



Mayor's Monthly Newsletter

Written by Mayor Rod Erskine

July 2013

You Can Make A Difference

I often wonder why so few residents attend and speak at council meetings, or provide feedback to council members outside of meetings. Admittedly, these meetings lack the excitement of a big Texans' game (or even a recent Astros' game for that matter). At every council meeting though, we make decisions on city issues - some are routine matters, some have long term implications. Rarely are these decisions made with input from residents. Could it be you think your opinion will not make a difference? If so, please read on.

At the June meeting, one of the items on the agenda was for council to potentially take action regarding digital billboards - possibly deciding to modify ordinances to allow digital billboards in our city. Some time ago, Clear Channel Communications approached council regarding converting their billboard, located on the south side of Hwy. 290 at the Jones Road intersection, into a digital billboard. Our ordinances currently do not allow the erection of new billboards, nor the requested modification to an existing sign. Billboards do not generate significant revenue to JV, digital or otherwise. However, Clear Channel indicated that they would consider eliminating other existing signs in return for being allowed to modify the sign in question. Council (including me at the time) voted to have our Planning & Zoning Committee consider the proposal and come back to us with a recommendation. My personal reason for supporting P & Z's investigation at the time was to see if Jersey Village could legally restrict the modification to one sign and one vendor only, and if so, could we negotiate removal of a significant number of other billboards as part of a potential agreement with Clear Channel.

For several months, P&Z and city staff researched digital billboards from several perspectives using local information as well as findings from studies done around the country: 1) Driving safety (are they a visual distraction as they change ads), 2) Actions of other cities and communities, 3) Observations of other digital signs in Harris County to see what types of businesses were purchasing advertisement, and 4) Available information on advertising rates. The types of businesses using this media and the rates is important because one of the points made by Clear Channel was that our local small businesses would benefit from utilizing the media, and the city would subsequently see an increase in sales tax revenue. The other issue - and the most important point in my mind - could we effectively craft an ordinance that restricted this conversion to one billboard only.

At the June council meeting, a number of residents spoke against allowing digital billboards in JV, in addition to other residents who had expressed the same sentiment via prior email. Later in the meeting, the P&Z committee presented a recommendation to council to not modify our ordinances to allow digital billboards. Council subsequently discussed the agenda item and chose to take no action, with several council members specifically indicating they had been influenced by the citizen's comments. I personally believe that some sort of motion to modify our ordinances to allow the digital billboards may have been passed had it not been for residents taking the time to provide their feedback. Because no action was taken, this matter can be reintroduced at any time. Whether you support or oppose this issue, you should continue to provide your opinion to your council.

The point of this newsletter is that you can influence your city government if you take the time and get involved.

The P&Z committee and city staff is to be commended for the significant effort they put into this issue - if you are interested in more details of their work, please visit the city secretary's page on the Jersey Village website at www.jerseyvillage.info where you can read the minutes of their meetings.

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