

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT FOR PLANNING COMMISSION
FEBRUARY 22, 2024

PROJECT TITLE

Wayfinding Sign Zoning Code Text
Amendment

APPLICANT

N/A

ADDRESS/LOCATION

Citywide

PROPERTY OWNER

N/A

ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBER

N/A

FILE NUMBERS

REZ23-009

APPLICATION DATES

N/A

APPLICATION COMPLETION DATES

N/A

REQUESTED ENTITLEMENTS

Zoning Code Text Amendment

FURTHER ACTIONS REQUIRED

City Council Ordinance

PROJECT SITE ZONING

N/A

GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION

N/A

PROJECT PLANNER

Christian Candelaria, City Planner

RECOMMENDATION

Recommend adoption to City Council

For Planning Commission Meeting of: February 22, 2024

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
PLANNING COMMISSION

TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: CHRISTIAN CANDELARIA, CITY PLANNER
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: WAYFINDING SIGN ZONING CODE TEXT AMENDMENT

AGENDA ACTION: RECOMMEND CITY COUNCIL ADOPTION

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Planning and Economic Development Department that the Planning Commission, by resolution, recommend that the City Council adopt a Zoning Code Text Amendment to amend Title 20 of the Santa Rosa City Code, Chapter 20-38, to provide standards for Wayfinding Signs, and Section 20-70.020, Definitions of Specialized Terms and Phrases, to add definitions related to Wayfinding Signs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

City Code Chapter 20-38, Signs, has limited standards for public/civic wayfinding and explicitly prohibits business wayfinding. On March 8, 2023, a Temporary Use Permit was approved to allow a one-year wayfinding signage pilot program for businesses located within the Railroad Square area. The proposed Zoning Code Text Amendment will allow and provide standards for public/civic wayfinding and business wayfinding, as well as various text amendments to allow for the implementation of wayfinding signage within the boundaries of both the North Santa Rosa Station Area Specific Plan and the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan. The proposed text amendment would allow the temporary Railroad Square Business Wayfinding Pilot Program to apply for a permanent Wayfinding Sign Program.

BACKGROUND

1. Project Description

The proposed Zoning Code Text Amendment for City Zoning Code Chapter 20-38, Signs, and City Code Section 20-70.020, Definitions of Specialized Terms and Phrases, will provide standards for Wayfinding Signage as well as for existing and proposed Wayfinding Sign Programs. The regulations would be

focused on wayfinding signage for areas located within the boundaries of the North Santa Rosa Station Area Specific Plan and Downtown Station Area Specific Plan.

2. Project History

March 8, 2023	Railroad Square Business Wayfinding Pilot Program approved through a one-year Temporary Use Permit.
September 21, 2023	Courthouse Square Wayfinding Sign Program approved through a Sign Permit application based on existing Zoning Code Section 20-38.040(U).
October 9, 2023 – November 9, 2023	A public survey was released requesting feedback on a potential business wayfinding sign program.
January 17, 2024	Cultural Heritage Board Study Session on the draft Wayfinding Sign ordinance.
January 25, 2024	Design Review Board Study Session on the draft Wayfinding Sign ordinance.

ANALYSIS

1. Proposed Zoning Code Text Amendments

The project includes a set of amendments to the Santa Rosa Zoning Code to incorporate Wayfinding Signage standards.

Zoning Code Section 20-38.040(U), Sign and Sign Changes allowed without a Sign Permit, is currently the only section that provides Wayfinding Sign standards.

“ U. Wayfinding and gateway signage. Special wayfinding, gateway, and directional signage located within the -DSA combining district does not require a Sign Permit when proposed as part of a project that is subject to Design Review. The signs may be off-site and located in the public right-of-way and may not include advertising or commercial identification. The size, location, and number of signs shall be determined by the review authority. Signs must be provided in English and Spanish. A Sign Permit and Design Review by the Director shall be required for signage proposed as part of a project that is not subject to discretionary Design Review.”

The above Wayfinding standards are only applicable within the Downtown Station Area (-DSA) combining zoning district boundaries and prohibit advertising or commercial identification. This section also sets forth the permit and application pathway that is proposed to be amended by this proposed ordinance.

The one-year, temporary, pilot program approved for the Railroad Square wayfinding signs was intended to provide City staff time to gather feedback and establish standards for Business Wayfinding. Under the proposed ordinance, the previously approved temporary Railroad Square program would need to apply for a new Sign Program and follow the new standards included in the ordinance, which would necessitate updating the sign poles to include a sign header, adding a public/civic amenity sign, and increasing the font size for some of the individual signs consistent with the draft standards.

The proposed Zoning Code text amendments are summarized below and are included in full in Exhibit A to the attached draft resolution:

- a. Add Zoning Code Section 20-38.080, Standards for Wayfinding Signs (Note: the existing Section 20-38.080 will be renumbered to 20-38.090)

- **Wayfinding Signs Program Eligibility Criteria**

Staff is recommending that the proposed Wayfinding Sign Program standards apply only within the North Santa Rosa Station Area and Downtown Station Area boundaries of the City. These locations were selected based on the fact that both Specific Plans include Wayfinding programs within their goals and policies.

- **General Standards**

This section includes standards and requirements for the number of signs allowed, sign dimensions and locations, design criteria, and the application process. The draft standards set forth a ministerial process for development and review of wayfinding sign posts and individual signs (also called sign plaques).

- **Renumbering of Sections**

In order to add in proposed Section 20-38.080, Standards for Wayfinding Signs, existing sections within Chapter 20-38, Signs, will need to be renumbered, with any cross-references to each section amended accordingly throughout the Zoning Code.

- b. Amend Zoning Code Section 20-70.020, Definitions of Specialized Terms and Phrases

This section of the Zoning Code would be amended to add definitions related to Wayfinding Signage, with renumbering proposed to add the new definitions alphabetically.

2. Zoning Code Text Amendment Findings

Pursuant to Zoning Code Section 20-64.050(B), amendments to the text of the Zoning Code may be approved only if all the following findings are made; the staff response to each are also provided:

- A. The proposed amendment is consistent with the goals and policies of all elements of the General Plan, and any applicable specific plan.

Staff Response:

The General Plan addresses issues related to the physical development and growth of Santa Rosa and guides the City's planning and zoning functions. The Downtown Station Area Specific Plan and the North Santa Rosa Station Area Specific Plan foresaw the need for Wayfinding Signage by providing goals and policies to promote transit options, walkability, businesses, and community character. The most relevant applicable goals and policies for each Plan, along with staff's analysis, are included below:

GENERAL PLAN

- LUL-DD-1 Promote activity-generating retail establishments, such as cafés, coffee shops, and newsstands, near the SMART station and on the ground floor of any parking garages developed on the site.
- LUL-DD-2 Provide pedestrian amenities, such as lighting, benches, and canopy trees, with a consistent visual appearance throughout the project area to encourage walking, identify pathways, and make the station area a comfortable and easy place to pass through or visit.
- LUL-LL-3 Develop and install wayfinding signage to the downtown Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) station, SMART multi-use path, Sebastopol Road commercial district, and other key destinations. Wayfinding should be designed to help create a sense of place and strengthen project area identity.

- T-H-5 Encourage ridership on public transit systems through marketing and promotional efforts.
- UD-B-1 Maintain and enhance downtown’s position as the main civic, entertainment, commercial, and office hub of Santa Rosa and the region.

DOWNTOWN STATION AREA SPECIFIC PLAN

- MOB-2.7 Activate bicycle and pedestrian connections under US 101 and SR 12 with enhanced lighting, public art, and wayfinding signage to improve visual quality and perception of safety.
- MOB-6.5 Improving branding, communications, and Wayfinding Signage.
- DG-6 Within the Core and Station areas, directional signage should be provided at key intersections in the Active Ground Floor Overlay indicating walking time estimates and the direction to key destinations.

NORTH SANTA ROSA STATION AREA SPECIFIC PLAN

- UD-4.6 Develop and implement a comprehensive wayfinding strategy and branding program, to create a sense of place and strengthen the area identity.

The proposed Wayfinding Zoning Code Text Amendment is a type of pedestrian-focused signage aimed at providing direction toward key sites and businesses within the Downtown Station Area and North Santa Rosa Station Area. Wayfinding signage would assist pedestrians with navigating the City’s streetscape and promote the walkable nature of the City’s commercial areas. Pedestrian-focused signage would help provide direction to the SMART Stations, nearby businesses, and Santa Rosa’s various civic/public locations. Wayfinding signs would be beneficial in helping pedestrians navigate between Railroad Square and Courthouse Square, which is currently separated by the Santa Rosa Plaza and Highway 101. Wayfinding signs would help provide a community feel within both the Downtown Station Area and the North Santa Rosa Station Area through the design and showcasing of the various features and amenities of their areas, and will serve to create a sense of place and strengthen the areas identity.

- B. The proposed amendment would not be detrimental to the public interest, health, safety, convenience, or welfare of the City.

Staff Response:

The proposed amendments would provide additional assistance with navigating toward areas of interest in Santa Rosa that provide social and economic benefits to the City. Wayfinding signage is reviewed for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, California Building Code, City standards for public right-of-way, Zoning standards for setbacks, and other applicable City, State, and Federal standards. The Design Standards provide convenient methods of conveying information to the public through time estimates and directional arrows toward destinations.

- C. The proposed amendment is internally consistent with other applicable provisions of this Zoning Code.

Staff Response:

The proposed amendments update several sections of the Zoning Code to establish internal consistency. The amendments would align the Zoning Code with and support multiple City Zoning Code, General Plan and Specific Plan objectives of creating incentives for promoting the economic, entertainment, and social amenities of the City.

- D. The proposed project has been reviewed in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Staff Response:

See the Environmental Impact section of this report below.

3. Summary of Public Survey

The Public Survey was open from October 9, 2023 to November 9, 2023 with over 400 individual respondents. The Survey was available in English and Spanish with two respondents taking the Spanish Survey.

See Attachment 1 and Attachment 2 for the questions, response data, and comments. The questions sought public input on the location, design, and accessibility of wayfinding signs, and asked whether business wayfinding signs should be allowed in the City.

Individual comments were also received as part of the survey and have been categorized into themes and common comments, as noted below.

- Cost
 - Respondents thought the cost of the wayfinding signs would come out of the City's general fund and had concerns there would be an impact on taxpayers.
 - Respondents would like to have smaller fees to receive a Sign Program and Sign Permit as part of wayfinding signage to reduce costs for businesses.
- Sign Design
 - Seen as simple (good)
 - Seen as simple (bad)
 - Small font size, varying font type, and varying logos can lead to sign clutter
 - Require time estimates
 - Design should represent Santa Rosa, historic areas and buildings, and the area it is located
 - Posts should be more visible
 - Unsure if logos should be used for Business Wayfinding
 - Increase the size of the district identifiers (Sign Header)
 - Lighting for nighttime use powered by Solar
 - Font is not ADA-friendly with Font Size and should also have Braille
 - Need more Languages translated
- Great for Tourism and Residents
- Promotes Bike and Pedestrian usage
- City needs Emergency 911 Poles
- Signs not necessary due to present-day technology
- Remove all Wayfinding Signs
- Public/Civic Amenities
 - Need Clear Symbols/Icons
 - Should be required

WAYFINDING SIGN ZONING CODE TEXT AMENDMENT

Page 9 of 12

- Should be easy to locate Amenities (Restrooms/Transportation Methods)
- Helps connect both sides of Downtown
- Too much Long-term Maintenance
 - Vandalism Standards will need to be followed
 - Continuous Sign Permits
- Code Enforcement needs to remove all “Sandwich Boards”
- Remove Parking Meters to promote walkability with Wayfinding

FISCAL IMPACT

Approval of this action does not have a direct known fiscal impact on the General Fund.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Adoption of the proposed amendments are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under CEQA Guidelines Sections 15060(c)(2) because they will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment, and because they are not a project as defined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15378, as they have no potential for resulting in a physical change in the environment, directly or indirectly. The proposed amendments are also exempt under CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3) because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that adoption or implementation of the amendments would have a significant effect on the environment, would not be detrimental to the public interest, health, safety, convenience, or welfare of the City.

This activity is also categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15301(c) (Existing Facilities, Highways and Streets), 15303 (New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures), and 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land). This activity is exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301(c) (Existing Facilities), as the signs would be added to existing City right-of-way (ROW). The activity is also exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15303 (Small Structures) and 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land), as the signs are small structures that would require minor alterations to the public ROW during installation. None of the exceptions to the exemptions as outlined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 would apply.

Further, the proposed amendments are statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15183, Projects consistent with a Community Plan General Plan, or Zoning. Specifically, the proposed amendments are consistent with the following:

- The Santa Rosa General Plan 2035 and the General Plan 2035 Environmental Impact Report (November 3, 2009, SCH No. 2008092114),
- The North Station Area Specific Plan and the North Station Area EIR (SCH No. 2011122034)
- The Downtown Station Area Specific Plan and the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan EIR (SCH No. 2006072104)

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Cultural Heritage Board

On January 17, 2024, the Cultural Heritage Board (CHB) reviewed and provided recommendations on the proposed Zoning Code text amendments (see Attachment 3 for the CHB meeting minutes). The following recommendations have been included within the proposed Zoning Code Text Amendment:

- Each sign post should have a sign header that clearly demonstrates the name and character of the Preservation District.
- Businesses should use their individual logos.
- Incorporating public/civic amenity should be a requirement for business wayfinding.
- Historic landmarks should be counted toward complying with the required public/civic amenity wayfinding signage.

Design Review Board

On January 25, 2024, the Design Review Board (DRB) reviewed and provided recommendations on the proposed Zoning Code text amendments (see Attachment 4 for the DRB meeting minutes). The following recommendations have been included within the proposed Zoning Code Text Amendment:

- Sign plaque dimensions should be increased to 12-inches in height.
- A wayfinding sign program should include a minimum of 3 sign posts (less would not be considered a “program”).
- Create specific application requirements for what is expected in a sign program application.
- A sign header should be required for each sign post to show the character of the area, and should be more prominent than the sign plaques.
- Business logos should be used in business wayfinding.
- Public/civic amenity wayfinding should have a uniform design through color palette, font type, font sizes.

WAYFINDING SIGN ZONING CODE TEXT AMENDMENT

Page 11 of 12

- Use pictograms when legally required by California Building Code and International Code Council.

It should be noted that the following recommendations from both the DRB and the CHB have not been included in the proposed text amendments:

- For proposed wayfinding sign plaques and posts located within one of the City's Preservation Districts, the overall design should match the historic character of the District where it is located.
- Sign posts should have a similar design to the character of the area it is located within.
- Concept review by the DRB should be required for all proposed Sign Programs.
- Concept review by the CHB should be required for any proposed Sign Program located within one of the City's Preservation Districts.

The above noted recommendations would add a level of discretion to the proposed ministerial wayfinding sign process, which was not the intent of the proposed Ordinance. The proposed Ordinance was developed as a ministerial process to be reviewed and acted on administratively, meaning that both new sign plaques and sign programs would not require a discretionary action by a City board or commission. The proposed Wayfinding Sign Ordinance is intended to create a streamlined process for the development and implementation of wayfinding signs to provide more visibility to existing businesses and civic/public amenities. Adding a discretionary review process would add additional time and uncertainty to the process. As such, staff is not recommending adding the above noted recommendations.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

Pursuant to Zoning Code Section 20-66.020(D), Alternative to Mailing, if the number of property owners to whom notice would be mailed would exceed 1,000, the City may, as an alternative to mailing and on-site posting, provide notice by placing an advertisement of one-eighth page in at least one newspaper of general circulation 10 days prior to the hearing. The proposed Zoning Code text amendments would affect properties Citywide, therefore, a one-eighth page advertisement was placed in the Press Democrat. Pursuant to Government Code Section 65091, where necessary, the City has incorporated notice procedures to the blind, aged, and disabled communities. These procedures include audio amplifier/assistive listening device support at public meetings, closed captioning, and optical character recognition conversion of electronic notices.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Public Survey (English)

Attachment 2 – Public Survey (Spanish)

Attachment 3 – Cultural Heritage Board January 17, 2024 Draft Minutes

WAYFINDING SIGN ZONING CODE TEXT AMENDMENT

Page 12 of 12

Attachment 4 – Design Review Board January 25, 2024 Draft Minutes

Attachment 5 – Railroad Square Business Wayfinding Approval Letter

Attachment 6 – Downtown District Wayfinding Sign Program Approval Letter

Resolution

Exhibit A – Proposed Zoning Code Text Amendment

CONTACT

Christian Candelaria, City Planner

(707) 543-3232

ccandelaria@srcity.org