

# Weymouth Digital Billboards Townwide Update

## A Critical Decision Point

Mayor Robert L. Hedlund  
January 19, 2021

# How It Started...

With a common goal of more progress for Weymouth!

Cooperative support for a Billboard Relocation Overlay District

Shared Original Goals:

- Removal of long-unwanted billboards on Route 3A
- Overall reduction in unsightly billboards throughout the Town
- Improve the impacts of the Rt 18 Abington billboard
- Prevent unfriendly development in Finnell Drive
- Preserve the open space abutting Gagnon Park
- Bring in needed, recurring revenue to support continued progress

# How It Started...

With a common goal of more progress for Weymouth!

With the Billboard Relocation Overlay District approved, the Town entered into a Billboard Relocation Agreement with Cove Outdoor, LLC, Bristol Brothers Seam Face Corporation, and Bristol-Lorusso Stone Corp. to allow for the construction of two, 2-sided electronic billboards along Route 3 and to achieve all of our original goals.

Cove Outdoor, LLC applied for these two electronic billboards with the State Office of Outdoor Advertising (OOA) and they were approved and legally permitted.

# How It Went Wrong...

With an agreement in place and approval from the State, Cove constructed the first billboard at 611 Pleasant Street in April of 2019.

When the 611 billboard was turned on, the unintended negative impacts of the billboard on the residents living across Route 3 in the Century Road area neighborhoods became apparent, and were unacceptable.

# After It Went Wrong...

Because of the unintended negative consequences of the 611 Billboard, the Town and Cove agreed that Cove would not construct the second billboard at 613 Pleasant Street. Cove also turned off the 611 Billboard.

Cove and the Town then began working on an alternative plan to mitigate the negative impacts to neighbors of the billboard. This involved dozens of meetings with neighbors, residents, Councilors, and the parties to the agreement.

The Century Road residents, Cove, and the Town agreed to a non-binding remediation agreement in December of 2019. After this agreement was signed, Cove began operating the 611 billboard.

# After It Went Wrong...

Cove sought a billboard permit at 0 Finnell Drive in order to construct an alternative second billboard further north on Route 3.

A successful Finnell billboard would stop the construction of a second billboard near the Century Road neighborhoods, at 613 Pleasant Street.

The financial arrangement between the Town and Bristol for the Finnell billboard would also allow the Town to acquire and preserve all 42 acres of land abutting Gagnon Park.

# How it Continued to go Wrong...

While the Town fulfilled promises in the December agreement with residents (with a small new section of fence left to be installed this Spring), Cove was unable to secure the financing they needed to be able to uphold their obligations in that agreement with residents.

# The Town continued to find a Solution...

After Cove's failure to finance the Finnell billboard and fulfill their obligations to the Century Road residents, the Town entered into discussions with Cove and Bristol to amend the original Billboard Relocation Agreement and present a plan that would solve the ongoing problems and still achieve our original goals of removing Rt. 3A billboards, acquiring and preserving the open space, and mitigating the impacts of the Rt. 18 Abington billboard.

The amended Billboard Relocation Agreement that is the result of those negotiations, is binding, and accomplishes our original goals.



# The Town Council Responds to Residents

While the Town worked to renegotiate the Billboard Relocation Agreement with Cove and Bristol, the Town Council took steps to address the lack of progress and the continued frustrations of Century Road residents and neighbors.

The Town Council approved two measures – 1) A citizens petition to change the Town's zoning ordinance as it relates to billboards, and 2) Imposing a one-year moratorium on issuing new billboard permits.

# Good Intentions – Harmful Consequences

Amending the billboard zoning ordinance and passing a billboard moratorium are an understandable reaction to a drawn-out and frustrating situation, but these are not solutions to the problems that neighbors still face.

The billboard zoning amendment has no impact on any of the billboards because Cove received or applied for a state permit for all of them prior to the adoption of the measure.

The moratorium may prevent Cove from constructing the Finnell billboard. Without the Finnell billboard, Cove will be unable to finance the lowering and other fixes to the 611 billboard.

With the moratorium in place, Cove is not expected to meet the terms of the new Billboard Relocation Agreement, jeopardizing our only path to also removing the Rt 3A billboards, mitigating the Rt 18 Abington billboard, and acquiring and preserving 42 acres of open space.

If the moratorium passes and Cove cannot build the Finnell billboard, Cove can be expected to try to construct the 613 billboard instead, which is likely to lead to a long, costly legal battle.

# The Choice:

## Supporting the New Relocation Agreement

- ✓ 611 is immediately turned off (as of 1/4/2021)
- ✓ Lower the 611 billboard 20-25 feet
- ✓ Install light blocking on 611
- ✓ Plantings/fencing as a visual barrier to 611
- ✓ Work must be completed by 9/30/2021
- ✓ Acquire/Preserve 42 Acres (Finnell) for Open Space  
Finnell board off until light blocking installed on 611
- ✓ No permit will be granted for 613 Pleasant Street
- ✓ Route 18 Billboard is mitigated
- ✓ Route 3A billboards removed at the end of their leases

## Supporting the Billboard Moratorium

- Cove will likely be unable to construct 0 Finnell billboard
- Cove will likely be unable to finance 611 remediation
- 611 will likely remain at current height and operating for unknown amount of time
- Cove expected to pursue constructing 613 billboard
- Town will likely fight 613 billboard – lengthy/costly legal battle
- Town will likely not acquire 42 acres near 0 Finnell
- Bristol expected to develop the 42 acres (by right)
- No Route 18 Abington billboard mitigation likely
- No agreement to remove Route 3A billboards likely

# The Town Made a Mistake...

## Let's Not Worsen the Consequences

The reasons behind the Town Council's measures are understandable and they did help to accelerate a new amended Agreement with Cove.

The Mayor takes full responsibility for the previous failure that has resulted in a frustratingly acrimonious situation filled with mistrust.

We are asking that you do not let the feelings from this past mistake block the only solution to fulfilling the goals of fixing 611, preventing 613, removing Rt. 3A billboards, acquiring and preserving 42 acres for open space, and mitigating the impacts of the Rt. 18 Abington billboard.

# Alternatives to a veto override:

## **Revisit the moratorium at a future meeting**

Cove needs to present an access plan for Finnell that will need ConCom approval. The earliest this can be heard is February 23<sup>rd</sup>. Once the access plan is approved, Cove will need to provide that information to the Office of Outdoor Advertising

A decision on Finnell is not anticipated until March 2021, at the earliest

If Cove does not perform, or has made no efforts to work on the 611 mitigation, the Council can consider imposing a moratorium at that time.

## **Rely on the Legally Enforceable New Agreement**

The Town will not approve the final inspection for a second billboard until 611 has light blocking technology installed

Cove is incentivized to complete the 611 work or else they lose that billboard and the revenue from it, including that in their Landmark deal

If Cove does not perform (no light blocking), they will not be able to operate either board