

CITY OF EAST CHICAGO
BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS COMMISSION

BOARD MEMBERS

Steve Segura, President
Lydia Lopez, Representative
Cesar Perez, Representative
Elizabeth Campos, Representative
Lilia Ramos, Plan Commission Representative

Special Meeting Minutes
Friday, October 21, 2022 @ 4:30 p.m.
Reported for Fissinger & Associates
By: Lisa Pena

CALL TO ORDER: 4:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Present in Chambers: Steve Segura, Cesar
Perez, Elizabeth Campos, Lilia Ramos

MR. SEGURA: Seems we have more than three people
present. So we do have a quorum.

STAFF: Present in Chambers: Richard Morrisroe, Debra
Gritters, Alysia Dunbar.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Wednesday, February 23, 2022.

Motion to approve February 23, 2022 Regular Meeting Minutes
made by Lilia Ramos. Second by Cesar Perez.

(Motion Carries)

NEW BUSINESS:

MR. SEGURA: Moving on to New Business. The first item
on the agenda is a request for a sign variance at 801 West
Chicago Avenue by Agnes Zabawa.

A petition has been filed for a sign variance at
801 West Chicago Avenue by Agnes Zabawa. I shall ask the
staff to explain the nature of this hearing.

MS. GRITTERS: My name is Debra Gritters. I am Manager
of the Planning Department. We're here today because Agnes

1 has presented a sign application for signage that is well
2 over our Zoning Code.

3 And we have supplied the Board Members with our
4 Zoning Code, a copy of our Zoning Code and also illustrations
5 of what our Zoning Code implies with the windows covering up
6 to 25 percent.

7 The Planning Department reached out. The Planning
8 Department and the Building Department both reached out to
9 Agnes. And we stated that the signage was over the allowed
10 square footage.

11 She still wanted to proceed. So now that's where
12 we're at today.

13 The position of the Planning Department is to deny
14 the petition as submitted and revisit her sign application to
15 conform to the Zoning Code.

16 MR. SEGURA: Do we have all the required documents?

17 MS. GRITTERS: Yes. They should be in your packets.

18 MR. SEGURA: At this time can we ask questions?

19 MR. MORRISROE: And offer Agnes an opportunity to
20 present their position.

21 MR. SEGURA: If you would like to come up and explain.

22 MR. SNEINEH: Hi. My name is Fadi Sneineh. I'm the
23 owner of the Insurance Navy Company. This is Agnes Zabawa.

24 So the reason that we were looking for larger
25 square footage of a sign is just it's a corner unit. And the
store frontage technically it's a smaller store frontage
because there's no windows on one entire side. It is a
corner unit.

With that being said every single, I mean I would
say the majority of the businesses in that center have the
grandfathered in bigger signs.

So if you look at the building right here at the
corner that's on Chicago and Indianapolis, you'll see like
the currency exchange next-door. You'll see there's all the
previous tenants there that have large, large signage.

1 And we just want something similar to theirs. Even
2 quite smaller than theirs is okay.

3 But the way that the square footage that this
4 allows us is just not significant enough for two signs
5 because obviously we're on a corner so we need one on one
6 side and one on the other side. It's just not enough square
7 footage.

8 The only other thing we could do to increase the
9 square footage count is to basically open up that entire
10 building, add windows, add more windows to open the whole
11 storefront. But I don't think all of this is necessary.

12 I mean we're having, you know, two to three broken
13 glasses every few months that we're replacing out of pocket.
14 I just don't think adding more windows on that corner is
15 going to be necessary.

16 It's just going to be more windows being, you know,
17 scraped and etched and broken. So that's something we do
18 deal with a lot over there on that corner is broken glass.

19 MS. ZABAWA: I would also like to say that, you know, we
20 do have other locations as well in Texas, California, Georgia
21 that our signage is larger there.

22 And we haven't had, you know, necessarily any
23 issues with not just the Village, but any of the tenants
24 nearby as well. So we do have the bigger signage there.

25 Not only that but the sign that is facing
Indianapolis if we're looking at a 32 square foot sign it's
going to be significantly smaller than what our space is. So
anybody driving by there will just see a very small sign
whereas we have that really big area.

 That, you know, just wouldn't be a nice comparable
to that as well.

 MR. SNEINEH: As Agnes mentioned we're in Texas,
California, Georgia. We have over 35 locations all around.
And signage is really never an issue for us. You know, I
think this is the first time we're struck with this.

 I mean every City has, you know, guidelines for
sign purposes. But in this particular case because it is a
corner unit and because we are limited for signage it just
would make the signs very, very small.

1 And it would actually make, you know, because our
2 sign is the words Insurance Navy it would just make it look
3 very, very small. And it actually would make it look awkward
4 on the building.

5 It would just be an awkward size to have on a
6 storefront, you know, that long on both sides.

7 MR. SEGURA: I call forward any written petitions or
8 comments.

9 Request of the staff, if any, have been received at
10 the Planning Office?

11 MR. MORRISROE: If I may, my understanding was that what
12 Agnes Zabawa was asking for was wall to wall signage as if we
13 were papering the whole building on the Indianapolis
14 Boulevard side and the Chicago Avenue side with signage.

15 We do admit that there are some buildings, current
16 buildings that have more than 32 square feet. But that's a
17 vast difference to be asking for perhaps 40, 42 feet than to
18 be saying you want the whole building and the wall nothing
19 but a sign.

20 MR. SNEINEH: May I speak? You know, to be quite frank
21 when we signed the lease, we actually signed a long-term
22 lease here with the hopes that we'd be here for the next 20,
23 20 plus years.

24 And we actually did try discussing with the owner
25 to purchase the building and to remodel it because I actually
26 have that line of business as well.

27 You know, currently now at the moment that wasn't
28 an option.

29 But to be quite frank when we looked at the unit we
30 basically looked at the other signs on the building like the
31 neighboring which is the Checks, the currency exchange
32 next-door adjacent to the right of it.

33 I mean they're wall to wall. Their signs are very
34 large. And they look very nice. It's not too overwhelming
35 on the building. It's actually a very nice facade and
36 frontage that they have.

37 And, you know, as many know the bigger the sign the
38 more expensive the sign is, the pricier it is.

1 Obviously the sign costs more. The electric bill
2 is more. The installation is more. The whole job could be
3 double or triple because we're going to a bigger sign.

4 We're willing to invest that money here in East
5 Chicago to give that space a nice look along with help us
6 exceed our goals in that location.

7 So I am not sure who is familiar here with retail
8 space. But I mean a business with no sign is a sign of no
9 business. So that's something we kind of go with.

10 We have many billboards. We have about 40
11 billboards currently in between Illinois and Indiana. So if
12 you drive up and down 294 closer to the Chicago area, we have
13 many billboards. So we go above and beyond with signage.

14 I think our first Indiana location, prime corner, I
15 think having a larger sign would be very helpful for the
16 business.

17 And also it's not going to be an eyesore. I mean
18 when you look at the other signs as I mentioned in the area
19 like the business adjacent they're wall to wall and they're
20 really large signs.

21 We just want to stick out like the other
22 businesses.

23 MR. SEGURA: Is this an illuminated sign?

24 MR. SNEINEH: Yeah. It's an illuminated sign, yes.

25 MR. PEREZ: I have a question. Where in Illinois are
you located?

MR. SNEINEH: We have a location Downtown Chicago four
buildings away from the Willis Tower, the 36th Floor of the
Clark and Adams Building.

Besides that we have three locations in Cicero,
North Riverside, Palos Hills, Midlothian, Harvey, Chicago
Heights, Calumet City, Bridgeview. We're all over. Melrose
Park, Aurora, Elgin.

MR. SEGURA: I have a question. What is the ordinance?

MR. MORRISROE: 32 square feet.

1 MR. SEGURA: Is that like a 4 by 8?

2 MR. MORRISROE: Well, it could be 4 by 8. Sometimes it
3 could be 3 by 10 and a portion.

4 We have different kinds of treatment of that. That
5 can be treated whatever way they want.

6 MR. SEGURA: That sounds pretty big.

7 MR. SNEINEH: The size of the sign you're asking?

8 A 3 by 8 is pretty big. But we have two signs. So
9 we have one facing one direction and one facing the other
10 direction. That's the issue.

11 If it was just a 3 by 8 on a solid like one sign,
12 it's doable. We wouldn't have to go through these measures
13 to get a bigger sign.

14 But because it's a corner unit, you know, traffic
15 depending on which way to travel they're going to have an
16 issue seeing the business.

17 And I just think that in the future down the line
18 that might be an issue for people to, you know, spot our
19 business, for potential clients and customers to spot our
20 business.

21 Already on that corner it's very congested. I
22 think it's the most congested intersection in East Chicago.
23 I don't know if that's correct or not.

24 MS. GRITTERS: It's High traffic. It's very high
25 traffic.

26 MR. SNEINEH: So it's high traffic in East Chicago.
27 It's right at the corner.

28 We do a lot of ground marketing. We do a lot of
29 direct mailers. We do a lot of different types of marketing.
30 The last thing we want to do is miss a client walking or
31 driving to our location.

32 MR. MORRISROE: You know that you have the hanging sign
33 which is very clear on Chicago Avenue.

34 MR. SNEINEH: Yes. I am aware of that sign as well,
35 yeah.

1 MR. MORRISROE: So if the Board considers 32 on the side
2 and something in the range of 16 or minus whatever the amount
is on that overhanging sign, it doesn't do your wall to wall.

3 I frankly without some pictures doubt that all of
4 these jurisdictions are giving you the wall to wall.

5 MR. SNEINEH: We can present the photos right now of
other businesses.

6 MR. MORRISROE: Of Palos and Midlothian?

7 MR. SNEINEH: We have photos right now we can present of
8 other townships.

9 MR. MORRISROE: That's not in Indiana.

10 MR. SNEINEH: It's not in Indiana, exactly. We didn't
think it was going to be relevant.

11 The issue is, you know, when we took this
12 storefront I don't know if anyone here remembers. I think it
was Gold. I think it was a Gold Store.

13 MR. MORRISROE: They moved. They're still in town.

14 MR. SNEINEH: Yes. So we actually, you know, the Gold
15 Store, just too much information right now, but the Gold
Store was just having issues with the store and keeping up.
16 So we made a deal.

17 We actually paid one year of rent upfront to get
this corner. Like we paid one year of rent upfront just to
18 get this corner.

19 The reason we wanted the corner, because they have
one or two interior spaces, was for the signage purposes.

20 So, you know, with that being said like the unit is
21 built out. And I can assure anybody in this room if they
walked into that location it's a very promising location.

22 And I can tell you the way we did the interior
23 remodeling, the way it looks inside even if you drive by and
peek through the windows I can tell you it's the nicest
24 office space in East Chicago without me looking at any other
office.

25 We put in a lot of time and, you know, a lot of

1 work into that location. And I think, you know, I think
2 allowance for a bigger sign and I mean it's a reputable
3 brand. It's a reputable company.

4 It's not like the first operation we've ever
5 opened, you know. We've been in business. We're BBB
6 accredited.

7 MR. SEGURA: Thank you. Do you have anymore questions?

8 MR. PEREZ: I do. So this hanging sign in this picture,
9 that does not suffice for you? You want the hanging sign
10 that's there already?

11 MR. SNEINEH: That's there.

12 MR. PEREZ: You can see that from both ends. So that's
13 not good enough for you? You want to go ahead and put one on
14 this side of the wall and one on the other side?

15 MR. SNEINEH: Yeah. Because box signage is kind of a
16 thing of the past like the hanging signs like that, the
17 sidewalk signs.

18 MR. PEREZ: So are you going to remove that sign?

19 MR. SNEINEH: We are willing to remove it if we needed
20 to.

21 I guess who did you speak to that said we could
22 keep it?

23 MS. ZABAWA: It was either Douglas or --

24 MR. SNEINEH: Douglas I think. We spoke with Douglas.
25 And he said that because it's already permitted for that
location.

MR. MORRISROE: It's grandfathered.

MR. SNEINEH: It's grandfathered, yes.

MS. GRITTERS: It's a grandfathered sign.

MR. SNEINEH: It's a grandfathered sign. So he said we
can disregard it in the permit application.

MR. MORRISROE: The content of that sign will be redone,
correct?

1 MR. SNEINEH: Yes.

2 MR. MORRISROE: The way they want it.

3 MR. SEGURA: Thank you.

4 MR. SNEINEH: Thank you.

5 MR. SEGURA: I call forward any citizens supporting the
6 petition.

7 I call any citizens opposing the petition.

8 I call forward any citizens with questions about
9 the petition.

10 I call forward the petitioner to respond to the
11 audience if there were any questions. And there are none.

12 At this time we already had questions from the
13 staff.

14 I do have a question. You said they are both
15 illuminated what you're looking for on both sides, correct?

16 MR. SNEINEH: Yes.

17 MR. SEGURA: I'll call for a motion to close taking any
18 public comment?

19 Motion to close taking public comments made by Lilia Ramos.
20 Second by Cesar Perez.

21 (Motion Carries)

22 MR. SEGURA: So, City Planner, do you make any
23 recommendations right now?

24 MS. GRITTERS: That we deny the petitioner.

25 MR. SEGURA: So City Planner has moved to deny the
petition.

MR. MORRISROE: If I may, however, I guess I am curious
as to what threshold. All the discussions as I understand
them, I have not been a party to them, have been all or
nothing. It's the whole loaf or nothing at all.

I think that if there was some reasonable

1 discussion of something that's visible. For instance if you
2 want to take down the hanging sign and put a little bit more
space into your new electrified signs, I think the Board and
Planning Department would consider that.

3
4 We want you to be in town. But we just don't want
you to think it's come in and anything goes.

5 MR. SEGURA: I design signs all the time. I think if
6 you are within the square footage of 3 by 10 which is 32
square feet on both sides, you leave the one in the middle, I
think that's sufficient.

7
8 The store that used to be there before the Gold
Store I always saw their signage. And it was very small to
be honest with you because the corner alone gets a lot of
9 visibility. There's a lot of traffic there already.

10 I don't think you need to be all Vegas style. I
11 don't want to gaudy up the corner. There's other ways. I
mean there's nice awnings you could do that will make it pop
is what I'm saying.

12
13 So if we can come to a happy medium with something
like that, I think the Board would be okay with it. But I
believe your plans would have to be revised from what they
14 currently are right now.

15 I'm honestly not a fan of covering up windows. If
16 you have a beautiful place inside, why not let people see it.

17 If I want to walk by and see what's inside of your
building, I would assume it would be better to leave it a
18 little bit open.

19 You can do 36 by 48's and hang them with suction
cups to say some of the stuff that you want to say and still
20 be very visible on that corner.

21 So if you're willing to do that, you have to come
back though. We'll have to do this again, correct?

22 MS. GRITTERS: As long as it's within variance it should
23 be okay. This is just a Special Hearing because it's just so
over extravagant.

24 MR. SNEINEH: But just if we were to do 3 by 10 you
25 said, right? 3 by 10 how many square feet is that?

1 MR. MORRISROE: 32.

2 MR. SNEINEH: So it's 3 by 10. So 1 and a half by 10 on
3 each side. That's just I mean 1 and a half inch letters.
4 It's just small for that space.

5 MR. SEGURA: But it's illuminated, correct? You're
6 still going to see it on that corner believe me.

7 MS. RAMOS: Also I don't agree with the signs that are
8 there now. But unfortunately those have been grandfathered
9 in. So there's nothing we can do there.

10 You did mention that you have a lot of other
11 successful stores and that you do direct marketing. So that
12 in itself will be enough for you to have advertising to get
13 the customers that you're looking for.

14 Signs help. But if you put something like that, I
15 think it would take away from the look of the City on those
16 four corners. And it's not in compliance with the permit.

17 MR. SNEINEH: The reason, the simple reason that we
18 applied was for the simple fact that half of the businesses
19 in that building have huge signs.

20 MS. RAMOS: And that's exactly what I'm saying. I don't
21 agree with that. But unfortunately they were grandfathered
22 in.

23 If they were to come before the Board, I would
24 probably say vote no.

25 MR. SNEINEH: So is there any sign square footage we
could agree to now greater than what's accepted?

MS. RAMOS: No.

MR. SEGURA: No. I would say no.

MR. SNEINEH: So what we're going to have to do is just
have a sign on one side.

MR. SEGURA: You can have them on both sides. I don't
see a problem with that. You can't do that?

MR. SNEINEH: No. I mean if we could do that, if we
could do 32 square foot on each side, that's kind of
basically what we'd like.

1 MR. SEGURA: They're only allowed to do it one side of
2 the building? Because the people coming this way, they won't
be able to see the sign.

3 MS. GRITTERS: Yeah, because they have the overhead.
4 They have the overhead hanging that's grandfathered.

5 MR. SNEINEH: But that overhead hanging is
grandfathered. What if there was no overhead hanging?

6 MR. MORRISROE: You'll remove it?

7 MS. GRITTERS: Then we'll give you another sign.

8 MR. SNEINEH: Say that again.

9 MS. GRITTERS: Then we would be able to give you a
10 different sign.

11 MR. SEGURA: If they removed the middle one, they could
do the two on the side?

12 MS. GRITTERS: The one on the side.

13 MR. SEGURA: Do one only?

14 MS. GRITTERS: Correct.

15 MR. MORRISROE: On one side, not on the front.

16 MR. SNEINEH: Well, a corner is both. I mean like for
17 instance when you rent retail space you pay more for a corner
because you have two sides and you have exposure.

18 Any corner unit no matter which city no matter what
19 state has two signs on each side. Like you could just look
at any corner building they'll have a sign on one side and a
20 sign on the other.

21 So if we're not allowed to do signs on both sides,
I mean that would be the first time I've ever heard of that.

22 If we go to Google Maps and just pick a random
23 state anywhere in Indiana anywhere in Illinois anywhere in
Wisconsin any corner unit is going to have two signs.

24 I've been around retail space for the last 20 years
25 of my life. I know that.

1 We have a lot of corner spaces right now. If you
2 go to Google and look at my locations, a list of my
3 locations, the majority of our locations are corner units.
4 And they have dual signs.

5 MR. SEGURA: At this time we're going to take a vote.
6 Roll call.

7 MS. GRITTERS: Steve Segura.

8 MR. SEGURA: No.

9 MS. GRITTERS: Cesar Perez.

10 MR. PEREZ: No.

11 MS. GRITTERS: Lilia Ramos.

12 MS. RAMOS: No.

13 MS. GRITTERS: Elizabeth Campos.

14 MS. CAMPOS: No.

15 MR. SEGURA: Thank you very much. Motion fails.

16 And we say it only fails because of the current
17 design you have right now.

18 So they can appeal this, correct, once they
19 redesign this?

20 MS. GRITTERS: They can reapply.

21 MR. SEGURA: So the no is to the current design that you
22 have right now.

23 MR. SNEINEH: The thing is we just don't want to keep
24 reapplying if we're not going to get anywhere.

25 I would say respectfully if we can't put a sign on
both sides of the building we're probably going to have to
relocate that office because we're paying like triple the
amount of rent for a corner.

 And it doesn't do any good if I can't have signage
on both sides of the building. I mean it just wouldn't make
sense for us to stay there.

1 We're an insurance office. We need one or two
2 employees max. That store is like 1,600 square feet. It
3 just doesn't make sense to occupy that and maintain that
4 property, you know, if we could only have one sign on one
5 side.

6 MR. MORRISROE: You have the hanging sign and the option
7 on the Indianapolis Boulevard side.

8 You have the hanging sign on Chicago Avenue. And
9 you have the option of putting a 32 foot sign on the
10 Indianapolis Boulevard side.

11 MR. SNEINEH: Okay. Can we get 32 square feet plus a
12 small sign on the other side?

13 MS. GRITTERS: We can't agree. This is just for the
14 sign right now.

15 MR. SEGURA: This is just for the way you have it
16 designed right now. I am sure it can happen.

17 MS. GRITTERS: You can call the Planning Department and
18 we can have a conversation.

19 MR. SEGURA: We're not saying you can't put a sign.
20 Just the way it's designed right now, that's why it didn't
21 pass. That's all.

22 I'd like to thank everyone for coming today. If
23 there's no further items, motion to adjourn.

24 Motion to adjourn made by Lilia Ramos. Second by Cesar
25 Perez.


Roll Call: "All in Favor": All Abstain: None
Opposed: None Motion Carries.

(Adjourned at 4:59 p.m.)

Approval of Special Meeting Minutes of
Friday, October 21, 2022

Approved and Signed December 9, 2022

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Steve Segura, President


Lydia Lopez, Representative


Cesar Perez, Representative

Elizabeth Campos, Representative

**Zoom-
Lilia Ramos**

Lilia Ramos, Plan Commission Representative


Alysia Dunbar, Recording Secretary

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Lisa Pena, a competent and duly qualified court reporter, do hereby certify that I did report in machine shorthand the foregoing proceedings and that my shorthand notes so taken at said time and place were thereafter reduced to typewriting under my personal direction.

I further certify that the foregoing typewritten transcript constitutes minutes of said proceedings taken at said time and place, so ordered to be transcribed.

Dated at Portage, Indiana, this 26th day of October, 2022.



Lisa Pena
Notary Public Porter County
Certified Shorthand Reporter
License Number 084-003483

