

Glenda Wiles

From: Sarah Roubik [sroubik@cybernet1.com]
Sent: Wednesday, October 24, 2012 10:36 AM
To: Ravalli County Commissioners
Subject: Open Letter to the Commissioners - follow up to sign meeting
Attachments: Open Letter to the Commissioners - follow up to sign meeting.docx

Good morning.

I attached a letter that four of us wrote to follow up on the sign ordinance meeting last week. I would like to thank you for your decision on 10/15/12. Additionally, I would like to request that public comment be allowed after the commission discusses amongst itself in future public meetings. There were some important corrections that needed to be made so we felt that a follow up letter was needed to clear things up.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely yours,

Sarah Roubik
961-5212

Open Letter to the Ravalli County Commissioners

In regard to the October 15th sign ordinance meeting:

Thank you for listening to your Ravalli County constituents and canceling the proposed sign ordinance. The ordinance would have been disastrous and backwards for Ravalli County, which was made clear by the unanimous and resounding opposition expressed in the packed meeting room.

As a follow-up to the meeting, we still have some concerns. After 34 people spoke in opposition, and no one in favor of the proposed changes, and the commission discussed amongst itself, it was unfortunate that there was no further public comment allowed. There were some corrections that needed to be addressed.

Highway 93 IS governed by our current ordinance (the citizens-initiated ordinance adopted in 2000). The legality of this is verified by Pat Hurley, the Outdoor Advertising Administrative Officer at MDOT. MDOT bases this opinion on State Statute 75-15-104, the same statute referred to on page one of the 2000 Citizen-Initiated Sign Ordinance.

We were surprised and dismayed to learn that no one from the Commission, including the Planning Manager, had even contacted Pat Hurley (as of 10/18/12), in order to alleviate your apparent confusion and get factual answers to your questions regarding the sign ordinance and Highway 93. According to Commissioner Stoltz, the Commission has been working on this new proposal for a year. That is plenty of time to gather factual information in order to make informed decisions. Mr. Hurley was very clear, helpful, friendly, and offered to assist with any future questions. We made this call and got our questions answered in 10 minutes.

During the October 15 public meeting, in an ironic twist, several citizens expressed an interest in settling the issue by removing ALL the signs and billboards. We must agree, this would be a satisfying end to this issue. Sadly, the "sunset provision" aka amortization (ie, removing the signs) does not apply to Highway 93, as noted on page 6 of the 2000 Sign Ordinance, which can be read and downloaded from the Ravalli County Planning website. This is due, ironically, to the Highway "Beautification Act" of 1965. Unfortunately, the billboard lobby at that time convinced congress to prohibit amortization on interstate or federal aid highways. This means that if communities want to eliminate billboards on these roads, they must purchase them with cash, usually for an unrealistic amount. Thus, we are stuck with the existing billboards on Hwy 93 unless something changes. With your proposal, we would have added to that supply of billboards that are too expensive to remove.

It is extremely unfortunate that you had to spend so much valuable time and money on this issue, especially since the existing 2000 document came from months of work by citizens, the Commission at that time, discussions with consultants, and meetings with engineers. Furthermore, each of you stated at the Monday meeting that you don't want billboards. The big questions remains: If YOU don't want billboards, the "few people" who brought this to your attention don't want billboards (per Commissioner Burrows), and we (represented by 177+ e-

mails, 60+ people at the meeting, folks who made numerous phone calls and probably the majority of residents of Ravalli County) don't want billboards, then why did you write an ordinance that allows oversized billboards every 500 feet on every road in the county and then pass it unanimously at the first reading? We can't imagine the county resources that went into this, that could have been spent on real, important issues facing our county. These questions still have not been answered.

Five commissioners and a planning manager working on this for a year is a lot of salary (READ: tax dollars), not to mention all the time and cost to your constituents who wrote letters, conducted research, and took time from work to stop the disastrous and unwarranted ordinance change. This was a time consuming, expensive and uninformed process and we cannot afford to have this happen again. We have all learned from this and expect you to consider the tax payer dollars that are funding your salary by providing an informed, respectful and transparent process when making decisions that impact all of the people, the place and the future of Ravalli County.

Thank you again for doing the right thing at the Monday, Oct. 15 meeting.

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