



STAFF MEMO TO TETON COUNTY PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

Public Hearing Date of October 9, 2012

FROM: Planning Staff
RE: Work meeting to discuss making amendments to Title 8 Chapter 9 (County Sign Code)
DATE: October 2, 2012

What are some of the purposes of this first sign work session?

1. One purpose of this first work meeting is to hear more about why the sign code needs work. Staff will identify and discuss some of the problems first.
2. Staff would like to formulate a process and plan on how to amend the sign code. We would especially like to hear your input about this! The PZC should discuss their perceptions of the problem and its magnitude. Discuss whether some quick fixes are possible for the worst problems. Discuss which issues they foresee as time-consuming and which issues are in need of input and compromises between business leaders and view protection advocates.
3. Help the Staff with what you believe will be the best approach to amending the code and who will be the best sources of input.
4. Identify other communities that have admirable, attractive signs that are affected by the local sign code.

Why amend our sign code?

1. The present sign code standards are difficult to interpret during the permitting process.
2. The present code actually could allow off-premise signs on properties along the highway to be placed at intervals of 660 feet. That is 8 signs per mile. At this rate, about 64 signs could be on just one side of the highway between Driggs and Victor city limits.
3. The enforcement of the Sign Code is difficult because there are vague definitions and lots of older "non-conforming signs" that existed before a permit system or were installed despite needing a permit- see some of the "problem sign" categories below.
4. Do we want to "brand" or make some themes to help market our special valley in a recognizable way or do most citizens really care if Teton Valley becomes Franchisevalley or Anyville, USA?

What types of signs are raising questions about the sign code?

The proliferation of different types of signs along the scenic highway corridors fall under one or more of the “problem” categories described below. The descriptions below lump various types of roadside signage into one or more categories. There are probably more types of odd scenarios for road side signs than those listed below.

1. *City biz out in County.* Under the current code, a few signs have been permitted in the unincorporated county for businesses that are physically located within the city limits of Driggs, Teton or Victor. These stores often have frontage on “Main Street” and have other storefront signs that are City-permitted signs. Typically these signs are based on lineal street frontage of the building. Will every business in these towns now realize they can apply for an off-premise sign along a highway out in the County?
2. *Illegal signs* that were never granted a permit despite needing a County permit when they were originally installed.
3. *Old sign & biz still open.* Signs that were legally installed at one point but no longer meet the current design standards. “Legally nonconforming” signs may be fully permitted, properly sized and well-designed signs for businesses that are still in operation.
4. *Old sign but biz closed.* Old and weathered signs that may also be considered “legally nonconforming” or “grandfathered” but it is questionable whether the business is still in operation. The County is not sure when it went up, but the sign appears to be old enough to outdate zoning and sign ordinances. *Old sign design.* Signs out of compliance in 1997 were supposed to have been taken down by 2000 per current ordinance.
5. *Temporary signs – no permit.* So-called “temporary” sign are not on a foundation but seem to appear for “special events”, or seasonally. There is no record of a sign permit having ever been issued. Since not on a foundation, these signs are sometimes located very close to an intersection, in the vegetated road right-of-way, or on the hardened travel surface.
6. *Signs in right-of-way or too close.* Signs that are much closer to the highway road surface and don’t meet the regulations.
7. *Out of area biz signs.* Signs sometimes show up that advertise a business out of the Teton County, or recently, Blackfoot, Idaho.
8. *Off-Premise signs.* Signs that are placed on a premise that has no business on the property. This includes some of the types described above but could be a legal sign. Generally the off-premise signs are shunned in many classy tourist areas and are the hallmark of places considered “tacky”. Do these off-premise signs start a trend straying towards billboards? Worse, will a proliferation of these signs destroy any hope of having a Scenic Corridor remain scenic? We have to question if these are consistent with our values as a rural community. The worst and most unsightly communities have rules similar to our own in that they also allow these types of off-premise signs. Other sign-cluttered communities may have little or no enforcement- Sound familiar?

9. *Off site and oversized Real Estate signs.* Some of these signs appear to promote the company and are not selling the property under the sign. Some real estate directional signs may or may not be “too much”.

What are some things Staff thinks we ought to consider in new sign regulations?

1. Shouldn't a sign code have pictures describing the types of signs rather than poor text descriptions? Good sign codes use this technique.
2. Make clear standards and remove as much vagueness as possible. For example: lots of signs may or may not be legally placed depending on the point from which the measurement begins. But it is not clear.

What are some examples of unclear standards in our current Sign Code?

1. Setbacks:
 - A. *Highways: Setbacks from the highway shall be a minimum of 50 feet.*
 - B. *Other Roads: Setbacks from other roads shall be a minimum of 35 feet from the edge of the road.*
 - C. *Distance from Other Signs: Signs shall not be located any closer than 660 horizontal feet from any other advertising sign.*

Read from our code above and decide how you would measure and what that means on the ground.

- a. In A, what is the “highway”? Would it include Ski Hill Road or only state maintained roads? The State right-of-way is sometimes 150-foot wide but in many places it varies throughout the valley.
 - b. Measure from the highway shoulder where the gravel edge crumbles toward the borrow ditch?
 - c. Measure from the place where the asphalt just sits beyond the white solid stripe.
 - d. Measure from the edge of the “white solid line” along the roadside- if there is one?
 - e. Measure from the yellow center stripes and add a lane width or 30 feet to the setback, or maybe add 24 feet or “X” feet, to be determined.
 - f. Measure from the “center” of the highway, whether the yellow stripes are located there or not.
 - g. In B- what exactly are “Other Roads”? Do two-track and narrow lanes count? These are all over the county. Can a private road advertise for a commercial use?
 - h. In C- Do we measure across the road to signs on the other side, or only on one side?
2. In Section 8-9-4-D-3, signs that have “*loud or gaudy colors*” are prohibited. Is there a way to quantify this?
 3. Section 8-9-H-3 Continuance of Existing Signs states: *Each sign that was physically in place prior to December 8, 1997, and which does not conform to the requirements of this chapter, may be continued for a maximum of three (3) years and no longer, this includes, but is not limited to, all lease signs, off-premises signs, and on-premises signs.*
This means the billboards should have been removed.

What are some basis issues or questions we'd expect about changing the sign code?

1. What kind of reaction will the Driggs and Victor business communities have to new restrictions on highway advertising?
4. Are there multi-business official State Highway signs (sometimes blue or brown signs) that could allow for advertising off-the beaten track businesses such as dude ranch or trail rides? Might these official signs be used instead of multiple signs for various individual businesses? (Notice signs around Pinedale, Wy.)
5. Are there alternatives for certain types of city businesses to advertise out in the county, but use a more uniform or attractive type of road signage, possibly with multiple businesses on it? (Think Interstate exchange signs).
6. Should new rules attempt to codify a certain type of "look" for signs? Signs in Teton County Wyoming, for example, reference natural finishes and raw logs and other elements that are softer and reminiscent of trees, defined earth tones, and boulders. Internal lighting is also prohibited there.
7. Should we amend the Teton County Sign Code before it is too late and a lot of undesirable signage gets approved? Would a large number of residents mind if the roadsides looked like our neighbors in West Yellowstone? Or worse? Do we care if more signs detract from the mountain scenery?
8. Are there effective ways to have multi-business, off-premise signs for certain in-town businesses? Make these signs easily read from the side of the road yet not poor quality and susceptible to disrepair and revolving businesses.

What methods are used to amend local sign codes in small counties?

1. Create a "Citizen's Sign Advisory Taskforce" to help represent all points of view. Get city and county business owners involved as well as applicable community groups. Let them hash it out and develop recommendations just on what to amend in current code. A dedicated Citizens Advisory Taskforce could start writing, line by line, a new sign code.
2. Get help from true outside experts... Code Studio would be ideal to help here – but the time frame for receiving this help may be too extended and signs could get lost in the priorities.
 - a. Immediate code changes could address the glaring needs and we wait for Code Studios to help with more complex choices in amending the code.
3. Have staff and the PZC look closely at other community's codes and copy the useful parts or comingle parts from several communities. Work with Staff at regular PZC meetings.
4. Possibly devise a survey method that can reach a greater segment of the Valley population. Administer the survey – in various formats, and report the results to the Planning Staff and the P&Z Commission.
5. Select a balance of folks from different stake-holder groups and have discussion and votes for recommendations to the PZC and Board. This would be like the Capital Improvements and Impact Fee group.
6. Do nothing with the sign code at this point in time.

7. Planning Staff researches and presents an amended code to the P & Z Commission for their input for them to and recommend to the Board.