



PROTECTING OUR SCENIC HERITAGE

Scenic Nevada

*To preserve,
protect and
enhance the
scenic beauty
of Nevada*

- a presentation on the impacts of billboards -

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INTRODUCTION

This presentation explains the impact of our region's permissive sign regulations and how those regulations work against a community's desire to preserve, protect and enhance scenic beauty. Further, we explain how billboards negatively impact driver safety and hamper Reno's development as a quality place to live, work and visit.

WHO WE ARE

- ◉ Scenic Nevada is a non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization, active since 2000.
- ◉ Our principal activities are to educate the public about the economic, social and cultural benefits of scenic preservation.
- ◉ We are an all volunteer group, advocating for sign control, scenic byways and protection of open spaces.
- ◉ Scenic Nevada is an affiliate of Scenic America, a national group dedicated to scenic preservation.

TIMELINE

- ◉ **November 2000** - 32,765 Reno voters (57 percent) approve Billboard Ballot Question R-1 to prohibit construction of new billboards.
- ◉ **February 2008** - Reno City Councilman Dwight Dortch requests a text amendment to allow digital billboards.
- ◉ **November 2009** - Reno Planning Commission holds a public hearing but postpones the vote. Commissioners request more information from city staff.
- ◉ **August 2011** - Scenic Nevada releases voter survey results that show 55 percent do not want the City Council to allow digital billboards in Reno.

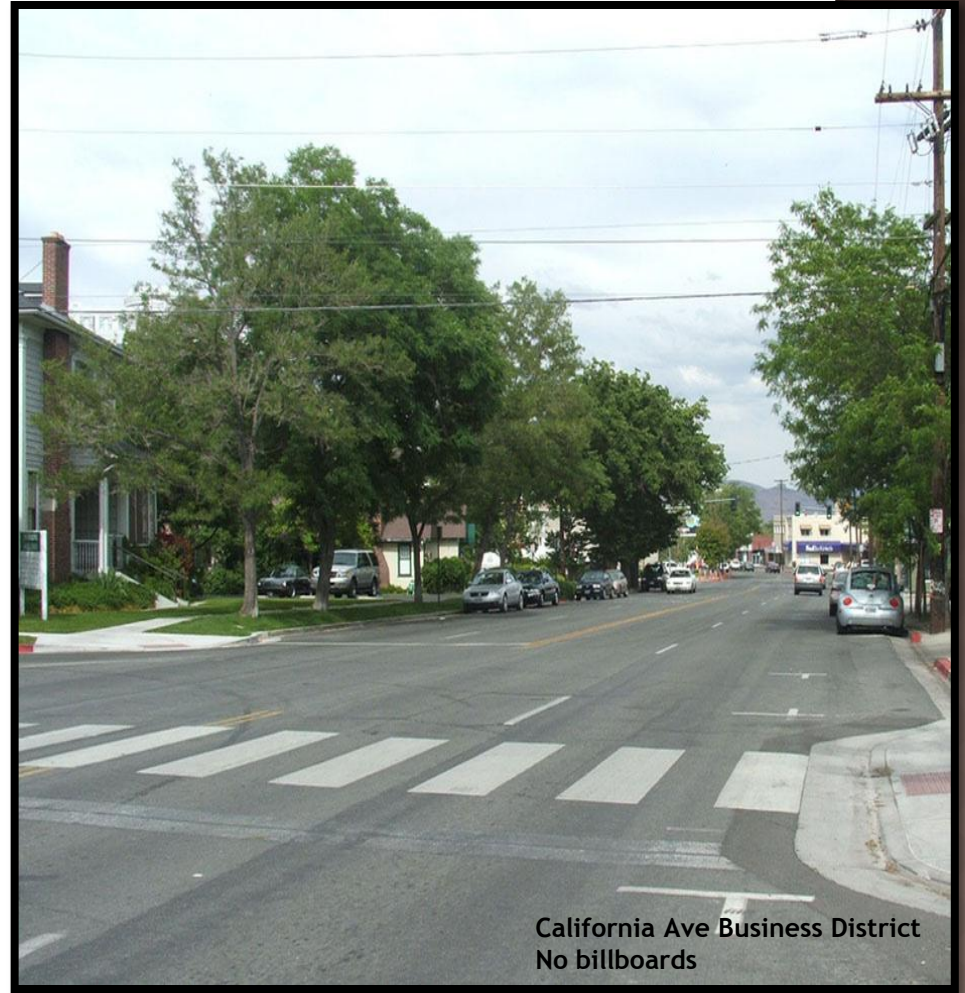
What's next

Fall 2011

Reno Planning Commission will hold a workshop to gather information for a draft ordinance allowing digital billboards in Reno. Reno City Council will hold a public hearing and make final ruling.

THE COMMUNITY'S INTERESTS ARE AT STAKE

- Public investment in roads ties the issue to the public interest.
- Our roads, paid for and supported by tax dollars, provide the viewscape.
- It's in the community's best interest to have sign regulations that protect viewscape and the public's investment.



USING THE PUBLIC'S VIEWSCAPE



S. Virginia Street billboard obscures mountain views

- Billboards derive their value from the road.
- Courts have long held that billboards represent a use of the road rather than private property.
(Churchill and Tait v. Rafferty 1918)

- Billboard companies use the public views and our roads for their benefit, yet they pay no road user taxes.

WHY SIGNS MATTER: OUR ZONING CODE

Title 18 of the city of Reno zoning code has a set of sign laws that includes a lengthy and detailed purpose section. It says:

- ◉ *That enhancing esthetic qualities is important to citizens' quality of life and to business concerns*
- ◉ *That commercial interests rely on the attractiveness of our community*
- ◉ *That we need a comprehensive system for regulating billboards*

WHY SIGNS MATTER: OUR ZONING CODE

The code continues:

- ◉ *That our regulations must be reasonable standards that prevent needless distraction and clutter*



A Drive Down Billboard Alley.

WHY SIGNS MATTER: OUR ZONING CODE

And finally:

- ◉ *That our signs laws should preserve and enhance property values, promote public safety, and promote enhancement of the environment*
- ◉ *That protecting the environment improves the character of our city, helps protect our economy and attracts tourists, business and residents*



South Virginia Street

BILLBOARD CONTROL AND LOCAL ECONOMIES

- ◉ Communities and states that enact tough billboard controls enjoy strong economic growth.
- ◉ A five-year study of 35 cities by the Mississippi Research and Development Center concluded:

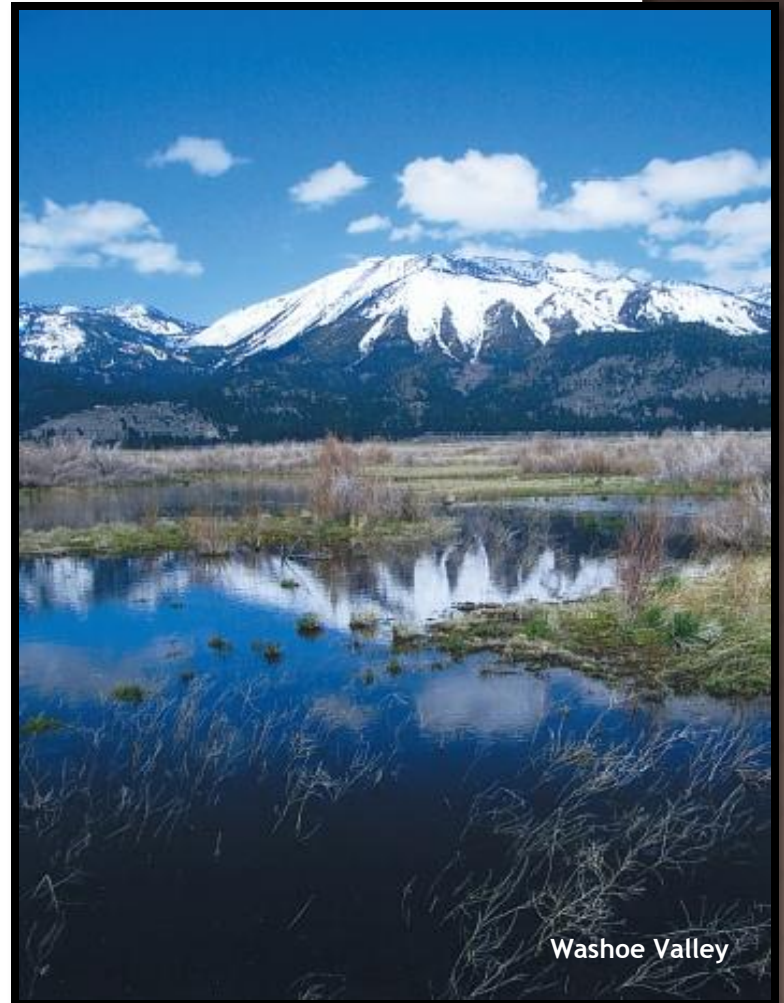
"The way a community looks affects how both residents and visitors feel about it. An attractive community has a better chance at industry, including tourism."

<http://www.scenic.org/billboards-a-sign-control/the-truth-about-billboards/100-billboard-control-is-good-for-business>

BILLBOARD CONTROL AND LOCAL ECONOMIES

- The President's Commission on Americans Outdoors reported that *natural beauty* was the most important criteria for adults choosing a site for outdoor recreation.
- Billboard control is especially important for communities like the Truckee Meadows that depend on tourism.

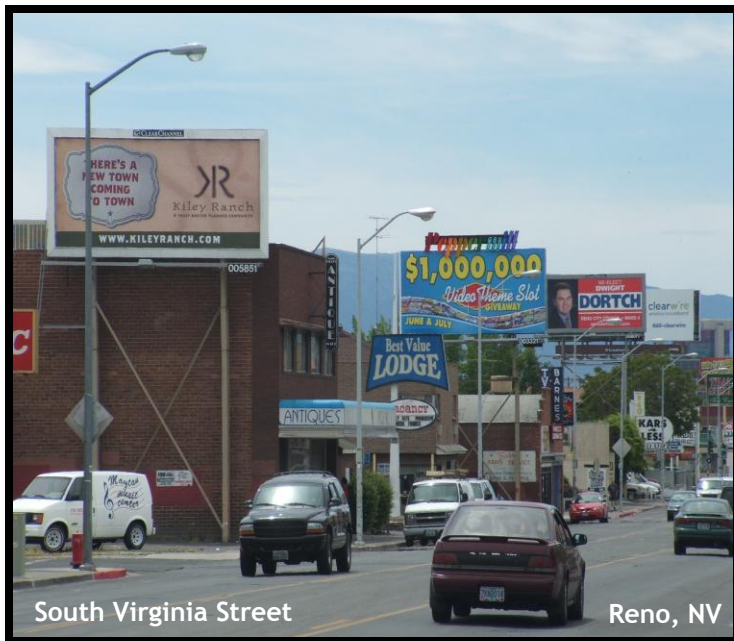
<http://www.scenic.org/billboards-a-sign-control/the-truth-about-billboards/100-billboard-control-is-good-for-business>



BILLBOARDS DETRACT

- The more a community does to enhance its unique natural, scenic, historic, and architectural assets, the more tourists it attracts.
- Vermont took down its last billboard in 1975. From 1976-1978, tourism revenues increased by over 50 percent.

<http://www.scenic.org/billboards-a-sign-control/the-truth-about-billboards/100-billboard-control-is-good-for-business>



BILLBOARDS DETRACT



- Communities can thrive without billboards. Most billboards have no connection to the local economy.
- They advertise either national brands or out-of-state products and services.

PROHIBITION OF BILLBOARD CONSTRUCTION

- ◉ A prohibition or ban on the construction of new billboards means that billboards can no longer be constructed, but all existing billboards are allowed to remain.
- ◉ U.S. cities adopt billboard bans because it is a proven and fair method to gradually reduce the number of billboards in a city over a long period of time.
- ◉ There is no forced removal of billboards under a billboard ban. Billboards are taken down only when the landowner chooses to remove them.



TOURIST COMMUNITIES BAN BILLBOARDS

- ◉ Many prime tourist cities prohibit new billboard construction even as their tourism revenues keep rising.
 - Palm Springs and Big Sur, California
 - Key West, Florida
 - Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts
 - Kitty Hawk and Nags Head, North Carolina
 - South Padre Island, Texas
 - Santa Fe, New Mexico
 - Aspen and Boulder, Colorado
 - Holland, Michigan
 - Portland, Oregon
- ◉ Four tourism destinations prohibit all billboards: Maine, Alaska, Vermont, and Hawaii.
- ◉ In Nevada, one community – Boulder City – has banned all billboards.
- ◉ Scenic America reports that more than 700 communities nationwide have banned billboards.

<http://www.scenic.org/billboards-a-sign-control/the-truth-about-billboards/100-billboard-control-is-good-for-business>

SCENIC NEVADA'S INITIATIVE TO BAN BILLBOARDS

- ◉ Pre-2000, the billboard industry in Reno and billboard blight were out of control.
- ◉ The City Council declined to initiate new laws to reduce billboard blight.
- ◉ A citizens group collected the necessary signatures and qualified Ballot Question R1 for the November 2000 election, asking voters if new construction should be prohibited.
- ◉ 57 percent of the voters approved the ballot initiative that said:

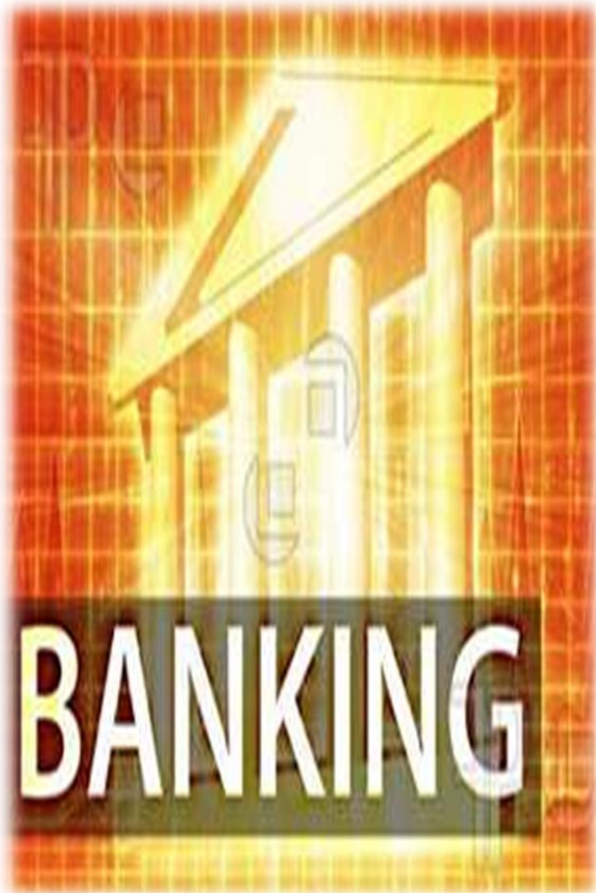
“The construction of new off-premises advertising displays/billboards is prohibited, and the City of Reno may not issue permits for their construction.”

RENO'S BILLBOARD BANKING SYSTEM

- Voters made their wishes clear.
- Billboard companies found a way around the law.
- The city and the billboard industry agreed to a new sign code that capped billboards at about 280 structures and created the billboard permit bank.



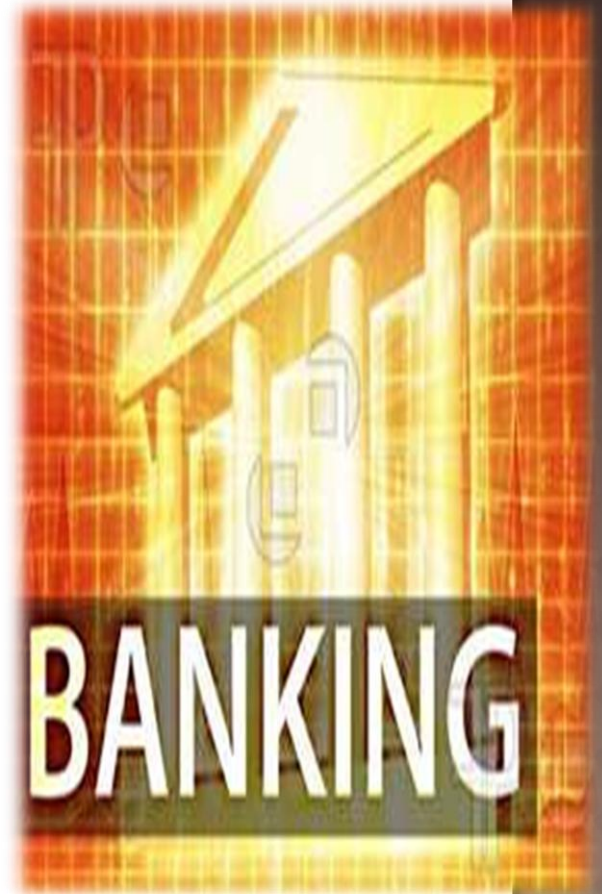
RENO'S BILLBOARD BANKING SYSTEM



- When one comes down, another can be constructed in a different permitted location.
- If the billboard company doesn't have a new location, it can “bank” its permit until a new location is found.

RENO'S BILLBOARD BANKING SYSTEM

- ◉ The banked permits can last 15 years.
- ◉ As of September 2011, there were 50 permits banked and about 234 standing billboards in Reno.
- ◉ No attrition, and more existing billboards due to annexations.



NEW CONSTRUCTION

- Despite the vote, new construction of billboards is permitted within the city of Reno.
- The billboard industry continues to get permits through the city's banking system.
- Where will they be erected next and will they be allowed to become digital billboards?



New billboard construction, corner of Market Street and Automotive Way, August 2011

DIGITAL BILLBOARDS - AESTHETICS

- They are the brightest objects in the landscape, and become a dominant visual element.
- They distract from other visual and scenic qualities.



- They clash with historic or established architectural elements, even at great distances.

DIGITAL BILLBOARDS - DISTRACTION

Driver distraction is the No. 1 cause of crashes, according to a 2006 study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Nearly 80 percent of the crashes and 65 percent of near crashes were caused by distractions that made the driver look away for up to three seconds.

Digital billboards:

- ⦿ Are the brightest object in the driver's field of vision, especially at night
- ⦿ Cause inadvertent and instinctual glances
- ⦿ Invite lingering looks with images that rotate every four, six or eight seconds
- ⦿ Include complex messages that often take five seconds to comprehend.

DIGITAL BILLBOARDS - ENERGY HOGS

- ⦿ They are 10 times brighter than the surrounding area and three times brighter than a traditional billboard, according to the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute.
- ⦿ They consume great amounts of electricity, using thousands of LED bulbs.
- ⦿ The carbon footprint of one digital equals 49 traditional billboards or 13.3 homes, according to the U.S. Green Building Council.
- ⦿ Daytime operation *requires* more power than nighttime operation, as the lit image must compete with the brightness of the sun.

DIGITAL BILLBOARDS - ENERGY HOGS

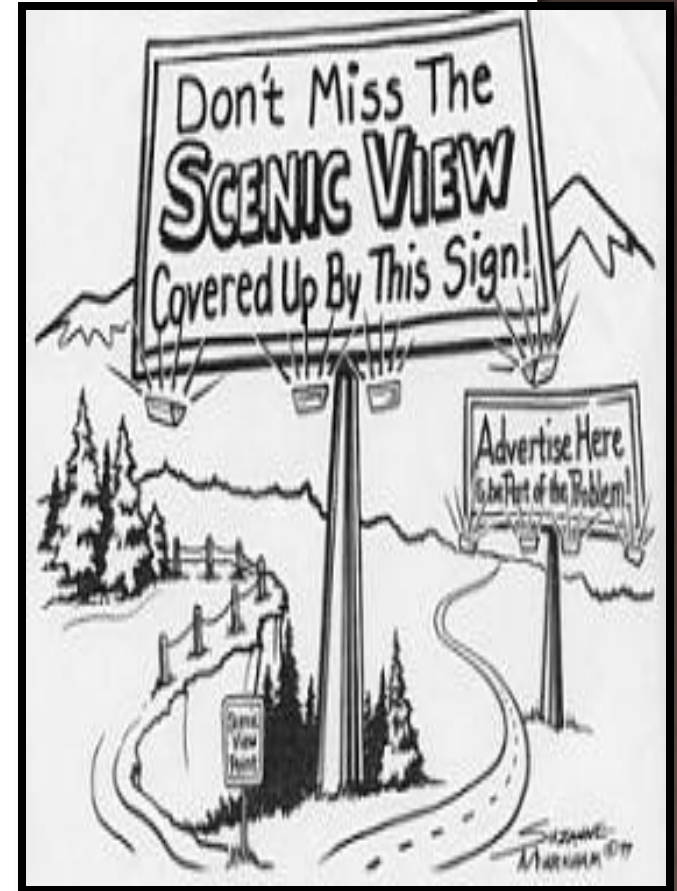
Hot summer weather, combined with LED heat generation, creates the need for an air conditioning unit to cool the components.

In many applications, such as television and computer displays, LED technology proves more energy efficient. But research shows that digital billboards are simply not an appropriate or responsible application for digital technology, says Gregory Young, LEED AP.

PUBLIC OPINION - SURVEY RESULTS

- 55 percent believe the City Council should not change city code to allow digitals here
- 66 percent do not want to view a digital billboard from their home or office window
- 80 percent believe there are enough or too many billboards in Reno already
- 89 percent believe that it is important or very important that drivers should not be distracted while driving

April 2011 600 registered Reno voters polled by M.J. Ross Group, Inc., Portland, Oregon



PUBLIC OPINION - SURVEY RESULTS

- ◉ The Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs, made up of more than 40 organizations, including the Sierra Club and Friends of Nevada Wilderness, passed a resolution advocating a permanent ban on digitals for safety and aesthetic reasons in 2009.
- ◉ The Reno Gazette-Journal ran an editorial in 2009 that advocates caution and encourages officials to make sure use of the billboards is safe.
- ◉ An RGJ reader poll in 2009 found that 72 percent (312 votes) favor a ban.



IF DIGITALS ARE ALLOWED - WHERE WILL THEY GO

In 2009, planning staff proposed limiting digital billboard locations to five areas one in each ward along:

- ◉ US 395
- ◉ Interstate 80
- ◉ South Virginia Street
- ◉ Longley Lane
- ◉ McCarran Boulevard

ALTERNATIVES TO TRADITIONAL AND DIGITAL BILLBOARDS

- ◉ Logo and tourist-oriented directional signs (TODS)
- ◉ A 1990 study sponsored by the US Department of Agriculture found that the annual direct economic impacts of TODS in Oregon and Washington exceeded \$25 million, with secondary impacts topping \$53 million. The benefit/cost ratio of the TODS program was nearly 2500 to 1 in Oregon and 1000 to 1 in Washington.

<http://www.scenic.org/billboards-a-sign-control/tools-for-action/32-alternatives-to-billboards>

- ◉ State highway electronic reader boards



TODS: Tourist-Oriented Directional Signs. A smart, sensible alternative.



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Questions