



Planning & Zoning Board Report

DATE: September 17, 2014
TO: Chair DiBella and Planning & Zoning Board Members
THROUGH: John Wesley, AICP - Planning Director
FROM: Gordon Sheffield, AICP CNUA - Zoning Administrator
SUBJECT: Amending Article 5 of the Zoning Ordinance (the Sign Code) related to **Street Banners**

PURPOSE AND RECOMMENDATION

Under present requirements, fabric banners may only be used in two circumstances:

- 1) For a period of 30-days when associated with the grand opening of a new business; or
- 2) For promotion of civic and public activities and events when placed on street light poles and similar devices located within the street right-of-way. This option is limited to locations within the immediate downtown area, and there is no limit to the length of time the banner may be displayed.

Part of the reasoning for this policy is related to the structural integrity of the street light poles. Banners placed on poles act as a type of sail, and most street light poles in Mesa have not been designed to withstand the extra wind load that would be brought by attaching fabric banners. This is especially true when considering extreme wind conditions, such as the occasional microbursts (with 70+ mph winds) that have happened in the past few years. The policy is also tied to the idea of limiting sign clutter, and the focus on civic activities in the Downtown Mesa area.

Staff Recommended Action: After review and discussion, it is suggested that the Board recommend that the City Council approve the proposed amendments to the Sign Ordinance (Article 5 of the Zoning Ordinance) regarding street banners. It is also recommended that the Board include any additional comments or modifications the Board may feel are needed to assure the modifications allowing more frequent use of street banners for civic activities and events remain consistent with the stated purposes and intents of the Sign Ordinance.

BACKGROUND

The recent reconstruction of Southern Avenue in the Fiesta District (between Dobson Road and Extension) includes the installation of new light poles that are specifically designed to accommodate banners. Mesa Community College has shown interest in using the new streetlights adjacent to their Dobson and Southern campus for banners that would help promote their 50th Year Anniversary celebration, which is scheduled to start this coming January. Staff has also heard interest in using street banners to promote Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, Falcon Field, and the Eastmark project. All of these other areas are outside of the Downtown Mesa area, and under current sign ordinance requirements using banners on light poles in any of these other areas would be prohibited.

Given that the use of street banners would be limited to promoting civic related activities and events, and that Mesa is a large enough city to have multiple areas that are worth promoting, the idea is to expand the eligible number of locations that may use street banners. With the emphasis on developing and enhancing the general character of differing areas, street banners can be used as a tool to reinforce the intended design characteristics of an area. When used in urbanizing or more intensely developed commercial and higher density residential areas, street light banners, to a certain extent, are often expected because of widespread use in similar conditions in other cities. As such, street banners can reinforce an intended urban or commercial design character, or help identify something special about an area.

The proposed amendment language would authorize the use of street banners for public and civic activities and events anywhere in Mesa, and would be under the oversight of the City Manager or designee. Criteria for review of the placement of the banners would include:

- A) Confirmation from the City Engineer that the light poles used for street banners are designed to accommodate the extra wind loads that might reasonably be expected in extreme wind conditions; and
- B) The use of the banners shall be limited to displays that include civic or public messages concerning events, activities or celebrations, or other clearly identified public purpose; and
- C) In the event that a commercial sponsorship is used, the sponsor's name or logo cannot exceed 15% of the sign area of the banner for a single pole banner, or 30% of a banner stretched across the street using two poles; and
- D) The design and placement of the banners remain in accordance with national highway safety standards for clearance from moving vehicles for height and distance from the street; and
- E) Removal of banners from public rights-of-way that show evidence of deterioration, such as fraying edges, rips or tears, excessive fading, or are in some other need of maintenance.

DISCUSSION *(For specific text amendment language, see Appendix A)*

Section 11-41-1 of the Sign Ordinance lists the Purposes and Intents of why signs are regulated. Among the reasons listed include:

- 1) Promoting the effectiveness of signs by preventing their over-concentration, improper placement and excessive size and number.
- 2) Assure public benefits derived from public expenditures for street improvements and other public structures are protected by exercising reasonable control over character and design of signs.

The present Mesa Sign Ordinance was adopted in 1986. Prior to that time, the Mesa sign regulations were less restrictive. The larger allowances of those earlier regulations clearly resulted in evidence of sign clutter, interference with vistas, and an over-concentration of signs that competed for attention with traffic safety signs. Adoption of the present sign ordinance was designed to reduce those perceived negative circumstances.

Forwarding 28-years later, the present Sign Ordinance has reduced sign clutter, reduced several instances of signs being over concentrated in one area, and has reduced interference with surrounding vistas. However, the somewhat less restrictive allowance of street banners in the Downtown area has been helpful in promoting downtown-oriented activities. The limited use of street banners is a part of a program that promotes civic holiday events, public activities, and monthly downtown activities. Banners may also call attention to cultural institutions, and may be used to promote awareness of the downtown area in general.

This proposal would expand eligibility of using public street light poles for banners to other areas of the city with characters areas designated as suitable for this extra signage. Under the Mesa 2040 General Plan, areas designated as *Mixed Use Activity*, *Mixed Use Community* and *Transit District* are all examples of character areas types that could be considered compatible with the use of street light banners.

Because placement of these banners would be limited to areas with light poles that can physically accommodate then extra wind loads, the use of street banners would still be restricted to only a few areas of the City. For this reason, it is not anticipated that the proposed language would result in an excessive number.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative A (Recommended) - Adopt the suggested amendment language: The proposed amendment is designed to address the circumstances in which a street banner is most likely appropriate to be utilized. Although the result of the banner would be an increase in the use of fabric banners, the limitation on the size, and the requirement to be elevated from the street to meet vehicle safety requirements would bring about more of a mass single view of the same color, as opposed to sign clutter.

Alternative B – Adopt the suggested Alternative A language, and add modifications to address any concerns raised by the Board during discussions.

Alternative C (Not Recommended) - Make no changes to the existing zoning ordinance: Doing so would leave the existing requirements in place, and street banners used for public and civic purposes would continue to be limited to the Downtown Mesa vicinity.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

Appendix A: Proposed Amendment Language for Street Banners (Section 11-41-7.F.2)

Section 11-41-7.F Banners and Nonrigid Signs

2. ~~Banners are permitted within the public right-of-way in existing approved locations for informational messages concerning civic and cultural programs within the Downtown Zoning District, subject to the approval of the Zoning Administrator. Sponsorship shall be allowed no more than 15% coverage on a streetlight banner. Sponsorship shall be allowed no more than 30% coverage on an over-the-street banner.~~
2. **BANNERS, ONLY WHEN ATTACHED A STREETLIGHT OR OTHER PUBLICLY-OWNED INFRASTRUCTURE AND INSTALLED BY CITY OF MESA STAFF OR APPROVED CONTRACTOR, ARE PERMITTED WITHIN THE PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAY AT LOCATIONS APPROVED BY THE CITY MANAGER OR DESIGNEE. THE APPROVAL OF THE USE AND LOCATION OF THE BANNERS SHALL BE DETERMINED BY THE FOLLOWING:**
- A. **THE CITY ENGINEER HAS DETERMINED THAT THE STREET LIGHT POLE OR OTHER DEVICE WILL SECURELY HOLD AND DISPLAY THE BANNER WITHOUT COMPROMISING THE STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY OF THE POLE IN EXTREME WEATHER CONDITIONS;**
 - B. **THE BANNERS SHALL BE USED TO DISPLAY INFORMATIONAL MESSAGES CONCERNING CIVIC AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS;**
 - C. **SPONSORSHIP SHALL BE ALLOWED NO MORE THAN 15% COVERAGE ON A STREET LIGHT BANNER.**
 - D. **SPONSORSHIP SHALL BE ALLOWED NO MORE THAN 30% COVERAGE ON AN OVER-THE-STREET BANNER;**
 - E. **THE BOTTOM OF ANY BANNER MAY NOT BE ANY LESS THAN 16-FEET HIGH FROM THE SURFACE OF THE STREET, AND MAY NOT EXCEED THE HEIGHT OF THE POLE ONTO WHICH IT IS ATTACHED.**
 - F. **THE LEADING EDGE OF THE FABRIC BANNER (THE VERTICAL EDGE CLOSEST TO THE STREET) SHALL NOT BE ANY CLOSER THAN 1-FOOT FROM THE FACE OF THE CURB OF THE ADJACENT STREET, OR TO THE EDGE OF PAVING WHEN A CURB IS NOT PRESENT; AND**
 - G. **BANNERS SHOWING EVIDENCE OF DETERIORATION, SUCH AS RIPS, TEARS, COLOR FADING, FRAYED EDGES, OR OTHERWISE SHOWING NEED OF GENERAL MAINTENANCE SHALL BE REPAIRED OR REPLACED PROMPTLY.**