



REFERRAL REPORT

Report Date: February 2, 2021
Contact: Jason Olinek
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RTS No.: 14210
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: March 9, 2021

TO: Vancouver City Council
FROM: General Manager of Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability
SUBJECT: Sign By-law Amendment - 688 Hamilton Street

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the application by Permit Masters on behalf of the City of Vancouver, the registered owners, of a building having a civic address of 688 Hamilton Street (PID: 011-641-479, Block 47 District Lot 541 Plan 21824) to amend the Sign By-law to allow one new free-standing electronic static image sign at Cambie Street and to replace three free-standing electronic static image signs at West Georgia Street, Hamilton Street and Dunsmuir Street, be referred to public hearing, together with:
- (i) draft by-law amendments generally as presented in Appendix A; and
 - (ii) the recommendation of the General Manager of Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability to approve the application;

FURTHER THAT the Director of Legal Services be instructed to prepare the necessary amending by-law, generally in accordance with Appendix A, for consideration at public hearing.

- B. THAT Recommendation A be adopted on the following conditions:
- (i) THAT the passage of the above resolutions creates no legal rights for the applicant or any other person, or obligation on the part of the City and any expenditure of funds or incurring of costs is at the risk of the person making the expenditure or incurring the cost;
 - (ii) THAT any approval that may be granted following the public hearing shall not obligate the City to enact a by-law amending the Sign By-law and any costs incurred in fulfilling requirements imposed as a condition of amending the Sign By-law are at the risk of the property owner; and

- (iii) THAT the City and all its officials, including the Approving Officer, shall not in any way be limited or directed in the exercise of their authority or discretion, regardless of when they are called upon to exercise such authority or discretion.

REPORT SUMMARY

This report evaluates an application to amend the Sign By-law at 688 Hamilton Street (Queen Elizabeth Theatre) to allow:

- a new free-standing electronic static image sign along Cambie Street; and
- the replacement of three free-standing electronic static image signs along West Georgia Street, Hamilton Street and Dunsmuir Street.

The proposed signage would display first party content such as theatre programming and events. There will be no advertising for products or services. Staff have assessed the application and conclude that it meets the intent of the Sign By-law. It is anticipated that Sign By-law regulations for brightness and hours of operation will result in reduced impacts on neighbouring properties. Staff recommend the application be referred to a Public Hearing, with the recommendation of the General Manager of Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability to approve it, subject to a Public Hearing.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

- *Vancouver Charter – Section 571A* authorizes Council to make by-laws to regulate signage.
- *Sign By-law No. 11879 (2017)* regulates the number, size, type, form, appearance and location of signs on private property.

REPORT

Background/Context

1. Site and Context

The subject site is located on the northeast corner of West Georgia Street and Hamilton Street (see Figure 1). The Queen Elizabeth Theatre (QET) and Playhouse, which opened in 1959, are on the City's Heritage Register. The QET complex consists of the Theatre, which is set back from West Georgia Street, a restaurant and the *šxwłexən Xwtl'a7shn* plaza.

Across Dunsmuir Street to the north is the VCC Downtown Campus. To the east across Cambie Street is a surface parking lot and temporary modular housing complex. To the south across West Georgia are the CBC building and the Vancouver Public Library. To the west across Hamilton Street is the future Amazon headquarters and street level retail space (formerly the Canada Post building).

There are other electronic signs and screens in the vicinity, that have been approved through a Sign By-law amendment, including:

- a) TELUS Garden, located at Richard and Georgia Streets;
- b) CBC, in the plaza at the corner of Hamilton and Georgia Streets;
- c) the Best Buy building, at the corner of Robson and Granville Streets; and
- d) International Village, at the corner of East Pender and Carroll Streets.

There are also electronic and video screens with third party advertising that are not under the City’s jurisdiction. This includes:

- BC Place, in Terry Fox Plaza, and at the Georgia Viaduct;
- Canada Place, facing the plaza on Canada Place Road;
- Burrard Bridge; and
- on the northwest corner of Powell Street and Salsbury Drive.

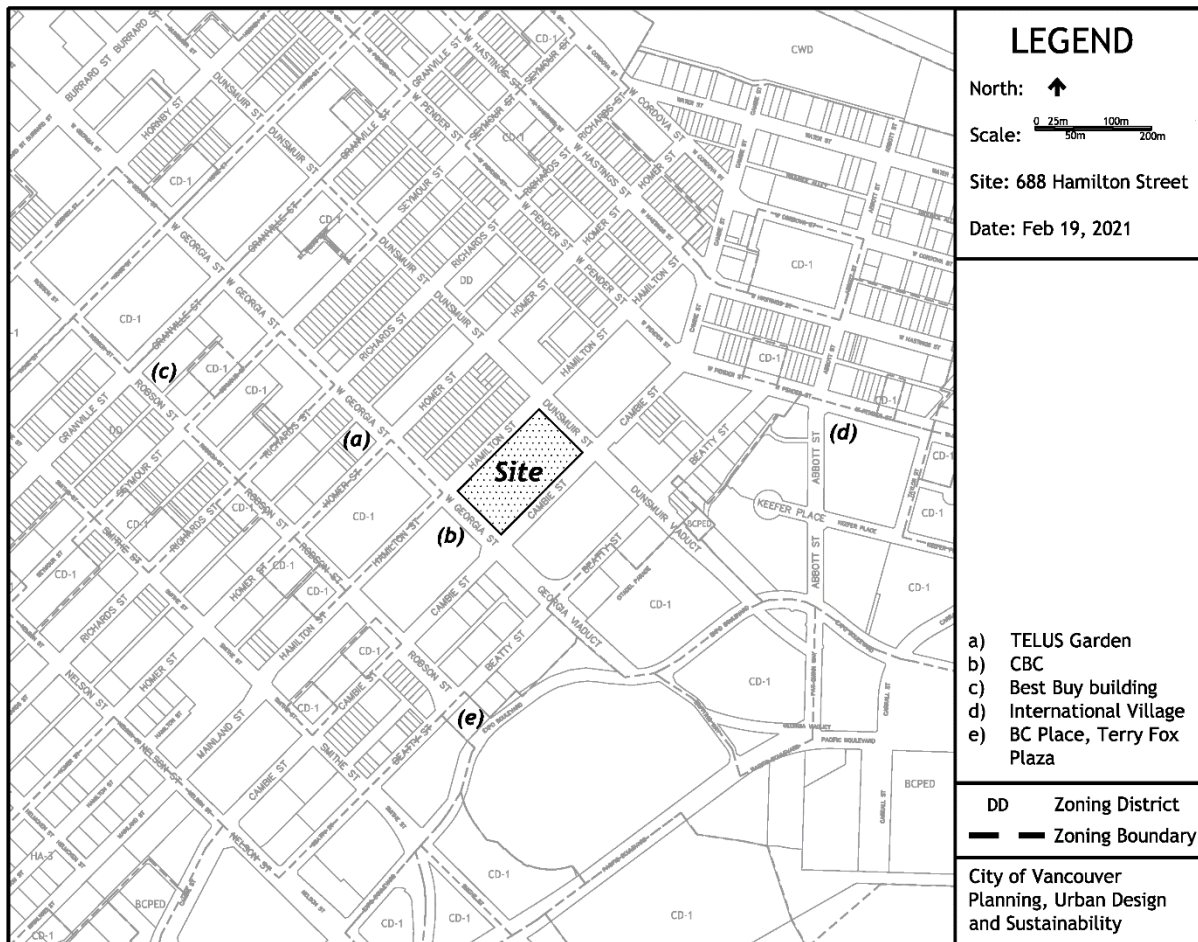


Figure 1: Site at 688 Hamilton Street and surrounding zoning and electronic signs

2. Policy Context

- *Vancouver Charter (Section 571A)*
- *Sign By-law No. 11879*
 - In 2017, Council adopted Phase 1 of the Sign By-law review which focused on business identification signage and resulted in a new Sign By-law.
 - Phase 2 of the Sign By-law review is currently underway and proposes to update the by-law in relation to electronic signage and third-party (advertising) signs.

Strategic Analysis

1. Proposed Signs:

There are currently three existing free-standing electronic static image signs on-site at West Georgia, Dunsmuir, and Hamilton Streets that display first party information, such as Theatre programming and events, and a free-standing parking sign on Cambie Street. The existing signs on West Georgia, Dunsmuir, and Hamilton Streets were approved by the Board of Variance in 2009, with sign permits issued in May 2010, prior to the adoption of the 2017 Sign By-law. The existing parking sign did not require a permit under Section 5.2.1(q) of the previous Sign By-law.

The proposal to replace three existing signs and add a new parking sign are an opportunity for the Queen Elizabeth Theatre to update the aging electronic sign technology with higher resolution screens, support the Theatre's branding, ensure consistency with other Vancouver Civic Theatre identification signs, and improve wayfinding as the current parking sign has proven to be too small to alert drivers of the available parking. The signs will continue to display first party information.

The following Sign By-law amendments are requested for this site in advance of completing broader Sign By-law Phase 2 work (see Figure 2):

- **Sign 1:** Replacement of the 4.27 m x 4.82 m existing sign (1.17 m x 4.26 m electronic screen) along West Georgia Street with a 5.33 m x 4.54 m double-faced free-standing electronic static image sign that includes a new 4.54 m x 2.23 m electronic screen, illuminated copy, illuminated light emitting diode (LED) vertical side panel, and the new Indigenous plaza name *šxwʷłexən Xwtl'a7shn* which supports the City's reconciliation initiatives (see Figures 3 and 4).
- **Signs 2 and 3:** Renewal of the existing copy and screens with new copy and double-faced free-standing electronic static image sign of the same size.
 - Sign 2 at Dunsmuir and Hamilton Street will replace the existing 1.16 m x 3.86 m free-standing electronic static image screen with a newer screen of the same size, and add illuminated text and illuminated LED-lit vertical side panel (see Figure 5).
 - Sign 3 at Hamilton Street will replace the existing 1.47 m x 2.38 m free-standing electronic static image screen with a newer screen of the same size and the addition of the *šxwʷłexən Xwtl'a7shn* plaza name on the sign (see Figures 6 and 7).
- **Sign 4:** The proposed 4.1 m x 2.23 m double-faced, free-standing electronic static image sign (1.60 m x 2.24 m electronic screen) will replace the existing free-standing sign on Cambie Street (see Figure 8). This sign is intended to communicate parking information, but may include event details from time to time.



Figure 5: Sign 2 – Existing & Proposed Sign Rendering (night)



Figure 6: Sign 3 – Existing Sign

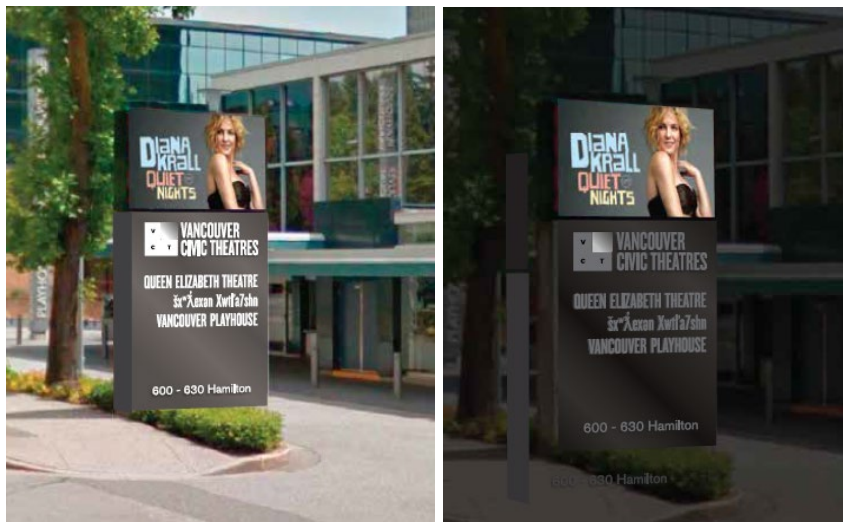


Figure 7: Sign 3 – Proposed Sign Renderings (day and night)



Figure 8: Sign 4 – Existing & Proposed Sign

Table 1: Summary of Sign Proposal

Sign	Original electronic screen sign dimensions	Proposed electronic screen sign dimensions	Sign type
Sign 1 (W Georgia)	1.17 m x 4.26 m = 4.98 m²	2.23 m x 4.54 m = 10.14 m²	Free-standing electronic static image sign
Sign 2 (Hamilton)	1.16 m x 3.86 m = 4.48 m²	No change	
Sign 3 (Dunsmuir)	1.47 m x 2.38 m = 3.50 m²	No change	
Sign 4 (Cambie)	N/A - New sign	1.60 m x 2.24 m = 3.58 m²	

- a) Content and Programming:
Proposed signs 1, 2, and 3 will be used for first-party content and display relevant public information including Vancouver Civic Theatre programming such as events, performances, and performer highlights. Sign 4 will be used to communicate on-site parking facilities and information such as parking availability on-site.
- b) Technology:
All signs will use digital LED technology and be equipped with software that will program and adjust sign brightness to limit power usage and light pollution. Signs can be adjusted remotely using this software, and the screens can be changed immediately. In the event of a malfunction, the screens would be turned off remotely. The signs will not have speakers or audio capabilities.
- c) Timing of Sign Replacement:
Sign replacement will occur in phases. Signs 1 and 4 are intended to be constructed first (estimated 2021), and signs 2 and 3 will be retrofitted with the Vancouver Civic Theatre brand. The screens for Signs 2 and 3 will be replaced in subsequent years, subject to the QET budget and civic theatre priorities, with no set current date.

2. Discussion

a) *Proposed Sign By-law Amendments:*

The following Sign By-law amendments are required to permit the proposed signs:

Current Sign By-law Regulations	Proposed Regulation Amendments
Equipped with ambient light sensor	Allow the use of software in lieu of an ambient light sensor to ensure signs are fully dimmable and programmable.
Electronic signs must be at least 15 m from a traffic control signal	Permit sign 2 to be located within 6 m of a traffic control signal.
Electronic Sign location is restricted to a window on the first storey of a building	Permit one double-faced free-standing electronic static image sign at the Georgia, Hamilton, Dunsmuir and Cambie Street frontages respectively.
Maximum one electronic static image sign on each frontage	Allow two free-standing electronic static image signs (signs 2 and 3) on Hamilton Street.
Maximum electronic static image sign size is 2.5 m ²	Allow a total sign area of 24.40 m ² , 18.80 m ² , 10.60 m ² and 9.40 m ² (Signs 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively) for each sign face.
Free-standing sign must be within 1.5 m of a property line	Permit signs 1 and 3 to have a zero-lot line setback, sign 2 within 0.2 m and sign 4 within 0.91 m from a property line.
Free-standing signs must be within 45 m of another free-standing sign.	Allow signs 2 and 3 to be within 26.8 m of each other.

To mitigate impacts, the signs will be required to meet Section 5.13 of the Sign By-law including:

- not exceeding an upper limit of 3.0 lux above ambient light conditions;
- having a maximum sign luminance or brightness of 300 nits during the daytime and 5,000 nits in the evening;
- being equipped with software that automatically adjusts the luminance of the sign;
- turned off between the hours of 11 p.m. to 7 a.m.; and
- automatically defaulting to a black screen should the sign malfunction.

b) *Rationale for the Proposed Amendments:*

Staff support the proposed QET signs for the following reasons:

- the signs have existed on the site for ten years and the City has not received any complaints specific to these signs;
- the signs are not anticipated to have any additional impact on nearby residential uses and would be turned off from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. per the Sign By-law;
- the signs will animate the Theatre's public areas, plaza and entrances; and
- the proposed signage compliments the QET architectural design.

The above-mentioned Sign By-law amendments are site-specific and apply only to this proposal given its unique circumstances: these existing electronic static image signs are currently on the site and the proposed amendments are intended to update the signage

technology, reflect the character of the facility and support the Theatre's programming and events. The new parking sign will support wayfinding and contribute to the presence of the Theatre on Cambie Street.

c) *Residential and Traffic Considerations:*

Impact on nearby residential uses is anticipated to be minimal as the signs are primarily oriented towards commercial uses. There are no residential dwellings on West Georgia, Hamilton or Dunsmuir Streets within 60 m that face the signs. Along the Cambie Street frontage, temporary modular housing is located approximately 38 m and a residential tower is located 125 m away from sign 4. The proposed parking sign is not anticipated to impact these dwellings. To further minimize impact, the signs will be turned off from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., in accordance with the Sign By-law.

Based on the specific circumstances at the identified intersections and streets, the proposed signs are not expected to interfere with the visibility of traffic signals or contribute to driver distraction. It should be noted that three of the four signs have been at the existing location for several years with no issues. Traffic data will be monitored to determine if there are any impacts to road safety. Any concerns that are identified will be addressed with the Owner, to the satisfaction of the General Manager of Engineering Services.

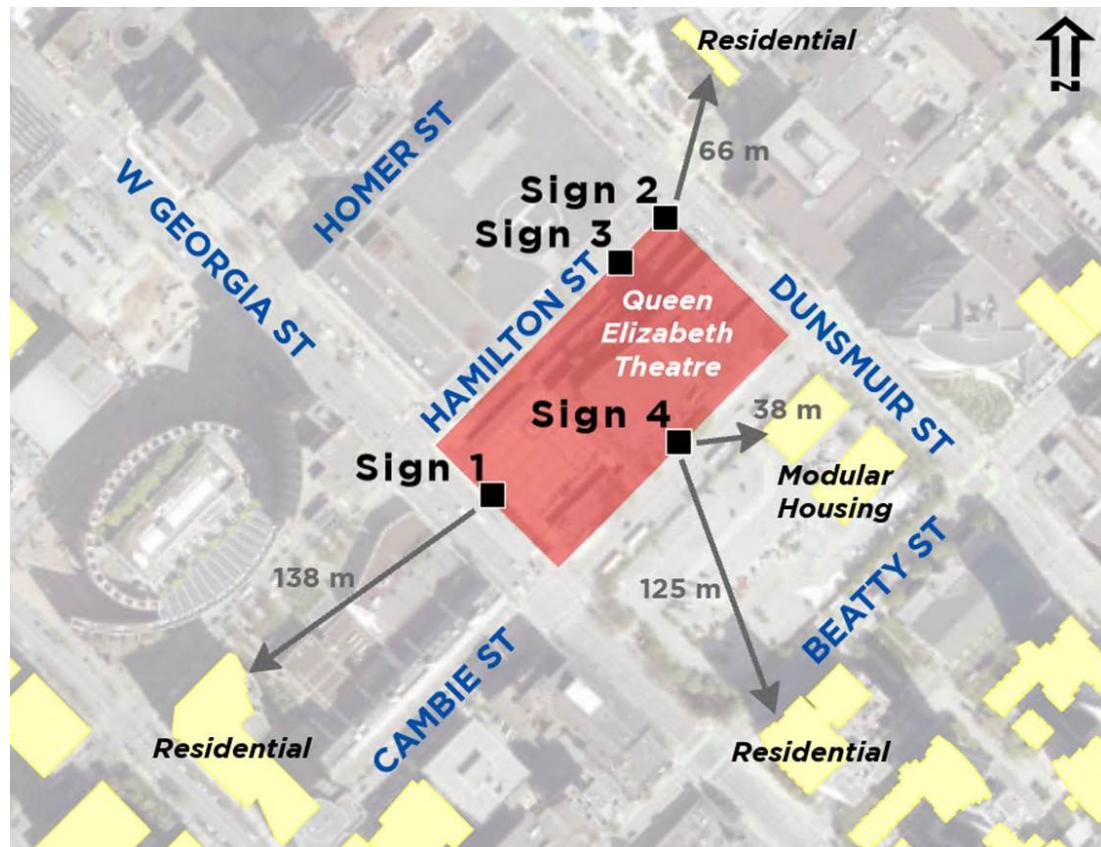


Figure 9: Distance from QET to nearest residential buildings

Public Input

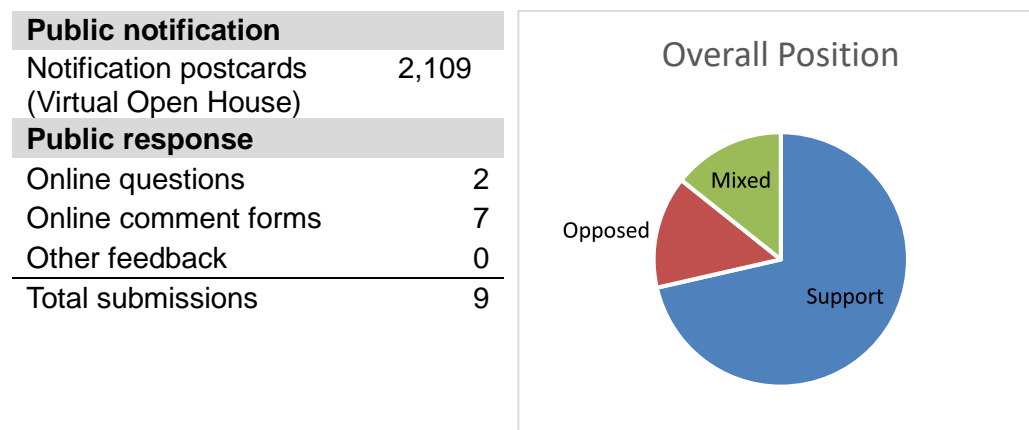
Public Notification – An information sign was installed on the site on November 2, 2020. Approximately 2,109 notification postcards were distributed to residents within two blocks of the site on or about September 30, 2020 to notify residents about this application’s virtual open house. The application information, as well as an online comment form, was provided on the City’s new digital engagement platform *Shape Your City Vancouver* (shapeyourcity.ca).

Virtual Open House – A virtual open house was held on the Shape Your City platform from October 5 to November 23, 2020 in lieu of an in-person event. Virtual open houses are the City’s method of conducting engagement, because of the provincial health authority’s restrictions for public gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The length of the virtual open house was extended to accommodate a delay in the site signage installation. The virtual open house consisted of an open-question online event, where questions submitted by the public were posted along with responses from staff over a period of seven-weeks. Digital presentations from the City and the applicant were also posted online, along with a digital representation of the proposed application.

Due to the pandemic, this virtual engagement strategy was put in place to ensure the City’s process for public discussion and obtaining feedback was maintained. This virtual approach allowed people to access materials online and engage at different levels at a time and location of their choosing.

Public Response and Comments – Public input was received throughout the application process through online questions and comment forms. A total of seven submissions were received. These seven respondents also indicated their overall position on the application, with five people (71%) in support, one person (14%) opposed, and one person with a mixed position of the application (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Public Engagement and Response to Sign By-law Amendment Application



Note: Providing an overall position is an optional question and may not directly reflect the qualitative feedback received below.

Appendix B provides a detailed summary of the results of the public consultation. The numbers above do not include multiple correspondence received from the same respondent, however all comments were assessed.

Generally, comments of support fell within the following area:

- Visual appeal

Generally, comments of concern fell within the following areas:

- Advertising
- Safety concerns

Staff Response – Public feedback has assisted staff with the assessment of the application. Response to key feedback is as follows:

- Safety and Advertising – The proposal is intended to update the existing signs by replacing the existing screens with newer technology. Only sign 1 will be replaced with a larger screen size. Signs 2 and 3 will be replaced with newer screens and the screen sizes will remain the same. The design and size for each sign has carefully considered the location, potential impacts, and surrounding area to create a harmonious and vibrant space.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As operator of the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, construction of the signs would be funded by the City. A \$0.4 million capital project budget for the work was approved in the 2020 annual budget, part of \$5.4 million of Civic Theatre Upgrades included in the 2019-2022 Capital Plan funded from the City's Civic Theatres Reserve.

CONCLUSION

It is recommended that the application to amend the Sign By-law to allow the addition of one new free-standing electronic static image sign along Cambie Street and the replacement of three existing free-standing electronic static image signs along West Georgia, Hamilton and Dunsmuir Streets at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre (688 Hamilton Street) be supported. The proposed screens will integrate the improved technology with the Theatre complex and plaza to continue to animate the site, enhance the presence and update the branding of the Theatre, and provide a venue to display theatre programming and on-site cultural events.

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Draft Sign By-law Amendment Provisions

Note: *A By-law will be prepared generally in accordance with the provisions listed below, subject to change and refinement prior to posting.*

BY-LAW NO. _____

**A By-law to amend Sign By-law No. 11879
regarding four electronic static image signs at
688 Hamilton Street**

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF VANCOUVER, in public meeting, enacts as follows:

1. This By-law adds to the indicated provisions of the Sign By-law 11879.
2. In Section 9.25, Council adds a new section after 9.25 (e) as follows:

“(f) 688 Hamilton Street (Queen Elizabeth Theatre)

In the block bounded by Cambie, Georgia, Hamilton and Dunsmuir Streets:

- (i) one free-standing electronic static image sign facing Georgia Street, that:
 - A. is located on the Georgia Street frontage,
 - B. has a sign area no greater than 24.40 m²,
 - C. have a copy area that is 100% of the sign area, except that the area of electronic copy must be no greater than 10.15 m²,
 - D. may be within 0 m of a property line,
 - E. may be illuminated,
 - F. be equipped with software that automatically adjusts the luminance of the sign; and
 - G. may include a logo or sign copy containing first party advertising.
- (ii) one free-standing electronic static image sign adjacent to the corner of Dunsmuir Street and Hamilton Street, that:
 - A. is located on the Hamilton Street frontage,
 - B. has a sign area no greater than 18.80 m²,
 - C. have a copy area that is 100% of the sign area, except that the area of electronic copy must be no greater than 4.48 m²,
 - D. may be within 0.2 m of a property line,
 - E. may be within 6 m of a traffic control signal,
 - F. may be within 26.8 m on the same frontage of another electronic static image sign that identifies the same occupant,
 - G. may be illuminated,
 - H. be equipped with software that automatically adjusts the luminance of the sign, and
 - I. may include a logo or sign copy containing first party advertising.
- (iii) one free-standing electronic static image sign facing Hamilton Street, that:
 - A. is located on the Hamilton Street frontage,

- B. has a sign area no greater than 10.60 m²,
 - C. have a copy area that is 100% of the sign area, except that the area of electronic copy must be no greater than 3.50 m²,
 - D. may be within 0 m of a property line;
 - E. may be within 26.8 m on the same frontage of another electronic static image sign that identifies the same occupant,
 - F. may be illuminated,
 - G. be equipped with software that automatically adjusts the luminance of the sign, and
 - H. may include a logo or sign copy containing first party advertising.
- (iv) one free-standing electronic static image sign, that:
- A. is located on the Cambie Street frontage,
 - B. has a sign area no greater than 9.40 m²,
 - C. have a copy area that is 100% of the sign area, except that the area of electronic copy must be no greater than 3.58 m²,
 - D. may be within 0.91 m of a property line,
 - E. may be illuminated,
 - F. be equipped with software that automatically adjusts the luminance of the sign, and
 - G. may include a logo or sign copy containing first party advertising.
3. A decision by a court that any part of this By-law is illegal, void, or unenforceable severs that part from this By-law, and is not to affect the balance of the By-law.
4. This By-law is to come into force and take effect on the date of its enactment.

ENACTED by Council this day of , 2021

Mayor

City Clerk

688 Hamilton Street

PUBLIC CONSULTATION STUMMARY

1. List of Engagement Events, Notification, and Responses

	Dates	Results
Online Engagement – Shape Your City Vancouver		
Total participants during online engagement period (City-led)	September 29, 2020 – present	167 participants (aware)* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 53 informed • 9 engaged
Public Notifications		
Postcard distribution – Notice of application and virtual open house	September 30, 2020	2,109 notices mailed
Public Responses		
Online questions via Shape Your City platform	October 5 – November 23, 2020	2 submittals
Online comment forms via Shape Your City platform	October - November, 2020	7 submittals
Overall position <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support • opposed • mixed 	October – November, 2020	7 submittals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 responses • 1 response • 1 response

Note: All reported numbers above are approximate.

* The Shape Your City platform allows staff to capture more nuanced levels of engagement associated with the rezoning application, categorized as:

- **Aware:** Number of unique visitors to the application webpage that viewed only the main page.
- **Informed:** Visitors who viewed documents or the video/photo gallery associated with the application; *informed* participants are a subset of *aware* participants.
- **Engaged:** Visitors that submitted a comment form or asked a question; *engaged* participants are a subset of *informed* and *aware* participants.

2. Map of Notification Area



3. Analysis of All Comments Received

Below is a summary of feedback received from the public by topic and ordered by frequency**.

Generally, comments of support fell within the following area:

- **Visual appeal:** The proposed signs would be attractive and appropriate for this location and neighbourhood, improving vibrancy and impression of the theatre.

Generally, comments of concern fell within the following areas:

- **Safety:** The lack of sightlines through the signs could pose a safety hazard.
- **Advertising:** Electronic billboards not appropriate at street level.

The following are other comments received from the public but were not as frequently occurring as the above topics.

Neutral comments/suggestions/recommendations:

- The use of City funds towards a public engagement process for a simple sign amendment project should not be necessary.

** Submitted comments may each include statements of support, concern, or neutral or general statements. Staff's analysis emphasizes a qualitative approach. Some duplication of responses may result where respondents chose to provide feedback using different mediums (comment form, email to the planner, petition, etc.).

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