

SIGNAGE WORKSHOP
Planning Board and the Historic Architectural Review Commission

March 28, 2013

- . **RECAP will be presented on April 9, 2013 HARC meeting .**

Discussion of sign issues in the Historic District:

1. Business vs. brand signs

- There are two types of signs that are often used in business, the business sign which has the name of the establishment and all support information related to it and brand signs- which are incidental signs that are used to attract the attention into the premises.
 - Our actual Sign Ordinance and Guidelines do not recognize any difference between those two types of signs.
 - By not having specific regulations that differentiate those types of signs our major visual clutter problem comes with brand signs which dominate the pedestrian experience in our commercial corridors, and particularly on Duval and Greene Streets.
 - It is staff's opinion that there should be recognition between these two types of signs and different ways to regulate them.
- ✓ **DISCUSSION-** No comments from audience or members from Planning Board or HARC.

2. Number of signs per business

a. Limiting to number of signs as stated in actual Ordinance

- The actual Ordinance under Chapter 114 on the Land Development Regulations includes specific regulations for the Historic District. Among those regulations the number of signs is limited to two (2) signs for businesses and three (3) for a business located on a street corner. A business shall be determined by its business tax receipt.
- By using business tax receipts one establishment located on a corner lot can have "X" amount of business taxes receipts, as an example liquors, pharmacy, retail and the city cannot deny the amount of a maximum of 9 signs for that particular

business. It is staff's opinion that this language should be reviewed.

- The limitation of number of signs allows a business that occupies an entire frontage be treated the same way as a business that only occupies half or less than a whole frontage of a building. This limitation also promotes visual signage clutter, particularly on buildings where there is more than one tenant.

b. Limiting signs to frontage lineal feet 1 lineal foot = one square feet of signage

- It is staff's opinion that signs should be proportionate to the building's façade. A limitation of signs by square footage by calculating the actual front façade's lineal feet of a business will make signs more proportionate and in scale with the building and will be a fair way to promote advertisement; the more frontage a business has the more square footage of advertisement it gets. Still, location of signs as well as their proportions must be regulated under the guidelines.

- ✓ **DISCUSSION-** Proposal of ratio of square footage for signage per lineal feet of frontage was well received by the audience and members from Planning Board and HARC.

3. Creating new districts for Commercial areas for different sign regulations;

- a. Entertainment District- Lower Duval, up to Truman Avenue
- b. Traditional Commercial District- Upper Duval, Truman Avenue, Greene Street, Front Street, Upper White Street, Key West Bight
- c. Peripheral Commercial/ Residential District- Eaton Street, Whitehead Street, Caroline Street, Simonton Street, Fleming Street, Southard Street, Petronia Street, United Street

- The HARC Commission in several occasions has discussed the need for recognition of our Commercial Corridors. Today Commercial Corridors in Old Town distinguishes from one to another; a distinction that can be traced through history. Duval Street used to have mixed used two story buildings, where commercial use was on the first floor and residential use on the second. Frame vernacular and Victorian single family homes were also built along the street as well as hotels. Duval Street is a pure commercial corridor, with re-adapted homes serving as commercial structures.

- The Planning Department staff has studied each Commercial Corridor in the Historic District and has drafted an Overlay District. This proposed draft took into consideration not only the actual characteristics of each urban block but also its historic transformation. As promoted by HARC members staff is recommending three signage corridor districts; the Entertainment District, the Traditional Commercial District, and the Peripheral Commercial/ Residential District.
 - The proposed Entertainment District comprises Lower Duval Street- from the waterfront up to Truman Avenue and will extend to one building on each side of a street intersection. This district has always been a vibrant area, where neon signs have been captured in photos since the 1930's. Specific guidelines should be drafted as to colors and lighting type and lighting intensity.
 - The proposed Traditional Commercial District is a less vivid district that Lower Duval Street. The Key West Bight, Hotel Corridors and structures with less intense commercial use comprises this district. Upper Duval Street, Upper White Street and the north portion of the Commercial core of the Historic District are included in this proposed district. Signs in these areas should be harmonious to the urban fabric.
 - The proposed Peripheral Commercial Residential District comprises areas where businesses are surrounded or are too close to residential areas. The businesses in this proposed district will have signs that cannot detract from the residential character. Highly ornate and extreme illuminated signs may not be appropriate in this district.
- ✓ **DISCUSSION-** This item was lengthily discussed by members from the public. Recommendations were to include Greene Street as part of the Entertainment District. A request to consider the idea for some urban blocks on White Street to have some type of illumination on their signs was also brought for consideration. In general the public was receptive to the creation of the three proposed districts for signage. Signs will still have same regulations in all three districts; the distinction will be on highly decorated and ornate and amount of lights; neon and LED use, as well as colors.

4. Materials for signage

- Historical signs in Old Town used to be made in aluminum and in wood. In the past years new materials for signs include PVC, Composite, Aluminum composite and a variety of man-made

plastics and resins. Digital prints attached to man-made boards is the most cost effective and fastest way to manufacture a sign. Cost is the primary reason to select non-traditional materials for signage.

- The importance on material selection should be towards the visual quality of the final product. The historic district must have back good quality and creative signs.

✓ **DISCUSSION-** No discussion.

5. Lighting for signage- Neon, LED, external

- Traditional lighting in signs in Old Town included exposed neon tubes and goose neck lamps. Today there are available LED lights which are energy efficient and can create various effects depending on its use, but LED signs and lights can be extremely bright making a sign too overpower. Neon signs can also be seen in our street, particularly on windows as brands advertisements.
- Type of lights on signage must take into consideration the location, the age, the architecture of the building and whether the façade has been altered through time; a building may have built on a specific year but the actual façade may not have the architectural attributes it originally had.

✓ **DISCUSSION-** Item was discussed as a general topic under proposed districts.

6. New and revised definitions

- It is staff's opinion that the definitions found in the LDR's particularly under Chapter 114 lacks of many adequate and accurate terms. Revisions to the existing definitions will update them and will bring new definitions that are more in keeping with actual trends and technology.
- As an example of problems in current definitions the LDR's have 2 definitions for signage and the HARC guidelines have a short version of one of those definitions.
- Having current definitions that have up-to date terms will make the regulation process more efficient and will reduce the need to make interpretations of what type of signage someone is proposing.

- ✓ **DISCUSSION-** Although there was no specifics about this item two public members mentioned the importance of revised definitions as well as definitions that are updated with actual technology and trends in the signage business. Staff is taking into consideration also feedback from Code Compliance Manager and the Legal Department.

7. Prohibited Signs

- The Ordinance includes eleven type of signs that are prohibited in the Historic District;
 1. Animated signs
 2. Banners including fringed and pennant string banners, except with the permission of the city commission.
 3. Bus bench signs
 4. Interior illuminated signs
 5. Plastic signs
 6. Portable signs
 7. Roof signs
 8. Signs painted directly on the exterior wall of a building, unless deemed historically appropriate by HARC
 9. Snipe signs
 10. Temporary window signs
 11. Poster board signs
 - Will this list be changed?
- ✓ **DISCUSSION-** No discussion.

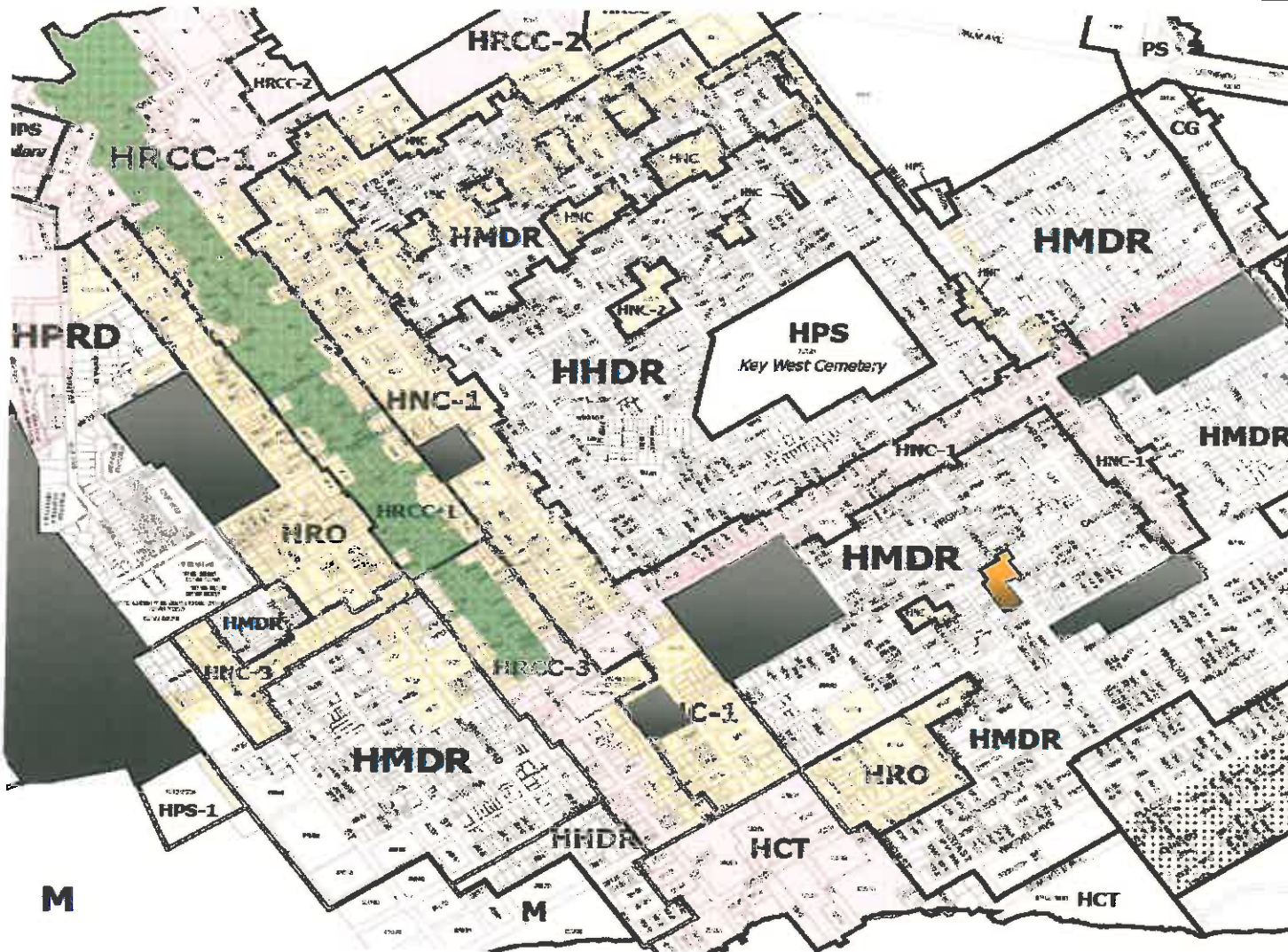
8. Transition from existing Ordinance to a new Ordinance

- If a new Ordinance is adopted there should be a transition period. Many HARC Commissioners have expressed that three years after adoption is a fair time to make all actual signs compliant, if they are not.
 - Removal of signs once a business ends operation.
 - Review legal aspects of grandfather clauses, if they are any.
- ✓ **DISCUSSION-** Public members and board members discussed problems with existing signs that have received approvals from the City. The Legal Department spoke about legal non-conforming signs and will analyze this specific topic.

General Discussion

- ✓ **DISCUSSION-** Architect Miller proposed the creation of a task force to work with all discussed items. He asked general public present for volunteers.

Signage Corridors Draft Overlay District



Proposed signage corridors typically follow zoning district boundaries for properties within Historic/ Mixed use/ Commercial zoning districts except where:

1. Commercial non-conforming uses exist
2. Duval Street corridor only
Includes properties facing directly onto Duval Street

