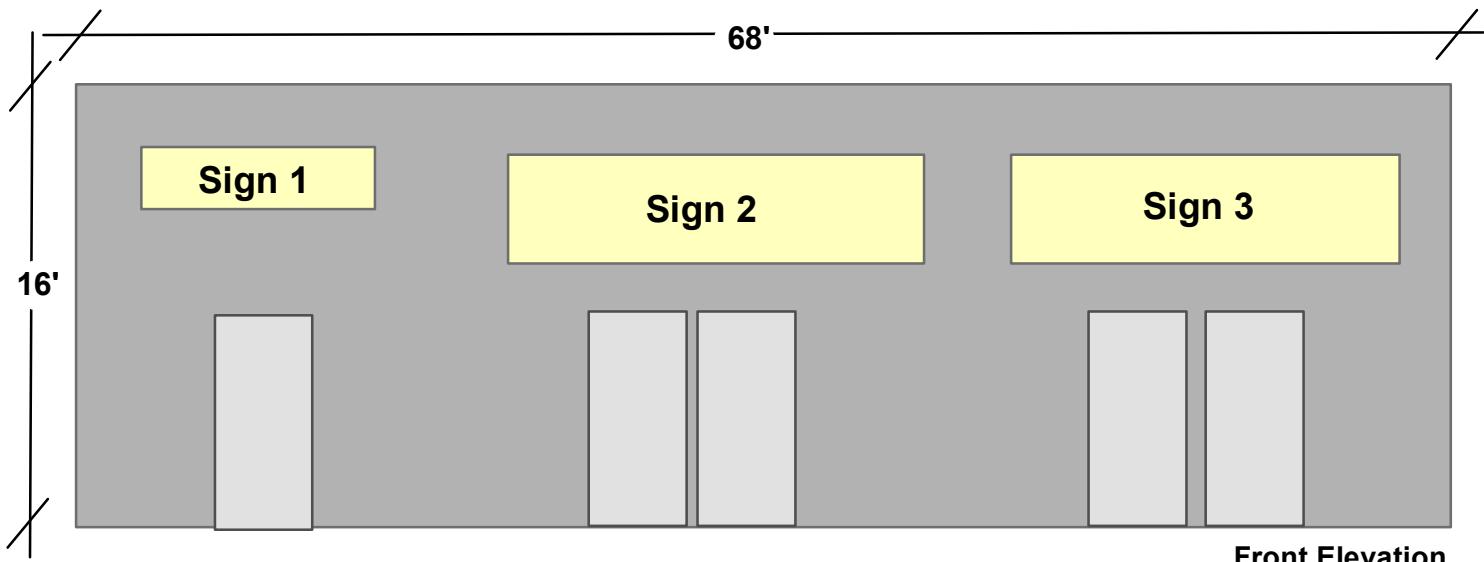
# Site Diagram for 1234 Post Drive

Post Drive



Sample Site Diagram

## Signage Detail for 1234 Post Drive



**Sample Sign Diagram**

PLANNING SERVICES DEPARTMENT  
City Hall, 50 W. 13th Street, Dubuque, Iowa 52001 (563) 589-4210



## FEE SCHEDULE

Effective July 1, 2025



### DEVELOPMENT SERVICES APPLICATIONS

Billboard Inspection Fee per sign/year	\$ 62
Electronic Message Sign Inspection Fee per sign/year	\$ 62
Extension of Subdivision Bonding	\$ 42
Flood Plain Permit	\$ 190
Flood Way Permit	\$ 763
Limited Setback Waiver	\$ 153
Freestanding Solar Array Waiver	\$ 153
Sign Permit Reviews	\$ 46
Site Plan: Simple	\$ 230
Site Plan: Minor	\$ 410
Site Plan: Major	\$ 470
Simple Subdivision (Staff Review)	\$ 77
Simple Subdivision (Council Action Required)	\$ 510
Temporary Use Permit	\$ 184

### OTHER PLANNING SERVICES FEES

Copies	\$0.25/page *
Maps, Reports & Ordinances	\$15 to \$51/document
Verification Letter, Report (i.e. Zoning, IDOT)	\$ 77

### ZONING ADVISORY COMMISSION APPLICATIONS

Planned District, NEW (PUD) (ID)	\$ 920+ \$2/notice
Planned District, AMENDED (PUD) (ID)	\$ 765 + \$2/notice
Plat: Minor Subdivision	\$ 460 + \$20/Lot
Plat (FINAL): Major Subdivision	\$ 663
Plat (PRELIMINARY): Major Subdivision	\$ 663+ \$20 /Lot
Rezoning	\$ 663 + \$2/notice
Text Amendment	\$ 510
Waiver from Site Design Standards	\$ 460

### ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT APPLICATIONS

Appeal	\$ 255
Conditional Use Permit	\$ 561+ \$2/notice
Special Exception	\$ 200
Variance	\$ 561+ \$2/notice

### HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION APPLICATIONS

Design Review (including Economic Non-Viability & Demolition)	\$ 200
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## Board and Commission Meeting Schedule January-December 2026

### Submit Application to:

Planning Services Department

City of Dubuque  
50 W. 13th Street  
Dubuque, IA 52001

[planning@cityofdubuque.org](mailto:planning@cityofdubuque.org)

### APPLICATION DUE BY

Dec 01  
Jan 05  
Feb 02  
Mar 02  
Mar 30  
May 04  
Jun 01  
Jun 29  
Aug 03  
Aug 31  
Sep 28  
Oct 26  
Nov 30

### MEETING DATE

Long Range  
Planning  
Advisory  
Commission  
(LRPAC)

Meets Monthly	3rd Wednesday 5:30 p.m.
* Agenda link	<a href="http://cityofdubuque.org/LRPAC">cityofdubuque.org/LRPAC</a>

Dec 17  
Jan 21  
Feb 18  
Mar 18  
Apr 15  
May 20  
Jun 17  
Jul 15  
Aug 19  
Sep 16  
Oct 21  
Nov 18  
Dec 16

Historic  
Preservation  
Commission  
(HPC)

3rd Thursday 5:30 p.m.
<a href="http://cityofdubuque.org/HPC">cityofdubuque.org/HPC</a>

Dec 18  
Jan 15  
Feb 19  
Mar 19  
Apr 16  
May 21  
Jun 18  
Jul 16  
Aug 20  
Sep 17  
Oct 15  
Nov 19  
Dec 17

Port of  
Dubuque/  
Chaplain  
Schmitt Island  
Design Review

4th Wednesday 3:00 p.m.
<a href="http://cityofdubuque.org/DesignGuidelines">Design Guidelines</a>

Dec 17  
Jan 28  
Feb 25  
Mar 25  
Apr 22  
May 27  
Jun 24  
Jul 22  
Aug 26  
Sep 23  
Oct 28  
Nov 18  
Dec 16

Zoning Board  
of Adjustment  
(ZBA)

4th Thursday 5:30 p.m.
<a href="http://cityofdubuque.org/ZBA">cityofdubuque.org/ZBA</a>

Dec 18  
Jan 22  
Feb 26  
Mar 26  
Apr 23  
May 28  
Jun 25  
Jul 23  
Aug 27  
Sep 24  
Oct 22  
Nov 19  
Dec 17

Zoning  
Advisory  
Commission  
(ZAC)

1st Wednesday 6:00 p.m.
<a href="http://cityofdubuque.org/ZAC">cityofdubuque.org/ZAC</a>

Jan 07  
Feb 04  
Mar 04  
Apr 01  
May 06  
Jun 03  
Jun 15  
Jul 01  
Aug 05  
Sep 02  
Oct 07  
Nov 04  
Dec 02  
Jan 06

City Council

3rd Monday 6:30 p.m.
<a href="http://cityofdubuque.org/novusagenda.com/AgendaPublic/">cityofdubuque.org/novusagenda.com/AgendaPublic/</a>

Tues. Jan 20  
Feb 16  
Mar 16  
Apr 20  
May 18  
Jun 15  
Jul 20  
Aug 17  
Sep 21  
Oct 19  
Nov 16  
Dec 21  
Tues. Jan 19

\* Agenda contains meeting location information.

The agenda link connects to the Board or Commission website home page.

Scroll to 'Agendas & Minutes' and click on 'Most Recent Agenda'



## APPLICATION FORM

### Zoning Advisory Commission

- Amended PUD
- Rezoning/PUD/ID
- Text Amendment
- Simple Subdivision
- Preliminary Plat
- Major Final Plat
- Minor Final Plat
- Waiver from Site Design Standards

### Zoning Board of Adjustment

- Conditional Use Permit
- Special Exception
- Variance
- Appeal

### Development Services

- Annexation
- Limited Setback Waiver
- Site Plan Simple
- Site Plan Minor
- Site Plan Major
- Simple Subdivision
- Temporary Use Permit
- Port of Dubuque/  
Chaplain Schmitt Island  
Design Review

### Historic Preservation Commission

- Demolition Review
- Historic Revolving Loan
- Certificate of Economic Non-Viability
- Design Review Certificate of  
Appropriateness
- Advisory Design Review (Public  
Projects)
- Historic Designation

***Please complete the applicable sections below. Please type or print legibly.***

#### **A. Property Information**

Site Location/Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Legal Description/Parcel ID#/Subdivision: \_\_\_\_\_

Existing Zoning: \_\_\_\_\_ Proposed Zoning: \_\_\_\_\_ Site Area (square feet/acres): \_\_\_\_\_

Historic District: \_\_\_\_\_ Landmark:  Yes  No

#### **B. Describe proposal and reason for application (attach a letter of explanation, if necessary):**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### **C. Applicant/Agent Information**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **D. Property Owner(s) Information**

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **E. Certification:** I/we, the undersigned, do hereby certify/acknowledge that:

1. Payment does not guarantee approval and fees are nonrefundable;
2. All additional required written and graphic materials are attached;
3. It is the property owner's responsibility to locate property lines and to review the abstract for easements and restrictive covenants; and
4. The information submitted herein is true and correct to the best of my/our knowledge and upon submittal becomes public record.

Applicant/Agent: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Property Owner(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Fee \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Ck# \_\_\_\_\_  CC  Cash Received by \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_