

MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MEETING
CITY HALL – COMMUNITY ROOM
DECEMBER 8, 2014 – 6:00PM

The Study Session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Brickner at 6:00pm.

Council Members Present: Brickner, Bridges, Bruce, Knol, Lerner, Massey and Steckloff

Council Members Absent: None

Others Present: City Manager Brock, City Clerk Smith, Assistant City Manager Boyer, Assistant to the City Manager Geinzer, Director Gardiner and Attorney Joppich

DISCUSSION ON TEMPORARY FOR LEASE/RENT SIGNS AND GRAND OPENING SIGNS:

Director Gardiner explained that a draft ordinance was provided to City Council at their last study session meeting based on discussions by Council on this issue that would accomplish the following:

- Permit a second larger sign for properties with freeway frontage
- Require a permit with a registration fee for these signs
- Establish a maximum time limit of six months for these signs

He noted that at that study session meeting, Council requested eliminating the time limitations and implementing an annual inspection/registration with reasonable fees.

Director Gardiner mentioned that at the last meeting he did not discuss Grand Opening signs; but when discussing the issue of signs at the staff level it was noted that the City had received several complaints from businesses that they felt the city's ordinance was too restrictive by allowing only 1 banner and 1 freestanding sign for a Grand Opening event. He added that if a business was in a shopping center it would be difficult to identify which business was having the Grand Opening. He stated that he would like to know if Council would be amenable to amending the ordinance to allow for 1 banner and 2 freestanding signs if the business were on a corner lot to allow for a sign on each street frontage. Mr. Gardiner added that Grand Openings are only permitted for a period of 2 weeks and they review approximately 10-12 requests a year.

Councilmember Lerner apologized for missing the last meeting, but commented that when this issue was first discussed he thought the concern was with regard to the clutter of signage but reading the minutes from the last meeting, it sounds as if the concern from Council now is more about the appearance of the signs. He inquired why an annual registration was suggested.

Mayor Brickner stated that the annual registration would allow staff to review the condition of the sign and determine if it were still needed.

Councilmember Lerner stated that the city already has a blight ordinance that he believes would apply to signs.

Councilmember Bruce added that the registration and fee was also to encourage company's to limit the length of time for the signs so that if it were not needed perhaps the company would remove the sign rather than re-register and pay the annual fee.

Councilmember Lerner inquired about the fee and approximate number of for rent/lease signs in the city.

Mr. Gardiner responded that the fee would be set by City Council, but he would estimate the fee to be around \$50 annually. He estimated there to be about 250-300 signs in the city.

Discussion ensued on the cost of signs and proposed fees.

Mr. Lerner reiterated that the original concern expressed was with regard to the clutter of signs along Orchard Lake Road and the proposed ordinance does not address that issue. Councilmember Bridges concurred that the ordinance does not address the original intent and concern expressed by City Council.

Councilmember Steckloff stated that she felt the concern was more about the freeway signs and allowing for larger signs, which the proposed ordinance allows.

Mayor Pro-Tem Massey stated that the original discussion had several components that included allowing for larger freeway signs, which Council agrees to allow and allowing for additional signage for Grand Openings, which was not discussed last time but sounds reasonable; and then the condition of signs and the clutter. He stated that if the concern is with regard to the number of signs and the city wants that number reduced, he asked the realtors present if the registration is a reasonable approach. He asked how the city and realtors could work together to address the issues identified but still allow for advertisement.

Councilmember Bridges inquired if the realtors were willing to police themselves and remove their signs when the buildings were full and maintain the signs.

Scott Elliott, realtor, stated that he feels when the buildings are fully leased, the signs are removed. As for his company, when signs are damaged they remove them and replace them.

Thomas Duke, realtor/broker, cautioned that whatever the Council determines for Orchard Lake Road will affect other areas. He added that some buildings have no signs, but also acknowledged that there are some abusers.

Councilmember Steckloff explained that Council's views changed following the discussion at the last meeting and the compromise was the annual inspection/registration with fees. She stated that at the last meeting she commented that she did not want the city to appear anti-business and it was suggested to try the annual inspection/registration to determine if that would help with maintenance and to eliminate signs that were no longer needed. Councilmember Knol concurred

Councilmember Lerner stated that he agrees with the amendments for freeway signs and grand opening signs, but still feels that the city can address the issue of sign maintenance with existing ordinances. He inquired what the City can do to help fill the buildings along Orchard Lake Road other than requiring an annual inspection and registration fee.

Dan Blugerman, realtor, commented that the time frame for getting into the buildings is key and if there is a way to expedite certificate of occupancies that would be helpful.

City Manager Brock commented that he believes the City is doing all it can now to expedite the process and that this issue is more about the ordinance or policies in place.

Mr. Duke added that people are going to use the signs to make a list of properties or spaces available and once they decide on a site, they want to be in that building within 2 weeks time. He stated that if he could always guarantee a client that they would be in within 2 weeks that would help greatly in filling the buildings, because often if they can't get in when they want they will move on to other property. In answer to Councilmember Bruce, he responded that the proposed registration and fee is an effort in futility and means nothing.

Mr. Blugerman and Mr. Scott agreed that the process would take time away from their current efforts in trying to get the buildings filled. Mr. Scott stated that if the city took a picture of a sign that they felt was up too long or was not being maintained and sent it to him, he could advise them as to who the owner was in order to address the issue.

Mayor Brickner commented that while the City removed the time limits in the proposed ordinance, they still do not want the signs up permanently. He stated that there are approximately 10-12 signs along Orchard Lake Road between 12 and 12 ½ Mile Road.

Mayor Pro-Tem Massey stated that he would agree with amending the ordinance to allow for larger freeway signs and more signage for Grand Openings and hold off on the requirement of an annual inspection/registration fee for the for lease/rent signs, with the understanding that there is a concern amongst Council as well as some residents regarding sign clutter and the condition of the signs. He added that if the City and the realtors could work together to mutually address the issues, he would agree to hold off on those requirements for now.

Mr. Duke proposed the idea that as businesses come in for monument signs to encourage using that sign as a way to advertise permanently by including the owners name and contact number right on the sign and not use a temporary sign. He stated that he has done this with some of his signs and that an insert could be included as part of the sign to allow for contact information. He suggested that this is something that could slowly be implemented in the city.

Councilmember Knol stated that she likes that idea and would like to see something like that phased in. She inquired if someone identified a sign in bad condition and sent a picture of that to the City would they know who to contact. Mr. Gardiner responded that there is a clear contact identified and the property owner is responsible for the sign.

Mrs. Knol stated that she is agreeable to moving forward as suggested by Mayor Pro-Tem Massey.

Mr. Gardiner stated that the city does not currently monitor what is on a monument sign, but that could be done and then a temporary sign would not be needed.

Attorney Joppich suggested that language could be included in the Zoning Ordinance noting that anytime a new sign or building comes a monument sign with leasing information would be allowed, but no temporary for lease/rent signs would be permitted.

Councilmember Bridges concurred with Mayor Pro-Tem Massey's suggestion. He added that he would like the realtors to police themselves on the issues discussed and inquired if the realtors present could provide any data as to the use of the internet for people obtaining the property information.

Mr. Elliott stated that people do their research on the internet but then use the signs to identify the properties.

Councilmember Lerner concurred with Dr. Massey's suggestion and stated that he likes the idea of the monument sign as an incentive to eliminate the need for temporary for lease/rent signs.

Mayor Brickner summarized that the consensus of City Council was to:

- amend the ordinance to allow for larger freeway signs and for additional signage for Grand Openings as proposed
- leave the language regarding other requirements for temporary signs as is
- review the idea of phasing in monument signs that include leasing information

Mayor Brickner commented that most of the signs along Orchard Lake Road were not monument signs and he is not sure that those companies would invest in such signs.

Attorney Joppich clarified that part of the proposed amendments included removing the section of the ordinance dealing with temporary signs from the Zoning Ordinance to be included as part of the City Code. City Council concurred with that change.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. B. Smith', written in a cursive style.

Pamela B. Smith, City Clerk