

BRIEFING NOTES

NAME OF GROUP:	PLANNING COMMISSION
DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING:	Wednesday, May 13, 2009, 11:45 a.m. Mayor's Conference Room, County-City Building, 555 S. 10 th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska
MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:	Michael Cornelius, Dick Esseks, Wendy Francis, Roger Larson, Jim Partington, Lynn Sunderman and Tommy Taylor. Gene Carroll and Leirion Gaylor Baird absent
OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:	Bob Norris of Nebraska Sign Company; Fred Hoke, Terry Kathe, Mike Petersen, Chuck Zimmerman of Building and Safety; Marvin Krout, Christy Eichorn, Steve Henrichsen, Ed Zimmer, Mike DeKalb, David Cary, Brandon Garrett, Rashi Jain and Michele Abendroth of the Planning Department; other interested parties.
STATED PURPOSE OF MEETING:	Proposed amendments to the sign ordinance.

The meeting was called to order at 11:45 a.m.

Christy Eichorn began by noting that the current sign ordinance was written in 1979. It has served the community well over the past 30 years. Although the sign ordinance is still effective, staff has found that it is cumbersome and difficult to interpret in some areas. This is in part due to text changes that accommodated specific developments and to changes in technology and types of sign designs.

Staff looked at how we can make the existing ordinance clearer and easier to understand. Surveys were sent to contractors to ask them what they would like to see changed. They also looked at sign ordinances from other cities, but they found that every city does it differently. Our sign ordinance is good and effective, but it needs to be more understandable.

First, staff reviewed common definitions in the sign ordinance. A 'pole sign' is a sign over 10 feet tall often mounted on a pole. A 'ground sign' is a maximum of 10 feet tall. These terms are used in the existing sign ordinance but will be replaced in the revised ordinance. The updated ordinance will use the term 'freestanding sign' which is any sign not connected to a building. Another new term is 'center identification sign' which is intended to be a larger sign that can advertise the center and the stores that are in the center. It is defined as a sign in which at least 10% of the sign area identifies a commercial center by name, address or symbol. It can also identify businesses within that center. A 'commercial sign' is any sign which serves to advertise and/or identify a product, service or activity conducted on or off the premises on which the sign is located.

Staff also clarified and added a provision that non-commercial messages can be put on any commercial sign. Krout added that this is an issue of free speech.

The purposes of the sign ordinance changes are to meet the needs of today's businesses, sign contractors, civic and religious institutions; to maintain the public health, safety and general welfare of the community; and to preserve and enhance the aesthetics of our existing and future streetscapes.

The goal is to make the ordinance easier to understand, implement, use and ultimately make it easier to follow. To reach the goals, staff has attempted to provide consistency, clarity and cohesion in the ordinance.

Items in the ordinance that are not being changed are signs in residential districts, off-premise signs and non-conforming signs, and special district signs.

Changes that were made include the addition of tables and graphics, the elimination of redundant language, the elimination of small differences between similar districts so they could be grouped together, and making some signs shorter and some taller. Other changes include the district sign requirements for PUDs, removing the limitations on the time duration for temporary signs used to advertise non-commercial messages, and adding language from Chapter 22.05 dealing with sign construction.

Graphics that were added include a table showing how to calculate the area of a sign, a table describing what is allowed for off-premise signs, and tables for signs in residential and commercial districts. Redundant language was grouped under 'General Provisions'.

Eichorn noted a key point is that in all commercial zoning districts with the exception of the O district, all signs in the front yard are allowed to be 50 square feet in area, signs outside the front yard are allowed to be 100 square feet in area, and center signs are allowed to be 150 square feet in area.

Today B-1, B-3 and B-4 are all business districts in older areas of town that have similar sign restrictions. Currently, the ordinance allows 1 pole or ground sign per business per frontage OR 2 if 1 business per premise with 150 feet of frontage OR 1 combined. The proposed language allows 1 freestanding sign per business per frontage OR 1 center sign per frontage.

In the B-2 and B-5 districts, both allow 1 ground sign per free standing pad site/ building and 1 ground or pole sign per public street with a minimum of 300 feet of street frontage. The proposed language is to have 1 freestanding sign per main building and 1 center sign per frontage.

The rules for the B districts also apply to the H districts. The only exception is that in some H districts located within 660 feet of an interstate, they can have an extra interstate sign.

In the Industrial districts which includes I-1, I-2 and I-3, the revised ordinance reduces the area of entrance (renamed center signs) in this district, but allows them to have more height.

Larson asked if any existing signs would need to be removed. Eichorn stated that any existing sign can stay in place. Any new business is allowed to make changes to the sign face. Once the business is gone, the footing and pole can remain, but the sign itself must be removed within 30 days.

Larson asked if sign contractors are aware of these changes. Eichorn stated that staff has had a great deal of contact and input from Bob Norris of Nebraska Neon. Staff worked with Mr. Norris, who has been a longtime member of the Lincoln Sign community, to develop height requirements that would work for businesses and preserve our streetscapes.

In the Office Districts, which consists of O-1, O-2 and O-3, one of the biggest changes is O-3 signs will be similar to the B-2 district. In the O-1 and O-2 district, one sign is allowed per main building. In O-3, they are proposing 1 free standing sign and 1 center sign. The R-T Residential Transition District will have the same sign requirements as the O-1 and O-2.

The O-1, O-2 and R-T districts have a maximum area of 32 square feet and a maximum height of 8 feet.

Eichorn then explained the height restrictions for ground and pole signs. The restrictions are different for each zoning district. Ground signs in Transition Districts can be a maximum of 8 feet tall and 32 square feet, 12 feet tall and 50 square feet in Use Permit Districts, and 15 feet tall and 50 square feet in Non-Use Permit Districts. Freestanding signs outside the front yard in Use Permit Districts can be a maximum of 18 feet tall and 100 square feet, 25 feet tall and 100 square feet in Non-Use Permit Districts and 35 feet tall and 150 square feet for Center Identification Signs.

Esseks asked how the changes improve the aesthetics. Eichorn stated that the proposed changes provide consistency and clarity. Ultimately, the goal is to reduce the number of signs and reduce clutter.

The proposed changes establish uniform distance requirements for illuminated signs near zoning districts. The minimum distance for signs from a residential zoning district is 50 feet if non-illuminated and 100 feet if illuminated.

In a PUD, staff changed the district that dictates allowable signs for a PUD from B-1 and O-2 to B-2, O-3 and I-3. Most PUDs have as their underlying zoning district B-2, O-3 or I-3 zoning. This provides consistency without violating the purpose and intent of the PUD.

The changes in non-commercial signs remove the limitations on the time duration for temporary signs in connection with political campaigns, nonprofit civic activities, and other noncommercial activities.

In Chapter 22, staff added language from Chapter 22.05 dealing with sign construction.

Krout stated staff is proposing that the Planning Commission hearing on the sign ordinance be on June 17.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Michele Abendroth
Planning Department

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