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Alternative Art Gallery wins Allentown zoning board appeal

Digital advertising signs approved for Center Square building, Union Boulevard.

Author: Randy Kraft, WFMZ.com Reporter, RKraft@wfmz.com

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Adams Outdoor Advertising won 2-1 zoning board approval to replace two "static" double-sided billboards that stand next to each other and face both directions of Union Boulevard traffic in east Allentown, with one double-sided digital billboard.

Adams appealed to the zoning hearing board because the city's zoning law does not permit digital billboards to stand within 1,000 feet of each other.

Lois Arciszewski, corporate director of asset development at Adams, said its proposed billboard will be 902 feet from another digital sign that has been approved by the city but not yet erected.

She said that other sign will stand along Long Drive, which runs between Dauphin Street and Coca-Cola Park.

Atty. Andrew Ralston, who represented Adams, a hill, trees and a building will be between the billboards, so one won't be visible from the other.

McCarthy noted the other permitted digital billboard does not yet exist. Said Ralston: "Who knows if that sign will ever be constructed?"

Arciszewski said the new billboard will be only half as large as the two now standing at the end of the bridge. She explained the difference is two billboards with exterior lighting will be replaced by one digital board with interior lighting.

Unger liked the fact that the digital sign will be only half the size of the billboards now there.

The fact that the sign will be 98 feet closer to the already-approved sign than allowed by zoning was not considered significant by Unger, especially because the other sign has not been constructed and won't be visible from the Adams sign.

"Relief is warranted," he said.

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Engle agreed, but McCarthy did not. He wanted to uphold the 1,000-foot separation requirement of the zoning ordinance and was concerned about the precedent being set by agreeing to a lesser distance between signs.

The vote for approval was 2-1.

Because of that change in illumination technology, Ralston argued it's not even a zoning issue, because it's just a conversion of existing billboards that already are non-conforming uses.

Arciszewski testified a billboard has stood at the east end of the Tilghman Street Bridge since at least 1950.

She testified that Adams has 1,087 billboards but only 26 of them are digital.

"It's a very strategic process to identify and determine which billboards should be digital," she said, adding it's based on several factors, including traffic counts and visibility from the road.

She said Adams Advertising has four other billboards along the Tilghman Street Bridge, but probably will lose three of them to the Waterfront development planned on both sides of that bridge, along the west bank of the Lehigh River.

She said that's one reason the company has decided to erect a digital billboard at the east end of the bridge.

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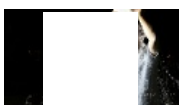


U.S. Army/Sgt. Kimberly Johnson

On this day: August 19

The Indianapolis Motor Speedway hosts its first auto race, The Beatles kick off their first American concert tour, Groucho Marx dies, Mike Tyson returns to the ring, and the last U.S. combat brigade leaves Iraq, all on this day.

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Ed Hanna, Wendy Davis accept Ice Bucket Challenge!



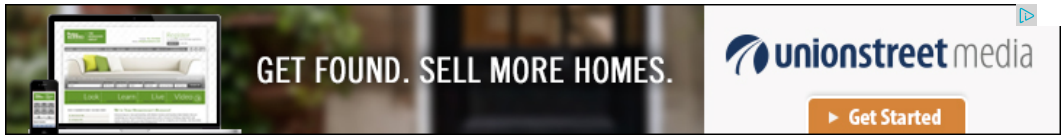
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