

BLUE ASH PLANNING COMMISSION

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**ITEM 1. - MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

Chairman Schafer called the regular meeting of the Blue Ash Planning Commission to order at 7:01 p.m. on Wednesday, July 9, 2008.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Raymond Schafer, Tom Adamec, Beverley Gill, John Moores and James Sumner

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager David Waltz, Assistant to City Manager Kelly Osler, Assistant Community Development Director Dan Johnson, Administrative Clerk Traci Smith, Council Member Lee Czerwonka, Council Member Henry Stacey and interested citizens

**ITEM 2. - OPENING CEREMONY**

Pledge of Allegiance

**ITEM 3. - APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

Commission Members waived the reading of the minutes.

DECISION: Bev Gill moved, Tom Adamec seconded, to approve the regular meeting minutes of June 5, 2008 as submitted. A voice vote was taken. All members present voted aye. Motion carried.

**ITEM 4 – 4230 Hunt Road – Crossgate Lanes**

Consideration of a minor amendment to an approved Planned Development at the Crossgate Lanes bowling alley to allow installation of a barrier around each of the two front entry doors and to allow use of tables and chairs inside of the enclosed area

PRESENT: Ronald C. Bedinghaus, Applicant  
Larry Norris, Architect

Ron Bedinghaus, President of Crossgate Lanes, Inc., said the Ohio smoking ban has been an inconvenience and stress on the business. His plan is an attempt to accommodate smokers and non-smokers by creating a comfortable place to walk outside to use cell phones, have a smoking that complies with the Ohio law, and not be in violation of any liquor laws. Mr. Bedinghaus said the Blue Ash Fire Department visited the property to review the ingress/egress and approved the plan. The Department of Liquor Control has also reviewed the plans submitted and said they are acceptable. The Hamilton County Board of Health said the area meets the smoking area requirements.

John Moores asked if any parking places would be removed. Mr. Bedinghaus said no parking places would be removed since this area would be on the concrete apron.

Larry Norris said the depth of the area is approximately 8-feet and the width of each area would be approximately 20-feet. Mr. Norris said there will be a fence wall to prevent patrons from walking out onto the sidewalk. They are hoping that the addition of tables and chairs will encourage patrons to stay in the enclosure. Mr. Norris said

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there will be trash containers at each door and pots to dispose of cigarettes. Mr. Bedinghaus added they also have porters on staff to keep area clean and that there would not be food or beverage service available outside. Mr. Bedinghaus added that the first table closest to the doors would be a non-smoking table.

Tom Adamec suggested the 20-foot fence have a planter in the center to break up the fence line. Mr. Bedinghaus said the concept was to have a planter serve as the center post.

John Moores said he was a little uncomfortable with taking drinks outside. Mr. Bedinghaus said they do not expect people to be there for more than about 7 minutes since they would need to go back inside to bowl. They will provide proper signage for the area to be in compliance.

Chairman Schafer opened the discussion to the public. Dan Donnellon said he is a resident and a bowler who feels the smoking ban has been good for the sport. He is a non-smoker but thinks this is a great idea for the smokers to have a more convenient place to smoke.

Ray Schafer said as long as the facility is done well, attractively maintained and keeps within the law with smoking and liquor; it seems to him that they have everything covered.

DECISION: Bev Gill moved, John Moores seconded, to approve the application as submitted, except that if the proposed changes have not occurred within 12 months of approval, the applicant may be required to return for further review and approval. A roll call vote was taken. Four members present voted aye, Jim Sumner abstained since he arrived late and was absent during most of the presentation. Motion carried.

**ITEM 5– 4870 Hunt Road – Charleston at Blue Ash**

Consideration of an electronic message sign facing Ronald Reagan Cross County Highway

PRESENT: Monte Williams, Applicant

Monte Williams of Kap Signs in Dayton said he is representing the owner who is planning to replace the existing sign on westbound Ronald Reagan Cross County Highway with an electronic message sign to advertise specials and provide directions to the development.

Jim Sumner asked about the variance being requested for the sign to change every 2-10 seconds instead of once an hour. Mr. Williams said that for this type of sign to only changing once an hour is a very long time. He said most communities they deal with have hold times that are in the range they have requested, the longest being 10 minutes. Most highway signs change every 5-6 seconds.

Dan Johnson noted that Planning Commission is reviewing the permissibility of electronic message sign and the hold time issues are addressed at the Board of Zoning Appeals. Jim Sumner and Ray Schafer both said that if they were to approve the sign, it

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would be based on our code. Dan Johnson said that the sign could be approved with the condition that the hold time provision stay in tact.

Jim Sumner asked if the brightness of this sign would carry to the residences across the highway and asked what color the letters would be. Mr. Williams said the owners have chosen red for the color and the brightness is dimmed down during the night. He said the size of the text would most likely be 10" with two lines of text. He said the sign only faces to the east, not directly across the highway, and is intended for only the traffic to be able to view. Dan Johnson said he does not feel it would be visible to the Wynnecrest Drive residents due to the angle of the face.

John Moores asked what they were hoping to accomplish with this sign as he does not feel it would make much impact. Mr. Williams said the owner feels the property is difficult to locate and wants to provide information to potential renters with directions and current specials. He said that if the sign changed every 2-5 seconds, drivers would get to see 4 or 5 panels as they drive by.

Bev Gill asked about the content of the sign and if it was going to be limited to the apartment complex only. He was concerned that would become an income generator for the complex. Dan Johnson said Blue Ash does not allow for off-premise advertising; therefore, the content would be limited to the apartment complex.

Ray Schafer said he thought of precedence and envisioning what Blue Ash wanted to see with electronic signs, which was not to change more than once per hour. He feels it would be reasonable to have approval for the sign but that it should be contingent on remaining within the one hour indicated in the code.

Jim Sumner asked if the aesthetics of the sign could be considered. Dan Johnson confirmed. Other elements of zoning are based upon the impact to other properties, not the property itself that it being regulated. He said that where there is not always an easy way to describe elements such as brightness and hold-time, it is sometimes just a judgment call. If it turns out to be a problem after it is installed, the City cannot make the property owner take it down. There is not an easy way to describe brightness, so whether or not it will detract from adjoining properties or nearby properties is a judgment call as to: 1.) if it is an esthetic problem, 2.) if it likely to be a safety problem, or 3.) if they feel this could detract from the property value on a resident, even if it is the first house on Wynnecrest, that is all it would take to deny and is all completely valid under our Code.

Jim Sumner said he is uncomfortable with the aesthetics and not sure he wants to see a proliferation of these types of signs. He feels it will detract from that corridor as well as set precedence. Mr. Williams said they do offer an amber color, which is not as bright as the red. Ray Schafer said if a sign will have a residential impact, then his thought is that a sign should not go there. He would want to be sure that it would not devalue any other property. He said if it were put at the right angle to truly face the traffic, then it could be oriented in such a way to not negatively affect residents. Mr. Schafer was comfortable with letting City staff work with applicant to make sure it would not be visible to residents on Wynnecrest.

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John Moores does not feel it needs to be illuminated and thinks the owner could accomplish what they want to do with a stationary sign. Mr. Williams said there are other ways to have changeable signs; however, that would require someone to physically change them which is difficult in this location.

Ray Schafer asked if there was a benchmark for brightness for these types of signs. David Waltz said when electronic signs were initially reviewed the focus was more on it being a digital alternative to a printed sign and the frequency of change more so than the brightness. Ray Schafer mentioned they were also interested in the orientation at CMC office park since the adjacent property was undeveloped and wanted to be sure it was not shining in that area. Jim agreed that the flashing lights were a big concern for them at that time.

Bev Gill asked if the background of the sign would be black. Mr. Williams said the entire area of the sign would be populated with LED's. In theory, every LED could be illuminated, but then there would not be a message on the sign. Usually, not more than 50% are lit and there are only two colors.

David Waltz said he cannot give an opinion on being visible from Wynnecrest but said he does not feel that the lights across the highway should not be a concern in their decision. He said since these lights do not protrude, they would not be as bright at a street light from the highway. He said the lights from traffic would probably be more visible to the Wynnecrest residents than the lights from this sign and the greater issues would be frequency of change and image control.

Ray Schafer addressed Jim Sumner's comment regarding this location being a key entryway into the City. He said he does not see the ability to put many signs right on the roadway so for him it is not an issue.

DECISION: Tom Adamec moved, Jim Sumner seconded, to approve the LED message sign according to submission at 4870 Hunt Road, Charleston at Blue Ash, subject to meeting the Code requirement that the message not change more than once per hour. A roll call vote was taken. Four members present voted aye, John Moores voted nay. Motion carried.

#### **ITEM 6- MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS**

David Waltz said last month he mentioned we were in the process of interviewing housing consultants to do a housing analysis. At the next Council meeting, Council is scheduled to approve a contract. Future updates will be provided as to what that process is going to entail and what the consultant is going to undertake.

Mr. Waltz said he brought boards of the downtown project if anyone was interested in looking at them after the meeting and he could address any questions at that time. He welcomed Tom Adamec to the board and reminded members that if they do not have a copy of the Streetscape Plan or the Downtown Redevelopment Concept Plan, that it is available on the website or a CD could be burned. Also, Dan Johnson did have a few black & white copies available to distribute at the meeting.

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**ITEM 7 – ADJOURNMENT**

DECISION: There being no further business to be discussed, Jim Sumner moved, Bev Gill seconded, to adjourn the meeting. A voice vote was taken. All members present voted aye. Motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

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Raymond Schafer, Chairman

MINUTES RECORDED BY:

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Traci Smith, Administrative Clerk