

Dalton Elementary Reader Board Request Update:

Dalton Elementary has been on a quest for an electronic reader board for quite some time. The PTA has been in discussion and participated in fundraising for the better part of the last 8 years for a new reader board. It was considered in their last bond project, but ultimately did not make the project list. The PTA continued their fundraising efforts toward this goal.

With funding secured, Maintenance applied for a sign permit with the City of Dalton Gardens in late 2019 to update the current marquee sign with an electronic reader board similar to what the majority of schools have.

We learned that, in 2009, Dalton Gardens changed their ordinance so that signs may only be 12 sq ft in total. The existing Dalton Elementary sign is 48 sq feet and is considered non-conforming. The new proposed sign is slightly smaller at 45 sq ft. and would be allowable as is replacing an existing sign but would require approval from the City Council.

The School District addressed the Council in March of 2020 with this request. Council deferred a decision and stated they wanted to hear more community feedback. Dalton Elementary and the City asked residents for feedback and the application was back on the agenda for May of 2020. However, COVID forced that hearing to be postponed.

We recontacted the City and rescheduled the hearing for May 6th. Approximately 12 Dalton residents spoke in favor of the reader board, including 2 students. Ten or so more supporters were there in person to support the sign but did not speak. There was no public comment against the sign.

The City received over 50 written comments regarding the hearing prior to the meeting. Over 90% favored the sign. Of the comments that opposed the sign, many indicated there were not in favor of a lighted sign at night.

Principal Jody Hildenbrand, also a Dalton Resident, gave a presentation to the Council and addressed the concerns that the sign could be dimmed or turned off at night. Neighbors directly across the street from the school spoke in favor of the sign.

The finding the Council was charged with was "Does the new sign improve the appearance of the old sign" The testimony was strong that it would indeed improve the dated sign of 25 years.

Council Member O'Brien was strongly in favor and made a motion to approve the sign. Due to failure of a second, the motion died. Council Member Wuest and Chase adamantly claimed that the sign makes Dalton "less rural", so they would not support it. Mayor Edward, gave quite a monologue in support of the sign stating it is the right thing to do for the community and the kids, but noted his vote would only count in a tie breaker. Councilman O'Brien continued to challenge his fellow council members to do the right thing and encouraged them to consider whether the new sign would be an upgrade from the old. Despite testimony on the tediousness of changing

the marquee-style sign and the limited messaging ability, Council Member Chase stated that, “It has worked for the past 30 years, so why change it?”

In the end, Council Member Chase made a motion to deny the sign, seconded by Councilman Wuest and the sign was denied 2-1. Notably, Council Member Craft was absent.

Despite the overwhelming support of the community in written and public comment, the request for a sign was denied. Council Member Wuest stated he might consider a smaller sign located on the ground.

I will request a meeting with the Mayor to discuss next steps and see if we can find a way through this request for a reader board.

Exiting Sign



Proposed Sign

