

Strategic Amendments to Sign Regulations Phase II

Zoning Committee Meeting
February 17, 2026

Deborah Albert, AICP
Jill Hunger, AICP
CPHD



Phase II - additional amendments to sign regulations

- Second of a two-phase approach to review Arlington's sign regulations and make strategic amendments that align with the Commercial Market Resiliency Initiative (CMRI) as well as other identified amendments.
- Broadly stated Request to Advertise on December 13, 2025, for public hearings no earlier than February 2026.

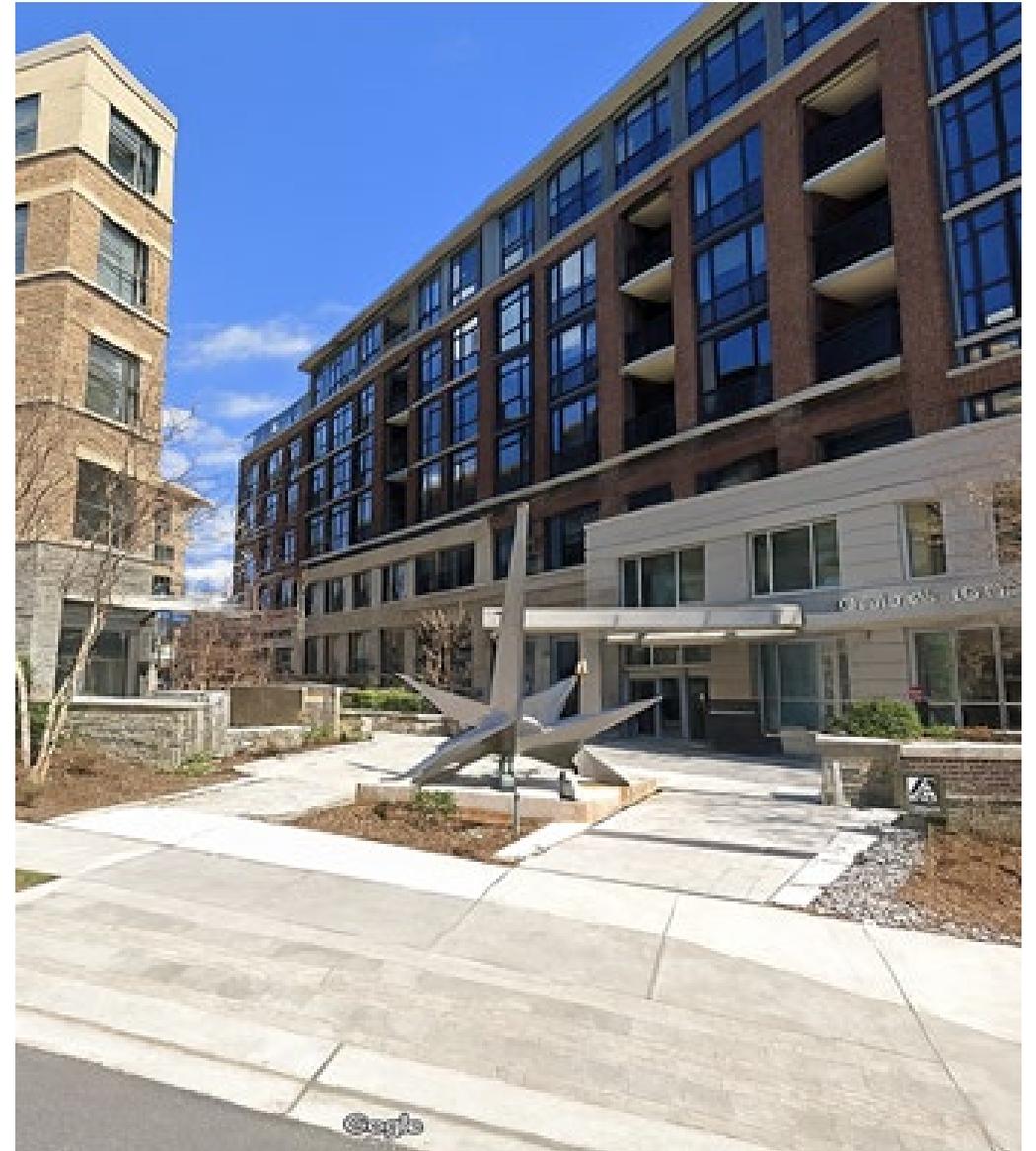
Proposed changes

- Greater flexibility for types, size, and number of signs allowed in RA districts.
- Expanded time frame for temporary banner placement within Public districts and on publicly-owned property.
- Allowance for signs and/or sign types that may include automatic changeable copy and off-premise advertising (i.e. advertising for businesses not immediately on the premises), in specified locations.
- Amended size and timing standards for certain automatic changeable copy signs.
- Removal of an allowance for temporary signs by private parties in the public right-of-way.
- Technical edits for consistency, organization and readability.
- NOT included for change: Amending the number and placement of sidewalk signs

Signs in RA districts (pp. 3 – 8)

Flexibility for signs allowed in RA districts including:

- increased awning & canopy signs;
- allowance for blade signs;
- additional freestanding signs;
- provisions for noncommercial temporary signs for townhouse developments; and
- allowances for additional wall signs



Temporary banner placement in Public districts & publicly-owned properties (p. 10)



Extended time frame for temporary banners (from 16 days to length of event)

Off-premise advertising and associated changeable copy

Signs for athletic fields in public parks and schools (p. 12)

- Additional allowances for signs for athletic fields in schools and parks.
- Up to two signs that accommodate commercial messaging, including off-premise advertising, and changeable copy elements.
- Standards to ensure signs are not legible from any public right-of-way outside of the property.



Off-premise advertising and associated changeable copy

Sign systems (pp. 16 – 17)

- Authorized by the County Board and placed by the County Manager
- Located in areas with adopted sector, area or revitalization plans; or on APS, County or jointly owned properties.
- Expand sign types and introduce changeable copy and illumination.
- Specific County Board findings:
 - Signs would not adversely affect traffic safety and would not result in clutter that would adversely affect the appearance or character of the surrounding neighborhood.
 - Signs are pedestrian-oriented with legibility limited to 15 feet.
 - Signs do not obstruct pedestrian movement.
 - Signs do not obstruct views for motorists.
 - Placement of signs maintains a clear walkway zone.
 - Permission is provided from underlying property owner(s) and easement holder(s).



Off-premise advertising and associated changeable copy

County Board ordinance to establish standards that may include:

- Specific size, locations and physical characteristics of the signs.
- Placement, maintenance, removal and replacement of the signs.
- Illumination and changeable copy standards that may deviate from the standards in section §13.13 (changeable copy).
- Sound.
- Length of time for which the signs may be displayed.
- Allowance and standards for automatic changeable copy.



Automatic changeable copy signs (p. 21)

Increases the size from 12 SF to 60 SF for signs that change no more than once per day.



Sidewalk signs

Current regulations

- One sign per public entrance.
- Self-standing
- Displayed during business hours.
- Maintain 6 feet of clear walkway.
- No lighting or automatic changeable copy.

Providing additional sidewalk signs is not aligned with feedback received or compatible with the competing interests within the confines of a sidewalk.

Online engagement themes



Sidewalk signs should be placed to maintain adequate clear zones to ensure accessibility;



Appropriate removal of sidewalk signs when businesses are closed; and



Continued enforcement and accountability around the existing regulations should be pursued.

Over 800 responses in total. Over 450 individual comments, many with upvotes about signs in outdoor public spaces.

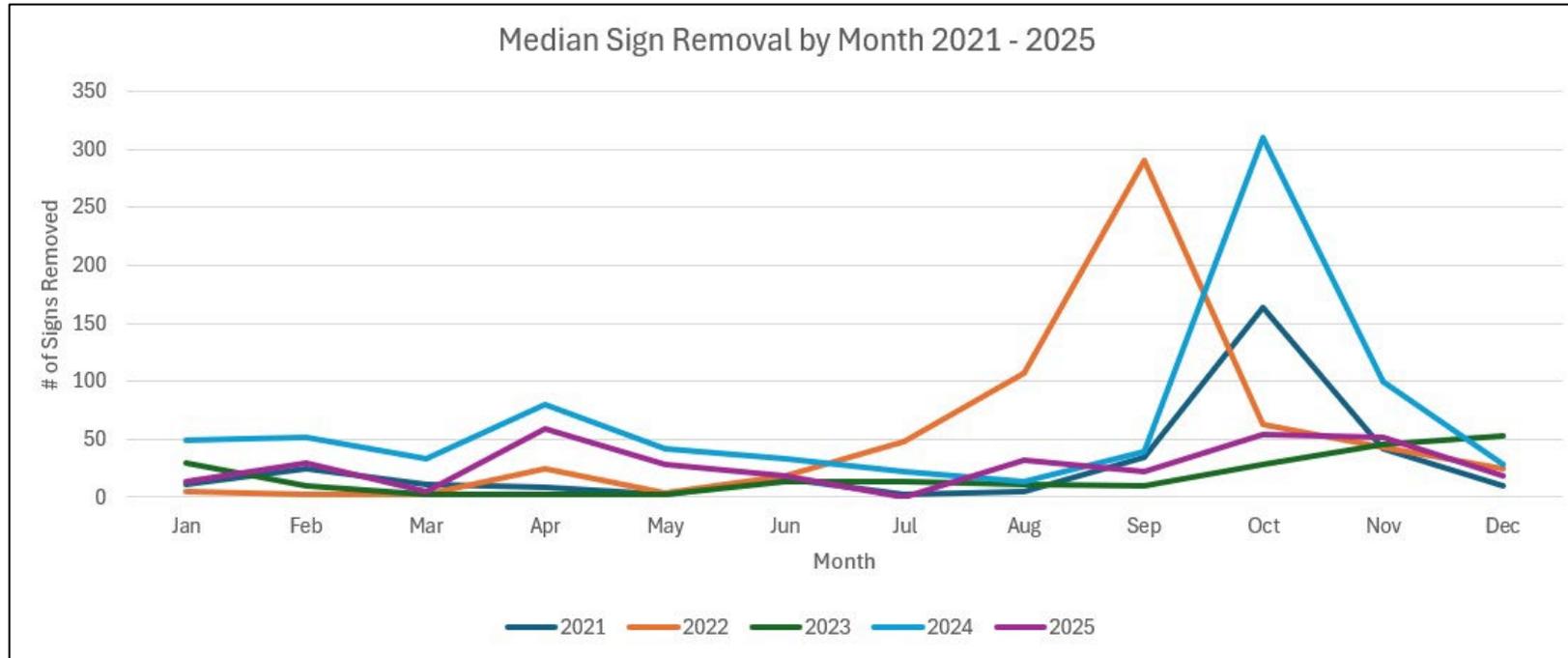
Eliminate allowance for temporary signs placed by private parties in the public ROW (“median signs”) (pp. 17 – 19)



Median signs – current regulations

Sign Type	Regulations	Examples	Constituency
31-day signs*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 4.5 SF 2 per candidate/issue per median strip From 31-days before to 5-days after election/caucus of duly constituted governmental body or political party registered in VA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vote Yes on Issue 1 Any noncommercial content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidates for office Ballot issue opinions
7-day signs*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 4.5 SF 1 per candidate/issue per median strip 7 consecutive days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lost dog Neighborhood meeting Vote Yes on Issue 1 Any noncommercial content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents Same as above
Commercial signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 1.5 SF 1 per item per median strip Weekends/holidays ½-mile of commercial activity lawfully occurring in R- or RA-district 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> House for sale/rent Yard sale Farmer’s market in R or RA district Any noncommercial content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Real estate community Chamber

Median signs – enforcement

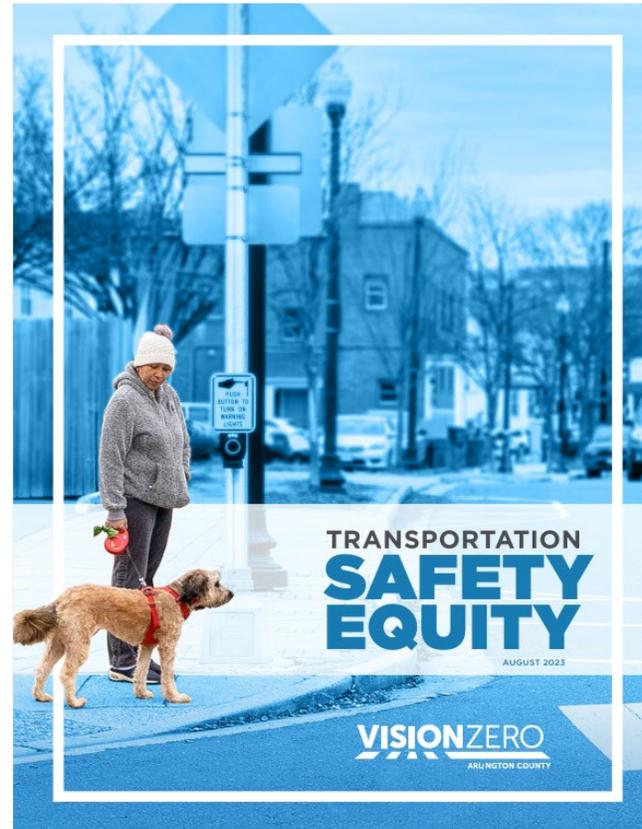
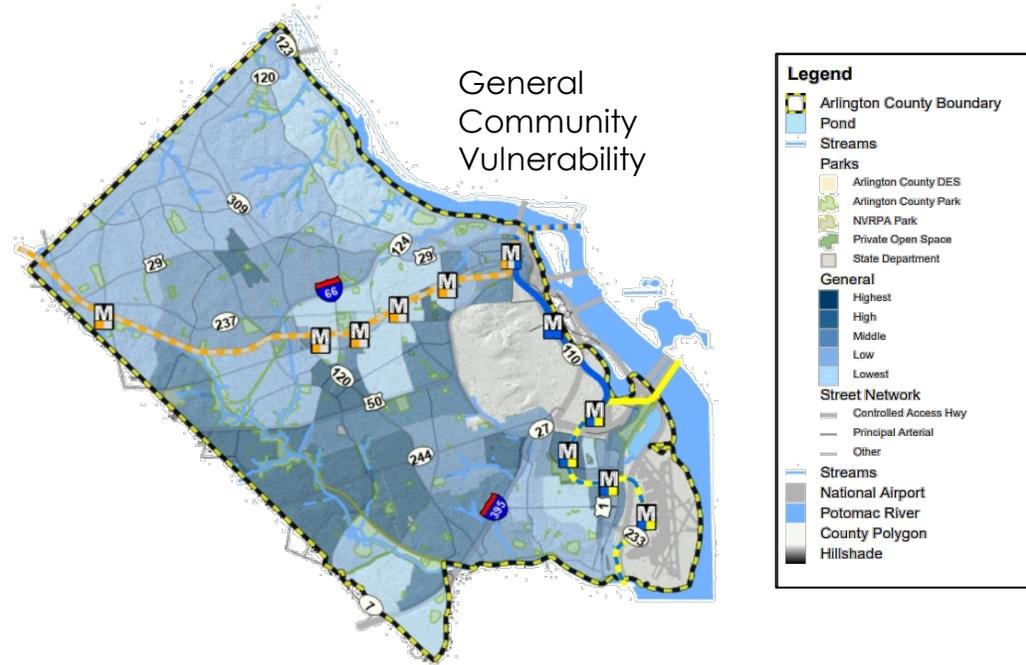


Year	# of Median Signs Removed
2021	329
2022	634
2023	223
2024	801
2025	332

- Signs removal rises sharply each year around scheduled elections and moderately around scheduled primary elections.
- Early voting has expanded the period during which median signs are most frequently in place.
- Ranked Choice Voting in Arlington may increase the number of candidates and thus number of signs.

Median signs – priorities and policies reviewed

Digital Equity Initiative



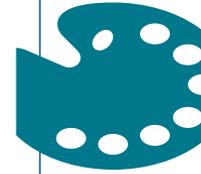
Median signs – evaluation

Options	Pros	Cons
Prohibit all signs by private parties in ROW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces number of signs • Simplifies enforcement • Moves noncommercial speech to private property • Simplifies rules • Consistent with sign-related traffic safety considerations • Most consistent with feedback received from survey and from additional outreach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change for all stakeholders • Could limit access to election and candidate information for residents with limited digital literacy
Alt a. Eliminate 31-day and 7-day signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces number of signs • Simplifies enforcement • Simplifies rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could result in compliance issues around elections due to place/remove requirement every weekend • Could increase signs on weekends
Alt b. Eliminate 31-day signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces number of signs • Could reduce duration of signs around elections • Continues to allow noncommercial signs for consecutive days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bigger change for election-related stakeholders • Could result in more frequent signs (e.g. new signs placed every seven days with no limits on timing tied to elections) – • Compliance works well for general noncommercial stakeholders; may not work as well for election-related stakeholders • Could increase/complicate enforcement
Alt c. Reduce 31-day signs to one per median strip (and clarify 31 days)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces number of signs • Consistent with 7-day signs • Limited change in regulation for all stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More limited impact than other options if goal is significant reduction in signs
Alt d. Limit all median signs to certain locations (e.g. specified zoning districts, road types, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces number of signs in some areas • Focuses signs in certain areas • Could simplify enforcement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas desired for sign placement varies for different stakeholders • Unevenly benefits/burdens different geographic areas • Challenging rules for people placing signs could impact compliance

Themes from comments received



Numerous comments (& upvotes) to ban signs on medians.



Aesthetics – Median signs described as eyesore, trash, blight, and visual clutter.



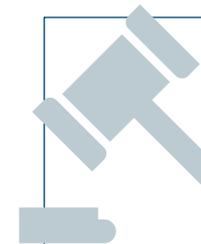
Safety & visibility for drivers – Median signs can block sight lines and cause driver distraction.



Time limits and removal necessary – Applicable to both median signs and sidewalk signs.



Accessibility – Sidewalk signs need to be placed to keep adequate clear zones.



Enforcement / accountability – The County needs to enforce existing regulations.

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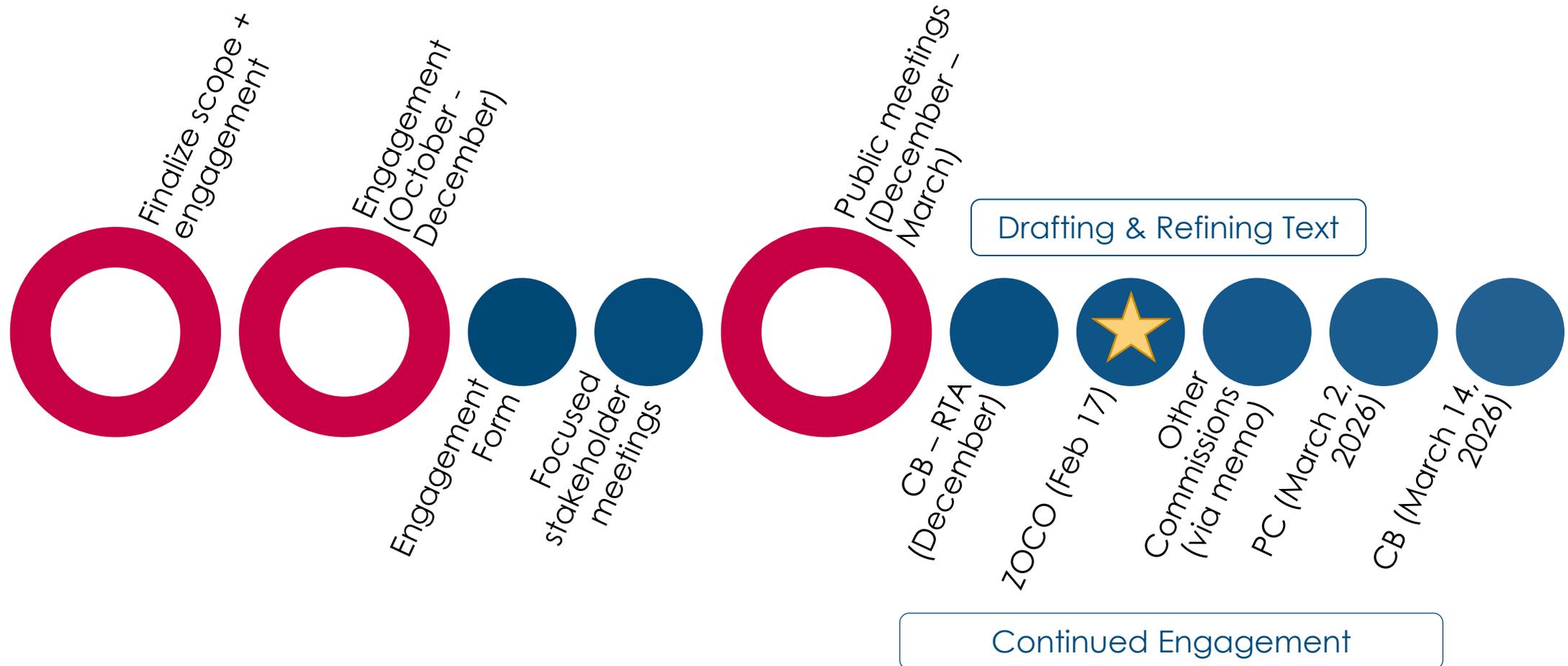
No proposed changes

- §13.1. Purpose
- §13.2. Applicability
- §13.3. Modifications
- §13.5. Signs in R Districts and for One- and Two-Family Dwellings in All Districts
- §13.9. Signs for Public, Civic and Institutional Buildings
- §13.14. Sign Permits
- §13.15. Comprehensive Sign Plans Approved After July 24, 2012
- §13.17. General Provisions
- §13.18. Nonconforming Signs
- §13.19. Definitions and Interpretations

Schedule

Date	Topic
October – November 2025	BID discussion about the second phase of strategic amendments to sign regulations.
November 2025	Online engagement feedback about signs within Arlington’s outdoor public spaces.
December 10, 2025	NAIOP discussion about the second phase of strategic amendments to sign regulations.
December 13, 2025	County Board authorized RTA
December 17, 2025	Chamber discussion about the second phase of strategic amendments to sign regulations.
February 17, 2026	Zoning Committee (ZOCO) review of draft amendment <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In addition to regular distribution, memo to be sent to numerous commissions and other stakeholders to ensure awareness and provide opportunity for feedback.
February – March 2026	Continued Engagement Opportunities
March 2/4, 2026	Planning Commission recommendation of draft amendment
March 14/17, 2026	County Board consideration of proposed amendment

Process & engagement





ARLINGTON
VIRGINIA

Thank You