

***Motion C24(309):
Illuminated Signs in the RU-2 Zone***

Planning Advisory Committee

Planning & Development

September 16, 2025



EAST HANTS

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: Illuminated Signs

- 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.

Digital Sign



Illuminated Sign



Current Regulations: Illuminated Signs

- 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.
- 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/>)



Why are Illuminated and Digital Signs Prohibited in Residential and Rural Areas

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

Jurisdictional Scan

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.

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 in the RU-2 Zone, including areas where denser residential development and 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 before 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.

Maitland Heritage Conservation District

- Motion C24(309) was made because the Maitland Fire Auxiliary wanted to install an electronic (internally lit) sign but it was not permitted in the Heritage Conservation District or the Rural Use North (RU-2) Zone.
- This report addresses the Land Use Bylaw regulations but if Council wants to permit the internally illuminated signs in the Heritage District, then Bylaw P-1100 — Maitland Heritage Conservation District has to be amended.
- Planning staff are planning to bring a report to PAC at a future meeting regarding a review of the Heritage Conservation District Bylaw and council could pass a separate motion directing staff to address internally illuminated and digital signs as part of the Maitland Heritage Conservation District review.



Alternative Motion 1

- *Planning Advisory Committee recommends to Council that Council:*
 - *To 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.*