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## GOVERNMENT

### County set to attack sign clutter

DAN BEEKMAN; The News Tribune

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Stapled to utility poles, staked roadside and littered across the ground, the advertising at the intersection of Canyon Road East and 176th Street East is hard to miss. "Stop Renting!" screams one sign. "FOR RENT" tempts another. Need a patio? Facing foreclosure? Seen an energetic and loving black Labrador lately?

More than 30 signs clutter two corners alone at the busy intersection. These include a forest of 10-foot billboards directing home-seekers to new development communities. Roseview. Autumn Glen. Wynham Ranch. Silver Creek. Foxbury Landing. Canyon Meadows.

For years, utility poles and other aspects of the right of way have served as advertising space for political campaigners, developers and cottage industrialists. But commercial signs placed in the right of way are illegal. Now Pierce County is preparing to launch a cleanup.

"It has gotten totally out of hand," said County Councilman Roger Bush, R-Graham. "These signs are unsafe and unsightly. We're dealing with visual pollution."

On July 11, the county's Public Works Department plans to launch a pilot program to remove illegal signs. Road crews in pickup trucks will patrol a 55-square-mile section of East Pierce County where the problem is exceptionally bad. The program, scheduled to last four months, will cost \$40,000.

"We want to demonstrate that we care about the appearance of our community," Bush said. "We want our streets to look nice and neat and clean and attractive."

Safety is an issue as well. In neighborhoods where no sidewalks exist, signs placed in the right of way might force school children and joggers into the street.

"These signs are getting progressively larger, more distracting and harder to remove, and it's created an arms race," Bush said. "Working together, we can stop it before someone gets hurt."

The pilot program, originally scheduled to begin this month, was postponed until the County Council can approve an ordinance removing enforcement restrictions. Currently, road crews are required to notify the owner of an illegally placed sign prior to its removal. Offenders are allowed 48 hours to comply.

"There has been almost no enforcement in the past," Public Works director Brian Zeigler said.

Under the ordinance expected to pass on Tuesday, road crews will be authorized to pluck illegal signs on the spot. Offenders will no longer receive prior notice.

“Nobody else committing an illegal act gets a 48-hour notice,” said Brad Chatfield, the County Council’s legislative analyst.

Road crews will patrol 112th Street East, Military Road South, 152nd Street East, Brookdale Road East, 160th Street East, 176th Street East, 224th Street East, Spanaway Loop Road South and Canyon Road East in particular.

First, illegally placed signs will be photographed and removed. Their owners will then be contacted if possible. Then road crews will conduct a second cleanup, which could lead to the prosecution of repeat offenders. The fine is \$250, though penalties are rarely handed out. Public Works officials say it’s hard to match homemade signs with their owners.

“The principal purpose of the road is transportation, and our goal is to make sure the road is safe,” Zeigler said. “This program provides us with additional resources to make a concentrated sweep through a defined area.”

Zeigler hopes this summer’s program will generate a signage solution. But it’s only a pilot, he said, designed to reveal the scope of Pierce County’s problem. There’s a chance Public Works won’t move forward alone.

Pierce County might enlist volunteers to remove illegal signs under the auspices of an official program, something like the county’s “Adopt-A-Road” campaign. Already a few citizens have dabbled in what Zeigler calls “sign-buster vigilantism.”

“We don’t encourage them,” he said, “for a whole host of legal and safety concerns.”

For now, local developers and real estate agents are going along with the project. Tiffany Speir, government affairs director for the Master Builders Association of Pierce County, says her organization supports the plan.

But Speir and others with ties to Pierce County’s housing industry worry about how the ordinance will be enforced. They’ve become accustomed to advertising in the right of way and have less than a month to move out.

“We understand and support the idea of removing illegal signs, especially those creating a safety hazard,” Speir said. “At the same time, there is no way for someone to advertise off-site for a new development. And that can turn into a safety issue too, when you have people driving around aimlessly.”

According to Bush, an ad hoc committee will address Speir’s concerns and work to develop an off-site permitting process. Community members will also sit on the committee.

Signs pointing the way to developments aren’t Bush’s primary concern. In fact, he expects a cooperative housing industry to self-police. It’s the amateur signs he’s after.

Here’s hoping that energetic and loving black Labrador has made its way home by now. The signs at Canyon and 176th should be coming down

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## **READERS COMMENTS:**

### **This is almost as funny a headline**

Submitted by [citylies](#) on June 18, 2007 - 1:37pm.

This is almost as funny as a headline that would read "Tacoma to get serious about crime". But I have far more faith in the county than I do in the city of Tacoma.

### **I think this is something**

Submitted by [turp63](#) on June 18, 2007 - 1:33pm.

I think this is something that has needed to be addressed. I drive the Spanaway loop road everyday and it is unsightly. I also like the idea of citizens being able to remove signs.. Some may consider that a sticky situation but I believe that is the only way you'd be able to tackle this problem. Now if we can just catch people illegally dumping out past the Roy Y.

### **Well intentioned**

Submitted by [turp63](#) on June 18, 2007 - 1:32pm.

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### **It's already illegal to put signs on utility polls**

Submitted by [david1943](#) on June 18, 2007 - 11:54am.

It's already illegal to put signs on utility polls. I've got no problem with them outlawing political signs as well. Want to put a political sign on your property? no problem. Put ANY sign on public property should be outlawed. Very simple law..your place=OK public place=NO....don't have property...make friends and get them to do it or find a soap box and stand on it and tell everyone who'll listen.

### **You're correct david1943**

Submitted by [mattersnot1](#) on June 18, 2007 - 12:12pm.

The court also addressed the issue of placing signs on public standards. They ruled it illegal.

### **Just in time**

Submitted by [mattersnot1](#) on June 18, 2007 - 10:33am.

for the 2007 election. Wonder how many campaign signs are going to be hitting the dust?

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They better be careful though. Our State Supreme Court has already ruled that signs can be posted in the right away. If I remember correctly, it was a case involving the City of Seattle and Mike the Mighty Mover.

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Citizens will be allowed to remove signs? Those signs better not be campaign signs.

By statute, it's a misdemeanor to remove or damage a legally posted campaign sign.

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Personally, I would never touch any campaign sign. If one is illegally posted, report it, but don't touch it yourself.

### **mattersnot**

Submitted by [Patofmanyhats](#) on June 18, 2007 - 2:27pm.

I didn't even think of that! your so smart..LOL

### **Com'on.....**

Submitted by [hiccup1234](#) on June 18, 2007 - 10:10am.

“We understand and support the idea of removing illegal signs, especially those creating a safety hazard,” Speir said. “At the same time, there is no way for someone to advertise off-site for a new development. And that can turn into a safety issue too, when you have people driving around aimlessly.”

I'm thinking someone's paycheck might depend on saying silly things.

Look into the MLS & MapQuest. Private homeowners rely on it when they go to sell, at a bare minimum, so should the greedy developers.

### **County set to attack sign clutter**

Submitted by [parispatty](#) on June 18, 2007 - 8:02am.

good luck with this one.