



City Council Memorandum

City of Arts & Innovation

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL DATE: JULY 15, 2025

FROM: COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WARDS: ALL
DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: ADOPT ORDINANCE - PLANNING CASE PR-2025-001768: ZONING CODE
TEXT AMENDMENTS TO GENERAL SIGN PROVISIONS

ISSUE:

Adopt ordinance to amend Title 19 (Zoning) of the Riverside Municipal Code related to sign code regulations.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council adopt an Ordinance amending Title 19 (Zoning) of the Riverside Municipal Code.

INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCE:

On June 24, 2025, the City Council approved Planning Case PR-2025-001768 (Zoning Text Amendment) related to sign code regulations to amend Title 19 of the Riverside Municipal Code including but not limited to Articles VII (Site Planning and General Development Provisions), IV (Land Use Development Permit Requirements/Procedures), and X (Definitions). The City Council approved staff recommendations with addition of a provision to window frosting as an acceptable treatment to Transparency Standards. The motion carried with Councilmember Conder voting no.

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

On May 8, 2025 staff presented the package of Zoning Code amendments to the Planning Commission where it was unanimously recommended for City Council approval.

BACKGROUND

On September 9, 2024, staff conducted a workshop with the City Council Land Use Committee to examine the current sign code and any opportunities for streamlining, improvements, or general feedback (Exhibit 2). The Committee expressed interest in revisiting and refreshing the sign code and exploring ways to incorporate some of the recommendations in the Citywide Sign Design Guidelines into codified requirements. Staff was directed to return to the Committee to discuss potential amendments.

On December 9, 2024, staff returned to the City Council Land Use Committee with a cross-jurisdictional analysis of best practices for sign regulations. Specifically, staff presented options

for window signs; blade signs; electronic message center signs; codified design requirements; processes for flexibility in development standards; and potential technical assistance options for the public. The Committee directed staff to prepare the following amendments for Planning Commission consideration: clarification of window sign standards and storefront transparency requirements, including vacant storefronts; standards for blade signs; and codification of certain provisions of the Citywide Sign Design Guidelines.

On February 27, 2025, staff presented draft amendments to Chapters 19.620 – General Sign Provisions, 19.590 – Performance Standards, and 19.650 – Approving and Appeal Authority to the Planning Commission for consideration (Attachment 1). Most of the proposed amendments are clarifications of existing standards or codifications of existing Sign Design Guidelines and were generally supported by the Planning Commission. After discussion, the Planning Commission motioned for staff to return with additional information on options for amortization of nonconforming signs and further clarification of the proposed storefront transparency standards.

On May 8, 2025, staff returned to the Planning Commission with three options for amortization:

1. Maintain the existing nonconforming sign procedures found in Chapter 19.620;
2. Add a requirement to address nonconforming signs upon a property's change of use or occupancy; or
3. Adopt a formal amortization program for all nonconforming signs.

Staff also offered clarification for proposed transparency standards, including the clarification that equipment or utility areas exposed to the street frontage by a window are exempt from the storefront transparency requirements. After discussion, the Planning Commission moved to recommend approval of amortization option #2 along with all other proposed amendments (Attachment 2).

Airport Land Use Commission Review

Legislative actions including Zoning Changes and Text Amendments affecting areas within the jurisdiction of the Riverside County Airport Land Use Commission (ALUC) require ALUC review to determine consistency with the 2014 Riverside County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan (LUCP). On May 19, 2025 ALUC found the proposed package of Zoning Code amendments consistent with the LUCP. The ALUC Director's Determination Letter is included as Attachment 3.

DISCUSSION

The proposed amendments to the Zoning Code are included in the Draft Zoning Text Amendment Ordinance (Attachment 4). The following is a summary of each of the proposed changes, including the Zoning Code chapter and proposed amendment. The proposed amendments would:

1. Promote high-quality signs through enhanced standards for materials and construction;
2. Establish a Creative Sign Permit process to allow for the flexible application of development standards for creative and high-quality designs;
3. Establish development standards for blade signs;
4. Require nonconforming signs to be updated upon change of use or occupancy;
5. Clarify and establish standards for window signage and transparency; and
6. Make other minor and/or non-substantive changes and technical corrections as required to provide clarity, improve useability, correct errors, or remove redundancies.

The proposed amendments are detailed in Attachment 4 and are summarized below:

1. *Codify Existing Design Guidelines*

- *Existing Requirements:* The existing Citywide Sign Design Guidelines identify exposed raceways, sign clutter, and cabinet signs as compromising factors to sign design quality. The RMC currently does not regulate these items, allowing for their continued use in sign construction and design.
- *Proposed Amendments:* Amend Chapter 19.620 to prohibit exposed raceways and cabinet signs and clarify that the primary intent of wall signs is for tenant identification.

2. *Establish a Creative Sign Permit Process*

- *Existing Requirements:* The RMC currently allows deviations from development standards through sign programs and administrative adjustments. While both offer some degree of flexibility, they are limited in application and do not call for superior design.
- *Proposed Amendments:* Amend Chapters 19.620 and 19.650 to introduce a new process for a Creative Sign Permit. The purpose of the Creative Sign Permit is to encourage signs of unique design that exhibit a high degree of imagination, inventiveness, creativity and thoughtfulness; and to provide a process for the flexible application of sign regulations that will allow for creatively designed signs. A creative sign permit may only be approved if it meets the proposed findings as found in Attachment 4. The creative sign permit would be reviewed and approved by the Community and Economic Development Director, whose decision would be appealable to the Planning Commission. Additionally, a Creative Sign Permit may be referred by the Director to the Planning Commission for consideration and approval.

3. *Establish Blade Sign Standards*

- *Existing Requirements:* Blade signs are identified in the Citywide Sign Design Guidelines as an attractive and desirable sign type, but the RMC currently does not have any standards to regulate or permit blade signs.
- *Proposed Amendments:* Amend Chapter 19.620 to include standards for blade signs including maximum size, maximum number, sign location, and sign projection.

4. *Addressing Nonconforming Signs*

- *Existing Requirements:* The RMC currently requires nonconforming signs to be replaced with signs conforming to the current code when alterations are proposed, the sign or property has been abandoned for longer than 90 days, or when damage or destruction occurs and exceeds more than 50% of the sign value.
- *Proposed Amendments:* At the direction of the Planning Commission, amend Chapter 19.620 to add a fourth provision to the nonconforming section, requiring nonconforming signs to be updated upon change of use or occupancy (for example, from one type of business to another). Signs of historic or cultural significance are exempt from this provision.

5. *Clarify Existing Window Sign Standards*

- *Existing Requirements:* The RMC currently permits one window sign per public entrance and a maximum of 25% of each window area.
- *Proposed Amendments:* Amend Chapter 19.620 to clarify, streamline, and create flexibility in the window sign standards by allowing window signs up to 25% of the overall window area.

6. *Establish Storefront Transparency Standards*

- *Existing Requirements:* The RMC currently does not have any transparency standards for storefronts, allowing window areas to be covered and completely opaque which can negatively impact the aesthetic character of street frontages and create public safety concerns.
- *Proposed Amendments:* Amend Chapter 19.590 to require storefronts to maintain 75% of the window area free and clear of any opaque coverings, including any allowable signs. Vacant tenant spaces and “back of house” areas for storage, mechanical equipment, or building utilities exposed to the street frontage are exempt from the transparency requirements. Language is added per the June 24th City Council Meeting to include window frosting as an acceptable window treatment.

PUBLIC OUTREACH AND COMMENT

Notice was published in the Press Enterprise on June 13, 2025. Staff conducted a series of Temporary Sign Public Information Sessions at the Main Library (March 20, 2025), Riverside Downtown Partnership (April 17, 2025) and the Arlington Library (May 15, 2025) to discuss the current code requirements for temporary and window signs. Feedback received included greater allowance for window sign coverage, differentiation between primary and secondary storefronts, clarification of existing sign provisions, and the need for a sign handbook to assist businesses with sign design and permitting. Additional sessions are scheduled to take place at other location within the City to reach specific groups within the business community. At the time of writing this report, Staff has not received public comments regarding this project.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

The actions undertaken for Planning Case PR-2025-001768 contribute to the following Strategic Priority and Goal from the Envision Riverside 2025 Strategic Plan:

Priority 5. High Performing Government – Goal 5.3 – Enhance communication and collaboration with community members to improve transparency, build public trust, and encourage shared decision making.

The actions undertaken for the proposed project aligns with the following Cross-Cutting Threads:

1. **Community Trust** – The Zoning Code Amendments are a proactive measure to respond to the changing needs of the community through a transparent public process.
2. **Equity** – The proposed amendments promote reasonable and equitable regulation of signs throughout the City.
3. **Innovation** – The proposed amendments promote high quality, creative, and innovative signs throughout the City.
4. **Fiscal Responsibility** – The proposed amendments do not incur cost to the City.
5. **Sustainability & Resiliency** – The proposed amendments as proposed reduce environmental, visual, and aesthetic impacts on surrounding communities.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There are no anticipated fiscal impacts with the proposed project.

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Attachment: Revised Ordinance Amending Chapters Riverside Municipal Code Chapters
19.590, 19.620, and 19.650