

# ordinances Review of city sign ordinance delayed

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The Watsonville City Council last night postponed action on a proposal to review the city's ordinance on signs.

Calling the city's 1967 sign ordinance "a cumbersome document," the Planning Department proposed the move to make changes in the ordinance. Some revisions did take place in 1970, but many of those provisions have become outdated, and some of the ordinance's administrative procedures are difficult to enforce or resolve, a department memo said.

Maureen Owens, Planning Department director, said more time is needed to schedule meetings with the business community and sign makers to come up with revisions. The department staff will also meet with the city's Economic Development Department staff, which will have a say in any revisions.

The Planning Department said one of the main problems is the

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"prolific use" of temporary advertising signs around Watsonville. Large signs hang in front of buildings, others are stretched across main thoroughfares like Freedom Boulevard and Main Street.

Merchants are not the only guilty parties. The city has stretched large banners across major city streets, announcing annual events, such as the Burrito Bash.

Enforcement of the sign ordinance dealing with temporary signs is a significant problem, according to the memo. Temporary signs are not allowed without a

permit.

To get that permit, an application and plan must be submitted to the Building Department, along with a fee. The Building Department is required to submit the application to the Planning Department, which is then required to hand the application to the city's Architectural Review Committee for a review of the application. The only problem is that the committee no longer exists.

Under such confusing regulations, merchants take it upon themselves use temporary signs as they see fit. If one merchant

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hangs one up, other merchants start putting up their signs to compete for customers' attention.

In October, a letter campaign was initiated by the city in which approximately 15 notices were sent out to merchants, informing them that temporary signs were not permitted. Most of the merchants who received the letters were located along Freedom Boulevard.

Merchants responded to the letters by saying other businesses were using the signs, "so why can't I?" the department's memo said.

"While the city is sensitive to the desires of the business community to attract customers to their place of business in a highly effective manner, this business need must be balanced with the desire of the community for an aesthetically pleasing streetscape," the memo said.

The matter will be taken up by the City Council in a couple of months.