

**NEWTOWN BOROUGH PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES**

October 3, 2011

In attendance were members Warren Woldorf, Debbie Donofry, Paul Snyder, Paul Salvatore, Jayne Spector, Karen White and Borough Council Liaison, Mike Sellers.

Also present was Borough HARB Chairman Jim McAuliffe.

Call to Order

Chairman Woldorf called the meeting to order at 7:03 P.M.

Applicant Plan Review

None.

Old Business

None.

New Business

Discussion of exterior signs in Newtown Borough

Chairman Woldorf advised that the Commission would be discussing exterior signs in the Borough and noted that HARB Chairman McAuliffe was in attendance. He commented on the lack of presence from business owners who had been formally invited for their input in the discussion.

Mrs. White reported on her review of Sycamore Street compared to State Street. She observed the sandwich signs are located on the grass covered easement near the street. State Street does not have any grass on its easements; pedestrians use this area for walking (where sandwich signs on Sycamore are located). Arguably, there is more pedestrian traffic on State Street vs. Sycamore Street which could result in a tripping hazard.

The Recording Secretary commented on Sycamore Street with regards to the sandwich board signs installed there. She advised that the Township does have zoning standards regarding the size and colors of the signs.

Mr. Salvatore noted that State Street has a lot of benches along the sidewalk that protrude into the walkway. He thought that an A-frame sign would not extend any further. Chairman Woldorf reported that the current zoning ordinance requires that any portable sign needs to be on the building side of the sidewalk, not the street side.

Mr. Salvatore noted that boutiques are permitted to have clothing racks on the sidewalk, restaurants are not permitted to have anything on the sidewalk, and that some businesses are not following the ordinance.

The members discussed what the zoning ordinance permits, enforcing the ordinance and safety concerns.

Mrs. White commented on the lack of maintenance of the tree wells along State Street. The members discussed Mrs. White's concerns and agreed that maintenance of the tree wells should be the responsibility of the property owner.

Mrs. White noted that maintaining tree wells would serve to improve business on State Street better than advertising with A-frame signs.

Chairman Woldorf discussed the control of A-frame signs, such as bringing them in at night, locating them next to buildings, and that their prohibition is not being enforced.

The members were disappointed by the absence of business owners for this discussion and the need for their input.

The members discussed maintenance on Sycamore Street. Mr. Salvatore reported that the maintenance is done by the Sycamore Street Association.

Mr. Sellers suggested expanding the conversation beyond A-frame signs. He commented on the need to get approval for replacing directory sign panels. He suggested that if their replacement meets the requirements of height, width, letters, and colors, that it might not have to be reviewed by HARB. He commented on how not having a sign affects a business. Mr. McAuliffe agreed that he could see Mr. Sellers point. Chairman Woldorf reported that the ordinance does allow the use of temporary signs during the approval process. Ms. Spector suggested that the Commission make a recommendation that replacement sign panels matching other panels on the directory would not need to go before HARB. The members liked the idea and agreed that it would make things easier for business owners if replacement sign panels only needed to be reviewed by the Zoning Officer and not HARB.

Mr. Salvatore recommended that business owners should read the book "Opening Your Business in the Borough" and to meet with the Zoning Officer.

Mr. Salvatore discussed the use and types of banners. The first type was a light post banner. He noted that brackets could be purchased to hang these banners. The second type was a flag banner which would be hung from a building. Chairman Woldorf noted that decorative flags are allowed by ordinance, but with no advertisements. The members discussed the businesses that are currently flying a flag and how having the flags could be helpful to the customers. Ms. Spector commented on the pros and cons of allowing the banners/flags.

Chairman Woldorf commented on the menu board ordinance. The members discussed the various businesses that have a menu board.

The members discussed the problem of window clutter.

Chairman Woldorf asked Mr. McAuliffe about HARB's sentiment regarding light post and banner brackets not being period appropriate. Mr. McAuliffe responded that HARB has discouraged the brackets due to historic reasons.

The members agreed that what currently exists in the business district needs to be cleaned up before adding more clutter. They also discussed the possibility of the businesses forming a group to help maintain the appearance of the street and ways that the businesses could effectively advertise.

Mr. Salvatore reported on the work done by Newtown Corporation regarding the maintenance of the tree wells along State Street.

Mr. Sellers suggested deferring the discussion until more business owners are present. The members agreed that was a good idea.

Chairman Woldorf reported that he would draft correspondence for Borough Council advising on the Commission's discussion.

Mrs. Donofry inquired on how the valet parking is going. Mr. Salvatore reported that the valet parking program is progressing.

The members discussed Borough Council's August Work Session with regards to businesses and signs. Mr. Salvatore noted that business owners need to be present for the discussion to move forward. Mr. Sellers suggested putting the topic on next month's agenda. The members agreed they would reach out to the business owners, letting them know that the matter will be discussed again at the November meeting.

Chairman Woldorf thanked Mr. McAuliffe for his attendance.

Mr. McAuliffe reported that he feels that temporary signs don't need to be reviewed by HARB, as well as some other items not required for review. Chairman Woldorf reported that any application requiring a permit needs to be reviewed by the Zoning Officer.

Ms. Spector discussed street directory signs, the work done by the former JDNC's design committee and a project that was envisioned by the Main Street Committee. Mr. Salvatore reported that all of the records are still in the office and that he could investigate the files.

The members discussed businesses promoting events and working together as a group.

Mr. Sellers suggested that the Commission make a recommendation regarding freestanding directory signs.

Ms. Spector made a motion to recommend that Borough Council allow directory plaques to be replaced with similar colors and text size, matching the existing plaques on the sign without having to go before HARB for review. The motion was seconded by Mr. Salvatore and passed unanimously (6-0).

Approval of September 12, 2011 Meeting Minutes

Minutes of the regular meeting of September 12, 2011 were reviewed.

Mrs. Donofry made a motion to approve the minutes from September 12, 2011 as presented. The motion was seconded by Mrs. White and passed unanimously with one member abstaining due to absence from the meeting (5-0-1).

Other Business

Chairman Woldorf provided copies of Ordinance No. 716 to the members.

Mr. Salvatore reported that the Commission's minutes are now current on the Borough website.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chairman Woldorf requested a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mrs. Donofry made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Spector and passed unanimously (6-0).

The meeting adjourned at 7:59P.M.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 7, 2011 at 7:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Christy Holley-Flaherty
Recording Secretary