



STAFF REPORT

August 22, 2023

PL23-0061 – Comprehensive Sign Ordinance Update

PROJECT NUMBER / NAME: PL23-0061 – Comprehensive Sign Ordinance Update.

REQUEST: Status report on Sign Ordinance update based on feedback received from the Planning Commission subcommittee, and the City Council Economic Development Subcommittee.

PROPERTY SIZE AND LOCATION: Citywide

APPLICANT: Development Services Department

GENERAL PLAN / ZONING: N/A

PRIMARY REPRESENTATIVE: Ivan Flores, AICP
Associate Planner

DISCRETIONARY ACTIONS REQUESTED: N/A

PREVIOUS ACTIONS: On May 23, 2023, the Planning Commission formed a subcommittee to discuss the Sign Ordinance Update

CEQA RECOMMENDATION: Not a project under CEQA, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15378 (b)(5)

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: None.

REQUESTED ACTION: None.

CITY COUNCIL HEARING REQUIRED: YES NO

REPORT APPROVALS: Andrew Firestine, Director of Development Services

Adam Finestone, City Planner



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BACKGROUND

The 2022/2023 Planning Commission Work Plan identifies a range of policies to be considered through its two-year horizon, and includes a comprehensive update to Article 66 (Sign Ordinance) of the Escondido Zoning Code.

SUMMARY OF REQUEST

At this time, Planning staff is providing an update on the feedback received from the Planning Commission subcommittee and the City Council Economic Development Subcommittee.

SUPPLEMENTAL DETAILS OF REQUEST

In June, Planning staff met with the Planning Commission subcommittee comprised of Chair Paul, Vice Chair Barba, and Commissioner Barber. The attached memo was provided to the subcommittee prior to the meeting (see Attachment 1).

On August 7, Planning staff presented to the City Council Economic Development Subcommittee. A summary of both meetings is provided below.

Planning Commission Subcommittee Feedback

The subcommittee was generally supportive of the effort and the direction of the sign ordinance update. The main discussion points can be broken down as follows:

Definitions: The subcommittee discussed the inclusion of new definitions to reflect changing technologies and nomenclature related to signs. Additionally, the subcommittee identified redundant terms that may be deleted from the sign ordinance.

Signs for businesses no longer in service: There was a robust discussion on signs for businesses no longer in service. Staff conveyed to the subcommittee that this was an enforcement issue, but will research other cities policies to see if there is an appropriate tool or process for the removal of such signs.

Sign Design Guidelines: The City of Escondido has sign design guidelines that were adopted by resolution separately from the Sign Ordinance. The subcommittee supports the incorporation of sign design guidelines into the sign ordinance. Staff will review surrounding cities to understand the implication of incorporating the sign design guidelines into the ordinance itself.

Signs within the public right of way: The subcommittee had general concerns regarding the placement of signs within the public right of way, specifically signs related to realtors. The current sign ordinance has regulations for real estate signs; however, these signs do not require a sign permit. Staff does not anticipate requiring a permit for these signs, but will explore additional standards regarding placement within the City.

Comprehensive Sign Programs: A significant change that staff is exploring as a part of the comprehensive update is the allowance for deviation from sign ordinance standards through a Comprehensive Sign Program (CSP). Currently, CSPs reiterate provisions of the sign ordinance and only regulate color, type of sign, and consistency among signs within a center. The only processes for deviating from the sign ordinance are the adoption of a Specific Plan or Master Plan; however, the adoption of these plans for the sole purpose of signage is overly burdensome. Allowance



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for deviation from sign ordinance standards through a CSP is currently allowed in some nearby cities (notably Carlsbad and Vista). The subcommittee was supportive of this effort, and staff will evaluate the implications of incorporating this into the sign ordinance update.

City Council Economic Development Subcommittee

Staff provided a brief presentation the City Council Economic Development Subcommittee (comprised of Mayor White and Deputy Mayor Garcia). The conversation focused on the following items:

Digital Media Signage: Staff is exploring the allowance of digital media signage within certain properties in the City. The subcommittee is supportive of this type of signage within the City, and the potential inclusion of public service announcements as a condition of their approval. Staff will continue researching the appropriate application process and design parameters for this type of sign.

“For Lease” Signage: The subcommittee had a brief discussion regarding “For Lease” signs, particularly for tenant spaces that were no longer vacant. This concern is similar to the concerns the Planning Commission subcommittee had relative to signs for business no longer in service. Staff will evaluate current enforcement language within the sign ordinance and explore potential solutions to this through the code compliance process.

Methodology for calculating sign area: Planning staff is also evaluating the calculation used to determine allowable sign area (that is the amount of signage a business is allowed). Escondido is an outlier in this respect as most nearby cities calculate allowable sign area based on building and/or lot frontage while Escondido uses building square footage. The current method is disadvantageous for smaller tenants or end cap tenants within shopping centers. The subcommittee was generally supportive of an alternative method to allow more signage for businesses within the City.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

The primary purpose of this agenda item is to provide an update to the Planning Commission on the feedback received from the Planning Commission subcommittee and the City Council Economic Development Subcommittee. The content of this agenda report is provided for informational purposes only, and is “not a project” under the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”), pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15378(b)(5), which excludes from the definition of “project” “organizational or administrative activities of governments that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.”

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Planning staff will continue working through the sign ordinance update through the course of the year. Staff anticipates having the ordinance to the Planning Commission for a recommendation to City Council in late Winter.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Planning Commission Subcommittee Memo