

Sumter City-County Planning Commission

April 25, 2012

OA-12-02, Digital Billboards (County)

I. THE REQUEST

Applicant: Glynn Willis- Adams Outdoor Advertising

Request: Request to amend the County's Sign Ordinance, *Article 8, Section 8.i.8, Off Premise Advertising(Billboards)* to allow for digital sign display on billboards

II. BACKGROUND

The Applicant has requested an Ordinance Amendment to allow digital sign displays on their existing billboards. Adams Outdoor Advertising would like to introduce the County of Sumter to digital billboards. This amendment would not change the current development standards pertaining to zoning districts which permit these signs, spacing between signs, maximum height and size of sign face. It would only allow for digital sign faces instead of the older traditional poster display billboards.

A digital billboard is a billboard that is created from computer programs and software. Digital billboards can be designed to display running text, display several different displays from the same company, and even exist to provide several companies a certain slot of time during the day. Because of the versatility and increased potential revenue for these signs, they are rapidly becoming the standard for the future.

Digital billboards, which change ads every few seconds to represent multiple advertisers, have gained popularity across the country in recent years. Small business owners turn to them as an affordable way to reach a large number of customers with a dynamic message. Public safety organizations rely on them to help bring fugitives to justice and provide emergency information. The news media use them to give up to the minute news and information to an increasingly mobile audience. The uses for this technology are as varied as the places they serve. Businesses increasingly choose digital billboards and signs for advertising.

As with any new technology, there are questions about how best to incorporate digital billboards into the Zoning Ordinance regulations and the aesthetic fabric of our area.

Back on September 25, 2007, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued a statement giving the green light to approve digital billboards, as long as there were appropriate regulatory controls in place at the local level.

Our Zoning Ordinance does not currently have regulations for governing digital billboards, therefore staff has researched other communities who already have gone through a similar review process and gathered input from the applicant who is in the business to try to develop criteria for regulating these special type signs.

III. PROPOSED ORDINANCE AMENDMENT

Amend Article 8, Section 8.i.8 to reflect the following (note that changes are in **Boldface** type):

8. i.8. Off-Premise Advertising (Billboard):

Is defined as a sign that communicates the availability of goods, services and ideas not necessarily available on the premises on which the sign is located.

Digital Sign- means an off- site sign or billboard that utilizes digital or light-emitting diodes (LEDs) or similar electronic methods to create a changeable image display area.

Electronically Changing Message Sign- means a sign or portion thereof designed to accommodate frequent message changes composed of characters or letters, and that can be changed or rearranged electronically without altering the face or surface of such sign.

a. Off-premise advertising signs are a permitted use out right only in the Light-Industrial Wholesale (LI-W) and Heavy Industry (HI) districts in the City of Sumter. The City of Sumter may also allow off-premise advertising signs as a conditional use within the Highway Corridor Protection District (HCP) irrespective of zoning districts including Light-Industrial Wholesale (LI-W) and Heavy Industry (HI). When a conditional use request for an off-premise advertising sign materializes in a HCP overlay zone, the Zoning Administrator shall review and approve such requests in the manner specified in Article Three, Section R and Article 5, Section B of this Ordinance and the Sumter City-County Comprehensive Plan. The County of Sumter shall permit billboards in the same districts as the City of Sumter, and the General Commercial (GC) districts in the County. The County of Sumter has elected to implement HCP review in the manner of the City of Sumter.

b. Outdoor advertising structure design:

1. No stacked (double deck) sign faces or side by side sign faces shall be allowed;
2. Structures permitted after the effective date of this ordinance shall be designed and constructed with single steel pole structural support designed to meet the wind load requirements of the latest adopted building codes;
3. Within five (5) years after the adoption of this Ordinance, all existing billboards not constructed with monopole structures shall be replaced with such structures unless permitted to remain as originally constructed by action of the Board of Appeals. This provision does not supercede Exhibit 12, Discontinuance Schedule for Certain Non-Conforming Uses found elsewhere in Article Six of this Ordinance.

c. Spacing Requirements:

1. One (1,000 ft) thousand feet on the same side of the street, and seven (700 ft) hundred feet on the opposite side of the street measured from the spot directly opposite from existing off-premise advertising sign.
2. The distance between advertising signs shall be measured along the centerline of the street or highway on which the signs have common frontage, and between perpendiculars to such centerline drawn from

the sign to the centerline of each street. Back-to-back signs and V-signs (consistent to 8.i.3.) shall be considered as one sign for the purpose of Spacing requirements;

3. Square footage allowed for outdoor advertising faces:

a. Maximum square footage shall be set forth within the following zoning districts;

1. General Commercial (GC) – three (300 ft.) hundred feet;
2. Light Industrial-Warehouse (LI-W) – three hundred (300) ft;
3. Heavy Industry (HI) – three (300 ft.) hundred feet;
4. Highway Corridor Protection – three (300 ft.) hundred feet;

b. The maximum square footage permitted for signs designed to advertise to motorists on Interstate Highway 95 shall not be greater than six hundred seventy-two feet (672 ft.). An additional twenty (20%) percent of sign face area will be allowed for embellishments. All signs must be located no more than 600 (600 ft.) feet from the Interstate Highway 95 right-of-way.

4. All new billboards in GC, LI-W, and HI in the City shall not be closer than 1,000 feet measured in a direct line to any entrance or access to a residential subdivision, historic district, design review district, historic building, or the Central Business District (CBD).

d. Setback Requirements:

1. Front property line: ten (10 ft.) feet.
2. Side property line: ten (10 ft.) feet.

e. Height Requirements:

1. Maximum height shall not exceed thirty-five (35 ft.) feet above the average roadway grade level with the following exceptions;

- a. The maximum height shall not exceed one (100 ft.) hundred feet above the average roadway grade if within six (600 ft.) hundred feet of Interstate Highway 95 (I-95);

f. Lighting Requirements: Lighting for outdoor advertising signs shall be indirect, nonflashing;

g. Landscaping Requirements:

1. Landscaping requirements shall be applied to outdoor advertising signs in the General Commercial (GC), Light Industrial-Wholesale (LI-W), and Heavy Industry (HI) Districts and the Highway Corridor Protection District (HCP) ;

2. A landscape strip shall be located immediately adjoining the support structure of the billboard and extend the length of the billboard;

3. A hedge or other durable planting of a least two (2 ft.) feet in height, attaining within four (4 yrs.) years after planting a minimum height of six (6 ft.) feet;

4. Single-faced billboard with rear viewable from the public right-of-way or other public property shall have three (3) equally spaced eight (8) foot tall evergreen trees planted in the rear of the billboard and the reverse side of the sign shall be of one neutral color or natural dark tone.

h. Digital and Electronic Changing Message Signs

1. Digital and Electronic Changing message Signs are permitted as off site signs, including preexisting nonconforming off premise billboards may be digital signs or electronic changeable message signs subject to the following provisions:

- a. All messages, images or displays on a digital sign or electronically changing message sign shall remain unchanged for a minimum of six seconds.**
- b. The time interval used to change from one complete message, image or display to the next complete message, image or display shall be a maximum of (1) second.**
- c. There shall be no appearance of a visual dissolve or fading, in which any part of one message, image or display appears simultaneously with a part of a second message, image or display.**
- d. There shall be no appearance of flashing or sudden bursts of light, and no appearance of video motion, animation, movement or flow of the message, image or display within the sign.**
- e. The intensity and contrast of light levels shall remain constant throughout the sign face.**
- f. Each digital sign or electronically changeable message sign shall be equipped with automatic day/night dimming software, to reduce the illumination intensity of the sign from one hour after sunset to one hour prior to sunrise.**
- g. The conversion of a preexisting nonconforming off site sign to a digital sign or electronically changeable message sign, including structural improvements related thereto, is permitted and shall not be considered as a removal, replacement, change, expansion, or restoration of a nonconformity. Any necessary modifications to a preexisting nonconforming off site sign to a digital sign or electronically changing message sign, including reconstruction of the structure or structural alterations, shall be allowed, as long as all dimensions of the sign display shall stay the same as the current dimension of the sign display.**
- h. Any digital display installation on existing sign structures as of the date of the adoption of this sign ordinance amendment shall be a minimum of 700 feet from any other digital display facing the same direction.**
- i. The following are the criteria for lighting standards for digital display signs or electronically changing message signs:**

- a. **Lighting Levels will not increase by more than 0.3 foot candles (over ambient levels) as measured using a foot candle meter at a pre-set distance.**
- b. **Pre-set distances to measure the foot candles impact vary with the expected viewing distances of each sign size. Measurement distance criteria follow:**
 - i. **Displays of 300 square feet or less 150'**
 - ii. **Displays of 378 square feet or less 200'**
 - iii. **Displays of 672 square feet or less 250'**
- c. **Each digital display or electronically changing message sign shall include a light-sensing device that will adjust the brightness as ambient light conditions change.**
- d. **No scrolling text messages**

Also Amend Article 10 Definitions to add the following:

Digital Sign- means an off- site sign or billboard that utilizes digital or light-emitting diodes (LEDs) or similar electronic methods to create a changeable image display area.

Electronically Changing Message Sign- means a sign or portion thereof designed to accommodate frequent message changes composed of characters or letters, and that can be changed or rearranged electronically without altering the face or surface of such sign.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of this text amendment after reviewing and researching other surrounding counties and municipalities.

V. ORDINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE – APRIL 17, 2012

This committee met on April 17, 2012 and recommended approval of the Ordinance Amendment as presented by staff. They did request to continue discussions pertaining to replacing nonconforming signs with the full Planning Commission Board.

VI. PLANNING COMMISSION – APRIL 25, 2012

The Sumter City-County Planning Commission at its meeting on Wednesday, April 25, 2012, voted to recommend approval for this request.

VII. COUNTY COUNCIL – MAY 8, 2012 – FIRST READING