Sign Permit Overview
A Sign Permit is required to install most types of signs. The purpose of a Sign Permit is to ensure that signs maintain the character and aesthetic integrity of the property. Sign Permits are discretionary permits which, depending on the type of sign, are considered by either the Community Development Director of the Planning Commission. Sign Permits considered by the Planning Commission requires a publicly noticed hearing.

Sign Permit Applicability
Capitola Zoning Code section 17.57, establishes design standards and criteria for signs. A Sign Permit is required to erect a sign on any billboard, fence, post, pole, tree, building, or structure in the City, with the following exceptions:

1. On-site signs not exceeding one and one-half square feet in area and bearing only property numbers, post office box numbers, names of occupants of premises or other identification of premises not having commercial connotations;
2. Flags and insignia of any government except where displayed in connection with commercial promotions;
3. Legal notices, identification, informational, safety or directional signs erected or required by governmental bodies or public utilities;
4. Integral decorative or architectural features of buildings, except letters, trademarks, moving parts or moving lights;
5. On-site signs directing and guiding traffic and parking on private property, but bearing no advertising matter and having a display area of less than six square feet;
6. Temporary signs (such as for sale/for rent, garage sale, and open house signs) subject to limitation in Zoning Code section 17.57.050 Repainting and/or making changes to the facing or lettering of an existing sign can be approved through a staff issued sign permit without the need for a public hearing.

Application Requirements
Applicants must submit a Sign Application and submit necessary fees as established in the City’s adopted Fee Schedule. Sign permit applications must also include a sign plan showing dimensions, elevations, the sign design, and any lighting proposed.

Temporary Sign and Banner Permits
A Sign Permit must also be obtained for certain types of temporary signs and banners, such as construction signs, subdivision signs, and temporary banners. Applicants for temporary signs must submit a Temporary Sign and Banner Application.

Master Sign Permit
Multi-tenant commercial properties may apply for a Master Sign Permit to allow multiple commercial signs on a single property. A Master Sign Permit allows future tenants to obtain over-the-counter sign permits (without a public hearing before the Planning Commission) if consistent with the original Master Sign Permit.

Time and Cost
Sign Permit applications typically require 30-90 days to process. The cost for Sign Permits are:
- Sign Permit (Staff Review) - $128 fee
- Sign Permit (PC Review) - $529 fee
- Master Sign Permit - $3,000 deposit
- Temporary Signs/Banners - $38 fee
Sign Permit Process
Sign Permits which are reviewed by staff are typically issued over-the-counter and do not require any noticing or public hearings. Sign Permits reviewed by the Planning Commission are publicly noticed and are considered at a public hearing. Sign Permit applications are reviewed concurrently with any other discretionary permits such as a Conditional Use Permit or a Design Permit.

Sign Permit Findings
In order to approve a Sign Permit application, the decision-maker must make the following two findings that the project would:

1. Maintain the character and aesthetic integrity of the subject property and the surrounding area; and

2. Reasonably prevent and reduce the sort of visual blight which results when signs are designed without due regard to effects on their surroundings. Reasonable conditions may be imposed in approving applications which would otherwise be disapproved.

Public Hearing Process
Applicants for a Sign Permit should attend the public hearing with their architect or sign designer, as applicable, and be prepared to present information to support their request. City staff will present its analysis of the request with a recommendation to approve or deny the application. The applicant and their representatives will then have an opportunity to present their case. The public will also have an opportunity to comment, either in support or in opposition of the proposal.

After the hearing body receives all public testimony, the public hearing is closed and the decision-maker(s) deliberate the merits of the proposal. The decision-maker then renders a decision to approve or deny the proposal. The decision-maker may approve a modified project or condition the project as necessary to ensure high quality design and compatibility with existing neighborhood character. Decisions of the Community Development Director may be appealed to the Planning Commission. Planning Commission decisions may be appealed to the City Council.