

City to consider tougher sidewalk sign regulations

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Port commission will review rules for appearance, location of sandwich boards in downtown Port

The Port Washington Plan Commission will tackle the topic of sandwich-board signs when it meets at 6:30 p.m. Thursday at City Hall.

Commission members will consider seven proposed regulations that cover everything from the size of the signs to aesthetics and locations.

The regulations would also reflect the city's current practices when it comes to the signs, said Randy Tetzlaff, the city's director of planning and development.

For example, the city ordinances require all signboards to be approved by the Design Review Board — something that hasn't been done, he said.

They also don't allow for businesses on side streets to place placards on Franklin Street, although that is a common practice, he said.

"We're trying not to be burdensome," Tetzlaff said, saying the proposed regulations would set minimal standards for the signs.

The signs — a common sight on the sidewalks in downtown Port — have been the topic of debate recently, with some officials criticizing them for cluttering the sidewalks and others hailing them as a sign of vitality.

The discussion was kicked off by complaints from some business owners as well as a commission member.

At least one complaint was about a poorly made sign outside the downtown, and other complaints cited signboards that were placed on the sidewalk in such a way that they impeded pedestrians, he said.

Some officials also expressed concern that the sandwich boards add to the clutter on the sidewalk, especially at intersections when multiple signs are placed.

In 98% of cases, Tetzlaff said, the city has no issues with the existing placards.

"We need to have a process to review them," he said, noting that this will give the city the authority it needs to address potential problems when they spring up.

While some people question the need for the regulations, Tetzlaff noted that the city requires businesses to meet standards for other types of signs.

"Is it really fair to allow businesses to put up these signs without any controls?" he asked.

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The proposed regulations would require all signboards to be professionally lettered and neatly painted, except when the signs are blackboards. Then, hand lettering would be permitted.

The signs can be no larger than 24 inches wide and 48 inches high, according to the proposal.

One signboard would be allowed for each business, and it must be displayed in front of the main entrance of the store unless a special exception permit is approved by the Plan Commission.

This permit, Tetzlaff said, would be used to allow businesses on the side streets to display their signs where pedestrians and motorists are likely to see them on the main streets.

Signs may only be displayed when the shop is open and must be removed at the end of the business day, the proposal states, and they cannot block intersections or cause a public safety hazard.

A one-time permit must be obtained for each signboard, and those that do not comply with the requirements may be removed from the right-of-way.

The permit, which would likely cost a nominal fee, is needed so the city has some idea of the number of signs and their owners, Tetzlaff said.