

A short speech to the Council

My name is John Ames; I can be reached at 818 Palmer Road.

I'm here today in place of my wife, Janet Boggia, who is out of town at a previously scheduled event.

My objective is to encourage you to dip your collective toes in the Lake of Liberty. I think you'll find it feels good.

Your sign ordinance covers a broad class of things. The proposed amendment carves out a small sub-set of things that I suggest you decline to control. It's worded not to mean that you control them in a special way, but that you simply leave them to the genius of the people.

In case you haven't had a chance to read the suggested amendment, here it is.

Add new sub-section 18.96.020.27 (a) **Decoration**. Any material such as paint, ceramic tile, ceramic relief or similar substance which is affixed to a surface, is small in scale relative to the building on which it is placed, which carries no overt meaning rising to the level of speech either by word or commonly understood symbols, and which neither identifies, describes, nor illustrates any significant aspect of a business shall be considered a decoration and not a sign and is therefore not subject to this ordinance.

It's remotely possible that this exception may at some future time lead to a threat to the public health, safety, or general welfare, but I find that difficult to imagine. If that happens, you should of course amend the ordinance to rectify the actual problem.

In the meantime, you avoid the risk of ridicule, and the enforcement officer has a clear statement of that with which he does not need to concern himself.

SS 10-20-214
Submitted Laird

Discussion of Wall Graphics

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I want to make a few, brief comments on the Book Exchange mural and small decorative art pieces in our city. I'm pleased that the council has decided to address the issue because the existing ordinance makes no provision for this kind of public art. That's an oversight which the council now has the opportunity to correct.

The proposed amendments to the Ordinance, written by John Ames and attached to the documents you received from me, provide a practical and viable solution to this dilemma, one that gives space for smaller projects without placing undue restrictions, red tape, and expense upon them.

As a practical matter, the city simply cannot effectively police and regulate all public art. It's too big of a job. This is not a gated community, it's a theater and an arts town. Public art will continue to spring up like flowers or like weeds, depending on your perspective. That's the sign of a vibrant community. It will be beautiful to some, messy and even offensive to others. It's not the job of government to attempt to regulate such expression.

The document on Wall Graphics in the Planning Session packet shows that there are as many alternatives as there are towns in how this art is handled. What we have now is not written in stone.

Finally, I cannot stress enough how strongly the public feels about this issue. Almost every day people come into the Book Exchange and comment on it. This is not an issue that has faded from view in the absence of publicity. People simply cannot understand why the city would require a simple mural of a potted plant and bird to be destroyed only to be replaced by a blank whitewashed wall. It doesn't make sense. It makes people cynical about their government and their representatives. I have made every attempt to counter such cynicism by telling people that the city has shown flexibility and is willing to address this issue.

The fact that the issue is on your agenda today makes me optimistic that it will be resolved in such a way that the public is reassured and that there remains a place for decorative art in our city.

1. Add the following in AMC 18.96.020 - Definitions Relating to Signs:

Decoration. Any exterior wall detail which is created by paint, ceramic tile, or other artistic medium, which is small in scale relative to the business frontage on which it is placed, which is two-dimensional or in low-relief and which does not identify, describe or illustrate in words or in commonly understood symbols any significant aspect of a business.

2. Add the following in AMC 18.96.030 - Exempted Signs:

On any given business frontage in the Commercial Industrial and Employment Districts and the Commercial-Downtown Overlay District, a decoration the area of which is less than *% of the otherwise allowable signage area on the business frontage. The area of a decoration is to be measured by the entire area within circles, triangles, or rectangles which enclose the extreme limits of the decoration.

3. Amend subsection L of AMC 18.96.040 - Prohibited Signs as follows:

No wall graphics shall be permitted, except for decorations exempted in AMC 18.96.030*.