



## DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

*Planning Division*

### **m e m o r a n d u m**

**TO:** Urbana Plan Commission

**FROM:** Matt Wempe, Planner II

**DATE:** June 2, 2006

**SUBJECT:** Plan Case 1997-T-06: Text Amendment to Table IX-6 of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance

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### **Introduction**

The Zoning Administrator is requesting an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to classify gas station canopy signs as canopy signs subject to the standards in Table IX-6. The proposed amendment is correcting a recent change to the Zoning Ordinance that has since proven to be unintentionally biased against gas station canopies by allowing a lesser amount of signage than types of canopies. This issue was recently raised in a major variance request for the gas station canopy at the new Speedway on Lincoln Avenue. The amendment is part of a larger effort to prepare the Zoning Ordinance for more comprehensive revisions as directed by City Council.

### **Background**

Currently, gas station canopy signs are considered wall signs as a result of the recent Omnibus text amendment. This change was proposed to formalize a Zoning Administrator interpretation made in 1988 that clarified two aspects related to gas station canopies; the display surface and the type of sign (see Exhibit A). The interpretation stipulated that the display surface of a canopy includes the individual surfaces of a canopy, but not the support beams. Additionally, although the zoning ordinance did not then define how to classify a gas station canopy, the interpretation classified such signs as wall signs, subject to the standards in Table IX-2. As part of the recent Omnibus text amendment, the interpretation was incorporated in an effort to formalize several long-standing interpretations. However, the need for this aspect of the amendment has been remedied by the recent changes to Table IX-6 that permit a larger sign area for canopy signs.

Since the 1988 interpretation was made, the nature of gas station canopies has changed. Today, many canopies are thinner, and as such have less display area as defined by the Zoning

Ordinance. Standards for wall signs are based on a percentage of the total wall area, or in the case of gas station canopies, the canopy display area (see Exhibit B). The wall sign standards ensure that there is a maximum amount of signage that a business can have, but the standards can result in smaller, less visible signage for small walls. For example, a 120 square foot gas station canopy face in the B-3, General Business District can only have a sign of up to 12 square feet. As illustrated in Exhibit C, this amount of signage can result in poor visibility. Under the same circumstances, if the canopy sign standards were applied, the same gas station could install a sign up to 25 square feet (a straight standard instead of a percentage of display area). While there are other situations where the wall size may undermine the visibility of a sign, gas station canopies are by far the most recurring example of such a problem.

The intent of the proposed amendment is not to allow excessive amounts of signage on a property. Instead, it is to permit adequately visible signage that, if not for recent trends in canopy construction, would otherwise meet the standards in the Zoning Ordinance. Gas station canopies are a form of a canopy, and it would be unfair to discriminate such signs as opposed to other types of canopies

## **Proposed Amendment**

The proposed language is indicated by strikeouts in Exhibit C.

## **Summary of Staff Findings**

1. The proposed amendment will assist the daily administration and enforcement of the Zoning Ordinance by reducing inconsistencies and updating regulations to meet current professional practices.
2. The proposed amendment is consistent with the goals and objectives of the 2005 Urbana Comprehensive Plan regarding updating various sections of the Zoning Ordinance.
3. The proposed amendment will recognize the trend for small gas station canopies while allowing visible sign sizes consistent with what has historically been allowed.
4. The proposed amendment will recognize that gas station canopies are a form of canopies, and will apply the same sign standards as other types of canopies.

## **Options**

The Plan Commission has the following options for recommendation to the Urbana City Council. In Plan Case 1997-T-06, the Plan Commission may:

- a. forward this case to City Council with a recommendation for approval of the proposed text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance, as presented herein;

- b. forward this case to City Council with a recommendation for approval of the proposed text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance, as modified by specific suggested changes; or
- c. forward this case to City Council with a recommendation for denial of the proposed text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance.

### **Staff Recommendation**

Based on the evidence presented in the discussion above, and without the benefit of considering additional evidence that may be presented at the public hearing, staff recommends that the Commission recommend **APPROVAL** of the proposed text amendment, as presented herein.

Prepared by:

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Matt Wempe, Planner II

Attachments:     Exhibit A: Original Zoning Interpretation  
                      Exhibit B: Proposed Changes to Table IX-2. Standards for Wall Signs

**TABLE IX-6. STANDARDS FOR SIGNS ATTACHED TO CANOPIES AND ENTRANCE STRUCTURES<sup>1</sup>**

Districts Permitted	Maximum Number Permitted	Maximum Area of Sign	Height of Sign
<p>R-6B Restricted Business</p> <p>B-1 Neighborhood Business</p> <p>B-2 Neighborhood Business Arterial</p> <p>B-3U General Business University</p> <p>MOR Mixed Office Residential</p>	<p>One per business frontage up to 100 feet. One additional sign for each 100 feet thereafter.</p>	<p>15 square feet</p>	<p>9 foot minimum clearance to ground</p>
<p>B-3 General Business</p> <p>B-4 Central Business</p> <p>B-4E Central Business Expansion</p>		<p>25 square feet</p>	
<p>IN Industrial</p>		<p>25 square feet</p>	

<sup>1</sup>~~These standards do not apply to gas station canopies. See Table IX-2 for wall sign standards and Section IX-3.E for regulations related to gas station canopies.~~