



STAFF REPORT

Planning Commission Workshop: July 28, 2025

Application:	UDO25-0001: Amendments to Title 18 Unified Development Ordinance Chapter 18.50 (UDO 18.50.190) pertaining to Signs
Applicant:	Economy – Planning Division
Staff Contact:	Jessica Schuller, Senior Planner

The Olathe 2040: Future Ready Strategic Plan prioritizes increasing unique experiences and places in Olathe, and establishing the City as the premier business, retail and entertainment draw in the region. One method of doing this is allowing more variety and creativity in downtown signage, which supports our community by enhancing the visual assets that create a vibrant and inviting place for people. Business signage should reflect the unique character of the business and support the overall enhancement of the downtown district.

Community Development staff recommends updates to Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) 18.50.190 pertaining to rooftop signs, wall signs, projecting signs, and canopy signs in the Downtown zoning district. These recommendations allow for greater flexibility in support of many new businesses coming to downtown Olathe and will also serve to attract future businesses. Additional updates are recommended to signage definitions, and to the process for approving exceptions to sign code requirements. Staff provided an overview of the proposed updates to the City Council on June 3, 2025 and Council directed staff to proceed with the recommended UDO update.

Staff is seeking feedback from the Planning Commission on the proposed amendments prior to holding a public hearing on August 25th. A draft redlined copy of the proposed updates are attached and will be discussed during the workshop, along with feedback from property owners, residents and sign companies.

18.50.190 Signs

A. Applicability and Definitions

This section applies to [signs](#). Signs, sign types, and other terms and phrases used in this section are defined as follows:

Indirectly (Externally) Illuminated Sign: A [sign](#) which is illuminated by a shielded light source located externally to the sign structure that projects a consistent light toward the sign but does not project beyond the structure to which it is attached.

Internally Illuminated Sign: A [sign](#) illuminated by an internal light source diffused through a translucent material. This includes back-lit signs with a light source located within the sign structure that projects illumination back towards the wall or other solid feature to which the sign is attached and which the sign face shields the light source in every direction except back.

Window Area: The total surface area of the combined glass portion of a window or a continuous group of windows and glass doors within a single wall plane of a building that are not separated by substantial frames, mullions, dividers or similar. This includes side lights and transoms if they are part of the same window system or storefront.

Backer Panel: A background behind the graphics of a sign that is made from a solid opaque material on which the graphics may be attached, used to enhance the aesthetic and structural durability of a sign.

B. Administration

1. Sign Permit

a. Applicability

It is unlawful for any person to erect, or alter any sign as defined in this ordinance without first obtaining a sign permit. This does not require a permit for sign maintenance, altering permitted changeable copy, or signs exempted from a permit as described elsewhere in this section.

Signs that are not readily visible from street right-of-way (public or private) do not require a permit unless the sign is visible from an adjoining lot or parcel zoned or used for residential purposes, and such determination will be made by the Planning Official.

Examples include interior signs located entirely within a building, and signs located in interior courtyards and enclosed patios that are screened from public view.

A sign is considered not readily visible where it is fully obstructed by natural changes in grade, buildings, or landscaping that provides an all-season visual barrier from ground level at the edge of the public right-of-way or residential property line, or from the upper level of a residential building on an adjoining property.

b. Initiation

Sign permit applications must be accompanied by one (1) set of plans drawn to scale indicating the sign size, location of the sign and any required landscaping, method of illumination, colors, materials of the sign and structure, method of attachment, and any permit fees. In addition, the applicant must submit other information relating to the placement, construction, and design, as needed to demonstrate compliance with this section.

Prior written consent of the property owner or authorized agent upon which the sign is to be placed is required at the time of application for a sign permit.

A separate permit for electrical and/or structural review may be required.

C. General Standards

1. Routine Maintenance:

All signs must be of sound structural quality, be maintained in good repair, and have a clean and neat appearance. The land adjacent must be kept free from weeds and trash. If signs are not being maintained as described, said sign may be ordered to be removed.

2. Minimum Setback

All signs must maintain a minimum setback of ten (10) feet from all property lines and set outside of the site distance triangle except as provided in this section.

3. Placement on Easement or Right-of-Way

No private sign will be placed on a public easement, unless, in the opinion of the City Engineer, the placement will not interfere with the intended use of the easement. No private sign will be placed on a public right-of-way.

4. Illuminated Signs

Illuminated signs must be internally or indirectly illuminated. Neon and fluorescent tubes, incandescent bulbs, fluorescent tubes, and other sources of direct illumination that are exposed to the human eye are not permitted. Directly illuminated incandescent bulbs and LED tube lighting are permitted but must not be brighter than is necessary for clear and adequate visibility of the sign, or create a visual distraction, and such determination will be made by the Planning Official. - Directly illuminated signs must be equipped with a dimming feature.

Signs must not display colors that change rapidly, intermittently, or in a manner that creates a flashing or distracting effect. Changes in color are permitted provided the transition occurs no more than once every 24 hours. Indirect illumination must be directed away from pedestrian walkways, and not shine into adjacent property or cause glare for motorists and pedestrians.

E. Signs Permitted in All Districts

8. Directional Signs

Such signs must not exceed four (4) square feet per face with two (2) faces permitted. The sign must not exceed four (4) feet in height if freestanding. The combined area of all directional signs applied to a window must not exceed 10% of the window area.

K. Downtown (D) District

Signs on all buildings in the Downtown (D) District must account for the scale, character and design of the subject building and its surrounding context. Materials, design and workmanship must be of high quality in appearance and character and complementary to the building. The signage must convey a sense of permanence and durability.

Signs must not dominate building facades or obscure architectural features (windows, cornices, grille work, piers, pilasters, ornamental features etc.).

Signs located on historically listed or eligible properties will be reviewed by the secretary of the Historic Preservation Board for appropriateness.

Cumulative Sign Area

The total area cumulative of all sign faces on a tenant façade must not exceed 15% of that façade area. The following sign types must be included as part of the maximum area allowed: Wall, Painted Wall, Projecting, Awning, Over Canopy, and Window Signs. Under Canopy signs, “A” Frames and Menu Boards are not included in the maximum sign area calculation.

The following [signs](#) are permitted in the Downtown (D) district with a sign permit:

1. Wall Signs

~~Same as permitted in subsection G, above, in addition to the following standards:~~

~~a. If a business is part of a multitenant complex, Each freestanding building with one tenant is permitted not more than three (3) wall signs, limited to one (1) per wall. The wall sign must not exceed ten (10) percent of the wall upon which it is mounted.~~

~~b. For multitenant buildings, eEeach tenant is allowed one (1) wall sign no greater than ten (10) percent of the tenant wall area upon which the sign is placed and must be common to the interior business space. -Corner tenant spaces will be allowed one (1) additional wall sign no greater than ten (10) percent of the tenant wall area upon which it is placed. One building identification sign is permitted and must not exceed ten (10) percent of the wall upon which it is mounted.~~

cb. [Wall signs](#) must be integrated with the architecture of the [building](#) and mounted in locations that respect the design of the building, including the arrangement of bays and openings. [Signs](#) must not obscure windows, cornices, grille work, piers, pilasters, and ornamental features.

~~c. —Lighted wall signs must not be located at the top of the building's façade if the façade is higher than two (2) stories and must not directly face a residential neighborhood.~~

d. Wall signs are limited to the ground floor of the structure, except for building identification signs. Wall signs located on the side wall of a building that faces a side property line, alley, or parking area (including a side property line along a street), must not be lighted above the ground floor, except for building identification signs. Lighted wall signs must not directly face property zoned or used for residential purposes.

e. One (1) wall sign located on the rear of the building is allowed provided it is adjacent to public right-of-way. Signs must be nonilluminated and are limited to ten (10) percent of the wall area or tenant space upon which they are placed.

2. Painted Wall Signs

Painted wall signs are permitted in the Downtown Core only.

a. Each single-tenant building is permitted up to two (2) painted wall signs.

b. For multitenant buildings, each tenant is allowed one (1) painted wall sign and must be common to the interior business space. Painted wall signs must be no greater than ten (10) percent of the tenant wall area upon which the sign is placed.

c. Painted signs must be maintained in good repair and be free from peeling, fading or other damage.

d. Artistic murals or art installations with no commercial or non-commercial message do not count toward the permissible sign area.

32. Projecting Signs

~~In lieu of a wall sign or canopy sign or an awning sign, o~~One (1) projecting sign per tenant ~~in a multitenant building or per single-tenant building~~ is permitted.

a. Projecting signs must not be closer than fifty (50) feet apart, and no more than three (3) for every three hundred (300) feet of street frontage.

~~b. —Projecting signs must be oriented to pedestrians passing on the sidewalk in front of the buildings rather than to automobiles or pedestrians on the far side of the street, and must not be located above the ground floor.~~

c. Projecting signs must not exceed twelve (12) square feet per sign face if perpendicular to the building, and must provide a vertical clearance of ~~eighteen (108)~~ feet along pedestrian areas. Radial projecting signs mounted on building corners are

only permitted in the Downtown Core and must not exceed 24 square feet per sign face.

d. Projecting signs must not be mounted above the third story and may not extend above the roof line or the parapet wall. Projecting signs must be mounted in locations that are compatible with the building design, including the arrangement of bays and openings. Signs must not obscure windows, grille work, piers, pilasters, and ornamental features.

e. Projecting signs ~~may not~~ be internally or indirectly illuminated. Signs that use blinking or flashing lights are prohibited.

f. Projection must not extend more than 3 feet from the face of the building. Projection may extend into the right-of-way but must maintain a minimum of 2 feet from the face of curb to the sign and 15 feet from street lights, power lines and power poles. The sign must not impede the visibility of traffic control devices.



Example Projecting Sign

43. Awning Signs

~~In addition to a wall sign or a projecting sign, an awning sign is permitted.~~

a. Sign copy must comprise no more than thirty (30) percent of the total exterior surface of an awning ~~or canopy~~. If side panels are provided, they must not carry signs greater than twenty (20) percent of the area of the awning panel.

b. Text on awning valences must not exceed eight (8) inches high. A valence drop length must not exceed twelve (12) inches.

c. Awnings must be permanently mounted on the wood or metal framing within a door or window opening, not on the wall surrounding the opening. The minimum height for awnings must be eight (8) feet from the lowest point to the sidewalk. Awnings must not extend more than four (4) feet from the building face.

- d. [Awning signs](#) are not allowed above the ground floor. Awnings without [signs](#) may be allowed above the ground floor if they complement the architecture.
- e. Awnings must not be a continuous feature extending over masonry piers or arches but designed to project over individual window and door openings.
- f. Internally lit or back-lit graphics awnings are not permitted.
- g. Standard residential aluminum awnings are not allowed. Awnings must be composed of noncombustible acrylic fabric.

5. [Canopy Signs](#)

[Signs consisting of individual letters, with or without a sign backer, placed on the face of the canopy/marquee, or above the canopy/marquee, are limited to 200 percent of the height of the vertical dimension of the marquee, or a maximum of 30 inches, whichever is less. For example, if the vertical dimension of the marquee is 12 inches, the letters may be up to 24 inches high \(including all mounting hardware\). Sign width is limited to two-thirds of individual marquee width dimension or no more than 20 feet, whichever is less.](#)



[Example Canopy Sign](#)

6. [Under Canopy Signs](#)

[One under canopy sign is permitted per business entrance in addition to the signs described in this section. Under canopy signs must not exceed 6 square feet and may be nonilluminated or indirectly illuminated. A vertical clearance of ten \(10\) feet must be maintained over pedestrian areas.](#)



Example Under Canopy Sign

74. Window Signs

~~In addition to a wall sign or projecting sign, but not an awning sign, one (1) window sign is permitted.~~

- a. No more than one (1) permanent [window sign](#) is allowed per window.
- b. [Window signs](#) must not exceed ten (10) percent of the window area so that visibility into and out of the window is not obscured, except that window signs may be as large as twenty (20) percent of each window area if no [wall sign](#) is provided.
- c. [Sign](#) copy must not exceed eight (8) inches in height, and must be applied directly to the interior face of the glazing or hung inside the window, thereby concealing all mounting hardware and equipment.
- d. [Window signs](#) on glazing must be either silk [screened](#), back painted, metal leafed, or sandblasted onto the glass. Vinyl lettering is not allowed.
- e. Neon [/ LED tube](#) and scrolling [marquee signs](#) displayed on the interior surface of a window constitute a permanent [window sign](#) within the Downtown Core and Downtown Santa Fe Corridor areas only. One (1) neon [/ LED tube](#) sign is permitted per business façade, and must not exceed twenty-five (25) percent of the total glass area of the window. Scrolling marquee signs are not permitted.

85. “A” Frame Signs

~~In addition to wall signs, projecting signs, or awning signs, “A” frame signs are permitted.~~ “A” frame signs are permitted in the Downtown Core only ~~and do not require approval of a sign permit.~~

- a. The maximum [sign area](#) for an [“A” frame sign](#) is eight (8) square feet.

- b. The maximum overall height is four (4) feet tall.
- c. "A" frame signs must not be permanently affixed to any object, structure, or the ground.
- d. Each tenant in a multitenant complex or building is limited to one (1) "A" frame sign, located on private property or within the public right-of-way adjacent to the tenant space, provided the sign does not interfere with vehicle access, pedestrian movement or wheelchair access to, through, and around the site. A minimum access width of five (5) feet should be maintained along all sidewalks and building entrances accessible to the public.
- e. "A" frame signs must be used only during regular business hours and must be removed during nonbusiness hours.

69. Menu Boards

In addition to the signs permitted above, a restaurant with table service is allowed a menu board. Restaurant menu signs are not included in the calculation of maximum sign area for the building or tenant space and do not require approval of a sign permit.

- a. Menu boards must be located in a permanently mounted display box on the surface of the building adjacent to the entry. Taping a sign to a box is prohibited.
- b. Menu boards must not exceed an area of six (6) square feet, including all framework.

107. Roof Signs

Roof signs are limited to buildings placed at the corner of two intersecting streets (excluding alleyways and not setback greater than 20 feet from either property line) within the Downtown Core district and must comply with the following:

- a. Roof signs are limited to flat roofs, not including mansard roofs, on buildings three stories or less in height.
- a.b. One roof sign is permitted per building and the sign must face a public street.
- b.c. Roof signs must not exceed ten (10) percent of the façade area to which it is parallel, or a maximum of 100 square feet, whichever is less. If angled, sign measurements will be based on the facade with the least square footage.
- c.d. Roof signs must consist of individual channel letters and/or logo mounted individually or on a sign backer. Box signs, in which the entire sign surface is illuminated, are not permitted.
- d.e. Signs that use blinking or flashing lights are prohibited.

- f. The overall sign height, including structural supports, must not extend more than 5 feet from the top of the roof line of a flat-roofed building, or the nearest parapet wall, whichever is greater. Structural supports must be designed to minimize visual impact and remain as unobtrusive as possible.
- e.g. The supporting structure for the roof sign must comply with all applicable engineering and Building Code requirements.

P. Prohibited Signs and Devices

It is a violation of these [zoning](#) regulations to [erect](#), install, place or maintain the following [signs](#):

1. Any [signs](#) or advertising [structures](#) which are not specifically permitted under the sign subsection in the schedule of district regulations or otherwise specifically permitted under these [zoning](#) regulations.
2. Any [sign](#) or advertising [structure](#) which constitutes a traffic hazard or a detriment to traffic safety by reason of its size, location, movement, content, coloring, or method of illumination, or by obstructing the vision of drivers, or signs that obstruct or detract from the visibility of traffic control devices or [emergency vehicles](#).
The [use](#) of flashing lights or revolving lights is prohibited in any sign as constituting a hazard to traffic. Any sign which by glare or method of illumination constitutes a hazard to traffic is prohibited. Electronic/video screen signs will not be permitted.
~~Exterior neon lighting, illuminated banding or other types of lighting that create a glare or is prohibited, unless it is approved by the Planning Commission as part of an overall theme for the development area.~~
3. [Erect](#) or alter any [sign](#) as defined in the [Unified Development Ordinance](#), or make [use](#) of a living sign displaying a commercial message, without first obtaining a sign permit in accordance with the requirements of, and procedures set forth in, the Unified Development Ordinance.
4. Any [sign](#) or advertising [structure](#) with words, scenes or graphics which are obscene, indecent and prurient, within the meaning of K.S.A. [21-4301](#), as amended.
5. Any [sign](#) or advertising [structure](#) (other than those [erected](#) by a governmental agency or required to be erected by a governmental agency for a public purpose) erected, installed or placed on the [right-of-way](#) of any [street](#), road or public way, or signs overhanging or infringing upon the right-of-way of any street, road or public way, except as specifically permitted by these regulations.

6. Any [sign](#) or advertising [structure erected](#) on [City](#) of Olathe property or other governmental property other than signs erected by said governmental entity for public purposes.
7. Any [sign](#) or advertising [structure](#) which is [erected](#), installed or maintained that obstructs any fire escape, required exit, window or door opening intended as a means of ingress or egress.
8. [Signs](#) are prohibited on the rear of a [building](#), except for the following:
 - a. A [sign](#) located on a rear exit door. The sign must not exceed six (6) inch nonilluminated letters painted, printed, stenciled or [attached](#) to the face of the rear door and covering no greater than twenty (20) percent of that door.
 - b. Where the rear of a commercial [building](#) is oriented toward [street right-of-way](#) or an internal [shopping center access](#) drive, a [wall sign](#) in accordance with subsections [H](#) and [I](#), above, are permitted on the rear [wall](#) of the building only if that building façade is architecturally designed to resemble the principal or front façade of the building by including similar architectural features such as windows, doors, awnings, building materials, and similar elements. The rear of a building is that side of a building opposite from the principal or main entrance to a building.
 - c. In the Downtown (D) district, subject to the standards established in subsection [K](#), above.
9. [“A” frame sign](#) (except in the Downtown (D) district).
10. [Attention-attracting devices](#).
11. [Abandoned signs](#).
12. [Off-site signs](#) (except [billboards](#) or where specifically allowed by this chapter).
13. [Portable sign](#), excluding [real estate signs](#).
14. [Roof signs](#) ~~(except in the Downtown Core-(D) district)~~.
15. [Snipe signs](#), except warning [signs](#) posted by public utility companies.
16. [Temporary signs](#), except as permitted by subsection [O](#), above.
17. [Vehicular signs](#), except that [sign](#) copy painted on a [motor vehicle](#) or semi-trailer normally in motion during [use](#) will not be considered a vehicular sign when moved at least one (1) time during a seventy-two (72) hour period.

18. Yard signs, except as permitted temporary signs.
19. Painted wall signs which are painted directly on the wall of a building or surface ~~(except in the Downtown Core(D) district).~~; ~~except that S~~signs painted on a window in a commercial zoning district (as part of the permitted wall sign) are permitted.
20. Directly illuminated signs, except to the extent specifically authorized in this chapter.
21. Any sign not specifically, or by reasonable implication, permitted in this section.
22. Barrel-type awnings signs.
23. Standard residential type aluminum awnings.

W. Exceptions

Exceptions to sign regulations ~~in the conventional and Business Park for standard zoning districts~~ may only be granted by the ~~Board of Zoning Appeals~~ Planning Commission through a ~~variance~~ deviation to this Chapter. ~~In the Original Town Overlay District, only the Governing Body may approve such exceptions. subject to the provisions of Chapter 18.40 of the Unified Development Ordinance. Deviations may be requested for sign size, location, illumination, number, or type, and should be based on unique architectural features, specific site conditions or a demonstrated hardship. Deviations to sign regulations for planned zoning districts may also be approved by the Planning Commission and Governing Body at the time of rezoning as part of the preliminary development plan. Any deviation or exception to the requirements of this chapter may only be granted upon a finding by the Governing Body that all of the following conditions are met:~~

The Planning Commission and Governing Body may consider the following criteria to the extent that they are pertinent to the particular application:

1. General spirit and intent of this ordinance.
2. Adverse effects on adjacent property owners or residents.
3. Safety implications.
4. Visual clutter.
5. Site constraints.
6. Lighting impacts on adjacent property.
7. Promotion of high-quality signage.
8. Any other factors which may be relevant to a particular application.

An applicant or aggrieved party may appeal a decision by the Planning Commission to the Governing Body and the applicant must file a notice of appeal with the Planning Official within ten (10) days following the decision. An appeal of a decision by the Governing Body must be filed in the District Court of Johnson County within thirty (30) days of the final decision.

~~1.--That the deviation requested arises from such condition which is unique to the property in question, is not ordinarily found in the same zone or district, and is not created by an action or actions of the property owner or applicant.~~

~~2.--That granting the deviation will not adversely affect the rights of adjacent property owners or residents.~~

~~3.--That the strict application of the provisions of this ordinance would constitute unnecessary hardship upon the property owner represented in the application.~~

~~4.--That the deviation desired will not adversely affect the public health, safety, moral order, convenience, prosperity, or general welfare.~~

~~5.--That granting the deviation will not be opposed to the general spirit and intent of this ordinance. (Ord. 19-74 § 9, 2019; Ord. 17-52 §§ 31, 41, 2017; Ord. 16-20 § 4, 2016; Ord. 10-59 §§ 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 2010; Ord. 09-15 § 1, 2009; Ord. 09-04 §§ 1, 2, 3, 5, 2009; Ord. 07-86 §§ 1, 2, 3, 2007; Ord. 05-35 § 2, 2005; Ord. 02-54 § 2, 2002)~~