



## North Carolina Chapter of the American Planning Association

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### **N.C. Professional Planners to Recognize Gov. Mike Easley's Work to Protect Community Choices Regarding Billboards**

The North Carolina Chapter of the American Planning Association (NCAPA) will present Governor Mike Easley with its *2004 Executive Leadership Award* at its annual conference on Friday, September 24<sup>th</sup>. The Awards Luncheon will be held at 12:45 pm at the Renaissance Asheville Hotel in Downtown Asheville. A representative from the Governor's staff will accept the award on his behalf.

NCAPA is presenting the award to the Governor for his distinguished leadership in protecting the interest of North Carolina communities on the issue of billboards. In late June of 2004, the N.C. General Assembly passed House Bill 429 – the “Billboard Bill”. This legislation would have prevented communities from using the longstanding practice of “amortization” to phase out unsightly billboards, and instead would have required local governments to pay billboard companies up to five times the net annual business value of their signs, simply to have them moved. In some cases, this would have totaled hundreds of thousands of dollars to move a single sign.

On July 9<sup>th</sup>, the Governor vetoed the bill. This was only the fourth time that the Governor has used his veto power, and the first time while the General Assembly was still in session. In his veto message, the Governor noted that “This bill would require excessive payment of taxpayer dollars by our cities and counties”, and added that it “prohibits local governments from enacting their own rules regarding billboards and creates a windfall for the billboard industry.” The Governor then called for the different parties involved to develop a compromise, which they subsequently did.

The original bill was strongly opposed by a coalition of public interest organizations including NCAPA, local governments, and groups representing environmentalists, scenic beautification advocates, historic preservationists, and downtown development professionals. These groups maintained that citizens and local governments should be able to make their own choices about the appearance of their communities, using tools upheld by the courts such as amortization.

“The Governor's efforts on behalf of the public interest were truly outstanding, and saved North Carolina communities from being stuck with quite probably the worst billboard legislation in the country,” said NCAPA Chapter President Bill Duston. “For this, he deserves our special thanks.”

*The North Carolina Chapter of the American Planning Association is an organization of more than 1,200 professional and citizen planners dedicated to preserving and creating great communities throughout North Carolina.*