

Amendments to the Sign By-law: 1 Dundas Street East

Date: March 26, 2025
To: Planning and Housing Committee
From: Chief Building Official and Executive Director, Toronto Building (Interim)
Wards: 13 - Toronto Centre

SUMMARY

In 2017, City Council adopted amendments to the Sign By-law (the “2017 Amendment”) to facilitate the installation of signage at 1 Dundas Street East (now Sankofa Square), previously known as Yonge-Dundas Square (“The Square”). The signage proposal included five electronic ground signs and two electronic roof signs featuring a mix of third-party advertising, event displays, information about upcoming events, art installations, and event sponsorships. Additionally, two of the seven signs were required to display sign copy consisting of either the phrase “Yonge-Dundas Square” or logos identifying Yonge-Dundas Square.

In December 2023, City Council officially renamed Yonge-Dundas Square to Sankofa Square. However, the provisions of the 2017 Amendment specifically referred to the former name of the square and do not accommodate the name change adopted in 2023. Also, as part of the 2017 Amendment, the seven electronic signs were permitted on the condition that the sign permits would expire after a ten-year term, specifically on July 31, 2027, and would not be subject to renewal.

Since their installation, the seven signs permitted in the 2017 Amendment have become an integral part of The Square, contributing to its sense of place and suitability as a dynamic event space in downtown Toronto.

The Sankofa Square Board of Management (the “Applicant”) has submitted a Sign By-law amendment application (the “Proposed Amendment”) for 1 Dundas Street East where The Square is located. The Proposed Amendment seeks revisions to the 2017 Amendment which will modify the clauses in the area-specific By-law requiring the display of “Yonge-Dundas Square” and the provisions concerning the permit expiry of the seven electronic signs.

Toronto Building conducted a thorough review of the application and supporting materials. The Chief Building Official (the “CBO”) is of the opinion that since their installation, the seven signs allowed and regulated by Subsection 4G have become an

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integral part of the Square, contributing to its sense of place and suitability as a dynamic event space in downtown Toronto. The CBO believes that the requested amendment aligns with the broader goals of the City, the objectives of the Sign By-law, and the specific regulations for the premises and surrounding area. Therefore, the CBO supports Council approval of the Proposed Amendment.

In addition, the CBO is proposing that similar changes to reflect the 2023 name change be adopted within the Sign By-law as a whole, specifically that all references to the Dundas Square Special Sign District or (DS-SSD) in the Sign By-law be changed to the Sankofa Square Special Sign District or (SK-SSD).

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council approve the application to amend Subsection 4G of Schedule C, Additional Special Sign District Regulations, to Chapter 694, Signs, General, to replace references to the previous name of the square with respect to regulations concerning the sign copy allowed to be displayed, and replace these references with the current name of the square; as well as replacing the modified permitting regime contained within Subsection 4G, with the standard permitting regime otherwise applicable for signs; substantially in accordance with the draft by-law set out in Attachment 1 to this report.
2. City Council amend Chapter 694, Signs, General, to replace all incidents of the phrase “Dundas Square Special Sign District” with the phrase “Sankofa Square Special Sign District” and incidents of the phrase “DS-SSD” with the phrase “SK-SSD”, substantially in accordance with the draft by-law set out in Attachment 2 to this report.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The recommendation in this report has no financial impact.

DECISION HISTORY

PG13.5 - Amendments to the Sign By-law

This report introduced amendments to the Sign By-law to add Schedule C, Additional Special Sign District Regulations to the Sign By-law, which was an update the provisions that apply to Special Sign Districts to replace references to provisions of

various By-laws from former municipalities with those in the Sign By-law, including an update and an amendment to the Dundas Square Special Sign District.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.PG13>.

EX21.8 - Authority for the Yonge-Dundas Square Board of Management to Enter into a Ten-Year Contract with Outfront Media Canada and Update to Dundas Square Special Sign District Regulations for 1 Dundas Street East (Yonge-Dundas Square)

On its meeting of January 31, 2017, the City Council amended Schedule C, Additional Special Sign District Regulations, of Chapter 694, Signs, General, to adopt new regulations for the property municipally known as 1 Dundas Street East allowing for the implementation of the signage proposal for the Square.

(<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2017.EX21.8>)

MM13.29 - Confronting the Legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Renaming Civic Assets Bearing the Henry Dundas Name - by Councillor Chris Moise, seconded by Mayor Olivia Chow

On December 13, 2023, City Council directed the Board, in collaboration with the General Manager of Economic Development and Culture to adopt the new name Sankofa Square and to report to City Council through the Executive Committee as part of the report on the Governance Review of Sankofa Square, to adopt the recommended new name by the end of the second quarter of 2024.

(<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.MM13.29>)

EX15.4 - A Governance and Operational Review of Sankofa Square (formerly Yonge-Dundas Square)

On June 26 and 27, 2024, City Council directed the Sankofa Square Board of Management to develop a multi-year strategic and business plan to enhance economic development, tourism, community programming, and safety, while rebranding Yonge-Dundas Square to Sankofa Square.

(<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.EX15.4>)

COMMENTS

Amendment Applications

The Sign By-law allows for applications to amend the Sign By-law by members of the public to implement significant changes for an area. Examples of those changes include: developing a comprehensive plan for all signage on a premises, implementing

a prohibition on signs in an area, altering a premises' sign district designation, or changes to administrative provisions, such as permitting requirements. Any member of the public may apply to City Council to amend the Sign By-law requesting permanent policy changes for specific properties or areas. Upon receiving an application, the CBO assesses the proposal to ensure the regulations align with the overarching objectives and purposes of the City's regulations, including the Sign By-law.

Community Consultation

In compliance with the Sign By-law requirements, notice of the application for the Proposed Amendment was provided to all property owners within a 250-meter radius of the Premises. Additionally, as required by the Sign By-law, the Applicant posted a notice of the application in a publicly visible location on the premises where the sign is proposed to be erected, for a minimum of 30 days prior to the City's consideration of the application, as stipulated in the Sign By-law.

Background

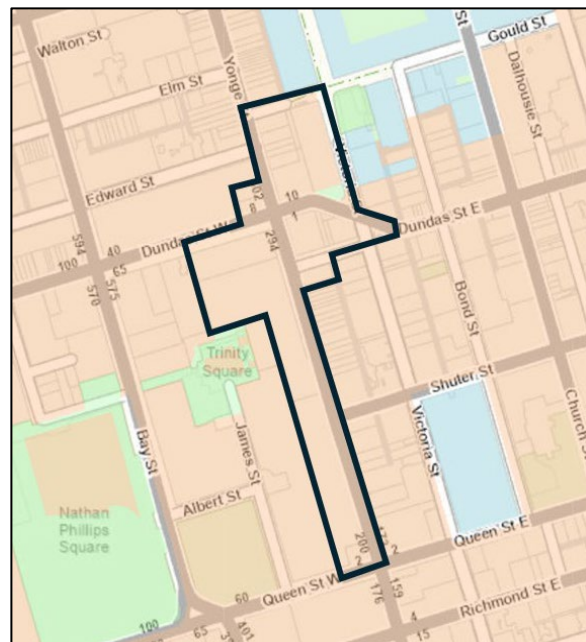
Sankofa Square is a public square, community gathering place, and event venue for the general public, owned by the City of Toronto. City Council established the Sankofa Square Board of Management to maintain, operate, and control the Square as an outdoor public square on behalf of City Council pursuant to Municipal Code Chapter 636, Public Squares.

The Square opened in May 2003 and was envisioned as the heart of a revitalized downtown, with signage being an integral component of The Square's identity. Since opening, many of the signs on The Square itself and surrounding properties have been updated.

In 2016, the CBO reported to Council for an amendment to the Sign By-law to add Schedule C, Additional Special Sign District Regulations, which provided for a comprehensive set of special regulations for the City's special sign districts; including a series of provisions regulating the signage allowed within the DS-SSD.

The Dundas Square Special Sign District is the most permissive Sign District in the city. All types of first and third-party signs are permitted and are generally governed, in addition to general permissions, on a site-by-site basis through a series of site-specific regulations. Additionally, the DS-

Figure 1- Dundas Square Special Sign District (DS-SSD)

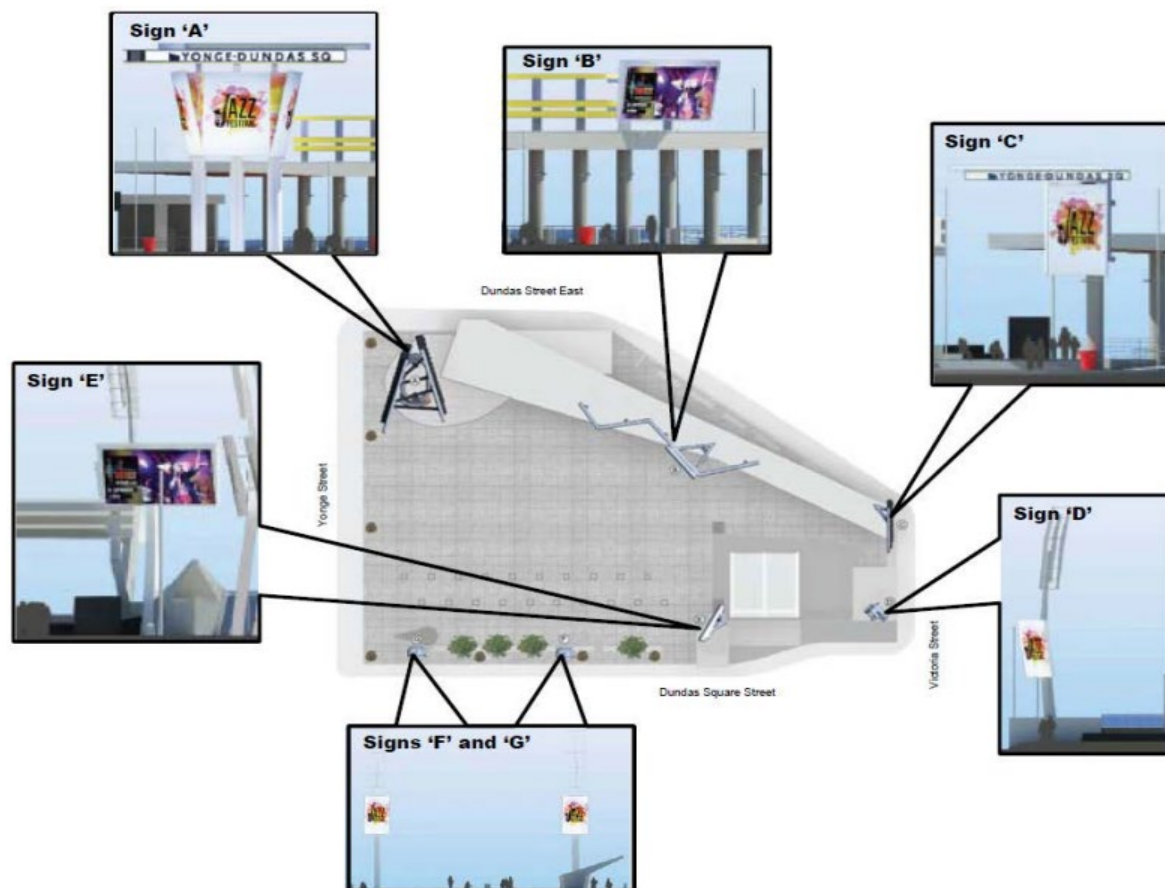


SSD is the only sign district that permits electronic moving sign copy.

In 2017, following a 24-month visioning exercise, the Board of Management for the Square developed a comprehensive signage plan to update the appearance and functionality of The Square, enhancing its use as an event space. This exercise stemmed from a two-phase Request for Information (“RFI”) process for the installation, operation, and maintenance of the signage components, as well as for identifying potential signage-related revenue sources. This process culminated in a ten-year agreement with Outfront Media Canada LP.

The signage developed through the visioning exercise aimed to replace the existing signs in The Square to better serve its unique programming needs. The signs in the 2017 Amendment were designed to facilitate the display of visitor information, public art, video projects, live events, event sponsorships, and third-party advertising.

Figure 2: Signage proposed by the 2017 Amendment to the Sign By-law



This visioning exercise led to the adoption of the 2017 Amendment, introducing new customized regulations to implement the Square’s signage plan on the Premises. At the time, the proposal was considered consistent with the existing regulations for many of the signs in the DS-SSD. Since its adoption, the seven signs permitted by the 2017

Amendment have not raised any concerns from the public and have become an integral part of The Square, contributing to its sense of place and suitability as a dynamic event space in downtown Toronto.

The provisions contained in the 2017 Amendment reference The Square by its former name. To update these references and reflect the Council's decision in 2023 to rename The Square, an amendment to the Sign By-law is necessary. Additionally, the 2017 Amendment limited the seven signs to a lifespan of approximately ten years, without allowing for the renewal of the sign permits. The Proposed Amendment seeks to address The Square's name change and to modify the expiration clauses.

Proposed Amendment

The Applicant's submissions state that in 2009, City Council adopted the "Signage Vision" for the Downtown Yonge BIA, providing guidelines for signage at the Yonge Street and Dundas Street intersection. This vision recognized the area's vibrant, large-scale signage as a defining characteristic and established that future large-format signage in this area should be subject to rules that are exceptional to any other location in the city. The Square was identified as the focal point for the highest intensity, animation, and scale of signage. This "Signage Vision" was one of many sources of information considered in the creation of the Dundas Square Special Sign District (DS-SSD) in the Sign By-law.

In 2017, regulations for the DS-SSD were amended to allow for the third-party signs currently present in the Square. The Applicant states that these signs, displaying commercial advertising, event information, and public service announcements, have positively contributed to the landmark signage described in the "Signage Vision." They indicate that the use of the seven signs has been consistent with the guidelines and by-laws of the DS-SSD and their presence is crucial for the Square's long-term success. The Applicant has also indicated that Chapter 694 contains multiple references to the former name of the Square that need to be updated to reflect the name change adopted by City Council in 2023.

The CBO agrees that the seven signs are a defining characteristic of the Square and have been in place for many years becoming an integral part of The Square. District-specific provisions for third-party ground signs and electronic signs within the DS-SSD are not subject to the permit renewal restriction that the signs in The Square are currently subject to, allowing many of the permits for the third-party signs surrounding The Square to be renewed every five years.

The CBO also agrees that administrative changes to reflect the new name of The Square, as adopted by City Council in 2023, are necessary to ensure that the regulations applicable specifically to the signs on The Square align with the broader goals of the City. As a result of the CBO's review, the proposed amendments to Subsection 4G to Schedule C of Chapter 694 regulations are listed below.

1. Allow for the renaming of the Square:

The CBO recommends amending Subsection 4G of Schedule C in Chapter 694, Signs, General, to update provisions G(1)(g)[5], G(1)(h)[5], and G(3)(d)[5]. These changes will replace the phrase "Yonge-Dundas Square" with "the name of the square as defined by Chapter 636, Public Squares, located within the premises". This amendment allows the sign copy on two of the seven signs (three sign faces in total) to display the new name of The Square adopted by City Council in 2023 as well as accommodate any future changes that may take place concerning the name of The Square without the need for any further amendments to the Sign By-law.

2. Delete and replace all references to Yonge-Dundas Square:

The former name of the Square in Subsection 4G to Schedule C is used primarily to identify the Premises at 1 Dundas Street East. To accommodate the name change adopted by City Council in 2023 and allow for future modifications, the CBO proposes deleting all references to the square's previous name and replacing these with general references to the square.

3. Replace modified permitting regime, with the standard permit regime in the Sign By-law:

All seven signs on the Square are subject to an alternative permitting regime where rather than sign permits being issued on a five year basis and subject to potential renewal; that all sign permits issued for the seven signs in the Square shall expire on July 31, 2027, and shall not be subject to renewal.

The Proposed Amendment seeks to remove the alternative process, from the requirements of Schedule C of the Sign By-law. As a result of such a modification, the sign permits for 1 Dundas Street East will comply with the standard permitting regime within the Sign By-law. Applications for sign permit renewal for an additional five years would be permitted in accordance with the standard permitting regime (section 694-10) contained in the Sign By-law. This modification will allow the seven signs located at 1 Dundas Street East to be regulated consistently with, and in the same manner as other third-party signs in the city.

4. Change references in the Sign By-law from 'DS-SSD' to 'SK-SSD':

In addition to the Amendment application, it is recommended that the Dundas Square Special Sign District (DS-SSD) be renamed to the Sankofa Square Special Sign District (SK-SSD), and that all references in the Sign Bylaw be amended accordingly. This is consistent with the direction in EX15.4 requesting that any City of Toronto by-law or Municipal Code Chapter to replace all references to "Yonge-Dundas Square".

Conclusion

The CBO believes that the proposed amendments to the Sign By-law, including changes to Subsection 4G of Schedule C, Additional Special Sign District Regulations, as detailed in this report and Attachment 1, will ensure the Sign By-law is updated to reflect recent council decisions. These amendments will also continue to regulate the signs at The Square in a manner consistent with the objectives and purposes of the Sign By-law.

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SIGNATURE

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Toronto Building

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Draft By-law – Amendments to Schedule C, Additional Special Sign District Regulations, of Chapter 694

Attachment 2 - Draft By-law – Technical Amendments to Chapter 694