

# Outdoor Advertising in Mixed Use Developments

## *A Special Report*

Municipal ordinances related to outdoor advertising have tended historically to be unduly restrictive shaped more by local political pressure than sound public policy. Many of these longstanding but discredited public policies also have been seen by some as a deterrent to new development and economic growth in the nation's urban landscapes. As the outdoor advertising industry continues to evolve, new technology is increasing the range of signage options that can help to bring new life to decaying

urban areas. This evolution in outdoor signage may also create opportunities for inclusion of outdoor advertising in new mixed use development projects that are designed to rebuild the nation's decaying urban infrastructure.

Outdoor advertising is an option for urban planners to consider so that new development restores commerce and attracts new taxpaying residents to live in urban centers, stimulate local economies, and transform an aging community infrastructure into the urban showplaces of the future.

In seeking to assess the opportunities and constraints of including outdoor advertising in new developments springing up across the nation's urban areas, the Foundation for Outdoor Advertising Research and Education (FOARE) to examine and assess the growing trend of urban planners' inclusion of outdoor advertising in mixed use developments.

FOARE recently funded a research study that examined plans for mixed use developments in several urban areas as a way to better understand the potential for including outdoor advertising in these new developments. This research also helps document the use of signage in some of these new urban mixed use developments.



## Observations

As a result of this research, FOARE can offer the following observations and shed new light on issues of interest to the industry and to municipal officials and developers who appreciate the value that signage can bring to creating a robust environment for economic growth in our nation's cities.

1. In general, municipal sign ordinances tend to be restrictive. Local authorities have tolerated these restrictive ordinances over the years because of a mistaken perception that such restrictions protect the visual quality of the city and the safety and well-being of its residents. As cities fall into decay and their local economies suffer, some local authorities are beginning to reassess the economic potential of outdoor signage. Moreover, changes in outdoor advertising, especially the advent of new digital technology, and developer interest in signage as an integral part of mixed use projects has prompted some cities to re-examine or consider reexamining these restrictive sign ordinances.
2. Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) that incorporate commercial and other uses have been established in various communities to allow off-premise advertising. The Minneapolis Block E project is an example. Factors influencing the treatment of signs within PUDs include: the location of the PUD (that is, whether it is located in a downtown, suburban, or more rural area); the pre-existing zoning at the site; how governing bodies generally view billboards and other signs; and the interests and specific plans of the developer.
3. Some developers and local officials believe that digital displays can add interest and vitality to a site. By attracting more people and making the project more commercially viable, outdoor advertising is viewed as helping to enhance the economic vitality and growth of the urban community. Local outdoor advertising industry representatives also embrace this view. Although some developers of mixed use projects are willing to invest heavily in digital displays, others give little thought or show little inclination to include signage in their projects.
4. In general, developers and business district officials are more likely than zoning and other local government officials to appreciate and understand the economic growth potential for grouping or clustering of signs in mixed use developments. That is, there is a belief that a clustering of signs (digital and others) is more likely to have a better impact and have a greater likelihood of achieving an area's economic growth objectives than a single sign.

5. Experience indicates that digital signs within new developments can be used in ways other than commercial advertising. They can be used as a media for public service announcements (PSAs) and to display graphic art competitions, movies, sporting events, and educational documentaries. Such non-commercial purposes alone – or in combination with commercial advertising – are viewed favorably by planning and community development officials and the general public.

### Research Highlights

The experiences of three cities – Minneapolis, Memphis, and New Orleans – with new mixed use development projects offer a blueprint for the industry as it seeks to consider ways to incorporate outdoor advertising in new projects designed to restore and revitalize the nation’s urban landscapes.

### Minneapolis Block E



Block E is adjacent to Minneapolis’ Target Center, home of the Minnesota Timberwolves, Minneapolis’ National Basketball Association (NBA) franchise. Block E and the Target Center are located in the northern part of downtown Minneapolis and are considered part of the city’s Downtown West neighborhood and warehouse district. Since 2001, the block has been developed as an enclosed shopping and entertainment mall containing shops, restaurants, bars, a movie theater, and a 5-star hotel. Block E is also linked to the downtown Minneapolis skyway system, a critical transportation link in the city. The develop-

ment of a new Major League Baseball (MLB) stadium for the venerated Minnesota Twins just northwest of Target Center is expected to bring even more people to the area – expanding Block E’s patronage, commercial activity, and its economic value to residents of the city.

### Signage

Flat and two-sided all-mounted off-premise signs are present on three sides of Block E; the northwestern side of the block contains a hotel, the Hard Rock Café (with its

signature sign), and a Hooters restaurant with one digital sign mounted on the wall between the restaurant and the hotel. There are also roof-mounted signs (digital and static) on the Target Center and the block to the southwest of Block E.



#### *Future Plans*

The developer's architectural model of Block E provides for more wall-mounted signs than currently exist on the structure. Similarly, there are proposals for a digital sign on the northeast corner of Block E and additional roof-mounted digital signs on the adjacent block to the southwest of Block E.

As the theater district matures and with the opening of the new baseball stadium, there will be opportunities for additional off-premise advertising in Block E and in the other two blocks within the District.

#### **Beale Street (Memphis)**



Beale Street is a 3-block area in the southern part of the Memphis downtown. The area is located within the Sports and Entertainment District, one of several districts in the Center City Commission's (CCC) Downtown Development Plan. The 3-blocks of Beale Street are a lively mix of restaurants, bars, gift shops, and other commercial establishments. There is also a small park – the W.C. Handy Park – located in the area. During the day, the area is relatively quiet while crowds and the musical sounds the blues, jazz, country, bluegrass, and gospel are heard late into the night. Beale Street is billed as the state's top tourist attraction. The district is also home to the FedExForum, home of the city's National Basketball Association (NBA) franchise Memphis Grizzlies.

#### *Signage*

For the most part, on-premise signs highlight the 3-block area. However, there is a scattering of off-premise signs within the blocks and within neighboring blocks.

Although there are no digital signs on Beale Street, a digital sign is located on the Rock n' Soul Museum, two short blocks south of Beale. This sign can be seen from the key intersection at Beale and Third.

### *Future Plans*

The downtown development plan for Beale Street calls for extensive improvements to the district, including new hotels and condominium construction projects, Handy Park upgrades, and a garage and retail center. According to the CCC staff and outdoor advertising industry representatives, there are no definite plans yet for the addition of off-premise signs in the area.

But, there is potential for additional off-premise signs at the key intersection of Beale and Third Streets and at either end of the 3-block strip. A digital roof-mounted sign on the one story building at the northeast corner has been proposed. Off-premise signs, including digital could also be used to highlight the two ends of the historic street.

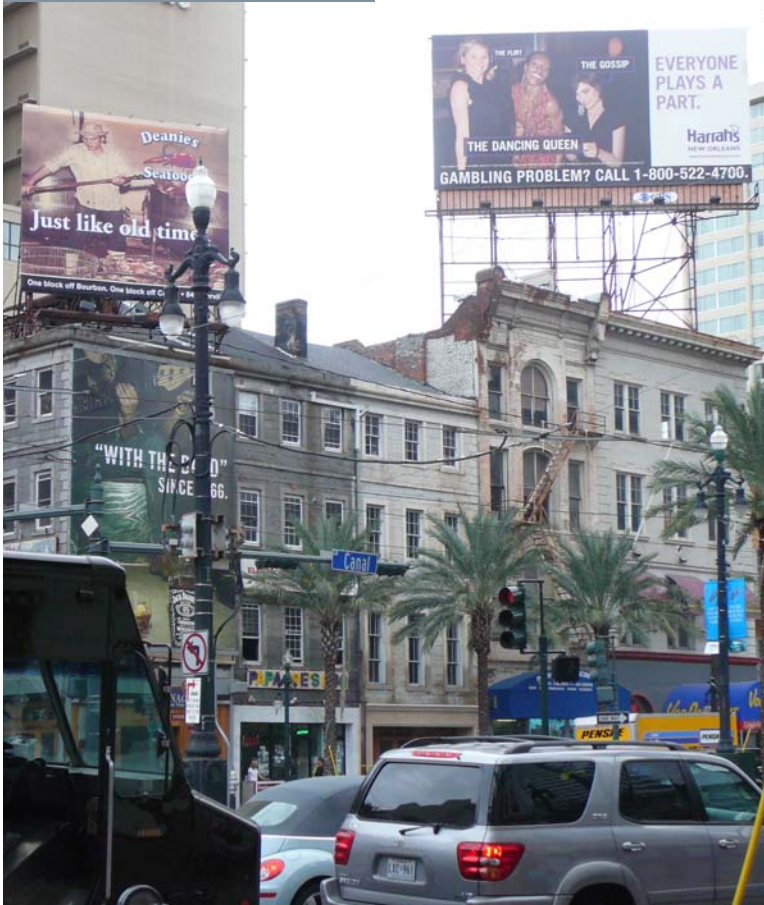
### **Canal Street (New Orleans)**



Canal Street is considered the historic core of the commercial downtown of New Orleans. The blocks along the eastern edge of Canal Street define the eastern edge of New Orleans' Downtown Development District (DDD). Canal also forms the western edge of the French Quarter. The southern end of Canal Street is economically strong dotted with hotels, a casino, an up-scale shopping mall, aquarium, the World Trade Center, one of the largest convention center facilities in the nation, and the tourist potential of the Mississippi River. But, the northern end of Canal Street toward Basin and Rampart streets is typical of so many urban areas that cry out for revitalization. The north-

ern end is characterized by vacant store fronts, abandoned theaters, and marginal business establishments. The section of Canal between Basin and I-10 is predominantly an institutional district.

Tourists and middle class residents who work in the downtown are most likely to be seen along the southern part of Canal while economically disadvantaged residents tend mostly to characterize the northern sections of the street.



### Signage

Although there are a limited number of billboards and signs on buildings in the southern part of Canal, there are more individual billboards beginning midway on Canal Street with a clustering of billboards moving up Canal to Basin. These billboards are largely roof mounted.

### Future Plans

As part of their efforts to strengthen the economic vitality of downtown New Orleans, especially in the wake of the damage caused by Hurricane Katrina, the DDD has made several proposals for improving Canal Street. These proposals include restoring the old streetcar line in the median; new landscaping; improved security; and building renovations aimed at restoring the historical and architectural character of the street. As part of its strategy for economic revitalization, the DDD strategy for enhancing Canal at Rampart-Basin includes the

development of an entertainment district built around several historic theaters. The design concept for the area includes the retention and enhancement of billboards and other signs. In discussions with city officials and the CEO of the DDD, the opportunity to create a "mini-Times Square" could be an important attraction for the city. DDD has been given authority by the city to use its police powers to enforce building and other codes within the district. DDDs. The DDD does not feel that billboards along Canal Street should be removed and in fact is supportive of their concentrated use in the proposed theater-entertainment district near the Canal-Rampart-Basin intersection.

*(Robert W. Marans, Ph.D., AICP, Research Professor, Institute Of Social Research, and Professor Emeritus of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Michigan Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, conducted the research for this report and contributed to the writing of this report.)*

## About Robert W. Marans

Robert W. Marans is a research professor at the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan and an emeritus professor of architecture and urban planning. Prior to his affiliation with the University of Michigan, Dr. Marans taught at Florida State University, Wayne State University, Michigan State University and the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology. He has also worked as a planning consultant, and as a staff planner for the City of Detroit Planning Commission (1957-1961) and the Detroit Regional Transportation and Land Use Study (TALUS) (1965-1968). Dr. Marans is a licensed architect and conducts research on buildings, neighborhoods, housing, parks, and the contributions of each to the quality of life of different population groups. He has written extensively on these topics and has lectured at universities and to civic groups throughout the world.

# FOARE

THE FOUNDATION FOR OUTDOOR ADVERTISING RESEARCH AND EDUCATION