

CASE SUMMARY

APPLICATION TYPE: ORDINANCE AMENDMENT

KNOXVILLE-KNOX COUNTY

M P C
METROPOLITAN
P L A N N I N G
C O M M I S S I O N

T E N N E S S E E

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File Number: 10-A-11-OA
Application Filed: 9/6/2011
Applicant: KNOXVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Related File Number:
Date of Revision:

PROPERTY INFORMATION

General Location:

Other Parcel Info.:

Tax ID Number: 999 999

Jurisdiction:

Size of Tract:

Accessibility:

GENERAL LAND USE INFORMATION

Existing Land Use:

Surrounding Land Use:

Proposed Use:

Density:

Sector Plan:

Sector Plan Designation:

Growth Policy Plan:

Neighborhood Context:

ADDRESS/RIGHT-OF-WAY INFORMATION (where applicable)

Street:

Location:

Proposed Street Name:

Department-Utility Report:

Reason: Amendments to the City of Knoxville zoning ordinance at Article V, Section 10, regarding the maximum height of ground and monument signs

ZONING INFORMATION (where applicable)

Current Zoning:

Former Zoning:

Requested Zoning:

Previous Requests:

Extension of Zone:

History of Zoning:

PLAN INFORMATION (where applicable)

Current Plan Category:

Requested Plan Category:

SUBDIVISION INFORMATION (where applicable)

Subdivision Name:

No. of Lots Proposed:

No. of Lots Approved: 0

Variances Requested:

S/D Name Change:

OTHER INFORMATION (where applicable)

Other Bus./Ord. Amend.: Amendments to the City of Knoxville zoning ordinance at Article V, Section 10, regarding the maximum height of ground and monument signs

MPC ACTION AND DISPOSITION

Planner In Charge: Mark Donaldson

Staff Recomm. (Abbr.): Staff recommends that the planning commission recommend approval of the proposed amendments to the sign code relating to sign height as shown in Exhibit A.

Staff Recomm. (Full):

Comments:

City Council requested MPC to consider making a recommendation on amendments to the Knoxville Zoning Ordinance and expressed its opinion that the maximum sign height allowed for ground and monument signs in the city is too high and should be reduced to 25 feet, citing excessive sign height as unnecessarily obtrusive, hazardous to those who are nearby and trying to read them, and generally detracting from the overall quality and value of the land on and near which they are located. Several issues emerge from the City Council request:

- Is the city best served by a single maximum sign height for ground and monument signs?
- Is the city best served by a single maximum sign height throughout the city?
- Is the exception to the maximum height requirement within 500 feet of the interstate right-of-way warranted?
- Is the required minimum sign setback related to the sign height and should it be adjusted as well?
- How about sign size and sign illumination?
- How do we get existing signs to conform to any new regulations

ANALYSIS

One size should not fill all. There is a general rule of thumb with regard to sign size (height and area) and safety: The higher the volume of traffic and the higher the speed of traffic, the larger the sign must be to enhance sign readability and traffic safety. Knoxville's sign code generally prescribes a single sign height, with a few specific exceptions, for all monument and ground signs. A review of several surrounding cities indicates that the maximum height allowed for signs in Knoxville is very aggressive. Looking at the major cities north and south of Knoxville on I-75, Chattanooga and Lexington, KY, the major cities east and west of Knoxville on I-40, Asheville, NC, and Nashville, as well as Memphis, which has a new, recently adopted land development code, indicates that these cities generally require much shorter signs, with one exception.

- Nashville allows a maximum height of 20 feet in its mixed-use, office and neighborhood oriented commercial areas, 40 feet in its general commercial areas, and 8 feet for monument signs in the downtown area.
- Asheville allows a maximum height of 12 feet in its neighborhood and community scaled commercial areas, 20 feet in its urban areas, and 25 feet in its general commercial areas.
- Lexington allows a maximum height of 10 feet for its mixed use and office areas, 20 and 25 feet for its general commercial areas, but allows very tall signs near its interstate interchanges.
- Chattanooga allows a maximum sign height of 20 feet for its commercial areas, but allows signs to get taller as they are set back farther from the street right-of-way.
- Memphis, in its new code, has created 4 distinct sign districts and maximum sign heights vary from 6 to 50 feet, depending on the district and the functional classification of the adjacent street, with more intense areas with higher traffic volumes and speeds allowed greater sign heights, including a very tall sign allowed near interstate interchanges.

Monument signs are different. Monument signs by definition are mounted on a base that is integrated with the ground, and the sign area should be closer to ground level so that motorist can easily view them while also scanning traffic. The maximum sign height for monument signs in Knoxville's newer, mixed use zone district is generally 6 feet. The maximum sign height for monument signs in all applications should be significantly lower than the maximum sign height allowed for ground signs.

Interstate orientation - too much. The current exception to the maximum sign height for signs that are

within 500 feet of the interstate rights-of-way to be set with the bottom of the sign no more than 20 feet above the elevation of the interstate roadway regardless of the sign height provides interstate orientation of signs that are much too far from the interstate, and because of the system of parallel roads allows many properties on both sides roads such as Kingston Pike, Parkside Drive and Executive Park Drive to create signs that can be oriented to the interstate rather than reflect the necessary orientation to the road upon which traffic accesses these properties.

Sign setbacks. The current code, through an exception to the general requirement, allows ground signs to be set so the sign face is immediately adjacent to the street right-of-way, so long as the bottom of the sign area is set at least 10 feet above ground level. This allows tall signs to line-up along the right-of-way, crowding the space as if there were tall buildings set at the same location. Most commercial zones have a setback for buildings of 25 feet. This is not normal; Nashville, for example maintains a 10 feet visibility zone adjacent to all street rights-of-way in all zones which have a front setback requirement. A zero setback may be warranted in a pedestrian oriented zone district where buildings are allowed adjacent to the street right-of-way, but most commercial development in Knoxville is along major arterial roads in a much more suburban setting. A minimum setback of 10 feet for all portions of a sign is warranted in such a setting.

Other issues related to sign height. The overall impact of sign height is difficult to examine without also considering other criteria such as sign area, sign illumination, and a strategy to minimize over time the impact of current signs that may not meet any new regulations that are adopted. It is important to eventually consider all these factors as they contribute to the overall context of all signs, not just ground and monument signs, especially the idea of creating an amortization program for signs that become legally non-conforming as a result of amending these regulations. Such a program would set a future date certain to bring all signs into compliance while providing adequate time to recover the value of past investments made in these signs.

In summary, City Council should:

- Consider the creation of multiple sign districts, with different maximum sign heights, depending on such criteria as the characteristics of adjacent roadways and the traffic volumes and speeds, as well as the orientation of the businesses toward those roads. Additional sign height could be allowed if signs are placed farther from the street right-of way.
- Consider creating a maximum sign height for monument signs that is different from the allowed height for other ground signs.
- Consider reducing the area within which sign height may be related to the existing surface level of the interstate highway.
- Consider eliminating the exception that allows ground signs closer to the street right-of way or pavement than the established requirement and allow additional sign height if larger setbacks are used.
- Consider creating an amortization program for signs that become non-conforming as a result of the adoption of new regulations.
- Consider revisiting the sign code to align allowed sign height with other requirements such as sign area and sign illumination.

Action: Approved

Meeting Date: 10/13/2011

Details of Action: Staff recommends that the planning commission recommend approval of the proposed amendments to the sign code relating to sign height as shown in Exhibit A.

Summary of Action:

Date of Approval: 10/13/2011

Date of Denial:

Postponements:

Date of Withdrawal:

Withdrawn prior to publication?: **Action Appealed?:**

LEGISLATIVE ACTION AND DISPOSITION

Legislative Body: Knoxville City Council

Date of Legislative Action: 11/15/2011

Date of Legislative Action, Second Reading: 1/21/2014

Ordinance Number:

Other Ordinance Number References:

Disposition of Case: Approved as Modified

Disposition of Case, Second Reading: Tabled

If "Other": 11-29-11 Postponed 6 mos until 5-29-12, PP 4 months to 9-18-2012, pp 120 days to 1-22-13, pp 12 wks to 4-16-13

If "Other": Postponed to 7-23, 11-26-13, 1-21-14

Amendments:

Amendments:

First Reading amended to reduce the maximum sign height

Date of Legislative Appeal:

Effective Date of Ordinance:

