



## ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: June 15, 2017  
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Meeting Date: June 28, 2017

TO: Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities  
FROM: General Manager of Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability  
SUBJECT: Sign By-law Review: New Sign By-law and Sign Fee By-law

### ***RECOMMENDATION***

A. THAT the General Manager of Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability be instructed to make an application to Council and bring forward:

- (i) a new Sign By-law; and
- (ii) a new Sign Fee By-law;

FURTHER that application be referred to a Public Hearing; and

FURTHER THAT the Director of Legal Services be instructed to prepare the necessary by-laws, generally in accordance with Appendices A and B, for consideration at Public Hearing.

- B. THAT subject to enactment of the new Sign By-law and Sign Fee By-law, Sign By-law No. 6510 be repealed.
- C. THAT Council direct the Director of Legal Services to request that the Province expand Council's authority to relax the Sign By-law regulations under Section 571AA of the *Vancouver Charter* to allow for flexibility for staff to consider creative and unique signs.
- D. THAT subject to enactment of the new Sign By-law and Sign Fee By-law, in January 2018, Council direct staff to undertake an education and enforcement campaign as proposed in this report.
- E. THAT Council endorse proceeding with Phase II of the Sign By-law review to address billboards, third party advertising and corporate sponsorship on private property, in coordination with other City and Park Board initiatives for advertising and sponsorship in the public realm, including on city streets and within city parks.

## **REPORT SUMMARY**

This report recommends Council adoption of a new Sign By-law and associated Sign Fee By-law. This represents the first comprehensive update to the City's Sign By-law (no. 6510) since it was adopted nearly 30 years ago in 1989.

The focus of this by-law update is on business identification signage which represents 99 percent of sign applications processed by the City. The updated Sign By-law is reformatted to be more efficient and user friendly and includes simplified regulations that reflect best practices and will reduce the need for relaxations. Several new sign types are introduced, including window signs and electronic signs.

The new by-law also formally incorporates the authorities which became part of the *Vancouver Charter* in 2006 and provide the Director of Planning with the authority to administer relaxations to the Sign By-law for unnecessary hardship, heritage, special events and new technology. To reflect this, the sign application review process has been revised to create two application streams: simple and complex. This approach will improve processing times for simple sign applications that comply with the Sign By-law, while the complex stream will provide the opportunity to consider applications requiring relaxations.

To provide additional assistance to applicants with unique signs that contribute to the public realm, but cannot be considered within the new by-law or relaxation provisions, a new minor Sign By-law amendment process and fee have also been created. To reduce the need for such minor amendments in the future, the report recommends that Council request that the Province amend the *Vancouver Charter* to expand the staff's authority to relax the by-law for unique and creative signs.

The proposed Sign Fee By-law includes revised sign permit and Sign By-law amendment application fees. These fees reflect the new, two-stream application review process, amendment process and full cost recovery objective.

A public consultation process to obtain feedback on the proposed regulations and permit process was held between August 2016 and January 2017. It included a Talk Vancouver Survey and a series of workshops and meetings with representatives of the sign industry, Business Improvement Associations (BIAs), various City committees and interest groups.

Should Council approve the new Sign By-law, after public hearing, the report recommends that Council direct staff to develop and undertake an education and enforcement campaign with the enactment of the new by-law, which is proposed for January 2018. The campaign, which will be designed and implemented in coordination with Development, Building and Licensing and Corporate Communications, will focus on raising awareness of the City's sign regulations and increasing compliance with the new by-law.

Finally, the report recommends that Council endorse Phase II of the Sign By-law review, which will focus on the regulation of conventional (paper) billboards, digital billboards and other forms of third party advertising, including corporate sponsorship, on private property. The Phase II review is to be coordinated with other City and Park Board initiatives involving advertising, sponsorship and digital displays in the public realm.

### ***COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS***

In March 2009, Council deferred the decision to remove the City's non-conforming billboards until a review of the Sign By-law was complete, taking into account the *Vancouver Charter* authority to provide relaxations for unnecessary hardship, heritage, special events and new technologies.

It is Council policy that fees and other charges be established on the basis of the full cost of providing the associated services.

### ***CITY MANAGER'S/GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS***

The City Manager and the General Manager of Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability RECOMMENDS approval of the foregoing.

### ***REPORT***

#### ***Background/Context***

The Sign By-law applies to all signs on private property, visible from the street, including on lands covered by water. The by-law does not apply to signs on streets, parks or on provincial and federal lands. Signs that are not regulated by or specifically exempted from the by-law are prohibited.

An update of the Sign By-law has been long anticipated. Since the existing Sign By-law was approved in 1989, Council has approved minor amendments to sign regulations and considered policy reports related to specific sign types, such as billboards.

In 2016, an inter-departmental staff team, led by the Planning Department, began work on a two phase update of the Sign By-law. Phase I of the review, focused on updating and restructuring the Sign By-law for business identification signs on private property and, if approved, will conclude with the enactment of the new Sign By-law.

Phase II of the Sign By-law update will focus on the role and regulation of billboards, advertising and sponsorship in the public realm. This work is being co-ordinated with a broader review of City advertising, sponsorship and signage initiatives in consultation with staff from the Park Board and various City departments including Engineering, Real Estate and Facilities Management, Finance, and Digital Services.

#### ***Strategic Analysis***

The regulations in the current Sign By-law have not been comprehensively updated since 1989. Since then trends in sign design and technology and building design and construction have changed (e.g. more glass curtain walls). Phase 1 of the Sign By-law review focused on modernizing and updating the City's sign regulations to reflect best practices. The proposed new sign regulations also take into account issues that resulted in appeals in the past and should reduce the need for relaxations. Major changes to the by-law include:

- Re-organizing the structure of the Sign By-law to improve user friendliness;
- Updating the regulations to:

- include new intent statements;
  - modernize and simplify existing regulations;
  - include new sign types and regulations;
  - exempt more small signs from permit requirement to simplify the permit process;
  - better distinguish public art from signage; and
  - align with the City's Naming Rights Policy;
- Incorporating provisions based on *Vancouver Charter* authority to enable the Director of Planning to administer relaxations in certain circumstances;
  - Streamlining the application review process; and
  - Updating permit fees to reflect the new review process and ensure full cost recovery.

The following sections discuss the key updates to the Sign By-law. A detailed description of the changes to the By-law is provided in Appendix C.

### ***1.0 Organization and Structure***

The new by-law has been reorganized to improve user-friendliness and reduce the amount of cross referencing required. The by-law is organized into general regulations which apply city-wide and seven comprehensive sign districts that regulate the look and feel of signage in each district. The latter includes the two largest districts, the residential and the commercial/mixed use and industrial sign districts which encompass the majority of the city, and five smaller distinct character areas: Chinatown and Gastown, the West End, Granville Street (downtown), Rogers Arena and International Village.

The intent of each sign district is to ensure that signage reinforces and compliments the character of the area and the streetscape and, where appropriate, reflects heritage and historic values. Each district has its own set of regulations. Signage is most restricted in residential areas, while more prominent signage is enabled in the downtown commercial core. On Granville Street large neon projecting signs are encouraged, while in Chinatown, a diversity of traditional sign types, including neon and other illuminated signs are encouraged to revitalize and maintain the character of the area.

### ***2.0 Update of Sign Regulations***

#### ***2.1 New Intent Statements***

The new Sign By-law provides a set of value-based intent statements or guiding principles that inform the content of the regulations. The intent statements focus on and give priority to:

- supporting local commercial activity through business identification and wayfinding;
- respecting neighbourhood character and context;
- preserving signs with historic and heritage value;
- promoting good design to enhance the public realm;
- encouraging energy efficiency and reducing light pollution; and
- ensuring public safety and preventing visual clutter.

The statements also serve as guiding principles to assist staff in administering the new relaxations.

## *2.2 Modernize and simplify existing regulations:*

The Sign By-law regulations have been updated to reflect new signage trends, along with changes in sign and building construction. The revisions include providing:

- more flexibility and options for siting canopy signs;
- fascia signs on the second storey of buildings and on glass building walls;
- streamlined and more flexible regulations for fascia signs located above 20 metres;
- simplified regulations for projecting signs;
- more options for signage for cultural, institutional and recreational uses;
- flexibility to allow more free-standing signs and free-standing wayfinding signs on larger sites and campuses; and
- new regulations to allow larger hoarding signs at construction sites.

These revisions and others listed in Appendix C will assist in improving efficiency by reducing the need for appeals to the Sign By-law.

## *2.3 New Signs and Regulations*

In addition, the new by-law introduces several new sign types to reflect current sign practices. These include:

### *(i) Window signs*

Despite the proliferation of temporary and permanent signs in business windows across the city, including identification signs, menu signs and opaque vinyl film and lifestyle images, window signs are not currently permitted by the Sign By-law.

The new Sign By-law includes regulations that will allow signs on windows, including small electronic signs (open-close, hours of operation), on the first or second storey of buildings. The signs will be exempt from the requirement for a sign permit provided they don't cover more than 30 percent of a storefront's glass façade on the first storey or 10 percent on the second storey. The regulations will ensure that sight lines in and out of premises are maintained for pedestrian interest and safety and to align with the City's design guidelines for active pedestrian-oriented streets which call for first floor transparency.

### *(ii) Temporary Signs*

The by-law also makes provision for a number of temporary (time-limited) signs that may be used to advertise events sponsored by civic, charitable, cultural and community organizations, to advertise farmers' markets, to promote business openings and sales and to display public service messages about municipal programs and services. Temporary signs will be exempt from the requirement for a sign permit.

### *(iii) Projected image signs*

Projected image signs are also introduced as a type of temporary sign, which may be used to advertise civic, charitable and cultural events. These signs project a static image onto a building or surface that is visible from the street or another site. They will be permitted to a maximum of 12 m<sup>2</sup> (129 sq.ft.) on a time-limited basis and exempt from the requirement for a sign permit.

#### *2.4 Electronic Signs*

Three types of electronic signs will also be regulated in the new by-law. These include:

- Electronic Message Signs - signs with electronic copy that display text only;
- Electronic Static Image Signs - signs with electronic copy that include images and text and remain static on the screen for a stipulated period of time (at least 10 seconds); and
- Electronic Video Signs - signs that display video or moving electronic copy.

Electronic message signs (formerly known as automatic changeable copy signs) will continue to be allowed in certain areas of the city subject to meeting specific size requirements. Electronic static image signs and electronic video signs are new sign types which will be allowed in windows at the first storey of a building within a limited area of the downtown core including portions of Robson Street, West Georgia Street and Granville Street (See Map 1). The signs will be restricted to one per premise or business and may cover no more than 30 percent of a storefront's glass facade, up to a maximum area of 2.5 m<sup>2</sup>. The electronic and static image signs will be monitored to determine their uptake and impact. This will assist with consideration of the possible application of these signs to other commercial areas of the city.

The proposed changes to the Sign By-law allowing for electronic static image and video signs are generally conservative in light of the range of digital signs, screens and technologies now available on the market. However, this is consistent with feedback received through public consultation to limit opportunities for electronic signs. In keeping with past practice, it is recommended that larger electronic signs and screens, particularly those displaying third party advertising, continue to be considered by Council on a case-by-case basis through a Sign By-law amendment application and public hearing process. The by-law amendment process provides Council, staff and the public with the opportunity to assess the merit of the sign, and, where necessary, to impose operational and programming restrictions. Under Phase 2 of the Sign By-law review, staff will also review opportunities for electronic advertising signs, in coordination with other civic digital initiatives.

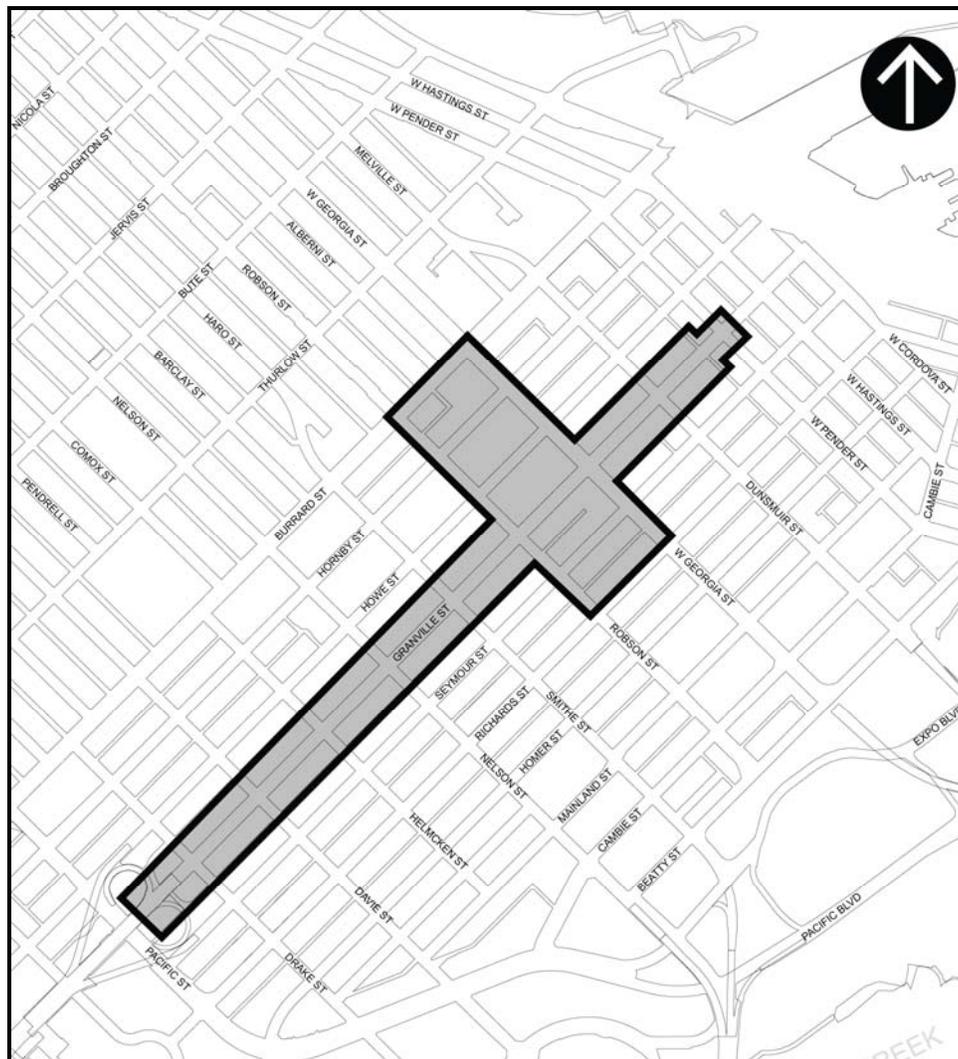
#### *2.5 New Electronic Sign Regulations*

New regulations to control the operation and brightness of electronic signs, minimize their impact on nearby properties, and limit driver distraction are proposed in the new by-law. Specifically the regulations stipulate that all electronic message, static image and video signs will:

- not increase the ambient light on an adjacent street or site by more than 3.0 lux;

- be equipped with ambient light sensors to automatically adjust sign luminance;
- not exceed a luminance of 300 nits between sunset and sunrise and 5000 nits between sunrise and sunset;
- be located at least 30 m from a dwelling unit facing the sign area;
- default to a black screen if the sign malfunctions; and
- not be located within 15 m of a traffic control signal.

Map 1: Areas Permitting Electronic Static Image and Video Signs



The regulations also ensure that all signs with electronic copy located within 60 m of a dwelling unit facing the sign area are turned off between the hours of 11 pm and 7 am or when a premise is not open for business. The Granville Street Sign District, as an entertainment precinct, is exempt from the latter rule.

In the future, electronic signs which are approved under site specific regulations (e.g., the electronic video signs at Robson and Granville Street) will be required to adhere to the new regulations. The regulations will also be used as a reference for future



## 2.7 Other Considerations

Additional changes to the by-law include:

(i) More exemptions from sign permit requirements

The current Sign By-law exempts a limited number of small signs, such as real estate signs and election signs, from the requirement for a sign permit provided they meet certain size and location criteria. To further streamline the application process and enable staff to focus on applications for larger and more complex signs, the new by-law will exempt more small signs from sign permit requirements, including new window and temporary signs.

(ii) Distinguishing between public art and signs

In the past there has been a lack of clarity regarding art versus signs. While some art may be similar to a sign in appearance, it does not have the same primary purpose and function of signage as business identification. To distinguish between art and signage, the new by-law provides an updated definition of a sign to exclude public art (including murals, light banding, electronic screens) approved by the City, through either a public art program or development permit.

(iii) Allowing for Public Art Sponsorship

Public art, such as a mural, often identifies the name of a sponsor. Under the current by-law, any reference to a business, product or service not provided on site, including the name of a sponsor, is considered third party advertising and is generally not allowed. Because sponsorship is often critical to the provision of public art, the definition of third party advertising has been revised so that acknowledgement of the artist, owner or sponsor of public art approved by the City will be allowed.

(iv) Alignment with City's Naming Rights policy

The current Sign By-law conflicts with the City's Naming Rights Policy. That policy enables the City to approve the naming of a civic community facility that is leased and operated by a non-profit organization, to recognize a significant corporate sponsor (e.g., the BMO Theatre Centre). Under the current by-law, sponsor names on signage are considered third party advertising. To address this, the definition of third party advertising has been revised to exclude the sponsor names on civic facilities leased or operated by non-profits, in keeping with the City's policy.

## 3.0 New Director of Planning Administered Relaxations

### 3.1 Background

The existing Sign By-law is based on *Vancouver Charter* authority as it existed in 1989. It consists of prescriptive regulations only. While this provides applicants with a clear understanding of the specific requirements, it also means there has been no flexibility in applying the by-law and no ability to respond to unique circumstances or sign proposals. Historically, if an application does not comply with the Sign By-law, applicants have

either applied to amend the Sign By-law through a public hearing process or appealed to the Board of Variance. On average, the City has received one or two by-law amendment applications and the Board of Variance has received 50 appeals, annually.

Amendment of the Sign By-law through a public hearing process has been used to introduce new sign districts or to allow larger, unique signs that have an impact on the public realm, such as the video screen signs at Granville and Robson Streets.

### 3.2 *2006 Vancouver Charter Legislation*

In 2006, the *Vancouver Charter* was amended by the Province to include provisions that enable Council to authorize the Director of Planning to administer relaxations to the Sign By-law for unnecessary hardship, heritage, new technology and special events. To date, the only time Council has used this authority was to temporarily amend the Sign By-law to permit unique signs and light projections during the 2010 Winter Olympics.

The proposed new Sign By-law will incorporate all the relaxation authorities authorized by the *Vancouver Charter*. The Charter amendments also provide that any appeal from a decision regarding relaxation must be to Council. As a result, appeals related to relaxations of the Sign By-law may not be considered by the Board of Variance.

Incorporating all the relaxation authorities into the new by-law will provide the Director of Planning with flexibility to relax the by-law to address many of the issues presently resulting in appeals.

### 3.4 *Regulations for Relaxations*

To support the administration of the relaxation provisions, the Sign By-law includes new definitions for unnecessary hardship and heritage, along with regulations that provide detailed criteria for the consideration of a relaxation. These include:

#### (i) Unnecessary Hardship

The proposed regulations will allow relaxations where there are unique physical circumstances that are peculiar and specific to the site and make it difficult to comply with the provisions of the Sign By-law. Under the new by-law, unnecessary hardship "does not include mere inconvenience or preference for a more lenient standard or a more profitable use" and the criteria used in considering a relaxation include how the proposal fits with the intent of the regulations, the context of the neighbourhood, the size and location of the site/premises, site topography and building and site design. Also taken into consideration are the potential impacts of the relaxation on public safety and adjacent properties and the submission of any interested parties.

#### (ii) Heritage

The relaxation provisions will provide staff with more flexibility in administering the by-law for signs on sites that are not officially 'protected' or 'designated' heritage areas. In particular, the provisions for heritage will enable relaxations to the Sign By-law for signs

on properties that have heritage value or are located in historic zoning areas (i.e. Yaletown, Gastown and Chinatown) and are not covered by Heritage Alteration Permits (HAPs) or Heritage Conservation Areas. Under the by-law, heritage value is defined as having “aesthetic, historic, scientific, cultural, social or spiritual significance for past, present and future generations”.

These provisions will also provide the Director of Planning with the ability to relax the by-law to allow refurbished original signs and replica signs that do not conform to the by-law, to be attached or re-attached to old buildings or in new developments. This will enable more efficient processing: past practice was to refuse these signs and require that the applicant appeal to the Board of Variance.

### (iii) New Technology and Special Events

Sign types and technologies evolve quickly. New sign types and forms may emerge that are consistent with the intent of the by-law but are not contemplated or regulated by the by-law. The relaxation provisions will enable consideration of these new signs without the need for a lengthier amendment process. The new provisions will also provide flexibility in considering signs for special events, designated by Council through a resolution or by by-law.

## 3.5 *Appeal to Council*

As previously noted, under the Charter any appeal of a decision of the Director of Planning regarding a relaxation must be to Council. An applicant who wishes to appeal a decision on a relaxation will request reconsideration at a special meeting of Council. The process will be similar to First Shaughnessy’s Heritage Conservation Area (HCA) appeals process and provide Council with the opportunity to uphold or vary a decision.

As an applicant may only appeal to Council from a decision on a relaxation, staff anticipate few such appeals. The new by-law regulations and relaxation provisions will provide more flexibility in administering the by-law and have addressed the majority (70 percent) of issues that have been the subject of Board of Variance appeals in the past.

The consideration of appeals will also be informed by the precise definitions and relaxation criteria that will provide clear guidance as to when a relaxation can or cannot be considered. Situations in which a relaxation cannot be considered include, if:

- a sign is not consistent with the overall intent and purpose of the regulations or Sign District;
- a relaxation of the regulations would alter the essential character of a building, neighbourhood or Sign District; or
- a sign impacts public safety or would negatively impact neighbouring properties.

It is expected that special meetings of Council to hear appeals will be held a maximum of two to three times a year, or as needed.

#### *4.0 Streamlined Review Process, New Fee Schedule*

##### *4.1 Simple and Complex Sign Permits*

To reflect the inclusion of provisions for relaxations and to further simplify the review process, the sign permit application process will be restructured and reflected in a new Sign Fee By-law that will accompany the Sign By-law.

Under the new review process, sign permit applications will be processed under one of two streams: simple or complex. Simple permits will apply to applications which comply with the by-law and will have a quick review and processing, while complex sign permits will be required for applications that require a more detailed review, such as those involving a relaxation or billboard signs. Today, the City issues an average of about 650 sign permits per year and 90 percent of all permits typically comply with the by-law.

##### *4.2 Ensuring Cost Recovery*

Council policy is to set fees and other charges on the basis of the full cost of providing services. In November 2015 and in May 2016, Council implemented a series of fee and permit increases to various by-laws based on a comprehensive review of services. Apart from annual inflationary increases, the increase in Sign By-law fees was postponed until the new by-law was introduced.

The proposed Sign Fee By-law includes updated fees that will ensure the signage program is fully cost recovered. The new fee for a simple sign permit application will be \$294 (an increase of 55 percent), while a complex sign permit will cost \$694, which is similar to the cost of a simple sign permit, plus the additional fee for an appeal that is currently charged at the Board of Variance. Both fees will now include the cost of a building inspection. Signs requiring an electrical connection and inspection will be charged an additional fee of \$149 (an increase of 57 percent). These fee increases appear substantial as sign fees have not increased significantly since the by-law was adopted in 1989. However, staff note that the updated fees are comparable to the sign permit fees in several other major cities across Canada. Appendix B includes a comprehensive list of the changes and fee increases made in the Sign Fee By-law.

##### *4.3 Revised Sign By-law Amendment Fees*

In addition to introducing simple and complex sign permit streams to improve processing, staff have updated the Sign By-law amendment process.

Despite the updates to the by-law and the provisions for relaxations, Sign By-law amendments will continue to be required for unique, creative or larger signs that are not permitted or contemplated by the by-law and do not qualify for a relaxation on the basis of unnecessary hardship, heritage, new technology or special events.

Today, there are three types of Sign By-law amendments. The first involves amendments that occur at the time of rezoning, when a new CD-1 district is assigned to a sign district to regulate future signage. The cost of the amendment varies (\$160- \$1,600) depending on whether the site is being assigned to a sign district with the same or different regulations than currently exist for the site, despite having the same process and requiring the same

staff time. The second tier of amendments (\$6,800) involves amending one section of the by-law (e.g. for a unique or large sign), while a third tier amendment (\$10,220) is available to applicants requesting a new sign type that involves amending several sections of the by-law or creating a new sign district schedule. Both the second and third tier amendments typically involve public meetings and consultation prior to the public hearing.

To further simplify and update this fee structure, the new Sign Fee By-law:

- includes a new updated fee (\$600) for all CD-1 zones assigned a sign district at the time of rezoning;
- maintains the fee (\$6,800) for major by-law amendments (e.g., large electronic video signs or sign types not permitted in a sign district that may impact adjacent sites and require additional consultation prior to public hearing), but adds an incremental fee (\$1,360) for each additional sign requiring an amendment under the same application; and
- includes an updated fee (\$20,000) to create a new sign district to better reflect the complexity of creating area specific regulations.

#### *4.4 Minor Sign Amendments and Charter Amendments*

In addition, the Sign Fee By-law contains a new minor Sign By-law amendment process that would create site-specific regulations to allow for unique, creative or innovative signs. These are signs that do not qualify for a relaxation on the basis of unnecessary hardship, heritage, special events and new technology, but require variations from the by-law. The signs will need to demonstrate exceptional design, be unique to a specific context, building or applicant and have a positive impact on the surrounding area. The signs should not create significant impacts on neighbouring properties or require extensive public notification or consultation prior to referral to Council for public hearing. The proposed amendment fee for these signs is \$3,000, with an incremental fee of \$600 for each additional sign requiring a minor amendment under the same application.

Applicants applying for a creative sign amendment will be required to meet a set of criteria that will be administered by the Director of Planning via staff and an internal design committee. The criteria will include standards as to what constitutes a creative sign, as well as parameters for evaluation.

Ideally, the criteria guiding consideration of a variance to the by-law for creative signs would be included in the Sign By-law and staff would administer a relaxation rather than process an amendment to the by-law. Staff are, therefore, requesting that Council direct the Director of Legal Services to request an amendment to the *Vancouver Charter* to expand the authority to relax the Sign By-law regulations under Section 571AA of the *Vancouver Charter* in order to enable creative and unique signs. This authority will further improve the efficiency of the permitting process and ensure that applicants with unique signs in the future do not have to go through a more lengthy and costly Sign By-law amendment process and Public Hearing.

### *5.0 Summary of Public Engagement and Consultation Activities*

Between August 2016 and January 2017, staff ran a public consultation process to obtain feedback on the proposed Sign By-law regulations and permitting process. The consultation, which kicked off with the introduction of a Sign By-law website and a Talk Vancouver Survey, included a series of meetings and workshops with the members of the sign industry, Business Improvement Associations (BIAs), City committees and other interest groups.

In all staff met with over 80 individuals with an interest in the Sign By-law during the course of the consultation. Highlights of the survey findings and the key messages from the survey and meetings are summarized below. Appendix D and E also contain a detailed description and summary of the Talk Vancouver Survey and the project's Public Consultation Summary Report.

#### Talk Vancouver Survey

From August 17 - September 18, 2016, a Talk Vancouver Survey, comprised of 28 questions, invited members of the public to share their thoughts on the different types of signs in Vancouver, how they should be regulated, and to obtain feedback on the new sign types and regulations being considered for the city. While the survey focused largely on business identification signage, it also included a few questions about advertising and sponsorship in the city.

Over 3,200 people responded to the Sign By-law survey, which was accessible to Talk Vancouver panel members and the general public via the Sign By-law webpage. Media coverage and an email invitation to external vendor panel members were also used to attract respondents to ensure a broad representation of participants. The survey results were weighted by age and residential zone to match census data for the city, and provided a representative sample with a margin of error of +/-1.0 percent.

A key message from the survey was that people are generally happy with the status quo and have a limited appetite for digital signage. Over 65 percent of those surveyed saw the city as having less signage than other cities and were happy with the level of signage. Seventy-three (73 percent) of the survey's respondents wanted the level of signage in the city to remain the same or decrease.

The intent statements (guiding principles) and electronic sign regulations proposed for the by-law also received high levels (75 -92 percent) of support. Forty-seven (47 percent) of respondents agreed with allowing electronic message signs in residential areas for use by cultural, recreational and institutional organizations, as well as, electronic image and video signs in the downtown commercial area limited to a portion of first storey windows. Sixty-one (61 percent) agreed with allowing projected image signs on a time-limited basis to promote civic, non-profit or cultural community events.

Generally, there was little appetite for much more electronic or digital signage. Fifty-six (56 percent) of respondents did not support allowing electronic static images or video copy on business identification signs such as fascia or freestanding signs, and electronic signage was seen as most appropriate in entertainment areas.

## Stakeholder Consultation

In addition, staff met with a number of external stakeholder groups, panels and committees to get input on the Sign By-law update. From March 2016 to January 2017, staff presented to and met with members of the Sign Industry of Canada, the Greater Vancouver sign industry, the Business Improvement Associations (BIAs), the Chinatown and the Gastown Historic Area Planning Committees (CHPAC and GHPAC), the Heritage Commission, the Urban Design Panel and the Persons with Disabilities Committee.

During the initial scoping of the project in 2013, most of these groups identified issues with both the readability and usability of the existing by-law, outdated regulations that did not reflect current sign and building technology, stressed the need for increased flexibility in the administration of the by-law to allow more creativity and indicated a desire to simplify and speed up the permit processing.

At the most recent meetings, the majority of those consulted generally endorsed the proposed updates to the Sign by-law. There was support for the introduction of the new sign types, the simplification of the regulations as well as the efforts to reduce the number common 'hardships' that require an appeal to the Board of Variance and streamline the sign permitting process. Many sign industry members thought the new by-law would encourage increased compliance. Sign industry and community representatives also expressed concern with the current complaint-basis enforcement and asked that the City increase enforcement efforts with the adoption of the new by-law.

There was also support for the creation of a new user guide, a fast-tracked simple sign permit process and a revised application submission process. Staff also received support from CHPAC, GHPAC, the Heritage Commission and the Urban Design Panel on the proposed Director of Planning administered relaxations to ensure that signs with heritage value to remain in situ after refurbishment or redevelopment.

Staff did hear concern from some members of the sign industry, and BIA representatives, about the removal of the Board of Variance from the Sign By-law appeal process. Concern focussed on the ease and expediency of the appeal process to Council.

Comments and feedback received through the consultation process has been incorporated into updated sign regulations. For example, in response to a request from the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association, the hours of illumination regulations for second storey signage were amended to exempt a larger portion of the downtown core. At both CHPAC and GHPAC's request, staff extended the new illumination regulations to include both Chinatown and Gastown given the amount of residential development in the area. Staff also amended the Chinatown's Sign District intent statement to encourage Chinese text and provided for neon-like LED illumination and in the HA-1 and HA-1A zones.

Finally through the public process, interest was expressed in creating new Sign Districts (e.g. an Alberni Street luxury goods sign district) through community plan implementation to better reflect the unique character of an area.

## ***6.0 Next Steps:***

### ***6.1 Phase I: Enactment and Enforcement***

If adopted by Council, the new Sign By-law and Sign Fee By-law will be enacted on January 1, 2018. This will provide time to review all in-stream sign permit applications, make the programming changes necessary to implement the new By-law, and train staff.

The programming changes will include updating POSSE to reflect the new permit streams, fees and fee structure, as well as revising the sign permit application package to make it more user-friendly and to clarify application requirements. An illustrated user guide will be created to accompany the Sign By-law. The new guide will explain the approval processes, the intent of the sign regulations and provide illustrative examples.

In January 2018, the new Sign By-law is to be launched in coordination with an education campaign, designed in conjunction with Development, Building and Licensing and Corporate Communications. The launch will involve developing a new website and a media and education blitz. Flyers and leaflets will be sent out through the business license renewal process in January, notifying property and business owners about the new by-law and the requirement to obtain a sign permit for new signs.

To further increase awareness, staff recommend increased enforcement, with the enactment of the new Sign By-law. Currently it is estimated that up to 80 percent of signs in the city are without permit or in contravention of permit requirements. Development Services will coordinate a program that will focus on increasing window sign, hoarding sign and electronic sign compliance.

### ***6.2 Phase II***

Phase II of the Sign By-law review, which will focus on the role and regulation of billboards, third party advertising and corporate sponsorship of the city, is getting underway. The initial work, has involved updating the billboard inventory and best practices research.

Vancouver is presently one of four municipalities in BC that continue to allow new conventional or paper billboards. Of the 453 billboards in Vancouver, 71 percent or 324 billboards now are legally non-conforming, largely as a result of redevelopment and changing regulations (e.g., required separation distance from residential units). In addition, there has been continuing industry interest in introducing more digital billboards and larger format electronic video signs across the city and allowing for more sponsorship signage.

Phase II is intended to address these concerns in co-ordination with a broader review of advertising, sponsorship and signage initiatives, such as transit shelter ads, interactive kiosks and other digital programs, which is being undertaken in conjunction with the Park Board and various departments including Engineering, Finance and Cultural and Digital Services. It is anticipated that staff will report back with recommendations in early 2018.

### ***Financial Implications***

As previously noted, the new Sign Fee By-law includes updated fees for sign permits to ensure the signage program is fully cost recovered. The by-law also includes increased fees for

inspections and work without permit that are in keeping with other City by-laws to ensure a full cost recovery of building and electrical inspectors staff time. Based on the current number of applications and projected volumes, it is estimated the proposed fee increases will generate additional operating revenue of approximately \$150,000 annually, effective January 1, 2018, to cover the cost of staff time for processing simple and complex permits.

The fees for amendments to the Sign By-law have also been updated based on the anticipated number of applications. Staff will monitor the number of applications and processes to ensure full cost recovery.

### ***CONCLUSION***

Signs are an important means of communication and support the local economy by providing appropriate identification to businesses and wayfinding. Regulating signs to promote and maintain public safety and encouraging signs that are innovative, contextual and enhance the public realm is crucial.

The new Sign By-law provides a significant update from the current by-law. It includes simpler, up-to-date regulations to reflect current sign and building practices to ensure that new signage enhances the public realm.

In addition, the new by-law incorporates all of the 2006 *Vancouver Charter* amendments that will enable the Director of Planning to relax the Sign By-law in certain circumstances. The relaxation provisions will provide for a more expedient review of applications requesting relaxations for unnecessary hardship, heritage, special events and new technology. The application review process will be streamlined to ensure faster processing times for simple applications that comply with the Sign By-law. The Sign By-law fees are also revised to ensure full cost recovery.

As part of the By-law update, a minor Sign By-law amendment process is also being proposed to better assist applicants with unique, creative and innovative signs. To encourage unique and creative signs with a positive impact on the public realm, staff are requesting that Council approach the Province to expand the authority to relax the Sign By-law for these signs.

Finally, if adopted, the Sign By-law will come into effect in January 2018, accompanied by an education and enforcement program. In addition, subject to Council approval, Phase II of the Sign By-law review will proceed and will address billboards, third party advertising and corporate sponsorship on private property, in coordination with other City initiatives. It is anticipated, staff will report back with recommendations on Phase II of the Sign By-law update in early 2018.

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