

# Sign code revisions get first look

By ERIC A. HOWALD  
Of the Keizertimes

The Keizer Planning Commission wrangled with the fallout from a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision during its Aug. 9 meeting.

City staff presented a host of changes to Keizer's sign code that brings the city into line with the Supreme Court's decision, clears up some areas of ambiguity, and will grant additional latitude to business owners regarding signage.

In the Reid vs. Town of Gilbert judgement, the Supreme Court determined that sign codes need to be content-neutral, which is another way of saying the code cannot suppress freedom of speech. That caused an issue for Keizer because it has rules applicable only to real estate and political signs.

Community Development Director Nate Brown said that staff was suggesting small adjustments rather than a major overhaul because "every adjustment has ramifications. The main objective of any sign code is identification of place and

balanced visual access to the public."

A public hearing on the issue will be continued at the commission's September meeting, but the commission reviewed and offered input on the suggested changes.

Some of the proposed alterations include:

- Allowing for a wider variety of geometric shapes.
- Placing signs for real estate, elections, government signs and non-profit signs into a larger category of temporary signs.
- Allowing temporary signs, such as banners, to be attached to buildings for up to 120 days within a 12 month period.
- Allowing portable signs and feather flags to be placed one-per-storefront with a 10-foot separation.
- Creating a new section that permits special signage for grand openings and special sales.
- Allowing electronic signs to change once every 60 seconds — the current code limits changes to once every 15 min-

utes — and allowing them to be attached to walls.

• Allowing smaller, secondary frontage signs for all businesses. The current code only allows such signage in Keizer Station.

The proposed changes are the result of staff input and conversations with the Keizer Chamber of Commerce.

The most-talked-about change was allowing electronic signs to change more frequently. The current limit of once every 15 minutes falls far outside the industry standard of once every eight seconds. In Keizer, there is even greater limitation on electronic signs associated with public entities, such as Keizer Fire District and McNary High School. Those messages can only change once per day, but would be treated the same under the new code if the changes are approved.

Jonathan Thompson, speaking on behalf of the Keizer Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, told commissioners that the Chamber preferred the eight second standard.



KEIZERTIMES/Eric A. Howald  
A Keizer Mart sign completely obscured by a tree planted for beautification highlights one of the conflicts between policies.

"One of the reasons that folks want the eight seconds was what we saw when police went up and down River Road asking businesses to put up messages about the fee hearing. It would be easier to post something like that in with a message from my business," Thompson said.

Testimony from Justin Briley, one of the new owners of Keizer Mart on River Road North, revealed the need for

one of the changes in the code and a space where conflict between competing goals has arisen.

Keizer Mart is located in Keizer Plaza with 12 other businesses and Briley drew the ire of some of them when he began placing signs outside promoting new ownership and other aspects of the business.

"We were unaware that there was any kind of restriction and I later found out that

we had to share between everyone in there," Briley said. That's one of the reasons for the proposed change to portable signs and feather flags. If the change is approved, a space like Keizer Plaza will be allowed more overall signage.

Briley also said he has trouble attracting attention of southbound drivers on River Road North despite having a sign on his River Road frontage wall. The problem is that a tree planted for the purpose of beautification now completely obscures the sign.

"Our urban renewal program sought to plant green trees along River Road, but that competes with the visual space available for business," Brown said.

As far as input from the commission, there was some support for both the more rapid change of electronic signs and some that preferred longer times, but the majority appeared to feel a 60-second rate of change was ideal.

Chair Hersch Sangster told staff "you're on the right track."

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