

Weymouth Digital Billboards: Townwide Update

Mayor Robert L. Hedlund

1/13/2021

Overview

- The Town recently held public forums on November 5th and November 18th to solicit feedback and explain the latest proposals to resolve the issues with the existing billboard located at 611 Pleasant Street.
- After hearing the feedback and taking into consideration the concerns of the residents of all impacted neighborhoods, the Town developed non-negotiable points with the billboard company.
- In addition, Weymouth Town Council proposed and passed 2 measures impacting billboards – a zoning amendment and a moratorium on billboards. The Mayor vetoed both measures and the veto of the moratorium will be considered on 1/19/2021 by the Council.
- The Council measures and the impending end of the calendar year pushed Cove and the Town to finalize an amendment to the Billboard Relocation Agreement, executed on 1/8/2021.
- The purpose of this meeting is to review the amendment to the agreement and what it means for the various stakeholders, including the residents, and the potential impact of the moratorium.

Brief Background

- In 2018, the Town of Weymouth executed the Billboard Relocation Agreement with Cove Outdoor LLC, Bates Brothers Seam Face, and Lorusso-Bristol to accomplish the following goals:
 - Remove 8 Static billboard faces on Route 3A
 - Prevent unfriendly development in Finnell Drive
 - Preserve Open Space abutting Gagnon Park (~42 acres)
 - Mitigate impacts of Rte 18 billboard in South Weymouth
 - Generate revenue for the Town
- Cove Outdoor LLC would erect 2 digital billboards with electronic faces, in billboard overlay district, at 611 and 613 Pleasant Street locations
- Cove negotiated agreements with Rte 3A landlords to not renew their existing static billboard leases, allowing removal the billboards at the end of their existing lease terms
- The parties to the agreement would share the advertising revenue and any capital revenue on the sale of the billboards
- Cove Outdoor LLC would mitigate the impacts of the Rte 18 billboard in Abington that affects South Weymouth residents

Brief Background

- After construction of the 611 Pleasant Street billboard was completed and the board was turned on, several unintended consequences became immediately apparent.
- Since then, the Town has been working with the parties to the agreement and the residents to identify a solution.
 - This includes: dozens of meetings, remediation agreements, conversations with state agencies, new proposals, amendments to proposals and much more

How has the Town been working on a solution?

- Over the course of 20 months, the Town has held meetings with the public, resident-representatives, the Town Council, the parties to the agreement, and state officials to determine a solution to the 611 Pleasant Street billboard problem
- To prevent additional impacts from the permitted (not yet constructed) 613 Pleasant Street billboard it was determined that a new location was necessary
- In addition, the Town wanted to preserve all 42 acres of open space abutting Gagnon Park
- To do this, 0 Finnell Drive was identified as an alternative location for a second digital billboard

How has the Town been working on a solution?

December 2019 Resident Remediation Agreement

- Cove Outdoor LLC, the Town, and the Century Road-area residents negotiated a non-binding remediation agreement to mitigate the impacts of the 611 Pleasant Street billboard.
- This included the following provisions:
 - Cove will lower the 611 Pleasant St billboard 20-25 feet
 - Cove will install light blocking faces at the time it lowers the sign
 - Cove will plant trees on the properties of neighbors affected by the sign
 - Cove will preserve the visual barrier from the quarry operation
 - Cove will build stockade fence for neighbors
 - Cove will lower the sign and install light blocking 3-6 months of execution of the agreement
- In addition the Town would complete remediation for the neighborhood, including the new Sarah Brassil Park

How has the Town been working on a solution?

- Cove failed to complete any of the mitigation by the June 30th 2020 deadline
- As a result, the Town has been working on amending the binding agreement to ensure the requests of the residents are met and the Town can preserve its initial goals to reduce billboards in Town, preserve open space, and mitigate the Rt. 18 billboard

Amendment to the Relocation Agreement

611 Pleasant Street Mitigation

- 611 is immediately turned off (completed on 1/4/21)
- Cove will lower the sign 20-25 feet
- Cove will install light blocking technology
- 611 remains off until the sign is lowered and light blocking is installed
- Cove will provide plantings/fencing as a visual barrier
- The work must be completed by 9/30/2021

Preserve 42 Acres of Open Space near Finnell Drive

- Bristol will convey all 42 acre of open space if a permit is granted for 0 Finnell
- Cove cannot operate 0 Finnell until light blocking faces are installed at 611

Other provisions

- No permit for 613 Pleasant Street
- Route 18 Billboard is mitigated
- Route 3A billboards come down at the expiration of their leases
- Content Guidelines have been updated and adopted in accordance with resident requests

What happens if Cove doesn't perform?

- If Cove does not complete the mitigation by 9/30/2021, the sign at 611 Pleasant Street will come down.
- If Cove turns the sign on for any reason prior to completing the work, they will be in breach of the legally binding agreement that is a condition of their zoning approval.

What do the recent Council Measures do?

Measure 20-100 changes the zoning for any billboard in the overlay district.

- Reduces the height, reduces the size of the billboard, and restricts content
- Because the measure was approved *after* 611 & 613 have been permitted, the measure has no impact on the boards
- Because Cove applied for a state permit for 0 Finnell prior to adoption of the new zoning, the new measure has no impact on that billboard

Measure 20-117 imposes a one-year moratorium on the issuance of building permits for billboards.

- The Council approved the measure and the Mayor vetoed it
- If the Council overrides the veto, Cove will be unable to construct 0 Finnell during the moratorium
- Without Finnell:
 - Cove will likely be unable to finance the work at 611 Pleasant St
 - Cove will likely be unable perform the remediation it promised
 - Cove will likely try to construct 613 Pleasant, instead of 0 Finnell
 - Bristol will likely develop the 42 acres

What do the recent Council Measures do?

- Without 0 Finnell:
 - Cove will likely be unable to finance the work at 611 Pleasant Street
 - The amendment will likely fall through as Cove may not be able to perform
 - Cove will likely try to construct 613 Pleasant St, instead of 0 Finnell
 - Bristol will likely develop the 42 acres, by right, with plans to develop 7 acres immediately
 - The Town may have to fight the 613 Pleasant Street billboard, but that will certainly result in a lengthy legal battle
 - A drawn-out and contentious legal battle will likely jeopardize any mitigation of 611, the route 3A billboards, Rt 18 billboard mitigation, and could result in the construction of 613

Questions/Comments:

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