



**Proposed Amendments to the Town of Bluffton Code of Ordinances,  
Chapter 23 – Unified Development Ordinance, Article 3 – Application  
Process, Sec. 3.19 (Site Feature-Historic District) & Sec. 3.21 (Sign Permits);  
Article 5 – Design Standards, Sec. 5.13, (Signs) & 5.15.6.Q., (Old Town  
Bluffton Historic District, Architectural Standards, Sign Guidelines); and  
Article 9 – Definitions and Interpretations, Sec. 9.2 (Defined Terms)**

**Presentation to Town Council  
July 13, 2021  
Department of Growth Management  
Heather Colin, AICP**

# *Background*



## **Why Update Sign Regulations?**

- FY21-22 Strategic Plan Action Item
- Ensure that regulations are comprehensive and clear
- Streamline processes and improve format
- Legal compliance – regulations should reflect current case law

# *How Signs are Regulated in Bluffton*



- **Development Agreements**

Signage will vary by PUD and is not governed by the UDO. Instead, permitted signage and related regulations appear in the approved Development Agreement, which is supplemented by the Beaufort County Zoning Ordinance in effect at the time of annexation.

- **Unified Development Ordinance**

All areas of Town not designated a PUD. These areas include:

- Old Town Historic District (“HD”- zoned districts)
- All other zoning districts

# *Sign-related Sections to be Amended*



## **Sign Regulations**

- Sec. 5.13: Signs
- Sec. 5.15.5.Q.: Old Town Bluffton Historic District, Sign Guidelines

## **Permitting**

- Sec. 3.21: Sign Permit (all areas except Old Town Bluffton HD)
- Sec. 3.19: Site Feature – Historic District (HD) (only Old Town Bluffton HD)

## **Other**

- Sec. 9.2: Defined Terms (various sign definitions)

# Sec. 5.13 Signs - Overview



| Existing Sub-sections                                    | Proposed Subsections |
|--|----------------------|
| Intent   | Intent               |
| Applicability  | Applicability        |
| Permissible Signs  | Exempt Signs         |
| Wall Signs   | Prohibited Signs     |
| Directory Signs  | General Requirements |
| Sign Materials   | Permanent Signs      |
| Prohibited Signs   | Temporary Signs      |
| Exempt Signs   | Off-premises Signs   |
| Setbacks from Right-of-way                               | Master Sign Plan     |
| Temporary Signs  | Sign Maintenance     |
| Automotive Service Station /<br>Convenience Market Signs | Severability         |
| PUD: Off-premise Directional Signs                       |                      |
| PUD: Off-premise Identification Signs                    |                      |
| Master Sign Plan   |                      |

# *Sec. 5.13 Signs – Amendment Highlights*



- **Reformat** of the entire section to locate information more efficiently.
- **Improved intent section**—include objectives that support “content-neutral and nondiscriminatory” sign messages.
- **Addition of a Permanent Sign category** to include Freestanding Signs (presently, Monument Signs) and Building Signs (presently, Wall Signs) and expand the permitted sign types for each category: Freestanding includes Monument, Post and Arm and Double Post signs; Building includes Wall, Window, Awning, Canopy and Projecting.
- **Addition of a Sign Maintenance section** to provide minimum requirements for upkeep and to require removal of signs on businesses within 30 days of ceasing operation.

# Sec. 3.21, Sign Permit



| Existing Sub-sections              | Proposed Subsections               |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Intent                             | Intent                             |
| Applicability                      | Applicability                      |
| Application Review Criteria        | Application Review Criteria        |
| Effect and Expiration of Approvals | Effect and Expiration of Approvals |

- Changes not substantive; intended to streamline and include cross-references to other potentially applicable UDO sections relating to signs (e.g., Sec. 5.13, Signs; Sec. 5.12, Lighting; and Sec. 7.10, Nonconforming Signs)

# *Sec. 5.15 Old Town Bluffton Historic District – Amendment Highlights*



| Existing Sub-sections | Proposed Subsections |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| General Requirements  | General              |
| Finish Materials      | Exempt Signs         |
| Configurations        | Prohibited Signs     |
|                       | Permanent Signs      |
|                       | Temporary Signs      |
|                       | Master Sign Plan     |





# *Sec. 5.15 Old Town Bluffton Historic District – Amendment Highlights*

- **Expands on Permitted Freestanding Sign Types:** Monument (the only permitted type presently), Post & Arm, Double-post. Other freestanding types as approved by UDO Administrator if consistent with character of Old Town.
- **Expands on Permitted Wall Sign Types:** ‘Wall Signs’ is a catch-all category for various types of unspecified building signs. Proposed to become ‘Building Signs’ with five types of permitted signs: 1) Wall; 2) Window; 3) Awning; 4) Canopy; and 5) Projecting. Limited to (2) signs and 25 sf per establishment.
- **Master Sign Plan Requirement Added:** Major subdivisions and buildings/complexes with multiple establishments

# *Sec. 3.10, Site Feature-Historic District (HD)*



| Existing Sub-sections              | Proposed Subsections               |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Intent                             | Intent                             |
| Applicability                      | Applicability                      |
| Application Review Criteria        | Application Review Criteria        |
| Effect and Expiration of Approvals | Effect and Expiration of Approvals |

- A Site Feature permit is required for certain staff-reviewed items in an HD zoning district, including: 1) Signs; 2) Modifications to certain site elements (parking lots, lighting, landscaping, etc); 3) Garden structures; 4) Maintenance/repair to exterior structures and buildings that does not change the design, architectural character or appearance; and 5) Minor modifications that do not alter the architectural character.
- Changes are not substantive; intended to streamline and include cross-references to other potentially applicable UDO section.

# *Sec. 9.2, Defined Terms*



## **Definitions Revised:**

- Sign
- Canopy Sign
- Portable Sign
- Suspended Sign
- Window Sign

## **New Definitions Proposed:**

- Commercial Message
- Non-commercial Message
- Sign Area

## **Definitions Eliminated:**

- Incidental Sign
- Residential Sign
- Integral Roof Sign
- Vehicle Sign

# Text Amendment Review Criteria



1. **Section 3.5.3.A. Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan or, if conditions have changed since the Comprehensive Plan was adopted, the consistency with the overall intent of the Plan, recent development trends and the general character of the area.**

*The proposed amendments are consistent with the needs, goals and implementation strategies of the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan, as adopted on September 4, 2007, balances “long-term visioning and goals” with “short-term actions.” The amendments also support the Old Town Bluffton Master Plan by ensuring that signage will support its historic and eclectic character.*

# Text Amendment Review Criteria



## **2. Section 3.5.3.B. Consistency with demographic changes, prevailing economic trends, and/or newly recognized best planning practices.**

*While these amendments do not have a direct relationship to demographic changes or economic trends, ensuring that sign regulations are legally compliant has been recognized as a best planning practice since the Reed decision in 2015. These revisions also provide an opportunity to ensure that the remainder of the sign regulations are clear and up-to-date.*

## **3. Section 3.5.3.C. Enhancement of the health, safety, and welfare of the Town of Bluffton.**

*The improved intent for Sec. 5.13, Signs, reinforces the desire of the Town to ensure that signs allow for effective communication while avoiding visual clutter and distractions that could result from less regulation.*

# Text Amendment Review Criteria



4. **Section 3.5.3.D.** Impact of the proposed amendment on the provision of public services.

*The amendments will not impact the provision of public services.*

5. **Section 3.5.3.E.** The application must comply with applicable requirements in the Applications Manual.

*The application complies with all applicable requirements of the Applications Manual.*

# *Planning Commission Recommendation*



The Planning Commission made a recommendation to approve the Application as submitted at the June 23, 2021 meeting with clarification by Town Staff regarding the difference between the terms “sign face” and “sign area” as found in the definitions section\*.

*\*The proposed term “sign face” has been removed as it was similar to “sign area.”*

# *Town Council Action*



As granted by the powers and duties set forth in Section 2.2.6.C.4 of the UDO, the Town Council has the authority to take the following actions with respect to this application:

1. Approve the application as submitted;
2. Approve the application with amendments; or
3. Deny the application as submitted.



# Next Steps



| Steps to Adoption   | Date            | Complete |
|---|-----------------|----------|
| Step 1. Town Council Workshop                                   | March 9, 2021   | ✓        |
| Step 2. Planning Commission Public Hearing and Recommendation   | June 23, 2021   | ✓        |
| Step 3. Town Council – 1st Reading                              | July 13, 2021   | ✓        |
| Step 4. Town Council Meeting – Final Reading and Public Hearing | August 10, 2021 | ✓        |

# *Proposed Recommended Motion*



*“I move to approve amendments to the Town of Bluffton Code of Ordinances Chapter 23 – Unified Development Ordinance, Article 3 – Application Process, Sec. 3.19 (Site Feature-Historic District) and Sec. 3.21 (Sign Permits); Article 5 – Design Standards, Sec. 5.13, (Signs) and 5.15.6.Q., (Old Town Bluffton Historic District, Architectural Standards, Sign Guidelines); and Article 9 – Definitions and Interpretation, Sec. 9.2 (Defined Terms)”*



# *QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION*