



TOWN OF EASTON
Planning & Zoning Board
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Subcommittee Meeting Minutes
Monday, January 31, 2011

Present: Christine Santoro, Chair; Walter Johnson, Clerk; Peter Deschenes; Gregory Strange; Dan Smith; Wayne Benson, Jr.; Brad Washburn, Planning Director

Christine Santoro called the meeting to order at 6:55pm.

SIGNAGE

Present: Tim Fisher, ID Graphics; V. Douglas Errico, Esq.; Kenneth Fries, RK Associates; Sue Warren, Easton Journal; Sean Noonan; Melanie Deware, Historical Commission

Wayne Benson, Jr. introduced Tim Fischer from ID Graphics. Mr. Fischer is also the VP of Massachusetts Sign Association. A representative of ID Graphics is attending the meeting to provide information and answer questions about signs.

The purpose of tonight's subcommittee meeting is to review potential revisions to the Zoning Bylaw with regard to signage. There have been issues related to the new bylaw amendment passed at the Fall 2009 Town Meeting which banned internally illuminated signs. The Planning Board is reviewing options for allowing internally illuminated signs in certain areas of Easton. There was discussion around the different types of lighting options. Mr. Fisher provided a brief explanation of lighting options. There are three types of lighting: LED, fluorescent, and neon. Currently there is a push for LED lighting because it consumes significantly less energy (90% less than neon), it is lower voltage which is safer, reliability is greater, and LED has lower maintenance costs over time. Currently LED is mostly used for banner lighting. From a business marketing perspective, brighter is better. LED is not as bright as fluorescent or neon. It is difficult to distinguish between the three types of lighting in internally illuminated signs. Brightness can be measured in foot lumens of illumination. Color differentials can tone down the brightness of a sign; white is brightest. Discussion ensued around overlay districts around larger shopping districts versus overlay districts around historical areas where the prohibition would apply. The goal is to strike a balance between maintaining the character of the town and the business' need to advertise. A sign bylaw committee was proposed to develop design guidelines for internally illuminated signs. The Historical Commission has been discussing a design review committee in the historic district and signage would be one aspect they would address.

Wayne Benson, Jr. researched sign bylaws in nearby towns. Sharon designates sign restrictions based on residential and business zones. Overlays usually focus on areas where the town wants to preserve aesthetics. Areas outside the overlay would have secondary guidelines but no prohibition. There was discussion around avoiding cost burden to business owners.

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Douglas Errico is an attorney representing RK Associates who owns Roche Brothers Plaza. Mr. Errico is also an Easton resident. Mr. Errico distributed a memo that outlines RK Associates' concerns raised by the recent bylaw prohibiting internally illuminated signs. Most but not all storefronts were occupied in the Roche Brothers Plaza prior to the recent ban on internally illuminated signs; new tenants must comply with the prohibition which puts businesses without internally illuminated signs at a disadvantage in a plaza where most businesses have internally illuminated signs. One of their tenants was grandfathered under the bylaw but was told when he moved his business to another space in the plaza that he was not allowed to move his internally illuminated sign. Mr. Errico encouraged the board to consider and move toward a more fair signage bylaw and offered his services in the review process.

Melanie Deware, Chair of the Historic Commission noted the historically significant areas in Easton and sought clarification on whether an overlay district would allow or prohibit internally illuminated signs. More discussion ensued on the pros and cons of overlay districts in commercial areas that allow internally illuminated signs versus an overlay on historically significant areas that prohibits internally illuminated signs.

Wayne Benson, Jr. noted that the most obvious places for reconsideration are the plazas where businesses have internally illuminated signs next to newer businesses that fall under the ban. Mr. Benson reviewed other Massachusetts towns' bylaws with regard to internally illuminated signs, including Littleton and Concord. Littleton set a two-year limit on externally illuminated signs with a tax incentive to help businesses make the transition. Discussion ensued around setting a time limit on existing internally illuminated signs versus not.

Chair Christine Santoro inquired about external illumination similar to the Derby Shops in Hingham, MA. Mr. Fisher stated that LED is not as bright for external illumination. Channel letters are considered internally illuminated. Exposed neon is least desirable. Halo effect is attractive.

Ken Fries of RK Associates works for Samuels & Associates which owns both Shaw's and Roche Brothers shopping centers. Mr. Fries expressed concerns about increased light pollution from shopping center parking lots' lighting when considering the character of externally illuminated signs; the lack of maintenance on box lighting if there were a ban with no time limit on grandfathered internally illuminated signs; the reduced marketability of the shopping centers by prospective tenants. Mr. Fries asserted that businesses will be at a disadvantage without using internally illuminated signs.

New business owners wishing to use internally illuminated signs now can file an appeal with Zoning Board of Appeals. Roche Brothers Plaza is hoping that a bylaw change will be considered at annual Town Meeting in May.

The Planning Board will consider its approach to revising the bylaw at the next Subcommittee meeting. The intent of a revised bylaw is to strike a balance between Easton's business community and maintaining the character of the town. It was recommended to include input

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from the Historical Commission and the Building Inspector because he is tasked with enforcing the current ban.

BUILDING HEIGHT

Gregory Strange, Christine Santoro, and Dan Smith attended the site walk on Saturday. The Subcommittee is considering amending the bylaw with regard to residential building height and setbacks to allow for home building or expansion on a scale that maintains the character of the neighborhood. Gregory Strange will present at the next Subcommittee meeting. Christine Santoro encouraged everyone to look at other town bylaws, specifically Littleton, Walpole, Sharon and Norton.

It was recommended to have a joint Historical Commission and Planning Board meeting to discuss vision and direction. The Historical Commission is currently working on design guidelines.

Walter Johnson motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:25pm. Gregory Strange seconded. Motion passes 5-0-0.

Meeting minutes respectfully submitted by Randi L. Graham, Recording Secretary.