



City of Tacoma  
Planning and Development Services

**Agenda Item  
D-1**

**To:** Planning Commission  
**From:** Shirley Schultz, Development Services Division  
**Subject:** **Billboard Task Force Recommendation**  
**Meeting Date:** **September 16, 2015**  
**Memo Date:** September 11, 2015

At the September 16, 2015 meeting, the Planning Commission will review and discuss the recommendation of the Commission's Billboard Task Force, as outlined in Attachment A. The associated draft code revisions will be provided to the Commission at the meeting. The Commission will consider authorizing the release of the information for public review and setting October 7, 2105 as the date for a public hearing.

The City is exploring amendments to the special billboards regulations in the Tacoma Municipal Code, Section 13.06.521.M. The main objectives are to continue to reduce the number of billboards in the City and facilitate the move of billboards which adversely impact neighborhoods, protected districts and land uses to more acceptable areas. This process is part of an effort to successfully end a legal "standstill" agreement between the City of Tacoma and Clear Channel Outdoor (CCO) regarding the City's efforts to enforce its billboard regulations.

Additional information relevant to billboards, including the Community Working Group's (CWG) full report is available on the Planning Services Division's website at [www.cityoftacoma.org/planning](http://www.cityoftacoma.org/planning) (and click on "Billboard Community Working Group").

If you have any questions, please contact me at 591-5121 or [shirley.schultz@cityoftacoma.org](mailto:shirley.schultz@cityoftacoma.org).

Attachment

c: Peter Huffman, Director





City of Tacoma  
Planning Commission

MEMORANDUM

September 11, 2015

TO: Planning Commission  
Chris Beale, Chair  
FR: Steve Wamback, Chair  
Billboard Task Force, Planning Commission  
RE: Summary of Task Force recommendations for Billboard Regulations

---

This memorandum is to transmit to you a summary of the Billboard Task Force recommendations for regulatory changes, in preparation for discussion at the September 16 Planning Commission meeting.

The Task Force consists of four members and one alternate from the full Commission: myself, Don Erickson, Meredith Neal, and Anna Petersen. Brett Santhuff served as alternate. The group met five times, starting on August 17 and concluding on September 10, 2015.

The purpose of this Task Force was to review the Community Working Group reports as well as staff review of work so far. The Task Force was formed to pick up where the CWG left off while also considering prior years' work, to incorporate the Commission's role in recommending code, and to form a recommendation for the Planning Commission in developing draft code and preparing for public review.

We discussed all major topics relating to existing and relocated billboards: design, maintenance, landscaping, height, lighting, buffering, dispersal, and allowed zones. We also discussed an exchange mechanism whereby billboards may be removed and some of all of the square footage be relocated to a new (conforming) location.

The summary of recommendations is attached. The recommendation reflects consensus among the group; we believe that the package will be at an appropriate level of detail to be released for public review.

A draft of code revisions will be provided to the Commission at the September 16 meeting.

## Summary of Task Force Recommendations – Billboards

### **Exchange:**

The Task Force recommends adoption of an exchange system to allow the removal of billboard faces and to relocate the square footage, in all or in part, in another location. This includes allowance of wall-mounted billboards in additional zoning districts.

In the existing “allowed” districts (M1, M2, PMI, and C2), new pole-mounted billboards would be allowed in exchange for removal of an equivalent nonconforming billboard. In the “newly allowed” districts, only wall-mounted billboards would be allowed.

An exchange “value” is assigned for each square foot of an existing nonconforming billboard per square foot of newly located billboard. The ratios are as follows:

- Relocating from a pole sign in any zone to a wall sign downtown (DCC, DMU, WR) or UCX has a greater ratio than 1:1 – the biggest incentive of the exchange.
- Pole sign to wall sign in same district or “newly allowed” zone is greater than 1:1.
- All other sign relocation would be less than a 1:1 ratio (more than one square foot of billboard would have to be removed per new square foot of billboard).
- NCX would become a receiving zone for relocated billboards (wall only) once tier 1 zones are rid of billboards (R, RCX, CONS, SHR, and C1 – approximately 17 billboards). This is subject to confirmation that there are no HIST or NRX, VSD, or similar zones billboards. If there are, they are included in this list.

Finally, the Task Force recommends keeping an amortization clause in the regulations, to be modified to align with the new exchange program and with a revised “sunset” date. Billboards would still be considered nonconforming if they are not compliant as of the date of the regulations and amortization should be pursued.

### **Maintenance:**

The CWG, staff, and the Planning Commission Task Force have concurred that the recommendation is to retain existing code related to maintenance.

The Task Force also recommends including language specific to immediate graffiti removal from a billboard. TMC 8.120 states that a site with graffiti is considered a nuisance. When a correction letter is sent the property owner has 18 days to abate the condition. The Task Force recommends stricter language for billboards, requiring abatement within 48 hours of notification. This would be enforceable under TMC 13.05.100, but would be supplemental to that language (which also allows 18 days for compliance).

### **Design:**

The Task Force concurs with the CWG and recommends removing the requirement that billboard faces be within five degrees of perpendicular of the roadway, as well as the deleting the 10-foot maximum setback requirement. Wall mounted signs must meet the requirements for all wall signs\*\*, and may not be located on the primary façade of a structure. Pole-mounted billboards would be subject to the applicable sections of the freestanding sign regulations. ++

Further, the Task Force agrees with the deletion of the clause about cantilevered design; however, offset faces would not be allowed. Pole signs would be required to be a single pole only. The rationale behind this is to reduce the amount of visible structure.

For sites with an existing freestanding sign, a billboard may be allowed only if it is building-mounted. No freestanding billboard would be allowed.

### **Landscaping:**

The Task Force concurs with CWG and staff to delete the section about the required landscaping buffer. The remaining language should be retained.

### **Dispersal:**

The Task Force forwards the following recommendation for changes to the dispersal language in the current TMC (which has a 500-foot dispersal restriction on all billboards).

- Billboard faces over 300 sf in size, not located on the same structure, shall be a minimum of 500 feet apart, including billboards which may be located outside the City limits.
- Billboard faces of 300 sf or less in size, not located on the same structure, shall be a minimum of 300 feet apart, including billboards which may be located outside the City limits.
- Wall mounted billboards shall not be located within 200 feet of another billboard within the same view corridor (i.e., billboards on opposite or perpendicular faces of a building/s may be closer).

Rationale: in order to achieve a reduction in the number of faces in undesirable areas, and in order to remove nonconforming billboards, additional areas need to be provided for an exchange.

### **Size/Dimensions:**

The Task Force forwards the following recommendations for allowed billboard sizes:

- Maximum size of 300 square feet in all non-industrial zones permitting billboards
- Maximum size of 672 square feet in M-1, M-2, and PMI for freestanding signs
- Wall mount maximum of 672 square feet in all districts allowing billboards

The Task Force concurs with staff to retain existing vertical and horizontal face dimensions for pole mounted signs; for building mounted signs vertical and horizontal dimensions are flexible.

### **Lighting:**

The Task Force recommends that any billboard lighting be LED or equivalently efficient lighting. All billboard lights must be turned off from midnight until 5 a.m. In addition, the code should clarify that timers or other device are used to make sure lights are off during daylight. Otherwise, retain current language.

### **Buffering:**

The Task Force recommends a buffer of 250 feet from all “non-billboard zones”, overlays, and protected uses. In short, retain the existing buffering language but change “500 feet” to “250 feet”. Religious institutions are removed from the list of buffered uses (unless deemed historically significant by historic preservation officer).

**Height:**

The Task Force recommendation is that for any freestanding billboard within 500 feet of residential, shoreline, view-sensitive, historic, and conservation districts the maximum height should be 30 feet; building mounted signs may be higher based on staff review.

If a billboard is located more than 500 feet from residential, shoreline, view-sensitive, historic, and conservation districts the maximum height would be 35 feet.

Wall mounted signs must be at least 10 feet from the ground to discourage vandalism.

**Location:**

Add UCX, CCX, CIX, DCC, DMU, WR, PDB, and NCX to zoning districts allowing billboards (see matrix below). The reasoning behind this is that these zones have development characteristics that are very similar to the current “allowed” zones. In addition, the allowed zones already have a concentration of billboards. By adding these zones some additional acceptable areas are opened up for relocating and consolidating billboard faces. The Task Force has included limitations on billboards in these new areas (e.g., no new pole-mounted billboards) and has maintained buffers, height, and lighting limitations.

In addition, the Task Force recommends a future consideration of off-premises signs that are smaller (maximum of 32 square feet) and incorporated into an overall streetscape design. These signs would be allowed in all “billboard” zoning districts as well as C-1 and all downtown districts. The Task Force concurs with the staff recommendation that code be developed for these kinds of signs:

- must be located on a building face which is perpendicular to the sidewalk if the near edge of the sign is within 10 feet of the sidewalk;
- signs are also allowed on permitted information kiosks ;
- signs must be located a maximum of 7 feet above the adjacent sidewalk;
- require a minimum 200 foot dispersal between each pedestrian scale outdoor advertising sign; and
- signs will require a sign permit (and a street occupancy permit if applicable) and square footage utilized will be deducted from banked billboard square footage.

**Zones**

|             | Zone                 | Existing allowed |        |        |    | "New Zones" |     |            |     |     |     |    |     |  |
|-------------|----------------------|------------------|--------|--------|----|-------------|-----|------------|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|--|
|             |                      | PMI              | M2     | M1     | C2 | CIX         | UCX | NCX        | CCX | DCC | DMU | WR | PDB |  |
| <b>Sign</b> |                      |                  |        |        |    |             |     |            |     |     |     |    |     |  |
| 72 sf       | Jr Poster/Wall Mount |                  |        |        |    |             |     | only later |     |     |     |    |     |  |
| 72 sf       | Jr Poster/Pole Mount | relocated only   |        |        |    | Not allowed |     |            |     |     |     |    |     |  |
| < 300 sf    | Poster/Wall Mount    |                  |        |        |    |             |     | only later |     |     |     |    |     |  |
| < 300 sf    | Poster/Pole Mount    | relocated only   |        |        |    | Not allowed |     |            |     |     |     |    |     |  |
| > 300 sf    | Bulletin/Wall Mount  |                  |        |        |    |             |     | only later |     |     |     |    |     |  |
| > 300 sf    | Bulletin/Pole Mount  | no new           | no new | no new |    | Not allowed |     |            |     |     |     |    |     |  |

### **Additional items:**

The Task Force recommends that a definition of “pedestrian-scale outdoor advertising sign” be developed to accommodate this additional type of signage.

Further information is needed about the effects of “MAP 21” applicability to arterial streets and the off-premises signs located along those streets.

Prior to any relocation of signs, all illegal signs must be removed.

The Task Force made a recommendation to keep the “cap” on billboard faces and square footage.

\*\* The wall-mounted sign definition includes any sign mounted or painted on the wall of a building. There are specific regulations for wall-mounted signs in TMC13.06.521. These would apply to a wall-mounted billboard, as well.

E. Wall Signs. Special regulations governing wall signs are as follows:

1. A wall-mounted sign shall not extend above the wall to which attached or above the roofline.
2. A wall sign shall not extend more than 18 inches from the wall to which it is attached.
3. No wall sign shall cover wholly or partially any wall opening nor project beyond the corner of the wall to which it is attached.
4. Where a wall sign extends over a public or private walkway, a vertical clearance of eight feet shall be maintained above such walkway.
5. For the purposes of this subsection, any building with an actual or false mansard roof may use such walls or roof for wall sign installation.
6. An architectural blade designed primarily for the placement of signs may be erected on top of a wall, parapet, roof, or building face and shall comply with all applicable height limitations. All supporting structure for such signs shall be completely enclosed.
7. Painted signs, on the building, shall be calculated with the allowed sign area for a business.

++ The Freestanding sign definition is “A permanently installed, self-supporting sign resting on or supported by means of poles, standards, or any other type of base on the ground” and would include pole-mounted billboards. The standards for freestanding signs are below, and could apply to billboards in addition to any other specific regulations. As with wall-mounted, this section could be referenced in the billboard section as well.

G. Freestanding signs. Special regulations governing freestanding signs are as follows:

1. No freestanding sign shall be located within 15 feet of a residentially-zoned district, and where the side of a commercially zoned property abuts the side of a residentially-zoned property the first 100 feet of the commercial frontage shall have a sign setback requirement of 15 feet.
2. Minimum clearance. All freestanding signs shall have a minimum clearance to the ground as follows:
  - a. Over parking lots and other similar areas where vehicles are moved or stored, 14-1/2 feet;
  - b. Over footpaths, sidewalks, and other spaces accessible to pedestrians, eight feet.
3. Signs shall be located upon the frontage for which the sign area is calculated.
4. No freestanding sign shall project over a public right-of-way, unless an adjacent structure or sign is built out to or over the property line that blocks visibility to a freestanding sign on the adjoining property; then, such freestanding sign may be located so that the sign structure is on private property and the sign cabinet may project over the right-of-way, subject to all the provisions regulating projecting signs which project over rights-of-way.
5. Signs placed on public property and/or right-of-way, abutting the business for which they identify, will require a Street Occupancy Permit. Sign regulations shall be determined by the zoning district of the abutting property.