



Agenda Item #:	3
Project Title:	Discussions and Information Related to Future Amendments to MGO Chapter 31 - Sign Code Ordinance
Legistar File ID #:	81636
Members Present:	Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Rafeeq Asad, Christian Harper, Wendy von Below, Marsha Rummel, and Shane Bernau
Prepared By:	Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Summary

At its meeting of January 24, 2024, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** from Zoning Administrator Katie Bannon on future amendments related to MGO Chapter 31, Sign Code Ordinance.

The last comprehensive update was in 2009. The general idea is looking at reordering sections of the code but not starting from scratch. Some portions could be removed or consolidated but working with the base we have. This will not involve updates as far as Urban Design Districts, those will be separate, but staff will be working on the two projects together and making sure the sign code and UDDs work together. Efforts will be made to simplify and update, streamline the application, review and permitting processes to make it more easily understood for customers and staff, while continuing to allow signs that promote effective identification of establishments within the community, with signage that is appropriate. Staff will identify any outdated regulations, laws do need to be adaptable over time, and evaluate policies and procedures for Comprehensive Design Review (CDRs) to reduce the need for them. Staff has heard the Commission would like less involvement administering the sign code and less CDRs in general. It may make sense to create a process to allow administrative approvals with specific criteria to make these decisions without the Commission's approval. Any legal updates made would maintain our constitutionality. Considering aesthetics and best practices, preserving high standards for design, while making sure signage doesn't detract from our beautiful community. Considerations will be given to sustainability, reducing sign clutter, more human scaled signage moving towards a more urban transit-oriented environment, protecting and maintaining safety (vision triangle) and ensuring signs aren't confused with traffic control signs. An equity analysis will be performed, as well as a survey and discussion, online stakeholder survey in the spring, and community engagement.

The Commission had the following questions for staff and the development team:

- I would definitely suggest that we are involved. We as a Commission should have input, I don't know what that looks like. Can you explain what you mean by constitutionality?
 - (Staff, K. Bannon) Free speech, there are laws outside of the code we need to be aware of. We'll have the City Attorney's Office very engaged to make sure there's not a free speech issue.
- The equity analysis, can you talk more about that.
 - (Staff, K. Bannon) The City puts together an equity team with answers, discussion based on impacts. Who is impacted and how, what should we do as a result? It's a pretty intense process that involves a variety of staff both in Economic Development and other departments involved in equity within the City.
- I am maybe more familiar than others with those teams and the process. What would equity and signage, tell us more, I get the process but how do we think it could be, what are some examples that bubbled up for staff?

- (Staff, M. Tucker) The point is that we are really close to this and know probably too much, we're not at a 30,000 foot level of interacting with our sign code. We're reaching out to people as staff and outside the City that may have experience in engaging with the sign code. We have done a number of amendments over time and I can think of a number of people to participate in that process. We want to get people in that aren't necessarily us, that can look at those very probing question and provide us with some equity based direction as part of this update.
- (Secretary) A big part is looking at our process, is our process exclusionary, where and how can we correct that. Looking at the applications, fees, process.
- I love the idea of taking photos. We just had a conversation about billboards, is it part of the sign ordinance review?
 - (Staff, K. Bannon) It's part of the sign code, how we regulate advertising signs and would be part of this update.
- The cap and replace was supposedly our solution, that would be back on the table?
 - (Staff, K. Bannon) That was extended by Council recently, I don't know if there is a desire from the policy makers to change that. That is one of the few things in our sign code that was updated relatively recently.
- I was on UDC in 2009 when we last updated the sign ordinance, here we go again.
- With the administration of CDRs being more of a staff approval, are you thinking that the UDC would be more about Zoning Administrator appeals?
 - (Staff, K. Bannon) That is still up for debate. For the CDR "light," which would be truly administrative, but also maintaining some kind of CDR that remains discretionary, that comes to the Commission.
- Should be interesting to see how that is categorized. We talked about it before, there's a parallel working of the UDD requirements for signage and some of the specific signage requirements that we have that may be better handled in the sign ordinance. We have some very vague language in our districts, I hope we're able to work with you to maybe eliminate or clarify those. Things like "avoid" and "suggest," super-specific things like illumination levels, I don't know how we could police that. I'm glad the Commission is working on a cleaning up of our ordinance at the same time, we stand a better chance of preventing things from falling through the cracks. So, this is really good timing.
- With regard to CDRs, it seems like those are primarily consent items. If that's the case it would be a simple thing that if staff thinks the exception should be made, why are they even coming to us? Just seems like a meaningless exercise that could be handled administratively. Save the ones where it is going to be a fight. The ones where staff seems to be okay with exceptions and changes and tweaks, those shouldn't even come to us in the first place.
- I also have observed instances where staff has a concern and a recommendation one way or the other, a lot of times the Commission goes in the direction staff has provided when we do review them as an agenda item. I would back you up on that for sure.

Action

Since this was an **INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** no formal action was taken by the Commission.