

## Draft Concept - Historic Landmark Sign Preservation Program

The City of Tucson is considering an approach to maintain its unique character, history and identity reflected in its signs that are both historic and iconic. Under the current Sign Code, owners of historic signs have difficulty restoring or relocating historic signs. To address these issues, staff has investigated options used by other jurisdictions in Arizona and around the country.

As the following pages outline, the City of Tucson could implement an Historic Landmark Sign Preservation program with input from stakeholders in the following steps:

- 1) Definition of Historic Landmark Signs,
- 2) Development of a Sign Inventory List and an official City of Tucson Register of Historic Landmark Signs,
- 3) Creation of Historic Sign Districts,
- 4) Clarification of the menu of options that will be available for owners of registered Historic Landmark Signs,
- 5) Definition of the process and procedures that will be used to implement and regulate the program, and
- 6) Amendments to the Sign Code.

### Definition of Historic Landmark Signs

Historic Landmark Signs exemplify the cultural, economic or historic heritage of the City of Tucson and were built prior to 1960. Each registered Historic Landmark Sign must meet the following criteria:

- (a) The sign is of exemplary technology, craftsmanship, or design for the period in which it was constructed; uses historic sign materials or means of illumination; and/or is unique in that it demonstrates extraordinary aesthetic quality, creativity or innovation;
- (b) The sign has not been significantly altered from its historic appearance, or, if it has been altered, it is potentially restorable to its historic function and appearance;
- (c) The sign is structurally safe or can be made safe without substantially altering its historical appearance;
- (d) The sign is operable or can be made operable without substantially altering its historical appearance;
- (e) The sign complies with movement, bracing, and illumination requirements contained in the City of Tucson Sign Code and/or the Land Use Code;
- (f) The sign is not an off-site sign or billboard as defined in the Sign Code.

### Sign Inventory and the City's Official Register of Historic Landmark Signs

The preservation of Historic Landmark Signs will be implemented through use of an official City of Tucson Register of Historic Landmark Signs. Inclusion on the Register is voluntary and handled through an 'opt-in' process. An initial inventory of signs in the Tucson area has been created to help identify those that are eligible to be designated as Historic Landmark Signs.

*Designation* – Properties with eligible or registered signs will be flagged in the City's databases, which are used by staff in the permitting process. Property owners will be given the opportunity to apply for designation of their signs. It is possible, in consultation with the Sign Code

## Proposal for an Historic and Landmark Sign Preservation Program

Administrator, to designate part of a sign as historic. Those that ‘opt in’ to the program will be eligible for certain options that apply only to Historic Landmark Signs.

*Application for Designation* – Property owners with signs that are not on the initial inventory of eligible signs can apply to include their signs on the official Register. The Sign Code Administrator will review the application through a site assessment using predefined criteria.

### Historic Sign Districts

Based on the initial inventory of eligible Historic Landmark Signs, Historic Sign Districts will be created for the areas with the highest concentrations of these signs. Within Historic Sign Districts property owners may apply for relocation of registered signs, or placement of donated historic signs. Maps of the Historic Sign Districts will be included in the Sign Code. To the extent possible, existing districts that are delineated in the Land Use Code or Sign Code will be used.

### The Menu of Options for Historic Landmark Sign Owners

The options that would be available to property owners who choose to register their signs under this proposed program include the following:

- **Relief from Sign Allowance:** Property owners of historic signs that have been “grandfathered” under the current Sign Code have limited ability to change or use these signs. To encourage the preservation of Historic Landmark Signs, property owners would be able to exempt their registered Historic Landmark Signs from the total sign allowance allotted for their property. New signs would be allowed for the property, provided they are compatible with the Historic Landmark Sign.
- **Restoration:** The current Sign Code allows the Sign Code Administrator to approve permits for restoration of Historic Landmark Signs, provided the sign is replaced in the same spot from which it was removed for restoration. The proposed program would ensure that property owners can restore and repair their registered Historic Landmark Signs.
- **Relocation:** Currently, the Sign Code requires that a sign conform to the existing Sign Code requirements if it is relocated on-site or to another location, including reducing the height and area by 10 to 20 percent. The proposed program would allow registered signs to be relocated to another location on-site, or to other properties with appropriate zoning and land use within designated Historic Sign Districts, without necessarily requiring reduction in height or area.
- **Removal:**
- **Re-Creation:** The current Sign Code does not allow for re-creation of historical signs that existed on a building or in a district, or for new signs constructed using “historic styles”. Such options would be useful in areas where other historic buildings and signs exist, or where old signs existed previously that would complement an area’s character.

### Process and Procedures

*Designation* – Property owners with signs on the initial inventory can ‘opt-in’ at any time to be included on the City’s official Register of Historic Landmark Signs. Approval is handled administratively by the Sign Code Administrator. Property owners with eligible signs will be prompted when they pull permits to indicate whether they want to ‘opt in’ to designation as an historic landmark sign and responses will be kept on record. Property owners with signs that are

## **Proposed Historic and Landmark Sign Preservation Program**

not on the initial inventory of eligible signs can apply to include their signs on the official Register.

*Minor Review* – Basic restoration of signs and change of text applications will be handled administratively by staff.

*Major Review* – Relocation and removal/demolition of registered signs will be handled through an application and review process. Historic landmark signs will be treated as conforming signs, and will be addressed by the Plans Review Subcommittee of the Tucson-Pima County Historical Commission. The Commission will provide recommendations to the Mayor and Council, who will then provide final approval of applications.

### **Amendments to the Sign Code**

Before starting the formal public process for amending the Sign Code, an Ad Hoc Committee will be formed to assist with developing the proposed program, draft the amendment, and to provide feedback to staff. This Ad Hoc Committee will be formed as a subcommittee of the Tucson-Pima County Historical Commission. The committee will be composed in a way to provide equal representation by the Tucson-Pima County Historical Commission and the Tucson Citizen Sign Code Committee. Eight (8) representatives in total will be sought to sit on the Ad Hoc Committee, of which 5 will have voting rights. The 5 voting members will include the representatives from the Tucson-Pima County Historical Commission (2 seats), the Tucson Citizen Sign Code Committee (2 seats), and a local business owner with an historic sign (1 seat). The 3 non-voting members will include a representative from the Tucson Downtown Partnership (1 seat), a member the sign industry with specialized knowledge of historic sign materials and construction (1 seat), and a citizen advocate for preserving historic signs (1 seat).

The formal public review process of the program would be governed by the Sign Code amendment process. Both the Tucson-Pima County Historical Commission and the Citizen Sign Code Committee would provide recommendations to the Mayor and Council, who would provide the final determination to amend the Sign Code.