Memorandum

TO: **Historic and Architectural Advisory Committee (HAAC)**

FROM: **Emily Heymann, Planner**

DATE: **January 31, 2020**

SUBJECT: **Signage in the Historic Village**

The role of signage is to communicate a message. Traffic signs provide wayfinding direction when moving at high speeds in a vehicle. Freestanding and wall signs designate a property as a single tenant or multiple tenant property. Banner and sandwich boards signs indicate a sale or special event at a business. Small directory signs tell you where to go when on a property: “use the front door,” “do not park in front of dumpster,” “thank you! Please visit again!”

Current signage standards set limitations on materials, height, panel size, and lighting type. Many signs in the village have white posts, white panel backing with customized font, text colors, logos. Many signs are unilluminated. While signs in the village have tended to be similar, this is often by default and not by the application of the signage standards. The HAAC has recommended colors in the past and amenable applicants have complied, but restrictions on color under current rules are appealable.

The signage standards should be reconsidered alongside the village chapter revisions. The potential for more non-residential uses means potential for more signs.

Proposed Intent of Signs in the Village:

- Visually define the “the historic village” as a cohesive and unique place
- Reduce visual clutter: signs of the same style & similar size will blend in, allowing the varied and historic architecture of the village stand out
- Allow businesses to communicate their individual message

Least Restrictive

- Any sign post style, shape, color
- Any type of lighting (gooseneck, inset tube)
- More options for business owner
- Potential for a cluttered streetscape with many sign styles

Most Restrictive

- Standards on text font & color
- Sign frame material, color, cap type, height & size predetermined
- Limits the unique expression of that business
- Can appear stagnant and boring

The most restrictive sign standards are often used in private shopping centers, where all tenant signs conform to the shopping center's requirements for size, color, and font.

Williston sign standards already set some restrictions. For example, internal illumination and moving letters are prohibited. Village standards already prefer wood as the sign material.

Freedom of Speech considerations: Sign standards can control the appearance but not the content of the sign.

Option: Use the "Williston post cap" to enhance a sense of place

There are many types of post caps available for use on signs. The town municipal signs and Federated Church use a unique style of post unlike anything else in town, and perhaps the state. The bylaw revision *could* include a requirement that all freestanding signs in the National Register & Additional Review Area use this style cap. Regardless of the use: the town hall, a coffee shop, a church, the vet office there would be a unified message.

Example of a proposed standard:

- Square posts, wood, painted white with the "Williston cap"
- Post size (3", 4", 5") and sign panel size proportional to building size and/or number of tenants
- Maximum 6' in height, DRB can permit a higher sign for combined municipal facilities (shared sign for Central School, library, Rec fields)
- Panel background shall be white or a soft color (50-75% max transparency)
- Business can use any font, text color, logo
- 1 sandwich board sign per property, must be place between building & sidewalk, and brought in when business is closed
- Temporary banner can be hung below freestanding sign panel for a total of 90 calendar days
- Wall signs prohibited. Small directorial signs, building circa date, and street numbers are allowed

Next Step: Village Sign Survey

One or more HAAC members to take photos and document the existing signs in the Village. We can use the existing baseline to help write a proposed standard.

Questions for the HAAC Members:

1) Does a uniform sign post style enhance or detract from Village vibrancy?
2) What are the pros and cons to matching sign style across uses in the village (municipal, school, commercial, etc.)?
3) Is panel color & design enough for businesses to express themselves?
4) Is the placement of a wall sign on a historic building acceptable? What about a wall sign on a newer building? Does the era of the building matter? For example, a wall sign on an 1800s house versus a post-1950s house?
5) If the “Williston post cap” is used, does the post have to be white, or could it be a color that matches the paint or shutters of the building it corresponds to?