



MEMORANDUM

TO: Deschutes County Board of Commissioners

FROM: Tanya Saltzman, Senior Planner
Will Groves, Planning Manager

DATE: September 10, 2025

SUBJECT: Consideration of First Reading: Dark Skies Text Amendments

On September 10, 2025, staff will present Ordinance No. 2025-018 to the Board of County Commissioners (Board) for consideration of first reading. The Board conducted a public hearing on August 27, 2025 to consider text amendments to update Deschutes County Code (DCC) Chapter 15.10, Outdoor Lighting Control (File no. 247-25-000377-TA).

Staff submitted a 35-day Post-Acknowledgement Plan Amendment (PAPA) notice to the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) on June 5, 2025. Staff presented the proposed amendments to the Planning Commission on June 26, 2025.¹ An initial public hearing was held before the Commission on July 10, 2025.² At that time, the oral portion of the public hearing was closed and the written record was held open until July 16, 2025. The Commission held deliberations on July 24, 2025³, issuing a recommendation for approval to the Board with several refinements, and requesting staff to relay the main topics of the Planning Commission discussion to the Board. At the conclusion of the August 27 public hearing before the Board, the Board closed the hearing and the written record, and deliberated immediately. The ordinance provided here reflects the decisions made during those deliberations.

All record materials can be found on the project website:
<https://bit.ly/DeschutesDarkSkies>

¹ <https://www.deschutes.org/bc-pc/page/planning-commission-68>

² <https://www.deschutes.org/bc-pc/page/planning-commission-70>

³ <https://www.deschutes.org/bc-pc/page/planning-commission-71>

I. AMENDMENT SUMMARY

The proposed streamlined code takes the challenges of enforcement and implementation into consideration, while addressing concerns that have been raised by experts and the public over the last several years.

- **Definitions:** Definitions, which previously utilized a separate section for each term, have been consolidated into a single section, and superfluous or outdated definitions (for instance, those defining certain types of light fixtures that are no longer referred to in the chapter) have been removed. New definitions have been provided for several terms, most notably “downcast,” “light trespass,” and “string lights.”
- **Purpose statement:** This statement has been revised utilizing previous input from a DarkSky representative to reflect the need for lighting practices that are both safe and responsible, recognizing the County’s night sky as an economic and community natural resource.
- **Guiding principles:** These principles, based on those from DarkSky International, have been added and are not intended to be mandatory. However, recognizing the limitations of enforcement, guiding principles can provide applicants with best practices for responsible lighting concepts. The City of Sisters utilizes a similar technique in its recently revised lighting ordinance.
- **Primary requirements:** DCC 15.10.050 presents three requirements applicable to all non-exempt outdoor light fixtures: lights must be downcast, fully shielded, and light trespass is prohibited. The proposed amendments remove distinctions between—and tables referring to—different types of bulbs/fixtures and wattage in favor of a simplified approach that is easier to implement and enforce. During the panel discussions, this simplification was acknowledged as a potentially effective strategy that recognizes the limitations of implementation and enforcement and that is easy to understand.
- **Prohibitions (formerly DCC 15.10.150) and externally lighted advertising signs (formerly DCC 15.10.160):** Both of these sections were deleted, with some language moved to DCC 15.10.060, Exemptions. Both contained redundant references to lighting that must conform to the shielding requirements that apply to all non-exempt fixtures (for instance, top mounted fixtures for advertising signs). Provisions for searchlights, recreational facilities, and bottom mounted advertising lighting were moved to DCC 15.10.060 Exemptions, which more accurately captures the criteria for these types of light fixtures.
- **Exemptions:** The proposed amendments clarify some existing exemptions and add others (see above). The amendments remove several exemptions that would now be subject to the requirements of DCC 15.10.050, including correctional institutions, historical areas, and motion detector lights. The amendments add exemptions for string lights, publicly owned lighting including streetlights, and searchlights.

Changes Since Hearing and Deliberations

During deliberations, the Board directed staff to finalize the amendment package to include the following change:

- **Exemptions for holiday lighting (DCC 15.10.060(C)):** Based on discussion during deliberations, this provision was modified slightly to better reflect current practices and accommodate lighting schedules that relate to the Thanksgiving holiday (previous requirement was from December 1 – January 15).

Revised language: “Seasonal holiday lighting from the day after Thanksgiving to January 15 is exempt. Other event-specific lighting for no more than fourteen cumulative days in a single calendar year also is exempt. “Event-specific lighting” means lighting other than seasonal holiday lighting, illuminated for a period not to exceed fourteen cumulative days in a calendar year, associated with a holiday or other special occasion.”

II. NEXT STEPS

Staff will return on Wednesday, September 24 for consideration of second reading of Ordinance No. 2025-018, which would then become effective 90 days after second reading.

Attachments:

1. Ordinance No. 2025-018 and Corresponding Exhibits