

**MINUTES OF WORKSHOP
HELD BY THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
OCTOBER 1, 2018**

Members Present: Eric Prause, Chairman
Michael Stebe, Secretary

Alternate Member Sitting: Patrick Kennedy
Julian Stoppelman
Teresa Ike

Absent: Andy Kidd
Jessica Scorso
Timothy Bergin

Also Present: Gary Anderson, Director of Planning
Matthew Bordeaux, Senior Planner
Nancy Martel, Recording Secretary

SIGNAGE REQUIREMENTS FOR DOWNTOWN

Mr. Gary Anderson reported that, in October 2016, the Planning and Zoning Commission changed some wording in the Zoning Regulations at Article IV, Section 13.07.01, regarding allowable sizes of signs, due to community feedback. The maximum sign area for wall and roof signs would be calculated on the basis of 3 sq. ft. for each linear foot of the face of the building. For example, he explained, a 10 ft. long building would allow the sign to be 30 sq. ft. However, there are maximum limitations on the total size of the sign, he noted. Mr. Anderson reported that, before 2016, a building 150 ft. or closer to the street would be permitted 100 sq. ft. of signage. He explained that, in 2016, sign size was further limited; for a building within 50 ft. of the street, the limit is 32 sq. ft., and for a building between 50 and 100 ft. from the street, the limit is 64 sq. ft. This has limited the size of signs all over town, which was the intent, Mr. Anderson said.

Downtown, this has caused issues, he noted. Mr. Anderson projected photos of various signs in the downtown area and discussed the problems that have been created. As downtown businesses are expanding, he explained, the sign regulation prevents the business owners from adding to their existing signage. Mr. Anderson explained that the area of the sign shall be determined from its outside dimensions; where a sign consists of individual characters and/or other symbols, the area shall be determined from the smallest rectangle enclosing all of the elements. He discussed specific buildings and the difficulties created by the regulation. In his opinion, expanded businesses should be allowed to extend their signage to allow signage above the entire tenancy spaces. Mr. Anderson pointed out several buildings with larger existing signs that would not be allowed under the current regulations.

Mr. Anderson suggested eliminating the wording “in no event,” from Article IV, Section 13.07.01, which would result in “three square feet for each linear foot of the face of the building.” He reminded the Commission of the Downtown Architectural Guidelines, which are being updated. Signs and

facades are reviewed based on those guidelines, he reported. Any changes that would fall under the Downtown Architectural Guidelines would be reviewed by at least Mr. Anderson and the Chairman, and by the full Commission if necessary. In his opinion, this is the easiest and quickest solution. Mr. Anderson read the full text of the regulation. He suggested the wording “Except in the Central Business District, in no event shall the area of the sign exceed...” if that is what the Commission decides.

Mr. Stoppelman suggested eliminating the first line, which limits signs to 32 square feet for a building within 50 ft. of the street, and making the limit 64 sq. ft.

Mr. Anderson stated that could be done, though 64 sq. ft. is small, and that approach would result in changes throughout the town. He noted that the wording was added for the specific purpose of limiting signs around town.

Mr. Stebe reflected that, if the Design Overlay for the Broad Street area is implemented, there would be buildings 10 ft. back from the street taking up all but 10 or 20 ft. of space. There will be tenant space where, if an owner occupies two units, the signage would be restricted in that location as well, he noted. He stated he is unsure if implementing a patch to the regulation to carve out the Central Business District will solve the issue. Mr. Stebe said it was unclear how the regulation would impact a business located on a driveway rather than on the road itself; if a business is on a driveway 200 ft. back from the actual road, it could have a 200 sq. ft. sign, while a tenant that is on the street would be limited to 32 sq. ft.

Mr. Anderson acknowledged he had not considered the Form-Based code on Broad Street.

Mr. Stebe suggested an equation based on the linear feet and maxing out the height of the rectangle. He pointed to several downtown locations which will encompass three storefronts.

Mr. Anderson pointed out that Manchester Hardware is one storefront.

Mr. Stebe stated that Manchester Hardware is grandfathered in, and anyone moving into that location would be grandfathered in. He reiterated that the other businesses he referred to have multiple storefronts.

Ms. Ike stated that she does not understand what would be accomplished by changing the regulation after two years.

Mr. Anderson explained the goal of limiting the size of business signs close to the street was achieved generally. He explained there is a building on North Main Street whose large sign became an issue. The regulation would have prevented the sign from being located there, he noted. In his opinion, because downtown has historically had larger signs and there are buildings with marquees in places adequate for a larger size, that was a patch. Perhaps, he speculated, there should be a two-step change to the regulation.

Mr. Stebe pointed to one specific building on Main Street, stating the sign should not be any taller. There could be better use of the font and letters within the existing marquee.

Mr. Anderson reiterated that there are downtown guidelines, and language regarding the historic marquees and historic placement of signs.

Mr. Stebe noted that, in the downtown district, there are only a few buildings where there would be room to make signs taller. He assumed that no one would propose a sign larger than the natural division between the marquee and the brick above. In his opinion, the regulation should be worded in a manner that will accommodate the downtown district and attract businesses so as not to restrict future development. Mr. Stebe noted again that he is considering Broad Street.

Mr. Kennedy agreed that Broad Street should be contemplated, though the problem downtown is an immediate one. He believed the simplest solution would be the best, and agreed with the suggestion of eliminating the language for the Central Business District.

Mr. Stoppelman suggested limiting the height of the sign to 2 to 2.5 ft., stating the limits do not apply if the sign is under 2.5 ft.

Mr. Anderson asked if Mr. Stoppelman intended this suggestion only for downtown.

Mr. Stoppelman's suggestion was to do that everywhere.

Mr. Stebe said the process of reviewing the Downtown Architectural Guidelines has begun.

Mr. Anderson noted that they are very close to awarding the RFP.

Mr. Stebe assumed there are many discussions being held prior to the award, and the matter should be early on their agenda so that, in the event that the Commission needs to take action on this, the Commission would have good, clear guidance from them.

Mr. Anderson informed the Commission that the first RFP did not include a budget. There was only one response at that time, for three times the budget. He reported the RFP was sent out for a second time, with the budget included, and they received three good responses. One will be chosen soon, according to Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Anderson proposed measuring sign heights downtown to determine if a height restriction would work. This would need to be done soon, as it is an immediate issue for downtown tenants. He stated he would like to get an application in as soon as possible as the tenants awaiting a decision will either have to apply for a variance or will need direction from the Planning Department.

Mr. Kennedy speculated that, if there were an application that only involves the Central Business District, it would not have to be sent to CRCOG because it would be nowhere near a Town boundary. Mr. Anderson agreed. Limiting the scope would help to expedite the matter, Mr. Kennedy noted.

Mr. Stoppelman reminded the Commission that, if this is for the Central Business District, the issue is not closed and will arise in the future for other businesses that are close to the road.

Mr. Anderson added that zoning regulations are never closed. He stated that he will be submitting an application and if the Commission does not approve, it could be tabled or changed.

The Workshop was closed at 8:15 P.M.