

May 9, 2016

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT

Ordinance amending the High-Rise Sign Code provisions in BCC 22B.10 to ensure consistency with the Comprehensive Plan Update and to support the City Council's economic development goals.

STAFF CONTACT

Carol Helland, Land Use Director, 452-2724

Development Services Department

Chris Salomone, Director, 452-6191

James Henderson, Economic Development Director, 452-7910

Jesse Canedo, Economic Development Manager, 452-4873

Emil King, Strategic Planning Manager, 452-7223

Planning and Community Development Department

POLICY ISSUES

Should the City amend Sign Code sections 22B.10.220, 22B.10.025 and 22B.10.030 to reduce the corporate size and headquarter requirements to 75,000 square feet for the placement of high-rise signs?

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL

☐ Action

☒ Discussion

☒ Information

This study session brings back a proposed amendment to the Sign Code as it relates to the placement of high-rise signs in Downtown. Council action on this ordinance is recommended for May 16, 2016.

BACKGROUND

The staff is recommending amendments to the Sign Code for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan Update that was adopted in August 2015. The Sign Code is contained in the Bellevue City Code and does not require Planning Commission review or a public hearing. The amendment before the Council reduces the minimum square footage requirement to 75,000 square feet that must be met before a sign can be reviewed for placement at the top of a high-rise. This amendment also supports City Council's economic development goals to attract and retain businesses in Bellevue's targeted industries.

The pre-Comprehensive Plan Update policy discouraged signs at the upper levels of high-rise buildings except for hotels and for logos that were compatible with the building's architecture.

UD -74 Discourage signs at upper levels of high-rise buildings with limited exception for hotel names and logos when compatible with the building's architecture.

Repealed August 2015.

Bellevue's skyline is identified as a public amenity, and to implement the direction contained in the UD-74 pre-Comprehensive Plan Update policy, signs were limited to hotel uses and large corporate tenants. The subset of corporate tenants permitted to have high-rise signs were limited to those entities that had either more than 180,000 sf of space, or the single corporate headquarters for the company, located in the building to which the sign was attached.

In August 2015, the Comprehensive Plan was updated. The policy still discourages signs at the upper level of high-rises that are not compatible with the building's architecture, but it removed the limitation on uses that were allowed to have high-rise signs in the Downtown subarea.

UD – 52 Maintain the skyline as a public view discouraging signs at upper levels of major buildings with limited exceptions. When allowed, signs should be in a subdued color and not impact the skyline.

Adopted August 2015.

To implement the new direction contained in the UD-54 Comprehensive Plan Update policy, the implementation provisions contained in the Sign Code need to be amended. The proposal recommended by staff includes the following amendments:

- Reduce the use based limitations on high-rise sign placements to 75,000 square feet so that hotels and large corporate tenants are not the only entities that can apply for a high-rise sign permit.
- Retain the size, design and locational requirements to ensure that the public view is protected.

The recommended Sign Code Amendment is being presented for Council consideration. The recommended amendment will ensure consistency with the Comprehensive Plan by aligning Sign Code implementation with the updated Policy UD-54.

The practical effect of the change on the skyline would be negligible. Currently, a single hotel or large corporate entity is permitted to have up to two high-rise signs when certain design requirements are met. A potentially broader group of users would be permitted to have high-rise signs under the recommended amendment, but the design requirements governing size, number of signs per building and location of those signs would remain in effect.

Bellevue is experiencing a nation-wide trend, particularly in the technology industry, whereby companies are consolidating their employees into smaller lease space. This "densification" of the workforce is based on both corporate and employee needs for more common space to promote innovation and collaboration in order to drive productivity and results. According to CoreNet Global, office space will continue to shrink due to the trend towards flexible space and bench desking. The average square foot per employee decreased from 225 in 2010 to 176 in 2012 and is expected to drop to 100 square feet by 2017. As a result, businesses are able to place the same number of employees into smaller spaces.

In 2010 it would take a company with 800 employees to occupy 180,000 square feet to qualify for a high-rise sign. Due to "densification" that same company would now need 1,800 employees in 2017 to occupy the same space to qualify for a high-rise sign. Therefore, reducing the requirement to 75,000 square feet will allow companies with over 500 employees to be able to qualify for a high-rise sign. For some companies, a high-rise sign is an important site location consideration because they need to be able to market their company at the new location to attract a talented workforce.

If the recommended Sign Code amendment is adopted, the skyline would remain protected as a public amenity. High-rise signs would also be available as a marketing and branding tool for an expanded group of building tenants, which supports the City Council's "Open for Business" vision, commitment to economic prosperity for all. Moreover the amendment would support City Council's Economic Development Strategic Plan and the Office of Economic Development's business attraction and retention programs. Staff will be present at the Study Session and available to answer questions related to the recommended Sign Code amendment.

ALTERNATIVES

High-Rise Signs – Sign Code Amendment

1. Direct staff to prepare the High-Rise Sign Code amendment recommended by the staff for Council approval at a future meeting. (Attachment).
2. Reject the Sign Code amendment and provide staff with alternative direction.

RECOMMENDATION

Option 1.

ATTACHMENT

Recommended High-Rise Sign Code Amendment