

S. Tahoe council still unable to agree on sign regulation

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe Councilman Tom Davis said, “I don’t want to be the taste police” when it comes to what kind of decorative lights people use on their businesses.



The Swiss Chalet sign could be grandfathered in.

The irony is the overall discussion was about signs – which is subjective and a matter of taste.

With more discussion Tuesday about the decades-old sign problem in the city, the council still is working through what rules it wants to dictate private businesses follow – all in the name of taste.

This type of regulation is something most cities have. The local problem is what is on the books is not enforced because this and previous councils have not agreed with it nor has there been the manpower to enforce the rules.

Too many changes were proposed Sept. 13 for a vote to be taken on the first reading of the ordinance. The soonest the next

revision will come back to the council is Oct. 4.

The five councilmembers took votes on individual sections of the ordinance, but most of those were split – meaning the issue is as divisive as it ever has been.

How any ordinance that might get approved will be enforced was the subject of much discussion.

Owners of non-conforming signs will be sent a letter giving them 10 days to bring it up to code. If they don't, then they'll be fined each day they are out of compliance.

The five could not agree whether the Planning Commission should be the last stop for some appeals or if the council should be the body making that decision.

Nor could they all decide on when sandwich boards should be used. Though the majority sided with Development Services Director Hilary Hodges' proposal to allow them only during holiday periods and city sanctioned community events.

What's being called "locally unique signs" will be allowed to stay if the owners apply for that designation. Sno-Flake, Swiss Chalet and Stardust were the examples used.

No longer will private businesses be able to hire someone to hold a sign pointing to their business. But people having car washes and the like will be able to lure people to their fund-raising event in this manner.

Businesses wanting to string up energy efficient blue or white lights year-round can do so. No permit needed to do so for 90 days between Nov. 1 and March 1, though a design review is needed and a building permit may be required to keep them up longer. This is primarily to look at fire safety issues.

While progress was made on the sign issue, until a final vote is taken, each council member can change their mind. After all, that is what happened with the medical marijuana vote.

In other action:

- The council approved the ordinance affecting how medical marijuana dispensaries are regulated. Councilman Bruce Grego was the lone vote against the law. At the first reading Councilwoman Angela Swanson had voted no. Tuesday she voted yes.