

Unofficial

HOOKSETT ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT

Tuesday, February 11, 2014

HOOKSETT MUNICIPAL BUILDING

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Chris Pearson called the meeting to order at 6:33 pm.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ATTENDANCE: Michael Simoneau, Don Pare, Gerald Hyde, Richard Bairam, Roger Duhaime, Chris Pearson, Jackie Roy, Phil Denbow, and James Levesque, Council Rep.

EXCUSED: Gerald Hyde

STAFF: Matthew Lavoie, Code Enforcement Officer

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

January 14, 2014 Regular Meeting – *R. Duhaime moved to approve the January 14, 2014 regular meeting minutes. Seconded by R. Bairam. Motion carried unanimously.*

NEW PUBLIC HEARINGS

JEFFREY LARRABEE
Hackett Hill Road
COM

Case #14-01
Map 17, Lot 7

A Variance is requested from Article 20 Section E, 3 & 4 of the Zoning Ordinance to permit (1) 750 SF sign approximately 40 feet high as shown on submitted plan for various commercial uses including conference center, festival grounds and botanical park.

Morgan Hollis (Gottesman & Hollis of Nashua): I am the attorney for Jeff Larrabee. With me as part of a team on this project is Nick Golon, the project engineer and Cathy Champagne, who has developed the proposed sign. As part of our team approach, we work together and each of us brings something to the table. I will introduce the application. Nick will talk about the site. Cathy will explain the sign. She and I have worked together on the points of the variance. The property is located on the west side of the turnpike, south of tolls, and off of Hackett Hill Road. It has an entry point off of Hackett Hill Road and abuts other properties which are in that corner of Hackett Hill and the turnpike. It is located in a commercial zone and is a large parcel; 59 acres and over 3000' of frontage along the highway. The frontage along the public right-of-way that

has access is limited. We are looking to locate the proposed sign in the most southeasterly corner of the property just off of the property line, set back appropriately 150' from the paved right-of-way on the southbound side of the highway, and 350' from the paved highway on the northbound side. The property is adjacent to other commercially zoned properties which do have frontage on Hackett Hill, but they are separate properties, also owned by Mr. Larrabee. The proposed uses for the site are complimentary to those that are proposed on the adjacent properties, including the conference center which will be primarily located on the adjacent lot but some on this property in the future. The Lilac Garden areas, festival grounds, and special family events center have yet to be determined and laid out on a site plan. It is unusual that we would come before a Zoning Board asking for a sign before there is a matter before the Planning Board. Portions of this entire property, including the adjacent parcels, have been laid out on schematic plans and presented for discussion to the Planning Board. As my client was proceeding to the final reclamation process of this property, which was a former gravel site area, it became clear to him and to the team that in order to get any use out of this property, which is hidden behind an embankment, there is a need for particular signage. Particularly the use that is going to encompass the entirety of this site. In looking at the signage, your ordinance has severe restrictions on commercial size signage and if anybody wants something different they have to come to this Board. Because of the uniqueness and unusual shape and location of the property, a unique signage response was required. Cathy analyzed signage needs and came up with a design that is going to put us over the top of your requirements. The request is for a 750 sq. ft. sign which is approximately 39' x 20'. It is smaller than the green overhead highway sign which you see going southbound out of the tolls. The location is to the right of that sign, after you have driven through the tolls. It will be 150' off of the paved area of the road. We are requesting a 40' height variance. We think it will be somewhere between 40' and 50'. If it doesn't fit 40' we would have to come back to you. Without the large sign and the height, the site becomes difficult for use for any kind of an opportunity in the future due to visibility. The power lines are being relocated right up against the right-of-way. This parcel will end up with little area to place a sign. We have identified the one small area that will fit the sign. As a result of this, we need to know size of the signage which would be allowed by this town, and that is why we are asking for the variance that we are. We think we have a compelling story, we think we meet all of the requirements of law of the variance and we think we have a good common sense approach to this sign. We have identified this site which is approximately 3,000' south of the crossing at Hackett Hill where the remaining toll booths are located, approximately 130' to 150' from the southbound lane, and around 230' to 300' from the other lanes, depending on which one you are in.

Nick Golon (TF Moran): Myself and Jeff Larabee were before you in June, 2013 in regards to the notice of outstanding violation for the subject lot. We were granted an extension with conditions that we come back before you as this project progresses. Since we had that meeting, Jeff has had the opportunity to stockpile a significant amount of material for the purposes of reclamation of the site that is from the adjacent parcel with Pike. We have 250,000 cubic yards

stockpiled. We have received an Alteration of Terrain permit not only for the subject lot but also for the 2 lots up front for the purposes of reclaiming the site. We went before the Technical Review Committee with an application for the front 2 parcels consisting of a hotel, conference center, and related uses. We had the opportunity to scope that project with the DOT as well as the Town, and Stantec as to what would be the appropriate intersections we are going to need to evaluate. We sat down with PSHN to finalize the easement relocation. What we propose to do, and PSNH has agreed to, is relocate that easement to the easterly most portion. That restricts us with the signage but provides a lot more area to develop. We were able to move forward to the engineering design. PSNH will be doing a line design for the revised location. TF Moran is preparing the appropriate easement plan and documents to be supported as part of that. PSNH then has the opportunity to order materials and get things rolling as far as the relocation of that easement. You have been by there. You can see how far those utility polls stick out in the ground. The idea is to relief that area as far as grade, relocate those polls, and use a fair amount of that material on the subject parcel. We sat down with DES relative to our waste water and how that can be managed on this site and we have come to an understanding on how it can be permitted. Municipal water will be extended for the purposes of this use. We have an unusual parcel of land and it requires a unique sign for the opportunity to move forward with this project. You have a plan before you that provides a little bit of the intent of what we want to place on the subject site.

R. Duhaime: You have a rough draft, but I don't know what this will look like with this sign. I don't know where poles will be, what the hotel will look like and if they will require a sign, what the botanical gardens will look like, etc. There are a lot of variables and you are not giving us a lot to work to see what this site will look like with this sign. This is very vague.

N. Golon: Our intent with the plan that has been provided is to give you an overall project schematic of how this sign would be used; what is it's message, what are we trying to convey. We have the uses for you. The finite location of where those are located on the parcel, we don't have the ability to provide today.

M. Hollis: It would be subject to Planning Board final massaging and review. One of the problems is the cart before the horse.

R. Duhaime: We have zoning to keep things in the area and what it is going to look like. We are talking about one sign on the far corner of the property and I don't know what the rest will look like.

M. Hollis: It would be the only sign for that single lot.

R. Duhaime: There would be no sign on the hotel?

M. Hollis: Those are separate sub-divided lots. This is the single sign for that lot and that is part of the uniqueness of this piece. It doesn't have frontage on the road.

R. Duhaime: This sign is for which lot?

N. Golon: 17-7. A 60 acre portion of land.

R. Duhaime: There would be more signage you would want for the other lots?

M. Hollis: Yes. We have not developed any kind of a signage package for that usage. It is critical to moving forward with any plan to know whether or not this type of large message board sign is viable and permitted in this town for this lot. We felt we would come to this Board, present the location and concept and ask for your authority. This is subject to Planning Board review. They don't have to allow a sign in that location just because you do and they can tell us what they think of that sign at the time of site plan review. The 1st step has to be relief from the ordinance or else this project loses a lot of its viability.

J. Roy: When you came in June with the outstanding violations, it was our understanding that you would be back before the Board in August/September. Are there still outstanding violations? Is everything in compliance?

N. Golon: The areas have not been restored so the condition persists.

J. Roy: So there are still outstanding violations on the entire site as it stands?

N. Golon: I believe the notice of violation as to those slopes needing to be restored exists. Our intent is to restore the property along with its development. In answer to your question, no those areas have not been restored.

J. Roy: If I recall correctly there was an agreement that you would be back before the Board with some way to clear up those violations and nothing was ever presented. Correct?

N. Golon: As part of the letter that was submitted, May 23, and then the subsequent conditions of approval, we said we would have an application for the Planning Board in September. We did have an application for the Board in September for the Technical Review Committee to review where we then had the opportunity to move forward with various components of the project. A formal site plan application has yet to be submitted. That has a lot to do with this signage need which is driving the project. There was a change in philosophy. TF Moran is managing the permitting and design of the project, as a whole. We have the history with the parcel.

R. Duhaime: Do you have anything else that we could refer to that has a sign like this, or where a sign like this is needed?

N. Golon: It would be difficult to find an example of something like this relative to this use.

R. Duhaime: What you are telling me is vague. You are telling me you need this sign and I have nothing to refer to.

N. Golon: Perhaps this part of the application process might clarify some of those components for you.

Cathy Champagne (Jutris Signs): This is a unique parcel and does warrant an unusual sign. 1st impressions are important and this is out of the norm from what we usually design for any complex. You will hear a lot about hardship tonight and unique features of the land. This sign will become a landmark as do most signs of this type. In terms of benefiting the public interest the sign is designed for highway traffic. It is unlikely any part will be seen from the surrounding area. It is located within the town boundaries but it's audience is the traffic that drives on the state highway. If somebody in the town were never to drive north or south on the highway, they would not know the sign exists. There is a gain to the general public for this particular sign in this particular location.

Cathy Champagne read the application.

D. Pare: Why would you write Exit 11 on a sign when you have already passed Exit 11?

C. Champagne: Some of our initial designs had it reading Exit 10 as you drive southbound. Keeping it as Exit 10 it would get complicated because people will get off Exit 10 and there is no easy way to guide them to where they need to go. What this is meant to do is communicate the Exit 11 access. Anyone passing the sign will know it is Exit 11 and they can get off of the highway and loop back, drive north and get off at Exit 11.

J. Roy: Is the drawing to scale?

C. Champagne: It is.

J. Roy: Once PSHN relocates, are the trees being cleared or are they staying?

N. Golon: As far as the relocation easement, we are moving that adjacent to the property line, so the majority of those trees would be removed.

P. Denbow: The sign is 2-sided and folks will be able to see it north and south?

C. Champagne: Correct.

P. Denbow: Would the part that is empty, in the drawing, be able to flash different messages so that you can advertise more than just the business that is there?

C. Champagne: That is the electronic portion. It won't be used as a static sign.

P. Denbow: If you use this one sign you can use it for multiple purposes?

C. Champagne: That is one of the reasons we designed it with an electronic portion. Electronic signs serve a lot of purposes. They are versatile and more dynamic.

P. Denbow: Because people from the highway are looking at, it is there a DOT permitting process?

N. Golon: I had the opportunity to review this with the DOT and because it is located wholly on our land and outside of their jurisdiction, there is no process we need to follow with DOT. However, it meets the criteria they possess.

J. Roy: So it does meet all of the DOT fall zone requirements?

N. Golon: Relative to square footage and what is permissible in keeping with that requirement, yes.

R. Duhaime: Why do you need such a big sign?

C. Champagne: When a real estate appraiser does an appraisal for a property he looks for comparables and that is kind of what we do as well. We look at the size of the property, the venue, the use, the line of site, the visibility, angles, color contrast, the legibility, everything about it. Every site is unique and this doesn't have anything comparable so we started from scratch. We have to design and determine what is going to look best. When a sign goes up, no matter the size, they all matter to the businesses and the properties that rely on them. This is the result of our work for this sign, where 750' in this configuration is what is needed to identify this property. It would not be hard to say a bigger sign would do more, but this is the right size.

R. Duhaime: I see it's a lilac sign, botanical park, etc. I would think of something more natural and rural, maybe a small building.

C. Champagne: Are you saying for the sign?

R. Duhaime: Yes. This is like a billboard to me and it seems big.

C. Champagne: We need to make sure the sign stands out, is visible and the electronic portion is important. The Lilac Center and Botanical Park are identifiers. The electronic portion will contain important content. In terms of if it could be smaller or how we arrived at the size, this is meant to give perspective. If you look at it in perspective it doesn't look as prominent. In Hooksett there is nothing comparable, however, I am going to refer to The Merrimack Premium Outlets to put this in perspective. When they put their proposal into Merrimack, they were concerned about the size of the sign that was being proposed. There was a lot of debate and discussion and they came up with a sign that worked and it fits. The Merrimack Premium Outlet sign, for me, reinforced and put it into perspective because we are as sensitive to the size and height as you are. We want to make sure it works. When I work with a client, if the sign is too big or too tall, it translates to them that it was too expensive. Being conservative and making sure the sign is the right size is important to us too. The state limit of 750 sq. feet may even be looked at as a recommendation of size due to the speed and distance of the viewing traffic. The signs

that the state puts up exceed the 750 sq. feet but they know the signs have to be a certain size and the letters have to be a certain height to be legible.

M. Hollis: Cathy, why don't you break down the proposed sign into dimensions of the 3 areas of the sign. It has to have 3 signs. We don't have a Home Depot we have a variety of uses that are going to take place that we need to bring attention to. The reader board is the only way to do that. You have the reader board, the exit, the Lilac Center and Botanical Gardens. They are separate components, which are fixed, but have to be large enough to be able to be read. Cathy's company worked out a series of metrics of the distance, speed limit, what you are going to read on the message board, and how far away it is. This is what sign companies do.

P. Denbow: Heading south you have already passed the exit. Was part of size of the signage calculating people heading north so they could still make the exit and get off? The size is big enough so they could see it and not crash into anyone getting over to Exit 11?

C. Champagne: That is a result of it, but whether they can see it and make the exit or whether they can just see it, is one in the same. It is the right size for either purpose. The center portion is about 450 sq. ft. The remainder is made up of a top section with a decorative portion and the Botanical Park identifier.

R. Duhaime: Are those all going to be lit up? Are the Lilac Center and Botanical Garden letters going to be lit?

C. Champagne: Yes.

C. Pearson: How big is the Lilac Center portion?

C. Champagne: About 175 sq. ft.

C. Pearson: What about the Botanical Park part?

C. Champagne: About 117.

C. Pearson: The locator?

C. Champagne: I don't have the dimensions on that because typically the address portion of a sign isn't counted as square footage. That is more directional and identifier.

C. Pearson: Would that be better served being at the top?

C. Champagne: No. I think that top section with the decorative element on it is going to get very busy. Between the poles at the end it is a different color. It is more distinct and separate and you will be able to read it just fine. The visibility is not compromised because of where it is.

M. Simoneau: Is the 750 sq. ft. including all three sections?

C. Champagne: Yes.

M. Simoneau: Not just the marque?

C. Champagne: No. This part is about 450 sq. ft.

M. Simoneau: The top is 175 sq. ft. and the bottom is 117 sq. ft.

C. Champagne: Correct.

C. Pearson: At what distance are you trying to capture the traffic?

N. Golon: Based on where the mile marker sign is for Exit 11, the 1 mile marker is right before where the sign is being proposed. It is in close proximity to where the Exit 11 signage is.

C. Pearson: If you are heading northbound, at what distance are you trying to capture the attention of the person in that car?

M. Hollis: It is approximately 2 football fields if you took a 45 degree angle.

C. Pearson: What is the letter height on the Lilac Center? What size are those letters? What are you proposing on the marque sign?

C. Champagne: It can be programmed electronically so that is a variable. I don't have the specifications with me about how big each of the letters are.

C. Pearson: I am trying to gauge what you are going for.

N. Golon: Looking at the sizes of the 3 components of the sign you are talking about a letter that is at least 3 ft. tall.

C. Champagne: I was thinking 3 ft. might be right for some letters and Botanical Park might be around 24 or 30 inches.

P. Denbow: I know you said it is programmable in the middle, but obviously you are looking to make it the most visible. What would be the maximum size lettering electronically in the middle of that sign?

C. Champagne: Those messages change throughout the day and each message will be unique. Some will have large letters with smaller sub-copy, some will be larger. It is going to be variable and programmed as it needs to be to carry the content.

N. Golon: From the geometric constraints of the space that we have, it can't be larger than 11'.

C. Champagne: The specifications will indicate the average number of characters at different heights. I have the information that I can submit that shows the breakdown. Was there a

particular concern you had about that?

P. Denbow: We just want to get an idea of what it will look like.

C. Champagne: Even though there is the potential for a letter to be that big it would not make any sense. You might get 4 letters.

R. Duhaime: You mention hardship and you can put a 10' high letter up there. How would it be a hardship if you put a 4' letter up?

C. Champagne: What did you mean by a 10' letter?

R. Duhaime: On the sign you could put a 10' high letter up.

C. Champagne: You could but you wouldn't. Whatever the content is it will need to be more detailed than one word.

R. Duhaime: I am looking at the scale and you can put that tall of a character in there.

C. Champagne: That is true by default. In order to get 3 or 4 lines of copy it would not be reasonable or practical for an owner to have the letters that big.

M. Hollis: You can put a condition on the size of the lettering. You might get one word such as "fair" if you maximize the letters. Is that a good message? You can say that you will give us the message board but the lettering cannot be bigger than a certain size. Then we have a message board to not put up one word.

D. Pare: How far do you think the distance between the 1st and 2nd state sign is in the picture? Coming north, the exit to use Exit 11 looks like it is about 1000' down the road. Will you see this sign fast enough to take Exit 11?

M. Hollis: That is why it is in the southeastern corner. It is the one place it can fit, accomplish the objective and why it is the size that it is.

D. Pare: I don't think, with the size of the sign, you will see it from there. There are a lot of things in the way.

C. Champagne: At the beginning, when a sign is first proposed and you look at it for the 1st time it makes an impact. The more you look at it and you see it in perspective, you look at it a different way. When a sign first goes up there are a lot of comments and calls and then it quickly becomes part of the landscape. People are going to have hundreds of impressions and that is the audience. This is meant as a landmark so they see it, know it and are aware of it.

Open to abutters (in reference to sign only.)

Michael Sorel (54 Cross Rd., Hooksett): We in the audience have not had the advantage that you

have with this presentation. In the future, if you could arrange these presentations so abutters and the general public can see what the applicant is presenting to you it would be helpful. If the members of the Board are speaking directly into their microphones we can hear clearly but if they are not we cannot understand the words being spoken. I don't want the Board to misunderstand my questions. I am very much in favor of signage. I have been in business in Hooksett for over 45 years. My signage on Rt. 3 has been advantageous to my business. I support this applicant and support signage. It is a very important part of a successful business. It has many different functions, It identifies, locates and directs. I don't disagree with any of the presentation or the answers that have been made by the applicant, but I have some questions and points that I would like to address. In the letter we received that indicated there were going to be festival grounds and the words Botanical Park. Could the applicant identify clearly what those 2 words mean. I hope the town can do what is within its means to help the applicant. This is a difficult site. They are going to spend a lot of time, effort and money to make it work, so anything they can do within reason to help it work will be helpful to the town overall. The applicant letter said that the sign would be approximately 40' high. I have received some communication via email from your Board that says it could be as much as 50' high. I would hope that it is within your decision making that you would be specific in your language, I would suggest to say "not to exceed," so we would know. I received a sign location map that has been prepared by TF Moran and I'm not able to locate how that applies to Tax Map 17 and Tax Map 13 because this very large piece of land is on both of those 2 pages. If you could help me locate it on those 2 tax maps we would have a better idea of how this sign location plan applies. It is my understanding there is a slope easement on the Everett Turnpike on both sides and I ask whether this sign location will be within that slope easement. The word approximately has been used several times and I would urge the Board to be specific in the language that if you are going to approve this I would like it to be specific. Reader board signs are important. I am the first to have a reader board sign on Rt. 3 in Hooksett. It has been helpful to my business. They are effective and they work. In the real estate business signage is number 2 to sell our product. Number 1 is word of mouth. When referring to the Merrimack Premium Outlets, as you drive up and down the Everett Turnpike there is signage that you can see that shows where that is. It is important. Even our small real estate sign should be done in a manner that they can be read it between 35 and 40 mph. If you have a nice artful sign that is beautiful in several colors, but can't be read, it doesn't have good function. I would like to not leave here until you can help me locate how it applies to those tax maps.

N. Golon: I will show you 2-fold; on the big board and on the one in front of you. Does this help where I have showed you?

M. Sorel: Yes it does.

C. Pearson: Are you all set?

M. Sorel: With the location of the sign, but on this site plan there are some dotted lines that I

don't understand. Perhaps the engineer could help me to understand what they represent.

N. Golon: The dotted lines he is referencing within the plan is the approximate edge of wetland associated with the water body that is in part on our parcel as well as on the adjacent parcel.

C. Pearson: Festival grounds and botanical parks doesn't apply to the sign. You can ask when they go to Planning and get a better understanding of what they plan to do. We will address the 50' vs. 40'. I did not see 50' brought up, was it?

M. Sorel: It was this evening and in communication I got from your Board via email.

M. Hollis: It is 40'.

C. Pearson: Your last question was if the sign location will be within the slope easement.

N. Golon: Relative to where the right-of-way is presently located our sign is proposed on Jeff Larrabee's property, not within the easement.

M. Sorel: Does Mr. Larrabee's property have a slope easement with respect to the Everett Turnpike?

N. Golon: TF Moran conducted a boundary evaluation of this property and located no such easement on that property.

M. Sorel: It may not be in a boundary agreement, but it would be in his legal description.

N. Golon. As part of the boundary evaluation we do research at all of the local registries, or otherwise, to evaluate if there are any encumbrances on the property which would include any slope easements, and none were identified.

M. Sorel: I support this application and want this Board to know that. I just want to cross the t's, dot the i's and make sure it is good for Hooksett.

Closed to abutters

Open public hearing

Susan Darian: I have been working with Jeff for a couple of years as he has been developing this project. I have been in marketing and branding in the sports and entertainment industry for over 20 years and value how important signage is. One question that came up was about content as far as what will be on there and another was why it says Exit 11. We are talking about being able to identify what this site is. Anything that goes up there are things that will be on the board itself. It will be talking about future events. It is not that somebody has to travel across those lanes. It is establishing the brand and what is going to be going on in that place because we know the topography is unique, the use is going to be unique and it will help that Exit 11 will be ingrained

in people when they are noticing that. I am not worried about people that will be feeling like they would have to cut across traffic or back track. It is more for future. We would not have a situation where only 4 letters would be going up. I have teams that I have worked with such as Disney, Universal, Planet Hollywood, and Patriot's Place. There is a reason for signs being the size they are, especially when you are getting into event destinations. I got involved in this because of Jeff's character and class. I enjoy this project. I support it whole-heartedly. I have teams of people that I would be bringing in from the perspective of marketing and design to make sure it is in keeping with what everybody wants to have this be portrayed as. Without this sign it severely hampers our ability to be able to brand this site. It is a destination.

R. Duhaime: Do you have any example?

S. Darian: No. We are depend on what is going forward.

R. Duhaime: I am trying to understand what you are trying to do, brand, and I don't have anything to compare it to.

S. Darian: I don't want to speak to what Jeff has planned for the property, but you would want to be able to advertise your business and what is coming up.

R. Duhaime: When the state of New Hampshire put I in the open road tolling they spend all of this money so people can drive through faster. They didn't spend any money on trees or add anything to the value of Hooksett. I am on the Zoning Board because I want to keep it a nice looking town. I see a sign like this and I don't know if that is really was what I was looking for when I got on this Board. I am trying to get a feel for it an I am not getting any comparisons at all.

S. Darian: I wouldn't be able to give you comparisons to anything with the exception of the level of display that would be put out there in a higher end design.

William Smiley (Villager Road, Chester NH): I am here in support of the application. My background is in the sign industry. I work for a company that has been in business for 82 years. We currently operate 49,000 digital signs in the US and over 1,000 digital billboards. I have been with the company over 20 years and with the industry close to 30 years. My credentials are that I am on the ISA Board, we are calling it finding common ground. We work with communities all over the country on signage and questions because a lot of concerns get brought up such as sizes in proportion to a project. I was thinking about the Singer Park in Manchester. Their signage is well over 1,000 sq. ft. City Island in Harrisburg, PA. We worked on a large digital board there for events. It is not so much as a directional. Someone once said to me, "if you can't read it, it ain't a sign." More importantly the branding of that location and how important that is in today's world. It is hard to make comparisons because someone might not like the signage at that location. Epping decided to take an area that was non-developed and develop it. Whether or not you agree with the development in Epping, it generated a huge

amount of revenue. Years ago, Walmart wanted to go to Exit 3 and develop that site, and they were denied visibility and access because they didn't want them. Now Candia would give their right arm to develop it. We did an concert venue park outside the city limits of Saratogo that had a fairly large digital board on it. Not quite this size, but almost. Probably 12' x 30' displaying the venue names and the name of the park itself similar to this design. That is intended to be lilacs all along there. Lilac Center is what you are talking about. The landscaping plan has not been submitted yet. A lot of things have not been submitted yet. I had asked if we had Planning Board approval with the development of the property. The property can't go anywhere without a landmark, signage and a brand. It needs that. It is not only done for directional purposes. That is a small part of it. It is really done to brand the location. My company builds the digital portion. Communities are looking at digital signage as a way to reduce sign clutter. The signs don't flash. They put up colorful advertisement and logos for the property intended to be attractive. The last thing you want is a banner strung up across the tree line when there is an event. This is the way businesses want to brand themselves and this is how it is being done all over the country.

C. Pearson: Is there a digital message board that sits on Rt. 93.

W. Smiley: Tilton Ford.

C. Pearson: That is not right on the highway.

W. Smiley: The Porsche dealer as you get into Nashua.

C. Pearson: That is not Rt. 93.

W. Smiley: Meadowbrook has signage but it cannot be seen from the highway.

R. Duhaime: You can't see it from the highway.

W. Smiley: They don't have highway visibility from the highway. If they did they would have a sign.

Tom Walsh (15 Berry Hill, Hooksett and Hooksett Planning Board Member): I was recently the Chairman of our Sign Committee in town, with looking at our ordinance and making some changes. Through the whole process we tried to use as much data from some of the research and information that is out there. Cathy Champagne was one of the people that came in to give us a hand, as well as some other sign companies. We used a lot of information from the USSC. I know the biggest topic is the size of sign because, if you look at our ordinance, nothing in there even comes close to this. Even the new proposed ordinance doesn't deal with freeway or urban freeway signs because it does not happen often. USSC, based on not just safety, navigation, and the well being of the business gives a lot of recommendations based on what size and height a sign needs to be in based on speed. On an urban freeway, their recommendation is a minimum for a single entity of 300 sq. ft., 74' high. I look at these recommendations from a public/private

research ground that puts this information out and I compare it to what I am seeing here. It is multi-tenant, multi-function. It has a bigger sq. footage but it is also 34' lower. It fits within the tree line. I think it is a nice sign. In keeping with the effort of the Sign Committee and a lot of people in town with taking economic development seriously and looking at some of the complaints we have had in the past with our sign ordinance, I am here to state I completely support this applicant.

Michael Bouchard: My partner, who is the proud owner of the Colosseum Restaurant, and I have been looking around the state for the last 6 years to locate a convention center. A place that is central, has easy access and is a branded site. We want a central place that everybody will recognize and come to run their conventions. We believe that if we moved in there and did not have this sign we would not be able to be recognized or identified. We are considering moving into this facility. It would create many jobs, but we need to have this sign here for advertising purposes.

Russ Kelcourse (Quincy, MA): I used to live in Wolfeboro, NH in 1971-1975. My wife and I bought a horse farm there. The 1st time I traveled through Hooksett, NH, the first business I stopped at was Ralph French's Prime Meats. What drew me to Ralph's business was the size of his sign. I became a regular customer because not only did he have a great sign identifying his business, he had great meats. You have a great town and I think you have a great future development on Rt. 93 at Exit 11. I have know J. Larrabee for about 20 years. Jeff is a 5-star guy and in my opinion this is a 5-star future development. I think Hooksett needs it, New Hampshire needs it, and I think it will prove to be one of the greatest developments in the State of New Hampshire. This would give you tremendous business and bring a lot of customers into Hooksett.

Close public hearing

C. Pearson: I think you mentioned that you had talked to the state DOT. I am not aware of any digital message board that sits on Rt. 93.

C. Champagne: Quirk Chevrolet, across from the Mall of NH on Rt. 293, has an electronic sign. The dividing line, when people start talking about electronic signs, is the size of the letters and what it will look like. When people don't like an electronic sign, it isn't the electronic sign that you don't like, it is the programming. There are electronic signs that are not appealing, but there are a lot that are. Whenever a sign is approved, I think we need to have faith that the owners want what you want. Anybody in Hooksett that has a business or a venue like this is going to care what it looks like, the impression it makes, and how effective it is. An owner wants a sign people want to look at. This sign will be programmed to be attractive and legible and programmed in such a way that you are going to want to look at that content.

C. Pearson: Based on your letter height and speed, it does seem you are targeting about 750' to

1000' away. Is that accurate as to where you are trying to grab the attention of a motorist?

C. Champagne: The sign has been designed to capture the attention and make sure the sign is legible from both distances traveling in either direction.

C. Pearson: Within the digital portion, is there ability to box out the tenants of the Lilac Center?

C. Champagne: There are messages that can be static if it is used on a portion of the sign, but legibility is going to come into play. It can be programmed so that one part is static and another is not.

C. Pearson: If I am heading north and I see information on the Lilac Center and a hotel comes up. Will I wonder if it is a hotel, garden, winery or restaurant. I am trying to understand how you are going to message this or the intent.

C. Champagne: That is what marketing people do best. It is not going to be the audience that sees the sign once for the 1st time. The programming is going to be for the audience that has seen it before that will see it again. It will have future events and future dates. It is going to be programmed in a way best suited for the highway audience.

C. Pearson: Is this something other than a sign that can be classified as a sign? Roger mentioned it is a digital billboard. I ask that because there are other people that have proposed large signs, not that we set precedence here, but it does open things up a little bit. I am trying to clarify if this can be something other than just a sign. As Tom mentioned, this is something we did not capture in our Sign Committee and potentially could, because it is something different than we have ever had to deal with.

C. Champagne: You have also talked about something where you are bringing up another property and certain decisions were made. That property does not share the same unique features that this one does and does not have some of the same hardships that this property does.

C. Pearson: I agree with you.

C. Champagne: Whatever was decided there, that was decided. This is a whole different proposal.

P. Denbow: I think that sometimes when we grant things we could do it with certain criteria. All of the talk has been great about putting tasteful items on there, etc, but how do you put a criteria around that because once you grant the sign we have no say in what goes on the sign.

C. Champagne: It reminds me of trying to legislate common sense or trying to control something. I think you have to look at the entire project, the owner, every part of this and say how is this going to be used and what do you think this will be. If the programming isn't effective, not appropriate or not attractive, it isn't just going to annoy you, it won't be good for

the owner or the venue. The owners will not risk people saying they love the venue but don't like the way the sign is programmed. That is why professional marketing people are so good at what they do. There are people who are going to be in charge to make sure that sign is the best landmark you could hope for, for Hooksett.

P. Denbow: When you think about a sign you think about the ones flashing sale; the distasteful ones, because that is normally what you see. This seems different because the businesses are different so I am trying to put together in my head what it will look like.

C. Champagne: The content changes. It will be different from message to message and personal opinions. There may be some messages you like more than others, but the ones you don't care for are still appropriate and attractive. We all have preferences and it is hard to dictate or legislate that?

M. Hollis: Are you concerned about the frequency, because many Boards are, and they put a time frame on it. Some ordinances have minimum seconds on them. Yours does not and has not addressed this. If it is the message itself, we are stating it is for the lot and for the uses that are immediately adjacent to that lot. It is not our intent, except for community messages, to advertise any off-site premises activity. I don't think you can do that with this sign if it is granted for this lot as the application has been made this evening. That would not be a permitted use.

R. Duhaime: We have seen this before in town. Signs get approved, something happens, and it transfers. Now we have a sign that is free will. There are new owners, we don't know what they will be doing, and it is an approved sign. Signs don't get smaller. That is my concern. I am trying to figure out what will go up and what will be the future. I am trying to ensure good planning so we don't have issues down the road and it shows we did the proper diligence. That is why not knowing the whole rest of the picture it is hard to know what is going to be successful on this sign, why it is needed, etc.

M. Hollis: The only information we can provide is that it is for this single lot. If this lot changes, not the use of the lot, but the lot itself, this sign goes with that lot. If you sub-divide the sign the rights of that sign don't stay with smaller parcels. If you have a sign that is granted for Home Depot, and they close and you end up with Target they can change the face of that sign because the sign is approved. I don't think that in any instance you can lock in the face of a sign. If the use changed tomorrow that use would be on that sign, but it is related to this use of this property. We only get a variance because of the uniqueness of the property. We can't get a variance for any other reason. We have a large piece of property which has huge frontage on the highway and very little frontage otherwise. There is no other place to put a sign so it has to be on the highway, somehow, to be able to make it meaningful. We have tried to identify the size, the location, and whatever use of that property is made, this is the right sign.

R. Duhaime: We are going back and forth. So many people come and say hardship. If you put

this big sign up and say, you don't even do any development, but now you have a sign to sell to some other person that wants to buy this development because it has a big billboard now, it makes this land more valuable. It is not hardship to me to make sure someone makes money. I am here to protect the character of the town and that is why I am trying to figure out what is going to be on this board and how it is going to affect zoning issues.

C. Champagne: What alternatives does the owner have. If the owner doesn't want to do anything with the property, he does not need a sign. For any business to go here they need exposure, they need a sign and you have to ask if not this sign than what else.

M. Hollis: What is the alternative? Can you use the permitted use? Could we put a 32' sign there. We can but it has no practical effect of advertising, promoting or locating that lot. Therefore, it is unique and there is a hardship on this property as a result of that fact. The permitted use, does not allow a reasonable use. This is why Board's grant variances. Otherwise, some of these ordinances would be confiscatory. You are the relief valve. In this case a 32' sign is confiscatory. It is a commercially zoned property. If all you are allowed to do for that whole lot is put a 32' sign up which is not going to be on an frontage, that is confiscatory so we deserve some relief.

C. Pearson: You aren't even allowed a 32' sign. On the Zoning Board we struggle with when the cart comes before the horse and the project is not fully identified. Based on this project there is 1 tenant so you would be allowed a 20' sign, 32 sq. ft. Maximum, if you had multiple tenants, you would be allowed a 165 sq. ft., 30' sign. Then there is the in between area. That is what I was trying to get to. This is more than a sign especially how you are presenting it, before any plans or outlay. I have never seen anyone come in for the sign first.

C. Champagne: But there may not be as many projects where the sign is a crucial element to the project.

C. Pearson: I don't disagree with any of that.

M. Hollis: To answer Mr. Duhaime's concern, if we came in with a cart at the appropriate time and said what the use is, but years later that use failed, that sign would still be there. I am not sure, as much as you want your question answered, that it is relevant. It is a unique and unusual sign, more than a sign, as the Chair has pointed out. It is a message board and a locator. It is so unique we had to come here to say this is what we need and hopefully you will give us some help.

J. Roy: Jeff has put a lot of time into this property. I think he purchased it in 2012 and has been working on development since then. Is a sign going to prohibit him from developing this? Is that what the hardship is?

M. Hollis: It will prohibit a reasonable use of this property, if you are limited to the sign

ordinance permission.

J. Roy: So it prohibits the development of the property?

M. Hollis: Yes. That is why we are so far ahead of the schedule. That is the criteria and we have to know.

C. Champagne: This is unusual to be coming here for a sign before the rest of it.

D. Pare: The gentleman who came through Hooksett in 1971, he did not have electronics and he found what he was looking for just like people are going to find this place. I don't see the size of this sign making any impact on this property. I think it is a great idea. If The Colosseum moves into this property, his name is already established. They will find him. I don't see where the sign is relevant to be this big to find this location.

M. Hollis: It is an event location. If you don't have a message board for an event location you can read from the highway you might as well not have a message board.

D. Pare: You can't be driving 70 mph and tell me you have time to read what is going on at this place. You might as well be texting and driving.

M. Hollis: I disagree and I think that is why it is designed this way. They have looked carefully at that size and I believe that is what it is designed for.

D. Pare: If something doesn't work out with The Colosseum, and a gentlemen's club wants to come in, we don't need that in Hooksett.

C. Champagne: In terms of signs being relevant because of technology and GPS, we have relationships with a lot of brands, stores, real estate brokers that look for sites, and we get calls all the time saying what is our experience and what do we think. One of the criteria they use to decide whether they are going to go into a certain city or town is still signs. I don't know if that will change 20 years from now, but it hasn't changed, and if anything they seem more aggressive and interested. What I think of is zoning, planning, what kind of relief can we get if we need it, and the visibility of their sign in that city or town. This is before they put a purchase and sales in. They won't if the criteria of the sign code of a certain city or town doesn't meet their threshold. That is real and to have a venue like this without a highway sign, a landmark, are people going to find it? We'll never know because it is very unlikely this is going to be viable without that landmark.

R. Bairam: All I have heard so far is marketing and they want this sign. They have not gone before the Planning Board. We have no idea what is going on in this lot. These are just dreams. It might work, it might not, but we are going to be stuck with that sign.

R. Duhaime: If you go by Walgreens in Bedford, they seem to do a good business. We have a

Walgreens in Hooksett and I'm not particularly fond of it. I prefer the one in Bedford. That is the point I am trying to make. I would like to see what they did in Bedford, in Hooksett. That is why I am trying to get the size of this sign to fit into what I am trying to envision and am looking for examples. I just don't see where this sign will fit into the zoning in the town.

C. Champagne: There are big signs in Hooksett and relief has been granted to properties for substantially bigger signs. The criteria fit and it made sense. Home Depot is one. When you look at it all by itself outside of its surroundings it looks unusual. In its setting it is going to fit. The first time you look at it you are going to have a different impression than subsequent times. It becomes part of the landscape.

R. Duhaime: If you put a cell tower in somebody's back yard, they are not happy about it, but after a while they learn to live with it. I agree but a cell tower is not always the best thing for what you want to see.

C. Champagne: When a sign is connected to a venue, it is not just a cell tower sitting there for the invisible transmissions that it needs. This is connected to a venue that I would assume would be desirable to the town.

R. Duhaime: I think it serves a purpose but I am trying to gauge the size of it. That is what you are here for, the size. You could put a small sign there but you want a really big sign.

C. Champagne: You could put a smaller sign there, but the legibility and effectiveness would be compromised to the point that putting up a smaller sign would still be a fairly large endeavor and if it is not going to be effective and legible. I would not recommend it. It would not fit and would not be right.

M. Hollis: The sign board, which is the lilac, the address, and the center is different than the message board and I am wondering if the Board, if you saw fit to approve it and are concerned about granting one so large without any connection or description, could limit it to say you approve the message board on the basis that it shall continue to be an event board as opposed to a static advertising board. It will advertise and announce what is going on at that site. We have 2 static signs and one message board. The condition could be granting the approval for the extra size so long as that shall remain an events message board connected to events on site.

C. Pearson: Before I went onto the Sign Committee I was an anti-sign guy and have done a major 180. I would not want a sign that goes up of that size to be ineffective. I would not want to handcuff anybody to have it be an ineffective sign because then it serves no purpose. I don't want the lack of a purposeful sign to infringe on the success of the site. Rogers point is valid in that we walk a fine line for what is aesthetically pleasing, and I think we are a little bit cart before the horse. I tend to bring things back to black and white and I don't know what I am granting you a variance from because I don't know what it is you are doing. It is like writing a blank check. I want to understand your site better so that I can understand what the Board would be giving

relief from.

Jeff Larrabee (Owner of Property): Would you want to spend \$250,000 to \$300,000 for engineering, architectural, etc. to get a project approved to only come back to this Board and have you say that you will only allow a 550 sq. ft. sign, which we know will not work. 750 sq. ft. is small for the venue we are trying to create. There is no way we are going to spend this type of money and develop this venue and spend \$1,000,000 for a sign people can't read. The project is dead without the sign. We are proposing one of the nicest developments you will find in New Hampshire. Where can you find a nice botanical garden and festival grounds where you can have events and festivals. We have something very nicely planned that I think this town and New Hampshire is going to be proud of. There is no way this will happen with a sign that people can't read and tell events that are happening. If it is too small it is dangerous. This sign is appropriate. The state signs are larger than this on this part of the highway for a reason, the high speed tolling. The state, in their research, had figured out that they needed to be bigger due to health, safety and welfare for the traveling public and those are directional. We are trying to create a sign that is appropriate. We need this type of sign for 65-70mph in high-speed tolling. Our sign is somewhat of a directional, but is informational. We are branding. There are other uses for this property, but it won't be anything of this magnitude that Hooksett will be proud of. I have no lack of people that want to come in and compliment or play off of Ritchie Brothers. When I brought Cabela's and Great Wolf Resorts to this town, it was a shame when it did not happen because we lost \$100,000,000 worth of tax base. Then the outlets were created in Merrimack. Even though Bass Pro was interested in coming to my site, I had a letter of intent with them, I did not want to go through what I went through with Cabela's for the next 4 years and end up empty handed. It would not have worked at this location anyway due to a lack it not being the correct environment. Richie Brothers suggested creating an event destination which this exit is perfect for. The reason why the New York Stock Exchange companies have come to this Exit 11 is because it is the crossroads of New Hampshire. Why don't we put something in that is world class. We can share parking, there is a double-sided sidewalk under the highway. We have a great brand here; the Lilac Center and Botanical Park to catch people's attention. Some of the people here that haven't had a chance to speak, like John Bentley, has formed a 501(c)(3) lilac charity. One of the things that we intend to do at this location with our lilac festival is create money and donations to give to children's charities. A person at the Arnold Arboretum has offered to donate 70 lilac cultivars to this venue. We are trying to create this venue so that universities, such as Harvard, and children's hospitals are taking a look and saying this could be something great. A charity donation. There is no way this venue will work without a decent sign, landmark and brand. If you think that going up the highway some little sign is going to make a world class venue, it is not going to happen. The person who has been helping me with this for the past few years and has put this all together and I met with the chief marketing person from the Patriots. All of these people want to get involved in this great project. If we can't do this what are we left with? I have had no lack of equipment rental companies, used car dealers and car auction places

that want to buy this site. I am not not interested right now. I want to do this. We want to create something nice for New Hampshire and put Hooksett on the map. I think you should grant this variance because what we are doing here is something really nice.

J. Roy: The Home Depot sign is 576 sq. ft. and is away from the highway but is visible from the highway. I respect what you are doing, I am just trying to understand the purpose. Is there a reason for the larger sign?

M. Hollis: The message board generates the need for a bigger sign. With that sign you have one static sign and they have 1 or 2 users of the site. Also, with that site you see the building. This site you do not. That site is up high on a hill. They are very different signs. You have to break out the message board. There are some message boards that have no detail. We have a sign board with the location, which is the brand, and then the message board. We need both.

C. Champagne: Another point about the Home Depot sign. The whole thing is a branded element and is very recognizable.

Open to Discussion

C. Pearson: It wouldn't be a bad idea to get some feedback from Planning. Personally, I am not opposed to this sign. I think it has a lot of merit to it, but I want to get a better understanding of it because we don't know what is going to go in here and how it will apply to what variance required it. That makes it difficult for us to either approve or deny a variance. That is why is was asking the applicants if this is something more than a sign.

R. Duhaime: That is valid and I think he has a great idea. Whatever they are trying to brand or sell should be on there. I like the idea of the size of the lettering. I would like to see what you are going to do with this sign in terms of flashing, etc. Other than that we are writing you a blank check to do whatever you want with this sign and that is more than I am comfortable with.

C. Pearson: I would like to get some feedback from Planning to get some clarification as to what we are looking at. Even the variance as it stands, makes it hard because the sign and the tenants are not defined. I think Planning could help or at least give us another set of eyes.

P. Denbow: When Jeff spoke I think we got a better idea what they are trying to do, but we still don't know what they are going to do there as far as events and how frequent.

C. Pearson: I don't know if this can be defined, I would like to get feedback from Planning. That would help us define what we are giving you the variance on.

J. Roy: Even if we have all of this here and it is what the Planning Board comes back and says, in 20 years from now if this is something completely different the sign is still there. Looking at the proposal of the sign, I understand the reasoning for it, I don't think it is a bad idea where it happens to be Botanical Gardens or a future hotel. Even if Planning comes back and says this is

what they are planning in 20 years it is still zoned commercial, it still has to be approved for whatever use it is if it is not approved already, so the sign would stay with where it is.

C. Pearson: I just want help in defining what we are giving them the variance for. Is it a multi-use tenant site, a single entity, etc.? It would help us define the proper variance to give them relief. Right now we are giving them relief as a single tenant. That kind of feedback and an idea from Planning on their perception will help us move forward. I am not opposed to this but want to make sure we do this right for the tenant and the town. Are we on a time table?

M. Hollis: We do not have a deadline.

R. Bairam: I would like to hear from Planning.

P. Denbow: I liken this to the Water Works. This is a different concept but we don't have enough to put our hands on.

R. Duhaime: Even a 3-D picture of what this might look like, other than just the sign.

C. Pearson: We can throw ideas out. Because this is different for the town, but I would like to get feedback and something we can work off of. Once we grant this it will go to Planning and I want them to be comfortable with whatever we do.

N. Golon: Can we get onto the next Planning Board meeting agenda?

M. Lavoie: I will let them know.

R. Duhaime motioned to continue to the next scheduled meeting. Seconded by R. Bairam. Motion carried unanimously.

R. Bairam motioned to adjourn. Seconded by R. Duhaime. Motion carried unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:49 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

AnnMarie White
Recording Clerk