



## CITY OF WASHINGTON, ILLINOIS

### Committee of the Whole Agenda Communication

**Meeting Date:** February 9, 2026

**Prepared By:** Jon Oliphant, AICP, Planning & Development Director

**Agenda Item:** Possible Billboards Zoning Code Amendment Discussion

**Explanation:** The City's zoning code allows for the placement of small and large billboards within the city limits. Small billboards are classified as signs that advertise goods, products or services not sold on the premises on which the sign is located and can be a maximum of 64 square feet. A large billboard is the same type of sign up to a maximum of 672 square feet. A billboard cannot be located any closer than 500 feet from the nearest lot line of any residential zoned lot or parcel used for residential purposes unless a small billboard is separated by a highway where the maximum permissible speed limit is not less than 55 miles per hour. In such locations, which is limited to the US 24 corridor, the minimum setback is 300 feet. No billboard, whether small or large, can be located anywhere but on a corridor where the maximum speed limit is not less than 55 miles per hour. The regulations are attached.

Two variance applications were submitted and considered over the past two years during public hearings by the Planning and Zoning Commission to potentially allow an electronic digital billboard at 1230 Peoria Street. Todd's Servicecenter was located on the property for decades prior to its demolition in 2021. The sign was proposed to be 16' from the intersecting front property lines abutting Eagle and Peoria and approximately 394' from the nearest residential zoned lot at 1103 Eagle. There were three components to the variance request:

1. The allowance for a large billboard adjacent to a road with a maximum permissible speed limit of less than 55 miles per hour;
2. The allowance for a large billboard to be located less than 20 feet from the property line; and
3. The allowance for a large billboard to be located within less than 500 feet from the nearest lot line of any residential zoned lot.

Staff had some concerns regarding the proposed location as well as the placement of any billboards near corridors that do not allow for such off-premise signs, as it could create precedent. Both the PZC and City Council did not favor that location. However, there appeared to be interest from the Council in potentially amending the zoning code to slightly increase the options for possible billboards or off-premise signage.

Billboards are intended to draw the attention of eyes to the displayed message. As such, they should only be considered where they will not substantially impact pedestrian and vehicular safety. Maintaining the desired city aesthetics should also be encouraged. Should there continue to be interest in a future zoning code text amendment, staff would advocate for two primary elements:

1. Consider any such requests through a special use process. That would allow for a specific site to be analyzed and if it may be deemed suitable, conditions could be attached that address its eventual operation and placement.
2. Continue having an underlying set of regulations that would apply to any billboards. There could be changes to the existing regulations but there should still be a framework from which any such billboards must abide by. Staff would recommend that such signs only be considered

on or adjacent to non-residential properties and/or those zoned such as C-2, C-3, and/or I-1, which are typically where more intensive non-residential uses are located.

**Fiscal Impact:** N/A

**Action Requested:** Staff requests direction at the February 9 Committee of the Whole meeting about its openness to a zoning code text amendment and whether they should be considered through a special use process. Following that feedback, a public hearing is tentatively planned for the March Planning and Zoning Commission meeting to gain a recommendation on any possible precise changes. A first reading ordinance would then be scheduled for a future Council meeting for potential amendment adoption.

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## **Sec. 56-271. Billboards.**

- (a) Billboards of the following three types shall be allowed:
  - (1) Poster panels or bulletins normally mounted on a building wall, roof, or freestanding structure with advertising copy in the form of pasted paper;
  - (2) Multi-prism signs alternating advertising messages on one displayed area; and
  - (3) Painted bulletins, where the advertiser's message is painted directly on a wall-mounted, roof, or freestanding display area.
- (b) Billboards are prohibited in the city, except under the following conditions:
  - (1) No large billboard will be permitted which advertises a business which is not located and presently being conducted on the premises on which the billboard is located, except as follows:
    - a. As may be permitted by applicable state and federal law, rules, and regulations along state and federal highways, or roads under the jurisdiction of the state or federal departments of transportation, and where the maximum permissible speed for vehicles traveling upon such highway or road is not less than 55 miles per hour;
    - b. The maximum height above grade of such large billboard shall not exceed 30 feet;
    - c. The maximum surface area of such large billboard shall not exceed 672 square feet;
    - d. The lot, block, or parcel of real estate upon which the large billboard is located must have an area of no less than 20,000 square feet, and must be zoned for commercial or industrial use;
    - e. The location of the large billboard shall be no less than 20 feet from the property line of the lot upon which the large billboard is located;
    - f. The large billboard may not be located or placed within 500 feet from the nearest lot line of any residential zoned lot, block or parcel, or any lot, block or parcel use for residential purposes;
    - g. The large billboard may not be located any closer than 1,500 feet from another such large billboard whether on the same side of the highway or road; and
    - h. The large billboard may not be located in such a place or in such a manner so as to block the view of drivers of vehicles approaching an intersection.
  - (2) No small billboard will be permitted which advertises a business which is not located and presently being conducted on the premises on which the billboard is located, except as follows:
    - a. As may be permitted by applicable state and federal law, rules, and regulations along state and federal highways, or roads under the jurisdiction of the state or federal departments of transportation, and where the maximum permissible speed for vehicles traveling upon such highway or road is not less than 55 miles per hour;
    - b. The maximum height above grade of such small billboard shall not exceed 15 feet;
    - c. The maximum surface area of such small billboard shall not exceed 64 square feet;
    - d. The lot, block, or parcel of real estate upon which the small billboard is located must have an area of no less than 20,000 square feet, and must be zoned for commercial or industrial use;
    - e. The location of the small billboard shall be no less than 20 feet from the property line of the lot upon which the small billboard is located;
    - f. The small billboard may not be located within 500 feet from the nearest lot line of any residential zoned lot, block, or parcel, or any lot, block, or parcel used for residential purposes if the small

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billboard is lighted using internal or external means unless the small billboard is separated by a highway or road where the maximum permissible speed for vehicles is not less than 55 miles per hour. If separated by such a highway or road, the small billboard may not be located within 300 feet from the nearest lot line of any residential zoned lot, block, or parcel, or any lot, block, or parcel used for residential purposes;

- g. The small billboard may not be located any closer than 500 feet from any other billboard with the exception of small billboards that are located on opposite sides of a public street; and
- h. The small billboard may not be located in such a place or in such a manner so as to block the view of drivers of vehicles approaching an intersection.

(Code 2000, § 154.154; Ord. No. 2033, 9-3-1996; Ord. No. 2941, 6-20-2011; Ord. No. 3169, 3-7-2016)