

Department of City Planning
DRAFT Citywide Sign Ordinance
Summary of Status | UPDATED June 5, 2019



General Background

Since 2002, the City of Los Angeles has maintained a citywide ban on off-site signs (also known as billboards) to control visual blight. Sign Districts, established by a process requiring City Planning Commission (CPC) review and City Council approval, have provided an exception to the ban by allowing off-site signs in geographic areas with unique characteristics that benefit from special off-site sign provisions. Generally, properties eligible for a sign district must consist of at least one block or three acres, whichever is less, and zoned C or M. These regulations are currently in effect.

In 2008, the City Planning Department began drafting a citywide sign ordinance to update sign regulations. Over the years, the CPC and the Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee of the City Council have considered several versions of a citywide sign ordinance, all of which address the following policies:

- Maintain the City's current ban on off-site signs, with exceptions
- Achieve a net reduction of off-site signs
- Limit the location of on-site digital signs
- Tighten requirements for establishing sign districts
- Establish digital sign standards
- Create sign-specific relief mechanisms
- Establish higher fines for violations
- Remove content-related provisions

As of the date of this summary, PLUM has not recommended an ordinance to the City Council.

Citywide Sign Ordinance - Summary of Major Milestones

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| April 2009 | CPC approved and recommended a draft ordinance to PLUM for consideration. |
| June 2015 | PLUM revised the CPC draft ordinance and transmitted Version B, as well as other policy questions, to CPC for consideration. |

- January 2016** CPC [disapproved Version B](#), and instead recommended [Version B+](#) to PLUM.
- March 2016** City Attorney prepared [Version B](#) for form and legality, per PLUM's instructions.
- May 2017** [PLUM instructed](#) Department of City Planning (DCP) to revise Version B.
- December 2017** DCP presented [a revised ordinance \(Dec 2017 Version\)](#), per PLUM's instructions. After presentation of the ordinance, PLUM requested DCP to return with a report on a number of items.
- May 2019** DCP presented [a report](#) and an accompanying draft [policy document](#) on the items requested by PLUM. After presentation of the report, PLUM requested DCP to return with a report on additional items.

Key Differences between Version B and December 2017 Version

Summary of Draft Ordinance Version B

Draft **Version B** contains the following summary of changes to current Zoning Code regulations:

- Maintains ban on all off-site signs, except for within sign districts
- Creates new ban on all on-site digital signs, except for within sign districts
- Establishes two types of sign districts:
 - Tier 1 (allows all off-site and on-site signs, including digital)
 - Tier 2 (allows all on-site signs, including digital; off-site signs allowed only if not visible from the public right-of-way)
- Tightens criteria for establishing sign districts:
 - Tier 1
 - Location restrictions:
 - Designated Regional Commercial/Center and zoned C or R5, Downtown Housing Incentive Area and zoned C, M, or R5, Los Angeles International Airport, Port of Los Angeles, 20,000+-square foot stadium, or 60+-acre zoo/botanical garden
 - At least 15 acres or 5,000 linear feet (2,650 in the Downtown Housing Incentive Area)
 - No off-site sign within 500 feet of RW1 Zone or more restrictive zone, ecological preserve, state/national park,

- designated scenic right-of-way, or River Improvement Overlay District
 - Requires sign area reduction (1:1 for static; 2:1 for digital) within the sign district or the “sign impact area” and community benefits in exchange for new off-site signs in Tier 1 sign districts.
- Tier 2
 - Location restrictions:
 - Not allowed in OS or PF zones
 - At least 3 acres of non-residential development or 50,000 square feet of non-residential floor area if designated Regional Commercial/Center or in the Greater Downtown Housing Incentive Area
 - At least 5 acres of non-residential development or 10,000 square feet of non-residential floor area if not designated Regional Commercial/Center or not in the Greater Downtown Housing Incentive Area
- Establishes new digital illumination standards:
 - Limitation of 0.3 foot-candles above ambient lighting.
 - Maximum nighttime brightness of 450 candelas per square meter and maximum daytime brightness of 7,500 candelas per square meter.
- Establishes digital message standards:
 - Duration of at least 8 seconds
 - Message to be static between transitions
 - No blank screens during transition
 - Instant transition between messages
 - Smooth transition between daytime and nighttime brightness
- Creates a sign-specific adjustment and variance.
- Imposes heightened penalties for off-site sign violations.
- Consolidates sign provisions currently in multiple locations in the Zoning Code into Article 4.4 Sign Regulations.
- Eliminates message or content-based regulations.
- Creates a “grandfather” date of December 16, 2014. Sign districts initiated prior to the grandfather date would not be subject to the new provisions.
- Includes general clean-up provisions.

Summary of Draft December 2017 Version

The draft **December 2017 Version** generally contains all the provisions of **Version B**, with the following summary of exceptions:

- Also allows on-site digital signs outside sign districts administratively, with location, size, and operation limitations:
 - Limited to 75 percent of sign area allotment, but not more than 350 square feet. No one on-site digital sign can exceed 300 square feet.

- Limited to C Zones designated as Commercial (Regional, General, Highway Oriented, Community, Neighborhood, or Manufacturing).
- Property must have at least 150 feet of frontage.
- Not permitted within 100 feet of single-family zones, scenic rights-of-way, or other digital sign.
- Operation limited to the hours between 7 am and midnight.
- Also allows off-site signs (static or digital) outside sign districts by new relocation agreement process, with location limitations:
 - Location restrictions for relocated signs:
 - Limited to C, M, or PF Zones designated Commercial (Regional, General, Highway Oriented, or Community), Industrial, or Public Facilities.
 - Not permitted within 200 feet of single-family zones, ecological preserve, state or national park, River Improvement Overlay District, or California Department of Transportation designated scenic highway.
 - Not permitted in Historic Preservation Overlay Zones that prohibit off-site signs, parks, schools, libraries, most civic buildings, or sign districts.
 - Must be at least 500 feet from another digital off-site sign, except when adjacent to a sign district it can be as close as 250 feet from another digital off-site sign.
 - Sign face must be oriented away from residential areas.
 - Location restrictions do not apply to existing off-site signs being “relocated” to their existing location if sign area reduction is at least 4:1.
 - Allows relocated off-site signs to be exempt from Freeway Exposure limitations in Code.
 - Required sign area reduction of at least 9:1 or an in-lieu payment per a schedule in the “billboard blight reduction policy” document, except not ever less than a sign area reduction of 2:1.
- Brightness regulations for digital signs tightened to maximum 300 candelas per square meter at night.
- Allows new copy on painted mural signs legally existing prior to April 17, 2012, using vinyl or other materials approved by the Department of Building and Safety and the Fire Department.
- Updates “grandfather” date to May 31, 2017.

How can I get more information?

For questions regarding the ordinance, please contact Yi Lu, yi.lu@lacity.org, 213-978-1287, Erin Coleman, erin.coleman@lacity.org, 213-978-1338, or Phyllis Nathanson, phyllis.nathanson@lacity.org, 213-978-1474.