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Recommendations of the Georgetown Business Improvement District on the proposed new District of Columbia Signage Regulations released July 11, 2012

Submitted to Alice Kelly, DDOT and policy.ddot@dc.gov

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Great commercial signage is an amenity to a commercial district and the city, and should be encouraged. Since it is impossible to regulate good sign design, the District should make clear that it encourages creative signage as an amenity to the public realm, and that it seeks to regulate only to prevent the installation of signage that is unsafe, obscene, has a negative impact on surrounding businesses or is in some way inappropriate for a mixed residential/commercial or historic area.

To the extent that regulations are imposed they should be clear, easy to interpret, and short. They should seek to help businesses advertise themselves as quickly and inexpensively as possible. To this end, there should be strict time limits on the regulatory process. Further, no sign should require the approval of more than one regulatory body for any one purpose. By this we mean that a sign proposed for a historic district should only be approved by one body for safety, and one body for historic preservation purposes. These reviews should take place simultaneously so that the time of the applicant is valued.

Specifically, Sections:

Exemptions:

As technology improves to provide real time transit information, we expect that some store windows will be used to provide such information, especially in places like Georgetown that have no bus shelters. We recommend that Transit Information Screens be exempted from these regulations with the following language:

"A transit information screen is a digital display that conveys to the public real-time information about the arrival times and/or locations of public transportation facilities. It may also display public safety messages and information on private transportation facilities (such as taxis, car sharing, private shuttles, etc.). A transit information screen may also include a non-changing (commercial or non-commercial) message of up to one square foot in size."



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100.3

The wording in section 100.3 should be amended to create “objective” rather than “impartial” regulations.

201.1

The minimum sized sign exempted from having a permit is too small. There should be a matter or right size that is appropriate in proportion to the area where it is being displayed. A one-square-foot sign might be appropriate matter of right for a 200 square foot storefront. However a ten-square-foot sign is perfectly appropriate for a 2,000 square foot store front.

201.2

The District should be able to issue a 1” square (or smaller) QR Code – that would have less visual impact on a sign and link directly to its permit.

303.1

Should be amended to read: “An application for a permit under this chapter shall be made in a form required by the permitting official specifically to protect health and safety only, and shall be accompanied by:”

303.1(a)

to make the administrative process easier on the applicant, they should be required to prepare only one set of drawings that can be used by every regulatory agency – to this end, this section should read:

- (a) “The same Drawings that will be used for the Commission Application, in triplicate, drawn to scale, showing the details of construction, dimensions, lettering, and method of attachment of the sign;”

400.4

This section is a major problem. If there is a federal jurisdiction that overlaps a local jurisdiction, the local regulator should yield. There is little or no public purpose served by requiring a small business (or any business) to sequentially ask permission for a commercial sign from two disconnected agencies with essentially the same mission. This section should read instead: “Signs and related building features subject to the jurisdiction of the Commission shall be reviewed by the Commission ~~in addition to~~ and shall be exempt from the HPRB.”

404

This section can be interpreted by a developer as favoring similar or related signs within a development of related buildings which could yield a much worse product than desired. Take, for example, Cady’s Alley. 25 buildings are related in a single development however



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they are designed to look and stand as individual buildings and their signage – which is quite diverse – is unique to each individual business. A master plan that does anything more than encourage great diversity of signage with no common themes, colors, materials or sizes (in effect no plan) is far preferable than the signs that would result from a “master planned look.” On the other hand, take a building like Columbia Square in the East End. The building is huge, monolithic, and hits the sidewalk hard. In this case, there was a signage master plan imposed by the owner that requires all retailers to design signs of similar size, shape and materials and allows only diversity in the graphics and messaging. This master planned signage does very little to enliven the street or contribute to a vibrant downtown signage scheme. Our recommendation is to delete all references to master planning signs.

406.3(a)

The prohibition against signs on canopies facing the direction of pedestrian travel seems arbitrary and unnecessarily prescriptive and could make for less interesting streetscapes. This section should be deleted or modified to allow greater diversity in business identification.

607.9

Banners in DC – both downtown and in neighborhoods, can have a very positive impact and should be encouraged. They also have traditionally hung as low as 8’6” above the pedestrian side of the sidewalk with no ill effects on the environment, the pedestrian, or the banner. The minimum heights should be as permissive as possible. It is fine for the language to read. “Wherever possible, banner installers shall attempt to hang banners with the maximum amount of clear space over the sidewalk as can be achieved, but in no case shall the bottom of a banner be less than 8’ 6” above the sidewalk.

Add a 607.15 to read:

A banner that is torn, damaged, or badly faded must be removed by the permittee within 48 hours of the banner falling into disrepair.

Respectfully submitted

Joe Sternlieb
CEO



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