



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

For the meeting of: 3/7/2024

File #: 24-230

To: Planning Commission

From: Planning and Building Department

Agenda Section: Public Hearing

SUBJECT:
Sign Ordinance
Assessor Parcel Numbers (APN) 000-000-000
Record No.: PLN-2023-18011
Countywide

Amendment of the Inland and Coastal Zoning Ordinance sections regulating Signs and Nameplates to provide a uniform set of standards for the development, siting, size, and installation of signs and (Section 87.3 of Chapter 3 and Section 87.2 of Chapter 4 of Division 1 of Title III of Humboldt County Code). These standards will protect aesthetic values along scenic highways, coastal views, and scenic areas; encourage siting in preferred locations to help preserve the County's environmentally sensitive habitat areas; ensure compatibility with Caltrans Outdoor Advertising Act requirements; and create standards to manage the size and locations of signs. The ordinance proposes changes to the following sections:

1. Amends sections 314-87.2.1 through 314-87.2.2 and adds sections 314-87.2.3, 87.2.4, 87.2.5, 87.2.6, 87.2.7, 87.2.8, 87.2.9, 87.2.10, 87.2.11, 87.2.12, and 87.2.13 in Chapter 4 of Division 1 of Title III of the County Code for the inland areas of the County.
2. Amends sections 313-87.3.1, 87.3.2, and 87.3.3 and adds sections 313-87.3.4 in Chapter 3 of Division 1 of Title III of the County Code for the coastal areas of the County.

RECOMMENDATION(S):
That the Planning Commission:

1. Adopt the resolution (Resolution 23-__) recommending that the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors take the following actions:
 - a. Find the proposed ordinance is exempt from CEQA pursuant to §15307 and 15308 of the State CEQA Guidelines and
 - b. Find that the modifications to the Zoning Ordinance are consistent with the General Plan

or Local Coastal Plan and

- c. Adopt the Amendment to the Inland and Coastal Zoning Ordinance sections regulating the location and size of signage.

DISCUSSION:

Project Location: All of the unincorporated areas of Humboldt County, including the Coastal Zone.

Present General Plan Land Use Designation: All land use designations.

Present Zoning: All zoning districts.

Environmental Review: The proposed ordinance amendments are exempt from environmental review under §15307 and 15308 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, actions by regulatory agencies for the protection of natural resources and the environment.

State Appeal: This project is located in part within the Coastal Zone and is therefore appealable to the California Coastal Commission. Changes proposed to the Local Coastal Program (zoning ordinance provisions in 313-87.3 and other sections of Chapter 3) must receive final certification from the California Coastal Commission before they may become effective.

Executive Summary: At the public hearing of January 18, 2024, the primary concern of the Planning Commission was wanting to know how the proposed ordinance relates to the existing ordinance and how it relates to other county's ordinances. There were other questions related to sign face changes, and reconstruction of billboards. The Commission was also concerned that they had not seen information presented by All Points Signs. Consideration of the ordinance was continued to allow information addressing these points to be provided.

The Planning Commission requested staff review existing signage and provide examples that would help guide their decision-making when determining appropriate sizes for appurtenant signage. Staff surveyed signage on twenty-two sites where images were taken to provide examples and measurements of existing signage. Estimates were taken for the height, width, and area of each signage type to be applied to the current and proposed ordinance. The sites visited by staff were within the County jurisdiction. These images will be presented at the hearing so that it is possible to visualize what types of signage exist and whether it would be allowed under the proposed ordinance.

Attachment 8 is a table that shows comparisons of the proposed ordinance in relation to the existing ordinance and compares the proposed ordinance to the Counties of Mendocino, Butte, and Sonoma and to information presented by Allpoints signs. Butte County was originally chosen as a model for the proposed sign ordinance because it has similarities to Humboldt County. Both are tourist destinations, have a strong population center, similar population sizes and have well known universities. Sonoma is similar and is one county removed from Humboldt. Mendocino County is directly to the south.

A comparison of the information in Attachment 8 reveals:

- a. Monument Signs. Size allowed in the proposed ordinance and Butte is 32 square feet. Height allowed in proposed ordinance, Butte and Sonoma Counties is 6 feet. Mendocino, Allpoints and existing ordinance do not differentiate between monument and freestanding signs.
- b. Freestanding Signs. Proposed ordinance would allow 32 sf, while Butte and Mendocino would allow 64 sf. Existing ordinance limitation in area based on road frontage and Allpoints advocates for up to 125 sf. The proposed ordinance would allow a height up to 14 feet, while Butte would allow 12 feet, Mendocino would allow 25 feet, and Allpoints would allow up to 32 feet in height. No limit in height in existing ordinance.
- c. Wall Signs. The existing ordinance groups freestanding signs and wall signs into one allowance with up to 6 signs allowed. Both the proposed ordinance and Mendocino County allow one square foot of sign area per linear foot of building façade. Butte County limits wall signs to $\frac{3}{4}$ square foot of sign area per linear foot of façade frontage. Allpoints advocates for 3 square feet of sign area for each linear foot of building façade.
- d. Window Signs. Not addressed in existing ordinance. Both Butte and proposed the ordinance would limit window signage to 25% of the window area. Allpoints advocates for allowing 100% of the window area to be used for signage.

Based upon these comparisons, the regulations in the proposed ordinance for monument signs, wall signs and window signage are consistent with the ordinances in Mendocino, Butte County and Sonoma County. The size and height of Freestanding signs deserve some additional consideration. Both Mendocino and Butte counties allow 64 square feet in area, while the proposed ordinance would allow 36 square feet. A sign area of 64 square feet would be a sign of 8 feet by 8 feet.

The height of freestanding signs is variable between jurisdictions. The proposed ordinance sets the limit at 14 feet, while Butte County sets the limit at 12 feet and Mendocino County allows 25 feet. Staff chose the 14 feet to keep the signage somewhat at a human scale. With a 14-foot-tall sign and if the Commission chooses to go to 64 square feet of area, that will basically allow an 8 foot by 8-foot sign, the bottom of which is 7 feet off the ground.

Ordinance Modifications.

In response to the comments by the Commission and observations made during the sign survey, several changes were made the ordinance:

- a. A No Permit Required Section (87.2.2.1) has been included for the purpose of allowing businesses to change the face of signage that already exists on their parcel.
- b. Installation of historic plaques has also been included within the No Permit Required Section.
- c. Subsections in the Nameplates Section (87.2.3) have been reorganized for formatting purposes.
- d. Revisions in the Appurtenant Sign Table (Section 87.2.6.5 of Inland and Section 87.3.3.4.5 of Coastal) for clarity and consistency.

- e. Wall signs have been limited to one hundred square feet as recommended by the Planning Commission and the quantity was revised to be consistent with existing signage.
- f. Window signs have had their quantity removed for clarity, and design features have been included to allow for typical signage that would be seen in commercial windows. A limit to the height of window signs has been included to limit the coverage of windows beyond what is necessary to advertise a product or service.
- g. A section for feather banners has been included as requested by the Planning Commission to address the common use of this type of sign.
- h. Fuel price signs have also been included to address standard allowances for this type of use.
- i. Section 87.2.10.3 of the Existing Billboard section has been updated to conform with state regulations and with the General Plan. Placement activities have been prohibited when a sign has been destroyed or damaged to the extent it loses functionality to be rendered useless and can no longer function as an advertising surface. Placement has been made allowable if the existing billboard has been destroyed due to natural forces, is not located within bodies of water, flood hazard areas, streamside management areas, sensitive habitats, scenic resources, or wetlands. If an existing billboard meets these requirements, then a Conditional Use Permit and Building Permit may be issued for a term of 15 years. Placement shall not be limited if a billboard has been destroyed due to vandalism, and the billboard shall not lose its legal, nonconforming status.
- j. Design standards for illumination have been updated for clarity and consistency with other allowances.
- k. Obsolete Signs in the Prohibited Sign Section (87.2.13) has been updated to require removal of sign frames that have not been utilized within five years to prevent degradation that may lead to engineering failures.

Although the General Plan does not provide specific guidance for the sign ordinance revisions, Attachment 7 includes General Plan policies and standards that are relevant to the revisions.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The project was referred to responsible agencies and all responding agencies have either responded with no comment or recommended approval or conditional approval.

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Planning Commission could elect to have staff review the recommendations made by the Planning Commission and consider revisions to the draft sign ordinance at a later hearing.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Sign Ordinance (Inland)
2. Sign Ordinance (No Strikethrough Version)
3. Sign Ordinance (Coastal)
4. Inland Resolution

5. Coastal Resolution
6. Information Submitted by All Points Signs
7. General Plan Guidance
8. Code Comparison Table

Please contact Jacob Dunn, Planner, at JDunn@co.humboldt.ca.us or 707-267-9390 if you have questions about this item.