



REPORT

Report Date: September 22, 2023
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VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: October 3, 2023
[Submit comments to Council](#)

TO: Vancouver City Council
FROM: General Manager of Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability
SUBJECT: 897 Granville Street – Sign By-law Amendment

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council refuse an application to amend the Sign By-law as generally set out in Appendix A to authorize a proposed electronic video billboard sign by Outfront Media on behalf of Granville Smithe Holdings Ltd., the registered owner of a building having a civic address of 897 Granville Street.

REPORT SUMMARY

This report evaluates an application for amendments to the Sign By-law to allow an electronic sign with third party advertising on the roof of a one-storey building at 897 Granville Street. Amendments to the Sign By-law would be required for the sign type (electronic) and rooftop location, as well as the proximity of the illuminated sign to nearby residential units and traffic signals.

Staff have evaluated and do not support the proposed sign and amendments as outlined in this report, and therefore recommend refusal. The application is located within the study area of a Council-endorsed planning program for Granville Street that is currently underway. The planning process will develop a new vision for Granville Street and the Granville Entertainment District (GED), including relevant updates to the Sign By-law, and will incorporate feedback from the public, businesses, nearby residents and other stakeholders in the area.

Amendments to the Sign By-law require approval of Council.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

- *Vancouver Charter – Section 571A*
- *Sign By-law No. 11879 (2017)*
- *Downtown Public Space Strategy (2020)*

- *Granville Street Planning Program (underway)*

CITY MANAGER’S COMMENTS

The *Granville Street Planning Program* presents a significant opportunity to address a number of Council objectives in the downtown core, including protecting and strengthening job space, expanding tourism, commitments to Reconciliation and supporting arts and culture in Vancouver. A new vision for Granville Street will provide necessary direction on land use, development guidelines, cultural and heritage preservation and supports, and public realm and transportation improvements. Through the planning process, staff will assess and identify new policy and by-law amendments required to implement the vision for a vibrant entertainment district. Comprehensive public and stakeholder engagement will help inform and shape the final strategy.

The City Manager concurs with the staff recommendation of non-support while there is an active planning process underway.

REPORT

Background/Context

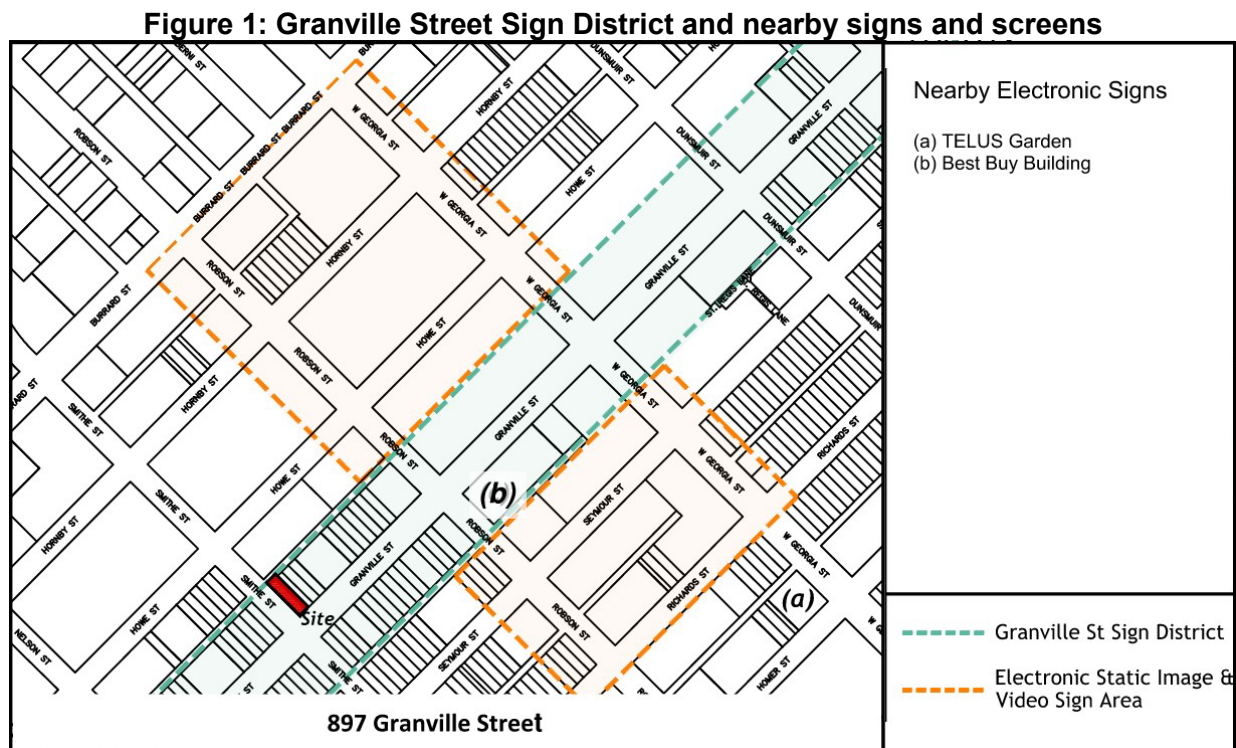
1. Site and Context

Outfront Media submitted an application to amend the Sign By-law to authorize an electronic sign at 897 Granville Street on September 8, 2022, subsequent to an initial inquiry to staff in June 2022. The site is located at the corner of Granville and Smithe Streets in the Granville Entertainment District (see Figure 1). It is subject to the Granville Street Sign District in the Sign By-law.

The Granville Street Sign District encourages signs that complement Granville’s vibrant historic character, including colourful neon, animated, and small electronic signs in first floor windows. The Granville Street Sign District does not permit rooftop electronic signs as proposed.

There are a limited number of electronic signs and screens in the downtown core that have been approved through a Sign By-law amendment, including:

- TELUS Garden, located at Richard and Georgia Streets;
- CBC, in the plaza at the corner of Hamilton and Georgia Streets;
- the Best Buy building, at the corner of Robson and Granville Streets;
- International Village, at the corner of East Pender and Carroll Streets; and
- Queen Elizabeth Theatre (688 Hamilton Street).



2. Policy Context

Downtown Public Space Strategy (2020)

In June 2020, Council approved the *Downtown Public Space Strategy* and directed staff to adapt the strategic directions to input into City-wide policy, including the *Vancouver Plan* and community and area plans. Designing public spaces for people is one of the six strategic directions in the strategy, which also includes walkability and thriving local businesses as key values. Public spaces should encourage enjoyable walking experiences with streets and open spaces that feel safe and comfortable, and engaging frontages that attract people and are exciting to walk by, to look at, and to visit. Part of this includes making streets ‘places’, where streetscape design, such as signage and lighting, are attractive and delightful.

Granville Street Planning Program (underway)

In December 2022, Council approved the Terms of Reference for the *Granville Street Planning Program* and added a further recommendation to consider a bold vision for the development of a significant new destination public space which goes beyond being pedestrian-friendly and aspires to the success of proven public spaces.

The objective of the study is to develop an *Urban Design Framework* for Granville Street that re-establishes this part of downtown Vancouver as a vibrant and inclusive entertainment district and destination high street. The work will be completed through three key interrelated streams of work:

1. Street and Public Spaces

2. Building Design and Land Uses
3. Lighting and Signage

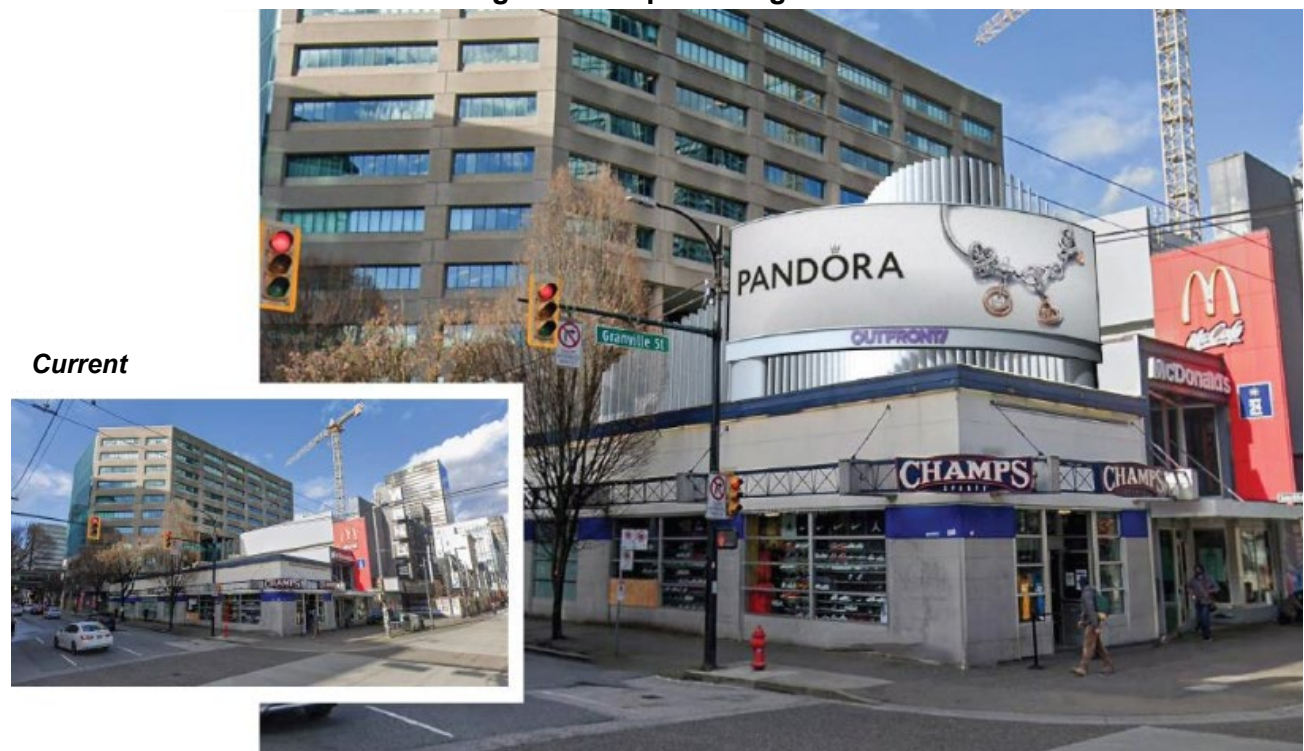
As part of the Lighting and Signage work stream, staff will develop a Lighting and Signage Design Strategy for the study area, which includes the subject site. The strategy will include a review of the Sign By-law to help identify placemaking opportunities which support the overall vision for a vibrant entertainment district. This deliverable will form part of the final urban design framework. Upon completion of the planning program, staff will bring forward specific recommendations for updating the Sign By-law, and a summary of public and stakeholder feedback for Council's consideration.

Strategic Analysis

1. Proposal

The proposed sign is a curved rectangular LED screen measuring 2.44m (8 ft.) tall by 8.84m (29 ft.) wide with a total sign area of 48m² (517 sq. ft.) located on the roof of an existing one storey retail building. The screen would display static third party advertisements, and would be mounted in front of a curved architectural feature which serves as a backdrop to the sign and will also be illuminated (Figure 2). The applicant proposes to allocate 10% screen time for the City of Vancouver and/or the Downtown Business Improvement Association (BIA) at no cost for the life of the sign.

Figure 2: Proposed Sign



2. Sign By-law Analysis

The proposed sign does not meet several provisions in the Sign By-law including:

Subject	By-law Requirement	Proposal
Illumination & Impacts on nearby residential units	Electronic sign must be at least 30 m from a dwelling unit facing the sign (<i>Section 5.13(e)</i>)	Electronic sign within 21 m of single room occupancy (SRO) units at 716 Smithe Street
Sign Location	Roof signs are not permitted in order to limit proliferation of visual clutter in the urban environment	Roof sign
Copy type	Third party advertising is generally only permitted on a billboard sign (<i>Section 5.17</i>)	Third party advertising
Location near traffic signal	Must be at least 15 m from a traffic control signal (<i>Section 5.13 (f)</i>)	5 m from a traffic control signal

Council has previously endorsed by-laws and policies which limit large format advertising, including video screens and billboards, as they can be perceived as a nuisance and have significant negative impacts on the livability of surrounding residential buildings. Further, these types of signs may interfere with the visibility of traffic signals and contribute to driver distraction.

Staff do not support the proposed amendments, noting in particular that the rooftop location:

- adds to visual clutter;
- negatively impacts residents of nearby SRO dwelling units directly across the street; and
- poses traffic impacts due to its location in close proximity to a traffic signal.

The applicant has proposed mitigation measures to address the impact of the illuminated sign on residential units, including turning off the sign between 11pm and 7am, and compliance with brightness levels and ambient light sensor requirements for illuminated signs in the Sign By-law. The proposed mitigation strategies do not sufficiently offset negative impacts of the proposed signage.

Finally, the application overall pre-empts the broader policy program underway in this area and does not address staff concerns.

3. Public and Stakeholder Input

Sign By-law Amendment Application

Public Notification – A sign by-law amendment information sign was installed on the site on May 30, 2023. Approximately 7,008 notification postcards were distributed within the neighbouring area on or about Month 10, 2023 Application information and an online comment form was provided on the Shape Your City (shapeyourcity.ca/) platform.

Question and Answer Period – A question and answer period was held from May 10 to 24, 2023. Questions were submitted by the public and posted with a response over a two-week period.

Public Response and Comments – Public input is collected via online questions, comment forms, through email, and by phone. A total of 5 questions and 21 comments were received. Refer to Appendix C for additional public consultation details.

Granville Street Planning Program

As part of the Granville Street Planning Program, staff have been engaging with the public and the Business Improvement Area (BIA) to assess neighbourhood priorities and long-range planning objectives.

Through the first round of engagement in summer 2023, there were approximately 2,000 survey responses, and close to 190,000 impressions in total through different engagement formats (e.g. stakeholder and public workshops, block parties, youth roundtables). Key highlights from the input received on signage included broad support for more neon signage, vibrant lighting, signifier signage for the entertainment district, and Sign By-law amendments.

Feedback from the Downtown BIA generally echoed feedback received through broader engagement, with the desire to:

- amend the Sign By-law to improve signage and wayfinding for cultural venues;
- explore signifier, signage or stylized lighting elements that are integrated into the design of buildings that highlight Granville Street's role as an entertainment district and destination, with special consideration for the intersection of Robson and Granville Streets; and
- not support more, pervasive third party advertising, including billboards and video screens, in the Granville Street study area.

4. Public Benefits

The applicant proposes to allocate 10% screen time for the City of Vancouver and/or the Downtown Business Improvement Association (BIA) at no cost for the life of the sign. Noting staff recommendation of refusal of this sign, ACCS has advised they will defer review of this proposal. If, after the Granville Street Planning process is complete, an application for a sign at this site is made, they would will review at that time, and would have an interest in securing screen time for community uses or public art as a public benefit.

Legal Implications

Council is not obligated to amend the Sign By-law. Council can refuse the proposed amendment. Council is also permitted to approve the proposed amendment if it considers that to be appropriate.

Conclusion

In summary, the report recommends that Council refuse the proposed amendment as it does not meet several provisions of the Sign By-law and pre-empts findings of the *Granville Street Planning Program* currently underway. Staff conclude that the sign does not meet the intent of provisions to limit proliferation of visual clutter in the urban environment, and will negatively impact nearby residential units. A review of more compatible signage on the subject site is recommended upon completion of the broader planning process, once updates to the Granville Street Sign District are complete. .

* * * * *

APPENDIX A**DRAFT SIGN BY-LAW AMENDMENT PROVISIONS****BY-LAW NO. _____****A By-law to amend Sign By-law No. 11879
regarding electronic static image signs at
897 Granville Street**

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

1. This By-law amends the indicated provisions of the Sign By-law.
2. In Section 12.20, Council adds a new section after 12.20 (a) as follows:

“(b) 897 Granville Street

On the site zoned DD one roof mounted electronic static image sign, that:

- (i) is located on the southwest corner of the roof facing both Granville Street and Smithe Street,
- (ii) is located on the roof of the first storey of the building;
- (iii) has a sign area no greater than 48 m² and a copy area of 22 m²
- (iv) has a vertical dimension no greater than 2.5 m;
- (v) may be within 30 m of a dwelling unit and 15 m of a traffic control signal,
- (vi) be turned off between the hours of 11 p.m. and 7 a.m.; and
- (vii) may display third party advertising.

APPENDIX B

PUBLIC CONSULTATION SUMMARY

Engagement Events, Notification, and Responses

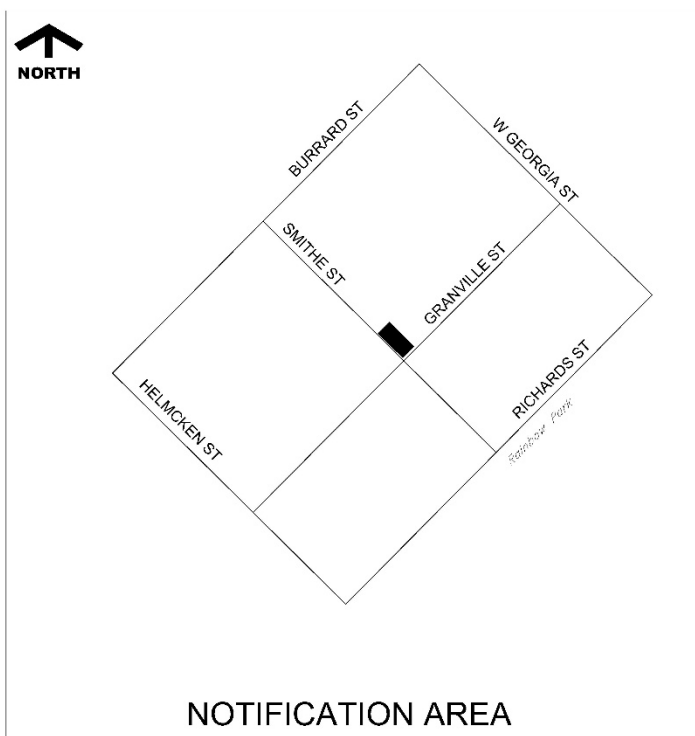
	Dates	Results
Event		
Q&A Period	May 10-24, 2023	123 participants (aware)* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36 informed • 23 engaged
Public Notification		
Postcard distribution – Notice of application and Q&A Period	May 10, 2023	7,008 notices mailed
Public Responses		
Online questions	May 2023	5 submittal
Online comment forms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shape Your City platform 	May 2023	18 submittals
Overall position <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support • opposed • mixed 	May 2023	18 submittals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 responses • 5 responses • 3 response
Other input (email, phone calls)	May 2023	3 submittals
Online Engagement – Shape Your City Vancouver		
Total participants during online engagement period	May 2023	126 participants (aware)* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36 informed • 26 engaged

Note: All reported numbers above are approximate.

* The Shape Your City platform allows staff to capture more nuanced levels of engagement associated with the 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.

Map of Notification Area



Summary of Comments

Generally, comments of support fell within the following areas:

- Advertising fits with the entertainment district context
- Activates and illuminates the street

Generally, comments of concern fell within the following areas:

- Light pollution and impacts of the illumination on adjacent residential buildings
- Intrusiveness and visual aesthetics
- Further commercialization/advertising within the entertainment district