



## **Central Avenue Neon Sign Design Overlay Zone**

# **CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE**

## **Twentieth COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL BILL NO. \_\_\_\_\_ ENACTMENT NO. \_\_\_\_\_**

**SPONSORED BY:**

### **RESOLUTION**

**CREATING A NEON SIGN DESIGN OVERLAY ZONE ALONG CENTRAL AVENUE.**

**Adopting the attached resolution to encourage neon sign along historic Central Avenue and provide sign controls and incentives as part of a comprehensive revitalization strategy.**

**BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL, THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE:**

A. Introduction

1. Purpose of the Design Overlay Zone

The purpose of the Neon Design Overlay Zone is to encourage the use of neon signs along historic Central Avenue and provide sign controls and incentives as part of a comprehensive revitalization strategy.

The Central Avenue Neon Sign Design Overlay Zone (CAN DOZ) applies to properties located along Central Avenue within the City-limits (approximately 118<sup>th</sup> Street to Tramway Boulevard), a 16 mile stretch of road. The overlay regulations apply to all non-residential zones and any residential zones that allow signage.

2. Definitions:

**FOOT-LAMBERT.** A measure of the luminance of light at its source. One foot-lambert is the amount of light that a surface emits as one lumen per square foot.

**FOOT-CANDLE.** A measure of the luminance of light over an area. One foot-candle is the amount of light that one candle generates one foot away from it.

**SIGN, ANIMATED.** A neon sign that uses changes in luminance in a sequential or radial manner to produce what appears to be movement of an element of the animated sign. Flashing and physical movement of a sign and/or its elements are not sequential or radial changes in luminance.

**SIGN, BLADE.** A small, pedestrian-oriented sign (i.e., less than four square feet) that projects outward perpendicular from a building or structure, and typically perpendicular to the flow of traffic. A blade sign is a type of projecting sign.

**SIGN, NEON.** Any sign that uses neon, argon, mercury or a similar gas to fill tubing, made of glass or similar material, which is charged with electricity and used to create an illuminated tubular sign or an illuminated decorative element(s) that comprises at least 20% of a sign area. The tubing may contain an alternative illumination technology, such as, but not limited to, light-emitting diodes (LEDs). Any non-gaseous illumination technology, such as LEDs, must produce illumination that appears to be a continuous, uninterrupted line, similar to illumination produced by gaseous illumination technology. A neon sign is the only type of sign that can be an animated sign.

3. Design Regulations

Design regulations are sets of criteria that are uniformly applied to evaluate the appropriateness of proposed development and redevelopment.

<b>What design regulations do:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Relax restrictions on Neon signs</li><li>• Provide guidance to property owners and design professionals undertaking construction in the</li></ul>	<b>What design regulations don't do:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Force property owners to change signs to neon</li><li>• Dictate stylistic design treatments which are based on individual</li></ul>
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<p>CAN DOZ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide an objective basis for review, assuring consistency and fairness</li> <li>• Increase public awareness of the area and its significant and/or historic characteristics</li> </ul>	<p>preference and taste</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restrict creative design solutions</li> </ul>
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#### 4. Administration of the DOZ

a.) Required design review and approval shall be by the Planning Director or his/her designee. The Planning Director shall review applications for neon signs to ensure that they comply with the Design Overlay Zone Regulations in conjunction with the sign permit application process. Compliance with the regulatory design guidelines will be monitored and enforced by Code Enforcement.

b.) Where there is conflict or inconsistency between the Design Overlay Zone Regulations, and other portions of the Zoning Code and Sector Development Plans, the Overlay Zone prevails (Zoning Code §14-16-2-28).

#### 5. Location of the Study Area

The design overlay zone boundary allows properties that front on Central Avenue to have a neon sign (see definitions). In addition, properties that front select major arterials that intersect with Central Avenue are included in a buffer area that extends 300-feet from Central Avenue's centerline. Three-hundred feet approximates the historic block size, a block size that is pedestrian- scale. These areas are included to encourage a similar vibrancy at key intersections.

The Design Overlay Zone includes:

- All properties that have direct frontage on Central Avenue; and
- Sign locations within 300-feet of the centerline of Central Avenue located on properties that front the following major streets: Tramway, Juan Tabo, Eubank, Wyoming, Louisiana, San Pedro, San Mateo, Broadway, Atrisco, Old Coors, Coors, Unser (north of Central only), and 98<sup>th</sup> Street (north of Central only).

Because of ongoing development along Central Avenue, the specific boundaries with direct frontage on Central Avenue may change over time, and the above textual description of the boundaries of the Overlay Zone shall control over any map to the contrary.<sup>1</sup>

#### 6. Design Overlay Criteria

This area meets the criteria of the Design Overlay Zone, §14-16-2-28 (F), which states that the overlay zone may be used for areas that deserve special design guidance and that are at least 320 acres. To qualify as an overlay zone, an area shall meet at least two of the following three conditions:

1. Contain highly scenic natural features or physical setting, or have highly significant views.

<sup>1</sup> Language taken from Las Vegas Boulevard Scenic Byway Overlay District.

2. Have development potential which is likely to require unusually complex coordination of floor control, transportation, open space, and urban land uses.
3. Have a strong role in the development of the form of the metropolitan area: arterial street corridors or critical areas near urban centers or historic zones.

Central Avenue's scenic physical setting has important historical significance. Central Avenue was the alignment of historic Route 66 through Albuquerque as the City developed from the 1920s to the 1960s, and remains one of its primary commercial corridors. Thus, the area meets the second criterion, that the design overlay area has development potential that will require complex coordination of various City agencies, property owners, and other stakeholders. Finally, the third criteria is met because Central Avenue was one of the original main streets that developed in the City, and it connects the Central Business District to four historic districts – Old Town, Fourth Ward, Huning Highland, and Silver Hill.

## **7. Policy Framework and Relevant Plans**

West Route 66 Sector Development Plan (2012)  
Huning Castle and Raynolds Addition neighborhood Sector Development Plan (1981)  
Downtown Neighborhood Area Sector Development Plan (2012)  
Downtown 2010 Sector Development Plan  
Huning Highland Sector Development Plan (Edo Urban Conservation Overlay Zone)  
University Neighborhoods Sector Development Plan (1986)  
Nob Hill/Highland Sector Development Plan  
International District Sector Development Plan  
East Gateway Sector Development Plan

## **B. Existing Conditions**

### **1. Setting**

Route 66 is undergoing a larger revitalization process and the Central Avenue Neon Sign Design Overlay is a contributing element.

### **2. Neon Sign DOZ Area Description/Visual Analysis**

The Central Avenue Neon Sign DOZ stretches the length of the city which allows for a varied area. Studies have been conducted to inventory the various historic and new neon signs visible from Central Avenue. Visual surveys have also produced a list of “orphan signs” which are shells of unused signs left standing by the property owner.

Insert photo of empty sign

Insert photo of historic neon sign

Insert photo of new neon sign

### **3. The Large Neighborhood Sections**

East Gateway

International District

Nob Hill/Highland

University Heights

Huning Highland Edo

Downtown

Huning Castle Raynolds Addition

West Route 66

### **4. Character Zones**

Central Avenue runs through multiple neighborhoods each with a distinct character. The Neon Sign DOZ will not over power or eliminate the individual nature of these neighborhoods. The CAN DOZ will allow each neighborhood to use neon signs to accentuate the neighborhood’s character while still allowing a common theme along Central Avenue (neon).

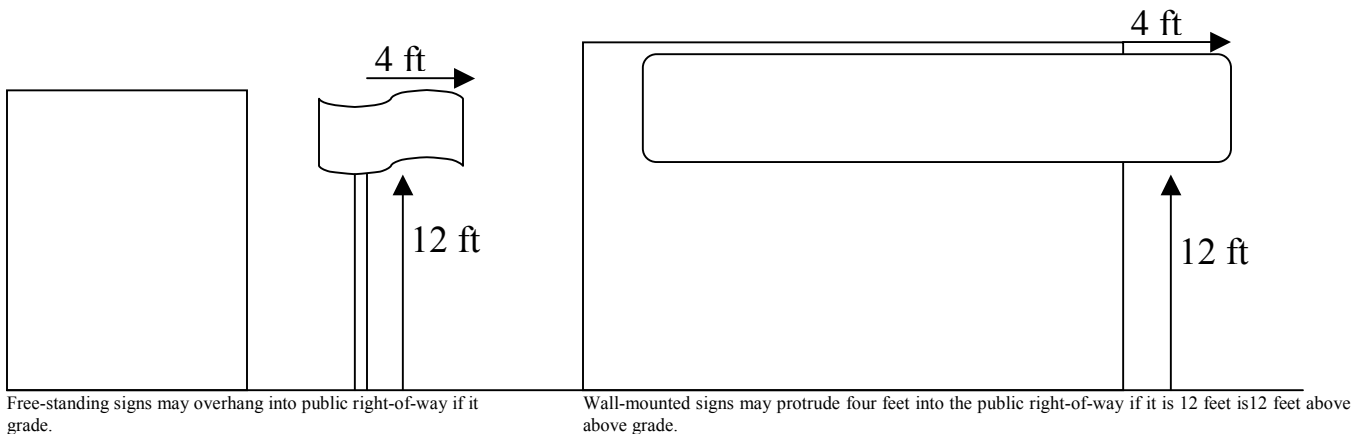
## C. Regulations/Guidelines

### Regulations

1. Sign location, number, size and height are regulated by underlying zoning districts (e.g. O-1, C-1, C-2, SU-1, etc.), and overlay zones, where applicable, except where modified by these regulations. Signs within the Central Avenue Neon Sign DOZ boundaries and with a design that includes at least 20% exposed neon as measured by total sign face area shall comply with the General Sign Regulations (§14-16-3-5) of the Zoning Code with the following provisions and exceptions:

#### 1. Location.

- A free-standing sign may overhang up to four feet into the public right-of-way and a wall-mounted signs may protrude four feet into the public right-of-way if it is a minimum of 12-feet above the right-of-way at grade except where signs would interfere with utility poles and/or easements.
- Projecting signs may project horizontally up to four feet if it is a minimum of 12-feet above the right-of-way at grade except where signs may interfere with utility poles.
- The sign shall not obscure portions of a building that contribute to it's or the area's architectural character including, but not limited to, doors and windows.

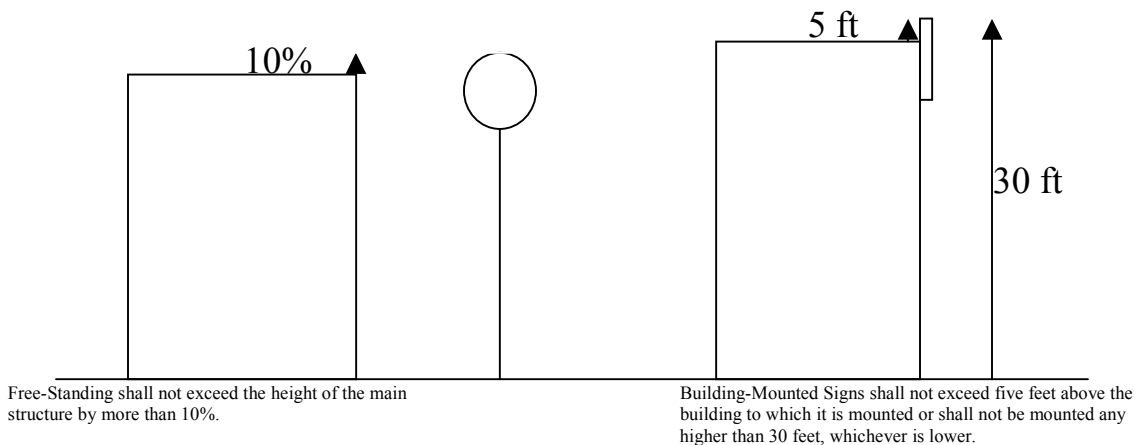


## 2. Size.

- a. **Size of Free-Standing or Projecting Signs.** Sign area for a free-standing or projecting sign may be up to 50% over the sign area allowed in the underlying zone, up to 250 sf total after the bonus is applied, if the sign is over 20% neon as measured by total sign face area. Sign letter size is allowed a proportionate size bonus.
- b. **Size of Building-Mounted Signs, Except Projecting Signs.** Sign area for a building-mounted sign may be up to 25% over the sign area allowed in the underlying zone, up to 20% of façade area after the bonus is applied, if the sign is over 20% neon as measured by total sign face area. Sign letter size is allowed a proportionate size bonus.

## 3. Height.

- a. **Height of Free-Standing Signs.** Height of a free-standing sign shall not exceed the height of the main structure on the property by more than 10%, except a sign within 200 feet of a moving, through lane of an Interstate Highway (excluding interchange ramps) shall not exceed 26 feet above the freeway at its closest point.
- b. **Height of Projecting Signs.** Height of a projecting sign shall not exceed the height of the structure to which it is attached by more than 10%.
- c. **Height of Building-Mounted Signs.** Height of a building-mounted sign shall not exceed five feet above the height of the building to which it is mounted or shall not be mounted any higher than 30 feet, whichever is lower.



4. **Illumination, Motion, Lettering.** In addition to regulations in the City's sign code [Section 14-16-3-5 ROA 1994], change of illumination may produce apparent motion of the visual image on signs. Such motion shall be the result of changes in luminance in a sequential or radial manner to produce what appears to be movement of an element of the animated sign. Flashing and physical movement of a sign and/or its elements are not sequential or radial changes in luminance.
5. **Lighting Technology.** Traditional neon requires a significant amount of electricity. Signage that uses LED tubing or similar and has the appearance of neon is allowed if it produces a continuous lit appearance similar to neon lighting technology, and does not create darker and/or shadowy spaces between individual LEDs that make the linear, illuminated image appear non-continuous.



6. **Historic Signs.** The procedure for removal of non-conforming signs applies, pursuant to §14-16-3-4, Nonconformance Regulations. However, historic signs are exempt from these regulations (see the Historic Sign Regulations herein).

### **Design Guidelines**

All applicants are encouraged to develop a sign design consistent with the overall vision for Central Avenue. The following Design Guidelines provide further guidance about desired elements of signs. In addition, the City has developed a list of incentives to encourage new or rehabilitated neon signs along Central Avenue. In order to qualify for the new incentives, the applicant must meet a minimum of three of the design guidelines (non-mandatory) listed below and the mandatory percentage of neon illumination. Neon Illumination needs to be at least 20% of the total sign face areas for the development should consist of illuminated signage, including neon signs, and other historic forms of illumination. Illumination calculations exclude any portion of the sign that is backlit plastic panels where sign content is painted or printed on the panel, instead of originating from luminous tubing.

1. **Sign Size.** The sign should be a similar size and scale to other historic or current neon signs located within ½-mile of the proposed sign location.

*Rationale:* Larger neon signs have a more dramatic impact and are more costly, which is why the City should offer increased incentives to design and install large neon signs provided they comply with the design regulations herein.

2. **Neon Design.** The neon portion of the sign should be intricate, creative and expressive, not simply a border around the sign. There should be added text and/or imagery highlighted with neon, preferably both.

*Rationale:* The City wants to encourage innovative neon sign design. Although design is understood to be subjective, the intent is to promote neon signs that emphasize a sign's text and imagery rather than its border.

3. **Sign Design.** The sign itself should not be a rectangle or a square unless the mounting structure has a unique design that integrates with the sign.

*Rationale:* The City wants to encourage innovative neon sign design. There is a historic precedent for novel sign shapes and dimensions. For example, historic signs frequently have a uniquely identifiable shape driven by the sign's design. This is a mechanism for requiring a more elaborate design than the typical modern sign types, which are almost exclusively rectangles and squares.

4. **Sign Restoration.** The restoration of a sign identified on one of the City's Historic Route 66 neon sign inventories would categorically qualify the applicant for the neon sign incentives herein.

*Rationale:* The City wants to encourage and promote the restoration of neon signs, especially those that have already been identified as possessing historic value.

## **Incentives**

The City of Albuquerque has developed the following incentives to encourage new development and restoration of neon signs within the Central Avenue Neon Sign Design Overlay Zone. In exchange for the new incentives, applicants must meet a minimum number of the Design Guidelines in addition to the required Design Regulations (see below).

1. Neon Sign Permit Application:
  - a. Consolidate the permit process into one application and fee that covers the sign permit, design review, structural analysis permit, and electrical permit.
  - b. Reduce or eliminate the fee for new or restored outdoor neon signs.
2. Flexibility with General Sign Regulations and Underlying Zone Requirements:
  - a. Allow pole-mounted signs, not to exceed the height of the non-residential portion of the building to which the sign pertains.
  - b. Allow building-mounted signs to extend five feet above the building to which they are mounted, up to 30 feet high whichever is lower (see Design Regulations, 3.c.).
  - c. Allow a larger size of sign (25-50% increase on typical sign size for each zone), including a proportionate increase in text size, where text size is limited by Sector Plans.
  - d. Allow signs to encroach into the right-of-way if the lowest point of the sign is at least 12-feet above grade.
  - e. Allow sign animation outside of the one existing animation-permissive zone (Nob Hill Highland Sector Development Plan, 2007).

## **Historic Sign Regulations**

Certain signs in Albuquerque warrant protection and/or exemption from height and size limits due to their role as landmarks or as important elements in historic streetscapes such as segments of Route 66. A historic sign may be listed individually in the New Mexico Register of Cultural Properties; be a historic part of a property listed individually in the New Mexico Register; contribute to the significance of a historic district listed in the Register; have been determined eligible for such listing; or be designated as a City Landmark or contribute to the significance of a City Landmark; or be determined by Planning Director or his/her designee.

Historic signs shall be exempt from the requirements of the General Sign Regulations and regulations of the underlying zone as to height, illumination, location, movement, and sign area, and number of signs, and may be maintained as legally conforming signs subject to the following conditions:<sup>2</sup>

1. All parts of the exempted historic sign including neon tubes, incandescent lights and shields, and sign faces shall be maintained in a functioning condition as historically intended for the sign to the greatest degree possible.

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from legislation adopted in Pasadena, California.

2. Parts of historic signs originally designed to flash or move may be allowed to continue to flash or move. There shall be no alterations to the historic pattern, speed, or direction of flashing or moving elements.
3. The copy or imagery of a historic sign may be altered only if the alterations do not substantially change the historic dimensions, height, scale, style, or type of materials of the historic sign.
4. Full reconstruction of a historic sign shall require approval of the Landmarks and Urban Conservation Commission (LUCC).
5. Signs listed on the City's Historic Sign Inventory are exempt from the General Sign Regulation §14-16-3-5 (B)(1)(a), signs prohibited in all zones, which states: "The copy on signs which advertise an activity, business, product, or service no longer produced or conducted on the premises upon which the sign is located unless they can meet requirements for a new off-premise sign. Where the owner or leaser of the premises is seeking a new tenant, such signs may remain in place for not more than 30 days from the date of vacancy." If the original, historic sign has been modified for the most recent tenant, then the copy must be obscured. If the copy is the original, approved copy when the sign was installed, then it is exempt.
6. Failure to maintain a historic sign as required above shall be grounds for disallowing an exemption from the requirements of this legislation. The sign shall thereafter be brought into compliance with the requirements of this legislation subject to a determination by the Planning Director or his/her designee.

## **Appendices**

**Appendix A** Historic properties significant to Route 66

**Appendix B** Photo examples

**Appendix C** Maps

# Route 66 Registrations in Albuquerque

*Historic properties significant to Route 66 in Albuquerque and Bernalillo County,  
listed in the National Register of Historic Places and/or  
State Register of Cultural Properties, and City of Albuquerque Landmarks as of 2011*

## EAST CENTRAL

- **La Puerta Lodge and sign**, 9710 Central SE
- **Enchanted Mesa Trading Post**, 9612 Central SE
- **Luna Lodge**, 9119 Central NE
- **Bow and Arrow Lodge sign**, 8300 Central SE (State Register)
- **La Mesa Motel**, 7407 Central NE (demolished 2003)
- **Tewa Lodge**, 5715 Central NE
- **De Anza Motor Lodge**, 4301 Central NE
- **Premiere Motel Signs (2)**, 3822 Central SE (State Register)
- **Aztec Auto Court--Lodge** (demolished 2011) **and sign**, 3821 Central NE
- **Nob Hill Motel and sign (Modern Auto Court)**, 3712 Central SE
- **Jones Motor Company--now Kelly's Brewery**, 3222 Central SE
- **Pig 'n' Calf Lunch**, 2106 Central SE
- **Cottage Bakery and Spot Ice Cream Shop**, 2000 Central SE

## WEST CENTRAL & BEYOND

- **Maisel's Indian Trading Post**, 510 Central SW
- **Horn Oil Co. and Lodge**, 1720 Central SW (lodge demolished 2007)
- **Tower Courts**, 2210 Central SW
- **El Don Motel Sign**, 2222 Central SW (State Register)
- **El Vado Auto Court (Motel) and sign**, 2500 Central SW (*City Landmark*)
- **Hilltop Lodge**, 5410 Central SW (demolished 2002)
- **El Campo Tourist Courts--now Sena Village Apartments**, 5800 Central SW
- **Westward Ho! Motel sign**, 7500 Central SW (State Register)
- **State-maintained Route 66 segment from Albuquerque to Rio Puerco**  
(frontage road north of Interstate 40)
- **Rio Puerco Bridge**, NMDOT #2530 (in Bernalillo County west of Albuquerque)

## SOUTH OF DOWNTOWN ON ORIGINAL 1926-37 ALIGNMENT OF ROUTE 66

- **Barelas-South Fourth Street Historic District**  
Along 4th Street SW between Stover and Cesar Chavez, its significance is two-fold –  
roadside architecture and Hispanic-dominated residence and commerce.
- **Mushroom Store** w/mushroom-shaped fuel pump canopy, 2455 Isleta SW (State  
Register)

*Thousands of copies of the Albuquerque New Mexico Historic Route 66 Map & Guide are available  
free from the City Planning Department, 600 Second Street NW, Albuquerque NM 87102. Telephone  
505-924-3860 or e-mail [ebolcs@cabq.gov](mailto:ebolcs@cabq.gov).*





## Summary of Recommended Regulations, Design Guidelines and Incentives

Below is a summary of the recommended regulations, design guidelines and incentives for the Central Avenue Neon Sign DOZ.

### **Regulations for signs containing 20% or more neon:**

#### **Location:**

- Free-standing signs 12-feet or more above grade may overhang four feet into public-right-of-way
- Wall-mounted signs 12-feet or more above grade may protrude four feet into the public-right-of-way
- Projecting signs 12-feet or more above grade may project horizontally four feet
- Signs shall not obscure portions of a building that contribute to architectural character including, but not limited to doors and windows.

#### **Size:**

- Free-standing signs may be up to 50% larger than sign area allowed in underlying zone, up to 250sf.
- Projecting sign may be up to 50% larger than sign area allowed in underlying zone, up to 250sf.
- Building-mounted signs (except projecting signs) may be up to 25% larger than the sign area allowed in the underlying zone, up to 20% of façade area.
- Sign letter size is allowed as proportionate to size bonus.

#### **Height:**

- Free-Standing signs may be up to 10% above the height of the main structure up to 26-feet. A sign within 200 feet of a moving through lane of an Interstate Highway (excluding ramps) may exceed the freeway at its closest point by 26-feet.
- Projecting signs may be up to 10% above the height of structure that it is attached.
- Building mounted signs may be up to 5 feet above the building to which it mounted up to 30 feet.

#### **Illumination, Motion, Lettering:**

- Signs may have a change in illumination that may produce apparent motion of the visual image on signs. Such motion shall be the result of changes in luminance in a sequential or radial manner to produce what appears to be movement of an element of the animated sign. Flashing and physical movement of a sign and/or its elements are not sequential or radial changes in luminance.

#### **Lighting Technology:**

- Signage that uses LED tubing or similar and has the appearance of neon is allowed if it produces a continuous lit appearance similar to neon lighting technology, and does not create darker/or shadowy spaces between individual LEDs that make the linear, illuminated image appear non-continuous.

#### **Historic Signs:**



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The procedure for removal of non-conforming signs applies, pursuant to §14-16-3-4, Nonconformance Regulations. However, historic signs are exempt from these regulations (see the Historic Sign Regulations herein).</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Design Guidelines:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Sign Size:</b> The sign should be a similar size and scale to other historic or current neon signs located within ½-mile of the proposed sign location.</li> <li><b>Neon Sign:</b> The neon portion of the sign should be intricate, creative and expressive, not simply a border around the sign.</li> <li><b>Sign Design:</b> The sign itself should not be a rectangle or a square unless the mounting structure has a unique design that integrates with the sign.</li> <li><b>Illumination:</b> At least 20% of the total sign face areas for the development should consist of illuminated signage, including neon signs, and other historic forms of illumination. Illumination calculations exclude any portion of the sign compromised of backlit plastic panels where sign content is painted or printed on the panel, instead of originating from luminous tubing.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Incentives for meeting a minimum of 4 of the 5 Design Guidelines:</b></p> <p>Neon Sign Permit Application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consolidated permit process.</li> <li>Eliminate the fee for a new or restored outdoor neon signs.</li> </ul> <p>Flexibility with General Sign Regulations and Underlying Zone Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allows pole-mounted signs.</li> <li>Allows building-mounted signs to extend five feet above the building to which it is mounted, up to 30 feet high, whichever is lower.</li> <li>Allows a larger size of sign (25-50% increase on typical sign size for each zone), including a proportionate increase in text size, where text size is limited by Sector Plans.</li> <li>Allows signs to encroach into the right-of-way if the lowest point of the sign is at least 12-feet above grade.</li> <li>Allows sign animation</li> </ul>