

Report to Council



Date: March 20, 2017
File: 1250-01
To: City Manager
From: Ryan Roycroft, Planner
Subject: Sign Bylaw Workshop

Recommendation:

THAT the Sign Bylaw Workshop report prepared by the Community Planning Department dated March 20, 2017 be received for information;

AND THAT Council direct Staff to bring the new Sign Bylaw to an afternoon Council meeting for consideration.

Purpose:

To review policy shifts in the Draft Sign Bylaw prior to the bylaw being considered for readings.

Background:

The new Sign Bylaw is prepared and ready for Council review and for reading consideration. Because there is no formal public hearing associated with the Sign Bylaw, Staff have prepared a briefing on key changes to the Bylaw that represent reasonably significant departures from previous policy. Key changes relate to digital signage and free standing sign heights.

A number of other changes have been made, largely to administrative and procedural matters. These amendments have been made in consultation with the Bylaw Enforcement and the Development Services Departments, the groups charged with implementing and enforcing the bylaw.

Animated and Digital Signs:

The current Sign Bylaw is unclear on the regulations regarding digital and animated signs. For the past 18 months, the City has been considering Digital Animated signs through the Council Development Permit process. Generally, digital signs in commercial buildings have not been supported, while digital signs on public service buildings such as churches or schools have been supported.

Staff are unable to see any public good, nor aesthetic value in allowing digital animated signs on commercial buildings. While new technologies allow sign lighting levels to be better controlled, there does not appear to be any benefit to residents of the city in expanding the deployment of these signs and it would not add to the visual character of the community.

The Official Community Plan currently gives some guidance on signs in the City.

Comprehensive Development Permit Guidelines

17.0 Signs

- 17.1 Integrate signage that contributes to the overall quality and unique character of a development (e.g. coordinate proportion, materials, and colour);
- 17.2 Do not compromise the scale and visual qualities of a building with the size and number of signs;
- 17.3 Locate, size, and format signs such that they can be easily read by pedestrians.
- 17.4 Where signage is proposed for buildings with historical character or heritage significance (i.e. Listed on the Heritage Register, with Heritage Designation and/or located in the Abbott Street and Marshall Street Heritage Conservation Areas) that signage should use design inspiration from historical influences (e.g. non-illuminated and non-animated.)

Revitalization Development Permit Areas (Downtown Considerations)

7.0 Signage

- 7.1 Design signage that is high quality, imaginative, and innovative;
- 7.2 Design signage with consideration of the size of any individual sign as part of the overall scheme of building signage and the appearance of the building's façade. Scale and architectural expression should not be compromised by size and number of signs;
- 7.3 Box signs are strongly discouraged;
- 7.4 Incorporate concise messaging and simple graphics into signage. Corporate and store logos are appropriate only if they form part of an overall sign design, and are suitably scaled to the façade composition;
- 7.5 Light lettering on a dark background is preferred over dark lettering on a light background and consideration should be given to those with visual impairment;
- 7.6 Minimize signage lighting (i.e., incorporate indirect front-lit signs wherever possible);
- 7.7 Counter-balance illuminated signs with natural materials and appropriate framing.

City Official Community Plan guidelines do not generally support digital animated signs in commercial, industrial or multi-family areas, especially downtown. The OCP emphasizes simple signage, unlit where possible, be installed as unobtrusively as possible.

Survey Responses:

The City conducted a survey on signage as part of the bylaw review process. The engagement indicated that 66% of respondents supported the notion of restricting digital signs to cultural, recreational and institutional areas. Only 13% of respondents felt digital signs were appropriate in local shopping areas. Respondents also indicated that they felt digital billboards were the most intrusive form of signage, with only 20% of respondents not considering them intrusive.

The engagement survey does not indicate a strong interest on the part of respondents for expanding digital signage coverage in the community.

Based on City policy and public comment, there does not appear to be any compelling reason to expand digital animated signage to commercial zones with this iteration of the bylaw. If Council opts to restrict digital signage at this time, as per the draft bylaw, the regulations can always be reconsidered if the OCP and public acceptance evolve. However, if Council opts to expand digital signage now, grandfathering protections will mean that the signage will not easily be removed if the decision is later reversed.

Sign Height

A common comment regarding the Harvey Ave corridor in Kelowna, and to a lesser extent other commercial corridors, relates to the number of free standing signs and sign clutter. The draft bylaw reduces the maximum size and height of free standing signs in commercial areas from 8.0 in height to 5.0 m in height.

The 8.0 m in height is already slightly lower than what is allowed in other Okanagan Valley communities.

Penticton – 9.0 m

Vernon – 9.0 m

West Kelowna – 9.0 m

The draft bylaw takes a stronger stand on signage size, placing Kelowna firmly in the category of leader in reducing signage size in the region. A 5.0m high sign is the size of a 1 ½ storey home and well visible from city streets.

Staff are recommending taking this route for a number of reasons. The OCP identifies a goal that Kelowna continue to develop a distinct style and feeling of its own. Traditionally, communities look at their neighbours to determine maximum sign sizes, leading to a fairly homogeneous level of signage across regions. By substantially reducing free standing sign sizes, Kelowna may set itself apart and begin to distinguish itself stylistically.

Sign size may also be varied by Council. Where an applicant requests a very large sign, Council will have an opportunity to review and determine if it appropriate.

Sandwich Board Signs

The current Sign Bylaw completely prohibits all Sandwich Board signs in the city, on private and public property. This has been cited by a number of groups consulted as excessive. It has also proven to be difficult to enforce. Further, the City does allow merchants on Bernard Avenue who enter into patio agreements to display sandwich board signs, notwithstanding the Bylaw, which is a source of frustration for other merchants.

Staff are recommending that the bylaw allow sandwich board signs to be located on private property, outside of the path of pedestrian travel. No signs would be permitted on public property.

Other Changes:

- All text in bylaw has been rewritten for internal consistency
- Restructured bylaw to read like the Zoning Bylaw
- Increased flexibility through menu-type options – “3 of the following kinds of signs”
- Increased allowances for Fascia Signs
- Clarified permit requirements for signage to improve usability
- Allowance of signs above a canopy
- Changed the way signs are measured to encourage channel letter signs over box signs
- Clarified the relationship between sign permits and Development Permits
- Increased use of imagery in bylaw
- Worked closely with Building and Bylaw Enforcement to enhance enforceability of the bylaw

Future Changes:

In the long-term, based on additional public engagement and paradigm changes in community expectations, staff may recommend additional amendments to continue to differentiate Kelowna from other communities.

Staff believe that as the city continues to evolve, free standing pylon signs may eventually be phased out entirely outside of Service Commercial and Industrial areas. Committing to this vision would starkly differentiate Kelowna from other cities in the valley and improve the character and quality of the built environment. In time, staff expect that Kelowna would see patterns of development similar to other cities where free standing signs are banned and where buildings are built closer to roadways to act as advertising, rather than signs.

Staff may also explore further reductions in lit fascia signs, especially in areas where there is already an established pattern of signage. This would apply to signs above the second floor.

As well, as Urban Center Plans continue, staff may recommend signage bylaw updates to require that signage be more contextual to identified neighbourhoods. Where the Urban Center Plans identify different characteristics or expectations in an area, the Sign Bylaw can be updated accordingly.

Considerations not applicable to this report:

Internal Circulation:

Legal/Statutory Authority:

Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:

Existing Policy:

Financial/Budgetary Considerations:

Personnel Implications:

External Agency/Public Comments:

Communications Comments:

Alternate Recommendation:

Submitted by:

Ryan Roycroft, Planner

Approved for inclusion:



Ryan Smith, Community Planning Manager

Attachments:

Sign Bylaw Survey

Draft Sign Bylaw