



No portion of this article may be reproduced without
express written permission of Style Publishing Group, LLC.
©2007 • All rights reserved.



Style Publishing Group
P.O. Box 1676
Frisco, Texas 75034
Phone: 972.335.1181
Toll Free: 877.781.7067
Fax: 214.722.2313

E-mail: info@friscostyle.com
Web: www.friscostyle.com

Ad Sales: (972) 335-1306



Signs of the Times

By Susan Bland

CATCHING THE ATTENTION OF CONSUMERS is not an easy task, especially at a time when “Now Open” signs are popping up as fast as the cement dries and the brick-and-mortar job is complete.

Are the days of simply hanging out a shingle by the front door and declaring yourself “Open for Business” in Frisco a thing of the past? Hardly. However, your shingle better be up to code – or you’ve got problems.

Business signs are a must for getting noticed amidst such stiff competition. There are signs announcing lost pets, school carnivals, new subdivisions, and homes for sale. All of them are vying for our attention and our dollars, and all of them fall under the rule of the city of Frisco’s sign ordinance.

Sign ordinances are meant to cover more than just signs on a business owner’s property. They may prohibit bunches of balloons too close to the street at a church

event. Or, they can be the impetus for many a realtor’s “Open House” sign being yanked from the ground by city crews.

They may even have to deal with the issue of “human signs,” the guy standing on the street corner – usually in 97-degree heat – dressed in a cow suit and wearing a sandwich-board sign advertising a leather furniture sale.

Given the city’s explosive growth, it’s hard to keep up. Older signs often don’t meet code requirements – even some city offices have signage that aren’t up to code and require exception. Replacing signs opens up a whole different “can of worms” regarding what is old and what is new. Regulating new signs that go up is one of the few options the city has to control how the city looks.

Some say the city’s current sign ordinance is overly prohibitive. Others say the key is to figure out how to cut through all the “red tape.” At the root

of the matter is this: Where do you draw the line between keeping your city beautiful and accommodating the needs of your business base, property owners and developers?

“There has to be some compromise on both sides,” says Audie Adkins, Frisco Chamber of Commerce president. As part of the Business Retention and Expansion Program in partnership with the Frisco Economic Development Corporation, Ms. Adkins says the chamber has begun to hold roundtable discussions on such issues.

During the discussions, city officials and members of the business community grapple with subjects like signage, roads, and parking. “It’s worked out well that we’re able to get feedback (from the business sector),” she says. “It’s our goal to act as a ‘middle-man’ – we try to meet the needs of the business community and retain the businesses we draw to Frisco.”

Ms. Adkins says the chamber has

fielded more than a few complaints from disgruntled business owners who are frustrated with getting their sign permits approved or irked by the city's sign restrictions. There are very specific requirements on placement, height, size, lettering, and a multitude of other considerations – all designed to meet aesthetic needs. "In all honesty, (the sign ordinance) is one thing that helps keep our city pretty."

Local realtor Paul Minze, of Elliott-Minze Properties, says some aspects of the city's current regulations are absurd. "Anytime you put up a 4' x 10' sign on a property that's for sale – and have to pay a fee for it – that's just ridiculous," says Mr. Minze. "The city should be ashamed."

Others say getting a sign approved is just a matter of hiring the right sign company. Tom Darling, Branch Manager of Farm Bureau Insurance, called an experienced sign company to get the job done. "They knew all the ins and outs of the city's sign ordinance, which made it easy to make a decision on what kind of sign to choose," he says.

If an applicant's request for a sign is denied, one of two options is available. The applicant can apply for a variance, which means going before the city's Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council. Ultimately, it's the city's Code Enforcement department that makes the final decision. If it's a small matter, an applicant can go back to the city's Code Enforcement department to address the matter, and hopefully move toward some kind of resolution.

Ms. Adkins says educating business owners on how the process works, and also what kinds of questions to ask before you apply for a sign permit is an essential role the chamber plays to help save business owners from wasting time and money. "Doing your homework is a must," she says. "Sometimes what you think may be simple is really not simple at all."

Barry Farris, owner of Qwik Wash America on Preston Road, learned the hard way. He says it was his unfamiliarity with the rules that caused a significant monetary loss when he had to start from scratch on a sign he'd already purchased.

It took Mr. Farris more than a year and a half to finally get the tastefully appointed flashing LED sign he wanted and at the



angle he needed – and in the process, he became a "trailblazer" of sorts in doing all the research needed to get city officials on board with the sign, the first of its kind in Frisco.

For the average business owner, doing one's homework on sign requirements can be a daunting task.

"There were challenges, but we persevered," he says. "They didn't want it to be a 'Vegas' kind of thing, and I understand that. But we worked it through, and the city was never anything but ready to work with me – that was a positive." Mr. Farris now plans on erecting a similar sign at a location in McKinney, where he says the rules are even more stringent. This time, he'll have the experience he needs for the venture.

For the average business owner, doing one's homework on sign requirements can be a daunting task. Most sign ordinances are not brief, and the city's current 66-page document – albeit somewhat reader-

friendly – is a monster for amateurs to sift through. The ease in finding the sign ordinance on the city's web site is a recent improvement; however, the sheer amount of information can be overwhelming.

Scott Ingalls, the city's Zoning and Subdivision administrator who helped to pen the current ordinance, says the city's doors are always open to help decipher what's needed and work on resolving problems. He says the ordinance is usually reviewed and updated every two years, and that process is due to begin within the next few months.

"Things come up over time," says Mr. Ingalls. "Things we didn't think about, things we've never seen before. We keep a laundry list of what we need to address when it's time to make changes."

He says the review process will include gathering input from the community, including the business sector, property owners, local developers, the chamber's discussion groups, and those who are having problems with the city's current version.

Dick Ellis, director of community affairs for Stonebriar Chevrolet on State Highway 121, says when the city reviews the ordinance, he hopes they'll relax the rules when it comes to temporary signage. He says the city left him few options when it came to letting potential customers know where their entrance was during all of the highway's heavy construction.

"The city wouldn't let us put anything out there other than a little 2' x 4' sign that said 'Now Open,' which couldn't be seen at night," says Mr. Ellis. The dealership's final solution was to have reflective signs made by the state, which cost \$500 each. "Maybe provisions need to be made to allow temporary signs for businesses in an ongoing construction setting."

Another area Mr. Ellis hopes the city will examine is the use of balloons at special events. He says some retailers spend big money on celebrity appearances, entertainment and festivities, however balloons are not an option. "It really is ridiculous," he says. "Even if there was just some window of opportunity to have balloons up, then they can be taken down – there needs to be some leeway there."

Susan Bland is a freelance writer living in Frisco.