

OFFICIAL

**MEETING MINUTES
TOWN OF HOOKSETT
SIGN COMMITTEE
Tuesday, November 5, 2013**

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AT 6:00 PM

PRESENT: Richard Marshall, Matt Mercier, Chris Pearson, Mark Sanborn, David Scarpetti, Tom Walsh

Town Staff: Jo Ann Duffy (Town Planner), Carolyn Cronin (Assistant Town Planner)

The committee members introduced themselves.

Chair T. Walsh made opening statements. The sign committee was created to review and amend the current Sign Ordinances. Some businesses think the current sign ordinances are too restrictive. The committee is looking for a balance. This meeting was scheduled to gather information. The committee invited representatives from two sign companies (Jutras Signs and Barlow Signs) to provide their perspective and input.

Kathie Champagne, Jutras Signs: When it comes to signs, everyone has an opinion. Over the years, I've heard a lot of opinions. There are facts surrounding signs. It's very important to businesses to have effective signs. Relationship between the Town and sign companies used to be adversarial. That's not the case anymore. There are not as many ideas for building as there are for signs. Owners spend a lot of time and energy on designing signs. There is good information available on how to make an effective sign. Signs distinguish one town from the other, without the landmark. I like the idea that the Town is looking to improve the sign code. It takes a fair amount of time and money to come up with an effective sign.

M. Mercier: What are the new technologies coming down the road that the Town can expect?

K. Champagne: Electronic sign is what's coming down the pike. Some people don't care for electronic signs. The signs themselves are similar, it's not the sign they don't like, it's the programming. The Verizon Wireless Arena is a great example. Most businesses that use electronic signs are the big boxes. Electronic signs are in everyone's line of sight. Business owners want to use signs that would help them. The resolution is much better with electronic signs. Signs are more aesthetic, clear, crisp and legible. Electronic signs are not going away. They are effective and they work. In my opinion, electronic sign is taking over signage. It is cheaper to maintain and looks sophisticated. Electronic sign fits on all devices that we use.

D. Marshall: Do you think there is a way that code could regulate the programming of electronic signs? We're concerned about signs being distracting to drivers.

K. Champagne: Some sequence of messages can take away the attention of the driver. If a sign gets someone's attention, it's not the sign's fault but the individual. That is subjective and depends on the individual driver. If a sign is being used correctly and effectively, it helps a business. The marketplace is more powerful than any regulations. You don't want a sign code that's too long. Some town's ordinances try to preserve the character of the town. Be careful about restricting signs to make it look older. The materials currently available are better, cheaper and easier to maintain. Every business is unique. They have their own image. Some businesses research the town's sign ordinances before they move in. I would be more than willing to come back and work with the committee.

D. Marshall: The committee will come up with an amended ordinance. It would be helpful if you can review what we would come up with before presenting it to the Planning Board for approval.

K. Champagne: I would be glad to do that. I can look at it from a different perspective.

T. Walsh: How often do you look at the USSC's (Us Sign Council) recommendations?

K. Champagne: I think formulas make more sense, i.e., for every 10 feet, you get so many square footage. I think that is a more accurate way of coming up with a size. Those formulas make sense. I can look at our database and pick the best 5 codes and 5 worse codes from towns. The best way is when the Code Enforcement Officer is given the discretion to work with the sign company and the business owner and discuss a way to come up with an effective sign. I would give Hooksett a 6 (10 being the best and 1 being the worse). Last few years in Hooksett have been more positive than previous years.

Tim Sullivan, Barlow Signs: I want to commend the Town for recognizing that the sign codes needs to be looked at. If you look at the businesses, that were granted sign variances, 90% of those businesses are large boxes. The larger corporations who can afford it would come and ask for variances. Smaller businesses don't have the time and energy to go through the variance process. One of the dangers of the code is that you can run into grandfathered sign, a legal non-conforming sign. It's important to get signs with good visibility. Rule of thumb is 4 inches of height for every 100 feet distance. The LED signs give businesses the flexibility to program the messages. Primarily, the concerns for Towns are blinking, moving and distracting signs. USSC recognizes that the sign is heading towards LED signs. It's a medium that is beneficial and it actually works. If you look at other towns' ordinances, you have to keep in mind the character of the Town. You have to create a sign ordinance that works for your town. The CEO having a lot of leeway on signs could be good or bad. I caution you about giving the CEO the power to be able to make a decision on signs. We'll be more than happy to review it and hopefully give you guidance. One of the things businesses look at when considering moving to a town is the sign ordinance. In a plaza, the individually lit letters is the best way to go. It's a lot more attractive than putting up square boxes. Sign ordinance should be simple. It is more important to have a sign on the building that is adequate. Sign companies try to educate the businesses on what works when programming LED signs.

M. Mercier: I saw a plaza with a scrolling sign of all the stores in it.

The Town Planner made a power point presentation showing the Town's business signage.

Discussion and comparison of different signage.

Another meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, Nov. 20th, at 5 pm for further discussion. After this meeting, the staff will come up with a draft amendment to the sign ordinance.

Dan Lagueux, Tap House: For a business like ours, the ratio using the distance from the road and proportioned to the size of the unit would be most effective.

M. Sanborn suggested including the interstate signage on the ordinance and make sure it is consistent with State law.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Evelyn F. Horn
Administrative Assistant