

AGENDA REPORT

DATE December 7, 2004

ITEM Ordinance No. 2896 Revised Sign Code

INITIATED BY City Commission

ACTION REQUESTED Accept Ord.2896 on First Reading and Set Public Hearing

PREPARED BY Sign Code Review Committee

PRESENTED BY Cheryl Patton, Assistant City Manager

RECOMMENDATION: It is recommended that the City Commission approve the following motion:

MOTION: I move the City Commission accept Ordinance. No. 2896 on first reading and set a public hearing for January 4, 2005 at 7:00 PM.

SYNOPSIS: The Sign Code Committee is recommending Ordinance No. 2896. This ordinance would serve to replace the existing regulations, and the interim regulations, which govern all signs for the City of Great Falls. The ordinance is intended to replace/update the existing Sign Code and move the location of the Code from Title 15 OCCGF to Title 17 OCCGF. It will become chapter 60 of the proposed Unified Land Development Code.

The goals of the proposed Code are: to promote a positive economic and business climate through distinctive and effective signage; to improve the community’s image by eliminating sign clutter; to encourage signage of a character and scale consistent with the built environment and desired future vision; to protect health and safety including damages caused by distractions of motorists; to provide a code that is readily understood; and to provide binding code implementation and enforcement.

Significant changes include: eliminating the clutter caused by uncontrolled temporary signs; encouraging signage to correspond to the scale of the built environment, and provide the design review board with the ability to negotiate signage that fits into the premise. Another major change is regarding interpretation. The new Code specifically assigns a maximum square foot sign allowance to the premise/property instead of to each business on the property.

Strong enforcement is recommended by the Committee in order for the community to receive the intended benefit from this new Code. Non-conforming signs, except billboards, are proposed to conform to the provisions of this proposed Code by December 31, 2014. The Committee is also recommending the City initiate an “incentive program” to encourage earlier compliance.

BACKGROUND: The current City of Great Falls Sign Code, adopted in the mid 1970s, has been amended, in part, from time to time. However, there has not been a major revision in over 20 years. The current Code’s main function is to address safety issues. This is reflected in both the purpose of the Code

and in its regulations. The new Code has defined goals to assist Great Falls to grow and develop in a manner that is visually appealing as well as safe. The goals of the new Code are listed in the Synopsis.

In December of 2001, after hearing concerns about the appearance of the City and its effect on our ability to encourage business and people to relocate to Great Falls, the City Commission appointed a Committee of citizens, sign industry professionals and staff, to rewrite the City's sign regulations. The Committee has worked steadily for the past three years to develop a Code the whole Committee could recommend. The process has been time consuming, and occasionally, frustrating as opposing points of view were explained and thoughtfully considered. The Committee has reached consensus on the Code proposed as Ordinance No. 2896 and is recommending the ordinance to the City Commission.

Proposed changes include:

1. Sign regulations would depend on the sign district where the premise is located.
2. Temporary signs and point of sale signs would be limited to one temporary sign per premise and it must be permitted.
3. Roof signs would be eliminated if they rise up the roof more than 50% to the ridge line.
4. The allocation of wall sign area would be in relation to the lineal footage of building frontage. Two (2) square feet of wall sign would be permitted for each lineal foot of building frontage up to a maximum of 200 square feet per premise.
5. One (1) freestanding (pole) sign per premise frontage would be allowed.
 - a. A maximum of one (1) square foot per lineal foot of building fronting a street would be allowed not to exceed two-hundred (200) square feet per premise.
 - b. Freestanding signs would be limited to a height of twenty-five (25) feet above the finished grade on the lot which it is located in most commercial and industrial districts. The Riverfront Corridor and the Central Business District have a twenty (20) foot height limit.
 - c. A monument sign, or a low-profile sign, could be substituted for a pole sign with a 10% bonus in allowable area.
6. Separate sections have been written to address premises over 40,000 square feet and multiple tenant retail premises over 250,000 square feet.
7. Regulations governing billboards have been addressed to require some existing billboards to meet specific standards by December 31, 2014, the date for other non-conforming signs to conform to the proposed code.
8. Existing signs which do not meet the provisions of the new Code are proposed to continue for 10 years if they are not altered. However, a change in occupancy, an exterior renovation, or an expansion of the building would trigger compliance with the new Code.
9. Signs which no longer advertise a business in operation must be removed within 6 months.

The Committee strongly recommends that adequate staff is assigned to implement and enforce the new Code after adoption. The Committee recommends strong enforcement action in order that the community may enjoy the benefits of controlled signage.