

# **Director's Report**

## **Center Campus Subarea Seattle Center Overlay District**

### **April 2021**

#### **Proposal Summary**

SDCI and Seattle Center are proposing amendments to the Land Use Code (Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) Title 23) that would create tailored sign code provisions for the Center Campus Subarea portion of the Seattle Center Sign Overlay District.

#### **Background**

Seattle Center is an active civic, arts and family gathering place in the core of our region. More than 30 cultural, educational, sports and entertainment organizations reside on the grounds, together with a broad range of public and community programs, creating thousands of events on the 74-acre campus and attracting over 12 million visitors each year. Seattle Center's purpose is to create exceptional events, experiences and environments that delight and inspire the human spirit to build stronger communities. Over 14,000 events take place on the grounds each year and the grounds feature the top attractions in the area. Seattle Center is the top visitor and tourism destination in the region.

Seattle Center was created for the 1962 World's Fair and became a department of the City of Seattle in 1965. The Director of the Seattle Center Department is authorized to adopt, promulgate, amend, and rescind rules and regulations consistent with and necessary to carry out his duties which include advertising events, publicizing, and otherwise promoting the use of Seattle Center facilities. These activities are governed by SMC Chapter 17.040.

In 2017 the City's Office of Economic Development released a Request for Proposal ("RFP") for the renovation of KeyArena at Seattle Center. The objectives for the project were to: (1) renovate KeyArena into a world-class sports and entertainment facility, (2) integrate with Uptown's Urban Design Framework, (3) include minimal City financial participation in capital development, (4) include minimal City financial participation in ongoing operations, (5) address transportation impacts, (6) treat neighbors and impacted workers equitably, and (7) contribute to Seattle Center's vibrancy.

In 2018, ArenaCo, the successful respondent to the RFP embarked on a challenging effort to redevelop, lease, and operate the landmarked Arena, a \$1B plus privately financed project. Concurrent with redevelopment of the Arena, Seattle Center has embarked on an effort to coordinate procedures and infrastructure to integrate and align the operations of the Arena with Seattle Center's operation of the Seattle Center campus.

Renovation and expansion of the modernized Arena, recently named Climate Pledge Arena ("CPA"), has been a catalyst for updating, modernizing, and coordinating CPA and Seattle Center's signage. To accomplish that goal, a new sign code overlay district for Seattle Center

was created and approved by Ordinance 125869 in 2019. The Ordinance established the Seattle Center Sign Overlay District subareas, and regulations for the subareas containing Climate Pledge Arena and the Bressi Garage block. The legislation addressed the signage needs of a modernized Seattle Center and anticipated the future creation of sign regulations for the balance of Seattle Center in an overlay district called the Center Campus Subarea. The Seattle Center Sign Overlay District recognizes the unique nature of Seattle Center as the City's civic cultural center, including numerous individual cultural and entertainment venues and hosting a wide range of community events year-round.

Seattle Center wants to upgrade signage across the Seattle Center Campus to integrate with CPA and address operational issues such as safety and wayfinding for the benefit of Seattle Center, its resident organizations, and the visiting public, as well as sustainability issues, including energy conservation. Many of the proposed new campus signs would display changing images (such as text, graphics, or photos) and would be capable of displaying video imagery (video capable), although video display will only be allowed further than 20 feet from an unvacated right of way and must be consistent with the Sign Guidelines and approved by the Seattle Center Director.

The proposed Land Use Code amendment establishes regulations for the Center Campus Subarea and also modifies the subarea to include the Northwest Rooms and Northwest Rooms Courtyards (consisting of the Northwest and Alki Courtyards), Seattle Center Monorail system, City-owned green space fronting Mercer Street, and the Seattle Center Skate Plaza.

An environmental (SEPA) review was also performed, evaluating two elements of the signage program proposed for Seattle Center. Those elements were:

1. A non-project action consisting of a legislative proposal to update and amend Chapter 23.55 ("Signs") of the Land Use Code to newly include regulations for the Center Campus Subarea.
2. A project action to replace signs in similar locations to those already existing within the Seattle Center Sign Overlay District and add new signs within the Seattle Center Sign Overlay District.

The SEPA review resulted in a Determination of Non-Significance issued April 5, 2021.

## **Proposal and Analysis**

The proposal would amend the Land Use Code to establish tailored sign code provisions for the Center Campus Subarea of the Seattle Center Sign Overlay District. The proposal is intended to provide for a modernized signage program that addresses both sustainability and operational issues and is consistent in design function while aligning the Seattle Center campus with the arena site and benefitting Seattle Center, its resident organizations, and the visiting public.

Specifically, the amendment would:

**Codify past practice** – Grant authority to the Seattle Center Director to manage signage on the interior of the campus consistent with the legislation and the adopted Seattle Center Sign Guidelines while continuing to comply with all landmark and technical code requirements. This codifies past practice regarding City-owned and City-managed signs at Seattle Center, which uses the Seattle Center Director’s authority outlined in SMC 17.040 to authorize City signs on the interior of the Seattle Center campus. This legislation maintains the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (“SDCI”) authority for signs within 20 feet of unvacated right-of-way and for certain other signs within the campus (such as for tenants, concessionaires, and other property owners on campus). It continues SDCI’s regulation according to the general sign standards in Part 1 of SMC Chapter 23.55 and certain other subsections such as the proposed 23.55.062.D and 23.55.062.E.4.f.

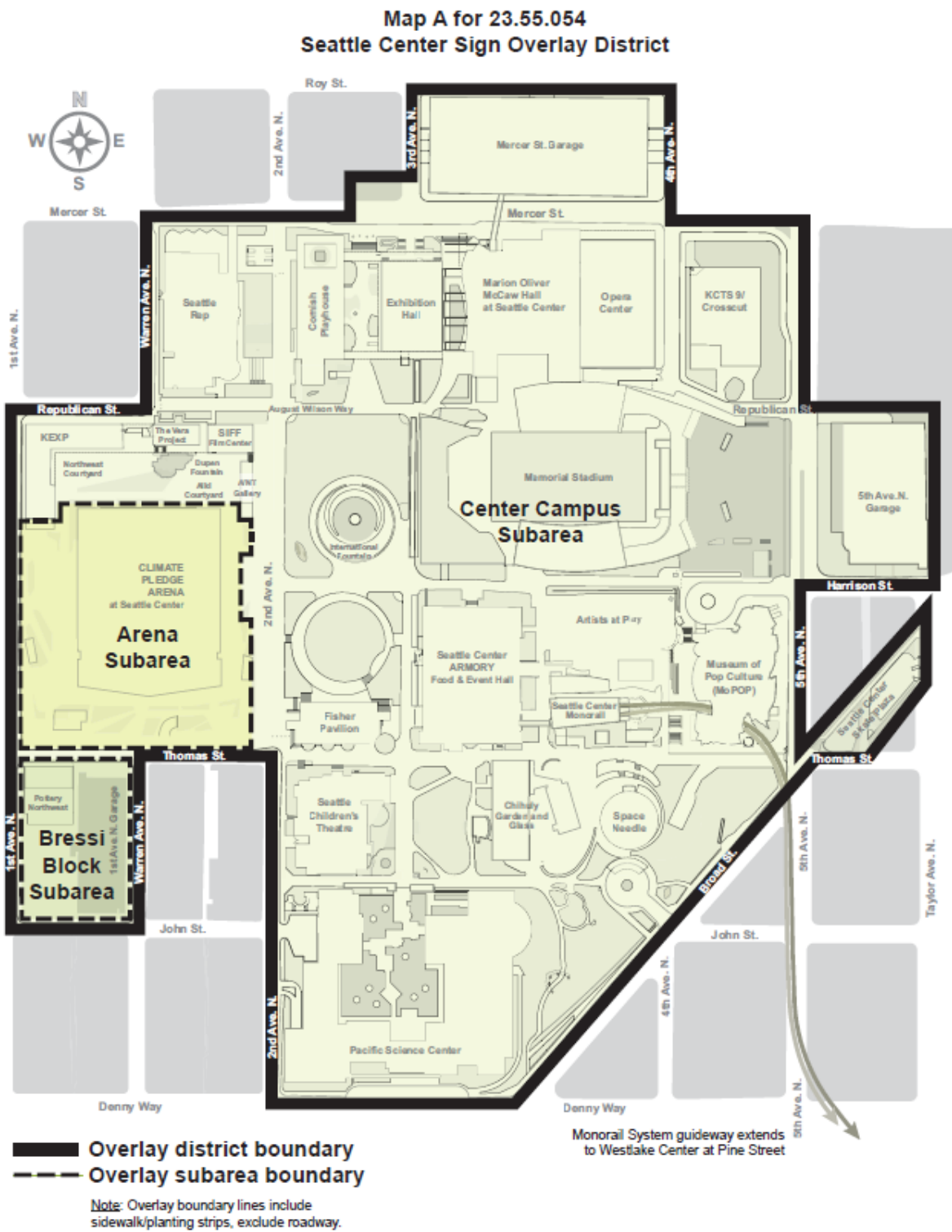
**Establish sign regulations supporting events** – The legislation allows for event-related signage on the interior campus such as balloons, posters, festoons of lights, banners, window graphics, movie screens, and signs on vehicles, and also limits the size and duration of temporary signage.

**Align with the Arena Subarea requirements** – Establish sign illumination, light and glare and video display requirements consistent with those for CPA.

**Address Sponsorship and Off-Premises Signs** – On-premises and sponsorship signs are permitted in the Center Campus Subarea, but they are limited to signs on City-owned or City-managed property. City-owned and City-managed signs are regulated by Section 23.55.062 while other signs are regulated by the general sign standards in Part 1 of Chapter 23.55 and subsection 23.55.062.D. All premises within the Seattle Center Sign Overlay District comprise the premises. Off-premises signs within the Center Campus Subarea owned or managed by the City on City-owned or City-managed property are prohibited.

**Correct and expand the Seattle Center Overlay District map** – The Seattle Center Sign Overlay District established in 2019 is updated to add the new Skate Plaza, include the Seattle Center Monorail system, add a portion of Seattle Center owned green space fronting Mercer Street and move the Northwest Rooms and Northwest Courtyards from the Arena Subarea into the Center Campus Subarea.

Proposed map of the corrected and expanded Seattle Center Sign Overlay District:



The proposed amendment would not alter the authority of the Landmarks Preservation Board over facilities at Seattle Center. It also does not alter the authority of SDCI over City-owned or City-managed signs within 20 feet of unvacated right-of-way or signs that are not City-owned or City-managed in the Center Campus subarea.

## **Comprehensive Plan Consistency**

### Capital Facilities Element – Strategic Investment

*Goal CF G1:* Develop and manage capital facilities to provide long-term environmental, economic, social, and health benefits for all residents and communities when using public investments, land, and facilities.

*Policy CF 1.5:* Encourage the protection, enhancement, and adaptive reuse of City-owned historic facilities.

### Neighborhood Plans Element – Queen Anne (Uptown)

*Policy QA-P15:* Seek ways to ensure that Seattle Center remains a vibrant and valuable community resource and a premier regional amenity.

### Cultural Space and Placemaking

*AC 4.5:* Encourage using public and institutional spaces, such as parks, community centers, libraries, hospitals, schools, universities, and City-owned places, for arts and culture.

## **Public Outreach and Notice**

Seattle Center has conducted community engagement efforts for the new sign program and related legislation, meeting with the Seattle Center Advisory Commission, Uptown Land Use Review Committee, Arena Community Coordination Committee, Seattle Center Resident Directors, and the Seattle Design Commission. Feedback from the groups has been positive, applauding the unified, modern aesthetic, encouraging the opportunity to improve communication with and visibility of organizations and events, focusing on the improvements to navigation of Seattle Center and supporting signs that celebrated arrival at Seattle Center. Community members also supported the improved sustainability impacts of the signs and encouraged ADA accessibility to all the signs.

Additionally, the SEPA environmental review for the proposed action included analysis and disclosure of impacts of the proposed sign code amendments, as well as constructing new signs that either replace existing signs or are in a few instances in new sign locations. The public will

continue to have opportunities for comment. The SEPA information may be reviewed at <http://www.seattlecenter.com/about/plans-and-projects>

A public hearing on the proposed legislation will be scheduled before the Public Assets and Native Communities Committee in 2021. Additional opportunities to provide input will occur as the City Council deliberates on the proposal.

### **Recommendation**

The SDCI Director and Seattle Center Director jointly recommend that the City Council adopt the proposed ordinance establishing tailored sign code provisions for the Center Campus Subarea of the Seattle Center Sign Overlay District.