

**ARTICLE 11.**  
**Outdoor Advertising Control Act.**

§ 136-126. Title of Article.  
This Article may be cited as the Outdoor  
Advertising Control  
Act. (1967, c. 1248, s. 1.)

**§ 136-127. Declaration of policy.**

The General Assembly hereby finds and declares that outdoor advertising is a legitimate commercial use of private property adjacent to roads and highways but that the erection and maintenance of outdoor advertising signs and devices in areas in the vicinity of the right-of-way of the interstate and primary highway systems within the State should be controlled and regulated in order to promote the safety, health, welfare and convenience and enjoyment of travel on and protection of the public investment in highways within the State, to prevent unreasonable distraction of operators of motor vehicles and to prevent interference with the effectiveness of traffic regulations and to promote safety on the highways, to attract tourists and promote the prosperity, economic well-being and general welfare of the State, and to preserve and enhance the natural scenic beauty of the highways and areas in the vicinity of the State highways and to promote the reasonable, orderly and effective display of such signs, displays and devices. It is the intention of the General Assembly to provide and declare herein a public policy and statutory basis for the regulation and control of outdoor advertising. (1967, c. 1248, s. 2; 1999-404, s. 6.)

**§ 136-128. Definitions.**

As used in this Article:

- (1) "Erect" means to construct, build, raise, assemble, place, affix, attach, create, paint, draw, or in any other way bring into being or establish.
- (1a) "Illegal sign" means one which was erected and/or maintained in violation of State law.
- (1b) "Information center" means an area or site established and maintained at safety rest areas for the purpose of informing the public of places of interest within the State and providing such other information as the Department of Transportation may consider desirable.
- (2) "Interstate system" means that portion of the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways located within the State, as officially designated, or as may hereafter be so designated, by the Department of Transportation, or other appropriate authorities and are also so designated by interstate numbers. As to highways under construction so designated as interstate highways pursuant to the above

procedures, the highway shall be a part of the interstate system for the purposes of this Article on the date the location of the highway has been approved finally by the appropriate federal authorities.

(2a) "Nonconforming sign" shall mean a sign which was lawfully erected but which does not comply with the provisions of State law or State rules and regulations passed at a later date or which later fails to comply with State law or State rules or regulations due to changed conditions. Illegally erected or maintained signs are not nonconforming signs.

(3) "Outdoor advertising" means any outdoor sign, display, light, device, figure, painting, drawing, message, plaque, poster, billboard, or any other thing which is designed, intended or used to advertise or inform, any part of the advertising or information contents of which is visible from any place on the main-traveled way of the interstate or primary system, whether the same be permanent or portable installation.

(4) "Primary systems" means the federal-aid primary system in existence on June 1, 1991, and any highway which is not on that system but which is on the National Highway System. As to highways under construction so designated as primary highways pursuant to the above procedures, the highway shall be a part of the primary system for purposes of this Article on the date the location of the highway has been approved finally by the appropriate federal or State authorities.

(5) "Safety rest area" means an area or site established and maintained within or adjacent to the highway right-of-way by or under public supervision or control, for the convenience of the traveling public.

(6) "State law" means a State constitutional provision or statute, or an ordinance, rule or regulation enacted or adopted by a State agency or political subdivision of a State pursuant to a State Constitution or statute.

(7) "Unzoned area" shall mean an area where there is no zoning in effect.

(8) "Urban area" shall mean an area within the boundaries or limits of any incorporated municipality having a population of five thousand or more as determined by the latest available federal census.

(9) "Visible" means capable of being seen (whether or not legible) without visual aid by a person of normal visual acuity. (1967, c. 1248, s. 3; 1973, c. 507, s. 5; 1975, c. 568, ss. 1-4; 1977, c. 464, s. 7.1; 1997-456, s. 27; 1999-404, s. 7.)

**§ 136-129. Limitations of outdoor advertising devices.**

No outdoor advertising shall be erected or maintained within 660 feet of the nearest edge

of the right-of-way of the interstate or primary highway systems in this State so as to be visible from the main-traveled way thereof after the effective date of this Article as determined by G.S. 136-140, except the following:

(1) Directional and other official signs and notices, which signs and notices shall include those authorized and permitted by Chapter 136 of the General Statutes, which include but are not limited to official signs and notices pertaining to natural wonders, scenic and historic attractions and signs erected and maintained by a public utility, electric or telephone membership corporation, or municipality for the purpose of giving warning of or information as to the location of an underground cable, pipeline or other installation.

(2) Outdoor advertising which advertises the sale or lease of property upon which it is located.

(2a) Outdoor advertising which advertises the sale of any fruit or vegetable crop by the grower at a roadside stand or by having the purchaser pick the crop on the property on which the crop is grown provided: (i) the sign is no more than two feet long on any side; (ii) the sign is located on property owned or leased by the grower where the crop is grown; (iii) the grower is also the seller; and (iv) the sign is kept in place by the grower for no more than 30 days.

(3) Outdoor advertising which advertises activities conducted on the property upon which it is located.

(4) Outdoor advertising, in conformity with the rules and regulations promulgated by the Department of Transportation, located in areas which are zoned industrial or commercial under authority of State law.

(5) Outdoor advertising, in conformity with the rules and regulations promulgated by the Department of Transportation, located in unzoned commercial or industrial areas. (1967, c. 1248, s. 4; 1972, c. 507, s. 5; 1975, c. 568, s. 5; 1977, c. 464, s. 7.1; 1991 (Reg. Sess., 1992), c. 946, s. 1; 1999-404, s. 8.)

**§ 136-129.1. Limitations of outdoor advertising devices beyond 660 feet.**

No outdoor advertising shall be erected or maintained beyond 660 feet of the nearest edge of the right-of-way of the interstate or primary highway systems in this State outside of the urban areas so as to be visible and intended to be read from the main-traveled way except the following:

(1) Directional and other official signs and notices, which signs and notices shall include those authorized and permitted by Chapter 136 of the General Statutes, which include but are not limited to official signs and notices pertaining to

natural wonders, scenic and historic attractions and signs erected and maintained by a public utility, electric or telephone membership corporation, or municipality for the purpose of giving warning of or information as to the location of an underground cable, pipeline or other installation.

(2) Outdoor advertising which advertises the sale or lease of property upon which it is located.

(3) Outdoor advertising which advertises activities conducted on the property upon which it is located. (1975, c. 568, s. 6; 1999-404, s. 9.)

**§ 136-129.2. Limitation of outdoor advertising devices adjacent to scenic highways, State and National Parks, historic areas and other places.**

(a) In addition to the limitations contained in G.S. 136-129 and G.S. 136-129.1, in order to further the purposes set forth in Article 10 of this Chapter and to promote the reasonable, orderly, and effective display of outdoor advertising devices along highways adjacent to scenic and historical areas, while protecting the public investment in these highways and promoting the safety and recreational value of public travel, and to preserve natural beauty, no outdoor advertising sign shall be erected adjacent to any highway which is either:

(1) a. A scenic highway or scenic byway designated by the Board of Transportation;

b. Within 1,200 feet, on the same side of the highway, of the boundary line of a North Carolina State Park, a National Park, a State or national wildlife refuge, or a designated wild and scenic river; or

c. Within 500 feet, on the same side of the highway, of the boundary lines of any historic districts and other properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places or State rest areas, or within the boundary lines of any historic district; except as permitted under G.S. 136-129(1), (2), (2a), or (3); or

d. Within one-third of the applicable distances under sub-subdivision (a)(1)b. and (a)(1)c. of this section, along the opposite side of the highway from any of the properties designated in sub-subdivision (a)(1)b. and (a)(1)c. of this section, except as permitted under G.S. 136-129(1), (2), (2a), (3), (4), or (5).

(b) The distances set forth in this section shall be measured horizontally in linear feet extending in each direction along the edge of the pavement of the highway from any point on the boundary of the subject property, or any point on the opposite side of the highway perpendicular to any point on the boundary line of the subject property.

(c) As used in sub-subdivision (a)(1)b. and (a)(1)c. of this section, the term "highway" means a highway that is designated as a part of the

interstate or federal-aid primary highway system as of June 1, 1991, or any highway which is or becomes a part of the National Highway System. (1993, c. 524, s.1.)

**§ 136-130. Regulation of advertising.**

The Department of Transportation is authorized to promulgate rules and regulations in the form of ordinances governing:

- (1) The erection and maintenance of outdoor advertising permitted in G.S. 136-129,
- (2) The erection and maintenance of outdoor advertising permitted in G.S. 136-129.1,
- (2a) The erection and maintenance of outdoor advertising permitted in G.S. 136-129.2,
- (3) The specific requirements and procedures for obtaining a permit for outdoor advertising as required in G.S.136-133 and for the administrative procedures for appealing a decision at the agency level to refuse to grant or in revoking a permit previously issued, and
- (4) The administrative procedures for appealing a decision at the agency level to declare any outdoor advertising illegal and a nuisance as pursuant to G.S. 136-134, as may be necessary to carry out the policy of the State declared in this Article. (1967, c. 1248, s. 5; 1973, c. 507, s. 5; 195, c. 568, s. 7; 1977, c. 464, ss. 7.1, 31; 1993, c. 524, s. 2.)

**§ 136-131. Removal of existing nonconforming advertising.**

The Department of Transportation is authorized to acquire by purchase, gift, or condemnation all outdoor advertising and all property rights pertaining thereto which are prohibited under the provisions of G.S. 136-129, 136-129.1 or 136-129.2, provided such outdoor advertising is in lawful existence on the effective date of this Article as determined by G.S. 136-140, or provided that it is lawfully erected after the effective date of this Article as determined by G.S. 136-140.

In any acquisition, purchase or condemnation, just compensation to the owner of the outdoor advertising, where the owner of the outdoor advertising does not own the fee, shall be limited to the fair market value at the time of the taking of the outdoor advertising owner's interest in the real property on which the outdoor advertising is located and such value shall include the value of the outdoor advertising.

In any acquisition, purchase or condemnation, just compensation to the owner of the fee or other interest in the real property upon which the outdoor advertising is located where said owner does not own the outdoor advertising located thereon shall be limited to the difference

in the fair market value of the entire tract immediately before and immediately after the taking by the Department of Transportation of the right to maintain such outdoor advertising thereon and in arriving at the fair market value after the taking, any special or general benefits accruing to the property by reason of the acquisition shall be taken into consideration. In any acquisition, purchase or condemnation, just compensation to the owner of the fee in the real property upon which the outdoor advertising is located, where said owner also owns the outdoor advertising located thereon, shall be limited to the fair market value of the outdoor advertising plus the difference in the fair market value of the entire tract immediately before and immediately after the taking by the Department of Transportation of the right to maintain such outdoor advertising thereon and in arriving at the fair market value after the taking, any special or general benefits accruing to the property by reason of the acquisition shall be taken into consideration. (1967, c. 1248, s. 6; 1973, c. 507, s. 5; 1975, c. 568, ss. 8-10; 1977, c. 464, s. 7.1; 1993, c. 524, s. 3.)

**§ 136-131.1. (Expires June 30, 2002 -- See editor's note) Just compensation required for the removal of billboards on federal-aid primary highways by local authorities.**

No municipality, county, local or regional zoning authority, or other political subdivision, shall, without the payment of just compensation in accordance with the provisions that are applicable to the Department of Transportation as provided in paragraphs 2, 3, and 4 of G.S. 136-131, remove or cause to be removed any outdoor advertising adjacent to a highway on the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways or a highway on the Federal-aid Primary Highway System for which there is in effect a valid permit issued by the Department of Transportation pursuant to the provisions of Article 11 of Chapter 136 of the General Statutes and regulations promulgated pursuant thereto. (1981 (Reg. Sess., 1982), c. 1147, ss. 1, 2; 1983, c. 318, s. 1; 1987 (Reg. Sess., 1988), c. 1024, s. 1; 1989, c. 166, s. 1; 1993 (Reg. Sess., 1994), c. 725, s. 1; 1998-23, s. 7; 1998-212, s. 27.5(a).)

**§136-132. Condemnation procedure.**

For the purpose of this Article, the Department of Transportation shall use the procedure for condemnation of real property as provided by Article 9 of Chapter 136 of the General Statutes. (1967, c. 1248, s. 7; 1973, c. 507, s. 5; 1977, c. 464, s. 7.1.)

**§ 136-133. Permits required.**

No person shall erect or maintain any outdoor advertising within 660 feet of the nearest edge of the right-of-way of the interstate or primary highway system, except those allowed under G.S. 136-129, subdivisions (2) and (3) in this Article, or beyond 660 feet of the nearest edge of the right-of-way of the interstate or primary highway system, except those allowed under G.S. 136-129.1, subdivisions (2) and (3), without first obtaining a permit from the Department of Transportation or its agents pursuant to the procedures set out by rules adopted by the Department of Transportation. The permit shall be valid until revoked for nonconformance with this Article or rules adopted by the Department of Transportation. Any person aggrieved by the decision of the Department of Transportation or its agents in refusing to grant or in revoking a permit may appeal the decision in accordance with the rules adopted by the Department of Transportation pursuant to this Article to the Secretary of Transportation who shall make the final decision on the agency appeal. The Department of Transportation shall have the authority to charge permit fees to defray the costs of administering the permit procedures under this Article. The fees for directional signs as set forth in G.S. 136-129(1) and G.S. 136-129.1(1) shall not exceed a forty dollar (\$40.00) initial fee and a thirty dollar (\$30.00) annual renewal fee. The fees for outdoor advertising structures, as set forth in G.S. 136-129(4) and (5) shall not exceed a one hundred twenty dollar (\$120.00) initial fee and a sixty dollar (\$60.00) annual renewal fee.

If outdoor advertising is under construction and the Department of Transportation determines that a permit has not been issued for the outdoor advertising, the Department may require that all work on the outdoor advertising cease until the owner of the outdoor advertising shows that the outdoor advertising does not violate this section. The stopwork order shall be prominently posted on the outdoor advertising structure, and no further notice of the stopwork order is required. The failure of an owner of outdoor advertising to comply immediately with the stopwork order shall subject the outdoor advertising to removal by the Department of Transportation or its agents. Outdoor advertising is under construction when it is in any phase of construction prior to the attachment and display of the advertising message in final position for viewing by the traveling public. The cost of removing outdoor advertising by the Department of Transportation or its agents pursuant to this section shall be assessed against the owner of the unpermitted outdoor advertising by the Department of Transportation. No stopwork order may be issued

when the Department of Transportation process agent has been served with a court order allowing the sign to be constructed. (1967, c. 1248, s. 8; 1973, 507, s. 5; 1975, c. 568, s. 11; 1977, c. 464, ss. 7.1, 32; 1983, c. 604, s. 2; 1989, c. 677; 1999-404, s. 1.)

**§ 136-134. Illegal advertising.**

Any outdoor advertising erected or maintained adjacent to the right-of-way of the interstate or primary highway system after the effective date of this Article as determined by G.S. 136-140, in violation of the provisions of this Article or rules adopted by the Department of Transportation, or any outdoor advertising maintained without a permit regardless of the date of erection shall be illegal and shall constitute a nuisance. The Department of Transportation or its agents shall give 30 days' notice to the owner of the illegal outdoor advertising with the exception of the owner of unlawful portable outdoor advertising for which the Department of Transportation shall give five days' notice, if such owner is known or can by reasonable diligence be ascertained, to remove the outdoor advertising or to make it conform to the provisions of this Article or rules adopted by the Department of Transportation hereunder. The Department of Transportation or its agents shall have the right to remove the illegal outdoor advertising at the expense of the owner if the owner fails to remove the outdoor advertising or to make it conform to the provisions of this Article or rules issued by the Department of Transportation within 30 days after receipt of such notice or five days for owners of portable outdoor advertising. The Department of Transportation or its agents may enter upon private property for the purpose of removing the outdoor advertising prohibited by this Article or rules adopted by the Department of Transportation hereunder without civil or criminal liability. The costs of removing the outdoor advertising, whether by the Department of Transportation or its agents, shall be assessed against the owner of the illegal outdoor advertising by the Department of Transportation. Any person aggrieved by the decision declaring the outdoor advertising structure illegal shall be granted the right to appeal the decision in accordance with the terms of the rules and regulations enacted by the Department of Transportation pursuant to this Article to the Secretary of Transportation who shall make the final decision on the agency appeal. (1967, c. 1248, s. 9; 1973, c. 507, s. 5; 1975, c. 568, s. 12; 1977, c. 464, ss. 7.1, 32; 1999-404, s. 2.)

**§136-134.1. Judicial review.**

Any person who is aggrieved by a final decision of the Secretary of Transportation after exhausting all administrative remedies made available to him by rules and regulations enacted pursuant to this Article is entitled to judicial review of such decision under this Article. In order to obtain judicial review of the Secretary of Transportation's decision under this Article, the person seeking review must file a petition in the Superior Court of Wake County within 30 days after written copy of the decision of the Secretary of Transportation is served upon the person seeking review. Failure to file such a petition within the time stated shall operate as a waiver of the right of such person to review under this Chapter.

The petition shall state explicitly what exceptions are taken to the decision of the Secretary of Transportation and what relief petitioner seeks. Within 10 days after the petition is filed with the court, the person seeking the review shall serve copies of the petition by registered mail, return receipt requested, upon the Department of Transportation. Within 30 days after receipt of the copy of the petition for review, or within such additional time as the court may allow, the Department of Transportation shall transmit to the reviewing court a certified copy of the written decision.

At any time before or during the review proceeding, the aggrieved party may apply to the reviewing court for an order staying the operation of the decision of the Secretary of Transportation pending the outcome of the review. The court may grant or deny the stay in its discretion upon such terms as it deems proper. The review of the decision of the Secretary of Transportation under this Article shall be conducted by the court without a jury and shall hear the matter de novo pursuant to the rules of evidence as applied in the General Court of Justice. The court, after hearing the matter may affirm, reverse or modify the decision if the decision is:

- (1) In violation of constitutional provisions; or
- (2) Not made in accordance with this Article or rules or regulations promulgated by the Department of Transportation; or
- (3) Affected by other error of law.

The party aggrieved shall have the burden of showing that the decision was violative of one of the above.

A party to the review proceedings, including the agency, may appeal to the appellate division from the final judgment of the Superior Court under the rules of procedure applicable in civil cases. The appealing party may apply to the Superior Court for a stay for its final determination or a stay of the administrative decision, whichever shall be appropriate, pending the outcome of the appeal to the appellate

division. (1975, c. 568, s. 13; 1977, c. 464, ss. 32, 33.)

**§ 136-134.2. Notification requirements.**

When the Department of Transportation notifies a permit applicant, permit holder, or the owner of an outdoor advertising structure that the application is denied, the permit revoked, or the structure is in violation of this Article or rules issued pursuant to this Article, it shall do so in writing by certified mail, return receipt requested, and shall include a copy of this Article and all rules issued pursuant to this Article.

If the Department of Transportation fails to include a copy of this Article and the rules, the time period during which the permit applicant, permit holder, or owner of the outdoor advertising structure has to request a review hearing shall be tolled until the Department of Transportation provides the required materials. (1999-404, s. 3.)

**§ 136-135. Enforcement provisions.**

Any person, firm, corporation or association, placing, erecting or maintaining outdoor advertising along the interstate system or primary system in violation of this Article or rules adopted by the Department of Transportation shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor. In addition thereto, the Department of Transportation may seek injunctive relief in the Superior Court of Wake County or of the county where the outdoor advertising is located and require the outdoor advertising to conform to the provisions of this Article or rules adopted pursuant hereto, or require the removal of the said illegal outdoor advertising. (1967, c. 1248, s. 10; 1973, c. 507, s. 5; 1975, c. 568, s. 14; 1977, c. 464, s. 32; 1993, c. 539, s. 998; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 24, s. 14(c); 1999-404, s. 4.)

**§ 136-136. Zoning changes.**

All zoning authorities shall give written notice to the Department of Transportation of the establishment or revision of any commercial and industrial zones within 660 feet of the right-of-way of interstate or primary highway systems. Notice shall be by registered mail sent to the offices of the Department of Transportation in Raleigh, North Carolina, within 15 days after the effective date of the zoning change or establishment. (1967, c. 1248, s. 11; 1973, c. 507, s. 5; 1977, c. 464, s. 7.1; 1999-404, s. 10.)

**§136-137. Information directories.**

c. 507, s. 5; 1975, c. 568, s. 15; 1977, c. 464, s. 7.1.)

The Department of Transportation is authorized to maintain maps and to permit informational directories and advertising pamphlets to be made available at safety rest areas and to establish information centers at safety rest areas and install signs on the right-of-way for the purpose of informing the public of facilities for food, lodging and vehicle services and of places of interest and for providing such other information as may be considered desirable. (1967, c. 1248, s. 12; 1973, c. 507, s. 5; 1977, c. 464, s. 7.1.)

**§136-138. Agreements with United States authorized.**

The Department of Transportation is authorized to enter into agreements with other governmental authorities relating to the control of outdoor advertising in areas adjacent to the interstate and primary highway systems, including the establishment of information centers and safety rest areas, and to take action in the name of the State to comply with the terms of the agreements. (1967, c. 1248, s. 13; 1973, c. 507, s. 5; 1977, c. 464, s. 7.1.)

**§136-139. Alternate control.**

In addition to any other control provided for in this Article, the Department of Transportation may regulate outdoor advertising in accordance with the standards provided by this Article and regulations promulgated pursuant thereto, by the acquisition by purchase, gift, or condemnation of easements or any other interests in real property prohibiting or controlling the erection and maintenance of advertising within 660 feet of the right-of-way line of the interstate and primary system of the State. (1967, c. 1248, s. 14; 1973, c. 507, s. 5; 1977, c. 464, s. 7.1.)

**§136-140. Availability of federal aid funds.**

The Department of Transportation shall not be required to expend any funds for the regulation of outdoor advertising under this Article, nor shall the provisions of this Article, with the exception of G.S. 136-138 hereof, have any force and effect until federal funds are made available to the State for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this Article, and the Department of Transportation has entered into an agreement with the United States Secretary of Transportation as authorized by G.S. 136-138 hereof and as provided by the Highway Beautification Act of 1965 or subsequent amendment thereto. (1967, c. 1248, s. 15; 1973,