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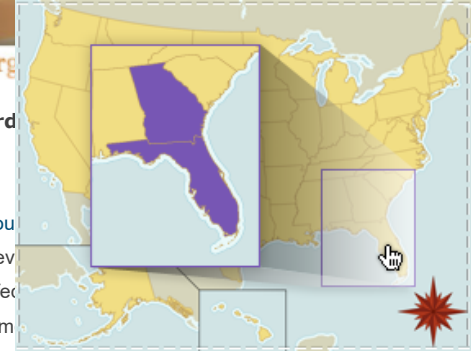
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March 2008

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Scenic Connecticut forms as state's governor confronts billboard blight

Connecticut Governor M. Jodi Rell set off a firestorm in February when she announced that billboard blight was damaging the state and issued an executive order to prevent renewal of current billboard permits on state-owned property. Her order didn't affect signs on private property and didn't require that existing signs be immediately removed, only that the permits on state land not be renewed when they expired. She subsequently introduced legislation to make her order permanent and added a provision that would ban new digital billboards along the state's highways.

It will come as no surprise that her proposal was met with considerable opposition from billboard interests and their legislative supporters. An industry-generated bill that would do the opposite of Gov. Rell's proposal was recently reported out of the General Assembly's transportation committee. Scenic America's Kevin Fry and William Brinton traveled to Hartford to deliver testimony in support of the governor's bill; Fry also appeared on four radio shows and penned an op-ed for the *Hartford Courant*.



Scenic America makes the news:

[Listen: Kevin Fry on KDKA](#)

[Hartford Courant editorial: Signs shouldn't define what state looks like](#)

[Should highway billboards go digital in Texas?](#)

[Digital billboard in South Carolina lights up the night, raises eyebrows](#)

[Scenic Nevada fights LED billboards in Reno](#)

[Bill lights up billboard debate in Missouri](#)

Although the governor's courageous proposal has encountered considerable political obstacles it has launched an important and long-overdue statewide conversation about billboards. It has triggered editorials, media coverage, op-eds, public comment, and, most importantly, the creation of a brand-new organization, Scenic Connecticut, which will now lead the fight against blight in the state. The fate of Gov. Rell's initiative remains uncertain, but the billboard issue is now out of the shadows and front and center in the public mind.

Those wishing to lend their support to Gov. Rell can contact her [here](#).

Court rulings uphold local sign laws in Georgia and Wisconsin

Two important rulings reasserting the rights of municipalities to regulate signage have come down recently in Georgia and Wisconsin.

The Georgia Supreme Court sided with the city of Roswell in a dispute with Granite State Outdoor Advertising over that company's desire to erect 70-foot-tall billboards in the city.

Granite State had sought to put up three of the billboards but Roswell rejected each application because their size violated the city's sign ordinance. Granite State filed suit, alleging that the entire sign ordinance was unconstitutional.

Scenic Quote of the Month

"Like Scenic America, landscape

architects strive to add beauty to America's cities. Our profession works hard to unite communities, add health benefits and bring people closer to each other and their natural surroundings."

~ ASLA President Janice Cervelli Schach, FASLA, at the announcement of a cooperative agreement between Scenic America and ASLA in February 2000.

Scenic Trivia Question

Q: Who received Scenic America's Stafford Award in the year 2000?

A: Clyde E. Pyers, former director of policy for the Maryland State Highway Administration and an early proponent of context sensitive highway design. The Stafford Award was named for Robert Stafford, former US Senator from Vermont whose efforts to reform the HBA won him admiration from all of us in the scenic conservation movement.

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The court ruled unanimously in Roswell's favor. "Granite State...cannot contend the city's height and size provisions are unconstitutional," said Georgia Supreme Court Justice Robert Benham.

More good news from Georgia: that state's House recently voted down HB 1318, a bill that would have discouraged local governments from banning or restricting billboards. The bill, which was heavily opposed by the Garden Club of Georgia, would have required that billboard owners be compensated when local governments require them to move or remove their signs.



Main Street in Freeport, ME photo by Max Ashburn

ruling in its entirety.

These rulings, coupled with a similar [recent decision](#) in New Hampshire, are significant legal landmarks that reaffirm of the rights of municipalities to decide what they want to look like and represent a diminishing ability for outdoor advertising companies to challenge local ordinances.

Scenic Illinois initiates Municipal Design Review Network and Legal Update Event

Eighty-five municipal planners, elected officials, commission members and land use professionals gathered recently at the [University Club](#) in downtown Chicago to hear news on recent Illinois legislation affecting appearance and architectural review.

[Scenic Illinois](#) has organized these meetings for Chicago metropolitan communities who are interested in municipal review of architecture, landscape and sign control. John Hedrick of Scenic Illinois provided background regarding design review approaches and moderated the breakout sessions for open discussion.

The "Legislative Updates" program featured presentations from Julie Tappendorf and David Silverman of the law firm [Ancel Glink](#) and Michele Stengell of the [Village of Glen Ellyn](#). The program offered an overview of the new legislation-Illinois Public Act 95-0475-which clearly establishes the authority for design review commissions and allows communities to adopt more effective design regulations. The program materials also included an overview of digital signage issues.

The session marked the fourth gathering of the Municipal Design Review Network, which was initiated by Scenic Illinois and co-sponsored by DePaul's University [Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development](#). Past topics have included form-based codes, retail center signage issues, and legal considerations.



Old-time Main Street - image from iStockphoto.com

In Wisconsin, a Court of Appeals upheld a municipality's right to adopt sign regulations which are more strict than those at the state and federal levels.

The town of Spring Valley has a zoning ordinance banning directional signs in residential and agricultural areas. This ordinance was challenged by a businessman who wanted to erect a billboard on land he owns that is zoned agricultural. The billboard would have advertised one of his businesses further up the road.

Read a further breakdown of the case [here](#) from the Wisconsin Law Journal, or [click here](#) to read the court's



Chicago skyline as seen from Navy Pier - photo by Max Ashburn

Your tax-deductible donation helps us to provide information, support, and guidance to communities, planners, and policy makers that recognize...

Cownover talks up scenic conservation at meeting of byways representatives

Brad Cownover, Scenic America's Director of Scenic Conservation Services, was a featured presenter at a recent assembly of byways officials in Dover, Delaware.

Change is Inevitable, Ugliness is Not!



The meeting, sponsored by [America's Byways](#) and the [Delaware DOT](#), served as an opportunity for Cownover to speak about the role of scenic conservation in byways planning and design.

"I believe that Scenic America and most everyone here today share some common interests and concerns about what we see happening in our visual environment around us," he said. "We care about protecting the fundamental character of our towns, communities, landscapes, and our roadways."



Brad Cownover speaks in Dover, Dela. - photo by Max Ashburn

Cownover reminded the audience that Scenic America was one of the founding partners of the [National Scenic Byways Program](#).

"Our roadway corridors are important landscapes," he said. "They connect the places we live, work, and play. We experience them everyday. It's vital that we protect and care for them."



Historic building in downtown Dover, Delaware - photo by Max Ashburn

Cownover presented the group with an outline of steps that they can take to ensure that their byway corridor becomes what they envision it to be. He said that poorly-planned corridors can just as easily degrade their surroundings as well-planned ones can benefit them.

"Through a lack of conscientious planning, design and management of our visual environment, our valued places can quickly erode," he said. "Our scenic heritage is at risk of becoming a vanishing resource."

[Contact Brad Cownover](#) for more information about scenic conservation or to inquire about having him speak at your event.

Phoenix could see first digital billboards despite intense local opposition

Contact Us

(We've moved!)

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The city of Phoenix is about to get its first digital billboards in spite of intense opposition from local scenic conservation and dark skies organizations.

The City of Phoenix Board of Adjustment has approved "use permit" applications to convert eight Clear Channel billboards from traditional static displays to full screen LED (light emitting diode) displays.

At a public hearing representatives from Clear Channel claimed the digital billboards were no brighter than traditional illuminated billboards and touted their ability to "catch a crook" by displaying photos of wanted persons. This is a tactic increasing in popularity amongst billboard companies seeking to change their signs to digital.



Phoenix at night - photo by Flickr member [JuDiTha A](#)

At the meeting there was substantial opposition from Scenic Arizona, the Neighborhood Coalition of Greater Phoenix (NCGP), the [International Dark Sky Association \(IDA\)](#), the

directors of eight major observatories and others. The IDA and the observatories had specifically requested a continuance, so as to allow time for Clear Channel to provide detailed specifications of the proposed LED displays in order to determine their effect on nighttime skies.

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