

Application for Three Variances Respecting One Third Party Electronic Window Sign - 4804-4812 Yonge Street

Date: February 27, 2026

To: Sign Variance Committee

From: Project Director, Business Transformation, Toronto Building

Wards: Willowdale (Ward 18)

SUMMARY

Kramer Design Associates (the "Applicant") has applied for three variances required to allow the Chief Building Official ("CBO") to issue a sign permit to erect and display a third party electronic window sign, displaying electronic static copy (the "Proposed Sign"), on the premises municipally known as 4804-4812 Yonge Street, in Ward 18 - Willowdale (the "Subject Premises").

The Proposed Sign would have a maximum height of 9.02 metres and would contain one rectangular sign face displaying electronic static copy, with dimensions not exceeding 14.5 metres by 4.0 metres, with total sign face area of approximately 58.0 square metres. The Proposed Sign is described further in Attachment 1.

The Subject Premises is designated as a Commercial Residential ("CR") Sign District, where third party electronic window signs, such as the Proposed Sign, are not expressly permitted. The Proposed Sign would be situated around 6.3 metres of the westerly limit of Yonge Street, entirely within an area governed by a site-specific area restriction that prohibits third party signs from being erected within 450 meters of this street. It would also be located less than 100 metres from an existing third party roof sign, contrary to the Sign By-law separation requirements. Therefore, variances to Chapter 694 are necessary to allow for a non-permitted third party sign type to be erected in the CR Sign District, with a non-conforming proximity to an existing third party sign, within an area where no third party signs are allowed to be displayed.

The Sign By-law contains criteria to be used in evaluating variance application for signs. Specifically, §694-30A states that an application for variance may only be granted where it is established that the Proposed Sign meet each of the eight established criteria. The Sign Variance Committee is required to conduct an evaluation and determine whether the party seeking the proposed variances meets all eight of the mandatory criteria, on the basis of the information presented by the parties before the SVC.

Following a review of the Applicant's submissions and additional City staff research, the CBO has determined that there is not a sufficient basis to conclude that the eight criteria in §694-30A of the Sign By-law have been established with respect to the three variances, as described further in Attachment 1 to this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. The Sign Variance Committee refuse to grant the requested variances to sections 694-15.A, 694-22.D and 694-24.A(23), required to permit the issuance of a permit for the erection and display of the Proposed Sign, as further described in Attachment 1 to this report.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

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

DECISION HISTORY

IE18.1 - North York Centre - REimagining Yonge (Sheppard to Finch) Municipal Class Environmental Assessment Study

On its meeting of December 16, 17 and 18, 2020 City Council considered staff report "Reimagining Yonge (Sheppard to Finch) Municipal Class Environmental Assessment Study" and endorsed the recommended design for the reconstruction of Yonge Street from Florence Avenue / Avondale Avenue to the Finch Hydro Corridor.

[\(Agenda Item History - 2020.IE18.1\)](#)

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Required Variances

Table 1: Summary of Requested Variances

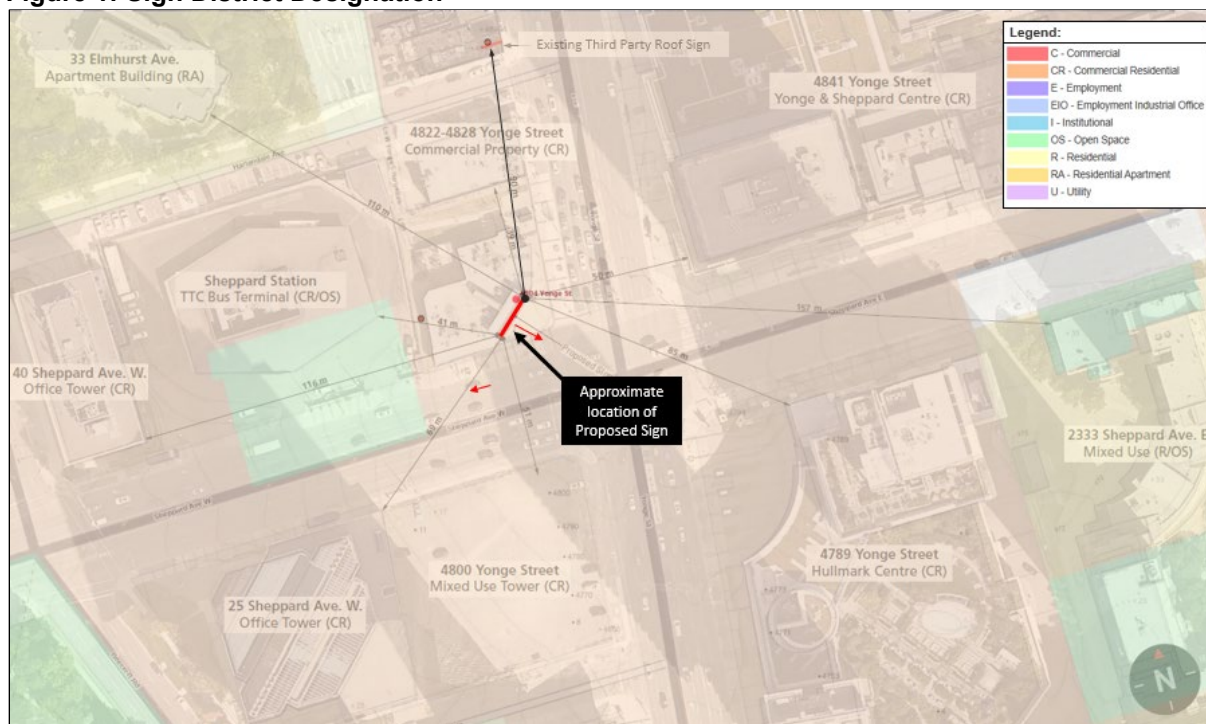
Section	Requirement	Requested Variance
§ 694- 15.A	Anything not expressly permitted by this chapter is prohibited.	Third party electronic window signs are not expressly permitted in the CR Sign Districts, which allows for third party signs, limited to wall sign or topiary wall sign types.
§ 694- 22.D	A third party sign shall not be erected within 100.0 metres of any other lawful third party sign whether or not erected.	The Proposed Sign would be located 80 metres of another third party sign at 4844 Yonge Street.
§ 694- 24.A(23)	A third party sign shall not be erected or displayed or cause to be erected or displayed in whole or in part within 450.0 metres of the westerly limit of Yonge Street, from the southerly limit of Highway 401 to northerly limit of Drewry Avenue.	The Proposed Sign would be located only 6.32 metres of the westerly limit of Yonge Street between Highway 401 and Drewry Avenue.

Sign Attributes and Site Context

The Proposed Sign would be a third party electronic window sign, displaying electronic static copy, to be placed at the second storey of the building on the Subject Premises. It is proposed on the southeast elevation of the building, oriented southeast, with intended visibility primarily to traffic travelling along Yonge Street and Sheppard Avenue West. The Proposed Sign consists of one rectangular sign face with a maximum area of 58.0 square metres, and overall dimensions not exceeding 14.5 metres horizontally (bisecting line) and 4.0 metres vertically (centre line), as further described in Attachment 1.

The designation of the Subject Premises and of most surrounded properties is CR Sign Districts. The area is predominantly comprised of mixed-use buildings, with identified residential uses to the south and southeast.

Figure 1: Sign District Designation



North: CR Sign District, 2-storey commercial

South: CR Sign District, high-rise mixed-use

East: CR Sign District, high-rise commercial - Yonge and Sheppard Centre

West: CR and Open Space ("OS") Sign Districts - Sheppard Station

Regulations for CR Sign Districts do not permit third party electronic signs, as such there is no specific set of regulations for electronic window signs such as the Proposed Sign. Variance to Chapter 694 is therefore required for the Proposed Sign to be erected or displayed at all within a CR Sign District.

Under Chapter 694, third party signs permitted in CR Sign Districts must fall into one of two sign types: wall sign or topiary wall sign. Table 1 provides a comparison between the applicable regulations for third party wall signs in CR Sign Districts and the characteristics of the Proposed Sign. As illustrated below, the Proposed Sign significantly exceeds several core regulatory limitations, including size, height, location, and sign copy type.

Table 2: Comparison of regulations for third party signs in CR Sign Districts and Proposed Sign

	Permitted Signs	Proposed Sign
Sign Type	Wall Sign or Topiary Wall Sign	Electronic Window Sign
Sign Copy	Static Copy; Mechanical Copy; or Topiary Sign Copy	Electronic Static Copy
Size	Sign face area shall not exceed 3.0 square metres	Sign face area of approximately 58.0 square metres

Height	Not exceed 3.0 metres	The height of the Proposed Sign would be 9.02 metres.
Location	Not be erected facing a street	Facing 2 streets (Yonge St and Sheppard Ave W)
	Not be erected within 30.0 metres of the intersection of a major street with any other street	Approx. 10.0 metres of Yonge St and Sheppard Ave W intersection
# of faces	No more than one sign face	One sign face

The purpose of CR Sign District regulations is to encourage pedestrian-oriented signage that supports local business identification and contributes to a cohesive streetscape.

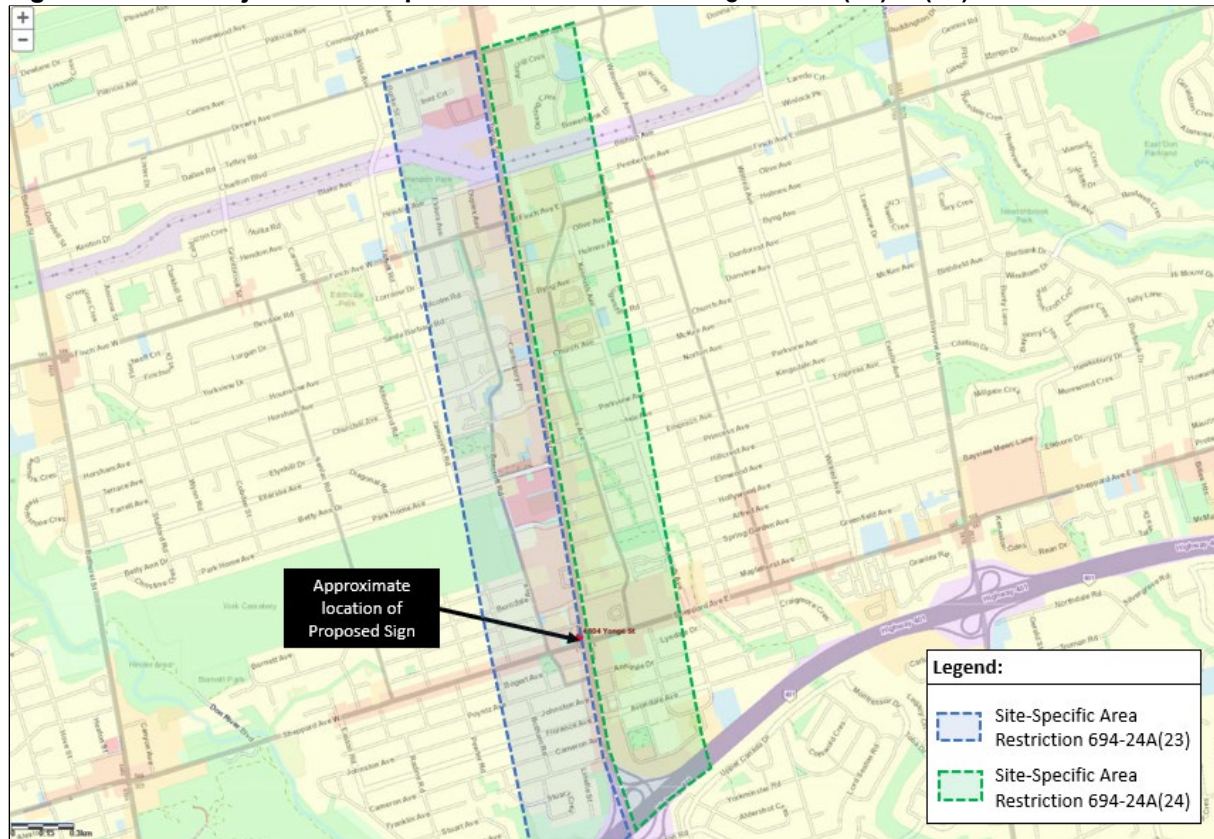
The Applicant's submission acknowledges Official Plan objectives for the area emphasizing pedestrian-supportive environments and an active public realm. However, staff find no clear rationale demonstrating how a sign of the proposed size, scale, height, and typology aligns with these objectives or with the intent of the Sign By-law for CR Sign Districts.

A variance is also required because the Proposed Sign falls within one of 84 site-specific areas where City Council has prohibited all third party signs. These restrictions were enacted based on Council's determination that third party signage in these locations would be inconsistent with surrounding land uses and would not positively contribute to the City's visual environment. In the case of North York Centre, the Sign By-law implements this direction through area-specific restrictions that prohibit third party signage within 450 metres of both the westerly and easterly limits of Yonge Street, extending from Highway 401 to Drewry Avenue on the west side and to Cummer Avenue on the east side.

These geographic limits correspond with the length and breadth of the North York Centre Secondary Plan area along the Yonge Street corridor, capturing the core mixed-use, transit-oriented portions of the Centre as well as adjacent transition areas. The Proposed Sign would be located approximately 6.3 metres from the westerly limit of Yonge Street, within the restricted corridor.

This regulatory approach can be traced to the planning framework established by the North York Centre Secondary Plan, which, while not explicitly prohibiting third party signs, places strong emphasis on pedestrian-oriented design, active at-grade uses, high-quality built form, and the protection of nearby residential areas. The CR Sign District regulations in the Sign By-law align strongly with this framework. Collectively, these objectives support the conclusion that large, more auto-oriented, visually dominant third party signage would be inconsistent with the intended character of the area.

Figure 2: Area Subject to Site-Specific Area Restrictions §694-24A(23) & (24)



In the submissions, the Applicant outlines that the intersection of Yonge Street and Sheppard Avenue is seen as the southern gateway to North York Centre. Staff were unable to locate any supporting material validating this interpretation. Instead, the North York Centre Secondary Plan specifies that:

Buildings near the Yonge Street - Highway 401 interchange should be designed to reflect a North York Centre South gateway, without diminishing the importance of the remainder of the North York Centre focused at the intersection of Yonge Street and Sheppard Avenue

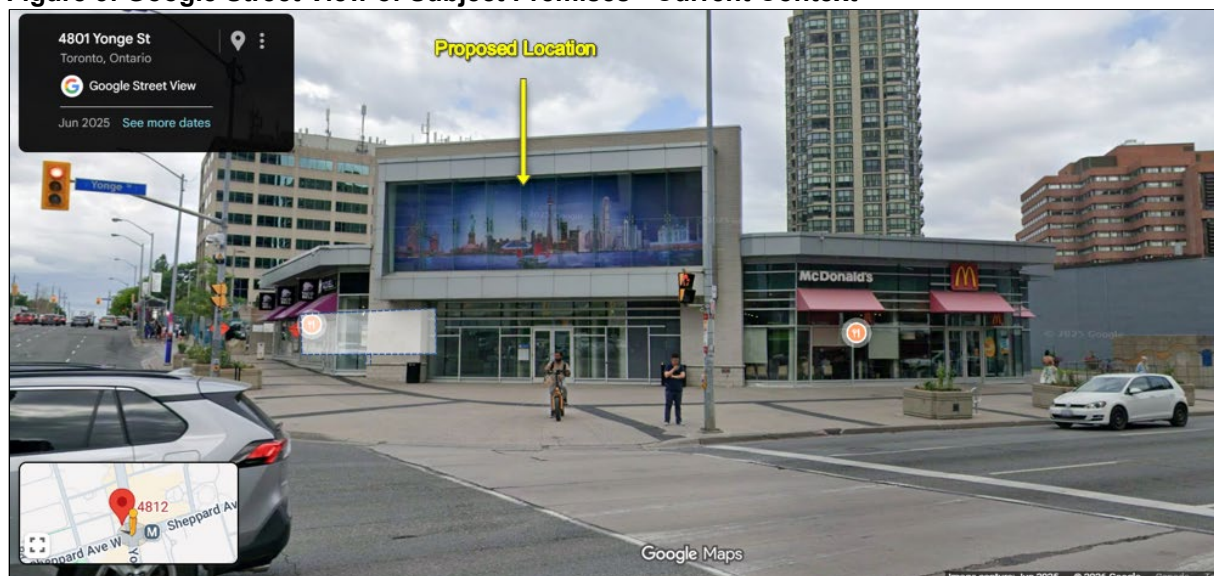
This finding renders the Applicant's assertion for the intersection both unsubstantiated and irrelevant to the evaluation of the Proposed Sign. Even if a gateway condition were demonstrated at the proposed location, no evidence has been provided showing how the Proposed Sign meaningfully contributes to this objective.

The Applicant references that the Proposed Sign supports the Reimagining Yonge Street study and the Transform Yonge initiative. Staff note these studies form part of the ongoing review of the North York Centre Secondary Plan. While there is currently no indication of when the updated Secondary Plan will be implemented, the available materials suggest that the Transform Yonge initiative focus on creating vibrant and active ground floor through widened boulevards, plazas, landscaping, and cycling infrastructure, objectives consistent with CR Sign District regulations. It is unclear how a second storey large-format digital signage would contribute to pedestrian activity, street-level vibrancy, or public-realm goals identified in the study.

Additional variance is requested to permit the Proposed Sign to be located approximately 90 metres from another third party sign, despite the Sign By-law requiring a minimum separation distance of 100 metres. When considered together with the Proposed Sign's large sign face area, electronic display, and City Council's direction to maintain a clear third party sign-free zone along this corridor, the reduced separation distance raises significant concerns related to clutter, cumulative impact, and erosion of Council's intended signage framework.

According to the submissions, the Proposed Sign would replace an existing first party sign in approximately the same location. Staff's investigation confirms this is inaccurate: the existing window mural was never approved as a sign. Under Chapter 694, a sign must meet the definition of either a first party or third party sign. The existing image does neither, as it does not identify or promote a business, service, or activity. The Proposed Sign would therefore be an entirely new sign where no other exists, and any claim that it merely replaces an existing sign is not supported by the facts.

Figure 3: Google Street View of Subject Premises - Current Context



The Applicant further contends that the Proposed Sign would display a mix of community/BIA messaging and commercial content. Staff recommend that the Sign Variance Committee disregard this information for the purposes of this consideration for the following reasons:

- a. Content type is not a criterion under §694-30A; once a third party class sign is permitted, any lawful third party message may be displayed.
- b. Conditioning approval on the provision of community benefits could conflict with the Donations to the City of Toronto for Community Benefits Policy. Any such arrangement would need to occur outside the variance process.

In support of the application, the Applicant referenced several existing third party signs along Yonge Street, some located within the corridor restricted by §694-24.A(23). Staff investigation revealed that all these existing signs display static copy and predate the current Sign By-law. While existing built form may be used to some extent to assess in

determining the character of an area, pre-authorized signs not aligning with the current regulatory framework hold limited relevance. Moreover, precedent is not listed as a criterion in Section 694-30A for granting or refusing a variance; each variance application is assessed individually based on its specific context.

Finally, the Applicant asserts that the Proposed Sign will not negatively impact nearby properties because it is oriented downwards, primarily toward traffic rather than adjacent buildings. Staff consider this claim to further reinforce the strong visual and functional relationship of the sign with both Sheppard Avenue West and Yonge Street, which directly contradicts the intent of the site-specific prohibition on third party signage along this corridor.

COMMENTS

Applicant Information

The Applicant has stated that they have been authorized by 4804/12 HRDOV Yonge Realty Limited (the "Owner" of the Subject Premises) to apply for three variances required to allow for a permit to be issued for a third party electronic window sign, with one sign face, displaying electronic static copy, as further described in Attachment 1.

Community Consultation

The CBO has adopted a practice of engaging in enhanced consultation process concerning variance applications for electronic signs. Notice required by the City's Sign By-law was provided to premises within a 250-metre radius of the Proposed Location. The Applicant was also instructed to post 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 Sign Variance's Committee's consideration, in compliance with the Sign By-law requirements.

Additionally, the CBO informed the public of a virtual Community Consultation, scheduled for on the evening of February 19, 2026. At the date of this report, letters of support have been received from the Councillor of Ward 18 Willowdale and from the Yonge and North York BIA (Attachment 2, pp. 37-39).

Applying the Criteria Established by §694-30A of The Sign By-law

Section 694-30A(1): The Proposed Sign belongs to a sign class permitted in the Sign District where the premises is located

The Applicant identifies the Subject Premises as a CR sign district (Attachment 2, p. 32), and the Proposed Sign is described as a third party electronic window sign (Attachment 2, pp. 7, 26).

Given that signs belonging to the third party sign class, are permitted in the CR Sign District, the CBO is of the opinion that this criterion has been established.

Section 694-30A(2): The Proposed Sign is compatible with the development of the premises and surrounding area

The Applicant's submissions identify the existing use on the Subject Premises as commercial retail (Attachment 2, p. 27). While the surrounding area contains major mixed-use and commercial developments, with residential uses located at 33 Elmhurst Avenue and 4800 Yonge Street (Attachment 2, pp. 11, 26–27, 35), the submissions do not evaluate how the Proposed Sign would interact with these sensitive uses, nor do they demonstrate that its scale, placement, or illumination would avoid adverse effects on adjacent mixed-use or residential properties.

The CR Sign District regulations are intended to support mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented environments, such as the ones identified in the area. Yet the Proposed Sign significantly exceeds core limitations related to size, height, location, and copy type. The submissions do not address how the proposal aligns with the requirements of § 694-25B governing third party signs in CR Sign Districts.

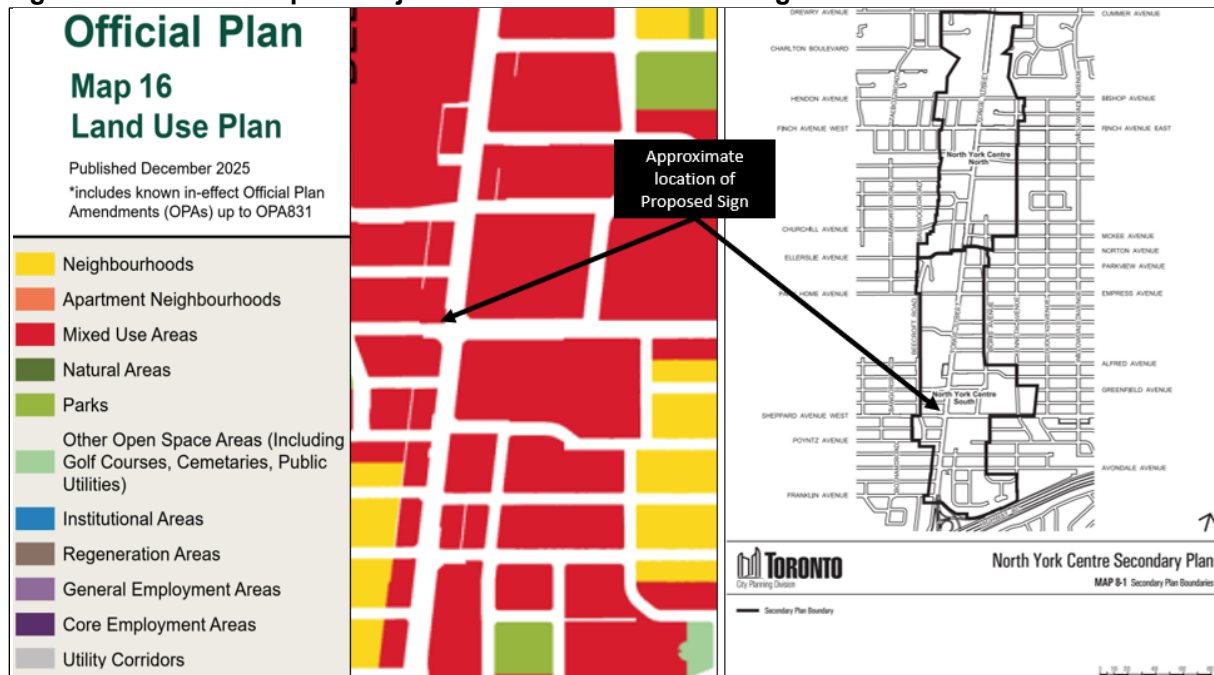
The Applicant references digital signage elsewhere in Toronto and North York Centre (Attachment 2, pp. 10, 35), as well as other third party signs in the broader area (Attachment 2, pp. 33–34). However, these examples are not comparable to the current application as either they fall outside the immediate area, involve different sign classes and types, and/or predate the current Sign By-law. The submissions also do not explain how these earlier approvals relate to the current regulatory framework, including the site-specific restriction in § 694-24A(23) prohibiting third party signs along this segment of Yonge Street, nor do they demonstrate how the Proposed Sign would not conflict with this prohibition.

Because the Applicant has not demonstrated how the Proposed Sign fits within these regulatory constraints or applicable policy restrictions, the CBO concludes that this criterion has not been satisfied.

Section 694-30A(3): The Proposed Sign supports Official Plan objectives for the subject premises and surrounding area

The Applicant's submissions identify that the Subject Premises is located within the North York Centre Secondary Plan area, where the Official Plan objectives emphasize creating a vibrant, multi-use district that supports cultural, economic, and community activity (Attachment 2, p. 30). The Applicant contends that the Proposed Sign would support Policies 2(b) and 2(c) by promoting creativity and innovation in arts and culture and supporting specialty retail associated with the Yonge North York BIA (Attachment 2, p. 35). However, staff were unable to locate the referenced policies within the Official Plan and therefore cannot confirm alignment with the stated policy rationale.

Figure 4: Land Use Map of Subject Premises and Surrounding Area



The Applicant also references objectives related to pedestrian-oriented environments, transit-supported intensification, and an active public realm, suggesting that programmable signage could aid wayfinding and support economic activity by promoting local events or businesses (Attachment 2, p. 30). However, no evidence was provided to further that third party electronic signs contribute to economic vitality or local engagement in a manner consistent with these planning objectives. Moreover, if the variances were approved, any lawful third party advertising content - local or not - could be displayed.

Moreover, the Applicant does not explain how a large-scale, second-storey third party electronic sign aligns with the pedestrian-focused objectives of the Official Plan and Secondary Plan, such as Policies 1.16 and 2.1.1 relating to at-grade activity and pedestrian-oriented design. Policy 2.1.4 also identifies public safety and pedestrian movement as explicit policy objectives, and the submissions do not address how the Proposed Sign supports to these considerations.

In light of the above, it is the CBO's opinion that not sufficient evidence was provided to demonstrate that the Proposed Sign supports Official Plan objectives, and this criterion has not been established.

Section 694-30A(4): The Proposed Sign does not adversely affect adjacent premises

The Applicant indicates that the Proposed Sign is designed with a downward angle to reduce glare, will be integrated behind glass to limit visual impact (Attachment 2, p. 35). They submit that the Proposed Sign would be located within an area characterized by large mixed-use buildings at surrounding corners and not create adverse impacts on nearby properties (Attachment 2, p. 28). However, the Applicant has not supplied an

analysis of potential visibility, illumination, or context-specific effects that would support this statement. Without technical evidence demonstrating the extent and direction of light output, staff cannot confirm whether the Proposed Sign would generate glare, visual intrusion, or nighttime disruption. The Applicant also references digital signage in unrelated locations (Attachment 2, pp. 10, 35), which is irrelevant to assessing effects of the Proposed Sign on adjacent premises in this local context.

Based on the above, the CBO concludes that this criterion has not been satisfied.

Section 694-30A(5): The Proposed Sign does not adversely affect public safety, including traffic and pedestrian safety

The City's Sign By-law regulations are intended to mitigate public safety impacts by ensuring that signs meeting prescribed standards do not create visual or physical hazards. The Applicant submits that the Proposed Sign - a second-storey display oriented toward traffic at Yonge and Sheppard - would incorporate high-resolution LED technology, brightness controls, and a downward angle intended to reduce driver distraction and glare (Attachment 2, pp. 27- 28, 36).

The Proposed Sign would be located within 30 metres of a signalized intersection (Attachment 2, p. 25), which conflicts with the setback requirements for third party signs under § 694-25.B(1)(d). The proximity of large electronic signage to signalized intersections is a key public-safety consideration. The submissions do not provide traffic safety analysis, no sightline assessment, no review of driver distraction potential, and no evaluation of signal visibility.

The Applicant also compares the Proposed Sign to digital displays located in other urban centres, including Yonge–Eglinton, The WELL, and the Bloor Street nodes (Attachment 2, pp.28 and 35), however the relevance of those examples cannot be established. No evidence has been provided to demonstrate that those locations have similar traffic volumes, signal spacing, roadway geometry, or collision risk factors. Submissions also lack evidence that directly addresses or evaluates public safety impacts associated with the Proposed Sign.

In the absence of a substantiated analysis demonstrating that the variance would not compromise traffic or pedestrian safety, the CBO concludes that this criterion has not been satisfied.

Section 694-30A(6): The Proposed Sign is not a sign prohibited by §694-15B

While the Applicant's submissions do not explicitly address the prohibited sign categories under § 694-15B, staff reviewed the documents and drawings provided and found no indication that the Proposed Sign meets the description of any sign type specifically prohibited by this section of the Sign By-law.

As such, the CBO is of the opinion that this criterion has been established.

Section 694-30A(7): The Proposed Sign does not alter the character of the premises or surrounding area

The Applicant asserts that the intersection functions as a “southern gateway” to North York Centre (Attachment 2, p.35), however they do not indicate any planning studies or guidelines to support this assertion or evidence indicating how the Proposed Sign meaningfully contributes the concept. They contend Proposed Sign would integrate with the building façade and enhance the corner (Attachment 2, pp. 33-34).

The Applicant references other digital signs in Toronto and North York Centre (Attachment pp. 10 and 35), however these examples either predate the Sign By-law or are outside the study area and therefore do not describe the character of this segment of Yonge Street. Further, the Subject Premises is located within site-specific area restriction § 694-24A(23), where third party signs are prohibited within 450 m of Yonge Street. The submissions do not address how introducing a 58 m² electronic window sign aligns with the area’s intended visual character established through this Council-directed prohibition.

The mapping of surrounding conditions shows no third party electronic signage on adjacent properties (Attachment 2, p. 27). The Applicant's submissions do not examine whether the Proposed Sign would be consistent with nearby signage in terms of scale, height, or illumination, nor does it evaluate clutter and visual prominence within the broader streetscape.

In the opinion of the CBO, the Applicant's submissions were not sufficient to conclude that the Proposed Sign would not alter the intended character of the area. As such, this criterion has not been satisfied.

Section: 694-30A(8): The Proposed Sign is not contrary to the public interest

The Applicant's submissions highlight a range of public-interest benefits, including the potential for community messaging, BIA-related content, arts and cultural promotion, and emergency notices (Attachment 2, pp. 27-28, 30, 35-36). They also include letters of support from the Yonge North York BIA and the Ward 18 Councillor, and state that these materials reflect an understanding that programmable signage may enhance communication and contribute to area vitality (Attachment 2, p. 37-39). While these perspectives provide useful context on how the Proposed Sign may be perceived by local stakeholders, under Chapter 694, once third party permissions are granted, any lawful third party advertising content may be displayed. The submissions do not address how agreements regarding community-focused messaging relates to the technical criteria under § 694-30A.

The materials also do not include evidence demonstrating how third party electronic signage supports economic vitality or local activities, nor do they explain how a large-format, second-storey third party electronic display relates to the pedestrian-focused objectives of the Official Plan. No technical studies were provided regarding visual effects, illumination, cumulative visual impact, safety evaluation, or interactions with nearby developments. The Applicant has also not provided explanation

of how the Proposed Sign aligns with the site-specific area restriction § 694-24A(23), nor do they discuss how the regulation may relate to built-form context, surrounding land uses, or the intended character of this segment of Yonge Street. The prohibition reflects Council's determination that third party signage in this area is inconsistent with City's municipal interests for both the area and the City as a whole.

For these reasons, in the opinion of the Chief Building Official, the Applicant has not established that the Proposed Sign would not be contrary to the public interest. Accordingly, this criterion has not been met.

CONCLUSION

The Applicant's materials, even supplemented by City Staff's research and investigation, have not provided sufficient information for the CBO to conclude that all eight criteria required to grant an approval for the requested variances have been established.

Specifically, the CBO is of the opinion that there was not sufficient information to establish that the Proposed Sign would be compatible with the development of the premises and surrounding area; would support Official Plan objectives for the premises and surrounding area; would not adversely affect adjacent premises; would not adversely affect public safety, including traffic and pedestrian safety; would not alter the character of the premises or surrounding area; and would not be contrary to the public interest.

As such, the CBO is not supportive of the Sign Variance Committee granting the requested variances.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Description of the Proposed Sign and Required Variances
Attachment 2 – Applicant's Submission Package