

DeFuniak Springs City Council

Workshop Session

February 10, 2009

The DeFuniak Springs City Council met in Workshop Session at 6:00 PM with the following members present: Mayor C. Harold Carpenter; City Council Members: Don Harrison, James Coffield, Wayne Graham, Henry Ennis; City Manager Kim Kirby, and Deputy Clerk Vanessa Mitchell. City Attorney Clayton Adkinson and Finance Director Sara Bowers were absent.

Mayor Carpenter called the meeting to order and announced the topic of discussion would be the sign ordinance. He explained Greg Scoville would discuss three parts to the discussion (billboards, number of ground signs, and information or directory type signs).

Greg Scoville advised the Council the information in their packets were recommendations only and he would be happy to make modifications. He then went over the packet information and gave an overview of the previous workshops.

Billboards:

Greg Scoville went over the packet reviewing the existing billboard ordinance and the recommended modifications. Discussion about the modifications followed. Mayor Carpenter asked if everyone could hear and understand. James Huffman asked if there was any distinction for the distance from the business to the sign. Mr. Scoville said that would be regulated by the on-premise signs. Don Harrison commented on the recommendation of the billboards being smaller in town. He said it would help with traffic flow and that it sounded reasonable. Don Harrison asked if the height was 20 feet maximum, was there a minimum off the ground. Mr. Scoville said that currently there is 7 feet between the grade and the sign. He said there was discussion to reduce that to 3 feet in town. James Huffman said he thought 20 feet height was high enough. He went on to say our city is growing, and as we grow we are going to have more signs. He said in Panama City, there are so many signs, you can lose the traffic signals in the signs. Mr. Huffman discussed the plasma screen billboard in Panama City; he said he heard there are more wrecks at that corner since they put that sign up. Mr. Scoville said that (type of sign) is the latest and greatest, but they can also change the brightness of the screen and there are other features. Mayor Carpenter asked Mr. Scoville to go over current regulations for the audience. Mr. Scoville did so. Mr. Harrison asked if (after the recommendations to change the billboards) all existing signs would remain the same. Mr. Scoville said the recommendation now is that all off premise signs would be 'grandfathered' in unless there were special circumstances such as a structural concern, it was abandoned or the use changed.

Greg Lathinghouse asked about use changes. Mr. Scoville discussed the issue. Mr. Scoville said that changing the ownership of a billboard does not affect the 'grandfathering' of off-premise signs. Art Dees asked if there was an sunset to that (grandfathering). Mr. Scoville said it would be there unless there were structural concerns or it was abandoned, etc.

Ground Signs:

Greg Scoville went over the recommended changes and the current regulations for on-premise signs. Mayor Carpenter asked for clarification of a business that took a whole city block, (there can only be a sign on two sides but not all four). Mr. Scoville said this does not take into account the largest parcels; it is a medium between the smallest and the largest. Mr. Scoville said he did not find any C-1 or C-2 properties that took up a whole City block. Mr. Harrison said this discussion came from a comment by Chelco who has an issue with the public not being able to find their building because they cannot put a sign on Hwy 90. Mr. Harrison said this should allow for an additional ground sign (for parcels such as Chelco or Triangle). Discussion followed. Greg Lathinghouse asked for more clarification on the recommendations. Mr. Scoville addressed him.

Greg Scoville continued discussing the recommended changes to the ordinance. Mayor Carpenter commented that two main points of the (recommended) 20 foot height is one

for safety, and also for the signs to be more uniform. Mr. Scoville said there are other advantages such as some signs conflict with power lines. Mr. Huffman requested Mr. Scoville explain the difference between C-1 and the C-2. Mr. Scoville explained.

Information or directory signs: Greg Scoville discussed the recommended changes to the ordinance. He clarified that the City can make a governmental directional sign to depict large clusters of businesses such as for downtown, the historic district, an office park or industrial park. Discussion followed. Mr. Huffman said such as the public works office; we could put an information sign up to direct traffic and the public to that area. Mr. Harrison asked if there would be three or four inch tall letters. Mr. Scoville said yes, and the City would maintain that and be responsible for their upkeep. Mr. Scoville explained they were trying to accomplish a balance of needs for the community along with the business community.

Mr. Scoville commented that the recommendations came from the previous workshops and issues. He noted that some areas have been tightened and some areas have been loosened. Kim Kirby said everything up to this point, the City has tried to positively address concerns, and find a solution. Mr. Huffman asked if there were any recommendations for anything to regulate mobile signs. Mr. Scoville explained that discussion was in part two of their packets.

Mr. Scoville said he would like to get a consensus on the first three issues from the Council on whether or not they would like staff to go back and bring it forward as an ordinance amendment to the sign code. Don Harrison commented that we have been hashing this around for 4 or 5 years. He said staff had addressed the major issues but probably two thirds of the changes are due to statute changes over the years. Mr. Harrison went on to say our sign codes don't conform to those statutes and the changes will also improve wording to make it fairer to businesses, and more understandable and clearer. He said he would like to see this go forward, that staff has gone over most things, and incorporated the things we had talked about, although there may be some fine tuning. Mr. Harrison recommended putting it on the agenda for the first meeting in March as first reading and advertisement for adoption. Ms. Kirby added that between now and that first meeting, if there were any changes, they could be made at the first reading.

Mayor Carpenter said he'd like to know from the audience if there are any further questions or comments about the billboards, ground signs, or directional signs. JW Adkinson asked for clarification on the 200 foot width between signs. Mr. Scoville addressed his question and reiterated that there is no intention of existing signs being changed, moved or altered in any way. Mr. Huffman asked for clarity on the definition of billboards. He said his concern was not being able to control what goes on the signs; and he would like to see billboards not allowed in the city limits. Mr. Scoville said there was a recommendation of changing the size of the signs, knowing it's not a solution to those concerns that some would like all billboards gone. Ms. Kirby reminded the Council these were just recommendations. Mr. Scoville said he did an analysis of what is on the billboard signs now; of the 18 signs, 7 advertised non local entities, 11 were local businesses. Mr. Huffman said that's now but we don't know what they'll say tomorrow and his concern is that we can't control what goes on them. Mr. Scoville recommended a compromise, or at least a position that will gain the most support. Mr. Huffman stated we have to put this out there to get support. Mr. Harrison said he was all for aesthetics but we need to look at the businesses right now. He said the business people think the signs and advertising help their businesses and there are some (businesses) about to close. Mr. Harrison went on to say we don't want it to get as bad as the nation, and given the economic climate like it is, he would recommend making it more uniform but to not hurt the businesses.

Mr. Huffman stated he didn't want anyone to think he is anti-business; he is concerned about the businesses. He clarified that he meant the businesses can still put up off-premise signs, but we can't allow them all. We need to use the directional signs to get people downtown, but the billboards take business away from downtown, we're backing up. Mayor Carpenter said we have debated it several times over the last sessions, there was a recommendation made to take a consensus. There were more comments from the audience. Roger Leatherberry, McLain's, commented on the purpose of his sign to stop

(out-of-town) travelers. Cathy Mosley commented that she had been nearly in accidents because people are trying to find places on tiny signs, and the businesses are hard to find. Mr. Scoville commented that reduction in sign size is from 1,000 ft. to 500 ft. in a C-2 and the City doesn't have one business that uses all 1,000 feet. Mr. Huffman added that informational signs will assist some of them. Discussion followed. Mr. Huffman discussed the content of the signs. Mr. Scoville asked for clarification that, since the content of the signs can't be regulated or censored, he would rather see the signs not allowed to begin with then we don't run into that situation. Mr. Huffman said yes. Mr. Huffman said he didn't have a problem with 20 ft. signs, it's the other ones. Mr. Harrison said we're not allowing an increase in the number of signs but reducing the size. Mr. Scoville clarified that if we annex more property in the future, we could get more billboards. Mr. Huffman said he isn't worried about the ones already here, in a neighboring community there are 60 billboards in a 3 mile stretch, the number of signs isn't the problem. Catherine King, Dave's music, commented on property she owned, it bothered her she can't do what she wants to with it. Mr. Scoville addressed her concerns. Mr. Huffman commented that Mr. Scoville had done a good job addressing his concerns, he had raised them to make sure they were addressed.

Greg Lathinghouse asked when this was formulated (the packet information), who arrived at this (the recommendations), and were local business people invited. Ms. Kirby said all meetings are advertised. Mr. Scoville said the idea was to get something on the table to open discussion. He discussed the staff drafting process. Ms. Kirby added that during the first workshop we had several people from the business community who brought their concerns. Greg Lathinghouse said the problem is that it was formulated by government, and the audience is made up of businesses tonight. Discussion continued on previous workshops. Greg Lathinghouse discussed the issue further. He said he felt the Council had a different agenda. Mr. Harrison commented that the packet tonight was not the new ordinance but included support information. Mr. Huffman said none of this is done, this is a proposal. Ms. Kirby asked Mr. Lathinghouse if his concern was about a lack of support from the City, or other things. Mr. Lathinghouse said he was referring to a feeling and a general attitude. Ms. Kirby said she would be happy to meet with him about other initiatives the City is working on that are designed to help our local businesses. Mayor Carpenter asked persons to come forward if they have concerns in order to discuss them. Mr. Lathinghouse furthered the discussion. Don Harrison said if there are issues, we need to discuss them at the Council meetings, out in the open. Ron Kelly, DBPA, commented that businesses don't buy signs because they don't have anything else to do with their money. Mayor Carpenter asked for examples where the City is too restrictive. Mr. Lathinghouse said he can't put a balloon on a car antenna that would draw attention to his business. Mr. Leatherberry said he can't put out an A frame sign. Mr. Scoville pointed out some of these concerns may be addressed in part II of the packet, it includes temporary signs. Discussion followed. Joe Nall, Evan's Carpet City, commented on the history of the sign ordinance and his opinion of what signs are used for.

Wayne Graham recommended conducting another workshop to make sure that our citizens and business owners have an opportunity to put their input into it. Mr. Harrison said he thought we need to finish it. Mr. Huffman said we need to come to a consensus and give Mr. Scoville some direction on what he needs to do. Mr. Scoville commented that the three issues tonight are the first issues we wanted to resolve. He said part II of the discussion may need more detail. Mr. Harrison said he thought we could come to a resolution. Mayor Carpenter asked if Mr. Lathinghouse's balloons were in the recommendations. Ms. Kirby read from the current municipal code. Mr. Henry Ennis said it seemed like balloons and things were a lot of little things that we haven't stopped to think about. Mr. Ennis said it's important to them to do the balloons, once they get there, its important to get them to stop at the businesses.

Ms. Kirby suggested Council move forward, if they were comfortable, with the three issues. Then the Council could hold another workshop with the business community to address their concerns. Cathy Mosley, commented on Christmas Reflections signs, you see their signs all month but not hometown Christmas. She asked if that was included in the part II discussion. Mr. Scoville said they differ because Christmas Reflections is a community event; the other is a fund raiser. Ms. Mosley said so is Christmas Reflections. Ms. Kirby said under the special event permitting, that type of sign is included. Mr.

Scoville commented that we have to balance the signs and where they are, such as around street corners because it is a distraction. Mr. Kelly asked if that (distraction) was like the Christmas Reflections signs in the Hwy 331 median. Mr. Scoville said he was not saying whether he agreed or not. Mr. Kelly commented the City needs to abide by their own rules. Mr. Scoville addressed the issue further and discussed the part II discussion. Aaron Bradshaw, Chelco, asked if a business could use a parade permit to promote business events. Mr. Scoville explained the special event permit further. Mr. Harrison said he liked the suggestion to move forward with the ordinance changes staff had been working. Then address the smaller issues that are important to the businesses, and ask them to come back to a meeting in March. Mayor Carpenter asked for a consensus on Mr. Graham's recommendation to table the discussion. Mr. Coffield commented that he was not told he would make a decision tonight and said he is not prepared to make a decision. Mayor Carpenter said this is not a binding decision but a consensus of a recommendation. Mr. Ennis pointed out this is a workshop; we shouldn't make any decisions tonight. Mr. Huffman said he was glad to see the people out there, we need this, we need their input, we are trying to help the businesses. Mr. Bob Jones commented on using banners. Discussion followed. Mr. Graham said we want to help our business community, that's why he recommended tabling the issue tonight and sitting down with the business community to come to a type of medium. Mr. Leatherberry commented on communication of the workshops, to invite the businesses individually. Mr. Huffman said we need something structured in front of us concerning what the business' needs are. Mr. Huffman said we hear this and we try to help but then it comes back with another group and they want something different. Ms. Kirby addressed Mr. Leatherberry's concern on communication. She said the public has to take some responsibility in addressing their council, either by email, phone, leave a note, etc. Ms. Kirby said she liked the suggestion to put notices on a water bill, if we knew ahead of time. Mayor Carpenter said he recommends staff move forward with drafting the sign ordinance with the stipulation that we involve the business community and business people in the process before coming to the City Council. Mr. Huffman said he agrees but added that we have received several suggestion letters from one person, but that's the only one. He said it's alright to discuss this stuff and it helps us to understand concerns but we don't have anything concrete (to make decisions on). Mayor Carpenter added to his suggestion that the people here tonight get with Ms. Kirby and Mr. Scoville to form a committee, as fast as Ms. Kirby can get it worked out.

Mayor Carpenter suggested Mr. Art Dees help to put a group together. Mr. Dees agreed. Mr. Dees, I think this group (the one present) represents all areas of town. Diane Ellenburg, asked if there was a document that she could take with her. Ms. Kirby asked for clarification that staff would be bringing back the three issues for first reading or were we waiting until this body is formed and there is time to discuss. Mayor Carpenter said staff will be going forward with it while working with them to gain their input that's necessary for you to bring it back to the Council. This would be for the whole ordinance. Ms. Kirby asked if they wanted to schedule it now with everyone here. They did not, they wanted accuracy not a quick turn around.

There being no further business, Mayor C. Harold Carpenter adjourned the meeting.

ADOPTED this 23rd day of February, 2009

C. Harold Carpenter

C. Harold Carpenter, Mayor

ATTEST:

Vanessa Mitchell

Vanessa Mitchell, Deputy Clerk