

CITY OF ISSAQUAH
Economic Vitality Commission

5:30 PM
January 20, 2021

Virtual Meeting

MINUTES

COMMISSION AND ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL PRESENT

Alternate Meeting Format: On March 6, 2020 the Mayor declared a civil emergency due to the outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19). On March 24, 2020 the Governor issued Proclamation 20-28 relating to the COVID-19 emergency and open public meetings. The proclamation has been extended. Due to these factors, the meeting was held using a remote meeting platform.

Commissioners Present :

Therese Garcia, Chair
Christopher Beaudoin, Vice Chair
Pavel Aprikian
Kathy McCorry
Ashwin Muthuvenkataraman
Tom Rogers
Kristi Tripple

Administration/Staff Present:

Jen Davis Hayes, Economic Dev. Mgr.
Benton Coblenz, Economic Dev. Coord.
Lucy Sloman, Land Dev. Manager
Andrea Snyder, Deputy City Administrator

Others Present:

Daniel P. Kenny, Ogden Murphy Wallace

CALL TO ORDER

GARCIA, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a) MOVED BY TRIPPLE, SECONDED BY BEAUDOIN that minutes of the December 16, 2020 EVC meeting be approved as presented. Minutes are approved.

AGENDA ITEMS

- a) **Sign Code Update, (D)**

Presented by:

*Daniel P. Kenny, Ogden Murphy Wallace
Lucy Sloman, Land Development Manager*

Kenny made a presentation using PowerPoint on recent developments that affect the City's sign code. He explained the City's objectives in reviewing its existing sign code; some background on why this effort is being undertaken now; and the process for reviewing and approving the City's sign code update, including upcoming opportunities for EVC, PPC, and the public to provide input. He noted that the proposal being presented tonight is in the preliminary stages and has not been thoroughly reviewed or approved by the Administration or Council.

He gave details about the US Supreme Court case (*Reed v. Town of Gilbert*) that has impacted the City's ability to have content-based signage regulations. He summarized the case's impact as follows: "*If, when regulating speech, the regulation is split into categories which require you to look to the content of the sign, and those categories are treated differently, that regulation is content-based on its face and must withstand strict scrutiny (heightened scrutiny).*" He also spoke about the desire to streamline the City's sign code and the sign review process.

He continued his presentation by describing key sections in the proposal on which EVC and others' input is being sought, and compared what is being proposed with the current standards. On the topic of the sign review process proposal, TRIPPLE spoke in favor of streamlining the sign review process and having all permits reviewed and approved by the Planning Director/Manager or designee rather than the Development Commission. APRIKIAN asked about any pending changes to the sign permit fees. Sloman replied staff understands the interest in that question, and we will consider it as part of the Administration's proposal as it develops. McCORRY asked whether signs on specific streets or in specific zones will be

eliminated from Development Commission review; in other words, will signs in all parts of the City be under the same review plan, regardless of the neighborhood. Sloman replied yes; the signage regulations will apply to the entire City, although there may be different processes for approving residential and commercial signs.

Kenny continued his presentation on the proposal for temporary sign permits and commercial A-frame signs to be in compliance with the *Reed* case. The Commission expressed interest in ensuring that existing A-frame signs that exceed new regulations be “grandfathered” or phased in rather than needing replacement, especially given the current economic uncertainties that businesses are facing. Alisa Taggart, Grand Ridge Plaza, asked questions about proposed regulations for specific sign types.

Kenny continued his presentation on other key sections in the proposal, including banners; temporary non-commercial signs in the right-of-way; temporary non-commercial signs on private property; follow-through signs; and anticipated next steps in preparing the draft sign code, leading to anticipated City Council consideration on April 5, 2021. He provided email addresses for Commissioners and members of the public to submit comments and concerns.

TRIPPLE said the predetermined banner permit is a great idea, and asked will temporary banners such as announcing grand openings that are now short-term and permit-excluded be part of the new regulations. She also spoke in favor of follow-through signs, particularly for visitors. She also recognized that sign content is very important to the community but also a complex issue, and she appreciates all the thought that is going into the City’s proposed sign code.

APRIKIAN commented on real estate signs and said the regulations for them should be the same as our neighboring jurisdictions. He noted that A-frame signs are being proposed to be within 50 feet of the main entrance of the building, but that may not be enough, or necessary, particularly if there are no adjacent businesses. He gave examples. He also said he thinks A-frames should be allowed at the four-foot height level because many A-frames are located on busy pedestrian streets, and visibility will be a problem if they are only allowed at three feet.

McCORRY said the group already working on wayfinding signs for the City should be part of this discussion, as should representatives of transportation concerns, particularly traffic calming signage. Sloman said we have met with the wayfinding group, but the transportation group is a good suggestion, and staff will follow up. McCORRY noted she agrees with others that the sign code is a complicated issue, and noted that businesses spend money on their signage and want it to be as effective as possible.

MUTHUVENKATARAMAN noted that the use of personal technology is changing how people use physical signage. He asked for a definition of wayfinding signage. Davis Hayes supplied the definition and described the efforts of the wayfinding group so far, which have been interrupted by the pandemic. She said we can have a longer discussion about that at a future EVC meeting.

Public Comments

Alisa Taggart, Regency Center/Grand Ridge Plaza, asked whether the Supreme Court case (*Reed*) is applicable nationwide. Denny replied yes; cities have different processes and timelines, but cities everywhere are having discussions about how to address this. Ms. Taggart asked if Grand Ridge Plaza has questions about the specific temporary sign sizes it uses, who should be contacted to discuss our needs. Sloman provide her contact information.

- b) **Mayor's Recovery Task Force, (I)**
Presented by:

Jen Davis Hayes, Economic Development Manager
Kathy McCorry, EV Commissioner

Davis Hayes said she and McCORRY attended the last meeting of the Mayor's Recovery Task Force, and participated in discussions about what the City can do in the next six months to support economic recovery. She gave details on the primary discussion points at that meeting, including how to use additional funding if stimulus funding is provided to the City; continuing to pursue regulatory relief; analyzing and supporting the needs of the virtual workforce; supporting the return to work and school; and installing hope by utilizing the City's communication tools to highlight business success stories, both large and small. Davis Hayes noted the Council will address how to spend any additional federal stimulus funds at a work session next Tuesday, January 26.

c) **2021 Schedule & Commissioner Recruitment, (D)**

Presented by:

Jen Davis Hayes, Economic Development Manager

Davis Hayes reviewed potential areas of effort in 2021 by EVC, as also discussed at the December EVC meeting, and ideas for discussions by EVC in each quarter of 2021. BEAUDOIN noted the City's budget should show up in this schedule as well; EVC should be aware of changes in the City budget's that could impact services in the community going forward. McCORRY agreed, and said EVC should also discuss what the priorities are for the business community as the economy recovers, such as addressing internet connectivity issues. Staff made a note of both suggestions.

Davis Hayes asked about availability for a joint EVC meeting with PPC on February 25, and canceling EVC's regular meeting on February 17, for a joint discussion of the proposed sign code. BEAUDOIN indicated his unavailability. Davis Hayes will follow-up with an email to confirm others' availability.

Davis Hayes noted EVC has six open seats for the term beginning March 2021—four vacancies and two renewal memberships (McCORRY, APRIKIAN). She said recruitment of new members will open January 29 and extend through February, with virtual interviews expected the first week in March. She noted TRIPPLE is leaving the Commission and expressed appreciation for her willingness to serve an additional term beginning last spring. Expanding the number of EVC members so that quorums are more likely, and including youth members, are possibilities, she added. McCORRY said we need to be sure the business community is aware of this opportunity. ROGERS asked whether specific sectors or business types are being sought, and Davis Hayes referred to the 2021 Commissioner Skill Set list developed at the last meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

REPORTS

- a) **Business Openings, Closures, & Trends.** BEAUDOIN reported on vaccination progress from his perspective. The situation is complex and complicated, he said, and the two biggest challenges are vaccine supply chain issues and finding adequate labor to administer vaccines.

The Commission briefly discussed closure of the GE Healthcare Life Sciences operation next to the Marriott Hotel on 12th Avenue and Newport. Davis Hayes noted that 61 employees worked there, and the building is now unoccupied. The City has become aware of some interest in residential redevelopment of the property, although some commercial development would be required as well.

- b) **City Council Report-Out.** Davis Hayes reported that on January 4, the City Council approved a rate-increase waiver on property it leases in downtown. She also reported that Victoria Hunt was re-elected for a one-year term as Council President, and Chris Reh as Vice Present. Councilmember Stacy Goodman will continue as Chair of the Lodging Tax Advisory Committee. She added EVC members may be interested in a virtual Council work session on the City's economic recovery to be held January 26.

OTHER BUSINESS / ANNOUNCEMENTS

TRIPPLE said she is grateful to have the strong medical presence that Swedish Medical Center provides the City, which adds greatly to the quality of life for Issaquah residents and businesses. She said she hopes that, as the vaccine becomes more widely available, the City's economic vitality can resume. She suggested that staff contact our area's state representatives to make a two- or three-minute video for the Council and groups like EVC to explain what is being done at a state level to support economic vitality and to help communities weather this difficult time. Davis Hayes made a note of the suggestion.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, GARCIA adjourned the meeting at 7:41 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Lowe
Recording Secretary