

November 1, 2011 Sign Program – Questions from Committee

Phase One, December Pending Items - P&Z Committee Q & A (5 minutes):

1. Sidewalk Signs –Staff is proposing to move from the current absolute ban on sidewalk signs to allowing them extensively by-right, except with legal restrictions on placement. Other communities have found these restrictions a challenge to enforce. Let's imagine a practical scenario where a particular business owner sometimes puts the sidewalk sign in its proper place, but often illegally places it in the middle of the sidewalk. Can you walk us through the procedures for enforcement and how that would ultimately get remedied?
2. Umbrella Signs – Does this proposal allow umbrellas themselves to be in more places than they are currently allowed? Why has staff recommended to limit sign area on an umbrella to four square feet as opposed to the entire area of the umbrella.
3. Parking Signs – Is this sign limited to the specific design approved by County regulations? Can this parking "way-finding" type sign be used for surface parking lots, for example, behind buildings and if so, under what conditions?

Phase Two, Comprehensive Revisions – P & Z Committee Q & A (5 minutes):

1. The current staff proposal would almost entirely eliminate the ability to apply to the Board for a special exception for an unusual situation or to accommodate a creative sign proposal. Instead, nearly all signs would be approved "by right" or with an administrative permit, or else not allowed at all. In addition to reducing the potential for creativity, this approach also eliminates public input and public notification regarding major new sign configurations. At the public meetings to date, this entirely "by-right" approach has been strongly questioned. a) Is it staff's opinion that this approach is legally required, and that there is no other viable alternative? b) If there are viable alternatives that include some discretionary County Board review, what form could they take? c) Is staff absolutely committed to the announced approach or is there a chance staff's recommendation could change? d) How can the public learn more about the legal basis that has led to the current staff recommendation, evaluate alternatives, and provide meaningful input?
2. The current staff proposal is organized to be fundamentally based on just three categories of regulation based on zoning district: one for single family housing districts, a second for some apartment districts, and a third for all other districts (including many townhomes and apartments, and all commercial and industrial area). For example, lighted signs are only permitted in the third category,

whereas unlimited non-commercial temporary signs are permitted in the first category. a) In light of the comments you have received to date, do you believe staff will continue to recommend only the three categories already announced? b) Some have suggested that sign regulations should perhaps be differentiated by neighborhood (e.g. Rosslyn, Columbia Pike, or Westover) rather than County-wide zoning category. What is your reaction to this?

3. The zoning ordinance in effect today limits median signs only to real estate signs on weekends and additionally only political signs near election time. The current staff proposal would substantially allowed median signs to include **any** commercial sign if a real estate sign is allowed, and allow any non-commercial sign if a political sign is allowed. (There are also some additional restrictions on these types of signs.) It has been explained that favoring one commercial industry (Real Estate) or one kind of non-commercial message (politics) is not legally defensible. a) As an alternative to this approach, has staff considered banning median signs entirely? b) Has staff considered any other approach besides "allowing all" or "allowing none"?
4. How bright can lighted signs be under the current staff proposal? What does that mean in practice in terms of how it affects neighbors?
5. In residential areas, under the current the staff proposal, what will be the best options for Civic Associations or other community groups that don't own property to advertize their community events, such as spaghetti dinners, picnics or meetings? What options are there for individuals in residential areas to post "lost kitten" or "yard sale" signs? Is staff firmly committed to the current approach in these areas, or is there a chance staff will make alternative recommendations in the coming months to make such signs easier?
6. The current draft would substantially relax restrictions on lighting and signage on buildings above the 35-foot level. What are the major comments you have received to date on the new regime? Are you considering any changes to the approach currently announced? If so, can you briefly describe the alternatives under consideration?
7. As new drafts of the plan continue to be released over the next 7 or 8 months, how should members of the public go about asking questions about the new approaches, making their core concerns known to others stakeholders, and offering suggestions for refinement and compromise?