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Reno Voters Reject Digital Billboards

Reno, Nevada – A majority of Reno voters are opposed to allowing digital billboards here, according to a recent poll commissioned by Scenic Nevada, a non-profit group dedicated to the preservation of scenic beauty.

In a telephone poll conducted April 16-19, 2011, Reno voters were asked whether the city should change the law to permit digital billboards within the Reno city limits. Fifty-five percent said no, 28% said yes, with 17% not sure. The poll of 600 registered voters in Reno was conducted by M.J. Ross Group, Inc., a communications firm based in Portland, Oregon.

Digital billboards are brightly lit electronic signs that are computer controlled and can change images every six to eight seconds, day and night.

“It’s interesting that so many people today feel the same way as those who voted 11 years ago to prohibit new construction of billboards,” said James Barnes, a local attorney and Scenic Nevada Board Chairman. “The vote in 2000 was 57% in favor of banning new billboard construction,” he added, “and, of course, digital billboards would be new construction.”

The poll results also show that two-thirds of the voters would object to seeing a digital billboard from the window of their home or office. Moreover, 80% said there are already enough or too many billboards in Reno.

In the overall poll results, most responses carry a 4% margin of error at the 95% confidence level, according to a report produced by Moses Ross, president of the polling firm



M.J. Ross Group, Inc. (The final question was added on the last day of polling, resulting in fewer respondents, and a plus or minus 5.74% error at 95% confidence).

“It is clear to conclude from this survey that a majority of voters oppose changes that would allow digital billboards,” said Ross in his report.

Scenic Nevada maintains the constantly lit billboards, flipping every eight seconds, will increase driver distraction, are an eyesore, use too much energy and violate the billboard ban.

In the poll, 89% said it was important or very important that drivers are not distracted. An even 80% said that it was important or very important to “preserve, protect and enhance” Reno’s scenic character and 81% agreed that it was important or very important for the city to adopt energy efficient billboard sign laws.

Digital billboards are “off-premise” signs and are not allowed under city code. But billboard industry representatives are anxious to change that and the city has agreed to consider permitting them.

Scenic Nevada commissioned the recent poll to find out how the community feels about billboards today with the advent of the new digital technology, Barnes said. It is part of the group’s project called, “Protecting Our Scenic Heritage,” funded through a grant donated by the John Ben Snow Foundation, which annually gives about \$300,000 to non-profit groups in Nevada.