

MVSNA



MOUNT VERNON SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Board of Directors

May 15, 2009

President

Cary Silverman

The Hon. Linda K. Argo

First Vice President

Si Kaillian

Director

Department of Consumer & Regulatory Affairs

941 North Capitol Street, NE, Suite 7200

Washington, DC 20002

Second

Vice President

DeeDee Slewka

Re: Removal of Illegal Billboards

Corresponding

Secretary

Jonathan Cohen

Dear Director Argo:

Recording

Secretary

Jefferson Parke

I was pleased to be among the community leaders in attendance at the Ft. McNair Officer's Club on Tuesday when the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) was recognized by the Federation of Citizens Associations for most improved public agency, particularly highlighting its shutting down used car lots that did not actually sell cars. The Mount Vernon Square Neighborhood Association (MVSNA) joins the Federation in commending your leadership on that issue and hope it demonstrates a movement toward more consistent enforcement of District laws that are so important to communities. I am writing now to ask you to apply the same spirit of enforcement to an issue that has a similar adverse impacts on our neighborhoods – illegal billboards.

Treasurer

Rob Amos

At Large

Merc Fox

Lydia Goring

Warren McBroom

John Thompson

As you know, for many years the District has had a permanent moratorium on new billboards, also referred to as "special signs." See D.C. Building Code 3107.7.6. There are only thirty-two billboards approved in the District.¹ Nevertheless, there are numerous illegal billboards throughout the District that do not appear on the list. These billboards provide a means for derelict owners of vacant property to receive a handsome profit, serve as a distraction to drivers, and are often a blight on the surrounding neighborhood.

Of particular concern to MVSNA is the billboard located on the north side of the 300 Block of New York Avenue NW. This month, as part of a neighborhood clean up, I personally mowed the two foot high grass, pulled weeds, and picked up at least three lawn-and-leaf-sized bags of soft drink and beer bottles, candy wrappers, and snack food bags, along with half dozen crack bags, along this strip. Our cleanup, however, has the effect of providing an even better view of the illegal billboard attached to the chain-link fence of what may be, not uncoincidentally, one of the 55 or so used cars lot shut down by DCRA. This billboard does not appear on DCRA's list of approved special signs. We have done our part to clean up our neighborhood. Will DCRA do the same and have the sign promptly removed?

¹ A full list, including photographs, is available on DCRA's website at http://dcra.dc.gov/dcra/cwp/view,a,1342,q,599840,dcraNav_GID,1691,dcraNav,%7C33420%7C.asp.

This is not a new issue for DCRA. You may be aware that residents just north of Mount Vernon Square in Shaw, including the Bates Street Civic Association, have repeatedly asked DCRA to remove the illegal billboards located at the intersection of New Jersey Avenue, Fourth Street, and P Street NW. In fact, one neighborhood resident, frustrated by the lack of enforcement by DCRA even after its staff acknowledging the illegality of the billboards, has gone as far as to start a website advocating for their removal. See <http://shawbillboardblight.org>. These massive billboards contribute to illegal parking and squatting. Moreover, they provide a financial incentive for the property to remain vacant for the foreseeable future rather than put into productive residential use that contributes to the safety and aesthetics of Shaw.

There are at least several additional examples of illegal billboards in the Mount Vernon Square and Shaw neighborhoods. These include the billboard on the fence of the vacant lot at Ninth and L Streets NW and the billboard on the side wall of the liquor store at Ninth and P Streets NW. We have attached photographs of each of these illegal billboards. We also question whether the lit signs located on the fence of the parking lot at Fifth and New York Avenue NW (southwest corner) are considered unpermitted special signs.

MVSNA would appreciate DCRA's removal of these illegal boards at its earliest opportunity or its requiring the property owners to do so. We ask that you keep us apprised as to whether you intend to enforce District law in these instances and an anticipated time table for action. It is an opportunity for DCRA to continue to live up to the spirit of the Federation's award and, as you commented on Tuesday, have an agency deserving of receiving such accommodation again in 2010.

With appreciation,



Cary Silverman
President

cc: The Hon. Theresa Sule (ANC 2C04)
The Hon. Anita Bonds (ANC 5C01)
Jim Berry, President, Bates Area Civic Association
Andrew Huff & Francisco Simbres, Ward 2 Outreach Coordinator
Alice Thompson, Ward 5 Outreach Coordinator
Emily Yates, Coordinator, Ward 2, Office of Planning



Illegal billboard on used car lot on the 300 Block of New York Avenue NW (north side).



Illegal billboard at the intersection of New Jersey Avenue, 4th and P Streets NW.



Illegal billboard on vacant lot at 9th and L Streets NW on the site of the future Marriott Convention Center hotel.



Illegal billboard on liquor store at 9th and P Streets NW