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# TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE

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**January 11, 2024**

**Design Review Committee**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Approved April 11, 2024 as Amended**

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, An Act Relative to Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency, signed into law on March 29, 2023, this meeting was conducted via remote participation. No in-person attendance by members of the public was permitted.

This meeting can be viewed at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s21PCLZNtmU&list=PL2mWMhvXDP2jEcEYII3OQcq1H4fKZ1CI8&index=35>.

**Members Present:** Amy Poretsky, Chair; Lisa Maselli.

**Others Present:** Laurie Connors, Planning Director; Robert Frederico, Building Inspector and Zoning Enforcement Officer

The meeting was called to order at 8:30am.

## **Review of Minutes**

The minutes for September 14, 2023, were reviewed, as amended. Ms. Maselli made a motion to accept the minutes of September 14, 2023, as amended; seconded by Ms. Poretsky. Roll call vote: Maselli – aye; Poretsky – aye; motion approved.

The minutes for September 22, 2023, were reviewed, as amended. Ms. Maselli made a motion to accept the minutes of September 22, 2023, as amended; seconded by Ms. Poretsky. Roll call vote: Maselli – aye; Poretsky – aye; motion approved.

The remainder of the minutes review were tabled until the next meeting.

## **Discussion of Proposed Sign Bylaw Changes and Modifications to Design Review**

The meeting began with a discussion about adding design review to the sign permit process for the Downtown only, as part of the Downtown Revitalization:

### **C. Sign permits. Non-Conformity and Compliance.**

(2) Design review by the Design Review Committee is required for any wall, projecting, or freestanding sign in the Downtown Business District. The Design Review Committee may prepare, and the Planning Board may adopt, guidelines relating to appropriate sign design for the Downtown Business District. The Design Review Committee shall review the sign permit application for compliance with those Guidelines and send its written review letter with

recommendations regarding sign design to the Building Inspector within twenty (20) days of receipt of the sign permit application. Failure of the Design Review Committee to act within twenty (20) days of receipt of the application shall be deemed a lack of opposition thereto. The deadline may be extended by mutual agreement of the Design Review Committee and the applicant.

Mr. Frederico commented on the twenty (20) day time limit. There needs to be a point of reference for the timeline to begin. This was discussed with the Committee. The Committee agreed that the wording should be changed to "Failure of the Design Review Committee to act within twenty (20) days of receipt of the application shall be deemed a lack of opposition thereto." Ms. Connors explained there may be a need to have an extra meeting to review applications depending upon the time of receipt. For example: If the DRC receives a sign permit application a day after a regularly scheduled meeting, the committee would have to reconvene before the next regularly scheduled meeting to review, in order to meet the twenty (20) day requirement.

Ms. Poretsky said that the sign bylaws would be discussed at the next Planning Board meeting and if Mr. Frederico had any other concerns or change requests it could be addressed there.

D. Basic Requirements (15) Awning signs are allowed for first floor businesses only and shall not extend above or beyond any top or side edge of the façade, cornice, moldings or trim of the building to which the awning is attached. Signs are allowed on the apron of the awning only.

Mr. Frederico questioned the wording "Awnings are allowed for first floor businesses only" (as sign requirement). He stated that as this is written, awnings wouldn't be allowed on the second floor. It was agreed to have it remain as written with additional wording regarding awnings added to the Design Review guidelines. Ms. Maselli agreed with Ms. Connors that awnings on second floors looks odd. Mr. Frederico wanted a separate regulation on awnings on their own not connected to signage. Ms. Connors stated that she put together a whole section in the design guidelines with a whole section of awnings. Ms. Poretsky stated that a separate bylaw should be written. Ms. Connors further stated that residential uses on second floors are allowed to put awnings up. Ms. Maselli asked if the residential use would be using awnings as shade since it will change the face of the downtown look. "The reason to change Route 20 to commercial was to accommodate businesses. Now we are changing that? Would that not conflict with the visual of the mixed use business facade?"

D.(17) Window signs are allowed in business districts only. All combined window signage shall be limited to 10% of the total glass area on any one façade/side of a building.

Ms. Poretsky asked to confirm what the window sign coverage was, 10% or 20% percent for the appropriate size for window signs. Ms. Connors suggested that size of the sign should be based on the cumulative area of the total glass for all the windows on the facade\_and phone numbers and email addresses should not be included. The Committee agreed that each business sign should be 10% of their cumulative window space. "Would it be per building or per tenant?" Ms. Maselli said per tenant. When reviewing projecting signs, Ms. Connors indicated that in the Downtown Business District box signs are not allowed.

Section G. Type, size and number of signs in each district were discussed and it was decided that a percentage of the wall façade along with a maximum size was appropriate. Northborough Crossing was discussed as an area where bigger signs were needed but there also may be smaller store where 250 sq ft would be too big so a percentage of the façade would be the alternative. Ms. Poretsky asked about the

maximum number of signs. Ms. Connors suggested wording for this paragraph as follows: “To minimize clutter, each store should be limited to 2 sign types only, i.e., one wall sign and one projecting sign or one freestanding sign and one wall sign, etc. The types of signs to which this wording should apply was discussed. Ms. Connors suggested that this language could be moved into the Bylaws.

Ms. Poretsky stated that we previously discussed that letters were going to go out to the businesses after this is done, so the businesses understand the sign bylaws. So many windows are currently covered with signs and in the past it was not allowed. In response to Mr. Frederico’s comment that they will be grandfathered, Ms. Poretsky responded that “ All of those window signs are not allowed in our bylaws now. They are all not compliant and should not have anything on the windows now. If they have to follow the old bylaw, they will have to remove the signs on the windows.”

Sandwich Board signs: Ms. Maselli asked about sandwich signs blocking sidewalks. Ms. Maselli asked if the area for pedestrian usage under the ADA is compliant. Ms. Connors said that they have to keep a minimum of three (3) feet of clearance. Ms. Maselli asked: “How do we make sure that wheelchairs are not blocked on the sidewalks? Should we write that in?” Ms. Connors said these sandwich boards are going to be brought out and in every day.” Whether it is a walker or wheelchair, Mr. Frederico stressed that the ADA/AAB guidelines need to be followed. The text says sandwich boards: “Provided that it does not interrupt the safe flow of pedestrian, cyclists, automotive traffic or safe flow of ADA/AAB traffic.” It was agreed that sandwich boards, directory signs and window signs should not be included in the two sign maximum and every business could have one of each of these.

Design guidelines would be discussed at the next meeting.

Ms. Poretsky made a motion to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Ms. Maselli. Roll call vote: Maselli – aye; Poretsky – aye; motion approved. The meeting was adjourned at 9:25 am.

Respectfully Submitted by  
Brenda M. DiCelie, Board Secretary