

Village OKs neon signage

By Susan DeMar Lafferty
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Neon signs have arrived in Frankfort.

But they didn't come easily, as not everyone thinks they are in keeping with the village's theme of "1890's charm."

Half of Frankfort's village trustees last week voted against lifting the ban on such signs, fearing it would diminish the village's standards. The other half agreed it's time for a change.

When Mayor Jim Holland broke the tie to allow the colorful, illuminated "open" signs to appear in store windows, business owners applauded.

"This is a major change in the philosophy of the village board," said Trustee Cindy Heath, who supported the new signs. It doesn't mean Frankfort will become "Pottersville," she said, referring to the fictional Bedford Falls' alternate version in "It's a Wonderful Life." These signs will be "small and tasteful,"

she said.

Neon signs will be restricted to 2 square feet in size, one per business, in one color and may not "flash, flicker or change color." They also are limited to four letters: O-P-E-N.

Violations occurring

Business owners said the signs are necessary to attract customers and said there already is a proliferation of illegal signs in the village.

"I have a hard time telling people they can't have them when Phillips Chevrolet has 31 signs," said Don Olivieri, who spoke on behalf of the Frankfort Chamber of Commerce. "This small adjustment will go a long way to helping businesses."

Peter D'Amico, of Wine-Styles, brought in the neon sign he initially displayed in his window until he was told to take it down.

"Revenue decreased when I took it down," he said. "I hope to get that business back."

Michael Papandrea, of Paresan's Pizza on Route 30,

said he had "no less than 20 customers a day" ask him if he was open.

"After a while, it drove me crazy," he said.

So he put up a neon sign and saw "an amazing increase in business." But six months later, he got his first ticket.

Business owners also said they don't want Frankfort to be cluttered with signs nor do they believe the economic slump is the only reason to change the code. Most are small businesses that rely on drive-by traffic.

Slippery slope?

"This small change is fine, but what about the next small change?" said Trustee Todd Morgan, who voted against the change with Trustees Dick Trevarthan and Kevin Egan.

Trevarthan said neon signs are "gaudy" and "out of harmony with the character of the village," but Trustee Doug Walker said he would have allowed them a long time ago.

Also in favor of the change was Trustee Mike Stevens, who wanted to see

businesses stay. Most trustees agreed the current sign codes need to be strictly enforced.

In breaking the tie, the mayor said it will benefit residents and businesses.

"A healthy business is good for the residents of Frankfort," he said.

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