



The Lowcountry's Hometown

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STAFF REPORT

TO: Town Council – 1st Reading
FROM: Justin Westbrook, Community Development Director
SUBJECT: Text Amendment (TA-23-01) – Sign Ordinance
DATE: August 15, 2023

Background: After an initial review of Article 13 of the Zoning Ordinance, and speaking with several local businesses, Staff has identified a community need to allow commercial “Multi-face Signs” for parcels zoned within the **C-1 – Office & Institutional District**.

Existing Ordinance: The existing Article 13 of the Zoning Ordinance sets forth the general provisions, definitions, zoning prerequisites, sign regulations and variance procedures for signs within the Town. Currently, “Multi-face Signs” are not permitted within the **C-1** zoning district. They are permitted within the **C-2** zoning district, as this district is intended to be a general, wide ranging district for commercial development, while the **C-1** district is specifically designed for light commercial uses such as offices and professional services. The Zoning Ordinance defines the C-1 zoning district as intended to:

“...accommodate a variety of general light commercial uses characterized primarily by professional office and service establishments, as well as boutique retail and restaurants, and oriented primarily to major traffic arteries or extensive areas of predominately commercial usage and characteristics.”

A “Multi-face Sign” is a sign geared toward shopping centers and strip malls. As those generally are not permitted within the **C-1** zoning district, there most likely was the approach this sign type was not needed in the **C-1** as the typical developments of such a sign were prohibited in this zoning district. The sign ordinance defines this sign type as a:

“free standing sign advertising more than four businesses located within the same development.”

These sign types are permitted within the **C-2**, **PDC**, and **M-1** zoning districts with a permit. In review of such a permit, Staff will check for compliance with regulations such as height, area, number, location, potential electronic changeable copy, and illumination. Currently, those standards are:

- **Height:** 20-feet
- **Area:** 150 ft² / exposed side (300 ft² aggregate)
- **Number & Location:** 1 / entrance (max. of 2), 200-feet apart

- **Electronic Changeable Copy:** <50% of allowable area
- **Illumination:** Internal or External

These standards represent some of our most complimentary sign standards. However, as this sign type is predominantly located within the **C-2** zoning district, and this district is predominantly located along the Town's major and minor throughfares, the size and scope of the sign type is appropriate along these busy corridors.

In contrast, **C-1** zoning is located along secondary roadways and limited corridors, where a sign type and associated use type, would be out of place. By separating these use types by zoning, the Town can help blend the fabric of the community by having transitional effects from highway-centric commercial to medium and low-density residential; a role **C-1** fits into nicely.

Proposed Ordinance: In speaking with several affected businesses, Staff has realized that a professional office park development, typically zoned **C-1** does not get the benefit of a "Multi-face Sign" to help identify the several businesses located within the development. While a professional office park does not have similar impacts to a commercial shopping center imposes, they are designed similar, in the aspect that multiple businesses locate in a planned, coordinated, and symbiotic way. This leads Staff to believe a development sign for multiple businesses may help provide the appropriate and compatible identification for a less intense, but similar development.

However, Staff is aware that there is difference between a professional office park and a shopping center, and that a "Multi-face Sign" in one in the latter would not be appropriate in the former development. Therefore, Staff has designed a middle ground, allowing "Multi-face Signs" within the **C-1** district, but to a lesser degree than those allowed within the **C-2** district.

Those standards are proposed as:

- **Height:** 10-feet
- **Area:** 100 ft² / exposed side (100 ft² aggregate)
- **Number & Location:** 1 / entrance (max. of 2), 200-feet apart
- **Electronic Changeable Copy:** Not Allowed
- **Illumination:** External Only

Staff believes that allowing this sign type in a **C-1** district will benefit a burdened development type, while curtailing it in size and scope. In Staff's research, we only found one development this would benefit that is currently zoned **C-1**. In research of other municipalities, we found those jurisdictions also had "Multi-face Sign" regulations that were permitted for professional office parks, that are reduced from the standards for the same sign type in a more general commercial district. Staff looked to achieve the same with our current proposal.

Consistency with Plans: The Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2017, lays out various goals and policies to help in decision making for land use requests. Staff believes the applicant and request generally follow the following policies listed in the plan.

- **Land Use Policy 3:** The Town will promote development that is appropriate and compatible with neighboring uses.

Procedural Issues: As part of any Text Amendment, the request may be initiated by a motion of the Planning Commission, motion of the City Council or by the Zoning Administrator. In this case, the requested Text Amendment was initiated by the Zoning Administrator after several discussion and research regarding the text to be amended and the impacts the change would cause on existing and future parcels, as well as the neighborhood and immediate community around these parcels.

Staff Analysis: Staff believes this proposed Text Amendment will allow a district the benefit of identification without the size and scope of similar sign types placed along major corridors. We believe that this helps create a middle pathway for potential professional office parks, which will help existing businesses in the community identify their location, while allowing future professional office parks the flexibility to help self-identify in a respectful and harmonious way to the transitional district that is **C-1**.

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends approval of the requested Text Amendment, to allow “Multi-face Signs” within the **C-1** zoning district with standards that are appropriate with the surrounding zoning district and adjacent impacted properties.

Planning Commission Recommendation: At their July 25th meeting, the Planning Commission heard the request, where they voted 5-0 in favor of recommending the request.

Attachments: DRAFT – Sign Ordinance (20230717)