Technical Assistance Panel Report

The Future of Signage in the District of Columbia

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The Future of Signage in the District of Columbia

Washington, D.C.
About ULI Washington
A District Council of the Urban Land Institute

ULI Washington is a district council of ULI – the Urban Land Institute, a nonprofit education and research organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the Institute today has over 30,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use planning and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service.

As the preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local, national, and international industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better communities.

ULI’s mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. ULI Washington carries out the ULI mission locally by sharing best practices, building consensus, and advancing solutions through its educational programs and community outreach initiatives.

About the Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program

The objective of ULI Washington’s Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) program is to provide expert, multidisciplinary advice on land use and real estate issues facing public agencies and nonprofit organizations in the Washington Metropolitan area. Drawing from its extensive membership base, ULI Washington conducts one and one-half day panels offering objective and responsible advice to local decision makers on a wide variety of land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions. The TAP program is intentionally flexible to provide a customized approach to specific land use and real estate issues. Learn more at http://washington.uli.org/TAPs.

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Acknowledgments

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Overview and Panel Assignment

While the primary role of signs in cities is to relay information, signs can also help define the aesthetics of a place and contribute to a person’s experience in a particular neighborhood or city. People rely on signs every day to help them navigate or understand their surroundings, and businesses depend on signs to promote their brand and attract customers. At the same time, signs can help create a cohesive identify for a neighborhood or give a bustling commercial district a vibrant, “24-hour” feel.

For cities around the world, regulating signs and making decisions about the “right” type, size and character of signage can be challenging because of the subjective nature of the issue: what is considered modern and lively to some might be seen as gaudy or distracting by others. For this reason, many signage experts believe that planning for and regulating signs is all about striking the right balance, between too much and too little and between commercial and community interests.

As the nation’s capital, Washington D.C.’s historic character is central to the city’s design and identity. While it is essential to preserve and protect that historic character, D.C. also has a number of emerging commercial districts and redeveloping neighborhoods where there is potential for a different urban aesthetic: one that is modern and helps define the District as a creative, green and international metropolis. At the same time, technology advances have brought about new forms of digital and interactive signs that are being used throughout the world. These emerging technologies require cities to take a fresh look at how to plan for and regulate new types of media. Last, given the growing financial constraints faced by public agencies, cities are increasingly developing partnerships for advertising in public spaces and are weighing the benefits and trade-offs related to the commercialization of street furniture and other public goods.

The District of Columbia is currently undertaking a review and update of its signage regulations and is also interested in developing a visionary plan for signage in D.C. At present, there is no citywide framework that guides the role of commercial and public signage in enhancing local culture, strengthening neighborhood and citywide identity, promoting artistry and helping to reinforce and diversify the District’s brand. The D.C. Office of Planning is exploring these issues so that it can be proactive about planning for high-quality signage and respond strategically to inquiries about signs that are currently not addressed or not permitted by the city sign code.

As part of its exploration of these issues, the Office of Planning engaged ULI Washington to conduct a two-day Technical Assistance Panel, where a multidisciplinary team of experts interviewed stakeholders and developed a set of recommendations in response to a series of questions, shown on the following page. In addition to the TAP, this project also included background research and interviews on the best practices in signage design and regulation from around the world (see Appendix B for a list of interviewees).

The findings and recommendations provided in this report are based on the collective expertise of the panel and on information learned from the briefing materials, tour of city districts, sponsor presentations, and roundtable discussions conducted during the panel’s two-day effort. The report also integrates the findings of the research on national and international best practices, conducted before and after the TAP. This project seeks to lay the foundation for a more strategic approach to decision-making about building wraps and other mega-signs, electronic signs, wayfinding signs and other forms of signage that have the potential to define and enliven D.C.’s unique districts and neighborhoods. The panel recommendations and research are organized under three themes, which correspond to the questions posed by the Office of Planning. These themes are: 1) Signage Design and Regulation; 2) Revenue Opportunities; and 3) Signage in Public Places and Social Spaces.
Note on Legal Considerations:
There are a broad range of legal considerations for regulating signs and advertising including issues related to free speech, the distinction between regulating content and design, and limitations on the amount of permit fees or fines. The material presented in this report has not been vetted or reviewed by legal experts. For general information about legal considerations related to signage, ULI Washington recommends the following resources:


The term “signage” is used broadly in this report to include: on-premise business signs; public signs such as wayfinding placards; outdoor advertising such as billboards or bus shelter posters; and sponsorship of public facilities or amenities. (Fruitvale image from Emily Badger, The Atlantic Cities, Kiosk image from FranceHouseHunt.com)
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL QUESTIONS

Signage Design and Regulation
Based on the view that signs have become a cultural component of the cities we build and experience; what decision-making framework (guidelines/regulations) will assist the District of Columbia in building on its historic and urban character, and also in tapping the latest in artistic and technological innovations? What is the role of design review in signage decisions? What are the costs and benefits of a design review system?
   a. What modern, artistic, creative or unusual forms of signage are being used in other cities around the world? What was the regulatory or approval framework behind them?
   b. How are districts or zones used in other cities to maintain historic or neighborhood character in some places, and permit or promote large, creative signs or advertisements in others?
   c. How have other cities handled the enforcement of the Highway Beautification Act within the urban area? Are there examples of major U.S. cities that have been exempted and, if so, under what conditions?
   d. How have other cities addressed/regulated “Full Motion Video” relative to traffic safety?
   c. How have other cities defined and regulated the difference between art and advertising?

Signage Revenue Opportunities
How should the District structure its signage fees? What kind of workable enforcement mechanism can be put in place to optimize the public benefit received from commercial signage?
   a. Which US cities have signage fees and enforcement structures that are working well and doing a good job of generating revenue? How much money are they generating for the community and what is the money targeted for?
   b. Are there general “rules of thumb” or industry standards for determining the value of commercial advertising space in private commercial settings, such as central spaces in shopping malls or gallerias? Can these fees be considered comparable for what might be charged for advertising space in public spaces?

Signage in Public Places and Social Spaces
How should the District evaluate proposals for signage and its impacts on public spaces? Are there places where the District should promote or pursue particular types of signs or kiosks in public space if they provide public information as well as aesthetic and financial benefits? What role can bus shelters and bikeshare stations play in contributing positively to the urban form and in generating revenue?
   a. What studies exist that establish a basis for charging for advertising on transportation facilities – on bus shelters, bikeshare stations, train stations and tunnels, and on vehicles?
   b. What are the best practices for kiosks and interactive displays that combine advertising and public/visitor information and are located in or visible from public spaces? How are they structured and what are the terms?
   c. Which cities successfully repurpose commercial signage infrastructure during emergency/crisis management (e.g. evacuation routes) or for public service announcements?
Findings and Recommendations

Before responding to the specific questions posed by the D.C. Office of Planning, the ULI Technical Assistance Panel made three general observations related to signage regulation. First, they asked the question: Do more regulations necessarily lead to better places? Many of the most interesting and vibrant neighborhoods in North America came about before there was any control on development¹, and the varied combination of neon and three-dimensional signs, window displays, awnings and banners in these places adds to their charm, authenticity and identity. While some regulations are needed to maintain the safety and quality of the public realm, overly prescriptive regulations can stifle creativity and lead to more generic or bland urban districts. The panel suggested that a core principle of this effort should be to simplify the sign code where possible and to identify the “sweet spot” for each neighborhood between an orderly and a chaotic urban aesthetic.

Second, the panel noted that the District is in the midst of a transition, caused largely by the steady trend of highly-educated, young people moving to D.C. As commercial districts grow and change in order to cater to this influx of young, hip urban dwellers, the boundaries between neighborhoods are shifting. At the same time, D.C. faces a unique challenge that makes it complicated to define the character of the city: the tension between federal and city influences. While the federal character is more stately and subdued, many of the neighborhoods outside of the federal core have an edgier and more


modern local aesthetic. The panel thought that the District’s character was best defined as a “hybrid” of these styles; D.C. is both a grand federal city as well as a modern, international, multi-district metropolis. City regulations should recognize this hybrid character and create space for both elements to thrive.

Third, after touring the city during the TAP, the panel agreed that the biggest issue facing Washington D.C. regarding signage does not appear to be a proliferation of poor-quality, decrepit or illegal signs, but instead a lack of excellence in signage. In many other cities around the world, high-quality commercial signs that have an artistic, sculptural, historic or other creative quality greatly enhance streets and plazas, making them memorable and interesting places to visit. D.C. needs to develop an approach to signs that encourages more outstanding signage while still preserving the historic character in and around the monumental core.

With these guiding principles in mind, the ULI panel made the following recommendations, which are explained further in the next section of this report:

**Sign Design and Regulation**

1. Embrace the Concept of Districts
2. Simplify the Approval Process and the Regulations
4. Integrate Signs into Locally Tailored Urban Design Plans for Sub-Districts

**Signage Revenue Opportunities**

5. Capture More Value from Large Signs
6. Reevaluate the Special Sign Program

**Signage in Public Spaces and Social Spaces**

7. Improve Consistency of Wayfinding and Regulatory Signs
8. Explore More Options for Sponsorship of Street Furniture and Other Public Goods
9. Include Public Information in Outdoor Advertising Deals

**Future Vision**

10. Create a Visioning Group to Think Proactively about Iconic Landmarks
11. Implement Pilot Programs
Sign Design and Regulation

Recommendation 1: Embrace the concept of districts

Because of the hybrid nature of Washington D.C.’s character, a one-size-fits-all set of standards will not allow for the type of local place-making that is desired in the District. The “right” amount and type of signage in each place should be based on the size and scale of the buildings and streets, the historic nature of the area, and the mix of commercial, residential and other uses. In other words, the design approach should be defined by the character (existing or envisioned) of each neighborhood. For this reason, the panel believes that D.C. should continue to incorporate “signage districts” into its regulations.

D.C. is currently considering a proposed new title that would update and make changes to this city’s sign code (proposed title 32174). One of the proposed changes is to create four “Designated Entertainment Areas” at the Gallery Place Project, the Verizon Center, the Southwest Waterfront and the Ballpark Area, where new types of signs would be allowed. The panel believes that this proposal is moving in the right direction but suggests that there may be other neighborhoods or types of districts that could also benefit from a tailored approach to signage. While it was beyond the scope of this project to identify specific new sign districts in D.C., the panel noted several approaches that are being used successfully in other U.S. cities that may be worth further consideration in Washington D.C.

For example, the City of Boston regulates signs individually for 22 different districts, which can be either more restrictive or more permissive than the general sign code. In New York City, sign regulations are based on zoning districts. Typical business signs are permitted in all commercial districts while advertising signs are permitted only in certain commercial districts, with size limitations ranging from a maximum of 150 square feet in neighborhood commercial districts to unlimited in Times Square. The Los Angeles Sign Code uses a three-tiered system that includes: 1) baseline regulations that apply in most areas, 2) special rules for large development projects that have an adopted Comprehensive Sign Program, and 3) unique regulations for “the most commercially intense 1% of properties which can be designated as Sign Districts.” Certain types of signs such as digital billboards are only allowed in designated Sign Districts and only places classified in the zoning as a “Downtown Center, Regional Center or Regional Commercial Area” are eligible to become Sign Districts. In order to achieve this designation, the districts

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2 Presentation, “New York City Zoning Resolution Sign Regulation Overview, Training for ECB Judges,” New York City Planning Department, 10/18/2012.
must meet specific criteria and go through individual and extensive public review processes.³

Another special type of sign district that may be worth further consideration in Washington D.C. would apply to “gateway” arterials or entrance corridors. These streets are particularly critical to maintaining and enhancing the image of the entire city and thus may warrant tailored guidelines for business signs or advertising. Depending on the character of the area, sign regulations in entrance corridors might be more restrictive in order to maintain the highest-quality urban aesthetic, or in certain instances such as New York Avenue, they may allow for larger, more creative signs that are oriented to drivers and transit passengers. In one example, Bozeman, Montana has designated seven arterial streets as “entryway corridors” and developed special guidelines for each one, addressing signage, building design, site layout and other urban design elements in an integrated way.⁴

Recommendation 2: Simplify the approval process and the regulations

Based on their conversations during the stakeholder interviews and on their past experience, the panel suggests that shortening and simplifying the approval process for signs in D.C. should be a key objective for the District. The current process involves review by Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, the District Department of Transportation, often the Advisory Neighborhood Commission and in some cases the Commission on Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission. While each of these organizations has an important role to play related to sign approval, the multi-step process creates a level of unpredictability that the panel believes stifles creativity. In other words, merchants and developers in D.C. are less likely to propose creative or interesting signs because they fear a long and expensive process.

In addition to simplifying the process, the District should make the sign regulations themselves more transparent and user-friendly. The panel recognizes that one of the changes recently proposed in Title 32174 is to consolidate the sign regulations into a single, unified title, removing them from various sections of the Building Code and Municipal Regulations. This is a commendable step toward improving clarity. Additionally, the panel recommends creating a “picture-book”

that would use images and diagrams to show what is allowable in the signage regulations. D.C. could create a graphical version of the regulations themselves, as was recently done in Arlington County, or the picture book could supplement the code.

Additionally, the panel learned during the stakeholder interviews that getting permits for signs for temporary events such as marathons and community festivals can be a lengthy and unpredictable process. The panel recommends a short and simple process for approving temporary event signs, accompanied by increased enforcement to ensure that signs do not create safety concerns and are removed in a timely manner.

**Recommendation 3: Permit more signs as-of-right and create an integrated review process for signs that go further**

For traditional “on-premise” business signs, the panel recommends broadening the regulations to allow more types of signs to be permissible as-of-right, with only staff review. This would help shorten the review process, making it more predictable for some types of signs and allowing for more creativity in design. For signs not approved as-of-right (e.g. those that are larger, brighter, etc), D.C. should aim to create a “One Stop Shop” for design review and approval. The panel envisions this “One Stop Shop” as a committee or review board that integrates all the local agencies that play a role in sign review, including D.C. Office of Planning, DCRA, DDOT and HPRB. The One Stop Shop should also include federal partners (CFA and NCPC) and non-governmental representatives who are environmental graphics professionals, urban designers and/or architects.

This process would give applicants a choice: either design a sign according to the baseline standards or go through a review process where there is more flexibility, but less certainty. Having a centralized and multi-disciplinary design review body would promote efficiency and lead to better coordination over issues including safety, historic preservation and design. This centralized board would also allow for an integrated review of all design-related elements of a proposal, including not only signs but also all of the public and private space elements of development projects. To add further predictability to the process, the ULI panel recommends that the One Stop Shop limit the review period to 30 days total.

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5 DDOT: Washington D.C. Department of Transportation  
NCPC: National Capital Planning Commission  
CFA: United States Commission of Fine Arts  
HPRB: Historic Preservation Review Board  
DCRA: Washington D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs
Recognizing that design review is inherently subjective, it may be necessary to create criteria or standards on which the board’s decisions will be based. In “Context Sensitive Signage Design” (2001), the American Planning Association discusses how these design review standards can work:

“For example, the (baseline) standard for a projecting sign might consist of a maximum allowable area of 10 square feet. This would probably produce a simple, rectangular sign, maximizing the copy area. Such a sign might say ‘Sam’s Seafood.’ Under an optional design review process, the sign area could be doubled. But the sign would need to include a unique, eye-catching logo, such as a jumping fish, that would add liveliness to the streetscape. Such a method rewards both merchants and sign producers for creative efforts.”

One example of a sign review process that balances explicit regulations with subjective design review is the “Designer Sign” program that is used in a number of Florida cities. For example in Coral Springs, FL, Designer Signs must be “creative, use quality materials, have a creative use of lighting and have three-dimensionality.” Designer Signs are subject to discretionary review by the city’s sign consultant but may be up to 40 percent larger than what is permitted by code. The city also expedites review of Designer Sign applications, aiming for a three to five week approval timeline.

Another example is the Boston Redevelopment Authority’s Comprehensive Sign Design program, which is designed to encourage “the imaginative integration of signage into the framework of new or existing buildings.” Under this program, the height and area of signs may exceed the regulatory limits if the design is approved by the urban design staff at the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA). The Comprehensive Sign Design program seeks to “achieve a complementary and harmonious relationship between the signage and the architecture of the building” and for this reason, the total exterior design treatment for the façade is reviewed collectively. For significant projects, proposals are also reviewed by the Boston Citizen Design Commission, a board of citizens and design professionals that

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8 Boston Redevelopment Authority Design Review website, http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/bcdc/design_review.asp#2
makes recommendations to the BRA on issues that impact the urban design and character of Boston.

**Recommendation 4: Integrate signs into locally tailored urban design plans for sub-districts**

While an important element of urban design, signs alone do not define the character of a street or urban district. Signs are one element of the broader streetscape design and should be planned holistically with other streetscape elements such as building facades, lighting, landscaping and street furniture. With this in mind, the panel recommends integrating sign design into local urban design plans that would be tailored for each neighborhood. Tailored plans for individual districts should be developed through local multi-disciplinary planning processes involving merchants, commercial tenants and residents in mixed-use districts. These plans would help to reinforce or establish the character of each neighborhood, especially if they led to the adoption of district-specific signage regulations. For example, walkable urban neighborhoods might choose to encourage pedestrian-oriented retail signs that extend perpendicular from the building face, while larger-scale commercial

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**Issue Spotlight: Art vs. Advertising**

Sometimes, the line between art and advertising is blurry. In many cities, including Dallas and Miami, the distinction between art and signage is at the discretion of the Director of Planning, City Manager or a Design Review Board. In other cities, art can contain no commercial logos or words, but this becomes problematic when a private company wants to sponsor a large mural or sculpture, in exchange for a small attribution or logo. In one case in Wellesley, MA, a fast food restaurant painted a mural on the side of their building and, although the mural consisted of images of food and no logos or words, it was deemed to be a sign and was found in violation of the sign code. To address this tricky issue, many cities make the distinction explicit in their regulations. For example, Arlington, VA specifically exempts murals or works of art from compliance with the sign code as follows:

A mural or work of visual art that otherwise meets the definition of “sign” in this Section 34 but that conforms with either of the following standards shall not be subject to regulation under this Section 34:

1. Art that is installed or located in accordance with the Arlington County Public Art Policy; or
2. Art that meets all of the following criteria:
   a. Is located on the wall of a building in any zoning district, but not in “R” districts or RA14-26, RA8-18, RA7-16 or RA6-15; and
   b. Includes no text legible from a public roadway; and
   c. Includes no logo or trademarked symbol; and
   d. Includes no specific commercial product, although it may include such generic products as automobiles, furniture, soft drinks or other items where the brand is not apparent; and
   e. Includes no picture, symbol or device of any kind that relates to a commercial business, product or service offered on the premises where the wall is located.

(Arlington County Sign Ordinance, §34.2)
districts might allow more electronic signs. These sub-district design plans could also include a local branding or wayfinding strategy tailored for each place. While the panel recognized that this recommendation will be expensive and time-consuming to implement, they felt that it could be initiated in one or two pilot areas, and also incorporated into existing and future small area planning efforts (e.g. Great Streets).

Sculptural signs can be difficult to regulate but can be handled through a “designer sign” program similar to that in Coral Springs, FL, as described above.
Signage Revenue Opportunities

This section focuses on fees and partnerships related to signs on private property. Revenue opportunities related to signage in public space are addressed in the next section. Before making specific recommendations about revenue opportunities, the ULI panel proposed two guiding principles that should remain at the heart of this issue. First, in evaluating fee structures and public-private partnerships related to signs, there must always be a shared interest and a mutual benefit for the public and private parties. Neither side should have all of the benefits or responsibilities. Second, since this is a field of practice that is rapidly evolving, the approach used in the District should be reevaluated every few years to ensure that D.C. is using the most appropriate best practices from around the world.

Recommendation 5: Capture more value from large signs

Large signs, including both on-site and off-site messages on billboards, building wraps, construction barricades, wallscapes or murals, often generate significant revenue for a developer or building owner. They can also play a major role in defining the aesthetic and character of a place. While the ULI panel endorses the use of attractive, artistic signs to help enliven commercial and mixed-use districts, the panel was split on the issue of off-site advertising signs, such as billboards. Some panelists felt that billboards are not suitable for the Nation’s Capital, while other panelists felt that these type of signs could add visual interest to the skyline, if used sparingly and scaled appropriately. If the District decides to allow more large offsite advertising signs in the future, the panel agreed that the “right” size and number of these large advertising signs should vary between different sub-districts and should be determined through the local urban design plans recommended above.

Washington D.C. has the opportunity to capture more value from large signs located on private property. Especially for on-site messages (e.g. business signs, “leasing soon” building wraps or construction barricades), there are legal constraints around charging more for fees or permits than is required to administer the sign program. Many cities, however, do not factor in the staff costs associated with the enforcement efforts needed to ensure that the value of code-compliant signs is not lessened by the presence of illegal signs. For off-site advertising, there are a number of U.S. cities that take a unique approach and could serve as models for Washington D.C.

The City of Miami uses a lottery each year to select a limited number of locations for “murals,” which are defined as “a painting or artistic work with a limited or explicit commercial message created on or attached to
a building.” Billboards and building wraps are both addressed through the mural program. The license fee is based on the square footage of the mural but ranges from a minimum of $48,000 to a maximum of $120,000 per year. The city views the program as a form of public-private partnership, where both sectors benefit and also have a responsibility to maintain the quality and character of the city. Miami currently has murals in 33 locations, generating $3.3 million in license fees in 2011. The fee revenue is not earmarked for a specific purpose though it has been primarily used to support the city’s parks and recreation programs.

In many cities, the only public revenue in excess of the administrative costs of the program is generated through penalties related to non-conforming signs. For example, San Francisco charges penalties for general advertising (off-site advertising) that violates the city code. Penalties range from $100 per day for signs less than 100 square feet to $2,500 per day for advertisements over 500 square feet. The panel noted that, in cases where the penalties are set too low compared to advertising revenues, the violator will simply choose to pay the fine as part of their cost of doing business.

There may also be the opportunity to allow more advertising in certain districts and capture a portion of advertising revenues to support local programs. Although the proposition failed, San Francisco attempted to do this in 2009 with Proposition D, which would have created the “Mid-Market Arts Revitalization Sign District.” Within this new zone, new general advertising signs would be permitted. Under the terms of the Proposition D, building owners with arts-related tenants on their ground floor would pay 20 percent of advertising revenue to the local Community Benefit District, which would use the funds to support local arts programs. Buildings without arts-related uses would contribute 40 percent of revenue to the Benefit District.\footnote{San Francisco Mid-Market Arts Revitalization Sign District, Measure D, 2009. http://ballotpedia.org}

The ULI panel suggested that a limited number of temporary building wraps should be allowed each year, as long as they are approved with an explicit time horizon that is limited to the building construction phase, and that there is adequate enforcement. When well-designed, building wraps can add an interesting visual element to a neighborhood and at the same time support real estate development. As long as they are temporary, the panel did not believe that the distinction between on-site and off-site advertising content was particularly important in the case of building wraps. If they include off-site advertising however, they could potentially generate revenue for the city through a licensing system similar to the Miami mural program. While it is not feasible for

In New York, art called “Yellow Trees” by Yayoi Kusama was used as a building wrap during condo construction. Similarly, a building wrap in Saint Mark Square in Venice shows a photograph of the building before and after construction. The advertisement for the construction company is small compared to the graphic element. (image from DDG Partners)
the city to exercise design-control over temporary building wraps, the ratio of text to image should be regulated so that the majority of the content is graphic.

**Recommendation 6: Reevaluate special sign program**

In 2000, the Washington D.C. City Council approved 32 “special signs” containing large-scale advertising content. Later that year, in response to public backlash, the District banned any additional permits for special signs. In the future, should the law be changed to allow additional permits for special signs, the ULI panel recommended implementing a ‘sunset’ clause for special signs and reevaluating the program to ensure that the scale of signs is proportional to the size of the surrounding buildings. They recommended an approach similar to the Paris Billboard program, which allows smaller but more frequent advertising signs that fit in with the scale and character of the surrounding community. Similarly, the ULI panel supported the use of a text:graphic ratio that strictly limits the amount of non-graphic content. For example, Dallas allows a limited number of wallscape advertisements in the downtown commercial district but requires that 92 percent of the sign must be graphics (non-text).

**Issue Spotlight: On-Site vs. Off-Site Advertising**

For large signs that are not temporary, such as most wallscape or billboards, most jurisdictions stipulate that content must be “on-site” advertising, meaning it must relate to the use on the property where the sign is located. The distinction between on-site and off-site has been problematic in many locations; for example in San Francisco, a clothing store rented a small storefront in a building and erected a large billboard advertisement on the side of that building. The storefront did not appear to be occupied but the clothes store claimed it was used for market testing. Similarly in Seattle, there have been cases where airline or coffee companies have posted large advertisements on buildings where their products were not sold but where you could buy a voucher for a flight or coffee.¹

Signage in Public Places and Social Spaces

Recommendation 7: Improve consistency of wayfinding and regulatory signs

At least in principle, an intuitively-designed city or neighborhood district should require minimal navigation signs, and some amount of exploration is a natural part of the urban experience. That said, a simple and clear wayfinding system is critical, especially in cities like Washington D.C. that attract a large number of tourists. For the core area in and around downtown D.C., the ULI panel felt that the existing, “blue” pedestrian wayfinding system was strong and that the only issue could be ensuring consistency over time as new destinations emerge. System-wide regulations for the design, placement and content of those signs would improve the system over time. In local neighborhood districts, the panel felt that unique wayfinding and interpretive signs could be designed for each place as part of the local urban design plan that was recommended above. These sub-district wayfinding systems should be prioritized in the areas immediately surrounding Metro stations, where panelists felt there was a particular lack of directional information.

With regard to regulatory signs, the panel noted that the District would benefit from an effort to remove duplicative or unnecessary signs, particularly those related to parking. Fewer and clearer regulatory signs will allow important information to “pop out” at people, rather than being lost amidst a sea of redundant street signs.
**Issue Spotlight: Signs, Traffic Safety and the Highway Beautification Act**

The Highway Beautification Act (HBA) controls signs located along federal aid primary highways, which include many major urban thoroughfares such as Wisconsin Avenue, Pennsylvania Avenue and many others in the District. In the research and interviews, ULI Washington did not find any cities that have been exempted from the HBA constraints on signage. Planners in Dallas reported having experienced strict enforcement of Highway Beautification Act along their urban federal aid highways and have thus denied the vast majority of sign applications in these areas. New York City has not experienced strict enforcement of HBA related to urban signs, but that is most likely because the city sign code includes size restrictions for signs located within 200 feet of designated arterial highways (and public parks) and prohibits advertising signs in these areas.

In response to controversy about the application of the HBA in urban areas, in 2011 the U.S. Federal Highways Administration published a report on the regulatory practices regarding signs near highways in Australia, Japan and Europe. The study found that in most other countries studied, “highway agencies primarily manage signs in non-urban areas while local authorities usually determine whether and where outdoor advertising may be allowed (e.g., billboards and signs on bus shelters, bicycle racks, or telephone booths)” in urban areas.¹

There has been a particular focus in the industry on the relationship between traffic safety and variable electronic signs such as video signs or scrolling message boards. The national research is divided on this topic. Many studies have shown that signage can lead to driver distraction and traffic delays, yet there is no conclusive evidence linking variable electronic signs and accident rates.² Furthermore, some researchers make the case that signs can help drivers establish bearings and navigate, thus playing an important role in urban wayfinding. In “Context-Sensitive Sign Design,” the American Planning Association makes the case that it is the density of signage, more so than the type of signs, that has the potential to distract drivers or mask important information such as street signs.³

Whether the reason is traffic safety or aesthetics, most cities are relatively restrictive when it comes to permitting variable electronic signs. For example, video signs are prohibited entirely in San Francisco and Arlington County, although both places have examples of “grandfathered” boards that were present before the current regulations went into place. Both cities regularly consider proposals for video boards in certain areas and can allow them via a special exception or zoning ordinance amendment. New York considers video signs to be “flashing signs” and regulates them differently in each zoning district.

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¹ “Outdoor Advertising Control Practices in Australia, Europe and Japan,” USDOT Federal Highways Administration, May 2011
Recommendation 8: Explore more options for sponsorships of street furniture and other public goods

Cities around the world are increasingly exploring partnerships with private companies or advertisers to sponsor public goods and amenities, such as street furniture, parks and public buildings. Washington D.C. currently holds a contract of this type whereby Clear Channel installs and maintains the city’s bus shelters in exchange for the rights to display advertising posters in those shelters. The District receives a portion of advertising revenue from the shelters. D.C. is also considering a similar sponsorship opportunity on its Capital Bikeshare stations, as is done in several European cities including London (see table below). The ULI panel recommended that the District government continue to look for opportunities for private sponsorship of key public goods, so long as these partnerships meet two criteria. First, the sponsorship should enhance the character of the public realm in some way. Second, the sponsorship should generate significant resources or support public programs that would otherwise not be possible. In all cases, the panel recommended shorter-term sponsorship agreements when possible, so that program benefits can be reevaluated every few years.

The panel noted that the Barclays logo on the London Bikeshare bicycles is appropriately scaled and is not the predominant design feature on the bikes. (image from thecityfix.com)

Examples of Advertising Deals funding City Bike Share Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Sponsorship Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paris (1,450 Stations, 20,600 Bikes)</td>
<td>Implemented and operated free of charge to the city by JCDecaux in return for rights to 1,600 advertising locations. JCDecaux also pays the City of Paris €3.5 million a year and a percentage of any revenue raised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyon (400 Stations 4,000 Bikes)</td>
<td>This is a similar deal with JCDecaux, although on a much smaller scale and with a lower prevalence of advertising around the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milan (103 Stations 1,400 Bikes)</td>
<td>The initial investment in the system was funded by the Municipality of Milan but Clear Channel operates it using revenues generated via external advertising displays. As of 2011, there were 206 free standing backlit advertising kiosks in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London (400 Stations 7,000 Bikes)</td>
<td>Barclays bank was awarded sponsorship rights to both the London scheme and to “cycle superhighways” which are dedicated cycle lanes in the city. Barclays agreed to pay £25 million over five years. The sponsorship deal entitles Barclays to name the scheme, design the bikes’ branding space and brand accompanying marketing and communications material. The bank’s corporate insignia is also stamped on maintenance support vehicles and uniforms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In some areas within D.C., there is a need for increased or improved bike racks, recycle bins, trash cans, community calendars, information kiosks or public art. The panel felt that it was worth exploring whether these needed amenities could be funded through private sponsorships, as long as the sponsor logo was appropriately sized. An excellent example of this type of subtle branding exists in New York City’s Bryant Park, where sponsorships generated $987,700 in operating funds for the park in 2010. Bryant Park is managed entirely by a private entity, The Bryant Park Corporation. In Bryant Park, sponsoring companies have their brands displayed on information kiosks, a café, umbrellas and ping pong tables, but the size of the commercial attribution has been minimized to ensure that the overall look and feel of the park is not dominated by commercial brands.


Corporate sponsorship generates approximately 12 percent of the annual operating budget in New York City’s Bryant Park, but logos are kept small. (photos from Dan Biederman, Bryant Park Corporation)
In deals similar to Washington D.C.’s bus shelter arrangement, many cities are entering into partnerships with advertisers to install digital kiosks on city property. While there may be limited locations in D.C. where this could work, the panel noted that sponsors and advertisers will be most attracted to locations in the city with the most foot-traffic, which primarily include downtown locations near Metro stations, events venues, etc. In these places, however, the sidewalks are typically extremely crowded during events and there may not be room for additional street furniture such as advertising kiosks. The panel felt that pedestrian space should be prioritized over advertising opportunities in these crowded locations. Through the research and interviews, ULI Washington also learned that these programs can be time-intensive for city staff to administer, at least initially. For example, Dallas has a deal with Viacom whereby the city is guaranteed a minimum of $21.3 million over twenty years for permission to install digital advertising kiosks throughout the city. While the program has been highly successful from a financial perspective, planners in Dallas noted that senior planning staff spent one day per week for almost a year reviewing and approving kiosk locations.

The following pages show a number of examples of modern, creative or unusual forms of advertising that are being applied in cities around the world. They are included here as examples, not as recommendations for Washington, D.C.
Interactive Message Boards can be installed on sidewalks and in other public spaces and operate similarly to a personal tablet device, only on a larger scale. The touch screen allows users to search maps, make purchases and access the internet.

San Francisco has an outdoor advertising deal with JCDecaux whereby the company provides two public toilets for every nine advertising kiosks it installs on city streets. To date there are 25 public toilets throughout the city. The company also pays a $35,000 annual administrative fee to the city as well as a portion of advertising revenue when sales exceed certain levels.¹

In New York, an ad campaign projected an ‘audio spotlight’ from directional speakers above a billboard, which is only heard by individuals as they walk through the spotlight location. (image from AudioSpotlight, holosonics.com)²

¹ Sullivan, Kathleen, “Neighborhoods want more JCDecaux toilets,” SFGate.com, 11/17/98
This ad campaign in Paris for Contrex water featured a projection and sound system powered by bicycles. These type of building projections, or “spectaculars” tend to be done without permits or through special exceptions.

These media columns in Seoul, Korea include advertising, public information and double as street lights.¹

This digital display system is embedded in a newsstand in Times Square. The information is a 50/50 mix of third-party advertising (including hyper-local advertising for events in the Times Square area), and dynamically driven information such as transit updates, news, sports, weather and event promotions.²

Recommendation 9: Include public information in outdoor advertising deals

Based on the feedback from the stakeholder roundtables, the ULI panel specifically recommended identifying new locations to promote Washington D.C.’s abundant cultural, educational and arts events to residents and visitors. In particular, it may be beneficial to find additional advertising opportunities for Events DC, the organization that manages the Convention Center, RFK Stadium and several other large venues. If Washington D.C. decides to pursue any additional forms of digital outdoor advertising, the ULI panel recommended that some amount of public information be included as part of the deal, in order to ensure that there is a significant community benefit realized from advertising in public spaces. In addition to information about upcoming events, outdoor media could provide real time transit or traffic updates, local maps, public service announcements or even evacuation or other emergency-related information.

There are a number of examples where cities have incorporated a public information requirement into their deals with outdoor advertising companies. For example, the contract in Dallas with Viacom requires that one panel on each three-sided advertising kiosk is dedicated to public information such as maps, events calendars or public service announcements. During the 2012 outbreak of West Nile Virus in Texas, the advertising company went beyond their requirement and rotated messages about mosquito spraying on many of the kiosks downtown. This was not accomplished through a formal agreement but instead was viewed by both parties as “good corporate citizenship.” In a busy shopping district in Seoul Korea, a strip of cylindrical advertising towers, or “media poles,” display a mix of media art (50%), public service messages (20%) and advertising (30%).11 The poles also double as street lights and feature a touchscreen where people can access Google Maps.

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Future Vision

Recommendation 10: Create a visioning group to think proactively about iconic landmarks

While changing the sign regulations and approval process could help encourage creativity in the type of business signs that make up the majority of signage in the city, it is unlikely to instigate the most significant, large-scale, iconic forms of signs that can become landmarks for a particular neighborhood. Landmark signs could come in many forms, including murals, sculpture, digital media or projected images on a building, and their commercial message could be either overt or inconspicuous. If strategically placed, a limited number of landmark signs could add dimension to the city’s character and help define some of its emerging neighborhoods as distinct destinations.

If the District is interested in exploring these types of large-scale commercial icons for one or more neighborhoods, the ULI panel recommended forming a task force or visioning group to think proactively about potential locations, parameters and partnership arrangements related to landmark signs. Tackling this issue proactively will allow the city to explore how different types of landmark signs would influence the “brand” of certain neighborhoods and the city, making it possible to respond strategically to individual proposals or concepts.

Examples of iconic landmark signs include the Ghirardelli sign in San Francisco, Galleria Mall in Seoul, which makes a strong architectural statement, and several of D.C.’s murals.
One example the TAP recommended was the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, although the panel recognized that Philadelphia’s program applies strictly to non-commercial public art. The collaborative and proactive nature of the program, however, could be a model in D.C. for either commercial or non-commercial signs/murals. The Philadelphia program is notable because of its unprecedented level of public involvement in the development of the mural, often occurring in sync with existing community revitalization strategies and in partnership with block captains, grassroots neighborhood associations, public schools, community development corporations and other local nonprofits.12

In each neighborhood, the selected artist works with the community to identify a meaningful theme for the mural, and then completes the artwork through “neighborhood paint days” and other forms of community involvement.

**Recommendation 11: Implement pilot programs**

Encouraging creativity in signage is most likely going to require taking some risks in terms of new policies or approaches. To test new ideas on a short-term basis, the ULI panel recommended implementing pilot programs in a few defined areas. Pilot programs could be aimed at encouraging more creativity in signage, bringing new partners to the table for design review in a particular neighborhood, or even relaxing regulations in a defined area to see what the market would deliver. The ULI panel thought that the Art Sign program in the H Street neighborhood, which provided funding for local artists to help create signs for small businesses, was a great example of this type of pilot and recommended that the program be expanded as resources become available. A similar program exists in Boston, where larger developers make a contribution to support creative and high-quality signage for smaller businesses. Pilot programs could be a way to tailor unique approaches for individual neighborhoods and then potentially expand the best programs and policies citywide.

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12 City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, [www.muralarts.org](http://www.muralarts.org)
**Conclusion**

Washington D.C. is one of the most distinctive and recognizable cities in the world. While signage is often a “hot button” issue in cities, Washington D.C.’s rich history and the presence of the federal government make it particularly challenging to find consensus around issues that relate to urban design. Especially as the city’s demographics continue to change, however, the character of Washington D.C. will naturally continue to evolve and it is likely that city staff will continue to receive proposals for new, modern or unusual forms of signage. The ULI Washington Technical Assistance Panel applauds the D.C. Office of Planning for taking steps to unravel this complicated issue.

Through their exploration of this topic, the Technical Assistance Panel identified three goals that should remain central to any future policy or planning efforts related to signage. Sign policies and programs should be designed to: 1) Respect and preserve the historic character of Washington D.C.’s core, 2) Help businesses communicate effectively with customers, and 3) Encourage neighborhood districts to develop an individual and localized aesthetic. With this in mind, it was clear to the panel that a one-size-fits all approach to regulating and planning for signage is not the best tactic for D.C. Additionally, simple regulations and a clear process for sign approval are critical to encouraging creativity in design. Last, put plainly, it is not possible to regulate creativity or good design. D.C. should focus on using incentives and proactive visioning groups to explore opportunities for one-of-a-kind signs that have the power to define a place and blur the boundary between art and commercial messaging.
Appendix A: About the Panel

Alan Harwood, *Panel Chair*
Principal and Vice-President
AECOM

Alan is a Principal and Vice-President of AECOM, a leading full-services design and planning firm (Alan is with the portion of AWCOM that was formerly EDAW). Alan is certified planner with 29 years of award-winning experience in urban planning and project implementation, specializing in urban revitalization and strategic planning. The vast majority of his work has been in the District of Columbia. Alan’s projects have won more than 25 professional awards since 2000.

Alan has served on several technical assistance and advisory services panels for the Urban Land Institute and is on the Advisory Board for the ULI Washington District Council. Alan is also a member of the American Planning Association, serves on committees for the DC Building Industry Association, and sits on the Board of Directors for Lambda Alpha. Alan earned a Masters of Urban and Regional Planning from George Washington University and a Bachelor of Science in Geography from the University of South Carolina.

David Kitchens
Principal
Cooper Carry

David Kitchens, AIA serves as Principal-in-Charge of Cooper Carry’s Alexandria, Virginia office. In 25 years of service with Cooper Carry, David has led Mixed-Use design efforts on a variety of award-winning projects including Mizner Park in Boca Raton, Florida. This mixed-use development has been recognized by a variety of organizations including the AIA, which bestowed upon it the Excellence of Design Award. Kitchen’s work includes Bethesda Row in Bethesda, Maryland, which was awarded the Best Block in America 2002 by The Congress for the New Urbanism, the Excellence Award from the Urban Land Institute and the Maryland/DC NAIOP Award of Excellence for Best Smart Growth Master Plan.

David is a member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), the Urban Land Institute (ULI), the National Trust for Historic Preservation and serves on a number of committees for the District of Columbia Building Industry. He participates on AIA-sponsored Urban Design Assistance projects, making recommendations to cities for downtown redevelopment. David holds Bachelors and Masters degrees in Architecture from the Georgia Institute of Technology. He is NCARB certified and is registered in a dozen states and the District of Columbia.
Mr. Leonard has over 20 years of experience in designing and executing mixed use projects throughout the United States and Europe. While directing design for Cooper Carry’s Main Street office in Alexandria, VA, he played a key role in many important projects such as Mizner Park, Bethesda Row, Santana Row, and Crocker Park.

Currently, Mr. Leonard is master planning and producing development strategies for a number of large mixed use projects such as National Harbor, Moorefield Station, and The Village of Valley Forge. The program for these developments totals over 20 million square feet.

Prior to joining StreetSense, Mr. Leonard was a Vice President at Starwood Urban Investments, SUI. While at SUI, Mr. Leonard was responsible for managing and directing the design of all new projects. Mr. Leonard played a key role in evaluating potential development sites in key urban locations, creating development strategies and evolving the strategies into a physical design. Mr. Leonard’s other responsibilities included working with the asset management and leasing/tenant construction teams and reviewing all tenant work within the portfolio.

Mr. Leonard maintains an active role in speaking and writing about key urban issues. He recently co-authored the publication Ten Principles for Reinventing America’s Suburban Business Districts for the Urban Land Institute and worked on their previous publication entitled Ten Principles for Reinventing America’s Suburban Strips. He is currently co-authoring Ten Principles for Successful Town Centers.

As Executive Vice President for Development and Leasing, Robin Mosle is responsible for growing JBGR’s development, merchandising, and place-making capabilities in the mixed-use arena, bringing to bear her 25+ years of experience in the retail real estate industry. Prior to joining JBGR in early 2011, Mosle served five years as Executive Vice President of Samuels & Associates, LLC, a Boston-based private real estate company, and held various leadership positions with Street-Works, LLC, Federal Realty Investment Trust, Grosvenor International, and The Rouse Company, where she lent her name to prominent, mixed-use developments like Boston’s Fenway Triangle; Blue Back Square in West Hartford, CT; Pentagon Row and The Village at Shirlington, both in Arlington, VA; and Northbrook Court in Chicago, among others.

Mosle holds a B.S. from SUNY Empire State College, has completed post-graduate studies in a Fellows program in Change Management at Johns Hopkins University, and is an active member of ICSC, ULI, and the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF).
**Chung Youl Yoo**  
Partner  
Lorenc + Yoo Design

Chung Youl Yoo, partner at Lorenc+Yoo Design, serves as the firm’s managing project director. Having joined the firm in 1988, Mr. Yoo has served as designer, project director, and, now, principal. He enjoys a reputation for conducting the work with meticulous attention to detail, and has been involved in graphics, environmental communications, and exhibit work since 1985. His projects include signage and wayfinding for Gaylord Opryland Hotels in Nashville, Orlando, and Texas; World Golf Village Resort; and numerous exhibit and retail identity programs.

Mr. Yoo possesses broad project management and design talents. His understanding of architectural environments and the integration of all elements is unparalleled, and his greatest design development strength is transforming a concept into reality. He has earned a Master of Science in Industrial Design and Bachelor of Science in Industrial Design from the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, GA.

**Tom Graboski**  
Principal  
Tom Graboski Associates, Inc.

Tom Graboski received his BFA from the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles, and was awarded his Masters Degree in Urban Design from the University of Miami School of Architecture in 1977. In 1980, he founded Tom Graboski Associates, specializing in wayfinding, environmental graphics, and signage design.

Tom’s unique background in architecture, interior design, urban planning and graphic design blends talents that are essential to any project.

A member of the Society for Environmental Graphic Design and the American Institute of Graphic Arts, he has been the recipient of many local and national awards. Tom has taught, lectured, and been a visiting critic at the University of Miami, Florida International University, Miami Dade Community College, the Miami International University of Art and Design, and Miami Ad School. Tom has authored several municipal signs codes for cities in South Florida and serves as a sign consultant to the city of Coral Springs, FL.
Jamie Gorski  
**Senior Vice President, Corporate Marketing**  
**Bozzuto Group**

Jamie Gorski is senior vice president, corporate marketing for The Bozzuto Group. In her role, she provides strategic marketing direction for the entire company, overseeing all marketing and public relations efforts for each of Bozzuto’s six integrated companies – Acquisitions, Construction, Development, Homebuilding, Land Development and Property Management.

Jamie brings more than 25 years of multifamily marketing experience to Bozzuto, including five years as chief marketing officer for Kettler. Prior to Kettler, she served as vice president of marketing for Archstone-Smith and for Charles E. Smith Residential.

Jamie’s expertise includes strategic brand development, standards implementation, market analysis and online marketing. She has extensive experience overseeing major digital marketing campaigns and is an expert in advancing both online and offline marketing initiatives.

Jamie has won numerous marketing awards, including 30 Pillars of the Industry Awards from the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB). She was named as one of the most influential multifamily executives to watch in 2012 by Multi-Housing News.

Jamie received a B.S. in mathematics from Ohio State University, where she was captain of the swim team, a Big Ten Champion and an NCAA National finalist. She and her family reside in Annapolis, Maryland.

**Gretchen Coss**  
**Director of Business Development**  
**Gallagher and Associates**

Gretchen oversees the business development and marketing efforts for the firm. Well-versed in brand management, environmental graphic design and experience design, she has been involved in large-scale mixed-use/entertainment projects, as well as museum exhibits nationwide. Gretchen graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Arizona State University, is past President of the Society for Environmental Graphic Design and an Adjunct Professor at the Corcoran College of Art + Design.

**Joe Sternlieb**  
**Vice President for Acquisitions**  
**EastBanc**  
*(Mr. Sternlieb has since left EastBanc and begun a new position as the CEO of the Georgetown Business Improvement District)*

Joe Sternlieb has worked at EastBanc since 2006 and brings with him over 20 years of experience as a Washington DC leader in public/private real estate planning and economic development projects. At EastBanc Joe heads the Acquisitions effort and is an integral part of the development team in particular with public/private partnerships and district zoning.
In the past he has headed the DC Council Committee on Economic Development from 1993-1996, drafted and managed legislation to build over $1 billion in public projects including the Washington Convention Center and Verizon Center, managed passage of over $500 million in revenue bond legislation, and wrote and managed passage of key economic development legislation including the Business Improvement Districts Act.

Joe was the Deputy Director of the Downtown BID from 1997-2006. He led over a dozen major initiatives including the DC Circulator (transit system); DC’s Retail Incentive Program ($30 MM TIF); DC’s Wayfinding Signage system; and the Mayor’s Task Force on the redevelopment of the Old Convention Center site.

He has been appointed or elected to serve on a broad range of commissions, boards and task forces, including: the National Capital Planning Commission; DC Building Industry Association, GreenSpace; DC Surface Transit Inc.; ANC 2C; DC Central Kitchen, the Mayor’s Interactive Downtown Task Force; DC Vote, and DC Committee to Promote Washington.

David Vanden-Eynden  
Co-founder and Principal  
Calori & Vanden-Eyden  

For over 30 years, Mr. Vanden-Eynden has designed signage, wayfinding, place making, and graphics systems for many project types including commercial, institutional, transportation, civic, cultural, and retail environments. He leads the firm’s commercial and retail projects in Asia and continues to focus his efforts on enhancing the user experience of public spaces.

An early practitioner of Environmental Graphic Design (EGD), David, together with partner Chris Calori, helped establish the field of EGD as an integral component of built environments the world over. He has been recognized as one of the 25 most influential designers in the field of EGD.

Mr. Vanden-Eynden is a Fellow of the Society for Environmental Graphic Design (SEGD) and a member of the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA). David served for 16 years on the Board of Directors of the SEGD, served as president of the SEGD’s Education Foundation, and was instrumental in helping establish segdDESIGN magazine. His work has been honored by the SEGD, AIA, IDSA, the AIGA, and the City of New York, and has been published in numerous national and international books and periodicals worldwide.

David has been a visiting instructor at Yale University and the University of Cincinnati and is a former Adjunct Instructor at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City; he continues to be a speaker, lecturer, and juror for events sponsored by many professional and educational design organizations.

David received a BS in Industrial Design from The Ohio State University, where he majored in Visual Communications.
Appendix B: Research Interviews

The research phase of this project included phone interviews with the following experts, conducted by Alia Anderson (Director of Community Outreach, ULI Washington) in August and September, 2012.

- Debbie Albert, Associate Planner, Arlington VA
- Douglas Kilsheimer, President and Arthur Goldberg, Executive Vice President/Creative Spirit, Art Display Co.
- Wayne Hunt, Principal, Hunt Design
- Theresa O’Donnell, Director of Planning and Eshandra Davis, Senior Real Estate Specialist, City of Dallas, TX
- Michael Zehner, Director of Planning, Lexington VA (former Assistant Planning Director, Wellesley, MA)
- Jonathan Purvis, Code Enforcement Chief, San Francisco Planning Department
- Grace Moore, News Rack Program Coordinator, San Francisco Department of Public Works
- Vicente Rodriguez, Zoning Plan Examiner, City of Miami
- Doug Ekstrand, President, Ekstrand Creative