



## Quality of Life Committee

### Amendments to the City of Houston Sign Code Airport Corridor District

July 22, 2020

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# History of the proposed Changes to the Sign Code (on-premise):

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- November 2017, several Sign Code changes were proposed by Scenic Houston and Sign Administration.
- Covered areas included creation of an airport corridor, management of abandoned signs, and a number of commonsense technical fixes.
- Concluded we need to have further discussion.

# History of proposed Changes to the Sign Code cont'd:

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- A taskforce was led by Tommy Friedlander and Philip Schneidau, who agreed to pull together all industry groups and Scenic Houston.
- Considerable interactions have occurred concerning the proposed changes, and today's proposal reflects the agreement reached by the taskforce.
- These changes are supported by:
  - Houston First
  - Scenic Houston
  - Houston Real Estate Council (HREC)
  - Institute of Real Estate Management (IREM)
  - Building Owners & Managers Association (BOMA)
  - National Association of Industrial & Office Parks (NAIOP)
  - Houston Apartment Association (HAA)
  - Houston Hotel Association
  - Greater Houston Restaurant Association



# Proposed Changes:

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- Creation of the Airport Corridor District.
- Define Abandoned Signs and Signs Not In Use.
- Allow on-premise signs to update advertising displays without losing grandfather status.
- Allow illuminated on-premise signs to update their lighting mechanism to LED without losing grandfather status.
- Allow wall signs to anchor above rooflines.

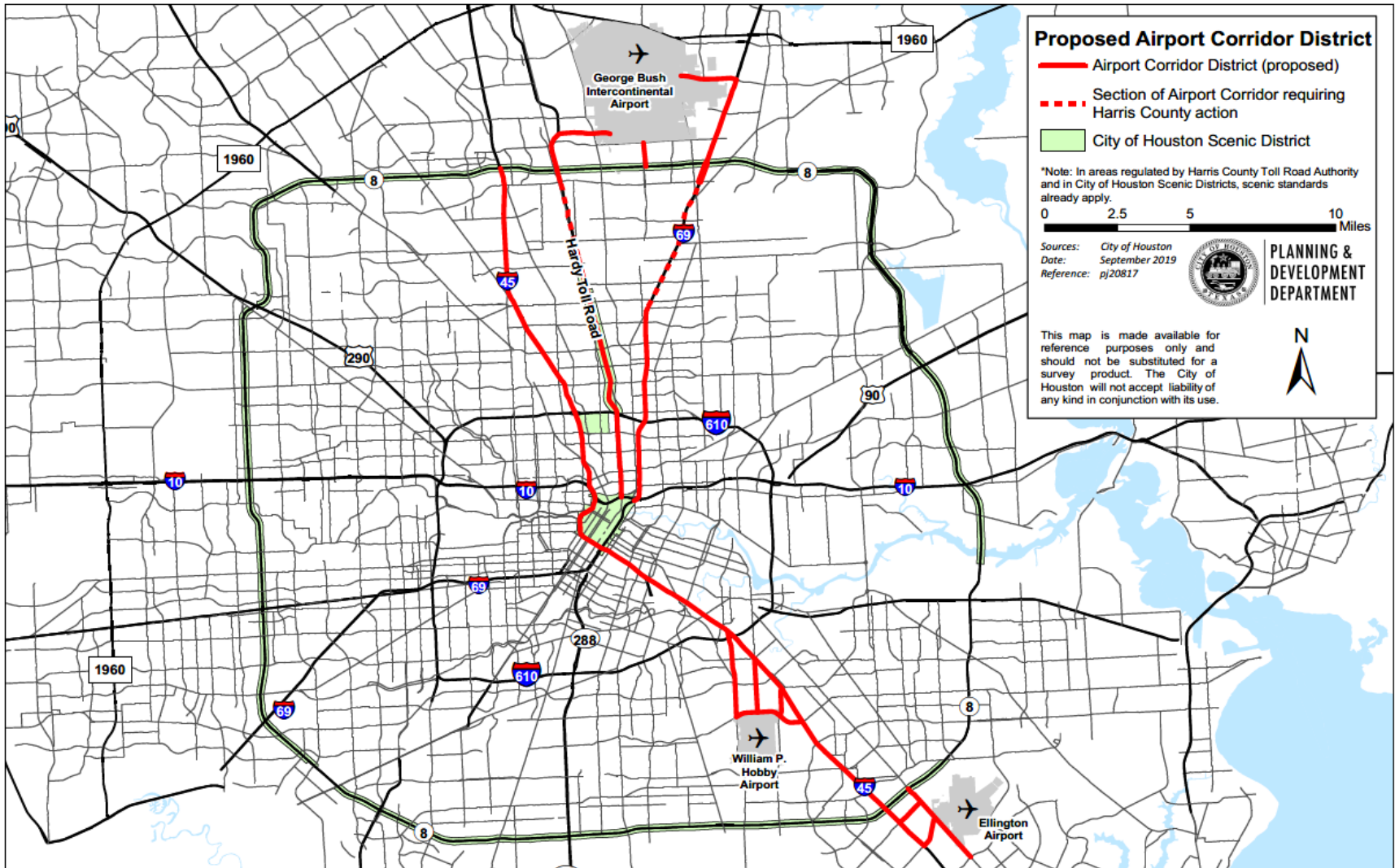


# Airport Corridor District

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**Purpose:** To reduce the height and size of on premise signs along the freeways between the City's airports and its central business district. This will reduce distraction to drivers and improve the first impression of travelers driving into the City from the City's airports.

# Airport Corridor District





# Abandoned Signs



**Background:** Currently, there are numerous abandoned signs around the City in various states of disrepair.

**Purpose:** To create a definition for abandoned signs in the Sign Code to facilitate the removal of these signs from throughout the City.



# Signs Not In Use



**Background:** Some signs remain unused for long periods of time, although their owners maintain them and intend to use them in the future.

**Purpose:** To add a definition for such signs to improve clarity and require that these signs be permitted to distinguish them from abandoned signs.





# LED Lighting



Internally illuminated sign with LED

**Background:** LED lights are more energy-efficient than incandescent and fluorescent lighting, and their brightness can be controlled. Currently, upgrading to LED causes a sign to lose grandfather status.

**Purpose:** To allow sign owners to convert a conventional lighting mechanism to LED without losing grandfather status.

# Summary of Positive Public Comments

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- **East End District:** Supports amendments. There is a broad consensus that negative first impressions of Houston are formed when driving into the city from our airports. The Airport Corridor District designation will foster, over time, a more welcoming gateway and more positive impressions of Houston. Adoption of the proposed revisions will go a long way that not only form visitor impressions but are the “spine” of adjacent neighborhoods.
- **North Houston District:** Strongly supports. The North Houston District helps to maintain the right-of-way and other greenspace within the District’s boundaries to foster a welcoming gateway into the city. Changes will help further those efforts by establishing specific height/size standards for new on-premise signs and include a regulatory structure to remove abandoned signs, which overall will improve the city’s streetscape.
- **Transportation Advocacy Group (TAG):** TAG supports the adoption of the Airport Corridor sign ordinance. The proposed changes support TAG’s critical endeavor. The Amendment will likely attract philanthropic support for targeted landscaping and other beautification projects along the corridor, further enhancing infrastructure.
- **North Houston Association:** Strongly supports. The designating Airport Corridor District, will address abandoned signs and provide for new technology. Designation will foster a more welcoming gateway and a higher rate of positive impressions of Houston for both residents and visitors. Adoption of the revisions will positively impact tourism, corporate relocations, and quality of life for residents.



# Summary of Positive Public Comments

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- **Houston First Corporation:** Supports the adoption of the proposed changes. The Airport Corridor District designation will foster a more welcoming gateway, and will positively impact visitors impressions, and create better “front doors” to the many neighborhoods along the corridors.
- **Hobby Area District:** Strongly supports adoption of the proposed changes to establish specific height/size standards for new on-premise signs and a regulatory structure focusing on the removal of abandoned signs.
- **East Aldine District:** Strongly supports changes. The Airport Corridor District designation creates a defined area of focus for improvement efforts. The proposed ordinance will establish specific height/size standards for new on-premise signs within the District, including a regulatory structure for focusing on removal of abandoned signs.
- **East Downtown Management District:** Strongly supports. The Airport Corridor District designation will create a welcoming gateway and positive impressions of Houston by creating a defined area of focus for improvement efforts.

# Summary of Opposing Public Comments

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- **Texas Sign Association:** Opposes the amendments. Believes the revisions will negatively impact the Sign Industry. Against the proposal as listed, due to the sections that calls for the lowering in height as well as in size. Safety, visibility of the signs, economic impact are some of the several reasons why they are opposed.
- **Matthew Baker/Baker's Signs & Man. Inc.:** Opposes the sign code revisions. They are not willing to continue to agree with the reduction of the height of signs nor that of the square footage of signs. Currently, size height calls for 42'6 tall; however, many on the freeway systems are much taller, and therefore, the signs can no longer be seen. They cite that the existing sign structures within the city are a hazard to the general public, and they can help with getting this fixed while cleaning up the old and abandoned signs. However, the economic impact that this can possibly have on the business owners can be substantial.
- **Brian Thorne:** Opposes and believes the amendment is going to significantly harm small businesses. States that it is critical to allow new, different, and unique businesses an opportunity to survive and thrive in our economy. The amendment will have enormous effects on small businesses and limit their ability to advertise, attract customers, and compete with national brands.



# Summary of Opposing Public Comments

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- **Future Sign Co. (Brenda Velazquez):** Strongly opposes and recommends that City Council allow for more public outreach and hear the voices of all the people in these areas before making a choice that will hurt Houston's increasing opportunities, affect the safety of anyone trapped in a flood along these freeways, and adversely impact many small business owners. States that there was a lack of research on conflicting regulations, policies and guidelines that were not considered when planning, and also, a lack of proper usage of terms that the sign industry uses on a national level. Believes that many who are in support of this amendment are Big Businesses and not small businesses.
- **Future Sign Co. (Brenda Velazquez):** Follow-up response. Strongly opposes. Cities that lowering and taking down signs does nothing for us as a community. States that real estate laws for abandoned properties can take over these abandoned signs and there inspectors on the field that can enforce unsafe signs and have these signs removed. Don't take down unused signs off properties because property owners can not find tenants. These signs bring value to these properties. Cites that half of the trees required for parking lots surpasses the heights the proposal shows. Asks that we enforce unstable / unsafe signs, enforce unpaid renewals, enforce un-permitted signs, enforce unlicensed contractors, and enforce community effective sign codes with adopting NEC terms and definitions.



# Summary

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## **What the proposed changes accomplish:**

- Addresses sign blight over time.
- Focuses stakeholder resources on maintenance improvements and landscaping enhancements.
- Establishes a regulatory structure for focusing on removal of abandoned signs.

## **What the proposed changes will NOT do:**

- Off-premise signs (billboards) are not addressed or in any way impacted by this ordinance.
- Does not require removal of existing non-conforming on-premise signs.
- Does not require additional City enforcement or capital resources (i.e. no fiscal note).



# Conclusion

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- Sign owners and many civic groups support the proposal and opposition comes from sign companies.
  - 30 years ago a more restrictive Scenic District was established in Southwest Freeway.
  - Business has prospered and no evidence of business losses.
- Recommend we proceed for Mayor/Council approval.

# Allowable On-Premise Sign Heights & Sizes



SIGN TYPE	CATEGORY A		CATEGORY B		CATEGORY C		CATEGORY D		CATEGORY E	
	Height	Size	Height	Size	Height	Size	Height	Size	Height	Size
	(Ft.)	(SFt.)	(Ft.)	(SFt.)	(Ft.)	(SFt.)	(Ft.)	(SFt.)	(Ft.)	(SFt.)
<b>SINGLE BUSINESS</b>	14	100	20	150	42½	225	8	60	<u>31</u>	<u>150</u>
<b>MULTI-TENANT 2 OR 3 BUSINESSES</b>	19	200	26	300	42½	450	10	120	<u>31</u>	<u>300</u>
<b>MULTI-TENANT 4 OR MORE BUSINESSES</b>	24	300	31	450	42½	600	12	180	<u>31</u>	<u>450</u>
<b>FLAG</b>	20	—	35	—	50	—	—	—	—	—

**CATEGORY A** shall mean visible from and located on premises with frontage on scenic and historical rights-of-way and districts and major thoroughfares in the Airport Corridor District.

**CATEGORY B** shall mean visible from and located on premises with frontage on major thoroughfares including collector streets other than scenic and historical rights-of-way and districts.

**CATEGORY C** shall mean visible from and located on premises with frontage on freeways and highways other than scenic and historical rights-of-way and districts.

**CATEGORY D** shall mean visible from and located on premises with frontage on local streets.

**CATEGORY E** shall mean visible from and located on premises with frontage on freeways in the Airport Corridor District.





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Thank You!

Questions?