



FRIENDS OF NORTH PLAINS

November 7, 2006

North Plains Planning Commission
31360 NW Commercial Street
North Plains, OR 97133

Dear Commissioners:

Friends of North Plains is submitting this testimony regarding the application for variance submitted by North Plains RV & Self Storage. We have reviewed the application, particularly the elevation diagram, and have several concerns about the proposed signs. We believe the Commission should deny the variance request. Our concerns are detailed below.

1. The proposed signs are out of character with the rest of the area. There are no other signs in the area that are anywhere near as large or as visible as the proposed signs would be. Most signs in the area are not lighted, or are modestly lighted with down-pointing lighting.
2. Three of the proposed signs are very high (over 20' above ground level), and thus would be visible from a very long distance. While we are sure that is the owner's intent, the owner's perceived need to advertise the facility should not take precedence over the town's aesthetics. The facility will not be difficult to find, especially for regular customers who will be familiar with its location. The proposed signs on the tower would likely be visible well into the surrounding rural areas. These signs' impact will be even greater because rural skies are darker.

The owner should be encouraged to seek alternatives to the proposed placement. For example, assuming that the lighted signs on the east and west sides of the tower are for visibility along West Union, at least two alternatives come to mind:

1. The signs could be located lower on the building. Looking at the west elevation, the sign could be placed on the first floor structure about 15' back from the front of the building, between the first two windows. This would place it less than 10' off the ground. A similar location is available on the east side of the building.
2. A sign that extended outward to the south could be placed above the awning (at about the 12' level).

Both options would provide good visibility along West Union. In either case, we do not see any reason for the signs to be lighted. We have attached a diagram showing the proposed locations.

Local ordinances, such as sign ordinances, generally are enacted to serve two purposes:

1. To establish guidelines that define the look and character of the town, and
2. To establish a “level playing field” that inhibits one or more businesses from gaining an unfair advantage over others through the use of building features or practices that are not available to others.

For these reasons, variances should be granted in only the most extraordinary of circumstances. A variance should benefit the City, not an individual or business. The injudicious granting of variances sets precedents that ultimately weaken the intent of the original ordinances. The Planning Commission has a tendency to grant variances, to the detriment of the appearance of the town and the surrounding area, as well as the quality of life of its residents. We believe the Commission should exercise restraint when it considers approving variances.

In this situation, it is clear that granting this variance would have a significant detrimental effect on the area and its surroundings. It would set a precedent that would be difficult to restrain in the future. And there are other placement options available that would conform to the ordinance.

Friends of North Plains is committed to preserving and enhancing the livability and small-town look and feel of North Plains. We urge the Commission to support this effort by denying the proposed variance.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Brian Beinlich
on behalf of the Friends of North Plains Steering Committee
(Brian Beinlich, James Just, Jim Long, and Pat Wolter)

attachment

