SUBJECT: Sign variance application for 695 Plains Road East

TO: Planning and Development Committee

FROM: Planning and Building Department

Report Number: PB-17-17
Wards Affected: 1
File Numbers: 530-05/13
Date to Committee: January 31, 2017
Date to Council: February 13, 2017

Recommendation:

Approve the application for variances to Sign By-law 34-2007, made by Tyraz Corporation, to permit the installation of a replacement ground sign, which requires the following variances:

1. A total sign area of 12.4 m$^2$ instead of the maximum permitted area of 1.5 m$^2$.
2. A sign height of 5.84 m instead of the maximum permitted height of 2 m.

Subject to the following conditions:

1. The variances apply to the proposed ground sign only and are valid only for the duration of the existing uses on site.
2. The existing ground sign is to be removed in its entirety prior to the installation of the proposed ground sign.

Purpose:

To recommend approval of the variance request to allow the installation of a new ground sign in place of the existing ground sign at 695 Plains Road East.
Background and Discussion:

Property Details

The subject property has the following characteristics:

- Located on the north side of Plains Road East, between King Road and Francis Road (see Appendix A – Location/Zoning Sketch). Surrounding uses consist of:
  - North: Low Density Residential
  - East: Open Space
  - South: High Density Residential
  - West: Commercial
- Currently contains a two-storey building with ground-floor commercial uses and second-storey residential uses, and surface parking at the front of the site. The subject property is approximately 0.28 ha (0.70 ac) in size and has a driveway entrance from Plains Road East.
- Zoned “MXG - Mixed-Use General” under Zoning By-law 2020 (see Appendix A – Location/Zoning Sketch)

Existing Signage

In 2003, a sign variance application was approved to permit the existing ground sign with a setback of 3.5 m. The existing sign is 4.22 m in height and has two sign faces; each with an area of approximately 3.12 m². The existing sign is located in the southwest corner of the property, adjacent to the site entrance.

Discussion

The applicant wishes to install a new ground sign to replace the existing ground sign. The new sign is proposed to be installed in the same location as the existing ground sign, at the southwest corner of the property (see Appendix B – Detail Sketch). The proposed sign would reflect the various tenants within the building.

The subject application was submitted to the City in June of 2013. The original proposal contemplated a sign height of 4.8 m, a sign area of approximately 6.6 m² per sign face, and retained the 3.5 m setback of the existing sign. After a period of inactivity, the applicant has submitted a new proposal that contemplates a sign height of 5.84 m, a total sign area of 12.4 m² (6.2 m² per sign face), and retains the 3.5 m setback (see Appendix C – Elevation). Given its proposed height, size, and location, the sign is intended to be visible to vehicular traffic on Plains Road East.
Sign By-law 34-2007

Sign By-law 34-2007 contains various regulations pertaining to signage, including general prohibitions listed under Section 5, and specific regulations for ground signs under subsection 6.1. There are further restrictions for signage on properties within the Plains Road Corridor, as identified in By-law Schedule ‘D’ – Aldershot Business Community, which apply to the subject site. The following regulation from Sign By-law 34-2007 is pertinent to the subject application:

6.1.11 Within the geographic area shown on attached Schedule “B” and Schedule “D” of this By-law, a ground sign on a property shall be setback 0.5 m from a property line and shall not exceed 2 m in height and 1.5 m² in sign area.

Intent of Sign By-law Regulations

The Sign By-law regulations are intended to allow businesses identification from adjacent public areas (mainly streets) while ensuring that signage does not pose a negative visual impact on the existing streetscape and surrounding land uses, and that it not impact public safety. Regulating the type and design of signage ensures that each property maintains an acceptable mix of signage; and that the signs are thereby compatible with the signage for similar uses in the surrounding area.

The Sign By-law regulates signage in terms of a number of criteria. Size, amount, location, clarity, compatibility, aesthetic quality, visual character, safety, and consistency with City objectives are all considered by the By-law and balanced with the public’s right to expression.

The By-law sets out separate regulations for various zones. For example, the By-law recognizes that in retail commercial zones, visibility of signs to the motoring public is a priority, while in employment zones, signage generally serves a more subtle way-finding function. The Plains Road Corridor regulations help align signage restrictions with the goals of the Plains Road Urban Design Guidelines.

Comments from Other Departments

Staff from the Capital Works, Transportation, and By-law Enforcement Departments have been consulted on the application. No objections were received.

Staff Considerations

Staff is satisfied that the requested variances maintain the intent and purpose of Sign By-law 34-2007, and that compliance with the By-law, in this case, would result in an
unreasonable hardship for the applicant. Staff views these variances as acceptable deviations from the requirements of the By-law.

In order to analyze the appropriateness of the requested variances, staff has considered a number of factors, including: the sign’s compatibility with the subject site, surrounding properties, and the overall streetscape; the hardship described by the applicant that precludes them from adhering to the By-law; the potential benefits of height and/or area increases to the functionality of the sign; the design quality of the proposal; and site-specific conditions or needs that were not anticipated by the By-law.

**Compatibility**

Larger signs, depending on their location and scale, can create a cluttering effect on a property and on the overall streetscape. Staff note that the proposed sign will be located in the southwest corner of the property. The significant distance between the proposed sign and the building on the site (approximately 30 m) minimizes any potential cluttering effect of the larger sign. Additionally, the height of the building, being two storeys, and large building setback ensure that the sign will not appear out of character or scale on the site.

There are several commercial properties to the west of the site along Plain Road East. Most of these properties are characterized by single-storey commercial buildings with peaked roofs, large building setbacks, and front parking areas. The scale of buildings and configuration of uses on these properties are similar to the same on the subject site, indicating that the sign would not clutter the wider streetscape, and would not be out of keeping with the scale of the neighbouring buildings.

**Hardship**

Poor exposure, due to the large building setback and insufficient size of the existing ground sign, is cited as the main reason for the proposal. The applicant has provided examples of existing ground signs located just west of the subject site (see Appendix D – Nearby Elevations) that are similar to, or exceed the proposal in terms of height and area.

Staff evaluate sign variance applications on a case-by-case basis, and the presence of larger signs on nearby properties does not guarantee support for variances. However, staff agrees that exposure for tenants on the subject property could be improved with a larger ground sign, and are of the opinion that if the By-law were complied with, the building tenants would suffer from an unreasonable lack of exposure.
Benefits of a Larger Sign

A larger sign may provide benefits, such as increased visibility to motorists and improved visual exposure for tenants of the plaza. From a safety perspective, a larger sign could better indicate the site driveway location to motorists, helping prevent sudden turning maneuvers and heavy braking on Plains Road East.

Design Quality

New development in the Plains Road Corridor is subject to the Plains Road Corridor Urban Design Guidelines, which include guidance for commercial signage. The Guidelines state that design of commercial signage should be of a quality comparable to the building in its scale, materials, and consistency.

The existing building incorporates brick, siding, and asphalt shingles of various earth tones. The proposed sign is to incorporate cultured stone into its base and edges, which would be similar in tone to the materials used on the existing building, reflecting the building’s architectural character, and establishing visual consistency between the building and the sign. Staff notes that the incorporation of stone into the sign exhibits a higher-quality appearance than the existing sign.

Staff also notes that the proposed sign would incorporate the Plains Road Village logo into its base (see Appendix C – Elevation), which is a positive design element that assists in promoting the identity of the area.

Site-specific Conditions/Needs not Anticipated by the By-law

Additional restrictions for ground signs on properties within the Plains Road Corridor were introduced when the City passed By-law 118-2007, which amended By-law 34-2007. These restrictions previously only affected ground signs in the Downtown Area. The amendment anticipates future redevelopment in the Plains Road Corridor, ensuring that new signage is consistent with a more compact, pedestrian-oriented built form that is expected to take shape. Furthermore, the property is zoned MXG (Mixed Use General), which generally provides for more compact, less automobile-focused development. Significant redevelopment has occurred in recent years along Plains Road East, west of the subject site. However, the immediate area around the site has yet to experience significant changes in form or function, and remains automobile-focused. The existing building was constructed in 2002, and staff expects that major redevelopment of the site is still years away.

Staff recognize that there is a disparity between the current condition of the area and the vision anticipated by the Sign and Zoning By-laws. Sign By-law regulation 6.1.11
was intended for a compact urban environment, hence its application to the Downtown Area. The restrictions call for ground signs of a human scale, in reference to the pedestrian-oriented character of Downtown. The subject portion of Plains Road East is classified as a Multi-Purpose Arterial Road, as shown in “Schedule J – Classification of Transportation Facilities” within the City’s Official Plan (OP). According to Table 1 of the OP, “Function and Classification of Transportation Facilities”, this type of road may serve up to 40,000 vehicles per day.

High traffic volume, road width (five total automobile lanes plus cycling lanes), large setback distance, and the automobile-oriented configuration of the subject and nearby properties have produced an environment where adequate vehicular way-finding is dependent upon larger ground signs. Sign By-law regulation 6.1.11 is more useful in regulating ground signs being proposed concurrently with new development or redevelopment in the Plains Road Corridor, and to sign proposals on properties with existing pedestrian-oriented built form.

Staff opines that the By-law has not anticipated new sign proposals on older, automobile-focused commercial properties within the Plains Road Corridor, and therefore do not object to the required variances.

Financial Matters:

The application has been processed under the standard fee for sign variances in accordance with the Development Application Fee schedule.

Conclusion:

Staff, having had regard for Sections 9.9.1, 9.9.2, and 9.9.3 of the City’s Sign By-law 34-2007, is of the opinion that the proposed sign variances satisfy the intent of Sign By-law 34-2007 and that compliance with the By-law would create unreasonable hardship for the applicant, and recommend the application be approved subject to the proposed conditions of the Recommendation.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Tellier, MCIP, RPP
Manager of Urban Design
(905) 335-7600 x7892
Appendices:

a. Sketch No. 1 – Zoning/Location Sketch  
b. Sketch No. 2 – Detail Sketch  
c. Sketch No. 3 – Elevation  
d. Sketch No. 4 – Nearby Elevations  

Notifications:

Tyraz Corporation  
561 Brant Street, P.O. BOX 85163, Burlington, ON L7R 2G6

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, Director of Finance and Director of Legal. Final approval is by the City Manager.
Appendix A – Zoning/Location Sketch

Sketch No. 1
LOCATION / ZONING SKETCH
Application by "TYRAZ CORPORATION" to permit a replacement ground sign at 695 Plains Road East.

GENERAL ZONING LEGEND

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DATE: December 14, 2016
Planning and Building Department
Development and Infrastructure Division
Appendix B – Detail Sketch

Sketch No. 2
DETAIL SKETCH

Application by "TYRAZ CORPORATION" to permit a replacement ground sign at 695 Plains Road East.

PROPOSED REPLACEMENT GROUND SIGN

DATE: December 14, 2016
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Appendix C – Elevation

Sketch No. 3
ELEVATION

Application by "TYRAZ CORPORATION" to permit a replacement ground sign at 695 Plains Road East.
Appendix D – Nearby Elevations

Sketch No. 4
NEARBY ELEVATIONS

Application by “TYRAZ CORPORATION” to permit a replacement ground sign at 695 Plains Road East.

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