



PLANNING DIVISION
"SERVING BILLINGS, BROADVIEW AND YELLOWSTONE COUNTY"
PLANNING & COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
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MEETING NOTES
Project Re:Code
Sign Code Working Group Meeting

Thursday, March 8, 2018

1:00 pm to 2:30 pm

2825 3rd Avenue North, 6th Floor Conference Room

1. **Welcome and Introductions** – Chair Paul Cox – Chair Paul Cox introduced himself and the other members of the working group. He thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and was anxious to get the conversation started. Besides the working group members, 12 members of the public attended.
2. **Review List of Suggested Topics** – See Attached Documents – The following issues were added to the list of topics:
 - a. Need broader representation of the community. Sign companies represent their customers well, but consumers and the public need a place at the table as well.
 - b. Code will need to be content neutral to comply with recent Supreme Court decisions (Reed v. Gilbert, AZ) and RLUIPA related to church and institutional type signs
 - c. The sign code (main city code & county code) is a good skeleton – we should use this to re-build a single code – pull in other sign code pieces that work, consolidate to create a level playing field, address nonconformities (heritage or iconic signs? Or just out of conformance?) to make sure all have equal treatment under the code.
 - d. Need to get more feedback on the procedural process – who can apply? Who “owns” a sign permit? Should approved permits expire if the sign is never placed on the property?
 - e. We should regularize the code to make sure we are keeping to what is expected and normal in Billings – e.g. do not adopt another city’s code.

The working group members and members of the public discussed the sign code approach further. A comment was made that personal taste is not a good basis for a sign regulation. Differences in sign requirements should be content neutral. Another comment was made to point out that other communities look to Billings as an example of good and appropriate sign regulations. A comment was made the main city sign code is an excellent framework and we need to organize a step-by-step plan to re-build this code so it fits the whole community. A comment was made there is a reason the city adopted a different sign code for Shiloh Road – this area is different and the public had an interest in making sure it did not end up as sign cluttered as Grand Ave or Main Street. A commenter agreed with this assessment since they always pre-planned their journey to Main or Grand so they did not need to look for a sign to know where to go or when to turn. Several members of the working group and public agreed it would be interesting to

look at what a consolidated and context sensitive sign code would look like. A comment was made the context of a road cannot be as simple as a road classification – e.g. arterial streets are not all the same – and Shiloh Rd is different.

The working group agreed any draft new sign code should address these 4 issues:

1. Context – not just the street, but the type of traffic, the adjacent land uses and other context considerations
2. Clarity – make sure the code is orderly, using clear language and definitions
3. Consolidation – try and incorporate the best qualities of each sign code within the framework of any new draft sign code
4. Content Neutrality and other Legal Issues – make sure known legal issues are addressed and content neutrality is maintained throughout the code.

The working group asked staff to provide a draft context matrix to review at the next meeting.

3. Update of Consultant Selection for Project Re:Code – Nicole Cromwell – The working group and public were briefed on the consultant selection process. A selection committee consisting of 3 Planning Division staff and the 2 Co-Chairs of the Project Re:Code Steering Committee (Dave Goodridge and Mike Boyett) were finalizing their review of the 3 submittals. A selection will be made, a contract negotiated and presented to the City Council for approval in April. The consultant will provide the following services to Project Re:Code –

- a. **Community Assessment and Outreach**
- b. **Code Assessment/Code Audit**
- c. **Drafting Code Sections**
- d. **Full draft regulations “testing” and adoption**

Staff noted the timeline for the consultant’s work will progress through Fall of 2019, with the Code Audit expected to be completed by Fall 2018. Drafting of code sections will begin in October 2018 and wrap up in June 2019. Staff hopes to have the new code completed and ready for adoption in Fall 2019.

4. Public Comment

Mayor Cole made the following public comments. He stated he appreciates the participation of all the sign company representatives but it is important to respect the sign consumers of Billings and the goals set through its adopted Growth Policy. He stated the working group will need to address aesthetically different places in the community. He said different places do need different signs. He stated that Grand Avenue should not try to become Las Vegas, NV. He stated this is not where the community wants to go in the future.

5. Set Next Meeting Date and Time

The next meeting was set for April 11, 2018 from 3 pm to 5pm in the 1st Floor Conference Room, 2825 3rd Ave North.

Staff reminded members the full Steering Committee will be having its meeting on Wednesday March 28 at Granite Tower, 222 N 32nd Street.

6. Adjourn – the meeting adjourned at 2:35 pm