

Proposed bylaw would limit election sign clustering



By [Jennifer Bieman](#), The London Free Press
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The city is considering changes to the bylaw governing election signs. (File photo)

London is bracing for two elections in 2018 and city hall is proposing new rules to keep candidates from hogging prime turf with their signs and cluttering up intersections.

With a provincial election due by June of next year, and London’s municipal election in the fall, city staff are recommending clearer rules for candidates’ signs.

“It’s not about increasing bureaucratic oversight,” said Coun. Paul Hubert, chairperson of the corporate services committee.

“Last go-round (in 2014) there was a proliferation of signs beyond what we’ve ever seen before . . . It’s just so it’s clear and everyone knows what the rules of the game are right up front.”

The corporate services committee will review updates to the existing election sign bylaw at its meeting Tuesday. The amendments applying to candidates for municipal, provincial and federal office would then be presented to council for final approval.

The rule preventing candidates from placing signs near intersections is clearer in the proposed bylaw, Hubert said. Campaign signs wouldn’t be allowed within seven metres of an intersection under the new regulation.

The setback now is nine metres. Although the new setback would be shorter, the proposed changes would make the rules easier to understand and keep signs from interfering with sight lines, Hubert said.

The city also wants to clamp down on clutter, specifically candidates who set up clusters of campaign signs in one spot. Signs for the same candidate would need to be at least 10 metres apart under the updated bylaw.

Hubert hopes the policy will lead to more sporting behaviour from candidates.

“They’ll put 10 signs up all over that corner so now, no other candidate can even get a sign there,” he said. “That’s not fair. It’s trying to encourage that fairness.”

The proposed changes would also stop election signs from being placed outside the ward where a candidate is running.

City staff reviewed the bylaw on the books and looked at feedback from candidates, public comments made to the election office and call centre complaints.

The top three reported problems were the length of time elections signs were posted, the signs’ closeness to intersections and their interference with sight lines.

Staff presented an updated bylaw in February, but council sent it back to staff for amendments.

Hubert said the changes are meant to make the rules easier to understand, not just for candidates, but for people working on their campaigns.

“When you have volunteers working on your campaign, you want the rules to be just really clear,” he said.

Freedom Party of Ontario president Robert Metz, who’s run both federally and provincially, said London’s election sign bylaws are fairer than other cities.

“We think it’s kind of a courtesy that the city allows people to put election signs on public property in the first place,” he said. “I think we can consider ourselves fortunate.”

Even so, Metz doesn’t want the city to get too carried away on needless regulations or too heavy-handed on enforcement.

“Clear rules are always welcome, it’s just when they get too restrictive,” he said.

“Or if someone gets too overly enthusiastic about enforcing the bylaw and says, ‘You have two signs that are five inches too close.’ . . . Signs are there to let people know there’s an election on . . . It’s part of the process.”

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