



## STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

### Harmonized Sign By-law Interim Report - Revised

<b>Date:</b>	December 3, 2008
<b>To:</b>	Planning and Growth Management Committee
<b>From:</b>	Chief Building Official and Executive Director
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	BLD2008PGM009

#### **SUMMARY**

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This report describes the progress made following the first stage of public and stakeholder consultation respecting the City's harmonized sign by-law. The sign by-law project team has been directed to bring forward progress reports at critical stages through the Chief Building Official and Executive Director, Toronto Building.

Through the first stage of the project, key issues that need to be addressed have been identified. The issues can be categorized into two distinct units - Organizational and Process Issues (dealing with internal matters relating to policy, procedure and staffing) and Substantive Sign Issues (dealing with external matters relating to environment, technology and sign proliferation).

Martin Rendl of the Planning firm Martin Rendl Associates, the sign study consultant, will present, in detail, the key issues at this Special Meeting of the Planning and Growth Management Committee.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

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**That the Chief Building Official and Executive Director, Toronto Building consider the information received at this Special Meeting of the Planning and Growth Management Committee while conducting the second series of public consultation sessions.**

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

There are no financial impacts with this report.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

Harmonization of Sign By-laws

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2000/agendas/committees/ey/ey000323/it014.pdf>

Development of a City-Wide Sign By-law

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2001/agendas/committees/plt/plt010911/it005.pdf>

Coordinated Street Furniture Program - Revenues; and Establishment of a New "Public Realm" Reserve Fund (All Wards)

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-8835.pdf>

Current Status of Harmonized Sign By-law

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-9032.pdf>

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

Since Toronto's amalgamation in 1998, the sign by-laws of the former municipalities continue to apply. A project team has been struck to develop a single comprehensive and readable sign by-law. The project team, including an outside consultant, has been involved in discussions with stakeholders, City staff from various divisions, local councillors and the public-at-large. Further, background material such as City policies, By-laws, reports, studies, etc. has been reviewed and various areas of the City have been visited.

Four public consultation sessions were held throughout the month of September in each of the respective districts of the city. These consultations were well attended and, as an outcome of the consultations, an issues matrix has been created to detail specific public concerns (refer to project website: [www.toronto.ca/signbylawproject](http://www.toronto.ca/signbylawproject)).

Following this report submission and presentation to the Planning and Growth Management Committee, the sign by-law project will present the issues and options along with Council's comments to a second series of four public consultation sessions in late January, 2009.

Upon completion of the second round of consultation sessions, the information received will be used to develop the final report to Council along with a draft Sign By-law.

The sign by-law project team anticipates that the new Sign By-law will be presented to Council in late spring, 2009.

## COMMENTS

As stated earlier, the key issues, although interrelated, can be categorized into two distinct units - Organizational and Process Issues and Substantive Sign Issues.

Organizational and Process Issues include issues that are deemed to be internal to the City's governance and structure. They include:

- Organization for sign approvals and enforcement
- Variance approval process
- More effective enforcement

Substantive sign issues are external in nature and deal with matters relating to the overall image of the City and a vision for the future. They include:

- Third party advertising signs
- New technology
- Safety
- Environmental considerations
- Sign regulations for individual sign types and areas

### 1. Organizational and Process Issues

#### a) Organization for sign approvals and enforcement

The public wants swift and effective enforcement of City by-laws and effective penalties that will curb new infractions. The City's current enforcement practices and attitudes are perceived as ineffective at getting results.

#### Options

- Creation of a Dedicated Sign Unit in Toronto Building to consolidate sign approvals, inspection and enforcement;
- Use of special fines under City of Toronto Act;
- License all sign companies and sign installers operating in the City.

#### b) Sign variance process

Sign variance applications currently consume an inappropriate amount of Council time. The goal is to create a sign variance process that is more efficient and less political.

#### Options

- Delegate approval of variances for first party signs to the new Sign Unit to be assessed on criteria contained in the new sign by-law. Applicant entitled to appeal decision to Community Council;
- All variances for third party advertising signs must be approved by Planning and Growth Management Committee;
- Post public notice of sign variance applications.

**c) More effective enforcement**

Signs erected without the benefit of a permit, signs erected in contravention of current by-laws and signs erected deviating from approved drawings are all common implications of perceived lax enforcement.

**Options**

- Prepare an inventory of third-party signs to know what exists, and what signs are legal and illegal;
- Require third-party signs to display a unique identifier;
- Provide a public on-line link to City's sign database.

**2. Substantive Sign Issues**

**a) Third-party advertising signs**

Third-party advertising signs are the type of sign the public most frequently commented on. They are also generally the largest signs in Toronto and have the greatest visual impact on the City.

**Options**

- Maintain a distinction between first-party signs and third-party signs;
- Use spatial separation of third party signs as an important control on sign proliferation.
- Subject the approval of new third-party signs to a sunset clause.

**b) New Technology**

Sign technologies currently used in the industry have leapt beyond the ability of current sign by-law to satisfactorily regulate them. As a result, the current by-laws are ill equipped to cope with the issues these new signs create (e.g., illumination levels, sign and message animation). Sign images can be immediately updated through computers and multiple electronic images can be displayed consecutively.

**Options**

- Create clear regulations for electronic and digital signs that control the characteristics of these signs that affect the public interest regarding visual appearance of streets and image of the City;
- Consider the appropriateness of such intense signs in specific areas.

**c) Safety**

Motorist distraction is a growing concern today. Although a relationship between signs and driver and pedestrian safety can not be scientifically determined, attention to the driver distraction matter is required.

**Options**

- Take a cautious approach to where digital video and animated signs are permitted and how they operate;

- Regulate sign size, brightness and degree of animation.

**d) Environmental considerations**

The new sign by-law is an opportunity to advance the City's goals on climate change and energy efficiency.

**Options**

- Require or encourage the use or purchase of renewable power for signs;
- Require all lighting of signs to conform to Toronto's Bird Friendly Guidelines;
- Require or encourage the use of recycled or re-used materials.

**e) Sign regulations for individual sign types and areas**

Toronto contains a variety of distinctive areas which merit sign regulations tailored to their needs – such as Dundas Square where signage is an explicit part of the design of its buildings and spaces. It also includes areas such as the area in and around Nathan Philips Square, University Avenue, the Fort York National Historic site and heritage conservation districts where signs would be inappropriate because they would conflict with the desired visual character of these areas.

**Options**

- Identify districts based on neighbourhood characteristics including density, lot size, building type and height, uses and the scale of the street;
- Develop regulations for signs that fit the context of where they are located;
- Regulate signs in windows;
- Restrict new roof signs.

**CONTACT**

Dan Mousseau,  
Project Manager, Sign By-law Project  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor, West Tower, City Hall  
Tel: (416) 392-4236 Fax: (416) 392-7536 E-mail: dmousse@toronto.ca

**SIGNATURE**

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V. Ann Borooh,  
Chief Building Official and Executive Director