

# Scenic Watch

Citizens for a Scenic Florida



August 2012



Photo: City of Clearwater

## Clearwater City Council Passes Comprehensive Sign Ordinance

**On August 2, the City Council voted to make sweeping changes to Clearwater's sign code.**

"In 2009, the city got into a legal fight with a bait and tackle shop that painted a mural of a half-dozen game fish on an outside wall facing the street. The city called this painting an illegal sign — and the city lost in court.

It was an embarrassing defeat that set Clearwater on a long and twisting journey to loosen up its famously strict sign laws. This task has taken three years and has involved two different citizens' task forces...."

-- Mike Brassfield, Tampa Bay News

**"Beauty is good for business. You're doing something in Clearwater because it's good for business and good for the community. It's a balanced approach..."**

-- Bill Brinton

The Clearwater Sign Code update reaffirmed two important elements in place since 1985.

The first was to continue the specific prohibition against the large outdoor advertising billboards. The second and perhaps more importantly was to continue to prohibit the electronic changeable message signs that are becoming more and more prevalent in so many communities.

Although allowed with a change frequency of every six hours, this time restriction avoids the scrolling and constant changes of EMC or LED signs typically distracting drivers attention and changing the character of the community.

The sign code now allows sidewalk signs city-wide in limited applications. The signs, sometimes called sandwich board signs, can only be used with a permit. Only one can be adjacent to the building entrance. They may not be located along the street. They have to also meet design standards.

The code also allows more rapid permitting of standard size signs and will simplify the calculation of sign sizes. A new provision allows the same sign package on both frontages of a business located on a corner.

Finally the code fully documents the important rational for the sign restrictions should it be challenged in court. .

-- Scenic Florida

[Read entire Tampa Bay News article here>](#)

August - September



## Fun Festivals and Events

### Central Florida

#### **Aug 18-19**

The 18th Annual Harvest Grape Stomp, Lake Wales

#### **Sept 1-30**

Orlando Magical Dining Month, Orlando

#### **Sept 3**

Suncoast Corvette Show, St. Petersburg

#### **Sept 3-5**

Sponge Docks Art and Craft Festival, Tarpon Springs

#### **Sept 3**

First Saturday Jam, Barberville

#### **Sept 9-10**

Night of Joy, Lake Buena Vista

#### **Sept 9-10**

Rock the Universe at Universal Studios, Orlando

#### **Sept 13-Nov 1**

Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party, Lake Buena Vista

#### **Sept 17**

Opening Gala Concert, Merritt Island

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### South Florida

#### **Aug 18**

Bon Festival, Delray Beach

#### **Aug 18-19**

Buckler's Craft Fair, West Palm Beach

## "St. Pete Council Votes For Digital Billboards"



Photo: Bill Jonson

"Six digital billboards, like this one that was at Tyrone Boulevard and Park Street, will be allowed. The digital displays will change at least every 10 seconds...."

...Clear Channel, which made some late concessions to seal the agreement, will have the next half year to remove the existing structures. As part of the deal, the city will receive 15 percent of the revenue generated by the digital displays. It's unclear what that will equate to in real dollars.

The council's decision reverses one it made last year, when members rejected a similar deal after enduring significant pressure from critics who wanted all billboards banned from the city.

The council's consensus on Thursday [August 16] seemed simple: The new arrangement, though not ideal, was better than the status quo.

'My preference would be no billboards,' said council member Karl Nurse. 'But getting two-thirds of them down, that's saying something.'

The decision will clear the billboard-cluttered skylines along many of the city's most trafficked thoroughfares, including Fourth, 34th and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. streets. The digital displays will change, at minimum, every 10 seconds, and their messages will be restricted in areas near schools.

They may also be used for emergency notifications, including those issued during major storms. City staff, which examined the potential changes for months, determined that the new digital systems would pose little distraction for drivers.

Thursday night's discussion, however, was contentious.

One woman called the digital signs "giant TVs with giant legs." Another said Clear Channel was a spider luring St. Petersburg — its fly — into a web. One man read aloud a lengthy letter in which he only referred to the mass media company as the 'Big Bad Wolf.' The council members, he said, were 'piglets'...."

-- John Woodrow Cox, Tampa Bay News

[Read entire article here>](#)

**Aug 25-26**

Caladium Festival, Lake Placid

**Aug 26-Sept 18**

VXI annual International Ballet

Festival of Miami, Miami

**Sept 5**

55th Annual Jaycees Pioneer Days

Parade, Englewood

**Sept 6-11**

WomenFest, Key West

**Sept 15**

Downtown Gallery Walk, Punta

Gorda

**Sept 16-19**

Key West Poker Run, Key West

**Sept 16-18**

Martin County Nautical Flea Market  
and Seafood Festival, Palm Beach

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## North Florida

**Aug 20**

Jazoo's Birthday-Back to School

Summer Bash, Jacksonville

**Sept 2**

First Friday Art Walk, St. Augustine

**Sept 3-4**

First Weekend Union Garrison,

Fernandina Beach

**Sept 10**

Artrageous Artwalk, Amelia Island

**Sept 17-18**

Spanish American War Event,

Fernandina Beach

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Note from the Editor

Suggestions for improvement are

# Is this a sign? Is it art?

## Free speech?



Photo: New York Times

This photo is from an article unrelated to the issues surrounding signage and artwork. However, it illustrates the care that must be taken when crafting sign ordinances. There are some complex legal situations that can arise when citizens create artwork, as the city of Clearwater found out during the now famous mural lawsuit a few years ago.



Photo: WinnipegSun.com

## Tachoma Update:

"Clearchannel would bulldoze some billboards under deal"

A proposed agreement that Tacoma officials say they expect to sign

always welcome.

Wednesday with Clear Channel Outdoor would require the company to tear down 17 of its billboards – possibly as soon as in three months – and give up its permits to build more. In return, the city would agree to at least consider letting the advertising giant keep some of the rest of roughly 190 billboards deemed “nonconforming” under a year-old code passed by the City Council.

The proposed agreement calls for a two-year time-out in a potentially expensive court fight looming between Clear Channel and the financially strapped city over the nonconforming signs. That would allow time for talks in which the city would seek to have Clear Channel tear down all but “a remaining few” signs, said City Attorney Elizabeth Pauli.

City Manager T.C. Broadnax announced the deal at Tuesday's council meeting, saying the “standstill agreement” wouldn't prevent the city from going back to court later. He said the city is not agreeing to talk about allowing digital billboards, which the council has banned.

'With this agreement, it's the biggest step we've taken in 30 years' toward removing billboards, Councilman Marty Campbell said.

Clear Channel's immediate responsibilities under the deal, according to Pauli, would include:

Applying for city demolition permits for 17 billboard structures within 30 days, then tearing them down within an additional 60 days after receiving the permits. The structures hold up 31 sign 'faces.'

Giving up all of its roughly 170 relocation permits, which allow a demolished billboard to be replaced in a new spot.

Repairing or cleaning up 15 deteriorating or defaced sign structures within 90 days.

City officials declined to reveal the locations of the affected signs, saying that would wait for Wednesday's finalizing of the deal."

-- Jordan Schrader, The News Tribune

[Read entire article here >](#)