

Signs Create Safer Communities

Imagine if, before beginning to recraft sign codes, planners sought out expertise from those who make the signs. It is happening more and more. In just the last two years, more than 2,000 planners have attended ISA webinars and in-person events to help them learn more about crafting reasonable and beneficial sign codes. These planners have left with resources produced by the Sign Research Foundation. And in May, ISA is providing education for planners at the American Planning Association's National Planning Conference—for the third time in four years.

These events build relationships with planners, who then have a resource when they need it.

A 'Go-To' for Planners

Sign codes can be tough enough to deal with when one jurisdiction is involved. In Calvert County, Md., there are seven primary growth areas called Town Centers, each with their own zoning ordinances and sign codes, in addition to an overall County Zoning Ordinance, with some over-arching sign regulations. Pat Haddon, principal planner with the county, was tasked with fixing the sign codes.

"We just had a convoluted set of regulations," she said.

But maintaining the "different flavor" of each community was important. In 2011 Haddon started the long and winding process of reconfiguring the sign codes. ISA's Kenny Peskin, director of industry programs, joined the stakeholder group for its monthly meetings.

"Kenny was very involved and helpful. We really wanted public input and we wanted the sign code to be reflective of a broad swath of the public," Haddon said. "So having the sign industry involved made sense."

After nearly two years of monthly meetings, the stakeholder group had a sign code ready to present at a public hearing. That's when the U.S. Supreme Court issued its ruling in *Reed v. Town of Gilbert*. "The Supreme Court said sign codes had to be content neutral and we weren't," Haddon said. It was back to the drawing board.

Finally, Calvert County's sign code is almost ready for public hearing again, and Haddon has since moved on to longer range transportation planning.

But working alongside ISA on the first iteration is a model worth imitating, Haddon believes. "No one got the impression that Kenny was just there to get bigger signs in the code. He supplied us with information and links to information. If people would say, 'We want 11-foot monument signs,' he would offer, 'The standard is...'" He wasn't selling a bill of goods. He was helping people see the way it should be."

Haddon also has worked with Peskin on a presentation at a regional meeting of the American Planning Association and always seeks out the ISA booth at the National Planning Conference. "ISA is the go-to booth and everybody seeks out the resources they offer," she said. "It's part of every planners' library."



STATS • FACTS

All four sectors—supply side printing, supply side electrical/digital, end market electrical/digital and end market architectural—show favorable growth in 2017,



ISA Resources

1. *New OSHA Regulations Set to Take Effect*

The Occupational Safety & Health Administration's (OSHA) crane safety operator requirement takes effect Nov. 10.

This regulation requires all crane operators to be certified. Companies that fail to comply could face shut downs, civil penalties and potentially even criminal charges.

ISA is working to help sign companies learn as much as they can as soon as they can with an online resource, including a listing of frequently asked questions. Two webinars have been held to help companies get up to speed. Find all the resources at www.signs.org/crane.

2. *Help for Local Officials*

Local officials can learn more about the sign, graphics and visual communications industry through a number of ISA resources, at www.signs.org/local.

3. *SRF: A Valuable Partner*

Much of the research that ISA uses to inform local planners is developed by the Sign Research Foundation. SRF has developed a robust library of information and research that sign, graphics and visual communications professionals can use to expand their own expertise or to share with local officials. See the research at www.signresearch.org.

'Helpful Throughout the Process'

As a planner with the city of Scottsdale, Ariz., Andrew Chi often finds himself walking a fine line. Scottsdale has one of the most restrictive sign ordinances in the country, but the city still wants to be seen as amenable to businesses.

When it came time to make changes to the sign code, Chi had one goal: to make it more user friendly. It is a tough challenge, given the fact that the current sign code is 80 pages long. The sign code revisions have been over a decade in the making.

The city first tackled the temporary portion of the sign code, regulating solely on zoning, size and location. That change would bring it into compliance with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Reed v. Town of Gilbert*, which said signs can't be regulated based on content. Permanent signs are already regulated based on zoning.

James Carpentier, ISA's director of state and local government affairs, provided comments on the changes. But more important were the resources he offered.

Chi attended a workshop presentation on developing reasonable sign codes and left with materials from the Sign Research

Foundation. "*Best Practices in Temporary Signs* and *The State of Sign Codes After Reed* are right here on my desk," Chi said. "The publications have been really helpful throughout the process. Even though the materials might help a town or city that has a less restrictive sign code than Scottsdale, staff used the materials to make sure that what we were drafting was sufficient and consistent. Those materials were very helpful."

Providing comments on proposed changes also has proven invaluable, Chi said. Carpentier has offered suggestions, as have sign companies. "It's always valuable input," he said.

Chi believes the end result of the sign code changes extend beyond being easier to understand. "It is a fine line we have to walk, but in the end, both Scottsdale residents and businesses will benefit from the sign code changes. We want to keep the aesthetics and character of the city intact by reducing sign clutter, while providing more signage flexibility for businesses."

Planners like Haddon and Chi aren't alone. In the last few years, ISA has worked with thousands of planners to help their communities develop reasonable and beneficial sign codes, creating a true win-win for all involved. | 

