



REPORT FOR ACTION

Amendment to the Sign By-law for Residential Apartment ("RA") Sign Districts

Date: March 9, 2018
To: Planning and Growth Management Committee
From: Chief Building Official and Executive Director, Toronto Building (Interim)
Wards: All

SUMMARY

This staff report reviews a proposed amendment to the Sign By-law to expand permission for first party sign copy in Residential Apartment (RA) Sign Districts. The proposed amendment will allow first party signs in RA Sign Districts to display all forms of first party sign copy by deleting the requirement that they display only copy associated with residential apartment uses. The Sign By-law currently limits the display of sign copy in RA Sign Districts to copy which exclusively identifies residential apartment buildings.

The proposed amendment will allow the incorporation of images, logos and non-residential sign copy, in support of the Tower Renewal Program and Residential Apartment Commercial (RAC) zoning adopted by City Council in 2014.

The Tower Renewal Program forms part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, to revitalize older apartment towers and their neighbourhoods through the introduction of small-scale non-residential uses. As the Sign By-law does not currently contemplate non-residential uses in RA Sign Districts, sign copy containing logos and non-residential sign copy now require Sign Variances. Staff note that members of the public generally stated that they had no concerns with the signs proposed in these variance applications.

This report was prepared in consultation with staff from Social Development, Finance and Administration (SDFA).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Building Official and Executive Director, Toronto Building, (Interim) recommends that:

1. City Council adopt the draft by-law in Attachment 1 to this report to allow authorized first party signs to display all forms of first party sign copy in RA Sign Districts by deleting the phrases "in association with an apartment building" from § 694-21.B.(2), and "identifying an apartment building" from § 694-21.B.(3) and §694-21.B.(4); and,

2. City Council authorize the City Solicitor to prepare the necessary Bills for introduction in Council to implement the above recommendation, subject to such stylistic and technical changes to the draft by-law as may be required.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The recommendations in this report have no financial impact.

DECISION HISTORY

EX20.10 - TO Prosperity TO Prosperity - Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy - 2016 Progress Report and 2017 Work Plan

City Council adopted the TO Prosperity 2017 Annual Work Plan. A review of the Sign By-law to allow signs for businesses in Residential Apartment (RA) Sign Districts was identified as part of the work to be completed in 2017.

(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.EX20.10>)

On June 10, 2014, City Council adopted the recommendations of the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning for the creation of the Residential Apartment Commercial Zone and applied it to over 400 sites in the City of Toronto.

(<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.PG33.6>)

COMMENTS

Issue Background

The current regulations in the RA Sign District differ from regulations in other sign districts as they only permit first party sign copy that is exclusively related to or identifies an apartment building. Other Sign Districts generally permit first party sign copy to identify any business, service or activity provided that the business, service or activity is available on that property.

Tower & Neighbourhood Revitalization

Approximately 500 apartment sites across the city are designated as Residential Apartment Commercial ("RAC") zones in the City's Zoning By-laws; however, many of these sites are located in RA Sign Districts. Tower Renewal Program staff, with input from the Tower Neighbourhood Inter-Divisional Committee, have determined that allowing signage for small-scale, non-residential uses is key for the success of these RAC sites.

As the Sign By-law does not now contemplate the introduction of non-residential uses into RA Sign Districts, the current restrictions are not compatible with the implementation of the RAC Zoning permission. Any retail stores, service shops or other non-residential uses trying to operate in an RA Sign District are currently not permitted under the Sign By-law to display any first party signage.

It is important to note that, to date, staff have not identified the need for changes to the size, height, illumination or location of signs as a result of Tower Renewal Projects. The only change needed is the ability to display additional forms of first party sign copy, other than simply identifying or providing direction to an apartment building.

Permitting non-residential first party sign copy in RA Sign Districts will complement the RAC zoning permission by allowing smaller non-residential uses to be more easily identified. This will help to support the vibrancy, vitality and small-scale economic development in tower neighbourhoods.

Impact of Current Sign Copy Restrictions in RA Sign Districts

Currently, participants in the Tower Renewal Program, seeking to display a sign identifying a non-residential use in an RA Sign District, are required to obtain sign variances as the proposed sign would not identify an apartment building. The requirement for a sign variance adds to the time, cost and complexity of implementing the Tower Renewal Program.

Similarly, property owners who wish to display signs containing logos, symbols or similar information require sign variances.

In 2017, staff processed a total of 23 Sign Variance applications for signs displaying corporate logos or symbols associated with apartment buildings. While the public expressed no concerns with the sign copy proposed in the variance applications, staff received comments about possible commercialization of residential areas, as well as increases to the size, height and illumination of signs. These concerns are addressed by maintaining the current restrictions on size, height, illumination and setbacks for signs in RA Sign Districts and limiting the sign copy to first party only.

Conclusion

The proposed amendments to bring first party sign regulations for RA Sign Districts in line with other sign districts will reduce the obstacles faced in the implementation of RAC Zoning permission. They will also make it easier for apartment building owners to display signs identifying their buildings to prospective renters.

As part of the planned review of the Sign By-law, staff will look to identify other issues that might occur through further implementation of the Tower Renewal Program, RAC Zoning, or changes in the residential apartment marketplace.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Draft of Proposed Sign Bylaw Amendment