

Sign ordinance begins to bite

Tough law shows its teeth

By BOB SMITH
STAFF WRITER

For the third time in a decade, the Longs-Albertson's sign on Capitola's 41st Avenue has been whittled down in height.

Today's 16-foot-high sign is a mere stump compared to the double-decked sign that once beckoned shoppers and listed daily specials.

The new sign and a handful of others along 41st Avenue and on Bay and Capitola avenues east of Soquel Creek are harbingers of the future in a city that has one of the toughest, most rigidly enforced sign ordinances in Santa Cruz County.

Many 41st Avenue businesses are now being told that free-standing signs in front of their businesses must go.

Col. Sanders' visage on a bucket of fried chicken won't be enticing customers into the Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet much longer. The sign array in front of 41st Avenue Liquors is also in violation of the city's ordinance. The Cafe Capitola sign also must come down.

If a building is within 35 feet of the street, it can no longer have a free-standing sign.

And those that are being allowed to retain their curbside signs have to cut them down to a maximum height of 16 feet.

Businesses along Bay and Capitola avenues are still being allowed free-standing signs out front, but they can only be 5 feet tall (8 feet in total height if placed on a mound as part of a landscaping plan).

The relatively new monument sign in front of First Interstate Bank was the first sign on Bay and Capitola avenues that meets the regulations there.

The latest sign program was set up by an ordinance passed by the Capitola City Council in 1980 following months of meetings between city officials and a committee composed of business owners and representatives of the sign industry.

The ordinance set up a five-year amortization period for existing "non-conforming" signs along 41st Avenue and on Bay and Capitola avenues.

That amortization period ends Sept. 1, Assistant City Planner Susan Tupper said.

She's been overseeing the implementation of the new ordinance, which includes contacting business owners and shepherding plans for new or remodeled signs through the city's Architectural and Site Review process.

There are some other restrictions, Tupper says.

For example, there can be no more than three names of businesses on a sign, and only one sign per street frontage.

There are some problems.

Kragen Auto Supplies is the principal tenant of a small shopping complex on south 41st Avenue.

The auto supply store is located at the back of the center, but its sign will have to

come down, Tupper says, because the front of the building (where Winchell's Donuts is) is within the 35-foot "no sign" zone.

The Alpha Beta and Thrifty Drug names — two of the three on a sign in front of the King's Plaza shopping center — will be able to remain, Tupper said. But the third tier of the sign, advertising Tiny's Restaurant, will have to come down because the restaurant, once again, is too close to the street.

The free-standing Wells Fargo and County Bank signs next to those financial institutions will come down for the same reason.

And the Citicorp Savings time-and-temperature sign on Capitola Road will also have to be removed. "I'm really going to miss that sign," Tupper said.

Burger King at 41st Avenue and Clares Street may be the last to bring down its sign.

"The Burger King sign is not in compliance with the new ordinance," Tupper said, but

the restaurant was given five years from the date its land was annexed to the city to conform to the sign ordinance, Tupper said.

Tupper said the present free-standing sign can remain in place until January 1988 but must then come down because the building is within 35 feet of 41st Avenue. The business can apply for roof or wall signs, Tupper said.

One problem facing the City Council and Planning Commission, Tupper said, is the request for a 40-foot-high pylon at Gross Road and 41st Avenue to mark the location of the



Bob Smith

Bucket booted

Col. Harlan Sanders' smiling face will soon be missing from Capitola's 41st Avenue. A number of other familiar signs are doomed along the busy thoroughfare and Bay and Capitola avenues, as the city begins to enforce its sign ordinance — one of the toughest in the county.

proposed auto dealerships.

The council has been under intense pressure from the auto dealers to approve the pylon.

But as might be imagined, Tupper points out, some of the other businesses on 41st Avenue

won't be too happy about being made to remove their signs while a new one that is far higher is being erected.

It will take a variance from the Planning Commission and City Council to allow the sign.