SIGN CODE UPDATE*
2019
City of Topeka
Planning & Development

*Title 18, TMC
CURRENT ISSUES

• OUTDATED
  • No comprehensive update for at least 50 years (only “band aids”)
  • Has not kept pace with best practices of other cities
  • Is not user-friendly for sign companies, city staff, and the lay public
  • Not consistent with the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court ruling (Reed v. Town of Gilbert, AZ) which mandates content-neutrality (i.e., time/place/manner)

• AESTHETICS/COMMUNITY SURVEYS
  • Aesthetics drives community attachment (i.e., pride) leading to more local spending/investment (Momentum 2022)
  • Only 15% feel Topeka has “above average/excellent” appearance (Momentum 2022)
  • A whopping 96% feel signs are “very important/somewhat important” to the visual quality of the community (CoT Planning & Development Department’s Visual Appeal Survey)
PROCESS

VISUAL APPEAL SURVEY
- Early 2018
- 964 respondents + 386 written comments

SIGN CODE COMMITTEE
- Sign industry professionals + legal consultants
- Met 9 times
- Benchmark other cities

PUBLIC REVIEW
- 2 public meetings (Feb. 26, 2019)
- 10 Planning Commission meetings including public hearing May 20, 2019 (9-0 approval)
- Direct mailings/emails to impacted organizations and businesses
## Visual Appeal Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>VERY UNAPPEALING</th>
<th>NEUTRAL</th>
<th>SOMEWHAT APPEALING</th>
<th>VERY APPEALING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answered:</td>
<td>964</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>11.83%</td>
<td>34.85%</td>
<td>20.12%</td>
<td>3.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Bar Graph

- **Very Unappealing**: 11.83% (114)
- **Neutral**: 34.85% (336)
- **Somewhat Appealing**: 20.12% (194)
- **Very Appealing**: 3.73% (36)
### Visual Appeal Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Unappealing</td>
<td>4.56%</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Unappealing</td>
<td>11.31%</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>27.90%</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Appealing</td>
<td>43.98%</td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Appealing</td>
<td>12.24%</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answered: 964

![Survey Results Chart](chart_image)
### Visual Appeal Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Unappealing</td>
<td>10.06%</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Unappealing</td>
<td>37.14%</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>30.71%</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Appealing</td>
<td>18.36%</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Appealing</td>
<td>3.73%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answered: 964
### Visual Appeal Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Answered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Unappealing</td>
<td>2.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Unappealing</td>
<td>7.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>26.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Appealing</td>
<td>44.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Appealing</td>
<td>18.15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Very Unappealing: 22 responses (2.28%)
- Somewhat Unappealing: 74 responses (7.68%)
- Neutral: 260 responses (26.97%)
- Somewhat Appealing: 433 responses (44.92%)
- Very Appealing: 175 responses (18.15%)

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The diagram on the right visualizes the survey results, with each bar representing the percentage of responses for each rating category.
RECOMMENDATIONS
THE BIG RECOMMENDATIONS

- Size/number of signs will be proportional to size of building/property – not a “1 size fits all”
- Monument signs in; pole signs phased out
- More relaxed standards for office/institutional uses; more restrictive standards for commercial
- Phase out “abandoned signs” and “portable message center signs” (1-2 years)
- 20-year “grandfather” period for non-conforming signs
WALL SIGNS

COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

- Max size per sign is 300 sq ft
- No limit on quantity of signs

*C-3, C-4, I-1, I-2

- Size and number based on building façade size
- Max 250 sf per single sign with exceptions based on distance from street
FREE-STANDING SIGNS

OFFICE & INSTITUTIONAL *

CURRENT

Local / Collector Streets

Max 40 sq ft
Max height 5 ft

PROPOSED

Max 50 / 60 sq ft
Max height 7 ft

BUSINESS NAME

● Unlimited number

PROPOSED

Arterial Streets

Max 70 sq ft
Max height 10 ft

BUSINESS NAME

● 0.5 sf per 1 ft of frontage
● 1 per frontage or 500 ft of frontage

PROPOSED

Arterial Streets

Max 40 sq ft
Max height 5 ft

PROPOSED

Local / Collector Streets

Max 50 / 60 sq ft
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*O&I-2, O&I-3
FREE-STANDING SIGNS

CURRENT

BUSINESS NAME

55’ max. height

300 sf maximum area

Unlimited number

PROPOSED

• 1 per street frontage/500 lf of frontage
• 0.5 sf per linear foot street frontage
• max 120 sf (168 sf w/ setbacks)
• Monument style

Max height 25 ft
(30 ft w/ setback)

*C-3, C-4, I-1, I-2

COMMERCIAL - General *

BUSINESS NAME
EXCEPTIONS

- Setback from street
- Corner Lots
- Historic Signs
- Highway Signs
- Shopping Center Signs
Legal non-conforming signs will be grandfathered up to 20 years after adoption of new code.
ABANDONED SIGNS

“any sign on a property for which the use to which it had applied has changed or the property containing the use has become vacant”

Current Code:
- Paint

Proposed Code:
- Remove any non-conforming signs immediately after building is demolished
- 1 year grace period
OTHER SIGNS

Temporary Signs
- Limited to four 30-day periods (2 periods for residential districts)
- Replaces vague “event” time limit

Incidental
- Of durable construction and secondary to primary sign
- Accommodated
PORTABLE MESSAGE CENTER SIGNS

Currently:
• Requires an annual permit
• No limit on number or time allowed
• 79% rated it “Very Unappealing”

Proposed:
• Treat as a “temporary” sign...
  • Restrict to commercial areas, churches, and schools
  • Restrict time, location, and number
  • Require permit
• Phase out entirely after 24 months
NEW FORMAT

- Dimensional standards in user friendly tabular format by zoning district
- Each sign type on single page
- “Notes” for exceptions

Wall Signs

**Definitions**

**Wall Sign**
A sign (other than Projecting Sign, Roof Sign, or Window Sign) that uses a building wall as its primary source of support, and that:

1. is placed directly on and contained totally within the dimensions of the outside wall,
2. does not extend more than 18 inches from a building surface

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards</th>
<th>Zoning Districts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wall Signs</td>
<td>IL, M-1, R-1, R-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permitted?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign Area Allocation</td>
<td>square feet per linear foot of building frontage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note 3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign Area Allocation - All Attached Signs</td>
<td>square feet per linear foot of building frontage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note 4</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sign Area Maximum</td>
<td>square feet per sign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note 5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Message Centers</td>
<td>% of allowed sign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note 6</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes/Exceptions:**

1. Regardless of the width of the building facade, each single tenant building is allowed a minimum of 1 wall sign per facade, and each multi-tenant or multi-use building is allowed 1 sign per tenant or use per facade.
2. Wall signs on facades located 300 ft or more from the street ROW to which they face are permitted up to 200 sf in C-1, U-1, MS-1, and D-2 district, and up to 300 sf in all other zoning districts.
3. Wall signs shall not cover or obstruct any architectural features deemed integral to the historic appearance or character of the building. Such features shall include, but are not limited to, transom windows, detailed brick, tile, or stonework.