

City of Columbus
Commercial Overlays and Special Graphics Control Areas
Summary of Proposed Changes

October 2007

Since 1999, a series of commercial zoning overlays and special graphics control area designations have been applied to areas of Columbus as a means of addressing community planning and design priorities. These designations work in conjunction with underlying zoning districts to provide additional standards for such things as building setback, screening, lighting and graphics. As the City gains experience in the administration of these code sections, a number of areas have been identified for needed revision. A city staff team undertook a comprehensive review of the commercial overlays (Urban, Community and Regional) as well as the Morse Road and Olentangy River Road special graphic control areas. As a result of that effort, a number of changes are being recommended to the code.

Many suggested modifications clarify ambiguous language or provide greater consistency of approach among overlays. In other cases, redundant standards or provisions were removed. The legislation replaces code sections that tie parking reductions to administrative waivers in the Urban and Community Commercial Overlays with a range of parking reductions linked to size of the proposed use. It also folds the special graphic control area standards into the regional commercial overlay section, thereby eliminating two code sections. It is important to note that these proposed changes would have no impact on the boundaries of existing areas.

This document is intended to summarize the changes proposed for the commercial overlays and special graphics control areas. More detailed explanations with side by side comparisons of existing and proposed text are also available.

Summary of Significant Proposed Changes to ALL Commercial Overlays

- Definitions section was merged into the overall zoning code definitions section (3303) and altered in minor ways to provide clearer guidance.
- Existing “Purpose” language appears in multiple locations. Proposed changes would establish a “Purpose and Intent” section at the beginning of each overlay.
- The “running” lists of overlay designation areas and primary streets within the main body of the overlay text were eliminated. These streets are designated with each individual listing in the relevant code section.
- Each overlay now has an Applicability and Extent section, which covers such issues as applicability of the overlays to nonconforming uses and graphics, maintenance and “in-kind” replacement of materials, etc. to ensure that they are consistent with legal requirements. The applicability and extent sections clarify that the overlays do not apply to residential uses. The relationship between the overlays and architectural review commissions is also covered in this section.

Proposed Significant Changes Specific to the Urban Commercial Overlay

- Design standards section renamed to “Building Design Standards.” Many standards remain identical, however standards not specific to buildings, such as fences, parking lots, and signage were placed in other sections. Pick up unit reference was added due to its relationship with building design.
- A minimum building frontage width requirement (60%), consistent with the Community Commercial Overlay requirement was added to the Building Design Standards section.
- A short graphics section was added to UCO to better align its structure with the other commercial overlay code sections. This section prohibits signs with flashing lights or bare bulbs, co-op signs, rotating signs, monopole signs, automatic changeable copy signs, projecting signs and roof-mounted signs
- A Landscape and Screening section was added to the UCO to better organize text elements addressing this area. A number of the items included in this new section were simply transferred from the Design Standards section of the existing UCO text. Additional guidance is included regarding the type and size of plant material. The section also includes additional requirements for parking lot planting bays.
- Opening sentence in existing Site Lighting section text was restated as standard and additional clarification added in a manner consistent with other overlays.
- Drive-thru uses section was modified to refer to pick up unit and moved to the Building Design standards section.
- Changes in the Parking and Circulation section focus on the replacement of the administrative waiver with a standard parking waiver tied to building size. Variances to the new standards would require consideration by the Board of Zoning Adjustment. Additionally, a parking cap has been established in an effort to eliminate the provision of unnecessary parking areas. Proposed parking standards are as follows:

In recognition of the development pattern associated with this overlay, the required number of off-street parking spaces shall be reduced in the following manner:

- 1. 0-2,000 square feet of building area: 25% of the required parking in Chapter 3342 shall be provided.*
- 2. 2,001- 10,000 square feet of building area: 50% of the required parking in Chapter 3342 shall be provided.*
- 3. Greater than 10,000 square feet: Parking shall be provided, but not exceed, the ratio given in Chapter 3342.*

- Also in the Parking and Circulation Section, an existing item addressing curb cuts was eliminated as this is already addressed elsewhere in city code.
- Administrative waivers for loading spaces were also eliminated.

Proposed Significant Changes Specific to the Community Commercial Overlay

- The requirements of the Accessibility section were moved to the Building Design and Parking and Circulation sections.
- Landscaping and Screening section was modified to incorporate additional guidance regarding suggested plant types and sizes as well as enhanced parking lot planting requirements. Mounding was eliminated as a suggested screening option due to dimensional challenges and minimum tree caliper was increased from two inches to two and one half inches.
- Changes in the Parking and Circulation section focus on the replacement of the administrative waiver with a standard parking waiver tied to building size. Variances to the new standards would require consideration by the Board of Zoning Adjustment. Additionally, a parking cap has been established in an effort to eliminate the provision of unnecessary parking areas. Proposed parking standards are as follows:

In recognition of the development pattern associated with this overlay, the required number of off-street parking spaces shall be reduced in the following manner:

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3. Greater than 10,000 square feet: Parking shall be provided, but not exceed, the ratio given in Chapter 3342.

- o Also in the Parking and Circulation Section, an existing item addressing curb cuts was eliminated as this is already addressed elsewhere in city code.

Proposed Significant Changes Specific to the Regional Commercial Overlay

- o The existing RCO does not have a graphics section, however the two areas currently covered by the RCO – Morse Road and Olentangy River Road are also covered by Special Graphic Control areas. These special graphics control areas are found in 3380 of the city code and cover the exact same geography as the RCO areas. Furthermore, the standards associated with these two special graphics control areas are almost identical. For the purpose of clarity, these requirements have been folded into the RCO and eliminated as separate code sections. The development characteristics and issues contributing to the designation of the special graphics control area are consistent with those of the RCO.
- o Purpose, introduction and boundary sections of the graphic control areas were not carried over to the Graphics section because these areas are addressed elsewhere in the proposed RCO language. Guidance on issues such as nonconforming graphics can be found in the proposed RCO Applicability and Extent section. The section addressing variances has been removed in light of the overall variance guidance included in 3307 of the Zoning Code.
- o Setback and height requirements for graphics are no longer different for properties with and without service roads. The smaller setback and height limitations have been used. Slightly larger sign area is allowed for those signs qualifying to be eight feet in height. Monument signs are no longer treated in their own section as they are also ground signs. The provision addressing tenant changes has been eliminated due to practical difficulties associated with enforcement. Dimensional requirements have been included for ground sign bases and associated landscaping. Limestone used for sign bases no longer must be native Ohio stone due to the challenges of verification. The proposed code also allows for the use of limestone veneer.
- o The Landscaping and Screening section was modified to incorporate enhanced parking lot planting requirements – specifically regarding planting bays. Native Ohio limestone was eliminated as a requirement due to the practical difficulties in oversight of this requirement. Other changes include clarification of wording regarding limestone features and the addition of boat dealerships to motor vehicle sales as uses with special screening provisions – see item E.
- o A Parking and Circulation section is proposed for the RCO and is comprised of elements formally found in the existing Accessibility section.

Proposed Significant Changes Specific to the Morse Road and Olentangy River Road Special Graphics Control Areas

These code sections are proposed to be folded into the Graphics section of the Regional Commercial Overlay. They would be eliminated as separate sections. Consult the summary of changes to the Regional Commercial Overlay for a more complete description of proposed changes to the requirements.