

VILLAGE OF HOMEWOOD



MEETING MINUTES

DATE OF MEETING:

March 6, 2025

APPEARANCE COMMISSION

6:00 pm

Village Hall Board Room
2020 Chestnut Street
Homewood, IL 60430

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Hrymak called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

ROLL CALL:

Members Banks, Scheffke, Quirke, Preston, and Chair Hrymak were present. Member Kluck was absent.

In attendance from Village staff were Angela Mesaros, Director of Economic and Community Development; and Noah Schumerth, Assistant Director of Economic and Community Development. There were three members of the public in the audience, and no members of the public were in attendance using the Zoom virtual meeting.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

Chair Hrymak noted that Member Kluck will need to be present to approve the November 13, 2024 meeting minutes. The Commission declined to make a motion on the minutes from November 13, 2024.

Chair Hrymak asked for corrections from the February 6, 2025 meeting minutes. No changes were requested. Motion to approve made by Member Scheffke; second by Member Quirke.

AYES: 5 (Members Banks, Scheffke, Quirke, Preston, and Chair Hrymak)

NAYS: 0

ABSTENTIONS: 0

ABSENT: 1 (Member Kluck)

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

None.

REGULAR BUSINESS:

25-01 SIGN CODE UPDATE - CONTINUED

Chair Hrymak introduced the workshop presentation to be conducted by Village staff. Chair Hrymak invited Noah Schumerth, Assistant Director of Economic and Community Development, to come forward to continue a workshop presentation on proposed sign code amendments.

Chair Hrymak requested that the workshop be presented with a brief overview for members of the audience and to refresh Appearance Commissioners on the discussion topics covered thus far in the workshop.

Assistant Director Schumerth introduced the project goals of the proposed sign code updates. Schumerth emphasized the need for revised and codified procedures to professionalize the work of staff and the Appearance Commission when reviewing signs and other improvements.

Assistant Director Schumerth presented an outline of the new sign code.

Assistant Director Schumerth presented requirements for individual sign types. Schumerth presented a table indicating which sign types would be required to be reviewed by the Appearance Commission. Schumerth presented highlights of proposed sign code regulations.

Schumerth presented proposed changes to temporary sign allowances. Schumerth noted that allowable window sign area was increased for temporary window signs.

Chair Hrymak asked if window signs were previously allowed to cover 50% of windows.

- **Staff Liaison Mesaros noted that the former code indicated that temporary window signs should follow the same regulations as permanent window signs.**

Chair Hrymak recommended that temporary window sign area be reduced for public safety purposes.

Member Banks asked how Walt's grocery store is permitted to have window signs which cover the entire window.

- **Staff Liaison Mesaros noted that the signs were not permitted as currently constructed, and may be legal non-conforming signs which existed before the current sign code was in place.**

Chair Hrymak recommended that temporary window sign area be reduced to 25%. Some members expressed concern about existing temporary window signs being larger to allow for temporary advertising needs to be met.

Member Scheffke asked how the temporary window signs are enforced, especially for their duration.

- **Staff Liaison Mesaros noted that signs are generally "one-offs" that are taken down after the end of sale or event. Mesaros noted that a separate application is required for these signs.**

Member Scheffke asked how frosted windows are treated, and whether they would be considered as window signs.

- **Schumerth stated that the code does not clearly regulate frosted windows.**

Member Banks requested changes to code that limit frosted window coverage and a maximum height to which signs and frosted windows are limited to allow for visibility for public safety officials.

Member Scheffke asked if public safety officials have asked for windows to be clear for signage, and what they would define as "clear."

- **Staff Liaison Mesaros noted that public safety chiefs have asked for clear visibility into windows, but there isn't a stated definition on what "clear" is aside from preserving visibility.**

Member Banks restated that height is an important consideration for window sign placement. Banks stated that safety comes before aesthetics, but the Appearance Commission must consider aesthetic quality.

Chair Hrymak asked that staff look into other communities and how they regulate window signage.

Member Preston stated that it is important for temporary window signs to be eye-catching for drivers and pedestrians, but that a “line” for size needs to be drawn.

Member Scheffke stressed that enforcement needs to be equal between businesses, and that some businesses may have concerns about larger businesses not being held to the same standard for window signage as smaller businesses.

Assistant Director Schumerth introduced comprehensive signage plans (CSPs) as a new set of procedures for the Village. Schumerth noted that application requirements, standards for review, and requirements for existing developments are included in the proposed chapter for comprehensive signage plans (CSPs).

Member Scheffke asked if cash stations would be considered a freestanding structure, and whether a bank with a cash station (ATM) would be required to provide a comprehensive sign plan.

- **Assistant Director Schumerth noted that the cash station would be an accessory structure and the site would not be required to submit a comprehensive sign plan. Schumerth noted that more than once principal structure, as defined by the zoning ordinance, must be on a site to require a comprehensive sign plan.**

Member Quirke stated that when small tenants in larger centers come and ask for signage through variances or design reviews, it should be the responsibility of the center owner to come up with a plan that can allow signage for all tenants in a building, rather than the Appearance Commission. Quirke stated that in larger shopping centers, the Village should be working with property owners rather than small, individual tenants. Quirke asked how centers could be required to provide sign plans which account for smaller tenants.

- **Staff Liaison Mesaros said that the new code would require the Village to reach out to plaza owners to prepare comprehensive sign plans, and the addition of the new tenant would trigger the need to come into compliance with new requirements for comprehensive sign plans.**

Member Quirke said that the comprehensive sign plan requirements would have long-term impacts on businesses in the Village.

- **Staff Liaison Mesaros said that CSPs would allow for more uniform signage in major centers in the future.**

Member Scheffke asked if existing businesses in a center would be required to install new signage with the adoption of a comprehensive sign plan.

- **Staff Liaison Mesaros said no and that requirements would only apply to future signage.**

Member Quirke asked what would be included in a comprehensive sign plan for an existing center.

- **Staff Liaison Mesaros said that plans would include future requirements for an entire plaza, including areas where signs can and can't go. Mesaros noted that when a business leaves, the new tenant would be responsible for complying with the plan. The plan would require long-term compliance.**

Schumerth showed examples of buildings which could fall under a comprehensive sign plan requirement.

Member Banks noted that in another community, a mixed-use building was required to provide plans for all signage on the building, including windows and doors. Banks noted that the property owner had to show where signs could go, including future signage if tenants were consolidated together or moved around the building. Banks said that the property owner was required to establish rules which would carry between property owners, and that carry with the lifespan of the building itself.

Assistant Director Schumerth noted that elevation drawings will be required to demonstrate where signs will go, and that any signs to be installed at the time of plan implementation could be included with additional construction drawings showing the design of those signs. Schumerth noted that additional rules or design standards could be established in CSPs.

Staff Liaison Mesaros noted that CSPs will be filed with the Village for continuous use and enforcement.

Assistant Director Schumerth introduced the review process for a CSP before the Appearance Commission, including the review of proposed modifications.

Assistant Director Schumerth noted that the goal is to move some sign variance applications received by the Village into a modifications review through the CSP process.

Member Quirke asked if there are opportunities to incorporate maintenance standards and other standards, such as landscaping, into the process of approving a CSP.

- **Staff Liaison Mesaros noted that CSPs should only govern signage; other projects can go through Appearance Review and be assessed by the Appearance Plan.**

Assistant Director Schumerth introduced new requirements for legal non-conforming signs, and discussed how legal non-conformities are monitored and enforced by the Village.

Chair Hrymak asked why timelines were not put in place for responding to major sign damage.

- **Assistant Director Schumerth noted that major damage requires removal of the sign and should be done as soon as the damage occurs, and that design and construction review for a new sign could take more than 180 days.**

Member Preston asked if there are exceptions for the repair and replacement limitations for non-conforming signs being discussed when a unique or historic sign is in place.

- **Assistant Director Schumerth noted that there are exceptions for certain sign types, replacing sign copy and for historical signs receiving landmark designation. Schumerth also noted an exception when the Village takes action requiring the alteration of a non-conforming sign.**

Assistant Director Schumerth introduced sign abandonment and amortization requirements.

Chair Hrymak asked that signage removal for abandoned signs should be strengthened from “may” to “shall.”

Chair Hrymak asked for clarification on if all non-conforming signs would be required to be removed after 10 years.

- **Assistant Director Schumerth said yes, unless they received an exemption via CSP or variance approval, or through another means identified in the code.**

Member Preston asked how this code would be enforced.

- **Assistant Director Schumerth noted that a notice would be given with time to complete the sign removal or receive an exemption. The Village would then cite a property owner with non-conforming signage.**

Staff Liaison Mesaros said that the Village Board may not be comfortable with the severity of this requirement.

Assistant Director Schumerth noted that the Village’s goal should be to remove non-conforming signage over time.

Member Preston recommended that the Village fall back on damage, use change or other types of triggering requirements where a sign would need to be removed, stating that signs are an asset to existing businesses and that sign replacement could come with a large price paid by existing businesses.

Member Scheffke asked if a sign for an abandoned tenant would still need to be removed after 180 days if the amortization requirement is removed. Scheffke asked if the business would need to pay to the removal or repair of abandoned signage.

- **Assistant Director Schumerth said yes. Staff Liaison Mesaros said that the property owner would be responsible for taking care of abandoned signs and making any necessary repairs to the signs.**

Assistant Director Schumerth shared examples of legal non-conforming signs in the Downtown and Southgate areas of Homewood.

Multiple Commissioners identified a desire to see the Perruso Cleaners and Tailors sign on Dixie Highway to receive future landmark status.

Assistant Director Schumerth introduced new construction and maintenance standards for signs.

Chair Hrymak asked if window signs would be included in these requirements, including open signs and other types of signs.

- **Assistant Director Schumerth said yes.**

Member Quirke asked whether an annual inspection of signs and other potential maintenance violations would be feasible.

- **Staff Liaison Mesaros noted that commercial code enforcement does inspections. Assistant Director Schumerth said that Village code enforcement staff regularly checks for sign code compliance, but completing a full assessment could require staff resources beyond what the Village has available.**

Chair Hrymak asked if language saying the Village “may” remove damaged signs should be changed to “shall” remove damaged signs.

- **Staff Liaison Mesaros said that the language will be reviewed by staff. Assistant Director Schumerth said that there should be different levels of enforcement or penalty between damaged or poorly maintained signs and signs which constitute a public safety hazard. Schumerth noted that the goal is to give the Building Division discretion in determining appropriate penalties for defective signage.**

Assistant Director Schumerth introduced that new sign definitions are provided to make the code easier to understand.

Assistant Director Schumerth introduced sign review procedures for sign permits, comprehensive sign plans.

Member Quirke asked if comprehensive sign plans (CSPs) and variances would be required to have an ordinance attached with them.

- **Assistant Director Schumerth said that currently the variance and CSP review processes are being retained at the level of the Appearance Commission, and that authority is stated in the new sign code and associated changes to Village codes.**

Member Quirke said that the comprehensive sign plans (CSPs) should go to the Village Board. Schumerth noted that the change would make the Appearance Commission a recommending body rather than a decision-making body for these reviews, and that staff would review the proposed procedures.

Assistant Director Schumerth introduced new variance processes. Staff Liaison Mesaros said that new standards were put in place to add legal basis for the variance review process, but the Appearance Commission would retain the sign variance review authority as they have currently.

Member Scheffke asked what was meant by “varying sign number” in the new code.

- **Assistant Director Schumerth said that it is one area where the Appearance Commission has the authority to make a variance decision. Like the Planning and Zoning Commission for other**

variances, the Commission is limited in its ability to make variances so that not every provision of the zoning ordinance can be modified through the variance process.

Assistant Director Schumerth noted that language about authority for variances could be made clearer and can be reviewed by staff.

Chair Hrymak and Member Preston said they wished to add language beyond “negative impact surrounding property” in the variance standards to add language about “improving general aesthetics” of the area.

Member Quirke said that the Dave’s Hot Chicken represented an effort to give away too much signage but that the Commission did not have appropriate input on the painted walls of the building. Member Quirke asked for more options to do something about buildings perceived to have poor appearance.

Assistant Director Schumerth introduced standards for Appearance Reviews and public art installation reviews.

Member Quirke asked about whether the Village has a right to review color.

- **Staff Liaison Mesaros said that color will largely be touched on through the Appearance Review process, and that there are few options for the Commission to review color because changing building color does not require a permit. Mesaros noted that staff sometimes asks applicants for review options for colors or brand refreshes.**

Assistant Director Schumerth introduced new review standards and procedures for public art installations and murals. Schumerth explained the difference between Appearance Reviews and the public art reviews to be brought forward to the Appearance Commission in the future.

Member Preston said that other communities have very strict standards for public art review which can encourage better looking art, but that some can be biased toward particular types of art or artistic expression.

- **Staff Liaison Mesaros said that architectural quality, impact on neighboring properties and other standards included in the proposed code could be relied upon to clearly state how an art installation may have sufficient quality to be approved.**

Member Scheffke asked if Dave’s Hot Chicken would have to remove the paint on the building to its previous state should the business become abandoned.

- **Assistant Director Schumerth said that the Dave’s paint work does not constitute a sign and is paint color on a building. Schumerth noted that the paint will not be required to be removed.**

Assistant Director Schumerth concluded the workshop.

OLD BUSINESS:

None.

NEW BUSINESS:

None.

ADJOURN:

A motion was made for adjourning the meeting by Member Scheffke, second by Member Preston.

AYES: 5 (Members Banks, Scheffke, Preston, Quirke and Chair Hrymak)

NAYS: 0

ABSTENTIONS: 0

ABSENT: 1 (Member Kluck)

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Noah Schumerth

Noah Schumerth

Assistant Director of Economic and Community Development