

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. AGENDA CHANGES
3. MINUTES
 - A) March 18, 2026 Minutes of the Planning Commission

Suggested Motion: I move to approve the March 18, 2026 Minutes of the Planning Commission.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS
 - A) Sign Code Update Work Session continued
5. CITIZEN COMMENTS
6. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS
7. ADJOURNMENT

Our Vision

Chelan is a rural lakeside community surrounded by pristine natural beauty where generations of visitors and residents enjoy an exceptional quality of life.

Our Guiding Principles & Outcomes

Visionary & Strategic - A city that is forward-thinking, collaborative, and fiscally responsible.

Thriving & Connected - A vibrant, well-planned city where residents have a sense of home.

Healthy & Sustainable - A flourishing city that supports an active community.

Accessible & Welcoming - A safe city where everyone can find community.

The next Planning Commission meeting will be on May 20, 2026, beginning at 5:15 p.m. in Council Chambers, 135 E. Johnson Avenue, Chelan, Washington.



CITY OF CHELAN
Planning Commission Meeting
March 18, 2026

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS AND ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL
PRESENT

Commissioners:

Joe Collins
Vickie Heimark
Gary Myers
Ryan Peterson
Gaylen Willett

Administrative Personnel:

Community Development Director John Ajax
Sr. Planner - Monica Libbey
Assistant Planner Linda Jo Williams
City Council Members: Brad Chitty and
Shane Collins

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. AGENDA CHANGES

NONE

3. MINUTES

A) February 18, 2026 Minutes of the Planning Commission

Suggested Motion: I move to approve the February 18, 2026 Minutes of the Planning Commission.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

A) Sign Code Update Work Session continued

Sr. Planner Libbey and Director Ajax presented the Sign Code Update Workshop. Staff explained that rather than presenting a full draft code immediately, the purpose of this workshop was to gather more detailed directions from commissioners on key policy questions. Staff indicated that the draft code language would be presented at the next meeting. A set of questions was provided for commissioners to review. Commissioners were invited to submit written responses to staff after the meeting.

B) GMA Periodic Update: Draft Critical Areas Ordinance

Director Ajax briefly presented the Growth Management Act (GMA) Periodic Update, which requires the City to update its Critical Areas Ordinance as part of the Comprehensive Plan

update process.

The Critical Areas Ordinance is a separate section of city code from the zoning code, governing how permits are handled in five types of critical areas: Wetlands, Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas (CARs), Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas,

5. CITIZEN COMMENTS

John Olson reported on the March 19, 2026 Manson Community Council meeting he attended at the Grange Hall.

6. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

7. ADJOURNMENT

Final Comments / Motion to Adjourn Suggested Motion: I move to adjourn the meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 7:45 pm

**The meeting was adjourned
at _____ P.M.**

**Date
Approved:**

**John Ajax
Community Development
Director**

**[NAME]
Chair**



Subject/Title: Sign Code Update Work Session continued
Department: Community Development
Staff Contact: Monica Libbey
Guiding Principles:
Initiatives:
Reviewed By:
Number of Looks:

PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN

Work Sessions held at February and March meetings.

OVERVIEW

Background

The City is updating Chapter 17.58 – Signs to modernize the code and ensure compliance with recent court decisions requiring sign regulations to be content-neutral and based on objective standards.

As part of developing a final draft ordinance, staff is requesting Planning Commission review and provide feedback on proposed standards across the key topics we've been discussing.

Temporary Signs & Downtown Banner Signs

The current code allows 30 days for most temporary signs and allows community activity banners tied to a specific event (30 days before, 14 days after). Under Reed, we can no longer tie sign rules to the sign's message.

The draft code consolidates multiple temporary sign categories into one content-neutral temporary sign category and proposes allowing temporary signs for up to 60 days.

Temporary signs, subject to the following:

1. In residential zones: maximum six square feet per sign, maximum 42 inches

- in height, limited to three signs per property;
2. In nonresidential zones: maximum 32 square feet per sign, maximum six feet in height, limited to three signs per street frontage;
 3. Signs shall be securely affixed to a building face / structure or placed in the ground using stakes, posts, or similar supports.
 4. Signs shall not be placed where they obstruct vehicle driver visibility at intersections, alleys, or driveways;
 5. Each temporary sign shall not remain for more than 60 consecutive days;
 6. This category includes signs commonly known as political signs, garage sale signs, real estate signs, banner signs, and similar temporary signs regardless of message content;
 7. A sign displayed continuously for more than 60 days shall be considered a permanent sign subject to permit requirements;

Window Sign Coverage

Currently there is no coverage limit for window signs, meaning a business could cover all windows with signage. The draft proposes no change.

Sandwich Board Signs

Sandwich-board signs are currently allowed in front of any business during business hours.

Sandwich-board signs subject to the following:

1. Limited to one per use or establishment;
2. May be placed in front of a use or establishment during operating hours only;
3. Shall be placed adjacent to the curb; provided that such signs shall not obstruct pedestrian or vehicular travel or visibility, or create blind spots at intersections. In areas with sidewalk business activities, signs shall be attached to sidewalk barriers or within the designated sidewalk business area;
4. Shall not exceed forty-two inches in height and thirty inches in width;
5. Shall be weighted to prevent it from tipping over;
6. Shall be painted or finished with a sealer, and
7. Shall be nonilluminated.

Murals

The mural section is currently reserved (empty). The draft proposes no change, this means murals will continue to be allowed without a permit so long as no portion of the mural meets the definition of sign.

TA District and Highway Frontage Signs

The current T-A District and Highway Frontage sign standards allow freestanding signs up to 25 feet tall and 50 square feet. The draft proposes the same standards in the T-A District as the downtown planning area. No change proposed to Highway Frontage standards.

Freestanding Sign Requirements			
	DMR, DMU, SUD, T-A, PLF Zoning Districts	A, C-HS, C-W, W-I Zoning Districts	Highway frontage
Height Limit	6'	16' or height of structure	25' or height of structure
Maximum Sign Area	20 sf	25 sf	50 sf
Large Parcels	40 sf ₁	50 sf ₁	75 sf ₂
Landscaping ₃	1 sf landscaping per 1 sf of sign face	NA	

Notes:

1. Parcels with more than 50 feet of frontage on any one street may increase the maximum size of the sign located on that street frontage by one square foot for each ten lineal feet of street frontage in excess of 50 feet up to the maximum size area.
2. Parcels with more than 100 feet of frontage on any one street may increase the maximum size of the sign located on that street frontage by one square foot for each ten lineal feet of street frontage in excess of 100 feet up to the maximum size area.
3. Landscaping includes a decorative combination of ground cover and shrubs to provide seasonal interest in the area surrounding the sign. Landscaping shall be well maintained at all times of the year. The administrator may reduce the landscaping requirement where the signage incorporates stone, brick, or other decorative materials.

Electronically Changeable Message Signs

Under the current code, electronically changeable message signs are only allowed in the PLF zone. The draft proposes allowing in the DP & PLF zones, and

for static vehicle fueling displays only.

Any permitted ECM sign shall be subject to the sign size and location restrictions applicable to the sign type and shall comply with applicable Illumination Standards.

Fuel Pricing: ECM signs may be permitted on nonresidential properties that include on-site vehicle fueling infrastructure and a permanent sign is used to display fuel prices. Messages shall be displayed as a single continuous static image and shall not scroll, flash, fade, animate, move, or transition.

Sign Illumination and Neon Signs

The downtown standards currently prohibit internally illuminated signs (back-lit box signs) but allow neon, shadow lighting, and indirect illumination.

The proposed draft regulates sign illumination to reduce light pollution and glare, protect traffic safety, conserve energy, and maintain community character. All illuminated signs must prevent glare onto residences and streets, limit upward light spill, and dim or turn off between 11:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. unless a business is open.

External lighting must be fully shielded, directed downward, use warm-white light (3000K or less), and stay within brightness limits. Internal illumination proposes limits on cabinet signs and clear brightness caps (luminance levels) for daytime, nighttime, and late night hours.

Cabinet signs (box signs). Internally illuminated cabinet signs are permitted only outside the downtown planning area and if the background is opaque and illumination is limited to translucent letters, logos, or graphic elements ("push-through" or "routed" letters).

The draft proposes allowing signs using similar gas-discharge tubes or neon-like LED illumination as neon signs.

Refacing Nonconforming Signs

Under the current code, "alteration" of a sign triggers loss of nonconforming status. The draft narrows this to "structural alteration or physical enlargement." This means a simple reface (changing the sign panel or copy without changing the structure) would NOT trigger compliance with new sign standards.

Sign Review Process

Sign review is based on objective standards and is reviewed by staff. The draft proposes no change.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

ATTACHMENTS

1. Proposed Code Changes Presentation

SUGGESTED MOTION

CITY OF CHELAN

Sign Code Update

Chapter 17.58 – Proposed Changes Overview

Planning Commission Work Session

April 2026

Why Update the Sign Code?



Reed v. Town of Gilbert (2015)

U.S. Supreme Court ruled that if an officer must read a sign to know which rule applies, the regulation is content-based and presumed unconstitutional.



City of Austin v. Reagan (2022)

Clarified that on-premises vs. off-premises distinctions are content-neutral, but must serve a real government interest.



Our Code Has Problems

Chelan's current code defines signs by message — 'political sign,' 'real estate sign,' 'construction sign' — exactly the framework Reed struck down.

The Reed Test — In Plain English

FAILS THE TEST

Must read the sign to know which rule applies

- "Political sign" → special size/timing rules
- "Real estate sign" → 1 per lot, remove after sale
- "Construction sign" → must ID architects
- "Community activity sign" → 30 days before event
- "Menu sign" → only at restaurants

PASSES THE TEST

Rules based on physical characteristics only

- "Temporary sign" → max 6 sf, 60 days, any message
- "Freestanding sign" → height/area by zone
- "Wall sign" → max 10% of wall plane
- "Illuminated sign" → luminance limits by time
- "Sandwich-board" → 42" tall, business hours only

Overview of Proposed Changes

1

New Content Neutrality & Substitution Clause

2

Definitions simplified and restructured by physical type, not message

3

Exempt signs reclassified — content-neutral categories

4

Temporary sign rules unified (any message, same rules)

5

New Comprehensive Sign Illumination Standards

6

Nonconforming signs — removed amortization/ownership trigger

7

Administration — objective standards

8

New Severability & Substitution

Track Changes: Purpose & Content Neutrality

Section	Current Code	Proposed Revision	Why
Purpose	Promote functional/attractive signs; prevent danger to public safety, obstruct vision, or endanger welfare.	Content-neutral time/place/manner regulations. Adds: aesthetic character, dark sky, property values, visual clutter prevention, constitutional consistency.	<i>Strengthened to articulate compelling interests per Reed. Adds dark sky purpose.</i>
NEW: Content Neutrality & Message Substitution	Does not exist.	New section: Content neutrality declaration, message substitution clause (commercial → noncommercial), severability of content-based provisions.	<i>Required by Reed + Metromedia. Core constitutional safeguard.</i>
Interpretation	Most restrictive provision governs; specific over general.	Adds: all regulations interpreted content-neutrally. Officials shall not consider message/viewpoint.	<i>Reinforces content-neutral enforcement mandate.</i>

Track Changes: Definitions

Section	Current Code	Proposed Revision	Why
Abandoned sign	Sign referencing a business that has been discontinued — defined by message content.	Sign on premises vacant 6+ months OR no valid business license/permit — defined by property use status.	<i>Removes need to read sign to determine if abandoned.</i>
Off-premises sign	Sign directing attention to a business not conducted on the premises — content-based.	Sign not located on the same premises as the activity it relates to — simple location test.	<i>Per Austin v. Reagan: location-based = content-neutral.</i>
Sign types (41 defs.)	Defines: political sign, real estate sign, construction sign, logo sign, commemorative plaque, etc. — all by message.	Moved to new §17.58.045. Types defined by structure only: freestanding, wall, projecting, banner, temporary, etc.	<i>Core Reed fix. An officer classifies by looking at the sign's structure, not reading it.</i>
Illuminated sign	Single definition: internally illuminated, light not exposed.	Expanded: internal, external, halo-lit, neon — each with specific standards.	<i>Supports new §17.58.065 illumination standards.</i>

Track Changes: Exempt Signs

Section	Current Code	Proposed Revision	Why
Political signs	Exempt as 'political signs' — must remove 1 week after election. Defined by message.	DELETED as category. Folded into 'Temporary signs' — any message, same rules: 6 sf residential / 32 sf commercial, 60-day limit.	<i>Textbook Reed violation eliminated. Same sign, same rules.</i>
Real estate signs	Exempt as 'real estate signs' — 4 sf residential, 16 sf commercial, remove 30 days after closing.	DELETED as category. Folded into 'Temporary signs' — same size/time limits for all messages.	<i>No longer need to read sign to classify it.</i>
Construction signs	Exempt with content conditions: must ID project, architects, engineers.	DELETED as category. Construction-site signs governed by 'Temporary signs on active construction sites' — size limits, no content conditions.	<i>Content conditions removed; duration tied to active permit, not message.</i>
Menu signs	Two separate exemptions: drive-in menus (no limit) and other menus (4 sf, must match customer menu).	'Customer information signs at service windows and entrances' — 4 sf max. Defined by location, not content.	<i>Regulates where, not what.</i>

Track Changes: Exempt Signs (cont.)

Section	Current Code	Proposed Revision	Why
Community activity signs	30 days before event, 14 days after — time limits tied to knowing event date.	DELETED as category. All temporary signs: 60 consecutive days, regardless of message.	<i>Event-tied timing is content-based under Reed.</i>
Commemorative plaques	'Commemorative plaque' — defined by commemorative purpose (content).	'Wall plaque' — engraved/cast material, ≤4 sf, permanently affixed. Defined by physical form.	<i>Physical description replaces content description.</i>
Historic site signs	Content restricted: may only show name, hours, and admission. Requires council approval.	Signs at historically registered properties — ≤12 sf, nonilluminated. No content restrictions.	<i>Content restriction removed. Regulated by location on historic property.</i>
Temporary signs	30 days only. Must show date of posting on face. Defined to include 'grand opening, special sales, garage sales.'	60 days. Residential: 6 sf/42"/3 per property. Commercial: 32 sf/6'/3 per frontage. Message-neutral. Includes all temp signs regardless of content.	<i>Unified temp sign rules — the heart of Reed compliance.</i>

Track Changes: Prohibited Signs & Illumination

Section	Current Code	Proposed Revision	Why
Prohibited Signs	14 categories. Off-premises signs prohibited; no CUP pathway noted. ECM signs prohibited except PLF zone.	18 categories. Adds: inflatable signs, unshielded lighting, luminance exceedances, white-background internal illumination. Off-premises fully prohibited (no CUP). 'Private entity' clarifier on utility poles.	<i>New light pollution protections. Clearer enforcement.</i>
NEW: Illumination Standards	Only 2 lighting provisions in §060: spotlights/indirect + wiring code.	Comprehensive new section: purpose, general requirements, external (shielded/3000K), internal (luminance limits by time of day), halo-lit, neon, prohibited types, measurement standards.	<i>Dark sky standards. IDA best practices. Content-neutral — regulates light output, not message.</i>
ECM signs	ECM only on PLF-zoned properties. No brightness/transition standards.	ECM on DP and PLF properties + fuel pricing ECM on any nonresidential with fueling. 4-second transition, 0.3 fc brightness limit, static fuel pricing display.	<i>Expanded access but with content-neutral performance standards.</i>

Track Changes: Design Standards

Section	Current Code	Proposed Revision	Why
Freestanding signs	Single set of rules. 25 sf base, 50 sf max. 16' height. Corner lots: one frontage only.	Tiered by zoning district: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DMR/DMU/SUD/T-A/PLF: 6', 20 sf A/C-HS/C-W/W-I: 16', 25 sf Highway: 25', 50 sf Corner lots: both frontages (150' separation).	<i>More nuanced, zone-appropriate standards. Still content-neutral.</i>
Wall signs	10% of wall plane. No max cap.	10% or 50 sf, whichever is less. Signs shall not cover architectural features. Multi-tenant: centered above storefront.	<i>Added absolute cap. Protects historic character.</i>
Gas stations	Separate 'Gas stations' exception with content-specific rules.	DELETED as special category. Gas stations use standard freestanding/canopy rules. Fuel pricing via ECM provision.	<i>'Gas station' = use-based, which is content-neutral. But consolidated for simplicity.</i>
Residential district uses	CUP-based categories: B&B, churches, motels, parking lots — each with content-based sign rules.	Three categories by use intensity: private commercial (12 sf), non-commercial institutions (18 sf), home occupations (4 sf).	<i>Simplified. Use-based categories defensible under Reed.</i>

Track Changes: Nonconforming Signs & Administration

Section	Current Code	Proposed Revision	Why
Nonconforming Signs	Detailed amortization process. Loss of status on: alteration, ownership change, replacement, any new sign. 10-year amortization + extensions.	Simplified: no enlargement/extension/relocation. Routine maintenance OK. Loss of status: structural alteration, replacement, or exceeding total signage allowance. Ownership change trigger REMOVED.	<i>Ownership change trigger was a potential due process / takings issue.</i>
Administration	Administrator reviews 'general design, arrangement, size, lighting, placement and appropriateness' — broad subjective discretion.	Administrator determines compliance with OBJECTIVE standards (size, height, location, type, lighting, setback). If standards met → must approve. Content of sign NOT considered. Subjective aesthetics only in downtown design review.	<i>Eliminates prior restraint risk. Objective criteria = mandatory approval.</i>
NEW: Severability and Substitution	No severability or substitution clause.	New section: Severability (invalid provision doesn't void code), Substitution (protected speech gets most permissive temp sign rules), Content neutrality severability.	<i>Standard constitutional safety net. Protects code from total invalidation.</i>

Legal Compliance Assessment

How well does the draft address each constitutional requirement?

Requirement	Status	Notes
Content-neutral classifications (Reed)	✓ Strong	All sign types defined by structure. Content-based categories eliminated.
Substitution clause (Metromedia)	✓ Strong	Commercial signs may carry noncommercial message.
On/off-premises distinction (Austin)	✓ Strong	Location-based definition. Safety/aesthetic rationale in purpose statement.
Uniform temporary sign rules (Reed)	✓ Strong	Single category, 60-day limit, size by zone — message-neutral.
Objective admin standards (prior restraint)	✓ Strong	Objective criteria, mandatory approval, no content review.
Severability protection	✓ Strong	Severability + substitution + content-neutrality backstop.

Items for Planning Commission Discussion

Exempt Signs: Temporary Signs, Sandwich Boards, Window Signs, Murals

T-A, Downtown, & Highway Frontage Signs

Electronically Changeable Message (ECM) Signs

Sign Illumination and Neon Signs

Nonconforming Signs & Administration