

**UNAPPROVED  
CITY OF BLAINE  
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES  
February 14, 2023**

The Blaine planning commission met in the City Hall Chambers on Tuesday, February 14, 2023. Chair Goracke called the meeting to order at 7:00PM.

Members Present: Commission Members Deonauth, Halpern, Homan, Olson, Swanson, and Chair Goracke.

Members Absent: Commission Member Gorzycki.

Staff Present: Shawn Kaye, Planner  
Elizabeth Showalter, Community Development Specialist  
Shelia Sellman, City Planner  
Teresa Barnes, Project Engineer

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**PUBLIC HEARINGS**

Item 4.6 – Case File No. 23-0006 – Public Hearing – The applicant is requesting the following:

1. Conditional use permit for a billboard up to 65 feet in height in a PBD (Planned Business District) zoning district to enable the billboard to be seen over a bridge.
  2. A ten-foot variance from the 65-foot height limit for a billboard, with a condition use permit, to allow a billboard with a total height of 75 feet.
- OUTFRONT MEDIA, 4202 PHEASANT RIDGE DRIVE NE.

The report to the planning commission was presented by Elizabeth Showalter, Community Development Specialist. The public hearing for Case File 23-0006 was opened at 7:59PM. As no one wished to appear, the public hearing was closed at 8:00PM.

Chair Goracke reported staff was recommending approval of the conditional use permit but denial of the variance. He asked if the applicant would like to speak to this.

Mark Stevens, 5331 Evanswood Lane in Edina, explained the recommendation for denial was made based on the fact the request was for economic reasons.

Community Development Specialist Elizabeth Showalter stated this was one of staff's concerns and noted staff has three other rationales for recommending denial.

Mr. Stevens stated he was the real estate manager for Upfront Media. He explained he hunts for locations that would allow for a billboard. He indicated he recently erected a 75 foot billboard near Lund's in White Bear Lake. He discussed how the adjacent residents of a senior housing building wanted the billboard higher in order to improve sight lines from the senior housing building. He discussed how the new digital display signs were viewed versus static signs. He reported the digital billboard could be used for emergency city messaging if this were required. He commented further on how affordable his digital messaging would be for local businesses. He requested the commission reconsider his request and allow for the billboard to be 75 feet in height.

Commissioner Halpern stated the billboards further south along I-35 have been a nice addition to the city. He indicated this request was rubbing him the wrong way. He believed the proposed billboard was not in keeping with the character of the neighborhood.

Commissioner Olson agreed this was not the right location for a billboard.

**Motion by Commissioner Olson to recommend denial of Planning Case 23-0006A a conditional use permit for a 65-foot-tall billboard in a PBD (Planned Business) zoning district.**

**Motion by Commissioner Olson to recommend denial of Planning Case 23-0006B a variance for a 75-foot-tall billboard with the following rationale:**

Case 23-0006B:

1. The location of the proposed billboard in relation to the bridge is not a unique circumstance because the code contemplates the potential for bridges and soundwalls to impede the visibility of billboards and identified a maximum height of 65 feet as the maximum appropriate form of relief for that circumstance.
2. The requested variance serves to make the billboard more profitable, by improving visibility, which is an economic consideration. Economic considerations do not constitute practical difficulties.
3. The subject property is located within a high finish shopping center and a 75-foot-tall billboard would alter that essential character.
4. The requested variance is not consistent with the purpose of the zoning code to conserve the natural, scenic beauty, and attractiveness of Blaine (23.01(f)).

**Motion seconded by Commissioner Halpern. The motion passed 5-1 (Commissioner Swanson opposed).**

Chair Goracke noted this would be on the agenda of the March 6, 2023 city council meeting.