

CITY OF KIRKLAND

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**DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
MEMORANDUM**

To: Interpretation File 85-8
From: Joseph W. Tovar
Date: November 15, 1985
Subject: Status of Neon Lighting and Lighted Awnings as Signs

Neon lighting and internally lit awnings are increasingly used by businesses to increase their identification and visibility. The purpose of this memorandum is to discuss whether these types of lighting are regulated as signs, and if so, how.

According to KZC 5.845, a “sign” is defined as: “Any communication device, structure or fixture which is intended: to identify a building use, business or event, or to promote the sale of a product, goods or service, using graphics, letters, figures, symbols, trademarks or written copy...”

It is my determination that this definition clearly encompasses neon lighting and lighted awnings. Consequently, these types of signs are subject to the regulations in Chapter 100 KZC, including those regulating sign type, number and height.

In certain cases, however, neon lighting and lighted awnings will not be considered as sign area. KZC 5.850 defines “sign area” as:

“the entire area of a sign on which copy is to be placed. Sign structure, architectural embellishments, framework and decorative features which contain no written or advertising copy are not included. Sign area is calculated by measuring the perimeter enclosing the extreme limits of the module or sign field containing the advertising message; provided, however, that individual letters using a wall as the background without added decoration or change in wall color have sign area calculated by measuring the perimeter enclosing each letter and totalling the square footage of these.”

Under the above definition, it is my interpretation that neon lighting will be considered as sign area only if it is used to write or draw out the business name, logo or advertising message or to provide a border around the message of the sign.

If, however, neon lighting is simply used to accent architectural features of a building such as windows or cornices, it will not be included within the sign area.

Similarly, it is my interpretation that only the portions of lighted awnings which contain a written or graphic message will be considered as sign area. Any letters or graphic symbols on the awning will

be calculated as sign area by measuring the perimeter enclosing the letters or symbols. The remainder of the awning will be considered as an extension of the building to which it is attached.

Notwithstanding the above, neon lighting or lighted awnings which are exempt from "sign area," if used to excess or if poorly designed, may still violate KZC 100.85(e). That section lists as prohibited: "Signs of a garish or of a carnival like nature."

The determination of which signs violate this section will necessarily be made on a case-by-case basis. However, anyone considering the use of neon lighting or lighted awnings would greatly reduce the likelihood of violation by:

- 1) keeping the intensity of lighting to a minimum and by using subdued and harmonious colors, and
- 2) for awnings the "field" or predominant surface area should be of a darker color than the "copy".

In addition, it is recommended that the desired signing be discussed with this Department at the earliest possible date.

cc: Sign Companies
Kirkland Chamber of Commerce