



# City of Largo Agenda Item 5

**Meeting Date**  
09/11/18

**Presenter:** Carol Stricklin, AICP Community Development Dir

**Department:** CD – Community Development

**TITLE:**

**NON-CONFORMING SIGN AMORTIZATION UPDATE**

The City of Largo sign code underwent a major revision in 2007 to improve the aesthetic appearance of the City by adopting standards to require all new free-standing signs to be monument signs. Existing signs that did not meet the new standards became non-conforming, but were allowed to remain through an amortization period that ends on June 5, 2019. This memorandum will provide a status update of the successful efforts to date to remove non-conforming signs, and will outline the steps that Community Development will take to encourage the remaining properties to come into compliance as the amortization period comes to an end.

Over the past 11 years, reduction in the number of non-conforming signs has been achieved with the removal and replacement of non-conforming signs with monument signs. The transformation of the City's major corridors through removal of visual clutter has been noticeable as the City redevelops and businesses reinvest in their properties.

The goal of Community Development is to continue efforts for voluntary compliance through outreach, education, and incentives. Compliance efforts will initially be targeted at the approximately 645 properties and businesses with existing, non-conforming pole signs. This memorandum will describe the steps staff will take to achieve voluntary compliance through sign removal and, if necessary, enforcement action through the Special Magistrate. Staff is also proposing an incentive in the form of reduced or waived demolition permit fees and expedited processing of demolition permits.

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**Budgeted Amount:** \$0.00      **Budget Page No(s):** NA      **Available Amount:** \$0.00      **Expenditure Amount:** \$0.00

**Additional Budgetary Information:** Not applicable

**Funding Source(s):** N/A      **Sufficient Funds Available:**  Yes  No      **Budget Amendment Required:**  Yes  No      **Source:** N/A

**City Attorney Reviewed:**  Yes  No  N/A      **Advisory Board Recommendation:**  For  Against  N/A      **Consistent With:**  Yes  No  N/A      Strategic Plan

**Potential Motion/Direction Requested:** DOES THE CITY COMMISSION WISH TO PROVIDE DEMOLITION FEE REDUCTION AND EXPEDITED PROCESSING AS AN INCENTIVE FOR NON-CONFORMING SIGN REMOVAL?

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**Attachments:** Pages 2 and 3

## **History**

Ordinance No. 2007-27, adopted in June 2007, created a ten (10) year amortization period for the removal of non-conforming signs, ending in June 2017. The revised sign code also provided standards for the size, height and location of new monument signs which replaced pole signs as the type of free standing signs allowed under the sign code. For several years, property owners have been notified of the changes to the sign code and the effect of the amortization period on signs on their property by means of a notice included in business tax receipt renewal notices.

A tiered incentive program was created to encourage businesses to replace pole signs with monument signs (Ordinance No. 2012-52, adopted September 4, 2012). This program operated for a four (4) year period between October, 2012 and September, 2016 and offered a credit against permit fees (first year of the program) and a graduated bonus for allowable sign area for either a new monument sign or wall signs (all four (4) years of the program).

Staff conducted an inventory of existing pole signs in early 2014 and presented this information at a City Commission Work Session in March, 2014. Discussion with the City Commission at this and a subsequent Work Session led to the following:

- The amortization period was extended by the City Commission until June 2019 (Ordinance No. 2014-72) to allow time for a marketing program and other incentives to be implemented;
- An annexation incentive provision was included in Ordinance No. 2014-72 to allow businesses that annex into the City near the original amortization date of June 5, 2017 a full five-year term for compliance;
- A marketing program was created to educate businesses about the sign requirements in order to encourage early, voluntary compliance ("Refine the Sign"). The program included pamphlets and other promotional materials, mailers to businesses and affected property owners, a workshop sponsored by the Mid Pinellas Chamber of Commerce and informational material on the City website.

Finally, in March, 2015, the City Commission adopted Ordinance No. 2015-12, which created a threshold for the repair of damaged nonconforming signs (including pole signs). This provision allowed for the repair of a damaged, nonconforming sign up to 25% of the replacement value of a new, conforming sign. If the repair cost is greater than 25%, or is not accomplished within 90 days of written notification from the City, then the sign must be replaced with a conforming sign. If the nonconforming sign is a pole sign, then it must be replaced with a conforming monument sign if a freestanding sign is desired.

## **Economic Development**

The Economic Development Division will play a crucial role in outreach efforts to assist businesses in understanding the City's regulations, and navigating the permitting process, if needed. Staff will continue to provide regular updates to the Mid Pinellas Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Committee. The last update was provided in May 2018. The Economic Development staff also administers the incentive program for sign replacement in the West Bay Drive Community Redevelopment District. This incentive provides all property owners or businesses who are bringing their signs into conformance a payment of \$1,000 to help off-set the costs associated with the removal and replacement of the new signage.

## **Planning**

An inventory completed in 2014 determined that there were 753 pole signs within the City limits and that 49 pole signs had been permitted for conversion to monument signs. The Planning Division recently conducted a 2018 inventory and identified 645 remaining non-conforming pole signs. The reduction in non-conforming signs has been a result of new development orders, voluntary replacement, and removal of abandoned and damaged signs. It should be noted that the inventory of pole signs has increased due to annexation of properties, which are subject to the additional five year extension of the amortization period.

Building upon past marketing programs, an informational postcard will be mailed in October 2018 and in March 2019 to the property owners and property address of properties with non-conforming pole signs advising them of the upcoming amortization deadline. The postcard will also be sent to sign companies doing business in the City of Largo. The Planner on Call and pPlanning staff will be available to assist property owners in planning for replacement signage for their sites.

Through the site plan review process, all properties proposing to redevelop or expand existing uses are required to bring all non-conforming signs into compliance. The Comprehensive Development Code (CDC) requires a Master Sign Plan for commercial site plans prior to issuance of a Development Order to ensure sites with multiple signs are not exceeding their maximum aggregate signage amount. Also, the CDC provides an Alternate Master Sign Plan option for large multi-building/tenant campuses that meet certain requirements to provide for flexibility for sign size, height and placement that corresponds with the identification needs of larger developments typically located along high traffic corridors and in activity centers.

### **Building**

Compliance with the sign ordinance requires a building permit for demolition and removal of the non-conforming sign. Replacement with a conforming sign is not required for compliance. New sign construction will be permitted separately. The Building Division will provide an information sheet for sign demolition outlining the process to obtain a permit for sign removal and the requirements for demolition and inspection. In order to provide an incentive for properties to obtain the appropriate demolition permit, staff is requesting City Commission direction to create a partial reduction of the cost of demolition permits for sign removal prior to June 5, 2019. The present cost of a demolition permit is \$137.40. Staff is recommending reducing the permit fee for a permit to demolish a non-electrical non-conforming sign to a flat fee of \$50 including the state surcharges, or \$75, if an electrical inspection is required. In addition, staff will expedite the processing of non-conforming sign demolition permits by issuing the demolition permit to a licensed general contractor within two business days with only a Building Division review.

### **Code Enforcement**

Code Enforcement's primary approach is one of voluntary compliance through education. Following the mailing of the information postcard to property owners, Code staff will personally visit all locations to speak with business owners about the upcoming responsibilities and opportunities for compliance.

Once the amortization period expires, Code Enforcement will determine which properties are in violation for not having removed the non-conforming pole signs. These property owners will be issued a Notice of Violation (NOV) with 30 day time frame to obtain a demolition permit and remove the non-conforming sign. Those property owners who fail to comply with the NOV will have their case set and heard by the Special Magistrate. It is anticipated that this process will occur over the period of several months, depending on the number of non-conforming signs that remain.

### **Future Activities**

Following the compliance efforts targeted at non-conforming pole signs, staff will evaluate how to approach other types of non-conforming signs, such as wall signs or other free-standing signs that are non-conforming for reasons such as sign area or height. Staff anticipates bringing information about this issue back to the City Commission at a Work Session in late 2019.