

Sign, sign, everywhere a sign

Planning Commission to talk overlay districts, sign ordinances

By the Staff News Service

The Arkadelphia Planning Commission will meet today in the Town Hall Boardroom at 5:30 p.m. to consider establishing subcommittees to implement overlay districts on North 10th Street and update sign ordinances.

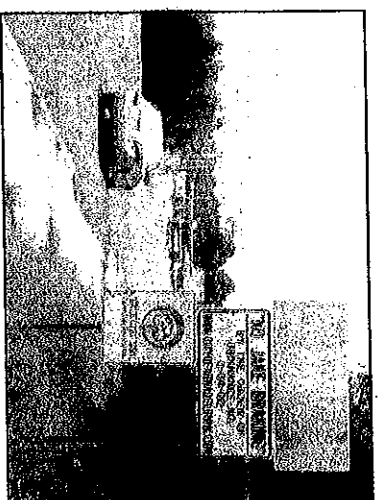
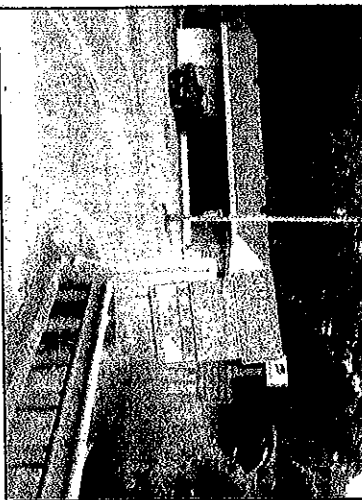
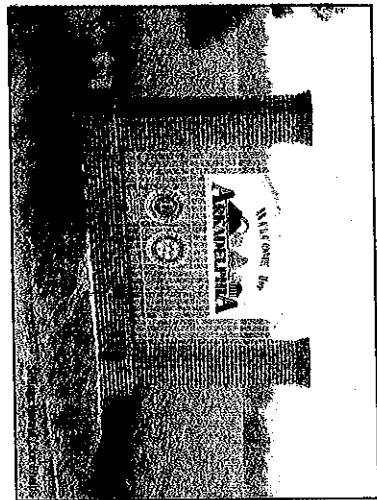
A memo included in the packet that the Land Use Ordinance needs to be revised to implement the city's updated comprehensive development plan.

Priority items for city and county plans include promoting desirable and attractive gateways into Arkadelphia. To accomplish this, the memo says, gateway districts will be created to regulate signage and landscaping. In addition, the city's sign ordinance will be updated for all streets.

Urban Planning Associates will be providing consulting services for these projects. They have submitted a preliminary sign ordinance and are currently drafting gateway district regulations. Gateway use developments within the overlay districts, as well as other issues, may be addressed. City staff has recommended that the planning commission consider selecting subcommittees for this purpose.

Included in the meetings are excerpts from the 2007 Comprehensive Development Plan, which outlines ideas for urban beautification, asset building and regulations. "... one of the areas of greatest concern to participants (in planning workshops) was urban beautification. Citizens desire a town that is aesthetically appealing and welcoming. With the potential of increased commercial development in currently undeveloped areas, Arkadelphia will be in a position to control the look and feel of these districts. To often, communities do too little to regulate the design and landscaping of new commercial areas. Subsequently, many towns are left with unattractive, short-lived developments that do not bring long-term benefits rather than assets for the community.

This plan proposes the creation of overlay districts in two areas that have been identified to



may be required by the existing zoning, subdivision and building code. These planning tools can be used quite effectively to guide development and design in areas deemed in need of protection or of particular importance to the city.

"As proposed the overlay districts will only regulate signage and landscaping, and will be further conceptually designed during the plan implementation phase of the planning process. However, most likely requirements within each of the overlay districts might include the following: height requirements, increased billboard regulation, size requirements, quantity regulations, increased fees, banner limitations, sign type prohibitions and location requirement for signs; and species regulations, size requirements, quantity requirements and maintenance regulations for landscaping.

"The Design and Gateway Overlay Districts may likely set a trend for future development patterns within the planning area, and the regulation of signage and landscaping in these areas will have the potential to provide for gateways into Arkadelphia that are desirable and attractive."

As for building assets, the plan is to clean up the main gateways into the city — "primarily 10th, Caddo and Pine streets" because "a visitor's first impression of a city is its gateway corridors. The city will work with discretion using code enforcement to clean up properties along Arkadelphia's entry corridors. The city will also work to aide business owners and residents along the corridor in improvement of their property."

Another part of the plan is to develop a university district with "well-defined, signature gateways" into Henderson State and Ouachita Baptist universities.

"The city and its universities should consider incorporating attractive fencing, landscaping, medians and signage in order to enhance the borders and entrances of these two universities. The city will also consider renaming 10th Street to University Avenue to further define and accent the unique city assets.

Gateway

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"The city will promote the development of a university district. This district would create a cohesive and inviting environment between the two universities and downtown. The area should be designated by attractive street signs, promenades and/or unique retail businesses mixes and combined with student housing in order to create a college town atmosphere. The corridor district would be designated along 10th Street and would act as a bridging gateway between downtown and the universities."

The two regulatory plans included are developing regulations for an overlay district and reviewing zoning and code regulations.

"The plan expressly proposes the creation of overlay districts. The city will draft and adopt regulations permitting the creation of these districts, and outline specific signage and landscaping criteria that will be regulated within the areas.

"The city will review its current zoning and code regulation to allow mixed-

use development and neotraditional development. These development models mix uses and places different to one another similar to what one might find in a downtown or older neighborhood. Current regulations do not allow for this type of development. Removal of these will be an important step in promoting this type of development over current development patterns." The public is invited to the meeting.