

Charter & Ordinance Committee
Meeting minutes Jan. 26, 2021

Committee members present: Rebecca Mattis (chair), Sam Gorruso, Chris Ettori, Melinda Humphrey. Other aldermen present: Paul Clifford, Michael Talbott, Tom DePoy, president Matt Whitcomb. Others present: building inspector Bob Pelletier, Brennan Duffy and Dave Cooper of the RRA, city treasurer Mary Markowski, city attorney Matt Bloomer.

Meeting convened at 5:31. The purpose of the meeting was to continue reviewing the sign ordinance draft. This new draft is the result of in-depth discussion with most of the board of aldermen, as well as sign professionals, business owners, and other interested parties. The first half of the new draft was reviewed in early December. We began this meeting with section IX. These minutes will not detail every change to the original draft, but just the sections for which there was major discussion.

We discussed projecting signs. Most projecting signs downtown are larger than the original draft would allow, and the committee was generally in favor of making the allowance larger. It was agreed that larger buildings can host larger projecting signs that would be inappropriate in smaller buildings. Also, such signs on the second story of a building can be larger than on the first story, and still be very attractive. Two solutions were proposed: making a limited waiver provision, and linking the size of the sign to the building frontage. The chair agreed to draft language to the latter effect.

Window signs were discussed at length, and the committee decided that to limit window signs to 50% of the window area would be appropriate.

We discussed portable signs in the city right-of-way. There was a lot of concern about safety because these signs can block the view of traffic for motorists pulling out into the roadway. We agreed that the main issue with these is enforcement, and that the language in the current draft is sufficient to allow for enforcement.

We discussed electronic message boards (EMBs). The committee was uneasy with the new proposed limit of 16 sq. ft. for these signs. The chair agreed to provide the committee with more information as to examples of these signs in the city. The suggestion was also made to increase the time allowed before a message change.

We discussed the grandfather clause. Building inspector Bob Pelletier brought a concern to the committee that the provision needs to be clarified to not grandfather signs for abandoned businesses, and the chair agreed to draft appropriate language. Most of the committee agrees with the draft language that requires an incoming new business to alter an existing sign to make it a conforming sign. Alderman DePoy would like to grandfather all signs for the lifetime of the sign. Alderman Ettori suggested that RRA grants could be offered to new businesses to make these sign changes, similar to the BIAP grants. Bob informed the committee that many businesses remove sign structures as soon as they vacate a building, without issues. Attorney Bloomer said the draft needs to clarify what it

means to “remove a sign” – removing the sign face or removing the sign structure. He said that he can draft language that matches the committee’s legislative intent.

The committee reviewed the rest of the draft and came to the end. The chair will make the desired changes and bring the final draft to the committee, where the issue remains.

Meeting adjourned 7:26 pm.

This report is for information only.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Mattis, chair