



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

September 7, 2010

To the Honorable the City Council:

RE: Planning Recommendation on the Zoning Petition to Revise the Sign Ordinance – Article 7.000

Recommendation. The Planning Board recommends adoption of the Petition, with modifications. Those modifications strengthen the objective of the original proposal to provide some useful but limited and well regulated flexibility in the administration of what is a fundamentally sound set of sign regulations.

The attached revised text shows the original changes proposed in the Petition [red, underlined text] as modified by the Planning Board recommendations [blue, underlined italics]. To provide some context, the proposed amendments have been inserted into an outline of the whole of Article 7.000.

Discussion.

As indicated in the attached *Summary of Proposed Changes*, the Petition makes changes in five areas of the Ordinance. In two of those areas: Signs in the public way and Calculation of sign area when a corporate-identified color or symbol is involved, the changes are meant to clarify ambiguities in the current Ordinance. The Board finds these changes reasonable.

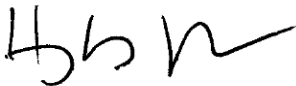
The three other changes: Building Identification Signs, Waiver of certain sign limitations within the context of a site-wide sign plan, and Temporary signs for non-profit performance spaces, introduce more significant policy changes into the Ordinance. In each case the Board finds, in part as a result of years of experience reviewing (along with the Board of Zoning Appeal) many applications for variances from the current provisions of the Ordinance, that the recommended changes are reasonable, introduce a helpful and positive flexibility into the Ordinance's provisions, and serve a legitimate need for owners of retail businesses and other enterprises in the City. Furthermore, the Board finds that the public interest in a well designed and carefully controlled sign environment is well protected, even with this added flexibility, either through the dimensional limitations imposed by the specific language of the amendments or by the special permit approval process that is required.

The most substantive changes to the original Petition language recommended by the Planning Board are in the "Building Identification Signs", Section 7.16.22 D.3. Originally conceived of as an as-of-right provision, much public testimony on this specific proposal has favored a special permit process. The Planning Board agrees and suggests other changes that will make the provision more effective. Most public testimony on the Petition was focused on this specific provision, and much of it was in opposition to the proposal. Nevertheless the Board continues to believe that the proposal is a good one that assists an important constituency in the city, namely the corporations and research companies that give new energy to the city's economy, while at the same time allowing only modest signs that will do no harm to quality of our urban environment (see the attached illustrations of signs granted variances in the past that illustrate many aspects of the signs that would be permitted under these proposed regulations).

The changes recommended by the Board to the original Petition language of the Building ID Signs section are summarized here:

- Establishment of a special permit process before the Planning Board.
- A narrowing of the zoning districts where such signs may be permitted, to areas of concentrated office development at the eastern and western ends of the city.
- Restriction of the signs to non-residential buildings only that are at least 100,000 square feet in size.
- Limiting the signs to identifying the whole building or an office tenant occupying a significant portion of the building. The Planning Board recommends that at least 25% of the leasable area of the building be presumed to be significant.
- Prohibition of such signs in local conservation and historic districts.
- Enumeration of the criteria for approval of the Building ID Signs, including: how the sign would be viewed from nearby residential districts, open space, historic districts, and the Charles River; light pollution.
- An articulation of the purpose of the provision.
- A relaxation of one standard in the current Sign Ordinance to allow the placement of an ID sign on the screening wall of mechanical equipment located above the building's roof where that placement would better integrate the sign into the architecture of the building (see Amgen and Genzyme examples in the attached illustrations).

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,



Hugh Russell, Chair

Attachments:

- Summary of the Proposed Changes
- Petition text with changes recommended by the Planning Board
- Illustration of signs previously granted variances
- Map showing zoning districts in which Building ID signs are permitted

Summary of the Proposed Changes

- I. **Signs in the Public Way.** *Signs in the public way (e.g. banners across the street, banners hung on flagpoles, signs on bus shelters, A-frame signs) are defined as exempt from the provisions of the Ordinance. This is the administrative interpretation of the current sign regulations. Such signs would continue to be subject to City Council jurisdiction.*
- II. **Corporate Colors and Graphic Images.** *A new provision makes it clear that such design elements are to be included when calculating the area of a sign. [Applies citywide]*
- III. **Building Identification Signs.** *This is a newly created category of sign. The proposed regulation allows the Planning Board to permit no more than two wall signs on a building to be higher than 20 feet above ground (the normal standard) and up to ninety square feet in area (that area is now limited to 60 square feet), after the issuance of a special permit, provided the signs meet specific lighting and design standards. The total area of all signs currently permitted on the lot is not increased. [Applies to non-residential district concentrations in the east and western portions of the city, where building heights of 50 feet or more are allowed]*
- IV. **Signage Plan for an Entire Lot.** *This new provision would allow the Planning Board to waive, by special permit, the individual dimensions and lighting standards imposed on wall, projecting and freestanding signs if a plan is created by the property owner for the allocation of all sign area that would be allowed on the lot. No sign in the plan could be located higher than 20 feet above the ground (the existing limitation) unless some other regulation would allow it and there would be no increase in the amount of sign area allowed on the lot now. [Applies in non-residential districts]*
- V. **Temporary Signs for Non-profit Exhibition and Performance Spaces.** *A new provision is introduced to allow the now common temporary banners and posters erected by museums and performance venues to announce their current exhibits or activities. Such signs, if meeting the limitations in the ordinance, would be allowed for non-profit entities. [Applies citywide]*

**Amendments to the Text of Article 7.000 incorporating changes
recommended by the Planning Board**

(Proposed changes identified in Red and Blue text)

ARTICLE 7.000 SIGNS AND ILLUMINATION

7.10 SIGNS

7.20 ILLUMINATION

7:30 SEVERABILITY

7.10 SIGNS

7.11 *Findings and Purpose*

7.11.1 Findings [...]

7.11.2 Purposes

The purposes of this Article are to preserve and enhance the substantial interests of the City of Cambridge in the appearance of the City; to preserve and enhance the public interest in aesthetics; to preserve and increase amenities of the City; to control and reduce visual clutter and blight; and to carry out the authority conferred by General Laws Chapter 40A.

7.12 *Applicability*

A. *General Applicability*

No signs or advertising devices of any kind or nature shall be erected or maintained on any premises or affixed to the inside or outside of any structure to be visible from the outside of any structure except as specifically permitted in this Article 7.000.

B. *MXD District*

The provisions of this Section 7.10 shall not be applicable in the MXD District, Article 14.000 of this Ordinance, during the life of the Kendall Square Urban Renewal Plan, as amended.

C. *Signs in the Public Way*

Signs and banners located entirely within a public way are not subject to the provisions of this Article 7.000 except as may be specifically provided for elsewhere in this Article 7.000.

7.13 *Definitions*

7.13.1 Sign [...]

7.13.2 Types of Signs [...]

7.13.3 Illumination [...]

7.13.4 Premises [...]

7.13.5 Sign Frontage [...]

7.13.6 Establishment, Ground Floor [...]

7.14 *Calculations of Area and Height of Signs*

- A. For a free-standing sign or sign attached to a building, the area of the sign shall be considered to include all lettering, wording, and accompanying designs and symbols, together with the background, whether open or enclosed, on which they are displayed, but not including any supporting framework and bracing which are incidental to the display itself.
- B. For a sign painted upon or applied to a building, the area of the sign shall be considered to include all lettering, wording, and accompanying designs or symbols, together with any background of a color different from that of the building
- C. For all signs, where a color or graphic pattern constitutes a Corporate or Brand Identification (by custom, contract or practice) as illustrated in advertising or in sign or building designs employed at multiple locations, the full extent of that background color or graphic pattern shall be calculated as part of the sign area when it is associated with any logo, lettering, or other graphic element constituting a sign.
- D. Where the sign consists of individual letters or symbols attached to or painted on a surface, wall or window, the area of the sign shall be considered to be that of the smallest rectangle or other geometric shape which encompasses all letters and symbols.
- E. Only one face of a two-sided sign shall be counted in computing the area of a sign, provided the sign faces are parallel and of equal size.
- F. The height of a sign shall be the vertical distance between the top of a sign and the mean grade of the ground adjoining that portion of the building to which the sign is attached; or that ground within ten feet of a free-standing sign.

7.15 *General Limitations for All Signs Permitted in the City of Cambridge [...]*

7.16 *Permitted Signs*

The signs and advertising devices which are permitted in the City of Cambridge are set out below.

7.16.1 Exempt, Temporary and Noncommercial Signs

The following signs shall be exempt from restrictions as to type, location, height, and size of signs or limitations as to the total area of signs permitted on a lot or business, as those limits are set forth in Section 7.16.2. Except as otherwise noted, such signs shall be naturally or externally illuminated only and shall be subject to all other provisions of this Article 7.000.

7.16.11 Exempt Signs

- A. In all districts:
 - 1. Signs not visible from a public way. (All illumination permitted.)
 - 2. Official traffic and directional signs, including bus and shuttle schedules. (All illumination permitted.)

3. Other signs in the public way.
4. Signs necessary for public safety and convenience not exceeding six (6) square feet per sign face, provided such signs contain no advertising.
5. Flags of a city, state or country.
6. Memorials such as grave stones and corner stones.
7. Historical site plaques installed or approved by a public Agency or duly established historical society.
8. Window display of merchandise or signs incidental to such display.

B. In business, office and industrial districts:

1. Permanent non-illuminated signs behind the glass of a window above the ground floor, provided: [...]
2. Permanent non-illuminated signs mounted on awnings on the ground floor of a building provided: [...]

7.16.12 Temporary Signs [...]

7.16.13 Non Commercial Signs [...]

7.16.2 All Other Permitted Signs

7.16.21 Signs in Residence Districts

- A. Identification Sign for Residential Uses: [...]
- B. Identification Sign, Bulletin Board or Announcement Board for Permitted Non-residential Uses Other than Permitted Hotel and Office Uses. [...]
- C. Signs for Lawfully Maintained Nonconforming Uses. [...]
- D. Permitted Hotel and Office Use: [...]

7.16.22 All Business, Office, and Industrial Districts

Total Area of Signage Permitted per Lot: One and a half (1 1/2) sq. ft. for each linear foot of sign frontage on the lot for sign frontage located one hundred (100) feet or less from the street line; provided that the total area of all signs on the exterior of the building, including free standing signs, shall not exceed one (1) square foot for each linear foot of sign frontage; or two (2) sq. ft. for each linear foot of sign frontage on the lot for sign frontage located more than one hundred feet from all street lines from which the sign frontage is visible. However, signs shall be further limited as set forth below. Maximum Permitted

A. Free Standing Signs:

- Area of sign: [...]
- Number of signs: [...]

Height of sign: [...]

Illumination: [...]

B. Projecting Signs:

Area of sign: [...]

Number of signs: [...]

Illumination: [...]

C. Wall Signs:

Area of sign: [...]

Number of signs: [...]

Height of sign: [...]

Illumination: [...]

D. Special Use Signs:

1. Wall and Free Standing Signs Accessory to Theaters and Cinemas.

2. Wall signs for Hotels and Motels.

3. Building Identification Signs

(a) Purpose: It is the intent of this provision of the Ordinance to allow more prominent, but limited, identification of large corporate buildings in the City that commonly host companies and enterprises that contribute significantly to the City's economic health and wellbeing. The added flexibility provided by this provision is intended to be limited to those districts in which large-scale commercial development predominates in significant concentrations.

(b) Applicable Districts: The special provisions of this Paragraph D.3 shall be applicable in the following zoning districts:

(1) In the eastern portion of the city, that portion of any office, industrial, PUD, non-residential Special District, or CRD District (as they may be modified by any overlay district) that has a permitted maximum height of fifty feet or more for non-residential uses where that zoning district is located east of either Brookline Street or Windsor Street.

(2) In the western portion of the city, that portion of any office, industrial, or non-residential Special District (as they may be modified by any overlay district) that has a permitted maximum height of fifty feet or more for non-residential uses where that zoning district is located west of Alewife Brook Parkway.

(c) Restrictions, Limitations and Requirements. A wall sign may exceed the maximum Height of Signs and the maximum Area of Signs limitations set forth in Section 7.16.22, Paragraph C above subject to the following conditions and limitations:

- (1) A special permit is granted by the Planning Board.
- (2) For each non-residential building of 100,000 square feet of Gross Floor Area or more on a lot, one such Wall Sign for each street the lot abuts (but in no case more than two signs per building) may be permitted.
- (3) The sign shall have Natural or External Illumination only.
- (4) The sign may be located at any height below the roof of the building. The Planning Board may, however, in granting the special permit, allow a sign to be placed on the solid screening wall of mechanical equipment carried above the roof of the building where in the Board's judgment such a location better integrates the sign architecturally into the building.
- (5) Where the sign is located at a height greater than one hundred (100) feet, the maximum Area of Sign may be increased to ninety (90) square feet.
- (6) The sign shall consist of individual letters or graphic symbols attached directly to the building face.
- (7) The sign shall be accessory to an office tenant occupying a significant portion of the building, or shall identify the building itself.

For the purposes of this Paragraph 7, the following shall apply:

- (i) Office tenant shall mean any use enumerated in Section 4.34, Table of Use Regulations or any other use customarily occupying an office building, but shall specifically exclude any Retail Business and Consumer Service Establishments, Sections 4.35 and 4.36.
 - (ii) A tenant occupying at least 25 % of the leasable area of a building shall be presumed to be occupying a significant portion of the building. However, the Planning Board may determine that a tenant occupying less than 25% of the leasable area of the building also occupies a significant portion of the building upon a finding that the intent of this Paragraph 7 continues to be met.
 - (8) The building shall not be located in a local conservation or historic district as defined in City ordinances.
 - (9) All other provisions of this Article 7.000 shall continue to apply, including the Total Area of Signs Permitted per Lot and the total area of signs permitted on any individual Sign Frontage.
- (d) In making its determination the Planning Board shall consider the quality of the design of the proposed sign, how well it is integrated and harmonized with the design and character of the building upon which it is placed, and how the sign is viewed from nearby residential districts and neighborhoods, any historic or neighborhood conservation districts, parks and official open spaces, and from the Charles River. The nature and impact of the proposed lighting shall be considered

as it might be perceived from residential neighborhoods and as the lighting might impact the city's environmental objective of protecting the night sky.

E. General Waiver of Sign Limitations

The limitations and restrictions of Section 7.16.22, Paragraphs A-C above (but specifically excluding any limitations and restrictions set forth in Paragraph D. 1-3 above) and Section 7.16.3 below may be waived by special permit from the *Planning Board*, within the context of an approved plan for all prospective signs on a lot, subject to the following requirements and limitations.

1. The Plan shall allocate all permitted sign area on a lot (as permitted in this Section 7.16.22), including existing signs to remain and prospective signs. The proposed Plan shall show the location, size, dimensions, and method of illumination of all existing and prospective signs on the lot.

The applicant may choose not to allocate all of the sign area permitted on the lot; in such case, future allocation of that additional area shall require the issuance of a new special permit by the special permit granting authority even if such additional sign area is proposed to be used in a manner conforming to the limitations of Paragraphs A-C above unless the Plan shall identify a process by which such additional sign area may be approved.

2. A narrative shall describe the variations requested from the normally applicable restrictions and limitations of Section 7.16.22, Paragraph A-C above and how those variations better serve the *purposes* of this Article 7.000, *the Citywide Urban Design Objectives in Section 19.30*, and any applicable area-wide plans adopted by the City of Cambridge.
3. No sign in the approved Plan may be higher than twenty (20) feet unless otherwise permitted in this Article 7.000 or previously approved by variance.
4. The area of all existing and prospective signs identified in the Plan shall not exceed the *total* area of signage permitted on the lot as set forth in this Section 7.16.22.
5. As a condition of the permit, the *Planning Board* may require the removal of existing signs on the lot not conforming to the requirements of this Sub-section E (e.g. signs above the permitted height) including signs permitted by variance.

The *Planning Board* shall approve the process and timing by which such non-conforming *or non-complying* signs are brought into conformance with the requirements of this Paragraph E and the approved Plan.

6. Location, size, dimensions, and method of illumination for individual signs may be presented in schematic detail. In such case the special permit decision shall establish a process by which the final design of each individual sign is approved.

17.16. 23 Special Sign Provisions for Non-Profit Theaters, Other Performance Spaces, Museums, Galleries, Libraries and Cinemas.

Notwithstanding the limitations of Sections 7.16.21 and 7.16.22 above and Section 7.16.3 below, additional signs shall be permitted on lots containing a theater, performance space, museum, library or art gallery owned and operated by a non-profit institution (which institution is granted the educational and religious exemption provided in Section 3 of Chapter 40A) or municipality for the purpose of identifying *current and future* educational programs, *lectures, performances,* and exhibits open to the public occurring in those facilities, subject to the following limitations and conditions:

- A. The signs may be any combination of wall, projecting or freestanding signs.
- B. The signs shall not be subject to the Area of Sign, Height of Sign and Number of Signs limitations found in Sections 7.16.21, 7.16.22 and Section 7.16.3.
- C. The signs shall be made of cloth, canvas or other similar flexible material and may only be naturally or externally illuminated.
- D. A freestanding sign may not be higher than 25 feet. Signs on a building wall may not be higher than fifty feet.
- E. Any individual sign shall be temporary in nature *and removed at the conclusion of the event for which it provided notice; at a minimum, however, such signs shall* be replaced at intervals not to exceed one year.
- F. The maximum area of individual Freestanding or Projecting Signs shall be 50 square feet; the maximum area of individual Wall Signs shall be 200 square feet.
- G. The total area of signs permitted on the lot shall be determined by the following:
 - (a) In non-residential districts the total area of signs on a lot shall be subject to the limitations for Total Area of Signs Permitted Per Lot as set forth in Section 7.16.22 for signs on the outside of the building (and shall be inclusive of any other signs on the lot not employing the provisions of this Section 7.16.23).
 - (b) In residential districts, the total area of signs on the lot shall be limited by the application of the formula of one square foot of sign for each linear foot of Sign Frontage on the lot for that portion of a building containing the eligible activity (and shall be inclusive of any other signs on the lot not employing the provisions of this Section 7.16.23).
- H. All other provisions of this Article 7.000 shall continue to apply.

7.16.3 Application of Sign Frontage Formula [...]

7.16.4 Sign Area For Lots Having No Buildings [...]

7.16.5 Signs Permitted in Planned Unit Development Districts [...]

7.17 *Noncommercial Messages* [...]

7.18 *Non-conforming Signs*

7.18.1 Signs Required to be Removed [...]

7.18.2 Other Signs [...]

7.19 *Community Development Department Certification* [...]

7.20 **ILLUMINATION** [...]

7.30 **SEVERABILITY** [...]

Examples of Existing Signs Comparable to “Building Identification Signs”

Amgen: One Kendall Square



- Consists of individual letters as required in proposed ordinance
- Sign area approx. 58 square feet (just within proposed 90 square-foot maximum)
- External “halo” illumination as would be permitted under proposed ordinance
- Located above roof on mechanical screening, as would be permitted in Planning Board recommendation

Novartis: 250 Massachusetts Ave



- Consists of individual letters and symbols as required in the proposed ordinance
- Signs on multiple façades, each approx. 75 square feet (below proposed 90 square-foot maximum)
- Internally illuminated, would not be permitted under the proposed ordinance

Examples of Existing Signs Comparable to “Building Identification Signs”

Genzyme: 500 Kendall Street



- Consists of individual letters as required by the proposed ordinance
- Sign area approx. 125 square feet (above proposed 90 square-foot maximum)
- External “halo” illumination as would be permitted under proposed ordinance
- Located above roof on mechanical screening, as would be permitted in Planning Board recommendation

EF Education: 1 Education Street (North Point)



- Consists of individual letters as required in the proposed ordinance
- Sign area approximately 150-170 square feet (far above proposed 90 square-foot maximum)
- Internally illuminated, would not be permitted under the proposed ordinance

Examples of Existing Signs Comparable to “Building Identification Signs”

Archemix and Alynlam: 300 Third Street



- Archemix: Letters affixed to a background panel, which would not be permitted in the proposed ordinance
- Alynlam: Consists of individual letters and symbols as required in the proposed ordinance
- Signs on two façades, each approx. 50-60 square feet (below proposed 90 square-foot maximum)

NOTE: All signs illustrated above were not conforming to current zoning regulations; each was granted a variance by the Board of Zoning Appeal.