

Sign Code Committee
Meeting #4
Date: July 31, 2008
6:00 PM-8:00 PM

Council Chambers, 6200 Southcenter Blvd
Tukwila, WA 98188

A. Residential Zones (10 mins)

1. Lighting of Wall Signs (continued from last meeting)

B. Dynamic Signs (30 mins)

C. Sign regulations for non-residential areas of the City (75 mins) (Discussion Only)
Discuss issues for next meeting

1. Should all non-residential areas of the City be treated the same? How do signs fit with the big picture for the City's overall development?
2. Are there some areas of the City, that given their locations (i.e. next to major freeways, adjacent to residential zones, etc), require special sign needs?
3. Are there certain uses that should be regulated in a different manner given specific issues with how the use functions?

D. Tentative Remaining Schedule (no discussion needed)

August 21 st	Freestanding and Wall Signs
September 11 th	Billboards Non-Conforming Signs
September 18 th	Special Considerations (Large Commercial/Industrial Properties, Hospitals, etc)

Sign Code Advisory Committee
Meeting #4
July 31, 2008
Agenda Item A

Issue

Lighting for wall signs at multi-family and institutional uses within residential zones.

Background

At the last Sign Code Advisory Committee there was a discussion on the lighting method for wall signs at institutional uses within residential zones. The Committee asked staff to look into the issue and report back to the Committee. The Committee recommended that all freestanding signs only be allowed indirect lighting. The City's current sign code allows indirect, concealed lighting, and backlit letters for wall signs within residential zones.

Analysis

Staff conducted a field survey of the current method of illumination for wall signs within the City and found that lighting typically is not provided for wall signs. Instead ambient lighting from other sources provides lighting to the signs.

Options

1. No change from current sign code.
2. Provide no limitation on the illumination method for wall signs within residential zones.
3. Ban illumination of wall signs within residential zones.
4. Only allow wall signs to be illuminated if they are certain distance from residential properties.

Recommendation

Staff recommends no change from the current sign code. The City's current sign code has allowed illuminated wall signs in residential zones for over 25 years. By limiting the lighting to indirect, concealed, and backlit lighting the impacts of illuminated sign are reduced to a minimum amount possible. It appears that wall signs within residential zones are not having an impact on surrounding residential uses.

Issue	Existing	Proposed
Method of illumination for wall signs in residential zones.	Allow indirect, concealed lighting, and backlit letters.	No change

Issue

Regulations Relating to “Dynamic Signs”.

Note: Dynamic signs would not be additional signs, but would freestanding or wall signs permitted by the City that would include dynamic displays.

Background

Dynamic signs, also known as animated signs or changing message signs; are signs that move or appear to move to individuals who are viewing the sign. There are a variety of technologies that are being utilized for dynamic signs. These technologies include LED displays, TV like images, tri-vision signs, and digital ink. Dynamic signs can also include flashing lights and signs which move due to mechanical manipulation.

The City currently prohibits are dynamic signs¹ with the exception of signs that display time, date, or temperature. However, the City currently has a moratorium on the installation of any sign which displays a moving image showing time, date or temperature. Also, a fixed electronic sign in which the image does not change more frequently than once every 24-hours is not considered a dynamic sign.

Analysis

There has and will continue to be a push to install dynamic signs in the City. In recent years the technological advancements have lowered the cost for businesses and non-profits to incorporate dynamic displays into their signage.

There are four main reasons that business and non-profits choose to install dynamic signs:

1. To facilitate the display of larger amounts of information within the limited space permitted by a jurisdiction.
2. To enhance the signs ability to attract attention.
3. To be able to conveniently change message content (i.e. the price of gas or to advertise a special).
4. In some cases to enhance the profitability of the sign itself (i.e. leasing space on signs to advertise goods or services).

¹ There are several non-conforming dynamic signs within the City. These include the Silver Dollar Casino, Foster High School, and Tukwila Riverside Inn. All three were permitted under different code provisions which are not longer applicable to the City.

Municipalities throughout the State and Country have been taking a hard look at signs which utilize dynamic displays. Many of these municipalities have found dynamic signs to pose a serious threat to public safety and the visual impacts.

Safety

Staff has provided a report to the Committee entitled, “*Dynamic Signage: Research Related to Driver Distraction and Ordinance Recommendations*”. The report provides an overview of over a dozen studies related to safety of dynamic signs. The report provided the following conclusions:

1. Drivers who are subjected to information-rich content that is irrelevant to the driving task (such as digital advertising) may be temporarily distracted enough to cause a degradation in their driving performance. The degradation could lead to a crash.
2. The unlimited variety of changing content allows dynamic signage to attract drivers’ attention at greater distances and hold their attention longer than traditional static signs.
3. Several studies have found a correlation between crashes and the complexity of the driving environment. For example, crash rates are higher at intersection because of the difficulty of the driving task is increased by the roadway’s complexity. Complex driving environments place a high demand on drivers’ attention. Introducing a source of distraction in an already demanding driving environment is more likely to result in crashes. This is illustrated by the 1994 Wisconsin DOT study that examined crash rates before and after installation of an electronic sign on a high volume curving roadway. Introduction of this sign was identified as a likely factor of the 80 percent increase in side-swipe crashes that was experienced.
4. Many of the studies have noted a correlation between outdoor advertising signs and crash rates, but have not established a casual relationship between the signs and crash rates. Driving is a complex task influenced by multiple factors. It is not necessary to establish a direct causal relationship between outdoor advertising signs and crash rates to show that they can make the driving task less safe. While the research shows that driver distraction is a key factor in many motor vehicle crashes, this often includes many interacting factors that distract drivers. The specific driver distraction danger that advertising signs contribute is difficult to quantify. A study that could control for multiple variables (human factors, vehicle, enforcement, and the roadway environment) would be needed to provide a definitive statement on the level of driver distraction that signs produce. Such a study would likely find that not all advertising signs cause a distraction that would lead to crashes, but some signs in some situations are more likely to contribute to crashes than others.

Regardless if a casual relationship exists regarding the safety of dynamic signs and driving it would seem prudent that the City would want to error on the side of caution in

permitting such signs in most areas of the City. One thing to remember is that most people who visit the City's commercial areas are not Tukwila residents, thus they might not be familiar with the City. Adding additional distractions to people in the City's commercial zones would most likely increase the number of traffic accidents within the City's commercial and industrial zones. It is also important to remember that commercial and industrial zones have higher speed limits. The ability to accomplish non-driving tasks is diminished as the rate of speed increases.

It might be appropriate to consider allowing dynamic signs in residential zones. The City's schools, fire stations and parks have expressed a desire to utilize changing message signs to advertise up coming events. Many of the issues raised in the attached report would still apply to residential zones. However, there are three things to consider regarding dynamic signs and safety within residential zones:

1. Drivers in residential zones are typically familiar within the area, thus adding additional external distractions such as a dynamic sign may not pose the same safety concerns as adding such signs in commercial and industrial zones.
2. The number of external distractions within residential zones is already severely limited unlike commercial/industrial zones where multiple properties and businesses have signs which compete for the attention of motorist.
3. Residential zones have lower speed limits than commercial/industrial zones. Lower speed limits improve response and stopping time and thus the impact of dynamic signs would be minimized.
4. The size of the dynamic signs would be strictly limited since the size of freestanding and wall signs within residential zones are extremely small (30 square feet for freestanding signs and up to 50 square feet for a wall sign).

In 2006 the City permitted Foster High School to install a dynamic sign along S. 144th Street. The sign is visible from the intersection of S. 144th Street and 42nd Avenue S. Planning staff reviewed the accident data for the intersection of S. 144th Street and 42nd Ave S to see if there was any change in the number of accidents after the dynamic sign was installed. The accident history does not provide enough information to be able to statically conclude that the dynamic sign at Foster High School is safe. However, there has not been a noticeable jump in accidents at the intersection since the sign was installed.

Aesthetic Considerations

Dynamic signs have a huge impact on the visual quality of a community, street, or district. While there are numerous areas, such as the Vegas Strip and NY Times Square which are famous for their flashy signs, there are also areas such as South Tacoma Way and Aurora Ave that also have flashy signs. The Vegas Strip and Times Square are exciting places and the dynamic signs in these areas add to the excitement. While places like South Tacoma Way and Aurora Avenue have reputations as being blighted and seedy areas.

Dynamic signs by themselves do not create the situations listed above. Adding “casino” signs within the City would not create a Vegas strip nor do dynamic signs create skid rows. Yet, adding dynamic signs to any part of the City deserves serious consideration.

Some things to consider with regards to aesthetics:

1. How would dynamic signs interact with allowed land uses within commercial and industrial zones? As staff has noted in the past, the City cannot regulate content. So if the City were to allow dynamic signs in commercial and industrial zones, all businesses would be eligible to install them including pawn shops, check cashing places, and adult entertainment establishments. Another thing to consider regarding dynamic and land use are the City’s current and future mixed use zones. Residents in mixed use zones that have dynamic signs could be impacted at night by dynamic signage (i.e. brightness and noise).
2. What impact would dynamic signs have on the visual environment? Sign regulations are about leveling the playing field for businesses, one sign it typically not a problem, but multiple dynamic signs can seriously impact the visual quality of a community. Some cities have minimum spacing requirements between dynamic signs, but that would create winners and losers.
3. Would dynamic signs contribute to creating pedestrian oriented environments? The City’s plan for Tukwila International Blvd and the future Tukwila Urban Center plan calls for creating pedestrian friendly environments where people are encouraged to walk instead of using cars. Dynamic signs are typically geared towards motorists and not towards pedestrians.

Recommendation

Staff has the following recommendations regarding “dynamic signs”:

1. All dynamic signs will be prohibited in commercial and industrial zones within the City, including signs which display time, date, and temperature. Staff recommends that the City continue to allow changing message signs within commercial and industrial zones, provided the sign does not change image more than once every 24-hours.
2. Staff recommends that institutional uses in the low density residential zones be permitted to have a portion of an allowed freestanding or wall sign utilize a changing message center.
 - a. The image on the sign may not change more frequently than once every ten seconds.
 - b. The image must appear and disappear as one image. The image may not appear to flash, undulate, pulse, or portray explosions, fireworks, flashes of light, or blinking or chasing lights, or appear to move toward or away from the viewer, to expand or contract, bounce, rotate, spin, twist, scroll, travel or otherwise portray movement.

- c. The hours of operation for the sign are limited to the hours of 7am to 10pm.

Alternatives:

1. One of the first alternatives to consider would be not to allow the changing message signs within the LDR zones. The City would have a complete ban on all dynamic signs.
2. The City could consider allowing dynamic signs in all zones or only certain zones under certain limitations, such as the rate of change and standards for regulating the brightness.
3. The City could allow dynamic signs with no restrictions.

Issue	Existing	Proposed
Use of dynamic displays, currently called animated signs within the City, within commercial and industrial zones of the City	Not permitted, except the City allows for the display of time, date and temperature. However, the City currently has a moratorium on all signs which utilize dynamic displays.	The only change is that no exemption would be permitted for signs which display time, date and temperature.
Use of dynamic displays within residential zones.	Not permitted, except the City allows for the display of time, date and temperature. However, the City currently has a moratorium on all signs which utilize dynamic displays.	<p>For institutional uses within the LDR dynamic displays would be allowed subject to the following limitations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The image on the sign may not change more frequently than once every ten seconds. ▪ The image must appear and disappear as one image. The image may not appear to flash, undulate, pulse, or portray explosions, fireworks, flashes of light, or blinking or chasing lights, or appear to move toward or away

		<p>from the viewer, to expand or contract, bounce, rotate, spin, twist, scroll, travel or otherwise portray movement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The hours of operation for the sign are limited to the hours of 7am to 10pm.
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Issue

Sign regulations for non-residential areas of the City.

Background

The biggest issues that this Committee will have to work on is to determine sign regulation changes needed for non-residential areas of the City. Staff would like to discuss certain issues with the Committee before bringing back recommendations.

There are several major issues that staff would like to discuss with the Committee:

1. Should all non-residential areas of the City be treated the same? How do signs fit with the big picture for the City's overall development?
2. Are there some areas of the City, that given their locations (i.e. next to major freeways, adjacent to residential zones, etc), require special sign needs?
3. Are there certain uses that should be regulated in a different manner given specific issues with how the use functions?

It is not necessary at this time to have consensus on any of the items listed above. Additionally, staff would like to know if there are any other issues that the Committee would like staff to examine before providing recommendations on the various sign issues within the City's non-residential zones.

Analysis

None at this time.

Recommendation

None at this time.