

Resident wonders if lit signs pollute city's night sky

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Wednesday, 26 May 2010 21:52 -

Expresses concern about proposed Runza sign.

Concern about light pollution in the city was cast during a public hearing about signage.

During their May 18 meeting, Gothenburg City Council members heard a request by fellow council member and Runza restaurant owner Jeff Whiting to erect a lighted sign by his restaurant.

Signs more than 100 square feet in commercial-zoned areas require a special use permit,

In his application for the permit, Whiting said he wants the 192 square-foot sign to attract business from Interstate 80.

Local resident Lois Stanton, who attended the meeting, said she worried about light pollution and wondered if it was "going to be another thing knocking out the stars"

Stanton said people seem to be afraid of the dark.

"Everything needs to be lit beyond reason," she said, noting that the large sign in front of the Pamida and Orscheln Farm and Home stores is not blinding but still painful. "I just want to register my concern about destroying the night sky."

Council president Jeff Kennedy said he understood Stanton's point of view but noted that the sign was important financially to Whiting so I-80 travelers could see it.

"And star gazing is tough in Gothenburg as it is because of street lights," Kennedy said.

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After asking if the sign could be erected along I-80, Stanton was told it would be difficult because of federal highway regulations and concern about sign pollution.

Planning & zoning commission members had earlier approved the request as well as the addition of a "Truck Parking" sign Whiting wants to erect underneath the larger sign.

City administrator Bruce Clymer said the second sign was within the 100 square-foot parameter.

Mike Bacon, city attorney, said there can be multiple signs on a pole.

Council members approved the special use permit for the large Runza sign. Whiting will have to reapply for a permit to erect the second sign.

After closing the eight-minute public hearing, they voted to grant Whiting's request to erect the larger sign.

On another matter, the council granted Jason Fiese a license to maintain city right of way so he can install a heat pump drain line at 612 Ninth St. to a storm sewer.

Fiese said the line would travel under the sidewalk, which has been torn up, in front of a building owned by Ron Alexander.

Alexander is doing the concrete work, Fiese said, and is okay with the line under his sidewalk.

Fiese paid \$150 for the license to maintain the right of way.

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Clymer reminded him that the line is there at the pleasure of the city.

In other business, the council:

- appointed David Littrell of Lincoln to serve as a building inspector for the Gothenburg State Bank renovation project. Clymer reminded the council that city building code regulations allow owners of large projects, that call for stamped plans and the services of an architect or engineer, to hire a qualified inspector to insure that the project is constructed under city building codes and to provide the city with inspection records. The inspector also signs off on a certificate of occupancy once projects are complete.
- approved two draw downs from state and federal grants to pay West Central Nebraska Development District for the city's owner-occupied project—\$5,301 for management and \$3,034 for administration.
- voted to pay two downtown business owners for improvements to their buildings from a state downtown revitalization grant the city received. Business owners and amounts are Sally Jochum of Gothenburg Realty, \$4,516; and the Home Agency, \$6,450 for facade improvements and \$2,334 in energy efficiency improvements.
- passed a resolution that authorizes the city to participate in the Nebraska Community Improvement Program.
- learned that Dawson Area Development is having another leadership class. For more information, call 308-784-3902.
- extended sympathy to city crew member Ralph Ogier whose stepdaughter was killed in a motorcycle accident.

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