

BILLBOARD STAKEHOLDERS GROUP
Minutes from May 10, 2006

I. Welcome, New Introductions, and Reminders

Sandra Montgomery welcomed the group to the third stakeholder meeting to review and explore possible changes to the existing Outdoor Advertising Regulations. She asked the new members to introduce themselves. Ms. Montgomery summarized the charge of the stakeholder group, and the overall process. She asked everyone to speak up so that your comments can be heard by others during the meeting. Ms. Montgomery asked Bailie Morlidge to give a brief summary of Part 1 of their proposal of how to change the Zoning Ordinance.

II. Brief summary of Part 1 of Adam's Outdoor Advertising Presentation

Bailie Morlidge of Adams Outdoor Advertising briefly summarized Adam's proposal to reduce clutter by taking down billboards in cluttered areas. The square footage of these billboard signs taken down could be deposited into a "billboard bank". Adams could then withdraw square footage to pursue new advertising opportunities. Adams proposes a Sign Overlay District in Uptown where this square footage could be used to enliven the Uptown environment.

Adams is proposing that "wallscape" billboards be allowed on the sides of buildings in the Uptown area, not freestanding billboards. Adam's envisions wallscares that are fun and creative, with little area of the sign devoted to text, or advertising. Mr. Morlidge proposed that up to 15% of the total billboard area could contain text. He demonstrated that at the intersection of Mint and Carson, there are 3 billboard structures, with a total of 9 faces. If 7 of the faces were removed, the removed square footage could be used to create a new advertising opportunity Uptown on a wall of a parking deck or building.

Mr. Morlidge suggested that the City could cap the total number of Uptown Wallscares. He continued by stating that Adam's is willing to donate a certain percentage of all new Uptown advertising space to upcoming events for art groups, non-profits, and entertainment groups.

III. Part 2 of Adam's Outdoor Advertising Presentation

Mr. Morlidge stated that another proposal is to use the billboard bank relocate square footage to the exit ramps along I-485. Currently there are 22 billboards along I-485 now, between Pineville and I-85. An overlay billboard district could be created close to the exit ramps. He noted that the exits on I-485 are usually two to three miles apart, and that most of the exits were commercial in nature.

Adam's also recognizes that the stakeholders have said that some signs are too large. Adams is proposing that large signs (672 square feet), that are non-conforming in size now, could be converted to a conforming size (378 square feet) with the remaining square footage deposited into the billboard bank for Adams.

Mr. Morlidge said to improve the visual quality of outdoor advertising they would prioritize what billboards would be replaced or relocated by:

- Clutter

- Legal Non-conforming Billboards
- Vegetation Obstructed Billboards

Copies of the PowerPoint are available online at:

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

IV. Brief summary of Lamar Outdoor Advertising Presentation

Bobby Soule of Lamar gave a brief summary of Lamar's proposal. He proposes that state-of-the-art, computer controlled electronic billboards is the technology that Lamar is interested in using on billboards in Charlotte. This is a product that transmits light through Light Emitting Diode Display (LED) technology. Lamar has LED billboards in other jurisdictions, some of which are local. He connected to a live webcam on the internet that showed each billboard in Lamar's countrywide inventory changing messages. The stakeholder's viewed a number of local LED billboards live.

Instant copy change is important to Lamar's clients and the ability to change copy also provides the opportunity to post amber alerts or timely public service announcements in an instant, versus printing vinyl and applying it to a billboard.. Mr. Soule stated that an LED display is cleaner looking, and more aesthetically pleasing.

Mr. Soule proposed that a text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance should allow the digital, LED display product, with automatic changeable copy, and mimic the current NCDOT regulations in terms of changing every 8 seconds.

Copies of Lamar's presentation are available online at:

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

V. Neighborhood/Resident Stakeholder Response

Ms. Montgomery asked the stakeholders that were not associated with the billboard industry to comment on the proposals from Adams and Lamar. Bill Keenan was the first to speak, and he claimed the City should stick to the regulations we have now. New billboards would give up scenery that the taxpayers paid for. The value of billboards is created by the taxpayers that fund road construction, it is not value added by the billboard companies. They are merely renting land. The flashier LED billboards would give the industry a multiple reward. The taxpayers don't owe it to the billboard companies to reward them in this fashion.

Wanda Towler indicated she would liked to reduce the clutter that a number of billboards can create when located too close together. She indicated that perhaps billboards that were proposed to locate in new areas could be considered clutter, too. The industry's definition of clutter seems to be only when billboards are within a certain distance of each other. She would like to see another ratio for deposit into a billboard bank to reduce the square footage of billboards, rather than just relocating it to another location. Ms. Towler added that the size of billboards is important to her...the smaller the billboard the more palatable it is.

Gordon Freeman noted that she was open to LED billboards, since they are more pleasing. She noted that bringing wallscapes Uptown would bring clutter Uptown, and be a distraction.

Mahlon Adam's stated she had participated in the billboard controversy in the past, and that billboards look better than they have in the past, but not as good as they could look. She prefers not to see billboards. In 1987 it took 4 years for the City to enact the regulations we have. She waited 8 years for the amortization period to end and the billboards to be removed. She doesn't want to change the equitable and fair regulations in place now. Charlotte is a lovely City and she doesn't want to view Uptown by peeking in between them to see buildings Uptown. She is interested in the new technology but scared, and doesn't want the billboard industry to have "another bite at the apple".

Nancy Haynes noted that there is room to improve the regulations for billboards. The fact that the hardware can't change is an issue.

Janelle Travis agreed that the old hardware is unattractive.

Delores Dixon said she was an artist and designer. She views billboards as clutter. They are out-dated, ugly, and offensive. She likes the new technology, but doesn't want billboards to scream at people. She likes the idea of smaller, more tasteful, aesthetically pleasing, up-to-date billboards. What is pretty in Charlotte are the trees, architecture, and open space. The billboards could be updated to LED or tri-vision. She is concerned that wallscapes Uptown should be considered carefully and that a cap should be considered. Ms. Dixon stated that a ratio of removing 1000 square feet of ugly billboards should be granted just 25 square feet of new billboard. And last, she would like to review the safety study and be sure to incorporate the appropriate findings.

Ruth McCann states she is interested in seeing wallscapes Uptown and the digital display boards. She said the square footage of 70 billboards could be placed in the billboard bank and used Uptown to create 10 new wallscapes. She asked if the City could purchase billboards and remove them. Ms. Montgomery indicated that yes, the City could, but has not done so.

Bill Keenan added that it seemed that taking down billboards is a good decision for the industry because they could replace it with an LED billboard. He asked about the depreciation of billboards and asked if the asset was depreciated over a number of years. It was noted that billboards were not like machinery that depreciates....they hold their value. Mr. Soule indicated that billboards are depreciated in a different way, and that the asset has an indefinite life. Mr. Morlidge added that there is no depreciation on an asset that continues to function.

Ruth Castleberry stated she lives Uptown and is excited about the proposals and they would add pizzazz Uptown.

Mike Whitehead noted that public service messages could be displayed on billboards.

IV. Wrap Up & Next Steps

Ms. Montgomery thanked the stakeholders and asked Mr. Applegate to distribute the copies of the Wallstreet Journal article to stakeholders. The next stakeholder meeting is scheduled for May 31, 2006 in the Innovation Station Conference Room on the 8th floor of the Government Center..