



CITY OF ST. ALBERT
ADMINISTRATIVE BACKGROUNDER

TITLE: BYLAW 18/2016 – DIGITAL DISPLAY PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

On August 22, 2016 and February 27, 2017 Councillor MacKay provided notice in accordance with Section 23 of Procedure Bylaw 35/2009 that he intended to bring forward the proposed motion below.

In order for Council to debate the motion, the motion must be formally moved.

PROPOSED MOTION(S):

August 22, 2017:

1. That the 500m setback in Schedule C.5(2)(b) be amended to 300m in the Land Use Bylaw when it is next reviewed.
2. Delete “In all districts where portable signs are permitted, a freestanding sign employing a digital display shall take the place of all portable signs allowed on a site” from Schedule C.5(4)(g) in the Land Use Bylaw in any potential change.

February 27, 2017:

3. That schedule c.5. 1(a) (vii) be modified by removing or a freestanding sign with a digital display and any other reference that precludes third party advertising on free standing digital displays.
4. That schedule c.5 2(b) (iii) be modified by adding “facing the same ongoing traffic” after display;
5. That schedule c.5 2 (b) be modified by changing 500m to 300m

BACKGROUND:

The proposed regulations for digital displays were drafted based on the following three principles:

- 1) Safety
- 2) Support local business
- 3) Aesthetics

With that in mind, please find the responses to the proposed Notices of Motion below.

1. That the 500m setback in Schedule C.5(2)(b) be amended to 300m in the Land Use Bylaw when it is next reviewed.

As noted in the 'Summary of Changes' attachment to the Agenda Report for February 27, 2017, Council, at its August 22, 2016, meeting had indicated that it would like to support the growth of local business.

In order to help facilitate this, the minimum separation distance between two billboards with a digital display facing the same oncoming traffic is proposed to remain 500m. The proposed separation distance of 500m will support the potential for local businesses to be able to have a freestanding sign with a digital display to promote their on-site business(es).

There is a fundamental difference between a sign which helps promote a business on-site and one that displays 3rd party (off-site) advertising. A sign which displays on-site advertising only helps promote and contribute to the success of on-site businesses. The 3rd party advertising could be local, national, or international advertising of any kind. When a business owner constructs a 3rd party sign or allows a large billboard company to lease space on their property for 3rd party signs, the sign is a commercial venture in its own right.

There are currently numerous opportunities to advertise on billboards with a digital display, both within St. Albert and just outside of the St. Albert City limits. There are two such billboards located within St. Albert, one on the north end of St. Albert Trail and one on the south end of St. Albert Trail. Additionally, there are three such billboards located along St. Albert Trail between the City limits and 137 Avenue in Edmonton which are currently able to provide billboard advertising to essentially the same audience, if not an arguably larger audience (along the commuting corridor from St. Albert to Edmonton).

Should the separation distance between billboards with a digital display be reduced from the proposed 500m to 300m, the perceived benefit of allowing an increased number of billboards with a digital display within St. Albert should be weighed against the resulting reality of less opportunity for freestanding signs with a digital display alongside St. Albert Trail. Fewer freestanding signs with a digital display could mean less advertising space for local businesses. This raises the question whether, if at all, local businesses would benefit from billboard-style 3rd party advertising, which is normally associated with non-local business advertising.

The economic advantage of adding more billboards with a digital display within St. Albert would be mainly experienced by billboard sign companies (none of which are based in St. Albert), not local businesses.

Traditional billboards are still an option at a lesser separation distance than what is proposed for billboards with a digital display.

Approximately 66% of survey respondents selected 'none-6' as the appropriate number of billboards facing the same direction of travel.

Approximately 75% of survey respondents stated digital display advertising should be locally (St. Albert focused).

A reduction of the 500m spacing is not recommended by Administration.

Billboard Spacing in Other Municipalities Reviewed:

Municipality	Minimum Spacing Between Billboards
Airdrie	800m facing same oncoming traffic (Highway Corridor) 400m not facing same oncoming traffic (Highway Corridor)
Calgary	300m facing same oncoming traffic
Cochrane	3 rd Party advertising (billboards) NOT permitted
Edmonton	100m to 300m (depending on size)
Fort Saskatchewan	Billboards with a digital display NOT permitted
Lethbridge	100m or 300m facing same oncoming traffic (depending on road)
Medicine Hat	150m
Spruce Grove	800m

* Transportation Association of Canada recommends a minimum of 300m spacing. (*Digital and Projected Advertising Displays: Regulatory and Road Safety Assessment Guidelines, pg. 47*)

- Delete “In all districts where portable signs are permitted, a freestanding sign employing a digital display shall take the place of all portable signs allowed on a site” from Schedule C.5(4)(g) in the Land Use Bylaw in any potential change.**

This had already been removed in the February 27, 2017, draft copy of the proposed regulations.

- That schedule c.5. 1(a) (vii) be modified by removing or a freestanding sign with a digital display and any other reference that precludes third party advertising on free standing digital displays.**

Administration understands the intent of this amendment is to allow for static images in addition to static text on digital displays (Electronic Message Signs), not to change the fundamentals (core structure) of Schedule C. Such a proposal would give freestanding signs and fascia signs with a digital display an unfair advantage over traditional freestanding signs and fascia signs without a digital display, as they do not allow 3rd party (off-site) advertising. This would create an unlevel playing field.

A freestanding sign or fascia sign advertises businesses, products, and services located on the site upon which the sign is located. A billboard advertises businesses, products, and services not located on the site upon which the sign is located. These three sign types serve different, specific functions. Additionally, they have different regulations regarding size and placement.

Allowing 3rd party advertising on freestanding signs may mean that an on-site business on a multi-tenant site could lose their opportunity to, or can't afford to, advertise on the freestanding sign, and in essence lose their freestanding sign advertising. It also potentially creates a larger pool of advertising for a message or business to potentially get lost in.

Such an amendment would mean the only discernable difference between freestanding signs, fascia signs, and billboards would then be maximum size, and spacing.

The full potential impact of such a change (on safety, the potential look and feel of St. Albert, visual clutter, enforcement, staff workloads, etc.) has not been extensively reviewed. It would therefore not be advised to move forward with such a change until the potential impacts could be appropriately assessed.

3rd Party Advertising in Other Municipalities Reviewed:

Municipality	3rd Party Advertising **
Airdrie	Limited allowance in certain land use districts
Calgary	Specific 3rd party signs only
Cochrane	3rd party advertising signs are PROHIBITED
Edmonton	Specifies which signs can and cannot have 3rd party advertising
Fort Saskatchewan	Billboards with a digital display are NOT permitted
Lethbridge	On billboards only
Medicine Hat	All sign types
Red Deer	No 3rd party advertising on digital displays
Spruce Grove	On billboards only
Strathcona County	3rd party advertising is PROHIBITED on all sign types

**** Transportation Association of Canada has separate recommendations for on-premise and off-premise digital displays.**

Digital and Projected Advertising Displays: Regulatory and Road Safety Assessment Guidelines)

4. That schedule c.5 2(b) (iii) be modified by adding “facing the same ongoing traffic” after display;

The intent of this amendment is to allow for static images in addition to static text on Digital Displays (Electronic Message Signs), not to change the fundamentals (core structure) of Schedule C.

The additional text is not necessary as the concern (safety/impact) is not the same for a traditional billboard as it is for a billboard with a digital display. The concern is between two signs, each with a digital display.

Adding this text would also be inconsistent with the rest of the regulations (both for traditional signs and the proposed freestanding sign with a digital display regulations). It should be noted that traditional billboards do not have this distinction. Traditional billboard to traditional billboard minimum separation distance is 150m, regardless of which direction of oncoming traffic it is facing.

The additional text is not recommended by Administration, as it is not deemed necessary and is inconsistent with the rest of Schedule C.

5. That schedule c.5 2 (b) be modified by changing 500m to 300m

This Motion is the same as Motion #1 above. Please see response to Motion #1.

Report Date: April 3, 2017
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