



STAFF REPORT

Meeting Type: City Council
Meeting Date: February 17, 2026
From: Kelly O'Neill Jr., Development Services Director
Josh Soper, City Attorney
Subject: Sign Code Modifications Work Session

DECISION TO BE MADE:

Hold a work session to discuss the proposed sign code modifications to Chapter 15.32 of the Sandy Municipal Code. Staff recommend the City Council review the proposed code modifications and provide direction prior to holding a public hearing for Ordinance No. 2026-02.

APPLICABLE COUNCIL GOAL:

6.10: Continue to improve and refine code language, policies, and practices related to code enforcement.

BACKGROUND / CONTEXT:

The City of Sandy sign code regulations were last revised in 2011. When leadership changes occurred at the beginning of 2017 it was quickly identified that the sign code had overly bureaucratic processes and constitutional violations. The City Manager in 2017, Yamashita, instructed the Development Services Director to start working on modifications to Chapter 15.32. Staff and attorneys started review in 2017, but code amendments were shelved by City Manager Wheeler due to the pandemic and other projects with a higher priority.

The Planning Commission held a work session on April 22, 2024, and provided staff with some recommendations which have been incorporated into the draft code in Exhibit A.

Staff met with the Planning Commission on January 13, 2025, to discuss goals for this biennium. One of the goals identified was to update the sign code. The Development Services Director listed updating the sign code as a department goal in several biennium retreat documents.

Staff's goals with these proposed amendments include ensuring compliance with constitutional requirements (e.g. first amendment issues), making code enforcement processes clearer, removing burdensome code provisions, and modifying the code for easier comprehension and implementation. Staff worked with attorneys at Beery, Elsner, and Hammond (BEH) to identify potential constitutional issues and modify the code based on past court decisions.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS / ANALYSIS:

In order to make the code easier to comprehend, to make enforcement clearer, and to remove burdensome code provisions, staff has proposed some policy changes to Chapter 15.32. The primary policy changes that were made by staff that the City Council has the most discretion on are the following:

- Section 15.32.020.D.3.: Staff propose the maximum height of a freestanding sign in the C-3 zoning district increase from 8 feet to 10 feet.
- Section 15.32.020.D.7.b.: Staff propose the frame on a rectangular shaped sign in all commercial and industrial districts decrease from three inches wide to two inches wide.
- Section 15.32.020.E.: Staff propose that A-frame signs are reviewed by Planning Division staff instead of an A-Frame Sign Review Committee (Since March 2017, staff have approved A-frame signs and staff have not noticed many issues.)
- Section 15.32.020.F.: Staff propose allowing electronic messages to change every 10 seconds, instead of once per hour as currently written.
- Section 15.32.020.G.: Staff propose to allow signs to occupy two wall surfaces of a food cart. (There are currently no regulations.)
- Section 15.32.020.H.: Staff propose reducing what is considered a temporary sign from 180 days total in a calendar year to 120 days in a calendar year. This is also reflected in Section 15.32.032.A.5.
- Section 15.32.030.E.6.: Staff propose the maximum height of a freestanding sign for a commercial or institutional use within a residential zone increase from 5 feet to 6 feet.
- Section 15.32.035.: Staff and the City attorney propose listing a “community event” as an event which has been designated in writing as a community event by the City Manager based on meeting one or more of the following criteria:
 - The City has contributed funding to the event either directly or indirectly; or
 - The event:
 - Is expected to significantly promote tourism in the city of Sandy; and
 - Will help achieve one or more established City Council goals.
- Section 15.32.140: Staff propose increasing the deadline to file an appeal of a sign application decision from 10 calendar days to 12 calendar days to match the appeal filing deadline in Title 17 of the Municipal Code.
- Section 15.32.150.B.: Staff propose that sign variance requests are reviewed by the Director, and that appeals of the Director's decision are reviewed by the City Council.
- Section 15.32.170.A.: Staff and the City Attorney propose that temporary signs have to come into compliance within 10 days of notice by code enforcement, not 30 days.

- Section 15.32.190.: Staff propose that violations of Chapter 15.32 are a Class B infraction, instead of a \$100.00 fine.

The following information further outlines the primary proposed code modifications:

Section 15.32.015 Director – Staff proposes this new section to define the Development Services Director and the use of the word ‘Director’ throughout Chapter 15.32.

Section 15.32.020 Signs permitted only in commercial and industrial zones.

- A. Sign Lighting** – Staff moved code language associated with sign lighting from Section 15.32.070 to Section 15.32.020, so it is easier to find for the reader.
- B. Wall Signs** – Staff modified this section to make it clear on how to complete measurements and also removed unnecessary language. The proposed modifications also allow for each tenant to have a wall sign area without dividing their signage with other tenants. The existing language was overly burdensome as it required tenants in a multi-tenant building to calculate sign area for all existing wall signs.
- C. Projecting Signs** – Staff modified this section to make it clear to the reader how to calculate height, clearance, and projection distance. Staff also added a maximum height for a marquee sign based on the League of Oregon Cities Model Sign Code.
- D. Freestanding Signs** – Staff finds this was one of the most confusing and poorly written sections of the entire sign code. The existing code language has led to frustration from applicants and staff for many years. Staff combined freestanding signs and integrated business center signs (used to be Subsection E. of Section 15.32.020) into a more readable and understandable code section.
- E. A-frame Signs** – Staff finds this code section was overly restrictive and bureaucratic. Staff propose to remove the A-frame Sign Committee (this committee has not met since early 2017) requirements and allow staff to work directly with applicants. Since March 2017, staff have approved A-frame signs and staff have not noticed many issues. The proposal also includes expanding the permitted A-frame sign material.
- F. Electronic Message Signs** – Staff finds that allowing electronic message signs to change more often than every 1 hour is prudent. Staff propose that electronic message signs can change every 10 seconds.
- G. Food Cart Signs** – This is a new section that applies to food carts. This section only allows food cart signage on two sides of each cart. This proposed section prohibits roof signs, temporary signs, and signs that drape or project.
- H. Temporary Sign** – The most important changes to this section are in regard to duration requirements. The modified code language decreases the maximum time to 120 days per calendar year and addresses constitutional compliance by making the regulations “content-neutral” (i.e. no longer requiring reading the sign language to determine if an event has ended). The proposed code changes also provide more clarity on anchoring requirements and not obstructing sight clearances. Staff also moved search lights to this section as they are temporary signs.

Section 15.32.030 Permanent signs allowed in residential zones – The proposed modifications in this code section require additional design requirements for multifamily (i.e. apartment) signage, subdivision gateway signage, and commercial institutional uses within residential zones. Staff finds that the design requirements for multifamily signs, subdivision signs, and commercial and institutional uses within residential zones should be similar to signage in commercial and industrial zoning districts.

Section 15.32.032 Signs allowed in residential zones exempt from permits but subject to regulations. – The most important changes to this section are in regard to duration requirements. The modified code language decreases the maximum time to 120 days per calendar year.

Section 15.32.035 Temporary signs for community events. – The City Attorney's office and staff worked closely on modifying this code section to comply with constitutional requirements and to define criteria for what makes an event, a community event.

Section 15.32.040 Signs allowed in all zones exempt from permits but subject to regulation. – The proposed modifications add clarity that exempt signs shall not be located in the right-of-way. The modifications also add clarification on regulations for signs held by people.

Section 15.32.050 Signs permitted in all districts, exempt from permits.

B. The proposed modifications make flag regulations content-neutral.

Formally G. Staff have deleted this exemption as it is covered by E. (formally F) in this section.

Formally H. Staff have deleted this exemption as it is covered by D. (formally E) in this section.

Formally I. Staff and the City Attorney are recommending removing murals as an exemption in the sign code because of constitutional concerns relating to regulating the content of murals through the sign code. This change will have the effect of prohibiting murals in the City as that term is generally understood for the time being. If the City Council would like to allow additional murals in the City, the City could consider adopting a separate mural program similar to what has been done in other Oregon cities such as Bend, Milwaukie, or Sherwood.

Formally J. (now F.) The proposed modifications add clarity that window signage may not exceed 33 percent of a window, otherwise this violates Chapter 17.90 that states that windows are required to “contain clear glass to allow views to interior activity or display areas.”

Section 15.32.060 Nonconforming signs. – The modifications in this section remove unnecessary language, ensure constitutional compliance, and make it easier to understand for the reader. Most of the deletions in this code section were recommended by the City Attorney. Also, this section was modified to only apply to permanent signs, because staff do not believe it is necessary to provide 30 days to bring a temporary sign into compliance with the Municipal Code.

Section 15.32.070 General construction and maintenance requirements. – The modifications in this section remove unnecessary language and make it easier to understand for the reader. Staff also propose moving the lighted sign requirements from this section to Section 15.32.020.A.

Section 15.32.080 Prohibited signs. – The proposed modifications address constitutional and enforcement concerns relating to regulating the content of signs on benches by eliminating signs on benches altogether. The proposed changes also add clarity that roof signs are not allowed on food carts.

Section 15.32.110 Permit application. – Modified this section to be consistent with how staff currently processes sign permit applications and building permit applications related to signs.

Section 15.32.120 Permit approval. – The proposed modifications remove the requirement that the permit fee be doubled if a sign installation starts prior to obtaining a sign permit. Staff found this requirement unnecessarily punitive. This section has also been modified to remove redundancies that are in the Oregon Building Codes and enforced by the Building Division.

Section 15.32.140 Permit appeal. – The proposed modification to twelve (12) days for an appeal is consistent with the appeal period set forth in Title 17.

Section 15.32.150 Variances to standards. – Similar to A-frame sign review, staff finds this code section was overly bureaucratic. Staff propose to remove the references to Sign Review Committee (this committee has not met since 2017) and allow staff (i.e. the Director) to work directly with applicants on sign variance requests. The proposed code modifications include variance criteria. Appeals of the Director's decision will be reviewed by the City Council.

Section 15.32.170 Sign removal. – Staff proposes different compliance deadlines depending on if the sign is a permanent sign or a temporary sign.

Section 15.32.180 Periodic review. – Staff proposes removing this section as it's unnecessary.

Section 15.32.190 Violations. – The proposed modifications reference Chapter 1.18 of the Sandy Municipal Code.

Section 15.32.200 Limitation of liability. – Staff proposes to remove this section as the City Attorney states it is unnecessary to have in this code chapter due to limitations on liability associated with issuance of city permits generally.

Section 15.32.210 Definitions. – Staff worked with the attorney's office to define the terms that are actually necessary in this section. Also, staff proposes removing the examples of signs as it has caused confusion for the public looking at the code.

BUDGET IMPACT:

Staff and City Attorney expenses that have already been incurred.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommend the City Council review the proposed code modifications and provide direction prior to holding a public hearing. Since this chapter is outside Title 17 of the Sandy Municipal Code, the Planning Commission did not hold a public hearing.

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS / EXHIBITS:

Draft Ordinance No. 2026-02

- Exhibit A. Sign Code markup