

**Planning Commission
Public Hearing
August 18, 2014**

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Dennis Thomas and the secretary called the roll.

Present: Michael Blache, Ren Clark, Simmie Fairley, Nixon Adams, Dennis Thomas, Rebecca Bush and Scott Quillin

Absent: None

Also Present: Louise K Kidd, Planning Director; Michael Lauer, Planning Works; Mayor Donald Villere; Council Member Rick Danielson and Carla Buchholz

Mr. Adams stated the meeting was an opportunity for the public to provide input on some changes that were being proposed to the CLURO after Mr. Lauer's presentation. There would be a work session the next evening to discuss the input. Ms. Kidd presented that notification of the meeting had been emailed, placed on the Causeway electronic sign, included in the Mayor's e-briefs, and regular mail.

Mr. Lauer presented the sign ordinance was a complex document that had grown over the years. He had been trying to make sense of it and decide what it should say, how to say it, and how to change the regulations to make them easier to implement. This was the outline stage of the process. Problems were being identified and solutions were being reviewed. In September, drafting of the document would be prepared and then a presentation to the public would be made.

Some of the identified issues in the Town Center area included density, use and alley standards. Site triangles would be reviewed as the City had a "one size fits all" policy for the clear zones and intersections. Visibility was different in different areas.

Ms. Kidd told Ms. Berard, Berard Automotive, that the Town Center fronted General Pershing Street and the Trailhead and was not all of Old Mandeville.

Some of the issues with signs was to include content neutrality, as well as viewpoint neutrality. Content neutral would be saying, "You can't put up a sign for an election." Viewpoint neutral would be saying, "You can't put up a sign supporting a Democrat." The former could be placed if there was a good public purpose for it. The latter would not be allowed and would be thrown into court. There were some content-based regulations that needed to be thinned out. Clarity and organization, sign permit exemptions needed to be reviewed and some were difficult to justify. There were questions with multi-tenant signs and locations of electronic message centers.

Potential Permit Exemptions

- Political signs – these were different from election signs.
- Election signs (in place of political signs)- have a specific season and can be treated differently.
- Residential real estate signs - six square feet with one square foot for contract pending, and one square foot for sold sign. These were content based regulations.
- Window signs – an issue
- Flags in residential districts – consideration of being exempt from a permit, defined as representing a governmental entity. Otherwise it was a banner and only permitted on a temporary basis with a 2 week limit. Seasonal banners were permitted only through the holiday seasons. Commercial districts allowed by permit up to 3 flags.

Define

- Incidental signs – not readable from the right-of-way (menu signs, parking space signs, gas pump information). These should probably be exempt.
- Election sign - distinct from political sign
- Construction project sign – at this time there were separate construction and project signs. These were problematic on how long they remained.
- Pavement sign – should be exempt since they provided guidance for traffic.

Non-Residential Uses in Residential Districts –

- Currently 24 square feet of wall signage and 24 square feet of freestanding signage for institutional uses.
- Proposed a flexible allocation of area and consideration for multi-frontage signs.

The B-3 district regulations were changed to allow the allocation of signage.

Window Sign Issues

- Window signs – maximum 50% of the window. These were temporary signs that were beginning to multiply in some businesses. The percentage of the window occupied was important. Stick-on signage was not always temporary signs, but they could be scraped off. There was a need to clarify the difference between a temporary and permanent sign.

Meryl Lussan, Meraco Signs, said Wendy's stick-on signs were supposed to be temporary, but they often remained in the window year round. Kenny Lussan, Meraco Signs, said donut signs were added on the inside of the windows.

Temporary was defined as having the ability to take the signs down. Mr. Lussan also stated that the hours of operation was permanent, but king cake and pigs in a blanket were temporary and asked how long could that temporary sign remain. Ms. Lussan asked if the hours of operation could remain on the window. Ms. Kidd said regardless of whether it was temporary or permanent, the question was how much coverage should be allowed. Mr. Lussan said a percentage should be established no matter whether the signage was temporary or permanent.

Steve Barnett, A-1 Signs, said it would be problematic for business owners trying to survive and compete. He also stated that you could call the Coke machine seen in the window a sign. The more restrictive you were, the harder it was for the businesses. He said that the board was trying to regulate tastefulness, which was difficult. It was suggested that a percentage of the window allowed for signage would be better. Since many vending machines were located on the outside, they could be viewed as signage.

- **Lighted Signs**

This involved a collection of signs within the category. Mr. Lauer said he had not heard many complaints about neon signs, but the square footage was adding up. Once of the concerns was the electronic message centers. These were not appropriate window signs. Because the City's approach to limit animation in signage it made sense to strive to not distract drivers. While fixed lit signs made sense, the EMC made less sense because it was basically a large television.

Mr. Lussan said once again it was being proposed to do away with temporary signs due to the amount of time that some business owners left up information on the EMCs. He then stated that sometimes it was needed for a short period of time. If something was for sale, it may need to be advertised for a couple of weeks or a month. After a while, this can become ineffective. Mr. Blache asked if

a business owner received considerations from companies for having those types of signs in the window. Mr. Lauer said he did not know. Mr. Lussan did state that the companies who send the neon signs to their customers were compensating them to do so. The suppliers would send the cardboard or paper signs to the customers to place in their windows, but were not paying the companies for these. Mr. Clark said if companies would stop displaying the Coors and other beer signs, they would be paying more for the products.

It was stated that blinking signs are prohibited.

There should be a way to distinguish window display versus a sign. If a company had a good they are selling, mannequin with clothes on it, or a display in the window that was a window display and not a sign. The key to doing this was to make sure to define the legal display, and exclude illegal signs not allowed to be displayed if they were being sold. A & J Sports had very few signs, but had displays of their products for sale.

Graphics on sunshades should be distinguished from signage. Sunshades were to block out the sun, but some will have graphics on them. If there was no signage or logo, it was not considered a sign. Mr. Blache said recently a dry cleaner had a shade used to block the sun, but the shade had his name on it, which became signage.

- **Real Estate Signs**

One of the major concerns with real estate signs was on commercial properties with permanent For Lease signs. There were nice monument signs and a piece of plywood on two 4x4s that stayed perpetually. The Planning Commission had discussed this and had determined to include the For Lease designation in the total signage to be part of the sign package. Then FOR LEASE could be placed in the window or on the tenant space on the monument sign.

- **Non-residential district signs: Consolidate and simplify the number of signs**

In terms of a single premise, there was an either/or menu of a wall sign or a monument sign. If there was a monument sign, there was an allowance of a small percentage to be attached. For a multi-tenant center, the monument sign was allowed based on the linear front footage with tenant attached signage at a minimum of 32 square feet. On single tenant premise, the attached sign was capped at 24 square feet.

The board was discussing allowing greater flexibility to reallocate signage between the two areas. Mr. Lussan said that most people would like a smaller monument and larger attached signage. Ms. Lussan said that if businesses started facing too many restrictions, they would start leaving and moving elsewhere. She suggested that the businesses be given ordinances for tasteful signs and to get them what they need to get their businesses off the ground. Mr. Lussan said allowing a 100 square foot monument sign for a single tenant was too large a sign.

With multi-occupant centers, the existing ordinance started out with the thought that there would be a project sign with the name of the project NS RHWIE address. This was expanded to allow the anchor tenant up to 50% of that sign.

Now, it appeared that more companies were wanting to be located on the monument sign resulting in the inability to read anything. The question was should we be able to have some standard legibility standards. Ms. Lussan said on electronic

LED signs, when driving by, only so many businesses could be shown at a time. Mr. Lussan said as an example of a large center with 20 tenants, a 16' tall and 6' wide sign was too small for the potential size of the center. It should be a larger sign. Ms. Lussan said many owners did not want to pay for a larger sign. Mr. Lauer said larger wall signs and a monument sign was not intended to accommodate all tenants. Ms. Kidd said the original intent was to advertise the name of the shopping center. Mr. Lussan said the 50% for the shopping center name owners were unhappy. Ms. Kidd asked how to better to advertise the shopping center and major tenants as opposed to more tenants. She stated it would be difficult to read. Ms. Lussan agreed that the monument sign would be hard to read with all of the tenant names. Mr. Barnett said many shopping centers could not have the interior of the tenants seen and that having a larger sign would not help. Most centers would be satisfied with 25% center identification and 75% tenants. Mr. Barnett suggested the EMC be part of the lease and tenants pay for the sign and its upkeep. He said advertising sale items became a problem. Mr. Lauer said legibility was content neutral. It was the property owner's decision on what to allow on the message sign. Mr. Lussan suggested going by the square footage as opposed to the number of tenants in determining the space on the signs.

Mr. Lussan said many sign companies were only interested in the money. He stated that with his customers, he would go back to them explaining what the Cathy would allow. Ms. Lussan said many out of town sign companies were not including installation and permit costs. Mr. Lauer said tastefully done was hard to legislate. Mr. Barnett said there were established charts on size for specific mile an hour roads. If you were driving 45 mph and have 8" tall letters, not all tenants could be placed on the sign without it being a huge sign. Mr. Lauer said that might be the limitation of not all tenants being on the sign. Mr. Lussan said there were many business logos. Ms. Kidd asked about limiting the font size based on the charts for readability. Mr. Lussan said that it depended on the local sign companies with the permit department making suggestions and giving the final approval. John Endres, City Planner for Special Projects, suggested instead of having one large monument sign to have two reasonably sized signs. Mr. Lauer said some communities would allow that if there was enough frontage. Mr. Barnett and Mr. Lussan were both in agreement.

- **Electronic Message Centers - Allowed throughout B-1, B-2, and B-4 districts.**

The idea of limiting these to Highway 190, LA 22, North, East and West Causeway approaches was being discussed.

Mr. Lussan said he liked the percentage changes for single occupant premises and that it would be helpful to the businesses. Twin Sushi was building a freestanding building and this would allow them to reuse the existing signage. Mayor Villere suggested Mr. Lussan making the presentation of a proposal to Mr. Endres for review. Mr. Barnett said he liked residential signs for schools and churches. He also suggested subdivisions and homeowners association be allowed messages. Mr. Lauer said there was a box on the back side of the entry sign for notices for the subdivision. Mr. Barnett said churches and schools want message signs that were not on major roadways and could an exception be granted. These signs were often sponsored by other people. Ms. Kidd thought that was a good point.

- **Town Center**

The two most important issues with the Town Center was use and density. The purpose of the Town Center was to create a vibrant mixed-use center. The current regulations did not address the orientation of those uses. In trying to create

an active square with townhomes and they line the square, it was tougher for businesses to survive long-term. The Planning Commission had been discussing limiting the number of townhomes facing the Square on the first floor. In talking about those uses, the board must be cognizant of the office uses and a lot of uses other than retail service that tend to dampen vitality. Part of the current discussions were permitting office space, facing the Square, on the bottom floors until there was more of a demand for the retail use to move in there. This would allow some stability in the market.

The other issue was density. The regulations allowed one unit for every 3,000 square feet of lot area. The Metairie CBD allowed 2,000 square feet of lot area. The discussion was recommending dropping the requirement per dwelling unit to 2,000 square feet.

Ms. Berard said the City had taken a rectangle of land to create a Town Square to be used for commercial space. She was having issues with determining if her property was zoned Town Center or not. Ms. Berard asked what the City wanted to achieve with the Town Center. Ms. Kidd said it was to have a mixture of businesses, and that the question was if it was kept as a truly residential use, that it would kill commercial uses. The goal was to have a mix of both residential and business. Another important thought was parking on Lafitte Street. Drivers needed to be careful of the size of their vehicle when parking, because many trucks stuck out in the street. Mr. Lauer said another issue was on the mid-blocks north of General Pershing with a start of alleys. The City had standards for alleys and he was looking at the best way to achieve them through the review process with examples of storing garbage, having access, and residential parking. Ms. Kidd said that with Woodrow and General Pershing Streets there were rear alleys that should be extended all the way through as developed. Shiver Shack constructed an extension and that would continue on the vacant lots to the corner. Garbage trucks could access the whole way and would not have to back out.

- **Sight triangles**

This was the area at an intersection that had to be kept clear so that you can see.

The CLURO currently had a "one-size-fits-all" standard. It was proposed to adjust the sight triangles to allow visibility according to speed.

- **Auto dealers**

Small commercial lots were selected by potential operators. The change of use permit did not require compliance for landscaping and parking standards. They could continue operating within the existing site. The proposal would change the use requirement to distinguish outdoor sales as a change of use process.

- **Event centers**

This was not currently a defined use. The board would discuss parking, hours of operations, different standards by zoning districts, and the buffering of residences.

Ms. Berard asked if this would change her zoning and she could not continue with her current use. Mr. Lauer said there would be no change to her property. Ms. Kidd said she was zoned Town Center since 2008, was still a legally non-conforming use and can continue to operate. If the business was closed for six months, then compliance would be required. Mr. Lauer said prior to 2008 there was an overlay district and that the rules were not changed that much since 2008. Ms. Kidd said the

B-3 and Town Center uses were basically the same. The City had amended the industrial district into a separate category for Acadian Millworks.

The Mandeville Lions Club rented their facility and it was currently reserved for several upcoming events. It was asked if there was anything to prohibit them on what they could or could not do. Mayor Villere said the changes discussed should not affect them adversely. The Mandeville Lions Club representative said there would not be any alcohol on the site. Ms. Kidd said on the civic side there were definitions.

Mr. Lauer said the board was starting a process for fill requirements, primarily in Old Mandeville for foundations, requiring piers rather than slab and to expand the definition of critical areas. At this time, the critical areas were defined as areas below 5'. There were upstream properties that were subject to inundation.

Mr. Clark asked about signs at the Trailhead. There was a garden with 30-40 snipe signs on the same site. He asked how do you deal with that. It was stated that this was not an enforcement meeting and that it would be addressed at a later meeting.

Mr. Fairley moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Blache and was unanimously approved.


Lori Spranley, Secretary


Dennis Thomas, Chairman