

To the Mayor and Members of the City Council**October 11, 2016**

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**SUBJECT: BANDIT SIGNS**

The City Council has requested an update on the removal and enforcement 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, losing weight, working from home, etc. Although funding was cut for bandit sign enforcement in 2010, successful volunteer programs have allowed the City to continue removing illegal signs. Also, field crews in various City departments routinely remove signs in the general course of their operations. This participation by multiple City departments creates a large positive impact without adversely affecting other services.

Sign enforcement is primarily a function of the Planning and Development Department. This department currently has only two full-time sign inspectors covering the entire city, but has been able to fulfill its responsibilities with assistance from the Code Compliance Department. Since 2010, Code Compliance officers have been doing limited sweeps, removing signs and doing enforcement. Overall, it is estimated that the City removes more than 40,000 illegal signs each year.

Code Ranger citizen volunteers assist with concentrated 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, the Code Compliance Department has allocated a City vehicle for volunteers to use and has wrapped the vehicle as depicted below to promote greater community awareness.



Throughout the year, messages are put out to both City employees and residents asking for assistance in removing bandit signs. Information is spread using resources such as NextDoor, media releases and *City News*.

When chronic violators are identified, Planning and Development, Code Compliance and the Prosecutor's Office work closely on enforcement action. The issuance of a citation requires staff either to observe the sign being placed in the right of way and issue a citation to the person doing it, or 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, not only by the City, but by other taxing entities, fraud investigations, etc. 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.

In summary, cooperation by multiple City departments and successful volunteer programs allow the City to continue removing illegal signs with limited budget impact. Citizens interested in becoming Code Ranger volunteers and helping with the removal of bandit signs should contact Code Compliance at (817) 392-1234. Citizens can also serve as the City's eyes and ears by reporting chronic violations to the same number or on the City's website under the Code Compliance Department.

David Cooke
City Manager