

Scenic Watch

Citizens for a Scenic Florida



June 2013

Flagler County Will Buy 11 Billboards on A1A and I-95 and Eliminate Most of Them By 2016



Photo: FlaglerLive

"...They loom large and ugly. They splinter views and assault the eye, screaming messages as discordant with their surroundings as they are intentionally distracting. If they're not vulgar for what they blare, their existence is vulgarity enough. But billboards in most states are a fact of road-life, as they have been in Flagler County.

This morning, a few were read their last rites.

It's been a long-awaited demise: 10 of the 26 billboards on State Road A1A in Flagler County will be gone in about three years.

In what amounts to a novel way of using public dollars for environmental enhancements, the Flagler County Commission Monday voted unanimously to spend \$140,000 to acquire 11 billboards in all, including one on I-95, and remove all but one or two of them by the latter part of 2016.

'Removing 10 out of 26 billboards on A1A is a rare opportunity, probably once in a lifetime,' Dennis Clark, a member of the Scenic A1A Pride and Friends of A1A groups, said, 'to make a real difference to our local national treasure that gives us a glimpse of old Florida, and is an inspiration to us all, and will be for

generations to come.'

Both groups as well as the Hammock Conservation Commission—whose president, Abby Romaine, endorsed the billboard-acquisition plan—have been striving for almost two decades to get rid of as many billboards as possible, with little success despite what appeared to be an anti-billboard victory a few years ago.

In September 2009, the county passed an ordinance that would restrict billboards or electronic signs to I-9, at least in unincorporated territory, phasing out the rest. But the phase-out period could be decades-long. The ordinance prohibits re-permitting abandoned signs or repairing signs at a cost of more than 50 percent of their value (in a two-year period), but its enforcement has always been foggy. Cities along A1A (including Flagler Beach, Palm Coast, Beverly Beach and Marineland) could each opt to stick with billboards. In 2009, there were 59 billboards in unincorporated Flagler County, and 127 in all.

Most billboards haven't budged.

Jim Cullis, the local developer, is buying 14 of the billboards on A1A and I-95, and will be selling 11 of them to the county. (Cullis is the Grand Haven developer who last year appeared before the Palm Coast City Council to win approval for an assisted-living and medical complex near the Woodlands. He was successful.) The county will pay \$80,000 for 10 billboards on A1A (four large billboards for \$12,500 each, four smaller ones for \$7,500 each; two billboards will be acquired at no cost).

Keep in mind, not every billboard is a separate structure. For example, the billboard at the intersection of A1A and the road that leads to the Hammock Dunes Bridge, one of the more massive and ugly ones—it stabs out from the wood-line across six pylons, literally sundering the view into the Hammock—counts for two billboards under the county's acquisition, each costing \$12,500, because of its two sides.

The money will come out of the general fund, but only initially. The money will be reimbursed by close-out dollars from the completion of the Hammock Dunes Development of Regional Impact. In other words, the Admiral Corporation's responsibility under the DRI agreement mean its money will pay for the A1A billboard acquisition.

Last September, the Scenic A1A Pride group met and voted to recommend that closeout funds be used for that purpose, as billboard removal was ranked first on the group's priorities.

As part of the agreement with Cullis, and to keep the county's costs down, Cullis will still use the 10 billboards on A1A to generate advertising revenue for the next three years. Only then will the billboards be turned over to the county. The county may choose to keep one or two for its own advertising.

The county's acquisition of the I-95 billboard is part of the same agreement, but under different terms. The county could have acquired it for \$20,000 and waited three years, or paid \$60,000 now and acquire it immediately, and use it to advertise tourism or economic development matters directly related to Flagler County. Commissioners chose that latter option. The \$60,000 will be paid out of either Tourist Development Council dollars (which are generated through the county's 4 percent bed tax supplement, levied on hotel, motel and other short-term rental bookings) or out of its economic development funds, which come out of the general fund.

'We started off by figuring out how to trade a greater evil for a lesser evil, which would be more billboards on I-95, and that really was problematic,' Cullis said. 'So we came up with this agreement, which gives us a much lower price than we anticipated but it also gives us three years to finish leasing out the boards before we turn them over, so I think it's a very good deal for everybody. I live on A1A so I'm happy to see the boards go.'

Commissioners had no objections. 'I think that A1A has a number of organizations that come together, work together to make that entire coastline more scenic, more enjoyable,' Commissioner Frank Meeker said. 'I find there's a place for billboards. I don't like the density that I see on I-95 or I-75 up into Georgia, so anything that can be done to reduce the density I think is a good thing, and I think that this is a fair agreement.' He called billboards 'visual blight.'

Carol McCleary, a resident of the Hammock immersed in its stewardship, told commissioners: 'My highs

School English teacher illustrated the terms dangling participle with a sentence: While walking down the street one day, a billboard met my eye. Far too many of them meet my eye when I drive up and down A1A. I've lived in the Hammock since 1995 and I don't regard them as attractive assets to our scenic highway, and my opinion has obviously been shared by the Hammock neighbors.'

She added: 'The county recently passed a new ordinance that prevents new signs, and we tried to figure out how to get some of the old ones to be phased out and put in some carrots for the companies to try to phase them out and move to 95. But it's time. Let's get rid of these billboards.'

-- FlaglerLive.com

[Read FlaglerLive here>](#)

July



Fun Festivals and Events

Central Florida

July 1

Red, White and Zoo, Sanford

July 3

Red Hot and Boom, Altamonte Springs

July 4

Old-Fashioned July Fourth Celebration, Winter Park

July 4

Mount Dora 4th of July Celebration, Mount Dora

July 4

Celebration of Freedom, Winter Springs

July 4

Fourth of July Lakefest Celebration, St. Cloud

July 4

July Fourth Celebration, Cocoa

July 4

Independence Day Celebration, Ormond Beach

July 5

Music on the Beach Concert, Tarpon



Photo: City of Clearwater

One Man's View On Why Scenic Matters:

Bill Strickland - Can Beauty Change a Life?

"Beauty is not just for the imagination. It's actually a way of altering human behavior for the better."

-- Bill Strickland

[Listen to NPR Interview here with Bill Strickland>](#)

Late Breaking News: June 27

Group of Civic Activists Send Industry Friendly Sign Code Back to the Drawing Board Again in Miami

"The proposed City of Miami Sign Code was deferred again on June 27th, 2013.

This was the second deferral.

Activists, lead by Scenic Miami and Scenic Miami-Dade, claim many provisions of the proposed code are overly friendly to the outdoor advertising industry.

City elected officials and administrators received over 100 emails objecting to the legislation.

Please help us by responding to future alerts and by donating to Scenic Miami.

"

-- Peter Ehrlich, Scenic Miami, Inc.

Springs

July 7

First Saturday Jam and Community Cookout, Barberville

July 7, 14, 21, 28

Summer Music Series, Clermont

July 7

Daytona Coke Zero 400, Daytona Beach

July 19-21

Celebrity Mascot Games, Orlando

July 25

Hyde Park Village Live Music Series, Tampa

July 26-29

Summer Sidewalk Sale and Survivor Reunion, Celebration

July 28

Art Walk on Flagler, New Smyrna Beach

[Read More >](#)

South Florida

July 3, 4

Independence Day Celebration, Sanibel Island

July 4

Old Fashioned Fourth at Flamingo Gardens, Davie

July 4

Fourth on Flagler, West Palm Beach

July 4

America's Birthday Bash, Miami

July 4

Fourth of July Celebration, Miami Beach

July 4

Charlotte Harbor Freedom Swim, Punta Gorda

July 4

July Fourth Celebration, Delray Beach

July 4

Old-Fashioned Fourth of July Picnic at The Barnacle Historic State Park, Coconut Grove

July 4

Red, White and Boom Celebration, Cape Coral

July 4

Fort Myers Beach Fireworks, Fort Myers Beach

"Lighting Up Your Life: Good News Miami - The City Commission is Planning to Reduce Your Electric Bill"

"At last, the Miami City Commission is poised to do something really good for the taxpayers. Scenic Miami reports that the Commission will have a First Reading on a new sign code on June 27th that will allow an unlimited number of electronic LED signs to be slapped on any and all businesses that want such a sign, and best of all, instead of just the single 500 foot high Media Tower that the Commission approved in July of 2010, those kinds of Media Towers will now be allowed in various parts of the city.

So, for those of you who want to radically reduce you electric bill, reach out to your City Commissioner and let them know just how much you support this new legislation. If it passes, a lot of you will be able to do away with any night time lighting of your home or condo.

All you'll have to do is open your windows wide, raise your blinds, or pull back your curtains, and you have all the light you'll need. Why, some of you folks will think you won the lottery and got a condo right smack in the middle of Time's Square it will be so bright.

Back in 2010, when the original Media Tower was proposed, folks who lived in the high-rise condos all around the area where the tower would light up the nighttime sky were told that probably the only way to block out the light would be with Blackout Curtains...

-- Al Crespo, The Crespogram Report

[Read proposed sign code](#) here

[Read Barbara Bisno letter](#) with suggested changes here

[Visit Scenic Miami website here>](#)

[Visit Crespogram website here to read entire article>](#)

"Stemming the Onrush of Flashing Digital Billboards"

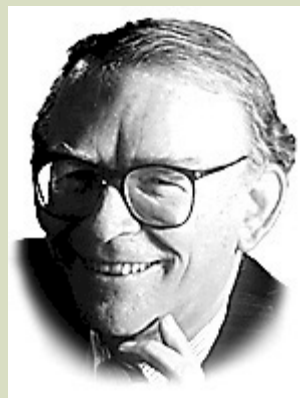


Photo: Washington Post Writers Group

"Massive, glaring, digital billboards are proliferating across most states, writes

July 6

Center for the Arts Campus Open House, Bonita Springs

July 6, 11, 20, 25

Jupiter Lighthouse Sunset Tour, Jupiter

July 14

Underwater Music Festival, Big Pine Key

July 14-15

International Mango Festival, Coral Gables

July 17-22

Hemingway Days, Key West

July 21-22

MangoMania Tropical Fruit Fair, Pine Island

July 27-Aug. 5

Key Largo Wine and Food Festival, Key Largo

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North Florida

July 4

Fourth of July Celebration, Jacksonville

July 4

Red, White and The Deep Blue Celebration, Amelia Island

July 4

Fourth of July Liberty Celebration, Jacksonville Beach

July 4

Fourth of July Celebration, St. Augustine

July 8

Summer Jazz Concert Series, Jacksonville Beach

July 16-21

Greater Jacksonville Kingfish Tournament, Jacksonville

July 27-28

Smokin' on the Suwannee BBQ Festival, Live Oak

[Read More >](#)

Neal Peirce. Studies strongly suggest, however, that the flashing billboards draw drivers' attention and may trigger more crashes.."

"... Once upon a time, advertising in America was fun. As a boy, I didn't want to miss the Burma-Shave jingles — one line a sign in a quick roadside series — as my father took me on my first drive across America.

Today it's different. Massive, glaring, digital billboards, commandeering attention as they flash new messages every few seconds, are proliferating across most states.

Around 2005, the first appeared. By 2008, there were 1,800. Last year there were 3,600, and this year the number is likely to be close to 5,000. The industry (about 250 independent contractors) is licking its chops.

The cost of new boards is dropping rapidly, the 'dynamic new content' allegedly outperforms television, radio and newspaper ads, and there's 'an increasingly favorable regulatory environment' — states and cities agreeing to the signs.

Unless, of course, regulations strike back. That's precisely what Scenic America, a nonprofit public interest group, is trying to force. It has filed suit in federal court to force the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to clamp down...

...it's fair to ask: How can the FHWA have opened the door to these diverting digital eye-catchers without making its own scientific tests — as Israel and Sweden actually have (deciding in each case to ban the signs)?

There have been no nationwide U.S. surveys to gauge Americans' opinion of the digital boards. But there's little question — in communities where citizens have a strong voice, opposition is high. And it is especially vociferous when the signs invade populated areas, flashing through peoples' bedroom windows.

Local governments, however, find themselves under big pressure to give in. And from two sides: the billboard lobby — seeing dollars dance before its eyes at every advance — and from local politicians in search of municipal revenue (and sometimes in search of campaign contributions).

In cash-strapped Chicago, for example, Mayor Rahm Emanuel is seeking state permission to erect 34 double-sided digital billboards, up to 100 feet high, on city property. In exchange, the city will get \$155 million in payments over 20 years. Five companies actually bid for the billboard agreement. The winner, The Chicago Tribune reports, was a firm that coincidentally contributed \$10,000 to Emanuel's mayoral campaign.

Sometimes, Scenic America notes, billboard interests come to a city and ask for new digital boards in exchange for taking down a few traditional boards, notwithstanding citizens' often fervid objections.

In other cases, a billboard firm just erects a digital sign — calculating neither citizen groups nor the city government will have the cash, or the gumption, to launch expensive legal action to stop the incursion.

The billboard firms' strongest argument may be that they're willing to post flood, tornado, traffic hazard or other warnings on their fast digital signs. But it's fair to ask: Aren't such warnings fundamentally the responsibility of state and local governments? Must drivers be watching private advertising billboards to catch crucial emergency information?



Note from the Editor

Suggestions for improvement are always welcome.

Getting legal restrictions on highway billboards has never been easy.

President Lyndon Johnson, in a recorded 1968 phone conversation with then-Rep. (and future Speaker) Jim Wright, let loose on the issue with his legendary bluntness. Legislation to strengthen the Highway Beautification Act, he asserted, was being blocked by 'this damned billboard lobby' — 'selfish, eager hogs' who 'won't even let folks sit down and try to reason with them.'

Yet it was Johnson's wife, the soft-spoken Lady Bird Johnson, who embodied the spirit of the Highway Beautification Act. She famously championed Americans' right to have flower-lined highways of beauty, 'not long alleys of advertisements urging you to buy this or that.'

Against powerful, well-heeled adversaries, Scenic America and its local allies carry on the fight."

-- Neil Peirce, Washington Post Writer's Groups from Syndicated Column in Seattle Times

[Read entire article here>](#)