



## RUTLAND CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

City Hall – 52 Washington St. – Rutland, VT 05701  
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### **Minutes April 11, 2018**

**Present:** Susan Schreibman (SS), Alvin Figiel (AF), Dave Coppock (DC), Pat Griffin (PG) and Larry Walter (LW).

City staff present: Tara Kelly (TK), Zoning Administrator and Barbara Spaulding (BS), recording secretary.

SS, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm

#### **I. OLD BUSINESS - Sign Ordinance Presentation to Chamber members at large.**

SS opened the meeting by having all participants introduce themselves. She discussed the opus for revising the sign ordinance saying the proposed ordinance will enhance the visual character of the City while enticing new businesses to locate here. SS said she hopes this presentation will gather input from the business community.

TK said there will be opportunities for comments and questions as she goes through the presentation.

##### Results of Current Ordinance.

Ivan Rochon asked if the current signs would be grandfathered or required for a change in use of a business. TK said that discussion would be better had at the end of the presentation.

Melinda Humphrey said she noticed a difference with the current signage when she visited other communities but it was difficult to see the problem with fresh eyes when living here.

Jerry Hansen also wanted to discuss grandfathering of existing signs and added that the City has to start somewhere and he commended the Planning Commission for starting the process.

Melinda Humphrey said the current ordinance is broader than most communities around us and over time it would be beneficial to see uniformity amongst signs.

##### Creation of Sign Districts – instead of one overall standard for the City.

Dave Soulia said unless the districts relate to the existing zoning, this could be more confusing and onerous for new businesses.

Matt Whitcomb said he is intrigued by the proposed districts if the signs are compatible with the existing area.

Melinda Humphrey asked about existing trends in signs. She also said lighting standards in different districts makes more sense.

Ivan Rochon said this might work in theory, but he did not like the idea of “junky” signs allowed in one area but not in “quaint” areas and thought all signs should conform.

Scott Tommola said the intersection of Routes 4/7 is not congruous with other districts.

Ivan Rochon said 80% of his window space has signage or decoration. How is signage vs. decoration addressed?

#### Free Standing Pole Signs, before and after photos.

Jerry Hansen said the character of a building dictates what kind of business it is.

#### Monument Signs.

Melinda Humphrey discussed the Howe Scale sign and how difficult it is to read while driving. TK discussed leaning toward a plaza designation but if a business is hidden from the right-of-way, we should allow those businesses to advertise.

LW asked how effective is a list of businesses on a monument sign? Sally Rochon believes it was effective.

Mike Gauthier suggested that if the signs were designed with the same font and size it would be more effective.

#### External illumination vs. Internal illumination.

Jerry Hansen said if a business is not open at night, why should it be lit up?

Ivan Rochon said his lights are on timers and there are people downtown after hours making brand recognition.

Scott Tommola said to consider district areas where “light pollution” distracts people from coming to the region where the environment is gorgeous. He suggested external illumination that is shielded from above to prevent this.

Ivan Rochon discussed switching all pole signs to monument signs.

Melinda Humphrey said lighting in some districts makes more sense than others.

AF said the idea was that Rutland is a city but it is a city in Vermont and should look different from Boston or New Jersey.

#### Electronic Messaging Boards.

TK said it was necessary to get a legal opinion on whether electronic messaging boards can be censored.

Melinda Humphrey is opposed to electronic message boards and said the one on State Street hurts her eyes and seems unnecessary.

Luey Clough said the electronic reader at the Fairgrounds is cost effective for events and the 52 acre parcel of land could have a bigger sign to advertise the Fair events.

Scott Tommola said he felt the Fairgrounds sign was less offensive and more subdued. Mike Gauthier said these signs can be controlled.

Chris Booth agreed that too much competition with lights is not appropriate outside of downtown.

Jerry Hansen agreed about the “light pollution” and said there wasn’t any need to advertise products. He said the orientation of the Fairground’s sign made a difference.

Dave Soulia asked if the Commission had chatted with folks on the effectiveness of the reader signs and what would the impact be if the signs were denied. LW said he had talked to some business owners while measuring signs and found that some felt that smaller signs were more noticeable.

Melinda Humphrey said big box stores’ reader signs are more appropriate in Boston or NJ. Big box businesses will do what is allowed when moving into a city or town.

Jerry Hansen said safety is a factor and the scrolling reader signs affect traffic and several businesses are not adhering to state regulations for the timing of the scrolling.

#### Next Steps – What’s fair? Grandfathered or Amortized?

Scott Tommola is not keen on grandfathering all the signs but suggested perhaps there was a way to find a middle ground between grandfathering and speeding up change.

Ivan Rochon is concerned about the cost of amortization on small business owners.

Leuy Clough said it would take too many years to accomplish but the Fair couldn't afford a new sign.

Dave Soulia said one has to look at the nature of economic development in the City for businesses that are struggling and was in favor of grandfathering.

SS said she did not think the Aldermen would approve an amortization of the signs to the community for fear of political repercussions.

Scott Tommola said personally he would make the right decision vs. politics and what works best for the whole.

LW suggested that a 10 year amortization and requiring smaller, less complex signs would be less expensive to business owners.

Ivan Rochon suggested lowering the standard from when compliance would be needed such as if a sign is in need of repair or is rusted. TK said adding this criteria would trigger compliance with the new sign ordinance.

Scott Tommola agreed that maintenance of signs needs to be included and stricter going forward.

TK thanked everyone for their input and said the Planning Commission would consider their comments before sending the proposed document for legal review which was the next step.

**II. ADJOURN** - Meeting was adjourned at 6:40 pm.