

Full Guide to Getting a Monument Sign

What a Monument Sign Is, Where It's Used, and Whether It's the Right Choice



Monument signs are one of the most recognizable forms of commercial signage. They create a permanent presence at the entrance of a property, identify businesses and organizations, and often serve as the first impression visitors have before they ever enter a building.

Unlike temporary signs or building-mounted signs, a monument sign becomes part of the property itself. It often remains in place for decades, making it one of the longest-term investments a business or property owner will make in exterior branding.

Choosing the right monument sign involves much more than selecting a shape or adding a logo. Materials, visibility, zoning regulations, landscaping, lighting, maintenance requirements, and future tenant changes all affect the final result.

This guide explains everything you should know before purchasing a monument sign, based on practical experience designing, manufacturing, permitting, and installing commercial signs throughout Charlotte, North Carolina, and the surrounding region.

What Is a Monument Sign?

A monument sign is a freestanding sign installed close to ground level that identifies a property, business, campus, subdivision, or development. Rather than being mounted on a building or elevated on poles, the sign sits on a solid base that appears integrated into the surrounding landscape.

Most monument signs range from three to eight feet tall, although larger versions are common for hospitals, shopping centers, universities, industrial campuses, and mixed-use developments.

The purpose of a monument sign is straightforward:

- * Identify a property
- * Improve visibility from nearby roads
- * Help visitors find the correct entrance
- * Reinforce branding
- * Create a permanent, professional appearance

Unlike temporary signs, monument signs are generally considered part of the property's long-term infrastructure.

How Does a Monument Sign Work?

At its simplest, a monument sign displays identifying information where it is most visible to approaching traffic.

Depending on the property, that information may include:

- * Company name
- * Corporate logo

- * Shopping center name
- * Multiple tenant panels
- * Address
- * Directional information
- * Electronic message center (LED display)
- * Hours of operation
- * Wayfinding information

The sign is positioned so drivers have enough time to recognize the property before reaching the entrance.

Good monument sign design is less about making the sign larger and more about making it easier to read at typical traffic speeds.

Several factors influence readability:

- * Viewing distance
- * Vehicle speed
- * Letter height
- * Color contrast
- * Illumination
- * Landscaping
- * Sign placement
- * Road elevation
- * Number of messages displayed

One of the most common mistakes is trying to fit too much information onto a single monument sign. More information almost always reduces readability.

Why Businesses Choose Monument Signs

For many commercial properties, monument signs provide the primary identification visible from the roadway.

Examples include:

- * Medical offices
- * Churches
- * Apartment communities
- * Corporate offices
- * Industrial parks
- * Retail centers
- * Hotels

- * Schools
- * Government facilities
- * Office parks
- * Financial institutions
- * Restaurants
- * Manufacturing facilities
- * Mixed-use developments

Even when building signs are installed, those signs may not be visible until visitors have already entered the property.

A monument sign often serves as the first directional marker.

Common Types of Monument Signs

Although they share similar purposes, monument signs come in several different styles depending on the property, budget, and architectural requirements.

Architectural Monument Signs

Architectural monument signs are designed to match the building materials used on the property.

Common materials include:

- * Brick
- * Stone
- * Stucco
- * EIFS
- * Concrete
- * Metal accents
- * Aluminum panels
- * Composite materials

These signs are common at:

- * Medical campuses
- * Universities
- * Churches
- * Corporate headquarters
- * Residential developments

Because they match nearby architecture, they often appear as permanent extensions of the property rather than standalone signs.

Tenant Monument Signs

Shopping centers and office parks often use monument signs with multiple tenant panels.

Each tenant receives its own identification area.

These signs make it easy for visitors to locate businesses before entering the property.

One important consideration is future tenant turnover.

Experienced sign companies often recommend designing removable tenant panels that can be replaced without rebuilding the entire monument.

This significantly reduces future maintenance costs.

Illuminated Monument Signs

Illuminated monument signs improve visibility after sunset.

Common lighting methods include:

- * Internally illuminated cabinet sections
- * Halo-lit channel letters
- * Push-through acrylic letters
- * LED lighting
- * Ground-mounted landscape lighting

Lighting should improve readability without creating glare for drivers or neighboring properties.

Many municipalities, including those around Charlotte, regulate brightness levels and operating hours for illuminated signs.

Electronic Message Center Monument Signs

Some monument signs incorporate digital LED displays that allow changing messages throughout the day.

These are frequently used by:

- * Schools
- * Churches
- * Municipal buildings
- * Community centers
- * Event venues
- * Hospitals

Electronic displays allow organizations to update:

- * Events
- * Announcements
- * Emergency messages
- * Promotions
- * Service information

However, these signs require significantly more planning because local ordinances often regulate:

- * Display timing
- * Brightness
- * Animation
- * Message transitions
- * Screen size

Directional Monument Signs

Large campuses often install smaller monument signs throughout the property.

These signs assist with navigation rather than branding.

Examples include:

- * Visitor parking
- * Emergency entrance
- * Student services
- * Building numbers
- * Delivery entrance
- * Employee parking

Although simpler than entrance monuments, they play an important role in improving visitor experience.

Where Are Monument Signs Commonly Used?

Almost every commercial property type can benefit from a monument sign if roadway visibility is important.

Office Buildings

Professional office parks frequently install monument signs near their main entrance to help visitors identify the correct location.

Large office complexes often include tenant directories.

Medical Facilities

Healthcare facilities place a high value on clear wayfinding.

Patients often arrive under stressful circumstances.

A clearly visible monument sign helps reduce confusion before they even enter the parking lot.

Medical campuses may also include additional directional monument signs throughout the property.

Churches

Churches frequently use monument signs to identify worship times, ministries, and community events.

Many newer church campuses combine traditional monument signs with electronic message centers for weekly announcements.

Schools

Schools use monument signs for:

- * Campus identification
- * School branding
- * Visitor guidance
- * Event announcements
- * Emergency communication

Public schools often work within strict municipal and district sign standards.

Apartment Communities

Apartment communities rely heavily on entrance monument signs because prospective residents often judge the appearance of the property before meeting leasing staff.

A well-maintained monument sign creates a stronger first impression than temporary banners or small entrance signs.

Retail Centers

Shopping centers typically use monument signs to advertise anchor tenants while helping customers locate individual businesses.

Larger centers may have multiple monument signs positioned along different road frontages.

Industrial Parks

Industrial developments often prioritize function over decoration.

Monument signs identify the property while directing truck traffic and visitors to the correct building.

Benefits of Monument Signs

They Improve Property Visibility

The most obvious advantage is visibility.

A monument sign helps drivers recognize the property before reaching the entrance.

Without proper identification, visitors may miss driveways or enter neighboring businesses by mistake.

They Create Permanent Identification

Unlike banners or temporary signs, monument signs become part of the property.

They continue serving their purpose for decades with relatively little maintenance.

They Support Multiple Businesses

Multi-tenant monuments provide identification for several businesses within one structure.

This reduces visual clutter while making navigation easier.

They Improve Wayfinding

Visitors who immediately recognize the correct entrance spend less time searching parking lots.

This is particularly valuable for hospitals, campuses, office parks, and apartment communities.

They Can Increase Perceived Property Value

While a monument sign does not directly increase property value, it often contributes to the overall appearance of the site.

A thoughtfully designed entrance with coordinated landscaping and quality materials creates a more established, professional image than temporary or poorly maintained signage.

For commercial developments, this can support leasing efforts by presenting the property as well-maintained and professionally managed.

When a Monument Sign Is NOT the Right Solution

- * Your building is already visible: If your storefront is easy to see from the road, a building-mounted sign may be all you need.
 - * Local ordinances restrict signs: Height, size, or placement limits can reduce a monument sign's effectiveness, so check zoning rules first.
 - * Visibility is blocked: Hills, curves, trees, utility poles, or nearby buildings can limit visibility. A different location or additional building signage may work better.
 - * Tenants change frequently: Choose a design with replaceable tenant panels to reduce update costs over time.
 - * You need advertising, not identification: Monument signs identify a property. For long-distance visibility, a pylon or other elevated sign may be a better option, subject to local regulations.
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Materials, Illumination, Design Considerations, Engineering, and Fabrication

A monument sign's appearance is only one part of its value. What truly determines how well it performs over time is how it is built. The materials inside the sign, the construction methods, and the engineering behind it all affect durability, maintenance, and long-term costs.

A monument sign exposed to years of sun, rain, humidity, temperature changes, irrigation systems, and occasional severe storms in the Charlotte area faces very different conditions than an indoor display or temporary sign. Selecting the right materials at the beginning of the project helps reduce repairs and extends the sign's service life.

This section explains the most common monument sign materials, lighting options, design principles, structural considerations, and the fabrication process.

Choosing the Right Materials for a Monument Sign

The best material depends on several factors:

- * The architecture of the property
- * Budget
- * Desired lifespan
- * Maintenance expectations
- * Local climate
- * Whether the sign will be illuminated

Many monument signs combine multiple materials rather than relying on just one. For example, a sign may include a steel frame, an aluminum cabinet, masonry veneer, acrylic lettering, and LED illumination.

Understanding the role of each material helps you make informed decisions.

Steel: The Structural Backbone

Most permanent monument signs are built around an internal steel frame.

The steel frame provides the structural support needed to withstand wind loads, support heavy materials, and anchor the sign to its concrete foundation.

The frame is generally hidden from view after installation, but it is one of the most important components of the sign.

A properly engineered steel structure helps prevent:

- * Leaning
- * Twisting
- * Cracking
- * Movement during storms
- * Structural failure over time

Because steel is susceptible to corrosion, it should be properly coated or galvanized when appropriate, particularly in environments where moisture is common.

Aluminum: Lightweight and Corrosion Resistant

Aluminum is one of the most commonly used materials in commercial signage.

Unlike steel, aluminum does not rust, making it an excellent choice for exposed sign faces, cabinets, and decorative elements.

It is commonly used for:

- * Sign cabinets
- * Letter returns
- * Trim
- * Decorative panels
- * Access doors
- * Tenant panels

Although aluminum costs more than some alternatives, its durability and low maintenance often justify the investment.

Aluminum Composite Material (ACM)

Aluminum Composite Material, commonly called ACM, consists of two thin aluminum sheets bonded to a solid core.

ACM has become one of the most widely used materials in the sign industry because it offers several advantages:

- * Smooth finish
- * Excellent paint adhesion
- * Lightweight construction
- * Weather resistance
- * Consistent appearance
- * Wide range of available colors

It is frequently used for:

- * Sign faces
- * Background panels
- * Directional signs
- * Decorative accents

Premium manufacturers offer factory-finished ACM with durable coatings that resist fading and chalking for many years.

Masonry Materials

Many monument signs incorporate masonry to match nearby buildings.

Common options include:

Brick

Brick provides a traditional appearance and blends well with office buildings, schools, churches, and residential developments.

Properly installed brick requires relatively little maintenance and can last for decades.

Natural Stone

Natural stone creates a distinctive appearance because no two pieces are identical.

Common choices include:

- * Limestone
- * Granite
- * Fieldstone
- * Sandstone

Stone is highly durable but generally increases both fabrication and installation costs due to its weight and labor requirements.

Manufactured Stone Veneer

Manufactured stone offers the appearance of natural stone while reducing weight and installation time.

Many commercial properties choose high-quality stone veneer because it provides architectural appeal without requiring the structural support of full-depth masonry.

Stucco and EIFS

Stucco and Exterior Insulation and Finish Systems (EIFS) are frequently used when buildings already feature those finishes.

These materials provide a clean architectural appearance but require proper detailing to prevent moisture intrusion.

Impact damage can also require periodic repairs.

Concrete

Concrete serves several important functions.

It may be used for:

- * Foundations
- * Structural bases
- * Decorative architectural elements
- * Monument walls

Although concrete is extremely durable, improper drainage or settling can eventually lead to cracking.

Proper site preparation is essential.

Acrylic

Acrylic is commonly used for illuminated lettering and logos.

Because acrylic transmits light effectively, it is often chosen for:

- * Push-through letters
- * Internally illuminated logos
- * Tenant panels
- * Decorative illuminated features

High-quality acrylic resists yellowing far better than lower-grade plastics.

Vinyl Graphics

Not every monument sign relies solely on dimensional letters.

Vinyl graphics may be used for:

- * Temporary tenant identification
- * Window inserts
- * Sponsor panels
- * Short-term messaging

Vinyl offers flexibility but typically has a shorter lifespan than routed or fabricated lettering.

Choosing the Right Lettering Style

The lettering used on a monument sign significantly affects readability and appearance.

Common options include:

Flat Cut Letters

These are precision-cut from aluminum, acrylic, PVC, or other materials.

Advantages include:

- * Clean appearance
 - * Durable construction
 - * Moderate cost
 - * Excellent readability
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Fabricated Channel Letters

Channel letters create depth and may be illuminated internally.

These are commonly used when businesses want their monument sign to match their building signage.

Push-Through Letters

Push-through letters extend through the face of an illuminated cabinet.

During the day they appear dimensional.

At night they illuminate evenly with LED lighting.

These provide a refined appearance while maintaining excellent nighttime visibility.

Monument Sign Illumination Options

Not every monument sign requires lighting.

However, businesses operating during evening hours often benefit from improved visibility after dark.

Several lighting methods are available.

Internal LED Illumination

Modern monument signs typically use LEDs inside the sign cabinet.

Advantages include:

- * Low energy consumption
- * Long operating life
- * Uniform lighting
- * Minimal maintenance
- * Instant illumination

LEDs have largely replaced fluorescent lighting in commercial signs because they require less maintenance and perform more reliably.

External Ground Lighting

Landscape fixtures mounted near the base of the sign project light upward.

Advantages include:

- * Easier maintenance
- * Architectural appearance
- * Suitable for masonry monuments
- * Minimal structural modification

However, landscape lighting requires careful aiming to avoid glare.

Halo Lighting

Halo lighting creates illumination behind dimensional letters.

Instead of lighting the face, the LEDs shine against the background surface.

This creates a subtle effect that is often preferred by:

- * Professional offices
- * Medical facilities
- * Corporate campuses

Electronic Message Centers

Some monument signs include LED displays.

These allow changing messages without replacing graphics.

Common uses include:

- * Event announcements
- * Emergency notices
- * Community updates
- * Promotional messages

Before selecting an electronic display, verify local regulations.

Many municipalities around Charlotte regulate:

- * Brightness
- * Animation
- * Transition speed
- * Display size
- * Hours of operation

Designing an Effective Monument Sign

A monument sign should be easy to understand within a few seconds.

Drivers rarely have more than a brief moment to read the sign before reaching the entrance.

Good design prioritizes clarity over decoration.

Keep Messages Simple

One of the most common design mistakes is including too much information.

A monument sign should answer only the most important questions:

- * Who is here?
- * Where is the entrance?
- * Which tenants occupy the property?

Everything else usually belongs elsewhere.

Letter Size Matters More Than Sign Size

Larger signs do not automatically improve visibility.

Letter height has a greater impact on readability.

Small lettering placed on a very large sign remains difficult to read.

Whenever possible, prioritize fewer words with larger letters.

Contrast Improves Visibility

Dark letters on a light background—or light letters on a dark background—are generally easier to read.

Poor contrast reduces legibility, especially during rain, fog, or nighttime conditions.

Match the Building Architecture

A monument sign should feel connected to the property.

Using similar materials, colors, and architectural elements creates visual consistency.

For example:

- * Brick office building → Brick monument
- * Stone church → Stone monument
- * Modern medical office → Aluminum and ACM monument
- * Contemporary retail center → Metal and illuminated lettering

Consistency creates a more cohesive appearance than treating the sign as a separate element.

Plan for Landscaping

Landscaping enhances monument signs—but only when properly maintained.

Overgrown shrubs and ornamental grasses frequently block lettering over time.

When designing the sign, account for the mature size of nearby plants, not just their appearance on installation day.

Adequate irrigation and drainage should also be considered to protect the sign base from long-term moisture exposure.

Structural Engineering Considerations

Every permanent monument sign must safely withstand environmental forces.

Structural engineering is particularly important for larger or illuminated signs.

Depending on the jurisdiction, engineered drawings may be required during the permitting process.

Factors engineers evaluate include:

- * Wind load
- * Soil conditions
- * Foundation size
- * Overall weight
- * Internal framing
- * Attachment methods
- * Electrical components

In North Carolina, engineered drawings are often required for larger commercial sign projects before permits are approved.

Skipping this step can delay permitting and create costly redesigns.

The Monument Sign Fabrication Process

Although every project is unique, most monument signs follow a similar production sequence.

1. Site Survey

Accurate measurements are taken to confirm property lines, utilities, visibility, grade changes, and installation access.

This step helps identify issues before fabrication begins.

2. Design Development

Designers prepare scaled drawings showing:

- * Dimensions
- * Materials
- * Colors
- * Lettering
- * Lighting
- * Structural details

These drawings are typically reviewed by the property owner and, when applicable, the landlord or architectural review committee.

3. Engineering

If required, structural engineers prepare calculations and construction drawings to meet local code requirements.

4. Permitting

Permit applications are submitted to the appropriate municipality.

Depending on the project, approvals may also be required from:

- * Landlords
 - * Property owners' associations
 - * Architectural review boards
 - * State transportation agencies if the sign is located near certain roadways
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5. Fabrication

Production begins after approvals are received.

Typical fabrication includes:

- * Welding the internal steel frame
- * Cutting aluminum and ACM panels
- * Fabricating letters and logos
- * Applying paint and finishes
- * Installing LED components
- * Pre-assembling the sign for quality control

Many shops test illuminated signs before delivery to ensure all electrical components operate correctly.

6. Preparation for Installation

Before transport, the sign is inspected to verify dimensions, finishes, lighting, and structural integrity.

Any necessary adjustments are made in the controlled shop environment, reducing the likelihood of field modifications.

Permitting, Installation, Maintenance, Lifespan, Cost Factors, and Common Mistakes

Designing and fabricating a monument sign is only part of the process. Before a sign can be installed, it must comply with local regulations, be engineered for the site, and be installed on a properly constructed foundation. Decisions made during this phase have a direct impact on the sign's durability, safety, and long-term maintenance costs.

For businesses and property owners in Charlotte, North Carolina, and surrounding communities such as Huntersville, Concord, Matthews, Mint Hill, Pineville, and Gastonia, permitting requirements and installation standards can vary by municipality. Understanding these requirements early in the project helps avoid delays and unexpected expenses.

Do Monument Signs Require a Permit?

In most cases, yes. Permanent commercial monument signs require permits before installation.

The permitting process ensures that the sign complies with local zoning ordinances, building codes, and safety requirements.

Depending on the jurisdiction, permit applications may include:

- * Site plans
- * Property surveys
- * Scaled sign drawings
- * Structural engineering documents
- * Foundation details
- * Electrical plans for illuminated signs
- * Contractor information
- * Landowner authorization

Submitting incomplete or inaccurate information is one of the most common reasons permit applications are delayed.

Local Considerations in Charlotte, North Carolina

Charlotte and neighboring municipalities each have their own sign ordinances. While requirements vary, common regulations address:

- * Maximum sign height
- * Maximum sign area
- * Distance from property lines
- * Distance from road rights-of-way
- * Sight triangles at intersections
- * Illumination standards
- * Landscaping requirements
- * Number of allowable signs

- * Electronic message center restrictions

For properties within planned developments or business parks, additional approval may be required from:

- * Landlords
- * Property management companies
- * Architectural review committees
- * Homeowners' associations (for certain developments)
- * Corporate branding departments

Receiving landlord approval before beginning fabrication helps prevent costly redesigns.

Understanding Setbacks and Visibility

A monument sign cannot simply be placed wherever it appears most visible.

Most municipalities require setbacks that establish the minimum distance between the sign and:

- * Public roads
- * Sidewalks
- * Property lines
- * Utility easements

Additionally, signs cannot obstruct visibility at intersections or driveways.

Traffic engineers consider these areas "sight triangles," where drivers must have a clear view of approaching traffic.

Ignoring these requirements can result in permit denial or mandatory relocation after installation.

Utility Location Before Excavation

Before any digging begins, underground utilities must be identified.

These may include:

- * Electrical service
- * Water lines
- * Sewer lines

- * Gas lines
- * Fiber optic cables
- * Irrigation systems
- * Communication lines

Striking an underground utility can create safety hazards, costly repairs, and project delays.

Locating utilities is a standard part of professional site preparation and should never be skipped.

The Monument Sign Installation Process

Although every project is unique, most installations follow a similar sequence.

Step 1: Site Preparation

The installation team confirms measurements, verifies the sign location, and prepares the site.

Preparation may involve:

- * Removing existing landscaping
- * Demolishing an old sign
- * Excavating for the foundation
- * Protecting nearby utilities
- * Establishing traffic control if necessary

Accurate layout at this stage helps prevent alignment problems later.

Step 2: Foundation Construction

The foundation supports the entire structure.

Its size depends on several factors, including:

- * Overall sign weight
- * Wind load requirements
- * Soil conditions
- * Sign height
- * Structural design

Most permanent monument signs are anchored to reinforced concrete foundations.

The concrete must cure properly before the sign is installed.

Rushing this step can compromise long-term stability.

Step 3: Electrical Installation

If the sign includes lighting, electrical work is completed before the sign is set.

Electrical components may include:

- * Dedicated circuits
- * Conduit
- * Junction boxes
- * Timers
- * Photocells
- * Disconnect switches

Electrical work should always comply with applicable building and electrical codes.

Step 4: Setting the Monument Sign

Depending on its size, the sign may be:

- * Lifted with a crane
- * Set using forklifts
- * Installed manually in sections

The installation team carefully aligns the sign, secures it to the foundation, and verifies that it is level from multiple directions.

Even small alignment errors become noticeable on large architectural signs.

Step 5: Final Assembly

After the structure is secured, crews complete remaining work such as:

- * Installing dimensional letters

- * Connecting LED lighting
- * Sealing joints
- * Touch-up painting
- * Installing tenant panels
- * Cleaning all finished surfaces

Before leaving the site, the sign should be fully inspected for appearance, structural integrity, and proper operation.

How Long Does It Take to Get a Monument Sign?

There is no universal timeline because each project differs in complexity.

Typical factors affecting the schedule include:

- * Design revisions
- * Engineering requirements
- * Permit approval times
- * Material availability
- * Fabrication complexity
- * Weather conditions
- * Utility coordination
- * Inspection scheduling

Projects with custom masonry, illuminated features, or electronic message centers generally require more time than simpler monument signs.

Planning ahead is especially important if the sign is needed before a business opening or property renovation is completed.

Maintaining a Monument Sign

A monument sign is designed for long-term outdoor use, but it still requires periodic maintenance.

Routine inspections help identify small issues before they become expensive repairs.

Cleaning

Dirt, pollen, mildew, and road debris gradually accumulate on sign surfaces.

Cleaning frequency depends on the surrounding environment.

Properties located near:

- * Busy roads
- * Construction sites
- * Trees
- * Irrigated landscaping

may require more frequent cleaning than signs in cleaner environments.

Always use cleaning products that are appropriate for the sign's materials to avoid damaging painted finishes or acrylic faces.

Landscaping Maintenance

Landscaping often enhances monument signs, but it can also create problems.

Common issues include:

- * Shrubs covering lettering
- * Tree branches blocking visibility
- * Irrigation overspray causing staining
- * Root systems affecting foundations

Routine trimming helps maintain visibility and protects the investment made in the sign.

Electrical Maintenance

LED lighting requires relatively little maintenance, but periodic inspections remain important.

Maintenance may include:

- * Replacing failed LED modules
- * Inspecting power supplies
- * Cleaning illuminated faces
- * Verifying photocell operation
- * Checking wiring connections

Ignoring minor electrical issues can lead to larger repairs later.

Structural Inspections

Over time, inspect the sign for:

- * Cracks
- * Loose panels
- * Water intrusion
- * Rust
- * Settlement
- * Damaged caulking
- * Foundation movement

Addressing these issues early helps prevent more extensive structural repairs.

How Long Does a Monument Sign Last?

A well-designed monument sign can remain in service for 20 to 30 years or more, although different components have different life expectancies.

Typical expectations include:

- **Steel framework:** Several decades when properly protected from corrosion
- **Masonry:** Often lasts the life of the property with routine maintenance
- **Aluminum components:** Decades with minimal maintenance
- **ACM panels:** Commonly 10–20 years, depending on product quality and sun exposure
- **LED lighting:** Often 50,000 hours or more under normal operating conditions
- **Vinyl graphics:** Generally require replacement sooner than fabricated lettering, depending on exposure and material quality
- **Paint and finishes:** May require refinishing over time due to weather and UV exposure

Regular maintenance can significantly extend the service life of the sign.

What Affects the Cost of a Monument Sign?

Rather than focusing on a single price, it's more useful to understand the factors that influence cost.

Size

Larger signs require:

- * More materials
 - * Larger foundations
 - * Additional engineering
 - * Heavier equipment during installation
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Materials

Material selection has a significant impact on both initial cost and long-term maintenance.

For example:

- * Brick and natural stone generally require more labor than aluminum panel systems.
 - * Custom fabricated metal features cost more than flat graphics.
 - * Premium finishes often last longer in outdoor environments.
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Illumination

Lighting increases complexity.

Additional costs may include:

- * LED systems
 - * Electrical installation
 - * Power supplies
 - * Wiring
 - * Controls
 - * Electrical permits
-

Engineering

Some jurisdictions require sealed engineering drawings.

Larger or more complex signs often require more extensive structural analysis.

Permits

Permit fees vary by municipality and project scope.

Additional review fees may apply for:

- * Electronic message centers
 - * Architectural review
 - * Land development approvals
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Site Conditions

Installation becomes more complex when sites include:

- * Sloped terrain
 - * Limited equipment access
 - * Existing underground utilities
 - * Poor soil conditions
 - * Existing concrete or landscaping that must be removed
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Custom Design Features

Features that increase fabrication complexity include:

- Curved walls
 - Integrated lighting
 - Water features
 - Multiple materials
 - Custom logos
 - Sculptural elements
 - Digital displays
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Common Mistakes Customers Make

After working on many monument sign projects, several mistakes appear repeatedly. Avoiding them can save considerable time and money.

Waiting Until the Last Minute

Many businesses begin planning their monument sign only a few weeks before opening.

Because permitting, engineering, fabrication, and installation all require time, early planning is essential.

Prioritizing Size Instead of Readability

A larger sign with too much information is often less effective than a smaller sign with clear, well-spaced lettering.

Visibility depends more on legibility than overall dimensions.

Ignoring Local Ordinances

Some customers assume they can build any sign they want.

In reality, zoning regulations often dictate:

- Maximum height
- Square footage
- Placement
- Illumination
- Digital displays

Understanding these rules before designing the sign helps avoid expensive redesigns.

Choosing Materials Based Only on Initial Cost

Lower-cost materials may require earlier replacement or more frequent maintenance.

Considering the total cost of ownership often leads to better long-term value.

Forgetting About Future Tenant Changes

Multi-tenant properties should plan for future occupancy changes.

Replaceable tenant panels simplify updates and reduce maintenance costs over the life of the sign.

Overlooking Landscaping

A monument sign should remain visible year-round.

Designing landscaping around mature plant sizes—not newly planted shrubs—helps preserve visibility over time.

Monument Signs vs. Other Types of Commercial Signs

Choosing the right sign often means comparing monument signs with other common options.

Monument Sign vs. Pylon Sign

A monument sign is installed close to ground level and is best suited for properties where traffic moves at lower speeds and the entrance is near the roadway. Its lower profile allows it to integrate with landscaping and architecture, making it a common choice for office buildings, medical facilities, schools, churches, and retail centers.

A pylon sign, by contrast, is elevated on one or more poles. Because it is visible from much greater distances, it is typically used along highways, major thoroughfares, and large commercial corridors where drivers need more time to identify a business. Pylon signs offer greater visibility but are often subject to stricter zoning regulations regarding height and placement.

Monument Sign vs. Wall Sign

A wall sign is mounted directly to a building and identifies an individual tenant or business. It works well when the building itself is highly visible from the road.

A monument sign identifies the property before visitors reach the building. On larger sites, the two sign types often complement one another—one guiding visitors to the entrance and the other identifying the specific business once they arrive.

Monument Sign vs. Directory Sign

Directory signs are intended to help visitors navigate within a property. They list building names, suite numbers, or departments and are usually located inside a campus or office park.

A monument sign serves as the primary identification at the property's entrance. Many larger developments use both: a monument sign at the entrance and directory signs throughout the site.

Frequently Asked Questions, Expert Recommendations, SEO Metadata, and Final Thoughts

By this point, you should have a solid understanding of what monument signs are, how they're built, how they're installed, and what factors influence their performance over time. The final section answers common questions from business owners, property managers, developers, and architects, followed by practical advice based on years of experience designing and installing commercial signage.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the difference between a monument sign and a pylon sign?

A monument sign is installed close to ground level and is designed to integrate with the property's architecture and landscaping. A pylon sign is elevated on one or more poles, making it visible from greater distances and higher-speed roadways.

If your business is located along a highway or major commercial corridor, a pylon sign may provide better visibility. If your goal is to identify a property's entrance while complementing its appearance, a monument sign is often the better choice.

2. Do all monument signs require a permit?

Most permanent commercial monument signs require permits. Requirements vary by municipality and may include zoning approval, structural engineering, electrical permits for illuminated signs, and inspections.

Always verify local requirements before beginning fabrication.

3. How long does it take to complete a monument sign project?

The timeline depends on design complexity, permitting, fabrication, and installation. Simpler projects move more quickly, while custom architectural signs or signs with digital displays typically require additional time.

The permitting process is often the biggest variable.

4. Can an existing monument sign be updated instead of replaced?

In many cases, yes.

Possible updates include:

- Replacing tenant panels
- Installing new logos
- Upgrading LED lighting
- Repainting
- Replacing sign faces
- Adding dimensional letters
- Installing a digital message center, if permitted

However, if the internal structure has deteriorated or the sign no longer meets current codes, replacement may be the better long-term solution.

5. Are illuminated monument signs expensive to operate?

Modern LED lighting is highly energy efficient.

Compared to older fluorescent systems, LED illumination uses less electricity, requires less maintenance, and typically lasts much longer.

Operating costs are generally modest, especially when the lighting is controlled with timers or photocells.

6. Which material lasts the longest?

There is no single answer because monument signs often combine several materials.

Some of the longest-lasting components include:

- Reinforced concrete foundations
- Structural steel (when properly protected)
- Aluminum
- Brick
- Natural stone

These materials can remain in service for decades with routine maintenance.

7. Can monument signs withstand severe weather?

Properly engineered monument signs are designed to withstand local wind loads and environmental conditions.

In North Carolina, this includes exposure to:

- Heavy rain
- High humidity
- Summer heat
- Occasional ice events
- Strong winds associated with severe storms

Engineering, foundation design, and proper installation are all critical to long-term performance.

8. Can tenant names be changed later?

Yes—if the sign is designed for it.

Shopping centers and office parks should use removable tenant panels or modular sign systems that allow updates without rebuilding the entire monument.

Planning for future tenant turnover saves significant time and money.

9. Should a monument sign match the building?

Generally, yes.

Using similar materials, colors, and architectural details creates a more cohesive appearance.

A sign that complements the property typically looks more intentional than one that appears unrelated to the surrounding architecture.

10. How often should a monument sign be inspected?

A visual inspection at least once a year is recommended.

For illuminated signs, it's also a good idea to inspect:

- Lighting performance
- Electrical connections
- Structural components
- Caulking
- Paint finishes
- Landscaping around the sign

Routine maintenance helps identify minor issues before they become major repairs.

11. Can digital message centers be added later?

Sometimes.

The existing monument sign must be structurally capable of supporting the additional weight, and local regulations must permit electronic displays.

In some cases, upgrading an existing monument sign is feasible. In others, constructing a new sign is more practical.

12. What is the biggest mistake people make when buying a monument sign?

The most common mistake is focusing only on appearance.

A monument sign should also be evaluated for:

- Readability
- Structural design
- Maintenance requirements
- Future flexibility
- Material durability
- Compliance with local regulations

A visually attractive sign that is difficult to maintain or update may become more expensive over its lifetime.

Practical Recommendations From an Experienced Sign Consultant

After working on monument sign projects for a wide range of commercial properties, several best practices consistently lead to better outcomes.

Start Planning Early

Permitting, engineering, fabrication, and installation all require time. If your business is opening on a specific date, begin the sign planning process several months in advance whenever possible.

Design for Readability, Not Decoration

Drivers typically have only a few seconds to recognize a monument sign.

Prioritize:

- Larger lettering
- Clear spacing
- Strong contrast
- Simple messaging

Decorative elements should never reduce readability.

Choose Materials Based on Long-Term Performance

Less expensive materials may reduce the initial investment but often increase maintenance costs over time.

When comparing options, consider:

- Expected lifespan
- Ease of repair
- Resistance to fading
- Moisture resistance
- Availability of replacement parts

A sign that performs well for decades often provides greater value than one that requires frequent repairs.

Think About Future Changes

Businesses evolve.

Shopping centers gain new tenants.

Medical offices expand.

Schools update branding.

Designing a monument sign that allows future updates can reduce costs throughout the life of the property.

Consider Daytime and Nighttime Visibility

A monument sign should perform well in all lighting conditions.

Evaluate:

- Sunlight direction
- Headlight visibility
- Landscape lighting
- Building lighting
- Street lighting

A sign that is easy to read during the day may require additional lighting for nighttime visibility.

Don't Overlook Landscaping

Landscaping should frame the sign, not hide it.

When planning the installation, consider how trees and shrubs will look five years from now—not just on the day they're planted.

Regular trimming is one of the simplest ways to preserve visibility.

Work Within Local Regulations

Every municipality has different sign codes.

Designing the sign around local requirements from the beginning reduces redesigns and keeps projects moving efficiently.

For businesses in Charlotte and surrounding communities, regulations may differ even between neighboring municipalities.

Final Thoughts

A monument sign is more than a marker at the entrance to a property. It is a long-term investment in identification, wayfinding, and the overall appearance of a commercial site.

The most successful monument signs balance several factors: visibility, durability, architectural compatibility, ease of maintenance, and compliance with local regulations. A thoughtful design supported by quality materials and proper engineering will continue to serve a property for decades.

Whether you're developing a new commercial site, renovating an existing property, or replacing an outdated sign, taking the time to understand the design, permitting, fabrication, and installation process will help you make informed decisions and avoid costly surprises.

For businesses and property owners in Charlotte, North Carolina, where weather conditions, municipal ordinances, and commercial development patterns all influence signage decisions, careful planning is especially important. A monument sign should not

only meet today's needs but also remain functional and adaptable as your property evolves.