Rope lights, consisting of mainly individual LED bulbs lining windows, doorways, and exterior structures have recently sparked in popularity around the city. Lighting system technology has evolved making it much cheaper to purchase, install and operate rope lights. The City of West Allis understands that every business needs to be as visible as possible, however, this form of exterior and/or window lighting is not code complaint based on the City of West Allis' Municipal Code 13.21(10)(a) and the City's Architectural Guidelines.

Rope Lighting Installation on Commercial Properties

Concerns

- Image
- Aesthetics
- Safety - Distracting

Rope Lighting Exterior Building Application

On commercial properties, exterior rope light installation is prohibited under the City's Architectural Guidelines.

The guidelines state:

- Colored light bulbs or spotlights are prohibited
- Light shielding that reflects light away from the street is required
- Light distribution shall not spill over onto adjacent properties
- Pedestrians should not be able to see the light source and glare should be minimized
- Overpowering light levels should not be used

Rope lighting installation on interior and exterior windows is prohibited under the City's Sign Code (10)(a).

The code states:

- Bare light bulbs shall not be permitted.
- No flashing, blinking or rotating light shall be permitted for either permanent or temporary signs.
- Illumination shall be so installed to avoid any glare or reflection into any adjacent property, or onto a street or alley to create a traffic hazard as determined by Building Inspection and Neighborhood Services (BINS).

Proper use of rope lighting.

How it works

- Applicant submits lighting and photometric plan to Planning staff
- If it meets the intent of the Architectural Requirements and Guidelines Planning approves it and passes the approval along to BINS
- BINS requires an electrical permit from the Electrical Division

What it means

If applied on the outside of a commercial, industrial or multi-family building an applicant needs:

- Approval from the Plan Commission or staff if minor
- Followed by an Electrical Permit

The City's Sign Code and Architectural Guidelines can be accessed on the City's website.

- Sign Code: http://www.westalliswi.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/196
- Architectural Guidelines: http://www.westalliswi.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/196

Please contact the Planning Department at 414-302-8460 for additional requirements for permit application information.

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