

MINUTES  
CITY OF DEKALB  
**PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION**  
February 18, 2025

The Planning and Zoning Commission held a meeting on February 18, 2025, in the Yusunas Meeting Room at the DeKalb Public Library, 309 Oak Street, DeKalb, Illinois. Vice Chair McMahon called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM.

A. ROLL CALL

Recording Secretary, Olivia Doss, called the roll. Planning and Zoning Commission members present were: Vice Chair Bill McMahon, Steve Becker, Trixy O'Flaherty, and Jerry Wright. Commission Chair Max Maxwell and Commission member Maria Pena-Graham were absent. Planning Director Dan Olson was present representing the City.

B. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA (Additions/Deletions)

Vice Chair McMahon requested a motion to approve the February 18, 2025, agenda as presented with the removal of item B – Elect Vice Chairperson due to the absence of Chair Maxwell. Ms. O'Flaherty motioned to approve the agenda as presented. Mr. Wright seconded the motion, and the motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. January 21, 2025 – Vice Chair McMahon requested a motion to approve the January 21, 2025, minutes as presented. Mr. Wright motioned to approve the minutes as submitted. Ms. O'Flaherty seconded the motion, and the motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

D. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Open Floor to Anyone Wishing to Speak on Record)

None.

E. NEW BUSINESS

1. **Public Hearing** – A petition by DeKalb Community Unit School District 428 for approval of a variance to Article 13.06.04.3 of the Unified Development Ordinance to allow an electronic changeable copy sign (digital display sign) of 55 sq. ft. to exceed the maximum of 40 sq. ft. for the lot located at 901 S. 4<sup>th</sup> Street.

Vice Chair McMahon read the petition by title only.

Tammy Carson, Director of Facility and Safety Operations, spoke on behalf of DeKalb Community Unit School District 428. She briefly reviewed their petition and explained that the current sign has been present at the location since the building was first purchased by the School District in 2001. The School District has acquired a grant to pay for the installation of the digital display sign, and it will advertise community events and open positions within the School District. Ms. Carson explained the School District is experiencing difficulties with filling positions, and the location of the proposed sign will provide a good opportunity to reach the community. She noted they have conversed with their neighbors, Children's Learning Center and The Growing Place regarding the sign. She said while they are all connected, they are all separate entities. Ms. Carson concluded, mentioning the Children's Learning Center and The Growing Place will be able to utilize the sign for messages but

will not shoulder any of the expenses. The School District will be responsible for the installation cost as well as the cost of upkeep/maintenance and messages.

Planning Director Olson went through his Staff Report dated February 13, 2015. Mr. Olson stated the petitioner, DeKalb Community Unit School District 428, is requesting a variance to Article 13.06.04.3 of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to allow an electronic changeable copy sign (digital display sign) of 55 sq. ft. for their Education Center located at 901 S. 4th St. The UDO allows a maximum of 40 sq. ft. for electronic changeable copy signs. The District plans to use the base of an existing sign for the new sign.

He explained the existing ground sign is 17.5 feet high and a total of 40 sq. ft. in size (8' x 5') and was probably constructed in the late 1960's when the Eagle Grocery Store occupied the subject lot. The existing sign also contains the Children's Learning Center and The Growing Place, which are located directly south of the subject site. Mr. Olson noted the School District purchased the building in late 2001.

Mr. Olson detailed the proposed new sign will be 17 feet tall and a total of 75 sq. ft. The digital display portion of the sign will be 55 sq. ft. and will include space for the Children's Learning Center and The Growing Place. The School District will work with both neighbors to occasionally allow messages to be shown on the digital display portion of the sign. Furthermore, per the UDO, the maximum size allowed for a ground sign for three or more tenants is 30 feet in height and 150 sq. ft. in size. Mr. Olson said for electronic changeable copy signs (digital display signs), the UDO states the maximum size cannot be more than 50% of the allowable size or 40 sq. ft., whichever is less. He mentioned the digital display portion of the sign will be 55 sq. ft. or about 73% of the total sign size.

Continuing, Mr. Olson noted the District states in their summary they are requesting the variance to allow the District Administration Office to advertise employment opportunities, school events, and celebrations that benefit the community. The School District also mentions with the high volume of traffic in the area, it's an excellent opportunity for District messages to be visible to a large group of motorists and pedestrians driving or walking along S. 4<sup>th</sup> St.

Mr. Olson said the applicant has indicated in their summary the rule of thumb for reading a sign is lettering should be one inch (1") for every ten feet (10') distance away from the viewer. With the sign at about thirty-eight (38) feet from the curb along S. 4<sup>th</sup> St., the standard letter size should be 4" in height. Since the majority of viewers will be motorists, the applicant is requesting the lettering size be increased to six (6) inches to accommodate for the traffic along S. 4<sup>th</sup> St. Mr. Olson mentioned the speed limit along S. 4<sup>th</sup> St. in this area is 35 m.p.h. The larger lettering size will increase the ability to put more information on the sign, which will improve its effectiveness.

Mr. Olson recalled in 2019 the School District received a special use permit and constructed digital display sign at Clinton Rosette Middle School along N. 1st St. that is 13 feet in height and about 50 sq. ft. The digital display portion of the sign is 25 sq. ft. The sign is about 25 feet from the curb along N. 1st St., which has a 30-m.p.h. limit. He also noted in 2022 the Planning & Zoning Commission approved a variance for Inboden's Meat Market (1106 N. 1<sup>st</sup>.) to construct a 50 sq. ft. digital display sign on an existing legal non-conforming ground sign. The sign is about 15 feet from the edge of the curb along N. 1<sup>st</sup> St. and the speed limit is 35 m.p.h.

Director Olson further pointed out there are several other pole signs along S. 4th St. that are at the same height or taller than the sign proposed by the School District. The other pole signs are Jim's Body Shop (817 S. 4th St.), French Toast Pancake House (831 S. 4th St.), 835 Suites (835 S. 4th St.), Firestone – AJ's Auto Repair (849 S. 4th St.), State Senator Sue Rezin (850 S. 4th St.) and Culligan (830 S. 4th St.). Further south along S. 4th St. the American Legion constructed a 25 sq. ft.

digital display sign last year (overall sign size is 50 sq. ft.). The sign met the regulations of the UDO and did not require a variance.

Concluding, Mr. Olson explained the UDO requires that electronic changeable copy signs have a minimum of five (5) seconds between message changes, limits on message movements and transitions and lighting limitations. The applicant has indicated they will comply with all the regulations for electronic changeable copy signs in the UDO.

Mr. Olson noted public input was received from Noelle Jacobson, 424 Culver Street, and Jeff Funfsinn of 838 Lacas Street both in support of the petition. Additional public input was received from Children's Learning Center generally in support of the petition and inquiring about pricing and maintenance issues which were addressed by Ms. Carson.

The City recommended approval, and Mr. Olson reminded the Commission they have final say on variances.

No public comments were made, and Vice Chair McMahon closed the public hearing.

Commission member O'Flaherty commented this request was an easy one and was in support of the request.

Vice Chair McMahon asked Ms. Carson if they planned on removing the old sign post that is not being used. Ms. Carson explained they did not plan on it, but explained she would look into having it removed during the parking lot updates planned for the summer.

Vice Chair McMahon requested a motion to approve. O'Flaherty moved that based on the submitted petition, testimony presented and findings of fact, the Planning and Zoning Commission approve a variance to Article 13.06.04.3 of the Unified Development Ordinance in order to allow an electronic changeable copy sign (digital display sign) of 55 sq. ft. to exceed the maximum of 40 sq. ft. for the lot located at 901 S. 4th St. as shown on the sign detail and aerial photo labeled as Exhibit A. Mr. Becker seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken: Becker – yes, O'Flaherty – yes, Wright – yes, McMahon – yes. Commission members Maxwell and Pena-Graham were absent. The motion passed 4-0-2.

## F. REPORTS

Mr. Olson noted the next meeting is scheduled for March 3, 2025, and there are text amendments to the UDO regarding EV (electronic vehicle) charging stations. He mentioned they include allowing EV charging stations as an accessory use in all zoning districts. He also noted the amendments would allow EV stations to be counted towards required parking spaces. He also communicated the City Council discussed limiting the amount of Retail Tobacco Stores in the City to four (4) at their meeting on February 10<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Olson said an Ordinance will be brought back to the City Council limiting the number of Retail Tobacco Stores as discussed.

Additionally, Mr. Olson explained J&S Towing was granted a special use permit a few years ago for 407 Industrial Drive to have a secondary site for excess storage, but the use was never established. The special use permit required J&S to put up a 10 ft high solid fence along the west property line to screen a home to the west. He explained since the special use permit was never established J&S requested the City revoke the special use permit. The City Council approved an Ordinance revoking the permit on February 10<sup>th</sup>.

G. ADJOURNMENT

Vice Chair McMahon requested a motion to Adjourn. Mr. Wright motioned to adjourn, and Ms. O'Flaherty seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Olivia K. Doss, Recording Secretary

Minutes approved by the Planning and Zoning Commission on March 3, 2025.

Click [here](#) to view the agenda packet for the February 18, 2025 Planning and Zoning Commission Meeting.

Click [here](#) to view the video recording of the February 18, 2025, Planning and Zoning Commission Meeting.