

The proliferation of political campaign signs heralds the arrival of the fall campaign season. While many people choose to express their political views by posting a campaign sign or two in their yard, campaign organizers often post political messages along public roads as well. The following information is intended to provide guidance regarding this practice.

What is a political campaign sign?

A political campaign sign is a sign, poster, or handbill promoting or publicizing candidates for public office or issues to be voted on in an upcoming election.

Where can I find regulations regarding signs?

Like almost every other municipal code in the country, the Jefferson County Code (Section 18.30.150) regulates signs in order to protect the safety and welfare of the public and to maintain an attractive appearance in the community. The code can be viewed on-line through links available at the Jefferson County web site <http://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/>. Many political campaign signs fall below permitting thresholds due to their small size and temporary nature, but it's a good idea to check the code, particularly if you are considering signage that goes beyond the typical small, lightweight campaign sign. Jefferson County sign code is administered by the Department of Community Development which can be reached at (360) 379-4450.

May political campaign signs be posted in the public right-of-way?

The simple answer is yes – provided the signs are temporary and do not create a public safety issue, or limit the use of the right-of-way for its intended public purpose (safe transportation, walking, utilities, drainage), or interfere with scheduled road/utility maintenance and construction.

What are some good guidelines for installing political campaign signs along public roads?

The safest place to put up a political campaign sign is on your own property. Locating a sign on your own property means it is less likely to be removed by someone else and less likely to cause a safety issue for the public. If you are going to put up a political campaign sign in the public right-of-way, the following guidelines should be helpful to make sure safety concerns are reduced and to make sure the right-of-way is preserved for its intended purpose.

Please, DO NOT:

- Install signs where they will block sight distance at intersections and driveways.
- Install signs where they will hinder pedestrian and bicycle use of the road shoulder.
- Attach signs to traffic sign posts or utility poles.
- Install signs where they will interfere with the visibility of traffic signs or distract from the message of traffic regulatory or warning signs.
- Install signs that by color, shape, or symbol resemble traffic signs.

Signs which are improperly placed may be removed by the Public Works Department.

If you are going to post a political campaign sign along a road, please DO:

- Construct the signs of lightweight materials, such as waterproof cardboard or lightweight plastic.
- Install the signs on lightweight supports such as wood lathe, stakes, or wire frames. Heavy posts and frames can be a safety hazard for errant vehicles in the clear zone. The clear zone width varies with each

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road but as a general rule of thumb for many rural roads the clear zone is the first 10 feet off the pavement or edge line.

- Install the signs as far from the edge of the traffic lane as possible to reduce safety problems and interference with maintenance. It is a good idea to locate signs on the back side of the ditch and not right next to the edge line.
- Install the signs as low as possible. Generally, signs which extend no higher than 48 inches above the ground can be constructed of lightweight materials, can be mounted on lightweight stakes or frames, and are less likely to block other traffic signs. Signs mounted higher than this often require heavier posts which can create a safety problem, are harder to install and take down, and may require more maintenance to keep upright.
- Request permission from the property owner before posting a sign on or in front of their property.

How many political campaign signs can I install?

There is no single answer to this question, but some basic common sense is helpful when considering this.

- Most people are satisfied with posting one political campaign sign for each issue that they care about in front of their property. Before posting a political campaign sign in front of someone else's property, it is recommended that you get their permission. You would probably want the same courtesy in return. Public Works does not "police" this situation.
- The practice of "peppering" road sides with multiple signs for the same candidate or issue is highly discouraged. Campaign workers should be aware that many people find this practice aesthetically intolerable, akin to road side litter. This practice can also distract from traffic signs. Remember, the person posting the signs and the campaign they are representing are responsible for the removal of these signs after the election or they will be considered litter.
- Just like traffic signs are spaced to promote readability and so as not to obscure each other, political campaign signs should have adequate spacing from each other and from traffic signs. Generally, it is good practice to keep campaign signs at least 100 feet from other road signs.

How long can the signs be up in the right-of-way?

The Jefferson County Code does not contain specific time limits regarding political campaign signs. The best advice is to remove them in a reasonable time period after the election before they deteriorate and become "litter" for which you or the campaign are responsible.

My sign is missing. Who do I call?

- Call the campaign headquarters to request a new sign.
- If you believe your sign was removed by Public Works to perform road maintenance such as mowing or brush cutting or because the sign may have created a public safety concern, you may contact the Road Maintenance shop at (360) 385-0890. Any signs removed by Public Works are stored at the nearest Road Maintenance shop until after the election at which time they are disposed of.
- To file a formal complaint about a damaged or stolen political campaign sign, contact the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office at (360) 385-3831 Ext. 1. Include such facts as license numbers, names, and witnesses to the theft. **Do not call 911 to report missing signs.**