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to

Ban Billboard Blight

DEFEND OUR PUBLIC SPACES

• PROTECT OUR VISUAL ENVIRONMENT

The Truth About Digital Billboards

Clear Channel and other billboard companies operating in Los Angeles are pushing for legislation that would potentially allow many more digital billboards in the city. Another company, Lamar Advertising, is suing for the right to put up 45 brand new digital billboards in a wide area of the city. Such actions would certainly enhance the profits of these companies, but would it be good for the city's residents, businesses, workers, and visitors? We think the answer is No.

Digital billboards cause light pollution:

The intensity of light from the thousands of LED's on a digital billboard face is much greater than the lighting of conventional signs. Traditional measures of brightness don't accurately reflect this intensity, which makes a digital billboard stand out markedly from its surroundings and presents a potential distraction to motorists as well as a serious nuisance to residents living near the sign.

“The first board really popped; you noticed it from a long way off.” - William Ripp, of Lamar Advertising, describing the first digital billboard the company erected. From Forbes Magazine

The fact that ads on digital billboards typically change every 6-8 seconds also creates a constant change in light levels, because of the different backgrounds and colors of the ads. People living close to digital billboards have complained that this constantly changing light in their windows is highly annoying, likening it to the flickering effect of a TV in a darkened room.

Digital billboards can be a hazard to motorists and pedestrians: Common sense tells us that digital billboards are intended to attract the attention of drivers. A recent Swedish government study found that drivers were distracted by digital billboards much longer than by conventional signs, and ordered the existing

digital billboards removed from the country's highways. U.S. studies showing a lack of correlation between the presence of digital billboards and traffic accidents were paid for by the outdoor advertising industry and their methodology has been severely criticized by independent experts. A Federal Highway Administration study being touted by Clear Channel and other billboard companies as “proof” that digital billboards are safe was peer reviewed by independent experts who concluded that data gathered in the study was seriously flawed and the results not credible.

“The reason [electronic] advertising works is because it is impactful. If you see people parked at the stoplight watching it, you see their eyes waiting for it to change.” -Clear Channel Outdoor Des Moines division president Tim Jameson. From Des Moines Business Record

Digital billboards can have a negative effect on property values and the economic prosperity of cities:

A 2011 urban planning study in Philadelphia found that homes near billboards sold for less than comparable homes further distant. The study also surveyed 20 cities across the U.S. and found that those with stricter billboard controls had

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greater median income and lower poverty rates than cities with less strict controls. Despite assertions that digital billboards will bring more jobs and economic prosperity to Los Angeles, there is scant evidence to show this is true.

Digital billboards are not an effective means of delivering emergency messages and public service announcements:

There is little hard evidence that broadcasting amber alerts and other emergency messages on digital billboards has resulted in a significant number of missing children being found and criminals being caught. Cell phone amber alerts reach a far greater number of people in a more effective form and the state already has a system of emergency message boards distributed along freeways and highways. The negative effects of digital billboards on neighborhoods and residents far outweighs any utility that signs located and controlled by private companies and normally broadcasting ads for fast food, alcohol, cars, and other products and services might have.

Digital billboards magnify the issue of objectionable ad content.

As controversies over billboard ads for TV shows like “The Strain” illustrate, many people are disturbed and offended by billboard ads that are inappropriate for children, show people brandishing guns, market alcohol and fast food, and display women as sexual objects. Because digital billboards are visually more intense and display a series of ads over and over, the issue of content that people find objectionable but cannot avoid is greatly multiplied. And the federal courts have ruled that any attempt by cities to regulate the content of billboard ads on private property is a violation of the Constitution.

“Technology helps people avoid other advertisements, but we are the one unavoidable media. There is no mute button, no off switch. You can't change the channel. We're there.” - Paul Meyer, global president of Clear Channel Outdoor

Digital billboards can negatively alter neighborhood and community character.

More than a decade ago in the Westwood area of Los Angeles., residents, businesses, and community groups got together to establish zoning overlays for sections of Westwood Blvd. to promote a pedestrian-friendly, village-like atmosphere where neighborhood shops, restaurants, and other small businesses would thrive. In 2007, without any notice, Clear Channel and CBS Outdoor converted five conventional billboards within a 10-block area to digital. The bright light and constantly changing ads created more of a Las Vegas or L.A. Live-style atmosphere that was completely at odds with the vision embodied in the zoning overlays. In the Silverlake area, Clear Channel converted a billboard to digital in a small neighborhood commercial area on Silverlake Blvd. surrounded by hillside homes, most of which had a clear view of the bright, changing billboard from their windows. One of the locations in Lamar Advertising's lawsuit is also in Silverlake, in the Sunset Junction area, a thriving neighborhood of small shops, restaurants and other pedestrian-oriented businesses. A number of residents and business owners have expressed dismay at the prospect of a full-size digital billboard in their midst.

For more information on digital billboards and related issues, visit:

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