



**CITY OF KIRKLAND**  
Planning and Community Development Department  
123 Fifth Avenue, Kirkland, WA 98033  
425.587-3225 - [www.kirklandwa.gov](http://www.kirklandwa.gov)

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**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Kurt Triplett, City Manager  
**From:** Eric Shields, Planning Director  
Nancy Cox, Development Review Manager  
**Date:** January 23, 2012  
**Subject:** Electronic Readerboard Signs at Schools

**RECOMMENDATION**

Consider the request of Forest Miller, Director of Facilities for the Lake Washington School District, asking that zoning regulations be revised to allow electronic readerboard signs at junior high/ middle schools and high schools in Kirkland.

Provide direction to staff on whether such revisions should be considered in the current group of miscellaneous code amendments.

**BACKGROUND DISCUSSION**

Electronic readerboard signs are now allowed only at two high schools: Lake Washington and Juanita, both of which are in the RSX zone. The signs must comply with the following regulations:

9. *Electrical signs shall not be permitted except at Lake Washington and Juanita High Schools. One pedestal sign with a readerboard having electronic programming is allowed at each high school only if:*
  - a. *It is a pedestal sign (see Plate 12) having a maximum of 40 square feet of sign area per sign face;*
  - b. *The electronic readerboard is no more than 50 percent of the sign area;*
  - c. *Moving graphics and text or video are not part of the sign;*
  - d. *The electronic readerboard does not change text and/or images at a rate less than one every seven seconds and shall be readily legible given the text size and the speed limit of the adjacent right-of-way;*
  - e. *The electronic readerboard displays messages regarding public service announcements or school events only;*
  - f. *The intensity of the display shall not produce glare that extends to adjacent properties and the signs shall be equipped with a device which automatically dims the intensity of the lights during hours of darkness;*
  - g. *The electronic readerboard is turned off between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.;*
  - h. *It is located to have the least impact on surrounding residential properties.*

*If it is determined that the electronic readerboard constitutes a traffic hazard for any reason, the Planning Director may impose additional conditions.*

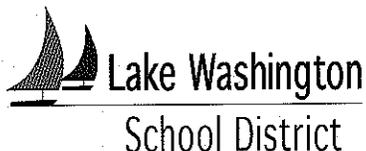
Mr. Miller's letter requests that readerboard signs be allowed at all junior high/ middle schools and high schools. The letter also lists specific schools, but two schools are missing: International Community School and Northstar. It's not clear at this time if those schools are intended to be within the scope of the request. I have asked Mr. Miller for clarification, but as of this writing I have not received a reply.

The Planning Department recently started discussions with the Planning Commission and Houghton Community Council about a new group of miscellaneous zoning code amendments. If the City Council is interested in considering Mr. Miller's request, the proposal could be reviewed as part of that group. The scope of the amendments would involve broadening the number of schools and zoning districts where electronic readerboard signs are allowed consistent with the above regulations. In addition, consideration should be given to whether any additional restrictions would be appropriate given the specific locations of the other schools. We expect that the Planning Commission and Houghton Community Council will forward to the City Council their recommendations on the proposed amendments by June.

Attachment:

1. Letter from Forrest Miller and Finn Hill Junior High.

cc: Forest Miller, Director of Facilities, Lake Washington School District



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## Support Service Center

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December 9, 2011

AM PM  
PLANNING DEPARTMENT  
BY \_\_\_\_\_

Eric R. Shields, AICP  
Planning Director  
City of Kirkland  
Planning and Community Development  
123 Fifth Avenue  
Kirkland, WA 98033

Dear Mr. Shields,

Currently the City of Kirkland (City) signage code allows for electronic readerboard signage at High Schools in the City. The School District very much appreciates the City's code modifications for electronic readerboards at Lake Washington High School and Juanita High School.

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Lake Washington School District (District) to request expanding the signage code variance or code amendment to include electronic readerboard signage at all the District's secondary school sites. The District is not requesting a change to any other condition within the ordinance.

The schools included in the District request would be both junior high schools (to become middle schools in the fall of 2012) and high schools within the City. They are: Finn Hill Junior High School (i.e. Finn Hill Middle School in Fall 2012); Kamiakin Junior High School (i.e. Kamiakin Middle School in Fall 2012); Kirkland Junior High School (i.e. Kirkland Middle School in Fall 2012); and, BEST High School.

As well as being educational facilities, our junior high schools are heavily used public facilities which regularly communicate community events. An electronic readerboard allows schools to provide information more effectively about events to parents and community members.

Finn Hill Junior High was recently modernized, and the school is ready to update their old, pole-mounted readerboard. They would strongly prefer to install an electronic display board, partly to save valuable staff and student time required to manually change letters on a static board. The District supports their desire for an electronic reader board.

Letters of support for the sign code change from the principal, students and PTSA are attached.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Forrest W. Miller, CFM, REFP, EFM  
Director of Facilities  
Lake Washington School District



**Lake Washington**  
School District No. 414

Victor J. Scarpelli - Principal  
Dana Greenberg - Assistant Principal

**Finn Hill Junior High School**  
8040 N.E. 132nd Street • Kirkland, WA 98034-2522  
Office: (425) 936-2340 • Fax: (425) 814-2955  
vscarpelli@lwdsd.org  
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Kirkland City Council  
123 5th Avenue  
Kirkland WA, 98033

Dear Council Members:

On behalf of the students, their parents, teachers, and staff of Finn Hill Junior High School, and the surrounding community, I would like to request a sign code amendment to allow an electronic readerboard to be installed and used at the southeast corner of the new Finn Hill Junior High campus. I envision that the readerboard at Finn Hill Junior High School would provide two unique functions for the Finn Hill community: expanding communication that will enhance the educational opportunities for all community members; and building community through offers of involvement in the activities of Finn Hill.

Schools strive to educate individuals on a daily basis and a readerboard would help extend that mission beyond the classroom. The new Finn Hill Junior High campus contains several unique features that, when shared with community, could provide a daily educational experience for all that drive or walk by and pause to read the readerboard messages. Messages will range from providing time and weather information (direct from Finn Hill Junior High's new weather station), to energy usage information (that will be closely and uniquely monitored in the new building) to information about upcoming school events. The readerboard could also provide information to the community in the event of an emergency (using the guidelines set forth during the April 5, 2011 Kirkland City Council meeting). Schools also celebrate the achievements of students, teachers, and staff, however, those achievements often are unacknowledged by the greater community. A readerboard would provide the opportunity for the entire community to participate in the successes of our students and staff.

Schools provide public spaces for community building and a readerboard would be a key component to welcoming the community to campus events. Each year, Finn Hill hosts a variety of events that would be enhanced by community attendance. Concerts, plays, open houses, and meetings are just a sampling of the events that are available to the general community. In the past, it has been challenging to involve community members who may not have school-aged children in these events. A readerboard would enhance community building by inviting the entire community to partake of these events. Finn Hill Junior High has always provided the community with access to its many facilities and now would like the opportunity to extend and enhance its educational mission to keep all of the Finn Hill community informed and involved.

The new Finn Hill Junior High School has much to offer and a readerboard provides the link between the school and the Finn Hill community. Students, community members, and neighbors of Finn Hill Junior High have professed their support for the installation of a readerboard on the campus (as evidenced by the attached letters). I hope that you agree that the installation of a readerboard on the Finn Hill Junior High campus will enhance the education opportunities of our surrounding community and increase our opportunities to develop links with the greater community.

Sincerely

Victor J. Scarpelli, Jr.  
Principal  
Finn Hill Junior High & Environmental Adventure School  
Kirkland, Washington



# Finn Hill Jr. High School

8040 NE 132<sup>nd</sup> ST • Kirkland, WA 98034

Phone: 425-936-2340 ~ Fax: 425-814-2955

[www.lwsd.org/fhjh](http://www.lwsd.org/fhjh)

May 10, 2011

Dear City of Kirkland,

In August, Finn Hill Jr High School (FHJH) will start a new school year with a brand new building and with the transfer to this new building we are requesting that the City of Kirkland approval a new electronic school reader board. As you know, communication is vital part of any business setting or interpersonal relationship. The same is true for a public school. One mission of the FHJH Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) is to help facilitate a strong relationship of communication between our school, our families, and the community we serve. Communication is an essential part of any relationship. FHJH and our PTSA strive to keep everyone aware, updated, and informed in a timely manner.

As representatives of the FHJH PTSA we ask that you grant the approval of the installation of an electronic reader board so we can continue to improve communication. The proposed electronic reader board could be updated from the school office to announce many activities on a daily basis to students, parents and the community as they walk or drive by. With the existing free standing reader board, messages about school activities and events are currently conveyed by individual letters slipped into slots using a long pole or by climbing a ladder. This method is not conducive to frequent updates, especially when letters disappear from theft or being blown out of the railing. A limited amount of space is available for messages making it hard to convey all of the pertinent information. Changing the current reader board in the rain or even snow is challenging and the messaging is limited. The advantages of an electronic reader board are efficiency, safety and visibility. Messages can be changed quickly and updated often. Staff and volunteers would not need to climb a ladder to change messages. Messages can be displayed prominently at a key spot on the school property for the whole community to read.

We are aware that that the City of Kirkland has approved four Kirkland Fire Stations to use electronic reader boards to improve communications between city officials and the public during emergencies or disasters. We on Finn Hill do not have much access to this type of communication and would feel we too could do this if our reader board was approved. We are located on 84<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE which is a very busy and well traveled road. Lake Washington School District prides itself in emergency preparation and could easily use a school electronic reader board to get information out to the Finn Hill Community in a time of disaster.

Schools depend on reader boards for communication. On April 21, 2009, the City Council adopted Ordinance 4193 which approved electronic reader board signs at Lake Washington and Juanita High School. By approving this request from Lake Washington and Juanita High School, can we assume the City Council understands the importance of schools having electronic reader boards to communicate?

We are requesting at this time the approval of FHJH to install an electronic reader board under the same ordinance so we can continue to improve communication with our community.

Sincerely,

*Jodi Linstead* *Marlene Vacknitz*  
 Jodi Linstead and Marlene Vacknitz  
 PTSA Co-Presidents  
 Finn Hill Jr High School



Lake Washington  
School District No. 414

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Dear City of Kirkland,

Imagine that someone fell off their ladder while trying to change the letters on our current reader board. It would be tragic if they got hurt and the school would be responsible for them. Here at Finn Hill Junior High, we need an electric reader board, because at night, you can't read a non-electric reader board, reader boards are helpful and informative, and changing the letters on a non-electric reader board can be dangerous. For these reasons, Finn Hill Junior High should get an electric reader board.

First of all, at night, you can't exactly read a reader board. This is due to the lack of light, which defeats the purpose of having a reader board at all. With an electric reader board, the message will be visible at night, due to the illuminated display. You might not think people would be outside in the dark to see it, but many people go on walks, bike rides, or are looking out their car window. We should have an electric reader board because it would be readable in the dark. We would also be able to control the hours that the reader board is on and we could accommodate the community needs with the new technology that reader boards now come equipped with.

Secondly, reader boards are informative and helpful. You might be thinking we should just get rid of our current reader board and not get a new one, because they sound like they're dangerous and hard to see. There is, however, a purpose to having one. Many students don't remember to tell their parents what's going on at school, so some of those parents stay up-to-date purely based off of reading the school reader board. It's important that parents always know what's going on with school events, because if they don't, they could easily miss a fund raiser that could improve the school. We need an electric reader board so everyone can stay informed with school events.

Finally, it's dangerous to change the letters on non-electric reader boards. You would hope that the person changing the letters on the reader board doesn't lose their balance, but accidents do happen and the person could fall off their ladder. This would be bad for the school and obviously the person who fell off the ladder. The school could lose a lot of money in a lawsuit, plus it could acquire an un-fitting reputation. For this reason, we need an electric reader board.

It's plainly seen that we need an electric reader board. Normal reader boards aren't readable in the dark, reader boards are helpful and informative, and changing the letters on a non-electric reader board is dangerous. Some people would argue that the energy bill for the electric reader board would be too expensive, but keeping people safe and informed is definitely worth the cost of a power bill. For all of these reasons, Finn Hill Junior High needs an electric reader board.

Sincerely,

*Peyton Mash*

Peyton Mash  
8<sup>th</sup> Grade Student  
Finn Hill Junior High



Lake Washington  
School District No. 414

Victor J. Scarpelli - Principal  
Dana Greenberg - Assistant Principal

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Dear City of Kirkland,

As A.S.B. Officers, we like to communicate with the public as a whole. At our school we have many public events such as the Pasta Dinner and PTSA Auction. If we do not communicate with the public about these events, we will not be able to raise money. The community plays a big part in our school and we would like to keep it that way as we enter our new school building. This reader board will communicate to people so they know we care about the students and staff here at Finn Hill Jr. High.

With this new reader board comes new electronic technology and with this new technology our school will be more efficient. With our busy schedule we don't have time to send out multiple flyers every week. The reader board would make the secretary at this schools' job much more efficient and easier. This school needs ways to be more time efficient to have a working environment in our new school. Electric technology will make our school as affective as possible for our office staff and community announcements.

All in all, the Finn Hill community needs an electronic reader board. If we do not have a reader board, it will be hard to communicate with everyone and will sometimes cause confusion. We don't want that at our school. This will also make our lives more efficient and easy. So please Kirkland allow us the opportunity to acquire an electronic reader board, because as you can see, we need it!

Thank you for your time,

Finn Hill Junior High -A.S.B. Officers

*Tori Vacknitz*  
Tori Vacknitz

*Rachel Blanch*  
Rachel Blanch

*Tina Overby*  
Tina Overby

*McCormick Clemensen*  
McCormick Clemensen

*Justine Lewis*  
Justine Lewis



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Dear City of Kirkland,

As Finn Hill Junior High leadership students we feel inclined to bring the issue of an electronic reader board to your attention. We strongly believe it would be a beneficial addition not only to Finn Hill but to parent's staff members and people of our community. The junior high staff and parents will be able to see what events are going on at school because the reader board we currently have is hard to see in our Washingtonian weather and we all know how unpredictable the weather can be sometimes.

It would be beneficial to our community because they will be able to see what events are going on after school so they can drive more cautious around the school areas that are not marked to have slow speed limits in. If we got a new reader board it would bring up students spirit in the school because it shows that if you pursue something and want something bad enough and you work for it then you are able to attain said goal. So in conclusion if we get a new reader board it would benefit Finn Hill, the community around us, parents, and staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jordan Bister', written over a horizontal line.

Jordan Bister  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade Student  
Finn Hill Junior High