



CITY SIGN ORDINANCE

Planning Commission November 12, 2025
Staff Report by Case Planner: Kurt Schmitt



Quick Facts

Impact

City-wide

Initiating Entity

City Planning Department

Applicable Code

UDC provisions affected by the ordinance include Section 7.3.2, Section 7.3.3, Section 7.4.13, Section 7.5.5, Section 7.6.2, and Section 7.6.3

Project Summary

The City of Colorado Springs' Sign Ordinance (refer to Attachment 1 – Chapter 7 Sign Ordinance Draft) is part of the City's efforts to update and modernize the local sign standards to reflect current technology, industry practices and federal requirements regarding content neutral sign regulations as well as the citywide strategic priorities of economic vitality and infrastructure to promote a thriving community. The City's Sign Ordinance proposes updates to the sign section of the Unified Development Code (UDC) and is an opportunity to update and align with industry standards and promote our economic vitality and business community.

The City's Planning Department initiated this Amendment to UDC Text application as part of an on-going effort to update and refine regulations established under the UDC.

File Number

CODE-25-0005

Application Type

Amendment to UDC Text

Decision Type

Legislative

Background

History

The City of Colorado Springs last updated its sign regulations in March of 2012. Prior to 2012, the sign ordinance was regulated by zone districts, whereas under the current regulations, the regulation of signs is based on the “Use” of the property, such as Commercial, Industrial, Office, Civic, and Residential uses. Additional updates made in 2012 consisted of the implementation of Electronic Message Center (“EMC”) signs, digital displays with changing messages, which are limited to the Commercial use category. The Coordinated Sign Plan (“CSP”) application was added to facilitate flexibility for developments looking for signage allowances that varied from the codified dimensional standards for signs through creativity of sign design. Since the adoption of the current sign regulations in 2012, the industry has evolved resulting in advancements in sign technology and new sign products including lighting technology, materials and manufacturing processes and advancements in EMC display capabilities. Lastly, legal developments have clarified constitutional requirements for content neutrality and the focus of regulation for signs on time (time limits for signs being displayed), place (the location of where signage is permitted) and manner (material and category of sign) rather than message content (in which the sign is displayed).

The proposed Sign Ordinance is an extension of the broader UDC and is an opportunity to streamline the City’s sign regulations to better align with industry standards.

Applicable Code

The subject Amendment to UDC Text application was initiated by the City Planning Department after the implementation date of the City’s UDC (06/05/2023). All subsequent references within this report that are made to “the Code”, “UDC” and related sections are references to the Unified Development Code. Per UDC Section 7.5.702 Amendment to UDC Text, this section establishes standards and provides a mechanism for the City to review and decide on an application to amend the text of this UDC.

Project Timeline

Community/Stakeholder Engagement	October 29, 2025
City Planning Commission	November 12, 2025
City Council	Early 2026 (<i>tentative</i>)
Implementation	Spring 2026 (<i>tentative</i>)

Stakeholder Involvement

Public Engagement

The City held informational meetings for both industry stakeholders and public at the Regional Development Center (RDC) on October 29, 2025. From both interest groups, comments and questions were raised regarding standards for electronic message center signs, short term sign, the anticipated adoption and implementation process, and whether informational or policy guidance would be released prior to implementation. City Planning staff shared information to clarify all comments raised and do not anticipate edits or revisions at this time. .

Agency Coordination

In preparing the proposed Sign Ordinance, City Planning staff coordinated with our respective agency partners as well as industry stakeholders.

Summary of Application

The proposed Amendment to UDC Text consists of a proposed Sign Ordinance (refer to Attachment 1 – Chapter 7 Sign Ordinance Draft) reflects the City's commitment to maintaining a balance between effective communication, public safety, community aesthetics, and economic vitality. Updates align with changes in technology, design practices and materials such as advancements in digital programmable displays, new construction methods and lighting efficiency. This update also aligns the City's regulations with current federal and state legal standards, including compliance with content neutral sign regulations established through court decisions. Beyond legal and technological considerations, the proposed Sign Ordinance aims to improve public safety through better review and permitting processes including sections added for application submission, permit review criteria and pre and post decision limitations. Importantly, the proposed Sign Ordinance recognizes the vital role signage plays in supporting local businesses. Well-designed and appropriately regulated signs contribute to effective wayfinding, strengthen business visibility, and foster a vibrant commercial environment. As such the ordinance proposes updates as an extension of the broader UDC adopted implemented in 2023 and is an opportunity to update various sections of the sign section of the UDC and an opportunity to modernize and be compliant with current sign industry standards.

A companion measure of the proposed Sign Ordinance include incidental revisions to provisions of City Code Chapter 3 (refer to Attachment 1 – Chapter 3 Draft Revocable Permits Signs Ordinance). The change proposed under this concurrently considered ordinance modifies language under the Revocable Permit provisions of City Code Sections 3.2.2.

Ordinance Changes

The proposed Sign Ordinance is a reformat and reorganization of the previously adopted Sign Ordinance in 2012. This reflects conformity with the current UDC and adds more continuity to the layout and review process for the regulations of signs. In preparing for this update, staff conducted a robust comparison of cities and communities relatively equal in size to Colorado Springs and proposes updates to various sections to current sign requirements as well as revisions to meet the content neutrality mandates for signage regulation. In conjunction with the repeal and replace of Part 12 (Signs) of Article 4 and Amend Article 6 (Definitions and Rules of Construction) of Chapter 7 (Unified Development Code), amendments to other section of the City Code was necessary which pertained to Temporary Uses (Section 7.3.305) and Nonconforming Site Features (Section 7.5.803) (refer to Attachment 2 – Chapter 7 Draft Temporary Use Signs Ordinance) and revocable section of City Code (refer to Attachment 3 – Chapter 3 Draft Revocable Permits Sign Ordinance)

Below are the five noteworthy, proposed updates to the Sign section of the UDC:

- Reformatting and Reorganization:
 - The layout of the ordinance has been reformatted and reorganized to coincide with the current flow of the UDC. Sections have been updated with new information and details have been refined to address the following:
 - Additional details in the review process for Sign Permits and CSPs have been added for better clarity relating to the requirements for application submittals such as:
 - More details on application submission, decision making body, permit review criteria, pre-decision and post decision limitations, and permit expiration
 - Updates to graphic diagrams and newly added images such as rules of measurement, sign classifications, building elevation details and property frontage references have been implemented for additional visual assistance.
 - Reorganization such as the rules of measurement and the definitions have been placed within their corresponding sections of the UDC.
- Coordinated Sign Plan Enhancement:
 - The CSP was developed as part of the 2012 Sign Ordinance adoption and was created to allow property owners or developers flexibility for signage and variation from the sign regulations. The CSP is used to review compliance against unique development approaches, site specific constraints or significant

features impacting signage and to allow variations from the sign code. The CSP review includes the design, color, size, height, lighting, location, quantity of signs and the construction type of all signs within the development. Proposed under this section in the updated ordinance includes criteria that expands to single use, single lot properties that have unique characteristics and allow flexibility for how the property calculations are figured based on orientation of the lot/property. De-aggregation of sign allocation for multiple access points for a property as well as increased sign height allocations for freestanding signs along major arterial right of way or higher classifications.

- Sign Classifications Updates:
 - The current Sign Ordinance is divided into multiple classifications of signs including Major, Minor and Temporary Signs. Each classification details the type of signs allowed and the “use” of the property determines the size, height and quantity of signs permitted. These uses are defined in the Sign Ordinance by the following: Commercial, Industrial, Office, Civic, Residential and Single Family Residential. These sections have been rerevised and updated to meet current standards and streamlined to reduce unnecessary verbiage. Changes to the individual classifications include:
 - Major Sign Types:
 - Combining Commercial and Industrial use classifications together and combining Office and Civic use classifications together for both wall and freestanding sign allocation.
 - Moving Awning/Canopy sign category from Minor Signs Type section to the Major Sign type section.
 - Additional wall sign allocation for the Residential use category as defined in the proposed Sign Ordinance.
 - Newly added graphic images detailing (awning/canopy signs, rooftop signs, projecting signs and visual details on calculating property frontages for freestanding signage)
 - Minor Sign Types:
 - Updates to “use” classifications under the Minor Sign Types to meet current UDC standard requirements as it related to type of use located within Table 7.4.13-D. Including, Commercial, Industrial, Office, Civic, Residential and Single Family Residential.
 - Removal and reclassification of sign types for efficiency and or to meet content neutrality standards. Sign categories removed from this sign type include:
 - Awning/Canopy Signs (moved to Major Sign Types)
 - Corporate and Decorative Flags (changed to “Flag”)
 - External use signs
 - Gas Island signs
 - Menu board signs
 - Yard/wall sign (this classification will now fall under Di Minimus signs)
 - Updates also include Federal compliance requirement standards that support the content neutral regulations for signs which means a sign may not be regulated based on the content or what the sign displays but only the time, place and manner of a sign.
 - Re-organization of the ‘*Additional Standards*’ section for Minor Sign Types
 - Temporary Sign Types:
 - Updates to “use” classifications under sign types to meet current standard requirements Similar to Minor Sign Types listed above
 - Removal and reclassification of sign types for efficiency and or to meet content neutrality standards. Sign categories removed from this sign type include:

- Construction, election and real estate signs (which will fall under “short term signs’ listed below)
 - Garage sale signs
 - Model home signs
 - Off Premise open house signs
 - Off Premise real estate signs
- Addition of new sign types to include short term signs and fence wraps/screens
- Reorganization of the *Additional Standards* section for Temporary Signs
- Electronic Message Center Sign updates:
 - The Sign Ordinance adopted in 2012, incorporated the addition of new technology and supported the use of Electronic Message Center Sign (“EMC”) components to be added to freestanding signs. These sign types have been limited only to the Commercial use classification and regulated with specific criteria. These criteria include requirements to the message hold times, transition types between messages, size of the EMC component (50% of the total size of freestanding sign permitted), the brightness requirements, as well as the prohibition of temporary signs on the property where the EMC components are located. These regulations are mandated through a required affidavit provided by the property owner at the time of permitting and are regularly inspected for compliance. Over the past thirteen (13) years the City has permitted 75 freestanding signs with EMC components equally approximate 5.5 per year. Over this time frame, interest by the business community for this type of technology has increased and the request to allow EMC signage has been widespread throughout the other use types identified in the UDC, such as schools, medical facilities, office complexes as well as churches. The proposed Sign Ordinance would allow for EMC signs to be expanded to include Industrial, Office and Civic uses but require conditions of approval and restrictions for these types of signs when they are adjacent to Single Family and Residential uses/zones.
 - These newly proposed EMC components will follow the current requirements that are in place which include a minimum of 10 second hold times for messages, a dissolve or fade method of transition between messages 1 second or less and brightness control levels not exceeding 500nits. Along with these current regulations, the following proposed additional criteria specific to the Office and Civic uses:
 - Setback requirements from adjacent Residential zones:
 - Signs shall be placed and oriented to maintain a separation distance of 200 feet measured from the adjacent property line to the nearest sign element, except when separated by a right-of-way with a roadway classification of collector or higher as defined in the City’s Engineering Criteria
 - Mandatory times of operation:
 - EMC’s will be prohibited to operate before 7am and after 10pm adjacent to a residential use
- Nonconforming, Abandoned, Nuisance signs and Sign Maintenance Requirements Updates:
 - Newly added and updated criteria detailing compliance requirements on signs that meet a non-conforming, abandoned or nuisance sign status.
 - Added sign maintenance criteria for our compliance requirements to support enforcement which includes:
 - Prohibiting any sign structure that is unsafe, is not maintained, is dilapidated, has a missing sign face, or otherwise constitutes a hazard to health or safety.
 - Sign owners or operators shall not allow any portion of any sign structure or face of the sign to become unsecured or otherwise unsafe as well as being free of broken or bent elements, exposed light bulbs, or electrical components.

- Building Officials or managers may order a sign to be repaired or removed if the sign is not maintained as described above.

The intent of the proposed revisions to the UDC related to signs is to promote an attractive built environment, successful commercial districts and a healthy local economy while working to incorporate new products, technology and marketing practices. The proposed revisions are also intended to highlight the positive contributions signs make in the community and ensure that new sign design standards and practices will allow businesses to function effectively and efficiently. The proposed Sign Ordinance updates are specific to private property/on-premise signage and will only affect tactile changes to other chapters of City Code to align with terminology. The proposed Sign Ordinance does not include the regulations for signage within the City Right of way. These regulations for the display of signage in the right of way will be addressed at a later update in the future.

Application Review Criteria

UCD Section 7.5.702: Amendments to UDC Text

An application for an Amendment to UDC Text shall be subject to the following criteria for approval:

1. *The Colorado Springs Comprehensive Plan and other plans adopted by City Council.*

The current Colorado Springs Comprehensive Plan (herein “PlanCOS”) provides extensive guidance surrounding the establishment of more permissive sign regulations and standards, which is supported under the proposed Sign Ordinance. PlanCOS further seeks out opportunities for citywide strategic priorities of economic vitality and infrastructure to promote a thriving community. The proposed Sign Ordinance promotes an attractive built environment while incorporating flexibility to adapt to the everchanging sign industry standards such as new products, technology, and marketing practices, yet ensures that the new sign design standards and practices function effectively and efficiently. Overall, the proposed Sign Ordinance is receptive to the established goals and values of PlanCOS, as well as the citywide strategic priorities of economic vitality and community activation.

2. *The current conditions and character of current structures and uses in each zone district. –*

The Sign Ordinance as proposed does not modify or impact existing structures in the zone districts. It does expand opportunities to commercial messaging and affects the landscaping moving forward along with improving the outward expression of the property use.

3. *The most desirable use of land in each zone district.*

Signs are regulated by the type of use of the property and not the established zone district. The proposed Sign Ordinance will have no effect on uses of land in established zone districts.

4. *The conservation of sensitive environmental features.*

The proposed Sign Ordinance continues to support City Planning staff’s ability to consider the protection of sensitive environmental features so that it remains unchanged. Given the regulatory approach of the proposed Sign Ordinance, staff remains able to discuss and implement reasonable restrictions on private property that mitigate impacts on sensitive environmental features.

5. *Promotion of responsible development and growth.*

Signs are an important part of our community and the goal is to continue to promote responsible growth by establishing clear, modern and flexible standards that enhance public safety, support business visibility and preserve community aesthetics. The Sign Ordinance encourages cohesive sign design that complements surrounding development as well as works on reducing visual clutter and strengthens wayfinding, thereby supporting economic vitality while maintaining the City’s overall character and visual integrity.

Statement of Compliance

CODE-25-0005

City Planning staff will further evaluate this Amendment to UDC Text application for the proposed Sign Ordinance as final decision-making progresses.