

TO: MUNICIPAL MANAGER 1991 MAY 08

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING & BUILDING INSPECTION

SUBJECT: PROPOSAL FOR SKY-SIGNS
METROTOWERS AT EATON CENTRE METROTOWN
REZONING REFERENCE #41/90

PURPOSE: To respond to concerns expressed by Council regarding sky-signs for
the Metrotowers at Eaton Centre Metrotown.

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Council advise the owner/developer of the Rogers Cantel Tower that their sky-sign proposal is not acceptable.
2. THAT Council establish as policy that:
 - a) No signs be approved more than 65 feet above grade; but that in exceptional circumstances, application may be made to permit an office or hotel towers discreet logo sky-signs not to exceed the guidelines outlined in Section 4.2 of this report, within the context of a Comprehensive Development Plan, and subject to justification on an individual case basis.
 - b) In the case of an office or hotel building face 30 to 65 ft. above grade, discreet logo signs not to exceed the guidelines outlined in Section 4.2 of this report and within the context of a Comprehensive Development Plan be permitted.

R E P O R T

1.0 INTRODUCTION

At its meeting of 1990 July 23, Council received an initial report regarding a rezoning application (R.Z. 41/90) to obtain approval for sky-signs at the top of Metrotower I and Metrotower II office towers in Eaton Centre Metrotown. Similar sky-signs are also proposed for Metrotower III in conjunction with Rezoning #13/90. Rogers Cable TV Limited, the proponent for sky-signs at the top of Metrotower I, renamed the Rogers Cantel Tower, also appeared as a delegation in support of sky-signs at the 1990 July 23 Council meeting. Arising out of the Council discussions, it was apparent that Council had concerns and expressed caution regarding sky-signs on office towers in Metrotown. The rezoning report was referred back to staff for a further report to address the concerns expressed by Council.

2.0 REZONING APPLICATION BACKGROUND

2.1 SKY-SIGN PROPOSAL

A rezoning application (R.Z. 41/90) had been submitted in order to obtain approval for large sky-signs at the top of the existing Rogers Cantel Tower and proposed Metrotower II office towers in Eaton Centre Metrotown. The developer also wishes similar large sky-signs on Metrotower III which is being pursued in conjunction with the currently active Rezoning Reference #13/90. These three towers ranging in height from 335 ft. to 360 ft. (26 to 28 storeys) over a raised plaza podium will constitute a landmark in the area and region. The application proposed two sky-signs on each of the three towers for a total of six sky-signs, each measuring a minimum 7 ft. by 30 ft. or 210 sq.ft. The two signs for each tower are proposed to be located on opposite sides of the towers except for the Rogers Cantel Tower where the two signs are proposed on adjacent sides both facing in the Kingsway direction.

In subsequent discussions, the proponent for the Rogers Cantel Tower sky-signs has indicated the desire for even larger signs with a height of 8 feet rather than the 7 feet noted above, in order for the signs to be legible in a wide arc along Kingsway from Boundary Road to Marlborough Avenue. The large desired sky-signs are not supported by staff and no agreement on suitable sky-signs has been able to be reached with the proponent.

A related matter of unsightly transmission dishes on the top of the Rogers Cantel Tower installed without permits has been the subject of Council, public and staff concern since they were brought to the Municipality's attention in 1990 October. Staff have been working with the developer/owners to achieve a suitable, architecturally integrated, screening solution for the three Metrotowers. Staff have been advised that the on-site construction of the necessary screening on the Rogers Cantel Tower would be commenced in June of this year.

2.2 CURRENT APPROVALS

The currently applicable Comprehensive Sign Plan which is part of the approved Comprehensive Development Plan for Eaton Centre does not include sky-signs.

Burnaby's overall Sign Bylaw does not specifically address sky-signs for commercial towers. In individual cases such as office buildings in an office/industrial park setting or hotel towers, sky-signs have been permitted as part of a Comprehensive Sign Plan in conjunction with Comprehensive Development CD Rezonings subject to their restriction to a modest compact size and their presentation in the form of a logo. It is noted that hotels such as the Sheraton Villa Hotel are special commercial cases since they primarily serve visitors from outside the area, providing a transient shelter need and require some type of "sign-post" identification.

3.0 DISCUSSION OF SKY-SIGNS

The following discussion is in response to the concerns expressed by Council. Issues raised in the previous rezoning report are restated and expanded upon as appropriate.

3.1 Sky-signs are essentially corporate advertising signs which are not intended to be seen at close range but are intended by their sponsors to be seen from a distance of a few blocks and, in some cases, a regional distance measured in miles. Care should be taken not to use sky-signs as a "regional" billboard solely to benefit private interests. The municipality's skyline, with Metrotown having a particularly significant and expanding building skyline, can be a source of pride for Burnaby and an interesting and attractive regional urban design focus for surrounding residents and visitors to our community.

Thus, the skyline is an important community environmental resource whose overall quality impact should not be degraded. From this context, sky-signs should be designed to be legible from nearby vantage points only and not from a distance of a mile or more; be tasteful and compact in size and shape; and emphasize discreet identification rather than advertising impact.

3.2 Sky-signs should be integrated with the architectural design of the commercial towers. Sky-signs should be part of the primary building facade and not be located on small mechanical penthouses nor have independent structural supports other than the building, in order to avoid a "billboard" sign image.

3.3 The current proposals for Eaton Centre relate to three office towers. However, on a broader municipal-wide basis, there are many other high office or hotel towers just rezoned, under rezoning or likely as rezoning applications in the next few years. As a result, Burnaby would likely be faced with a plethora of sky-sign proposals in the near future. The apparent contrast between "signed" and "non-signed" towers could force owners of non-signed towers, as a defensive equalizing measure, to implement their own signs. Therefore, it is important that clear guidelines be established in order to assure that each tower proposal is treated equitably in relation to each other.

3.4 A number of Canadian cities and also Seattle and Bellevue in Washington State were surveyed. Vancouver, Richmond, and Toronto permit sky-signs although all three are in the process of further revising their regulations. North York and Winnipeg have no clear bylaws on the subject as yet. Calgary and Edmonton promote guidelines for relatively small sky-signs, primarily logos up to 10 ft. by 10 ft., although a few examples of large lettered signs exist in these cities. Seattle, Bellevue and North Vancouver City do not permit sky-signs. Seattle and Bellevue now do not allow signs over 65 ft. above grade and no higher than the fourth floor respectively. In part, dissatisfaction with existing sky-signs prompted the recent ban on further sky-signs by Seattle and Bellevue. A recent hardship case appeal to Seattle Council resulted in approval of one (1) sky-sign logo on a hotel tower. Bellevue also allows some discretion on sky-sign logos for hotels.

The broad qualitative aspects of this survey are significant. A range of cities have made specific choices as to the quality of their visual environment. Seattle, Bellevue, and North Vancouver City have taken a quality, enlightened and leading approach by precluding sky-signs (with a few logo exceptions). Buildings are encouraged to be defined and identified by the quality of their architecture rather than by signs. Bellevue, in particular, could be considered akin to a sister-centre to Burnaby's Metrotown - a suburban regional town centre to Seattle which has attracted corporate offices and major hotels within a high-quality urban context where urban design has been stressed.

It is desirable that Burnaby and Metrotown join those urban centres which have chosen to be in a pro-active urban design vanguard.

3.5 Commercial towers in Burnaby are often provided in an overall mixed-use context where high-rise apartments may be located as close as 100 feet to commercial towers. Therefore, it is important that commercial towers be designed to be good neighbours with numerous proximate apartment towers primarily applicable within the Brentwood, Lougheed and Edmonds Town Centre areas and especially within Metrotown. It is noted that sky-sign logos have also been proposed for the B.C. Hydro office towers located within the larger apartment context of the Edmonds Town Centre. Apartment residents should not be faced with the prospect of staring at close quarters at bright, oversized sky-signs on nearby towers. A grouping of large, and glowing sky-signs would also be obtrusive when seen from a distance.

3.6 Burnaby's Metrotown is a unique urban centre. It does not have the downtown Central Business District of larger cities. Its commercial district has definable limits and is not overly large in acreage as compared to other more extended suburban commercial centres. It has a strong local community context provided by parks, such as Central and Bonsor Parks; developed public open space; and public facilities such as Bonsor Recreation Complex, and the Bob Prittie Metrotown Library - a context which many other centres would like to emulate. It has a unique integrated residential context ranging from townhouses and low-rise apartments to high-rise apartments.

It is of note that there are 53 high-rise towers greater than 4 storeys currently in Metrotown of which 9 are office towers - the balance being apartment towers. The unique socially-balanced character of Metrotown is a reflection of both its integrated linkage systems for pedestrians, vehicles, and public transit, and its integrated residential and community facilities context. While office and hotel towers by their large size will be significant skyline elements, they should not be permitted to achieve dominance, for example, through sky-signs, over the overall residential/community context. Towers with sky-signs will function as landmarks, with a risk that Metrotown would be identified, for example, as "the place with the Rogers Cantel Tower".

Attaining a sense of quality and liveability, specifically suited to Metrotown, will in the long run assure a safe, healthy and economically viable urban environment. It is important that this desirable environmental and discreet approach be assured precedence in assessing technical sign specification aspects of size and legibility.

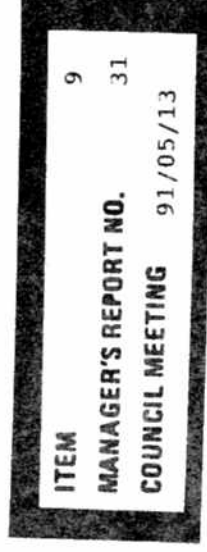
4.0 SKY-SIGN CONCLUSIONS AND GUIDELINES

4.1 CONCLUSIONS

The large lettered sky-signs of up to 8 ft. by 30 ft. (up to 240 sq. ft.), 2 for each of the three office towers of Eaton Centre, as proposed by the developer/owners, are completely unsupportable.

It is recommended that as policy no signs be permitted over 65 feet above grade; and that any signs on an office/hotel building face 30 to 65 feet above grade be restricted to discreet logo signs.

However, should Council wish to grant greater leeway on office/hotel sky-signs to developers despite the drawbacks of sky-signs outlined in this report, it is proposed that in exceptional circumstances, application may be made to permit an office or hotel towers discreet logo sky-signs not to exceed the guidelines outlined in Section 4.2 of this report, within the context of a Comprehensive Development Plan, and subject to justification on an individual case basis. These guidelines are considered the maximum leeway possible for sky-signs and should not be further eroded. It is understood that there may be circumstances where skysigns, even in logo form, would be precluded.



These conclusions are based on the preceding discussion with emphasis on the unique nature of Metrotown with its important residential/community-oriented context and on the need for a quality urban design approach. Larger sky-signs than outlined on the guidelines could not be supported.

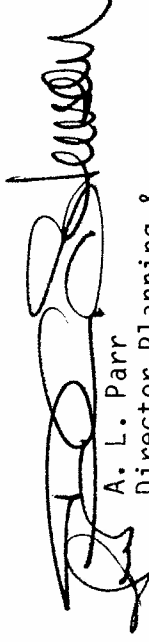
4.2 GUIDELINES FOR SKY-SIGNS

Should Council decide that sky-signs should in principle be permitted, it is recommended that the following guidelines outlining the terms for the provision of sky-signs at the top of high-rise commercial towers throughout Burnaby be approved:

- a) Sky-signs would only be permitted within a project as part of a rezoning application to CD Comprehensive Development District (utilizing the C3 General Commercial District or, in special cases, the M5 Light Industrial District for major Office Park developments as a guideline) and having a Comprehensive Sign Plan.

Within the context of the Burnaby Sign Bylaw, sky-signs would be classed as a facia sign variant located above the second floor level.

- b) Cut-out, monochrome logo signs are preferred although letters, internally illuminated, may be utilized subject to a specific design acceptable to the Municipality. Sign "boxes" would not be permitted.
- c) Sky-signs shall have no dimension greater than 10 feet in height nor 10 feet in width nor an area greater than 100 sq. ft. On small towers and buildings 30 to 65 ft. high, the sky-sign logo if permitted should have no dimension greater than 8 ft. in height nor 8 ft. in width.
- d) A tower shall have no more than two sky-signs, nor more than one sign on any tower face. For any tower where two sky-signs are proposed, each sky-sign shall be located on opposite faces of the tower. Two sky-signs on any tower should not be both seen from the same angle of vision.
- e) Sky-signs should be fully integrated with the architecture of the tower.
- f) Sky-signs should be located on the main face of the tower within 20 ft. of the top of the main face or possibly where very large architectural penthouses are provided. Sky-signs should be visually balanced within a background "field" and should not be placed too close to either the top or side edge of towers.


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