



January 21, 2009

Arkansas State of Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD)
Attn: Ricky Prince
Environmental Division, P. O. Box 190296
Little Rock, AR 72219-0296

RE: Landscape Buffer Zones: Request to Protect/Maintain buffers along all scenic interstates/highways

Dear Mr. Prince:

One of the duties of the Little Rock City Beautiful Commission (CBC) is to promote a greater public interest in the improvement of the appearance of the city of Little Rock. To this end, CBC has been involved in beautification projects around the city such as the Bicentennial Carillon/Bell Tower by the Zoo (1977), the Belvedere Pavilion, Riverfront Park (1986), and the City Hall North Entrance Beautification Project (2007-08). CBC has also taken the lead as an anti-litter advocate in promoting the City's Adopt-a-street program to other groups as well as adopting a street.

In addition, another duty of our commission is the responsibility for reviewing all commercial development plans requesting variances to the required Landscape Ordinance in an effort to maintain a beautiful landscape for our city. The City's Planning Commission and Board of Adjustments have a similar responsibility to review related landscape buffer variances.

The other two charter duties of our commission are to provide environmental policy and aesthetic improvement guidelines to the Board of Directors. To this end, CBC felt obligated to contact the Planning Commission and Board of Adjustments to express our concern and our position on the landscape buffer variance matter and also contacted the Mayor and Board of Directors to let them know our position and recommendation. CBC is concerned about a possible trend for increased variance requests for landscape buffers along scenic interstate/highways in our city that would be under your department's review authority.

At our June 2008 meeting, CBC voted and passed a motion stating that CBC is opposed to removing, reducing, or altering the landscape buffer zones along the scenic interstates/highway such as the I-430. We asked that the Planning Commission and Board of Adjustments not approve any such variance requests especially since it might establish a precedent for any future development along that interstates/highway corridor. CBC feels any such approvals in variances of the landscape buffer zone would significantly change the quality of life for the city with increased noise levels and decreased visual appearance of major transportation entrance routes into our city. This landscape buffer zone was

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established by the city to maintain the beautiful and scenic qualities of the area and CBC feels that it needs to be preserved and protected.

CBC approved a motion in our August meeting to send a letter similar to this one to the Planning Commission and Board of Adjustments to communicate our position. In addition to the distribution to those noted below, our position on the opposition to the approval of any landscape buffer variances is on record with our June meeting minutes and this position letter is posted on our website (www.lrcitybeautifulcommission.org) on the ordinance page at the top.

Our, then-chair, Lynn Warren (in behalf of CBC) appeared before the Planning Commission on October 2nd when a proposed buffer variance by Crain Automotive was discussed to present our opposition. However, after some discussion, the Planning Commission approved Crain's variance request to modify and grade their "previously protected" buffer, saying that the highway buffer will be preserved so it was not a concern. At the CBC October meeting, we agreed to send this letter to your department to request that the highway buffer be preserved and protected by your agency.

There is a concern that Crain Automotive (and future clients, especially in the Colonel Glenn exit area) will also go to AHTD requesting the removal of the highway buffer along their property to open up visibility into their car lot. We are writing your agency to request that you not approve any such variance requests especially since it might establish a precedent for any future development along that interstates/highway corridor and cause the de-forestation of the scenic highway and gateway into our city.

On behalf of the Little Rock City Beautiful Commission, thank you for your time and consideration of this request. We hope that your department will join us in our efforts to promote and demonstrate a higher level of aesthetics for our community.

Sincerely,



Steve Homeyer, Chair
Little Rock City Beautiful Commission

SH: LMW:LMW

eCc. Mayor Mark Stodola and Board of Directors
Little Rock City Beautiful Commission (CBC)
Planning Commission members
Board of Adjustments members
Associated city staff: Planning and Development Department-Tony Bozynski, Dana Carney, Christy Marvel; City Attorney Office-Beth Carpenter, Deputy City Attorney; Public Relations-Scott Carter
Lynn Malbrough, Head, Environmental Division, Beautification Section, AHTD