

PLANNING COMMISSION
THURSDAY, MARCH 2, 2017
4 P.M.

Members present: Vice Chairman Betty Root, Jim Cunningham, Joe Frontiera, Diane LaPorte, Peggy Wittman and Rob Splane (4:02). Absent: Jerry Spencer

Also present: City Manager Stan Rickard, Mayor Ron LaPorte, senior community planner David Jirousek (Williams&works) and deputy clerk Gale Goldberg. There were also several business owners' and representatives from Main Street in attendance (see list).

The meeting was called to order by Vice Chairman B. Root at 4 p.m. The 1st amended agenda was approved (5-0) upon motion by D. LaPorte and supported by P. Wittman. The minutes of the February 2nd, 2017 meeting were approved (5-0) as presented upon motion by J. Cunningham and supported by D. LaPorte.

SIGN ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS

D. Jirousek gave an overview of the topic as presented at last months' meeting, stating it was a valuable discussion with evolving ideas and multiple options. Then he went through the memo dated February 6, 2017, listing proposed deletions, revisions and additions to Chapter 1259.

At this point commission members questioned if the Main Street program, which stresses the preservation of the historical look of the down town area, had any problems with these; and it was questioned whether the Main Street members and the down town business owners had viewed this material. It was approved (6-0) that all memo's and proposals from Williams&works be forwarded to the Hart Main Street Design Committee and that all information be open to all interested merchants, along with the pictures and samples of signs. Motion was made by J. Cunningham and supported by D. LaPorte. It was stressed that the commission would like to reach a compromise with the businesses.

Public Comments:

Stacie Hegg mentioned the motion may not be necessary since she felt they had received most of the information the commission had. She stressed the appreciation of historic preservation – the need to be realistic – the need to look to the future in order to survive- signs enable them to reach the public – and they have a substantial investment in this city and also live here.

Gail Zieger explained she and her husband have been here almost two years and invested their life savings in their venture, living in an apartment above the business – expressed the need for freedom to entice the public back downtown – hopes the sign ordinance will not be too stringent or limited.

Dale Zieger asked the commission to refer back to the opening portion of their letter dated February 25th, expressing their hopes to work together with the commission – hoping for cooperation and compromise – he feels they should be free to use today's technology but understands there will need to be some restrictions.

George Sadler did not want the commission to feel the businesses were being adversarial but felt they had been kept in the dark and the proposed changes came as such a surprise to them – he also has a big investment here and does not want to feel hand cuffed in making his business successful.

Tom Drenth – downtown businesses need to survive or there won't be a viable downtown – need to be able to communicate with their customers via signs – limiting a business to grow is counter productive.

Eva Kostal – noted she loves to walk all over the city and loves this community – finds sign boards useful, and along with cafe’ tables and chairs, these create an attractive, quaint look.

Commission discussion:

There was clarification as to why a monument sign was approved on State Street in front of the library but not allowed in the B1 district. There was a discussion with several thoughts expressed, including:

- The feeling that there is just a difference of opinion on small items
- Confirmation that the list of requests stated in the recent letter from the merchants was a firm list with no changes anticipated
- The understanding and the importance of signs as a communication tool
- Clarification of the business’ held to 25% of window space as opposed to 25% of the front of the building
- Clarification of using a back door entrance and the use of advertising at that point of entrance

The Mayor expressed to those present that the city does understand their business is important – their needs are taken seriously – and their valuable input is appreciated. He also noted that this will be a slow process and will include input from the businesses and the Hart Main Street board with the hopes of the commission making solid decisions.

MEDICAL MARIHUANA FACILITIES LICENSING ACT (MMFLA)

D.Jirousek gave another overview of this, reminding the city that Act 281 will take effect December, 2017. The city has the choice to act on it or choose to do nothing – they have the choice to prohibit it or allow it or allow it with restrictions. In order to permit a medical marihuana facility it is necessary to write zoning code to cover it.

Since some of the city council members were present they were included in the discussion. There was a clarification how this is different from the Medical Marihuana caregiver Act of 2008 and the clarification of some terms. Gail and Dale Zieger expressed their concerns that allowing this in town will bring more crime and other drug activity; and questioned if Hart has the police manpower to follow up on this. After a short discussion the city manager felt the Planning Commission would not do anything on this unless the city council directs them to do so. The general feeling was not favorable towards a medical marihuana facility.

REDEVELOPMENT READY COMMUNITY (RRC)

D. Jirousek gave a short explanation of the purpose and the goals and the benefits of this, and noted the city’s efforts toward certification. The next step is a self-evaluation. R. Splane has attended the classes and offered to do a short talk on them at a city council meeting (March 14th) and at the next Planning Commission meeting.

The next Planning Commission meeting is Thursday, April 6, 2017, at 4 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 5:20 p.m. upon motion by P. Wittman and supported by J. Frontiera and approved (6-0).