

Sign Regulation Committee – Summary of Meeting

Monday, November 10, 2008

Conference Room 1, Urban Government Center

Present:

Debbie Brent, Steven Ward, April Robbins, Bonnie Betz Loeb, Paul Whitty, Greg William, Jo Bishop, Kelly Will.

Staff:

Christopher French, Dave Marchal, Bob Keesaer, Theresa Senninger, and Chris Cestaro (notes)

Summary of the Meeting:

Items for discussion were handed out by staff prior to the beginning of the meeting.

Christopher French introduced the subjects of today's meeting, which are attached sign regulations and LED/Changing Image Signs. He also showed a Power Point presentation that detailed the proposed recommended revisions to the table format, and reviewed the handout in detail.

Attached Sign Regulation (continued)

He said that, at the last meeting, the Committee had reviewed options for reformatting the sign regulations; making possible amendments to the sign regulations based on what kinds of attached sign variance requests had been made in the past; and how other cities handled current sign issues (mounting height, square footage, etc.) The only thing left over that the Committee must come to a consensus on today is if or how to change the mounting height requirements for traditional neighborhood and village form districts (residential form districts), especially ways to meet pedestrian level/neighborhood scale.

He reviewed the "table" format that had been agreed upon at the last meeting and also discussed revisions that he had made, based on that last meeting:

- Use new table format
- Add institutional and office uses to the non-residential sign table
- Allow greater sign size in form districts that permit very large structures such as Downtown and Regional Center
- Allow institutional uses to have the same free-standing sign requirements as office, commercial and industrial uses based on form district

- Allow institutional uses to have the same sign requirements as other non-residential uses in all form districts except Neighborhood, Village, and Traditional Neighborhood.

He said he found there had been four variance requests made since 2004 for mounting height of attached signage for non-residential uses through BOZA; the total number of variance requests for this was 11 total. The maximum height requirements for Village Neighborhood and Traditional Neighborhood form districts varied between 25-35 foot maximum height, and will allow up to 45 feet if the upper story is used for residential. The Traditional Marketplace Corridor has a 20-foot maximum height.

A person present at the meeting pointed out that the 20-foot height might be okay if there was an exception for the architecture for the building in question, especially with older buildings that have different uses than what they were originally constructed for (adaptive reuse.) It can be difficult to make one rule apply to many different styles.

Bob Rueff (representing the Falls City Sign Association) said they do not agree with the 20-foot standard, especially since it can cause problems when applied to many different types of facades and older buildings (for example, a church or school that is now being used for offices, etc.)

Paul Whitty said it does not make sense to tie an outside sign requirement to the interior. He also disagreed with the 20-foot standard. He suggested tying the sign placement to the exterior roofline.

Mr. French asked how mounting height standards should be adjusted for mixed-use buildings (for example, one that has commercial/retail on the first floor and residential on the second floor.) A committee member asked if a building owner should decide whether the sign placement would compromise their ability to lease the residential floors.

Bob Keesaer and Dave Marchal discussed various areas where mixed uses are common and what they have done in certain circumstances. Mr. Marchal said most of the buildings on the Bardstown Road Overlay district, for example, are not that tall and the 20-foot restriction has little or no impact. Downtown, where the buildings are much taller, the guidelines have been revised. There is a more of a problem with neighbors' signage having more of an impact on other nearby buildings/residents (the blinking sign across the street, etc.) Mr. French said he could examine proportional requirements from other cities to see how mixed uses are handled.

Different types of roofing styles were discussed. There was discussion about how the current attached signage regulations can cause difficulties when applied to certain types of facades and roofs. Mr. Rueff suggested no signs on a slanted

roof that sheds water (with exceptions for a mansard roof.) It was also suggested that height requirements were problematic – it was the square footage of the signs that was important, not the 20-foot measurement.

Mr. French said the primary issues regarding institutional buildings with attached signage were: 1) Should larger facades be allowed to have larger signs? 2) Should institutional buildings to have both attached and free-standing signs?

Bonnie Loeb asked if free-standing signs for multi-family was an alternative to signature entrance/attached signs. Mr. French said signature entrances would not be permitted for non-residential uses, only for multi-family residential uses. Ms. Loeb said she does not want to lose the good standards of the current code.

Mr. French said that, from a staff perspective, form district seems to be the best way to determine compatibility (mass, scale, intensity, mixed-use, etc.) It is more useful to use form district to determine appropriate size and scale of signage. Regarding mounting height, the current proposal is to use the area below the roof line or the uppermost portion of a parapet wall. There was still concern about Traditional Neighborhood form districts with mixed-use buildings that might have residential use on the upper floors.

Mr. Rueff said the Falls City Sign Association submitted a table of *suggestions* for changes to the Code regarding attached signs. The suggested changes were:

- Change mounting height to “below roofline or uppermost portion of a parapet wall”
- Change signs area to 15% of façade area, not to exceed 1000 square feet.
- For Downtown and Regional Center form districts (non-residential uses) – signs area should be changed to “1000 square feet”.

Regarding multiple-retail store buildings, Mr. Rueff said the number of signs can be a problem; in addition to signs designating their businesses, retailers want to put “Open” signs in their windows, signs advertising brands they sell, sales, etc. Required permits for this signage was discussed.

LED / Changing Image Signs

Mr. French introduced the portion of the meeting that concerned LED/Changing Image Signs. He distributed three handouts on the subject of study by the Federal Highway Administration regarding the safety effects of electronic billboards on driver attention and distraction. He pointed out that most of the cities and states that allow these billboards have minimum separation requirements, so that helps reduce driver distraction; also, the billboards studied are on highways.

He emphasized the importance of minimizing driver distraction, especially on heavily-traveled roadways. He said the best way to enforce a regulation on these signs is through the permitting process (restrictions on number of LED signs on a property; percentage of signs that can be LED, etc.) He discussed regulation vs. timing restrictions in terms of effectiveness. He gave some examples of what other cities have done about regulating these signs, and said he would bring more to the next meeting.

In response to a question from a Committee member, Mr. French said some problems encountered by other cities included institutional uses wanting to have them in residential zones, enforcement of timing restrictions/rate of change, video streaming, intensity of light/color, etc. He said other cities have a wide range of where video signs can or should be used. Areas that were deemed appropriate for these could be downtown areas, where traffic speed is greatly reduced; also areas with high pedestrian traffic.

One of the Committee members said that he has recently visited Los Angeles and Cincinnati, both of which have a high number of these signs. He said the light at night from these signs is very intense and glaring. Mr. Rueff said the signs were designed to have their light intensity lowered at night, theoretically to reduce energy costs.

Mr. French asked the Committee members to consider the questions at the end of his first handout and discuss these issues at the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 2:25 p.m.