Policy Changes Requested to Draft Sign Ordinance

Below is a description of changes that were requested by staff, by the P&Z during the July 28th workshop, and citizens during the August 3rd P&Z public hearing. This memo addresses each request with a response and a staff recommendation.

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Section 22-313 Street Block-Face.
Request by Staff: Add a definition for block face to this section.
Response: Since “street block-face” is proposed as a constraint for the Marquee sign, staff recommends adding a definition to clearly define this measurement.
Recommendation: Add the following definition for block face “Means one side of a street between two consecutive intersections.”

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Section 22-313 Pole Sign.
Request by Staff: Remove language from definition requiring pole signs to be no more than 4’ above the ground.
Response: Pole sign height regulations are covered in section 22-325(f) Clearance
Recommendation: Remove this language from the definition

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Section 22-313 Yard Sign.
Request by Staff: Consider removing language “permanent suspended sign mounted on a porch parallel to the building’s façade”.
Response: This sign type is covered by another proposed definition Suspended Sign
Recommendation: Remove this language from the definition

Section 22-314(c) Applications.
Request by Staff: Consider replacing his section with current application requirements
Response: As written, the application process creates an overly burdensome requirement for sign applicants and includes information that is unnecessary for determining sign permit approval.
Recommendation: Modify this section as necessary

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Section 22-314(e) Multi-tenant signs.
Request by P&Z: Consider adding a reference to section 22-330(c)
Response: This reference would point readers to the requirement for tenants to remove or neutralize signs within 30 days of discontinuance of use.
Recommendation: Add the reference to this section

Section 22-314(f) Insurance for certain signs.
Request by P&Z: Consider adding a reference to section 22-315
Response: This reference would point readers to the signs exempt from permit requirements.
Recommendation: Add the reference to this section

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Section 22-315(4) Standard Informational Signs.
Request by P&Z: Consider adding a reference to section 22-327(b)
Response: This reference would point readers to the requirements regarding Standard Informational Signs
Recommendation: Add the reference to this section

Section 22-315(6)
Request by P&Z: Consider allowing signs on 30% of total window glazing
Response: This would allow applicants to place signage over 30% of their total glazed window area, instead of limiting them to 30% per panel. Any alteration to the language should consider visibility inside the store from a safety perspective.
Recommendation: Consider modifying this section to allow for “not obscuring more than 30% of the total window glazing per building façade”

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Section 22-316(2),(3),(4) Animated Signs, New Technology Signs; Electronic Message Boards
Request by P&Z: Review with sign manufacturer to consider allowing these sign types within the City
Response: While it is not uncommon for sign manufacturers and trade groups representing the sign industry (for example, the ISA) to request larger, brighter, and more technologically advanced signs, staff believes that these signs should not be allowed “by right” within the City of Thomasville. Studies regarding the safety implications of these signs are inconclusive, with a 2005 Study by the Texas Transportation Institute concluding that flashing or changing sign messages are more distracting than static images. However, a more recent study conducted in 2013 by the FHWA concludes that static digital billboards does not present a safety hazard to motorists. With safety and community character as primary concerns for sign regulation, staff believes that any new, animated, or electronic signage should have to go through
additional review of the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council via a text amendment, rather than be allowed “by right”.

Recommendation: Leave the draft language as presented

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Section 22-319(a) Brightness Limits.

Request by Staff & Public Input: Consider further review of brightness limits

Response: Under further review, staff found that brightness is calculated using two different measurements in the draft code; footcandles and nits. Reviewing guidelines in the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IESNA), staff found recommendations for lighting in both well lit (urban) areas and low light (rural) areas. Based on this information, staff recommends modifying this section to comply with the guidelines of the ISENA.

Recommendation: Modify this section to read “Brightness of an illuminated sign shall not exceed 125 nits on Hwy 19 and 250 nits elsewhere within the city at any one point on the sign face”.

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Section 22-324(d)(1) Illumination limits in Urban Center Area.

Request by Public Input: Consider not allowing marquee signs to be internally lit in the Urban Center Area

Response: Thorough investigation of the marquee sign type has shown that in almost all circumstances, the historic marquee sign was lit by some sort of internal illumination. This holds true for Thomasville, with the Mode Theater (currently SoHo), Ritz Theater (demolished), Rose Theater (demolished), Hollywood Jewelers (currently Element Style Bar), among others as having internally lit signs built in the early 1900’s that characterized Thomasville’s historic downtown up through the middle of the century, when many of these buildings and signs were either removed or demolished. If this sign type is to be allowed again within the Urban Center Area, staff recommends that this sign be illuminated in keeping with the historic character of the sign type. To address the concern of multiple lighted signs within the urban center area, see Section 22-326(d) for an additional recommendation that would only allow one marquee sign per block face.

Recommendation: Leave the draft language as presented.

Section 22-325(c) Limitations on type.

Request by Staff & Public Input: Consider striking the language that limits freestanding signs in the UCA to monument signs

Response: After further review, staff believes that this limitation would cause an unnecessary restriction on signs constructed within the UCA. Section 22-324(b) already prohibits pole signs, banners,
and feather flags within the UCA; monument signs, landscape wall signs, and yard signs are all acceptable and appropriate in this area.

**Recommendation:** Remove the language from the draft document.

Section 22-325(d) **Maximum size of sign area for freestanding signs.**

**Request by Staff & Public Input:** Consider modifying the maximum allowable sign area in certain districts.

**Response:** Through extensive research and measuring, staff believes that the maximum allowable area for the UCA and other districts within city (excluding Highway 19) are appropriate and justifiable. In these areas, the total allowable sign area in the proposed document for multi-tenant signs is increased, while the single-tenant sign sizes are consistent with the existing signs. Along Highway 19, staff recommends increasing the total allowable sign area to 150 square feet. Along with standards for clearance **Section 22-325(f)** staff believes this will create a more uniform sign size that allows maximum visibility of tenants.

**Recommendation:** Increase **Maximum size of sign area** to 150’ along Hwy 19 for both single-tenant and multi-tenant signs.

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Section 22-325(f) **Clearance from ground to base of sign.**

**Request by Public Input:** Consider modifying language regarding ground clearance for pole signs

**Response:** With the recommended modification to the **Section 22-325(i) Yard Signs**, staff believes that the pole sign language can be modified to address both safety and aesthetic concerns.

**Recommendation:** Modify language regarding pole signs as follows “Hwy 19: 5’ min – 10’ max; Elsewhere in districts: 3’ min – 7’ max.

Section 22-325(1) **Yard Signs.**

**Request by Public Input:** Consider modifying language regarding size of yard signs

**Response:** With the recommended modification to the **Section 22-325(f)**, staff believes that the yard sign language can be modified to address small freestanding signs that would be appropriate both throughout the city and in the UCA. These would be similar in size and scale to the current “City of Thomasville” department signs.

**Recommendation:** Modify language regarding yard signs as follows “14 sq. ft max.; Width: 54” max; Height: 36” max; Overall height of sign structure: 6’ max. Remove language referring to porch mount, this is covered by suspended sign Section 22-326(f).
Section 22-325(j)(2)(d) **Character Height.**

**Request by Public Input:** Do not regulate character height by speed limit; difficult to enforce

**Response:** Staff agrees that character height may be difficult to enforce long-term; there is justification for dictating character height on changeable copy based on vehicular speed.

**Recommendation:** Leave the draft language as presented.

Section 22-325(j)(2)(e) **Changeable copy message duration**

**Request by Public Input:** reduce message duration from 180 minutes to 6-10 seconds.

**Response:** Research into message duration finds that an 8 second display is the minimum message duration that is widely accepted by the sign industry (ISA); however, a 2006 study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that physical conditions of the roadway as well as the posted speed limit can widely impact the number of messages a driver may see on any given changeable copy sign. Instead of setting arbitrary numbers, staff has conducted a thorough review of the street conditions and speeds on corridors in Thomasville to arrive at a well calibrated standard. Most commercial streets in Thomasville have speeds averaging 35 MPH; with an average visibility (due to level topography and linear streets) of ¼ mile. Based on this information, a message duration of 25 seconds would allow for a driver traveling at 35 MPH to see only one potential sign change. On US 19 where both the speed of traffic and visibility of signs is increased, the 25 second display time has a similar viewing period.

**Recommendation:** Modify language to allow for a 25 second message duration for electronic changeable copy.

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Section 22-326(d) **Marquee Signs.**

**Request by Public Input:** Concern that too many marquee signs can become detrimental to the Historic Downtown.

**Response:** Staff understands this concern, especially with marquee signs allowed to be lighted within the Urban Center Area. Staff recommends modifying the language of this section to limit the total number of marquee signs per block within the UCA.

**Recommendation:** Modify this section to read “Only one marquee sign shall be allowed per street block-face within the Urban Center Area”.

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Section 22-327(a) **Temporary Signs.**

**Request by Public Input:** Allow feather flags to be permitted more often than currently proposed

**Response:** As long as feather flags are permitted according to section 22-327(d)(5), staff does not see an issue allowing these to be permitted as often as one week per month.
Recommendation: Modify this text to allow for feather flags to be utilized up to 7 consecutive days per month. Language regarding permitting of banners shall stay the same.

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Section 22-327(b)(6) Standard Informational Signs (1-2 family residential).
Request by Staff: Modify language to allow for composite materials to be used for mailbox post signs.
Response: See recommendation
Recommendation: remove text requiring mailbox post to be composed of wood, and add “no more than” 4” x 4” not to exceed overall height of 5’.

Section 22-327(b)(7) Standard Informational Signs (all other properties).
Request by Staff: Modify language to allow for composite materials to be used for mailbox post signs.
Response: See recommendation
Recommendation: remove text requiring mailbox post to be composed of wood, and add “no more than” 4” x 4” not to exceed overall height of 5’.

Section 22-327(c)(1) Banners.
Request by Public Input: Remove language not allowing banners and feather flags to be displayed at the same time, and the cumulative time period associated with both.
Response: Staff agrees with this recommendation so long as banners are permitted through the procedures outlined in subsection (5) below.
Recommendation: Modify this section as necessary.

Section 22-327(c)(5) Banners, Permit fee.
Request by Public Input: Do not charge a permit fee for banners.
Response: Due to the additional staff time required to monitor banner and feather flag permits, staff requests to leave the permit fee as part of the application process for banners and feather flags.
Recommendation: Leave the draft language as presented.

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Section 22-327(d)(2) Feather Flags.
Request by Staff: Allow all businesses to utilize 3 feather flags regardless of street frontage.
Response: Staff sees validity in monitoring feather flags by linear street frontage; this would keep from potentially overcrowding a street frontage with multiple flags. However, staff sees benefit in decreasing the existing distance requirement from 40’ to 30’. This would allow all
commercial entities 90’ or wider to utilize up to 3 feather flags. These flags would not be required to be spaced 30’ apart.

**Recommendation:** Modify the text to allow display of 1 feather flag for each 30 feet of linear street frontage.

Section 22-327(d)(2) **Feather Flags.**

**Request by Public Input:** Remove language not allowing banners and feather flags to be displayed at the same time, and the cumulative time period associated with both.

**Response:** Staff agrees with this recommendation so long as feather flags are permitted through the procedures outlined in subsection (5) below.

**Recommendation:** Modify this section as necessary.

Section 22-327(d)(5) **Feather flags, Permit fee.**

**Request by Public Input:** Do not charge a permit fee for feather flags.

**Response:** Due to the additional staff time required to monitor banner and feather flag permits, staff requests to leave the permit fee as part of the application process for banners and feather flags.

**Recommendation:** Leave the draft language as presented.

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Section 22-327(e) **Sidewalk Signs.**

**Request by P&Z:** Remove language prohibiting Pedestal Signs on Broad Street

**Response:** Staff has spoken with the Main Street Department, and the intent for this language to be included in the original draft is not clear. Staff, along with Main Street support, recommends removing this language from the document.

**Recommendation:** Remove language prohibiting Pedestal Signs on Broad Street from the document.