

New Hope Borough Planning Commission
Thursday, March 20, 2023
Meeting Minutes

The New Hope Borough Planning Commission met on March 20, 2023 in the public meeting room. In attendance and voting were Chairman Keith Voss and members Lawrence Greenberg, Lou Bellafronte and Peter Meyer. Also in attendance were Matthew Walters and David Kimmerly of the Bucks County Planning Commission (BCPC), and Mary Stover, Interim Zoning Officer.

Call to Order: Mr. Voss called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

Public Comment: None.

Minutes: Monday, October 17, 2022 Meeting Minutes; Mr. Bellafronte made a motion to approve the October 17, 2022 Meeting Minutes. Mr. Meyer seconded the motion. Motion approved 3-0-1 with Mr. Greenberg abstaining since he was not in attendance at the October meeting.

Review of Sign Ordinance Amendments

The Planning Commission began to review the proposed amendments prepared by Bucks County Planning Commission. Mr. Voss noted that he had a few punctuation comments. He noted that in the first paragraph, the second sentence of the Purpose section was not a sentence. There should be a comma rather than a period. At the end of the paragraph, the word “to” should be removed since the items beneath all begin with “to”. In item (3), the “s” should be removed from “zoning districts”. In item (4), Mr. Voss felt “and prevent sign clutter” was confusing. It was discussed that this phrase could be removed. Mr. Meyer noted that, in item (4), the phrase “adequate, effective and aesthetic” is in the eye of the beholder. It was decided to remove the word “adequate”.

The Planning Commission began to discuss the “Definitions” section. The definition of “Abandoned Signs” was discussed. It was noted that the definition should be broad. The proposed modified definition was the following: “A sign that is not maintained, is unsafe, illegible, or no longer contains a relevant commercial or non-commercial message.”

The definitions of “Awning” and “Canopy” were discussed. It was determined that the type of construction and/or material used for an awning or canopy was not important and should be removed from the definitions. These definitions are needed so that the ordinance can later define an “Awning Sign” or a “Canopy Sign”. Signage such as the “Stella’s” sign were discussed that are located on a flat roof over the door and are not a “Wall Sign”. It was discussed whether the definition should include the provision that an awning provides “shelter”. The proposed modification to the definition for “Awning” was as follows: “A structure attached to the wall of a building or structure that is intended to shelter a door, entrance, window, porch, patio or deck.” For the definition of “Canopy” it was decided the second sentence regarding the material used for a canopy should be removed.

Mr. Meyer asked about whether the definition for “illuminated sign” was needed since there are definitions for the various types of illuminated signs. It was decided to leave the definition but to change it to be more general. The proposed definition was as follows: “A sign that is lighted artificially.” It was also suggested that “Non-illuminated Sign” be changed to: “A sign that is not lighted artificially”.

Various types of illumination for signs was discussed as well as some potential future technology. The definition of "Self-illuminated Sign" was discussed. It was determined that the examples should be separate from the definition. It was discussed to make the definition more general. The proposed definition was as follows: "A sign which is made of light. Examples include" Glow paint or light emitting paint and other technology that could be self-illuminating were discussed.

It was noted that "Façade" and "Roof Line" should be removed from the Sign Types section to the Definitions section.

In the definition of "Sign clearance", it was suggested that the phrase "below the sign" be added after "ground level" for the measurement from the ground level to the lowest point of the bottom of the sign.

In the definition of "Sign size", there was a discussion of the phrase "measured at the greatest length and greatest width". It was suggested that this phrase be modified to "measured using the greatest vertical length and greatest horizontal width." It was noted that this definition required that the size of abnormal shapes or signs would include blank space. It was noted that they would still be measured using the rectangle that fits the sign with the greatest length and width. Mr. Kimmerly noted that they have included some incentives later in the ordinance that would allow for greater sizes for more creative signs.

It was noted that there was a typographical error in the opening paragraph for Sign Types (275-50.A) where "of" should be "or".

The definition of an "A-Frame Sign" was discussed. It was noted that there are many different types of "A-Frame" signs and that the description that the "faces can be written on, such as chalk board or white board" should be removed since there are A-Frame signs that are pre-made and cannot be written on. The proposed modified definition was as follows: "Also known as a sandwich board sign, these signs have two faces connected by a hinge, typically placed outside a building."

There was a discussion regarding the definition of an "Electronic message sign". The definition is long and includes various examples. It was discussed if the definition should be reduced. The difference between an "changeable message sign" and an "electronic message sign" was discussed where the changeable message sign is changed manually. The proposed definition for electronic message sign was as follows: "A sign, or portion thereof, whose content is capable of being changed electronically. Electronic message signs may include computer programmable, microprocessor controlled electronic or digital display. Electronic message signs also may include projecting of a sign or advertising onto an object, building or structure. Electronic message signs include signs that utilize technology not listed in this definition and shall include similar technology which may be developed in the future, or the use of which may become widespread in the future."

The definition of "Flags" was discussed. It was suggested that "square or rectangular shape" should be removed from the definition since flags can be varying shapes.

For the definition of "Incidental sign" it was noted that the definition should indicate what the sign is first and then define what it is not.

The discussion of signs was concluded.

The Planning Commission asked if their recommendation for the Comprehensive Plan had been provided to Council. It was noted that the Borough staff had been advised of the recommendation recently, but it had not yet been brought to the attention of Council. It was suggested that the Planning Commission start thinking about what topics they wanted to be included in the plan or a survey to the public.

Mr. Bellafronte made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Greenberg seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 8:34 pm.