



PRESS RELEASE

Council Rushes to Approve Digital Billboard Tsunami Citywide
AG Racine Stops Illegal Digi Media Billboards in Court

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The City Council is rushing to approve legislation that will allow massive digital billboards citywide in “designated entertainment areas” (DEAs) without adequate public notice or public hearing. The full Council vote is scheduled for December 6, 2016.

On Nov. 14 the Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs, chaired by CM Brianne Nadeau, held a hearing on a bill sponsored by CM Charles Allen and others, to allow hanging up to 10 digital billboards on the Nats stadium and garages. But by Nov. 16 it had scrapped that bill and substituted a new and very different, one. While the new legislation would allow even more than the original 10 digital billboards on the stadium and garages, its principal effect would be setting up a process to enable the spread of this harsh light-emitting billboard advertising throughout the city -- starting immediately with two large areas in Southeast where digital billboards would be allowed from day one. Only CM Elissa Silverman voted against the bill.

"This is a rotten way to conduct the public's business," said Meg Maguire, incoming Vice Chair of the Committee of 100. "Billboards are huge LED machines churning out unwanted light and in-your-face ads that you can't turn off. They are a pox on DC's mixed-use communities and serve no redeeming public purpose whatsoever."

In a related billboard industry legal issue, DC Attorney General Karl Racine successfully obtained a preliminary injunction in DC Superior Court on Nov. 10, 2016 to stop Digi Media Communications LLC (“Digi”), a billboard company, from illegal construction of large electronic billboards on the sides of eight different buildings, many in downtown locations, in violation of Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) stop-work orders. Digi had planned to illegally blanket the city with 52 large-scale LED screens of outdoor advertising. The Attorney General is now seeking a permanent injunction on any further construction of unpermitted billboards.

“We applaud Attorney General Racine’s quick, aggressive and successful action,” said Nancy MacWood, Chair of Committee of 100. “Without it, the District would have been subject to a tsunami of digital billboards that distract drivers, waste energy, threaten public health and severely compromise both the aesthetic and livability of the city. **We call on the City Council to kill the Billboard Blight Bill NOW.**”
