



AGENDA REPORT

To: Planning Commission

From: Ben Song, Community Development Director

Agenda: December 16, 2024 – Planning Commission Meeting

Item: **Sign Ordinance Amendment (A-24-004) to Comprehensively Modify, Add and Revise Applicable Sections of the Code and Establish Signage Regulations for Town Center Development**

Item Summary

Staff proposes amending the Johns Creek Sign Ordinance (Appendix A. Article XXXIII) to comprehensively modify, add and revise the ordinance and establish new signage regulations for the Town Center.

Background

The Sign Ordinance (Appendix A. Article XXXIII) was replaced in its entirety in 2014. The most recent amendment was in 2020, tackling signage issues related to window signs and banners in residential zoning districts.

Update

Establishing uniform and coordinated signage requirements promotes greater economic development opportunities that are mutually beneficial for the City and its residents. Modernizing of definitions, simplifying the calculation for sign area, and providing for various sign provisions throughout the city and in the Town Center area aligns with the City's desire to support existing and welcoming new businesses. By ensuring signage is proportional to the built environment of commercial and institutional developments, the amended ordinance will continue to maintain the existing character of Johns Creek.

Extensive research of sign ordinances from neighboring jurisdictions – Alpharetta, Roswell, Duluth, and Suwanee – as well as a collection of best practices were taken into consideration to draft the amendment. The proposed amendment to the Sign Ordinance not only includes establishing appropriate signage regulations for the Town Center area but also addresses common issues that have been presented to staff by existing businesses.

Amendment Highlights

The following information highlights the significant amendments proposed for the Sign Ordinance.

Section 33.3. - Definitions

The following definitions have been added or modified:

- Awning/Canopy Sign
- Cabinet Sign
- Copy
- Copy Area
- Master Planned Mixed-Use Development
- Pennant or Streamer
- Portable Sign
- Projecting Sign
- Roof Line
- Roof Sign
- Site Plan
- Street Pole Banner
- Tenant Frontage or Tenant Space Frontage
- Tenant/Sign Panel

Section 33.8. – Application Content

The language pertaining to application submittal for sign permits was updated to reflect the City's transition to online permitting and documents required for submittal.

Section 33.16. – Identification Labels; Inspection; Notice

Deleted this section as placing stickers on all new signs (wall and freestanding signage) was a practice of validating approved signs prior to implementing the online permit system. With the online permit system in place, Code Compliance officers have the capability to search for permits in the system to verify that new signs were permitted.

Section 33.23. – Measurement of Sign Area

Simplified how sign area is to be measured. Replaced the measurement of the sign area based on a “continuous polygon comprised of not more than eight (8) straight lines” to “area within the smallest rectangle enclosing the limits of the sign face.”

Section 33.26. – Wall Sign Calculation

The proposed amendment is based on research of the City of Alpharetta's Sign Ordinance and is a significant improvement from our current practice of determining the size of a wall sign for a tenant space. Currently, to determine the allowable size of a wall sign, the applicant must provide us with the height and width dimensions of the storefront. Staff then use the dimensions to determine the sign area proposed for the wall sign does not exceed 5% of the storefront elevation area. Staff is proposing to only require the linear foot measurement of the storefront and applying a calculation of one and one-tenth (1.1) square foot per one (1) linear foot to determine the allowable size of a wall sign. Please note, however, that the maximum size of a wall sign will remain at 100 square feet for tenant space that has less than 50,000 leased gross square feet. An example of the existing and proposed wall sign calculation is provided on the following page.

Example: Wall Sign Calculation



Current Calculation:

- $H \times W = 22' \times 74' = 1,628 \text{ SF}$
- $5\% \text{ of } 1,628 \text{ SF} = 81.4 \text{ SF}$
- Proposed Wall Sign = 70.39 SF

Permit Approved as proposed is equal to or less than 5% of storefront area.

DETAIL DRAWING



Proposed Calculation:

- Width of Storefront = 74 feet
- $1.1 \text{ SF per } 1 \text{ linear foot} = 81.4 \text{ SF}$
- Proposed Wall Sign = 70.39 SF

Easily understood and verifiable calculation for business and staff. Size of wall sign is proportional to the dimension of the building.

Section 33.26. – Wall Sign Calculation for Buildings with Three (3) or More Stories

Staff proposes amending the wall sign calculation for buildings with three (3) or more stories (i.e. Emory Hospital) by moving away from the 5% of wall elevation square footage calculation and instead applying a simpler calculation of allowing the wall sign to equal 20 SF per floor above road grade, not to exceed 100 SF.

Section 33.26. – Commercial Tenants with 50,000 SF or More of Lease Space

Many of the existing grocers and big box tenants, such as Target, had more than one sign placed on a single wall elevation before Johns Creek became a city. Since the incorporation of the City and adoption of our initial Sign Ordinance, having more than one sign on a single wall elevation has been prohibited. To correct this issue and allow big box tenants to place their primary store sign and also advertise other components of their business (i.e. pharmacy) or other internal tenants (i.e. Starbucks, internal bank/credit union), staff is proposing an amendment to allow up to three (3) signs not exceeding the aggregated sign area based on the calculation of 1 SF per 1 linear foot of tenant space frontage or 250 SF, whichever is less.

Section 33.26. – Convenience Store with Gasoline Pumps

Staff recommends adding a specific section for convenience stores with gasoline pumps (i.e. gas stations) to provide requirements for a use with differing signage needs from other retail service-oriented businesses. While the monument, wall and window signage will conform to sign provisions permitted under the commercial zoning district, specifics related to changeable copy, canopy and fuel pump signage have been added for clarity and consistency to better regulate such business-related signage.

Section 33.26.G. – Town Center Mixed Use (TC-X) District

The most prominent component and the primary purpose of the amendment to the Sign Ordinance is to establish sign regulations to support new development and businesses in the Town Center area, particularly master planned mixed-use developments. A variety of signage options are offered along with the provision of allowing a greater number and larger signage to be placed on the development, complementary to the mixture of uses and scale of the development. Prior to drafting this new section for the TC-X zoning district, staff consulted with Medley to account for the desired sign types, numbers and dimensions. Balancing the needs of the Medley development with future developments that may be forthcoming in the Town Center area, staff believes the regulations presented below will support the success of businesses in the Town Center area.

G. Town Center Mixed Use (TC-X) District

1. Freestanding Signs.

- a. One (1) forty-two (42) square-foot sign per street frontage with a maximum height of eight (8) feet. The freestanding sign may have up to six (6) tenant panels, which shall be calculated as part of the copy area. Changeable copy is prohibited.
- b. In addition to subsection 1.a., up to two (2) primary entrances of the master planned mixed-use development, one per street frontage having five hundred (500) linear feet or more of frontage on a public road, shall be permitted one (1) sixty-four (64) square-foot freestanding sign with a maximum height of eight (8) feet.
- c. All freestanding signs may be substituted for two (2) single-faced freestanding signs, one on each side of the street, and limited to eight (8) feet in height. The aggregate copy area of both single-faced signs shall not exceed forty-two (42) square feet for freestanding signs or sixty-four (64) square feet for primary entrance freestanding signs.
- d. For lots that contain structure(s) 50,000 square feet and over (not including single-family residential structures), the maximum number of freestanding signs permitted are as follows:

<u>Structure Size</u>	<u>Total Number of Signs</u>
<u>50,000 sq. ft. to 150,000 sq. ft.</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Over 150,000 sq. ft. to 200,000 sq. ft.</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Over 200,000 sq. ft.</u>	<u>5</u>

- e. One (1) freestanding sign not exceeding six (6) feet in height and thirty-two (32) square feet in copy area is permitted for each outparcel; however, if the outparcel is a corner lot, one (1) sign for each road frontage is permitted.
- d. If constructed as part of a brick or stone wall, at least thirty (30) feet in length, the sign face may go up to forty-eight (48) square feet, and tenant panels (maximum of 10 panels) may be measured separately.
- e. Freestanding signs shall have materials that relate to the exterior of the building(s) that serve the development.
- f. Where illumination is needed, lighting fixtures may be placed at the top of the sign and aimed downward or may be placed on the ground and aimed in such a way as to illuminate

the sign without creating spillover into the night sky. If external illumination is used, lighting fixture shall be minimized or obscured from public view.

g. The sight distance of each freestanding sign shall conform to City standards (Article XI, Section 113-128.(6)), and evidence of conformity shall be provided to the Community Development Director.

h. A minimum 2-foot-wide planting area shall be provided around the base of all freestanding signs. Shrubs, groundcover, or mulch shall be installed in the planting area.

2. *Wall Signs, Commercial.* No more than four (4) wall signs shall be allowed for a single tenant space. If the wall is visible from a public street, no more than two (2) wall signs shall be allowed per wall. Congregated wall sign(s) for each tenant space shall not exceed the sign area of one and one-half square feet (1.5 sq. ft.) per one linear foot (1 ln. ft.) of tenant space frontage or hundred (100) square feet, whichever is less. Wall signs shall not cover architectural features or details and not extend beyond the roof line or outer edges of the building. Raceways shall be painted to match the color of the exterior walls to which they are attached. If reverse or halo illuminated letters/logo are used, a minimum of one-inch (1") and maximum of three-inch (3") return depth shall be required. The illumination color shall relate to the interior lighting of the building on which the sign is attached or to the brand color of the business occupant. Up to 50% of unused tenant sign area for wall and projecting signs shall be permitted to be aggregated and distributed to a particular building elevation.
3. *Wall Signs, Office and Hotel.* A maximum of two wall signs. Only one sign is allowed per wall located at the top of the building. The maximum area of such sign shall not exceed 25 sq. ft. per floor or story above road grade, not to exceed one hundred and fifty (150) square feet in sign area. Wall signs may be internally illuminated but shall not be reverse or halo illuminated. Wall signs shall not cover architectural features or details, and not extend beyond the roof line or outer edges of the building. Raceways shall be painted to match the color of the exterior walls to which they are attached.
4. *Projecting Signs.* Each tenant space located on the ground floor of a building shall be permitted one (1) projecting sign, which shall not exceed ten (10) square feet in size, shall be placed at least seven (7) feet but no more than twelve (12) feet above the sidewalk, and internally illuminated. For corner tenant space fronting two roads, one (1) projecting sign shall be permitted for each frontage. Projecting signs shall not extend horizontally more than three (3) feet from the wall. Projecting signs shall not be higher than the roof line for one-story buildings and shall not be higher than the spandrel zone between the first and second floor openings for multi-story buildings. Extraneous information, such as services provided by the business, telephone numbers, hours of operation, etc. is not permitted.
5. *Rear Entrance Signs.* Businesses located within the first two floors of a building that backs onto a parking lot, alley, or other public space may have an additional wall sign. Rear entrance signs shall be located near the tenant space's rear door facing the parking lot, alley, or other public space and placed within general proximity of the associated business. The area of rear entrance signs shall not exceed 50% of the front-facing sign area allowed for the same tenant or twenty-four (24) square feet, whichever is less.
6. *Awning Sign.* Awning signs may be displayed, and the signs shall be deducted from the allocated wall sign area.
7. *Canopy Signs.* Canopy signs may be displayed. Canopy signs shall be deducted from allocated wall sign area, and the area of the canopy sign shall not exceed seventy percent (70%) of the canopy area.
8. *Window Signs.* Window signs are permitted for each tenant space. The aggregate copy area of such signs shall not exceed a maximum of twenty-five percent (25%) of the total window area of the subject tenant space. One (1) illuminated window sign is permitted for each tenant space provided that such sign does exceed a maximum of four (4) square feet in area, and such sign is exempt from the

aggregate window sign area calculation. Any illuminated window sign shall be constant in its light emission, shall not be animated, and shall not be so large or of character to obscure vision into the premises from the outside. Window signs do not require a permit, but each tenant shall immediately remove any window sign upon receipt of written notification from the Community Development Director stating that such window sign obscures the vision of police or other security or safety personnel into the premises in a manner that endangers public safety. LED, string or similar lighting outlining the windows, doors or other similar building feature shall be prohibited.

9. Door Signs. One door sign is permitted for each tenant space and does not require a permit. Door signs shall not exceed a sign area of two (2) feet by two (2) feet (2 ft. x 2 ft.) and shall be only allowed to post business/tenant/occupant name and hours of operation. In lieu of placing the sign on the door, it may be alternatively located on the side door panel and not count against the window sign area calculation.
10. Flags. Each lot may display no more than four (4) flags and/or flagpoles, unless a variance is obtained. Flagpoles shall not exceed thirty (30) feet in height. Flag size shall not be more than 40 square feet, and the hoist side of the flag shall not exceed twenty percent (20%) of the vertical height of the flagpole.
11. Signs during Construction. One (1) temporary sign shall be allowed during construction for each road frontage. The sign shall not be internally illuminated, shall not exceed forty-two (42) square feet in area and ten (10) feet in height. The sign shall be allowed upon the commencement of construction and terminated upon the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy, installation of a permanent sign, or expiration/termination of the land disturbance permit/building permit, whichever occurs first. The location of the sign shall be confined to the site of construction, and only one (1) such sign may be permitted per project.
12. Standard Informational Signs. Each lot may display Standard Informational Signs as defined in this Article.
13. Banners. Banners shall be allowed for a period not exceeding fourteen (14) days with no more than four (4) such 14-day periods being permitted per calendar year per lot. An individual banner permit may be divided into two non-consecutive weeks provided the dates are stated on the permit. In the case of lots which contain multiple Places of Business, each Place of Business shall be allowed a banner. Banners shall not be more than thirty-two (32) square feet. No banner shall be mounted so as to extend above the horizontal plane of the roof where the building wall and roof meet and shall not extend more than five (5) feet above grade when on the ground. Banners shall be erected with supports or other means so that they do not sag or become dilapidated.
14. Street Pole Banners. Street pole banner signs that comply with the requirement below may be allowed. The street pole banner signs shall not be included in the determination of the banner signs allowed on a property. Street pole banners do not require a permit.
 - a. Applicability. Street pole banners are only allowed in a master planned mixed-use development for the branding of the overall development. Street pole banners shall not be related to any individual commercial or residential use and said sign shall not be used for advertising or promoting any political candidate, parties or issues, or identifying, advertising or promoting any religion.
 - b. Size. Each street pole banner shall have a maximum area of 12.5 square feet and a maximum width of three (3) feet. Up to two (2) street pole banners are permitted per street pole.
 - c. Double-side. All street pole banners shall be double-sided.
 - d. Illumination. Street pole banners shall not be illuminated.

- e. Location. No street pole banner shall be located in the public right-of-way. No street pole banner shall be located on a pole that has traffic or pedestrian control signals. Street pole banners shall not interfere with the visibility of traffic signals or signs.
 - f. Height. The lowest edge of the street pole banner shall be at least eight (8) feet above the finished grade and the pole shall not exceed twenty (20) feet in height.
 - g. Materials. Street pole banners shall be made of high-quality and durable vinyl, flame retardant canvas, or other awning material with wind slits. The material shall be opaque, non-shrinking, water, tear and fade resistant.
 - h. Maintenance. Street pole banners that are frayed, torn, or faded will be deemed unmaintained and will be required to be removed or replaced.
15. Directory Signs. Each master-planned mixed-use development shall be allowed directory sign per road frontage in addition to the freestanding signs permitted. Directory signs shall not exceed ten (10) feet in height and thirty-two (32) square feet in size and shall meet the architectural requirements of freestanding signs. If the primary freestanding sign is constructed on a wall with the increased sign size allowance, the parcel shall not be permitted to construct a directory sign.
16. Interior Project Directional/Wayfinding/Street Signs. Each master-planned mixed-use development shall be allowed interior project directional/wayfinding signs. These signs shall be uniform in size, material, color and shape, and not visible from the public right-of-way. Interior project directional/wayfinding/street signs do not require a permit.
17. Interior Electronic Information Signs. Each master-planned mixed-use development shall be allowed interior electronic information signs to display such information as maps and events within the development.
- a. The electronic sign face shall not exceed thirteen (13) square feet, and the sign shall have a maximum height of nine (9) feet.
 - b. No interior electronic information signs shall be visible from the public right-of-way.
 - c. Interior electronic information signs shall present only static displays (still pictures and printing), with no portion of the display being in motion or changing in color or light intensity. No flashing, scrolling, or other variation in the static image that gives an illusion of movement or variation in light intensity during the display of a single image is allowed. Signs shall not display movies, animation or video containing motion.
 - d. Each static image shall be maintained for a duration of at least eight (8) seconds before the next message appears. The transition between a complete static display of the previous message and the next message shall be accomplished in two (2) seconds or less.
 - e. Interior electronic information signs along private streets shall adjust display brightness so that the display does not cause glare or other conditions that impair the vision of the driver of any motor vehicle or which otherwise interferes with the safe operation of a motor vehicle.
 - f. Signs shall be fixed to the ground.

Recommendation

Staff recommends amending the Sign Ordinance as presented.

Attachment

1. Sign Ordinance Amendment (Redline Version)
2. Sign Ordinance Amendment (Clean Version)