

Town of Eatonville
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
Monday, March 17th, 2014
COMMUNITY CENTER
305 CENTER STREET WEST

Chairman Lambert introduced the new Planning Commissioners, Marty Miller and Richard Bertoia.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Lambert called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

ROLL CALL

Present: Chairman Lambert, Commissioners Beach, Justice, Craig, Miller and Bertoia.

STAFF PRESENT: Mayor Schaub and Kerri Murphy.

OPENING CEREMONIES – Commissioner Miller led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Commissioner Beach motion to approve and **Commissioner Justice** seconded. All in favor. (AIF)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes of the February 18th,2014. **Commissioner Beach** motion to approve. **Commissioner Justice** seconded. AIF

CITIZEN COMMENTS – None COMMISSIONERS COMMENTS- None

PUBLIC HEARING - Review of the Sign Ordinance 18.06

Chairman Lambert comments from the audience.

Waylan Jumper, 304 Antonie Ave N. - He came to the meeting to hear what concerns the Planning Commission had with the sign ordinance. He was on the committee that worked on this ordinance. Essentially this was thrown back to all the business owners to draft something to bring to the commission originally. He was just curious as to why it was coming back up for review.

Commissioner Beach said the Planning Commission decided to review this because he raised a question about these feather signs that they did not consider at the time of the ordinance was work on. They didn't exist. He was concerned how they would fit with the ordinance. He added that he was involved with the Planning Commission at the time and that they had spent a lot of time on the ordinance.

Mr. Jumper asked that when the commission is reviewing this and deciding what's best for the businesses in town, people are struggling. Businesses are struggling and a lot of this is done to try and get people in. He understands if things are not put in properly or become tattered and worn and that we have a certain amount of upkeep that needs to be done in this situation. He hopes that they will be sensitive to the people out there that are using them trying to attract that business because it's difficult right now.

Chairman Lambert said that he did not think that it was something for (not audible)....so it seemed like a good idea.

Mayor Schaub said that he had the sign ordinance brought forward because the ordinance came up in 2009 when this one was originally passed, the new updated. After five years it nice to come back to it, review it and found out how it has actually has affected ...after five years businesses can see that there is a need to update it because it didn't work for us quite like it was originally planned. He said he asked for it to come forward just so it could be reviewed and make sure what we have out there works the best for the businesses. If something wasn't working quite right, we can look at it, talk about it and find out how we can

change it so it meets our requirements and what we are expecting in our town. Since it was started from scratch it was a major undertaking. The businesses would know if it's working or not. If anything was put out there that is not working quite right and needs to be tweaked a little bit. This is what he was hoping for this evening was for feedback. Is there anything that we can make better so it is more useable and working for the community?

Nancy Iams, 129 Washington Ave. N. – The signage is our life blood. When people go through the town, if they don't have good signage..their busy driving. We like them to be artistically lovely, but if you don't have rules, people will put up some really tacky things. We understand that you have to have these rules. One thing that has always kind of bothered her, of course we are state highway that goes through there, we have the biggest antique stores in Pierce County and it's all under one ownership. Antique'rs are dedicated people. She has always had the philosophy that if it's good for Eatonville, it's good for the Holly Hut. So if lots of people go to that antique store they are also going to go to the restaurants and the other places, but there has never been a way that we could figure out how to let people know that there is a really good antique store just down the road a piece...a really good one. So I thought that maybe if I came tonight you might be able to come up with some kind of a solution for that.

Commissioner Beach said that the code as its written, does not allow off premises signs. He had thought at the time the sign ordinance was being written and put together that we would end up with something like the highway department puts up along side of the freeways and so on. That people would buy in to a certain kind of sign that indicates what is here specifically in terms of businesses. But for whatever reason that never occurred. This would deal with some of the problem of the antique store not having anything except their temporary A-board which is legal under the ordinance. If we had some of that kind of thing where we had businesses' that wanted to buy into that to get their little bit there, then there would be something for the antique store. He felt that the point that Ms. Iams made was a good one. He added that there is some general benefit for not allowing for off premise signs. One of the things that people need to be aware of is that under the state law if someone wants to put in an adult store, you can't keep them from putting it in. The town has to have some zoning that allows an adult store. The town does have the zoning that allows for an adult store and it's in the industrial area. They can't put up an off premise sign so what are the odds that they are going to do that? The same would be true if the people don't want the marijuana shops. As far as he knows there is no provision in the code as to how the marijuana shops would be dealt with because this again is a new issue. There is good and bad about this off premises signs. He thinks that one of the issues that does need to be dealt with is how a business like the antique shop which is not on a major road can be dealt with in a fair manner without getting off premises signs all over the place. The only thing that he has been able to come up with is the general type of sign similar to what the highway department puts up. Maybe we can get the highway department to do it because they do control, at least to some degree the signage on the highway.

Bryan Merrill, Sears Store-101 Mashell Ave N – asked for clarification on what is meant by "off premises"? Most of the traffic comes in on SR 161 / Washington Avenue and continue south. He has had people come into the town and say they didn't realize the Sears store was there. They are from Eatonville and the Sears store has been there for over five years. Could he have something on the highway, 161 or does he have to have it right on his property?

Commissioner Beach said that as far as the ordinance is concerned you have to have it right on your property. That was the issue he was addressing about the signs on 161. The state highway department has some control over that. He is not sure about the technicalities of that. The Sorenson's Motors has a sign on top of their building that faces 161. He went through a different process of a conditional use permit or a variance was allowed under the ordinance. He went through a different kind of hearing than what we are having here tonight. Whether there is a way of dealing with the Sear's store that way or not, he didn't know.

Mr. Merrill asked if there was something that they could do to in the ordinance to change it so we can have off premises signs if it is allowed by the county or the state. If we are here to discuss possible changes to the ordinance, it would be nice to discuss changes that ordinance...it would be nice to advertise and let people know, even if he has to go to Graham and put up a sign to let people know there is a Sears store in Eatonville.

Commissioner Beach said that he thought that the point he is making is similar to the point made by Ms. Iams about the antique store. Personally he is very leery of off premise signs. There are legitimate concerns about businesses that are not on the major thorough fare.

Chairman Lambert said that the purpose of this hearing is what is working and what is not working with this ordinance. Obviously there are concerns about attracting people to your businesses and that is a very legitimate concern.

Mr. Merrill asked if there was height limit. He was unable to get a chance to read the ordinance. If he is able to put a sign on the roof, how high could he go so that people could see the sign?

Commissioner Beach said that with the Sorenson's sign they did have to go through a different kind of hearing, either a variance or conditional use. Then it would be up to council to approve that. He suggested that he talk with town staff to find out if there is a way of dealing with that under the existing code.

Abby Gribi, 311 Pennsylvania Ave N – she told the Planning Commissioners that they were “you’re welcome; I’m the reason you are here”. She explained that she was the one who asked that this be brought forward. As a council member, as a patron of as many Eatonville businesses’ as I can, time and time again I hear that the town isn’t business friendly. The Town doesn’t want businesses. She knows that this is not true so her question is what can the town help with, what can we change and what can we look at to make this more friendly for our businesses. We’re a bedroom community. We would love for some businesses to come in, but it’s hard to attract when you have 2,750 residents she believed was the last census. We get a million people through this community, and she just heard there was a slide along Hwy 7 today so that may continue in the summer even higher. Truth be told, she is the Committee Chair for the Visitor’s Center and she violates the ordinance. Those signs go out and they do not move. She started thinking, ok, it town property, for town property, but in the end we are not being compliant with our own laws. We have new types of signs going up. Time and time again she gets complaints about the sign ordinance. What really brought it home was we had a business owner, and the business is no longer in business, “Go Green Landscaping”. He had permission to put an offsite sign on Mr. Cross’ property and it wasn’t allowed. She can’t say that one is directly related to the other but it is a concern to her, it’s a concern to her as a citizen and it’s a concern to her as a councilmember. She would love all the businesses the town can get, it’s a great tax base if we look at it from the towns side. She really thinks there needs to be some changes. There was really no appeals process that was really available to him (Go Green Landscaping) for that. She noted that there were a few business owners in the audience and was hoping for a few more. Wants to really get out there and ask what do you need in a sign ordinance? What would you like to see? We can’t make everybody happy, I completely realize that but as a government she thinks the town is restricting a little too much with these ordinances.

Jim Cross, Bruno’s Restaurant – stated that he thinks that the feather signs that are being talked about are in direct correlation with the problem they are having with signage. When he looks out his window they have a sign only this tall...(6-7 feet) while all the trucks that park there block the sign. Nobody knows they are there...it’s a converted house into a restaurant. It is sad that they have to put up these flags instead of having a nice sign that would be useful to the community. Bruno’s sign is used also for the community to let people know about various events that are going on in town. With a lot of the other signs it’s difficult to get people out of their cars and this is what we have to do in this town. The only way we can get them to do that is get signs that people can see. Get them to stop, get out of their cars and direct them to where they need to go. If we can’t get them to get of their cars we will just lose money. The will go up the line or up north. Everyone in Eatonville is in competition with South Hill and up the line. He feels that work can be done on the sign ordinance and really help some of the other businesses by getting the signs out there where they are visible. He hasn’t read the ordinance since they got their sign put up but feels that if some business owners get together with the planning commissioners and make changes that can help everybody.

Commissioner Beach asked if anyone has ever done a study to find out, for instance, South Hill, with their proliferation of signs, if it actually does bring in business that amounts to anything.

Mr. Cross said he was sure they do. Who would think that deep fried pickles would be a number one appetizer in a restaurant? And that is because it is on their sign. Signage will make people come, stop and get out of their cars.

Commissioner Beach said that he is not so sure about that. It seems to him that the big problem of Eatonville is getting all these people that go to Rainier through. Well one is that some of the businesses that they might be attracted to are closed on Saturdays and Sundays, that is not particularly helpful in that regard even in the summer time. Actually, even though we are on the road to Paradise, we're not Paradise and in some sense we are either to close or we are too far away. We do get people stopping at the grocery store and Bruno's restaurant going towards the mountain and back from the mountain. His observation is particularly going to the mountain. People think that they are close enough, we'll be there and then when they are coming back they are anxious to get home. There is not much outside of the park either which suggest that people are just not stopping. He is just not convinced. He explained that he had heard this argument before about all these people we are losing when they come through town.

Mr. Cross said that they talk to a lot of people about what the town has to offer. Talking to people about Northwest Trek another reason to come back. The town and the Chamber are now working together and we are now going to be on the "Visit Rainier" website which is going to bring a lot of exposure. Mr. Cross said that they have been trying to get on this site since they opened the doors, but because they couldn't share the money, the hotel and all that money, we couldn't get on the website, now we are going to. That's a plus. We work on our signage that's another plus. He thinks there are a lot of things that can be done. He agreed that we do not need a proliferation of signs but we do need to let people know as they are driving through what we have. The reason for the feather signs, they had to get something that could be seen to establish themselves as a business. So maybe we can get the sign ordinance to where they can get it up above the vehicles parked in front of their business. We don't want to take away parking, we found out what happens when we did that on Mashell. If we can get signage that is visible for people going by, instead of hiding it in behind the vehicles he feels this will help dramatically. Instead of having a cluster sign, where you have five businesses in a strip mall type atmosphere, maybe they could have independent signs for each of these businesses so you can see them. When the signs are clustered, it all just goes into one.

Commissioner Beach said that if you have several where the frontage is relatively small, they are going to compete with each other.

Mr. Cross suggested a certain size minimum per business. He said he does not have a problem with that because the more people that come to town, the more business he is going to have, the more people that we can get out of their vehicles. With more business maybe we can start having more jobs for the kids to start staying in town. There is not much for them to do anymore, the kids are leaving town to find jobs. Luckily we are starting to see some of the logging and stuff coming back. He would like to see this town grow and everybody be prosperous and he thinks the sign ordinance can be a part of that.

Commissioner Craig said that he really appreciates what has been said tonight and it's got him really thinking about this because he is a business owner on Washington. Signage is sparse, you have to get right in front of the shops to really see it and know they're there. He hears all the time from people who didn't know he was there and they are from Eatonville. He said that about 90% of the folks actually going to Mt. Rainier and a lot of folks just making a day trip from Orting or Tacoma, but his business is after 2:00 p.m. They say we saw you as we went by, went up to Paradise and they stop. He always asks and they have stopped at Bruno's, Cruiser Café and they'll wander down the street on their way home. Not everybody is in a rush to get home. He has been open as late as 9:00 p.m. in the summer as people are getting out of restaurants and walking by. They are looking to buy. He likes the feather signs.

There is a little place in Kauai, Hawaii and the shops all use the feathers signs. They are bright colors, they say what is coming up and it is well done. The banners, they're neat but if they were replaced with something that says what we have here. When coming into Eatonville heading south, you get to the top of the hill and there is a sign, it says "lunch". Kudos to the bakery, that caught my attention otherwise I wouldn't know and drive right by the bakery, now he sees it. Tourists see that, they'll stop. It is effective. Businesses in town are struggling. Getting signs out and he agrees with what Nancy Iams said, if it's done "not tacky". He would like to see town council recognize the importance of loosening things and allowing businesses just try to do business. It is a struggle, he is in the position of sitting on the planning commission but he is also a business owner. It's about 50 / 50, either people like them or they don't but they are effective. Back next to the Puerto Vallarta, there is a candy shop and she has a feather sign. She needs it,

how would you know she is there. He would like to see no restrictions or just guided on how we are going to do this. This is a great topic and we need to talk about this and do it now. If Hwy 7 is closed, there is going to be a parking lot of people this summer again. Let's do the best we can now.

Waylan Jumper asked Commissioner Beach how he finds places and things without signs.

Commissioner Beach said that he is not denying that the sign is useful. We need a balance here.

Businesses need signs for identification but on the other hand how far do we want to go? He feels that going into South Hill that the signs are competing with each other. It's not the businesses competing with each other it's the signs that are competing with each other. Its great for the people who sell signs. It is not only the business owners, what about the people who live here also. They should have an equal say in this as do the businesses.

Mr. Jumper said the reason he asked was because earlier in the meeting Commission Beach asked if anyone had done a survey as whether the signage works. It works that how you get people in.

Commissioner Beach said it's not if it works, we know it works. It's how much and what kind of signage do you need. This is more the issue than whether you need it or not. He added that the biggest private employer in this town does not have a sign.

They are not a retail business.

Commissioner Beach said that the point is that businesses can survive in all kinds of sign environments and some need them and some don't. People in retail businesses trying to attract people do need signs. There is nothing in the ordinance that actually forbids the feather signs. They are a free standing sign. There are some problems with them...apparently not a single feather sign has a permit for a sign. They are all illegal signs at the present time and they need a permit. The ordinance now says one sign on each frontage. If you have no other sign on your frontage they would be legal. They also obstruct the sidewalks the way a lot of them are placed and so on. However we deal with these flag signs, we do need to deal with them in some fashion. The people that have them should treat them like any other sign and they need a sign permit.

Abby Gribi asked Mayor Schaub if he could provide a figure of how much more the town got in sales tax for the town because of the diversion of Mt. Rainier traffic.

Mayor Schaub thought that during the 5 month period it was approximately 15,000 to 18,000 dollars more.

Abby Gribi commented that this went into the general fund which is directly where our public safety is paid from. Abby stated that the council is going to have some severely hard decisions this year that they have to make. Anything that we can do to help our current expense fund.... To say that we are to close, to far...Enumclaw is a sister city that we can learn a lot from of their growth and how much they capitalize being close to the mountain. We have talked and talked and failed to really capitalize on what goes through Eatonville. Whether that means we need some traffic studies or a light in this town. The Visitors Center gets close to probably 5,000 people through there asking about our businesses and that is why it has been her goals to keep it open as much as possible. These businesses are hurting. This community is a niche community and it needs to be fought for. She has never heard from a citizen that we have too many signs. If this sign, which you do not like to look at makes this business money are you against it? Abby said that she came to council with the idea of fighting for the businesses in this town. She would appreciate as much input as possible and a positive recommendation from the people working with this. We are limited in what we can do as a government for our businesses; this is something that we can do.

Commissioner Miller said he would like to make it easy to do business here. He does not see a problem with a business having as sign on the back of his business. He does not have a problem with the flag signs other than he does not want to see a bunch of ratty un-kept signs up and down the street. He suggested that the flag signs be taken in every night and put out every morning, one or two for every business. He wants to help the businesses any way possible. He suggested the possibility of a sign that said what the town had; people can park, get out of their cars and have a look around. He added that they are not here to stifle business. If he thought more signs would bring in more money he would be all for it, but you get to a point where there's so many signs you can't read them all.

Mr. Cross said that before he owned Bruno's he said that those feather signs were designed to get around the codes. The minute you try to outlaw or limit them, they are going to come out with a new deal. That's why you have all these people out there spinning signs, because you can't put "A-Boards" out anymore. He thinks those are a bigger distraction. He feels that the Planning Commissioner has a real opportunity here to make a very good comprehensive to help the businesses and keep the town looking nice. It is not the town against the business; it's starting to feel like a real community working together. The Chamber of Commerce is growing dramatically. Everyone working together will be better for the community. He said that he has his sign and does not have a problem, but when the others are busier he is busier. This makes more jobs and more money in the community. Need to find a way to increase revenue and take advantage of the million cars that go through Eatonville every year. There is another slide on Hwy 7 and people are coming through Eatonville again. Bruno's sign is amazing. People stop because they see deep fried pickles. It is also an informational sign because any time there is a big school function, as long as they come in and talk to me directly he will put it on the sign.

Mayor Schaub said that Commissioner Craig had said "you do see it". This is the one thing he noticed about the bakery and the Cruiser Café. He looks to Leavenworth for signs, as a community, took an idea, created a theme and everything maintains that theme. When we are looking at signs, we should look at something that fits the theme of the town and directs you to where the businesses are. It would be nice to limit the colors, but you want it to maintain that theme. You would want to limit the number of signs to the front. He had never thought about that with the bakery sign and the height. If trucks are parked in front you don't see the sign but you do see the feather signs you from a distance and you that it's there. With a lot of businesses that are a lot that do not look like businesses so you need something that will draw their attention to the business. From the government stand point, it would be working with the businesses and finding out what is it we want as a theme? What makes sense for the town? Look at the businesses frontage and try to come up with what works best for the town. We need to look at what can be done to get people to stop. The Visit Rainier site is a positive move and he agrees that the Chamber took off this year. He is hoping that the partnership with the town and all the businesses will be working together. The town is looking at some type of grant to bring an electric charging center to the Visitor's Center; again it gets you on the map. The town is also trying to utilize the triangle property to bring people off of Hwy 7 and into town. There are a lot of irons in the fire and it keeping the momentum and coming up with a plan that will work for the community and the businesses. We are headed in the right direction and it will take a lot of work to get us there.

Abby Gribi suggested a gathering on some Saturday for discussion with the business people.

Commissioner Beach said he is glad to hear that the Chamber of Commerce is getting more active in this. When the sign ordinance was done several years ago, he heard the same arguments that he heard tonight. He did a study of all the literature put out on going to Mt. Rainier National Park. Eatonville was listed below Roy, you would not even know that Eatonville existed. Now the Chamber is starting to rearrange that financing so that you get into the Tacoma Chamber of Commerce where they put out information on Mt. Rainier. The Dispatch put out an advertisement for "Come to Mt. Rainier" with a map and Eatonville did not even appear on the map. We need to get the publicity out.

Chairman Lambert confirmed with Mayor Schaub that there was about an \$18,000.00 increase in revenue to the town.

Mayor Schaub said yes with Hwy 7 closed.

Chairman Lambert asked what percentage that was.

Mayor Schaub said it did increase from about \$ 24,000.00 up to 27 - 28,000.00 a month. It not only made an impact of the amount of traffic through the town but it also made an impact on the number of people stopping at the businesses. It was a pretty significant increase. The largest loss to the town was when the car dealers left Eatonville.

Chairman Lambert said that he wanted to keep the public hearing open for one additional meeting to hear from additional business owners and citizens. The Public Hearing was continued until April 7th, 2014.

CITIZENS COMMENTS: None

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS – None

The next meeting is set for April 7th, 2014.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Lambert adjourned the meeting at 8:05 p.m.

Chairman Lambert

David Craig – Secretary

ATTEST:

Kerri Murphy, Recording Secretary