

News Release

April 6, 2010

City of Toronto introduces new sign bylaw updating and improving sign regulations

The City of Toronto's new sign bylaw and Third-Party Sign Tax came into effect today. The bylaw and sign tax were approved by City Council at its meeting of November 30 to December 7, 2009.

"Together the new bylaw and related initiatives provide a means to advance city beautification, enhance the public realm, and assist in achieving our environmental goals," said Mayor David Miller. "The bylaw also creates a more accessible and transparent review and enforcement process for permanent signs in the City of Toronto."

The adoption of a new city-wide sign bylaw for Toronto, including processes for administration and enforcement of the bylaw, and the introduction of a new tax on third-party signs, will improve the regulation of signs in the city.

Previously there were six comprehensive sign bylaws and close to 100 amendments, all containing separate definitions and/or regulations for signs. The new sign bylaw contains one common, updated set of definitions and regulations for the entire city.

The sign bylaws of the former municipalities were also largely reliant on the zoning designations of the properties where signs appeared. Those bylaws do not always result in the most appropriate signage permissions for the property. The new sign bylaw addresses this issue through the creation of Sign Districts and Special Sign Districts that conform to the vision for the city as outlined in the Official Plan and respect the unique characteristics of certain neighbourhoods in the city.

Many signs in Toronto are within close proximity to residential or natural areas. The new sign bylaw contains regulations which protect those areas. These regulations include standards for the maximum level of illumination of a sign, prohibiting signs from spilling light onto adjacent properties and the requirement that illuminated signs be shut off between the hours of 11 p.m. and 7 a.m.

As Toronto is a dynamic city with neighbourhoods that are constantly evolving, there is a need to create a limit as to how long third-party signs (billboards) can remain at a given location. Under the former bylaw there was no limit, which over the years led to some third-party signs operating in incompatible surroundings. The sign bylaw now contains a five-year renewal requirement for all third-party signs. Third-party signs may continue to operate beyond the original five years, but in order to do so they must continue to comply with sign bylaw regulations; this compliance ensures that these signs only operate in compatible surroundings.

The new sign bylaw also prohibits the construction of new roof signs. Roof signs are difficult to integrate into the architecture or design of a building. They can also interfere with established skylines and work against urban design policies and zoning bylaws that restrict the heights of buildings and structures throughout the city.

Along with the new sign regulations comes a new process for seeking minor relief from those regulations for signs where a proposal may not comply with the sign bylaw. Formerly, relief from the requirements of the sign bylaw (variance) was sought through an application to one of the four Community Councils. Under the new bylaw, the approval of variances for first-party signs has been delegated to staff. In the case of third-party signs, the authority has been delegated to a new Sign Variance Committee.

Nearby/neighbouring residents and businesses will also be notified of variance applications, as there are now requirements for notification for any sign variance applications in the city.

A Third-Party Sign Tax (TPST) has been developed with the goals and objectives of the new sign bylaw in mind and will be used to provide a stable source of revenue for the new Sign Bylaw Unit. This tax will apply to the owners of all third-party signs in the city with a sign face area greater than one square metre. The TPST rates range from \$1,150 to \$24,000 per sign structure and are expected to raise approximately \$10.4 million in revenue annually for the City.

All owners of third-party signs in the city were required to provide a complete inventory of their signs to the Chief Building Official by March 31, 2010. The owners of third-party signs will receive their first tax bill by July 1, 2010, and TPST payments are due September 1, 2010. The TPST will be payable on the issuance date of all third-party sign permits after April 6, 2010.

In the future, a new Sign Bylaw Unit in Toronto Building will be formed. In the meantime, existing district staff will continue to assist customers with sign applications. Customers should be aware of the following service changes throughout the transition period:

- Applications for permits and preliminary project reviews (PPRs) for first-party signs will continue to be taken in, reviewed and inspected through one of the four district offices.

- Applications for permits and preliminary project reviews (PPRs) for third-party signs will be taken in and reviewed through the Toronto East York District office located at Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. W., 1st floor, West Tower.
- All third-party sign permits issued after April 6, 2010 will be issued through the Toronto East York District office (located at Toronto City Hall) and inspected through the district offices.
- Applications for sign variances and sign bylaw amendments will be taken in and processed through the Toronto East York District offices at Toronto City Hall.

For more information and updates, please visit <http://www.toronto.ca/signbylawproject/>, e-mail signbylawproject@toronto.ca, or call 416-392-8000.

Toronto is Canada's largest city and sixth largest government, and home to a diverse population of about 2.6 million people. It is the economic engine of Canada and one of the greenest and most creative cities in North America. Toronto has won numerous awards for quality, innovation and efficiency in delivering public services. Toronto's government is dedicated to prosperity, opportunity and liveability for all its residents. For information about non-emergency City services and programs, Toronto residents, businesses and visitors can dial 311, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.