

DIGITAL SIGNAGE POLICY - APPROACH AND WORKPLAN

RECOMMENDATION

That the September 27, 2022, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE01127 be received for information.

Requested Council Action	Information Only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Urban Places		
City Plan Values	THRIVE		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	N/A	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Economic Growth
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning Bylaw 12800 • Traffic Bylaw 5590 • Parkland Bylaw 2202 • Bylaw 12846 Regulation of Work and Equipment Installation on City Lands • Safe Mobility Strategy/Vision Zero • Light Efficient Community Policy C576 • Public Places Bylaw 14614 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light Efficient Community Policy C576 (August 28, 2013) • CR_5345rev Digital Sign Regulations and Signage Policy (Urban Planning Committee, May 22, 2018) • Charter Bylaw 18534 (September 5, 2018) 		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the February 23, 2022, City Council Public Hearing, the following motion was passed:

That Administration return to the Urban Planning Committee with a report outlining an approach and workplan to establish a digital signage policy including considerations for impacts of light on the night sky, visibility, wildlife, public health, climate goals and the effects of digital light on driver

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distraction.

Executive Summary

- Digital signage is a rapidly developing technology that is redefining advertising and marketing, and changing the urban environment of Edmonton and other major cities.
- While The City Plan and other policy documents provide some guidance, at present there is no comprehensive policy that provides strategic guidance on digital signage.
- The development of strategic guidance must consider current trends and opportunities presented by digital signs while also considering the various impacts. Mitigation measures need to be easily and efficiently translated into subsequent zoning and other bylaw regulations.
- Creating effective strategic guidance on digital signage reinforces a number of key policy objectives in The City Plan related to economic development, livability, and human health, as well as environmental and ecological health and wellness.

REPORT

Digital signage is a rapidly developing technology that is redefining advertising and marketing, and changing the urban environment of Edmonton and other major cities. At the same time, there is an increasing awareness of the negative impacts of digital signage on traffic safety and human, wildlife and ecological health. This report provides an overview of a proposed approach and work plan to create strategic guidance that allows the appropriate use of digital signage on both public and private property, while mitigating its negative impacts.

Current Policy Context

Digital signs are generally understood to be signs with illuminated, electronic displays that can switch messages rapidly or play video. While Zoning Bylaw 12800 permits and regulates fascia (signs attached to a building facade) and freestanding digital signs on private property, this report considers the need for guidance for all types of digital signage on both public and private property.

Although signage regulations are in place, the City of Edmonton presently has no comprehensive policy that supports decision-making on digital signage, though related elements do appear in The City Plan, Safe Mobility Strategy and City Policy C576 - Light Efficient Community. The City of Edmonton Zoning Bylaw 12800 includes a number of regulations governing the use, location, siting, intensity and operation of digital signage installed within private land.

On public land and road right-of-way, the use of digital signage is regulated by the Traffic Bylaw 5590, Regulation of Work and Equipment Installation on City Lands Bylaw 12846 and Parkland Bylaw 2202. The need for developing strategic guidance was introduced in report CR_5345rev Digital Sign Regulations and Signage Policy (Urban Planning Committee May 22, 2018). This report outlined an approach to developing guidance, as well as the update of the zoning bylaw regulations. While some updates to the Zoning Bylaw 12800 were made following the completion

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of CR_5345rev as approved by Urban Planning Committee, the development of strategic guidance was not undertaken at the time.

Proposed Approach

The proposed approach to developing effective strategic guidance on digital signage recognizes trends, opportunities and impacts related to digital signage, which is particularly important with consideration for an increasing demand for digital signage in the urban environment.

Digital Signage Trends and Opportunities

Digital media is being adopted in many areas of social and business activities and interactions. It can be expected that the utilization of digital media for business branding, advertising and public communication is going to increase. One reason for this emerging trend is that digital media allows for more agility to deliver programming/content.

Based on recent research, some of the current trends and opportunities for consideration in the development of digital signage policy guidance include:

- **Economic activity** - Business owners and signage companies advise that digital signage provides greater flexibility and more effective means of communication and has the potential for substantial revenue generation.
- **Signage for Schools and Community Leagues** - There is interest in the use of digital signage by community leagues, schools and other not-for-profit community organizations and sport associations, primarily due to the ease and effectiveness of communicating to the public.
- **Urban Vibrancy** - In certain urban situations, digital signage can create public space vibrancy, introducing colour, light and visual interest. If handled according to regulations, digital signage can positively complement other initiatives to activate the public realm at all times of day and night, and particularly in winter.
- **Public Communication** - Digital signage provides important information to the general public, for example, conveying messages related to public events, informing of road conditions and detours on public roads, and providing transit schedule updates at public transit facilities.

Considerations and Impacts

While there are many opportunities provided by the continued application of digital signage, there are impacts for consideration, including the following:

- **Safe Mobility** - Illuminated, digital signage in a driver's field of view may cause glare, confusion and distraction, which may impact drivers' reaction time and can contribute to traffic collisions. Light glare can also disorient pedestrians and cyclists and affect their behaviour on the road. Addressing these issues requires careful location selection and prioritization of traffic control signage (regulatory, warning and informational) over digital signs and minimizing signage clutter.
- **Health and Well-being** - Digital displays visible from residential premises or in close proximity to office building facades disturb people's daily routines and may be harmful to human health. According to scientific research, excessive lighting during night time leads to disrupted circadian rhythms which may cause health issues.

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- **Crime Prevention** - Excessive glare from digital signage, as with other types of lighting, can make it difficult to see other people or activities within open spaces at night.
- **Energy Conservation** - At present, it is difficult to assess the life cycle energy efficiency and environmental footprint of digital signage; however, excessively bright digital signage is an unnecessary use of energy.
- **Light Pollution** - It is difficult to shield the light emanating from digital signs, resulting in light spillage into adjacent areas (and into the night sky).
- **Wildlife / Ecology** - Light pollution from digital displays can disrupt the daily activity cycle of insects, animals and plants. This in turn affects growth, survival, pollination, migration, hunting and foraging habits and other behaviours.
- **Urban Quality / Placemaking** - Digital signage can adversely impact efforts to create an attractive, walkable, human-scaled public realm. The proliferation of digital signs can undermine land values, impact views and erode community character (including those places with historic resources).
- **Diversity and Inclusion** - Equity-seeking and underrepresented groups may be adversely impacted by sign location and placement, and content and readability. For example, the location of digital signs may negatively impact people experiencing homelessness, and in other instances, digital signs may be difficult to read by people with visual impairments.
- **Brand and Reputation** - Public messages and advertising reflect the values of society with consideration for diversity, respect, equity and inclusion of all members of Edmonton's communities and population. Messages communicated on digital signage, particularly on City-owned land or within the right-of-way, have inherent City brand and reputation implications.
- **Enforcement** - Difficulty in enforcement of any digital signage regulations/requirements since, unlike static signage, a digital display can vary after installation, and continually change, e.g., brightness is affected by displayed program or possibly faulty automatic brightness adjustment (time of day or content); the programming can easily change from static messages to video contrary to sign approval. Enforcement may require new monitoring procedures and resources, establishing positive relationships with the industry and raising public awareness.

The breadth and diversity of these considerations and their impacts are significant factors impacting the proposed work plan.

A Work Plan to Develop Effective Strategic Guidance

Developing effective strategic guidance would include the following steps:

- **Undertaking background research** including:
 - Reviewing previous signage approval processes, considerations and issues;
 - Reviewing best practice and conducting a jurisdictional scan;
 - Reviewing current regulations to identify potential policy gaps;
 - Engagement with the public as well as internal and external stakeholders to gather input on the trends, opportunities, issues and impacts associated with digital signage, including a GBA+ analysis; and
 - Undertaking technical research as needed to inform the development of guiding principles.

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- **Establishing policy direction and guiding principles** for review and approval by Council. Approved policy direction will subsequently be integrated into an appropriate statutory plan, e.g., District General Policy (subject to the approval of Council).
- **Preparing guidance to activate Council-approved policy direction**; e.g., guidance related to the nature, location and operation of digital signage with due regard to the trends, opportunities, issues and impacts identified previously. Specific consideration will be given to the creation of guidance that can be efficiently and effectively translated into subsequent zoning, traffic bylaw and other regulations, in alignment with the Zoning Bylaw Renewal initiative.

A future phase of work, beyond the current scope described in this report, involves Administration undertaking the development of updated zoning and other bylaw regulations, and enforcement mechanisms as appropriate. Resourcing for this work will be examined as required.

Because of the rapid changes in digital signage technology, it is prudent that Administration regularly review policy direction, strategic guidance, bylaws and enforcement mechanisms related to digital signage.

Budget/Financial Implications

The scope of the work is anticipated to require both internal and external resources and expertise. Existing internal resources will be utilised for management and delivery of the project. Existing base consulting budgets, approximately \$150,000, will be leveraged for specialized knowledge support and technical research.

It is anticipated that the work would require approximately 12-15 months to complete and will commence in 2023.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

As part of the May 22, 2018 Urban Planning Committee report CR_5345rev Digital Sign Regulations and Signage Policy, Administration conducted public and stakeholder engagement in 2016 and 2017 and the results were shared as part of the What We Heard report. Input from this past engagement is still valuable in considering the development of effective strategic guidance for digital signage. While the feedback from that time was primarily related to regulation, a key takeaway from this engagement was that the opinions on signage in Edmonton are diverse and further engagement is needed to develop values and a vision for signage policy.

As part of the recommended work plan, Administration will continue to engage with key stakeholders and the public with a particular focus on how digital signage technologies and trends have evolved since the original engagement was completed.

GBA+

This report outlines an approach and work plan in advance of the development of strategic guidance, GBA+ will be considered as a part of that work. This analysis will include, but not be limited to:

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- Conducting a literature review to identify groups impacted by digital signage;
- Conducting an equity analysis, seeking input from equity-seeking and underrepresented groups (equity-seeking and underrepresented groups may be adversely impacted by digital sign location and placement, and content and readability); and
- Suggesting mitigating measures to address GBA+ considerations.