

Title: City of Greater Sudbury Sign By-law Review

Date: June 7, 2019

BACKGROUND

Historical

In 1978 the Region of Sudbury passed a sign by-law which regulated the erection of permanent signs and other advertising devices within the Region.

In 1988 the Region of Sudbury passed a new sign by-law which incorporated the previous regulations but also added new controls for the ever growing types and sizes of permanent signs.

Before amalgamation each of the seven area municipalities had zoning by-laws which governed type, size and location of signs on private property.

After amalgamation and further to a public input meeting, a Comprehensive Sign By-law 2007-250 was passed by Council which regulated portable signs and poster signs. In 2010 when the new Comprehensive Zoning By-law 2010-100Z removed permanent signage from the zoning by-laws, By-law 2010-221Z amended Sign By-law 2007-250 to include permanent sign provisions.

Issues with Sign By-law

The feedback from stakeholders prior to review identified a number of issues with the current sign by-law:

- Outdated causing need for numerous sign variance applications
- New technologies and types of signs not included in by-law
- Requires two permits, one for signs under the sign by-law and one for building permit under the Ontario Building Code
- No policy framework for signs in right-of-way
- CGS Tourism signage program does not allow for small farm and agriculture directional signage

Based on the above, a request from Council was made to undertake a review of the sign by-law. A request for proposal for a Comprehensive review of the current sign By-law 2007-250 was issued and Martin Rendl Associates were retained to undertake the review.

Scope of Review

The consultant as part of the Comprehensive Sign By-law review was to:

- 1) Review of current state utilizing background information provided by the staff Steering Committee including the current by-law and policies involving signage with City of Greater Sudbury.
- 2) Assess existing conditions and prepare a report which would evaluate existing conditions including various types of signage currently in use in the City of Greater Sudbury.
- 3) Identify best practices for municipalities of same size, including administration, enforcement, application process and user fees so as to provide approaches for regulating all sign types.
- 4) Undertake public and industry stakeholder consultation.

Consultation Process

An internal staff steering committee was formed to work with Martin Rendl Associates and included divisional representation from various departments within the City of Greater Sudbury.

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- By-law Enforcement
- Tourism and Culture
- Planning
- Roads and Transportation
- Leisure Services
- Earth Care Sudbury
- Building Services
- Economic Development

Staff helped to provide the consultant a current state analysis by providing the following from their divisional work with signage.

- Existing sign by-laws and policies
- Existing sign types regulated
- Current administrative and enforcement processes
- User fees
- Review of Committee of Adjustment variance decisions related to signage.

Public and Stakeholder Consultation

Martin Rendl Associates, with the assistance of City staff, embarked on an initial series of fact finding presentations and met with the following stakeholder groups:

- Local sign association members and sign companies
- Sudbury Chamber of Commerce – Municipal Advocacy Committee
- Downtown Sudbury BIA
- Greater Sudbury Food Policy Council
- Sudbury Real Estate Association
- Two public input sessions

As well, citizen surveys were undertaken by the City of Greater Sudbury's Corporate Communications section seeking citizen opinion on current sign standards and their priorities for improvements for a new sign by-law. Over a hundred people responded to the surveys and results were provided to the consultant.

Results of Current State Analysis/Stakeholder Feedback/Public Service

Martin Rendl provided an initial assessment and critique of the existing sign by-law.

Positive Aspects

- Sign By-law has a good overall structure
- Temporary sign regulations meet current industry best practice
- Generally few instances of roadside clutter as a result

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Negative Aspects

- By-law is outdated, shows its age and origins
- Lack of a consolidated single by-law
- Inconsistent and undefined terms
- Gaps filled by staff interpretations
- Current permanent sign regulations
 - Overly narrow range of permitted sign types
 - Standards often difficult to understand
 - Overly complex
 - Gaps in by-law created
 - Unnecessarily rigid application of standards
 - Reliance on high number of recurring sign variances

Goal of New Sign By-law

Based on the public and stakeholder feedback as well as consultant review our goal is to achieve appropriate community standards as follows:

- Signs that are appropriate in size and number and location to the type of activity or use to which they pertain.
- Signs which provide reasonable and appropriate means for public to locate and identify facilities, businesses and services without difficulty or confusion.
- Signs which are compatible with their surroundings
- Signs that protect and enhance the aesthetic qualities and visual character of the City of Greater Sudbury
- Signs which are consistent with the City of Greater Sudbury Planning, urban design and heritage objectives
- Signs which do not create a distraction or safety hazard for motorists and pedestrians
- Signs which minimize adverse impacts on nearby public or private property
- Signs which allow the public the right and freedom of expression while staying in proportion to the purposes and direction of the By-law
- Signs which are structurally sound and safe to withstand appropriate climate loading

Next Steps

Martin Rendl has recently (May 28th/29th, 2019) undertaken a second series of public and stakeholder meetings to provide the results of his current state analysis with suggested modifications and upgrades to be brought forward for City Council's consideration for a new draft regulatory framework around signage in the City of Greater Sudbury including:

- By-law format

The existing structure and organization of Sign By-law 2007-250 adheres to the drafting norms and best practice for municipal sign by-laws in general but is dated. Sign types allowed are based on zoning by-laws districts which follow best practice.

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However, new sign by-laws should address the following shortfalls in current by-law:

- Consistency in the terms used
 - Clear definition for key terms within it
 - Update regulation to address post 2007 signage trends including electronic and digital displays in signs.
- Types of signs regulated

The current sign by-law provisions for temporary signs are generally appropriate and consistent with best municipal practice.

The provisions for permanent signs are the greatest weakness in the current sign by-law and some are as follows:

- Too narrow a range of permitted sign types
 - Difficult to understand standards
 - Overly complex provisions that impede understanding by users
 - Failure of sign by-laws to recognize common sign types associated with modern development resulting in a high reliance on minor variance applications to fill by-law gaps.
- Sign standards

Appropriate best practice sign standards for size and location for all permanent signs including wall signs, canopy and awning signs, projecting signs, ground signs and billboard signs will be provided for Council consideration.

- Aesthetic and safety consideration

The sign by-law will review current regulations and provide Council best practice standards to ensure that for various sign types their size, location and illumination will be consistent with the municipality's Planning and Community Design Policies. This shall ensure signage that is appropriate and suitable for their role and context so as to reinforce the physical character of their surroundings and maintain visual quality.

The recommendations will ensure signage does not create or conflict with other signs, specifically signs located adjacent to public road allowance.

- Approval processes

Martin Rendl has reviewed the current administration and approvals processes related to signage within the City of Greater Sudbury including permits, variances and fees. This review was for all types of signs, portable, permanent and tourism signs as well as signs in public road allowances to offer recommendations on governance as well as process improvements for Council's consideration.

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- **Enforcement**

Enforcement provisions for signs has also been reviewed for best practice recommendations to be provided to Council. Again this involved all sign types, however specific attention was provided to poster signs on City right-of-ways, based on citizen input.

- **Signs located on public road allowance**

The current state review has identified the need for clarity on how the City of Greater Sudbury manages signs in the public road allowance involving traffic control signs, tourism as well as agricultural directional signs. Signage on public road allowance within business improvement areas was also specifically reviewed.

Council will be provided recommendations on governance as well as appropriate frame work for managing non-traffic control signs in the road allowance.

The consultant was provided further feedback at these second stakeholder sessions including two public open houses, which he will further refine for presentation to City Council on September 24th, 2019 for Council's consideration and direction including a new draft by-law.

Resources Cited

Report Presented to [Policy Committee May 19, 2010](#)

Report Presented to [Policy Committee July 14, 2010](#)

Report Presented to [Policy Committee June 22, 2011](#)