

## STAFF REPORT

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**Date:** December 4, 2024

**To:** Mayor and City Council

**Through:** Jackie Bryant, Interim City Manager

**Subject:** Staff Report (For Possible Action): Presentation, discussion, and potential feedback related to Case No. TXT23-00002 (Title 18 Sign Code); including an initial review of Reno Municipal Code Title 18 Annexation and Land Development Chapter 18.02 (Zoning Districts), Chapter 18.05 (Signs), and Chapter 18.09 (Rules of Construction and Definitions); together with matters which pertain to or are necessarily connected therewith.

**From:** Angela Fuss, Assistant Director of Development Services

**Department:** Development Services

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### **Summary:**

In June of 2022, City Council initiated several text amendments to the Title 18 Annexation and Land Development Code, including one to specifically address the sign standards. Draft amendments to the sign standards have been developed and reviewed through a technical advisory committee and through a series of stakeholder and public outreach meetings. This is an initial review by City Council for the purpose of gathering input and feedback prior to processing the final ordinance. This is only for feedback and is not intended to be a final review. The final draft ordinance will be reviewed through a full public hearing process in the early 2025 timeframe. The proposed changes are identified in redline excerpts from the Development Code document provided as **Attachment A –Sign Standards Draft Amendments** to this staff report.

### **Alignment with Strategic Plan:**

- Economic and Community Development
- Infrastructure, Climate Change, and Environmental Sustainability

### **Previous Council Action:**

June 8, 2022 – Council initiated a text amendment to update the zoning code to address the sign standards.

January 13, 2021 – Council adopted Ordinance #6587 – Title 18 Annexation and Land Development Code of the City of Reno.

**Background:**

Council adopted a new Title 18 Annexation and Land Development Code (i.e. Zoning Code RENOVation) on January 13, 2021. The key objectives of the update were to implement the Master Plan, make the code more user-friendly, and establish a more predictable and transparent review process. Following adoption of this code, Council initiated a separate text amendment to specifically address the sign standards. Initially, staff had assumed a full rewrite of the Sign Code would be necessary, due to the complexity of regulating signage, and has been working with a consultant to help guide the development of new regulations. However, after stakeholder meetings and input from the sign community in 2023, it was determined that a full rewrite was not necessary, but that key targeted areas did need to be modified, specifically tied to *Table 5-1, Sign Regulations by Zoning District*.

**Discussion:**

Staff initially worked with a consultant to review the current sign standards found in Title 18, assuming a full Sign Code rewrite. Through stakeholder meetings, it was determined that the sign standards in *Table 5-1* needed to be simplified. Additionally, there were a number of inconsistencies and implementation issues that needed to be addressed. During the month of September, staff hosted Technical Advisory Committee and public stakeholder meetings to garner feedback on proposed changes. Then in October, the information was presented to the Planning Commission. Following feedback from the Planning Commission, three more meetings were held in November to target feedback from the downtown business community.

Proposed redline changes found in **Attachment A –Sign Standards Draft Amendments** are generally summarized below:

**Overall Changes:**

- There were a variety of inconsistencies, formatting issues, and unclear language that needed to be addressed to better implement code. Also, district naming (Urban District and Employment District) was made consistent with the larger Code Clean-up.
- Requirements for a Conditional Use Permit were changed to a Major Site Plan Review, as this entitlement type is more applicable to signage. The usage of a Major Site Plan Review is also intended to help ensure that site specific characteristics relating to the sign, such as height, size, and illumination are reviewed for impacts to neighboring developments, which attempts to better ensure content neutrality in the signage review. The Major Site Plan Review process still requires public noticing, a public hearing, and review by the Planning Commission in the same manner as a Conditional Use Permit. In some instances, a Minor Site Plan Review requirements were amended to a Major Site Plan Review for consistency in signage review types.

- A content neutrality and substitution statement was included to address federal law relating to freedom of speech as it relates to signage.
- The definition of a “monument sign” was included, and definitions relating to “freestanding sign” and associated sign types were clarified.

#### Gaming Sign Standards:

- Prior to the Development Code rewrite in 2021, the Downtown Entertainment District was allowed very liberal sign standards. This included all parcels within the District and were not limited to just casinos. In the 2021 Development Code rewrite, the Gaming Overlay was created and established sign standards that allow what was previously allowed in the Downtown Entertainment District code but regulated throughout the full overlay area. The larger Gaming Overlay sign standards were applied to all parcels within the overlay, unintentionally allowing much more area than before. Amending the standards as proposed will align with the initial intent of allowing more liberal sign standards for the Downtown Entertainment District and for casinos. It should be noted that all parcels within the Downtown Entertainment District have been allowed the unlimited sign regulations since 2005. The draft redlines propose to maintain the signage within the Downtown Entertainment boundary and remove the unlimited signage from the broader Gaming Overlay, resulting in an overall reduction of unlimited signs.
- Legally established nonrestricted gaming operations are proposed to still maintain the same larger sign standard allowance as well, which is also currently allowed by code.

#### Sign Regulations by Zoning District Table

- The sign regulation Table was amended for overall clarity, as well as consistency in measurement types and standards. For example, many of the different districts had different items that were regulated as part of the standards, like letter height, copy area, sign length, linear frontage, etc. Many of these were removed, in favor of more consistent standards throughout each district.
- To further simplify the table, many of the footnotes were worked into the appropriate standards within the table. The sign regulation table currently has 13 footnotes and is proposed to be reduced to four footnotes.
- Regulations were simplified where there were multiple standards or ambiguity, such as different size allowances for arterial street adjacency, nearby roadway speed, or parcel size.
- Certain zoning district standards were made consistent if they were similar in terms of intensity, such as Neighborhood Commercial and Professional Office, or the Employment Districts (Industrial, Industrial Commercial, Mixed Employment and Mixed-Use Airport).

- The Mixed-Use Airport (MA), Parks, Greenways, and Open Space (PGOS), and Unincorporated Transition (UT-) districts did not have sign standards, which were added to the table.

#### Areas that Were Not Changed:

- No changes were made to off-premise sign (i.e. billboard) regulations.
- No changes were made to digital/animated sign regulations.
- No changes were made to digital/animated sign brightness levels (i.e. nits).

Feedback garnered through the technical advisory, public stakeholder meetings, and emailed correspondence indicate concern regarding the allowance of the large signage standards found in the Gaming Overlay. The Gaming Overlay encompasses an area of almost 2,000 acres. Staff is recommending that the unlimited signage be reduced from the Gaming Overlay boundary and revert to just the Downtown Entertainment core area, a boundary of approximately 136 acres that has had the unlimited signage allowance for the past 20 years. As noted, and discussed, staff is attempting to reduce the area that the larger signage is allowed and maintain what has been in the Sign Code for two decades. Additionally, some commenters indicated that the other standards as proposed were acceptable and offered minor amendments. Written public feedback received can be found at **Attachment B** to this staff report.

**Analysis:** This staff report provides a general overview of the proposed changes to the Sign Standards in Section 18.05 and the standards specific to the Gaming Overlay in Section 18.02 of the Development Code. Specific redlines with annotations explaining the changes in more detail are provided in **Attachment A – Sign Standards Draft Amendments**.

#### **Financial Implications:**

None at this time.

#### **Legal Implications:**

Legal review completed for compliance with City procedures and Nevada law.

#### **Recommendation:**

Staff recommends Council review the proposed changes and provide feedback.

#### **Proposed Motion:**

I move to direct staff to move forward with the text amendment based on feedback from Council.

**Attachments:**

Attachment A – Sign Standards Draft Amendments

Attachment B – Public Comment