

## Signs, Signs, Everywhere a Sign

The City of Port St. Joe is preparing to step-up code enforcement. According to City Manager, Charlie Weston, the intent is to make our city a more appealing place to live, work or visit. Likewise, the intent is not to punish but to get things cleaned up. The redevelopment agency expresses complete support of this program. The full support of the public is also a necessary part of this process, and often the beginnings of support lie with education.

To that end, let's talk a little about signage and the sign ordinance as it was originally intended. The signage ordinance that is currently referenced in the City of Port St. Joe was adopted November 5, 2002. It states, "The City of Port St. Joe ...has an economic base which increasingly relies on tourism. In order to preserve the city as a desirable community in which to live, vacation and do business, a pleasing, visually attractive urban environment is of importance. ...These sign regulations are prepared with the intent of enhancing the urban environment and promoting the continued well-being of the city."

Signage is regulated for a number of reasons: to lessen hazardous situations, confusion, and visual clutter; to help direct; and to advertise. Permitted signs should be compatible with the surroundings and aid orientation and not conceal or obstruct adjacent land uses or other signage. Signs should also not distract from the business of driving safely. Signs should be installed and maintained in a safe and satisfactory manner.

Now, let's start the "did you know" part of the sign ordinance. Let's see if the following requirements and prohibitions are common knowledge:

If a business closes, that sign is essentially abandoned by the business and should be removed. Did you know that abandoned signs must be removed by the property owner within 30 days after receiving notification? Did you know that the following signs are prohibited: bench signs; off-premise signs (signs located on other properties); changeable message signs (except menu and time/temperature signs); portable signs; roof and above-roof signs; sandwich board signs; signs located on publicly-owned land or easements or inside street rights-of-way (handbills, posters, advertisements), or notices that are attached in any way upon lampposts, telephone poles, utility poles, bridges, and sidewalks; signs that obstruct visibility; signs attached to or placed on any tree or other vegetation; freestanding signs and pole signs.

Variances are available for any use; however, without such variance, we can see that there are quite a few signs around town that are not in compliance with the ordinance.

In this climate where all the advertising business can get will help, we nonetheless must maintain an environment that invites exploration and does not appear trashy or cluttered. With that in mind, let's start being more aware of our signage and start cleaning up our roadways, medians and intersections. One clear example are the wire signs that appear in city right of ways and on landscaping near roadsides. We would recommend that business stop investing in these signs as they will soon be on the code enforcer's list to address directly. We would hate for you to have ordered and paid for these signs only to discover they will not be allowed.

Copies of the complete signage ordinance are available at City Hall; please pick one up if you have questions about what is or is not allowed and how you can best utilize signage within the guidelines. Soon, we will begin a concentrated effort to enforce the signage ordinance within the redevelopment area...again not to punish but to improve the area for everyone.