

## Staff Report

**REQUEST TO AMEND THE MUNICIPAL CODE TO ALLOW ENTRANCE SIGNS FOR  
MULTIPLE-FAMILY DEVELOPMENTS**

May 27, 2014

During Council Comments on March 18, 2014, the City Council discussed a letter they had received from Fernsler Hutchinson Architecture who represents the Copper Beach townhome. As a result of that conversation, the City Council made the following referral to City staff:

*"Requested staff prepare a memo regarding the letter from Fernsler Hutchinson Architecture."*

In response to this directive, a memo was distributed to the Council on April 18, 2014. On May 20, 2014, the City Council directed staff to place this request on a future agenda.

**Background:**

On January 23, 2014, Sara Van Meeteren, Community Codes Liaison, received a Sign Permit application for the Copper Beech project on South 16<sup>th</sup> Street. The applicant, Copper Beech at Ames II, LLC, was proposing an 18.8 square foot monument sign approximately three and a half feet tall, located near the entrance to their property. The purpose of the sign was to identify Copper Beech as a residential housing development. **Ms. Van Meeteren was unable to approve the permit application because Chapter 21, Signs, of the Ames Municipal Code does not allow this type of sign on residentially zoned property.** The subject property is zoned RH (High Density Residential)

**Code Reference:**

Ames *Municipal Code* Section 21.121, On Premise Signage, regulates the types of signs that can be erected on residential lots:

*For all signs subject to the sign regulations, in agricultural, commercial and industrial zoning districts in the City of Ames except in the S-HM District, there may be three (3) square feet of signage for each foot of street frontage. Signs in the Planned Zoning districts are as permitted on the approved site plan. Where any side of a building abuts on an alley, only painted on wall signs shall be permitted on the side abutting the alley. Such sign shall be calculated as part of total permissible signage. **For all signs subject to the sign regulations in residential zoning districts in the City of Ames, only the following signs are permitted:***

- (1) *Real estate signs not exceeding six (6) square feet in area, which advertise the sale, rental, or lease of the premises upon which said signs are located only.*
- (2) *Signs, including bulletin boards, which are not over sixteen (16) square feet in area for public, educational, charitable, fraternal or religious institutions when the same are located on the premises of such institution.*
- (3) *Signs denoting only the name and profession/business of an occupant in a commercial building, public institutional building, or dwelling house and not exceeding two (2) square feet in area.*
- (4) *Single sign denoting the architect, engineer or contractor when placed upon work under construction and not exceeding thirty-two (32) square feet in area.*
- (5) *Memorial signs or tablets, names of buildings, and date of erection when cut into any masonry surface or when constructed of bronze or other noncombustible materials.*

- (6) *Publicly owned street name signs, traffic control signs, legal notices, railroad crossing signs, danger and temporary warning or emergency signs; and emblems, names, logos, and symbols on motor vehicles and equipment being used for purposes other than the display of signs or advertising devices.*
- (7) *Public service signs which give only directions "in and out" or signs which provide only information about directing people to ancillary facilities such as parking, entrance, etc.*
- (8) *Temporary or portable sign.*
- (9) *Subdivision Development Signs. One subdivision development sign may be permitted per preliminary plat or Conceptual Development Plan for subdivisions of 2 acres or more in area. This sign shall not exceed 96 sq. ft. in area and 12 ft. in height. It shall be located in the subdivision it identifies and no closer than 25 ft. from any property line, no closer than 100' from any pre-existing residence and only on lots abutting collector or arterial streets. The sign shall be the sole use of the property on which it is located. The sign shall identify the name of the subdivision exactly as it is set out on the preliminary plat or conceptual development plan approved by the City and may include the names of the subdivision developers, a map of the area covered by the subdivision and a description of amenities in it. The sign shall not be installed until utility construction has begun in the subdivision and the sign shall be removed once building permits have been issued for 50% of the lots in the subdivision.*
- (10) **Residential Subdivision Entrance Signs.** *The regulations described in this section apply to subdivision entrance signs in residential subdivisions. The location, number, size, height, materials, maintenance, and message regulations for subdivision identification signs are as follows:*
- (a) *Signs located on private property shall be no closer to the traveled part of a street than the right-of-way line. Signs shall not be allowed in the street visibility triangle, as such is described by Section 29.408(5).*
- (b) *It shall be unlawful to erect a subdivision entrance sign on public property, and the Council shall grant no encroachment permits for such signs.*
- (c) *Subdivision entrance signs shall not be permitted off-premise.*
- (d) *Two signs shall be permitted at each subdivision entrance. Double-faced signs shall be counted as two signs.*
- (e) *The size of the message area (subdivision name and address) of the sign shall not exceed 20 square feet. The size of the sign structure in comparison to the size of the message area shall not exceed a ratio of 7 to 1, unless approved as part of a Planned Unit Development.*
- (f) *Signs shall not exceed six (6) feet in height.*
- (g) *Materials used in the construction of subdivision entrance signs shall be low maintenance materials and may include: metal, wood, brick, stone, and concrete.*
- (h) *Maintenance of signs, illumination devices, and landscaping shall be the responsibility of the property owner. Signs which, by reason of deterioration, may become unsafe or unsightly shall be repaired or removed by the property owner upon written notice of the City. Signs which by reason of deterioration become unsafe or unsightly may be removed by the City upon written notice of the City.*
- (i) *The message on a subdivision entrance sign shall include only the name and address of the subdivision.*
- (j) *Signs may be illuminated internally or by reflected light subject to the following:*
- (i) *The light source shall not be directly visible and shall be arranged to reflect away from adjoining premises;*
- (ii) *The light source shall not be placed so to cause confusion or hazard to traffic, or to conflict with traffic control signs of lights;*
- (iii) *No illumination involving movement, by reason of the lighting arrangement, the lighting source, or other devices shall be permitted. This includes blinking, flashing rotating, and message changing; and*
- (iv) *The Property Owner's Association shall be responsible for the costs associated with providing electricity to the light source.*
- (k) *Landscaping shall be incorporated at the base of each subdivision entrance sign which enhances the site and the surrounding area. Plant materials shall not obstruct the visibility of moving vehicles or interfere with the maintenance of adjacent public property. Approval of a landscape plan for each residential subdivision entrance sign by the Director of Planning and Housing is required.*

**Staff Comments:**

The sign type being proposed by Copper Beech most closely resembles a Subdivision Entrance sign as described in Ames *Municipal Code* Section 21.121(10). However, the property owner would need to subdivide the property and name the subdivision Copper Beech to be able to construct an entrance sign that would meet their needs. Processing a minor subdivision typically takes 60 days.

Leaving the Code as it is currently written does not resolve the signage needs of other multiple family developments. Inspection staff has recently had discussions with developers regarding the Northridge Village project in Somerset and the type of signage they will be allowed to construct at the entrance to their development. The property is residentially zoned, so an entrance sign will not be allowed without a subdivision.

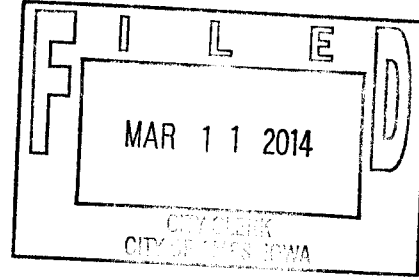
**Entrance signs for multiple family developments that clearly state the name of the development, similar to a subdivision sign, are typical in most communities. Ames *Municipal Code* Chapter 21, Signs, does not currently address signage for multiple family projects and Inspections staff foresees current and future needs for the suggested text amendment. Staff would further suggest that, if the City Council chooses to amend the *Municipal Code*, the new signage requirements be similar to the standards for subdivision entrance signs.**

**Should the Council desire to address the request, a motion should be made to direct the City Attorney to draft an appropriate amendment to the Municipal Code that would allow entrance signs for multiple family developments in compliance with the existing standards for subdivision entrance signs reflected in Section 21.121(10).**



March 7, 2014

Ames City Council  
515 Clark Avenue  
Ames, IA 50010



**Re: Copper Beech Townhouses - Ames Entrance Sign Text Amendment  
South 16<sup>th</sup> and Grand Avenue**

Ames City Council:

I am writing to ask for a text amendment regarding entrance signs for residentially zoned projects.

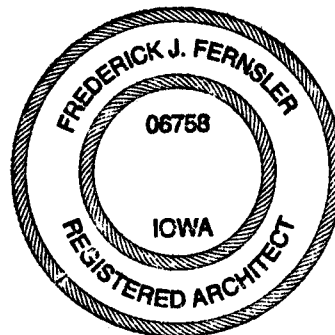
Currently the On Premises Signage ordinance, Sec. 21.121 section (10) allows only entrance signs for residential projects that have been subdivided. This regulation seems peculiar as there are projects like ours (large residential projects that have not been subdivided) that have a large number of living units (213) that are very similar in character to the subdivided ones where the intent of the sign ordinance should be the same. The intent being that housing (whether it is being rented or owned) provided in groups in the same development would need an entrance sign to identify its location for its users or prospective users and more importantly for emergency first responders.

We are respectfully requesting that the ordinance be changed to allow entrance signs for residential properties that have not been sub-divided.

Respectfully,

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