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City of Dublin Planning and Zoning Commission

# Planning Report

Thursday, September 3, 2015

## Bridge Street District Sign Guidelines

### Case Summary

Agenda Item	3
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	<b>Recommendation of Approval to City Council</b> Planning recommends that the Planning and Zoning Commission review the proposed BSD Sign Guidelines including the modifications since the June 18, 2015 meeting and make a recommendation of approval to City Council.

## Facts

## Administrative Request

### Previous PZC & ARB Comments

#### *Planning and Zoning Commission*

The PZC reviewed the draft Bridge Street District (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, as well as 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 writing regulations that could yield 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 forward-thinking signs proposed through Master Sign Plan requests.

#### *Architectural Review Board*

The ARB 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 *Historic Dublin Design Guidelines* 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). 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.

At their meeting on August 26, 2015, the ARB made a recommendation of approval to PZC with a condition that the amendments discussed, including some minor changes to wording, labels, and technical modifications to some of the graphics, are made to the final version presented to City Council.

Both the Planning and Zoning Commission and Architectural Review Board made recommendations for organizing the content in a more user-friendly manner.

#### *Administrative Review Team*

The ART made a recommendation of approval to the PZC at their meeting on August 27, 2015.

## Facts

## Administrative Request

### BSD Sign Guidelines Updates

The following is a summary of the updates to the August 2015 draft BSD Sign Guidelines:

- New cover photo showing more variety in sign types.
- Added the “Bridge Street District Sign Characteristics” spread 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, and the attributes that make them desirable. They are also intended to show how the envelope can be pushed 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.
- 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 ARB, given the importance the sign’s location with the Bridge Street District can have in directing the design of the proposed sign.
- Switched out many of the duplicate images.
- Added image credits at the end of the document.
- Technical/formatting/wording updates.

### Intent for Signs in the Bridge Street District

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 with the pedestrian-oriented nature of the Bridge Street District. In addition, 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.

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. In this environment, for example, 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.

## Facts

## Administrative Request

### Case Background

During the adoption process for the BSD regulations, one of the sections that received extensive discussion at all levels of review was the sign provisions (refer to "Intent for Signs in the Bridge Street District," above). City Council, PZC and ARB members individually and jointly discussed, at length, appropriate numbers and types of signs permitted throughout the BSD.

Soon after the adoption of the BSD zoning regulations, City Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission began to discuss regulatory approaches to improve quality sign construction and create 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," (Section 153.065(H)(4)), the signs that had been approved in the Bridge Street District had not always, in the opinion of some members, achieved the intent of this requirement.

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.

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 related to sign quality. Based on their review of communities throughout the country, Studio Graphique recommended 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.

With regard to sign character and design creativity, Studio Graphique recommended that, in lieu of regulations to require more imaginative signs, the City explore the possibility of sign design guidelines to illustrate 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.

In their recommendation to City Council in November 2014 for the amendments to the BSD regulations, the Planning and Zoning Commission recommended that sign design guidelines be prepared after the adoption of the revised Code provisions. Since that time Planning has worked with Studio Graphique and Kolar Design to prepare these draft Bridge Street District Sign Guidelines.

## Details

## Administrative Request

### Process

Zoning Code Section 153.232(B)(9) provides "other powers and duties" to the Planning and Zoning Commission, which includes amendments to the Community Plan and recommendations on other planning-related policy documents.

Details	Administrative Request
	<p>The Planning and Zoning Commission is requested to review the proposed Sign Guidelines and provide a recommendation of action to Council. The proposed Sign Guidelines will be forwarded to City Council for final review and potential adoption by resolution.</p> <p>The draft Sign Guidelines were reviewed by the ARB, who made a recommendation of approval to the Commission at their meeting on August 26, 2015, and the ART, who made a recommendation of approval to the Commission at their meeting on August 27, 2015.</p>
Objectives	<p>In addition to explaining the zoning review process for signs and assisting applicants with using and applying the BSD sign requirements, the Sign Guidelines are intended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain the City's standards of quality and character.</li> <li>• Encourage excellence in sign design, both as a communication tool and as an art form.</li> <li>• Allow and encourage creative and unique sign designs while preventing cluttered and unattractive streetscapes.</li> <li>• Provide basic parameters for creative signs that may be as varied and unique as the businesses they represent.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul> <p>The intended audience for the Sign Guidelines is primarily sign designers and contractors who prepare and submit applications for new signs in the Bridge Street District, business owners/building tenants that commission signs, and reviewing bodies such as the ARB, PZC, 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"> <li>1. Purpose &amp; Intent Explains intent for signs in the Bridge Street District, intent for signs in the Historic District, and how the guidelines should be used.</li> <li>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.</li> </ol>

Details	Administrative Request
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>3. Process Describes the zoning review and sign permitting process.</li><li>4. Master Sign Plans Outlines the purpose of Master Sign Plans, as well as information that must be included.</li><li>5. Requirements Summary Explains how to determine the number of permitted signs and summarizes the sign types.</li><li>6. Quality &amp; 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.</li><li>7. Sign Character Principles This section includes descriptions and images illustrating the six principles for desirable sign character: Architectural Integration, Illumination, Colors &amp; Secondary Images, Graphic Design &amp; Composition, Dimensionality, and Context.</li><li>8. 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.</li></ol>
Images	<p>A statement in the Purpose &amp; Intent section notes that: "(T)he graphics and photos in this document are used to illustrate design concepts, and should not be viewed as an exclusive inventory of acceptable signs...Further, some of the signs in this document may not meet all of the dimensional or specific design requirements for signs in the Bridge Street District."</p> <p>There are other similar references throughout the 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 City Council

The proposed Bridge Street District Sign Guidelines explain the zoning review process for signs and assist applicants with using and applying the BSD 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.

Planning requests that the Planning and Zoning Commission review this draft forward a recommendation of approval to City Council for the Bridge Street District Sign Guidelines.