

CITY OF WASHINGTON

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

301 Walnut St. · Washington, IL 61571

Ph. 309-444-1135 · Fax 309-444-9779

<http://www.washington-illinois.org>

joliphant@ci.washington.il.us

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairman Burdette and Planning and Zoning Commission
FROM: Jon R. Oliphant, AICP, Planning & Development Director
SUBJECT: Discussion Item – Potential Billboards Zoning Code Text Amendment
DATE: April 27, 2026

Summary: The City's zoning code grants a narrow allowance for small and large billboards within the city limits. Two recent variance cases prompted consideration of an amendment to those regulations to potentially expand the allowable locations. Attached is a draft amendment that would slightly increase the possible locations; there are no changes to this version that was discussed at the March PZC meeting. Staff requests additional feedback to be utilized in making revisions to a possible code amendment. This is scheduled as a discussion item and an official vote on a recommendation to give to the City Council would be scheduled for a future PZC meeting.

Background: 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. Both types of billboards are permitted only along corridors where the maximum speed limit is not less than 55 miles per hour. The existing 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, some of the Council expressed interest in exploring a zoning code amendment that could modestly expand the allowable locations for billboards.

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. Preserving the community's visual character is also an important consideration. Among the placemaking strategies within the 2023 Comprehensive Plan is to initiate a façade improvement program along Business Route 24, which is intended to make the corridor more inviting to residents and visitors to the city. The third year of the Washington Commercial Building and Property Improvement Grant Program has an open call for

projects. A variety of options exist for a possible zoning code text amendment. The previously drafted amendment ordinance is attached; no changes have been made to that version. These include the following:

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 addresses its eventual operation, height, size, and placement.
2. Maintain an underlying set of regulations applicable to any billboards. The existing regulations could be adjusted, but there should still be a baseline framework that all billboards must meet. Staff recommends limiting consideration to non-residential properties, specifically those zoned C-2, C-3, or I-1, which typically accommodate more intensive non-residential uses. The current regulations allow billboards on commercially or industrially zoned properties. Staff recommends removing C-1 properties from eligibility given the relative scarcity of C-1 parcels and their close proximity to residential uses. Including AG-1 parcels was also discussed at the March PZC meeting. There are relatively few AG-1 properties; most are located along W. Cruger Road, near the Business Route 24/McClugage Road intersection, and a small number of rural, undeveloped parcels near the southern city limits.
3. Require that any billboard that incorporates automatic changeable technology to contain a light detector or photocell that allows for the brightness to be dimmed when ambient light conditions darken as well as to prohibit any video or graphic animation or chasing, scintillating, or high intensity lighting. These standards reflect the existing zoning code requirements for electronic message board signage.
4. Coordinating the size and/or height with the location adjacent to a higher speed corridor. For example, only large billboards could be near limited-access highways. Potential categories could be:
 - a. 55 mph+: 672 sq. ft., 30' height (current regulations; note: 672 sq. ft. is larger than most central Illinois municipalities allow)
 - b. 50-54 mph: 200 sq. ft., 25' height
 - c. 45-49 mph: 150 sq. ft., 20' height
 - d. 40-44 mph: 100 sq. ft., 15' height
5. Note that most modern billboards are digital. The City's zoning code allows electronic message boards to have a maximum display area of 60 square feet and limits the electronic portion to no more than 40 percent of the total sign area. Electronic message boards may not display advertising other than references to the business conducted on the premises and may not be located within 100 feet of any residential zoning district. A sliding scale—similar to the proposed size and height standards—could also be applied towards setbacks from residential zoning districts as follows:
 - a. 55 mph+: 500' (current regulation)
 - b. 50-54 mph: 300'
 - c. 45-49 mph: 200'
 - d. 40-44 mph: 100'
6. Include the aggregate square footage of a billboard with ground signage. The maximum size of ground signs is one square foot per each foot of frontage up to a maximum of 160 square feet on either side. Consolidated business park signs cannot exceed 34 feet in height and 260 square feet in sign area on either side. They must be at least 10 feet from the right-of-way line, no less than 300 feet from any residential property, and no less than 500 feet from any other commercial center sign or billboard.

Some municipal zoning codes designate particular locations where billboards are permitted or prohibited. Washington's zoning code already outlines these allowable and restricted locations. While not included in this draft amendment, further refinement could provide for a range of sizes depending on the whereabouts—for example, differentiating between the US 24 (Boyd Parkway) corridor versus McClugage Road or limited-access highways versus major arterial roads. Another option could be to allow slightly broader placement of small billboards (up to 64 square feet in size) while maintaining strict limitations on large billboards (up to 672 square feet in size), given the significantly greater visual impact of larger signs.

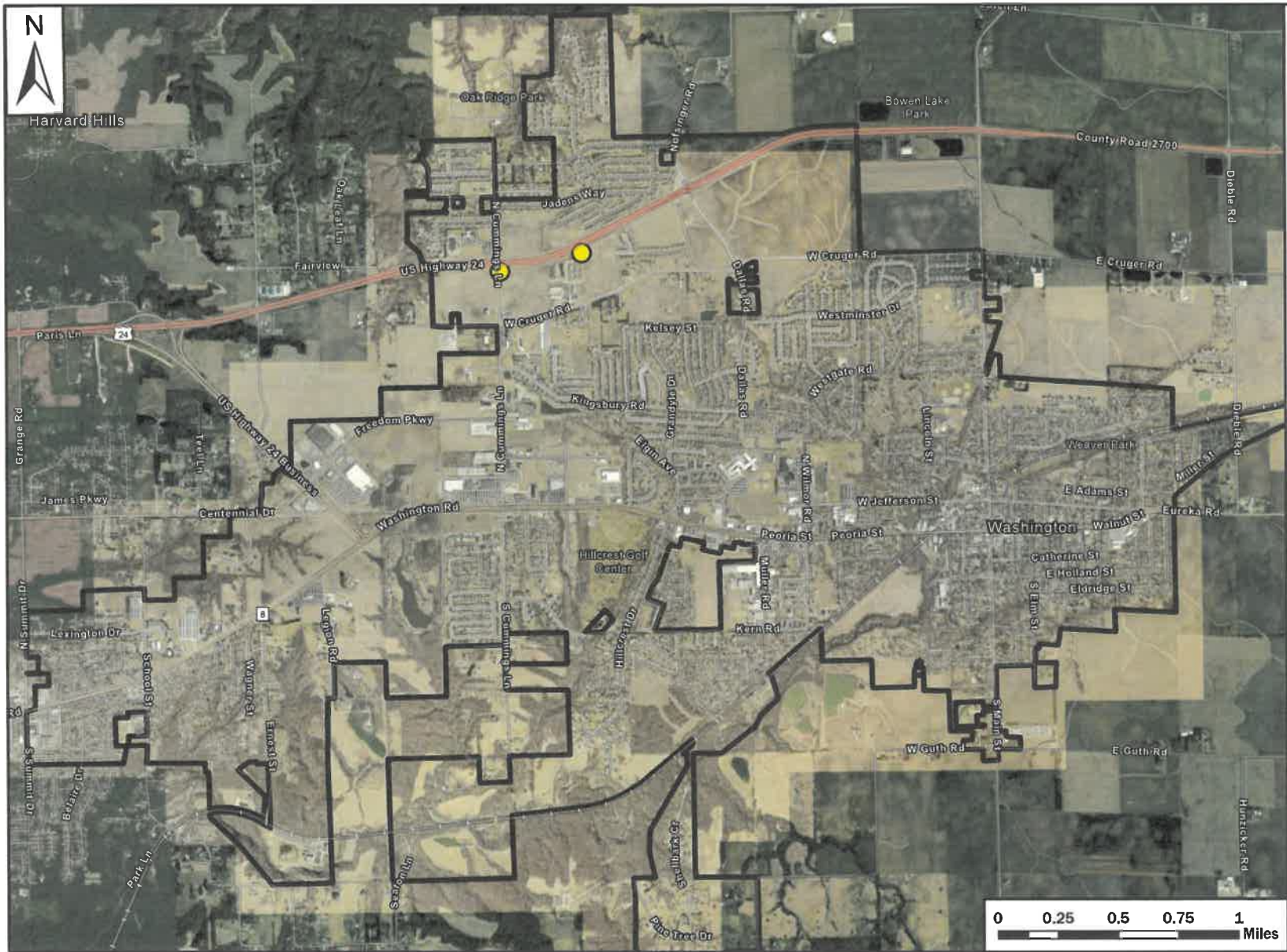
that are customarily only adjacent to divided highways or major arterials. A related approach could be to allow taller monopole signs adjacent to US 24 but to require ground signs with a shorter height maximum near other commercial or industrial corridors.

Attached are several maps:

- The locations of the existing large billboards;
- The locations of the existing large billboards, the 500' residential buffer, and the 1,500' buffer from existing billboards;
- The same information with the addition of roads with a posted speed limit of at least 50 mph;
- The locations of all AG-1 properties;
- The locations of all C-2 properties;
- The locations of all C-3 properties;
- The locations of all I-1 properties;
- The locations of all roads with a posted speed limit of at least 50 mph;
- The locations of all roads with a posted speed limit of at least 45 mph; and
- The locations of all roads with a posted speed limit of at least 40 mph.

Staff requests additional input on a potential code amendment at the May 6 PZC meeting. A public hearing was held at the March 4 PZC meeting; additional discussion was tabled for a future meeting. This item is scheduled for discussion only; no recommendation is intended to be forwarded to City Council at this time. A public hearing would be scheduled for a future meeting with a draft amendment ordinance before the PZC could consider making a recommendation to the Council.

Attachments



Existing Billboards Map

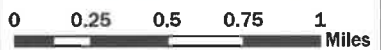
Existing billboards located in & around City of Washington limits

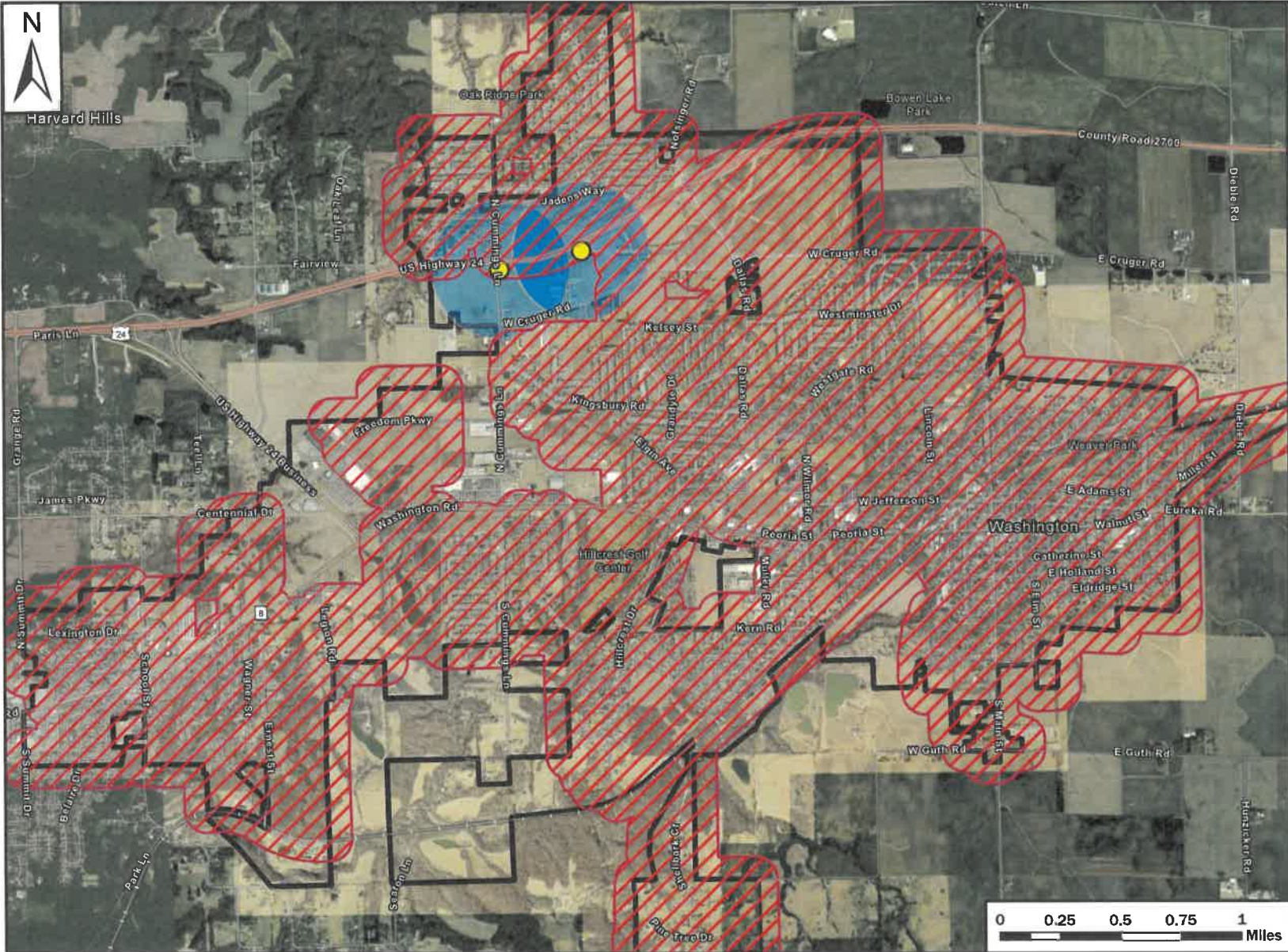
- Legend**
- Existing Billboards
 - City Boundary



Date: 4/29/2026

This map indicates approximate data locations and may not be 100% accurate. Parcels are provided and maintained by Tazewell County.





Billboard Regulations Map

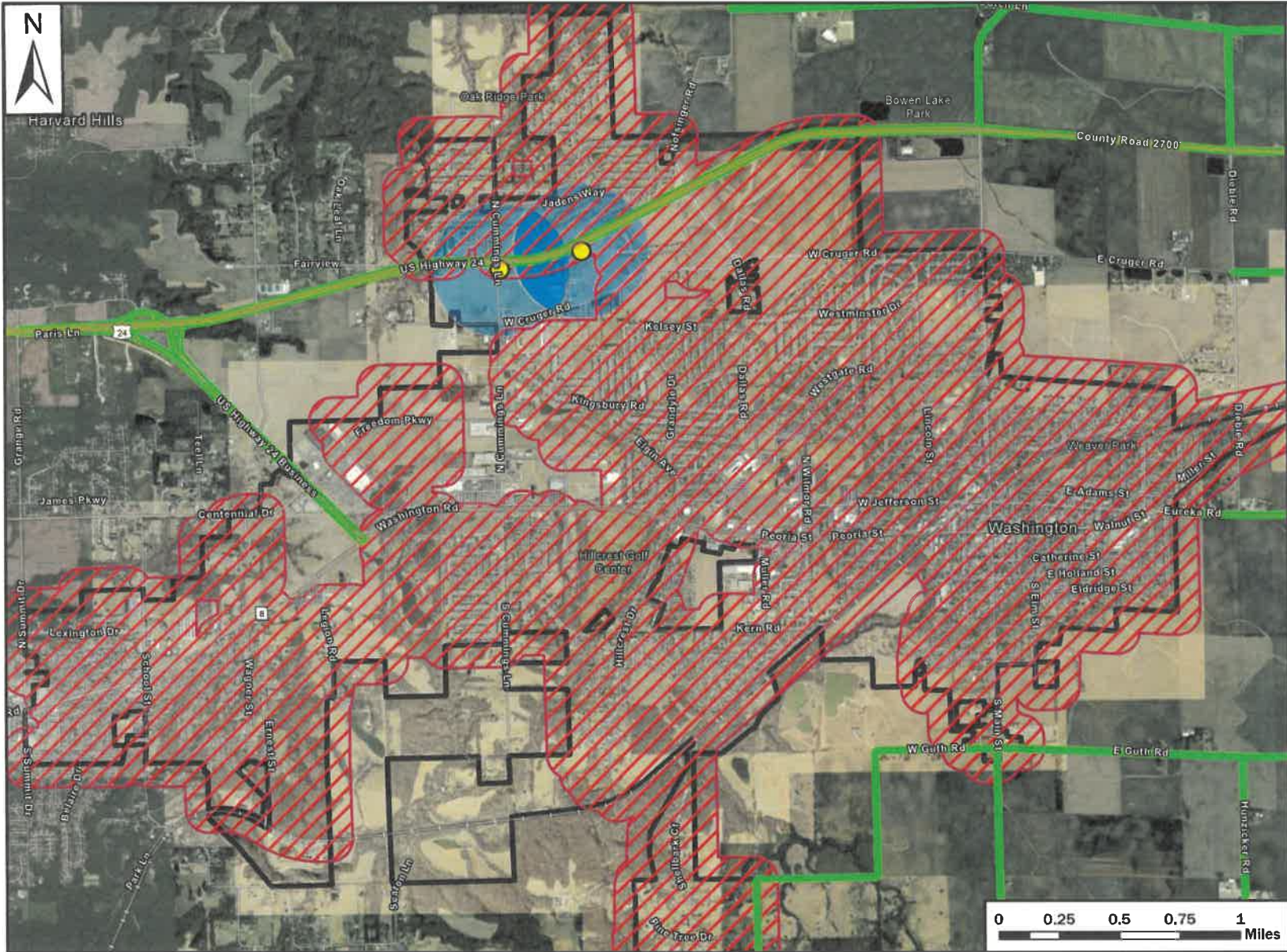
Area allowable for billboard placement based on a 500 ft. buffer around residentially zoned properties, and a 1500' buffer around existing billboards

- Legend**
-  Existing Billboards
 -  Residential Buffer
 -  Billboard Buffer
 -  City Boundary








Date: 4/29/2026

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Billboard Regulations Map

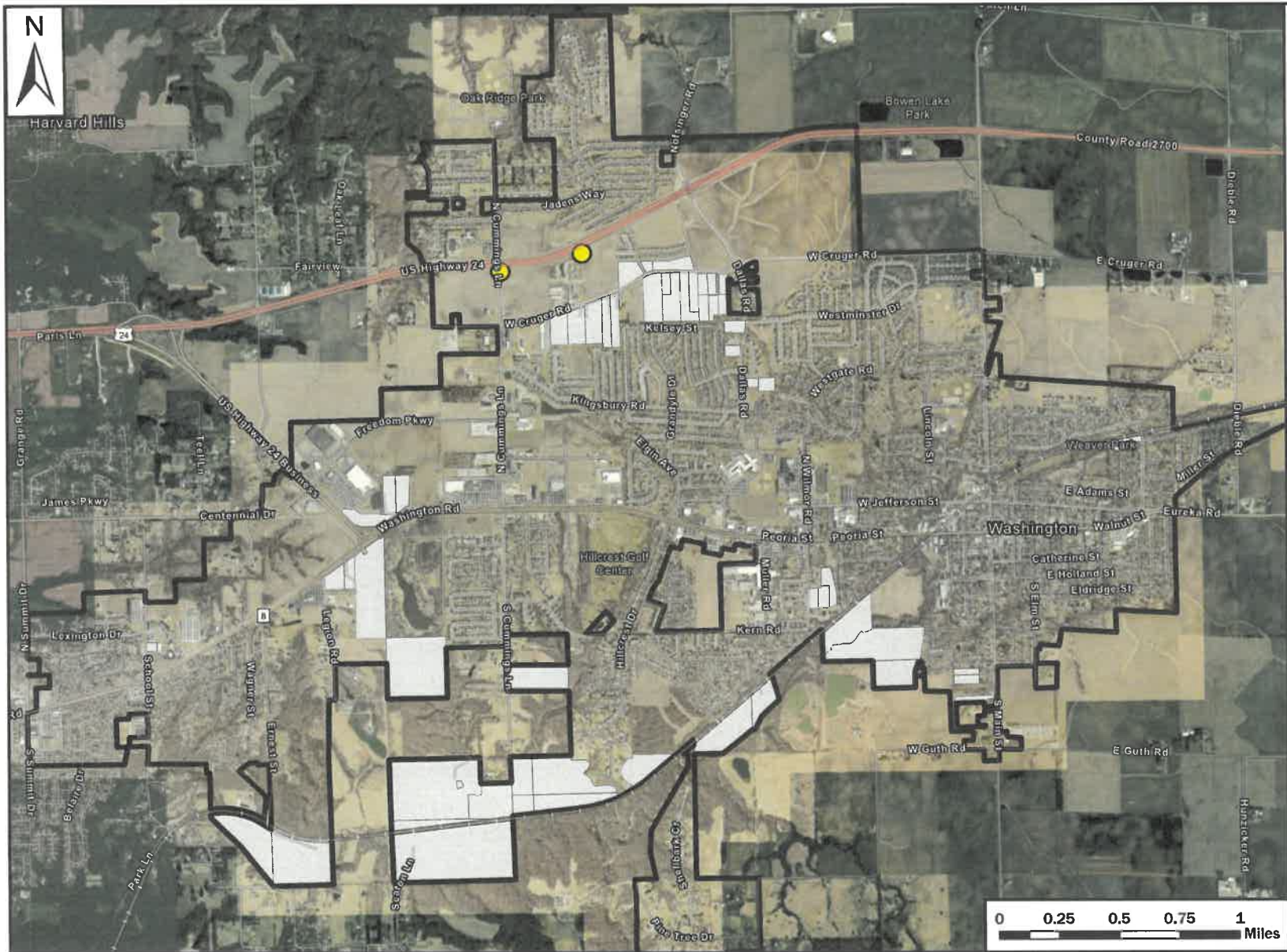
Area allowable for billboard placement based on allowable speed limits of 50 mph, a 500 ft. buffer around residentially zoned properties, and a 1500' buffer around existing billboards

- Legend**
-  Existing Billboards
 -  Speed Limit Permissible Roads (50+ MPH)
 -  Residential Buffer
 -  Billboard Buffer
 -  City Boundary



Date: 4/29/2026


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Zoning Map

Total of 56 properties zoned AG-1 within the city limits of Washington

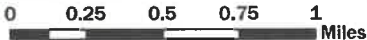
Legend

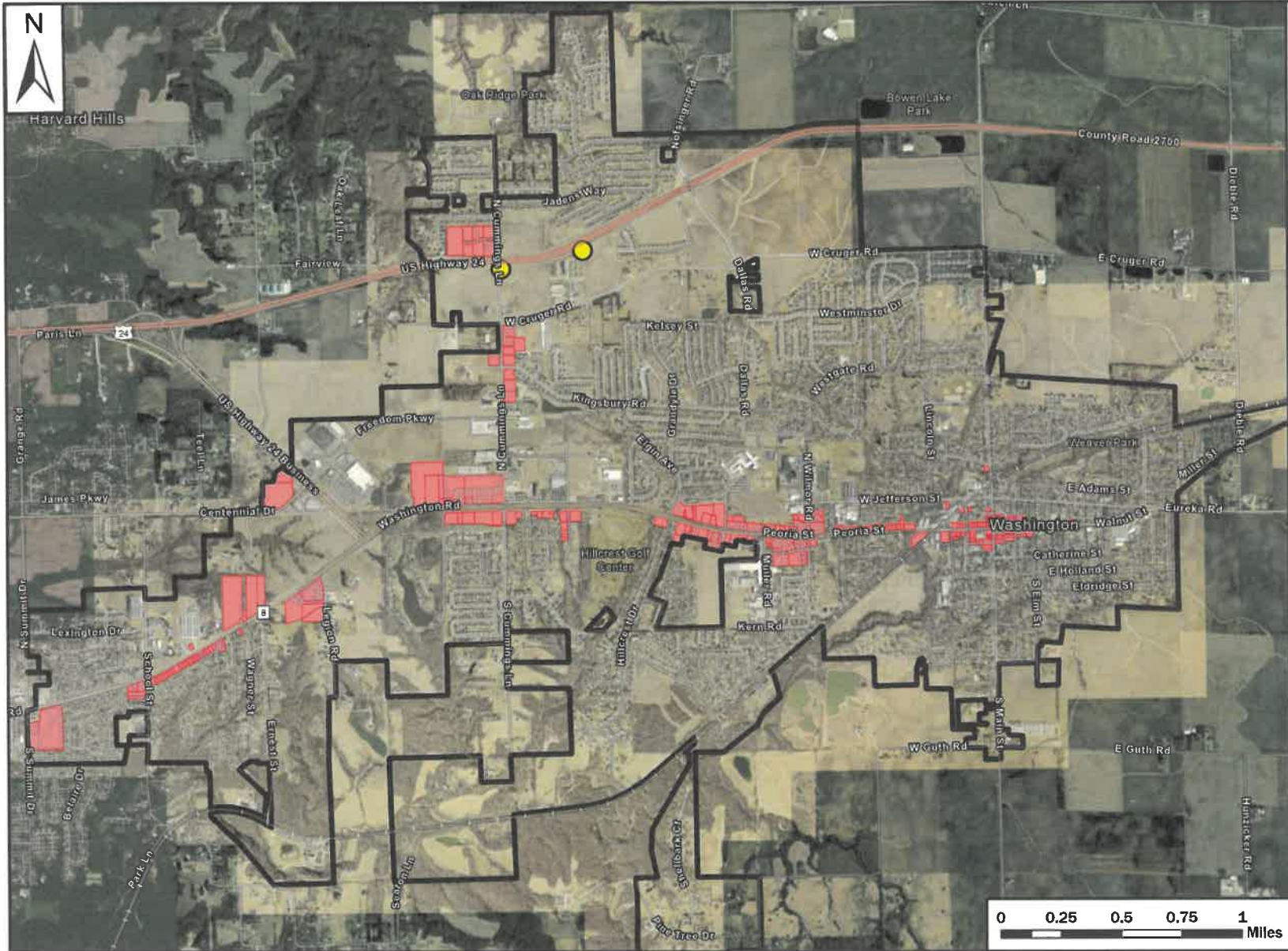
-  Existing Billboards
-  City Boundary
-  AG-1 Properties



Date: 4/29/2026

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Zoning Map

Total of 260
properties zoned C-2
within the city limits
of Washington

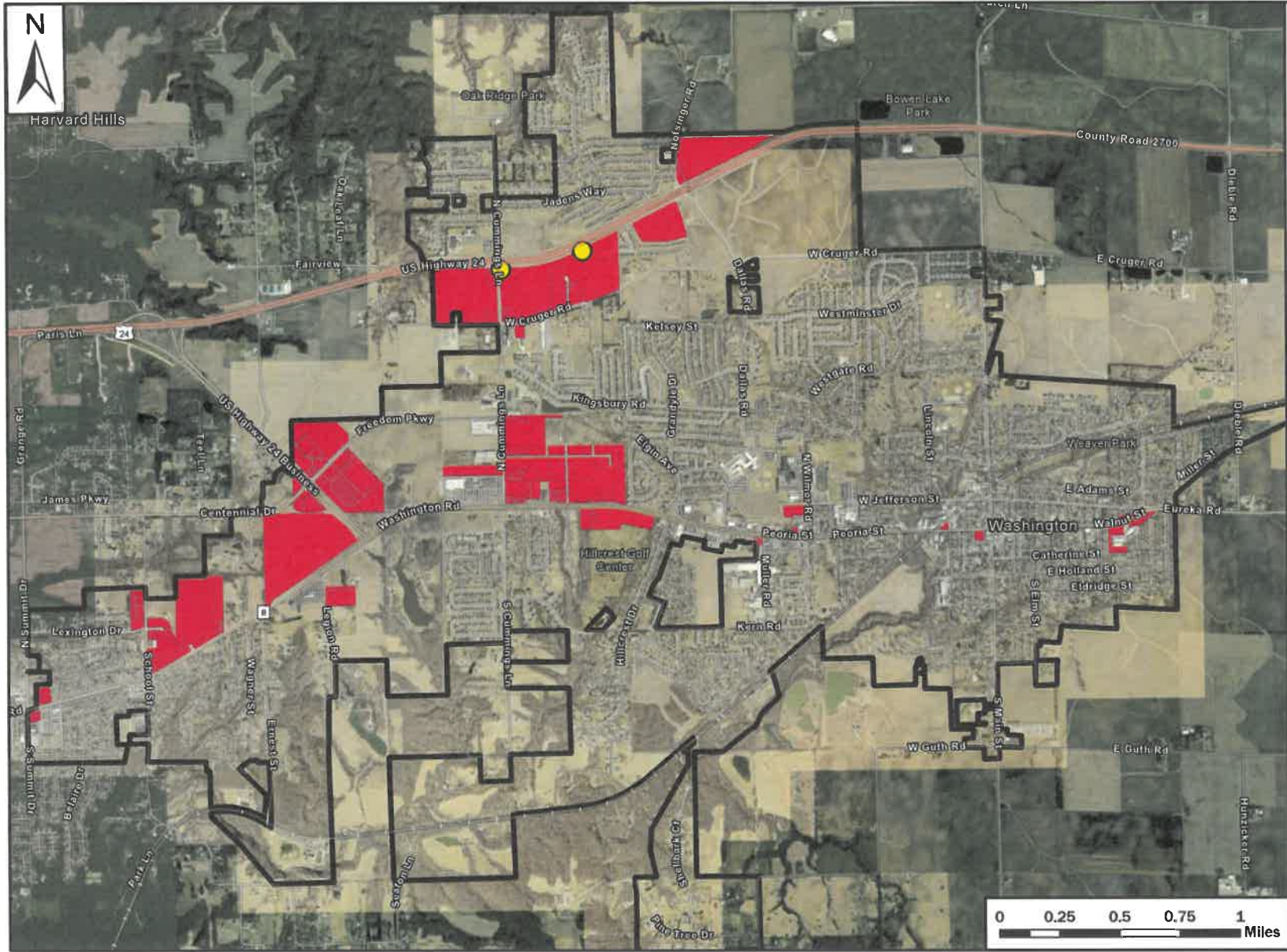
Legend

-  Existing Billboards
-  City Boundary
-  C-2 Properties



Date: 4/29/2026

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Zoning Map

Total of 123 properties zoned C-3 within the city limits of Washington

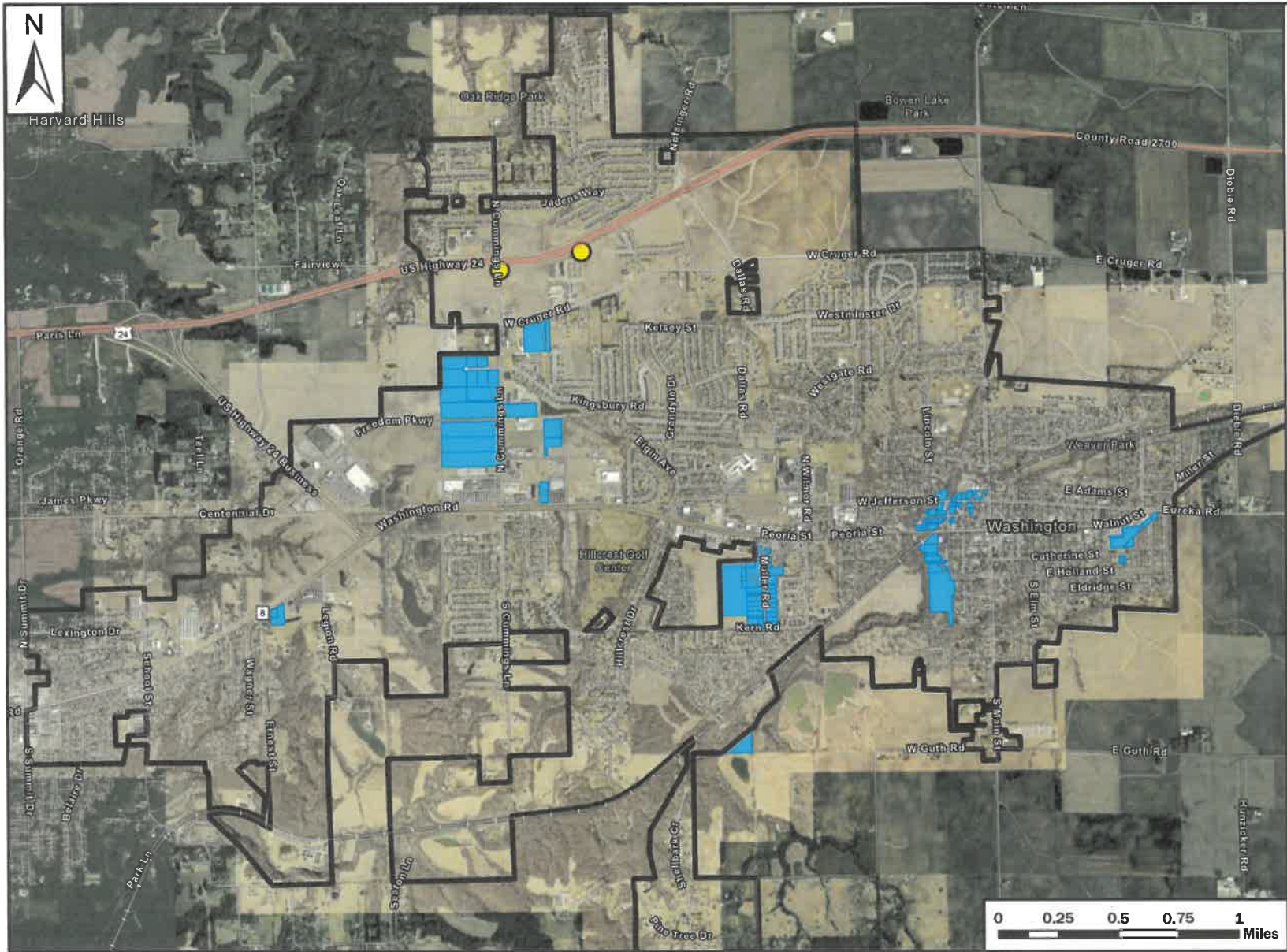
Legend

-  Existing Billboards
-  City Boundary
-  C-3 Properties



Date: 4/29/2026

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Zoning Map

Total of 104 properties zoned I-1 within the city limits of Washington

Legend

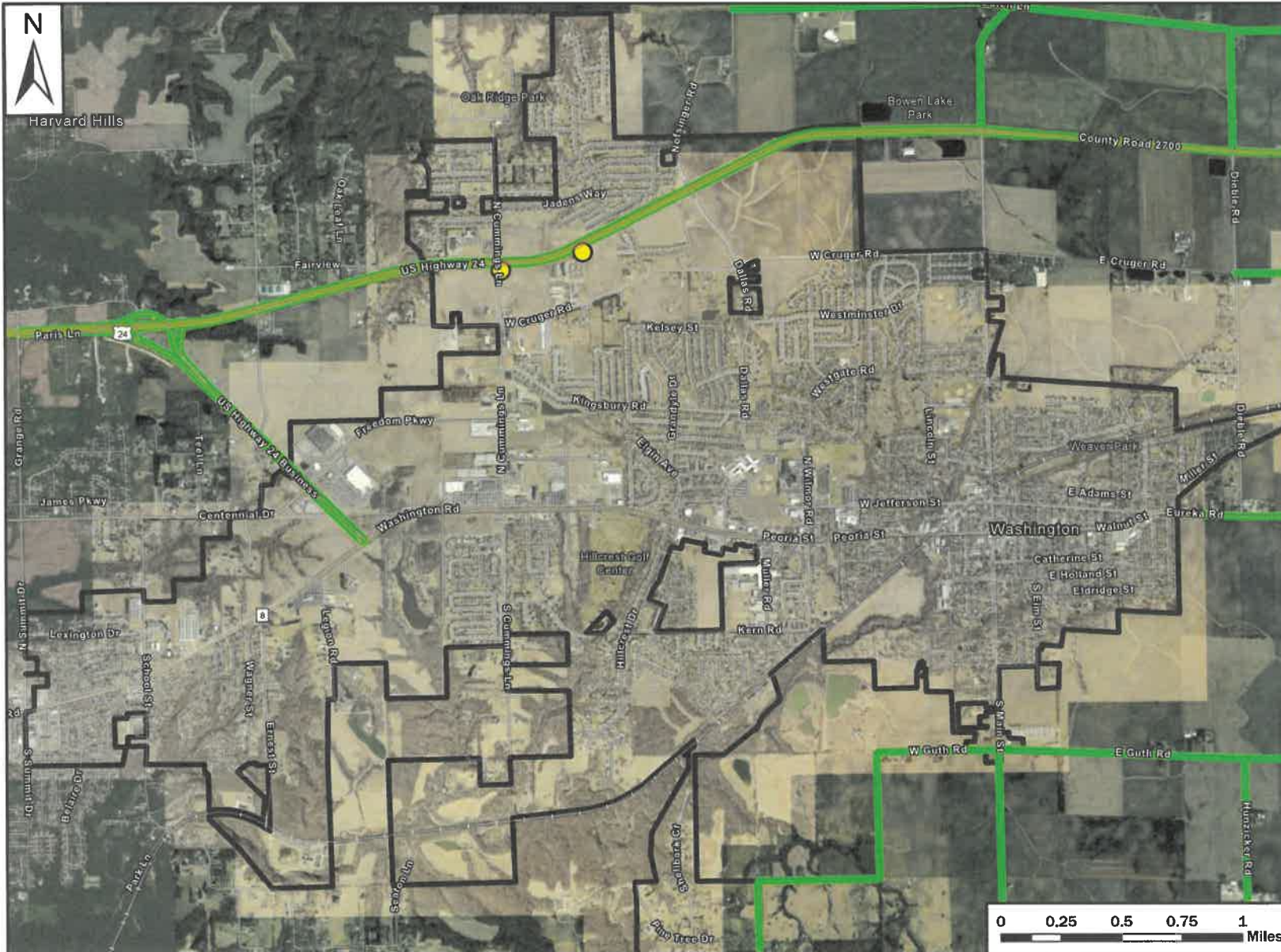
-  Existing Billboards
-  City Boundary
-  I-1 Properties



Date: 4/29/2026

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Roadway Speed Limits

Roads with posted speed limits of 50 MPH or greater

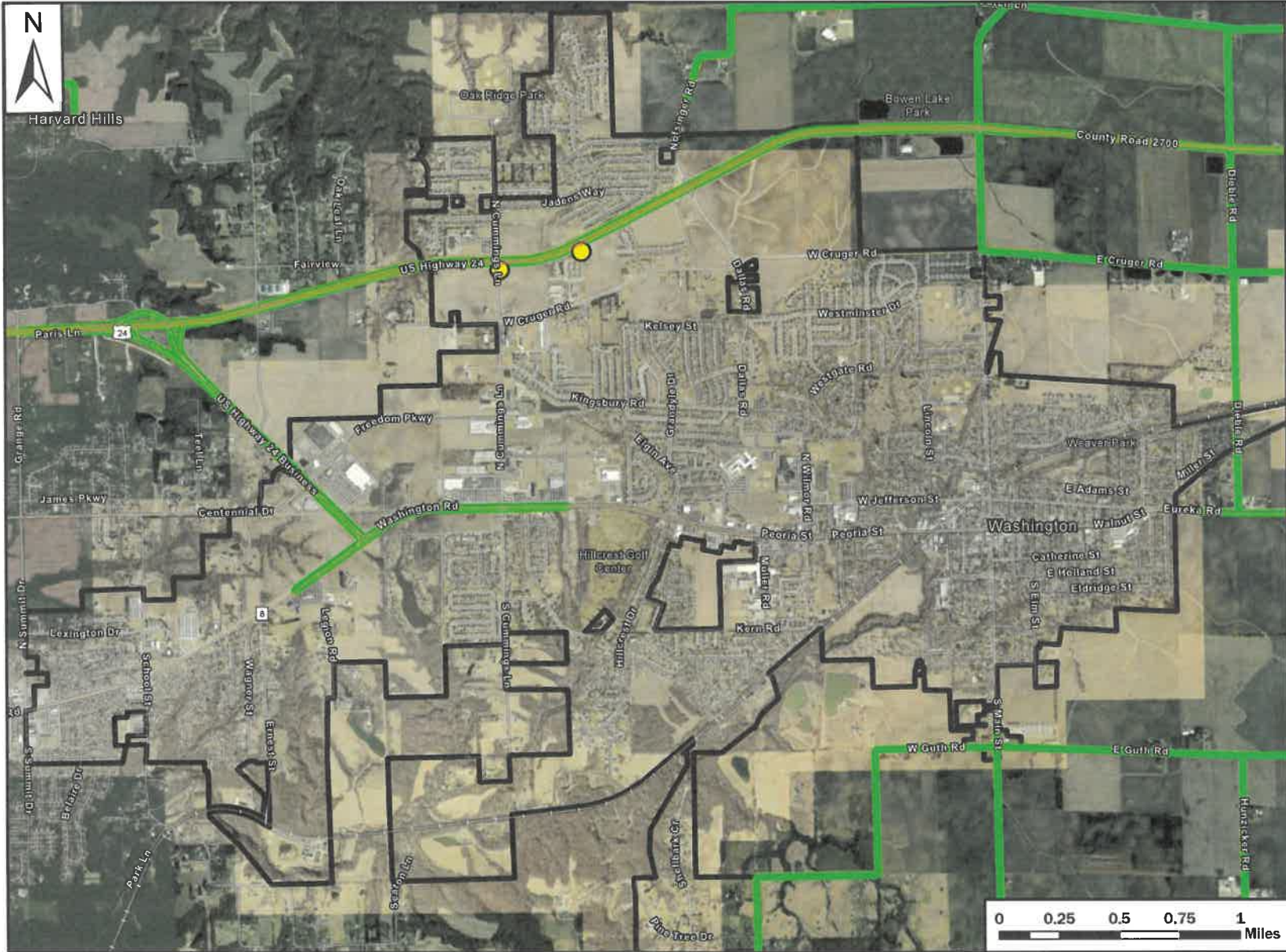
Legend

-  Existing Billboards
-  Speed Limit Permissible Roads (50+ MPH)
-  City Boundary



Date: 4/29/2026




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Roadway Speed Limits

Roads with posted speed limits of 45 MPH or greater

Legend

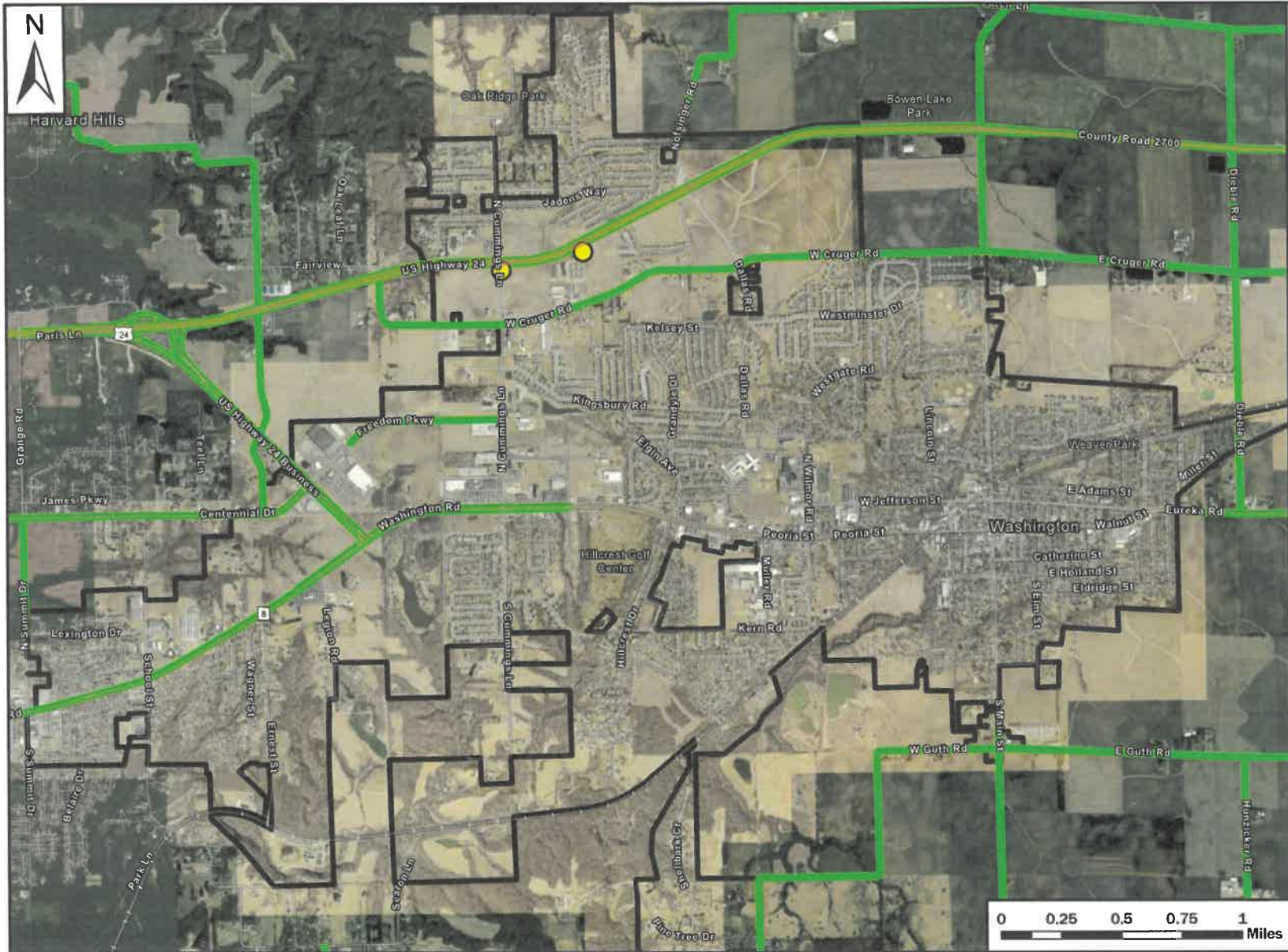
-  Existing Billboards
-  Speed Limit Permissible Roads (45+ MPH)
-  City Boundary



Date: 4/29/2026

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Roadway Speed Limits

Roads with posted speed limits of 40 MPH or greater

Legend

-  Existing Billboards
-  Speed Limit Permissible Roads (40+ MPH)
-  City Boundary



Date: 4/29/2026

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ORDINANCE NO. _____

(Approval of this ordinance would amend regulations pertaining to the allowance of billboards within the Washington city limits)

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE CODE OF ORDINANCES OF THE CITY OF WASHINGTON, ILLINOIS, BY AMENDING SECTION 56-271 ENTITLED "BILLBOARDS"

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WASHINGTON, TAZEWELL COUNTY, ILLINOIS AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. The foregoing recitals shall be and are hereby incorporated as findings of fact as if said recitals were fully set forth herein.

Section 2. That Section 56-271 (entitled "Billboards") of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Washington is hereby amended as follows (additions are indicated by **bold underline**; deletions by ~~strikeout~~):

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~~ **50** 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~~ **C-2, C-3, or I-1**;

- 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;
 - i. **No large billboard shall be erected in the city without a prior public hearing for a special use and recommendation from the Planning and Zoning Commission followed by approval of the City Council;**
 - j. **If the large billboard incorporates automatic changeable technology, the large billboard must contain a light detector or photocell by which the sign's brightness can be dimmed when ambient light conditions darken; and**
 - k. **The large billboard shall not incorporate video or graphic animation and shall not utilize chasing, scintillating, or high intensity lighting.**
- (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~~ **50** 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~~ **C-2, C-3, or I-1;**
 - 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 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;
- i. **No small billboard shall be erected in the city without a prior public hearing for a special use and recommendation from the Planning and Zoning Commission followed by approval of the City Council;**
- j. **If the small billboard incorporates automatic changeable technology, the large billboard must contain a light detector or photocell by which the sign's brightness can be dimmed when ambient light conditions darken; and**
- k. **The small billboard shall not incorporate video or graphic animation and shall not utilize chasing, scintillating, or high intensity lighting.**

Section 3. All ordinances or parts of ordinances in conflict with this ordinance are hereby repealed insofar as they are in conflict with this ordinance.

Section 4. If any provision of this ordinance is adjudged invalid, such adjudication shall not affect the validity of the ordinance as a whole or of any portion not adjudged invalid.

Section 5. This ordinance shall be in full force and effect from and after its passage, approval and publication as required by law.

PASSED AND APPROVED this _____ day of _____ 2026.

AYES: _____

NAYS: _____

ATTEST:

MAYOR

CITY CLERK

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 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)