



Request
Project Name
Council District
Requested by
Staff Reviewer
Staff Recommendation

DTC Modifications
Nashville Yards Signage
19 – O’Connell
Joe Bucher, with Gresham Smith;
Hammer
Approve with conditions, deferral without all conditions.



Site Aerial

APPLICANT REQUEST

A request to modify various signage standards of the Downtown Code (DTC) for property located at 913, 1010, & 1020 Church Street and 1000 & 1010 Broadway (17 acres), east of 9th Avenue North, south of Commerce Street and within the Core and Upper Broadway Subdistricts of the DTC.



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DTC MODIFICATION REQUEST SUMMARY

1. Building Sign Entitlements

- Required: Building signage entitlements are calculated at a rate of 2 square feet of sign area per 1 linear foot of building façade when no ground sign exists and 1 square feet of sign area per linear foot on façades not facing streets.
- Proposed: Building signage entitlements are established as proposed.

2. Skyline Signage Entitlements

- Required: Buildings in excess of 75 feet in height are permitted a skyline sign per each street frontage.
- Proposed: Buildings in excess of 75 feet are permitted skyline signs as proposed.

3. Digital Signage

- Required: Electronic Changeable copy is allowed on wall signs or monument signs provided the changeable copy portion is no greater than 50% of the sign area.
- Proposed: Electronic Changeable copy is allowed as proposed, with select building signs allowed 100% of the built sign area.

4. Monument Signage

- Required: Monument signs must not exceed 10 feet in height. Only a single monument sign is allowed per frontage unless property frontage exceeds 300 feet, then 2 are allowed. Monument signs must be 32 square feet or less.
- Proposed: Monument signs at various heights, sizes, and locations.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The general bounds of Nashville Yards are shown in Figure 2, with the property generally bounded by Broadway to the south and CSX right-of-way to the west. Nashville Yards consists of approximately 17 acres of land stretching over 8 interrelated phases, with several towers containing various uses. The site is bound together by a series of integrated pedestrian passageways, called “paseos”, that wind through the length of the development. These paseos are lined with active uses. The signage package proposed includes nearly an acre of signage, including a diverse mix of tenant, wayfinding, and environmental branding signage. Several of these proposed signs, particularly those associated with large gathering spaces and entertainment complexes, are large format signs with digital technology. Figure 1 shows the amount of signage proposed within the Nashville Yards site. Parcels 6 and 7, east of 9th Avenue North are either not proposing signage or are not included in this package.

Nashville Yards Wayfinding	1,600 square feet
Parcel 1: Grand Hyatt Hotel	2,616 square feet
Parcel 2: Residential / Retail	2,409 square feet
Parcel 3: Office / Retail	8,625 square feet
Parcels 4/5: Amazon Operations	8,734 square feet
Parcel 8: Residential / Retail	405 square feet
Parcel 9: AEG Complex	16,888 square feet
Total Proposed:	41,277 square feet

Figure 1: Entitled and Proposed Skyline Signage



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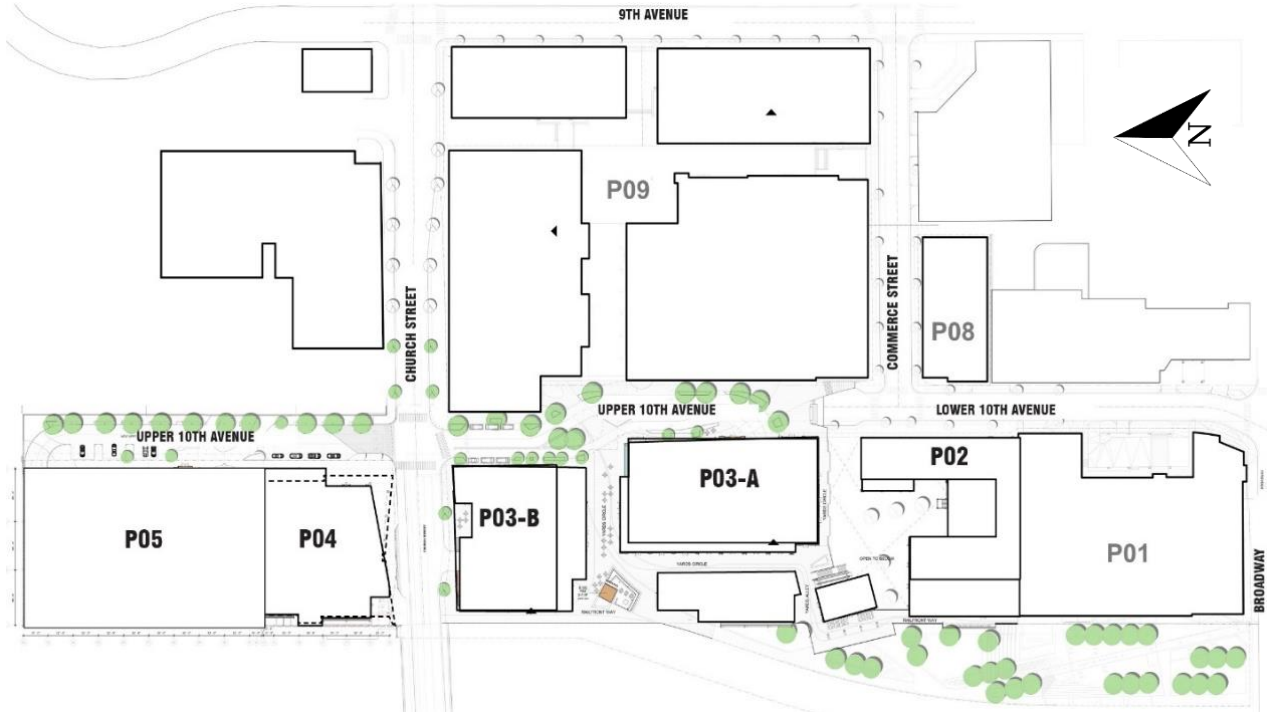


Figure 2: Overall Nashville Yards Conceptual Plan

BACKGROUND

All streets within the DTC, except for those properties within historic zoning overlays, are classified as either Pedestrian, Transitional, Gateway, Interstate, or Printer’s Alley and these classifications are used to calculate entitlements for signs facing streets. This allows the signage standards to be more narrowly tailored to the context of a site. The DTC divides signage into three broad categories: skyline signs, ground signs, and building signs. Skyline sign entitlements are related to the height of a building and the number of street frontages. Building sign entitlements are calculated as a multiplier of the linear feet of a building façade. Facades facing streets have greater entitlements than those not facing streets, regardless of the function of individual facades.

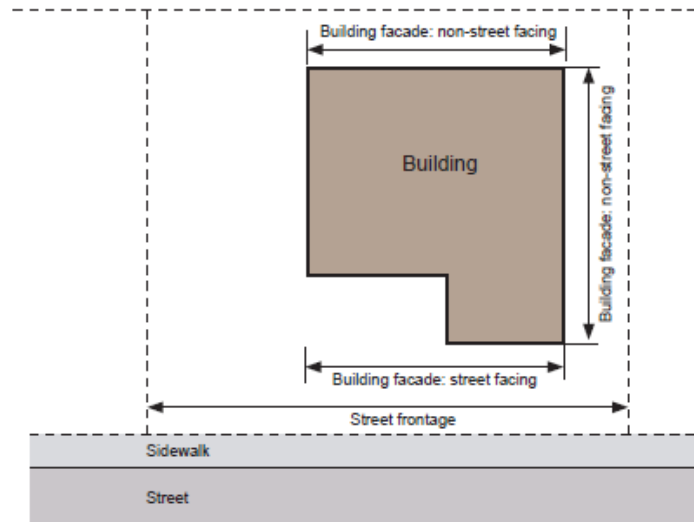


Figure 3: Sign Entitlement Diagram



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ANALYSIS

While DTC signage standards provides a consistent and logical approach for most sites within downtown, Nashville Yards is a unique development with site-specific features that disrupt the logic of the regulatory structure.

Building Sign Entitlements

As described previously, building signage entitlements are primarily allocated to façades that face streets, with façades that do not face streets entitled to half that allocation, regardless of the activation of the façades. In addition to activating façades that face streets, Nashville Yards activates the pedestrian paseo that flows through the site. This pedestrian-only space is lined with active uses, including tenant spaces that will require appropriate building signage.

Figure 4 below shows this condition, with activated non-street facing facades shown in red and internal pedestrian flow shown in blue. Compounding this, several non-street-facing facades within Nashville Yards feature two levels of activated space facing walkways or other pedestrian spaces, which essentially doubles the signage necessary on a façade that is allocated half of the typical entitlement for façades facing streets.

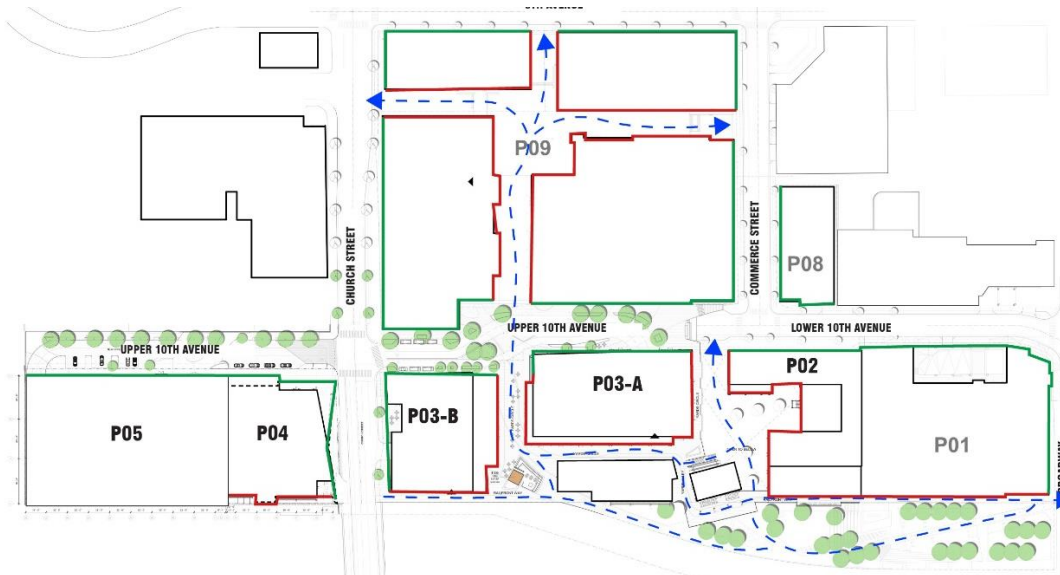


Figure 4: Street Facing and Non-Street Facing Activated Facades with Pedestrian Paths

Additionally, several large environmental branding signs that read “Nashville Yards” are scattered throughout the site, with varying sizes and materials ranging from stone relief to staggered railroad spikes. These signs are not linked to an individual building but rather reinforce the identity of the neighborhood. This is congruent with guiding principles of the DTC as it assists in creating a distinctive urban neighborhood with a sense of place.



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Figure 5: Examples of Proposed Large Environmental Branding Signage

Due to these unique factors, the signage quantities proposed by this package are rational and establish reasonable entitlements for business identification and tasteful environmental branding within these active spaces.

Skyline Sign Entitlements

Within the DTC, skyline sign entitlements are allocated based on the height of a building and the number of street frontages. A building must be at least 75 feet in height to qualify for a skyline sign, with the maximum display area varying between 480 and 720 square feet depending on the height of the building. Based on current approved plans and the conceptual master plan, 10 towers within Nashville Yards qualify for some amount of skyline signage.

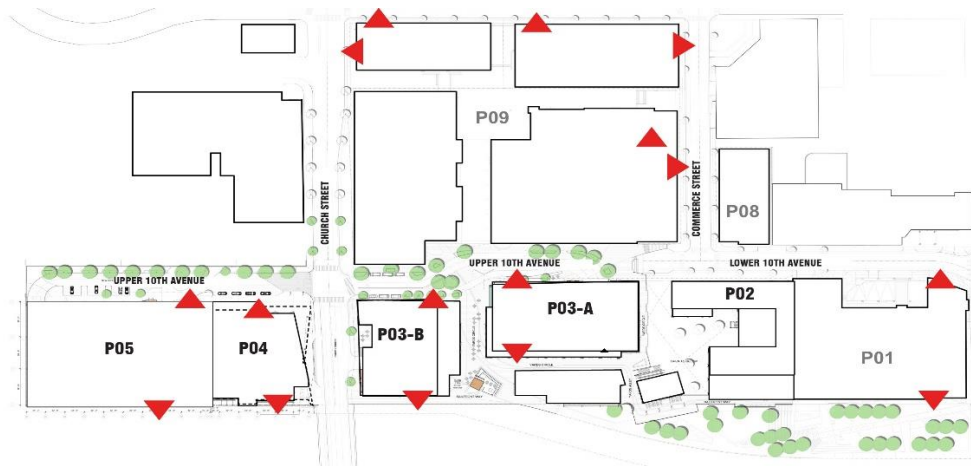


Figure 6: Locations and Orientation of Skyline Signage within Nashville Yards



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The proposed sign package proposes 2 modifications for skyline signs. First, it seeks to transfer the skyline signage entitlements from the entitled façades facing streets to more visible non-street facing façades particularly on the west side of the site along railroad right-of-way, as indicated on Figure 6. Other projects have requested and received approval to reallocate their earned sign entitlements to ensure optimal business identification.

Secondly, the package proposes allowing the towers on Parcel 3a and 5, which only have frontage on 10th Avenue North, to have 2 skyline signs where each would typically only be allowed 1. Given that the proposed package contains fewer overall skyline signs than would be allowed by right, we view the additional sign on this tower as a reallocation of existing entitlements, rather than a creation of new signage entitlements. Due to this context, we find the request to be appropriate.

	Allowed	Proposed
Parcel 1: Grand Hyatt Hotel	2	2
Parcel 2: Residential / Retail	1	0
Parcel 3a: Office / Retail	1	2
Parcel 3b: Office / Retail	2	2
Parcel 4: Amazon Operations	2	2
Parcel 5: Amazon Operations II	1	2
Parcel 8: Residential / Retail	2	0
Parcel 9a: MGM Hotel	2	2
Parcel 9b: Future Phase	2	2
Parcel 9c: Future Phase	2	2
Total:	17	16

Figure 7: Entitled and Proposed Skyline Signage

As with any phased project, several buildings within the site have not been fully designed and instead serve as placeholders for future development. These buildings, as noted in the package, are towers 3a, 9b, and 9c. Although we recommend approval of these reallocations, the maximum area of individual skyline signs is determined by the height of the building in the manner set forth by the DTC.

Digital Signage

Advancements in digital signage technology have led to a renewed interest in electronic changeable copy signage. While this technology is eye-catching, overuse and inappropriate placement of digital signage can have severe deleterious effects on the urban environment and serve as an unpleasant distraction. Digital signage may be appropriate in limited cases when the placement is successfully integrated into the architecture of buildings and is associated with gathering spaces or major entertainment uses.

Nashville Yards proposes the use of digital signage on several façades, most of which are located on or nearby the AEG Entertainment Complex planned on Parcel 9. The DTC allows consideration of more robust signage with digital technology through the Modifications for Tourist-oriented Businesses section, which establishes criteria for considering larger signs and expanded use of digital technology. To qualify as a tourist-oriented business, the business must offer lawful activities



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or services to the general public of cultural, historical, educational, or entertainment purposes and have a fixed seating capacity of 500. The AEG Entertainment Complex satisfies these criteria.

In determining the appropriateness of this modification, the DTC requires conformance with all lighting standards of the DTC and a requires consideration of any impacts on residential or hotel uses. In this case, based on the location and orientation of the signage, there are no apparent impacts on these specified uses. The DTC further specifies design criteria that must be considered when judging the merits of digital signage, including: architecture, the configuration or location of the building or property, building scale, legibility, technical competence, and quality in design, construction, and durability.



Figure 8: Digital Signage on the Northwest Corner of Church Street and 10th Avenue North

On Parcels 5 and 9, digital signage is proposed to be integrated into structural bays within buildings when facing the public realm. An example of this, in Figure 8, shows how digital signage can be successfully integrated into a façade in a tasteful manner. In this example, the proposed building has a theatre at the second floor and the signage makes use of the lack of openings to add visual interest to an otherwise blank section of the building. Digital signs within Parcel 9 are also proposed along internal pedestrian pathway, where they are also integrated into façades.



Figure 9: Digital Signage on Parcel 1 (left), Location of Digital Signage on Parcel 3 (right)



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The remaining two digital signs on Parcel 1 and Parcel 3 face gathering spaces that are internal to the property. The sign on Parcel 1 faces the Nashville Yards open space and is integrated into the structure of the building. The digital sign is nearly 300 feet back from Broadway and is oriented towards the gathering space and not the street. Similarly, the sign on Parcel 3, as shown in Figure 9, is internally focused and positioned above the heart of the pedestrian walkway system. Due to the context and positioning of these signs and their integration into the site, staff can support these signs as proposed. Although, staff feels that these particular signs are an acceptable use of this technology, digital signs adjacent or directed towards prominent streets, such as Broadway, are heavily scrutinized and may not be appropriate in other cases. Approval of modifications to allow expanded use of Electronic Changeable Copy on the façade of Parcel 1 will impact the assessment of any subsequent signage modification requests for this portion of the site.

Monument Wayfinding Signage

Due to the size of the Nashville Yards site and the unique configuration of spaces, including pedestrian walkways and elevated private roadways, wayfinding signage is critical for navigation purposes. This signage package proposes a range of wall-mounted and free-standing directional signage, which indicate parking areas, valet drop-off areas, and directional signage. Although some freestanding pedestrian-oriented directional signage is placed at critical entrances to the area, most of the signage is placed within internal pedestrian walkways or adjacent to the elevated private street of Upper 10th Avenue North. There are several urban kiosks that also display advertising, but these are all located internal to the site and in locations that will minimize disruption.



Figure 10: Wayfinding Sign Locations and Example Imagery

As described previously, the DTC allows these as monument signs but places several limitations on them. Along Transitional Streets, it limits the size of monument signs to 32 square feet and limits the height of the signs to 10 feet. One monument sign is permitted per one street frontage, unless the frontage exceeds 300 feet, in which case a second is allowed. Monument signs must be spaced a minimum of 200 feet apart when co-located along the same street frontage and a set back of 5 feet must be applied in certain cases.



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The intent of these standards is to minimize distracting visual clutter while establishing reasonable standards for business identification while reinforcing the envired character of Downtown. The DTC also prioritizes building signs over ground signs in allocating signage entitlements, as it envisions new buildings constructed with a close relationship to the sidewalk and street.

In this case, this monument signage is not being proposed for specific business identification, but generalized wayfinding and environmental branding. Proposed signage along streets is oriented to pedestrians and is constructed with quality materials that tastefully reinforce the sense of place within the Nashville Yards site. The proposed signs range from approximately 4 feet to approximately 12 feet. Staff recommends approval of modifications to allow these signs with the purposes and locations shown. In the event that any wayfinding sign encroaches into the public right-of-way, it must seek and receive approval via the mandatory referral process.



Figure 11: Pedestrian-oriented Wayfinding and Environmental Branding Signage

The proposed signage package strives to meet the intent and spirit of the DTC signage standards through a unified approach in creating a complete branded environment and identity for Nashville Yards. In general, the proposed signage package strives to meet the expectations of the guiding principles of the DTC. Specifically, the DTC calls for:

- Creation of active and attractive streetscapes by promoting safe, interesting, and comfortable environments.
- Creation of “great spaces” throughout Downtown for enjoyment of citizens and visitors alike by supporting varied and unique types of open space.
- Creation of distinctive urban neighborhoods that align with the intended character of each Subdistrict.



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Additionally, the signage package strives to meet the intent of the general provisions outlined for signage in the DTC. Specifically, the purpose of signage regulations should accomplish the following:

- Establish reasonable and improved standards for Downtown business identification;
- Encourage creative and innovative approaches to regulating signs consistent with the principles of the Downtown Community Plan;
- Promote economic vitality Downtown;
- Enhance overall visual environment while not creating visual clutter;
- Ensure signs are designed for the purpose of identifying a business in an attractive and functional manner; and
- Ensure signs reinforce the existing and envired character and are complementary to the architectural design of Downtown.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The requested modifications are appropriate given the context of adjacent streets and orientation of buildings. Staff recommends approval with the following conditions and deferral without the conditions:

1. Skyline signs affixed to the conceptual tower on Parcel 3a and both conceptual towers on the western portion of Parcel 9 shall conform to the sign area allowed for each building's final height.
2. Modifications approved to allow digital signage shall terminate if the subject sign is moved from the placement specified by this common sign package.
3. All other standards associated with the use of Electronic Changeable Copy, including brightness and duration must be followed.