

PLANNING COMMISSION

October 4, 2012

The City of Portage Planning Commission meeting of October 4, 2012 was called to order by Chairman Cheesebro at 7:00 p.m. in Council Chambers of Portage City Hall, 7900 South Westnedge Avenue. No citizens were in attendance.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Wayne Stoffer, Bill Patterson, Paul Welch, Miko Dargitz, David Artley, Allan Reiff and James Cheesebro.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

None.

MEMBERS EXCUSED:

Rick Bosch and Dave Felicijan.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Vicki Georgeau, Director of Community Development; Christopher Forth, Deputy Director of Planning, Development and Neighborhood Services; and Randall Brown, City Attorney.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Chairman Cheesebro led the Commission in the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chairman Cheesebro referred the Commission to the September 20, 2012 meeting minutes contained in the agenda packet. There being no comments, a motion was offered by Commissioner Dargitz, seconded by Commissioner Patterson, to approve the minutes as submitted. The motion was approved 7-0.

7:05 p.m. – The Commission took a short recess and reconvened the meeting in conference room number 1 at 7:10 p.m. to discuss business signs

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

None

SITE/FINAL PLANS:

None

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Business Signs. Georgeau provided an introduction regarding the topic of business signs. Georgeau summarized the topics of review by the Council Sign Committee involving business signs and the desire of the Committee to obtain input from the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals members. After receiving input from the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals members, the Sign Committee will report back to City Council and further discuss the topic of business signs at the upcoming City Council retreat. Georgeau explained the intent of the sign ordinance and summarized the historical development of the ordinance and amendments that have been made over the years as well as administrative trends relating to the number of permits issued annually, Zoning Board of Appeals variance requests and typical sign violations.

Georgeau requested input from the Planning Commission regarding signs (freestanding, wall and temporary signs) in general, and if there were concerns or opportunities to consider. Chairman Cheesebro indicated he attended the City Council meeting when the banner sign amendment was discussed and there was very little public interest at the time. In addition, he noted only one citizen and one sign company commented at the hearings for electronic message displays. The discussion that followed focused primarily on temporary and banner signs. Commissioner Dargitz commented that she believes there may not be a level playing field regarding the use of window signs since some businesses and institutional uses may have significantly more window area than others. Georgeau stated that the sign ordinance does not regulate signs placed on the inside of a window(s), but that windows along a building façade are encouraged for architectural interest and design. Commissioner Dargitz also mentioned that signs present a placemaking opportunity as opposed to a competition among businesses to attract attention. Commissioner Welch asked what the community should like related to the use and appearance of business signs: Las Vegas v. Richland v. Hilton Head. Commissioner Welch also asked if there is a community that could serve as Portage's benchmark. Commissioner Welch acknowledged the need for businesses to advertise but also need to look at the big picture. Commissioner Welch mentioned the problems with the use temporary signs and glare/brightness of electronic message display boards (EMD). Commissioner Artley commented that not all signs should have to look the same. Businesses should have choices, but at the same time there should be regulations to ensure consistency for business owners. Commissioner Artley stated very tall signs appear out of place and multi-tenant signs with numerous sign panels can be hard to read.

Commissioner Welch identified three categories of signs: Standard business signs, temporary signs and creative or unique signs. Creative or unique signs, such as a tea cup, should have some mechanism for approval. Commissioner Dargitz noted that with the development of low cost GPS devices used to find places of business, the need for signs is less today. Commissioner Welch agreed and suggested the intent of a sign to identify a location may be less today than it was 40 years ago and the cost for a larger sign may better suited for advertising purposes. Chairman Cheesebro noted that signs being erected today are attractive, but had concerns about the brightness level of some EMD signs. Commissioner Patterson concurred and added that dramatic background contrast of some EMD signs are distracting and poor design. Commissioner Dargitz suggested regulating sign colors/contrast. Attorney Brown advised against this type of regulation. Commissioner Stoffer stated that temporary signs are his primary concern. Some temporary signs can have the appearance of litter. Commissioner Welch suggested that if a wide variety of signs are permitted, it can create inconsistent problems for business owners. Limiting the use of signs levels the playing field and creates less competition among businesses. Commissioner Welch also mentioned that South Westnedge Avenue corridor is unique and perhaps an overlay district for sign regulations should be considered. Commissioner Stoffer suggested offsetting freestanding signs so the view of a sign is not blocked by another.

There being no further discussion, Georgeau thanked the Commission members for their input regarding business signs and indicated their comments would be forwarded to City Council.

STATEMENT OF CITIZENS:

None.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher T. Forth, AICP
Deputy Director of Planning, Development & Neighborhood Services