

Planning Board Meeting
November 12, 2013
6:30 pm

Council Chambers

Minutes & General Account

Planning Board Members Present: Art Wise, Dot Perdue, John Capes (Alternate for Kerry Miller), Sarah Glanville and Eddie Oakley

Town Council Representative: Lynn Montgomery

Staff Present: Matthew Johnson and Martha Wolfe

Visitors Present: Dean Ebert, Ebert Sign Company; Carol Brooks of the Jamestown News

1. Call to Order – Art Wise presiding, called the meeting to order.
2. Approval of minutes from October 14, 2013 – Dot Perdue made a motion to approve the October 14, 2013 minutes as presented. John Capes made a second to the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote.
3. Continuance of Public Hearing to consider a Master Signage Plan for the Forestdale Shopping Center – Matt Johnson stated this is a continuance of the Public Hearing from October 14, 2013 to consider a Master Signage Plan for the Forestdale Shopping Center. The reason due to the original sign company that the applicant had contacted went out of business. The applicant requested the Public Hearing continued to allow them to contact another sign company to quote the project. Dean Ebert, Ebert Sign Company, was present and representing the applicant. The applicant, Hackeny Real Estate Services, is located out of town.

Johnson explained that the Town's current sign ordinance has a provision to allow a Master Signage Plan. There are certain types of developments that qualify for this provision. These types being: Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND), areas of Town governed by corridor plan or other area plans that include sign guidelines or commercial/institutional/industrial or mixed use development containing three (3) or more acres in area. The subject property fits into the commercial development containing three (3) or more acres of land. We understand that Shopping Centers are unique in that they are larger and require a different sign ordinance than one single building on a small lot. The sign ordinance contains the flexibility to bring forth a Master Signage Plan for these parcels to change/vary from the sign ordinance.

The applicant has submitted a Master Signage Plan for the subject property. Johnson called upon Dean Ebert, Ebert Sign Co., to present this proposal. Ebert handed out two (2) proposals to the Planning Board Members. Option A – 14' version and Option B – 12' version. Ebert stated the only difference between the two versions is the base of the sign. The base on the 14' sign is increased by an additional 2'. Ebert described that the top portion of the sign is aluminum, push through face. At night, the only part that lights up is the copy itself, the green background does not light up. The faces of the tenants' signs are internally luminated so the background does light up. The sign has a stucco finish in earth

tone. In his opinion, this sign is much more attractive than the existing sign which is to be replaced. The current sign is a commercial look, the proposed sign is a more up to date monument look. It allows tenants to gain some exposure. Some of the smaller tenants are lacking in exposure on the Main thoroughfare.

Capes asked the expected time table for the project. Ebert stated as soon as the permitting process could be completed. The applicant is ready to start.

Dot Perdue asked the height of the current sign. Ebert could not verify the height. However, the current sign was constructed under the sign ordinance prior to the adoption of the 2009 ordinance. The height restriction at that time was 16'. Oakley asked the height of the Sheetz Store. Johnson stated the Sheetz sign is 12'. Sheetz went through this same process and received the approval of a Master Signage Plan for their site. Glanville asked what advantage is there making the sign shorter or taller. Ebert stated the main reason for the taller sign is to raise the tenants' signs up 2' to be visible over vehicle height.

Capes asked if this change could have a negative impact elsewhere for the Town. Johnson stated the purpose of the Master Signage Plan provision is to allow flexibility that works for the specific site and works for the Town as well. Approval is subject to Planning Board recommendations and ultimately the Town Council's approval that the plan is appropriate for the Town.

Capes commented he thought the 14' height made more sense. Ebert stated the disadvantage of the 12' height would be the tenants' signs located on the bottom would not be visible from the Main St. Also, any type of shrubbery would cover them up.

Oakley said when the Sheetz Master Signage Plan was approved, the Board had a long discussion regarding the 12' signs. Johnson agreed, Sheetz was the first owner to request a Master Signage Plan. The Planning Board did discuss the height restrictions at length. Johnson said the current ordinance states that 8' is the maximum height for a monument sign. That restriction is not practical for a shopping center, because of the number of tenants. Johnson said we often have complaints from tenants that do not have storefronts on the Main Rd. that their signs are not visible and people cannot find them. Therefore, they put temporary signs up all over town. I have to pick them up because they are not allowed. The tenants then get upset with the Town. They get upset with the Landlord.

Oakley would like to see us stay consistent. We approved Sheetz for a 12' sign. He has a concern that if we approve a 14' sign, then the next applicant will request 16'. He would like to stay at the 12' height approved for the Sheetz location. Johnson stated one factor to consider is that the size and the number of tenants is different in both locations. He is not advocating for one or the other.

Dot Perdue stated she was on the Historic Preservation Commission when the Shopping Center was constructed in Oak Ridge. The Historic Commission supervised this development. The signs approved were insignificant and did not take over the property. She felt if Jamestown is going to keep their historic theme going then the signs should be smaller. Glanville & Perdue felt it would be more appropriate to have the sign constructed in brick. The brick would be significant in keeping the historic look. Ebert said that is possible, but he would have to go back to the landlord. The brick would be more expensive. The proposed sign is already an expensive investment.

Glanville felt that the Sheetz location is not viewed the same as Forestdale Shopping Center. Sheetz is out of the downtown Main Street area. Downtown is more historic and should have a different standard. Capes said the existing Forestdale Shopping Center sign already sits higher than either of these two signs discussed. That being the case, either sign option we approve will be shrinking the current footprint. Ebert said the existing Food Lion copy is larger than what is being proposed on the new sign.

Capes said his reason for considering the 14' sign is that smaller tenants, the ones that always struggle, are the ones that will really be impacted by cutting the sign to 12'. I think to do a service to tenants we should consider the 14'. Montgomery stated 2 of the small businesses were directly impacted by not having signage on the road. She has personal knowledge of this. The initial landlord did the tenants a disservice by not providing road front signage.

Oakley restated he would like uniformity throughout the city. To him the smaller sign will serve the same purpose as a 16' sign if you display the names in appropriate scale. They will get the same publicity. Dot Perdue asked how many tenants are in the Shopping Center. Ebert stated 10 tenants signs are displayed in the sign. The tenant signs measure 2' X 4'. This size is the same for both the 12' and 14' sign. Johnson said a requirement of the existing sign ordinance is that the sign will have landscaping around it. This is not reflected in the rendition.

The Planning Board discussed that each site is different when considering a Master Plan. Topography is a factor in determining the height of a sign. (high vs. low area) They discussed the 12' and 14' height and the visibility of tenants' signs located on the bottom of the sign.

Ebert asked if the sign was done in brick would that help the Planning Board agree to the 14' option. Some Planning Board Members felt that would be more acceptable. Ebert stated he would be glad to go back to the applicant and make that suggestion. It is obviously more expensive and he would have to get the Landlord's approval for this change in design.

Seeing that this is a Public Hearing, Art Wise asked if there was anyone present that wished to speak for or against the proposed Master Signage Plan. There was no one.

Capes made a motion that assuming we are in agreement on the change to a brick sign, we move forward with the 14' rendition. There was no second to the motion.

Glanville stated she was not in favor of back lite signs. She does not think they have any place in a small Town. Her concern is that Main St. starts looking like Battleground Ave. She asked for clarification that the subject property and the ACE Hardware Shopping Center are the only Main Street properties that could be allowed to submit a Master Signage Plan. Johnson stated that any potential site in the Main Street area would have to contain three (3) acres or more. Oakley felt this proposed signage was getting away from the small town look and the aesthetic value. The Planning Board discussed ways to find a balance with height and aesthetic.

Capes asked if there was any way to get a commitment on a final rendition of what the sign would look like in brick. It was stated the Planning Board would have to continue the Public Hearing and ask Ebert Sign Co. to return with the Landlord/Applicant's agreement to the change in the signage to brick construction.

Capes made a motion to continue the Public Hearing to December 9th, 2013 meeting to get a final sign rendition and commitment from the Landlord on the change to brick construction for the 14' sign.

Glanville asked if Ebert had designed signs that have the spot lighting. Ebert said he had, but of course he could not comment on this without meeting with his client. This type of lighting is usually not used for a multi-tenant sign.

Dot Perdue made a second to the motion. Art Wise called for a vote. The vote was 4 to 1 in favor of the motion. The motion passed by majority vote.

The Town Clerk stated this Public Hearing will be continued until the December 9th 2013 meeting. There will be no further advertising since this continuance was made in an open session.

4. Public Comment Period – Carol Brooks of the Jamestown News commented about the existing sign as it relates to earlier discussions regarding a blind spot for traffic. The sign is far enough back that it should not be a problem.

5. Other business – Wise asked if there was any other business. Seeing none, Dot Perdue made a motion to adjourn. John Capes made a second to the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote. The meeting ended at 7:20 pm.