



2012 Annual Amendment Application No. 2012-4
Sign Code Revisions

ASSESSMENT REPORT

Application #:	2012-4
Applicant:	Community & Economic Development Dept.
Contact:	Shirley Schultz, 591-5121, shirley.schultz@cityoftacoma.org
Type of Amendment:	Regulatory Code Text Change
Current Land Use Intensity:	City-Wide
Current Area Zoning:	City-Wide
Size of Area:	City-Wide
Location:	City-Wide
Neighborhood Council area:	All
Proposed Amendment:	Amendment to the sign code to address digital signs, consistency, and clarity of sign code, reformatting for ease of administration

General Description of the Proposed Amendment:

Proposed are amendments to the sign code, TMC 13.06.520, 13.06.521, and 13.06.522. The primary purpose of the proposal is to address electrical on-premise changing message signs – including digital and LED signage. In addition, changes may be proposed to ensure consistency and clarity in the sign code, including, potentially, revisions to the signage allowance tables, changes to the definitions section, and clarifications of sign types. Sections may be added or modified to ensure consistency with other sections of the TMC (such as the Shoreline Master Program).

The need for updated regulations regarding electronic signage became clear during the Planning Commission’s study of digital billboards (off-premises signs); concern was raised both by Commission members and the public during the review of the billboard ordinance.

Additional Information:

The Planning Commission addressed digital billboards from December 2010 to May 2011 at the request of the City Council. The Commission developed a public review draft of proposed zoning code changes which would allow a limited number of digital billboards in exchange for the removal of a substantial number of standard billboards and billboard relocation permits. The public reaction to the code was predominately negative – aside from aesthetic reasons, the primary reason that citizens were opposed to digital billboards was due to safety concerns related to driver distraction.

The Planning Commission noted the same concerns: changing message signs had the potential to distract both drivers and pedestrians and create safety hazards, and they also presented aesthetic impacts that weren’t desirable in the city. They further found that these same concerns could be noted for on-premise signs, and in their Findings and Recommendations Report to the City Council recommended that on-premise changing message signs be addressed in the 2012 Annual Amendment.

Of note, several performance standards were discussed for digital billboards, that may be considered for on-premise electronic signs:

- Static image time (the length of time a message must be displayed)
- Transition time (the amount of time between messages)
- Animation (moving text or graphics)
- Brightness (maximum light, whether it is adjusted for day or night)
- “Off” time (hours of operation)
- Default settings (turning the sign off in case of malfunction)

Following is a summary of sign permits in the City of Tacoma from the last five years, noting which signs are electronic changing message signs.

Summary of Sign Permits - January 2006 to July 2011	
Number of sign Permits:	966
Number of replacements, copy only:	24
Number of illuminated signs (includes digital/electronic):	741
Number of non-illuminated signs:	198

Assessment Criteria:

In order to assist the Commission in determining which applications should be considered in which amendment cycle, staff provides an assessment of each application pursuant to the following criteria, which are contained in TMC 13.02.045.F.

1. Determining if the amendment request is legislative, and properly subject to Commission review, or quasi-judicial, and not properly subject to Commission review.

The duties and responsibilities of the Planning Commission include development, review, and revision of the *Comprehensive Plan*, including goals and policies therein, along with the development and review of development regulations. Chapter 13.06 Zoning of the *Tacoma Municipal Code* applies to all development within the City of Tacoma and is thus very broad in its scope. Sections 13.06.520-522 apply to signage within the city.

2. Determining if the request is site-specific (i.e., a land use intensity or a zoning change for a specific parcel(s) likely to be under one ownership).

The proposal is not site-specific. The proposed amendments would apply to all signage in the City.

3. Receipt by the application deadline, if applicable (a large volume of requests before the deadline may necessitate that some requests be reviewed in a subsequent amendment cycle).

The Planning Commission requested review in May 2011 as part of their recommendation to the City Council concerning billboard regulations.

4. Order of receipt.

N/A

5. Recent study of the same area or issue (this may be cause for the Commission to decline further review).

The Planning Commission studied the related issue of digital off-premise signs from December 2010 to May 2011. During that review, the Commission found that many of the same concerns regarding digital off-premises signs were also pertinent to on-premise electronic signs. The scope of the previous Commission review was limited to off-premise signs; therefore the Commission recommended addressing this subject during the 2011-2012 amendment cycle.

6. Amount of analysis necessary (if a large-scale study is required, an application may have to be delayed until a future amendment cycle due to work loads, staffing levels, etc.).

Depending on the ultimate scope of work, the amount of analysis is expected to be moderate, and staff time has been allocated to the project. If the scope is expanded beyond electronic on-premise signs, the code amendments may need to be removed from the annual amendment package and schedule and proceed on an independent extended timeline. Certain questions regarding performance standards for electronic signs remain unanswered (e.g., the ideal static image time given road speeds). Consultant input may be necessary if research of existing sources proves inadequate. Benchmarking will be conducted and it's likely that stakeholder review will need to occur.

7. Available incorporation into planned or active projects.

This request is largely independent of other requests before the Planning Commission. It may incorporate other code changes and projects – for instance, it may include information from the Shoreline Master Program Update and may incorporate future neighborhood planning activities.

Recommendation:

The Planning Commission will review the assessment and make its decision as to: (1) whether or not the application is complete or what information is needed to make the application complete; (2) which amendment application(s) will be considered and in which amendment cycle; and (3) whether or not to prepare alternative proposed amendment(s) that either expand or contract the scope of the original proposed amendment (TMC 13.02.045.F).

Staff recommends that the application be considered as part of the 2011 Annual Amendment.