

**PLANNING COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT**

Date: October 16, 2024

To: Reno City Planning Commission

Subject: Case No. TXT23-00002 (Title 18 Sign Code) – 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

Ward #: 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5

Case No.: TXT23-00002

Applicant: City of Reno

APN: N/A

Request: Review and provide input on the Sign Standards proposed amendments of the 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).

Location: City-wide

Proposed Motion: Staff recommends Planning Commission review the proposed changes and provide feedback.

Summary: In June of 2022, City Council initiated several text amendments to the Title 18 Annexation and Land Development Code, including one to 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. Review of the proposed changes by the Planning Commission is being requested, prior to review by the City Council. This initial round of meetings with the Planning Commission and City Council is for input and feedback only. The final draft ordinance will be reviewed in the 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.

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, staff has been undertaking a larger Code Clean-up, as well as several subject specific text amendments, at the direction of City Council.

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. After stakeholder meetings and input from the sign community in 2023, it was determined that a full rewrite was unnecessary; however, there are specific amendments and insertions needed, particularly 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. Staff has been hosting technical advisory committee and public stakeholder meetings to garner feedback on proposed changes.

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, Minor Site Plan Review requirements were amended to a Major Site Plan Review for consistency in signage review types.
- A statement of content neutrality and substitution 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 permitted in the Downtown Entertainment District code but implemented 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 (NC) and Professional Office (PO), or the Employment Districts (Industrial (I), Industrial Commercial (IC), Mixed Employment (ME) 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 committee, 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.

Staff is bringing this item forward to Planning Commission and City Council for input. Based on input received, it is anticipated that an ordinance will be drafted and move through the approval process in early 2025.

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**.

Recommendation: Staff recommends Planning Commission review the proposed changes and provide feedback.

Findings: *General Review Criteria:* The decision-making body shall review all development applications for compliance with the applicable general review criteria stated below.

- 1) Consistency with the Reno Master Plan: The proposed development shall be consistent with the Reno Master Plan. The decision-making authority:
 - a. Shall weigh competing plan goals, policies, and strategies; and
 - b. May approve and application that provides a public benefit even if the development is contrary to some of the foals, policies, or strategies in the Reno Master Plan.
- 2) Compliance with Title 18: The proposed development shall comply with all applicable standards in this Title, unless the standard is lawfully modified or varied. Compliance with these standards is applied at the level of detail required for the subject submittal.

- 3) Mitigates Traffic Impacts: The project mitigates traffic impacts based on applicable standards of the City of Reno and the Regional Transportation Commission.
- 4) Provides Safe Environment: The project provides a safe environment for pedestrians and people on bicycles.
- 5) Rational Phasing Plan. If the application involves phases, each phase of the proposed development contains all of the required streets, utilities, landscaping, open space, and other improvements that are required to serve or otherwise accompany the completed of the project, and shall not depend on subsequent phases for those improvements.

Amendments to Text of Title 18: Text amendments shall be in substantial conformance with the statement of purpose and intent for this Title, as set forth in Chapter 18.01 Article 2, *Purpose*, and the Master Plan:

The general purpose of this Title is to promote the public health, safety, and welfare by providing appropriate and reasonable controls for the development and use of lands in Reno, while also protecting the rights of property owners. This Title also is intended to:

- (a) Implement the policies, goals, and strategies adopted by the City of Reno, including those set forth in the Reno Master Plan and other adopted plans;
- (b) Promote, preserve, and protect environmental quality as a critical element in Reno's quality of life and encourage the wise use of natural resources;
- (c) Conserve and enhance the architecture, history, pedestrian-orientation, mixed-use, and urban character of Downtown Reno, and promote its role as regional government, civic, entertainment, and tourist center;
- (d) Promote economic development and the improvement of property, with priority given to adaptive reuse and redevelopment projects in Downtown Reno and urban mixed-use areas;
- (e) Conserve and enhance the character of Reno's established residential neighborhoods through mitigation of adverse factors, promotion of a balanced mix of housing types, and through appropriately scaled and planned infill development;
- (f) Encourage innovative, affordable, and quality residential development so that growing demand for housing may be met by greater variety in type, design, and layout of dwellings, and by conservation and more efficient use of open space ancillary to such dwellings;
- (g) Encourage quality, nonresidential development that preserves and protects the character of the community, including its natural landscape, and that minimizes objectionable noise, glare, odor, traffic, and other impacts of such development, especially when adjacent to residential uses;
- (h) Facilitate adequate provision of transportation, water, wastewater, electricity, gas, communications, schools, parks, trails, stormwater management, and other public requirements; and

- (i) Provide the economic and social advantages gained from a comprehensively planned use of land resources.

Attachments:

Attachment A –Sign Standards Draft Amendments

Attachment B – Written Public Feedback Received