

Bridge Street Code – Sign Discussion

Jennifer Rauch introduced the discussion regarding signs in the proposed Bridge Street Code (BSC). She stated the presentation was meant to be informal and asked for feedback throughout. She reminded the Board members that the draft Code was provided at the first joint work session for all the Board and Commission members to review and provide comment.

Ms. Rauch said the Board discussed preliminary ideas regarding the sign section of the BSC at the March meeting and staff did not have time to incorporate the comments and ideas into the draft before them tonight. She said the intent of the discussion was for the Board to review the draft at a high level. She said the comments provided by the Board will be considered as we move forward with future drafts of the Code. Ms. Rauch stated sign review was on the Board's approved annual items of interest and Planning wanted to ensure signs were reviewed specifically.

Ms. Rauch summarized the common themes identified by the Board at the March meeting. She stated the Board wanted to ensure uniformity in terms of the number and types of signs and design details between planned districts and standard districts. She said the Board also expressed an interest in making sure the sign design and details were appropriate to the size and scale of the building, as well as in the instance of a ground sign ensuring it is proportionate to the site. She said the Board discussed the use and intent of sandwich board signs, whether they should be temporary or not, where they should be located, and how many sandwich board signs businesses should have. She said the Board also discussed how to address window signs and how to distinguish them from window display. She said maintenance and enforcement were also discussed as an on-going issue.

Ms. Rauch stated the Bridge Street Code regulates the types of signs permitted, the number, size, location, materials and height. She also highlighted the topic of sign color, not focusing on the number of colors, but the type of colors used. She asked whether sign colors should come from a historic color palette, or complementary to the building or structure. She said fonts were another discussion topic, as the existing guidelines specify approved fonts.

Ms. Rauch asked the Board members to envision the various sign types and numbers from a single tenant building or multiple tenant building, and from a vehicular or pedestrian oriented standpoint and provide feedback on what they find appropriate in a given situation.

Mr. Souders suggested a total maximum be permitted for a multiple tenant building with a square footage limitation for individual tenants. He stated that the proposed 25 square foot maximum was too large.

Mr. Currie cited other examples from other communities that based the area of the sign on the scale and proportionality of the building.

Ms. Rauch asked for the Board members to discuss whether the goal of the sign is for pedestrians or vehicles and whether the area of the sign is dependent on the type of sign.

Mr. Souders expressed his concern of how to define proportionality to the building and determine an area that is appropriate for the District. He stated the area of projecting signs should be consistent with the Guidelines with 6 square feet.

Mr. Souders stated that the draft Code does not distinguish between if the 25 square foot area is for four tenants in a building to share or one tenant with one large sign.

Ms. Rauch stated the draft Code could incorporate sign regulations that regulate signs for single tenant versus multiple tenant buildings.

Mr. Souders said the Code needs be fair to multiple tenants in a big building and a larger single user occupying the whole building. He said Town Center I has a sign plan that specifies locations, size and types, which were approved as a whole package. He said if a tenant wanted to deviate from the approved plan the Board would have to approve it.

Ms. Rauch stated the current Guidelines recommend approval of a sign plan for buildings with two or more tenants. She said we could investigate the parameters for approval of a sign plan for multi tenant buildings and how that should be incorporated in the draft Code.

Mr. Karrer asked how the Code accounts for signs for mixed use buildings and live-work units. Ms. Rauch said she would look into the topic as the Code moves forward.

Ms. Rauch asked the Board to discuss the permission and appropriateness of a combination of sign types within the Historic District. She stated the existing planned districts with the Historic District permit this, but standard district regulations do not. She also asked for feedback about the appropriateness of a ground sign for every business.

Mr. Currie stated the Code should permit all sign types and a combination of sign types for a particular lot. He said the setbacks and the right-of-way limit the location of ground signs along some portions of High Street and Bridge Street.

Mr. Souders stated the buildings on North High Street are setback farther and the ground signs look nice.

Ms. Rauch asked the Board to use the BriHi development as an example of a multiple tenant building, where a single tenant is permitted a wall sign and a projecting sign. She asked the Board to discuss whether an additional sign would be appropriate to the rear of the building adjacent to a parking lot.

Mr. Schisler pointed out that Town Center I provides for a combination of signs provided they are located in the approved locations. He stated the building along South High Street that contains the Nationwide Insurance tenant has a ground signs, which lists the individual tenants and allows each tenant a small placard on the door to identify the individual business and overall was well done. He said we should allow wall signs or placards when you have multiple tenants.

Mr. Schisler said the Code should allow signs on the back of buildings.

Mr. Souders stated he would like to ensure uniformity within the District regarding the sign types, numbers, combination regardless of zoning districts. He said if the requirements approved for the planned districts within the Historic District are appropriate then they should be permitted for all businesses within the District.

Mr. Souders asked how awning signs and window signs should be treated throughout the District.

Ms. Rauch stated there was difference window signs and window displays. She said the current Code permits either a permanent wall sign, ground sign, or window sign, in addition temporary window display signs would be permitted.

Mr. Souders stated the draft Code allows a ground mounted sign and a wall or projection sign, but window signs not addressed. He said the draft Code permits three permanent signs at one time, plus a temporary sale sign, and a sandwich board sign.

Mr. Souders suggested permitting two permanent signs. He asked for discussion on awning signs, as he saw them as the same type as a projecting sign.

Mr. Schisler said awnings should permit only name of the business, the street number, and perhaps a logo.

Ms. Rauch confirmed the discussion stating the Board determined ground signs are appropriate in certain locations and window signs need to be addressed within the revised draft.

Mr. Schisler agreed with two permanent signs, but suggested any combination of sign types be permitted and the list be expanded to include awning, projecting, wall, ground or window.

Mr. Souders stated the need to permit a sign to the rear of the building separate from the two permanent signs allowed along the front. He said this sign should have very limited square footage and act as a directory sign.

Mr. Souders said the draft Code permits up to four signs for a corner lot. He suggested permitting a maximum of two sign types in this instance.

Mr. Currie cited other community examples for window signs permitting 6 square feet of window sign and one-fourth of the total glass area, and ensuring it is readable from the sidewalk.

Ms. Rauch suggested a requirement that focuses on transparency to achieve Mr. Currie's goal.

Ms. Rauch asked the Board to discuss the appropriate sign heights and asked whether the heights outlined in the Guidelines should be utilized. The Board agreed to utilize the heights specified in the Guidelines as a baseline.

Mr. Currie suggested that the signs could be regulated by the street type to determine the appropriate scale. Ms. Rauch agreed to look into the idea.

Mr. Souders asked if there was a method for measuring the area of a sign without penalizing business for the white space left. Mr. Langworthy reviewed several examples, but stated it was very difficult to administer the method Mr. Souders suggested.

Mr. Karrer presented a series of historic photos of the District over several decades, which demonstrated the variety of signs provided and the character they provided to the District.

Ms. Rauch asked for feedback about sandwich board signs. She said at the March meeting the Board discussed the location, use and design.

Mr. Currie said the sandwich board signs should be used to advertise sales and not be used as another permanent sign.

Mr. Schisler stated the sandwich board sign should be displayed only during business hours and not be visible from the street when they are stored.

Mr. Currie said the size should be decreased to a standard size around 6 square feet in area.

Ms. Bailey asked to incorporate language regarding the location of sandwich board signs to not impede pedestrian traffic on the sidewalk.

Mr. Currie asked if a permit should be required. Ms. Rauch said Planning and Code Enforcement were already looking into this topic.

Ms. Rauch confirmed there were no additional comments regarding sandwich board signs.

Mr. Souders suggested a maximum square footage be allotted to address incidental signs, such as menu boards, credit cards, hours, etc and that this information is contained in one area of the window. He expressed concern for the bits and pieces to located in various windows and said he would like to see a consolidated area where this information is permitted. He said this should be treated differently from permanent window signs and display signs.

Mr. Souders said the biggest concern with the current requirements is there is no consistency among the businesses and he wanted to ensure the signs provision are more uniform.

Ms. Rauch thanked the Board for their comments and agreed to go back and review them in conjunction with the draft Code.