

Maryland Coast Dispatch

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"WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY, AND HE IS US." POGO

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Trash Can Ads Proposed In Downtown Area

OCEAN CITY – The City Council balked this week at the idea of allowing advertising on the new trash cans downtown due to concerns they would be adding to sign clutter or eye pollution downtown.

A Canadian company, Outdoor Partner Media, pitched the idea of testing out their free PartnerBins at the Mayor and City Council work session Tuesday, after working with Superintendent of Maintenance Bruce Gibbs on the proposal for eight months.

Outdoor Partner Media CEO Mark Brodtkin said he just returned from Key West, Fla., where he proposed the same idea. The company would provide 20 free PartnerBins, about four feet long and wide and able to hold about 90 gallons. The bins are designed to separate trash from recyclable plastic and glass with the bonus of marketable advertising space the resort community could eventually generate revenue from, plus eight free poster panels on which the city could promote town events for free.

If the city was happy with the units and the free maintenance provided by the company for one year, they could purchase more units for the rest of the resort and would have the ultimate say on exactly what type of advertising could be used.

If resort officials were not pleased with the product or the service after

a one-year trial period, Brodtkin said the units would be removed with no questions asked.

"For a one-year period, if it is successful, that is how we will benefit ... and the city would generate \$36,000 in revenue and benefit from \$1,500 in free receptacles," he said. "If not, we will bring in the trucks and pull them out."

Gibbs and Assistant to the Director of Public Works Dick Malone supported the project and said the equipment would encourage recycling and deter people from dumping large household bags of trash in the downtown receptacles that are manually emptied each day. "This is a free, win-win situation for us," Gibbs said.

But Councilman Joe Hall said while he supported the concept of recycling, the available advertising space on the PartnerBin would go against what resort officials enacted when they codified the Downtown Design Guidelines brought forward by the Ocean City Development Corporation to revitalize downtown Ocean City.

"I think it would go against what we are trying to do," Hall said. "Right now I feel with the off-premise advertising and signage issues we have had would go against that and totally reverse what the council has done over the past year."

Councilman Vince Gisriel said he shared Hall's concerns about signs

and but thought it fair to put the chance to advertise out to bid.

Brodtkin said the affordable cost of monthly advertising, between \$200-\$300 per panel was designed to attract local entities like restaurants and real estate agents.

However, Councilman Lloyd Martin said he would be interested in opening up the add space to corporate entities like Frito Lay and Pepsi, for example.

Councilwoman Nancy Howard said the resort had gone a long way to eliminate eye pollution and the proliferation of more signs downtown could lead to problems. "I could just see them getting busier and more colorful," she said.

Brodtkin said his product lessened visual pollution by removing current trash barrels overflowing with trash. He also assured the council the bins could be bolted down to prevent rowdy beach-goers from tipping the units and that a maintenance team would repair any damage or defacing within 48 hours.

Mayor Jim Mathias said he thought it was a good idea and applauded the potential revenue, but called the situation "bittersweet."

"I think we should do it, I like the pilot program," he said. "But I think 48 hours is a long time for something to sit on the street that is defaced ... this is a hybrid step towards privatization."

Mathias and Gibbs agreed 48 hours was too long and said they have developed what they refer to as an immediate graffiti response team to attend to damage within two or three hours. A sample PartnerBin has been on the corner of Dorchester Street and Baltimore Avenue for one month, and Gibbs said no problems have been reported.

Councilman Jim Hall said he liked the idea and the resort community should take advantage of the trial offer. "And in 12 months, if we are not happy, we are going to tell you to take your cans and get the hell out of here," he said.

But Council President Rick Meehan said with all the work that has been done downtown, he thought it proper a presentation be made to the Ocean City Development Corporation. "We have given them the ability to take the lead down there," he said. "I think you should take the presentation to OCDC. We are at a new beginning downtown, and any decision we make I think we need to include them in this process."

Hall agreed and made a motion the idea be brought to the 15 OCDC board members the first Wednesday in August.

The council voted 6-1 in favor of the motion, with Gisriel opposed stating the concept could lead to a proliferation of signs throughout town.

– Jennifer A. Dawicki