

Digital Billboards



CONA
Land Development
and
Historic Preservation
Committee

St. Petersburg Billboard History

- 1992 – Mayor David Fischer implements new sign code
- De-facto ‘billboard ban’
- Billboards have been disappearing
 - 2002 209
 - 2010 164 (22% reduction in 7 years)
- 2009 – Clear Channel asks City Council to allow digital billboards

Clear Channel's Proposal

- Remove 80 low, unobtrusive billboards
 - Was 110
- Install eight new 14 x 48 digital billboards
- New signs allowed within 100' of ROW
 - Roosevelt , Gandy, 34th Street, Tyrone Blvd
 - Interstate and Interstate feeders
- Separation from neighborhoods TBD
- Height restrictions TBD
- Relocation and repair provisions TBD

Central – 21st St

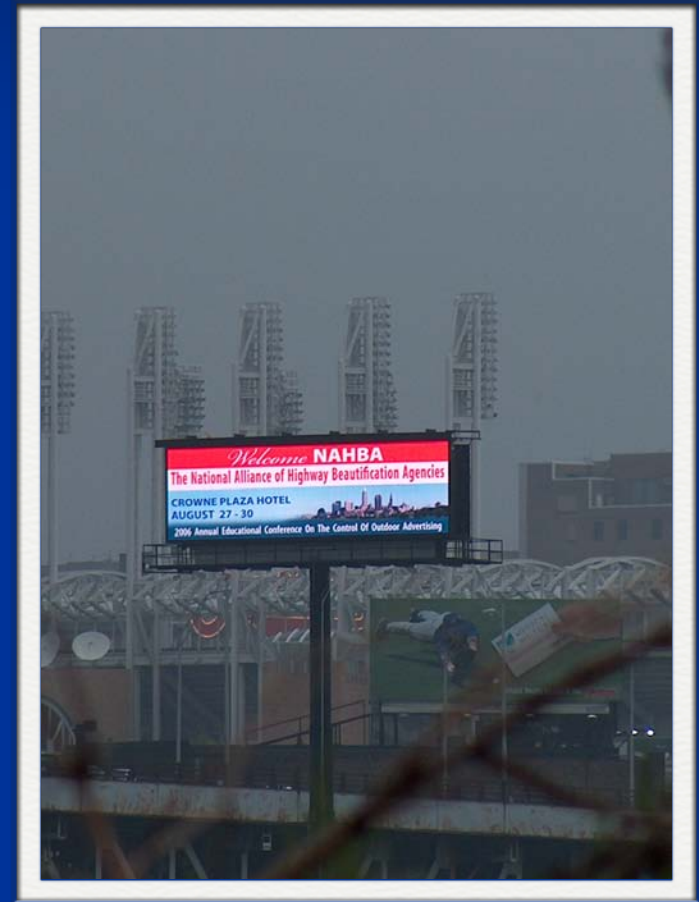


9th Ave N – 30th St



What's wrong with digital signs?

- Safety
- Aesthetics and Image
- Environmental Consequences
- Legal Risks



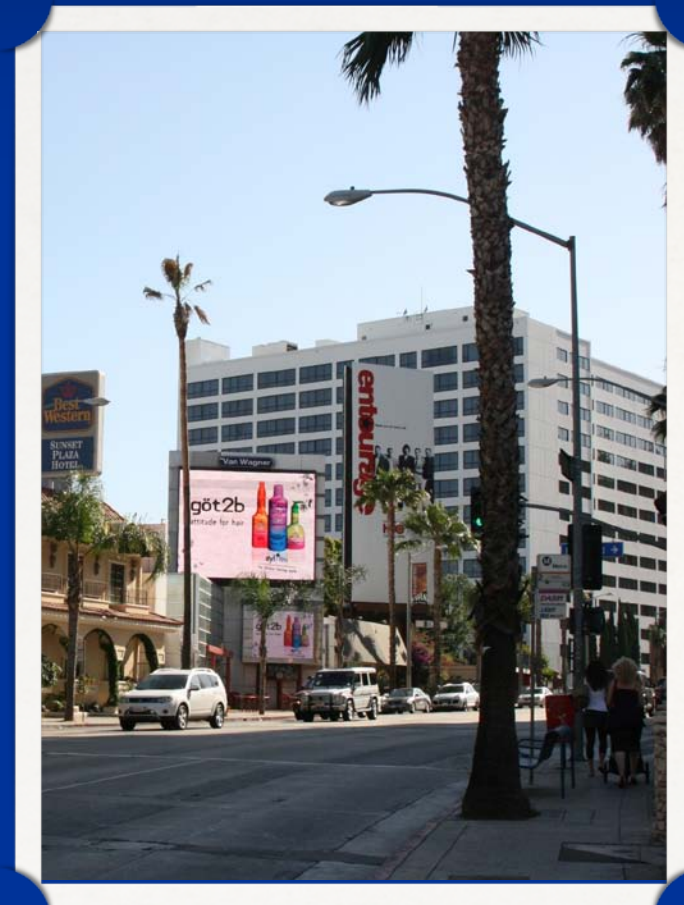
Safety - Brightness



- Sun = 6,500 nits
- Daytime, a digital sign can be over 8,000 nits
- Brightest object in the driver's field of vision, especially at night

Safety - Distraction

- Causes inadvertent and instinctual glances
- Images rotate every 6 to 10 seconds causing lingering looks to see what's next
- Complex messages often take 5 seconds to comprehend



Safety – Human Factors

- The human eye is hard-wired to be drawn to the brightest objects in the scene and to those that display motion, or apparent motion
 - Recent research (Theeuwes) shows that this response is both automatic and unavoidable
- Digital BBs use both brightness and image change “movement” to capture attention

But Clear Channel has research that says these signs are safe!

- Industry sponsored safety studies are disputed
 - NY Federal judge – “study so infected by industry bias as to lack credibility and reliability.”
 - Maryland State DOT – “unsupported by scientific data.”
 - Reviewers rejected Virginia study for publication in 2008 by the Transportation Research Board, a Congressionally chartered agency
- CC will cite AAA and local government experiences, but won't tell the whole story
 - Pinellas County's view is different

What safety research is coming?

- Federal Highway Administration study underway
- There will be no regulation resulting from Phase 1 of the study BUT
- The research will determine the extent to which signs are distracting
- Phase 2 of the study will identify distraction factors (message change interval, brightness, etc.) and form the basis for legislation

Aesthetics & Image

- Brightest objects in the landscape
- Become dominant visual element and change the fundamental character of the place
- Distraction from other visual /scenic qualities
- Clash with established architectural elements, even at great distances
- 500' or even 1000' separation from neighborhoods is not enough to prevent light pollution

Environmental Considerations

- One digital billboard can consume > 300 megawatts/year
- Carbon footprint of 13 homes
- Produces 108 tons/year of carbon dioxide



Other Considerations

- City gets no revenue from these signs
- Special treatment for one industry using public airspace for their own gain
- Negative effect on property values
- Enormous compensation costs if signs need to be altered, moved, or removed



St. Paul, Minnesota



But Clear Channel says these signs will provide a public service!

- Amber Alerts
- Silver Alerts
- Hurricane Evacuations
- “Catch a cop killer”



Your tax dollars have already put just such a system in place: Variable Message Signs

But Clear Channel says cities all around St. Petersburg have approved these signs

- Tampa - as a result of a legal settlement
- Pinellas – placed moratorium on new billboards
- Clearwater - prohibits new billboards

Legal Risks

- Other billboard companies?
- Is it legal to 'lock out' new entrants?
- Unintended consequences
 - Potential to invalidate sign ordinance
- Industry history

Durham, NC

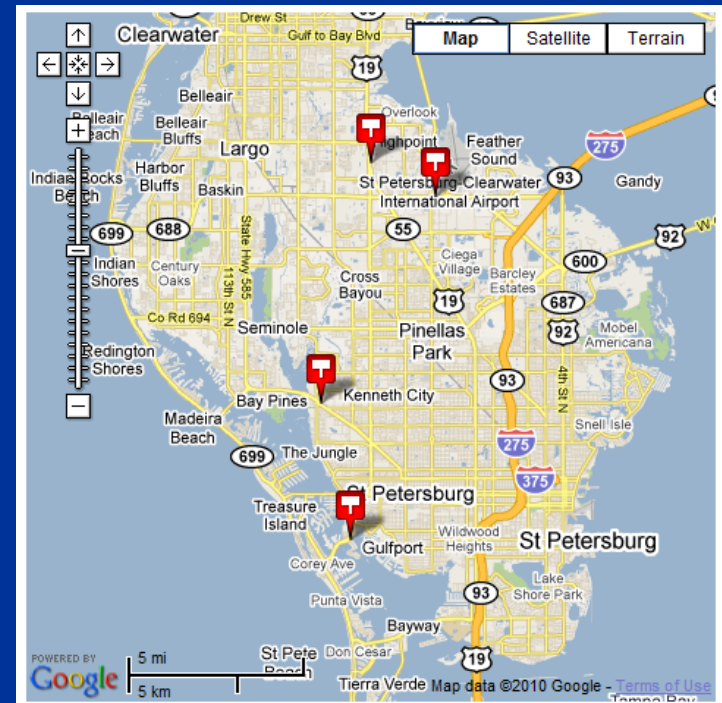


City Council's Options

- Leave existing ban in place = no digital billboards, old boards disappear over time
- Moratorium on new billboards = time for Federal safety study Phase 2
 - Moratoriums already adopted by cities from Denver to Knoxville – and Pinellas County!
- Do a comprehensive review of sign ordinance
- Approve digital billboards = many unknowns

CONA LDHP Committee Recommendation

- Ask City Council to leave existing sign ordinance in place and do a comprehensive review of sign code
- Meanwhile:
 - Go see these signs for yourself
 - Contact your City Council member and let them know what you think
 - Get your neighbors involved



Digital Billboards

CONA
Land Development
and
Historic Preservation
Committee