

**MINUTES  
CITY OF DARIEN  
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION MEETING  
February 19, 2020**

**PRESENT:** Lou Mallers-Chairperson, Michael Desmond, Robert Erickson, Steve Hiatt, Julie Kasprovicz, Brian Gay (7:05pm), Brian Liedtke (7:12pm), Ralph Stompanato

**ABSENT:** Hilda Gonzalez

**OTHERS:** Joseph Hennerfeind-City Planner, Dan Gombac, Director

Chairperson Lou Mallers called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Darien Police Department Training Room, 1710 Plainfield Road, Darien, Illinois and declared a quorum present and swore in the audience members wishing to present public testimony.

**REGULAR MEETING:**

**A. Public Hearing PZC 2020-01 Case: PZC 2020-01 7532 South Cass Avenue (Sign Variations) Petitioner City of Darien requests approval to permit the construction of 2 (two) electronic message board signs adjacent Cass Avenue and Plainfield Road, located within the B-2 Community Shopping Center Business District.**

Mr. Joe Hennerfeind, City Planner reported that this is a continuation of PZC 2020-01 and reported that staff investigated reducing the variations and options for one sign versus two signs. He reported that staff provided two options but that in either option there are still three variations regarding electronic message boards, permitting advertising, and illuminated signs with changing light intensity, brightness and color all still applicable.

Mr. Hennerfeind reported that as requested, staff investigated reducing the number of signs. He reported that Option 1 is for one sign placed with a direct view to the intersection of Cass Avenue and Plainfield Road and would only be viewable for traffic traveling southwest on Plainfield Road and north on Cass Avenue. Mr. Hennerfeind reported that the revised site plan has eliminated the need for a setback variation as the sign will be installed within the setback. He reported that the overall sign area for the message board portion of 7' x14' or 98 square feet is proposed from the initial 122 square feet and that staff was able to discount the area allotted to "City of Darien" as non-commercial information. Mr. Hennerfeind reported that this sign would exceed the 60 square foot requirement by 38 square feet.

Mr. Hennerfeind reported that Option 2 is for two signs and the preferred staff option. He reported that the sign location would be located 1.93' from the Cass Avenue property line which an improvement from the initial request and requires a variation of 2.07' to the required 4' setback.

Mr. Hennerfeind reported that staff worked with Chicago Billboards to overcome the issues of building over the sanitary sewer line and merging the two signs into one perceived grouping. He reported that there is very little difference between one sign or two as the landscaping, base walls and water feature will be crafted into a monumental entry gateway. He further reported that the second sign would be viewed when traveling south on Cass Avenue capturing an additional 25% of motorists.

Mr. Hennerfeind reported that the proposed signs would be constructed on brick bases similar and compatible to the brick used on the adjacent commercial building. He reported that landscaping and further design features would be coordinated by the City, including a planned water feature integrated into the base to match the water feature across the street.

Mr. Hennerfeind reported staff recommends Option 2 specifically for the civic communication engagement, additional business exposure, and opportunity to create a greater presence to the gateway intersection. He reported that the City is interested in providing a community digital network as a new communication tool for events, public meetings, and alerts throughout the year and that placing this at a prominent corner will create additional civic engagement as is has proven for other local communities.

Mr. Dan Gombac, Director reported that staff was directed by a goal setting workshop that there is not enough communication to residents. He reported that the goal of the signs is to capture northbound, southbound and westbound traffic and to enhance the area with a water feature like the clock tower which has been viewed as a landmark in the City of Darien.

Mr. Gombac stated that a sign at 75<sup>th</sup> and Cass would be much larger and more obtrusive. He reported that there is no cost to the City of Darien and that staff worked with the vendor to get the smallest size possible so that motorists can see but not get too distracted. He further reported that the big businesses such as Walmart, Home Depot, etc. are not likely to advertise.

Commissioner Desmond questioned if the water feature is available for both sign options.

Mr. Gombac reported that the water feature can be done for Option 1 or Option 2.

Commissioner Hiatt acknowledged the sign company and thanked them for listening.

Chairperson Mallers stated that there are concerns regarding safety and motorists taking their eyes off the road and if the sign is compatible with state law. He also stated that the citizens communicated that the cannabis public hearing was not fully communicated and that this is good form of communication.

Mr. Bill Przblyski, Chicago Billboards stated that IDOT endorses what the federal guidelines regulate which is ten seconds.

There was some discussion from the Commissioners regarding one sign or two.

Commissioner Gay provided data referencing the Boilingbrook sign and a more significant setback with the same size sign as proposed in Darien. He also provided visitor data and the local businesses surrounding Darien within two miles and what will prevent them from advertising in Darien. He stated that the sign is inviting additional competition to the Darien businesses.

Mr. Gombac stated that the Darien businesses will be given priority and surrounding businesses such as Mariano's and Pete's have their own signs for advertising.

Chairperson Mallers stated that there is no real advertising for businesses in Darien.

Commissioner Liedtke stated that the sign is a gateway piece to identify Darien and that he respects the data but that the sign will be a benefit to advertise in Darien. He stated that competition is good and that he does not believe it a logical reason not have the sign.

At 7:37 pm Chairperson Mallers opened the meeting to anyone wishing to present public comment.

Mr. Ron Price, Darien stated that that the real issue of safety has not been discussed. Mr. Price read aloud research data regarding driver distractions and the increase crash risks. He stated that 10 seconds may be too short and that there is transition phase to the driver after they read the sign and there needs to be a recovery zone. Mr. Price questioned if there is data regarding accidents at that intersection.

Mr. Hennerfeind reported that that a traffic study was not done specific to this signage request.

Commissioner Hiatt stated that there are signs everywhere and that if this sign pulls people off their phone and on the street, it is a plus. He stated that he was in favor of only one sign because of the distance.

Commissioner Desmond stated that if safety is a concern that there may be need for a traffic study. He stated that he likes the idea but that he cannot support it because of the location.

Mr. Hennerfeind reported that a traffic study was not required. He noted that the location had a gas station with four curb cuts and the commercial development would reduce them to one. He stated that this is a great opportunity to the City in having a property owner on a busy intersection willing to dedicate the easement. He stated that other potential sign locations may not present the same opportunities and that this is no cost to the City.

A resident in the audience asked if the City would own the sign and asked what legal action could be taken against the City if someone gets in an accident and states that they were distracted by the sign.

Mr. Hennerfeind stated that he could not render a legal opinion, but that the City would not own the sign.

Mr. Przbyski stated that they will own the sign and that the City will get one slot. He also stated that the property owner will also get one slot split between the three businesses.

Mr. Hennerfeind reported that anyone in Brookhaven can advertise as well as nonprofit organizations.

Mr. Przbyski stated that they worked with staff and tried to incorporate the changes in the rendering. He stated that the two-sided sign incorporates brickwork, so it looks like one piece with a water feature. Mr. Przbyski stated that safety is their major concern and that they look at the proximity to residential areas. He referenced one of their sign locations at 103<sup>rd</sup> and Cicero Avenue and stated that the sign is located right on the lot line and that they have had no dialog with the police department regarding the sign causing havoc. He stated that they meet and follow all the federal guidelines and that all their signs are programmed to ten seconds and that they can adjust but it is not the standard.

At 8:20 p.m. Chairperson Mallers closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Kasprowitz stated that she thought that a traffic study was a good idea but questioned what information would be collected without the businesses in place. Commissioner Liedtke agreed.

Mr. Hennerfeind reported that although the County conducted a traffic study at some point, he was unsure of when it was completed. The study would not have addressed signage.

There was no one else wishing to present public comment.

**Commissioner Hiatt made a motion and is was seconded by Commissioner Stompanato to approve Public Hearing PZC 2020-01 Case: PZC 2020-01 7532 South Cass Avenue for Option 1 – 1 sign.**

**Upon voice vote, THE MOTION TIED 4-4.**

**Yay - Hiatt, Liedtke, Mallers, Stompanato  
Nay - Desmond, Erickson, Gay, Kasprowitz**

**Commissioner Hiatt made a motion and is was seconded by Commissioner Erickson to approve Public Hearing PZC 2020-01 Case: PZC 2020-01 7532 South Cass Avenue for Option 2 – 2 signs.**

**Upon voice vote, THE MOTION WAS DENIED 2-6.**

**Yay - Erickson, Liedtke  
Nay - Desmond, Gay, Hiatt, Kasprowitz, Mallers, Stompanato**

**Commissioner Liedtke made a motion and is was seconded by Commissioner Erickson to amend approval of Public Hearing PZC 2020-01 Case: PZC 2020-01 7532 South Cass Avenue for Option 1 – 1 sign.  
Upon voice vote, THE MOTION CARRIED 5-3.**

**Yay -Hiatt, Liedtke, Erickson, Mallers, Stompanato  
Nay - Desmond, Gay, Kasprowitz**

**CORRESPONDENCE**

None

**OLD BUSINESS**

There was no old business.

**NEW BUSINESS**

There was no new business.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**Commissioner Erickson made a motion and is was seconded by Commissioner Hiatt to approve the amended December 18, 2019 Regular Meeting Minutes.**

**Upon voice vote, THE MOTION CARRIED 8-0.**

**Commissioner Gay made a motion and is was seconded by Commissioner Liedtke to approve the February 5, 2020 Regular Meeting Minutes.**

**Upon voice vote, THE MOTION CARRIED 8-0.**

**NEXT MEETING**

Chairperson Mallers announced that the next meeting is scheduled for March 4, 2020.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS (On any topic related to planning and zoning)**

There was no one in the audience wishing to present public comment.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**With no further business before the Commission, Commissioner Desmond made a motion and it was seconded by Commissioner Stompanato. Upon voice vote, THE MOTION CARRIED unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 8:33 p.m.**

**RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:**

**APPROVED:**

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**Elizabeth Lahey  
Secretary**

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**Lou Mallers  
Chairperson**