



Planning Commission

Sign Code Update - Briefing

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Title

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Recommended Action

Information only. No action requested.

Report

Issue:

Discussion on the second public draft of the proposed sign code.

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Presenter(s):

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Background and Analysis:

Work to update the sign code began in late 2016, primarily in response to the US Supreme Court case known as Reed v. Town of Gilbert, AZ, which addressed sign content and standards for temporary signs. The City also wanted to update the sign code in order to increase clarity, provide more consistency across standards and zoning districts, and to streamline and simplify the code.

An advisory committee was used to consider policy changes to how the city addresses signs, changes in the sign industry and new sign types, and options to provide more clarity in the code. The committee was made up of businesses, neighborhood representatives, the sign industry, and community members. The committee met seven times with its final meeting devoted to review of a draft sign code. Comments on that draft led to the first public draft, which was issued in July of 2018.

The City held an Open House on the draft sign code in August of 2018. Additionally, newsletters and email announcements were sent to subscribers, committee members, and interested parties. Comments received since the issuance of the first draft have been considered and revisions have been made. The second public draft was issued and posted to the Sign Code Update webpage on Friday, September 21, 2018.

The second draft primarily responds to comments received on the first draft. New text has been

added to clarify how sign size allowances are calculated in the Downtown Sign Zone. Additionally, language was added to address concerns raised about wall signs for small tenant spaces in multiple tenant buildings in the Business & Corridor Sign Zone, where buildings are more likely to be setback from the street with parking areas between the building and sidewalks.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

Comments received have varied and have generally addressed the following:

- The amount of time needed before an electronic message can change
- Limit the size of political signs in neighborhoods
- Consider a minimum sign size for small tenant spaces in multiple tenant buildings
- Consider how to address changes in sign technology, for example some signs can now change colors
- Preservation of historic signs
- Do not allow new billboards in the City of Olympia
- Code Enforcement
- Addressing unique situations, such as when one building is setback substantially farther from the sidewalk than all other businesses on the same street
- Reducing sign clutter in public rights of way, keeping signs out of accessibility routes, bike lanes, roundabouts and medians, keeping signs off of trees and utility poles
- Similar uses should be treated similarly but certain areas of the city are different from each other and should be treated differently

The draft includes language about the frequency with which messages on electronic signs can change and the amount of time for the transition to occur. These signs, which are only allowed in limited situations, have different standards under the current code. There are a few existing signs of this type that are for individual businesses, which do not have a specific minimum standard for the message “hold” time, although the signs are not allowed to have a flashing or scrolling message. In other situations, the hold times are specific and different from each other. Existing signs of this type are primarily associated with schools and the Auto Mall but there are some public service signs that display time and temperature. Attachments 2 and 3 provide language about hold and transition times associated with electronic signs. Under the “Electronic Message Signs” section of the City’s webpage (attachment 1), a summary of related studies is posted.

Options:

Information only. No action requested.

Financial Impact:

A consultant team was used to address legal issues associated with the Reed case and other relevant cases and to develop the draft code. No additional funding is needed to continue review, and eventual adoption, of a new sign code.

Attachments:

Sign Code Update webpage
FHWA Memo
Summary of Other Cities
Public Comments