



## Citywide Sign Ordinance

December 2020  
Case Number: CPC-2015-3059-CA  
Council File: CF 11-1705

### Summary

The Citywide Sign Ordinance is a comprehensive update of the City's sign regulations. The proposed Ordinance would consolidate sign regulations into one section within the City's Zoning Code and would modernize its existing regulations and processes for both on-site and off-site signs. The City's ban on off-site signs, first enacted in 2002, would remain in place as would certain exceptions to it. This effort will provide a unified and comprehensive set of sign regulations that are consistent, transparent, and responsive to modern design.

The current iteration of the proposed [Ordinance](#), released in December 2020, was drafted in response to [instructions](#) adopted by the City Council in September 2019 (Council File # [11-1705](#)). As instructed by City Council, this proposed Ordinance along with an accompanying staff report outlining alternative approaches to several key provisions will go before the City Planning Commission in 2021.

### Background

The Citywide Sign Ordinance, in some form, has been under consideration since 2009 when it was first recommended for adoption by the City Planning Commission (CPC). The proposed Ordinance has evolved substantially from that original proposal, however certain elements remain key and these include:

- Maintain the City's current ban on off-site signs, with exceptions
- Achieve a net reduction of off-site signs

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- 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

These elements serve as a framework for the proposed Ordinance, as they have for each previous iteration. The last time a version of the ordinance was considered by CPC was in 2015, and since then subsequent versions have been requested by the City Council's Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee. These intervening drafts expanded the scope of sign regulations and allowances under consideration, particularly for off-site signs. A prior proposal was released in [December 2017](#), and included a number of these new provisions. This 2020 proposed Ordinance incorporates the 2019 City Council instructions and builds on the foundation of the previous 2017 version.

The City Council instructions requested several substantive changes in their 2019 instructions. Those changes primarily deal with off-site sign exceptions and include the introduction of a Tier 3 Sign District with distinct regulations, defining "Billboard Blighted areas," establishing an equitable distribution of blight reduction, defining public land and assets, establishing a citywide cap on off-site signs under relocation agreement, and options for prioritizing relocation agreements on public land and phasing in allowances for them on private property. The proposed Ordinance also includes several technical and consistency changes.

## Key Provisions

The proposed Ordinance includes the following provisions.

- Maintains ban on all off-site signs, except within a sign district or by relocation agreement
- Establishes three types of sign districts:
  - Tier 1
    - Large regional centers and entertainment districts with unique characteristics
    - Off-site signs are allowed, however a sign reduction plan and community benefits must be provided



- Tier 2
    - Designed for campus-like settings
    - Any off-site signs must be internally facing and not visible from the public right of way.
  - Tier 3
    - Allows relocation agreements on private property in most C & M zones
    - Includes nuanced criteria for the relocation of off-site signs and conversion to digital
    - Require compliances with relocation agreement off-site sign reduction requirements
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- Consolidates all sign provisions in the Zoning Code into Article 4.4
  - Updates definitions to include public property, relocation agreement, and provide alignment with the proposed new Zoning Code
  - Allows relocation of existing off-site signs and conversion to digital
    - Separate process for public property and private property
    - Must adhere to specific locations limitations
    - Must provide off-site sign reduction plan that removes at a rate of 9:1 or an in-lieu payment proportionate to the reduction provided
    - Defines Billboard Blighted Area, and requires roughly equal distribution of off-sign reduction and in-lieu payment between it and vicinity of sign
    - Establishes a Citywide cap and phase-in scheme for relocation agreements on private property
  - Establishes new digital illumination standards
  - Establishes digital message standards
  - Establishes a process and standard regulations for on-site digital signs in certain nonresidential zones
  - Allows new sign copy on painted mural signs legally existing prior to April 17, 2012 using certain materials approved by LADBS and LAFD
  - Creates a sign-specific adjustment and variance process
  - Increases penalties for off-site sign violations
  - Eliminates content—based regulations
  - Includes technical and consistency corrections



## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the relationship between Tier 3 Sign Districts and Relocation Agreements?

The establishment of a Tier 3 Sign District is required for specific geographic areas where the relocation of existing off-site signs is desirable. The main purpose of Tier 3 Sign Districts is to allow for the relocation of existing off-site signs on private property.

An application for a relocation agreement will only be accepted if the property the off-site sign is relocated to is within a Tier 3 Sign District. The location restrictions for off-site signs in a Tier 3 Sign District must be met to allow for a relocation agreement to be considered. A Tier 3 Sign District and a relocation agreement may be considered concurrently. A relocation agreement on public property is not required to be in a Tier 3 Sign District.

### What is the approval process for relocation agreements on public property? How does that differ from those on private property?

Public property is uniquely defined in the proposed Ordinance. It is defined as a City owned property or asset, or one that is owned by another public entity that has an agreement with the City allowing off-site signs.

The relocation of an off-site sign onto public property is not required to be located within a Tier 3 Sign District or adhere to its off-site sign restrictions. The process only involves the adherence to and approval of a relocation agreement and its restrictions and blight reduction regulations. The review process for any relocation agreement involves a staff level hearing, consideration and recommendation by the City Planning Commission (CPC), and final consideration by the City Council.

### How does the relocation agreement phase-in process and off-site sign cap for private property work?

Before the approval of any relocation agreements on private property may occur, a minimum of thirty sign relocation agreements on public property must be approved. This allows for a deliberative phase-in process wherein the City has initial control over consideration of public options for sign relocation agreements prior to allowing the relocation process on private property.



A citywide cap for relocation agreements on private property is proposed as part of the Ordinance. This cap is set at 150 off-site signs and 120,00 square feet of sign area Citywide, and no more than 10% of the overall Citywide Cap may be in any one Community Plan Area.

### How will blight reduction be handled in the proposed Tier 3 Sign District?

Sign reduction will be a key component of a Tier 3 Sign District. Any relocation agreement will include a net reduction in off-site signage in exchange for permission to relocate an existing off-site sign and convert an existing off-site sign to a digital sign. A mandatory sign reduction plan with an optional public benefit payment is required as part of any relocation agreement on public or private property.

Furthermore, the sign reduction that is required by a relocation agreement has been drafted to reflect City Council's instructions to distribute those benefits to both the vicinity of the relocated sign as well as to areas of the City that are considered billboard blighted. The proposed allocation of sign reduction and community benefits is approximately 50% to the immediate vicinity of the relocated sign, and 50% to areas considered to be billboard blighted.

### Does the proposed Ordinance contain an opt-in or opt-out process for the allowance of relocation agreements in certain geographies?

The proposed Ordinance requires the establishment of a Tier 3 Sign District to enable relocation agreements for private parcels. This process is separate and apart from the approval of a relocation agreement, however they may be considered concurrently. In this manner, areas may opt-in through a legislative process that will require approval by City Council and Mayor. Relocation agreements on public property do not require the establishment of a Tier 3 Sign District.

### Which provisions will have alternatives explored in the forthcoming staff report to CPC?

The City Council instructions requesting the proposed Ordinance also instructed the Department to present a number of options for how to proceed with Tier 3 sign districts and relocation agreements. This directive is focused primarily on how to phase-in, cap, and/or prohibit the relocation of off-site signs on private property. The proposed Ordinance provides an initial option for all three, and the City Planning Commission will consider the proposal at a public meeting on a future date. The recommendation of the



City Planning Commission will then be presented to the City Council and Mayor for final consideration and approval.

### What are the next steps in terms of the legislative process?

The instructions directing City Planning to draft a revised ordinance also directed the Department to bring the proposed Ordinance before the City Planning Commission for consideration and a recommendation report. Following CPC, the proposed Ordinance would move to the Planning and Land Use Management Committee (PLUM) of the City Council for consideration before review by the full City Council and Mayor.

### Will there be opportunities for public comment?

Comments and questions regarding the draft can be submitted to Department staff identified below. This item is tentatively scheduled for consideration by the City Planning Commission at a public meeting in February 2021. Any public comment wishing to be considered and incorporated into the Department's report on the matter must be received by January 29, 2021. Once the Department's report is released for the City Planning Commission, additional comments can be directed to [cpc@lacity.org](mailto:cpc@lacity.org).

### Who can I contact for additional information?

Please submit questions and comments for this proposed Ordinance to Andrew Pennington: [andrew.pennington@lacity.org](mailto:andrew.pennington@lacity.org), (213) 978-1395. To sign up for the updates on this proposed Ordinance and other updates from the Department please visit, [planning.lacity.org/about/email-sign-up](https://planning.lacity.org/about/email-sign-up).