

Judge rules against billboard in Arden Hills

by Maria Elena Baca (reprinted from the September 25, 2008 Star Tribune)

The flashing electronic billboard in Arden Hills stays off.

That was Ramsey County District Judge J. Thomas Mott's message to Clear Channel Outdoor Inc. in a ruling this week that also reprimanded the company for flouting the city's laws.

The company had appealed Mott's August 1 order to remove the billboard at the I-694 and I-35W interchange, pending an appeal of the case it lost to the city of Arden Hills. The company sued when the city ordered that the billboard be removed.

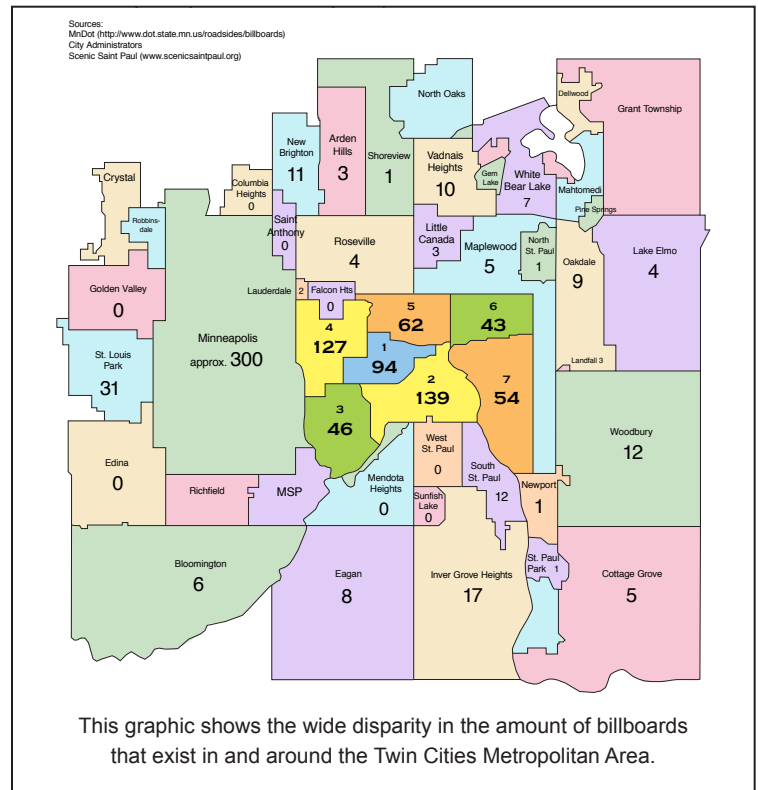
In his ruling, Mott upheld Clear Channel's claim of damages, asserting that the ongoing violation damages the city. "Allowing such a continuance is to essentially deny the city's authority to govern," he said.

John Baker, the city's attorney, agreed: "There's an inherent value in having the city's laws followed," he said, "and so it was important from our point of view to see the judge draw those conclusions."

Nearly two years ago, Clear Channel installed the rapid-switch digital LED billboard. The company secured an electrical permit, but did not seek needed permission to change the size and scope of the billboard. Almost a year later, Clear Channel sought the permit, which was denied, and the city set a deadline for the company to restore the sign to the standard size and format. Clear Channel filed suit, arguing that it needed the sign to remain competitive in the industry.

James Lehnhoff, the city's community development director, said the city applauded the ruling.

"We strive for conformance with the code," he said. "That can be a challenging thing to do, but we didn't want to look the other way because Clear Channel is a large corporation."



Scenic Saint Paul's goals for reducing billboard blight in 2009 and beyond...

Scenic Saint Paul's goal continues to be ridding our city of non-conforming billboards. We will continue to push for changes on the state level to make it easier for Saint Paul to eliminate billboards through amortization. We will work to join forces with other groups and individuals around the state who share our commitment to reducing billboard blight.

- We will work toward a statewide ban on digital or electronic billboards
- We will work to repeal the statewide ban on amortization, returning zoning control to the local level
- Encourage divestment in billboards by towns and cities around Minnesota, as well as by the Metropolitan Council and MNDOT
- Help make Saint Paul the most beautiful state capitol in the country
- Encourage redevelopment of our inner city neighborhoods



Billboards are often the target of graffiti artists.

This example is near Interstate 94 and the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary.



An old billboard that should have been taken down long ago.

Photo taken on Front Street near Farrington.

Scenic Saint Paul completes its 2008 Billboard Blight Inventory

With the help of many individuals, a complete (and compelling) inventory of all billboards in Saint Paul was undertaken and completed during the summer of 2008. A photographic record and an updated list of all known billboards is available to all elected and appointed officials in the city who have a stake in improving Saint Paul's image. Please contact us if you would like Scenic Saint Paul to give an audiovisual presentation of the current billboard situation in Saint Paul.

Contact John Mannillo or Jeanne Weigum for more information.

www.scenicsaintpaul.org

Scenic Saint Paul supporters

Sherie Bozak • Joel Clemmer • Andy Driscoll • Christina Habibi • Andrew Hine • Lise Houlton • Ruby Hunt • Peggy Lynch • John Mannillo • John Manthey • Sen. John Marty • Victoria McCurdy • Kelly McSweeney • Gerald Mischke • Emily Noble • Ossian Or • Rep. Michael Paymar • Brin Petersen • Jane Prince • Robert Straughn • Jeanne Weigum • Please let us know if we can add your name to this list!

Scenic Saint Paul is proud to be associated with Scenic America, the national anti-billboard group.
Visit them at www.scenic.org.