

LOCAL NEWS

A break for some illegal signs?

Businesses, homes for sale could get leniency from Pierce County

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Published: July 5th, 2008 01:00 AM

Four months into a campaign that has rid Pierce County of nearly 8,000 illegal signs, the County Council is considering changes that would make it easier for some signs to remain in public rights of way.

The council is considering a budget ordinance that directs county workers to avoid removing signs that advertise adjacent real estate and businesses, even if the signs are illegally posted on a county right of way.

The measure also would require the county's Public Works and Utilities Department to store some illegal signs for at least 10 days to give owners a chance to retrieve them.

County Councilman Roger Bush, R-Graham, said the proposal is an attempt to reduce the clutter caused by illegal signs but protect businesses and property owners who use signs to advertise.

"We're trying to get some kind of reasonable balance," Bush said.

It's illegal to post commercial signs in county rights of way, but the county for years seldom enforced that prohibition. County residents complain that the signs – posted on telephone poles or mounted on stakes or poles – clutter neighborhoods and pose a safety hazard.

Last summer Pierce County launched a pilot program to remove illegal signs along county roads. The program was so successful that the County Council this year set aside \$168,000 of the public works budget to launch a permanent sign removal program.

The program started Feb. 15. Since then, the department has removed 7,749 signs.

But real estate agents say removing the signs is hurting their business. And they've complained about the cost of replacing the signs.

Bush, who last year sponsored an ordinance that permitted the pilot sign-removal program, responded with two proposals. The first directs the public works department to target off-premises signs – signs that advertise real estate or business far from the site of the sign.

That would allow county employees to remove the weight loss and the "We Buy Ugly Homes" signs that clutter many intersections. But they would leave "for sale" signs posted in front of a home for sale even if the sign is in a public right of way.

Bush said employees could still remove any sign that poses a safety hazard.

Bruce Wagner, the county's road maintenance manager, said he believes the change wouldn't prevent his employees from collecting the vast majority of illegal signs. But he's seeking clarification of the proposal.

The other measure would require the county to store the illegal signs it removes for at least 10 days. Owners could retrieve only those signs containing a first and a last name, an address and a telephone number.

Wagner said storing signs could prove problematic.

The department stored signs during the pilot project. But Wagner said some people complained that others had taken signs and posts that didn't belong to them. He said it might require additional staffing to manage the storage area.

Bush doesn't think additional staffing would be necessary. He said the department could find a way to effectively manage sign storage.

"Everybody acknowledges there's a problem," Bush said. "We're trying to solve a problem."

The council's Rules Committee approved the provisions June 23. They're part of a budget ordinance that hasn't yet been scheduled for a hearing before the full council.

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READERS COMMENTS:

County Council and R. Bush can Personally Pay When Sued - Submitted by **Hannah98** on July 5, 2008 - 5:35pm.
William R. Maurer, (attorney) is the Executive Director of the Institute for Justice Washington Chapter (IJ-WA), which he joined in November 2002. IJ-WA engages in constitutional litigation in the areas of economic liberty, private property rights, educational choice, freedom of speech, and other vital liberties secured by the Washington State Constitution.

Maurer has successfully led challenges to a number of governmental abuses...

He was also lead attorney on IJ-WA's successful challenge before the Ninth Circuit to a City of Redmond ordinance that banned the use of portable signs for commercial businesses while allowing them for politicians and real estate companies...

<http://www.ij.org/staff/maurer.html>

THERE IS NO REASON WHY THE CITIZENS OF PIERCE COUNTY SHOULD PAY TO DEFEND A LAWSUIT THAT WAS CAUSED BY THE DELIBERATE UNCONSTITUTIONAL MISCONDUCT OF ROGER BUSH AND OTHERS OF THE PIERCE COUNTY COUNCIL.

clarify please - Submitted by **Idozy1** on July 5, 2008 - 5:11pm.

Here's what I don't understand. If I remember correctly, this code was passed AFTER numerous meetings took place that also involved the representatives of these businesses. Presentations and comments from both sides were presented to the Council. The Council then voted and approved the code. THEN months later when the code was partially enacted upon (leaving out the failure to collect fines) THEN these businesses came back claiming foul. Now taxpayers get to pay again for Council time to change the code and I just don't understand the justification.

Why didn't these businesses use their voice back at the beginning? And if their representatives who did attend didn't apparently make a good case to not get the code approved, what's changed now? From what I can see, the only change is now its being enforced.

Here's a few question - Submitted by **S_Emerson** on July 5, 2008 - 4:05pm.

Here's a few question which taxpayers should be asking...

Do any of the code enforcement officers have the authority, and means, to impose the \$250 allowable fines on those who illegally place signs?

If they do, have any "tickets" been written on the 9,000+ illegal signs PWU has removed from Pierce County rights-of-way since the onset of the pilot program less than 1 year ago?

And if so, how much of the \$2,200,000.00 worth of fine money (based only as if removed on 1st day of discovery) has been collected?

If they do not have the authority, and means to write citations, then, why not?

And if not, then shouldn't the Executive worked to make it so they could, rather than charge the taxpayer the \$228,000.00 we've paid thus far (2008 budget at \$168,000 + \$55,000 pilot program + \$5,000 ad hoc committee)?

The answers should P-O every taxpayer and voter, problem is the majority don't pay a lick of attention to what the politicians are doing in The People's "honor".

the people? who cares about the people - Submitted by **boggled** on July 5, 2008 - 3:42pm.

Interesting that amendments were introduced and passed on this issue without public notice and without informing the IPL, which tells us decisions are being made behind closed doors.

Statutory Provisions: The legislature finds and declares that all public commissions, boards, councils, committees, subcommittees, departments, divisions, offices, and all other public agencies of this state and subdivisions thereof exist to aid in the conduct of the people's business. It is the intent of this chapter that their actions be taken openly and that their deliberations be conducted openly. The people of this state do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created. RCW 42.30.010.

Pierce County government AKA the instruments of our creation..... This continued insistence that special consideration be allowed so that these eyesore blight signs can be plastered all over our communities is nothing more than blatant disrespect for the people who elected you, pay your wages, your benefits, and also have to pay from their own pockets to bail out the mortgage industry to the tune of more than 17 BILLION dollars already, because of development/real estate practices that included bad mortgages designed to sell, sell, sell to justify the insistence that there is this burning need to build, build, build the bedrooms for another county. This practice has already caused many to lose their homes and the failure of the mortgage industry was the initial trigger to our current economic crisis. The development industry has repeatedly argued back (and won) that they don't want to pay their true and fair share of impact fees, leaving us with no parks, no recreational facilities, no public transportation, ruined roads, choking traffic, children roaming the streets, destroyed water resources, and the loss of beauty of our communities, all to profit a private industry that does not contribute to our well being at all. And while you're at it, tell them how much each new house costs the rest of us - last I heard, it costs the taxpayers of this county \$84,000 for each new house built. You have heard over and over again how much the people hate this sign blight yet you insist on spitting on us and our communities by again trying to push this through. Time to clean house! We don't need a government who treats it's citizen's this way. Why don't you tell the voters how you REALLY feel about them when you're asking for their votes? Sauce for the goose...

I guess we will now see special consideration of other broken laws too – why don't you just declare Pierce County as 100% lawless, do away with the courts and the rest of the laws, since surely some other special interest groups will now come forward asking you to waive their laws too. Where does it end? No illegal signs! Get some guts for a change and try telling your taxpaying voting citizens the truth – you don't care AT ALL about them, their children, their communities or their wishes, only what one private, for profit interest wants. Better yet, take the money from all those fines if you actually enforced our laws, and use it to offset some of the costs dumped onto us by this development industry!

For those who have apparently forgotten.... - Submitted by **S_Emerson** on July 5, 2008 - 3:54pm.

Washington State Constitution

PREAMBLE

We, the people of the State of Washington, grateful to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe for our liberties, do ordain this constitution.

**ARTICLE I
DECLARATION OF RIGHTS**

SECTION 1 POLITICAL POWER. All political power is inherent in the people, and governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and are established to protect and maintain individual rights.

SECTION 5 FREEDOM OF SPEECH. Every person may freely speak, write and publish on all subjects, being responsible for the abuse of that right.

SECTION 8 IRREVOCABLE PRIVILEGE, FRANCHISE OR IMMUNITY PROHIBITED. No law granting irrevocably any privilege, franchise or immunity, shall be passed by the legislature.

RE: Who does our County Council work for anyway? - Submitted by **S_Emerson** on July 5, 2008 - 3:05pm.

Let's consider a few facts:

- 1) GM is down 15%, which is the lowest since the 50's. Car sales are down 9.3% and truck sales are down 21.3%. Four of the U.S. car manufacturers have reported a decrease of 18-36% in sales, therefore are closing numerous plants and laying off thousands of workers. Analysts have said "this is as bad a scenario you can imagine". Merrill Lynch said "bankruptcy is not impossible if the market continues to deteriorate".
- 2) Starbucks is closing 600 stores and laying off thousands of workers.
- 3) Food prices went up 8.5% in the past year--and nearly 28 million people in the U.S. rely on food stamps (which averages a mere \$23.47 per person per week).
- 4) Even Victoria's Secret reported a sales decrease of 12% and are struggling.

This is an example of how the economy is impacting all industries. This IS NOT exclusive to the real estate industry, so why is our local government cowing to their demands? If they do grant "special priveledges" to the real estate industry, should they not grant the same to all industries and allow everyone to post directional advertisements wherever they say they "need" them to drive a sales increase to "save them"?

Now, let's look at this...

Reports state that women start new businesses at twice the rate of men AND that small business in the "engine of growth in this economy" as it "produces about 70% of the economies jobs" AND women represent 52% of the voting public. So I ask, should women then be seeking, and receiving special favors from our local government by granting special priveledges to all businesses started by women but not those started by men? No!

Equality for ALL is the only answer, whether it be NO OFF-PREMISE SIGNS WHATSOEVER, or EVERYONE IN BUSINESS CAN PLACE OFF-PREMISE SIGNS. And if the politicians decide that everyone can, then they cannot limit it to only those with storefronts or those who keep certain hours or those who operate their business in say, rural verses urban areas. It will have to be open to ALL businesses, whether retail or service, whether home-based or shopping mall.

What will our county look like then?

Rogert Bush and the Council Place Big Business Above People - Submitted by **Hannah98** on July 5, 2008 - 1:16pm.

We need some fresh ideas on our county council and not condoning "big business" breaking our laws; when it comes to big business, including real estate, who deliberately break our laws at the county council's blessing, the

people in Pierce County have a problem. It is time we had council members that protect the people, not big business. The people in Dist. 3, Graham, need to vote for a change. As stated earlier, "Who are they working for?"

Who does our County Council work for anyway? - Submitted by **S_Emerson** on July 5, 2008 - 12:35pm.

The article says "The council is considering a budget ordinance that directs county workers to avoid removing signs that **advertise adjacent real estate and businesses**, even if the signs are illegally posted on a county right of way."

So I ask, "adjacent" meaning IN FRONT of THE real estate and business[es] which the signs advertise? And/or perhaps along the SIDE of said real estate and business IF said real estate or business is on a corner lot?

That is the ONLY reasonable compromise I've heard so far, however given the fact that government, including certain members of our local government spin definitions to it their agendas, it's likely that "adjacent" doesn't mean to them what it means to Webster, or to The People.

It's interesting that although the blight from these off-premise advertisement signs isn't exclusive to right-of-way, as it's become an increasingly prolific problem on private property as well (which is also illegal).

So why isn't our Council addressing the issue of the large, wooden, off-premise directional signs erected on private property, often miles from the sales site - such as these:



Does it not matter to them that off-premise signs often block visibility to legal, on-premise signs, such as this:

Illegal sign which was allowed to remain for 4 years



Gary Johnson Floor Covering has been serving the Midland community for more than three decades, yet this new-to-the-community development had the "pre-emptive" of blocking visibility to his legal, permitted sign for four years.

Does it not matter that Councilmember Bush proposed R2008-41 and now Councilmember Goings is proposing 2008-56, which would allow the real estate and development industries the "right" to use what they call "kiosks" to direct homebuyers to available houses, such as this:

Proposed "legal" kiosk



Does the kiosk solve the problem of legal signage being visible obstructed? No.

I don't understand what makes our government think they are represent The People fairly when they cater to big business while tromping on the rights of small business and the rights of the taxpaying public. This isn't what we elect them to do, is it?

For more information on this issue [click here](#).

"So why isn't our Council - Submitted by **hiccup1234** on July 5, 2008 - 1:15pm.

"So why isn't our Council addressing the issue of the large, wooden, off-premise directional signs erected on private property, often miles from the sales site"

Answer: It's the only way developers living in King County or somewhere else can sell their ugly & environmentally-destructive (2 hours each way from any jobs) housing.

THE IRRESPONSIBLE - Submitted by **Poptart** on July 5, 2008 - 11:44am.

people ruin it again for the ones that do go back and remove. But I do have to agree in some areas it does look TRASHY! But look at the on the road and ditch litter in some areas it is totally TRASHY and that sure tells visiting people that we a SLOBS!!!! Unless they come from a country that likes that, then we are in trouble if they decide to stay!!!!!! (more trash) Us neat people are in big trouble....

Idozy1...you sound like a - Submitted by **ratujack** on July 5, 2008 - 7:06am.

Idozy1...you sound like a good little proletarian and combined with being a control freak you want to run the world around you. In Russia you would have been labeled a "apparatchik" look it up in the Communist manifesto. Give businesss a break for goodness sake.

Since apparatchik is a Russian word - Submitted by **beerBoy** on July 5, 2008 - 7:31am.

derived from the Soviet hierarchy and the Communist Manifesto was written in German (Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei) and first published on February 21, 1848, before the Soviet Union was a gleam in Lenin's eye (Russian Revolution was in 1917), you are not gonna find the word in the text.

Guess your right BB - Submitted by **Idozy1** on July 5, 2008 - 3:06pm.

All I could find was this. Gotta admit, the "slam" went right over my head since I don't quite get how I can be both a Proletarian and Apparatchik but then, never was a student of Communism. Yes, happily a member of the working class and nope absolutely no desire to be an agent of any government. Control freak? yup- I wish. Wish I had control to make elected officials honor the codes and quit wasting money/time waffling a year later.

Apparatchik (Russian: аппаратчик, Russian pronunciation: [ɐpɐˈratɕɪk] plural apparatchiki) is a Russian colloquial term for a full-time, professional functionary of the Communist Party or government; i.e., an agent of the governmental or party "apparat" (apparatus) that held any position of bureaucratic or political responsibility.

Question - Submitted by **Idozy1** on July 5, 2008 - 1:43am.

Do the cities have ordinances about the signs? I know I don't see as much sign spam driving through the city owned roadways. I guess I'm just clarifying that the Council will keep any changes (if they do make any) equal for county roads as they are in cities. It sure seem unincorporated and county areas got pretty littered before the County began enforcing the code.

I also would like to see some real statistical data that shows the loss of sign spam is whats depressing the real estate market here. Maybe the Council should ask for an independent study done (paid for by the Realtors) to prove that the decrease in sign spam is causing a business loss. I know our market is a bit different than much of the rest of the county but I thought the lending issues were causing the reduction in business.

Somewhere along the way, our - Submitted by **hiccup1234** on July 5, 2008 - 11:11am.

Somewhere along the way our County's elected officials decided Unincorporated Pierce County should have the look and feel of an armpit.

It couldn't have anything to do with the developer's campaign cash, could it?!