

# Regulation of Window Signs:

## Limiting the Amount of Allowed Window Signs in St. Paul

### Background

Signs can be informative, attractive, innovative and integral to finding your way to businesses, parks and public places. They can also be sloppy, tasteless, distracting to passing motorists and detract from the very businesses they are trying to promote because of their sheer numbers. Excessive window signs can create a safety hazard as people can see neither in nor out.

Because signs play such an important role in promoting businesses and the community, most cities have adopted comprehensive sign codes that regulate the number and size of signs. Some regulate the brightness and movement of lighted signs. New technology makes dynamic lighted signs affordable and easy to install. Brightly lighted dynamic signs which flash and scroll can create a nuisance for nearby residents and a traffic hazard for motorists. Some cities are working towards changing their sign codes to regulate this new technology.

A group of community members are working to amend Saint Paul's sign code to improve the quality of signs, reduce the negative impacts of excessive numbers of signs and regulate the movement and brightness of window signs. This coalition is not working to regulate the content of the signs, that is, what the sign says.



Examples of the types of signs that would be limited by the proposed St. Paul ordinance.



### Why Limit Window Signs?

Excessive window signage is a problem. Large numbers of window signs:

- ⇒ Make it difficult to see both in and out of stores, which is a safety issue; and
- ⇒ Clutter and pollute neighborhoods, with low-income areas most adversely affected; and
- ⇒ Cause driver distraction.

### Do Any Other Cities Limit Window Signs?

Many surrounding communities regulate the amount of window coverage. For example, Little Canada allows no more than 20% of the glass area of a store to be covered with signs, Maplewood and Mounds View allow no more than 25% of the glass area to be signed. Roseville does not allow signs that block the view into the building from a public street in the cashier's work area.

## What Changes Are Being Proposed?

1. Temporary and permanent signs **shall not exceed 25%** of any window area, including windows in a door, and shall not exceed 5% of the building façade. [An additional window sign area of up to 20 % coverage is allowable for purposes of seasonal or holiday window decorations, not to exceed forty five days in any calendar year.]
2. Flashing or scrolling signs may not be used as a window sign.
3. Electronic Message Signs may be used as a window sign only if the message changes no more than every 20 minutes.
4. No window signs are allowed between 4 and 7 feet from the interior floor level, unless window offers no visibility. Window signs should not be placed in a location that would block the view into the building from a public street of the clerk's or cashier's area.

## What Does Excessive Window Signage Look Like?

These pictures, which were all taken in St. Paul, show what excessive window signage looks like. In all cases, the windows are cluttered with signage and it is nearly impossible to see in or out of the establishment, which creates a safety hazard and a crime concern.



## What Does Appropriate Window Signage Look Like?

These pictures, which were also taken in St. Paul, show what appropriate signage looks like. In all cases, customers are able to gather the necessary information about store name, whether the store is open or closed, and what items or services are available. At the same time, the signage does not obstruct visibility both in and out of the store.

