

Area-Specific Amendment to the Sign By-law: 2 Strachan Avenue (Exhibition Place)

Date: May 4, 2021
To: Planning and Housing Committee
From: Chief Building Official and Executive Director, Toronto Building
Wards: 4 - Parkdale-High Park and 10 - Spadina-Fort York

SUMMARY

The Sign By-law is a harmonized, City-wide set of regulations governing signs which was adopted by City Council in 2010. The Sign By-law contains a process for any member of the public to apply to City Council to amend the Sign By-law in order to implement significant changes to the sign regulations for a specific property or area. Applications are commonly made requesting amendments to the Sign By-law to allow signs that are prohibited, to remove permissions for signs in an area, or to modify the administrative requirements of the Sign By-law. The Chief Building Official (CBO) brings applications to amend the Sign By-law together on an annual basis for City Council consideration, so that City Council can more easily assess the overall and cumulative impact of these applications on the city's built environment, and the Sign By-law itself.

This report is in response to an application for an amendment to the Sign By-law to amend the regulations concerning third party signs for the lands municipally known as 2 Strachan Avenue (commonly known as Exhibition Place). Branded Cities', (the "Applicant") application requests that City Council amend the Sign By-law to remove the requirements for Heritage and Toronto Region Conservation Authority approvals related to the replacement of two existing third party ground signs displaying static and electronic readograph copy (the Existing Signs), with two third party electronic ground signs displaying static and electronic static copy (the Proposed Signs). The Existing Signs arose from a 15-year 'Wayfinding Signage Agreement' between the sign owner and Exhibition Place approved by City Council in 2005.

The Proposed Signs would be in the same location as the Existing Signs, along the southern and western portions of 2 Strachan Avenue, and would have the same height, and a slightly reduced sign face area as the Existing Signs.

The property at 2 Strachan has multiple Sign District Designations, with the southern and western portions being designated as an Open Space (OS) Sign District, and the northern portion being designated as part of the Gardiner Gateway Special Sign District (GG-SSD). The Proposed Signs will be located in the southern and western portions of

the property in the OS Sign District. (See Figure 3). In 2014, City Council enacted regulations to establish that third party signs were no longer permitted in the portions of 2 Strachan Avenue where the Proposed Signs would be located.

Toronto Building, in consultation with Transportation Services and City Planning, conducted a thorough review of the application, and does not feel that the Applicant's rationale is consistent with the objectives of the Sign By-Law, relevant traffic safety concerns, or the Exhibition Place Master Plan Phase 1 Proposals. For the reasons set out in this report, the CBO does not support amending the Sign By-Law for 2 Strachan Avenue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council refuse the application to amend the Sign By-law to add a further area-specific amendment to Schedule 'B' of Chapter 694, Signage Master Plans and Area-Specific Amendments, to modify the existing Sign By-law regulations concerning third party signs applicable to the premises municipally known as 2 Strachan Avenue with regulations to allow for, and regulate, two third party electronic ground signs, within specific portions of these premises, as described in Attachment 1 of this report.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no current or known future year financial impacts arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

TE18.42 - Exhibition Place Master Plan - Phase 1 Proposals Report

In October 2020, City Council adopted the Exhibition Place Master Plan Phase 1 Proposals Report which described the outcomes from the first phase of the Master Plan for Exhibition Place exercise and included a proposals report comprising a recommended vision, guiding principles and a draft structure plan to support and enhance the continued success of Exhibition Place.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.TE18.42>

PG 5.13 - Electronic and Illuminated Sign Study and Recommendations for Amendments to Chapter 694:

These amendments attempt to minimize the adverse impact of electronic signs by establishing separation distances between electronic signs and sensitive land uses, and reducing the maximum brightness at night. Third party electronic signs are now permitted in Employment, Utility and Commercial Sign Districts, but are specifically not permitted in OS Sign Districts, where there are open space and recreational uses.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.PG5.13>

PG34.7 - Amendments to Chapter 694, Signs, General, with Respect to the Gardiner Gateway Special Sign District

In July 2014, City Council amended the boundaries of the Gardiner Gateway Special Sign District, to re-designate the southern and western portions of 2 Strachan Avenue from being part of the Gardiner Gateway Special Sign District to being Open Space Sign Districts. As a result, third party signs were no longer permitted in the Open Space Sign District portions of 2 Strachan Avenue.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.PG34.7>

Wayfinding Signage Agreement - 2005 Amendments

In April 2005, City Council adopted amendments to a 'Wayfinding Signage' agreement between Exhibition Place and Clear Channel Outdoor. The agreement allowed for the 'Lake Shore Signage Program' containing two third party signs along Lake Shore Boulevard, and contained provisions for capital investments in the signs and payments to Exhibition Place over a 15-year term.

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2005/agendas/council/cc050412/pof4rpt/cl017.pdf>

COMMENTS

Annual Reporting

Area-specific amendment applications are considered together annually by City Council. This practice allows for applications made throughout the year to be more easily reviewed and considered in a comprehensive manner. The Sign By-law allows for applications to amend the Sign By-law in order to implement significant changes to the Sign By-law for a specific area. Examples of those changes include: establishing regulations to authorize a sign that is prohibited by the Sign By-law, developing a comprehensive plan for all signage on a property, implementing a prohibition on signs in

an area, altering a property's sign district designation, or changes to administrative provisions, such as permitting requirements.

The proposed amendment must proceed as an amendment to the Sign By-law because the Applicant is seeking to modify the administrative provisions of the Sign By-law, to remove the requirement that any applicable approvals from the City's Heritage Preservation Services and Toronto Regional Conservation Authority be obtained prior to the issuance of a sign permit. This is a general requirement in the Sign By-law and is applicable to all properties within the city.

Applicant's Amendment Proposal

The Applicant is seeking an area-specific amendment to the Sign By-law to replace the existing third party sign regulations applicable to 2 Strachan Avenue, which no longer permit third party signs, to allow for the removal and replacement of two third party ground signs displaying static and electronic readograph copy, with two third party electronic ground signs displaying electronic static sign copy.

The height of the Existing Signs is 10.92 metres. The Existing Signs contain six sign faces of varying sizes in a back-to-back configuration displaying static and electronic readograph sign copy. The total sign face area of each sign is 43.72 square metres, and consists of:

- Two third party sign faces in a back-to-back configuration each displaying static sign copy with an area of 37.2 square metres;
- Two first party sign faces in a back-to-back configuration each displaying electronic readograph sign copy with an area of 3.72 square metres;
- Two sign faces on each side displaying "Exhibition Place" in static copy, and channel letters with a sign face area of 2.8 square metres. (See Figure 1)

One of the Proposed Signs (Sign A) will be located to the southeast of the intersection of British Columbia Road and Lake Shore Boulevard West; the other Proposed Sign (Sign B) will be located at the northwest corner of Lake Shore Boulevard West and Ontario Drive. (See Figures 2 and 3). The requested amendment would not result in any changes to the permissions for first party signs on the property.

The Proposed Signs, if permitted through the proposed amendment, would replace the static sign faces with electronic sign faces and remove the electronic readograph from each sign. The Proposed Signs will each be double-sided and will have a total sign face area of 42.2 square metres, consisting of:

- One sign face on either side displaying electronic static copy measuring 6.1 metres by 6.1 metres, for a sign face area of 37.2 square metres; and,
- One sign face on each side displaying "Exhibition Place" in static copy measuring 0.46 metres by 6.1 metres for a sign face area of 2.8 square metres.

This represents a reduction in sign face area of 3.72 square metres in the Proposed Signs when compared to the Existing Signs. (See Figure 2)

Figure 1 - Existing Sign A (left photo) and Existing Sign B (right photo)



The Proposed Signs will have an overall height of 10.92 metres, which is the same height as the Existing Signs.

The amendment application has also requested that Section 694 5B(2) and 5B(4) of the Sign By-law be amended in order to permit the Proposed Signs. These two sections of the Sign By-law require approval from Heritage Preservation Services and the Toronto Region Conservation Authority prior to the issuance of a sign permit.

The Applicant states that the signs are not located on lands regulated by the Toronto Region Conservation Authority and that the Proposed Signs are not located near any building of heritage significance.

Figure 2 - Diagram of Proposed Sign A (left) and Proposed Sign B (right)

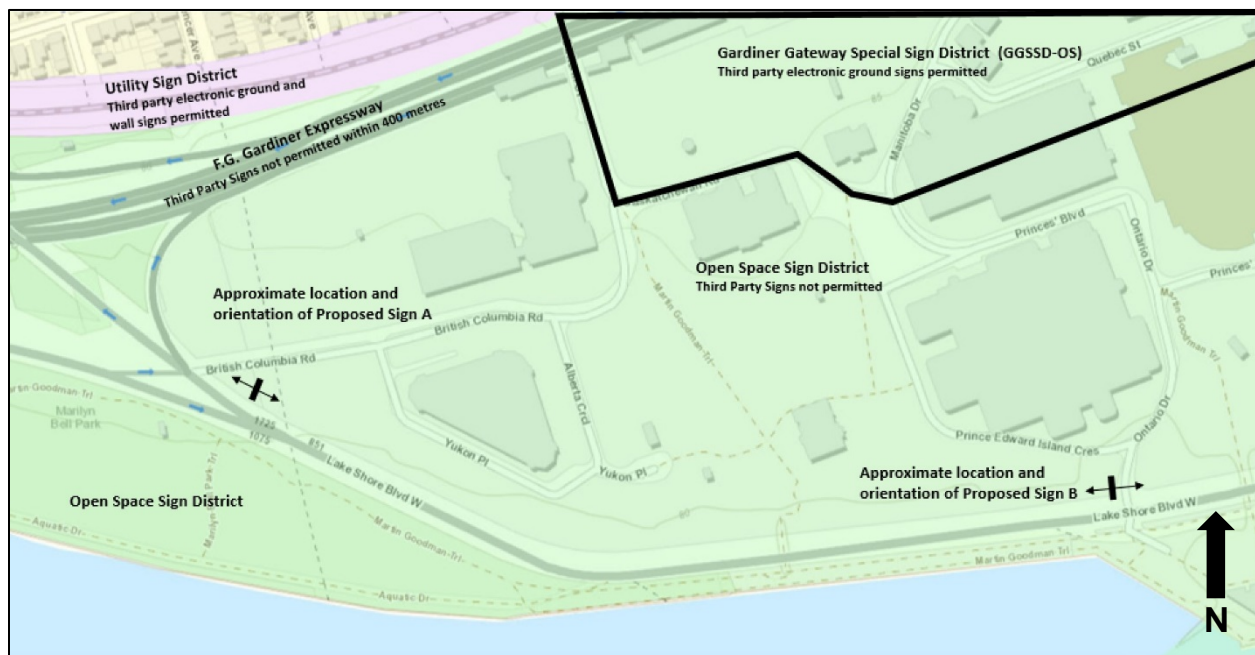


It is important to note that if this area-specific amendment were to be granted, the Proposed Signs would still be required to obtain a building permit (in addition to a sign permit). Under the *Building Code Act*, any building permit application would be subject to review by Heritage Preservation Services and the Toronto Region Conservation Authority prior to issuance.

Site Context - 2 Strachan Avenue

The property at 2 Strachan Avenue is commonly known as Exhibition Place. The property is located in Wards 4 and 10, on the south side of the F.G. Gardiner Expressway and the north side of Lake Shore Boulevard West. It is surrounded by residential and employment uses to the north and parkland and open spaces to the east, west and south.

Figure 3 - Sign District Map Showing Proposed Sign Location and Surrounding Area



The property at 2 Strachan Avenue is primarily designated as an Open Space (OS) Sign District; however, the northern portion of the property is part of the Gardiner Gateway Special Sign District (GG-SSD), which permits third party electronic ground signs on properties directly adjacent to the F.G. Gardiner Expressway. As a result, the majority of 2 Strachan Avenue is not permitted third party signs.

The property at 2 Strachan Avenue contains the Exhibition Place grounds, as well as various entertainment and sports facilities, conference facilities and a hotel. The property at 2 Strachan Avenue has been designated by City Council as a heritage property.

As stated above, the Existing Signs are currently located along the southern and western portion of 2 Strachan Avenue. In 2005, City Council approved Exhibition Place

entering into a 'Wayfinding Signage Agreement' with a 15-year term. Permits for the Existing Signs were issued, and the Existing Signs were inspected in 2007. The Existing Signs have not been significantly altered since 2007.

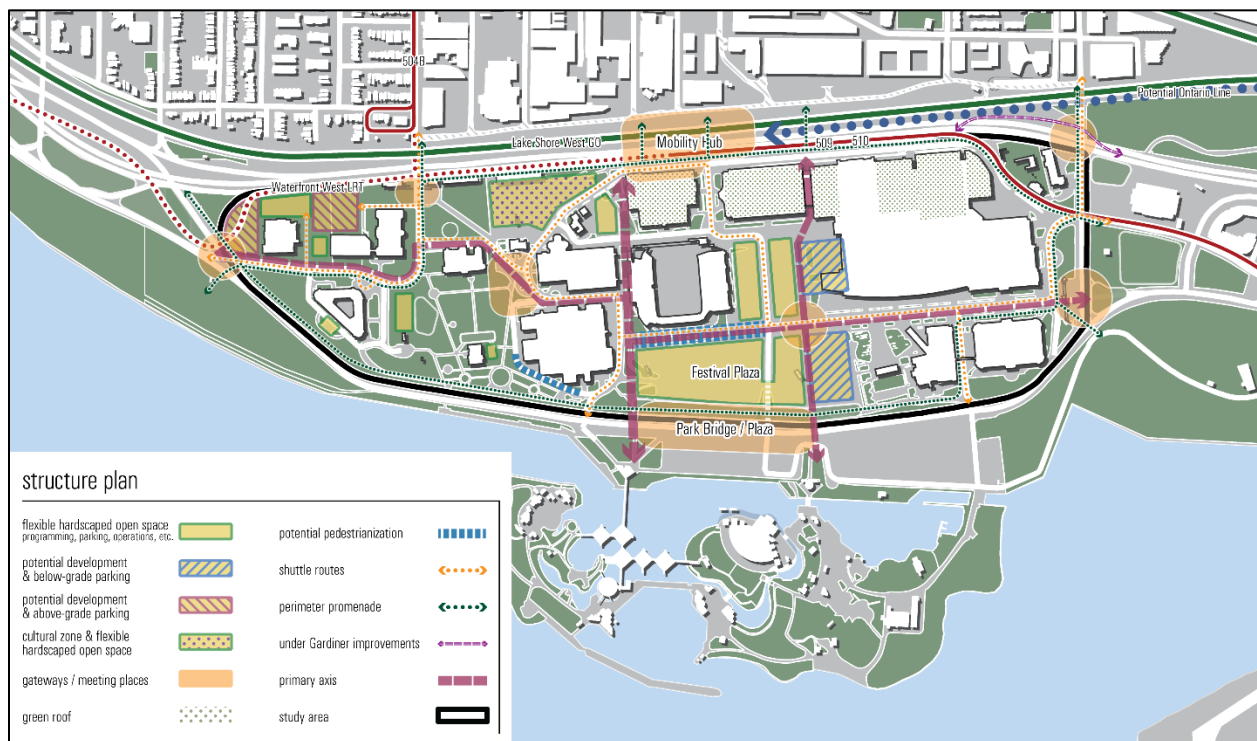
Area Compatibility

Exhibition Place is a significant city resource which is currently going through a Master Plan exercise with the goal of supporting and enhancing Exhibition Place's contribution to the City of Toronto. Phase 1 of the Master Planning Process has been completed and a Phase 1 Proposals report was adopted by City Council in October 2020.

The Proposed Signs would be located along Lake Shore Boulevard West, on the periphery of Exhibition Place. The Structure Plan included in the Phase 1 Proposals report has identified the areas where the Proposed Signs are to be located as a 'perimeter promenade'. (See Figure 4). This promenade is envisioned to allow for pedestrian movement through a soft landscaped area along much of the south edge of the site.

City Planning staff have commented that the presence of large electronic signs adjacent to the proposed promenade would not contribute to the public enjoyment of this important public amenity.

Figure 4: Structure Plan from Phase 1 Proposals for Exhibition Place



The proposed amendment also seeks regulations for the Proposed Signs which do not meet many of the regulations that City Council has determined are appropriate for the construction and display of third party electronic signs.

The Proposed Signs are located in OS Sign Districts, and are surrounded by properties to the east, south and west that are also designated as OS Sign Districts. Although electronic signs are not permitted in OS Sign Districts, where permitted, they must be separated by at least 60 metres from sensitive uses, including OS Sign Districts. Further, where electronic signs are permitted, they must not face any OS Sign Districts located within 250 metres.

In addition to being visible from the proposed promenade along the southern boundary of Exhibition Place, the Proposed Signs will also be visible to the surrounding OS Sign Districts, particularly users of the Martin Goodman Trail which is less than 40 metres away from Proposed Sign A (see Figure 5).

Where permitted, the Sign By-law requires that electronic third party signs be located a minimum of 30 metres from an intersection. Proposed Sign A is located just over 30 metres from the intersection of Lake Shore Boulevard West and British Columbia Road. Proposed Sign B is located approximately ten metres from the intersection of Ontario Drive and Lake Shore Boulevard West, one third of what the Sign By-law requires.

Figure 5 - Sign A in relation to the Martin Goodman Trail in Marilyn Bell Park
View looking West
View looking East



The Sign By-law also requires that, where permitted, third party electronic signs be set back 150 metres from any other third party sign. Sign B is located approximately 55 metres away from a third party sign located directly to the south, 95 metres less than what is required by the Sign By-law. (See Figure 6).

The area within 400 metres of the north limit of the F.G. Gardiner Expressway and the south limit of the F.G. Gardiner Expressway between the Humber River and the eastern limit of Dufferin Street is one of 74 specific areas throughout the city where City Council has determined that third party signs should not be permitted. These 74 area-specific restrictions were imposed by City Council based on the determination that third party signs in these locations are inconsistent and incompatible with the surrounding area, and would not contribute positively to the quality of Toronto's appearance.

Although Sign A is not likely to be visible from the F.G. Gardiner Expressway, it appears to be within the area-specific restriction established by City Council. The requested amendment by the Applicant would permit Sign A to be located approximately 67 metres from the Lake Shore-Gardiner on-ramp, and approximately 160 metres from the main travelled portion of the F.G. Gardiner Expressway. Sign B complies with the required 400-metre separation.

Figure 6 - Proximity of Sign B to Existing Third Party Sign at Ontario Place Entrance



As set out in the Sign By-Law, notification of the proposed amendment was sent to all property owners within a 250-metre radius of the subject property, and a notice was posted at the property. The notice provides details of the proposed amendment and invites feedback by email, telephone or at a virtual public meeting which was to be held on April 19, 2021 via WebEx. No interested parties requested to attend the WebEx consultation and, as of the date of this report, no feedback has been received on the proposed amendment.

The Gardiner Gateway Special Sign District

The northern portion of 2 Strachan Avenue forms part of the Gardiner Gateway Special Sign District (GG-SSD). The GG-SSD is one of the areas of the city where large electronic ground signs are permitted to be constructed provided that the new signs are replacing existing electronic ground signs displaying electronic static or electronic moving copy.

In 2014, after reviewing plans for the area around the GG-SSD, and feedback provided by residents and sign industry representatives at two consultation sessions, City Council modified the boundaries of the GG-SSD to exclude the areas adjacent to Ontario Place and the shoreline of Lake Ontario as well as properties to the north of the F.G Gardiner Expressway that did not contain any third party signs.

In the amendment application, the Applicant makes reference to the GG-SSD, and states that this modification to the boundaries of the GG-SSD has placed their current application at a disadvantage. The Applicant makes particular reference to Proposed Sign B as Proposed Sign A was never located in the GG-SSD.

Neither of the Existing Signs display electronic static or electronic moving sign copy, and therefore would not be able to be replaced by Proposed Sign A or B under the standard permissions of the GG-SSD contained in the Sign By-law.

Comments from Other City Divisions and Agencies

City Planning staff have concerns regarding the proposal for electronic signage at Exhibition Place. The Master Plan proposes to create a 'perimeter promenade' which is designed to provide a comfortable barrier-free connection across the site, emphasizing the historic connection of the site to the former lakeshore and providing views of the historic buildings on the site. The presence of large electronic signs adjacent to the proposed promenade would not contribute to the public enjoyment of this important public amenity.

With respect to concerns raised about traffic safety, Transportation Services was consulted throughout the development of the Sign By-law and is in agreement with the regulations in the Sign By-law governing electronic third party signs located within 30 metres of an intersection. As the Proposed Sign B is located within the required 30 metre-separation distance from the intersection of Lake Shore Boulevard West and Ontario Drive, Transportation Services does not support the application as it is not in keeping with the requirements of the Sign By-law for electronic signs.

Conclusion

The Applicant has not provided a basis for the CBO to support amending the Sign By-Law to establish unique regulations which would allow two third party electronic ground signs at 2 Strachan Avenue. There is also no practical or policy basis to justify exempting the Proposed Signs from the required approvals from Heritage Preservation Services or the Toronto Region Conservation Authority.

The proposed amendment would allow two third party, electronic ground signs that are not permitted in an OS Sign District, will be facing parkland to the south, east and west, and will be contrary to the plan for having a public promenade along the southern boundary of Exhibition Place, which has recently been endorsed by City Council.

As a result, it is the position of the CBO that the current regulations for the subject property are appropriate, and should not be modified as requested by the Applicant.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

1. Draft of Proposed Area-Specific Amendment – 2 Strachan Avenue