



City of Tacoma  
Planning and Development Services

**Agenda Item  
D-1**

**To:** Planning Commission  
**From:** John Harrington, Development Services Division  
**Subject:** **Billboard Regulations**  
**Meeting Date:** July 15, 2015  
**Memo Date:** July 8, 2015

At the July 15, 2015 meeting, the Planning Commission will receive a presentation from staff and then discuss options for billboard regulations in the City. This is follow-on to the introductory meeting you received at your June 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting.

The City is exploring amendments to the special billboard regulations in the Tacoma Municipal Code, Section 13.06.521.M. The main objective is to continue to reduce the number of billboards in the City and move billboards which adversely impact neighborhoods, protected districts and land uses to more acceptable areas. This process is part of an effort to successfully end a legal “standstill” agreement between the City of Tacoma and Clear Channel Outdoor (CCO) regarding the City’s efforts to enforce its billboard regulations.

The specific areas to be covered in the presentation and discussion at this meeting will be:

- Zoning districts permitting billboards
- Buffers from certain uses and districts
- Distribution of billboard structures from other billboard structures
- Size of billboard faces
- Height of billboard structures

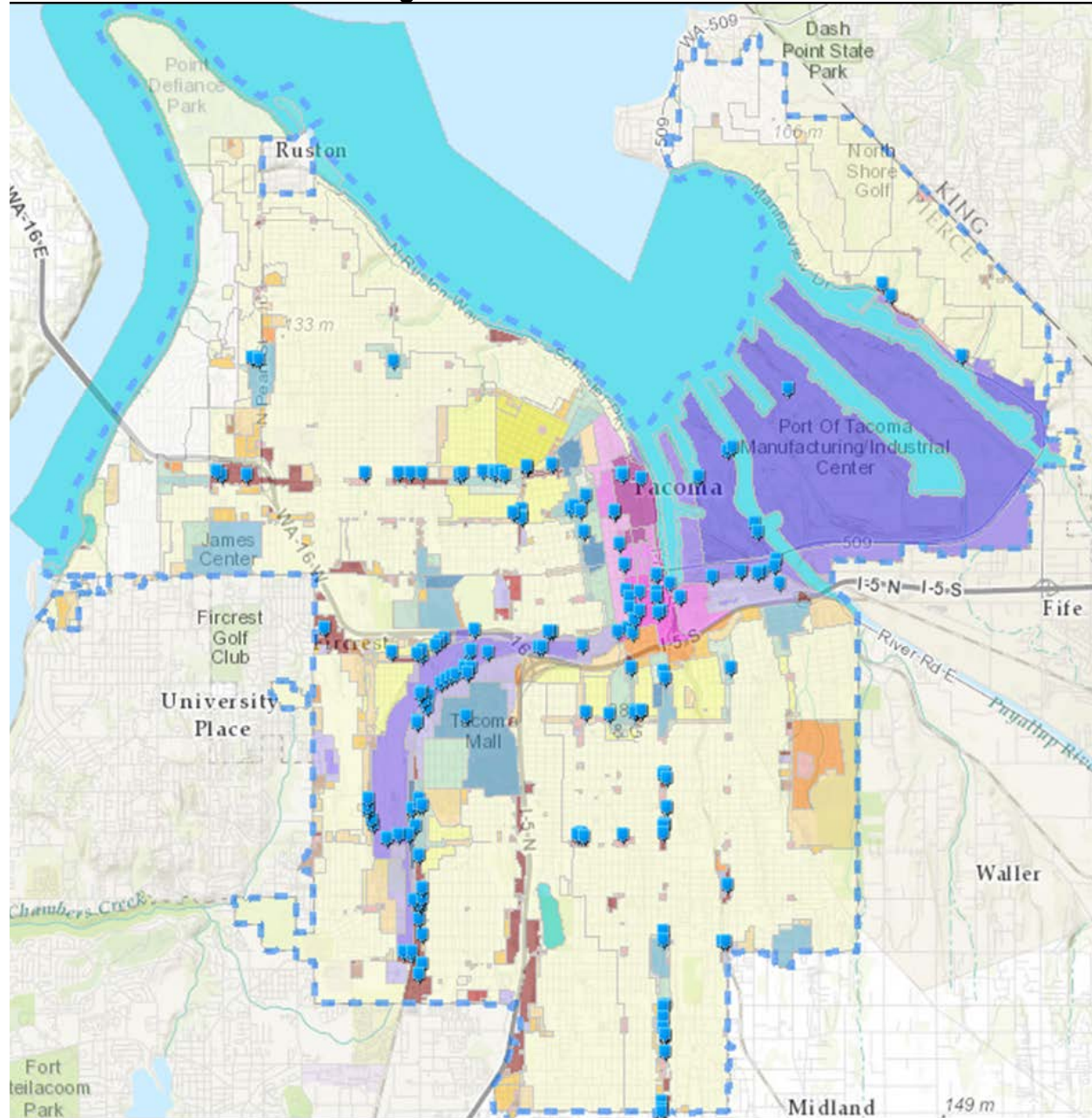
See the attached page for a short discussion of each of the above items. Additional information relevant to billboards, including the Community Working Group’s (CWG) full report is available on the Planning Services Division’s website at [www.cityoftacoma.org/planning](http://www.cityoftacoma.org/planning) (and click on “Billboard Community Working Group”).

If you have any questions, please contact me at 253-279-8950 or [jharring@cityoftacoma.org](mailto:jharring@cityoftacoma.org).

Attachments

c: Peter Huffman, Director

## Billboard locations and zoning districts



**Zoning for billboards.** Currently, billboards are permitted in just four zoning districts, C-2 Commercial and three industrial zones – M-1 Light Industrial, M-2 Heavy Industrial and PMI Port Maritime & Industrial. About 37% of billboards (114 faces) are outside of these zones.

In order to meet buffering and distribution requirements, billboard structures have been incentivized since 1997 to move within an amortization period (at owner expense) to areas that comply with the regulations. Apparently, because there were limited desirable locations to

move the non-complying billboards to within these often billboard-crowded districts, little progress was made to bring more structures into compliance. The CWG addressed this problem by concluding that, with some reservations, potentially seven new zones could be added, primarily in Downtown Tacoma and other Mixed Use Centers (MUCs). In downtown, they recommended the potential addition of the DCC – Downtown Commercial Core, DMU – Downtown Mixed Use and WR – Warehouse Residential. In the MUCs, they recommended potentially adding the UCX – Urban Center Mixed-Use, CCX – Community Commercial Mixed Use, and CIX – Commercial Industrial Mixed Use. They also added the much less prevalent PBD – Planning Business Development District, which is a commercial zone. There are 242 billboard faces in these proposed zones and the zones currently allowing billboards.

The CWG could not reach agreement on whether billboards could be allowed in the following three zones: NCX – Neighborhood Commercial Mixed Use district, the C-1 Commercial district and T – Transitional district. There are 51 billboard faces in these zones today.

If these recommendations were adopted, 78% would be conforming to zoning, but all 308 nonconforming billboard faces would remain nonconforming for other reasons (size, height, etc.).

**Buffers for billboards.** Of the 311 billboard faces, 85% do not comply with the current buffering requirements. Currently, billboards must be 500-feet from residential, mixed-use and shoreline districts, historic and conservation districts, historic structures, parks, churches, and schools. The narrow width of the boundaries of many commercial and mixed-use districts means that the current buffers restrict large portions of these otherwise acceptable zones.

The CWG concurred that a reduction in buffering may be appropriate, but that range was 100-300 feet depending on height, size and illumination of the billboard and the specific feature or district needing the buffer.

**Dispersal of billboards.** 65% of the existing billboards do not meet the 500-foot dispersal requirement for billboard structures. Over the years the dispersal requirement changed from 100, to 250, to 500-feet. Dispersion was looked at in terms of size of billboard faces and the speed at which the traffic on the adjacent street moved.

The CWG also recommended potential reductions to a range of 100-300 feet depending on sign characteristics and the character of the area in which it is installed.

**Size of billboards.** 10% of the billboard faces are larger than the 300 square foot maximum now allowed. At one time, our code permitted billboards as large as 672 square feet.

The CWG recommended that the City consider allowing larger signs in industrial areas and was split on whether to allow larger sizes in other billboard-allowed zones.

**Height of billboard structures.** The current maximum height allowed for billboard structures is 30 feet and 45 feet in the PMI district. About half of the existing billboard structures do not meet this standard. A number of billboards were constructed when the height requirement was much greater (at one time a billboard in an industrial zone could be as high as the maximum height allowed in the zone – 100 ft.).

The CWG was divided on whether changes to this standard would be appropriate, some opting for the existing 30 feet, some recommending 35 feet and others wanting to allow more than 35 feet in more districts.