



CITY OF SAINT PAUL
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DATE: February 13, 2013
TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Neighborhood Planning Committee
RE: Public Hearing Response to Amendments to the Highland Village Special District Sign Plan

Background

On July 14, 2011 the Planning Commission initiated a study, undertaken by a task force, of the Highland Village Special District Sign Plan. The task force was made up of members of the Highland Business Association and the Highland District Council. The group met between July 2011 and May 2012 and made recommendations to amend the plan and plan area (see Attachment A). The recommendations are modeled on those made for the 2009 update of the Grand Avenue Special District Sign Plan. They clarify language and amend the area to which the sign plan applies.

The Highland Village Special District Sign Plan was originally drafted by the Highland Village Planning Committee and adopted by the City Council in 1986. It applies to the area shown on Attachment B. In February, 2011 the Highland District Council requested review of the Highland Village Special District Sign Plan. At the same time, the Highland Business Association recommended that signs with dynamic display be prohibited within the sign district, and the Highland District Council supported this recommendation.

The draft amendments and their rationale are detailed in the attached document. Primarily the changes result in a sign plan that follows more closely the style of the existing zoning code by clearing up unnecessary and ambiguous language. In addition, the draft plan expands the area of the sign district to the Ford site and up to Snelling Avenue. One of the principal changes to the document is the addition of a prohibition on dynamic display signs.

A public hearing was held on December 14, 2012.

Public Hearing

Two sets of comments were received during the public comment period. One, a written response, was received from Zoning Administrator Wendy Lane in the Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI). She raised three issues.

1. *Procedures.* Ms. Lane wanted the Highland District Council and Highland Business Association to know that they can be notified by email when a sign permit is submitted, automatically, but that the plans will not be available electronically until after the permit has been issued.

2. *Business Signs.*

- a. Ms. Lane recommended against including portable, temporary and interior window signs in the maximum square footage of business signs allowed because they are used periodically and are not issued with a permit. Allowing them to be included in the total amount of business signs allowed would severely limit the business' ability to put up temporary or portable and interior window signs.
 - b. Ms. Lane also recommended against reducing the maximum square footage from 2 times the lot frontage to 1 times the lot frontage for fear that it would create too many non-conforming signs. She recommended using the Traditional Neighborhood standard instead.
 - c. Ms. Lane noted that permanent and temporary window signs are not defined in the code, rather that interior window signs are. According to Section 64.125.W, window sign, interior is defined as: "A sign placed on or behind and within four (4) feet of a window or within the window display area that is oriented toward the street and plainly visible from an adjoining street, sidewalk or other public right-of-way, but excluding skyways." There is no definition for an exterior window sign. Staff has regulated signs on the outside of windows the same as any other business sign: a permit is required and they are included in the total square feet of signage allowed on the property. Sign permits are not required for interior signs.
3. *Signs with Dynamic Display.* Ms Lane wished to make sure that the impact of prohibiting any sign with dynamic display is clear. It would mean that electronically changeable gas station signs would not be permitted. New or moved gas station signs could not have dynamic display pricing, which is now the industry norm. Interior signs with dynamic display are regulated the same as exterior dynamic display signs, so this change would prohibit them as well. The most commonly affected type of interior dynamic display sign would be the lottery signs with electronically changeable jackpot amounts. Now that dynamic display signs are allowed for institutional uses in residential zoning districts, the greatest increase in the use of these signs in the past couple of years has been for churches and schools.

The second, an in-person testimonial, was from task force member Tia Anderson. She said that both organizations support the plan as presented but that in light of some of the comments by DSI staff she felt the task force should have additional conversations with staff about the concerns. The Grand Avenue Sign Plan and Highland Village Sign Plan both opted to ban dynamic display signs outright, with out understanding the implications to gas stations in particular. But that is something Ms Anderson said the task force hopes to revisit with staff.

Public Hearing Response

Zoning staff sat down with the task force to discuss the issues raised by Ms. Lane. During that conversation it was agreed that many of the changes Ms. Lane suggested would be adopted.

The task force recommendation to the Neighborhood Planning Committee is attached to this document. Double underlines indicate new language added and double strikeouts indicate "new" language taken out.

Recommendation:

The Neighborhood Planning Committee recommends that the Planning Commission recommend the attached amended version of the Highland Village Special District Sign Plan and accompanying map to the City Council for adoption.

Attachments:

Attachment A – Planning Commission Resolution

Attachment B – Proposed official zoning map of the Highland Village Special Sign District

Attachment C – Original 1985 (current) Highland Village Sign District map

Attachment D – Recommended Sign Plan amendments with explanatory notes

Attachment E – “Clean” copy of Highland Village Special District Sign Plan as proposed