

MAY 26 2009



LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING



The **New** Comprehensive **Sign Ordinance**

Recommended by the City Planning Commission on March 26, 2009

A balanced vision for Los Angeles.

This packet provides a summary of the new **sign ordinance** that is currently pending review by the Los Angeles City Council.

What does the **ordinance** do?

- 1 **Reduces visual clutter** caused by permissive sign laws, through an approximate 40% reduction in the amount of signage allowed on a lot
- 2 **Protects our visual environment** by prohibiting billboards, digital signs, roof signs and supergraphics throughout most of the city
- 3 Allows these prohibited sign types only in areas planned for **exceptional commercial intensity** (sign districts)
- 4 Gives the city **more traction in court** through specific, objective standards
- 5 **Strengthens enforcement** through tough new penalties to deter illegal signage



Many Los Angeles streets are cluttered with signs.

Photo by: Alfredo Perez

The ordinance accomplishes the above objectives through a 3-tiered approach, as described on the following pages.

tier 1: baseline standards

The baseline standards would apply to the vast majority of the city, except for certain larger developments, and areas planned for exceptional commercial intensity.

Prohibited signs: off-site signs, digital signs, and roof signs **Effectively prohibited signs:** supergraphics (jumbo wall signs)

Photos by: LA Dept. of Building & Safety

- The above are the most visually intensive sign types, that are incompatible with the lower intensity commercial development that makes up most of the city.
- Research has shown that large, bright signs, especially those with changing images, can distract drivers and cause accidents.
- Off-site signs (that advertise products or services sold off-site) tend to draw attention away from the smaller on-site signs of local businesses.
- Limiting total sign area and prohibiting window coverage are the best ways to control and prevent supergraphics and jumbo signs of any kind (including future sign display methods not yet developed).



Digital billboard

Clutter reduction:

Sign clutter needs to be reduced, to improve our streetscapes and help local businesses that are getting lost in a mishmash of competing signage. The ordinance will accomplish this in two ways:

- Reducing the total sign area for on-site signs
- Reducing the size and number of on-site signs

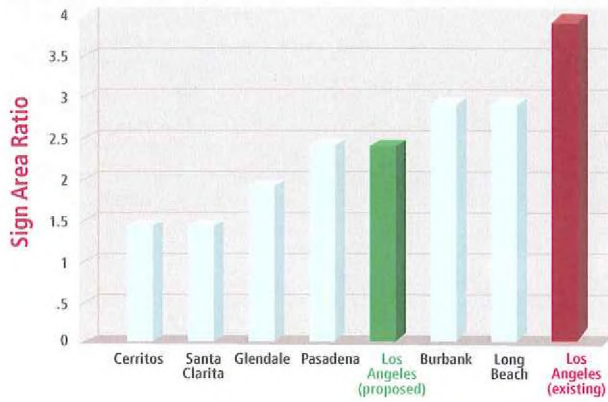
Removal of ban on murals:

The ordinance removes the 2002 ban, and allows murals as wall signs. Further allowances for larger murals are in development under a separate ordinance.



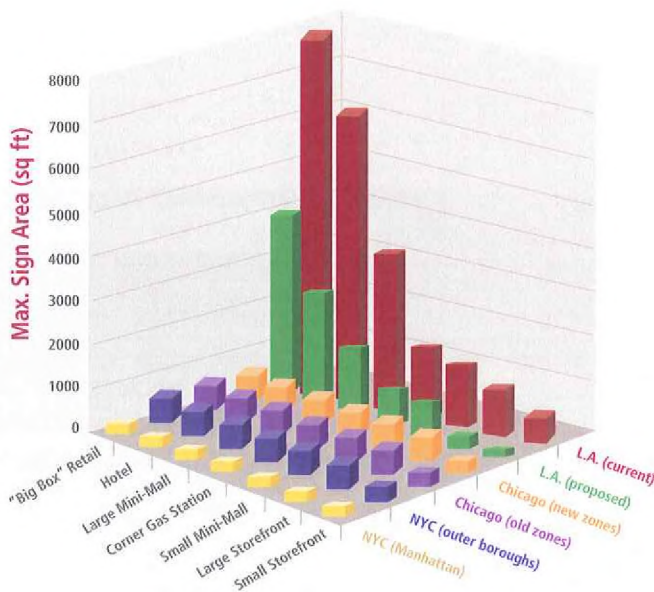
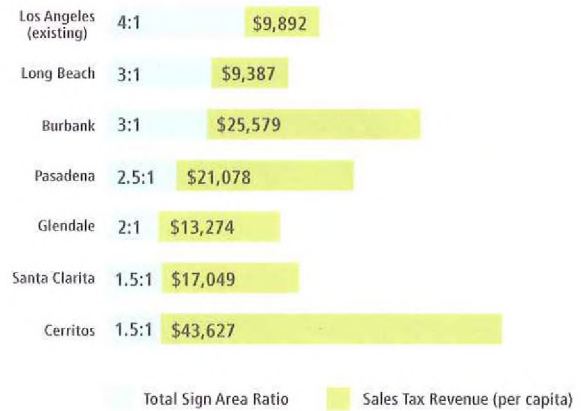
Supergraphic

Reducing Sign Clutter: Good for streetscapes, good for local business



- Businesses in our neighboring cities do not suffer for having better controlled signage. In fact, sales tax revenues are generally higher in these cities, which have been recognized as among the most “business-friendly” in the region.

- The new ordinance includes a total sign area ratio of approximately 2.5:1, which allows: 1 square foot of signage for each linear foot of street frontage, plus 1.5 square feet of signage for each linear foot of building frontage.
- 2.5:1 is a mid-range limit, compared with neighboring cities.
- Our current sign laws are very permissive. We allow more signage than Cerritos, Santa Clarita, Glendale, Pasadena, Burbank, Long Beach, Santa Monica, and West Hollywood.



- Our current limits are also more permissive than those of other major cities across the country, such as New York City and Chicago.
- The proposed ordinance also reduces the size and number of on-site signs.

For example:

Pole signs (current): 42' tall, 400 sq ft of sign area

Pole signs (proposed): 25' tall, 200 sq ft of sign area

What does 2.5:1 look like?

The drawings below represent what the proposed 2.5:1 sign area ratio would look like on actual sites in Los Angeles. The proposed ratio allows for signage that is ample but not oversized.



tier 2: sign programs

The new ordinance creates Sign Programs, a discretionary review to consider slightly larger amounts of signage for certain large or unique developments, such as shopping centers, museums or movie studios.

- Can allow signage up to the current baseline (approximately 4:1 sign area ratio)
- Can allow larger pole signs, up to a maximum of 50 feet in height
- Available for sites with at least 5 acres and 100,000 sq ft of non-residential floor area
- A public hearing is required, with notification to owners and occupants within a 500-foot radius
- Specific findings require a **design theme**, and **compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood**
- Findings also require that signs **do not create traffic hazards**, **light pollution**, or other negative environmental effects

Photo by: Bob Hale (Rios Clementi Hale Studios)

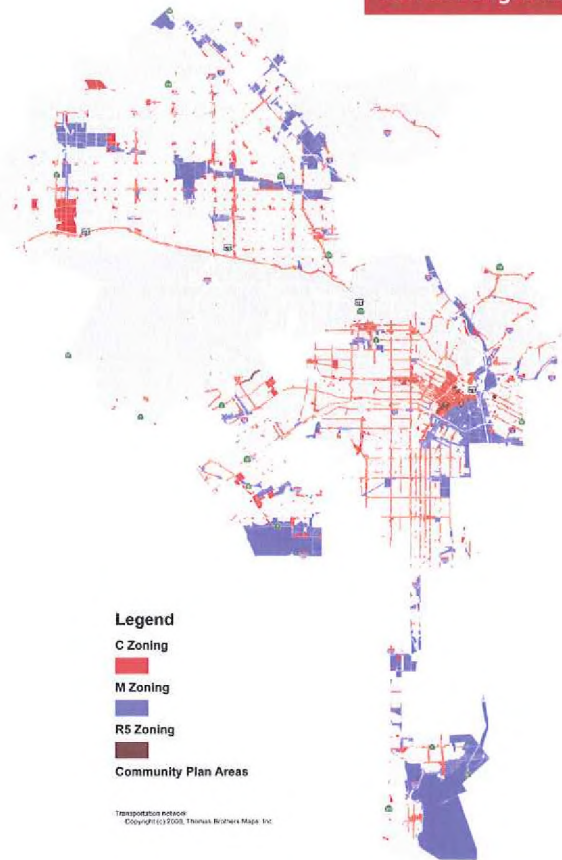


tier 3: sign districts

The new ordinance tightens the requirements for Sign Districts, which can allow sign types otherwise prohibited citywide, in certain areas planned for exceptional commercial intensity.

- Can allow off-site signs, digital signs, supergraphics and roof signs
- Eligible areas are those planned for the most intense commercial uses — **regional center, regional commercial, or downtown center** land use
- For each square foot of new prohibited signage, more than one square foot of existing off-site signage must be removed from the surrounding area
- Minimum size of **5,000 linear feet of street frontage** or **15 acres**, whichever is smaller

Current Eligibility

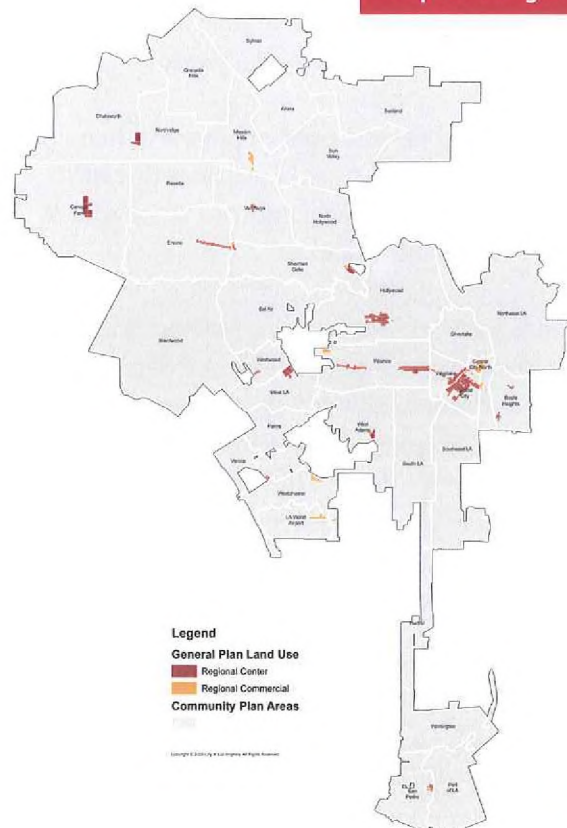


Sign Districts: Stricter, More Objective Criteria

Currently, Sign Districts can be established virtually anywhere in the city, in any commercial or industrial zone (see map on top right). This type of broad granting of exceptions (termed by one judge as “willy-nilly”) has gotten the City into legal hot water.

Under the new sign ordinance, eligibility is restricted based on objective land use criteria. Sign Districts would be allowed only in areas where community-based long range plans have called for the most commercially intense land uses. This would represent about a 90% reduction in eligibility for Sign Districts citywide (see map on bottom right).

Proposed Eligibility



New Enforcement Tools

A vital component of any effective sign ordinance is good enforcement. This ordinance includes tough penalties, similar to those used effectively in New York City, to curtail illegal signage.

Penalties vary with the size of the sign and the number of repeat violations:

Sign Area of Sign In Violation	Civil Penalty Per Day of Violation		
	First Violation	Second Violation	Third and all Subsequent Violations
Less than 150 square feet	\$2,000	\$4,000	\$8,000
150 to less than 300 square feet	\$4,000	\$8,000	\$16,000
300 to less than 450 square feet	\$6,000	\$12,000	\$24,000
450 to less than 600 square feet	\$8,000	\$16,000	\$32,000
600 to less than 750 square feet	\$10,000	\$20,000	\$40,000
750 or more square feet	\$12,000	\$24,000	\$48,000

For each violation, a penalty can be assessed against both the property owner and the sign owner.

The ordinance also allows a **right of private action** whereby owners and occupants of real property within 500 feet of an illegal sign can pursue civil action against the parties responsible for the sign.

Parties that are delinquent in paying penalties and correcting violations can be referred to a collection agency. In addition, the City can place a **property lien** against the site where the illegal sign is located.

Finally, there is a new **cost recovery** provision that allows the City to recoup costs of enforcement, including costs of removal of illegal signs. ■

