

TO: Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission  
FROM: Amy Brooks, AICP, Executive Director  
DATE: 5/05/2021 **Agenda Item #47**  
RE: 5-A-21-OA: Proposed Updates to City of Knoxville Zoning Code Article 13

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### **Recommendation**

Staff recommends approval of text amendments to the City of Knoxville's Zoning Code, Article 13, as shown in Attachment 1, to include specific standards for signage in the Institutional (INST) district. Further, amendments address the unique signage needs of healthcare facilities with on-site emergency rooms, through the optional master sign plan process.

A summary of recommended changes is included here:

- Eliminated the INST zoning district from Commercial and Industrial Sign Standards. (13.7F)
- Created a new section for sign standards in the INST district. (13.9G)
  - Size and height standards closely align with the Office (O) and Office Park (OP) zoning district sign standards.
- Added a new section D, under 13.7 - Master Sign Plans for Unified Developments, to allow healthcare facilities with an emergency room to modify sign regulations to meet their unique needs, including site specific conditions, with approval of a master sign plan.
- Added a provision to allow signs to be externally illuminated, provided that no light source is visible from the public right-of-way or adjacent properties. The provision also allows healthcare facilities with an emergency room to internally illuminate signs, upon approval of a master sign plan. (13.9G.1.c)
- Added institutional campuses to the Master Sign Plan section. (13.7)

### **Background**

On October 13, 2020, City Council asked Planning staff to develop new signage standards for the Zoning Code's Institutional district.

INST is a special purpose district that provides standards for large medical centers, universities, schools, and similar uses located in a campus-like setting. It is a new zoning district, created during the City's update of its Zoning Code, which went into effect on January 1, 2020.

In its initial form, signage requirements in the INST district followed those in the Commercial and Industrial districts. (Standards for signs are determined in part by the classification of the zoning district (for example, residential, office, commercial, industrial, and institutional) and in larger part by the

classification of the roadway adjacent to the sign's placement.) City Council and other community members, however, expressed concern regarding the lack of standards specific to the unique needs of the Institutional district, including those of healthcare facilities with emergency rooms.

The draft sign standards for the INST district represent several months of staff research and input from key stakeholders. These include Scenic Knoxville, the Knoxville Chamber, and representatives from East Tennessee Children's Hospital, Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center, and University of Tennessee Medical Center.

ATTACHMENT 1:            Proposed Article 13, as amended.



## ARTICLE 13. - SIGNS

### 13.7 - MASTER SIGN PLANS FOR UNIFIED DEVELOPMENTS

#### A. Purpose

For the purpose of providing flexibility and incentives for coordinated, well designed sign systems for shopping centers, commercial subdivisions, office parks, [Institutional district developments](#), and other large scale commercial and mixed-use developments, a master sign plan is required for certain signs identified within this section. A master sign plan will promote the use of signs which are aesthetically pleasing, of appropriate scale, and integrated with surrounding buildings and landscape, in order to meet the community's expressed desire for quality development consistent with the property's land use designation.

#### B. Application Requirements

Master sign plans required pursuant to other provisions of this Code must be submitted for review and consideration by the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission as a special use, and include the following information in the application package:

1. Master sign plan application and a consent form signed by all the property owner(s), or owners' representatives, for the unified development under consideration.
2. A site plan showing the location and dimensions of all property lines, rights-of-way, easements, improvements (buildings, driveways, street access points, etc.) within the unified development, the location of all existing and proposed signs, [required signs setbacks](#), and if required pursuant to other provisions of this Code, building elevations showing all building signs.
3. Scale drawings showing the dimensions and construction details for all proposed signs including sign illumination and landscaping plans.
4. Computation of the maximum total sign area, the maximum area for individual sign, the height of sign and the number of freestanding signs allowed on the lots included in the unified development under consideration. [The applicant shall also submit written information indicating all modifications to existing signs.](#)
5. A copy of any sign restrictions proposed or implemented for the unified development.
6. Documentation including an accurate site plan for the development must be provided showing that the development was approved as a shopping center, commercial subdivision, office park, [Institutional district developments](#), or, mixed-use development. The development may be located on both sides of a street or streets if it is determined by the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission that it functions as a unified development.
7. The minimum size of a development eligible for consideration as a unified development is 25,000 square feet of gross floor area and must contain three or more businesses or tenants [or be located in the Institutional district with a minimum 25,000 square feet of gross floor area.](#)
8. For the purposes of approving a master sign plan, the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission will determine the boundaries of the unified development based on the application and evidence submitted in support of the application.

9. The approved signs must be located on property within the area defined by the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission as the unified development.

### C. Administrative Procedures

Master sign plans are reviewed by the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission as a special use. A master sign plan may also be included as part of a development plan or special use application for a shopping center, commercial subdivision, office park, [Institutional district developments](#), or similar development. The Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission may approve, modify, or deny the request. All applications for sign permits in an area with an approved master sign plan must be in conformance with the plan. Since approval of master sign plan is a privilege and not a right, variances from the sign standards of this article will not be granted for development directory signs or project directional signs. When a master sign plan has been approved, variances will not be granted for any signs on a lot covered by the master sign plan. The action of the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission may be appealed as provided in this Code.

### D. [Sign Regulation Modification for healthcare facilities with an on-site emergency room](#)

[A master sign plan may modify the sign regulations in any district for healthcare facilities with an on-site emergency room as outlined below to allow for creative responses to site-specific conditions.](#)

1. [Sign Area](#)
2. [Sign Height](#)
3. [Sign Location and Setbacks](#)
4. [Number of Signs](#)
5. [Illumination permissions](#)
6. [Additional sign types being utilized per item E. and F below](#)

### E. Development Directory Sign

To encourage coordinated, well designed sign systems that allow sufficient identification of businesses within unified developments in a manner which promotes traffic safety and avoids visual blight, development directory signs may be approved by the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission as a part of a master sign plan subject to meeting the following:

1. The development directory sign must meet the requirements of Section 13.9 of these regulations for a detached sign in a commercial or industrial district.
2. The development directory sign will count as one of the detached signs permitted pursuant to these regulations for the lot on which the sign will be located. If the maximum number of business ground or monument signs and/or the maximum surface area is already met or exceeded on a lot proposed for a development directory sign, the number of signs and/or surface area must be reduced so that the addition of the development directory sign would put the signs on the lot in conformance with the maximum limitations.
3. Only the name and/or logo for the unified development and the names and/or logos of individual establishments within the unified development are permitted on the sign face(s). The name of the unified development must be located at the top of the sign and designed to stand out from the listing of tenants within the unified development.

4. Only one development directory sign is allowed per street frontage (per side of the street) for the unified development. Interstate frontage is considered a street frontage.
5. Approved development directory signs cannot be converted to any other type of off-premise sign.

#### **EE. Project Directional Sign**

To promote the safe and efficient flow of traffic, project directional signs may be approved by the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission as a part of a master sign plan to direct traffic from a collector or arterial street (as designated in the "Major Road Plan for Knoxville—Knox County, Tennessee") to businesses located on the same or lower classification streets within the same unified development, subject to meeting the following:

1. The project directional sign must be located at the intersection of the lower classification street with the collector or arterial street and oriented toward the traffic flow on the collector or arterial street.
2. The project directional sign must be located out of the right-of-way and must comply with setback, sight distance, and sight triangle requirements for the lot on which it is located.
3. A project directional sign cannot be located closer than 500 linear feet to any other project directional sign on the same side of the collector or arterial street. Only one project directional sign is permitted per intersection on the same side of the collector or arterial street.
4. The project directional sign may be approved in addition to any ground or monument signs that are allowed on a specific lot.
5. Only the name and/or logo for the unified development, name and or logo of individual establishments within the unified development, and a directional arrow are permitted on the sign face(s).
6. The project directional sign cannot exceed six feet in height and a maximum surface area of 36 square feet.
7. Approved project directional signs cannot be converted to any other type of sign.

#### **GF. Administrative Changes**

After approval of a master sign plan by the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission, the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission Executive Director may approve a change to the signage plan administratively in instances of an increase in the size of any sign by up to 10%; provided this does not exceed the maximum sizes permitted by these regulations.

### 13.9 - SIGNS PERMITTED IN SPECIFIC DISTRICTS

In addition to signs that may be allowable pursuant to other sections of this Article and this Code, this section delineates the signs allowable in specific districts and the standards for such signs.

#### **A. Agricultural and Open Space Districts: AG, OS, NA**

1. In the AG District, non-illuminated nameplates and wall signs for home occupations with proper approval of the home occupation use are allowed as attached signs, with a maximum sign area of two square feet.

2. In the AG, OS, and NA Districts, detached signs are allowed, and may include ground signs, monument signs, column signs, and temporary signs as permitted within this section; provided that the signs are for the purpose of advertising the sale of farm products produced on the premises. Such signs are limited to two non-illuminated signs on the parcel or lot, and each individual sign cannot exceed 12 square feet in sign area and eight feet in height.
3. In the AG, OS, and NA Districts, identification signs, detached or attached to a building, are permitted for public parks, playgrounds and other outdoor recreation uses with a maximum sign area of nine square feet and a maximum height of eight feet. Such signs may be externally illuminated, but cannot be internally illuminated.

**B. F Floodplain Overlay Zoning District**

1. In the F Overlay District, identification signs, detached or attached to a building, are permitted for public parks, playgrounds, and other outdoor recreation uses with a maximum sign area of nine square feet and a maximum height of eight feet.
2. Detached identification signs may be externally illumination, but cannot be internally illuminated.
3. All signs in this district are subject to review and approval by the City Stormwater Engineering Department.

**C. H Historic Overlay Zoning Districts**

1. In the H Overlay District, one information sign, detached or attached to the building, is permitted in connection with the use of the lot with a maximum sign area of nine square feet and a maximum height of eight feet.
2. An information sign is allowed in addition to any other signs allowed in accordance with the underlying base zone district.
3. All signs in the H Overlay District are subject to review and approval by the Historic Zoning Commission.

**D. Residential Districts: EN, RN-1, RN-2, RN-3, RN-4, RN-5, RN-6, and RN-7**

1. In the residential districts, the following signs on a residential parcel or lot are allowed, subject to the following dimensional requirements:
  - a. For properly approved home occupations, one wall sign with a maximum sign area of two square feet. Such signs cannot be illuminated.
  - b. Wall signs for multi-family dwellings, rooming and boarding houses, and fraternity and sorority houses with a maximum total sign area of nine square feet per structure; such sign are limited to only the name and/or address of the premises, and the name of the management. Such signs may be externally illuminated, but cannot be internally illuminated.
  - c. Monument or column signs for multi-family dwellings on sites greater than two acres, mobile home parks, and subdivisions with more than 25 lots for residential purposes; provided that such signs are limited to one sign per each separate street frontage that exceeds 150 lineal feet; cannot exceed a maximum sign area of 36 square feet and a maximum height of six feet; and may be externally illuminated, but cannot be internally illuminated.

2. In residential zone districts, the following signs on a nonresidential parcel or lot are allowed, subject to the following dimensional requirements:
  - a. For medical facilities with less than 150 linear feet of street frontage, clubhouses for civic or nonprofit organizations, lodge halls, studios and day care centers for more than 12 children:
    - i. Non-illuminated attached signs, excluding window signs, up to a maximum total sign area of 16 square feet.
    - ii. One monument or column sign with a maximum sign area of 20 square feet, and a maximum height of five feet. Such sign may be externally illuminated, but cannot be internally illuminated.
  - b. For medical facilities with 150 linear feet or more of street frontage, churches, schools, public buildings, cemeteries and country clubs:
    - i. Non-illuminated attached signs, excluding window signs, with a maximum total sign area of 32 square feet.
    - ii. One monument or column sign with a maximum total sign area of 36 square feet, and a maximum height of six feet. Such sign may be externally illuminated, but cannot be internally illuminated.

**E. Office Districts: O, OP**

1. In the office districts, regulation of signs for permitted residential uses are the same as those for the residential districts.
2. In the office districts, the following signs on a nonresidential parcel or lot are allowed, subject to the following dimensional requirements:
  - a. Attached signs with a total allowed sign area not to exceed 5% of the wall area of the primary building elevation(s), provided that the sign area may be used on any elevation of the building that does not face an adjacent residential district. Within the Office (O) District, no individual sign may exceed 24 square feet in area. Signs in the office districts cannot be internally illuminated, but may be externally illuminated provided that no light source is visible from the public right-of-way or adjacent properties. Healthcare facilities with an emergency room may internally illuminate signs upon approval of a master sign plan.
  - b. One detached sign is allowed per parcel or lot, but is limited only to monument or column sign; provided that the maximum sign area is 36 square feet and the maximum height is six feet. Such detached signs cannot be internally illuminated, but may be externally illuminated provided that no light source is visible from the public right-of-way or adjacent properties.

**F. Commercial ~~and~~, Industrial, ~~and Institutional~~ Districts: C-N, C-G, C-H, C-R, DK, I-MU, I-RD, I-G, I-H, ~~INST~~**

1. In the commercial ~~and~~, industrial, ~~and institutional~~ districts, the following signs on a nonresidential parcel or lot are allowed, subject to the following dimensional requirements:
  - a. Development directory and project directional signs may be approved as part of a master sign plan.

- a. Attached signs with a total allowed sign area equal to 10% of the wall area of the primary building elevation(s), and such sign area may be used on any elevation of the building.
  - b. Detached signs in accordance with the standards described herein, except that standards specified for individual districts control.
2. In the commercial and ~~industrial, and institutional~~ districts, the number of detached signs on a nonresidential parcel or lot are allowed in accordance with the following requirements:
- a. One detached sign is allowed per street frontage, up to a maximum of two per parcel or lot. For these purposes, an adjacent interstate highway is considered a street frontage, even if there is no access to it.
  - b. The detached sign that is oriented to the street frontage on which the parcel is addressed is deemed primary and subject to the requirements of this subsection.
  - c. Any secondary detached sign on each lot is limited to a monument or column sign with a maximum sign area of 32 square feet and a maximum sign height of eight feet.
3. In the commercial and ~~industrial, and institutional~~ districts, the maximum sign height for primary detached signs is based upon the classification of the road or road adjacent to the property upon which the primary detached sign is located, as indicated in Table 13-2: Roadway Type and Maximum Sign Height:

| Table 13-2: Roadway Type and Maximum Sign Height        |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Roadway Type  | Maximum Allowable Sign Height |
| Property within 500 feet of interstate interchange area | 35 feet                       |
| Property adjacent to interstate right-of-way            | 30 feet                       |
| Property fronting on federally designated highways      | 20 feet                       |
| All other roadway classifications                       | 10 feet                       |

4. In the commercial ~~and~~ industrial, and institutional districts, the maximum sign area for primary detached signs is based upon the classification of the road or road adjacent to the property upon which the primary detached sign is located, as indicated in Table 13-3: Roadway Type and Maximum Sign Area:

**Table 13-3: Roadway Type and Maximum Sign Area**



| Roadway Type  | Maximum Allowable Sign Area |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Property within 500 feet of interstate interchange area | 200 sf                      |
| Property adjacent to interstate right-of-way            | 200 sf                      |
| Property fronting on federally designated highways      | 165 sf                      |
| All other roadway classifications                       | 100 sf                      |

5. The following exceptions apply to the above standards:
- a. On parcels and lots adjacent to the interstate, a secondary detached sign, if located within 100 feet of the interstate right-of-way and if its sign faces are oriented perpendicular or radial to the interstate right-of-way is subject to the maximum height and sign area requirements for a primary detached sign.
  - b. On parcels and lots adjacent to any streets or roads that are part of the state scenic highway system, only a monument or column sign is allowed, provided that the maximum sign height for such sign is six feet and the maximum sign area is 36 square feet.
  - c. In the C-N District, the maximum sign area for detached signs is 50 square feet.
  - d. In the I-RD District, the maximum sign area for detached signs is 100 square feet and the maximum height is six feet.
  - e. In a C-G, C-H, C-R, I-RD, and I-G Districts, additional signs may be approved by the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission provided that scale drawings indicate the signs will not detract from the character of the development or surrounding development; and that the development plan clearly shows that because of unusual topography, building locations and relationships or developments with multiple structures, additional signs are essential to inform and direct the public.

**G. INST Institutional District**

- 1. In Institutional districts, the following signs on a nonresidential parcel or lot are allowed, subject to the following dimensional requirements:**
  - a. Development directory and project directional signs may be approved as part of a master sign plan.**
  - b. Attached signs with a total allowed sign area equal to 5% of the wall area of the primary building elevation(s), and such sign area may be used on any elevation of the building with the exception of an elevation adjacent to a residential district. No attached signs are permitted on an elevation adjacent to a residential district, except**

healthcare facilities with an on-site emergency room upon approval of a master sign plan.

- c. Signs may be externally illuminated provided that no light source is visible from the public right-of-way or adjacent properties. Healthcare facilities with an on-site emergency room may internally illuminate signs upon approval of a master sign plan.

**2. Detached signs are allowed as follows:**

- a. Detached signs are limited to monument and column signs, except on property within 500 feet of interstate interchange areas, property fronting on interstate right-of-way, and property fronting on federally designated highways."
- b. One primary detached sign is allowed per parcel or lot.
- c. The detached sign that is oriented to the street frontage on which the parcel is addressed is designated primary.
- d. An adjacent interstate highway is considered a street frontage, even if there is no access to it.
- e. On parcels and lots adjacent to any streets or roads that are part of the state scenic highway system, only a monument or column sign is allowed, and the maximum sign height for such sign is six feet and the maximum sign area is 36 square feet. This applies to all detached signs, whether primary or secondary.
- f. **Primary Detached Sign Area and Height**
  - i. The maximum sign height for primary detached signs is based upon the classification of the road adjacent to the property upon which the primary detached sign is located, as indicated in Table 13-4: Roadway Type and Maximum Sign Height:

| <b>Roadway Type</b>  | <b>Maximum Allowable Sign Height</b> |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <u>Property within 500 feet of interstate interchange area</u> | <u>15 feet</u>                       |
| <u>Property adjacent to interstate right-of-way</u>            | <u>15 feet</u>                       |
| <u>Property fronting on federally designated highways</u>      | <u>10 feet</u>                       |
| <u>All other roadway classifications</u>                       | <u>6 feet</u>                        |

- ii. The maximum sign area for primary detached signs is based upon the classification of the road adjacent to the property upon which the primary detached sign is located, as indicated in Table 13-5: Roadway Type and Maximum Sign Area:

| <b>Table 13-5: Roadway Type and Maximum Sign Area</b>          |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| <b>Roadway Type</b>  | <b>Maximum Allowable Sign Area</b> |
| <u>Property within 500 feet of interstate interchange area</u> | <u>65sf</u>                        |
| <u>Property adjacent to interstate right-of-way</u>            | <u>65sf</u>                        |
| <u>Property fronting on federally designated highways</u>      | <u>50sf</u>                        |
| <u>All other roadway classifications</u>                       | <u>36sf</u>                        |

**Secondary Detached Sign Area and Height**

- i. Secondary detached signs are limited to monument or column signs with a maximum sign area of 36 square feet and a maximum sign height of six feet, with the exception of those signs that meet the qualifications of item ii below.
- ii. On parcels and lots adjacent to the interstate, a secondary detached sign, if located within 100 feet of the interstate right-of-way and if its sign faces are oriented perpendicular or radial to the interstate right-of-way is subject to the maximum height and sign area requirements for a primary detached sign.