

**ELECTRONIC MESSAGE BOARDS / VIDEO DISPLAYS
CITY OF BLOOMINGTON
FOCUS GROUP MEETING**

Minutes

August 23, 2006

McLeod Conference Room

1st Floor Bloomington City Hall

2 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Introductions and overview

- On Wednesday, August 23, 2006 the Electronic Message Boards/Video Display Focus Group met. Persons in attendance included: Jim Hoeft, Hoeft Companies; Cheryl Long O'Donnell, Visual Communications; Dan Dahlen, Dahlen Sign Company; Tom McCarver, Clear Channel Outdoor; and city staff.
- Staff provided Focus Group members with an overview of the project; discussed the chronology, direction from the City Council, meeting schedule; and the purpose and role of the Focus Group input in the process.

Details and discussion

- Staff inquired information regarding industry forecasts and technical capabilities of billboard signs. Members explained that using electronic changeable copy signs in billboard spaces is a growing trend. Using wireless technologies these signs have the ability to receive and display a continually changing array of commercial advertisements and community-focused information such as Amber Alerts.
- Members discussed national billboard standards established by the Outdoor Advertising Association of America (OAAA). OAAA standards mandate static messages change at a frequency no less than every 8 seconds. Animation is currently not allowed on state-aid highways in Minnesota.
- Staff raised questions concerning the operability of electronic message signs during periods of extremely cold weather. Members explained the majority of signs using light emitting diodes (LED's) are immune to weather effects. Some signs that employ more sophisticated technologies incorporate heating and/or cooling elements within the sign cabinetry.
- Regarding definitions and terminology staff expressed the desire to remain "technically neutral" within the ordinance given rapidly changing technologies emerging within the sign industry.
- Members and staff discussed brightness levels and the ease with which sign brightness levels are adjusted; one member mentioned the OAAA has devised brightness standards for electronic signs.
- There was a general consensus between staff and members that video display signs must employ lower brightness levels (as compared to daytime brightness levels) during evening hours.
- One member stated that the majority of video display signs such as those in Las Vegas, Nevada are controlled by an "electronic eye" that senses the level of surrounding ambient light and adjusts the brightness of the sign accordingly.

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- Creating a brightness level standard will be complicated by the fact that ambient light levels are constantly changing due to changing weather conditions, the presence and/or addition of neighboring lights, etc. Most electronic signs are equipped with an electronic sensor “eye” that measures ambient light levels though these do occasionally fail.
- Staff inquired as to the level of driver distraction that may be caused by the re-pixelization of L.E.D. signs as they transition from one image to another. One member indicated that they would attempt to forward a demonstration of that transition.
- Members and staff discussed maximum brightness ranges for morning and evening that would allow for photo sensor adjustments within that range based upon varying levels of ambient light.
- Members agreed that animated, video display signs could be appropriate in certain environments such as pedestrian-oriented areas and entertainment districts such as Airport South or the Mall of America. Safety measures will be needed to mitigate the existing traffic issues at the MOA with the additional distraction of a video display sign.
- One member expressed the desire that the standards created for electronic changeable message signs be available to billboard spaces as well. Billboards would still be subject to state and national laws governing animation and flashing content.
- The question was raised as to how existing electronic message board signs would be treated if they were made non-conforming by the new ordinance. Because most existing electronic signs are capable of being re-programmed to operate within the allowable ranges to be set forth in the proposed ordinance, sign owners would have to ultimately bring the operational characteristics of their signs into compliance. However, Staff expressed a desire to work with signs owners during a fair and reasonable time period, remaining mindful to that fact the process could be expensive and time consuming, to bring these signs into compliance.
- Staff’s does not intend to regulate sign content – new standards would focus on operational characteristics.
- Members and staff discussed the possibility of allowing electronic changeable message signs in residential districts for non-residential uses such as churches, offices, and daycare centers. Standards would be needed to prevent excess illumination from affecting adjoining residential property. These signs would be limited to on-premises signs of limited size and careful placement, containing no element of movement. Static messages would have to remain for a prolonged period in order to be compatible with the residential quality of the neighborhood.
- One member explained that certain high-quality electronic message boards may actually produce less illumination than traditional internally-illuminated cabinet signs.
- Staff expressed a desire to create an ordinance that doesn’t restrict sign users to a particular technology, which may become outdated as the industry changes.
- Members and staff discussed proposed vehicle sign standards and agreed the language must be carefully crafted so as not to target legitimate business vehicles with sign displays.
- One member raised the question as to whether or not electronic changeable message signs could be used on temporary signs. Currently that would not be allowed under the proposed ordinance.

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Next steps / wrap-up

- Focus Group members stated they would pass along industry standards and information related to electronic message boards and video display signs.
- Some Focus Group members stated their intent to attend one of the scheduled public hearings.
- Staff will prepare a summary of the group's input and share it with the Planning Commission and City Council.