

# Sign Code Update

## Study Session

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**City Attorney's Office**

November 25, 2025



City of Bellevue



# Information Only

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1. Provide a project update on the Sign Code Update, including completed outreach and the overall direction of code amendments.
2. Gather input from Council on priorities for the Sign Code Update.



# Agenda

Background & Project Drivers

Council Initiation

Outreach Approach

Themes from Outreach

Project Scope Details

Next Steps



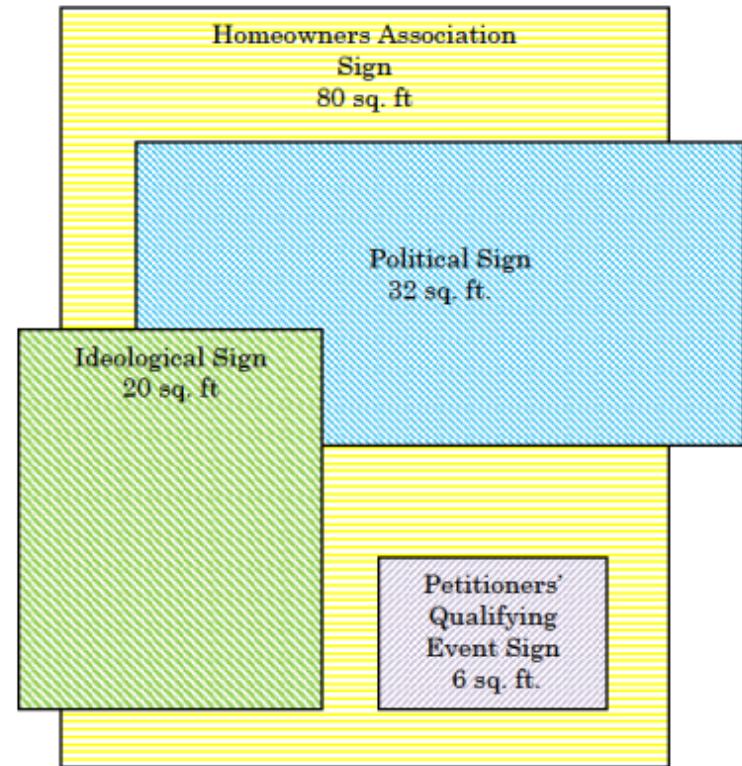
# Reed v. Town of Gilbert et al.

U.S. Supreme Court  
Decision holding that local  
sign codes generally:

- Cannot regulate based on the content of signs
- Must regulate all signs of the same type in the same manner

Can continue to regulate signs for:

- Form, Location, Timing, Lighting, Safety



*Example of sign regulations that are **not** content-neutral*





# Council Initiation

August 6, 2024

- Desire for simplicity and flexibility
- Ensure forward looking code
- Diverse outreach approach
- Consistency across code



# Project Goals

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Balance business  
needs and aesthetic  
desires



Encourage  
contemporary design  
and technology



Simplify and  
streamline regulations



Align with key court  
decisions



# Outreach Approach Overview

## Phase 1 – Listening & Fundamentals (Aug. 2024 – Oct. 2025)

- Expand awareness of the project
- Share project objectives and proposed approaches
- Gather perspectives on project priorities

## Phase 2 – Reviewing and Drafting (Dec. 2025 – Q1 2026)

- Share key themes/priorities that emerged from phase 1
- Solicit feedback on recommended code changes

## Phase 3 – Action, Adoption, and Implementation (Q1 2026)

- Expand awareness of new code and impacts
- Focus on community education and public information sessions



# Outreach Phase One

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ONLINE  
PRESENCE



SIGN CODE  
QUESTIONNAIRE



LISTENING  
SESSIONS



CITY  
NEWSLETTER  
UPDATES



INTERNAL SUBJECT MATTER  
EXPERTS



DIRECT ENGAGEMENT  
& INPUT FROM  
RESIDENTS



# Key Themes and Priorities

1

Aesthetics and Preferences

2

Temporary Signs and Enforcement

3

Streamline Regulations and Increase Flexibility



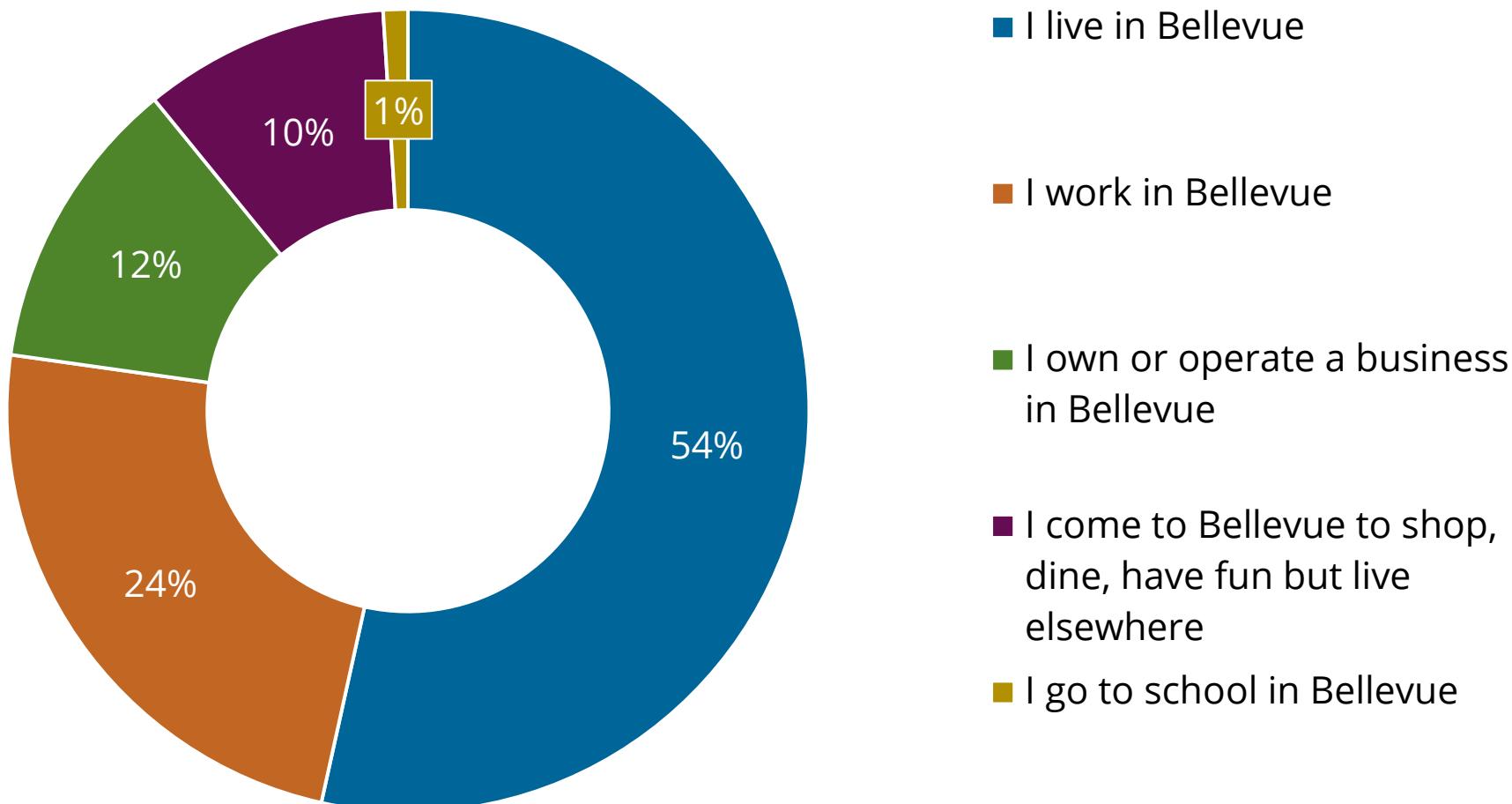
# Questionnaire Results

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## What is your main relationship with Bellevue?

*130 total responses*

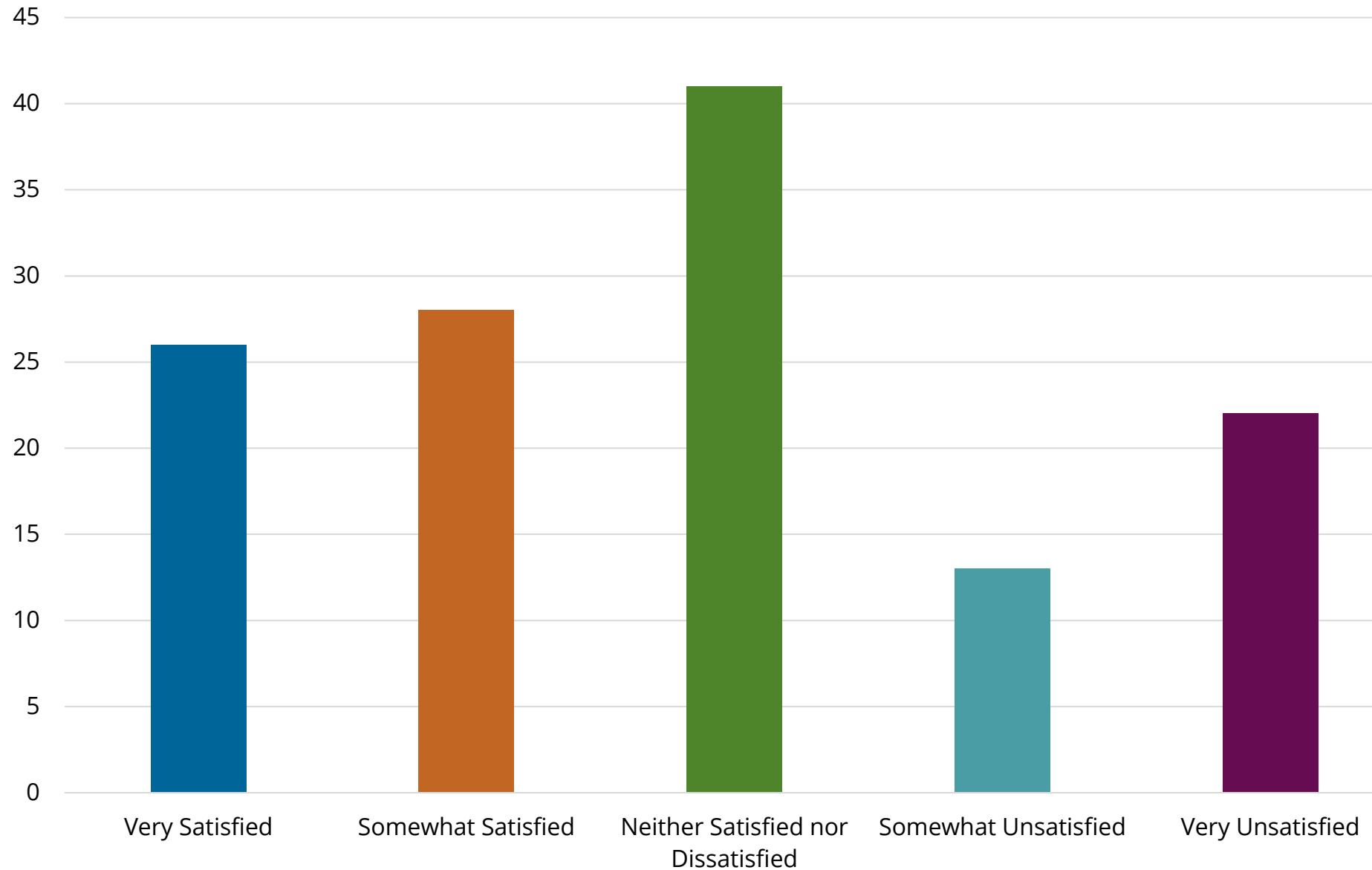


## Key Themes and Priorities

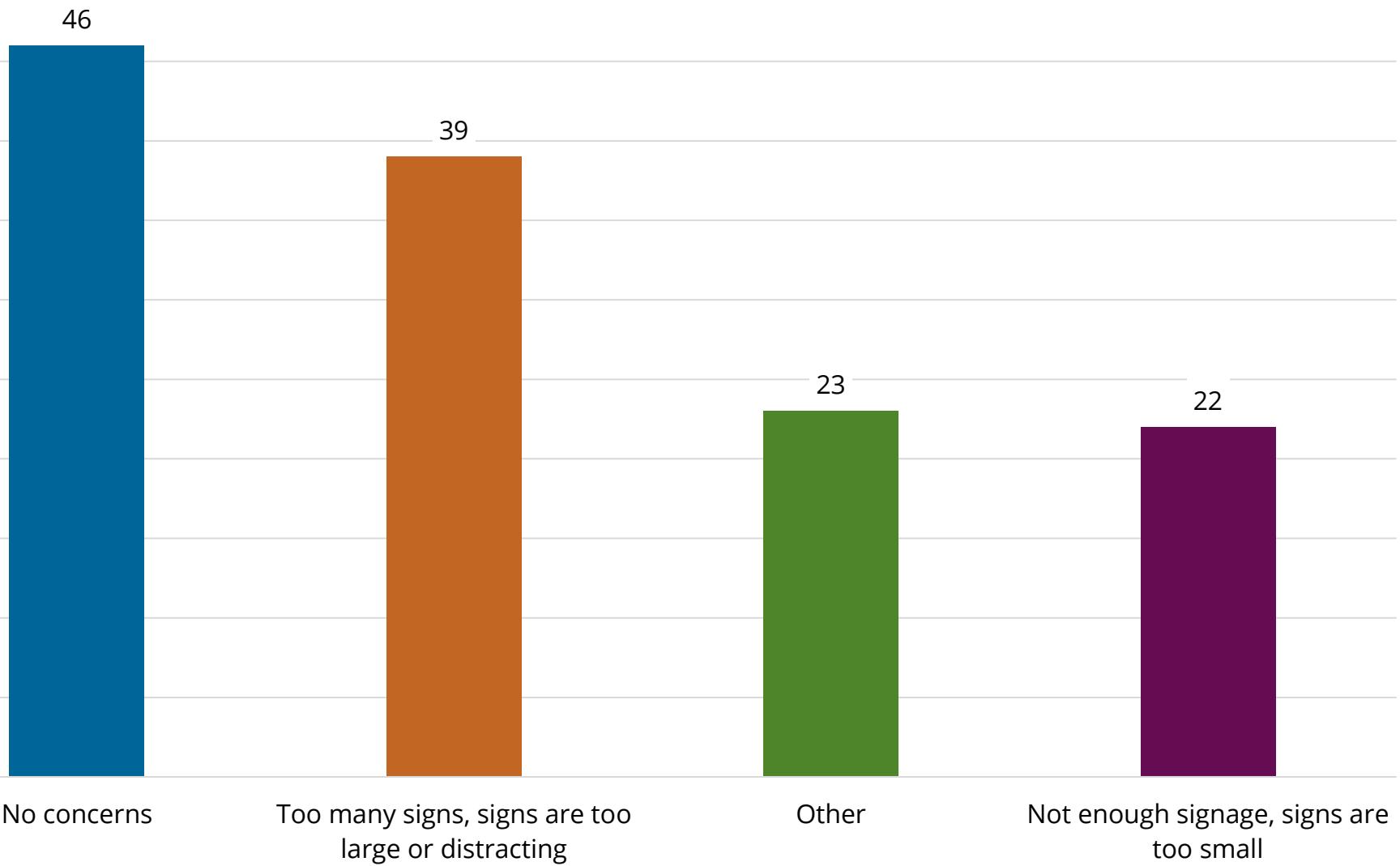
# Aesthetics and Preferences



## How satisfied are you with the current sign regulations?



## What concerns, if any, do you have about existing signs in Bellevue?



# “Other” Responses

“...There are too many temporary signs stuck in the medians ...”

“People don’t pick up their signs after their useful life and they become street trash”

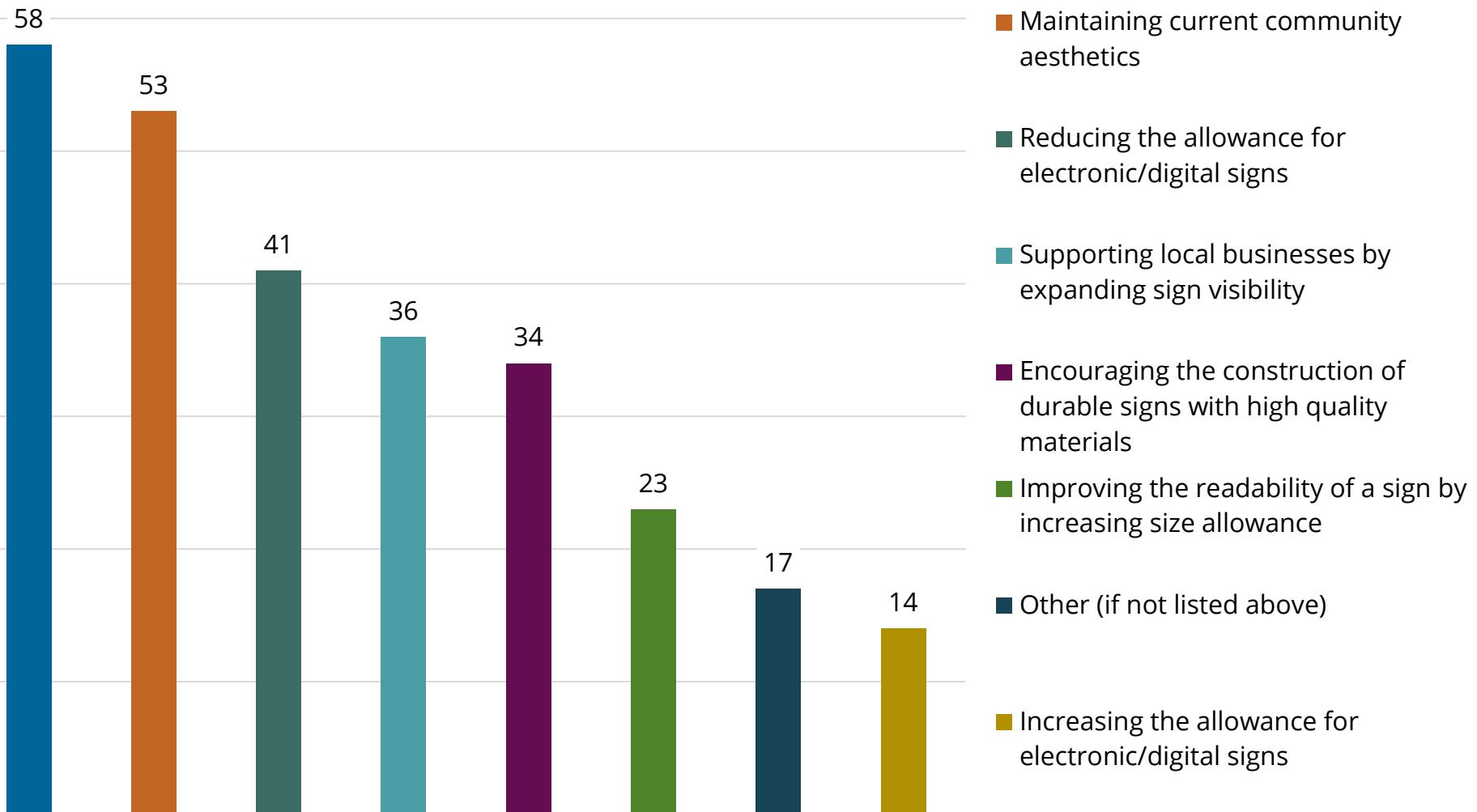
“Signs on median and road side are overwhelming”

“Signs are not allowed to be done in a way that is fully artistic in nature. They are viewed as something that should be avoided, instead of done in a way that lends value to the community.”

“Sign placement on building not adequate to identify properties”



# Which of the following matter most to you?

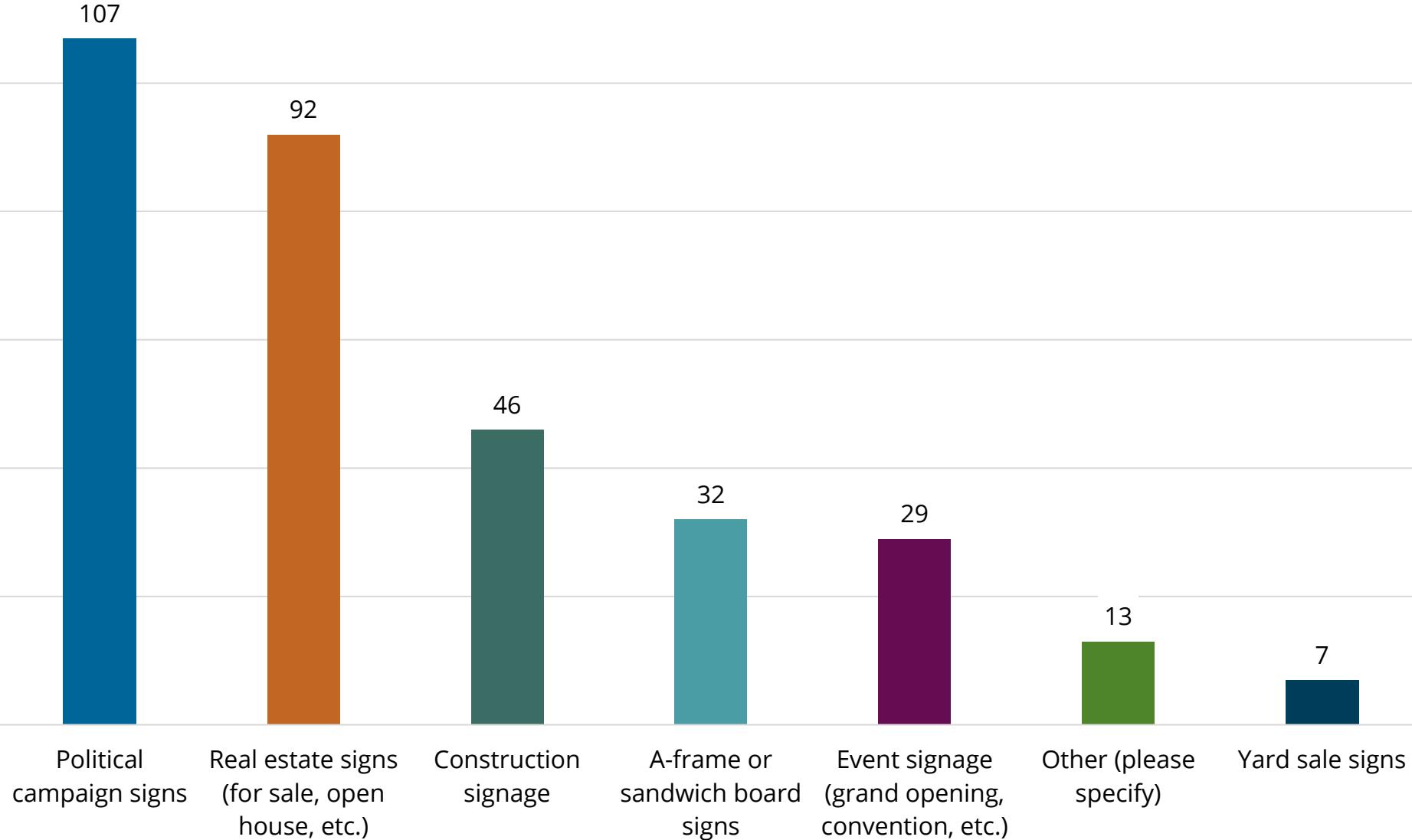


## **Key Themes and Priorities**

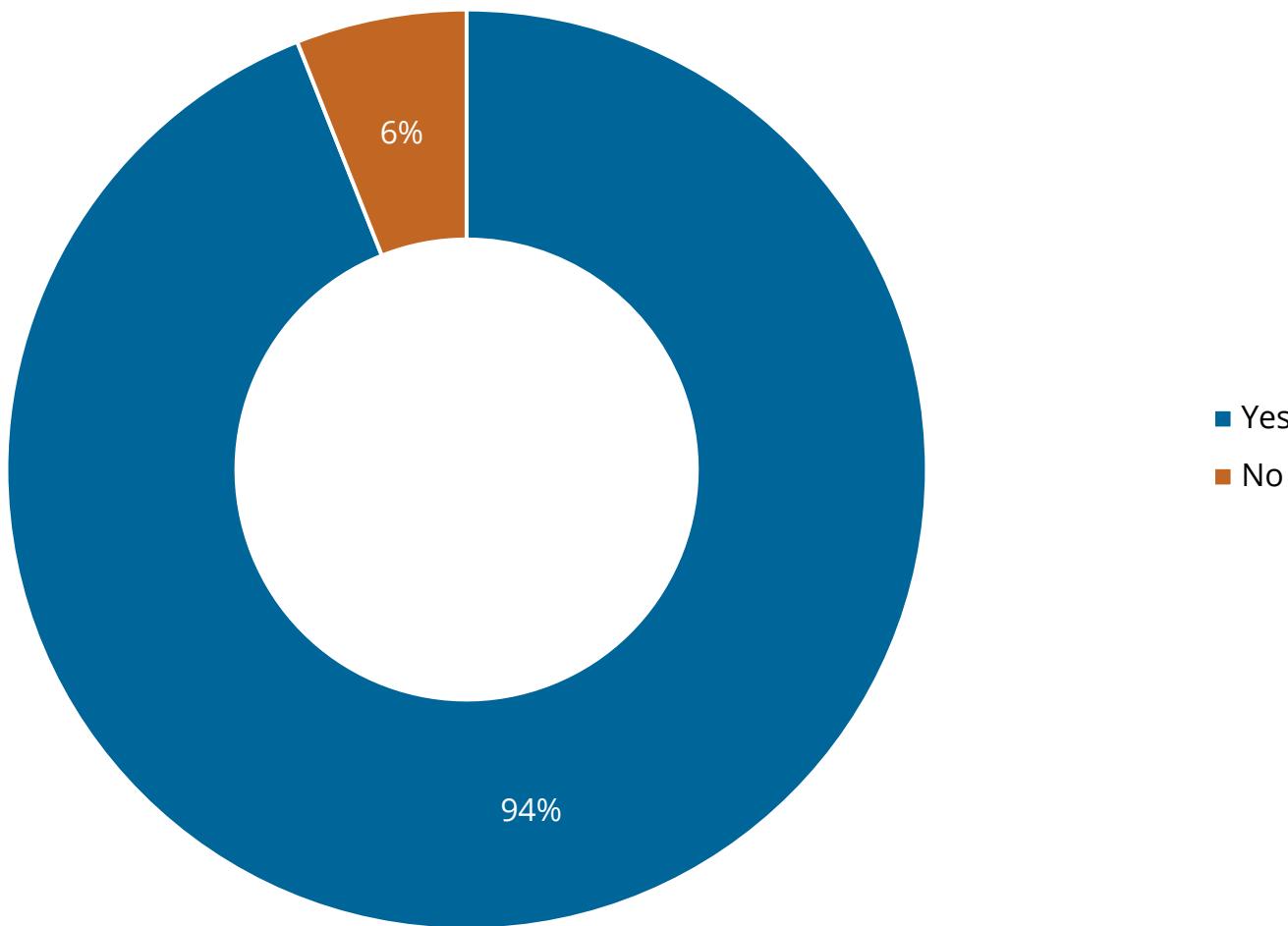
# **Temporary Signs and Enforcement**



## What types of temporary signs do you see most often?



## Should removal of temporary signs that are damaged, faded, or in disrepair be required?



## Key Themes and Priorities

# **Streamline Regulations and Increase Flexibility**



# What We Heard

“Signage code guidance is too complicated and needs to be simplified”

“...Too many rules, too confusing, and for what purpose??”

“Offering Signage Count for tenant in multi-use property without a direct exterior entrance”

“...I believe the sign code is too restrictive for a broad brush approach. I would like to see more flexibility from the city on a case by case basis”

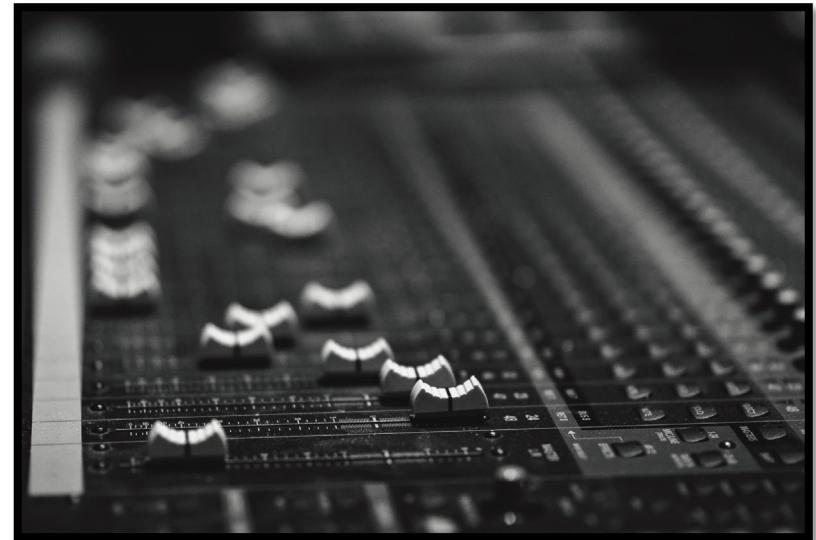
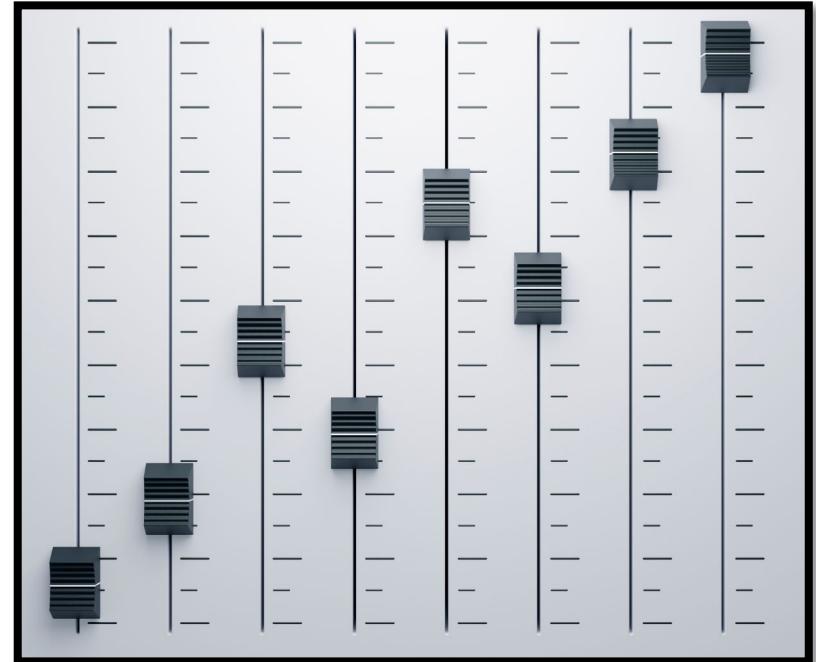
“Signs are informative. They should be allowed for a certain period from its specific location.”

“Increased allowance for signage based on road frontage distance owned.”



# The Right Balance

- Finding the right mix and balance between many competing interests
  - Aesthetics
  - Regulations
  - Safety
  - Flexibility
- If you maximize for business visibility you may sacrifice aesthetics and visual clutter



# Sign Code Update Scope

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## Overall Direction

- Full rewrite of the sign code to improve clarity, usability, and consistency
- Consolidate sign standards across districts
- Maintain similar overall signage allowances for properties compared to today
- Ensure letter size, scale, and visibility remain comparable to current standards
- Update rules for temporary signs on private property and in city streets

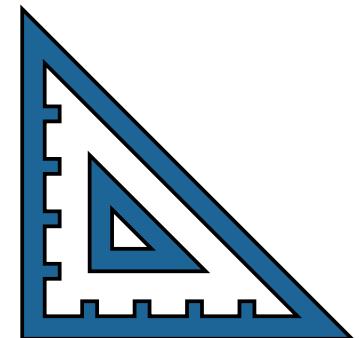
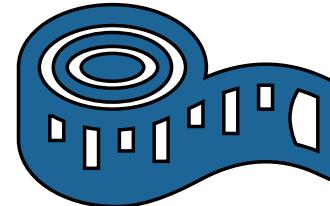


# Sign Code Update Scope

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## Sign Measurement

- Improve clarity on calculating sign area
- Support for unique logos and mixed text/graphic signs





# Sign Code Update Scope

## Commercial and Mixed-Use Districts

- Use consistent standards for commercial districts
- Provide area-specific standards for Old Bellevue to reflect its different scale and historic character
- Continue allowance for high-rise signs for corporate HQs or major tenants
- Allow limited freestanding digital/interactive kiosks along key corridors (e.g., Grand Connection).
- Establish pathway for Master Sign Plans across large/multi-building sites





# Sign Code Update Scope

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## Residential Districts

- Use consistent standards for residential districts
- Limit permanent signage allowed, consistent with current sign code approach



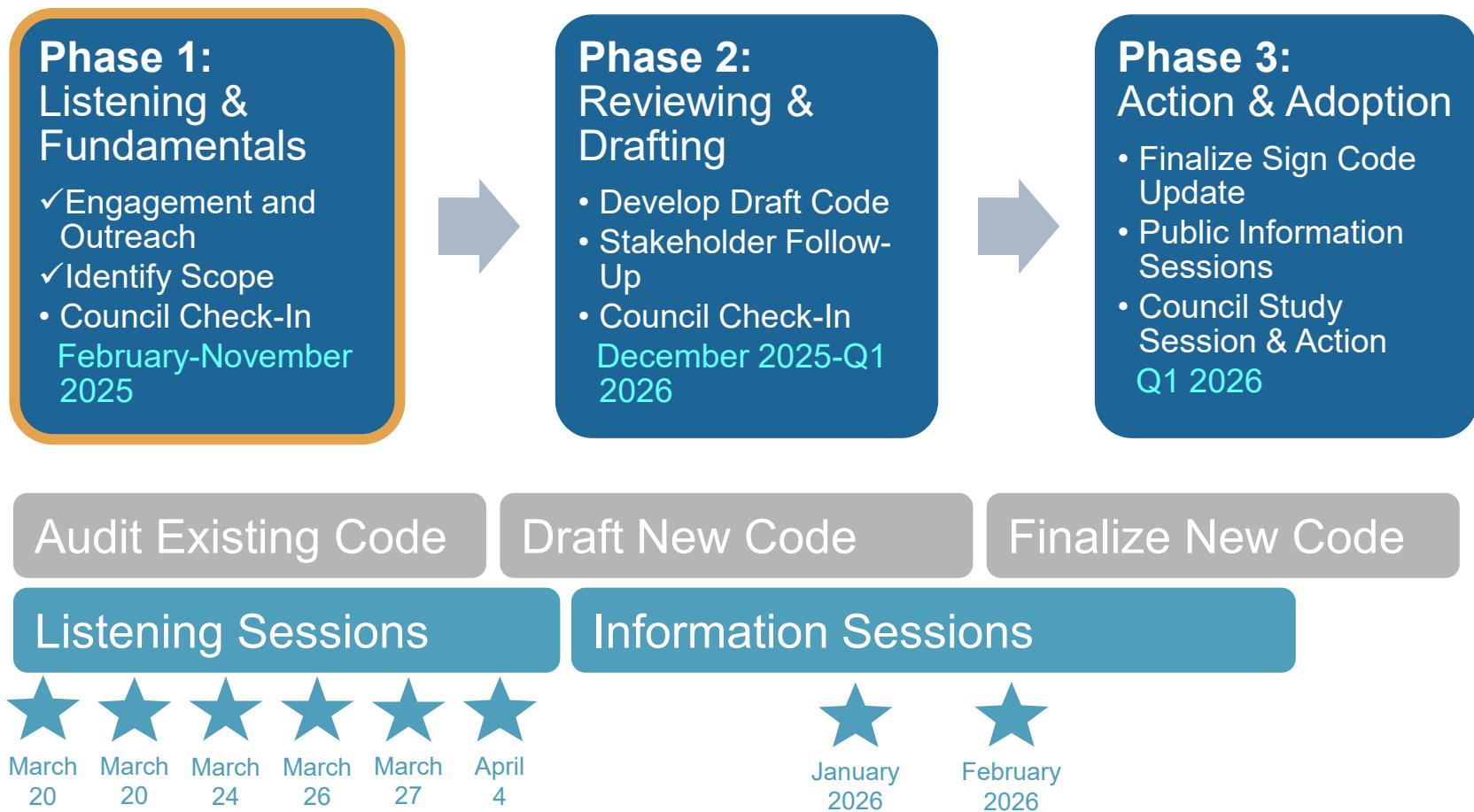
# Sign Code Update Scope

## Temporary Signs

- Uniform framework replacing scattered rules
- District-specific duration and size limits
- Portable sign allowances (A-frame) and limits
- Permitting requirements and exceptions
- Clarify timeframes and removal requirements



# Project Schedule



# Project Webpage

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## Learn More:

[BellevueWA.gov/sign-code-update](http://BellevueWA.gov/sign-code-update)

## Includes:

- Background information
- Opportunities to engage
- Contact information
- Project schedule and timeline





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