

**Sign Ordinance Amendments Public Meeting
May 29, 2013, 7:00 pm**

Meeting Summary

Attendance: Approximately 40 people (34 signed in)

Wendy Rampson, Planning Manager, reviewed the background of the proposed amendments to the Sign Ordinance. She said that City Council had approved a moratorium on digital billboards in April 2012, which they subsequently extended to June 30, 2013. She said Council had approved the moratorium because they recognized the current sign ordinance was dated and there was a lot of new legal information.

Rampson reviewed a handout outlined the reasons for the proposed changes to the ordinance. She said that Ann Arbor and cities throughout the state recently had been receiving requests for conversion of billboards to digital technology, but sign ordinances did not adequately address the unique characteristics, such as brightness and motion. She said the primary concern has been with the impact of these types of signs on driver distraction, especially on streets where there are pedestrian and bicycle travel is occurring. She said another concern is the visual clutter can result from bright and moving digital signs, especially in corridors the city is working to improve. She said light pollution is a concern, since the city has already been receiving complaints about the conversion of standard exterior lights to LED technology, and digital signs use LED technology. Finally, she noted the city recently adopted a climate action plan, which seeks to reduce energy use citywide, and digital technology uses a substantial amount of electricity over traditionally illuminated signs.

Rampson then reviewed the three major changes proposed in the amendments: prohibition of billboards, allowing the addition of changeable copy, including digital, on portions of allowable signs, and adding limitations to the brightness of illuminated signs. She noted the map on the back of the handout shows the location of existing billboards within the city's jurisdiction; she explained that two additional billboards located on Plymouth Road are in the city's perimeter, but located on an Ann Arbor Township island.

Rampson answered questions about the city's regulations and the proposed changes.

Todd McWilliams, General Manager for Adams Outdoor, said he represents businesses, advertisers and non-profits. They wish for people to grow their businesses. He noted that Adams gives 30% of its excess inventory to community organizations for their use. He said there are 28 billboards in Ann Arbor, and it's been 19 years since any billboards were constructed. He said they have been looking for additional sites, but haven't found a place that isn't non-conforming. He said they are only asking for digital conversions in three locations: the Schlanderer billboard on I-94; the Aldi billboard at Maple and Dexter; and the billboard at Madison and Main. He said that they want to be allowed to grow.

Mitch Gatsche, Real Estate Manager for Adams Outdoor, said they looked at SEMCOG data to assess the safety of their billboards on I-94. He said they took data from three years before and three years after the billboards were constructed. He said they did not see an increase in accidents. He noted they also looked at changes in traffic counts, and found that they were within 3% over all six years. He said the most recent objective study, done by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, found that digital billboards were “safety neutral”.

Ted McMullen, a fourth generation developer in the City of Ann Arbor, said that originally he was against billboards and was involved in Scenic Michigan, and said he didn't see the need for billboards initially. He said he is a recent convert to what billboards do as a result of Adam's support of nonprofit and youth activities, such as the Young People's Theater, which his daughter belongs to.

Harvey Wolfe, head of an advertising agency, said his business is solely for billboards. He said there are many businesses in Ann Arbor that use billboards to advertise. He said businesses would suffer if Ann Arbor didn't have billboards, which would be a disservice to Ann Arbor residents. He said he represents a local dealership which is in the top five in the state, and their major advertising expense is for billboards. He said that billboards support restaurants that would never be able to make it within their limited geographical area, but do well along a highway. He said that business goes up if someone advertises on a billboard. He said that a client in Richmond, Michigan – Burger King – experienced almost immediate increase in sales.

A participant asked about whether billboards are allowed to flash and move. Todd McWilliams responded that Adams Outdoor digital billboards do not flash or have animation.

Another person asked whether Adams has provisions for emergency information. Todd McWilliams said that Adams allows Amber Alerts to pre-empt advertising. They also use digital billboards for weather alerts and public messaging. Wendy Rampson clarified that this is a service offered by Adams and is not something that can be mandated by an ordinance.

Shannon Flowerday, art director for Adams Outdoor, said that they have added messaging for Red Cross relief efforts. She said she has worked with Commerce Township to publicize community events, concerts and road closings.

Stephanie Entratter said that it is important to consider the human element. She said that Adams provides a public service and has aided in capturing criminals.

Lonnie Edwards, manager of Citizens Bank in Ypsilanti Township, said their bank partnered with Adams to use ad space on the Ypsilanti billboard to advertise their backpack donation drive. She said many of the people who ended up donating the 100 backpacks had seen the billboard. She said she drives by the Ypsilanti billboard every day and has grown used to it.

Katherine Mills, a lifelong resident of Ann Arbor, said she didn't see how billboards could be negative. She said billboards keep people engaged in the community, rather than providing a distraction. She said billboards help the community to get to know local businesses, which is a benefit to the local economy.

Michael Check asked for a definition of "nit". Rampson said this is a measurement of luminance.

Michael Check said he finds billboards to be helpful. He said it is possible to do more on billboards, which are seen by people driving through Ann Arbor. He said the number of billboards currently in place is not obnoxious.

Brian Wilson said that billboards are the best way for out-of-towners to find businesses.

Jennifer Brant said she was born and raised in Ann Arbor and moved away. She said that when she moved back, the billboards were top of the line, all advertising local businesses.

Jack Hanson, from ZON LED in Romeo, said he does LED lighting contracting for Adams. He said the foot candle limit at the property line seems unreasonable, since 0.1 foot candles is indistinguishable. Wendy Rampson clarified that the measurement is 0.1 foot candle above ambient.

A participant asked if the ordinance would eliminate neon lights, which are also bright. Rampson said that any signs that would spill over into residential areas would be prohibited and need to be adjusted.

A participant asked whether the city received many complaints. Rampson said that they had not yet received complaints about sign lighting, but have received a number of complaints about conversion of lights to LED because of the brightness and glare.

A participant commented that billboards should not be targeted for reducing energy usage when other businesses were not.

Mitch Gasche said that current digital signs have sensors that dim lighting levels. He said 0.1 foot candles is undetectable. He said nits are not the industry standard for measuring sign illumination.

Dan Pikula, NTG Enterprises, said construction of billboards generate income for this business and brings income to the community.

Harvey Wolfe said that his business represents national accounts. He said that before Cabela's goes into an area, they check local billboard laws. He said that the Cabela's in Dundee has become the #1 tourist attraction in Michigan. He suggested that four million of the eight million annual visitors may have stopped by Ann Arbor on their way down US-23. He said City Council needs to consider this type of impact.

Joe Kovalcheck commented that City Council would be limiting the delivery system for Amber Alert messages if they did not allow digital billboards.

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Benny from Good Guys Delivery said that he has a new small business in Ypsilanti. He said they are looking at Adams as a way to grow their business. He said a ban would cause business to suffer.

A participant asked how the cost compares for a static billboard vs a digital billboard. Katherine Mills responded that she is involved in selling this advertising and she said it could be either more or less. She noted that static billboards ads are sold for 30 days, but a digital ad can be for as limited time, such as a weekend.

Todd McWilliams said that City Council should speak for constituents and that no one in the crowd in attendance at this meeting is opposed to billboards.

Rampson asked for a count of city residents in the room. Nine people indicated they were city residents. She encouraged participants to provide their email address if they want to follow the progress of the ordinance changes. She said City Council is likely to consider this at its June 17 meeting.

Prepared by Wendy Rampson

Overview of Proposed Amendments to the Ann Arbor Sign Ordinance

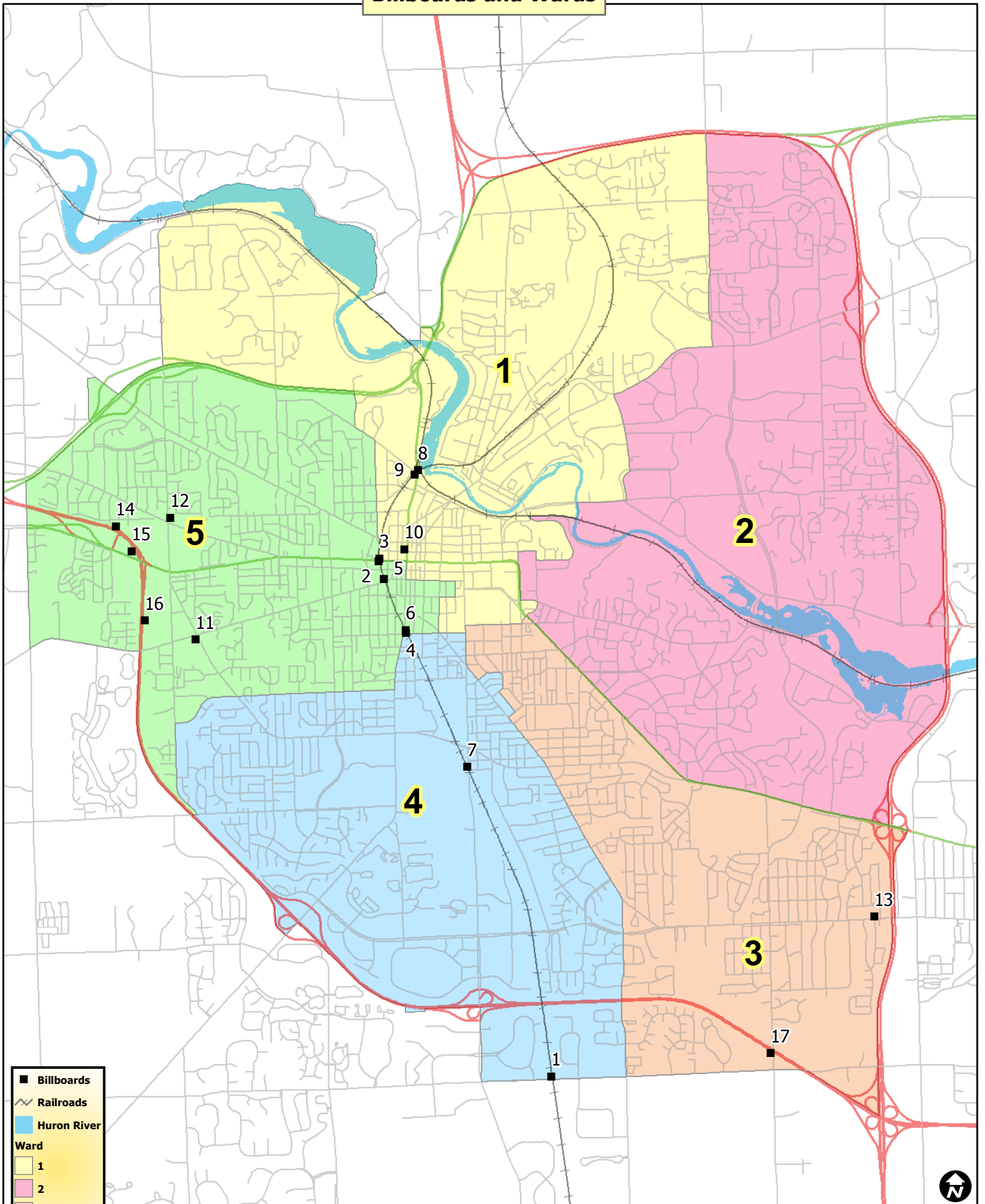
Reasons for Proposed Changes

- Requests for digital billboards – The City has received inquiries about introducing digital technology on existing billboards. The proposed amendments better address the unique characteristics of digital signs, such as the large size of billboards, typically three times the size of the largest on-premise signs, and their proximity to residential areas of City.
- Driver distraction – Billboards and digital “changeable message” signs are designed to capture the attention of auto traffic traveling along freeways or streets. As Ann Arbor implements its Complete Streets policy, more bicycle and pedestrians will be integrated into auto traffic in the downtown and commercial corridors, where these signs would compete for a driver’s attention. The freeways within Ann Arbor can become highly congested during rush hours, sporting events, and other events that draw vehicles from other communities, therefore distraction to freeway users should be minimized.
- Visual clutter – Auto-oriented billboards and changeable copy signage can act as visual blight in the downtown and redeveloping commercial corridors.
- Light pollution – LED sign lighting may appear brighter to the eye than other forms of illumination and has prompted complaints from adjacent residential areas about light spillover and glare.
- Increased energy use - New digital signage requires significantly more electricity to operate than traditional illuminated signs, a characteristic that runs counter to the City’s climate and energy goals.

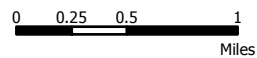
Proposed Changes

- Section 5:508 Prohibited Signs: Off-premises signs greater than 200 square feet, which the code defines as "billboards," would no longer be permitted. Existing signs of that size could be maintained and repaired, however they could not be altered to add mechanical or electronic features. Billboards could not be added or relocated.
- Section 5:510.1 Changeable Copy Signs: A definition would be added to recognize signs that have sections that can readily be changed. The changeable copy portion of a sign, which would include manual, mechanical and digital/electronic changeable signs, would be limited to 50% of the area of any sign, with a maximum of 30 square feet per sign (15 square feet per sign face). Changeable copy signs could not be changed more than once every 15 minutes.
- Section 5:510 Illumination: The maximum brightness of any illuminated sign, including digital/electronic, would be 5000 nits during the day and 100 nits at night, and no greater than 0.1 foot candles above ambient at a residential property line.

Billboards and Wards



- Billboards
- ⚡ Railroads
- Huron River
- Ward**
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- 2
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- 4
- 5



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