



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and City Council

From: Charles Goff, Assistant to the City Manager

Re: Sign Ordinance

Date: March 13, 2014

In anticipation of our sign ordinance discussion at Monday's work session, the following summary is provided for your information and review.

Background:

The code defines a sign as "any device, flag, light, figure, picture, letter, word, message, symbol, plaque, or poster visible from outside the premises on which it is located and designed to inform or attract attention of persons not on the premises." The sign ordinance was enacted to provide standards for the erection and maintenance of these private signs in order to maintain a certain level of safety, communications efficiency, and landscape quality and preservation.

The most recent revision to the sign code occurred in 2010. At that time, the Council requested that staff look at two issues in particular. The first related to the kind of signage that the code encouraged. Up until this point, pole signs were prominently used by businesses in Addison. As the landscaping matured, trees began to block the view of these signs creating conflict between signage and the Town's landscaping requirements. To correct this, the code was amended to allow for larger multi-tenant monument signs. This brought the signage away from or below the tree canopy and allowed for more creative and aesthetically pleasing signage than could be achieved with pole signs.

The second main issue that was reviewed by staff related to the size of signage allowed. Prior to the updates of 2010, letter/logo height was only regulated based on how high the sign was above grade using the following scale (Schedule A):

Sign Height Above Grade (feet)	Maximum Letter/Logo Height (inches)
0-36	16
37-48	36
49-100	48
101-150	60
151 and up	70

This scale gave no deference to the distance of the sign from the street curb, so signage that was 50 feet away was required to be the same size as signage 500 feet away from the street curb, unless Council granted an exception. This led to many requests for meritorious exceptions from business owners. To accommodate these concerns, the code was amended to include a second scale that took into consideration horizontal distance (Schedule B):

Horizontal Distant of Sign From Street Curb (feet)	Maximum Letter/Logo Height (inches)
100-149	24
150-199	27
200-249	30
250-299	33
300-349	36
350-399	42
400-449	48
450-499	54
500-549	60
550-599	66
600-649	72
650-699	78
700-749	84
750-799	90
800 and up	96

The Meritorious Exception

The meritorious exception has always been included in the sign code to allow some flexibility for Council when considering signage. It is not the intent of the code to discourage innovative signage and it is conceivable that signage proposals, while clearly not conforming to the code, have merit based on specific or unique conditions that exist on the site.

As noted above, it was, in part, the number of meritorious exception requests that Council was receiving that prompted the previous review of the sign ordinance. Staff recalls that prior to code changing, between 10 and 15 requests were brought to Council for consideration each year. Since that time, the number of requests has been significantly lower.

Calendar Year	Number of Requests	Number Approved
2010 (partial)	3	3
2011	4	4
2012	5	4
2013	5	4
2014 YTD	3	1

Policy Options

The Council has three policy options with regards to the meritorious exception. Council could maintain the meritorious exception as-is with no change to policy or procedure. The second option would be to eliminate the meritorious exception process. Another option is to delegate decisions regarding meritorious exceptions to another body. Many other cities handle sign variances as they do other zoning variance request by utilizing the Board of Zoning Adjustment for review and consideration. It should be noted that BZA has a different standard for approving zoning variances and the applicant has to prove that the existing requirements impose an undue hardship on the use of the property in order for the variance to be approved.

Staff is prepared to discuss these issues in more detail with Council at the work session, however please let me know if you have any question in the meantime.