

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 1999

SESSION LAW 1999-404
SENATE BILL 254

AN ACT TO INCREASE VARIOUS OUTDOOR ADVERTISING PERMIT FEES, EXPAND CURRENT NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS, AND MODIFY AND UPDATE THE OUTDOOR ADVERTISING CONTROL ACT WITH RESPECT TO VENUE REQUIREMENTS, DEFINITIONS, AND PARTIES RESPONSIBLE FOR PAYMENT OF REMOVAL OF ILLEGAL OUTDOOR ADVERTISING.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

Section 1. G.S. 136-133 reads as rewritten:

"§ 136-133. Permits required.

(a) No person shall erect or maintain any outdoor advertising within 660 feet of the nearest edge of the right-of-way of the interstate or primary highway system, except those allowed under G.S. 136-129, subdivisions (2) and (3) in this Article, or beyond 660 feet of the nearest edge of the right-of-way of the interstate or primary highway system, except those allowed under G.S. 136-129.1, subdivisions (2) and (3), without first obtaining a permit from the Department of Transportation or its agents pursuant to the procedures set out by rules ~~and regulations promulgated~~ adopted by the Department of Transportation. The permit shall be valid until revoked for nonconformance with this Article or rules ~~and regulations promulgated~~ adopted by the Department of ~~Transportation thereunder.~~ Transportation. Any person aggrieved by the decision of the Department of Transportation or its agents in refusing to grant or in revoking a permit may appeal the decision in accordance with the rules ~~and regulations enacted~~ adopted by the Department of Transportation pursuant to this Article to the Secretary of Transportation who shall make the final decision on the agency appeal. The Department of Transportation shall have the authority to charge permit fees to defray the costs of administering the permit procedures under this Article. The fees for directional signs as set forth in G.S. 136-129(1) and G.S. 136-129.1(1) shall not exceed a ~~twenty dollar (\$20.00)~~ forty dollar (\$40.00) initial fee and a ~~fifteen dollar (\$15.00)~~ thirty dollar (\$30.00) annual renewal fee. The fees for outdoor advertising structures, as set forth in G.S. 136-129(4) and (5) shall not exceed a ~~sixty dollar (\$60.00)~~ one hundred twenty dollar (\$120.00) initial fee and a ~~thirty dollar (\$30.00)~~ sixty dollar (\$60.00) annual renewal fee.

(b) If outdoor advertising is under construction and the Department of Transportation determines that a permit has not been issued for the outdoor advertising, the Department may require that all work on the outdoor advertising cease until the owner of the outdoor advertising shows that the outdoor advertising does not violate this

section. The stopwork order shall be prominently posted on the outdoor advertising structure, and no further notice of the stopwork order is required. The failure of an owner of outdoor advertising to comply immediately with the stopwork order shall subject the outdoor advertising to removal by the Department of Transportation or its agents. Outdoor advertising is under construction when it is in any phase of construction prior to the attachment and display of the advertising message in final position for viewing by the traveling public. The cost of removing outdoor advertising by the Department of Transportation or its agents pursuant to this section shall be assessed against the owner of the unpermitted outdoor advertising by the Department of Transportation. No stopwork order may be issued when the Department of Transportation process agent has been served with a court order allowing the sign to be constructed."

Section 2. G.S. 136-134 reads as rewritten:

"§ 136-134. Illegal advertising.

Any outdoor advertising erected or maintained adjacent to the right-of-way of the interstate or primary highway system after the effective date of this Article as determined by G.S. 136-140, in violation of the provisions of this Article or rules ~~and regulations promulgated~~ adopted by the Department of Transportation, or any outdoor advertising maintained without a permit regardless of the date of erection shall be illegal and shall constitute a nuisance. The Department of Transportation or its agents shall give 30 days' notice to the owner of the illegal outdoor advertising with the exception of the owner of unlawful portable outdoor advertising for which the Department of Transportation shall give five days' notice, if such owner is known or can by reasonable diligence be ascertained, to remove the outdoor advertising or to make it conform to the provisions of this Article or rules ~~and regulations promulgated~~ adopted by the Department of Transportation hereunder. The Department of Transportation or its agents shall have the right to remove the illegal outdoor advertising at the expense of the ~~said~~ owner if the ~~said~~ owner fails to ~~act~~ remove the outdoor advertising or to make it conform to the provisions of this Article or rules issued by the Department of Transportation within 30 days after receipt of such notice or five days for owners of portable outdoor advertising. The Department of Transportation or its agents may enter upon private property for the purpose of removing the outdoor advertising prohibited by this Article or rules ~~and regulations promulgated~~ adopted by the Department of Transportation hereunder without civil or criminal liability. The costs of removing the outdoor advertising, whether by the Department of Transportation or its agents, shall be assessed against the owner of the illegal outdoor advertising by the Department of Transportation. Any person aggrieved by the decision declaring the outdoor advertising structure illegal shall be granted the right to appeal the decision in accordance with the terms of the rules and regulations enacted by the Department of Transportation pursuant to this Article to the Secretary of Transportation who shall make the final decision on the agency appeal."

Section 3. Chapter 136 of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new section to read:

"§ 136-134.2. Notification requirements.

When the Department of Transportation notifies a permit applicant, permit holder, or the owner of an outdoor advertising structure that the application is denied, the permit revoked, or the structure is in violation of this Article or rules issued pursuant to this Article, it shall do so in writing by certified mail, return receipt requested, and shall include a copy of this Article and all rules issued pursuant to this Article.

If the Department of Transportation fails to include a copy of this Article and the rules, the time period during which the permit applicant, permit holder, or owner of the outdoor advertising structure has to request a review hearing shall be tolled until the Department of Transportation provides the required materials."

Section 4. G.S. 136-135 reads as rewritten:

"§ 136-135. Enforcement provisions.

Any person, firm, corporation or association, placing, erecting or maintaining outdoor advertising along the interstate system or primary system in violation of this Article or rules ~~and regulations promulgated~~ adopted by the Department of Transportation shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor. In addition thereto, the Department of Transportation may seek injunctive relief in the Superior Court of Wake County or of the county where the outdoor advertising is located and require the outdoor advertising to conform to the provisions of this Article or rules ~~and regulations promulgated~~ adopted pursuant hereto, or require the removal of the said illegal outdoor advertising."

Section 5. Chapter 136 of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new section to read:

"§ 136-18.7. Fees.

The fee for a selective vegetation removal permit issued pursuant to G.S. 136-18(5), (7), and (9) is two hundred dollars (\$200.00)."

Section 6. G.S. 136-127 reads as rewritten:

"§ 136-127. Declaration of policy.

The General Assembly hereby finds and declares that outdoor advertising is a legitimate commercial use of private property adjacent to roads and highways but that the erection and maintenance of outdoor advertising signs and devices in areas in the vicinity of the right-of-way of the interstate and primary ~~highways~~ highway systems within the State should be controlled and regulated in order to promote the safety, health, welfare and convenience and enjoyment of travel on and protection of the public investment in highways within the State, to prevent unreasonable distraction of operators of motor vehicles and to prevent interference with the effectiveness of traffic regulations and to promote safety on the highways, to attract tourists and promote the prosperity, economic well-being and general welfare of the State, and to preserve and enhance the natural scenic beauty of the highways and areas in the vicinity of the State highways and to promote the reasonable, orderly and effective display of such signs, displays and devices. It is the intention of the General Assembly to provide and declare herein a public policy and statutory basis for the regulation and control of outdoor advertising."

Section 7. G.S. 136-128 reads as rewritten:

"§ 136-128. Definitions.

As used in this Article:

- (1) "Erect" means to construct, build, raise, assemble, place, affix, attach, create, paint, draw, or in any other way bring into being or establish.
- (1a) "Illegal sign" means one which was erected and/or maintained in violation of State law.
- (1b) "Information center" means an area or site established and maintained at safety rest areas for the purpose of informing the public of places of interest within the State and providing such other information as the Department of Transportation may consider desirable.
- (2) "Interstate system" means that portion of the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways located within the State, as officially designated, or as may hereafter be so designated, by the Department of Transportation, or other appropriate authorities and are also so designated by interstate numbers. As to highways under construction so designated as interstate highways pursuant to the above procedures, the highway shall be a part of the interstate system for the purposes of this Article on the date the location of the highway has been approved finally by the appropriate federal authorities.
- (2a) "Nonconforming sign" shall mean a sign which was lawfully erected but which does not comply with the provisions of State law or State rules and regulations passed at a later date or which later fails to comply with State law or State rules or regulations due to changed conditions. Illegally erected or maintained signs are not nonconforming signs.
- (3) "Outdoor advertising" means any outdoor sign, display, light, device, figure, painting, drawing, message, plaque, poster, billboard, or any other thing which is designed, intended or used to advertise or inform, any part of the advertising or information contents of which is visible from any place on the main-traveled way of the interstate or primary system, whether the same be permanent or portable installation.
- (4) "~~Primary systems" means that portion of connected main highways, as now officially designated, or as may hereafter be so designated by the Department of Transportation as primary system, or other appropriate authorities and are also so designated by N.C. or U.S. numbers.~~ means the federal-aid primary system in existence on June 1, 1991, and any highway which is not on that system but which is on the National Highway System. As to highways under construction so designated as primary highways pursuant to the above procedures, the highway shall be a part of the primary system for purposes of this Article on the date the location of the highway has been approved finally by the appropriate federal or State authorities.
- (5) "Safety rest area" means an area or site established and maintained within or adjacent to the highway right-of-way by or under public supervision or control, for the convenience of the traveling public.

- (6) "State law" means a State constitutional provision or statute, or an ordinance, rule or regulation enacted or adopted by a State agency or political subdivision of a State pursuant to a State Constitution or statute.
- (7) "Unzoned area" shall mean an area where there is no zoning in effect.
- (8) "Urban area" shall mean an area within the boundaries or limits of any incorporated municipality having a population of five thousand or more as determined by the latest available federal census.
- (9) "Visible" means capable of being seen (whether or not legible) without visual aid by a person of normal visual acuity."

Section 8. G.S. 136-129 reads as rewritten:

"§ 136-129. Limitations of outdoor advertising devices.

No outdoor advertising shall be erected or maintained within 660 feet of the nearest edge of the right-of-way of the interstate or primary ~~highways~~ highway systems in this State so as to be visible from the main-traveled way thereof after the effective date of this Article as determined by G.S. 136-140, except the following:

- (1) Directional and other official signs and notices, which signs and notices shall include those authorized and permitted by Chapter 136 of the General Statutes, which include but are not limited to official signs and notices pertaining to natural wonders, scenic and historic attractions and signs erected and maintained by a public utility, electric or telephone membership corporation, or municipality for the purpose of giving warning of or information as to the location of an underground cable, pipeline or other installation.
- (2) Outdoor advertising which advertises the sale or lease of property upon which it is located.
- (2a) Outdoor advertising which advertises the sale of any fruit or vegetable crop by the grower at a roadside stand or by having the purchaser pick the crop on the property on which the crop is grown provided: (i) the sign is no more than two feet long on any side; (ii) the sign is located on property owned or leased by the grower where the crop is grown; (iii) the grower is also the seller; and (iv) the sign is kept in place by the grower for no more than 30 days.
- (3) Outdoor advertising which advertises activities conducted on the property upon which it is located.
- (4) Outdoor advertising, in conformity with the rules and regulations promulgated by the Department of Transportation, located in areas which are zoned industrial or commercial under authority of State law.
- (5) Outdoor advertising, in conformity with the rules and regulations promulgated by the Department of Transportation, located in unzoned commercial or industrial areas."

Section 9. G.S. 136-129.1 reads as rewritten:

"§ 136-129.1. Limitations of outdoor advertising devices beyond 660 feet.

No outdoor advertising shall be erected or maintained beyond 660 feet of the nearest edge of the right-of-way of the interstate or primary ~~highways~~ highway systems in this State outside of the urban areas so as to be visible and intended to be read from the main-traveled way except the following:

- (1) Directional and other official signs and notices, which signs and notices shall include those authorized and permitted by Chapter 136 of the General Statutes, which include but are not limited to official signs and notices pertaining to natural wonders, scenic and historic attractions and signs erected and maintained by a public utility, electric or telephone membership corporation, or municipality for the purpose of giving warning of or information as to the location of an underground cable, pipeline or other installation.
- (2) Outdoor advertising which advertises the sale or lease of property upon which it is located.
- (3) Outdoor advertising which advertises activities conducted on the property upon which it is located."

Section 10. G.S. 136-136 reads as rewritten:

"§ 136-136. Zoning changes.

All zoning authorities shall give written notice to the Department of Transportation of the establishment or revision of any commercial and industrial zones within 660 feet of the right-of-way of interstate or primary ~~highways~~ highway systems. Notice shall be by registered mail sent to the offices of the Department of Transportation in Raleigh, North Carolina, within 15 days after the effective date of the zoning change or establishment."

Section 11. This act is effective when it becomes law.

In the General Assembly read three times and ratified this the 20th day of July, 1999.

s/ Dennis A. Wicker
President of the Senate

s/ James B. Black
Speaker of the House of Representatives

s/ James B. Hunt, Jr.
Governor

Approved 9:43 p.m. this 5th day of August, 1999