

## **COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE - FEBRUARY 28, 2012**

### **REDUCING “PLACARD SIGN” PROLIFERATION ON CITY ROAD ALLOWANCES**

#### **Recommendation**

The Commissioner of Engineering and Public Works, in consultation with the Commissioner of Legal & Administrative Services, recommends that this report be received for information.

#### **Contribution to Sustainability**

Achieving a reduction in the volume of placard signs placed, or eliminating the issue altogether, contributes to sustainability by lessening the environmental impact associated with the removal of this illegal advertising in the future and reducing the litter and debris the signs generate.

#### **Economic Impact**

There is no economic impact arising from the recommendations contained within this report.

#### **Communications Plan**

N/A

#### **Purpose**

To update Council on staff efforts to reduce or eliminate the proliferation of placard signs throughout the City.

#### **Background - Analysis and Options**

In May of 2010, staff was directed to prepare a report addressing sign proliferation in residential areas.

In 2011, two Equipment Operator I positions were added to the staff complement in the Public Works Department to increase the department's ability to manage road sign installations and repairs throughout the City. As part of the justification for these two new positions, the removal of placard signs was made part of the Roads Division's duties.

This report outlines actions taken to date and staff's proposed plan for managing nuisance placard signs in the City.

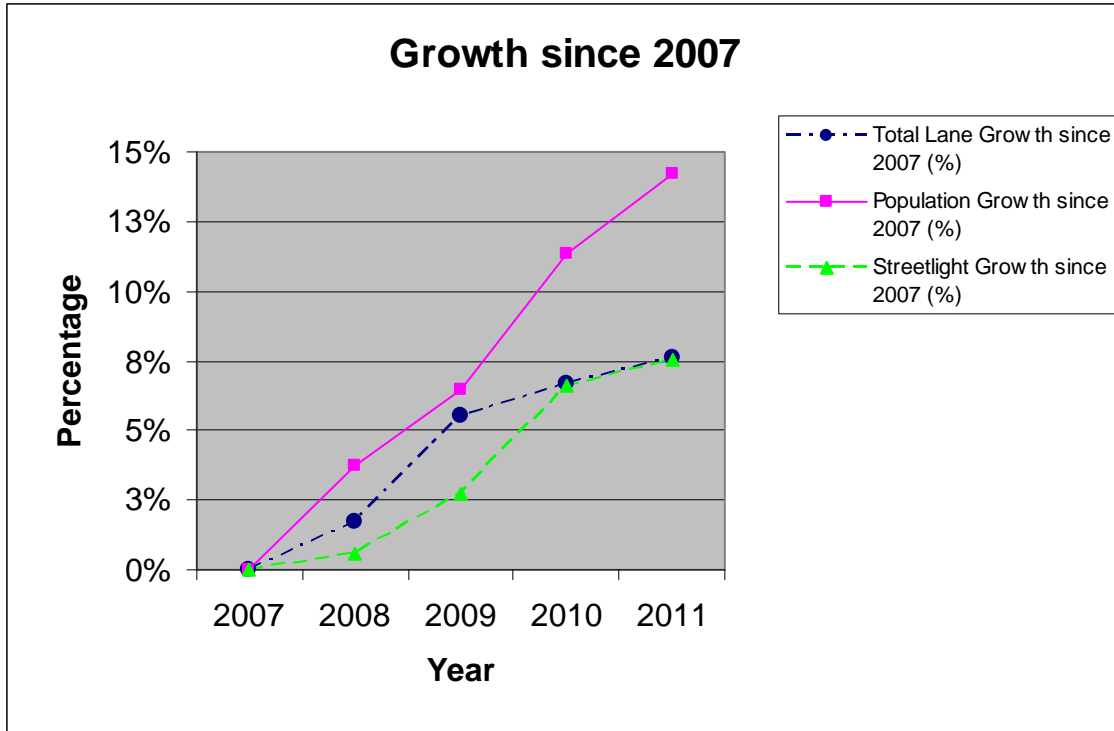
#### **Opportunities for Illegal Placard Signs are Increasing**

The proliferation of placard signs continues to be a major challenge for the City of Vaughan, the Region of York and other Greater Toronto Area (GTA), municipalities. These signs negatively impact the urban environment aesthetically and the nuisance signs undermine streetscape efforts by municipalities.

Placard signs are a quick, easy and inexpensive form of advertising. They are easy to attach and difficult to remove. The increase in placard signs appears related to growth, in the City of Vaughan, and in York Region. As the roadway network has increased, so has the number of 'opportunities' at streetlight poles, traffic signal poles and municipal/regional signs. Staff estimate that for each new kilometre of roadway constructed, the City gains approximately twenty streetlight poles, 10 street signs and poles, and additional traffic signal poles. These structures

provide surfaces to affix advertising. Parties wishing to promote a product or service are taking advantage of the simplest and cheapest method to target potential customers.

The following graph shows the continued growth of the road network, streetlight poles and population since 2007.



The rate at which nuisance signs are placed far exceeds the City's current ability to remove the advertising.

#### Enforcement Services

Past efforts by Enforcement Services staff have had limited short term impacts. Enforcement Services' priorities do not allow for anything more than occasional 'blitzes' to remove placard signs, and they reappear just as quickly. Charging and prosecuting offenders presents challenges because often the sign contains little information to identify the offender, other than a cell phone number.

In July 2006, Enforcement Services launched the "Sign Off Initiative". Staff undertook a pilot program focused on cleaning placard and sticker signage off the backs of traffic signs and metal street poles. Illegal signs were scraped off, and an oily substance was applied, whose residue prevented new signs from sticking to the pole. Approximately 1600 intersections were targeted, with approximately 4,000 placard signs being removed and at least that many stickers scraped from traffic signs. York Region participated in the program, contributing 32 staff hours.

The pilot project's success was limited, as the oily substance needs to be re-applied every 5 months. Also, stickers started to be placed beyond the reach of Enforcement Officers, making their removal more difficult and dangerous.

The following data from Enforcement Services provides an insight into the extent of the problem:

A 3 day effort resulted in the following:

1,071 – Stickers removed  
17 – Bag signs removed  
40 – Placards removed  
257 - Poles cleared and applied with sticker inhibitor  
168 - Sign backings cleared and applied with sticker inhibitor  
54 - Intersections cleared

Other sign removal “blitzes” were carried out with the following results:

Jul 2009 - Nov 2009

326 stickers removed from Ward 4  
87 stickers removed from Ward 5  
Bag signs removed – 8,493 (Citywide)  
Placard signs removed – 6,588 (Citywide)

Jan 2010 - Sep 2010

72 stickers removed from Ward 1  
455 stickers removed from Ward 2  
686 stickers removed from Ward 3  
456 stickers removed from Ward 4  
202 stickers removed from Ward 5  
Bag signs removed – 5,507 (Citywide)  
Placard signs removed – 3,308 (Citywide)

2011 Jan - Dec (City wide)

Bag signs removed - 5995  
Placard signs removed - 1958

### York Region’s Experience

The Region of York recently completed an analysis of the placard sign issue that looked at several alternatives to reduce or eliminate the problem. The alternatives the Region considered included:

1. Maintaining current staff levels and targeting only the most problematic locations
2. Retaining external contracted services to assist with nuisance sign removal
3. Cost-sharing with local municipalities to provide additional By-law enforcement staff
4. Hiring two additional internal staff to provide the resources necessary to address the nuisance sign issue

The Region adopted the fourth alternative because it provided the most benefit at the least cost. Region staff indicated that approximately 18,000 signs have been removed from Regional infrastructure to date.

### Short Term Solutions

Until 2011, nuisance signs were largely dealt with by roads maintenance crews during non-winter months. The following shows the approximate proportion of staff time spent on road maintenance activities during the non-winter period:

- (5%) Ditching including culvert maintenance/replacement and sod replacement

- o (2.5%) Rural roadside grass cutting and vegetation maintenance
- o (2.5%) Guide rail repairs
- o (10%) Contract inspection (curb & sidewalk, mill & pave, interlock, crack sealing, etc.)
- o (25%) Road platform maintenance (large and small asphalt repairs, pothole patching, rural road maintenance, grading, shoulder repair, etc.)
- o (30%) Street sweeping, debris and litter clean-up
- o (5%) Sidewalk maintenance, repair and grinding
- o (15%) Sign installation and repair
- o (5%) Road patrol and inspection

In 2010, 210 hours of roads maintenance staff time was dedicated to nuisance sign removal.

In 2011, it was decided to supplement the time allocated by roads maintenance staff, through the addition of sign maintenance crew time to the task of nuisance sign removal. Sign maintenance crews now erect and maintain City signing, and assist in nuisance sign removal. Two additional sign maintenance crew members were approved in the 2011 Roads operating budget. These new additional staff were hired in 2011.

In 2011, roads maintenance staff spent 145 hours, and sign maintenance staff spent 825 hours removing nuisance signs, for a total of 970 hours dedicated to this activity.

It is estimated that 1750 hours of sign crew and roads maintenance staff time will be dedicated to nuisance sign removal in mid 2012.

#### Longer Term Strategy

The Public Works Department is reviewing other routine maintenance programs for 2012 to determine if any of the existing complement of summer students could be assigned to nuisance sign removal for an extended period over the summer to increase the time allotted for nuisance sign removal. Public Works typically hires five to six summer students each year during the summer break to assist with various maintenance activities. These activities include grass trimming around guide rails in the rural areas, litter and debris pick up, assisting with asphalt repairs, culvert repairs, and performing other general labouring duties. Depending on the results of the 2012 summer student reassignment, Public Works may request additional funding in the 2013 Operating Budget to hire 2 additional Summer Students, whose duties would be dedicated solely to removal of placard signs. This would be a matter for budget consideration in 2013 and beyond.

Staff are currently preparing the new tender document for the provision of regulatory and non-regulatory road signs. Included in the tender is a provisional cost for these signs to come with an anti-graffiti coating. On a go forward basis, and depending on the additional cost, all new regulatory signs may be ordered with this coating. It is anticipated that such a coating will assist crews in removing both the placard signs and spray painted graffiti from such signs.

Roads staff will continue to report back to Enforcement Services with respect to the names of companies, where these are identified on the face of the signs, whose signs have been found and removed. By working together, both departments contribute to the overall success of this initiative.

#### **Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan**

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council.

Reducing or eliminating illegal signs on City road allowances, prioritizing work assignments, and introducing efficiencies and process improvements, conforms with the following Vaughan Vision 20/20 Goals and Objectives:

Goal: Service Excellence  
Objective: Demonstrate Excellence in Service Delivery  
Objective: Promote Community Safety, Health & Wellness  
Objective: Lead and Promote Environmental Sustainability

Goal: Organizational Excellence  
Objective: Manage Corporate Assets  
Objective: Ensure a High Performing Organization

### **Regional Implications**

The management of illegal placard and sticker signs on Regional roads is the responsibility of the Region of York. As discussed in an earlier section, the Region recently hired additional staff to deal strictly with the removal of nuisance signs.

The recommendations contained in this report support a co-operative and co-ordinated approach to reduce or eliminate the nuisance sign issue on all road allowances throughout the City.

### **Conclusion**

The proliferation of placard and sticker signs throughout the Greater Toronto Area continues to present challenges for municipalities attempting to curb or eliminate the issue. Both Enforcement Services and Public Works continue to attack the problem.

### **Attachments**

None

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