

Leading the Way to Sign Code Success

Roy is a relatively small town not far from Ogden, Utah, about 30 miles north of Salt Lake City. Ogden is booming, ranked one of the 20 fastest-growing cities and, at one point, was leading the nation in job growth. Salt Lake City also is ranked as one of the 20 fastest-growing cities.

Though Roy sits comfortably positioned between the two—connected via Interstate 15—the economic boom of the two larger cities leapfrogged over Roy.

Even with these struggles, planners and the town council were discussing enacting extremely restrictive sign codes which would allow only monument signs.

The Utah Sign Association, an ISA Affiliated Association, contacted ISA. Along with the Signage Foundation Inc., the team quickly organized a workshop to help Roy officials understand how enacting such stringent codes could further damage the town's economic viability.

By the end of the workshop, Roy officials had seen the light: Signs contributed positively to

its economy. Officials opted to allow EMCs and other types of signs, including temporary signs.

Roy is a dramatic success story, in part due to the swiftness in which city officials understood the economic impact of signs. But that same story has occurred time and time again throughout the United States in recent years. ISA, its Affiliated Associations, member companies and the Signage Foundation often come together to work on improving sign codes.

This is an issue that likely will become even more important in light of the recent Supreme Court ruling in *Reed v. Town of Gilbert*. For the sign and visual communications industry, the ruling was a landmark case, and marked the first time in two decades that the highest court had ruled on a sign code issue.

At the heart of the case was a discrepancy in different types of temporary signs. A church used temporary directional signs to let worshipers know where it would be meeting since it lacked a permanent venue. The town's sign code limited the size of these directional signs and limited how long

they could be displayed. Political and ideological signs, however, were allowed a larger size and duration.

The Supreme Court found that different rules for these types of similar signs amounted to content-based regulation—a violation of the First Amendment.

In the immediate aftermath of the ruling, some communities discussed temporary moratoriums on sign code permits. Others slowed down sign code changes in process. Both were to allow time to make sure that the sign codes were compliant with the new Supreme Court ruling.

In reality, these sorts of issues are nothing new, as proven by Roy, Utah. What has changed, though, is the sheer number of sign code issues that could occur in the coming months as the Supreme Court ruling is applied to sign codes and permits.

Roy, Utah, also provides a model for how the sign and visual communications industry can positively influence sign codes, especially now as more communities explore them.

NEED HELP?

ISA offers sign code assistance via email, phone and occasionally in-person. Contact David Hickey, ISA vice president of government affairs, at david.hickey@signs.org to learn more.



STATS • FACTS

Digital signage revenue to account for 16.2% of all global OOH advertising revenue for 2015 and 16.7% in 2016 according to the ISA Sign Industry Quarterly

It provides a road map for future sign code issues:

- 1. Member and Affiliated Association involvement.** This is a critical first step. Member sign companies work in communities and are more likely to hear about proposed code changes first. Affiliated Associations can connect other sign and visual communications companies in the area, all of whom could be impacted by any code change.

Involvement at the local level doesn't end there. Local businesses who will be affected—including sign companies—can gain the attention of a planning commission or city council in a way that outsiders won't.

To find your local Affiliated Association, visit www.signs.org/affiliatedassociations.


- 2. ISA.** ISA has built relationships with city leaders and planners for a number of years, and has trained more than 1,500 planners on sign code issues through our Planning for Sign Code Success™ events. With two full-time staffers devoted to working with communities on sign code issues at the state and local levels, ISA has the expertise to assist communities in developing reasonable sign codes.

Planning for Sign Code Success™ continues in 2015 with events planned in Arkansas, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Texas, New Jersey, Maine and Georgia. These events rely on Affiliated Associations and member involvement, as well.

ISA offers a number of online resources, including two model sign codes and EMC night-time brightness recommendations, which have been adopted in whole or in part by over 150 communities.

- 3. The Signage Foundation Inc.** As the sign and visual communications industry's research arm, SFI develops resources that can be used to better inform community leaders about the impact of proposed sign code changes. A new guide, "Best Practices in Regulating Temporary Signs" (www.signs.org/tempsigns), should prove extremely useful in assisting communities in responding to the *Reed v. Town of Gilbert* case.

SFI releases new publications throughout the year, though most are previewed or released at its annual National Signage Research and Education Conference (NSREC). NSREC 2015 will be Oct. 11-12. Learn more at www.thesignagefoundation.org.

When stringent sign codes are enacted, it can negatively affect the business environment for sign companies. However, when members, Affiliated Associations, ISA and SFI come together, they've proven to have a winning argument. | 



5 RESOURCES

to Help Fight Sign Codes

For communities discussing sign code issues, ISA's website includes links to numerous helpful—and free—resources. Unless otherwise noted, all can be accessed at www.signs.org/local.

- 1.** "The Economic Value of Signs," two research projects, by the University of San Diego (1997) and the University of Cincinnati (2012), help local officials to see how signs benefits businesses and communities.
- 2.** "Best Practices for Regulating Temporary Signs," compiled by prominent planner Wendy Moeller, communities offer assistance in understanding different kinds of temporary signs and best practices for regulating each type. Find it at www.signs.org/tempsigns.
- 3.** EMC Night-Time Brightness Recommendations from a noted lighting scientist, includes peer-reviewed research, model statutory language and step-by-step directions to measure brightness and ensure responsible use of EMCs
- 4.** Two Model Sign Codes, drafted by respected planners and engineers, easily can be adapted by local communities.
- 5.** EMCs and Traffic Safety, featuring comprehensive research from Texas A&M University, demonstrates that EMCs do not cause traffic accidents.

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