

**ITEM NO. 14-060 CITY COUNCIL OF PEORIA, ILLINOIS, IN COUNCIL, ASSEMBLED
YOUR COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE to Whom was Referred a
POLICY SESSION Regarding DESIGN AND COMMUNITY
CHARACTER (Signs, Landscaping, Screening, Parking
Requirements, Building Design & Materials).**

A Policy Session was held on Tuesday, February 18, 2014, at ROOM, 305 SW Water Street, Peoria, Illinois, at 6:58 P.M., with Mayor Jim Ardis presiding.

ROLL CALL

Roll Call showed the following Council Members were physically present: Akeson, Grayeb, Jensen, Johnson, Montelongo, Moore, Spain, Riggerbach, Turner, Weaver, Mayor Ardis – 11; Absent – None.

Others present were: City Manager Patrick Urich, Community Development Director Ross Black, Senior Planner Leah Allison, Senior Planner Josh Naven, Senior Planner Kimberly Smith, Senior Planner Shannon Techie, City Clerk Beth Ball, Chief Deputy City Clerk Stefanie Rice, interested citizens and members of the media.

Communication from the City Manager and the Community Development Director with a Request to Hold a Policy Session Regarding DESIGN AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER (Signs, Landscaping, Screening, Parking Requirements, Building Design & Materials).

Community Development Director Ross Black distributed hardcopies of the presentation for Design and Community Character.

Director Ross Black summarized the change of community character over the 20th century noting the early 20th Century community was built for slower transportation and foot traffic and the late 20th Century community was built for faster transportation with minimal foot traffic. With the increased use of vehicles, he said it created an increased need for parking lots. He said these parking lots were placed in front of the buildings, which meant the buildings had to be set back from the street, which now created the need for bigger signs for people to see. Finally, he said buildings from the late 20th Century were built with a first cost in mind and franchise designs with very little thought to reuse.

Landscaping and Screening

Senior Planner Leah Allison provided a presentation on landscaping and screening. She said the landscaping and screening regulations within the Land Ordinance and the Land Development Code began with a purpose statement, and she recited the purpose statement.

“Landscaping is intended to add visual appeal, establish an ecological balance that reduces storm water run-off and soil erosion and at the same time, work to reduce noise, glare, wind and heat abatement. It’s to provide buffering between different uses, it’s to enhance property values, protect our economic base and conserve energy. It’s to promote nature vegetation. Lastly, landscaping is designed to provide flexibility in landscaping design.”

Ms. Allison said there were three benefits to landscaping aside from adding beautification, which she listed as economic, environmental and social.

Ms. Allison said that economic benefit included an increase in property value and a reduction in the "heat island" effect, and an increase in pavement life. She remarked that environmental benefits included erosion control, filtering runoff, soil stabilization, and siltation reduction of storm water systems, which coincided with the City's ongoing combined sewer overflow project. She said landscaping improved air quality and habitat for insects, birds and other wildlife. Social benefits, she said included attractiveness and livability. She said landscaping also provided screens for utility poles, light poles, and parking lots. She said landscaping softened the environment and added beauty and encouraged activity within neighborhoods. She said it helped mitigate noise from car engines and tires and provided a place where people wanted to live, work and socialize.

Ms. Allison provided an overview of the City's landscaping requirements, which was formula based where points were allocated for shade, evergreen, intermediate trees, and shrubs. She said landscaping plans were required for all developments, except single-family residential. She said landscaping was required in front yards, transitional buffer yards and parking lots, with alternative landscape plans allowed in unique situations.

Ms. Allison provided an overview of the City's current screening requirements, which were focused on garbage and recycle containers, with a minimum height of six feet up to eight feet for the enclosures. She remarked that mechanical equipment must also be screened, which included ground and rooftop mechanicals. She said screening materials were required to be consistent with the primary building materials. If landscaping was used, she said a solid visual barrier must be achieved within two years of planting.

When applying the Code, Ms. Allison identified the following issues:

- 1) A lack of plant variety.
- 2) A lack of encouragement of the use of bioswales.
- 3) Does not easily allow alternative landscape features such as covered parking and rooftop gardens.
- 4) Does not require street trees.
- 5) Only provided landscape islands for large lots.
- 6) Does not allow for creativity.
- 7) Lacked incentive for landscaping and screening.
- 8) The Zoning Ordinance and the Land Development Code, excluding Form Districts, differed slightly.

Ms. Allison said it was Staff's intent to bring a text amendment to the City Council that addressed landscaping and screening issues, which would allow for the following:

1. Provide for a greater variety of shrubs, native plants, perennials;
2. Require street trees.
3. Require landscaping within islands of 50 parking spaces versus 100 parking spaces.
4. Encourage bioswales within parking lots.
5. Provide incentives to reduce the number of parking spaces required, reduce permit fees, and to allocate greater point credits in the landscape plan.
6. Allow for artistic painting of mechanical units.
7. Align the Zoning Ordinance and Land Development Code to be consistent, excluding Form Districts.

Off Street Parking Requirements

Senior Planner Shannon Techie provided a presentation on off-street parking requirements. She described parking lots as having vast amounts of impervious surface; minimal design with regulations addressing the number of parking spaces, size and amount of impervious surface.

Ms. Techie said parking lots were an essential part of cultural life noting they were one of the few spaces that both people and vehicles shared, they were one of the most common regularly used public outdoor open spaces, they influenced the places people visited, and alleviated on-street traffic congestion. However, she also noted parking lots contributed to detriments such as environmental costs, pollutants, limited landscaping, energy costs, water, bright lights and lots of heat.

Ms. Techie said parking lots also created excellence noting that they were carefully designed to be part of the arrival experience and were integrated with their surroundings. She said parking lots allowed for commentary and expression and were a place for outdoor events during the summer such as farmers markets, festivals and concerts. She remarked that parking lots should be thought of as public open spaces. As such, she said flexibility should be encouraged in their design with more self-regulation and possibly grass-like permeable pavers for overflow parking. She said parking lots should focus on design quality versus quantity through performance standards and incentives. She noted that excellent parking lots incorporated gardens and encouraged culture and art such as painting on parking surfaces and artistic bike racks along with other sculptures.

In terms of regulation, Ms. Techie addressed the regulations that applied to the entire city. She reported there was a minimum number of parking spaces required with no cap on the total; however, parking spaces were not reviewed for use changes in the Heart of Peoria Area. She said there were different requirements based on usage, with an option for a waiver, which would allow for the existing parking number to remain. She said transitional buffer yards were required for lots near residential areas; however, it was not reviewed for a change of use in the Heart of Peoria Area. Within the Heart of Peoria Area, she said there was an allowance for alternative parking options such as on-street parking, shared parking and offsite parking. She said there was no parking required in certain areas such as in Form Districts, the Warehouse District and the Central Business District. She noted that the parking lot perimeters required landscaping in the Heart of Peoria Area; however, they were not reviewed for use changes.

Ms. Techie identified issues with parking lots such as vast areas of impervious surface, confusing layers of parking requirements for different uses, very little focus on design, built based on peak demand, located in front of buildings, and provided inadequate runoff control. She provided examples of parking lots in Peoria that resulted from the City's current requirements, which resulted in more parking than what was required.

Ms. Techie proposed certain actions that would address parking lot issues. She recommended reducing the number of parking spaces required, condensing the Off-Street Parking Table and increasing the Off-Street Parking Standards. She provided suggestions of various design standards including additional landscaping to address some of the environmental issues; one-way angle parking, which would reduce the drive aisle width resulting in less impervious surface; water retention features to address runoff, including rain gardens, bioswales, and infiltration trenches; energy efficient lighting to address light pollution issues; and permeable pavements to address runoff. She recommended incorporating pedestrian and bike paths along with bike racks to encourage vehicle alternatives. To allow for artistic expression, she

suggested allowing painting on the parking lot surface or installing artistic bike racks, sculptures, or signage.

As a result of these recommended changes, Ms. Techie said the impact would result in less impervious surface, better integration with the built environment, increased sustainability, more flexibility in the use of parking areas and reduced combined sewer overflow issues.

Signs

Senior Planner Kimberly Smith provided a presentation on signs noting that they affected community character, and that they were purposeful, limited to identification and information.

Ms. Smith remarked that street signs should not cover the street scene, but be part of the street scene. She said street signs provided stopping points and showed people what they wanted to see. She said they were meant to attract people and cars from a distance. She said signs were eye-catchers, visual street interruptions that defined the street scene.

Ms. Smith said the City allowed roof top signage in the downtown area, and she said other districts allowed roof top signage with a special use approved by City Council. She said the City allowed wall signage up to 20% of the façade, and window signage was allowed with restrictions. She said the City allowed monument signs with a limitation. She noted that off-premise signage, a typical billboard, was approximately 300 square feet. She said the City's Ordinance had specific rules on how to calculate area, and that there was an amortization schedule for nonconforming signs. Another type of signage allowed in the downtown area was animated and digital. She said the City allowed digital signage with static changes, and animated signs were allowed in the downtown area.

Ms. Smith commented that the City's current Zoning Ordinance was not context sensitive and it lacked design focus. She said the Ordinance did not connect to the character of individual areas throughout Peoria. Except in Form Districts where the focus was on pedestrian-oriented signs, she said the City's current regulations focused on vehicles. She remarked that the City's current Ordinance was overly complex and along with widespread violations such as façades covered by signs, animated signs, tear-drop signs, and the floppy man/inflated signs. Because there were common violations, she said it meant that the current Ordinance was not recognized by all businesses, and it showed a lack of knowledge and understanding of it.

Ms. Smith remarked there were safety and environmental issues with animated signs. She said they directly distracted or confused motorists, obstructed visibility, emitted light that impaired driver vision, reduced conspicuity and clarity of traffic signals. However, she said when it came to defining character in different parts of the City, there may be some areas where this may be appropriate, such as the business district, but she said it was not necessarily appropriate in every area of the City because character varied. She said inappropriate use of animation changed the impact of these signs from street interruptions to street distractions. She said studies have indicated that even small signs could potentially cause the most distraction to drivers.

Ms. Smith said Staff proposed the following actions to resolve sign issues: align sign types by streetscape and location, which would recognize the unique character of different parts of the City; have signs match the context of each area of the City; draft a simple, pictorial Ordinance; no alterations within the Form Districts; no change to animated regulations, which would allow animated signs within the Central Business District; invoke the amortization of non-conforming signs, which was contained in the Ordinance but not used.

Where appropriate, Ms. Smith recommended the following as they related to each of the areas within the City: restriction of signage to elements that encouraged community interactions and pedestrian scale; regulation of understated signage; regulation for overstated signage; design for pedestrians; restriction of size and types where appropriate; regulations for canopy, wall, window and projection signage; regulation for sandwich boards; favor monument signs over lollipop signs; and to initiate nonconforming sign corrections.

Non-Residential Building Design

Senior Planner Josh Naven provided a presentation on non-residential building designs. He said the City's current regulations outlined in Appendix B of the Zoning Ordinance addressed aesthetics in order to create an attractive appearance and to instill aesthetics as a value and a standard throughout the City. He also said Appendix B addressed aesthetics to promote land uses and designs, which preserved existing aesthetic benefits within the City. He commented that if aesthetics were not instilled, there would only be minimum requirements as a guideline. He said this would create developers providing the aesthetics versus the community vision. In Appendix C, however, the City tried to change that in order to provide a pedestrian-friendly environment with wider sidewalks, tree-lined streets, active shop fronts, short blocks and a variety of uses; to promote re-use redevelopment and infill; and to promote infill development for vacant parcels that reflect the surrounding scale and character. He said the best example of Appendix C was reflected in the Form Districts.

Mr. Naven said the benefits of building design reviews were economic, environmental and social. As far as the economic realm, he said the focus was to increase/maintain the property values through the City's vision and workspace while maintaining and increasing the tax base. He said community review allowed for the protection of local economy and development predictability. In the environmental realm, he said the development of high quality structures allowed for reuse, with less possibility for demolitions. He said if the City reused structures, he noted that was less material going into landfills. In the social realm, he said it preserved the community character and quality of life. He noted that citizens were accustomed to their surroundings and wanted to preserve and enhance that character. He said that it also assured harmonious land use relationships with affected areas, which helped with new uses in an existing neighborhood, and had some design review that softened the impact of that use in that area.

Mr. Naven said the City had current design review areas with the most restrictive areas located in the Form Districts, Historic Districts and residential areas in the Land Development Code area. He said there were other design review areas such as special uses, development agreements, TIF agreements, commercial development, annexation agreements and multi-family plans. He said it was required that these additional design review areas submit documents to demonstrate elevations, design, and renderings, but he commented that there were really no established criteria. He said the neighborhood associations currently implemented this type of review for new additions. He said this protected the local economy and the developer's initial investment. He commented that the City previously had design review commissions, but they were no longer in existence.

Mr. Naven reported that the current design regulations lacked in design criteria outside the Form and Historic Districts, lacked in high-quality building materials, lacked context-sensitive design requirements, and lacked adaptive reuse of prototype buildings.

In conclusion, Mr. Naven said Staff would provide recommended actions to the City Council for appropriate text amendments to establish multi-family non-residential zoning districts in the City of Peoria that would require high quality, long-lasting building materials with adaptive reuse requirements.

Community Development Director Ross Black provided a summary of the presentations and provided examples of design and community character and how they could impact the City. He stressed that community character and design standards had nothing to do with what was occurring on the inside of the building, but rather on the outside instead. He said the basis of all zoning authority was to protect health, welfare, and safety of residents. He provided a list of actions Staff recommended for the City Council to review.

CITIZENS' OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS THE CITY COUNCIL/TOWN BOARD

Hearing no objection, Mayor Ardis granted Privilege of the Floor to those citizens wishing to address the City Council/Town Board.

Mr. Frank Abnour, a Peoria resident and owner of the Spotted Cow, said he had a study from Texas A&M that was conducted in 2012 that noted the importance of animated signs for small business owners and what little impact these types of signs had on traffic. He said the Chamber of Commerce indicated that these types of signs were important to small businesses and how they got their message to the public. He said the City should consider forming a committee to review sign policies, and he requested to sit on said committee. He said he had conducted research on this matter and would be able to provide pertinent information.

Mr. Don Shaffer, Board Member of the Chamber of Commerce and co-chair of the Governmental Affairs Committee, encouraged the involvement of the business community when it came to design guidelines for the City. He said they had meetings relating to sign ordinances and regulations. He expressed the importance of getting the business community's input on the matter.

CITY COUNCIL COMMENTS

Council Member Akeson expressed her appreciation for the presentation, and she recommended, in order to satisfy the community and its variety of different interests, that Staff should review the City in terms of "districts" or "transects." She said transects described conditions that were unique to the core of the City. She said for the City, Council should justify putting more work in on this topic if dramatic changes were to occur. She said design guidelines were not about building the City, rather it was about making the City a great place for people to live. She said she liked the proposed actions brought before Council, but she cautioned against a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

Director Black said, in response to Council Member Moore, street trees may not be appropriate in every development. He said the majority of the older parts of Peoria had street trees already in place and there have not been issues with those. He said there was not any significant issue with the infrastructure as long as the street tree location was planned at the time of a new development. He said development was planned so that there would not be an issue with the roots of the tree and any underground structure that may exist.

In regards to animation of signs, Director Black responded to Council Member Moore and noted that East Peoria, Washington and Germantown Hills did not permit animated signs. He

remarked that Morton was silent on the regulation of animated signs either way. He acknowledged the issue of the City enforcing all sign regulations.

Council Member Moore noted that the City could manage the number of animated signs and the locations of the same. She said she was not opposed to animated signs as long as the City could control their location and how they animated.

In response to Council Member Moore, Director Black said Staff had reviewed parking space requirements over the last several weeks. He recommended changing the parking space requirements from a minimum number to a maximum number of spaces. He suggested that if a business owner wanted to exceed the maximum number of spaces, then they would need to implement additional landscaping, or pay an additional fee for the space. He recommended possibly implementing incentives for a business owner to decrease their current number of spaces. He said Staff would like to review the issues and include the business community and property owners in order to bring something tangible to the City Council for discussion.

In regards to Form Districts, Council Member Moore requested a meeting with the Community Development Department to review Form District rules for Western, South Adams and MacArthur Highway. She said there was currently less retail on Western than there was on South Adams. She said now would be the perfect time to identify areas on Western and MacArthur Highway that were not pedestrian friendly and to address those issues.

Council Member Spain said he would like to see the list of proposed actions move forward. He said he was not in agreement with the proposed action for animated signs, and that additional conversations needed to be held regarding building material requirements. In the discussion regarding parking, he recommended taking the same logic and applying it to signage. He expressed an appreciation to the entire team on their presentation.

Director Black said, in response to Council Member Spain, other communities had best practices in place in terms of landscaping in parking lots that utilized native vegetation. He said the use of native plants would cause a need for additional care beyond what was normal. He said a number of "cutting edge" Ordinances, in terms of parking lot landscaping or just landscaping in general, provided a list of plant materials that could be used.

In regards to design standards, Council Member Spain said there was a great opportunity for the City to gain through enhancement. He commented that it would be important to have a conversation on how to balance working with the business community and the current market forces. He inquired whether it was more common than not for cities to have a town architect on staff to assist with developers and businesses, which may be part of the proactive education to help achieve better design standards voluntarily.

Director Black said, in response to Council Member Spain, it was not uncommon, particularly in larger communities, or communities the size of Peoria and larger for there to be a town architect on staff. He said what determined whether there was a town architect or an architectural review board, or some type of design review process was that the local jurisdiction adopted design requirements that required an architect to provide guidance or markup plan. However, he recommended that a well done design book could achieve a similar outcome.

Council Member Akeson commented that when she was on the Heart of Peoria Commission, the Commission advocated for a town architect. She said the City needed to describe its goals first. She expressed a concern on whether the Council could collectively describe what it wanted to achieve and then get those components in place.

Council Member Spain said the idea of bulk regulations that have application through the majority of the City should be something to review. He said he appreciated how the Form Districts worked and recognized that the different parts of the City had different uses and environments. He remarked that signs varied for different areas of the City. He commented that sign regulations should allow for some minor modifications that could be useful to businesses. He noted that enforcement of sign regulations was an issue.

Council Member Riggerbach said Staff presented some very valuable information. He commented that he would be in favor of reducing some of the over built parking lots. He said he was in favor of energy efficient lighting, permeable surfaces, and pedestrian pathways. He said he liked the concept of grass parking lots and the use of artistic expression. He said additional discussion was needed on the tightening of design standards. He encouraged Director Black to engage Mr. Abnour in the discussion on signage. He said he would like to continue with a 60-day moratorium on animated signs. He said he would like to receive more input on how the City could make this more effective for the business community without creating a nuisance.

Council Member Weaver said he appreciated Mr. Abnour and Mr. Shafer's comments. He said it was important to receive input from the business community. He agreed that there needed to be flexibility for different parts of the community. On the issue of signage, he said there may be a need to grandfather in regular signage, due to the cost of changing the signs would be inhibitive. Regarding parking, he said most businesses wanted less parking.

In response to Council Member Weaver, Director Black said incentives helped achieve a positive result. He commented that there needed to be a balance in parking requirements. He said Staff could engage the business community and develop something tangible and bring back to the City Council for further discussion.

Council Member Weaver encouraged a cost analysis as it related to the City's combined sewer overflow and whether implementation of some of the recommended system within the parking lots would not make sense from a cost basis. He said as the City was going through this process, it was important to keep jobs as a priority. He said the City needed to make sure it was not impacting the desire of businesses to locate in the City of Peoria.

Council Member Grayeb said the discussions had related to a value system. He said different people had different value systems, and the City had to be very careful that it would not impose something that would be uniform over the entire City and would not meet the needs of every part of this community. He said there was room for diversity in the community. He said we had to be very careful to accommodate Mr. Abnour and others who wanted different things where it was appropriate.

Council Member Jensen agreed with the previous comments of Council, and she commented regarding the importance of flexibility. She said she was enthused about the action items as they related to parking and landscaping. She said the City needed more permeable pavers, landscaping and bioswales. She commented that the requirement for the number of parking spaces should be less than 50 spaces.

In response to Council Member Jensen, Director Black said Staff presented a Policy Report on animated and moving signs to the City Council last fall that contained a lot of background information. He said animated signs had an impact on aesthetics, and that studies concluded that they contributed to the cause of distractions, which could lead to more accidents.

Council Member Jensen said there were different types of animation and animated signs, and she suggested Staff and the City Council review animated signs a bit more in depth.

Council Member Montelongo said the City needed to increase its expectations of all business owners. He agreed with breaking down the City into different districts in order to develop or enhance those areas' characters. He said it was important to work with the business community when the Council discussed anything that could impact them as it related to signs, lighting or landscaping.

In regards to a Sidewalk Café Ordinance, City Manager Urich said in response to Council Member Akeson that they were a design feature, and Staff was working on bringing that Ordinance back in approximately two months. He said it addressed a use within the downtown area of the public rights-of-way.

Council Member Spain said the size of signs and the incentives or disincentives in some of our permitting fees was worth additional discussion.

Mayor Ardis said he was in favor of looking at the City in separate "districts" as it related to design standards. He said doing so would acknowledge that each district was unique and different. He said the entire Council supported the engagement of the business community. He said he would not want to see the City go from no design standards to just minimum design standards. He said he would like the best standards possible. He said it was important to not just review the cost of something like this, but what the cost would be if something like this was not pursued. He said the final thing he wanted Staff to incorporate was the City was not designing minimum design standards, but rather, the City was designing quality design standards that would be fairly universal recognizing different characteristics in different parts of City. He agreed with the incentives to bring businesses on board. He said the focus should be on getting it done right versus getting it done fast.

City Manager Urich said Staff would reach out to the Chamber of Commerce and speak with them regarding design standards and would continue to move forward engaging the business community. He said he would take Mr. Abnour up on his offer to discuss further the issue of animated signs, and he said Staff would engage the business community as well in the discussion of the transects of the City. He said Staff had made some recommendations to bring forward for actions. He said the main recommended action was to begin with the text amendment process on some of the items presented to the Council.

ADJOURNMENT

Council Member Turner moved to adjourn the Policy Session regarding design and community character (signs, landscaping, screening, parking requirements, building design & materials); seconded by Council Member Akeson.

Approved by roll call vote.

Yeas: Akeson, Grayeb, Jensen, Johnson, Montelongo, Moore, Riggerbach, Spain,
Turner, Weaver, Mayor Ardis – 11;

Nays: None.

The Policy Session closed at 9:20 P.M.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Beth Ball". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Beth Ball, MMC, City Clerk
City of Peoria, Illinois

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