

**MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING
HELD BY THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
OCTOBER 15, 2018**

ROLL CALL:

Members Present: Eric Prause, Chairman
Andy Kidd, Vice Chairman
Michael Stebe, Secretary
Jessica Scorso

Alternates: Julian Stoppelman, Sitting
Teresa Ike

Absent: Timothy Bergin
Patrick Kennedy

Also Present: Matthew Bordeaux, Senior Planner
Gary Anderson, Director of Planning &
Economic Development
Katie Williford, Administrative Secretary

The Chairman opened the Public Hearing at 7:00 p.m. The Secretary read the legal notice for the application when the call was made.

TOWN OF MANCHESTER PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION – To revise Art. IV, Sec. 13.07.01 to change sign size limitations in the Central Business District zone. – Zoning Regulation Amendment (2018-112)

Mr. Anderson explained Staff noticed an unintended consequence of changes to the zoning regulations pertaining to signs several years ago. Art. IV, Sec. 13.07.01 limits signs to 3 sf. for each linear foot of the face of a building, Mr. Anderson explained. In a 2016 amendment, the Commission added requirements based on the distance from the building to the street. Prior to 2016, the maximum sign area per tenant was the same for buildings up to 150 ft. from the street, but then an amendment added new limitations: Signs on buildings within 50 ft. of the street are now limited to a maximum of 32 sf; signs on buildings between 50 and 100 ft. from the street are limited to 64 sf; and signs on buildings greater than 100 and up to 150 ft. from the street are now limited to 100 sf. Mr. Anderson said the intention of the 2016 amendment was to limit the size of signs in business districts, specifically those near residential districts.

Mr. Anderson said he was recently approached by downtown business owners interested in expanding their businesses, who have run into issues with the sign size limitations. For example, Lucky Taco has expanded into an adjacent space and would like to move some of their sign's lettering over the new space. Because sign size is measured based on the rectangle around all of the elements of the sign, if Lucky Taco moved some of their lettering, their sign would be much larger than the permitted 32 sf, Mr. Anderson explained. As another example, the Peter's Furniture building has a large marquee, but the sign size is limited to 32 sf. even though it is a long space. Hair by Jeicoby is also expanding into the adjacent space and their existing sign is as large as they would be allowed; similar to Lucky Taco, half of their business would have no signage above it. The new Ethiopian restaurant across the street is also limited in their signage in

the same way. When a business is taking up two tenant spaces, the allowable signage only covers one side of it, Mr. Anderson said.

Mr. Anderson went on to present some signs that were installed prior to the 2016 amendments, for Beller's Music and Manchester Hardware, which are larger than 32 sf. These signs seem to fit downtown, he said.

Mr. Anderson noted that there is a level of design control in the Central Business district that does not exist in other areas of town, because the downtown district is also subject to the Main Street Architectural Guidelines, which guide façade changes, including signage. Art. II, Sec. 15.04.02 of the zoning regulations, which will remain in place, states that all façade changes shall conform to the Main Street Architectural Guidelines. This involves administrative approval by the PZC Chair and the Planning Director, but proposals can also be referred to the full Commission. The Main Street Architectural Guidelines are currently in the process of being revised and signage can be considered during that process.

Mr. Anderson presented the proposed text, which would return the maximum sign size in the Central Business District to simply 3 sf per linear foot of the face of the building. He noted that this proposal is a patch that would only affect the Central Business District, but it seemed to be the most prudent approach because it would address a current need that has been communicated to Staff. The Commission could look at the sign regulations more widely if desired, he said.

Mr. Anderson said the sign size limitations for other Town centers vary. Middletown's downtown allows 2 sf per linear foot of the building or 150 sf, whichever is less. West Hartford's limitations vary depending on the number of entrances, either 2 sf or 3sf per linear foot. Meriden's limitation is 2 sf per linear foot in commercial zones. If the Commission would like to change the 3sf per linear foot number, that would probably be a wider conversation and beyond the scope of tonight's discussion, he said.

Mr. Anderson went on to say that the sign size limit in the Form Based Zone is very similar. There are some differences, and when the FBZ code conflicts with Art. IV Sec. 13, the FBZ regulations override the signage section. In general, however, the limit on sign size is 3sf for every linear foot.

In response to a question from Mr. Kidd, Mr. Anderson said the Main Street Architectural Guidelines discuss best practices, where a sign should be placed, what it should look like, the best materials, and what size signs should be. The PZC Chairman and Planning Director are required to consider whether proposals conform to those guidelines. The Guidelines offer a little more leeway than the zoning regulations, but the Guidelines also offer clarity on certain topics that are not included in the zoning regulations. For example, the Guidelines specify that a sign should be placed above the doorway. Mr. Anderson noted that the example of a wall sign that appears in the Guidelines would not be allowed by the zoning regulations because it is larger than 32sf. That fact alone, Mr. Anderson said, makes it seem to him that more leeway downtown would make sense. There are historic buildings downtown that were built to have certain placing for signage, and this change would allow for those to be taken into account.

Mr. Kidd said it appeared that some of the signs Mr. Anderson showed were just not sized properly. The Manchester Hardware sign fits, while some of the other signs appeared artificially shrunk and do not make good use of the space. He said he thought the proposed amendment is on the right track, but asked Mr. Anderson to discuss the proposed language and how it would

fix the issue.

Mr. Anderson said the proposed change would eliminate the additional restriction in the CBD zone. He read from the proposed text, "Except in the Central Business District, the area of the sign shall not exceed the following based on the setback of the building." The maximum sign area of 3 sf per linear foot would still be in place, but the other restrictions would not apply to the downtown, he explained.

Ms. Scorso asked if similar problems have occurred in areas other than Main Street. Mr. Anderson replied that he has not seen a pattern elsewhere, while on Main Street there were at least three or four issues. He noted that, because I-84 is considered a regular street, buildings close to I-84 are limited to a very small sign area, and that would not be addressed by this proposal.

Mr. Bordeaux said there were no outstanding comments from Staff on the proposal and no written correspondence was received.

Chairman Prause asked that any member of the public that wished to speak either in favor of or in opposition to this application come forward at this time.

Scott Lanney, owner of Hair by Jeicoby, said the business has only been in Manchester for two years and is growing rapidly. More than 12,300 cars pass the location every day, but if the lights are green when drivers pass, the signage is too short. It is not like the example of the sign for Beller's, which is much wider, he said. That is important to the goal of bringing business to Manchester from other towns, to make Main Street and the town thrive, Mr. Lanney said. Modifying the regulations slightly would help attract more people. Many clients say they have driven past and never saw his business, and they only learned about it through social media, Mr. Lanney said.

Mr. Stoppelman moved to close the public hearing. Mr. Stebe seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

The Chairman closed the Public Hearing portion of the meeting at 7:21 p.m.

NOTICE: A DIGITAL RECORDING OF THIS PUBLIC HEARING CAN BE HEARD IN THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT.