

BONITA SPRINGS

Businesses voice concerns about changes to signs

By Christina Cepero
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About 20 business representatives voiced concerns at a forum Thursday that Bonita Springs' proposed sign changes will hurt them.

"Signs are the lifeblood of a business and you're in competition with everyone in Naples and Coconut Point," said Rex Sims, who owns Heaven Scent Flowers on Old 41 Road.

"In order to have a successful city, you have to

have successful businesses."

He said landscaping should not block signs.

Bonita Surveyor Jay Sweet said landscaped signs with shopping center names would replace ones that list individual businesses, which would be able to have signs on their facades that cover 15 percent, up from 10 percent of the building facade.

"There should be some happy medium," said real estate agent Andrew Sa-

luan, where the larger individual tenants can be on the center sign and still look nice.

Sweet said it's up to the landlord to decide the content on the sign but the maximum height is 8 feet from the edge of the asphalt of the road.

The most controversial proposal is a limit of color. Only one primary color — red, yellow or blue — would be allowed on free-standing signs. The background of the signs would not be able to have pri-

mary or secondary colors — orange, green or purple.

New or replacement signs or ones with changes of more than 25 percent of the value would have to meet the sign code changes.

Jeffrey Satfield, engineering consultant for quick-service restaurants, said businesses should be able to keep their signs unless changing more than half of their value.

He said it will take

longer for the community's look to change but it will allow businesses to get the value out of the investment in their signs.

Muted signs don't catch the eye of people driving by, he added: "A completely muted area can be almost as deafening."

He suggested businesses be allowed more leeway if they enhance their signs architecturally.

Businesses would be able to have sandwich, or

A-frame signs, on front of their businesses citywide, not just downtown.

They would be allowed during business hours without permits.

"It's in front of your store. You should be able to have one," said planner Jackie Genson.

"I think that helps out the businesses."

Kathy Markiewicz with Edward Jones Investments on Burnt Pine said it will help her to be able to have her sign under her porch legally.

Budget

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Councilman John Carioscia. "There would be no discussion because that's what we agreed to do when we put together the fire services assessment ... there's no way we can."

In a final vote, council set the fire service assessment at 38 percent for this next fiscal year. That money collected

will be placed in escrow, pending the ruling.

"This is the same rate as last year and is lower than the public-noticed rate of 64 percent," said Connie Barron, spokeswoman for the city, in a news release. "The assessment will be collected on the property tax bill along with the annual stormwater and solid waste fees."

Council also established a 20-day hardship deferral program for the new assessment. This will allow permanent

residents of Cape Coral, whose total household income is at or below a certain level, to defer all or a portion of the assessment, Barron wrote. Homeowners have until September 24 to apply for the deferral.

The city has a "Fire Services Assessment 101" posted on capecoral.net that explains the assessment and how it is calculated. Homeowners should call 242-3851 for information on how to complete the hardship application.

BONITA SPRINGS

City Council approves proposed \$29.2M budget

By Christina Cepero
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The Bonita Springs City Council approved a tentative \$29.2 million budget Thursday that includes \$37,000 in gas taxes for a citywide traffic study that will help determine the need for road projects.

Public Works Director Matt Feeney asked for \$12,000 to count traffic on city roads during season starting in January. He budgeted \$25,000 to update the city's 2008 master transportation plan in April. He plans to contract the work.

The \$5.9 million Shangi-La Road extension from Old 41 Road east to Imperial Parkway, expected to be complete in late October, will then be included in the study. The city will finish paying for the project with \$511,580 in 2014-2015.

Feeney said the study will allow the city to prioritize road projects to improve traffic flow.

"Does Old 41 need to be four-laned sooner than later?" he gave as an example.

The \$15.1 million widening of Old 41 to four lanes from Bonita Beach Road south to the Collier County line would be fully funded by 2023-2024 unless bumped up. No money is budgeted for the project in 2014-2015.

At a July workshop, the City Council removed \$11.4 million from the capital improvement plan allocated from 2019 to 2024 for widening Bonita Beach Road from four to six lanes from Old 41 Road west to U.S. 41.

"For us to look out that far and not have anything there for east-west expansion of any kind of capacity I don't know how we can in good conscience even contemplate that," Mayor Ben Nelson said.

"Do we not think that there will be any more people going east and west on any of these roads? If we don't think we will, then this is A No. 1 correct."

"If we know or we think there will be a 20 percent raise in traffic volume or whatever there is, shouldn't we start at some point?"

The 2014-2015 budget

does include \$100,000 for a consultant to develop a vision for Bonita Beach Road for pedestrians, bicyclists, bus riders and drivers. Lee County's transportation planning board killed a federally funded \$1.1 million state intersection study of U.S. 41 and Bonita Beach Road last month because of Bonitians' fear it could lead to a flyover.

The city's budget also allocates \$224,700 to create a multi-use path for pedestrians and bicyclists on West Terry Street. "That's where we also get most complaints as being not safe. There isn't currently a bike lane so we're looking at a multi-use path," Parks and Recreation Director Nicole Perino said.

The city's taxable value increased 8 percent to \$7.6 billion. The City Council voted 6-0 Thursday to keep the tax rate at 82 cents per \$1,000 of taxable value. The city will collect almost \$6 million in property taxes, up from \$5.5 million in the current fiscal year. A tax rate of 77 cents would have yielded \$5.5 million.

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Scam

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funds after he applied for benefits for his son while he was living in Mexico with his mother. Hicks allegedly collected more than \$76,000 in disability payments for his son and hid the fact the two were not living together.

Mackey is accused of collecting about \$139,919 in Social Security disability from her husband, who had died sometime prior, accord-

ing to the statement.

Wisniewski, who is also known as Robin Sabatine, is being charged with theft of government funds and concealment of an event that would have affected the ability to obtain Supplemental Security Income. She allegedly continued to collect her mother's retirement and survivor's insurance after her death. In total, Wisniewski is accused of stealing more than \$38,599.

Staff writer Melissa Montoya contributed to this report.

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