

Village of Gurnee  
Plan Commission Minutes  
July 6, 2011

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 P.M.

Plan Commission Members Present: Chairman James Sula, Richard McFarlane, Gwen Broughton, Sharon Salmons, Patrick Drennan

Plan Commission Members Absent: David Nordentoft

Other Officials Present: Tracy Velkover, Planning Manager

**1. Approval of Plan Commission Meeting Minutes for June 15, 2011.**

Mr. McFarlane made a motion, seconded by Ms. Salmons, to approve the Plan Commission Meeting Minutes for June 15, 2011.

Roll Call

Ayes: Sula, McFarlane, Broughton, Salmons, Drennan

Nays: None

Abstain: None

Motion Carried: 5-0-0

**2. Public Hearing: Amendment to the Gurnee Town Centre Planned Unit Development Wall Sign Standards**

Ms. Velkover stated Image One Sign Company is representing hhGregg in this request and they are looking to amend the sign standards within the Gurnee Town Center Planned Unit Development (PUD). She stated specifically they are looking to add a new classification, called Major Anchor that would allow wall signs of up to 255 sq. ft. in size with a mounting height of 35 feet. She stated currently the largest tenant within this building is considered an anchor and limited to a sign of 150 square feet with a mounting height of 25 feet.

Chairman Sula stated this is a Public Hearing, and asked for anyone from the petitioner or members of the general public who intend to either give testimony or ask questions to stand and be sworn in. Chairman Sula swore in the participants in the absence of the Village Attorney.

Mr. Lindsey Vetzner with hhGregg introduced himself and Mr. Tom Gianni of Image One Industries. He stated hhGregg is an appliance and electronics retailer based in Indianapolis, Indiana and currently have 180 stores in 15 states. He stated they are currently looking to open stores in Chicago during 2011. He stated to date they have 15 signed leases for the Chicagoland market with Gurnee as one of these stores which is currently under construction. He stated their intention is to open all the stores on the same day to assist in leveraging their advertising costs and capture as much market exposure as they possibly can. He stated when they open in these markets the intention is to have all the stores branded and looking the same so there is no confusion amongst the customer base as to who they are and what they are trying to do. He stated with their name being hhGregg it is somewhat difficult as a new player within the Chicagoland market for people to realize who they are. He stated it is very important for them to add the appliance and electronics branding to their signage. He stated they understand there are signage criteria and noted they have had good luck across the board with the other 14 stores in being allowed to add appliance and electronics to their signage. He stated they are looking for the Commissions help to allow them to brand themselves in the proper way within the market place while being able to reach customers with what they are selling.

Mr. Gianni of Image One Industries of Bensalem, Pennsylvania introduced himself. He stated they are asking the Commission to consider sign criteria to the existing PUD for a major anchor. He stated hhGregg is occupying approximately 34,000 square feet and is the only store of this size in the center. He stated the other signs appear proportionately sized to the square footage of each of the stores. He stated they are asking based on the retail square footage they are seeking they be allowed to add this square footage to the criteria and become the major anchor at this site. He stated hhGregg's logo suffers a bit because of the ascenders and descenders throughout their letters. He stated the "g's" go low taking up white space as well as the space between the appliances and electronics. He stated their logo is their national trademark and due to the application of the logo with the

appliances and electronics, they are asking the Commission to consider the addition of the major anchor signage for the additional 255 square feet. He stated they feel this sign is proportionate to the size of the store and to the storefront and is similar to the intention of the area which includes several other shopping areas where the signage fits the storefronts and looks appropriate. He stated the letters are LED illuminated which are high energy savings as well as low cost to maintain with an average lifespan of 25 years. He stated the lumen output on an LED letter is approximately 30% less than those made with fluorescent lighting or neon tube lighting.

Chairman Sula asked the members of the Commission for questions or comments.

Mr. Drennan asked if the size of the sign being proposed is 254 square feet.

Mr. Gianni responded 247 square feet.

Mr. Drennan asked why a variance is not done for this versus amending the Planned Unit Development at an anchor.

Chairman Sula responded that he assumed this is one of the Commission's options if they wish to go down that path.

Ms. Velkover responded signs are generally better reviewed by the Plan Commission than the Zoning Board of Appeals. She stated amendments to signs have always been taken to the Plan Commission. She stated even under the old sign code that the first threshold for a sign change was a Special Use before the Plan Commission. She stated the Plan Commission is really more adept at dealing with these issues than the Zoning Board of Appeals. She stated as this is a PUD there is that avenue to take it through.

Chairman Sula stated to clarify Mr. Drennan's question, in that assuming there are two choices with one choice being to amend the PUD and the other choice could be to possibly make an exception on this one sign.

Ms. Velkover responded it is not a listed variation in a Planned Unit Development and is uncertain if this would be an avenue that could be gone through.

Chairman Sula stated to be safe it should be an amendment to the PUD.

Ms. Velkover responded correct.

Mr. Drennan mentioned in the Staff notes, page two, under the last bullet point where it notes that the Ordinance would allow the sign to have 152 square feet and questioned what this was referring to.

Ms. Velkover responded this is a PUD and noted when this PUD went into effect the Village was under a different sign code. She stated if she applied the Village's new sign code to this storefront with it being this type of sign, then it would allow a 152 square foot sign. She stated to please remember that the way the sign code is written, a person is rewarded for putting in a higher quality sign. She stated if a different type of sign were used, i.e., a pin-mounted channel letter sign, then a potential 185 square feet would be allowed; and with a distinctive materials sign, then it would be possible for a 215.5 foot square foot sign to be built. She stated this is a comparison of an individual channel letter sign and what would be allowed under the current code. She stated this is superseded by the PUD agreement.

Mr. Drennan asked if the other stores in the Chicagoland area will be around 34,000 square feet and if the signs for those are around 250 square feet.

Mr. Gianni responded the stores are between 25,000 and 35,000 square feet and the signs in the other areas of Chicagoland will be larger. He stated what is being presented to the Commission is on the lower side of what they prefer and what they have been permitted.

Mr. Drennan asked if the hhGregg sign that is being proposed is approximately the same size as the Linens N Things sign.

Mr. Gianni responded he didn't know what Linens N Things had on the storefront.

Chairman Sula stated Linens N Things had 143 square feet.

Mr. Vetzner stated hhGregg would be about the same as Linens N Things without adding appliances and electronics.

Chairman Sula stated it would be close in size.

Ms. Velkover stated that is correct.

Ms. Broughton stated she understands the appliances and electronics and sees it as a necessity.

Ms. Salmons asked how brightly the sign would be illuminated at night and asked if the lights would be shining downward so it would not be so bright at night, especially for those residents across the street.

Mr. Gianni responded the signs are all on timers and energy management systems. He stated the signs are only lit during business hours in the evening. He stated he did not have the exact lumen output on the hhGregg signs. He noted studies that have been done across the board showing and LED sign is 30% less bright than a standard sign that perhaps was made 5 years ago with neon tubes or with florescent lighting.

Ms. Salmons asked if when the store closes if the lights would then go out.

Mr. Gianni responded yes. He stated the parking lot lights may stay on as they are controlled by the development. He stated signs have the tendency to look the same but if they were all put in a blackened room a sign with LED lighting would have a noticeable difference in the illumination than signs with neon or fluorescent tubes. He stated when all these different signs are outside coupled with the parking lot lights and lights from surrounding stores the signs tend to look all the same in illumination. He noted again, LED lighting is actually 30% less bright.

Chairman Sula stated he is somewhat taken back by looking at a sign that is going to be nearly 80% bigger than the existing sign that was there for Linens N Things. He stated he understands about coming to market and the petitioners need to have the signage include appliances and electronics but from his perspective Best Buy was new to the market several years ago and that signage does not include appliances and electronics. He stated Circuit City and Lowes signs have the store name only. He stated there is a strong history of major chains coming into Gurnee that do okay noting Circuit City's issue was a national and not a local issue. He stated he is not buying into the reasoning that this is why the sign needs to be bigger and that it doesn't make sense to him. He stated he is familiar with the hhGregg franchise and personally doesn't think it has to have appliances and electronics on their sign and is struggling with the pure bulk of the sign.

Chairman Sula opened the floor to the public.

Ms. Bernice Ramis, 36102 N. New Bridge Court, stated she is the President of the Homeowners Association for Brookside Colony which is the group of townhouses across Grand Avenue and across from the shopping Center. She asked if thought has been given to what the sign would look like from the property across the street. She stated some of the townhouse units face Grand Avenue and will have a full view of this sign and the homeowners are concerned about property values. She stated there is somewhat of a tree barrier on the north side of Grand Avenue for some of the property owners but a lot of property owners do not have any barrier. She stated there is a berm which goes up and down, however it doesn't protect all of the property owners and asked if the Commission would consider some sort of variance to what is being asked for this evening.

Mr. Dan Smith, 36123 N. New Bridge Court, who also lives in the Brookside Colony Townhomes stated the size of the sign that is being requested is huge compared to the other signs in Gurnee. He stated he believes the Commission has taken into consideration the businesses mixing with residential. He stated the sizes of the signs for the car dealerships and restaurants are appropriate. He stated he believes most people think that type of sign as being nice and even as well as the signage in the strip malls being appropriate. He stated he believes what hhGregg is proposing is unacceptable and believes most Gurnee residents would agree with him.

Ms. Cathy Petry, 36087 N. Springbrook Lane, also from the Brookside Colony community stated her house is one of the closest ones and faces Grand Avenue. She stated her townhome has (5) five very tall windows as well as her patio. She stated once the leaves fall from the trees, as well as now, the light from the proposed sign will shine

directly into her home as well as into her yard. She stated the sign is what she will see all the time and asked what affect this will have on the resale value of her home. She stated this would be a long range question.

Chairman Sula closed the floor to the public.

Chairman Sula stated he is not aware of any property value study that is sign sensitive.

Ms. Velkover stated these townhomes are across a state highway from a commercial center. She stated she didn't know if the additional signage would devalue property and noted there are other signs along Grand Avenue that are larger than the sign being proposed. She stated all of the PUD's are a little different and east and west of this location there are different centers. She stated for example, the center where Home Depot is located allows a 200 square foot wall sign of which their sign is 198 square feet. She stated they are also allowed additional signs for product identification up to 50 square feet which includes identification of their nursery and indoor lumber yard. She stated every one of the PUDs is slightly different, noting this PUD at this point has a threshold for an anchor of 150 square feet of sign.

Mr. Gianni stated they understand what the neighbors have stated and the concerns on their part about the signage. He stated they drove the area prior to tonight's meeting and what they would like to do if acceptable to the Commission is to ask to amend the application to 215 square feet rather than the 255 square feet. He stated they feel this would downsize the letters, dropping down the overall height of the letters a little further, hopefully keeping it down below the tree line and less visible from the neighbors.

Mr. Vetzner stated they are willing to compromise and he understands the Commissions point about the appliances and electronics. He stated this is very important to them as they are new to the community and noted they need to get their message out to the customer base. He noted their store will bring jobs into Gurnee as well as provide revenue. He stated he knows there is a partnership between retailers and villages in terms of sales tax revenue and things of this nature and noted the more successful they are as a retailer it will benefit the community. He stated their intent is to obviously be visible and customer accessible, as well as to the community and get their message out as to who they are and what they sell. He stated again, he believes it is very important to them as well as to speak to everyone this evening and noted again to get the appliances and electronics on the storefront with hhGregg is meaningful to think where 150 square feet doesn't lend itself to allow for a nice image. He stated they are willing to compromise on the size but he feels 150 square feet is still less than what is desirable to them and is less than what they need for their purposes.

Mr. McFarlane stated the LED signs are better signs in terms of the brightness and this will help people out who live across the street. He stated the Village spent 1 – 1 ½ years working on the new Sign Ordinance and he knows there are other sites that have larger signs. He stated part of this was to get some consistency and bring the size of the signs down to a size the Village was comfortable with. He stated he agrees with Chairman Sula in that advertising is what will make people aware of your store. He stated he is uncomfortable with the variance or the revision to the plan and would prefer to stick with what the Commission has.

Ms. Broughton asked if the sign requested would be 215 square feet and what the size was of the Linens N Things Sign.

Mr. Gianni responded 215 square feet.

Chairman Sula stated Linens N Things had 143 square foot sign.

Chairman Sula stated he understands about the appliances and electronics but candidly doesn't know if it would be readable from Grand Avenue. He stated in looking at the difference in the letter height between hhGregg which should be the focal point without question, he doesn't know how legible appliances and electronics would be from Grand Avenue. He stated it would certainly be legible and readable from the parking lot. He stated in terms of trying to get bangs from the buck and in terms of visibility on the sign he personally thinks it is a waste of square footage in trying to do this.

Mr. Vetzner stated they obviously have this same sign up in several of their newer locations. He stated Chairman Sula is correct in that the letter height is a little bit less but in their opinion it does get the message out to the customer. He stated in this particular location the building is really not set as far back as some of the other

shopping centers and there is definitely a parking field and there is some distance. He stated some of their locations it is much further back and they feel it gets the message across to the public just fine.

Chairman Sula stated according to the Staff notes, 173 square feet was approved in Naperville. He stated 173 square feet is a lot closer to 143 square feet than 215 square feet.

Mr. Vetzner stated it is a larger letter set sign in Naperville but the way they measure the square footage didn't include all the dead space between hhGregg and the appliances and electronics. He stated they allowed for each letter to be measured individually and that is how they were able to achieve that square footage.

Ms. Velkover stated she was informed that the 10 ½ foot dimension was down to 8.33 feet and the 28 foot wide dimension was down to 24 feet. She stated the way in which the Staff calculates this is not counting all the dead space above Gregg and underneath appliances and electronics except for where the "p's" drop down. She stated based on this dimension of 24 feet x 8.3 feet would be approximately 199 square feet. She stated the open area above Gregg and under appliances and electronics except for where the "p's" drop down. She stated proportional to where Staff is at with this sign, she gets approximately 173 square feet.

Mr. Vetzner asked if Ms. Velkover was proposing a different way to measure this.

Ms. Velkover stated she is proposing to measure in the way that has always been talked about. She stated basically this is taking 10.6 feet x 28 feet discounting the area above Gregg and underneath appliances and electronics except for where the "p's" are at which arrives at the 250 some feet. She stated when speaking with Naperville the 28 foot wide dimension was down to 24 and the 10 ½ foot height for hhGregg Appliances and Electronics was down to 8.3. She stated the dimension of 24 feet x 8.33 feet is 199 square feet. She stated taking out all the open area above Gregg and underneath appliances and electronics equals 173 – 175 square feet. She stated this is how the sign area is calculated.

Mr. Vetzner asked if this would be acceptable to the Commission in getting some additional square footage up to the 173 square feet which is what he would consider as a 6 foot letter set noting the letters of hhGregg would be dropped approximately 1 foot.

Chairman Sula asked the Commission if this was acceptable and asked for any further discussion.

Ms. Velkover clarified this will be a modification to the PUD to allow for a major anchor up to 175 square feet with a mounting height taken down from 35 feet based upon the reduced size of the letters.

Mr. Gianni stated the letter size comes down proportionately but remains at the center of the fascia so the height will drop.

Chairman Sula stated it will go from 10 ½ feet to 8.3 feet still centering it would be a 1 foot difference.

Ms. Velkover stated yes, 1 foot.

Chairman Sula asked what would the mounting height.

Ms. Velkover responded 34 feet. She stated Linens N Things is at 28 feet.

Chairman Sula stated the façade of the building would be changed because it is more squared off as opposed to the reverse gable.

Chairman Sula stated the new Sign Ordinance would have allowed up to 45 feet if it was straight zoning.

Ms. Velkover stated that is correct.

Chairman Sula stated he is okay with 34 feet.

Chairman Sula asked for any other questions or comments from the Commission.

Chairman Sula asked the Commission for a motion.

Ms. Broughton made a motion, seconded by Ms. Salmons, to forward a favorable recommendation for Image One Sign Company requesting to amend the Gurnee Town Center Planned Unit Development sign standards allowing up to 175 square feet in size with a mounting height of 34 feet and creating a new store classification as a major anchor for stores with at least 33,000 square feet.

Roll Call

Ayes: Sula, Broughton, Salmons, Drennan

Nays: McFarlane

Abstain: None

Motion Carried: 4-1-0

Chairman Sula asked for motion to adjourn.

Mr. McFarlane made a motion, seconded by Ms. Salmons to adjourn.

The Meeting was adjourned at 8:13P.M.

Respectfully Submitted:

Joanne Havenhill  
Plan Commission Secretary