

**To the Mayor and Members of the City Council****December 1, 2020**

Page 1 of 1

SUBJECT: BANDIT SIGNS

City Council requested an update on the enforcement and removal of “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 or losing weight. Although funding was cut for fulltime bandit sign enforcement in 2010, successful volunteer programs and field crews in various City departments routinely remove signs in the general course of their operations. This participation by multiple City departments results in over 40,000 illegally placed signs being removed from the right of way and a reduction in roadway blight.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Code Rangers assisted with removal of signs in high volume areas, such as Woodhaven, Beach, Basswood, Hulen and Bryant Irvin. In an effort to increase the use of citizen volunteers and promote greater community awareness, the Code Compliance Department allocated a City vehicle for volunteers to use and wrapped the vehicle with the message “Help Keep Fort Worth Beautiful; Pick Up the Illegal Signs!” However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Code Rangers (mostly elderly and retired citizens) have not been able to assist because they are considered high risk individuals for catching the illness. While Code Compliance staff continue to perform limited sign sweeps, their current priority is enforcement of Governor Greg Abbott’s executive orders in response to COVID-19.

When chronic violators are identified, Development Services, Code Compliance and the Prosecutor’s Office work closely on enforcement action. Citations are issued using two approaches. The first requires staff to observe the sign being placed in the right of way and the person doing it receives the citation. The second allows the officer to locate and issue a citation to the business advertising on the sign. 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. 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 in order to minimize any advertising benefit to the unlawful business practice.

While staff are currently focused on the City’s COVID-19 response and the projected uptick through the holidays, all staff have been reminded to remove signs during the course of daily operations (when and where they can). Once a COVID-19 vaccine is distributed and the threat of exposure lessens, the Code Ranger volunteers will once again be able to help remove bandit signs. Citizens can also serve as the City’s eyes and ears by reporting chronic violations to the City’s Call Center at 817-392-1234, on the City’s website, or using the MyFW app.

Given the City Council inquiry and the general uptick of such signs in late November and early December, Code Compliance staff will reach out to other departments and arrange for a post-Thanksgiving sweep of the City. For more information, Brandon Scott Bennett, Code Compliance Director is available at (817) 392-6322.

David Cooke
City Manager