

**Background:**

The new zoning code enacted in December 2011 did not include substantive amendments to the sign controls portion because the Zoning Code Commission did not have the resources to complete this work within its timeline. At the end of 2010, an interagency Sign Controls Working Group began analyzing the existing sign controls and developing a new framework for this chapter of the code. The Working Group followed the guiding principles set forth in the Home Rule Charter for the Zoning Code Commission:

*The Commission's work shall be guided by the principles that Philadelphia's Zoning Code should be consistent and easy to understand, should help shape future construction and development, and should enhance and improve Philadelphia's development approval process while encouraging positive development and protecting the character of Philadelphia's neighborhoods.*

The civic engagement program for sign controls included: publication of background materials and a web-based visual preference survey; a series of five discussion groups on sign controls; presentation of draft sign controls at two City Planning Commission meetings; and a series of five community-based meetings.

**Structure of Ordinance:**

The Ordinance includes amendments to several sections of the new zoning code addressing sign controls:

- Chapter 14-200 – Incorporating new rules of measurement and definitions
- Chapter 14-400 – Revising sign regulations in Special Purpose districts to be consistent with new definitions. Substantive changes were made in the Special Purpose – Institutional district with the intent to produce more predictable amounts of signage
- Chapter 14-500 – Modifying or removing the portion of neighborhood-based overlays dealing with signs, because the sign controls in base districts (Chapter 14-900, below) now address the preponderance of their concerns
- Replacing Chapter 14-900 with a new Chapter 14-900
- Carrying over the Market Street East and I-95 Condemnation Corridor sign controls

**Major changes:**

- General:
  - Creating consistent and easy-to-understand terms for sign types (such as wall, window, projecting, freestanding) and sign characteristics (such as illumination, animation, and mechanical movement)
  - Addressing new types of signs/technology such as digital displays, art as signs, and projected images on walls and sidewalks
- Non-Accessory Signs:
  - Regulating digital non-accessory signs more strictly than non-digital non-accessory signs, and no longer allowing a change from a non-digital to a digital sign as a “face change”
  - Changing replacement ratio from 1:1 to 4:1, based upon priority removal areas and digital vs. non-digital format
  - Incentivizing removal of signs from neighborhood commercial areas, historic districts, and important gateways
  - Reducing the size and amount of non-accessory signage
  - Clarifying the ability to maintain non-accessory signs in a state of good repair, because the current zoning code has confusing language that can be interpreted as not permitting the sign owner to repair the sign
  - Creating a system of “credits” for sign removal that can be used or banked for future use towards the placement of a new sign.

- Accessory Signs:
  - Reducing permitted accessory sign area in some districts
  - Regulating signs placed within buildings but viewable from the sidewalk through windows
  - Addressing the sign needs of commercial properties with multiple tenants
  - Limiting window sign area to provide transparency, but allowing without permits to maximize flexibility for businesses that need to advertise seasonal products, sales, etc.
  - Defining temporary signs based on duration and allowing small temporary signs, such as grand opening signs, without a permit

**Issues:**

- We are meeting on May 14<sup>th</sup> with representatives of the outdoor advertising industry to discuss their concerns regarding:
  - revised replacement ratio for non-accessory signs. The ratio we are using (ranging from 1:1 to 4:1) is similar to that used in other cities.
  - spacing standards are greater for digital signs than for non-digital signs. Because digital displays have the ability to be more distracting to drivers than other types of signs, we believe this space recommended (1,500 feet between digital signs) is justified.
  - length of time that sign credits would be valid. In response to this concern, we increased the time period from 5 years to 10 years.
  - their view that there are too many areas that prioritize the removal of signs and not enough permitted areas
- Some members of the public have advocated for a consolidated “design review” process for signs that would incorporate the Historical Commission and Art Commission reviews, but address additional signs. The Working Group has not supported this request because it feels that the current review requirements, which derive from the Charter, are sufficient.
- Neighborhood groups where overlay restrictions on signs were modified or removed may request re-incorporation of some or all of the current restrictions. The Working Group believes that there is great benefit to having consistent requirements citywide, and that the new regulations support the current overlay requirements.