

Council approves sign ordinance changes

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Flower Mound Town Council members hope that Monday night's approval of sign ordinance changes is one step in improving the working relationship between the town and local business owners.

The council unanimously voted to approve a list of sign ordinance amendments recommended by the Sign Regulations Stakeholders Committee. The committee was established in July and included long-time members of the local business and real estate community.

After the vote, Councilman Mike Wallace said the changes don't compromise the town's Scenic City Award status but helps bridge the gap between town standards and economic viability.

"There's that natural conflict between one extreme of people who want to have an arms race with signs to get their message out there," Wallace said. "And there's the other extreme, to be too strict with rules to where (businesses) can't even let people know you exist for the sake of quality of life. So we're doing a good job of finding that natural balance."

The committee looked at 17 issues regarding signs around town, and after several meetings decided on amendment recommendations on 10 of them. The council approved an amendment relating to real estate directional signs in October.

Monday, the council approved the remaining nine, which included use of electronic signs.

A digital electric message board or changeable message panel sign will be allowed on ground signs for non-residential uses other than schools and churches. They can use a changeable panel up to 50 percent of the tenant identification area. The message can't blink, scroll or contain moving or animated parts and must remain static for no less than 15 seconds.

Previously, fuel price and institutional signs were the only ones allowed in town to have a changeable message. But some businesses had expressed interest in having one, as has the Wellington HOA -- to inform residents of upcoming events.

Councilman Steve Lyda encouraged language to be put into the ordinance to allow HOAs the ability to have electronic signs. Mayor Melissa Northern said larger HOAs would be better suited for these signs than smaller ones. But town attorney Alan Lathrom said a town can't distinguish which neighborhoods can have one and which ones can't.

"A lot of HOAs had wanted these electronic signs to communicate information to their residents," Lyda said. "But the concern was having a lot of electronic signs up and down the road."

HOAs still have the ability to request one through a comprehensive sign package by going to the planning and zoning commission and the town council.

The recommendations also prohibit human signs, except for those advertising a fundraising event.

It prohibits signs located on walls, railings, fences, sidewalks, curbs, gutters, streets, utility poles, public building or structure unless otherwise allowed, which include schools.

Monument signs will also change. Businesses have been allowed to have a 60-square-foot sign with the name of the business not exceeding 25 percent of the sign. Now, the name of the company can be 75 percent of the sign. The signs will still feature a masonry border.

New businesses can now display a grand opening banner for 30 days, within 90 days of receiving its certificate of occupancy. The previous regulation was for 14 days within 30 days of receiving the

certificate. This was done to accommodate businesses who have soft openings rather than grand openings.

Regarding window signs, a business can have a permanently mounted, framed poster within three feet of the window.

Businesses whose back of the building faces a major roadway can now have signs on the back of the building without having to request a comprehensive sign package through the town.

Other recommendations relate to commercial real estate signs. Previously, real estate brokers who are advertising the sale of multiple tracts of land adjacent to each other had to post signs on each tract. The amendment allows all adjacent tracts to be advertised on one sign, though a permit number is required for the back of the sign. Also, the setback for these signs from the right of way from 20 feet to three feet.

Other changes include prohibiting signs on architectural elements, such as towers, unless the sign is located 10 feet or less from the top of the building's roof line. This was recommended to keep signs from being placed too high on buildings.

Also at the meeting, the council approved a resolution that supports HJR 56, which prohibits the state from passing new laws this legislative session that places unfunded mandates on local governments. HJR 56 was submitted by Rep. Burt Solomons of Carrollton.

"We understand that the state is under financial restraints," said Deputy Mayor Pro Tem Tom Hayden. "But so are we. The answer isn't rolling the ball down the hill to us."