



BRIEFING MEMO

PLANNING DIVISION
DEPARTMENT *of* COMMUNITY
and NEIGHBORHOODS

To: Salt Lake City Planning Commission

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Re: Vintage and Nonconforming Amendments to Salt Lake City's Sign Ordinance

BACKGROUND:

The character of Salt Lake City's unique neighborhoods and business districts are defined by a number of elements including the dimensions of the street and sidewalk, the availability of diverse types of housing and commercial businesses, and the architectural character of the buildings.

One significant, but occasionally under-appreciated, contributor to a neighborhood or district's character is the presence of vintage signs. These signs reflect unique eras in the development of Salt Lake City through their creative use of shape, hand-lettering, mechanical animation, or lighting technique.

The Salt Lake City Council initiated a petition requesting that the Planning Division review issues surrounding Salt Lake City's vintage signs and propose some changes to the zoning code to allow for the continued retention, restoration, and reuse of these important objects.

ISSUE:

Because many Vintage Signs are currently considered nonconforming, there are significant restrictions on what an owner can do with them. Essentially, this means that the signs can continue to be used "as is, where is", without any account taken of redevelopment or changing uses on the site. This creates significant barriers for an owner who wishes to improve, relocate, or modify a sign. As a result, many times, vintage signs can be lost to due to disrepair and removal.

PURPOSE:

The goal of these text changes is to create:

- Additional clarity about the maintenance options available for nonconforming signs.
- A process for property owners to nominate potential vintage signs for designation and modification.
- Criteria to ensure that designated signs have characteristics that make them worthy of additional flexibility.
- A framework of options that will support property owners in retaining these signs.

ACTION:

Through this briefing, planning staff is seeking feedback on these proposed changes, so as to inform the final draft of the ordinance revision.

PROPOSAL:

What follows is a list of topics related to the Vintage Signs in Salt Lake City. These are areas that the proposed amendments are intended to address.

Clarification of Code Related to Nonconforming Signs

Signs that, through changes to Salt Lake City's zoning code, have become nonconforming can continue to be used 'as is, where is'. Though they are allowed to continue, there are significant restrictions on what can be done with them. 21A.46.140 states that "...a nonconforming sign shall not be reconstructed, raised, moved, replaced, extended, altered or enlarged unless the sign is changed so as to conform to all provisions of this chapter."

This has led to some confusion about whether nonconforming signs must be repaired in place, or may be temporarily removed for repair and then reinstalled in the same location.

Staff proposes the inclusion of language clarifying that routine maintenance of a nonconforming sign may include the temporary removal, off-site repair, and reinstallation of the sign in the same location and manner as it was prior to removal.

Criteria for Designation as a "Vintage Sign"

Not every sign that is nonconforming has specific characteristics that distinguish it as unique or notable (and thus worthy of additional flexibility). Additionally, in some cases, a nonconforming sign might not continue to retain enough of its original appearance to justify special flexibility. An example of this might be a hand-lettered sign that, while it retains its original form, has been entirely painted over. In some cases, the original character of a sign could be restored based on historic evidence such as drawings or photographs.

Likewise, since the intent is to retain signs that provide unique character that is specific to their context, billboards will not be candidates for vintage sign designation.

A sign must meet at least four additional criteria from a list designed to ensure that only those signs that have qualities worthy of conservation are granted "Vintage Sign" status.

These criteria include whether the sign:

1. Was specifically designed for a business, institution, or other establishment on the site where the sign is located;
2. Bears an emblem, logo, or other graphic specific to the city or region;
3. Exhibits specific characteristics that enhance the streetscape or identity of a neighborhood;
4. Is characteristic of a specific historic period;
5. Is integral to the design of the site or building where the sign is located; or
6. Represents an example of craftsmanship in the application of lighting technique, use of materials, or design.

Flexibility for Designated Vintage Signs

At its core, the purpose of Vintage Sign designation is to provide additional assurance and flexibility to the owners of these signs, to support their retention, restoration, and reuse into the future. The current draft of the ordinance provides that a designated Vintage Sign may, by special exception:

1. Be relocated within its current site.

2. Be modified to account for changing uses within its current site. These modifications shall be in the same style as the design of the original sign. This includes:
 - Shape and form
 - Size
 - Typography
 - Illustrative elements
 - Use of Color
 - Character of Illumination
3. Be relocated to a new site for use as a piece of public art, provided that the original character and design of the sign is intact and it advertises a business no longer in operation.

Application and Review Process

Applications to designate, modify, or relocate vintage signs, would follow the same process as a special exception, with additional submission requirements designed to allow the planning staff to determine compliance with the criteria for Vintage Sign designation or modification.

Once an application is deemed complete, notice will be sent to all abutting property owners, including those located across the street from the subject property. A minimum of 12 days notice will be provided so that these nearby property owners can contact the Planning Division to for provide additional information about the proposal or to ask questions.

If it is found that the application successfully meets the required criteria the petition could be approved administratively. If it is determined that the application is complex in nature, or would create a significant change to the subject property or area, the petition could be forwarded to the Planning Commission for review and decision.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- Should there be a limit on the number of signs that could be designated as Vintage Signs on any given site?
- What restrictions should be placed on the relocation of designated Vintage Signs within their current site?
- Should signs that have been removed from their original site and held in storage be allowed to be designated as Vintage Signs and reinstalled?

NEXT STEPS:

Staff is continuing to engage with various community councils, business district associations, property owners, and stakeholder groups around this issue through individual conversations, citizen walking tours, and the SLC Mobile phone app. The information gathered from these engagements, along with the conversation and feedback generated tonight, will be used to inform and refine the draft ordinance changes.

Staff plans to bring this project back before the Planning Commission in the coming months, for a public hearing and recommendation.

Attachments:

- Draft Ordinance Amendments Related to Nonconforming and Vintage Signs

21A.46.020(B): DEFINED TERMS:

VINTAGE SIGN: An on-premises sign with unique identifying characteristics that contributes to the historical or cultural character of the neighborhood, city, or region and designated as provided in Section 21A.46.125 of this title.

21A.46.070: GENERAL STANDARDS

V. Historic District Signs: The historic landmark commission may authorize, as a special exception, modification to an existing sign or the size or placement of a new sign in a historic district or on a landmark site, including placement of a sign type not allowed in the underlying zone, if the applicant can demonstrate that the location, size and/or design of the proposed sign is compatible with the design period or theme of the historic structure or district and/or will cause less physical damage to the historically significant structure. If a sign in a local historic district or on a landmark site has been designated a Vintage Sign as per 21A.46.125, the modifications allowed in that section may be authorized, as a special exception, by the historic landmark commission subject to the appropriate standards of 21A.34.020.

21A.46.125: VINTAGE SIGNS:

- A. The purpose of this section is to promote the retention, restoration, and reuse of currently nonconforming signs that represent important elements of the City's heritage and enhance the character of the community.
- B. Notwithstanding any contrary provision of this title:
 1. The Planning Director shall designate an existing sign as a vintage sign if the sign:
 - a. Is not a billboard as defined in 21A.46.020;
 - b. Retains its original design character, or its original character will be restored, based on historic evidence such as drawings or photographs;
 - c. Meets at least four (4) of the following criteria:
 1. The sign was specifically designed for a business, institution, or other establishment on the site where the sign is located;
 2. The sign bears an emblem, logo, or other graphic specific to the city, or region;
 3. The sign exhibits specific characteristics that enhance the streetscape or identity of a neighborhood;
 4. The sign is characteristic of a specific historic period;
 5. The sign is integral to the design of the site or building where the sign is located; or
 6. The sign represents an example of craftsmanship in the application of lighting technique, use of materials, or design.
 2. An application for designation of Vintage Sign status as well as for modifications to or relocation of a Vintage Sign shall be processed in accordance with the following procedures for a special exception, as per 21A.52:
 - a. Application: In addition to the general application requirements for special exception, an application for vintage sign designation or modification shall require:
 1. Detailed drawings and/or photographs of the sign in its current condition.
 2. Detailed drawings of any modifications being sought.
 3. Detailed drawings of any relocation being sought.
 4. Historic and current photographs of the sign.
 3. A designated vintage sign may, by special exception:
 - a. Be relocated within its current site.

- b. Be modified to account for changing uses within its current site. These modifications shall be in the same style as the design of the original sign including:
 - 1. Shape and form
 - 2. Size
 - 3. Typography
 - 4. Illustrative Elements
 - 5. Use of Color
 - 6. Character of Illumination
- c. Be relocated to another location for use as a piece of public art, provided that the original design and character of the sign is not altered and it advertises a business no longer in operation

21A.46.140: NONCOMFORMING SIGNS

- A. Moving, Extensions Or Alterations: A nonconforming sign shall not be reconstructed, raised, moved, replaced, extended, altered or enlarged unless the sign is changed so as to conform to all provisions of this chapter. A nonconforming sign may be temporarily removed for routine maintenance and reinstalled in the same location and manner. Alterations shall also mean the changing of the text or message of the sign as a result of a change in use of the property. Alterations shall not be interpreted to include changing the text or copy on outdoor advertising signs, theater signs, outdoor bulletins or other similar signs which are designed to accommodate changeable copy. Specific modifications permitted to nonconforming signs designated Vintage Signs as per 21A.46 may be authorized by special exception.

21A.52.030: SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS AUTHORIZED

- A. In addition to any other special exceptions authorized elsewhere in this title, the following special exceptions are authorized under the provisions of this title:
 - 25. Designation, modification, or relocation of a Vintage Sign as per 21A.46.