

Calgary



# Calgary Third Party Advertising Sign Guidelines

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# 1. Purpose of the Guidelines

The purpose of this guideline is to provide support on the appropriate use and location of Third Party Advertising Signs in Calgary.

Third Party Advertising Signs are sometimes referred to as Billboards. These signs contain copy directing attention to a business, commodity, service, or entertainment that is conducted, sold, or offered elsewhere than on the parcel where the sign is located. A Third Party Advertising Sign may or may not contain a digital display to present its copy.



*Third Party Advertising Sign*



*Digital Third Party Advertising Sign*

Third Party Advertising Signs have been a part of Calgary throughout its history. Calgary has grown into a major urban centre and outdoor advertising has evolved alongside the changes in the City. Third Party Advertising Signs are a long-standing part of the Calgary community and economy, supporting businesses and helping keep Calgarians informed.

## 2. Application of the Guidelines

Third Party Advertising Signs are a discretionary use in Calgary's Land Use Bylaw. As such, they are considered generally appropriate for particular Land Use Districts, but of a nature that may not necessarily make them compatible with other uses or development in the district.

The city, in exercising its discretion, can apply considerations to Third Party Advertising Signs by adapting Bylaw rules to the context of the location to achieve greater compatibility. This may involve relaxing the rules governing Third Party Advertising Signs to a lesser or higher standard and attaching conditions to the development permit to address issues.

This guideline should direct the review of development permit applications for Third Party Advertising Signs. The guideline is to be read in its entirety and all relevant principles are to be applied to each situation.

This policy must be used in conjunction with other applicable Council approved policies for Third Party Advertising Signs, such as Entranceway Guidelines, an Area Structure Plan or Area Redevelopment Plan, to help guide decisions on Third Party Advertising Signs. When a new Area Structure Plan or Area Redevelopment Plan is being prepared, these guidelines may be considered to help determine if there are appropriate locations of Third Party Advertising Signs.

## 3. Approach to Regulating Third Party Advertising Signs

The Calgary Municipal Development Plan (MDP) and the Calgary Transportation Plan (CTP) provide the long-term strategy for managing growth and change in Calgary consistent with Council adopted land use goals and objectives. These include creating a prosperous economy, shaping a more compact urban form, creating great communities, using urban design to create a livable and attractive city, connecting the city, and greening the city.

The policies of the MDP and CTP direct implementation of Calgary's planning processes. This includes tools such as the regulation of land use and the approval of development permits. The principles of this Third Party Advertising Sign guideline are based on these policies and intended to ensure their consistent application in the development approval process.

The Land Use Bylaw rules govern the development of all types of signs in Calgary. The priorities for regulating Third Party Advertising Signs are:

- Promoting community aesthetics and public safety in the approval and development of signs;
- Preventing visual clutter arising from sign proliferation; and
- Protecting Calgary's communities and visual environment from unsuitable signs.

These priorities for Third Party Advertising Signs can be addressed in the Land Use Bylaw by rules dealing with:

- Land Use Districts where Third Party Advertising Sign development is appropriate;
- Requirements for the location and siting of Third Party Advertising Signs;
- Size and height regulations;
- Illumination and operational characteristics; and
- The development permit review process.

The focus of the following principles of Third Party Advertising Sign regulation is to maintain and enhance a high quality urban environment in Calgary and a city that continues to be a desirable community in which to live, work, and visit.

## 4. Principles of Third Party Advertising Sign Regulation

### (A) Land Use Districts

Third Party Advertising Signs are commercial advertising signs that benefit from high visibility and maximum exposure of their advertising and information to passersby. A Third Party Advertising Sign's success depends on attracting attention.

Third Party Advertising Signs can be among the largest signs in cities and are generally free standing structures on private property. The introduction of digital display screens to Third Party Advertising Signs has changed the traditional visual characteristics with respect to sign brightness and the manner in which sign copy is changed and displayed.

Third Party Advertising Signs are designed to attract attention to their advertising and requires that they be located in appropriate Land Use Districts among compatible development. This reduces

the potential for adverse impacts on their surroundings and conflicts with adjacent Land Use Districts with a different land use character and purpose. This basic planning principle applies to all uses and is inherent in all Land Use Districts.

## Principles

- I. The appropriate location for Third Party Advertising Signs is generally in commercial and industrial Land Use Districts, preferably on properties adjoining Arterial Streets, Industrial Arterials, Urban Boulevards and a limited number of Skeletal Roads, as designated in the Calgary Transportation Plan (CTP).
- II. Third Party Advertising Signs are not an appropriate use in districts that promote residential development including: low density, multi, and high density residential land use districts, or in parks, open space and natural areas. When not competing with business and building identification signage, some Third Party Advertising Signs may be appropriate in the Special Purpose – City and Regional Infrastructure District on select Calgary Transit parcels. Third Party Advertising Signs may also be considered in the Special Purpose - Recreation District when associated with sponsorship of sport activities on playing fields.
- III. Any Third Party Advertising on select Calgary Transit parcels should predominately be oriented to pedestrians as these areas should have a strong relationship to the human scale.
- IV. The development of Third Party Advertising Signs in the Commercial – Corridor 1 (C-COR1), Commercial – Corridor 2 (C-COR2), Centre City Mixed Use (CC-X), and Centre City Commercial Corridor (CC-COR) Districts, where residential development is allowed, must have regard to maintaining and protecting quality living environments for residents. When in these districts, Third Party Advertising Signs must have a sign area that is oriented to a pedestrian and copy must be at the eye level of pedestrians. When in areas that have been specifically identified as pedestrian oriented areas, Third Party Advertising Signs are not appropriate as they take away from limited opportunities for businesses to advertise.
- V. Third Party Advertising Signs must not be located at the major road entrance points to Calgary or along thoroughfares that pass through or adjacent to primarily residential communities. This maintains the visual amenity of these points, open and landscaped boulevards and enhances traffic safety.
- VI. A prime objective in locating Third Party Advertising Signs is to maintain views and vistas of Calgary's downtown skyline, the Foothills and Rocky Mountains.
- VII. The character, visual amenity and quality of public parks, escarpments, regional pathways, rivers, and natural areas will be maintained free of the view of copy on Third Party Advertising Signs. Pedestrian scaled and oriented Third Party Advertising Signs on Calgary Transit parcels may be visible from regional pathways leading to Transit facilities or stations.
- VIII. The location of Third Party Advertising Signs will take into consideration maintaining the visibility of and views to landmarks and buildings of historical, cultural or architectural significance.
- IX. Where appropriate in the Centre City, signs with digital displays may be integrated into development and be of a form and quality that contributes to defining a distinct identity for adjacent public space, and enhances the experience of the space through good urban design.

## (B) Location and Siting

The appropriate location and placement of a Third Party Advertising Sign in an area produces a compatible relationship with other buildings, signs and the surrounding context. Achieving an appropriate distribution and spacing of Third Party Advertising Signs along a street or corridor promotes visibility, public safety and a sound streetscape. It also avoids creating visual sign clutter from the proliferation of too many signs.

### Principles

- I. The orientation of Third Party Advertising Signs and their distance from residential communities, major parks, natural areas and similar sensitive uses must be suitably regulated to minimize and limit their visual intrusion into these areas.
- II. Third Party Advertising Signs must be located on private property along streets in such a way that their location mitigates or avoids risk to public safety. The location should not create an obstruction to vision or contribute to visual confusion with official traffic control devices.
- III. The placement of a Third Party Advertising Sign on a property must satisfy appropriate minimum setbacks from other buildings and structures on the parcel, street edges and parcel lines, other Freestanding Signs, other Third Party Advertising Signs, and Digital Message Signs. This will reduce sign proliferation and clutter which should be discouraged.
- IV. Priority must always be given to a business owner to advertise on their parcel over the ability to have a Third Party Advertising Sign. Any Third Party Advertising Sign that no longer meets the separation rules from other first party signs should be reviewed and discouraged upon renewal of a permit.
- V. Along a street or corridor, minimum separation distances between Third Party Advertising Signs on different properties will maintain proper visibility of all signs and avoid visual sign clutter along the streetscape including the undue concentration of Third Party Advertising Signs along a street.
- VI. On Calgary Transit parcels, every effort should be made to orient Third Party Advertising Signs into the site and away from surrounding streets, neighbourhoods and businesses so adjacent buildings and businesses do not have to compete for signage opportunities.
- VII. A Third Party Advertising Sign attached or adjacent to the wall of a building may not cover or obscure the openings and windows of the surrounding buildings or architectural features and decorative elements.
- VIII. No Third Party Advertising Sign may be located on a heritage building unless such a sign was originally on the building and is an acknowledged part of the heritage asset.

## (C) Size and Height

Third Party Advertising Signs come in a variety of sizes. Third Party Advertising Sign size and height are factors for achieving an appropriate fit between the Third Party Advertising Sign with surrounding buildings and spaces so that it is in scale with its context and the character of the area.

### Principles

- I. A freestanding Third Party Advertising Sign supported above the ground by a structure may have a height no greater than twice the vertical dimension of the sign area.
- II. It may be appropriate to lower the height of a freestanding Third Party Advertising Sign when it is in proximity to a building to maintain a suitable relationship to its height and scale.



*Third Party Advertising Sign next to a building and below the roofline.*

- III. A Third Party Advertising Sign may not be located above the second floor of a building when it is attached to the wall of a building.
- IV. A Third Party Advertising Sign must not project above the eave or roofline of a building or be located on the roof of a building.
- V. The largest size Third Party Advertising Signs are suited to auto-oriented corridors. These are where access to properties is primarily by automobile and there is little pedestrian circulation. The development fabric is characterised by low density development, relatively large lots, low parcel coverage, and buildings that are well set back from the street edge. Select Calgary Transit parcels may be appropriate for large Third Party Advertising Signs when the adjacent area is generally commercial or industrial in character and signs do not impact pedestrian circulation.
- VI. Pedestal Type Third Party Advertising Signs are smaller in scale than other Third Party Advertising Signs and are suited in districts that have commercial development on both sides of the street, with buildings that are close to each other and have a relationship with the street and public sidewalk.
- VII. Where Council has identified specific pedestrian areas which promote business opportunities, such as Business Revitalization Zones, Third Party Advertising Signs are not appropriate as they provide additional visual clutter that may detract from the local businesses in the immediate vicinity.

## (D) Illumination and Operational Characteristics

The technology of a digital display makes the entire Third Party Advertising Sign a direct light source and the sign must emit light both day and night to be visible. The sign's highest luminance levels or brightness are during the day in order to be seen in sunlight. Less luminance is required at night.



*Digital Third Party Advertising Sign at Night*



*Light Overspill from Excessive Sign Illumination*

Digital displays also give signs the flexibility to change sign copy frequently. Single images can be displayed and changed in sequence or full animation video can be shown on the sign as well as other kinds of animation and graphic effects.

These new operational characteristics of signs with digital displays increase their ability to attract attention and potentially distract drivers as they attempt to follow the changing messages and images.

Rapidly changing sign copy can also alter the visual character of an area where, except for the movement of traffic, the visual environment consists predominantly of objects and surfaces that do not move, change or flash. In some settings, this visual excitement from signs may help define or brand a place; in others, it can be disturbing and inappropriate.

### Principles

- I. The illumination of Third Party Advertising Signs must not adversely affect adjacent development, neighbouring residential communities and areas or the character of the streetscape.
- II. The luminance of Digital Third Party Advertising Signs must be suitable to the time of day or night and the surrounding context. Light from signs must not adversely affect adjacent development, neighbouring residential communities, or the character of the streetscape.
- III. Driver distraction is reduced by limiting the frequency of message changes on Digital Third Party Advertising Signs and prohibiting animation, sequential messages, and full motion video on Digital Third Party Advertising Signs.
- IV. Digital Third Party Advertising Signs will include a light sensor to control sign luminance within appropriate levels and incorporate measures to display a blank black screen in the case of a malfunction of the display.

- V. Minimum separation distances between Digital Third Party Advertising Signs, Digital Message Signs and Third Party Advertising Signs will maintain proper visibility and prevent a proliferation of signs with automatically changing messages that could impact area aesthetics and the streetscape.
- VI. Where a parcel in the City is identified through policy as an area where Third Party Advertising Signs will be a part of the character or design, consideration may be given to the use of various types of Third Party Advertising Signs and the use of full animation and video. This may be considered through careful site design, paying attention to ensuring that signage is oriented to the site, ensuring that digital displays are not oriented to any adjacent residential development or the street, and ensuring that light trespass does not affect adjacent parcels.

## **(E) Development Permit Review Process**

The flexibility inherent in the development permit process for discretionary uses such as Third Party Advertising Signs allows The City to tailor the development permit approval to the specific circumstances of the location of the proposed Third Party Advertising Sign and its surrounding context.

The review of development permit applications involving Third Party Advertising Signs should take into account matters including: any relevant plans or policies, the suitability of the location and parcel for the Third Party Advertising Sign, compatibility and impact of the Third Party Advertising Sign on adjacent development, and principles of good planning.

### **Principles**

- I. The objective for the review of development permits for Third Party Advertising Signs is to maintain and improve the quality of Calgary's communities and its overall visual character.
- II. Applications will be circulated to the Transportation Department for review of visibility and public safety issues.
- III. Where a proposed Third Party Advertising Sign is located in an area that is subject to a specific policy or plan, any applicable policies on signage or urban design will be taken into consideration.
- IV. Prior to making a decision on an application for a Digital Third Party Advertising Sign, the Development Authority must post a notice when the application is adjacent to a parcel that has the potential to contain a dwelling unit.
- V. The public will receive notification of the approval of a development permit for any Third Party Advertising Sign.
- VI. Conventional Third Party Advertising Signs may be approved for a maximum of five years. An application to renew the permit can be granted if the Development Authority is satisfied that the Third Party Advertising Sign remains compatible with its location and the character of the surrounding area.
- VII. Digital Third Party Advertising Signs may be approved for a maximum of three years. This provides a suitable time period to assess the operation of this different type of sign display and illumination technology and implement changes considered appropriate when an application is made for a new development permit.

VIII. When reviewing an application for any Third Party Advertising Sign, the Development Authority may consider relaxing bylaw standards provided that the applicant can demonstrate that such relaxations are unique, do not create a clustering of signage on a parcel or lead to sign proliferation in the general area.