

BILLBOARDS AND SIGNAGE (1990, R2001, R2010)



Policy Statement

The American Society of Landscape Architects believes that signage, including on-site, street oriented advertising signs and billboards, can have a detrimental effect on the public realm. The Society urges that the size, lighting, animation, and placement of all signage be regulated so that public safety and the visual quality of their surroundings is not diminished. The Society further believes that appropriate, properly designed, and well-located signage can have beneficial impact on people by assisting with way-finding and orientation.

Rationale

Typically billboards and other signage are located to maximize their impact and visibility. They also compete for prominence so that they will be noticed.

Billboards located in otherwise pristine or natural areas diminish the public enjoyment of the landscape. In doing so, these signs often deface nearby scenery in both the natural and built environment. In some cases, valuable vegetation is routinely cleared to maximize the visibility of signs and new plantings, such as street trees, that might screen signage are discouraged.

Improperly designed and located signs and billboards can also degrade the public realm by contributing to visual clutter. Along highways and streets, this in turn creates the potential for distracting or confusing motorists, thereby negatively impacting the health, safety, and welfare of the public.

Brightly lit signs, electronic signs, and animated signs waste valuable energy, contribute to light pollution, produce hazardous glare, and are in conflict with dark sky policies. However, properly designed and placed signage can be valuable to the public by assisting with way-finding, orientation, and decision making and therefore contribute in a positive way to the health, safety, and welfare of the public.

Also, ASLA acknowledges that in some very vibrant urban centers (such as Times Square) brightly lit and animated signage is actually part of the unique sense of place and is therefore appropriate.

The Society endorses and encourages the following actions:

1. National, state and local programs to control the size, lighting, animation, and placement of advertising signs and billboards.
2. Moratoriums on construction of new billboards along Interstate and federal aid highways and along major local transportation corridors.
3. Prohibition on the cutting of trees and other vegetation along public rights-of-way for the purpose of making signs and billboards more visible.
4. Policies that encourage street tree plantings and bufferyard plantings, regardless of their impact on existing signs and billboards.
5. The removal of nonconforming billboards with appropriate compensation provided through amortization or other appropriate means.

The establishment and maintenance of comprehensive street and highway graphics programs to ensure fairness to all advertisers and businesses while protecting the quality of the visual environment and assisting with way-finding.