

VEVAY TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
Special Meeting
Thursday, January 23, 2014
Vevay Township Hall – 6:00 p.m.

MINUTES

Members present: Stacy Byers, Jack Cady, Roger Cargill, John Lazet, Ilene Thayer, and Bruce Walker.

Member absent: None.

Other Persons present: Supervisor Gary Howe; consultant Mark Eidelson.

I. Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chair Thayer.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

The audience joined the Commission in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. Set/Amend Agenda

Under “Pending Business”, add a presentation by Rick Imshaug of Skyline on digital signs.

IV. Brief Public Comment

There was no public comment.

V. Pending Business

Rick Imshaug of Skyline - He has been working in the sign industry for 35 years, and has been involved with the signs in Spartan Stadium as well as in East Lansing. They are an advertising agency that specializes in designing billboards around the Midwest. They design, negotiate, and place billboards around the state for dozens of customers, as well as for placement nationally.

Business sign trends - signs fall into two categories: on premise and billboard. The Lansing area has about 12 digital billboards. Billboard size is standardized across the country, the three common sizes being 14x48 feet, 10x30 feet, and 11x22 feet. Billboards used to be painted by hand, which evolved to pre-printed paper that was pasted on the display area, to tri-vision signs with moving vertical display parts, and now to digital. Signs across the country are all moving to digital display, with a focus on energy efficiency and better programming capabilities. As pixilation technology progresses, older signs seem more crude in display. The lifespan of these signs is about 10 years, with a trend towards replaceable modules to extend their life.

Digital billboards - represent a large investment, the largest ones today costing upwards of \$250,000-\$500,000 per billboard, not including the cost of the structure to hold the sign. However, signs from China are in the \$150,000-\$160,000 range, so they will likely continue to replace older billboards. Far more common are much smaller signs for businesses, gas stations, and restaurants, commonly with scrolling text. Given the difficulty of obtaining sign permits,

digital billboards allow multiple advertisers or messages to be displayed without the need for new locations. The digital billboard near the Quality Dairy across from the MSU campus switches every 10 seconds. Most jurisdictions do not allow animated messages. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) mandates a minimum of 6 seconds between changes with an instantaneous switch, no fade in/out. Most companies tend to display messages around 10 seconds, allowing 6 advertisers/messages per minute.

Digital Billboards - some counties allow moving messages and full animation. Digital billboards allow for more advertisers, all adjustable by frequency of message, time of day, etc. At the Eastwood Towne Center, there was consideration of an entertainment area with a digital display on a parking structure, with anticipated full animation as there would be no distraction to traffic. At least 39 states allow for digital signs, and research has shown that distraction is not an issue. MDOT uses them for directing traffic via portable trailers, etc. MDOT has a moratorium on new billboard permits without turning in old permits. The result has been billboards leaving rural communities/lower traffic regions and moving to higher viewing areas. MDOT requires 1000 feet between signs, but are considering 1750 feet between digital billboards. They tend to proliferate as businesses compete with each other. There is not a huge demand for signs on US-127 between Lansing and Jackson. A 14x48 billboard costs about \$500/month while the same size sign on I-96 between Novi and Lansing costs about \$2500/month. Okemos is a prime viewing area and you see the increasing number of billboards.

Illumination - Customers don't choose lighting or brightness, but depend on Skyline and others to design signs that meet local standards. All signs have self-dimming features, though not dependent on each individual display. Previous practice was to have lights aimed upwards for illumination; today they tend to be above the sign and aiming downwards. Some signs have caps on top of the sign to reduce stray light above the sign, though light shields are not utilized. Lighting today is more focused, needing fewer sources. On older signs, workers replacing printed signs use ladders and may bump lights, resulting in less light on the message and more stray light. Often adjustment of the light source can help with stray light, but sign technology is improving and could be self-correcting as lighting becomes more efficient and focused.

Digital signs and lighting - Digital signs eliminate the need for illumination and emit light more horizontally, and he expects illuminated signs to be phased out as technology improves and costs come down. As a message background changes, the sign may seem brighter when it's actually more a matter of contrast, especially when the background is white versus a darker color. He is not aware of any research on the effect of the brightness of the background of a digital sign in enhancing readability. There have been no complaints from residents about the large sign by the Quality Dairy in East Lansing, though that may be in part as it's considered a commercial area.

Illumination standards - East Lansing regulates light using the standard of nits, which he believes is unworkable due to meters using nits being so expensive and relatively uncommon. He had complaints of a sign being too bright, and couldn't find any company with equipment to measure nits. Even the city didn't have the expensive meter. Equipment measuring foot-candles is less expensive and more common. The rule of thumb is for emitted light to be 0.3 foot-candles above ambient lighting, and self-adjusting to ambient light. Both when they design a sign and when they negotiate with local communities for placement, discussion is usually in terms of foot-candles. He will see if he can provide examples of signs emitting 0.3 foot-candles.

Mr. Eidelson – pointed out that nits are used ~~not only~~ in measuring intensity of light on/from a sign, ~~but also in how rapidly it fades over distance.~~

Non-billboard trends in the industry - Skyline owns a fleet of mobile self-contained billboards that travel throughout the Midwest; so far they are not electronic but printed. Some companies have mobile digital billboards that do not operate while traveling but only when parked. They travel to events or locations, park, and start the display. He anticipates MDOT eventually controlling the regulation of these types of signs. Skyline also does “vehicle wraps” for vehicles such as Dean Transportation. Some businesses wrap a cheap vehicle and park it in a prominent place as opposed to applying for a new sign.

Size of signs - digital billboards are standard sizes, depending on the setback. For billboards over 100 feet away from the traveled road, lettering needs to be at least 12” high. A 4x8 foot sign would have no room for a picture plus a meaningful message. He is not aware of any rule of thumb for size of copy based on distance, but has utilized a table/chart of readability size based on the viewing distance.

Smaller, on premise Electronic Message Centers (EMCs) - digital is becoming more prevalent as the cost drops. He foresees increased placement of digital signs within an existing sign. The changing message would allow the elimination of fence signs, drive in signs, etc. Usually EMCs are text and low grade animation. Scrolling messages can be more distracting as they take longer to reveal. On premise signs are likely to be more difficult to regulate as the technology evolves. If a client wants an on premise sign, they will design the sign, check local ordinances, and work with the client and the jurisdiction to have the sign approved and installed. Digital signs are new enough that often jurisdictions don’t have digital sign regulations in place.

Sign regulation trends - He would recommend having square footage regulations mirror common sign sizes used around the country. They’ve encountered pushback from jurisdictions not wanting signs at all, digital or not. Their regulations use sign size, or setbacks, or limit the allowable jurisdiction-wide total number of signs to effectively keep signs out. Businesses have responded by using yard signs, signs on telephone poles, and vehicle graphics. Inevitably they find ways to advertise by getting around the regulations. While not particularly common, the portable white signs with black letters changeable by hand are still around.

Mr. Imshaug - gave or will provide to the Commission research on distraction, readability, signs in general, viewing and readability charts, lighting, and hold-times. He also provided a copy of the East Lansing ordinance language on signs.

- A. Draft ZO Amendments from Community Planner Mark Eidelson
 - 1. Cellular Tower facilities

This item was tabled for the evening.

- 2. Generally Accepted Agricultural Management Practices (GAAMPs)

This item was tabled for the evening.

- 3. Solar Energy Systems (SES)

This item was tabled for the evening.

4. Sign Regulations

Mr. Eidelson - provided a one page summary of various aspects of sign lighting information. Literature he has been reviewing measures brightness in nits, and he is not aware of either nits or foot-candles being a preferable measurement. A sunny day is approaching 6500 nits ambient light. He suspects that the industry establishes sign brightness at the time of manufacture, and then don't measure brightness again. Though not in the current draft, he would recommend including nits as well as foot-candles. He does not know if a screen change would qualify as a change that would submit a sign to a new ordinance regulation of illumination, and thinks the question would be one for the courts.

COMMISSION - It was noted that some jurisdictions completely disallow digital signs, such as Howell, and that the Township is not required to allow billboards within an Agriculture district. After extensive discussion, the Commission asked Mr. Eidelson to have the next draft proposal:

- Apply the proposed digital sign standards to B-1, B-2, and Industrial Districts
- Require a minimum hold-time interval of 8 seconds for on-premise signs
- Limit illumination/light emitted to 2000 nits during the day, and 500 nits after dark
- Retain the 0.3 foot-candle standard for allowable sign brightness above ambient light
- Require digital signs to be dark if they malfunction
- Allow EMCs to operate all night long
- Prohibit the use of EMCs as temporary signs
- Clarify that temporary signs are exempted from the provisions of Chap. 20.03(c)(4)
- Consider a limit on the number of digital signs in the Township
- Prohibit digital signs within an Agriculture District except as follows:
 - allow EMCs for non-residential uses within 500 feet of the US 127 right of way, if the parcel has frontage on the service roads within that distance.

VI. Any Other Business

A special meeting to continue discussion was scheduled for March 26, at 6 pm.

VII. Additional Public Comment

Greg Shaw - had questions/discussion with the Commission about how various businesses along the US 127 corridor would be affected by the proposed sign changes.

VIII. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:06 p.m.

John Lazet, Secretary