BORED WITH BILLBOARDS?

In 2001, the SoHo Alliance spearheaded a campaign to eliminate monster billboards from our neighborhood. Because SoHo is zoned for manufacturing use, billboards had been permitted.

Working with other activist groups throughout the city, we helped pass a law to eliminate this garish and intrusive form of advertising. Our members made sure that SoHo was included in neighborhoods with tighter restrictions. Only smaller traditional-size billboards, a few hundred square feet in area at most, will be permitted.

The law will also add teeth to enforcement by subjecting violators to fines up to $5,000 per day. Prior to the new law, the old $50 a day fine was just a cost of doing business, considering some of these monster billboards command $50,000 and more a month in rent.

However, the powerful outdoor advertising industry sued in Federal Court claiming that this law was an infringement on their right of commercial free speech.

This spring, a Federal court denied the motion and the law stands.

There is no talk of this decision being appealed. Currently the Department of Buildings is promulgating rules for enforcement.

Meantime, the city is beginning to take down some of the illegal signs near the Holland Tunnel.

The other billboards that were placed under the old law will be allowed to remain a few years so that the owners can amortize the cost of installing them.

So we may have to bear it for a few years, but this scorge of monster billboards will eventually removed from our neighborhood. If you have a billboard you think should be re-moved, call Robert Iulo at the NYC Department of Buildings at 646-248-8101.

SoHo Library? You Can Book On It!

SoHo’s new library is on schedule to open in the winter of 2003-2004. Our former Council member (and SoHo Alliance co-founder), Kathryn Freed, obtained permanent funding for the library, which will be located at the border of SoHo and Little Italy on Jersey Street near Mulberry Street across from the Puck Building. It is 95% designed and will soon go out for bidding on construction.

Both neighborhoods are sorely lacking a library and this new bibliothèque is just what we need. Jersey Street is a quaint alley that is rarely used by vehicular traffic, so the NYC Department of Transportation will
SoHo’s Poster Girl

Bonnie at work, sprucing up SoHo

Back in the 1970’s local art, music, theater, and dance groups would announce their events on lampposts in SoHo. It was a cheap, immediate and appropriate form of advertising. However, as Downtown became popular, crass commercial posters began to appear and cover our lampposts like a bad wallpaper job. Advertising a loft sale, a community event, a lost pet is one thing, but renegade companies sprang up to plaster our community with ads promoting fly-by-night moving companies, hip-hop events, airline ticket schemes, ad nauseam.

One long-time SoHo resident, Bonnie Lynn, has taken it on herself to clean up our lampposts. Other residents volunteer sporadically to remove the litter from the streetlights, but Bonnie does it on a steady basis.

Her efforts have been instrumental on improving the look of our neighborhood. We urge others to help her. When you see an illegal poster on a lamppost, don’t be shy. Tear it down. Bonnie would like to organize a campaign to maintain the lampposts. If you want to volunteer, call 353-8466.