

## Tents, Canopies and Membrane Structures

Temporary membrane structures, tents and canopies, are popular shelters used for a variety of special events. While generally safe, these structures pose their own peculiar fire and life safety concerns and are therefore subject to permit and inspection requirements as described in this client assistance memo when erected in the City of Gig Harbor. In addition to the requirements contained in this memo, tents, canopies and membrane structures must comply with all other requirements of the Gig Harbor Municipal Code.

**Definitions:** For the purposes of this client assistance memo, the following words and terms shall have the meanings shown below.

**Air-Supported Structure** – A structure wherein the shape of the structure is attained by air pressure, and occupants of the structure are within the elevated pressure area.

**Canopy** – A structure, enclosure or shelter constructed of fabric or pliable materials supported by any manner, except by air or the contents it protects, and is open without sidewalls or drops on 75 percent or more of the perimeter.

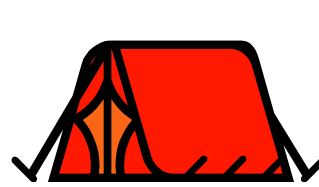
**Membrane Structure** – An air inflated, air supported cable or frame covered structure as defined by the International Building Code, which is erected for less than 180 days and is not otherwise defined as a tent, canopy, or awning.

**Tent** – A structure, enclosure, or shelter constructed of fabric or pliable material supported in any manner except by air or the contents it protects and is open without sidewalls or drops on less than 75 percent of the perimeter.

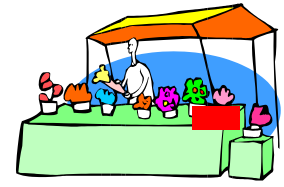
**Permit Required:** A permit is required to erect or operate any air supported temporary membrane structure or tent having an area in excess of 200 square feet and canopies in excess of 400 square feet.

**Exceptions:**

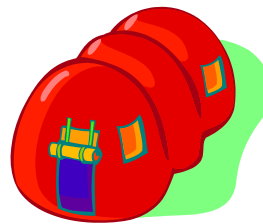
1. Tents used exclusively for recreational camping purposes;
2. Fabric canopies open on all sides which comply with **all** of the following:
  - A) Individual canopies having a maximum size of 700 square feet;
  - B) Multiple canopies placed side by side without a fire break clearance of 12 feet, and not exceeding a total, aggregate size of 700 square feet;
  - C) A minimum clearance of 12 feet is provided between all canopies or groups of canopies and other structures and tents.



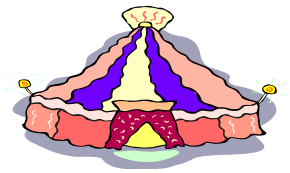
Recreational Camp Tent



Canopy



Air Supported Structure



Tent

**Inspections:** An inspection of all temporary membrane structures, tents and canopies requiring a fire code permit is required prior to occupancy. Inspections must be requested 24 hours in advance by calling the City inspection scheduling line at 253.851.6170. All required structural, fire and life safety provisions must be complete at the time of inspection. After hour and weekend inspections may be requested for an additional fee. Additional inspections may be required depending on the use as determined by the Fire Marshal.

**Access:** Fire department vehicle access with a clear, all weather driving surface width of 20 feet must be provided to within 150 feet of all temporary membrane structures, tents and canopies. Access roads in excess of 150 feet in length must be provided with an approved vehicle turnaround as specified in GHMC 15.30.2. A site plan demonstrating compliance must be provided at the time of permit application.

**Location:** Tents, canopies or membrane structures shall not be located within 20 feet of lot lines, buildings, other tents, canopies, or membrane structures, parked vehicles, or internal combustion engines. For the purposes of determining required distances, support ropes and guy wires shall be considered as part of the temporary membrane structure, tent or canopy.

*Exceptions:*

1. Separation distance between membrane structures, tents and canopies not used for cooking, is not required when the aggregate floor area does not exceed 15,000 square feet.
2. Membrane structures, tents, or canopies need not be separated from buildings when all of the following conditions are met:
  - A. The aggregate floor area does not exceed 10,000 square feet
  - B. The aggregate floor area of the building **and** membrane structure, tent or canopy shall not exceed the allowable floor area, including increases, indicated in the International Building Code.
  - C. Required means of egress provisions are provided for both the building and the membrane structure, tent or canopy including travel distances.
  - D. Fire apparatus access roads are provided in accordance with this policy.

**Structural Stability:** Temporary membrane structures, tents and canopies shall be adequately braced and anchored to prevent collapse or displacement from natural or man-made occurrences. Documentation of structural stability shall be furnished to the building official/fire marshal upon request.

**Flame Resistance:** Fabrics used in the membrane of all structures permitted under a fire permit must be composed of flame resistant material or shall be treated with flame retardant in an approved manner. A permanently affixed label bearing the size and fabric or material type; flame resistance information; date of last treatment, trade name and type of retardant used, and name of person and firm applying retardant for treated fabrics. Floor coverings and combustible decorative materials shall be flame retardant or treated in an approved manner.

**Seating Arrangements, Means of Egress, Exit Identification, Cooking, Heating, and Sources of Ignition:** Seating arrangements, means of egress, exit identification, cooking, heating and sources of ignition, must be in accordance with IFC Chapter 24 requirements. A floor plan demonstrating compliance must be provided at the time of permit application.

**Combustible Materials.** Hay, straw, shavings or similar combustible materials shall not be located within any tent, canopy or membrane structure containing an assembly occupancy, except materials necessary for the daily feeding and care of animals. Sawdust and shavings utilized for a public performance or exhibit shall not be prohibited provided the saw dust and shavings

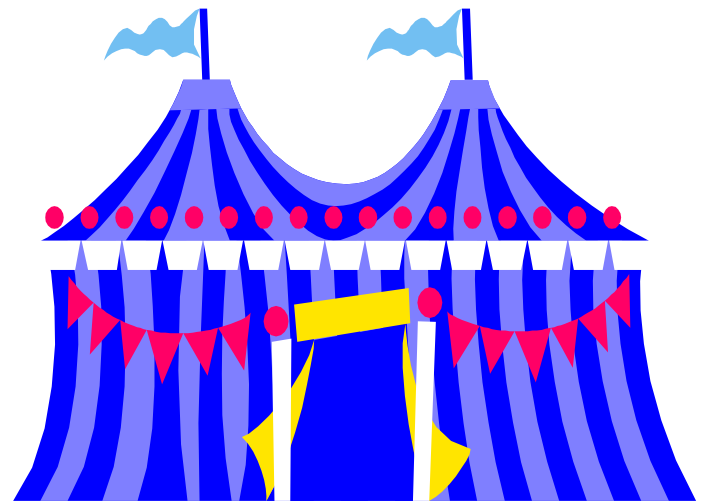
are kept damp. Combustible materials shall not be permitted under stands or seats at any time.

**Smoking.** Smoking shall not be permitted in tents, canopies or membrane structures. Approved "No Smoking" signs shall be conspicuously posted in approved locations.

**Portable Fire Extinguishers.** Portable fire extinguishers with a minimum rating of 2A: 10 BC shall be provided within 30 feet travel distance of all points within the tent, canopy or membrane structure.

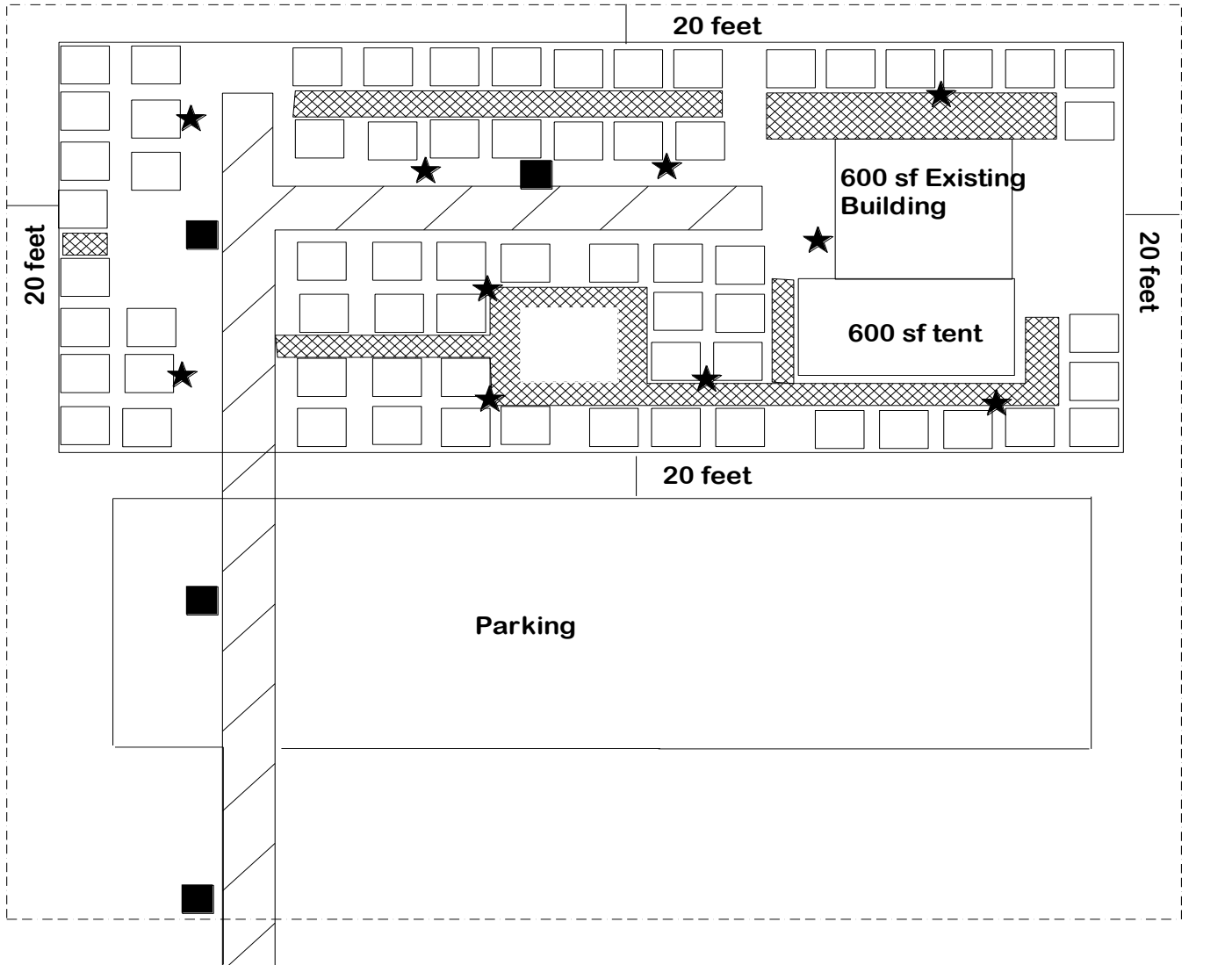
**Vegetation Removal.** Combustible vegetation shall be removed from the area occupied by a tent, canopy or membrane structure and from areas within 30 feet of such structures.

**Combustible Waste.** Floors of membrane structures, tents and canopies, and the area around them for a distance of 30 feet shall be kept clear of combustible waste. Waste shall be stored in an approved container and removed from the structure at least once a day.

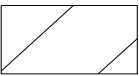


**For more information:** This client assistance memo provides information on general requirements for tents, canopies and air supported structures. There are additional requirements for special uses such as places of assembly, cooking, vehicle display, fireworks sales and more. In addition, the Gig Harbor Municipal Code contains requirements for permitting of special events and temporary structures. For more information on the permitting and use of tents, canopies and air supported structures, contact the Community Development Department at 253.851.6170. We thank you for your cooperation.

# Sample Site Plan



Market St.



Fire Department Access Road



No Parking - Fire Lane sign



2A:10BC Rated Fire Extinguisher



100 sf. canopy



Min. 12 ft. fire break