

## Off-Premise Digital Signs

### A Statement by June Kachtik to the Electrical Supervisory Board

September 11, 2007

I am June Kachtik. With the approval of the board of directors of the Vance Jackson Neighborhood, Inc I am here to express our disapproval of allowing off-premise digital signs in any manner for the following reasons:

1. We don't like billboards, which by definition are a form of advertising along the roadways paid for by our tax dollars. We feel billboards cheapen the public investment and offend our sense of scenic values. We are not alone in this view. As a gauge of public opinion regarding billboards of any kind, by 2005 almost 300 towns and cities in Texas have banned new billboards. That includes the smaller towns of Alamo Heights, Bulverde, Fair Oaks Ranch, Helotes, Hill Country Village, Olmos Park, Shavano Park, Terrell Hills, Universal City and Windcrest in our area. Among the largest and most economically viable cities in the state – Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth and Houston – only San Antonio does not ban new billboards.

It leads us to infer that the effort is being made in San Antonio to install digital signs because other markets are closed.

2. We are not convinced that digital signage is not a safety hazard. Your role as the Electrical Supervisory Board is to assure public safety. But, can you do so?

An analysis of the “100-Car Naturalistic Driving Study”, conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and released in 2006 states: *taking one's eyes off the road for more than two seconds for any reason not directly related to driving significantly increased individual near crash/crash risk.* The study goes on to say that the factors that make drivers likely to look at an electronic sign for more than two seconds at a time are:

- They are extremely bright and are designed to be visible in bright sunlight and at night. They are designed to be eye-catching, and they are.
- They can be seen from great distances, making them distracting even before they begin to communicate their messages.
- Because the messages rotate, drivers are likely to look to see what comes up next. And, unlike static signs, there will always be the urge to look. These signs do not fade away into “background visual noise.”
- Younger drivers may be more easily distracted by electrical media.

The sign industry may well say that this is not enough “proof” that digital signs are a safety hazard. But, that is the point. You are considering an ordinance where the safety of digital signage needs to be proven. The Federal Highway Administration in January 2007 announced that it will initiate a study to examine the safety issues related to electronic signs. Details on the scope and timing of the research have not been released, but results are not expected until 2009. We urge you to disapprove this modification of the sign ordinance for other reasons, but at least until you know the results of that study.

3. If you allow off-premise digital signs now, and the Federal study determines that they are not safe, what will the City do? San Antonio has no amortization process that would force sign companies to remove signs at their cost. If the City allows digital signs and then finds that they are unsafe, would not the City be responsible for removing them? We understand from the publication, “Billboards in the Digital Age – Unsafe (and Unsightly) at any Speed,” that Clear Channel Outdoor spent \$3.5 million converting seven static boards to digital in Cleveland. That's an average of \$500,000 per sign. We don't think you should put us, as taxpayers, in the position of having to compensate any sign company for its investment in a technology that has not been proven safe.

*[Editor's Note: June Kachtik of the Rock Creek subdivision presented this in September. It is repeated here since it neatly sums up reasons to oppose Digital Signs.]*