



City Council Agenda Report
September 17, 2024

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. 24-1748 - ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT NO. 2024-02, TO AMEND VARIOUS SECTIONS OF TITLE 17 OF THE NORWALK MUNICIPAL CODE TO CREATE A REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS FOR SPECIAL SIGN DISTRICTS

Background:

A Special Sign District is an overlay containing multiple parcels reasonably grouped together that would allow for the approval of a freestanding sign. Freestanding signs are desirable to the City as they provide opportunities to enhance the urban aesthetics and promote effective communication through controlled and cohesive signage.

On July 16, 2024, City Council considered and tabled the following request:

- Zoning Text Amendment (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 would establish minimum site requirements, conditions, appropriate zoning, types of uses and a review process to create a Special Sign District.

City staff-initiated proposal, ZTA No. 2024-02, establishes a city-wide review process and regulatory framework for the creation of a Special Sign District. This item will be considered concurrently with the following applications:

- Zone Change (ZC) No. 2024-01 – A request to approve the Special Sign District No. 1 (SD 1) overlay;
- ZTA No. 2024-03 – A request to approve, SD 1 development standards; and

- ZTA No. 2024-01 – A request to amend various sections of Title 17 of the NMC as it relates to Specific Plan Area No. 1 (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.

Planning Commission meeting of June 26, 2024:

On June 26, 2024, the Planning Commission considered ZTA No. 2024-02, ZC No. 2024-01, ZTA No. 2024-03, and ZTA No. 2024-01. There were some in attendance voicing concerns about this action. An e-mail and letter from Jordan R. Sisson, Esq., an attorney for Unite Here Local 11, was submitted to the record. In summary their concerns were as follows:

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

Staff clarified that the proposed request was to establish the regulatory framework to create a Special Sign District for the purpose of providing more opportunities for creative and effective marketing with on-premise freestanding signs. Staff confirmed the request is not in conjunction with any active application to construct a second hotel in SP 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 application 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 application. 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 the proposed amendments to SPA 1, which echoed the concerns raised by those in attendance during the June 26, 2024 Planning Commission meeting. After discussion, a motion to table all three items passed by a vote of 3-2.

Updated information:

Currently, the request for 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 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).

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this project is exempt 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 Public Code, for the construction or replacement of minor accessory structures including on-premise signs. The project will not involve any construction nor have a significant effect on the environment.

Fiscal Impact:

N/A

Citizens Advised:

The public hearing notice was posted at the City’s three designated posting places, posted online, and published in The Norwalk Patriot on September 6, 2024. . 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 introduce by title only Ordinance No. 24-1748, AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORWALK AMENDING TITLE 17 (ZONING), CHAPTER 17.02 (APPROVAL PROCEDURES), ARTICLE I (PROCEDURES, HEARING, NOTICES) AND ARTICLE V (DISCRETIONARY APPROVAL AND PERMITS) OF THE NORWALK MUNICIPAL CODE WITH ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT NO. 2024-02 ALLOWING FOR THE CREATION OF A REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS FOR SPECIAL SIGN DISTRICTS, and schedule for adoption.

Attachments:

1. Ordinance No. 24-1748 (ZTA No. 2024-02)
2. Redlined Exhibit A