

Cambridge Redevelopment Authority

MXD DISTRICT SIGNAGE REVIEW & APPROVAL PROCESS AND GUIDELINES

FINAL

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1.0 PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

The Cambridge Redevelopment Authority (CRA) independently reviews new signage proposals within Cambridge's MXD Zoning District in the Kendall Square Urban Renewal Area (KSURA). The purpose of this document is to:

- a. define a public, transparent, and well articulated review and approval process for signs in the MXD District.
- b. establish criteria for review and approval of the design, size, shape, locations, materials, and illumination of new commercial signage and public information displays that will reflect contemporary goals for Kendall Square.

2.0 SIGNAGE REVIEW JURISDICTION

In accordance with Section 408 of the Kendall Square Urban Renewal Plan (KSURP), the CRA has review jurisdiction over all signs, including their colors, finishes, fabrication, and illumination, as further described in the sections below. These Guidelines constitute the design standards anticipated under Section 502 of the KSURP for signage. Signage proposals within the MXD District are exempt from Cambridge's citywide Sign Ordinance provisions (Article 7.0) and review jurisdiction.

- a. Exempted from CRA review are: state and federal signage, including MBTA signage, advertising signage on Hubway bike stations and MBTA bus shelters; and city, state, or federal flags.
- b. Signs within the KSURA but not within the MXD Zoning District are subject to the Cambridge Sign Ordinance or Federal design jurisdiction.

2.1 Ownership and Placement

Within the MXD District, CRA jurisdiction includes the following:

- a. Private permanent signage on or within private property which is visible from public ways, public passages, or public open spaces,

- b. Private permanent signage and related structures extending over sidewalks or other public ways,
- c. Public informational or wayfinding signage or kiosks designed specifically for the MXD District either on or within publically accessible private property, or on public sidewalks, plazas or open spaces,
- d. Private or public temporary signage or banners,
- e. *Advisory* review of city signage for purposes of coordination and compatibility.

2.2 Signage Types

The list of signage types below illustrates the wide range of sign types that the CRA reviews, which includes but is not limited to the following:

- a. Wall signs, including commercial signs, corporate identity signs, tenant identification signs, tenant directories, building identification signs, building street address signs, plaques, wayfinding signs, and parking facility exterior signage
- b. Projecting and suspended signs, including blade signs, marquee signs, entrance canopy signs, awning signs, and banner signs
- c. Free-standing signs, including monument, pedestal, pole, and kiosk signs
- d. Ground surface signs, including commemorative signs and plaques
- e. Window signs, including window lettering, decals, vinyl lettering, etching, and painted signs; and paper signs and video screens, mounted directly on windows or in the interior within three feet of storefront windows
- f. Sidewalk sign boards (which require additional city review when placed on city sidewalks).

Such signs may be illuminated, digital displays, or temporary signs.

2.3 Signage Types that are Strongly Discouraged

- a. Rooftop signs projecting above a building's façade or cornice line
- b. Flashing or strobe light signs
- c. Audible signs
- d. Free-standing pole signs in public ways or public easements
- e. Translucent (backlit) plastic sign faces
- f. General advertising on signs not associated with a building's use or public information, such as billboards or street furniture signs
- g. Repeated use of temporary signs

- h. Any signage, which because of its location, size, movement or illumination diminishes public safety, including:
 - i. Signage that obstructs eye-level views of streets, driveway entrances, pedestrian ways and/or pedestrian crossings, and
 - ii. Moving signage that may unduly distract passing motorists.

3.0 CRA SIGNAGE GOALS

The CRA seeks to meet two overarching goals through its signage review process:

- a. Encourage signage design within the MXD District that reflects the worldwide innovation and high-tech reputation of Kendall Square,
- b. Encourage signage appropriate to the evolving mixed-use context and community character of the MXD District.

While these goals may at times be in tension with one another, the Guidelines seek to outline a process that ultimately leads the CRA and signage proponents to meet both of these goals within the built environment of Kendall Square.

4.0 MXD SIGNAGE DESIGN OBJECTIVES AND GUIDELINES

The CRA staff and Board will review signage proposals in accordance with the follow Design Objectives and Guidelines which have been crafted to reflect the signage goals of the CRA and support the unique characteristics and aspirations of the Kendall Square district.

4.1 Encourage Creativity

Signage should promote the image of Kendall Square as a center for technological innovation.

- a. Signage proponents should explore creative methods for expressing their messaging needs through contemporary design using innovative materials and graphic techniques.
- b. The CRA seeks to provide for sufficient signage variety to allow individual tenants and companies to express their own unique identities, using properly scaled and located tenant identification and corporate identification.

4.2 Utilize Scale Appropriately

Signage should not dominate the urban landscape of Kendall Square but should instead be integrated into the built environment based on its function and position on a building.

- a. Signage should be complementary to the façade of the building, or provide highlights to mark particular uses or entries.
- b. The size of the sign and its lettering should relate to a hierarchy of wayfinding and the intended audience.

- c. Building identification signs that are intended to be read at a distance are anticipated to be larger and may function as distinctive landmarks.
- d. Storefront or wall signs, which are to be read from the sidewalk should be sized appropriately, and tenant directory signs should be sized to be read at a building entrance.

4.3 Find Suitable Signage Locations

All signs should be installed at a location and height appropriate for their intended audiences.

- a. Retail signage or wayfinding / informational graphics should be installed at locations and heights best seen by passing pedestrians and motorists on immediately adjacent streets.
- b. Retail tenant signage should be installed at first or second floor heights, but in no instance higher than twenty (20) feet above the ground.
- c. Corporate identity and hotel identification signage intended to be seen by both local visitors as well as by wider audiences from broader regional view points may be located near the tops of buildings.
- d. In general, signage located at the mid-heights of buildings is discouraged.

4.4 Maintenance of Sightlines and Visibility

Views along the length of public right-of-ways, into public spaces, or toward key landmarks should be preserved.

- a. Signage must not diminish public safety by unduly distracting motorists' attention, causing undue glare, or visually obstructing sightlines to driveway entrances or pedestrian street crossings.
- b. Signage must not unduly obscure key sightlines; particular attention should be paid to the size and position of projecting wall signs. Projecting wall signs ("blade" signs) should not project over more the 25% of the width of the neighboring sidewalk, or five (5) feet, whichever is smaller, unless part of a canopy structure.

4.5 Avoid Signage Clutter

Signage proposals should be designed to convey their message with the minimum number of signs possible. Avoid excessive signage.

- a. A retail tenant should display only the minimum number of signs necessary to advertise itself and be seen from all appropriate frontages.
- b. Window display signs, including paper signs, should be minimized in order to allow clear and direct views of the activity inside retail establishments from adjacent sidewalks or streets.
- c. In multi-tenanted office or research buildings, individual company tenant signage should be confined to consolidated ground-level building directories.
- d. With the exception of a building's prime tenant signage, multiple tenant signs should not be individually wall-mounted.

4.6 Maintain Façade Transparency

Signage on windows and doorways should be designed to maintain the overall transparency of the ground level façade.

- a. In general, signs on or behind windows should not exceed ten (10%) percent of the available glass area at ground level.
- b. Translucent or transparent applications on windows are preferred over opaque images and lettering.
- c. Permanent signage in upper story windows is discouraged.

4.7 Create Clear Wayfinding Signage

Kendall Square requires a clear system of wayfinding elements to contribute to the district's identity and to assist visitor navigation.

- a. Wayfinding signage should be designed to be graphically consistent throughout Kendall Square.
- b. Information graphics should be designed so that people can quickly orient themselves to their location and destinations.
- c. Design distinctions and similarities should be made between wayfinding signage that is part of a larger citywide signage graphics program and wayfinding and information graphics particular to Kendall Square as a uniquely identified district.

4.8 Signage Illumination

Innovative signage lighting is to be encouraged to activate the Kendall Square district during evening hours, but lighting levels must be moderated to minimize broader environmental or community impacts. Adjustable lighting levels are preferable.

- a. A wide range of lighting technology for signs may be appropriately utilized depending on the type of sign.
- b. Signage lighting brightness levels should not cause undue nuisance to residential neighbors; and limiting brightness levels and/or nighttime operating hours may reduce unwanted impacts.
- c. Lighting installations should be adjustable to adapt to changing environmental conditions and/or to respond to identified concerns
- d. and should demonstrate high levels of energy efficiency.
- e. To respect dark sky objectives, signage illumination should not be directed skyward.

4.9 Electronic Signage

Electronic signs that change message or copy at intervals may be acceptable if they provide information about on-premise activity and contribute positively to the dynamic character of Kendall Square.

- a. Electronic signs must not be positioned where they could distract drivers or bicyclists.
- b. Electronic signs should minimize flashing, intermittent or moving lights or animating, moving, or scrolling displays.

- c. Electronic signage must automatically adjust to natural ambient light conditions and minimize brightness on sensitive receptors such as residential uses and parks or other public facilities.
- d. Electronic signage should demonstrate high levels of energy efficiency.

5.0 SIGNAGE REVIEW & APPROVAL PROCESSES

Signage must be reviewed and approved by the CRA before it is fabricated or installed. Signage proponents may be building owners or managers or building tenants who have received a written approval from their building owner or manager. Proponents are encouraged, but not required, to informally meet with CRA staff and/or the Board's Design Review Committee early in the design process, before submitting formal schematic design proposals.

5.1 Administrative Staff Review of Preliminary Signage Designs

Signage proposals documented completely per Section 6.2 and conforming to the threshold criteria set forth below, will be administratively reviewed by CRA staff and/or their designee for compliance with the CRA's Signage Goals (Section 3.0) and Design Guidelines (Section 4.0). If a proposal is in alignment with these goals and guidelines, the CRA's Executive Director may approve the submissions and so inform the CRA Board, the City of Cambridge, and the proponent.

The CRA staff may at its discretion consult with the CRA Board members and/or City staff prior to an administrative decision. Staff will respond to proponents within thirty (30) business days and may ask for additional information. The staff may request an extension or additional submission materials at its discretion. If warranted, due to complexity or unique elements, the Executive Director may at his/her discretion determine that the CRA Board shall review a signage application.

Signs meeting the threshold criteria listed below are eligible for Administrative Review:

- a. Temporary signs that are installed for less than three months and are not more than twenty (20) square feet in size.
- b. Replacement signs that do not increase the size, change the location, change the shape, or increase the illumination levels of signs previously installed.
- c. Window Signs
 - i. Size occupying no greater than 10% of the available glass area
- d. Wall plaques meeting all of the following limitations:
 - i. Size less than six (6) square feet
 - ii. Number of signs no more than two per usable entry
 - iii. Installed at eye level (approximately five feet on center above grade)
 - iv. Projection no greater than eight (8) inches from the face of the wall.
- e. Flush mounted wall signs, meeting all of the following limitations:
 - i. Size less than twenty (20) square feet, as measured either as a sign panel or the area defined by individual letters

- ii. Maximum installation height of any portion of the sign is no greater than twenty (20 feet) above the ground, provided it is below the second floor window or the lowest part of the roof, whichever is less.
 - iii. Projection no greater than eight (8) inches from the face of the wall
 - iv. Natural or external lighting
- f. Movable sidewalk signs – subject to City approval

All other signs will go through full CRA Board review.

5.2 CRA Board Review of Preliminary Signage Designs

The following signage proposals must be submitted to the CRA Board for review and approval:

- A signage proposal that does not meet the threshold criteria defined above in Section 6.1
- All sign systems involving multiple buildings or installation locations, including District-wide proposals.

The proponents should provide clear evidence in their submission documents that the proposal fully complies with the CRA's Design Goals (Section 3.0) and Design Review Guidelines (Section 5.0).

a. Initial Review by CRA Staff

The CRA staff shall review proposals in order to make a determination of completeness and to make a recommendation to the CRA Board. The CRA staff shall meet with proponents within ten (10) business days after submission in order to make a determination of completeness and outline a schedule for review and consideration by the Board; however, they may request an extension or additional submission materials at its discretion.

CRA staff may, upon initial review of any submission, make a determination and notify the proponent that:

- i. A submission is incomplete or requires further materials to allow for adequate understanding and review of the proposal.
- ii. A submission is complete, appears to meet the goals and objectives of the CRA and staff will recommend approval to the Board.
- iii. A proposal requires a more intensive review process. This determination may be made, for example, for proposals that are so complex or controversial as to require greater public review and discussion by the CRA Board at one or more meetings.
- iv. A proposal does not meet the Signage Goals and Design Guidelines. The proponent may submit a revised proposal.

b. CRA Board Review

The CRA Board shall review all preliminary sign proposals that do not fall within the criteria for Administrative Review outlined above as well as those proposals determined by the Executive Director to require review by the Board. The Board will consider designs for their conformance with the Design Goals (Section 3.0) and Design Guidelines (Section 4.0).

After preliminary review by staff and the determination that the application materials are complete, the Board shall consider proposals within sixty (60) business days after submission at a duly noticed public meeting.

Based upon the Board's sole interpretation, the Board may approve, conditionally approve, or disapprove a signage proposal. If a proposal is conditionally approved or disapproved, the proponent may resubmit a revised proposal. Once approval is granted, the Board shall inform the proponent and the City as needed.

5.3 Construction Drawing Review

Proponents shall submit 90% Construction documents to the CRA staff for review and consistency check with the prior schematic approval. Proponents shall notify CRA staff of any design changes that have been made to the signage proposal between the schematic design approval and the 90% construction plan stage. Staff will make the final determination if the construction plans are consistent with the schematic approved or contain minor non-substantive variations from the original submission. If the construction drawings represent a significant departure from the schematic design, then the proposal must be re-considered by the Board before fabrication and installation.

6.0 SIGNAGE SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

6.1 Submission Procedures

Signage submissions are required at the schematic stage for staff and/or Board review and at the 90% construction document stage prior to fabrication in order to insure sign installations conform with approved schematic designs.

The timing of these signage submissions may be divorced from the required submission stages for building design (schematic, design development and construction documents).¹

6.2 Submission Requirements

Signage proponents must submit the following documentation at both the preliminary and 90% construction stage of submission:

- Proponent information, including name address, contact number
- Approval of the building owner or manager, if necessary

¹ This represents a change from the CRA's previous procedure, which had linked signage and building design submissions. Building designs should still provide façade information regarding planned sign locations.

- A written description including the size of the sign
- Site plan and building façade showing the proposed location and position of the signage, and signage elevation
- Design documents showing the proposed signage in plan, section, and elevation in relationship to the proposed building facade
- A materials list
- A description of how the signage is to be mounted or installed and a proposed installation schedule
- Color illustrations of the proposed signage, including dimensioned elevations, dimensioned cross-sections, and a rendering(s) of the signage shown in its full architectural context
- If the sign requires internal illumination, technical description of the method for illuminating the sign, the hours of illumination, and brightness levels at the sign's installed location.
- Documentation of liability coverage for signs that project over a public way

6.3 Additional Materials

If a nearby residential property is in close proximity of the proposed signage location and may potentially be adversely impacted by such night signage illumination, the CRA may request additional information about brightness levels relative to the location of the residential property.