

Sign Regulation Committee – Summary of Meeting

Monday, August 25, 2008

Conference Room 1, Urban Government Center

Present:

Tammy Switow for Bonnie Loeb, Greg Williams, Paul B. Whitty, Steven Ward, Judy Francis, Maggie Harlow, April Robbins (IPL), Darlene Hayden, and Kelly Will.

Staff:

Charles Cash, Christopher French, Debra Richards, and Chris Cestaro (notes)

Notes on the agenda:

Introduction

Charles Cash welcomed the new members of the Sign Regulation Committee to the meeting, and all the members introduced themselves. Items for discussion were handed out by staff prior to the beginning of the meeting. They included an agenda, a summary of the last meeting (August 11, 2008); and sign code format examples from other cities around the country.

Sign Regulation Format

Christopher French reviewed the existing form of Louisville's LDC Chapter 8 (see handout.) Next, he showed a Power Point presentation that summarized the sign code formats from other jurisdictions. He then reviewed the examples taken from other cities and how they differed from the format Louisville Metro currently uses. He described a standard Table of Contents. Finally, Mr. French showed an example of "Street Graphics and the Law" document prepared by the American Planning Association that has a model ordinance with it.

He pointed out that many of these codes start with generalizations, but then deal with more detailed legal questions. He suggested starting with generalized regulations regarding the types of signs first, and then working on how those regulations will be applied in specific zoning districts.

Maggie Harlow asked about organizing the information by types of signs, rather than restrictions in an area. (As a business owner, she thought it might be easier to understand if she could look at a permit and say, "Here's what I can do on an awning, here's what I can do on a portable sign, etc.) This is as opposed to organizing the information by zoning category or form district. Mr. French explained how this works now with the current regulations (the zoning districts are looked at first; then the signage is broken down by type.)

One Committee member asked what is it, specifically, that seems to create a problem for applicants? He said he would rather address that specific. He said

some things could be “tweaked” and there may be some content issues; however, he thought there could be some simple and small changes to the format. Mr. French said there seems to be a lot of cross-referencing that could be confusing. He gave some suggestions for format. He said a general section and statement of purpose should be standard.

Zoning and form districts, and how they affect signage and use, were discussed. Mr. French explained how the character of different form districts could affect what is permitted.

Ms. Harlow suggested an electronic database that would allow citizens/applicants to search for criteria according to neighborhood, or form district, etc. How the format should be organized was discussed.

Judy Francis asked how these revisions might affect smaller cities which have adopted Cornerstone 2020, but have more restrictive standards. Mr. Cash said smaller cities were all encouraged to adopt Cornerstone 2020, but often they have an additional layer of regulations. He said many smaller jurisdictions want to maintain the uniqueness of their areas.

Mr. French showed a Power Point of the sign code format from the city of Minneapolis, which is in a chart, or table, format, and is broken down into uses. The paragraphs are in turn broken down into categories.

A non-Committee member, who identified himself as a sign-company owner, said that what is already in Cornerstone 2020 seems clear. He is in favor of simplification; use what’s already there, but make it simpler to access and use. Mr. Cash said the goal of this Committee is to put together what is already there in a more simplified version.

Kelly Will asked how topography might affect sign height regulations, what type of variances may be needed, and/or uses. Mr. Cash and Ms. Francis both agreed that topography does make a difference.

A Committee member suggested that graphics or illustrations in the Code might make some regulations more understandable. Mr. French showed a drawing illustrating different types of signs. April Robbins agreed that illustrations could greatly help to clarify some of the legal verbiage.

Regarding charts or graphics, Mr. French said the current version of Cornerstone 2020 has some parts in table format, and others written in paragraph format. He said readers sometimes have trouble finding things in Chapter 8. Ms. Harlow said this goes back to the idea of a database; making it searchable. Mr. Cash said more graphics and more tabular info presentations were advisable.

Mr. French said the city of Chicago has their permitted uses in categories (uses). Under each zoning category, what was permitted in that category was listed. Mr. French said many cities use a format that has a “definition” section.

In response to a query from Mr. Cash, all the Committee members said they agreed with the idea of the sign regulations having their own definition sections and their own chapters.

Regarding definitions, Mr. French said the definition of “Business Sign” under the General Requirements section needs some revision because it may be straying into the area of content. The definition of “Directional Signs” should also be restricted to size and height requirements.

The benefits of cross-referencing versus putting everything under one heading were discussed. Mr. French said a frequent question to planners is how to calculate the area of a sign. Mr. Cash said that could be put under a “reference” section.

A citizen with the Louisville Sign Company said she was told to go by an illustration, not by the verbiage. Mr. Cash said that this may be an opportunity to redo some illustrations. Billboard regulations should be separate from residential, churches, etc. in the Table of Contents.

One of the Committee members brought up the fact that outdoor advertising is changing – people are using trucks, cars, parking lots, sidewalks, benches, mobile billboards, etc. (Bus stop advertising signs are not being included under these revisions.) The Committee member mentioned that ads are now being projected onto the sides of buildings and sometimes into the street. She wanted to make sure that some of these new/alternative forms of signage would be addressed in the Code. Mr. French said some of these projected signs can be dealt with under “Illumination”.

In response to a question from one of the Committee members, Mr. French said an attached sign is regulated based on the size and height of the building it is attached to.

Regarding breaking down the signage into categories, Mr. French recommended breaking it down by Use, Form District, kind of sign, location, etc.

The next meeting will deal potential format changes to Chapter 8 Part 3. Judy Francis suggested adding something dealing with Maintenance and Repair to the Code.

The meeting adjourned at about 2:30 p.m.