



**The Council of Neighborhood Associations of South Pinellas County
P.O. Box 13693 St. Petersburg, Florida 33733**

November 19, 2009

City Council Members
City of St. Petersburg
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Re: Digital Billboards

Dear City Council Members:

The subject of Digital Billboards was placed on CONA's November 18th meeting agenda. The Mayor's proposal to swap out old static billboards for new digital billboards within the City was discussed. The CONA membership voted unanimously for a resolution **AGAINST the city's adoption of the proposal at this time**, for the following reasons:

- There is a grave concern about the impact of these electronic signs on traffic safety. A Federal Highway safety study on digital billboards is due to be completed in early 2010. There is no reason to expedite approval of a new sign ordinance ahead of the study results, which are expected to provide significant guidance on the subject for local municipalities.
- Digital billboards have enormous implications for our city's look, character and quality of life for residents and visitors. To date, there has been no public input to this discussion.
- The extent to which other billboard companies such as CBS Outdoor are willing to participate in this agreement is unknown. We could end up with many more than ten digital billboards, in locations not yet identified.
- Other cities (e.g., Tampa) have found themselves on the receiving end of unanticipated consequences subsequent to adoption of 'swap out' proposals from the billboard industry.

As our sign ordinance currently stands the City of St. Petersburg has a 'de-facto ban' on new billboards. We believe that ban should be maintained for now.

CONA respectfully requests that Council:

- Defer any action regarding changes to our Land Development Regulations and sign ordinance until after the Federal Highway safety study is completed next year.
- Engage with the community and CONA and conduct a 'visioning' process as a prerequisite to revising our sign ordinance. What should our cityscape be in 2020? What should our signage look like (Las Vegas, or Hilton Head)?
- Engage outside legal counsel experienced in this subject to undertake a thorough review of any revised city sign ordinance.
- Require Council be briefed on the results of that review before adopting any changes to our existing sign code.

Thank you for your careful consideration of CONA's position in this matter. Please contact me if you have any questions or need further information.

Sincerely yours,

Barbara McCormick Heck
CONA President

cc: CONA Executive Board