

TCT Editorial 4/25/89

Billboard ban is a positive move

IN THE next six weeks, Madison residents will have a chance to comment on whether the City Council should make permanent a temporary moratorium on new billboards in the city.

While people may have strong feelings about the advertisements some of the billboards contain — whether they be for cigarettes, liquor or the like — the issue of banning billboards goes much deeper.

Ald. Henry Lufler, District 16, emphasizes that his decision to sponsor the temporary ban was not one that was reached lightly. Adams Outdoor Advertising, the firm which dominates the local billboard market, has been a “good corporate citizen,” Lufler says.

But the east-side alderman began working on his proposal months ago because of his concern over what kind of city he wants Madison to be. He asked himself whether billboards are compatible with a city that has increasingly spent funds to beautify such high traffic areas as East Washington Avenue and South Park Street.

Lufler also looked at the efforts the city has put into economic development and the revitalization of some of its older neighborhoods

through low-interest loans and other development tools. He concluded that the way the city looks has an impact on the kind of future development Madison will see.

One last argument Lufler makes is that the ordinance is needed to protect some of those older, poorer areas of the city which are not protected aesthetically by being within an urban design district.

We agree with Lufler that outdoor advertising detracts from the environment of our city and does not fit well with Madison's efforts to remain an attractive place to work and live. Both Lufler and Ald. Jean Stewart, District 20 — who has worked for years on regulating billboards in residential areas — should be commended for their efforts.

THE PROPOSED ban on new billboards in the city is reasonable, and we urge the City Council to adopt it once the public has had an opportunity for comment. It should be noted that the ordinance would not immediately do away with existing outdoor signs, but would rather eliminate them through attrition.

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TCT 6/6/89

Plan Commission backs billboard ban, group home

By TRACY DINGMANN
Capital Times Staff Writer

The Madison Plan Commission unanimously passed measures banning new billboards and allowing a south-side group home for recovering alcoholics in a marathon seven-hour session that ended around 12:30 a.m. today.

Many people showed up for the public hearings on the controversial matters; the billboard hearing alone lasted more than two hours. Both measures will ultimately be decided by the City Council.

A crestfallen John O'Connell, general manager of Adams Outdoor Advertising, had no comment after the commission's vote in favor of freezing the number of billboards the city now has and prohibiting the building of new ones. Adams owns the majority of billboards in the city.

Earlier in the evening, O'Connell heard many business people — including representatives of media outlets like Madison Magazine and sister radio stations WHIT/AM 1550 and WWQM/FM 106, who consider Adams their competition — praise the company for its public service and protest the outright banning of a legitimate form of business in the city simply because some consider it unsightly.

"To me, having a billboard being called visual pollution is worse than calling me, myself, ugly," said Adams Art Director Anthony Alwin, in response to an expression used by a registrant favoring the ban.

Most of the positive comments about the billboards were indistinguishable from the positive comments about Adams. When asked



Henry Lufler

by commission member Steve Braunginn if they would support billboards if Adams was not in the picture, both public relations consultant Anthony Brown and Vivian Bailey of Employment Options said yes, citing the general effectiveness of the advertising method.

On the other side of the coin, District 20 Ald. Jean Stewart and others spoke of the unpleasantness of having a billboard looming and its lights shining in or near residential neighborhoods.

Others noted the plethora of billboards lining both the South Beltline and East Washington Avenue, both considered gateways to the city. District 16 Ald. Henry Lufler, a sponsor of the measure, said the proliferation of billboards along those streets and in neighborhoods is "antithetical to the city's basic planning goals."

A number of citizens also testi-

fied at the public hearing for a conditional use permit at 810 W. Olin Ave., a house that a not-for-profit group is hoping to convert into a group home for 15 recovering alcoholics.

The directors of Rebos ("sober" spelled backward) characterized their existing homes — for men at 549 W. Johnson St., and for women at 1903 University Ave. — as "quiet" and "low profile." Residents are out working or attending at least one Alcoholics Anonymous meeting during the day, they told the commission.

The police were only called to the home about 10 times a year, said board member John Strother.

Rebos Executive Director JoAnn Herling said the group looked at about 75 homes before finding the one on Olin, which they ultimately chose because of its relatively low price (\$129,000), its proximity to major bus lines, and its remodeling potential.

She said the organization, which receives 90 percent of its funding from Dane County, raised about \$170,000 in a two-year fund drive to enable them to move out of their aging men's home.

Neighborhood residents who oppose the placement of the home challenged the number of Rebos police calls. According to police data they obtained, the number of calls at existing Rebos homes was much higher, they said.

Several of those living near the prospective site complained that there are already enough group homes in their south-side neighborhood and expressed fears that property values would plummet.



MIKE DeVRIES

Mayor Paul Soglin assumed a familiar role Tuesday, wielding the mayor's gavel for the first time since leaving office in 1979. Seated next to Soglin is City Attorney Henry Gempeler.

Council halts new billboards

City plans to discuss total ban

By JIM PUGH

Capital Times Staff Writer

While just about everything in Madison has thawed, the city's billboards are frozen solid.

The City Council, on a 17-4 vote, approved a moratorium on new advertising billboards Tuesday night.

The moratorium was pushed through to prevent sign companies from flooding the city while an ordinance banning the advertising is pondered in committees, the chief sponsor said.

If Madison approves the ordinance, the city will join the ranks of hundreds of municipalities large and small that have instituted similar bans in the United States, said Jim Voss, an assistant city attorney.

The ban was the first controversial move by the new City Council. Earlier in the day, Mayor Paul Soglin announced a shakeup of council committee memberships and

named three of his four aides.

Soglin laid down the law with the council in his opening remarks Tuesday afternoon, declaring a change in the balance of power. He told council members they would set policy that would be administered by his office and staff.

Soglin said he wants to discuss the sign ban with sign companies and review existing ordinances and sign-reduction agreements before he takes a position.

He said he has been supportive of bans on billboards downtown in the past.

The sign-ban ordinance, which has a majority of 13 council members as co-sponsors, would eliminate sign permits for new or replaced billboards, said Ald. Henry Lufler, 16th District, the chief proponent.

Lufler slipped the moratorium through Tuesday night with little advance notice.

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Ald. Warren Onken, 3rd District, said the city should have waited two weeks before starting the freeze.

"This will be a very controversial issue I'm sure," Lufler said. Lufler serves on the city's Urban Design Commission, which regulates aesthetics in architecture and development. "I think it's time for Madison to do it. Certainly Madison is not on the forefront."

Lufler said it will take six to eight

Hormone

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somatotropin from other milk; 61 percent said they did.

About half of that group said such regulations should be promulgated nationally; the other half said the state should do it. A bill requiring separate handling on the state level (SB 146) has been introduced by state Sen. Russell Feingold, D-Middleton.

Only 11 percent of farmers opposed such regulations. Another 28 percent were undecided.

In Minnesota, a legislative committee has refused to ban or restrict the hormone, which increases milk production.

"The Minnesota committee action is reasonable," said state Rep. Judith Klusman, R-Oshkosh, a dairy farmer herself.

Another farmer-legislator, state Rep. Ben Brancel, R-Endeavor, agreed. "I do not want Wisconsin to become a technologically barren island, surrounded by other states whose dairy industries are more competitive," he said.

The Madison-based Coalition for Responsible Technology, an opponent of bovine somatotropin, countered that more than 500 delivery customers quit buying milk from British Columbia's largest dairy cooperative, Dairyland Foods, after a Vancouver newspaper reported that the dairy was selling milk from cows injected with the hormone.

"Bovine growth hormone will do for milk what Alar has done for apples," said the coalition's John Stauber, referring to the recent pesticide scare.

The coalition announced that it has mailed a survey on attitudes about bovine growth hormone to 100 milk processors in the United States.

The Wisconsin secretary of agriculture, Howard Richards, has called for a nationwide moratorium on the use of bovine growth hormone for as long as three years until the issue can be resolved.

weeks for the ordinance to be considered by the urban design and plan commissions.

The measures would primarily affect Adams Outdoor Advertising of Madison, which has about 250 billboard permits in the city and dominates the local market, city officials said.

Voss said Adams is the largest billboard company in the city, with two other firms controlling "a handful" of signs.

Lufler said the billboards distract from city efforts to improve the community as a place to live and attract businesses. He said the city is within its legitimate regulatory powers to ban the advertising medium. He said there is no free expression issue.

"I think that outdoor advertising detracts from our efforts" at creating an attractive community, Lufler said today. The billboards "detract from the general environment in the city."

Signs at a business site would not be banned, Lufler said.

He said the Adams company has not complied with a billboard-elimination agreement worked out in 1981 with another company it replaced.

Lufler said the company was to eliminate one billboard annually from the downtown area, but Adams failed to remove a sign in 1988.

In addition, Lufler said Adams has illegally increased the size and height of some signs in the area.

New Soglin aides: Soglin announced three of his top aides Tuesday. The appointees do not need council approval.

Anne Monks, 37, former council president and aide to state Sen. Russell Feingold, D-Middleton, will serve as aide.

Roberta Gassman will also be an aide. She is president of Gassman, Cohn & Associates, an organizational training and consulting firm. She worked as former Gov. Tony Earl's policy adviser on employment and women's issues.

James Thomas, a Soglin aide from 1975 to 1978, will serve again. He has served as director of emergency services for the Dane County chapter of the American Red Cross since last year.

A fourth aide will be named later.

Meriter Nurses

5 mile run

Front Page TCT 4/18/89

City Council may blot out billboards

By JIM PUGH

Capital Times Staff Writer

Madison's new City Council will be facing controversy at its first meeting tonight as it considers a moratorium and eventual ban on billboard advertising in the city.

If Madison approves the measure, the city will join the ranks of hundreds of municipalities across the country, large and small, that have instituted similar bans, said Jim Voss, an assistant city attorney.

The council is expected to pass a moratorium on new billboards tonight, said Ald. Henry Lufler, 16th District, who is sponsoring the moratorium.

"This will be a very controversial issue, I'm sure," Lufler said.

Lufler serves on the city's Urban Design Commission, which regulates aesthetics in architecture and development. "I think it's time for Madison to do it. Certainly Madison is not on the forefront," he said.

The measures would primarily affect Adams Outdoor Advertising of Madison, which has about 250 billboard permits in the city and dominates the local market, city officials said. Adams representatives could not be reached this morning.

Voss said Adams is the largest billboard company in the city, with two other firms controlling "a handful" of signs.

Lufler said the immediate mora-

torium is needed so billboard companies don't flood the Madison area with signs while the council and committees debate the proposed ban as an ordinance.

He said the billboards hurt city efforts to improve the community as a place to live and do business.

"I think that outdoor advertising detracts from our efforts" at creating an attractive community, Lufler said today. The billboards "detract from the general environment in the city."

The ordinance is co-sponsored by 13 council members, one more than needed for approval.

The ordinance, which would eliminate permits for signs ranging

up to 700 square feet, would get rid of billboards through attrition, Lufler said.

Lufler said the ordinance would ban installation of new billboards or replacement of removed or destroyed billboards. "On-premise" signs, those at the location of a business, would not be affected, he said.

He said the Adams company has not complied with a billboard-elimination agreement worked out in 1981 with another company it replaced. Lufler said the company was to eliminate one billboard annually from the downtown area, but Adams failed to remove a sign in 1988.

Billboard ban would freeze number, location of signs

By JIM PUGH

Capital Times Staff Writer

Billboards will remain in Madison for decades, possibly controlled by a city-created monopoly, despite a billboard ban expected to be approved tonight by the City Council, says the ban's chief sponsor.

"We'll be seeing billboards in Madison into the next century," said Ald. Henry Lufler, 16th District. Lufler is chief among 13 co-sponsors of the ban.

Twelve of the 22 council members must vote to approve the ban for it to pass. Lufler said today he has a minimum of 15 supporters.

The ban essentially freezes the number and location of billboards on Madison's streets today. The signs will be eliminated by attrition.

Lufler said the city is "essentially conveying a monopoly" to Adams Outdoor Advertising, 102 E. Badger Rd. Adams controls about 240 of the 275 Madison billboard sign permits, Lufler said.

The council enacted a moratorium on such sign permits in April in anticipation of the permanent ban.

If the measure wins approval tonight, Madison will join a number of municipal governments around the country that have passed similar ordinances. County government is also considering billboard restrictions.

The Urban Design Commission and Plan Commission approved the ban earlier.

Lufler said billboards conflict with city beautification efforts.

The council had been considering

a less-severe proposal from Ald. Jean Stewart, 20th District. Stewart's proposal had called for banning billboards within 1,000 feet of parks, the Arboretum, designated landmarks, or areas zoned residential or conservancy.

Stewart is a co-sponsor of the ban being considered tonight. The earlier proposal will die when the ban is enacted, Lufler said.

Lufler said council members met with Adams officials while the ban was being considered by committees.

The company, Lufler said, offered to limit the number of sign permits, but wanted to be able to switch locations of signs.

Lufler said the company's proposal was unacceptable.

Adams officials could not be reached today.

TCT 6/21/89

City bans replacement of 250 existing billboards

By JIM PUGH

Capital Times Staff Writer

Slowly, Madison's billboard population is expected to die off.

The City Council Tuesday approved banning new billboards in the city on a 17-4 vote. (One member recently resigned.)

Under the plan, the existing 250 billboards cannot be replaced or moved. The restrictions affect only advertising on signs not located at a place of business.

Despite the edict, the city will continue to sell advertising space on the sides of buses.

John O'Connell, general manager of Adams Outdoor Advertising, said council members had not dealt fairly with his company, which controls most of Madison's billboard permits.

"It's difficult to do business with people who don't understand being honest and being reasonable," O'Connell said.

O'Connell said Ald. Henry Lufler, 16th District, sponsored the changes in April without discussing the ban with the sign company. O'Connell said Lufler had been working with the company on related matters, and then brought up the ban without warning.

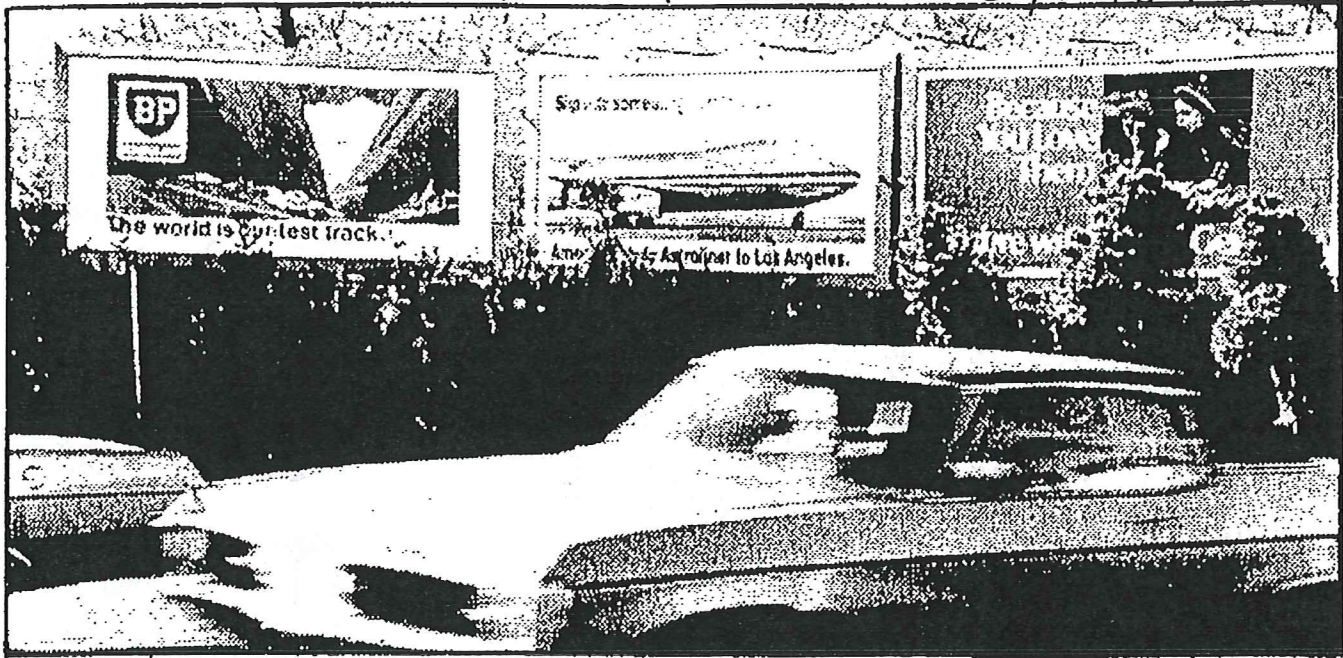
Lufler "blatantly misrepresented himself and wasn't honest in his discussions," O'Connell said.

Lufler said he proposed the ban after discovering Adams was considering increasing the number of billboards in the city. He said Adams had not been complying with an agreement to remove billboards from downtown.

He said he couldn't notify the company of a possible ban because the company might have erected more signs before the ban was in place. The council approved a temporary ban in April.

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1/28/89 WSJ Opinion



Christian Science Monitor

The beauty of billboards is in the eye of the beholder.

Billboard ban backed

I take strong issue with The State Journal's Jan. 15 "billboards as art" feature. Some may call it art, but others don't and for those who don't, it's an imposition of some people's taste on the rest of us.

Furthermore, as the director of the Coalition for Scenic Beauty says, it's the medium, not the message, that those opposed to billboards are concerned about. It doesn't matter what's on the billboard, it's still an intrusion of what some call art into the public space of others. And it is public space. The advertising industry is selling circulation — the message has value depending on the circulation along publicly financed rights of way. He calls it "slam-dunk" advertising. You can't turn the page, you can't change the channel.

It's worth noting that several

states noted for their scenic appeal (read tourist dollars!) have outlawed billboards altogether. Those states include Vermont and Hawaii. Vermont Gov. Madeleine Kunin stresses that the billboard ban in her state has been a great boon to both tourism and the economy. "After vigorous debates when the law was first enacted, Vermonters are in general agreement today that we like to see our landscape without obstructing the view," she said. "Frankly, I think it would be great if the rest of the country followed suit."

Is Wisconsin less endowed with natural beauty than Vermont? Are people here less visually aware? Does Wisconsin's tourism industry care less about its future than Vermont does? Are we different?

— Paul Whiting, Madison

WSJ 11/7/89

Phelps gets 'Onion,' Shain an 'Orchid'

State Journal staff

Dane County Executive Richard Phelps and the city of Madison traffic engineering division shared "onions" from Capital Community Citizens on Monday for failing to maintain storage buildings.

The awards, along with 15 "orchids," to individuals — including former UW-Madison Chancellor Irving Shain — and organizations that help beautify the city were announced in what has become something of an annual ritual, the "Onions and Orchids" awards.

The traffic department received its onion for a rundown storage building on Wingra Creek that Capital Community Citizens leaders argue symbolizes the city's low priority for cleaning and maintaining shorelines.

County officials past and present, including Phelps, received an onion for the deteriorated warehouse on the Dane County Expo grounds.

Orchids went to:

■ W. Jerome Frautschi and John Frautschi, owners of Webcrafters printers, for making a \$1.5-million donation that allowed the UW Foundation to purchase Second Point on Lake Mendota.

■ Shain for his long-term commitment to development of the UW Research Park at Mineral Point Road and Whitney Way.

■ Karl Marschke and Marquip Inc., for renovation of the old Gisholt Building at 1245 E. Washington Ave.

■ Architect Kenton Peters, for converting a parking lot on a long, narrow strip of land overlooking

Lake Monona into the Hamilton Point Apartments.

■ Developer and attorney Frederic E. Mohs, for initiating efforts and donating \$5,000 that ultimately resulted in the relocation of the sculpture "Act" by New York artist William King. The sculpture was moved from the rear Civic Center entrance on Henry Street to an open space at Olbrich Park near Starkweather Creek.

■ James M. Dennis and Nancy K. Kendrick, for preserving a Frank Lloyd Wright Usonia 1, a house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright at 441 Toepfer Ave.

■ Bram's Addition Neighborhood Association and others responsible for the Park Street Gateway sculpture that forms an arch welcoming residents and

visitors to South Madison.

■ Lake Windsor Lake District Committee, for the quick and effective formation of a lake district.

■ Lane's Bakery, for its new building on Park Street, a building that serves as a buffer between a neighborhood and busy commercial street.

■ Kathy Newport, Debora Kennedy and Ralph Pelkey and others, for planting city parkways and the curbsides with flowers.

■ City politicians Henry Luffler Jr., Robert Horowitz and Jean P. Stewart, for leading efforts to freeze new billboard permits earlier this year. The freeze will reduce the number of billboards over time.

■ Nicholas Ladopoulos, for a development in Middleton that

combined mixed use of buildings, recycling and personal initiative.

■ Madison Community Development Authority, for its bonding program designed to stimulate home ownership for first-time and middle-income homebuyers.

■ Isthmus, weekly newspaper, for informing readers about the environmental scene with stories about urban sprawl, development and recycling.

■ WKOW-TV broadcaster Patty Loew for building environmental awareness in May with a locally produced show called "A Throwaway Future." Over six days, the series covered topics such as Dane County's landfill problems, refuse-derived fuel, curbside recycling, newsprint glut and the plastic recycling industry.

WSJ 5/25/89

Dispelling myths about billboards

By Robert Horowitz

The city of Madison already has 261 billboard panels. Do we need any more? Fourteen members of the City Council think the answer is "no" and are sponsoring an ordinance that would ban new billboards.

Of course, the billboard industry wants to scuttle the ordinance. It will undoubtedly rely on many of the myths about billboards.

Myth No. 1: Billboards are beautiful. The fact is that the pictures on billboards can be beautiful, ugly or just ordinary. But when they are enlarged to 350 square feet or 672 square feet, and raised to a height of 30 feet or more, billboards become an eyesore. They become the dominant feature of the urban landscape, overshadowing buildings and trees. They mar the city's natural scenic beauty. They blight the city's neighborhoods. They lower property values. They are visual pollution.

Horowitz is chairman of the Madison Urban Design Commission and a partner in the law firm of Stafford, Rosenbaum, Rieser & Hansen.

GUEST COLUMN

Myth No. 2: Billboards are good for business. The fact is the billboards are bad for business. A community's appearance can attract new business and new residents — or it can repel them. Efforts to encourage clean, environmentally sensitive economic development are undermined by billboards that make the city unappealing.

Myth No. 3: We shouldn't do anything about billboards until we study the entire sign ordinance. The fact is that the city has just finished studying the sign ordinance, and making several improvements, with the cooperation of representatives of the on-premise sign industry. Billboards remain a glaring loophole. On-premise signs can't be more than 22 feet high or 144 square feet in areas. Billboards can be 30 feet high and 750 feet in area. There was never any justification for this special treatment.

Myth No. 4: Billboards are needed for communication. The fact is that on-premise signs are important to identify business establishments, but off-premise signs are just another form of advertising. The products most com-

monly advertised on billboards are alcohol and tobacco, accounting last year for 33 percent of outdoor advertising contracts nationwide.

Myth No. 5: The billboard industry is a good citizen. Madison's leading billboard company, Adams Outdoor Advertising, is violating existing ordinances and renegeing on an agreement made by its predecessor, Hansen Advertising. In 1983, Hansen and the city settled a lawsuit by agreeing on an ordinance that billboards existing on Nov. 1, 1983, can't be enlarged. Adams has now added illegal extensions to these "grandfathered" billboards. Even on non-grandfathered billboards, the extensions are illegal because they typically exceed the 30-foot height limit. The city attorney has ruled that these extensions are illegal. Adams is continuing to use them anyway while it tries to get them retroactively legalized.

Myth No. 6: Billboard companies are sensitive in locating billboards. The fact is that billboard companies put billboards wherever they can. When the city recently put a temporary moratorium on billboards, Adams went ahead and installed two double-faced billboards for which it

had just received permits. One is on South Park Street, near the intersection with Fish Hatchery Road. It is just across the street from a triangle that has been beautifully landscaped at considerable trouble and expense. The other is on North Park Street, just north of Regent Street. It is directly across the street from the new and attractive College Park apartments which resulted from years of effort by the city and the university.

Myth No. 7: People like billboards. The fact is that most people favor restricting billboards. A 1983 study of Wisconsin attitudes about billboards by Nicolet Research Corp. found that 91 percent of those surveyed favor either prohibiting new billboards or even more restrictive alternatives.

Myth No. 8: Billboard companies have a constitutional right to build new billboards. The U.S. Supreme Court has recognized that cities have the right to prohibit billboards so long as they don't discriminate based on their content. That principle was firmly established in "Metromedia v. San Diego" and "Los Angeles v. Taxpayers for Vincent." The city attorney has confirmed that Madison's proposed ordinance would be consti-



State Journal photo/CHRIS COFSMEIER

Billboard on South Park Street is one of 261 in Madison.

tutional.

Myth No. 9: Billboards are a necessary evil. The fact is billboards have been banned or restricted in hundreds of cities and eliminated altogether in four scenic states: Vermont, Maine, Hawaii and Alaska. Information for motorists can be provided by the new "logo" signs, already appearing on highways near Madison, which conspicuously but unobtru-

sively guide motorists to food, lodging and service stations.

Myth No. 10: Billboards are not an important issue. The fact is that Madison is an exceptionally beautiful city. Our lakes, Capitol, historic landmarks, UW-Arboretum and parks all contribute to this beauty. Billboards do not. To preserve the beauty of our city, we need to say, "No more billboards."