



**CITY COUNCIL
COMMUNICATION:**

ITEM _____

98-155

**OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER
CITY OF DES MOINES, IOWA**

AGENDA:
APRIL 20, 1998

SYNOPSIS —

SUBJECT:
TEMPORARY
MORATORIUM ON
CONSTRUCTION OF
OFF-PREMISES
ADVERTISING
SIGNS

Two outdoor advertising companies have made application for 45 new off-premises advertising signs (billboards) in the past few weeks. (List of addresses is attached.) The City currently has approximately 200 billboards. A 22 percent increase in the number of signs may have a negative impact on public safety and the character of the community. Staff recommends that a temporary construction moratorium be imposed to allow adequate time to determine if changes to the zoning ordinance are necessary in order to protect the public from the impact of billboards on traffic safety, property values, and neighborhood preservation and revitalization.

TYPE:
RESOLUTION
ORDINANCE
RECEIVE/FILE

FISCAL IMPACT –

SUBMITTED BY:
JAMES GRANT
COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT
DIRECTOR

N/A

RECOMMENDATION –

Approval of temporary moratorium on construction of off-premises advertising signs.

BACKGROUND –

The City currently has approximately 200 off-premises advertising signs, mostly located along the major corridors. The number has not changed substantially in the last ten years. Requests for an additional 45 billboards means a 22 percent increase in the total number of billboards. Requests for additional permits are being received daily. This size of an increase indicates that the billboards have been controlled principally by market forces rather than by the zoning ordinance. The establishment of two new companies in the city has changed the dynamics for advertising and marketing of the

off-premises signs.

Off-premises advertising signs are created to distract the motorist and stand out from a neighborhood. Such signs can create a traffic hazard if improperly placed and have a blighting influence upon the neighborhood in which they are located. The effect of a large increase in the number of off-premises signs on property values, traffic safety, and neighborhood preservation and revitalization needs to be determined.

The visual clutter of irregularly and unnecessarily placed large signs causes concerns for the aesthetics of Des Moines' neighborhoods and commercial corridors. The Plan and Zoning Commission is currently working on a 2020 Community Character Plan that will provide new approaches to developing, regulating, and implementing land use decisions. A moratorium will allow the Plan and Zoning Commission time to propose changes to the zoning ordinance, compatible with the approaches being taken in the 2020 Community Character Plan, that will protect the character of the community.

Advertising signs can provide necessary and useful information to those who use the public rights-of-way when properly placed and sized. Staff needs time to evaluate our current ordinances to ensure that the signs are sited so as to provide information without endangering the public or lowering surrounding property values. Other city' s approaches to off-premises sign regulation will be explored, as will recent legal decisions on signage.

The City' s zoning ordinance currently regulates off-premises advertising signs through zoning classification, height, placement on a street, spacing, and size. Billboards are allowed in several of the commercial and industrial zoning classification as either a principal or accessory use. A billboard is a principal permitted use in a C-2 zone and can be up to 975 sq. ft. in area. Changes to any and all of these regulations will be considered.

The advertising industry in general has been successful in resisting regulation. Sign companies in general have been willing to take zoning ordinances to litigation. It is essential that the City legal staff have adequate time to review any proposed ordinance changes to ensure that they will not be overturned if the City is taken to court.

Attachment

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