



Planning
5800 Shier Rings Road
Dublin, Ohio 43016-1236
phone 614.410.4600
fax 614.410.4747
www.dublinohio.us

City of Dublin Architectural Review Board

Planning Report

Wednesday, August 26, 2015

Bridge Street District Sign Guidelines

Case Summary

Agenda Item	2
Case Number	15-040ADM
Proposal	This is a proposal to create a guide to help applicants understand and apply the sign requirements in the Bridge Street District. The proposed guidelines are also intended to provide direction for sign design and placement in a pedestrian-oriented environment.
Applicant	Dana McDaniel, City Manager, City of Dublin.
Planning Contact	Rachel S. Ray, AICP, Economic Development Administrator (614) 410-4630, rray@dublin.oh.us
Request	Administrative request for review and recommendation of approval to City Council for Bridge Street District Sign Guidelines.
Planning Recommendation	Recommendation of Approval to the Planning and Zoning Commission Planning recommends that the Architectural Review Board review the proposed BSD Sign Guidelines including the modifications made since the June 24, 2015 meeting and make a recommendation of approval to the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Facts	Administrative Request
PZC & ARB Comments	<p>The Planning & Zoning Commission reviewed the draft BSD Sign Guidelines on June 18, 2015. The Commissioners commented that the draft was generally effective and met the stated objectives, with some specific comments. The Commission members discussed the urban nature of sandwich board signs and how they can be tastefully designed to enhance a walkable environment.</p> <p>In addition, Commissioners discussed signs with interesting neon lighting, digital signs, and other forward-thinking/high tech signs that the Code does not currently address. The Commissioners discussed the challenge of regulating creative, tasteful, and interesting sign designs, and suggested that the BSD Sign Guidelines make clear to applicants that well-designed signs should be encouraged regardless of whether they meet the specific requirements of the Code. The Commission commented that they would like to see more forward-thinking signs proposed through Master Sign Plan requests.</p> <p>The Architectural Review Board reviewed the draft guidelines on June 24, 2015. Board members discussed the proposed Character Principles, and suggested the addition of a sixth principle, "Context," to better address sign design and appropriateness in the Historic District in particular. The Board members agreed that the <i>Historic Dublin Design Guidelines</i> recommendations for font and character may be too limiting in terms of the unique and interesting designs and fonts that design designers may propose (citing the Jeni's Ice Cream sign as a good example).</p> <p>However, the Board members also agreed that additional discussion of the intent for signs in the Historic District should be clearer, and that the special considerations for sign placement on historic structures should also be added to the document. The Board also discussed sandwich board signs, and how the guidelines can be used to make their design intent and approval process clearer.</p> <p>Both the Planning & Zoning Commission and Architectural Review Board made recommendations for organizing the content in a more user-friendly manner.</p>
BSD Sign Guidelines Updates	<p>The following is a summary of the updates to the August 2015 draft BSD Sign Guidelines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• New cover photo showing more variety in sign types.• Added the "Bridge Street District Sign Characteristics" at the beginning of the document. These pages are intended to set the tone for the Sign Guidelines and illustrate at the onset the types of signs that are desirable in the Bridge Street District, as well as the attributes that make them desirable. They are also intended to show how additional creativity can be encouraged in terms of sign design through the Master Sign Plan process.• Added references to the Historic District throughout the document where appropriate, and particularly in Section 1, Purpose and Intent.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modified the content order to make the document more user-friendly and sequential in terms of explaining the sign intent, review, and design process. Added a sixth Character Principle: "Context" at the recommendation of the Architectural Review Board, given the importance the sign's location with the Bridge Street District can have in directing the design of the proposed sign. Switched out duplicate images, added image credits at the end of the document, and other technical/formatting/wording updates.
<p>Intent for Signs in the Bridge Street District</p>	<p>Specific sign provisions apply to the Bridge Street zoning districts that result in a wider variety of available sign options than elsewhere in the City of Dublin. The intent of these sign provisions is to balance the need for the vehicular use of signs, but also to be clearly related to the pedestrian-oriented nature of the Bridge Street District. Within the Bridge Street District (BSD), special sign provisions apply to properties within the Historic District boundaries due to the intent to preserve and enhance the historic village character of this area.</p> <p>Signs in walkable, urban environments are meant to be visible to pedestrians from all directions – across the street, the same side of the street, or from parking areas behind the building. While visibility to passing vehicles is also a consideration, it is secondary to the pedestrian emphasis. Accordingly, in this environment, two smaller signs can be more effective and more attractive than one larger sign directed toward vehicles. When carefully integrated into the architectural design of a building, signs can help create a pleasurable, comfortable strolling and window-shopping experience while still providing adequate identification for the business.</p>
<p>Case Background</p>	<p>The Bridge Street District zoning regulations were adopted by City Council on March 25, 2012 after more than a year of drafting, public input, redrafting, and review by the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Architectural Review Board.</p> <p>One of the sections of the BSD zoning regulations that received extensive discussion at all levels of review were the sign provisions (refer to "Intent for Signs in the Bridge Street District," above, for more information). City Council members as well as Board and Commission members discussed at length appropriate numbers and types of signs permitted, both for the Historic District and throughout the BSD.</p> <p>Soon after the adoption of the BSD zoning regulations, City Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission began to discuss regulatory approaches to require quality sign construction and strategies to encourage creative design. While the BSD Code provisions state, "All signs shall be designed with the maximum of creativity and the highest quality of materials and fabrication,"</p>

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	<p>(Section 153.065(H)(4)), the signs that had been approved in the Bridge Street District, in the opinion of some members of the Commission and City Council, had not always achieved the intent of this requirement.</p> <p>To address this, Planning contracted with design review consultants specializing in sign design to review and make recommendations on sign proposals reviewed through the BSD Minor Project Review process to verify that they were in keeping with the intent for signs in the Bridge Street District.</p> <p>As part of the 2013-2014 update to the BSD zoning regulations, the City engaged one of these consultants, Studio Graphique, to assist with drafting amendments to the BSD sign provisions related to sign quality. Based on their review of sign regulations in communities throughout the country, Studio Graphique recommended the amendments that were ultimately incorporated into the Code as Zoning Code Section 153.065(H)(4)(e), Sign Materials, with provisions for minimum construction standards.</p> <p>With regard to sign character and design creativity, Studio Graphique recommended that, in lieu of more regulations intended to require more imaginative signs, the City explore the possibility of sign design guidelines to illustrate the intent. Studio Graphique indicated that many other communities use sign guidelines, particularly in areas similar to the Bridge Street District to demonstrate desirable sign qualities.</p> <p>In their recommendation to City Council in November 2014 for the amendments to the Bridge Street District zoning regulations, the Planning and Zoning Commission also recommended that sign design guidelines be prepared after the adoption of the revised Code provisions.</p> <p>Since the amendment adoption by City Council on December 8, 2014, Planning has worked with Studio Graphique and Kolar Design to prepare the draft Bridge Street District Sign Guidelines.</p>

Details	Administrative Request
Process	<p>The Architectural Review Board is asked to review the proposed sign guidelines and provide a recommendation to the Planning and Zoning Commission, who in turn will make a recommendation to City Council, along with the provisions that apply outside the Historic District. The proposed sign guidelines will be forwarded to City Council for final review and adoption by resolution.</p>
Objectives	<p>In addition to explaining the zoning review process for signs and assisting applicants with using and applying the Bridge Street District sign requirements, the BSD Sign Guidelines are intended to:</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain the City’s standards of quality and character.• Encourage excellence in sign design, both as a communication tool and as an art form.• Allow and encourage creative and unique sign designs while preventing cluttered and unattractive streetscapes.• Provide basic parameters for creative signs that may be as varied and unique as the businesses they represent.• Provide guidance for designing signs in the Historic District, as well as signs associated with buildings that were constructed prior to the enactment of the Bridge Street District zoning regulations.• Outline the contents of Master Sign Plans, which are intended to allow greater flexibility and creativity in sign design and display where signs are used as a placemaking tool. <p>The intended audience for the BSD Sign Guidelines is primarily sign designers and contractors who prepare and submit applications for new signs in the Bridge Street District. But the Guidelines are also intended for business owners/building tenants that commission signs. Finally, the Guidelines are to be used by reviewing bodies such as the Architectural Review Board, Planning and Zoning Commission, and Administrative Review Team.</p>
Overview	<p>The BSD Sign Guidelines include the following sections, which have been reordered slightly since the June 2015 draft to improve user-friendliness:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Purpose & Intent: Explains intent for signs in the Bridge Street District, intent for signs in the Historic District, and how the guidelines should be used.2. Applicability: Illustrates the Bridge Street District and Historic District boundaries, as well as the neighborhood zoning districts, to demonstrate to applicants which requirements apply to their site.3. Process: Describes the zoning review and sign permitting process.4. Master Sign Plans: Outlines the purpose of Master Sign Plans, as well as required information.5. Requirements Summary: Explains how to determine the number of permitted signs and summarizes the sign types.6. Quality & Character: Reiterates the BSD Code requirements for high quality materials and construction, and the preference that signs are designed by professional graphic designers and installed by professional sign fabricators. This section also includes descriptions and images illustrating the six principles for desirable sign character: Architectural Integration, Illumination, Colors & Secondary Images, Graphic Design & Composition, Dimensionality, and Context.

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	<p>7. Sign Type Requirements: Illustrates the dimensional requirements for each of the main types of signs, including ground, wall, projecting, awning, window, building identification, and sandwich board signs. Also includes precedent images demonstrating good examples of each type of sign, as well as “what to avoid.” These pages are intended to function as two-page spreads, similar to the building type tables in the Bridge Street District zoning regulations.</p>
<p><i>Historic Dublin Design Guidelines</i> Coordination</p>	<p>Pages 84-86, 109-124 of the <i>Historic Dublin Design Guidelines</i> (HDDG) includes recommendations for signs in the Historic District. With the update to the HDDG, Planning has recommended that signs be removed from the document and coordinated with the Bridge Street District Sign Guidelines. Some of the regulations, policies, and procedures included in this document are outdated, and including relevant information in a single location (the BSD Sign Guidelines) makes it easier for applicants – often sign contractors – to use and for Staff to update when changes are needed. Recommended revisions to the HDDG include a reference to the BSD Sign Guidelines to instruct applicants to consult this separate document for more information.</p> <p>Within the modified draft of the BSD Sign Guidelines, there are a few provisions specific to signs in the Historic District. The Sign Character Principles (pages 15-21), particularly the addition of the “Context” principle, and illustration of sign requirements (pages 22-35) are intended to encourage imaginative and well-designed signs that are tailored to respond directly to their specific architectural and site context. The intent is to allow for signs that are appropriate to a historic building where they exist, but allow for more modern designs to correspond with newer buildings.</p> <p>Currently, the HDDG include recommendations that signs are limited to nineteenth century characters, from lettering font selections to limiting the use of logos and sign materials. While this will remain an option for businesses, the Bridge Street District Sign Guidelines are intended to allow greater flexibility to add varied character to the Historic District while recognizing and respecting its historic nature.</p>
<p>Images</p>	<p>The graphics and photos in the draft BSD Sign Guidelines illustrate design concepts, and should not be viewed as an exclusive inventory of acceptable signs. Further, some of the illustrations of signs included in the document may not meet all of the dimensional or specific design requirements for signs in the Bridge Street District. There are a number of references throughout the draft Guidelines intended to direct applicants to verify specific sign requirements for specific sites and sign proposals.</p>

Recommendation	Recommendation of Approval
Recommendation of Approval to the Planning and Zoning Commission	<p>The proposed Bridge Street District Sign Guidelines explain the zoning review process for signs and assist applicants with using and applying the Bridge Street District sign requirements. Most importantly, the Guidelines allow and encourage creative and unique sign designs while preventing cluttered and unattractive streetscapes and reinforce the vision for the Bridge Street District.</p> <p>Planning requests that the Architectural Review Board forward a recommendation of approval to the Planning and Zoning Commission for the BSD Sign Guidelines.</p>