


District of Columbia Office of Planning



Office of the Director

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Melinda M. Bolling  
Director, Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs

**FROM:** Eric D. Shaw  
Director, Office of Planning 

**DATE:** November 9, 2016

**SUBJECT:** Assessment of Verizon Signs

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The Office of Planning (OP) has reviewed the proposed Verizon Center Graphics application to continue operating existing digital LED signs on the exterior of the Verizon Center and found no basis for preparing an adverse report. As required by the “Verizon Center Graphics and Entertainment Congressional Review Emergency Amendment Act of 2012 (DC Act 19-504)”, the Director of the Office of Planning reviewed application numbers SG1600484, SG1600485, SG1600486, SG1600487, SG1600488, and SG1600489 to determine if the proposed Verizon Center Graphics would adversely impact:

1. The character and integrity of the Verizon Center as a sports and entertainment arena; or,
2. The character and integrity of the surrounding neighborhood as a whole for residential, business, and recreation uses.

1. Character and Integrity of the Verizon Center as a Sports and Entertainment Arena

The Verizon Center is an important destination that draws significant crowds to Gallery Place, an area that has evolved into a distinct neighborhood and regional attraction. The Verizon Center signs contribute to a vibrant and active character of the area and are not inconsistent with the District of Columbia’s Comprehensive Plan. The Citywide Economic Development Element of the Comprehensive Plan states:



***Policy ED-2.3.6: Entertainment Districts***

*Support the continued concentration of entertainment uses in the Gallery Place / Convention Center area to create a stronger and more visible destination for visitors, workers, and residents, and to avoid the over-concentration of these uses in neighborhoods where they might have adverse impacts.... 709.10*

Gallery Place is intended to have uses and attractions that are one-of-a-kind and appropriate for a 24-hour neighborhood. The Comprehensive Plan identifies Gallery Place as one of eight areas within Central Washington that is distinct to the District of Columbia, outside of what is commonly thought of as the “federal city”, and specifically identifies Gallery Place as an Arts and Entertainment District (CW-2.2).

2. *Character and Integrity of the Surrounding Neighborhood as a Whole for Residential, Business, and Recreation Uses*

OP reviewed the surrounding Gallery Place neighborhood as that area within one full block around the Verizon Center that included the area between E Street NW on the south, H Street NW on the north, 5<sup>th</sup> Street NW on the east, and 8<sup>th</sup> Street NW on the west.

The surrounding neighborhood area is identified on the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map as high density commercial or high density mixed use commercial/residential, except for the property immediately across 7<sup>th</sup> Street, which is identified as federal and home to the National Portrait Gallery and the National Museum of American Art. The area is also identified on the Comprehensive Plan Generalized Policy Map as Central Washington.

The Central Washington Area Element of the Comprehensive Plan states:

***Policy CW-2.2.1: Art and Entertainment District***

*Promote the development of the Gallery Place and 7th Street area as a pedestrian-oriented arts and entertainment district, with nightlife and restaurants, theaters, galleries, and independent and national retailers. Continuous ground floor retail, arts, and entertainment uses should be encouraged along 7th Street between Mount Vernon Square and Pennsylvania Avenue. 1612.6*

The location of the signs along 7<sup>th</sup> Street and the corner at F Street is not inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan identification of this area as an Arts and Entertainment District and related uses are permitted by zoning.

Through a GIS mapping analysis, OP has determined that the closest residential building facing the signs is 547 feet away, which is far greater than minimum standards used across North America for residential separation from illuminated signs.<sup>i</sup> Further, the signs do not face any parks or significant public open spaces.

Current criteria established through DC Act 19-504 require an assessment of whether the signs cause adverse impacts to “the character or integrity of the surrounding neighborhood as a whole for residential, business, and recreation uses.” Based on the Comprehensive Plan guidance articulated above - regarding both the designated land uses and stated economic development and entertainment district goals - as a whole, the signs are compatible and not found to adversely impact the intended character and integrity of the surrounding neighborhood.

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<sup>i</sup> Martin Rendl Associates. (2013). *Planning & Design Review of Illuminated & Electronic Signs*. Retrieved from the Toronto, CA government website