



Subject: *Motion C24(309): Illuminated Signs in the RU-2 Zone*
To: CAO for Planning Advisory Committee, September 16, 2025
Date Prepared: September 10, 2025
Related Motions: C24(309)
Prepared by: Debbie Uloth, Community Planner II
Approved by: John Woodford, Director of Planning and Development

Summary

Council has directed staff to review regulations in the Land Use Bylaw that prohibit the use of illuminated ground signs in the Rural Use North (RU-2) Zone. Planning Staff have outlined why illuminated signs have not been permitted in the RU-2 Zone and have completed a jurisdictional scan.

Financial Impact Statement

There are no immediate financial impacts associated with the recommendations of this report.

Alternative Motion 1

Planning Advisory Committee recommends to Council that Council:

- *maintain the illuminated and digital signage regulations for the Rural Use North (RU-2) Zone.*

Alternative Motion 2

Planning Advisory Committee recommends to Council that Council:

- *authorize staff to amend the Land Use Bylaw as part of the 2026 Plan Review to permit the use of illuminated and digital signs in the Rural Use North (RU-2) Zone.*

Background

At their regular meeting in September of 2024, Council passed the following motion:

C24(309) *Moved that staff bring a report on internally lit signs and how we can do this for better use in the RU2 zone.*

As a result of this direction, staff have prepared a review of why the Land Use Bylaw excluded illuminated signs.

Current Regulations for Illuminated Signs

Below are the current regulations for the use of internally illuminated signs in the Rural Use North (RU-2) Zone and other zones.

Definition of Internally Illuminated and Digital Signs, as per Part 3 of the Land Use Bylaw:

Sign, Digital means a sign with more than 20% of the sign area having internal LED(s) or a similar light source capable of displaying words or symbols that can be electronically changed by remote or automatic means.

Sign, Internally Illuminated means a sign that provides artificial light directly, or through any transparent or translucent material from a source of light connected with such sign, or a sign illuminated by a light focused upon or chiefly directed at the surface of the sign. This use shall include Digital Signs.

Below are examples of a digital sign and an internally illuminated sign:

Digital Sign:



Internally Illuminated Sign:



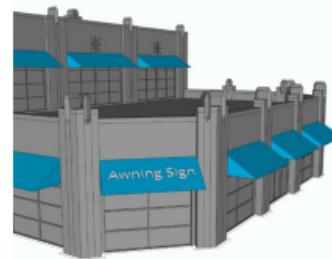
Below are sections of Part 4 of the LUB:

4.7. Illumination of Signs (including Digital Signs)

- a) No sign can be illuminated between 12:00 a.m. and 6:30 a.m. unless the business associated with the sign operates during this period.
- b) Where signs are externally or internally illuminated, they shall be illuminated in such a manner not to cause a glare or hazard to motorists, pedestrians or neighbouring premises.
- c) The intensity of exposed bulbs on a Sign, excluding Digital Signs, shall not exceed 1100 lumens.
- d) Digital signs shall use automatic light level controls to adjust light levels at night, under cloudy and other darkened conditions to reduce light pollution, in accordance with the following:
 - i. Ambient light monitors shall automatically adjust the brightness level of the sign based on ambient light conditions. Brightness levels shall not exceed 0.3 footcandles above ambient light conditions when measured from the sign face at its maximum brightness, at a distance equal to the equation shown: measurement distance (in m) = $\sqrt{\text{Area of the sign in m}^2 \times 9.29}$
 - ii. The Development Officer shall require a letter from a sign manufacturer indicating that a sign will be calibrated to be compliant with required brightness levels prior to issuing a development permit or sign permit.

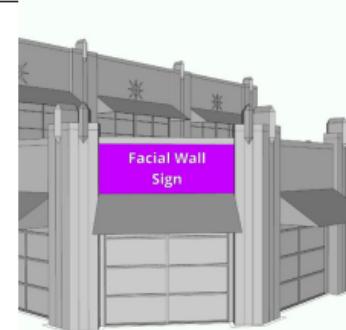
Awning Signs

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• AR• IU• MC• OS• R2-T• R3• RU• VC• RU-2	<p>Maximum Area: The lesser between:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8% of the area of the main wall of the building to which the awning is affixed; or• 0.8 m² of sign area per metre of street facing facade.	<p>Must not project more than 1.8 m from the wall to which it is affixed.</p> <p>Must not project over the eaves, parapet, or roof line of the building.</p> <p>Must be between 3 m and 4.6 m above grade.</p> <p>Internally illuminated and digital signage is prohibited.</p>
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Facial Wall Sign

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• AR• IU• MC• OS• R2-T• R3• RU• VC• RU-2	<p>Maximum Area: The lesser between:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8% of the area of the main wall of the building to which the sign is affixed; or• 0.8 m² of sign area per metre of street facing facade. <p>For home-based businesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maximum Area: 2 m²	<p>Must not substantially protrude from the wall to which it is affixed.</p> <p>Internally illuminated and digital signage is prohibited.</p>
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Ground Sign

- AR
 - IU
 - OS
 - RU
 - RU-2
- Maximum Area: 2 m² or 6 m² if the sign is not within 150 m of a dwelling.
 Maximum Height: 4 m
 Minimum Yard Setback: 2.4 m

Internally illuminated signage is prohibited.

Digital signage is permitted only in IU zones, and subject to the special requirements below.

Ground Sign



Projecting Wall Sign

Permitted Zones	Dimensions	Conditions	Example
Any	Maximum Area: 1.5 m ² Permitted Height Range: 3 m - 4.6 m above grade. No part of the sign may be less than 3 m from grade.	Must not project more than 1.5 m from the wall to which it is affixed. Must not project above the eaves, parapet, or roof line of the building. Internally illuminated signs are prohibited. Digital signs are prohibited.	

Temporary Sign (Portable)

Permitted Zones	Dimensions	Conditions	Example
• GC • HC • MC • RC • RU • IU • BP • R3 • IC • RU-2 Institutional uses in: • VC	Maximum Area: 4.6 m ² Maximum Height: 2.5 m Minimum Yard Setback: 2.4 m Minimum Driveway Setback: 1.5 m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Portable signs on a multiple tenancy property should have a minimum separation distance of 15 m. Portable signs are not permitted in Growth Reserve Areas. Illuminated or digital signage is prohibited. May be permitted to occupy 1 parking space where there is no practical alternative. 	

Illuminated and digital signage is not permitted in the majority of zones where the signage may have a negative impact on residential or rural uses. The signs are limited in their use to certain commercial areas, depending on the zoning.

WHY ARE ILLUMINATED AND DIGITAL SIGNS PROHIBITED IN RESIDENTIAL AND RURAL AREAS

Illuminated and digital signs are largely prohibited in residential and rural areas because of light pollution. Light pollution is unwanted or excessive artificial light (Britannica). Too much light can impact ecological systems and human health.

Artificial light can wreak havoc on natural body rhythms in both humans and animals. Nocturnal light interrupts sleep and confuses the circadian rhythm—the internal, twenty-four-hour clock that guides day and night activities and affects physiological processes in nearly all living organisms. One of these processes is the production of the hormone melatonin, which is released when it is dark and is inhibited when there is light present. An increased amount of light at night

lowers melatonin production, which results in sleep deprivation, fatigue, headaches, stress, anxiety, and other health problems. Recent studies also show a connection between reduced melatonin levels and cancer.

(<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/light-pollution/>)

Other factors for prohibiting illuminated and digital signs are safety and road glare. Glare is excessive brightness that can cause visual discomfort, especially when driving in wet conditions or in rural areas at higher speeds. The loss of dark skies may also be important to rural homeowners and cottagers who move to rural areas to escape urban environments.

Alternatively, not permitting illuminated and digital ground signs does make it more difficult for drivers not to be able to locate a rural business during the evening and nighttime hours.

JURISDICTIONAL SCAN

A scan of neighbouring jurisdictions has been completed to determine how other municipalities regulate illuminated and digital signs.

Municipality	Regulations
Colchester	<p>10.4.1 Notwithstanding any other provision of this Bylaw, the following signs shall not be permitted in any zone: ((b) Signs which by reason of size, location, content, colouring, motion, or intensity or manner of illumination, obstruct or detract from the vision of drivers or obstruct the effectiveness of any traffic sign or traffic control device on public streets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- No illuminated signs in residential areas.- Some commercial zones permit illuminated signs with limits. For example: Signs may be internally illuminated or illuminated through the use of shielded downlighting but such illumination shall not flash.
West Hants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Signs that incorporate flashing illumination or moving parts are not permitted in any zone.- No illuminated signs for home-based businesses.- No person shall erect a sign with lights external to the sign itself or illuminate an area outside any building or structure unless the illumination is directed away from adjoining properties and any adjacent street.- Some commercial zones do not permit illuminated wall signs.
Wolfville	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Illuminated signs are not permitted in any zone.
Cumberland County	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Signs in the Downtown Commercial Zone shall not be back-lit or internally illuminated, except for traditional exposed neon tubes.- Signs that by reason of size, location, content, colouring or manner of illumination obstruct the vision of drivers or obstruct or detract from the visibility or effectiveness of any traffic sign or control device on public streets or roads are not permitted in any zone.- No digital or internally illuminated signs are permitted in the residential zones.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The Municipal Government Act, Part VIII gives legislative authority for this proposal. This section outlines the process for these amendments to be considered, including the advertisements for a Public Hearing.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

No financial impact analysis will be completed as part of this analysis.

Citizen Engagement

Planning staff will comply with the Citizen Engagement Policies of the Municipal Planning Strategy when processing any proposed amendments. If Council chooses to move forward with amendments as part of the 2026 Plan Review, then citizen engagement will take place as part of the review process.

Alternatives

Staff have prepared two alternatives for the consideration of PAC. If Council chooses to move forward with permitting digital and illuminated signs in the RU-2 Zone, the signs would then be permitted in all communities of the RU-2 Zone, including areas where denser residential development or cottages may be located. There may be existing illuminated signs in the RU-2 Zone that are considered non-conforming because they were in place prior to the adoption of the 2023 Planning Documents.

1. To direct staff to maintain the illuminated and digital signage regulations for the Rural Use North (RU-2) Zone.
2. To direct staff to amend the Land Use Bylaw to permit illuminated and digital signs in the Rural Use North (RU-2) Zone as part of the 2026 Plan Review.

Conclusion

If PAC would like to proceed with changing provisions to permit illuminated and digital signs in the Rural Use North (RU-2) Zone, staff recommend that changes be considered as part of the 2026 Plan Update process instead of being considered as a separate project.