Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

October 25, 2023

1. **Call to Order at 6:00pm**
2. **Roll Call –** Chairperson DeBoer, Commissioners Dean, Tecca, Lyon-Jenness, and Bliesener, City Manager Stoddard, and Zoning Administrator (ZA) Harvey.
3. **Approval of Minutes – September 27, 2023**
* Bliesener noted that on Page 3, 4th bullet point from the bottom, the word simple should be changed to single.
* Motion to accept the minutes with the revision by Bliesener and supported by Lyon-Jenness. All ayes.
1. **Additions/Changes to the Agenda –** No changes
2. **Citizen Comments**
* No comments
1. **Old Business**
2. Article 15 - Signs
3. Review of Article 15
* Chairperson DeBoer asked Zoning Administrator (ZA) Harvey to go through the changes.
* ZA Harvey provided three documents to the PC members:
1. Complete draft text
2. Clean Copy
3. Set of tables and the former table so that it could be compared
* Section 15.1 – Intent – This was rewritten
* Section 15.2 – Definitions – Even with additions, this section went from 51 definitions down to 37. Sign area language and graphics was added. Temporary signs explained a variety of signs (balloon, etc.), Directional signs were corrected, Electronic signs were expanded and the definition of ground sign was expanded.
* Section 15.3 – Exempt Signs – Redundancies were removed reducing the amount of exemptions from 11 to 3
* Section 15.4 – Prohibited Signs – Reduced from 14 to 10
* Section 15.5 – General Sign Regulations – Sign surface was deleted. All the sign standards were compiled into this section; this was reorganized. Minor supplement changes occurred.
* Section 15.6 – Direct Sign Regulations – The effort was focused on sign tables; all is essentially new in this section. The PC will decide to regulate or not the following: development signs, residential and commercial signs. Parks have directional signs, helpful signs.
* In this section, the standards were looked at and the redundancies were reduced. All zoning districts have all that is current in our ordinance. The sign standards were condensed into a table with the following information: What kinds, how many, how big, how tall, and location requirements. It will be easier to look at a table to see what is allowed. All the standards are in the table with the added items in bold. C3 – Size standards for ground and monument signs are in this section but they need to be in all the districts. The ZA matched the sign standards in the other districts. Temporary signs needed to be written to bring the ordinance into content neutrality. The PC may want to regulate the number signs allowed, how big, and to look at the format and how it will be used.
* Changeable signs –The changes to this section speak to the nuances that are not currently in the ordinance. It also speaks to the percentage of sign allowed, which the current ordinance lacks. The changes add structure to the ordinance.
* Murals was an added definition, which is currently subject to PC review. Is a mural a sign? The new definition clarifies that a mural is artwork. If a store name/brand is on the mural, then it becomes a sign. Authority to regulate artwork is arbitrary. The example used is from the City of Holland ordinance metrics and can be changed. The PC needs to decide if they like the idea of mural regulations. If not, take out murals. They can be regulated with the percentage of their size on the building.
* R-3 Residential Transition – Things for the PC to consider: There are no limits on the amount of signs allowed. Signs are only limited by frontage. Wall signs – The PC may not care how many but may be concerned about the size. Currently, projecting signs on a corner parcel, in a non-residential area are allowed to have signs on the ground, one on the wall, and a projecting sign. ZA Harvey added one sign per store front to the table, although the PC may want to have two signs per store front. Currently canopy, marquis, and projecting signs are allowed; the PC may want to change that to one sign is allowed.

**Key – Bold writing** represents something we don’t do now. This table should be helpful to the public because it is easy to read. The PC could decide to use some different ideas in the new table.

* Section 15.7, 15.8 – Maintenance of Signs, 15.9 – Nonconforming Signs – These will be corrected and reorganized for clarification.
* Section 15.10 – Sign Permits, 15.11 – Violations, 15.12 Severability – These are new portions that should be added to the ordinance, related to violations. Violations used to be misdemeanors, changed to civil infractions; these must match with the ordinance.

Discussion

* Lyon-Jenness asked about the electric display signs and if the City Hall sign was considered to be one. ZA Harvey stated that it is considered a #1) Electronic changeable copy sign; most signs with letters are considered this.
* ZA Harvey said that pictures and graphics signs are considered 2). 3) Video display sign. The way the ordinance is written allows for 1 and 2. We define 3 and 4 because they are prohibited signs.
* Dean stated that she likes what was added to murals.
* ZA Harvey stated that the City could limit how many murals are allowed.
* Tecca stated that he has seen towns with multiple murals and they draw in the public.
* Lyon-Jenness said that a mural could be a historical story/picture.
* ZA Harvey has heard that some people view murals as graffiti.
* Bliesener thinks it looks great and that the PC has to wrap its head around the decision.
* DeBoer stated that the PC will need to take a close look at temporary signs.
* Lyon-Jenness asked about prohibited signs on page 6, animated signs definition. What is disallowed?
* Bliesener said that it makes her think of a waving sign in Vegas, with its action/movement.
* ZA Harvey said that signs that spin, like beacons are not allowed.
* DeBoer recalled a rotating sign at Orrin B Hayes.
* Tecca spoke about Section 15.5 where obscene matter is prohibited. He feels that the way that it is stated is interpretive. Even if it is something like the sculpture of David, some would say it is unacceptable.
* ZA Harvey said that currently the City ordinance can identify and regulate what is allowed. Standards may be subjected to interpretation. The PC has the right to regulate it.
* Bliesener said that she would like the PC to regulate it.
* ZA Harvey said to have the City attorney look at the language of this standard to see if it’s acceptable. She also spoke to language about a non-used sign that was removed from the current ordinance. If the City is not enforcing this part of the ordinance, then it needs to be removed. Signs in disrepair and standard zoning language remains.
* DeBoer asked ZA Harvey what the PC will work on at the next meeting besides any questions that they have from diving into Section 15.6.
* ZA Harvey confirmed that the focus would be on Section 15.6. They would also be looking forward in January 2024 to do some housekeeping, annual reporting, elections and the Work Plan. Items in the Work Plan would include: Items in the Master Plan, Identified by using ordinances and consistency with State laws. She will share ideas for the Work Plan in November.
* DeBoer stated that he has been keeping track monthly of what has been going on, but would like ZA Harvey to check the PC’s track record. He asked if she would come with suggestions that include a small narrative.
1. **New Business** - None
2. **Comments from Planning Commissioners**
* Lyon-Jenness asked about the sale of property in the City. Specifically if there were provisions to reacquire the parcel if a developer did not do the work. The City Manager stated that the real estate attorney has been advised regarding this situation.
1. **Next Meeting** – November 29, 2023 at 6pm

1. **Adjournment** – Motion by Lyon-Jenness, supported by Bliesener. All ayes. Meeting ended at 7:05 pm.