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The Villager

He's stuck on removing illegal fliers and stickers

By amNY 0 comments Posted on March 6, 2007



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By Kristin Edwards

“Moving \$19 Per Man Per Truck.” Signs with messages like this are posted, illegally, all around the city.

While many New Yorkers may take these signs and stickers as part of New York life, others aren’t taking the matter lying down.

Ben Benson, who lives on Bank St. in the Village, is one of those people. The posting of fliers and signs throughout the city “cheapens the quality of life,” Benson said.

New York City Sanitation Codes 10-117 through 10-122 declare the postings of stickers, fliers and other advertisements on telephone polls, garbage bins, lampposts or other public property illegal. Only city government agents can post signs or stickers on city property.

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The code also allows the Sanitation Department the right to subpoena posters of the sign and fine them. Under the code, the owner of the phone number provided on the flier is held responsible and is the one who will be fined, regardless of whether he or she was the one who posted the flier. E-mail addresses are tracked down through the Internet. Anyone who violates the law more than once is considered a repeat offender and must pay a higher fine of \$150, said Keith Mellis, a Sanitation spokesperson.

Mellis confirms that the department follows through on this matter.

“We don’t differentiate between postings by big businesses and postings by individuals,” he said. “All postings are treated the same.” He suggested that anyone who noticed such illegal postings and stickers should call 311 to report the incident, since the city is so large and it’s hard to keep on top of all of them.



For the past three years, Benson has been fighting back. He works on Wall St., and is not part of any community organization. He is merely “a concerned citizen,” in his words, who has been fighting this battle on his own. However, Benson says he is aware of others, who, like him, despise such postings.

Bob Gormley, district manager for Community Board 2, said Benson is the only resident who has complained about the signs, though other board members have raised the issue.

Explaining his distaste for the signs, Benson said, “I don’t get upset when people put up fliers saying ‘Lost Dog.’ I have a heart. I just don’t like when businesses use them.

“What irks me most is last summer, [there were] posters everywhere reading ‘Lost Dog,’ and when you looked at it closely, it was actually an advertisement for a dog-grooming business.”



This flier was particularly obnoxious to Benson since the company was “playing on

peoples' emotions," he said. Benson also noted a similar ploy: a poster posing as a missing person notice was actually an advertisement for male models.

Last summer, annoyed with the proliferation of illegal postings, Benson spent four hours of his own time one day removing such signs. Benson frequently takes it upon himself to remove such signs. Last Tuesday, Benson spent several hours in the snowy weather removing signs from the Village. But he feels the problem is too large for him to take on himself.

In fact, Benson said, the Department of Sanitation has asked him to stop removing signs so that they can collect the numbers and fine the violators.

As Benson explained, his removal of such fliers and stickers is not related to the message of the postings but to the postings themselves, which he feels display a blatant disrespect for public property.



Wish

The Greenwich Village Society for History Preservation went after a locksmith company that was placing stickers on private property, such as windows and doors. These stickers were quite a problem, since often they were difficult to take off and sometimes left a mark, said Andrew Berman, the society's executive director. Berman said they didn't deal with the issue of fliers, however.

Not being able to solve the matter himself, Benson has been in contact with the Department of Transportation and Department of Sanitation, G.V.S.H.P. and the Greenwich Village Block Associations, among others.

John Collins, a City Council spokesperson, said the Council has been in communication with Benson and takes his complaints seriously.

"We make sure the government works for you not against you," said Collins. Collins said the Council has been working to address Benson's complaints. Collins also said that the Council has made sure to let Benson know when particular complaints have been addressed.



Marilyn Dorato, secretary of the Greenwich Village Block Associations, said that G.V.B.A. has discussed the matter, and like Benson, they find commercial fliers to be an annoyance. However, some fliers provide “good services which outweigh the annoyance they pose to others,” Dorato said, citing posters for community events and lost dogs as an example. Dorato explained that they didn’t mind such fliers, as long as the people who post them take them down when they become dated.

C.B. 2 puts up fliers to announce meetings on liquor licenses and zoning and public hearings, among others. According to Gormley, the board’s resources are too small to send people out to remove the signs as soon as they become dated, but they do take down old signs they see around when they are posting new ones.

Benson has even taken down G.V.B.A. fliers announcing community meetings, to Dorato’s chagrin.

“I can’t call everyone to let them know,” Dorato said, explaining the need for posting the fliers.

Benson, however, denies ever taking down G.V.B.A.’s posters.

“I’ve never seen any,” he said.

Dorato has gotten St. Vincents Hospital to agree to establish a community bulletin board on Greenwich St. facing Bank St. Dorato hopes the board will alleviate the number of postings in the neighborhood.

Dorato, who has received many faxes from Benson on the matter, said that while she sympathized with him, he’s taking the matter to extremes.

“Has he ever thought about the annoyance of faxes?” she said. Besides, she added, “there are bigger issues.”



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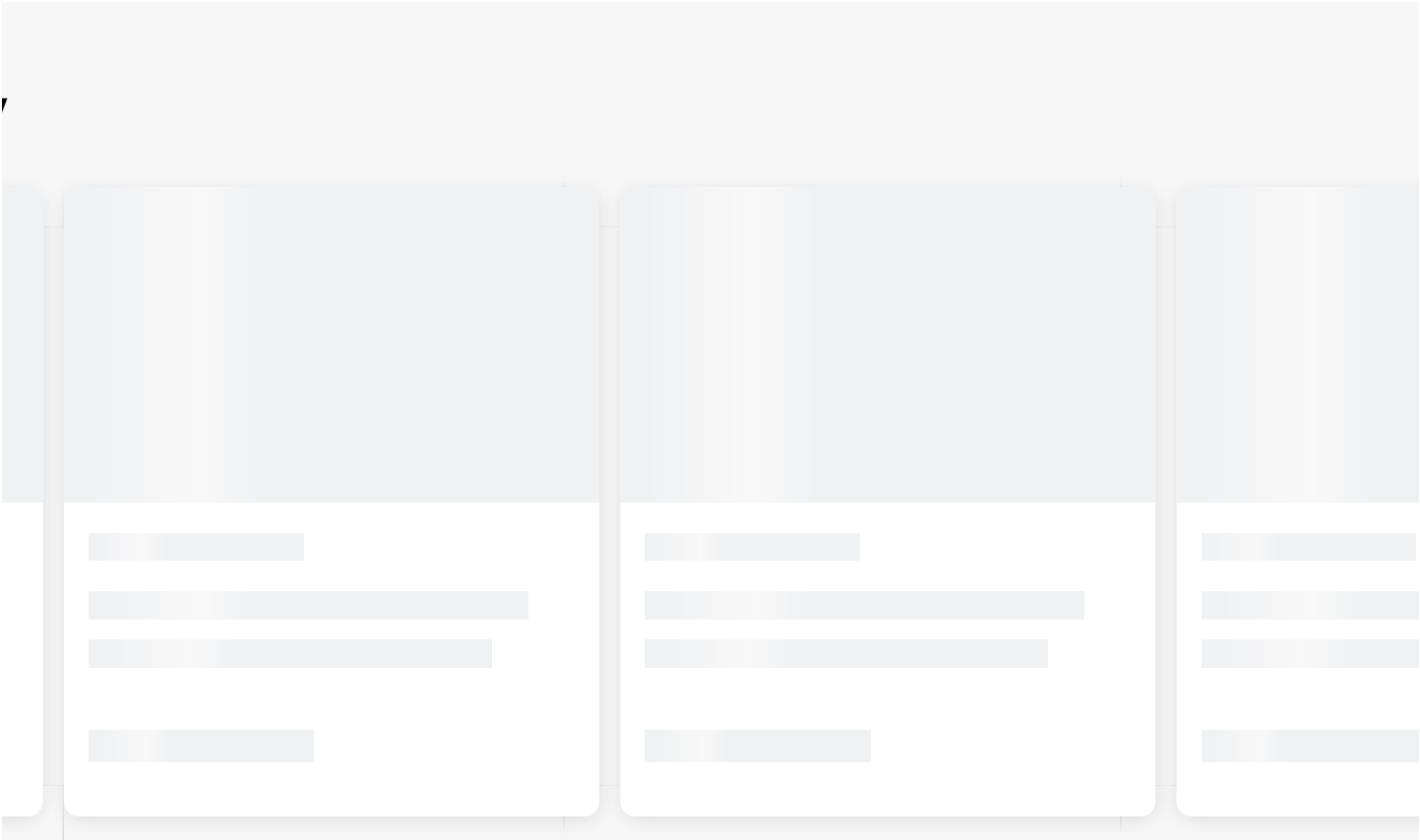
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