

CHAPTER 159

OUTDOOR LIGHTING ORDINANCE

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159.01 PURPOSE.

(A) This chapter will provide regulations for outdoor lighting that will:

- (1) Permit the use of outdoor lighting that does not exceed the levels specified in the Night Sky Protection Act and recommended practices for nighttime safety, utility, productivity, enjoyment, and commerce;
- (2) Minimize adverse off-site impacts of lighting such as light trespass and obtrusive light;
- (3) Curtail light pollution, reduce sky glow and improve the nighttime environment;
- (4) Help protect the natural environment from the adverse effects of night lighting from gas or electric sources; and
- (5) Conserve energy and resources to the greatest extent possible.

(B) The illustrations attached to the ordinance codified in this chapter* are intended to help the public understand acceptable and unacceptable exterior lighting within the city.

(Ord. 14-16)

* Code reviser's note: Illustrations referenced in this chapter are on file in the City Clerk's office and are available for review upon request.

159.02 GENERAL PROVISIONS.

This chapter hereby adopts by reference all definitions and exemptions to the Night Sky Protection Act unless modified or changed by this chapter.

(Ord. 14-16)

159.03 DEFINITIONS.

ACCENT LIGHTING. Any directional lighting that emphasizes a particular object or draws attention to particular areas.

DISABLING GLARE. Lighting that impairs visibility and creates a potentially hazardous situation for pedestrians or motorists.

GLARE. The brightness of a light source sufficient to cause eye discomfort for an average person not suffering from a visual impairment.

LAMP OR BULB. That portion of the fixture that produces light by attaching to a socket within the fixture.

LIGHT POLLUTION. Excessive or inappropriate artificial light.

LIGHT TRESPASS. Light emitted by a luminaire that shines beyond the property on which the luminaire is installed.

LUMEN. A unit of light or illumination from a lamp or bulb, as defined by the International System of Units (SI). A typical 60-watt incandescent bulb or a 13-watt fluorescent bulb emits approximately 800 lumens. Light incident on a surface is measured in foot-candles (SI) using a commercial light meter.

LUMINAIRE OR FIXTURE. A complete lighting unit, including the lamps or bulbs, as well as the parts that connect to power, the housing that protects the bulbs and parts that distribute the light.

NUISANCE GLARE. Light that creates an annoyance or aggravation but does not create a potentially hazardous situation.

RECREATIONAL USE LIGHTING. Lighting devices designed for illuminating public playing fields, courts, or similar facilities to allow sports and recreation in the evening hours.

SHIELDING/HOODING. Shielding requires that no light rays be emitted above the horizontal plane

running through the lowest point of a light fixture. Hooding is additional or appropriate shielding to prevent light trespass below the horizontal plane. A fixture may contain both.

SPOTLIGHT OR FLOODLIGHT. Any lamp that incorporates a reflector or a refractor to concentrate light output into a directed beam in a particular direction.

WATT. A unit of electric power flowing into a lamp or bulb, as defined by the SI. One watt is a rate of energy transfer of one joule per second.

(Ord. 14-16)

159.04 APPLICABILITY.

(A) All nonconforming outdoor fixtures installed prior to, and operable on, the effective date of this chapter shall be removed or converted to a conforming fixture when the existing fixture is inoperable or unrepairable. The city may require a nonconforming use to be corrected if the city determines that the nonconforming use is creating a nuisance glare or disabling glare as further defined in this chapter.

(B) All existing outdoor lighting fixtures owned and maintained by any public utility company within the city are required to comply with the Night Sky Protection Act and this chapter as fixtures become inoperable or unrepairable except as otherwise stipulated in this chapter.

(C) This chapter does not apply to interior lighting.

(D) All new installations and modifications to existing nonconforming fixtures shall comply with this chapter.

(E) Compliance with this chapter shall be administered and enforced by the Department of Development Services and the Police Department Code Enforcement Division.

(F) All exterior lighting shall comply with the Night Sky Protection Act and the provisions of this chapter. Where there is conflict, the more stringent requirement shall apply.

(G) An individual will only have standing to submit a complaint for violation of this chapter if the offending property is within 300 feet of their own property.

(Ord. 14-16)

159.05 EXEMPTIONS.

The following are exempt from this chapter:

(A) Traffic control devices;

(B) Lighting within public right-of-way or easement for the principal purpose of illuminating streets shall be exempt from the height requirement;

(C) Temporary emergency lighting (i.e., fire, police, repair workers);

(D) Moving vehicle lights;

(E) Navigation lights (i.e., communication towers);

(F) Seasonal decorations with light displays in place no longer than two months before a holiday or 30 days after the holiday;

(G) Special situations approved by the City Manager, or her/his designee, for temporary or periodic events (i.e., fairs, fiestas, emergencies, or city-sanctioned nighttime construction);

(H) Covered porch lighting on single-family or multifamily homes; provided, that each outdoor light source does not exceed 790 lumens output;

(I) Security lights of any power that are controlled by a motion sensor switch and which do not remain on longer than 30 minutes after activation. Security lights may not project light onto a neighbor property or outside the boundaries of the property on which they are mounted;

(J) Sports field outdoor sites herein defined as recreational use lighting;

(K) Flagpoles that display the United States flag, New Mexico state flag, and the City of Rio Rancho flag after sundown;

(L) Legally permitted digital outdoor advertising erected and operated pursuant to Chapter [156](#), Sign Regulations;

(M) Solar lighting.

159.06 SUBMITTALS.

(A) Applications for building permits shall include a lighting plan or a statement of compliance with this chapter. A change to a lighting plan shall be approved by the Department and shall include, at a minimum, a statement of compliance with the requirements of this chapter.

(B) Any person or business may submit an application to deviate from the requirements of this chapter to the Department. The request shall state fully:

(1) The circumstances and conditions relied upon as grounds to deviate;

(2) The circumstances and conditions by which strict application of the provisions deprive the applicant of reasonable use of the land, building or outdoor light fixtures.

(Ord. 14-16)

159.07 GENERAL STANDARDS.

The following general standards shall apply to all outdoor lighting installed after the effective date of the ordinance codified in this chapter, which are not covered by any exemptions above. Fixtures may not project light onto property outside the boundaries of the property on which they are mounted.

(A) Outdoor lighting must be hooded, shielded and aimed downward. Examples of acceptable and unacceptable light shielding and hooding are shown in Tables 1 through 6 attached to the ordinance codified in this chapter.*

(B) The hood and/or shield must mask the direct horizontal surface of the light source. The light must be aimed to ensure the illumination is only pointing downward onto the ground surface, with no upward escaping light permitted to contribute to light pollution;

(C) Existing fixtures may be adapted to comply with this section by adding a properly designed hood or shield, or by pointing any upward-mounted, shielded fixture downward toward the ground surface;

(D) Any light falling onto adjacent property or streets that results in nuisance glare or disabling glare shall not be permitted. Light trespass beyond property boundaries or above the horizontal plane shall be considered noncompliant;

(E) Any outdoor lighting fixtures shall be designed, installed, located and maintained, or shielded,

such that the glare onto other properties or streets shall be eliminated and all direct illumination kept within the boundaries of the fixture owner's property;

(F) Accent or landscape lighting shall be directed onto foliage or objects and not toward the sky or onto adjacent properties. Direct light emissions shall not be visible above the roofline or beyond the building edge;

(G) Upward directed accent lighting may be administratively approved for specific sites of historic, cultural or artistic merit;

(H) Spotighting on landscaping, foliage, and flagpoles shall be limited to 450 lumens output. The lamp shall be shielded and not create disabling or nuisance glare;

(I) Rotating, flashing, moving or stationary beacons of light used for advertising purposes or public events are prohibited;

(J) Exterior nonresidential parking lot lights and building mounted fixtures shall be limited to 24 feet in height from grade, unless located 75 feet from all property lines, in which case they may be 40 feet in height. Residential yard lights shall be limited to eight feet in height from grade;

(K) Where exterior lighting is used for security purposes or to illuminate walkways, entrances, driveways, equipment yards and parking lots, outdoor shielded lights shall be used to minimize trespass and glare.

(Ord. 14-16)

* Code reviser's note: Tables referenced in this chapter are on file in the City Clerk's office and are available for review upon request.

159.08 ENFORCEMENT AND PENALTIES FOR VIOLATION.

This chapter shall be administered and enforced by the Development Services Department and Code Enforcement when it has been determined that a violation may exist or when any citizen makes a complaint in writing to the Development Services Department. When investigation by the city determines that there is a violation of this chapter, the owner, tenant, agent, or person designated in charge of the premises where the violation has occurred shall be provided written notice of the violation and the time for compliance. Failure to comply may result in a citation into Municipal Court. Penalties shall be as determined and assessed by Municipal Court.

(Ord. 14-16)

The Rio Rancho Municipal Code is current through Ordinance 23-23, passed October 26, 2023.

Disclaimer: The City Clerk's office has the official version of the Rio Rancho Municipal Code. Users should contact the City Clerk's office for ordinances passed subsequent to the ordinance cited above.

City Website: <https://www.rnm.gov/>

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