

Sounding off on signage

In an effort to appease the business community, the planning board has revised its recent sign ordinances

By **JOE NOVAK**
Bedford Now

Despite working together on revising ordinances governing signs in Bedford Township, many local business leaders and government officials still are divided on what they think are appropriate rules.

Township officials drew up ordinances last year regulating signs outside of businesses, commercial centers and residential areas. The ordinances were widely criticized by many in the business community, and the Bedford Township Planning Commission decided to meet with local business leaders to revise them.

During the township planning board's May 14 meeting, board member Thomas Covrett said the changes were designed to appease members of the local business community, and while many dislike the ordinances, they are necessary.

"The ordinances needed to be developed to guide growth," Covrett said. "We're trying to soften up the regulations to make it more palatable to the business community. I do believe it's a step in the right direction."

The most significant change to the ordinances concerned strip malls.

In the first draft of the ordinances, strip mall developers were allowed to put monument signs up with the development's name on it, but no businesses in the development were allowed to put their names on the sign. Individual businesses were restricted to having signs on the building facade.

While this may not have affected strip malls that face and are close to the

street, many strip malls in Bedford Township are set back off the road, and are difficult to see from the road. Business owners and developers have complained since the ordinances were first drafted, saying they are unfair to the small businesses that rent space in such developments.

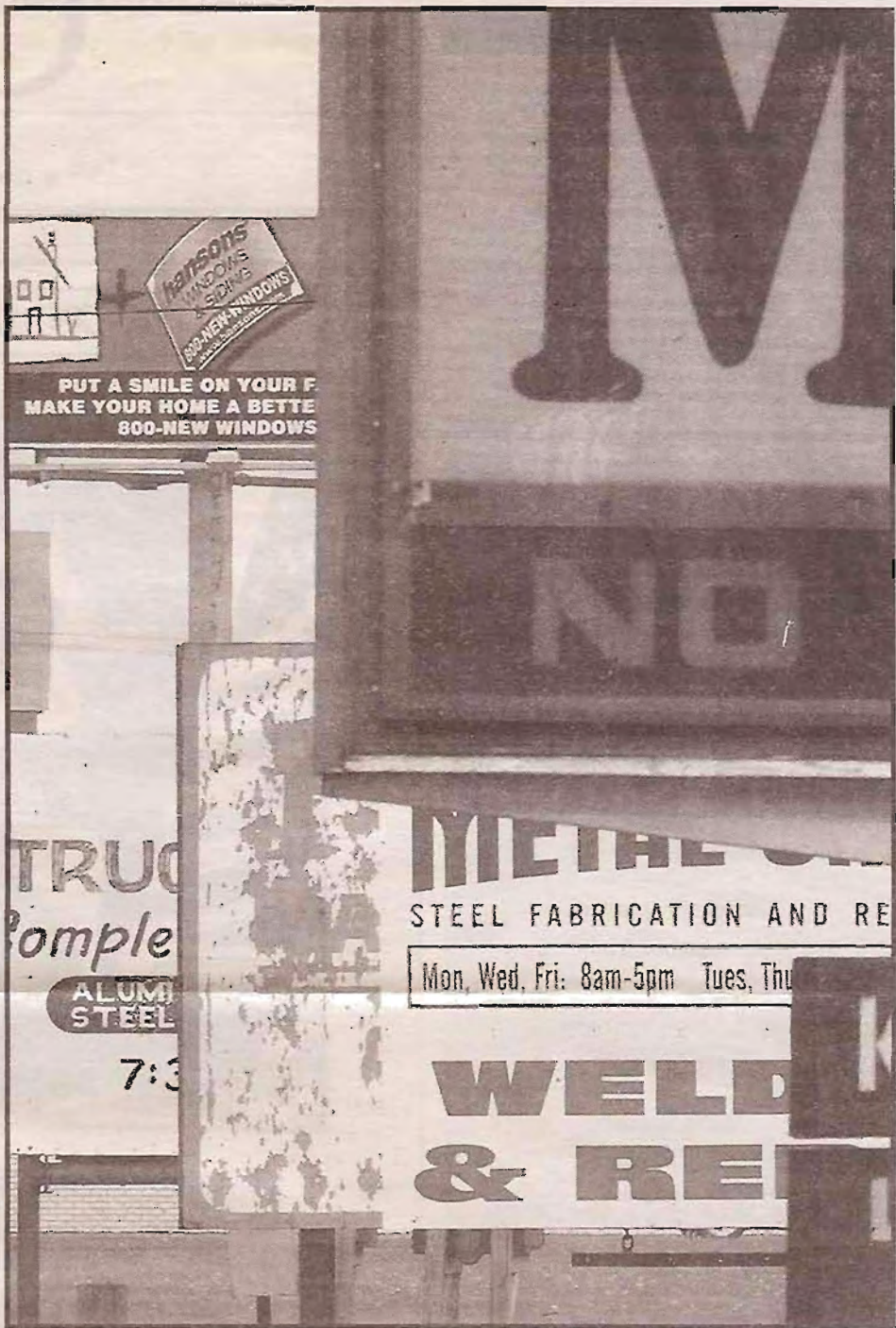
Dennis Cox, who owns the Deer Creek Commons development off Secor Rd. south of Sterns in Lambertville, said the previous ordinances made it difficult for businesses to prosper. Cox said several businesses in his development, which includes the Secor Diner and Magic Wok, have moved out because they had a tough time attracting customers.

"I don't want a great big sign — that is ridiculous," Cox said. "But for God's sake, you need people who are driving by to know that you are there."

The compromised version, approved by the board at its May 14 meeting, states that 75 percent of a monument sign could be used to list individual businesses. Developers can use their discretion on how to divide the space up between their tenants, the ordinances state.

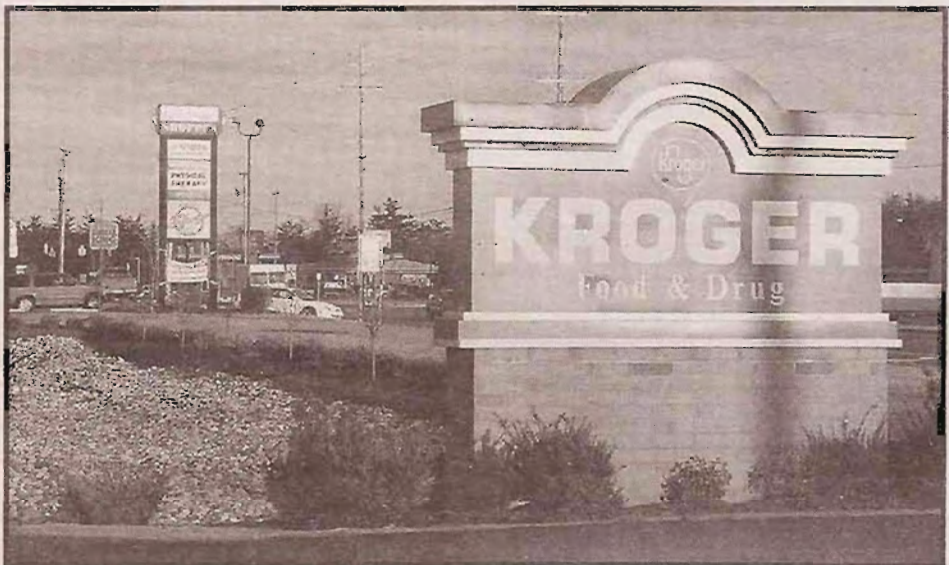
With a compromise on signage in place, some business leaders and members of the township government are looking for a way to cut the business community a break in bringing current signs up to compliance with the new ordinances.

Local commercial real estate agent Steve Lennex, Covrett and planning and township board member Arnold



— Bedford Now photo by VALERIE TOBIAS

Numerous big signs on Alexis Rd. near Lewis Ave. in Toledo, just south of Bedford Township, advertise for many commercial businesses.



— Bedford Now file photo

The monument style sign graces the entrance to the Kroger Plaza at Secor and Sterns Rds.



— Bedford Now file photo

This pole sign in front of Burger King on Secor Rd. in Lambertville is an example of the old style of signage used in Bedford Township.

Signage (cont.)

Jennings suggested a tax break or deferral for developers so they do not have to build or upgrade signs.

Township attorney Tom Graham is looking into the possibility of some sort of financial compensation for developers before the ordinances come before the Bedford Township Board in July.

If there is no way to help defray the cost of building or upgrading signs, members of the local business community could be saddled with another large, unnecessary expense, Lennex said.

"I'm opposed to beautifying the township at private expense. This has gone way too far," he said. "You are not going to beautify Bedford on the back of the business community."

Jennings, who

owns a Retirement Living in Lambertville, said he thought some kind of deferral would be a welcome idea.

"We're selling this (ordinance) on the pretense that it makes Bedford Township look better," Jennings said.

"I think it is reasonable to expect the township to give an incentive to the businesses to change the signs."

Planning board member Michael Minges said he supported finding a way to compensate business owners for

building new or upgrading current signs, but added the businesses are the ones benefiting from an attractive community, so ultimately they should be responsible for the costs of doing business in Bedford Township.

"Nobody followed Kroger's to Bedford. Nobody moved to Bedford because McDonald's is here," Minges said.

"The business is the beneficiary of an attractive community because it draws people here to buy goods and services."

Lennex disagreed, saying

“I’m opposed to beautifying the township at private expense. This has gone way too far. You are not going to beautify Bedford on the back of the business community.”

— Steve Lennex,
local commercial real estate agent

how a sign looks doesn't attract customers. The emphasis, he said, should be on what the sign says.

"The purpose of a sign is to attract customers," Lennex said. "People have to see it, they have to be able to read it. Let businesses decide how they are going to attract their customers."

The draft of the revised signage ordinances, which goes to the Monroe County Planning Commission in June and then to the Bedford Township Board in July, sets forth height and square footage requirements for signs, among other regulations.

Along with allowing business names to be placed on the face of signs, the township planning board also rewrote the application for building a sign. The new application would

Signage (cont.)

require both the developer and sign builder to sign the application.

Signs for seasonal businesses such as Christmas tree farms or pumpkin patches also are going to be allowed. A business may display three signs, all within two miles of the business.

Signs may not be displayed for more than 45 days and may not be placed in residential districts or on utility poles. Each business may display signs during no more than three seasons a year.

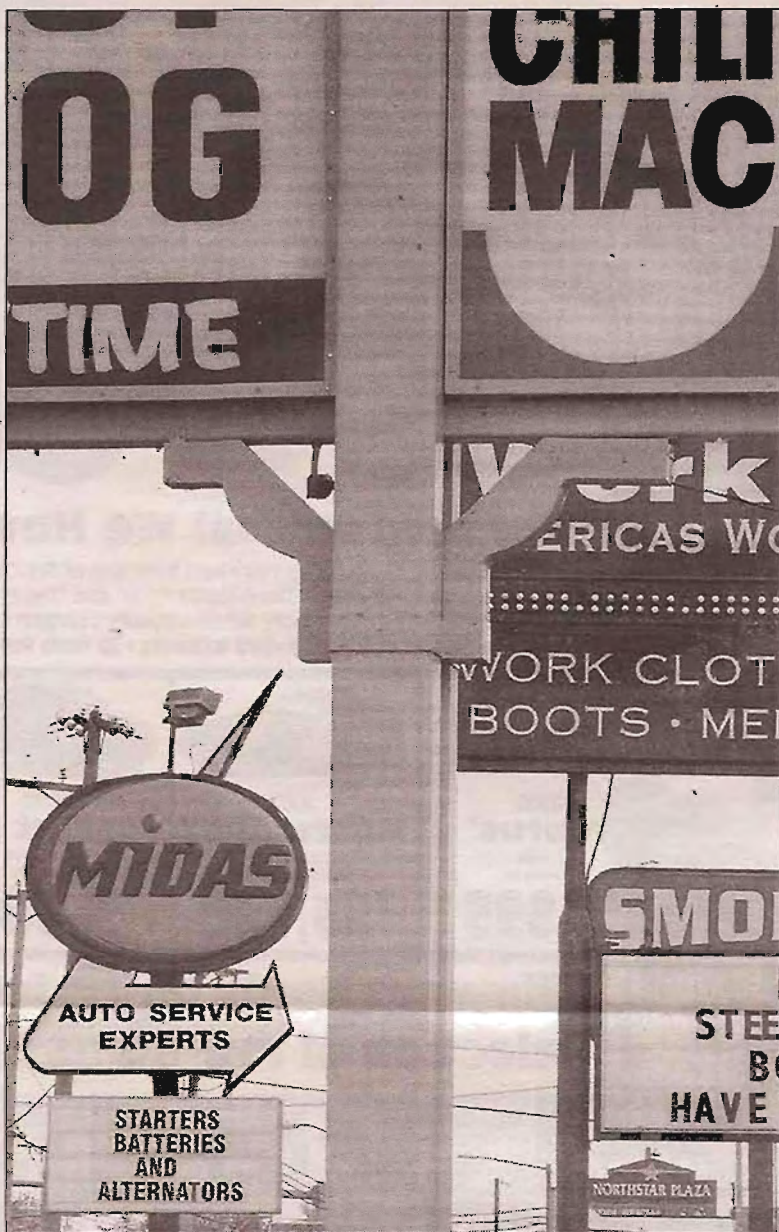
The board also revised the ordinance concerning sign changes. The new rule states that when a developer proposes to change a legal, non-conforming sign, a five-year period begins, at the end of which, the developer must bring the sign into full compliance with current ordinances. This rule does not include changes such as painting the sign.

Cox, who said he worries these ordinances could cause him to lose even more tenants, said he has seen some move to other communities so they don't have to contend with the ordinances.

"Whiteford Township compared to Bedford is a breeze," he said. "Some others have gone down to Alexis Rd. (in Toledo) where they don't have to worry about all of this."

Signage regulations in Bedford Township are similar to those in Toledo in many ways, with one notable exception: the prohibition on pole signs. A pole sign is one that is raised off the ground on a pole. Bedford Township ordinances only allow for monument signs — signs that sit on the ground.

The City of Toledo's ordinances set formulas for how big a sign may be in relation to how large the building is that it



— Bedford Now photo by VALERIE TOBIAS

Numerous big signs clutter Alexis Rd. near Lewis Ave. in Toledo, just south of Bedford Township.

is advertising for. As in Bedford Township, the formula is based on square footage.

The Toledo regulations also outline how much space on a sign can be used for lettering, which is similar to Bedford Township's regulation stating

that 75 percent of a sign may be used for lettering.

Toledo's regulations also include a formula for how large a sign can be based on how wide the street is it faces and how fast traffic goes on that street.