

**Brandon Planning Commission
Sign Ordinance Hearing
March 31, 2014**

Planning Commission Members Present: Anne Bransfield, Jeff Guevin, Linda Stewart, Marty Feldman, Tracy Wyman

Others present: Richard Baker, Tina Wiles, Devon Fuller, Eric LaRock, Eric Mallory, Wayne Kingsley, Janet Mondlak, Sue Gage, Maria Ammatuna, Dave Atherton, Robin Bennett, Edna Sutton, Ethan Swift

Call to Order:

Anne Bransfield opened the Sign Ordinance hearing at 7:03PM.

Introductions:

A motion was made by Anne Bransfield and seconded by Marty Feldman to start with the Sign Ordinance hearing and then move to the Waiver hearing, followed by a Planning Commission meeting. **The motion passed unanimously.**

The hearing was open to discuss the Sign Ordinance proposed to the Brandon Land Use Ordinance.

Questions/General Discussion:

Bernie Carr stated many of the questions being brought up are concerning lit signs. Mr. Carr read the following excerpt from a publication:

“Mobile customers who stop on impulse demonstrate the importance of knowing that potential consumers – those whom you think know where you are – are constantly coming and going. You are constantly in need of replenishing your customer base. Effective signage does just that. It announces your presence, especially to those who are new to an area, and who are looking for a reliable provider of your product or service.

A sign should possess optimum visibility, readability and conspicuity.

When revenues had stagnated, a friend of the owners suggested a new sign. The installation of a new V-shaped, internally illuminated sign increased gross annual revenues by 16% during the first year. In the second year, revenues increased another 32%.

Impulse trade is very important to many businesses. And because the stops are not planned, it is unlikely that drivers would stop without an effective sign to guide them. The goal of any business is to attract the attention of potential customers, and signs play a role in convincing that potential customer to stop. Signage is often the only visible clue that a business exists.

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The data and research in this handbook have demonstrated that the on-premise sign is the most efficient, most cost effective form of advertising available to a small business. In its most basic form, it has been shown to be responsible for bringing in as many as half of all new customers. When it is designed as part of an overall site motif, and tied in with other forms of advertising, it benefits to the bottom line can be even more substantial. The sign tells everyone who see it that they are welcome to come inside and conduct a business transaction.

One other thing, the issue of illuminated, neon and flashing signs. The new sign regulations do a very good job of controlling interior lit signs on the outside of buildings, but the questions we have are involving illuminated and flashing signs inside our windows. It actually makes the case for the effectiveness of these signs by the fact that they've done such a GOOD job of attracting your attention. The fact that the Chinese Restaurant's open, flashing sign has their name on it should only mean that it has to be a part of the overall square footage allowance of their facade signage. The information above clearly shows the effectiveness of lit signs to passing motorists and with 10-14000 cars passing our storefronts every day, we need to do all we can to stop a percentage of them. Therefore, we request that illuminated signs be allowed in our windows."

Mr. Carr stated in this economy, it is important for the town that businesses stay viable.

Eric Mallory stated many stores are fighting to stay open and many stores are closing across the state. He started a business 27 years ago and it is harder to make the bottom line look better now. He strongly feels what is inside the building is his. He pays taxes on his property and he needs to have the signage and he wants his signage visible. He has never had an illuminated sign and he has been offered a sign by a tire dealer and he feels that the Planning Commission is infringing on his business. He pays his taxes on his building and he wants to run and market his business effectively. Many businesses have gone away, such as Nexus and Tubbs and the local businesses need to have lighted signs and sandwich signs. There are companies that help businesses with signage, such as beer distributors, who will give the businesses signs. Businesses should be able to market and advertise their services.

Janet Mondlak would like to hear the opinions of why the Planning Commission feels it is important to regulate what is inside the windows and the objection to lit signs. Tracy Wyman does not feel it should be regulated. Jeff Guevin stated his understanding is that the Planning Commission can regulate this because the signs project outward. Aesthetics need to be balanced and it is clearly within the Planning Commission's power. Anne Bransfield stated this ordinance is the result of years of work. They were working on this ordinance when Ethan Swift was Chair of the Planning Commission. They have reviewed many ordinances and it is not thought that anything proposed is out of line. She is open to working with the business community and is open to input. Mr. Guevin stated the Planning Commission does not have the authority over blinking signs; the state has a mandate against blinking signs. It was noted that any signs that are blinking are out of compliance. Linda Stewart stated Brandon does not want to be a Woodstock, but the town does rely on travelers and one of the reasons people like Woodstock and go there is because it has a certain charm, look and feel and that is the kind of feel that the Planning Commission would like to cultivate in Brandon. Marty Feldman stated there is a balance between the right to sell product in the stores and the ability to sell the town. A historical, clean

look to the town will bring more people to town. He stated a lot of businesses in town benefit from tourism and the Planning Commission is trying to promote that.

Eric Mallory stated we don't need 20 foot neon signs, but the 1 by 2 open sign is a very boring look and he relies on the travelers. He has had many people indicate that some of his signs have brought business to him.

Tracy Wyman stated 30 years ago, the windows of the buildings were full of weekly specials. When one came into town, there was a lighted sign for stores that were selling and being able to have signs in the windows is part of the history.

Dave Atherton stated Woodstock is a far away comparison, as they have clientele with a lot of money to spend. He stated window signs are an important part of business and signs are what sell product.

Maria Ammatuna stated during Irene there were many people who did not realize what the town had to offer. When Route 7 is straightened out, they will be coming through quicker and there will be less of an opportunity for the traveler to see businesses. She has a business that is in a mixed development, and with the way the signage is for Park Village, it is very restrictive. There is a sign that one can pay a fee to have their name on it, however, no one sees them. She stated the town does not want to be so non-descript that one cannot find anything.

Janet Mondlak stated the businesses that are well established may not need the signage; however, any new businesses will not have the opportunity to become well established without signs. This is the most restrictive sign ordinance that she has seen in the 25 years that she has been in town. She stated maybe the businesses that are well established do not need it, but the newer businesses do need the signage. Linda Stewart stated with Park Village, the signage could be designed to have a cluster sign. Ms. Ammatuna noted the state sign permit cost \$100.00 per year per sign and one would need three signs for Park Village to be found. This would be \$300.00 per year for signage for a new business. She stated the signage to Park Village is not correct and this is why those businesses are getting very irritated. She would like to have a sign out on the corner of Route 7. Tina Wiles stated when the ordinance was drafted, the two sites that were focused on were the Ayrshire Building and Park Village. Some of the other people in the development are not on board to make the change. The Planning Commission tried to address Park Village like the state office building in Middlebury. The changes are in place, but it is necessary to get everyone together on the same page.

Wayne Kingsley stated being in the vegetable business, he would like clarification on whether it is a product. Tina Wiles stated vegetables are not considered products. Mr. Kingsley interprets that he can have up to two signs and not exceed 64 square feet and asked if there are considerations for grandfathering signs that are already in place. Tina Wiles advised current signs will be grandfathered, unless the business makes a change to their sign. She also noted there are special considerations for agriculture signs.

Maria Ammatuna asked if she gets market development funds and carries a specific product; would she be able to place a logo from the product. Jeff Guevin stated it can be done within the Brandon Planning Commission

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limits of the ordinance. Tina Wiles stated there are no restrictions on products for window signage and it can cover 30% of the window. Ms. Wiles stated it is a permitted use and each window can have the 30% use. Eric Mallory does not like that there are restrictions of what is inside the window. Marty Feldman stated the Planning Commission's view is that this reflects on the look and feel of the town and they are trying to strike a balance between selling the look of the town and the businesses having the right to sell. Dave Atherton stated there are a lot of businesses that hang product in the front of their windows and the reality is that businesses do what is necessary to run their business. Tina Wiles asked what a compromise would be. Devon Fuller stated a Goodrich sign in Eric's window makes sense for a service business. Bernie Carr stated the sign ordinance has been a big project and this is a small part of the ordinance and there may need to be a little more compromise. He feels the ordinance is better than what it was before and he agrees with Mr. Feldman that an entire window covered looks bad. He agrees that windows are to be seen through.

The second Sign Ordinance hearing is scheduled for April 21st at 7PM. There was a recommendation to send the Planning Commission questions in advance. Bernie Carr stated the Planning Commission has a tough job and he feels the ordinance looks great. Mr. Carr stated he would not put lit signs in his windows, but he thinks it should be allowed.

Anne Bransfield called the hearing to a close at 7:53PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Charlene Bryant
Recording Secretary