



# NEWS

## Real estate agents protest sign removals

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Real estate agents to Federal Way: Please keep your hands off our signs.

That's the message about 20 agents sent Tuesday night when they protested the Federal Way City Council's stricter enforcement of its sign code.

They say the city is hurting their business by picking up open house signs in the public right of way. Times are tough enough with the slumping housing market, agents told the council.

They want the city to add an exception to the code, allowing real estate professionals to put up sandwich boards at least during open house hours.

Otherwise, agents will have to advise sellers there's little reason to hold open houses because agents can't direct people to their homes, said Marylyn Gates, a Federal Way agent for Windermere Real Estate.

The agents also don't want the city removing directional "for sale" signs.

"I would just ask you to imagine how you would feel if you were trying to sell your home in these challenging times," Gates said.

In a similar appeal, Pierce County real estate agents spoke out in March after road crews began removing and throwing away illegally installed signs on county rights of way. The sign roundup was part of a countywide effort to enforce longtime sign laws.

Federal Way City Council members didn't comment on the sign issue, which wasn't on Tuesday's agenda.

Mayor Jack Dovey referred the matter to the council's land use and transportation committee, which will meet Monday.

"I feel we need to listen to their concerns," councilwoman Linda Kochmar said in an interview Wednesday.

Especially in a down economy, "we need to accommodate them, if possible," said Kochmar, chairwoman of the council committee.

Recently, Federal Way has more clearly defined where signs are illegal in the public right of way and enforced the code prohibiting them. The off-limits areas cover roads and the space between curbs and the outside edge of utility boxes, power poles and fire hydrants.

Medians with grass and landscaping are off-limits also.

Since more houses are on the market this year and fewer are selling, more real estate signs are being displayed.

In May, 547 homes were for sale in Federal Way, compared with 417 in May 2007, according to regional real estate figures.

Some streets and medians also have been inundated with election signs.

"We've been getting some complaints about the signs," said Lee Bailey, the city's building official. "We've been picking up more in the past six months."

He estimated that the city's picked up from 50 to 75 signs during that period.

The city keeps the signs for 15 days. Owners can fill out a form at City Hall and get their signs back for \$5 each. If no one claims them during that time, they are destroyed.

The city confiscated at least 12 signs from three real estate agencies on June 18 for a two-hour open house, according to Gates.

She said the 2-foot-by-2-foot wood sandwich signs cost \$200 for six.

Gates and another Windermere agent, Joni Ribera, got their signs back. The city waived monetary charges after she and Ribera met with city officials, Gates said.

But Ribera said getting the signs back "took a lot of time and effort."

She said that during past election seasons, signs with council members' names plastered on them outnumbered real estate signs. City Council seats are not on the ballot this year.

Organizers for the Federal Way Farmers Market also complained that the code enforcement leaves them little space to place their signs along the sides of roads.

"There's really no spot we can put them up without their being taken," said Karla Kolibab, the market manager.

Carol Stopper, who's on the farmers market board, added, "It doesn't seem to me to be conducive to doing business in the city."

Steve Maynard: 253-597-8647

## **READERS COMMENTS:**

sign blight - Submitted by **boggled** on July 3, 2008 - 6:17pm.

Several months ago, our country started falling into a serious economic decline triggered by the failure of the mortgage/real estate industry. We were overbuilt at the expense of our environment, roads, schools, and public facilities, all of which the builders and developers whined about having to pay anything toward at all, even though they are supposed to. That refusal has resulted in nasty clogged roads as we were overwhelmed with massive and unneeded tract housing with no yards, no parks, nowhere for our children to play except on a postage stamp yard, a paved road or a "tot lot". Many are now teens, wandering the streets since all of the other amenities like parks, recreation centers, swimming pools, etc, and public transportation did not materialize because the developers cried and whined about the impact fees. On top of that, you were supposed to build housing to match the JOBS in this county. There are no jobs for all the people who flocked here for cheap housing and questionable mortgage

practices from other counties who do charge impact fees. Now that we are in this mess, with horrible mortgages that this very same industry was well aware of, mortgage companies & banks going under, the Feds had to bail out the mortgage industry at our expense, they think we should owe them something? The real estate signs plastered all over our communities only served to direct yet more people to this disaster. 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. You have heard over and over again how much the people hate this 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 feel about them when you're asking for their votes? No illegal signs! Blight your own community, not ours. Cover other counties with cheap plastic crap that will never break down in our landfills and see where you get. Federal Way has the right idea. They have the guts to stand up and say no - why don't you?

Fact is - Submitted by **speakout** on July 3, 2008 - 12:53pm.

The truth is that open houses are not designed to sell that specific house, but are in fact designed as a way for an agent to gather up potential buyers and sell them something else. It's just one of the many things on the Brokers list of how to keep agents busy and out of the way, especially the new ones.

A like all sales positions the age old rule still applies, that would be the 80/20 rule, meaning 80% of the business is done by 20% of the sales force, thus leaving 80% of those agents to squabble over 20% of the pie, which is why there is an 85% failure rate in agents for the first year.

Are the signs really necessary, nope, they are really just more like a fishing lure than anything else, designed to snag potential buyers as they drive by, hoping they'll take the bait, while also knowing that any serious buyer has already contacted another agent, and of course as a way to make the seller think the listing agent is actually doing something to get the place sold. When in reality it is NOT a common thing for the listing agent to bring in the buyer, oh it happens now and then but double dipping as it's called is in fact a rare treat.

So IF they don't like the law as written then let them do what everyone else that doesn't like a law has to do to get it changed; and in the meantime suck it up and don't be a criminal or a whiny baby.

signs - Submitted by **retired81** on July 3, 2008 - 11:09am.

Is Federal Way going to be picking up all the political signs that will surely be going up in these areas?

Can't stop political signs - Submitted by **logicmonster** on July 3, 2008 - 12:43pm.

Even if they wanted to, they couldn't. They would find themselves in clear violation of First amendment rights - and be facing mountains of settled case law. Political signs are protected free speech. Commercial advertisements do not enjoy the same free speech protections as political signs do.

logicmonster - Submitted by **mattersnot1** on July 3, 2008 - 4:35pm.

You're mistaken. Freedom of speech applies to everyone, no exemptions. Of course, you can't abuse speech. (i.e. You can't falsely yell 'fire' in a confined area)

This was made very clear in our State Supreme Court rulings in Collier v City of Tacoma and Mighty Movers, Inc v City of Seattle. Also, in the Ninth Circuit Court ruling in Ballen v City of Redmond.

Collier involved political signs in the public rights of way. Mighty Movers and Ballen involved commercial signs in the public rights of way. All prevailed under the Constitutional Right to Freedom of Speech.

The Mighty Mover ruling made it clear that no signage of any kind can be posted to public standards (i.e. utility poles).

Therefore, as much as we don't like it, the realtors have the same right to post their signs in the public rights of way as do candidates for public office.

What I find amusing is seeing the road crews ignoring cleaning the rights of way this campaign period. The political signs are being covered by tall grass, weeds and brush along the roadways.

Real Estate signs - Submitted by **davidjohnjr** on July 3, 2008 - 10:29am.

Not much sympathy to be had for them. If anyone is looking for a house and they have to resort to street signs to find one, they're either blind to the numerous houses available on almost any street, or don't have the internet. Now if we could only get rid of all the stupid political signs...How many people vote for someone simply because they saw a sign in someone's yard? Oh wait, that'd assume that people take the time to make an intelligent and thoughtful decision...

Oh Wahhhh! - Submitted by [jegggo](#) on July 3, 2008 - 10:03am.

Real estate agents should try getting off there asses and actually try and sell some properties instead of relying on eye sore sign's. Not to mention once these lazy so called Real Estate agents put them up they are far to often lazy to the point of not picking them back up. Then everyone has to see them for weeks on end. Like the song says SIGN"S SIGN"S EVERYWHERE A SIGN TAKING UP THE SCENERY AND BREAKING MY MIND. I say ban them forever on rightaways nothing worse then a sorry real estate agents sign and that would include all sign's.

F\*\*K the real estate agents - Submitted by [bacon\\_a](#) on July 3, 2008 - 9:59am.

If every business could just put signs out anywhere, there'd be no room on the sidewalks. If you can't sell houses, you need to find another line of work, not ruin our neighborhoods with land spam so you can try to make money.

To City Manager Beets... - Submitted by [S\\_Emerson](#) on July 2, 2008 - 7:35pm.

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From: Stacy Emerson  
Sent: Wednesday, July 02, 2008 4:05 PM  
Subject: Off-premise signs  
Importance: High

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City Manager Beets,

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Although I am not a resident of Federal Way, I have great interest in the issue of illegal, off-premise signage, in particular those blighting the roadsides and communities of unincorporated Pierce County.

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This afternoon's News Tribune update features an article on Federal Way's illegal sign clean-up effort. The article will likely appear in the hard copy paper tomorrow, but for now you can read it here - <http://www.thenewstribune.com/news/updates/story/403342.html>. As usual, the real-estate industry (and development industry) claim that due to hard times, they "need" to use off-premise directional signage to drive home sales, yet fail to acknowledge that these hard times are felt by all industries, such as the U.S.'s four largest auto manufacturers who reported a sales decrease of 18 through 36%, causing the closure of numerous plants and the layoff of thousands of people.

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The real-estate and development industries in the area are well aware of the fact that it has been proven unconstitutional for government to grant permission for one industry to erect off-premise signage while restricting all other commercial industry form doing the same (see [Ballen v. City of Redmond](#)).

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All industries are feeling the impact of the decrease in product and service sales, whether it be a coffee shop, barber shop or veterinarian. The realtors/developers who have lobbied the Pierce County Council on his issue have claimed that off-premise directional signage has contributed to more than 60% of their home sales. I have suggested the possibility that if other commercial industries violated the law by blanketing our communities with off-premise signage, they too could likely accredit 60% of their sales resulting from such signage.

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I urge you to familiarize yourself with Pierce County's plight with illegal, off-premise signs via the articles, videos and documents linked below my signature tag, as my hope is that it will help you come to a fair and just conclusion.

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Please acknowledge receipt of my correspondence by way of reply. Even a blank reply will suffice to tell me that my correspondence was not caught by spam filters.

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Respectfully submitted,

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Stacy Emerson

XXXX XXth St E  
Tacoma, WA 98445-5401  
(253) 921-6874

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CC:  
Brook Lindquist  
Lee Bailey  
Brian Zeigler  
Bruce Wagner  
Pierce County Council  
The News Tribune

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The "list" referred to above can be accessed via [this link](#).

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UPDATE: Brook Lindquist called to confirm receipt, and to inform me that my correspondence will be shared with the City Council and other interested parties. I encourage others to share their opinions with Federal Way government, whether or not you are a resident.

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Give um hell Stacy - Submitted by **Badtothebone** on July 2, 2008 - 8:31pm.  
Kudos !

I agree with you both. If - Submitted by **papasan** on July 2, 2008 - 4:21pm.  
I agree with you both. If the RE companies would just police themselves, they wouldn't have the problem now. Include campaign signs in the ord. Get them off the public roadway and public rights of way. I refuse to vote for any candidate that uses "Sign Spam".

papasan - Submitted by **mattersnot1** on July 2, 2008 - 8:44pm.  
That means you're not going to vote for either Goings or McCarthy for County Executive?

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Both have 'littered' the public rights of way through out the County.

add - Submitted by **Idozy1** on July 2, 2008 - 9:57pm.  
Rossi, Ron Paul..... wow, if the list grows we should all stay home and not vote. OOPS, we still have to soundly defeat the term limit lift, so off to the polls folks, no matter what!

So has Bunney, and lots of others.... - Submitted by **S\_Emerson** on July 2, 2008 - 9:34pm.

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Uh-huh.

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Hands off our county and city property - Submitted by **Idozy1** on July 2, 2008 - 4:09pm.  
It is and was due to the unsightly "spamming" of public roadways that brought this on the industry. Given an inch they took miles... now the piper has to be paid. I am shocked at the waffling in enforcing the fines for code violations. Most of the worst offenders are not promoting resident homes for sale but builders communities and condos. I agree, a one day Open House sign is significantly different than the roadway blight we have been subjected to until the code finally was enforced.  
Pierce and Federal Way need to follow code and quit codifying violators.  
I am not fond of all the election signs either that are starting to blight the roadways/shoulders. I don't see why election teams feel they have to post a sign every 10 feet. Yuck!

Signs... - Submitted by **Whatever1214** on July 2, 2008 - 4:00pm.  
The signs are nothing but visual spam. If a real estate agent puts up a sign on the day of an open house and then removes it that is reasonable. It is people like "Decks by Tex" that nail ugly signs to utility poles that need to go. Of course the easiest thing is to allow the utility companies to bill the sign spammers for use of their pole and the county to bill for use of the right-of-way. A \$100 a day sounds about right.