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MEMO:

To: Planning Committee of the City Council
Mayor Johnson

From: John Coleman, AICP
Planning Director

Date: December 9, 2020

Subject: Electronic Reader Boards in the Central Business District

ISSUE

Should the Planning Commission study whether electronic reader boards should be allowed in the Central Business District?

PROJECT DESCRIPTION/HISTORY

Electronic reader boards are not currently permitted in the CBD. Council member Kesti requested that the Planning Committee of the Council review whether the rules for electronic reader boards in the Central Business District should be reconsidered.

The intent of this meeting is to understand the facts and purpose of the city regulations and determine if the Planning Commission should study the issue closer.

Chapter 3 of the Sedro-Woolley Design Standards and Guidelines address electronic reader boards in Central Business District (CBD). At page 23, the standards specifically state:

Flashing, animated, rotating, changing message signs and signs that combine a white background with internal illumination are specifically prohibited. Exposed neon illumination or shielded external illumination are accepted alternatives.

If the Planning Commission is instructed to study the issue and the Council determines that electronic reader boards should be permitted in the CBD, the above of the Design Standards section would need to be amended. The Design Standards can be found here: https://www.ci.sedro-woolley.wa.us/Departments/Planning/Docs/Design_Standards_and_Guidlines.pdf.

The purpose of the prohibition on electronic reader boards in the CBD is based in the unique challenge of regulating them and maintaining the safety and aesthetic standards in the historic downtown area. It is difficult to regulate the intensity of the light emitted by the signs and flashing or fast moving images and text. Bright, flashing and fast moving messages may be unnecessarily distracting and cause a safety hazard or just be unpleasant to passers-by. There is no set mechanism to limit how bright a sign may be. The sign code (Chapter 17.44 SWMC) has general

criteria that are fairly subjective, thus are difficult to enforce. The underlined portions of SWMC 17.44.010(A) is the language currently in place to attempt to tone-down the intensity of message boards:

SWMC 17.44.010(A): No sign shall be erected or employed that:

1. Impairs scenic views or the appearance of the surrounding area;
2. Creates traffic hazards by blocking vision or causing excessive diversion of attention;
3. Is structurally incapable of withstanding stresses to which it is likely to be subjected;
4. Contains flashing or uncomfortably intense light;
5. Is designed to attract attention through mechanical or wind-generated movement; or
6. Is employed without consent of the property owner;
7. Is a festoon, banner, or pennant type sign.

If the Planning Committee of the Council believes that the issue should be studied further, then the committee will make a recommendation to the Council as a whole. By the direction of the full Council, the Planning Commission may be asked to study whether electronic message boards should be allowed in the CBD. Then Planning Commission will then render a recommendation to the Council upon completion of their study. Photos of existing reader boards within city limits are attached to this memo.

REQUEST

Does the Planning Committee recommend that the City Council ask the Planning Commission to study the existing city regulations that prohibit electronic reader boards in the Central Business District?



