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**Squilla claims wide neighborhood support for 3-D billboards**


- Thursday, March 19, 2015
- By [Jared Brey](#)
- [26 Comments](#)
- [12th and Arch, Philadelphia, Pa.](#)








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Councilman Johnson limits UED Displays





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Councilman Mark Squilla said on Thursday that his office has received hundreds of letters of support from Center City residents who feel that three-dimensional structures displaying digital advertisements would liven up the city’s streets.

The signs—called “Urban Experiential Displays” by Catalyst Outdoor, the billboard company that hopes to build them—would be permitted on a few key downtown corners under legislation introduced by Squilla. On Thursday, Squilla introduced amendments to the bill that further limit the signs’ height and brightness.

At Councilman Kenyatta Johnson's request, Squilla also removed one sign, at the Bellevue Garage on South Broad Street, from the bill. That sign was to be placed in Johnson's district, but [Johnson said he wouldn't support it](#) after hearing from Center City residents who are opposed to the displays.

After the amendments, the bill allows only two locations for the signs to be placed: outside the Convention Center at Broad and Arch and across from the Reading Terminal at 12th and Arch. Squilla said he planned to amend the legislation in the future to allow for a third location within his Council district.

Squilla said that his office has received more than 300 letters of support from residents who live in the areas surrounding the two proposed signs.

"The neighbors—they're upset that these people who don't live around it are complaining about it," Squilla said. "And they're the ones who want it. So that's the main concern. They're saying, 'Well how could somebody who doesn't live in our area tell us what we should have in our neighborhood?'"

At Thursday's Council session, four witnesses testified in opposition to the bill. Mary Tracy, director of Scenic Philadelphia and a longtime opponent of billboards, commended Councilman Squilla for working to improve the bill. She said the height and brightness limits would reduce the negative impact of the signs. Even so, she said she still opposes the concept.

"It was terrible from the beginning," Tracy said, summing up the other witnesses' testimony. "And even now, no matter what improvements, it's still going to be terrible ..."

Tracy said that all Council members should take responsibility for Center City, no matter what neighborhoods they represent. She called on them to vote against the legislation. That's not likely to happen, as City Council routinely follows the lead of the District council member on matters that affect only his or her district.

Squilla claims he has 60 to 70 people willing to testify in support of the bill at next week's Council meeting, when he plans to call for a vote. He said he'll talk to Council President Clarke about how many of them should actually speak.

"For three or four or five people who don't want it to have all the attention—[the neighbors] are getting upset about it ..." Squilla said. "People who support something don't go out and, like, call the newspaper ... So we'll have them here next week so everyone can get a good idea."

Thaddeus Bartkowski, the head of Catalyst Outdoor, has given almost \$10,000 to Council members' political campaigns in the last few years. Frank DiCiccio, Squilla's predecessor on Council, is [working on the proposal](#) as a lobbyist for Catalyst.

*If you live in the immediate vicinity of the Convention Center or the Reading Terminal Market, we'd love to hear what you think of the proposed signs. Drop a note in the comments section or email the reporter at [jbrey@planphilly.com](mailto:jbrey@planphilly.com). You can also email your Councilman at [Mark.Squilla@phila.gov](mailto:Mark.Squilla@phila.gov)*

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## About the author

### Jared Brey, Zoning and development reporter

Jared Brey writes about development, zoning policy, and city government for PlanPhilly.com. He wasn't interested in being a reporter until halfway through a master's program in journalism at Temple University that he intended to parlay into an academic career. His work has appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Daily News*, *City Paper*, *Business Journal*, and *Metropolis*.

Jared grew up in Montgomery County and moved to Philadelphia in 2005. He has since lived in Brewerytown, the Italian Market, North Central, Bella Vista, and East Passyunk. He believes he will stay in South Philadelphia. Follow him on Twitter [@jaredbrey](#), or send him tips at [jbrey@planphilly.com](mailto:jbrey@planphilly.com).

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