

Regulating Historic Signs

Planning Webcast Series
Sponsored by the County Division

April 5, 2019



American Planning Association
County Planning Division

Making Great Communities Happen



INTERNATIONAL SIGN ASSOCIATION

Speakers

- **James Carpentier AICP** – Moderator
 - Director State & Local Government Affairs/International Sign Association
- **Al Barna/Randall Ann Homan**
 - San Francisco Neon/Historic Neon Network
- **Lannette M. Schwartz, MHC**
 - Historic Sign Conservation, Consultant
- **Stephanie Cisneros**
 - Preservation Planner, San Francisco Planning Department

Takeaways

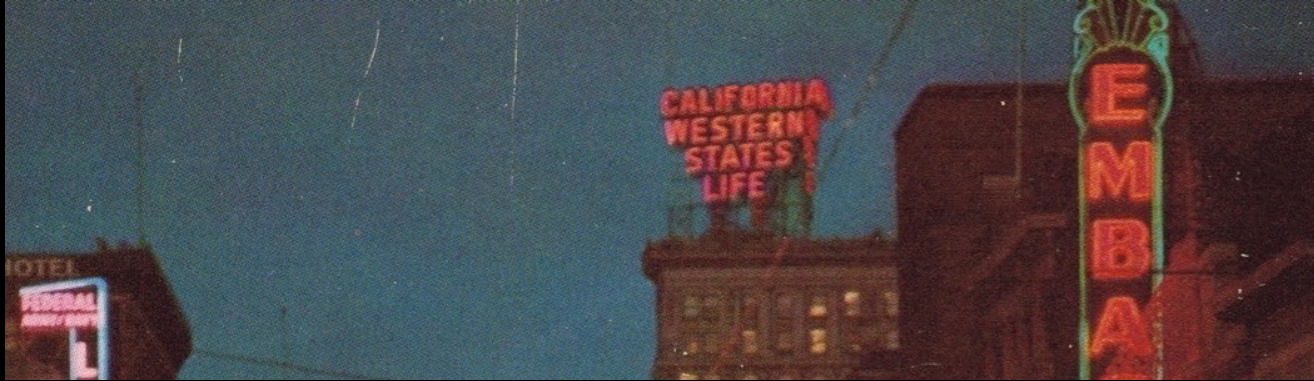
- Understand neon signs
- Understand approaches in Burbank, Los Angeles and San Francisco
- Keys to developing historic sign regulations
- What makes a sign “historic” vs. “vintage”

Your Favorite Historic Sign

- Send us the city, state and name of your favorite historic sign
- Tell us why it is your favorite sign
- The panel will talk about your favorite sign!

Presentations

- www.signs.org/planners - presentation, Saving Neon Best Practices Guide, Burbank Regulations and other resources at this link



1955

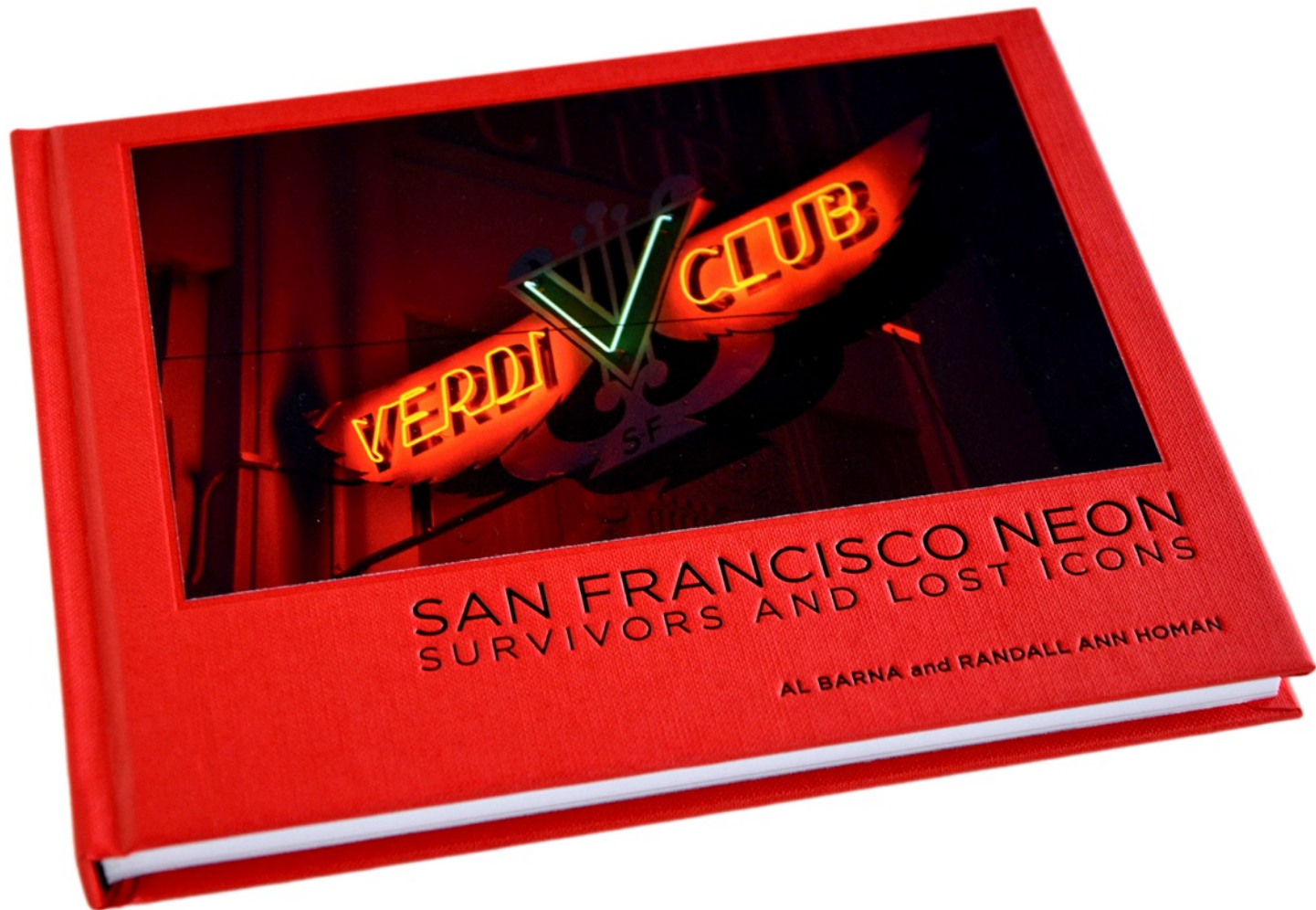
SAN FRANCISCO NEON



Al Barna and Randall Ann Homan, sfneon.org



PHOTO: ED
CHRISTIANSON

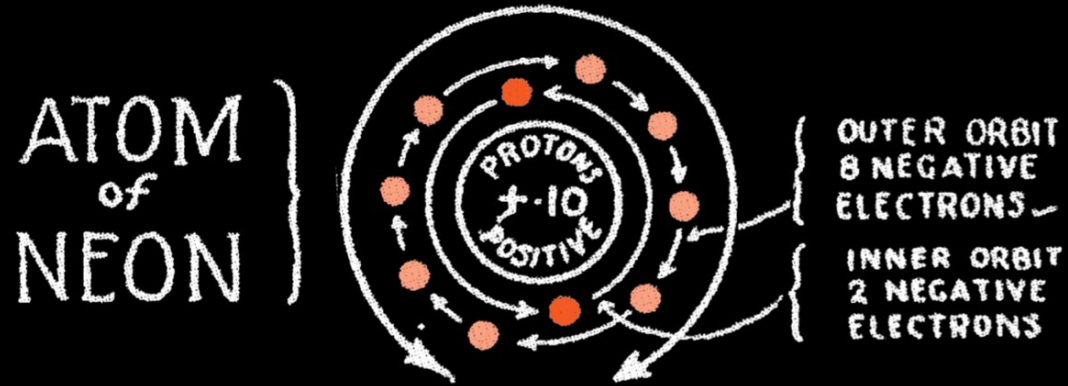


ANATOMY OF A NEON SIGN

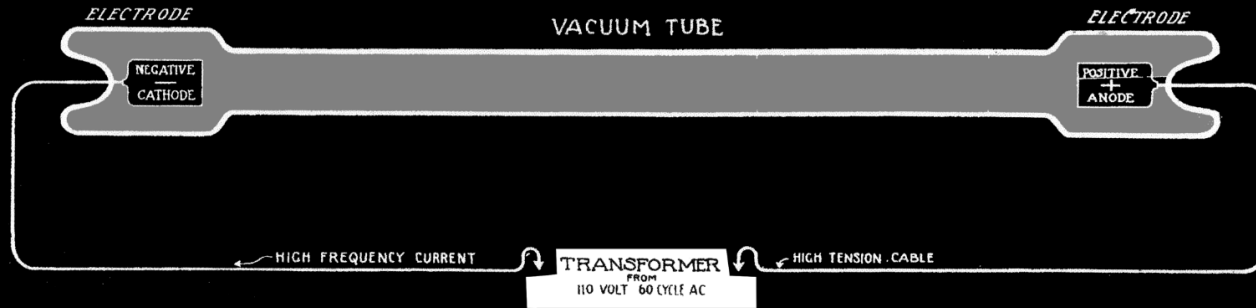
SIGN SCIENCE: AURORA BOREALIS



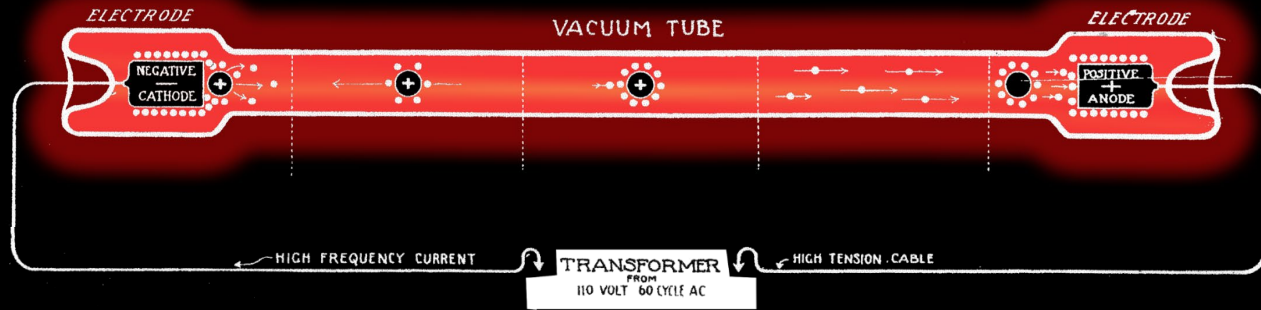
SIGN SCIENCE: INSIDE A NEON TUBE



SIGN SCIENCE: INSIDE A NEON TUBE



SIGN SCIENCE: INSIDE A NEON TUBE



THE PHENOMENA OF NEON LIGHT

ELECTRIFIED COLORS OF NOBLE GASES



COLORFUL PHOSPHOR COATED TUBES





TIN CANS: FROM ADVERTISING TO ART



TIN CANS: FROM ADVERTISING TO ART



TIN CANS: FROM ADVERTISING TO ART



TIN CANS: FROM ADVERTISING TO ART



SIGN TYPOLOGY



QUESTIONS



QUESTIONS



Describe a neon sign in your community. Has it become a local landmark?

QUESTIONS



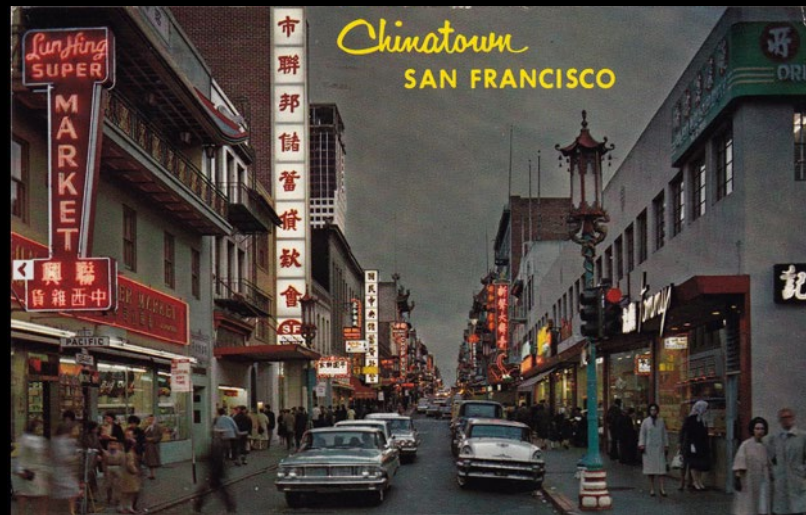
Is there a neon sign in your neighborhood that has become a local landmark?

Is the sign a candidate for restoration? Why?

1960



1965



2014



1940s



GOLDEN STAR RADIO, 1940s. From 1939 to 1979, the **Golden Star** Chinese Hour provided Chinatown with the latest news and entertainment on KBRG-FM (105.3 FM). Every weeknight from 9:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. and every Saturday from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., families and businesses tuned in to hear Mary Chinn Tong (right) deliver the news on events in China, the United States, and the Chinese American community from her husband, Thomas Tong's, studio at 846 Clay Street. (Courtesy of National Archives.)

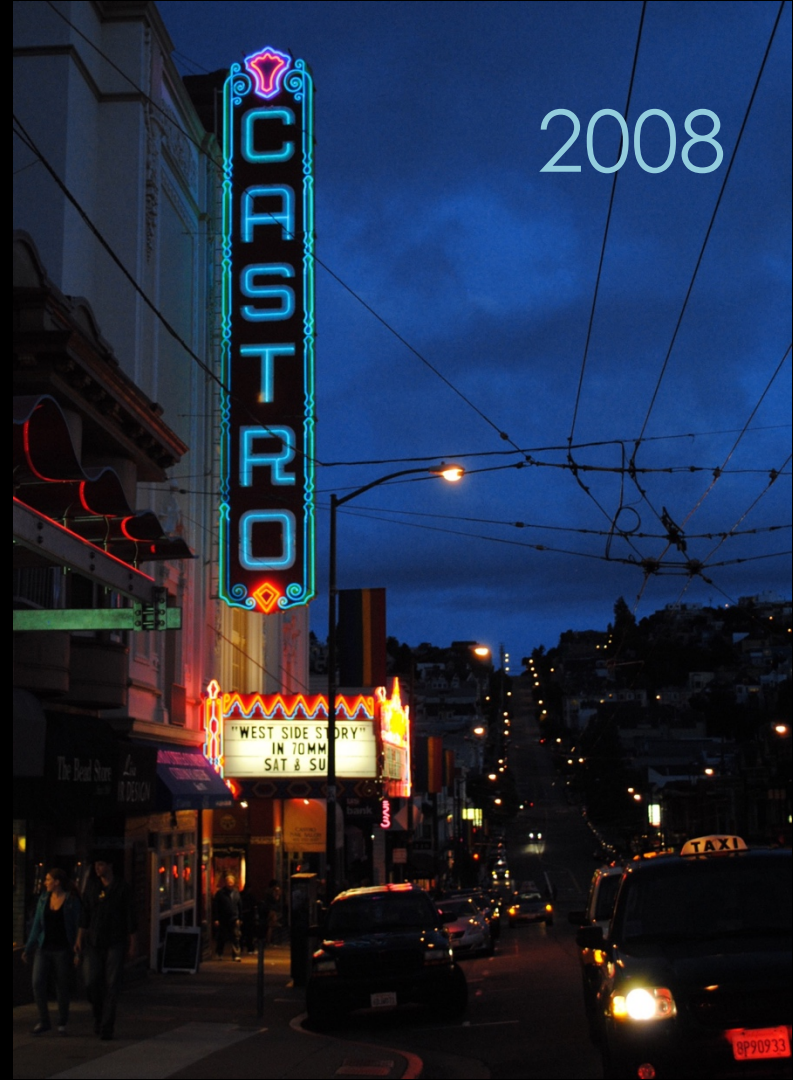
2014



PHOTO: SFNEON.ORG

2014





2008



PHOTO COURTESY: PETERSON NEON

2008



PHOTO COURTESY: PETERSON NEON



2008

2008

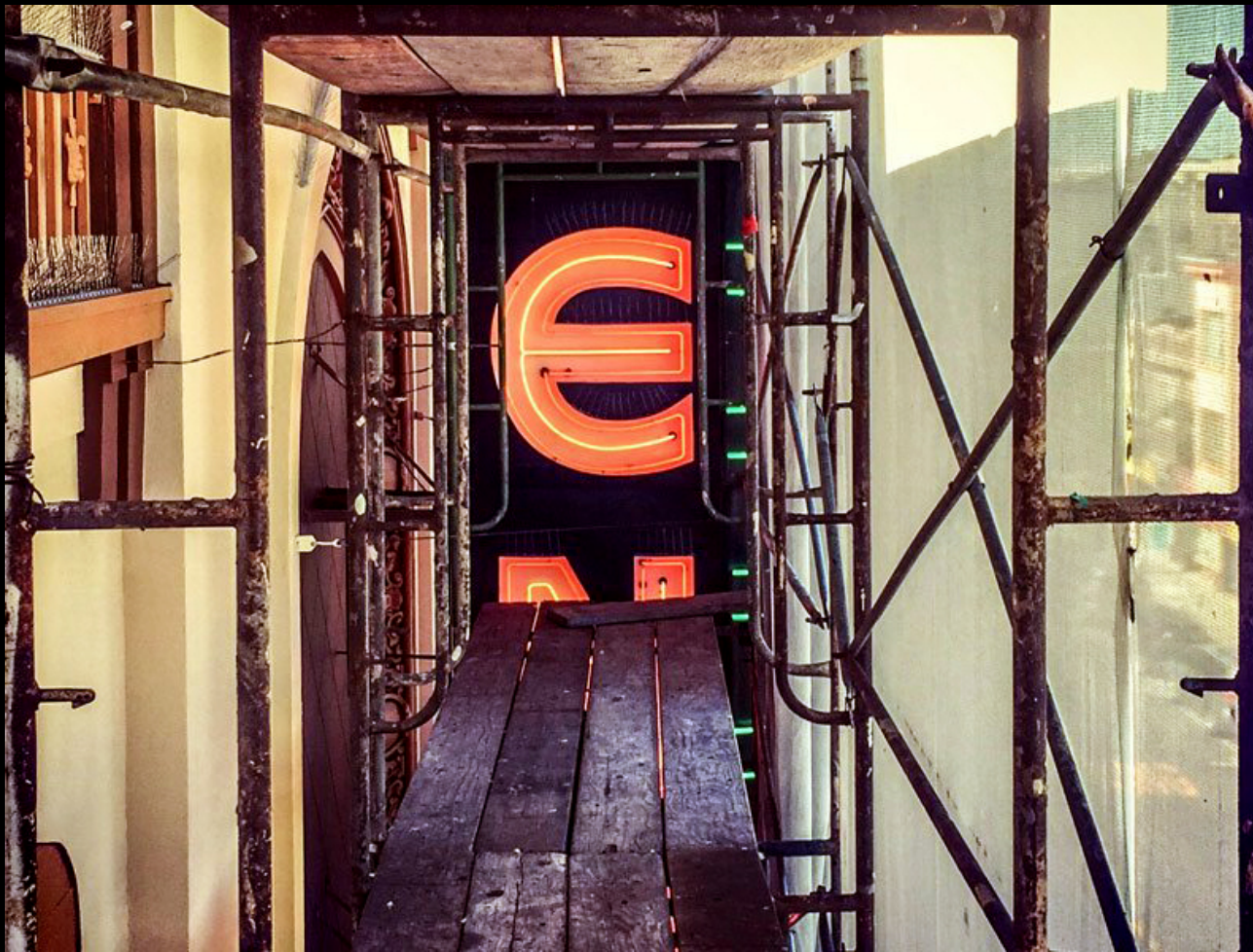


PHOTO COURTESY: PETERSON NEON

2017



PHOTO: SFNEON.ORG



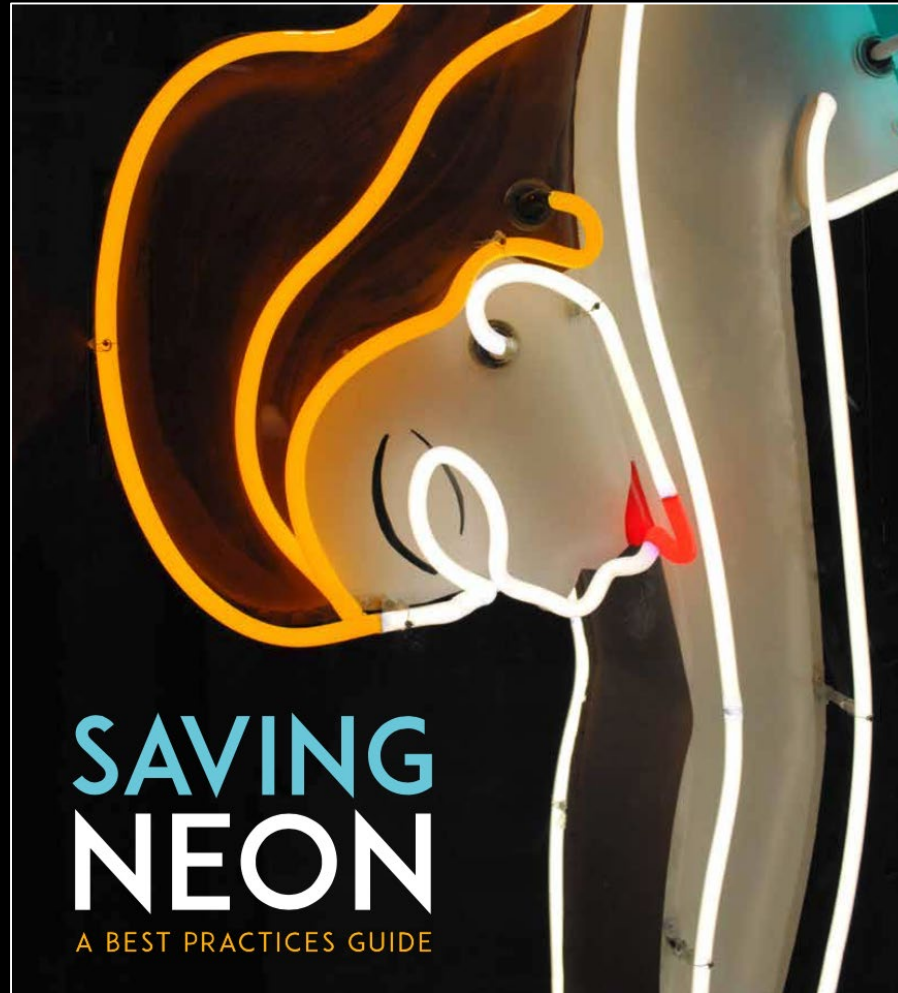
2017

PHOTO: LUKE SPRAY



2017

2018



SAVING
NEON
A BEST PRACTICES GUIDE



Photo: Al Barre 2014, Radio-TV, San Francisco, CA

Detail photo: Randall Ann Hornen 2018, Bel Air Motel (collection of CN Signs), Fresno, CA

PATINA & PAINT

Q: The paint on our sign is peeling and it looks interesting. Do we have to repaint the sign? Should we take the sign down to paint it? How often does a sign need to be repainted?

A: After decades of neglect, a vintage sign might have a fascinating patina of peeling paint. In the next ten years, all of the paint could be gone with nothing left but a rusting metal cabinet. Paint is the best way to protect the sign. Whenever possible, save the vintage sheet metal instead of using aluminum as a replacement.

Patina is not forever, and rust is certain if an unpainted sign is kept outdoors. You can try to slow the patina peeling with a clear coating, but it will peel and shrink at a different rate, compounding problems. Sign-specific paint or automotive-grade paint is the best protection. Usually vintage signs are repainted in place with a roller for the background and a brush

for lettering. Removing a sign for restoration is problematic because it is easy to damage the sign as you take it down. Sign removal can be done successfully, but it takes extra time and requires working with local planning agencies and securing permits.

Sand the old paint first to reveal any layers of older lettering, and photograph it for historical documentation. Then scrape or use a chemical stripper to remove old paint down to the bare metal of the sign and prep for painting. Insist on either sign-specific or automotive grade paint. One-Shot and/or Matthews are sign-specific paints that are perfect for hand lettering. It is important to use paint that is graded for outdoors and metal.



Exterior neon signs require repainting, approximately every six to ten years.

Galvanized metal signs require a special self-etching primer. Failure to use the self-etching primer will result in new paint peeling and flaking in a matter of months because paint does not adhere to a galvanized surface. Always use primer and two coats of paint on the background and the foreground/lettering.

Painting letters by hand with a brush is best practice, no vinyl lettering! Vinyl might be cheaper, but is not traditional and will shrink and peel faster than paint.



Photo: Al Barre 2016, White Stag Sign, Portland, OR

Detail photo: Al Barre 2016, Civic & 98th RAD-B-G sign, collection of the Museum of Neon Art, Glendale, CA

ANIMATED SIGNS & LED BULBS

Q: What about the animated neon signs with flashing bulbs? Should incandescent bulbs or neon tubes be replaced with LEDs?

A: Animated signs are controlled by a mechanical unit, sometimes called a sequencer unit, inside the cabinet. A sequencer basically turns the electrical contacts on and off to different parts of the sign in sequence. A damaged unit can be repaired or rebuilt. Original units should be saved, they hold clues to the timing and sequence of the sign's original animation design.

Incandescent bulbs that flash in sequence are a brilliant addition to a neon sign. But, they are energy vampires. Governments around the world have passed measures to phase out incandescent light bulbs to be replaced by energy-efficient LED bulbs. These measures will

soon serve as a ban on the future manufacturing of incandescent light bulbs. LED bulbs are much more energy efficient than incandescent bulbs. The ban on incandescent bulbs may soon leave no choice but to use new LED bulbs on vintage signs.

Neon signs have suffered from comparisons with incandescent bulbs as a significant drain on the electricity grid. But a neon sign consumes much less power relative to the brightness of the light it emits. A neon tube uses cold cathode technology. It is not heated by a filament, increasing its energy efficiency and longevity compared to an incandescent bulb.



Flashing bulbs on neon signs add motion and brilliance. Incandescent bulbs use much more energy than neon tubes or LED bulbs.

LEDs should never be substituted for neon glass tube lighting. It's just, well, wrong. LEDs don't have the same ambient glow or color range as neon signs. Neon glass tubes and metal cabinets can last for decades and are recyclable.

New LED "faux neon" tubes are often touted as a better option by manufacturers. But in a few years they become e-waste and cannot match the aesthetic of neon light.

1947



1957



LI PO COCKTAIL LOUNGE 916 Grant Ave, San Francisco HISTORIC NEON COLOR CONSULT

Submitted by: San Francisco Neon, Summer 2018

Submitted to: Darcy Bender, OEWI Invest in Neighborhoods, SF Shines grants program








Specifications from SF Neon

All colors listed below are preliminary recommendations. Subject to review by Li Po and SF Shines.



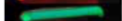


All paint colors are based on existing colors when possible.

All neon colors are based on historical photos, no phosphor-coated colors recommended.

PAINT COLOR RECOMMENDATIONS

P1 1-Shot Custom match		Top lantern pole
P2 1-Shot 104L Bright Red		Lantern cap
P3 1-Shot 103L Polar White		Lantern Li Po letters
P4 1-Shot 104L Bright Red		Lantern cabinet background
P5 1-Shot Custom match		Lantern cabinet base trim
P6 1-Shot Custom match		Porcelain cabinet return, lantern cabinet base
P7 1-Shot 191 Metallic Gold		Bells/tassels

GLASS TUBE COLOR RECOMMENDATIONS

N1 Novial gold colored glass		LI PO on 4 lantern faces
N2 Clear pumped Neon red		Lantern border glass
N3 Emerald colored glass		Arrow on porcelain cabinet top
N1 Novial gold colored glass		LI PO on porcelain cabinet face
N5 Clear pumped Argon with mercury		COCKTAILS on porcelain cabinet

Specifications from Arrow Sign Company

- Replace all neon housings and tube supports
- Rewire all primary and secondary wiring
- Manufacture and install all neon glass tubes (both cabinets) except top decorative crown sections on lantern sign
- Supply and install new neon housings and tube supports
- Repaint cabinets with 1-Shot enamel paint per paint color specifications
- Faces of "COCKTAILS" sign are porcelain enamel and will be cleaned/restored as best as possible
- Supply and install new turnbuckles and guy wires
- Supply and install new bottom diagonal stiff arms to stabilize sign. Replace primary wiring conduit as required
- Supply and install one single pole, time clock to existing easily recognizable dedicated circuit.
- Any new neon transformers, if needed to be replaced at additional time and material basis.
- Any damaged, rusted metal or unforeseen conditions to be addressed and refurbished at a time and materials basis.

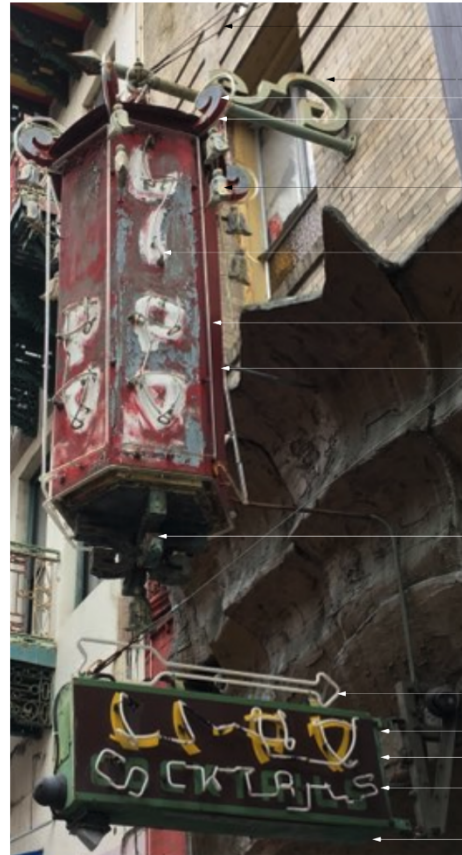


Photo: Arrow Sign Co

SAN FRANCISCO NEON
HISTORIC SIGN NETWORK
AL BARNIA • RANDALL ANN HOMAN
415-272-7623 • SFNEONBOOK@GMAIL.COM



Replace all guy wires and turnbuckles with new

P1: Prep/paint top lantern pole

P2: Prep/paint lantern cap

N2: Replace glass tubes on lantern cabinet roof

P7: Clean bells and prep/paint

P3: Prep/paint "LI PO" letters

N1: Replace "LI PO" glass tubes

N2: Replace glass tubes outlining lantern cabinet

P4: Prep/paint lantern cabinet faces x 6

P5: Prep/paint lantern cabinet base yellow trim

P6: Prep/paint lantern cabinet base aqua

N3: Arrow on top of porcelain sign cabinet

N4: "LI-PO"

Clean porcelain enamel sign faces

N5: "COCKTAILS" letters

P6: Prep/paint cabinet filler on return

2018



PHOTO: SFNEON.ORG



2018

2019

APRIL IS NEON MONTH

April 1-30 Tenderloin Museum

Exhibition: Neon Family, A Tribute, SF

April 6

Chinatown Neon Walking Tour, SF

April 13

APA Conference: Neon Walking Tour, SF

April 16

APA Conference: Preservation of Historic Signs, SF

April 26-28

Neon Speaks Festival and Symposium, SF

April 28

Neon Works Shop Tour, Oakland

Info at sfneon.org



PHOTO: SFNEON.ORG



NEON SPEAKS

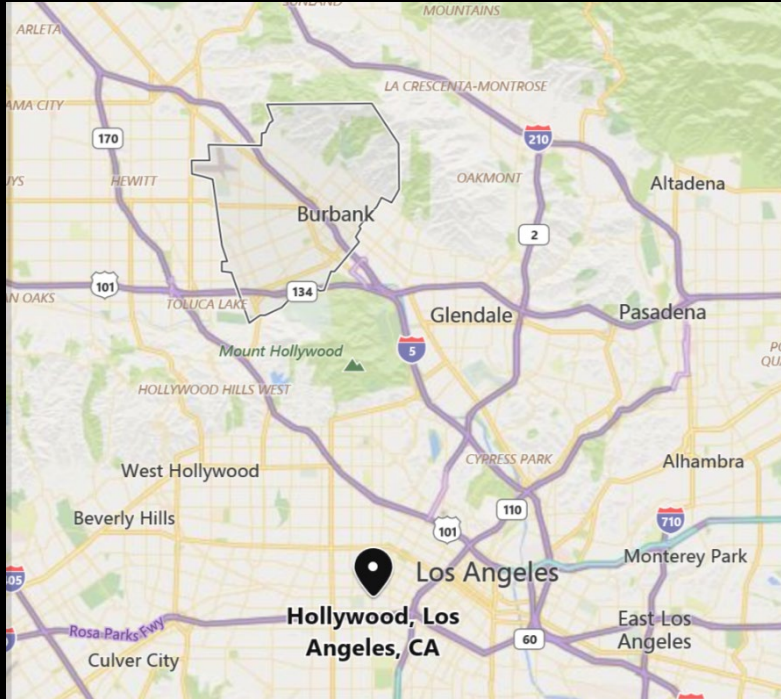
FESTIVAL & SYMPOSIUM

A CELEBRATION OF HISTORIC NEON SIGNS

APRIL 26-28, SAN FRANCISCO-OAKLAND, INFO AT [NEONSPEAKS.ORG](https://neonspeaks.org)

PHOTO: [SFNEON.ORG](https://sfneon.org)

YOUR FAVORITE SIGN



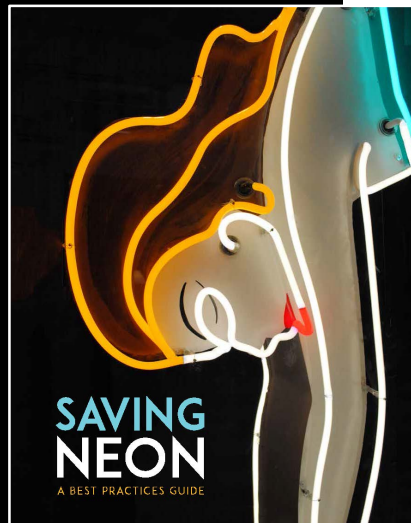
Source: Bing map 2019

REGULATORY AND POLICY APPROACHES THAT PRESERVE HISTORIC SIGNS IN SOCIAL

An Interactive Educational Discussion Session
Planning Webcast Series
April 5, 2019

Presented By *Lannette Schwartz, MHC*
Architectural Historian and
Historic Sign Conservation Consultant

WHERE IS YOUR FAVORITE SIGN IN AMERICA?



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to the contributors and reviewers who illuminated this guidebook with their experience and expertise.

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 Kate Widdows, Co-Producer, Neon Speaks Symposium, Portland, OR

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Mike Buhler, Director, San Francisco Heritage; Kim Koga, Director, Museum of Neon Art; Jim Rizzo, Neon Works; and Tod Swormstedt, Director, American Sign Museum; for their advice, encouragement, and support.

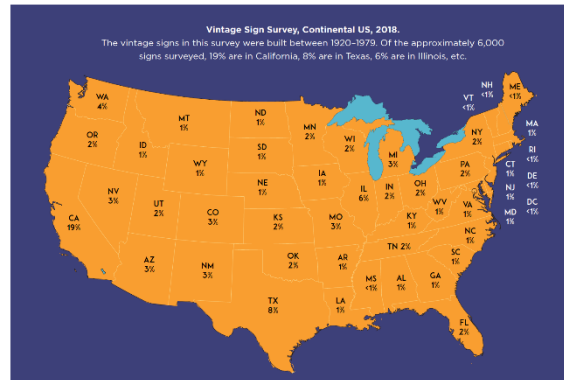
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FUNDING

The Neon Speaks Symposium 2018 and this publication were made possible by a grant from the San Francisco Heritage and the Alice Ross Carey Preservation Fund; a matching grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation; a donation from the Art Deco Society of California; and the fiscal sponsorship of the Tenderloin Museum.



Source: 2018 Survey, RoadsideArchitecture.com

Detail photo: Al Berne 2018, Katz's Delicatessen, New York, NY

SIGN SURVEYS

Q: Should I document neon signs in my area? Does anyone document signs nationwide? Which state has the most neon signs?

A: Old signs disappear every year at an alarming rate. Debra Jane Seltzer is a tireless historian who travels coast-to-coast documenting vintage buildings, signs, and statues built between 1920-1979.

Debra Jane's image-rich website, RoadsideArchitecture.com, is a deep dive into the documentation of neon signs. She compiled data from her website for the 2018 Neon Speaks Symposium. The results outlined how many vintage signs remain in each state and how many have been lost in the past eighteen years. California has more vintage signs than any other state (1000+).

More land mass, larger population, and milder climate means more surviving signs. Texas has 444+ signs, less than half the amount as California. Illinois has 300+ signs. Washington, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, and Michigan each have about 200 signs still in place.

It is fascinating that each state has its own cache of surviving signs. The map on this page shows the estimated percentage of all the surviving vintage signs from the 2018 survey by Debra Jane. But she can't be everywhere in the US at once, and signs are being refaced or removed at a rapid rate.



We encourage you to photograph, document, and create a searchable online record for signs that have historic importance in your community, city, and state.

Every state needs a community campaign for its neon signs to be restored and preserved for future generations. What better way to celebrate the legacy of this unique art form, local culture, and mom and pop businesses?

IS THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE (NPS) TERMINOLOGY IMPORTANT?

- I. Conservation is a broader NPS term that embodies four distinct treatment approaches.
- II. Secretary of the Interior's Standards The Treatment of Historic Properties offer four distinct approaches to the treatment of historic properties:
 - Preservation
 - Rehabilitation
 - Restoration
 - Reconstruction
- III. Guidelines

Website for more information: <https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards.htm>

POLICY THEMES AS “TAKE AWAYS” YOU NEED TO KNOW

What you need to know when developing a historic sign conservation/preservation approach:

I. Policy

- a) Most cities have not performed a citywide historic sign survey.
- b) Most financial or code compliance “carrots” are tied to a resource that has been identified, defined, and determined by the city, state, or National Park Service to be a “qualified” historic resource.

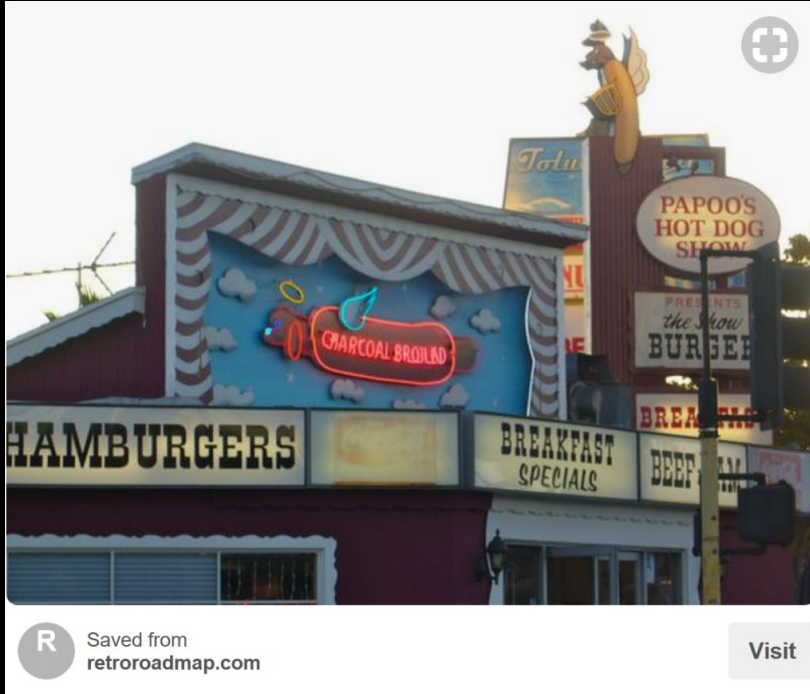


Photo of the Burbank Papoos Hot Dog Show Sign by Marriott Burbank posted on Pinterest, <http://retroroadmap.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/papoos-hot-dog-show-burbank-ca.jpg>

REGULATORY THEMES AS “TAKE AWAYS” YOU NEED TO KNOW




Photo of Vogue Sign and Marquee by author 2013

II. Regulatory

- a) Most cities do not require historic resource review of vintage signs not yet determined to be “historic” as defined by its sign use code.
- b) Most owners of historic or vintage sign resources get caught in a gap where rehabilitation efforts are not possible repair **non-conforming sign onsite**; or an **onsite repair is not financially feasible for a small business owner**. Both of these scenarios can lead to unintended city repair barriers that result in demolition by neglect.


BURBANK

CITY PLANNING USES CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT GRANT TO SURVEY HISTORIC SIGN RESOURCES (2014)




BURBANK HISTORIC SIGN SURVEY
Historic Resources Survey Report

Prepared for:



City of Burbank
Planning and Transportation Division

Prepared by:



Architectural Resources Group, Inc.
Pasadena, CA

July 2, 2014

RESOLUTION NO. 18

A RESOLUTION OF THE HERITAGE COMMISSION OF
THE CITY OF BURBANK RECOMMENDING APPROVAL OF
PROJECT NO. 14-0003761, A ZONE TEXT AMENDMENT, AMENDING TITLE 10,
ARTICLE 2, TITLE 10, ARTICLE 9, AND TITLE 10, ARTICLE 18 OF THE BURBANK
MUNICIPAL CODE PERTAINING TO HISTORIC SIGNS

(Historic Sign Ordinance)

THE HERITAGE COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF BURBANK FINDS:

A. The Heritage Commission of the City of Burbank at its meeting of October 8, 2015, held a public hearing on Project No. 14-0003761, a Zone Text Amendment, to permit the designation and restoration of Historic Signs.

B. The Heritage Commission considered the report and recommendations of the City Planner and the evidence presented at the meeting.

C. This Ordinance is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act in accordance with Section 15331 Historical Resource Restoration and Rehabilitation pertaining to projects consists of projects limited to maintenance, repair, stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, preservation, conservation, or reconstruction of historical resources in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings (1995), Weeks and Grimmer.


THE HERITAGE COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF BURBANK RESOLVES:

1. Project No. 14-0003761, a Zone Text Amendment as described above and in the staff report dated October 8, 2015, and as reflected in the exhibits attached hereto, is hereby recommended to the City Council for approval. Attachment A is attached to this resolution, reflecting the Heritage Commission's recommendation.

2. The City Planner shall report this decision to the Planning Board and City Council.

APPROVED this 8th day of October, 2015.

CITY HERITAGE COMMISSION



Commissioner

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
CITY OF BURBANK

EXHIBIT B-1

- I. The 2014 Burbank Historic Sign **survey** (Historic Resources Survey Report) became the basis and was codified as an element of the Burbank Historic in 2016.
- II. It established a starting point and listed eligible historic signs
- III. It answers the question of **“what makes a sign historic”** in Burbank by establishing local, state, or national **historic contexts for the sign types within the city boundaries.**

Source: City of Burbank Website:
<https://www.burbankca.gov/home/showdocument?id=28269>

BURBANK: KEY ELEMENTS OF A CITYWIDE HISTORIC SIGN CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Policy / Regulatory Theme(s)	City of Burbank, California: 2016 Historic Sign Ordinance Developed in Response to Partial Sign Loss
Non-conforming sign repair loopholes prior to new ordinance	Yes. Intended to control use of un-permitted or illegal signage.
Unintended demolition or neglect of specific sign	Yes. Papoos Hot Dog Show sign. New small business owners at location unable to save historic sign due to financial reasons.
New city ordinance developed to address policy gaps	Yes. Codified in 2016.
Voluntary program	Yes Legal and business concerns limit program to voluntary basis.
Historic sign resource survey	Yes. CLG grant to research and prepare context statement, windshield inventory, and voluntary ordinance.
Historic sign register or “qualified” historic designation	Yes

BURBANK: KEY ELEMENTS OF A CITYWIDE HISTORIC SIGN CONSERVATION PROGRAM CONTINUED

Policy / Regulatory Theme(s)	City of Burbank, California: 2016 Historic Sign Ordinance Developed in Response to Partial Sign Loss
Acknowledgement and Consent Waiver	Yes. Written consent to process the voluntary designation application. Program allows for owner to remove sign if Burbank Heritage commission finds that attempt to find donee and no suitable donee site or economic feasible options available to preserve sign.
Sign Treatment Plan	Yes.
Demolition Stay	Yes. 30 day stay to relocate or salvage.
Financial Incentives or “carrots”	Yes. Permit fee waivers. Sign area bonus.
Covenant recorded with land	Yes. A designation covenant is recorded and runs with the land title.

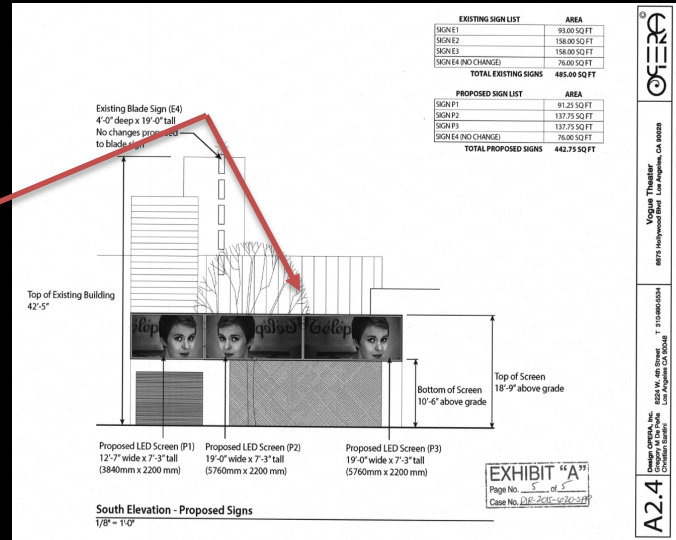
HOLLYWOOD: A LOS ANGELES NEIGHBORHOOD WITH A SIGN USE DISTRICT



1935 Vogue Theatre photo source:
Mott-Merge Collection, Box 22,
folder 533, call number 1992-2552,
accessed March 29, 2016,
http://catalog.library.ca.gov/exlibris/aleph/a21_1/apache_media/XJPA4LR_TLRAREB8G3S7MHUVICJ6YL3.jp
eg.



CEQA EXEMPTION:
DIGITAL ONVERSION APPROVED *PRIOR TO APPEAL* ALLOWED PARTIAL
DEMOLITION OF CHARACTER DEFINING NEON FEATURES



Source: LA City Dept of City Planning
<http://161.149.221.137/caseinfo/casesummary.aspx?case=DIR-2015-620-SPP&zimas=y&pin=&address=6669%20W%20HOLLYWOOD%20BLVD>



Photo of Vogue Sign and Marquee by author 2013, 2019

LOS ANGELES CITYWIDE SIGN USE PRESERVATION PLANNING – ITS COMPLICATED!



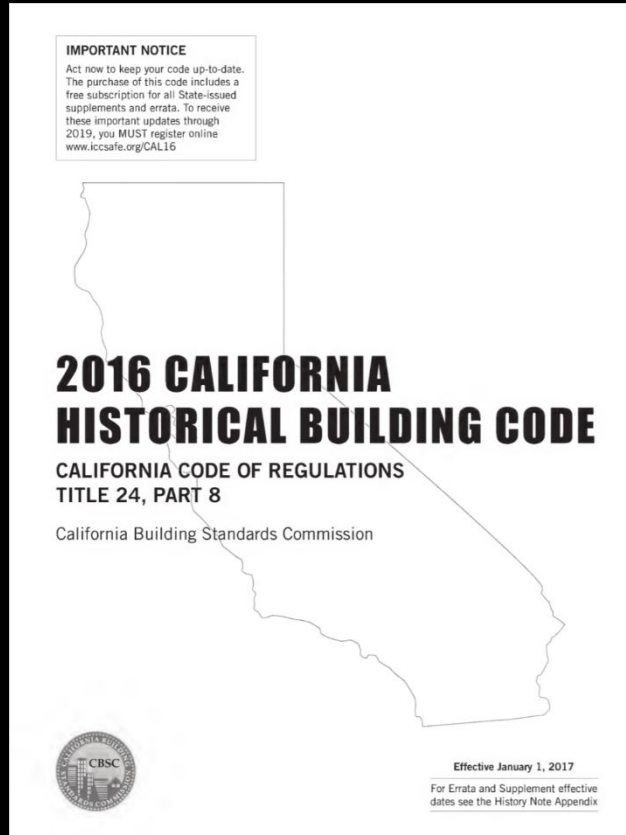
Citywide Sign Ordinance (LAMC)
Sign Use Districts (SN)

Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monuments
Ordinance (HCM)
Mural Ordinance



Community Plan Design Elements
Streetscape Plans
Business Improvement Districts
Historic Districts

SUPPORT REPAIRS OF NON-CONFORMING SIGNS

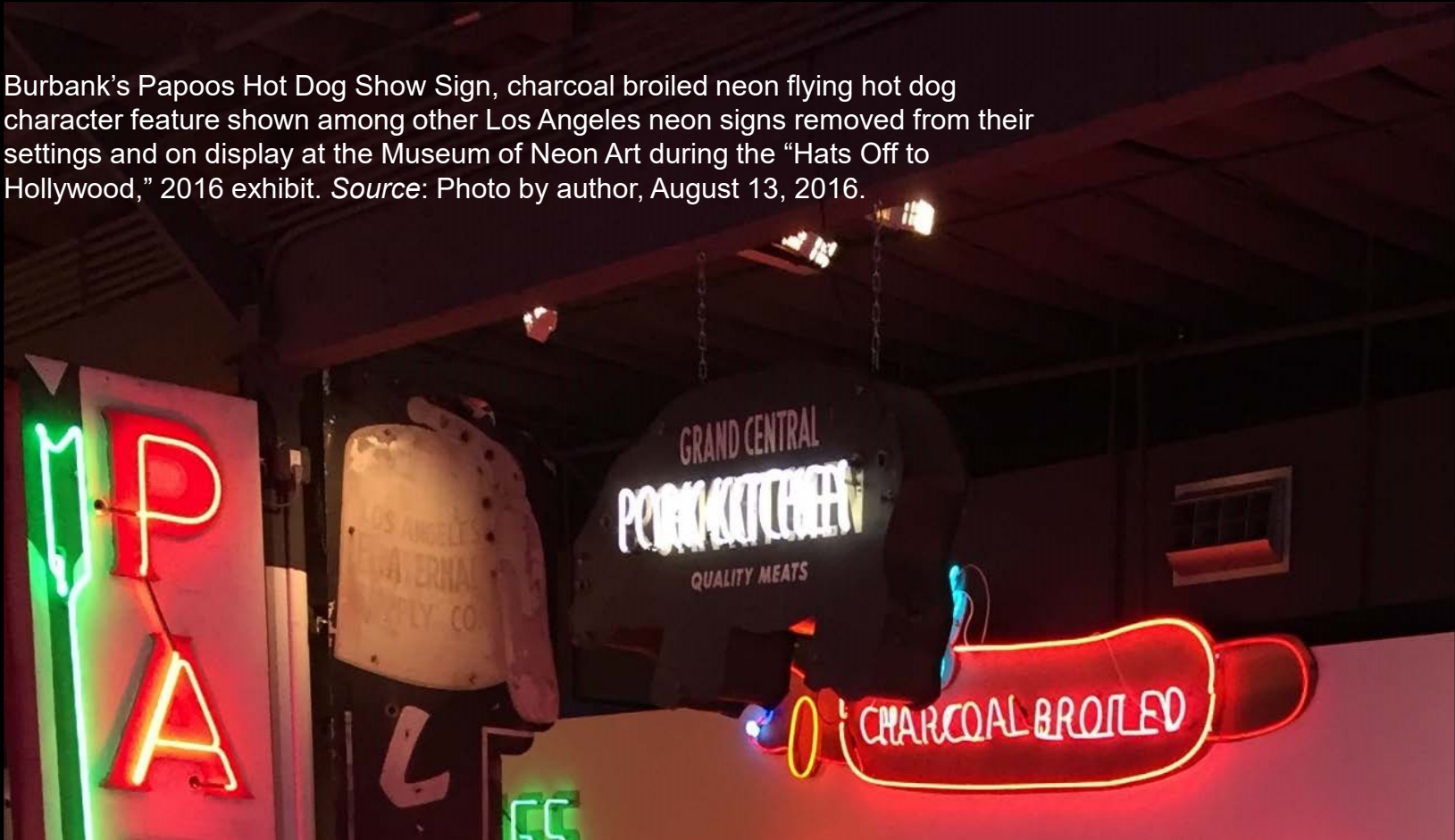


- I. One approach is to work with existing policy framework to take advantage of regulation incentives, such as the California Historical Building Code for **qualified** historic building or sign:
 - Local
 - State
 - National

<http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/pages/1074/files/2016%20CA%20CHBC.pdf>

WHERE DID THE PAPOOS HOT DOG GO?

Burbank's Papoos Hot Dog Show Sign, charcoal broiled neon flying hot dog character feature shown among other Los Angeles neon signs removed from their settings and on display at the Museum of Neon Art during the "Hats Off to Hollywood," 2016 exhibit. *Source:* Photo by author, August 13, 2016.



QUESTIONS/DIALOGUE?



www.historicsignconservation.com

Lannette@historicsignconservation.com

YOUR FAVORITE SIGN

Vintage Signs in San Francisco



Stephanie Cisneros
Preservation Planner
San Francisco Planning
Planning Webcast
Series

April 5, 2019



Key Takeaways

- Local sign regulations and programs
 - What are the local sign regulations? Is/are there regulations on historic signs?
- Local preservation programs
 - What role can/do signs play in local preservation programs? What protections can preservation programs offer?
- What is the community/city interest in protecting and ensuring longevity of these historic signs?

Vintage Sign Ordinance

- Article 6, Section 608.14 of the San Francisco Planning Code
- Board of Supervisors Ordinance No. 276-98
- Passed and added to Planning Code in 1998; amended in 2011
- Conditional Use Authorization required
 - Photos and documentation of vintage sign to prove meets criteria

Vintage Sign Ordinance

- Criteria to authorize vintage signs:
 - Sign proposed for vintage sign authorization is at least 40 years old; and
 - Sign is a cultural artifact that depicts a particular residential, business, cultural, economic, recreational, or other valued resource of the past that contributes to the visual identity and character of a City neighborhood or the City as a whole.

Benefits of Vintage Sign Designation

- Able to keep non-complying vintage signage
 - Restoration
 - Maintenance
 - Relocation
- Does not count against any new signage

Benefits of Vintage Sign Designation

- Illustrates development history of neighborhood/city
- Contributing features to historic districts, cultural districts and Legacy Businesses

Coca Cola Sign



Constructed 1930s/1940s
First Vintage Sign designated in 2012

Doc's Clock



Doc's Clock original location
2575 Mission St.



Doc's Clock new location
2417 Mission St.

Designated a Vintage Sign in 2016

Ghirardelli



Constructed 1915

Designated a Vintage Sign in 2019

Thank you

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Summary

- Follow best practices when dealing with neon
 - Saving Neon Best Practices Guide
- Determine community interest in historic/vintage signs
- Historic/vintage regulations considerations: flexibility, incentives, relocation, reconstruction, ease of administration

Questions?



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www.signs.org/planners - presentations and other resources

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