



CITY OF TOPEKA
PLANNING COMMISSION
M I N U T E S

Monday, May 21, 2018

6:00PM – Municipal Building, 214 SE 8th Street, 2nd floor Council Chambers

Members present: Brian Armstrong, Marc Fried, Dennis Haugh, Wiley Kannarr, Corliss Lawson, Ariane Messina, Katrina Ringler, Matt Werner (8)

Members Absent: Carole Jordan (1)

Staff Present: Dan Warner, Planner III, Mike Hall, Planner III; Kris Wagers, Administrative Officer; Mary Feighny, Legal

Roll Call – Chairperson Katrina Ringler called the meeting to order with seven members present for a quorum. Mr. Fried arrived after rollcall.

Approval of Minutes from April 16, 2018

Motion to approve; moved by Mr. Haugh, **second** by Mr. Kannarr. Mr. Fried arrived prior to the vote. **APPROVED** (7-0-1 with Ms. Messina abstaining.)

Discussion Items

Building Design Standards

Mr. Warner presented a PowerPoint presentation for review and discussion of non-residential building design standards updates, reviewing the DRAFT standards provided in the agenda packet. During the presentation there were questions and discussion with and by Commissioners.

Following a question, Mr. Warner explained that the standards are to apply to projects that require building permit.

Mr. Warner confirmed that design standards would be reviewed by Planning staff and as early in the design process as possible so there are no “surprises” late in the project. This is part of the “early site plan review” that is encouraged by Planning staff and has been in practice for awhile now.

In regard to d) on p. 3 of the draft, Mr. Warner explained that this is something the technical committee is still working on. It was agreed that we should research what other cities require.

Mr. Warner reviewed the Non-Residential Design Standards – Building Design Review Examples included in the agenda packet, as well as the Building Design Standards (pp. 5-7).

For windows/doors (___% of the area of the front façade required), Mr. Fried asked if garage doors will count as “doors”. It was agreed that they probably should not count.

There was additional discussion about d) on page 3, with Mr. Kannarr asking if there will be a “look back” provision in case someone breaks a remodel into stages. Mr. Warner stated that we don’t currently do that but it’s something to consider. Mr. Werner added that for remodels, it only pertains if someone is adding on

APPROVED

or reducing the size of the building, or changing the façade. If only interior changes are planned, exterior standards will not apply.

Sign Code Revision

Mr. Hall presented a PowerPoint presentation for review and discussion of existing and proposed standards for free-standing and wall signs in Commercial and Office & Institutional Districts, as well as the Proposed Standards and City Comparison that was included in the agenda packet.

Mr. Hall explained that the first step in the sign code update is to review wall and free standing signs in Commercial and Office & Institutional Districts. These make up the highest number of signs currently installed and being permitted. He went on to explain that the code must balance safety, traffic safety, business identification needs, communication needs, and wayfinding needs. It must also be constitutional, taking into account freedom of expression and freedom of speech.

Mr. Hall reviewed some of the issues of the current sign code, including lack of clarity, overly permissive standards, especially in Commercial and Industrial Districts, unsightly signs, quantity and quality, etc. He also reviewed some of the outcomes of the Visual Appeal Survey which seems to indicate that people prefer short, monument style signs.

Questions/clarifications as Mr. Hall went through his PowerPoint presentation included that the “height” of a sign is the very top of a sign (not the top of the pole) and the square footage is based on one side of the sign or one sign face.

Mr. Hall reviewed options for when people would be required to come into compliance with the new standards, including when a sign is re-faced, when a cabinet is replaced, when the entire sign is being replaced, or if there’s a business change. He explained that the technical committee is not ready yet to make a proposal on this yet but anticipates it will be on the side of the less onerous.

Following a question, Mr. Hall explained the concept of “incidental signage” which might include directional signs, menu boards, etc. that would be subject to a different set of standards. He added that large institutions such as hospitals, school campuses, retirement communities, etc. have a lot of need for directional signage that can be handled through a “master sign plan”.

Mr. Hall noted that in some instances, staff is recommending more restrictive height standards than what representatives from the sign industry would recommend.

Ms. Ringler noted that there will be a discrepancy at some point when the sign code is changed and asked if signs would be grandfathered in. If they are, when would the more restrictive standards be triggered, etc. She noted there is an issue of potential hardships that may come about when there are existing 40’ signs and new sign codes require a business owner have a maximum 25’ sign, putting them at a disadvantage to their neighbor with a grandfathered (legal non-conforming) sign. She also noted that there comes a time when the code has to be updated and that the technical committee had discussed this. Mr. Werner stated that there should be a standard set and that cities he’s aware of allow a panel change, but anything beyond that would require the sign come into compliance with the new standards. Mr. Fried stated that he believes the standard should be set once rather than changing it gradually over time to finally get to the standards the city ultimately desires.

Discussion continued about when and how signs might be grandfathered and when they might lose their grandfathered status. Discussion of a “hard deadline” was included, with an example of a city that did this (Goddard / deadline 2021), as well as discussion about the cost of sign replacement for businesses. Both Cindy Proett and Virginia Baumgartner of Luminous Neon came forward to give information and answer questions.

There was discussion about the fact that if you provide a maximum height of (i.e. 15'), almost every sign installed will be 15' and this initiated discussion about possibly allowing additional height if the sign is set back further from the street.

Mr. Hall spoke about wall sign standards and suggested the possibility of the standard based on a ratio of square feet per linear foot. This hasn't been discussed yet by the technical committee so no recommendation is ready. He also explained that sign material will determine whether the wall sign is considered "temporary" or "permanent".

Communications to the Commission

Mr. Warner reminded the Commission that the June meeting date is June 25 in Council Chambers.

With no further agenda items, meeting was adjourned at 7:35.