



**CALL TO ACTION:**

**Oppose DDOT's Plan to Permit Throughout DC  
Jumbo High-Intensity Electronic Billboards  
Giant Wall-Mounted Billboards & Rooftop Signs**

DDOT proposes to radically change DC's sign control and billboard ordinances to spread electronic advertising on the sides of buildings and rooftops throughout the city. The draft regulations are now out for public comment. We urge you to oppose these radical and unwarranted changes that constitute, in effect, **the Gigantic Digital Billboard Pollution Protection Act**, by the **May 13, 2015** deadline. (Note: You may view the draft regulations at <http://dcregs.dc.gov/Gateway/NoticeHome.aspx?noticeid=5312901>)

**The proposals permits billboard companies to obtain a routine sign permit to spread the most intrusive forms of outdoor advertising technology** thus far devised, erasing the last vestiges of District's historic ban on billboards (see *DC v. Billboard Industry: A History* below) and caving to the industry's demand for free-range billboards in the nation's capital. Here's how it would be done:

- **Digital “variable-message” billboards:** 40sf video monitors flashing a different screen every ten seconds could be installed anywhere zoning allows commercial activity. This would include mixed residential/commercial districts, where there would be no restriction on proximity to, or impact on, residential units or offices.
- **“Designated Entertainment Areas”** - Supersized full-motion-video billboards up to 1200sf could be erected anywhere in the city that a Mayor, in his/her sole discretion with only token public consultation, labels an “entertainment area” – for example a neighborhood commercial strip with a theater and a couple of bars featuring live music. There would be no restrictions on either size or location. These “DEA’s” could pop up near residential areas, historic sites, parks, monuments, federal buildings or anything else. In addition to Gallery Place and Verizon Center, two more much larger billboard zones would be created instantly: SW Waterfront and the Nationals Ballpark. For the first time, digital projection would be allowed that can turn any available surface not already occupied by some other sign into a full motion video.
- **“Special Signs”** –Gargantuan wall-screen billboards whose size is limited only by the size of the building on which they're mounted could migrate from downtown where, since 2001, they have been confined. Some have been as large as 6000sf.
- **Rooftop signs** - Still-image video billboards could even be located on rooftops, visible for miles around.

4/23/15

**(Over to Take Action.)**

## **TAKE ACTION:**

**1. Describe the effect these regulations will have on your own community, particularly on mixed-use and commercial areas where *mixed use is becoming mixed abuse*.** Include impact on residences and offices as well as on the livability and character of your neighborhood, and the skyline of the city.

**2. Call for a ban on the construction of all new billboards in our beautiful national city.**

The Supreme Court has upheld the right of local governments to regulate the size and placement of signs as a land use issue. The District can ban additional billboards as it did 80 years ago. Thousands of municipalities have banned construction of new billboards because they understand that beauty, not electronic billboard blight, is good for business: 386 communities in Texas including Houston, Amarillo, Austin, El Paso, Ft. Worth, Galveston and San Antonio; 287 cities and counties in the FL (representing more than one-half of Florida local governments) including Jacksonville, St. Petersburg, Tampa Bay; Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, and San Jose, CA; Denver and Greeley, CO to name but a few.

**3. E-mail written comments to:**

Mayor Muriel Bowser, Mayor of the District of Columbia [eom@dc.gov](mailto:eom@dc.gov)

Alice Kelly, DDOT [alice.kelly@dc.gov](mailto:alice.kelly@dc.gov) and [publicspace.policy@dc.gov](mailto:publicspace.policy@dc.gov)

### **Sample Letter**

*Date and Inside Address*

*RE: Comments on Second Proposed Rulemaking – Title 13: Sign Regulations*

*Dear Mayor Bowser:*

*I am writing to oppose DDOT's proposed sign regulations that would permit digital billboards on the sides of buildings and rooftops throughout the city.*

*The effect on (name of your neighborhood) would be \_\_\_\_\_. (Be specific. Elaborate on all the characteristics you love about your neighborhood that would be impacted by these regulations.)*

*Call for a ban on construction of new billboards in keeping with the excellent history of billboard control before 2001.*

*Sincerely, Your name*

**For further information on billboard control nationwide: [www.scenic.org](http://www.scenic.org)**

**For further information on DC's regulations, please contact: Meg Maguire,  
[megmaguireconsultant@msn.com](mailto:megmaguireconsultant@msn.com) 4/23/15**

## DC vs. THE BILLBOARD INDUSTRY: A HISTORY

After WWI, throughout the booming twenties, large-scale outdoor advertising exploded in the United States. By decades' end, Washington, like many cities, found itself at risk of being overrun by what was then state-of-the-art technology: large freestanding billboards whose advertising message could be changed conveniently and frequently.

The reaction, **in the early 1930s was a permanent ban on billboards in the Nation's capital.** Existing ones could remain --most have long-since disappeared – but there could be no new ones. That is still DC law, and even though not always well enforced, it has kept DC relatively free of this form of visual pollution for decades. Meanwhile, however, the billboard industry was at work developing ever larger and more intrusive types of billboards employing tough new materials and video and other digital technologies.

**In 2000, the billboard industry concluded it was time to crack the potentially lucrative DC market, and persuaded the Mayor to propose regulations allowing huge wall signs** imprinted on flexible screens, capable of covering an entire 10,000sf side of a multi-story building, to go up across the District. Through a legislative fluke they became law, but the citizens' uproar that followed resulted in permanently capping the number of these so-called "Special Signs" at 32 and restricting them to a few designated areas, mainly downtown.

Appetite whetted, **in 2004 the industry managed to persuade the DC government to allow huge full motion video and other forms of electronic billboard in a narrowly defined area -- Gallery Place.**

Meanwhile, **by 2010 DC had mounted a concerted effort to get rid of illegal billboards that had popped up as a result of lax enforcement, and ordered removal of five that were illegally located on residential property. The industry responded by suing** — its standard operating procedure – and then persuaded the Mayor to endorse a swap: they would take down the five antique (and relatively valueless) illegal billboards if the Mayor would ask the Council to increase the number of allowable permits for the huge (and hugely lucrative) "Special Signs". They duly scrapped the billboards, but as a result of concerted citizen opposition the Council said "no" to this lopsided deal, and the cap remained intact.

**By 2011 the industry had gotten legislation introduced extending Gallery Place-type electronic billboards to Verizon Center.**

**By 2012, the billboard industry concluded that DC was ripe for a much more ambitious conquest. They persuaded the Mayor to propose sweeping regulations by which electronic billboards could routinely locate in commercial strips across the city,** and the largest and most intrusive – such as 1200 square-foot-full motion video billboards or 10,000 square-foot-wall billboards – could go up any place that the Mayor, acting alone, decided to label as an "entertainment area." These proposals were tucked away in a long-overdue general updating of the sign regulations by DDOT. The draft drew a deluge of critical comment from citizens, and DDOT decided to revise it.

However, **in early 2015 the city proposed a revised draft that is in many respects even more favorable to the billboard industry. That is now open for public comment.**

**TAKE ACTION: STOP CONSTRUCTION OF NEW BILLBOARDS IN DC!**  
**Send your comments to [publicspace.policy@dc.gov](mailto:publicspace.policy@dc.gov) by May 13, 2015**