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City Council Agenda Report  
September 17, 2024

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**TO:** Honorable City Council

**FROM:** Jesus M. Gomez, City Manager

**BY:** Alex Hamilton, Interim Community Development Director  
Nancy Lee, Development Services Manager  
Sophia Tatlyan, Consulting Senior Planner

**SUBJECT: ORDINANCE NO. 24-1749 - ZONE CHANGE NO. 2024-01 AND ORDINANCE NO. 24-1750 - ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT NO. 2024-03, TO AMEND VARIOUS SECTIONS OF TITLE 17 OF THE NORWALK MUNICIPAL CODE TO ESTABLISH A SPECIAL SIGN DISTRICT NO. 1 OVERLAY WITH DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS FOR 11 NON- RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES WITHIN THE SPECIFIC PLAN AREA 1, SPECIFIC PLAN AREA 16, INSTITUTIONAL AND PUBLIC FACILITY OVERLY ZONE DISTRICTS.**

**Background:**

In 2023, City Council adopted the Norwalk Entertainment District - Civic Center Specific Plan Area 16 (SPA 16). SPA 16 is located at the southeast corner of Imperial Highway and Norwalk Boulevard. The development of this area is anticipated to be implemented through one or more leases to a private developer of all or a portion of the portion of the City owned land and other contractual arrangements between the City and a private developer. Specific Plan Area 1 (SPA 1) is located to the south of SPA 16. The SPA 1 parcels included in this proposal comprise the AMC Theater, retail pad tenants, and Outback Steakhouse. Currently there is one existing freestanding sign located within Assessor Parcel No. 8047-007-191 (the Outback Steakhouse).

The height and location of the existing freestanding sign is not optimal given the existing conditions. Expansions and improvements to Interstate-5 have diminished the visibility of the existing freestanding sign, originally constructed in 1999. Establishing the proposed Special Sign District No. 01 (SD 1) would allow for the relocation of this sign to a more visible location, and also allow for a taller freeway-oriented freestanding sign and provide greater flexibility for businesses entities within SPA 16 to utilize the sign, when submitted as part of their future Master Sign Program.

On July 16, 2024, City Council considered and tabled the following staff initiated requests:

- Zone Change (ZC) No. 2024-01 – A request to approve the SD 1 overlay; and
- Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) No. 2024-03 – A request to approve SD 1 development standards.

The above-listed requests were considered concurrently with the following applications:

- ZTA No. 2024-02 – Request to amend Title 17 (Zoning), Chapter 17.02 (Approval Procedures), Article I (Procedure, Hearing, Notices) and Article V (Discretionary Approvals And Permits) of the Norwalk Municipal Code (NMC) to establish the review process to create a Special Sign District. The proposed ZTA will establish minimum site requirements, conditions, appropriate zoning, types of uses and a review process to create a Special Sign District; and
- ZTA No. 2024-01 – A request to amend various sections of Title 17 of the NMC as it relates to SPA 1 by expanding the list of allowable uses to include billboards, arcades, and similar uses, updating the list of prohibited uses, establishing a wayfinding signage review and approval process, and streamlining the entitlement process for certain projects in SPA 1

As set forth in ZTA No. 2024-02, a Special Sign District overlay must be approved by City Council through a zone change and zoning text amendment request. As such, the approval of ZC No. 2024-01 and ZTA No. 2024-03, to create SD 1 is contingent upon on the approval and adoption of ZTA No. 2024-02.

*Planning Commission meeting of June 26, 2024:*

On June 26, 2024, the Planning Commission conducted a duly noticed public hearing and considered ZTA No. 2024-02, ZC No. 2024-01, ZTA No. 2024-03, and ZTA No. 2024-01. There were some in attendance stating concerns with this action, and an e-mail and letter from Jordan R. Sisson, Esq., an attorney for Unite Here Local 11, was submitted. In summary the concerns are as follows:

1. Adequacy of California Environmental Quality Act reviewed for the action; and
2. This action will allow for more projects (i.e. hotels, digital billboard sign, other accessory signs, etc.).

Staff rebutted points raised by the opposition by clarifying that these proposed changes are not in conjunction with any active application to construct a second hotel in SPA 1, a billboard, or freestanding sign. Any future submittal to develop a second hotel, would require approval by the Planning Commission with a Conditional Use Permit and any future submittal to construct an on-premise or off-premise freestanding sign would require approval by the Planning Commission with a Sign Use Permit. In either scenario, all the requests mentioned are discretionary applications and subject to an environmental review and CEQA determination at the time of their submittal.

The Planning Commission recommended that City Council approve ZTA No. 2024-02, ZC No. 2024-01, ZTA No. 2024-03, and ZTA No. 2024-01 by a vote of 4-0.

City Council meeting of July 16, 2024:

On July 16, 2024, staff presented ZTA No. 2024-02, ZC No. 2024-01, ZTA No. 2024-03, and ZTA No. 2024-01 to City Council. There were some in attendance that spoke in opposition to a proposed amendments to SPA 1, which echoed the concerns raised by those in attendance during the Planning Commission meeting. A motion to table all three items was passed by a vote of 3-2.

Discussion:

ZTA No. 2024-02, ZC No. 2024-01, ZTA No. 2024-03, and ZTA No. 2024-01 have been revised for City Council consideration. Specifically, changes were made to ZTA No. 2024-01 by removing text reference to a second hotel use in SPA 1 and is not being presented to City Council for consideration as allowed per NMC 17.02.260 (I) and 17.02.260 (J).

Further, ZC No. 2024-01 is a request to establish a SD 1 overlay. SD 1 is comprised of 11 non-residential properties, located within the SPA 1, SPA 16, Institutional, and Public Facility overlay zone districts. SD 1 includes the following parcels listed (in no particular order) by Assessor Parcel Numbers: 8047-006-910, 8047-006-922, 8047-006-924, 8047-006-925, 8047-006-926, 8047-006-927, 8047-007-136, 8047-007-188, 8047-007-189, 8047-007-190 and 8047-007-191. The proposal meets the minimum site conditions to create a Special Sign District, as set forth in ZTA No. 2024-02.

ZTA No. 2024-03 proposes to amend Title 17 (Zoning), Chapter 17.01 (Administration), Article II (Establishment of Zones, and limiting the Uses of Land Therein) and Title 17 (Zoning), Chapter 17.03 (Development Requirements), Article III (Signs) to establish SD 1 development standards and allows one freeway-oriented on-premise freestanding sign up to 100' in height. The development standards specify the maximum freestanding sign height, sign width, number of sign panels, and sign design review process. As indicated previously, there is no implementing project as part of this request. Any future request to construct a freeway-oriented freestanding sign will require a Sign Use Permit and the review and approval of the Planning Commission.

The formation of SD 1 will allow business entities within the Norwalk Entertainment District (SPA 16) more flexibility for their signage when submitted as part of their future Master Sign Program. Additionally, the proposed development standards would allow for a sign height greater than the existing freestanding sign to maximize freeway visibility.

To clarify, any future submittal to construct an on-premise freestanding sign would require approval by the Planning Commission with a Sign Use Permit application and subject to an environmental review and CEQA determination at the time of their submittal.

Staff's recommendation remains the same as presented on July 16, 2024.

**California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):**

Pursuant to the CEQA, this project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to Section 15061(b)(3) of the California Code of Regulations, also known as the "Common Sense Exemption" and Section 15311 (Class 11 – Accessory Structures) of the California Code of Regulations, for the construction or replacement of minor accessory structures including an on-premise sign.

**Fiscal Impact:**

N/A

**Citizens Advised:**

Notice of the Public Hearing was posted at the City's three designated posting places, the City website and social media accounts, and published in *The Norwalk Patriot* on September 6, 2024. Four notices were posted on or in proximity to the subject parcels. As of the writing of this report, staff have not received any new public comments.

**Strategic Plan 2023 Implementation:**

The recommended actions will further the City's Strategic Plan Goals 2 and 3 to work in partnership with our community to achieve safe and livable neighborhoods and to create and sustain a resilient and economically prosperous city.

**Recommended Action:**

Staff recommends City Council:

- a. introduce by title only Ordinance No. 24-1749, AN ORDINANCE OF CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORWALK APPROVING ZONE CHANGE NO. 2024-01 ESTABLISHING SPECIAL SIGN DISTRICT NO. 01 (SD 1) OVERLAY, and schedule for adoption; and
- b. introduce by title only Ordinance No. 24-1750, AN ORDINANCE OF CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORWALK APPROVING ZONE TEXT AMENDMENT NO. 2024-03 TO ESTABLISH THE DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS FOR THE SPECIAL SIGN DISTRICT NO. 01 OVERLAY AND AMENDING TITLE 17 (ZONING) OF THE NORWALK MUNICIPAL CODE, and schedule for adoption.

**Attachments:**

1. Ordinance No. 24-1749 (ZC No. 2024-01)
2. Ordinance No. 24-1750 (ZTA No. 2024-03)