

BILLBOARD STAKEHOLDERS GROUP
Minutes from April 19, 2006

I. Welcome & Introductions

Sandra Montgomery welcomed the group to the first stakeholder meeting to review and explore possible changes to the existing Outdoor Advertising Regulations. Staff and stakeholders introduced themselves. Stakeholders were asked to share their expectations for the process. These included:

- Wanting to hear opinions
- Wanting to explore other options
- Wanting to leave the existing ordinance alone
- Wanting to protect street trees, which can be affected by visibility issues
- Wanting to enhance the appearance of the City
- Wanting advertising to look good
- Wanting to protect the greenspace and beauty of the City
- Wanting to allow changes to the architecture and technology used for billboards and to hear others issues with this
- Addressing concerns about highway safety and the location of billboards
- Wanting to learn about existing regulations
- Wanting to listen to others
- Wanting to participate in a successful group process, where everyone treats one another respectfully
- Wanting any changes to adhere to NCDOT policies

II. Presentation

Sandra Montgomery gave the stakeholders a presentation, which covered the:

- Reason for the process;
- Purpose of the stakeholders meetings
- Process and timeline
- Roles and responsibilities
- Definitions of different types of signs
- History of billboard regulations in Charlotte
- Types of new technology

Copies of the presentation were provided to stakeholders and are available online at:

<http://www.ci.charlotte.nc.us/Departments/Planning/Rezoning/Stakeholder+Groups/Text+Amendment+Stakeholder+Group/Billboard+Regulations.htm>

During the presentation, stakeholders made comments and asked questions. These included:

Comment: Adams clarified that the reason they approached the City was because they wanted to address the issue of clutter. They were looking for opportunities to reduce clutter and to help billboards change with the City.

Question: What is meant by “mitigate adjacent land use issues,” which is listed as a possible goal of this process?

Answer: We want to make sure that any discussion of the location of billboards takes into consideration the impacts they may have on nearby land uses (i.e. single family homes).

Question: What is the difference between off-premise signs and outdoor advertising sign?

Answer: An off-premise sign is usually a billboard (outdoor advertising sign).

Question: What about signs advertising a business on the property of a business?

Answer: That would be an on-premise sign. This stakeholders group will not be discussing those.

III. Issue Identification

Following the presentation, stakeholders were asked to share their issues with the current billboard regulations.

Comments and questions heard, included:

- There are many benefits of digital advertising (like LED). The ads can be changed immediately, which makes them useful for public service announcements like Amber Alerts or criminals. Additionally, research shows that digital billboards are not dangerous distraction for drivers.
- What happens to billboards when residential development is built nearby? (Staff answer: If residential is built such that the billboard is now within 400’ of residential uses, it will become a legal non-conforming sign.)
- Can legal non-conforming billboards be changed, such as to improve the frame? (Staff answer: Only non-structural changes can be made to non-conforming billboards)
- I think we need to look at the inability to update old non-conforming billboards because many of them are visually unattractive.
- Why can’t you make structural changes to non-conforming billboards? (Staff answer: The intent of non-conforming signs is for them to go away over time. If you are allowed to continually improve and update the signs, it is unlikely they will ever go away. We probably need to separate the issues of a.) extending the life span of the structure and b.) improving their appearance.)
- We should be able to trade locations of billboards – replacing old billboards and locating new ones in new locations, particularly since this

City has evolved since the regulations were first written. Areas that were once industrial are no longer and vice versa.

- When talking about trading locations of billboards, are we suggesting that they should be moved to a new non-conforming location? Because you are already allowed to take down a billboard and replace it with one in a conforming location.
- How will new billboard technology benefit the citizens? Anything we change in the ordinance must be an improvement over what we already have.
- What I don't like about billboards is how they are jammed in your face. Once a billboard goes up, you have no choice about whether or not you want to look at it.
- I actually like billboards that are fun. But they are only fun in small doses. Too many spoil the fun.
- The LED billboard on the arena looks gaudy – like Las Vegas
- Should we be able to make changes to aesthetically unpleasing non-conforming billboards?
- In relation to where are appropriate locations for billboards, I think industrial districts are the only appropriate location.
- I would like to see more billboards with uplifting messages.
- Maybe a billboard overlay would allow new locations without opening up entire zoning districts.

IV. Wrap Up & Next Steps

In summary, the issues identified by the stakeholders are:

- **The desire for new technology – such as digital (LED) and trivision**
- **The ability to trade locations**
- **The ability to relocate/replace old billboards with new ones**
- **The ability to place billboards in better venues/less cluttered locations**
- **The ability to update the hardware of non-conforming billboards**
- **The desire for no change to the existing regulations**

The next stakeholder meeting is May 3, 2006 in room 280.