

1 City of Pass Christian
2 Municipal Complex Auditorium
3 105 Hiern Avenue

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5 **Planning Commission**
6 **Meeting Minutes**
7 **Tuesday, June 25, 6pm**
8
9

10 **CALL TO ORDER**

11 Chairman Tom Phares called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. In attendance were Commissioners
12 Adam Pace, Michael Lizana, Ken Austin, Rebecca O’Dwyer and Steve Hunter. Commissioners Lisea
13 Johnson, Margaret Jean Kalif and Lisa Smith were not in attendance
14

15 Also in attendance was the City Planner, Danit Simon.
16

17 **ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

18 The first order of business was to table the adoption of the minutes from the monthly Planning
19 Commission meeting held on May 28, 2019. A *Motion* by Commissioner Austin, seconded by
20 Commissioner Lizana, was made to table the adoption of the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.
21

22 **NEW BUSINESS**

- 23 ○ *Begin Public Hearing*
24 A *Motion* by Commissioner Pace, seconded by Commissioner Austin, was made to begin the public
25 hearing. The motion passed unanimously.
26
- 27 ○ *Application PD-22-2019, Pastor Ella H DeDeaux as agent of St. Paul United Methodist Church, 322 &*
28 *0 Clark Avenue, #0313B-02-096.000, Planning Commission Approval for an Internally Lit Monument*
29 *Sign and a Variance for the sign to have Movable Letters, in the T4L Limited Mixed-Use Zone.*
30

31 Chairman Phares introduced the application.
32

33 The City Planner, Danit Simon, briefed the Planning Commission on the application: Before I start, if
34 anyone is here for the 538 Saint Louis Street application, it has been tabled from tonight’s agenda. It
35 will not be reviewed tonight, and it will be re-advertised prior to returning to a future meeting agenda.
36

37 The applicant at St Paul United Methodist Church proposes installing an internally lit monument sign
38 with movable letters. The sign meets the size and height standards of a monuments sign. But the
39 internal illumination must be approved, and a Variance for movable letters must also be approved.
40 There is a photo of the proposed sign in your packets. Signage is an important element of defining a
41 neighborhood’s sense of place and character. They have the ability to either add or detract from a
42 community. The SmartCode allows for externally lit signs in the T4 Mixed-Use Zones. The most pertinent
43 reason for external lighting is to focus the light on the sign itself, and not illuminate neighboring
44 residential structures. To the south, the Church is surrounded by properties in the T4 Mixed-Use Zones,
45 and the Randolph Center is located across the street with a Civic Overlay. To the north, Clark Street
46 transitions into the T3R Single-Family Residential Zone. 316 Clark Avenue is the only existing nearby
47 residential house, but the zoning allows for future residential structures on the undeveloped
48 neighboring lots. The proposed location of the sign will be approximately 120-feet north of 316 Clark
49 Avenue, and will most likely not impact the existing house with its lighting.
50

51 The more important part of tonight's conversation, is that the SmartCode prohibits manual and
52 electronic movable letter signs. Since 2010 when the code was adopted, no movable letter signs have
53 been issued a permit. In fact, no permits have been issued for any signs on the prohibited sign list that
54 is included in your packet. The Commission must consider why such a variance for a movable letter sign
55 should be approved in this particular situation, and whether you want movable letter signs throughout
56 the City. If you grant this variance, other churches and business will make the same request. You must
57 consider whether this type of signage is the direction you want for the character of the City at large, or if
58 the signs on the prohibited list are there for a reason and should be maintained. Finally, one of the
59 standards for Planning Commission Approval is for the sign to be in harmony with the character of the
60 neighborhood. Please note, that across the street is the Randolph Center, a beautifully restored Historic
61 Building that sets the tone for Clark Avenue. Please also consider whether the proposed sign is in
62 keeping or in contrast to the Randolph Center's architecture and style. This concludes my report and
63 the applicant is here to answer your questions.

64
65 Commissioner Phares stated that the development of the signage standards was a long and arduous
66 journey that required an immense amount of consideration. I believe that movable letter signs were
67 prohibited in reference to the big yellow signs with flashing arrows, located at gas stations, promoting
68 sales, etc. Please clarify what type of movable letter sign this is?

69
70 Simon answered that the proposed sign has an illuminated white background with movable black letters
71 that can be moved.

72
73 Commissioner Austin referenced the sign for the Baptist Church on 2nd Street, I believe they installed it
74 without a permit and then came to us and we did not allow them to internally illuminate the sign.

75
76 Simon added that there are a few movable letter signs in the City, they predate the adoption of the
77 SmartCode in 2010, and therefore they are legal and non-conforming. This status allows them to be
78 maintained, but the non-conforming status would end if the sign were ever removed. I was not with the
79 City when the Baptist Church came before the Planning Commission, so I do not have any additional
80 information on that. Regarding internal illumination, the City permitted internal illumination for
81 Bacchus's sign on Highway 90, since there are no neighboring residential units to affect. And for the
82 Whisky Hotel's sign on Davis, but only the one facing Highway 90, they had the turn off their sign facing
83 Davis/East as it was negatively affecting residential units. With today's application, there isn't an
84 existing neighboring property that internal illumination could negatively impact, but there are a lot of
85 undeveloped lots that will most likely become residential due to the elevation requirements. So it is
86 possible that internally lighting the sign could negatively impact a future neighboring house.

87
88 Pastor Ella H DeDeaux explained that the reason they are requesting movable letters, is so that they can
89 let the public know about there special or seasonal events. For example, this weekend we are doing
90 vacation bible school, and we would like to service more children in the program and that sign would
91 help is to let people know about Church activities and services.

92
93 Chairman Phares asked about the banner signs that they can use for special events.

94
95 Simon stated that Temporary Signs can be installed 14-day in advance of an event and removed three
96 days after the event. It makes total sense that the Church wants a movable letter sign to advertise for
97 services and holidays, the issue is that if a variance is granted for movable letter signs they also have to
98 be allowed for other churches and businesses. You cannot not discriminate and allow for a type of sign
99 only for Churches, signs are allowed or prohibited based on the zone.

100 Commissioner Austin asked for clarification on the internal illumination.

101

102 DeDeaux stated that the Church name and the entire signboard would be backlit.

103

104 Commissioner Pace asked if the sign could be used without the internal lighting.

105

106 DeDeaux responded that the sign does not have to have the lighting.

107

108 Commissioner Austin clarified that the zone allows for external illumination by right, so they can install
109 external, top-down, light fixtures onto the sign. It's only the backlit lighting that is not allowed by right.

110

111 A *Motion* by Commissioner Pace seconded by Commissioner O'Dwyer, was made to *approve* the
112 Variance for a Movable Letter Sign and *deny* the request for internal lighting, due to the tasteful glass
113 enclosure and a size that meets the Monument Sign standers. The motion passed unanimously.

114

115 Chairman Phares stated that now that we have approved this sign, everyone will see it and will be
116 coming in to make the same exact variance request for a movable letter sign. They have it, why can't I
117 have it?

118

119 Simon stated that if you want to allow for movable letter signs we need to update the SmartCode. Keep
120 the electronic movable letters in the prohibited sign section, and create a definition for allowable
121 manual movable letter signs.

122

123 Commissioner O'Dwyer stated that the difference between this sign and the large gas station signs is
124 that it is tastefully enclosed in glass.

125

126 ○ *End Public Hearing*

127 A *Motion* by Commissioner Austin seconded by Commissioner O'Dwyer, was made to end the public
128 hearing. The motion passed unanimously.

129

130 **OLD BUSINESS**

131 N/A

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133 **OTHER BUSINESS/PUBLIC COMMENT**

134 N/A

135

136 **ADJOURN**

137 A *Motion* by Commissioner Austin, seconded by Commissioner Lizana, was made to adjourn the meeting
138 at 6:20 P.M. The motion passed unanimously.