

**To the Mayor and Members of the City Council****January 24, 2023**

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SUBJECT: REMOVAL AND ENFORCEMENT OF BANDIT SIGNS

The City Council requested an update on the removal and enforcement of illegal bandit signs. A bandit sign is typically a sign that is illegally attached to a utility pole or placed in the right-of-way advertising such activities as buying homes, losing weight, working from home, etc.

While there is not dedicated staff to bandit sign removal, field crews in various City departments routinely remove signs in the general course of their operations, such as removing bandit signs while mowing medians. This participation by multiple City departments creates a large positive impact without adversely affecting other services/budget. Primary departments include Development Services, Parks, TPW and Code Compliance. The Police Department will assist as time allows in problem areas (Neighborhood Police Officers).

Sign enforcement is primarily a function of the Development Services Department. This department only has two full-time sign inspectors to cover the entire city. They primarily focus on commercial signage on private property. The Code Compliance Department assists with bandit signs on public property. Since 2010, Code Compliance officers have been doing sweeps, removing signs and doing enforcement. Overall, it is estimated that the City removes more than 40,000 illegal bandit signs each year.

When chronic violators are identified, Development Services, Code Compliance and the Prosecutor's Office work closely on enforcement action. The issuance of a citation requires staff to observe the sign being placed in the right-of-way and issue a citation to the person doing it.

This is a national problem and increasingly we are seeing the use of 800 numbers, disposable phones and shell companies as tactics to avoid enforcement action, not only by the City, but by other taxing entities, fraud investigations, etc. Enforcement is not impossible, but it is very staff-intensive and time-consuming. The most effective response is therefore to remove the signs as soon as possible to minimize any advertising benefit to the unlawful business practice.

In summary, cooperation by multiple City departments allows the City to continue removing illegal bandit signs with limited budget impact. The general public can serve as the City's eyes and ears by reporting chronic violations using the MyFW app, contacting the Call Center at 817-392-1234 or on the City's website at <https://www.fortworthtexas.gov/Home>.

For questions regarding this information, please contact Brandon Bennett, Code Compliance Director at brandon.bennett@fortworthtexas.gov.

David Cooke
City Manager