



CITY OF RIDGECREST
100 West California Avenue
Ridgecrest, California 93555-4054

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
Council Conference Room
Thursday, July 26, 2007 5:30 pm

MINUTES – SPECIAL MEETING

Members: Chair Steve Morgan, Chip Holloway, Jerry Taylor, Nellavan Jeglum

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5.30 p.m.

Present: Chair Steve Morgan, Member (Mayor) Chip Holloway, Member Nellavan Jeglum.
Absent: Member Jerry Taylor

Staff Present: Assistant City Manager Mike Avery, Public Services Director Jim McRea,
Economic Development Project Manager Gary Parsons, Administrative Secretary Danielle
Valentine

2. SIGN ORDINANCE

Chair Steve Morgan opened the meeting by advising that the Special Meeting on Sign Ordinance had been called in an attempt to eliminate confusion when interpreting the Ordinance. It was generally agreed that the simplest way to do this would be to address areas of concern one by one.

Public Services Director Jim McRea referred members to page 3 of the Sign Ordinance handout summarizing a suggested format for the meeting.

1. **Ease of Interpretation.** Mr. McRea explained that there was nothing wrong with the code – it was just difficult to interpret.
2. **Compliance.** Mr. McRea indicated this topic could be problematic not knowing how many signs were non-compliant.
3. **Electronic Signs.** Mr. McRea stated there were seven (7) in existence and it could be difficult to suddenly say that they did not fit with the code. He further explained that the existing code was probably written in the 1950's and worded to say that signs could not have "blinking or chasing lights" and that this wording was not applicable to current day signs.
4. **Neon Tubes.** Mr. McRea indicated that there were at least four (4) buildings with neon signs and all had been in place for some time. He explained that it could be argued that these signs were part of the architectural design of the building.
5. **Signs on Buildings.** Mr. McRea explained that if the City were to do a review of signage it would be prudent to discuss if signs should be allowed to be painted on buildings.
6. **Comprehensive Sign Plans.** Mr. McRea explained that given it was difficult to ask a developer to submit a comprehensive sign plan before they had knowledge of their tenants, staff had not successfully used such ability.
7. **Overlay District.** Mr. McRea identified the possibility of an overlay sign district explaining that businesses applying for signage in the district would appear before the Planning Commission to submit a plan. The Commission would be looking for consistency in signage within the Overlay District. He further explained that the City already has an Overlay District in place for billboards.
8. **Sign Application.** Mr. McRea suggested that a sign application be included as part of the building permit process. The application would include guidelines so that expectations were set as part of the building process.

Economic Development Project Manager Gary Parsons summarized stating that signage was a big issue for local business and an “expensive code” would not be appropriate.

Chair Steve Morgan initiated discussion on the topic of height stating that height was a point of consternation for the people of the community. Member Jeglum said it was her feeling that signs put in a long time ago consistent with code at the time of installation should be allowed to stay as erected. Mr. McRea referred member Jeglum to the current code sighting that it said that the useful life of a sign is 15 years, further he explained that the code stipulated that in order to have an exception to code businesses are required to submit an application for special circumstances or alternatively lower their sign. Member Jeglum responded stating that if the City intended to enforce this requirement they should do so consistently.

Chair Morgan indicated concern that whilst there had in the past been consistency in seeking compliance, when businesses had not been compliant the City had not enforced compliance. Mr. McRea responded stating that in some cases a clause allowing for variance in terms of unique sign structure would be applicable. Mayor Chip Holloway noted that fast food restaurant signage codes needed correction. He explained that “preview boards” are used in most restaurants for the purpose of keeping traffic flow manageable through “drive-thru” areas.

After more discussion Mr. McRea raised the idea of a sign survey for the purpose of compliance enforcement. He noted that it was not appropriate to have the Police Department undertake that task and that Code Enforcement Officer Bob Smith being the only Code Enforcement employee could not undertake such a task on his own. Member Jeglum asked if it would be appropriate to involve P.A.C.T. volunteers and Chief of Police Mike Avery responded stating that they could be involved with the survey but not enforcement.

Chair Morgan then directed conversation to Painted Signs stating that the issue was to decide if signs painted on buildings should be subject to the same area restrictions of other signs. Member Jeglum indicated that she was happy for business to paint signage on their building provided it was framed to give definition to size. Mr. McRea pointed out that some businesses on Balsam Street for instance, were now painting signage on glass.

Member Jeglum made the suggestion that the code allow for businesses who have frontage onto more than one access be able to use that frontage in their signage area calculations. Businesses with more than one frontage, as per Member Jeglum’s suggestion, would add frontage of all access areas before calculating signage area. Chair Morgan reminded the Committee that the Conditional Use Permit application in the current code was provided for situations such as that described by member Jeglum.

Chair Morgan acknowledged that understanding signage restrictions under the current code could be confusing and asked if it would be possible to have a tri-fold flyer made up listing the key elements in a simple format and referring readers to the full code for further information. Mayor Chip Holloway responded indicating that he didn’t think the code could be simplified – hence the need for the evening’s discussion.

Chair Morgan then asked members to move on to discussing neon signs stating the Committee had given staff direction on the areas of height and area. He started discussion with the question “what can we put on a neon sign?” Member Jeglum responded stating that the sign needed to be about the business. Mayor Holloway indicated that the distraction of neon signs came about because of the movement and suggested that the code stipulate a 30 second freeze requirement. Chief Avery acknowledged there was a safety issue associated with moving signs and said that slowing the roll of a sign assisted with distraction. He further explained that color was also a consideration and should be regulated particularly around stop lights.

The Committee then discussed Roof Signs. Chair Morgan stated that the current code stipulated that roof signs were not allowed above the eaves and asked if any members had a problem leaving this stipulation in place. Member Jeglum responded stating that she thought the ordinance should be designed so that there are not too many instances where a Conditional Use Permit is required.

Mayor Holloway made the statement that the spirit of the Ordinance should be to eliminate blight and spoke about several businesses where signs were desperately in need of repair. Mr. McRea responded explaining it was a problematic discussion because if a business is selling and the pole installed for signage is worth \$5,000 the sign will be taken down and the pole remain – and in so doing the business would be in compliance.

Chair Morgan asked for direction from members in regards to height. There was discussion back and forth including mention of funding opportunities for businesses whose signage was in need of repair and/or adjustment to comply with code. Chair Morgan acknowledged that the city through the Redevelopment Agency has the capability to help a business remove or change their signage if were to also be in need of repair, but stated a concern that if existing businesses were allowed to be non-compliant until signage needed repair it placed an unfair disadvantage on new businesses.

Mayor Holloway stated that any enforcement had to be universal however he stipulated that a height restriction of 20 feet was not always applicable. Chair Morgan responded saying that would be an instance for a Conditional Use Permit.

There was further discussion back and forth and Member Jeglum summarized saying she thought that the City needed to have a sign survey done and find how many signs were non-compliant. Chair Morgan disagreed stating he didn't think it worthwhile to conduct a survey unless there was resolve to enforce compliance at the completion of such survey. Mr. Parsons responded explaining that the survey could be done "to find how much pain you're going to feel".

Mayor Holloway asked that there be a clear defined mechanism for the process of enforcement and questioned how the code would be regulated and how much the City was willing to pay to enforce height restrictions. Mr. Parsons clarified that the initial purpose in terms of height enforcement would be to lower the sign rather than the more costly process of removal and replacement.

Mayor Holloway suggested there may be a benefit in asking businesses to co-operate and organizing for a larger sign company to come to town in order to effect any repair/replacement/lowering of signs. There was discussion back and forth as to the merits of this idea.

Chair Morgan asked members to be mindful of proofing the ordinance when reading through it and pointed out that page 2098.35 paragraph 5. of the current code did not make sense.

Member Jeglum said that the Committee needed to talk about temporary signs.

Chair Morgan noted that the next regular meeting would be on August 2nd and asked that staff advise the Committee of a time suitable for the next Sign Ordinance meeting and summarized that the Committee had given direction to staff to undertake a sign survey and consider review points for allowable area for signage and painting signage on buildings.

6. ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 7.00 p.m.