

**PLANNING COMMISSION
CITY OF RAMSEY
ANOKA COUNTY
STATE OF MINNESOTA**

The Ramsey Planning Commission conducted a worksession meeting on Thursday, October 28, 2021, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Chairperson Randy Bauer
 Commissioner Bruce Anderson
 Commissioner Andrew Dunaway (attending virtually)
 Commissioner Cheri Gengler
 Commissioner Eric Peters
 Commissioner Gary VanScoy
 Commissioner Brian Walker

Members Absent: None

Also Present: Senior Planner Chloe McGuire Brigl
 Code Enforcement Officer Bria Raines
 Planning Technician Brian McCann
 City Council Liaison Matt Woestehoff
 City Councilmember Debra Musgrove

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Bauer called the regular meeting to order at 5:34 p.m.

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: Review Ordinance Amending Digital Display Billboard Regulations

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl reviewed the staff report.

Commissioner VanScoy asked if billboards are not currently allowed.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl confirmed that to be true but noted that there are a few legal nonconforming which predate the existing ordinance.

Commissioner VanScoy commented that this change would then allow up to three billboards. He stated that it would seem one company is requesting this.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl commented that the City is requesting this and put out an RFP.

Commissioner VanScoy asked if there would be a public hearing related to this change.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl confirmed that the City Council would hold a public hearing at the first reading of the ordinance.

Commissioner VanScoy commented that he does not support allowing billboards. He stated that he is bothered that this change is being brought forward by a request from one company but understood that the City initiated the process.

Councilmember Woestehoff clarified that this is not a request by one company, as the City initiated the request. He stated the other two billboards could be through different companies.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl commented that the sign previously discussed would be placed upon City property and the other two signs could be placed upon private properties.

Commissioner Walker asked the number of properties that would fit the necessary criteria.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl commented that the vacant spaces along the highway would qualify, or a portion of the property could be split off for the billboard. She noted that signs would only be allowed within commercial or industrial areas.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that the purpose of having the sign on a parcel without a building would ensure the existing company would not have advertising on the site as well.

Commissioner VanScoy asked if there would be an impact to the monument sign that exists or whether the billboard would be in addition.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl confirmed that the monument signs of the City would not be impacted. She stated that a billboard would not be classified as a monument sign. She clarified that the City would maintain ownership of the land and lease it to the business that operates the sign.

Chairperson Bauer referenced pages four and five which provides additional background information. He stated that some of the language seems duplicative to the information found within the sign ordinance.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl commented that an intent section of an ordinance is common to include. She stated that if there is pushback on the ordinance, it helps to have the intent.

Chairperson Bauer stated that on page five there is language related to the distance between signs and asked if the two miles would be exact or a minimum distance.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl commented that it would be intended as a minimum distance and that language could be updated.

Commissioner Walker stated that he does not like this idea and finds billboards to be tacky. He noted that he would not support the ordinance.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if more research was completed related to the duration of messaging. She specifically asked for the message duration near the intersections of highways 10 and 65.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl provided details on the minimum message durations allowed by different communities.

Councilmember Musgrove commented that she believes longer message durations are better in order to avoid driver distraction.

Chairperson Bauer agreed that messages that change too quickly become distracting and hard to read. He recognized that some members of the Commission are opposed to billboards and asked the Commission if there is consensus to continue working on this topic.

Commissioner Gengler stated that she would rather provide input on the restrictions rather than saying the Commission is opposed and losing the opportunity to have input.

Commissioner Peters agreed that he would rather be able to provide input as well. He stated that location and light pollution are important issues. He noted that not everyone uses social media and therefore the messages can be helpful.

Commissioner Dunaway commented that he believes the Council will move this forward and therefore he would agree that it would be better to provide input on the restrictions as well.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that he was the only Councilmember opposed to the concept of billboards, therefore he would believe the item will move forward.

Councilmember Musgrove commented that there was consensus from the Council to pursue the RFP, based on the support from the EDA. She did not believe that the concept had returned to the Council again since that time.

Chairperson Bauer suggested that the Commission focus on the proposed regulations which the Council will be reviewing.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl suggested that billboards be allowed through Conditional Use Permit (CUP), which would mean the Commission would still have the opportunity to review a request that comes forward and provide input.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if the signs could perhaps only be allowed in a specific zoning district, meaning that the property would need to be rezoned and a public process would be required.

Chairperson Bauer noted that would become an issue of spot zoning and therefore would prefer to use the CUP tool.

Commissioner Anderson stated that his concern is related to safety. He noted that if drivers are taking their eyes off the road to look at a sign, it causes a safety concern. He did not see the need for additional distractions until the stoplights are taken off Highway 10.

Commissioner Gengler commented that there are digital billboards throughout the metro and therefore she is unable to make the connection that the sign is responsible for accidents. She stated that perhaps fewer signs be allowed within The COR if these larger signs are going to be allowed.

Commissioner VanScoy commented that The COR Framework is specific to what is allowed, but the City continues to issue variances outside of that framework. He stated that the monuments were meant to communicate what is within The COR. He expects that this ordinance will pass even though he does not like the idea of allowing billboards in Ramsey. He commented that billboards are a distraction and, in his opinion, are not worth looking at and detract from the look of the community. He stated that he does like using a CUP as that would allow additional review of each proposed location. He commented that perhaps eight seconds is too low for message duration.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl commented that she would recommend ten seconds.

Commissioner Walker commented that people are often caught up on how short eight or ten seconds is when it is longer than it seems. He noted that by the time a driver sees the sign, they would only see one or two messages before they pass the sign.

Chairperson Bauer reviewed the consensus items from the Commission related to this ordinance.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that based on the comments he would suggest taking this item off the Consent Agenda for the regular meeting to allow those opposed to vote against the request.

2.02: Consider Ordinance #21-18 Allowing Accessory Dwelling Units on Single-Family Residential Properties

Planning Technician McCann reviewed the staff report.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl noted that staff attempted to make this as simple as possible.

Chairperson Bauer suggested a language change.

Commissioner Dunaway stated that the ordinance states that an accessory dwelling unit would be allowed for properties over 2.5 acres. He noted that there is also language related to a garage conversion and found that confusing as to whether properties under 2.5 acres would qualify.

Chairperson Bauer replied that only properties 2.5 acres or larger would be eligible.

Commissioner Dunaway commented that in the previous discussion he recalls discussion about elderly family members that may require direct care and whether the regulations would be too restrictive.