

PLANNING COMMISSION

TO: Planning Commission Subcommittee

FROM: Ivan Flores, AICP, Associate Planner

SUBJECT: Sign Ordinance Update Purpose and Goals

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a brief background to the Planning Commission subcommittee on why the Planning Division is undertaking an update to the Sign Ordinance (Article 66), and proposed modifications to the sign ordinance. This memo will also outline the role of the Planning Commission in this process, and the purpose of this subcommittee.

Scope of Work

The proposed project entails the repeal and replacement of Article 66 (“Sign Ordinance”), which will create new regulations for signage within the City of Escondido. In addition to new regulations, the new ordinance will consolidate, simplify, and clarify existing regulations that will remain as a part of the update. The new regulations include, but are not limited to: increased sign area allowance, inclusion of new types of signage within the City, provisions to allow for deviations from the sign ordinance, operational standards, and signage for temporary uses.

Background

The Sign Ordinance (“Ordinance”) was first adopted by City Council on November 4, 1992 (Ordinance No. 92-47 – see attached document). Additionally, the City Council adopted sign design guidelines (Resolution N. 92-441) to further regulate sign design. The Ordinance has been revised over the last two decades with the most recent update earlier this year (Ord. No. 2023-07); however, this effort represents the first comprehensive update to the Ordinance as the foundation of the Ordinance has remained largely intact including minimum allowable sign area square-footage, calculation method for determining allowable sign area, and general structure.

Planning Commission and Subcommittee Role

The Sign Ordinance exist to regulate signage within the City of Escondido on private property. It is the intent of the sign ordinance to preserve and enhance the aesthetic values of the community while respecting the rights of business owners to publicize their business. The Planning Commission acts as an advisory body to the Council on the adoption of the final ordinance. The Planning Commission has jurisdiction over the following types of sign permits:

- o Reviews Regional Market Signs with recommendation to City Council
- o Electronic changeable copy signs – design review

- o Appeals of the Director's decision on signage
- o Director may refer sign permits to the Planning Commission
- o Zoning Administrator approves comprehensive sign program

Overview of Proposed Changes

The following section will provide a brief overview of the changes that are being considered under the update.

(Section 33-1390 – Purpose and Applicability): The purpose and applicability section outline the purpose of the sign ordinance, and a general statement as to its applicability to signs. **Staff does not anticipate any changes to this section.**

(Section 33-1391 – Definitions): This section outlines the definition for terms used throughout the sign ordinance. **Staff does anticipate changes to this section to be made to remove, clarify, and add new terms.**

(Section 33-1392 – Permit Administration): This section outlines the process for obtaining a sign permit and required material (e.g., site plan, photos, etc.). **Staff does anticipate modifications to the section. Most notably, streamlining the sign permit process by combining it with the building permit process. This section also discusses the Comprehensive Sign Program which may have its own section.**

(Section 33-1393 – Exempt and Prohibited Signs): This section outlines the types of signs that are not required to obtain a sign permit, and signs that are not allowed within the City. **Staff does not anticipate any changes to this section.**

(Section 33-1394 – Construction and Maintenance of Signs): This section outlines the general construction and maintenance standards for signs. **Staff does anticipate changes to this section to include lighting standards.**

(Section 33-1395 – Sign Standards – General): This section outlines regulations for freestanding signs. **Staff does anticipate removing this section to cover another topic, or removing it entirely.**

(Section 33-1395.1 through Section 33-1395.12 – Sign Standards for Type of Sign and Zone): These sections comprise the bulk of the sign regulations pertaining to the types of signs that are allowed within the City. **Staff does anticipate substantive changes to these section; most notably, staff intends to consolidate these sections.**

(Section 33-1396 – General Use Signs): This section covers temporary signage within the City, in addition to regulations for specific types of uses including on-site subdivision signs, real estate kiosk signs, and sign regulations for nonresidential uses in residential zones. **Staff does anticipate changes to this section. Those changes include adding a separate section for temporary signage, and combining sections with other proposed sections as appropriate.**

(Section 33-1397 – Temporary Signage on Private Property): This section discusses temporary signage on private property that is not commercially related to the use on site including but not limited to signs for political expression. **Staff does anticipate changes to this section.**

(Section 33-1398 – Enforcement and Penalties): This section outlines the penalties associated with not obtaining a sign permit. **Staff does not anticipate any changes to this section.**

(Section 33-1399 – Nonconforming Signs): This section discusses nonconforming signs (legally permitted signs that are out of compliance due to code changes) and the process by which a sign may lose its nonconforming status. **Staff does not anticipate any changes to this section.**

Other Items for Consideration

In addition to the clean up existing sections, staff is also exploring several other items through the sign ordinance update. Those items are as follows:

New Types of Signage/Processed Allowed

1. Allowing Digital Media Signs
2. Allowing Roof Signs
3. Allowing for A-Frame/Sandwich board signs which are currently only allowed in the Downtown Specific Plan.
4. Allowing deviation from the sign ordinance regulations via the Comprehensive Sign Programs.

Sign Design Guidelines

Potentially rescinding them or incorporating them into the sign ordinance. They would have their own section. A similar example would be City of Carlsbad and has been highlighted in their ordinance.

Allowable Sign Area/Methodology

Establishing a minimum or maximum allowable sign area. The Ordinance currently allows for 15 sq. ft. regardless of building size. On that note, another item to be considered is how we calculate the allowable sign area which is currently 1 sq. ft. of sign area for 50 sq. ft. of building area. An example of this is a tenant with a 950 sq. ft. building and who is allowed 19 sq. ft.; the tenant may allocate that 19 sq. ft. to as many signs as they like as long as they don't exceed the maximum. The attached documents from the comparison cities outline their methodology for calculating allowable sign area.

Conclusion

This memo is intended to provide the subcommittee with the background and information needed to make recommendations to staff on the proposed update.