

To: Members of the Dublin Planning and Zoning Commission
From: Jennifer M. Rauch, AICP, Director of Community Planning & Development
Zach Hounshell, Planner II
Date: February 6, 2025
Re: 25-005ADMC - Zoning Code Amendments

Summary

Planning Staff requests a review and recommendation to City Council of proposed Zoning Code amendments regarding the review process for Concept Plans, minor updates and use allowances within the West Innovation District (WID), and modifications to the Temporary Sign regulations for special events. The proposed changes are in response to the City's Economic Development Strategic Plan initiatives to make the development process more transparent and predictable, which was introduced as part of the Joint Work Session in October 2024. The Planning and Zoning Commission received an introduction to the proposed amendments in November 2024.

Background

In 2023, the City of Dublin adopted its Economic Development Strategic Plan, which updated the City's development strategy. The second strategy identified in the plan is to "Make Dublin's Development Processes More Transparent and Predictable, Thereby Reducing Uncertainty."

The previous Economic Development Strategy from 2019 detailed that attracting and retaining value-added business enterprises is highly competitive, and the ability to grow and scale such companies within a region is extremely difficult. For a city to be a competitive location, it must ensure that its government policies, procedures, regulations, and codes encourage, rather than discourage, investment.

In gathering input for the 2019 Economic Development Strategy, business leaders indicated that there is a perception that Dublin can be a difficult and expensive place to do business. In follow-up questions, business leaders expressed concern over the lack of transparency in decision-making, as well as the predictability and timeliness of decisions, all of which increase costs to conduct business in Dublin.

In 2024, Staff engaged several City Council members, Board and Commission members, and members of the development community to identify opportunities to improve the development review process. Through these engagements, Staff determined several Code areas ripe for greater simplification, predictability, and consistency with the Community Plan.

The list of Code updates included are as follows:

- Bridge Street, Historic and Mixed-Use Regional Districts – Concept Plan review process
- West Innovation District – minor text updates and modifications to ID-2 Uses
- Sign Regulations - Special Event Temporary Sign Requirements
- Public Nuisance Regulations – Clarifying language for code enforcement

These Code updates are initial changes that have been identified to improve the development process and code enforcement immediately. Code amendments for Public Nuisance Regulations will be provided at a future Planning and Zoning Commission meeting date.

Proposed Amendments

Concept Plan Review Process

The current Code requires the Concept Plan as the first step in the review process for large-scale development projects within the Bridge Street, Historic and Mixed-use Regional Districts. Under the current review process, the required reviewing body is required to make a determination as part of this step unless a Development Agreement (DA) is included. When a DA is contemplated, the required reviewing body recommends the application to City Council for their determination.

The proposed amendment retains the Concept Plan as a required step in the review process for large-scale development projects. However, it would move from a determination step to a non-binding feedback step by the required reviewing body for projects with and without a DA. The goal of this amendment is to provide consistency amongst the City's review processes, allow an applicant the opportunity to gain feedback and streamline the number of approval steps.

The Informal process will remain an optional step for both Minor Projects and larger projects. Staff will continue to encourage this step for the earliest feedback, especially on more complex projects.

Development Agreements (DA) require approval from City Council via a separate action requested by the applicant. With the proposed modification, the Concept Plan would be discussion-only and not require a recommendation by the required reviewing body or approval by City Council when a DA is included. The timing of a DA will be the applicant's purview and will no longer be linked to a specific step in the review process. As is the current practice, project proposals are included in the ordinance documentation for a DA when approved by City Council. This would continue to be the case with future DAs, thus not requiring a separate City Council determination on a development application.

The proposed amendment to the Historic District regulations was presented to the ARB for review and recommendation on January 29, 2025 and received a recommendation of approval to the Planning and Zoning Commission.

West Innovation District – ID-2 Uses

The West Innovation District includes five zoning districts, which outline each district's intent based on the desired development character and uses. Each district's purpose is highlighted below:

- 1) Research Office (ID-1) – Intended to provide for the integration of large format research and office uses in multistory buildings.
- 2) Research Flex (ID-2) – Intended to provide for the integration of small to medium-sized research and office uses in flexible building construction with smaller footprints and lower building heights than the ID-1 District.

- 3) Research Assembly (ID-3) – Intended to provide for a greater emphasis on large format buildings and sites focused on clean manufacturing and assembly at a higher intensity or scale.
- 4) Research Mixed Use (ID-4) – Intended to provide opportunities for a limited mix of uses in close proximity to employment, recreational amenities and existing neighborhoods.
- 5) Research Recreation (ID-5) – Intended to support the continued use and development of sports, recreation and amusement uses located within the Innovation Districts as an integral public amenity for residents and businesses within the area.

The WID Special Area Plan recognizes the need to remain regionally competitive and drive future growth. Planning Staff and Economic Development Staff have worked together to identify opportunities to improve development processes and remove unintended barriers of the development process. The primary barrier identified by Economic Development Staff was Assembly and Manufacturing being a Conditional Use in the ID-2 district, as this use is an integral part of many small-scale flex innovation businesses that are targeted for this region. Additionally, Assembly and Manufacturing being a Conditional Use conflicts with the recommendations of the Future Land Use Plan, as the Flex Innovation designation recommends clean manufacturing as a principal use and not a supporting use.

To provide better alignment with the recently adopted Envision Dublin Community Plan recommendations and the Economic Development Strategy, staff recommends a proposed amendment within the Research Flex (ID-2) District to modify the Assembly and Manufacturing use category from a Conditional Use to a Permitted Use. Additional revisions have been made to remove references to the Economic Advancement Zone (EAZ), which was a previous accompanying document to the Code, which has been replaced with the update to the Envision Dublin Community Plan and the WID Integrated Implementation Plan, currently underway.

Temporary Sign Regulations

The temporary sign regulations were updated in April 2021 to address content neutrality following a US Supreme Court ruling. Following the adoption of these amendments, staff recognized the need for additional minor modifications to the temporary sign allowances for Community Activities and Special Events to align with current practices. The proposed amendments align the temporary sign requests with the city's event permitting process. For special events, the event organizer is required to complete a community event permit application and include a detailed description of the proposed signage, which is reviewed by the city's event staff. The proposed amendment clarifies this process and allows the city's event staff to approve appropriate temporary signage for the various levels of events. The proposed amendment also clarifies temporary sign allowances for community activities, such as public meeting notices and city events.

Recommendation

Staff requests the Planning and Zoning Commission review and recommend approval of the proposed amendments to City Council.