

Planning Staff Analysis

SD25-0001/Landmark Special Sign District

City Council District #4

REQUEST:

Establish a Special Sign District for Landmark commercial area.

SITE DATA:

The Landmark Special Sign District is an approximately 120-acre commercial area which will include a grocery anchored retail development, along with multi-family, office space, and other types of commercial uses. The ground work for these uses is currently underway. The property is located within the Hunter Ranch (now Landmark) Master Planned Community (MPC) zoning district.

The site is bordered by three roadways:

- **I-35W Frontage Road:** IH-35W Frontage Road is classified as a Secondary Arterial in the 2022 Mobility Plan. It is currently designed with one travel lane. The subject site is designed with a minimum of two driveway connections to the subject site.
- **Robson Ranch Road:** Robson Ranch Road is classified as a Secondary Arterial in the 2022 Mobility Plan. The roadway is currently four travel lanes from IH-35W to Yarbrough Way. Traffic signals will be installed at the Landmark Trail and Robson Ranch Road intersection. Bicycle and pedestrian improvements include a 10-foot-wide sidepath along the north side of the road. The site includes one driveway connection to Landmark Trail.
- **Landmark Trail:** Landmark Trail is classified as a Secondary Arterial in the 2022 Mobility Plan. Landmark Trail is constructed as a 110-foot-wide residential neighborhood street with 10-foot-wide sidewalks along the east side of the roadway. There is one planned driveway connection from the subject site.

SURROUNDING ZONING AND USES:

Northwest: Zoning: Landmark (Hunter Ranch) MPC (MN Base) Use: Undeveloped Land	North: Zoning: Landmark (Hunter Ranch) MPC (MR Base) Use: Undeveloped Land	Northeast: Zoning: Landmark (Hunter Ranch) MPC (MR and R7 Base) Use: Undeveloped Land
West: Zoning: Landmark (Hunter Ranch) MPC (MN Base) Use: Single-family dwelling use (in development)	SUBJECT PROPERTY	East: Zoning: Mixed Use Regional (MR) District and Planned Development 174 (PD 174) Use: Undeveloped, commercial offices, hospital
Southwest: Argyle City Limits Use: Undeveloped Land	South: Argyle City Limits Use: Undeveloped Land	Southeast: Argyle City Limits Use: Single-family residential

CONSIDERATIONS:

- A. Section 33.18 of the Denton Sign Code (Chapter 33 of the Code of Ordinances) provides approval criteria applicable the creation of a sign district for any property which has more than three hundred (300) feet of continuous street frontage on one (1) public street:
1. *Provides a Comprehensive Plan for signs that would be clearly superior to what would be allowed without the plan*

Signs are needed as part of the urban built environment: they provide directions for residents and visitors and communicate messages for commerce and community. However, signs can create nuisances such as visual clutter on city streets, glare for nearby property owners, and distract drivers. Generally, sign regulations aim to balance a property owner's sign needs with a community's aesthetic and safety goals by limiting the type, size, number, and setbacks in order to minimize nuisances.

Due to the parcel size, perimeter easement constraints, location along a major highway, and the phased development of this commercial area, Landmark, formerly known as Hunter Ranch, will rely upon signage to effectively communicate current information to residents and direct drivers to their desired locations within the site. Because of these conditions, some proposed ground sign designs do not meet the regulations within the Denton Sign Code. The proposed Landmark Special Sign District (LSSD) establishes a comprehensive plan for a variety of ground signs for the District that is equal to or superior to the minimum standards under the Denton Sign Code by adapting the ground sign regulations to meet the distinct needs of an expansive commercial area while seeking to reduce impacts on the neighboring properties and the IH-35W corridor. A full listing of the LSSD standards is provided in Exhibit 6 and summarized in Exhibit 1, and the following demonstrate elements which are superior to what would be allowed without the plan:

- **Maximum Effective Area:** Per Section 33.14.2(b), signs on Arterial roadways have a maximum effective area of 60 square feet. Although proposed LSSD Multi-Tenant signs exceeds the maximum effective area for the IH-35W (max 250 square feet) and Primary Arterial roadways (max 60 square feet), the effective area for the remaining pedestrian directory and directional signs ranges from 12 square feet to 20 square feet, lower than the maximum for ground signs. This reduction reduces potential visual impacts along the adjacent corridors.
- **Maximum Height:** Per Section 33.14.2(b), signs on Arterial roadways have a maximum height of 20 feet. Under the Denton Sign Code, temporary signs up to 8 feet are permitted, while along Primary Arterial roadways, a maximum of 20 feet high is permitted. As proposed, LSSD will limit temporary signs along the IH-35W corridor to 16 feet tall, due the easement constraints along the highway. Additionally, pedestrian directory and directional signs will lower than the maximum 20-foot allowed permitted by the Denton Sign Code.
- **Design:** In addition to the regulations proposed by the LSSD, which will limit the number, size, and height of signs, the development is controlled by Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions (CC&Rs) operated by HR, JV, L.P., otherwise referred to as Hunter Ranch, which includes a design review board who controls design guidelines to ensure a unified sign package to reduce visual clutter with consistency and uniformity. The City will have no role in enforcing the CC&Rs for the development, and review for compliance with these will take place with the developer prior to submittal for City sign permits.

2. *Would be compatible with surrounding properties. In considering whether a district and sign plan is "compatible" and "clearly superior", the commission and council shall consider, but are not limited to considering the following:*
 - a. *Scale. The relationship between and compatibility of sign scale, site scale and the scale of nearby buildings.*

Given the parcel size and easement constraints along IH-35W, the LSSD proposes height and size limitations for some of the ground signs that exceed those allowed in the Denton Sign Code in order to ensure visibility for motorists along the highway. The LSSD also includes numerous wayfinding signs to ensure drivers can locate and navigate the site easily. The proposed grocery retail anchor building for the property is approximately 41 feet tall at its highest point.

- b. *Color. The relationship between and compatibility of sign color to the color of nearby buildings and landscaping: The degree to which sign colors are complimentary to its surroundings.*

The LSSD does not propose to regulate sign color. The sign colors will be controlled by development CC&Rs operated by Hunter Ranch to ensure a unified sign package that's consistent and uniform to the design of commercial area and its surroundings.

- a. *Material. The materials of the signs and how they relate to their surroundings.*

The LSSD does not propose to regulate sign material. The materials for the signs will be controlled by development CC&Rs operated by Hunter Ranch to ensure a unified sign package that's consistent and uniform to the commercial area and its surroundings.

- b. *Shape. The shape and design of the signs and how they relate to their surroundings.*

The LSSD contains conceptual renderings that reflect traditional shape and design for commercial ground signs. The specific shape and design of the individual signs will be controlled by development CC&Rs operated by Hunter Ranch to ensure a unified sign package that's consistent and uniform to the commercial area and its surroundings.

- c. *Landscaping. The relationship of signs to landscaped features in and outside the district.*

The majority of the proposed multi-tenant ground signs would be installed adjacent to the I-35W Frontage Road. Consistent with the landscaping standards in the Hunter Ranch Master Planned Community (MPC) Section 7.7.7, street trees planted every 30 feet were required along this right-of-way, along with additional screening of right-of-way elements set by MPC Section 7.7.5.

Given that the maximum heights of the proposed signs range from 7 feet to 32 feet, conflicts between multiple ground sign types and the tree canopy (at maturity) will be minimal, allowing visitors to the site to clearly read the signs.

- d. *Traffic safety and traffic circulation. The impact of the signs on driver's view, the degree to which view obstructions are created or improved, avoidance of confusion with or obstruction of traffic control signs and devices, and the time it takes a motorist to read the sign.*

The proposed LSSD is not anticipated to obstruct drivers' view or create confusion. With the exception of the multi-tenant signs along IH-35W, each multi-tenant, single-tenant, pedestrian directory, and directional sign meets the minimum setbacks to ensure a clear field of vision and provide legible directions to various locations within the site. Additionally, the LSSD specifically defines pedestrian directory sign and directional signs to ensure wayfinding signage is available for all modes of transportation within the subject site.

- e. *Illumination. The impact and compatibility of sign illumination within the district and in relation to neighboring properties. The avoidance of glare and light pollution.*

The subject site is located in a developing area of the City, accessed by a highway to the west and a Secondary Arterial roadway to the south, and a future Secondary Arterial roadway to the east. Surrounding future development includes single-family residential to the west and northwest. The LSSD does not proposed any type of illuminated ground signs not permitted by the Denton Sign Code.

- f. *Integration. How the signs in the district are integrated into a unified development concept with the topography, building design, other signs, landscaping, traffic circulation and other development features on the district and nearby property.*

- i. *Is not being used merely to avoid or gain a variance of the sign regulations;*
The proposed special sign district is not intended to merely vary from the sign regulations, rather, the purpose is to comprehensively plan the ground signs to determine the appropriate number, adequate sizes, and to clearly communicate necessary information while minimizing potential impacts.

- ii. *Does not violate the spirit or intent of the sign regulations; and*
According to Section 33.1(c), the purpose of the sign regulations is to balance important and competing interests, including the constitutional right to free speech and the public interests in safety and aesthetics, including controlling visual clutter.

The proposed LSSD would not violate this purpose, rather, it is intended to promote the commercial area and direct vehicular and pedestrian traffic to various areas throughout the District. Additionally, the proposed special sign district limits potential visual clutter by requiring oversight via development CC&Rs and by placing ground signs in key locations to residents and direct drivers, potentially reducing the need for additional signs throughout the site.

- iii. *Complies with the requirements of this section.*

The proposal complies with the requirements of this section.

- g. *Under no circumstances may a special sign district be used to authorize construction of new billboards or any other new signs that are otherwise prohibited under section 33-4, or one (1) or more signs that will be used for general advertising for hire.*

As discussed above, the purpose of sign regulations is to protect the community's standards related to safety and aesthetics. Prohibiting certain types of signs is a necessary component to prevent unsafe or noxious signs from dotting the landscape. For example, Section 33.4 prohibits dilapidated signs, signs which interfere with the use of a parking space, and signs which obscure the view of a driver.

By and large, the sign package in the LSSD does not include signs that are otherwise prohibited under Section 33.4. However, the proposal includes a modification to Section 33.4(i)(1)b, based upon the following rationale:

- The current Denton Sign Code text prohibits *portable signs* if “not a properly registered nonconforming portable sign as provided for in this chapter.” Staff generally agrees with the prohibition of these types of signs; however, the language in the LSSD is restrictive, limiting the max effective area, maximum height, and number permitted per business or establishment.