

## Indiana Borough council to vote on new sign rules



Indiana Borough to vote on electronic sign ordinance  
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Indiana Borough's new sign ordinance - regulating, among other things, where electronic signs may and may not be displayed - is headed toward a September public hearing and council vote.

Council Tuesday approved for publication the revised ordinance crafted by the borough's Planning Commission with input from council. The proposed ordinance will be published as a legal advertisement in The Indiana Gazette within the next few days.

The proposed ordinance, if approved, will allow electronic signs and those with video and LED displays only in the borough's Commercial C-2 Zone and small M-1 Manufacturing Zone, but not in the C-1 Commercial Zone along Philadelphia Street between Sixth and Ninth streets.

The proposed ordinance also sets limitations on the size and placement of sandwich board signs on sidewalks in the C-1 and C-2 zones downtown.

In the public comment period of Tuesday's meeting, Doug Varner, the active business partner of Mindsight, delivered a petition with the signatures of 382 people that Varner said are in favor of having electronic signs in Indiana, and three who were opposed to electronic signs.

Varner said surveys and telephone calls to the borough's Code and Zoning Department have also favored the signs.

``It seems that ... there is a decided number of people who would like to see the opportunity for electronic signs," Varner said. ``I heartily encourage you, in the pro-business sense, that this is a valuable tool. ... This is a great way to have this community continue to be vibrant."

Mindsight earlier this year was forced to remove two of its electronic message centers from the building at 700 Philadelphia St. because they displayed off-premise advertising - ads for businesses other than the one where the signs are located - in violation of the sign ordinance.

In other business, council approved advertising a proposed change to the previously-approved non-conforming use - or grandfather approval - for rental properties.

Under the current ordinance, if a landlord has approval for a non-conforming use to allow more tenants in a property than the current law allows, and the number of tenants dips below that number for nine months or more, the property subsequently can only be rented to an individual or to a functional family.

Under the proposed change, if the number of tenants falls below the allowable number of tenants for nine months or more, the new allowable limit is the new number of tenants in the property at the nine-month cutoff.

The proposal is considered a more liberal ordinance that likely will find favor with landlords.

A public hearing will be held at 6 p.m. Sept. 8 to accept comments on both the sign ordinance and the non-conforming use change.

Another public hearing was scheduled for 7 p.m. Aug. 18 to hear comments on a housing project at South Seventh and Washington streets proposed by developer Dave Moore under the provisions of the borough's traditional neighborhood development overlay.

The overlay zone created near the Indiana University of Pennsylvania campus was adopted to encourage the construction of high-density housing units for students living off-campus, while at the same time promoting more pedestrian traffic and less vehicle traffic in the zone.

David Kirk, director of the borough's Code and Zoning Department, said Moore's plan has received tentative approval from the borough planning commission.

There were two new developments in efforts to persuade IUP officials to reopen 11th Street between Oakland Avenue and Grant Street.

Jim Wakefield, of Papermill Avenue, told council he has collected 852 signatures on a petition asking council to formally request university administrators to reopen 11th Street to vehicle traffic. And councilman Richard Thorell made a motion that council ask IUP leaders to reopen the street for safety and convenience reasons.

Wakefield and Thorell will deliver the petition and the formal council resolution to the IUP Council of Trustees, possibly at the trustees' September meeting.

Borough manager Ken Gabler said that following more discussions with university officials, it was decided that it would be best for Maple Street to remain closed where the new IUP dormitories are being built, and to have the Foundation for IUP and the contractor rebuild the damaged street when the construction work is completed.

Council also agreed to withhold as liquidated damages \$6,733 from Hirschmann Construction Services of Hermitage, the contractor for the borough's Elm Street Program. Councilman John Hartman said the borough incurred that amount in expenses for higher inspection and engineering fees because the contractor did not complete work on schedule.

The borough is also withholding a final payment until the contractor returns in the fall to re-seed some areas of the project.

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