

So many opinions about S. Tahoe signs requires 2nd meeting

By Jessie Marchesseau

The room was far from empty at the South Lake Tahoe City Council sign workshop Tuesday. As planned, the meeting was for discussion and public input only, and no action was taken.

More than a half dozen residents and business owners took their turn at the podium to express concerns over the city's current sign ordinance.

"It took a problem, a bad problem, and sort of made it worse," said Paul Gonzales of the Tahoe Chalet Inn.

Like most of the other business owners and managers in attendance, Gonzales would like to see the ordinance changed. However, exactly what should be changed was a little harder for everyone to put a finger on.



Blue Angel Cafe's sign is an example of one that conforms to the ordinance.

Photo/LTN

Director of Development Services, Hilary Hodges, presented a short history of the sign ordinance that went into effect in 1989. The floor was then opened to public comment. The council members listened thoughtfully to what the speakers had to say and visited many of their concerns during the council's discussion.

A handful of topics came up multiple times throughout the meeting. Financial incentives were perhaps the most visited topic of the evening. A new sign can cost business and property owners thousands of dollars. Residents and council members seemed to concur some sort of financial incentive needed to be offered to help businesses bring signs into compliance.

The other hot topics were the use of banners and sandwich signs, and once again allowing reader or message board type signs. While all of the council members touched on these topics, they were not fully in agreement.

One thing everyone agreed on, however: there is no consistent enforcement of the ordinance.

Among the council, there seemed to be a division of the sexes with Claire Fortier and Angela Swanson pushing for a quicker decision, fewer changes to the current ordinance and more stringent enforcement.

Tom Davis and Bruce Grego, on the other hand, approached the topic with less fervor than their counterparts. Both were in favor of liberalizing the current sign standards. Grego's opinion of the current ordinance is that it makes everyone's sign look the same. Davis advocates allowing more variety of signage and a grace period of another two to three years before enforcement begins.

Regardless of their differing opinions, council members acknowledged the urgency of the issue due to the current improvements being done to Highway 50. The work will require

several businesses to move their signs, raising the questions: Should the city let them just move their old non-compliant sign, or require them to replace it with one that complies with the city ordinance? And should that ordinance be changed?

Even though the council was only supposed to meet once during the month of July, they added another sign ordinance workshop to the calendar, stating that this topic was too important to push back until August.

Over the next few weeks, South Lake Tahoe staff will be collecting input from local sign makers, business owners and the chamber of commerce to come up with a set of proposed changes to be discussed at next month's workshop.

The next sign ordinance workshop is scheduled for July 26.