



**GUIDE TO OFF-SITE SIGNS (BILLBOARDS)**  
**in the**  
**CITY OF LOS ANGELES**

*POLICIES, PROGRAMS, PROCESSES, & PROVISIONS*

May 2019

***Prepared by the Department of City Planning***

***... with assistance from the Office of the City Administrative Officer***

*Disclaimer:*

*This guide is intended as an introduction to and overview of the policies, programs, processes, and other provisions pertaining to the establishment and maintenance of off-site signs in the City of Los Angeles. Applicants, property owners, and sign operators are advised to review all the pertinent provisions in Section 13.11 and Article 4 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code for the exact Code provisions. This document is not a substitute nor does it supersede any regulations in the Code.*

## BILLBOARD BLIGHT REDUCTION PROGRAM

The Billboard Blight Reduction Program consists of two tools, sign districts and relocation agreements, which provide options for outdoor advertising, while ensuring that the flexibility offered will result in no net new off-site signs and a likely net reduction in their numbers. These tools are more fully summarized below.

### SIGN DISTRICTS

Since 2002, the City of Los Angeles has sought to reign in the proliferation of off-site signs by channeling them into appropriate locations, such as within sign districts. The purpose of a sign district is to reinforce the distinctive identity of an area that serves as a destination or hub of commerce, culture, entertainment, or international transport. Applicants may apply for a Tier 1 or Tier 2 Sign District as described in the Los Angeles Municipal Code Section 13.11. Tier 1 Sign Districts may allow off-site signs, including those having digital displays; Tier 2 Sign Districts may also allow off-site signs, but only if each sign face is not visible from any public right-of-way or any other property. Tier 2 Sign Districts do not require sign reduction or community benefits.

**Sign Reduction (Tier 1 Sign Districts).** Every square foot of sign area of a new off-site sign must be offset by at least one square foot of existing off-site sign area (1:1), or at least two square feet of existing sign area if the new off-sign has a digital display (2:1). The sign reduction must be from within the Sign District or from the “sign impact area”, which is to be defined at the time the Sign District is established. Required sign reduction may only be met through the removal of existing, legally permitted off-site signs, including nonconforming off-site signs in existence on or before the effective date of ordinance establishing the Sign District.

**Community Benefits Program (Tier 1 Sign Districts).** In addition to sign reduction, the establishment of a Tier 1 Sign District requires the implementation of a Community Benefits Program, which must include Community Benefits Measures that directly eliminate blight or improve aesthetics or traffic safety, if a nexus can be made between the Community Benefits Measures and negative impacts cause by signs in the Sign District. Possible Community Benefits Measures include:

- Sidewalk widening and landscaping
- Undergrounding of utilities
- Streetscape improvements
- Lighting improvements
- Original art murals and public art installations
- Public parking structures to served pedestrian centers
- Façade improvements
- Other permanent improvements that directly eliminate blight or improve aesthetics or traffic safety within the Sign District of the “sign impact area”.

**Location Restrictions (Tier 1 Sign Districts).** Tier 1 Sign Districts are subject to the following location restrictions, as summarized below:

Tier 1 Sign Districts are limited to properties that are:

- in an area designated on an adopted community plan as “Regional Center” or “Regional Commercial” and also zoned C or R5; or
- within the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) Specific Plan or the Port of Los Angeles Plan; or
- in the “Greater Downtown Housing Incentive Area” and also zoned C, M or R5; or
- at a stadium or arena with a seating capacity of 20,000 or more; or
- at a zoo or botanical garden of 60 acres or greater.

Tier 1 Sign Districts are limited to properties of at least 5,000 linear feet of street frontage or 15 acres in area, or at least 2,640 linear feet of street frontage in the “Greater Downtown Housing Incentive Area”.

Within a sign district, no off-site sign can be located:

- Within 500 feet of R Zone or more restrictive zone, an ecological preserve, a state or national park, or an adopted River Implementation Overlay District; or
- Along the frontage of, or on public land within, 500 feet of the centerline of a scenic highway, scenic parkway, scenic corridor, or scenic route as designated on an adopted specific plan, community plan or adopted element of the General Plan.

**Location Restrictions (Tier 2 Sign Districts).** Tier 2 Sign Districts may also allow off-site signs if the sign face is not visible from any public right-of-way or other properties. However, no sign reduction or community benefits are required for the establishment of a Tier 2 Sign District. Tier 2 Sign Districts are subject to the following location restrictions, as summarized below:

Tier 2 Sign Districts are limited to properties that are:

- Not zoned OS or PF; and
- Contain at least three acres of non-residential development or at least 50,000 square feet of non-residential floor area if the site is located in an area designated on an adopted community plan as “Regional Center” or “Regional Commercial” or is located in the “Greater Downtown Housing Incentive Area”; or
- Contain at least five acres of non-residential development or at least 100,000 square feet of non-residential floor area if the site is located in any other area.

**Process to Establish a Sign District (Tier 1 or Tier 2 Sign Districts).** The establishment of a sign district is a discretionary legislative action that requires environmental review, a public hearing, review by the City Planning Commission, and approval by the City Council. To be approved, a proposed sign district must satisfy specified criteria, as summarized below:

- The proposed area must have a unique regional identity that serves as a regional destination or hub of commerce, culture, entertainment, or international transport; and
- The area must possess a unique quality, theme, or character; and
- The design of the proposed signs reinforce that unique quality, theme, or character; and
- The design of the proposed signs are compatible with the surrounding environment; and
- As an exception to the citywide ban on off-site signs, the sign district directly advances the purpose of aesthetics and traffic safety; and
- The elimination of blight, or the improvement of aesthetics or traffic safety, resulting from the establishment of the sign district outweighs any aesthetic or traffic safety harm resulting from signs within the sign district.

Tier 1 Sign Districts may only be comprised of parcels that are contiguous to one another. However, the parcels may be separated by public streets, ways, alleys or other physical features. "Sign impact areas" must have at least one boundary adjacent to the Sign District.

## RELOCATION AGREEMENTS

Relocation agreements represent another tool by which the City is demonstrating its commitment to improve the aesthetic appearance of its neighborhoods. Relocation agreements allow an applicant to establish a sign in a new location or modify an existing sign in its current location while still observing the City's prohibition on new off-site signs by requiring substantial sign reduction for each relocated sign. The purpose of this program is to facilitate the culling and modernization of the city's inventory of off-site signs, which will reduce the total number of off-site signs and improve aesthetics with the replacement or elimination of older signs. Relocation agreements will consolidate the rights of multiple off-site signs, through sign reduction, into one relocated sign off-site sign. It is anticipated that the relocated off-site sign (the new sign) will have a digital display, whereas the existing off-site signs that are being consolidated (removed/replaced) will not have digital displays. Though a relocated off-site sign with a digital display may be considered by some to carry increased public impacts, these will be substantially offset by the cumulative reduction in existing off-site signs, and the provision of public benefits in some cases. The Program is constructed to accommodate the participation of both large and smaller outdoor advertising companies. Large outdoor advertising companies may be able to more easily offer the removal of existing off-site signs to satisfy the sign reduction requirements than firms with smaller inventories. For that reason in-lieu public benefit payment options are provided.

**Sign Reduction.** Applicants may request approval to relocate an existing, legal off-site sign to a new location. Relocation agreements require that every square foot of sign area of a relocated off-site sign must be offset by at least nine square feet of existing sign area (9:1). Sign reduction of less than nine square feet for every square foot of relocated off-

site sign area (9:1) is permitted but requires participation in the Billboard Blight Reduction Public Benefit Program, summarized below. However, in no event can sign reduction be less than two square feet of existing off-site sign area for every square foot of new off-site sign area. A relocation agreement may also authorize the conversion of an off-site sign having a static display into an off-site sign having a digital display in its current, not-otherwise-eligible location, as long as every square foot of converted off-site sign area is offset by at least four square feet of existing sign area (4:1), as the absolute minimum.

The location of existing, legal off-site signs is not evenly distributed throughout the City; some geographies contain a larger concentration of off-site signs than others. The relocation agreement will specify the location of the existing, legal off-site signs to be removed, with the goal of at least 50 percent of the sign reduction occurring from within the Council District within which the relocated or converted sign is located or within five miles of the relocated or converted sign. The remaining sign reduction (up to 50 percent) could be allowed to occur outside of those parameters.

**Billboard Blight Reduction Public Benefit Program.** The Billboard Blight Reduction Public Benefit Program consists of the following elements:

1. Public Benefit Payments

Payments may be made in-lieu of providing sign reduction at a rate of 9:1 or more, corresponding to the applicable sign reduction ratio. As a part of their relocation agreement, applicants will be required to pay a percentage of generated revenue as indicated in the schedule below, annually, for a period of 20 years.

Annual Public Benefit Payments	
Sign Reduction Ratio	In-lieu Payment (portion of revenue)
2:1	40 %
3:1	30 %
4:1	20 %
5:1	10 %
6:1	7.5 %
7:1	5 %
8:1	2.5 %

Funds collected through these payments will be used by the City to purchase existing off-site signs for their subsequent elimination in lieu of the applicant removing the signs and other public benefits that directly eliminate blight or improve aesthetics or traffic safety.

2. Payment Terms

Payment terms, with payments either annualized over a payment period or the entire amount paid at once, will be analyzed, and a recommendation will be provided by the Office of the City Administrative Officer.

### 3. Payment Alternatives

An applicant may propose to provide Public Benefits that may be considered for credit towards the required Public Benefit payment. The valuation of the Public Benefit will be validated by staff upon submittal of a cost analysis by the applicant. Public Benefits can only be considered for up to 30 percent credit towards the required Public Benefit Payment.

An applicant may provide Public Benefits in the vicinity of the relocated sign and be credited towards the required Public Benefit payment. Provided Public Benefits may include the following:

- Sidewalk widening and landscaping
- Undergrounding of utilities
- Streetscape improvements
- Lighting improvements
- Original art murals and public art installations
- Public parking structures to served pedestrian centers
- Façade improvements
- Removal of existing off-site signs having no record of a building permit that can be demonstrated to have been established prior to 2002 and do not otherwise qualify for sign reduction credit
- Other permanent improvements that directly eliminate blight or improve aesthetics or traffic safety

**Relocation Agreement Location Restrictions.** Relocation agreements are subject to the following location restrictions, as summarized below:

- Signs can only be relocated to properties that are in an area designated on an adopted community plan as “Regional Center Commercial”, “Regional Commercial”, “General Commercial”, “Highway Oriented Commercial”, “Community Commercial”, “Industrial”, or “Public Facilities” and also zoned C, M, or PF.
- Relocated signs cannot be located within, and must be at least 200 feet from, an R Zone or a more restrictive zone, an ecological, a state or national park, or an adopted River Improvement Overlay District.
- Relocated signs cannot be on a site along the frontage or within 200 feet, of a California state designated scenic highway.

- Relocated signs with a digital display must be at least 500 feet away from any other digital off-site sign, except that signs with a digital display relocated to a site adjacent to the boundaries of an adopted sign district, must be at least 250 feet away from any other digital off-site sign.
- The face of any relocated sign shall be oriented away from adjacent residential zones or those across an adjoining alley.
- Signs cannot be relocated to the following locations:
  - Adopted Historic Preservation Overlay Zones, adopted specific plans, or in any adopted overlay district which prohibit off-site signs
  - Public parks or recreation facilities
  - Public or private schools which offer instruction in grades K through 12
  - Public libraries
  - Civic buildings, except for centers that primarily store city archives and records
  - Established Sign Districts

These location restrictions do not apply to existing off-site signs being “relocated” to their existing location for the purpose of being converted from a static to a digital display, as long as every square foot of relocated sign area is offset by a reduction of at least four square feet of existing off-site sign area.

**Process to Establish a Relocation Agreement.** An application for a relocation agreement must be preceded by a pre-filing consultation with the Department of City Planning. A relocation agreement is a discretionary action that requires environmental review, a public hearing, report by the Department of City Planning, and approval by the City Council. In approving a relocation agreement, the City Council must find that the relocated off-site sign, which includes existing off-site signs converted to a digital display in their existing location, is compatible with and will not adversely affect or further degrade the surrounding environment or public safety, with respect to the off-site sign’s location, size, height, operations, and any other significant features.

**Relocation Agreement Application Procedures.** Only legally existing off-site signs, with no pending or unresolved Code violations, will be considered for relocation. A separate application will be required for each off-site sign relocation agreement. To control the flow of applications and ensure their review by Department of City Planning staff in a timely and comprehensive manner, applications for relocation agreements will be accepted only within a monthly application window, to be determined by the Department. The number of relocation agreement applications accepted per applicant within any monthly application window will be restricted to a maximum, corresponding to the level of sign reduction proposed in the applications submitted within that application



window. For any given month, applicants are encouraged to submit applications with sign reduction ratios that are the same for all relocation agreement requests submitted. For applicants that submit multiple applications in a month that propose various sign reduction ratios, that applicant will be restricted to the number of applications corresponding to the lowest sign reduction ratio proposed in that month. Applicants proposing a higher ratio of sign reduction, will be allotted a larger number of applications for the month; applicants proposing lower ratios of sign reduction, will be allotted fewer application for the month. Applications brought to the Department for filing that exceed an applicant's monthly allotment will not be accepted by Department staff.

The allowed number of relocation applications per month per applicant will be as follows:

Proposed Sign Reduction Ratio	Maximum Relocation Agreement Applications per Month
5:1 or higher	5
4:1	4
3:1	3
2:1	2

Applications will be reviewed and accepted during a relocation agreement application window, to be determined by the Department. Applications in compliance with the applicant's monthly allotment received after the close of the relocation agreement application window will be considered in the next relocation application window. Only applications that are complete will be accepted into the relocation agreement application window.

**Resolving Location Conflicts.** Since off-site signs are subject to location restrictions, such as spacing from each other and from certain uses, and some eligible locations are perceived by the outdoor advertising industry as more lucrative than others, there may be concurrent applications from different applicants that present a location conflict.

In the event two or more applications, accepted in the same application window, propose relocation agreements for new off-site signs in locations that pose conflicts with one another, the Department will notify the affected applicants. Priority will be given to the application requesting relocation, which includes conversion to a digital display at the same location, of the existing off-site sign having the structure with the longest tenure (earliest built). In the case of two or more sign structures built on the same date, the Department will randomly select one that will be processed for that location. Applicants may offer any one of the following as proof of date built: old advertising contracts, photographs, property tax records, structural or electrical permits or other governmental

or reliable business records. An affected applicant will be allowed to modify the application to propose an alternative location that does not conflict with locations requested by any other applicants in that same application window.

## PAINTED WALL SIGNS

As a consequence of the citywide ban on off-site signs, off-site signs outside of sign districts and legally existing prior to the establishment of the ban in 2002 have nonconforming rights. This means that they may continue in their current location as long as sign structures are not modified. Painted wall signs present a unique problem, because they consist only of a sign face with no structure, except the building wall on which they are painted. A collection of signs, colloquially known as the Barry Blue painted signs, have building permits that require that changes to the advertising message be hand painted. To modernize this limitation, the new regulations now specifically allow wall or mural signs legally existing prior to April 17, 2012, and in regular use for off-site advertising within the Greater Downtown Housing Incentive Area as of December 4, 2012, to change their advertising message using paint, vinyl adhesive materials, or other materials approved by the Department of Building and Safety and the Fire Department, as long as a building permit for the change is obtained.

## TEMPORARY OFF-SITE SIGNS

Temporary off-site signs are another exception to the citywide prohibition on off-site signs in exchange for maintaining the property and public property in the surrounding area free of graffiti and trash through the Graffiti Removal Program under the auspices of the Department of Public Works Office of Community Beautification. Temporary off-site signs are allowed on temporary construction walls, when a construction wall is required by the Department of Building and Safety and there is no operating business on the property, or on solid wood fences surrounding vacant lots. The exception for temporary off-site signs on temporary construction walls is valid for two years, or for as long as the construction work authorized by a separate valid permit continues, whichever is less. The applicant is required to patrol a specified abatement area every 24 hours to search for and remove any graffiti and trash within 24 hours of its discovery. Permits for the temporary signs may be revoked by the Department of Building and Safety for the applicant's failure to comply with the regulations and responsibilities.

## ADDITIONAL STANDARDS APPLICABLE TO ALL OFF-SITE SIGNS

### AREA

A single face of an off-site sign is limited to 800 square feet.

### HEIGHT

Height to the top of the off-site sign is limited to 42 feet above the sidewalk grade or edge of roadway grade nearest the sign, except that a sign that is more than 80 percent above

a roof of a building may extend to the top of the sign a maximum of 30 feet above the surface of the roof under the sign. The bottom of the off-site sign must be at least eight feet above the sidewalk grade or edge of roadway grade nearest the sign.

In no event can the height of an off-site sign exceed a height greater than that height specified for the height district in which the sign is located, or a height of 60 feet above the sidewalk grade or edge of roadway grade nearest the sign, whichever is more restrictive.

## LOCATION RESTRICTIONS

In addition to the location restrictions applicable to off-site signs in sign districts and off-site signs approved through relocation agreements, all off-site signs are subject to the following location restrictions, unless specifically superseded by the provisions of an adopted sign district:

- Off-site signs having a sign area greater than 80 square feet cannot be placed within 200 feet of an R Zone located on the same side of the same street.
- For lots with two or more street frontages, an off-site sign may be located on a street frontage not on the same street as a residentially zoned lot as long as the off-site sign and its support structure are placed in the half of the lot farthest from the street frontage on which the residentially zoned lot is located. However, an off-site sign cannot be located in that half of a lot located farthest from the street frontage when residentially zoned property is located to the rear of that street frontage.
- Off-site signs are only permitted along the portion of a lot that has a street frontage of at least 50 feet.
- No more than four off-site signs can be located at the intersection of two or more streets when the off-site signs are located within 150 feet of the intersection of two street frontages.
- An off-site sign face cannot be located within one foot of an interior lot line.

## SPACING

All off-site signs are subject to the following spacing restrictions, except where specifically superseded by the provisions of an adopted sign district. These spacing requirements also apply to the distance that must be observed by an off-site sign having a digital display from an off-site sign without a digital display. These spacing requirements do not apply between two off-site signs both having a digital display, approved through a relocation agreement; those are subject to the relocation agreement spacing requirements.

- An off-site sign, which is either single-faced or parallel double-faced, shall be spaced as specified in the table below from any other existing or previously permitted off-site sign, which is single-faced or parallel double-faced.
- For any double-faced off-site sign, the spacing requirements shall be based on the area of the largest sign face.
- For double-faced off-site signs whose faces are not parallel, the spacing between any proposed, permitted or existing off-site sign shall be determined by the following formula:

$$D = S \left( 1 + \frac{(B - 5)}{90} \right)$$

WHERE:

D= required spacing between signs, in feet.

S= sign spacing determined from the table below in feet.

B= widest edge separation of sign faces in feet.

- Spacing shall be measured between off-site signs that are located on the same side of the same street. Spacing shall be measured from a line that is perpendicular to the building line and that passes through a point on the building line that is closest to the nearest sign face edge. Spacing shall be measured along the center line of the street.

**SPACING REQUIREMENTS BETWEEN OFF-SITE SIGNS**

	Sign Area	PROPOSED SIGN		
		Less than 80 sq. ft.	80 sq. ft. to 300 sq. ft.	Greater than 300 sq. ft.
<b>Existing or Permitted Sign</b>	Less than 80 sq. ft.	100 ft.	100 ft.	200 ft.
	80 sq. ft. to 300 sq. ft.	100 ft.	300 ft.	300 ft.
	Greater than 300 sq. ft.	200 ft.	300 ft.	600 ft.

## DOUBLE-FACED SIGNS

The provisions regarding double-faced signs apply to all off-site signs. Off-site signs may be either single or double-faced. For double-faced off-site signs whose faces are parallel, the distance between sign faces cannot exceed six feet. For double-faced off-site signs whose faces are not parallel, the distance between sign faces at their widest point cannot exceed 35 feet. The separation of sign faces at their closest point cannot exceed six feet. In no event can the angle between sign faces exceed 37 degrees.

## PROJECTION

The provisions regarding projection apply to all off-site signs. Off-site signs cannot project beyond the building line.

## SUPPORT

The provisions regarding supports apply to all off-site signs. Supports for off-site signs must comply with the following:

- A maximum of two poles is permitted for any off-site sign.
- The maximum cross-sectional dimension of a pole cannot exceed ten percent of the overall height of the sign.
- Off-site sign supports shall be structurally independent of a building.
- Sign support structures must be located directly under the sign face as viewed from the front of the sign.
- The maximum horizontal distance between the center of the sign support structure and the sign face shall not exceed ten feet.

## ILLUMINATION STANDARDS

General illumination of an off-site sign is limited to 3-foot candles above ambient lighting, as measured from the property line.

## DIGITAL DISPLAY STANDARDS

Off-site signs with digital displays must comply with the following:

- Changing messages must:
  - Last a duration of at least 8 seconds for each message
  - Remain static between transitions
  - Utilize an instant transition between messages.
  - Not go blank during a transition

- All digital displays must be equipped to automatically adjust the brightness of the display according to changes in ambient lighting to comply with a brightness limitation of 0.3-foot candles above ambient lighting.
- The maximum brightness of any digital display cannot exceed 300 candelas per square meter during the nighttime and 7,500 candelas per square meter during the daytime.

## SIGN REDUCTION CALCULATION AND CREDIT

Only legal off-site signs may count towards sign reduction requirements. The sign reduction ratio represents the square feet of existing off-site sign area being removed for every square foot of new digital off-site sign area. The amount of existing off-site sign area being removed is to be expressed as a whole number. When the amount of sign area being removed compared to one square foot of new sign area results in a fraction of a number, the calculation of the sign area being removed is to be rounded down to the nearest whole number. Credits for sign reduction are assigned to the owner of the sign from which the sign area is being reduced pursuant to a Project Permit determination. Credits are transferrable. Owners of off-site signs are responsible for notifying the Department of Building and Safety Off-Site Sign Periodic Inspection Program (OSSPIP) regarding any transfers or sales of existing off-site signs.

## ADDITIONAL PROCEDURES APPLICABLE TO ALL OFF-SITE SIGNS

### RELIEF MECHANISMS

The following sign-specific relief mechanisms cannot be used to allow a sign otherwise prohibited by the Code or any adopted sign district. These mechanisms cannot be used to permit off-site signs.

**Sign Adjustments.** Sign Adjustments are available for modifications to height, location, area of an individual sign, shape, projection and clearance of signs; time limit of temporary signs; and sign type for commercial corners and mini-shopping centers. Requests for an adjustment pertaining to height or sign area is limited to an increase of less than 20 percent beyond what is otherwise permitted by the Code.

**Sign Variances.** Sign Variances are available for modifications to height, location, area of an individual sign, location of combined sign area, shape, projection, clearance, time limit of temporary signs, sign type and number of signs.

## VIOLATIONS

A violation of the sign regulations is considered to be a continuing violation, and each day that a violation continues will be penalized as a new and separate offense. The penalties for violations are as follows:

SIGN AREA OF OFF-SITE SIGN IN VIOLATION	CIVIL PENALTIES PER DAY OF VIOLATION		
	First Violation	Second Violation	Third Violation and All Subsequent Violations
Less than 150 square feet	\$2,500	\$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