

## PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES - CITY OF INVER GROVE HEIGHTS

Tuesday, January 21, 2020 – 7:00 p.m.  
City Hall Chambers - 8150 Barbara Avenue

Chair Maggi called the Planning Commission meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Pat Simon  
Tony Scales  
Joan Robertson  
Brett Kramer  
Jonathan Weber  
Elizabeth Niemioja  
Armando Lissarrague  
Annette Maggi  
Dennis Wippermann

Commissioners Absent:

Others Present: Allan Hunting, City Planner

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes from the January 7, 2020 Planning Commission meeting were approved as submitted.

### **OUTFRONT MEDIA LLC – CASE NO. 20-01ZA**

#### **Reading of Notice**

Commissioner Simon read the public hearing notice to consider the request to amend the billboard overlay district by rezoning the north half of Section 33, Township 28N, Range 22W, north of I-494 to dynamic display billboard overlay district, and to amend Title 10-15E-6 to expand the dynamic display billboard overlay district to include the north half of Section 33, Township 28N, Range 22W, north of I-494. No notices were mailed.

#### **Presentation of Request**

Allan Hunting, City Planner, explained the request as detailed in the report. He advised that the applicant owns two billboards on the north side of I-494 just east of Highway 52. They are proposing to convert the westerly most sign from a general static into a dynamic display billboard. Mr. Hunting advised that in 1993 the sign ordinance was amended to allow new billboards only along Highway 52/55 in the southern end of the city. In 2011 the City amended the code again by creating an overlay district limiting location to the same geographic area where standard billboards are allowed. For a billboard along I-494 to be converted to dynamic display requires an ordinance amendment to expand the overlay district to include the portion of Section 33 listed above. The basis for the dynamic display overlay ordinance was to address concerns such as traffic, driver distraction, and light pollution. The applicant has provided letters from other cities stating they have not experienced issues with dynamic display billboards in their cities. Mr. Hunting also checked with the IGH police department and they are not aware of any issues or traffic problems caused by the City's only dynamic display billboard on southbound Highway 52/55. If this would be allowed there could be no more dynamic displays possible on I-494 because of spacing requirements and because no new billboards are allowed along I-494. The code requires the owner to enter into an agreement with the city to provide no less than five hours per month of display for community and public service messages. The City takes advantage of that benefit with the Highway 52/55 sign which hits traffic on the southern half of the city. Allowing a dynamic display on I-494 would increase the audience regarding posting informational messages. The Planning Commission is asked to provide a recommendation to the City Council.

Chair Maggi asked Mr. Hunting if there were any billboards along Highway 52 in Section 33.

Mr. Hunting replied that he did not believe so.

Chair Maggi asked if any new billboards would be allowed in that area.

Mr. Hunting replied that any new billboards along Highway 52 would only be allowed in Sections 27 and 34 in the southern portion of the City.

Commissioner Simon asked if he was referring to all billboards or just dynamic display billboards.

Mr. Hunting replied both.

Chair Maggi asked if staff knew of any statewide research that had been done regarding potential impacts of dynamic display billboards.

Mr. Hunting replied that he was not aware of any such information.

Commissioner Kramer questioned why the proposed overlay district went so far east if no new billboards could be built along I-494.

Mr. Hunting replied they could narrow the overlay district down to have an eastern boundary of Blaine Avenue.

Commissioner Niemioja asked if the applicants were proposing a height increase from the existing billboard.

Mr. Hunting replied that his understanding is there would be no changes in sign size and height.

### **Opening of Public Hearing**

John Bodger, Outfront Media, Minneapolis, advised he was available to answer any questions.

Chair Maggi asked the applicant if he read and understood the report.

Mr. Bodger replied in the affirmative. He advised that a Federal Highway Administration study showed no accident increase from digital signs. He added that the light from digital signs projects forward and is typically less bright than a standard LED front lit sign.

Commissioner Weber asked if the billboard would remain in a 'V' configuration which would direct the light towards the highway.

Mr. Bodger replied in the affirmative.

Commissioner Weber asked if the proposed sign would be .3-foot candles at 250 feet.

Mr. Bodger replied in the affirmative. He noted there was 500 feet between the two billboards.

Commissioner Weber noted that the sign is less than 100 feet from the residential property line to the west.

Mr. Bodger stated the billboard has been there for 30 years and the neighbor would likely not see it because of the sign angle.

Chair Maggi closed the public hearing.

### **Planning Commission Discussion**

Commissioner Niemioja advised that she did some research to supplement the anecdotal evidence provided by the applicant from four other cities. She referenced a recent article in the *Pioneer Press* and a report called *The Compendium of Recent Research Studies on Distraction from Commercial Electronic Variable Message Signs*. One of their findings was that outdoor advertising signs attract drivers' attention. They state that experienced drivers can tolerate this if the billboard is in a low risk, low cognitive demand driving situation. Her concern with this particular area is that it is not a low cognitive need area; rather drivers need to be well aware of what is going on around them. According to the *Compendium* the risk increased when such signs competed for drivers' visual attention with more demanding traffic and/or unanticipated events. She requested that staff include the article from the *Pioneer Press* in the Council packet and look at the *Compendium* as she has concerns about the request.

Commissioner Robertson had concerns about adding a potential for distraction in an area that was so highly traveled.

Commissioner Scales supported the request, stating that trying to legislate a distraction-free world was impossible and it was up to drivers to keep their eyes on the road.

Chair Maggi stated she was conflicted because the Planning Commission recently approved without hesitation the request for a larger electronic sign at The Grove; however, she noted that area had much less traffic than the I-494 location being discussed.

Commissioner Robertson stated her main concern was adding a distraction to a highly dense traffic area, especially since recent laws were aimed at reducing driver distractions.

Commissioner Lissarrague stated he supported the request but understood the concerns.

Commissioner Weber asked the applicant if he would be changing the sign angles, to which Mr. Bodger replied the angles would remain the same.

Commissioner Lissarrague asked if they had ever placed signs in areas where they received neighbor complaints about their signs.

At Chair Maggi's request, Mr. Hunting provided an aerial showing where the multi-family neighborhood to the north and two single-family homes to the west were located.

Chair Maggi noted that the sign was angled away from the residential neighborhood.

### **Planning Commission Recommendation**

Motion by Commissioner Weber, second by Commissioner Kramer, to approve the request to amend the billboard overlay district by rezoning the north half of Section 33, Township 28N, Range 22W, north of I-494 to dynamic display billboard overlay district, and to amend Title 10-15E-6 to expand the dynamic display billboard overlay district to include the north half of Section 33, Township 28N, Range 22W, north of I-494, with the overlay district being changed to depict Blaine Avenue as the eastern boundary.

Motion carried (6/3 – Niemioja, Simon, Robertson). This item goes to the City Council on February 10, 2020.

The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Fox  
Recording Secretary