

# CITY OF SAN DIMAS PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

Regularly Scheduled Meeting  
Wednesday, May 4, 2011 at 7:00 p.m.  
245 East Bonita Avenue, Council Chambers

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## **Present**

Chairman Jim Schoonover  
Commissioner David Bratt  
Commissioner John Davis  
Commissioner Stephen Ensberg  
Commissioner M. Yunus Rahi  
Assistant City Manager of Community Dev. Larry Stevens  
Director of Development Services Dan Coleman  
Planning Commission Secretary Jan Sutton

## **CALL TO ORDER AND FLAG SALUTE**

Chairman Schoonover called the regular meeting of the Planning Commission to order at 7:00 p.m. and Commissioner Bratt led the flag salute.

## **CONSENT CALENDAR**

1. Approval of Minutes:     March 16, 2011 Special Meeting  
                                      April 6, 2011

**MOTION:** Moved by Davis, seconded by Ensberg to approve the Consent Calendar. Motion carried unanimously, 5-0.

## **COMMISSION BUSINESS**

### 2. **DISCUSSION REGARDING COMMUNITY SIGN FORUM**

*Assistant City Manager of Community Development Larry Stevens* stated the Commission received a number of comments at the Community Sign Forum held on March 16, 2011 regarding the existing sign ordinance. The staff report presented tonight provided a summary of each comment made at the Forum, along with some additional comments on issues that were not brought up, and then comments from Staff, which are presented in three different tables in the report. The tables also provide information in reference to the applicable code section.

He stated it is Staff's conclusion that there are areas of the code that need amending, and using the tables with the three sets of comments will help to identify the scope. The purpose of the meeting tonight is to determine if there is enough merit to make a change, and once the scope

is defined, to work within those areas only in order to move this forward in an expeditious manner. He stated he would be discussing the areas that merit consideration, and while it does not necessarily mean these areas need to change, it is felt they should be reviewed to see if they are appropriate as is, and if not, what changes the Commission would recommend.

Once that process is completed, it will go through the public hearing process with the Commission and City Council. He also asked the Commission to identify any areas of the code that they may feel need revision.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated Item 1 had to do with merchandise in front of the windows. This is not addressed in the sign code currently, and typically the Sheriff's Department would only be consulted if it involved a Conditional Use Permit.

**Commissioner Davis** thought the comment from the public was expressing concern if the amount of window signage allowed increased above five percent.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated Staff took the comment to mean not blocking the view with merchandise.

**Commissioner Bratt** stated whether it was concerning merchandise or signage, he felt five percent window coverage for signs was too little, but that there should be some type of regulation to not block the view from the outside to the cashier area with anything.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** clarified that this was more a consideration of a design standard rather than the amount of coverage only.

The second comment was concerning digital signs and message boards. Currently digital signs are not addressed by the code, though it might be possible to interpret the standards for public message boards as possibly allowing them, which is what the DPRB had to consider in regards to the request from the hospital. Staff felt this should at least be looked at, and if they were going to allow them, what standards should be applied. If they are not going to allow them, it should be clearly listed as prohibited in the code so this is not brought back continuously to define; this should be resolved one way or the other.

**Commissioner Davis** felt they need to be clear about what is allowed, as he felt reader boards were undesirable, but the new picture-style boards were more modern and similar to using a banner for displaying the message.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated the message on the new electronic boards can change rather rapidly, and it can be argued that they create a traffic distraction. They could consider limitations on how frequently it can change, and look at potential conflicts with traffic devices depending on size and location.

**Commissioner Rahi** asked if it was possible to regulate the message on a digital sign.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated one of the most difficult areas of law related to sign regulations is what is called "content neutrality." They have to be careful not to run into constitutional issues. It is possible to write findings to allow some distinction by sign type as long as it is not regulating the message. Digital signs can change very quickly so part of the discussion may involve setting standards for the frequency of changing the message.

**Commissioner Bratt** stated maybe the basis for allowing this type of sign can be on the square footage of the business and restrict it to the larger businesses only, as well as regulating the size of the sign to help control how many there can be in the City.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated the next comment related to having a monument sign in the public right-of-way in Historic Downtown only in conjunction with a façade upgrade. He stated this standard may be outdated and could be reviewed for applicability. The main concern with allowing commercial signs in the public right-of-way is that care needs to be given so that it doesn't set a precedent for having to allow less desirable signs also.

**Commissioner Davis** asked if the public right-of-way in the downtown area started at the front of the building, and how monument signs can be allowed if part of the right-of-way is landscaped.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated the right-of-way does start at the front of the buildings, and the opportunity to have a monument sign only applies if there is a zero set-back on the building. While there is landscaping in certain areas now, the Council is discussing possible modifications to the streetscape.

**Commissioner Ensberg** felt this requirement should be changed if there hasn't been a request for a façade upgrade in fifteen years.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated there might be better ways to have a more effective sign, such as a perpendicular icon sign or projecting sign rather than a low-set sign at the curb with a car parked in front of it. This can be a consideration when reviewing the whole downtown streetscape.

He stated in regards to portable signs, you can get all manner and types of signs if they are allowed. He stated while Staff is not in favor of allowing this type of sign, they will research other cities' standards.

**Commissioner Davis** stated he was not in favor of this type of sign.

**Chairman Schoonover** asked if portable signs included those held by people.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated they have a different regulation for human mounted signs.

**Commissioner Bratt** felt there should be something allowed for the downtown merchants to let people know who they are and when they are open.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated you have to be careful when allowing portable signs because a recurring theme for businesses is to go with the cheapest common denominator, and a lot of businesses are going for the flash of temporary signs and banners and visibility of cheap sandwich boards and portable signs. These are very inexpensive compared to an icon sign on the building. You have to think about the type of environment you want to create. He stated a good example of an overabundance of temporary signs can be seen along Foothill Boulevard in the City of Upland.

**Commissioner Davis** concurred with Commissioner Bratt that the downtown merchants needed some type of signage to bring attention to their businesses, but didn't want to see a lot of little signs everywhere.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated Staff feels the limitation of five percent window coverage for signs needs to be reviewed. In regards to “for sale” and “for lease” signs, vacant tenant spaces could currently have five percent window coverage with a sign, and it may be possible to use a temporary banner also. The bigger concern though is the large signs that are posted along the street frontage that are in place 365 days a year.

**Commissioner Davis** stated there are too many of them. The corner of Arrow and Walnut is a good example; there are currently eight to nine large yellow signs there advertising vacancies.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated if you have more than one broker in a complex, then you get even more clutter. Staff feels there needs to be standards set and possibly permits required.

In regards to monument signs, this standard is for commercial, industrial and office zones and has been in the code even prior to the 1999 amendment. Part of the reasoning behind not having an individual tenant monument sign was if you allowed one business to have one, then all the others would want to have their own, and it would be difficult to coordinate. However, this can be reviewed to see if there are other options.

**Commissioner Davis** felt maybe the landlord should have the discretion to choose which tenant can be on the sign. He also felt there should be a minimum size for the lettering and set limits to the amount of tenants on the sign.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated the Ralph’s Center was an exception to the standards, and they were allowed to have several smaller signs with tenant names on them, but in reality it has made the names so small on the signs it is difficult to read them. It would be better if there was a large monument sign for the center, and the tenants could advise customers that is where they are located. They could look at setting a minimum letter size to regulate the number of names and to ensure they are legible.

**Commissioner Bratt** stated at the Target Center the monument sign only highlights the major tenants, not all of them.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated in that center the landlord determines who can be on the monument signs. The City set a size limit on the sign and letter size, and that may be the best way to address this issue.

**Chairman Schoonover** stated it appeared that the size of monument signs varied by zone, and felt they should try to make the sign size consistent.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated a comment was made to increase the number of days for temporary banners to 90 days annually. The City Council reviewed the temporary banner section a few years ago and increased the number of banners allowed per year from four to six, but did not feel it was necessary to increase the number of days. Staff can review to see if that is still reasonable. They may also want to review consistency on size based on location. The new “feather” type banners have not been allowed in San Dimas yet, and if they are going to consider increasing the time limit, they may also need to look at some additional standards.

In regards to “for rent” signs, they tend to be quasi-permanent, and the person who spoke had an enforcement case that went beyond just having a “for rent” sign, so the circumstances presented weren’t entirely accurate. Most rental complexes have some vacancies at any given time, so Staff can review what is a reasonable way to advertise that.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated in regards to the comments made relative to the Holiday Inn Express, the current wall sign is externally illuminated. The City does not prohibit having an internally illuminated sign, but it was a choice made by the developer prior to the current owner. Since there is no prohibition, the current owner would just need to go through the normal approval process. It is a similar circumstance in regards to the monument sign. Under the existing code a monument sign could be permitted if he was willing to give up one of his wall signs. Staff does not feel there needs to be any change to the sign code in regards to these comments.

He stated the limit on freeway signs for centers over 100,000 square feet in size seems fair and reasonable, and the intent was to keep from having batches of signs along the freeway, and keeping the focus on larger centers. In regards to the next table, Items A-C and E were already discussed, and Item D really only applies to the downtown where lighting is restricted to external illumination to complement the historic architecture. Staff feels this standard can be reviewed, though he is not sure if it should be changed. The other item for consideration is shown under Item F. This comment was brought up due to the unique situation at Starberry Farms during strawberry season, where there is a need for temporary signage but on a long-term basis. The difficult part may be in defining "seasonal" so that every business doesn't try to apply that standard.

The last chart represents comments and concerns from Staff. The first item has been discussed and will be reviewed further. Next is a series of definitions that need to be clarified. Staff is also concerned with businesses trying to use strings of lights year-round in substitution for appropriate signage. Staff would like to make some minor revisions to signage in the Town Core and Historic Downtown. Staff would also like to review the procedures for sign approvals and design standards. Unless it involves a Master Sign Program, which is reviewed by DPRB, most signs are reviewed at the Staff level. There may be some new types of signs that should have a more formal review process such as digital message boards. The City also has a problem with handbills and other signs being posted in the public right-of-way damaging City property, and discussed an ordinance adopted by the City of Los Angeles that allows them to recoup the cost of repairs to City property.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated Staff is intending to take these items, along with the Commissioner's comments, to the City Council to confirm the scope of research. He stated he also received a letter today from the Bonita Avenue Corridor Committee asking the City to consider allowing flag banners similar to the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary banners. The letter did not indicate what they wanted them to say, whether it would be a seasonal theme or some form of community identification.

**Commissioner Davis** stated he sees that type of banner in cities he travels to and they often advertise upcoming events.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated that is a common use, but they have to see if this competes with other signs or Christmas decorations that use the same poles. There is also a cost every time a sign is put up or taken down. He thought maybe they were asking for something that was more seasonal to add to the ambience of the downtown. This can be reviewed and brought back for discussion.

**Commissioner Davis** felt whoever is requesting the sign should pay the cost for installation and removal.

Chairman Schoonover opened the meeting for public comment. Addressing the Commission were:

**Paul Kirby, 211 W. Bonita Avenue**, commended Mr. Stevens on his presentation and felt it covered a lot of issues. He was disappointed in the lack of turnout from the business community and encouraged the Commission to make appropriate decisions, get the rules in place, and then let Staff enforce the rules. He has been in this community for 40 years and felt all of these issues can be resolved.

**Alline Kranzer, 508 N. San Dimas Avenue**, stated the Bonita Avenue Corridor Committee will be submitting a more detailed report about their request for the banners after they conduct further research on what other cities allow. The purpose of the banners is to enliven downtown, and they could be business related, seasonal or promote different businesses in the area. She stated they have staff that could help with putting the banners up. She was encouraged by the discussion on banners and signage, and urged the Commission to listen to all parties and use common sense in coming to their decision.

**Alta Skinner, 850 Walnut Avenue**, stated she has been in the community for 38 years and is concerned about businesses like the Holiday Inn Express not having appropriate signage to draw attention to them. She felt there should be a stipulation regarding how a business is positioned on a parcel and its proximity to the street. She stated the new Twisted Sage Café doesn't have much visibility to Foothill Boulevard. She felt the City should encourage businesses to come to San Dimas and help them out more.

There being no further comments, the public comments section was closed.

**MOTION:** Moved by Ensberg, seconded by Davis to approve the recommendations made by Staff and instruct them to take this report along with the Commissioners' comments to the City Council to review and receive direction on amending the sign ordinance. Motion carried unanimously, 5-0.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated after the Council gives direction, it will take approximately 3-5 months to go through the public hearing process. When there is a draft of the proposed changes, they may schedule an informal meeting again before going through the formal public hearing process.

## **ORAL COMMUNICATION**

### **3. Director of Development Services**

**Director of Development Services Dan Coleman** stated the terms of Commissioners Bratt, Ensberg and Rahi will be expiring this year.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated the City Council will be talking about a preliminary site for the Metro Gold Line Station for the purpose of conducting an environment study at their next meeting. Some of the impacted property owners are unhappy with the location, but it is primarily the Gold Line Authority's decision. The Council will also hold a special study session on the budget, as well as discussing at the regular meeting that night.

### **4. Members of the Audience**

No communications were made.

## 5. Planning Commission

**Commissioner Davis** asked if it would be possible to have an item in the budget to hire a consultant to review the situation at San Dimas Station.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated if the City were to expend funds for that, it would be appropriate to do so through the Redevelopment Agency. In terms of the Agency's budget, the current draft does not include any projects since we are still waiting to see what happens with Governor Brown's proposal to eliminate redevelopment agencies statewide. He stated there is a Council subcommittee which is reviewing the situation at San Dimas Station and whether the City should be more proactively involved.

**Commissioner Rahi** asked if there was an update on the Costco pads.

**Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated Staff is working with two proposed restaurant projects but still do not have complete application packets. Once they have a complete submittal, then they would come to the Commission for a Conditional Use Permit and possibly a code amendment relative to the fast food restaurant.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION:** Moved by Ensberg, seconded by Bratt to adjourn. Motion carried unanimously, 5-0. The meeting adjourned at 8:31 p.m. to the regular Planning Commission meeting scheduled for May 18, 2011, at 7:00 p.m.

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James Schoonover, Chairman  
San Dimas Planning Commission

ATTEST:

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Jan Sutton  
Planning Commission Secretary

Approved: June 2, 2011