

Draft Minutes

TOWN OF GUILFORD Design Review Committee Minutes – 8th August, 2018

A regular meeting of the Design Review Committee was held on Wednesday 8th August, 2018 at 4:00p.m. in the Guilford Community Center with Chairman William Thompson presiding.

Present: Philippe Campus, Robert Charney, John Cunningham, William Thompson. David Rosenthal and Walter Weissenborn. Also present Town Planner George Kral. Excused: Shirley Girioni, Karin Patriquin, Mary Repetti and Shavaun Towers.

The meeting was called to order at 4:00p.m.

REVIEW APPLICATIONS

345 Boston Post Road (Property of Shoreline Diner and Vegetarian Enclave), Map 49, Lot 29, Zone TS: Informal discussion with billboard owner regarding changing to a digital billboard:

Attorney Tim Lee stated that he was working with the outdoor advertising company that had billboards on the Shoreline Diner property. At present there are 4 signs and the company would like to reduce this to two signs and convert to LED. As part of the application process Mr. Lee said he had been advised to meet with the Design Review Committee to obtain insight as to how the signs might be made to look better. To illustrate the proposal Malcolm Little (marketing) showed a video on a tablet of two signs in Bristol, CT. Mr. Thompson mentioned LED signs on I-95. Mr. Lee replied that his would be smaller. Mr. Charney queried the size was told 10' x 5' x 22' wide. Later in the meeting a representative said the I-95 signs were 14' x 48'.

Mr. Kral briefly explained the zoning process. The applicant wished to change a non-conforming use to another non-conforming use and so PZC would have to determine if the new signage would be more in conformity with the character of the community. The simplest form would be a reduction in size but with a change to a digital format. The question was would a smaller digital sign be less non-conforming. Mr. Kral mentioned that the current regulations do not allow the existing signs but they had been there for years. Mr. Thompson said whether the new signs were the same or smaller than existing, one was dealing with a different element. He added that there had been discussions in other towns regarding color, brightness, etc. Mr. Rosenthal asked if digital signs were allowed under the regulations and Mr. Kral replied yes. He said the question was: was a digital version of the sign at this location nicer than the existing signage. He also mentioned that the regulations prohibited billboard signs.

Mr. Campus felt this proposal might not be an issue for DRC. Mr. Charney said there was at least the question was a digital sign different to a paper sign. Could one make all 4 signs digital and why was DRC being asked this question. Mr. Kral said the signs could not be converted to digital without PZC approval. He outlined two questions: a) Does DRC have an opinion regarding the compatibility

if the signs were smaller than existing? b) Are there other things that could be done to make the situation more desirable? Mr. Cunningham said if the signs were reduced from 4 to 2 then placement could be an issue. Mr. Lee replied that the signs would be staying in the same location. Mr. Kral added that they would be part of a special permit application. Mr. Thompson asked the width of the new signs and was told 22 feet. Mr. Campus felt before DRC could come to any decision it needed more information such as a site plan, differences between new and existing signage, drawings of the signs, calibration of decrease of the area, etc. He said if the Committee was being asked to react then it needed detailed information to look at. Mr. Campus asked how long the signs would be illuminated. Mr. Lee replied that the hours would be limited. Later in the meeting he said the signs would be turned off between 10:00p.m. and 6:00a.m.

A representative said that DRC represented the community and so he would like to find out what the Committee thought would be palatable and pleasing to the community and that he was only limited by the Committee's imagination. He mentioned that the State regulated all LED signs so one could not have any motion or a change in intensity. Mr. Thompson asked if this meant the Guilford sign would have an image that came up and then after 8 seconds it would change to another image. The representative replied yes. He added that State regulations allowed illumination of 0.3 above ambient light which was reduced as darkness approached. Mr. Kral mentioned that PZC would only regulate size, location and timing. Mr. Weissenborn was concerned about how high the signage might be such as 40' high. However, Mr. Kral replied that the only signage which would be allowed was either what was there now or what PZC felt was less non-conforming than the current signage. Mr. Cunningham talked about digital signage which had been installed on the marquee at the cinema in Madison. Initially the property owner was a bit carried away with moving content and very bright colors. Now the signage was up for approximately half a day and the colors were reduced to black and white. Mr. Cunningham said he believed townspeople now liked the signage.

Mr. Cunningham said his personal opinion regarding design was that the signs would look better if there were metal supports rather than the proposed stone work. He explained that the stonework drew one's eye and it would be better if there was a bracket that disappeared, softened with plant material. Mr. Lee pointed out that as well as advertising the signs could do public service announcements such as Amber Alerts, notices of local football games, etc. Mr. Cunningham queried maintenance. The representative replied that the signage was good for 10 years apart from any electrical issues that might arise. Mr. Kral asked if anyone regulated the content of the signage. He was told the advertising agency did and that there could be no "attack ads" or other inappropriate material. Mr. Campus said if the State changed its regulations then the signs could change and Guilford would have no control over that. He was concerned that PZC did not have any regulations governing these matters. Mr. Lee felt this could be dealt with through stipulations in the approval. Mr. Weissenborn expressed concern about the precedent approving this proposal would set. He said he had just been in Pennsylvania in beautiful countryside which had been marred by signs every few miles. Mr. Thompson said a paper sign could be part of the landscape but when it had lights it orientated you to the sign more than the countryside, thus having more impact. Mr. Campus pointed out that the signage would be adjacent to the U-Haul site where people had expressed concern about

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lighting. He said the Committee was looking at a corridor not just an individual site. Mr. Rosenthal wondered how this proposal related to the *Planning and Design Guidelines: Route 1 East Boston Post Road* and asked if they contained any information regarding bigger issues. Mr. Thompson replied yes. Mr. Rosenthal said he would be curious to know how this proposal fitted into the Guidelines. He said he understood that a digital sign created more attention for the clients. He felt the cart was way before the horse because the question was should Guilford have digital lights whereas the Committee was already discussing details. The whole issue had not been addressed by PZC and how would this fit into the overall plan of Guilford? Mr. Thompson said he was not comfortable with the idea of digital signage and thought the impact would be pretty substantial. Mr. Cunningham recommended that the Committee should review this proposal because PZC would need its input regarding the aesthetics of the area, etc. Mr. Charney felt the key question was the character of the corridor and he was concerned about the precedent of having something that changed every 8 seconds. Mr. Cunningham thought the digital aspect could be separated from the design of the sign. Mr. Campus replied that you could not approve the design of something if you did not agree with the concept. Mr. Weissenborn said flashing signs were not allowed in Guilford so where did this fall into that category.

Mr. Thompson made a motion that the Committee felt this proposal did not conform to the regulations. Mr. Charney seconded the motion. During discussion Mr. Thompson said he thought basically it was setting itself up as quite separate and jarring to its surroundings. Mr. Weissenborn agreed saying it created a frame saying “look at me” more than had been allowed before. Mr. Charney asked if the sign changed every 6 hours would that make a difference. Mr. Thompson replied that it might if one knew the specifics and that the Committee almost needed to see a mock up. Mr. Rosenthal said there needed to be a balance between what was good for the community and for business. This would be moving from a passive thing to something that distracted more. Part of this was the question of appropriateness. Mr. Rosenthal said billboards were not allowed in Guilford and why was this. At some point the planners must have said they did not want this. He added that he felt awkward being asked to justify this proposal when he did not know what the townspeople would say. Mr. Charney said if the Committee agreed it was inappropriate but PZC approved it anyway then the Committee could ask for stipulations. He thought the signage should be appropriate within the context of the town but the Committee could say that the proposal went above and beyond the context of its review. How does the character of a digital sign change the realm of the community given that it changes every 8 seconds? Mr. Cunningham said he was not very familiar with digital displays and asked if the Committee could look at one. Mr. Campus had a problem with motion. He added that everything was verbal right now and that the Committee needed more detail. He had a problem with allowing something that was not allowed in town and with no reference to the Design Guidelines. He asked if the Committee should even address this proposal, noting that it would continue to affect the visual corridor. Mr. Campus pointed out that the Guidelines did not stop at the property line and that the Committee was supposed to look beyond the property lines.

Mr. Thompson withdrew his motion, noting that if the Committee did not deal with this then it was not addressing it at all. Mr. Campus felt the Committee was totally blind going into this project. Mr.

Thompson replied that the Committee could ask for more information. Mr. Lee asked the Committee to table this matter and said he would return with more information. To summarize, Mr. Thompson said some members wanted more specifics, some were not comfortable with the idea but are not certain how to frame that, there was no regulation to support the proposal, billboards were not allowed and there must be a reason for that, then there were the planning goals for Route 1 East. Mr. Rosenthal said he would like to review the planning documents, make a site visit and do his own research. Mr. Charney asked if there had been any similar applications in the past. Mr. Kral replied yes, that about 5 years ago a digital sign was proposed which was denied by PZC.

The Committee agreed to table this proposal and asked for more detailed information regarding a site plan, drawings and maybe a sample sign, etc. Mr. Charney said the main problem for him was that the sign changed.

Approval of Minutes: Mr. Cunningham made a motion to accept the Minutes of 11th July, 2018. Mr. Weissenborn seconded the motion and it was carried with 3 votes in favor. Campus, Charney and Rosenthal abstained since they were not present at the July meeting.

Public Forum: There were no members of the public present.

Approval of Bills: Mr. Weissenborn made a motion to approve the following bill: Katharine Stewart, secretarial services. Mr. Charney seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15p.m.

The next meeting of the Design Review Committee will be held on Wednesday 10th October, 2018 at 4:00p.m. in the Guilford Community Center.

Respectfully submitted,

Katharine Stewart
Recording Secretary