

ELECTRONIC SIGNS

Design Commission Position Statement & Recommendations

Approved April 12, 2016

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COMMISSIONER ECKHARDT TO APPROVE THE DESIGN COMMISSION POSITION STATEMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS ON ELECTRONIC SIGNAGE. COMMISSIONER KUBOW SECONDED THE MOTION. ALL WERE IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.

Task:

On February 19, 2016, Mayor Hayes sent a letter to the Design Commission regarding electronic signage requesting that the Design Commission complete the following tasks for Village Board review:

- Develop a general overview of the issues related to electronic signage.
- Report on a range of general approaches regarding electronic signage.
- Recommend an approach for the Village Board to discuss this matter by early June of this year.

History & Background:

The Design Commission first discussed the matter of electronic signage in 2007 relative to several specific sign variation requests, all of which were recommended for denial by Staff and the Design Commission, and one request denied by the Village Board. After detailed research by Staff, the Design Commission discussed the matter again in 2008 at a kick-off meeting and then in detail in 2009 where the Design Commission concluded to continue to not allow electronic LED signs. Since then, the Design Commission has discussed this matter in 2012 relative to the Visual Preference Survey undertaken and in 2015 regarding Patton School's request. As a result of the 2015 review, this topic was placed on the Design Commission agenda again in January 2016.

Process:

In response to Mayor Hayes' request, Staff and the Design Commission have completed an initial Village-wide study of electronic signage, and have discussed the matter at three recent Design Commission meetings:

- February 23, 2016. Kick-off meeting, preliminary discussion and thoughts.
- March 29, 2016. Staff presented a survey of other communities' electronic sign requirements along with photos and videos of electronic signs from other communities for discussion.
- April 12, 2016. Review and approval of Position Statement and Recommendations.

Types of Electronic Signs:

1. LED (Light Emitting Diode) Signs

- a. The sign display is created by a series of light emitting diodes arranged on a panel.
- b. Available in monochromatic (red or amber) or full color.
- c. Available in low and high resolution. Best viewed from a distance.
- d. Generally, very bright and glaring.
- e. Capable of static, scrolling, and animated displays.
- f. High resolution displays are capable of full color video.
- g. Uses range from gas station pricing, small message boards, and highway billboards.
- h. It is the most common type of electronic sign due to many manufacturers and competitive pricing.

2. LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) Signs

- a. The sign display is similar to a high definition television.
- b. Capable of static images and full color video.
- c. Generally, very bright.
- d. Less common and more expensive than LED electronic signs.
- e. Typically used for close up viewing, such as indoor fast food menu signage, outdoor drive-through signage, and bus shelters.

3. Electronic Ink Signs

- a. Has the appearance of printed ink on paper, as seen in a Kindle reader.
- b. Does not emit light. No glare.
- c. Extremely low power consumption.
- d. The display can be changed, but not capable of scrolling, animation, or video.
- e. Is currently being used in limited outdoor signage applications such as gas station pricing and bus shelters, but is not currently a production/commodity product.
- f. Is currently under development for more widespread use in outdoor signage applications.

Questions to be Answered:

1. Is electronic signage something that the Village should continue to explore?
2. What is the image that the Village wants for its corridors?
3. Should electronic signage be allowed in residential districts for schools and churches across from residential homes?
4. Should electronic signage be allowed in business and manufacturing districts (with restrictions)?
5. Should electronic signage be allowed for specific uses such as major tourism venues such as Arlington International Racecourse, Metropolis Theater, Star Cinema Grill, or major developments such as Arlington Downs?
6. Should electronic signage be allowed in specific locations such as along I-90?
7. Should electronic signage be allowed as of right, or through an additional discretionary review process?
8. Should electronic signage continue to be deferred until more energy efficient and aesthetically pleasing technology is prevalent, such as electronic ink signs?

Summary of March 29, 2016 Design Commission Meeting:

On March 29, 2016, Staff and the Design Commission continued the review of electronic signs. A survey of other communities' electronic sign requirements along with photos and videos of electronic signs from other communities were presented by Staff for discussion.

Highlights of the presentation were:

1. Photos and videos of electronic signs from surrounding communities such as Mt. Prospect, Prospect Heights, Palatine, and Rolling Meadows were presented.
2. Examples of signs from churches, restaurants, automotive repair, retail businesses, Village, library, fire department, and park district were provided.
3. The technology of these signs were either monochromatic (red or amber) or full color LED displays. Full color signs use a combination of red, blue, and green LEDs to create the full color displays.
4. Overall the electronic LED signs were bright and glaring, and the commissioners were encouraged to visit these signs in person to understand the full impact.
5. All of the signs had changing messages and most utilized flashing, scrolling, animation, and videos.
6. Many of the signs observed were located adjacent to residential properties, which is a concern.

7. Messages on the signs ranged from dancing Easter eggs to hot dog specials, and some signs had burnt out sections of LED lighting which added to the poor appearance of the signs.
8. The value of the advertisements being communicated on the signs for businesses was discussed, as opposed to the value of public information being communicated on the signs for municipalities, schools and churches.
9. Electronic Ink as an alternative to LED signs was discussed, possibly for use at schools and churches in residential neighborhoods.
10. Summary of concerns:
 - a. LED displays are bright and glaring.
 - b. Electronic LED signs in residential neighborhoods are not appropriate.
 - c. Dozens of electronic signs along commercial corridors create character concerns.
 - d. Nuisance to adjacent properties, especially residential.
 - e. Traffic distraction concerns.
 - f. Electronic Ink signage has great potential as an alternative to LED, especially for school and church message boards.
 - g. Electronic signs may be appropriate at major tourism venues, such as Arlington International Racecourse, or possibly along I-90.

Design Commission feedback and areas of concern:

1. The examples of signs presented raised concerns amongst the Design Commissioners.
2. None of the signs presented were favored by the Design Commissioners.
3. The Design Commission needs to consider the beauty of the Village.
4. Brightness is one of the primary concerns.
5. There would be no way to control the use of electronic signs.
6. Arlington Heights does not need more clutter along the commercial corridors.
7. Large pixel signs look crude and cheap.
8. The purpose of signs should be to locate a business, not to advertise products and services.
9. Until there are more cost effective options for high quality, high resolution or electronic ink signs, electronic signs should not be allowed.
10. Electronic signs should not be allowed along I-90 which is already cluttered with signage.
11. The needs for public information message boards for churches, schools or Park District facilities need to be considered, as compared to advertisements at a business or a fast food establishment.
12. The commissioners were interested in electronic ink signage as an alternative to electronic LED signs.
13. If electronic signs were to be allowed in Arlington Heights:
 - a. A special review process for all electronic signs should be considered.
 - b. Electronic signs should be visually quiet, calm, and small.
 - c. To minimize brightness, only electronic LED message signs with black backgrounds should be considered.
 - d. Only high quality, high resolution displays such as a high definition television screen should be considered.
 - e. If allowed along I-90, it will need to have high quality graphics and be large enough to be easily read.

Chairman Eckhardt requested that the commissioners drive through surrounding communities and be prepared to present 4 or 5 position statements regarding electronic signs at the next meeting.

Options:

1. Continue to not allow electronic signs Village-wide.
2. Allow electronic signs Village-wide.
3. Allow limited applications of electronic signage.

General Approaches / Options for Specific Uses, Locations, and Types of Signs:

1. **Community Wide Commercial Business Electronic Signage**
 - a. Option 1. Continue to not allow electronic signs.
 - b. Option 2. Allow electronic signs by right (with restrictions).
 - c. Option 3. Allow electronic signs with special review process.
2. **Major Tourism Venues** (such as Arlington International Racecourse, Metropolis Theater, Star Cinema Grill, or major developments such as Arlington Downs)
 - a. Option 1. Continue to not allow electronic signs.
 - b. Option 2. Allow electronic signs by right (with restrictions).
 - c. Option 3. Allow electronic signs with special review process.
3. **Schools, Churches, Government, and Park District Facilities**
 - a. Option 1. Continue to not allow electronic signs.
 - b. Option 2. Allow electronic signs by right (with restrictions).
 - c. Option 3. Allow electronic signs with special review process.
4. **I-90 and Route 53.**
 - a. Option 1. Continue to not allow electronic signs.
 - b. Option 2. Allow electronic signs by right (with restrictions).
 - c. Option 3. Allow electronic signs with special review process.
5. **Future Technology**
 - a. Continue to not allow electronic signs at this time, but monitor the developments in electronic sign technology in the future for new, aesthetically pleasing, environmentally friendly alternatives to current electronic signs, such as electronic ink signage.

POSITION STATEMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Issues related to electronic signs:

1. **Image**
 - a. Electronic LED signs are inherently bright and glaring with blinking, scrolling, animation, and video displays which can be obnoxious, portraying a negative image of the community.
 - b. Allowing electronic signs at numerous businesses along our commercial corridors could result in sign blight and create a negative image for the community.
2. **Nuisance**
 - a. Bright LED signs can create a nuisance to adjacent properties, especially residential uses.
3. **Traffic Safety**
 - a. Changing messages on electronic signs can be distracting to drivers creating a safety concern.

4. Code Enforcement

- a. The use of electronic signs would be difficult to enforce, and control of message content is legally limited.

5. Environment

- a. Electronic LED signs consume energy at all times to display their message, day and night.

Recommendations:

1. Community Wide Commercial Business Electronic Signage

- a. Option 1. Continue to not allow electronic LED signs.
Commercial signs should be used for business identity, not advertising.

2. Major Tourism Venues (such as Arlington International Racecourse, Metropolis Theater, Star Cinema Grill, or major mixed use developments such as Arlington Downs)

- a. Option 1. Continue to not allow electronic signs.
Major tourism venues may be a good application for electronic signage. However, it may be challenging to draft code language and to predict the possible impacts for these unique, individual electronic sign applications. Review of electronic sign requests for major tourism venues may be best handled through the sign variation review process.

3. Schools, Churches, Government and Park District Facilities

- a. Option 1. Continue to not allow electronic signs, except for electronic ink signs as may be approved by the Design Commission.
Schools, churches, Government and Park District facilities do have the need for community message board signage. However, since these uses are typically located within residential neighborhoods, electronic signs should continue to not be allowed. Alternate emerging non-light emitting electronic sign technology, such as electronic ink, should be closely monitored for this application.

4. I-90 and Route 53.

- a. Option 1. Continue to not allow electronic signs.
Allowing electronic signage along major highways would not directly impact the character within Arlington Heights. However, it may have unintended consequences such as possibly creating a competitive advantage for those businesses with frontage along major highways over similar uses elsewhere in the community, and contributing to signage blight along the highways.

5. Future Technology

- a. Continue to not allow electronic signs at this time, but monitor the developments in electronic sign technology in the future for new, aesthetically pleasing, environmentally friendly alternatives to current electronic signs, such as electronic ink signage.