



# Seattle Center Campus Signage and Sign Code Update State Environmental Policy Act Threshold Determination

Proponent: Seattle Center

Lead Agency: Seattle Center

Seattle Center (the lead agency) has determined that the proposed Signage and proposed Sign Code Update would not have a probable significant adverse impact on the environment. This Determination of Non-Significance (DNS) is issued under Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 197-11-340(2) and is based on review of a completed State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Environmental Checklist.

Responsible Official: Rose Ann Lopez

## Description of Proposal

There are two parts to this proposal:

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

## Location of the Proposal

The Code amendment applies to a portion of the Seattle Center Campus, referred to as the Center Campus Subarea in proposed amendments to Chapter 23.55 of the Land Use Code. The Center Campus Subarea includes the majority of the Seattle Center Campus, and also would be modified by this proposal to include the Northwest Rooms and the adjacent Northwest and Alki Courtyards, the Seattle Center Monorail system, City-owned green space fronting Mercer street, and the Seattle Center Skate Plaza. The project site is in Section 30, Township 25N, Range 4 East.

## Public and Agency Comments

Comments on this DNS must be submitted by April 19, 2021. Comments must be sent to:

Julia Levitt  
Seattle Center  
305 Harrison Street  
Seattle, WA 98109  
[SeattleCenterProjects@seattle.gov](mailto:SeattleCenterProjects@seattle.gov)

**City of Seattle**  
Jenny A. Durkan, Mayor

**Seattle Center**  
Robert Nellams, Director

### ARTS / VENUES

A/NT Gallery  
Book-It Repertory Theatre  
Classical KING FM  
KCTS 9/Crosscut  
KEXP 90.3 FM  
Pacific Northwest Ballet  
Pottery Northwest  
Seattle Children's Theatre  
Seattle Opera  
Seattle Rep  
Seattle Shakespeare Company  
SIFF Film Center  
TeenTix  
Theatre Puget Sound  
The Vera Project

### ATTRACTIONS / VENUES

Armory / Food & Event Hall  
Artists at Play Playground & Plaza  
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation  
Discovery Center  
Chihuly Garden and Glass  
Climate Pledge Arena  
Cornish Playhouse  
International Fountain  
Marion Oliver McCaw Hall  
Museum of Pop Culture (MoPOP)  
Opera Center  
Pacific Science Center  
Seattle Center Monorail  
Seattle Center Skate Plaza  
Seattle Children's Museum  
Space Needle

### EDUCATION

Academy of Interactive  
Entertainment  
The Center School  
Cornish College of the Arts

### PROGRAMS & EVENTS

Bite of Seattle  
Bumbershoot®  
Community Created Events  
Concerts at the Mural  
Festál Cultural Festivals  
Fitness Programs  
Movies at the Mural  
Northwest Folklife Festival  
Seattle International Film Festival  
Seattle/King County Clinic  
Seattle PrideFest  
Winterfest

### SPORTS

Seattle Kraken (NHL)  
Seattle Storm (WNBA)

Accommodations  
for people with  
disabilities provided  
on request



Please address emails to Julia Levitt and include Signage and Sign Code Update in the subject line.

A copy of the Environmental Checklist is available online at <http://www.seattlecenter.com/about/plans-and-projects>.

### Appeals

Appeals of this DNS must be accompanied by an \$85.00 filing fee and must be filed by 5:00 p.m. on April 26, 2021. Delivery of appeals filed by any form of USPS mail service may be delayed by several days. Allow extra time if mailing an appeal.

- Written appeals must be sent to:  
City of Seattle Hearing Examiner  
700 5th Avenue Suite 4000  
P.O. Box 94729  
Seattle, WA 98124-4729

Appeals can be filed electronically. Details on electronic filing procedures are available under “e-File” at the Office of the Hearing Examiner’s web site: <http://www.seattle.gov/examiner/>. Filing fees must be paid by the appeal deadline and can be paid via check (made payable to the City of Seattle) or credit/debit card (Visa and MasterCard only). Credit/debit card payments can be made over-the-phone.

Please note, the Office of Hearing Examiner is working remotely until the public health emergency is lifted. Appeals cannot be filed in person; one of the methods listed above must be used.

You should be prepared to make specific factual objections. Please refer to the *Hearing Examiner Rules of Practice and Procedure* for rules that govern appeals. These rules are available on the Hearing Examiner’s website at [www.seattle.gov/examiner/rules-toc.htm](http://www.seattle.gov/examiner/rules-toc.htm) or by calling 206-684-0521.

For interpretation services please call **(206) 684-3066**  
Para servicios de interpretación por favor llame al **(206) 684-3066**

Proposal Name: Seattle Center Campus Signage and Sign Code Update

### Summary of the Proposed Action

There are two parts to this proposal:

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.

### Background

Seattle Center is a 74-acre arts, educational, tourism and entertainment center owned by the City of Seattle (City) located in the Uptown urban center, generally between Mercer Street and Denny Way in Seattle, Washington. Seattle Center is proposing to install new signs across the Seattle Center Campus as a part of a modernization of its communications, marketing, and sponsorship program. Seattle Center wants to upgrade signage across the Seattle Center Campus to 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 new campus signs would display changing images (such as text, graphics, or photos) and would be capable of displaying video imagery (video capable).

The City’s Sign Code ([Seattle Municipal Code] SMC Chapter 23.55) was amended in July 2019 to establish a sign overlay district and sign regulations for the Seattle Center and included regulations for the Seattle Center Arena and the Bressi Block Subareas. The Center Campus Subarea was established, but regulations were not included in the 2019 amendment; therefore, Seattle Center has also proposed changes to SMC Chapter 23.55 that regulate the Center Campus Subarea. The proposal includes both a non-project action (amending the Code) and a project action (installing new signs).

### Code Amendment

The Sign Code amendment would:

1. Amend the boundary of the Center Campus Subarea to include the City-owned and City-managed area north of the Arena referred to as the Northwest Rooms and the adjacent Northwest and Alki Courtyards; and also to include the Seattle Center Monorail system, City-owned green space fronting Mercer Street and the Seattle Center Skate Plaza.
2. Create sign regulations for the Center Campus Subarea.
3. Allow for video displays within the Center Campus Subarea further than 20 feet from the right of way edge that are larger than those permitted under the existing

code, provided they are consistent with Seattle Center Sign Guidelines and meet the Seattle Center Director’s approval.

The Sign Code amendment would allow the proposed signs to be installed and would also allow future signs that are not yet designed or proposed. Therefore, this State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) analysis considers the possible cumulative impact of future signs that would be allowed under the amended Sign Code.

### Proposed Signs

A plan showing the proposed sign locations is included with the Environmental Checklist. The proposed signs include replacement signs in similar locations to those already existing on the campus, and new signs. New signs would be similar to signage proposed for installation in the plazas at the Climate Pledge Arena, which is on the Seattle Center Campus.

All signs with a digital component would require electrical wiring. Where needed, new wiring would be installed underground. A small amount of grading and excavation would be necessary for utility trenching, site preparation, and sign installation. There would be approximately 1,000 – 2,000 cubic yards of grading required for utility trenching, site preparation and sign installation.

### Analysis

Environmental review resulting in a Threshold Determination is required pursuant to the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), WAC 197-11, and the Seattle SEPA Ordinance (SMC 25.05).

The following describes the analysis conducted to determine that the proposal is not likely to result in probable significant adverse environmental impacts. This threshold determination is based on:

- the language of the proposed amendments and related contents; and
- the information contained in the SEPA Environmental Checklist (dated March 29, 2021); and
- review of background information materials about the code amendments, prepared by City staff.

Potential impacts are outlined in the SEPA Environmental Checklist (dated March 29, 2021), this section summarizes key findings.

Earth, Air, Water, Plants, Animals, Energy and Natural Resources, Environmental Health, Land and Shoreline Use, Housing and Recreation

Neither the proposed amendment nor the proposed signs are expected to generate significant adverse impacts for these environmental elements, due to their small scale and location in an already urbanized setting.

### Aesthetics

The Sign Code amendment creates regulations for the Center Campus Subarea and allows for video displays larger than those permitted under the existing code in places beyond 20 feet of a right of way. New and larger changing image signs could potentially adversely affect public spaces, viewpoints, and adjacent properties through incrementally adding to visual clutter and potential spillover light and glare. A regulatory framework exists that limits these impacts: first, the existing code includes limits on the sizes, timing, and operation of changing image and video capable signs of signs within 20 feet of the unvacated right of way; and second, the proposed Sign Code amendment limits the brightness, timing, and hours of operation of video capable signs. In addition, the Seattle Center Century 21: Signage Guidelines, which were adopted in 2008 and updated with approval of the Seattle Center Advisory Commission, will ensure that signage is coordinated and consistent with the desired character at Seattle Center, limit the sizes and location of signs, and will require signs clearly visible from the right of way to be operated in a way that minimizes driver distraction. The proposed signage plan was reviewed by the Seattle Design Commission to ensure quality urban design, and received the Commission's overall support.

The proposed signs have been designed to complement the Seattle Center Campus, follow the updated Seattle Center Century 21: Signage Guidelines, and would be similar to signage at the Climate Pledge Arena. The signs are intended primarily to provide information (e.g. wayfinding, art identification, event and general information, and sponsorship messages), consistent with Seattle Center policies and practices. Overall, the number of signs throughout the Campus containing digital rather than static displays would increase. The tallest signs would be the Campus Readerboards, Pole Banners, and Facility Readerboards. Campus and Facility Readerboards would replace signs of similar bulk and scale in similar locations. Pole Banners would be new and possibly more noticeable due to their height (up to 19 feet), but would replace a proliferation of more than 120 vinyl light pole banners throughout the campus, resulting in a simplified overall look and presence in the visual environment. Other new signs, such as 3 additional digital wayfinding signs, 3 new art walk signs, and 5 proposed non-digital entry marker signs, would be similar in bulk and scale to the existing wayfinding signs. Garage signs around both the Mercer Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Garages would also be updated, with limited new additions in locations similar to existing signs. The proposed code amendment would also permit the continued use of temporary event-related signs on the Seattle Center campus, consistent with past practice.

City policy protects views of significant natural and human-made features from identified viewpoints and scenic routes (SMC 25.05.675.P). The only identified viewpoint near Seattle Center is from Kerry Park viewpoint. Scenic routes also surround the perimeter of the Seattle Center Campus. Protected views that are visible from these scenic viewpoints and scenic routes include territorial views of the city and surrounding mountains and water bodies as well as views of designated Landmarks. Scenic views from Kerry Park viewpoint would not be altered. In the case of the scenic routes, the perimeter of the Seattle Center Campus is the primary scenic resource that can be viewed.

The proposed signs are generally for wayfinding and information purposes, with the intent to point to important features on Campus, including Landmarks. Signs are proposed in locations where they would be visible by pedestrians and/or drivers including in front of or near designated Landmarks. Views of Landmarks would change but impacts are not



expected to be significant, because the scale of the signs is relatively small, and the signs are located to avoid detracting from these structures.

Along scenic routes, Campus Readerboards with changing image displays would replace existing digital changing image signs, and Facility Readerboards would replace existing amber text signs with new digital changing image displays. The remaining signs along scenic routes would be new or would replace static signs. The new signs would change the look of the scenic routes but would be consistent with the character of the Seattle Center Campus. This analysis interprets the degree of potential adverse impacts to protected views to be minor-to-none.

In March 2021, the proposed Signage Plan was reviewed by the Seattle Design Commission in a meeting that was open to the public. The Commission supported the overall project and agreed that the proposed signs would be an aesthetic improvement compared to existing signs. Seattle Center will also coordinate with the Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board regarding proposed changes adjacent to designated Seattle Landmarks. Proposed signs have been designed with input from community stakeholders to complement Seattle Center, be sensitive to and minimize impacts on neighbors, and be mindful of a spare and uncluttered design aesthetic. The addition of new signs including signs with changing image displays or video would change the look of the Campus but would not likely result in a significant adverse aesthetic impact.

#### Light and Glare

Extensive illumination currently exists on and surrounding the Seattle Center Campus. The most prominent lighting element is the illumination of the Space Needle which is visible within the entirety of the site and from many locations surrounding the campus. The other high levels of illumination and visible lighting consists of the platform lighting located at the Monorail station and the unshielded floodlighting at Memorial Stadium. Most of the other illumination that exists on site are at low to moderate levels. Surrounding the Campus, lighting is used for illuminating surrounding arterial streets, commercial properties, and residential properties. As there is extensive illumination on and surrounding Seattle Center Campus the potential for adverse impacts to light and glare from the proposed new and replacement signs are minimal to moderate depending on the sign.

The new LED displays for wayfinding pylons, information kiosks, art walk signs, and pole banners located interior to the Seattle Center Campus would increase glare for individuals at these locations, but this analysis interprets the degree of potential adverse impacts to be low-to-moderate. Low to moderate adverse impacts would likely occur from the garage wayfinding signs at 3rd Avenue North and 4th Avenue North as these displays are larger with more visual exposure.

Seattle Center evaluated the potential for driver distraction from signs along the perimeter of the Campus. Changing images and video have a potential for driver distraction from signs that may be visible from surrounding streets. The effects of the proposed signs would be limited by regulations for brightness, location, and changing images included in the existing Sign Code and Sign Code amendment. In addition, the update to the Century 21: Signage Guidelines requires signs that are clearly visible from the ROW to be operated in a way that

minimizes driver distraction. Like some of the existing digital signs, some of the proposed signs could be a source of distraction to some drivers but would not result in a significant safety hazard.

Potential adverse impacts from light and glare can be minimized by selecting displays that minimize luminance and light spillover. Additionally, best practices for digital signs with respect to video capabilities, placement and spacing, message hold times, message sequencing, transitions and dimming will be incorporated. Therefore, significant adverse environmental impacts from light and glare are not expected.

#### Historic and Cultural Preservation

To date, there are seven designated Seattle Landmarks and seven aboveground historic built environment resources that have been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) by the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) Three of these resources are both Seattle Landmarks and NRHP determined-eligible resources.

No previously recorded archaeological sites, cemeteries, or traditional cultural properties are located within the Project Area. The DAHP's Statewide Archaeological Predictive Model classifies the Project Area as High Risk to Very High Risk for containing precontact-era archaeological resources. Non-Indigenous development of the area began in the early 1890s and the construction of the 1962 World's Fair / Century 21 Exposition drastically altered the landscape of the area.

Seattle Center will coordinate with the Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board regarding the potential proposed changes adjacent to designated Seattle Landmarks in the Project Area. Based on current designs, no signs would be installed on the exterior of any designated Landmarks. One existing sign that would be replaced is located on the edge of Pacific Science Center property and would be replaced in a similar location. A Certificate of Approval from the Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board will be obtained prior to the replacement of this sign.

An archaeological resources inadvertent discovery plan (IDP) for Seattle Center would be implemented prior to construction of the project. Should any cultural resources be encountered during construction, Seattle Center will follow the procedures outlined in the plan to comply with all state laws requiring the protection of cultural resources.

#### Transportation

The signs would generate a small number of trips for installation and occasional trips for maintenance, none of which would adversely affect traffic. As a result, neither the Sign Code amendment nor the proposed signs would likely result in a significant adverse impact to transportation.

#### Utilities

All signs with a digital component would require electrical wiring. Given the age of the electrical network serving the areas where signs will be placed, localized upgrades could be needed to sufficiently serve the new signage. Where needed, new wiring would be installed

underground, requiring a small amount of grading and excavation for utility trenching, site preparation, and sign installation. With these improvements, the signage proposal could be served without significant adverse impacts to the Center’s electrical systems. Electrical service will be provided by Seattle City Light and Seattle Center, and there is adequate electric supply serving the site.

SEPA Decision

This decision was made after review by the responsible official on behalf of the lead agency of a completed Environmental Checklist and other information on file with the responsible department. This constitutes the Threshold Determination and form. The intent of this declaration is to satisfy the requirement of the SEPA (Revised Code of Washington [RCW] 43.21C), including the requirement to inform the public of agency decisions pursuant to SEPA.

- Determination of Non-Significance. This proposal has been determined to not have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).
- Determination of Significance. This proposal has or may have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).

Signature  Issue Date: April 5, 2021  
Rose Ann Lopez  
Seattle Center Director of Facilities, Planning and Operations