City Council Item

April 13, 2026

Item	Ordinance XXX: Amending Chapters 1 and 20, Updating Sign Definitions and Regulations	
File No.		**Item No:** D.18
Agenda Section	**CONSENT AGENDA**	
Prepared By	Rachel Arsenault, Associate Planner	
Reviewed By		

SUGGESTED ACTION

"The Chanhassen City Council approves the ordinance as proposed to amend the sign code and associated definitions."

Motion Type	Simple Majority Vote of members present
Strategic Priority	Development & Redevelopment

SUMMARY

The sign code ordinance was brought to the Planning Commission for discussion and public hearing on March 3rd. Staff received feedback that prompted updates to the proposed ordinance, and they brought the updated proposal back to the Planning Commission on April 7th for continued discussion and a second public hearing.

The proposed sign code ordinance has been previously reviewed by City Council for feedback at two work sessions. Staff has been working on the sign code ordinance to ensure compliance with federal law, clarify language, create efficiencies, and update it to reflect the downtown design guidelines.

Conformance with federal law is achieved by updating definitions, removing unlawful regulations, and regulating based on construction rather than content. Staff has clarified language by removing outdated definitions and ensuring proper definitions for the code ordinance amendments. Staff is proposing to create efficiencies by removing temporary sign permits that, based on permit data, contain repetitive

requests. The proposed ordinance includes changes to implement the downtown design guidelines. Staff would like to clarify that the images shown within the definition portion of the ordinance are larger than what would be officially published and that the size shown in the attachments is due to software limitations.

BACKGROUND

The current sign ordinance can be found in Article 20-XXVI of the zoning code. The sign regulations were written in 1995, amended multiple times since, most recently in 2022. Updating the sign code was a part of the Planning Department work plan for 2025. City staff has mailed a public hearing notice to the official newspaper for this public hearing at the March 3 Planning Commission meeting and the April 7 Planning Commission meeting.

Updates to the proposed ordinance amendment based on planning commission and public hearing feedback include the following:

- Expanded the ability to utilize canopy signs and projecting signs to all commercial districts, not just the downtown zoning district.
- Added a definition for "window covering".
- Modified window sign regulations to allow 50% of the total number of a business' windows to be utilized for window signs, but each window sign may occupy no more than 30% of that individual window. Entry doors are exempt from the window count calculation and the window sign percentage.

DISCUSSION

The Planning Commission discussion during their meeting on April 7th centered on the following:

- Providing a definition for "window covering" in addition to "window sign".
- Expanding the option of awning and projecting signs to the neighborhood business, fringe business, office and institutional, highway business, and general business zoning districts in addition to the central business district.
- Refining window sign regulations. Previous versions of the ordinance proposed limiting window sign size to 6 square feet. The updated ordinance proposed that 50% of a business's windows could display window signs, with each sign occupying up to 30% of the window area. The Planning Commission recommended that each window sign may occupy up to 50% of the window area for windows with signage. The City Council ultimately recommended that the previous limit of 30% of the window area be brought forward for adoption.
- Lawful nonconforming status. The Planning Commission was split 4-1 on how lawful non-conforming signs should be treated under the ordinance, with the majority believing that when a sign is replaced in its entirety, it should be required to come into compliance with the ordinance in effect. Common maintenance would not require complete conformity.

Two members of the public attended and spoke during the public hearing. Public comment included the need for the sign ordinance to be mindful of business needs and the importance of signs to businesses. In particular, it was noted that the window coverings at liquor stores are prevalent. Staff noted that window signs do not currently require permits and that while the ordinance has regulations for window signs, it is common for window signs, especially those used at liquor stores, to not be in compliance with existing city code.

The city's code enforcement practice is to respond to complaints, and since no complaints have been made, city staff have not pursued window sign violations.

BUDGET

RECOMMENDATION

The Chanhassen Planning Commission recommended approval on a 4-1 vote of the proposed sign ordinance amendment.

ATTACHMENTS

Sign Code Ordinance
Public Comment
Summary Ordinance Amendment