

MEMORANDUM

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TO: Chamber Board of Directors

FROM: Casey Steinbacher, President/CEO

DATE: November 18, 2008

RE: Recommendation for Text Amendment to Enhance Existing Billboards in Durham County

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There presently are one hundred billboard structures in Durham County. These 100 existing billboards are protected under state and federal laws. The current version of Durham's Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) does not allow for any improvement to or the relocation of these billboards. Many, if not most, existing billboard structures are made of creosote soaked wooden poles, and, while the State and federal laws allow general maintenance for the replacement of a wooden pole, no billboard structures can be upgraded to use steel monopoles or digital displays, nor is any billboard relocation allowed.

Fairway Outdoor Advertising owns 54 billboard structures in Durham. Fairway is a Chamber member with an outstanding record of community involvement and support for important local initiatives, such as the Durham Public Schools, local government bond referendums and the Durham non-profit community. Fairway has submitted a request for a text amendment to the UDO to allow for the enhancement and relocation of the existing billboard structures in Durham. The text amendment would apply to all billboard structures in Durham, not just Fairway's.

The proposed text amendment would not increase the number of billboard structures in Durham County, nor would it allow them to be located along highways where they currently are not permitted. Today, billboards are located along NC 147 (from Briggs Ave. north to I-85); US 70; US 15-501; US 501; and I-85. The text amendment will allow for billboards to be relocated along these corridors in non-residential areas. It would not allow billboards along I-40. In addition, the text amendment will allow wooden poles to be replaced with steel monopoles and require appropriate landscaping around upgraded signs.

The text amendment will allow for upgrading up to 25% of existing billboards to digital billboards. Digital billboards would provide Durham with an excellent means of conveying public safety (e.g., Amber/Silver Alerts) and public service information. The pending text amendment will require all digital billboards to post one public service announcement per minute. Moreover, with the tremendous growth of visitor opportunities in Downtown Durham, digital billboards would be excellent tools to inform and direct persons to the Durham Farmers' Market, the DPAC, the DAP (for NCCU baseball games and other events), and events at the American Tobacco Campus and the DBAP. Current academic research shows no traffic safety concerns associated with digital billboards. Accordingly, the Chamber Local Government Committee and the Chamber Executive Committee unanimously and enthusiastically recommend that the Board support this proposal to enhance existing billboards in Durham.