



# COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

For the meeting of: 11/2/2023

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File #: 23-1484

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**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-2023-18801  
Countywide

Amendment of provisions within the Zoning Ordinance regulating Signs and Nameplates. This ordinance will provide a uniform set of standards for the development, siting, size and installation of signs and billboards in the Zoning Ordinance (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 permit requirements; and create standards to manage the size and locations of signs. The new 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, and 87.2.9 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 §15303 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

- 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 §15303 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, the construction of limited numbers of new small facilities or accessory structures.

**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:** The amendment of the Signs and Nameplates provisions of the Zoning Ordinance is intended to implement adopted policies of the General Plan and to consider other revisions to ensure community compatibility. This ordinance will provide a uniform and comprehensive set of standards for the development, siting and installation of signs and billboards in the Zoning Ordinance (Section 87.3 of Chapter 3 and Section 87.2 of Chapter 4 of Division 1 of Title III of Humboldt County Code).

This ordinance is intended to implement measure **SR-IM2 Sign Ordinance Revision** of the Humboldt County General Plan which seeks amendment of the sign ordinance to implement adopted policies for off-premise billboards and to consider other revisions to ensure community compatibility. This measure was accomplished by implementing policies for off-premise billboards in accordance with the goals and policies of the Humboldt County General Plan and public input from workshops. Revisions have been made to the sign ordinance to ensure community compatibility by including a more robust purpose and applicability statement, clearer nameplate, property sale, and appurtenant sign regulations, and the addition of language for temporary signs, prohibited signs, and design standards which regulate illumination of signs.

This Sign Ordinance has undergone multiple revisions and drafts to adhere to the General Plan, address public concern, and conform to State requirements. This ordinance initially solely focused on regulating billboards, but after further discussion implementing SR-IM2 seemed appropriate. The first target was organizing the regulatory language to be consistent with other regulations and the coastal version of the sign ordinance. After reorganizing the ordinance, the regulatory language has become much more clarified with specific sections that inform the public and decision makers what the standards are. Implementation of a purpose and applicability section should provide a decision making

basis for making findings consistent with the goals and policies of the General Plan. Sections have been added to clarify questions regarding specific types of signage and their allowances. Temporary signs have been included as a section of this ordinance to allow for temporary uses that may not pose a threat to the public health, safety and welfare if followed. Prohibited signage was included to protect public spaces from signs that may be hazardous or cause a nuisance to residents and the public. Digital and animated signs would be considered prohibited under this ordinance due to the distraction they may cause to drivers and other motorists. This regulation has also been included to protect the night sky and promote responsible outdoor lighting that is functional without negatively impacting the environment.

The Humboldt County General Plan provides goals, policies and standards that address how to accomplish the implementation measures. In Section 10.7.3 of the Goals and Policies for Scenic Resources **SR-G1 Conservation of Scenic Resources** prioritizes the protection of high-value scenic forest, agriculture, river, and coastal areas that contribute to the enjoyment of Humboldt County's beauty and abundant natural resources. **SR-P4 Term of Off-Premise Billboards and Prohibition** limits the term of new and existing off-premise billboards by ordinance to provide for removal consistent with the Outdoor Advertising Act and prohibit the construction of new off-premise billboards along mapped Scenic Highways and coastal views. **SR-P5 Billboards in Sensitive Habitat Areas** prohibits construction of billboards in mapped sensitive habitat areas. Section 10.7.4 of the Humboldt County General Plan provides standards including **SR-S3 New Off-Premise Billboards** which restricts new off-premise billboards to a maximum of 15 years and limits them to areas designated as Commercial Services or Industrial General. This standard also states that off-premise billboards shall not include animation or electronic messaging unless for public service purposes and be restricted to a size of 300 square feet. **SR-S5 Permits for Billboards** requires Conditional Use Permits and conformance to building, zoning and other local codes for construction of new billboards, as well as the expansion of existing billboards.

Although SR-S5 pertains to new billboards and expansion of existing billboards, staff believes that to protect the public health, safety and welfare of Humboldt County residents and visitors, existing billboards must undergo planner review of a building permit application. Building permits determine if the proposed work is consistent with the original engineered plans and planner review will determine if the proposed work poses a potential significant impact to environmentally sensitive habitat areas. If sensitive habitats are present within the project area a Special Permit would be required within the inland jurisdiction and a Coastal Development Permit for coastal jurisdictions. Customary Maintenance, as defined in the Outdoor Advertising Act, does not require permitting or review of such work, although the work includes structural components that may pose a risk to the public if not reviewed. As an alternative, staff believes that requesting permit renewal forms submitted to CalTrans for planner review would ensure consistency with the requirements of this ordinance. Although, maintenance activities would be conducted without local agency review. Permit renewal forms are submitted to CalTrans every five years but are not currently reviewed by local agencies for consistency with local regulations. These goals, policies and standards have provided a framework for developing a set of regulations that address community interests and protect the scenic and environmental quality of the unincorporated areas of Humboldt County.

The draft ordinance has undergone public input at multiple public meetings where comments were made and responded to. The comments received were particularly interested in the billboard section, which regulated new and existing billboards. After receiving comments on new billboards, staff found that there was little interest in allowing new billboards. Existing billboards became more contentious as we discussed their removal and added requirements for new permits. After deliberating with County Counsel, we have found that at the most basic level of review a building permit would be necessary to confirm that the engineered structure is being maintained properly and that environmentally sensitive habitats are not significantly impacted by work within streams, wetlands etc. The County also sees this ordinance as an opportunity to protect our scenic views that would qualify our highways as Scenic Highways by standards regulated by Caltrans. Staff believes that the ordinance has been developed in a way that satisfies the public interest as well as protects the scenic natural resources in the unincorporated portions of Humboldt County.

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. Draft Resolution (Inland)
2. Draft Resolution (Coastal)
3. Draft Sign Ordinance (Inland)
4. Draft Sign Ordinance (Coastal)
5. Public Comments

Please contact Jacob Dunn, Planner, at [JDunn@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:JDunn@co.humboldt.ca.us) or 707-268-3749 if you have questions about this item.