

Sign Policy Amendments

City-wide changes impacting
the historic districts

*Peter Smeallie
OHAD/BAR Meeting
3 February 2016*



Creation of Sign Work Group

City-initiated the *Ad Hoc Group for Digital Signs and Portable A-Frame Signs* in Spring 2015

Creation triggered by:

1. A-Frame signs, especially on King Street
2. New electronic & digital signs
3. Bandit signs on utility poles & in Right-of-Way
4. Political signs in Right-of-Way



Group Make-up and Mission

16 members representing businesses, civic associations, historic districts and neighborhood organizations throughout City.

Group has met 7 times.

Group Questions/Mission:

- What issues have been observed regarding A-frame & digital signage in recent years?
- What regulations & guidelines exist to address current issues?
- What changes are needed?
- Are additional recommendations needed to improve signage policies and programs for A-frames & digital signage?



Ad Hoc Group Consensus on Storefront A-Frame Signs

- Debated legalizing A-Frame signs in front of stores on sidewalks; decided not to legalize.
- A-Frames seen as:
 - Inappropriate for historic districts & add to visual clutter
 - pedestrian travel disruption
 - maintenance challenges
- Additional signs should be allowed for businesses to display current activity as restaurants currently display menus
- A-Frames should be permitted only on private property outside the two local historic districts



Ad Hoc Group Consensus on Digital Signs

- Debated permitting digital signs in specific situations
- Determined that current conditions do not warrant allowances for digital signs
- Technologies may evolve & new types of digital signs may warrant allowance in the future
- Digital signage should be limited only to governmental signage at this time



Ad Hoc Group Consensus on Wayfinding A-Frame Signs

- Program for side-street businesses should continue
- Wayfinding signage of this type is considered governmental signage
- The current King Street A-Frame program needed better management and signage
- Make the Wayfinding A-Frame Signs part of the City's wayfinding guidelines and not the zoning ordinance

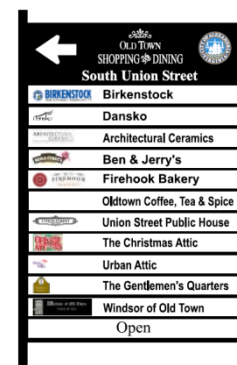


Ad Hoc Group Consensus on design of Wayfinding A-Frame Signs

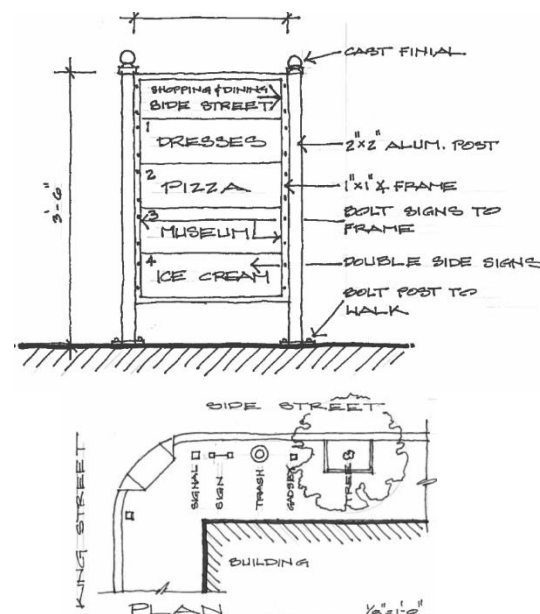
- A flat, 2-sided, sidewalk-mounted monument-style sign
- Each business's sign panel would be slid into a sleeve or bolted onto a track
- Operated and managed by the City
- Businesses would pay a fee to participate
- Expand program beyond King Street to other pedestrian-oriented shopping streets



24"x2" 12 Signs



24"x2" 12 Signs



Reed v. Town of Gilbert

- Supreme Court ruling concerning a local ordinance that regulated signs according to content
- Court finding: *Content based regulations only permitted if they are narrowly tailored to serve a compelling governmental interest and if other avenues of communication available*
- Aesthetic and safety justifications are not enough



Response to Reed v. Gilbert

- Comprehensive revision of Article IX, Signs of the Zoning Ordinance based on a model ordinance prepared by the Local Government Attorneys of Virginia (LGA)
- Can regulate based on a location, size, number, and other *non-content* items
- Regulations need to be content-neutral



Sign Group Recommendations Approved by Planning Commission & City Council

- Individual business A-frame signs: not permitted in the right-of-way
- Digital signs: not permitted, except governmental signs
- Right-of-way signs: not permitted, except governmental signs
- Corner Wayfinding program for businesses off King:
 - Continue the program but manage through the Wayfinding Sign Program (and City Staff), not the zoning ordinance
 - Redesign the signs to be fixed
 - Consider for other areas of the city (e.g., Del Ray)



Next Steps (Sign Work Group)

- Overall signage policy amendments in three phases
 - Phase I: signs in the right-of-way **(complete)**
 - Phase II: signs on private properties
 - Phase III: signs in the historic district
- Enforcement



Next/Concurrent Steps (BAR)

- Revise the Sign Design Guidelines (1992)
- Revise the Criteria & Standards for Administrative Approval of Signs (2010)
- Amend zoning ordinance sign chapter pertaining to exemptions (which must be content-neutral) and formerly described as:
 - Real Estate Signs
 - Contractor Signs
 - Temporary Signs
- Consider recommendations of the Work Group regarding menu boards and other signage alternatives

