



## 1.0 Statutory Authority

[2017 Wisconsin Act 232](#), enacted April 3, 2018, created two key statutes on municipal welcome signs:

- [Wis. Stat. s. 84.30\(2\)\(hm\)](#): “Municipal welcome sign” means an official sign erected and maintained by a municipality that the municipality determines is necessary to inform motorists of the territorial boundaries of the municipality.”
- [Wis. Stat. s. 86.19\(1n\)](#): “...[A] municipality may erect and maintain within the right-of-way of any highway within the boundaries of the municipality a municipal welcome sign, as defined in s. 84.30(2)(hm). No sign under this subsection may be placed within the right-of-way of a highway designated as part of the national system of interstate and defense highways. A sign placed under this subsection is not a traffic control device and is not subject to the provisions of the Wisconsin manual on traffic control devices adopted by the department under s. 84.02(4)(e).”

From various Wisconsin statutes, a municipality may be a town, village, city or county. It does not include unincorporated communities.

## 2.0 Permit Policy

Since municipal welcome signs are physically located on WisDOT highway right-of-way (ROW), a permit is required from WisDOT for the sign to be authorized. Municipal welcome signs are not defined as encroachments or outdoor advertising signs, and they cannot be permitted using a revocable occupancy or outdoor advertising sign permit. Therefore, a work on highway right-of-way (WHROW) permit (form [DT1812](#)) shall be used to authorize a municipal welcome sign.

### 2.1 Permit Record and Retention

A WHROW permit issued for a municipal welcome sign shall be kept on file for the duration that the sign is on WisDOT ROW. If the location of the sign is moved (e.g., a municipality annexes more territory and its boundary subsequently changes, or a WisDOT highway improvement project necessitates the move to a nearby location), a new permit should be issued that voids and supersedes the previous one. A permit may also be amended if the move or a change to the sign is minor. Previous permits for a municipal welcome sign should be kept on file for a historical record or legal review. Each region office shall develop a filing system to maintain an electronic copy of the permit. Include latitude/longitude coordinates to denote each sign location. (*Note: Google Earth kmz files are recommended for this.*)

### 2.2 Applicant

All permit applications for a municipal welcome sign shall be filled-out and signed by an elected official or authorized employee of the municipality. Other municipal clubs, civic groups, and organizations may have an active role in providing assistance towards establishing a sign, but shall not be the main point of contact when working with the municipality during the permit application process.

### 3.0 Costs and Insurance

A municipality is responsible for all material, installation, restoration, operation and maintenance costs of a municipal welcome sign. This includes relocation and all associated costs if a sign needs to be moved due to a WisDOT highway improvement or maintenance project.

A municipality shall be self-insured or carry sufficient insurance to cover vandalism, crashes, or other harmful acts related to the sign.

#### 4.0 **Municipal Welcome Sign Criteria**

WisDOT staff must review each municipal welcome sign permit application to determine if it meets Wis. Stat. s. 84.30(2)(hm), i.e., the sign informs motorists of a municipality's territorial boundary. No other function is allowed under the statute. Any item placed on a municipal welcome sign must be associated with the municipality. The word "welcome" in the statute definition implies that it may be placed on the sign. The following items may be used on the sign, but it is not meant to be an all-inclusive list:

- **Logos.** A symbol or other pictorial drawing.
- **Graphics.** A pictorial drawing showing the municipal boundary shape (e.g., a county), or other prominent feature(s).
- **Taglines (slogans).** Words, phrases, etc. such as, "Hometown USA," "The Good Neighbor City," or "The Good Life on a Great Lake."

A good place to find these items is on existing signs installed by the municipality, stationery, websites and other social media platforms that a municipality is using. The municipality may also have created a branding campaign to market itself that includes the items.

The sign itself, and any landscaping or other tertiary items associated with the sign or landscaping, must be static, i.e., no moving part or parts, including no moving reflector disks.

The following items are outside the scope of messages authorized under Wis. Stat. s. 84.30(2)(hm) and shall not be allowed:

- **Other official or service club signs.** For example, Kiwanis, Lions, Optimists, 4H, etc.
- **Electronic message boards.** Signs that have static or changeable messages or pictures regarding municipal or other local events, time & temperature, etc.
- **Static message boards.** Signs that use individual letters/numbers changed by hand to provide information to the public regarding municipal or other local events.
- **Auxiliary placards.** Signs that promote a championship high school sports team, or messages like, "Voted in the top 100 nationwide as one of the best places to live in 2017."
- **Advertising or sponsorship.** Any sign or message publicizing a business (for profit or non-profit), organization, civic group, individuals, etc.
- **Memorials.** Any tribute or plaque to a deceased member of the municipality or any other person.

A municipality may have the option of erecting an off-ROW sign with such features under Wis. Stat. s. 84.30 and Wis. Adm. Rule Trans 201.

#### 5.0 **Permit Application Review**

Each municipal welcome sign permit application sent to a WisDOT region office shall, at a minimum, be reviewed for the following items:

1. **Interference with other WisDOT traffic signs.** The primary function of a state highway is to safely and efficiently move traffic. WisDOT uses many regulatory, warning, guide and other traffic signs to do this. The location of a municipal welcome sign shall not obstruct or conflict with any of these signs. A traffic sign may be moved, at the municipality's cost, if the sign's placement meets the established guidelines in the Wisconsin Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices. Additional guidance with traffic signs is available in [TEOpS 2-1-41](#).
2. **Interference with intersection sight distance or vision corners.** The location of a municipal welcome sign shall not obstruct sight distance or vision corners for motorists attempting to turn onto or cross a state highway. Intersections include all driveways.

3. **Size, material, lighting.** Unlike the requirements in [Trans 201.05](#) for official signs, there are no criteria for municipal welcome sign construction. If a sign has lighting, the lighting shall not interfere with motorists' vision. Breakaway or yielding materials may be required as stated in #4.
4. **Crash hazard.** The location of a municipal welcome sign shall be out of the clear zone and should be out of the clear runout area if used. The location should also be as close to the ROW line as practical. This is consistent with the location of aboveground utility facilities in [HMM 09-15-25](#), section 3.1. However, it may be difficult to build the sign in a location that meets this criteria due to narrow ROW widths. Should this occur, the sign shall be made of yielding or breakaway materials or protected at the municipality's cost. If a sign is protected with guardrail, for example, any future guardrail repair or maintenance shall be at the municipality's cost. Any sign made with breakaway materials shall account for how the materials will be scattered or fall to avoid striking pedestrians or traffic.
5. **Landscaping.** Landscaping under or around a municipal welcome sign may be allowed if the landscaping does not obstruct or block sight distance or vision corners as stated in #2, and the municipality performs regular maintenance on the vegetation. A water line may be installed to the site to provide irrigation. Landscape bricks or timbers, or any other aboveground item used for landscaping near the sign, shall not be a hazard if struck.
6. **Location on state highway.** Only one municipal welcome sign is allowed per each state highway direction that crosses a municipal boundary even if the highway crosses a boundary more than once. No signs are allowed in a roundabout, splitter islands, or median islands at intersections. A sign may be placed in the median of a divided highway provided it does not interfere with any traffic signs or obstructs motorists' vision. The sign must be located within the municipality's boundary.
7. **Interstates and freeways.** Municipal welcome signs are not allowed on Interstate highways, but may be allowed on freeways. No direct access for the installation, maintenance or repair of the municipal welcome sign shall derive from the travel lane or shoulder of any freeway, nor from any interchange ramp.
8. **Interference with utilities.** A municipal welcome sign should not interfere with existing utilities. If utilities need to be moved, it is the municipality's responsibility to work with a utility company to move the facilities. WisDOT shall not revoke an existing utility permit solely to accommodate a municipal welcome sign since utilities have authority under [Wis. Stat. s. 86.16](#) to locate on state highways. The municipality shall be responsible to obtain the location of, and protect or cause to be protected from any damage, any utility facilities in the area that may be affected by the municipality's work. All notifications to other utilities are likewise the municipality's responsibility.
9. **Vegetation.** Vegetation may be removed to install a municipal welcome sign upon prior approval from WisDOT. WisDOT may require new plantings in other locations within the municipality to compensate for the public's loss. New plantings will be furnished at a rate of two trees for every tree removed that is 2" DBH<sup>1</sup> or greater that is not dead, diseased, invasive<sup>2</sup>, or hazardous. Vegetation obstructing a sign more than five years after the sign's installation may be removed in accordance with [Wis. Stat. s. 84.305](#).

If a municipality wants to mow a larger area on the ROW in front of its sign and/or more frequently than current WisDOT policy, add a supplemental provision to the permit to document the mowing. A drawing or sketch depicting the area to be mowed shall also be included with the permit.

### 5.1 **Municipal Sign Maintenance**

A municipality shall perform customary maintenance to keep its welcome sign and any landscaping in good condition. A separate WisDOT permit is not required for maintenance. However, if a shoulder is closed for more than 30 minutes or a lane closed or encroached for any duration due to the maintenance, then a separate permit is required to evaluate and approve the necessary work zone traffic control.

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<sup>1</sup> Diameter at Breast Height

<sup>2</sup> Species as listed in [Wis. Adm. Rule NR 40](#)

## **5.2 WisDOT Highway Maintenance**

Per WisDOT's standard indemnification language that is included with all permits, WisDOT is not responsible for any damage to a municipal welcome sign because of its highway construction or maintenance activities (snowplowing, mowing, etc.).

## **5.3 Additional Supplemental Provisions**

Under [Wis. Stat. s. 86.07\(2\)\(a\)](#), conditions may be placed on any permit as a requirement of approval. There are 51 general and supplemental permit provisions on the WHROW permit form. A list of additional supplemental provisions derived from this policy should also be included. If necessary, a situation unique to a WHROW permit should be handled by writing a special provision for that permit starting with #52 on the DT1812 form.

## **6.0 Existing Municipal Welcome Signs**

Unpermitted, existing municipal welcome signs should be removed if conditions warrant that the sign is a safety hazard and cannot be permitted using the guidelines in this policy. Prior to removal, WisDOT shall work with the municipality to determine if the sign may be moved to a different location, rebuilt with breakaway or yielding materials, protected, etc. to allow issuance of a WHROW permit. During the permit review process for an existing sign and upon WisDOT notification, a municipality should immediately remove any aboveground obstacles (e.g., landscape bricks or timbers) near the sign that are determined to be a hazard if struck.

## **7.0 Permit Revocation**

Any WisDOT permit issued may be revoked for policy or permit violations, safety violations, or as needed to facilitate a WisDOT highway improvement or maintenance project. If a permit is revoked, the permittee may appeal WisDOT's decision under [Wis. Stat. s. 86.073](#).