



May 27, 2025

Ms. Angela Calvillo, Clerk  
Honorable Supervisor Sherrill  
Board of Supervisors  
City and County of San Francisco  
City Hall, Room 244  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: **Transmittal of Planning Department Case Number 2025-001743PCA/MAP:**  
Projecting Signs in Neighborhood Commercial and Residential-Commercial Districts  
Board File No. 250140

**Planning Commission Recommendation: Approval**


Dear Ms. Calvillo and Supervisor Sherrill,

On May 15, 2025, the Planning Commission conducted a duly noticed public hearing at a regularly scheduled meeting to consider the proposed Ordinance, introduced by Supervisor Sherrill. The proposed ordinance would amend the Planning Code and Zoning Map to allow two projecting signs for all corner businesses in all Neighborhood Commercial and Residential-Commercial Districts citywide. It would also abolish the 2301 Chestnut Street Special Sign District and amend the Zoning Map to reflect that District's abolition. At the hearing the Planning Commission adopted a recommendation for approval.

The proposed amendments are not defined as a project under CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c)(2) and 15378 because they do not result in a physical change in the environment.

Please find attached documents relating to the actions of the Commission. If you have any questions or require further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

  
Aaron D. Starr  
Manager of Legislative Affairs

cc: Giulia Gualco-Nelson, Deputy City Attorney  
Lorenzo Rosas, Aide to Supervisor Sherrill  
John Carroll, Office of the Clerk of the Board

**ATTACHMENTS :**

Planning Commission Resolution  
Planning Department Executive Summary



# PLANNING COMMISSION RESOLUTION NO. 21738

**HEARING DATE:** May 15, 2025

*Project Name:* Projecting Signs in Neighborhood Commercial and Residential-Commercial Districts  
*Case Number:* 2025-001743PCA/MAP [Board File No. 250140]  
*Initiated by:* Supervisor Sherrill / Introduced February 11, 2025  
*Staff Contact:* Audrey Merlone, Legislative Affairs  
Audrey.Merlone@sfgov.org, 628-652-7534  
*Reviewed by:* Aaron Starr, Manager of Legislative Affairs  
aaron.starr@sfgov.org, 628-652-7533

**RESOLUTION ADOPTING A RECOMMENDATION FOR APPROVAL OF A PROPOSED ORDINANCE THAT WOULD AMEND THE PLANNING CODE AND ZONING MAP TO ALLOW TWO PROJECTING SIGNS FOR ALL CORNER BUSINESSES IN ALL NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL-COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS CITYWIDE, AND ABOLISHING THE 2301 CHESTNUT STREET SPECIAL SIGN DISTRICT; AMENDING THE ZONING MAP TO REFLECT THAT DISTRICT'S ABOLITION; AFFIRMING THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT'S DETERMINATION UNDER THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT; MAKING FINDINGS OF CONSISTENCY WITH THE GENERAL PLAN, AND THE EIGHT PRIORITY POLICIES OF PLANNING CODE, SECTION 101.1; AND MAKING FINDINGS OF PUBLIC NECESSITY, CONVENIENCE, AND WELFARE UNDER PLANNING CODE, SECTION 302.**

WHEREAS, on February 11, 2025, Supervisor Sherrill introduced a proposed Ordinance under Board of Supervisors (hereinafter "Board") File Number 250140, which would amend the Planning Code and Zoning Map to allow two projecting signs for all corner businesses in all Neighborhood Commercial and Residential-Commercial Districts citywide, and abolishing the 2301 Chestnut Street Special Sign District; amending the Zoning Map to reflect that District's abolition; affirming the Planning Department's determination under the California Environmental Quality Act; making findings of consistency with the General Plan, and the eight priority policies of Planning Code, Section 101.1; and making findings of public necessity, convenience, and welfare under Planning Code, Section 302;

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission (hereinafter "Commission") conducted a duly noticed public hearing at a regularly scheduled meeting to consider the proposed Ordinance on May 15, 2025; and,

WHEREAS, the proposed Ordinance has been determined to be categorically exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act Section 15378 and 15060(c)(2); and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission has heard and considered the testimony presented to it at the public hearing and has further considered written materials and oral testimony presented on behalf of Department staff and other interested parties; and

WHEREAS, all pertinent documents may be found in the files of the Department, as the Custodian of Records, at 49 South Van Ness Avenue, Suite 1400, San Francisco; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission has reviewed the proposed Ordinance; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission finds from the facts presented that the public necessity, convenience, and general welfare require the proposed amendment; and

MOVED, that the Planning Commission hereby adopts a **recommendation for approval** of the proposed ordinance.

## Findings

Having reviewed the materials identified in the preamble above, and having heard all testimony and arguments, this Commission finds, concludes, and determines as follows:

The Commission supports the proposed Ordinance because it will enhance commercial street corners without harming the appeal of small commercial corridors or the pedestrian experience. Corner units serve a unique function compared to mid-block businesses. With entrances on two street frontages, corner commercial units draw consumers from multiple directions and serve as anchors that set the tone for the entire block. Ensuring these spaces are active and welcoming is essential to fostering a vibrant commercial atmosphere in our NC and RC Districts. Beyond design considerations, there are also economic justifications for expanding the Ordinance to all NC and RC Districts. Small businesses continue to struggle post-pandemic, and the Ordinance will provide flexibility to corner businesses that may want to increase their visibility to consumers through additional signage.

## General Plan Compliance

The proposed Ordinance and the Commission's recommended modifications are consistent with the following Objectives and Policies of the General Plan:

### URBAN DESIGN ELEMENT

#### Policy 1.3

Recognize that buildings, when seen together, produce a total effect that characterizes the city and its districts.

#### Policy 1.6

Make centers of activity more prominent through design of street features and by other means.

#### Policy 1.8

Increase the visibility of major destination areas and other points for orientation.

*The general pattern of buildings should emphasize the topographic form of the city and the importance of centers of activity. It should also help to define street areas and other public open spaces. Shopping streets and other centers for activity and congregation of people should stand out in an attractive manner in their districts. The proposed Ordinance aims to highlight corner commercial businesses as a focal point on the block. By allowing corner businesses to have two projecting signs, the Ordinance signals to pedestrians approaching from different directions that they are entering a vibrant commercial corridor. This visual cue will not only attract patrons to the individual business but also draw attention to and encourage foot traffic throughout the entire commercial area.*

### Planning Code Section 101 Findings

The proposed amendments to the Planning Code are consistent with the eight Priority Policies set forth in Section 101.1(b) of the Planning Code in that:

1. That existing neighborhood-serving retail uses be preserved and enhanced and future opportunities for resident employment in and ownership of such businesses enhanced;

*The proposed Ordinance would not have a negative effect on neighborhood serving retail uses and will not have a negative effect on opportunities for resident employment in and ownership of neighborhood-serving retail.*

2. That existing housing and neighborhood character be conserved and protected in order to preserve the cultural and economic diversity of our neighborhoods;

*The proposed Ordinance would not have a negative effect on housing or neighborhood character.*

3. That the City's supply of affordable housing be preserved and enhanced;

*The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on the City's supply of affordable housing.*

4. That commuter traffic not impede MUNI transit service or overburden our streets or neighborhood parking;

*The proposed Ordinance would not result in commuter traffic impeding MUNI transit service or overburdening the streets or neighborhood parking.*

5. That a diverse economic base be maintained by protecting our industrial and service sectors from displacement due to commercial office development, and that future opportunities for resident employment and ownership in these sectors be enhanced;

*The proposed Ordinance would not cause displacement of the industrial or service sectors due to office development, and future opportunities for resident employment or ownership in these sectors*

*would not be impaired.*

6. That the City achieve the greatest possible preparedness to protect against injury and loss of life in an earthquake;

*The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on City's preparedness against injury and loss of life in an earthquake.*

7. That the landmarks and historic buildings be preserved;

*The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on the City's Landmarks and historic buildings.*

8. That our parks and open space and their access to sunlight and vistas be protected from development;

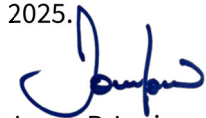
*The proposed Ordinance would not have an adverse effect on the City's parks and open space and their access to sunlight and vistas.*

### Planning Code Section 302 Findings.

The Planning Commission finds from the facts presented that the public necessity, convenience and general welfare require the proposed amendments to the Planning Code as set forth in Section 302.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Commission hereby ADOPTS A RECOMMENDATION FOR APPROVAL of the proposed Ordinance as described in this Resolution.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Commission at its meeting on May 15, 2025.



Jonas P. Ionin  
Commission Secretary

Jonas P Ionin

Digitally signed by Jonas P Ionin  
Date: 2025.05.21 13:48:10  
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AYES:	McGarry, Campbell, Braun, Imperial
NOES:	None
ABSENT:	Williams, Moore, So
ADOPTED:	May 15, 2025



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# PLANNING CODE TEXT & ZONING MAP AMENDMENT

**HEARING DATE:** May 15, 2025

**90-Day Deadline:** May 27, 2025

*Project Name:* Projecting Signs in Neighborhood Commercial and Residential-Commercial Districts  
*Case Number:* 2025-001743PCA/MAP [Board File No. 250140]  
*Initiated by:* Supervisor Sherrill / Introduced February 11, 2025  
*Staff Contact:* Audrey Merlone, Legislative Affairs  
Audrey.Merlone@sfgov.org, 628-652-7534  
*Reviewed by:* Aaron Starr, Manager of Legislative Affairs  
aaron.starr@sfgov.org, 628-652-7533  
*Environmental Review:* Not a Project Under CEQA

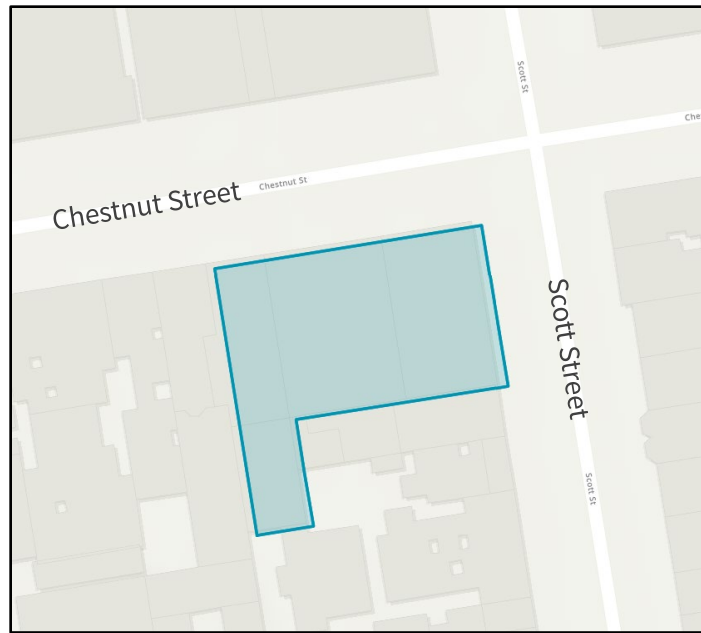
**RECOMMENDATION:** Adopt a Recommendation for Approval

### Planning Code Amendment

The proposed Ordinance would amend the Planning Code to allow two projecting signs for all corner businesses in all Neighborhood Commercial and Residential-Commercial Districts, and amend the Zoning Map to abolish a single-lot Special Sign District (SSD) at 2301 Chestnut Street.

#### The Way It Is Now:

1. A business located in a Neighborhood Commercial District (NC), or Residential-Commercial District (RC) may have **up to one** projecting sign.
2. Within the 2301 Chestnut Street Special Sign District (SSD), a business located on the corner is permitted to have up to two projecting signs.



*The 2301 Chestnut Street Special Sign District.*

### The Way It Would Be:

1. A business located on a corner – defined as the unit that fronts two adjoining streets – within in a NC or RC District would be permitted to have **up to two** projecting signs. All other requirements for projecting signs and signs in general, including but not limited to size, illumination and placement, would remain the same.
2. The 2301 Chestnut Street SSD would be deleted from the Zoning Map.

### Background

The building at 2301 Chestnut Street contains three commercial units. A full-service restaurant occupies the corner unit, while another full-service restaurant is in the center unit. The westernmost unit is occupied by a small grocery store. In February 2024, the restaurant on the corner applied for a permit to install an additional projecting sign at a secondary entrance on Chestnut Street. Although the business already had a projecting sign at the main corner entrance, it wanted to direct patrons to the bar side of the establishment through the secondary entrance.





*The corner business at 2301 Chestnut Street.*

On November 14, 2024, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to approve with modifications the ordinance that created the 2301 Chestnut Street Special Sign District. The Commission's one recommended modification was to allow **all** corner Commercial businesses in NC Districts to have two projecting signs. Supervisor Stefani, the ordinance's sponsor, supported this recommendation and duplicated the ordinance to create a separate version incorporating the Commission's recommendation. The original ordinance establishing the 2301 Chestnut Street SSD proceeded and became law on January 18, 2025. The duplicate version was later withdrawn to allow for the development of a new ordinance that would extend the same signage allowance to corner Commercial businesses in Residential-Commercial (RC) Districts, in addition to NC Districts. That ordinance is the focus of this report.

The Planning Commission unanimously recommended allowing all corner Commercial businesses in NC Districts to have two projecting signs on November 14, 2024.

## Issues and Considerations

### Types of Business Signs:

The sign controls exist to safeguard and enhance property values across use types and enhance the distinctive appearance of San Francisco. To accomplish this, a permit is required to install, replace, reconstruct, expand, intensify, or relocate any sign unless it is specifically exempted from the regulations. Signs must conform to the provisions set forth in Article 6 and other applicable sections of the Planning Code. There are many types of signs regulated under Article 6, including Identifying Signs, General Advertising Signs, and Business Signs. Section 602 defines a Business Sign as:

*“A Sign which directs attention to the primary business, commodity, service, industry or other activity which is sold, offered, or conducted on the premises upon which such Sign is located, or to which it is affixed.”*



*Two examples of Wall Signs.*



*Example of a projecting Sign.*

*Example of a Sign on an Awning.*

Three of the most common types of Business Signs are Wall Signs, Projecting Signs, and signs on Awnings. The Ordinance would only increase the *number* of projecting signs allowed for corner businesses in NC and RC Districts. A projecting sign generally extends beyond a street property line or a building setback line.

### Existing Sign Controls in NC and RC Districts

Neighborhood Commercial and Residential-Commercial Districts are typically mixed-use areas with commercial units on the ground or lower stories and residential uses on upper stories (*see Exhibit B for a map of NC and RC Districts*). All NC's and RC's limit projecting signs to one per business. Flashing elements are not allowed on projecting signs in any NC or RC. In NC-1, NC-2, certain named NC's, and all RC's, projecting signs may only be directly illuminated during business hours. Dimensional limits of projecting signs vary by district.

PROJECTING SIGNS	NC-1 and NCT-1	RC, NC-2, NCT-2	NCT, NC-3, NCT-3
Permissibility	1 max per business	1 max per business	1 max per business
Projection from the Building Face Maximum	6'6" or no more than 75% of distance from property line to curb	6'6" or no more than 75% of distance from property line to curb	6'6" or no more than 75% of distance from property line to curb
Height or Total Area	15' high or height of the wall to which it is attached	24 square feet total area 24' height or height of the wall to which it is attached, or height of lowest residential windowsill of the building	32 square feet total area 24' height or height of the wall to which it is attached, or height of lowest residential windowsill of the building
Illumination	Direct or Indirect allowed	Direct or Indirect allowed	Direct or Indirect allowed

### Considerations for Corner Buildings

Corner lots have an enhanced role in shaping the neighborhood's identity, often serving as focal points that establish the streetscape's initial impression. The city's Residential Design Guidelines recommend that corner *residential* buildings highlight their strategic location by visually engaging with the public realm. Similarly, corner *commercial* buildings are essential in defining and anchoring commercial corridors. Unlike mid-block buildings, corner commercial properties generally occupy larger frontages and frequently feature multiple entrances, facilitating access from various directions and extending their reach beyond the primary commercial area. Activating and maintaining these spaces to ensure they remain accessible and inviting is crucial.



Two existing projecting signs at corner commercial units.





## Awning and Sign Amnesty Program

In August of 2023, Mayor Breed signed an ordinance (149-23) that amended the Building Code and Planning Code to create a temporary amnesty program for existing unpermitted Business Signs and Awnings. The legislation was created due to the large number of businesses throughout the city that had one or more unpermitted sign, including many businesses that contained two projecting signs. Though this program created much-needed alleviation from the sign controls for businesses with *existing* unpermitted signs, it did not allow businesses to install new signs unless they comply with the Planning Code.

## Supporting Small Businesses

The Controller's Office of Economic Analysis released a report<sup>1</sup> in October of 2022 on the status of the re-opening of the City's economy. One of the key findings was that new business formation (tracked by the number of business registration certificates filed) remained far below pre-pandemic rates, especially in the retail trades and restaurant/bar categories. The report revealed that visitors were beginning to return to San Francisco to shop, eat, and experience the city; however, the lack of daily commuters and lower than normal number of tourists has hurt small businesses. The Controller's March 2024 report<sup>2</sup> on the state of San Francisco's economy indicates similar findings from the 2022 report on the status of the reopening: Although tourism and commercial vacancy rates are slowly improving, they are still below pre-pandemic levels. Many businesses are still attempting to recover from the pandemic amidst a period of slow economic growth both locally and nationally. In an era where brick and mortar commercial businesses are struggling to attract patrons, the city should be encouraging vibrant and attractive streetscapes that pull pedestrians into commercial corridors, and allowing two projecting signs for corner businesses serves that end.

The Ordinance signals to pedestrians approaching from different directions that they are entering a vibrant commercial corridor.

## General Plan Compliance

Policy 1.6 of the Urban Design Element is to: "*Make centers of activity more prominent through design of street features and by other means.*". Policy 1.8 is to: "*Increase the visibility of major destination areas and other points for orientation.*". Shopping streets and other centers for activity and congregation of people should stand out in an attractive manner in their districts. The proposed Ordinance aims to highlight corner commercial businesses as a focal point on the block. By allowing corner businesses to have two projecting signs, the Ordinance signals to pedestrians approaching from different directions that they are entering a vibrant commercial corridor. This visual cue will not only attract patrons to the individual business but also draw attention to and encourage foot traffic throughout the entire commercial area.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://sfcontroller.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Economic%20Analysis/October%20Re-Opening%20Report\\_final.pdf](https://sfcontroller.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Economic%20Analysis/October%20Re-Opening%20Report_final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sf.gov/sites/default/files/2024-04/Status%20of%20the%20San%20Francisco%20Economy%20March%202024.pdf>

## Racial and Social Equity Analysis

A survey conducted by Supervisor District 2's office in late 2024 identified numerous corner commercial buildings in NC Districts across the city that already contain two projecting signs. Staff research found that some of the highest rates of noncompliance— i.e. corner businesses with two projecting signs—occur in the city's Cultural Heritage Districts. These unique neighborhoods are vital to San Francisco's economy, drawing tourists who come to experience the diverse cultures, aesthetics, and artistic heritage each area offers. At the same time, the individual character of Cultural Districts has never been more at risk, and the city's historic small businesses are especially vulnerable. Prior to the pandemic, commercial rents in most neighborhoods doubled or tripled, forcing otherwise thriving businesses that anchored commercial corridors to close. The pandemic only worsened financial pressures on these historic small businesses, intensifying their challenges.

It is also important to acknowledge the origins of many of the city's design controls, and why certain aesthetics are considered "desirable" over others. Many of the city's oldest design controls sought to reduce "visual clutter". The term "visual clutter" is often employed as a proxy to minimize the expression of cultural identity and diversity. More recent design guidelines in the Japantown and Calle 24 Cultural Districts recognize the importance of celebrating these districts' unique aesthetics and diverse qualities of signage. The Cultural Districts strive to promote and protect businesses and industries that advance the culture and history of said districts. In this way, the Ordinance would further equity by complementing this goal of the Cultural Districts.

## Implementation

The Department has determined that this ordinance will not impact our current implementation procedures.

## Recommendation

The Department recommends that the Commission ***adopt a recommendation for approval*** of the proposed Ordinance and adopt the attached Draft Resolution to that effect.

## Basis for Recommendation

The Department supports the proposed Ordinance because it will enhance commercial street corners without harming the appeal of small commercial corridors or the pedestrian experience. Corner units serve a unique function compared to mid-block businesses. With entrances on two street frontages, corner commercial units draw consumers from multiple directions and serve as anchors that set the tone for the entire block. Ensuring these spaces are active and welcoming is essential to fostering a vibrant commercial atmosphere in our NC and RC Districts. Beyond design considerations, there are also economic justifications for expanding the Ordinance to all NC and RC Districts. Small businesses continue to struggle post-pandemic, and the Ordinance will provide flexibility to corner businesses that may want to increase their visibility to consumers through additional signage.

## **Required Commission Action**

The proposed Ordinance is before the Commission so that it may adopt a recommendation of approval, disapproval, or approval with modifications.

## **Environmental Review**

The proposed amendments are not defined as a project under CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c)(2) and 15378 because they do not result in a physical change in the environment.

## **Public Comment**

As of the date of this report, the Planning Department has not received any public comment regarding the proposed Ordinance.