

Special Joint Meeting

President and Board of Trustees
Planning and Zoning Commission
Village of Lemont
September 17, 2012 at 7:30 p.m.

Lemont Police Department
14600 127th St.
Lemont, IL 60439

AGENDA

- I. Call to Order
- II. Roll Call
- III. Electronic Message Centers and Sign Illumination
- IV. Adjournment

Posted: September 11, 2012 at 12:00 p.m.

By: Linda Molitor, Executive Assistant



Village of Lemont
Planning & Economic Development Department

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TO: Committee of the Whole #101-12
Planning & Zoning Commission

FROM: James A. Brown, Planning & Economic Development Director
Charity Jones, Village Planner

SUBJECT: Case 12-12 UDO Amendments - Electronic Message Centers and Sign
Illumination

DATE: September 13, 2012

BACKGROUND

August Meeting. In August the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Committee of the Whole met to discuss electronic message centers (EMCs) and other kinds of internally illuminated monument signs. Jointly, the Boards focused their discussion on five key questions: whether to allow EMCs; if allowing EMCs, where to allow them; whether to allow internally illuminated monument signs; if allowing them, what types of internally illuminated monument signs to allow; and if allowing internally illuminated monument signs, where to allow them.

A majority of the Board favored allowing EMCs with the following conditions:

1. The EMC must be part of a monument sign and must be smaller and accessory to the primary non-EMC sign message on the monument sign. Staff is to propose a maximum allowable EMC sign area.
2. The Village should continue to require a minimum separation between EMC signs, but this separation should not be as large as the current requirement of 500'.
3. EMCs should be allowed in most major commercial areas, including the current overlay and other major thoroughfares. The Boards directed staff to further define these areas.

A majority of the Board favored allowing the following types of internally illuminated monument signs in all B zoning districts:

1. Channel letters, including standard channel letters and reverse channel letters but not including open face channel letters.
2. Cabinet signs, only if the sign background is opaque. Aluminum face cabinet signs should be allowed without further restrictions. Plexi/acrylic face cabinet signs

should be allowed only if the sign cabinet is at least partially enclosed by sign base material (to be further defined by staff in the draft ordinance).

The Boards did not reach a consensus on whether to allow internally illuminated monument signs or EMC signs in residential areas. The Boards also did not reach a consensus on whether to allow internally illuminated manual changeable copy signs. The asked staff to compile a list and photos of institutional or other non-residential uses in residential areas for this meeting; that list is attached.

STAFF ANALYSIS

As we proceed with our discussion of sign regulations, staff offers this summarization of our attitudes toward EMCs:

We like the flexibility and visibility that EMCs offer our businesses and institutions. However, we remain concerned about the aesthetic and nuisance effects that a proliferation and/or concentration of such signs could create. Specifically, we are concerned about: the brightness of the EMCs; the movement of graphics and text within the EMCs; and the color of the graphics and text within the EMCs. We therefore believe it to be in the best interests of the Village, its businesses, its institutions and residents to allow EMCs with limitations aimed at mitigating the potential nuisances of such signs and their potential impacts on community character. It is important to find ways to limit the size, display time, color, and locations of EMCs will still affording the advantages of flexibility and visibility that EMCs offer.

Moreover, staff finds it important to summarize the goals of tonight's meeting. For this meeting, staff is seeking elected and appointed officials' consensus on the following issues:

1. EMCs
 - a. Appropriate maximum allowable size.
 - b. Appropriate minimum display time.
 - c. Appropriate colors
 - d. Appropriate locations
 - e. Appropriate limitations such as minimum separation between EMCs
2. Appropriateness of internally illuminated signs (including EMCs) in residential areas
3. Appropriateness of internally illuminated changeable copy signs in residential areas

Minimum EMC Display Time.

Current UDO standard. "The electronic message shall not change more frequently than once every three seconds (§17.11.200.B.3)

Reason for standard. For aesthetic and safety reasons, officials and staff were adamant that EMCs should not give the impression of motion or have text or graphics that changed too fast. Three seconds was determined to be an appropriate compromise between a sign that was not detrimental to aesthetics or safety yet still allowed the sign owner some flexibility in breaking a message into more than one segment. It was felt that passing motorists would still be able to read an entire message broken into two or more three-second segments.

Reason to consider a change. Some officials feel the three-second display time allows too frequent changes and thus is distracting and aesthetically displeasing.

Staff comment and suggestions. As discussed last month, other communities that allow EMCs require minimum display times that range from three seconds to 10 seconds. Some members of the PZC have suggested a longer minimum display time so as to further discourage scrolling messages (which is prohibited by the UDO) and breaking messages into multiple parts. Staff thinks that attempting to influence sign owner behavior is difficult, and question what the valid government concern is here.

If our concern is indeed creating a street corridor that eliminates, to the fullest extent possible, distracting or aesthetically displeasing elements, then an increase in the minimum display time would probably help accomplish that goal. Staff suggests the trustees and commissioners therefore consider a minimum display time ranging from seven to ten seconds. Longer display times limit the flexibility of the sign owner to display messages.¹

Maximum Allowable EMC Size.

Current UDO standard. "The electronic message center shall not comprise more than 25% of the sign area" (§17.11.200.B.1). The maximum allowable sign area for a monument sign in the B zoning district is 64 square feet; for a sign this size an EMC of 16 square feet would be allowed.

Reason for standard. Lemont officials have long felt that EMCs, although allowed under certain conditions, should nevertheless remain a secondary portion of the total sign. This desire for the secondary appearance is rooted in officials' contradictory and conciliatory attitudes toward EMCs: we don't really like them, but we'll acquiesce to business concerns for flexibility so long as such signs aren't too big.

¹ If the goal of the minimum EMC display time is to discourage segmented messages, then the minimum display time needs to be equal to or longer than the time it takes someone to drive from the point at which the sign first becomes legible to when they pass the sign. Staff measured the legibility of three existing EMC signs and found them to be first legible at distances ranging from 315 feet to 469 feet away from the sign. Many factors influence legibility, including text color, size, visual obstructions, eyesight of the viewer, etc. Additionally, because staff conducted their measurements while walking the minimum legibility distances observed for the subject EMC signs are likely greater than the distances would be for drivers. However, these observations can still serve as a general basis for discussion. The speed limit on State Street is 35 miles per hour (mph); a vehicle traveling at 35 mph goes 154 feet in three seconds, 257 feet in five seconds, 359 feet in seven seconds, and 513 feet in ten seconds. Therefore, along State Street, a minimum display time of seven seconds would likely incentivize EMC sign owners to attempt to convey an entire message in one display, rather than breaking their message apart. For a 45 mph road like Bell Road, a shorter minimum display time, e.g. five seconds, may also accomplish this goal.

Reason to consider a change. Some officials have opined that our current standard forces sign owners to break up messages into several segments. As indicated above, such segmented messages and messages that change too frequently are undesirable. In an effort to compensate for the increase in minimum display time, and to help remove another barrier to placing an entire message on the sign at one time, an increase in sign area may be in order.

Staff comment and suggestions. Staff suggests a slight increase in maximum EMC area from 25% to 33%. This would result in an increase in maximum potential square footage from 16 to 21 square feet. Alternatively, a 40% threshold could be granted. This would mean that 25 square feet of the allowable 64 square feet of signage could be devoted to an EMC.

For current EMC signs in the Village and those signs' dimensions, see the attachment.

Allowable EMC Locations in Commercial Areas.

Current UDO standard. EMCs are confined to an "Electronic Message Center Overlay District." The district is centered on the intersection of State and 127th. (Map 17-11-02).

Reason for standard. The overlay district was intended to curb the proliferation of EMC signs throughout Lemont. The area around the intersection of State and 127th already had a couple of EMCs when the UDO was drafted, and the intersection is viewed as the center of the auto-oriented business areas in town.

Reason to consider a change. Some officials believe an expansion of the allowable area for EMCs is in order, i.e. that such signs should be allowed along other commercial corridors where traffic counts are relatively high.

Staff comment and suggestions.

At last month's joint meeting, a majority of the Board members present favored allowing EMCs in most major commercial districts. Specifically, the existing overlay district, Bell Road, and the Route 83 TIF District were mentioned. Staff suggests that the 2002 Comprehensive Plan be used as a guide to defining the major commercial districts, within which EMCs would be acceptable. The Comprehensive Plan categorizes certain roads as arterial roadways. This list includes I-355, Lemont Road/State Street, 135th Street, McCarthy Road, Bell Road, and Archer Ave/Route 83. Staff recommends that EMCs be allowed only:

- On property zoned B-3 or INT; and
- Along I-355, Lemont Rd/State Street, 135th Street, McCarthy Road, Bell Road, and Archer Avenue/Route 83; and
- At locations at least 250 feet from residentially-zoned property

There are approximately 308 acres of B-3 zoned property in the Village. Of this total, approximately 21 sites comprising 60 acres are not located along arterial roadways. So under the above criteria, those 21 would not be allowed an EMC. Distances to residentially zoned properties may further restrict locations of EMCs.

For a discussion of INT-zoned property and EMCs, see below.

Minimum Separation between EMCs.

Current UDO standard. EMCs shall “not be allowed within 500 feet of another electronic message center” (§17.11.200.A.3).

Reason for standard. The 500-ft requirement was intended to prevent the concentration of EMCs in any one specific area. It was also seen as a way of limiting the total number of EMCs within the Village.

Reason to consider a change. The 500-ft requirement is inherently unfair. Those property owners who request a sign first, get one (providing all other conditions are met). There is a potential for two similar and competing businesses, e.g. two fast food outlets, to both desire EMCs, yet an EMC would be approved only on the first applicant’s site.

Staff comment and suggestions. At last month’s meeting, several Board members favored reducing our minimum separation between EMCs, but still maintaining some separation. Using GIS, staff analyzed the impact of changing the minimum separation from 500’ to 300’, 250’ and 200’. There are currently four EMCs in the overlay district (Illinois Bar & Grill, District 113A, Wahlgreen’s, LNB). Using GIS to analyze potential impacts of changing the minimum separation requirement, staff estimates the following:

Min. Separation	Potential New EMCs
500	1
400	3
300	5
250	6
200	9
0	11

This analysis does not account for the three shopping centers, which all have approved sign plans for their PUDs. The addition of EMCs to these centers and outlots in the centers could feasibly add several more EMCs to the existing overlay area. The figures above do not include a potential EMC at a gas station.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, staff has not received an overwhelming number of requests for EMCs, although this could change with a perceived relaxation of EMC standards. Only one instance comes to mind where a permit application for an EMC was denied because the proposed location did not meet the 500-ft threshold. Staff is preparing a series of maps that attempts to examine potential impacts based on various standards.

Staff sees few good options to prevent the potential concentration of EMCs along specific segments of corridors. Although we can examine potential impacts along State Street, an analysis of Bell Road or Archer is much more difficult. Our inclination is to keep the 500-ft threshold.

Limits on EMC Colors and Other Display Features.

Current UDO standard. EMCs shall “consist of amber lettering on a black background. The use of red lettering or lettering colored other than amber is prohibited” (§17.11.200.B.5).

Reason for standard. Backgrounds other than black were considered too bright and too much like a television screen—which officials felt inappropriate for signs. In an additional attempt to prevent signs from looking like TV screens, the limitations on the color of the lettering were imposed.

Reason to consider a change. Some officials feel the insistence on amber lettering is too severe, that an additional color or two will not be a detriment to either aesthetics or safety.

Staff comment and suggestions. Although there was some discussion of limiting the colors used on EMCs and animation or other display features, there was no formal consensus on this issue expressed at last month’s meeting. Staff recommends that the Village: maintain its prohibition on animation, flashing scrolling, etc; allow the EMC message to display up to two colors at any given time, without restricting what those colors can be; and continue to require a black background for all EMC displays.

EMCs and other internally illuminated signs for institutional or other uses in predominately residential areas

Current UDO standard. The Electronic Message Center Overlay District—the permitted area for EMCs—does not contain institutional zoning. Several institutional uses, however, have received special use permits or variations for EMCs.

Reason for standard. Village officials desired to limit the number and locations of EMCs within the Village to strictly auto-dominated, commercial corridors, and thus the overlay district centered on 127th and State was created. It was never anticipated or intended at the time that EMCs would be allowed to proliferate beyond this relatively small area, or beyond the few institutional uses that already had EMCs. The Village was also against internally illuminated monument signs on any type of property.

Reason to consider a change. Recently the department has received two variation applications for EMCs from churches. Staff anticipates more such applications from churches or other institutional uses.

Staff comment and suggestions. EMCs have been established in predominately residential areas with little adverse effects. Nevertheless, staff is concerned that blanket permission for EMCs on institutionally-zoned property would be ill-advised. If the Board and Commission find it appropriate to allow EMCs for institutional uses, then we suggest the following limitations:

- EMCs must not be closer than 250 feet to a residentially-zoned property
And/or

- EMCs for institutional uses are allowed only when the institutional use and the sign are located along an arterial road.

Both of these suggested requirements are consistent with what we proposed for commercial areas. Closely-related to the issue of EMCs for institutional uses is internally illuminated signs in residential areas and internally illuminated changeable copy signs.

Per the Boards' direction at the last meeting, staff has taken photos (see attached) of the various institutional or other non-residential uses that are either residentially zoned, or are institutionally zoned, but near existing residences; 21 sites met this criterion. All neighborhood parks and local cemeteries would also meet this criterion; they were not counted toward the 21 total sites, however. Additionally, any institutional uses in the Downtown District or Historic District were not included as these areas have their own sign regulations which are not proposed to be amended at this time.

Staff believes the Village's overriding concern should be the mitigation of adverse effects of illumination in residential areas. A secondary concern would be aesthetics. We find many of the new types of internally-illuminated signs (e.g. reverse channel letter) to be attractive and unobtrusive, and see no reason why they could not be allowed in residential areas. Internally illuminated changeable copy signs are, in our opinion, too bright and unattractive.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Existing EMCs and their dimensions
2. Map of B-3 zoned properties not on arterial roads
3. Non-residential uses in residential areas

Unless otherwise noted, all uses are located in residential zoning districts. INT zoned uses are included if located near residential uses.



Ateitis Foundation

Location: 12690 Archer Ave. (north of Archer, off Castlewood Drive)



Bethany Lutheran Church

Location: 508 Lemont Street

Institutional & Other Nonresidential Uses in Residential Areas



First Church of the Nazarene
Location: Bell Road Total Sign Size: 59 sf EMC Size: 32 sf EMC % of total sign: 54%



Franciscan Village
Location: SW Corner of Main Street & Walker Road

Institutional & Other Nonresidential Uses in Residential Areas



Gerharz Funeral Home
Location: 501 State Street



Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago
Location: 10915 Lemont Road

Institutional & Other Nonresidential Uses in Residential Areas



Lemont Fire Protection District - 2 fire stations
Location: Walker Road (pictured) and Bell Road (not pictured)



Lemont Nursing & Rehab
Location: 12450 Walker Road

Institutional & Other Nonresidential Uses in Residential Areas



Lemont High School
Location: McCarthy Road



Lithuanian World Center
Location: 14911 127th Street

Institutional & Other Nonresidential Uses in Residential Areas



Oakwood / River Valley Schools
Location: 1149 State Street



Park District / Old Quarry Middle School
Location: 16028-16100 127th Street (Park District zoned INT)



Ruffled Feathers Golf Club
Location: 12851 Derby Road



St. Alphonsus Catholic Church
Location: 625 State Street / 210 E. Logan Street

Institutional & Other Nonresidential Uses in Residential Areas



SS. Cyril and Methodius Parish
Location: 608 Sobieski Street



St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church (future site)
Location: 12900 127th Street (zoned INT)



Timberline Knolls
Location: 40 Timberline Drive



Township Community Center
Location: 16300 Alba Street (primarily zoned INT)

Institutional & Other Nonresidential Uses in Residential Areas

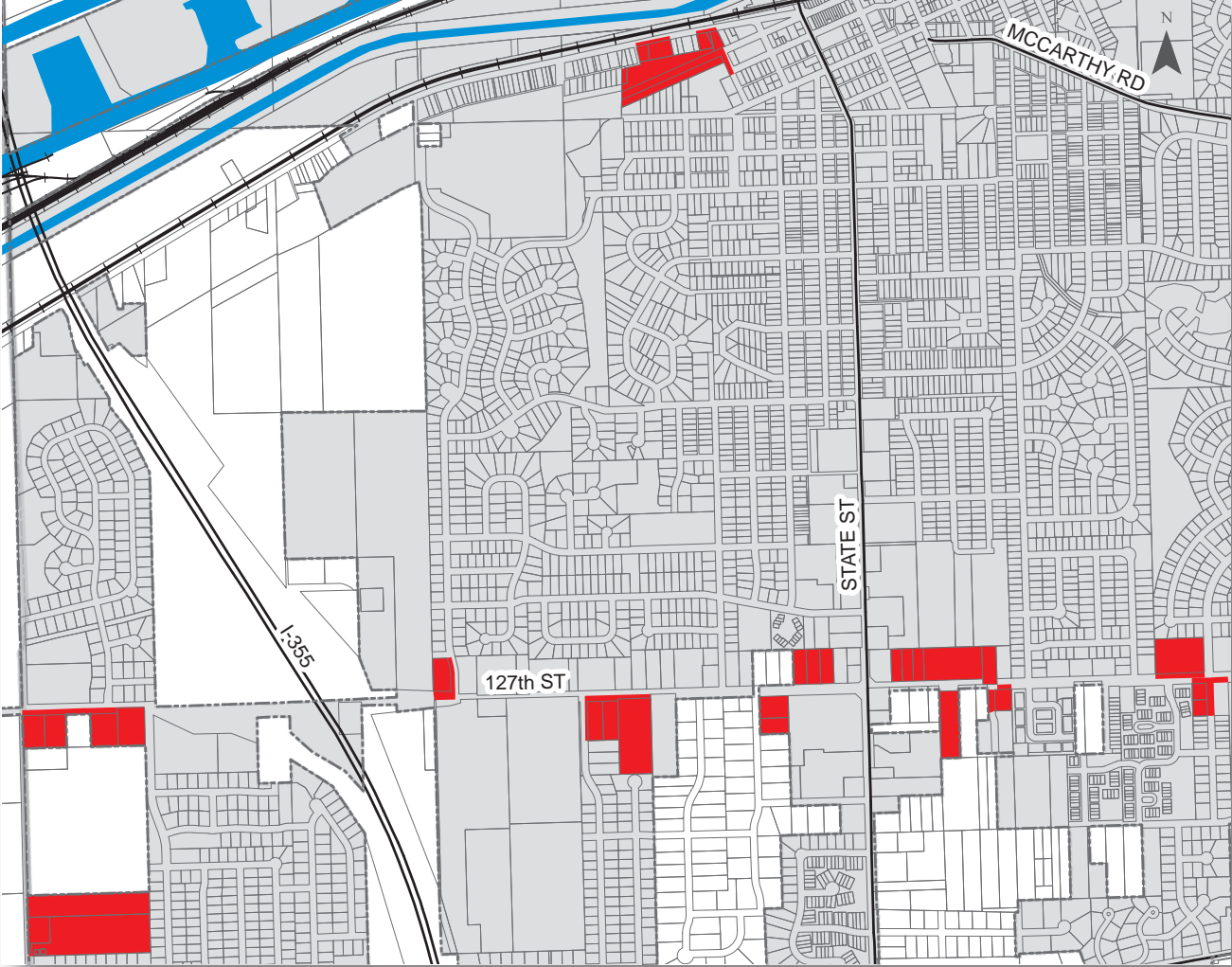


Township Offices
Location: 1115 Warner Ave.



United Methodist Church
Location: 25 W. Custer Street

B-3 Zoned Properties Not Adjacent to Arterial Roadways



Legend

- Corporate Boundary
- Arterial Roads
- B-3 Properties Not on an Arterial Roadway
- Railroad
- Water
- County Boundary



Planning & Economic
Development Department
Village of Lemont

