

MEMBER OF COUNCIL DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Engaging Council about Reducing Election Sign
Complaints by Improving the Temporary Signs
Bylaw (EC2023-0238)

2023 June 6

Operational Services and
Community Services

BACKGROUND

On 2022 December 20, Council approved the Notice of Motion on Reducing Election Sign Complaints by Improving the Temporary Sign Bylaw (EC2022-1372). Concerns were raised about the number of signs placed alongside roads, particularly during the 2021 federal and municipal election periods. Administration was directed to return with proposed bylaw amendments to support a reduction in the number of temporary signs.

Administration's report was presented to the Executive Committee on 2023 March 22 and proposed minor changes to the existing bylaw following consultation with Law, Community Standards and Mobility. The Executive Committee felt there was more work to be done to ensure any updates would result in a reduction in signage and referred the report back to Administration with the direction to engage with Members of Council on their thoughts regarding temporary and election signage.

ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Administration held meetings about election signage and temporary signage with The Mayor's Office and each member of Council throughout 2023 April and May. Two primary questions were asked to start off the conversations:

- What changes do you think are needed in the Temporary Signs Bylaw?
- What changes do you think are needed in the approach to enforcement?

Key themes that emerged included improving compliance with the existing bylaw and how best to affect a reduction in the number of signs seen. Council had diverse opinions on whether managing election signs in a different manner from other signs was important at this time.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Issue	Discussion
Lack of Enforcement	Bylaw rules require consistent and effective enforcement to change behaviour. Limited follow-through encourages some sign users to take advantage of the enforcement gap, which leads to more signs and impacts The City's reputation.
Service Delivery	Sign complaint numbers are high, though certain communities see many more signs than others. Some Councillors indicated that the issue is more one of nuisance than safety. They believe that the current resourcing or prioritization is not sufficient to deliver the service – what options are available? Seasonal work,

	Alternative Duties, Junior/Developmental Officers? Bring ideas forward for consideration.
Communication	Most believe that the bylaw language is quite clear and easy to follow in most cases. Simplifying the Prohibited Roadways rules by including the entire roadway, rather than just certain sections, may reduce any confusion. Communication to campaign offices leading up to an election is also clear. There would be value in reviewing communication about signs to the business community and other ways to ensure City has done enough to educate.

Reduction in Numbers	
Issue	Discussion
Dissatisfaction	Too many signs clustered in certain areas or staying up far too long. Thousands of complaints. Some sign types are more likely to end up as litter (small, paper) which adds to the nuisance. Need to see an actual reduction in the number of signs on the boulevards.
Bylaw Changes	Can we ban signs on public property? Control number of signs allowed by any one Owner in a particular area (block or distance). Have a minimum size restriction, for readability (transportation standards) and nuisance reduction (litter). Prohibited Roadway review to extend existing boundaries (simplify) and look to add new areas.
Administrative Changes	Explore opportunity and costs to develop a booking/permit system to control (reduce) available space for signs. Self-service model would be ideal.
Business Impact	Concerned how further restrictions or fees would impact small business and the companies that produce/set up signage. Review current fee structure for annual permit, may be a disadvantage for smaller/local companies.

Election Signage	
Issue	Discussion
Bylaw Changes	Can election signs be restricted more so than business signs? Can we say No to election signs on public boulevards entirely – keep it to private property? Control number of signs allowed by any one Candidate in a particular area (block). Require a deposit by Campaigns to cover costs of enforcement (return if signs are compliant)? Would appreciate seeing what other cities do.
Reputation	Concerns raised about optics and reputation of a sitting Council choosing to restrict/reduce election sign placement for the next election. Changes perceived to favour incumbents.

Actions Underway Now	
Waste Diversion	Waste and Recycling Services had collection stations ready for unwanted election signs at all three Throw n' Go locations at City landfills. They will operate free of charge until the end of June.
Compliance Checks	Mobility will be assigning field staff to record (geo-tag) all non-compliant signs along prohibited roadways and playground/school zones in June. Data collected and to be shared with Community Standards.
Legal Opinions	A few Canadian Charter-related questions were raised during the signage conversations. Law will research and bring back opinions to be included in the report to the Executive Committee.
Research	<p>A review of options to address service delivery resourcing, including potential seasonal work and alternative duties.</p> <p>A municipal scan to capture different approaches to regulating roadway signage and look for practices that could be beneficial to adopt.</p> <p>An estimate on feasibility and cost to create a booking or permit system for roadway signage.</p>

EARLY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conversations with Council and internal engagement Administration heard that the primary issue around compliance and reducing the overall numbers of election signs or advertising signs along the roadway is the capacity for enforcement. This is not a reflection on Community Standards. As the Chief Bylaw Officer discussed in the conversations, it is a matter of prioritizing the service delivery for more than two dozen municipal bylaws and provincial acts.

Where compliance numbers are believed to be low, and the prioritization of sign investigation is also at the lower end of the scale, new or updated restrictions will have a negligible impact on behaviour. At this time, amendments to the Temporary Signs of Highway (29M97) bylaw would not significantly change the status quo.

An examination of this service – investigating improperly placed signs – will be completed for the upcoming Executive Committee report. This will focus on a review of all available options to address service delivery resourcing, including potential seasonal work and alternative duties.