



**TOWN OF CALABASH
PLANNING AND ZONING BOARD
SPECIAL MEETING—WORKSHOP REGARDING ANIMATED SIGNS
Monday, November 15, 2010-6:00 pm-Sanborn Hall**

AGENDA

CALL TO ORDER

PLEDGE TO FLAG:

ROLL CALL:

WORKSHOP: The Planning & Zoning Board will review the Town's current regulations pertaining to animated signs as well as examples from other municipalities and begin to determine how best to move forward in revising the regulations for animated signs.

BOARD COMMENTS:

ADJOURN:

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MINUTES

The Calabash Planning and Zoning Board (PZB) held a Special Meeting on Monday, November 15, 2010, 6:00 p.m. at Town Hall, 882 Persimmon Road, Calabash, NC. The purpose of the Special Meeting was to hold a Workshop to discuss animated signs.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Vice-Chairperson Marty Keefe, Mr. John Thomas, Mr. Ken Drennan, Mr. Alton Watts.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Chairman J.W. Brown and Mr. Josh Truesdale.

STAFF PRESENT: Town Clerk/Interim Town Administrator Kelley Southward.

GUESTS PRESENT: Commissioner Mary Knight, Commissioner Forrest King, Ms. Cecelia Herman, Ms. Emily DiStasio, and Ms. Daria Buccilli.

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE TO THE FLAG: Vice-Chairperson Keefe called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and led Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

After calling the meeting to order, Mr. Keefe suggested that the first thing to do was determine a place to start. He stated that according to the UDO animated signs were not allowed and that it appeared that the Board of Commissioners wanted that to change. Mr. Watts stated that they should start with blinking signs as this type of signage should not be allowed. Ms. Southward read the UDO definition of animated signs. Mr. Keefe asked if anyone had any thoughts. Mr. Drennan stated that after reading the Land Use Plan (LUP) he thought that the vision conveyed in the LUP was the preservation of the quaint village with a fishing atmosphere as well as the promotion of commercial enterprise. Using animated signs would be a balancing act between preserving the quaintness and promoting business. He felt that the PZB should move forward without any more guidance from the Board of Commissioners (BOC). He suggested involving citizens and explaining to the public why some restrictions would be altered. He posited three goals with definitive objectives, with each objective having established implementation considerations or restrictions.

The first goal: promote advertising and commercialization in the Town while maintaining the vision of the LUP. The second goal is the reduction of existing signage clutter within the town. One implementation consideration/restriction might include a one for one swap. Another consideration or restriction would be to recognize that not all building environments are the same; animation for a strip mall cluster milieu being different than a stand alone detached building. Delving in without knowing what to accomplish is difficult. Mr. Keefe stated that he wanted to know what the BOC wants and doesn't want. Mr. Keefe said that using Mr. Drennan's idea; a business owner could take any existing sign and add animated lights without adding to the total amount of signage. Mr. Drennan, referencing such variables as color, brightness, blinking and pulsating signage, stated that this project could take a year to meet established objectives. He went on to comment on maintaining the vision of the LUP and the difficulty in not knowing what needed to be achieved other than prompting animated signs. Mr. Keefe noted that 12 to 14 years ago there were many animated signs and people felt the town had a quaint fishing village type environment. Starting from scratch without knowing what is wanted is difficult. From the research there appeared not be any towns that allow animated signs. Ms. Southward stated that towns prohibit such signs but towns where such signs appear, towns do not seem to be upholding their ordinances. She went on to say that in the original UDO an Architectural Review Committee was referenced and from her research there are area municipalities that use their Planning and Zoning Boards to determine what is acceptable signage with those decisions based on set parameters.

Mr. Keefe suggested two or three different levels. Level one could be for digital signs which add no more signage than the footage of the present sign and the digital sign aspect had to be no more than 10% of the total 20% and could change periodically but not move. Before continuing with the levels he questioned whether blinking and trailing lights would be approved. Ms. Southward noted that the BOC was requesting the PZB to determine multiple options for the BOC to select. Mr. Watts stated that blinking signs should not be permitted. Mr. Thomas commented on whether all businesses in town could afford animated signs. Mr. Drennan asked if they should restrict animation to the business district only and that the PZB needs to define how far they want to carry it.

Discussion continued with Mr. Keefe suggesting they start with categories of signs and the types of signs that are not allowed. Ms. Southward suggested coming up with reasons for allowing animated signs. Mr. Keefe said that they were attention catching. Discussion followed regarding animated signs that can be seen in various milieus in many different areas and that local/state/federal governments can do what they want.

Mr. Drennan stated that when you consider all the different zoning districts one goal could be to focus on the business district first and then determine directives under that heading. He used an example of a stand alone business on a corner. The owner would first, before spending any money, submit a signage plan to staff. The plan would show no net gain in signage numbers and how they would maintain their technology based on town restrictions for brightness, chasing, etc. Ms. Southward explained how the total amount of signage is determined by the UDO and the existing permitting process.

Commissioner Mary Knight read a definition of animated signs and suggested they use some of the information they have as a starting off point.

Mr. Keefe proposed permitting illumination, lights on signs, neon and digital animation similar to those at banks. If a business changes its existing signage to use illumination or animation, the signage would have to be a certain percentage of the total signage and before a sign could be replaced with be in compliance with remaining criteria of the sign ordinance.

Discussion continued with Commissioner Knight suggesting PZB members consider the pros and cons of animated signage. Mr. Thomas stated that signage could be in line with what is permitted under the LUP. Mr. Drennan stated that technology is changing faster than a town can change its ordinances. Mr. Keefe stated that digital signs are more informational than anything else and asked about existing restrictions regarding lighting. Ms. Southward replied that back lighting and flood lights are permitted and read what lighting was not permitted by ordinance. Commissioner Knight stated that starting with the question of whether such lighting was permitted and list pros and cons and asked Commissioner King if he had any suggestions. Commissioner King stated that the issue at hand is complicated. He provided a history of signage at the time when Calabash and Carolina Shores were united, a time when illuminated signs were not permitted. Animated signs had been a part of the town's fishing village environment for thirty or forty years. At the time of the separation the ordinance should have been changed to again allow illumination so business could be promoted. Some Beach Drive businesses closed due to the lack of illuminated signs. He stated that illumination should be permitted as a percentage of total signage, made to be a permanent fixture and the Central Business district should be the only area to be permitted to have such signage.

Mr. Drennan stated that they just throw ideas out that can be discussed even though he did not agree with that approach. Commissioner Knight stated that signs are everywhere and left unregulated can lead to clutter and decreased property values. With the lighting issue, he cautioned members that when thinking about lighting possibly infringing on residents that there have been court cases with illuminated lights cited as the cause of traffic accidents. They have a huge issue, with a lot to consider and that needs to be taken apart piece by piece to determine if the pieces fit or not in the town.

Mr. Drennan asked if the Board of Commissioners had provided any guidance regarding whether animated signs should be restricted to a certain district only. Commissioner King stated that the PZB is a separate entity and does not need the guidance from the BOC and if they as a Board think that animated signs should be restricted to a certain district, than that is what they can recommend.

Mr. Watts asked if it was the opinion of all businesses in town if they wanted animated signs. Mr. Keefe stated that a consensus was not necessary for their decision making. Mr. Drennan stated that there were many existing nonconforming signs.

Mr. Keefe asked if there was any thought regarding how to proceed? Ms. Southward stated that there should be separate parameters for strip malls and stand alone businesses. Mr. Keefe stated that they needed to determine what percentage of the signs be illuminated with the free standing sign be the site of the animated sign. Mr. Keefe stated that they would need to determine the “center” of the sign. Mr. Drennan stated that was too restrictive and that not all businesses in a strip mall might not want an illuminated sign. Mr. Keefe stated that the most strip mall signs are owned by the property owner and not each business and it would be up to the owner to put signs out. Mr. Drennan stated that it was Commissioner King’s thought that the purpose of animation is to catch the attention of cars passing by. Ms. Southward suggested moving past the changeable message board as such signage is already allowed and that the issue is more about blinking and LED signs. Mr. Keefe stated that such signage can be sophisticated and have the images and pictures that can be distracting with possible liability in a congested traffic area.

Discussion continued with Mr. Keefe asking if anyone had any ideas. Commissioner Knight suggested they make a list of pros and cons. Mr. Drennan stated he thought that the BOC would have done this as part of their direction to the PZB. Mr. Keefe stated that he thought they had accomplished something during the course of this meeting. He went on to say that he would like to get more background information regarding towns that allow animated signs. Commissioner Knight stated that she found four out-of-state municipalities that allow animated signs and that she would gather that material for the PZB. Mr. Keefe said that creating such an ordinance from scratch could be a monumental task. The material from Commissioner Knight will be available for discussion at the December PZB meeting. Mr. Drennan asked if the goal was to cannibalize segments of animated ordinances from other towns. He stated that agreement between the BOC and PZB was needed before getting started on the technological implementations and then establishing criteria for changes to the existing ordinance. Mr. Keefe asked if Mr. Drennan did not think that reading what other towns had would not be helpful. Mr. Drennan stated that visions for other towns are different from the vision set in the LUP for Calabash.

Mr. Watts suggested they continue the discussion at the December 6th meeting and determine at that time if they wanted to pick a date for another workshop. Mr. Keefe asked that they review the material regarding the four ordinances that Commissioner Knight gathered and ready some suggestions for the PZB members to review.

Ms. Southward opined that each member, prior to the next meeting, devise one goal to accomplish that can be discussed at the next meeting.

Mr. Thomas asked if there was a member of the Merchant’s Association that might be interested in attending the next meeting to provide feedback. Commissioner King stated that he thought there would be someone.

Ms. Herman, from the audience, stated that the PZB had the power to hold a public meeting to educate the public and thinks that an issue this large should be a referendum, allowing residents an opportunity to have their say. Mr. Drennan stated that while he agreed with holding a public hearing but not up front with the PZB gathering its thoughts first.

Mr. Keefe stated that at the next PZB meeting members will come prepared with a goal and objective.

ADJOURN: *Mr. Drennan motioned to adjourn the workshop, seconded by Mr. Watts and carried unanimously.*

(SEAL)

Chairman or Vice Chairman

Attest:

Town Clerk