

5.03: Public Hearing: Consider Request for Conditional Use Permit for Oversized Ground Signs at 14590 Armstrong Blvd NW (Project No. 20-101); Case of RGH Ramsey LLC

Public Hearing

Chairperson Bauer called the public hearing to order at 8:10 p.m.

Presentation

City Planner Anderson presented the staff report stating that while a request for an oversized ground sign is not necessarily unusual, the square footage proposed with his request is larger than contemplated in previous discussions. As a result, staff is in need of some policy direction from the Planning Commission before any specific recommendation can be provided. While staff understands the Planning Commission desires to broaden the scope of administrative approvals for signs, the size is larger than what had been discussed in the past, and larger than staff is comfortable with approving administratively at this time. Staff is understanding of the desire for visibility from Highway 10 for businesses and does believe that signage could help attract businesses to the area. He noted that two letters of opposition from adjacent landowners were received and included in the case.

Chairperson Bauer asked the typical size of a billboard sign.

City Planner Anderson replied billboard signs are typically between 600 and 700 square feet. He confirmed that as proposed the original sign request exceeded that size.

Chairperson Bauer asked if the City has ever approved placing a private sign on City property.

City Planner Anderson stated that he is not aware of a private sign on City property but noted that there are City signs that promote local business through tenant spaces.

Chairperson Bauer asked the visibility concerns raised from businesses in The COR to attract additional drivers from Highway 10.

City Planner Anderson replied that is a common concern from businesses. He stated that typically there are blue MnDOT signs that alert drivers to upcoming businesses but noted that those signs are not an option in Ramsey. He confirmed that prospective businesses have expressed the need to have visibility from Highway 10.

Chairperson Bauer commented that the entire sign ordinance should be reviewed, as the ordinance is too restrictive in many ways.

Commissioner VanScoy referenced the existing community signs and asked if those are on City owned property.

City Planner Anderson confirmed that those signs are on City owned property.

Commissioner VanScoy stated that while he understands the need and desire, he is appalled at the magnitude of the sign proposed. He stated that this request has multiple conflicts with the ordinance. He stated that the City has an opportunity to address the issue of visibility but did not think it appropriate to do that with a private sign on City property. He stated that perhaps a third community sign would solve this problem.

Citizen Input

Rob Hardy, applicant, provided background information on himself, experience, and his local connection to Ramsey. He stated that when he looked at Ramsey, he could not figure out why the City was not attracting retailers. He stated that he attempted to purchase land on Highway 10 and was quickly educated on why that property would not work for development because of the Highway 10 improvement proposed to occur. He stated that retailers were interested in being on Highway 10, but there is not available land. He stated that he then spent time working on the parcel in The COR that he holds a Purchase Agreement on. He stated that the retailers that have declined interest have stated that it is because they would not have visibility on Highway 10. He advised of a sign that he recently saw along a highway advertising businesses, which caused him to pull off the highway to visit those businesses. He explained that the reason Ramsey does not have the retailers that other communities have is because it lacks exposure for those businesses on Highway 10. He explained that the sign he proposed would cost over \$500,000 and explained how those costs would be recovered from the tenants. He noted that the original sign proposal included a City branding area and a digital reader board, which could be used by smaller businesses that perhaps could not afford a tenant space. He noted that after receiving the feedback from staff, he removed those sections. He stated that he also reduced the height to match the U.S. Bank sign. He explained why the proposed location was chosen. He stated that Ramsey has a unique challenge in that The COR properties in that the businesses will want visibility from Highway 10. He believed that the time has come for the City to consider putting a larger sign on the City property, suggesting a modern digital sign which could be used to advertise local businesses, local events, and other civic announcements. He stated that without visibility from Highway 10, Ramsey will not be able to attract retailers.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl stated that the issue of private signage on City owned property will be a policy discussion for the Commission to consider.

Matt Kuker, PSD and Armstrong West Retail, stated that he is the adjoining property owner. He stated that if the City wants to do something with the property, it should consult the adjacent property owners to determine if they are interested in purchasing the lot. He stated that he has invested a significant amount of money into his site and to allow the applicant to put a sign closer to Highway 10 than his sign, and of this size, would be appalling. He stated that he is doing a fully electronic sign. He stated that he was asked to work with the applicant but does not have experience with the applicant and would prefer to own his sign and allow his space for his tenants. He stated that if the applicant wants property along Highway 10, he could have sold him property where Diamond's was. He stated that the City has never offered an off-premise sign to his knowledge. He stated that he would have liked to increase the size of his sign but followed City ordinance. He stated that if the Commission grants this, he will sell portions of his land along Highway 10 to be used for signs. He stated that allowing this action would open Ramsey to

becoming signville. He stated that he has spoken with the adjacent property owner about buying his land to continue retail use and this sign would fall directly in the center. He stated that PSD is a business of the community that has invested in the community and does not feel that approving this for future retailers would be the right move.

Mr. Hardy agreed that he does not have anything invested in the community as of yet but does have a Purchase Agreement with the City. He stated that he has the financial wherewithal to complete this project. He stated that if there is available land, he is unsure why there are not buildings going up on those properties. He stated that in his discussions with staff, the proposed Highway 10 improvements show tremendous impacts to the properties along Highway 10, with most of those properties no longer having access. He stated that if he goes away, the next developer will come in and want the same thing, exposure from Highway 10. He stated that this issue will need to be addressed.

Motion by Commissioner Woestehoff, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, to close the public hearing.

Motion Carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Bauer, Commissioners Woestehoff, Johnson, Anderson, Gengler, Peters, and VanScoy. Voting No: None. Absent: None.

Chairperson Bauer closed the public hearing closed at 8:56 p.m.

Commission Business

Chairperson Bauer stated that it seems the developer is willing to delay this to March to allow time to review additional options.

Commissioner Woestehoff stated that he would suggest determining the square footage of a billboard. He stated that he would much rather see another sign of 330 square feet at 75 feet. He stated that he likes the idea of having combined signs for multiple tenants.

Commissioner VanScoy stated that if this is going to be delayed to March, there could be the same discussion if nothing is done between now and then.

Commissioner Woestehoff stated that he would like to see the sign on land owned by the applicant and not City owned land.

Commissioner VanScoy recognized that the visibility issue is a huge policy issue that needs to be dealt with.

Chairperson Bauer agreed that the sign ordinance needs to be reviewed, as visibility will continue to be a huge issue for The COR.

City Planner Anderson provided additional details on the different types of signage allowed. He stated that the Council has talked about going away from The COR branding and focusing on the City of Ramsey.

Councilmember Musgrove provided additional input on recent Council discussions related to uniform City of Ramsey branding and signage.

Chairperson Bauer asked if this topic could be added to the joint meeting with the City Council the following week.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl replied that she did not believe that agenda would have space for an additional topic. She asked for input from the Commission on whether it would support an off-premise sign.

Commissioner Johnson stated that he would not support an off-premise sign for the applicant specifically but would support a community sign for multiple tenants/projects.

Commissioner VanScoy stated that he would like the Commission/City to consider a community sign, looking at the long-term needs for The COR. He stated that perhaps a partnership could be done to support that action. He stated that he would like to see more signage for the businesses but also wants to see the City have control.

Commissioner Woestehoff stated that he would appreciate a community sign but believes that the Ramsey overpass would need to be completed prior to that sign being added because of future visibility issues.

Commissioner VanScoy stated that the Armstrong interchange has caused a significant negative impact on visibility for businesses even though it was a positive for transportation.

Commissioner Peters stated that he has an issue with the size of the sign. He stated that the population of Ramsey will support the businesses and not the traffic that pulls off the highway by chance.

Commissioner Woestehoff asked if a decision would need to be made in March, if tabled tonight.

Chairperson Bauer stated that if the issue is still not resolved in March, the Commission can recommend it not be approved. He stated that tabling does not require the request to come back in March.

City Planner Anderson replied that the City has a 60-day timeframe for review but can issue a 60-day extension if needed. He noted that anything beyond one extension would require consent of the applicant.

Commissioner Johnson asked what would change between now and the next review.

Commissioner Anderson suggested that there be a worksession before the next meeting to allow additional discussion.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl stated that she can schedule a worksession for signage. She noted that the applicant has some urgency because of potential tenants.

Chairperson Bauer stated that it seems the consensus would be a community sign on City property or a comparable sign (to Armstrong Retail) on private property.

Motion by Commissioner Anderson, seconded by Commissioner VanScoy, to table the request and allow the applicant time to revise the proposal for consideration at a future meeting.

Further discussion

Commissioner Johnson requested that the worksession occur at least one week prior to the regular Planning Commission meeting. He thanked Mr. Hardy for his input tonight.

Motion Carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Bauer, Commissioners Anderson, VanScoy, Gengler, Johnson, Peters, and Woestehoff. Voting No: None. Absent: None.

Mr. Kuker stated that he also owns the land at Armstrong and Bunker, and if off-premise signs are allowed, he could potentially make that retail and post signage along Highway 10. He just wanted to ensure the Commission thinks about precedent that could be set.