

## **Director's Report and Recommendation Seattle Center Sign Overlay District**

### **Background and Purpose**

The Seattle Center is a premier civic center and a vital community resource serving all of Seattle's population, with its numerous arts, entertainment, sports, and civic events. The City recognizes the unique nature of the Seattle Center and encourages its long-term vitality and attractiveness.

The Arena is an important part of Seattle Center that has been proposed for renovation and expansion, which is a catalyst for this sign code amendment proposal. A renovated Seattle Center Arena will accommodate sporting and other events in a modernized facility, including for the newly-awarded NHL hockey franchise in Seattle. Interior and exterior updates will enhance the event-going experience and create a lively entertainment hub. Accommodating more signage at the Arena, by implementing a new sign code overlay district for Seattle Center, will contribute to the renovation resulting in a modern visual image for the facility and will add to the festive atmosphere with a variety of informative and attractive signage on its grounds. These signs will identify the Arena and its amenities, promote future Arena events, and improve wayfinding to the Arena consistent with adopted City policies related to sign regulation.

### **Proposal**

The proposal would amend the Land Use Code to define a sign overlay district allowing tailored sign code provisions for the Seattle Center. The Arena and its grounds are a large entertainment facility that will attract attendees from multiple directions, with several plazas and entry points. The current sign code provisions for the property's Seattle Mixed zone do not fit well with the needs of a modernized Arena at the Seattle Center. The proposal establishes a Land Use Code sign overlay district for Seattle Center, with subarea standards tailored to allow sufficient signage in consideration of the Initial Sign Plan prepared for the Arena that is consistent with City sign policies and the intent of the sign regulations in the Land Use Code.

The sign overlay district would include three subareas: one for the Arena's grounds and the adjacent area to the north containing the Northwest Rooms, one for the Bressi Garage block south of the Arena, and one containing the balance of the Seattle Center campus (see Attachment A). Any additional sign overlay provisions for the third Seattle Center campus subarea would be proposed in a later phase of work.

***Manage the number and type of signs:*** The proposal regulates the number of signs allowed per linear foot of public right-of-way frontage, the same method used for sign allowances in several zones across the city. The proposed overlay district provisions resemble existing sign code in Chapter 23.55, but with amendments to the method for calculating the number of signs allowed to account for the nature of Seattle Center and its facilities.

The overlay district would allow conventional types of “Type A” signs (ground-oriented, roof, projecting and combination), “Type B” signs (wall, awning, canopy and marquee), pole signs, and a new vegetative wall sign type. This new kind of wall sign would consist of plants arranged in a container on a wall to form sign messages.

- The overlay district for the Arena subarea adjusts the sign allowances for these areas to accommodate a reasonable sign program for the Arena and related facilities, while not allowing an unlimited or excessive number of signs. For example, the number of signs allowed per linear foot in the overlay district is one Type A sign and one Type B sign per each 65 linear feet of right-of-way frontage. This contrasts with the city-wide commercial zone allowances for one Type A sign per each 300 linear feet and one Type B sign per each 30 linear feet. While these current code allowances work for typical commercial properties, they do not fit well to address signage purposes for the Arena facility.
- The proposal would allow approximately 36 permanent signs (18 each for Type A and Type B signs, plus a defined limit of 12 double-faced pole signs, on the Arena’s grounds.
- For the Bressi Block subarea south of Thomas Street, the proposal would allow signs at a lower rate than the Arena site, similar to city-wide code provisions but with a tailored reduction in allowances of Type B wall signs (one Type B sign per each 300 linear feet of right-of-way frontage, rather than one per each 30 linear feet in the relevant existing sign code provision). The Bressi Block subarea does not have the same characteristics as the Arena subarea. While it is part of Seattle Center grounds it is separated from the main grounds by streets, and this separate block contains parking uses and the historic Bressi Garage facility used as a ceramics studio and maintenance facility.

***Limit the maximum size of signs:*** The proposed limits include a roof sign limit of 700 square feet per sign face, and a wall sign limit of 672 square feet per sign face, except with an allowance for a larger sign (up to approximately 2,400 square feet in area) that would be visible on or through a non-landmarked glass wall at the south façade of the Arena. Other sign size limits include a 600 square foot limit on ground-related, projecting or combination signs.

***Apply maximum sign height limits:*** The overlay district maximum sign height limits would be 30 feet for pole signs and 65 feet for most sign types, except roof signs could locate at the rooftop of the Arena and could extend as high as mechanical equipment on the roof

(approximately 135 feet above grade with the proposal), helping to visually screen that equipment.

***Allow temporary signs:*** The proposal accommodates temporary signs of varying types, including banners, posters, window graphics, and signs using projected light on building surfaces.

***Allow changing image and changing color signs:*** The proposal allows for changing-image signage that can convey information to site visitors on signs at a pedestrian-oriented scale, as well as at larger scales. This allows for more information to be communicated. Changing colors on signs could help coordinate aesthetic displays across the site (along with accent lighting on the Arena building edges), which would add to the festive and modern qualities of the venue, its outdoor spaces, and related features.

***Allow larger video display signs:*** The proposal accommodates this type of sign, with a proposed 150 square foot size limit. Also, an allowance for video signs larger than 150 square feet is included, if seen on or through a portion of a non-landmarked Arena glass wall. Limits would also prescribe the:

- Duration of each video display message (between two and ten seconds);
- Number of video messages in a period of time (20 seconds of every two minutes);
- Times of day this method can be used (until 10 PM or one hour after events conclude);  
and
- Length of visual transitions that must occur after video messages (minimum 10 seconds of still image or blank display).

In addition, a type of video display with messages using alphanumeric characters that move would be permitted to locate adjacent to a right-of-way in the Arena subarea if it does not exceed specific size limits (18 inches in height and no more than 21 feet in length facing any given right-of-way). This would accommodate a sign of this type along the street frontage of the Northwest Rooms where KEXP has a broadcast studio.

***Limit light emission from illuminated signs:*** The proposal accommodates permanent and temporary signs that would be lit using a variety of methods, including but not limited to light emitting diode (LED). The proposal would limit the night-time brightness of video display signs, to not exceed 500 nits (candela/square meter, a measure of luminous intensity). This is the same as limits for video displays in other parts of the city.

***Allow sponsorship signs:*** The overlay district accommodates including sponsors' names and related information on signs within the Arena subarea by defining a new type of "sponsorship sign." This kind of sign would allow identification of a sponsor's business, product, service, or

identity through the use of images, texts, fonts or colors pursuant to agreements between the property owner or authorized tenants and sponsors. The proposal would, however, prohibit the use of comparative language, price information or other indications of savings or value, or overt encouragement to take any action with respect to the sponsor, the sponsor's business, or any other products or services.

In the Arena subarea, sponsorship signs could be roof, wall, ground, pole, or projecting signs, and would be subject to the other controls defined for the sign overlay district and the Arena subarea. In the Bressi Block subarea, the applicable sign controls, including for sponsorship signs, would be more limited than in the Arena subarea, for example fewer sign types would be allowed and an overall cap of two sponsorship signs is proposed.

## **Analysis**

This portion of the report includes analysis of the proposal including the following: the adopted intent of the sign standards in the Land Use Code; comparison of existing sign provisions to the proposal; information included in the Arena Environmental Impact Statement and consistency with the Comprehensive Plan goals and policies.

### **Intent of Sign Standards**

The overall intent of the City's sign standards in Chapter 23.55 of the Land Use Code is:

*"A. To encourage the design of signs that attract and invite rather than demand the public's attention, and to curb the proliferation of signs;*

*B. To encourage the use of signs that enhance the visual environment of the city;*

*C. To promote the enhancement of business and residential properties and neighborhoods by fostering the erection of signs complementary to the buildings and uses to which they relate and which are harmonious with their surroundings;*

*D. To protect the public interest and safety;*

*E. To protect the right of business to identify its premises and advertise its products through the use of signs without undue hindrance or obstruction; and*

*F. To provide opportunities for communicating information of community interest."*

The proposal is consistent with this overall intent by:

- Accommodating signage that complements and adequately serves to enhance the visual environment of the Seattle Center grounds and facilities and tenants where they are

located, with limits that prevent excessive proliferation of signs (limits include number of signs allowed, size, brightness, and the pace of moving images);

- Allowing varieties of sign that will add aesthetic value, and enhance the festive and unique qualities of Seattle Center facilities;
- Allowing sufficient signage for facility identification, wayfinding, event-announcement, and other purposes supportive of community interests;
- Requiring features that will ensure signage will protect the public interest and safety.

### **Comparison of Existing Sign Provisions and the Proposal**

The proposed sign overlay district would be a new Part 4 of Chapter 23.55 that would be mapped for the Seattle Center property. A sign overlay district is a mapped area with sign provisions tailored to the unique conditions of that area, in this case the Seattle Center. The overlay includes provisions for types of signs and standards for signs that differ from those that otherwise apply to the city as a whole. Sometimes sign code overlay requirements supersede a city-wide sign requirement, and sometimes they add more details that can be more permissive or more restrictive. This allows for tailoring of sign code requirements so they can be most responsive to particular characteristics of a given area while meeting the overall intent of sign policies and the City's sign regulations.

The Seattle Center's management, because the City owns the property, will continue to have authority to approve all signs. The Seattle Center has published policy documents about Center signage, including the Seattle Center Corporate Sponsorship Guidelines, Seattle Center Century 21 Signage Guidelines, and the Seattle Center Perimeter Campus Readerboard Operating Guidelines.

The sign code for the new overlay district would vary in a number of ways from the otherwise applicable sign code requirements in Chapter 23.55 of the Land Use Code. See the following table for a comparison of the main differences:

	<b>Citywide Sign Code</b>	<b>Arena Subarea</b>	<b>Bressi Block Subarea</b>
<b>Method for calculating number of signs allowed</b>	Per linear foot of street frontage. In SM zones: Type A: 1 per 300 ft. Type B: 1 per 30 ft.	Type A: 1 per 65 ft. Type B: 1 per 65 ft.	Type A: 1 per 300 ft. Type B: 1 per 300 ft.
<b>Number of signs allowed</b>	Arena property: A: 4 signs B: 39 signs NW Rooms: A: 2 signs B: 19 signs Bressi Block: A: 5 signs B: 42 signs	Arena property: A: 18 signs B: 18 signs NW Rooms: A: 9 signs B: 9 signs	Bressi Block: A: 5 signs B: 5 signs
<b>Sign types allowed</b>	As indicated above, except 1 pole sign per each 300 linear feet can be substituted in for a Type A sign.  Temporary signs, with limits on types and durations	Up to 12 pole signs are allowed (double-faced)  A variety of types of event-related temporary signs are allowed, beyond citywide rules.  A new sponsorship sign category is proposed, which makes use of the types of signs currently allowed by the sign code plus the pole and temporary signs mentioned here.	Same as citywide provisions  A new sponsorship sign category is proposed, which makes use of the types of signs currently allowed by the sign code.
<b>Maximum sizes of signs</b>	Type A: sliding scale of 72-300 square feet, depending on frontage width; 600 square feet for business center signs  Type B (wall): 672 square feet	Type A except roof signs have a sliding scale of 72-600 square feet depending on frontage width  Roof signs: 700 square feet per sign  Type B (wall): 672 square feet except a sign visible on or through a non-landmarked glass wall may exceed that	Same as citywide maximums

	<b>Citywide Sign Code</b>	<b>Arena Subarea</b>	<b>Bressi Block Subarea</b>
		limit, up to 30% of the glass wall area Up to 200 square feet size limit for non-rigid signs	
<b>Maximum height of signs</b>	Type A: 65 feet or the zoned height limit, whichever is less for projecting or combo signs; 30 or 40 feet for pole signs; other limits on roof signs	Similar to citywide rules, including wall signs allowed up to roof edge. Roof signs on roofs above zoned height limit that provide screening are accommodated	Same as citywide maximums
<b>Video and changing image sign details</b>	Video displays up to 1,000 square inches (approx. 7 square feet)  Video messages 2-5 seconds in length  An alphanumeric sign as in column to the right would be limited to maximum 3 feet in length	Video displays up to 150 square feet, except may be larger displays on signs visible on or through a non-landmarked glass wall  Video messages 2-10 seconds in length; total not exceeding 20 seconds of every 2 minutes  An alphanumeric moving-character sign allowed adjacent to street; length up to 42 feet (and height of 18 inches)	Same as citywide provisions
<b>Brightness</b>	Night-time limit of 500 nits (candela/m <sup>2</sup> )	Same as citywide limit	Same as citywide limit

Footnotes: "Type A" signs include: ground-related, roof, and projecting signs, and those with combinations of similar Type A features. "Type B" signs include: wall signs, awning signs, canopy signs, marquees, and signs under marquees. Pole signs are a separate type that are neither Type A or B signs. Sign calculations by linear foot allow one additional sign for the last increment of length.

A primary purpose of this proposal is to provide flexibility for different varieties, amounts and sizes of signage at the Arena facility, recognizing that this large facility on the Seattle Center campus is unique. The Arena is a large facility with multiple plazas, multiple tenants, event sponsors, and frequently hosts large-attendance events throughout the year. Also, the Arena is part of the Seattle Center and the Uptown neighborhood, and it draws attendees arriving and departing from all four directions. With the proposed renovated facility and its grounds, the

Arena warrants tailored sign provisions including policies and provisions protecting the public interest and safety.

### **Information from the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and EIS Addendum**

With respect to the proposed major renovation of the Arena, the amount, type, and size of signs to be used at the Arena property and the Bressi Garage block are informed by the Initial Sign Plan analyzed in the Arena EIS (SEPA<sup>1</sup> environmental review) and additional information prepared about subsequent refinements to the proposed sign program and recommended sign code overlay. The combination of different kinds of facility identification signs, pedestrian-oriented wayfinding and informational signs, festive banners relating to events, and a variety of changing-image and video signs will serve the anticipated needs of Arena eventgoers while also adding aesthetic enhancements. The EIS noted changes in appearance of the Arena and grounds with new signage but did not identify any significant adverse impacts related to visual quality. While different approaches to sign code regulations are possible, the recommended code reflects a tailored approach that generally allows for the amount and type of signs that are anticipated by the sign plan recognized by the City Council.

As noted earlier in the proposal description, the amount of signage allowed for the Bressi Block subarea is also tailored to allow signs at a lower rate than the Arena site, similar to city-wide code rules but with a tailored reduction in allowances of Type B wall signs. This will help avoid excessive amounts of wall signs placed in this portion of the Seattle Center grounds that are directly adjacent to parts of the Uptown neighborhood.

The overlay district defines the Seattle Center campus as the premises for sign code purposes. This is consistent with current practices at the Center, allowing for sign placements across the Center to direct visitors to many events and facilities.

***Roof signs, Arena naming, and sponsorship signs:*** The overlay district would authorize the presence of roof signs similar to the signs present on the Arena today, except larger in size and with the ability to change color. This will make the signs more visually prominent than they appear today, complemented by additional visual elements like roof edge lighting that could change colors. To the extent that the roof signs provide more screening of rooftop mechanical equipment, they would incrementally improve the appearance of features at the top of the Arena. The SEPA environmental review for the Arena proposal evaluated visual impacts of roof sign and Arena appearance on scenic views from public viewpoints but did not identify significant adverse impacts to these view resources.

An addendum to the EIS discloses a recommended code proposal to allow “sponsorship signs” that will identify the names of sponsors and related information to be present on arena naming

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<sup>1</sup> “SEPA” refers to the State Environmental Policy Act.



signs on the Arena roof and other locations such as on ground signs, wall signs and pole signs. The proposed definition also has restrictions on what kind of sponsorship-related information can be provided. The information in the EIS Addendum supplements information provided in the FEIS and is consistent with the analysis of the proposal for flexibility in how signs are controlled in the proposed overlay. In addition, the addendum updates the Final EIS's visual resources analysis but does not identify new adverse environmental impacts as a result of this updated code recommendation.

***Video displays:*** Anticipated signs with video displays at the Arena include a sign on the west side of the Arena grounds facing toward 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue N, and a large sign (up to 2,400 square feet) that would be viewed on or through a glass wall on the south side of the Arena, facing toward Thomas Street. The code proposal would limit video displays for the 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue N sign to be 150 square feet maximum size and would require a setback of 20 feet from the nearest street curb, but the code would not limit the size of video displays on the larger glass wall sign.

The SEPA environmental review for the Arena proposal evaluated sign code changes, including potential light and glare impacts from illuminated signs, and the relationship to sign messages and traffic safety.

The EIS identified potentially significant adverse visual impacts due to: the combined amount of spillover light from a cluster of signs near 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue N and the potential for larger and longer video displays (and changing images) near 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue N to cause distraction of drivers. Past studies indicate that video sign messaging tends to draw and hold attention of passersby longer, due to a tendency for people to want to watch until the end of a message. The longer the message, the greater the potential for passing drivers to keep their eyes off the road longer. The proposed video message length of 10 seconds is longer than the current code's limit of 5 seconds for other parts of the city. The code proposal would also limit the total amount of video message to not exceed 20 seconds out of every two minutes. This could help reduce the potential exposure of passing traffic to video messages, and it could encourage the programming of video messages to be less than 10 seconds each, to provide more shorter messages every two minutes.

The EIS did not identify significant adverse impacts for the glass wall sign on the south side of the Arena. Although that sign could be visible to pedestrians and drivers, it could be partly obscured by trees and elevation differences, and limited use of Thomas Street for vehicle traffic during times when video messages could play would reduce the potential for adverse traffic safety impacts to occur.

The EIS included a range of possible impact mitigation measures that could be required by decision-makers, including strategies for better controlling the total light from signage, and strategies to limit duration of video display messages and changing images in order to reduce the potential for driver distraction. The proposal is responsive to this and would provide mitigation

for spillover light. The proposal includes a standard for night-time video display brightness of 500 nits, which would be the same as elsewhere in the city. Also, video displays are proposed to be prohibited after 10 pm or one hour after the conclusion of an Arena event.

***Alphanumeric moving-character sign, Arena subarea:*** The allowance for a sign with moving alphanumeric characters in the Arena subarea would likely affect the vicinity near the intersection of 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. N/Republican Street. Such a sign may wrap around the corner of the building at that location where the Northwest Rooms are used for a KEXP broadcast studio. It is possible that drivers primarily on 1<sup>st</sup> Ave N northbound (one-way) would be able to read a sign message offered by KEXP, which occupies almost all of the space with frontage on 1<sup>st</sup> Ave N and Republican Street. However, with a maximum sign height of 18 inches, the sign's message would be of limited size in the driver's visual field. No significant adverse impacts relating to brightness or glare were identified for this sign during environmental review, but adverse impact findings related to the potential for driver distraction were noted in the EIS.

## **Comprehensive Plan Policies**

### ***Land Use Element – Commercial/Mixed-Use Areas***

*Policy LU-9.15: Allow limited exceptions to the height limit in order to accommodate ground-floor commercial uses or special rooftop features, encourage development of mixed-use structures, enable structures to function appropriately, accommodate special features consistent with the special character or function of an area, or support innovative design that furthers the goals of this Plan.*

### ***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.*

Land Use policy LU-9.15 accommodates the possibility that buildings and their improvements may be allowed to exceed height limits for features that include special rooftop features. The Arena structure already exceeds the zoned height limit of 95 feet. The Arena renovation proposes to include larger roof signs up to approximately 135 feet above grade, in a manner that would

provide screening to rooftop equipment. Given the Arena's size, function, and its iconic presence in Seattle Center and Uptown, accommodating signage improvements in a location above the zoned height limit would be consistent with the intent of this policy. The proposed sign overlay district would allow such improvements.

The Capital Facilities goal and policy relate to the proposal, in that the Arena is a historic facility that is a venue for numerous events that add to the economic and social health of Seattle. Its renovation will be an enhancement to those public benefits and ensure its long-term presence. To the extent the sign overlay district proposal enables an attractive and well-functioning Arena and grounds, it is supporting these objectives for use of City capital facilities. Regarding the Uptown neighborhood plan policy, the proposal's support for Arena improvements is one way to help ensure that Seattle Center will remain a premier, vibrant, and useful community amenity.

### **Public Outreach and Notice**

The SEPA environmental review for the proposed Arena renovation project included analysis and disclosure of impacts, including those related to signage and sign code amendments in the affected area. During this process, the public had opportunities for comment and did offer comments on these topics after the Draft EIS was published, and the Final EIS provided an up-to-date description of this proposal and additional analysis of the potential for impacts. This information has been in the public record since August 30, 2018 and may be reviewed at <http://web6.seattle.gov/dpd/edms/> under project number 3029061.

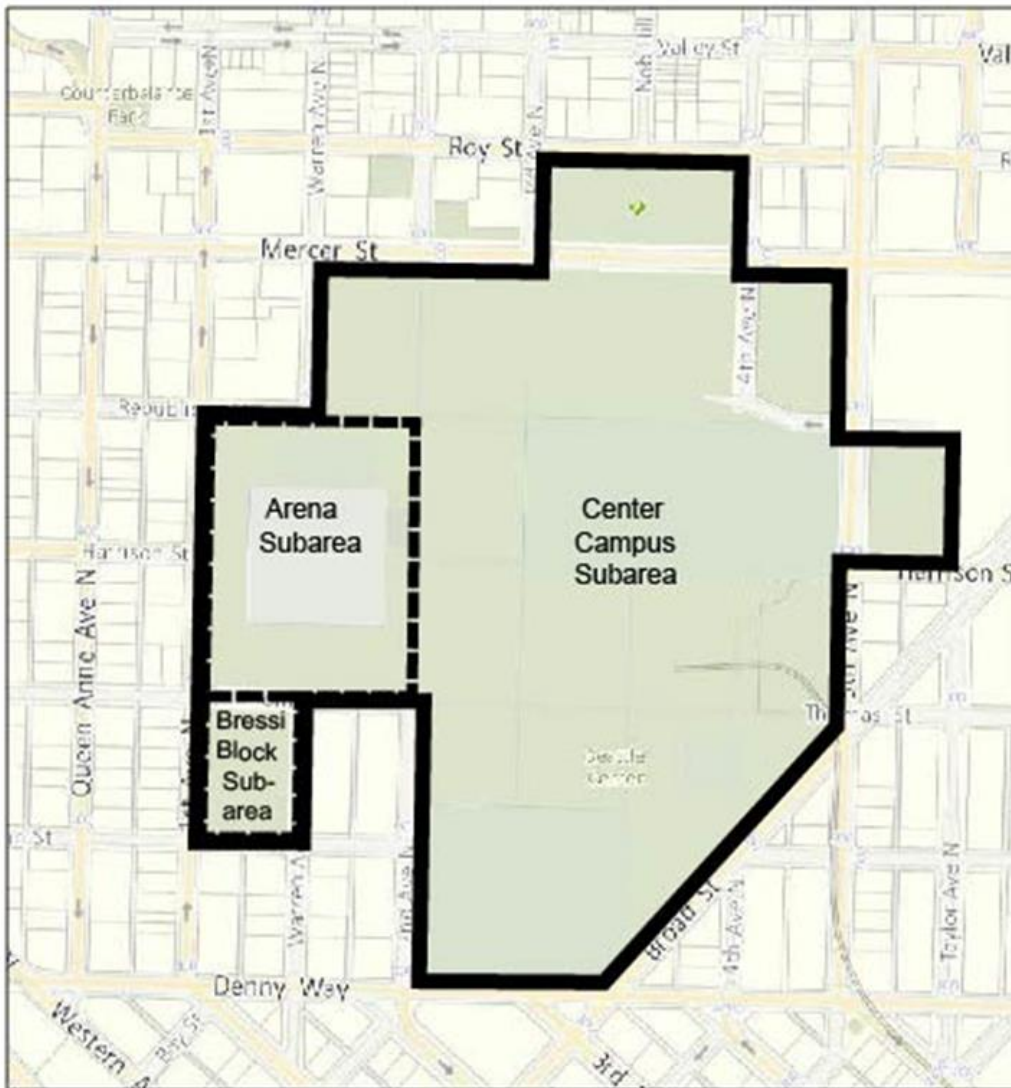
A public hearing on the proposed legislation will be scheduled before the Council's Planning, Land Use and Zoning Committee in 2019. Additional opportunities to provide input will occur as the City Council deliberates on the proposal.

### **Recommendation**

The SDCI Director recommends that the City Council adopt the proposed ordinance establishing a Seattle Center Sign Overlay District.

## Attachment A Map of Proposed Sign Overlay District

Map A for 23.55.054  
Seattle Center Sign Overlay District



### LEGEND

- Overlay district boundary
- - - - -** Overlay subarea boundary