

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

NORTH COAST DISTRICT OFFICE
1385 8th STREET, SUITE 130
ARCATA, CA 95521
VOICE (707) 826-8950

**ADOPTED FINDINGS**

TO: Coastal Commissioners and Interested Persons

SUBJECT: County of Humboldt LCP Amendment LCP-1-HUM-24-0034-1-PartA
(Sign Regulations)

I. ADOPTED FINDINGS

At the Coastal Commission meeting of July 11, 2025, the Commission (1) rejected the Implementation Plan (IP) portion of LCP Amendment No. LCP-1-HUM-24-0034-1-Part A as submitted; and (2) certified it as modified in accordance with the suggested changes set forth in the June 26, 2025 staff report as modified by an addendum published July 7, 2025. The addendum presented one change to Suggested Modification 3 and to Appendix A (list of all suggested modifications) in response to an error identified by County staff. The change to Suggested Modification 3 was in reference to “riparian corridors,” which is the terminology referring to vegetative areas along streams used in the coastal land use area plans (LUPs), rather than “streamside management areas,” which is terminology used in the inland zoning code (which is inapplicable in the coastal zone). The Commission adopted the staff recommendation as modified by the addendum, and the following resolutions and findings were adopted by the Commission on July 11, 2025.

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II. RESOLUTIONS

Following a public hearing, the Commission adopted the following resolutions and findings.

A. Denial of the IP Amendment as Submitted

Resolution A: The Commission hereby denies certification of Implementation Program Amendment No. LCP-1-HUM-24-0034-1-Part A as submitted by the County of Humboldt on grounds that the implementation program amendment as submitted does not conform with, and is inadequate to carry out, the provisions of the certified land use plan. Certification of the implementation program amendment as submitted would not meet the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act as there are feasible alternatives and mitigation measures that would substantially lessen the significant adverse impacts on the environment that will result from certification of the implementation program amendment as submitted.

B. Certification of the IP Amendment with Suggested Modifications

Resolution B: The Commission hereby certifies the IP Amendment No. LCP-1-HUM-24-0034-1-Part A for the County of Humboldt if modified as suggested on grounds that the implementation program, as amended, conforms with and is adequate to carry out the provisions of the certified land use plan. Certification of the implementation program amendment as modified will comply with the California Environmental Quality Act, because 1) feasible mitigation measures and/or alternatives have been incorporated to substantially lessen any significant adverse effects of the implementation program amendment on the environment, and 2) there are no further feasible alternatives and mitigation measures that would substantially lessen any significant adverse impacts on the environment.

III. SUGGESTED MODIFICATIONS

The Commission hereby suggests the following modifications to the proposed Implementation Plan (IP) amendment, which are necessary to ensure that the IP conforms with and is adequate to carry out the policies of each of the County's six certified LUP Area Plans. If the County of Humboldt accepts the suggested modifications within six months of Commission action, by formal resolution of the Board of Supervisors, the modified amendment will become effective upon the Executive Director's determination that the County's action is legally adequate and has reported that determination to the Commission at a scheduled Commission meeting.

Text shown below in underline and ~~strikethrough~~ font denotes text that the County proposes to add or delete (respectively) to the certified IP. Text in **bold double underline** and ~~**bold double strikethrough**~~ format denotes text to be added through the

Commission's suggested modifications. [Appendix A](#) includes all suggested modifications in the context of all proposed IP amendments.

1. **SUGGESTED MODIFICATION 1: Modifications for consistency with visual resources policies of the county's six certified LUP Area Plans.** To ensure that the IP amendment conforms with and adequately carries out the visual resources protection policies of the County's six LUP Area Plans, including signs located within designated Coastal Scenic Areas and Coastal View Areas, add the following text to section 87.3.3.10 (Design Standards):

Sec. 87.3.3.10 Design Standards.

...

87.3.3.10.2 Protection of Public Views. Any permitted sign shall be (a) sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, (b) visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas, (c) subordinate to the character of its setting in Coastal Scenic Areas, and (d) found consistent with applicable Coastal View Area standards required under the coastal land use plan for the sign location.

2. **SUGGESTED MODIFICATION 2: Modifications to ensure signs do not interfere with public access inconsistent with six LUP Area Plans and the Coastal Act.** Add the following to the list of prohibited signs:

Sec. 87.3.3.11 Prohibited Signs.

...

87.3.3.11.13 Signs Blocking Public Access. Signs that interfere with public access inconsistent with the public access policies of the Coastal Act or the County's certified Local Coastal Program.

3. **SUGGESTED MODIFICATION 3: Modifications to ensure maintenance activities do not impact natural resources.** Add the following text to section 87.3.3.8 Existing Billboards:

87.3.3.8 Existing Billboards. It is the objective of this section to provide regulations to implement ~~General Plan~~ provisions to regulate Billboards consistent with the ~~Outdoor Advertising Act~~ **certified Land Use Plan Area Plans.**

...

87.3.3.8.3 Placement shall not be permitted unless otherwise allowable:

87.3.3.8.3.1 Placement includes, but is not limited to, the following activities:

...

87.3.3.8.3.1.9 Re-erection of a destroyed advertising display where destroyed is defined as damaged to the extent it loses functionality so

~~as to be rendered useless and can no longer function as an advertising surface it meets the requirements in section 87.3.3.8.3.2~~

~~87.3.3.8.3.1.10 The maintaining and the erecting, constructing, posting, painting, printing, tacking, nailing, gluing, sticking, carving or otherwise fastening, affixing or making visible any advertising display on or to the ground of any tree, bush, rock, fence, post, wall, building, structure or thing when not performed incident to the change of an advertising message or customary maintenance, as defined by the Outdoor Advertising Act below, of the advertising display~~

~~87.3.3.8.3.1.10.1 “Customary maintenance” means any activity performed on a Display for the purpose of actively maintaining the Display in its existing approved physical configuration and size dimensions at the specific location approved on the application for State Outdoor Advertising Permit, or at the specific location officially recorded in the records of the Department for a legally placed Display, for the duration of its normal life. Customary maintenance includes the following activities: (1) Changing the advertising message; (2) Adding an extension to an outside dimension of a Display as incident to the copy for a temporary period up to three years; (3) The sale, lease, or transfer of the Display or Permit; and (4) Adding a light box. Customary maintenance that constitutes “development” under Public Resources Code section 30106 requires a Coastal Development Permit unless otherwise exempted under the California Public Resources Code Section 30610.~~

...

87.3.3.8.3.2 Placement of a destroyed advertising display shall be allowable if the following conditions are met:

87.3.3.8.3.2.1 An advertising display has been ~~destroyed damaged~~ by a disaster, as defined in section 30610(g)(2)(A) of the Coastal Act, natural forces and accidental incidents to the extent it loses functionality so as to be rendered useless and needs to be re-erected; and

87.3.3.8.3.2.2 The destroyed advertising display shall conform to applicable existing zoning requirements and, in addition, shall ~~is~~ not be located on public land, public easements on Natural Resource zoned properties, within bodies of water, flood hazard areas, ~~streamside management areas~~ riparian corridors, sensitive habitats, scenic resources or wetlands; and

4. **SUGGESTED MODIFICATION** : **Modifications for Internal Consistency, Minor Corrections, and Clarifications.** As shown in [Appendix A](#), add various changes for internal consistency, to add cross-references to related IP sections, and to make minor corrections and clarifications.

IV. PROCEDURAL ISSUES

A. Standard of Review

Pursuant to Coastal Act section 30513, to certify the proposed amendment to the IP portion of the County of Humboldt LCP, the Commission must find that the IP as amended would be in conformity with and adequate to carry out the policies of the certified LUP. Humboldt County has six certified LUP Area Plans – North Coast Area Plan, Trinidad Area Plan, McKinleyville Area Plan, Humboldt Bay Area Plan, Eel River Area Plan, and South Coast Area Plan. The IP as amended must be in conformity with and adequate to carry out the policies of each. Maps of the six LUP planning areas are included as [Exhibit 1](#).

B. Public Participation

Section 30503 of the Coastal Act requires public input in preparation, approval, certification and amendment of any LCP. The Humboldt County Planning Commission held a public hearing on the proposed amendment on October 19, 2023, and the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors held a public hearing on April 9, 2024. Public comment was collected and addressed by the County during public hearings. The hearings were noticed to the public consistent with sections 13551 and 13552 of Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations. Notice of the subject amendment has been distributed to all known interested parties.

C. Procedural Requirements

Pursuant to section 13544 of the Commission's regulations, if the Commission denies the LCP amendment as submitted, but then approves it with suggested modifications, the LCP amendment will not take effect until the County accepts and agrees to the Commission's suggested modifications, the Commission Executive Director determines that the County's acceptance is consistent with the Commission's action, and the Executive Director reports the determination to the Commission at the next regularly scheduled public meeting. If the County does not accept the suggested modifications within six months of the Commission's action, then the LCP amendment is not effective within the coastal zone. If the Commission certifies the LCP amendment as submitted, no further County action will be necessary to formally adopt the amendment.

D. Deadline for Commission Action

The County initially transmitted this IP amendment application to the Commission on August 27, 2024. Commission staff requested certain information necessary to complete the application on September 11, 2024. The County provided the requested information on December 3, 2024, at which point Commission staff deemed the subject application filed. On February 6, 2025, the Commission granted a one-year time extension to extend the deadline for the Commission to act on the IP amendment application. The last day for Commission to act on this item is March 3, 2026.

E. Additional Information

For further information, please contact Catherine Mitchell at the Commission's North Coast District Office in Arcata at Catherine.Mitchell@coastal.ca.gov. Please mail correspondence to the Commission at the letterhead address. In addition, please send a copy of all correspondence or other documents electronically to NorthCoast@coastal.ca.gov.

V. FINDINGS FOR DENIAL OF IP AMENDMENT AS SUBMITTED & APPROVAL IF MODIFIED AS SUGGESTED

A. Description of Proposed Amendment






The County of Humboldt (County) is proposing to amend the Implementation Program (IP) portion of the County's certified Local Coastal Program (LCP) related to signs, and specifically to amend Section 313-87.3 of Chapter 3 of Division 1 of Title III of Humboldt County Code with regulations pertaining to type, size, dimensions, placement, number, and design of signs ([Exhibit 2](#)). The proposed regulations would apply to all signs in the County's unincorporated coastal zone.



There are several differences between the existing certified sign regulations and the new sign regulations proposed under this IP amendment request. These include but are not limited to: (1) details pertaining to type, size, dimensions, placement, number, and design of signs; (2) updated regulations for off-premises and non-conforming signs, (3) new restrictions for digital (electronic messaging) signs, (4) updated standards for illumination; (5) specifications of prohibited sign types and features; and (6) regulations pertaining to maintenance of existing billboards.

As specified in the ordinance adopting the proposed IP changes, the intent of the proposed updated regulations is in part to update performance standards and permit procedures for all types of signs to promote: (1) public health, safety, and welfare; (2) the use of signs that are of appropriate scale and compatible with nearby development and landscape; (3) the free flow of traffic and the protection of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists from injury and property damage caused by distracting signs; and (4) support for business serving county residents, workers and visitors. Table 1 below summarizes the types of permitted signs addressed by the proposed regulations, descriptions and standards of each sign type, and zones where the specified sign types would be allowed.

Table 1. Summary of sign types addressed under the proposed regulations and requirements for each sign type.

Sign Type	Details
<u>Monument Signs</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowed as appurtenant sign subject to standards, zone restrictions, and permit requirements Quantity: 1 per frontage Area: 36 sq. ft. Width: 12 ft maximum

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Height: 7 ft maximum • Depth / Projection: 2 ft maximum
<p><u>Projecting and Banner Signs</u></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowed as appurtenant sign subject to standards, zone restrictions, and permit requirements • Quantity: 1 per facade • Area: 25 sq. ft. • Width: 8 ft maximum • Height: 8 ft maximum • Depth / Projection: 4 ft maximum • Clearance: 8 ft minimum • Distance to Curb: 2 ft minimum
<p><u>Awning Signs</u></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Awning Signs Under Canopy Signs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowed as appurtenant sign subject to standards, zone restrictions, and permit requirements • Quantity: 1 per window • Area: Not applicable • Width: Width of facade • Height: Not applicable • Depth / Projection: 4 ft maximum • Clearance: 8 ft minimum • Valance Height: 12 inches maximum • Distance to Curb: 2 ft minimum
<p><u>Wall Signs</u></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowed as appurtenant sign subject to standards, zone limitations and permit requirements • Quantity: Not specified • Area: 2 sq. ft. per linear foot of façade (not exceeding 100 sq. ft. per facade) • Width: 90% of the width of facade • Height: Roof line or parapet of the structure • Depth / Projection: 18 inches maximum • Clearance: 7 ft to sign edge minimum
<p><u>Window Signs</u></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowed as appurtenant sign subject to standards, zone restrictions, and permit requirements • Area: Not more than 25% of glass per facade • Clearance: 4 ft • Illumination: Design features may consist of neon or other small diameter tubing illuminated by fluorescing gas
<p><u>Freestanding Signs</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowed as appurtenant sign subject to standards, zone restrictions, and permit requirements • Quantity: 1 per business • Area: 64 sq. ft. • Width: 8 ft • Height: 18 ft • Clearance: 8 ft minimum • Valance Height: Not applicable

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distance to Curb: Not applicable
<p><u>A-frame and Standing Signs</u></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowed as appurtenant sign subject to standards, zone restrictions, and permit requirements Quantity: 2 per business (includes feather banners) Area: 8 sq. ft. Width: 2 ft maximum Height: 4 ft maximum Depth / Projection: Cannot be placed within County right-of-way or obstruct ADA access
<p><u>Feather Banners</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowed as appurtenant sign subject to standards, zone restrictions, and permit requirements Area: 30 sq. ft. Width: 3 ft maximum Height: 12 ft maximum Depth: Cannot be placed within County right-of-way or obstruct ADA access
<p><u>Fuel Price Signs</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowed as appurtenant sign subject to standards, zone restrictions, and permit requirements Quantity: 2 per business Area: 64 sq. ft. Width: 8 ft Height: 18 ft Clearance: 8 ft Display: May consist of changeable LED numbers
<p><u>Existing Billboards</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defined as an advertising display affixed to any post within 660 feet of a state highway, freeway, or historic highway or freeway that was lawfully erected in compliance with state laws and local ordinances in effect at the time of its erection “Placement” generally not allowed except in certain limited circumstances “Placement” defined (in part) as raising height, altering dimensions, relocating, adding back-up facing, turning direction of, adding electrical box or illumination to, re-erecting a destroyed structure, and certain maintenance activities
<p><u>Nameplates</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principally permitted on existing structures appurtenant to any permitted use when conforming to specified size limits that vary by zone district Statement of name, address, and occupational designation of occupant No illumination allowed

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 nameplate allowed
<u>Temporary Signs</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political signs, special event signs, temporary event signs • Limited display and not to exceed 32 sq. ft. • Principally permitted in any zone district when conforming with the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strings or banners, streamers, pennants and similar devices for business openings, temporary sales and events can be placed 30 days prior and must be removed within 10 days after opening. • Political signs pertaining to a scheduled election can be placed up to 90 days prior to election and removed within 10 days after election day • Temporary signs advertising a special event being held by a public agency or non-profit can be placed up to 30 days prior and must be removed within 10 days after event
<u>Property Sale Signs</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary signs to advertise sale of property on which sign is displayed • No illumination allowed • Must be removed within 15 days of sale or lease • Size varies by zone district • Signs advertising sale of lots in a subdivision may be permitted in any zone district when not exceeding 100 sq. ft. aggregate.
<u>Murals, Decorations, & Exterior Design Elements</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If sign does not advertise product, business, or service, it is principally permitted in any zone
<u>Directional Signs</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicate directions to public recreational areas, visitor serving facilities, and other facilities. • Limited to name of the use(s), a directional arrow or statement, and approximate distance to the use(s) • Permitted with a Special Permit in all zones, can only be located along arterial roadways and higher order streets.
<u>Creative Signs</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any appurtenant sign may deviate from specified standards as a creative sign where no more than 40% of sign area is digitally printed, of unique design • This type of sign is reviewed by the Zoning Administrator, permitted with a Special Permit, and shall follow specific design, size, and materials specifications
<u>Prohibited Sign Types</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital, Animated, or Changeable Copy Signs • New Billboards • Off-premises Signs • Decorative Signs (banner, yard, inflatable, etc. except as allowed as Temporary Signs) • Hazardous Signs (those adversely affecting traffic control or safety)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obsolete Signs (identifying a use or activity that has not occupied the site for more than 6 months) • Signs placed on Public Roads (except by Dept. of Public Works), public property (except by public property owner), natural features (trees, rocks, etc.), or other structures (utility poles, street sign poles, garbage receptacles, etc.) • Roof signs • Dilapidated signs
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Permitting New Signs

Under the proposed regulations, signs would require a Coastal Development Permit (CDP) in most cases, though as proposed, the permit requirements are somewhat unclear and internally inconsistent. Discretionary Conditional Use Permits and/or Special Permits also are required for signs in certain cases, including when signs are proposed that are inconsistent with the Sign Requirements in section 87.3.3.4.5 of the proposed regulations.

The proposed regulations include details for submittal of a Master Sign Plan for larger multi-tenant development sites to provide a coordinated approach to signage. A Master Sign Plan could be principally permitted if consistent with the standards of section 313-87.3.3.4.5 or would otherwise require a Special Permit in order to deviate from the standard requirements to allow transfers of maximum sign areas between tenants on a site, deviation from the total number of each type of sign allowed, or deviation from the maximum size of signs allowed.

B. Consistency Analysis

1. Visual Compatibility and Protection of Visual Resources

Throughout the County and the six LUP planning areas, there are a number of public views to and along the coast and scenic coastal areas available, including scenic overlooks, coastal roads and highway segments offering views of the ocean, bay, wetlands, and vast agricultural bottomlands. There are several key areas in the County coastal zone where the erection of new signs could raise visual resources issue due to the high visibility of sign development to visitors traveling through or visiting the areas and/or due to visibility of signs from scenic coastal areas and the California Coastal Trail (CCT). In addition, excessive and/or misdirected sign lighting during nighttime hours could impact public views of the nighttime sky from scenic coastal areas and waterfront walkways.

(a) Applicable LUP Policies

Each of the County's six LUP planning areas include policies related to the protection of visual resources, including, but not limited to, the following Coastal Act policies:

§ 30251, in applicable part:

The scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, to minimize the alteration of natural land forms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas, and, where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas...

§ 30253(e):

New development shall do all of the following:

...

(e) Where appropriate, protect special communities and neighborhoods that, because of their unique characteristics, are popular visitor destination points for recreational uses.

In addition, all six LUP planning areas include the following additional visual resources protection policy (in applicable part):

Physical Scale and Visual Compatibility: No development shall be approved that is not compatible with the physical scale of development as designated in the zoning for the subject parcel...

The six LUP planning areas further protect visual resources through designation of Coastal View Areas (CVAs) and Coastal Scenic Areas (CSAs), where additional policies beyond the above-cited policies, apply. These areas, which are described in each LUP planning area and shown on Resource Protection Maps, also are designated for "Design Review" (D) on zoning maps. The zoning code defines Coastal Views as "Views of the beach and ocean from the public roads and parks." The CVA and CSA policies limit, prohibit, or require additional review for new development, including signage, with the potential to impact public views, as summarized below:

- In the South Coast Area Plan (SCAP): Prohibits structures over 20 feet, unless expanded side yard view corridors are provided.
- In the Humboldt Bay Area Plan (HBAP): Includes policies stating that all development visible from Highway 101 shall be subordinate to the character of the surrounding area, and policy 3.40(B)(4) for Coastal View Areas: "No off-premise signs shall be permitted, and on-premise signs to a total area of 40 square feet shall be permitted. Existing billboards (offsite signs) shall be phased out where feasible." and (B)(6) "New Off-Site Signs: No new off-site signs shall be permitted in rural areas except for directional signs that indicate directions to major recreational facilities, hospitals, and other emergency facilities." Coastal View Areas include the Bottomlands between Eureka and Arcata, South Spit, and Table Bluff, and Highway 101 between Bracut and Brainard.

- McKinleyville Area Plan (MAP): Several important view areas are zoned and designated Public Recreation, Natural Resource, or Agriculture Exclusive. Coastal Scenic Area designation for the Clam Beach area and coastal bluffs west of Clam Beach;
- Trinidad Area Plan (TAP): Several areas within the Humboldt Bay Area Plan are zoned rural residential, and Parcels within the Trinidad Area Plan Coastal View Areas have a D-Design Review combining zone designation, which requires a design review process for new development. Limits on-premise signs to a total area of 40 square feet within Coastal View Areas. Includes requirements for off site signs to be clustered adjacent to off ramps, sited and designed to maintain views of a forested corridor from highway. Coastal View Areas include portions of Scenic Drive and Patricks Point Drive.
- North Coast Area Plan (NCAP): Within Coastal View Areas, “No off-premise signs shall be permitted, and on-premise signs to a total area of 40 square feet shall be permitted. Existing billboards (offsite signs) shall be phased out where feasible.” Additional requirements for residential uses in between the coast and a road affording a view of the coast, including height restrictions and requirements for detailed plans for any exterior lighting of structures and signs. The NCAP also sets up a Design Assistance Committee which reviews, among other things, off-premise signs to direct visitors to commercial recreation areas. Coastal View Areas include portions of Highway 101 adjacent to the lagoons.

(b) Standards Proposed to Protect Visual Resources

The proposed IP amendment as submitted includes various standards to protect scenic resources and visual compatibility consistent with the above cited LUP requirements. First, the proposed IP amendment prohibits certain types of distracting signs outright that generally are incompatible with the character of the County’s coastal zone lands, including digital, animated, or changeable signs, billboards and off-premises signs, permanent decorative signs, roof signs, and dilapidated signs that have been declared a nuisance. The proposed regulations prohibit signs on public roads, signs on public property, and signs on natural features and other structures including utility poles, traffic signal equipment, and garbage receptacles.

Second, the proposed regulations prohibit certain design features on all sign types, including, but not limited to, signs containing colors or reflective paint that blinds the vision of drivers, or signs which stimulate or imitate the appearance of any traffic sign or signal.

Third, the proposed regulations include section 313-87.3.3.10.1 illumination standards to minimize glare and protect visual resources. Generally, light sources for signs (1) must be steady, stationary, static in color, (2) must utilize full-cutoff lighting, be downward casting, and shielded, and (3) light sources for externally illuminated signs must be shielded and positioned so that light is only directed at the face of the sign and does not extend beyond. These illumination standards are more detailed and protective

of visual resources compared to illumination standards in the existing certified sign regulations, which do not have clear specifications for sign illumination.

Fourth, the County considered existing and surrounding land uses of different areas of the County in determining which sign types to allow in which areas. With the goal of using of signs “that are of appropriate scale and compatible with nearby development and landscape” the proposed regulations (1) prohibit digital and roof signs in all zones, and (2) only allow appurtenant signs in residential zoning districts with a Use Permit, providing for additional review in residential areas.

Finally, the proposed regulations include additional design restrictions for non-standard signs through the Master Sign Plan process and supplemental regulations for Creative Signs. The Master Sign Plan provides an avenue to deviate from the requirements of the Appurtenant Sign requirements in proposed Section 87.3.3.4.5 with a Special Permit. Creative Signs require a Special Permit and supplemental review under the Zoning Administrator.

(c) Findings for Denial as Submitted and Approval if Modified as Suggested

Although the proposed regulations include the many standards discussed above to protect visual resources, as submitted the proposed IP amendment does not conform with and is not adequate to carry out certain LUP policies related to visual resources protection. The proposed regulations omit standards for development of signs within Coastal View Areas and Coastal Scenic Areas, where the associated “D – Design Review” combining zone designation is applied. The various LUP Area Plans and the D-combining zone requirements of the existing IP include specific policies and standards that in some cases conflict with the sign standards of the proposed regulations. For example, in designated CSAs in the Trinidad Area Plan planning area, policy 3.40(B)(3)(b) and (4)(a) restrict signs in CSAs and CVAs (respectively) to a total area of 40 square feet (similar CVA policies are included in the Humboldt Bay Area Plan and North Coast Area Plan of the LUP as well). However, the proposed regulations as submitted allow for appurtenant freestanding signs of up to 64 square feet, with no further limitations specified for CSAs or CVAs. As another example, in CSAs in the Humboldt Bay Area Plan planning area, new development in designated CVAs (such as along the Highway 101 corridor between Eureka and Arcata), signs and other development shall “not block any part of the view to the coast or coastal waterways as viewed from public roads in a vehicle” (HBAP policy 3.40(B)(4)(c)(1)). No such standard is included in the IP amendment as submitted. Additionally, IP section 312-9.3.1 specifies that, within Coastal Scenic Areas, a project must be sited and designed to be *subordinate* to the character of the setting, whereas the proposed IP amendment as submitted does not include standards requiring signage in CSAs to be subordinate to the character of the setting.

Therefore, **Suggested Modification 1** adds a design standard for new signs as section 313-87.3.3.10.2 for public view protection requiring that any permitted sign shall be (a) sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, (b) visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas, (c) subordinate to the

character of its setting in Coastal Scenic Areas, and (d) found consistent with applicable Coastal View Area standards required under the coastal land use plan for the sign location. This modification will ensure that new signs are sited to avoid interfering with public views to and along the ocean from public roads and recreation areas and protect the scenic and visual qualities of Coastal View and Coastal Scenic Areas designated in the LUP Area Plans.

Therefore, the Commission finds that the proposed IP amendment, as modified by Suggested Modification 1, conforms with and is adequate to carry out the requirements of the certified LUP, consistent with section 30513 of the Coastal Act.

2. Protection of Public Access

Humboldt County's coastal zone spans approximately 100 miles of coastline (with an additional ~100 miles of shoreline area along inland sloughs and waterways associated with Humboldt Bay alone), giving it the longest coastline of California's counties, and contains both easily accessible areas and some of the state's most remote sections of coast. According to the California Coastal Trail (CCT) website, Humboldt County enjoys 143 miles of Coastal Trail, some of which follows roads and passes inland on its way to remote and rugged sections of the southern Humboldt coastline. Portions of the CCT connect to trail segments built by the cities of Arcata and Eureka, including the 4.5-mile-long segment through the Eureka-Arcata Highway 101 corridor as approved via CDP No. 1-20-0560 and nearing project completion in the summer of 2025. There are multiple access points throughout the County's coastal zone that are used by recreators to access these trails, including dedicated parking areas throughout each of the area's six LUP Area Plans, as well as informal locations used for convenience. Key access points are listed in Access Inventories in each Area Plan.

(a) Applicable Coastal Act and LUP Policies

Coastal Act sections 30210, 30211, 30212, and 30212.5 (emphasis added) are listed as enforcement policies in each of the six LUP Area Plans:

§ 30210:

In carrying out the requirement of Section 4 of Article X of the California Constitution, maximum access, which shall be conspicuously posted, and recreational opportunities shall be provided for all the people consistent with public safety needs and the need to protect public rights, rights of private property owners, and natural resource areas from overuse.

§ 30211:

Development shall not interfere with the public's right of access to the sea where acquired through use or legislative authorization, including, but not limited to, the use of dry sand and rocky coastal beaches to the first line of terrestrial vegetation.

§ 30212 (in applicable part):

(a) Public access from the nearest public roadway to the shoreline and along the coast shall be provided in new development projects except where: (1) it is inconsistent with public safety, military security needs, or the protection of fragile coastal resources, (2) adequate access exists nearby, or (3) agriculture would be adversely affected. Dedicated accessway shall not be required to be opened to public use until a public agency or private association agrees to accept responsibility for maintenance and liability of the accessway.

...

§ 30212.5:

Wherever appropriate and feasible, public facilities, including parking areas or facilities, shall be distributed throughout an area so as to mitigate against the impacts, social and otherwise, of overcrowding or overuse by the public of any single area.

Additionally, each LUP Area Plan includes various polices related to accessway improvements, prescriptive rights, dedication requirements, coastal trail routes, and detailed access inventories. In addition, IP sec. 312-7.2.1.6 directs (emphasis added):

Development shall be sited and designed in a manner which does not interfere with or diminish any public right of access which may have been established based on substantial evidence of historic public use.

(b) Findings for Denial as Submitted and Approval if Modified as Suggested

The proposed IP amendment as submitted omits standards regarding the protection of public access and the avoidance of allowing new signage to interfere with public access. The submitted regulations are inadequate because the regulations do not acknowledge the possibility that signage may impact coastal public access and include appropriate language which prohibits interference with public access as required per the certified LCP and chapter 3 of the Coastal Act. For example, proposed section 313-87.3.3.11.7 allows the Department of Public Works to erect signs on public roads, such as No Parking signs that may interfere with existing coastal access points. Because such signs could have an adverse impact on public access to the shoreline inconsistent with the Coastal Act, the Commission therefore provides **Suggested Modification 2** to prohibit the placement of signs that interfere with public access inconsistent with the public access policies of the Coastal Act or the County's certified LCP.

Therefore, the Commission finds that the proposed IP amendment, only as modified, is consistent with and adequate to carry out the public access protection policies of the certified LUP, consistent with section 30513 of the Coastal Act.

3. Protection of Natural Resources & Water Quality

Coastal Humboldt County has abundant lands and waters planned and zoned for natural resources uses. Notable natural resource areas include the Shelter Cove area,

the Eel River area, lands around Humboldt Bay, dune habitats along the Samoa Spit and north to the Mad River, sensitive forest lands around Trinidad, and the coastal lagoons and parkland areas in the northern part of the County. In addition to areas zoned for natural resources uses, the County coastal zone contains extensive wetland areas and riparian habitat areas around rivers, creeks, sloughs, and agricultural bottomlands.

(a) Applicable LUP Policies

The six LUP Area Plans each include a number of policies to protect wetlands, water quality, ESHA, and marine resources in the County including, as enforceable policies, Coastal Act sections 30240 and 30233:

§ 30240: Environmentally sensitive habitat areas; adjacent developments

(a) Environmentally sensitive habitat areas shall be protected against any significant disruption of habitat values, and only uses dependent on those resources shall be allowed within those areas.

(b) Development in areas adjacent to environmentally sensitive habitat areas and parks and recreation areas shall be sited and designed to prevent impacts which would significantly degrade those areas, and shall be compatible with the continuance of those habitat and recreation areas.

§ 30233: Diking, filling or dredging; continued movement of sediment and nutrients

(a) The diking, filling, or dredging of open coastal waters, wetlands, estuaries, and lakes shall be permitted in accordance with other applicable provisions of this division, where there is no feasible less environmentally damaging alternative, and where feasible mitigation measures have been provided to minimize adverse environmental effects, and shall be limited to the following:

(...)

All of the Area Plans except for the Eel River Area Plan include Coastal Act sections 30230 and 30231 as enforceable policies:

§ 30230: Marine resources; maintenance

Marine resources shall be maintained, enhanced, and where feasible, restored. Special protection shall be given to areas and species of special biological or economic significance. Uses of the marine environment shall be carried out in a manner that will sustain the biological productivity of coastal waters and that will maintain healthy populations of all species of marine organisms adequate for long-term commercial, recreational, scientific, and educational purposes.

§ 30231: Biological productivity; water quality

The biological productivity and the quality of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, estuaries, and lakes appropriate to maintain optimum populations of marine organisms and for the protection of human health shall be maintained and, where feasible, restored through, among other means, minimizing adverse effects of waste water discharges and entrainment, controlling runoff, preventing depletion of ground water supplies and substantial interference with surface waterflow, encouraging waste water reclamation, maintaining natural vegetation buffer areas that protect riparian habitats, and minimizing alteration of natural streams.

In addition, the LCP identifies Environmentally Sensitive Habitats within each Area Plan. For instance, the Humboldt Bay Area Plan identifies ESHA as follows:

- (1) Wetlands and estuaries, including Humboldt Bay and the mouth of the Mad River.
- (2) Vegetated dunes along the North Spit to the Mad River and along the South Spit.
- (3) Rivers, creeks, gulches, sloughs and associated riparian habitats, including Mad River Slough, Ryan Slough, Eureka Slough, Freshwater Slough, Liscom Slough, Fay Slough, Elk River, Salmon Creek, and other streams.
- (4) Critical habitats for rare and endangered species listed on state or federal lists.

ESHA lists in the five other LUP Area Plans are similar but vary slightly.

(b) Standards Proposed to Protect Natural Resources

In some parts of the County, lands planned and zoned for NR uses are immediately adjacent to industrial and commercial (CR and MC) lands, which will allow for a variety of types of signage. If not restricted, development associated with signage could adversely affect the natural resource areas via lighting impacts. Illumination associated with signage could affect nocturnal wildlife using adjacent wetland and ESHA habitats. Many wildlife species are known to avoid areas with excessive lighting, and some species simply stop reproducing if habitat destruction from overly bright lights becomes too severe. Such lighting also can create reflective glare off the waters of Humboldt Bay detrimental to marine species that inhabit coastal waters. Thus, the proposed IP amendment as submitted includes standards to protect ESHA and wetlands from these potential impacts associated with signs.

The proposed IP amendment as submitted includes illumination restrictions that will protect adjacent ESHA and parks and recreation areas from signage lighting impacts that could significantly degrade those areas. As previously discussed, proposed section 313-87.3.3.10 includes illumination restrictions that apply to all sign types and requires that (among other requirements) for externally illuminated signs, the light source must be positioned downwards, shielded and positioned so that light is only directed at the face of the sign and does spill beyond where it is needed. Lighting luminance is limited

to 100 candela per square meter, which is generally considered to be an appropriate level of luminance for outdoor illumination. Lighting is further limited to the lowest light level necessary to be visible from the property line, so that light does not shine beyond property boundaries, and lighting can only be on between sunrise and sunset or 30 minutes before opening/after closing.

Additionally, the proposed regulations prevent the re-erection of a “destroyed” advertising display (e.g., if any existing billboard blows over due to high winds, as has happened in the past with billboards erected along edge of Humboldt Bay) if the display is located on “public land, public easements on Natural Resource zoned properties, within bodies of water, flood hazard areas, streamside management areas, sensitive habitats, scenic resources, or wetlands.” This restriction will serve to phase out inappropriately sited existing billboards in wetlands and on public lands planned and zoned for NR uses.

Furthermore, the proposed IP amendment as submitted prohibits the erection of signs affixed to or painted on trees, rocks, or other natural features.

(c) Findings for Denial as Submitted and Approval if Modified as Suggested

While the proposed standards are appropriate, the proposed IP amendment as submitted lacks standards for repair and maintenance activities of existing billboards located in or adjacent to ESHA and wetlands. There are approximately two dozen existing billboards located within and/or adjacent to wetlands and ESHA (such as riparian areas and other types of sensitive natural communities) within unincorporated areas of the County coastal zone along Highway 101 between Arcata and Loleta. Many of these billboards are within view of public lands, including scenic byways, recreational areas, and federal and state wildlife areas. While the proposed regulations prohibit new off-site signs, including new billboards, they do allow maintenance of existing billboards. The proposed regulations define an existing billboard as “an advertising display affixed to any post within 660 feet of a state highway, freeway, or historic highway or freeway that was lawfully erected in compliance with state laws and local ordinances in effect at the time of its erection.” The regulations specify that billboards claiming to be “existing” must provide an active and compliant Outdoor Advertising Display Permit, and that billboards without an active permit may need to be removed consistent with the Outdoor Advertising Act (OAA).

The proposed regulations refer to several maintenance and modification activities as “placement” in reference to OAA standards. Placement includes, but is not limited to, activities such as raising the height of a display, adding a back-up facing to a single facing display, adding illumination, a changeable message, or an electrical box, and re-erecting a destroyed advertising display. Placement activities are prohibited except in cases when (1) the display has been damaged to the extent it loses functionality and is therefore rendered useless, (2) the display is not located on public land, public easements on NR properties, or in water, flood hazard areas, sensitive habitats, or scenic resources, (3) a Conditional Use Permit with a term limit of 15 years has been secured, and (4) a Building Permit has been issued.

While these limitations on placement activities are appropriate, they include a significant loophole allowing “customary maintenance” (as defined by the OAA) of existing billboards without any permit requirements for maintenance activities for existing billboards located in and adjacent to wetlands and ESHA. Customary maintenance, as defined by the OAA, includes the following: (1) changing the advertising message; (2) adding an extension to an outside dimension of a display as incident to the copy for a temporary period up to three years; (3) the sale, lease, or transfer of the display or permit; and (4) adding a light box. Certain customary maintenance activities, including extending the outside dimensions of a display and adding a light box, could have a negative effect on adjacent ESHA and wetlands. Additionally, the methods of customary maintenance work could pose a risk of substantial adverse environmental effect if the billboard is located within an ESHA, within 50 feet of the edge of ESHA, or within 20 feet of coastal waters. Section 30610(d) of the Coastal Act and 14 CCR section 13252 of the Commission’s regulations require a CDP for maintenance activities that involve the use of mechanized equipment or construction materials in (among other areas) an ESHA, within 50 feet of the edge of ESHA, or within 20 feet of coastal waters. Therefore, **Suggested Modification 3** would add language to require any customary maintenance that constitutes “development” under Public Resources Code section 30106 to obtain a Coastal Development Permit, unless otherwise exempted under section 30610. The suggested modification also adds the above definition of customary maintenance from the OAA to the ordinance itself.

Therefore, the Commission finds that the proposed IP amendment, only as modified, is consistent with and adequate to carry out the natural resources protection policies of the certified LUP, consistent with section 30513 of the Coastal Act.

4. Permit Procedures

(a) Applicable LUP Policies

As defined by the Coastal Act (section 30106) and the definition section of each of the LUP Area Plans, “development” refers to both “the placement or erection of any solid material or structure” on land as well as any “change[s] in the density or intensity of use of land[.]” The construction of new structures including signs constitutes the “placement or erection of solid material.” Therefore, these activities would generally constitute development in the coastal zone that requires a CDP or other authorization. (Pub. Res. Code section 30600.)

Each of the LUP Plan Areas, as well as existing IP section 312-3.1.4, require securing a CDP for any development (defined in existing IP section 313-139 consistent with the definition of development in Coastal Act section 30106) in the County’s unincorporated coastal zone, unless the development is exempted or excluded under the Coastal Act or the California Code of Regulations. Coastal Act sections 30610(b) and (d) provide that (respectively) improvements to existing structures and repair and maintenance activities that do not add to or enlarge or expand the object of the repair and maintenance are exempt from CDP requirements unless the development risks adverse environmental effects. Coastal Act section 30610(g) exempts from CDP requirements “The

replacement of any structure, other than a public works facility, destroyed by a disaster.” Disaster is defined as any situation in which the force or forces which destroyed the structure to be replaced were beyond the control of its owner.

(b) Findings for Denial as Submitted and Approval if Modified as Suggested

As submitted, proposed IP section 313-87.3.3 states that new signs shall be permitted with a CDP unless otherwise specified but elsewhere (e.g., section 313-87.3.3.3) the proposed IP amendment includes conflicting information on CDP requirements suggesting that a CDP is required only in certain cases. As submitted, the proposed IP amendment does not provide adequate or accurate detail on exemptions from CDP requirements for signs in certain cases as provided under Coastal Act section 30610. Essentially, in some places the proposed IP amendment suggests that a CDP is required for the erection of a new sign in all cases when in fact there may be instances where installation of a sign may be exempt under section 30610(b) or (g). In other places the proposed IP amendment states that no CDP is required in situations where in fact an exemption may not apply under the limitations specified in the Commission’s regulations for CDP exemptions (e.g., 14 CCR sec. 13253 or 13252). For example, the proposed regulations would allow an existing billboard to be re-erected if destroyed or damaged by “natural forces and accidental incidents,” but the proposed regulations do not include the Coastal Act section 30610(g) requirements that the exemption only applies if certain circumstances are met. As previously discussed, the proposed IP amendment includes no permit requirements for the repair and maintenance of existing billboards that are located in an area where (pursuant to 14 CCR sec. 13252) the exemption afforded under section 30610(d) (for repair and maintenance of existing structures) is inapplicable. The Commission therefore provides **Suggested Modification 4** to clarify that new signs require a CDP unless exempt under 30610, add reference to 30610(g) for destroyed billboards, delete erroneous references to the inland zoning code, remove references to external regulations for clarity, and other minor corrections and non-substantive changes necessary for internal consistency.

For all of the reasons stated above, the Commission finds that the proposed IP amendment, only as suggested to be modified, conforms with and is adequate to carry out the coastal resource protection policies of the County’s six certified LUP Area Plans as amended.

VI. CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA)

As set forth in section 21080.9 of the California Public Resources Code, CEQA exempts local government from the requirement of preparing an environmental impact report (EIR) in connection with its activities and approvals necessary for the preparation and adoption of an LCP. The Commission’s LCP review and approval program has been found by the Natural Resources Agency to be the functional equivalent of the environmental review required by CEQA, pursuant to CEQA section 21080.5. Therefore, the Commission is relieved of the responsibility to prepare an EIR for each LCP and LCP amendment.

Nevertheless, the Commission is required, in approving an LCP amendment, to find that the approval of the proposed LCP, as amended, does conform with CEQA provisions, including the requirement in CEQA section 21080.5(d)(2)(A) that the amended LCP will not be approved or adopted as proposed if there are feasible alternatives or feasible mitigation measures available that would substantially lessen any significant adverse impact which the activity may have on the environment [14 CCR §§13542(a), 13540(f), and 13555(b)].

The Commission incorporates its findings on LUP conformity into this CEQA finding as if set forth in full herein. As discussed throughout the staff report and hereby incorporated by reference, the IP amendment as originally submitted does not conform with and is not adequate to carry out the policies of the certified LUP. The Commission, therefore, has suggested modifications to bring the IP amendment into full conformance with the LUP.

As modified, the Commission finds that approval of the LCP amendment will not result in significant adverse environmental impacts within the meaning of CEQA. Further, future individual projects on the subject parcels would require coastal development permits. Throughout the coastal zone, specific impacts to coastal resources resulting from individual development projects are assessed through the coastal development review process; thus, an individual project's compliance with CEQA would be assured. Therefore, the Commission finds that there are no other feasible alternatives or mitigation measures which would substantially lessen any significant adverse impact which the activity may have on the environment [14 CCR §§ 13542(a), 13540(f), and 13555(b)].